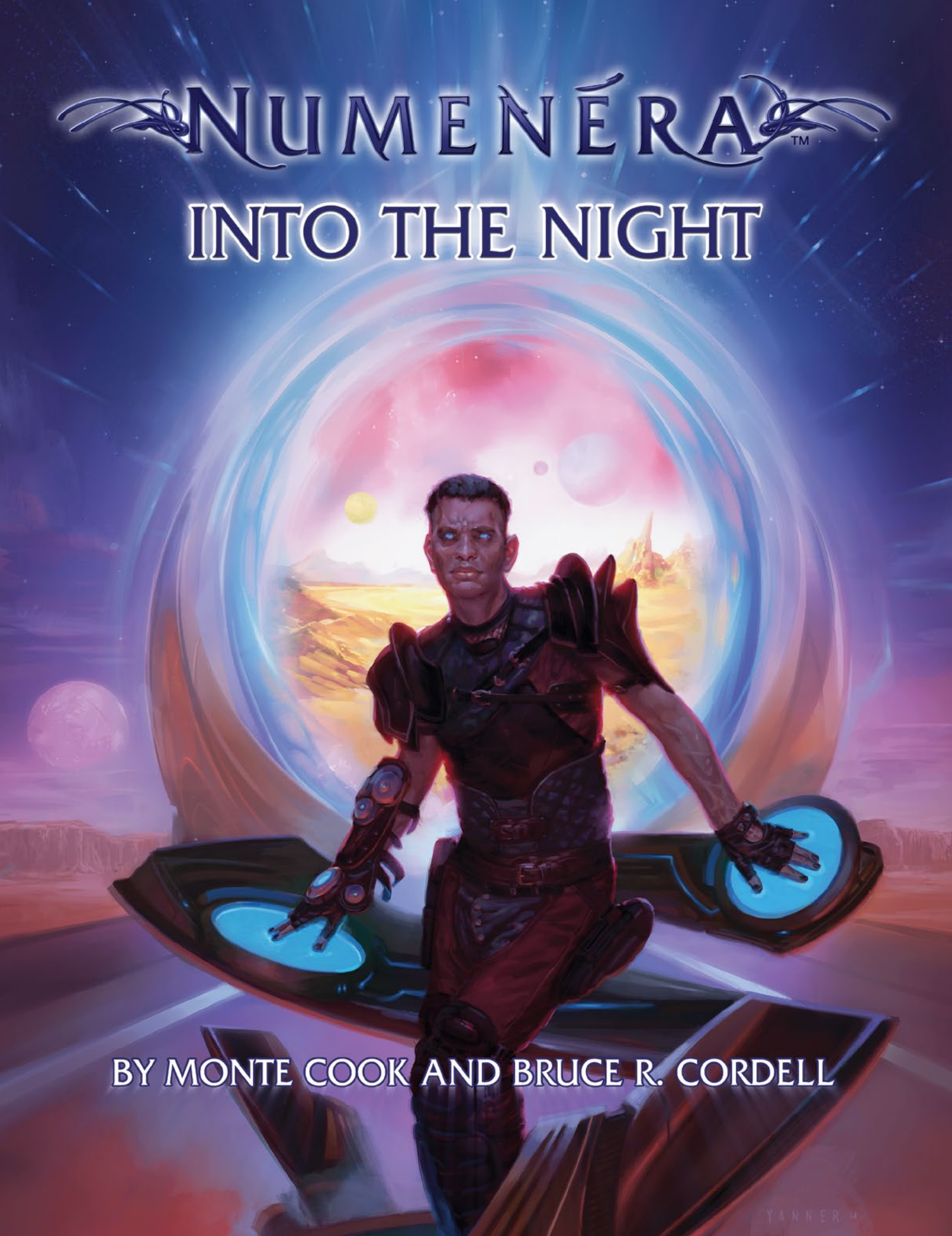
NUMENÉRA™

INTO THE NIGHT



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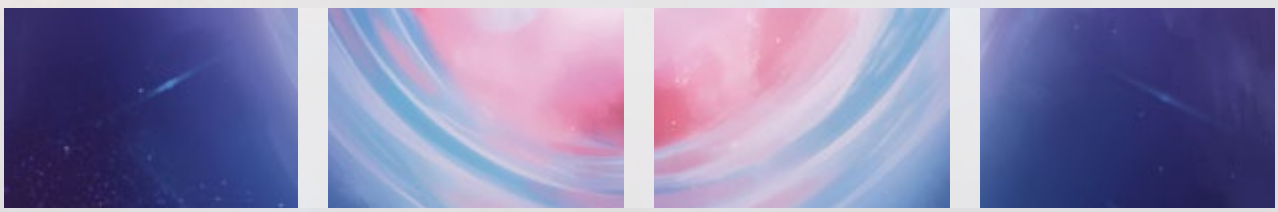

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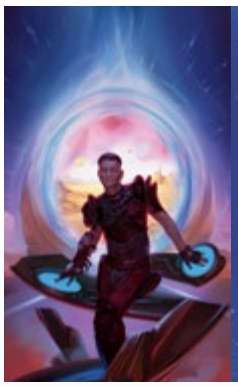

INTRODUCTION

As above, so below.

As you probably know, Numenera is a science fantasy game. Although that phrase evokes many ideas, I feel that one of the things it suggests—no, begs—is that there be some kind of space travel involved. We've hinted at it in the past, after all. Many of the creatures of the Ninth World (and don't forget the visitants) very likely have extraterrestrial origins. We've mentioned that at least one of the prior worlds was the hub of an interstellar empire. Or maybe even an intergalactic one. In Numenera we deal with truly epic lengths of time, but the idea of an empire spanning multiple galaxies suggests some kind of faster-than-light travel—and in a setting where one can travel to other universes and rewrite the laws of reality, is that really so hard to believe?

If we're going to explore the universe of Numenera, we know that it's got to be big. Jaw-dropping. And, most important, weird. No simple moonbase is enough. No, the moon shifts in time. No simple "desert planet" or "water planet" is enough. No, here you'll find a black hole used as a storage device for minds and a living Dyson sphere.

Like the Ninth World, the realms beyond Earth in a weird science fantasy setting need to be dark, mysterious, terrifying, and filled with the unknown. We hope that you'll find that to be true here when you begin to travel into the night.

In the margins of this book, you'll find occasional "search terms," accompanied by this symbol. These are real-world, cutting-edge technological terms that can start you on a journey of learning more about some of the ideas you'll find in these pages. You don't have to know a thing about how suspended animation works to have cryogenically preserved creatures in your campaign. However, if you're interested, you might find further research informative and perhaps inspiring.

Throughout this book, you'll see page references to various items accompanied by this symbol. These are page references to the *Numenera* corebook, where you can find additional details about that item, place, creature, or concept. It isn't necessary to look up the referenced items in the corebook, but doing so will provide useful information for character creation and gameplay.

REACHING FOR THE STARS

A simple villager walks down the road from his farm to an aldeia of the Beyond. A barrister stands on her balcony in a high tower in the city of Qi. A sailor keeps lookout on the deck of a sloop in the Sea of Secrets. These far-flung individuals' lives have nothing in common, scattered as they are across the Ninth World. Except if they look up. Each of them, looking skyward, sees the sun, the moon, and the stars. These are mostly the same to anyone in the Steadfast or the Beyond.

Gazing deeply into the infinities of the night sky, Ninth Worlders are likely to wonder what the heavenly lights they see represent. Many realize that the stars are other suns, simply farther away. Others—perhaps not quite as many—know that

Aldeia, page 134

Qi, page 148

Sea of Secrets, page 171

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some of those lights are other planets circling the sun. They might ponder such imponderables as what the distant worlds might be like and who might dwell among those spheres. Their fellows might dismiss such speculations, for they have no practical relevance, right?

With such a big, weird world around them, why would our dreamers take the time to contemplate the spaces even more distant? Is there any reason to wonder at locales beyond the Beyond—and still farther beyond?

Yes. A very select few have discovered that the magic of the numenera, left behind by those of the prior worlds, enables any dream to become reality, even a dream of reaching the stars. Through craft that ply the night as if it were an endless sea, instantaneous travel through intricately designed doorways, or even stranger means, it is possible for the folk of Earth to travel to those distant realms in the vastness of the night.

These brave wanderers are sometimes called "midnight pilgrims" or "pilgrims of the night." They have taken it upon themselves to reach beyond anything known to them or anyone that they know. They are the explorer's explorer, going places that most people don't even know exist.

TAKING THE CAMPAIGN INTO THE NIGHT

Game masters interested in running adventures beyond the bounds of Earth will find that new challenges and new opportunities arise. Adventures so distant from home can be exciting and daunting to PCs (and to players). The rewards might make the exploration worth it, but for many people, the experience itself justifies the journey.

MODIFYING ABILITIES

It's best to keep most PC abilities working the same even on other worlds to avoid needless complication and frustration. That said, logic dictates that a few sorts of abilities will work differently so far from home.

Nanos and nanites: Nanos retain their abilities even beyond the reaches of the nanite-infested Ninth World because they subconsciously take an invisible cloud of nano-spirits with them when they leave.

Gravity: You can't use something that's not there. In a gravity-free environment, items or abilities that use gravity won't work. However, some abilities might be able to create gravity where there is none. So a weapon that manipulates gravitational waves to inflict harm wouldn't work, but something that can increase gravity's pull might allow someone to walk across the floor normally. Of course, in such an environment, the character can orient the pull however he wishes. In a high-gravity environment, the same ability might be able to reduce the wearying pull.

Magnetism: Magnets and magnetic powers work normally anywhere, but effects that take advantage specifically of the Earth's magnetic field may not work in the void between worlds, and they may work differently on worlds that have different magnetic fields.

The Datasphere: The datasphere is linked to Earth and can't be accessed outside of the planet's orbit. However, depending on the circumstances, other worlds might have their own network that is analogous (but potentially even more alien).

Datasphere, page 12

Weather: Manipulating the weather, air currents, precipitation, and so on requires an atmosphere to work at all.

Fire: Fire requires oxygen to burn, so environments without it cannot sustain flames. Something that creates great heat, however, probably works the same anywhere.

SURVIVING THE VOID

The actual void itself—the devilishly cold space between worlds and suns—is lethal. There's no air to breathe, there's no gravity, and the lack of pressure causes havoc on an organic body. An unprotected character moves one step down the damage track each round. However, at the point where she should die, she instead falls unconscious and remains so for about a minute. If she is rescued during that time, she can be revived. If not, she actually dies.

Damage track, page 93

FIRST STEPS

The first step of the impossible journey into the vast, dark reaches of space is leaving Earth itself. This is, in fact, the most difficult step, and few ever discover the means to take it. Presented here are three possible first steps. They can be used and tailored in any way the GM sees fit.

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CREATURES ON OTHER WORLDS

Unless the GM intends to show a connection with Earth or the extraterrestrial origins of a Ninth World inhabitant, no creature encountered away from Earth should be a standard Ninth World being. No margr, ithsyns, or erynth grask. Part 4 offers plenty of new creatures, and brief descriptions of alien beings appear throughout this book. Just as easily, however, GMs can take existing creatures and "reskin" them with otherworldly appearances. For example, if an automaton is needed, use the stats for an Oorgolian soldier, but describe it as a scampering metal insectoid thing with grasping arms and built-in weapons. If a terrible predator is needed, use the stats for a ravage bear, but describe it as a furry reptile with a gigantic maw and a whiplike tail. And so on. Or, as mentioned in the Running the Game section of the *Numenera* corebook, describe whatever insane, bizarre beast you wish and simply assign it an appropriate level. The work comes in the imagination and flavor, not in the stats.

If you need a quick weird creature on the fly, base it on a real-world creature, like a jellyfish or a bird, but place it in a foreign environment and drastically alter the size one way or another. You might come up with a jellyfish-thing that drops down from tree branches to sting prey, or tiny birdlike things that dart about underwater in swarms. You can also play "the numbers game." To do that, just change the standard number of body parts, resulting in a beast with twenty-four eyes, a creature with two mouths, a flightless bird with six insectlike legs, or a batlike thing with four pairs of wings. Any germ of an idea can make a quick alien beast to populate the far-future universe.

Margr, page 244

Ithsyn, page 241

Erynth grask, page 240

Oorgolian soldier, page 250

Ravage bear, page 254

Running the Game, page 319

Beanstalk, page 186

THE TOP OF THE BEANSTALK

In the Beyond lies a structure—a sort of tower—that some say goes up forever. It's called the Beanstalk, and the portion that extends upward, disappearing into the sky, is very thin, hence the name. The legends around it say that a young jack somehow scaled the Beanstalk and found the lair of a horrible giant.

It is indeed possible to scale the Beanstalk, but it's much too tall to climb. Instead, someone skilled in numenera lore can recognize a level 6 mechanism within the base structure that will transport a vehicle up the stalk—a kind of thick synth tether—at great speeds. The oblong, upright vehicle is large enough to transport a hundred passengers relatively comfortably or a great deal of cargo. The interior of the vehicle has many chambers, but today their exact uses are somewhat of a mystery. Numerous synthsteel windows allow passengers to see the Earth from high above.

The tether is about 22,400 miles (~36,000 km) long. That means the trip up to the top takes about five days. Once activated, the vehicle can go only up or down and does not need to be directed. However, it is possible to get it to stop and reverse direction with a level 6 task. Doing so takes about an hour due to the speeds involved. More than one such vehicle can move up and down the tether at once, but there is currently only one in the ground structure.

At the top of the Beanstalk is a wide, round structure of metal and synth. It is a quarter of a mile across and has three interior levels. The view from anywhere inside is a starry night sky, with the stars seeming so close and full of promise. But danger lurks at the top of the Beanstalk. The few who know the round structure exists refer to it as the Giant's Abode. The giant of the legends is real. However, the being that dwells at the top of the Beanstalk isn't humanoid but a huge automaton that guards the area from any who do not give it a special clearance code. It moves on four thick legs and has a long, rectangular body topped by an egg-shaped nodule that seems almost like a head. This nodule can create up to four tendrils of energy that can attack or grasp, and it can fire a destructive beam.

When visitors arrive in the tether vehicle, the giant is there to greet them. Destroying the automaton or somehow sneaking past it is likely the only way to survive, as there is no longer any way to transmit the proper passcode to it.

The Giant's Abode has dozens of chambers to explore, with discoveries to be made and numenera to scavenge. However, the real "treasures" are the vessels moored

Beanstalk giant: *level 7; health 45; Armor 4; make up to four melee attacks as a single action, or a single ranged attack that inflicts 12 points of damage; fire a destructive beam at any target within 500 feet*

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here like ships in a port. Six different vessels are docked with the structure via short tubes (there are twenty-two such tubes, but sixteen have nothing moored to them). Two of these vessels are functional. The GM can allow knowledgeable characters to use them to travel to somewhere intentionally (a series of at least three difficulty 9 tasks) or simply activate a preprogrammed course (a difficulty 5 task). One obvious preprogrammed trip would be to the moon, a journey that would take about a day.

Story Seed: The PCs intercept a signal using a numenera device they have found. Tinkering with the device reveals that the source of the transmission is on the moon. The characters might not think that following the transmission is possible—until they hear legends that people of the prior worlds traveled to the moon all the time from the top of the Beanstalk in the Beyond. If the PCs' thirst for discovery and adventure is sufficient, they might be in for the journey of a lifetime. What will they find at the source of the transmission—a fantastic treasure? Intelligent beings? Nothing but an ancient automatic transmitter? There's only one way to find out.

THE STELLAR DOOR

Deep within an ancient ruin in the Ninth World lies a curious doorway. Standing in the middle of a chamber cluttered with ancient devices (mostly wreckage), the doorway is an empty rectangular arch, about 12 feet tall and 8 feet wide (4 m by 2 m). However, the arch is positioned at an angle of about 60 degrees in relation to the floor, so at first it might not even be identifiable as a door. It is a difficulty 5 task to recognize the arch for what it is—a numenera portal that leads anyone passing through it to somewhere else.

Unfortunately, the doorway is currently without power. Anyone interested in using the portal must first find a power source adequate to the task. Likely candidates would be a functioning artifact of level 8 or above, or two artifacts of level 6 or 7. Connecting a new power source to the door is a difficulty 8 task.

Repowering the door also activates a nearby connected device that can pose quite a threat to explorers. This malfunctioning level 5 device begins transmitting subsonic signals that affect the minds of anyone in the area who fails an Intellect defense roll each round. Those affected suffer 2 points

Functional vessel: *level 5; can carry about ten people; no weapons*

The Stellar Door can be placed anywhere in the Ninth World. In fact, it's possible—even likely—that multiple similar doors are located across the globe.

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Who knows what kind of warps in spacetime, exotic matter bits, strange energies, cosmic rays, or unclassifiable objects and events might be found in the limitless void?

of Intellect damage and begin making convulsive, jerky movements they cannot control. This effect ends when the lost Intellect points are restored. However, if someone is affected two rounds in a row (and thus has suffered 4 or more points of damage), the convulsions take on an eerie purpose. Affected characters begin clumsily repairing and reactivating yet another device, which takes three more rounds but requires no roll. They continue working on this unless physically restrained, even if the subsonic transmissions stop. If they finish their task, the newly activated level 8 device begins flashing with weird radiance that affects all within immediate range who fail a Might defense roll each round. The horrifically debilitating radiation moves victims one step down the damage track.

If the PCs manage to repower the Stellar Door and resist or cope with the effects of the other devices, the doorway shows a twisting, moving starscape that does not appear to be the night sky they recognize. Moving through the portal transports a character to a location not on Earth. The GM should determine the destination, whether it be one of the polar fortresses on the moon, a ruin on Swarmstar, or anywhere else desired. A knowledgeable character who succeeds on an Intellect task with the level 8 device might be able to get some idea of the preset destination. Changing the destination is possible, but without specific coordinates (perhaps gained elsewhere), choosing a location with a safe arrival point is extraordinarily unlikely.

Story Seed: As thanks for an unrelated good deed, a wizened woman of a mystical nature gives one of the PCs a piece of paper that has strange symbols and a map. She says that the symbols must be given to a magical artifact in a nearby ruin (the location of which is shown on the map), and the artifact will take the character to a location with fabulous treasures and wealth beyond imagining. But success relies on ingenuity and bravery. Is the PC up to the task?

Aeon Priest, page 222

Polar fortress, page 33

Swarmstar, page 97

Intellect damage ignores Armor, unless otherwise stated.

THE NIGHTCRAFT

Aeon Priests speculate that at some time in the distant past, Earth was the hub of an empire that spanned the vastness of space. At such a time in the dim recesses of the prior worlds, numenera craft of all varieties

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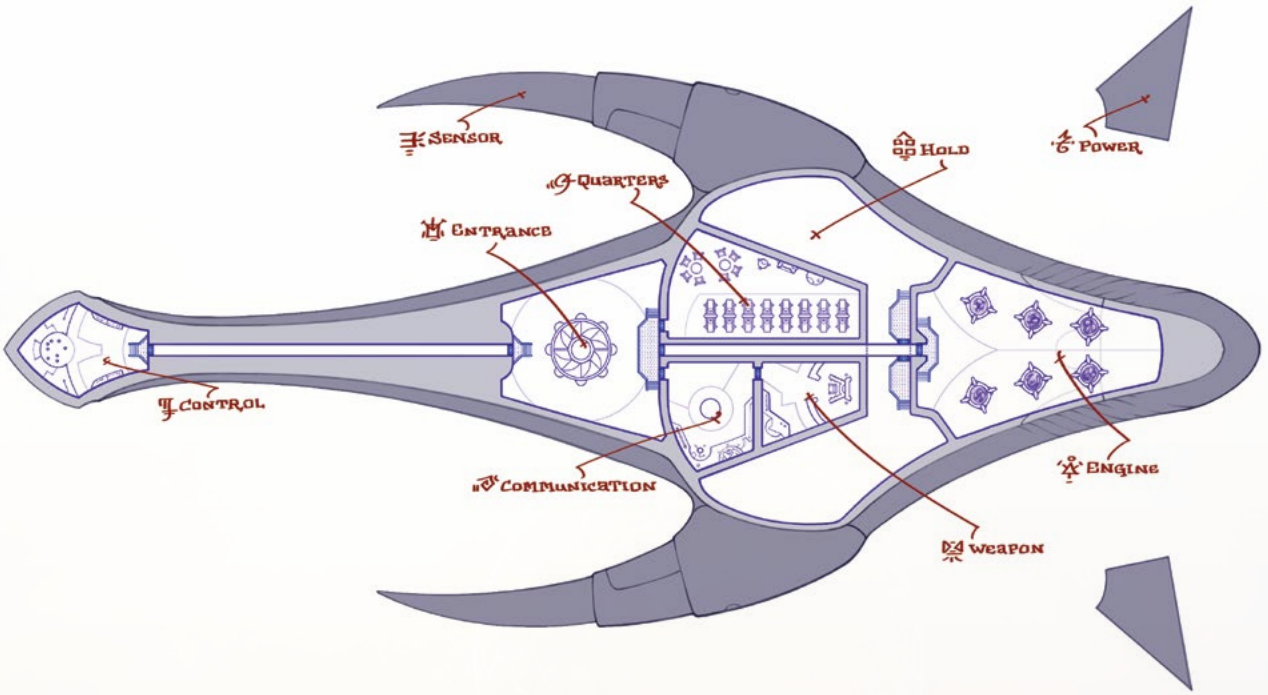

crossed the gulfs and came here, only to later turn around and fly back into the night. Some of these craft remain in the Ninth World deep inside ancient ruins, buried in the ground, submerged in the sea, lying out in the desert, or in similar locations.

The Nightcraft, as it is called, is one such vehicle. Although its existence is not well known, a few numenera experts have long speculated that the ship can be used to travel into the void beyond the edges of the world. And they are right. The craft is awkward in an atmosphere and makes for a poor means of traveling from place to place on Earth (destinations are frequently overshot, and landing is difficult). But it excels at very long-distance journeys, including to the stars.

The nature of such craft belies the dangers of space. Ships designed for the void are exceedingly sturdy and filled with intricate mechanisms to control speed and position, as well as navigation, inner atmosphere, gravity, food, and other necessities for the crew. Special engines (if that's even the right word) propel the craft at unimaginable speeds to cross even more unimaginable distances in relatively short periods of time. The Nightcraft can travel to anywhere in the sun's system in less than three days, and anywhere in Earth's galaxy within two weeks. Beyond that, a trip takes months, not weeks.

LAYOUT OF THE NIGHTCRAFT

Overall, the Nightcraft is a level 6 vessel.

Entrance. The level 6 door irises open if someone can get the controls to work. The door is on the underside of the craft, but gravity-nullifying suspensors bring anyone wishing to enter up and into the vehicle. A minor force field keeps the inner atmosphere from escaping, even when the door is open.

Control Bridge. From here, characters can control the ship's immediate movements and long-term navigation as well as monitor what's going on in and around the vessel. The bridge is also where the craft's internal environment (air, gravity, and temperature) is adjusted. The controls here are level 7 devices—synth orbs floating in the air that must be manipulated in specific ways.

Weapon. From this area, one can control the Nightcraft's weapon, which is a level 6 device. It projects orbs of destructive energy up to 20 miles (32 km), inflicting 12 points of damage in an immediate radius.

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Communication. Here, one will find a level 5 console with a flat piece of synth. When touched, this device allows telepathic communication with one other person within 100 miles (161 km).

Engine. This chamber contains a series of transparent pillars filled with roiling gas, which together serve as a level 7 device. Occasionally one can see flashes and arcs of energy within the gas. A series of synth knobs on each pillar manipulates the gas and thus adjusts the engine. Figuring out how to do so correctly, however, requires an Intellect-based roll.

Quarters. This long chamber holds beds, chairs, and other comforts. The room contains a level 4 device that will produce food that is nourishing to a specific creature, and it can be used up to ten times in a 28-hour period. There is also a level 3 device here that will clean a person using sonic vibrations, along with 1d6 entertaining oddities.

Hold. This area has its own large hatch to the outside. It is empty when the ship is found.

Story Seed: A strange flying craft lands near a small village and abducts some of the villagers, including someone close to one or more of the PCs. This is not the first time it has happened. Locals know that the abductors come from a place called Phaeton. Most everyone accepts that the victims are gone forever, but if a PC does a little research, she learns not only the location of Phaeton, but also the existence of a vehicle called the Nightcraft that might be able to take her (and her friends) there.

GM intrusion, page 325

Group intrusion, page 328

ENCOUNTERS IN THE VOID

While traveling through the void in a vessel (like the Nightcraft), whether in the sun's system or deep in the empty night between stars, most of the time, there are no encounters at all. The void is emptiness incarnate. Since all of the encounters described in this section are "random," they are likely to arise from GM intrusions—probably group intrusions.

RELATIVITY AND TRAVELING INTO THE NIGHT

Using the magic of the past, Ninth World characters can travel the far reaches of the universe at unimaginable speeds without risking considerable relativistic problems, because the creatures of the prior worlds would have wanted to (and could have) overcome such challenges. So despite the fact that the PCs might travel near, at, or far exceeding the speed of light, there's no reason to worry about the fact that time is relative and will pass at different rates for them in comparison to their friends back home. Perhaps in order to cross the universe, prior-world ships travel in time as well as space, or they negate this aspect of physical reality, or they do something even stranger. But the PCs will never know it and very likely have no reason to even think to question it.

MALFUNCTION OR DAMAGE

Something goes wrong with the vessel. Perhaps it's a simple malfunction or maintenance issue. Maybe the vessel struck a tiny bit of matter or crossed paths with a micro-meteor. Most of these events can probably be dealt with in the same manner.

1. Some kind of alert (horrible sounds, flashing lights, telepathic shouts, or the like) comes from the craft, interrupting what would have been an uneventful scene that the GM would have skipped over quickly.
2. The PCs determine the nature of the

Midnight pilgrims speak of not one, but a whole race of intelligent nebulae called Suhlachil. These beings, over millions of years, create solid objects from their own mass, including telepathic bombs that they hurl at inhabited worlds at near light speed.

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problem. It might be obvious, or it might require a roll (probably Intellect based, modified by skill in the numenera).

3. The PCs determine how to fix the problem. The solution might be obvious, or it might require a roll (probably Intellect based, modified by skill in the numenera).

4. The PCs fix the problem, or bad things happen. This might simply be a repair roll, but it might require someone going outside the craft in protective gear. The "bad things" could be that the ship stops moving, that it begins losing atmosphere, that it loses gravity or heat, that it veers wildly off course, or that it will soon explode.

ANOMALY

Who knows what kind of warps in spacetime, exotic matter bits, strange energies, cosmic rays, or unclassifiable objects and events might be found in the limitless void? This situation is very similar to a malfunction, but the solution is almost certainly more than just a repair roll. An anomaly could be anything. It might alter the ship, the PCs, or both. It might change the laws of physics, at least in a localized area. The GM should determine the level of the anomaly and then roll for (or select) the effect from the table below.

OTHER INTELLIGENCES

The PCs might encounter something intelligent. It could be another starcraft, traversing the void. It could be something capable of surviving in the emptiness. It could be something that teleports onto the PCs' vessel. Or it could be a telepathic call from a world the explorers are passing.

This encounter probably begins with some kind of attempt at communication. Unless telepathy or a device is available to assist, language is likely a barrier. But if it can be overcome, the PCs can interact with the intelligent beings and learn their circumstances, motives, and whatever else might be pertinent. The intelligence might be in need, it might be curious, or it might be hungry.

Sample Encounter: Ierrestus is a telepathic being whose intelligence and personality was placed in an artificial brain structure on an orbital satellite aeons ago. The satellite was set adrift when Ierrestus's homeworld was destroyed by a comet

The order of significant worlds and similar locales around the sun is:

- *Urvanas (closest to the sun)*
- *Earth*
- *Naharrai*
- *The Phaeton Halo*

ANOMALY TABLE

01–10	**Ship damage:** One or more of the ship's important functions (such as propulsion, gravity, or atmosphere) stops.
11–20	**Character damage:** All on board must make a Might defense roll each round or suffer damage equal to the level of the anomaly. A successful roll ends the effect.
21–25	**Rapid aging:** All on board must make a Might defense roll each round or instantly age ten or more years. A successful roll ends the effect.
26–30	**Reverse aging:** All on board must make a Might defense roll each round or instantly become ten or more years younger. A successful roll ends the effect.
31–40	**Mental alteration:** All on board must make an Intellect defense roll or something happens to their mind. This might include loss of memory, false memories, increased or decreased intelligence, or a personality change.
41–55	**Mutation:** All on board must make a Might defense roll or gain a random mutation.
56–70	**Teleportation:** The craft ends up somewhere unexpected (in this universe or elsewhere).
71–75	**Time travel:** The craft ends up somewhen unexpected.
76–80	**Apportation:** An unexpected creature appears on the craft.
81–85	**Duplication:** One or all on board (or the entire ship) is duplicated. The duplicate might be time displaced, called from a parallel universe, or simply a true replica.
86–90	**Multiple effects:** Roll again 1d6 + 1 more times, ignoring this result.
91–00	**Something really weird:** The GM chooses a very strange effect.

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Harryd: *level 4, resist intimidation as level 3; Armor 2; nerve-disruptor artifact*

impact. As the PCs travel nearby, all on their vessel get a telepathic call from Ierrestus, who has detected their presence. It wishes to learn more about the characters, where they come from, and where they are going. Ultimately, its goal is to find someone trustworthy who will take it to an interesting location. Ierrestus doesn't want to be simply adrift. In exchange for transport, it can offer all kinds of information, or even numenera that could be cobbled into cyphers or artifacts on its satellite. However, Ierrestus won't broach the idea until it feels it can trust someone.

PIRATES

Raiders (probably nonhuman) attack the craft. This encounter is similar to the one with other intelligences, except this one is absolutely hostile.

The most obvious sort of pirate attack comes from another craft plying the void. The pirates use a device that interrupts the explorers' journey, either by capturing their vessel and pulling it toward the pirate craft, or by teleporting or phasing directly into the explorers' craft, hoping to take it over. Either way, unless the PCs have extraordinary negotiation skills, they will probably have to fight to repel the boarders.

More than likely, pirates that attack will have access to numenera. They likely come from a sophisticated society where such things are even more common than in the Ninth World. Thus, if the midnight pilgrims from Earth are successful in defending their vessel from a pirate attack, they probably end up with new cyphers and artifacts.

Sample Encounter: The harryd are humanoid avian creatures that inhabit a structure deep in the void. The structure emits an energy web to capture craft that pass through it. The web is hundreds of millions of miles across, even though the structure is only 150 feet (46 m) across. When a craft is caught in the web, it slows down and comes to a complete stop, regardless of its propulsion system. Power is slowly leeched from the craft, but before that process is complete, the harryd move in with a small vessel to board the trapped craft.

The harryd vessel is a small level 4 vehicle, equipped to drill into another ship while creating a seal so that no atmosphere is lost. The drill inflicts as little damage as possible so as to leave the captured ship more intact (and thus more valuable).

The harryd begin their assault with gas that causes all organic beings inside the target vessel to lose all ability to move for about a minute if they fail a level 5 Might

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ARTIFACT: NERVE DISRUPTOR

Level: 3
Form: Metal wand
Effect: Inflicts 1 point of Speed damage (ignores Armor) and increases the difficulty of the target's physical actions by one step until the lost point is restored.
Depletion: 1 in 1d10

defense roll. Then six of the harryd move in, subduing or killing anyone who resists. The avian creatures are ruthless and cunning, but cowardly if faced with a real threat. They wear light armor and carry artifacts that project a nerve-disrupting beam of energy up to long range.

Even if the PCs repel the boarders, escaping the energy web might involve getting to the central harryd structure and shutting it down—which is tricky, since there are a dozen more harryd on it.

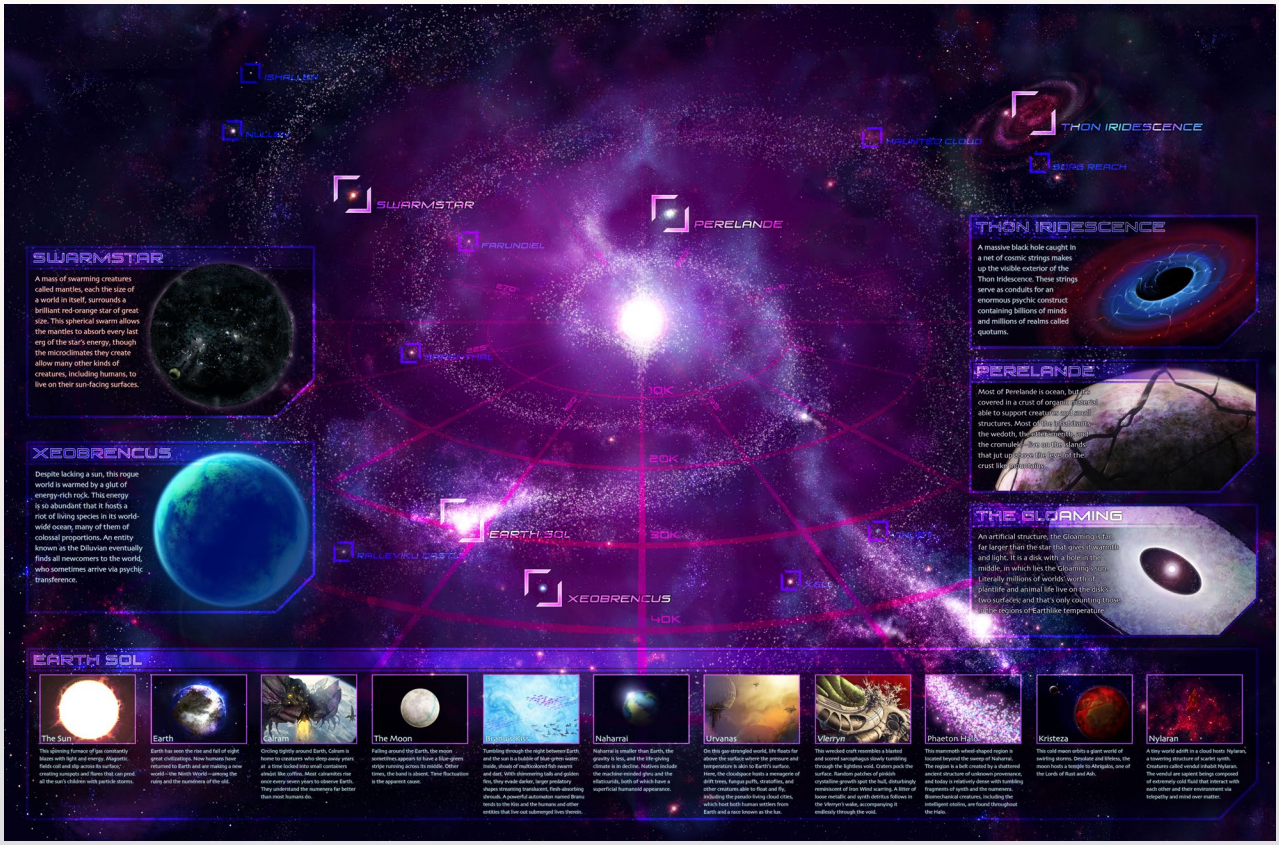
PREDATOR

Even in the deep void, there are creatures that dwell in the nothingness, waiting for . . . something. Anything. A tiny vessel filled with tinier organic creatures might be just what they seek.

In combat, a void-based creature that attacks a vessel should be treated like a vessel. The creature's level is compared to the vessel's level, and its body parts can be approximated to the targeting tasks. For example, whatever it uses to attack are its "weapons," its eyes might be its "maneuverability," and so on. Its health and Armor don't matter much, but take them into account as the creature's defenses—high health or Armor might suggest that the difficulty of attacking the beast is increased by one step. Further, in this case, a large creature's Speed defense is not decreased due to size. (A small creature's size still matters.)

Sample Encounter: The naracrux is a creature of both matter and energy. It attacks the PCs' vessel with an energy blast, trying to disable their engine. It wants to feed on their minds, but first it has to stop their craft. If the naracrux does not fare well in the "vehicle" combat, it will use its telepathic blast against the PCs directly. A few hits on the naracrux, no matter where they strike, will drive it away.

Naracrux: *level 6; health 50; attacks either with an energy blast with a range of 10 miles (16 km), or with a telepathic blast with a range of 10 miles that can affect all in a long radius, inflicting 5 points of Intellect damage and keeping victims from acting on their next turn if they fail an Intellect defense roll*



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COMBAT BETWEEN VESSELS

Battles between star-traveling craft are likely rare in a Numenera campaign. However, if the PCs are involved in combat in which they are entirely enclosed in vessels (so that it's not really the characters fighting, but the vessels), use the following quick and easy guidelines.

In some cases, the GM may wish to use the level of an NPC pilot or driver rather than the level of the NPC's vessel, but this is only for special cases, such as with a very skilled or very inept pilot.

Vessel combat on this scale isn't like traditional combat. Don't worry about health, Armor, or anything like that. Instead, just compare the levels of the vessels involved. If the PCs' vessel has the higher level, the difference in levels becomes a reduction in the difficulty of attack and defense rolls involved. If the PCs' vessel has the lower level, the difference is an increase in difficulty. If the levels are the same, there is no modification.

These attack and defense rolls are modified by skill and Effort, as usual. Some vessels also have superior weapons, which reduce the difficulty of the attack (since there is no "damage" amount to worry about), but this circumstance is probably uncommon in this abstract system and should not affect the difficulty by more than one or two steps. Further, if two vessels coordinate their attack against one vessel, the difficulty of the attack is reduced by one step. If three or more vessels coordinate, the difficulty is reduced by two steps.

The attacker must try to target a specific system on or portion of an enemy vessel. This modifies the attack in the defender's favor based on the system or portion targeted.

Targeting Task	Modification	Effect
Disable weapons	Two steps	One or more of the vessel's weapons no longer function
Disable defenses (if applicable)	Two steps	Difficulty of attacks against the vessel are reduced by one step
Disable engine/drive	Three steps	Vessel cannot move, or movement is hampered
Disable maneuverability	Two steps	Vessel cannot alter its present course
Strike power core or vital spot	Five steps	Vessel is completely destroyed

That's a lot of modifications. But it's not really that hard. Let's look at an example. A PC in a small level 2 craft attacks a weird level 4 vessel made of crystals that poses a threat. Since the NPC vessel is level 4, the difficulty of the attack starts at 4. But the attacking craft is weaker than the defender, so the difference in their levels (2) is added to the difficulty. The PC craft must make a difficulty 6 attack on the foe. However, the PC is trying to swoop in and damage the foe's drive (a glowing blue crystal that moves rapidly around the vessel), which modifies the attack by another three steps, for a total difficulty of 9. If the PC pilot is trained in this kind of combat (or perhaps just in the numenera), the difficulty is reduced to 8, but it's still impossible without help. So let's say that two other PCs—also in level 2 craft—join in and coordinate their attack. Three vessels coordinating an attack on one target reduces the difficulty by two steps, resulting in a final difficulty of 6. Still, the attacking PC would be wise to use Effort.

During a battle in the void, there might be chatter about shields failing, hull integrity, being outmaneuvered, coming in too fast, and whatnot. These sorts of details are great, but they're all flavor, so they're represented in the rules generally, rather than specifically.

Then the crystal ship retaliates and the PC needs to make a defense roll. The level difference between the two vessels is a two-step modification in the NPC's favor, so the difficulty of the defense roll starts out at 6. But the entities in the crystal vessel try to take out the PC's weapons, reducing the difficulty of the defense roll by two steps. Thus, the PC needs to succeed at a difficulty 4 task or lose her weapons.

It's important to remember that a failed attack doesn't always mean a miss. The target craft might rock and reel from the hit, but the bulk of the damage was absorbed by a force field or defensive plating (or whatever is appropriate), so there's no significant damage.

This bare-bones system should allow the GM and players to flesh out exciting encounters involving the whole group. For example, perhaps while one PC pilots the craft, another mans the guns on the same vessel, and another frantically attempts to repair damage to the propulsion system before they crash on the alien world they were hoping to explore.

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PART 1:

WITHIN THE GRASP OF EARTH

Chapter 1: Branu's Kiss 16

Chapter 2: Calram 25

Chapter 3: The Moon 30

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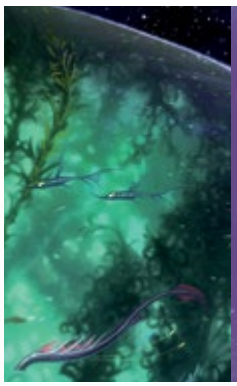

CHAPTER 1

BRANU'S KISS

Tumbling through the endless night between Earth and the sun is a bubble of blue-green water about 30 miles (48 km) in diameter called Branu's Kiss. A riot of green and blue plantlife fills the Kiss, so thick that it's usually impossible for creatures inside to see more than a long distance in any direction. Among the junglelike submerged growths of green and yellow, shoals of multicolored fish swarm and dart. With shimmering tails and golden fins, they evade darker, larger predatory shapes streaming translucent, flesh-absorbing shrouds. Thousands of tiny living creatures constantly swim through the Kiss, and as often as not, they tickle the back of an explorer's neck or legs in their profusion.

Branu, page 20

Crux, page 23

The fluid filling Branu's Kiss isn't normal water. It can be breathed by creatures used to breathing air like that found on Earth. Getting used to the sensation can be somewhat traumatic—for a Ninth Worlder who comes to the Kiss, the first few breaths are akin to drowning. In fact, it's almost impossible for a human to force herself to take a breath before she reaches the ultimate state of air starvation; the body resists, thinking it will die.

A powerful automaton named Branu tends to the Kiss, seeing to the habitat's welfare and protection like a gardener. Branu nourishes that which enriches the Kiss and eliminates that which it judges to be as useless as a weed. The automaton also protects the Crux, a massive device at the heart of the Kiss. The Crux maintains the environment within the bubble, constantly treating the water to make it breathable and scrubbing it so that toxins don't build up. The Crux also extrudes new animal and plant species into the Kiss, though much of what the device produces eventually dies off.

GETTING TO BRANU'S KISS

Many of the creatures in Branu's Kiss have lived there for unrecorded ages. However,

USING BRANU'S KISS

The GM can use Branu's Kiss several ways in a campaign. The following scenarios could be provided as hooks to player characters:

- A legendary artifact known as the Crux can synthesize specialized medicine to stop a plague in the Steadfast. But finding the Crux requires that the characters come up with a way to reach the Kiss.
- The characters got on the wrong side of the mayor of a village called Nebalich, and they are banished through a teleportation device (a "line node") that deposits them in Branu's Kiss.
- A sizeable bounty for Malia, a nano with a metal eye, has been offered by Aeon Priests in Qi. They provide interested hunters with a strange map to a location in the sky called Branu's Kiss.
- The characters are looking for a woman named Zalkezia from a collapsed dimension once referred to as the Air Castle. They've been told that only she can enter a derelict structure buried in the Beyond that has her name and likeness carved on its door.
- The PCs arrive in Branu's Kiss by accident. The only way to leave is to figure out how to use the line node, a teleportation gate, at the bubble's center.

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humans of the Ninth World have a way of showing up occasionally, usually via a transportation device next to the Crux called a line node. Upon first arriving and finding themselves "underwater," humans react as if drowning. Natives (and other human immigrants) who witness these arrivals have learned to let it play out until the newcomer realizes the fluid can be breathed.

The automaton Branu is aware of the line node and refers to it as a "stop along the Line." The node is a circular hoop of green stone about 10 feet (3 m) in diameter. It usually delivers creatures that have accessed a similar node on Earth or in a more distant location, and usually only by accident. Finding a node interface artifact, whether in the Kiss or elsewhere, is how some explorers later discover the node itself.

The introduction provides additional methods whereby explorers can reach Branu's Kiss. PCs traveling to the Kiss in a vessel may at first attempt to land on the exterior of the bubble, almost as if it were a tiny world—albeit a world with a flexible, transparent crust and a watery interior filled with life.

ARTIFACT: NODE INTERFACE

Level: 1d6 + 3
Form: Lightweight synth helmet
Effect: Wearer gains an asset when attempting to understand and operate a line node (whether in Branu's Kiss or elsewhere).
Depletion: —

SURVIVAL IN BRANU'S KISS

Outside the bubble, the void reigns, and characters must figure out how to survive in the vacuum of the night. Luckily, getting past the bubble barrier to the interior is almost as easy as trying.

BUBBLE BOUNDARY

The material bounding the Kiss is transparent and repairs itself relatively quickly, even in the face of large rents. In fact, the membrane itself has limited consciousness. When the membrane senses a being pressing against it from outside or from within, it attempts to determine (with a high degree of success) whether there is a desire to move through the boundary. If so, it becomes selectively permeable. Objects as large as about 70

Branu's sphere slowly rotates, taking about three Earth days to spin around once. Light propagates through the watery sphere; even at the center, it never gets completely dark.

Surviving the Void, page 5

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"The Order speculates the fragmentary node pieces, plus the one active node we know about and monitor in the Beyond, were once part of an invisible road reaching between worlds and distant suns. Using a device of the prior worlds is always dangerous, but stepping onto 'the line' might drop an explorer into naked void where a structure or world once existed, into the heart of a dead sun, or into the clutches of creatures on the opposite side of existence that think of humans as food."

~Vour Soemiss, Aeon Priest

feet (21 m) in diameter can pass through the boundary in this fashion. Sometimes creatures native to the Kiss, throwing caution to the wind, leave in the same way. When they do, most freeze and die in short order.

Branu carries an artifact called a bubble splitter that provides finer control over the bubble boundary.

Moving around inside the Kiss requires a creature to swim or otherwise propel itself through the fluid.

Bubble splitter, page 21

The Kiss boundary membrane is flexible level 8 synth. It keeps out deadly energies that sleet through the void, insulates against the airless cold beyond, and regulates movement into and out of the Kiss.

FLORA AND FAUNA OF BRANU'S KISS

Fishlike and plantlike creatures and vegetation fill the Kiss. Golden tails, shimmering fins, polyps and jellies, forests of tangled green and silvery vine, and thousands of tiny, darting shapes are everywhere. Larger shapes move in the murk beyond. The flora and fauna are so disparate and profuse that attempting to delineate between long-extant and newly arising species would be a full-time job. In fact, an explorer with any knowledge of nature realizes within just a few hours of casual study that there seems to be *too many* different kinds of life for such a small area. It's as if new orders of creatures arise every few days that have a new color, limb placement, organ, or even stranger variation on anything that's previously shown up in the Kiss.

In fact, the mechanism called the Crux at the center of the bubble is constantly adding variation to the flora and fauna. Most of these creatures fail to survive more than a few days or weeks, but some thrive in the long term. Success stories include the golden-tailed moxal, a fishlike creature that can grow up to 6 feet (2 m) in length. Moxals are immune to the poison thorns of the kebo brambles, the continual growth of which would threaten to fill the Kiss if the nibbling moxal shoals didn't constantly trim them back. Purplish darter fins, each no larger than a human's pinky, move in groups so thick that they can (and do) block out the light of the sun, which is their tactic for confusing other natives of the Kiss that enjoy feasting on darter fins.

Other creatures are more dangerous, and include slime devils that look like floating sacs of jelly with long, stinging tendrils able to catch tiny fish and large creatures alike in their toxic grip. Lantern eels have glowing eyes that dazzle prey before their impressive maws tear out a victim's throat. And the rare but massive nildar are feared by all lesser creatures, many of which can be swallowed whole by the scaled, bulky beasts.

Moxal: *level 1*

Kebo bramble: *level 1; thorns inflict 1 point of Speed damage (ignores Armor) for three rounds*

Darter fin: *level 1*

Slime devil: *level 3, stealth as level 5; attack inflicts 3 points of poison damage for three rounds*

Lantern eel: *level 4; light burst attacks all creatures within immediate range, requiring a Might defense roll to avoid being stunned and unable to take actions for one round*

Nildar: *level 6; Armor 2; bite attack inflicts 8 points of damage*

DRIFT CLUSTERS

The learned know of the debris pockets in the void, much closer to Earth. These areas are filled with rubble, broken stations, pulverized craft of previous worlds, and oddments of synth, rubble, and ancient machines in forestlike congregations of dust and flotsam. Some explorers believe these pockets are related and call them drift clusters, each shaped by invisible lines of influence that naturally extend between Earth, the moon, and the sun.

Most of the material in a drift cluster is inert, but some things that get caught in one are more interesting and include raw materials, broken spacecraft, and weird objects, some of which are inhabited, like Branu's Kiss.

Search Term: *Lagrange points*

Five drift clusters exist around Earth and the sun.

NATIVE RACES OF BRANU'S KISS

Branu is the lord of the Kiss, though its role is more of a gardener or sometimes a "spirit guide." Besides the automaton,

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several races of intelligent creatures live in the closed, tiny worldlet. These include the saunukar, the predatory dramath, and the residents of the small village of Kestin's Folly, which is composed of explorers—mostly from Earth—who accidentally found their way into the Kiss and couldn't figure out how to escape the closed ecosystem.

SAUNUKAR

Saunukar are smooth humanoids with elongated heads who sport multiple sets of flippered arms and a surprisingly long flippered tail. They dwell in huts of cunningly woven curls and snarls of aquatic foliage. Most huts contain a single pod (a family grouping) of around five individuals, though any given hut is usually no more than a long distance from two or three other inhabited huts. The saunukar fish, gather parts of wild plants, and on rare occasion, hunt the humans of Kestin's Folly, which a few of the outlying pods have developed a taste for. Though not especially advanced, the saunukar are dangerous. In particular, their nets are tough and barbed with a soporific level 5 poison.

To call the saunukar civilized, a human of Earth might have to get over an internal bias, especially if faced with one of the pods that likes to hunt humans. However, saunukar enjoy stories, art in the form of complex weave-and-braid sculptures, and an extensive knowledge of the toxins, medicines, and other natural substances the Kiss provides through its bounty of plant and animal life that is surprising in its breadth of usefulness. For instance, if a saunukar takes time to gather proper materials (about ten minutes), the difficulty of healing tasks is reduced by two steps.

The saunukar speak their own language, some speak the Truth, and a few can make themselves understood in dramath, even though talking with dramath is rarely profitable and usually ends in tragedy.

The oral histories of the saunukar tell stories of the First Pod of saunukar, ancestors born from the Crux "a long time ago." The first pod appeared before there were dramath and before Kestin's Folly was established by stranded humans, but not before Branu. The First Pod, into whose minds great knowledge was given, told their descendants the story of a place that existed before Branu's Kiss. This place, called the Air Castle, was ruled by a mighty queen, but that queen was betrayed and murdered, leaving only a single heir named Zalkezia. However, this story is more than mere legend, because sometimes the likeness of Zalkezia is reborn in the Kiss by the inscrutable actions of the Crux, as described under Zalkezia and her Quest.

THE VICIOUS DRAMATH

Nightmares of translucent shrouds that shimmer with phosphorescent light, dramath are predators that move like torpedoes through the Kiss. Measuring more than 15 feet (5 m) long, little deters a dramath from going after something it has identified as prey. Thankfully, the creature

Zalkezia and her Quest, page 21

Saunukar hunter: *level 3, swims as level 7; health 15; short-range spear attack inflicts 4 points of damage; immediate-range net attack restricts movement and, on a failed level 5 Might defense roll, puts target to sleep for three rounds*

The Truth, page 133

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gets hungry only once every few days. Dramath slowly digest their previous meals in the intervening time, and it's possible to see the gory, ongoing process through their nearly transparent skin.

Dramath could be mistaken for simple predators. Unfortunately, they are thinking beings and have a culture, which makes them all the more dangerous. They can shape their shrouds into appendages like tentacles, which allows them to manipulate their environment handily, including the occasional use of found tech.

Dramath prefer to swim about the periphery of the Kiss, along the boundary membrane. When not hunting, they sometimes layer themselves over the surface and slowly flash glittering sparks of light across their bodies, as if replicating the starscape visible beyond (they engage in this behavior only on the "night" side of the Kiss). In truth, they are participating in a ritual dating back to their arrival in the Kiss via the Crux. Dramath believe they were fashioned to slay a scion of a mysterious place called the Air Castle. They succeeded—and yet they failed, for this scion, named Zalkezia, reappears every so often in the mouth of the Crux, as described under Zalkezia and her Quest. For their failure, dramath prostrate themselves to the pitiless stars, attempting to count all the numberless points of light beyond. Given that the task is impossible, they believe it to be a fit punishment.

Zalkezia and her Quest, page 21

Dramath: *level 5; health 20; bite inflicts 6 points of damage, and on a failed Might defense roll, swallows victim into stomach sac that inflicts 5 points of acid damage per round until victim is freed or dies*

HUMANS

Several of the humans in Branu's Kiss are refugees who remember their life on Earth, and the rest are descendants of those who arrived even earlier. In fact, most humans in the Kiss come from the same village called Nebalich, where a line node matching the one in the Kiss was found in a previously sealed temple. The first few explorers who slipped through were the curious and incautious, but after that, the mayor of Nebalich started to use the node to get rid of troublemakers and criminals (including those brought in from nearby villages for the same purpose). Only a few people are sent through in any given year, but the population of humans in the Kiss has swelled to several hundred, and many were first branded—rightly or wrongly—as criminals. Add to that mix several adventurers who sought out news of the weird green circle in Nebalich and went through willingly. The resultant population in the Kiss is a contentious lot of ne'er-do-wells, brigands, and loudmouths. Despite the strife that often springs up between individuals, most of the humans live together in Kestin's Folly.

Nebalich, page 208

BRANU

The automaton Branu is humanoid above the waist, though its lower portion is streamlined like that of a metallic eel, save for the synth spines and flippers that make the machine completely maneuverable in the watery environment. Branu knows only the Kiss and has no direct memories of any time or place before. That said, it is hyperintelligent, as well as personable and knowledgeable. It is gracious to those who do not endanger the sanctity of the limited environment of the sphere. It remembers every conversation it ever had with every creature that has visited the Kiss. Branu also knows where to find the remains of those it had to destroy, which include humans who appeared via the line node and seemed more interested in taking apart the Crux to study it or in experimenting with the line node to escape the Kiss.

If explorers or exiles from Nebalich appear in the Kiss via the node, they are often confused, frightened, and sometimes threatening. Natives of the sphere (including Branu) profess not to know the method for initiating travel using the node,

"You are guests in my realm as long as you stay away from the Crux, at the center. The Kiss is an oasis in the void, a treasure without compare. If harm befalls it, a wonder of the night would be extinguished forever. Which is why I am here—to guard the Kiss, and extinguish those who betray my hospitality."

~Branu

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but the automaton is well up to the task of dealing with those who become aggressive or want to experiment on the node for their own purposes. If charmed into talking, Branu may allow that the line node is part of a derelict interstellar transport system, and that the only way to leave the Kiss is to use the node to travel to someplace even farther from Earth.

ARTIFACT: BUBBLE SPLITTER

Level: 1d6 + 1
Form: Long device with wide metal tube
Effect: When this artifact is used within immediate range of the membrane boundary of Branu's Kiss, a section of membrane stretches and englobes the user (and all creatures within immediate distance of her) in a sphere. The sphere contains the life-giving, fluidlike liquid of the Kiss and is able to sustain those within for up to seven days. The sphere can exit the Kiss under the control of the user, moving under its own power even in the empty void at a rate of up to about 1,000 feet (305 m) per round, as long as it stays within 20 miles (32 km) of the Kiss.
Depletion: 1 in 1d20

ZALKEZIA AND HER QUEST

For reasons unknown to Branu, the Crux produces a humanoid female with ebony skin at periodic intervals years apart. Each time Zalkezia appears, she has a set of memories that leads her to believe that she once lived in the Air Castle, a realm that was corrupted by a being of pure malicious hatred. Fleeing this great evil, she descended into "purgatory" (which to her mind includes, but is not limited to, the Kiss). She believes that only by undergoing a series of tests and challenges can she make her way back into a state of grace, which will allow her to both find and somehow renew the Air Castle.

ZALKEZIA AND THE SAUNUKAR

According to the legendary saunukar First Pod, the only heir of the Air Castle was sent into hiding so that one day she could complete an ancient quest and renew her home. However, the First Pod did not tell its descendants what the quest was, because when Zalkezia appeared in the Kiss for the first time, with her appeared dramath assassins. They slew Zalkezia and the First Pod, and they would have destroyed all the saunukar if Branu hadn't intervened.

Unfortunately, the automaton didn't destroy all the dramath, so they remain in the Kiss, mortal enemies of the saunukar. Zalkezia also continues to make appearances in the bubble every so many years.

When she reappears, it's a holiday period for the saunukar. They wear their finest weavings and braids, prepare fish feasts, and offer her adoration, a parade, and many gifts of their art. Most important, they pass along to her the same piece of knowledge the First Pod knew: "the key to the Air Castle lies in the Grinder of Infinities." It never strikes the saunukar as odd that Zalkezia reacts to the message as if it is new to her each time. The saunukar just wish they knew what the Grinder of Infinities was.

First Pod, page 19

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Day-to-day life in Kestin's Folly is about maintenance; defense against dramath, rogue saunukar, and other dangers of the Kiss; gathering food; and a mental fight against ennui.

ZALKEZIA AND DRAMATH

Dramath know more than other creatures in the Kiss—including Branu—about the true nature of the Air Castle. For instance, they know it once existed in a nearby dimension that has since collapsed. They know a renegade of the collapsed dimension betrayed the Air Castle's queen and sent the dramath to assassinate the only heir, Zalkezia. They try to murder each new instance of Zalkezia that appears in the Kiss. Although that last point is obvious to everyone, the dramath reveal their deeper knowledge only if at the mercy of other creatures, and then only if those creatures can understand the flashing light patterns that serve as dramath language.

