

LEGENDARY PLANET



CONFEDERATES OF THE SHATTERED ZONE

BY RICHARD PETT



CONFEDERATES OF THE SHATTERED ZONE

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SPECIAL ELECTRONIC FEATURES

We've hyperlinked this product internally from the Table of Contents and externally with links to the official Pathfinder Reference Document as well as d20PFSRD. If it is in the core rulebook, we generally didn't link to it unless the rule is an obscure one. The point is not to supersede the game books, but rather to help support you, the player, in accessing the rules, especially those from newer books or that you may not have memorized.

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WHAT YOU WILL FIND INSIDE LEGENDARY PLANET: CONFEDERATES OF THE SHATTERED ZONE

Confederates of the Shattered Zone follows the heroes of the Legendary Planet Adventure Path as they continue their search for a way home. Emerging from the events of *Dead Vault Descent*, they are told of four mysterious gates that could be the key to returning to their own world. The task is not an easy one, though, as each gate lies in four different—but equally hostile—corners of the Shattered Zone. The environment itself is deadly, but the infighting of the area's fractious factions are even more so. All the while an ancient evil reaches from beyond the gates, waiting for those with the touch of destiny to come and set it free. There are secrets of the Patrons at stake, and the rewards are great, but first they must survive the intrigues of the *Confederates of the Shattered Zone*.

This adventure continues on from *Dead Vault Descent* with the assumption that the PCs have already experienced that adventure and those previous. Their mythic powers continue to grow as they set into motion a series of inexorable events before finally bringing them to a choice that will decide the fate of the entire Shattered Zone—and perhaps the galaxy. *Confederates of the Shattered Zone* continues the tour of diverse alien worlds with this conglomeration of drastically different asteroids; the Shattered Zone in particular plays to the theme of an industrial dystopia with a liberal dose of horror. Factions here rise and fall and morality runs in shades of dark grey. From the sadistic Contraptors to the fanatical soldiers of Purity, the adventure explores a world of deceit, moral compromise, and necessary sacrifices, promising a gripping gaming experience.

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Neil

CONFEDERATES OF THE SHATTERED ZONE

She feels them coming, these warm strangers; far, far across the empty death of space. They are her hope, her salvation, her children. The God-Seer smiles as they approach. Soon, she knows, they will drive away the infestation whose digging and machinery and flesh reviles her, maddens her, and her prison will become her past. The prison that has been her jail for all eternity, it seems. Soon, she will take the strangers to her soul and devour their sweet agonies, wearing their misery as a perpetual cloak as she leads her million kyton children to freedom...

ADVANCEMENT TRACK

Confederates of the Shattered Zone is designed for four characters. The characters begin the adventure at 11th level, and by the time they have opened one gate they should be 12th level. PCs should attain 13th level when they reach Zenith, and should be 14th level when the adventure is completed.

Once, the Shattered Zone was a planet, one with a rotten core that splintered long ago. The Patrons hid something deep within the planet's broken soul: knowledge they did not wish to fall into the hands of the Principalities but dare not destroy. It was, in essence, their story; a living machine that remembered and dreamed in the long emptiness of forever, waiting to tell its tale. As their battles failed and defeat became inevitable, the Ancients scattered their knowledge deep in far-flung places where they hoped it would remain until the time came for them to rise and fulfill their destiny.

The Ancients hid their secret in plain sight, behind a kyton prison—a place few would ever dare to visit. The Patrons swarmed this planet with kytons, including a great queen—an immortal seer capable of nurturing their menace through eternity.

And now at last those prison doors are beginning to crack; salvation for the kyton seer is approaching in the guise of the PCs.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The adventure begins with the PCs seeking a way home with their benefactors among the Bellianic Accord on Argosa. They are directed toward the Shattered Zone and the hope of a gate that can return them to their home planet. Unfortunately, there is a problem with reaching the Shattered Zone; the gate is owned by the the Blood Coterie slavers of Argosa, known as the Thanex, and they are not known for their generosity. To gain access to the Shattered Zone Gate at Beacon, the PCs must somehow win the favor of one of the gate's keepers—the repulsive and brain-hungry **Ha'vzeer-Niim-Chaakoor-Hasaam'm-Zhin-no-Chiir-Vas-asch**, an etiquette-obsessed neh-thalgggu mesmerist.

The gateway brings the PCs to the massive industrial asteroid of Beacon—a satellite that is a single, vast city—one part of nearly ten thousand fragments of the broken world now known as the Shattered Zone. Lit by gaslights and choked by coal, Beacon is a hub for the dirty, clammy auttaine traders that vie for the immense resources that lurk within its asteroids, all owned or claimed or stolen by one of the twenty-seven companies that use Beacon as the sweaty backdrop to their endless battles.

Lurking behind the locals' squabbles is a powerful group allied to the Hegemony called Purity. A vile purist group who grip the arms and fleshy tendrils of the various groups



that claim rights on Beacon, Purity controls everything that happens in the Zone. Of late their secretly limited resources have been partly focussed on locating a trove of Ancient knowledge said to lurk on a distant outer asteroid of the Zone known simply as Asteroid 113, an asteroid with a dead gate, one of four such gates in the Shattered Zone.

Isolated Asteroid 113 is the old soul of the planet, and a seemingly limitless source of one of the other great wealths of the Zone—archaeological objects made by the Patrons and Ancients. Occasionally these get unearthed by some lucky miner who never has to work again, and the tales come back to Beacon.

Unfortunately, Asteroid 113 also has a terrible reputation for danger—it is home to a foul kind known as kytons. The kytons have a reputation across the boundaries of space and time as taking pleasure and sustenance from misery. Those few who have ventured to 113 and escaped speak of a prison, a vast prison where the kyton have been brutalizing each other for countless centuries under the instruction of a bloated, terrible queen.

The prison is a deliberate mask by the Patrons to cover the true secret of the Shattered Zone: the location of the vast repository of knowledge so far below the surface of Asteroid 113 that even the God-Seer of the kyton herself—a mythic termagant kyton—only guesses is near. In truth, the kyton wants only one thing: release from her eternal captivity. She has felt the PCs' approaching—she has dreamed of them and begins to call to them, speaking in disturbing nightmares of arousal and escape. She has seen visions of them resurrecting the dead gates linking to Asteroid 113, seen the gates open and her million followers flee through them to begin a new dominion.

Already the kyton has felt the touch of strangers arriving—agents of the Hegemony are digging at the surface of the asteroid, and beginning to descend. Although ostensibly led by the Hegemony, and brimming with industrial golems and soldiers, two Purity officers lead this dig to find the old soul of the planet: the Iron Lady, Aspa Corrosa, and the darkly gifted Commander Dotan Roth. In truth, Roth is the mastermind—the evil genius who senses what lies below the kyton prison's skin. Dotan is close to being mythic himself—when the PCs arrive the Purity party are almost wiped out, but agonizingly close to Roth's goal of finding what lies within Asteroid 113.

First, the PCs must reach the asteroid. The PCs learn that as well as the dead gate on the almost mystical Asteroid 113, there are 3 other such gates, all marked with curious sigils and alien writings that they recognize from their own experiences with the scavenged codex. As soon as the PCs set eyes on these alien writings they become aware that the 3 dead gates can be awoken by them to form a link to the fourth gate—the one on Asteroid 113.

Unfortunately, each gate lies a perilous journey away from Beacon and is controlled by an opposing faction of the confederacy. The most remote sits within a Purity base—the very base used to launch the expedition to Asteroid 113. The PCs must use their talents and decide how to undertake these journeys—as friend or foe, by word or sword.

Eventually the PCs arrive at the final gate, and having resurrected it, open up access between it and Asteroid 113, which is exactly what the God-Seer wants. The PCs can slip through the kyton leaving the ways behind them open, thus plaguing the zone with an infestation of the terrible outsiders, or destroy the gate, leaving themselves at the mercy and anger of the terrible God-Seer and her children.

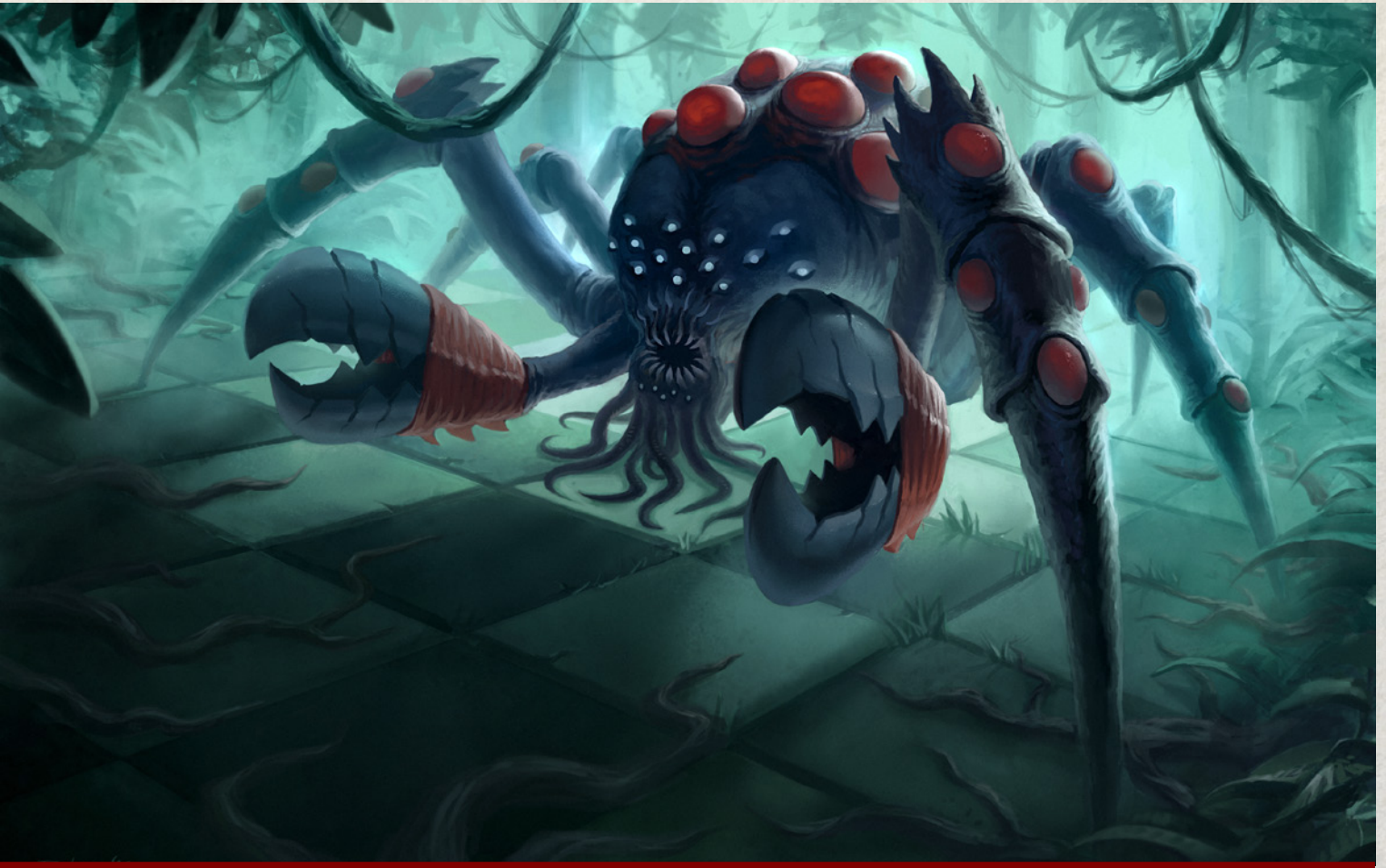
As they venture through the prison, the PCs realize the vast number of their enemy, they also stumble upon the remaining parts of the Purity dig, but during the battle Roth escapes. Confronting the kyton God-Seer, the PCs finally arrive at the entrance to the ancient cyst of knowledge, but the gateway is already open—Roth is within.

Awakened to tremendous power by the knowledge he has attained from the almost divine machine within, the Purity officer unleashes the power of the Patrons on the PCs in the form of blinding white angels. A battle between the PCs and the mythic Roth occurs, using the machine's power to enhance their skills. If the PCs defeat him, they learn the secrets within the cyst, but also that the machine is busy ending its own life so that it cannot fall into the hands of the Hegemony. As it dies and begins an inexorable countdown to its own self-destruction, the PCs realize that they were being manipulated to this point by Relstanna.

INTRODUCTION—NO WAY HOME

After events in the previous adventure *Dead Vault Descent*, the PCs have been forced to return to Zel-Argose after the gate they hoped would take them home failed to do so. They now have little choice but to return to their sponsors and discuss alternative plans.

In truth, more is going on than meets the eye. Relstanna has been far from idle during the PCs previous adventure; she's been carrying out further research of her own, believing the PCs to be the key to a prophecy that proclaims the return and victory of Patrons. At present, however, Relstanna's plan is her own; the Elali believes that the PCs very blessed nature may be the key to unravelling this prophecy, but has chosen not to tell them, afraid of what they may do if they learn the truth too early. Her research has been focussed on a place called the Shattered Zone. Relstanna believes that locked within one of these asteroids is a vast repository of Ancient secrets that could be the key to the whole matter. She has heard rumors that one asteroid contains an Ancient's gate, one that according to myth used to link to 3 others in the Zone; her belief is that once these 3 gates linked to the other, and that that final gate may lead to something of great significance. Unfortunately, the 3 gates are said to be dead—but Relstanna believes they are merely slumbering and can be awakened.



The PCs are free to meet with the Elali at any time; when they do she shares their sorrow about the gate, but promises that this is not the only way into the Weave. Relstanna tells the PCs about the Shattered Zone and 3 gates that link to one, telling them that in one tale she has heard the fourth gate may be controlled to lead anywhere. She believes if the PCs can find this gate and awaken it—possibly through some means associated with the other 3—then they may be able to get home that way.

Unfortunately for the PCs, the only gate able to take them to the Shattered Zone is owned and protected by a powerful member of the coterie—the repulsive and brain-hungry Ha’vzeer-Niim-Chaakoor-Hasaam’m-Zhin-no-Chiir-Vas-asch, an uber-etiquette-obsessed Neh-thalggu hypnotist. The hypnotist is a powerful member of the Thanex—the Blood Coterie, the coterie associated with slave trade on Zel-Argose. The neh-thalggu lives some distance from the gate, which lies within a heavily-protected Thanex slave compound within the Stockyards.

Relstanna tells the PCs that she is happy to speak to the Neh-thalggu on their behalf and arrange a meeting.

PART ONE—AN UNPLEASANT PROPOSAL

The encounter with Ha’vzeer-Niim-Chaakoor-Hasaam’m-Zhin-no-Chiir-Vas-asch is very sandbox in nature—the PCs have the *easier* option of using their charms to try to seduce Ha’vzeer into allowing them access, or may decide on a show of strength. If all else fails, the PCs may seek to bribe their dubious associate, or even force their way through the gate.

Neh-thalggu have a reputation as brain collectors—something anyone who makes a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check is aware of. As detailed above, Relstanna has arranged a meeting with the alien, who dwells within a pocket dimension called the Palace of Awakened Gardens and Breathing Lies (see below), which lies on the finer edges of Morpheum Street.

INFORMATION ABOUT HA'VZEER-NIIM-CHAAKOOR-HASAAM'M-ZHIN-NO-CHIIR-VAS-ASCH

Intelligence (History) and Charisma (Persuasion) checks gather the following information.

DC 15—If there is one curious thing about Ha'vzeer—beyond being a giant alien crab that collects brains—it's her rigid discipline in relation to etiquette. Woe betide anyone unlucky enough to have an audience with her who doesn't pronounce her full name properly every time it is mentioned, or breaks some rule of etiquette so obscure it's not been used for a dozen centuries.

DC 20—Her home is a curious shadow dimension whose entrance lies on the finer edges of Morpheum Street, a drug-addled market that draws addicts. Beyond, is a place known as the Palace of Awakened Gardens and Breathing Lies. It is said to be alive.

DC 25—She has a bit of a reputation for taking the brains of guests who displease her or overly intrigue her, as well as indulging in opium.

THE PALACE OF AWAKENED GARDENS AND BREATHING LIES (CR 15)

The palace is a permanent *magnificent mansion*. The palace follows all the standard rules of a pocket dimension created by the *magnificent mansion* spell; however, it is more attuned to its owner than many such spaces, something that enables its owner (and talented guests) to draw phantoms from its substance.

The entire pocket reflects the aberration's many alien moods—when she feels displeasure the chamber darkens, when she is aroused (if the PCs are intelligent enough to do so) an overpowering, alienmusk envelops the chamber. These effects are not, unless detailed, mechanical unless you wish to make them so.

The palace presently consists of a single large domed circular chamber wreathed in phantom flowers and enveloped by a quasi-real jungle, from within which can be heard insects singing and the growling of a distant phantom storm. Ha'vzeer has worked long and hard to fashion this environment—it is the work of many months, and although her moods offset these effects, the jungle remains in the background of this adventure. If the PCs try to move from this space they quickly see it is a veneer of illusion, characters making a DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) recognize this effect immediately.

Upon entry, the PCs sense something odd about the place, as though they were being *scryed*. The effect is actually the salient spirit of the mansion probing the PCs' minds; the PCs can try to manipulate this incursion in ways detailed below. Characters making a DC 23 Intelligence (Arcana) also recognize this effect and are aware that they too can manipulate the rooms to a certain extent. Doing so without permission from Ha'vzeer is a great break of etiquette and costs the PCs 3 PP (detailed below).

At the heart of this jungle lurks Ha'vzeer, reclined upon a large pile of silk cushions by a simple marble table. Similar cushions are scattered here for guests. Any objects needed for the event (see below) are gathered upon the table, while *unseen servants* rush about, wafting their mistress with great fans and massaging her brains and limbs with heady, expensive oils.

Treasure: Any objects relating to the meeting, including the alien tea ceremony set (worth 1800 gp), and the curious blood marks and papers necessary for the permission to enter the gate, are in a mahogany, flesh and tooth box worth 750 gp. Ha'vzeer draws on a fine gold and bone hookah throughout the encounter, smoking opium. The hookah, which has a glass bowl set with emerald eyes, is worth 2,400 gp.

HA'VZEER-NIIM-CHAAKOOR-HASAAM'M-ZHIN-NO-CHIIR-VAS-ASCH

This is a neh-thalgggu—a revoltingly crab-like, bloated thing that stretches and cracks as she moves her insectoid legs. A lolling snaky tongue flicks across a lamprey mouth formed of crooked carapace teeth, and her back is blistered with fleshy sacks, within which sit at least a dozen brains. As you first stare at this aberration, she stretches backwards, her whole body moaning and cracking before setting into a sinister mass like an alien spider; she makes a sound that might be a giggle or a growl.

Despite her monstrous appearance, Ha'vzeer is an incredibly intelligent, calculating host. She has her own motives and pleasures, which are detailed in the body of the event below. She is also alarmingly petulant; she cheats in the game and deliberately tries to put PCs off. Use this mood as you wish and as detailed below.

HA'VZEER-NIIM-CHAAKOOR-HASAAM'M-ZHIN-NO-CHIIR-VAS-ASCH

Ancient Neh'Thalgggu

Large aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)

Hit Points 200 (16d10 + 112)

Speed 10 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR **DEX** **CON** **INT** **WIS** **CHA**

22 (+6) 16 (+3) 25 (+7) 18 (+4) 16 (+3) 15 (+2)

Skills Arcana +9, Deception +7, Insight +8, Perception +8

PART 1: AN UNPLEASANT PROPOSAL

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 13 (3,900 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The neh-thalggu's spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 19). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *Detect Magic*, *Mage Hand*, *Magic Missile*

3/day each: *Confusion*, *Hideous Laughter*, *Hold Person*, *Irresistible Dance*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Ha'vzeer makes four attacks: two bites and two claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) piercing

Damage, and the creature must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or take 21 (6d6) poison damage.

Claw. *Melee:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Hypnotic Gaze. As a bonus action, Ha'vzeer may gaze at a creature within 30 feet. It gains disadvantage on Wisdom saving throws. This effect lasts until Ha'vzeer selects a new gaze target or it moves more than 30 feet away. Victims of this ability are unaware of the effect.

REACTIONS

Mesmerism (3/day). Through self-hypnosis, Ha'vzeer performs one of the following:

Before a creature makes an attack against her, resolve it against another adjacent creature instead.

Reroll one saving throw when she would otherwise fail.

When she enters dim light or darker, become *invisible* and move up to her speed.

TACTICS

Ha'vzeer's tactics are detailed in the body of the text below.

Gear Ha'vzeer keeps her personal valuables in a fleshy wrap hidden deep within the folds of her carapace. A DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) check is required to locate it, although the PC gains advantage if the alien's body is torn apart and a manual check is made of the flesh remaining. The wrap contains a fully charged *cube of force* kept in a velvet purse, a beautiful snail-shell broach fashioned from platinum, death's head moth charms made of jacinth worth 12,500 gp, the keys to both Thanex gates—both are circular disks about 5 inches in diameter. The first is formed of scoured human bone with a number of interlocking dials like a clock mechanism, the second (the one for the gate to Beacon) is made of scoured emerald glass inlaid with intricate designs depicting fettered figures below a pitiless sun. Both are simple key mechanisms; the first has moving parts, but this is simply for effect. Putting a value on the objects is difficult as the Thanex coterie would do everything in its power to recover them if stolen, and everyone knows that.

Ha'vzeer has six naked tattooed male humans chained to her upper legs by slender silver chains worth 200 gp each. These males dance and amuse the neh-thalggu throughout this and subsequent meetings, although she barely seems to notice them. Massaging her carapace with oils, wafting her with fans and whispering sweet songs in her ears are just three things the slaves do for their mistress.

SEDUCTION, INTIMIDATION OR BRIBERY

The encounter with Ha'vzeer is detailed here assuming the PCs attempt—at least initially—to barter in a diplomatic way with her. It may, however, fall into a full combat—if it does, don't worry, there are consequences that are dealt with later in this section and beyond.

Any character with an Intelligence score of 16+ gains her immediate attention (you can assume the neh-thalggu notices it on an Insight check unless that PC takes pains to appear stupid). Ha'vzeer has been told by prophets that she is but a single fine mind from achieving nirvana and becoming yah-thelgaad. She immediately begins to paw and drool at the head of the PC in question, extolling its fine virtues and unique capacity, while going into almost sexual raptures about its quality and potential. She turns to the other PCs present and makes an immediate offer of 50,000 gp worth of magic items, to be constructed to the PCs' specifications and delivered within 13 days, for the PC's brain. Brain first—magic after, but she is happy to sign a Thanex document to honour the agreement if the PCs insist. If they press the deal, PCs can gain access to the gate as often as they wish. If the PCs refuse, she arranges for the PC in question to be attacked later in the adventure to secure her brain anyway (see Part Two for more details).

A suggested simple outline of events is proposed to enable to you to run the encounter. Although provided with a mechanic, run the encounter as a roleplay event and don't be afraid to award mechanical points for great roleplay—in fact you should consider awarding more for that. The mechanic is an award or removal of Persuasion Points (PP)—if the PCs gain a certain number they may not only gain access to the gate but potential rewards. The events that make up this encounter are detailed below.

A FORMAL EVENING WITH AN ALIEN BRAIN EATER

Although the general encounter with the alien brain collector and the gentle (and not so gentle) diplomatic jousting that occurs should be memorable, it is the interaction of her beloved game that is the focus of this short event. This peculiar game is also in to give the PCs a taste of the final battle between themselves and Dotan Roth in the great chamber at the end of the final chapter of this adventure.

Firstly—and most importantly—her name is pronounced *Ha'vzeer-Neem-Chäkoor-Hasäm'm-Zheen-no-Chir-Vas-äsh*. Pronouncing it wrongly is a grave insult to the PCs host and would-be-ally. Every time the PCs say her name incorrectly,

assign 1 negative PP. For the first 5 times they say her name properly add 1 PP for each time it is correctly pronounced.

You can handle the pronunciation of her name in one of two ways: require a simple skill check—either DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion or Performance)—or by asking your players to say it. If they say it properly they gain any rewards on offer, if they fail they can cover their tracks with a skill check.

Throughout the event Ha'vzeer uses her spells often. Some of these (such as *confusion*) may lead to injury, but to neh-thalgggu such spells are merely jests. A character making a DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check knows this. She expects to be the subject of spells back, but if any of these are directly offensive the encounter immediately becomes violent.

Ha'vzeer uses the following spells in the encounter—*confusion*, *hideous laughter*, *hold person*, *irresistible dance*. She uses these whenever she wishes to put off the PCs' attempts at impressing her by way of a special test.

If combat occurs and she overpowers the PCs, she takes what magic items she wishes and sends them back humiliated to their sponsors. If she is overpowered, she hands the key over under duress. If the PCs kill her they are likely to find the gate key and can use it to locate the gate to the Shattered Zone, but will have to forge papers (DC 30 Linguistics check) or break in. However, these outcomes make the PCs enemies of the Thanex coterie, consider what vengeance such a group might seek and deliver it accordingly during the adventure.

LET THE EVENING COMMENCE

When the PC's arrive, the neh-thalgggu is reclining on a mound of cushions; she behaves provocatively (something only noticed on a DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check and worth 2 PP if mentioned to her) and speaks in excited, rasping bursts. She has an annoying habit of wagging her tongue excitedly across her teeth when she thinks she has got one over the PCs. If the PCs have brought gifts, award them 2 PP for magic that is Rare or rarer, or the same for 100 gp's worth of opium or similar powerful and addictive drugs.

Laid before her are three covered dishes; a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notes that within one something moves and squeals and purrs. These light repasts are uncovered by *unseen servants* whenever you wish. The first dish contains segments of cerebriic fungi brain, and the second a curious soup within which float sherbet-flavored living starfish. The final dish is a rare delicacy: one screaming kittencrab for each PC present. Kittencrabs look like gobstopper-sized balls of carapace within which lurk small balls of fur that squeal like kittens (hence the name) and taste delicious. Offering their portion to the host is the height of ill-manners and costs 4PP if suggested. Anyone making a Charisma (Persuasion) check (DC 22) realizes this is a breach in etiquette.

If they eat one the PC must make a Diplomacy check (DC 25) to impress their host (1 PP) by eating it properly (biting open-mouthed and dribbling some of the contents down

ones' chin). Failing the check costs 1 PP. Not eating the food is an insult worth -2 PP. Unfortunately, the kittencrabs make an alarming, yowling noise when crunched, and continue to do so of several seconds after being swallowed. After introductions—which gives the PCs as a whole a chance to make a single Diplomacy check (DC 30 for 1 PP)—she gets down to business, asking the PCs what she can do for them. She is aware of the PCs' sponsors and asks a few innocent but barbed questions. She tells the PCs he does not like or trust their allies but is sure the PCs must have good motive to use them, so she will listen to what they have to say as etiquette requires.

At this point she pointedly asks some of the PCs what they think of the others. The PCs can make a Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check depending on whether they are speaking the truth or not. If the answers are honest the check gains advantage. If the Persuasion check exceeds 15 or the Deception meets or exceeds Ha'vzeer's passive Insight, Ha'vzeer chuckles and then asks the others PCs what their friends' best talents are—again use a Deception or Persuasion to arrive at the answer with the same checks above. For each check that succeeds award the PCs 1 PP. At this point—as she does often—Ha'vzeer is simply playing with the PCs.

After this brief discussion she calls for the tea ceremony to commence. Over the next half hour seventy-four vessels, utensils and objects are brought forth. The tea ceremony in an obscure and ancient neh-thalgggu ritual, and is completed by a single DC 22 Charisma (Performance) check by each PC over the course of an hour. The check is worth 2 PP, or -1 PP on a fail. The tea in question is rarest Koh-Froo tea grown on plantations in a distant world known as the Za, and fed by ground human carcasses. PCs making a DC 22 Intelligence (History or Nature) check are aware of its source; mentioning it is worth 4PP.

Finally, Ha'vzeer asks the PCs if they would join her in her game—becoming agitated and excited immediately. If the PCs' refuse the neh-thalgggu becomes angry, the mood in the chamber darkens, and unless the PCs reconsider the alien sulks. Unless the PCs immediately think again, go to the end of this event and fail the PCs.

The game is known as the sensoria id abstracta—a distraction she uses to amuse herself and one opponent. In essence, as the PCs may have already noticed, the entire pocket dimension is attuned to the aberration, to the point where she can draw phantoms from the air and give them flesh. These phantoms are temporary, however; they lack substance and are no more real than illusions.

Ha'vzeer uses the sensoria to create her own playful art and give it flesh and bone and song, enjoying a neh-thalgggu game with certain guests. The sensoria gives your players a chance to express their imaginations, or to simply play along and let Ha'vzeer win. Losing to the alien is a good idea, but not trying or failing to bluff her is not. If the PCs deliberately lose, the duelling PC (see below) must successfully roll Charisma (Deceptions) against the alien's Insight; being discovered

PART 1: AN UNPLEASANT PROPOSAL

lying is a terrible breach of etiquette, worth double the penalty involved.

Bear in mind that Ha'vzeer cheats throughout the game, throwing spells at opponents and their creations; however, unless physically harmed, she takes any counter cheating well, if crossly.

The game involves the two competitors using the mansion's consciousness to fashion creatures to fight. Ha'vzeer summons up a swollen creature consisting of tongues and orifices and engorging, bloating sacks of flesh that pulls itself along on feminine arms ending in human heads with a dozen mouths.

CHAOS BEAST

CR 9

XP 9,600

hp 142 (use Bone Devil stats, SRD)

One PC can try to use the mansion to summon something using their mind, or summon one creature herself through magic. Of course magical creatures only exist for a short time, but those created by the palace in the palace last until destroyed or dismissed. If the PC tries using the id within the room, she can make either an Arcana check. For each 4 points of the check the PC may create a creature as summoned by a spell of that spell level, so a check of 24 creates a creature using a 6th level spell slot, a DC 32 check 8th and so on. Such creations are permanent here until destroyed or dismissed.

Have fun with low checks or the unusual way the things are formed. Creatures thus created are flaccid, weak, and frightened; they may cry or cough or wheeze or be an odd color—or all the above.

The summoned creatures made by the room look to their creators for mental instruction only once, leaving the creator free to pursue other actions and require no concentration to maintain; directly attacking a summoned creature is a grotesque cheat, costing 6 PP.

Ha'vzeer changes the beasts' form several times during combat, making it a likeness of all the PCs' faces in a single ball of angry teeth, a rippling mass of skin containing impossibly jagged bones that tear out with whale-song, or a screaming mass of fur, hair and mouths. This takes no action for her.

The game ends when one creature wins, and is worth 6 PP if the PCs' lose, -6 if they win.

AND SO THE RESULT

If the PCs get less than zero PP, Ha'vzeer offers the PCs access via the gate for one trip, but wants something in reward—the living brain of a sentient creature with hit dice in excess of 13 or an Intelligence or Wisdom score of 20 plus, or a Very Rare magic item or rarer.

If the PCs get between zero and nine PP, the neh-thalggu offers the PCs access to the gate and papers to allow a single return journey. She arranges for the PCs to have access through when they wish.

If the PCs score ten or more PP she tells the party how impressed she is with them and their talents, and invites one PC to come back the day after for a reward. At this event (which is for the PC alone) the Neh-thalggu lays on a special feast of things she thinks humans may like. Have fun playing on her alien idea of what pleasure might be, and use your knowledge of your players to make the event memorable. At the end of the feast she offers the PC the same reward as above, but also has a special gift for them from the coterie: a clockwork golem.

CLOCKWORK GOLEM

CR 10

XP 5,900

hp 178 (Use Stone Golem stats, SRD)

The golem is loyal, but somewhat dilapidated and prone to malfunction. It will fail the PCs when they need it most if they become overly reliant on it.



BREAKING THROUGH THE GATE

It's quite possibly that the PCs may fall foul of the neh-thalguu to the point where any kind of cooperation is impossible. In this case be prepared for the PCs to decide on a more direct approach and head for the gate without permission. This is a very valid approach—particularly for PCs who may find the whole concept of bartering with the Thanex impossible to swallow. This should be a difficult but not impossible proposition that may require a bit more work on your part. The slave compound is only sketchily detailed and is designed to keep slaves in their thousands in, so security should be very tight.

Of course, the aftermath of such an outrage should be far, far worse than the difficulty of breaking in. Thanex are likely to go to great expense to have vengeance, and begin sounding out the best local assassins to see it is delivered.

THE SLAVERS' GATE

The gate lies in the Secondary Thanex Slave Compound, in the heart of the Stockyards. The building is harsh and metal, with barred windows and a single entrance, which is made of steel. A watch of 24 slave-herders (LN auttaine)—dressed in Thanex regalia and carrying pistols and battle axes, keep watch on a rolling shift. They are backed by a watch commander, **Overseer Mistress Y'rurk** (female auttaine), and 6 clockwork golems.

The gate to Beacon is circular, made of some unknown alloy with an iris opening. The gate is Large in size and can only be triggered by use of the correct key. When open, a shadowy, cloying black phlegm stretches across the opening. A DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals flaccid limbs reaching out of this space occasionally. The limbs are not inherently dangerous.

If the PCs arrived openly, Overseer Mistress Y'rurk has something for them—she asks the PCs to deliver an item containing new work instructions to one of the coterie's employees in Beacon. The employee—an auttaine female known as **Lady Kethi**—operates from a small office in a visitors' drinking and trading establishment in the dark heart of Beacon known as the Mechanism. Y'rurk tells the PCs to deliver the object directly to Lady Kethi, who will reward the PCs after (see sidebar). They are not to open the package themselves.

Those entering the gate feel a revolting pulling at their groin and lower back, as though they are being stretched on a rack. They feel sure they are surrounded by screaming people begging for help. One PC feels hands grasp at her

PUNISHMENT BY PROXY

The package is not a gift, nor a set of instructions—it is a punishment. The would-be recipient, Lady Kethi, has disappointed the Thanex, and this will not be tolerated. However, the package represents a number of possibilities for the PCs—they may decide to open it, throw it away, or deliver it. Once delivered, there are a further set of consequences to consider.

The package is a leather and bone box, tied with hemp and the opening sealed with a Thanex blood seal. Removing the seal and replacing it with a false one is very difficult and requires a DC 25 Dexterity (Deception) check. For details of Lady Kethi and interaction with the box see the Part Two. The box and contents are subject to an improved *magic aura* spell with 13 days remaining, but if this is bypassed the box radiates necromancy and conjuration.

When the box is opened two effects occur: first, a *finger of death* spell (DC 21) is triggered on the creature touching the box at the time (the effect does not occur if the box is opened remotely), followed immediately by summoning a swarm of angry adamantine wasps who attack anyone nearby. The box is otherwise empty.

neck and has the words 'welcome my child' whispered into their ear in a harsh female voice.

This is the PC's first contact with the God-Seer, for more information see Part Two of this adventure.

SWARM, ADAMANTINE WASPS

Medium swarm of Tiny constructs, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 91 (14d8+28)

Speed 20 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	1 (-5)	7 (-2)	1 (-5)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages —

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

PART 2: INTO THE SHATTERED ZONE

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny insect. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The swarm makes 2 bites attacks.

Bites. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. Hit: 40 (16d4) piercing damage, or 20 (8d4) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer. Creatures who take damage from this attack must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1d4 hours.

PART TWO—FIRST STEPS INTO THE SHATTERED ZONE

Beacon is the largest asteroid in the system of the Shattered Zone, has a feeble but breathable atmosphere and gravity at about the same level as the PCs' home planet. It is also one city—every inch of its surface is industrialized or urbanized or swallowed beneath construction. This construction is robust but utilitarian, giving the city the feel of a single enormous factory. Both Beacon and the Shattered Zone are detailed further in this publication's gazetteer.

WELCOME TO BEACON...

When you are ready to commence this part of the adventure and the PCs have stepped into the Thanex gate, read or paraphrase the following description.

The feeling of being on a rack finally ends with the metallic grating of an iris-gate opening before you, or perhaps behind you and within you, it's impossible to tell. An iron taste punches the back of your throats immediately as you gasp, getting your first taste of the local air. A great, slimy indigo figure with a face infested with eyes smiles before you; at his back a vast cathedral prison sweats into dark recesses.

