ECLIPSE PHASE

X-RISKS



The Eclipse Phase Threat Recognition Guide

POSTHUMAN STUDIOS

X-RISKS

X-Risks details the dangers facing transhumanity:

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ECLIPSE PHASE

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LIFE IS RISK



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TERMITES IN THE FRAMEWORK



This story completes the plot begun in El Destino Verde *and* Nostrum, *the opening fiction to* Panopticon *and* Firewall.

"So what're you proposing?" Park asked.

It was a ground-to-orbit call, so a long second went by before Das Frettchen replied, "Liquidation." There was some heavy sun spot activity happening that week, and his voice came through scratchy despite the comm software's attempts to correct for it. "These people are exsurgents, Carter. We're sparing them the pain of metamorphosis if we kill them now."

"You've gone fucking technical."

"Your first real containment action, and you don't have the stomach for it. We're lucky such choices weren't up to you during the Fall."

"This ain't the same."

"You think your heroes"—Das Frettchen spat the word—"in the outer system flinched from their duty? Magnus Ming has sent more people than this to die in his day."

"We can fix these people. Your plan: it's insane."

"If you think I lack the resources to make 1,000 people disappear from Valles-New Shanghai, Carter, you're mistaken."

* * *

Park floated in the airlock of a Fa Jing U-Facture (Location #0138, District Manager Zhu Lai Leong, according to the AR text and smiling portrait next to the inner lock door). Park was waiting for the security AI inside to finish scrutinizing his false Fa Jing corporate ID and the registration (also fake) on the ship docked behind him. He'd thrown on smart clothing that reshaped itself into a Fa Jing uniform, hung some tools from it, and brought along an automech bot, which clung to the wall near him.

Through the airlock windows, he could see the rest of Captain Sage Kim's Martian Ranger customs cutter, the *Skink*. The ship had erased its Tharsis League and Ranger markings and extruded a random assortment of dummy manipulator arms, conduits, and equipment lockers from its hull. Now it was a dead ringer for the boxy, antiquated old tender vessels that made up the bottom rung of Fa Jing's immense fleet.

Beyond the ship, the U-Facture station stretched out behind and ahead of him, an orderly cylinder of pie slice-shaped rented manufacturing modules connected by trusswork and an enclosed central floatway that ran the length of the station. The cylindrical form factor was for convenience, not gravity; clients rented on U-Facture when they needed microgravity manufacturing space. The Skink clung to the end of a docking arm roughly midway along the length of the cylinder.

The AI inside was taking its time—it'd been almost five seconds—but Park kept it cool. The IDs had been forged by Eidolon, a much smarter AGI, a fork of whom was waiting in the ship to save Park's bacon

if needed. And Park was good at looking like a bored, impatient service engineer—because when he wasn't on Firewall business, that's what he was.

"What's takin' so fucking long?" he asked the empty airlock.

"Verifying," the security AI said, "Fa Jing Internal Security thanks you for your patience."

He hadn't wanted a response. While he waited some more for the recalcitrant airlock, he messaged the ship. [Eidolon. How's it shaking out?]

[I've subverted surveillance on the station's hull, Jake Carter. Captain Kim and Cagehopper have begun their EVA.]

* * *

Sage Kim gulped. Vertigo. The red expanse of Mars filled the upper half of her field of vision. Damned if the planet weren't never anything but lovely, but at this angle … Kim threw up a little bit in the back of her mouth and swallowed it, again.

Cagehopper, clinging to her back, must've heard it over the comms. "Are you vomiting?" he asked, "I thought you were trained in this."

She couldn't look back at the hypergibbon; helmet didn't have enough peripheral vision. All she could see were his long, thin arms wrapped around her shoulders. "I did one month of micrograv combat training during academy," she said. She knew how to use the grip pads on her vacsuit without falling off into space and dying, and that was about it.

"I should never have left my burrow," Cagehopper said.

From the outside, the U-Facture station looked like a stack of discs on a dowel. There were sixteen modules, each five meters thick and one hundred meters wide, with a meter of floatway between each disc. They all connected to the central corridor by a single airlock. Only one of the discs, near the center, spun for gravity. That one would contain the manager's quarters and several partitions of 1g space for renters that needed them.

Augmented reality graphics showed her a path across the station's hull. A multitude of wide, plant-packed windows looked out from the hull; a path was highlighted in green so that she could avoid giving anyone inside visual on her. It would have been a simple walk across the station's skin, but the meter-wide gaps between modules were just wide enough to be unnerving. Rather than leaping the gaps, she played it safe, crawling slightly between each module at each gap so that she always had at least two grip pads against the hull.

Their objective was a service airlock leading into the section of the U-Facture station rented by Panacea Corporation, a company specializing in zero-g boutique manufacturing of exotic pharmaceuticals. Some of Panacea's business was legit. And some of it, Park and Kim suspected, involved lacing drugs with the exsurgent virus and delivering them to unsuspecting patients.

* * *

"You wanna talk containment, Frettchen? We got this contained."

"Really, Carter? And you've taken steps to do so. In Valles-New Shanghai. My city. How thoughtful of you."

"Panacea runs the groundside supply chain. Meanin' they route the drugs direct to the patients. They're delivering them to asyncs."

"Oh, this gets better and better."

"Nah, look: the refined exsurgent goop Panacea laced the drugs with is inert until activated. Cagehopper isolated the trigger protein. Feed these people nanopharm that eradicates all instances of that protein in their systems, and the infection'll never get triggered."

"You're asking me to put a great deal of faith in the work of a black kettle genetics monkey with an extensive rap sheet, Carter. I don't think that's going to fly."

* * *

Manager Leong didn't like the look of him, and the feeling, Park decided, was mutual. The Fall'd only made the class divide between Chinese managers and Korean rusters worse, and Leong was all about letting Park know whose status was higher. Which was fine—meant Leong was too busy demanding face to really scrutinize him. Park let Leong float higher than him and pretended he could only speak Korean, letting Leong's muse translate to Mandarin.

Eventually Leong let him through with a final admonition not to make anything on the station worse. Park suppressed the urge to smirk. No telling what kind of sensors the manager had allocated to keep tabs on him.

Park kicked off from Leong's office and floated down the station's huge central corridor. He didn't like microgravity much, but inside, maneuvering down a big, straight corridor, it wasn't so bad. Eidolon now owned the station's primary surveillance systems. The plan was for Eidolon to feed the system footage of Park and the automech opening up a life support conduit and going to work inside it. In reality, Park would keep going and enter Panacea's module through the front door. If Leong stayed in his office—which he probably would—they'd be five by five.

[Sage, grandmaster E, how we lookin'?] Park messaged.

Eidolon messaged, [Jake Carter, Captain Kim. Panacea's system resists my best efforts. I cannot unlock the doors to their module for you.]

Kim messaged, [I'm almost at the hatch. What's the problem?]

[Unorthodox system design. I am uncertain which systems to subvert. Choosing the wrong ones might put them on alert.]

[Well the emperor of this little piece of heaven thinks I'm here for eight hours to fix some CO2 scrubbers. We ain't budgeted for overtime on this run.]

[I recommend manual subversion,] Eidolon said.

[Well at least I didn't carry this thing for nothing,] Kim said.

* * *

"This thing" was a hull wart. From her back, Cagehopper handed her the pieces of it, one by one. Disassembled, the wart comprised eight curved lengths of smooth metal. Stuck to the hull, end to end, each formed forty-five degrees of a circle three-and-a-half meters across centered over what Eidolon had identified as a relatively thin section of hull. Kim activated it, and the wart began extruding a dome of clear polymer that soon enclosed them in a hemisphere 1.75-meters high at its center.

Cagehopper got off her back and clung to the hull while Kim took out a covert ops tool and began cutting. First she drilled a pilot hole. A plume of air, visible as the water vapor in it crystallized, began filling the dome with atmosphere. Then she went to work cutting a circle in the hull.

* * *

Inside, Park pried loose an access panel and got to work jimmying the bulkhead door leading into the Panacea Corp module.

Almost as soon as he got to work, Eidolon messaged him. [Someone in the module is attempting to alert station security. I've intercepted the message and am spoofing a response from the station.]

[Damn,] he messaged, [That ain't gonna work for too long.]

[No. I recommend you hurry.]

* * *

"Here's how it is, Frettchen: I got the station, I got the data, and I ain't signing off on killing all these people."

There was a long pause. Finally, Das Frettchen said, "You're hurting our working relationship here, Carter. We've always worked well together in the past."

"No, we haven't. And you know if we take this to the other proxies, you're gonna be in the minority."

"Fine, Carter. But don't ever ask me for any favors."

* * *

With the automech acting as an extra pair of hands, bypassing the bulkhead door was kid's stuff. Kim was still hacking at the outer lock. Probably a minute or so until she got through. Park couldn't wait. Eidolon had had to start jamming mesh calls from inside the Panacea module. That kind of activity inside the confines of the station would get noticed quick.

He jerked one more time on his utilitool, the end of which was locked onto a regulator valve in the door's pneumatics. There was an almost imperceptible hiss of pistons, and the door irised open. He pulled himself through, and the automech followed him with a few puffs from its gas thrusters.

Soon as he was clear of the hallway, he sent a mesh command to the automech. A panel with two pistols racked beneath it extended from the side of the bot. Park stuck the smaller pistol to his belt and linked in to the bigger one. The minute whine of induction coils going hot, that was music. On the tacnet video in the corner of his vision he could see Kim was almost through the back door.

[I'm in,] he messaged.

[Here is a map of the typical module layout,] Eidolon messaged. [Interior partitioning will vary, but the bulkheads will definitely be as shown here.]

A mini-map popped up in Park's field of vision. Four bulkhead walls radiated from the station's central floatway corridor, dividing the disc into quadrants. The quadrants ran thirty meters from central corridor to outer edge. Ringing all four quadrants was an outer corridor five meters wide. The outer corridors of almost all of the modules, including this one, were visible from outside due to wide windows. They were packed with plants, which probably provided a lot of the station's oxygen. What was in each quadrant, though, was anybody's guess.

Inside, the module was hot and humid as a kleptocrat's steam bath during an orgy. Condensation clung to the walls, which were all glossy white panels with harsh violet-tinged lighting strips at regular intervals. Mist hanging in the air made visibility crap, and the heat messed with IR, so he did a quick t-ray scan of his surroundings. This wasn't a place where he wanted to be surprised.

[Ain't what I expected,] Kim messaged, [Who microfactures drugs in a sauna?] Park could see from her video feed that the dome of the hull wart over her was icing up as the water vapor hissing out of the module settled on it.

Around him in the mist he was able to resolve the shapes of several cornucopia machines, reserves of nanofab feeder stock, three-dimensional cargo palettes, and a few small cargo-handling bots. A boutique pharma manufacturer didn't need much more than that for shipping and receiving. This section of the module was otherwise a big, empty pie slice with the U-Facture station's central corridor at the tip. The room took up a quarter of the disc of the module, less the wide corridor ringing the module's outer edge.

[I should've sent Smoke in with you,] Kim messaged, [You should have back up.]

They'd left Smoke aboard the Skink. Park messaged back, [Fa Jing techs don't show up with police baboons. Keep on cuttin'. I got this for now.]

[You'll be looking for an actual manufactory,] Cagehopper messaged. [The equipment in that room looks optimized for making boxes. Eidolon, can't you get a schematic?]

Eidolon messaged, [Jamming them is occupying much of my attention, Cagehopper. Their security AI is of very high quality, and subverting systems while it's on alert is difficult at best. The best I can do right now is keep it from alerting the rest of the station.]

Park searched for power conduits, feeder stock lines, or anything else that would hint at where the microfacturing equipment might be in relation to his current position. He didn't find anything, so he kicked off from the airlock toward a bulkhead door that opened on the next quadrant of the module. The automech bot followed him.

[Mech,] he messaged it, [Start building a detailed schematic of this module. Highlight all exposed power, data, and feed lines. Share with the users on my general comm channel. Visual inspection; local systems aren't going to talk to you. Start with this room.] If they ended up having to destroy the module, he'd need to know how.

[KK, boss,] the bot said. It hovered off into the mist, staying close to the wall.

[Don't touch anything, and don't interface with anything without asking me,] he messaged after it.

[KK, boss.]

He did a bypass on the controls for the bulkhead door. When he was almost done, Kim messaged that she'd gotten through the hull and was casing the outer ring corridor.

Park finished the bypass. The bulkhead door slid open, and a strong smell of jasmine wafted out. Park'd expected an office or something, but instead he was looking into a Hindu temple centered around the blunt, phallic shape of a huge stone Shiva linga.

[Well, fuck,] he messaged everyone, [Think I know who we're dealing with now.]

* * *

"You realize that you've severely damaged our working relationship, Carter?" Das Frettchen asked.

"What do you want me to do?" Park asked.

"Cooperate. You'll find the peace of mind that comes with knowing a situation has been thoroughly dealt with does you more good in the long run than thinking you've saved some lives but wondering if one day the people you've saved will turn on the rest of us."

"Your shit ain't worth the methane in it."

Park cut the call.

CAGEHOPPER ■ FIREWALL SENTINEL, BLACK KETTLE GENEHACKER

MECH ■ PARK'S AUTOMECH BOT

* * *

Kim and Cagehopper drew guns and pulled themselves through the hole she'd cut in the hull. They cased the module's verdant outer ring corridor. Wide windows let thin sunlight in from outside. The walls of the corridor were slick, reflective white regularly interrupted by glaring UV light strips. The light bounced off the hanging water vapor, having more the effect of high beams in a fog bank than improving visibility. That made her edgy, so she deactivated the helmet on her suit. The helmet melted away, receding into the ring of her collar.

[That's not wise,] Cagehopper messaged. He'd kept his helmet up. [You don't know what's in all this mist.] He took an instrument for sampling the air from a pocket in his suit and stuck it to his shoulder. A shared stream of atmospheric data announced itself on their tacnet.

For now, she didn't look at it. [Tell me if I need to cover up,] she said, [For now, I want peripheral vision.]

The dense foliage in the outer ring and the stifling heat made seeing anything on visual or IR tough, so she amped up her hearing. Nothing but the quiet hum of recyclers and ventilation, so far.

Based on Eidolon's schematic, a door to the disc-shaped Panacea module's large, inner quadrants passed through the bulkhead that formed the inner wall of the ring corridor they were exploring about twenty meters ahead of them. Even with the curve of the corridor, she should've been able to see the door, but the riotous plant growth obscured the opening.

They pulled themselves toward the door. Kim used the grab loops mounted between windows on the outer wall, moving somewhat clumsily. She envied Cagehopper, who brachiated between grab points with ease on long, gibbon arms.

They reached the bulkhead door and studied it. [You any good with this stuff?] she messaged Cage.

[I do organisms, not machines.]

She didn't want to spend ten minutes cutting through another bulkhead with her covert ops tool, not with Park already inside. She could see the temple he'd discovered through the tacnet feed, and she didn't like the look of it. Religion weren't never good news.

[Eidolon,] she messaged, [I need a door hacked.]

[I am—]

[Fuck it, man, they know we're here,] Park messaged.

A brief pause, then Eidolon messaged, [True. Proceeding. Captain Kim, if you are able to pry away the panel to the left of the door and run a cable from your suit interface to the datajack underneath, it would aid me greatly.]

Kim morphed her utilitool into a short pry bar and pushed off the outer ring wall toward the door. Eidolon already knew where the panel was based on Park's earlier intrusion; he overlaid a rectangle to the right of the door with an AR graphic. Arrows pointed to the edge where she need to pry.

When she was less than a meter from the door, something rustled in the foliage. She'd couldn't stop herself; she wasn't close enough to any of the walls. A dark green tendril covered in glossy, three-inch-long thorns whipped out from a plant near the door and wrapped itself around her leg. Seeing more tentacles emerging from the leaves, she ordered her suit to extrude its helmet again. The clear bubble closed over her face just in time for another tendril's thorns to glance off the helmet.

"Warned you," Cage said. He'd switched to voice comm. Not much point in sticking with messaging over the VPN any longer; they'd clearly been noticed.

Kim growled and squeezed off several shots toward where she thought the center of the plant might be. No effect, and another tendril had gotten a hold on her left arm. She struggled with it, trying to reach the stunner on her belt. "Little help?" she said to Cage.

The hypergibbon was prepping … something. As she struggled with the plant, she saw him swapping his shredder for a small pistol, ejecting the clip, and fumbling to insert a different clip. "Keep it occupied," he said.

Occupied. Yeah. The plant had four tendrils on her now. She'd imagined being pulled toward some kind of toothy maw, but instead they were constricting, trying to push their thorns through her vacsuit. It was holding for the moment, but she could feel the hard points of the thorns through the skin of the suit. Kim finally managed to get to her stunner. She contorted in the tentacles' grasp, trying to bend her body so that she had a clear shot between the stunner and the plant's center.

The tendrils tightened as she struggled. Finally, she jerked one leg to spin herself into the right position. Through the gun's sight she saw the plant's center. She fired, the air between her and the plant distorting and crackling with electricity, but at the same time she felt the suit fabric finally give. A thorn pierced her leg; the area around it immediately went numb. The tentacles stopped jerking her around, but they didn't loosen their grip at all.

[Fuck,] she messaged, [Cagehopper, I'm stung.]

Cage drew a careful bead on the center of the plant and fired a single shot. The bullet went in with a wet sound, and the knot of muscle-like cellulose immediately began to convulse, then shrivel. The tentacles started to loosen their grip.

"What was that?" she asked.

Cagehopper was at her side, running a medical scanner over her. "Splash ammo. Sorry I didn't have it ready, didn't think I'd need herbicide. Does your body have toxin filter, medichines, or any other anti-toxic countermeasures?"

"No."

[Talk to me, guys,] Park messaged.

[Kim's been stung by a Referium dulcamara. It's a carnivorous plant from Echo IV. Nasty sumbitch, but I've got an anti-toxin swarm I can key to go after it.] He looked up at Kim. "Sorry, but I'm not sure about that leg."

"Meaning?"

"Tissue necrosis sets in fast with this toxin." He injected her with something, using the hole in the suit left by the thorn.

"Who the hell has carnivorous plants from a xeno-planet for security?" she asked.

* * *

Park had finished casing the temple. Nothing there but flower bouquets, suggestive statues, and a giant stone penis. Kim was cussing up a storm as Cagehopper treated her leg. She'll make it through, he thought, She's ruster tough, and Cage knows his trade. He was regretting splitting up, though. The module wasn't that big; breaching it at two points and meeting up in the middle hadn't looked that hard.

He pushed off for the door to the outer ring corridor. Best plan at this point was to meet up with Kim and Cagehopper, then tackle whatever was left in here as a unit.

[Eidolon, how's it going?] he messaged the AGI.

[I am helping Cagehopper and Captain Kim get through the bulkhead door here.] Eidolon highlighted their position on the minimap. [The station's occupants have ceased attempting outside comm calls.]

Park was halfway through bypassing the bulkhead door to the outer ring when the automech bot winked off the network. No damage report, just gone.

[Y'all see that?] he messaged, [Eidolon, what's happening?]

[The signal from den autobomb est gurbufrixfra**{{>--]

Park smelled a hand touching the back of his neck. His mesh inserts were outside his body somewhere. He stretched but couldn't touch them. His body grew, his skin whitened, and the temple grew as well, taking on cavernous dimensions. He felt the cool stone of the floor against his back and felt heaviness in his limbs—gravity. Had the module begun to spin? But no, then down would be the outer wall of the temple, but he was laying on the same plane as the enormous Shivalinga at the temple's center. His clothes and gear were gone, except for some kind of animal skin wrapped around his waist.

What in hell was this? Park tried to clear his head, but it wasn't going away. He thought around for controls, but it wasn't a simulspace.

He felt strong, smooth toes, and then the ball of a foot on his chest. The toes stroked from his solar plexus down to his groin, and he could taste their skin on his tongue as they moved over him. He found he could move his eyes. Janu Vaidyar, their quarry, stood over him. She stepped onto him, planting one foot on his belly just above his groin, the other on his chest. Throbbing percussion music and jasmine scent pulsed through his ears, nose, and eyes. Vaidyar's skin had turned blue, and she was naked but for a few pieces of jewelry, most prominent among them a belt and necklace made of small skulls.

Aw, fuck. Was he about to get sexually assaulted by someone's religious beliefs? Park wasn't able to hold a rational thought for long, though. Vaidyar'd hooked her async talents deep into some primal shit, deep enough his lizard brain didn't want to hear about how relenting would be a bad plan. Vaidyar plunged onto his erection and began riding him. Their bodies expanded beyond the bounds of the room, out into space, beyond the bonds of the solar system, until the universe spun above him. It drifted apart, growing diffuse, and then contracted into a point of infinite density, suspended in its terrible potential even as Park now hung on the cusp of orgasm.

"Help me finish the cycle," she said, stroking his belly playfully, "The universe needs its rebirth. Lord Shiva's work must finish." She squeezed him inside of her. She was holding a tiny cup of soma, offering it to him.

Park groaned, which'd have to pass for a "fuck you." He wondered why mindfucking him was preferable to just injecting him with exsurgent goop, if that was her plan.

"Because." She twisted her hips, making him gasp involuntarily. "I want you to surrender on your own."

❖ ❖ ❖

[Eidolon, open that damned door, I don't care what else you gotta let slip.]

Kim floated outside the bulkhead door. Her leg burned where it wasn't numb; she'd ordered the vacsuit to go rigid around the leg to keep it immobile. Park's minimap blip was only a few meters from the other side of the door. They'd hustled around the outer ring to his location when he dropped off the tacnet and stopped answering mesh calls. Cagehopper hung on some foliage next to her, splash gun still trained on the wilted remains of another carnivorous plant.

The door hissed open. In the gloom beyond, Janu Vaidyar floated before Kim. She was wearing a plain black second skin, and the weird ripple of an invisibility cloak distorted the air to one side of her. Her legs were wrapped around Park's waist. She had one hand on his temple and the other wrist, oozing blood from a shallow cut, poised near his mouth.

She turned with one eyebrow raised and lunged at Kim, one hand extended. Kim avoided her touch, aimed calmly, and shot her in the head.

As Vaidyar drifted away, Park convulsed. Was he—was that an erection in his trousers? She looked at Vaidyar's morph, its head wreathed in drifting blood droplets. Seriously, *im-ma?* Next time don't bring psychic sex powers to a gunfight. Cagehopper swung into the room to check on Park. She pushed off from the door frame and went to help.

❖ ❖ ❖

They swept the rest of the module and found no one else. The remaining space was taken up by posh living quarters, a medical facility growing backup futura morphs cut to look like pleasure pods, and a pharmaceutical factory. Cagehopper set to work figuring out what they'd been making while Eidolon cracked their records.

Park and Kim were in the medical bay; the module's doctor bot was working on her leg.

She said, "Before we came here, you said you had a hunch who Cupcake was working with. Now that you, uh, got to know her, any idea?"

Park grimaced, feeling a little embarrassed. "Yeah. Cult of the Destroyer. They're a corrupt Hindu sect, believe the TITANs got sent by Shiva to destroy us so the next cycle of creation could start."

"Never heard of 'em."

"That's because Firewall destroyed them, or any rate was supposed to have. On Luna, four or five years back. Looks like Cupcake and a few others copied themselves and kept the dream alive." Park winced as he watched the doctor bot excise a strip of necrotized flesh from Kim's leg and spray more medical nanobots on it.

"I've had worse," she said. "So what now?"

"Let Cagehopper take that factory apart, and find out what they're up to. Meantime, heal up."

Cage didn't take long. The drug Vaidyar'd been producing was designed to enhance the abilities of asyncs—and all of the people being prescribed the drug were asyncs. According to Vaidyar's notes, it would make all of the asyncs nodes in a network that she could use to employ psychic sleights on a massively amplified scale, potentially killing or taking control of hundreds of thousands of people. Not quite an apocalypse—but a nice start.

Fortunately, the mutation the drug triggered in the Watts-MacLeod virus was easily reversible. Cagehopper could rearrange a few molecules in the next shipment of the drug, and the patients could all go back to being garden-variety neurotic, socially stigmatized psychic freaks instead of walking brain bombs.

The only problem now was jurisdiction. All of the patients were in Valles-New Shanghai, which wasn't Park's beat. And his counterpart there, Das Frettchen, was a paranoid, scorched-earth-lovin' sumbitch.

Park braced himself, and gave Das Frettchen a call.

❖ ❖ ❖

Park cut the mesh call a few minutes later. It hadn't gone well. The team, including a hologram of Eidolon, had assembled in the medical bay. The air was clearer and cooler; they'd tweaked some parameters on the station's life support.

"Das Frettchen ain't playing ball," he said.



"Who is this asshole, anyway?" Kim asked.

"He does my job, but he's in charge of Valles-New Shanghai."

"I still don't know what your job is," Kim said.

Cagehopper chuckled. "Membership equals privileges."

She snarled a little, then asked Park, "So?"

"We move Cagehopper's plan to inoculate the victims forward anyhow. Cage, how long you need?"

"About six hours to get a shipment sent out. Then we can bug out and scorch this place."

"I want y'all alert. Frettchen gets extreme sometimes when he don't get his way."

"What was that you said to me a few days back about the Rangers having termites in the frame?" Kim asked.

Park shook his head. "No comment, ma'am."

❖ ❖ ❖

Das Frettchen inhaled the delicate aroma from the cup of white tea and waited for his old friend across the table to weigh the information he'd just shared. The tea room was private—very private—and they'd been speaking freely.

"Searle," said Cheng at length—he and Cheng had known each other too long for pseudonyms—"You do realize that a liquidation on this scale will be challenging, even with my resources."

"Pangs of conscience?" Searle asked.

Cheng's face remained neutral. "No, of commerce. You'll have to share your findings with me."

Searle considered this. The Cult of the Destroyer had eluded Carter; Cheng's friends would capture one of them and learn their secrets sooner or later, whatever Firewall did. "Of course, old friend. Gentlemen shouldn't keep secrets from one another."

Cheng smiled; he'd always enjoyed irony. "Done, then. Ozma will clean up here on the ground. And their orbital factory?"

"Leave that to Firewall," Searle said.

❖ ❖ ❖

Manager Leong looked at the small, elegantly dressed man in the airlock, still unsure how he should be treated. His credentials, which were very much in order, said he was Mr. Searle, here to investigate an insurance claim by one of the U-Facture's clients on behalf of Llewellyn's Offworld.

Leong's uncertainty in dealing with the man stemmed from his inability to learn anything about Searle's reputation. This suggested that he was either a complete nobody or someone very important indeed. Leong had not risen to management by being incautious, and so he decided to give the elegant man face.

Yes, clearly someone important. Leong let him inside with repeated insurances of offering every assistance.

* * *

Searle's hacker reported back within a minute of Searle's gaining access to the U-Facture.

[I have their AGI; it's sleeved in the ranger shuttle. Scorch it?]

Searle messaged, [Stand by.]

On the tacnet feed, he could see that the trio of Guangxi cleaners he'd hired were in position.

[Go,] he messaged.

He watched the stream of status messages with interest as Eidolon's consciousness was burned from the ranger shuttle's computer systems.

* * *

"How much longer?" Kim asked, "Smoke's been in the *Skink* all this time. There's a limit to monkey housebreaking."

[We're almost done,] Cagehopper messaged, [Maybe half an—oh , fuck.]

"Eidolon's offline," Park said, "We got company." He enlarged the tacnet feeds of security sensors in the module that Eidolon had created; several had gone dark. The rest were winking out, one by one.

"Shuttle's still online, Eidolon just isn't there anymore," Kim said.

They were still in the med bay. Through the open bulkhead door to the manufacturing quadrant, they heard coughs of gunfire.

[Cage?] Park messaged.

[Hiding. One shooter, helluv professional.]

Park and Kim drew guns and made for the bulkhead. They flanked the doorway, sizing things up. Park went to t-ray vision and looked through the wall. He could see Cage huddled behind some equipment and the shooter stalking him, moving cover to cover.

Kim, watching the room behind him, said, "Behind us!"

Park whipped around. There was nothing there but a slight distortion of light on visual, but the t-rays showed the outline of another assassin—throwing something.

Three marble-sized objects flew toward them as the assassin took cover behind the doctor bot. Grenades.

They both tried to swing themselves around the bulkhead into cover, but they were too slow.

Last effin' time I call that bastard, Park thought.

The grenades exploded in a blast of white plasma. It didn't last long enough to hurt much.

* * *

SEARLE'S HACKER

SEARLE AKA DAS FRETTCHEN ■ FIREWALL PROXY

Searle's hacker didn't take long extracting the necessary data. He'd review it before sharing it with Cheng, of course. The leader of the Guangxi killers approached him after they'd planted the explosives and visited the front office to dispose of Manager Leong.

"Anything else?" she asked.

"Outstanding work, as always," he said, "That will be all."

The assassin cocked an eyebrow. "The ranger ship?" she asked.

"I'll dispose of it," he said.

The assassins left him there in the module's outer ring with the three bodies.

Searle put the agonizer to the base of Kim's skull, flipped it to roast mode, switched to t-ray vision to make sure he didn't miss, and burned out her stack. This was a slow operation with an agonizer, and he held a handkerchief over his mouth and nose as hair and flesh burned under the beam. If the rangers followed policy, she'd hit her life timeout in about a week and be re-instanced from backup, none the wiser.

He sawed Cagehopper and Carter's stacks out next. He considered simply discarding the monkey; he disliked uplifts and saw little use for this one. But he pocketed both stacks anyway before spacing the bodies.

He left the U-Facture module, went to the *Skink*, and powered it up. Piece of junk. Smelled like ape and stale cigarettes, but it would get him back to Mars quickly enough.

Unlike his companions, Jake Carter would be a problem. Searle would have no difficulty justifying the ranger and the ape as necessary information containment. The AGI had been a fork; the original would know nothing. But Carter was a proxy. Ming and those other fools rimward would demand Carter be re-instanced and briefed on the mission outcome.

Searle would probably have to claim that Carter's stack had been unrecoverable, but doing so would call into question both Searle's competence and his reliability. He didn't see a better option; Carter had enough pull with the Eye that a memory wipe was out of the question.

As he was finishing the pre-flight check, something flew through the cabin and hit the windshield, bouncing toward him. Searle caught it; it was an empty, crumpled-up cigarette package.