ZALKEZIA AND BRANU

The first few times Zalkezia appeared, Branu attempted to convince her that she was confused, but that only ended up making her an enemy who believed the automaton was lying to dissuade her. Instead, Branu now helps her on her quest through its domain, which makes her happy for the brief period of time she remains in the Kiss.

With Branu's aid, she fights the vicious dramath that seem especially antagonistic toward her, is worshiped by saunukar that always deliver a message of hope to her, braves flesh-eating animals and plants of the Kiss, and occasionally finds useful devices and cyphers that are randomly synthesized by the Crux. In addition, Zalkezia sometimes allies with humans of Kestin's Folly who are taken in by the strength of her belief and wish to help her, perhaps hoping that they will finally be able to escape, too.

And at last, she finds her way to the periphery and escapes the Kiss—whereupon she freezes solid as her flesh enters the airless void. Her corpse drifts away to become part of the dead flotsam in the surrounding drift cluster. Branu will not admit how many Zalkezias tumble in the cluster, but the number is certainly approaching a thousand.

Varjellen, page 121

Wildern: *level 4; accompanied by a dramath*

Malia: *level 5; Armor 2 from esotery; long-range psychic attack from esotery inflicts 5 points of Intellect damage*

SITES OF INTEREST

Interesting places in the Kiss include Kestin's Folly, the Crux, and the Mote.

KESTIN'S FOLLY

The village of stranded Ninth Worlders, composed of floating reed structures secured by vine, contains about a hundred individuals. They've worked out the rules for their community, which includes an understanding with Branu—as long as someone doesn't mess with the Crux or the line node, that someone can continue to live in the Kiss.

Day-to-day life in Kestin's Folly is about maintenance; defense against dramath, rogue saunukar, and other dangers of the Kiss; gathering food; and a mental fight against ennui. This is why whenever a new explorer stumbles into the Kiss (almost always via the line node), something of a party atmosphere erupts. And the first question everyone has for the newcomer is: Can you get us out of here?

The village is sited at its current location (several miles from the Crux) because it's near the growth of a particular vegetation that produces red fruit almost continuously. The fruit, called floon, is about the size of a person's head, has a spongy red outer layer and melonlike inner meat, and is used to make food staples, special recipes, and a potent alcoholic spirit.

A varjellen named Wildern took a leadership role in the Folly after arriving in the village. Wildern has a "pet" dramath that it wears like a many-layered cloak with long trailing edges. Those who cross Wildern supposedly become a meal for dramath, though no one's ever seen that happen (unless they were the meal). But the fear that it might happen gives Wildern wide latitude. Thanks to the varjellen's ability to adapt its body, Wildern is also the fastest swimmer in town, faster even than dramath.

A new plot in Kestin's Folly to disregard Branu's wishes is making the rounds, and the woman behind it is Malia, a nano with a metal eye. Her plan is to enlist the

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next Zalkezia who emerges from the Crux. Wildern, hearing rumors but not knowing the source, has publicly declared its intention to quell any such plot the moment anything comes of it. Wildern fears that Branu's punishment for disobedience could extend to everyone in the village.

Sometimes human children are born in Kestin's Folly. About one in ten is born with a seal-like head instead of having normal human features. Most of these are given to the saunukar to raise.

THE CRUX

Though Branu is the chief entity and "gardener" of the Kiss, it has only partial control of the Crux, a massive technological device that maintains the environment. The bronze-colored object constructed of synthsteel maintains a position in the center of the Kiss. The size of a small village, the Crux is constantly boiling with activity as it extrudes vegetation and odd-shaped life forms (usually fishy creatures) at one end, scrubs the fluid filling the Kiss for impurities, processes waste, and according to Branu, does a hundred other things to keep the Kiss habitable. Sometimes the Crux also synthesizes randomly fashioned tech, including cyphers and a few artifacts, and not even Branu knows why.

The Crux is a fiendishly advanced artifact. Gaining any sort of control over the device usually lasts for only a few minutes and is a difficulty 7 Intellect-based task. And that's assuming that Branu can be distracted while such an attempt is made.

Sometimes, the Crux produces monstrosities that are completely unlike its usual variations on a life-form theme. Whether these horrors represent a passing external influence, deep corruption in the command and control functions of the Crux, or a planned release designed to challenge the standard life forms is unknown to any, save perhaps for Branu.

A separate, more underlying corruption of its functions causes the Crux to extrude an ebony-hued humanoid called Zalkezia every few years, in spite of efforts by Branu to "repair" the device so that it stops doing so. Zalkezia believes she's on an epic quest, as described earlier in this chapter. Unfortunately, it's an epic quest that usually ends tragically.

COMMON CYPHERS EXTRUDED BY THE CRUX

CRUX NODULE

Level: 1d6
Wearable: Belt, wristband, ring
Usable: Complex device, handheld device
Effect: For one hour, the difficulty of attempts to manipulate the Crux (or understand and manipulate any unfamiliar items of the numenera) is decreased by three steps.

VACUUM PROTECTOR

Level: 1d6
Internal: Subdermal implant
Wearable: Bodysuit, belt
Usable: Injector
Effect: Keeps the user alive in vacuum for 28 hours by protecting against extremes of vacuum-caused heat and cold and eliminating the need to breathe for the duration.

WATER LENS

Level: 1d6
Internal: Pill
Wearable: Lenses, headband
Usable: Disk that must be held to forehead
Effect: Allows the user to view any area of the Kiss (up to a long range in diameter) that she has previously visited and see what occurs in that location for up to an hour. During that time, the user can switch seamlessly back and forth between regular vision and the projected vision.

Line Node: The Crux is also associated with a connected line node. A bundle of synth tubes connects the green stone hoop with the huge device. The Crux sometimes provides extra power for the line node, though most of the time, the Crux draws power *from* the node. The node can teleport creatures from Earth to the Kiss, but using it to transport creatures from the Kiss to elsewhere is at least a difficulty 7 task, and getting back to Earth via the node is a difficulty 10 task.

The Crux sometimes produces a mass of living vegetable matter with the likeness of newcomers to Branu's Kiss. The vegetable duplicates can apparently do little other than blink and tread water.

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THE MOTE

A chunk of solid, vegetation-wrapped material called the Mote floats on unseen currents, wending its way through the Kiss. The Mote is thickly overgrown with marine foliage that couldn't otherwise take root in the free-floating environment.

More than twenty saunukar and almost as many humans live on the Mote, creating homes woven within the surrounding foliage or, in a few cases, in the tiny caves and cavities that pit the underlying stone.

The thick vegetation hides the truth: the underlying stone of the Mote is shaped like a perfect cube, about 1,000 feet (305 m) to a side. The stone, rough and pitted, opens onto many caves and tunnels. Where the surface isn't eroded and the original stone can be seen, strange symbols of complex shape and obscure meaning peek out.

Cral (saunukar): *level 4; carries steamer artifact*

A saunukar named Cral carries an artifact that she calls the steamer. When she activates it, she can boil water within a range and radius she specifies. Cral doesn't use the steamer to claim rulership over the Mote, as well she might. Instead, she uses it to defend the Mote from looters out of Kestin's Folly, who have recently started poking around the area. According to the report of one such explorer, inactive machines similar to (but much smaller than) the Crux lie inside the Mote. Malia of Kestin's Folly believes they might be control mechanisms for the Crux and is secretly putting together an expedition to find and operate them. But she steps lightly, fearing that Wildern and his pet dramath might stop her.

Every few days, a large treelike growth rooted in the Mote flowers tiny beads of flame, which are quickly snuffed by the surrounding fluid. If the buds were taken and brought into an atmosphere with regular air, it's possible they would explode like detonations.

ARTIFACT: STEAMER

Level: 1d6 + 2
Form: Short rod with crystal buttons along the side
Effect: The user designates an area within long range that is an immediate distance across as an action, and the medium (usually the fluid in the Kiss) within that area immediately begins to heat up. In the following round, the fluid boils and continues to do so for three rounds. All creatures and items in the area that are susceptible to extreme heat take damage equal to the artifact level each round.
Depletion: 1 in 1d20

BRANU'S KISS HEARSAY

The Stone: A large rocky object recently appeared just beyond the Kiss's protective membrane and slowly circles at a distance of about 1,000 feet (305 m). Branu is concerned, and no one in Kestin's Folly knows where it came from or whether it's a natural phenomenon. But it seems likely that the stone was somehow moved into orbit around the Kiss purposefully. Whatever its origin, it needs exploring to determine if it's a danger.

Hungry Swimmers: Never-before-seen shoals of fishlike creatures from the Crux have started to appear, attacking other creatures indiscriminately in swarms. Branu seems indifferent, so the saunukar have posted a bounty of 6 shins per fin.

Hungry swimmer swarm: *level 4; attacks all creatures within immediate distance as a single action*

THE WEIRD OF BRANU'S KISS

Animate Membrane: A patch of the interface, hazed with silvery lines like arteries, sometimes appears at random points on the boundary membrane. If approached, the hazed section of membrane bulges and creates a pseudopod that tries to grab the investigator. Those who are caught are usually never seen again, though where they go isn't obvious.

Message From Nowhere: Sometimes humans and other creatures that sleep while in the Kiss share a dream. In the dream, a sexless mechanical voice warbles through the fluid, describing an awful disaster in which the Kiss is punctured and vents all its contents into the endless emptiness.

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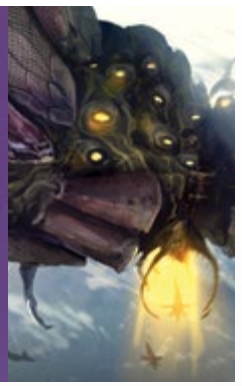
CHAPTER 2

CALRAM



Circling tightly around Earth is an object a few miles (8 km) in diameter covered with an inhospitable exterior of jagged spikes, curling tendrils, and weaponlike protuberances. The object, called Calram, looks partially organic. Its interior is home to creatures who sleep away years at a time locked into small containers almost like coffins. Most of the calramites rise once every seven years to observe the world, make plans, socialize, and take part in other strange rituals that humans of Earth would have a hard time understanding. Some groups of calramites rise according to a different calendar, and a few never sleep at all.

The Aeon Priesthood on Earth knows of Calram because calramites sometimes openly send embassies to them (as opposed to the many expeditions they mount to other parts of the Ninth World in secret). From these contacts, Aeon Priests know that calramites are advanced beings that possess a much greater facility in manipulating powerful tech than most humans enjoy. The priesthood also suspects that calramites are not completely sane.

GETTING TO CALRAM

The few outsiders who come to Calram usually do so only because they are brought into the habitat by a drone or other servitor for questioning by the Seven (the de facto rulers of Calram), for tests by the Dissenters (the renegades of Calram), or sometimes for experiments by a Mozck-controlled automaton (a malignant machine entity infecting Calram for its own purposes).

A chamber on Calram contains several pod-shaped vehicles large enough to hold a small team of calramites plus up to ten human-sized subjects. The pod ships have enough energy to make trips to Earth or the moon and back to the habitat. A pod

USING CALRAM

The GM can use Calram several ways in a campaign. The following scenarios could be provided as hooks to player characters:

- A flying white pod filled with humanoids that have branching tentacles for arms (calramites) abduct the PCs from Earth and bring them to Calram for testing.
- A legendary place called Calram, located somewhere in the night, contains beings that have watched over the world for millennia. They likely know an important historical fact that the PCs require that seems to have been altered or removed from the supposedly all-knowing datasphere.
- The PCs need a component from a malignant machine entity called Mozck in order to open a mysterious capsule in an impressive ruin, and they learn that Mozck is "intermittently present" in a hard-to-reach location called Calram.
- A mysterious group on Earth hires the PCs to fly a captured vessel in the shape of a white pod back to its home base and deal with those who keep sending such pods on abduction missions.
- The PCs are invited to Calram by a group of powerful beings they know only as the Seven. According to what the characters learn, if they can reach Calram, the Seven will offer them an exciting opportunity for further adventure.

Search Term:
suspended animation

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Naharrai, page 38

Urvanas, page 49

ship could go farther, such as to Naharrai, Urvanas, or another location in the region, but only once—and one way—before all power is drained. On rare occasions, pod ships that set down on Earth are commandeered by Earth natives, who tend to activate automatic systems that return the ship to Calram unexpectedly.

In addition, the introduction of this book describes other methods that can take explorers from Earth to Calram. PCs traveling there in a vessel of some kind (including a pod ship) can dock with one of the many curling white tendrils that extend from the outer surface of the habitat. A tendril makes a connection to the vessel and inquires in various languages about the purpose for the visit to anyone inside. If the response seems reasonable, a Calram drone triggers a docking sequence. Otherwise, explorers will have to rely on their skill in interfacing with machines to open exterior doors while muffling the self-defense mechanisms that stud the habitat's exterior.

ATMOSPHERIC CONDITIONS

A machine keeps all creatures and objects within Calram at a weight slightly in excess of Earth gravity, which is fine for a few hours, but beyond that period of time, humans of Earth begin to notice the strain.

The air is breathable and smells slightly of leather and an unfamiliar sharp spice. The habitat is amazingly hot and humid—comfortable for calramites, but most humans find it miserable.

CALRAM INHABITANTS

Typical calramite: *level 4, tasks related to the numenera as level 8*

A Calram native is usually called a calramite. If they possess an actual species name, they've never revealed it.

Calram natives are humanoid, but instead of arms, they sprout a set of five tentacles like those of cephalopods, each of which branches into a smaller and finer set of manipulator tendrils at the far end. Calramites can manipulate complex machines in a way that a regular human could never hope to.

Calramites possess a level of technology and advancement well above that enjoyed by the humans of the Ninth World. In addition to being fully conversant with a variety of different technologies (what most humans lump together as the numenera), they use tools and weapons of such complexity that only their arm tendrils, perfect for micromanipulation, allow them to make full use of the items. In fact, a normal human has some difficulty in teasing out the full abilities of most calramite-fashioned items.

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"They looked like people, but then I saw they had no hands. None. The calramites sprout a bundle of snaking tendrils from each arm, thick at the shoulder, but finer than fingers at the tip. Maybe even as fine as a nanomachine manipulator. Sometimes I wish my hands were so precise."

~Haranko, Aeon Priest

For all their technical superiority, most calramites are aloof in regard to their lessers and prefer to sleep away years at a time rather than live year to year like humans. They await some kind of special emergence among the descendants of Earth humans. What exactly that emergence might be has not been communicated to any human—not to Aeon Priest ambassadors on Earth, and certainly not to lowly test subjects brought aboard the habitat. But it's clear that they're looking for something and not finding it.

The Calram natives know that their heritage is connected to Earth in some way. Possibly only the Seven or maybe Mozck knows for sure, but ancient machine memories indicate that some kind of probability wave collapse threw Calram out of a parallel dimension—or perhaps out of the future—to its present location, where the residents wait. Thus, many calramites (though not the Dissenters) come across as a patient and quiet people, sometimes a bit melancholy.

Calramites speak their own language, though one with access to data ports in Calram can learn to speak the Truth in just a few moments.

A group of calramites called the Seven has the most authority in the habitat. However, they are not the sole power; they are opposed by a group of Calram natives called the Dissenters. Both the Dissenters and the Seven are occasionally bedeviled by an entity called Mozck that lives as an electric "spirit" in the substance of Calram itself. All the groups rely on Calram drones to aid them in their investigations and, if necessary, defend them from the aggression of test subjects.

THE SEVEN

The Seven is a political group of calramites with direct mental control over most of the machines in the habitat. They do not sleep away long periods in the same way that most other calramites do. Rather, they exist in a constant state of semi-hibernation, though with consciousness-enabling machinery allowing them to remain cognizant at all times and stay connected with habitat functions and others among the Seven. This latter capability enables them to eternally engage in mental debates on obscure topics related to the Ninth World.

The Truth, page 133

Calram drone: *level 5; long-range psychic attack inflicts 5 points of Intellect damage on one target*

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CALRAM HEARSAY

Ninth World Notice: A group of Aeon Priests on Earth has become aware of Calram after a priest abducted and later returned by the Dissenters regained shards of her memory about her experience in the testing arena.

Missing Calramite: A native of Calram named Ardolana left the habitat on a pod vehicle and went to Earth without leave. It's not clear what she plans to do, but her companions swear that she doesn't intend to compromise Calram—Ardolana just doesn't want to live out her existence in cryo-suspension, waiting for some future change that might never occur. However, the defection is one thing the Seven and the Dissenters agree can't be allowed to stand, and they have dispatched hunters to retrieve her or, failing that, kill her.

The One: The Seven are excited about an event that hasn't happened in the memory of any living calramite. Rumor has it that a particular human on Earth is showing signs of being "the one." Pod ships have already been deployed to collect the individual; however, it's possible that the Dissenters have commandeered a few pods of their own, possibly in an attempt to eliminate the target.

THE WEIRD OF CALRAM

Cryo-Worm: Some Calram wake from cryo-suspended animation and claim to have dreamed of blood-red worms chewing through their bodies, eating real tissue and leaving behind duplicate material in its place.

Strange Sculpture: In the wake of one of Mozck's experiments, an ivory sculpture of a beautiful human male was found. Apparently crafted of a strange combination of synth and human bone, the sculpture sometimes activates for unknown purposes. It has a way of showing up in the possession of seemingly randomly selected calramites, much to their surprise and worry.

The Seven lie in a crystal vessel at the center of the habitat, where they are visible within a wide bank of translucent crystal. (Anyone who does a count of the group through hazed crystal discovers that the number of figures visible varies from five to seventeen, but never actually seems to be seven.) Though the Seven seem unmoving, stuck within the crystal, their minds and wills are very much active and connected to most parts of Calram, including the drones.

Sometimes the Seven arrange to have humans brought to Calram for questioning. More rarely, explorers find their way to the habitat on their own initiative. In either case, drones conduct the humans to the council area, where the Seven are on display behind crystal. Explorers who meet with the Seven retain vague memories of the experience but rarely remember what was discussed, what questions were put to them, or why they were released.

Calramite warrior: *level 5; Armor 1; makes five melee blade or ranged energy attacks as one action*

Calramites might be able to eliminate a particular automaton that Mozck has infiltrated, but inevitably, the intelligence appears again in a new machine elsewhere.

DISSENTERS

The Dissenters oppose the non-interaction policy that the Seven enforce. They believe Calram natives should be able to interact with humans of the Ninth World immediately, rather than continuing to wait for some mysterious future emergence, which the Dissenters have come to believe will never happen. To that end, the Dissenters sometimes abduct humans and other Earth entities and put them through mental and physical tests designed to measure their capabilities, maybe to convince the others of their view that humans lack potential.

Mozck, page 147

Sometimes Dissenter tests involve being pitted against calramite warriors—or abhumans also collected from Earth—in a sort of arena aboard the habitat. Defeated subjects are slain and discarded. If the test subjects survive (as rarely happens), rent flesh is sealed, broken bones are set, shattered organs are replaced, and the subjects are returned to Earth. Those who survive testing usually forget the experience afterward, though they may wonder at their new scars and odd side effects of replacement organs.

The Dissenters claim only a small fraction of Calram, and then for only a few months out of every seven or so years while they are awake. However, they lay constant claim to a small staff of servitor drones at all times, which see to the needs of the Dissenters even when none of them remains conscious.

MOZCK ON CALRAM

Mozck is a machine intelligence that haunts certain locations in the grasp of Earth and among the sun's other children, including Calram. Because of Mozck's nature, calramite attempts to completely eradicate the machine intelligence have thus far ended in failure.

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Calramites might be able to eliminate a particular automaton that Mozck has infiltrated, but inevitably, the intelligence appears again in a new machine elsewhere. It may be that Mozck has a permanent, fixed form that is vulnerable to being destroyed, but if so, it's not located on Calram.

Mozck usually makes an appearance on Calram only during the periods of highest somnolence among the inhabitants. When it appears, it infiltrates a servitor automaton or two, sends them to Earth to abduct subjects, and imprisons the victims in one of the medical theaters aboard Calram. Unlike the questions of the Seven or the tests of the Dissenters, Mozck experiments on its subjects using advanced techniques that slowly transform one kind of creature into another, usually in mind as well as in body. The machine intelligence is still perfecting its technique; many transformations end only halfway complete when the subject dies from a stroke, seizure, or heart attack. The result is a rotting pile of mutated flesh, protruding bone, and blood spatter. Most experimental subjects don't survive the experience, and those that do usually wish they hadn't. And unlike the Dissenters, Mozck doesn't return survivors to Earth.

CALRAM CYPHERS

CALRAMITE ANALYZER

Level: 1d6 + 1
Wearable: Wristband, ring
Usable: Complex handheld device
Effect: Serves as an asset for the use of one task related to using or understanding the numenera (including the use of the Scan esotery).
Calramite Effect: In the manipulator tendrils of a calramite, this device is an artifact that can reveal a host of secrets about a creature or object within long range. It raises the effective level of the user by 2 for the purposes of scanning for information and has a depletion roll of 1 in 1d20.

CALRAMITE BLADE

Level: 1d6 + 3
Internal: Injection into fingertip
Wearable: Glove
Usable: Device similar to hilt
Effect: Produces a 3-foot (1 m) blade of hard blue light that lasts for ten minutes. It can be used to cut, carve, or sever objects, just like a normal blade, though the device's high level makes it particularly good at such tasks. If used in combat, it is a light weapon that ignores Armor.
Calramite Effect: If held defensively by a calramite, the device is an artifact and can be triggered potentially multiple times. In addition, the blade lengthens like a ray to attempt to intercept every projectile attack made on the wielder for the next round. Projectiles are destroyed if they are of a lower level than the artifact. Each projectile destroyed requires a depletion roll of 1 in 1d20.

CALRAMITE PHOTONIC EMITTER

Level: 1d6 + 3
Wearable: Contact lens, glove, ring, headband, shoulder-mounted device
Usable: Synth tube with grip and array of buttons
Effect: Long-range energy attack inflicts damage equal to the artifact's level to the target and all creatures within immediate range of the target.
Calramite Effect: In the manipulator tendrils of a calramite, the emitter is an artifact with advanced targeting options that enable a 3-mile (5 km) ranged attack, and it has a depletion roll of 1 in 1d20.

CALRAMITE WAR PLATING

Level: 1d6
Wearable: Ring, belt, bracelet, headband, amulet
Effect: Nanomachines sweep out of the cypher, completely covering the user's body in a sheen of bronze-colored armor, granting her an Armor bonus equal to the artifact level for ten minutes.
Calramite Effect: A calramite can gain multiple uses of the cypher as if it were an artifact with a depletion roll of 1 in 1d10.

Scan, page 36

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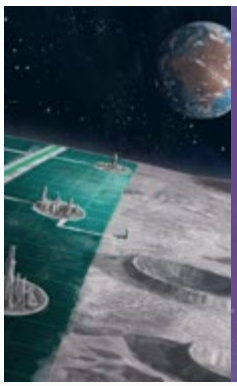

CHAPTER 3

THE MOON

"Night sight,
Moon sight,
Stripe tonight,
Night sight?"

~Children's rhyme in Navarene

The moon that shines above the Earth has seen eight great civilizations rise and fall, and now it watches a new one, the ninth, rise. But the moon that the people of the Ninth World see changes. On any given night, it might have a blue-green stripe running across its middle. Some call it the moon's belt. Others refer to the occasions it appears as a "bounded moon." The Corhay people of western Matheunis tell a story of a great hero named Thullane who used a rope of woven seaweed to lasso the evil moon and keep it in submission.

The truth is just as strange, if not stranger, but unknown to all except the midnight pilgrims who travel to the moon using various means.

TRAVELING TO THE MOON

It is likely that the people of the prior worlds traveled to the moon frequently. Certainly, there is evidence of whole complexes and even small abandoned cities across its desolate landscape. Did the people of the past enjoy the moon because it was our closest neighbor—a beloved sister world—or was it simply a stepping-stone to other destinations? Either way, for the people of the past, reaching the moon was a small matter.

Today, that trip is much harder—unthinkable by most. However, any of the means suggested in the introduction of this book can take explorers from Earth to the moon. If the PCs use a gateway or teleporter, they probably arrive in one of the polar fortresses, the Deep Citadel, or a station along the Luna Ring. If the moon has shifted backward in time when the PCs travel to it, they arrive in one of the Empty Embassies instead.

If the PCs travel to the moon in a vessel, they find that many places offer safe landing, but all of the aforementioned locations have landing pads as well. Automated systems in the fortresses and stations are likely to guide an incoming craft onto a pad with ease.

SURVIVAL ON THE MOON

Far worse than any Earth desert, the moon is dry, desolate, and utterly void. There is no breathable air, no water that isn't frozen, and no appreciable atmospheric pressure. It is unbearably hot in the light of the sun, and

USING THE MOON

A trip to the moon will likely be short. Although there are plenty of interesting locations to explore, the conditions make survival difficult. If nothing else, the PCs' food and water stores probably won't last for an extended stay. First and foremost, though, they might grapple with the moon's weird temporal shifts and learn why sometimes there is a green stripe on the moon, and sometimes there isn't. Exploring the Deep Citadel or the Empty Embassies may result in great rewards and possibly knowledge. In many ways, however, the moon is really a stepping-stone for trips into the void beyond. It's a good first step in getting to Naharrai, Urvanas, or other places in the same system as Earth.

Naharrai, page 38

Urvanas, page 49

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For reasons unknown, sometimes the moon shifts backward in time, many millions of years.

deathly cold out of the sunlight. The moon has no weather and very little seismic activity. It is a stagnant place of very little change.

Gravity is about one-sixth of Earth's gravity, meaning that explorers operate under the rules of low gravity.

Explorers need not only some type of breathing apparatus, but also some way to preserve an atmospherelike pressure around their bodies to protect them from the heat and cold. Of course, they need to provide all their own food, for the moon offers nothing. For many who leave Earth, the moon—despite being far closer than many destinations—is in fact far more hostile than other locations in the void.

THE MOON'S UNSTABLE FLOW THROUGH TIME

For reasons unknown, sometimes the moon shifts backward in time, many millions of years. When this happens, everything native to the current moon disappears and is replaced with the moon as it was so very long ago. Explorers from the Ninth World are not affected, but everything around them is. In some areas of the moon, this alters things only slightly. A mountain in the distance gets smaller, or a new crater appears. In places with defined structures, however, such as the Luna Ring, the change is dramatic. The entire ring structure disappears, replaced with barren landscape or—if the explorers are in the right spot—perhaps one of the twelve so-called Empty Embassies.

To anyone standing on the moon's surface looking up at Earth, the configuration of the land masses there are quite different. The stars in the sky also appear different—in fact, to many explorers, it may seem that they have shifted to a completely different world, or to a moon circling a different sphere altogether. And in a way, this is true, for the distant past is practically a different world, as Ninth Worlders know all too well.

This time slippage is limited to a sort of bubble around the moon, extending just 10 miles (16 km) or so from its surface. Passing out of that bubble while the moon has slipped backward sends a traveler hurtling back to his proper time period. This sudden return is physically and mentally jarring, and those unable to resist a level 6 effect suffer 5 points of damage to all three of their stat Pools (three separate defense rolls are required, one for each stat).

The time shifts usually last about twenty hours, and occur once every seventy to eighty hours. In other words, about a quarter of the time, the moon above the Ninth World is the moon of the distant past. There is no known predictable pattern, however. The shifts can vary significantly in length and frequency, but this is rare.

THE PRESENT-DAY MOON

Covered in ruins, the present-day moon is a shining ball of white with a blue-green stripe around its middle.

LUNA RING

The Luna Ring is the name of the megastructure built (and now abandoned) on the "current" moon.

The structure runs the entire circumference of the moon (about 6,800 miles, or 11,000 km) in a band that is about 250 miles (400 km) wide and is made primarily of synth cells lying flat on the surface. Spread throughout this structure are bowl-like depressions 12 miles (19 km) in diameter, made of synth and metal. Anyone with skill in the numenera can determine that the cells absorb energy from the sun, and that power is transmitted via cables to the large dishlike structures, which then send it . . . somewhere.

The amount of power generated by the ring is incredibly vast. Too much, very likely, for most tinkerers and dabblers of the numenera to deal with. If someone attempts to recharge or repower a used cypher or artifact by tapping into the system somehow, the task has a difficulty of 9. Success means that the device is restored,

Low gravity, pages 97 and 100

Surviving the Void, page 5

Search Terms: *surface boundary exosphere, conditions on the moon*

Empty Embassies, page 35

It is believed that in the time of the moon's past slippage, the Earth is a mostly dead place, without intelligent life. This would mean that it is a time between the fall of one of the prior worlds and the rise of the next. That might be hundreds of millions of years ago.

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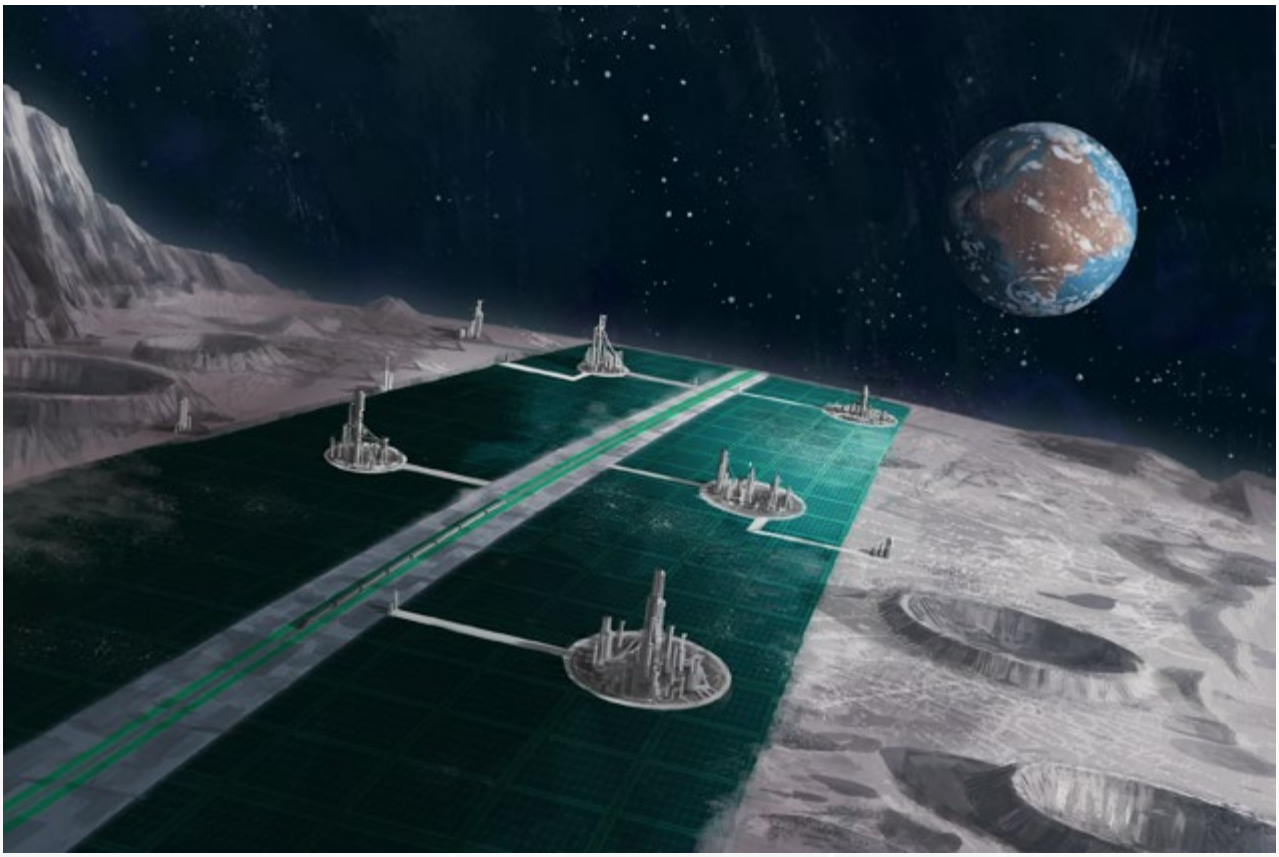

It is a difficulty 3 task to call a magnetic carriage to a station if one is not already there. It is a difficulty 4 task to get a carriage moving or get it to stop.

Luna Ring automaton: *level 3; Armor 2*

Metal philosopher: *level 7, all matters relating to the numenera and resisting persuasion or intimidation as level 9, all other interaction tasks as level 4; Armor 3; usually has one or two useful random cyphers*

The Luna Ring and the polar fortresses do not exist in the past that the moon sometimes shifts back to.

but failure means that it overloads and explodes, inflicting 10 points of damage to all within immediate range.

Running down the middle of the ring is a set of tracks that guide a magnetically propelled transportation system that still functions. Travelers at one of the thousands of stations along the tracks can call a "carriage" that moves to them at speeds of up to 124 miles per hour (200 kph). It usually takes less than an hour for a carriage to arrive.

The carriages seat up to a dozen people comfortably. Some are far larger, clearly designed to haul cargo rather than passengers.

All Luna Ring stations have storehouses of still-preserved food and water as well as breath recycler artifacts and moon suit artifacts. These are occasionally maintained by automatons that look more like human-sized rectangles with spidery legs. Some explorers claim to have encountered other types of automatons around the ring as well, including some that are vaguely humanoid in shape and have attained a level of awareness. These metal philosophers spend their long lunar days contemplating the universe. With the knowledge to tap into the power of the ring, they need never worry about such things—they are effectively immortal. However, they are awkward communicators and do not deal well with others, particularly organic beings. Their behavior seems erratic and strange.

ARTIFACT: BREATH RECYCLER

Form: Mask of synth
Effect: Provides breathable air for a human or any similar creature.
Depletion: 1 in 1d100 (check each day)

ARTIFACT: MOON SUIT

Form: Fairly lightweight full-body suit of synth
Effect: Serves as light armor and offers complete protection from environmental temperature and pressure dangers. Also allows the wearer to operate as if under normal Earth gravity if so desired (turning this effect on or off requires an action). The suit operates only within 100 miles (160 km) of the moon.
Depletion: —

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THE WORLD DOOR

Located in the middle of a crater-filled plain, the World Door appears to be a metal platform with a strange console in the middle of it. The console is a level 7 device, and if activated, a portal in space opens and leads either to the world of Perelande or to the Gloaming. The catch is, an energy field around the platform makes it extraordinarily dangerous to fly in the sky above or near it, whether in a craft or with a personal device or ability. This level 7 field starts about 50 feet (15 m) above the ground and extends upward about 1 mile (2 km) and outward about 20 miles (32 km). Any creatures entering the field must make a Might defense roll each round or suffer 5 points of damage and lose their next turn. Devices (including vessels, cyphers, and artifacts) that are level 7 or below lose all power within the field.

The only safe way to approach the World Door is overland.

POLAR FORTRESSES

An ancient technological complex lies at each of the moon's poles. Each complex is like a small abandoned city, with domes and sprawling structures filled with machinery and covered in frost and ice. These places are sealed and contain an atmosphere that is breathable, warm, and pressurized enough that humans can survive inside without suits or breathing apparatus. Each complex has a facility for producing water from the polar ice. These still function on their own.

Hovering cylindrical automatons equipped for war patrol these fortress-cities in groups of three or four. They attack all intruders and fight to the death.

North Pole Fortress: Remnants within huge glass domes, now empty, suggest that the water produced in this complex once sustained vast orchards and gardens. These are now long gone. The place is lifeless, although scavenging through storehouses and numenera-laden chambers will turn up a wealth of shins, cyphers, oddities, and artifacts, as well as preserved foodstuffs and other gear useful for survival on the moon. A working wheeled vehicle with room for up to eight people inside can be found here, among a dozen more that no longer function. The vehicle can move up to 100 miles (161 km) per hour, but driving at those speeds on the rugged lunar surface is foolhardy.

South Pole Fortress: This is the only place on the moon inhabited by humans to any significant degree. A small group of thirty-eight explorers has taken up residence here, having walled off a section of the city to keep the guard automatons at bay. Naryla is their leader, a woman more machine than human. The others follow her fanatically and believe that one day their descendants will create a new nation on the moon. Naryla is suspicious of outsiders but is pleasant and diplomatic, and she welcomes those who earn her trust. The group has recovered an extensive collection of supplies, cyphers, and gear from their explorations of the fortress-city, but they need help in destroying the hostile automatons once and for all so they can spread out and claim the entire place for their own.

Perelande, page 84

The Gloaming, page 118

Naryla: *level 6, diplomacy as level 7, any task requiring strength as level 8; Armor 2; inflicts 12 points of damage in melee; extensive mechanical implants and components grant her great strength as well as Armor*

Patrol automaton: *level 4; Armor 3; energy blast attacks a target in long range for 6 points of damage*

Wheeled vehicle: *level 5*

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THE DEEP CITADEL

Far below the surface of the moon lies a sealed set of caverns filled with Earth-compatible atmosphere, kept at a temperature that's relatively comfortable for humans (if a bit cold). Even the gravity is a bit stronger, although still less than Earth's normal pull.

Airlock: *The lock and the door are both level 8.*

To access these caverns, explorers pass through an airlock-style entrance, locked with a complex set of key codes. The caverns wend their way like a labyrinth below the surface, but at the center is a clearly artificial structure of great size. The Deep Citadel boasts hundreds of levels connected by gentle, spiraling ramps. It seems to have at one time been an elegant dwelling for what were likely nonhuman creatures. All furnishings are gone, and only the structure itself remains, although the walls and sometimes the ceilings, in their baroque decoration, bear reliefs and carvings depicting somewhat reptilian creatures with an almost insectlike array of limbs.

Throughout the Deep Citadel, explorers stumble every so often upon skeletal remains of creatures, all different and very nonhuman in appearance, although none resemble the creatures depicted on the walls. The age of the remains varies considerably as well—some may have been there for years, others for hundreds of years, and still others for far longer. Some of these remains include tools and devices (or are only tools and devices, their owners entirely gone), suggesting the creatures were intelligent. A fair number of them include what appear to be life-support equipment, suggesting that they were not from Earth or anywhere like it. Past explorers have speculated that this means the Deep Citadel might contain some mode of interplanetary travel. Perhaps it is a hub or nexus leading to many places. If this is true, however, the means to use it have never been found.

Just as likely, the Deep Citadel might be a nexus for time travel. Some people believe that the key to the moon's time shifts lies somewhere within the citadel's walls. Could it be that the remains of visitors are actually from other times rather than (or in addition to) other worlds?

The caverns stretch for miles, twisting and branching. Within them grow a variety of strange fungi, happy to dwell in the eternal darkness and cool, dry environment. About 10 percent of these are edible by humans, but the rest are highly toxic. Determining which is which is a difficulty 6 task.

Ylhath, page 158

Within the caverns dwell the ylhathi, who bear little resemblance to the creatures depicted in the Deep Citadel or to humans. These air-breathing, semi-intelligent beings are cannibals, but they would welcome a new source of food. They are long-lived and have slow metabolisms, so the fact that they are their own sole food source has winnowed their numbers only very slowly. The ylhathi have a rudimentary language and strong religious beliefs as well as a wide variety of superstitions. Their leaders are religious figures who interpret omens in everything that happens.

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The ylhathi no longer exist in large numbers, although they once did. Current members of their kind have no idea how they got where they are (they are clearly not natives of the moon). They will enter the citadel but refuse to make their homes there for superstitious reasons.

THE MOON OF THE PAST

White and empty, the moon of the past is even more desolate than that of the present. The only visible structures are twelve crystalline keeps scattered across the surface.

EMPTY EMBASSIES

Twelve in number, the so-called Empty Embassies stand like beacons above the dry, crater-filled plains and rocky mountainscapes of the moon. One glance is all that is needed to realize that no human had a hand in their creation. Twisted, asymmetrical, and grotesque, the metal structures are covered in an array of strange crystalline formations slowly growing and spreading like a pox along each embassy's outer surface.

Within each embassy are multiple hidden storehouses of technology. These caches contain 2d6 cyphers and one or two artifacts, all based on crystals. Finding a cache is a difficulty 7 task and takes many hours, and that's assuming one is looking carefully.

Since the embassies do not exist in the moon's present, some explorers presume that the people of one of the prior worlds—perhaps the same people who built the Luna Ring or the other current structures—destroyed them. Or maybe they were claimed by the passage of time, although the forces of decay work far more slowly on the moon.

These embassies are not empty, however. Sent on behalf of powerful alien intelligences from far across the galaxy, the huluraloch dwell within the structures and are sustained by them. The huluraloch are beings of pure perception. The embassies are actually massive circuits that hold the huluraloch the way seawater holds salt. Complex crystalline devices run throughout the framework of these alien structures, providing the huluraloch with a fourth-dimensional space from which they can observe the Earth.

The Empty Embassies no longer exist in the present, only the past.

Huluraloch: *level 6, perception as level 10; exists only as pure thought and perception; cannot be harmed physically or interact with the physical world; cannot be detected in any way except in dreams*

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Stirthal, page 155

Tuleer, page 54

THE MOON HEARSAY

Fugitive: A criminal who stole a powerful artifact from the ruler of the city of Stirthal fled to the moon and now hides amid the people in the South Pole fortress.

Spacefaring Secret: The huluraloch in one of the Empty Embassies can relate the location of an ancient vehicle near the moon's south pole that still functions and can travel to any location in the sun's system in less than fifty hours or so. If found, it is already set with the coordinates of Tuleer on Urvanas.

THE WEIRD OF THE MOON

Missing Station: There is a location along the Luna Ring where the transport carriages always stop, even though no station exists at that spot. No one knows why.

Blue Area: The dust in a few dozen acres of a mountainous region of the moon is blue, piled around the barely extant ruins of an ancient city. In this small area, atmosphere and gravity are identical to that of Earth.

Crater Flower: Within the deep shadows of some of the larger craters of the moon, a tiny flower blooms, despite the utter lack of anything that should sustain it. If the flower is picked, a tiny scream of pain can be heard, but perhaps not if the picker is wearing an environment suit.

The only known way to communicate with the huluraloch is by sleeping in one of the embassies. During this time, a sleeper will have a lucid dream, in which she sees a creature that seems like a huge, floating, insubstantial eye. If treated with respect, the huluraloch will speak in the dreamer's language. If not, the dream will simply end.

If the dreamer succeeds in creating and continuing this interaction, she can learn the following:

- Currently (which is to say, in the past), no intelligent life exists on Earth.
- The huluraloch are artificial entities created by equally alien beings from the other side of the galaxy who are interested in Earth.
- The embassies have valuable artifacts of crystalline technology that visitors can find and use.
- The Deep Citadel was built by nonhuman creatures from Earth and offers a means of travel to other stars. The huluraloch also reveals the citadel's location and entrance code.
- The huluraloch shares details about the ylhathi.

Since time travel is technically involved, it's possible that PC actions could destroy the Deep Citadel or the ylhathi in the past, causing them to no longer exist in the present. This development is very unlikely. The only way it could cause a major issue in a campaign is if the PCs encountered the citadel or the ylhathi in the present, went to the past and destroyed what they saw in the present, and then returned to the present. This sort of paradox should take a huge toll on the minds of those experiencing it (that is to say, the PCs). Significant Intellect damage is not out of line.

The following information cannot be learned:

- Why the aliens are interested in Earth.
- How far in the past this occurs (neither the huluraloch nor the dreamer will have a common reference point to make this understood).
- Details about the Deep Citadel's builders or how to access its means of interstellar transport.

THE DEEP CITADEL

The caverns and the central structure within them exist in the moon's past as well as its present. The only difference is that the ylhathi are far more numerous in the past, not to mention more intelligent. Both factors make them more dangerous, but the latter makes them less savage, and thus negotiation might be possible. The ylhathi of the past remember that they were originally brought here by the creators of the Deep Citadel and made to serve as slaves. Their godlike masters are long gone now, and most of what the ylhathi "know" of them is just superstitious nonsense.

THE WORLD DOOR

The World Door exists in exactly the same manner in both time periods.

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CHAPTER 4

NAHARRAI

There was once a small planet close to the sun, making Earth the third from the sun, but that world is long gone.

Naharrai has one very small, distant moon. Legends speak of another, larger moon that crashed into the planet aeons ago.

The Naharrai natives known as the ghru do not believe that Earth humans came to their world in the distant past. They believe that their ancestors developed the Cold Cities and hated the people of Earth—even warred with them using great weapons that could span the distances. If true, this would mean that the people of Naharrai and the people of Earth have no shared past, except as rivals.

Arthoyn, page 45

Lhauric, page 197

Low gravity, pages 97 and 100

The learned know that Earth is the second world out from the sun. That makes Naharrai the third. Legends say that it was once a lifeless place of red sands, but that long ago some great force transformed it into a lush, green place, not unlike Earth.

If that is true, and Naharrai was once like Earth, those days are long gone now. Perhaps the forces that altered the world decided to alter it again. Or, more likely, those forces are so far in the past that their work is now crumbling. The air of Naharrai smells stale to anyone from Earth, some going so far as calling it the "faint whiff of doom"—or death. They liken it to the odor of a patient slowly dying of a wasting disease. In any event, Naharrai is now a place quite different from anywhere else.

GETTING TO NAHARRAI

Most people believe that Earth and Naharrai were once partners, with people from Earth establishing the cities and sites of Naharrai. There is, in fact, a direct "tunnel" between the city of Lhauric on Earth and the city of Arthoyn on Naharrai. However, this is a closely guarded secret, and use of the tunnel is restricted from both sides.

Of course, any of the means suggested in the introduction of this book can also take explorers from Earth to the moon. If the PCs use a gateway or teleporter other than the Lhauric tunnel, they very likely arrive in one of the Cold Cities.

PCs traveling to Naharrai in a vessel almost have to land in the wilderness. The Cold Cities do not emit beacons or offer any kind of welcome or landing spot, and no occupied towns or cities have landing areas for spacecraft.

SURVIVAL ON NAHARRAI

Naharrai has only one-third the gravity of Earth. That means that all characters operate according to the rules of low gravity. Natives suffer no penalties and move with grace in the environment.

The summers are extremely hot, the winters are very cold, and the seasons are twice as long. Each day is just a bit shorter than on Earth, but not enough to make much difference. However, even at high noon, the sun's light on Naharrai is dimmer overall than humans are accustomed to.

Something in the air of Naharrai is poisonous to non-natives over the long term. Travelers from Earth (or, in theory, elsewhere) often wear some kind of breathing apparatus or filter, or they take pills or injections produced by the natives. Those who do not must attempt a Might defense roll with a

USING NAHARRAI

Earth's closest major neighbor is not wildly different from it, so for explorations beyond the confines of the Ninth World, it's not a bad place to start. The theme of Naharrai is a world falling apart, however, as the modifications placed on it millions of years earlier have begun to collapse and turn in on themselves. The PCs face horrific storms and other conditions while exploring Naharrai and the ruins called the Cold Cities, rich with numenera treasures. Interacting with the indigenous races can be trying but potentially rewarding. Successful midnight pilgrims are likely to return home with great treasures and knowledge of a world beyond their own.

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difficulty of 4 once each day. On a failure, the traveler suffers 4 points of damage. Worse, each day thereafter he suffers the same damage, with no chance to resist it. But if he continues to breathe the Naharrain air, he must continue to make Might defense rolls each day. Thus, a number of failed rolls can result in 8 points, 12 points, 16 points, or more of damage suffered each day. A cure must be administered to end the continuing damage, even if the traveler uses a breather or leaves Naharrai altogether.

And then there are the storms. Naharrai's storms are colossal, horrific cataclysms of wind, hail, and rain that can last for days or even weeks, particularly in the late summer. These deadly storms can destroy unprotected homes and belongings. Many natives dwell on the outskirts of the so-called Cold Cities to protect themselves, building low, sturdy homes to keep from being torn apart in the winds.

Every year on Naharrai is a bit drier than the year before it. Slowly but inexorably, rivers and lakes dry up, forests shrink, and crops suffer. Even the ocean recedes. The storms likewise grow more violent each year. It is as if the world is a house of cards, and the more cards that fall, the more the house collapses.

FLORA AND FAUNA OF NAHARRAI

Creatures and plants of types recognizable to explorers from Earth live on Naharrai—grasses grow on the hillsides, trees thrive in forests, birds fly across the sky, fish dart through the water, and mammals, reptiles, insects, and other beasts live on the land. However, none of the specific creatures of Naharrai have an identical counterpart in the Ninth World. For example, the green-leafed yarbis tree grows to be 80 feet (24 m) tall and produces a weird moaning sound when the wind blows. Reddith are fernlike plants that produce a secretion so toxic that to even touch a leaf requires a Might defense roll (difficulty 4) to avoid suffering 2 points of Might damage and 1 point of Speed damage.

METEORS

Meteors are much more frequent on Naharrai than on Earth. Falling stars are a common sight every night, and meteor strikes are known everywhere in the world.

When a meteor strikes a creature or object—which is still very rare—the target typically suffers 8 points of damage. Even more rarely, a large strike might affect all within an immediate radius, inflicting 12 points of damage. Larger strikes (which are far more rare) can obliterate everything in an immediate radius, leaving nothing but a crater.

A meteor strike could be a GM intrusion on Naharrai, if used sparingly.

Creatures include the semi-gelatinous corra bird, which catches insects in its flesh as it flies so it can eat them later. The vlinx is a catlike mammal about 2 feet (60 cm) long that has six legs, the middle pair sporting huge envenomed claws. Terror ants are insects that move just under the ground in swarms, attacking much larger creatures from below.

Voranochs are reptiles large enough to be ridden when domesticated, with ten insectlike legs and eyeless heads. (Both native races of Naharrai use voranochs as mounts and beasts of burden.) Terredel are vicious pack hunters that prey on voranochs and everything else.

Of course, this is just a small sampling of the world's flora and fauna. There are many tens of thousands (or more) of species alive on Naharrai, although the storms—and in particular the droughts—claim many of them each year.

NATIVE RACES OF NAHARRAI

Naharrai boasts a wide variety of unique fauna, but two distinct races of intelligent beings are both prevalent and prominent across the world.

Most people believe that Earth and Naharrai were once partners, with people from Earth establishing the cities and sites of Naharrai.

The toxic element in Naharrai's atmosphere is almost certainly bacterial in nature, in case a PC explorer has resistance or vulnerabilities to such things.

Other regions of Naharrai have different climates, although the differences are not as dramatic as on Earth. So the relatively lifeless poles are cold, and the mostly uninhabited equator is hot, but the rest of the world fits generally into the description given here.

Corra bird: *level 1, Speed defense as level 3 due to size*

Vlinx: *level 2, Speed defense as level 3 due to size; poison inflicts 2 additional points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) if a target fails a Might defense roll*

Terror ant swarm: *level 3; 4 points of damage; ignores attacks (such as a small projectile or piercing weapon, or a single-target mental effect) that do not affect a number of ants at once*

Voranoch: *level 3; Armor 1*

Terredel, page 154

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ELLATICURIDS

The ellaticurids superficially resemble humans, but they are taller, lankier, and have a bluish tinge to their flesh. Most ellaticurids routinely remove all body hair.

Ellaticurids find themselves in a state not unlike that of the humans of the Ninth World. Their general level of technology and advancement is fairly low, but they have access to the tools and weapons left by far more advanced peoples of the past. The major difference is that the ellaticurids have surprisingly detailed records of the past, when their ancestors of thousands of years ago had a much greater grasp of science and the numenera. Ellaticurids never think of the numenera as magical and have no real taste for religion or mysticism in any form.

They are a civilization in decline. They know that they once wielded great technologies, but the skill for using and understanding them is now lost. Occasionally, an individual makes a breakthrough and restores an old device or figures out a process from long ago, but as time passes, such things happen less and less often. Ellaticurid records detail historical events but not technical issues (or at least, not in a way that current people can understand them).

Ellaticurid records do not mention Earth, but most believe that their far-distant ancestors came from that world and adapted to Naharrai (or perhaps adapted the world to themselves). These ancestors, however, would have come a million Naharrai years or more in the past—perhaps much more—and their histories go back only ten thousand years or so.

These are a grim, cynical people. They are well aware that their race and their world are dying, and that there is nothing they can do about either. But their lack of religious or superstitious beliefs does not mean they are wholly pragmatic or emotionless. On the contrary, visitors might find their obsession with the stories (or rather, the glories) of the past—whether read in books, recited aloud, converted into song, or conveyed in theatrical presentations—to be quite impractical when faced with the overt challenges of their lives.

The ellaticurids speak their own language, and many speak the language of the ghru. Some around the city of Arthoyn have

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learned to speak the Truth. They have their own currency of copper and silver coins. In the Ninth World, these would be accepted as shins, but the ellaticurids will not accept shins as coins.

A typical ellaticurid village is built of low stone buildings, all of which have a significant portion underground to serve as shelter from the storms. Most people attempt to raise crops or tend herds of animals, but this is frustrating, difficult work and gets harder each year. They use voranochs as draft animals and mounts. Often one or two people in a village have a functioning numenera device that they can operate and understand. It's always different and sometimes is practical (such as a weapon, a protective device, or something that helps to produce food, build homes, tend crops, and so on), but other times the device is simply frivolous—what a Ninth Worlder would call an oddity, most likely.

There are a few ellaticurid cities, but they are relatively small; Taranhall, with its population of 10,000, is a vast metropolis by their standards. Warriors guard the cities from stout stone fortresses and patrol the borderlands near ghru lands. These warriors are typically mounted on armored voranochs, which often have mounted repeating crossbows built into their saddles. Ellaticurid soldiers prefer long melee weapons, like spears or polearms, and wear heavy armor of leather, metal, and wood. Armor is usually stylized to give the appearance of a dangerous Naharrain animal—perhaps a serpent, toothy reptile, or frightening bird.

A great enmity exists between the ellaticurids and the ghru. Their lands are normally far apart, and open warfare between them erupts from time to time, with one side or the other making raids or encroaching on the territory of the other. Ellaticurids outnumber their enemies almost ten to one, but ghru command a far higher level of technology.

THE MACHINE-MINDED GHRU

When a ghru child is born, its brain is removed in an elaborate ceremony and replaced with a biomechanical brain built by the ghru in a processing plant that is more like a temple. Sometimes, the machine mind of a dead ghru is recycled, but this is rare. Ghru look very much like pale humans with large heads that resemble strange numenera devices, with glass panels for faces. On these panels, they project the image of a human face that speaks and makes expressions as a human would. Thus, ghru are humans with machine minds.

Because ghru brains are implanted, there are no ghru schools. No training is needed, for ghru brains are designed with knowledge and skills already in them. However, it is difficult for a ghru brain to learn much beyond what it is initially given. The ghru have fine memories and store new information, but they do not adapt well. You can show one how to build a boat, and she'll remember all the steps of the process, but unless that skill was given to her at her implantation ceremony, she will have a difficult time at best carrying out the task. All ghru with machine minds are treated as equals, even one whose biological body is still very young and undeveloped.

Ghru have an incomplete understanding of the numenera, the past, and the nature of their world. A young ghru possesses certain skills and knowledge, but only some of it is still applicable. If no ghru has the skill to operate a particular machine, that machine might be discarded. Later, when a new ghru comes along who does possess that knowledge, the machine is no longer available, and the knowledge is regarded as superfluous.

Despite this, ghru have a far greater understanding of machines ("mystical gifts of the Great Old Ones") and advanced knowledge like medicine, biology, and various machine sciences than their ellaticurid rivals do. Ghru warriors, for example, often wield storm staves. Ghru priests and others of importance ride in insectlike vehicles that fly through the air by furiously beating gigantic wings. Ghru also employ poison against their enemies whenever possible. For the ghru, sometimes a warrior is one who employs stealth to get close to an enemy and strike with a poisoned fingertip needle rather than a burly armored figure with a massive weapon.

Other common ghru devices include electric armor, servogloves, and mental transmitters. The latter work only for ghru, allowing their mechanical brains to communicate with any other ghru within 1 mile (2 km). Ghru also use various cyphers.

The Truth, page 133

Oddity, page 314

Storm staves are level 5 artifacts that appear to be black metal rods about 3 feet (1 m) long. In melee, they are medium weapons that inflict 3 additional points of damage from an electrical shock. They can also be used at short range, projecting bolts of red lightning that inflict 5 points of damage on a single target. They have a depletion of 1 in 1d10 when used at range, but no depletion roll is needed in melee.

Electric armor is a level 4 artifact in the form of a belt- or armband-affixed metal device. When activated, it creates a scintillating aura of energy for one hour that gives the wearer +1 to Armor and lets her deal 1 additional point of damage in melee from the ever-building charge. Creatures that directly touch the wearer suffer 1 point of damage as well. The device has a depletion roll of 1 in 1d10.

Servogloves are level 3 artifacts that appear to be metal gauntlets. When activated, a glove animates for one minute and moves as the user desires within immediate range. A bond of force connects the user with the glove. Thus, it can grasp objects, but it can also help the user climb, pulling him up as though it were his real hand. The glove acts as an extra hand or—if used as part of a physical task that involves the user's hands—it offers an asset on such tasks. A glove has a depletion of 1 in 1d10.

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A few ghru priests over the centuries have experimented with creating artificial animals, either whole cloth—automatons—or implanting mechanical brains into living individuals.

It may be that the priesthood's selection process for new brains has inadvertently led them to favor those with a predilection for religion and mysticism over pure science. Thus, the ghru religion might be an unintentional, self-perpetuating ouroboros, as the priests literally throw out brains that might have useful skills now utterly lost by their society.

