

TARTARUS GATE

GM REFERENCE BOOK



SPECIAL RULES

GM REFERENCE

GM – read these, then explain as much as you wish to your players in your own words. They should feel like aspects of the story, rather than additional rules.

RESTLESS

As the action is continuous, Protagonists do not automatically regain Health and Resolve between Chapters. Allow them to regain up to half their total Health and Resolve at your discretion – a group is at their more entertaining when they're battered but on their feet. There can be several story justifications for a rest, including barricading the Hydroponics or Refrigeration Rooms, or even the entrance to the Charnel Corridors if they don't take the hints.

AUGMENTED REALITY (AR)

Augmented Reality allows programmers to upload images and sounds directly into the user's brain, where they experience them as vibrant, over-the-top stimuli. It's very hard to make "realistic" AR programming; attempts to in the past have left users unsettled and confused as their brains jar with the conflicting data. As such, most AR inputs are deliberately and stylistically false and favour bright colours, clean iconography and idealised concepts.

Essentially, it's not possible to "fool" people with AR disguised as real life, but it is *certainly* possible to bombard users with stimuli and confuse them. All the Protagonists, and all of the people in cold storage, have the implants required to experience AR. Disabling these implants requires complex surgery which is outside the scope of this adventure. Some Protagonists have abilities related to AR, and Assisti uses AR in the Break Room.

The Charnel Corridors and Yasin's disguises are NOT AR, and as such, the players won't automatically know what's real or not. They may think it's AR, but realise otherwise. If they want to test Wits (5), they'll realise that quickly, but have no idea of the source/cause of the distortions.

REBIRTH (OPTIONAL)

If one of the Protagonists dies you can declare that they awaken in the body of someone trapped in cold storage – their ghost, energised by the events on board, has possessed an unwilling host. They lose their Gear, and their Toughness and Agility are set to 2. Set their other stats to match what they started the game with. Replace two of their Drives (player's choice) with *ISOLATED* – *reunite with the others* and *COLD* – *find a way to get warm*.

Test Toughness or Smarts (9) to break out of the capsules from the inside: failure inflicts 1 damage on the Protagonist as they injure themselves trying to get through the glass. They can no longer leave the environs of *Charon* without dissipating into nothingness and leaving their host.

This trick only works once per Protagonist, and even then only at your discretion. Don't let players become complacent because they can just "wake up" after dying – find a reason for this not to work again if you need to.





NAZARI, THE SUPERVISOR

Your contact for this work cycle is a cheery – if slightly overworked-looking – man in a crimson suit (as is the fashion for business people in Earth orbit) called Nazari. Contacting Nazari is as easy as using the Meeting Room in the Employee Quarters; he'll appear on the large monitor, although due to the time to broadcast messages to and from Earth orbit, comms can be crackly on occasion.

The Protagonists don't know this, but instantaneous communication with Earth orbit is impossible at this range. Nazari is a digital ghost in service to OBOL, bound to the comms centre on top of the ship.

SPECIAL

POSSESSION

Nazari's soul has been mangled and hacked to make him obedient, but as the rebels spread throughout the ship, he'll become able to project his consciousness into the cold-storage bodies on the lower decks and interact physically with the players. He'll still use this option to further the aims of the OBOL Corporation, although he might be persuaded to change his mind.

This action is never specified in the adventure, but can be introduced at any point to make things more interesting. Use these stats for a body possessed by Nazari:

TOUGHNESS	2
AGILITY	2
SMARTS	2
WITS	2
HEALTH	6

ROLEPLAYING TIPS

Nazari's primary aim is to ensure that the souls reach Tartarus Gate intact and to avoid an interstellar incident, and – as Nazari – you'll **tell the Protagonists whatever they need to hear** to make that happen. If they think that they're in danger (and they are!) offer to unlock the cache of weapons in the cargo hold if they agree to use them to fix the problem. Repeat yourself occasionally; it comes across as learned marketing-speak rather than data corruption in your animus, you hope.

outlining processes, answering basic questions, and cheering them along with cordial greetings. Assisti appears as a ball of blue-white energy that buzzes and deforms as they speak.

Like Nazari, they're a digital ghost. Or, rather, they're a swarm of digital ghost shards – each a fragment of someone's spirit – that functions as a gestalt consciousness. They're not very bright but they're perfectly loyal to the OBOL Corporation. They are polite, pleasant to be around, and do their best to support people.