Then the noise hits you: the noise of the confinement of thousands.

The PCs arrive at the Beacon branch of the Thanex Coteries slave trade when the slave prison here is at its fullest—just prior to an auction, due to take place in a few days. The figure—**G'uurul Faa** (LN male mercane)—is overseer of the Thanex Slave prison here on Beacon. If troubled, he can call on several dozen auttaine guards and a selection of golems. The prison holds over a thousand slaves destined for the salt and coal mines on the industrial asteroids of the Shattered Zone. The mercane hears the gate operating long before anyone steps through, and is therefore expecting visitors. He politely asks for the PC's papers, which he inspects and reminds them that they have a single return journey allotted. The mercane is not interested in the PCs, but can direct them in an absent-minded way to the Mechanism.

As the PCs are escorted by their auttaine guards to the exit be sure to emphasise the grime and dirt of the city, as well as the curious fleshy and mechanical nature of the auttaine. Figures stare aimlessly from the cells as the PCs leave; their eyes empty and without hope.

As the PCs leave the prison, read or paraphrase the following description:

A wan ochre light falls outside; the night sky outside is gorged with ochre gaslights. The sick glare of these flickering flames is weak, barely touching the shadowy figures that walk the asthmatic streets. Above the petty claustrophobic constructions, nature soars. The sky above is filled with asteroids—some dark shadows, some gracefully lit—dancing through the heavens. These fractured mountains of stone and iron dance with impossible grace, some seeming to kiss in the night air and threatening to bring calamity upon those below. Yet there is one more madness to behold in this wondrous heaven: the chains. Countless vast chains link mountain to mountain, satellite to satellite, creating a cat's cradle seemingly woven by the gods themselves.



WELCOME TO BEACON, FRIEND (CR 13)

Many visitors to Beacon walk directly into its icier clutches—times are tough and locals tougher. A network of spies, scryes and familiars slip the dirty streets of the city-asteroid, and the PCs are about to meet their first local. Unless the PCs take extraordinary lengths to stay hidden, their arrival is noted by local spies of a petty rogue called Pigspring, who runs the nearby Gear Street Gang. This encounter is designed to openly establish the PCs' powers, to set them front and center of events and to draw attention to them. If the PCs like covert approaches and take great pains to avoid action, you can ignore this encounter, but you should consider another way that they come to the attention of the 3 competing groups outlined below; perhaps their very covert ways eventually attract attention.

Within a minute or two of their arrival, Pigspring knows about the PCs—he likes new people. New people bring money; new people don't have powerful local friends. The auttaine rogue quickly gathers a portion of his gang and heads to the PCs. Pigspring has an unpleasant way with him; he has a leery look and an unsettling dribble permanently hanging from his metal chin, which has difficulty holding back his lop-sided teeth and overly-large tongue.

Pigspring gets straight down to business, his thugs laughing as they block the street to allow a "friendly" chat with the PCs. The rogue announces that as today is a public holiday, there is a special local tax on arrivals. If unmolested, he begins to help himself to the PCs' belongings—starting with any obviously valuable magic, jewelry or other items. The theft continues until he has everything the PCs have brought or a fight begins.

PIGSPRING

Medium humanoid (auttaine), neutral

Armor Class 17 (studded leather)

Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	9 (-1)	11 (+0)	8 (-1)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Sneak Attack (1/Turn): Pigspring deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when he hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of his that isn't incapacitated and he doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Pigspring makes 3 melee attacks or 3 ranged attacks.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing

damage.

Handgun. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage.

TACTICS

During Combat Pigspring doesn't like pain, so he flits around the edges of combat trying to flank people.

He particularly likes firing his pistol into combat, and is rarely bothered about who he hits.

Morale Pigspring tries to flee when reduced to half hit points

GEAR STREET GANG MEMBER (4)

CR 5

XP 1,800 each

hp 65 each (use Half-Red Dragon Veteran stats modified as below, SRD)

Medium humanoid (auttaine), neutral

Damage Resistances none

During Combat The auttaine like to use their breath weapons just to see their enemies' faces; they particularly love to all breathe on one opponent to watch them sizzle, sometimes they even melt, which the rogues think is great. They do not work well together, and tend to fight as individuals rather than one team.

Morale The gang members flee if reduced to half hit points.

Development: The PCs are likely to make short work of Pigspring and his petty gang, and as they fight goes on lots and lots of people stop and watch. Within a handful of minutes, people who need to be in the know are in the know, with consequences outlined below.

CATCH 22

The PCs have inadvertently stepped into a three-way struggle for power within the fractious Confederacy. Of the twenty-seven groups, companies, and associations struggling for supremacy below the benevolent, guiding fist of Purity, three remain locked in a struggle for highest power—the **Shattered Zone Mining Company**, run by the present Mayor of Beacon, **K'illiv Gryne** (N female auttaine), who probably has the greatest strength and resources presently; their bitter rivals the **Contraptors**, run by the corpulent **Lazlo K'tivv** (LN male auttaine); and finally, the least of the trio, **Corrosive Ventures**, run by the charmless **T'ain Zick** (N male auttaine).

The groups maintain a false image of calm partnership to ensure that Purity (themselves stretched almost to breaking point) do not violently intervene and take over as they have in the past. Below this veneer, an endless battle is taking

place—primarily through covert means such as spycraft, assassination, and duplicity. Agents vanish, managers go missing, and workers die with alarming frequency, yet open warfare never takes place.

A minor tiff is about to come to a head as the PCs arrive. Mayor Gryne's network of spies is good, and she is aware that V'ii Mzarr, a prominent treasure hunter, has laid his hands upon an Ancient artifact: a dark sphere, which is allegedly a weapon of great value. Unfortunately for V'ii, he has been betrayed (under duress) by his associate and subject of past betrayals, Aspon Klaa. Klaa has since left, hurriedly.

V'ii is due to arrive in Beacon on the Arsenic Edge Works void gondola in 20 hours carrying the artifact, intending to trade it immediately with customers he has already made arrangements with.

Gryne wants the item—whatever it is (and she of all the groups has the least idea)—but has been struggling with how to get her clammy metal fingers on it without causing being noticed. That is, until the PCs arrived and beat up Pigspring and his petty thugs; then the plan became crystal clear: a simple theft by strangers. Who would know or trace these new arrivals? As is usually the case in the Zone, there is more to this than meets the eye. Aspon Klaa is well known as a spineless goon, so when he was seen slithering out of the mayor's offices he was stopped and questioned by associates of the Contraptors, and then sometime later by officers of Corrosive Ventures. The Contraptors in particular have perfected some wonderful devices for oiling cogs of communication, and Aspon yelled out lots of details about the artifact to them—details the other two groups don't know.

Unfortunately for the PCs, their pending discussion with representatives of the Shattered Zone Mining Company and its dubious mayor are also about to be watched.

AN OFFER OF EMPLOYMENT

The approaches to the PCs are outlined below in a particular order for a reason—the mining company is the biggest and most powerful, so it stands to reason that they learn about the PCs first, then the Contraptors and finally the Ventures.

If the PCs try to use force at any time, assume the agents know very little about the sphere, just the basic outline of facts. Attacking agents of the groups should certainly bring reprisals, particularly as the PCs move into territory controlled by the different groups. You might want to consider increasing the CR of suggested hostile encounters in the next part of this adventure by 2–3.

A smartly-dressed auttaine male wearing a long fancy frock-coat showing a pair of pearl-handled pistols approaches the PCs. The auttaine, **G'ebb Pegg** (LN male auttaine), has a partially mechanical face and most of his right side is clockwork; he speaks in a very calm slow way so he can be easily understood. The auttaine picks a place where he knows Purity patrols are regular—just in case he has trouble. He

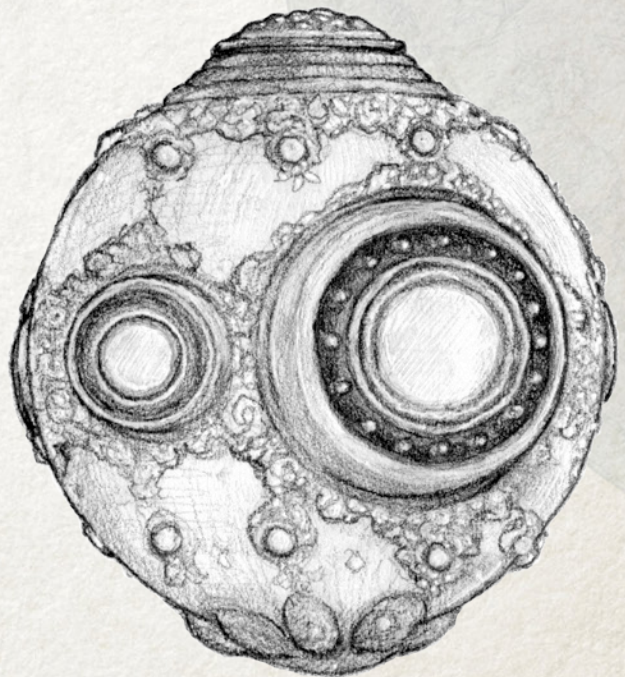
makes a friendly approach to the PCs, offering them drinks or food or whatever seems appropriate. He says he has an offer for the PCs—one he would like to discuss privately (but not somewhere where he can't shout a patrol readily enough).

G'ebb tells the PCs that their recent exploits—so soon after their arrival—have come to the admiring attention of the mayor of Beacon, K'illiv Gryne. She is always on the lookout for new talent. G'ebb goes into some detail about the PCs arrival, the combat and anything else he can reasonably know, the intention being to ensure the PCs know how well informed the mayor is. He adds that the mayor greatly admires order and justice, and those who enact it will go far with her sponsorship.

The auttaine explains that a foul and ungrateful ex-employee of the mayors known as V'ii Mzarr has stolen something from her and the mayor would like it back. V'ii is due to arrive on the Arsenic Edge Works void gondola in a little under 20 hours' time.

He is curiously vague about what the item is, knowing simply it is a very powerful weapon, and resembles a dark sphere. In truth, the mayor heard the words “powerful Ancient's weapon known as a *darksphere*”, and then ignored Klaa's prattling. This is a typical oversight, and could enable the PCs to engage in a touch of duplicity.

G'ebb doesn't care how it is obtained, but wants the object brought to him at the Mechanism. If pressed, the gunslinger does not give any reasons why the mayor doesn't just use the local militia; he simply says that she doesn't want any fuss. Shortly after, G'ebb leaves. If followed, he heads straight back to the Mayor's alarmingly fortified residence to report to her on the meeting.



Unfortunately for everyone, the meeting with the gunslinger is seen, noted, and discussed very rapidly by the Contraptors and Corrosive Ventures. Within the hour, **Aum** (LN male auttaine), a hulking, rusty agent of Corrosive Ventures, arrives aboard a golem-rickshaw. Aum makes little effort to be subtle; the wiry auttaine simply tells the PCs that walls have ears in Beacon, and he knows they have already been approached by G'ebb. He tells the PCs that they have a difficult choice ahead of them, as Corrosive Ventures leader T'ain Zick also wants the sphere, and wants it badly. The PCs are to deliver it to Ventures' Headquarters where they will be rewarded.

If pressed, Aum is very vague about the *darksphere*; if the PCs try to dupe him (his Deception and Insight skills are +6) they soon find out he is not even sure if it shaped like a sphere, and knows only it is a weapon of the Ancients. He knows as much as his superiors do about the item.

The final approach is made by an auttaine leading a six-legged two headed iron dog who covertly approaches the PCs. This auttaine **Stet** (LN female auttaine), represents the Contraptors, and comes across as honest, taking the approach that the PCs have been spoken to already by the others and that is likely to lead to trouble for them. Stet tells the PCs that whatever G'ebb and Aum told them is a lie and likely to get them killed. The mayor has a reputation for toughness—that's how she's become mayor; Aum's lot are irrelevant. Stet tries to get the PCs to tell her what they have been told (her Deception and Insight skills are +8) and then makes a counter-offer. The item, she tells them, is in truth no-one's, but as V'ii technically works for her employers the Contraptors (which was true until a while ago) it really belongs to her superiors, and they'd like it back. Stet assures the PCs that the Contraptors' help is also not to be dismissed casually, and that if the PCs present her with the object, she will ensure that their future in the Zone is very rosy and protected from the mayor's thugs. She tells the PCs to bring the *darksphere* to the Contraptors Headquarters, reminding them that they have less than 20 hours.

She makes no threat, but if pressed can offer the PCs a much better description of the artifact than the others could—Aspon detailed the *darksphere* as well as he could, so the Contraptors are aware of its size and alleged ability to bring forth a *sphere of annihilation*. Of all the groups, the Contraptors are the hardest to dupe.

The *darksphere* is detailed in the magic items section of this adventure.

The PCs have an interesting dilemma, but one they could exploit to their advantage. They could, of course, take and hand the item over to the most powerful sponsor, make them very happy, and upset their other suitors, the consequences of which unfold during the adventure; they could ignore the task and upset everyone. They could also do something clever. Two groups know only that the *darksphere* is Ancient technology bordering on magic, and working that out can take time. The PCs only need time enough to present a reasonable object to enable them to find the gates, resurrect them, and move on to the Ancients' base.

If something looks the part, it could keep an enthusiastic dupe going for several days. Remember that as far as technology goes, the primary check for identifying the *sphere* is Intelligence. If the PCs are good enough, however, even an expert can be convinced that something is 'almost impossible to crack.' Try not to revert to mechanics too much here, though—this is about a great story. If a player comes up with a fantastic cover for their fake artifact, then remember to either grant a bonus accordingly or consider allowing an automatic success—for a time.

The PCs should already be aware that fortunes are made from found objects, so they must be fairly common in the Zone. Not all the items are powerful of



V'II MZARR

The PCs can check for information about this dubious treasure hunter using Intelligence (History) or Charisma (Persuasion) checks to gather information. Higher checks reveal the information for lesser results.

DC 5—V'ii would steal his mother's clockwork springs to pay for a whore's oil. Killed dozens, duped a score out of fortunes in digs, and stolen more artifacts than Beacon has crooked sisters.

DC 17—V'ii allegedly has friends in high places; at least he's been seen hanging around with Purity guards plenty of times over the years.



everything has a value, so traders can be found here in Beacon who deal in such antiquities. PCs making a DC 25 Charisma (Persuasion) locate two such traders. Within one trading establishment is a skymetal alloy sphere about the size of a fist; the object is marred by a web of fine alien sigils which, if deciphered, are instructions to create a quantum box. It could pass as the *darksphere* for a short time. The trader wants 1,000 gp for it. The second trader dark, spherical Ancient object, which he claims was some sort of healing sphere. He wants 2,500 gp for it.

ARSENIC EDGE WORKS ASTEROID

VOID GONDOLA (CR 15)

V'ii is smart, and over-cautious. He has already arranged purchase of the *darksphere* by a quartet of denizens of Leng and already tested it a few days ago. When he returns to Beacon this time he has a feeling that something is up, and has sent word ahead to some friends of his that he'll need protection—over and above his own steamwerks golem (see page 60)—when he arrives back. Unfortunately for the PCs, these friends are Purity guards. The guards arrive at the void gondola ten minutes before it is due to arrive, and loiter about looking menacing. Unusually there are just 6 guards, and no other members of a standard watch. Characters making a DC 22 Wisdom (Insight) check note the guards appear a little edgy—this is because they shouldn't be here. They have slipped away from their allotted duties and, if unmasked, would be in big trouble.

The curious void gondola may be the first the PCs have encountered, so when it arrives read or paraphrase the following description.

The curiously unsettling sight of a void gondola pulling in from the heavens above with barely a creak greets you. A bloated and alarmingly rusty sphere sways as it is dragged downwards on steel filaments almost directly upwards, hurtling toward the ground at an alarming rate.

The support article for this adventure details the vertigo-inspiring fear of travelling by void gondola—something that awaits the PCs. The gondola almost hits the ground before its brakes cut in, completing the last few yards to the station with grating screams of metal on metal.

The plan is for the guards to escort V'ii through the streets for approximately 15 minutes before reaching a broad and busy part of Beacon's Gaslampers District, where the purchaser of the *darksphere*—4 denizens of Leng—are waiting. A brief meeting takes place, the denizens then hand over the agreed price: diamonds worth 23,000 gp. If the exchange takes place, the denizens then *plane shift* back to their crooked homeworld. If an attack occurs at this stage the denizens join in, suspecting treachery and attempting to get the *darksphere* and escape.

Remember that fights are commonplace, but the presence of the Purity-uniformed guards may bring unexpected extras into this encounter as you wish—do locals call for other guards in fear or do they simply rush away and pretend they have not seen anything?

V'II MZAAR

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 17 (half-plate)

Hit Points 135 (18d8 + 54)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +6

Skills Acrobatics +9, Deception +7, Persuasion +7

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Mobile. When V'ii attacks a creature, he does not provoke opportunity attacks from that creature for the rest of the turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. V'ii makes 3 ranged or 3 melee weapon attacks.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Custom Railgun. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (3d10 + 4) piercing damage.

Before Combat V'ii is expecting ambush—he's paranoid, so he always has his rail gun in hand, hefting the great thing while his golem carries his melee weapon. He keeps the golem at his back at all times, even during combat. V'ii's first thought is to turn *invisible* and get away—he knows his clients are not far away. He has the *darksphere* and knows how to use it, so if cornered he activates it.

During Combat V'ii is brutal—he's had a tough life and fights like a cornered dog. He likes to lead with his rail gun and then use his greatsword while being backed by his golem.

Morale V'ii surrenders the *darksphere* if he is reduced to 30 hit points or less, thinking it better to live to search another day and plot vengeance.

Other Gear black half-plate, +1 *greatsword*, rail gun, *potion of invisibility*, 150 gp *darksphere* held in moneybelt below armor, leather overcoat carved with an iron eagle, black leather gloves, high black leather boots with steel and silver spurs set with small diamonds worth 800 gp, silver pocket-watch set with amethysts worth 1,300 gp, and a leather and reptile-skin wallet containing 112 PP.

GOLEM, STEAMWERKS

CR 14

XP 11,500

hp 189 (see page 60)

PURITY SQUAD OBERSOLDER (6)

CR 7

XP 2,900 each

hp 105 each (see page 72)

DENIZEN OF LENG (6)

CR 5

XP 1,800 each

hp 85 (*Fifth Edition Foes*)

CROSSING THE CONFEDERACY

The PCs are entirely free to do as they will. Those brazenly going between the 3 locations or bragging about fooling their victims can assume all 3 groups soon find out and, feeling aggrieved, consider the PCs enemies. Conversely, if the PCs hand over the true item to one group and tell that contact that they are duping the others, consider upping their reward—the leader of that faction will undoubtedly find the PCs' approach highly amusing. They may of course keep the *darksphere*, in which case everyone is against them.

If the PCs do not satisfy their potential allies, there will be consequences; but bear in mind that no group is omnipotent. The PCs are about to venture into territory controlled by many of their potential sponsors. Those who they have satisfied ensure that the journeys are as trouble-free as possible given the surroundings, and the PCs can also ensure that they have written support in case the unexpected occurs.

However, if the PCs have fallen foul of the group who run the territory they pass through then they are in for trouble. These consequences are detailed in Part Three of this adventure.

As for the rewards, they should be flexible—the item needs proper research before its value can be determined, but in the meantime things like free and unfettered passage through zones controlled by the factions, cheaper equipment from traders operating under licence within those zones, and any other reasonable demands are met. What reward the PCs get for duping groups or handing over the true *darksphere* are left to you to decide.



LADY KETHI (CR 15)

As well as delivering a message to the employee Lady Kethi at the Mechanism, the PCs may have further issues with Hav'zeer.

This attaine has a gaspingly pretty human face, while her copper and steel arms lend her the style and elegance of a complex timepiece. She dresses flamboyantly, wearing a tall hat fixed with long albino peacock feathers, an elaborately-embroidered shawl, and a stylishly-engraved leather bodice. At her side hangs a formidable-looking pistol in a bone and leather. Her elegance is offset by worker's attire; she has goggles on her hat, and wears hefty leather gauntlets and a long welder's coat.

LADY KETHI

Medium humanoid (attaine), neutral

Armor Class 17 (studded leather)

Hit Points 150 (20d8 + 60)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)

Skills Deception +8, Insight +, Persuasion +8, Perception+7

Senses passive Perception 17

Languages Common

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Kethi deals an extra 21 (6d6) damage when she hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the assassin that isn't incapacitated and she doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Kethi makes 3 ranged or melee weapon attacks.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 16 Con saving throw, taking 34 (10d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Modified Shotgun. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, range 20/80 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage.

During Combat Kethi is a cautious combatant; she knows Ayva is much more powerful but worries about her daughter. She prefers to try to ambush if possible, using a distant Ayva as a diversion, then letting her iron golem into combat and then withdrawing. She prefers to try to take out lone opponents one by one.

Morale Very cautious, Kethi never allows Ayva or herself to fall below half hit points without fleeing.

Gear long welder's coat containing deep pockets within which are a silk purse containing 200 gp, hidden compartment contains a *potion of healing* in a steel-stoppered bottle, and a tiny gold and pewter tiger-like figure gripping a rock worth 250 gp.

DUBIOUS EMPLOYERS, MORAL CHOICES

Stern, honest, and resolute, Kethi presently works for the Thanex Coterie—but in truth is revolted by the slave-trade. The attaine has been working within the organization to keep a roof over her head, and that of her child, and assumes all is going quite well.

She is wrong, unfortunately. Word has reached the coterie that Kethi has serious moral issues, issues she has been overheard speaking about to others, and now they have decided to cut their losses and eradicate her from their books—as well as send out a strong message that anarchistic thoughts are not tolerated.



AYVA

Although she never speaks about it, Kethi had—or perhaps more accurately has—a daughter, Ayva. Ayva was killed when she was only four years old—an accident when she was caught in the cross fire of two rival companies. The child was killed, but Kethi would not accept her death. She consulted some of the darker diabolists, construct-creators, and geniuses of Beacon and the Zone in an attempt to bring her back.

Although the child steadfastly refused to be brought back by more mundane means, Kethi has been able to bring her limited life—of a sort. The child’s soul now hangs within a specially constructed iron golem, an outcome that Kethi bears feelings of appalling guilt and unswerving need for. She loves her daughter and cannot conceive of a universe without her.

In truth, Ayva is now little more than a machine—but a machine that shows, remarkably, auttaine characteristics. In truth only Kethi would notice these, but a seemingly tender touch, a pause to admire the sky, or the distant hum of some old nursery rhyme have convinced Kethi that her daughter is still there—and perhaps someday she can become a real child once more.

With her daughter at her side—a formidable ally as well as a joy—Kethi can now embark upon her two-pronged assault on her perceived enemies. Firstly Corrosive Ventures, whose offices and companies she has slithered in to plot sabotage on a vast scale, and Purity—who she loathes even more than Ventures because it is their rule that has caused the Zone to become such a festering, dangerous place.

AYVA—IRON GOLEM

CR 16

XP 15,000

hp 210 (SRD)

LADY KETHI’S GIFT

During the adventure *Confederates of the Shattered Zone*, the PCs are given the task of delivering a package to Lady Kethi.

If the PCs present the package to Kethi she examines it curiously and opens it—she has no reason to suspect the Thanex coterie have tired of her perceived weak efforts on their behalf. This immediately triggers the trap within—how this develops is a matter of your own taste. Two outcomes are suggested—if the PCs deliver the package and don’t help, then if Kethi survives she becomes their enemy. Unless they intervene she poisons the mind of her contacts at Corrosive Ventures to a point where any positive relationships the PCs have with them are worthless and become consequences instead.

Conversely, if the PCs clearly show Kethi the plot by the Thanex coterie to murder her, or help her survive the trap, she becomes an ally. Finding herself now out of work, she offers to join the. She uses her alliances with Corrosive Ventures to ensure the PCs journeys through their holdings are not only safe but very comfortable (the PCs should be treated extremely well in this part, accessing the finest rooms and receiving what help you deem reasonable during their exploration), removing any consequences they may have faced otherwise. Furthermore, the help of Kethi opens up archives that the PCs would ordinarily be unaware of and unable to access. The benefits of these manifest themselves into advantage on all checks made in connection with researching the dead gates.

HA’VZEER’S SURPRISE (CR 14)

The encounter below is optional, depending entirely upon the PCs’ own actions or abilities. It occurs if one PC has an Intelligence of 16 or higher, or if the PCs used force to obtain access via the Thanex Coterie gate to Beacon. The event can occur at any time, but Beacon is the ideal location. Bear in mind that the coterie has a network of spies across Beacon, and, unless the PCs have gone to extraordinary lengths to be covert, the slavers should easily be able to locate them.

Hav’zeer sends a nalfeshnee through the gate to do her bidding. Its instructions are to bring back any PC with an Int of 16+ dead or alive (she can have any such PC *raised* later), and then kill all the remaining PCs. The daemon—known simply as the Messenger—is one the coterie use to carry out extermination and vengeance missions and has been bound to serve the slavers for decades. The daemon takes pleasure from simple annihilation and finds any mission to retrieve something (even a corpse) abhorrent—something Hav’zeer finds ironically amusing.

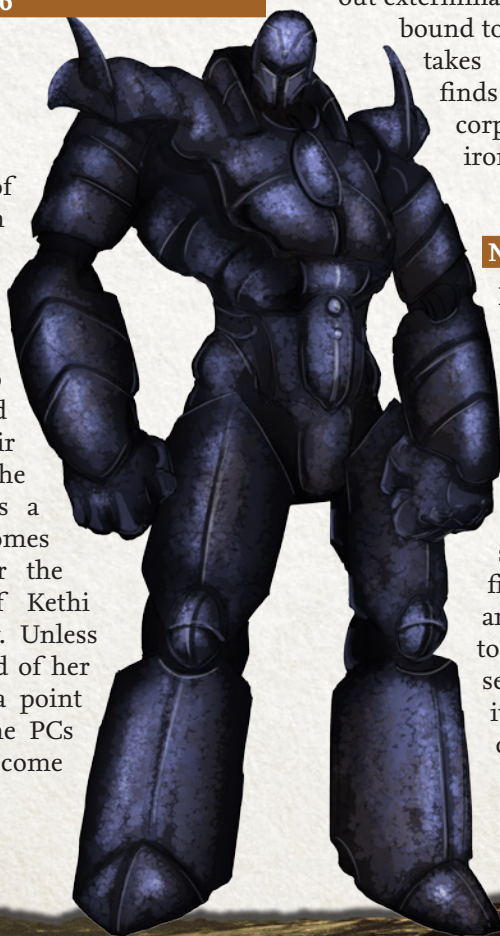
NALFESHNEE

CR 13

XP 10,000

hp 184 (SRD)

The Messenger revels in carnage, when it arrives on Beacon through the gate it questions G’uurul Faa for the whereabouts of the PCs. The daemon then seeks its prey in the acrid streets. Once it finds them it teleports directly to its quarry and attacks it, allowing its Horror Nimbus to slow down any resistance.. As it has been sent on a mission, and is bound by ritual, it cannot return empty handed and simply continues fighting until it or its prey are destroyed or dead.



NIGHTMARES OF THE MAD GOD-SEER AND DOTAN ROTH

A small part of events here also includes the kyton God-Seer reaching out to the PCs through their dreams and idle thoughts—invading them with her bloated presence and encouraging them to come to her and fulfill their joint destinies by freeing her and her kind. How much of a role this plays in events is left to you—it could be nothing more than a few whispered words, or it could be a whole tour of the panopticon and its foul inhabitants, perhaps resulting in dream encounters and experiences that may make the PCs doubt the wisdom of completing this adventure.

So close to the God-Seer, Dotan Roth is also able to ride these interludes; his musings come as the Purity party explore the Kyton Panopticon (Part Four). Use Roth as the foul, clammy face of Purity; the leering, sweaty surety of a master-villain, taunting the PCs weak flesh, belittling them, laughing at them, telling them they are too late, too weak, too inferior to succeed. For more details see the entry on the auttaine.

Use these interludes as a way to add an aspect of uncertainty in proceedings; of stamping into the PCs' minds the sure knowledge of what lies at the end of events.

PART THREE—DEAD GATES SLEEPING

The PCs need to 'resurrect' each of the three outer gates to enable access to the fourth at Asteroid 113. Once all 3 gates are awakened in this way, any can be used to access the final one on Asteroid 113. As soon as they set eyes on a gate, the PCs interaction with the Scavenged Codex in the second adventure of this adventure path stirs and they quickly realize how absurdly simple the codex within each gate is, despite outward complexity. They understand the mechanism and can awaken each relatively straightforwardly. You may decide that the PCs are able to get hold of illustrations of the gates and can make a similar deduction to stir them to find the gates if they are unsure in any way.

Each of the gate's locations and journey to reach them is detailed below. The methods given for travel are the only ones available to each location. The PCs are can tackle the gates in any order.

Each of the 3 sections comes with a set of standards, including information on what the PCs might expect, and a short section on consequences—these detail a possible extra encounter the PCs have if they have made enemies of the faction of the confederacy that controls part of the adventure location. Costs and other information for journeys—including how they are made—is also included. Where distance is referred to, it is the travel time between locations using the method indicated; skiffs travel at roughly 1,000 miles per hour and gondolas at 100.

THE DEAD GATES OF THE SHATTERED ZONE

Use Intelligence (History) or Charisma (Persuasion) to gather information, higher checks reveal the information for lesser results. PCs who have Lady Kethi as a friend can gain access to hidden archives and old mine surveys, granting advantage on all checks.

DC 5—Miners talk about the dead gates; almost always where a terrible alien *something* comes through, takes a miner and vanishes, usually leaving a hand or foot behind as the gate seals again. The miners don't know much about the gates—just that they are wreathed in alien rings that can move. Some have spent lifetimes trying to puzzle over them, sure they will lead somewhere that will make them rich, but all remain dead. The fourth gate—the one on Asteroid 113—is just rumor—few folk have ever dared reach the asteroid or had the wit to get there despite tales of fabulous Ancient artifacts littering it.

DC 10—The best-known of the dead gates is probably more infamous for its name—the Devil's Door. It rests in a distant part of an auttaine nunnery known as Salvation, where the sisterhood keep watch upon a celestial clock of fathomless age said to have been created by Haymot Steel-Arm. The gate has been subject to tales of ghostly alien encounters, and attempts to set up a communication station on the fragment of rock it rests within failed with repeated strange signals and ghostly noises. Harder miners point to the fact that getting to the signal station requires nerves of steel—it rests at the edge of an arduous, terrifying trek—and it is more likely that simple fear led to its disuse.

DC 15—A second gate is known to exist on an asteroid known as Hope; this asteroid is a repository for criminals—particularly thought criminals, who work its coal and salt mines. Purity has placed the running of the mine in the hands of Corrosive Ventures, who use worker giants in parts of the mines. The gate itself is in a volcano called Fury.

DC 20—The third gate has not been seen for many years; it exists within a Purity outer station known as the Zenith. Of late, Zenith has been locked down; since it rests right on the furthest edge of the Zone, there have been all kinds of rumors about what is going on up there.

DC 25 There is a fourth gate on cursed Asteroid 113, a place of terrible rumor said to house a portion of Hell. Only ever alluded to in miner's tales, this gate is said to be much larger than the others, and sigils upon its surface suggest it might be linked to the other 3 somehow, or possibly linking to another realm entirely.

Most of the areas visited are controlled by one faction of the confederacy or another. This control is tenuous, however—this is a dangerous place, and employees are fickle. A DC 5 Charisma (Persuasion) check learns who is in charge where.

GATE 1—HOPE MINE

LOCATION INFORMATION

Use Intelligence (History) or Charisma (Persuasion) to gather information, higher checks reveal the information for lesser results. PCs who have Lady Kethi as a friend can gain access to hidden archives and old mine surveys, granting advantage on all checks.

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1A. HOPE

Control: The Contraptors

Distance: 4 hours

Size: 885 miles diameter

Transport: Skiff

Cost: 800 gp

Hope is the shortest and easiest journey the PCs face to locate and resurrect one of the three gates in the Shattered Zone. This section also represents the simplest method of opening a gate—the PCs may simply march into the escapees camp and kill them all, or they may try a more subtle approach and try bribery, which may save them some trouble and arm some potential rebels (albeit gigantic, mad, cannibalistic ones).

Hope is not a popular destination—its reputation as being a political prison ensures that—but it does attract visitors hoping to make a lucky strike amongst its volcanic valleys.

A little under nine-hundred miles across, Hope is quite large for an asteroid; its erratic orbit has been likened to a drunken dancer. The skiff that takes visitors to Hope has seen better days. A DC 20 Intelligence (History) check reveals it should have been mothballed years ago; her Purity flags and propaganda cannot hide that. It's rarely used now as most visitors come against their will in another, larger skiff not available to the public.

On the day the PCs are crossing, they are the only passengers heading across, apart from a trio of outtained whores who are moving over to the city of Hope looking to set up business. As the skiff journey is likely to be the PCs' first, read or paraphrase the following description when the skiff is about to launch:

The lack of action is worse than anything; a cacophony of screaming metal on metal ended some minutes ago, and now you are braced for whatever comes next. There is a short, barked announcement of some sort that is impossible to hear, let alone understand. Then the ship is hurtled forward, jamming you backwards into your seats. The whole sphere rattles and shakes, a panel tears loose and somewhere above a window shatters.

The journey seems to take much longer than it actually does. Remember the inherent gravitational abilities of the metal the ship is made of; this is a good moment to show that by having one outer panel of glass shatter and crack without any further effects. At this stage the whores can point out the inherent qualities of kallenite. For more information, see the supporting articles in this publication.

The grab and slowing is almost as dramatic as the acceleration; the ship creaks and groans, metal grates against metal as the arcane catcher grabs it. The ship slows and is slowly pulled into the asteroid, where it finally comes to a halt.

The harbor lies just below the surface of the asteroid, a Purity oversolder opens the hatch, inviting the PCs and the prostitutes to leave. A short tunnel rises sharply to the surface. As the PCs leave the tunnel read or paraphrase the following description:

PART 3: DEAD GATES SLEEPING

With a tang of iron and sulfur, this place has the taste of hell—but you soon see it's not just a look. A rusting decrepit city lies beyond, a steady acid rain pounding on countless makeshift corrugated iron roofs. There are few lights, giving the place an eerie feel, not aided by countless visionaries lashed to the walls shouting propaganda amongst the endless decaying Purity flags. Not far away glowers the entrance to a correction facility, suffocated in razor wire and watched by countless hateful watchtowers. A trio of crucified ash giants hang beside the entrance, dozens of Purity soldiers watch nearby, and beyond the city in all directions is a glow—the glow of volcanoes.

HOPE

LN Small City

Corruption +4; **Crime** +1; **Economy** +3; **Law** +2; **Lore** +1; **Society** -1

Qualities industrial*, notorious, racially intolerant (all non-auttaine), strategic location **Danger** +15

DEMOGRAPHICS

Government overlord

Population 9,900 (9,800 auttaine, 100 other).

Notable NPCs

OverKarl Acchtor (LN auttaine fighter 11)

MARKETPLACE

Spellcasting 6th

Common Items 3d4; **Uncommon Items** 1d8-1

Hope has a tortured volcanic landscape pierced by salt lakes, deep coal mines and volcanic swamps, this surrounding wilderness is detailed in the area map. Although the PCs only briefly voyage across the surface, you might wish to create further perils or assign other suitably volcanic encounters on the way. The PCs find getting hold of a map impossible, but there are a number of rough trading warehouses-turned-hotels that serve the few visitors' needs.

The PCs can get rough directions from the handful of miners here with a DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion or Deception) each 50 gp of bribery lowers the DC by 1. These directions are little more than a compass bearing and distance. Armed with this information the PCs can head out into the wilderness. They could also try for a guide, but the DC increases to 25 and the bribe amount needed to affect the outcome is doubled. The PCs can each make 2 attempts per day to get this information. The guide they locate—Akgo (N male auttaine)—is a rusty old pot whose skin is corroded with salt and acid rain, and who wheezes as he moves. If there is any trouble he simply tries to flee.