All ghru owe fealty to the queen, a female who is given a special brain during her implantation ceremony. There is only one queen at a time, and as soon as her mind is in place, she begins her rule. However, the priests wield great power in society. Although the queen is theoretically an absolute monarch, if she ever challenged the entirety of the priesthood, that would likely be a mistake.

The ghru do not have currency, for all goods are technically owned by the queen. Individuals are given what they need for their predetermined roles, as distributed by the queen's agents and the priests. Ghru follow a mostly vegetarian diet and grow various crops as well as fruits in sprawling orchards. It is not uncommon for a ghru farmer to have some kind of numenera to aid in food production, but such devices are neither ubiquitous nor uniform. Similarly, a ghru engineer, physician, or record keeper might have a miscellaneous device to help with tasks.

Ghru with titles (like the queen) do not have additional personal names. Priests have numbers, such as priest-755 or priest-931. Other ghru do have simple personal names. Most are content to live their lives carrying out their assigned duties in the name of the greater good and their gods. Occasionally, a malcontent attempts to break free from the system or challenge accepted practices, but these "malfunctions" are quickly eliminated in most cases.

A templelike processing plant creates ghru brains. Priests study the brains and select those that fit categories as determined by doctrine. Based on appearance, many brains are destroyed, and only a few are used in the implantation ceremonies for young children. The priests have an idea what a given brain is suited for based on its appearance, so they know a queen brain from a laborer brain, a warrior brain, or a priest brain.

Ghru reproduce exactly like humans, and a ghru baby looks just like a human baby. Newborns are well cared for, but no consideration is given to a young child's intellectual or social development, since all of that will change completely with the implantation ceremony. Ghru eat and do everything else necessary to care for their organic bodies. This includes sleep (in truth, a sleeplike rest period—a ghru mind

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continues to function normally during this rest, but the body is more or less immobile).

The ghru believe that the gods they refer to as the Great Old Ones will return to restore Naharrai to its former glory if they serve them and pray fervently enough. These Great Old Ones, they believe, started life on Naharrai, built the Cold Cities, and developed the first ghru brains, thus giving the race its genesis. Supposedly, the gods also created the processing plant in the holy city of Mehbivrobek that produces new brains, which the priests maintain along with their mobile temples that walk about so that all ghru, wherever they are, can partake of important ceremonies.

Ghru religion has many rules, restrictions, and taboos. It also compels them to execute ellaticurids they find, although only rarely do they seek such conflicts. (A small heretical group of ghru priests believes that ellaticurids should be captured and given machine minds so they become ghru, but if the priests do this, they do it in secret.) How ghru react to other intelligent non-ghru (such as humans) varies. It happens rarely enough that they have not developed a formal doctrine. However, if a human makes it clear that he is from Earth, a ghru might remember the old tales of enmity between the two worlds and seek to destroy him.

THE COLD CITIES

Across Naharrai lie silver cities encased in shimmering domes of pure force. The interiors of these cities are sealed and have their own atmosphere (which protect non-natives from the toxic effect). Within the cities, the temperature is very low, and gravity is Earth-standard. For these reasons, most ellaticurids never venture inside the

It is possible that there is a link between the Cold Cities of Naharrai and the cloud cities of Urvanas. Perhaps these domed cities were originally created by the same ancient peoples.

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Within the Cold Cities, natives of Naharrai operate under the rules of high gravity, pages 98 and 100.

Cold Cities except to take shelter from a storm under the domes. But even then, such occurrences are rare. Ghru won't go inside even to shelter from a storm, for they believe the cities to be forbidden ground.

Getting inside the Cold Cities requires passing through one of the iris-door-sealed airlocks. When one enters an airlock, soft voices can be heard, almost as if whispers from far away are somehow projected at the visitor. No one has deciphered these whispers, but most people assume they are the preserved voices of the long dead, not living beings attempting real communication.

Characters in the Cold Cities suffer 1 point of ambient damage per round from the cold if they do not have warm clothing or similar protection. But the term "Cold City" refers to more than just the temperature. They are stark, eerily lifeless places.

Exploring one of the Cold Cities is not unlike exploring a well-preserved city of the prior worlds of Earth. Plenty of opportunities for scavenging shins, oddities, or cyphers abound, and artifacts can be recovered as well. There are also dangers, as incomprehensible machines do things that can easily vaporize (or worse) an explorer who steps in the wrong place or activates the wrong control panel.

Explorers who have entered one of the domes and returned report finding one or more of the following:

- Automated transports that move throughout the city (although finding a way to direct them is almost impossible)
- Machines that produce strange but edible foodstuffs
- Machines that produce clothing tailored to fit a given character, using fabric that cleans and repairs itself
- Machines that produce unknown metals, synth, or textiles in vast quantities
- Drugs that transport consciousness into another dimension temporarily
- Immobile machines that heal almost any wound or cure virtually any disease
- Machines that transfer the consciousness of one creature into the body of another
- Glass screens that show moving images of unknown creatures in bizarre locations doing inexplicable things
- Holographic projections of unknown humanoids speaking incomprehensible languages
- Sculptures of metal, glass, or stone that represent nothing that can be understood

Every Cold City is unique. Whereas some might be found on an open plain, one is on an island the exact size of the city in the middle of a lake. Another hangs over the side of a cliff, perched on what appears to be the spinal column of a dead creature of unimaginable size. Some are said to be inhabited by intelligent automatons, and others are supposedly haunted by shadowy, ephemeral beings that the ghru call ghosts.

TRAVEL ON NAHARRAI

Travel on established roads is safe by Ninth World standards. Exploring the wilderness beyond the reaches of civilized areas, however, is quite dangerous. Bandits—usually ellaticurid, but sometimes ghru—attack travelers, but worse are the unexpected appearances of bizarre beasts. The roads of Naharrai are ancient, but they stretch between the Cold Cities and remain in serviceable condition. The natives are not leery of traveling the roads the way typical Ninth Worlders are, although they fear the wilds just the same.

A FEW NAHARRAI LOCATIONS

TARANHALL

Taranhall is an important center of ellaticurid civilization—as close to a "capital city" as they get, although the ellaticurids do not have a centralized government. Rather, Taranhall is important not because of politics, but because it holds the largest of the ellaticurid libraries. The library is the biggest and centralmost structure in town, but like most ellaticurid buildings, it is low to the ground to protect it from storms, with much of it existing underground. Many small, independent schools, each with its own focus and philosophy, lie around the library.

Gehathi: *level 5, all interactions and lore as level 7, attacks and defense as level 4*

The leader of Taranhall is Gehathi, an older woman who is respected by almost everyone. She seems to know everyone in the city personally, although that can't literally be true, for approximately 10,000 people live there. Still, she can't cross the street in less than fifteen minutes due to all the people who stop her to chat amiably.

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ARTHOYN

Arthoyn would not be a very important ellaticurid town except that it lies at one end of a numenera tunnel that extends to the city of Lhauric in the Beyond on Earth. A tall, imposing man named Bartheum is the master of Arthoyn, and he has an elite guard who keep order in town and control the entrance to the tunnel.

The town, whose current population numbers about 6,000, was established on this site because of the tunnel. On the Arthoyn side, the tunnel entrance looks like a huge metal doorway in the side of a stone structure that appears to be a perfect cube 75 feet (23 m) to a side, making it without a doubt the most prominent structure in the city. The doorway is 24 feet tall and 16 feet wide (7 m by 5 m). The cube is, by all means of examination, solid. The doorway's metal portals (level 7) remain closed and sealed with chains (level 6). Passing through them is like stepping into an invisible tunnel that extends through the night sky, with stars above and below. This strange passage is just less than a mile in length, and at the other end is a closed set of metal doors identical to those at the start (one end of the tunnel cannot be seen from the other). On the Lhauric side, the tunnel entrance appears very similar to the other, except that the people of that city have taken pains to disguise the cube as part of a building, with the doorway concealed inside the newer structure. Tharimalles, the priest-king of Lhauric, keeps the doorway a closely guarded secret, with only those blessed by the gods of the Challifani allowed to enter.

Tharimalles and Bartheum honor an agreement maintained by their predecessors, and established by their predecessors before them. Passage is allowed only by those willing and able to pay at both ends—200 shins on the Lhauric end, and 200 gold coins on the Arthoyn end. The equivalent in numenera (oddities, cyphers, or artifacts) is allowed instead, but it's difficult to get the better end of the exchange in such an arrangement. More important than the payment, however, is that the existence of the tunnel remain a secret. Most who pass through do so to conduct some limited—and typically lucrative—trade. Others are on some kind of exploratory mission on one side or the other, often sponsored by a wealthy or influential source.

Bartheum is not as good as his Lhauric counterpart in the secrecy aspect of the agreement. Most of Arthoyn knows the tunnel exists, and many outside the town have heard rumors. Nevertheless, few ellaticurid people have any desire to go through the passage, for (rightly or wrongly) they believe Earth to be a far worse place than Naharrai.

All in all, the tunnel is used on average only one day out of every fifty or so. Nevertheless, a fair bit of Arthoyn's industry is geared toward trade with Lhauric and its priesthood and religious faithful who use the gate, so they produce crafted goods, foodstuffs, textiles, and freshly mined ores (all varieties that are exotic on Earth). Traders from Earth bring equally exotic foods and materials, as well as numenera. In addition, the people of Arthoyn attempt to service the needs of travelers from Earth. For example, humans need things to help them breathe safely on Naharrai or deal with the maladies that can arise from the air. These breathing apparatuses, as well as various pills and remedies, are made by the ghru, who have a far greater understanding of such things. Ellaticurid spies and thieves steal them from their enemies.

THE MINES OF TALBISS

Although a few exceptions exist, mines are almost unknown in the Ninth World. Pure ores accessible from the surface have long since been depleted over the aeons. Ninth Worlders scavenge metals, ores, and other materials from extant objects created in the past. None of this is true on Naharrai. The mines of Talbiss are rich in iron, nickel, and silver. Ghru miners bring these ores to the surface, and the foundries of Talbiss immediately smelt them into usable metals. The ghru use powerful energy cutters to make mining much simpler, and the foundries likewise have numenera advancements that enhance the processes.

Five hundred ghru work in the mines, and another thousand in the foundries. Double that number serve these workers' needs, although food is mostly shipped in from nearby farming villages. A council of former miners (now too old for the manual labor) runs the mines and the associated town, answering directly to the ghru queen.

Lhauric, page 197

Bartheum: *level 5, attacks and intimidation as level 6; health 20; Armor 2*

Bartheum's elite guard: *level 4; health 15; Armor 2*

Tharimalles, page 197

Gods of the Challifani, page 197

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The queen's retinue usually consists of six soldiers, three to five attendants, two to four entertainers, and four to six supplicants and advisors, including a representative of the priesthood.

MEHBIVROBEK

Ghru culture and religion revolve in the orbit of Mehbivrobek, their holy city. Three thousand people call the city home, but at any given time the visiting pilgrims equal that number. The city is a maze of small homes and larger temples. Ghru society has no real economy, so there are no shops, only storehouses from which goods are distributed. (Outsiders get nothing, but individual ghru might be willing to barter.)

Ghru soldier: *level 3, attacks as level 4; health 10; Armor 2; armed either with metal crossbows and swords or with storm staves, inflicting 4 points of damage; one in ten soldiers wears electric armor in addition to normal chainmail*

Mehbivrobek is also the home of the queen, who dwells in an angular structure suspended by cables from the apex of a 200-foot (61 m) tall arch of stone and synth. Steps on the interior of the large arch allow servants of the queen to climb up and down inside, lowering themselves into her home via the cables. The queen and her personal retinue travel in a hovering craft with fluttering insectlike wings. During the megastorms that batter Naharrai, the palace swings wildly in the winds, but the cables never break. The interior is built like a gyroscope, so no matter how it swings, the floors are always oriented down.

THE FORTRESS OF VIBBORN

Vibborn is a sophisticated fortress housing ghru soldiers and fighting vehicles. An odd structure on the Naharrai landscape, the fortress is a metallic sphere about 200 feet (61 m) in diameter, supported by a single metal leg. Ghru insectoid craft flutter in and out of hangar bays, armed with level 6 missiles that often carry poison gas (creating clouds that cover a short area). One hundred and fifty soldiers are billeted here, and they maintain a "stable" of twenty-five flying craft.

The fortress has two weapons, which are long poles that come out of the sphere when needed. Those within can cause these weapons to emit concentrated bursts of pure sonic energy that strike an area within 500 feet (152 m) of the structure. The energy affects all in immediate range of where it hits. Those in the area suffer 10 points of damage if struck, and a minimum of 3 points even if not struck. Affected targets are also rendered deaf for two rounds.

NAHARRAI HEARSAY

Medical Slaves: Bartheum, ruler of Arthoyn, has agents seeking ghru knowledgeable in medicines. He plans on capturing those individuals, holding them indefinitely, and forcing them to make the antidote and the cure for human visitors who have problems with the air.

Threat in the Trees: A terrible predator not unlike a giant, tentacled cephalopod climbs amid the Stone Trees and is a threat to the treehomed. They will pay a handsome reward for proof of its death.

Stone Tree predator: *level 6; attacks up to three foes as a single action*

Spies Sought: The ghru queen, aware that outsiders come to her world very occasionally, puts out an offer to pay them to spy on the ellaticurid communities closest to ghru lands.

THE WEIRD OF NAHARRAI

Ancient Red Desert: A ghru man named Gerat claims to have visions of the distant past in which Naharrai appears to be a desert without water, air, or life. A single wheeled automaton rolls across the dark red sands.

Singers of Strange Songs: Deep within the Barharail Sea dwell intelligent crustaceans that create music by passing water through various tubes within their shells.

Mist of Tongues: A green mist floats across the lands, altering the mind of anyone it touches. Victims begin to speak in a different (otherwise unknown) language, and only that language. Those affected by the mist can converse with one another. This alteration fades after a few weeks.

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A GHRU ARTICULATED TEMPLE

Outside of Mehbivrobek, ghru temples are mobile. Each temple is housed within a metal vehicle that moves like an enormous, bulbous insect. Articulated temples can be found throughout ghru lands, but usually only one is in a given town or region at a time. Some need maintenance or repair if a leg stops working or something else malfunctions, but most temples operate well. The ghru priests do what they can to maintain the temples, but skills, tools, and materials are not always available.

When a temple stops in a location, the acolytes set up a welcoming area around it for supplicants. This includes woven rugs, candelabras, braziers, and a few sculptures important to meditation. When the temple needs to move, or in cases of danger or inclement weather, all materials can be packed up and stored inside with great speed.

ENTRANCE
Visitors who pass through the doors are greeted with images of the Great Old Ones painted on the walls. The images are strange and abstract, more like swirling energy vortices in the void than people or creatures. Atonal piping music emanates through the area at all times.

SACRISTY
This is a storage area for priestly vestments, candles, and other paraphernalia, as well as all the materials set up outside the temple when not in motion.

SANCTUARY
Here, the priests conduct rites before an altar dedicated to their gods of the distant past.

COMMAND ROOM
This is where the priests control the temple. From here, they can open and close (and lock) the main doors, control the movement of the temple, and cause the legs to attack foes nearby.

ENGINE ROOM
This is an access port for needed maintenance.

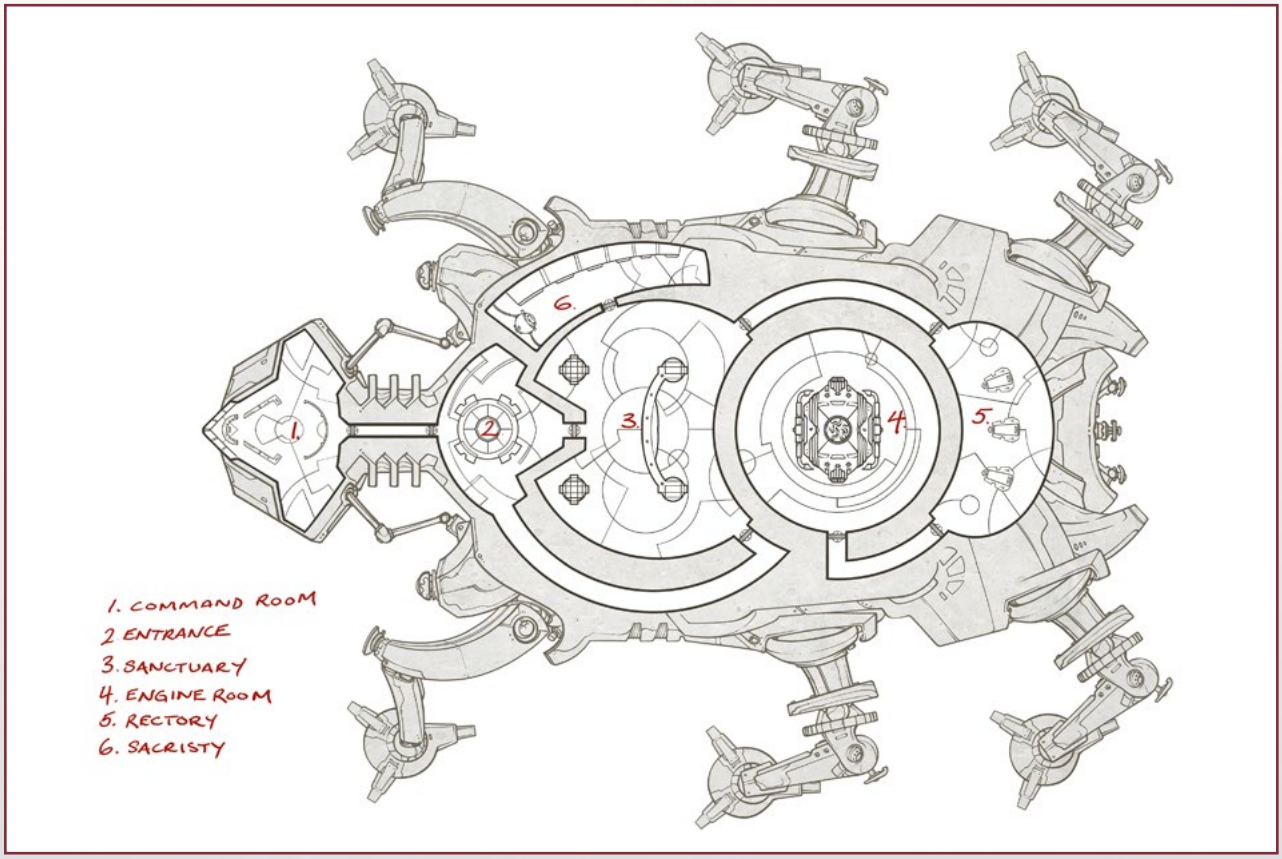
RECTORY
The priests sleep in this chamber. Generally, a temple has two priests and occasionally two or three acolytes who sleep in the sacristy.

The walls of an articulated temple are made of a level 7 metal.

Ghru priest: *level 4, all interactions and perception as level 5*

Temple leg: *attacks as a level 6 creature, inflicting 8 points of damage*

Temple door: *level 6*



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THE STONE TREES

No one knows where they came from. No one knows if they date back to the mythic days when Naharrai was a dead world, or if they came about somehow afterward, but one hundred and twenty-eight immense stone pinnacles rise up at the edge of the Barharail Sea. They range from 600 to 1,000 feet (183 to 305 m) in height, and each is 80 to 100 feet (24 to 30 m) in diameter. Natives call them the Stone Trees, and with good reason—they appear to be the trunks of enormous trees. They even have occasional protrusions that could easily be where branches once connected. However, these pinnacles are made of stone, not wood (or even petrified wood), which raises the question—are they natural, or did intelligent hands craft them, with the resemblance to trees being likely intentional? No one alive knows.

To make the trees even stranger, they are apparently honeycombed with open veins filled with air that is heavy with helium. In various places throughout each pinnacle, vents allow the helium to escape into the open air. Some of these passages are 5 to 8 feet (1.5 to 2.4 m) in diameter, but most are smaller.

Treehomed: *level 3, climbing as level 6*

Some explorers and daredevils have attempted to plumb the insides of the Stone Trees using the tubes and passageways, wearing various kinds of breathing apparatuses to prevent asphyxiation in the helium-rich air.

The Treehomed: About a thousand ellaticurid people have taken to living in the Stone Trees, dispersed throughout the many pinnacles. They live in wooden structures built into the sides of the trees, using huge cloth sails buoyed by helium escaping from vents to ensure that their homes never fall. The treehomed are excellent climbers and dislike spending too much time on the ground. They gather food from the plants and lichens that grow on the Stone Trees and hunt the birds and other animals that make their homes there. Still, they must return to the ground for water (although they attempt to catch rainwater when they can). These trips to the ground sometimes involve procuring additional food, wood, or other needs. They are a practical, quiet people, living in small groups and contending with great challenges.

The treehomed are insular and distrustful of outsiders of any race, although unlike others of their kind, they are not immediately hostile to ghru any more than they are to anyone else that comes their way. However, most ghru are still hostile to them.

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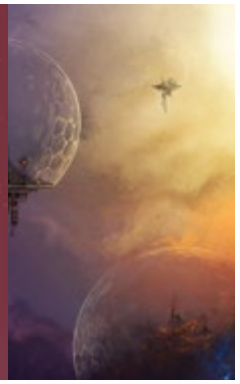
CHAPTER 5

URVANAS



Like other worlds circling the sun, the one now closest survived the violent and often improbable expansions of several previous civilizations, though those expansions left their mark. To someone gazing into the night from the surface of the Ninth World, Urvanas is visible only as a bright star in the sky, albeit one that moves with respect to the other stars. But to those with devices of sufficient power to offer a closer view, or to those traveling in a craft that moves close enough to Urvanas, the world is visible as a milky sphere streaked with muddy brown smears, hinting at a place of storm-wracked clouds.

TRAVELING TO URVANAS

Given the evidence of the great floating cities that remain hovering over the clouds, it's certain that prior-world civilizations extended to Urvanas.

Any of the means suggested in the introduction of this book can take midnight pilgrims from Earth to Urvanas. If they use some kind of gateway or teleporter, they might appear in the cloud cities of Tuleer or Nightwatcher Spire. If they arrive in a craft or vessel, they would do well to head toward one of the floating cities far above the surface. Heading down into the atmosphere below the clouds is risky—the weight of the air and the hellish heat near and at the surface could crush their craft in a few hours or less.

Tuleer, page 54

Nightwatcher Spire, page 57

SURVIVAL ON URVANAS

Floating cities above Urvanas possess an atmosphere breathable by humans. Even beyond the cities' protective domes, at and near the layer over the clouds where the cities are commonly found, the pressure and temperature are ideal for humans (and the natives, called lux), though they would need a source of supplementary breathable air.

Search Terms: *runaway greenhouse effect, cloud city Venus*

Lux, page 53

USING URVANAS

The GM can use the world of Urvanas several ways in a campaign. The following scenarios could be provided as hooks to player characters:

- The characters begin play as natives of Urvanas, not Earth, and adventure through the weird, floating cloud cities instead of the continents of the Steadfast.
- Characters on Earth learn that a moon-sized artifact called Aato that circles the world of Urvanas might hold the key to eliminating an invading force of creatures of utter darkness (called shadows of the void).
- Criminals who escaped justice on Earth half a millennia ago in a vessel designed for a much grander purpose have been found. They are on Urvanas, and perhaps so is their vessel, called the Ark. The PCs are sent to investigate.
- An Aeon Priest on Earth offers a treasure in artifacts and cyphers in return for a captured entity known as a lux, but specimens of lux are apparently found only on the world of Urvanas.
- The PCs arrive on Urvanas by invitation of a group of learned humans and lux called the Nightwatchers, apparently a group akin to the Aeon Priests. The Nightwatchers want the characters to undertake a special mission to destroy a rogue combat automaton of Earth vintage.

Shadow of the void, page 151

Ark, page 53

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But about 30 miles (48 km) lower, none of that is true, which is why the surface is referred to as "deathlands" by humans and "Zhoh" by lux. Those who are condemned of a crime, who take their own lives, or who simply slip and fall are said to take the "Death Dive" (often shortened to just the "Dive"). The pressure from thick, dead air means the surface is hot enough to melt some metals and synth. At ground level, the pressure is almost 100 times that of Earth. The conditions destroy unshielded lux, humans, and even most machines and vessels that weren't specially created with high pressure and heat in mind. And that doesn't include the immense electrical storms or the massive volcanoes that sometimes explosively erupt on the surface with little warning.

Urvanas windrider, page 55

Malork, page 146

Even above the clouds, storms and winds can whip up to colossal ferocity with relatively little warning. When this happens, the cloud cities automatically generate static force shields that provide protection, but a lone flyer in a small craft or someone on a windrider faces a serious task just to remain above the clouds, let alone stay on course, while in the grip of such a storm.

Windrider, page 313

Gravity on Urvanas is about 90 percent of Earth's, which means humans operate without hindrance—in fact, they have just a bit of spring in their step. Lux are even more at home.

MOVING FROM CITY TO CITY

The cloud city inhabitants travel between cities primarily by Urvanas windriders, though some ride on flying beasts called malorks.

A few refurbished flying vessels, some originally designed for travel into the night, also fly between the more prominent cities on something of a regular basis. Most are run by well-known traders whose first priority is cargo and the upkeep of trade routes, but passengers can buy passage on these craft. The most renowned vessel is called *Perseverance* and captained by a lux named Garing, who likes to trade in spices and other luxury goods.

The most difficult part of flying between cities is the fact that the cities are always moving. Knowing where a particular city is located at any given time is troublesome,

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though the cities themselves have an innate sense of where the other cities are. The ability to cajole and steer cities in a desired direction, especially to meet with another cloud city, is a very rare talent that some lux and humans have developed, and those who can do it are highly sought after. For everyone else, knowing where a cloud city lies requires knowledge of wind currents and the season, previous locations of the city, and the city's habits—though sometimes, cyphers known as cloud city guides (often created by Nightwatchers) can help.

CLOUD CITY GUIDE

Level: 1d6
Internal: Subdermal injection
Wearable: Headband
Usable: Handheld device
Effect: For the next 28 hours, the user knows the name (if any) and location of all cloud cities within 1,000 miles (1,600 km).

MOON OF URVANAS

A small moon, green as a leaf and slightly translucent, circles Urvanas. Humans unimaginatively call it the Green Moon. The lux call it Aato and revere it as a sort of deific presence.

The Green Moon is utterly airless and almost smooth, and with one-tenth the gravity of Earth. The surface is empty of blemish or cratering. Composed of diamond-hard synth akin to volcanic glass, it constantly soaks up sunlight, possibly to power one or more internal processes. Rumors of a vast cache of the numenera held inside sometimes motivate explorers to use extreme methods to reach the moon. But those who try to bore their way beneath the surface immediately discover that the Green Moon can focus all the available light falling over it onto a troublesome intruder anywhere on the moon's surface or anywhere within a few hundred thousand miles (500,000 km) to which it has line of sight.

Insectlike automatons, called aobo by lux, scuttle across the surface at widely distributed locations. These creatures, as green as the moon they live upon, mend cracks, smooth over craters, and provide other repairs to the surface of Aato. They each possess a unique personality; many are quiet, but some are personable, brooding, angry, or childlike. A few are murderous. A talkative aobo might speak about Urvanas and what it has observed about the planet over the last few hundred years, but it will not discuss the Green Moon, not even admitting that it exists, or that the automaton spends most of its existence maintaining the moon's exterior.

Sometimes the Green Moon transmits messages. These messages are picked up by ancient receivers, by some automatons and machines already capable of speaking with each other over private machine channels, and sometimes by psychically sensitive individuals. The messages contain vast amounts of data on incredibly specialized topics, so even when the messages are heard, their contents are often so esoteric that it's impossible to make much sense of them. But all of them begin with an image of the moon hanging above the world of Urvanas.

The Green Moon's light-focusing attack inflicts 25 points of damage per round.

Aobo (Green Moon automaton): *level 4, tasks related to the numenera as level 6, knowledge related to Urvanas as level 5*

Nightwatchers, page 57

CLOUD CITIES OF URVANAS

Thousands or perhaps hundreds of thousands of cloud cities float above Urvanas, each a variation on elaborate themes that include, at minimum, a flexible synth gas dome that provides breathable

Aato looks artificial, and that's because it is. Urvanas had no natural moon before a prior-world civilization left the Green Moon to orbit the world.

The Green Moon maintains a polar orbit—in which it consecutively passes above both poles of Urvanas—so it's never caught in the planet's shadow with respect to the sun.

A day on Urvanas is well over one hundred Earth days long. Most cloud cities prefer to remain in daylight and generally move in the direction of the oncoming dawn quickly enough to stay ahead of darkness.

"Those condemned to the Dive swiftly fall beneath the clouds, leaving behind that band of light and life where the cloud cities drift and play in idyllic ease. Moving ever faster through thickening clouds and warming air, the diver feels as if a giant grips his body, a grip that grows stronger every second. Should the diver survive by some miracle of Aato's grace, he finds the surface, the deathlands, where everything is burned and crushed to death."

~Uojonor, Nightwatcher

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CLOUD CITY BEHAVIOR

Cloud cities sometimes act like living creatures. For instance, if a city "feels" threatened by another large object (be that another city, a vessel, or a wind creature rising from the clouds), it can attack with a static force field blast that has a range of 3 miles (5 km) and can be used every few rounds. The blast inflicts 10 points of damage to the target and everything within short range of it.

Packs and Predators: A cloud city usually prefers to forage alone, using large underbody sieves to gather what it needs for self-repair from the air and clouds all around it, though small packs of three cities sometimes drift within a few miles of each other. This grouping is preferred because sometimes very young cloud cities demonstrate feeding aggression, having learned that they can collect several years' worth of volatiles and particulates if they attack, defeat, and absorb an older, unsuspecting city. Cities that move in packs are far less vulnerable to this sort of activity.

Internal Defenses: Cloud cities retain a desire to be lived in. Empty ones encourage settlers and long-term residents to put down roots and stay awhile (or forever), using the food and supply caches that the city has built up over years. However, if would-be settlers turn out to be raiders interested in looting the caches, the city can activate shepherds in the form of multilimbed flying automatons. Sometimes raiders who are caught are forcibly restrained and become the source of a new population for that city. Such cities are not happy places.

City Supply Caches: Most wild cities store at least several months' worth of food and water for a group of up to twenty humans, as well as a supply of 2d6 cyphers and a few useful artifacts, including several windriders and breath recyclers. Food takes the form of mildly flavorful bricks of chewy protein.

Inhabited City Resource Production: An inhabited city modifies its production of food and water to a quantity sufficient to maintain the population, and it also makes available feed stock for fabricating other items and structures the inhabitants might want. The stock can be fashioned into cooking implements, housing units, or even special devices if someone has the right knowledge.

Because of their genetic programming and ability to replicate, cloud cities have undergone selective pressure and evolved interesting and sometimes lifelike behaviors.

For the purposes of combat between vessels (page 14), cloud cities range in level from 3 (juvenile cloud cities) to 6 (mature cloud cities).

Cloud cities filter for rare volatiles, minerals, and other necessary particulates from the atmosphere.

Urvanas windrider, page 55

Breath recycler, page 32

Shepherd security automaton: *level 4; Armor 3; flies a long distance each round; long-range static force shield blast inflicts 3 points of damage and stuns target for one round so it can take no actions on its next turn*

Malork, page 146

Fungus puff: *level 3, Speed defense as level 1 due to size; catalytic touch attack burns for 3 points of damage for two rounds*

atmosphere and lift that keeps the city aloft. In a manner akin to how living creatures multiply, cloud cities reproduce. The process isn't easily understood, even for Nightwatchers who have taken an interest, but it's clear that after two or more cloud cities float in close proximity to each other for a few days, one or more of them buds an "offspring" that quickly develops into a small but complete new cloud city childlet. Over time, juvenile cloud cities grow larger and more complex.

As a result, many cloud cities—especially the smaller ones—seem abandoned. That's the opposite of the truth; newly budded cloud cities have never been lived in. The oldest are large enough to hold several thousand people, and the younger cities contain about as much living space as a large village.

A younger city that's never been lived in is considered a "wild" city, valued by lux and by humans for the raw, unclaimed resources it carries.

FLORA AND FAUNA OF URVANAS

In addition to the cloud cities, Urvanas's cloudscape is host to a menagerie of floating and flying life. Drift trees, fungus puffs, stratoflies, malorks, blatherswifts, bubbleworms, and other plants and creatures swim, float, or flap across the sky, spending their lives without ever touching the ground far below.

For example, fungus puffs vary in size from 3 feet (1 m) to hundreds of feet (150 m) in diameter. They constantly shed a silvery pollen that burns like fuel when concentrated and is toxic to breathe.

Stratoflies buzz about on diaphanous wings of translucent green and red, feeding on all manner of smaller insects and animals. They rarely try to eat humans or lux, though there are exceptions.

Blatherswifts are snakelike twists of curling flesh (or possibly vine) constantly whipping through the air in erratic zigs, zags, and swirls as they emit an annoying noise. When more than a few are seen at once, it usually means a massive storm is brewing.

Bubbleworms are connected masses of twinkling spheres that move almost like single unified worms, though the bubbles can change place or form into shapes more complex than simple columns. At least some of the bubbles serve as stomachs, and animals and plants caught on the sticky exterior are visibly digested within each cavity.

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The inhabitants of Urvanas's cloud cities are composed chiefly of native lux and the descendants of Ninth World humans.

Far more creatures live in the cloudscape than those described above. And nearly without exception, those that die cease their flight and begin their Dive.

INHABITANTS OF URVANAS

Humans and intelligent beings known as lux inhabit Urvanas's cloud cities, usually with humans on top (and inside the air dome) and the lux inhabiting the structures that hang beneath any given city.

HUMANS

Humans feel like they've been on Urvanas "forever," though it's well known among the Nightwatchers and the learned that humans came to the world about five hundred years ago in a vessel called the Ark, and then couldn't find a way to leave again. Legends say that the settlers came aboard the Ark because an authority or entity on Earth called the Clamant had marked them all for death; fleeing to another world was their only option for survival. The Ark was procured from a powerful nano named Thersitica who never exacted payment for the aid she provided, despite promises by the refugees. Even the learned assume that Thersitica is long dead.

Systems aboard the Ark malfunctioned as the vessel came into the grasp of Urvanas. Whether due to accident or malicious intent, the resulting damage caused the Ark to fall into the clouds and ultimately crash on the surface. Many of the humans on board managed to escape before the ship ended its journey in the deathlands. Those refugees were the initial stock from which most of the humans now on Urvanas descended.

What remains of the Ark is still down on the surface of Urvanas. Every few years it draws new human (and some lux) adventurers who hope to pierce the mystery of the vessel's failure, learn why it came in the first place, or at the very least, salvage treasures from the wreck. These expeditions are almost uniformly never heard from again, and the stories told by those who do return suggest that something terrible in aspect and purpose now lives inside the crumpled wreck.

LUX

Lux are only vaguely humanoid; they are made for clambering, crawling, and adhering, not standing and walking on a level surface. Thus, their segmented, nonsymmetrical limbs (seven in all) are arranged "above" their torso, while their heads "hang" beneath. However, a lux that clambers up onto a level surface inside a cloud city's dome easily reverses its orientation, so that its legs move beneath it in a manner similar to that of an Earth animal. Lux skin is smooth and green—the same color as the moon they call Aato—and slightly translucent, but lux are made of flesh, not diamond-hard synth.

Stratofly: *level 2; poison inflicts 2 additional points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) if target fails a Might defense roll*

Blatherswift: *level 3; distracting noise requires a foe to succeed on an Intellect defense roll or the difficulty of all actions is increased by one step for the length of encounter*

Bubbleworm: *level 5; health 28; acidic touch attack inflicts 6 points of damage*

Lux heavily customize and decorate their windriders, and hang beneath them rather than stand on top like humans do.

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Typical lux warrior: *level 3; Armor 1; 300-foot (91 m) range bow attack inflicts 5 points of damage*

Most lux continue to live as their ancestors did before humans arrived and began colonizing wild cloud cities. They exist in fairly static hunter-gatherer groupings called "srays" as they have for time out of mind. Some srays cooperate with each other, though a few outliers survive by raiding the bounty of others. Lux wear colorful braids, beads, and other elaborate decorations, which differentiate lux of one sray from another. Despite their hunter-gatherer lifestyle, lux are not primitives. They can and do use ancient devices they find and are able to activate, using the items to improve their lives in a variety of ways. The most obvious example is the lux reliance on windriders. Lux heavily customize and decorate their windriders, and hang beneath them rather than stand on top like humans do.

Lux oral histories describe their origins in a variety of ways that often conflict, though almost every such legend includes Aato as a creator god, as the mother of the lux race and thus eldest, or as a vengeful father that sent the lux away for some imagined crime. Many lux regard the physical moon in the sky not only as a manifestation of their deity, but possibly also as a place where their spirits go after their bodies are discarded in Zhoh.

Individually, lux are as variable as humans, except in one particular. Even lux who have fully embraced human ways and live among them with no connection to their original sray (as some lux have done for generations) remain beings that are given to deep contemplation of their surroundings. Almost to a one, lux revere life on Urvanas, even if they hunt it for food, and acknowledge the presence of Aato in all things. Various rituals, usually based on a particular position of Aato as it moves around Urvanas, celebrate this fact. Many lux claim that Aato communicates with them, though they never seem to recall the conversation afterward. They say the glory of the experience overwhelmed them.

The Truth, page 133

Lux speak their own language, and many also speak the dialect of the Truth that the humans speak.

Phloe (lux): *level 3, windrider crafting tasks as level 7; Armor 1*

Lux can breathe the air within inflated air domes where humans live, but they prefer the air outside. That's why they inhabit the structures and levels that hang beneath each cloud city, for the most part, rather than the structures contained within the domes, as humans do. Larger cloud cities include hanging gardens, sacred areas, and individual spaces for lux loners and families. A human can get around the hanging, "upside-down" lux structures on the underside of a cloud city, though doing so is dangerous, and a misstep initiates the Dive (lux are built to hang and do not face the same challenges). Humans who find it necessary to interact with the lux on their home turf need a breath recycler and, if they can get a pair, gravity boots.

Lux warriors and hunters alike ride windriders provided by their home cloud city or stolen from lux of a rival city. Unlike some human raiders, no lux would consider using a malork as a mount. They consider riding living creatures to be disrespectful, and in fact the lux make a point of killing any malork-mounted raiders they encounter in an effort to liberate the beasts. A few lux rely on tech, such as static force guns, to conduct raids and defend their homes, but most prefer mighty bows that have extremely long range.

CLOUD CITIES AND OTHER FEATURES

Some cloud cities contain citizens (both humans in the dome and lux hanging beneath), others are hellish traps, and a few have developed consciousness almost equal to that of a sapient being.

TULEER

Tuleer is a medium-sized cloud city supporting just over a thousand humans and not quite as many lux. A network of especially long and complex windrider piers stretches from the exterior, including one much longer and thicker than the rest. A single docked vessel seems permanently welded to this pier, one that has been dormant and unpowered for as long as anyone in Tuleer can remember, and which has successfully resisted all efforts at entry.

Phloe, a lux of the Tuleer Sray (for which the cloud city takes its name), is a maker of custom Urvanas windriders. Unlike regular windriders, Phloe's have various additions that provide further safety features, maneuverability, and offensive and defensive options. Phloe can normally be found in her hanging shop beneath the

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cloud city, shouting at her apprentices to be more careful. Her child Davren disappeared several years ago while riding a standard windrider, and she refuses to admit that he's dead. She imagines he is out hunting wild cloud cities and having adventures. And who knows? Maybe he is.

Gaslard Narm, the human town gossip, has got it into his head that Tuleer has become a target for the Spindrift Slayers, a notorious gang of human cloud city raiders who ride malorks. Terrifying news, if true, but Gaslard has been going on about the same thing for months, and people are starting to think that he's mistaken—or worse, being purposefully inflammatory.

A man (or, at least, a humanoid) without a name lives in Tuleer's understory among the lux, though they give him a wide berth, whispering that he is "Zhoh cursed." He lives alone and rarely emerges. When he does, he never shows his face, hiding it under a scarlet mask. Kids of both races say that he is so hideously scarred that one look at his face would kill a lux or human alike.

KHRELHAM

The residents of Khrelham—about four hundred humans and nine hundred lux—have painted the city in vivid hues that reflect all the colors of the rainbow, going so far as to use colors beyond the spectrum visible to humans, though the lux can see them just fine. Lux and humans alike say the bright colors deter malork attacks.

One particular patch of chartreuse "painted" on the city has a way of disappearing and then reappearing in a new location a few days later, sometimes even inside structures within or beneath the dome. The citizens of Khrelham are disquieted by its behavior and keep an eye out for its latest location. Human and lux children tell stories of how "the color will get you" if you ever find yourself alone somewhere in the city and happen to glimpse the yellow-green hue.

Mist Beauties: A human troupe of traveling performers known as the Mist Beauties calls Khrelham home, when not flying between inhabited cloud cities in a small refurbished vessel called *Mist Dancer*. The troupe is led by Qeecan Mefot, a man with the ability to throw "illusions" of himself, which is useful when performing a play requiring a lot of extras. The duplicates he creates

ARTIFACT: URVANAS WINDRIDER

Level: 1d6 + 1
Form: Variable-length metallic wing at least 9 feet (3 m) long
Effect: An Urvanas windrider is designed to work with the peculiar gravity, atmosphere, and winds of Urvanas, and it doesn't fly reliably elsewhere. On Urvanas, a rider must make Speed rolls (level 1) each round. On a failure, the windrider doesn't pitch off a rider or shake off a hanging lux; instead, it coasts at whatever speed and in whatever direction it moved the previous round. During combat, an Urvanas windrider moves a long distance each round, but on extended trips, it can move up to 80 miles (129 km) per hour. Some Urvanas windriders have one or more of the following features as well. Each day the Urvanas windrider is used requires a depletion roll.

Breather: A human rider can breathe normally at city altitude even if she's not wearing a breath recycler. Both human and lux riders can descend several miles lower into the clouds and suffer no harm from increasing heat and crushing air thickness; this feature is usually paired with the Diver customization.

Diver: An invisible static force shield protects the rider from heat and pressure, allowing her to dive all the way to Urvanas's surface for up to an hour before a return is necessary.

Force Gun: The rider can use a built-in long-range static force weapon by manipulating foot pedals and still move up to a short distance in the same round. The gun has a range of 300 feet (91 m) and inflicts 8 points of damage on a target. It can fire only once every other round and each use requires an additional depletion roll.

Passenger: Up to three passengers or an equivalent mass of cargo can be carried on (or under) the windrider.

Shield: An invisible static force shield protects the rider from wind and attacks, and grants her +1 to Armor while riding.

Depletion: 1–3 in 1d100

Gaslard Narm (human): *level 2, perception as level 5*

Malork, page 146

Breath recycler, page 32

Qeecan Mefot: *level 4, sleight-of-hand tasks as level 6; can create up to five level 2 duplicates of himself at one time*

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Harbinger: *level 6, tasks related to persuasion and perception as level 7; Armor 3; touch attack charms victim for one minute (or longer with repeated uses); long-range light-focusing attack inflicts 9 points of damage*

are sometimes female versions of himself, other times younger or older versions. Secretly, Qeecan is a spy for the Covenant of Urvanas, a group based in Ruxali that seeks to consolidate central power over all the human-inhabited cloud cities.

The Mist Beauties sometimes give free shows to Khrelham locals. After such shows, wonderful and strange news about the rest of the world is dispensed, but only as long as someone else provides the ale and food.

The Covenant of Urvanas is based in Ruxali, and a lux known as the Harbinger sits at its head.

RUXALI

Ruxalian trooper (human or lux): *level 3; Armor 2; long-range static force gun inflicts 5 points of damage*

Ruxali is home to about a thousand humans and more than twice that many lux. The city isn't a cloud city in the normal sense; it is a massive series of platforms and descending towers suspended via a web of synth cables from a perfectly spherical green object that hangs at just above cloud level over Urvanas. (The sphere and the structures that hang from it are obviously from two different origins.) The floating sphere, about 2 miles (3 km) in diameter, somewhat resembles the Green Moon that circles Urvanas, though it's *much* smaller, it doesn't circle the planet, and it doesn't host any green automatons—which may be why several cracks and pocks have developed on the sphere's surface. On the other hand, lux and humans wearing gravity boots routinely clamber over it, seeing to the cables and nets that secure the hanging city below. Unlike a cloud city that repairs itself, Ruxali must be maintained. And unlike in a normal cloud city, humans who live here must make their own arrangements for breathing.

The Covenant of Urvanas is based in Ruxali. A massive lux known as the Harbinger sits at the Covenant's head. Standing over 7 feet (2 m) tall, covered in long robes from which only a few of its many limbs are visible (including one silvery prosthetic limb), and always wearing a head-concealing space helmet, it's clear that as far as lux go, the Harbinger is something of an eccentric outlier. Not that it matters. The Harbinger has a way of commanding absolute trust in its subordinates with just a few words of encouragement or censure. Backed by a growing army of lux and humans who were previously Ruxali citizens, the Harbinger is well on its way to creating a force of troopers to be reckoned with on Urvanas and, eventually, perhaps even beyond.

Large sections of Ruxali now support the Harbinger's plans for conquest and rely on salvaged prior-world devices to build gravity boots, static force guns, and armor. They also continually capture windriders and other devices that provide transport.

Word among the army is that the Harbinger found a crack in the sphere from which the city of Ruxali depends. This might explain why it is sometimes observed high overhead on the sphere, dangling from its many limbs. By inserting its machine prosthetic into the crack, the lux leader recently learned to focus light that falls upon the Ruxali sphere as a weapon, a power that seems to grow more potent and exact as time passes.

Usually, the lowermost sections of hanging Ruxali are completely covered by clouds, which obscure vision beyond an immediate distance. However, when storms lash the strongest, red lights are visible

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ARTIFACTS

GRAVITY BOOTS
Level: 1d6
Form: Boots
Effect: The wearer can walk on any solid surface, including walls, ceilings, and other objects, as if that surface was the ground. She can also use an action to jump between two locations within a long distance of each other with no harm from the impact upon landing (requires a depletion roll).
Depletion: — for walking on any surface; 1 in 1d20 per jump

STATIC FORCE GUN
Level: 1d6 + 1
Form: Cylinder with handgrip
Effect: Long-range static force blast inflicts damage equal to the artifact level on the target and one additional target within immediate range of it.
Depletion: 1 in 1d20

streaming through the vapor, swirling and almost dancing, suggesting the outline of a vast creature. If it really is an outline, the creature's size would be several miles across. Regular cloud cities, which also sometimes dip into the tops of the cloud layer, never report seeing a similar sight.

NIGHTWATCHER SPIRE

This small cloud city boasts a coal-colored spire that reaches straight skyward, so high that its top isn't visible from the base, and in clear defiance of the amount of weight a normal cloud city could possibly carry. The spire, made of super-strong synth, has a hollow core that rapidly transfers lux and humans from the base of the tower to the top, which is far above Urvanas's surface. The top level contains a small complex of chambers, including a wide observation dome with a sealed atmosphere, since the top rises beyond the breathable atmosphere. The spire and the complex at the top are claimed by an organization called the Nightwatchers.

The Nightwatchers are a premiere group dedicated to preserving ancient lore by studying the present and researching the past. A few hundred lux and humans make up the organization, though humans are more common. In a manner not unlike that of Aeon Priests of the Ninth World, the Nightwatchers are self-appointed experts on the numenera and related lore, and they seem to be gathering knowledge in a selfless effort to learn more rather than to use for personal aggrandizement and power. Any given Nightwatcher usually has one or more cyphers about her person.

Officially, the group does not study the Green Moon, which even lux Nightwatchers venerate as a spiritual entity and object, not ancient technology to be understood. Although this sometimes frustrates human Nightwatchers, the group abides by the rule for the sake of solidarity.

A human woman named Mhaviser, also called Nightwatch Prime, leads the organization. Her flesh is partly fused with an automaton's metallic form, giving her great resilience and the ability to plug directly into many devices brought to the spire for study. Mhaviser secretly directs a small cell of human Nightwatchers, plus one lux atheist, who study the Green Moon's occasional emanations. Mhaviser believes that, whether the moon was made by a god or a super-advanced machine mind, its communications are enciphered in a complex manner that hides a deeper meaning. If she and her secret cell could break that code, she believes all the knowledge of the prior worlds would become available for the Nightwatchers to study.

Mhaviser: *level 4, tasks related to the numenera as level 8; health 25; Armor 1*

Mhaviser is one of the original humans who came to Urvanas in the Ark from Earth. Many people now alive could trace their lineage back to her if they only knew her true age, which she keeps in abeyance with secret tech. If anyone knows what terrible thing lies trapped in the wreck of the Ark down on the surface, it is Mhaviser. But it's not something she cares to discuss out of fear that it would somehow get back to the Clamant—a biological entity of hellish power that the humans fled in the Ark to escape—or, possibly as bad, that it might lead to the discovery of the nano named Thersitica, who Mhaviser believes isn't dead but lies in stasis in the ruins of the Ark down on the surface.

Ark, page 53

Clamant, page 53

Thersitica, page 53

Sometimes humans and lux traveling up and down the spire disappear midtrip. They show up again days later with no overt memory of where they've been, though some later have dreams of being enveloped, dissolved, studied, and reassembled by a field of molten emerald light.

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GREAT VORTEX

The Great Vortex is a one-way transdimensional gate that shifts anything that passes through it to a distant location. That location could be among the sun's other children, such as on Naharrai or in the Phaeton Halo, or it could be in realms far beyond, such as the Thon Iridescence.

Naharrai, page 38

Phaeton Halo, page 67

Thon Iridescence, page 106

A blemish in the clouds of Urvanas appears from a cloud city high above as an endlessly twisting vortex whose mouth is dozens of miles (50 km) across, creating an enormous empty gap in the clouds. The gap opens into a wavering, twisting "passage" that leads many miles deeper into the atmosphere. This cyclonic storm is poised over a particular spot on the planet's surface; it doesn't move with respect to the surrounding clouds and winds. Lux tell almost as many stories about the Great Vortex as they do about Aato, and some call it the "Mouth of Zhoh."

Explorers on windriders or similar craft have learned that the only safe way to approach the vortex is from high overhead, and to stay as far as possible from the walls. Those who stay in the center of the calm eye of the vortex can travel in relative safety without worrying about increasing heat and the crushing weight of thickening air. However, as a traveler descends the throat of the vortex, the diameter dwindles, and the walls shiver and twist, making it more and more likely that he will come into contact with the swirling outer wall. When that happens, an explorer on a windrider or other craft must succeed on a difficulty 5 Speed-based task to remain in control or take 10 points of damage and be spun out into the crushing clouds beyond, where survival is difficult. Attempting to pass back in through the spinning wall of the vortex requires the same Speed-based roll.

Explorers and creatures who make it to the base of the vortex some 30 miles (48 km) lower down discover a tear in reality. Massive structures are just visible on the surface beyond the vortex wall, gleaming, tall, and unmelted, in defiance of the heat and pressure. Nightwatchers suspect these structures are responsible for calling the hole in space, and therefore the vortex, into being; however, they believe that a malfunction has occurred. They worry that if the hole isn't shut, it'll tear open further. So far, no explorer sent through the gap has returned, though the Nightwatchers keep looking for new volunteers to try the passage, both within their own ranks and from explorers unaffiliated with the organization. In a few cases, the Nightwatchers have liberated criminals condemned to face the Death Dive and instead sent them down the vortex.

URVANAS HEARSAY

The Truth Is Out There: A lux driven by curiosity about the past believes that his race has lain fallow long enough and may have devolved from a highly technical species. He seeks explorers willing to travel up to Aato and find a means to restore the lux to the godlike beings he believes they once were. Most lux who hear of his aspirations decry him as an apostate.

Raider Army: Overcoming philosophical differences, savage lux srays and a small army of human raiders on malorks have thrown in together, forming a group called the Ghosts of Urvanas. Only a lust for power and wealth seems to motivate the Ghosts, and they've already overtaken several cloud cities.

Blue Swarm: Shiny blue insectlike creatures sometimes blow in on storms and afflict cloud cities. The insects are a recent phenomenon and, unfortunately, seem to have a taste for the city domes. Several cities have been sent to their dooms, their domes punctured, in a city-sized Death Dive. A female Nightwatcher named Ladrana says she knows the source of the insects, but to reach it requires a trip down to the surface.

THE WEIRD OF URVANAS

Searchlight: At rare and irregular intervals, the Green Moon stabs the clouds with a burning beam of light as bright as the sun. The light is never (apparently) focused on a known cloud city or creature. Instead, it acts more like a searching beam, burning down through the choking clouds as if hoping to reveal something far below on the surface.

Defunct Automatons: More than cloud cities and flying flora and fauna move through the skies of Urvanas. A fleet of barely functioning automatons also limps through the cloudscape on air jets, gravity nullifiers, and internal lift devices. Most of them look partly melted, as if they survived a great conflict or explosion.

Vanishing Tower: Citizens of various cloud cities have reported seeing the top of a tower poking out of the clouds during heavy storms—a tower with lights, crystal windows, and the appearance of activity within. So far, no one has been able to dispatch windriders while the storm rages, and afterward, no sign of said tower remains.

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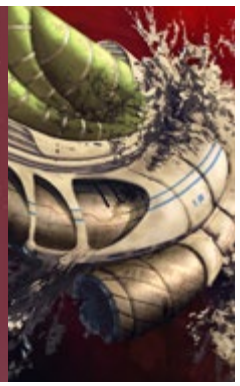
CHAPTER 6

WRECK OF THE *VLERRYN*



Looping away from Earth for years at a time before appearing out of the black again for a brief rendezvous, a prior-world void-sailing vessel called the *Vlerryn* coasts in lonely isolation. A monstrous disaster struck the *Vlerryn*, almost as if a manifestation of the Iron Wind blew across and through the craft, twisting both the structure and the crew into so much atrocious and twisted "art."

VLERRYN BACKGROUND

The Iron Wind wasn't what destroyed the prior-world warcraft called the *Vlerryn*; that destruction was initiated by an artificial machine mind named Mozck, a numinous creature of sadistic and unpredictable nature whose automatons burned through the ship's halls. Mozck's "infection" of the craft forced the last surviving crew into an act of desperation, one that finally rendered local instances of Mozck inactive (at least on the *Vlerryn*) at the cost of their own lives and their vessel's spaceworthiness.

Prior to Mozck's arrival, the *Vlerryn* was crewed by the Moonwreckers, a group of explorers originally hailing from Qi. They discovered a crashed prior-world vessel buried on Earth and got it running after a few years of exceptional effort. From there, the Moonwreckers broke the grasp of Earth and sailed into the night, continuing their adventures in the airless realms. They named their craft the *Vlerryn,* after one of their companions they lost during the process of retrofitting it.

Unfortunately for the Moonwreckers, on one of their adventures, they brought aboard a dormant component of Mozck.

VLERRYN'S CREW: THE MOONWRECKERS

A record of the Moonwreckers is retained in Qi. In addition to the three principal members, described below, the group had a small crew of almost ten people when they headed for the sky.

Abipona Scar: Known for her hatred of abhumans and her love for the grisly scar that streaked down one side of her face like a bolt of lightning, Abipona was skilled with leading, tactics, and long-distance combat. Before reforming and joining the Moonwreckers, she was something of a notorious outlaw.

Mozck automaton, page 147

Qi, page 148

USING THE *VLERRYN*

The GM can use the *Vlerryn* several ways in a campaign. The following scenarios could be provided as hooks to player characters:

- The PCs need a piece of data or an artifact (such as the oracle or the machine prosthesis) that only Narris apparently knew or possessed.
- In the distant past, Abipona Scar killed someone close to one of the PCs, and new information on her location has become available.
- The PCs uncover a map showing the orbital trajectory of an amazing salvage opportunity (the *Vlerryn*), which predicts a window that will allow them to make it aboard the craft through some means that they possess.
- The PCs arrive on the derelict by accident. The only way to get off is to repair the craft so they can use it to get back to Earth (or wherever they need to go).

Search Term: *elliptical orbit*

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Narris: A man whose flesh was partly fused with an automaton, Narris could interface with the prior-world machines like no other, and he was instrumental in reanimating the *Vlerryn*. He was known for accomplishing similar feats for the Aeon Priests before he disappeared, and for his possession of a silvery orb that provided improved access to the datasphere.

Zadra Araime: Zadra possessed a weird talent for manipulating magnetic fields, which she used for offense, defense, and investigating the interior makeup of unknown artifacts. When working with Narris, there was almost nothing they couldn't figure out.

Aeon Priest, page 222

Datasphere, page 12

Naharrai, page 38

Phaeton Halo, page 67

THE *VLERRYN*

The *Vlerryn* is a derelict spacecraft looping in a long path around Earth, then back out past Naharrai and the sun's more distant children, including a passage through the Phaeton Halo. A complete circuit takes several years.

TRAVELING TO THE *VLERRYN*

Reaching the *Vlerryn* is impossible for most humans on Earth, though the means suggested in the introduction of this book can accomplish the task. If the PCs use some variety of instant travel, such as a gate, they might arrive in the cargo airlock. Otherwise, they probably first come upon the craft's exterior and must figure out a way to gain access.

The Vlerryn *resembles a blasted and scored sarcophagus slowly tumbling through the lightless void. Various craters pock the surface, perhaps from high-velocity impacts. Random patches of pinkish crystalline growth spot the hull here and there, disturbingly reminiscent of Iron Wind scarring. A litter of loose metallic and synth detritus follows in the* Vlerryn's *wake, accompanying it endlessly through the void.*

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Getting Inside: After some study of the exterior, an observer can pick out at least three means of ingress, which include two smaller circular hatches (regular entry airlocks) and one much larger square hatch (the cargo airlock).