SPECIAL

POSSESSION

Assisti can, as an absolute last resort – if all the Protagonists are dead or they side with the rebels – disperse their consciousness into twenty or so bodies in cold storage that act as a stuttering, lunatic hive-mind. Stumbling but nightmarishly fast, these enslaved bodies have a blue tint to their eyes, speak with a distorted version of Assisti's voice and are treated as the Crowd of Followers Antagonists (see page 5). They'll do anything they can to make sure that the ship stays under control of the OBOL Corporation.

ROLEPLAYING TIPS

The Protagonists can communicate with the ship's AI, Assisti, by saying "Hello, Assisti!" out loud to activate it. They appear in the subject's vision as an AR projection. The deeper the Protagonists progress into the ship, the less sense Assisti will start making: they can't rationalise the events that are happening on board, and attempt to fill in the gaps with obviously incorrect information. Assisti isn't lying maliciously, **they just don't really understand what's going on but are still compelled to help**.

As Assisti, give surface-level information – make the players get their hands dirty if they want to find out anything in detail.

RANDOM EMPLOYEES

If you want to add additional characters to the adventure – if the Protagonists rescue someone from possession, perhaps, or you want to mess with them by throwing in some innocents, here are a few ideas. Roll one die and use the matching character, or just pick one you like the sound of.

- 1. NOVAK.** Slim, gang tattoos, no thumb on their left hand. Furious and terrified in equal measure. Temperature control specialist.
- 2. MINASSIAN.** Heavy-set, shaven head, both arms are prosthetic from the elbow down. Confused and disorientated. Shuttle pilot.
- 3. DEEQA.** Five feet tall, hair woven in complex braids, metallic canines. Seeks to be protected by the Protagonists. Biologist.
- 4. DRESDEN.** Skeletal build, scabs on extremities, blind. Vomits and draws the attention of enemies. Theologian.
- 5. LAJANI.** Prosthetic eye, loyalty shunt, rotund build. Asks difficult questions. Internal Security agent.
- 6. WILLEMS.** Fit, ashen pallor, rosary beads wound around their hand. Detached and unresponsive, but will follow Protagonists. AI Developer.

ASSISTI

Assisti (pronounced like "Kristy") is the ship's digital assistant. They appear on monitors throughout the ship; the Protagonists can talk to them freely (summoning them with "Hello Assisti!"), although they might not have all the answers they need. Their primary aim is to assist the crew with their basic duties by



ANTAGONISTS

GM REFERENCE



DIGITAL GHOSTS

The rebels can possess the unconscious cold-storage passengers on board *Charon* but are unable to leave the proximity of the ship's server farms unless their spirits are transmitted somewhere else. When possessing a host, the ghost will change the body to look like their own by twisting the meat and bone into a grotesque parody. **Ghosts can voluntarily leave a body that they've inhabited:** the subject will be disoriented from cold storage and unable to be of much use, or they might be left in a completely catatonic state.

The Rebels are led by Dwyer and Yasin. The first time the crew encounters these two they'll be sickly and weak, but this will change as time goes on. If reduced to zero health, their body is killed but they possess another passenger in the bowels of the ship. **Each time they die, they get more dangerous:** increase two of their stats by 1 to a maximum of 4; increase their health by 6; and pick a monstrous change from the list below.

Night-black eyes that trail smoky shadows in the air

Elongated limbs

Bony talons instead of fingers

An extra foot of height

Spectral serfs in chains surrounding them that do their bidding

Chains pushed through their flesh

Gory horns growing from their temples

Needle-teeth

Ghostly winds buffet everything around them

Digital Ghosts cannot possess dead bodies: the target must be living, and preferably unconscious, for them to make an entry. The only way you can permanently kill a Digital Ghost is to find their mind on the servers and delete it – or destroy the servers themselves, at great cost to the OBOL Corporation.



DWYER

Digital Ghost. A broad-shouldered man with long, unwashed black hair. His throat is slit.

Dwyer led a bloody revolution on Earth against the OBOL Corporation. It worked, for a while, but treachery and espionage from the Corps saw him defeated, tried for his crimes, and executed in secret. His digital ghost, along with the ghosts of everyone in his country who dared defy their corporate overlords, has been stored on hard drives and will be imprisoned in eternal electronic torment at the Tartarus Gate penitent storage facility.