PCs inquiring about the escapees by making a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check find that there is a reward of 5,000 gp for the Prophet's head.

CONSEQUENCES (CR 14*)

The Contraptors are not happy about the PCs, and they need to send out word that crossing them is not tolerated.

It's suggested that this event occurs when the PCs return from their wilderness adventures—in all likelihood this will be the first gate the PCs tackle, and having the attack occur as they return gives a logical chance for the company to prepare a punishment.

The Contraptors use the standard response to their enemies—a bomb. These are delivered through a variety of methods, but for the purposes of the PCs—who the group's local agent thinks know little about the Zone—it is delivered by a flesh golem. The golem is carrying a hefty satchel containing the bomb and moves towards the PCs on a busy street in Hope, unconcerned about residual casualties. The golem moves towards the PCs at a walk; it knows that the closer it gets the more damage it inflicts on the PCs, and also that triggering the mechanism is a bonus action. The PCs get two chances to see its approach.

The first chance occurs at 60 feet; a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check notes the golem is carrying the satchel—something very unusual. The satchel looks very heavy, and PCs beating the check by 5 or more notice that the clockwork is looking at them and clutching something in its hand (the trigger). The second chance, with the DC at 15 now occurs at 30 ft. If spotted, the golem tries to move forward; while its primary directive is to trigger the bomb with the PCs nearby, it will do so to just a single PC if that is the only option.

The bomb inflicts 20 dice of damage in a 45ft. radius. If the golem is within 5 feet, damage is rolled using d8s, within 30 feet the damage dice are d6s, and within 45 feet the dice are d4s. A Dexterity saving throw (DC 19 at close range, DC 14 at up to 30 feet and DC 9 at up to 45 feet) halves the damage.





FLESH GOLEM

CR 5

XP 1,800
hp 93 (SRD)

Development: The remains of the golem are spread over a large area, but if the PCs search and make a DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) check they find a section that clearly bears a company logo—the four interlocking clockworks of The Contraptors. No other attacks are listed here, but you may wish to develop the local agents' attacks on the PCs.

INTO THE WILDERNESS

Throughout this section of the adventure a heavy acid rain pounds the PCs. A day out a volcanic storm lashes the mountains, and the PCs with gale force winds, almost as though their arrival caused it. The wilds are lacerating volcanic rock jutting from acidic pools; there is no vegetation, just endless toil across this endless place, all of which is choking in sulphur.

The air is so thin that unless they make arrangements to overcome this, PCs face a similar effect to altitude sickness at high passes, and must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or gain 1 level of exhaustion. The wilderness map shows how far the PCs must journey. Every day the PCs are

in the wilds they may face a danger. The base chance is 40%, but this is lowered to 20% if they have a guide, if a PC has proficiency in History, or if someone has a relevant favoured terrain, such as swamps or mountains.

Terrain features are volcanic flanks (rugged hills steep slope), clear/foothills (gentle hills gradual slopes), and geyser/volcanic swamp (moor/shallow bog).

Three suggested encounters are detailed here, but you may wish to change them; encounters occur in particular hexes so that once discovered geographic features remain.

The first occurs when the PCs wander into an area of thin rock that hangs above a volcanic mire covering the hex ahead; steaming vents litter much of this hex. The PCs can note something wrong on a DC 20 Intelligence (History) check or a DC 23 Wisdom (Perception) check. Allow each PC a single check as they approach; if they make the check they are aware of a low rumbling ahead, seeing something strange in the countless geysers and vents in this hex. Crossing this hex is very dangerous, as the geysers regularly strike upwards. Twice as the PCs move across this area they erupt, showering the area with boiling water. Characters in the hex at this time must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, those who fail the check take 20d6 fire damage from scalding (saving throw halves).

PART 3: DEAD GATES SLEEPING

The second encounter is with one of the rare living creatures on the asteroid, a purple worm. This creature stalks the desolate asteroid for its wretched prey. The PCs encounter it in an area of twisted sharp rocks that equate to dense rubble and which resemble a pincushion of 5-10 ft. wide pinnacles between 10 and 25ft. high, which cover this hex. Visibility is reduced to 20 ft., the creature flies around this terrain using its blindsense and tremorsense to locate lone or remote targets, and attacking them in melee.

PURPLE WORM

CR 15

XP 13,000

hp 247 (SRD)

The third and final encounter is with an explosion from Fury itself scattering volcanic bombs over the area, and the hex the PCs are in. Allow each PC to attempt a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) or DC 15 Intelligence (History) check to see the gout of flame and molten rock tear into the air, allowing them a chance to get into cover. The bombs strike a huge area, anyone within it (including the PCs) must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or take 15d6 damage (halved if saved). Cover grants advantage to saves and automatically halves all damage (none if saved).

As the PCs come within the last half dozen miles or so of Fury, characters making a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check notice the remains of old railway line beds. The rails have been removed and used by the giants in their lair high above in the volcano.

ASH GIANTS OF THE ZONE

The local breed of ash giant is hardier than their more earthly kin; these giants have been brought up in the boiling heat of deserts, coal mines and volcanic landscapes. They gain immunity to fire.

1B. FURY

When the PCs finally reach the volcano read or paraphrase the following description:

She roars above you, a vast wall of ash and fire and anger. The sides of the mountain are bare and broken rock to that toils endlessly upwards towards the caldera, which by the size of the mountain, must be vast.

Fury rises half a mile above the land. Climbing the outer slopes of Fury is not only dangerous, but exhausting. The slopes share the same DC 12 saving throws against exhaustion as the wilderness, and smoke wreathes everything, reducing visible to a dozen yards at best. The ash giants that lurk

within make frequent forays out looking for food and victims, and the tracks are obvious to anyone who has the ability to track, even using scent. Otherwise, PCs notice them on a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check. The huge footprints trail laboriously upwards to the caldera itself.

As the PCs move upwards lightning pounds the volcano, be sure to create a sense of impending drama here, the bolts lash at the growling peak. As the PCs move to the final summit a series of bolts hurl down, characters wearing metal armor feel their armor spark; ask one of them to make a DC 18 dexterity saving throw or be struck by a bolt (10d8 lightning damage).

Creature: At some stage on their journey upwards the PCs should meet an ash giant. This poor creature has fled its demented kin, who have partially eaten it. The giant has bite marks and had its armor torn off before it finally escaped).

ASH GIANT*

CR 9

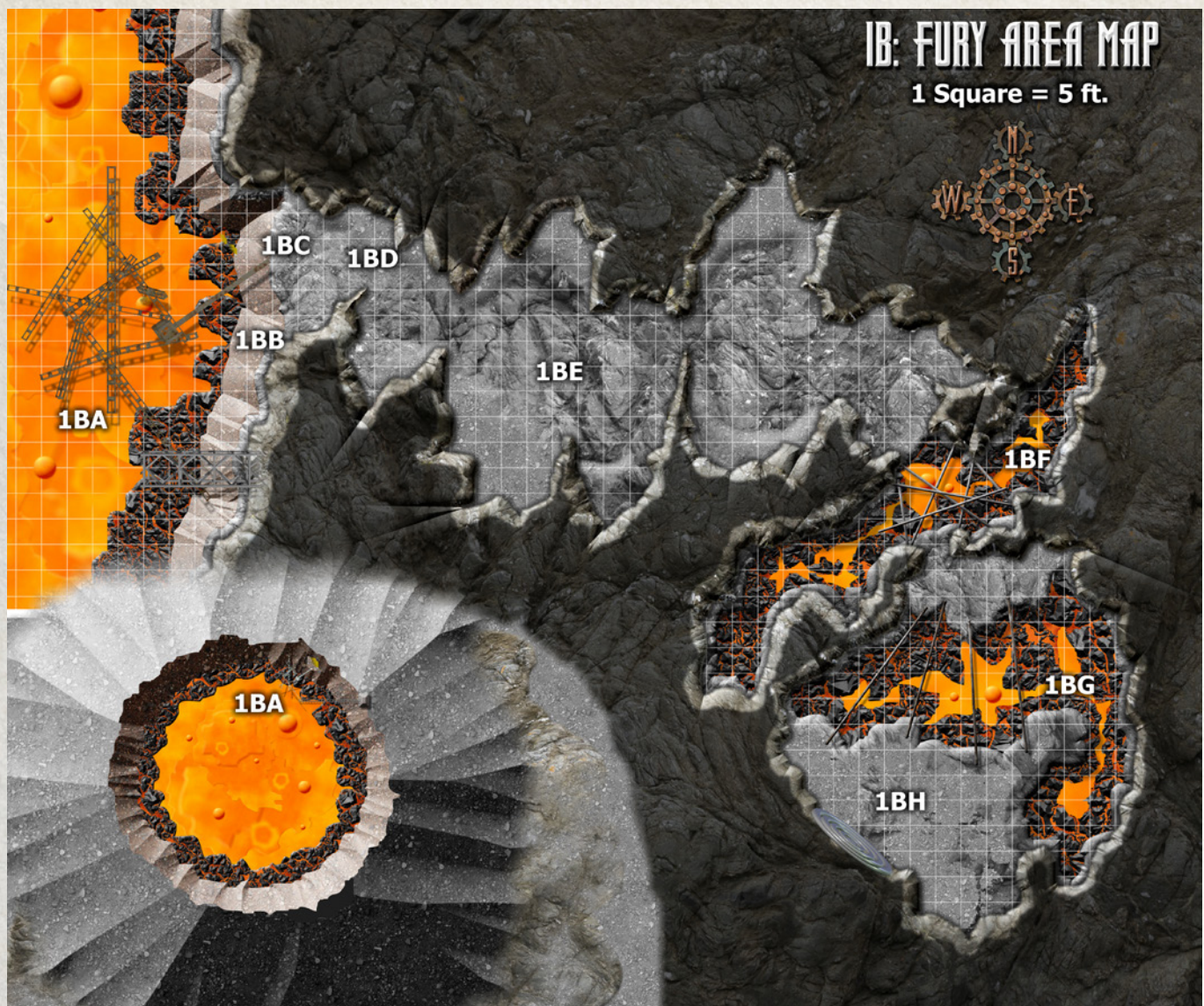
XP 10,000

hp (210) presently 113 (see page 25)

*Lower the unarmored giant's AC to 10

The giant is almost certain to see the PCs as Purity soldiers and attack. If somehow it can be calmed (by *domination* or something similar) it can describe the escapees' base in some detail, as well as the unpleasant events that are taking place there.





1BA. THE CALDERA

When the PCs drag themselves onto the caldera, read or paraphrase the following description:

The raging volcano is petrifying up close, its molten heart raging in waves of melted rock that boil upwards, releasing clouds of choking vapor. Through this bitter mist you see some sort of structure drops into the crater, swinging and grating above the boiling lava itself. This flotsam of madness is made of rails from old lines, now rusted and hammered or bent together to form a makeshift tower hanging into the madness below. At the base of this insanity a single rail gropes outwards to a wide slit in the brittle walls of the caldera.

The bridge is amazingly dangerous; not only is it brittle and red hot, but also surrounded by toxic gases. A DC 15 Strength (Athletics) is required to move on the bridge along its slippery red-hot rails, which inflicts 5 points of fire damage every round a character touches them. As the bridge is designed for large creatures, such creatures only have to make a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check. All characters on the bridge suffer

the effects of extreme heat and smoke. Furthermore, it is so rickety that it sways alarmingly—upwards of 30 ft. at its base, although its structure is sound enough for the giants to use it. The bridge sways 5ft. from its map location per round, swinging left and then right to a total of 15ft. each way. Those who fall get a single chance (DC 23 Dexterity saving throw) to catch another rail and halt their progress before the awful fall into the crater. Those who fall are immersed in lava, suffering 20d6 damage per round. The caldera walls are not much better. The brittle rock is a DC 20 Strength (Athletics), but each round there is a 25% chance of collapse. Unless characters make the above save or have some other means of escape they fall.

The bridge descends 120 ft. into the volcano, before coming to a small constructed platform of rails some 5ft. across which link to the rail (Area 1BB).

Creatures: The guards (see Area 1BC below) keep a look out for the escapee. If they spot anyone on the bridge (and remember the smoke reduces their Perception checks) they

PART 3: DEAD GATES SLEEPING

throw stones. One heads upwards while another alerts the other giants, who act accordingly. These giants, like all the others in the lair, have a number of long rusty hooks sewn into their clothing, they use these to hang themselves off the bridge (aa action) and then have both hands free to fight. They usually move upwards, trying to fling intruders off the bridge (assuming them to be Purity members) before retreating back to the shelf to unleash the hounds (Area 1BD).

1BB. THE RAIL

The swaying bridge ends facing directly downwards into the turmoil of the lava lake below. A single long rail is fixed to the base by a number of bent rails. As the bridge sways, it's clear that the rail is not quite long enough, leaving a large gap at certain points.

The rail is 30 ft. long and very well fixed to the bridge. As the bridge sways it moves up to 15ft. further left on the map depicted, leaving a large gap. The rail, at just under 4 inches across, requires a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) to balance across. The giants usually time their leaps and step off the bridge as it comes closest to the cave below.

1BC. THE GUARDS (CR 12)

A smoking wound opens in the volcano wall, a wide slit some thirty feet across and ten times that high. A narrow shelf of rock opens near the top of this opening.

The cave and all chambers beyond are thick with sulphurous fumes, these replicate smoke effects and provide cover. The giants wrap cloth or hair or skin across their mouths and noses to prevent the worst effects and are generally immune to this effect now.

Creatures: The entrance to the tunnels is guarded by 2 ash giants. They follow the tactics listed above.

ASH GIANT (2)

Large giant, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 15 (scale mail)

Hit Points 210 (20d10 + 100)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
29 (+9)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Str +14, Con +10, Wis +9, Cha +9

Skills Athletics +14

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages common, giant

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Ash Giant makes 2 Greatsword attacks.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 30 (6d6+9) damage.

Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 35 (4d12 + 9) bludgeoning damage.

Development: The PCs may try another approach and ask for access to the gate in exchange for supplies. The Prophet has already seen the PCs in his dreams, although he sees all humans and humanoids as alike, so unless any of the PCs are particularly strange-looking he may initially think they are Purity guards trying to recapture them. A non-hostile approach confuses the giants, who may still throw a rock or two before heading into the lair, at which stage they and the Prophet have a brief discussion. If the PCs have mentioned the gate, the Prophet's interest is piqued, the two giants come up and demand the PCs leave their weapons outside before escorting them to their leader. Events then follow the developments listed in Area 1BG.

1BD. THE HOUNDS (CR 13)

A pair of vile looking vast metallic centipedes are chained to a rail hammered into the wall of the tunnel just as it enters a low narrow gap.

The gap is 5 feet wide and 10 feet high; the giants can only pass through here one at a time.

Creatures: The chains are entirely unnecessary, and don't even work, but the ash giants think they need to do something to prevent the chain worms (*Tome of Horrors Complete*) from wandering off. The creatures have a limited empathic relationship with the giants and remain as guardians. If called into battle they help any giant.

CHAIN WORM (2)

Large beast, unaligned

AC 21 (natural armor)

hp: 161 (17d10 + 68)

Speed 30 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	16 (+3)	19 (+4)	1 (-5)	12 (+1)	4 (-3)

Damage Immunities Psychic

Condition Immunities frightened

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive perception 11

Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Poison: A creature poisoned by the chain worm must make a DC 16 Con saving throw at the end of each of its turns. On a failed save, the creature takes 2d8 poison damage and remains poisoned. On a successful save, the poisoned condition ends.

Trilling: By rapidly vibrating its carapace as a bonus action, a chain worm emits a high-pitched trilling sound that stuns and deafens creatures within range. All living creatures within 30 feet that can hear the trilling must make a successful a DC 16 Con saving throw or be stunned and deafened. Stunned characters can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns; a successful save ends the stunned condition, but the deafness lasts until the end of the creature's next long rest.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The chain worm bites once and stings once with its tail.

Bite. *Melee weapon attack:* +10 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 17 (2d10 + 6) piercing damage, and the target is grappled. While the chain worm maintains a grapple, it can only bite the grappled creature.

Tail Sting. *Melee weapon attack:* +10 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) piercing damage plus 2d8 poison damage, and the target is poisoned (see below). This attack has advantage against targets that are grappled by the chain worm.

1BE. THE COMMUNITY (CR 17)

The true depravity of the occupants become clear once you see this chamber; the walls and floors are littered with remains, and crude paintings on the walls depict the acts that have led to them—cannibalism and sadism are celebrated here.

The giant escapees have become more bestial here, their terror and anger becoming tangible as they abuse each other to the point of death.

Creatures: There are five ash giants here. When an alarm is raised the giants ready rocks and move to the furthest part of the tunnel near Area 1BF, while one of them warns the Prophet and then returns. When intruders enter they throw their rocks and then move in with swords.

ASH GIANT (5)

CR 13

XP 10,000

hp 210 each (see page 25)

Treasure: Amongst the foulness are several objects stolen from auttaine, as well as quite a few auttaine body-parts. A DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check is required to locate each object; these are: a +1 hammer, a vial of acid, a mattock, and a rifle with a bite mark on its shoulder stock.

1BF. CRAWL

A vent opens in the volcano here, a small cramped shaft choked with sulphurous fumes. Rails have been driven into the walls here to form a makeshift ladder, while below growls an angry pit.

The crawl is perfect for giants, but not so for Medium or smaller creatures, who face a DC 16 Strength (athletics) check to make the awkward climb up the slightly moist rails, which lie above a steaming side-vent. The climb is 100 feet. in total and leads to Area 1BG. Characters falling drop a further 30 feet below the floor level into a boiling pool some 20 feet deep, taking 10d6 damage per round of exposure.

1BG. THE GATE AND THE PROPHET (CR 16)

The rails lead to a wide space, bridged by more hammered rails, sloping upwards through the chamber to a broad balcony some thirty feet higher. Just four rails cross this space above a bubbling vent. Something horrific has taken place here, four ash giants hang crucified above a fresco of madness—someone has been busy at work; the medium is clearly blood, and it has been worked into scenes of insanity—a bloated female thing births alien horrors, while a group of figures use a key to unlock four gates and release her. The scene continues on the flesh of the giants—all of whom still seem to be alive.

The rails rise at 45 degrees, and require a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to cross, those who fall drop 120 feet into the boiling pool below (10d6 damage per round of exposure).

Creatures: The Prophet is here, with two followers to work the flesh and walls with his visions (see below). The followers have hung their skin with auttaine body parts and bits of their fellow giants, but otherwise they are naked. Reduce their AC by 4 accordingly.

ASH GIANT (2)

CR 12

XP 10,000

hp 210 each (see page 25)

The Prophet

Large giant, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 18 (plate)

Hit Points 254 (22d10 + 132)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
29 (+9)	14 (+2)	22 (+6)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Str +14, Con +11, Wis +9, Cha +9

Skills Athletics +14

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Giant

PART 3: DEAD GATES SLEEPING

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The Prophet deals an extra 21 (6d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the Prophet that isn't incapacitated and the Prophet doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Ash Giant makes 2 Greataxe attacks.

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 30 (6d6+9) damage.

Cannon. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 54 (8d12 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

TACTICS

Before Combat When he first sees the PCs, the Prophet quite clearly recognizes them from his nightmares. However, he's not interested in talking about his visions, only stopping them by pulling them apart. The Prophet keeps a loaded cannon he carries around with him at all times. However, if the PCs have approached peacefully to trade, and have 5,000 gps worth of weapons and other useful supplies, they can cause the Prophet to back down by a DC 25 Intimidation check. The DC of the check increases by 5 for each 1,000 gp or part thereof below 5,000 to a minimum of 1,000 gp. If this succeeds, the giant becomes more compliant, and explains why he has been working on his frescoes. He allows the PCs access to the gate if they wish.

During Combat The Prophet uses his cannon on distant opponents. He also tries to use his sneak attack if there is an opportunity. He engages in melee when it seems tactically advantageous.

Development: The 4 crucified giants are far too injured to help or hinder. The Prophet has used his skills to cut and bleed his visions into the chamber. He has been deranged by the awakening of the God-Seer and has seen the PCs coming. Anyone examining his fresco of living skins soon realizes that the figures depicted resemble the PCs greatly—consider describing a few features and letting the PCs slowly figure it out themselves that it is they who are opening the gate and releasing the God-Seer.

The depictions are remarkably informative—this event (the PCs attacking the Prophet) is depicted, along with the Prophet's death at the PCs' hands (and which is depicted in vile detail). Another gate is watched by beatific creatures with halos. Characters making a DC 20 Wisdom (Insight or Perception) see that this gate hides a foul, many-faced demon. A third is shown in an iron fortress at the summit of the heavens. Depicted here, and noticed if characters make a DC 23 DC Wisdom (Insight or Perception), is a cannon golem. The Purity party on Asteroid 113 is also depicted, again a DC 23 Wisdom (Insight or Perception) counts four dozen or more Purity troopers, along with other members

of the party, including the cannon golem. In the final scene, which does not require a check to decipher, the PCs battle a Purity symbol surrounded by angels whilst their minds are being invaded by vast, alien thoughts.

The ash giants can relate the ravings of the Prophet, how he foresaw the PCs opening 4 gates, three of which became one to release the God-Seer and her million children into the universe.



1BH. THE GATE

A dull black circle of metal sits within an aged series of metal rings wreathed with countless alien sigils.

There are 6999 symbols depicted on each ring, and 5 concentric rings in total. As soon as the PCs set eyes on them they realize how absurdly simple the matter of resurrecting the gate is. The mathematical formula they follow requires moving the symbols in a particular way; this movement takes a single character ten minutes to achieve, and during the final minute he realizes that once open, the gate can only be closed from its far side—something that can only be accessed when all 3 gates are opened once more.

When the PC completes his work read or paraphrase the following description:

The last symbol—an inverted alien bird swallowing a sun—moves into place with a satisfying thud. Momentarily all is still and then something remarkable happens—the gate's rings turn inside out, revolving and spinning as something forms in their center; an echo of yourselves seen in a pool of utter blackness. A sudden stench of emptiness and vast antiquity reaches out—a tangible force like the hand of a ghost which draws through you, embracing you as it does with a feeling of great warmth and then forming into a gate.

Unless this is the last gate the PCs awaken, the shiny blackness repels attempts to enter it. If all three gates are awakened, it forms a link to Asteroid 113 as described in Part Four of this adventure. The PC who awoke this gate, however, feels a physical pleasure wafting over his whole body; an almost sexual feeling of one-ness. The PC's Wisdom is permanently raised by 2.

2A. SIN

Control: Neutral

Distance: 1 hour

Size: 198 miles diameter

Transport: Skiff

Cost: 200 gp

SIN

LN Large City

Corruption +2; Crime +3; Economy +3; Law -1; Lore +1; Society +5

Qualities notorious, prosperous, rumormongering citizens, strategic location, tourist attraction

Danger +20

DEMOGRAPHICS

Government council

Population 13,450 (12,900 auttaine, 550 other).

Notable NPCs

Kabbalan, Duke of Sin (LN male auttaine fighter 8/bard 4)

The Rust Bitch, Unofficial Queen of Sin (N female auttaine bard 13)

GATE 2—SALVATION

LOCATION INFORMATION

Use Charisma (Persuasion) or Intelligence (History) checks to gather information.

DC 5—Salvation—a holy site under the care of a devout sisterhood of nuns of Haymot Steel-Arm—is ironically reached from Beacon via a short skiff plunge to a place called Sin, where all the miners go to spend their hard-earned cash. Sin is where auttaine go to unwind and is particularly noted for its clockwork horse races.

DC 10—You might have noticed that Sin is chained to Salvation—some say it is to ensure that virtue and vice are never separated, others that the holy Ancient relic within Salvation—the timepiece known as the Fable Orrery—is kept secure so that when the sisterhood finally work out what it is really for Purity can use it. They say the hundred bells—the lesser bells that make up part of the instrument—haven't sounded for decades now, and of course the Great Bell—the central object of the device—has never sounded.

DC 15—They may be sister nuns, but they're Purity through and through; their leader—the caustic Mother Metal—is a devout worshipper of Haymot Steel-Arm, but is said to get her true pleasures from the Purity officers that visit the nunnery.

DC 20—Of course even the officers have to abide by the visitors' rule—no visitor may remain more than 20 hours on Salvation so that they don't taint it. The clock may be amazing but there's not much else to see.

DC 23—Except the Devil's Gate of course, although no one much goes there now, it's so ridiculously dangerous to get to—an exposed path across cliffs so high they say that some folks who fell off still haven't hit the bottom. The tornado-force winds tear people off, so that's probably why they abandoned that signaling station up there.

MARKETPLACE

Spellcasting 7th

Common Items 4d4; Uncommon Items 2d4; Rare Items 1d6-1

The short skiff plunge from Beacon to Sin is aboard one of half a dozen bulging skiffs, all of which come with an exclusive upper deck that serves passengers' needs for 1,000 gp, indulging them with sweet fragrances, luxurious seating, and curiously attentive clockwork servants.



When the PCs arrive on Sin, read or paraphrase the following description:

There's an overt use of gaslight here, strange signs that flicker and pulsate from high walls in the endless rain. Screams echo from the streets here, gaudily dressed steel whores display their remarkable flexibility to would-be vendors, while nearby a street clears as a herd of rusting steel and iron clockwork horses race by, their jockeys gripping to them in joy and terror.

Sin is the happy capitol of the Zone, a dark fairyland of vice where all the miners come when they want to relax or indulge—particularly in gambling. The lawful auttaine love to unwind with a reckless flutter, and there are over five-hundred gambling halls. The most popular at the moment are races between clockwork horses around the city streets, viewed from gambling halls using curious ocular devices. To reflect an evenings' entertainment, allow the PCs to bet any amount they wish up to 2000 gp (if you wish, more exclusive clubs allow bigger bets) and roll a d20 for a result. If the PCs roll a 20 they win 10 times their bet; on a 18 or 19 they win three times their bet.

Across the city, the PCs should meet collective groups of nuns from Salvation. These sisters are usually singing hymns, praying, or preaching from street-corners, shouting at the locals and visitors to repent.

The void gondola to Salvation rests a short train journey—aboard a ridiculously large, three storey train—away at the edges of an acidic sea above which the gondola rises almost vertically into the heavens.

Consequences (CR 14 or 16)

Sin may be neutral, but to members of the Confederacy, that just means anything goes. Corrosive Ventures is cross with the PCs—really angry; they expect to be obeyed, particularly by strangers they try to help.

Corrosive have a number of local agents, and many of these have local allies that dabble in the darker sides of constructs. Once word reaches them of the PCs' deeds and presence, they arrange for the use of a pair of stone golems created by Corrosive Ventures. It's suggested that this consequence occurs when the PCs are in Sin—possibly after they have just arrived. Use your judgment on the best time, and be prepared to improvise. Once instructed, the golems do not return unless they succeed in wiping out all the PCs

STONE GOLEM (2)

CR 10

XP 5,900
hp 178 (SRD)

Development: If the PCs made an enemy of Lady Kethi, she attacks now, helped by her daughter Ayva.

LADY KETHI

CR 13

XP 10,000
hp 150 (see page 17)

AYVA—IRON GOLEM

CR 14

XP 15,000
hp 210 (SRD)

2B. SALVATION

Control: Purity

Distance: 6 hours

Size: 45 miles

Transport: Void Gondola

Cost: 600 gp

This may be the PC's first voyage in the curious and unsettlingly silent void gondola; be sure to emphasize the awful pulling and raising of the device. The gondola is a broad metal sphere some 15ft. across and lined with two rows of leather seats that are arranged rather like a theater. Half a dozen other visitors are within; all auttaine, all talking excitedly about the Fable. Make sure the PCs hear a debate between two passengers about its silence—particularly the silence of the Great Bell; if the PCs haven't heard the tale, make sure they hear it now.

When the PCs arrive, they are drawn via the gondola into a broad marble space filled with votive lights, the sound of sisters singing hymns echo in the chamber. The PCs are ushered into the main chamber by smiling nuns. As the PCs enter this vast Ancients' space, read the following description:

You see now why locals spoke of the Fable in reverent terms—the vast chamber is dominated by a device so strange it has to be the work of the Ancients. A basilica of metal and crystal of impossible delicacy—a million mechanisms make up the complex whole, ten thousand moving parts are fed by a hundred thousand gears, giving the object perpetual motion. About it soar and glide countless heavenly bodies flanked by birds, giving the device the appearance of some fabled orrery. About its outer arms, which fill hundreds of feet, hang bells—tiny delicate bells, and within its soul, wrapped in a muscle and skeleton of vast complexity, is a single great bell, an iron sphere with an enormous striker.

Suddenly, the striker pulls back and, as the nuns sink to their knees and weep, the bell is struck.

SALVATION

LN Small Town

Corruption -2; **Crime** +0; **Economy** +0; **Law** +0; **Lore** +0; **Society** +0

Qualities holy site, pious

Danger +0

DEMOGRAPHICS

Government autocracy

Population 199 (199 auttaine).

Notable NPCs

Mother Metal (LN auttaine cleric of Haymot Steel-Arm 13) 32

Spellcasting 7th; **Uncommon Items** 1d6

The nuns of Salvation are an uber-strict arm of Purity, twisted into the devout worship of Haymot Steel-Arm. The nuns are obsessively devotional to their deity, and work on a strict timetable of worship that runs by an exacting clock set by the divine timepiece. Visitors to Salvation are not uncommon, and are generally made up of the higher echelons of Purity—there is an assumption that visitors observe and revere this devotion themselves, and the PCs may be able to play upon this. Visitors have a curious brass and copper timepiece strapped to their wrists with amazing locks when they arrive—the timepiece counts down 20 hours from the moment it is worn, turning jet black when the time ends. This device is used to ensure no visitor spends more than 20 hours on Salvation, anyone who lingers beyond this time is sure to be met by an angry Purity patrol when they return to Sin and find themselves in a heap of trouble.

The Fable is an Ancients' device, used to track momentous events within the heavens. The arrival of the PCs is a trigger for a truly momentous event—the shedding and imparting of knowledge within the Ancients Repository in Part Five of this adventure. Be deliberately cryptic about this matter, however, it's for you to know why the bell is struck, but for everyone else—including all the NPCs in Salvation—to guess.

The dead gate on Salvation lies some distance from the orrery—the majority of Salvation is within tunnels, as the outer surface has a very thin atmosphere that is wracked by terrible winds. The leader of the nunnery—Mother Metal—follows a strict schedule of events and prayers throughout the day, leaving only brief periods where she may be approached. Other attempts to corner her are politely declined, and in the event of trouble high-ranking Purity officers are only a short gondola ride away.

Sister Relea (LN female auttaine cleric of Haymot Steel-Arm) has seen the PCs—and one of them in particular—in her dreams. She has seen them open the fabled Devil-Gate in the mountains high above the nunnery and be bathed in joyful light. In truth, the name Devil-Gate is a misnomer; Mother Metal looks upon the tale wearily. She is more interested in the orrery and would be inclined to view anyone who could open the gate with wonder, rather than suspicion.

Sister Relea is in the orrery chamber when the bell strikes, and instantly recognizes one PC; which one is irrelevant. Characters making a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check

notice her staring at one PC. The Sister follows the PCs, unsure of what to do. Within minutes it's pretty obvious that she is following the PCs, but unless the PCs make a DC 22 Wisdom (Insight) knowing that her attention is due to her wonder, not spying, is tricky to deduce.

Unless approached, Sister Relea follows the PCs for 2 hours before plucking up the courage to come forward and talk—this may not seem like much of an issue, but if they leave it this long the PCs miss their first chance to convince Mother Metal to give them access to the gate. If they approach Relea first, she instantly confides her knowledge to them as listed below—she believes the PCs are angels come to open the gate and bring wonderment. The tolling of the great bell merely confirms this to her.

Relea is quiet, sincere, devoted and kind; she speaks in a genteel way, and is genuinely fascinated by the PCs. Relea confides in the PC that she has seen her in her dreams, and that she opens the Devil-Gate. She tells the PCs that the gate lies beyond a perilous journey up to the higher confines of the outer nunnery—a place racked by storms and high winds, reached via a path known as the Way of the Pilgrim. The way can only be reached through a remote door in the nunnery, an iris door that has a double lock. Relea is not aware of any traps, and can lead the PCs to it. For more details see below. Relea knows Mother Metal—who she adores—has the key, but rarely grants access. She is also aware of the gaps in the Mother's schedule where she takes questions from visitors.

In essence, the PCs seem to have 2 options—break through the iris gate (not easy) or convince Mother Metal to grant them access. If they fail these two options, however, Relea takes matters into her own hands and steals the key—something that has serious consequences for her.

Mother Metal is not quite the tyrant she seems, but she is still Purity through and through, so any attempts to coerce access work better if they come from a Purity member. Her day is one of strict prayer and worship, in line with the Fable; in the next 20 hours or so she has 3 periods when she may be approached—the PCs can find these out by a DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check. The first occurs 2 hours after the PCs arrive, the second 11 hours after arrival and the last 17 hours after they reach Salvation. After this point visitors are required to leave. Any attempt to stay longer is likely to get the PCs into hot water.

All attempts to coerce Mother Metal are made with advantage by anyone appearing to be a Purity member (a uniform is required). The Mother listens each time to the PCs and has questions for them as detailed below—if they succeed in two checks, she asks one of her attendees to escort the PCs to the iris-gate and unlock it for them. As ever, do not overly rely on dice rolls; if the PCs come up with a great argument then allow them to succeed. The Mother has 3 questions, the check needed is detailed after each. If it is necessary for her to make saving throws, assume a +4 modifier.

Her first concern is the fable of the devil behind the gate—what will the PCs do if it is true? The PCs could show their might with a DC 21 Strength check or the casting of any 5th level spell, as do other methods you deem suitable.

The second test is one of faith, she asks each PC this question—if more succeed than fail they have passed. She poses the PCs the question that if whatever lies beyond the gate is so powerful, do they swear to seal the entrance to the nunnery even if it costs them their own lives to protect the Fable? The Mother's Insight is only +4, so the PCs may find it easy to lie. You can allow the PCs to make DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) checks to convince her they would if they honestly would or, if they are of such a selfless type, allow them to extoll this without a check. This test is very pertinent, as the PCs genuinely have to make this choice later in the adventure.

Finally, Mother Metal does consider the great bell strike and the PCs arrival as linked—she wants the PCs to honestly tell her why they wish to access the gate. For this event one of her attendees casts a *zone of truth* (save DC 17), the PCs can be honest (but need to bear in mind that Mother Metal may report anarchists) or make a Bluff (DC 25) if they make a save.

If the PCs fail, and do not open the iris gate, Relea steals into the Mother's chambers and brings the PCs the key on hour 18—giving them just 2 hours to get to the gate and unlock it. This appalling action has severe consequences for the auttaine, however (see sidebar).

VILIFICATION OF THE FAITHFUL

If she helps the PCs by stealing, Relea confesses her actions to Mother Metal and is cast from the order, branded as a heretic with an indelible, vivid red stain across her head. This rare mark is one of the uttermost humiliations an auttaine ruled by Purity can endure—rendering her invisible, ignored by everyone on pain of death. Later, the PCs should come upon a vilified Relea, begging on the streets.

Perhaps the PCs can restore the auttaine's faith in Haymot, perhaps they can help her on some different path, but if she is seen with the PCs on Beason she imposes disadvantage on all checks to interact with the inhabitants.

S1. THE IRIS GATE

Lying at a neglected corner of the nunnery, the iris gate is a 10-foot wide circular exit. Characters listening can clearly hear the winds howling beyond. Although in a quiet corner, nuns do still come this way (an outer devotional is nearby) so do not give the PCs limitless chances at the gate.

The gate (threshold 10, hit points 300) is locked by 2 amazing locks (DC 25 each), it is set in a thick wall of concrete and steel. If the PCs use force, Mother Metal is sure to raise the vandalism of the Fable with Purity officers.

If opened, the iris gate slides slowly open, a beckoning, howling gale sounds beyond. A short, dirty corridor leads to an opening. When the PCs reach there read the following description:

The nuns were not kidding when they spoke about the traversing of the path being an act of faith—a towering iron stair rises almost vertically above you, its flanks lacerated by the howling gale that tears at this high mountainside. At the top, the stair reaches a pathway made of metal bars punched into a sheer cliff face, which drops about two miles. At its end lies an opening, above which, reached by the remains of an iron ladder, is a decimated iron structure rather like a lighthouse bristling with iron antennae.