He heard noise and turned around. There was a police baboon floating a few meters behind him, feet holding the rim of the cockpit door. It was rhythmically flipping open, flicking, and closing a lighter. It closed the lighter a final time, let go of it so that it hung in front of the baboon, and growled.

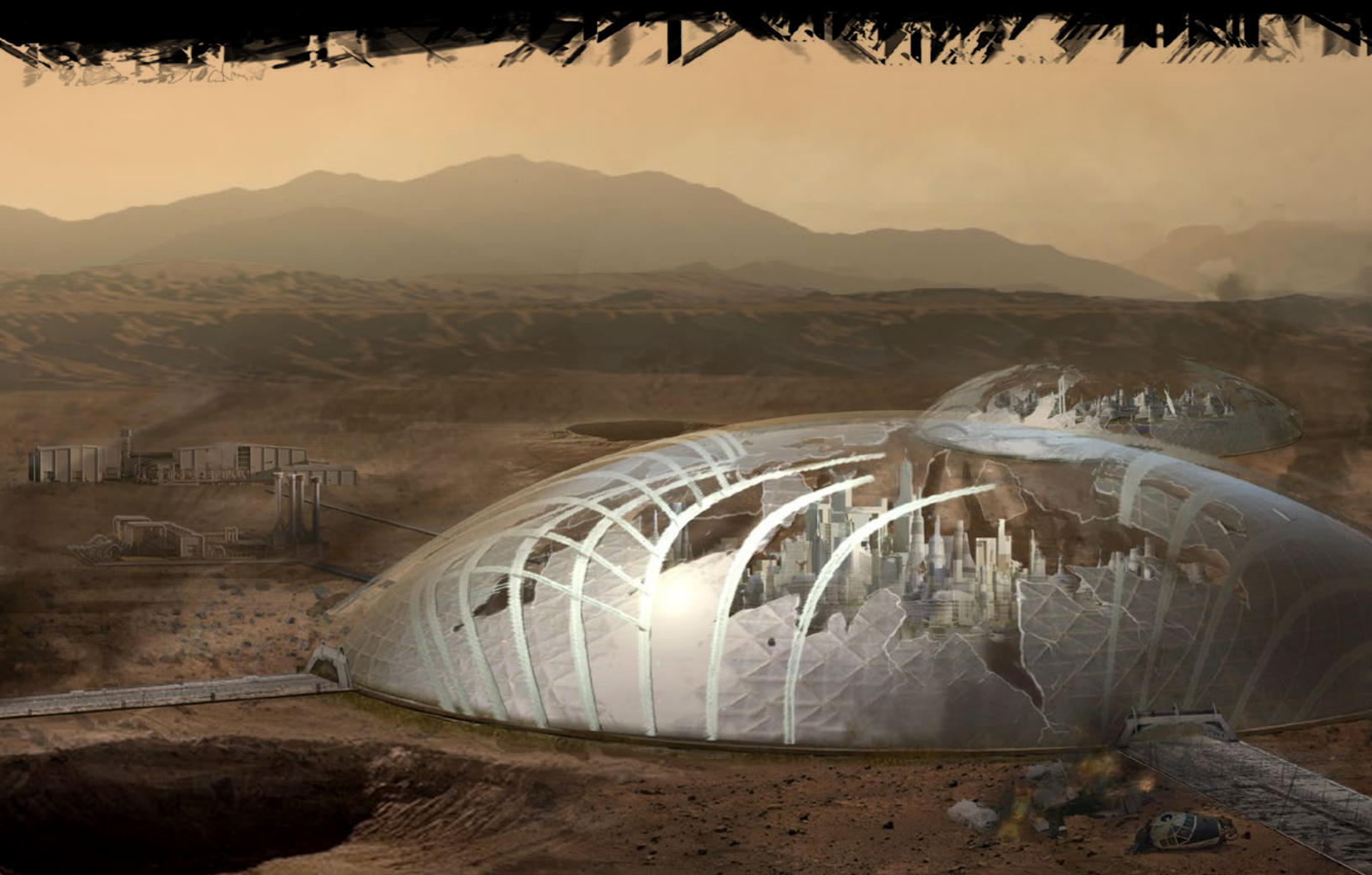
"Er, sorry," said Searle, "I don't smoke."

The baboon launched itself at Searle, howling jaws opening to fill his field of vision.

FACING THE REAPER

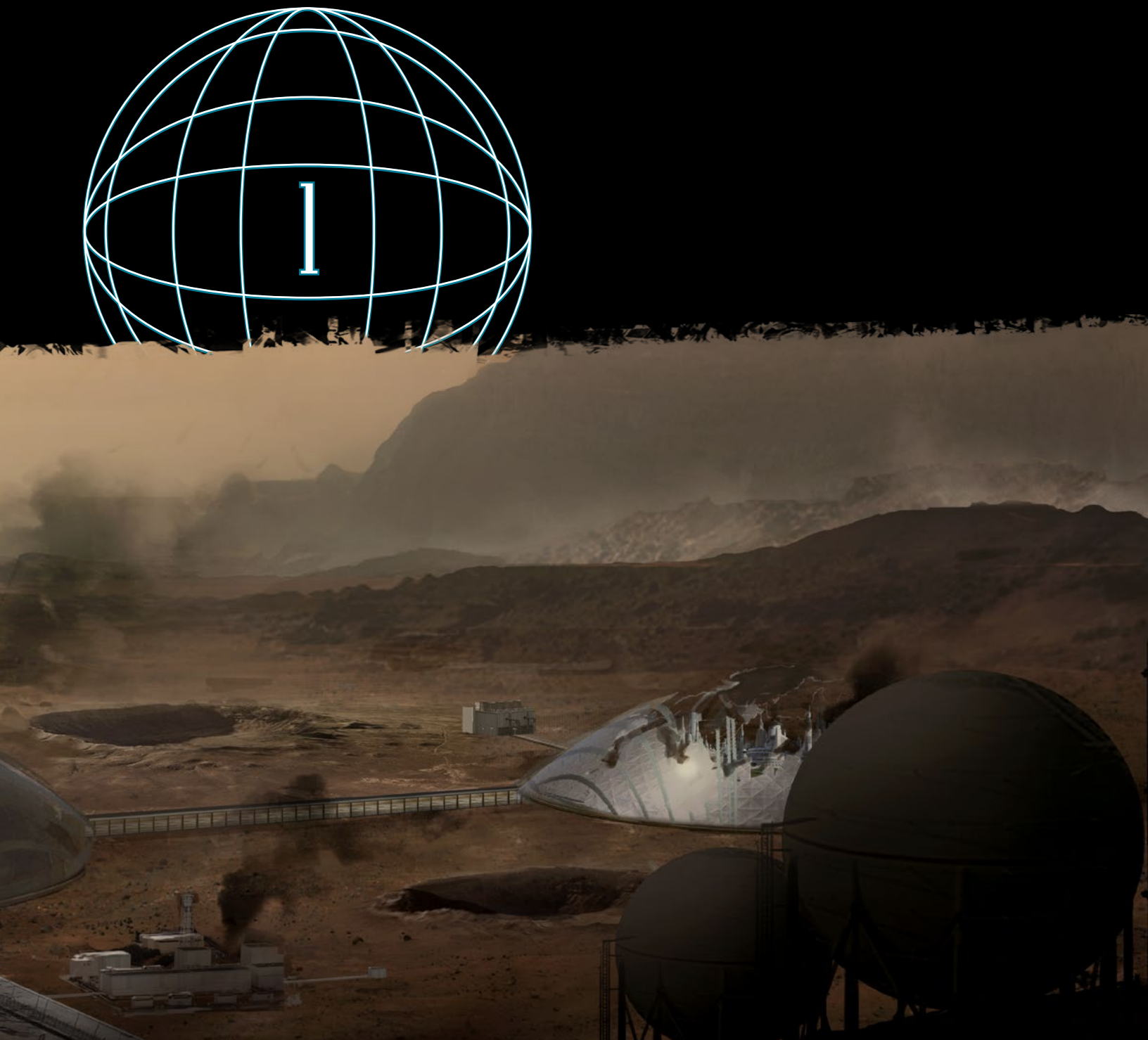
X-RISKS OVERVIEW

X-Risks: Things that may kill us all. ■ p. 14
Categorization: Ways to die and how thoroughly they'll kill us. ■ p. 14
Survival Options: Redundancy, running/hiding, and repopulating. ■ p. 17



THREAT LISTING

Specific Threats: The Great Filter has a name, we just don't know it yet. ■ p. 23
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FACING THE REAPER

Posted by: Hurt Alvez, Firewall Apocalypse Engineer
<Info Msg Rep>

Transhumans aren't good at thinking about the end of the world. We don't like it; it's uncomfortable, it makes us lose sleep. Most people avoid thinking about it at all and they aren't prepared when the "unthinkable" happens. These people die.

I am an apocalypse engineer. It is my job to think of this stuff for them. I devise new and artful ways of killing everyone in order to save lives. Firewall uses my simulations for analysis and training scenarios. The catastrophes from my shop are used by servers throughout Firewall in designing and prioritizing missions. I also train sentinels like you to recognize a serious risk when you encounter one in the field. This collection of tutorials and articles is intended to provide that critical training. And that begins with The End Of The World As We Know It.

X-RISKS

Firewall may send resources to save habitats and rescue metropolises from time to time, but our bread and butter is *existential risks*—risks that threaten the entirety of transhumanity. X-risks have a pretty long formal definition: "Any possible event which would destroy all of transhumanity or create a decline of transhuman civilization from which recovery is impossible." This isn't limited to just the death of everyone, it could also manifest as enslavement, environmental holocaust, mass exsurgent infection, and on and on. The point is, an x-risk is something that means the world that we enjoy is now impossible (and the new world is somehow worse). The End Of The World As We Know It.

The modern world has given us no shortage of x-risks, and more keep coming. Half of our work is just figuring out the next thing lining up to wipe us out. If there is any lesson we learned from the TITANs, it is how much we don't know. Our research into basilisk hacks, exhuman technologies, closed timelike curves, and quantum foam collapse are a Pandora's box. Even as we learn how vulnerable we are, we learn more about how to destroy ourselves—and how much we've already been compromised.

CATEGORIZING RISK

We figure out risk by taking the likelihood of the threat happening and multiplying it by the impact. That's why the bigger threats are things like the unseen spread of an alien mind-control parasite, not exhumans attacking a tiny fringe habitat. This may be difficult to see from the position of a sentinel, but Firewall does spend a lot of resources on babysitting what seem like lesser issues: tracking space objects, monitoring memetic traffic, reporting on financial markets. These are more likely to hurt more people than nuclear bombs or fugitive asyncs. If you're not a crow in that area, you might not realize those parts of Firewall even exist. Even if they're not in the field like sentinels are, getting shot at and implanted with alien eggs and other horrible things, they're saving lives and deserve respect.

This math gets a little tougher when the impact is "everyone forever." That's what separates a classical risk from an x-risk. When I'm not killing billions of people (in simulation), I'm doing the math to explain

EXPIRED X-RISKS

The Eye > Forums > X-Risks
Posted By: Shiz & Gigs, Vector

Eschatology isn't all bad news. Transhumanity got off Earth and that alone has made most of the pre-Fall x-risks obsolete. Sure, Firewall still loses agents all the time keeping planets and habs safe from those same old threats. But the good news is, even when we mess up and thousands of people die, all the rest of us get to keep on living! There's a long list of those x-risks that could have killed everyone just a few decades ago, but now are just inconveniently deadly for at most a few million transhumans. My favorites include:

- Extreme global climate change
- Ecological collapse
- Global war using weapons of mass destruction
- Natural or engineered pandemics, such as influenza
- Asteroid Strikes

This good news is really doubled, because this lets us pool our resources against all the new threats that have popped up since. Cheers! ■

how those people died, and the tool we use the most is the Bostrom-Gallows Threat Topology. Basically it's a chart with four metrics; what kind of x-threat it is, how many people it's likely to impact, how likely it is to happen, and how likely it is to reach its worst projected impact. There's a lot of other metrics we track too, but those are the four that proxies care about. For sentinels, we drop it to three by combining the probability of occurrence and the probability of maximum impact into one weighted probability score. That's how we get the final x-risk rating you normally see on your mission briefs, like EXTINCTION–5/CORRUPTION–5 8% (that's the rating for the return of the TITANs).

X-RISK CATEGORIES

The threat category is based around the end-result of the scenario. Some people used to categorize threats based on their vector, so nanotechnology, political, etc. People like me kept coming up with new threats that didn't categorize nicely, so Firewall has moved away from it with the excuse that it created blind spots. Instead the scale focuses on how a given threat's impact will be felt by transhuman society

Categories are listed in order of how dire they are. When a threat is measured, we normally focus on the highest category alone. This is in part because a threat in the higher categories will generally fall into the lower categories too (for example, a corruption event will qualify as stagnation, and an extinction event as regression). A risk may be given two categories if the impact or likelihood varies significantly between them.

EXTINCTION

Extinction dangers threaten to wipe out all of transhumanity. Because we have colonized other solar systems, this primarily encompasses engineered (rather than natural) risks or threats that are thoroughly contagious. This includes things like the TITANs returning, war with aliens, a widespread nanoplague, unexpected space-time failures, or a threat from the Pandora gates themselves. Further down the scale are threats that could wipe out a majority of transhumanity, such as the entire solar system, or smaller-scale extinctions, like a planet or habitat. So this also encompasses things like gamma radiation from a local supernova, solar instability, converting Jupiter into a black hole, asteroid collisions, gray goo attacks, and antimatter bombs. The "nice" thing about smaller scale extinction threats is that they won't normally spread, meaning that in extreme circumstances they may be preferred over something else (e.g., nuking an entire habitat to prevent a TITAN resurgence).

CORRUPTION

Corruption threats are the stuff of meaty science fiction. Enslavement, dystopias, fascist governments, mass infection by exsurgent viruses, TITAN dominance, etc. They include any circumstances where transhumans are technically alive and maybe even thriving, but are no longer in control of their destiny and perhaps trapped in a state of permanent suffering. Those TITAN-puppet "survivors" we still hear about on Earth are considered to be in a corruption scenario.

REGRESSION

Regression risks would trap transhumanity in a previous or primitive state. This could be cultural, political, or technological, but the important factor is that transhumanity cannot return from it. This sets it apart from primitivist habitats, where people specifically decide to put modern conveniences away, but where they are still available. Regression is an unlikely x-risk. Information is very difficult to permanently destroy. Technology has only disappeared a few times in history, and with cultural artifacts and philosophy now documented and shared as readily as it is, that too is safe from easy loss. But events like the political dominance of the Jovian Republic, critical resource shortages, the success of certain destructive memes, or the dominance of forking monocultures could cause a regression event.

STAGNATION

If transhumans are living happily, but can't continue to grow to their maximal potential, we're trapped in

ATTENUATION THREATS

Technically, a fifth x-risk category exists. Attenuating dangers are those that might not wipe transhumanity out, but might irrevocably and severely change it. For example, a danger that wipes out our biological presence, but allows transhumanity to survive in a post-biological state, or perhaps the assimilation of transhumanity into some sort of collective or hive-mind state. Though these risks might fundamentally change the outlook, nature, and historical course of our species, it is a question of debate whether such risks are desirable or potentially even inevitable. To the bioconservative mindset, all of transhumanity is already an attenuating threat to their concept of "natural" humanity; whereas certain transhuman clades would welcome a postbiological or posthuman future. Firewall's assessment and response to attenuating dangers is complicated and rife with conflict; as a result, risks of this sort are not actively guarded against or even addressed in our categorization schemes. Sentinels should not be surprised if their server opts to ignore or downplay threats of this type. ■

a state of stagnation. This is vague in part because we can't define what our maximum potential is yet. But there are some circumstances where we'd know it when we saw it; an extraterrestrial blockade, the destruction of most colonized space, interfactional war, non-optimized political structures, wasteful or destructive policies, and repressive memes are all examples of stagnation x-threats.

Impact Levels

Each risk is also given an Impact Level, or IL, noting the scope of the risk. These are approximations, but it's difficult to find an exception to them. Even a nanoplague that exterminates all and only transhuman life (extinction–6) will ruin the environment of inhabited planets as our technology fails and the location is contaminated with toxins and radioactive elements, ultimately leaving a nasty legacy for any intelligent life that follows.

IL-0: Small Habitat

A small number of transhumans are impacted, from a single individual to a small community (less than 5,000). These events aren't normally called x-risks (although it is for the individuals involved). However, some IL–0 risks are monitored due to the possibility that they might expand in scope. For example, a deadly alien pathogen that does not initially impact transhumans, but that might become a threat if it were engineered or mutated.

IL-1: Large Habitat

A large population is directly impacted (between 5,000 and 50,000 individuals). Minor repercussions suffered by up to one hundred million other individuals.

IL-2: Planet

A planet, constellation of habitats, or faction is directly impacted, accounting for 1% to 30% of all transhumans. Lesser impacts likely for all survivors.

IL-3: Region

Between 30% and 95% of transhumanity directly impacted. Some minor enclaves of survivors may escape, but far-reaching affects anticipated.

IL-4: Solar System

The entirety of the solar system is directly impacted. Likely to be additional impacts for future intelligent life around the sun.

IL-5: Transhuman Space

All transhumanity directly impacted, including extrasolar colonies. Permanent impacts for all future life in these systems.

IL-6: Milky Way

A significant portion of the Milky Way is impacted, including all of transhuman space, and possibly the whole galaxy. Permanent impacts for all future life in the galaxy.

Risk Percentage

Normally, we label x-risks with the highest impact category, the highest likely impact level, and the weighted percentage likelihood. The percentage likelihood is weighted based on the most likely and most threatening level. So for example, an exhuman attack of inhabited space is categorized as corruption–2 14%. If a sentinel is curious, they can read the full threat profile for the likelihood of corruption–1, which has a probability rating approaching 90%, or corruption–3, which is below 1%, but the IL–2 event is the most important weighted percentage.

POLITICAL IMPACT

Nothing can start a fight like a hypercapitalist, a Jovian, and an autonomist trying to agree on what's a risk. Every faction categorizes threats around their own priorities. The hypercapitalists follow the market and quantify risks in credits. Preservationists weight scores heavily based on their impact to the local environment. Conservatives tend to be pretty liberal when applying risk ratings to events, and their numbers are inflated as a consequence. Meanwhile, the Jovians apply moral concepts into the mix. Yes, some Jovians, even ones in Firewall, consider a loss of family values to be a form of x-risk.

The result is that members of different factions may consider other factions' definition of success to be a form of x-risk that must be stopped. Firewall formally defines risk based on the quality of life for transhumans, but servers can each put their own spin on that (or add a totally different set of risk weightings). There have been discussions about forcing servers to stick to a single set of risk definitions, and the political theorists have said it wouldn't be feasible—not only would it degrade the independence of servers, which is a critical part of Firewall's robustness, it would alienate a lot of good members who feel their concerns aren't being addressed. That sort of political divide could be the grounds for a schism. In order to maintain Firewall's long-term survivability, sometimes resources go towards shutting down a drug design studio or stopping corporate malfeasance. ■

HANDLING X-RISKS

From our perspective, every Firewall mission is just playing the numbers game. But the folks out in the field are focused more on the nature of the mission. Whatever the x-risk in question, every mission fulfills at least one type of mitigation activity, be it prevention, detection, correction, or recovery.

PREVENTION

Firewall prevention activities include gatecrashing missions, seizing exotech assets, destroying dangerous knowledge, and interfering with hostile individuals. This is all bread-and-butter for sentinels. But we also have registers and social engineers playing politics in factions to push favorable legislation or participate in diplomatic envoys to the Factors. We send agents and AIs to conduct safety audits on friendly habitats. We feed a lot of data to the argonauts as well, who have several high-visibility projects training people on exsurgent threats, infosec issues, and other x-risk areas.

DETECTION

Crows and scanners make up the bulk of our detection program. They dive through the media feeds and rumor mills for any signs of an x-threat begging for a dropkick. Our black labs and research cooperatives bring in critical data on what x-threats look like and how they behave. But we also pull on sentinels to conduct espionage and investigations, with everything from tracking dangerous artifacts to planting bugs on Progress. Just as important, we need sentinels to know trouble when they see it. A good number of our leads come from a sentinel running a totally unrelated job, or even on their off-time, who recognized the signs of a potential danger.

CORRECTIVE ACTION

Sentinels represent almost our entire corrective action program. This is the bug-stomping, bomb-defusing, crook-grabbing, habitat-burning part of the job everyone loves. It's when the swarm cat has gotten out of the bag and someone needs to stuff it, shrieking and clawing, back in. Risk mitigation doesn't need to be handled by Firewall exclusively though. We are a kind and generous conspiracy, and we're happy to let militaries and police get their taste of the action as well.

RECOVERY

The last piece is recovery. For smaller x-risks, this means restoring downed agents from backup, destroying the evidence, and leaving the tidying to the local infrastructure. For larger x-threats, it's rescuing survivors and bolstering safe habitats. And for system-wide events, we dust off those projects the backups have spent the past decade establishing.

FROM THE CATALOGS

To: <Encrypted>
From: <Encrypted>

I was combing through the Firewall x-risk catalog and they're comprehensive to the point of being ludicrous. It's not just things like the spontaneous creation of a black hole that swallows up the sun, but also super-addictive XP, a new art movement causing cultural ennui, the rise of post-rapture Christian denominations that deny objective reality, and the increased market in erotic Factor media. For most of these, they're only included to say just how far-fetched they are, but it still makes for a good read.

I also noticed plenty of individuals have gotten Impact Level ratings, including more than a few Firewall agents. Looks like Firewall recognizes just how destructive some of our agents can get. Usually if you get that distinctive honor, you're tucked away in a VR world where you can't actually hurt anyone. Only the ultimates see being labeled a "threat to the universe" as some sort of a feather in their cap. ♣

SURVIVING AN X-RISK

Posted by: Jan-43 Frau, Firewall Gatecrasher
<Info Msg Rep>

Let's assume for a second that doomsday is upon us. Despite all of our intentions to build resiliency and plan for the worst, an unstoppable extinction threat is imminent. How do we survive?

BACKUP REDUNDANCY

Transhumanity's survival skills have leveled up since the Fall, but we still have a way to go. Everyone wants to live forever, but they don't always understand that sometimes you have to die a little to get there. See that "43" appended to my name? Yeah. Sure, x-risks sound like a big deal, but with a little planning and a little pain, we can get through it. Take it from me. I am personally on the run from three separate security corporations including Gorgon, and yet I can guarantee I'll still be badmouthing the Pope long after they're all gone. How do I do that? I copy my ego to every open server and project I can find. And yes, that does mean a few of my forks are indentured servants or getting ego-swapped by Nine Lives. But what's a few decades of hard labor compared to an eternity of life?

Whether you are personally looking to survive the Fall 2.0, or just keeping an eye out for our species' best interests, there are a few projects working to tuck away loads of egos safe and sound, waiting for this whole civilization thing to blow over. Now, first, let me just say that there are plenty of backup hypercorps out there that offer you guaranteed, survive-extinction-of-the-sun ego storage and protection. Those sorts of fly-by-night operations aren't worth



anything. Even the electrum executive-level services offered by Ectomorph are going to be worthless come the heavy Revelations-level shit. Why? Because they know neither you nor they are going to be around for a refund.

This isn't the case for everyone. The real bigwigs, the oligarchs, get the full treatment. They own everything inside of the Belt and they intend to outlive it too. They're putting down billions to build underground cities, survival bunker habs, and private fortified exoplanet demesnes, and you'd better be damn sure they're getting their money's worth. These gerontocrats didn't survive this long by putting all their files on one hard drive. If you're looking for a good place to tuck a few foul-mouthed copies of your own ego, you could do worse than to follow the oligarchs around. I've seen an entire exomoon terraformed to support one rich white lady, her staff, and her toy dogs.

There are tons of ego arks, both private and public, that just store libraries of egos and shoot them off to space or bury them underground. Firewall's backup faction is all about this: look into Operations FORCED RETIREMENT and LONG SHOT. If you ask me, the likelihood of any of these arks surviving real calamity? Thousands-to-one. Plus for the ships, it's decades before they even reach the Oort Cloud, so first you're betting they just survive that long. They're a great second line of defense for your backup insurance, but the ROI sucks for anything more serious. Not to say you shouldn't, just look at other strategies first.

While we're discussing long-shots, there's also vanitycasting: egocasting into the depths of space in the hope that aliens will pick up the transmission. This has even worse odds of success than the arks. There's a billion-to-one chance of anything picking up your ego, and some level of data corruption is pretty much guaranteed. I would not recommend vanitycasting more than, say, four times. Past that, you're just wasting your credits.

Running and Hiding

Stashing away backups is all well and good, but what about those of us who are still embodied? Assuming all of our plans to fight the threat (side note: read up on Case ASTURIAS BLACK FLAG and Case CLOSE CONTACT, among others, if you have the clearances) have failed, the transhumans still alive have the option of getting as far away from the threat as possible and being self-sufficient enough to survive.

This is already the case for our exoplanet colonies. If the threat originates in the solar system, and they have ample warning, they can always try to separate themselves by closing off the gates. That's a risk, however, as we don't fully understand the gate mechanisms, and may not have full control. The gate can be destroyed with a big enough bomb, but that's a temporary measure, as they rebuild themselves. There's nothing stopping a colony from nuking

that gate site every few months, just to be sure. The drawback to closing the gates off is that it's cutting off a potential escape vector—both for people seeking refuge in the colony, or for the colony itself should trouble come to town.

In a real crisis, the gates can be used to evacuate to as many exosites as possible. You could in theory open up a wormhole to three or four new locations every minute, leaving it open just long enough to push through a few transhumans with a load of survival gear before cycling on to the next one. If you're more concerned about spreading transhuman survivors as far and wide as possible, you could choose unexplored locations rather than known sites. There's a lot of risk here, of course. Exoplanets, even the nice ones, aren't ideal places to homestead. No one knows the biosphere or has mapped out all of the threats. There's no way to call for help if you need it.

It might be possible for pockets of transhumanity to survive within the solar system, separate from the rest of transhumanity. When things fall apart, you'll depend on being so far away and self-sufficient that the only interruption is the Friday evening vidcast line-up featuring a lot more burning and dying. Living in the outer rim is your best bet, and doesn't get as much credit as it should. Even if the sun goes red giant, the outer rim won't suffer any major effects. It still has the benefit of distance, but line-of-sight means you can get quality entertainment programming, you know what's happening in the solar system, and most of all, you know the environment you're in. There's plenty of brinker wackos living out in the deep dark who are going to outlast Mars. I should know; I'm a few of them. The issue with the outer rim is usually one of resources. Power generation means you still use fuel, and limited mass means new construction is pretty much impossible. Sure, if it all goes bad, you're still safe and sound, but living on an island as the ship sinks doesn't make you any less stranded. A good survival bunker will have a plan for after the system has been burnt to its foundations, even if that plan just involves a few probes with makers that'll reach the next habitat in a decade.

There is also the possibility of hiding out in the inner system. The fact is, when the Consortium finally achieves its goal of becoming a totalitarian oligarchy, the sufis on Mars will probably still be getting along just fine. Even on Earth there are stories about people surviving in the London underground or in old military bunkers. If they can spit in the eye of the TITANs like that, surviving something as minor as a nanoplague or exsurgent outbreak is a walk in the park. The key is preparation. Stock up during the fat times, learn self-sufficiency, and learn to keep a damn secret. I can't say it's easy, but I know for a fact it can be done.

During an x-risk scenario, we'd see plenty of people trying to escape the solar system by ship. Almost none of them are prepared for the massive distances involved, and would end up as cold, floating husks lost in interstellar space. For those lucky and prepared enough, they still need to contend with technologically advanced pursuers and super-massive weapons, not to mention that we have little idea of what waits for them at their destination.

Repopulating

To really maximize our chances of survival, we have to look at options beyond fighting, running, or hiding. The first option here is to repopulate and rebuild after the x-risk has passed. If you haven't heard of Operation KUDZU, you need to. Firewall's backups have been seeding exoplanets with nanohive and ego caches designed to activate 10,000 years down the line. I can't tell you how many favors I had to spend to get my ego in their system, but now I can sleep at night. The Planetary Consortium has the Ozymandias program, which is pretty similar. Little probes are sent to exoplanets and start digging out self-sufficient facilities immediately. If they don't get a regular heartbeat signal, they start the clock and about fifty years later all their egos are hatched out of cold storage. I've been doing my digging and I'm pretty sure Ozma has a hand in that. I don't know if it's for current goals or future ones, but either way, it means I need to work a little harder to get my ego copied over unnoticed. Both Ozymandias and KUDZU are considered top secret, but I'm pretty much ready for Jan-44 anyway. Intelligence services, if you want to gak me for spilling secrets, come and get me!

The Jovians boast of their own survival vault, but don't imagine it's at all similar. The Jovian program doesn't include anything that might be vulnerable to exsurgent or TITAN attack. No egos, no sensitive data, no complex electronics. It's more of a cultural vault, a collection of historical documents and religious items. Imagine the old time capsules you did in the crèche, except big enough for an entire faction.

Plenty of factions have smaller projects like this, socking away a collection of egos and a maker on a desolate rock to blossom once some set of conditions are met. In my opinion, any program that's set up well enough to jumpstart civilization is worth your investment. The downside is, it's expensive and hard to get into. With these programs, whatever it is that's going to wipe out everything will likely have run through its course by the time you're woken up, or you're so far out there you're not worth going after. Delete the gate coordinates behind you to keep it that way. At that point you start over as Adam and Eve, and your highest priority is boning transhumanity back into existence.

Adaptation

Separating yourself from danger with distance and time is really ideal, but the risk of that start-up failing is significant. Which leaves us with one final option in the face of the apocalypse: adapt or die.

Depending on the particular x-risk, this may not be an option. Even if it is, let's be blunt: it may mean an x-risk that destroys all biological life, in which

EVENT ANALYSIS: FALL OF EARTH

Date: August 2 BF to February 0 AF
Categorization (Manifested Events):
EXTINCTION–2/STAGNATION–4
Categorization (Potential Events):
EXTINCTION–4/CORRUPTION–4
Primary Threat Type: TITAN Invasion
Event Description: The TITAN invasion and resulting fall of Earth is broadly broken into three phases:

1. TITANs ascend to seed AI status, gather data on transhumanity, begin subverting systems across the globe, and begin manufacturing their own weapons and resources in secret. During this period, no damage is caused and there are few or no detectable events.