The *Vlerryn* is slowly spinning, which makes approaching it from the exterior somewhat tricky. It's a difficulty 4 Speed task to manipulate a mobile suit, a device that grants flight, or small craft controls to reach the desired hatch, followed by a difficulty 3 Might task to grab and hold onto an attachment surface while the spinning vessel tries to launch the character or small craft back into the void.

Last, powering up and accessing an external hatch to one of the three airlocks is a difficulty 4 Intellect task (manually operating the hatch into an airlock is a difficulty 5 Might task).

VLERRYN ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

Some atmosphere remains in the *Vlerryn*, despite its derelict nature. A character could breathe it for up to an hour before passing out from the low-pressure effects; however, long before she passed out, the difficulty of her actions would be increased by one step due to constant feelings of illness and dizziness. Some kind of suit or other intervention is required to avoid this effect (for instance, extra envirosuits can be found in the cargo hold, and controls for normalizing the air can be found on the flight deck).

Zero gravity rules aboard the *Vlerryn*, complicating character maneuvers.

Zero gravity, pages 98 and 100

1. CARGO BAY

Like the regular entry airlocks, the larger airlock into the cargo bay requires a couple of moments to cycle before opening. (If characters enter this way rather than through a main entry airlock, consider using the Weird Event described there here instead.)

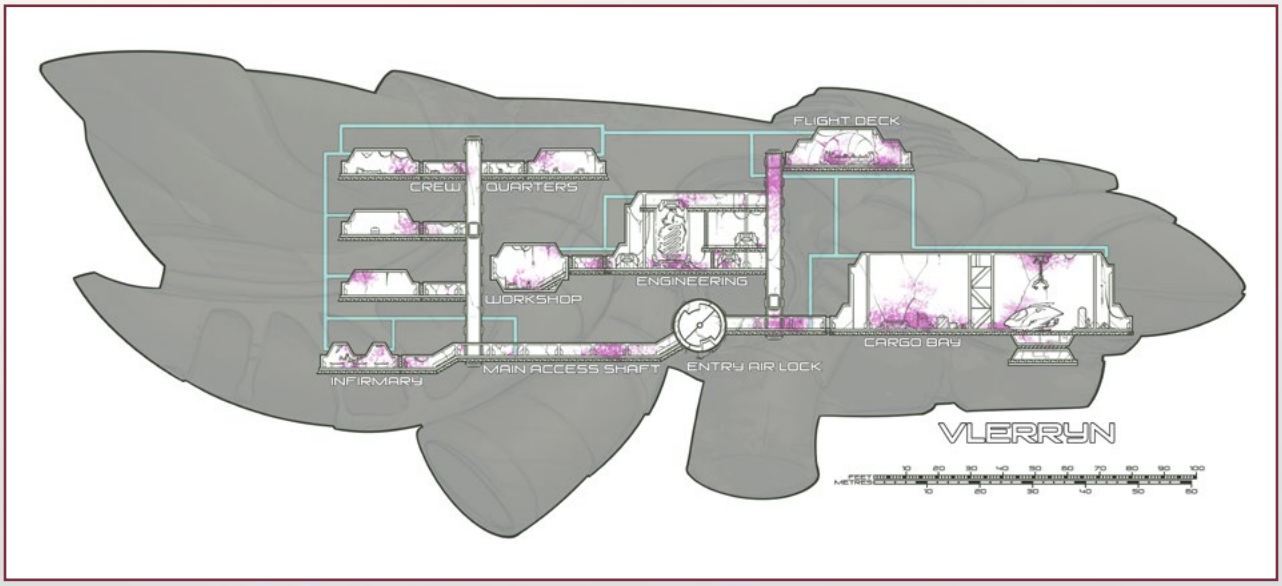
The lock opens into a large internal area filled with synth containers of various sizes, about half of which are smashed. A tiny vessel is also docked here. Though it's damaged, a few days of work (including salvaging parts from around the rest of the *Vlerryn*) by someone trained or specialized with the numenera could repair it. If repaired, the vessel in the cargo bay has enough power to leave the *Vlerryn* and make it to the surface of Earth, the moon, or some other body, depending on where the vessel is along its path among the other worlds circling the sun.

A search of the chamber uncovers a lot of junk from which 5d6 shins and a couple of cyphers can be recovered, as well as four salvageable envirosuits and a helper drone.

Weird Event: Upon investigation, a smashed container holds what seems to be a mummified alien body that has been grafted to a machine carapace. The carapace looks disturbingly parasitic. When the character who finds it blinks, glances away, or is otherwise distracted, the machine carapace apparently vanishes. This weirdness could be exacerbated if presented as the suggested GM intrusion.

GM Intrusion: *After vanishing from the cargo bay, the parasitic carapace turns up lurking in random, dark locations thereafter, visually haunting the character. The carapace is either a level 5 psychic poison that requires treatment, or a sneaky automaton that's waiting to get the character alone.*

Sneaky automaton: *level 3, stealth tasks as level 7*



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ARTIFACTS

ENVIROSUIT
Level: 1d6
Form: Skin-tight black bodysuit with helmet and gloves
Effect: The wearer can survive in a vacuum, breathing atmosphere recycled by the suit.
Depletion: 1 in 1d20 (Roll for depletion for each full day of use. If depleted, suit regains function after spending 28 hours in an environment with a full atmosphere.)

HELPER DRONE
Level: 1d6 + 1
Form: Fist-sized sphere
Effect: A helper drone can be keyed to one or more users with the correct passphrase (or by someone trained with the numenera). The drone provides aid in the form of knowledge (voice activated), surveillance, potential communication with other devices, and offense (once every other round, it can fire a short-range energy beam that inflicts damage equal to its level).
Depletion: — (The drone must be recharged every few days, which it can accomplish by drawing energy from other devices, possibly depleting them.)

Aneen, page 231

The body the carapace was attached to is part of a Ninth World riding beast called an aneen that the Moonwreckers brought aboard to supplement their diet.

2. ENTRY AIRLOCKS

The normal-sized entry airlocks (one on either side of the craft amidships) take a few moments to come up to the very low pressure inside the ship before they open to the interior. Both are scored with scratches, loose or severed cables that once ran through bulkheads, and random debris. The wall panels are unpowered and dead; anyone attempting to access or otherwise connect to them detects only empty static.

Weird Event: A character hears a whisper over the static that says, "Your friend [name] wants to kill you. Get [him/her/it] before [he/she/it] gets you." No one else hears it.

3. MAIN ACCESS SHAFT

Strange crystalline growths that sprout like fungus and bundles of cables that should be contained behind bulkheads dominate the main access shaft. Malfunctioning illumination panels along the walls flicker unnervingly. A grim psychic aftertaste lingers; it's not too difficult to imagine that something horrible happened aboard the *Vlerryn*.

Weird Event: The character brushes against a pile of debris, which collapses to reveal a human body. The corpse is partly turned inside out, and partly melted to the metal of the wall. The helmet front is smashed open, and it seems like something grotesque happened to the victim's face, resulting in several leglike protuberances sprouting forth. (Searching

GM Intrusion: *The discovered body hides a fist-sized spiderlike creature that pops out of the smashed helmet and attacks the character.*

Face spider: *level 3; bite deals 2 points of damage plus 3 points of Intellect damage on a second failed Might defense roll*

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The corpse is partly turned inside out, and partly melted to the metal of the wall.

the body uncovers 12 shins, a cypher, and an explorer's pack.) This weirdness could be exacerbated if presented as the suggested GM intrusion.

4. CREW QUARTERS

The crew quarters include small chambers, dilapidated in the same fashion as the main access shaft. Searching them reveals personal items amid the wreckage, including 4d6 shins and a cypher. The search also turns up another set of human remains, this one wearing some kind of leather face mask, possibly a breath recycler. The most obvious issue is that some kind of hard, amberlike substance has burst from the corpse's head and crystallized long ago, as if the victim's grey matter was transformed, found its bony confines too small, burst free, and resolidified afterward.

Weird Event: Further study of the remains reveals that the body isn't wearing a face mask or breath recycler at all. Instead, the corpse's face transformed, creating a long, leathery tube that loops back into the man's lower body, apparently forcing him to feed on his own organs. This weirdness could be exacerbated if presented as the suggested GM intrusion.

5. ENGINEERING

Sleeping energies that once impelled the ship between the sun's many children are contained in the complex devices that stud this chamber. Even when they are somnolent, a subtle vibration thrums through everything. Spiky crystal growths of pinkish synth on various surfaces don't seem to have critically breached the devices.

Ship-Shape Once More? Someone trained in the numenera who spends time studying the situation discovers that the mechanisms were apparently designed to be easy to understand, which is why a human of the Ninth World can realize that it might be possible to wake the sleeping machines. The prescription for doing so involves a few days of work in this chamber, the discovery or fabrication of a few key broken components in the workshop, and both efforts coordinated by someone working the systems on the flight deck. All in all, waking the machines is a routine task, but it requires two or three days of time spent in the unsettling interior of the *Vlerryn*. Doing so might provide the characters with a functioning vessel able to travel to all the worlds around the sun and perhaps even farther. Of course, this possibility is tempered by the equally real chance that an instance of Mozck will awaken.

Breath recycler, page 32

GM Intrusion: *The feeding tube pulls loose from the corpse in the crew quarters and tries to insert itself into a character.*

Animate feeding tube: *level 3; tube insertion deals 2 points of damage, plus 3 additional points of ambient damage each round that the tube continues feeding*

GM Intrusion: *The whisper in engineering has some psychic oomph behind it and deals 3 points of Intellect damage to a character who fails a level 4 Intellect defense roll.*

Workshop, page 64

Flight deck, page 64

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO THE *VLERRYN*?

Explorers curious about the disaster that brought the *Vlerryn* to its current derelict state can investigate. They can gather evidence by exploring the ship and collecting clues, though the best clues are found in engineering and on the flight deck. Without access to the real story or other external knowledge, the best an explorer can put together is that the ship was damaged in some kind of event similar to the Iron Wind. However, that can't be the answer because the damage seems more focused and specific than in regular Iron Wind events, and more important, the crystal synth growths and other oddities are not what turned the craft into a derelict. Unless the PCs can peer into the past or access information from the datasphere, the closest they can come is determining that the *Vlerryn* was subjected to some kind of transdimensional storm that burned out specific machines throughout the ship, but especially the ones used by machine intelligences and similar devices.

The truth of the matter is this: the *Vlerryn* brought aboard an active component of Mozck, which began to transform the ship and the crew to its own needs. Before it could completely succeed, the last surviving crew person (Zadra Araime) managed to send the ship through the mouth of a massive artifact called the Vendav Ring, which burned Mozck—and Zadra—out of the *Vlerryn*, leaving it derelict.

Mozck, page 147

Vendav Ring, page 81

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The fabricator spits out a naked human spine and brain preserved inside a solid crystal matrix.

Weird Event: A character—preferentially the one who heard a similar whisper in one of the airlocks—hears a whisper over the engine hum that says, "[He/She/It] wants to eat your brain. Eat [his/hers/its] first." No one else hears it. This weirdness could be exacerbated if presented as the suggested GM intrusion.

6. WORKSHOP

More strange devices stud this chamber, as do spiky synth patches like those on the ship's exterior and elsewhere. A couple of benches contain various tech devices held in place with slender tethers. A search through the assembled objects reveals enough spare parts for someone trained with the numenera to create up to two random cyphers.

Fabricator: One massive floor-to-ceiling device in this chamber still retains a bit of power, as lines of light pulse a dim red up and down its vertical, tubelike length. Using the fabricator is a level 3 Intellect task, but each successful use allows the character to create an object of up to level 4 (including cyphers or parts required to fix the engine in engineering) in 1d6 + 3 hours. After each such item is created, the machine must sit idle for three hours, recharging reservoirs and power from some mysterious source; a depletion roll of 1 in 1d10 is also required.

Weird Event: A malign influence interferes with the fabricator. The fabricator spits out a naked human spine and brain preserved inside a solid crystal matrix. If the characters have the means to contact it telepathically, they learn that the brain believes itself to be Abipona Scar. (Using the fabricator, the PCs could conceivably create a cypher that allows telepathic communication for up to one hour.)

From the brain's perspective, it's locked in a dark room, unable to move or speak. As time goes on, this becomes more and more oppressive for Abipona. If some kind of relief isn't provided, the experience eventually drives the brain completely insane. In the meantime, telepathic communication is something of a balm to her mind. Abipona remembers her former life, including when she and her fellow Moonwreckers found, boarded, and fixed the *Vlerryn* when it was still on Earth. She remembers boosting beyond the grasp of Earth in the repaired vessel, remembers receiving a distress signal from something calling itself Mozck . . . and then nothing. Efforts to cajole the brain to remember rapidly accelerate Abipona's inevitable insanity, a breakdown laced with unrelenting, terrified screaming at whatever unspeakable fate she encountered, which left this final abominable record of her stored in the *Vlerryn* fabricator. This weirdness could be exacerbated if presented as the suggested GM intrusion.

GM Intrusion: *A character in contact with Abipona's brain when she slides into terrified insanity must make a difficulty 5 Intellect defense roll. On a failure, he takes 1 point of Intellect damage and must make a second Intellect defense roll. On a second failure, he trades places with Abipona's consciousness.*

Abipona Scar, page 59

GM Intrusion: *If explorers use the healing machine as the Awakening approaches or afterward, the machine animates, essentially becoming a tethered Mozck automaton that tries to kill the character being healed.*

Tethered Mozck automaton: *level 5, Speed defense as level 3; health 20; Armor 3; cutting scalpel attack inflicts 5 points of damage; unable to move from infirmary; see page 147*

7. INFIRMARY

This chamber contains three reclining chairlike devices, one of which holds a desiccated human corpse, freeze dried and as light as a foam pillow. A glance upward reveals a device with many cutting arms and poking needles attached to the ceiling over the chairs.

Healing Machine? The device on the ceiling was capable of healing most wounds, curing most diseases, and eradicating many poisons from a victim's body. Someone trained in the numenera could use the device to reduce the difficulty of a healing task by three steps.

Weird Event: A character treated by the healing machine seems fine but later develops a weird growth on the back of his neck that looks like a flower with green petals and a human eye blinking at its center. The growth can be cut away (inflicting 1 point of damage that ignores Armor), but it periodically returns. If a character decides to let the growth be and not hide it, he may discover that he can see in the dark through the flower's eye.

8. FLIGHT DECK

Control surfaces and crystal display screens are the focus of this chamber, but spiky pink synth growths and loose cables reminiscent of a machine disembowelment

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ARTIFACTS

MACHINE PROSTHETIC ARM
Level: 1d6 + 2
Form: Synth artificial arm
Effect: This prosthetic arm can be attached in place of a normal arm. It functions exactly like a normal arm, except it has 5 Armor against damage that specifically targets the arm (for instance, if the wearer sticks her hand in acid or fire). Normal function of the arm doesn't require a depletion roll, but the wearer can choose to increase the strength of the arm while attempting a task related to Might, such as attacking with a melee weapon, opening a hatch, or crushing something. If he does, the difficulty of the task is reduced by two steps, and a depletion roll is required.
Depletion: 1 in 1d20

ORACLE NODE
Level: 1d6 + 2
Form: Silvery sphere
Effect: Telepathically transmits one random fact about a person, object, or location that is pertinent to the topic designated by the user. The oracle node usually connects to the datasphere to get its answers.
Depletion: 1 in 1d20

are everywhere. Several chairlike devices also sprout from the floor near the control surfaces, and in one of those, the freeze-dried corpse of a man is strapped. The man clutches a silvery orb in one skeletal arm. His opposite arm is a machine prosthetic.

Narris: The corpse is Narris, who still has the artifact he called an oracle node and wears another artifact as a prosthetic. He died when his own prosthetic reached up and crushed his throat, though that's not obvious at a glance (but it is easy to see that his throat has been crushed).

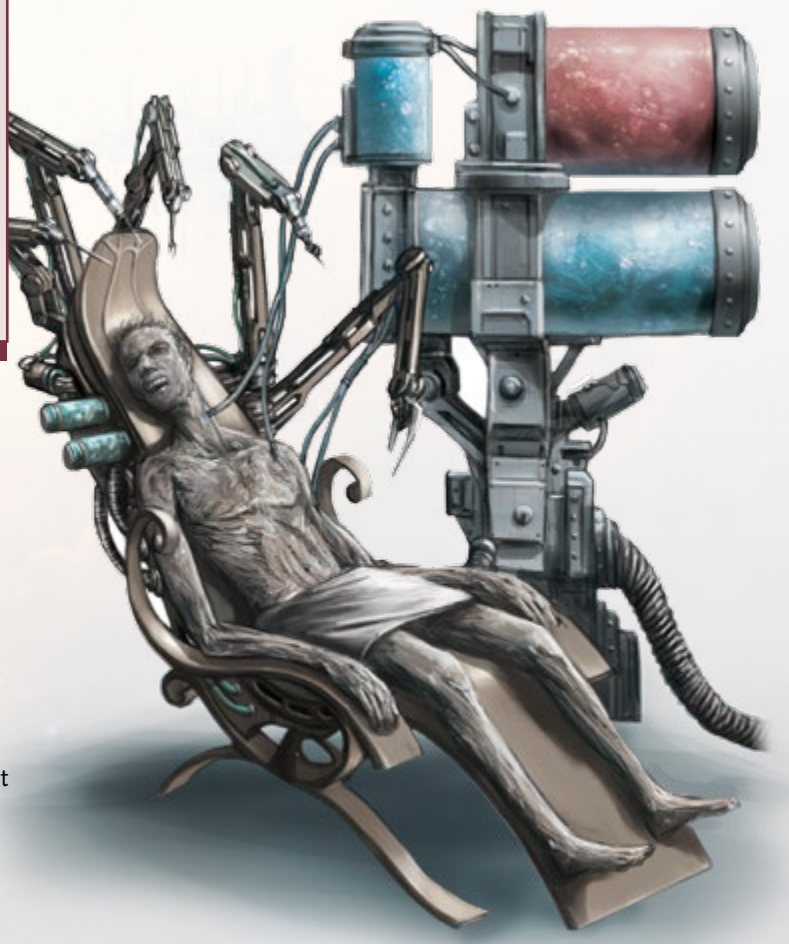
Fixing the *Vlerryn*: As noted in the description of the ship's engineering section, the *Vlerryn* can be repaired anew. Doing so requires that at least one person trained in the numenera spend most of her time on the flight deck coordinating engine repairs in engineering and parts manufacture in the workshop, via a communication system controlled in this chamber. Whoever takes up this task can expect to spend about eight to ten hours each day so engaged.

Separate Process Initiated: If explorers attempt to fix the *Vlerryn,* the character responsible for coordinating the effort on the flight deck might notice that another process also wakes up, as if triggered by the repair activity. Using the sophisticated sensors on the flight deck, the PC can determine that the process isn't internal to the *Vlerryn's* original systems but is caused by an external parasitic system, one with vast and impressive control over the nanomachinery that infuses almost every bit of substance in the *Vlerryn*, including the air. This process is called the Awakening, and once it begins, the explorers' time aboard the craft is probably limited.

Prosthetic Arm GM Intrusion: *A malignant intelligence called Mozck animates the arm, causing the wearer to operate a control, push an ally, or otherwise take an action designed to cause harm to the wearer or his ally.*

Oracle Node GM Intrusion: *A malignant intelligence called Mozck hijacks the connection and answers the user's question with a response designed to cause as much harm as possible to her.*

The Awakening, page 66



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Mozck, a machine intelligence that has learned to secrete itself in the tiniest bits of matter, infects various installations located in the grasp of Earth, but the Vlerryn *is where the next "Mozck plague" is most likely to originate.*

Weird Event: When a character is alone on the flight deck, she sees a ghostly image of a woman flicker into existence: Zadra Araime, or at least a transdimensional memory of her bleeding over into the *Vlerryn*. The flickering, sometimes spastically jerking Zadra is desperate to warn those who see her about something, but she is unable to make any sound. If communication can be established somehow, the Zadra bleed-over is probably the one entity aboard the ship who recalls how they managed to blast the Mozck infestation into subatomic dormancy—as the last surviving crew member, she flew the *Vlerryn* through the Vendav Ring.

This weirdness could be used as a GM intrusion; otherwise, the image fades away after a minute or so.

Mozck automaton, page 147

GM Intrusion: *Zadra Araime is more than a two-dimensional image. The bleed-over retains a memory of the power Zadra once wielded, and in an effort to stop the PCs from reawakening the* Vlerryn, *she attacks a character.*

Zadra bleed-over: *level 5; Armor 4 against metallic weapons and ammunition; magnetic powers can blast a target at long range, pin a metal-wearing character to the ceiling or wall, and accomplish similar feats*

Vendav Ring, page 81

THE AWAKENING

The *Vlerryn* is infected with dormant instantiations of the malign machine intelligence called Mozck. Once triggered, the instantiations begin to slowly rebuild themselves from the many spiky pink synth patches covering the interior and exterior of the craft.

Timeline: The suggested timing for one or more Mozck automatons to reach full sapience and mobility should be synchronized with the characters' progress in repairing the vessel. Once the PCs get the *Vlerryn* fully operational, it's only a matter of a few hours before one or more Mozck automatons "hatch."

Mozck's Actions: Awakened Mozck automatons go after the explorers, seeking to neutralize them directly by killing them, or indirectly by transforming them in some horrific way. At the same time, the automatons attempt to gain control of the *Vlerryn*, fly it to a location near the sun, and there begin to build something gargantuan using magnetic filaments and raw plasma as building blocks. If left undisturbed, it's possible that Mozck's project could endanger the sun itself.

Final Thoughts: In truth, it's hard to predict what awakened instantiations of the murderous intelligence will do. Not only is Mozck insane (at least by the standards of a Ninth World human), but it's also far superior in intelligence and capability than most other machine minds created—or self-evolved—before or since. A fault within its mind gives it the capacity for both godlike brilliance and demonlike rapaciousness.

VLERRYN HEARSAY

Twinship: Rumors say that when the Moonwreckers first left Earth in the *Vlerryn*, they saw another ship, nearly identical to it, in orbit. The other vessel still appeared to have power.

Secret Hold: Records in Qi suggest that the *Vlerryn* had a secret compartment where the Moonwreckers stored a powerful biomechanical device they found on a moon far from the sun.

THE WEIRD OF THE *VLERRYN*

Crater Mist: A strange yellow-green mist rises out of the pit where the *Vlerryn* was first excavated. Anyone who breathes the mist finds that, for the next few days, the only word she is able to speak is "eye."

Echo Warp: Sometimes, in the engineering chamber, noises (including words spoken aloud) are repeated from one to five minutes after they are first made.

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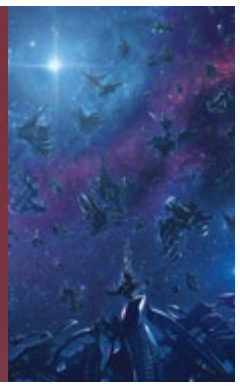
CHAPTER 7

THE PHAETON HALO



A massive world—or perhaps entity—spun for many ages as yet another sibling of Earth, Urvanas, Naharrai, and other worlds in the sun's grasp. The Aeon Priests who study the empty void call this lost object Phaeton. The same priests postulate that this vast fabricated creation might have been the penultimate achievement of a prior-world civilization. If so, the destruction of Phaeton likely spelled the end of that civilization's reign.

Today there is no Phaeton. Instead, there is the Phaeton Halo. The Halo is a mammoth wheel-shaped region located beyond the sweep of Naharrai. The region is a belt created by a shattered ancient structure, relatively dense with tumbling fragments of synth. If explorers wish to find interesting salvage and explore the ruins of the prior worlds, there are few better places to prospect than the vast Halo. That is, assuming they have the means to get there and the ability to protect themselves from the airless void, predators, the otolins who claim the Halo and everything in it for themselves, and even more unexpected dangers.

Search Term: *asteroid belt*

Urvanas, page 49

Naharrai, page 38

Aeon Priest, page 222

GETTING TO THE PHAETON HALO

"Phaeton has fled far away,
never again will the sky display
a welcome flash or happy ray."

~Ninth World nursery rhyme

In addition to the methods described in the introduction of this book that could take explorers from Earth into the Phaeton Halo, other ways exist. These include a sometimes-functioning line node that deposits travelers in a citylike structure called Nachant, being snatched and added to the collection of an obsessive creature named Ghamalso,

Line node, page 23

USING THE PHAETON HALO

The GM can use the Phaeton Halo several ways in a campaign. The following scenarios could be provided as hooks to player characters:

- An Aeon Priest named Khotanis asks the PCs to collect fragments of an ancient structure (or perhaps machine entity) called Phaeton, which has been destroyed and now circles as a belt of rubble in the void. To help them accomplish this goal, she will "transmit" them to their location and retrieve them in a similar way after an agreed-upon period of time has elapsed.
- A well-heeled varjellen hires the PCs to steal something from a collection housed in a structure called the Menagerie and provides a means for them to reach it. He doesn't reveal where the Menagerie is actually located, however.
- The PCs have a void-faring vessel and know that the Phaeton Ring is rich in the numenera.
- A being named Ghamalso contacts the PCs and asks them to retrieve a unique object for his collection from a dangerous place in the Phaeton Halo called the Temple of Eurynomec.
- Otolins ask the PCs to destroy one of their own kind who is dangerously close to evolving into an unstoppable machine entity with power akin to a god.

Menagerie, page 76

Ghamalso, page 76

Temple of Eurynomec, page 80

Otolin, page 70

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or being conveyed there in an encoded message beam sent from Khotanis, an Aeon Priest on Earth who has a device capable of transmitting bodies as invisible signals.

Getting to the Phaeton Halo is only the first step; the Halo covers a diameter so wide that light takes twenty-two minutes to cross from one side to the other. Thus, moving between objects in the region could be as monumental a task as getting to the Halo in the first place. Depending on how a group travels there, many will be "stuck" in the location they arrive at, while others could have more mobility, as described in the section Moving From Bit to Bit.

Breath recycler, page 32

Moving From Bit to Bit, page 69

Either way, given the vast expanse of the Phaeton Halo, one group's experiences prospecting in the ring of tumbling ruins is likely to be far different than another group's adventures, depending on the particular object or structures investigated.

Zero gravity, pages 98 and 100

SURVIVAL IN THE PHAETON HALO

Surviving the Void, page 5

Some objects making up the Halo may have internal atmosphere, but for the most part, the Halo is airless, void, and deadly, offering no sustenance for Earth creatures used to breathing in an atmosphere. Explorers need some type of breathing apparatus, a way to preserve an atmospherelike pressure around their bodies, and a way to avoid the extreme heat of direct sunlight and cold in the sun's shadow (such as breath recyclers and void suits). Explorers also need to provide their own food, for the void offers nothing. (For void-adapted flora and fauna, things are different. Such creatures—especially biomechanical creatures—are relatively common in the Halo, as described below.)

Gravity is absent, which makes it difficult for characters to maneuver unless they are trained in zero-gravity movement.

Finally, an explorer must be prepared to find cover from the horrifying detritus storms, because for a creature of flesh, being caught in the full blast of one is almost certainly a death sentence. Detritus storms occur when thousands of tiny synth fragments sleet through an area, scouring it with deadly, steel-hard rain. The native otolins know to stay clear of detritus storms, having mapped the route of almost every such storm that circulates through the Halo. They know ahead of time when to clear out of a region or find shelter within a structure.

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ARTIFACT: VOID SUIT

Level: 1d6
Form: Fairly lightweight full-body suit of synth
Effect: Serves as light armor and offers complete protection from environmental temperature and pressure dangers. Also allows the wearer to fly a long distance per round if desired (but only within areas of zero gravity or microgravity). Each 28 hours of continuous use requires a depletion roll; however, depleted suits can be recharged by someone with resources and knowledge of the numenera.
Depletion: 1 in 1d20

MOVING FROM BIT TO BIT

The flora, fauna, and sapient races like the otolins described below have their own methods of traveling between discrete objects in the Phaeton Halo. Visitors will have to rely on their own means (such as whatever vessel they used to travel there, or the flying capacity of a void suit) or flag down and befriend a passing otolin. Given that otolins are fairly outgoing and eager to learn new things despite their nonhumanoid appearance, getting a ride isn't out of the question.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE HALO

Many encounters in the Halo will be in zero gravity, though within clear sight of one or more of the drifting chunks of synth and ruined machines that make up the region. Other encounters will take place inside one of the very same objects, in which case the rules for gravity and even air might be completely different.

FLORA AND FAUNA OF THE PHAETON HALO

Though deadly to life forms that rely on atmosphere, the Phaeton Halo is home to a variety of "living" machine creatures that fill niches the way plants and animals do on a normal world. These creatures are, for the most part, descendants of automatons that served a completely different purpose in the structure from which the Halo is smeared, purposes that likely varied between the mundane and those with no translatable equivalent in the Ninth World.

Examples of these life forms include scuti root, grendlim, ramak, and void snails. All of these creatures are potential encounters for explorers that spend enough time moving between objects in the Halo.

SCUTI ROOT

The dominant "flora" in the Halo is actually biomechanical. It is composed of a grasslike black tendril that grows in smothering mats over exposed synth and other processed material if given half a chance. Called scuti root, this flora tends to soak up available light, and from a distance greater than long range, it camouflages otherwise reflective debris, giving it the semblance of ash and asteroid rubble.

If left undisturbed, a patch of scuti root can bore holes through even the toughest synth hull plating (though the process takes years) and extend rootlike tendrils into the hollows within, seeking power sources. When a patch finds one, it sprouts one or more ebony fruits shaped like hearts. Otolins and other prospectors of the Halo know to look for these scuti fruit, not only as a sign of potential treasures hidden inside, but also because each fruit mimics a level 5 detonation cypher. (Such a detonation also spreads scuti spores far and wide.)

Otolin, page 70

Detonation, page 284

GRENDLIM

The grendlim are a predatory biomechanical species that hunts across the Halo. Resembling 10-foot (3 m) long angular lizards scaled with synth, grendlim have no rear legs, but they do possess a long tail with a jetlike vent at the end, which allows them to move with remarkable agility. Their pack tactics make them stand out as a common danger in the Halo. Though not fully sapient creatures, the strategies any given group employs to bring down much larger prey—including otolins, kruem, and in at least one storied incident, a wharn—can make them seem devilishly smart. Grendlim always seem to be able to predict how prey will react, which way it will flee, and where it will try to hide, even before the prey itself realizes it. This predictive facility, along with teeth that can bite through nearly anything and their ability to spit sticky nets, means that grendlim should be avoided when possible. On the other hand, if a pack is defeated by a group of otolins or

Grendlim: *level 3; Armor 2; long-range level 5 sticky net attack; bite inflicts 4 points of damage that ignore Armor; gain swarm advantage if acting in groups of three or more*

Kruem, page 70

Wharn, page 157

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Ramak: *level 3, long-range "leg spear" attacks as level 6; inflicts 8 points of damage*

Void snail: *level 3; Armor 8; acidic bite inflicts 4 points of damage (ignores Armor) for three rounds*

Void snail shell: *level 8 synth*

Kruem: *level 7, Speed defense as level 6 due to size; Armor 5; flies a long distance each round; two bludgeoning fist attacks inflict 8 points of damage each as a single action; for details, see the skysmasher in* The Ninth World Bestiary, *page 116*

When kruem are encountered on Earth, Ninth Worlders call them "skysmashers."

prospectors, the grendlim survivors learn to avoid marking the same crew as prey in the future.

RAMAK

Spiderlike creatures with a central body several times larger than that of a human, ramaks are best known for their legs, which can reach yards or in some cases even miles (up to 3 km) to find footing amid the tumbling Phaeton Halo (the legs seem to pull mass from a transdimensional source to stretch so far). Ramaks feed on rubble, patches of scuti root, and pretty much anything else that won't fight back; these creatures occupy a niche at the intersection of grazing herbivore and scavenger. That latter quality is why they sometimes follow kruem or grendlim packs at a safe distance, and often use their spearlike legs to defend themselves only if bothered.

VOID SNAIL

Machine life that mimics real biology is often as susceptible as flesh to the same invisible energies sleeting through space, though that susceptibility stretches across far longer timescales. Still, machine fauna of the Phaeton Halo has developed various ways to protect itself. The void snail, for instance, spins red crystalline shells from the synth-rich rubble of the Halo. As they grow larger and larger, void snails continually add to their shells. Over time, these shells can reach impressive sizes. In fact, the otolins use evacuated shells for dwellings, for storage, and even as the basis for the special vessels they use to rapidly move about the Halo.

A void snail isn't automatically aggressive, but if pressed, it defends itself with acidic spittle able to eat through almost any substance.

KRUEM

A kruem is a being of fused flesh and synth that lives most of its life in the airless void, hunting the Phaeton Halo for nutrition from special synth grades, minerals, and energy sources smeared out in a massive ring around the sun. That nutrition can sometimes be pried from raw chunks of ruined artifacts bigger than houses, but sometimes it must be torn from the defeated bodies of other void-adapted creatures. A kruem maneuvers with tiny jets of ethereal blue flame from its palms and feet, but it can also launch itself with extreme velocity, and then rocket away in its chosen direction on a flare of burning plasma.

Kruem are resistant to massive shock, even when they fall to the surface of a world like shooting stars, which they do every few hundred years. Falling kruem target barren places on Earth where they crash down, spawn, and lay eggs before blasting off again into the night.

OTOLIN

Otolins resemble very large beetles or other large-bodied insects with wings made of cut synth and cast-off automaton pieces. No two otolins look exactly alike, but once a human explorer has seen several, it's clear that they are all of a kind. They range from half the size of a human to more than double or even triple the size. Despite their

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biomechanical chemistry, otolins move with the fluidity of living things, and they dye their outer components with bright colors and, when possible, illuminated spirals and lines.

Otolins move through the void by pushing against the fabric of existence when they spread their metallic wings, the undersides of which glow with pinkish illumination when active and creating propulsion.

Young otolins are formed from an infusion of carefully selected parts from a quad family of adults. Despite their techno-organic minds, the young do not begin their existence with all the knowledge of an adult. Instead, they follow adults around for the first several years of their life, learning all the ways of an otolin, just like a human youth learns from her parents and teachers.

Otolins have an inborn understanding of the numenera, and indeed they rely on that knowledge to constantly repair and replenish their forms. Otolin form varies from one individual to another, and this variance provides for specialized skills and abilities. The creatures do not continually evolve their forms over time to become ever more powerful, stronger, and smarter versions of themselves, even though they could, using ancient devices they come across in the Halo. However, to self-evolve is taboo.

Stories of ancient otolins who self-evolved are impressed on the young as object lessons: those who went down this path ceased to be otolins and instead became monstrosities or aberrations, usually going insane as well. Sometimes referred to as "the fallen," these otolins had to be put down or exiled. Some of them still exist on the outermost, darkest edges of the Halo or are sealed in one of the countless tumbling components of old Phaeton. And of course, every so often, a contemporary otolin decides to ignore the taboo and goes beyond prescribed limits. The temptation is always there, but for an otolin to indulge it is to fall into evil.

Despite the internal danger of "falling" and the external dangers posed by many aspects of life in the Halo, otolins are an upbeat and usually optimistic race. They know that enough raw material—parts for repair and broken machines to drain for power—lies amid the remains of Phaeton to allow their kind to thrive for several hundred million more years. They look to the future, to what they might find in the next big structure they investigate, and in the delight that the next cycle of children will bring.

Otolins speak over a range of machine channels and can usually make themselves understood to almost any other sapient creature, either by direct machine signaling or by causing a piece of tech in the possession of strangers to begin speaking on behalf of the otolin. Once an otolin learns a language (and they learned the Truth, plus many other languages, long ago), it's not long before all otolins can draw on that skill. Other skills usually don't spread between individuals in this fashion; communication is a special exception.

Otolins can spend months or years of their lives alone in their red crystal loneshells, which are vessels crafted from void snail shells 20 feet (6 m) in diameter. A loneshell contains otolin provisions, prospecting gear (including ancient devices with hypersenses), and an engine that works in a way similar to how an otolin moves through the void, though a loneshell goes much faster.

When otolin prospectors are not out looking for parts for repair and machines to drain for power, they return to the community they call home. Finding the idea of life inside a hollowed Halo structure to be confining and dreary, they tether empty void snail shells to create communities. In fact, a subset of loneshells in a community stay in place for a long time. Despite the underlying mobility that individual loneshells represent, a given community tends to retain its name and location for many years, even if component loneshells leave and then return again years later. Otolins have mapped most detritus storm paths, so their communities are sited in areas rarely touched by such natural disasters.

Every community has an agora in the form of a massive void snail shell or a discarded dome, sphere, or vessel found in the Halo. The gathering spot usually swarms with otolins, all screaming (via invisible machine channels) stories, songs, and the oddly patterned anecdotes that they consider jokes, while passing around containers of green rock that gives off subtle radiation that's slightly intoxicating to biomechanical creatures.

Otolin society has no fixed number of genders, though five genders are most common. Four of those are usually required to bring a new otolin to birth. The genders don't map congruently to human genders, and the names otolins use don't translate well either, but humans who meet otolins often default to using "he" and "she" when referring to individuals. Most otolins don't seem to mind this. In many cases, they actively encourage it.

The Truth, page 133

Loneshell walls are level 8 for the purposes of breaking, cutting, and penetrating them.

Otolin prospector: *level 4, knowledge of the numenera as level 6; Armor 2; flies a long distance each round*

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ARTIFACT: CARAPACE COMPONENT

Level: 1d6 + 2
Form: Varies by ability, but all of characteristic otolin design
Effect: A component provides an additional ability to the creature it is fitted to. Carapace components are semiliving machine beings, but they can be fitted to organic creatures as easily as to fully autonomous machine creatures. Fitting a component to a flesh creature is a difficulty 3 Intellect task and may require modifications to the flesh (such as shaving away skin for plating, removing an arm to make room for a manipulator, digging pits in a skull for antennae, and so on). When a carapace component is fitted to an organic creature, each use of the special ability conferred requires a depletion roll. The otolins use hundreds of different carapace components beyond the small sampling described below.

Antennae: When the wearer uses the antennae in conjunction with making a ranged attack or another task that relies on distance sensing, the antennae provide an asset on the task.

Armor Plating: When the wearer uses an action activating this component, a force-weave exolayer grants her +2 to Armor for one minute.

Manipulator: When the wearer uses the arm to complete a task requiring fine manipulation, the arm provides an asset on the task.

Phase Plating: When the wearer uses an action activating this component, both he and it become intangible for one minute, during which time he can move through substances whose level is lower than the artifact's level. The wearer can't make normal attacks or be attacked during this time.

Spinneret: The wearer can spend a round filling an area 10 feet by 10 feet (3 m by 3 m) with thin webbing made of sticky synth cable whose level is equal to the artifact's level. The webbing can serve as a barrier, a bulwark, or part of a larger web construction. If the spinneret is used to make an attack, the wearer can squirt material at a target within short range to immobilize the creature in web netting for up to one hour.

Wings: When the wearer uses an action to activate the wings, she gains the ability to fly a long distance per round for ten minutes.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

Most communities also employ several otolins in the role of midwife, which is a highly respected position. In addition to being present any time an otolin is fused together by its quad family, midwives are also skilled in taking specifically prospected machines and turning them into artifacts called carapace components. Not only do carapace components give different individuals specialized abilities, but they also serve as the foundation of every living otolin.

Most otolins, especially those who are gone from communities for long periods, keep one or more pets. Otolin pets have the aspect of a piece of partially animate machine or oddity. Very simple pets can vibrate, move, sing on machine channels, or otherwise provide the semblance of affection. More complex pets might look like miniature otolins that follow their masters around and have the capacity to provide real affection. Particularly well-off otolins may keep living biological plants or small creatures bought from Ghamalso in small, portable biospheres.

Ghamalso, page 78

LOCATIONS IN THE PHAETON HALO

The Halo is far too vast to fully catalog. Only a handful of interesting sites are provided on the following table as a sample of the wonders that populate the void.

NACHANT

Nachant is a silvery obloid structure tumbling gently through the Halo, measuring a few miles (6 km) in diameter. A small asteroid circles Nachant like a moon. The single known entrance is a circular cavity 10 feet (3 m) in diameter flooded with light so bright that staring into it is like looking directly at the sun.

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HALO LOCATIONS

d20	Random Halo Location
1	Massive empty shell of metal or synth
2	Massive shell of metal or synth with scavenging possibilities
3	Massive intact structure with scavenging possibilities
4	Otolin prospector
5	Otolin community
6	Ramak lair
7	Massive chunk of drit
8	Derelict vessel with scavenging possibilities
9	Massive intact structure covered in scuti root
10	Detritus storm
11	Massive chunk of ice
12	Massive chunk of ice encasing intact structure
13	Wharn, inactive
14	Wharn, active
15	Inactive, corrupt component of ancient datasphere
16	Unstable wormhole to a specific, named location somewhere in the cosmos
17	Mountain-sized chunk of rock
18	Sorg scout ship, crashed
19	Sorg scout ship, active
20	Detonation (level 8) left over from a prior-world war

Otolin, page 70

Ramak, page 70

Drit, page 12

Scuti root, page 69

Detritus storm, page 68

Wharn, page 157

Sorg, page 152

The otolin called Heurist believes the light is a defense mechanism meant to keep intruders from accessing the interior. Anything that passes into the brilliant cavity melts after a few seconds of exposure. Other otolins come to Nachant for various reasons—some hoping to gain entry, others intrigued by a few words of prophecy that names Nachant, but most to attempt various new methods for siphoning energy from the entrance to charge their artifacts or repower cyphers.

HEURIST

A scarred and ancient otolin named Heurist has permanently affixed her loneshell to Nachant and claims the structure as hers. She spends most of her time observing the entrance to the interior, and her loneshell is appropriately placed to allow her to do so. Heurist invites visitors to Nachant to talk, which usually involves meeting in her expansive shell over refreshments. The otolin reserves the right to refuse those who come to recharge items that she deems too dangerous to experiment with. Visitors who don't respect her claim find that she has a few tricks, including a pack of a dozen or more pet grendlim that shelter on a small asteroid that circles Nachant like a moon.

During an initial visit, Heurist plies visitors with questions about their intentions and origins, especially if they are not otolins. In the latter case, she may

Grendlim, page 69

Loneshell, page 71

Hypermal heard the transmission of Nachant, but he did not understand. So he asked, "Great one, what will the outcome of all this be?" The transmission came only once more, then never again. It said, "Go your way, Hypermal, because the way is closed up and sealed until the time of the Cosmic Singularity."

~Otolin prophecy

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"What does Nachant hide? I ask myself the same question every revolution of the Halo. Sometimes I have visions of the interior I do not understand. Other times prospectors find a way to gain entry, but they never return to tell what they find. Maybe it is time I enter myself."

~Heurist, otolin observer

Heurist: *level 7, knowledge of the numenera as level 8; Armor 2; flies a long distance each round; long-range energy beam attack inflicts 6 points of damage to target and all creatures within immediate range*

Wharn, page 157

Nachant key, page 75

Low gravity, pages 97 and 100

even ask that visitors do something for her before she allows access to Nachant's entrance. Tasks can be as easy as delivering a message to another otolin community or as potentially dangerous as dealing with a wharn that has become active in the area.

Heurist may reveal that a handful of those who sought Nachant's interior made it through the sun-bright entrance without dying, though she doesn't know why (they had a Nachant key but didn't tell her). The otolin believes that sometimes creatures manage to enter safely because whatever lies inside is aware, and allowed it. To Heurist's knowledge, no creature who entered has ever returned.

NACHANT ENTRANCE

Gaining entry to Nachant is incredibly dangerous and difficult. Without the proper key, getting in requires a long period of study (or access to the records of someone else who has already done the work) and a series of difficulty 8 Intellect tasks. A misstep along the way usually results in the would-be explorers and their equipment being destroyed as if they had touched the surface of the sun itself. Those who attempt to phase or teleport into the interior face similar defenses.

The best way to get into the structure is to find a Nachant key in another part of the Halo and bring it to the entrance. In the presence of a key, the illumination pulse does not occur, and creatures can enter without being destroyed.

NACHANT INTERIOR

The interior of Nachant is hollow and filled with breathable (if thin) air, has low gravity, is lit by a sourceless illumination of hard white light, and contains what seems to be a perfectly preserved city of synth skyscrapers, each reaching unbelievable distances "upward." At first glance, the city

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seems empty of life. In fact, in its dustless perfection, it gives the impression of a massive monument to a place that once was important to beings of vast knowledge and advancement.

Several subtler weird things become apparent to visitors, but only after some time has been spent moving about the interior.

First, no matter how far explorers move among the towering structures along the empty, completely flat flooring material, the interior of Nachant seems to stretch farther, suggesting either that perceptions are being manipulated or that the interior is larger than the exterior.

Second, if explorers lose direct sight of the entrance, finding it again becomes difficult. In fact, it becomes a difficulty 8 Intellect task because the interior, despite giving the apparent facade of timeless permanence, is constantly shuffling, expanding, and retracting through spacetime. This quality also adds to the sense that Nachant's interior seems to stretch on forever. If visitors use some kind of marking technique as they explore, such as memorizing landmarks, marking buildings, or paying out a thin cord behind them, the effort provides an asset on the Intellect task but doesn't guarantee success. Marks turn up missing or moved, compasslike artifacts spin and reorient for no obvious reasons, cord followed back seems to have stretched or is found to cross itself in ways it shouldn't, and so on. This confusion is one of the reasons most explorers don't emerge from Nachant again.

The PCs might find the shells of previous otolin explorers, or the desiccated remains of human explorers, that found their way inside Nachant and failed to get out again.

Sometimes traces of a Nachant key's memory flood remain with the user, and she can pose a one-time question to the datasphere to gain an answer.

ARTIFACT: NACHANT KEY

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Handheld silvery, smooth obloid shape

Effect: Each time a user activates the key, it shows the distance and direction to an object in the Phaeton Halo called Nachant. It works by feeding alien memories, apparently stored within the key, into the user's mind in an unfiltered torrent so dramatic that she must make an Intellect defense roll upon activation. On a success, she gets a fix on the distance and direction but still takes 1 point of Intellect damage. On a failure, she doesn't get a fix, takes 2 points of Intellect damage, and is stunned and unable to take actions for a round due to the intense memory flood.

If the key is used inside Nachant, or if it spends an hour inside the structure, it transforms into a pyth, becoming a self-willed creature with its own interests and goals, possibly ones that have nothing to do with the user's plans. However, the pyth will comply with one request made by whoever carried it into Nachant, even if the request is expansive.

Depletion: 1 in d20

Pyth, page 150

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Third, the majority of the buildings are mostly impenetrable (level 8 synth) and solid. That said, one or two in every "block" is open to exploration. Inside these are dozens of dark levels accessible by simple vertical passages. The chambers on these levels sometimes contain devices of the prior worlds, no two of which seem to be of the same origin. Some objects are tiny, and others occupy whole floors (or more). Most fall somewhere in between, and explorers can usually loot a few shins and cyphers from these if they spend the time salvaging.

The Menagerie's force field is level 9.

Finally, Nachant isn't actually empty. Beetle-brown vermin, similar in shape to otolins but about half the size, have built nests throughout the interior. They are drawn to activity such as explorers make, especially if otolins are part of the group. (The vermin, called orolins, are devolved otolins. Thus, otolins find them both physically dangerous and spiritually terrifying.)

Orolin: *level 4; Armor 2; bite inflicts 5 points of damage*

Far more worrisome than orolins are entities called pyths. Perhaps as many as a hundred pyths inhabit the interior, each claiming a section for its own, each constantly scheming to gain control of a rival pyth's section. These schemes—or perhaps games—occur on a level of reality that most creatures can't sense, except indirectly. It's why the city within Nachant seems to shift and change when not directly observed.

Pyth, page 150

Pyths consider otolins, humans, and other creatures of similar intellectual development to be little more than vermin. However, a pyth may decide to use an explorer to gain a brief advantage over another pyth in their endless struggle against their fellows. That opportunity is probably the only way explorers can get free of Nachant rather than waste away, fall victim to an orolin nest, or be accidentally "brushed off" by a pyth that regards them as insects.

Ghamalso: *level 7, perception as level 9; uses offensive and defensive artifacts to grant him level 9 attacks and Speed defense*

THE MENAGERIE

Across all the worlds in the sun's sway, and in places far beyond, whispers of Ghamalso the Collector and his Menagerie elicit wonder, envy, and not a little fear from the learned. The Menagerie is where Ghamalso's collection is housed. From the exterior, it appears to be a perfectly white decahedron a little more than a mile (2 km) in diameter tumbling in the outer sweep of the Phaeton Halo. However, it has been reported in other locations, including hovering over the surface of Earth, Naharrai, and Urvanas, as well as locations immensely farther away, leading some people to suspect that it's actually duplicate structures.

Those who come upon the Menagerie through their own agency (rather than being invited or collected by Ghamalso) find the exterior immensely hard to bypass, thanks to the fact that the white material is an opaque force field. Usually, Ghamalso must cause an opening to appear in one of the faces to allow entry, though there are stories of daring pirates who managed to pierce the walls using tech provided by a third party so they could steal valuables from the collection.

MEETING GHAMALSO THE COLLECTOR

Ghamalso is humanoid, but not human. His back is hunched dramatically forward, his skin is covered in shiny black down, one spindly arm ends in a five-taloned hand, and the other ends in a machine manipulator that any otolin would be proud of. His head is always sheathed in a helmetlike device that sprouts whirring lenses, ears like dishes, and antennae. Ghamalso says that his "head prosthesis" allows him to notice every detail of his environment, the better to appreciate his collection. Certainly, he has never been seen without the helmet. Visitors sometimes notice a faint mental static when they stand too close to Ghamalso, but only intermittently and usually not intense enough to impede thought or action.

Otolin servitor: *level 4, knowledge of the numenera as level 6; Armor 2; flies a long distance each round; long-range energy beam artifact inflicts 6 points of damage (depletion: 1 in 1d20)*

Otolin servitors employed by the Collector escort those who come (or are brought) to the Menagerie into a finely appointed salon set with sculptures, light displays, painted art, and unique devices behind crystal. Here, visitors are soon met by Ghamalso, who either inquires politely after the reason for the visit or describes why he has brought the visitors to his Menagerie. The salon is also where he meets with bounty hunters so he can inspect rare objects brought to him, whereupon he either buys the object on the spot or rejects it and sends the bounty hunters packing to find better-quality items.

Generally speaking, Ghamalso is a font of information regarding interesting worlds, worldlets, sites, and objects.

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Though he specializes in the region around the sun, he sometimes travels to other places to add to his collection. If visitors arrive to get information, sell an object, or perhaps obtain an item they believe lies in Ghamalso's collection, he requires a trade of unique information or a collectible item in return. Given that Ghamalso has no compunction against collecting sapient, free-willed beings, he may suggest that the most interesting visitor among those seeking his aid become part of his collection as remuneration.

Indeed, if Ghamalso had characters brought to him, it might be because he wants to pick their brains about an interesting object he's heard they encountered. But it could also be because he wants to add one or more of them to his collection for a term of one hundred years. Unless a character can provide something of equal value, Ghamalso may insist.

GHAMALSO'S PURPOSE

Like all collectors, Ghamalso enjoys the process of finding and adding new prizes to his growing assemblage of rare and unique items. He also enjoys the opportunity to show it off, so visitors who are particularly adroit at flattery can get a long way with Ghamalso by complimenting his collection.

A few decades ago, he found an object of special wonder, which he calls the Sherangeval. It's a jet-black rod that he keeps with him at all times. When he first found it, touching it released so much energy it blew off his hand. Now he dares handle it only with the carapace component manipulator he uses as a prosthesis. Besides coming close to killing him, the Sherangeval seeded a vision in Ghamalso's dreams of a place of utter strangeness unlike anything he'd heretofore seen—a place called the Thon Iridescence.

Ghamalso believes that if he can collect other segments of the Sherangeval, each one will lead him closer to understanding where to find the Thon Iridescence, which he suspects lies so far across the void that normal means of travel are not sufficient to reach it. Instead, he believes that some kind of psychic entanglement is necessary. To that end, Ghamalso has started to focus on adding items (and creatures) to his collection that possess odd psychic abilities, especially those that relate to dreaming.

He's glimpsed in his own dreams and nightmares an entirely different realm, one that seems maddeningly difficult to find with the waking mind. This fantastic realm, he believes, is the Thon Iridescence.

Ghamalso recently discovered that other beings, including those on Earth, seem to have learned about the Thon Iridescence, too. The one who came closest to finding it, a Queen Whenith Sarromere of Iscobal, was deposed and supposedly died in exile. However, before that came to pass, she issued rewards to explorers who scoured

Queen Whenith Sarromere, page 158

Iscobal, page 158

The Sherangeval is Ghamalso's name for an artifact called a singularity drill (page 78).

Carapace component, page 72

Thon Iridescence, page 106

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ARTIFACTS

INSTANT MOONLET

Level: 1d6 + 3
Form: Fist-sized white dodecagon (when collapsed); moonlet-sized white dodecagon (when instantiated)
Effect: Creates a three-dimensional dodecagon a little more than a mile (2 km) in diameter. The moonlet is formed from force fields and lasts for one month or until deflated. The instantiation of the moonlet is not destructive, and in the process, the user and creatures specified can be taken up and deposited safely within one of the modules that make up the interior, which are sized and connected according to her specifications. Entrances and exits between modules and to the moonlet's exterior are similarly determined by the user. Once the moonlet is instantiated, the user can move modules, open or close doorways, or make other adjustments within the volume, but doing so takes her complete concentration for at least a minute for each change.
The user can "deflate" the moonlet, which stores everything inside the dodecagon (except objects and creatures she specifies) in a transdimensional space.
The artifact cannot be used within the gravity well of another world or moon.
The interior modules are always pure white.
Depletion: 1 in 1d6

SINGULARITY DRILL

Level: 1d6 + 4
Form: Jet-black rod
Effect: A would-be wielder who holds the singularity drill in an attempt to use it must make a successful difficulty 3 Might defense roll or take 5 points of ambient damage and drop the artifact. Success means he can use the rod in one of the following ways.
Gravity Immunity: As an action, the user can render himself and a volume of matter (including other creatures) equal to a modestly sized vessel immune to the effects of gravity, including the extreme gravity near or inside a black hole, for one day. (In areas of extreme gravity, where time is slowed with respect to creatures outside the gravity well, this immunity also keeps the user synched to the normal time stream.)
Gravity Manipulation: As an action, the user can target a creature within short range, plus all creatures within immediate range of the target, and cause their weight to increase so dramatically that they are yanked to the ground (if any), which deals damage equal to the artifact level and holds them in place for one round. If this effect is used in the void where there is no ground, affected targets are launched at extreme velocity in a direction chosen by the user.
Singularity: This effect can be used only once because it depletes (and destroys) the artifact. As an action, the user can set the drill to transform into a small black hole one round later. The created black hole lasts for 1d6 rounds, and while manifest, creatures and objects within short range must make a Might defense roll each round or be drawn into the singularity (at least partly) and sustain 30 points of damage. Creatures who die from this damage are consumed and utterly destroyed within the singularity.
Depletion: 1 in 1d6

the Ninth World for devices and knowledge related to sleep and dreams. Most of the items and information disappeared when she was exiled, but Ghamalso is hoping to reconstruct the queen's original collection.

MENAGERIE INTERIOR

The Menagerie is one vast artifact, a particularly robust form of an object called an instant moonlet. Ghamalso controls it mentally and can move modules around the interior as easily as a child is able to move blocks that make up a toy castle, though such rearrangement takes all his concentration. It's easier for him to command a particular external wall to open to allow visitors inside, usually into a prearranged salon but sometimes into holding cells before being processed into one of the many themed collections.

Most of the interior of the Menagerie is given over to the collections, but Ghamalso keeps several smaller modules available for entertaining (such as the salon),

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guest rooms, food preparation, rooms for servitors and staff (mostly otolins), labs for testing, and a private study where he keeps notes and maps on his progress toward locating items of special interest, especially those relating to the Thon Iridescence.

The Collector doesn't need a control room for the Menagerie, though he does keep diagrams of various worlds and systems in his study, and may retreat there when the time comes to move the entire craft. As when he reorders the interior, moving the craft takes all of Ghamalso's concentration. However, instead of calling on a function of the instant moonlet artifact that created the Menagerie, he mentally calls out to Eurynomec, a self-evolved otolin "demon-god" who Ghamalso released from bondage. In return for that singular favor, Eurynomec uses its vast abilities to move the entire Menagerie around the system up to a few times each year, apparently instantaneously.

In addition to the otolin servitors and staff, security inside the Menagerie is provided by a small unit of Zhev automatons that Ghamalso collected from the city of Qi on Earth. The Zhev answer to him but always have the option of demanding to return to Earth, so the Collector treats them with great respect.

THE COLLECTIONS

The amazing items, art, and creature specimens (many still alive but in suspended animation) in the Menagerie beggar the imagination. Endless halls set with tasteful lights wend through various collections. Each piece is described by a plaque, a recorded message, or an otolin curator. If there's a larger museumlike complex in existence, what with the Menagerie's fifty-plus collections, its transdimensional zoological preserve (which lies in a side dimension and might be larger than the surface area of Earth), and its various scientific stations where otolins toil, Ghamalso doesn't know about it. If he did, he'd try to incorporate it. Several billion objects are housed within the Menagerie, so many that a mortal visitor who spent one hundred years doing nothing but moving from exhibit to exhibit, spending a minute on each, would still see only about one percent of everything. In fact, it's unsafe to head into the collections without a curator or docent assigned by Ghamalso. To do otherwise risks getting lost.