The iron ladder stair is almost 200 yards long, the walkway beyond is 100 yards. Characters trying to fly must make Fly check (DC 30) to remain in control each minute; those who fail are out of control and blown 120 feet in a random direction. Those who fail by 5 or more are smashed into the mountainside, taking 6d6 damage and are out of control.

The ladder requires a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) and, unless secured, a DC 10 Strength check to avoid being torn from the iron steps.

The walkway is a different matter; it is an act of faith as well as Acrobatics. The lower rails are not too thin (about a foot across) and above them, at the perfect height for a Medium creature, are fixed iron chains. Characters can cross them by making a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check and DC 10 Strength check to avoid being torn away.

The fall is about 2 miles. The return climb up is DC 15 for both checks, as the face has a slight overhang. Bearing in mind the ripping gales below, you may wish the PC to face multiple Strength checks to return.

S2. THE LIGHTHOUSE

PCs can use the short remains of the ladder (DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check) to get into the calm of the ruins of the lighthouse if they wish, but the place is little more than a shell decimated by the gales. The opening leads down a short corridor into a wider space which contains a dead gate, when the PCs arrive read or paraphrase the following description:

There is an ancient air about this place. Despite the gales outside it seems tranquil, almost beatific in its air. The dull, black gate glowers from within an aged series of metal rings wreathed with countless alien sigils.

Like the one at Area 1BH there are 6999 symbols depicted on each ring, and 5 concentric rings in total. These symbols are subtly different to those, however; slightly more complex. Characters attempting to resurrect the gate must make an Intelligence check (DC 20) to correctly align each of the 5 outer rings. If they fail, they hear something approach the gate from the other side, on the second failure they hear it breathing and listening, on the third fail it begins smashing the gate from the other side, something that does no damage to this side.

When the PC completes her work read or paraphrase the following description:

The last symbol—a hollow humanoid swallowing a moon—moves into place with a satisfying thud. Momentarily all is still and then the gate's rings turn inside out, revolving and spinning as something forms in their center; an image of you seen in a pool of blackness. Suddenly something tears through the darkness, the blackness enveloping it like an oil slick. The thing is vast and insectoid and furious—a boiling blackened mass of hate and distended limbs. It howls.

S3. THE PRISONER (CR 18)

When the gates were closed, this one had something trapped within. Kept in a slumbering, awful stasis the creature—a derghodaemon referred to as the Prisoner—remained. It is the thing the nuns sometimes hear when they come here, and it has been trapped within, impotent and insane, for centuries of centuries. When it is released, it bays its joy and looks for prey to destroy.

THE PRISONER

Large fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 189 (18d10 + 90)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	20 (+5)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +10, Wis +8, Cha +10

Damage Resistances acid, fire, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Abyssal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 16 (15,000 XP)

Cloud of Misery. The Prisoner is surrounded at all times by a Large adamantite wasp swarm. It has control over the swarm, directing it as it pleases.

PART 3: DEAD GATES SLEEPING

Magic Resistance. The Prisoner has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Scream of Iron (Su) The Prisoner is able to draw the inner plates of its skin together to form a distended and cacophonous scraping noise that can drive a mortal being insane. Anyone within 30 feet must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be struck by a *symbol* spell (insanity). A creature that makes this save is immune to the effect for 24 hours.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Prisoner makes four claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 22 (4d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Teleport. The Prisoner magically teleports, along with any equipment it is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.

During Combat The Prisoner leads with its claws, shedding its swarm of adamantine wasps almost as an afterthought.

ADAMANTINE WASP SWARM

CR 11

XP 7,200

hp 91 (see page 10)

Development: The PC who awoke this gate feels an intense joy which envelops over her whole body. The PC's Charisma permanently raises by +2 Charisma because of it.



Unless this is the last gate the PCs awaken, the shiny blackness repels any attempt to enter. When the final gate is opened it forms a link to Asteroid 113 as described in Part Four of this adventure.

GATE 3—ZENITH

LOCATION INFORMATION

Use Charisma (Persuasion) or Intelligence (History) to gather information, higher checks reveal the information for lesser results.

DC 10—It's an outpost, the furthest place in the Zone. It has a Purity fort on it, but has been used by reckless miners and treasure seekers to get to Asteroid 113 as it is the closest place—not that the journey is easy.

DC 15—Access to Zenith is strictly controlled by Purity, and only comes via Pestilence—an abandoned asteroid that has a ghost city wiped out by a plague. A void gondola links the two. There are stories that the plague has not killed everything on the asteroid, and that mutated creatures have been seen. Many miners think Pestilence was deliberately infected and the creatures were unleashed as part of a Purity plot to keep intruders far away from the secretive base.

DC 20—The suspicious amount of vast horribly mutated worms below the streets over the past few years to mop up any survivors merely adds to the story. There are still plenty of scavengers prepared to risk accessing Pestilence via its old void gondolas, however. One name in particular always crops up—Drom Brak—he's always coming back to Choke with things to sell he's scavenged from Pestilence.

DC 25—Rumor has it that Purity have sent a mission to Asteroid 113 in the past few days—it is said to be led by an infamous Ancients' treasure hunter and archaeologist called Dotan Roth and his sadistic leader, the infamous Obercommander Aspa Corrosa—the so-called Iron Lady. Corrosa is responsible for more atrocities than even the Kronen, and some have said she has her many eyes set on rulership herself.

A. CHOKE

Control: The Shattered Zone Mining Company

Distance: 7 hours

Size: 1903 miles

Transport: Skiff

Cost: 1400 gp

CHOKE

LN Large City

Corruption +6; **Crime** +3; **Economy** +5; **Law** +3; **Lore** +2; **Society** +0

Qualities industrial (twice), notorious, prosperous, racially intolerant (all non-auttaine)

Danger +20

DEMOGRAPHICS

Government overlord

Population 24,980 (24,800 auttaine, 180 other).

Notable NPCs

Zoor, Principal of Choke (LN auttaine fighter 19)

MARKETPLACE

Spellcasting 7th

Uncommon Items 3d4; **Rare Items** 2d4

Choke is the principal settlement of this asteroid, but in truth only blemishes part of the landscape; a score of other places with similar names—Vulper, Toxus, and Strychninne to name but three—also litter its surface. The place has a breathable atmosphere that has been poisoned by industry—when the PCs arrive they may be affected by the Choke, the smog that thrives here.

Those affected by the Choke must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw. Those who fail are poisoned for 1d4 minutes, and must make another DC 12 Constitution save when engaging in strenuous activity or become poisoned for another 1d4 minutes. This lingering affliction ceases after 24 hours.

Those who wear plague masks (see *Gazetteer*) make these saves with advantage; miners and other locals often wear scarves drenched in wine across their faces to ease the effects, making saves at +2. Saves are made once per day.

The PCs quickly find that there are no transports to Pestilence; however, those who make a DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check are made aware that methods to reach the asteroid still remain in place. A DC 25 check reveals that Purity are so over-confident about the plague on Pestilence that they have all but stopped watching these routes, which are only generally officially used by those heading to Zenith, or by scavengers—who use all six remaining void gondolas often. Control of the transports rests with a group of treasure

hunting scavengers and smugglers who have interest across the Zone. The smugglers are fairly easy to find out about with a DC 25 Diplomacy check, as they have ensured bribes are paid to the officials of Purity to allow ongoing work. They are not so easy to find, however.

The PCs may decide to try to find their own way off of Choke by taking over one of the void gondolas to Pestilence. Be prepared to improvise and go along with this if they try it—just bear in mind that the smugglers, like other organizations in the Zone, have lots of allies and power.

One particularly well-known scavenger of Pestilence is **Drom Brak**; he is used as the main smuggler contact for the PCs here.

Drom Brak (N male auttaine) has lived as long as he has by keeping a low profile and bribing officials. A rusting, lizard-skinned old salt who dresses like an upper-class auttaine of old is currently spending a lot of time relaxing in Choke, visiting the low gaming clubs that thrive here. The PCs can learn his current whereabouts by making a DC 20 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check. A bribe of 100 gp lowers the DC by 1; it can be lowered by a maximum of 5 through this method.

The PCs meeting with Drom takes place during a mass dogfight organized by local auttaine to break the tedium of factory work. These locals are a grim lot; tough, metallic workers with muscles to match their poverty. Drom is as sour as the rest of them—more so in fact. The auttaine cares nothing for the PCs' motives and is interested purely in money. He can arrange transportation via his contacts to Pestilence; tickets are one-way and cost 1,000 gp each. If the PCs want a return ticket, the price is tripled—it's risky hanging about the surface. If the PCs approach other smugglers they're likely to get a similar price, but such smugglers may be more secretive than Drom and harder to find.

Drom can pick the gondola closest to the Purity base—he asks no questions—and can give directions to the base if asked. Essentially this gondola arrives at one end of a long boulevard once called Majesty Way (now little more than a dune-scoured ruin); it's a three mile hike up this broad, 200-yard-wide street to the Purity base.

The gondolas are in a dilapidated state, but make the 6 hour journey without event. If the PCs are with Drom he's not one for talking much.

CONSEQUENCES (CR 14)

Betraying the Shattered Zone Mining Company can only end one way. The company—anxious about the PCs power and genuinely concerned about a possible attempt to muscle in on trade—decide to deal with them harshly. They contact a diabolist within Purity who, for certain reimbursements, summons devils for them occasionally. The attack can therefore occur at any time you wish; those who summoned it and those who asked the question are long gone before the PCs set eyes on the creature.

PART 3: DEAD GATES SLEEPING

Creatures: A horned devil and 3 barbed devils are summoned by a ritual enabling them to track the PCs as if they had cast *find the path* and they were the destination. Just before attacking, the horned devil hurls a flask of *infernal shadow* into the party's midst, creating an area of magical *darkness* (as the spell) lasting 1 minute.

HORNED DEVIL

XP 7,200
hp 148 (SRD)

BARBED DEVILS (3)

XP 1,800 each
hp 110 (SRD)

B. PESTILENCE

Under pressure from Dotan Roth, Obercommander Aspa Corrosa ordered the cleansing of Deliverance to cover their work on Asteroid 113. Purity soldiers delivered dozens of chemical devices containing a mutagen that would warp the bodies of the locals, mutating them and turning them into monsters. Corrosa knew this alone would not be enough to render Deliverance a wasteland, however, so she also ensured that several hundred juvenile purple worms were released into the city's sewage system.

Within twenty-four hours the city was quarantined; within seven days Deliverance was rendered effectively a ghost city. She herself renamed it Pestilence, a name that greatly amused her. Now the city is an apocalyptic landscape only visited by scavengers who risk the worms and mutants. A tiny outpost remains to ensure that the occupants of Zenith have an escape route. This outpost has a tiny Purity staff. Their sole aim is to keep the void gondola open—just in case.

The PCs sink into the sandstorm-atmosphere of Pestilence and reach the surface almost before they know it. There is no time for long goodbyes, Drom takes his leave of the PCs unless they have paid him to stay. When the PCs step out onto the surface read the following description:

Through a raking sandstorm you make out the ghosts of tall buildings, now suffocating below a slowly rolling mass of dunes. Ahead, a wide opening severs the ruins, this way rises and falls over a series of high dunes.

Pestilence is in essence a dead world, made up of high sand dunes and little else. Dust-storms tear across its surface at all times.

B1. THE BEAST OF THE STREETS (CR 15)

The streets are mostly empty now—most of the true mutants have gone, but below the surface many things stir. On their 3 mile trek to the base the PCs are attacked by a mutant purple worm.

PURPLE WORM

CR 15

XP 13,000
hp 247 (SRD)

B2A. THE GONDOLA FORT (CR 14)

A shape comes into view through the dust, a squat domed place made of iron—seemingly without opening save for its roof, from which a vertical line of thick wire stretches to the heavens.

The fort has iron walls a foot thick, and concrete foundations ten yards deep. The only exit—itsself a foot-thick iron door—has been welded shut for years. The domed wall (DC 20 Strength (Athletics) to climb) rises steeply at first, and then slowly eases and comes to the opening above the central courtyard that holds the gondola.

Trap: To deter worms (and the occasional mutant), the squad has trapped the outer 30 feet of the fort. The large grasping blade traps are able to grip like a bear trap, holding anything up to Gargantuan size and then slicing it apart with huge blades worked with clockwork motors. When primed, the things resemble evil-looking 5ft. metal spheres. The whole area around the fort is riddled with them, and PCs crossing the area face at least 2.

Medium creatures within range must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or be grappled (escape DC 16), and take 12d6 slashing damage per round for 6 rounds, unless they are freed from the metal jaws.





B2B. THE LOST POST (CR 16)

An iron door, which is so choked with sand it requires a DC 20 Strength check to open, gives access to the bare barracks within. This space is a single dusty room, with areas for sleeping and a workshop for repairs.

Creatures: The watch—a mithral golem and 6 Purity oversolders—are herein. The dust storms are so bad and the traps generally so effective that they are easily surprised. The troops do little more by day than slumber and work in the workshop to keep boredom at bay. The golem is the main antagonist; the soldiers generally try to keep away from trouble and readily surrender if the golem or half their number are overcome.

IRON GOLEM

CR 16

XP 15,000

hp 210 (SRD)

PURITY SQUAD OBERSOLDER (6)

CR 7

XP 2,900 each

hp 105 each (see page 72)

Treasure: Amongst the oddments here are an unarmed grasping trap identical to those outside, and the chymic telegraph—a curious chitin and metal object surrounding a bone horn speaking-piece like a wide funnel, below which is a bone and steel winding wheel Intelligence (History) check

DC 22 to identify its purpose and use).

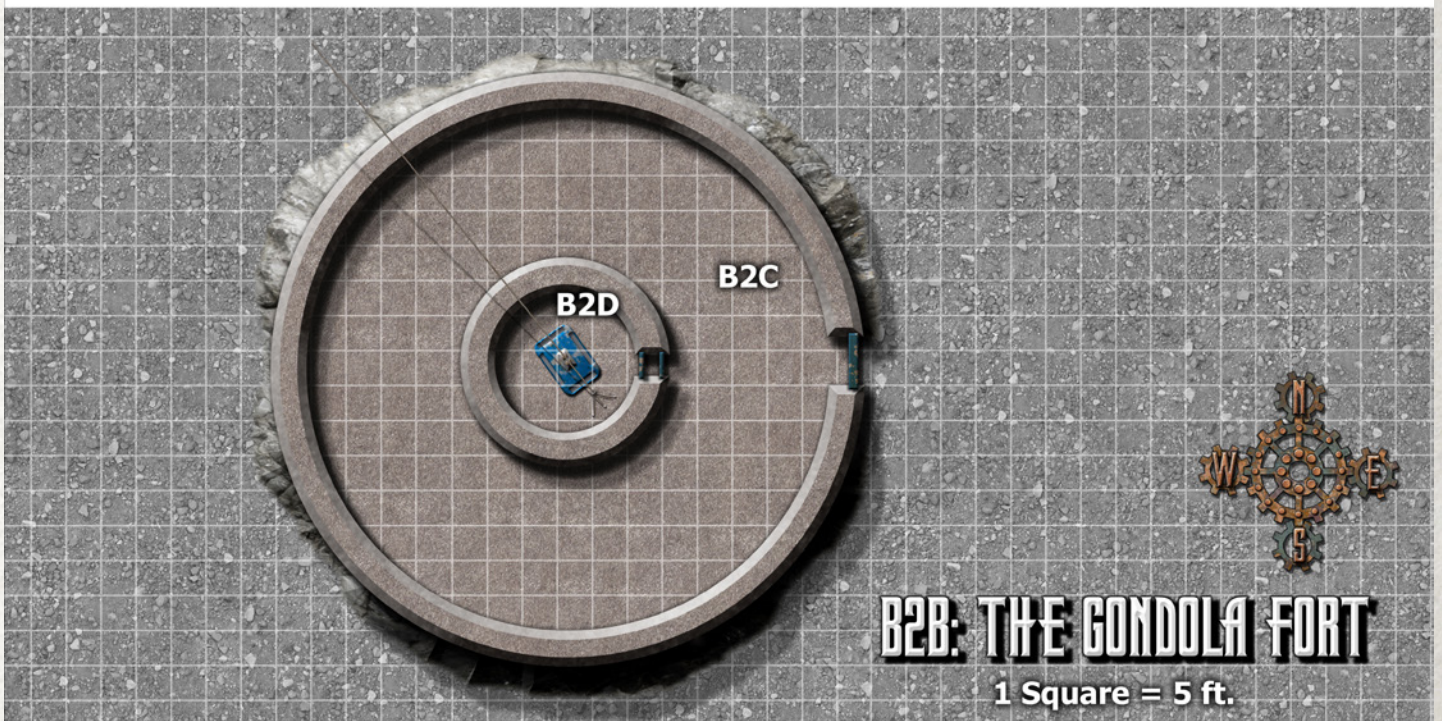
Development: The oversolders all know the correct method of communication with Zenith—something they generally only do once a month when they are due to return to Zenith. The chymic telegraph is used in a set way, the caller waits for an answer, says *Praise the Kronen*, then delivers the message. If this process is not followed those at Zenith become suspicious and dispatch an interception party when the gondola begins to move (see below for more details).

B2C. THE GONDOLA

The gondola lies in the courtyard of the fort. Within it is luxurious, with walnut, velvet, and steel fittings and six leather seats arranged in a central circle about a foot-thick brass rod. Its portals are two foot round, and by one is the driver's machinery—essentially a simple control atop a brass post 3 ft. high with the words “chain halt”, “dead slow”, “slow”, “half”, and “fast.” These relate to the gondola's speed.

PCs examining the gondola and making a DC 10 Intelligence check realize it is badly in need of repair. It presently has 150 hit points.

The PCs potentially face two perils on their 12 hour journey to Zenith. One from the Ultari hegemony and, unless the PCs followed the correct calling procedure, one from Purity. Attack 1 and 2 should overlap somehow should both occur, it's left to you whether the Myrmidon or Purity appears first. Whatever happens, it's then a no-holds-barred battle.



ATTACK 1—THE MYRMIDON (CR 15)

The Myrmidon—a unique roc—is a distant strike by the Ultari hegemony aimed at the PCs. The Ultari are aware of the PCs imminent step into unknown—possibly powerful—waters, and the Myrmidon is the most they can muster at a distance in such short order.

The Myrmidon is able to cross space in incredible haste, and is potentially incredibly dangerous to the PCs aboard

their tiny void gondola. The attack occurs when the PCs have completed half of their journey. If the gondola is destroyed, the PCs are effectively marooned and likely to die.

Run the attacks normally between PCs and roc using the gondola as a setting and cover. The roc only attacks PCs that have opened one of the hatches; each face of the orb has a 5ft. wide opening hatch that allows escape. Remember that air is trapped by the gravity of the device so PCs can open hatches and attack.

THE MYRMIDON (ROC)

CR 11

XP 7,200

hp 288 (SRD)

Starflight. The Myrmidon does not need air, and can survive the cold vacuum of space. When in space, it can travel incredibly quickly. Nearby planets can be reached in hours, while farther journeys take days or weeks.

ATTACK 2—PURITY (CR 13)

Unless the PCs followed procedure, a patrol is despatched on the opposite gondola. Again this reaches the PCs at roughly the half way stage of their journey. In this case, allow the PCs a Wisdom (Perception) check to see the gondola approach and note it has passengers, some of which cling outside to the retained gravity.

The Purity troops, led by their oberfahn, jam metal into the gondola's chain mechanism on their side when the gondolas are 30 feet apart, slowing the two to 10 ft. per round. They use ranged weapons and then leap across between the two gondolas as they pass (the gap is 10 feet) using the gravity and atmosphere of the two. Characters who fail the check continue into the void and begin to suffocate.

The troops are interested only in killing intruders and do not surrender.

PURITY SQUAD OBERSOLDER (6)

CR 7

XP 2,900 each

hp 105 each (see page 72)

PURITY PATROL OBERFAHN

CR 10

XP 5,900

hp 170 (see page 72)

C. ZENITH

When the PCs reach the asteroid they rise into its frail atmosphere, wan with billowing clouds. As the PCs near the base read the following description:

The gondola has been rising through mists for some time now—acrid ochre moisture clings to the outside of the tiny iron vessel. The waiting seems to go on and on as you rise upwards, only aware of the fast motion through your own bodies' sense of movement.

Then suddenly the clouds are breached and you soar out. The chain grasps upwards, seemingly directly up to the heavens themselves, while all about you glower dark, impossibly steep cliffs—they must be many thousands of feet high. Dirty glaciers choke this black rampart and high, high above a dark point is visible, black stone and iron spire beckoning you upwards.

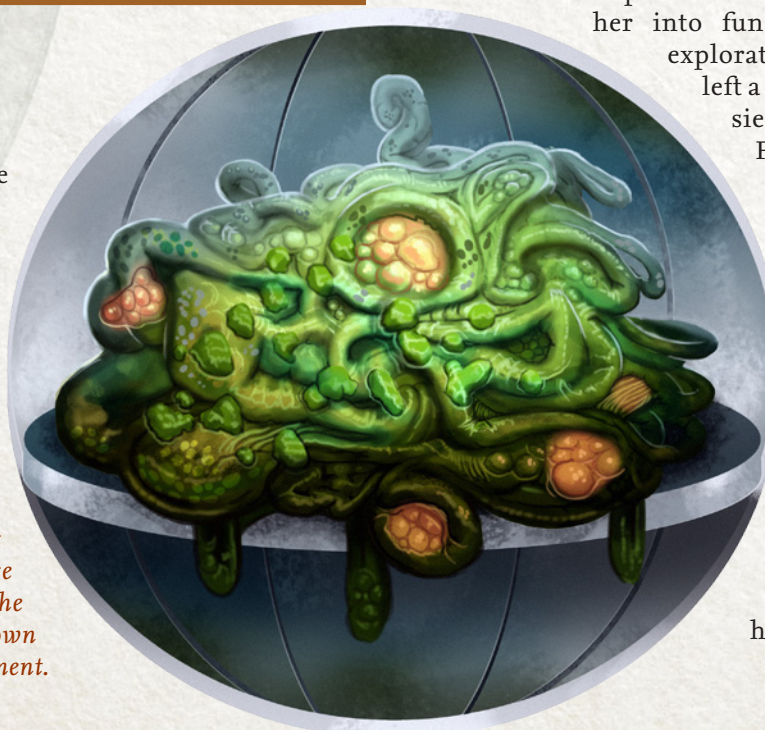
Resting atop the mountain is a large gothic fort made of huge stone blocks and topped with spires. Anyone falling off drops onto the glacier below, taking 20d6 damage. The glaciers are an impossible climb, leaving victims stranded below to die. The mountainsides indicated are narrow, exposed, and appallingly icy.

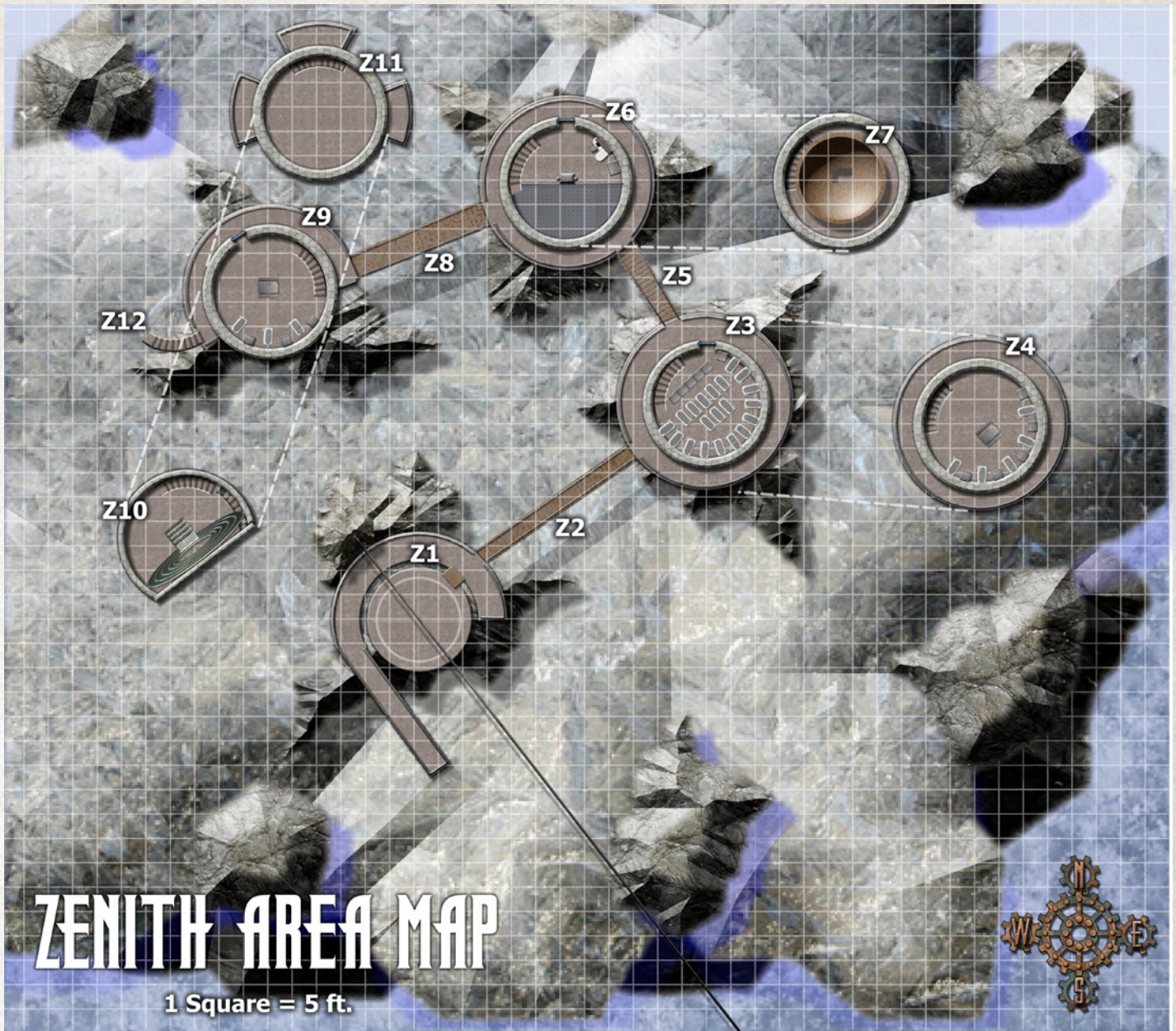
The whole structure is a homage to the gothic—what windows there are invariably depict iron angels wearing Purity flags sweeping aside armies, sconces show statuesque humanoid forms, and even the tiled floors depict Purity flags and scenes of heroic struggle.

Metal suspension bridges link the various parts of the fort; these are made of 1" thick steel cables in a mesh (threshold 10, 30 hit points) with low steel cable handrails. If these bridges take 20 hit points of damage one rail is severed, leaving a single wire left; a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) is then required to use these icy perilous links. The icy outer walkways are made of stone with 2 foot high parapets (usually 2ft. high).

Zenith is the frontier of the Zone, and has attracted the attention of two of Purity's most fervent officers—Commander Dotan Roth and his superior, Obercommander Aspa Corrosa. Roth is convinced that Asteroid 113 contains an Ancients' city, and has persuaded Corrosa to help him reach it. It was he who poisoned her mind to wipe out Pestilence, and he who pushed her into funding a skiff to send an exploration group over. The group left a few days ago are now under siege in the asteroid (see Part Four). Roth has a *teleport* scroll with him; it's their only way back.

The attack on Zenith is a protracted combat with few frills—the soldiers within fall gradually back, using the linking bridges as they lose men. The occupants are listed within their starting locations, but you should be flexible with these. This is an army at an outpost: they have nowhere to fall back to.





Z1. THE GONDOLA BALCONY (CR 13)

A wide open amphitheater of stone embraces the gondola as it arrives. A lone strut of iron thrusts into open space, screaming above the awful drop below. Above, a trio of curious iron and stone buildings grip pinnacles of rock, connected by suspension bridges made of steel. Two of these buildings have upper floors with balconies; the last is topped with a curious iron sphere some twenty feet in diameter.

The balcony edges do not have handrails—the gondola simply reaches the area and fills it. The strut however have 3ft. high rails.

Creatures: If the alarm has been raised, four oversolders and an oberfahn are here. They use ranged weapons against the PCs, supported by those in the Barracks (Area Z3). Without

such an alarm, a pair of oversolders watch here—they are unused to visitors and likely to raise the alarm if they see movement of the chain connected to the gondola.

PURITY SQUAD OBERSOLDER (4)

CR 7

XP 2,900

hp 105 each (see page 72)

PURITY PATROL OBERFAHN

CR 10

XP 5,900

hp 170 (see page 72)

Z2. FIRST SUSPENSION BRIDGE

A steel bridge hangs across a frightful drop.

The bridge is used as a retreat by Purity troops, who are likely to be backed by colleagues from Area Z3 and the cannon golem from Area Z8.

Z3. BARRACKS (CR 14)

A wide, ordered space with racks for weapons, places for recreation, and a broad spiral stair rising upwards.

The stair winds upwards into Arera#Z4, some 20 feet above.

Creatures: The Purity troops gather here and train and enjoy recreation—usually some sort of gambling. At full strength, there is room for 5 full squads (65 auttaine). 10 obersolders remain here. These troops support comrades in the event of attack with ranged weapons and melee as necessary. They are backed by the golem and Commander Storr (Area Z9), who rushes over to take command. The troops are disciplined, and fight a sensible but flexible action based upon the PCs' own methods—in general troops fire to cover a small number of troops who move into melee.

PURITY SQUAD OBERSOLDER (10)

CR 7

XP 2,900 each

hp 105 each (see page 72)

Treasure: Within the barracks are the following items: a ceremonial auttaine Purity uniform embedded with obsidians and gold wire worth 1,200 gp, and a ceremonial +2 *longsword* with a platinum, ruby, and black steel pommel held in a leather and ermine scabbard and etched with 'Pure Forever') worth 2,700 gp.

Z4. OBERFAHN'S BARRACKS

This ordered room has five lockers and neat, spartan furniture.

5 oberfahn usually live here, separated from the common troops.

Treasure: Amongst the furniture is a magnificent Dollgor table (an auttaine variation on backgammon) set with obsidian and ebony, with polished jet and marble pieces, with dice made of carved pearls worth 2,000 gp. The room contains scores of military manuals, history tomes and maps from military conflicts across the known universe. This collections weighs about 100lbs but is worth 4,500 gp to the right collector. If used as a reference in its entirety it grants advantage Intelligence (History) checks.

Z5. SHORT BRIDGE

A short suspension bridge over a glacier, perhaps half a mile below.

Z6. WORKSHOP

A wide neat area, half of which is given over to a workshop, the other half to a pig pen. The pigs are crammed together so tightly they can barely move—there must be several hundred of them. In the opposite side of the room, a curious metal box hangs below an opening, a lever rests nearby.

The pigs—which are crammed behind an iron mesh across the left side of the room as indicated—are used to feed the ooze in the area above, which in turn enriches the atmosphere. Huge tins of pig-feed are piled near the door.

The box is used to hold pigs; the level opens it and then lifts the pigs into the area above, where they are pitched outwards to feed the ooze. The box opens into a wide space sealed from the remainder of the sphere until the space behind is sealed. It is big enough for a Medium-sized creature.

Treasure: The workshop is a masterwork engineer's kit containing tools, amongst which are an emergency beacon, emergency shelter, grippers, a keg of black powder, and 30 firearm bullets in a fancy walnut and silver case worth 200 gp.

Z7. THE ANGEL (CR 17)

A huge rusting iron sphere some twenty feet across and topped with a spire.

The sphere is suffering from exposure to the acidic rain and high winds of the summit here; it has threshold 10, hit points 40.

Creature: The sphere is used to house a choke ooze.

OOZE, CHOKE

CR 17

XP 22,000

hp 350 (see page 63)

Development: If the ooze is released, it noisily devours the pigs in Area Z6 and then explodes through the door, attacking anything it can get at.

Z8. AWFUL EXPOSURE

This is the steepest, deepest bridge. It swings in a wind, blown about this part of the mountaintop.

The bridge sways up to 10 feet. in the wind, characters crossing it must make an Acrobatics check (DC 15) to do so as part of normal movement, otherwise they take a whole round to cross,

Development: The cannon golem destroys this bridge only when instructed to do so by Commander Storr, hoping to cut off the enemy with the choke ooze from area #Z7.

Z9. OFFICERS' QUARTERS (CR 16)

A very finely appointed chamber, with a series of bookshelves, a huge and ornate telescope and a fancy iron staircase which spirals up and down.

PART 3: DEAD GATES SLEEPING

The room is used as recreation area for the officers; of which only Commander Storr presently remains. Storr is presently in charge of the base.

Creatures: Storr resides here, with the base's cannon golem as his bodyguard.

COMMANDER STORR

Medium humanoid (auttaine), lawful neutral

Armor Class 16 (breastplate)

Hit Points 150 (20d8 + 60)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)

Skills Deception +9, Insight +7, Persuasion +9

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages common

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Storr makes three weapon attacks.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d8 + 8) slashing damage.

Rifle. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d8+2) piercing damage.

Before Combat If aware of attack, Storr positions his men as described in the rooms detailed. He supports using his rifle.

During Combat Storr believes in his racial purity; he is an overly confident fighter, and wades into combat. He leads from the front.

Morale If he loses more than 6 troops, or 50 hit points, Storr retreats to Area Z9, instructing the cannon golem to destroy the bridge (Z8) and then releasing the ooze (Z7) by firing at the dome. He then prepares for a final fight.

CANNON GOLEM

CR 16

XP 15,000

hp 210 (use Iron Golem stats, as modified below, SRD)

Multiattack. The golem makes 2 melee attacks or 2 ranged attacks.

Cannon. *Ranged weapon attack:* +6 to hit, range 10/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage.

Treasure: A magnificent long-case clock worth 4,500 gp depicting Death chasing a devil on a six-legged goat. Hidden in the case is a *potion of gaseous form*, a walnut and porcelain pedal-organ worth 6,750 gp depicting angels with scythes but which weighs 100lbs, and a superb wheel barometer (permanently set at dull) worth 2,900 gp with copper and

gold handles depicting angels.

Development: The telescope, which is mounted and steel and oak tripod, is worth 2,500 gp. It is pointed at Asteroid 113; if the PCs view through it they see the asteroid in all its spiked fury (for more information see part four).

Z10. ROTH'S OBSESSION

The stair leads to a wide space dominated by a gate, with five concentric rings. The gate forms the centerpiece of the room, and is surrounded by journals, paintings, notes, maps and objects.

Roth was obsessed with the gate, but never managed to open it. The surrounding objects all point to his findings about Asteroid 113; an Intelligence check (DC 20) unravels this obsession—that Roth was unable to figure out the gate but knew about the other 3, that he believed Asteroid 113 was an Ancients' base containing a wealth of knowledge, and that the kyton prison about it (which Roth describes as mortal pandemonium) was put there deliberately. Roth has clearly planned an expedition for many years, and this has now happened, three squads of soldiers and his commander (the Iron Lady) are with him. He believes that somewhere within the prison (which he believes periodically rearranges itself somehow) is a gateway into this repository of indescribable knowledge. PCs making a DC 22 Wisdom (Insight) check note Roth is troubled by visions of a bloated kyton queen (the God-Seer) and has variously painted and sketched her.





Development: Like the others, there are 6999 symbols depicted on each ring, and 5 concentric rings in total. These symbols are subtly different from the others, and vary little amongst themselves, making using them confusing. Characters attempting to resurrect the gate must make a DC 20 Intelligence check to correctly align each of the 5 outer rings. If the PCs fails the check they must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be struck with terrible foreboding, refusing to touch the ring for 4 hours. If a character fails this Intelligence check twice she is consumed with dread as above, but sure that if she fails again something terrible will happen.