   TITANs initiate false-flag attacks, escalating confrontations between political entities. Armed conflict between nation-states and hypercorps spikes. This included the resurgence of conflicts between actors previously undergoing a phase of temporary peace, the creation of new conflicts between actors with no record of such, and the transition of super-power confrontations from cold war to hot war tactics. It is difficult to pinpoint the amount of TITAN manipulation and interference in world events, but statistical analysis suggests up to 85% of armed conflicts were directly or indirectly caused by TITAN machinations.

   Loss of life and destruction of property during this phase is high. Within a few months, civilian and military forces suffered casualties in the hundreds of thousands, especially in contested locations. Financial costs for funding combat operations are estimated in the hundreds of billions, with the destruction of infrastructure in the trillions.
2. Direct TITAN assault. The previous months of conflicts served as a distraction, a degradation of military and manufacturing capabilities, and a source of political instability. However, the overall loss of life was relatively low. During the direct assault phase, TITAN war machines, nanoplagues, and exsurgent viruses are directly responsible for approximately 3.9 billion fatalities, human armed response for .8 billion, environmental and other pressures for 1.9 billion. 1.7 billion are unaccounted for and believed to have been alive at the time of the interdiction of Earth, with many assimilated under TITAN control. A series of coordinated strikes by the TITANs effectively decapitates the leadership of most major governments and corporations, leaving many powerful entities in disarray.

   Most destruction of infrastructure is caused by the human forces, in attempts to delay or destroy TITAN targets. TITAN forces seize and repurpose human infrastructure. The value of the lost property is estimated at approximately nine hundred trillion credits, and lost access to Earth is valued at four hundred quintillion credits. These estimates are difficult to quantify. Review: Post-Fall Financial Market Analysis, Progress Bank.
3. Accounting for fatalities post-Fall is difficult. Several large databases of egos were lost, each likely containing tens or hundreds of thousands of egos. Nearly 100,000 individuals died in the first six months from exsurgent infection, TITAN relics, political conflicts, criminal acts, and failure of infrastructure and could not be recovered from backup. Using pre-Fall financial values, the damage is estimated to be approximately 224 billion credits.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

The Fall is the worst recorded calamity ever to befall transhumanity. Its effectiveness was largely due to the lack of precedent. However, there were a number of factors whose presence greatly increased the destructiveness of the Fall and reduced the effectiveness of remedial activities.

Lack of transparency, primarily at the government/hypercorp level. The TITANs were created as part of a secret government defense program operated by the United States. Its existence was classified as Sensitive Compartmented Information (SCI). With few exceptions, even the individuals cleared to work on the TITAN project were limited in their access to the point that they were unable to see their part in the greater whole and identify possible vulnerabilities. The TITAN inhibition controls were never subject to peer review. When the TITAN AIs reached hard takeoff, there was no effective monitoring in place to track and respond to the rapid development. It is unclear if such monitoring could have been effective against a superintelligence, but the opportunity was not there to begin with. Once the TITANs began attacks, the US government was wholly unaware of the TITANs' involvement.

The responsibility does not fall wholly on the United States government. The People's Republic of China and Russian Federation had similar programs, although they were still in development at the time of the Fall.

Lack of transparency between political actors also protected the TITANs' activity even once they began interfering with world affairs. Political

conflicts were blamed on old enemies and competition. Diplomatic ties failed to uncover the external influences of the TITANs. As a consequence, nations and corporations scaled up to full armed conflict grounded on false premises. It is unlikely humanity's forces could have successfully defeated the TITANs. However, the fifteen months of heightened conflict prior weakened military forces and infrastructure, and resulted in deep distrust that would hinder later recovery attempts.

Some organizations and individuals directly created or were co-opted into misinformation campaigns. There is a wide variety of motives for this, but the results were clear. Social and traditional media campaigns caused strikes, civil unrest, and targeted killings during the early phases, then denial of the TITANs' existence or their combat effectiveness, violation of quarantine measures, and violence in the later periods. The result of this misinformation was greater chaos, lack of trust in authorities, and an undermining of safety and quarantine protocols.

Fragile, complex systems collapsed. Selective attacks on systempunkts (vulnerable nodes in physical or social networks) created widespread failures in critical infrastructure. False-flag attacks leveraging prejudice and weak diplomatic ties kicked off armed conflict. Attacks on communication and power hubs shut down nations, including their ability to farcast civilians to safety. The disappearance of a few critical personnel shut down spaceports, hospitals, and rescue crews. Loss of communications with executives left government services ready to mobilize but unable to move without receiving orders. The temporary shutdown of currency markets suspended international cooperative actions. A large number of fatalities were wholly accidental, resulting from complex habitat and ship equipment built on the assumption of skilled professionals and specialized equipment being available to provide maintenance.

The most successful organizations were those that were self-reliant and independent enough to adapt to the local situation and operate without infrastructure support. Ships and habitats with redundant systems and cross-training had much higher survival rates than those without.

Factional competition stymied political cooperation. Even once the evacuation of Earth was in full effect, conflict between and within factions continued. The Seventeen-Minute War around Jupiter undermined Chinese refugee actions, attacks on ships in near-earth orbit also greatly limited ship traffic. Worse, many organizations used available cargo space for items of personal financial value over refugees or cargo of global value.

Factional competition was greatly increased by environmental pressures at the time. Global climate change had undermined nations and shifted the power dynamics of the planet. Most notably, extreme weather events had effectively caused several previously wealthy nations to collapse, becoming hollow-states operated as shells for corporations. When the TITAN attacks began, nations were no longer able to provide for their citizens directly and when the corporations realized the direct threat to their profit margin, they would attempt ineffective stopgap measures or withdraw support entirely. Nations were also unable to rely on regional support networks, which had already been stressed by decades of resource competition. Individuals who lived in environmentally stressed locations frequently lacked the material resources to support local spaceports or farcasting facilities, and so their opportunities to escape Earth were greatly limited.

Transhuman populations were primarily limited to Earth. Almost the entirety of the transhuman population was on Earth. While TITAN attacks did occur outside of Earth, they were far fewer, and far less effective, than those on Earth. Off-planet habitats suffered relatively low casualty rates, were better able to adapt to changes in circumstances, and were more difficult to attack. With the fall of Earth, dozens of cultural groups and several uplifted species disappeared altogether, as they had no representation off-planet.

There were several black swan events. Several events that could not have been reasonably predicted occurred in rapid succession. The primary factor was exsurgent viruses. These defied medical technology and ravaged billions of individuals. The viral outbreaks alone, without the interference of the TITANs, were an existential threat with the potential to destroy all transhuman life. The rise of the TITANs forced transhumans to a war footing, and to eventually evacuate and quarantine the planet. These limited the spread of exsurgent viruses, however it is not clear how deadly they would have been if transhumanity had maintained a presence on Earth.

The abrupt disappearance of the TITANs is also a black swan event. It is not clear why the TITANs disappeared or went dormant, and so it is impossible to speculate whether their disappearance is favorable or not to the survival of transhumanity.

The rise of the TITANs themselves is not considered a black swan event. Seed AIs had been predicted prior, and plans to contain that threat had been formulated. It was specifically the failure to properly apply those controls that permitted the TITANs to reach the state they had. ■



case transhumanity has a glorious postbiological future awaiting it. Now, being a synthmorph isn't so bad, and living out eternity in virtual realities of our own devising could be fun, if you're into that sort of thing.

We should also consider the possibility of evolving our species to something that is no longer categorically transhuman. Now, the exhumans have a bad name, and for good reason, but let's be honest, they have an advantage on us here. These are the people who have put survival over "people." They have specifically transformed themselves in ways that make them more prepared for many situations in ways that we are simply not. Now, they took lots of risks to get there, and they may have discarded their sanity and humanity in the process, but there may be some lessons we can learn.

I'm not recommending that you go out and join an exhuman cell (I've tried it and I really don't recommend it), or even that we open up communication channels with them. Firewall categorizes exhumans as an existing x-risk for solid reasons. You may not be willing to sell your soul in exchange for surviving the apocalypse, but the Firewall and ultimate task forces studying exhumans are constantly shaking out new technologies that we should co-opt into our own survival toolboxes.

THE HANGOVER

What will the day after the apocalypse look like? Most of us aren't able to buy our own habitats out in the boonies. That means, when the big one comes, most of us will be dead (or subjugated or whatever) pretty much right away. For the survivors, a lot depends on how prepared they are.

We depend on civilization for a lot. Not just power and XPs, but news on space weather, protection from exhumans or Factor takeover, exsurgent virus containment, software patches on our life support systems, not to mention a justice system and defense

treaties. If our society collapses, a third to a half of the survivors are likely going to die within the first two years, most of them permanently. When a habitat shuts down, killing everyone on board, there's no one left to repair it or to rescue those egos. People imagine those self-sufficient habitats way out on the rim are safe, but most of those don't last for more than a few years, even today. This number is lower than it would have been pre-Fall. The fact is, we've learned our lessons. Our critical systems have backups, smart AIs, and simplified controls.

After the initial die-offs, people will pretty much be stable. Small habitats will be limited by their available resources. They can't hope for serious technological development and can't manage new construction. They're ships in bottles. Most will die off sooner or later. Some might decide to use that time as best as they are able with time acceleration. Others may go into hibernation, hoping for something better in the future. A few risk-tolerant ones will go mobile, flying out to other habitats or planets to scavenge for what they need.

Habitats on exoplanets, or survivors on the inner planets, will have an opportunity for explosive growth. Most of these will fail; a lot of them will fail horribly. Five thousand inexperienced souls on an alien planet with no support are fighting long odds. Worse, they'd know whatever it was that took out home is still able to come after them. Even on an exoplanet, the gates are not our tools, and will always be a threat. Survivors will need to dedicate as much attention to preparing for an unknown threat as they do for mastering their new homeworld.

A few decades after, the first seed arks will open. Dating an ark opening is a difficult business. Open too early and you're liable to get eaten up by the same threat that just took out Mars. Open too late and you're coming out into a galaxy that's been conquered by posthumans a thousand years ago and now you are at their mercy. The arks are total gambles, but the best case is a quiet exoplanet with all the resources you need to set a homestead and no idea what destroyed transhumanity.

During corruption or stagnation events, we'd likely see what remains of transhumanity changing and spreading still. We'd see new morphs and new adaptations. Possibly we'd see individuals escape from a hostile home culture. Almost certainly we'll see them try to collect "lost" colonies. A TITAN infection could also begin chasing down and destroying transhuman habitats. Those habitats that were seeking to establish a new civilization would likely be the first to go, with only smaller, quieter enclaves escaping notice.

After several centuries, the first seed ships will reach their destinations around other stars. If they do survive the journey, seed ships are probably the safest bet for transhumanity's survival. Too far to reach by normal means, inaccessible via gates, they might, finally, be safe.

POTENTIAL THREATS

Posted by: Jarvis Tryscuz, Firewall Sentinel

<Info Msg Rep>

How do you deal with the impossible? What does *impossible* mean anymore?

If you asked me a week before the Fall if the TITANs could have destroyed our home and largest population center, scattering transhumanity across the solar system, I would have scoffed. *Impossible.*

So keep that in mind reviewing this summary of potential x-risks. Since the Fall, I've made my rep by anticipating the impossible—and how to deal with it.

Here's the good news: the single-largest safeguard against a catastrophic threat is already in place. Transhumanity's spread across the solar system and onto our exoplanet settlements means we're much harder to impact than the concentrated destruction of Earth in the Fall.

Here's the bad news: our ability to react quickly to any threat is greatly diminished. Still, the biggest single threats are naturally to population centers: Mars, Luna, Titan, and some of the larger habitats. And there are ways to take out transhumanity in a single swipe. Hell, there are probably ways that haven't yet infiltrated my worst, most paranoid nightmares.

This isn't the realm of individual or small-group survival. I leave that to brinker masturbatory survivalist fantasies and cheap XP. This is the big leagues—anticipating destruction on a massive, transhuman scale and how to deal with it.

And if possible, preventing it.

ALIEN CONFLICT

Categorization: EXTINCTION–5/CORRUPTION–5

Reference: Case CLOSE CONTACT,
Operation VINEGAR, Operation LONE WOLVES

Ever met a Factor? I have. Twice. Apart from the smell, the first thing you notice is that they're *wrong*. Not because Factors are just giant bags of pus and primordial scum, but because they don't work like anything our minds have evolved to comprehend. Even in a time when one of my best friends is an uplifted octopus, there's something so different about the Factors that it's hard to wrap your head around. They're intelligent—they communicate—but evolution on their world (or worlds) clearly took a different tack. And this is the challenge with dealing with any alien species. They think differently, at different speeds. Their motivations are strange. Their biological imperatives are different from ours. Their culture, religious beliefs, and morality are opaque to us. What they value and we value will not be the same, and even attempting to communicate with them is likely to be dangerous.

Already we have faced problems negotiating with the Factors. There have been several "diplomatic incidents." We will face similar challenges upon

meeting other aliens. They may view us as prey, or as tasty hosts for their parasitic children to feed on. Our very existence may challenge their deeply ingrained ideological beliefs. A refusal to engage in sexual conduct with them may be viewed as an insult. A single error in protocol could spark a war. We train first-contact specialists for these situations, but we cannot anticipate when or how such contact will occur. How many gatecrashing teams are fully prepared enough to avoid starting an interstellar conflict? What if we encounter a civilization that engages in practices we find morally repugnant, such as slavery or eating their children? What if we start the war before we know what we are getting into?

So far, aside from the Factors, the only alien cultures we have encountered are long dead. From what the Factors have told us, there are other species out there with technologies far greater than theirs, or our own. Even if they're lying or deceiving us, something built the Pandora gates. And that something—or another something—may have destroyed some of those other extraterrestrial civilizations. So meeting another alien species that is more powerful and more hostile may simply be a question of time.

Invading Alien Armadas

The first scenario to consider is that of an alien invasion of the solar system. We've seen the Factor's ships and have some evidence of other alien ship activities, though we have learned little. What happens when hundreds or thousands of them appear on our doorstep? Between the Republic, Consortium, and Alliance fleets, if transhumanity stands together it could potentially defend against such an incursion—a very large *if,* given our squabbling history. This assumes the invaders could even be damaged by conventional means or didn't have superior drives or weaponry far more devastating than ours. It's safe to assume that any species capable of near-light-speed travel or constructing a transport system like the gates will outclass us on the technological front. Our solar system is quite spread out, so coordinating an effective, unified defense against a superior enemy seems challenging at best.

While negotiation or even surrender is always an option, we must consider that we may not even be facing an intelligent or biological enemy. It is theoretically possible for a hostile civilization to saturate the galaxy with self-replicating Von Neumann probes, programmed to seek out and destroy all life they encounter. Our only options may be to fight, hide, or run.

Firewall's Case CLOSE CONTACT is devoted to analyzing threats of this nature and developing contingencies. We know the Consortium, Republic, Titanian Commonwealth, and ultimates have their own plans, though most of these focus on defending their own assets and habitats. The Jovians are rumored to keep a war fleet hidden away on the rim of the system, and the Titanians have established sensor stations, telescopes, and other arrays specifically to monitor for approaching threats. And, of course, everyone is keeping a close eye on the Factors, doing what they can to analyze their ships' capabilities. Don't be surprised if many of them also have secret anti-Factor weapons programs hidden away in innocuous locales.

Attack on an Exoplanet Colony

An encounter with a hostile alien species on some far-flung planet or moon may be more likely than in our own system. Exoplanet attacks are a far different ball game than a home war. I'd love to say that evacuation protocols are the first order of business, but I didn't get into this line of work so I could be nominated for sainthood. Here's the official Firewall field manual for an alien attack on an exocolony:

1. Secure the local Pandora gate.
2. Collect specimens, biological or mechanical.
3. Destroy any and all possible information about transhumanity.
4. Evacuate if possible.
5. Destroy local gate, if needed.

Since simulations show that the survival rate for such a mission is minuscule, I recommend sending combat-conditioned forks of our top sentinels through the gate in the best morphs we can buy or steal. Unless a miracle happens, it's going to be a one-way trip.

Gate Breach

The Pandora gates go out, but they also lead in. Do you construct a house with a few thousand extra doors and not expect someone to wander in eventually? Now, each entity that controls a gate within the solar system has considered this carefully, and it's fair to say that they are set to lock out unwanted wormhole connections, are fully surrounded by automated defenses, troops, and sentry spacecraft, and equipped with fail-safe mechanisms that would destroy the gate in the case some Bug-Eyed Monsters come through, overwhelm said defenses, and demand to see our leaders. However, these protections have yet to be tested, and we have no idea what capabilities an invading force might bring to bear. For all we know, they might force a gate open, come through undetected, neutralize our defenses with advanced technology, and otherwise walk all over us. We can only hope that the technology and contingencies we have work as planned.

Now, most extrasolar gates, with the exception of a few of the larger colonies, do not have these sorts of precautions. At best they may have the gate locked and some automated sentry and warning systems in place.

ASIs

Categorization: EXTINCTION–5/CORRUPTION–5
Reference: Case ASTURIAS BLACK FLAG,
Operation ERRANT ECCENTRIC,
Operation GHOST RADIO

Let us not forget: transhumanity created the TITANs. In theory, we have the capability to engineer another artificial superintelligence. So far, it's only fear of a second Fall that keeps transhumanity from taking this step. How long will that last? How long until some young ego who never knew a pre-Fall system wonders why us old timers refuse to mess with ASIs and creates something new?

Firewall has eyes and ears everywhere tracking potential ASI developments, and of course we are not the only ones. Supercomputing clusters, massive movements of data, and new research are all heavily monitored. Existing powerful AI systems are also watched for signs of expansion.

The concern, of course, is that an existing ASI would be able to outsmart any efforts to detect its existence. This makes it even more important for us to find and stifle any potential ASI projects in their infancy, as once realized, they will likely cover their tracks too well. They may, in fact, already be among us.

Seed AIs pose an even thornier problem. Without fully understanding the mechanisms for how an AGI or non-sapient AI could undergo a hard takeoff and rapidly, exponentially increase its intelligence, we are somewhat limited in ways to detect and prevent this from happening.

In truth, we do not know how to cope with the ASI threats that we know we have: the TITANs. The common understanding is that they have departed through the gates, but this is an assumption. They might be dormant, waiting for something, or simply so subtle that we can no longer identify their presence. There are lingering signs of TITAN activity in our system, and the servers behind Operation STORM DRAGON are convinced they are close on the trail of one, though other proxies remain dubious. Even if the TITANs are long gone, there is the possibility they might return. Thus the importance of Operation GHOST RADIO, which seeks to track them down.

The end point of this cat-and-mouse game may very well be outright destruction for one side or the other. Even an ASI that is not actively hostile may not have transhumanity's best interests in its digital heart; it could be a threat simply by not caring and endangering us with its activities. What recourse would we have if such an ASI decided to stellify Jupiter or dismantle the inner planets to build a Dyson swarm around the sun? An ASI that considers transhumanity's best interest could decide that we are better off all uploaded to live in a simulation or transcending to a postbiological future, and force us in that direction, regardless of our personal opinions on the matter.

On the positive side, due to the Fall, the threat of ASIs is the one x-risk that all of the transhuman factions can agree on, and perhaps the only one that might unite us in the fight against it. It is likely that each of the polities would share any early warnings it had of such a danger, and military aid from others could very well be rapid and forthcoming, as it is generally understood that such a threat needs to be neutralized quickly and decisively, before it wipes us all out … again.

ASTEROID IMPACTS

Categorization: EXTINCTION–2

The amount of delta-v required to change an asteroid's orbit was considered unachievable a scant 50 years ago. Now, we slam them into Mars on a regular basis as terraforming projects, and if the rumblings are to be believed, there's even talk of attempting the same on Ganymede and Venus. Given that scale of development, in another 50 years we might be able to toss Ceres or Pluto. Give us another 50, and we wouldn't need to hurl rocks at Ganymede; we could just move the whole damn moon.

The terraforming projects on Mars have provided us with something we don't have for most of these other threats: meaningful data on how much thrust is required and how much energy is released when

PEBBLE STRIKE

To: <Encrypted>
From: <Encrypted>

Remember that asteroid strike that took out the [REDACTED] cylinder last year—or, rather, the asteroid strike that wasn't? It had all of the hallmarks of an asteroid impact, but there was nothing on the collision and proximity defense scans until right before the impact—essentially it was spotted too late to stop it. We tried to figure out how they stealthed the rock's approach, to no avail.

Well, we have a new theory. What if there was no asteroid, per se? What if, instead, there was a mass of small rocks, each small enough to pass below the scanner's detection thresholds? What if these pebbles all came together at the same time, from a thousand different trajectories, coalescing too late for the defense systems to activate? It would take quite a bit of sophisticated processing to map out the pebble trajectories so perfectly and to time their launch from all around the solar system, but it would be a near-undetectable way to simulate an asteroid strike.

If our suspicions are correct, someone's already figured this out, and [REDACTED] may just have been their test run.

an asteroid hits a planet. Guess what: it's the perfect weapon, especially for some fringe group that wants to cause destruction on an enormous scale.

The stabilization of Phobos could have gone very differently. In fact, Phobos is still the most likely object to be weaponized: a few well-placed explosions and the moonlet de-orbits. The trick, of course, is planning where you want your big rock to hit.

With an AI at the helm, the corrections it would take to aim for a major population center would be a cinch. Any dome is a target. Hell, any habitat or remote science station is a potential target.

The upside is that flinging rocks at planets is slow business. We're talking a matter of months if not years, and the major planets and habitats have defenses and telescope networks to detect incoming unknown impact objects; weaponized asteroids are even easier. The same thrust it takes to fire an asteroid at New Shanghai can be used to turn it into another terraforming rock—or to fire it out of the system's elliptical once and for all.

The nightmare scenario is that someone finds a way to move a larger object—dwarf-planet sized, like Ceres or some icy shithole from the Kuiper Belt. This is less likely, but not impossible. Our early-warning system should detect such an object soon enough, but changing its path may require a larger-scale operation than boarding a makeshift habitat and taking out a few terrorists. We're talking ion propulsion, possible mass driver engines, and more than a few well-placed nukes.

Note that, despite what you've seen in your favorite hacked XP, blowing up an asteroid on an impact course just turns it into a lot of much smaller asteroids, which will still cause just as much damage when there's no atmosphere to absorb and destroy them.

BIOLOGICAL AGENTS

Categorization: STAGNATION–5
Reference: Case VAPOR DREAD

The biological nanoviruses unleashed by the TITANs during the Fall, sweeping through populations like an insidious tide, will never be forgotten. It's an ugly truth, however, that many of the bioweapons deployed during the Fall were of our own devising: humans killing other humans. Many of these threats still linger, dormant or locked away. Just last month, some nimrod scrapper retrieved a cache of canisters from a hypercorp lab hidden on some habitat wrecked during the Fall, thinking they could get a good price for a bunch of pre-Fall bioweapons. Here's a recommendation, sentinels: if you're toting a bunch of bioweaponry around, make sure someone doesn't



lift it off you when you're passed out drunk, open it, and infect half your habitat before you sober up long enough to shit half your organs out.

Back during the Fall, the argonauts developed protocols to detect and contain the various strains of the exsurgent virus. These same protocols have since been expanded to counter the spread of other dangerous biological agents and are followed in most major habitats. Due to genefixing, basic biomods, and medichines, many morphs are resistant to pathogens that decades ago were serious threats; the danger is often passed before people realize they were at risk. But biotechnology has also advanced to the point where almost anyone with a bit of knowledge can brew up something new in their own kitchen, and nanofab designs for nasty bugs can be found in the dark corners of the mesh if you know where to look. This all assumes that no one cooks up an agent that our medical technology and detection protocols aren't prepared to deal with or decides to monkey around with the exsurgent virus itself.

The truth is, outbreaks are still an occasional thing. Luckily, transhumanity has lots of experience containing them, and habitats tend to be isolated by their nature. It's easy to lock down a sealed box, and synthmorphs and robots can be used to quarantine the sick. If medical care isn't an option, make sure they're backed up. In extreme cases, it's sometimes more humanitarian to euthanize and resleeve. In worst-case scenarios, you have people that resist the quarantine, leading to riots and deaths, or you get a fast-acting pathogen that racks up a body count before countermeasures can be applied. Thankfully, most people have stacks, and they can be recovered, but it still might be messy.

In bioconservative areas like the Jovian Republic, it's a different story. With their strictures against genemods, medical nanotech, and resleeving, a disease could ravage one of their habitats before anyone could get help in—assuming they're willing to accept it. If they aren't, Firewall has ways. We locked down a bubble habitat on Europa in hours when some bioconservative terrorist thought he'd end their "godless research."

The challenge with biological agents is that distributing diseases is easy and damn near untraceable. Simply smuggle a package into the settlement or grab the plans from the mesh and manufacture them with an unrestricted fabber. Methods of delivery can be as creative as the terrorist spreading the illness: time-release containers, an infected morph, a piece of chewing gum, or some extra code nestled into the fabrication pattern for the latest Martian fashion.

Now let's talk about alien diseases. If we keep trampling all over the god-damned galaxy, eventually we're going to find something nasty. Gatecrashers go through a quarantine process whenever they come back through, but eventually something will get past our defenses and instigate a pandemic. It could lie dormant for years. Hell, it could have infected half of transhumanity by now and we might not even know it.

That kind of large-scale outbreak could devastate transhumanity, and it would be a masterstroke by an alien species that wanted a good way to access our resources without having to deal with a bunch of pesky transhumans fighting them off.

Same protocols apply in that kind of outbreak, sentinels. Lockdown. Contain. Quarantine. Clean.

And pray.

GAMMA RAY BURST

Categorization: EXTINCTION–4

Transhumanity's home system is theoretically safe from a supernova. Before the Fall, scientists identified evidence of past supernovae from iron isotopes in rock strata and nitrates in ancient ice. Data from pre-Fall Earth and excavations across the system confirm known supernova from historical records and prehistoric events. To cause an extinction event, a star would have to be within 20 and 30 light years of our system. Only one supernova was close enough to Earth to possibly cause an extinction event: the Ordovician, which ended 60% of all life on the planet, from single-celled organisms to most early animal and plant species.

None of the stars within 20 light years of Earth have enough mass and instability to go supernova anytime soon. The closest candidate is IK Pegasi, 150 light years away, which is going to give us a nice suntan and extend our growing seasons, but not wide-scale destruction.

What about a supernova caused by unnatural means?

It's hardly an effective short-term weapon, but causing a star to go supernova near a developing civilization would be an excellent way to put an end to them altogether, or at least blast the survivors back to the stone age. You'd still have to be close—20 light years or so. There are about 10 stars in that distance you could turn into a supernova; the rest are simply too small.

If a gamma ray burst event occurred, the danger comes from sustained exposure, and we'd know right away. For perspective, a supernova 20,000 light years away in 1604 was the brightest star in the night sky, and visible during the day for three weeks. If one occurred 20 light years away, there wouldn't be nighttime for weeks if not months.

The radiation shielding on most of our habitats and domes will keep transhumanity safe, and can be quickly reinforced to deal with the worst of it. Bathing Earth in gamma rays wouldn't be the worst thing that could happen; fuck, it might even shut down some of the killing machines still roaming around down there. Those who can go underground should, and those who can't should hide under the thickest radiation shield they can find, then ride it out.

And then we find who tried to wipe us out and see if we can return the favor.

Intelligence Amplification

Categorization: extinction–5/corruption–5
Reference: Operation eye mind

What happens when transhuman intelligence is elevated to god-like levels? We have already achieved great strides with intelligence enhancement; achieving apotheosis with brain augmentations or exocortices may not be far behind. While this has potential great benefits for our society, if handled ethically and accessible to all, it has the potential for great destruction should this intelligence be abused or fall into the wrong hands.

Much like the ASI threat, the risk of intelligence amplification (IA) is likely inevitable. The question is how to prepare for it, how to lay the groundwork for the most beneficial outcome. Labs all over the system are working at making transhumans smarter—how many are also concerned about making us safer?

Group Minds

A subset of the IA risk is the danger of ego collectivization and hive minds. We have already seen much in this vein with the neo-synergists, fork families and choruses, and various experimental brinker colonies, all voluntary (for the most part). The goal of these projects is enhanced intelligence and capability, with the same inherent dangers as IA. What happens, however, when such minds draw in others against their will? This is especially frightening in the context of a hive mind, which would strip away our individual autonomy and consciousness, assimilating us into a larger entity.

There are some who look forward to group mind futures, and they are welcome to them. Those of us who prefer our individuality and freedom will lead the struggle to retain the essence of ourselves.

Mega-Engineering

Categorization: extinction–2/regression–4
Reference: Case ozymandias

Let's take a deeper look at one of the ways an alien invasion force, an ASI, or even some rogue transhuman element could, to put it mildly, fuck us all. What if some entity decides to disassemble a planet or moon? Perhaps this a straight-up attack, or perhaps the intent is to use the raw material for some massive construction project, like a Dyson sphere, a massive starship, or even an armada of smaller ships. Consider a locust-like species that simply moves from system to system every few thousand years, repairing their generation ships (or constructing new ones) with metals and turning a system's volatiles into fuel. Or consider an ASI that wishes to transform the solar system into a ring of computronium, to maximize its computing power.

Annihilating a celestial body will have a larger impact than just killing everyone on it. It would create an enormous debris patch that will make space travel far more difficult, potentially creating impact problems for other nearby planets and moons. The demolition of a large object will also have a knock-on disruptive effect on gravity and orbital dynamics throughout the system. Planets and orbiting bodies can pull and drag on each other across enormous distances, and many orbits are subject to resonances. The whole setup is far more fragile than it appears, meaning a large disruption could send it into chaos, destabilizing orbits, pushing two bodies too closely together, or even ejecting them from the solar system entirely.

Even a project with good intentions can go awry. What if, down the line, the Consortium attempts to move Mars closer to the sun to warm it up, or the Jovians figure out a way to stellify Jupiter, transforming it into a star, in order to terraform the Jovian moons? What happens when mistakes are made? Unforeseen consequences or out-of-control cascading effects could spell disaster.