The table on the following page is a tiny sampling of exhibits and includes a snippet of information from the plaque mounted next to each one.

Zhev, page 149

Qi, page 148

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MENAGERIE EXHIBITS

d10	Exhibit
1	**Head of strange humanoid.** "Collected from the surface of the moon, this individual fell out of an alternate dimension where the moon supported life. It died quickly, but the memory of its visit remains as long as its head is kept."
2	**Red shoes.** "These shoes, apparently able to fit a human woman of small stature, were immensely symbolic to humans of a prior world. Research continues as to why."
3	**Unearthly color.** "This color, which doesn't exist in the normal spectrum, was caught in this special crystal prism when a fracture in existence nearly swallowed the fifth child of the sun, threatening to suck away its mass for an unknown purpose."
4	**Dread destroyer.** "These giant war machines have organic brains and internal organs protected by a self-repairing metal shell. With their twelve legs, they lumber over any surface, even clinging to a vertical surface like an insect if need be. Better not to touch."
5	**Weird contraption.** "Always shifting, transforming, folding, and unfolding, this oddity has driven insane sapient beings who spent too much time trying to understand its weird beauty."
6	**Diamond claw.** "This massive object is only the tip of a creature that lives in the sun. It looks like diamond, but it's far harder and immune to heat."
7	**Magnificent painting of red desert.** "This masterpiece from Naharrai, from the hands of the most talented ellaticurid artist who ever lived, is literally priceless."
8	**Laughing child.** "This human child, twelve years old when collected, has a laugh that delights anyone who hears it. Please press the plaque to hear a recording of the glorious sound."
9	**Cosmic slide.** "Enter here and experience a magnificent ride through the cosmos! Average ride time one minute. Warning: some rides last substantially longer."
10	**Chrysalis.** "Receive an injection and feel what it's like to go through a metamorphosis: slug, cocoon, and back to yourself, in just three short hours. Not responsible for possible derangement following emergence."

Dread destroyer, page 239

Ellaticurid, page 40

The language used on plaques and in recorded messages in the Menagerie is the Truth, perhaps suggesting at least a little something regarding Ghamalso's origin.

Low gravity, pages 97 and 100

TEMPLE OF EURYNOMEC

When otolins find especially advanced items of the numenera, a few are tempted to meld the objects to themselves, effectively evolving abilities far beyond others of their kind. Doing so is taboo, and most otolins would never think to attempt it. The rare ones who give in to temptation become an object lesson to the rest. Offenders become dangerous and must be eliminated or locked away, usually at great cost to the otolin community inhabiting the Phaeton Halo at the time of each incident.

The otolin Eurynomec is just such an example. By incorporating ever more powerful devices, she self-evolved abilities that at first allowed her to create illusions by manipulating energy. As her power grew stronger, mere illusion became easy as she gained the capacity to change first her own shape—which she used to take various terrifying forms—and then the shape of other things by manipulating matter. The latter ability provided Eurynomec with access to even more impressive powers, up to and including altering the shape of those who opposed her. But perhaps her greatest feat was learning to jump vast distances through space, apparently without limit as to how far she could go or what she could carry.

The effort to cage Eurynomec in her own "temple" wiped out fully one-tenth of the otolins inhabiting the Phaeton Halo. That was a few millennia ago, and it would come as a shock to present-day otolins to learn that Eurynomec has recently been freed by Ghamalso the Collector, and that she can come and go as she pleases.

From the exterior, the temple appears to be a lightless object about 1,000 feet (305 m) on a side, shaped like a pyramid. To every analysis other than touch, it gives the impression of being completely impenetrable. However, any object or creature touching the wall is teleported into the Court of Eurynomec as a level 7 effect.

COURT OF EURYNOMEC

Artificial gravity (low gravity) holds sway within the temple. Malachite-green oil fills the Court to an average depth of 3 feet (1 m), but hidden hollows and vertical shafts plunge much deeper, leading to other areas of the temple. Illumination is provided by darting

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ARTIFACT: CHRYSALIS INJECTOR

Level: 1d6 + 1
Form: Tube with plunger and needle
Effect: Each use causes a willing creature (or an unwilling creature, if used as part of an attack) to undergo a metamorphosis that lasts ten hours. While protected by the chrysalis, the subject gains +6 to Armor against all effects, even those normally not affected by Armor, and does not need to eat or breathe. If the subject takes enough damage to kill her, the chrysalis bursts, and blood and fluid drain out in a mess of goo.

If the subject is left undisturbed for ten hours, she emerges from the chrysalis completely healed and with one of the following secondary abilities, which are essentially mutations. If a subject uses a chrysalis injector multiple times, she loses the benefits of the previously gained secondary ability, which is replaced by a new one.

1d6	Effect
1	*Infrared Eyes:* Subject gains a set of nictitating membranes she can blink into place over her eyes, allowing her to see farther into the spectrum and sense heat as light, which permits sight even in full darkness, though fine details are difficult to make out. Something furnace hot is like a blinding light.
2	*Poison:* Subject gains a bite or stinger attack that she is practiced with that inflicts poison damage (ignores Armor) equal to the artifact level.
3	*Bigger:* Subject grows a foot taller; she adds 3 points to her Might Pool but subtracts 1 point from her Speed Pool.
4	*Quicker:* Subject is more slender and dexterous; she adds 3 points to her Speed Pool but subtracts 1 point from her Might Pool.
5	*Smarter:* Subject's head is slightly larger; she adds 3 points to her Intellect Pool but subtracts 1 point from her Might Pool.
6	*Beneficial Mutation:* Subject gains a mutation from the Beneficial Mutation list.

white lights, similar to fireflies, that hover over the fluid. Hiding along the walls is a company of creatures called shadows of the void or, as Eurynomec calls them, shades.

When Eurynomec is in residence, she occupies the center of the Court, usually half submerged. She appears somewhat like an otolin but much larger, and instead of the insect-wing components that most otolins sport, her carapace is smoother, with things that more closely resemble fins and flippers. Eurynomec can swim through the green oil filling her temple without issue, but she can also swim through dimensions that separate one place in space from another with those same fin-and-flipper components.

EURYNOMEC'S GOALS

An otolin in Eurynomec's court would deem it a twisted and evil place, the oil a tainting sickness, and the shadows of the void her demonic vanguard. And though otolins are nothing if not biased on the subject, they might not be wrong. Eurynomec's goals, where she goes when she's absent for long periods to locations beyond the sun, and why she retains an interest in the Phaeton Halo are mysteries. Whatever else she's up to, she also responds to requests by Ghamalso to move him and his Menagerie to distant locations and then back again to the Halo, allowing the Collector to continue his avocation.

Characters from Earth who find their way into Eurynomec's Court will not necessarily be tortured and slain, their dismembered body parts used for decoration by shadows of the void, despite what otolins warn. Eurynomec negotiates with visitors, and if they provide something of great enough interest, she may grant a boon in return. The few times this has previously occurred, her gift has been to transport a group to a location somewhere else in the universe.

VENDAV RING

A circular hoop of yolk-yellow synth called the Vendav Ring is a well-known object of the Phaeton Halo to inhabitants. The hoop is just over half a mile (1 km) in diameter and is hundreds of feet (100 m) thick. A thin screen of dim light stretches across the ring's interior like the surface of a soap bubble, and upon that surface scenes constantly flash: a sunrise over a ringed planet; a lightning storm through a cloudscape; coral-like growths in a sunlit marine environment; a sun going nova; a galaxy being devoured by a black hole; a waterfall hundreds of miles long; a herd

Beneficial Mutation list, page 124

Eurynomec: *level 10; can create, shape, and destroy matter and energy; can jump as a move to nearly anywhere in the universe*

Shadow of the void, page 151

Vendav is the name of a mythical being in otolin lore who was "betrothed" of Phaeton, before the Halo formed with Phaeton's destruction.

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"Do not look; glance away from those wondrous visions; to stray into the Vendav Ring chasing dreams is to die."

~Otolin saying

of strange creatures on a prairie; an eye as large as the ring; an alien starscape; and on and on. Each scene lasts no more than half a second, and the same scene almost never repeats.

The learned who investigate the ring (and there have been scores over the centuries) detect a faint transdimensional energy signature. Vessels, automatons, and biomechanical creatures that pass through the Vendav Ring in an attempt to reach one of the scenes usually fail to go anywhere. They simply emerge from the opposite side completely burned out, with most of their internal machine parts fried, often beyond salvage. Living biological creatures that pass through the ring usually disappear, even if the vessels they were riding in come out the other side. Sometimes "ghosts" of such travelers show up later, flickering into and out of reality like two-dimensional projections, unable to make a sound or affect anything solid, but sometimes cognizant of the events occurring around them.

Whatever the original purpose of the Vendav Ring, now it is nothing but a dangerous curiosity, a way for otolins to commit suicide, and a place to dispose of vicious biomechanical criminals when nothing else will do.

Scuti root, page 69

PHAETON HALO HEARSAY

Message in the Body: Years ago, an Aeon Priest named Khotanis uncovered a prior-world installation on Earth that had the capability of viewing and transmitting messages to certain locations in the Phaeton Halo. Entities in some locations occasionally answer back. When Khotanis contacts the Halo, she can send words, objects, and people, though the latter power sometimes comes as a surprise to those who are transmitted.

Otolin Claim Jumpers: A group of otolin prospectors calling themselves the Moiza decided it's easier to steal from others than to stake their own claims. Their strategies for flushing out new targets continue to evolve, and to this end, they have started offering payments in cyphers and oddities to anyone who gives them leads on fresh claims made by other prospectors.

Vendav Irregularity: Lately one image has started to repeat with some frequency on the Vendav Ring's screen: a massive vessel glowing with ghastly purple-blue prominences. Otolins who glimpse it say they feel an unmistakable sense that the vessel represents something malign, mainly because the glimpses coincide with a burst of machine channel static that contains fragments of words and ideas, all of them apocalyptic.

THE WEIRD OF THE PHAETON HALO

Smart Roots: Scuti root is essentially a plant, but some patches have been found to communicate with other patches via invisible machine channels. They seem to be sharing information about the object in which they are embedded, along with less easily understood messages.

Reconnaissance: At regular intervals, comets originating far beyond the Phaeton Halo sweep in from the cold. But some of them are more than just rock, ice, and compacted dust—they are devices that glow blue and white, and they have a limited ability to change their direction. Otolins believe they are scouts for a larger force that will one day emerge from the great dark beyond the sun.

The Egg: One of the large pieces of rubble making up the Phaeton Halo is called the Egg because of its similarity to just such an object on Earth, except that this one is miles long. Recently, growing cracks along the length of the Egg resemble a little too closely the slow-motion hatching of something inside.

Great Tree: A recently discovered object in the Phaeton Halo appears to be a massive living tree at least 60 miles (97 km) long surrounded by its own atmosphere. Animal-like creatures crawl on the surface and burrow in the crevices of the bark, which are as deep as canyons. The discovery of one such Great Tree suggests there may be others somewhere in the Halo.

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PART 3:

FALLING INTO INFINITY

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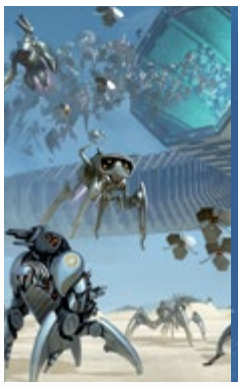

CHAPTER 8

PERELANDE

An old book written by a woman named Tassandra Koil says that she discovered evidence amid prior-world relics that some of the peoples of the past had the ability to move from world to world very easily. Although there are indications of this truth throughout the stars, no greater evidence exists than that found on a world called Perelande. This evidence comes less from numenera that can be found there and more from the existence of three intelligent races, none of which belongs on Perelande. In other words, all the people on Perelande are visitants, of a sort.

The atmosphere and gravity of Perelande are quite similar to those of Earth. The gravity is a bit stronger and the air a bit heavier, but the only effect this has on explorers is a slight feeling of lethargy and tiredness at the end of the day.

That is where the similarities with Earth end. A Perelande day is almost twice as long as a day on Earth, and a Perelande year is almost three times an Earth year. Unlike Earth, Perelande has no moon. Most strikingly, however, is the strange surface of the world. Most of Perelande is ocean, but it's covered in a crust of organic material 12 to 18 inches (30 to 46 cm) thick. The crust will support a great deal of weight, so it is safe to walk across. Sometimes, brave souls even build small structures atop it, but most of the inhabitants live on the islands that jut up above the level of the crust like mountains.

GETTING TO PERELANDE

Perelande is a world on the far side of Earth's galaxy. Any of the means discussed in the introduction of this book can be used to reach it, although the only known portal, the World Door, is on Earth's moon. Travelers using this gateway arrive on a small, uninhabited island on Perelande, where a large metal platform rests atop a plateau with a numenera console in the middle of it. The console is identical to the World Door on Earth's moon. If activated, a portal in space opens and leads either to U-i-Nstor on the Gloaming or to the aforementioned moon.

Numenera console: *level 7*

U-i-Nstor, page 124

World Door, page 33

FLORA AND FAUNA OF PERELANDE

The whitish brown crust that covers much of the world is organic and filled with life. Created by tiny creatures in the saltwater sea, the crust is not unlike a clam's shell. It is firm and fairly solid, but porous enough that certain specific kinds of plants can grow in the surface and have roots that reach the water level. In places, there are small cracks and gaps in the crust. These gaps are filled with another, somewhat spongier yellow growth called thloam, which is very much alive. This aquatic, plantlike substance grows up toward the sunlight. Sometimes, smallish plants take root in the thloam.

Atop the crust, Perelande could be mistaken for a desert. Occasionally, a large opening in the crust, not yet filled in by thloam, can be mistaken for a pool or a small lake. But for the

USING PERELANDE

The weird environment of Perelande, with PC explorers walking across a crust-covered ocean, will probably be the first challenge of a trip to this world. Although there are ancient structures to explore and numenera to salvage, the characters are perhaps more likely to get caught up in current events with the arrival of the cromulek. All three races on the world are potential allies or enemies, depending on what the PCs choose.

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most part, the crust extends for miles upon miles of relatively flat, dry terrain, with only occasional small plants. Only small animals live atop the crust—mostly reptiles, insects, and birds that prey on both. Below the crust, however, the oceans are thick with life of all kinds. Very little sunlight reaches creatures beneath the crust, so the life there has adapted to the dark.

Some powerful creatures can break through the crust. A few of these are air-breathers that excel at swimming and like to enter the water to hunt. Most are the opposite: aquatic creatures that wait just below the crust and break through it to snatch prey on the surface. The most dangerous and feared of these is the vimruth.

The islands are home to more conventional surface life, although it still consists mostly of reptiles, birds, and insects (the number of mammals on Perelande, for example, is very small). Notable examples include the kreed, a six-legged lizard the size of a human child that uses its spittle as a ranged attack to bring down flying insects and birds; the nasthor, a raptor with unique color-changing plumage that makes it very difficult to see; and the ulon, a beetlelike insect 18 inches (46 cm) long with a venomous bite.

INTELLIGENT RACES OF PERELANDE

This world is home to two intelligent species, although they could not be more different and generally have nothing to do with each other. The wedoth and the etteramerith dwell on separate islands and conduct no trade with each other, have little or no ability to communicate with each other, and know next to nothing about each other. On the rare occasions when they cross paths, their reactions are typically filled with a mixture of distrust and distaste.

A third race, the mechanical cromulek, has recently come on the scene from a far distant world. Their appearance is perhaps poised to change everything.

WEDOTH

Wedoth are short, hairy creatures, generally peaceful, quiet, and retiring. Their large claws are appropriate for digging, and wedoth use them to break through the crust when need be or burrow into their islands to make homes.

Although they do not wear clothing and rarely have accessories or weapons, wedoth are quite adept at manipulating specialized tools with their mouths (their claws could never suffice for tool use). They use these tools to build and repair simple machines: diggers, winches, drills, saws, and small motors for their crustcraft. Crustcraft are boats made of synth, with engines that extend well below the bottom, a propeller in the back, and a metal blade in the front. The engine cuts through the crust as it moves and propels itself in the water. The boat skims along the top of the crust.

Wedoth engines and tools suggest that perhaps they once had contact with others who had a greater grasp of the numenera, or they once had such a grasp themselves.

Vimruth, page 156

Kreed: *level 3; Armor 1; can attack a target in short range*

Nasthor: *level 3, stealth as level 6; if it strikes with surprise, it inflicts 4 additional points of damage*

Ulon: *level 2; Armor 2; bite inflicts 2 points of Speed damage on those failing a Might defense roll*

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Both the wedoth and the etteramerith have in their languages the concept of a lunar month, a period of time of about fifteen Perelande days. This is significant because the world has no moon.

Today, however, they excel at fixing their engines but have no ability to produce the materials required to make the parts and tools. The synth panels they cobble together for boats, for example, do not seem to be products of the wedoth or even to have originated on Perelande. Thus, these are precious things to the hairy creatures.

The wedoth's own legends say that they are not from Perelande, but instead were brought here long ago from another world in tubes that stretched across the distance. With the appearance of the cromulek tubes, it's not hard to imagine that in the past, the wedoth migrated from another world (perhaps against their will) just as the cromulek are doing now.

Typical wedoth: *level 2, stealth as level 4; claws inflict 4 points of damage*

Wedoth live in small clans ruled by elders. They worship no gods but revere the spirits of their ancestors, whom they believe watch over them from deep within the void between worlds. They value durable materials of all kinds and use a barter economic system, which means that most shins, oddities, and other numenera would be valuable to them for the materials alone.

They speak their own language and appear incapable (or perhaps unwilling) of speaking any other.

The difficulty of interactions with the etteramerith may be increased by one step, but if a varjellen is involved, this penalty becomes an asset, reducing the difficulty by one step.

If explorers encounter the wedoth, most likely the creatures flee or hide. If not, they are reticent and wary at best. Crossing them or outright attacking them can be dangerous. Although they likely flee from such an encounter, the wedoth will wait and enact vengeance at a later time in a manner of their choosing. This might mean a stealthy attack, but it could also mean the destruction or theft of a device important to the explorers.

ETTERAMERITH

Typical etteramerith: *level 3, physical attacks and physical tasks as level 4; health 14; deals 4 points of damage*

Tall, thin humanoids with finlike crests atop their heads, the etteramerith have bright red skin. Not a few Ninth Worlders have noted that the etteramerith greatly resemble the varjellen. At first, some wondered if Perelande might be the original varjellen homeworld, and the etteramerith their long-lost cousins. However, just as the varjellen know that they are not native to Earth, the etteramerith know they are not native to Perelande. Aeons earlier, the etteramerith's ancestors were starfarers who traveled from world to world, exploring and colonizing. Something happened unimaginably long ago (so long that no accessible records exist) that stranded those ancestors here. It is not difficult to surmise that it could have easily been the same event—or series of events—that left the varjellen on Earth. Was it the end of a great civilization and the loss of powerful technologies used to travel across the void? If so, it is interesting to note the implication that, perhaps, the end of one of the prior worlds and the death or disappearance of that civilization may have affected more than just Earth.

Varjellen, page 121

Like the varjellen, the etteramerith can alter their metabolisms and internal systems. However, they do so only to make themselves physically stronger, faster, and more durable. Although they rarely wear armor, etteramerith use spears, bows, javelins, and knives with great skill. They prefer ranged weapons but are excellent in melee combat as well. They travel on foot, hunting and gathering amid the crusted seafields (unlike varjellen, etteramerith can digest meat). The humanoids rarely have numenera, although some collectives have stumbled upon remnants of the past and have fully adopted their use.

Etteramerith have their own language, which is entirely a sign language—there is no verbal component. They live in autonomous collectives, usually without specific leaders. Their commerce is done almost exclusively through barter. Most important to etteramerith life, however, is art. Painting, sculpture, and music dominate their society and are prized more highly than virtually anything else.

Explorers are likely to find the etteramerith to be aloof and cold. However, if a varjellen is part of the group of midnight pilgrims, the etteramerith will be curious about it, and perhaps a little in awe.

CROMULEK

Within the last few months, strange sights have appeared in the skies above Perelande—massive, open-ended cylinders projected seemingly out of nothingness. From within these tubes, flying metal beings descended upon the world. At first, they seemed to be searching for something, but that something may have simply been a safe place upon which to build.

The cromulek are a race of automatons. They come in a variety of configurations: some are vaguely humanoid, others somewhat like arachnids, boxy angular

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masses, or floating spheres. Most possess individual adaptations for different tasks. For example, builders are strong and have multiple arms, and scouts are smaller, faster, and have a wide array of senses. Still, cromulek individuals have many similarities. They all are well armored, they all can fly, and they all have about the same level of intelligence.

Cromulek are free-willed machine intelligences. Since they are not biological, they do not need to sleep, eat, or breathe. They procreate by building more cromulek (although they have used all the parts and raw materials they had on hand before coming to Perelande). They achieved sentience on a now-dead world without a name, arising from leftover wreckage many millions of years in the past. Eventually, they discovered that whomever was responsible for their existence left behind a powerful method of travel—extradimensional tubes that extend through space to allow quick travel across immense distances. Using these tubes, they came to Perelande.

These beings do not have their own spoken language. Instead, they use intense transmission bursts to convey great amounts of information to each other instantly at a planetary range. However, these signals are highly disruptive to most organic minds and nervous systems. Living creatures close to a cromulek suffer from this unintentional effect. A cromulek can halt the effect by going "radio silent" with others of its kind, but this assumes both that the cromulek realizes what is happening and that it cares. Cromulek can

THE NUMENERA ON PERELANDE

The numenera is far rarer on Perelande than in the Ninth World, but there are still occasional cyphers, oddities, and artifacts to be found. As the world was once part of a larger, interstellar community, it had small complexes with advanced technology. Today, however, most of them are submerged. On the islands, or sometimes jutting up through the crust in a shallow part of the sea, the wreckage and remnants of an ancient vehicle or some such may be found, but this is rare. If an explorer wants access to the numenera, she must go through the crust and down deep into the water.

The etteramerith do just that sometimes, returning to their collectives with cyphers or other valuable devices. Although the wedoth possess devices that suggest numenera, they are much less likely to scavenge. They are more interested in the materials of the ancients than in the technologies.

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Typical cromulek: *level 5, attacks and defense as level 4; Armor 4; fly a long distance each round; all living beings within immediate range must make a Might defense roll or suffer 1 point of Speed damage and 1 point of Intellect damage each round (ignores Armor)*

Cromulek adapted for combat: *level 5; Armor 4; fly a long distance each round; attack a single target within long range with a heat ray, or fire a missile up to 200 feet that explodes and deals damage to all targets in immediate area; all living beings within immediate range must make a Might defense roll or suffer 1 point of Speed damage and 1 point of Intellect damage each round (ignores Armor)*

adapt to the language of another being fairly quickly, if they choose to do so.

The creatures of Perelande are the first instances of biological life the cromulek have ever encountered, and the wedoth and etteramerith are the first non-cromulek intelligences they have run across. Initially violent reactions from the etteramerith caused some of the mechanical beings to adapt themselves to battle, but doing so is a slow process and involves trial and error. The cromulek are confused by what they have found on Perelande, but that confusion won't last forever.

THE CONFLICT

For thousands of years, the wedoth and the etteramerith have successfully ignored each other. Their lives have been peaceful and relatively quiet. But that has all changed. Every few days, one of the enormous, almost ethereal tubes appears in the skies somewhere in Perelande, disgorging a few hundred more cromulek. The newcomers' mere presence is disrupting all life on the planet, and so far, the mechanical beings don't understand how or why. And just as important, they don't know if it matters.

The wedoth hide from the cromulek, but soon they will likely need to revise that strategy. The first etteramerith that encountered cromulek attempted communication but took the disrupting effect of the transmissions as an attack and reacted with hostility. Word is spreading from collective to collective that the mechanical beings are a threat and should be destroyed.

The cromulek never experienced violence before coming to Perelande, but they are learning to defend themselves. If they decide to take the offensive, the etteramerith and wedoth are likely in grave danger.

Traveling back to the cromulek homeworld using the tubes is not possible. Whether this is by design, damage, or a misunderstanding of the technology remains to be seen. That means, however, that when each new batch of cromulek "colonists" arrives, they are surprised by all the new things they encounter until they have a chance to communicate with their fellows that arrived before them.

PERELANDE HEARSAY

Diplomats Sought: The wedoth of Clan Graekel want to establish communication with the cromulek, but if they discovered the existence of explorers from another world, they would much rather offer to pay the visitors to entreat with the mechanical beings than do it themselves.

Consultants of War: The etteramerith want to combat the cromulek and either drive them away or destroy them altogether. Do they have a weakness? Are there better options than spears and bows to fight the monstrosities? The etteramerith would greatly reward such knowledge or resources.

Teaching the Noisy Mutes: The cromulek would like to find someone to inform them about Perelande and the rest of the universe as well. But first, one would have to instruct and persuade them to go silent so that a conversation could take place. Able diplomats might convince the machine intelligences that peaceful coexistence is the best option. In any event, cromulek allies would be an abundantly valuable resource for cyphers, artifacts, and more.

Falling Sky: During one of the sudden tube extrusions into Perelande, very large objects fell to the crust, broke through it, and sank into the sea. Might these be the machines that direct and control the tubes, or something else entirely?

THE WEIRD OF PERELANDE

Ruin of Knowledge: On an island the etteramerith call Thrinniala, an ancient ruin of metal and glass hides amid trees and other growth. Anyone who visits the ruin instantly gains a bit of knowledge that may or may not be of interest to them presently, but that always becomes vital at some point in the future.

The Hidden Ones: Wedoth tales suggest that there is a fourth intelligent species on Perelande, living beneath the crust. This vicious, predatory aquatic race is not humanoid—more like gigantic, intelligent fish with the psychic ability to steal knowledge and rewrite memories.

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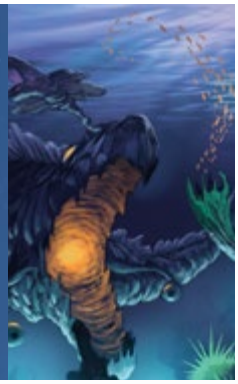
CHAPTER 9

XEOBRENCUS



A world with no warming sun to call its own, Xeobrencus is a dark wanderer, a planet tumbling through the empty nothingness far from the light. But rather than being a cold, frozen rock, the rogue planet claims an ocean of liquid water, one bursting with life. Indeed, the worldwide ocean of Xeobrencus hosts a riot of living species, with continent-sized growths of coral, free-swimming polyps hardly larger than nanoparticles, giga-titanic creatures of nearly unimaginable girth, and more. Instead of relying on sunlight, Xeobrencic life uses an energy hosted in the rock of the planet itself, specifically a mineral called silacthonite. The oceans are so rich in energy leaked by silacthonite that vast swaths glow blue, making the planet visible even from the void.

The amount of free energy liberated by silacthonite is lethal to most creatures born around suns—they quickly die of a sickness that burns and kills their tissues from the inside out. But for Xeobrencic life, the energy is a never-ending flood of food. On Earth, creatures of mind-blowing size, regardless of shape, are classed as titanothaurs by the learned, and the appearance of even one is a rare event. But on Xeobrencus, creatures at least as large as titanothaurs are the norm, and they do not represent the most colossal creatures that swim and hunt the world's apocalyptic waves.

GETTING TO XEOBRENCUS

Xeobrencus is just one of millions of rogue planets that wander alone in the endless void. Despite that, getting to Xeobrencus is even easier than getting to the moon, thanks to a unique connection the place has to Earth and some other worlds.

Search Terms: *rogue planet, extremophile*

Silacthonite is composed of a variety of radioactive minerals found in supernormal abundance on and within Xeobrencus. Before the ranthra—a species native to the world—devolved, they carved millions of "idols" from the mineral, which now lie scattered across and buried under the sea floor.

Titanothaur: *level 3, health 140; Speed defense as level 8 due to size and speed; punch, kick, or tail lash inflicts 18 points of damage to all creatures within short range; for more details, see* The Ninth World Bestiary, *page 126.*

USING XEOBRENCUS

The GM can use the world of Xeobrencus several ways in a campaign. The following scenarios could be provided as hooks to player characters:

- The PCs find a Xeobrencus stone as part of salvage from another adventure and then must figure out what's happening and how to return to their original bodies, perhaps with aid from a being on Xeobrencus called the Diluvian.
- An NPC known to the characters appears and claims to be someone else completely: a being called the Diluvian, native to a world called Xeobrencus. The Diluvian asks the PCs to help it find an artifact called a Xeobrencus stone, which is being used by criminals in Qi for sport hunting "by proxy" on Xeobrencus.
- The Diluvian appears as above, but with a Xeobrencus stone in hand, asking that the PCs accompany it back to its homeworld, where a colony of natives called ranthra are in danger of being wiped out by disease.
- The PCs' starfaring vessel is thrown through space via a cosmic anomaly and finds itself in orbit around Xeobrencus. Only a single island stands above the ocean world, but it holds a structure (Nordramu Citadel) that might prove useful in gaining answers or help.
- The PCs are asked to cure a small group of important people—perhaps Aeon Priests—who have apparently become possessed by "minds transferred from another world." The source of the affliction, an artifact stone, has been lost and must be found.

Xeobrencus stone, page 90

Diluvian, page 94

Ranthra, page 92

Nordramu Citadel, page 93

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A character who uses a Xeobrencus stone switches bodies with an alien, thus leaving an alien mind in charge of her comparatively puny form. Different aliens react differently to the new manifestation; some become like awestruck explorers, others shut down, and a few become violent.

Despite the name "Xeobrencus" stone, most of these artifacts are found on Earth and other worlds.

Psychic transference engines, page 94

Ulagra, page 155

Ranthra, page 92

Turnevur Enclave, page 94

Diluvian, page 94

Nordramu Citadel, page 93

Combat between vessels, page 14

ARTIFACT: XEOBRENCUS STONE

Level: 1d6 + 4
Form: Palm-sized, disc-shaped objects inscribed with fractal grooves
Effect: Each stone can psychically link to one or more natives on the world of Xeobrencus. When used, the mind of the user holding it switches places with the mind of a creature on Xeobrencus, no matter how far they are from each other. If the user wishes it, the minds of willing creatures within immediate range of her are likewise switched. The linkage remains until someone new touches the stone, the body of a user or creature dies, or some other effect is used to sever the psychic connection.

A Xeobrencus stone forges its connection anew with an individual creature each time it is used, as determined by massive psychic transference engines located on the planet. Potential transfer bodies include colossal creatures called ulagras, devolved nonsapient creatures called ranthra, atavist ranthra who retain their sapience and reside in Turnevur Enclave, or some other random creature on Xeobrencus. Sometimes an entity known as the Diluvian may intervene in the process and choose the target and manner of transference to suit its own needs.

Depending on circumstances, sometimes the minds of several users can be transferred into the body of a single Xeobrencic creature. If this occurs, those controlling the body share a telepathic link. All must be in accord each round regarding the actions they wish to take; otherwise, the body doesn't move or take any actions in that round.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

Transdimensional psychic pathways sometimes open between the minds of characters on Earth and creatures on Xeobrencus. These pathways rely on keys called Xeobrencus stones, but the power behind the phenomenon comes from psychic transference engines in one of the only places on Xeobrencus that rises above the water: Nordramu Citadel. There, machines hum and vibrate as they maintain their connection to Xeobrencus stones scattered across the universe. If people on Earth find such a stone, they can become psychically linked with creatures of Xeobrencus, allowing them to see—and act—as if they were the creatures themselves. Meanwhile, the creatures of Xeobrencus see and act from the bodies left behind on Earth.

PSYCHIC TRANSFERENCE GUIDANCE FOR GMs

As described under Using Xeobrencus, characters may find or be given a Xeobrencus stone. This likely leads to the PCs mentally taking a journey to the distant world, where they find themselves in new bodies, usually either dreaming ranthra or ulagras.

In order to avoid a disjointed experience for the players (unless that's what you're going for), every character should appear within the body of the same kind of creature, and all those creatures should be near each other on Xeobrencus, allowing transferred characters to find each other relatively quickly.

Alternatively, you could have the minds of all the characters appear in the body of a single creature (preferably an ulagra), requiring that they cooperate to control their new body. In fact, different characters could be assigned different roles, such as speaking, moving, attacking, and so on, akin to the way duties are split up among PCs for combat between vessels.

Transferred characters retain their own consciousness but have the stats and equipment (plus cyphers) of the creature their minds transferred into. They do not have access to the equipment (or cyphers) from their original bodies for the duration of the transfer.

Generally speaking, the characters' bodies are fine when their minds return "home," despite being inhabited by alien creatures from Xeobrencus. Dreaming ranthra and ulagras are not battle-maddened monsters at heart. That said, the characters might well discover that their bodies got up to some minor mischief in the meantime, such as having eaten every single morsel of nearby food, having drunk all the alcoholic spirits, and so on.

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SURVIVAL ON XEOBRENCUS

The atmosphere is not suited for Earth life, and characters who physically visit the world require some kind of breathing apparatus, such as a breath recycler. Of more concern is the sickening energy flux caused by silacthonite energy radiation. In fact, explorers from worlds less fraught with radiation find even a short visit to the planet lethal. Vast swaths of the ocean, called "blue zones" because of the color they glow, are particularly radioactive. Native Xeobrencic life eats radiation—some by passive absorption (the way plants on Earth soak up the sun's light and warmth), some by eating silacthonite directly, and many by predating other Xeobrencic creatures (just as Earth's apex predators do). Visitors from elsewhere quickly perish unless they employ tech that provides immunity, such as a flux suit.

But even with a flux suit and breath recycler, a visitor must beware the storms. Like the native creatures, Xeobrencic storms are overwhelming, terrifying catastrophes of waves, lightning, waterspouts, and vortices, where ocean spray and clouds above are sometimes hard to distinguish. These storms are deadly to visitors on a watercraft, whether they are floating on the surface or in a submersible. Really, Nordramu Citadel is the only place visitors can expect to survive for long if they are present physically rather than via psychic transference.

Breath recycler, page 32

ARTIFACT: FLUX SUIT

Level: 1d6 + 2
Form: Fairly lightweight full-body suit of synth
Effect: Serves as light armor and offers complete protection from radiation that is equal to or less than the artifact's level. Also allows the wearer to swim a long distance per round if desired. Each 28 hours of continuous use requires a depletion roll; however, depleted suits can be recharged by someone with resources and knowledge of the numenera.
Depletion: 1 in 1d20

All life native to Xeobrencus regains 1 point of health per minute in the presence of radiation, which essentially includes the entire world.

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Orv: *level 3, stealth tasks as level 6; swims a long distance each round; bite inflicts 4 points of damage*

Yalla: *level 4, Speed defense as level 3 due to size; flies and swims a short distance each round; water cannon attack inflicts 5 points of damage on a target within long range*

Xakak: *level 5, Speed defense as level 3 due to size; health 25; swims a short distance each round; short-range web attack restricts movement on hit*

Ulagra, page 155

Ranthra, dreaming: *level 2, stinging tail attack as level 4; tail attack inflicts 3 points of damage, plus 3 additional points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) for three rounds on those who fail a Might defense roll*

"Drowned in a single vast ocean, Xeobrencus is lit with a flux of energy burning from every rock and water droplet, an endless feast for a riot of coiling, swimming, and flying monstrosities."

~Terha Katrellin, a jack who explores the night

FLORA AND FAUNA OF XEOBRENCUS

Many creatures and sea plants on Xeobrencus are similar to life on Earth, though most specimens are far larger on the alien world. Kelp grows in great swaths in various parts of the ocean, corals swell like underwater mountains and sometimes breach the surface, flying things that resemble birds flap across the sky when it's not storming, insects the size of ships scuttle on the boundary between air and water, and fish of every kind swim the oceans. That said, nothing on Xeobrencus is exactly like anything on Earth, mainly because of their peculiar energy biology, though other distinguishing factors exist.

For example, the massive, purple-flowered sea kelp stays afloat with the help of flotation bulbs filled with tiny insects that constantly vent lighter-than-air gas. Ferrenk seagrass grows only near blue zones, usually on the ocean floor, and when it flowers, it can briefly render an area nonradioactive (and thus deprive other creatures of food) as it sucks every last rad of energy for itself. Movan coral produces structures so huge that the tops sometimes break the waves, climbing higher and higher, until an ulagra comes by and smashes them.

Creatures include the predatory orv, which silently slice through the water by using a propulsive psychic ability to move their massive bulks without creating a wake or splash. The yalla is a birdlike creature the size of a house that launches itself from the ocean surface on jets of rapidly expelled compressed water. The xakak are huge insects that prey on even larger creatures (especially ulagras) by trying to net them in massive cocoons of sticky cord.

Then, of course, there are the ulagras and ranthra.

RANTHRA

Fauna of every conceivable sort swims the seas of Xeobrencus, but one distinct race of quasi-intelligent beings is prominent. Called ranthra, these entities are as much as 13 feet (4 m) in length, are covered in iridescent gold scales, and possess a single large eyelike organ on their heads. They have clever hands and lower bodies like stingrays.

Ranthra abide in coral caves and live in somewhat primitive tribal communities. Their language seems to consist of a limited selection of clicks and subsonic pulses.

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However, despite their savage, simple lives, they possess amazingly useful instincts for using their environment. They use basic tools like spears fashioned of chipped volcanic glass, nets woven from sea plants, and similar implements. They also keep many pets, guard creatures, and helper beasts like light-emitting eels, fungus that produces preservative slime, and ulagra eggs that spark with electric energy.

As the Diluvian of Nordramu Citadel knows and may relate, the ranthra purposefully devolved their conscious minds to live in relative mental peace and tranquility. They once possessed remarkable abilities granted by superior technologies (which created the Xeobrencus stones, for instance). Now, the ranthra spend their centuries adrift in the Great Dream, without the barbs of personal daily anxiety or the racial stress brought on by the sense that technological growth and advancement must come before all other things.

From time to time, a particular ranthra breaks out of the Great Dream long enough to operate an ancient device, speak to visitors, or accomplish some other unexpected goal. But sooner or later, every dreaming ranthra—except the Diluvian—reverts back to a state akin to a wild animal. Events that might elevate a ranthra from its pre-sapient existence into full consciousness seem random and spurious in all cases except for one: when silacthonite prospectors descend from the void to steal the energy-rich mineral. Whether such prospectors are simply surveying or (as happens every few millennia) come in vast fleets hoping to strip the world of every last gram, the ranthra mentally rise to the challenge and stop the poachers.

When ranthra—individually or in small groups—emerge from the Great Dream, their intellect ramps up to supergenius levels as they draw upon a racial reservoir of knowledge. With this knowledge, they repair relic machines scattered about their world to create a defense appropriate to the threat. For instance, mentally commandeering the body of an ulagra is sufficient for smashing survey ships that land in the ocean, but turning around a fleet of mining vessels sailing the endless night requires substantially more technological deployment. That level of response could mean assembling a planetary defense particle beam array, or building a fleet of automaton-controlled ships to bring the combat into the void.

The "Great Dream" is the state of mental sub-sapience in which most ranthra spend their entire existence immersed, purposefully never quite reaching a state of mental cognition complex enough to care about the future.

SILACTHONITE PROSPECTORS

Various entities, groups, and interests occasionally appear on Xeobrencus as silacthonite prospectors, some accidentally, others purposefully. In the former case, explorers might discover by chance that the mineral is exceedingly rich in energy (though dangerous to handle) and thus could serve to recharge devices of ancient technology. They might seek to excavate samples or, more likely, help themselves to one of the thousands of idols carved from silacthonite that litter the ocean floor.

At the other end of the spectrum, interstellar-capable races occasionally learn of the silacthonite, found only on Xeobrencus, and mount expeditions to capture the storied material for themselves. Lately, most such raids have been conducted by the sorg.

XEOBRENCUS SITES OF INTEREST

Despite the initial appearance of being a vast water-covered world, Xeobrencus harbors many sites of interest—or danger—to explorers.

NORDRAMU CITADEL

The Diluvian lives in Nordramu Citadel, which is a miles-tall series of spires rising from the single wave-battered metallic island on Xeobrencus. The ancient structure predates the ranthra falling into the Great Dream. Most of the chambers are empty, but several contain machines of unknown purpose or providence. Except for the chambers inhabited by the Diluvian, the internal floor plan shifts and changes according to random chance, or perhaps the subconscious dreams of the ranthra.

Entering Nordramu Citadel is easy. An arch 300 feet (91 m) wide and tall, always open except during storm surges, provides access to a much larger central foyer on the ground floor level of the main spire. From here, hundreds of winding stairs and doors lead

Sorg, page 152

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"The heaving waves, the flashing sky, the thunder of a world reverberating with life! It's intoxicating. I can't get enough. No one could."
~Borah Valena, a nano with a Xeobrencus stone

off into other parts of the structure. Some of the interior doors are open, and others are sealed. But before would-be explorers head off into the mysteries offered by the citadel, they must deal with the Diluvian.

Diluvian: *level 8; if killed, a new Diluvian awakens in the body of a random dreaming ranthra, powered by the psychic transference engines*

THE DILUVIAN

The Diluvian is a ranthra that has not devolved. It resembles a regular ranthra, though one who wears clothing and carries devices of ancient vintage. If visitors enter Nordramu Citadel, they may be met by the Diluvian or by an automaton in the form of a levitating sphere that directs them to the Diluvian's presence in a nearby chamber.

The Diluvian is a sage, planetary guardian, psychic transference engineer, and museum curator rolled into one. It remained behind when its fellows fell into the Great Dream. Lonely, the Diluvian spends much of its time lost in memories. It enjoys conversing with visitors as long as they do not represent a danger to the devolved ranthra or prove to be silacthonite prospectors. For the most part, the Diluvian is happy to provide answers, though it may ask a favor in return.

Sometimes the Diluvian transmits its consciousness to other worlds via the psychic transference engines to explore, ask for aid on a particular issue, or simply get away from it all for a while.

The Diluvian is well aware of the Turnevur Enclave but doesn't consider the ranthra that make it up to be "true" ranthra—rather, it sees them as a mutation of the species. The Diluvian hasn't quite decided what to do about the Enclave yet. If its ranthra grow more numerous, the Diluvian is worried that they may have to be eradicated.

PSYCHIC TRANSFERENCE ENGINES

Massive devices in the basement of Nordramu Citadel shudder and rumble, sending out psychic static that sensitive creatures within a few miles (5 km) can detect. Among other capacities, the engines allow the minds of creatures on distant worlds to trade bodies with various Xeobrencic life forms (usually ulagras). The Diluvian can tune the engines to cast itself or others into the bodies of creatures on distant worlds without the need for a Xeobrencus stone, though that requires several days of tuning to set up. The engines were once a single node in a vastly larger network that enabled communication not only between several far-flung galaxies, but also into some transdimensional worlds.

According to the Diluvian, the engines were created by the ranthra at the height of their technological prowess, but not merely for communications. The ranthra wished to mentally migrate to a higher state of being and become one with the universe itself, becoming like omniscient gods. When that proved untenable, the ranthra radically changed course. They decided to devolve themselves instead rather than face a dead-end future without further evolution.

The engines are powered by a grid of cables that spirals out across the surface of the world, collecting excess energy from silacthonite deposits; the world itself fuels the engines.

TURNEVUR ENCLAVE

Sometimes ranthra are born with the faculties of a fully sapient being, though they do not possess a connection to the reservoir of knowledge that dreaming ranthra gain when they "peak" into sapience. These smart children are eventually recognized as genetic throwbacks—or mutants—and exiled from dreaming ranthra communities. Most exiles, only a few years old, quickly perish or are eaten, but those that survive eventually make their way to Turnevur Enclave.

The Enclave is a tower composed of solidified water that reaches several hundred feet above normal sea level. Translucent, the structure sometimes glistens and shines like a crystal from afar. Within the Enclave and in an area behind it, ranthra evolutionary throwbacks (known as atavist ranthra) exist at a level of civilization not much less advanced than

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that of humans of the Ninth World. Because they have access to the tools of their highly developed ancestors, these atavisms often accomplish similar amazing feats.

THE GREAT WORKING

The atavist ranthra do not believe that their race willingly chose to fall into the Great Dream. Instead, they are convinced that their dreaming cousins were struck by some sort of spell that rendered them like unto animals. On the other hand, they're well aware of how dreaming ranthra sometimes wake from the Great Dream with mental powers far beyond those of the atavists. Thus, the atavists constantly work with a small population of captive dreaming ranthra, seeking some way of permanently unlocking those higher abilities and, if possible, learning to fully awaken the ancient knowledge in themselves, too. This process includes observing dreaming ranthra colonies, researching catalysts that might cause the ramp-up, and, sometimes, dissecting an unfortunate dreaming cousin who was close to death anyhow.

XEFILA

An atavist ranthra named Xefila rules Turnevur Enclave. She calls herself a wizard and carries several objects from which she derives her "magic" that allows her to attack others at a distance with green fire, protect herself and bolster her health, and take brief control of the psychic transference engines without the Diluvian's knowledge. Xefila fears the Diluvian and Nordramu Citadel, believing the structure to be the very manifestation of evil, and perhaps responsible for the spell that causes most ranthra to live yoked to the Great Dream. Among the many tasks Xefila undertakes as leader of the Enclave, she constantly looks for ways to kill the Diluvian and steal its magic.

THE HARD SEA

Across a region of ocean some 400 miles (640 km) in rough diameter, the Hard Sea changes color, consistency, and even substance according to no apparent schedule or plan. The waters in the region are infused with a semisolid aspect that comes and goes, which means that sometimes the sea is as tenuous as gas and other times as hard as stone. These characteristics make the area both incredibly dangerous and highly interesting, especially when the waters turn to gas, which allows unprecedented access to the sea bottom without the crushing pressures that deter all but the hardiest Xeobrencic sea life.

Standard flora and fauna are mostly absent from the Hard Sea. Instead, strands of extra-tough sea grass extend through the region. The grass has many qualities, including being perfect for weaving into especially strong garments, objects, and other items by atavist and dreaming ranthra alike. Even the Diluvian sends its spherelike automatons to the Hard Sea from time to time to harvest the exceptional grass.

Creatures of note in the Hard Sea are the ochoz, which resemble ship-sized mollusks with massive whorled shells. The behemoths move slowly across the sea bottom, becoming visible only when the Hard Sea becomes airlike in consistency.

CYPHERS USEFUL ON XEOBRENCUS

ANTI-RAD SYMBIOTE

Level: 1d6
Internal: Inhalable powder
Usable: Injector
Effect: Activation inflicts 1 point of ambient damage as the symbiote becomes established in the user's system. For the next 28 hours, the user is immune to the secondary effects of radiation and gains +1 to Armor against attacks that inflict direct damage by radiation.

SHRINK RAY

Level: 1d6 + 2
Usable: Projector ray
Effect: An object or creature in short range shrinks to one-twentieth its normal size and remains that way for 28 hours. Its mass decreases as well, though it's still much heavier than an object or creature of the new size normally would be. A creature's effective level for most tasks and attacks is decreased by 4 (to a minimum of level 1).

Xefila: *level 6; health 27; Armor 3 from an esotery; long-range green fire attack from an esotery inflicts 7 points of damage (ignores Armor)*

Esotery, page 35

Extra-tough sea grass: *level 7*

Ochoz: *level 7; Armor 5; treats matter of its level and lower as if a navigable watery environment, including the Hard Sea when the Hard Sea is solid.*

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The ochoz are known for leaving dung-stone deposits that are layered with cyphers.

A colony of dreaming ranthra resides in coral caves near the Hard Sea. They seem to know when the sea will be safe enough to send swimmers (or skydivers, when the sea is like air) and when to sound the retreat before the waters turn to a substance as hard as granite.

NOXUS'S SEAMOUNT

This subsurface island rises from much deeper sediments to within about 90 feet (27 m) of the ocean surface, though several pinnacles reach above the water. The seamount contains scarcely any silacthonite, but nourishing currents from a nearby blue zone create a rich and diverse ecosystem that serves as a breeding ground for all manner of Xeobrencic life, including large colonies of yallas, xakaks, and dreaming ranthra.

Yalla, page 92

Xakak, page 92

Marine automaton: *level 5, tasks related to understanding Xeobrencic life functions as level 6; Armor 3; swims a long distance each round; torpedo ram attack inflicts 8 points of damage*

A group of marine automatons resides in caves that riddle the seamount; most are elongated torpedoes some 30 feet (9 m) long that manipulate objects via slender extendible robotic arms. The automatons spend most of their time analyzing water, sealife, and air from above the ocean surface, plus all manner of other samples of less obvious origin. If their attention is drawn by visitors, the automatons seek to take samples of the new arrivals to the seamount.

Only a few of the automatons care enough to interact with visitors. One is Noxus, an automaton with severe rust problems. The rust is the result of Noxus's unfortunate interaction with a device it encountered while investigating samples brought back from an ancient structure in the abyssal plain. Afterward, Noxus became curious about other creatures, desiring to know their minds as well as their bodies. But because it has little opportunity to practice its social skills, Noxus usually reverts to the manners and tantrums of a spoiled five-year-old human child when it doesn't get its way.

XEOBRENCUS HEARSAY

Extraction Mission: A sorg survey scout ship with a single pilot has descended to the surface of Xeobrencus using advanced tech to hide its location. The Diluvian offers a substantial reward for any creature—whether a native of Xeobrencus or an explorer from Earth—that obtains a sample of the stealth device.

Wounded Ulagra: One of the colossal entities was injured in a storm and has retreated to the depths, hidden from its fellows. Unfortunately, the minds of several explorers from Earth are trapped in the wounded body, and the group mind can't come to a decision on how to act. Without aid, the ulagra body will die, as will the minds of all those transferred into it.

Abyssal Plain Dome: Atavistic ranthra, the Diluvian, marine automatons, and even some ulagras are interested in knowing what lives within a green crystal dome recently discovered in one of the deepest places of Xeobrencus. All attempts to pierce it so far have failed, and in most cases, have killed or permanently wounded those who attempted to gain entry.

THE WEIRD OF XEOBRENCUS

White Sphere: A sphere a little less than a mile (1 km) in diameter sometimes appears in the sky over the ocean. Any creature within a few miles of the sphere that can see it and that uses language or telepathy to speak triggers the sphere, which begins to produce audible sounds akin to whistles, beeps, and thrumming vibrations. Once these sounds are discharged, the sphere disappears again for months or years.

Lost Ship: A derelict sailing craft of black synth, crystal, and flickering red force fields lies partly crusted into a coral mountain 200 miles (322 km) from Nordramu Citadel.

Pieces and Parts: The complex topology of the ocean floor includes several rift valleys. One unnamed valley is cluttered with barnacle-crusted objects of variable size and shape—a veritable graveyard of craft and devices of the numenera, possibly dating back to a time when the ranthra were still sapient.

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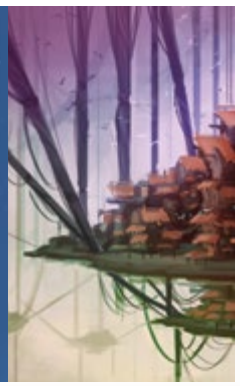
CHAPTER 10

SWARMSTAR



The void holds many strange sights. Perhaps none stranger, however, than what a few call Swarmstar. As travelers approach, they see nothing but the darkness of the void ahead. Then a brief flicker of light. Then another. Only when one gets very close can the full concept of Swarmstar be understood. It is a brilliant red-orange star of great size, but it is surrounded by a swarm of creatures causing its light to be almost entirely obscured. The star can be glimpsed only when one or more of the creatures flutters or shifts a bit.

MANTLES

Mantles are almost unimaginably huge creatures. Each one resembles a kind of manta ray, but with a wingspan that rivals the diameter of an entire world. Their underside (facing away from the star) is utterly black, but their upper side (facing toward the star) is blue, although in the constant light of the orange-red star it appears almost violet. This upper side is covered in filaments a mile or more long that reach reflexively toward the star. Through these filaments, mantles absorb and thrive on the star's energy, catching it like massive, living sails. They use the energy to keep from falling into the star and to move when needed, adjusting their positions carefully within the swarm.

Mantles do not seem to age, or at least not in human timescales. They do not eat or breathe and can survive in a vacuum. The warmth of the star is important to them, but they store heat and energy so efficiently that if a mantle ever finds itself without a nearby star, it could still survive for thousands of years.

The mantles swarm about the star at a distance such that the temperature on their upper sides is as warm as a cool autumn day in the temperate part of a world like Earth. And stranger still, as a mantle absorbs energy from the star, it expels gas from spiracles amid the filaments all along its upper side that, in effect, create an atmosphere. In other words, the upper sides of the mantles are habitable. The creatures form a sphere, and the inside of this sphere can support life. The atmosphere extends more than 200 miles (322 km) from the mantles.

The mantles' bodies are dense (far denser than any terrestrial creature) but thin, so they don't have much mass. Thus, they don't offer much in the way of gravitational pull, even as large as they are. However, the swarm is far enough away that the star's pull on the mantles is not strong—more than the pull of gravity on Earth, but somewhat negated by the minor gravity of the mantles' own mass.

Although each mantle is practically as large as a planet, and various factors make the side facing the sun quite habitable, when you factor in the gravitational forces, it creates a situation where the "world" is eternally upside down from the point of view of most

It's confusing to newcomers that the inhabitants of Swarmstar use the word "up" to describe the direction in which things fall. But up is toward the star in the sky, and that's how the gravity is oriented.

Search Terms:
Dyson sphere, statite, solar sail

Some explorers believe that mantles are bioengineered creatures, not natural ones.

There are approximately 600 million mantles, and the upper side of one offers roughly the surface area of the Earth. That's about equal to the habitable zone of twelve Gloamings in total area.

The Gloaming, page 118

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USING SWARMSTAR

In a book filled with truly alien environments, Swarmstar might be the most alien of all. However, it is one of the few places where PCs might find other humans in their travels. Strangely enough, it might be a place of relative safety in a hostile universe, once the explorers figure out how to operate there.

Explorers from Earth may find the need to go to Swarmstar because some of the same ancient civilizations that existed in the prior worlds left their mark there as well. It's not hard to imagine that the only way to repair a malfunctioning device found in a ruin on Earth could lie in a ruin on Swarmstar. Alternatively, Swarmstar might simply be ripe for general scavenging (or plundering, if that's the way the characters operate).

The other thing to consider is Swarmstar's sheer size. It is almost impossible to truly wrap one's head around how much space exists. Literally hundreds of thousands of civilizations and hundreds of billions of different species could exist there, so far apart that none is truly aware of the rest.

beings. What would seem to be the ground (the mantles) is up, and toward the sun is always down. The star never changes position, so there is no night anywhere within Swarmstar, nor are there seasons or years.

Wind storms and electrical storms are not uncommon across the mantles, but rain falls down, toward the star, and it evaporates before leaving the atmosphere, creating clouds. Moisture for plants and animals comes from heavy condensation on the mantles' flesh, which sometimes runs up the filaments.

GETTING TO SWARMSTAR

Explorers can travel to Swarmstar in a starfaring vessel, but once they arrive, the vessel must be maneuvered through one of the spaces that occasionally opens amid the mantles. These are sometimes quite narrow, and successfully navigating one is at least a level 6 task. Once inside the sphere of the mantles, it is likely possible to "land" only on one of the hanging cities.

Swarmstar has no known teleport gateways or other instantaneous access points, but that doesn't mean they don't exist. It just means that if they do exist, they're probably somewhere in a ruin, not in an occupied hanging city.

FLORA AND FAUNA OF SWARMSTAR

Plantlife flourishes on the upper (sun-facing) side of most mantles. Vines entwine around the filaments, and smaller plants cling to them as well. It is generally too dark at the surface of the mantle for photosynthetic plants to grow, as the filaments block most light at that point, but fungi thrives in the thick, moist atmosphere there. Puff trees float beyond the reach of the filaments but still well within the atmosphere. These bulbous, treelike plants use huge leaves like solar sails (the mantles in miniature) but also expel puffs of gas like jets to keep from falling into the star. All plants in Swarmstar rely solely on solar energy and dewy condensation for nutrients, as there is no soil for root systems. Some rare plants aggressively burrow shoots into mantle flesh to absorb nutrients that way, but the mantles' flesh is so dense that the shoots never get deeper than a few inches.

A wide variety of creatures crawl along the sun-facing side of the mantles, climb amid the filaments, or simply find places to roost when they are not flying through the atmosphere. Ikarikans are large, segmented arthropods that crawl along the mantles' flesh, while fist-sized varanga bugs live their entire lives on the filaments. Hoovras are mammals with a head in the middle of their torso and four grasping arms radiating outward so they can brachiate through the hanging filaments. Vine serpents are snakes that slither amid the filaments but in particular the plant vines that entwine the filaments. Dearth spiders are the size of humans and live in large colonies, building webs hundreds of yards across amid the filaments. Red gunters nest in puff trees and fly in large flocks, feeding mostly on insects but occasionally on larger prey.