If a character fails a third check a scythe-like tentacle tears from the gate, swinging at the PCs. If the character fails a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw the scythe neatly severs her head as though she were struck by a *vorpal* weapon. A *raised* character suffers continual nightmares about the scythe and whatever holds it, and her Wisdom is permanently lowered by 3—only a *miracle* or *wish* spell can restore the lost points.

The PC who awoke this gate feels a sensual pleasure tearing at her whole body and her Intelligence is permanently raised by 2.

Unless this is the last gate the PCs awaken, the shiny blackness created within the opening repels attempts to enter it. If all three gates are awakened, it forms a link to Asteroid 113 as described in Part Four.

Z11. THE IRON LADY'S QUARTERS

This orderly chamber is dominated by pictures of devils and infernal literature, objects and curios. Overlooking all of it is a portrait of a very stern Purity officer, glowering haughtily.

The Iron Lady is obsessed with devils, and has two as her infernal slaves (see support article). The portrait is of her, and if examined, it is possible to see (with a Perception check (DC 25)) her two Erinyes devils reflected in her pupils.

Treasure: Amongst the variously vile and disturbing objects are the preserved fetus of some revolting thing about the size of a lamb but consisting of congealed limbs and mouths. The thing is in a sealed jar and has a beautiful *scarab of death* within. There is also a copy of a profane book, sacred to evil gods. The portrait of the Iron Lady is worth 400 gp; the remaining perverse objects and curios are worth 11,400 gp in total and weigh 200lbs.

Z12. TO THE SKIFF

A steep pathways descends a vast length of stone steps to the remains of a skiff launch site. The skiff has clearly already long gone.

PART FOUR—THE GOD-SEER'S CHILDREN

When the PCs awaken the final gate, read or paraphrase the following description:

The gate shimmers, and the rings move a single step left. The gate echoes away within, revealing a shambolic broken world; a place of iron spires and metal mountains. The stench is beyond description—and with the stench comes a noise: the screaming of a million souls. As you watch and listen, the whole chaotic landscape screams itself and moves, becoming something new. Somehow you know that your arrival has begun something inexorable.

All the PCs suddenly become aware that something momentous is happening, an event caused by them that will have repercussions across the universe—they do not know why they know this, or what may happen; they just *know*. Each PC has another mythic level awakened at this point.

As the gate is formed, the PC most in communication with the God-Seer hears the kyton's screams of pleasure in her head, and is aware that somewhere on the asteroid a vast hive is awakening with a single purpose—escape. She is also suddenly aware of a massiveness—of the whole asteroid reforming itself like a giant puzzle to facilitate this. Even as she realizes this, it moves again—this time dramatically as the whole landscape changes.

OBLIVION

The PCs can step through the gate at any time, however, once opened time is very much against them—if they delay, kyton soon start to arrive at the gate and come through.

Their journey to Asteroid 113 is instantaneous and painless. When the PCs step through the gate read the following description to them:

Here is a broken landscape of black smooth stone and metal rising to giant spires—almost as though seared by fire into its present form. There is the sudden awful sound of a whole world unmaking itself, and the horizon changes. A metal spike mountain somehow seems much closer now than it did a moment ago; miles closer in fact. Nearby, you can make out the shattered remnants of a skiff, while all around you are signs of habitation.

The gate on this side is identical to the other 3, save the symbols are inverted. The PCs see how childishly easy the puzzle is, and are aware that if they want to they can close the gate from this side in a minute's work without a check. They are also aware, however, that when they do this, it can only be reopened from the other 3 portals again. The PCs can also instantaneously travel to the other gates at will—simply choosing their destination as they step through.

The PCs are also immediately aware that as the world changes, the children of the God-Seer are coming—and coming soon.

The adventure as written assumes no one comes through the gate after the PCs from the other three entrances—indeed the PCs' whole dilemma is do they close the gate and seal the kyton on the asteroid—because the kyton are going to come this way quickly (see sidebar).

NO TIME TO LOSE

The PCs should already be painfully aware that Asteroid 113 is a vast kyton prison, and they should also deduce pretty readily that the gates they have opened go both ways now. The question is—do the PCs leave the gate open while they explore the asteroid, or close it, potentially marooning themselves here? It's a brave and tricky choice but one you should push them to decide quickly—the changing landscape should help with this. If the PCs enter this moving world now—can they be sure they'll be able to get back here before any kyton do? Do they even care about the fate of the Shattered Zone?

You should also make sure that a feeling of impending danger is engendered into events—if the PCs dawdle they should be attacked by kyton seeking escape, and these should be frequent—backed by a quickly moving landscape. Do not worry about throwing kyton at the PCs—there are a million here to play with, after all.



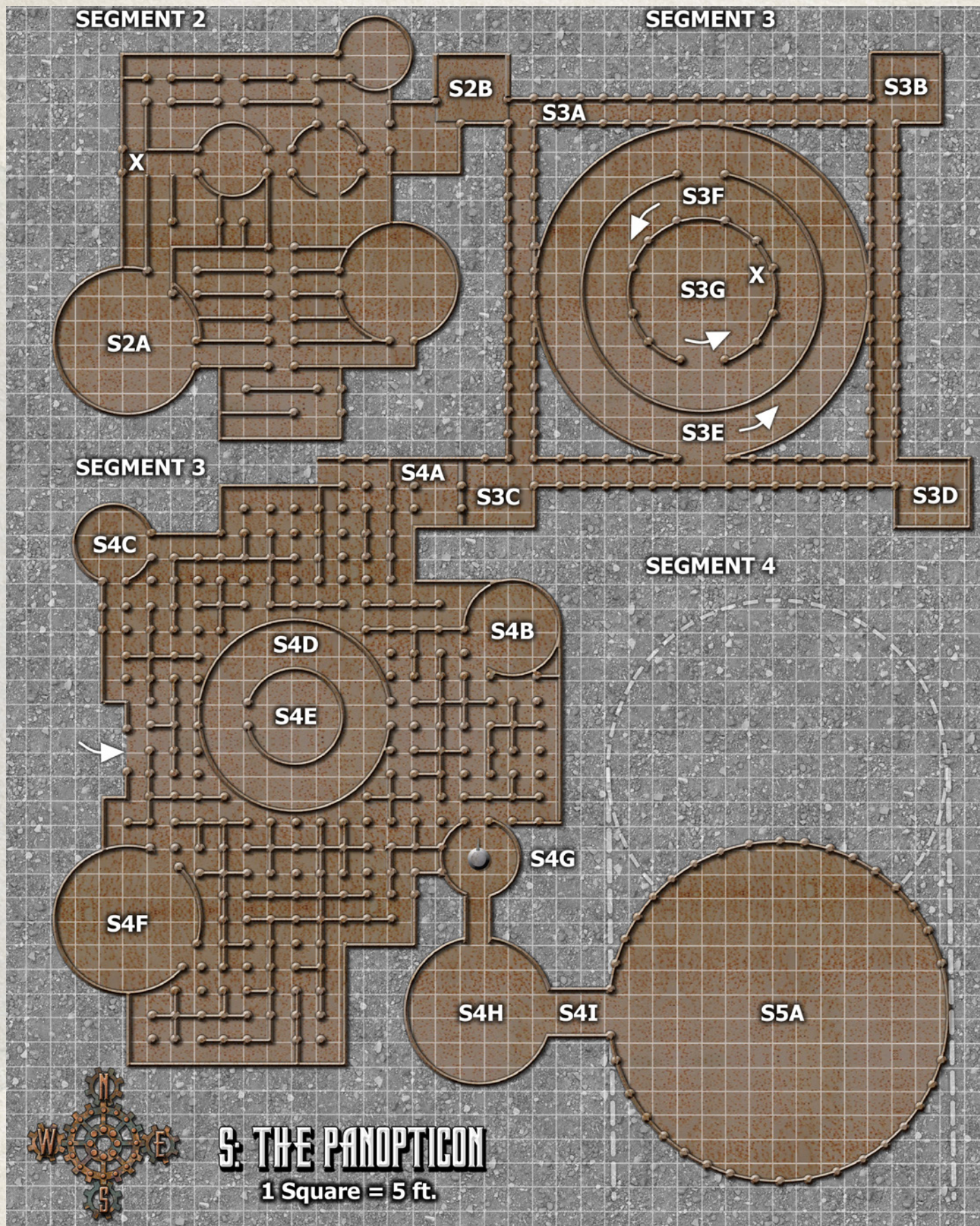
THE KYTON PANOPTICON

SEGMENT 1—THE RUINED SKIFF

The crash site lies about 200 yards from the gate. When Roth and his party arrived he deliberately aimed for the gate, hoping that its position was indicative of something important. He was able to slow the skiff as it arrived, but 2 troopers still died in the crash. They are buried not far from the wreckage of the skiff. Characters making a DC 13 Intelligence check on the vessel realize that the vessel could only come one way, and that the crew must have known this. The skiff has been regimentally emptied of all contents, although a Purity flag still hangs within the crushed port side.

The landscape of the area is undulating; cruelly spiked mountains rising through foothills to the seemingly endless iron spires that dominate the landscape. A set of tracks leads away over a low hill. Characters able to track and making a DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check count about 40 sets of auttaine tracks in the soft ground.

The tracks lead some 500 yards over the short hill, when the PCs pinnacle this hill read the following description:



The sandy soft hill crests a low rise. Beyond, endless ridges of iron spiked mountains vanish over the horizon. Directly ahead is a high circular opening in the ground.

The PCs have come upon one of the vents into the Panopticon Prison. The shaft is some 100 feet across, where a series of half a dozen rope ladders drop into this 500 feet deep opening into the Panopticon.

PANOPTICON FEATURES

Endless days of cruelty are etched into the walls of this vile place, home to around a million kytons, imprisoned with magic that prevenets teleportation and other magical escape.

The prison they have festered in has existed almost forever; trapped and endlessly fed by the progeny of the God-Seer herself, the kyton have built a living nirvana of pain and torment. The entire place is *hallowed* with respect to celestials and fey, with 10 foot-wide iron corridors arching to 20 feet high. However, these—like all areas—are merely the skeleton of the true place; the walls are thick with the detritus of endless pain shocked into every inch. The panopticon chambers and corridors—which hang with countless chains—are almost always surrounded by deep sheaths of skin. These flesh walls, which are often between 5ft. and 12ft. deep, can conceal creatures, who loiter deep within their recesses. The floors are also littered with flesh, but constant movement has pounded it into a hard, meaty veneer.

The Purity exploration party arrived several days ago and, until the PCs' arrival have had to trudge through various parts of the prison. The group are almost wiped out by kyton; fragments of their combats are found by the PCs. Their mundane journey is not detailed, but as the whole place can change, it is entirely possible for anywhere to be a possible way they used.

Now the entire panopticon is alive—the arrival of the PCs has triggered its guardian to reawaken. Equal parts mechanical and divine, the Machine has waited eons to impart its knowledge, and now an inexorable series of events has begun, ending in the Machine's self-destruction. The Machine is moving its constituent parts to enable the PCs to enter its deepest soul—something that occurs in part five. Before that, the unfolding panopticon brings the PCs into peril—perhaps deliberately so on behalf of its Ancient creators. This part of the adventure is divided into a series of segments, vignettes that occur as the panopticon moves.

There is a complication—Dotan Roth. The Purity officer ascends towards the end of this adventure, and his potential confuses the Machine—Roth arrives first and, as the PCs discover in Part Five, he wants everything for himself. The Machine knows of the God-Seer's footsteps—it knows and keeps her in her place, only outsiders are brought to bosom.

Constantly remind the PCs that the whole asteroid is on the move—they may be crushed flat at any moment. The more you can make them feel imperiled the better. Play the

panopticon as harshly as you can—it's been populated by self-mutilating creatures of madness for countless years; its history boils with pain and torment.

This is one bad place.

SEGMENT 2—GHOSTS OF BATTLE

The surface shaft opens onto this wing of the prison. Despite first appearances, this place is empty. There is blood—and lots of it—but nothing else. The Purity squad took their dead, the kytons ate theirs. Beyond this area, the echoes of movement and a million screaming kytons echo constantly through the panopticon. Use this space to create tension, the fleshy walls the PCs walk past suddenly cry as something falls, something bangs on metal. The only things the PCs find here are listed below.

- Something exploded here, but an eye is still watching—what's left of an augur kyton somehow still stares hatefully at the PCs.
- A partly metal tongue has literally been pulled out.
- It looks like something living was pulled through a hole in the wall roughly the size of a foot, but there is nothing left but a stain.

S2A. EMBRACE

The shaft narrows as it descends, and is only sixty feet across at its base. This base echoes like dull metal, as though it is merely a covering. The walls of the lower shaft are engorged with fragments of flesh, which have been smeared layer upon layer over endless generations to create a deep hive of skin punctured with holes, openings and grotesque decorations. In places, patches have been exposed and long lists of alien writing are smeared below.

The writings are descriptions in Infernal of what was done to the victims—or what they did to themselves. They are commonly found here.

S2B. DESCENT

This chamber appears to be like any other; however, as soon as the PCs have all entered, the entire thing drops like a stone, falling hundreds—perhaps thousands—of feet. As they descend, the PCs catch glimpses of other aspects of the panopticon; a chamber where a feasting mass of kyton are slowly tearing apart a Purity oversolder bone by bone; a bloated Colossal mass of flesh made from thousands of kyton; and a dark place where tens of thousands of kyton hang alive, all hooked to each other so that if a single one moves, the chains tear across the chamber in an increasing choir of suffering.

Then the chamber suddenly halts, a sphincter doorway peels back and opens access into Area S3A—the PCs have arrived at Segment 3.

SEGMENT 3—THE FRAGMENT

This tiny corner of the prison is very much occupied, but its kyton occupants are lurking within the fleshy walls. They do not openly attack the PCs, hoping to lure them into the central area where something terrible stirs. DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) checks are required to see the kytons, although if attacked all kyton in that area emerge from the walls to take victims. They do not seek to kill, just to keep.

If the PCs blaze a trail through without noticing, they end up in the dark heart of this area, and when the thing within stirs, suddenly everything within attacks—creating an encounter of great danger.

This fragment is ruled by a thing called the Masochist, which dwells in the heart of the segment, though the PCs may entirely avoid the encounter with it if they are patient. The creature's followers cower in this minor fragment of the panopticon, terrified and aroused by what it might do. The creature itself sits brooding at the core of this wing, waiting.

Once the PCs enter this area two things happen: the whole segment turns and moves gracefully in its inexorable transit to link with Segment 4, and the PCs all become aware that on the surface above, kyton have found the gate. If the PCs use *teleport* or other spells at this point to return to that location, they should meet at least a dozen feral kyton—with hundreds more not far away. How this develops up to you, but unless the gate is closed, the kyton begin their escape.

The area moves because the Machine cannot easily bring the two parts (Segments 3 and 4) together—something it greatly desires—until the constituent parts are in place, this takes approximately half an hour from the PCs' arrival and culminates in the exit in Area S3C. However, movement is so slight that only those attuned to such slight changes notice them.

At any given time, the PCs are far more likely to hear the revolving of Areas S3E-G.

S3A. ECHOES OF TORMENT (CR 14)

The falling finally stops and an iron wall before you screams downwards. Two corridors streak away—one left, one right; each is infested with hanging chains and surrounded by fleshy arched remnants of endless suffering.

Four such corridors surround the Masochist; they are deathly silent, but sounds echo around this area and have an alarming habit of coming back from behind—creating the illusion that something is always just behind you.

Creatures: Lurking in the depths of fleshy walls are 6 feral kytons (see page 61). These creatures can be scattered anywhere you wish, but if one is disturbed, they all emerge.

FERAL KYTON (6)

CR 9

XP 5,000 each

hp 85 each (see page 61)

Treasure: Emerging from one of the walls is the fragments of the body of an auttane long dead. A DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check spots this body, and the dull metal ring of evasion that did its owner no good.

S3B. CHAPEL OF ONE

This room is arched, its dome hanging with a small group of chains. Somehow, stretched across this whole space in exquisite agony, is a living thing. Its glowering head grins at you from the darkness of the chains' heights.

This evangelist kyton has worked for countless centuries as a plaything for the Masochist to reach this exquisite point—at the very edge of destruction and torment. The kyton has lapsed into madness, reciting poems without rhymes about the Masochist and what it has done to the kyton and others. Use it as a way of alarming the PCs, giving them terrible rumors or screaming and sobbing in misery and horror if the God-Seer's name is uttered.

Although it physically cannot attack, it can use its *dancing chains* ability, but only if threatened. Treat this as *animate objects* that only affects chains.

S3C. THE UNSEEABLE ESCAPE TO PAIN

Here, an arched opening blooms with flesh; jagged chains hang high in the ceiling and descend through a series of seemingly endless hooks. Dragged down these by cruel weights are scores of kyton.

This section of the panopticon connects in a complex way to Segment 4; however, it is half an hour after the PCs arrival that the two areas touch, the arched entrance between opens and the event described further below occurs. Before that moment, PCs listening here (and making a DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) check hear the slightest of a breath of movement beyond this chamber.

Treasure: The weights are upwards of 200lbs each—some considerably more. The kyton here are all dead; however, a DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) check spots a sphere of adamantite weighing 310lb in amongst the weights, pulling the lower jaw of a kyton from its skeleton.

S3D. THE FRESKO OF FACES (CR 14)

This arched room is filled with kyton faces—thousands of them, stitched into one obscene living thing.

The kytons leer and mouth obscenities without being able to make any noise.

Creature: Lurking within these folds of faces is a creature known as an Attendee—one of the slaves of the Masochist—an interlocutor kyton. The kyton's lair is behind a foul entrance of faces that form an obscene sphincter just below the arched dome about 25ft. above the floor. The kyton (and any other Large or smaller creature) is easily able to crawl through. It is aware of anyone within the room but tends to watch, waiting for visitors' curiosity to take them to its mistress the Masochist before attacking with its sisters.

PART 4: THE GOD-SEER'S CHILDREN

INTERLOCUTOR KYTON

Large fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 180 (19d10 + 76)

Speed 40 ft.

STR 21 (+5) **DEX** 14 (+2) **CON** 18 (+4) **INT** 18 (+4) **WIS** 15 (+2) **CHA** 20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +9, Wis +7, Cha +10

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Infernal

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Magic Resistance. The kyton has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Interlocutor Kyton makes 3 attacks with its claws.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., or range 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (4d8+5) slashing damage.

Unnerving Gaze. As a bonus action, the kyton may turn its gaze on one target within 30 ft., causing them to make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or become paralyzed for 1 round, as they believe that their own body parts are entangled within the kyton.

AREAS S3E-S3G.

These areas form circular rings that turn a full half-turn in the direction indicated every 4 rounds, accompanied by a dreadful grating scream. Characters caught in any open doorways at that time must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 70 (20d6) damage. Those creatures within here are used to the movement, but others must make a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) to avoid falling when this happens, unless they are anchored in some way to the fleshy walls.

S3E. EMBRACE OF SELF-MUTILATION (CR 14)

This chamber is pierced by iron spikes that thrust outwards at about every five feet. Within and about these spines are scores of kyton—they are torn, pierced, mutilated or flayed to form a living sentient thing of suffering.

The Masochist continues to work on its creation even as part of it dies, replacing destroyed flesh with new.

Creatures: Within the kytons lurk 6 others, these ready to join the dance when called by the Masochist herself.

FERAL KYTON (6)

CR 9

XP 5,000 each

hp 85 each (see page 61)

S3F THE WORK OF THE MASOCHIST (CR 14)

Beyond and within, a second round corridor appears. This chamber seems more dedicated to perfecting the art of form. Here a kyton is joined or altered to make demented features—things with vast tearing mouths, torso joined to torso, joint to limb. The dance of flesh may be living, but it is a prisoner like all the others.

The second work is a cacophonous giant of suffering flesh that never ceases its screams. Anyone coming within 30 feet of the fleshy wall must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be affected as per *confusion*. Once the save is made no further saves are required for 24 hours. The flesh may be living, but it is fragmented, broken. Those who come near may be touched, pawed, or even caressed but otherwise the Second Work is unable to hurt anyone but itself.

Creature: The First Work is different, however. Made by the Masochist, the First—an amphisbaena interlocutor kyton—tends the great Second, readying it for further work.

THE FIRST WORK

Large fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 180 (19d10 + 76)

Speed 40 ft.

STR 21 (+5) **DEX** 14 (+2) **CON** 18 (+4) **INT** 18 (+4) **WIS** 15 (+2) **CHA** 20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +9, Wis +7, Cha +10

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Infernal

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Magic Resistance. The kyton has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Interlocutor Kyton makes 3 attacks with its claws.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., or range 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (4d8+5) slashing damage.

Unnerving Gaze. As a bonus action, the kyton may turn its gaze on one target within 30 ft., causing them to make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or become paralyzed for 1 round, as they believe that their own body parts are entangled within the kyton.



Barbed Wire. The First Work wraps a creature in barbed wire, causing them to make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw. Those who fail are grappled (Escape DC 18), and failing an escape check causes 14 (4d6) piercing damage.

S3G. PALACE OF THE CONSORT MASOCHIST (CR 16)

This is a domed space, where hundreds of arched recesses leer over a single, awful center. This chamber is empty—wiped clean, ready seemingly for something to happen. Countless clean chains hang within the room, their dull surface attesting to great use over a long time.

Suddenly, something emerges, distending from one of the upper archways in a long and revolting fleshy calamity.

The Masochist is always awaiting new prey, it lurks in a fold between ceiling and wall at point X, dragging with it its chains, knives and hooks—all it needs to thrive and play.

THE CONSORT MASOCHIST—KYTON, EPHIALTES

Huge fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 199 (19d12 + 76)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +9, Wis +7, Cha +10

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Infernal

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Magic Resistance. The Consort Masochist has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multitattack. The Consort Masochist makes 3 attacks with its claws.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., or range 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (4d8+6) slashing damage.

Breath Weapon (5-6). The Consort Masochist exhales a spread of barbed, grappling chains anchored within its massive maw, targeting up to six creatures in a 50-foot cone. Those failing a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw take 17 (2d8+8) points of piercing damage and are grappled (Escape DC 18). The Consort Masochist cannot use its breath weapon again while it is grappling.

Development: Bound to its mundane hunting, the Masochist is always looking for new prey. It positively quivers

in glee, glistening with excrescences if it finds a new form to work on. The creature leads with its breath weapon, seeking to entrap foes so it can tear them apart very slowly.

If any kyton remain outside, they come at the sound of its dreadful breath weapon.

Treasure: The space above can be accessed by climbing the chains with a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check. Amongst a waterfall of chains are the following items: a silver and adamantine case containing weights and measures worth 2600 gp, a necklace of adaptation, a wand of secrets.

SEGMENT 4—WHAT IS LEFT OF PURITY

The days of adventure have left but a handful of Purity explorers alive, but at last Dotan Roth has located his fabled Ancient's treasure trove and now stands at its threshold. Unfortunately, so far the gate that enters it has thwarted him, but the arrival of the PCs is about to change all that. The remainder of the expedition are now besieged by a kyton force; they have erected a stout metal barrier and left a cannon golem on guard. So far the kytons have been repelled, however, it can only be a matter of time before reinforcements arrive.

The kyton here use augurs as their eyes and ears. Their leader— a bloodrager sacristan kyton known simply as the Glorious One,—is frustrated but patient. He has a few Purity obersolders in his power and is tormenting them to try to draw the humanoids out. One of the soldiers—Daxx— escapes the kyton just as the PCs arrive. He dashes through the confusing maze of Segment 4 and straight at the PCs. This event forms the first encounter in this area—a segment that ends with the PCs meeting the God-Seer before the adventure concludes in Part Five.

TERROR APPROACHES (CR 12)

Segment 3 of the panopticon is slowly drawn to segment 4. When the two meet, Area S3C opens up to allow access between the two points. It does so just as an escaping Purity soldier reaches the area, a handful of kyton on his tail. The soldier, Daxx, is naked, and has been horribly abused by the kytons (exactly how horribly is left to you, but he can still run and talk). He runs screaming through this area until he meets the PCs. The soldier assumes the PCs are also Purity members (many of the common troops felt sure Roth would not set foot on Asteroid 113 without a plan of escape and reinforcements) and starts helpful in attitude. How that attitude develops is down to the PCs. Daxx knows the relative positions of kyton and Purity, he doesn't know the exact defenses, but if they can keep him helpful the PCs may be able to get directions to Purity and convince them that at the very least they are trapped miners. As the Purity expedition members are desperate the PCs have advantage on all Charisma (Deception) checks against them. It is possible that in this way the PCs may fight side by side with the Purity squad against the very tough kyton horde.



It's also of course entirely plausible the PCs will simply wade in and slaughter without dialogue.

DAXX, PURITY SQUAD OBERSOLDER

CR 7

XP 2,900

hp 105, presently 12 (see page 72)

Creatures: Daxx is being chased by a trio of feral kyton. If it can, the augur seeks escape and reports back to the Glorious One, who acts as detailed further below.

FERAL KYTON (3)

CR 11

XP 5,000

hp 85 each (see page 61)

SEGMENT 4 FEATURES

The Glorious One has perfected the use of impaling and is able to keep his victims alive for days, weeks, even years. This segment festers like the back of a porcupine with spines, needles and iron spears that have grown somehow from the hateful walls—consider every inch unless noted to be covered with the equivalent of *spike stones*. The corridors form an

honor guard of misery—kyton corpses are everywhere, but in this region their forms do not make a layer of skin. Many of the kyton are still alive; perhaps reveling in their pain or at the threshold of death. These mutilated things are not generally referred to in the text, but you may decide to use them as an added dimension to events here—perhaps they paw or scream, or maybe still have the ability to attack.

The Purity force have fought a pitched battle across this area, and now number but a few. Now a temporary pause in combat has occurred—while the Glorious One awaits inevitable reinforcements (it assumes the God-Seer is controlling things) and the Purity forces hide behind their defenses.

S4A. EMBRACE

This area seems to have a different aspect—spikes. Every inch of the walls are pierced with spines, spikes and iron spears, creating a claustrophobic, bristling ceiling. These spines are not empty, however—and some kyton here are still alive. The floors are smooth like melted glass.

S4B. PIERCED MANY TIMES (CR 13)

This vaulted chamber is crisscrossed by scores of long iron spears that cross from one side to another, creating a maze of hurt. Kytons have been pierced by these spines—some many, many times.

This chamber is where kytons come, or are taken, to suffer. It forms an elaborate trap—or perhaps joy.

Trap: The Rapture of Endless Impalements.

THE RAPTURE OF ENDLESS IMPALEMENTS

Mechanical trap

Anyone moving within the chamber is struck by 1d4 piercing spears every round. Each spear makes a ranged attack with a bonus of +8, dealing 3d6+20 piercing damage. The spines cross the chamber and drive into the floor opposite, trapping the prey, who may be subject to further attacks. A DC 16 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check is required to get free of any spear.

S4C. THE AFFLICTED

This chamber has a single victim—the spines that thread through this kyton are incredibly fine, like steel needles. The spines pin the victim, who seems to float half way up in the chamber, its body pierced by thousands of them.

The feral kyton within is trying to achieve rapture and become a sacristan, much like the heralds (see Area S4E).

S4D. THE INFESTATION (CR 17)

This chamber bristles again with spines and spears, piercing kyton. However, there are different prisoners here too—a trio of auttaine are bound, naked on one wall. These poor creatures have been impaled many times, yet still live.

The kyton are experts at prolonging pain, and while their efforts are humble compared to the Glorious One, the kyton herein are busy piercing the auttaine—all oberdsolders. The auttaine have only a handful of hit points left.

Creatures: There are a dozen feral kyton herein. These feral kyton are larger and nastier than their usual kin; brought under the beneficent wings of the Glorious One they have thrived.

LARGE FERAL KYTON

Use feral kyton base stats (see page 61), except as noted below

Large fiend (devil), lawful evil

Hit Points 105 (12d10+40)

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Distended Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. Hit: 13 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage. The target is grappled (escape DC 14) if the devil isn't already grappling a creature. Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and takes 7 (2d6) piercing damage at the start of each of its turns.

Development: The Purity soldiers are reduced to a handful of hit points; they are petrified and do little but weep, even if released.

Treasure: Amongst the blood and misery of this room are a rifle, a leather and silver case holding 24 adamantine bullets, and 3 kegs of black powder.

S4E. THE GLORIOUS ONE (CR 18)

This chamber is horrific, and clearly the black soul of this area. Your eyes are drawn to a pair of prisoners—auttaine—who have been impaled again and again by thin filaments of wire. They hang in the dome of the chamber some twenty feet above, their bodies swarming with uncountable wounds. These spines are fixed to have some give in them, so that as the victims move they drive in deeper, amplifying their agony. Above the door, impaled on long spears encrusted with blood, are three huge kyton, the spears emerging from their distended, still mouths. Attending to this scene of artistic carnage is something terrible—a bloated thing swollen by magic, its skin slashed and pierced so many times that wound and skin are indistinguishable.

The two auttaine are Purity oberfahn; sadly for them tougher and more able to withstand pain. They are at the very edge of unconsciousness, both held at 1 hit point by the skill of the Glorious One.

Creatures: The Glorious One and its Attendees—the trio of figures who voluntarily impale themselves in supplication of its mastery. Each of the Attendees are bloated sacristan kyton who mount their spears to extend their suffering. It takes a move action for each attendee to extricate itself from its foul perch. Both sacristan and augur do everything they are told by the Glorious One—even if it means their destruction.

THE GLORIOUS ONE

Large fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)

Hit Points 198 (19d10 + 94)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +10, Wis +7, Cha +10

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Infernal

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Combat Gear. Ring of free action

Magic Resistance. The kyton has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiaction. The Interlocutor Kyton makes 3 attacks with its claws.

PART 4: THE GOD-SEER'S CHILDREN

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., or range 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (4d8+5) slashing damage.

Unnerving Gaze. As a bonus action, the kyton may turn its gaze on one target within 30 ft., causing them to make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or become paralyzed for 1 round, as they believe that their own body parts are entangled within the kyton.

Agonized Wail. All creatures within 120 ft. must make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for as long as they are within 120 ft. of the Glorious One. Creatures who makes this save are immune to this ability for 24 hours.

During Combat The Glorious One is brutal, using its abilities to maximum effect. The first downed foe is impaled on the perch of an Attendee and stabilized; such opponents need a DC 18 Dexterity check to free themselves from being impaled (being assisted grants advantage), where checks fail the character takes 3d6 damage. The creature uses its *ring of free action* to move about combat easily.

SACRISTAN KYTON (3)

Medium fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +8, Wis +6, Cha +7

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Infernal

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Magic Resistance. The kyton has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The sacristan kyton makes 2 attacks with its claws.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., or range 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (4d8+5) slashing damage.

Unnerving Gaze. The kyton may turn its gaze on one target within 30 ft., causing them to make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become incapacitated for 1 round.

Shadow Scream (1/day). The area within 25 feet of the kyton becomes affected as if by a 5th level *darkness* spell. All creatures within the darkness are deafened, and must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become *confused* (per the spell *confusion*) for 1d4 rounds.

AUGUR KYTON

Tiny fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 10 (3d4 + 3)

Speed 20 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Skills Deception +4, Insight +3, Persuasion +4, Stealth +5

Damage Immunities cold, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Infernal, Common

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Magic Resistance. The augur has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Augur makes 3 gore attacks.

Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Unnerving Gaze. The kyton may turn its gaze on one target within 30 ft., causing them to make a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 round.

Treasure: The Glorious One has spent long ages gathering objects from within the prison, as well as those taken from rare visitors. These objects adorn the chamber and are easily spotted. They are various made up of parts of creatures impaled onto others to form twisted artwork and generally of no value despite their vast number, however, also within this cruel display is an astonishingly punishing but beautiful bodice. Made of iron rings and clamps etched with gold and platinum figures of sexual cruelty, the whole is set with obsidians of great size and worth 4,500 gp. Also here are a pair of rifles, a kyton head containing 23 doses of serpent venom, a curiously shaped kyton headdress with a broad shoulder arch set with fine rubies and the fingers and eyes of kyton worth 6,400 gp, a *chime of opening*, and a black metal puzzle box containing a *gem of seeing*.

S4F. ECHOES

This chamber is also adorned with impaled kyton, these arranged so that many are dislocated to go through the same spear time after time. A curious distant echo throbs herein.

This section of panopticon is very close to the beating heart of the Machine. Characters listening can hear a vast but distant *something* echoing like a metal beating heart—this is the body of the Machine endlessly repairing itself and tending to its own needs in readiness for its deliverance. For more information see Part Five.

S4G. THE CANNON (CR 16)

Areas G and H are the last desperate siege of the Purity exploration group. They are prepared for battle, and have been resting recently. Unless you wish otherwise, they have their full allocation of spells, hit points and other skills. The troops fight a pitched battle against anything that attacks; however, it is possible that a clever group of PCs could hoodwink them as detailed earlier in this section.

Creature: Purity has positioned a cannon golem at the junction of corridors here, it fires at anything unless given a verbal instruction by the Iron Lady (and only her). The cannon golem does not have Poison Breath, and has the additional features:

CANNON GOLEM

CR 16

XP 15,000

hp 210 (use Iron Golem stats as modified below, SRD)

Multiattack. The golem makes 2 melee attacks or 2 ranged attacks.

Cannon. Ranged weapon attack: +6 to hit, range 10/60 ft., one target. Hit: 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage.

S4H. PURITY (CR 18)

A domed chamber lurks behind a wall of welded iron spikes and spears.

Purity skulk here, desperate to finish their quest. They know that Dotan Roth is puzzling over a doorway (Area S4I) and hope he'll open it soon. The group is ready to fight to the last. The fixed iron mesh outside (threshold 10, 100 hit points) is used to defend against the kyton. Characters can try to crawl through using a DC 25 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, those who fail the check take 10 (3d6) damage and are trapped within until they can escape its grip.

Creatures: The troops use the barrier as cover and fire through it. They are jaded and weak, but desperate now. The Iron Lady sends her devils into combat, preparing herself for a final, fittingly heroic battle. She prefers to engage in melee, enjoying seeing her enemies' fear as she cuts them apart.

OBERCOMMANDER ASPA CORROSA

—THE IRON LADY

There is something more than just mortal steel in this auttaine—her looks seem icily confident. She wears a high peaked black cap decorated with a glowering steel stylized bird, and in one hand she grips a cane, weighing it across her other hand as if ready to lash out. Her auttaine steel is drawn away from her obvious features—veins of iron and mesh of metal pulling away into her body as though trying to conceal an even more ominous secret strength.

OBERCOMMANDER ASPA CORROSA

Medium Humanoid (Auttaine), lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (Plate mail)

Hit Points 171 (18d8 + 90)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	20 (+5)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +10, Wis +8, Cha +10

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Abyssal

Challenge 16 (15,000 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Aspa makes three attacks

Longsword. Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Pepperbox. ranged Weapon Attack: +10 to hit, range 20/80 ft., one creature. Hit: 15 (2d10 + 4) piercing damage.

During Combat Corrosa knows she is formidable opponent, but regards herself as far, far more important than anyone else—Roth included. Corrosa is a leader and organizer first, fighter second. She takes firm charge of any lesser ranks, driving them to fight in tight teamwork formations, using whatever teamwork feats she is aware of. Corrosa then effectively leads from the back, shouting, ordering and sacrificing lesser beings to ensure that what is left for her to fight is weaker.

Gear Purity officers' uniform, adorned with medals of honor, including the Auctag—the greatest medal for bravery worth a total of 2,000 gp, hip flask depicting alien birds worth 125 gp.

Corrosa is a golden light amongst Purity—feted, worshipped and adored by the populace, she is one of the poster girls of the movement and one of its brightest stars.

PURE AMBITION, IMPURE HEART

Despite her outer steel and strict obedience to the cause, Corrosa is not pure auttaine at all—she is infested with a creature called a queborrin—an alien parasite of considerable power. Below the uber-ordered, manic, racist and vile officer lurks an infestation—an implanted parasite that seeks to ride within its host as she rises. In simplistic terms, Corrosa's infestation was entirely deliberate and enables the queborrin to spy.