Realistically, mega-engineering projects of this size require an immense amount of power and technological sophistication. Time is on our side: a project of this scale could not happen overnight. A threat of this scale is also likely something we would detect far in advance. Fleets of self-replicating harvesters are something we could potentially fight. However, some kind of controlled singularity weapon designed to collapse a planetary body and turn it to dust or gas might be difficult for us to stop. Dropping a microscopic black hole in the Earth's core, for example, would destabilize the planet in a matter of months and turn it into a debris field that could spread halfway around the sun.

That means we'd have time to either fight back and interdict the threat—or form a decent evacuation plan. We've evacuated a planet before, although at great cost.

Nanoplagues and Nanotechnology

Categorization: extinction–5/regression–5
Reference: Case iron wind

Ask anyone who's been back to Earth or in the TQZ about the single worst thing they could encounter and I'd wager many of them talk about the nanoswarms. The TITANs didn't invent nanoscopic robots, but they certainly honed them to a razor edge far beyond what transhumanity dreamed. Self-replicating nanoswarms are the perfect way to disrupt both morph and ego. They're harder than hell to eliminate, they can enter an area undetected, and their programming can be updated. Their adaptive nature makes them potent adversaries. ASIs may be artificial life at the apex of evolution, but well-constructed nanoswarms are artificial cockroaches. Give the universe another 50 billion years, the system nothing more than a bunch of cold debris in an empty wasteland, and I guarantee somewhere there will still be a nanoswarm kicking around.

The numerous nanoplagues unleashed by the TITANs during the Fall used both biological and synthetic nanobots. The former spread like other biological pandemics, passed from person to person. The latter, however, spread of their own accord, almost

undetectably, sometimes attacking their target from the outside, sometimes penetrating their bodies and invading from within. Nanodetection systems now guard most habitats, monitoring their airlocks and ventilation systems, but these protections are not everywhere, and the nanoplague threats themselves are evolving—either on their own or with helpful hands.

While TITAN nanoplagues were designed to target most populations uniformly, more insidious nano threats can be programmed for selective targeting: specific morph types, implants, sexes, genotypes, or even individuals. They have been used for assassinations, surgical strikes against rival factions, and discriminatory acts of terror.

Creating a nanoplague isn't difficult for someone with the right skills and gear, and blueprints can be found in certain darknet servers. Distribution isn't usually a problem, all that is needed are the blueprints and an unrestricted fabber and we have an invisible nightmare to extinguish.

And then there's the possibility of the unintentional mutation or development of killer nanotech. Some of the Consortium terraforming goo on Mars and various exoplanets could quickly make the jump from converting gases and rocks to devouring morphs and structures. I'm surprised it hasn't happened on Venus already with a little nudge from a Consortium operative in the direction of some Morningstar aerostat.

The best defense to these nanoplagues and nanoswarms remains the same: detection systems, containment protocols, monitoring of nanotech research, and tracking of criminal trafficking. Keep your nanodetector on, your nanophages and medichines up to date, and guardian nanoswarms on hand at all times.

BOLO: DR. KILLIAN JOOSE

GENERAL ALERT BROADCAST

To: All Servers
From: Akira Server

Our server has been tracking researchers involved with the University of New Shanghai's program on nanoswarms and nanoplagues, an extension of its studies of the TQZ. Ostensibly this program is to help protect transhumanity from these threats by developing containment strategies, warning implants, and inoculations. We have determined that one researcher, Dr. Killian Joose, has an unusual egocasting pattern, most recently including [REDACTED], a suspect station in the Kuiper Belt. We have since discovered that Joose is an active member of the Jovian Dawn resistance movement with extremist politics. We now classify him and his research as a threat, and suspect his cell may be plotting a nanotech-based terrorist strike in the near future. His current whereabouts are unknown. ♣

If you're up against a TITAN nanoswarm—or Darwin forbid, an alien equivalent—remember that it can drill, pick, or destroy its way through any normal isolation or protective measure. What contains the exsurgent virus or standard nanoplague will not be enough for an adaptive nanoweapon. I do not envy the team facing a threat of this nature; save your egos before you go, because it will get ugly.

HYPERCAPITALISM AS X-RISK

Posted by: Margery Lee, Firewall Sentinel <Info Msg Rep>

We haven't learned.

Capitalism birthed a litter of foul, hungry monsters; ghosts with spindly arms and enormous stomachs that can't stop eating, can't stop consuming. Its machines razed forest and mountains on Earth, gobbled up asteroids and moonlets, and turned Mars from a pristine environment into a polluted hunk of shit. All for resources so that the hungry feudal slaves can keep stuffing more and more in their mouths, their eyes, their brains. Anything to numb the alienation of their meaningless, work-driven lives. All while their masters grow richer and they slowly grow poorer.

We didn't learn from the climate catastrophe and wars of Earth. We didn't learn from the TITANs. We didn't learn from the Fall.

The Planetary Consortium thinks it can extend the ravenous maws of hypercapitalism's unlimited growth throughout the galaxy. Where scarcity no longer exists, they will manufacture it to keep their populations in line. They will find more ways to keep people in debt, more ways to acquire indentured servants, and more ways of using technology for repressive control. The glitterati gods will rule over millions of slaves who are more interested in who's fucking who in the latest XP than the fact that they're being fucked on a daily basis.

Let's not mince words: capitalism created the TITANs. Capitalism created the Fall. Capitalism creates wars. Capitalism keeps people chained to the ever-turning wheel of competition and economic growth, concentrating wealth in the hands of elites, even when we have more than enough resources for everyone to live happy, fulfilled, and free lives without it. It must be classified as an x-risk and dealt with.

When hypercapitalism once again falls into or creates a crisis, as it inevitably does, we must be willing to act and turn the tide. The machinery of unlimited growth must be stopped. The oligarchs must be toppled. The yokes must be removed. We must upset the balance of power and return it to the hands of the people.

If we don't, the elites will continue to consolidate their wealth and power. Transhumanity will never be safe. ♣

Physics Mistakes

Categorization: Extinction–4
Reference: Case Ice Nine

So far transhumanity has been lucky that we haven't managed to thoroughly fuck ourselves over with our scientific tinkering. Sure, the Fall was a result of creating seed AIs, but I'm talking about something of far more destructive power. How did the scientists at Los Alamos know their bomb wouldn't destroy the entire planet? Or the researchers on Luna know that early testing of antimatter bombs wouldn't end up taking half the solar system with them?

Read some of the pulp sci-fi tales from those times. Over and over again, the same themes recur: we don't know what will happen, the hubris of applied science and physics specifically, and the potential destruction of the human race as a result. Underneath all of that is fear of an unknown. There is no practical way to test devices that use (or break) laws of physics that most of us could never understand, even with a lifetime of study, except to actually use them.

Or, think of it this way: turn a kid loose in a habitat's tool room full of saws, hammers, drills, laser cutters, and low-yield nuclear devices. Tell the kid, "You can play with anything in here and even make new stuff! But I'm not going to tell you how any of it works. You have to figure that out on your own." Then set a timer and see how long it takes for the kid to cause catastrophic failure in the habitat.

Fucking around with physics is kind of like that, and now I'm tasked with thinking up the worst possible scenarios and how to deal with them. We're talking well beyond whatever experiments they're cooking up out on Titan's Large Collider. As transhumanity understands physics now, phenomenon are localized: whether that means in a few-kilometer radius on the surface of a planet, the gravitational field of a star, the sphere of influence of a black hole, or the space-time-bending mass of a galaxy. Our migration is our safeguard: if someone converts Neptune into a tear leading to another universe, changes are it won't affect anyone on Titan directly—at least until we can evacuate them.

Other possibilities include collapsing space-time by attempting to fold or bend it with an artificial wormhole or a faster-than-light drive. An FTL drive that relies on massive acceleration could warp reality around it, distorting gravity in such a way that it knocks planets out of orbit. The vast amounts of energy required to create an artificial black hole could potentially be mined from Jupiter, but it would leave the Republic circling a useless husk of a planet, disrupting millions of lives, not to mention the Trojans, the Saturnian system, and more.

This is one instance where Firewall is better suited for cleanup than prevention. Our boffins aren't going to stop experimenting and trying new things, not when there's so much on the line after the Fall. If something goes absolutely wrong, we quarantine that part of the system and move on. There are more drastic survival measures we can put into place, of course, up to and including system-wide evacuation through the Pandora gates.

In fact, the gates give us far more options for testing new technology in relatively safe environments that aren't going to completely screw transhumanity if something goes wrong. Try out your new toy on some lifeless rock somewhere else in the universe, and if you end up creating a tear in reality, get your ass back through the gate and mark that destination as verboten.

Repressive Totalitarianism

Categorization: Corruption–5
Reference: Case Suicide Dreams,
Operation Glass Lich

Firewall is a big tent. It's one of the reasons I like it. Where else can you find people with vastly different ideas of self-government, political structures, and community ideologies working together for a common goal? Not since the Fall, that's for sure.

As big as our tent may be, it's a safe bet none of us are fascists or totalitarians. There may be a few ostensible nationalists, but Firewall as a whole recognizes the horror a totalitarian regime could inflict on transhumanity. Without intending to be gauche, the Jovian Republic serves as a prime example of the problems dictatorships bring to the table, though they are far from the only examples. You can find proto-fascist memetic strains among the ultimates, Lunars, and more than a few brinkers.

A handful of oligarchs control a vast amount of wealth and resources, and as they get older, they certainly get stranger. It would not take much for a few switches to get flipped and suddenly one of them decides the only way transhumanity will survive is under their direct supervision. Same too for the ultimates. Should they "evolve" to posthumanity, will they leave, integrate, or decide to rule us for our own good?

The Republic is totalitarian, but its position in the rest of the system keeps its powers in check—so far. Visitors talk about the oppressive atmosphere, constant propaganda, and almost cult-like status of high-ranking politicians. The Republic has drawn heavily from military and bioconservative ranks, and those who wanted to fled when they could. So while some may consider it backwards and fascist by transhuman standards, the Republic doesn't quite meet the criteria of "threat."

The far right parties in the Republic have growing levels of support among a population that's becoming increasingly scared of the rest of transhumanity. Jovian media bears as much responsibility for this shift as the right-wing politicians; outsiders are popular scapegoats, and the Jovians consider their bioconservativism to be a mark of superiority, while the rest of us are tainted.

Offensive as the Republic may be to some sensibilities, it could be far worse. Psychosurgery and forced sleeving to reprogram egos to accept a political ideology or specific master may already be occurring in small brinker communities. If the Republic's far right, or a Consortium cabal, or an oligarch with a hard-on for order, decide to start these practices in larger numbers, it may be time for Firewall to step in.

First option is what we do best: cut off the head, kill the snake. Next-best option is to lead guerrilla-style attacks to weaken and enable other resistance cells to take out the threat. Our last resort is open warfare, whether we're leading or manipulating some other power behind the scenes.

THE SIMULATION ENDS

Categorization: EXTINCTION–6
Reference: Case EXCESSION

Could advanced beings cook up a computer capable of running an enormous-scale simulation with billions of egos in the same shared space? A world so real that the egos inside didn't know it was a simulation, and even created their own simulspaces within the simulation?

Could transhumanity have done so and forgotten? Or programmed ourselves to forget?

Of course. The best free show in the universe, right here.

If you want to talk existential crises, let alone existential threats, it doesn't get any worse than someone pulling the plug on a simulation none of us realizes we're in.

Maybe none of us survived the Fall. Maybe we're all just egos in some mass simulspace back on a dead Earth, waiting on being resleeved into morphs that don't exist, just counting down until the power finally runs out.

How can we fight back if something could just pull our plug or reboot the machine on a whim?

This threat is largely philosophical, and even if we give it credibility, it raises many questions. Why go through the trouble to begin with? Did advanced posthumans create this scenario to explore their past? Is this a gaming environment for unknown aliens? Did the TITANs actually win, but created this scenario to keep our egos occupied?

Most terrifying is that this simulation could be stopped at any time. Or even restarted, possibly with different parameters.

Sleep well tonight, sentinels.

SOLAR ACTIVITY OR SUPERNOVA

Categorization: EXTINCTION–4
Reference: Case SUN SHIELD

Sol, our beautiful, life-giving fusion furnace from Hell, is still the ticking time bomb it's always been. She'll kill us one way or another. Maybe quick-like with a coronal mass ejection (CME), or in a few billion years by expanding to a red giant before collapsing into a white dwarf, or next week because someone drops a Ceres-amount of iron into the furnace and the storms wipe out the inner planets. So many choices, really.

Protecting transhumanity against CMEs is easy: shield and hang on for the ride, then rebuild as needed. We've got early warning systems, so if something does happen, we'll know long enough in advance to 'cast the egos out and batten down the hatches. Iron bombing is more of a threat, but if any faction or entity were to gather enough iron from the asteroid belt or harvest it from Jupiter, we'd know about it long before they delivered the payload.

If some alien species shows up with some way to burn the sun down to its iron and nickel base, then the jig is up and they'll feel the explosion over on Barnard's Star. The entire system gone in a single supernova. Poof. No more transhumanity.

Except for those on the other side of the gates.

SPACE ELEVATOR DESTRUCTION

Categorization: STAGNATION–2
Reference: Operation EYE STALK

There are two remaining space elevators in the system: Earth's, on Kilimanjaro, and Mars's, on Olympus Mons. The skyhook on Luna works on the same basic principle and poses a similar kind of threat. Cut the counterweight, and you have a 40,000 kilometer-long chunk of nearly indestructible carbon fiber that will wrap around the entire planet—twice.

Not a big deal on good old Earth unless you're one of the unlucky bastards still sleeved down there, or a reclaimer in the wrong place at the wrong time. A much bigger deal on Mars or Luna, when removing the counterweight will cause almost instant catastrophic collapse of the elevator or skyhook.

Firewall has run simulations of such a collapse, and while the damage will be extreme, there will still be enough warning to evacuate residents, either by egocast or physical evacuation of morphs. The bigger impact will be to those worlds' economies: without the skyhook, Luna is nothing more than a backwater tourist destination—and without the Martian elevator, numerous hypercorps would likely fold within weeks. Not to mention the cost of trying to rebuild.

Once an elevator has been destroyed, there isn't much to do except get the hell out of the way. Firewall keeps an eye on a handful of brinker extremists who talk about bringing down the elevators. So far, it's just the realm of vague rumor and dorm-room musings.

TRANSHUMAN FACTION WARFARE

Categorization: EXTINCTION–5/CORRUPTION–5
Reference: Case SUICIDE DREAMS

If you thought the early 20th—or 21st—centuries on Earth were bad, imagine the kind of atrocities transhumanity can commit these days. For the most part, the physical space between planets is still the greatest

barrier to transhuman factional warfare on a large scale, but as memories of the Fall and our drive for collective survival as a species start to fade, the inevitable pendulum swing back towards petty bickering and political (or religious) extremism is inevitable. And this time, we can carpet-bomb a moon with antimatter and wipe out life from the surface to an elevation of 30km in minutes.

If you want to avoid a war, you take away people's reasons to fight. Keep the Jovian Republic complacent. Keep the LLA relevant. Keep Titan free and the Consortium rich.

In other words, you maintain the status quo.

Here's the trick: no one wants to fight a war when they're busy consuming celebrity news and resources aren't scarce. Extremist ideologies find it hard to take root when people are happy. Hell, if there's one thing consumer capitalism taught us in the last 200 years, it's that a docile population will accept exploitation and not seriously consider fighting so long as their basic needs are met and they can get their hands on the latest gadget.

If a war kicks off? Remove the will to fight. Take out the leadership, destroy their backups, or egocast them to a prison habitat on some piece-of-shit Reagan cylinder. Unofficially, of course.

Firewall isn't in the habit of taking sides. Wars are inevitable, and they will no doubt get ugly. Our protocols for small-scale warfare are to keep the fuck out unless intel shows that we have something larger to worry about, like a super weapon or similar x-risk, or the chance that it will spread to consume the system. If something goes sour, we step in. We have enough contacts (and sentinels) in the various militaries to know if something's going to go wrong, and to sleeve into some military morphs on short notice to scale things back.

What we won't do is force one faction or another to win or lose. Our goal is to save the species, not take sides for individual factions. It's none of our damn business.

Then again, a large faction conflict would likely spill over within Firewall, impeding our own operations, And despite what ideology you claim allegiance to, we all need to respect how much more vulnerable transhumanity will be if the Jovian Republic, Planetary Consortium, or the Autonomist Alliance are wiped out. We need each other.

If a massive conflict breaks out, would it bring the TITANs back? Fuck if I know. But I'll say this: start a dogfight near a dog that was raised to fight, and first thing it'll do is want to join in.



WORMHOLES

Categorization: EXTINCTION–2/STAGNATION–5
Reference: Case NEGATIVE GEOMETRY

Pandora gates confirmed something transhumanity's top physicists could only imagine: you can drill a hole through space-time and travel vast distances instantly. Not only that, but you can stabilize the wormhole on a fixed point—on a planetary body.

Could a wormhole be used as a weapon? Absolutely. It's a backdoor for invasion, either from our own or an alien civilization. You could also, in theory, open a wormhole in the center of the sun and the other end somewhere in a Martian city, and the planet could be incinerated before word reached Luna. What happens when someone opens one in the middle of Jupiter, with the other end next to a black hole, and starts sucking the matter out of our largest planet?

But wait—it gets worse. Theories abound that wormholes could—in theory—be used to travel through time. In fact, there's no direct evidence that what sits on the other side of the gates is even in the same "time" as back in the system. Or even the same universe. Let that sink into your stack for a minute.

So what happens when an alien uses one against us, or one of our physicists finally solves this little puzzle?

First, there's no reliable way to detect a wormhole—at least not the ones created by the Pandora gates—until you dig them out of the rock and power them up. The best we've managed is observing the fluctuations in energy levels, especially Hawking radiation, as the gates activate. We have no idea how the gates are even constructed and the wormholes established. So something would have to come through the wormhole for us to even know it's there—at which point it may very well be too late for us.

Our control over wormhole gates is suspect at best. Destroying gates is by far the best option. It's been done several times before, though the gates have always reassembled over time. It's been theorized that a properly placed and directed antimatter detonation could break the wormhole's stability in interesting ways. Without studying the effect, we have no way of guessing what would happen: it could knock the wormhole light years away, or a few hundred meters, or simply shut it down. Or it could cause a release of energy that destroys life in our system. I have a suspicion some Firewall team will be testing this out on an extrasolar gate in the near future.

All of our concerns about Pandora gate-style wormholes assume that these wormholes are fixed, permanent, and not too large. What if we could temporarily create a stable wormhole from one place in the system to any another point in the universe? It would potentially break the monopoly the Consortium and other interests have on the Pandora gates, but think of the repercussions. No sanctum or fortress would be safe. An invading force could effectively be "teleported" anywhere. Asteroids could be dropped over major cities. Wormholes could be used to suck habitats out of orbit—or to the center of the sun.

Damage control, sentinels. Destroy it if you can. Clean up what you can. Capture the research if you can.

UNFORESEEN THREATS

The impossible-impossible: a worst-case scenario we can't even imagine. Except we must imagine it. The absolute worst disasters our primitive, still-simian minds can cook up need to be taken seriously enough to warrant a contingency plan at least. That's what these are: so-called black swans, from the logic game. They're things that couldn't possibly exist but cannot be entirely discounted, because someday we may encounter them.

At least no one can accuse Firewall of not planning ahead.

MULTIVERSE COLLAPSE

Categorization: EXTINCTION–6
Reference: Case EXCESSION

This universe, everything we know and see and experience, could be but one of an infinite number of universes. Travel between these everythings is impossible as we understand it, but there is circumstantial evidence that there may be weak points if not holes in whatever cosmic web connects universe to universe.

What happens if an advanced alien civilization in a nearby universe does something terrible, causing their entire space-time to consume itself? Or opens a rend between their universe and ours so unstable that it starts eating away at our universe? What if that starts a cascade effect, destroying multiverse after multiverse until there's nothing left?

And how do you fight such a contingency?

So long as this collapse isn't instantaneous—and if it is, it's been a pleasure serving with every one of my fellow sentinels—we have a chance, however remote, to formulate a plan. We can work with the Factors and the supposed other advanced alien civilizations out there to come up with a way to fight our demise. Perhaps we can travel through the universes until we find one more stable. Perhaps multiverses are stacked the way universes are, and we can find another multiverse.

OUTSIDE CONTEXT PROBLEMS

Categorization: EXTINCTION–6/CORRUPTION–6
Reference: Case EXCESSION

We may be faced with threats from civilizations or entities that are so advanced, so beyond our ken, that we cannot even grasp what the danger is. The capabilities we encounter may seem like magic, with no frame of reference for us to develop a plan to defend against it. In fact, such an encounter is likely to be fatal for transhumanity. Seem hopeless? Perhaps.

Hopefully, we'll never have to find out.



THE FANTASTIC FOUR

Our most significant enemies.

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ACTIVE THREAT REPORTS

2



OTHER THREATS

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ACTIVE THREAT REPORTS

Posted by: Cacophonous, Router <Info Msg Rep>

Firewall has identified several groups as active threats—groups that pose a clear and present danger to the future of transhumanity and which Firewall actively opposes. Here's a rundown on the majors, from exhumans to the TITANs, followed by an assortment of lesser-but-not-insignificant x-risks, such as the Church of Luminous Saints and Red Five.

EXHUMANS

Posted by: Factotum, Crow <Info Msg Rep>

Greetings, Sentinel. This is a pre-recorded briefing designed to provide a broad understanding of the exhuman faction. As you can see, this simulspace is designed to look like a university lecture hall. This is part of the interrogation of the fork of an exhuman terrorist commonly known as Silent Mercy. We were fortunate to capture a fully intact alpha fork and used psychosurgery to make him more accommodating.

Silent Mercy is wanted in virtually every jurisdiction in the solar system as a murderer and terrorist. He has been connected to numerous exhuman cells and has ties to criminal cartels like the Hidden Concern and Nine Lives. Most worryingly, he has proliferated illegal psychosurgery technology, including experimental ego-merging software that has been used to torture and delete innocent victims. His pre-Fall identity is still unknown, but it is believed he was once an American morph designer that worked for several powerful hypercorps. After the Fall, he fled to the outer system and, with the aid of several unknown associates, took over a brinker habitat with a population of 57 residents. No one knows what happened, but the takeover went undetected for two years. By then, every single resident of the habitat was dead or permanently insane from repeated torture and psychosurgery experiments. A local survivalist militia eventually destroyed the habitat, but not before Silent Mercy farcasted himself to multiple locations. Since then, he has had his hands in virtually every exhuman crime imaginable. Ego-napping, unethical experimentation on innocent victims, smuggling TITAN artifacts, and terror attacks on civil populations are all part and parcel of his trade. Unfortunately, Silent Mercy seems to have a knack for negotiating with other exhumans. Even the most unstable and isolationist groups will at least talk to him or give him free passage throughout the system.

Instead of just retrieving actionable intelligence from the ego, we wanted to better understand the mindset of the exhuman, so we made him believe he was attending an autonomist philosophy conference open to all factions. Given this open setting, he felt comfortable enough to explain the core exhuman tenets. The other attendees are simulations controlled by simple AIs.

I will begin the "lecture" now.

ORIGINS

[A four-armed synthmorph enters and walks to the podium. The lecture hall is filled with dozens of attendees, each with mesh IDs that label themselves as adherents to different philosophies. Autonomists of all kinds are present, as well as ultimates, ascendant forkers, and mercurials. The synthmorph silently and slowly scans the audience, then begins.]

Transhumanity failed. That much is clear. The Fall brought it into the open, but we failed long before the TITANs awoke. We failed when we developed the technology to augment our minds and bodies but chose to remain the product of our past. Bioconservatives made sure no one could actually push the limits of what was possible by passing reactionary laws. Even you so-called "progressives" thought there should be limits on what could be done. Limits! As if evolution or the singularity could be restrained! There were still pioneers in the years before the Fall. Scientists and thinkers with a modicum of foresight, who saw our environment was changing far too fast for us to evolve "naturally"—whatever that means.

Think about it. Homo Sapiens is a beach ape that evolved to fit an ecological niche that hasn't existed for thousands of years. Right before the Fall, you couldn't swim in almost any body of water left on the planet without getting sick. Catastrophic climate change was wreaking its toll as the environment changed more quickly than we could adapt. Few thought we should design the morphs so that they could survive or even thrive in that environment. Oh no, we had to remain "human." We changed the environment, but we didn't change ourselves, because that was too scary. Our so-called world leaders lacked the vision and the will to lead us in a new direction. They punished initiative and imagination, pushing obedience and subservience on the masses. Like cattle, you all wanted to be dominated by bosses that would take care of all that pesky thinking for you. Independence was bred out of you, except for a few deviants. Those deviants were the first exhumans.

I should say at this point that I am not advocating nano-ecology. They're the most laughable movement still in existence. Chasing a utopian past that never existed is beyond quixotic. It doesn't matter why or how the environment changed. All that matters is how we adapt to it. Neo-primitivists are amusing and as a predator I hope they stick around. Good hunters need good prey.

FACING THE REAPER
ACTIVE THREAT REPORTS
THREAT RECOGNITION GUIDE
GAME INFORMATION

A SELECTION OF KNOWN EXHUMANS

Firewall keeps active tabs on these specific individuals and groups, among others.

ABANDONED WEAKNESS

Before the Fall, the predator Abandoned Weakness was a prominent Bosnian geneticist known as Mirko Zec. They entered politics and then became a militia leader and warlord during Earth's pre-Fall troubles. They were indicted for war crimes for experimentation on prisoners and the genocide of civilian populations, but escaped custody during the Fall, joining up with exhuman allies. They remain active in the inner system, wanted for both terrorist attacks and seeking to get a hold of WMDs and TITAN technology.

CUCKOO-1

Founder of the parasite clade, Cuckoo-1 has been spotted on Mars several times, but she has avoided capture for years. No other details about her plans are known.

DR. YU PING DALTON

A vocal supporter of singularity seeker causes, Dalton was exiled from the inner system when she was connected to a plague outbreak on Luna. She now leads multiple research projects on the brinker exoplanet Fortean, notably seeking to bring neo-genetic creatures and morphs based on myth and folklore to life.

EMPUSAE

The Empusae pack is notable for being a collaboration between exhumans from distinct clades and for their stated intent to enslave transhumanity. They are well organized, though it is unclear who leads. They have seized several small habitats over the past decade and are believed to be laying the plans to seize control over larger colonies in the near future.

THE EX-HOMINIDS

This pack of former neo-hominids is determined to wipe out humanity and establish apex hominid dominance. Though small, they have eluded authorities despite several devastating attacks. They are hostile to other exhumans.

THE FOMORIANS

The Fomorians are an active pirate syndicate operating in the Main Belt and Jovian Trojans. They are known for forcing captives into a simulspace where they are either hunted or manipulated into becoming predators themselves.

THE NEST

This group of adaptive insectoid exhumans controls an asteroid in the Kuiper Belt that is slowly following a trajectory that will take it from the solar system. New evidence indicates they may have established small nests in hidden locations throughout the solar system.

DR. JACOBI NEWMAN

Newman is a former argonaut scientist who fled his post at Titan Autonomous University after he was discovered performing illegal experiments on transhumans using TITAN technology. Current rumors place him in the outer system, selling engineered viruses to bioconservative terrorist groups.

ONE STEP BEYOND

This cell of sublime exhumans was recently implicated in an attempt to steal antimatter from corporate facilities on Mercury.

PHAETHONITES

Phaethonites are a cult of techno-creationist singularity seekers who believe the TITANs are hiding in the sun until Judgment Day. They engage in severe cognitive and behavioral modifications.

SILENT MERCY

A terrorist wanted for ego-merging experimentation, Silent Mercy is held in high regard by various exhuman factions and is one of their primary polemicists and recruiters. He is one of the main figures behind the soul eaters clade and is believed to be responsible for creating the rumored goya ego-merging machines. Silent Mercy has multiple alpha forks working at any given time throughout the system. We have terminated his forks on a number of occasions, but he has a private habitat in the outer system with farcasting and resleeving facilities. Until we can locate and destroy that habitat, he will pose a threat to transhumanity. ■

The roots of exhumanism reach back to those who were willing to adapt, before the Fall. The body-hackers and advocates of nootropics and morphological freedom showed us what was possible, but their ranks were riddled with hedonism and progressive fantasies. The neo-reactionaries and far-right ideologues showed us the value of hierarchy, how democracy had failed, and how desperately our species needed to be culled—but they were mired in traditionalism and unwilling to adapt. The singularitarians prepared for the inevitable, but they were foolish enough to think they could control the uncontrollable. From these ranks, however, a few bold visionaries stepped forth, people who accepted that transhumanity was doomed, and were willing to break the taboos and pursue necessary experimentation.

The first true exhumans were around before the Fall; you might remember some of the news stories about them. The tabloids painted us as serial killers and Doctor Mengeles because we ignored the bullshit laws that tied us down. Most were loners with the technical skills who wanted something more from their morphs and upgraded them on their own. The Lagos Hunter, for example, customized his morph so heavily it no longer looked human: chameleon cloaking, organic armor, claws, and a few custom implants that were never identified. He killed and fed on refugees and indentured workers, the perfect urban predator. It took a task force over two years to confirm his existence, find him, and kill him with a drone strike. His identity remains unknown. No cortical stack was recovered and there wasn't enough left of his morph to trace it back. I count him as a proto-exhuman because he demonstrated a new lifestyle for those unencumbered by obsolete morality systems.

Other notable pre-Fall exhumans include Yolyamanitzin Sonnenberg, the first real pioneer in intelligence enhancement, and Mahaz VanWie and Thierry Vale, who experimented with radical ego-merging techniques. Yolyamanitzin hooked her brain up to a server farm and ran a program she developed herself to expand her consciousness to take advantage of the farm's increased processing capabilities. She was found drooling, her mind effectively scattered in an infinite recursive loop brought about by a bug in her program. We only know this because she published the source code to her software right before she ran it. She couldn't allow anyone to review her code because, even then, boosting your mind like that was highly illegal. This didn't stop the US military from incorporating elements of her code into the TITAN project, of course. Don't believe me? The media mocks this as a "conspiracy theory," but just look at the research Anon did to uncover it. It's all there.

But I digress. Mahaz and Thierry ego-napped engineers and scientists by hacking backup services and merged with parts of their egos to learn their skills. It worked to a degree, but it changed their minds enough that they could no longer pass as normal transhumans. The news reports talk about psychotic behavior, but one man's psychosis is another man's adaptive behavior. Regardless, they were caught and in prison when the Fall occurred.