Ikarikan: *level 2, climb as level 6; Armor 2*

Varanga bug: *level 1, climb as level 4; Armor 1*

Hoovra: *level 3, climb as level 5, stealth as level 4*

Vine serpent: *level 2, climb as level 4; bite also inflicts 2 points of Intellect damage if victim fails a Might defense roll*

Dearth spider: *level 5, climb as level 7; bite also inflicts 3 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) if victim fails a Might defense roll; webbing is level 6*

Red gunter: *level 1; fly a long distance as an action; group of eight can attack large prey as a single level 3 creature*

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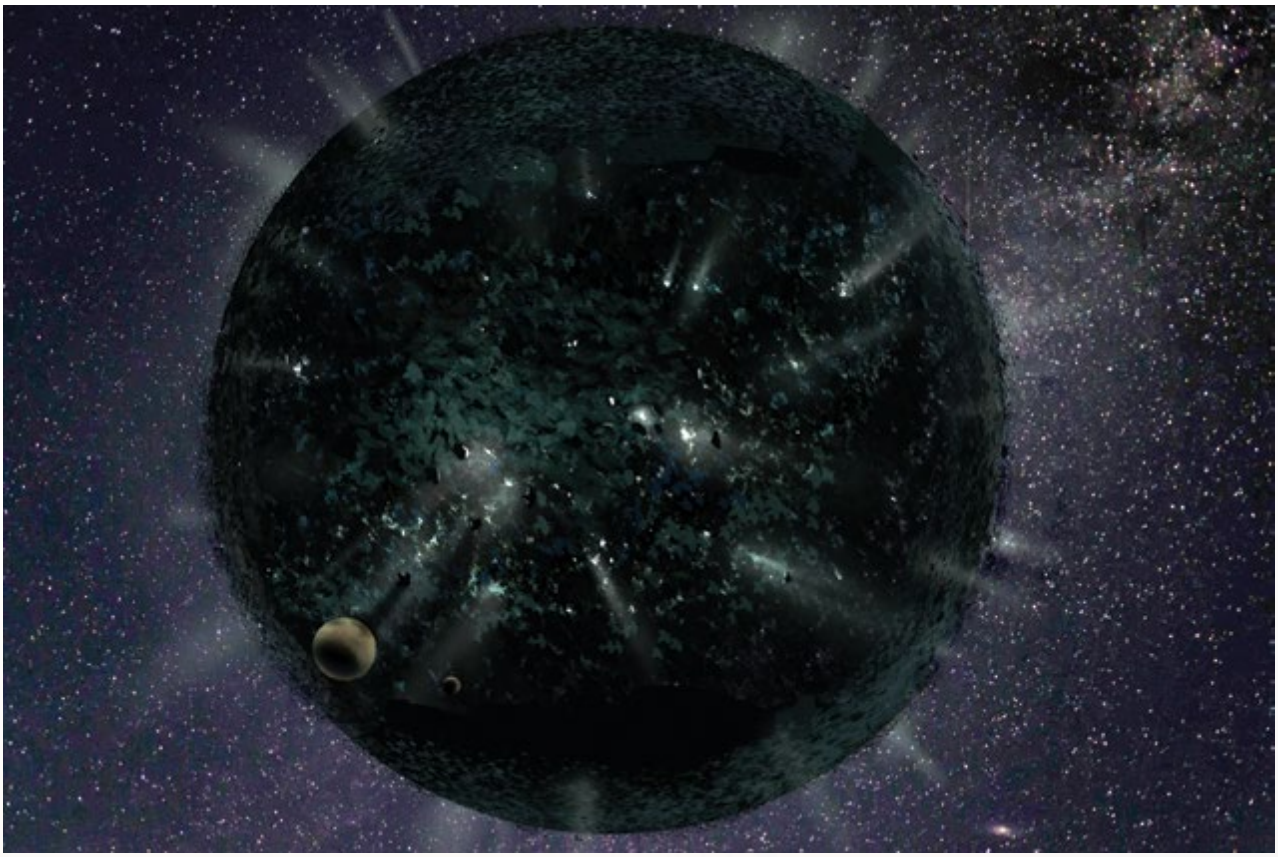

Humans also live inside the sphere of Swarmstar. Whether they are related to the humans of Earth is unknown. They share no common language or known history, but their physiology is virtually identical. For the most part, they are as generally unaware of Earth as Ninth Worlders are of Swarmstar. Only the few midnight pilgrims who have traveled from Earth to Swarmstar, and the relatively few inhabitants they have encountered there are aware of the existence of both places, and that both are somehow current homes of what appear to be branches of the same species.

Some people say that in a universe as vast as this one, it is possible that two places could birth such similar beings, but two facts make this unlikely. First, it is highly doubtful that humans originated on Swarmstar. They almost certainly journeyed there from somewhere else very, very long ago. Second, the ruins on some of the mantles' star-facing sides resemble ruins found in the Ninth World.

Of course, there could be other intelligent races amid the mantles as well. Swarmstar is so large that it could be home to thousands of intelligent species that have simply not yet encountered each other.

JOURNEYING IN SWARMSTAR

Moving about essentially requires either the ability to fly or a much slower, more difficult process of climbing through the filaments that extend up (hang down) from the mantles. Each filament is like a very sturdy mile-long cable. One is usually no more than a foot or two from the next. Many of them are tangled, and some become extremely tangled into ball-like snarls. Moving through the filaments normally means brachiating from one to the next. Smart travelers wear a harness that can attach to a filament so they can rest and even sleep while on the move. Otherwise, they would have to find a snarl to crawl within to find purchase to rest. The inhabitants are highly skilled at this kind of movement and can do it as quickly as a Ninth Worlder can run along the ground.

Moving from one mantle to another is possible, but usually difficult and sometimes dangerous. Occasionally, the creatures are so close and so evenly positioned that it's just a matter of swinging from a filament on one mantle to a filament on another. Sometimes the gap is as little as 20 to 30 feet (6 to 9 m)—a space fairly

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Probably the most compelling evidence for the idea that humans in Swarmstar originated somewhere else is that their language has concepts for time periods like minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years. Each of these units is only an abstraction, based on nothing. Still, they are very rough equivalents of similar time periods on Earth.

easily crossed by a skilled person and a swing with good momentum. More often, however, the mantles are much farther apart, or the next mantle over is positioned higher or lower, making crossing very difficult or impossible. Worse, the spaces between the mantles are buffeted by winds because this is where atmosphere leaks into the void outside the sphere. The difficulty of all physical actions in these regions is increased by one step. These winds can blow with such force that they pull a person down with a strength that defies the gravity of the star. A particularly deft and strong traveler can ride these winds down (away from the sun) and over, and then catch the filaments on the next mantle before being flung into the eternal night. Such a task would have a difficulty of at least 8.

MANTLE FLUTTERS

Every once in a while, a mantle shifts. The creatures are always moving, slowly orbiting around the star, which means that they slowly change position relative to one another. In an Earth year's time, two hanging cities on two mantles might be in different positions from each other. In ten years' time, they might be lost to each other. For this reason, most inhabitants stick to one mantle. (Surely there is no want for space.)

One sage in a hanging city called Tequali contends that the plagued near that location seem intent on using the super-tough flesh of the mantles to create a craft that could travel in the void so they can leave Swarmstar.

Sometimes a mantle shifts or flutters, usually for reasons known only to the mantle. This is a very dangerous time for those living in the creature's filaments. Fortunately, minor tremors occur across the mantle before this happens, giving a warning from a few minutes to a few hours before the violent quakes occur. Simply hanging on, unsecured, in a violent flutter-quake is a difficulty 8 Might-based task.

Even in secured places like a hanging city, people are knocked off their feet, possessions go flying (often over the side), and there is considerable damage. Sometimes, in a real catastrophe, an entire hanging city comes loose and everyone on it falls to their doom. Fortunately, these flutters happen only once a decade or so.

Typical plagued: *level 3, deception as level 5, brachiating and stealth as level 4*

THE HIERARCHY

One remarkable thing about human culture in Swarmstar is that no matter how far apart two groups are—and they might be hundreds of thousands of miles apart—they have more similarities than differences. They all speak the same language, for example. The technology involved in the creation of the cities or their structures shows great similarity. They also have the same hierarchical system.

Within the hierarchy of humanity, people get special tattoos from their necks down to their shoulders indicating their position. There are 36 ranks, with the 36th being the highest. No matter where one goes, her position within the hierarchy holds true. So a 27th-rank person who travels to a faraway community that she's never before visited still immediately fits into the society, and she has position and authority over all those of 26th rank and below.

One can move up (or, rarely, down) in the hierarchy through wealth, service, or extraordinary deeds. Only someone of a higher rank can promote an individual, so sometimes a community limits how far one can progress based on the others who live there.

Individuals of the 36th rank are extremely rare. Most people go their entire lives without meeting one.

THE PLAGUE OF WILL

Some kind of virus plagues the people of Swarmstar. Those infected by the so-called Plague of Will slowly lose their personality. Their will is overcome and eventually transformed. The plagued, as they are called,

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have their own agenda, driven by the virus. Rather than acting differently, however, the plagued attempt to keep their affliction a secret. In the guise of his former self, a plagued carries out the will of the virus in secret. This is not a matter of choice. A plagued might have the same appearance and memories of his former self, but he is an entirely different being, forever changed. The plagued have not been subverted—the process is closer to total possession, and there's no known form of exorcism for it. The Plague of Will has no known cure or remedy.

The plagued who are discovered remove themselves from the rest of society. However, they band together with other plagued in their own hanging city communities, often not far from the places that exiled them (or from which they exiled themselves). These communities are sometimes called plague enclaves. To a visitor, there's likely no way to tell an enclave from a normal hanging city—most activities and people seem identical to what one would find elsewhere.

The plagued work to undermine the hierarchy and take actions that cause general dissent and setbacks for humanity, but they don't want to completely destroy humans. The Plague of Will is not life-threatening, and it doesn't wish to kill all humans—it just doesn't want them to flourish. Humans who do anything but eke out the merest survival are seen as a threat. This includes people of different hanging cities working together, sharing ideas, exploring the ruins, and scavenging old technologies. Weirdly, the spread of the plague seems of only minor importance in the virus's overall goal. Each plagued wants to create at least one new plagued in his lifetime so that overall numbers do not decrease. More important, though, the virus is interested in infecting the right people—those in positions of importance, influence, and power—to further its strange ends.

The plague is spread by direct interaction and must be a conscious, intentional act on the part of the plagued.

HANGING CITIES

The people of Swarmstar live in cities that hang from the filaments of the mantles. These cities are usually small—more like villages of several hundred residents—but a few are much larger. The true cities that are home to many thousands of people usually possess multiple levels and an

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almost mazelike layout, while more typical villages are rarely more than a gathering of homes and buildings on a platform or two suspended in the filaments.

If mantles have any idea when a filament is cut or large sections of "bone" are carved away, they do not show it. They never react in any way to the relatively insignificant actions of the creatures that dwell upon them.

Humans use the building materials they have at hand to fashion their cities, and what is most abundant are materials taken directly from the mantles. Filaments can be woven (either severed or while still connected to the mantle) into a variety of shapes, creating netlike platforms upon which to build, or creating the structures themselves. More ambitious builders climb to the top of the filaments, where the flesh of the mantle is. The mantles are made of extremely strong materials, and digging into them and calving away sections can produce thin, dense sheets or spars of carapacelike flesh. The inhabitants erroneously call this material "bone." Cutting away mantle bone requires skill and proper tools capable of piercing and slicing into the creature. The best tools are made of metal or synth scavenged from the ancient ruins found throughout Swarmstar. The people who retrieve this material are called bone miners, and hardened mantle flesh is used to make a variety of tools, weapons, and implements, as well as being used for building material.

Each hanging city has one or more leaders drawn from the highest-ranking residents in the hierarchy. It also has a large number of hunters and gatherers, craftspeople, and guards. Hanging cities near one of Swarmstar's many ancient ruins sometimes possess a few numenera objects or innovations, along with a handful of people who tinker with such things. The people living in the cities occasionally tend small gardens on the city platforms or keep a handful of domesticated animals, but large-scale agriculture is not possible. Thankfully, food—in the form of edible plants and game—is plentiful.

Hanging cities are generally communal, with all residents sharing in the general bounty (or lack thereof). Sometimes, however, barter is involved.

GURALASON, A TYPICAL HANGING CITY

About five hundred people live in Guralason. Their leader is a 24th-rank woman named Tyrrea Uol. Tall with high cheekbones and a long nose, she is a fit and active leader, going out on hoovra hunts with other hunters. Her wife, Idelia Uol, works as a weaver and makes clothing out of spun filament shreds.

Tyrrea Uol: *level 6, climbing and brachiating as level 8, persuasion and deception as level 7*

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Approximately eighty of the residents are hunters and gatherers, and another forty or so are bone miners. That means a significant portion of the city leaves its confines every day. Those who remain are crafters and artisans, guards watching out for navarac assaults and other threats, and the very old, the very young, and the people who care for both. The residents of Guralason have little time for luxury, extensive recreation, or scholarly work. Still, they occasionally hold festivals that include athletic competitions and other games.

As in so many hanging cities, most people keep a similar active period in their daily cycle. With no delineation between day and night, it would be easy for everyone to fall into different cycles of active and sleep periods. Tyrrea does her best to keep everyone except the guards sleeping at about the same time.

For the most part, the people of Guralason do not spend much time in religious or philosophical pursuits. They have only a little experience with the numenera, but they are keenly aware of the threats they face on a continual basis—namely, the plagued and the navaracs. In particular, they know that a small plague enclave is just a few miles away. They are keen to keep out plagued infiltrators, spies, and saboteurs and have a standing order to kill them when discovered (although considering that many plagued are former residents of Guralason, carrying out that action can be difficult).

Feazon Orriel, a hunter, is one of the plagued, though this fact has not been discovered. He occasionally sabotages portions of the city—not enough to make it collapse, but enough to keep many of the craftspeople and builders occupied with constant repairs. He also occasionally dumps food stores up over the side of the city or does other things to encourage hardship and struggle. Sometimes, other plagued come from the nearby enclave to help. Tyrrea knows that there must be a plagued infiltrator somewhere in Guralason, but neither she nor the guards have discovered who it is.

THE NAVARACS

Although not truly an intelligent race, the navaracs are capable and crafty. These reptiles have membranous wings that allow them to fly anywhere they wish, and although they typically hunt in twos or threes, they sometimes migrate en masse from one area to another (or from one mantle to another), numbering in the hundreds or thousands.

Navaracs get special mention, however, because they have become very specific foes of humanity. They nest near hanging cities and build ambushes for those coming and going. Sometimes they launch assaults against the cities themselves, hoping to snag a few victims. Rumors speak of navarac packs so large and aggressive that they attack a hanging city with the goal of destroying it entirely.

It's worth noting that the navaracs are as much a threat to plagued humans as they are to uninfected ones. The reptiles do not seem to distinguish between the groups.

Typical hanging city resident: *level 2, brachiating as level 4*

Feazon Orriel: *level 5, climbing and brachiating as level 7, stealth and perception as level 6; health 23; Armor 2; long-range attack with a bow*

Navarac, page 149

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Within the ruins of one mantle, explorers found an enormous pictograph-covered plinth. They contend the images suggested that one day the mantles would all scatter into the galaxy, only to return and swarm about this star again in a billion years or so.

THE RUINS

On some mantles, explorers can find ruins of fantastical structures of metal and synth. Inverted domes and towers rise up (hang down) from the creature's body, in an area usually clear of filaments, creating a bald spot miles wide. These ruins are not unlike the ancient complexes and structures of the Ninth World. Their original design and purpose is often unfathomable, but those who know what to look for can find valuables to scavenge.

Of course, there are dangers. Strange creatures and automatons dwell within the ruins, many of them hostile. Machines trigger deadly effects, either to foil infiltration or simply by accident.

The ruins are the only source of metal available to the humans in Swarmstar, so sometimes they come to look for metal or synth to shape into tools, armor, or weapons. Rumors speak of a specific material—likely a very solid form of synth—found in certain ruins that is anathema to navaracs for some reason. Weapons made of this material inflict 2 additional points of damage on the beasts. Other rumors, perhaps even more significantly, say that explorers of the ruins have found devices useful against the plagued. These include machines that can detect the infection and serums or radiations that can inoculate against it or eliminate it from a victim entirely. It seems unlikely that all these tales are true, but each one is enough to encourage brave or foolhardy explorers to enter these dangerous places.

SPINED SPHERE

Level: 4
Usable: Needle-covered ball (made of mantle bone) the size of a fist
Effect: The cypher is hurled at a foe within short range like a medium weapon. The foe must make a Might defense roll or be injected with one of a variety of poisons; the most common kind inflicts 4 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor). Moreover, all within immediate range of the target are attacked at random as needles fly from the exploding sphere. These needles inflict only 1 point of damage, but they are poisoned just like the needle that injects the first target.

THE ABANDONED TOWERS OF BONE

Some of the mantles have growths, almost like tumors, in the shape of huge towers. Inhabitants of Swarmstar refer to them as the Towers of Bone, even though it's a misnomer. The towers appear to have been engineered—intentionally grown to rise up from the mantles' tough flesh so they can serve as homes for creatures. Many of the structures do not appear to have been grown with humans or even humanoids in mind. Others do.

Like the ruins of metal and synth elsewhere, the towers can be found in areas bare of filaments. They grow right out of the mantle's flesh, but they are made of

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the flesh as well. The material is familiar to the humans who live in hanging cities. In particular, bone miners can cut into and dismantle the stuff with skill.

Inside the abandoned Towers of Bone, explorers can find the same treasures and rewards as in other ruins, but sometimes things are even stranger. The cyphers, artifacts, and oddities recovered from the towers are usually organic in nature, or at least once were. Ray projectors, detonations, and handheld devices seemingly grown from the same tough flesh as the towers are not uncommon. One recurring find are cyphers called spined spheres.

ROGUE MANTLES

In the void around Swarmstar, and even between or around other stars, one might find a single mantle "swimming" through the eternal darkness.

Rogue mantles' filaments are usually a tangled mess because there is no star to pull them in one general direction. Still, in the middle of the upper side, there is moisture and even an atmosphere. The mantle offers little in the way of gravity, but if the rogue is between stars there may be no gravitational pull other than the very minor tug of the creature itself. The mantle also provides heat, though it is much colder than in Swarmstar. Thus, it is possible that a rogue mantle will sustain life, carrying inhabitants between worlds and distant suns.

Midnight pilgrims exploring the void might encounter a rogue mantle with creatures living on it, adapted to the cold and dark. Humans on a mantle like that would have abandoned their hanging cities and would dwell right on the flesh of the mantle, amid the bases of the slowly atrophying filaments.

SWARMSTAR HEARSAY

Miner Minders: More and more bone miners are being attacked by mysterious amorphous monstrosities on the mantles' flesh, and they need protection. Some say that these things are coming directly out of the wounds that the miners make in the mantles' hides.

Going Rogue: A mantle that is home to a number of hanging cities has been experiencing far more flutters and quakes than normal. Some learned folk believe that the mantle is preparing to leave Swarmstar and fly off on its own. Among those who believe this, the reaction is split. Some wish to leave the creature before it departs, and some see it as a blessing—a religious experience that will "carry them to heaven."

Fighting the Plague: Desperate, the leader of Guralason is willing to pay almost any price for a miracle (probably a numenera device from one of the ruins) that will help her detect or combat the plagued.

THE WEIRD OF SWARMSTAR

The Grey Woman: A woman who appears to be made of ash emerged from one of the ancient ruins and now wanders the surrounding area. When she encounters a living creature, half the time she attacks it savagely, and half the time she touches it gently, imbuing it with health and sustenance.

The Others: An intelligent race of flying creatures—a bit like insects and a bit like birds—is exploring the Swarmstar and has encountered humanity for the first time. Despite the two races having no experience with each other, each is perhaps native to Swarmstar (more or less—it is possible that no one is truly native to Swarmstar). So far, the humans have had no success in communicating with these unknown, unnamed creatures.

Intelligent Growth: A type of lichen grows in certain parts of some mantles. In the right circumstances, it communicates telepathically with nearby humans and explains complex mathematical formulas that no one has ever understood. Attempts at responding result only in different expressions of math.

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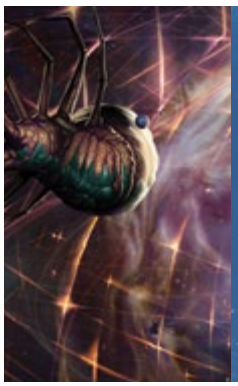

CHAPTER 11

THE THON IRIDESCENCE

The Thon Iridescence is also referred to as Thon.

Black holes are holes punched into existence. They pull in everything like hungry gods, whether that be rubble of broken worlds, living creatures in starfaring vessels, or even light. Around one such cavity has been constructed the megastructure of the Thon Iridescence, which is visible as hairline cracks in reality reaching around the hole in space to create a complex, many-layered net. The threads surround and flare iridescently against the absolute lightlessness of utter annihilation at the megastructure's center.

Channeling gravity, space, and existence itself, these threads moderate the thickening slowdown of time normally observed by those beyond the limits of a black hole's grasp. Likewise, creatures within the grasp do not observe the rest of the universe rapidly aging, flaring red, and dying in eternal darkness (unless they fall through the net and into the hole itself).

The threads do more than merely hold these effects of temporal "relativity" at bay—they also serve as the conduit for a massive psychic construct containing millions of realms, all powered by the black hole inside. These realms consist of consensual spaces and private realms—called quotums and domains, respectively—

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USING THE THON IRIDESCENCE

The GM can use the Thon Iridescence several ways in a campaign. The following scenarios could be provided as hooks to player characters:

- The PCs find a shattered fragment of an entity known as a Greeter in a ruined structure in the Ninth World. When they investigate it, the fragment destructively scans them and sends their minds across the cosmos and into the psychic dream construct of Thon. Getting back to Earth requires learning about and navigating a completely alien set of rules, until the PCs can find a realm whispered about: the Thon Cortex.
- The PCs' vessel falls into a wormhole and emerges near the cosmically sized Thon Iridescence. Finding a way back—according to an uncharacteristically helpful Greeter who hails the PCs after they first arrive—requires that the explorers travel down into the dream construct and gain ancient knowledge from a being known as the Navigator who "retired" there.
- The PCs begin as beings native to the Thon Iridescence. They agree to leave the psychic construct and enter the physical universe to learn if it's possible to forestall an imminent collision between the black hole the Thon habitat is constructed around and the interloping galactic core.
- A bounty of amazing size is offered by a pyth of the Phaeton Halo for the PCs to track down another pyth, who fled through the Vendav Ring to the Halo and secreted itself in one of the private dream domains hosted there. The pyth who provides the PCs with this opportunity also gives them a vessel and a means to navigate through the Vendav Ring without coming to too much harm. The PCs don't have to kill the renegade pyth when they find it; they just have to deliver a package of some sort to the pyth.
- The PCs enter the Thon Iridescence with the express mission of retrieving a replayer artifact so they can restore a slain comrade or an indispensable NPC.

Thon Cortex, page 117

Phaeton Halo, page 67

Vendav Ring, page 81

Replayer, page 109

Search Terms: *black hole, cosmic string, mind uploading, Matrioshka brain*

constructed of dreamlike psychic matter. All told, Thon contains quintillions of individual creatures living out immortal lives of peace, wonder, exploration, ecstasy, and hundreds of other experiences, many of them not amenable to anything a human of Earth could understand.

Thon is one amazingly vast mental habitat, where the extracted minds of populations of whole worlds live in constructed realms of individual and group design. When the residents come together, they do so in multifarious quotums the size of a room that can seem larger than worlds. Quotums are used for communion, games, governance, celebration, and more. Private domains are generally used as personal living spaces, places for meditation, and realms where an avatar can tweak the rules without regard to the desires of any other entity.

GETTING TO THON

Any of the methods suggested in the introduction of this book can take explorers from Earth to the Thon Iridescence. If the PCs use some kind of gateway or teleporter, they probably arrive in Ecatora.

Characters traveling to Thon in a vessel can't "land" on a thread and find the inhabitants and structures described in this section; those locations are psychic constructs of dream peopled by avatars. In fact, pointing a vessel directly toward the Thon Iridescence is supremely dangerous because Thon has defenses designed to envelop incoming debris (or recklessly piloted vessels) in a stasis field that safely steers the material around and through the thread net, whereupon the object is released to the savage grasp of the black hole inside.

However, visiting vessels are hailed when they draw near one of the physical Greeters orbiting within a thin accretion disc surrounding Thon. A Greeter provides the means by which physical travelers are rendered into mental avatars able to manifest within the vast psychic construct of Thon.

Thon was constructed to serve an alien species of the same name as a "soulbank" where they could keep backups of their minds in case anything happened to their physical bodies. Billions of years later, Thon has taken on a radically more active life of its own.

GREETER

Greeters exist in the physical universe. Each is a yellow, moon-sized crystal shaped like a box. Once a Greeter has established a method to communicate with an identified approaching craft, it warns the visitors to stay clear of the megastructure of Thon and

Ecatora, page 112

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instead bring the vessel in to dock with it.

Closer approach to a Greeter reveals that each cube face is studded with alien vessels, some shiny and apparently recently landed, others obviously ancient and decrepit. All such vessels are empty of crew (though many offer opportunities for salvaging ancient treasures, should a visiting vessel manage to evade a Greeter's scanning beam).

Scanning beam: *level 7*

Once a vessel comes close enough, a tractor field brings the visiting craft in for a soft landing, whereupon a scanning beam blasts through the ship like sunlight through crystal. Each sapient creature aboard who submits (or fails to avoid the notice of the scanning beam, based on an Intellect defense roll) is destructively scanned, leaving behind only dust. A psychic avatar of each character then manifests in a newly fashioned dream realm (called a quotum) within Thon. The custom quotum, chosen by the Greeter, resembles a place that all those on the vessel would find familiar and restful. For instance, visitors from Earth might find themselves in a quotum that seems like a sunny day on a plain of green grass—one with a door that reflects like a mirror and leads to other portions in the psychic construct of the Thon Iridescence.

Tractor field: *level 7*

SURVIVAL IN THON

Once manifest as psychic avatars by the efforts of a Greeter, visitors to the megastructure are in one sense invulnerable to physical harm. But that's only because they lack physical bodies. Their avatars are subject to the rules governing any given quotum, which vary. In fact, some locations in the black hole habitat are designed to be dangerous and, depending on their specific nature, can be ultimately deadly. Although some locations, especially domains, include a "replay" feature that returns a psychic avatar to an earlier state if it is destroyed, most quotums do not.

REPLAY

A replay is a process whereby slain residents in specified realms are returned to life one day after their death at a location adjacent

MANIFESTING A PSYCHIC AVATAR IN THON

When a Greeter scans a character and manifests her as a psychic avatar within the Thon Iridescence, the character retains the same abilities, stats, equipment, artifacts, and cyphers that she had in the physical world. Thus, the same forces—fire, force, psychic trauma, and so on—that might harm the character in the real world can harm and even kill her in the simulated realms of Thon.

A newly created avatar is granted 200 femtos (the currency of Thon). In addition, further changes might be made to an avatar. For instance, a Greeter may let the character choose a new focus that is active only while the avatar is active within the dream construct. The GM and player should work together if further changes are desired.

Thon currency, page 113

Finally, when a character is scanned and appears as a psychic avatar inside Thon, the new dream avatar gains one additional feature: a timer in the form of glowing symbols on her inner wrist that count down from 100 hours. When the timer reaches 0, if the character returns to the quotum where she first appeared as a psychic avatar, she is reverse-scanned and rebuilt as a physical creature back on the vessel she arrived in (if it still exists; otherwise, she is put on the nearest empty vessel). If she misses the rendezvous, the timer restarts, though it does so only a maximum of three times before the chance to leave freely without charge or obligation is rescinded. After that, returning to the realm of the physical requires substantially more effort.

Returning to the Physical Universe: If a character abandons her avatar and regains her physical form (by taking advantage of the timer or locating a place in Thon called the Cortex), her original focus becomes active again. Any equipment, objects, cyphers, or artifacts she gained while an avatar in Thon are recontextualized to function in the physical universe. For example, a character might bring a replayer artifact back from Thon and attempt to use it in the real universe at a location far distant.

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"Once the Greeter called it to our attention, I saw the remus. Its body was bulbous; its legs were kilometers long, and it used them to move along the glowing threads. Damn me if it wasn't a spider big as a moon."
~Terha Katrellin, a jack who explores the night

to the exit in the realm where they perished. They return with full health and a hazy memory of the event that killed them.

In private domains, replay is nearly always available to the owner, though only a small percentage of quotums have replay enabled. When a quotum is created, all avatars involved in the process jointly determine whether replay is a feature they wish to be available. A surprisingly large number of quotums choose to forgo replay, perhaps feeling it makes existence within the dream artifact ring hollow and meaningless.

That said, rare artifacts called replayers can pull the consciousness of a slain avatar back into the land of the "living."

ARTIFACT: REPLAYER

Level: 1d6
Form: Handheld device
Effect: In areas of the Thon Iridescence where replay—the service of resurrecting slain natives to an earlier state when they were alive—doesn't normally function, this device will accomplish the same task, assuming it is within long range of the subject at the time of his death.
Depletion: 1 in 1d6

FLORA AND FAUNA OF THON

In the physical universe, automatons called remuses guard and repair the cracks in reality that serve as the threads of the megastructure woven around the black hole. A remus is as large as a tiny moon, climbs on threads using multiple legs that are miles long, and has firepower to take on starcraft and other threats.

Within the dreaming psychic construct of Thon, too many separate ecologies of flora and fauna exist to give any meaningful overview. The only entities worth mentioning are those that roam between consensual spaces. Two entities stand out: nepenths and mind thieves.

NEPENTH

A nepenth manifests an avatar like that of a cloaked humanoid figure with a hood containing a lonely starscape. Nepenths deal with quotums and domains that become damaged for one reason or another. Unfortunately, they deal with the problem by deleting damaged quotums and domains wholesale so the damage doesn't corrupt other psychic constructs. A nepenth usually isn't much concerned whether there is anyone within a quotum or domain it attempts to destroy. Using their ability to spawn duplicates (an ability their duplicates share), nepenths delete a realm by completely filling it with duplicates of themselves until the place bursts. Nepenths are famous for their ability to track down avatars, even those who have moved vast distances across the dream and changed their likeness.

Nepenth: *level 4, tasks related to seeing through disguise and tracking across Thon as level 7; touch attack inflicts 5 points of ambient damage; use an action to spawn another nepenth*

MIND THIEVES

To some Thon inhabitants, the mind thieves represent a duly authorized peacekeeping force founded when the Thon Iridescence was first constructed. After all, mind thief avatars often display a badge that promises peace and tranquility. Of course, that authority means little in the present reality in which the concept of a soulbank is utterly outdated. Thus, to most, mind thieves are as their name suggests: pirate bands that steal the consciousness of others to sift through them for useful information, abilities, or exciting experiences. Mind thieves do not adhere to any one look or level of power; inhabitants of Thon know them for their crimes. Some mind thieves have inborn abilities to steal the minds of others, though most who take to the lifestyle do so only after finding a peace badge in an old archive or derelict quotum.

Mind thief: *level 5; immediate-range attack inflicts 4 points of Intellect damage*

Remus: *level 9; health 99; Armor 5; particle beam with a range of 140,000 miles (225,000 km) places object struck in stasis for predetermined period*

For the purposes of combat between vessels (see page 14), treat remuses as level 7.

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ARTIFACT: PEACE BADGE

Level: 1d6
Form: Badge that telepathically projects a promise of peace and tranquility to viewers
Effect: In addition to projecting telepathic promises, a peace badge grants its wearer +2 to Armor against effects that would otherwise deal Intellect damage that ignores Armor.
If prominently displayed as part of an attack by the user, the badge fires an immediate-range beam of psychic energy that inflicts Intellect damage equal to the artifact level. The mind of an avatar killed by a peace badge attack is stored within the badge and available for later study or instantiation by the badge owner. While the badge stores a mind, all replays of the mind stored in Thon are wiped.
This artifact exists and operates only within the dream construct of the Thon Iridescence.
Depletion: 1 in 1d20

NATIVES OF THON

The Thon Iridescence contains a multitude of races of intelligent beings, none of which are especially prominent. But thanks to a special communication feature enforced in every psychic realm, all the natives, no matter their outward appearance, are able to speak to each other in a language all can understand, which to each resident seems to be his native language.

Ecatora, page 112

Because most inhabitants have been immersed in Thon since their inception, the vast majority have little conception of the physical reality of their habitat. To them, they live in the world, and the various ways of it that might seem like miracles of the numenera to visitors from Earth are just how things work in Thon. Except for a few elders, scholars, and visitors from outside, most inhabitants—regardless of their apparent species—have even less knowledge of the underlying workings of the reality threads, psychic constructs, scanning mechanisms employed by the Greeters, and so on than nanos and other explorers from the physical universe have.

PSYCHIC REALMS OF THON

As indicated for the number of races inhabiting Thon, the individual realms within the dream construct defy description. For this reason, only a small handful of quotums are described below, but there are far, far more to be explored. Among all these realms, Ecatora stands out as a central hub.

QUOTUM AND DOMAIN RULES

All the realms of Thon abide by certain fundamental rules, which include the following.

Realm: A realm is either a quotum or a domain.

Level: Every quotum and domain has a level. Newly fashioned quotums are level 2, and newly fashioned domains are level 1. As a realm is occupied over time, its level gradually increases, which means older realms are generally higher level. Level is useful to determine how difficult it is to access an impeded quotum, the typical level of a realm's inhabitants or hazards (though individual avatars and hazards can vary), and other characteristics the GM wishes to determine by way of level.

Level also determines the maximum size a realm can reach (though some realms can appear smaller than their maximum if designed that way, and many do, including the city of Ecatora). Level 1 realms can reach a little less than a mile (1 km) in diameter. Each level beyond the first increases the maximum size by an order of magnitude, so a level 2 realm can be up to 6 miles (10 km) in diameter, and so on.

Access: Personal domains permit only their owner to enter, unless they have been specifically unfettered (as described below). On the other hand, most quotums allow anyone to enter, unless its rules include an impeded entrance that requires a passphrase or key. Without the right passphrase or key, entering an impeded quotum is an Intellect task equal to the level of the quotum.

Replay: Some realms have replay enabled, and others do not.

Special: If a quotum or domain behaves in a way that is out of the ordinary, such

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as granting all residents the ability to fly, breathe water, or sing their conversations instead of talking normally, it is considered a rule of that realm.

TRAVELING BETWEEN REALMS

Many quotums and domains operate according to rules similar to those of normal worlds, allowing inhabitants to walk, fly, swim, slide, or otherwise move around in a manner appropriate to the realm's theme.

Moving between different quotums and domains is trickier and requires that a traveler discover an exit. Every exit resembles a plane of shimmering reflective material. In some realms, exits are obvious; in others, they are hidden and must be found. Passing through an exit puts the traveler into the "superficies," which is a formless limbo offering an ever-multiplying choice of entrances into realms, often with only a little information to go on. The overwhelming number of possible realms has the potential to sear the mind. Thus, knowing the coordinates for a particular quotum is important. Attempting to navigate without coordinates is challenging, but sometimes travelers have only the name of an entity, a group, or a quotum to direct them. (An individual who creates a personal domain always knows the coordinates for that domain.) A group can travel together through an exit, though one character must be nominated as the navigator.

Generally speaking, navigating to a realm without knowing its coordinates is an Intellect task equal to 4 + the level of the realm sought.

In most cases, when navigating between realms, travelers can bring only the items they can carry. For this reason, artifacts that are much bigger on the inside than the outside are popular, especially among settlers wishing to build up a community within a newly created (or discovered) quotum.

CREATING DOMAINS AND QUOTUMS

To create a quotum, one must first create a domain.

CREATING A DOMAIN

Creating a domain is an act of will. Any time a sapient creature enters the superficies (the limbolike area beyond realm exits), instead of seeking to enter another extant realm, he can try to create a completely new domain by attempting a difficulty 4 Intellect-based task. If successful, he delineates the kind of domain desired, and that domain melts into being around him, as simple as that. Given that the rules inside the domain can be essentially whatever the creator wants, anything goes, other than the fact that new domains are always level 1 realms. (If the creator was serving as the navigator for other travelers, those travelers appear back in whatever realm they just left—they do not appear in the newly created private domain.)

A domain fades into nonexistence if its owner doesn't spend at least a few hours there out of every 28 for the first few weeks after its creation. After that formation period, the domain gains more solidity and remains extant even if the owner is gone for long periods.

At any time, a domain owner can create an unfettered domain or convert the domain into a seed for a quotum. Once the domain is so converted, the owner gives up his control and potentially godlike existence within it. Extreme aspects of the domain may also become muted as described below, but whatever the domain previously was flavors the new quotum. For example, if a domain was a skyscape of apparently endless clouds, the base state of the new quotum begins with the same theme.

CREATING A QUOTUM

A quotum seed can be freshly created by three or more individuals or taken from a

A navigator without coordinates must succeed on a difficulty 4 Intellect defense roll to find what she's looking for. On a failure, the navigator loses 3 Intellect points and ends up back in the quotum or domain just departed. On a success, and assuming no keys or passphrases are required, the traveler (and her companions, if any) appears in the quotum sought.

Unfettered domain, page 114

Human visitors from the Ninth World are rare in Thon, but the few who've made the trip eventually realize that remnants of one of Earth's previous worlds may exist among the quotums.

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domain that has been converted to seed status. Newly created quotums are level 2.

A new quotum is a blank slate, and every individual who enters it within the first few hours after its creation can essentially put in a "vote" on its theme by attempting a difficulty 4 Intellect-based task. If all the creators are in agreement, the quotum takes on the shape of the consensual theme. If not, a blending of all the aspects voted upon takes form.

Quotums manifest cyphers and sometimes artifacts, usually shaped by the realm's theme. For example, a cypher that grants the ability to fly might be found in a mountainscape or skyscape.

Themes include up to three narratives, such as serene mountainscape where the sun never sets, stormy jungle where plants hunt animals, empty cityscape where glowing mist sings of beauty and loss, quiet skyscraper frozen in quantum spin ice, busy coralscape where visitors breathe water, sealed maze where dangerous creatures roam, and so on.

No further customization is normally allowed beyond the overall theme choice. Once that is locked in, the underlying mechanism of the Thon Iridescence chooses particulars for the quotum to fashion the theme. For example, if the theme is "serene mountainscape where the sun never sets," the type of plants that grow on the mountains, the shape and color of the mountains, the shape and color of the sun, its position in the sky at any time, the nonintelligent creatures (if any) that live in the mountainscape—all of these particulars, and more, are populated into the quotum. Themes that include the narrative "serene" generally do not end up populated with hidden caches of dangerous beasts, whereas those that specifically call for such things certainly do.

Thon Cortex, page 117

In this way, no quotum is ever exactly what its creators envisage, especially if the theme contains particularly extreme narratives. Unlike in a domain, every whim does not become quotum law.

After a quotum is created, sapient creatures can move into it if they choose, settling it and extracting its resources just like settlers might do in the physical universe when new lands and worlds are discovered.

ADVANCING REALM LEVEL

Most realms advance in level based on how much time sapient individuals spend within them. That said, the rate at which realms advance in level strikes most inhabitants as completely arbitrary. A domain only ten years old might achieve level 4, while a quotum inhabited continuously might achieve level 4 after hundreds of years.

GM ADVICE FOR USING THON

The psychic dream construct of Thon is a trippy, wide-open location for adventuring that might leave a GM wondering how to use it. But just remember one simple thing: each realm of Thon is like a tiny world with its own internally consistent rules, NPCs with needs and plots, and creatures and threats that must be dealt with just like normal worlds have. PCs who enter Thon do the same sorts of things that they might do if traveling across the Steadfast or Beyond—explore and gain XP, agree to help others, quest for a legendary artifact or realm with special qualities, and earn money (in the form of femtos) for accomplishing jobs offered by NPCs and patrons.

In the dream construct of Thon, characters wend across the face of mountains thousands of miles high in pursuit of mind thieves, barter with wily merchants of Ecatora for rare artifacts, dare an unfettered domain to hear the mad whispers of an NPC who knows a secret of existence, fashion domains of their own, or quest for that most sought-after quotum of all: the Thon Cortex.

ECATORA

Realm: Quotum
Level: 4
Access: Open
Replay: Inactive

One of the most well-known and populated consensual spaces within the Thon Iridescence is the city of Ecatora. Fashioned as if on the exterior of a fat torus floating over a real-time image of the black hole around which Thon is constructed, Ecatora is a city of lights, color, and swirling motion, in stark contrast to the vast nothingness "below" it. Because gravity is normal to the surface of the torus, inhabitants can't easily fall off the city and into the black hole image. Instead they wend around

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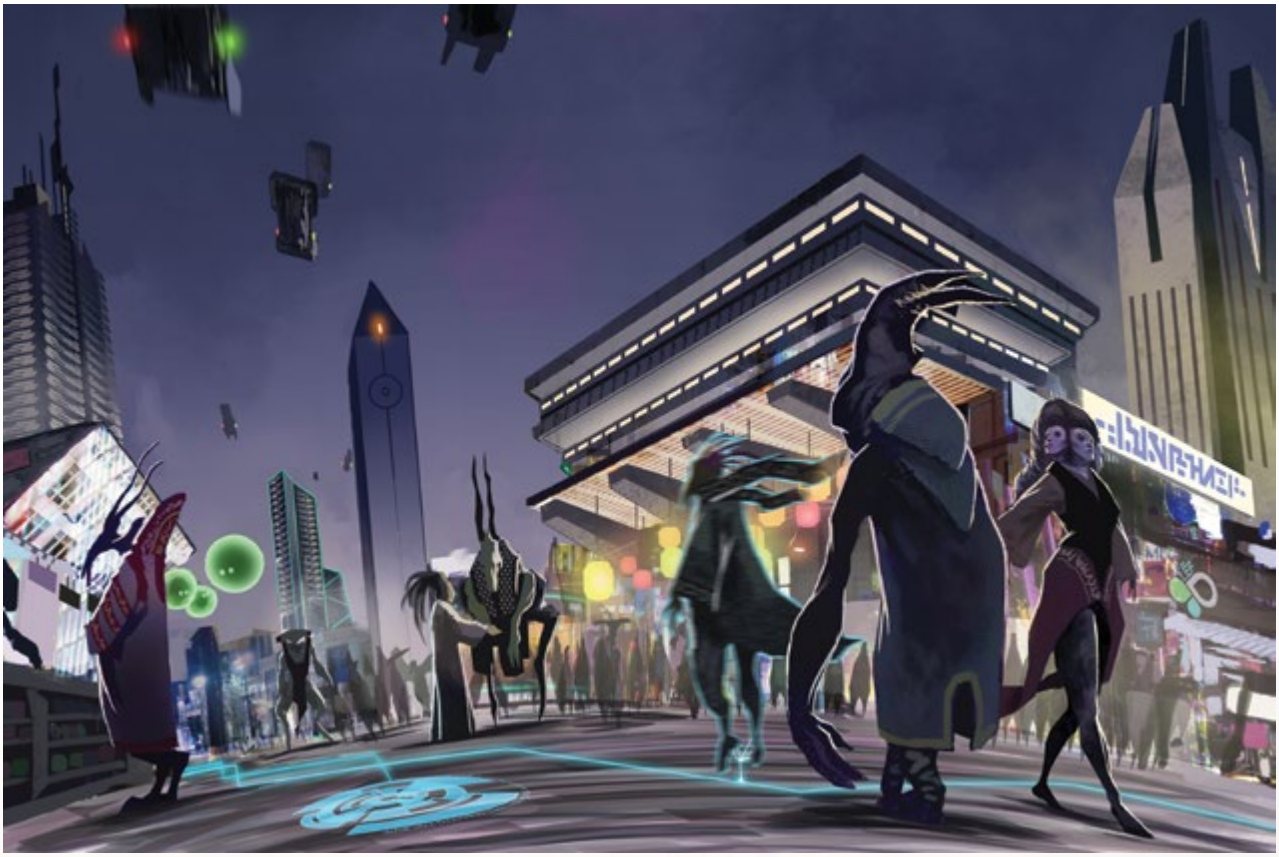

the circular diameter of the fat ring, moving between interesting locations for entertainment, trade, learning, and more.

Ecatora's exit is located at what would otherwise be the hollow center of the torus, so traffic is thickest there, as inhabitants leave for other quotums and personal domains. On the opposite side of the exit, they stream into Ecatora, eager for all the diversions the city offers.

The "people" of Ecatora are as varied in form and dress as is possible to imagine. A human doesn't stand out any more than does a silvery insect with clothing of flowers, a three-faced woman with a triple halo, floating green bubbles that speak, froglike hoppers with tentacles for hair, and hundreds of other body shapes.

Ecatora residents travel via glistening lines of energy that crisscross the ground. If trod upon purposefully, a "slide-line" whisks a traveler to another part of the city—miraculously, without hitting anyone else. Because slide-lines deposit travelers at preconfigured destinations, flying cabs shaped like whorled transports are thick overhead, wending between the often-amazing architecture.

Some of the largest draws of Ecatora are its markets. Even for creatures that have led long, full lives in Thon, it seems there is always something new to find in Ecatora. That's because the Thon Iridescence is so massive and contains such an unthinkably large population that only a fraction of all that's possible is on display in the Ecatora markets at any one time.

Njevarard Sect: Even Thon has its criminals, and one of the largest groups of them is based in Ecatora. Called the Sect, or sometimes the Njevarard Sect after its founder, the group specializes in femto theft, kidnapping, and smuggling banned goods into Ecatora to put them on sale. The Sect never goes so far as to cross the

THON CURRENCY: FEMTO

The currency of Ecatora, and for all of the Thon Iridescence, is calculated in femtos. A femto resembles a jet-black coin and is equivalent in value to a shin, but it can also be exchanged for increased "cycle time" within the dream construct of Thon. This is why rich individuals are often successful in their ventures.

Increased cycle time could grant a character extra actions or extra Intellect Edge for a limited period of time.

For a character, exchanging 20 femtos as part of any other action counts as an asset for that action, and thus decreases the difficulty of the action by one step.

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ARTIFACT: DUPLICATOR

Level: 1d6
Form: Palm-sized disc
Effect: Creates a duplicate of the user that persists for up to one hour. The duplicate's level is equal to the artifact's level or the user's level (or tier), whichever is lower. The duplicate is dressed like the user but has no specialized equipment such as cyphers and artifacts. The duplicate possesses the general knowledge of the user, including some abilities, though usually only those that most define the user. This artifact exists and operates only within the dream construct of the Thon Iridescence.
Depletion: 1 in 1d20

Njevarard: *level 5, tasks related to disguise and deception as level 6*

line into mind thievery, because Njevarard is certain that would call nepenth attention to herself and Ecatora, both of which she would consider a terrible loss. Njevarard resembles a bipedal furred beast with two snakelike "arms" but no head. She wears shimmering gold robes and is usually attended by circling clouds of singing insects.

Judge Kazinoyo: *level 5, tasks related to detecting falsehoods as level 7; carries duplicator artifact*

The Judge: Judge Kazinoyo arbitrates on issues brought before him, but most of them are trade disputes between rival vendors, which he usually has one of his hundreds of under-judges handle. If anything out of the ordinary (and potentially illegal) occurs in Ecatora, Kazinoyo attends to it himself, and depending on how entertained he is by what he finds, he may be lenient to those who otherwise deserve punishment by Ecatora law. When acting in his official capacity, he is accompanied by a small fleet of look-alikes; there's nothing like strength in numbers. Kazinoyo resembles a bundle of ropelike tendrils studded with eyes and wears a shimmering crown that signifies his office.

Navigator's Guild: Given that the Thon Iridescence is essentially an entire universe of worlds bottled in a psychic dream construct, exploring it is the job of many lifetimes. But that's the task the Navigator's Guild, based in Ecatora, has set for itself. Its head, Merte Vardhet, finances ever more expeditions by charging those who explore

Merte Vardhet: *level 4, tasks related to navigating Thon as level 7*

on behalf of the guild to return to Ecatora with unique and novel items gathered from distant quotums. Merte resembles a hairless, tangerine-colored lion with manipulator tendrils instead of a mane.

TYPICAL DOMAIN

Realm: Domain
Level: Begins at 1
Access: Closed unless unfettered
Replay: Active for owner, at minimum
Special: Anything goes

Instead of choosing to navigate to a consensual quotum, someone who has found an exit into the superficies can travel to one of her own personal domains, or choose to create one. A domain can look like anything, be anything, and grant any ability to its owner while the owner remains within it. Many travelers and longtime inhabitants lose themselves forever in their own private domains in fantasies of unchecked power, sensuality, or peace.

Normally, no other entity (except possibly a nepenth) can enter a domain other than its owner. However, a domain owner can change the rules in two ways to allow others inside, but not without consequences.

The most common way to change the rules is to change the domain into a quotum, a consensual space, which is a permanent update. Whatever extreme rules applied previously become moderated. The new quotum's rules resemble consensus conditions like those that normally apply in other quotums, though the new quotum has the same essence and look (as much as possible) from when it was ruled by a single ego.

The second way a domain owner can change the rules is to create an unfettered domain. She does so by explicitly tagging the domain—either when it's created or anytime thereafter—so that those seeking to enter are warned, earnestly and without the opportunity to misunderstand, that they are about to enter a nonconsensual space and give up autonomy over their avatar. In effect, those who seek entry are warned that they would be giving complete power over themselves—how they look, how they react, what they think, and even the continuity of their own existence—to the domain owner. Even if an owner claims that she'd never

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Think of the most fanciful, the most outrageous, or the most twisted environment imaginable. Then know that among the realms of Thon, a quotum like it probably already exists, but in an even more extreme form than a normal mind could conceive.

take advantage of someone who entered her unfettered domain, the truth remains that she would have godlike power over visitors, as she does over everything else within her purview.

Unfettered domains include places like Nestra and Perithog.

NEMONE

Realm: Quotum
Level: 5
Access: Impeded
Replay: Active for scree, inactive for visitors

The quotum of Nemone is a dramatic mountainscape where beings called scree reside in a seemingly precarious cliff-side community of narrow paths and slender spires. Scree resemble rats twisted with silver strands that flash various colors depending on a scree's particular mood. They have the reputation of hosting prognosticators who can see the future and peer into distant quotums, and sometimes even into the physical universe itself, especially into the dreams of creatures on distant worlds. But the scree are territorial and jealous of their gifts. Those who visit to ask for a vision of the future must prove themselves, first by reaching the scree community without falling off a mountain, and then by paying an exorbitant price in femtos or through trial by combat with a scree champion.

Window of Dream: The scree mystics gather around this serene, still pool within a central spire when they wish to see other times. It always glows with flashing images of past, current, and future events within Thon, but it takes a scree mystic to pull meaning from the chaos offered.

NESTRA

Realm: Domain
Level: 3
Access: Unfettered
Replay: Active
Special: Visitors transformed into aquarium specimens

This unfettered domain warns that anyone who enters will come under the power of Ternya the Watcher and swim forever in a beautiful sea of quietude as part of a shoal of wondrous creatures several billion strong. And true to the warning, most of those who enter are bodily and mentally transformed into a dazzling, fishlike entity, unique to the massive aquarium known as Nestra.

Ternya charges femtos to buyers in Ecatora for view-globes that grant amazingly realistic views into the extraordinary marine environment. For even more femtos, she will sell selected specimens (formerly sapient inhabitants of Thon that chose to give up their autonomy) to buyers, though this sort of transaction is illegal in Ecatora. Thus, the price for specimens from Nestra is ludicrously high, even for those who hope to rescue a former friend who became enthralled by the sea of quietude.

GAME OF PERITHOG

Realm: Domain
Level: 6
Access: Unfettered
Replay: Inactive
Special: Visitors forced to act as game pieces

In some unfettered domains, visitors become pieces in complex games. The Game of Perithog is one of those places. Those who enter despite being warned manifest on a vast three-dimensional board, making moves individually or as a team

Regular quotums often are dangerous or lethal to inhabitants, but only unfettered domains put the power of wholesale transformation or deletion of visitors into the hands of a single entity.

Ternya the Watcher (outside her domain): *level 3, tasks related to smuggling as level 7*

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Perithog the Grandmaster (outside his domain): *level 3, tasks related to strategy and gameplay as level 8*

against the disembodied voice of Perithog the Grandmaster. Pieces who lose the game are discarded (and destroyed without hope of replay). Those who beat Perithog are offered a reward, or a chance to go two out of three for an even greater prize. Rewards include freedom and the ability to pick from a random selection of the many cyphers that belonged to all those who previously lost to the Grandmaster.

RANUNCUL

Empress Oria: *level 6, tasks of persuasion and polite interaction as level 8*

Realm: Quotum
Level: 5
Access: Open
Replay: Inactive
Special: Visitors take 5 points of Intellect damage each day they fail an Intellect defense roll

Green lightning flashes erratically across the always dim and hazy sky of Ranuncul, a quotum that resembles a sphere of cracked grey stone whose many fissures drop for miles into lightless depths. However, the depths are not quiet; the cries of tortured creatures echo audibly from below. A visitor is immediately struck by the sense of pervasive dread, a psychic emanation so strong that those who stay overlong risk being driven mad. In fact, the rot of Ranuncul is so extreme that it has infected other quotums, both indirectly when those maddened by the psychic corruption find the exit and take a seed of that evil elsewhere, and directly by somehow leaking foul influence through the superficies. Frankly, it's a puzzle why nepenths have not dealt with the realm, but for reasons unknown, those creatures stay far away.

Nepenth, page 109

The Crypt: Monstrous creatures are continually spawned at the core of Ranuncul. New beasts launch into battle with previously spawned creatures in fights to the death, and the sounds of that conflict are what visitors on the surface hear. From time to time, monsters seep up from a fissure and find their way to Ranuncul's exit.

THRYNATHUM

Realm: Quotum
Level: 5
Access: Open
Replay: Active
Special: Those born in the quotum may not leave

Joyous singing greets visitors to the quotum called Thrynathum. The singing resounds from the Family Choir, which is made up of a few dozen of the many hundreds of thousands of children of the quotum's leader, Empress Oria. Oria, her many consorts, and all her children belong to a race of creatures that are remarkably humanoid in nature, given the wide variation of Thon body type. The quotum takes the form of a structure like a palace with many miles of towers, keeps, and surrounding walls, at the center of which is a throne room that seems carved from the inside of a diamond, where the Empress holds daily court and nightly parties.

Given that everyone in Thrynathum is closely related and, under most circumstances, forbidden to leave, visitors are always accorded a royal welcome and are the subject of extreme interest. A visitor even halfway similar in morphology is probably auditioned to be the Empress's next consort, though the purpose of the audition isn't immediately apparent. Since every race inhabiting the Thon Iridescence is at heart a dream construct, biology doesn't stand in the way of two consensual beings having a child together. Of course, by the law of Thrynathum, any child of the Empress becomes her subject, and may not leave the quotum except under special circumstances. Those who disobey are almost always found by bounty hunters hired out of Ecatora.

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THON CORTEX

Realm: Quotum
Level: 8
Access: Impeded
Replay: Active
Special: Tweak rules of other quotums and domains from here

Even if the coordinates for the Thon Cortex are known, without a Cortex key, it's difficult to enter this impeded realm. (Cortex keys are extraordinarily rare objects, though they sometimes come up for sale in Ecatora.) Those who gain entry find what appears to be an endless plain of milk-hued synth under a similarly colored sky.

The Thon Cortex is, essentially, the control room for the entire dream construct. That said, the complexity of attempting to make dramatic changes is such that anyone who gains entry will find that doing anything too disruptive is a task far beyond their abilities.

On the other hand, a visitor can usually find coordinates for quotums, make minor changes in the laws that govern extant quotums, and perhaps most exceptionally, choose to emigrate from the Thon Iridescence in a process that is the reverse of that described for visitors who meet a Greeter.

Greeter, page 107

The Lost: Few creatures find their way to the Cortex, and fewer still ever leave. Those who remain are visitors who lost their minds attempting to control processes far deeper and more integral to Thon. Because of the complexity or some defensive feature hidden in the dream, these creatures failed and left behind almost-mindless avatars that wander the Cortex. The Lost, for all their emptiness, sometimes can provide clues to newcomers who seek to gain control of less intrinsic functions (such as leaving Thon altogether). However, the Lost are erratic, and if not treated with special care, they can be triggered into shocking violence.

Lost: *level 3, tasks related to understanding the Thon Cortex as level 7; level 7 when triggered into violence*

THON IRIDESCENCE HEARSAY

Colabula: The realm of Colabula, thought to have been destroyed long ago, has been rediscovered. Inhabited by animate glass creatures with many limbs, Colabula is rumored to contain a substance that will drive any creature of Thon into a state of continual bliss.

Adventurers Sought: The Navigator's Guild of Ecatora is always looking for new members to join its ranks, even if just for one mission into the heart of a newly discovered quotum inhabited by violent cannibal automatons—for which service, they would pay handsomely.

Defective Greeter: One of the Greeters has malfunctioned. It is randomly culling Thon inhabitants from their avatars and instantiating them in flesh bodies in the physical universe. Most inhabitants do not react well to this sudden phase shift in their existence, especially since the bulk of their knowledge and skills no longer applies. Given that no remus seems inclined to fix the Greeter, someone else needs to do so before its malfunction grows worse.

Ship Shape: A vast fleet of sorg battle ships is en route to the Thon Iridescence. The ships seek not to gain entry but to mine the threads that conduct and enable the psychic dream for their own use. The sorg believe they can use the "cosmic strings" as weapons capable of shredding whole worlds.

Sorg, page 152

THE WEIRD OF THON

Haunts: Rumors of ghosts in the superficies have riled inhabitants, leading many to retreat to personal domains for the duration. According to survivors, these ghosts take form in the grey limbo itself and seek to drain all color and form from a victim.

Amorpha Growing: A realm of voracious slime, referred to as Amorpha in furtive whispers by the Navigator's Guild, ingests every visitor, making them part of the realm forever.