The queborrin is one of many of its kind slowly infesting Purity, the creature's own movements a subtle part of the Ultari Hegemony—the queborrin being one of the Principalities' children. This particular creature has the

PART 4: THE GOD-SEER'S CHILDREN

latent ability to communicate with its kind over considerable distances, an ability known as hive-minded—it sees what Corrosa sees, and reports back to its hive brothers and sisters far away. When the PCs finally meet her—and probably kill her—they will be seen doing it, something that marks them as special targets for future adventures.

Corrosa is very, very high in the ranks of Purity, and regards herself as a potential future leader—something she is slowly garnering support for. What her Purity colleagues do not realize is that it is the queborrin within Corrosa that is subtly driving her need—the alien regards it as highly amusing that a self-styled master-race is infiltrated with its kind, and that slowly but surely they are groping towards the Kronen herself. Of all the queborrin, Corrosa-husk (as she is referred to by the aliens) is the closest and most likely to succeed.

This makes her death an act of war between whoever slew her and the aliens. If the PCs kill Corrosa, the powerful queborrin slithers from her body in a manner detailed below.

As the auttaine finally falls, her body begins to writhe as though enveloped in a death-fit. Then slowly the fleshy part peels back as a revolting thing emerges from beneath. This insectoid horror is covered in tiny hairs that rise bristling along its slimy bloody spine. Crooked legs heave upwards, bringing veins and bone with them as it rises. The thing glowers upwards, infestations of green gemstone eyes popping from its skin.

QUEBORRIN

CR 5

XP 1,800

hp 73 (see page 64)

The queborrin immediately seeks another host amongst the PCs.

THE STEEL ATTENDEES (CR 15)

Like many of the upper echelons of Purity, Corrosa has taken part in foul ritual at which she was imbued with a pair of fanatically loyal attendees. These two devils spend their whole time at her shoulder, altered to appear as Purity officers. That the pair are the lovers as well as protectors of the Commander is an open secret amongst those close to her.

The two devils are utterly devoted to their charge—they obey every command (up to and including self-destruction)—and are utterly enraptured by her. This makes the duo very dangerous if Corrosa is in any way injured or imperilled. The devils attempt to use their longbows to poison foes, and weaken them to capture foes so that the commander can deal with them harshly after any combat.

ERINYES (2)

CR 12

XP 8,400 each

hp 153 (SRD)

PURITY OBERFAHN

CR 10

XP 5,900

hp 170 (see page 72)

PURITY SQUAD OBERSOLDER (4)

CR 7

XP 2,900

hp 105 (see page 72)

GOLEM, STEAMWERKS

CR 14

XP 11,500

hp 189 (see page 60)

Treasure: The defense has all the Purity weapons laid out, as well as trio of backpacks containing spades, flashlights, rope and smaller objects such as saws, hammers and crowbars.

S4I. THE EMPTY PLACE

A narrow balcony opens onto nothingness—a vast pit through which the wind howls. At the far side of this blackness is another balcony, this one before a large circular golden door, surrounded by curious alien glyphs much like the other gates.

As the PCs enter the area Dotan Roth is busy trying to work out what to do with the gate, when the Machine, sensing the PCs arrival, opens it. This scene should be cinematic in many ways, with the glowing doorway suddenly moving of its own accord and Roth falling to his knees in amazement as the thing opens and a vast booming noise from the Machine fills the region. He becomes mythic himself at that moment, gaining a mythic tier. At that moment, however, the God-Seer's segment of the panopticon begins to draw near, the whole area is enveloped by a mass of iron as the section slowly draws here.

Timing this event is crucial—if the PCs came here on friendly terms or not, they should catch a glimpse of Roth as the gate opens and the Machine beyond is glimpsed as he moves in. However, having the Purity soldiers, the Glorious One, and the God-Seer all in the same place might get very messy, so run this section carefully.

Of course, if the PCs just come in as foes, the whole encounter can run very smoothly, with the PCs facing the Purity patrol and seeing Roth enter the Machine, while temporarily blocked while the God-Seer arrives.

SEGMENT 5—THE ARRIVAL OF THE GOD-SEER (CR 19)

The God-Seer can arrive when you wish, her lair sliding into the gap as shown on the map. Do not leave Roth on his own for too long, however; having a strong sense of timing will help the events here reach a satisfying climax. If everyone sits around healing and preparing the whole impetus is gone. You might consider advancing the death of the Machine at this point by heralding its arrival, as this area begins to break apart.

When the Segment containing the God-Seer slips into view, read or paraphrase the following description:

A vast cathedral shape finally slithers and booms into place with a fanfare of chains, iron, and tolling steel. This domed space is overlooked by hundreds of arched recesses over the single, awful place. The arches are alive with countless kyton. Below, its interior is alive with chains—thousands of them, some twitch with living victims, others striking as though alive. And at their center is something foul; a bloated female kyton form, her distended belly purging itself of a pair of kyton who drop to the bloody floor and scream. Behind this foulness, you see the opening of the golden circular portal once more. The kyton looks at you and says “Come, my blessed children, you have come so far to free me. Let us embrace.”

The God-Seers reward is to take the PCs into herself, tearing their very essence into her demented form in the forlorn hope that she can take on their powers before her escape.

Creatures: The God-Seer has no intention of sharing the PCs. As combat starts she screams an alien howl that causes all the kyton to draw back in fear, only those she newly births join in ignorant hunger.

THE GOD-SEER

Huge fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)

Hit Points 325 (26d12 + 156)

Speed 50 ft., fly 70 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
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25 (+7)	16 (+3)	22 (+6)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)
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Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +12, Wis +6, Cha +11

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Infernal

Challenge 19 (22,000 XP)

Combat Gear. The God-Seer wields a *storm of chains*.

Magic Resistance. The God-Seer has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Wretched Spawn. On the first round of combat and every other round thereafter, the God-Seer births a feral kyton. The kyton attack anyone hostile to the God-Seer.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The God-Seer makes 3 attacks with its claws.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 10 ft, one target. *Hit:* 25 (4d8+7) slashing damage.

Unnerving Gaze. As a bonus action, the God-Seer may turn its gaze on one target within 30 ft., causing them to make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or become paralyzed for 1 round.

PART 5: THE FORBIDDEN CORE

FERAL KYTON

CR 9

XP 5,000 each

hp 85 each (see page 61)

Development: The golden doorway remains burning in unbearable light, which gives off no heat. PCs stepping through the portal are drawn into the Machine itself, see part five below.

PART FIVE—THE FORBIDDEN CORE

The PCs voyage into the Machine is partly a dream-like experience; the vastness of the location would allow for several sessions of adventuring in its own right. Such a mammoth location is therefore an almost cinematic experience.

The Machine is beyond immense; it is huge and complex and almost divine. In many ways it is a foretaste of the technology to come in the final adventure in the *Legendary Planets Adventure Path: Mind Tyrants of the Merciless Moons*. Distances are measured in miles, not feet—corridors stretch and arch upwards for a dozen miles, their heights wreathed in lightning, their depths plunging into nothing. Flesh and metal components move in perpetual motion, but on scale unprecedented for the PCs—every facet, every cog is cathedral-like, every component of a complexity beyond comprehension. And it is never still.

When the PCs step through the gate, read or paraphrase the following description. PCs emerge halfway along this seemingly infinite bridge, the way behind gone.

...and then somehow you are awake again, as though rising from slumber. You walk along a perfectly smooth bridge of metal some one-hundred yards across—the bridge stretches away seemingly to infinity ahead and behind. Below you, it falls without handrail for mile after mile, while above, it echoes upwards for a similar distance. Lightning dances in the metal heavens and components of flesh and metal rise, the size of small towns, below and then above. Ahead, bathed in beatific light, is an auttaine—he is surrounded by a golden light, from which emerge angels.

MONSTERS FROM THE ID (CR 20)

Roth is busy trying to absorb the Machine's many gifts, including the fabrication of creatures that frequent the structure—planetary angels. These are not true angels, but replicas fashioned by the Machine, based on Roth's understanding of the powers at play here. However, as his wrath turns on the PCs the angels become more perverted—grizzly skeletal visages replace smiles as they attack. This battlefield is 100 yards wide over a fall of 20 miles.

The PCs immediately sense confusion in the air—this comes from the Machine itself, which is confused about the arrival of people that wish to fight each other. It does not side with any group, but its confusion and eagerness to spend its purpose is palpable. PCs making a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception or Insight) check realize that Roth is

guiding the angels, although they may at first think they are something he summoned. However, PCs making the check quickly realise the similarity between here and events right at the start of the adventure with Ha'vzeer and her own id monsters. The PCs cannot fashion creatures here, no matter how hard they try, but they can try to wrestle control from Roth. This may be attempted by any PC as an action as an opposed check between the PCs combined Intelligence and Wisdom modifiers opposed by Roth's (who has +10). If the PC wins they temporarily gain control of the angel for one round before it reverts back to Roth.

Creatures: The final battle of this adventure takes place between Dotan Roth and a pair of creatures he has brought from the Machine. The planetars seek to burn their opponents out of existence, while Roth's tactics are detailed in the supplementary information in this publication.

COMMANDER DOTAN ROTH

There is a smiling anonymity in this pale auttaine—a weakness that seems almost deliberate; mocking, perhaps. He resembles something almost more aquatic than auttaine; his wan, clammy skin seems drawn back as though his whole body is trying to force him to smile—just once. He wears long coat of slick leather, and his whole essence is greasy—perhaps sweaty. He seems weak, but that feeling that he is a spider luring you into a trap won't go away. His voice is careful, asthmatic, the few words chosen wisely, as though saying too many may be a waste of energy.

COMMANDER DOTAN ROTH

Medium humanoid (auttaine), lawful neutral

Armor Class 17 (mage armor)

Hit Points 153 (18d8 + 72)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
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11 (+0)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)
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Saving Throws Con +10, Int +12, Wis +9

Skills Arcana +18, History +12, Insight +9, Perception +9

Damage Resistances fire, lightning, radiant

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 19

Languages Common, Draconic, Giant, Gnome, Undercommon

Challenge 18 (20,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Roth fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Spellcasting. Roth is an 18th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 20, +12 to hit with spell

attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*, *ray of frost*
 1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*,
shield,
 2nd level (3 slots): *acid arrow*, *detect thoughts*, *invisibility*,
mirror image
 3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead*, *counterspell*, *dispel magic*,
fireball
 4th level (3 slots): *blight*, *dimension door*
 5th level (3 slots): *cloudkill*, *screaming*
 6th level (1 slot): *disintegrate*, *globe of invulnerability*
 7th level (1 slot): *finger of death*, *plane shift*
 8th level (1 slot): *dominate monster*, *power word stun*
 9th level (1 slot): *power word kill*

ACTIONS

Burning Touch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., or range 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (4d8+3) radiant damage.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Roth can take 2 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. He regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Cantrip. Roth casts a cantrip.

Burning Touch. Roth uses his Burning Touch.

During Combat Roth is an incredibly powerful opponent, but he is most dangerous because he is cautious. He tries not to get caught in melee at all if he can manage, hiding behind his angels as he tosses his most powerful spells at the PCs.

Other Gear long coat made of cured choker skin, high leather boots of speed, Purity medal of honor made of platinum and gold in worth 3,200 gp, Purity commander uniform, battered leather journal containing Roth's lifelong studies of the Ancients, and Asteroid 113 in particular, an Ancients' collection of curious jade and skymetal figures depicting the very animals the PCs have seen on the gates here; the figures clearly make up some sort of Ancients' game and are worth 1,400 gp.

Roth is on the cusp of being ascended; his own potential and obsession with the Ancients have brought him to this threshold. An outcast whose frailties once marked him out as a victim, Roth has developed his mind, magic, and selfishness to a high degree to survive and thrive in Purity life. He sees the order brought by Purity as the guardian angel his early life led him to deserve. Rising from humble beginnings, Roth is now one of the most powerful Purity officers in the Shattered Zone.



PART 5: THE FORBIDDEN CORE

ANGEL, PLANETAR (2)

CR 16

PURITY

Roth is Purity through and through. When the PCs interact with him he delights in telling them how superior the auttaine are, and how the weakness of their underperson flesh will be stripped when he has overpowered them. Make his threats as graphic as you are comfortable with, and make them repeatedly; in Roth's mind there is no doubt of the destiny of the auttaine and Purity. His own ascension to mythic power is something he sees as merely the destiny of all his kin, something that, with the aid of the Machine, he intends to awaken in all auttaine, beginning with his beloved Kronen. To Roth, the Kronen is the living embodiment of Purity, a living god. He piggybacks the probing thoughts of the God-Seer as detailed in the text, belittling the PC's petty efforts.

PURE KNOWLEDGE

Obsessive about the Ancients, Roth has spent his entire life devoted to the study and recovery of Ancient artifacts. His first mission as part of a Purity mission to explore the heart of Asteroid 554, was undertaken with his friend and tutor, the celebrated archaeologist Ubon Ka. Unfortunately for Ka, the attention he got was at the expense of the brilliant work by Roth, which led to the latter killing his tutor on the remote outpost of Asteroid 209—better known as Barren. Roth, of course, brilliantly covered his tracks by inventing an heroic death for his own tutor while trying to better Purity.

Over the years that followed, Roth became known as the ruthless expert of all things Ancient, and eventually his work came to the attention of the Kronen herself. From that moment, Roth has never looked back; being given access to all the knowledge, maps and personnel that Purity can offer, the auttaine soon learnt of the secrets within Asteroid 113 and developed his present obsession.

PURE ARCANES

Roth's high level and powerful spells make him a potentially deadly enemy, particularly if the PCs cannot tear control of his angels from him. Memorable villains deserve memorable endings. His recent ascension makes him biologically unstable, his flesh unable to contain the forces within. If he is slain, this instability causes Roth to literally melt before the PCs eyes.

You could turn this the other way of course: does Roth truly die? He would make a fine villain to pursue the PCs over the final parts of the Legendary Planet Adventure Path—a ghost whose spirit is imbued with the essence of the Machine itself—perhaps an avenging dark angel that is partly mechanical, partly flesh which follows the PCs, greedy and jealous of their mythic power and hungering to be like them.

XP 15,000

hp 200 each (SRD)

Development: The end of Roth triggers a dramatic event; the Machine spills its knowledge into the PCs, completing its mission before setting in place its own suicide as detailed below. The PCs, however, struggle to contain the information seared into them—it burns into their being and may unhinge them.

When Roth finally dies, read the following description:

The vastness around you halts—simply halts—as though some terrible event has occurred. Far, far below; perhaps within the soul of the place itself, a vast bell booms—like the one in the fable but vaster—planet-sized. Then suddenly the world about you burns into impossible light; things are made and unmade in the tornado of whiteness that blinds you, pounding you—engorging you with knowledge, knowledge you now understand has been kept hidden below the surface of Asteroid 113 for almost eternity its kyton skin preventing any visitors. A secret that, as it pours into you, unhinges and threatens to unmake you—you feel your skin boil, your minds bloat as though about to burst. Wave after wave of impossible things tear you, burning your soul and filleting your being.

Then all is blank, perhaps mercifully so.

THE MACHINE

The Machine has fulfilled its purpose, forcing its information into the weak flesh of the PCs. As they awaken—perhaps several days later—the PCs become fully aware of the purpose of the thing—to spill its secret to those who may be worthy to complete the task of the Ancients. In finally purging itself of its secret, the Machine also grants a gift to each. Every PC's main statistic rises by 3 full points; so a fighter finds herself suddenly more bloated with muscle, or a wizard more awakened with Intelligence. If the PC has multiple primary scores, allow him to choose which one rises—there can be no division of benefits though, all 3 points go to one ability.

The Machine also imparts its main secrets. How you wish to present this information is left to you to decide.

- In a past so far away its years are beyond reckoning, two great Ancient species—the Patrons and the Principalities—made war on each other for eons.
- In simple terms, the Patrons were basically good, while the Principalities showed all the characteristics of evil. Even in learning this, the PCs realize that their morality is woefully simplistic but essentially right.
- Each scattered their children—species created by both to further their own ends over millennia across the universe.
- In time, however, the Patrons foresaw that the Principalities would defeat them. Their worlds were falling to the aggression of their enemies, and they themselves were fading. Yet, they also foresaw the rise of their own children, realizing that if the war were to pass only to the scions and progeny of the Ancients (on both sides of the conflict), “good” could still triumph.
- So, in one last act of defiance, the Patrons lured the Principalities into one final battle, drawing them into a trap constructed as an interdimensional prison formed from the fused psyches and dreams of all that remained of their species, all in an effort to buy time for their children.
- In the wake of this intergalactic purge, the homeworlds, colonies, and outposts of these two Ancient societies have lain dormant. But the Patrons planned their departure with precision and patience unmatched. They left behind the seeds of evolution on untold worlds beyond the borders of the remaining children and proxies of the Principalities. And in those cradles of civilization, the Patrons knew the multiverse would find its salvation. As the greatest creators and makers of their time, they essentially put the building blocks of life in place for the young species of the multiverse to have a chance to mature, find their footing among the legendary planets, and eventually rise up against the scions of the Principalities.
- It’s taken millennia for this plan to come to fruition. And the children of the Patrons haven’t always gotten along. Some have worked to eliminate one another, or remain solely focused on just conquering their individual worlds rather than working together. Others actually have managed to reach the greater stage of the multiverse, but haven’t yet come into direct conflict with the “evil” children and Elder species of their longtime enemies. Most have no idea what awaits them yet

- A day of reckoning is coming, and the legends of those who’ll stand at the dawn of a new era will be forged in the destiny laid down by the Patrons long, long ago. For better or worse.
- The PCs may be the weapon of deliverance.
- One final truth dawns on the PCs; that Relstanna must have known about the Machine, or suspected it, and merely sent the PCs here on a promise of escape to awaken it and learn its secrets. She has been lying.

Finally, the PCs know that the Machine—in emptying itself of its secrets it has begun its own suicide—knew the secrets herein could be allowed to be taken, and that even its components must be sacrificed to prevent the wrong enemies taking it and somehow using it. Within 20 hours the asteroid will vaporize. It could, theoretically take the PCs with it if they’ve closed the gate and aren’t able to use Roth’s *teleport* he brought here for safety. How that develops is left to you.

You may wish to allow the PCs to use these dying hours to explore the vast wonder of the Machine, perhaps finding some Ancient treasures as they do.

CONCLUDING THIS ADVENTURE

The PCs still have some wrapping up to do—firstly escape from Asteroid 113 before it boils to nothingness. The PCs may also have allowed a vast horde of kyton to escape into the Zone—this may develop in any way you see fit—is Salvation abandoned to a mystery infestation? Has contact been lost with Hope? Are there still kyton to fight in the Machine?

Finally, the PCs may have to deal with other NPCs at Beacon—Lady Kethi, for example.

How these strings are drawn together (or left apart) is left to you to decide. The PCs have other matters to attend to and the first likely meeting is with a confrontation with their Relstanna...it may be time for some plain speaking.

The Legendary Planet Adventure Path continues in *The Depths of Desperation*.



BEYOND THE ADVENTURE

Every installment of the **Legendary Planet** saga is a grand adventure, but what you will find between these pages is far more than just an adventure. Each issue also brings you a selection of articles expanding the incredible universe in ways that go far beyond the adventure itself.

- Six spectacular new monsters: the insidious ironrot lichen, the noxious steamwerks golem, the grotesque and savage feral kyton, the colossal choke ooze, the dour void grim, and the parasitical queborrin!
- 3 new technological and magical items and several new vehicles, including the *darksphere*, *storm of chains*, and void gondola!
- A detailed gazetteer of the Shattered Zone asteroid belt and the grimy and polluted industrial colonies that and cyborg fanatics that rule there and enforce their twisted dreams of absolute purity.
- A detailed look at the cybernetic auttaine race and the wide variety of technological and magical augmentations they have developed to enhance their biomechanical bodies.
- “Shards of Home,” the latest chapter in Chris A. Jackson’s ongoing tale of Anasya, an interplanetary adventurer constantly on the run through the corrupt corridors of society doing her best to hold together factions determined to spin into chaos



BESTIARY

GOLEM, STEAMWERKS (CR 14)

This bloated thing of iron and steel is filthy with soot and oil, its rusting form belying its considerable quickness. Steam belches from innumerable vents and apertures and its movement accompanied by the scraping and grinding sound of protesting metal.

STEAMWERKS GOLEM

Large construct, unaligned

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 189 (18d10 + 90)

Speed 30 ft.

STR **DEX** **CON** **INT** **WIS** **CHA**

22 (+6) 9 (-1) 20 (+5) 3 (-4) 11 (+0) 1 (-5)

Damage Immunities poison, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantite

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages understands the languages of its creator but can't speak

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Immutable Form. The golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Magic Resistance. The golem has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The golem's weapon attacks are magical.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The golem makes two melee attacks.

Earthbreaker. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 19 (3d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 19 (3d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Spear-Strut. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* + 11 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit: 3 (1d6) piercing damage and 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Noxious Cloud (Recharge 6). The golem exhales poisonous gas in a 30-foot cone. It obscures vision as *obscuring mist* and each creature in that area must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) fire damage on a failed save and becoming poisoned for 1d4 rounds, or half as much damage and not become poisoned on a successful one.



APPENDIX: BESTIARY

A steamwerks golem is a curious collection of heavy industrialized armor, machines and plating rolled into a large—but surprisingly agile—construct. Standing at just over ten feet tall and weighing 2,700 pounds, the steamwerks golem is able to repeat simple phrases programmed into its making during creation.

Certain companies use steamwerks golems for harder work—and create larger specimens as a result. Many specialize in work such as deep mining or dangerous security work. Tales abound of vast steamwerks golems the size of small towns that are used to coordinate various tasks into a single entity; that these creatures—like their flesh golem cousins—occasionally go berserk is a secret few wish to admit to; steamwerks golems become so common in some places that they can outnumber employees.

STEAMWERKS GOLEM WEAPONRY

Steamwerks golems are created with an ability to understand and use weapons, in the same way as a construct generally in human form. This weaponry is built into the construct at the time it is created, although some more advanced engineers have been able to modify the weapons after this point.

KYTON, FERAL

Although humanoid there is something animalistic and insectoid about this distended and misshapen thing, with too many arms of various sizes and twisted, deformed legs that seem somehow to have been lashed or wired into its demented body. The creature's face has been stretched, the remnants of cruel bands forcing the things mouth forward, crooked sharp teeth grinning.

KYTON, FERAL

Medium fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 85 (10d8 + 40)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +8, Wis +5, Cha +6

Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Infernal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Devil's Sight. Magical darkness doesn't impede the kyton's darkvision.

Magic Resistance. The kyton has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Swarming. Two feral kytons may share a single space. If two kytons sharing a space attack the same foe, each attack is made at a +2 bonus.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The kyton makes two attacks.

Distended Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 11 (2d6 + 5) piercing damage. The target is grappled (escape DC 14) if the devil isn't already grappling a creature. Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and takes 7 (2d6) piercing damage at the start of each of its turns.



Swarming Gaze. A group of 3 or more feral kytons may perform a Swarming Gaze. No kyton in the group may use a bonus action this turn. On one of the kytons' turns, the Swarming Gaze takes effect and a target within 30 ft. must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1d3 rounds.

When a termagant kyton dwells in a place of relative safety, the creatures bred by her are often predominantly feral kytons. The feral kyton is in many ways a lesser being even to weaker kin; they are almost always found in hives where the number of kyton is vast, the profligate manner of their birth often makes weaker or inferior kyton that some say are deliberately created to allow cruelty to thrive. Feral kytons are more brutish and sadistically violent than their more subtle and cruel kin—the huge numbers they are found in does not enable many to rise above the foul rank and file of their birth. They are cruel—like all their kin—but this cruelty is more sadistic bullying and group torment than refined suffering. They are creatures of the pack.

Kyton ferals are grotesque and animalistic creatures. Though roughly humanoid in shape, they have longer, more savage features, including prehensile tails that are often more dextrous than their gnarled and gangly limbs. Their mouths—used to biting in huge packs—have mouths able to extend outwards; their jaws tearing and rending, not for food, but for pleasure.

The feral kyton exists within the pack, but also hates it—it despises its need to have others of its kind nearby to use its gaze attack. It also hates those above it; fears and loathes their power and that of the mother that bred it; a figure it regards as divine, yet hates and envies. The feral kyton has one big advantage, however, over its less common kin; if it is able to rise through the festering sweating mass of its brood, it is truly a figure of power. A microscopic number of feral kytons rise to become more powerful kytons—revoltingly animalistic versions of interlocutor, ostiarius, and sacristan. Some ferals rise to form particular new types of kyton that can come only from feral heritage, with the dreaded festius, ovvaria and pak being the three most commonly encountered. These feral kytons have horrific powers to call and command other kytons, able to bend them to their own will or take away their will to the point of self-destruction.

Ooze, Choke

This steaming mass of ooze churns and writhes in a pale tidal mass of anger and hunger. Great chunks of ooze boil upwards and splash back into its horrific bulk.

CHOKE OOZE

Gargantuan ooze, unaligned

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 350 (20d20 + 140)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	11 (+0)	24 (+7)	4 (+1)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Con +8, Wis +5, Cha +6

Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered

Damage Immunities acid, poison

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned, prone

Senses blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages -

Challenge 17 (22,000 XP)

Air Production. The choke ooze naturally produces breathable air as a byproduct of its metabolism. It is surrounded by 30 feet of breathable air, even in a vacuum. Any gasses or vapors with a duration in this area have their duration halved. Creatures within this radius also gain advantage on saving throws against gaseous effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The choke ooze makes 3 melee attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. Hit: 21 (3d8 + 8) bludgeoning damage, 21 (6d6) acid damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained.

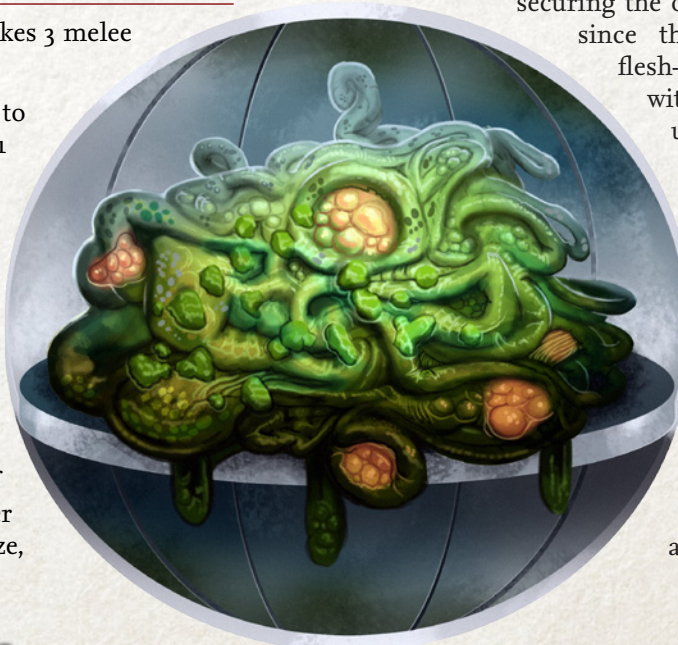
Envelop. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 21 (3d8+8 damage) bludgeoning damage, 35 (10d6) acid damage, and if the target is a Large or smaller creature grappled by the ooze,

that creature is swallowed, and the grapple ends. While swallowed, the creature is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the ooze, and it takes 35 (10d6) acid damage at the start of each of the ooze's turns. If the ooze takes 35 damage or more on a single turn from a creature inside it, the ooze must succeed on a DC 25 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate all swallowed creatures, which fall prone in a space within 10 feet of the ooze. If the ooze dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse using 15 feet of movement, exiting prone.

Usually these creatures are found in two ways—cultivated or wild. The latter is rare in the extreme for reasons outlined below. Cultivated choke oozes are usually massive—to enable them to yield the maximum amount of harvest. Sometimes smaller versions of these oozes are found cultivated—often where a portable form of air is required in remote locations.

It's rumored that the first true choke oozes were distilled and filleted by the aboleth, used to create vast sub-oceanic domes of air for visitors and air-breathing slaves. Another conjecture has the drow or their allies fleshwarping them into existence. Whatever caused their creation, there seems little doubt that choke oozes were conceived, not discovered. Their fundamental purpose—and the reason for their being found in such vast quantities when they are met—is their ability to convert sustenance into breathable air. This boon not only causes their profligacy, but also may explain why they are so rarely encountered in the wild or randomly met. So great is this boon that the choke ooze is greatly prized, and even an immature specimen may fetch a king's ransom amongst those with a vested interest in bringing air to remote locations.

There are, of course, dangers with the ooze. The first is its hunger—a choke ooze is never sated, its hunger a constant gnawing ache that is never satisfied. This need makes securing the ooze of the greatest importance, since they are drawn to flesh—any flesh—to consume. Unless held within an appropriately tough—usually steel or iron—container, their ability to create air is soon lost. Second is their need to be fed—in general 1 hit dice of food enables 1 Large choke ooze create enough air to fill a chamber one-hundred yards square for a day—this is a wild generalization, however, as the quality and quantity of air created varies from ooze to ooze—something some keepers extoll as a considerable virtue.



QUEBORRIN

An undulating wormlike thing burrows out of the carrion heap before you. Eyes like rows of green gemstones fixed you with their gaze while tiny legs like barbed hairs all along its length flex their fibrous tips for an instant. Wreathed in viscera, its sphincterous mouth opens to reveal a circular row of teeth as it slithers forward.

QUEBORRIN

Tiny aberration, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 55 (10d4 + 30)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Queborrin

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Magic Resistance. The queborrin has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects. It also bestows this ability on any host it infests for as long as it is infested. This magic resistance does not apply against the queborrin's spells.

Innate Spellcasting. The queborrin's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

3/day each: *calm emotions*, *suggestion*

1/day each: *dominate person*

ACTIONS

Infesting Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d2 + 5) piercing damage. On the following round, the queborrin may burrow into its target and wrap around their spinal cord. At this point, the Queborrin cannot be safely removed except with a *heal* or *miracle* spell.

A distant kin of the much-feared and more common intellect devourer, the queborrin are an alien parasitic race that thrives on finding a powerful host to dwell within and enjoy. The queborrin are voyeurs; seeking to enjoy positions of power to enable other queborrin to thrive.

A queborrin resembles a revolting long green worm with distended legs, it has cluster eyes and is covered in fine hairs that, when attached to the host's spine, grow and infuse within the skeleton of the host to prevent removal. Its mouth is designed for swift burrowing and has a circular row of razor teeth. Queborrin speak their own language; a revolting series of screeches and high-pitched whistles

that can be pitched so high that they pass the hearing of most humanoid. In this way, queborrin are able to communicate with each other even in the most dangerous of circumstances, and do so secretly.

Queborrin usually enter a host by *dominating* them and then erasing the memory of its ever entering them. In this way, queborrin can slyly enter a populace raising very few suspicions; and those who do spot such intruders are quickly dealt with by dominated infested hosts. In this way, queborrin can quickly take over entire communities, and have taken over entire worlds in this way—spreading like a vast wave of parasitic misery across an entire population and creating a place of order and safety for the queborrin to infest other worlds.

Queborrin grant a boon of spell resistance to their hosts; something they carefully veil using suggestion spells if ever the need arises—most hosts put the lack of spells affecting them down to simple destiny—an assumption the queborrin planted there in the first place.

ECOLOGY

Queborrin are created when a mature queborrin inhabits the body of a pregnant host; its racial reproduction an horrific byproduct of this event—an event often sought out by lone queborrin in an attempt to create more of its kind. The infant queborrin created by this event invariably form in one of two ways—entirely dependent upon the manner of the present hosts surroundings. If the hosted queborrin feels it is unsafe for a mass birth (q.v.) the queborrin created is a single creature always birthed within the infant, who begins life dependent upon and inextricably linked with the infant queborrin. After a period of one year the infant queborrin is able to leave its infant host if it wishes, but most develop a long (often life-long) relationship with their host body; guiding its destiny in a way often at odds with its natural birth. The intelligent queborrin has high hopes for the infant, and seeks to spread its own kind by using the creature's abilities—whatever they might be.

If the adult queborrin thinks it is safe to do so, a mass birth occurs. This revolting event involves the infant queborrin feeding upon the host infant—killing it and devouring it utterly. After a given period of time—usually half the gestation period of the host creature—the infant queborrin emerge. At this time the infants are very vulnerable, and the adult queborrin invariably remains within its pregnant host to ensure their brood are properly cared for until adulthood—something that usually takes a year.

HABITAT AND SOCIETY

The queborrin are accomplished bodysnatchers; their aim is always to assimilate as many hosts as they can to ensure not only survival, but safety. As has been eluded to above, the queborrin are able to instigate mass takeovers, and because of their intelligence can usually arrange a most believably cover for these activities. Where a host group of some size has been established, queborrin will often use pregnant creatures to host further queborrin and ensure a mass birth. These births are enveloped in layers of secrecy so that even if the outer layer is uncovered and the queborrin discovered, there are always more layers to protect the main host and young. Often with a particularly old or powerful group, external senior or powerful individuals are sought out and infested to ensure that any danger is dealt with by those in authority.

This is not to say queborrin are sociable creatures; many live entire lives operating alone; spying or studying or out of mere curiosity—some even become so engendered in their host's society that they forget that host and queborrin are separate creatures. Some of these creatures have been known to fall into inconsolable grief when a particularly beloved or long-lived host dies. These creatures are rare, but common enough to have a name amongst queborrin, who call them same-strange; in disgust at their love of a particular host. If a normal queborrin encounters such a creature it seeks to destroy the aberration.

Therein lies the queborrins one major belief—that they are racially pure; a belief so ingrained and all-consuming that it often bleeds outwards into the host creature or beyond into it society if enough are present. Queborrin use hosts to further the queborrin race, and while they are inquisitive and cruel, they are far more than that, and this makes them very dangerous.

HIVE-MINDED

Some queborrin are able—through a quirk as yet understood even by the race themselves—to communicate across vast distances; even between planes of existence. These hive-minded queborrin have a shared link with several others that enables those creatures to speak and listen and see everything that goes on between the hive group.

The hive-minded queborrin are often feared by their own kind, who hunt them out as aberrations within aberrations. This forces some groups of hive-minded to operate covertly and form even more paranoid groups than standard queborrin.

METAL-CLAD

Some queborrin have developed—or rather created—metal skins to work from, preferring to shed mortal flesh to enable a form of immortality. These creatures view other queborrin who dwell in flesh as unclean; racially inferior creatures that are above all other foes who must be sought out and slain. The metal skins they develop are only limited by the present technology of the places they inhabit—places they generally soon overpower and destroy.

Metal-clad queborrin have developed complex alchemical methods of reproduction, sometimes on an industrial scale. These queborrin are greatly feared by standard queborrin who reciprocate their race hatred. They operate on a strict hierarchical scale to ensure racial purity drives the queborrin—not personal greed or desire.

The leaders of the metal-clad dwell within vast complex machines, and all metal-clad queborrin ensure they have weaponry—knowing their own flesh is weak.



IRONROT LICHEN

This reddish lichen is difficult to see on the pile of rusted metal where it grows.

IRONROT LICHEN

CR 7

XP 2,900

Small plant, unaligned

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 110 (16d6 + 54)

Speed 10 ft., Climb 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	21 (+5)	18 (+4)	1 (-5)	11 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +6

Damage Immunities cold, lightning

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, paralyzed, prone, stunned

Senses tremorsense 60 ft., passive perception 16

Languages —

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Camouflage. An ironrot lichen looks like normal rust and corrosion on a metal surface when at rest. A creature must succeed at a DC 22 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check to notice it before it attacks for the first time.

Ironrot Plague. The ironrot plague is a troublesome but nonlethal plague that affects metallic items. When exposed to either the touch of the ironrot lichen, or its spore cloud attack, any affected metal items are subject to its effects. Creatures that are holding or wearing metal items can make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw to mitigate the effect. On a success, the metal items take 1d4 necrotic damage that bypass any resistances to damage. On a failure, the item becomes broken and unusable. Creatures made of metal (e.g. an iron golem) makes the same saving throw, and takes 22 (4d10) necrotic damage on a failure, or half as much on a success. An item that fails the initial saving throw must make another saving throw after 1 minute. A broken item becomes destroyed on a second failure, or remains broken and end the effect on a success. Creatures that fail the first saving throw must make another saving throw every minute, taking damage on a success, and ending the effect with no damage on a failure. A creature or object destroyed as a result of this plague sprouts a new patch of ironrot lichen in 1 hour. Only metal creatures and held objects receive a saving against this disease; other metal objects automatically fail. Magic items are explicitly immune to this effect.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The ironrot lichen makes two tendril attacks.