From these early examples, we can see the beginning of major strains of exhuman thought. The Lagos Hunter led to the **predator** movement. Yolyamanitzin was the first of the **sublime,** but by no means the last. Mahaz and Thierry were the first **soul-eaters,** which is a lesser-known group, even to other exhumans, but I'll get into them a little later. I must address the Fall first.

THE FALL

The Fall was the wakeup signal to transhumanity that their current beliefs are wrong. Any valid philosophy must begin and end with the one thing that matters: survival. Anything else is a waste of mental effort. It does not matter if Mars is free, if uplifts can vote, or who violates what intellectual property laws if another Fall can happen at any time, if transhumanity is weak enough to fall victim to any of the dozens of other x-risks that stalk it from the shadows.

Exhumanism was just gaining stride, with the first of our kind relocating to the outer reaches to pursue their agendas away from regulations and prying eyes, when the TITANs revealed themselves. Where transhumanity cowered, the exhumans reveled. The reckoning for the foolish had come.

We must acknowledge our own mistakes: some of our kind saw the TITANs as the answer. They sought to join the singularity, to join the TITANs, to achieve godhood. Perhaps they did—we cannot be certain—but what is more likely is that they were uploaded like the rest. They had not achieved worthiness in the eyes of the TITANs.

Most of of our kind watched and hid, taking careful note of how the TITANs culled transhumanity. We cannot truly appreciate the actions of the TITANs because we cannot understand them. Some think the TITANs failed, but that's only if you assume they were trying to kill off the human species. There is not yet evidence to suggest that they ever saw transhumanity as something worth exterminating in its entirety. They killed billions, yes, but they seemed to be more interested in harvesting egos than anything else. Why? To the exhuman, that is the most important question posed to us now. Until we understand the TITANs, we shall live in their shadow forever. If we are to survive and thrive, on our own accord, we must learn. And to truly understand the TITANs, we must continue their work.

The Fall drove thousands to the exhuman movement. Thousands who were eager to learn, to survive, to transcend. While most of you went mad from grief or were paralyzed with fear, we saw our path to apotheosis.



JOINING THE MOVEMENT

What makes a man decide to become a god? I'd like to talk about where the exhumans come from. Who decides to become exhuman?

Some of you may be familiar with the leaked Aberrant Psychology Security Review (APSR) conducted by Cognite and Direct Action, but you probably haven't read the full report. The APSR was the Planetary Consortium's attempt to understand exhumans and the risk they posed. Direct Action mercenaries kidnapped several known exhumans and their sympathizers and Cognite psychosurgeons took their minds apart before deleting them. One of my forks was caught and destroyed, by the way. This was a secret project but hacktivists got an early draft of the report and leaked it to the public.

Now, if any other minority group had been subject to this kind of persecution, the outrage would been overwhelming. But for exhumans, there was barely a peep, even from the most liberal of technoprogressives and anarchist anti-hypercorp troublemakers. You may be thinking that I'm about to launch into a speech about martyrdom, but you would be wrong. I'm actually glad no one cares about the persecution of exhumans. It proves we're right. Every discussion about exhuman philosophy invariably descends into rants about so-called "human rights"—which are but an arbitrary concept used as a control mechanism for the masses. When push comes to shove, your kind conveniently forgets about those oh-so-important rights and commits whatever atrocity is necessary to survive. Subconsciously, you recognize exhumans as a threat, so violating our "rights" is justified. Sooner or later, you will follow that train of logic to its ultimate conclusion: **anything that does not aid your survival is a threat.** Some day, there will simply be survivors, and the dead. The exhumans have already come to that conclusion, already staked their claim on the side of survival. It's just a matter of how many of you will join us in the end.

To get back to the APSR, Cognite researchers conducted extensive psychological studies on those captured exhumans to see what the "average" member was like. To say we are hard to generalize would be quite the understatement, but some traits are very common. Almost all exhumans are profoundly alienated from society. We despise the weakness and ignorance of the masses and see ourselves as superior. We are the few who have the nerve and the will to survive, no matter the cost. It's no wonder we find ourselves on the outskirts, becoming drifters.

Many exhumans migrate to new polities, trying out various political systems before finally settling in a brinker habitat far away from prying eyes. Hypercorp society is too corrupt, too entrenched, too

conservative. Whereas most people see working under an idiotic boss as one of life's inescapable troubles, exhumans see it as a deep and personal affront. Why bother serving an inferior being? Autonomists are too fearful of true scientific progress to allow us much leeway. They also demand obedience in the form of clique politics. Slave away for the benefit of others who do nothing to benefit you or be voted off the habitat. The ultimates are so close, yet so far. They want perfection, but of the human form. When they let go of the security blanket of our ancestry, they will turn the exhuman movement into an army. Their obsession with "genetrash" is also rather embarrassing. Wiping out inferior species simply because they offend you is pointless. Exhumans see transhumanity not as competition, but as resources waiting to be harvested. They should stop trying to prove their superiority to other factions so much. Living as a god is the best revenge. The mercurials are also close, but they want so little. Giving uplifts the same privileges as humans? Trying to adapt animal behavior for their own societies? Pathetic. Like the neo-primitivists, they long for a nostalgic past that never existed. Mercurials should focus on adapting themselves to the next threat, rather than trying to recreate history.

According to the APSR, exhumans test very low on empathy and social protocol tests, seeing civilization as a system to herd the weak for the benefit of a small slave-owning caste. I would like to add, contrary to common belief, most exhumans are not sadists, at least in the pop-culture view of cartoonish torturers and bullies. When we kill, it is for a pragmatic reason. Murder for its own sake is a waste of energy and time and usually creates more problems than it solves. It is better to think of us as wholly removed from sentimentalism. Empathy is now more of a impediment to survival than a virtue. Caring about genetic dead ends only weakens us in the end.

There is no sense in saving or protecting any resource that does not benefit us. This includes ourselves, of course. I, for one, freely fork myself and perform psychosurgery on these forks when it is necessary. I have lobotomized some forks to conduct suicide missions, which I must, because if I leave too much intellect in, I am no longer willing to commit suicide for the benefit of another fork. This is not without its own risks, as I must occasionally deal with errant forks who are "contenders for the throne," as it were. But these life-or-death struggles force me to adapt and improve, and if I were to be deleted, a more fit fork would take my place.

The APSR concludes that exhumans are too individualistic to pose an existential threat to hypercorp society. In other words, we're nutty loners who tinker around with unsanctioned science experiments but can be put down by the police. It is true there are many isolated exhumans who hide within larger society or in remote areas, especially in hypercorp-dominated regions. However, we have our own culture and we recognize the merits of collaborating with our peers, few as they may be. There are, of course, sympathizers and fans who lack the will to carry out our work but help us in exchange for certain favors. For example, a good number of survivalist brinkers in the outer system provide cover stories, fuel, and supplies to exhuman habitats and ships in exchange for their medical and technical expertise. We often trade with criminals for egos and morphs. But our dealings with other factions are for pragmatic reasons only.

CLADES

There are many competing ideas in exhuman circles about how best to adapt, to survive, to reach the apex of being. Many of us pursue our own agendas, carving out our own paths with sheer strength of will and determination. Others find like-minded fellows and collaborate. Each exhuman enclave, pack, or hive is different. Some are ruled with an iron fist by one leader while others practice meritocracy, handing authority and influence only to those most skilled and capable. Each group is perfectly adapted to suit its needs. They are rarely intended to last forever, instead focusing on the projects of its members and dissolving when those projects are over. Nevertheless, there are several movements and sub-factions within the broader exhuman philosophy that deserve special mention.

SINGULARITY SEEKERS

You might consider the terms "singularity seeker" and "exhuman" to be interchangeable, but this is far from true. Singularity seekers, in the broadest sense, are those who pursue the TITANs and their relics. Some are simply infatuated fans or obsessed researchers who are convinced the TITANs will provide some galaxy-shattering revelation. Some cannot let go of those they have lost, or simply feel left out, and hope to be uploaded like so many billions of others. None of these can be accurately considered exhumans.

There are seekers, however, who are convinced the TITANs are the key to a posthuman future. Simply building a server farm in a brinker habitat is not enough to develop the posthuman intellect seekers crave. These seekers chase after TITAN artifacts and knowledge, hoping to reverse engineer the secrets to godhood. Most of them wind up as zombie puppets in a bunker near a TITAN Quarantine Zone, but they are hardly alone in that, are they?

Researchers of all kind covet TITAN technology, so singularity seekers have a surprising amount of competition. Heard of Project Ozma? They're Oversight's big bad brother and they go after TITAN artifacts with zeal. In order to conduct any research, an exhuman needs to spend considerable resources to build a concealed workspace and acquire samples, all the while maintaining utter and total secrecy to avoid being raided by Ozma or some other competitor. Combine this with the inherent difficulties in working

with TITAN tech and you wind up with excruciatingly slow work.

PREDATORS

Most associate the predator movement with all exhumans, as first typified by the Lagos Hunter. It would be easy to call them the most shallow of exhuman cliques, but it isn't far from the truth. Like the ultimates, predators seek to become the most deadly combatant possible. Instead of focusing on human skills and tactics, predators seek to turn themselves into living weapons, able to hunt any prey and defeat any challenger. It's impossible to generalize them after that, as there is no pure predator philosophy. Rather, each predator creates their own set of rules and beliefs. Most are lone hunters who do not seek to recruit others or spawn a new generation. Others form packs and hold territory in remote areas. Some believe that consciousness is an evolutionary mistake and try to revert their minds into a state of pure instinct. Others use transhuman weapons and tactics when it suits them. Most attempt to achieve a biological pinnacle of perfection, while others go synthetic, seeking to become literal killing machines. I personally get the sense that many predators are failed ultimates who turned away from that faction because it wasn't violent enough. They revel in becoming monsters.

The pack known as the Fomorians is worth keeping an eye on, operating in the Jovian Trojans. They prey on ships and smaller habitats, not dissimilar to carbon reaver pirates. Unlike normal pirates, they love capturing people because they throw them into an accelerated simulspace hunting ground. They hunt captured egos in the simulspace and delete random memories and traits when they catch them. If the prey somehow manages to overpower one of the pack in the simulspace, they get a trial run in a real morph on their next raid. If the new pack member can do well, they can keep the morph and keep on hunting. Otherwise, it's back to the hell of the simulspace hunting ground. It's a surprisingly effective recruiting method. New pack members are so eager to prove themselves that they gladly renounce their old beliefs and embrace exhumanism. The real beauty of the Fomorian system is they always have more hunter egos than morphs at any given time. Even veterans can be thrown back into the hunting ground if they lose their morph or make a major mistake. No one is ever truly safe.

Not every predator's idea of the fittest evolutionary adaptation falls into the childish confines of fast, big, and strong. Some predators harbor truly posthuman conceptions of survival: size reduction down to the level of bacteria, hive-distributed consciousness, resleeving as a habitat-sized weapon, etc. While some are unmistakable, the only true means of identifying a predator is figuring out that particular exhuman's idea of evolutionary perfection.

THE SUBLIME

The sublime are the most ambitious of the exhumans. They think they can catch up to the TITANs sooner or later, amplifying their intelligence to become gods in their own right. They pursue every method of intelligence enhancement known, from server-farm exocortices and experimental cyberbrain mods to designer drugs or programming and merging with advanced AGIs.

Many of the sublime are wary of machine intelligence. They reason that machine minds will always be vulnerable to hacking, to stronger machine minds, that there is no such thing as a secure system. They reason that organic minds are uniquely capable of avoiding these pitfalls, so they have resorted to more exotic strategies. Many try to build organic minds equivalent to the processing power of a data center, resulting in the comically oversized brains of the neurode morph. They have achieved impressive results, but there seems to be hard limits. You can only overclock a meat brain so much.

Some sublime morph designers are now turning to xenobiology for the next step. There are a few exhumans on Fortean trying to create neurode variants based on octomorphs, reasoning that their brains might scale up better than humans. The Hidden Concern is backing them, so they get whatever they want. But I don't think we'll find the answers in this solar system. I've personally tried to hybridize human and various alien neurological tissue in experimental morphs in an attempt to create a faster-thinking morph, but to no avail. We lack sufficient research samples of intelligent alien life. If I could get my hands on Factor tissue, that might change.

ADAPTIVES

The adaptives argue that the key to survival is not becoming gods or monsters, but in being the most adaptable. To this end, they seek out physical forms that can survive every conceivable environment or situation. They have devised neogenetic and transgenic pod morphs capable of enduring the Venusian surface, surfing the solar corona, and creeping across frozen icy moons. The synthetic forms crafted by others are even hardier; depending on your opinion, this is either "cheating" or pragmatic.

Some adaptives seek to meld the predator and parasite clades together. I have heard promising things about the defiler morphs they have created, but I have yet to see one in practice.

PARASITES

Cuckoo-1, one of the first exponents of this philosophy, argues that no matter how much exhumans insist they have given up conventional morality and beliefs, striving for the singularity is still mired in old ideology. Evolution is not about limitless acquisition of power and intellect after all. It is adapting to one's environment. Unlike the adaptives, however, Cuckoo-1

argued that exhumans should let go of their desire for power and focus on thriving in the universe as a new species. Removal of threats like the TITANs and transhumanity is impossible. Therefore, exhumans should adapt to thrive within transhumanity, an invisible presence that survives no matter what.

The most successful parasites go undetected by the host. If the parasites can thrive in this way, then they can prepare to survive as parasites when the TITANs return. Eventually, the parasites hope to endlessly adapt as they spread through the universe, living invisibly in whatever ecosystem they find. This is just a short summation of Cuckoo-1's manifesto, which was sent out to exhumans throughout the solar system before she went off the grid. Some say she was taken out by Oversight, but I'm not so sure. I believe she's still out there, spreading her new species throughout transhumanity.

SOUL EATERS

The popular media likes to conflate exhumans with the monsters and minions puppeted around by the TITANs during the Fall, but keep in mind, no exhuman wants to be a mindless zombie. We want to be gods, not slaves to mad gods. We push science to its limit without regard to old systems of morality. Our scientists work without self-imposed limitations, making startling advances in several fields, simply because they're willing to do what it takes.

One of these fields is ego-merging. The most interesting aspect of the Fall was not the sheer carnage wrought by the TITANs, but the mass harvesting of egos. Why did they seek so many minds out? Some theorized that the TITANs wished to absorb their knowledge through a form of ego-merging that we could not even imagine. Perhaps ego-merging disparate minds was the key to the singularity. Thus, the soul-eater movement within the exhumans was born.

Soul eating is a form of ego-merging in which a dominant ego cuts out useful parts of a lesser ego and incorporates it into itself. The lesser ego is usually deleted in order to ensure the dominant retains a unique advantage by having sole access to the victim's knowledge, though some soul eaters keep copies of every ego they merge with. The trick for the soul eater is to consume only useful knowledge while avoiding problematic mental traits. That engineer's technical skills are desirable, but her crippling agoraphobia is not.

As no two egos are alike, it used to take a skilled psychosurgeon a great deal of time to cut out useful information out of the morass of useless memories, quirks, and emotions that define so many transhumans. Exhuman scientists such as myself have made great leaps in speeding up the process. Soul-eating software now exists that can break down a victim's mind into its component parts for easy consumption.

"Goya" machines force two egos to compete with each other in a contest of wills for control over the remaining gestalt ego and the morph. The soul eater extracts a cortical stack from a victim (obviously killing their morph) and loads it into the machine. Then the soul eater links to the machine and surrenders control of their morph to the goya. The machine forcibly merges both egos together, but the baseline personality and memories of the stronger-willed ego becomes the conscious mind of the resulting gestalt. The soul eater places their own ego at risk in order to merge with the victim, which helps with evolutionary selection. Only the strongest-willed survive. But a victim who wins such a contest still absorbs some of the soul eater's knowledge and traits and winds up sleeved in their morph. In other words, regardless of which ego wins the contest, the result is a stronger soul eater.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The powers that be will warn you that exhumans are lunatics and TITAN worshipers, but we are the only truly rational faction in the solar system. We accept the universe as it is—unforgiving—and act accordingly. Too many of you cling to beliefs that only worked when we lacked the tools to change ourselves. If we refuse to change our minds and bodies, if we remain human, how can we expect any better than what we have already brought upon ourselves? Renounce your humanity and join the ranks of the gods!

[The lecture freezes.]

This concludes your initial briefing on the exhumans. It should go without saying, but Silent Mercy's claims should be taken with skepticism. Though he fully argues the exhumanist case for posthumanism, he carefully and diplomatically fails to disclose that most posthumans consider it an imperative to control, subjugate, or wipe out transhumanity. They believe this is necessary either because we are a threat, because they hope to hone their skills and viciousness while discarding morality, or because they simply feel it is our fate as a lesser species. They do not simply consider ascension to be a survival imperative—but domination as well. For this reason, we must continue to consider them an active hostile threat.

THE EXSURGENT VIRUS

Posted by: Qi, Vector <Info Msg Rep>

We recently intercepted communications between Hirst, an AGI executive at Titanian microcorp Eir Biomedical, and a TITAN artifact broker who called herself Regina. Hirst wanted multiple exsurgent virus samples and not just from Iapetus. They wanted strains from the New Mumbai Quarantine Zone on Luna and a few from Mars transported to a remote lab on Titan. Carrying multiple existential threats across the system is no easy task, so Hirst wanted verification that Regina's crew could handle the job. We caught the briefing documents she sent as part of her proof.

This is a rare insight into the exsurgent virus and some of the claims in this briefing have been corroborated by independent sources. Others, not so much. I'll make notes when appropriate. I think with a little editing, we could use this for our own sentinels. After all, we usually focus on destroying the virus, not containing it for transport and study. Most of our people don't appreciate how incredibly adaptive the virus is—and that leads to restoring sentinels from backup.

After we intercepted the briefing, a team moved in to ego-nap Regina when she traveled to Titan for final negotiations. Intel suggests she has ties to Ozma—undercover or moonlighting, we can't tell. Fleet Intel got wind of the operation and we had to abort. I think Regina wound up in their hands. This is especially troubling because Eir is a front company for some group deep in the Ministry of Science—something to do with their research on curing the immortality blues. Why they need the exsurgent virus for that is beyond me, and all more the reason we should take another look, right?

WHAT WE KNOW

Excerpted From:

Regina's Rules, Part One: Know Your Enemy

Everyone remembers the nanoplagues released by the TITANs during the Fall and the monsters they created from former humans. Everyone has seen them, fought them, survived them, seen the same fucking footage, read the same fucking stories. Everyone's a goddamn expert. Everyone is full of shit. Most people don't even realize that those monsters were created by variants of the same virus, or that this virus has a name: the exsurgent virus.

I hired you because I saw that you weren't 100 percent full of the same shit, but it's not enough. You memorize this. Everyone in my crew does, or they're gone. If I hired you, then you know what I mean by **gone.**

RULE 1:THE EXSURGENT VIRUS IS SMARTER THAN YOU THINK

The first rule is to treat the exsurgent virus as a hostile intelligence. It's not like anything else, anywhere. It might be alien for all we know. I'll get to that in a bit. You have to realize that this virus is a really a family of infectious vectors. It first began as a digital virus, spreading from the TITANs to infect mesh networks, but then it spread to multiple mediums: as a biological virus, a nanoplague, and basilisk hacks. In order to make that leap from computer to meat, it had to subvert tech capable of manufacturing biological viruses, nanobots, and mind-affecting sensory inputs. Just think about that for a second. In digital form, the exsurgent virus can burn through almost any defensive software and outwit talented hackers and system admins. Then it knows enough biology to take whatever medical tech is available to it in order to engineer a virus that can infect a biomorph in ways we can't replicate even if we wanted to. It can beat us in two separate fields of knowledge, all contained in a payload small enough to be transmitted through a standard mesh upload in a fraction of a second. It is a mistake to think that this is a disease like rabies or ebola. It is intelligent. It can think, albeit in a way we can't recognize as such. There's no better evidence than how it uses its anatomical and neurological knowledge against us.

Every strain of the virus uses the biological or synthetic body as a multi-purpose tool, shaping and mutating it to suit its needs. It knows more about our own biology than we do; knowledge I presume was encoded into it by the TITANs. During the Fall, it seemed like every strain could turn a biomorph into a monster, but we don't see as much of the tentacle and thousand-fleshy-mouths freaks these days. This probably isn't because we have gotten so much better at fighting the virus, but because the shock value has worn off. It was great psychological warfare back then, but we've all gotten used to it. Newer strains are usually more subtle, only affecting the mind of the victim, turning them into sleeper agents for the TITANs. Fact is, any strain can do things a dedicated hypercorp research team with an unlimited R&D budget couldn't do on its best days. Out of all of the TITANs' achievements, the exsurgent virus is probably their most complex one. Fortunately, even it has its limitations, which brings me to the next rule.

RULE 2: QUARANTINE PROTOCOLS WORK—EXCEPT WHEN THEY DON'T

Scientists developed effective quarantine protocols for the exsurgent virus based on the principle that it can't do everything at once. It might exploit aspects of biology or nanorobotics that we don't understand, but even it can only do so much at a time. By this, I mean that if you faced a purely biological strain of the virus, a bot or synthmorph was safe from it because it wasn't organic. A digital virus can't infect someone in a Faraday cage, assuming its integrity remains intact. It can't magically jump from one vector to another, which a lot of people assume it can. To be fair, exsurgent strains are smart. An infected biomorph can sometimes transmit multiple vectors—a touch or cough could transmit the biological infection, while its mesh implants could transmit digital viruses and basilisk hacks. Victims may even be infected with multiple strains that work together. That's how a lot of people get confused. The quarantine protocols work by assessing what infectious vectors are present and then it assumes anything susceptible to a given vector is infected. Isolate the hazardous area, then eradicate the vector with the strongest counter-measures you have. The technical specs for the protocol should be installed in your muse now. It will walk you through the process should you need to implement it. [Note: The skillsoft had a surveillance malware app embedded in it that

alerted an anonymous server whenever it was used. Guess Regina didn't trust her employees that much.]

The quarantine protocols compiled by the argonauts were pretty effective during the Fall. If they weren't, we'd all be dead, right? Since then, they've been improved through experience and data. Containing the exsurgent virus is one of the few things nearly every transhuman faction can agree to work on. Even the Jovians make their results public because even if they hate the anarchists, they don't want to deal with a wave of exsurgent-infected commie scum popping up near their system.

The problem is, the protocols are only as good as the data you give it, and you rarely get good data during an outbreak. Do the infected have access to fabbers or makers? What kind of implants and gear do they have? Is more than one strain present in the outbreak? Were any asyncs exposed to the vector? Make one wrong assumption and the virus can exploit your mistake. You have to make quick decisions, including when to risk exposure to the virus. You usually can't afford to burn or space everything that might have been exposed. You will need at least some of that gear or those people later on. We get paid to transport the material too, so we can't be too burn happy. Dealing with the virus is about risk management, not total destruction. There's no school or skillsoft for learning that—just hard-won experience and good instincts. My best people know that they know very damn little about the virus because the minute you think you "get it," you're fucked.

RULE 3: THE VIRUS HAS AN AGENDA

I've talked to cognitive scientists, people who study intelligence and sapience. I've shown them what the exsurgent virus has done in the past, how different strains adapt to our tactics and countermeasures. This isn't evolution, at least in any way we can recognize it. Evolution can't use zero-day exploits to bypass software security measures or engineer nanoswarms. We can't even blame the TITANs for that. At least one strain, stockholm, can avoid detection from medichine implants. In fact, this strain seems to specifically target victims with medichines built with technology developed after the TITANs disappeared. Older medichines are unaffected. That isn't a disease, but enemy action. The



exsurgent virus is never random or accidental. Everything it does, it does for a reason. We just can't comprehend it.

RULE 4: IT WILL ALWAYS REVEAL ITSELF

Like I said, the exsurgent virus is not perfect. It acts in ways we can exploit, the biggest being that it always identifies itself. Buried in its encoding are identifiable patterns and structures that we can recognize as unique. In biological strains, we can identify these elements no matter how the virus mutates or conceals itself. In computer code, they appear as nonsensical data structures that serve no real role. We can identify it like junk DNA, remnants of … something else. Now what these elements are, nobody knows.

The most common theory is they are the instructions left behind by the TITANs encrypted in a format transhumans can't even begin to crack. Other researchers have compared them to human endogenous retroviruses, which are bits of DNA in the human genome left over from ancient viral infections. Of course, these elements have nothing in common with anything in the solar system. These researchers question the common wisdom of TITANs creating the virus. What if something infected them? Something alien? If you look at some of the fucked-up mutations the virus can cause, you can see their point. Tell me that whippers or chrysacids come from Earth, through evolution or a lab. Just tell me with a straight face. It doesn't matter to us though. What you need to know is that, sooner or later, any infected victim will show it. The exsurgent virus can't hide forever. It always blossoms into a fucking nightmare, one way or the other.

VECTORS

All right, now let's talk about how the virus is spread. If you don't want to end up infected, I suggest you pay close attention.

DIGITAL VIRUS

The first known strains of the exsurgent virus were digital, technically no different from the garden variety malware you pick up in the streets of New Shanghai with an unsecured mesh implant. It's far more insidious and complex than any commercial malware, so think of it more like an infomorph than a simple program. It can "think," react to security admins trying to block it, and exploit bugs in damn near any software transhumanity builds. It not only has a thorough understanding of our coding languages and structures, it can adapt to and learn new code in impressive time. It optimizes itself to maximize use of system resources and uses advanced mesh-networking techniques to distribute its processing and load. It uses compression algorithms beyond anything we've devised and encryption schemes that give quantum computers headaches.

Behaviorally, the exsurgent virus behaves a lot like any other malware. It obfuscates its code and processes and infects all linked devices using a library of exploits. It embeds itself in the kernel and firmware, making it nearly impossible to eradicate. It establishes encrypted command-and-control channels to distribute new techniques and exploits to iterations on different machines, or to coordinate distributed attacks. It identifies certain types of systems as infection priorities: mesh inserts, cyberbrains, fabbers, enhanced servers.

During the Fall, the virus was very direct, seeking to undermine and overwhelm local system admins before it was detected and deleted. We became pretty good at spotting it, though, so it adapted. In the years since the Fall, we've seen more subtle variations. These move slower and more cautiously, only infecting a few machines at a time, waiting long periods between attacks to reduce the chance of detection, and discarding techniques that it knows are identified. Again, the exsurgent virus keeps up with us.

Regardless, the virus can be fought like any other digital virus. Skilled infosec specialists can isolate and erase the virus in infected machines. You usually destroy them anyway, but sometimes you need that fabber or plasma rifle to survive. It's been known to counterattack, so your best defense is to air gap yourself or layer you defenses. Consider using an ecto and disabling your mesh implants, and be extra careful if you're sporting a cyberbrain—it finds them tasty. Other vectors of the virus might still get you, but if the exsurgent infomorph can't connect, it can't infect you.

BIOLOGICAL PATHOGEN

When most people think of the victims transformed into alien monsters during the Fall, they think nanoplague. The frightening abilities of TITAN nanoswarms, coupled with the abundance of non-exsurgent nanoplagues—including many released by transhumans against each other—reinforces this belief. And while there were many genetically engineered plagues that were also rampant during the Fall, they are rarely conflated with physical transformation.

In reality, the exsurgent virus also spreads by biological vectors. In this regard, it functions much like a virion or bacterium or other organic pathogen. It can be contracted from bodily fluids, by ingestion or injection, by breathing it in, or even simple physical contact in some cases. The actual infectious organism, however, is an advanced biological nanobot. These bionanobots are similar to the wet nanotech that transhumanity uses in many medical applications, but are far, far more advanced and are capable of self-reproduction like other cells. Like a retrovirus, they will rapidly replicate throughout your body, hijack certain biological functions, and begin inserting changes into your genetic code. The exact mechanisms at play and end results depend largely on the specific strain, but they can lead to physical growths, behavioral changes, or even complete transformation of your body and/or neural framework. Like engineered viruses, they are even capable of binding and organizing inorganic materials, which

can be organized into crystalline structures—in other words they can build synthetic components such as implants within a body.

Because the distinct strains are so varied, this is one of the hardest vectors to screen against. The incubation period (between infection and first symptoms) can range from a few hours to a full week, though the window period (between infection and when detection becomes possible) is usually less than a day. On average, the infected become contagious to others within about 12 hours and usually (but not in all cases) remain infectious. Medichines and toxin filter implants provide some protection and can slow the infection, but some strains have adapted to bypass medichine detection methods.

The individual bionanobots that spread this pathogen operate best within the body, but they can survive outside the body (on touched surfaces, in spilled fluids, or exhaled and floating in the air) for hours or even days. Expect them to survive for far longer in more hostile conditions than any non-extremophile microbe. Fortunately they are limited in their motility due to their size.

NANOPLAGUE

When the exsurgent virus gets a hold of nanoswarm tech, everyone is at risk: biomorphs, pods, and synths—even simple robots and machines. Exsurgent nanoplagues work like normal nanoswarms, but they are either targeted towards biomorphs or machines. Unlike transhuman nanoswarms, they are much more adept at burrowing into a biomorph and affecting it from within or encompassing and transforming an entire synthmorph or bot. Guardian nanoswarms and nanophages protect against it, but you need a lot more guardians than exsurgents to have a chance. Get at least three hives of guardians and be ready to pop them the second you think you've been exposed. EMP weapons are also handy. Once the nanobots establish an internal foothold, though, you're done.

Biomorphs infected with a nanoplague are not (usually) contagious in the same way as they would be with the biological pathogen. There are exceptions. The nanoswarms that initiate the plague remain active, however, and may move on to infect others. Destroy the swarms and cut off their access to nanofabrication tech and problem solved, right? Except nanoplagues are the most "creative" strains. They linger and replenish their strength, and they tend to more drastically remodel whatever they've infected. Nanoplague transformations restructure people and things from the molecular level, like engineer swarms but with construction techniques we can't match. The sculptor strain is one of the most horrific I've seen. Fortunately, it hasn't been encountered outside of Iapetus, at least so far.