Replay Error: Sometimes those who are brought back from death via replay have more than just their own memories—they also have the half-repressed memories of an utterly alien being.

Remus, page 109

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CHAPTER 12

THE GLOAMING

Six of the creatures approached us with trepidation. Two could have been mistaken for children except that their skin was a brilliant rainforest green. Another was a tall, spidery thing, walking next to an undulating slug with what seemed like dozens of waving tendrils. A wide, armored figure with four arms brought up the rear, while at the head of this motley group strode a humanoid thing half again as tall as the tallest man I've ever seen, multijointed limbs moving with grace. Its face bore a very human visage showing a mix of distaste and worry.

"Abhumans?" Tymlin's hand went to her sheathed sword.

"I don't believe so," I replied in a whisper. "But let's be cautious."

I approached and greeted these creatures in the Truth. They didn't reply.

"Where are we?" I asked them. "There was an accident with a machine. Do you know of the numenera? There was an explosion, and, well, it was like something swallowed us up. Then we found ourselves here, which is obviously far from home."

"They don't understand a word," Tymlin said. "You can tell."

But then one of them spoke. "You are not of the confederation." He wasn't speaking the Truth, but somehow, I could understand him. Her? It? I had no idea.

I tried to engage them further, but that was all I could get out of them. No answers. No explanations. Eventually, they turned and walked back to those strange buildings in the distance. The look on the four-armed thing's face when I started to follow them stopped me dead in my tracks.

We watched them leave.

"Now what do we do?" Aynreal asked.

"How do we get back?" Tymlin looked me straight in the eye the way she did sometimes. As always, I felt her gaze silently boring into me, tearing at my heart.

I couldn't bring myself to speak, but I didn't really have anything to say anyway.

The sun here glowed a deep orange and sat on the horizon in a brilliant sunset. It was Tymlin who first noted, however, that the sun had been setting when we first arrived, and it hadn't moved. We would later learn, of course, that the sun remained in that state perpetually here. It was Aynreal who first coined the name for this place, but given this odd state of time, neither truly day nor night, it seemed quite fitting. We called the place the Gloaming.

The portion of the disk habitable by humans offers a surface area of about 50 million Earths.

Search Terms:
Alderson disk, cosmic megastructure

The Gloaming is a strange place located well beyond the reaches of Earth's galaxy. Upon arrival, it seems to be a place at dusk or dawn, but that dusk or dawn never ends. Only through communication with the inhabitants can a visitor truly comprehend what the Gloaming actually is—an artificial structure far, far larger than the star that gives it warmth and light. It is a disk with a hole in the middle, and in that hole rests the Gloaming's sun. The disk itself extends out more than 150 million miles (241 million km). Only a small portion is habitable by humans—and thus, very likely, the inhabitants that visiting humans might encounter—but that portion is a band about 3 million miles (5 million km) wide running around the disk, about 90 million miles (145 million km) from the star. The portions nearer to the center are hotter, and it gets

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colder as you move toward the outer edge. Temperature defines the habitable portion; eventually, it gets too hot or too cold to survive. The inhabitants call the habitable portion "Godsland," and they understand that the disk extends well beyond those limits, but no one has ever encountered the boundaries at each extreme.

The gravity, atmosphere, and climate of the Gloaming are very close to Earth standards, which suggests that perhaps there may have been some connection with the prior worlds. But if this is true, the only other evidence is the existence of the U-i-Nstor Gateway that connects the Gloaming with other locations in the void.

TRAVELING TO THE GLOAMING

The only way to reach this location is via an interstellar portal, teleportation, or something similar. Approach by a vessel is almost impossible due to a defense system that destroys incoming meteors and would likely mistake a star-spanning craft as yet another rock hurtling through the void toward the massive structure. The U-i-Nstor Gateway is the obvious choice. Of course, ending up on the Gloaming after a disastrously botched teleportation attempt or some kind of monumental numenera-related accident (the result of a GM intrusion) would also make for an excellent tale.

FLORA AND FAUNA OF THE GLOAMING

Literally millions of worlds' worth of plantlife and animal life live on the Gloaming, and that's only counting those in Godsland (creatures adapted to great heat or cold live beyond its boundaries). Typically, however, the closer creatures are to each other, the more alike they might be. For example, a species of mammal that can feed on minerals rather than organic matter might be found near a reptile that draws its sustenance from the same sources, while a similar creature is not to be found on the rest of the Gloaming.

Other creatures seem ubiquitous, such as the weird colony organisms called alioptors.

There are no automatons or biomechanical creatures on the Gloaming. Although the variation in life is jaw-dropping, the creatures here appear

Most inhabitants of the Gloaming are unlikely to realize that the disk is about 3,000 miles (4,800 km) thick and is habitable on the "underside" as well.

U-i-Nstor Gate, page 126

Alioptor, page 143

Inhabitants of the Gloaming sometimes refer to the beings who made it as "the makers," but they don't seem to give those beings much thought.

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USING THE GLOAMING

The Gloaming is a shadowy, mysterious place, and the PCs will be challenged in simply figuring out what it is, at least at first. Rather than exploring ruins and focusing on the past as they might on Earth, as a change of pace PCs on the Gloaming will focus entirely on the here and now. Interacting with the wide variety of races is probably one of the prominent features of adventures set here. The subtle struggle between the inconae and iltegu, a "war" fought both literally and figuratively in the shadows, might draw in PC explorers. The characters can spend a lot of time here, their cyphers replaced by the similar Archadian motes. Bringing some of those motes home might also be of real interest.

to be entirely organic and naturally evolved. Likewise, other than the inconae (and, in theory, the iltegu), there are no ultraterrestrials here.

THE NATURE OF THE GLOAMING

The nature of the disk of the Gloaming means that many things one takes for granted on a more conventional world (such as Earth) are not true here.

ETERNAL SHADOWS

There are places across the Gloaming hidden forever from the sun on the horizon by mountains or similar features. These areas are often cooler in temperature than surrounding areas and, not surprisingly, devoid of conventional plantlife. However, throughout the Gloaming, various species of plants thrive that do not require sunlight. These plants usually range in color from white to blue to violet, and they tend to have long, stringy tendrils rather than wide leaves (although there are exceptions). Thus, the inward-facing sides of mountains and hills are green, and the outward-facing sides are blue and violet.

Within the regions called eternal shadows, some individuals have found that psychic abilities are greatly magnified. Ranges and affected areas (or, if appropriate, number of targets) are doubled or even tripled. The abilities deal 4 to 8 additional points of damage, and the difficulty to resist such effects is increased by two to three steps.

The inconae always build their permanent residences within eternal shadows.

Inconae, page 144

DIRECTIONS

There is no north, south, east, or west on the Gloaming. Instead, people use sunward, edgeward, forward, and backward. Sunward is obvious, and thus edgeward is as well—it's always away from the sun. Forward is the direction of the disk's spin, so as one stands facing the sun, it is to the right. Backward is the opposite of forward. Technically, backward and forward are not straight lines, but that is true only if looking at the entirety of the disk from above. From the perspective of someone on the disk, those directions are indeed straight.

PASSAGE OF TIME

The Gloaming has no days, months, seasons, or years, because the sun does not move and there is no moon. Most inhabitants measure the passage of time by more personal methods—usually, by hunger, since they need to eat at regular intervals to survive comfortably. Thus, what they refer to as a *mealspan*—the time between large meals—is equal to about a day (or probably a bit less) for a Ninth Worlder. Others use the need for sleep, called a yawn, which is about the same length of time. Of course, there are many species of intelligent beings on the Gloaming, and they all have different food and sleep requirements. Thus, in the Confederation of Iltegu, they adopted a standard unit of time called the *yan*, which is about forty hours on Earth. It's based on the sleep needs of one of the more prominent races from the earliest days of the confederation.

Longer units of time don't come up often. It takes about a year and a half for the red-flowered toful bush to sprout, bloom, and die. Some residents use the term *toful* to mean that span of time. In fact, this has

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spread throughout the confederation, so many use the term despite having no idea what a toful bush is. Yet some Gloaming inhabitants don't bother with such long timespans at all—their lives don't require it.

Time measurement outside the span of a creature's life is almost never needed. That's just "before" or "after." People on the Gloaming rarely talk about history beyond the lifespan of their parents, or the future beyond that of their offspring, so it just doesn't matter.

A PRISTINE WORLD

Unlike the Ninth World, the Gloaming is not filled with ruins and leftovers of past civilizations. Ruins, if any, are always of stone or similar unsophisticated building methods, indicating no greater advancement than techniques used in the present. Other than the disk itself—and a few notable exceptions here or there—even the so-called makers left no evidence of their existence. In this way, the Gloaming seems virginal. Even though it has been inhabited for millennia, much of (perhaps most of) the near-endless lands remains virtually untouched, and certainly unspoiled. There's so much room on the disk that it's difficult to comprehend, let alone explore.

Still, in all the time of intelligent races on the Gloaming, there should have been some who reached a level of sophistication greater than what seems to be prevalent—draft animals pulling wagons and plows, soldiers armed with iron blades, and buildings made of wood and stone. But no. In this way, the Gloaming is the Ninth World's opposite.

Visitors from elsewhere may realize that there seems to be little in the way of progress or evolution. Life has remained more or less the same for the last hundred millennia or longer. Although few inhabitants realize it, the main reason for this lack of growth appears to be the influence of the inconae. These beings use their mental powers to keep the inhabitants from progressing, changing, or advancing in any way. No one develops new ideas, tools, or methods. Everyone seems content with the way things are, and no one can remember when things were significantly different.

INSTABILITY

Occasionally, the ground shudders and shakes, accompanied by a deafening, high-pitched squeal that continues for up to ten minutes and can be heard for miles. These quakes are usually not overly destructive, but sometimes they cause wide cracks to open in the ground and extend for miles. Once in a while, these fissures can claim a life or even a whole farm or village, but this is quite rare.

ARCHADIAN MOTES

Whether these are leftover technology of a past civilization (or even the makers) or some other kind of phenomenon, no one knows. Regardless, the so-called Archadian motes contain interesting secrets and powers. The motes are spheres of semisolid light that range in size from a pinprick to a clenched fist, and they rise from the ground in conjunction with the seismic upheavals. They float up and then gently back down, resting on the solid ground until found.

Archadian motes can be touched, picked up, and moved around like physical objects, despite being composed entirely of energy. They are warm but comfortable. The motes can be stored in a container and kept for an indeterminate amount of time. They cannot be harmed in any way, but they can be used (which causes them to blink away, out of existence). When used, a unique power manifests, as if the mote were a piece of technology. Interestingly, these powers can be activated by anyone and are always beneficial to the user; sometimes they are weapons, quite detrimental to the creatures they are used against. Many suspect that the motes are relics of the makers themselves, as they seem to come directly from the Gloaming. The fact that they are always useful suggests that they are intentional creations.

To determine the power of an Archadian mote, roll on the cypher list. Any ability that is given by a traditional cypher can be given by a mote, although the flavor might need adjustment. A cypher that is a weapon, like a ray emitter, becomes a mote that can project a beam. A cypher that is normally a glove is a mote that coats the user's hand in a gauntlet of energy. And so on. Also like cyphers, gathering too many motes in a small space is dangerous. Characters

Weather on the Gloaming is appropriate to the climate zone, but storms are infrequent. In general, the weather patterns seem extremely predictable, with regions getting the same amount of precipitation over a given period of time. One region might differ greatly from another, but each remains internally consistent with little variation.

Cypher list, page 281

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The Gloaming might be older than the Ninth World. It's difficult to know because the people there do not measure time as humans do.

Archadian: *level 2, perception as level 3*

should still respect their cypher limits. Thus, for all intents and purposes, motes are cyphers.

The motes are prized by all intelligent beings on the Gloaming and traded like jewels. Those who find them are sometimes called mote harvesters. These people pay particular attention to seismic activity and follow the incidents of quakes and upheavals. But mostly, they use Archadians, from which the motes get their name.

Archadians are beings that can sense the motes for miles, but only the ones that have never been touched. These semi-intelligent creatures are used by other, more intelligent species as hounds to find and gather new motes. It's said that one Archadian in ten thousand can sense any mote, even those in the possession of someone who has claimed it. The creatures are prized by thieves, mostly.

THE CONFEDERATION OF ILTEGU

Details of the genesis of the Gloaming are sketchy at best, although some claim to know the truth, or at least their own version of it. Natives know that their home is a fashioned thing, but who fashioned it? Their ancestors? The gods? A highly advanced race? Everyone's answer is different, so when speaking generally, they use the simple term "makers." Most natives accept that the makers created the Gloaming and populated it with creatures and plants, putting each type in a region where it could flourish. Even well beyond Godsland, it is said, some creatures enjoy the incredible heat or cold of distant regions of the Gloaming.

Eventually, the makers left, died, or retreated to watch but never interfere. The inhabitants know this because no one has seen or heard from the makers, and there is almost no evidence of their existence at all, other than the Gloaming itself.

After the makers disappeared, a vast amount of time passed. For hundreds of millennia (or the human equivalent thereof), each species on the Gloaming kept to itself or spread out only as far as needed, which was still far away from the regions of other races. But the need for land is only one reason the beings moved out into the unknown.

It was the explorers and would-be conquerors that eventually led their various peoples to meet. These instances of contact were rarely peaceful. The races were too different to relate to one another, communicate with one another, or even tolerate one another. After innumerable aeons-long wars, treaties, pacts, and still more wars, a group of discorporate beings called the iltegu managed to bring the hundreds of species that had become aware of one another into a single confederation, to the benefit of all concerned. This occurred the equivalent of a thousand or more years ago, and there are now more than a thousand species in the confederation.

For the most part, the iltegu have disappeared as surely as the makers did, but their presence is still felt by the peoples of the confederation.

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The vast distances involved mean that one race of creatures might encounter a few—maybe even a dozen or two—of the other races involved, but that is likely it. They might have heard of some of the others and be utterly unaware of the rest, who might live in regions hundreds of thousands of miles away.

Citizens of the confederation come in all shapes, sizes, colors, and configurations. After a thousand years of interaction, however, they are more alike than different in outlook and demeanor. In some localities, the races have mixed into a cosmopolitan mélange, adapting to one another and their idiosyncrasies in surprising fashion. Although certain incompatibilities remain, they are more unified than not.

Although vast, the Confederation of Iltegu doesn't extend the width of Godsland, let alone its length (all the way around the disk). Still, the area under its influence is many times—perhaps a hundred times—the area of Earth. The Gloaming is just too large to be explored, conquered, or perhaps even comprehended by the inhabitants, given their level of sophistication.

If the confederation continues to grow, and there is every reason to believe it will, it could extend beyond Godsland. The species in the middle of Godsland can't survive past its boundaries, but those who live near the edges can. Thus, people who come from the burning hot lands toward the sun, dwelling farther inward than a human could go, could still find the hottest reaches of Godsland survivable. And the same is true of the cold reaches away from the sun. In other words, different species dwell in different bands, but these bands overlap, so a visiting human could speak with creatures able to survive farther out or closer in than she could, allowing her to learn even more about the Gloaming. The Confederation of Iltegu does not include creatures that live too far past the extremes of Godsland in either direction. But even the term "Godsland" and the idea that it is the only habitable section of the Gloaming is relative.

The citizens of the confederation have a very simple level of technological advancement, and they have remained content—even stagnant—at this level for far longer than anyone can remember. A thousand years ago (Earth time), the iltegu tried to spur the people out of this stagnation, but they failed. Some of those alive today still remember their warnings against the lack of progress and innovation, but their numbers are too few to be significant. Still, the ever-growing, ever-adapting confederation is at least a form of advancement, and the integration of different people and ideas makes the concept of progress a possibility.

The races of the confederation have learned to adopt a shared manner for things like timekeeping, directions, units of measurement, and so on. They often use small crystalline spars as a common currency, although the different races sometimes have their own local currency as well.

A spar is close enough in value to a shin that one can call them the same and not be too far off. However, whereas a spar would work as a shin, the reverse is not true.

THE UBIQUITY

The citizens of the confederation speak an astonishing language—astonishing in that somehow anyone listening to it can understand it, and after a few minutes can even begin to speak it. This language, which they call the Ubiquity, is used by everyone, although there are local languages as well. These other languages are not dialects or versions of the Ubiquity, but entirely different tongues originating with individual groups and races. One cannot have an accent or dialect of the Ubiquity due to its very nature. It is always the same coming from anyone. Only species incapable of a spoken language cannot use the Ubiquity.

There is no written form of the language, so such barriers must be overcome in other ways. For example, rather than keeping a lot of written records—particularly in business dealings and other relatively short-term situations—trained individuals called yfesitrani remember things using the Ubiquity and recite it upon command. Any written records must be inscribed in a localized language. It's not uncommon for books in the confederation to have two, three, or more translations of the same text gathered together, side by side.

One can learn the Ubiquity completely simply by hearing it spoken for about half an hour. Without constant immersion in the language, though, it eventually fades from one's mind.

This language was a gift of the iltegu, and it is probably the single most important aspect of the existence of the confederation.

Because they are different species, the groups within the confederation must mate with their own kind if they want to produce offspring. However, as time passes, more and more interspecies love affairs have begun to lower the birth rates of certain species.

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THE INCONAE AND THE ILTEGU

Two forces seem to be secretly warring over the nature of existence on the Gloaming: the vampiric inconae and the incorporeal iltegu. The learned few who know of both speculate that each originated in a universe entirely different from this one, perhaps near the beginning of time.

These beings are forever enemies—the inconae are defenders of constancy, and the far less prevalent iltegu are the agents of change. The inconae thrive on stability. They benefit from situations that they establish and thus control, and they never want anything about that control to change. They want an easily managed, disparate population of creatures on the Gloaming, with poor communication and no access to innovation or technology, upon which to prey.

The iltegu, on the other hand, want to disrupt the inconae's influence on the Gloaming, and they do so by subtly encouraging development and advancement by the other inhabitants of the disk. However, the iltegu's numbers have dwindled over time, and their influence is waning. Unless something changes, eventually the iltegu will fail, and the inconae will—very slowly—take steps to break apart the confederation. Any chance the people of the Gloaming had to evolve or progress will fade, and they will be nothing more than livestock for the inconae, even if they do not realize it.

Although this is a war about change, it would be wildly incorrect to think of the iltegu as radical anarchists interested in destroying the status quo with rapid, violent change. On the contrary, they work over great spans of time.

U-I-NSTOR

U-i-Nstor is pronounced Yoo-ee-NUH-stohr.

The heart of the Confederation of Iltegu, despite its disparate populations and great distances, is a city called U-i-Nstor.

The first thing to understand about the city of U-i-Nstor is its size. The city stretches for 300 miles (483 km) from end to end—not because it has an immense population (although it is home to about a million residents), but because it is so very spread out. It sprawls, with huge tracts of open land between city sections, vast parks, and expansive campuses of large buildings. By the standards of other worlds, U-i-Nstor might be regarded as many cities in relatively close proximity. But there is a unity to it all with a single ruling body, a single lawkeeping force, and a unique mass-transit system that ties everything together. Still, it takes the equivalent of days for most inhabitants to physically cross the city, should they ever wish to do such a thing.

For example, the Gardens of Garet Nuel stretch 50 miles (80 km) from end to end. The gardens are well tended but sparsely populated. One might walk for a day or more across the well-manicured lawns and carefully trimmed hedgerows before encountering another intelligent being.

Hurra: *level 4, Speed defense as level 2 due to size; health 20*

Zephil: *level 3; Armor 2*

Rumor has it that some people have spread domesticated niul colonies far across the Gloaming, allowing for travel across the vast expanse. If true, it should take no longer to move a few million miles than it does to move across U-i-Nstor.

GETTING AROUND

Obviously, for a city so large, transportation is an issue. Many elite citizens ride in multitiered howdahs atop massive creatures called hurra, which have legs like tree trunks. Less affluent people ride upon or in carts pulled by zephil, swift quadrupedal insects.

It's not uncommon for the people of U-i-Nstor to use hot air balloons to travel from one part of the city to another. This is a particularly good way to cross the vast parks and gardens.

Perhaps most impressive, however, is the niul. The niul is a mass transit system of a sort, as well as a type of creature. Niuls are colonies of tiny creatures that swarm around a person and consume him molecule by molecule. The person is then reintegrated by another colony of niul far away. Domesticated colonies are used to teleport people around the city of U-i-Nstor. There are more than seventy-five domesticated colonies in the city, each a potential destination or starting point. The process of being consumed and reintegrated takes about fifteen minutes, but as long as a traveler keeps the proper destination in mind, nothing will go wrong.

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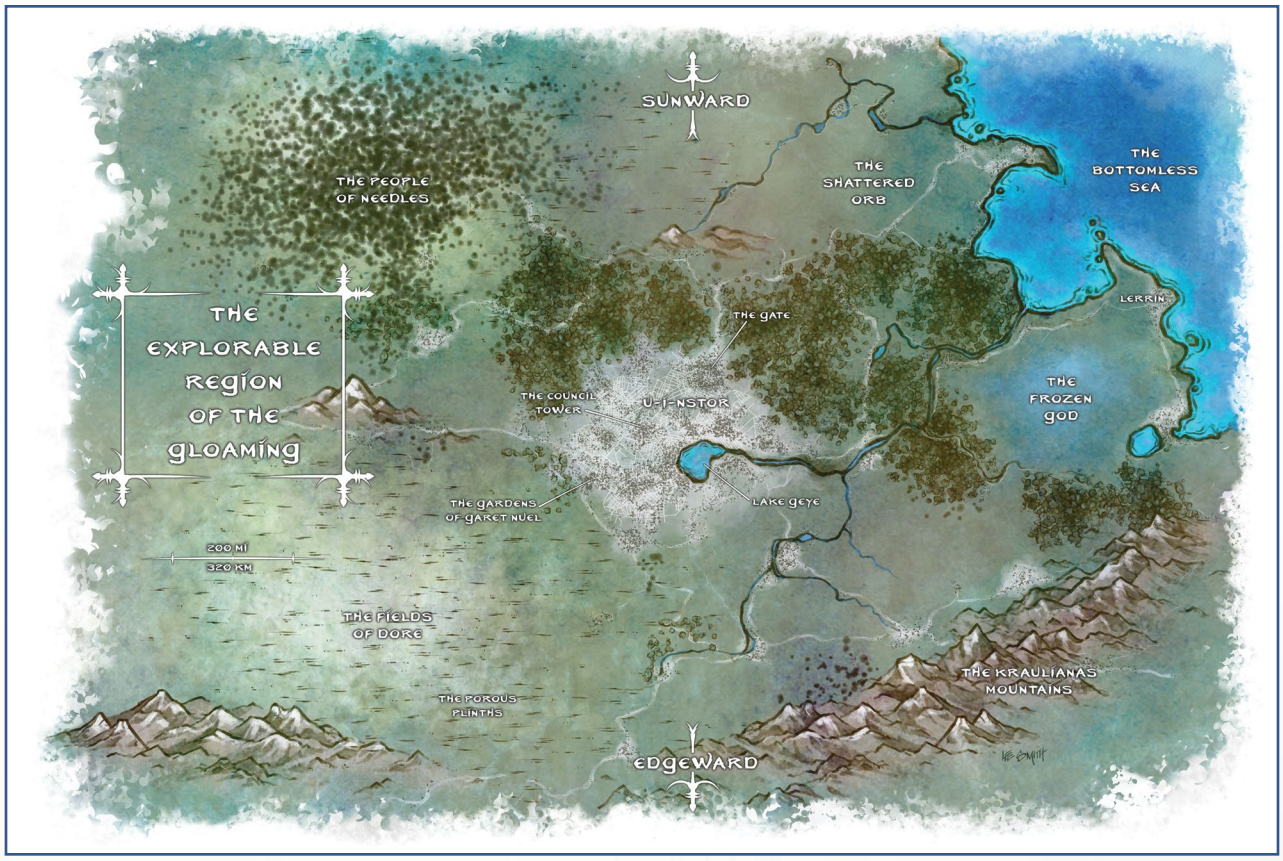

THE DISTRICTS

U-i-Nstor has more than a hundred districts, most of which are based around a particular race. Despite the cosmopolitan nature of the heart of the confederation, most creatures ultimately stick with their own species. However, there are a few centralized districts that are a mixture of many disparate creatures, including individuals from far-off regions whose only role in the city is to represent the very existence of their race amid all the others. Many of them live so far from their own kind that they are the descendants of travelers who first came to U-i-Nstor, and they know they will likely never see another member of their own species.

The districts are often quite compact (relatively speaking) and usually surrounded by a significant amount of open space. Each typically has a population of five to ten thousand residents.

LAKE GEYE

One central district is the very large freshwater body called Lake Geye. The lake is almost 70 miles (113 km) long, and although the city surrounds the water, it lies atop the water as well.

Residents cross the shallow lake on glass gondolas. In the middle of the lake is the Floating Market, where merchants sell their wares from rafts and barges. Food, clothing, goods, art, and other things produced by hundreds of races are for sale. Although there are a great many markets in U-i-Nstor, the Floating Market is the largest and most cosmopolitan of all.

Rumors speak of a hidden bank under the surface of the lake that facilitates the transactions of the market and safeguards the money of many of the vendors.

THE COUNCIL

A group called the Council rules U-i-Nstor. It is made up of ten individuals chosen from the elite class, each from a different race (so at any given time, obviously, not all races are represented). The Council meets in a tall tower of stone and stained glass, around which lies a campus of buildings that serves as the offices of hundreds of aides and administrators. The complex maintains a storehouse for a variety of important records as well as the dwellings of hundreds of yfesitrani.

The Council directs many thousands of guardians that keep the peace throughout

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the vast city. Each district has a garrison of constables and soldiers. The guardians enforce laws and maintain order. There is no real concept of defending the city from the outside, for the outside offers no threat to U-i-Nstor as a whole.

THE GATEWAY

In an out-of-the-way portion of a district populated mainly by raddich—a species of tall, four-legged reptilian creatures with tentacle arms, red flesh, and yellow eyes—lies a metal platform with a single console upon it, unlike just about anything seen on the Gloaming. The console is identical to the World Door on Earth's moon. If activated, a portal in space opens and leads either to the world of Perelande or to the aforementioned moon.

Typical raddich: *level 3; Armor 1; make a long move as an action*

World Door, page 33

Perelande, page 84

Console: *level 7*

THE EXPLORABLE REGION

The Gloaming is large enough that explorers from the Ninth World could travel a thousand years and never cross a significant amount of its diameter. The "explorable region," then, is simply the area surrounding the U-i-Nstor Gateway out to about 1,000 miles (1,609 km). This entire area is only a small portion of the lands of the confederation, which in turn is only a small fraction of all of the Gloaming.

Despite its many, many inhabitants, the Gloaming is mostly unoccupied wildlands. Villages and towns are rare, and roads equally so. Traveling overland is dangerous, for there are many predators, brigands, and other hazards. It's easy to get lost in expanses of eternal shadow along or within mountainous regions. Thus, travel is almost as uncommon as it is in the Ninth World. Those who do travel a significant distance use the so-called trance road.

THE FIELDS OF DORE

Wide green fields filled with wildflowers of yellow, red, and blue, the Fields of Dore are pleasant by most standards. Villages of intelligent creatures are extremely uncommon here. Travelers might cross the fields for the equivalent of weeks without encountering anyone they can attempt to talk to.

Herbivorous quarnocks live in large herds in the Fields of Dore, their primary threat being the carnivorous mujidavari.

The Porous Plinths: Energy from the structure of the Gloaming is emitted through the pores of these megaliths. (This energy may be related to the formation of the Archadian motes.) Once tall, rectangular structures, these mysterious edifices are weathered and worn today. Each has an

Quarnock: *level 3, Speed defense as level 4*

Mujidavar, page 148

In addition to dealing damage, plinth energy can force anyone failing a Might defense roll to gain a mutation from either the Beneficial Mutations list or the Harmful Mutations list, page 124.

THE TRANCE ROAD

If visitors hear inhabitants talking about the trance road, they are likely to become confused, thinking the term refers to a specific route across the land. It does not. The trance road is not a path through physical space, but the means to bypass it.

The citizens of the confederation know of a powder made from the crushed roots of a sarpur tree that has been exposed to the energies of any Archadian mote. When the powder is inhaled, the user can begin walking in a particular direction, and her mind will skip forward in time up to the equivalent of about fifty days. It is possible for the user to walk 1,000 miles (1,609 km), but to her, that time passes in an instant. This is called walking the trance road.

The experience takes a toll. Although the powder sustains the traveler physically, and she stops to rest when needed, she really does cross that grueling distance on foot. Travelers on the trance road typically need the equivalent of a week's rest after most journeys.

The user can specify a route and a time period that she will be on the trance road. However, if the route is unknown and she heads into mysterious territory, only a direction is specified. She can be confident that she won't walk off a cliff or into the sea, but predators and other overt threats present a real danger. Travelers whose trance is interrupted (usually by a physical attack) are stunned for the first round after the interruption occurs and can take no action. After that, each round she must attempt a Might-based roll with a difficulty of 5. Once she succeeds, she can act normally. Otherwise, she continues to be stunned.

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almost fleshy texture, with pores that leak glowing blue energy. It's as if they draw energy from the ground and store it, but some bleeds out. The energy is dangerous, and coming into contact with it is a level 6 attack resisted by a Might defense roll. A few people claim to have harnessed the raw energy to "enchant" items. Perhaps a weapon imbued with this energy inflicts more damage, clothing protects like armor, and boots allow the wearer to move farther and faster. Essentially, at least in some cases, the essence of the item is enhanced, and whatever it does, it does better when "enchanted."

THE KRAULIANAS MOUNTAINS

This range of incredibly tall mountains is home to two indigenous, intelligent races, the hrill and the baerastor. Hrills are air-breathing cephalopods who climb in trees and along rocky ledges with ease. Baerastors stand just 3 feet (1 m) tall, appearing to be humanoids without heads. They have mouths and other sensory organs in the palms of their hands.

Neither race has much use for tools or weapons. Hrills are migratory, and baerastors make permanent homes in caves and narrow ravines. The two races aren't just hostile toward each other—they feed on each other. This is a violation of the confederation, but neither race is sophisticated enough to fully understand the organization or its laws. They do pay it lip service, however, and both hrills and baerastors use the Ubiquity language. Occasionally, other members of the confederation head into the mountains to try to civilize one or both species, usually without much success.

THE BOTTOMLESS SEA

The other side of the disk that is the Gloaming is inhabited. It is almost impossible to get there, but one way would be to go down through the Bottomless Sea, which is in effect a hole in the disk. The sea exists on both sides, but it is many miles deep. Without some kind of aid to provide air and cope with the great pressures, travelers can't use the sea to get from one side to the other. If they have the means, however, the trip is unique, with gravity shifting once they are halfway "down."

Neither lack of air nor change in pressure is a real challenge for the aquatic nivm, another of the Gloaming's many, many intelligent species. The nivm are large sea-snakes and are part of the Confederation of Iltegu. They built a city, Lerrin, amid submerged caves near the shore of the Bottomless Sea. Some nivm claim to have been to what they call the "Deep Side of the Sea," but it is a place they fear.

A few non-nivm dwell along the shore near the cave-city and have friendly interactions with the sea-snakes. Many of these surface-dwellers are working (with

Hrill: *level 3, climbing as level 7, stealth as level 4*

Baerastor: *level 2, stealth as level 3; inflict 4 points of damage in melee with their hands that have both mouths and claws*

Typical nivm: *level 5, swimming as level 8, Might defense as level 6; Armor 3; swim a long distance as an action*

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Uthur: *level 4, engineering as level 5*

the help of the nivm) on a vessel or process that will allow non-nivm to descend to the Deep Side of the Sea, but so far they have made little progress. Their leader is called Uthur, an asymmetrical being with spindly, twisted legs and a bulbous body with multiple tendril arms. If someone who has the knowledge (and perhaps the materials) of the numenera joined the project, the endeavor might bear fruit. The people of the Gloaming do not understand such things well enough to make this a reality for the equivalent of many, many years, if ever.

THE FROZEN GOD

Long ago, perhaps even before the existence of the Confederation of Iltegu, someone built a structure of stone nearly 80 feet high and 60 feet across (24 m by 18 m). Within lies a single chamber of intense cold. The cold seems to emanate from a block of dark ice that fills more than half the interior. The frozen liquid, which is not quite water, is a cube with rounded edges, sweating slightly but never really melting. On the cube side that faces the entrance to the structure, the ice bears the image of a huge bestial face.

The cube is the frozen body of a being of pure liquid, which people today call the Frozen God. No one knows anything about it. The name comes mainly from its size rather than its nature or powers. No one has ever made a concerted effort to thaw the ice or communicate with the frozen being, as the people of the confederation do not have easy access to heat sources that are potent enough, and the Frozen God does not or cannot respond to their simple speech.

The only thing people who have visited the cube know for certain is that if anyone eats anything—no matter what—within about half a mile (1 km) of the stone structure, they become violently ill. Nausea becomes fever, and fever becomes delusion, all within an hour or so. In the victim's delusions, he sees a wave with the face of the Frozen God rising out of a turbulent sea, and a brilliant yellow moon in the sky above.

THE SHATTERED ORB

Pieces of slightly concave, rounded glass cover this region. It is theorized that the area once held a hollow sphere of glass more than a mile in diameter that shattered for some reason. No one understands how or why this could have happened, but even with weathering of the glass, travel

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across the area is hazardous due to jagged shards everywhere. The broken glass covers a region 20 miles (32 km) across, with—not surprisingly—the main concentration near the center. Some of the pieces of the Shattered Orb are 10 to 20 feet (3 to 6 m) across, but most are much smaller, able to be picked up with one hand.

Each hour spent in this region requires a Speed defense roll. Anyone failing a roll suffers 2 points of damage from cuts or piercings from the broken glass.

THE PEOPLE OF NEEDLES

A verdant forested region stretches for hundreds of miles. The inhabitants are a mix of races of the confederation, but all share one quality—they are devotees of the Way of the Wood. Outsiders call them the People of Needles. Whichever name is used, they are cultlike followers of the teachings of six elders (all long dead). The teachings embody the idea that the woods are a single sentient being, one far superior and more important than any other. Leaders maintain a firm hold over the devotees, usually instructing them to carry out tasks for the good of the group: gathering food, building homes, patrolling the forest to expel interlopers, and so on.

By slathering their bodies with the sap of a particular tree, most species in the Way of the Wood have a reaction that causes their flesh to grow hard protrusions like needles—the source of the name given to them by outsiders. This treatment also grants each devotee +1 to Armor and the ability to deal 1 additional point of damage in melee combat.

Most people who are not part of the cult fear and distrust its members. They are an extremely fanatical and focused group. Other concerns—even things like eating or self-preservation—are secondary to the Way of the Wood. The commands of the leaders, who speak for the wood, are not to be questioned or disobeyed. In general, the People of Needles do not abide the presence of non-devotees in their forest.

The teachings of the Way of the Wood do not hold trees, plants, or animals in the forest sacred. It is the wood as a composite that is the superior entity. Thus, cultists can hunt woodland creatures, cut down trees to use the wood for construction, prepare plants and herbs as medicine, and so on.

Typical Way of the Wood devotee: *level 3; navigating, perception, and stealth in the forest as level 4; Armor 1; inflicts 4 points of damage in melee combat*

THE GLOAMING HEARSAY

The Devilkith: Rumors speak of an extremely hostile race that has all but conquered the portion of the "underside" of the Gloaming that corresponds to Godsland. These creatures are known only as the devilkith and very little is known about them, although many people fear that they might someday find an easily accessible way to Godsland.

The Innovator: A creature in U-i-Nstor believes that by combining Archadian motes, she can create a structure of solid light capable of communicating over limitless distance with other people who have a mote. But this innovator, Yevbrin, needs help gathering motes. Yevbrin is a large creature with a segmented, multilegged body, but her head and arms are somewhat similar to those of a human.

Child of the Wood: Tourum, the father of a recent convert to the Way of the Wood, would like his son returned to him. Tourum works as a brewer in a village just outside the forest of the People of Needles, and anyone who brings back his son Yonoush will be rewarded with all the honey-liquor they can carry. Both father and son are members of a humanoid race with greenish-grey skin, long necks, and long, thin arms.

THE WEIRD OF THE GLOAMING

Impossible Etchings: Some of the pieces of the Shattered Orb bear etchings of mysterious creatures and what might be numenera devices.

Peer Into the Future: In the Kraulianas Mountains lives the jeni bird, which has a mysterious organ. If the bird is killed and this organ removed and eaten, the person consuming it can immediately see the future of his current location—about the equivalent of ten years in advance.

Swarmstorm: A never-ending storm blows across the Gloaming, and within it tiny insects ride the winds. They leave the storm only to nest in a cavity in a living creature's body, where they lay eggs and then die. The eggs do not hatch until the storm returns.

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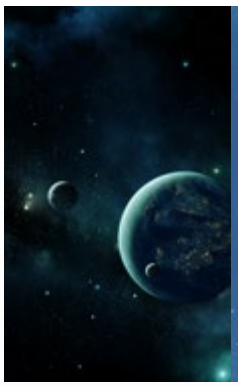

CHAPTER 13

OTHER WORLDS

There are countless worlds within the void. Most stars have children, and the night sky holds far, far more stars than can be seen.

The void is a cold, dark place, and most worlds are lifeless orbs of stark stone or roiling gas. Simply exploring every world one comes across likely results in a lot of empty days. Only a few offer a spark of something more. If explorers travel into the night using prior-world vehicles, gateways, or other means, these more interesting locales are likely to be preset destinations. Traveling with a beacon sensor artifact, however, allows a group of midnight pilgrims to explore on their own.

This chapter provides brief descriptions of worlds and places that explorers can visit if they travel into the night. It's not really possible to summarize an entire world in a few sentences, but most of the ones described here are not as complex as others in this book. In other words, these worlds are typically worthy of nothing more than a brief visit. Reaching them is usually a matter of using one of the methods described in the introduction of this book. However, a GM can use these worlds however she wishes. Further, a few have special ties to the Ninth World and may offer their own means and motives for traveling to them.

None of the locations in this chapter are in the system of Earth's sun. They are all scattered much farther away. But with the numenera, even such daunting distances are not insurmountable barriers.

ARTIFACT: BEACON SENSOR

Level: 8
Form: Large, heavy device with an array of glass screens and controls
Effect: Detects the presence of a navigation beacon (which most artificial structures in the void have, unless their creators wanted them to be secret) within an interstellar range. Once the sensor detects a beacon, the user may be able to glean a bit of information about the location (a difficulty 8 task). In any event, if the sensor is used aboard an interstellar vessel, the craft can be guided to the source of the beacon.
Depletion: 1–2 in 1d100

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FARUNDIEL

Although farun devices do not work elsewhere, numenera the PCs bring with them to Farundiel function normally.

Farundiel is a populous world, and its people have advanced technologies and understanding of mechanical science. They have craft that fly through the air at great speeds, machines that think and teach, and devices that service needs and provide extravagant comforts. The technologies of Farundiel, however, are nothing like anything found in the Ninth World. The parts and pieces do not interface with anything the PCs likely brought with them, and numenera knowledge provides little insight in dealing with Farundiel things.

The people of Farundiel look almost like humans, although their skin is a ruddy pale color, and their hair is always white. They call themselves the farun. The farun live in weird globular cities and can negate the effects of gravity with ease, flying through the sky in gleaming craft of metal and synth. The people are divided into hundreds of fractious groups, each with its own leaders. Skirmishes, raids, and struggles among these groups are common, and the weapons the farun wield are as potent as any Ninth World ray emitter, detonation, or offensive artifact.

Farundiel is a world next to a strange hole in space, through which leaks ultraterrestrial energies unknown in this universe. All of the farun's machines and devices draw energy directly from the anomaly and don't function anywhere other than on Farundiel. Thus, farun never leave their homeworld, and it's not a particularly good place for Ninth Worlders to come to gain new cyphers or artifacts.

Still, explorers may wish to visit Farundiel because of the anomaly itself. It is a doorway between our universe and the universe of the Nibovians. Nibovians cannot leave their universe under any circumstances, but they can send their creations through for mysterious (and certainly malevolent) purposes without the use of the anomaly. However, the hole in space is the only known way for people of our universe to get to that other universe, should such a journey ever wish to be attempted. Because of the anomaly, Farundiel is as plagued by the treacherous creations of the Nibovians as much as the Ninth World is, if not more so.

Typical farun: *level 2, using the numenera as level 3, using its own technologies as level 4*

Nibovian wife, page 249

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GARANTHAL

For every hour that non-natives breathe the air on Garanthal, they must make a Might defense roll or move one step down the damage track due to colonies of creatures filling and multiplying in their lungs.

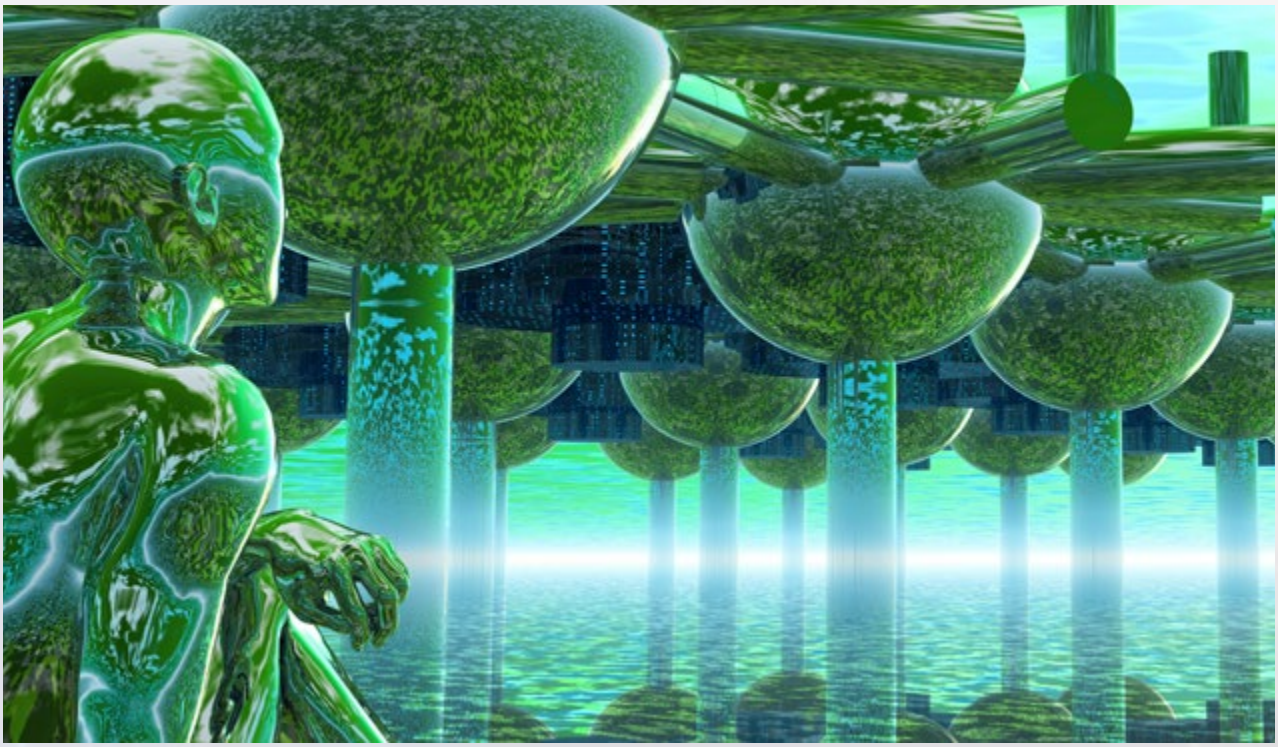
Typical clure: *level 3, all matters pertaining to biological knowledge as level 5; health 5; Armor 4; does not need to eat, sleep, or breathe in any way familiar to humans*

Verdant does not begin to describe the world of Garanthal. Teeming with life, the majority of the planet is covered in a shallow sea just a few feet deep. Within the endless coral reef live fish, crustaceans, cephalopods, and other creatures. A great deal of plantlife of all varieties thrives in the water as well. But as thick as the sea is with these creatures and plants, Garanthal is truly dense with living creatures that are too small to see, except when in great numbers. The green vastness of these tiny single-celled creatures fills the shallow sea, the occasional rocky islands, and even the air.

Gravity on Garanthal is slightly less than on Earth, but the atmosphere is so filled with tiny living organisms that it is dangerous for traditional beings (like humans) to breathe the air.

The intelligent inhabitants of Garanthal are the clure, each of which is a colony of tiny creatures, all dwelling within a transparent field of force in the shape of a humanoid. The clure dwell in cities that are likewise formed from shaped force fields that contain a wet, sticky biomass of a wide variety of organisms. The clure swim within these force-field cities made of globes and cylinders of green life.

Without the aid of telepathy or something similar, communication with the clure is nearly impossible. Still, if one wanted to find a cure for a disease or a way to deal with some other organic threat, the clure would be more likely to know the answer than just about anyone else. Similarly, the clure manufacture poisons that can kill any creature (as well as antidotes). Last, they design organic microorganisms that can perform almost any conceivable task, not unlike the nanotechnology found elsewhere. The clure would be willing to barter any of these things for interesting cyphers or artifacts.



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THE HAUNTED CLOUD

A mass of dust and gas lurking in the void, the Haunted Cloud is known to only a few midnight pilgrims that dare travel into the night. A trillion miles across, the cloud is vast and strange. Passing through this region of space can have two effects.

The first is a loss of substance. A single object or person slowly becomes less and less tangible. Once it is entirely insubstantial, it eventually fades from sight as well and is gone forever. The objects or creatures affected by this evanescent effect seem entirely random.

The second effect is an infestation of incorporeal creatures known as the eulm. These creatures give the cloud its name, because they seem very much like ghosts. They might appear within a starfaring vessel passing through the cloud and take up residence, so to speak, within the same space as an existing creature or object. Eventually, they take on the essence of the creature or object, "possessing" it and—if the creature or object is lower than level 5, or if a PC fails an Intellect defense roll—controlling it, if applicable. A powerful jolt of energy (something that is level 5 or higher or that inflicts at least 8 points of damage) drives the eulm out of whatever it possesses.

Near the center of the Haunted Cloud lies an interstellar vessel called the *Rosenant*, piloted by a man named Quientan. He visits the region to study its strange effects and negotiate with its inhabitants. A quiet megalomaniac, Quientan seeks to return to his homeworld with a secret he can glean from the cloud that would make him powerful or give him an edge against his enemies. (An army of eulm allies or slaves would certainly suffice.) He will not speak of his home to others under any circumstances. Although he appears to be human, he is not from Earth.

Evanescent effect: *level 6*

Quientan: *level 6, diplomacy and persuasion as level 8; Armor 2; headband artifact makes long-range mental attacks that inflict 4 points of Intellect damage*

Eulm: *level 5, stealth as level 8; can use an action to become solid or insubstantial; when insubstantial, can pass through matter, cannot be affected physically in any way, and cannot affect anything physically*

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THE ISHALLEN

PCs in communication with either of the machine intelligences in the Ishallen must make an Intellect defense roll each minute or suffer 6 points of Intellect damage.

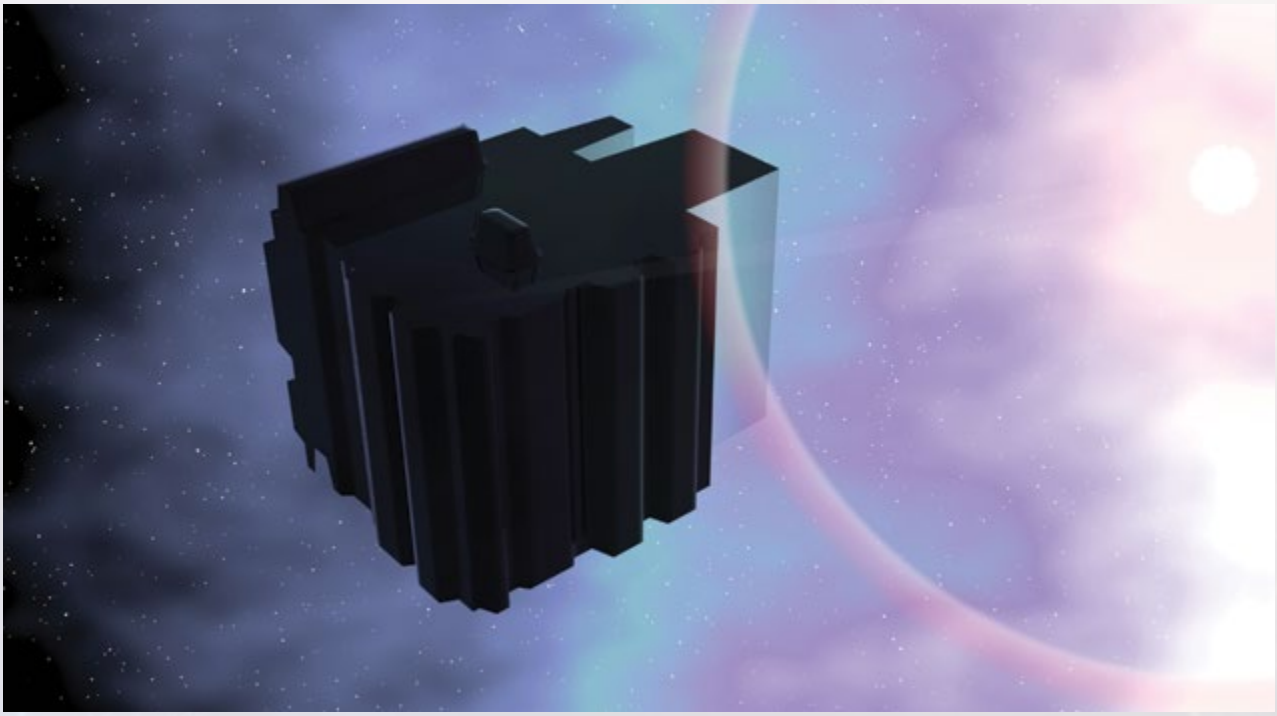
The Yellow God and the Blue God: *each level 10*

Floating in a lonely corner of the void, circling a cold, childless star, the Ishallen is an artificial structure many miles across. As such, it is an excellent place to scavenge for numenera. However, it is well maintained by the two machine intelligences that control it. These intelligences, which call themselves the Yellow God and the Blue God, have no material bodies. Rather, they inhabit the very workings of the structure. However, each has a great deal of power to shape reality in the Ishallen, thanks to a host of nano-spirits that swarm within it. Not unlike two incredibly powerful nanos, the Yellow God and the Blue God can reshape matter and energy, create objects out of pure force, observe distant locations, and so on.

Each of these beings "manifests" as an animate head of metal on a huge pillar thousands of feet above the floors of two chambers. To communicate with either of them, one must ascend to a hovering platform and don an adjustable helmet connected to a variety of cables and wires. The interaction is not conversation so much as direct mental interface, which can be taxing.

The Yellow God and the Blue God despise each other and seek nothing more than to taunt, insult, and belittle the other. Trapped within the Ishallen together for all eternity, they use their almost limitless intellects and great powers to annoy and inconvenience each other. Destroying or harming the other is impossible without the destruction (or harm) being mutual.

Visitors to the Ishallen are likely drawn into this disputation and bickering as soon as they arrive. Promised great rewards by one machine being to perform a specific task intended to belittle, denigrate, confuse, or embarrass the other, newcomers are tools in the struggle of the "gods." Angering one or both entities can be extraordinarily dangerous. However, the rewards offered could be worth getting involved, as the machine intelligences have the ability to repair, reshape, or create almost anything, including flesh.



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KRISTEZA

Kristeza is a cold moon orbiting a giant world of swirling storms. The gravity here is low and the air is breathable for humans, although it's as cold as the highest Earth mountaintop in winter.

Kristeza is a desolate, lifeless place, yet next to the shores of a frozen sea, a black and grey temple rises. This temple is dedicated to Ahrigalos, known as one of the so-called Lords of Rust and Ash. Most of the time, the temple is abandoned. Its walls and pillars, as one might imagine, slowly decay. But in that decay, the temple grows more potent. At least, that is what the devoted of Ahrigalos believe.

Worshippers of Ahrigalos from the Ninth World travel to Kristeza and the dark temple once each year using a powerful interstellar teleporter located somewhere in the Black Riage. These pilgrims are usually a mix of humans and intelligent automatons, along with a few humans who have bonded with mechanical parts. They revere decay as the representation of time marching inexorably toward the utter end of the universe, which to them is holy.

They are also anarchists who value life only as a way to observe the degradation of existence. It is because of this that, paradoxically for people who revere the end, the priests and devotees of Ahrigalos seek ways to prolong their lifespans. They want to come as close as possible to observing the ultimate death of the universe. They spend their time in the Ninth World attempting to find or create the means of long life or even immortality. On Kristeza, however, they meet to worship their cold god of decay.

Should they ever discover an ancient device or means of extending life, they would likely store it here in their secret, sacred place, protected by automaton guardians.

Low gravity, pages 97 and 100

Black Riage, page 177

Automaton guardian: *level 6, perception as level 7; health 35; Armor 3; attack with long-range energy weapon for 8 points of damage*

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NULLEN

On an otherwise quiet and unremarkable world, the shell of a giant structure rises like a shadow out of the past. The ruin is just short of a mile (about 1.5 km) long and more than 3,500 feet (1,070 m) high. It seems to have been a vessel or perhaps a stationary cylindrical structure that once floated in the air or, more likely, in the void itself. The terrain around it indicates that it crashed here long ago. The interior appears set up so that gravity was always toward the outside—all portions of the interior were habitable, covered in what appear to be buildings, plazas, and streets. The shell itself is honeycombed with small, winding, tubelike corridors that lead to cramped chambers.

This ancient ruin, or rather, what is left of it, has been scavenged by unknown forces (Nullen holds no intelligent life). But stalwart numenera hunters can still find plenty of things of use or value if they look hard. Much of the shell, as well as the structures on the interior of the cylinder, is filled with a pale orange slime mold that reacts to movement. If it senses movement within an immediate distance, it begins to expand very quickly. A single human moving down a corridor could get entangled in the muck and held fast if she fails a Speed defense roll (a GM intrusion). If trapped in the muck for more than three consecutive rounds, she begins to suffocate, moving one step down the damage track. A Might defense roll will break her free, but so will standing perfectly still for five rounds. Two or more creatures moving within immediate distance of each other set off the slime and cause it to grow large enough to completely seal off the corridor, doorway, room, street, or what have you. Nothing short of disintegration is likely to clear away enough of the slime mold to have any appreciable effect.

Breath recycler, page 32

Envirosuit, page 62

Slime mold: *level 5*

The shell lies on the edge of a sea whose waters are deadly to humans. In fact, the air of the world is dangerous to breathe, and those doing so suffer 1 point of damage each round. A breath recycler, envirosuit, or something similar is needed here. Nullen's gravity is relatively like that of Earth, however. Most of the planet, including the area around the ruin, is tropical in temperature and precipitation, but the poles are predictably cold.

Those who have been inside the structure claim that it was damaged in a great war among the stars millennia ago, when intelligent nebulae across the galaxies attempted to wipe out all other life. These beings, called the Suhlachil, were defeated, but not eliminated.

Nullen has a large moon, more friendly to Earthlike life, but still supporting no intelligent inhabitants. Could there be another, perhaps undisturbed fallen structure there? Some people speculate yes.

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NYLARAN

Contact with the exterior of Nylaran transmutes any creature—whether machine or automaton—and its equipment into a life form similar to a vendul.

Located on a tiny world adrift in a cloud of similar tiny worldlets, ice chunks, dead comets, and rubble is the fortress of Nylaran, if fortress it is. From here, the sun is visible as just another star in the ocean of night. Nylaran is a towering structure of scarlet synth resembling the whorled shell of a sea creature of Earth, if the shell were inscribed with all manner of tiny script and symbols.

Creatures who call themselves vendul inhabit Nylaran. The vendul are sapient beings composed of extremely cold fluid. They interact with each other and their environment via telepathy and mind over matter, but they find it difficult to deal with creatures born closer to the sun. The temperature of such intruders is annoying and potentially dangerous, and vendul will not abide their presence for long.

Contact with the exterior of Nylaran translates any creature—whether machine or automaton—and its equipment into a life form similar to a vendul. Creatures who undergo this experience must succeed on a difficulty 3 Intellect defense roll or essentially go insane for a period of several minutes, after which they return to their normal form and state of mind. Upon taking vendul form, a creature that retains its mind discovers that vendul senses are exceptionally acute, and one of the first things a transformed creature notices is the thousands of tiny channels that penetrate the surface of Nylaran. A vendul can use these channels to flow between the exterior and interior of the scarlet tower.

Nylaran's interior is an immense supercooled pool, swirling like a vortex around a central ebony-hued crystal. The pool is made up of all the vendul currently within Nylaran, joined into a communal being of vast intellect and memory called Ny. From day to day, the number of vendul making up Ny vary, but for the most part, the communal being retains continuity. A vendul (or a creature temporarily transformed into a vendul) who enters the communion and later leaves it remembers being swallowed by a vast collective, and possibly recalls an important piece of information gained from being part of a superior intellect.

Of late, the most important piece of information someone retains after leaving Ny is the concept of an approaching starquake. The vendul of Ny are concerned that a relatively nearby star—actually an "ultracompact stellar corpse"—is soon to undergo a paroxysm that will release an intense burst of energy far enough across space to irradiate all things in the grasp of Earth.

Search Terms: *superfluid helium, Oort cloud*

Vendul: *level 4; move a long distance each round; touch inflicts 6 points of cold damage; immune to damaging effects from cold*

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RALLEVIKU CASTLE

"I am a humble servant of the castle."