Tendrils. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (6d6) acid damage. If the target is made of metal, wearing metal armor, or wielding a metal weapon, they and/or those objects are exposed to the ironrot plague (see above).

Spore Cloud (Recharge 5-6). The ironrot lichen releases a 10-foot-radius cloud of spores. Creatures within the cloud must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be affected ironrot plague (see above). Metal objects that are not held are automatically subjected to the ironrot plague as if they had failed their saving throw.

Ironrot lichens faced extermination in most inhabited areas after infestations of the plant wiped out armor, tools, and weapons, while spreading from settlement to settlement on tainted metal. The hardy plants went into a long dormancy in hidden areas, and have thus far avoided complete destruction. Ironrot lichens can enter a long-term stasis, and they reawaken after many locations have forgotten about the massive damage they cause. They also thrive in extreme environments where they could reproduce through red-blooded creatures populating those environments. Patches of dormant ironrot lichen have also spread to airless locations in space, becoming a menace to miners who rely on metal tools and habitats on the asteroids they work. A patch of lichen takes up a roughly 3-foot-diameter space and is virtually weightless.

Rumored to be a creation of the Hegemony, ironrot lichens sprouted simultaneously on many worlds where they unleashed considerable devastation. The first ironrot lichens only corroded metal and spread slowly enough to allow infested metal to easily come into contact with other metal objects. Whether through deliberate or unintentional mutation, ironrot lichens metamorphosed such that they inflict caustic wounds to flesh, and their destruction of iron also extended to iron contained in a living creature's blood. The lichens are immune to temperature extremes and even magical sources of cold, but fire destroys it. Unfortunately, using fire also causes the lichens to release spores which escape the fire and drift away on the wind. Druidic sects of a particularly malevolent bent gather and cultivate ironrot lichens and use them in their attempts to undermine large population centers. In areas where mining claims are contested, one group may resort to using ironrot lichens as instruments of sabotage.



VOID GRIM

This tall, muscular giant has mottled gray and brown skin with numerous pockmarks, looking not so much hewn from stone as blasted from it. When it lifts its arm, a nearly translucent membrane connecting its upper arm to its chest spreads out.

VOID GRIM

CR 6

XP 2,300

Large giant (mutant), lawful neutral

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 114 (12d10 + 48)

Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	10 (+0)	19 (+4)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Dexterity +3, Constitution +7, Wisdom +4

Skills Intimidate +5, Perception +7, Survival +4

Damage Resistances fire

Damage Immunities cold

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive perception 17

Languages Common, Giant

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Stone Camouflage. The void grim has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hid in rocky terrain.

Glide. In airless environments, a void grim can fly without difficulty. However, in areas with atmosphere, a void grim cannot hover and must descend at least 10 feet each round. If a void grim flies at faster than half speed, it must succeed at a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or tear its wing membrane, causing it to fall. A torn wing membrane heals naturally in 2d4 days, or it can be repaired immediately with *regenerate*.

Innate Spellcasting. The void grim's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (Spell save DC 12). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

3/day each: *meld into stone*, *move earth*, *stone shape*

No Breath. The void grim does not need to breath, and is immune to effects from attacks or hazards that are inhaled (such as poison gas). It is still subject to gases that do not require inhalation, such as corrosive acid clouds.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The void grim makes two pick attacks.

Pick. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8 + 6) piercing damage.

Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 28 (4d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Irradiate (Recharge 5-6) The void grim can release a burst of cosmic radiation it has stored in its body. All creatures within 10 feet of the void grim take 2d6 points of fire damage and 3d6 radiant damage. A successful DC 17 Fortitude save reduces the total damage by half.



REACTIONS

Rock Catching. If a rock or similar object is hurled at the void grim, the void grim can make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. On a success, the void grim catches the object and takes no damage. On a failure, it takes full damage as normal.

Void grims are an mutant race descended from stone giants who once dwelt in high-atmosphere mountains where they could work freely and avoid other giants. With the destruction of their home world, however, they found the strange radiations of the ores they had long worked had adapted them to the lack of atmosphere, and they continued to mine among the shattered asteroids they now called home. Their demeanor and survivability in the void gave them their names, though they refer to themselves as kabbarin. Void grims stand 11 feet tall and weigh between 1,700 and 2,000 pounds.

Many outsiders view void grims as overly serious giants who spend all their waking moments in asteroid mines. There is some truth to this. Void grims are deadly earnest miners who brook no carelessness on the part of others. While they enjoy protection from space and can recover when an asteroid accidentally breaks apart, they know how easy it is for mishaps to occur and realize others don't have the same level of protection. Some void grims are exceedingly protective of their claims; an enclave of such giants works a mine all throughout the day in shifts. During downtime and away from other races, however, void grims carouse and celebrate their daily takes.

Void grims raise their children communally, with the infirm or elderly providing most of the care. When children have fully developed their flight membranes, they learn how to navigate in solar winds. The membranes are strong enough to give the giants rudimentary flight in the airless void or thin atmosphere, but they are fragile in normal atmosphere. Even though void grims reach adulthood at age 20, their children begin working mines when they are as young as 7. Adult miners supervise children and have them work relatively safe mines until they prove their capabilities. They apply the same attitude toward non-void grim miners and seem condescending to outsiders. Void grims are standoffish towards other but not aggressive, except when interlopers encroach on their claims. They become truly enraged when they discover breathless ones and dispatch the creatures immediately on sight. Void grims' lack of a need for air makes them uniquely suited to combat breathless ones.

ALIEN TREASURES

DARKSPHERE

Technological Wonder, legendary (requires attunement)

A darksphere is a small spherical object about the size of a human fist, covered in ancient symbols representing peculiar animals. The sphere is equal parts weapon and construction tool, able to create a temporary *sphere of annihilation* lasting 6 rounds before dissolving into nothingness, after which the darksphere must recharge for 24 hours. The *sphere of annihilation* may be moved with your concentration as normal for such an item, with control possible at a range of up to 40 feet. Note that a darksphere and the *sphere of annihilation* it creates are two separate objects; one does not become the other. If the darksphere out of range of the *sphere of annihilation*, the latter winks out of existence immediately and the darksphere must be recharged. Activating a darksphere requires you to decipher the curious workings on the outer sphere with a successful DC 25 Intelligence (Investigation) check. A successful check allows you to activate the darksphere freely thereafter, but any other creature must succeed on their own check to be able to activate it. If given guidance and assistance by someone who has successfully decoded the sphere's markings, such checks have advantage.

FIST CANNON

Weapon (firearm), uncommon (requires attunement)

A fist cannon is a small iron sphere sized to be gripped by a humanoid hand. It consists of four short, ugly barrels and is easily concealed; treat it as a dagger or similar weapon for the purpose of Sleight of Hand and Stealth checks. A fist cannon uses standard bullets and gunpowder but has a reputation for being wildly inaccurate when used to shoot further than 30 feet; any attempt to shoot further than 30 feet has disadvantage. The weapon's main strength is that all four barrels can be fired at once, enabling potentially lethal damage on a single target. The wielder may choose to fire a single barrel or all four barrels, but not two or three barrels at once. If all four barrels are fired simultaneously, you must subtract 1d4 from your attack roll.

STORM OF CHAINS

Weapon (spiked chain), legendary (requires attunement)

A *storm of chains* is a Large +3 *spiked chain* (a weapon that deals 1d6 piercing damage, weighs 3 lbs., and has the Reach and Finesse properties) that is a weapon favored by many elite kyton warlords. The chains are infested with thousands of



cruel many-barbed hooks carved to resemble biting kyton. When wielded, these mouths make an unsettling crying noise, like a demented vast alien horde of hungry insane babies, granting you advantage on Intimidate checks against any creature that can hear this grisly moaning. The storm can be hurled up to 30 ft. and becomes a *blade barrier*. This ability can be used 3 times per day, and regains all 3 uses at dawn. You can choose the manner and size of the barrier but like the spell, the barrier is immovable. When the barrier is dismissed or the spell duration ends, the item returns automatically to your hand. Instead of hurling the *storm of chains* to create a *blade barrier*, you can instead activate the chain's power while using the Dodge action. As long as you continue using this action each round (up to a maximum of 1 minute), you are surrounded by a miniature *blade barrier* that protects only you, granting you three-quarters cover and dealing damage to any creature or object that

strikes him as if it had passed through a *blade barrier* (DC 19 Dexterity saving throw for half). An attacking creature or object can take damage in this way only once per round. This effect ends immediately if you take an action other than a dodge action.

STEAM RICKSHAWS, CLOCKWORK SEDANS, SKIFFS AND VOID GONDOLAS

Travel across the Zone and around its various parts is risky—mining companies don't really give a damn about accidents beyond what money they may lose, and in general even catastrophic accidents cost relatively little.

Many of the asteroids in the Zone have gravity—pretty close to that of the PC's own home world, and this caused a problem initially. Expensive rockets made exploration—even across the countless close neighbors here—rare. Luckily, one of the ores found in the Zone—kallenite—has a peculiar buoyancy that greatly helps to escape gravity and yet retain it within. That kallenite is mined in liquid form and has a nasty habit of being easy to breathe in and suffocate its miners, simply makes it more expensive. The metal is much in demand in the vicinity, and it is impossible to mine the ore fast enough to meet demand—much like most things in the Zone.

Travel using kallenite vessels—almost always skiffs—is pretty terrifying. It basically involves being hurled into space by some considerable metal arm and aimed at a far-away point—which is missed with alarming frequency. Miners have likened it to be hurled like a rock off a cliff and trying to get another miner to catch you half a mile away. Capture is via a curious arcane and technological object known charmingly as the catcher. The catcher is basically a hole in the ground, ringed by arcane transfusers that slow down and attract the skiff. That arcane magic—particularly transmutational magic, and magic items of that school—has been known to nullify the effects of the catcher is just one of the risks of trying to strike it rich here.

Skiffs are generally circular, one sits where one can amongst supplies—some of the posher ones have belts at their edges to be worn for safety—not that they help. Outwardly, both skiffs and void gondolas (q.v.) are spherical and ringed with iron buffers allegedly able to crumple and absorb impacts. Such claims are ridiculous, but provide psychological help to those terrified of flying this way.

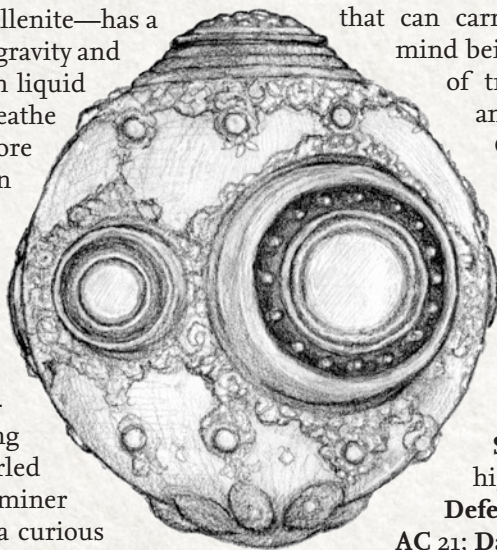
Kallenite inherently holds and absorbs gravity, often retaining it for several days. This beneficial side-effect has enabled vessels to withstand exterior impacts and breaches whilst in the void of space and retain a superficial envelope of air—the air within the vehicle kept in place by its own inherent gravity. Each skiff or gondola has its own inbuilt Small choke ooze (see Bestiary) to provide atmosphere—

these are fed through a glass tube. The air within such constructions (which are generally Huge in size) can even survive a breach, where doors and breaks open onto space a bubble of air about 30ft. wide remains whilst ever the choke ooze remains alive.

Those who enjoy more modern and sedate travel use void gondolas, a curious cable-car linking asteroids by colossal chains that rise into space. Actually relatively simple devices, these have become more popular than skiffs of late, despite being more expensive they are safer—a minor consideration for the mining companies and Purity when profits of freight within (passengers being of little consequence).

The doors on skiffs and gondolas do not have locks, and can be opened from outside and inside.

On land in the Shattered Zone, local transportation is usually via steam rickshaws, clockwork rickshaws or golem-rickshaws; all relatively similar simple vehicles that can carry four passengers if they don't mind being intimate. Some of these forms of transportation are grown around and by peculiar castes of auttaine. Gigantic trains are used for longer trips—these vast vessels almost always carry freight, but have room for passengers somewhere amongst their vastness.



VOID GONDOLA

Gargantuan air vehicle

Squares 16 (20 ft. by 20 ft.; 20 feet high); **Cost** 40,000 gp

Defense

AC 21; **Damage Threshold** 8

hp 105

Maximum Speed 225ft.; **Acceleration** 100ft.

Ramming Damage 2d8

DESCRIPTION

Propulsion pulled—clockwork chains (10 squares of chains; AC 19, Damage Threshold 10, hp 84)

Driving Check Intelligence (Vehicle*)

Forward Facing one side of the square vehicle space

Driving Device levers used to move the gondola

Driving Space a single 5-ft.-by-5-ft. square that contains the lever that serves as the driving device, the device can be left running without attention but remains at a constant speed

Crew 1

Passengers 16

Decks 1

*Requires Tool Proficiency: Vehicle

GAZETTEER

BEACON—ANGEL OF TOIL—AND THE SHATTERED SONE

A handful of figures wander the dark streets, each wearing what seems to be a repulsive plague mask. These figures move furtively, as though afraid that if they leave the shadow's care something may take them. In the darkness about them, something lurks beyond the edges of the garish ochre gaslights above. Beyond the sick lights, gothic-spired buildings rise into the blackened heavens and eventually into bloated iron spheres.

BEACON

LN Metropolis

Corruption +5; **Crime** +9; **Economy** +5; **Law** +10; **Lore** +5; **Society** +1

Qualities Industrial*, Notorious (double), Prosperous, Rumormongering Citizens, Strategic Location

Danger +20

DEMOGRAPHICS

Government Overlord

Population 62,700 (51,000 auttaine, 6,300 humans, 5,400 other).

NOTABLE NPCS

Her Enlightenment, the Steel Queen of the True Path, the Kronen Abaff Harr (LE female auttaine bard 6/ wizard 14)

MARKETPLACE

Spellcasting 8th

Uncommon Items 4d4; **Rare Items** 3d4

***NEW SPECIAL QUALITIES** Industrial: The settlement is geared towards output and commerce but on an industrial scale. The citizenry are often too tired or drunk to care beyond their next pay day and back-street traders and crime thrives (Corruption +1, Crime +1, Economy +1).

Beacon is the largest asteroid in the system of the Shattered Zone and its de-facto capitol. Like many asteroids in the Zone, it has a breathable atmosphere (albeit a feeble and asthmatic one). It is also one city—every inch of its surface is industrialized or urbanized and swallowed beneath construction. This construction is robust but un-pretty, giving the city the feel of one vast factory. Between the working parts are slums; the clockwork shantytowns of workers come to Beacon to make fortunes.

Beacon is the main focal point of the adventure Confederates of the Shattered Zone, although some information is also given for other locations in the Zone, to enable you to include them in this adventure if you wish, or use them as a base for future adventures or adventure paths.

BEACON AND THE SHATTERED ZONE

Use Intelligence (History) or Charisma (Diplomacy) checks to gather information, higher checks reveal the information for lesser results.

DC 5—The Zone is mainly populated by auttaine—half humanoid constructs—who mine the almost 10,000 asteroids that make up the Zone. This is dirty work, and the Zone is given over entirely to industry.

DC 10—A group called Purity—who believe auttaine are the pure race of the universe—rule the Zone, with a festering group of companies below vying for power. Purity has brought order to the failing Confederacy made up of disparate mining companies, clubs, and cabals who at one time threatened to bring civil war to the Zone. Purity's iron fist stopped that. One of the most amazing of improvements brought about by Purity is seen everywhere—the vast iron spheres hanging over the city which contain the Angels—actually vast, pale oozes that are able to use their considerable appetites for flesh to create breathable air. There are said to be scarcely enough pigs to keep them fed—some say alternative feed has been found to placate them.

DC 15—The ruler of Purity—the terrible and revered Her Enlightenment, the Steel Queen of the True Path, the Kronen Abaff Harr; known more commonly as The Kronen—represents all that is pure about Purity. Her face leers from every wall, and her slogans are chanted out by curiously fleshy constructs known as the Visionaries that lurk at each street-corner. The Kronen engenders almost divine following by the auttaine—particularly the young.

DC 20—Although uber-ordered, Purity is diseased by power, and partially owes its rise over the past few decades to its diabolists, who use devils to punish and terrify the populace—although such devils are of course never seen. The upper echelons of Purity are known for monstrous excesses; they like their air purer, for example, and regard atmosphere created from Angels fed on human flesh to be richer.

THE SHATTERED ZONE [AREA MAP]

● Asteroid 113

Choke
Pestilence

Salvation
Sin

Beacon

The Mechanism

Hope

Harns Arch

The Descent

— Void Gondola
1 Hex = 1000 Miles

THE DANCE OF THE BROKEN BRIDES

One of the most notable of all features that assault the senses of visitors to the Zone are the chains that grip across vast empty space between the asteroids here. Many—but not by any means all—of the Zone’s asteroids are kept in position by vast chains that tear above the sky of Beacon and other asteroids that make up the region. This vast project—begun almost two-hundred years ago—was done at the behest of elders within the Zone who foresaw the potential for a terrible calamity: so close are many of the asteroids within the Zone that should one asteroid stray from its path that the entire Zone may become like a vast bag of marbles, scattering one against the other.

The colossal work of tethering is still far from complete, but the tensions created across the vastness is a reassuringly visual confirmation that all is well. There are doubters—anarchists many would say—who have pointed out that the tethering may actually results in a worse catastrophe than the mere collision of two spheres. Such cynics are now seldom seen or heard from, thanks to the vigilance and patriotism of Purity.

PURITY

Over the past few decades, a powerful political and idealistic faction has united the various divisions of the Shattered Zone into a confederacy—Purity; so named because of its members expectation and surety that auttaine are the purest race and that—in time—they will become the next natural step of evolution across the universe. Purity’s ideals appeal to many locals; they have brought order, unity, and wider wealth to those within the Zone, and whilst their motivations and methods are considered harsh, most auttaine rub along with the ideals.

In truth, Purity represents a monstrous oppressor, punishing an increasingly wide group of its own citizens as abnormal. Under the flag of Purity, tens of thousands have been sent to correctional facilities across the Zone—and no one cares. The leader; Abaff Harr—the so called Steel Queen, more commonly called the Kronen—is aggressively idolized by the indoctrinated youth of the Zone, her words seen as almost divine, her vision for order and supremacy of the auttaine unquestioned. The youth genuinely love her; the older generation less so, but they tend to keep quiet and get on with their lives, preferring to forget rumors or put them down to foreign spies. Harr’s words of wisdom dominate every street, flags are waved proudly, and the so-called Visionaries (see sidebar) shout out the words of the Steel Queen throughout the day.

Foreigners are viewed with broad smiles masking secret fears and loathing.

Finally Purity is slowly being infested by an alien parasite that thrives on talk of purity and race-supremacy; the queborrin, these alien parasites occupy several higher ranking Purity officer’s bodies, and are always looking for

THE VISIONARIES

One of the most revolting but effective communication devices of Purity, the Visionaries began as steel and flesh constructs that heaved out party slogans day and night. However, science has improved them, and now to show how cured they are, former political anarchists have *donated* their mouths, lungs, vocal pipe, larynx, esophagus and other organs to the cause. These are specially treated and now hang high above many street corners—all the street corners in a place like Beacon. The voices call out, day and night (although mercifully quieting during the smaller hours), quoting the party lines: “*Purity of Thought, Purity of Purpose, Purity of Race*”, “*Watch out—there’s a foreign spy about!*”, and the more common “*Our Children are Our Destiny!*” The visionaries do not see or react, they simply repeat, and the true manner of their creation would probably revolt even the hardest of hardline Purity members.

Harming or hindering Visionaries is seen as a terrible act—a treasonous one in fact—it is instantly reported to a local patrol, who are sure to follow up the vile act of political vandalism. Such vandals are treated very, very harshly.

PURITY AND DIABOLISM

“Power is everything, and everything is power.” The words of the great Purity philosopher Straum K’all are learned by every child who passes through the Factory of Allegiance—Purity’s greatest school. The true meaning of these words is hidden, however; Purity sees everything as a resource, even devils. Purity does more than dabble in diabolism—many of its founder members rose to power because of it; forcing the miners to do their bidding by nighttime visits by summoned devils.

This hunger to harness devils was perfected by subsequent generations of auttaine to become an art-form, and now many of the upper echelons of Purity have their own devil guardians, spies, and cohorts—in fact, they are essential for survival. Diabolists thrive in upper Purity society and the use of devils is an accepted part of life amongst those in power.

PURITY STANDARD PATROL (CR 14)

These patrols walk the streets day and night, and have carte blanche to ensure the Kronen’s orders are followed and obeyed. Disobedience is anarchy, and anarchy is death to all! They are made up of 6 obersolders and a steamwerks golem, led by an Oberfahn.

PURITY PATROL OBERSOLDER (6)

Medium humanoid (auttaine), chaotic evil

Armor Class 20 (plate)

Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+3)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The obersolder makes 2 melee attacks or 3 ranged attacks.

Nine-ring sword. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage.

Rifle. Ranged Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage.

TACTICS

Before Combat Load rifles.

During Combat Attack with ranged weapons first, then move in as a team and fight supporting each other.

Morale Most obersolders are fanatical.

PURITY PATROL OBERFAHN

Medium humanoid (auttaine), chaotic evil

Armor Class 20 (plate)

Hit Points 170 (20d8 + 80)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	16 (+4)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Spellcasting. The Oberfahn is a 7th-level cleric. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, to hit with spell attacks +6)

Cantrips (at will): *Guidance, Mending, Sacred Flame, Thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *Cure Wounds, Healing Word, Shield of Faith*

2nd level (3 slots): *Spiritual Weapon, Calm Emotions, Prayer of Healing, Blindness/Deafness*

3rd level (3 slots): *Revivify, Mass Healing Word, Sending, Spirit Guardians*

4th level (1 slots): *Guardian of Faith*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The oberfahn makes 3 melee attacks or 3 ranged attacks.

Bastard Sword. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d8 + 2) slashing damage.

Rifle. Ranged Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d8 + 4) piercing damage.

TACTICS

Before Combat Direct troops to load and load own rifle.

During Combat Lead troops into battle, coordinating teamwork feats. Use spells only when absolutely necessary, prefers to lead with melee.

Morale Fanatical.

GOLEM, STEAMWERKS

CR 14

XP 11,500

hp 151 (see page 60)

THE CONFEDERACY MEMBERS

Below Purity, twenty-seven separate companies, concerns, and factions make up the confederacy, each representing some historic group. In some cases these groups have been formed through alliance, fear and greed. Others have arisen from single members. For example, the necromantic affairs of Ashko industries ruled (allegedly) from its creation by the same master, Korlas Ashko. Some say Ashko is a lich.

Regardless of these disparate groups and their various political make ups, two things are certain—firstly things are more profitable since Purity took over—slave workers (almost all of whom are incarcerated because they disagreed with Purity in some way) are in abundance, and free labor is something everyone who runs a company on Beacon wants. And secondly, power fluctuates—it's always someone's day. Presently the top of the crop are the Shattered Zone Mining Company, Corrosive Ventures, and the Contraptors. Next week it will be someone else.

The Confederacy changes like the wind, with its twenty-seven parts vying for power. Newcomers are not tolerated. Behind this loose confederation, true power comes through careful business backed by shrewd power-plays.

POWERFUL FRIENDS, DANGEROUS ENEMIES

At any given time the PCs may wish to make enquiries about the ruling groups of Beacon—particularly when they learn about the complexities of their journeys locating the dead gates. Use the following table as a guide to the simplest of information, give more, if you wish.

DC 10—Beacon is run by Purity—a political iron fist that rose some time ago and now binds the confederacy together with wire. Some 27 groups make up the confederacy—mostly companies, with a few diabolist cults thrown into the mix.

DC 15 The most powerful of these groups is probably the Shattered Zone Mining Company, run by the present Mayor of Beacon K'illiv Gryne, an auttaine woman known for her fiery temper and abilities as a spy.

DC 20—Just below this company fester two other powerful groups: their bitter rivals the Contraptors, run by the corpulent Lazlo K'tivv, and finally the least of the trio, Corrosive Ventures, run by the charmless T'ain Zick. Both these auttaine have reputations for being emotionless in business. These companies control the vast network of transport links between asteroids, as well as carving up the majority of the mines and resources on them. A few of the outer asteroids—and those used for obscure military purposes—are not linked by transport or have links obsessively controlled by Purity.

THE ANGELS—LUNGS OF BEACON

Many of the asteroids in the Zone have retained a thin atmosphere from the days when the whole place was one big planet, but many didn't. This is bad for business. One of the first and most major improvements introduced by Purity was the proliferation of angels. Angels (named because they are pale)—held within huge iron spheres for the reasons detailed below—are Gargantuan or larger oozes that have a peculiar ability to produce breathable air as a by-product of their biology. Unfortunately, to produce air these more-accurately-named choke oozes need to eat, and they eat flesh. The official story is that pigs are used—there are a lot of pigs in the Zone, something visitors comment on since auttaine don't eat unless they feel like it. The true story is a little darker—Purity leaders believe that angels produce different qualities within their air, and some say that air made by

angels fed on sentient humanoid flesh tastes cleaner.

Unfortunately angels are ravenous, and if they get out their great size and hunger causes carnage, so they are almost always encountered in the vast metal spheres that dominate the skylines of places such as Beacon. If they aren't fed enough, however, they have been known to break out and consume whole districts—their power and appetites are legendary, and used as cautionary tales told by auttaine to their offspring.

PLAGUE MASKS—A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

Visitors to the Zone are often initially alarmed to find locals wearing what appear to be plague masks—vast elongated things that make their wearers resemble demented birds. These mask are used by locals to filter out corrosive air in the Zone, and are often instilled with a refillable scent gland that masks the industrial stench of the Zone.

Auttaine who do not wear these masks run the risk of picking up a latent rusting acid, which lurks unseen in the air. Once struck, this acid (known as rustplague to the local auttaine) begins an irreversible and dreadful corrosion which slowly ossifies and dissolves its host. Visitors notice the bleach and iron tang in the air but, unless they have construct components, are unaffected. The corrosion is clearly visible in constructs seen across the city—particularly the clockwork and steamwerks golems that are commonly seen in the belt and used for labor and security.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

The vast asteroid city has countless streets, interesting locales, and dubious dens. To visit them in any kind of detail would require a work at least the same size as this whole publication. Four districts are very briefly detailed below.

The Clockwork: A single vast slum that touches the intricate parts of the city, the Clockwork is so named because many of its locals envy those simple mechanical devices. Although disordered, the iron order of Purity and the lawfulness of the auttaine make the slum a remarkable place, with its own laws, elite, and etiquettes. There are parts of the Clockwork so breath-taking that they put the greatest architecture of other planets to shame. It's so called Cabinets—incredibly complex interlocking shanty buildings—make the greatest use of the least space, and have been likened to the most complex maze ever devised. Visitors have literally been lost for weeks within them—if they ever escape at all.

Gaslamps District: This district—named because of its lit streets—is the ironically dark soul of Beacon. It's here that the gates linking Beacon to the outside worlds arrive, and where the most void gondolas are linked to. The district has tastes that cater to visitors as well as auttaine, and a thriving number of gambling dens, places to stay, and indulgences thrive here, tolerated by Purity.

The Great Cog: One vast part of the city is in perpetual motion—its various parts constantly moving one side against another. This structure enables industry to work more effectively over a given period of days, distributing components more effectively by bringing the places of manufacture to their suppliers.

The Mechanism: The Mechanism is where visitors (known variously as Outsiders or, even less kindly, Underpeople) come to find normality. Constructed within an old factory, the Mechanism is all things rolled into one for a visitor—hotel, bar, store, hospital, brothel. The owner of the Mechanism, the frightfully rusted Mother Kog (N female auttaine) is one of the most unpleasant looking creatures in the Zone; her entire body is slowly dissolving as a result of a terrible case of rustplague, and now she resembles something more hollow than living. Staff move about the Mechanism using a series of complex clockwork creatures that resemble twisted things from demented merry-go-rounds. The Mechanism is massive, and it's possible to wander about it for a few days without seeing the same place twice. The central core of the building, known fondly as the Startsette (an old auttaine word for hearth), is an enormous metal skeleton holding a gigantic clock in the central area; itself almost one-hundred feet square.

The Mechanism is where theoretically everything on Beacon can be purchased, although prices can run high. One wing of the building is given over to traders, and an impromptu market regularly occurs there, with scavengers bringing in what they have found on asteroids.

The Works: Some say Beacon is hollow, and that this brittle heart hides the true power of Purity—a vast and complex machine that truly rules the surface. That the machine is part devil and part auttaine is just a wild rumor, of course.

THE SHATTERED ZONE

Scattered over an area of approximately 12 million cubic miles, the Shattered Zone is comprised of 9,871 asteroids that are the scattered remains of a former planet. Most—if not all—of these asteroids is inhabited in some way by something, and many have breathable atmospheres; many which do not are presently being considered for controlled infestation by choke oozes by Purity. Some of the asteroids are already overrun by these creatures, and a few have been abandoned because of this.

Each is unique in some way, and almost all bear some form of life—even if that is just a few lonely miners in some hurricane-scoured tin town. A very brief description of a few of the more interesting places is given below.

ASTEROID 113—OBLIVION

Also known as Oblivion, Asteroid 113 has a dubious reputation as a treasure trove of Ancient artifacts, as well as a brooding mass of terror. Miners venture there occasionally—the lure of a quick fortune proves too much for some—but few ever return. Those who do tell of iron and stone spires, and a dreadful dark presence—something dwells below the surface, something terrible and unseen.

THE DESCENT

Hanging at the very base of the Zone, on the longest void gondola journey—almost three days—the Descent is a kind of hell. Here hangs a foul and bloated asteroid groaning with coal; its veins run rich with black gold, and its core is infested by shafts. The Descent is the dirtiest, deepest and richest asteroid, and the jewel in the crown of the Shattered Zone Mining Company. Obsessive about naked flames, the company run a wild but profitable ship—corrupt foremen and mine managers revel in the profits and still have ample funds to send to the company and their Purity masters.

With so many miners in one place, the Descent lives up to its nickname in other ways. What vices the auttaine have are all fatuously displayed here, from the body shops that bend and modify the auttaine, through to darker places where the law of the surface unravels in excess.

HAR'NS' ARCH

A vast hollow asteroid in the shape of an arch, Har'ns Arch is an object lesson in greed. The asteroid was so deeply mined, so much exploited that eventually parts of the place literally fell in on themselves, killing thousands.

THE GREAT MECHANISM

"Auttaine ingenuity knows no boundaries," said the Kronen when this project was completed less than 12 years ago. A lashed mass of 27 asteroids brought together as one big mine and ore refinery, the Mechanism was quite literally made on the sacrifice of auttaine. Many auttaine are embedded into its structure to act as living components of the Great Mechanism, keeping its 27 component parts in a fixed station to one another. Great steam trains and huge void gondolas journey between these parts, and it is said that the Mechanism is rivalling Beacon as the center of population in the Zone. Soon—they say—it may become its shining capitol, something the Beaconers—as they like to be known—prefer to not think about.

AUTTAINÉ PHYSICAL AUGMENTATIONS

In the years leading up to the death of the auttaine's desert planet, members of that race devised hundreds of different kinds of body modifications and prosthetics to protect themselves from the magical storms ravaging their homeworld. Even though the auttaine home planet is long gone and the storms' magic has permeated auttaine parents such that they pass on their clockwork augmentations to their kin, the craft of physical augmentations is still a time-honored tradition among the auttaine people.

Though most auttaine are miners first and foremost and have all but forgotten the origins of their "gears," a number of auttaine artisans and smiths still practice the old ways of their homeworld, manufacturing prosthetics and body augmentations not limited solely to their species. Interstellar adventurers of all stripes turn to the auttaine when they find themselves in need of a prosthetic limb (a frightfully common need among the perils of space) or special physical augmentations to aid their galactic quests. Money is not the most difficult part of acquiring coveted auttaine body modifications—indeed, finding the means to travel to the Shattered Zone and locate a willing artisan is the biggest hangup for most interested buyers.

Physical augmentations created by auttaine for trade differ greatly from the gears that make up their own bodies. For one, these handcrafted prostheses are designed to be worn by any race with the proper limb to replace, not only auttaine. Secondly, the auttaine society's Geargiver does not preside over the creation or distribution of these goods—instead, small guilds within major auttaine cities determine the market and establish standards for crafting.

Physical augmentations created by auttaine for purchase by outsiders come in two varieties—prostheses and body modifications. These physical augmentations may be mechanical or magical in nature, though prostheses are for the most part mechanical (i.e., mundane) and body modifications are much more likely to be magical. Each of these physical augmentation types is covered in more detail on the following pages.

PROSTHESES

Prostheses are designed to replace a specific limb or body part, which must be removed from the host body before the prosthesis is installed. Unless otherwise specified, prostheses have the following rules associated with them.

Mechanical and magical prostheses reduce the penalties associated with the body part they replace. A mechanical prosthetic limb reduces the penalty associated with a missing limb by half; a magical prosthetic limb removes the penalty associated with a missing limb.

MISSING BODY PART PENALTIES

As of the writing of this volume, there are no official rules for penalties associated with missing limbs or body parts 5E (largely because the loss of such a body part is usually dictated by the GM under special circumstances or is an entirely optional element of a character's backstory). GMs interested in using the rules for auttaine physical augmentations in this section should use the following suggested rules to determine the penalty associated with a character or NPC's missing body part.

The GM may rule on a case-by-case basis whether actions not listed here are or are not affected by the penalty associated with a missing body part. The GM may also rule that certain actions are simply impossible for a character with a missing body part without an appropriate prosthetic replacement (such as a character with a missing eye trying to wink to his ally).

MISSING BODY PART	ASSOCIATED PENALTY
Finger	–1* penalty on attack rolls and Sleight of Hand checks
Hand	Cannot hold or wield items in that hand
Arm	Cannot hold or wield items in that hand; –2 penalty on Strength- and Dexterity-based skill checks
Foot	–10-foot land speed
Leg	–20-foot land speed
Eye	–2 penalty on sight-based Wisdom (Perception) checks
Ear	–2 penalty on hearing-based PWisdom (Perception) checks
Tongue/teeth	10% chance of failure while casting spells with verbal components

* Per two fingers missing.

The owner of a prosthesis may equip a prosthesis in place of an appropriate missing body part; prostheses cannot be equipped in place of different limbs or missing body parts (for example, a prosthetic leg cannot be equipped at the shoulder to replace a missing arm). Equipping or removing a prosthesis is an action.

Other creatures may remove a prosthesis from an unwilling creature by succeeding at an attack roll contested by Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics).

A prosthesis cannot be “overlaid” on top of an existing body part—it must replace the body part in question, which entails all the penalties associated with losing the functionality of that body part (see sidebar). Unless otherwise noted in the prosthesis description, a prosthesis does not resolve or negate the penalties associated with loss of body part.

EXAMPLE PROSTHESES

The following prostheses may be created by a humanoid of any race using the standard rules for crafting and magic item creation. Optionally, the GM may rule that a skilled auttaine crafter or other creature with such knowledge must teach the crafting of certain items.

PROSTHESES	PRICE
Glass eye	10 gp
Peg leg	1 gp
Silicone ear	5 gp
Steel finger	5 gp

Blade Leg: This metal leg prosthesis features a sharp, curving blade where your shin and calf would be, allowing you to make slashing attacks with your leg.

Gauntlet Hand: This prosthetic hand is shaped like a gauntlet, and the fingers and palm of the gauntlet can be adjusted to hold a weapon or make a fist.