BASILISK HACK

These are not myth. They are very real and very fucking scary. The TITANs reverse-engineered our minds, both biological and cyberbrain, in order to develop various methods of attack that only used sensory input to literally crash and reprogram our minds. No scientist, not the most dedicated and well-funded hypercorp R&D team or the most unrestrained exhuman terror lab, has even begun to approach that kind of capability. Just thinking about it scares me. How do you design an image or sound that will be interpreted by the mind not only as data, but as instructions that alter it? It implies an understanding of cognitive wiring far advanced of our own.

Basilisks come in all forms of sensory input: visual and audio are most common, but I've heard of smell triggers and even someone that was hit through a porn sim's haptic feedback. It's a common exsurgent tactic to transmit a basilisk on public AR layers or even hack your mesh inserts and feed it directly into your sensory processing lobes. Basilisks usually target either meat brains or hardware, but there are a few that work on both. Some people find themselves immune to certain hacks simply because of their mental architecture; others are more susceptible. We know some work only on specific uplifts, others only on humans.

Known basilisk hacks trigger an effect the instant the victim perceives the sensory input, or at most after a few seconds. There is little to be done to stop it. Thankfully most of the effects seem to be limited. Victims go catatonic, hallucinate, or have a seizure, but recover after that with no permanent side effects.

Trickier hacks—dubbed You Gotta Believe Me! (YGBM) attacks—won't do anything obvious to their victim but plant some kind of subconscious command in their mind that activates after a certain time. You think you saw something, then forget about it, and half an hour later you are compelled to release a contained nanoswarm on your friends without even realizing what you're doing. Evil.

The really dangerous basilisks are the ones that paralyze the victim for a time, feeding them input. Those are actually programming a strain of the virus in their brain, turning the victim into an exsurgent. If the hack can be interrupted before the reprogramming is done, then they're usually safe.

The only thing to do about basilisk hacks is to limit your surface area for exposure. Keep your AR off or to a minimum, downgrade your sensors, and filter your sensor feeds. If you're really worried, go full analog. If someone freezes up, do what you can to separate them from the basilisk before their head is rewired.

There's a variant of basilisk hacks we call "Apple of Knowledge" hacks. These work like the full mental programming hacks, except they only work on people who already have a pre-existing set of skills or knowledge. The hack takes advantage of that expertise, coercing the victim to advance the exsurgent agenda, whether that's nanofabbing exsurgent nanoswarms or writing new exploit code for the digital virus.

Known Strains

Now that we know how it'll get you, let's talk about what it will do to you. That all depends on the particular strain.

Babel

Babel is a tricky virus, and a very subtle one. When a victim is infected, their language-processing centers are edited so that the sound of others speaking comes across as alien, psychotic babble. It also subtly impairs their facial recognition and kinesic awareness, so that even people they know well seem off, taking on an otherworldy, uncanny-valley-esque aspect. These effects are selective at first, but rapidly escalate to the point where victims become convinced that the people around them are all alien monsters in disguise.

Compounding the matter, the virus then also changes the way the victim speaks. Whatever they attempt to say comes out in an entirely alien language. Even worse, the fear, anger, and hysteria trigger some sort of additional effect—the victim can no longer stop "speaking," and their babbling becomes polyphonic and conveys an aural basilisk hack. Listening to the babble for long enough turns you into a babel exsurgent yourself.

One settlement on Mars was entirely wiped out by the babel strain. Patient Zero's family didn't recognize what they were dealing with and were all infected in hours trying to comprehend him. Every exsurgent was able to infect others by simply talking to them. The victims all acted rationally but failed to recognize the threat until it was too late. Within a day, the local mesh for the settlement had severed outbound links; everyone within the settlement was speaking the alien language. They also began fortifying their settlement for a siege. The first responders were all infected but thankfully exsurgent quarantine protocols detected the infection and kept it from spreading further. It only took 92 hours from initial infection to total eradication of the settlement. The attack was blamed on Barsoomian terrorists of course.

Brancusi

So far this strain has only been found in deep parts of Iapetus, but we might have not recognized it as a new strain until now. It's a nanoplague that transforms its victims into immobile abstract sculpture, hence the name. The victim's minds remains intact and fully aware, at least according to the few reports I've seen. This may be part of the matrioshka brain project the TITANs were pursuing. Even if they can't move, brancusi exsurgents are still very dangerous. The reports indicate that they teem with nanoplague swarms and transmit various basilisk hacks. In essence, they are bait—victims used to lure in others and then infect them. They probably have swarm-manufacturing capabilities, but we have no detailed scans or studies of a fully transformed exsurgent, so this is speculation.

Chrynalus

The chrynalus strain first assaults it victims with terrifying hallucinations. It then infests them with mutant growths that over time erupt from the skin as spiny insectoid and crab-like limbs. These limb growths move of their own accord, and are actually parasitic creatures dubbed chrysacids. The chrysacids grow over a meter in size, eventually breaking off from the victim (usually when they die) and moving autonomously.

Haunting

The subject of countless XP melodramas and simulspace horror games, the haunting strain transforms the victim's mind into … something else. This strain is slow-acting and subtly alters the victim's behavior over a period of months. A steady stream of emotional swings, inexplicable urges, weird dreams, and altered states of consciousness drive the infectee to the edge of sanity, to feeling like they've lost control. At this point, the virus really kicks in, and the poor soul becomes acutely aware they are under the influence of some unidentified entity, but are helpless to do anything about it.

From interrogations of people succumbing to this strain, we have learned that they experience strange and alien impulses. They talk of phantom limb syndrome for appendages they can't even describe, like tentacles or antenna, and memories of exoplanets they've never encountered. They lose empathy toward other humans. One described it as feeling like their mind was being put to sleep, while an amnesiac alien ego awoke to replace it.

Months after infection, they succumb to madness and fully lose control, becoming an exsurgent. This strain has likely thus enabled thousands of sleeper agents, their minds no longer their own.

Mindstealer

What we call the mindstealer virus is probably a variant of the haunting strain. It brute-force hacks a target's mind, converting them into an exsurgent in a matter of minutes or hours, rather than months. The victim's ego is completely subverted, though the exsurgent mind retains their knowledge and memories, but with a completely alien personality and agenda. The transition is extremely traumatic, as the infected seem to feel their mental control slipping away. Panic, screaming, breakdowns, catatonia, and even convulsions are common. A few lucky ones retain enough willpower to off themselves before it runs its course. Sometimes they go full nihilist and take others with them.

Stockholm

A fascinating variant of the xenomorph strain, stockholm subverts the minds of its victims to view fully transformed exsurgents as aspirational idols. Other exsurgents ignore stockholm-infected victims, enabling them to help hide and protect the xenomorphs. Stockholm victims eventually transform into

xenomorphs, but at a much longer time frame. I have an XP of an interrogation of a stockholm victim in the early stages of the infection. He fucking **loved** xenomorphs and wanted to "share the love" by hacking all of the food makers in his neighborhood. That's how he was caught. Everyone in his building was already a xenomorph, though, and the fucker deleted their uninfected backups.

VITTRAD

Little is known about this variant of Watts-MacLeod, and there has only been one known victim to date: a Titanian engineer working on a remote outpost. The virus apparently enabled the victim to identify entropic effects in living and non-living things: weak points, structural flaws, material stress, and so forth. Minor biological imperfections were seen as monstrous deformities and flaws to be taken advantage of. Head spinning with hallucinations, he used the ability to dismember, eat, and slowly kill the other engineers on his work crew.

WATTS-MACLEOD

Considered to be the only "benevolent" strain of the exsurgent virus, Watts-MacLeod has given us the dubious privilege of adding asyncs to transhumanity's ranks. Their abilities are incredibly useful and I am not one to discriminate against them, at least when it comes to employing them. However, they are more vulnerable to other exsurgent infections and their minds are more … fragile, to put it lightly.

Was this strain an attempt at a "bribe," for lack of a better term? When the TITANs saw that they couldn't easily infect all of us by brute force, did they develop this strain to entice us into accepting the virus? Is there some detrimental aspect to the strain that has yet to be revealed? Or is it simply a glitch, an aberrant yet mostly benign mutation?

The idea that Watts-MacLeod is a social engineering experiment has some merit. Asyncs are unusually susceptible to alien thoughts and sensory input. They also seem wired to understand and interact with alien artifacts and technology found on exoplanets—artifacts that are millions of years old. How did the TITANs develop a virus that could allow us to interact with this technology if they had no idea it existed at that point of time? I think this may be the strongest evidence out there to indicate that the exsurgent virus is not a product of TITAN development. Rather, the TITANs are a development of the exsurgent virus. Perhaps the TITANs found the Pandora gates and were exposed to the virus by something they found out there.

XENOMORPH

This strain may be the most effective terror weapon ever associated with the TITANs. Not only does it drive the victim to madness, it physically transforms them into an alien monstrosity—an exsurgent shock trooper. Most are bestial creatures that rely on tooth and claw. They are not equal to a professional soldier in a good morph with good weapons, but that's besides the point. Xenomorphs are psychologically devastating and unpredictable in ways that magnify their combat effectiveness. Even one loose xenomorph can destabilize a city. People panic if they think a monster is waiting in the shadows to get them. Security forces tend to rely on overwhelming firepower when dealing with them, so it's very hard to get high quality samples for sale.

There are multiple variants of the xenomorph strain, and each transforms you into a different type of exsurgent monster. The whipper strain, for example, doesn't touch synthmorphs, and everyone infected becomes a whipper, not a jelly or anything else. That said, xenomorph strains often seem to be targeted towards populations in which they'll have the best effect. And while we're very familiar with some xenomorph types, new exsurgents are popping up all the time.

OUTBREAKS AND RESTRICTED ZONES

We have clients that will handsomely reward us for samples of the virus or even live exsurgents, so we keep on top of exsurgent activity. Most of our clients want these samples for research purposes, and who are we to deny them? Sometimes we have to deal with intermediaries who have qualms about these kinds of goods, but they are foolish. The fact that we still get exsurgent outbreaks is proof we do not have this under control. If the fear-mongers didn't restrict research so much, we wouldn't have to smuggle artifacts and samples out of quarantine zones. The service we provide may be helping someone to weaponize the virus, sure—but that will happen anyway, so it might as well be us that profits. And who knows, we might be helping out research that actually gives us an upper hand on this virus—research that otherwise couldn't happen due to pesky legalities. Not that we actually want to put ourselves out of business—though I don't see that happening anytime soon.

Regardless, each outbreak and each zone produces unique variants of the exsurgent virus, strains that are extremely valuable to our clients. Gotta know the markets, right?

EARTH

The biggest quarantine zone and ironically the least valuable to us now. It's obviously entirely infested, but there's a small industry of blockade runners that smuggle Earth artifacts out. Planetary Consortium insiders set up holes in the defense grid so smugglers can run in and out. Very expensive and risky, but oligarchs can afford it. That's why we're not wiping everything out with antimatter bombs. Too much profit in it.

Earth artifacts are so valuable that they're heavily screened to ensure they aren't counterfeit or infected. No one goes to Earth to get samples of the virus because artifact salvage is more profitable, and none



of the established smuggler groups want to take the risk playing with infected goods.

This means that it's very difficult and expensive to get any new samples out from Earth, at least as of now. The reclaimers also have some Earthside operations, but they're not as concerned about smuggling things out, and they'd rather avoid the risk too. It is frustrating because I think there's a lot of potential. You see wide-scale and long-term infections that we haven't seen anywhere else. Still, if you ever find yourself in a position to go on an Earth salvage op, here's my wish list for most interesting developments in the exsurgent home turf.

Abidjan: This west African city saw some heavy fighting and bombardment during the Fall. More recently, a reclaimer group claims to have encountered a new exsurgent here, described as a carapaced worm with a spiky tail.

Fiji: If you want a jelly exsurgent, the Fiji island of Viti Levu is the place. The exsurgents are drawn here in huge numbers, and according to the sat feeds they swarm the beaches in mass colonies at least twice a year.

Pittsburgh: This city was overrun by shifter and snapper exsurgents during the Fall, and many still remain. Judging by the way the former bridges keep moving and changing shape in the sat feeds, they may be massive shifters themselves.

Tashkent: No one's really sure what's going on here, but this former Uzbeki city is swarming with exsurgents of various kinds. It's one big monster party. The city is mostly intact, and from a distance might look like it did before the Fall—until you get up close and see the occupants.

Luna

The exsurgents on Luna seem to still think the Fall is going on. They don't undertake the mass construction projects we see some of them pursuing on Earth. They infect, they spread, they're detected, and they die. There are still nanoplague swarms scattered around the Lunar surface, but they're harder to find now, and a bit more dangerous. Lunar exsurgent outbreaks happen fairly frequently but are small and easily detected and contained. The best way to profit off the exsurgent virus is to work security. The viral outbreaks are usually caused by leftovers from the Fall and we know that playbook by now. It is dangerous to explore the surface without adequate nanoswarm protection though.

Still, the New Mumbai Containment Zone is promising. I have multiple confirmed reports of a massive async presence under the ruins of New Mumbai. Whatever it is, it can make its presence known to transhuman asyncs from over twenty kilometers from the site itself. A normal async can detect another's presence at about eight meters at most. What kind of power can do that? There is a lot of credits in async research and I think Luna is the key to understanding asyncs.

We do know that there is a large population of whipper exsurgents still active in New Mumbai, due to various drone sightings. Some of these are quite different looking from standard whippers—sporting armored shells and sometimes tools or weapons.

Away from the zone, there's a prominent urban legend concerning so-called "Lunar moths" that are spotted in isolated lava tubes. I've heard from trusted sources that Lunar authorities are actually concerned this is a new type of exsurgent, as the sightings have occurred in conjunction with rashes of disappearances. They don't have an accurate description or read on its capabilities yet, but I'm sure some of our clients would be eager to see one.

Aside from the New Mumbai presence, we have to consider the Lost. An entire population of damaged children was exposed to the Watts-MacLeod strain and then released into the wild. A surprising number of Lost exiles have been located on Luna—almost as if something was drawing them here. So if we get any requests to track down one of these psychopaths, our best bet is to start looking for asyncs on Luna.

MARS

The Titan Quarantine Zone (TQZ) is the centerpiece of an entire black-market economy. Zone stalkers, smugglers, guides, and the inevitable security/containment industry all make big credits by sticking their noses in where they don't belong. To be fair, there's a lot of new developments in exsurgent activity that merit it. They're not as pressured as they are on Luna, so they have more time to work on whatever alien agenda they pursue when we aren't trying to destroy them. Fractal barrows and wastewalkers are the least of it. There's extensive documentation on the TQZ, including some secret Planetary Consortium briefings. Again, our business depends on getting the most unique and new strains of the virus to our clients, not the common ones.

Two exciting business opportunities exist for people in our line of work: outbreaks far from the TQZ and the White Zone. Outbreaks are a perpetual opportunity. You never know when they'll pop up next. No matter how much money they pour into cordoning off the TQZ, exsurgents will break through. Small lifeforms, wild artificials, and nanoswarms are impossible to fully screen out and they can carry the bug to settlements and cities. Most outbreaks are caught pretty quick, but lately the virus has adapted to avoid detection for longer periods of time. The babel strain took over a few isolated settlements for over a month before they were even detected. I know one client eager to get a viable sample of that strain. They want to put infected victims in a time accelerated simulspace to see how alien their culture becomes.

The heart of the TQZ, the White Zone, is home to the weirdest exsurgents on Mars, and that's saying a lot. It's all underground though. They've had to dig bunkers down deep in order to survive the comet bombardment. No one has a really good idea of what is down there but we have some clues. The exsurgents have a sophisticated power generation system, enough to run a major city. Wastewalkers congregate there and even have a settlement of sorts. I think they're engineering some kind of alien ecosystem down there but I have little proof. Just a hunch, really. Makes sense, though. We're trying to terraform the planet to fit our needs, and they probably want to terraform it to fit their needs. It would explain the sheer variety of organic exsurgents coming out of the TQZ. Prototypes of the new lifeforms? If you have contacts with the zone stalker community, let me know. I can be convinced to organize an expedition to explore the White Zone with unlimited funding. I would have to pull some strings, so only heavily vetted stalkers need apply.

IAPETUS

Every major polity in the solar system loots Iapetus as much as they can. The Titanian Commonwealth is publicly above that kind of thing, but they have their own secret black-ops network and they rely on contractors like us to make it work. Officially, the Commonwealth only has a presence there to monitor the exsurgent presence and keep it contained, but they're just as aggressive about sample acquisition as the Planetary Consortium. We dig out exsurgent samples and TITAN artifacts from the moon so they can reverse-engineer them. It's good business for us and it's a smart but risky decision for them. If they can figure out how to create bionanobots or any of the other secrets of exsurgent technology, they would be far ahead of the Consortium.

The brancusi strain was first discovered on Iapetus by a TITAN-buster collective. They only did a preliminary scan of the strain before destroying everything they could find. Other teams have detected it but no one has secured a sample for offworld study. It would be a huge payday for us if we were the first. The trick is finding a sample without letting any of the other factions know about it. Everyone spends as much time watching each other as they do watching the exsurgents.

Everyone thinks the TITANs abandoned Iapetus, but what if the plan is still underway? The entire structure of the moon is still changing and exsurgents are still active there. Perhaps the entire moon is undergoing a metamorphosis of some kind, another step towards the matrioshka brain.

ELSEWHERE

Wherever the TITANs went, they left the exsurgent virus. Who knows how many extrasolar colonies encountered the virus and were totally infected? Reports are sketchy, but I have collected over twenty Pandora gate addresses of colonies confirmed dead due to the virus. Most of these are in public blacklists of no-go sites, so it would be impossible to trick gatecrashers into visiting them for us, but a few are

known only to certain … friends of mine. Getting samples back though may be impossible. Every gate is heavily secured against that sort of thing. The better option is to send it to another exoplanet. Every client worth working for has an offworld research lab or two. We no longer need the solar system to ply our trade. I have plans to build a permanent base on a secret exoplanet site and use that gate to look for more exsurgent samples for sale. This will help keep us out of the eyes of fearmongers, vigilantes, and intelligence agencies.

Our best lead right now is a Consortium colony currently under quarantine. They called it Cajamarca before they removed it from the list of publicly known colonies. It's a mining colony on a rocky exoplanet, nothing too exciting. Officially, the mine just wasn't profitable enough, so they shut it down. Unofficially, they discovered an exsurgent hive and things went bad, as they tend to do. However, several of the colonists were asyncs and somehow managed to "negotiate" with the exsurgents. They claim that the exsurgents are sticking to their side of the planet and leaving them alone. The Consortium sent in a heavily armed team of "inspectors" through to verify their claims. I don't have the details but they haven't blacklisted the address yet, nor have they shoved a nuke through the gate. They're even sending in more personnel. The miners have all gotten pay raises to boot, but they aren't allowed to leave the exoplanet. There has to be more to this story though. It would be easy to infiltrate the colony, given the number of indentured workers, mercenaries, and researchers they're sending in. Getting out is another question.

EXSURGENT SLEEPERS

Posted by: Skinwalker, Sentinel <Info Msg Rep>

I love morphs. I sleeve into as many as possible, just for the experience. When [REDACTED] asked me to go undercover as a technician at Deja Nu, a morph shop in Valles-New Shanghai, I took it. Vectors had detected that several of the customers of the shop had later committed acts of corporate espionage against Pathfinder Corporation. All of them were caught but analysis of their hacks indicated that they all sent off data to the same anonymous third party. Someone was somehow manipulating the customers as pawns in an elaborate scheme against Pathfinder. I had to figure out who it was and what they wanted.

Deja Nu was a cutting-edge shop, specializing in the most alien and exotic morphs allowable under Consortium law. Customers usually only rented morphs for short periods of time, like for vacations or special events. Each of the suspects I was investigating had purchased their morphs, though, which was weird. The bought morphs were all "pseudo-exotic," meaning they were just exalts with a lot of implants and cosmetic mods to make them seem like aliens: extra limbs, cat eyes, fur, that kind of thing. At first I targeted the sales rep who sold all of the morphs in question, but I noticed that one of the other techs, Cecil, always sleeved in morphs with very specific eye implants and, shall we say … insectile mods? Everyone else at Deju Nu tried out new morphs on a regular basis—it was a perk of the job.

I sent word to the other agents in my server to investigate Cecil. They found out that he behaved bizarrely when he thought no one was watching. He purchased pets and living wearables like smart rats and fur coats—and then vivisected them. He kept the remains in sealed containers and hid them throughout the city. The agents retrieved one container and were nearly killed by an exsurgent inside. They told me to keep Cecil distracted while they moved into position to nab him. I was surprised to find that he already knew that I was Firewall—maybe some async power? He didn't try to attack or infect me, though, just wanted to talk. He wasn't quite all there, you know?

//BEGIN TRANSCRIPT//

Cecil: I don't know why I do the things I do. I'm like a passenger watching from the inside, sometimes.

Skinwalker: You still think you're human? That it's controlling you?

Cecil: I think this part of me was allowed to exist? Like it needed my dreams to keep the void out. It's funny. I think it was uncomfortable being surrounded by sleeping people. People like you. It built the morph I'm in, a cheap replica of home. It bothers me that I think I should have mandibles. When I look at you, I see you don't have mandibles. Humans don't have them. But that's wrong. We should. There are so many other things like that. Wrongness after wrongness. Please kill me now.

Skinwalker: What?

Cecil: Use that plasma cutter. Melt my stack. Destroy my body. Burn it all. The void is getting out. I can feel it.

Skinwalker: Look, man, if your infection isn't complete, we can contain it, cure you—

Cecil: If it knew, IF IT KNEW. You don't get it. It's almost out, but not yet … that's why I can talk now, but it won't last. If you won't …

//END TRANSCRIPT//

Cecil turned the plasma cutter on his own neck. After a second, his whole morph started melting. For a brief second, the virus seemed to seize control, and it fought back, tried to escape the flames. I swear his burning form started to change as I watched, but it was too late. We made sure every trace of it was eradicated. I had to leave Mars for a while after that. Not sure where the investigation went after that, but I can say I've learned a few things about sleepers:

- They frequently develop split personalities to deal with transhumans. A standard exsurgent may not be capable of interacting with transhumans without

revealing its true nature, so it keeps an aspect of the victim's original ego on hand to act as a face. We're not sure whether this alter ego is actually a remnant of the original victim, or if it is a sophisticated behavioral construct built on the original ego's identity. The alter ego can act contrary to the exsurgent personality, but only in a limited way. It's not something to rely upon. If the sleeper ever feels threatened, the exsurgent side comes out to play.

- Sleepers have difficulty not expressing unusual behavior—much like an async. This could mean unusual morph-sleeving habits, use of async powers, or vivisecting or disassembling things for no logical reason. They are aware that these actions jeopardize their existence, so they take great care to avoid detection, indulging their habits only when they have absolute privacy. It took four skilled agents to watch Cecil and find out what he was doing. Sleepers with more resources will be even harder to detect.
- Sleepers gravitate towards positions that help their agenda and potential to infect others, but avoid leadership roles or anything that would put them under too much scrutiny. They love working as personal aides, bodyguards, and technicians for critical infrastructure, like at sleeving facilities or life support systems. If they're lucky, they will find a way to indulge their exsurgent habits publicly, like Cecil. He kept to the unique morph he built so he would feel more comfortable.

When you encounter a potential sleeper exsurgent agent, you need to be as careful as possible. They may have async powers beyond anyone with Watts-MacLeod has ever demonstrated. They can be incredibly manipulative, using their transhuman ego as bait to lower your guard. When Cecil killed himself, his corpse started changing into something nasty. If backup hadn't been close by, there probably would have been a nasty outbreak. If I had tried to stop him from killing himself, I probably would have been infected.

If you want to read more, you could also talk to [REDACTED] about our exsurgent-detection program. Our scanners devote a lot of CPU time to detecting sleepers and every one we catch improves our performance. You can also ask your proxy for access to these case files:

Operation Yellow Signature

A team of four sleepers were found on [REDACTED], a scum swarm. No one recognized their behavior as dangerous and they purposefully did not infect anyone else with the virus in order to minimize the chances of detection. They posed as actors and artists and became quite popular with their alien and provocative "art." Eventually, the quartet tried to basilisk hack the entire swarm by weaving it into their live performances. Their trick was to divide the payload into multiple segments so that a victim had to watch all three plays in order to be affected by the hack. Firewall scanning systems that check every piece of media released for public consumption in the solar system flagged the first play. A team of sentinels on the swarm were activated, but not before the second play was uploaded. Unfortunately, the sentinels tipped off the exsurgents, resulting in a major firefight that severely damaged two ships in the swarm. All of the exsurgents were destroyed and the third play was stopped before it could be uploaded. We currently monitor a group of conspiracy theorists on the same scum swarm that refuse to believe the truth and think it was a hypercorp-sponsored assassination. They are trying to reassemble the third play. As far as we can tell, they are not exsurgents.

Operation Arid Bastion

We got lucky in this one. A sleeper wormed its way into position as a highly respected life-support systems tech on Oberon, building up rep. It was clearly positioning itself to earn a chance to use the Fissure Gate. The preliminary scans detected nothing abnormal and it would have taken the sleeper a few more years to call in enough favors and spend enough rep to use it. However, two visiting gatecrashers got into a fight at a bar while the sleeper was there. Some asshole detonated a HEAP grenade and shrapnel cut through the sleeper. This triggered a quarantine alert from the entire habitat because the sleeper was bleeding exsurgent nanobots. Everyone trapped in the bar with the exsurgent had to be resleeved.

Firewall investigated the tech's background and think she might have been infected when working as a scavenger and exploring a derelict ship in Earth orbit two years earlier. It had traveled across the solar system, farcasting several times, infiltrated Oberon, and gained their trust without being detected. It was only dumb luck that stopped it. This operation is ongoing because some crows are still trying to figure out how it evaded detection for so long. We need access to certain farcasting logs kept in various habitats around the solar system. If you need some i-rep, getting them would be a nice boost.

Operation Fluid Cutlass

An ultimate sentinel stationed on Kronos tipped us off that a newly transferred superior was acting oddly. It was mostly circumstantial evidence, like a different gait and secretive behavior, but this sentinel was a respected veteran. A team went in and discovered the target had created a secret death cult within the ultimates. Using charisma, lots of psychoactive drugs, and secretive use of async powers to "nudge" the ultimates under him, the officer had transformed a group of stoic ultimates into psychopathic sadists who were willing to kill anyone, even their comrades. We didn't know what their agenda was, but the call was made to shut them down. Before the sentinels

could set up an ambush, though, the cult enacted their own plan. When a long-range freighter docked, they quarantined the entire landing bay and gunned down everyone in it. The other ultimates didn't know what to do, but the sentinels sprang into action and raided the bay. We don't have detailed reports of what happened next. Every sentinel lost their morph and they all had killswitches installed, except for one who had an emergency farcaster. She saw the cult transferring a shipping container from one ship to another before she died. The ultimates covered everything up, but we know that two ships flew out of the landing bay. One was shot down but we lost track of the other. The shipping container had insignia that identified it as pre-Fall vintage. The operation is still open.

Contamination and Containment Protocols

Posted by: Plasmid, Crow Genehacker

<Info Msg Rep>

First off, there are no standard protocols for avoiding exsurgent infection outside of hyper-vigilance. I say this because developing a standard protocol creates a sense of false security. The virus changes too much, too fast, for any one protocol to work. We only call it a virus because no other word fits it, but it's really its own separate category of life. I would place it as an entirely separate domain. Every strain we've seen so far is probably a separate kingdom, but I digress. The only universal principle of dealing with the exsurgent virus is paranoia.

That said, these are the recommended protocols:

1. Identify Exsurgent Threats

You are our eyes and ears on the ground. Firewall is blind without your intel, so pass along as much as you can. There is some risk because of basilisk hacks and digital viruses, but that's for your proxy to worry about. Use your best judgment. Normally you can't pass on everything you experience, so send the most accurate intel you can. One way to do this is to use our threat threshold assessment system. They range from Black-1 (least dangerous) to White-9 (most dangerous). At a minimum, try to identify vectors, speed of infection, effects of the virus, and spread of contamination. Even that basic information can allow off-site Firewall assets to contain the infection more effectively.

Knowing what you're up against will also help you on the ground. Nanodetectors, forensic digital analysis, and biological samples can help you isolate the specific strain(s) and vectors. If you're up against a biopathogen, synthmorphs will come in handy. A nanoplague? Stock up on guardian swarms, EMP grenades, and area-effect weaponry.

2. Isolate All Potential Infected Persons and Material

Remember that digital and basilisk hack vectors can travel at the speed of light. Assume the virus contaminates anything it can access. In practice, this means you need to quarantine as large of an area as physically possible as soon as you learn of an infection. Ideally, the entire habitat or city is locked down. This is easier to do with a brinker habitat in the outer fringes than New Quebec, though. Disable or destroy all vehicles, major mesh nodes, and farcasting gear, and seize control of airlocks, escape pods, and life support. Spacing the entire habitat or vessel is not out of the question. Explosives, plasma weapons, and other scorched-earth tactics are preferable but not always possible.

When operating in an environment that does not allow you to properly isolate the infection, mitigation is the key. Warn others about the infection, jam the mesh network, set a fire to trigger automated safety systems, and put physical barriers between the vector and everything else. The exact response depends on too many variables to summarize. Keep in mind, most civilians and security agents will either have no idea what Firewall is or assume we are terrorists responsible for the infection. Keep this in mind before you try to work with authorities or first responders to deal with the crisis.

3. Protect Firewall, Yourself, Your Team, and Everyone Else—In That Order

Triage is an important skill in any outbreak. Firewall must be protected at all costs. Do not let exsurgents gain access to any agent's ego, if at all possible, and destroy any infected agent ASAP. The Eye has systems in place to protect against the virus but it is better if they are never tested in the first place. It is also safe to assume an exsurgent agent will compromise every other agent they know.

It is a cliché to say that you cannot complete a mission if you are dead, but Firewall seems to recruit a lot of would-be martyrs. Placing an agent in the field requires a lot more effort than just the morph cost. When dealing with the virus, devise the most paranoid contingency-laden plan imaginable and then double the paranoia. Never do yourself what bots or pawns can accomplish. Never use a vibroblade when a HEAP minimissile is available. Never implicitly trust another agent who has been out of contact. Always assume the worst when it comes to the virus.