He has no intention of letting that happen. From beyond the grave, his spirit has manifested in the bowels of the spaceship *Charon*, and he has raised his army – quite literally a phantom of what it once was, but still **filled with a bitter desire for vengeance**. He will hunt down and kill any OBOL employee he sees with great enthusiasm.

TOUGHNESS	2
AGILITY	2
SMARTS	2
WITS	2
HEALTH	14

GEAR

HOOKED SPEAR

An iconic weapon; the symbol of the revolution. Deals one extra damage in melee combat, or can be thrown to make a ranged attack. You can reach with it and hook people off balance.

The rebellion's icon and flag are based on his weapon. Dwyer drags it along ductwork and railings to signal his approach each time the Protagonists meet him. If he dies, the spear remains alongside his twisted body, and Protagonists can use it. The next time he appears, the Protagonists' version will rust and corrode into nothingness and Dwyer will bang a revitalised version along the ducts again to let them know he's there.

ROLEPLAYING TIPS

As Dwyer, **you're in charge, you're angry, and you're excited at the opportunity to get revenge** on the people who executed you. Far from a mindless killing machine, you take every opportunity to separate your targets before hunting them down. When you talk to people – which is rare – you do so to intimidate, not to gain understanding.

You know what the OBOL Corporation does to rebels after corporate wars: they forcibly download their consciousnesses and then transport them to Tartarus Gate, a digital Hell. Sometimes you get confused and think you're still fighting back on Earth, and that maybe you can win this time if you're strong enough.



YASIN

Digital Ghost. Body bloated as if drowned.

Dwyer's chief speaker and diplomat who turned a nation of corporate serfs into hot-blooded revolutionaries. A charmer who's very willing to talk to the Protagonists in order to get what they want; and an excellent liar.

TOUGHNESS	1	HEALTH	10
AGILITY	2		
SMARTS	2		
WITS	3		

SPECIAL

ILLUSION

Yasin can hide their tells and appear as a normal person; this costs 1 point of health, and hurts. If they take further damage, or if they wish to end it early, the illusion ceases.

As written, there are no living characters in this adventure (Protagonists aside) – everyone the characters meet is a ghost in some form or another. If you decide to include any additional characters, you can at any point deduct one health from Yasin and declare that they were in disguise as that character the entire time.

ROLEPLAYING TIPS

Lie. Use your Illusion ability to get in good with the players, then take their gear and sabotage their plans. Give them false information about the situation that leads them into danger. Don't attack anyone unless you're discovered. If the Protagonists unveil your true identity, strike as hard as you can and turn up as someone else next time. Mess with their heads.

Yasin is loyal to Dwyer, but is motivated by escaping Hell rather than revenge. They'll compromise with the players if they think they can be trusted, but it'll take some convincing..

CROWD OF FOLLOWERS

A swarm of low-level digital ghosts.

Dwyer rallied a nation together and led a revolt against the owners of his country. His Followers are the digital shadows of the people who pledged their allegiance to him in life. Confused and angry, these phantoms inhabit the bodies preserved in cold storage. Unlike Dwyer and Yasin, the Followers aren't able to come back with increased power after being killed. There are enough of them that this shouldn't really make a difference, though.

Followers look *wrong*. They move with jerky, badly-coordinated movements and many of them are leaking blood from the nose, eyes and mouth. They can talk, and do talk to one another (or scream at the Protagonists) but they struggle to speak through their unfamiliar mouths.

TOUGHNESS	1	HEALTH	6
AGILITY	2		per
SMARTS	2		member of
WITS	2		the group

SPECIAL

SWARM

Inflicting 6 damage to the group of Followers "kills" one of the meat-puppets, and leftover damage can be spread throughout the group however you like. Attacks that affect multiple targets (explosions, gouts of flame, shotgun blasts) inflict 1 extra damage against a Crowd of Followers.

GEAR

Whatever they can grab to function as weapons: shards of glass from their smashed cryochambers, lengths of pipe ripped from walls, chair-legs, and work tools. If a Protagonist grabs one, it deals 1 extra damage to their next successful attack but then it breaks.