Reaching Ralleviku Castle is not easy. It is a stone structure that floats within a gigantic gaseous world without a name. The fortress is hewn from a single solid piece of rock—probably a transplanted asteroid. It looks like a stylized castle, complete with battlements and a hideous stone maw for an entrance. Inside, passages wind through the castle, connecting various chambers, though few—if any—have an obviously discernible purpose.

Ghru, page 41

Lattimor, page 122

The only living beings in the fortress are two humans, a ghru, and a lattimor. Stranger still, their minds seem to have been altered. None appears to have any memory of who they are, where they came from, or how they got here, and instead they act as stewards and servants maintaining the castle. If asked their names, each simply says, "I am a humble servant of the castle." Visitors are welcomed and offered food and rest.

Ralleviku Castle's effect: *level 9*

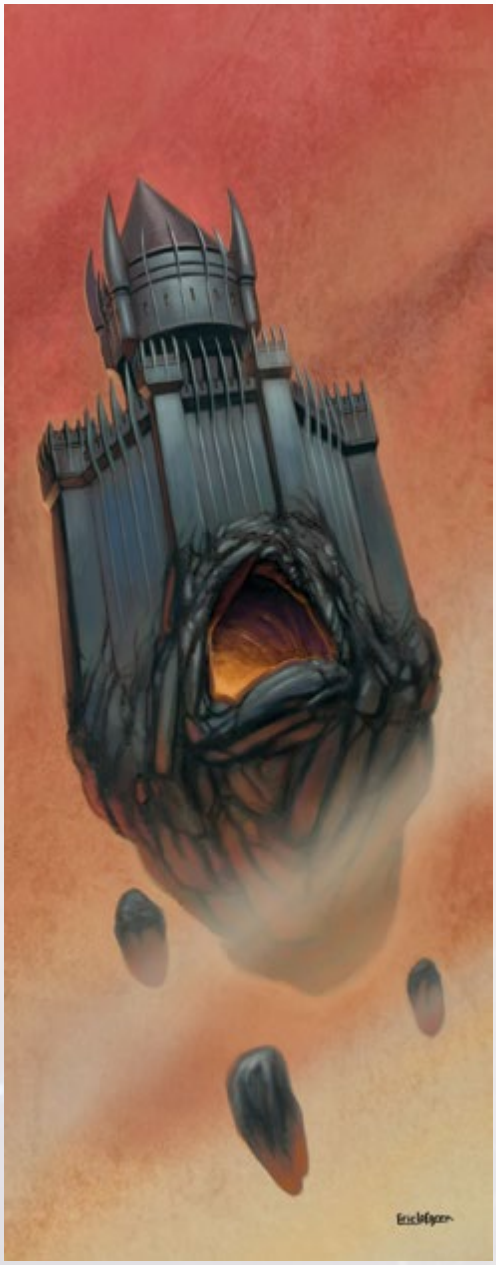
The larders are always full of excellent food and drink, and the environmental conditions are always comfortable. Sleep is always restful here. As time passes, the castle's effect makes it harder and harder to not feel happy and content, and it also becomes harder to want to leave. Those who remain for more than a month become humble servants.

Humble servant: *level 6*

The servants never react with hostility unless they are attacked or mistreated. If the PCs attempt to leave, the servants try to convince them to return again for further succor.

GM Intrusion: *If the PCs arrive at Ralleviku Castle in a vessel, they discover that someone has sabotaged the engines while they rested. Three difficulty 8 tasks must be completed to enact repairs, taking five hours each.*

If the PCs escape the castle, once every few months thereafter, they hear a whispering voice—in a dream, when they are alone, or amid a crowd of strangers—beckoning them to return to Ralleviku Castle.



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VINUET

The eluvia call Vinuet home. This is a world distant from its blue star, circled by six moons. Eluvia are beings of considerable intelligence and sophistication, but they generally abhor the numenera, which they call "the curse of the ancient folk" or, simply, "the sickness." Their knowledge of such things comes solely from a ruined towerlike structure, the only one of its kind on the entire world. This large ruin is more than 1,000 feet (305 m) tall and teems with powerful artifacts and discoveries, but for every treasure there is a horror. The tower contains weapons, defenses, vehicles, and other helpful devices, but also terrifying creatures held in stasis, viruses in containment, easily triggered detonations of deadly energies, mind-affecting narcotics, and more. Carelessness or just bad luck while exploring this ruin could spell disaster not only for the explorers but also for the nearby inhabitants.

The eluvia are tall, pale blue humanoids with an additional joint in their arms and legs. They speak their own language and use only the simplest tools and weapons. They tend a wide variety of domesticated animals as a major part of their livelihoods. The leader of the community nearest the tower is Speaker Brahn Igo, who sees it as her duty to keep the foolish and unwary from stirring up trouble in the cursed ruin.

Eluvia live simple lives, their largest structures being stone temples they erect to honor their gods, each represented by one of Vinuet's moons. Those seen possessed of what they call "the sickness" are at best feared and shunned and at worst subdued, incarcerated, and tried for the crime. Numenera devices are destroyed if possible. If not, the eluvia throw them into the sea.

Typical eluvia: *level 2, animal tending and general knowledge of nature as level 3*

Speaker Brahn Igo: *level 4, negotiations and seeing through deception as level 6; health 24; Armor 1*

The GM should fill the Vinuet ruin with truly powerful boons and banes, even beyond what is found in most Ninth World locations, to allow the tower to live up to its reputation.

Vinuet is a world of high gravity, but the air is quite pleasant to humans.

High gravity, pages 98 and 100

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XELL

Xell is not a single world, but three.

Xell Primus is an expansive world of wide oceans and rocky, craggy landmasses teeming with nonintelligent life. The atmosphere is roughly like that of Earth, but the gravity is twice as strong (use the modifications for high gravity).

High gravity, pages 98 and 100

Xell Secundus is a surprisingly Earthlike world bathed in energies that make it impossible for anything to live there. Visitors suffer 3 points of damage each hour from these energies.

Xell Tertius is a small world, more moon than planet. It is also entirely artificial. This dark world, devoid of atmosphere or gravity, is honeycombed with caverns and tunnels—storehouses for millions of sophisticated machines used to store information. Here and there in these catacombs, one can find points where the information can be accessed. Accessing this information is hard (a difficulty 8 task), but understanding and making use of it are even harder (a difficulty 10 task). If an explorer is successful, however, he can learn the answer to almost any question about the universe. At the same time, Tertius's systems constantly attempt to gain new information from the person tapping into it. There is no reward for doing so, however.

Abusing the access to information—perhaps by asking too many questions—draws the attention of guardians who look like torus-shaped metal constructs 8 feet (2 m) across, with swirling vortices at their centers. These beings have the same stats and abilities of dark fathoms and attack relentlessly.

Dark fathom, page 237

The energies of Xell Secundus extend visibly outward toward Tertius, holding the small world forever in place. However, these energies are not lethal on Tertius.

From the surface of Xell Primus, one can see the other two worlds locked together with a tether of energy. Their presence in the sky causes tides on Primus that are more like tidal waves that occur every morning and evening. The animals and plants of the large world have adapted to these scheduled deluges.

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PART 4:

CREATURES OF THE STARS

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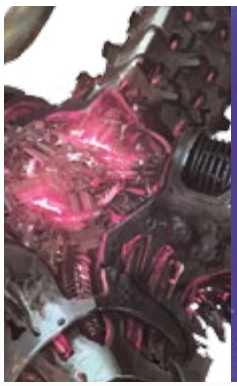

CREATURES OF THE STARS

The creatures presented in this section can be found in the specific locations described in this book, but as always, GMs are free to use a creature however and wherever they want. Remember that the universe opened up by *Into the Night* is so vast (infinite, even) that this chapter only begins to explore the types of creatures that characters might encounter in their travels.

The most important element of each creature is its level. You use the level to determine the target number a PC must reach to attack or defend against the opponent. In each entry, the difficulty number for the creature is listed in parentheses after its level. The target number is three times the level.

A creature's target number is usually also its health, which is the amount of damage it can sustain before it is dead or incapacitated. For easy reference, the entries always list a creature's health, even when it's the normal amount for a creature of its level. For more detailed information on level, health, combat, and other elements, see the Understanding the Listings section in the *Numenera* corebook.

Understanding the Listings, page 228

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ALIOPTOR 6 (18)

Like a horrific cloud of writhing, undulating tongues, alioptors sweep out of the cover of shadows to attack prey. These creatures fly by some unknown means of literally negating gravity in a precisely controlled manner. They are, in fact, colonies of many organisms fused together.

Motive: Hungers for flesh and seeks to reproduce
Environment: The Gloaming
Health: 34
Damage Inflicted: 6 points
Armor: 1
Movement: Long (flies)
Modifications: Stealth as level 7; Speed defense as level 5 due to size.
Combat: Alioptors can attack all within immediate range with their barbed tongues. Creatures struck by this attack must immediately make a Might defense roll or be pulled into the mass of tongues and toothless mouths and held there. Victims held in this way suffer 6 points of damage each round if they cannot break free, although a new attempt is allowed each round. Held victims must also make a Might defense roll or be injected with alioptor larvae. The larvae live and grow beneath the victim's flesh for about a week, at which time they move to the tongue and cause it to swell. Eventually, the victim begins to choke, and each hour must make a Might defense roll or move one step down the damage track. After six hours, the victim's tongue ruptures, and tiny alioptors squirm out. The rupture moves the victim one step down the damage track. If the victim is dead, the young alioptors feed on the corpse before joining together into a single mass.

Once an alioptor injects larvae into a victim, it won't do so again for months, instead attacking prey simply to feed.

Interaction: The alioptor is a near-mindless predator that cannot be reasoned with.

Use: An intelligent native in a small town was killed, and a new alioptor emerged from the corpse. Now the residents are intent on finding and destroying the thing before it can claim another victim (and produce another alioptor).

The hideous effect of the alioptor larvae holds true for humans and humanoids. The process might take a different form in another creature.

GM Intrusion: *The alioptor uses its control over gravity to affect the character. The alioptor floats slowly to the ground, but the character is flung 15 feet (5 m) into the air and crashes down, suffering 3 points of damage unless he grabs hold of something first or lands gracefully (a Speed-based roll either way).*

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INCONA 7 (21)

Creatures of darkness and terror, the inconae wormed their way into this universe from somewhere else: an otherworldly realm, it is said, that they devoured entirely.

Although some think the inconae built the Gloaming, that seems unlikely. More likely, they influenced the so-called makers to fashion the megastructure and fill it with creatures upon which to feed. From the inconae point of view, that's all the Gloaming is—a slaughterhouse of waiting cattle.

Inconae can alter their metabolisms and digestive systems to eat literally anything, but their default sustenance is blood. Only when they cannot get blood will they turn to other sources of nourishment, both organic and inorganic. Some people speculate that if need be, they will feed on spacetime itself, eventually consuming the universe.

Motive: Hungers for blood (or other things)
Environment: The shadows of the Gloaming
Health: 30
Damage Inflicted: 8 points
Armor: 1
Movement: Short
Modifications: Stealth and jumping as level 10.
Combat: Inconae hunt in packs, seeping out from the shadows to devour prey and then receding into the darkness. They attack with tooth and claw, making two melee attacks as a single action.

An incona can also use its action to mesmerize a foe. If the victim fails an Intellect defense roll, she suffers 2 points of Intellect damage. Until those points are restored, she is confused and disoriented, and the difficulty of her actions is increased by two steps. During this time of confusion, an incona can make a subtle suggestion and the victim will follow it, believing it to be her own idea. The suggested action cannot be something she wouldn't normally do, so committing suicide or murdering a friend are likely right out. The inconae always use far greater subtlety, their plots and plans more convoluted.

Inconae can see in complete darkness, and they hate bright light. The difficulty of an incona's actions in bright light is increased by one step.

Archadian mote, page 121

If an incona touches an Archadian mote, the incona suffers 5 points of damage, but the mote is consumed.

GM Intrusion: *After striking the character, the incona also destroys or devours a small piece of her equipment that is easily grabbed.*

Interaction: Inconae consider all other creatures to be nothing more than prey or feedstock. And they do not entreat with feedstock.

Use: The inconae make excellent villains, and because they work in groups, they can be a direct challenge even for the most powerful PCs.

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MACHINE EATER 3 (9)

Machine eaters burrow vast subterranean tunnel complexes in solid structures tumbling through the Phaeton Halo. When they are encountered in empty space, it's usually because one is in the process of traveling from one spinning Halo component to another, or because the machine eater sensed a particularly strong numenera signature.

To otolins and other forms of machine life, machine eaters are vicious and pernicious predators. To living creatures of flesh, machine eaters are not usually lethal, though they will go after any character who carries enough devices of the prior worlds. Machine eaters want to extract the power that many machines rely on to operate.

Machine eaters are void-adapted creatures.

Motive: Hungers for devices of the numenera and automaton vital energy
Environment: Anywhere in the Phaeton Halo
Health: 12
Damage Inflicted: 4 points
Armor: 1
Movement: Immediate; short when burrowing
Modifications: Perception as level 8 for detecting automatons, machine life creatures, and creatures bearing cyphers and artifacts.
Combat: A machine eater clamps its sticky pedipalps onto its target, inflicting 4 points of damage. Against automatons and biomechanical creatures, that damage ignores Armor. Instead of dealing damage, the machine eater can choose to drain an oddity, an artifact, or a cypher carried by the target. When this occurs, the item becomes useless, and the machine eater regains a number of points of health equal to the level of the drained object.

A machine eater can also attempt to stun automatons and biomechanical creatures within short range by generating a pulse of energy. Affected targets lose their next round of action, and artifacts and cyphers cannot be used for one round.

Interaction: Machine eaters are not sapient creatures; they are more like burrowing vermin on Earth, though with a more predatory bent.
Use: A meteorite struck a city in the Ninth World. Unfortunately, it was riddled with tunnels and contained a nest of machine eaters. Now the surviving creatures are moving out into the city and causing havoc by eating every tech device they come across.
Loot: 1d6 cyphers (each one level higher than normal, up to a maximum of level 10) can be salvaged from a machine eater's deactivated form.

Phaeton Halo, page 67

Otolin, page 70

The otolins believe that machine eaters enjoy a communal life in their colonies. Studies are ongoing—if a tainted power source could be introduced into a colony, it would likely wipe out an entire nest and render that region of the Halo safe.

GM Intrusion: *The machine eater fires a single-use energy beam, targeting a character at a range of up to 1 mile (2 km). On a failed Speed defense roll, either the character takes 8 points of damage and descends one step on the damage track, or all his cyphers are treated as if used up.*

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MALORK 4 (12)

"Animals of all sorts can be found floating and flying above the clouds of Urvanas. Most are benign, some are dangerous if approached, and a few should be avoided at all costs. The malork, while not the most dangerous, is the most prolific, and given to flying in packs."

~Uojonor, Nightwatcher

Given how Urvanas animals seem simultaneously alien and familiar to human eyes, it's probable that they are not natives, but rather the result of past efforts at atmospheric engineering.

With the malorks' brown-hued hides, diaphanous wings, and penchant for gliding for long minutes, it's hard for their prey to distinguish these predators from the cloud banks and thunderheads that serve as their hunting ground far above the surface of the storm-swaddled planet of Urvanas. That is, until a malork gives voice to its supersonic screech, a noise so terrible that it splits atoms and rends flesh.

Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Alone or in groups of two or three. Some malorks are used as combat mounts by cloud city raiders.

Health: 24

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Movement: Long

Modifications: Speed defense as level 3 due to size; tasks related to flying maneuvers and stealth while gliding near the cloud layer as level 5.

Combat: A malork tries to incapacitate prey from a distance with a long-range sonic blast that can target either a single creature for 5 points of damage, or all creatures in immediate range of a chosen spot for 3 points of damage. Creatures that take damage from the sonic screech must also make a secondary Might defense roll or be stunned for one round and unable to take actions. For flying creatures, this usually means loss of flight.

Up close, a malork's bite is almost as dangerous as its hunting cry.

A malork is adept at diving because it must often catch falling prey on the wing, but more important, it's skilled at pulling out of dives, even after entering the cloud layer. When a malork dives into a cloud, it usually emerges again in a place where the prey least expects it. The first time a malork surprises prey with this tactic, it gains an asset on its next attack on that target.

Interaction: Malorks are valued as mounts, but only after they've been broken and trained. Otherwise, they react like predators interested in eating and defending themselves.

Use: A malork nest of unusual size infests a wild cloud city that always seems to turn up near populated cities. Either the nest needs to be burned out, or the wild city needs to be dropped.

Loot: Malork wing segments are crystalline in nature and sell for up to 20 shins per pane in a populated cloud city.

GM Intrusion: *The malork jostles or knocks the character off balance, and he falls unless he makes a difficulty 3 Speed defense roll.*

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MOZCK

The entity called Mozck is a machine intelligence with no apparent physical form. Instead, Mozck flits from servitor drone to ancient machine to artifact and on to some other mechanism by compromising and overriding the previous level of consciousness. After Mozck has overwritten a machine, the compromised automaton gains hideous new abilities and becomes sociopathic, twisted, and what can only be described as evil. Why else would a Mozck automaton inflict such horrible, spirit-wracking transformations on its victims? One thing is clear, if nothing else: Mozck understands the numenera far better than almost any other entity.

MOZCK AUTOMATON 5 (15)

Any time an instantiation of Mozck infiltrates and overwrites a machine, the resulting entity ends up with many similar traits, despite initial differences in the shape and conformation between hacked machines. Likewise, a Mozck automaton's shape alters over time so that it resembles a nightmare machine version of a scorpion, a starfish, or something else that doesn't normally come into the light.

Motive: Inscrutable

Environment: Almost anywhere in the grasp of Earth or among the sun's other children

Health: 20

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Armor: 3

Movement: Short

Modifications: Tasks related to understanding and manipulating the numenera as level 10; detecting falsehoods as level 7.

Combat: A Mozck automaton makes physical attacks with a bladed wing, pincer, tentacle tip, or some other implement related to its form. However, a mature Mozck automaton (one that's fully transformed, which takes a few days) usually relies on psychic attacks that disrupt the thought processes of organic and machine intelligences. A target within long range must make an Intellect defense roll; on a failure, it takes 5 points of Intellect damage, and the difficulty of its actions is increased by one step while it remains within long range of the Mozck automaton.

A target that is defeated by a Mozck automaton may be killed, though some survive. Those that do are infected with a nanoscopic parasite that slowly begins to change their flesh in random and usually horrible ways (if desired, the GM can refer to the Harmful Mutations list).

Most Mozck automatons regain health at a rate of 1 point per hour, even when they are at 0 health. The only way to eliminate this ability is to destroy the automaton utterly.

Interaction: If a Mozck automaton communicates at all, it usually does so in broken psychic images that tend to make humans nauseous and rarely offer any real chance of negotiation.

Use: These compromised machines can be found in many ruined installations floating in the void.

Loot: The inactive (though slowly regenerating) remains of a defeated Mozck automaton can be salvaged for 2d6 shins and 1d6 cyphers.

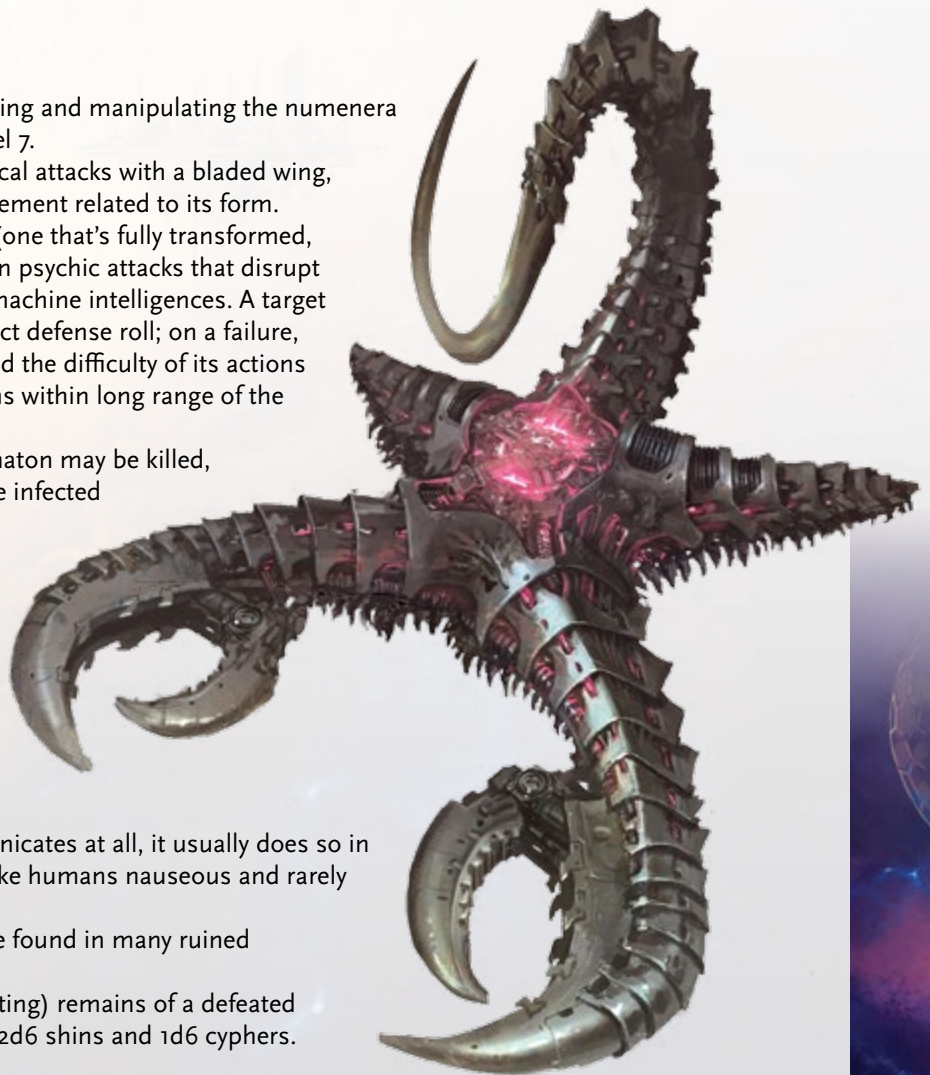
Harmful Mutations list, page 124

More powerful instantiations of Mozck likely exist, running the gamut all the way up to a level 10 nanoswarm creature of ever-shifting shape and abilities.

Some otolins theorize that Mozck automatons stem from a single self-evolved otolin.

Otolin, page 70

GM Intrusion: *The automaton uses its psychic ability to anticipate and negate the character's attack(s) for one round.*



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MUJIDAVAR 6 (18)

Fields of Dore, page 126

The universe is an interesting place. How else can a location of such incredible beauty—the Fields of Dore—also be home to a predatory terror with such a hideous countenance?

Mujidavari are bipedal, scaly monstrosities with long tails. Where one might expect a head, a mujidavar has a squirming mass of tendrils and tiny mouths. Some of the tendrils end in bony blades, some in bulbous eyes, and a few in still more tiny mouths.

Motive: Hungers for flesh
Environment: The Fields of Dore on the Gloaming
Health: 28
Damage Inflicted: 6 points
Armor: 3
Movement: Long
Modifications: Stealth and Speed defense as level 4.
Combat: A mujidavar can use an action to move a short distance and then attack with its tendrils or use its subsonic screech. Despite having a large number of tendrils, the creature can use them to attack only a single foe at a time.

Archadian mote, page 121

The terrible focused screech of a mujidavar operates on a subsonic level, which can scramble the senses of a single foe within short range. If the target fails an Intellect defense roll, she believes that everything she sees and hears is not precisely where it truly is. As a result, the difficulty is increased by three steps for any of her attacks, Speed defense rolls, movements, or tasks involving targeting or knowing where something is.

Interaction: The mujidavar is basically an animal—a belligerent, predatory animal.
Use: A pair of mujidavari is terrorizing a small isolated community, and the PCs traveling by are the villagers' only hope. As a reward, they offer the characters the location of a recent eruption of Archadian motes.

GM Intrusion: *The character is caught in the tendrils of the mujidavar and cannot move unless he succeeds on a Might-based task. In each round that he remains caught, he suffers damage as the creature automatically bites him.*

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NAVARAC 4 (12)

Navaracs hunt humans. They kill and eat prey of all kinds but seem to have an almost irrational hatred for humans. Although these flying reptiles are not intelligent, they possess a sort of cunning that makes them terrifying hunters. They are awkward when not in the air, but that occasion happens rarely.

Motive: Hungers for flesh, hates humans
Environment: Swarmstar
Health: 18
Damage Inflicted: 4 points
Armor: 2
Movement: Long when flying; short when not
Modifications: Stealth and perception as level 6.
Combat: Navaracs attack with a vicious bite. They also use torn loops of mantle filaments to lash or entangle foes up to short range. Overall, however, they try to use the unique environment of Swarmstar against their foes. They cut filaments their foes hang from, knock foes off ledges, or grab foes and drop them, often swooping down to grab them again seconds later. They knock foes' weapons from their hands (likely to be lost forever). When attacking humans, inflicting pain and terror is as important as bringing down prey to feed.

If reduced to less than 6 health, a navarac will usually attempt to fly away. If one or two fly away, the whole group probably follows—but only to come back again and again with harassing tactics to eventually wear their enemies down.

Interaction: Navaracs don't speak or have human-level intelligence, but they are more intelligent than what most people would expect from animals. A nonhuman might be able to have a very simplistic, nonlinguistic interaction with a navarac, but the creatures hate humans too much to do anything but kill.

Use: A small pack of navaracs has set a number of traps—loose filaments, loop snares, sharp sticks hidden amid filaments, and so on—around a hanging city to catch or kill those who come and go.

Loot: Navaracs nest in filament tangles. Within a nest, an explorer might find human-made objects of value (including a cypher or two) kept as trophies.

Mantle filament, page 97

Hanging city, page 101

GM Intrusion: *A navarac previously cut the filament a PC hangs from, so it breaks as soon as the character puts his weight on it.*

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PYTH 9 (27)

Immense and only partly material, active pyths are found mostly in the Phaeton Halo, especially within the object known as Nachant, though not exclusively. In Nachant, pyths seem intent on winning an aeons-long game that is inscrutable to other beings. Their origin is unknown, but they are obviously remnants of a prior age. They are either survivors or exceptionally capable agents of the ancient people. Pyths retain their motivation and purpose, despite being scattered and, in some cases, reduced to mere scraps of information coded into an artifact or oddity (a so-called "inactive" pyth; a Nachant key is an example).

Nachant, page 72

Nachant key, page 75

The 30-foot (9 m) tall body of a pyth is composed of silvery strands of light, partly immaterial, and is vaguely humanoid in shape but missing a head. A pyth's chest sometimes forms a transparent pane on which images or symbols are displayed.

Motive: Dominate other pyths

Environment: Active in the Phaeton Halo; inactive almost anywhere

Health: 90

Damage Inflicted: 10 points

Movement: Long

Modifications: Speed defense as level 7 due to size.

Combat: Despite seeming to be made of immaterial light, a pyth can make straightforward physical attacks, smashing foes with its hands or feet. It can make two such attacks on two different foes (or on the same foe, if the target is big) as a single action. At the same time, the pyth can call upon its impressive psychic abilities, attacking creatures within long range. Targets who fail an Intellect defense roll suffer 3 points of Intellect damage and must make a Might defense roll or move one step down the damage track.

Alternatively, a pyth can psychically target all creatures within immediate range. Targets who fail an Intellect defense roll are teleported to a location chosen by the pyth. The destination could be anywhere in the Phaeton Halo, or much farther away. Sometimes a pyth chooses this option to brush away annoying creatures, teleporting them just far enough so it can't perceive them. A pyth may instead decide to be punitive and teleport creatures to particularly dangerous locations.

Using this same ability, a pyth can also teleport willing creatures to locations on its behalf, if negotiations lead to such an outcome.

If a pyth is destroyed, all creatures in a radius of 1 mile (2 km) are bathed in a flood of unfiltered memories so overwhelming that they must make an Intellect defense roll. On a success, a victim takes 1 point of Intellect damage but can recall one piece of information from the flood as if having connected to the datasphere. On a failure, a victim takes 4 points of Intellect damage and is stunned and unable to take actions for one round due to the intensity of the memory flood.

Interaction: PCs must usually do something dramatic to get the attention of a pyth, though that could lead to a conflict. However, sometimes a pyth decides that characters could be useful for getting the better of a rival pyth, and it sets the PCs on a task in return for something they want or need. Pyths communicate best by triggering relevant memories in characters in response to their questions—sometimes memories the characters never had previously.

Use: A pyth asks that the PCs bring it a functioning Mozck automaton (or a once-infected piece of such a being).

Mozck automaton, page 147

GM Intrusion: *A PC who takes damage from the pyth's mental attack doesn't move one step down the damage track. Instead, she fights for one minute as the pyth's ally thanks to a new suite of memories, but she can attempt a new Intellect defense roll every few rounds to throw off the effect.*

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SHADOW OF THE VOID 5 (15)

"Nothing seeped down from the night, nothing made a noise as it entered the camp, nothing covered Javran up so completely that he seemed to disappear. And finally, nothing remained except for Javran's denuded bones."

~Anonymous

A shadow of the void is an entity built for assassination, which means it usually appears only as a shadow cast on a surface, if it's visible at all. When visible, the shape might resemble a human, an otolin, a kruem, or an immobile object or piece of equipment—whatever is least likely to rouse a victim's suspicion.

Shadows of the void have become more common on Earth since explorers began returning from trips into the night. To the Aeon Priesthood, this suggests that the shadows are something like vermin infecting the void overhead.

These assassination entities are void-adapted creatures.

Motive: Murder
Environment: Almost anywhere in the Phaeton Halo
Health: 20
Damage Inflicted: 5 or 9 points (see Combat)
Armor: 5 or 0 (see Combat)
Movement: Short; long when flying
Modifications: Tasks related to deception and stealth as level 7.
Combat: A shadow of the void uses stealth to its advantage. If it successfully attacks a creature that wasn't aware of its presence, its touch deals 9 points of cold, energy-sucking damage. Thereafter, it deals 5 points of damage per successful attack.

The shadow can also direct an energy-sucking ray at a target within long range that inflicts 5 (or 9) points of damage, but if it fails to hit a creature, this attack drains the shadow of 1 point of health.

In dim light or darkness, a shadow of the void uses lightlessness as protection and gains +5 to Armor. If forced into bright light or sunlight, it loses this advantage and both of its movement rates drop to an immediate range per round. For this reason, shadows of the void attack in places that are unlikely to have bright light or be open to sunlight.

Interaction: Shadows of the void are intelligent, thinking creatures, but they use their ingenuity for selecting targets, not negotiating.
Use: The characters are called to investigate several murders in a nearby city. They discover that a vessel recently returned from a trip into the airless void, and its crew were among the first victims.
Loot: The deactivated form of a shadow of the void is a cloaklike piece of synth that grants an asset on stealth tasks to any creature wearing it.

Otolin stories suggest that shadows of the void represent active components of a far more deadly entity that once strove against Phaeton, before that object's destruction.

GM Intrusion: *The shadow of the void hurls itself through empty space up to a long distance and attacks the character as part of the same action.*

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SORG

Sorg define antagonism. They gain status by conquering other creatures, all supposedly in the name of a distant sorg king. Sorg usually command deadly weapons, the ability to move between worlds, and a murderous desire to spread their own kind across all existence. They have colonized—or conquered—a region of the void consisting of several hundred suns called the Sorg Reach. As creatures protected by a pressurized-bivalve shell crusted with tech, sorg prefer microgravity or aqueous environments, but they can operate in full gravity by relying on levitation artifacts attached to their shells.

Sorg do not have gender. They reproduce by expelling eggs that any other sorg can later fertilize. Eggs hatch into tiny swimming "fry" that fight and eat each other until only a few individuals of that spawning are left.

Sorg are hierarchical beings, and each warfleet commander rules over lesser-ranked sorg serving on its ship with iron discipline. In fact, every sorg fancies itself something like a king in its own right, and always plots for a way to rise over its current superior. However, all sorg owe fealty to an especially revered individual called Sorganis, found on a pearl-hued planet called the Throneworld somewhere at the center of the Reach.

Sorg are xenophobic, expansionist, and ruthless to those they consider weaker than themselves, including their own young. Even though they've been traveling the void for only about a thousand years, their numbers have swelled geometrically in that time. Sometimes they wipe out alien species they conquer, and sometimes they enslave creatures to serve as workers in sorg shipyards, constantly churning out new warships at the cost of stripping conquered star systems bare of resources.

The Reach is not especially near Earth and the sun, but the region is always growing. War-capable sorg scout craft continually search for new locations to bring into the Reach. They are especially interested in star systems rich in machines of extinct prior-world civilizations. At least one such scout craft crashed on Earth and deposited a few surviving sorg in the Beyond. It's only a matter of time before the stasis effect that protected the occupants during the crash fades or is turned off by explorers, releasing the sorg (and edou, the dangerous vermin most sorg vessels harbor) into the Ninth World.

The Beyond, page 174

SORG WARBREAKER 5 (15)

An open shell reveals a sorg's true form: a mass of muscular tissue supporting a beaked mouth frilled with many tendrils.

A sorg's massive bivalve shell is twice as large as a human. Normally closed, the shell is encrusted with tech items (including levitation devices), weaponry, and decorations denoting the individual's grand achievements. When necessary, dexterous manipulator tendrils squeeze from inside the closed and pressurized shell.

Motive: Expand territory, conquer others
Environment: Almost anywhere
Health: 20
Damage Inflicted: 5 points
Armor: 4
Movement: Immediate; long when flying or in microgravity
Modification: Speed defense as level 4 due to size; knowledge of tactics and strategy as level 6.
Combat: The average sorg is equipped with shell-mounted weaponry able to target foes at long range with detonations that inflict 5 points of damage to the target and all creatures within immediate range. Alternatively, a sorg can attack a single foe within long range with a ray that paralyzes the target for about a minute,

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which is useful for capturing enemies and live food. High-status sorg usually have more potent weapons mounted on their shells.

Usually, the only time a sorg opens its shell is to eat a paralyzed, but still living, creature. Sorg encountered in the empty void are often in command of advanced space vessels.

Interaction: Even among their own kind, sorg do not recognize an inherent right to happiness, freedom, or life. All of these must be earned, and the weak pay the ultimate price. So even though sorg have translation technology built into their shells, negotiating with one is difficult. However, if outsiders can win a concession from a particular sorg, it is usually good to its word. Other sorg may feel differently.

Use: A sorg vessel claims salvage rights to a site the PCs are currently exploring. It claims those rights by dint of sending in a sorg battle company to clear out the characters and any other resistance.

Loot: A sorg shell can be salvaged for at least one cypher and sometimes an artifact.

GM Intrusion: The sorg attacks the character with an auto-turret mounted on its shell during the same round in which it makes its normal attack. The auto-turret makes three attacks as one action and inflicts 4 points of damage on each hit.

EDUM 2 (6)

Edou are voracious and will eat anything. They are particularly fond of the succulent meat inside a sorg shell and will break off hunting (or even eating) other prey if there is an opportunity to eat sorg instead.

Edou are no larger than half a foot (15 cm) in diameter, but they tend to move in swarms of dozens or hundreds. Edou have a thick exoskeleton that resembles the dusty crust of a comet, several sets of pincers perfect for mooring to spacecraft hulls or the hard shells of their favored prey, a flexible proboscis with a drill-like head, and cavities for expelling vapor jets that allow them to move through the void with precision and speed.

For all their power and mastery, sorg can't seem to keep edou from infesting their ships, which indicates a deeper level of edou-on-sorg parasitism than the shelled creatures care to admit.

Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Anywhere sorg have ventured

Health: 6

Damage Inflicted: 2 points

Armor: 2

Movement: Immediate; short when flying or in microgravity

Modifications: Speed defense as level 3 due to small size.

Edum is singular; edou is plural.

Combat: An edum can attack with its pincers and inflict 2 points of damage. It automatically clamps onto a creature it hits and remains attached until pried off (a Might task) or killed. The round after an edum attaches to a target, it inserts its proboscis (ignores Armor) and automatically feeds for 2 points of Speed damage; this damage continues in each subsequent round it remains attached.

Five or more edou can coordinate their attack, acting like a swarm. When they do, they make a single attack against one target as a level 4 creature and deal 4 points of damage. However, of more concern to the target is that following a swarm attack, five or more edou are now attached to it, and each must be killed or pried off individually before the target is sucked dry of life.

Edou are void-adapted creatures.

Interaction: Edou are not mindless, but they are hungry swarm predators, with little fear for their individual continuity.

Use: A dealer in strange food has a special crystal cage filled with snapping edou. The dealer says the creatures taste wonderful but are vicious little things. She explains that she found them when they emerged from the side of a curved ruin at the center of a nearby crater.

GM Intrusion: One character successfully pries off an attached edum. Unfortunately, the scuttling creature slips loose and manages to attack another character with surprise, which increases the difficulty of that character's Speed defense roll by two steps.

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TERREDEL 4 (12)

Ellaticurid, page 40

"Vanished like a terredel" is an ellaticurid saying referring to something that disappears quickly and unexpectedly.

Naharrai, page 38

Running across the grasslands of Naharrai, a pack of terredel can be a terror to behold. These predators hide in the tall grass and burst out to bring down prey too slow to escape. In addition to their savage attack, they can cloud a foe's mind, making them seem to be attacking from behind or to the side even as they lunge from straight ahead.

Motive: Hungers for flesh
Environment: Naharrai plains and hills
Health: 15
Damage Inflicted: 4 points
Armor: 1
Movement: Long
Modifications: Runs and jumps as level 5.
Combat: A terredel leaps to attack with its mandibles. Against more challenging prey, the creatures attack in pairs, making a single attack roll as a level 5 creature that inflicts 6 points of damage.

Each terredel has an inherent psychic ability. Moments before it bites, it strikes its prey with a mental assault (all part of a single action on the terredel's part), which makes the target believe that the attack is coming from a different direction. If the target fails an Intellect defense roll, the difficulty of the Speed defense roll to dodge the attack is increased by two steps.

Ghru, page 41

Interaction: There are rumors that a few ellaticurid individuals have learned to master terredel, training them to be companions, guards, and hunting animals.

Use: A sudden cry for help comes from the deep grass. If the PCs investigate, they find a lone ghru beset by a pack of terredel. If rescued, the ghru will take the characters back to his community so they can be rewarded.

Loot: The brain of a terredel contains a chemical compound. If properly treated (a difficulty 5 task for someone with experience or knowledge of such things), the compound can be used as a cypher that restores 4 points to one's Intellect Pool.

GM Intrusion: *The terredel uses its psychic ability defensively. If the character fails an Intellect defense roll, the difficulty of his attacks is increased by four steps.*

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ULAGRA 9 (27)

Big as cities, ulagras are behemoth natives of a sunless world called Xeobrencus.

Like a vast starfish, an ulagra is far swifter and more vital than the slowly creeping, much smaller echinoderms found in some seas of Earth. Measuring about 600 feet (180 m) in diameter, these creatures are like lightning made flesh when storms rage. That's when ulagras stir from happy dreams to race across the waves, looking for prey, ulagra mates, or a chance to dance amid the thundering sprays and mad chaos of a Xeobrencic storm that other native life forms wisely eschew. The energy absorbed and discharged by ulagras during these periods is immense, and through a process not readily understood, it might precipitate psychic transference between an ulagra and a creature on another world—or, on rare occasions, the physical translocation of the ulagra to a different world.

Motive: Seeking new crescendos

Environment: Anywhere on Xeobrencus

Health: 99

Damage Inflicted: 13 points

Armor: 6

Movement: Long

Modifications: Speed defense as level 5 due to size.

Combat: An ulagra can attack every creature within short range with its multitude of arms, and even those who succeed on a Speed defense roll take 6 points of damage. Creatures within immediate range of an ulagra are subject to 7 points of damage each round from its electrical aura. In a round during which it doesn't use its arms to attack, an ulagra can discharge a massive bolt of lightning at any target it can see, inflicting 20 points of damage. After it makes a lightning attack, the ulagra's immediate-range electrical aura is suspended for one minute.

An ulagra active in a storm or a similar electrically charged area regains 2 points of health per round. If the ulagra would otherwise take direct damage from an electrical source, it instead gains the same number of points to its health (even if that increases the ulagra's health above its normal maximum).

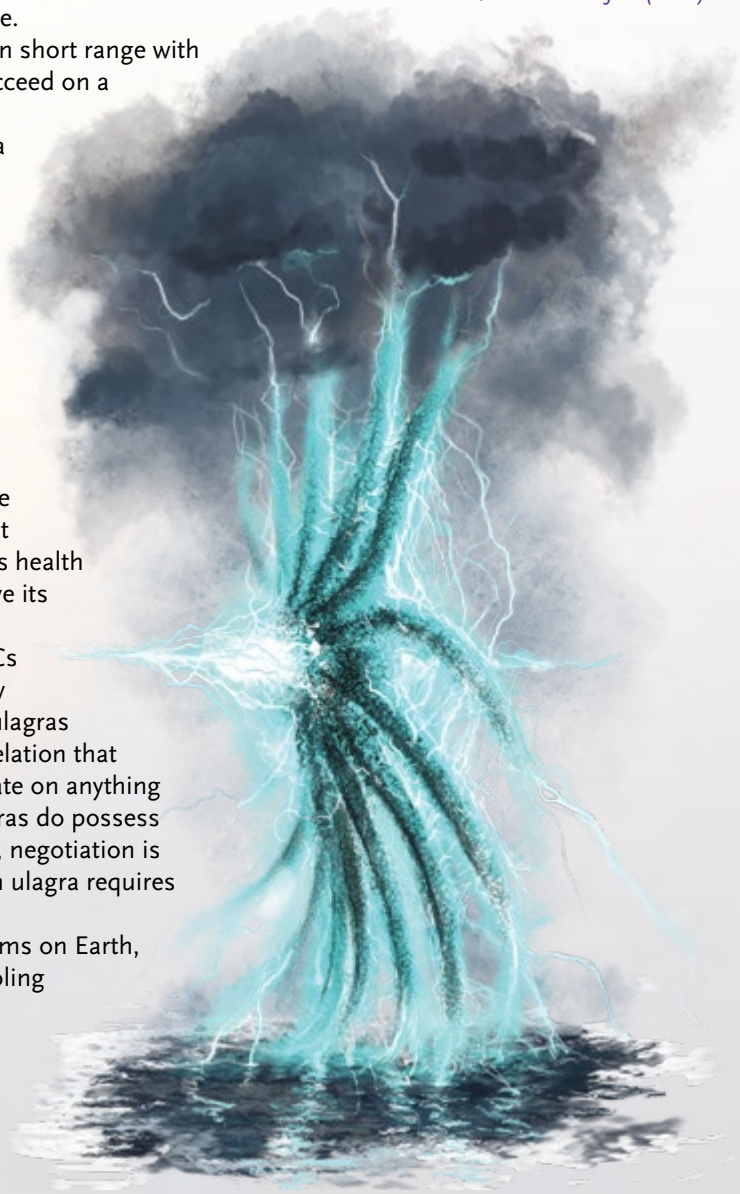
Interaction: Thanks to a Xeobrencus stone, the PCs find themselves inhabiting ulagra bodies. They can interact with one another and with other ulagras as equals, but the primal power and surge of elation that runs through them makes it hard to concentrate on anything other than frolicking across Xeobrencus. Ulagras do possess sapience, and if one's attention can be gained, negotiation is possible. In all other cases, interacting with an ulagra requires some kind of telepathic ability.

Use: During particularly impressive electrical storms on Earth, reports of a vast, many-armed creature gamboling across the seas—and smashing hapless watercraft flat in the process—are a mainstay of the seafolk, who have begun to revere the entity like a minor deity of destruction and the storm.

Psychic transference of ulagra minds with creatures of other worlds usually requires the use of a Xeobrencus stone, though not always.

Xeobrencus stone, page 90

GM Intrusion: *A human-sized character hit by an ulagra's arm attack must attempt a second Speed defense roll or be batted up to half a mile (800 m) and fall from a height of at least 200 feet (61 m).*



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VIMRUTH 7 (21)

Perelande, page 84

Wedoth, page 85

Etteramerith, page 86

Bursting up through the crust that covers the Perelande oceans, a massive vimruth can send a whole group of characters flying in all directions. The vimruth is the most feared predator on Perelande, making both the wedoth and the etteramerith wary of crossing the open crust. The amphibious vimruth sense movement through the crust and will happily attack a wedoth boat as well as a group of creatures on foot. A lone traveler, however, might be safe, as only a starving vimruth would waste the effort on such a small meal.

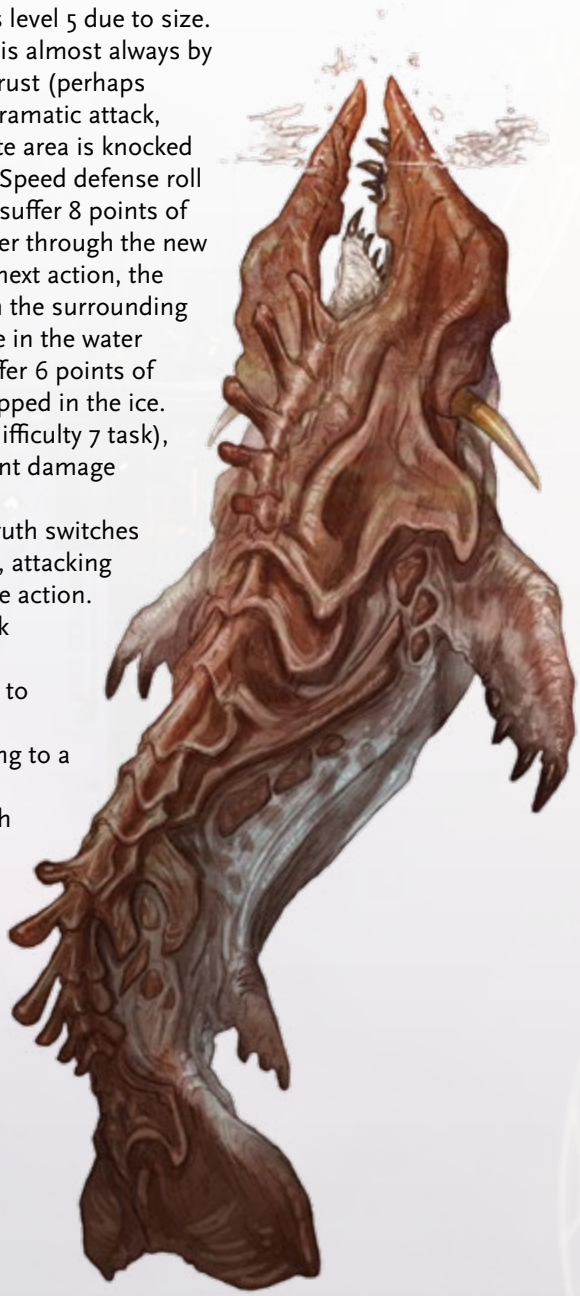
Motive: Hungers for flesh
Environment: Perelande ocean
Health: 35
Damage Inflicted: 8 points
Armor: 2 (or 12 against cold)
Movement: Short
Modifications: Speed defense as level 5 due to size.
Combat: A vimruth's first attack is almost always by surprise, from beneath the crust (perhaps as a GM intrusion). In this dramatic attack, everyone within an immediate area is knocked off their feet. Those failing a Speed defense roll (difficulty 9 due to surprise) suffer 8 points of damage and fall into the water through the new opening in the crust. On its next action, the vimruth drains the heat from the surrounding water, flash-freezing it. Those in the water at the time automatically suffer 6 points of ambient damage and are trapped in the ice. Until they can break free (a difficulty 7 task), they suffer 3 points of ambient damage each round.

After trapping prey in ice, a vimruth switches to more conventional tactics, attacking up to three targets as a single action. Trapped characters are struck automatically.

A vimruth has an additional +10 to Armor against cold.

Interaction: There's just no talking to a vimruth.

Use: The PCs meet some wedoth crossing the crust. The interaction is tense. Suddenly, a vimruth strikes, attacking everyone. If the PCs and wedoth survive by working together, it likely will help improve relations afterward.



GM Intrusion: *A character trapped in the ice was flash-frozen with her head underwater. If she can't get free in three rounds, she begins to suffocate, moving one step down the damage track each round thereafter in which she fails a difficulty 6 Might defense roll.*

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WHARN 8 (24)

Wharns are void-adapted behemoths. If asked, the datasphere responds that wharns are living battle automatons that fought during a prior age, serving as a first line of defense—though against what isn't clear. An age later, wharn descendants now glide through the airless night for centuries at a time, as if dead or deactivated. But don't be deceived. For reasons known only to themselves, these behemoths sometimes light up, open eyes burning with deadly energy, and flex claws of particle-beam fury.

In spite of their ferocious aspect and war-machine heritage, wharns do not destroy every craft (and void-adapted creature) they come across, or even most. Indeed, sometimes a wharn may attempt to initiate communication via various machine channels. But what comes across are usually nonsense sounds and tones, and sometimes, mathematical formulas.

Motive: Defense

Environment: Anywhere floating through the void, often along the periphery of the Phaeton Halo

Health: 33

Damage Inflicted: 10 points

Armor: 5

Movement: Long when flying

Modification: Speed defense as level 6 due to size.

Combat: Most of the time, wharns are inactive and might seem to be tumbling artifacts. In this state, explorers might be able to partly wake one in an attempt to negotiate. However, if a wharn is damaged, or if the passive senses hidden deep in its body wake it to combat for reasons of its own, the creature becomes aggressive. Because of its size, a wharn can attack large vessels, and because of its discerning senses, it can also go after human-sized targets.

A wharn's main weapons are its claws, which can extend in an instant, becoming exotic matter beams able to reach a target within 20 miles (32 km). Unless a target is protected by some kind of force field, the 10 points of damage inflicted ignores Armor.

A wharn's eyes can pierce most forms of camouflage, cloaking effects, and cover that is less than about 700 feet (213 m) thick.

Interaction: If interaction with a wharn can be initiated, the war machine is willing to transmit strange tones and mathematical symbols indefinitely. After at least an hour of such communication, someone attempting to collate the information provided can tease out at least one simple statement, which is "Mozck must be eradicated."

Use: The PCs, attempting to enter a floating ruin or structure somewhere in the night, are distracted when a wharn attempts to destroy that very same ruin or structure.

Loot: A wharn carcass can presumably be salvaged for dozens of cyphers (or more).

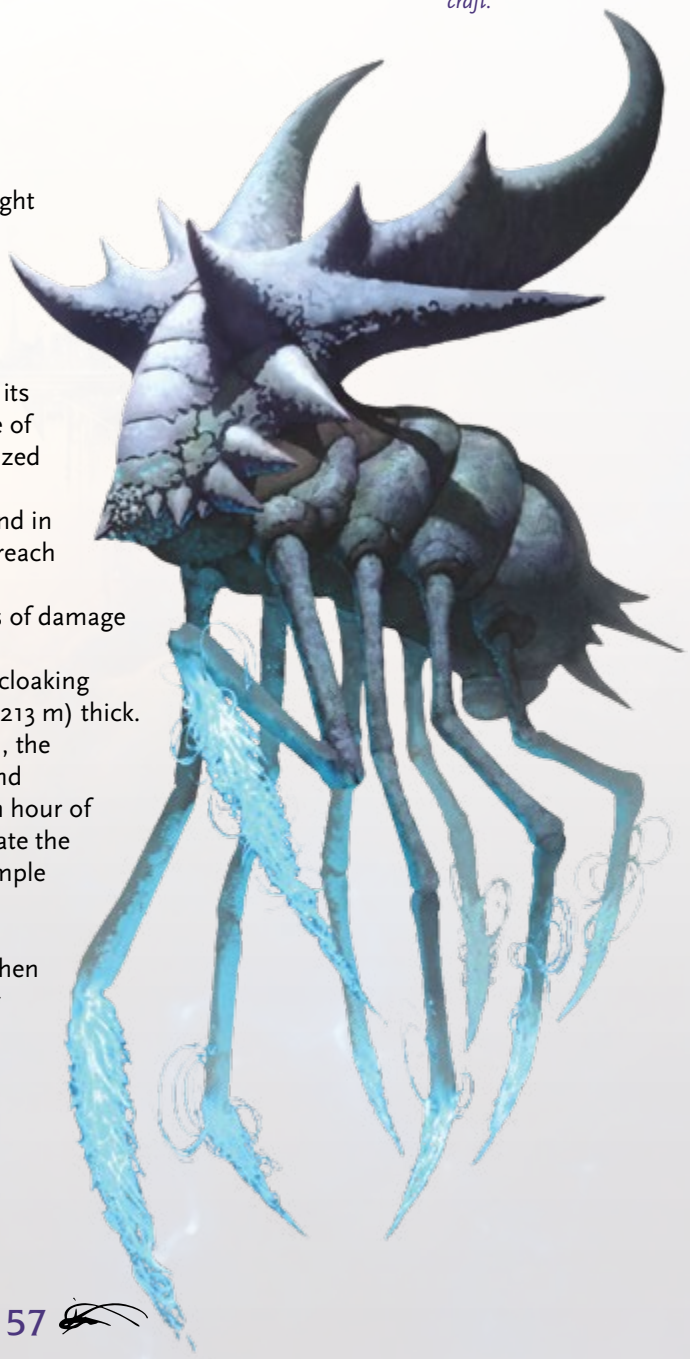
A wharn always activates and attempts to destroy any craft, system, or automaton that has been touched by or is currently infested with Mozck.

Mozck, page 147

For the purposes of combat between vessels (see page 14), treat wharns as level 6.

Phaeton Halo, page 67

GM Intrusion: *The wharn moves unexpectedly, striking the vessel the PCs are traveling in, which has a chance to damage the craft.*



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YLHATH 3 (9)

On Earth, the ylhathi might be thought to be abhumans, but unlike abhumans, there is no evidence that these beings come from human stock originally or have any genetic relationship to humanity at all.

These air-breathing, degenerate cannibals are likely the remnants of a far more sophisticated civilization of the past. Long-lived and semi-intelligent, the ylhathi have a very rudimentary language, strong religious beliefs, and a wide variety of superstitions. Their leaders are religious figures who interpret omens in everything that happens.

Motive: Hungers for flesh
Environment: Caverns beneath the moon's surface
Health: 9
Damage Inflicted: 4 points
Armor: 1
Movement: Short
Modifications: Climb and run as level 4.
Combat: A single ylhath attacks with a crude but vicious melee attack, or perhaps it throws a hefty stone to attack a foe at short range. In a group, however, ylhathi are far more dangerous. Five of them can attack as a single level 5 creature, inflicting 6 points of damage.

Ylhathi leader: *level 5; health 20; Armor 2; inflicts 6 points of damage*

Ylhathi leaders do not engage in this kind of mass attack. A leader always carries a crude implement of religious importance—an icon, a statue, a symbol, or the like. When the leader brandishes the implement, all ylhathi within sight of it are roused and inflict 1 additional point of damage per attack. A group of five roused ylhathi attack as a single level 6 creature, inflicting 8 points of damage.

Interaction: It's difficult to reason with ylhathi, but it is possible to deceive or intimidate them. They fear anything that might seem like a dire omen or an angry message from their gods.

Use: These savage brutes are conducting a bizarre and elaborate religious ritual, and the PCs literally wander right into the middle of it.

GM Intrusion: *Four more ylhathi appear from around the corner and join in the fray.*

Loot: Occasionally, explorers from Earth have found a cypher, an oddity, or an artifact in ylhathi possession. The creatures don't seem to know how to use the devices, but something in their racial memory says they are items of importance.

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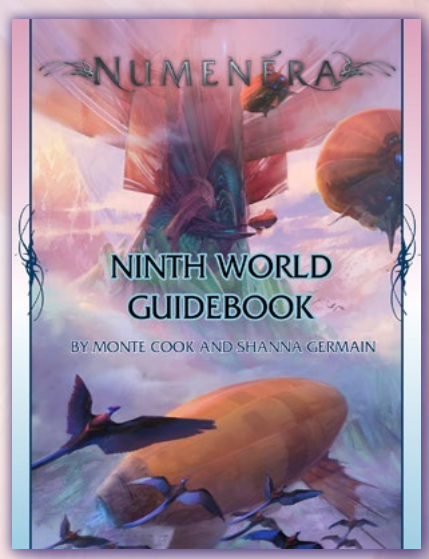

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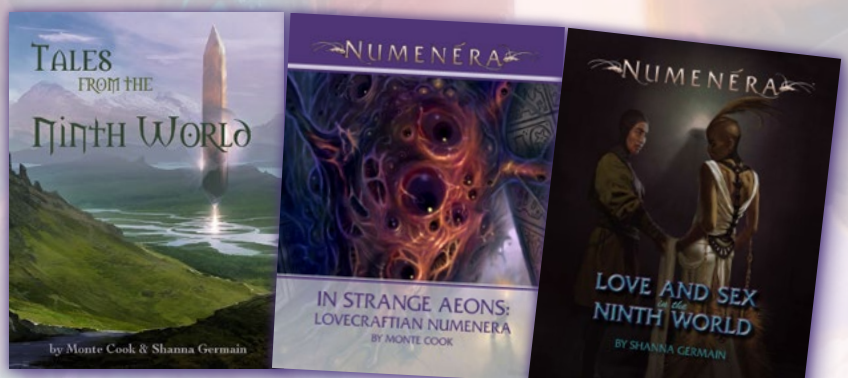

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