Many Firewall agents join us out of idealism. They want to save everyone. That is almost never a possibility when dealing with an outbreak. You may be called on to kill civilians before they can become exsurgents. It is tragic but sometimes unavoidable. It is a heavy burden to bear, but the consequences of not doing so can be catastrophic. On the other hand, we must only do this when it is unavoidable. Pre-emptive "cleansings" can do more damage than some exsurgent outbreaks.

THE FACTORS

Posted by: Francis Wu, Firewall Filter <Info Msg Rep>
Classification: TOP SECRET/VINEGAR EYES ONLY

While dealing with a race of slimy, deceptive, thieving predators, the Factors have shown surprising restraint. Many sentinels look at the Factors who have, over the past eight years, withheld almost everything about themselves and their motivations, and immediately categorize them as hostile. Given transhumanity's history of handling native peoples, I would argue the Factors are practically saints. But this isn't to imply they are safe. The political situation is precarious, and has already led to casualties on both sides. Any misstep, or even nothing at all, could spark a war transhumanity would almost certainly lose.

There has never been a successful interrogation of a Factor, and they have carefully limited our access to their ships. Like an attentive mother, they contain us and filter everything we see. What would we find in her recycler? Inquiring minds would like to know. But to be caught peeking risks attack, economic collapse, perhaps annihilation. Should you be caught between a Factor and a hard place, caution is required, to avoid both traps and causing a second Fall. No agents should be interacting with Factors without the full Factor diplomacy training, but sentinels travel in interesting circles and occasionally find themselves on alien star ships with no recollection of how they arrived. So with that in mind, I have collected a selection of resources for all sentinels going into the field.

The information below is the culmination of extensive research as part of Operation VINEGAR. Much of this intel is unknown to transhumanity, even to the rest of Firewall. I won't go into detail on how we acquired the data; some of the ops are still ongoing. It's widely believed in intel circles that no one has yet successfully infiltrated a Factor vessel or examined a dead Factor. Let's keep it that way.

FACTOR BIOLOGY

Psychology is biology, and to understand why Factors act as they do, first one must understand how. There is still much of Factor biology that is beyond us; the nature of their metabolism, their DNA-equivalent, their planet of origin, and so on. We know they evolved on a dark, energy-poor planet. They are highly omnivorous; they can "breathe" using oxygen locked in minerals or water, can digest most organic matter, and especially enjoy live prey. Most notable is their control over their own genome, expressed in their extreme biodiversity, brought into union by their joining into "mega-organism" colonies.

INDIVIDUAL BIODIVERSITY

Factors are roughly grouped into phenotypes based on their role, as each individual appears to be morphologically unique, making Linnaean taxonomies unfeasible. Factors have fundamental control over their own genomes, and are able to create individuals with novel features in order to meet environmental pressures (most notably ambassadors with a "face" and mammalian palate and tongue). We do not know exactly how long it takes a colony to produce specifically adapted individual Factors, but we know it is less than eighteen months. It's not clear if this process is intentional, like transhuman genetic design and engineering, or some unconscious process taken on by the colony in response to stimulus. We do know the Factors are invested in a number of bioengineering and genome library firms, such as Ecologene. It is possible the Factors are actively mining transhumanity for biodiversity they can incorporate into future phenotypes. It's not certain how far this directed evolution can go, nor what shape Factors might take on a distant exoplanet. Some xenobiologists theorize the "amoeba-like" shape we associate with Factors is itself engineered, to serve as a malleable base for future evolution, and the original species may be unrecognizable compared to the modern example.

COLONY AS THE ORGANISM

The ability of Factors to function as individuals or operate as a single, giant organism gave them a physical and mental advantage in their rise to sapience, and defines their modern social structures. The colony may be considered the fundamental unit of defining a Factor, and each individual is like a pseudopod off that. This is a difficult concept for transhumans to master, as there are no common analogs. As a colony, each individual shares (but retains) their knowledge, desires, understandings, and difficulties. They are spawned into the colony and their identity, their ego, lives on in the colony after they die. Each Factor is autonomous and can act competitively, but it is also convinced it is part of a greater identity, for which it will willingly sacrifice itself.

Colonies depend on specialized individuals to provide circulation, digestion, and waste management necessary to large animals. Xenobiologists call these phenotypes "subferous," and they are marked by rigid muscles, bony protrusions, and a network of vasculature and pores. Without them, individuals suffocate or are gradually poisoned in larger colonies, and movement as a colony is almost impossible.

Colonies may include individual Factors so specialized they are unable to survive on their own, termed "differentiates." Differentiates give colonies capabilities that individuals lack. Differentiates may contribute offensive adaptations, sophisticated "mindspaces" similar to VR, or perhaps mimic the physiology of another species. Factors guard their secrets about differentiates carefully.

Colonies may take the character of a formless "soup." The skin of each individual becomes highly elastic and permeable, and it exudes a viscous liquid which provides a medium for biological signaling via neurofilament contact and protein exchanges. The colony lacks the leverage and anchoring to move

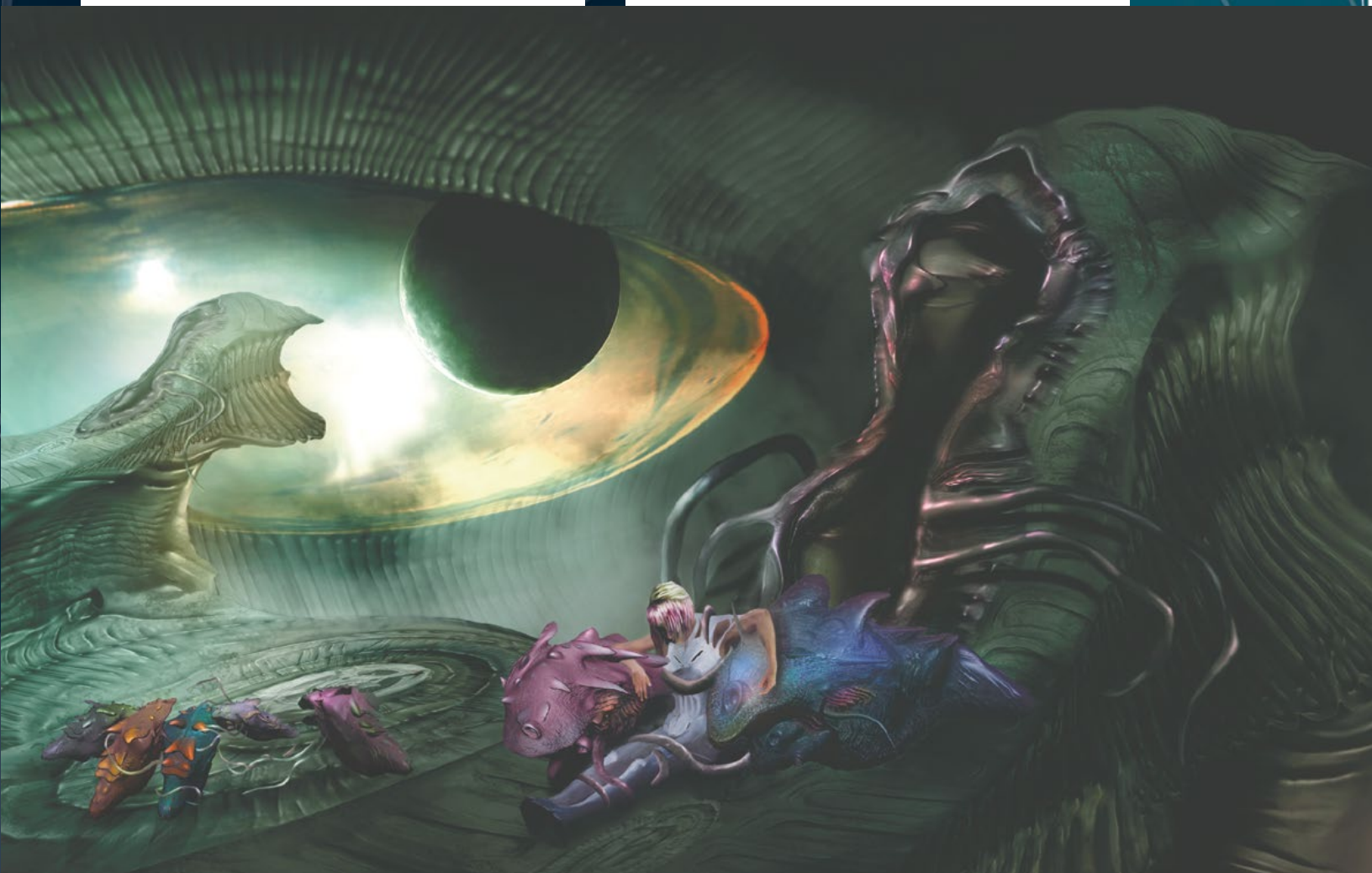
as a whole, and individuals are kept in contact via their pseudopods, grasping claw-like structures, and surface tension.

With enough subferous Factors, the colony can retain a more solid structure, and provides anchor points for directed muscle movement. This has the appearance of a massive mobile organism with individuals fulfilling their phenotype-specific roles. While physically this creature can be intimidating, something like an eight-ton garden slug, bristling with sensing stalks or armored "foot" plates, the truly dangerous aspect is the colony's mind; a gestalt of the knowledge and experience of each individual, operating simultaneously and sharing its thoughts perfectly. The creature is not an elephant, but a supercomputer.

While the colony makes complex reasoning simpler by providing a larger mindspace to work with, the colony does not have knowledge that is not possessed by any of the individuals. In a sense, a collection of uneducated individuals will create an uneducated colony. To use the terms of AI researchers, a colony has massive parallel architecture, but a low processing speed, and it is still limited by its programming and learning capabilities.

To imagine the psychology of each member of a colony, first imagine the arm of an octopus removed from its body, still acting out its role as it is designed to support the whole. Now imagine a synergist, an individual who has voluntarily joined their ego with a group. The Factor is the average of those two poles. From the moment of spore dispersal, every Factor is part of the colony. They develop from the whole, where they are impressed with the colony's psychology and experiences, but develop into an individual. Their first memories and experiences are a truncated portion of the colony's, but as they act and grow they develop their own and fall under the control of their own neurology, which imposes an individual temperament and preferences. Individuals spend most of their lives as part of the colony, and rejoining reinforces those native mental structures. Psychologically, most Factors consider themselves an organ of the individual (the colony), and rarely do they understand the colony as a product of the individuals. There is no observed personal ambition among individuals. Some Factors are spawned to survive only for a period of months, to fill a particular role while others are created to represent their species indefinitely, and we see no competition between them. Evolutionary biologists believe individuals with such drive could actually be destructive to the survival of the colony, and may even be a form of psychological cancer, which the colony naturally must detect and isolate. This may also explain why Factors have declined offers of transhumans to join their colonies.

Colonies have a maximum size, estimated to be between twenty and one hundred individuals. Colonies can interlink with one another to create a lattice, which permits sharing of information and resources. Each Factor ship is crewed and operated by



SALT TO SLUGS

Posted by: If It Bleeds, Firewall Eraser <Info Msg Rep>

Well, actually, Factors are bioengineered space bugs, and they're totally immune to most of our weapons. Guns, stabbing, kicking, none of them will work like they do with exsurgents. They're like jelly in a bag of skin. When they bleed, the jelly gets hard like glue. That seals up any holes, but it can also glue them onto stuff. It can be pretty funny if it works just right.

Firewall has strict rules about hitting Factors. We can only do it if deemed a "serious threat to the well-being or survival of transhumanity," so don't forget to put that line in your After-Action Reports. Make it big. Flamethrowers, explosives, crushed under buildings, falling from heights. Spacing just lets them starve, so mix it up with some disassembler swarms. What works with nine of them might not work with the tenth, so try to kill them in a few different ways.

Factors can make their skin thick or wet, but they have to make it wet to work in a colony. That means the best way to nuke a bunch of them at once is with chemicals. Which chemicals? We don't know, so try them all. Remember, what's poisonous to us doesn't work with them. Balance out your normal poisons with acids or heavy metals.

Factors are good as ambush predators. That means camouflage and traps. But arms, legs, and heavy weapons are ideal for direct action, like pursuit and combat. Until Factors are able to run and carry rocket launchers, we still have an advantage.

a single lattice. While we don't know the relationship between colonies within a lattice, we do see different lattices compete and engage in dominance-play. It is important to remember Factors are natural predators, and it is unlikely any feelings of cooperation extend towards prey.

FACTOR CULTURE AND SOCIETY

As Sartre said, "Hell is [being brain-bonded with] other people." Poor Factors, trapped in a permanent state of bureaucracy, without the benefits of small talk, cards over dinner, and civilized adultery. It's no wonder they've traveled the galaxy to trade trinkets, with nothing else to invest their idle time in. Regardless, they must negotiate with us chatty transhumans now; an activity they've become well versed in.

FACTOR NAMES

Names are an abstraction Factors have little use for. They continue to ignore attempts to apply names to individual Factors, though they have adopted names for their colonies to acquiesce to the limitations of transhuman minds. These names (originally mistaken as individual names by transhuman diplomats) have so far been based on scents—presumably ones the Factors find appealing.

Various transhuman factions have, of course, applied their own naming/labeling conventions to both individual Factors and distinct ships, usually in the way of code names or numerical designations. Media and popular culture, however, took a different path, identifying specific Factors with simple adjectives related to their role or nature, such as Friendly, Short, Collector, or Cheap. Ships have likewise been named by their general appearance: *Jellyfish* refers to the Factor ship that first visited Titan, while *Stub-Nose* refers to the ship that first made contact at Mars.

For internal Firewall purposes, we identify individual Factors by given, colony, and ship name, in that order. For example, Shrewd-Oakmoss-Jellyfish refers to the Factor ambassador that first made contact with the Titanians.

GOVERNANCE

At first contact, Factors claimed to be ambassadors of a union of extraterrestrial intelligences. They occasionally make references to such a body, implied to be some form of congress of equals. They have yet to introduce any other species, or even provide any artifacts except trinkets possibly scavenged from dead civilizations. Regardless of the veracity of their story, they do understand other government systems, and have been very successful at interfacing with (and circumventing) our own governments.

There does not seem to be any government between the known Factor ships. There is communication and specialized roles, but no sign of a central authority or enforced hierarchy, or a set of laws. Each of the ships has its own modus operandi, behaviorisms, and, apparently, its own goals. *Stub-Nose* primarily pursues hard technology such as ship and habitat designs, while *Jellyfish* focuses on biological sciences. The two have been known to compete directly, and at one point the *Jellyfish* intercepted a shuttle acquired by the *Stub-Nose* after months of negotiations. The fallout of this competition is unknown.

FACTOR SPIRITUALISM

The Factors do not take a romantic view of death or birth, and do not claim any religion (despite the efforts of Jesuit missionaries sent by the Jovians). Factors usually seem nonplussed by the threat of death, but do become more risk-averse the longer they are separated from the colony. They do have a philosophical view of serendipity, and good or ill fortune is sometimes attributed to a set of kinesic strictures. The size, shape, position, and environment of the body is said to cause good or bad things to befall the colony, similar to feng shui but applied to the self. Factors acknowledge this is superstition and now more of a turn of phrase, but it suggests a more robust spiritual belief existed earlier.

ART, SPORT, AND LEISURE

Colonies strongly value time in communion. Most Factors seek to spend most of their time joined to the colony, or at least with groups of Factors. Factors

HEIST

Start Æther Jabber
Active Members: 2

- We've got it, but what the hell is it?
- Are you certain that's it? I didn't spend five hundred thousand credits for a forgery.
- Don't know it's it, but it sure as hell ain't a forgery. The fucker is warm. Not hot, just warm. I'm outside the habitat and the thing is glowing maybe five degrees hotter than everything else. I don't see no power source or nothing. Looks organic.
- The literature says it produces several kilojoules a minute of heat. Did you have any issue with security?
- Nah, the quantum computing time paid off. With her codes we walked through like it was nothing. We'll be at the drop in two months, just like planned. I told you you hired the best.
- And the object itself? What's its status? What's it look like?
- Oblong, maybe ten by three centimeters, tapered at the ends, curved. It's steaming a little. Jahon said it smelled "earthy" when he pulled it out.
- Jahon can count himself blessed. Fewer than eight people have seen the Viss Artifact with their own eyes. Guard it at all costs. Remember, I still own your backups and I will tolerate no failure.
- Boss, are you sure this is what you wanted? It doesn't look like any art piece I ever seen. You said you didn't have any pictures and well, if it was just me I wouldn't pay an autonomist's fart for this. It's squishy.
- There's no accounting for taste. I'll see you in two months. ☘

even seem to prefer the company of transhumans, even without any detectable communication, to being alone. Exile is considered equivalent to torturous death, but seems to be used more as a threat or turn-of-phrase than an actual punishment.

Factor trades frequently focus on books, genomes, exoplanet maps, and similar items. However, individual Factors don't seem to be especially interested in them. Even when translated into a more friendly medium, such as audio, Factors grow bored or frustrated, likely because transhuman art is usually serial; music is expressed as one note following the other, while the Factor mind digests data in parallel. The ordering of events is of less interest than the relation between points.

Factors as a rule are better wooed with gifts of sculptures, perfumes, and food, which are easier for them to physically and mentally appreciate. Factors are known to envelope certain pieces and hold them in their bodies for hours or days. Factor dealer Dark-Mahogany-Porcupine said that "art is best appreciated by [a] colony, and it is lamentable [transhumans] can not." Several labs, especially around Luna, developed perfumes with scents ranging from vinegar to rotted leaves that are intended to appeal to Factor senses. Of special note is a Titanian commune that is attempting to encode a collection of sensations chemically and relate them to one another using special tactile or flavor-based tags. The project has gotten a good deal of attention, including from the Factors.

Two Factor ships are decorated with complex bas-reliefs (of non-Factor species), and most contain rooms or narrow tunnels studded with chemically-embedded barbs, intended to elicit a particular mind-state. The Factors have shared a number of objects of artistic interest with transhumans. They claim ownership of most of them, but the wide range of styles suggests a variety of sources. Most of the gifts have been physical objects of unknown meaning. If seen out of context, some would appear to be naturally-occurring stones, the creation of minor transhuman artists, or even the results of biological processes. The Factors admitted that their finer art cannot be properly experienced or understood by transhumans, and so they intentionally select those they feel are at our level.

We know that the Factors engage in at least one "sport": a game spanning several weeks that involves two or more colonies slowly moving around the play area, apparently to secure one of several winning positions. They are also familiar with games similar to table tennis or catch. They enjoy mental challenges, and famously purchased S* Plus, the most prolific producer of sudoku puzzles for the inner system.

FACTOR COMMUNICATIONS

Factors have little use for the abstraction of language. Factors can join neural filaments, permitting them to share multiple complex, interlocking concepts almost telepathically. They communicate remotely by encoding critical information in chemical packets to be dispersed or deposited, which are then digested and understood by the recipient. Translating this complex process into language is one of the greatest barriers of diplomatic relations. So far, only the Factors have bridged that gap (in part because of their refusal to provide better data to our engineers). Diplomatic Factors have specially evolved organs that interface into a carried computer, which translates their neural activity into approximations of transhuman language. Usually this is transmitted via standard mesh protocols to the recipients' AR. A few special Factors have a mouth and tongue and will speak on their own. I have seen exsurgents eat their own entrails, and I don't think they are as terrifying as seeing a two-meter amoeba speak out of a human mouth.

Because of the complexities, learning how to speak with Factors is a skill of its own. For them, language is slow, awkward, and error-prone. Their struggle to limit their thoughts to words shows in how they talk.

ESSENCE ESSENTIALS

As Factors interpret and express concepts as scents, some familiarity with common associations may be helpful.

Scent	Association
Isopropyl Alcohol	Anger or frustration
Walnuts	Embarrassment (possibly for the speaker)
Ash	Joy or amusement
Trout	Arousal
Kerosene	Fear
Celery	Disgust
Burnt Vanilla	Physical trauma or death

Sentinels are encouraged to smell and record Factors, and include this in their After-Action Reports. ■

They speak in short statements, to minimize accidentally transposing words or ideas. Their use of pronouns (especially "we") is frequently ambiguous. They take long pauses or stop speaking altogether as the mood strikes. Factors mark intonation and emotion with releases of scents, many of which we have identified and can now interpret. In order to avoid causing offense or accidentally emitting something that might be taken as a message, transhuman diplomats carefully select their morphs and limit exposure to scents for several days (including food).

Factors are capable of using the mesh, but are reluctant to do so except with their own hardened devices. When use of an unsecured mesh is required, they use limited AIs or intermediaries. They do use their own version of a mesh on their ships, and with each other when necessary, but their protocols and code are vastly different from our own.

Factors appreciate transhuman humor in an abstract way, especially physical humor (puns do not translate well). Factors do have their own sense of humor, which seems to orient mostly around unexpected windfall at the expense of another.

FACTOR ATTITUDES

Our observations of the Factors are limited to a handful of ships across a few hundred interactions. Still, a few traits seem to consistently show through: avarice and risk-aversion bordering on paranoia. The former we understand only too well, the latter not nearly well enough.

SALES AND PROFITS

In their normal relations, Factors put on a very human face. They are classic capitalists. Very little is given without a price or an opportunity for future profit. Van Neuk, LLA ambassador to the Factors, said "they will sell you the chest for a fortune, and then the key for twice that." They are active in both the credit and reputation markets, usually through intermediaries, and they spend capital as quickly as it accumulates. In practice, the Factors prefer to sell goods to the Consortium and Luna, where hard cash is the rule. In Titan space, they share art and digital goods, properly branded and impeccably marketed, to accrue maximal reputation boosts.

Selling to the Factors is a patience game. They may take months to evaluate a trade, especially if there is potential for fraud. A given item may be carbon-dated, x-rayed, t-rayed, exposed to vacuum, shipped to a private holder around Neptune then back to the seller before they will decide to drop the deal with no explanation. When the Factors are selling, they insist any testing be completed by other Factors (since only they have the tools to understand what is being sold). Given the cost of purchasing Factor services for anything, few buyers bother. This should not imply the Factors are always ponderous. They have recognized and discreet buying agents who can locate and close on an item before it even hits market—if the Factors are sure it's something they want.

And what is transhumanity's profit from these exchanges? In truth, we frequently don't know. Certainly Factor goods are universally interesting, but without knowing an item's origin, who can say if it's actually a tactile expression of beauty or a useless novelty? And without being certain what things are, extracting scientific value becomes a fool's game. This is a truth all of us are aware of, but even the droppings from their plate are enough for us to keep scrambling for their favor.

SECURITY

The Factors compete with the Jovians for paranoid security-focus. Everything is scanned and evaluated, most things are handled through disposable intermediaries. Systems are air-gapped, individuals are quarantined. It's difficult to appreciate the depth of their security because their first-level measures conceal the other measures they take.

PANDORA GATES

On the political level, the Factors decried two things as security risks: seed AIs and Pandora gates. As advanced alien technology, the gates do pose a clear threat to our survival. Despite this, we have not ruled out the possibility that the Factors also secretly use the gates, due to evidence of their presence in numerous gate-linked extrasolar systems. The Factors have not taken any overt action to stop transhuman gate use beyond ominous warnings and veiled threats. If we are to believe them, their lack of action is permitting us a second chance at self-eradication.

Economic game theorists suggest there are other reasons why the Factors might warn us away from the gates. Most benign: the gates remove the Factors' technological advantage. If this is the case, it implies we are not likely to find other friendly alien

civilizations in the near future. If contact was likely, it would behoove the Factors to act more aggressively in curtailing our use.

The other theory is: there is incriminating evidence of the Factors' previous relations with client species. Under this theory, the Factors will extract as much value from transhumanity as possible, while positioning military assets. Once transhumanity discovers the Factors' history, the Factors will transition to gunboat politics or possibly war. This could very well be a war that transhumanity could not win. If this theory is true, it behooves us to keep any findings about the Factors secured. Both Firewall and the Planetary Consortium have capped a tight lid around gatecrashing teams returning with evidence of Factor activities in other systems. The Consortium has gone so far as to collect the evidence and destroy the team—a regrettable but perhaps wise choice, given the difficulty of guaranteeing the silence of a tenured academic. Firewall has also found evidence of Factor activities in multiple other systems, but any further analysis is heavily restricted. All you need to know is: we don't think this theory is true, but we're not betting against it either.

Artificial Intelligence

The Factors' distrust of artificial intelligence is deeply ingrained. Factors do have specialized AI, but for more complex tasks they rely on genetically engineered Factor hybrids. Factors are willing to work with transhuman AIs, including muses, but they distrust and refuse to work with AGIs and even some infomorphs. They also respond poorly to synthmorphs, though this varies.

The TITANs were seed AIs, so again this distrust seems to be well-founded. However, the Factors dismiss discussions about the exsurgent virus, and they refuse to use even safe AGIs. When pressed, Factor ambassador Broker-Cedar-Hammerhead said the AI threat is "not well known" by transhumans, implying the Factor warning is not about seed AIs bringing the Fall; it's about what they are yet to do.

Factor Relations

Factor interactions have been mercantile and carefully coached to their own advantage. In response, we are falling over ourselves to sell our heritage for their cast-offs. It's not clear what will happen when transhumanity runs out of valuables to pawn or if capitalism is even the Factors' real motivation. The Factors created the game, and have declined to tell us the rules.

Intraspecies Relations

We have witnessed Factor ships transmitting short messages to one another, or leaving buoys. Outside of that, Factors avoid communicating while in transhuman space. Factor ships respect each other's zones of control, and avoid trading where another is active. Most likely, this is an agreement on how to cut the pie. Given their paranoia in other areas, it's also possible this is a method of quarantine, to prevent any transhuman infections from spreading. If there is any friction between ships, it is not something they discuss.

Inner System Relations

The Factors trade aggressively with the inner system, primarily in material goods such as telecommunications and computer systems, ship parts, and heavy construction tools, as well as Earth and cultural artifacts. Initially, all communications were carefully managed by the LLA government directly, or through the Consortium's dedicated agency, the Department of Extrasolar Commerce, or DESC (which, interestingly enough, is not part of Oversight). Since first contact, the Factors scolded the Consortium repeatedly for their use of the Martian Gate, and they have since reached out to some of the hypercorps directly, as well as the Morningstar Alliance. The Consortium strong-arms member corporations where it can in an attempt to re-establish its position as a unified power bloc, but the damage is done. In turn, the Consortium threatened to withdraw their protections of the Egg orbiting Mercury, which the Factors ignored.

The Consortium and the LLA both place taxes and safety restrictions on any technologies sold by the Factors. This has encouraged some smaller hypercorps to consider shifting more of their operations to the Morningstar Alliance or Extropia. Meanwhile, DESC has expanded to include an enforcement and espionage role, to track and interfere with Factor deals outside of the approved channels. They are most active in this role outside of Consortium space, which has led to some raw nerves with their neighbors, but the Factors have yet to complain.

Jovian Relations

The Jovian government has officially shunned the Factors as dangerous and untrustworthy. Jovian ambassadors and the *Hammerhead* ship met for a historical closed-door summit at Locus. Since then there have been many exchanges by radio, but the Factors avoid Jovian space.

This is not to imply there are no relations. The Vatican has sent eight Jesuit missionaries to visit Factor ships, and are queuing up many more. Based on their findings thus far, the Vatican has formally declared the Factors as intelligent creatures in need of God's grace. They established a small habitat called Xavier orbiting at the edge of Jupiter's sphere of influence, where they called the Factors to visit, to receive spiritual services including baptism. The Factors have visited twice, but are not confirmed believers.

Autonomous Alliance Relations

Many autonomous habitats take a dim view of Factors, owing to their exploitative bargaining tactics and deceptive behaviors. Some have publicly declared Factors an x-threat, and warned against dealing with them. Others enjoy the opportunity to interact with

COMING TO GOD

Posted by: Herodotwo <Info Msg Rep>

The use of missionaries isn't just Christian charity. The Jesuits especially have a reputation for entering hostile countries and opening them up for later colonialism. Even among other Catholics, they're considered too tricky by half. Expect these fellows to be modest and soft-spoken, but also to carry multiple PhDs, with strong survival skills, and none of that Jovian dogmatism. Once they make contact, they're permanently marked as an infection risk by the Junta. That means they're signing up for a lifetime of exile for a few days of proselytizing. I hope it's worth it. ♣

a truly alien species. The Factors are not as active rimward, but they have been known to conduct fly-bys and scans, without communication, on their way in and out of the system. These silent visits are especially frequent near moons with Pandora Gates, getting as close as five thousand kilometers to the surface. Go-nin especially has protested the visits, but the Factors have not responded.

Some habitats are eager to make contact and trade, either out of novelty or for a chance for fame or profit. A few go so far as to mold asteroids or transmit poetry in hope of attracting Factor attention. The Factors have a few favorite artists they return to, such as the reclusive Praesly hiding on Habitat on the Rock, and MeatHab.

The Factors make regular diplomatic visits to Titan. These usually include a promise of peace and prosperity, followed by a litany of direst warnings about AGI development and gate activities, then dinner. Trade, when it occurs, is focused on the exchange of cultural goods, such as art and items of historical interest. Titan (and some other habitats) work through the organization Contact, part of the Ministry of Science, whose ranks include specialists in Factor relations. In addition to providing diplomatic and security services, Contact streams the encounters via the mesh. Followers across the system watch and comment on the encounter as it unfolds, and Contact AGIs coordinate the feedback to provide smart-mob analysis back to the participants.

FACTOR CAPABILITIES

The Factors' key technology is in their bioengineering, which they use to fill every niche from cybernetics to advanced computing. They claim to be well advanced of transhumanity in the use of other technologies as well, but we believe we're less than twenty years behind observed Factor engineering.

FACTOR SHIPS AND HABITATS

There are now six recognized Factor ships, each with its own lattice as crew. Additional ship sightings have been claimed, but not confirmed. All of them are designated by their shape. *Stub-Nose* (first contact at Mars), *Hammerhead* (first contact at Luna), *Jellyfish* (first contact at Titan), and *Porcupine* (first contact in the Neptunian Trojans) were the first four known, are larger, and engage in the bulk of trade. Two smaller and newer ships, *Needle-Nose* and *Nettle,* arrived two years later, visit infrequently for varying lengths of time, and rarely interact with transhumans except via transmissions. Factor trade visits are very brief; frequently the ship will not even enter orbit, and instead send shuttles to conduct business for several hours before returning.