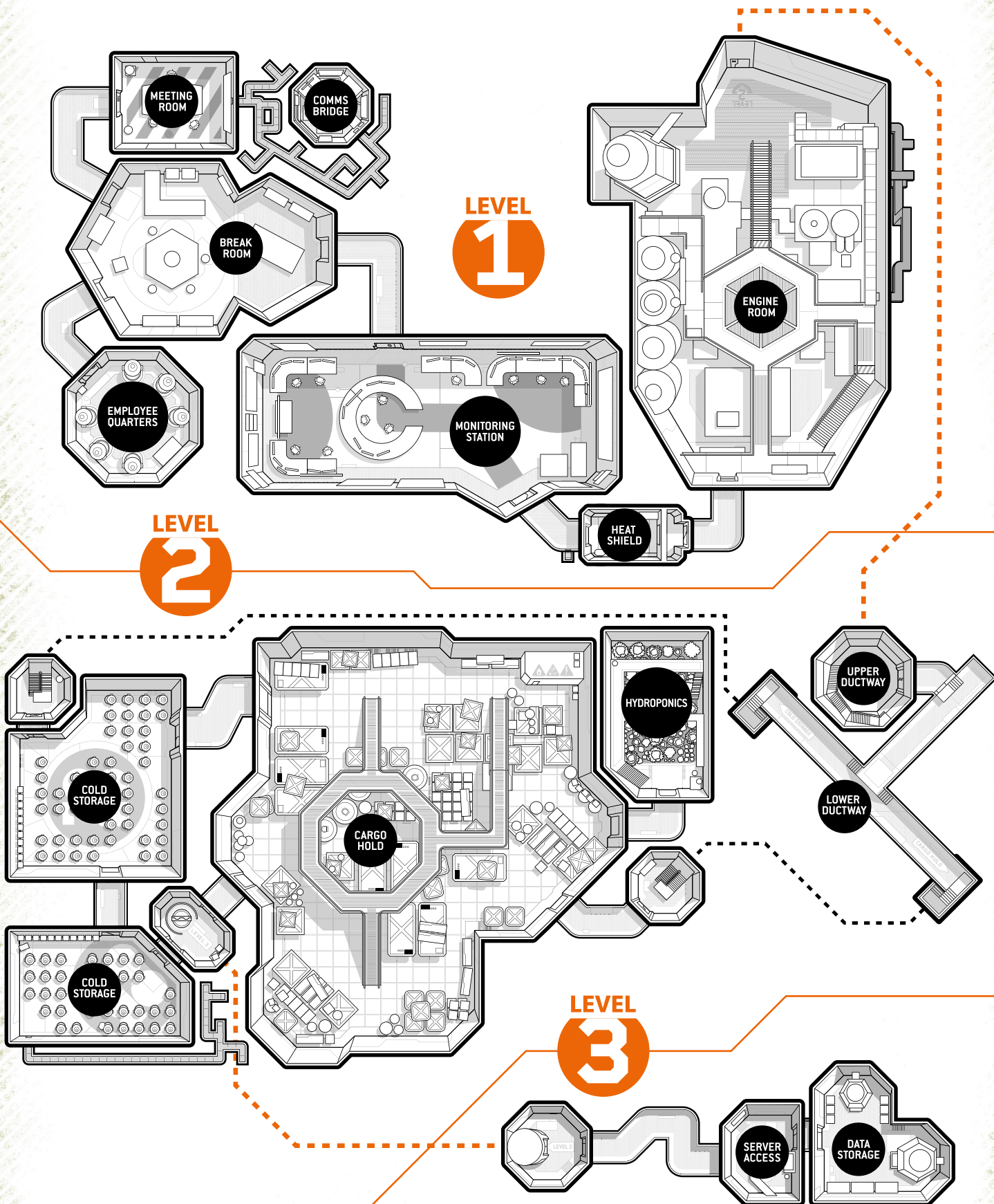
ROLEPLAYING TIPS

As a Follower, you're barely hanging on to consciousness; **your body is sluggish and strange and not your own**. You've been told that, unless you find a way to steer the ship and defeat the Protagonists, you're destined for a lifetime trapped in a digital Hell. You're not a zombie, and you're not an idiot, but you're not used to your body yet and you make mistakes often.



ADVENTURE MAP

GM REFERENCE



LEVEL
3
ALTERNATE