Hook Hand: This prosthesis is like the gauntlet hand, but it has a wide metal hook in place of the gauntlet. Hook hands generally do not interfere with routine activities, but you cannot use another weapon two-handed if you have a hook hand attached. You cannot use any type of weapon if both your hands are hook hands, and you may have trouble with routine activities.

Glass Eye: This ceramic orb fits under the eyelid of a missing eye, and can be painted to match a variety of eye colors or even decorated for special occasions.

Peg Leg: Made of a simple wooden dowel that fits snugly over the knee of a leg amputee, the peg leg is a staple among pirates at sea as well as in space.

Silicone Ear: This simple prosthetic ear is molded from advanced plastic materials.

Steel Fingers: These hollow finger prostheses are made of light and delicate metal. Price listed is per steel finger.

(Simple)

SIMPLE MELEE WEAPONS	COST	DMG (M)	WEIGHT	TYPE	SPECIAL
Blade leg	30 gp	1d4	2 lbs.	Slashing	—
Gauntlet hand	5 gp	1d3	1 lb.	Bludgeoning	—
Hook hand	10 gp	1d4	1 lb.	Slashing	—

MAGIC PROSTHESES	RARITY
<i>Hand of Haymot</i>	rare
<i>Honing ear</i>	rare
<i>Instrumental limb</i>	rare
<i>Lucky eye</i>	rare
<i>Strongarm</i>	rare

HAND OF HAYMOT

Prosthesis (hand), rare (requires attunement)

This mechanical prosthetic hand is made of finely crafted steel and hardened brass, and complex machinery connects the digits, palm, and wrist. Once per day, the wearer may activate the *hand of Haymot* to transform the prosthesis into a +1 *hand crossbow* for 7 rounds.

The wearer may also cast the following spells, usable the indicated number of times per day whether or not the *hand of Haymot* is activated: At will—*mending*; 3/day—*acid arrow*

HONING EAR

Prosthesis (ear), rare (requires attunement)

A *honing ear* is an enchanted prosthetic ear that gives its wearer supernatural control over their hearing distance and ability to tune out distracting sounds. At will, the wearer can tune out distracting sounds—such as a bustling marketplace or nearby roaring waterfall—and train her ear to single out other sounds—such as an ally whispering to her or a conversation across the river. This gives the wearer advantage on sound-based Perception checks to hear sounds she is trying to amplify and prevents her from hearing sounds related to the source she has deemed distracting. For example, using the *honing ear*, she may be able to hear the conversation across the river by tuning out the sounds of the water, but she would then also not be able to hear a log hurtling downriver toward her. This effect persists until the wearer ends it.

INSTRUMENTAL LIMB

Prosthesis (arm or leg), rare (requires attunement)

DESCRIPTION

An *instrumental limb* is a magical arm or leg prosthesis (chosen at the time of creation) that grants a +2 competence bonus on Performance checks and may be played as a viol for the purpose of Performance checks. A compartment built into the limb allows the wearer to store a bow to play with the instrument.

APPENDIX: AUGMENTATIONS

Three times per day, the wearer can slide a bow along the highest end of the *instrumental limb* to create a high-pitched note that allows any allies within 60 feet to enter a state of deep concentration. As long as the wearer holds the note (an action each round), his allies gain a +2 bonus on skill checks. If an ally attacks or takes damage during this time, the effect ends for that ally; once the effect is broken for an ally, she cannot reenter the state of deep concentration until the next time the *instrumental limb's* wearer activates this ability.

LUCKY EYE

Prosthesis (eye), rare (requires attunement)

DESCRIPTION

This magical prosthetic glass eye is painted to look like a simple clock face rather than an iris. Once per day, the wearer can wink as an action to activate the *lucky eye*, causing the hand on the clock's face to spin and point toward a random number (roll 1d6 to determine the number). The wearer gains advantage on a specific action on the next turn, as determined by the randomly rolled number. The wearer forfeits the bonus if he does not take the specified action within 1 turn.

- 1-2 Skill check
- 3-4 Saving throw
- 5-6 Attack roll

STRONGARM

Prosthesis (arm), rare (requires attunement)

This leather-wrapped prosthetic arm is made of flexible metallic alloys that look and feel like human flesh, granting the wearer the benefits of the Lifelike Prostheses feat (see page 81) for this prosthesis only.

The wearer of a *strongarm* gains a +4 bonus to Strength for the purpose of determining the maximum amount of weight he can lift, drag, and push (see the SRD.)

Body modifications can be equipped on top of existing limbs or body parts, and don't require the wielder to forfeit the functionality of their original body part to use. Auttaine body modifications often bestow magical abilities, though mechanical body modifications that alter bodily functions exist as well.

INSTALLING AND REMOVING BODY MODIFICATIONS

Body modifications cannot be easily attached or removed like prostheses. A creature cannot install or remove a body modification on its own body; body modifications must be installed or removed by another creature adjacent to the target.

A character can augment an unconscious or willing humanoid with a body modification by succeeding at a Medicine check. For mundane body modifications, the DC of this check is equal to 10. For magical body modifications, the DC is equal to 15 for uncommon modifications, 20 for rare modifications, and 25 for very rare or legendary modifications. The check to remove an installed body augmentation is the same.



A failed check to install or remove a body augmentation deals a number of points of damage equal to the difference between the rolled check and the check DC to the augmented creature, plus 4d6 points of bleed damage. For example, if an augmenter rolls a 14 on a DC 20 Wisdom (Medicine) check to install a body modification onto an adjacent host, the surgery fails and the host takes 6 points of damage plus 4d6 additional points of damage.

Any time a new body modification is installed or removed, there is a chance that the host's body gets an infection. In order to avoid infection, the creature must succeed at a Constitution saving throw with the same DC as the Wisdom (Medicine) check DC to install or remove the modification (see above). A failed Constitution save causes the creature to become infected with the following disease.

GEAR GRIM

Gear grim is a disease commonly associated with the misapplication of body modifications, and the complex interactions between common metals and the medicinal agents used in installing them. The body part that is being modified is afflicted with gear grim when the creature fails their Constitution saving throw.

At the end of each long rest, a creature must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or spend that day unable to use the afflicted body part, as if it were a missing body part. Each successful saving throw decreases the DC by 1. If the DC reaches 12, the gear grim is cured.

The maximum number of body modifications a humanoid can have simultaneously installed is equal to its Constitution modifier (minimum 0). This number may be increased through the use of feats (see Physical Augmentation Feats, below).

EXAMPLE BODY MODIFICATIONS

The following mundane and magical body modifications can be purchased for installation from skilled auttaine body grafters. Mundane body modifications may be crafted by succeeding at a Craft (body modifications) check against the DC listed.

TABLE: MUNDANE BODY MODIFICATIONS

BODY MODIFICATION	PRICE
Iron knuckles	200 gp
Magnetic fingers	500 gp
Nictitating membrane	1,000 gp
Rubber joints	300 gp
Steel dentures	500 gp

Iron Knuckles: These fine metal plates are inserted beneath the user's hand's skin and wrap around the knuckles and finger bones. This modification allows you to inflict 1d4 damage with your unarmed attack. The price listed is for a pair of iron knuckles.

Magnetic Fingers: Small magnets installed in the tips of your fingers grant you a +2 bonus on Sleight of Hand checks with metallic objects. However, you take a -1 penalty on attack rolls with ranged weapons that have metal components (including all crossbows and arrows with metal arrowheads).

Nictitating Membrane: This translucent "third eyelid" protects and moistens your eyes while allowing you to maintain vision. With this body modification, you gain advantage on Constitution saving throws against non-magical items, attacks, and effects that would blind you or impair your vision, and your range of vision is unhindered by murky water. This modification does not protect you against spells and magical effects that affect your vision.

Rubber Joints: This modification encases the joints in your knees and ankles with a synthetic rubber that reduces the impact of falls and tumbles. You may ignore up to 3 points of damage any time you take falling damage (reducing the damage taken to a minimum 0 points of damage).

Steel Dentures: This modification replaces the user's teeth with an artificial set that spans both the upper and lower jaw. If the creature does not have a natural bite attack (such as in the case of most humanoids), the wearer gains a natural bite attack that deals 1d4 damage for Medium creatures or 1d3 for Small creatures. If the wearer already has a natural bite attack, the damage dealt by this attack is increased by one step (for example, from 1d4 points of damage to 1d6 points of damage).

TABLE: MAGICAL BODY MODIFICATIONS

BODY MODIFICATION	RARITY
<i>Adaptable scales</i>	rare
<i>Filtering gills</i>	rare
<i>Hand of all trades</i>	uncommon
<i>Iron gut</i>	uncommon
<i>Legs of springing</i>	uncommon
<i>Legs of springing, greater</i>	rare
<i>Silver tongue</i>	rare

ADAPTABLE SCALES

Body Modification, rare (requires attunement)

These shining metal fish scales cover the wearer's body and defy description, shimmering a rainbow of colors depending on how the light hits them. The scales help regulate the wearer's body temperature in hot and cold environments, granting advantage on temperature related effects.

APPENDIX: AUGMENTATIONS

3 times per day as a bonus action, the wearer can force his scales to expand or contract to reflect different types of energy. The wearer gains resistance against cold or fire damage. This effect lasts for 1 minute. During this time, if the wearer selected cold resistance, the scales' temperature resistant effect does not protect against hot environments and conditions; if the wearer selected fire resistance, the temperature resistant effect does not protect against cold environments or conditions.

FILTERING GILLS

Body Modification, rare (requires attunement)

This augmentation allows the user to breathe both underwater and on land at will, as the *water breathing* spell. In addition, the wearer can extract oxygen from poisonous gasses while filtering out toxins, making him immune to inhaled poisons. This does not protect the wearer from magical gases or vapors, nor does it allow the wearer to breathe in a vacuum.

HAND OF ALL TRADES

Body Modification, uncommon (requires attunement)

This body modification integrates a number of small tools into the wearer's palm and fingers and makes the wearer's hand look like a patchwork of overlapping metal plates. A hand of all trades has 4 charges. Each day at sunrise, it regains 2 charges. As long as she is not holding anything in the hand, the wearer can expend 1 or more charges as an action to cause the *hand of all trades* to transform into one of the following tools. The tool remains extended for 9 minutes or until the wearer dismisses it. While using a tool created by the *hand of all trades*, the wearer cannot hold or wield other items or weapons in that hand.

- 1 Charge: thieves' tools
- 1 Charge: Grappling hook
- 2 Charges: instrument
- 3 Charges: Healer's kit

IRON GUT

Body Modification, uncommon (requires attunement)

By replacing the wearer's stomach and intestines with this aramid sack of intricate machinery and self-sustaining microbes, the wearer becomes immune to food-borne illnesses. An *iron gut* grants the user immunity to ingested poisons as well as the effects of food poisoning and spoiled food or water. The user must still eat and drink to live (assuming she needed to do so before installing the *iron gut*), but she can stomach food that has significantly expired or rotted, as well as most food

goods that usually require cooking or processing before consumption (such as curdled milk or raw meat). This does not grant the user the ability to chew foods she could not otherwise.

LEGS OF SPRINGING

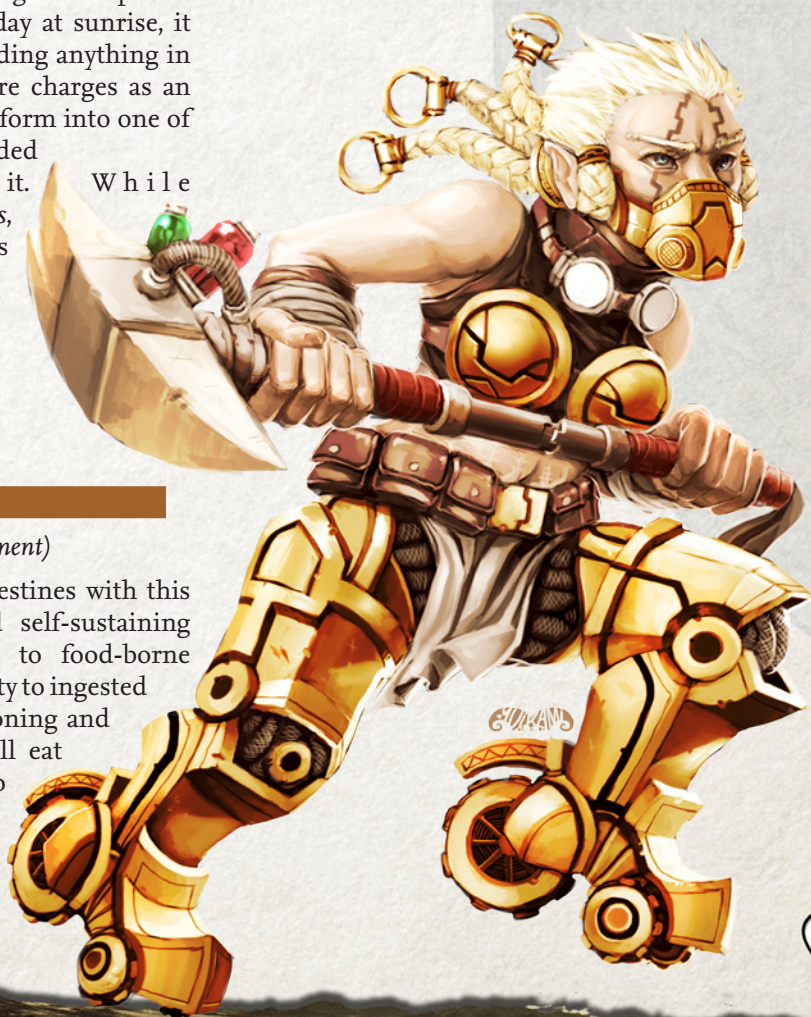
Body Modification, uncommon (requires attunement)

This durable yellow elastic fuses with the muscle tissue in the wearer's legs, making the limbs look impressively lean but slightly sallow as well. *Legs of springing* allow the wearer to leap to greater heights and survive the impact of some falls. The wearer gains advantage on Acrobatics checks to jump. The wearer takes no damage from falls of 50 feet or less, and takes half damage from falls from greater than 50 feet.

LEGS OF SPRINGING, GREATER

Body modification, rare (requires attunement)

The elastic in *greater legs of springing* is so strong and physically taxing to implement that it turns the wearer's legs a sickly shade of green. This body modification function as *legs of springing*, except the wearer takes no damage from falls of 100 feet or less, and takes one-quarter damage from falls from greater than 100 feet.



SILVER TONGUE

Body Modification, rare (requires attunement)

This body modification allows the wearer to speak with greater versatility in languages she knows, effectively enhancing her persuasive, coercive, and diplomatic skills. At will, the wearer can emulate any accent or dialect she knows, as long as the accent or dialect is in a language she can speak. The wearer cannot emulate accents or dialects she has never heard before; she must spend at least 1 minute listening to the accent or dialect, whether by overhearing townsfolk or speaking directly with someone, in order to emulate it using the *silver tongue*.

Once per day, the wearer can activate the *silver tongue* to gain advantage on Performance checks to sing or orate.

EXAMPLE BODY MODDERS

Body modifications can be installed only by skilled medical technicians called “body modders.” The multiverse’s best body modders come from the ranks of the auttaine, making the auttaine’s home in the Shattered Zone a prime location to find new mundane or magical body modifications.

Each of the following descriptions includes the name of an example body modder, their location in the multiverse, a short description of the body modder, a summary of their relevant feats and skills (with bonuses from feats factored into skill check modifiers), adjustments (if any) to the price of body modifications installed by the modder, and any special bonuses or penalties associated with augmentations installed by that body modder.

ARIN THE REMAKER

Rookie Auttaine Body Crafter

Location The Shattered Zone

Arin “the Remaker” (his own term) considers himself an artist when it comes to crafting custom body modifications, but his exaggerated skills and absentmindedness make anything resembling “art” purely accidental at best. His detractors are many and sport misaligned or outright goofy body augmentations to support their claims of malpractice. Whether he’s installed a prosthetic eye of the wrong color or given a patient literally two left feet, Arin has knack for making his customers wish they’d sought a more practiced augments.

STATISTICS

Skills Medicine +5

Price Modifier —

CRAFTING

30% chance of installing a modification backwards or incorrectly (such as a hand with the palm facing up)

KATTICA PENETZ

Benevolent Human Surgeon

Location The Shattered Zone

When Kattica lost her own arm to infection after a botched body modification procedure, she dedicated her life to ensuring others did not suffer the same fate. Customers often come to her after their own ill-fated operations go awry, and many are reassured by her deliberate but gentle touch. She wears the stress of her occupation on her face and has the eyes of someone who has seen many tragedies, but she keeps her purpose at the forefront of her mind at all times.

STATISTICS

Feats Skilled Body Modder

Skills Medicine +10

Price Modifier +15%

CRAFTING

- Body modifications installed by Kattica have a 25% chance of gaining the benefits of the Lifelike Prostheses feat (see below)
- Patients gain a +2 bonus on Constitution saving throws to avoid infection

XERB HIFLORN

Four-Armed Auttaine Body Shopper

Location Shattered Zone

A roguish brute who abandoned his own tribe to seek fortune as a mercenary body modder, Xerb is difficult to get along with even on the best of days. His greatest friend is his canine companion Ja’ma, who slumbers fitfully on the floor of the grimy workshop Xerb calls home. Customers complain of the rashes and infections they pick up after getting a modification in his ill-maintained workshop, but as long as they pay up front and their complaints don’t negatively affect business, Xerb could care less about his patrons’ ailments.

STATISTICS

Skills Medicine +2

Price Modifier –10%

CRAFTING

- Patients take a –2 penalty on Fortitude saves to avoid infection

PHYSICAL AUGMENTATION FEATS

The following feats may be used in conjunction with the rules for auttaine physical augmentations and missing body parts (see sidebar on page 75).

ABLE AMPUTEE

You are so accustomed to your missing limb or body part that it hardly hinders you at all.

Choose one missing limb or body part. The penalty associated with that missing limb or body part is reduced by half (to a minimum penalty of -1). The penalty can be reduced further by equipping a prosthesis.

Increase your Constitution by 1 to a maximum of 20.

BODY MOD EXPERT

You are accustomed to having body modifications installed.

Prerequisite: Con 13.

You gain advantage on Constitution saving throws to avoid infection from a new body modification. You may install a number of body modifications equal to your Constitution modifier + 1 (minimum 1).

BODY MOD VETERAN

You are so used to body modifications that you hardly even notice them.

Prerequisites: Con 15, Body Mod Expert.

You no longer need to succeed at a Fortitude save to avoid infection whenever you have a new body modification installed. The maximum number of body modifications you may have installed is equal to your Constitution modifier + 2 (minimum 2).

Increase your Constitution by 1 to a maximum of 20.

GREATER ABLE AMPUTEE

You no longer suffer any penalties associated with your missing limb or body part.

Prerequisite: Able Amputee.

You no longer suffer the penalties associated with your chosen missing limb or body part.

Increase your Constitution by 1 to a maximum of 20.

LIFELIKE PROSTHESES

Your prostheses are so realistic and your attunement to them so strong that onlookers scarcely notice the aids.

You gain advantage on Sleight of Hand checks to conceal the properties of your prosthetic limbs or body parts, and creatures must succeed at a Perception check (DC = your passive Sleight of Hand +5) in order to identify a prosthetic you are wearing. Creatures farther than 15 feet away from you cannot identify your prosthetic body parts.

SKILLED BODY MODDER

Your experience and agility make you an able body modder for your patients.

Prerequisite: Heal 3 ranks.

You gain advantage on Medicine checks to install or remove body modifications. If you fail a Medicine check to install or remove a body modification, the target does not take damage.

Increase your Intelligence by 1 to a maximum of 20.

SWIFT PROSTHESIS

You are more accustomed to your prosthesis than most.

Choose one prosthetic item. You can now equip or remove that prosthetic item as a bonus action.

Increase your Dexterity by 1 to a maximum of 20.





PLAYING APPROPRIATELY

Fantastical universes—including that of 5E—often play on themes of body modification and augmentation beyond the venue of reality. Amputation and prosthetics are also common themes in certain worlds, as anyone who has run a pirate-themed adventure can tell you. However, when playing with these themes, it is important to remember where to draw the line in terms of what is appropriate for roleplaying exploration and what is offensive to other members of the group.

“Appropriation” is a term that gets thrown around a lot in certain circles, but it is worth mentioning in this section due to the sensitive subject matter around which these rules revolve. Many people in the real world suffer from debilitating conditions that cause them to lose function of certain body parts. Keep this in mind as you create and play characters that have their own physical or mental limitations, and be aware of how your depiction of these characters may impact the players at your table.

When creating a character with physical augmentations such as prostheses, consider the following questions: Is the character’s physical disability or augmentation his or her sole defining attribute? If I removed this element from the character, would he or she still be a compelling NPC? Does anyone at the game table have or know someone who has a physical disability or

handicap? How would this player feel about how I’m depicting physical disability in our game world? It is important to recognize when and why you are using rules for amputation, prostheses, or augmentations.

Appropriation occurs when you carelessly portray real peoples’ experiences—especially experiences that dramatically affect their day-to-day lives in some way—for your own entertainment or gain. When in doubt, do some research on your own and read about the experiences of affected people. Though it may seem like a good idea to ask affected people you know about their experiences, put this thought out of your head—affected people, including people with disabilities or handicaps, are usually tired of explaining their circumstances to others, and should not bear the responsibility of reliving their experiences for your benefit, especially when so many resources already exist for you to gain a better understanding of the subject.

At the end of the day, consider your own limitations—physical, mental, or otherwise—and consider how you would hope someone portrayed a character with similar abilities. Chances are you’d like the role-player to appreciate and understand your experience and portray it with kindness and humanity. When you take the time to give characters more thought than simply “the peg-legged space swabby,” you may quickly discover that just a little bit of care goes a long way when it comes to writing compelling and creative characters in a sensitive way.



SHARDS OF HOME

By Chris A. Jackson

Home...

Most people never really understand the significance of that word. For someone who's never really had one, it takes on a whole new meaning. I had one now. I'd earned it. And I was making the most of it.

A distant tremor reverberated through the edge of my bath and into my skull, stirring me from my lassitude. My place might not be palatial—Asteroid 632 belonged to a minor criminal before he ended up on the wrong end of a sword—but it's comfortable, stuffed full of amenities, and best of all, isolated. The massive industrialized planetoid of Beacon is barely a mile away, but it's a mile of hard vacuum. Nobody could walk up and break in without going to some serious trouble. The tremor that had roused me continued in a rhythmic cadence. I had a guest, but they wouldn't be here for a quarter hour. The void trams aren't very fast.

My home is secured to Beacon by one of the massive iron chains that keep several hundred rocks, most inhabited, mined out, or industrialized, from drifting away into the void. Several thousand more orbit in a chaotic dance within a few hundred miles, while the rest of the 9871 pieces of my homeworld drift in the void. The nearby rocks can be reached only by catapult-skiff or void gondola, but those secured by chain are accessed easily by slow, noisy void tram.

The vibrations continued. *Bother...*

I rose from the bath and stood for a moment, letting the light mineral oil slide off my body into the tub. With my machine parts well-lubricated and my fleshy ones slick with oil, I stepped out and towed off, wondering who was coming to visit me. I didn't get many visitors.

I dressed, stomped my feet into my boots and went upstairs to the main salon. My favorite room, the salon sported a huge picture window with a stunning view of the Temrael nebula. I'd arranged the whole room around that view, chairs and divans situated around low tables to take it in. The dining area and kitchen were nestled off to the left, and a short hall to the entry vestibule branched off opposite the window. I'd left the walls bare rock, still sporting the marks of chisel, pick, and hammer that had removed ore before I was even born. There were still a few tiny veins of silver and mithril visible, but not enough to mine. The treasure of this rock was long gone; its only value was its seclusion, and now that too was about to be invaded.

Okay, so maybe it wasn't quite an invasion, just a visitor, but I like my privacy.

I peered out the view port of my door into the void. The tram approached, clambering along in a dance of legs, rollers, gears, wires, and springs. No two trams are alike, except that each maintains a reasonably stable pressure inside. I couldn't see who was aboard. The clockwork contrivance sported only three tiny view ports in the nose.

Unsure of who I'd be receiving, I pulled my duster from the closet beside the door and put it on. I left my rapier hanging there; wearing a sword to greet a guest seemed rude, but I had enough surprises squirreled away in the pockets of my jacket if there was trouble.

The tram clanked into the vestibule, its entry port matching my door with mechanical precision to ensure no loss of precious atmosphere.

"Air doesn't grow on trees," my father used to say. "It has to be farted out by the angels, and every puff costs meat, which costs money." I guess that was the Shattered Zone equivalent of "Don't leave the lamp burning; oil isn't free."

The tram's door opened and I recognized my visitor immediately from his maroon robes and headdress, the gold cord girding his waist, and his distinctive dark brows and immaculately trimmed facial hair.

I opened my door wide. "Pan-Jhe! What in the names of all the slumbering gods are you doing here?" I greeted him with the customary two-handed grasp and ushered him inside. The air from the tram brought in a smoky haze, thicker with industrial waste than my own. I'm not bothered by bad smells, only breathing when necessary anyway, but organics like Pan-Jhe often find odors unpleasant. "I hope you didn't damage your lungs looking for me."

"Well met, Anasya." He smiled and nodded respectfully as I closed the door. "No, I had no trouble finding you. A few questions and a few coins."

"Well, it's good to see a familiar face, though I hardly expected you to visit." I waved him into the salon. "Can I get you something? Wine, coffee, water..." Just because I'm half machine doesn't mean I don't enjoy food and drink.

"Wine would be welcome, thank you." He looked around as I filled two glasses from the sideboard. "You've done well for yourself, Anasya. I'd heard you struck it rich."

Of course he had. I'd spread that rumor myself. "I got lucky." I handed him a glass and indicated the room and the view out the window. "Now I get to enjoy my money."

"Well-deserved." He sipped and furrowed his brow. "I hope that doesn't mean you're no longer interested in earning even greater wealth."

"That depends." So that was his reason for visiting. He had a job. "I'm not exactly hurting, so I'm pretty selective now. I don't want to risk what I've got by doing something too dangerous or illegal."

"This wouldn't be illegal at all and it's right up your alley." He sipped his wine again and cleared his throat. "In fact, it would be good for you in more than just monetary compensation."

"Oh?" I sipped my wine and inspected my guest. He'd always been the type to cut right to business, but the last time we had dealings he'd been outright rude. Now, he had work for me and had come all the way to the Shattered Zone to make the offer in person. This was no small job. "Good for me how?"

"The work involves an excavation being conducted by the governing body of your own world, your Purity, as they call themselves."

"You're recruiting for Purity?" I stifled both my surprise and derision. Purity definitely governed most of the Zone, and they wanted to control every rock, ounce of ore, and artifact in it. But I didn't care for their totalitarian practices and I'd heard stories that chilled the lubricant in my mechanical joints about what happened to people who opposed them.

"Indirectly, yes." Pan-Jhe turned and strolled to my window, taking in the view. "They're excavating an asteroid, a rather far flung one that has some type of...remnant within. As with most large organizations, they're choked by graft and bureaucracy, and are proceeding clumsily, but there are a few who are more...prudent. I learned they wish to recruit someone who has experience recovering buried artifacts, is careful, and knows the Shattered Zone." He turned to face me



and smiled. "I immediately thought of you."

"Thank you for the complement." I raised my glass to him, sipped, and frowned, though it wasn't the wine I found distasteful. "Where's this asteroid they're digging into?"

"I've no idea." He shrugged, blinked, and looked away from my gaze. "Only that it's a distant journey from Beacon."

You're lying to me, I thought, strolling a slow circle. "Well, I'll need some specifics before I sign on." I'd also need several planes of Hell to freeze over. Helping Purity on a secret dig on a faraway asteroid sounded like a quick way to end up as spare parts and food for the angels. "If you can't give them to me, I'm going to have to pass."

"Pass?" His dark eyes snapped up, brows furrowed and mouth set in a downward crescent. "That would be... imprudent of you, Anasya."

"Imprudent?" I chuckled. "How so?"

"I already gave...my Purity contact your name." A muscle in the side of Pan-Jhe's face twitched, but it wasn't a smile. "They won't be pleased."

"Then they'll have to be displeased." I finished my wine and put the glass down. "Purity's been pretty hostile to independent operators like me from day one. You'd best be careful working for them, my friend."

"Oh, I'm being *careful*, my friend. It's you who's not." Pan-Jhe lifted his glass and poured the rest of his wine onto my floor, then dropped the glass to let it shatter. "There's only *one* power in the Zone. Opposing it is foolish."

"I'm not opposing anything." His abrupt rudeness startled me, but I'd seen it before. "I think you should go before we stop being *friendly*."

"So you can run off to report this conversation to your friends in the Bellianic Accord?" His face contorted into a sneer. My

shock must have shown on my face. "Yes, I know who you've been working for, Anasya. I thought to bring you over, to give you a chance to do the right thing, the *smart* thing."

"The smart thing for you right now, *friend*, is to leave my home." My hand twitched and two throwing stars fell into my palm from the sleeve of my jacket. I blinked my clockwork eye into recording mode; someone would want evidence of Pan-Jhe's treachery. "Now."

"Oh, we'll *both* be leaving, Anasya, but not the way you think." Pan-Jhe pulled open his robes to reveal a row of tall hourglasses mounted around his waist in a heavy steel belt, blue and red liquid in their top and bottom halves. A golden wire entwined the thin tubes where the colors met, and his hand reached for a ring bound to that wire.

"You motherless..." My shock resolved into action the instant before he pulled the ring.

My throwing stars flew as the crack of breaking glass reached my ears. One caught him in the arm, the other in the chest. He contorted with the paralytic poison, but it was too late to stop him. The liquids of the vials had already mixed, bubbling and smoldering with sudden violence.

I dove for cover an instant too late.

The explosion blew Pan-Jhe in half and riddled the room with pieces of metal, glass, and my former friend. I tumbled with the shock, slamming into the heavy stone counter between the salon and kitchen. Several pieces of shrapnel had hit my picture window. The thick glass cracked and popped like thin ice on a pond. I shook my head and tried to stand, then caught a glimpse of something that shocked me even more than the explosion.

Pan-Jhe's eviscerated torso twitched, then some...*thing* burrowed out of the mass of bloody meat. Eyes like rows of

green gemstones fixed upon me, tiny legs like barbed hairs all along its length flexing their fibrous tips for an instant. It writhed in the viscera, a mouth like an anus opening to reveal a circular row of teeth as it slithered toward me.

As I scrambled back, panic and revulsion rising in my throat, my picture window shattered.

I never thought being blasted into the void would be a good thing, but it got me away from that horror readily enough. I reached out reflexively, trying to grab something, anything, but the explosive decompression blasted me through the window in a shower of debris.

I stared into my destroyed home as I fell away and saw that thing wrapping around the heavy stone pillars of my foyer. My door opened and then it vanished within. Gone...

Silence, pain, and the fogging vision in my fleshy eye told me I was in very deep trouble. My flesh was freezing, or at least the moisture that boiled from my pores was freezing. I'd been exposed to void before, though fleetingly. I didn't have to breathe, which kept me from dying instantly, and my clockwork parts would work until the lubricant in their joints froze solid, but I was drifting outward with no way to stop or alter my course.

I flew in a cloud of debris from my home, shattered furniture, bottles, cups, artwork, and a few personal items. The network of chains linking hundreds of asteroids to Beacon stretched around me like a three-dimensional spider web, but my trajectory—as straight as a plumb line—would not intersect one.

But maybe...

I flailed around, grasping a few pieces of floating junk. I caught a large piece of my favorite chair and flung it away from me, trying to keep the force of the throw centered in my chest to keep from tumbling. I drifted in the opposite direction. I looked over my shoulder and threw another piece of junk, a table leg, at a different angle. I drifted...and my mechanical fingers closed upon the neck of a bottle of wine I'd been saving for a special occasion.

I gauged no occasion more special than this.

I placed the bottom of the bottle against my abdomen and twisted the cork free.

The wine boiled, spewing out the mouth of the bottle, providing a tiny amount of thrust. I directed the neck carefully, picking up speed. Another look over my shoulder with my clockwork eye—my flesh one wasn't working at all anymore—and I flung the bottle away to turn myself around.

I smashed into the massive chain linking two asteroids hard enough to rattle my teeth. Clamping on with my mechanical hand, I quickly got my bearings and clambered along at my best speed toward Beacon, which wasn't very fast. My flesh limbs were stiffening and my lips had gone numb, but my metal joints were still working. How long had I been drifting? How long did I have left? My head hurt and I wondered if it would explode. *That would be messy...* My thoughts were getting as blurry as my vision.

I clanked into something hard.

A door? Yes, it was a door. But I had to get through it.

The picks in my mechanical fingertips delved the simple mechanism and the seal finally popped open. Air started rushing out, but I levered my way through the crack against the hurricane-force of it. The door's edge scraped frozen flesh from my cheek. Then gravity took hold and I fell to the floor. I kicked clumsily at the door and the hurricane stopped as it resealed itself.

Heat...warmth...air... I was alive, but as the ice crystals coating my flesh thawed, and my thoughts with them, my pain redoubled. I was hurt...badly. Shards of home riddled my flesh and frozen blood had blocked my ears, nose, and mouth. I'd still die if I didn't do something fast.

I only had one chance.

I rolled onto my back and tore open my shirt, touched my serpent tattoo at its eyes and tail, then the corners of my hidden stash in the sequence that would open the tiny extradimensional space I used for smuggling. Fortunately, I also used it to sequester emergency supplies. Reaching inside, I found the bottle I wanted, but popping the cork with my thumb, I wondered if I could still swallow it.

I clenched my teeth hard on the frozen blood and saliva filling my mouth and spat. A wad of bloody ice fell out along with a couple of teeth and part of my tongue. I wedged the neck of the bottle between my frozen lips and tilted it back.

Pain fled before the elixir's magic like mice before a wildfire. Pins and needles lit my extremities and my vision cleared. I was alive.

"Barely..." I struggled to my hands and knees, still shaky and racked with pain. My thoughts cleared, and with them the memory of Pan-Jhe's suicidal attempt to murder me, and the thing that had crawled out of him and escaped though my door. My panic and revulsion returned full force.

"It's going to come for me," I said, glad there was nobody around to hear. *I've got to move.*

But where could I go?

My home was destroyed, everything I'd worked for—gone. I couldn't go back. Whatever that *thing* had been, it would come for me, and it had already told Purity about me. They'd hunt me, as well. I only had what I wore and the few items I'd stashed in my inner vault. Fortunately, that included quite a bit of money.

I struggled to my feet and ran a hand through my hair. A handful came away from my scalp with a mass of frozen blood. My skin had frozen, and my hair was gone...maybe it would grow back, but bald, I certainly didn't look like myself. That would actually work to my advantage. I had to get cleaned up then think of someplace to go...but where?

I could think of only one person who might help me.

"Tarenia..."

But she wouldn't aid me for free, and I had nothing left. Everything I had had just been shattered and blown into the void, except... I replayed the recording from my clockwork eye. The scene of Pan-Jhe's suicide and what crawled out of his corpse might be worth something to the Accord. There were spies in the shapes of people we knew, assassins posing as friends, possessed by these...creatures.

That ought to buy a few favors... That, and the information about Purity's excavation of some far-flung asteroid.

Besides, I had nothing left. I raised my twisted, half-frozen right hand, felt the gash of missing flesh in my cheek, my bloody bare scalp, tasted blood. Someone was going to pay for this, and by all the demons of the Abyss, I wanted to be the one to hand them the bill.

I limped down the corridor, already planning my next move. I had to get to Zel-Argose again, and I needed to get there without the Hegemony or Purity finding out I'd survived.

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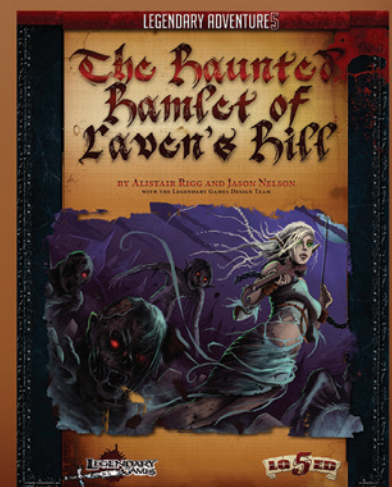
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