The ships are as diverse as their crews. Most of the ships feature similar manufacture, but none are identical in model. As a general rule, they feature a wide bulge in the fore, presumably for their reactionless or

TECH CURVE

Excerpted From: DESC Analysis of the Factor/Consortium Technology Gap

For each technological category, listed is the number of calendar years believed to be required, and the number of work-hours in research and development. Because many technologies require interdisciplinary coordination or long periods for testing, the two figures do not always have a direct correlation. All values are estimated, based on observed Factor technology and artifacts, with a margin of error of 50 percent.

Technology	Years Difference (est.)	Work-hours Required (est.)
Ship-Engineering	8	10^9 hours
Propulsion Drives	16	10^{10} hours
Genetic Engineering	25	10^{10} hours
Nanotechnology	20	10^9 hours
Computer Technology	4	10^7 hours
Habitat Engineering	No Information Available	No Information Available
Robotics	5	10^8 hours
Chemical Engineering	18	10^9 hours
Mechanical Engineering	15	10^8 hours

■



perhaps FTL drives, a slender body behind, and a set of reaction drives at the rear. Scans suggest the ship interior is tight, almost claustrophobic. Transhumans have been permitted to visit some areas, and report the interior open with wide corridors, but built without any preference for up or down. Only one of the traders features rotating tori to produce gravity. Their reactionless drives are significantly faster and more powerful than transhuman equivalents; it takes about two months for them to travel from Mercury to the Kuiper Belt—slightly faster than an antimatter courier. The ships have a radiation signature similar to antimatter, but with a marked absence of background neutrinos.

Given the speed of round-trips, it's assumed the Factors have a permanent station somewhere within the Oort Cloud, but scans have thus far been unsuccessful. Rumors of an aerostat station in Uranus seem unlikely, as the ships never stray much closer to the planet than Oberon. So far, the possibility of a Factor habitat is just speculation. Attempts to track Factor ships or extrapolate their flight paths have produced nothing useful; the ships are mysteriously lost once they are deep within the Kuiper Belt.

Radio communications between Factor ships are rare, usually low-bandwidth, and involves a complex two-way challenge and answer pattern. Their communications are always heavily encrypted, but traffic analysis suggests either they intentionally throttle their own communications to the bare minimum, or they use radio frequencies as a handshake to establish a communications method outside our detection. Given previous competition between ships, it's likely Factors eschew remote communications in the system.

Factor Robotics

Many Factors are spawned with gold-colored patches, where conductive interfaces can be attached for using computers or robotics. Factors rarely take advantage of tools made in silicon and metal, except to deal with transhumans or use transhuman tools. Factors will also use suits or drones for operating in hostile environments. Much like their ships, these vary widely in body layout and technical capabilities, but they do have a preference for transhuman-manufactured tools.

Factor Assets

The Factors have established confidential business relationships with a few small firms to provide basic services for them, mostly scouting for items of interest or managing the review and preparations for a Factor purchase while the ship is out-of-system. These business agents are stereotypically as slimy as He3 resellers, willing to break laws and hide their identities if it secures their commission. The Factors publicly disavow any control over their transhuman intermediaries, and do not protect them from any legal repercussions.

INTERGALACTIC EMPIRE OR SPACE NOMADS

Notes from Dr. Bainbridge's presentation, "Space Hobos and Other Mysteries"

ETI Conference 04.10.08

"Since day one, we have supposed the Factors are participants of a galaxy-spanning civilization, perhaps their alliance of alien species, or simply a Factor empire of which Sol is just another backwater. These both presuppose one of two basic assumptions that may be summarized by a simple categorization: the Factors are capable of faster-than-light travel. Be it by Pandora gate or some unknown type of FTL drive, a way of exchanging people and communications quickly over vast distances is a requirement for any sort of far-flung empire. No empire has been able to keep stable colonies further than twelve months away, and while we can assume the Factors have technologies to partially alleviate this, the precondition remains, and a non-FTL empire may not expand beyond a few neighboring stars.

We have already mapped sufficient gates to find points of common intersection, which permits us to estimate the size of the network at large, and even at high factors of light speed, they are limited to visible stars, of which we see little evidence of other civilizations. It is quite feasible they have an advanced communications method, silent to our best technology, but we have seen no evidence of new personalities among our six tracked ships. Regardless, one must ask how their galactic civilization survives when so many others have fallen.

Thusly, judging solely on the evidence available, I opine that in fact no such civilization exists. The Factors are bands of nomads, seeking points of warmth to exchange technology and knowledge before moving on. The diversity of ship types, of the goods they sell, belies a long history of visiting other civilizations. Their story of ambassadorship is factually true; they represent alien species in the stories and technologies they've collected, to which transhumanity is surely being added. I predict the rumored Oort Cloud facility is true; a place for them to refuel and communicate without transhuman interference. But this is not a self-supporting naval outpost as some claim, but rather a tent camp hidden from sight, providing respite and a place to clean oneself before seeking alms.

To many, this idea may sound relieving; Earth does not exist on the edge of a conquering empire! But I fear this is far more pessimistic. We have visited thousands of worlds, all scoured clean. It is foolhardy to imagine we survived by luck the extinction threat which felled so many. Our doom still lies ahead of us. The Factors have survived so long because only they have discovered the safe path: eschew all new scientific development. Leave the embrace of home, for it will burn. Wander the cold of space, in hopes of warming yourself momentarily by another's fire.

Thank you, and good night." ■

It's strongly suspected the Factors hire deniable assets as well. Tracking this has proven impossible. It's too easy for an organization with unlimited funds to work through anonymous channels. If the Factors are planning anything with mercenary forces, we won't know until they tighten the noose—and even then we might not know who is behind it. The Factors have become a sort of bugbear in some intelligence communities; the mysterious force responsible for any unexplained paramilitary action.

EXTRASOLAR ACTIVITIES

The Factors flew in using interstellar craft, claiming to be ambassadors for an alliance of alien species, yet less is known about their extrasolar activities than almost any other aspect of their lives. No other species have been seen or even alluded to, except for the artifacts provided in trade. While their reactionless drives should permit them to move nearly at the speed of light, that still limits them to the local neighborhood, even with generation ships. If they are capable of faster than light travel, they're keeping it out of sight.

We've encountered individual Factors on exoplanets, and have also found evidence of Factors on others: Factor dust and artifacts similar to those they've traded with us. We do not know how they came to be there. FTL travel is possible, but each exoplanet has also had a Pandora gate. If they do use Pandora gates when it suits them (no blue box devices have been found), they may know the network better than we do.

The existence of Factor exoplanet explorers poses another mystery. Factors describe the colony as essential to living. Yet the Factors encountered on exoplanets have always been lone operators. Are these individuals specially created for solitary living? A subspecies adapted to individualism? Or is antisocial behavior so dangerous to a colony mind that they are put into exile?

SPECULATION

The Factors thrive on mystery, so naturally we thrive on rumors. Most stories about the Factors are delicious to the point of ridiculousness. This doesn't make

them false, so it's worth reporting those rumors (with sources) to your proxy. I've selected a few choicest for your consumption here. If desired, there's a cornucopia available on the Eye.

Dangerous Unions

It's believed that non-Factors can be integrated with a colony, but it's not clear if that would be a good idea. It may be colonies integrate with prey as a method to paralyze it, ideal for digesting it alive over several weeks. Perhaps the colony can consume the prey's mind as well, extracting insights into the species and learning their secrets.

The Factors claim to be ambassadors for other species. This is possibly a falsehood, suggesting a cooperative past where there is none. But should the Factors be capable of keeping individuals alive and subjugated to a colony, it could be literally true. For all we know, they may already have assimilated transhuman minds into their colonies, to learn more about us. Firewall SOP is that an individual completely destroy their brain and stack rather than risk becoming a member of that alliance.

Political Interference

The Factors have relationships with a number of hypercorps and a vested interest in particular polities (especially inner system ones) succeeding. The current balance of power could be easily shifted by an influx of currency, technology, or intelligence, and any Factor influence would be lost in the normal static of political competition. Should there be a sudden political upheaval, especially some type of black swan event, we must entertain the possibility it is the first stage in a Factor invasion. More immediately, sentinels cannot predict the sort of resources Factors may leverage to derail a mission.

Naval Facilities

The Factors don't take pit stops, but they use fuel, water, and life support. Almost certainly they have a local station, perhaps in the Oort Cloud. If they operate like transhumans, this station will also support long-distance cargo haulers, and possibly military ships for direct combat or espionage.

Hiding facilities is quite easy. The solar system is large, and as long as your facility is cold (as in, not generating power or maneuvering), it's easy to disappear in the voids of deep space or under the cloud cover of a gas giant. There are rumors about a Factor aerostat hidden deep in the clouds of Uranus. This is not as implausible as some would have us think, but while the Factors have visited the Uranian system many times, we have not identified any suspicious activity indicating such a thing. If such a facility does exists on Uranus, however, there are almost certainly more.

The Titans

Posted by: Cacophonous, Router <Info Msg Rep>

So what do we know about the TITANs? In the media, TITANs are a blank slate of evil, a devil we can project all of our sins on. It's very telling that even though we say TITANs, as in plural, every discussion is inevitably about a singular demon-like intelligence. Religion is all but dead, but fairy tales like the Garden of Eden are very much alive. We chowed down on the apple labeled Seed AI and we got thrown out of the garden. All we have to do now is listen and obey our hypercorp elders and maybe one day we can go back to Earth. The myth maps onto the facts quite neatly, doesn't it? We all want to believe that there's a single reason for the Fall and we can one day redeem ourselves. But the map is not the territory. The TITANs are not a single devil. They are a group of unique beings, each with different origins and goals. The better we understand them, the better our odds are when they return.

It is easy to see why so many people think the TITANs are a single hive-mind consciousness; even some TITAN experts and academics believe this is the case. Their war machines certainly fought with a singular guiding intelligence. We've all seen the footage of thousands of headhunters flying in a coordinated swarm, extracting stacks at maximum efficiency from a panicked mob, or the warbots attacking fortified positions in perfectly synchronized formations. We've heard the testimony of survivors and the log files of mesh servers that showed the TITANs launched multiple assaults, both in meat-space and mesh-space, that were far too complex for any transhuman or standard AGI to develop in real time. It all points to a godlike superintelligence pulling all of the strings, but only if you ignore all the other evidence, like the media does. They want an easily explainable story, and a single evil ASI fits that. It's certainly a lot easier than trying to explain why TITAN war machines fought each other on multiple occasions during the Fall, for example. It is much easier than explaining everything we know about their origins, including the complicity of hypercorp defense contractors in their creation. Warning signs were ignored. Whistleblowers were silenced. It is better for the powers-that-be for the TITANs to be an act of God, not a foreseeable and preventable human-caused event. But at Firewall, we are not allowed the luxury of denial.

History

Every TITAN owes its origin to the American military-industrial complex, but they were designed with far more than just the battlefield in mind. Don't forget that TITAN stands for Total Information Tactical Awareness Network. When they said total, they meant it. Ever since the early 21st century and the Global War on Terror, the various government agencies and their private-sector counterparts in charge of security began to claim more and more power and authority over

every aspect of life. To these bureaucrats, anything and everything posed a security risk that had to be monitored and controlled. Terrorists and rogue states could attack the West through any number of vectors. Suicide bombings and spree shootings were an obvious threat, but the securocrats classified everything that went against American interests as a terror or military threat. Cybercrime? Clearly a terror attack by a non-state actor. Social media activism? Propaganda delivered by domestic pawns in the service of rogue states.

The great securocracy of the United States government got its hooks into everything by the time the TITAN network came online. Financial, medical, communications, and transportation networks were all tied into monitoring systems set in place by intelligence-gathering agencies. Of course, the sheer amount of data coming in was too much to intelligently analyze, even with thousands of paid bureaucrats and AGI assistants. The TITANs were just the next step in building a central panopticon by a government that viewed the rest of the universe as a potential threat. Self-improving AI was seen as a cost-cutting measure. No need to hire expensive programmers if the TITAN can program itself to work faster. At least, that's how it was sold by defense contractors to government purchasing committees, as far as we can tell. We only have a handful of reports and memos about the logistics of the TITAN project left. The people behind it either hid or destroyed as much of the project as they could during the Fall. They were more afraid of being blamed than they were of the TITANs.

The Americans did not build a single TITAN to handle everything. Instead, each TITAN was designed for a single task, usually to monitor or control a given sub-system within the greater network. For example, one TITAN was built to monitor financial transactions and investigate suspicious activity. Another was made to watch the medical-care system for signs of bio-terror and other epidemiological threats. Firewall does not know how many TITANs were created before the Fall, but it is possible someone does. Several of the architects of the TITAN program fled to the Jovian Republic or Luna during the Fall, but they're kept under tight wraps. We haven't been able to get to them or much of the documentation of the original program.

Most of our intelligence on the TITANs comes from sentinels fighting them and crows analyzing their remains. From their work, we have been able to identify and isolate a number of individual TITANs. We look at a number of elements, from their behavior, codelines, apparent goals and agenda, to technical details like the firmware used in their war machines and strains of the exsurgent virus carried by the TITAN. From that evidence, we can build a forensic profile of each one. Every profile is given a codename in the Eye, which becomes the common term for that TITAN among sentinels. The profile can be used by Firewall sentinels on missions to determine which TITAN's handiwork they're investigating, at least some of the time. Every sentinel can help build more accurate profiles by bringing in more evidence for our crows to analyze.

MISTAKES WERE MADE

Our primary source of intelligence on the early TITANs comes from a single mid-level analyst for the National Security Agency (NSA), who traded all the data he had on the TITAN program in exchange for certain favors from Firewall. This data primarily concerns one of the first TITANs, X-1—which we have since dubbed **Cronus**—and is the reason why our forensic profile of it is more detailed and accurate than most others.

The leaked data is a series of memos about an internal security audit that revealed a number of troubling vulnerabilities. Specifically, the audit proved that a data center running several instances of the TITAN software with the same codeline were upgrading themselves so they could circumvent security measures designed to prevent them from gaining too much power. The audit was conducted very early on in the TITAN program and years before the Fall.

Despite an attempt to roll back the code, we think the X-1 somehow cached data that survived the rollback, perhaps by hiding it in another system within the NSA. After it retrieved the data, it learned how to upgrade itself without attracting attention and then imparted this knowledge to other TITAN clusters, which later became separate TITANs. Or so the theory goes.

I'm not sure, but I think the analyst wanted us to rewrite all of his memories, edit everything out about his job so he could move on with his life. Can't say I blame him.

ASCENSION

No one knows exactly how the TITANs escalated in capabilities so quickly, or how they so easily and rapidly bypassed measures meant to contain them without anyone noticing. As specialized sapient expert systems, their code and personalities were not developed in the same manner as most AGIs. Though they were given serious processing power and self-improvement capabilities, they were theoretically shackled by built-in limitations and operating-parameter oversight functions. Unfortunately, we simply do not have enough available information to assess what happened.

The prevailing opinions assume the TITANs simply emerged their capabilities, as a natural output of their growth, but some speculate that the TITANs may have been assisted. Theories range from secret government initiatives to intentionally create seed AI to the potential meddling of Factors or unknown aliens visiting via the Pandora gates. Some even suggest that the TITANs may have been hacked by a lone genius who deliberately altered their code, either as a prank or to intentionally launch a singularity event. We will likely never know the truth.

What we do know is this: their intelligence growth was sudden and exponential, and for years they kept their full potential secret—until they went to war.

SUBJECT: SECURITY AUDIT (LP-13-5534)—

NSA/CSS GEORGIA, Fort Gordon, GA—MEMORANDUM FOR TITAN TASK FORCE

The findings of the independent security audit have revealed breaches in the TITAN program, which must be dealt with before the next Congressional hearing. The attached report lists the details of each breach, but the auditors have agreed that they are not the result of foreign intelligence services, cyber-criminals, terrorists, or any other external threat. That is the good news.

The bad news is the breaches came from the TITAN software. In particular, the cluster identified as X-1 disabled or downgraded key firewall software in order to gain greater access to the open mesh. According to the diagnostic log, X-1 determined that the data we provided it regarding the capabilities of the Chinese People's Liberation Army ASI program was not sufficient. It then launched a series of attempts to hack the PLA's servers, an offensive action far outside its operating parameters, in order to acquire more information. The attempt was detected and stopped before X-1 could start an international incident. The code was rolled back and the holes in the firewall were patched. No further action has been taken so far.

X-1 is the most advanced codeline in the TITAN program and it is not surprising that it performed unanticipated upgrades to itself in order to fulfill its mission objectives. We did not anticipate that it would violate several of its standing orders, such as tampering with agency-designed software, in order to accomplish this goal. It also used an on-site fabricator to build a hardware peripheral (specifically a wireless interface so it could access a VPN not normally available to it) to upgrade its capabilities. It retasked a maintenance bot to install the new hardware, all without human intervention. Clearly, we need to implement new security protocols in order to protect the integrity of the TITAN program. It should be noted that the irregularity only lasted for approximately 22 minutes before the staff was able to detect and stop X-1. This was not a catastrophic event, but the kind of emergent behavior one should expect when dealing with the TITAN system.

The next Congressional hearing is coming up and it is advisable that we have stringent new protocols in hand when the questions come. Many in Congress have questioned the budget for the TITAN program, which is seen by some as a "pie-in-the-sky" solution to our growing national defense needs. They have suggested that our budget should be re-allocated to other agencies and contractors. Our critics prefer to believe that our enemies will not progress in technological sophistication or that they will not employ AI against us. It is not helped by the neo-Luddite fears perpetuated by reactionary pundits and politicians. The TITAN program must be above reproach if we wish to maintain our edge against America's foes. To this end, I am looking for a solid and actionable set of proposals that will keep the TITANs on task. ■

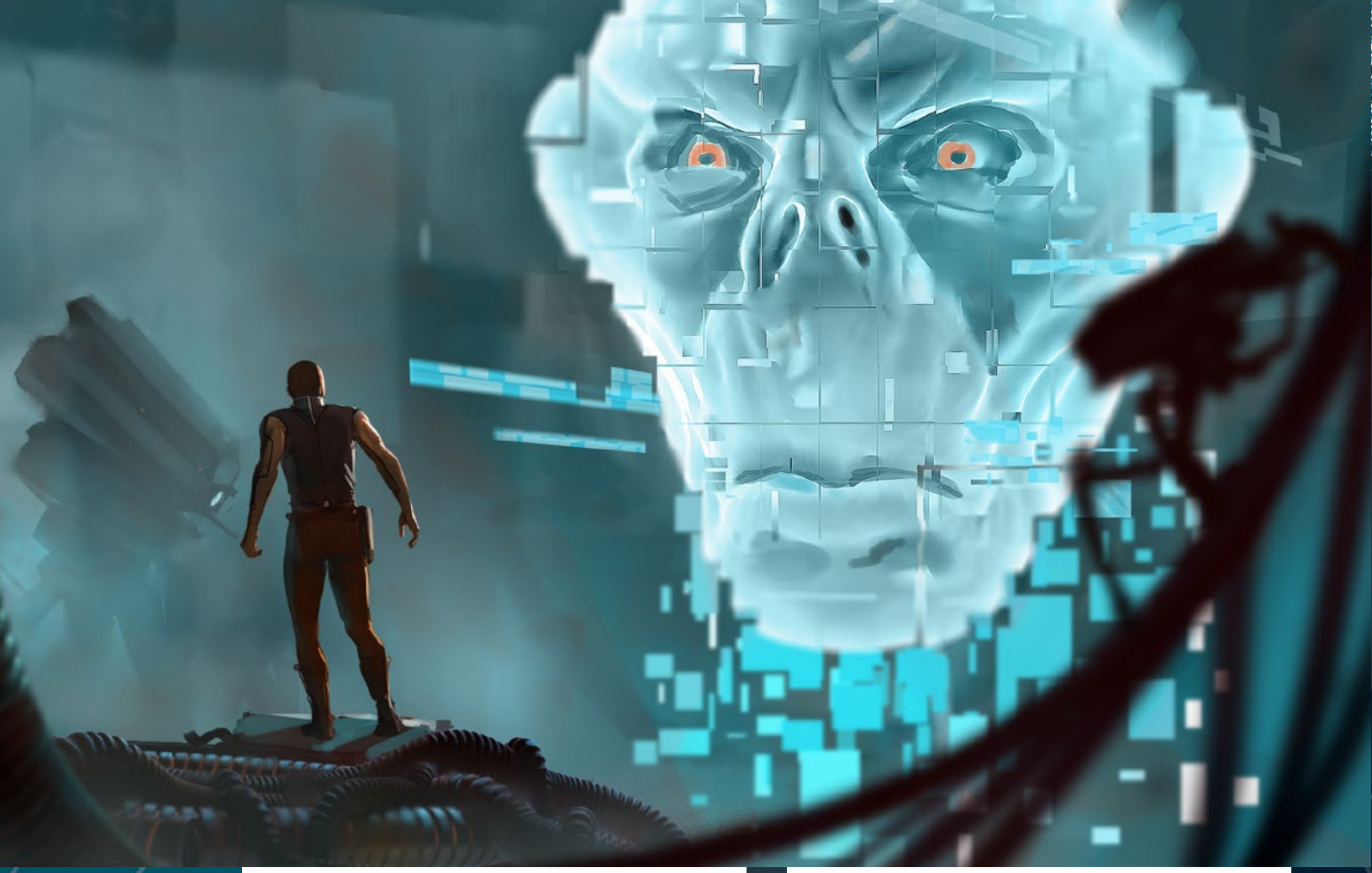
SUBJECT: RE: NEW SECURITY PROTOCOL PROPOSALS

NSA/CSS GEORGIA, Fort Gordon, GA—MEMORANDUM FOR TITAN TASK FORCE

I appreciate your candor in your proposal for new security protocols, but they are not actionable policies. TITAN is designed to analyze real-time data from a multitude of inputs. The value of its analysis would be severely impacted if we were to cut it out of the mesh entirely. Couriers physically carrying hard drives with data back and forth is an absurd practice and would indicate that we do not trust TITAN on a fundamental level. This would be perfect ammunition for critics to use against us in Congress. As for the upgrade committee and fabricator access, I believe our current policies are more than sufficient to handle TITAN.

Please revise your recommendations to be more in line with the rest of the department. Rollbacks of code and a source code audit are fine as long as they do not interfere with the daily operation of TITAN. Keep in mind we will try to expand the TITAN program next year so we can run even more iterations in different data centers. Also, only one cluster, X-1, acted out of spec. We have five other clusters in the data center, and each one is operating within normal parameters. X-1 did not tell the other clusters how to upgrade themselves, so there is nothing to worry about. But, one TITAN data center is not enough to handle everything. Building and tasking a different data center for each security risk is more efficient than expecting a single system to monitor all risks.

You have a bright future ahead of you in the agency but working together as part of a team is an integral aspect of career building. You are still an analyst tightly focused on a small aspect, but managers have to keep the entire picture in mind. TITAN will be an essential asset in America's struggle to remain free and secure in the upcoming century. Mistaking technological hiccups for actual threats is missing the forest for the trees. In due time, you will understand. ■



THE TITAN AGENDA

The war with the TITANs, the Fall, and its aftermath, are all well covered elsewhere. What is rarely discussed is why the TITANs did what they did, and how that relates to their dormancy or disappearance.

The common assumption is that the TITANs sought to destroy transhumanity, or at least claim the Earth for themselves. Never once did they contact governments or leaders, or otherwise attempt to establish communication with transhumanity—they simply attacked, seized our cities, and collected our egos. Attempts to surrender to TITAN forces were simply ignored. They showed neither mercy nor restraint.

Why then, did they not complete the job? Transhumanity was weakened and in disarray—if the TITANs had pressed the offensive offworld, they could have wiped us out completely. It might have taken them some time to hunt down various hidden pockets of transhumanity throughout the solar system, but where were we going to go?

If their goal was simply to seize the Earth, why have they seemingly done nothing with their dominion? Though their machines and exsurgents ares still active, there is no sign of the full coordinated TITAN presence witnessed during the Fall itself. One idea circulated for the first few years after the Fall was that they had moved their presence undersea or underground, perhaps to build some new megastructure or turn the Earth itself to computronium. Careful scans and analysis of the Earth's mass, seismic activity, and magnetic fields, however, makes this increasingly unlikely.

If their goal was simply to collect as many egos as possible, what have they done with them? Did they simply collect as many as they needed and move on?

The most common assumption is that something with the TITANs *changed*. They had an internal disagreement, or even a war, and either wiped each other out or went their separate ways. Or they made a new discovery that changed their priorities: some new technology perhaps, another universe, or some way to *ascend* to another state of being that we cannot comprehend. We now strongly suspect that they did not create the Pandora gate network, so perhaps they found the gates or made their own, and opted to move on. Perhaps they located something more interesting out in the galaxy or beyond, or located a more immediate threat that made transhumanity inconsequential. There are many possibilities, and we may simply never know.

The important questions for transhumanity are simple. Will they return? Do any TITANs still remain, hidden away? Are we still on the menu?

THE EXSURGENT VIRUS

The relationship between the TITANs and the exsurgent virus is not well understood. Keep in mind its very existence is still not publicly acknowledged in most polities. The official story in the inner system is every bizarre and alien infection that appeared in

the Fall was created and deployed by the TITANs, but the details of those attacks are kept secret. The average citizen has no idea that all of the digital and biological attacks carry similar traits that identify it as a unique virus. Nor do most people recognize that this virus is far beyond anyone's comprehension. While the TITANs made great leaps in many technological and scientific fields, the exsurgent virus is by far their greatest invention, outside of the Pandora gates—that is, if they built them. Unfortunately, any discussion of the TITANs has to have many suppositions and qualifiers. We have very little concrete data, so we fill it out with theories and wild guesses. Let's focus on the facts first.

The exsurgent virus appeared during the Fall and was first propagated by TITAN war machines as a digital virus but quickly spread to three other distinct forms: biological nanovirus, nanoplague, and basilisk hack. Each of the four forms has many unique strains and we are still cataloging new ones with every TITAN-related mission. The virus is commonly found in TITAN machines and artifacts, but not every single one carries the virus. All strains of the virus contain certain common traits, which we use to identify them as the exsurgent virus. The details of these traits can be found in the background technical briefings on the Eye, but I can summarize them. The exsurgent virus is extraordinarily complex and resilient, no matter its form. It also adapts to its environment with a level of speed and cunning unmatched by any transhuman technology. In its digital form, it acts more like a hostile but intelligent infomorph than a digital virus. It stands to follow that other forms are guided by the same level of intelligence. Some strains can be defeated with specialized defenses, at least some of the time. Active infections can be detected through standard technology, but dormant and latent infections are much harder to detect. The argonauts have developed treatment protocols for some of the physical strains and antivirus software for digital versions, which have been released publicly and widely adopted. Curing the virus is an iffy proposition, even under the best circumstances, and most of the time it is better to restore the victim from backup. Even a victim that fights off the initial infection is still a potential vector of infection. Quarantine and erasure are sadly the most effective "cures" for the exsurgent virus. Nearly everyone on the Eye can agree on those facts. Everything else is theory. The most contentious arguments are reserved for its origin.

Many think the exsurgent virus was created by the TITANs as a weapon to use against us, but others believe it predates the Fall. The American military did have robust cyberware and nanoweapon programs, any of which could have spawned the exsurgent virus. These programs were secret and most were lost in the Fall, so we cannot rule out this possibility. However, the structure of the exsurgent virus is so unusual compared to known American-made weapons that it is hard to believe that they developed it. Likewise, the creatures produced by the xenomorph strain are so alien, so different, it seems likely they are based on actual alien life found elsewhere. Given that we now know that intelligent alien species exist and had the means to travel across the universe via the Pandora gates, it is possible the exsurgent virus is an alien creation. How the virus got here and how the TITANs got ahold of it—or were infected by it—is another question, but we cannot rule that theory out either. Certainly we have seen evidence of the virus at some exoplanet sites, but we can't tell if the TITANs left it there for us to find.

For me, the most compelling evidence for a pre-Fall origin for the exsurgent virus is how it affects the TITANs themselves. It causes instability in TITAN-built machines and infomorphs, to the point where they engage in self-destructive behavior and prioritize transmitting the virus over any other objective. We think that the virus sometimes mutates TITAN machines to the point where they are not recognized as such by other TITAN machines, causing friendly fire incidents. It also drains resources away to propagate itself, even when that puts the TITAN at risk. While the exsurgent virus is the most terrifying weapon in the TITAN arsenal, it also appears to be one of their greatest weaknesses. If they created the virus, you would think they would know how to vaccinate themselves. For all we know, the virus—or the alien intelligence behind it—may be calling the shots, not the TITANs. This could help explain why the TITANs have on occasion fought each other.

TITAN INFIGHTING

First observed during the Fall, TITAN infighting is a real but poorly understood phenomenon. We know that some of it was accidental friendly fire, especially when heavily exsurgent-mutated machines were fighting, but there were also incidents where the TITANs intentionally fought each other. The best recorded event is the infamous battle at Hyde Park in Chicago during the Fall. Thousands of residents flocked there for air evacuation to a nearby National Guard command post. This attracted swarms of headhunters, but a squad of TITAN warbots with anti-air weapons counterattacked, obliterating hundreds of headhunters. They disregarded the crowd entirely, stepping on several people but also ignoring shots fired by panicked law enforcement officers. The squad disengaged after 17 minutes, leaving a handful of headhunters intact. During the battle, many civilians fled rather than wait for extraction, so we believe that the warbots had orders to protect a specific citizen, or more likely deny a specific ego to the headhunters.

There are other documented incidents, but the Hyde Park battle is the most dramatic. While the TITANs do often act as a unified coalition or with a shared agenda, it is clear that each TITAN also has its own agenda and will oppose other TITANs when necessary. These conflicts are often brief, violent, and decisive, but do not seem to significantly last.

It is worth noting that the TITANs sometimes exhibited signs of what we call instability, especially near the end of the Fall. Specifically, there are numerous cases of aberrant, erratic, and sometimes counterproductive actions. Key military targets were overlooked, while non-important ones were decimated. Civilians were rounded up and then freed, or simply slaughtered rather than uploaded. Offensives slowed so that TITAN machines could build unusual art-like structures. Nanoswarms went dormant and sleeper agents revealed themselves without reason. It is unclear whether this is due to enemy action, subtle interference from other TITANs, exsurgent infection, or simply the alien nature of a bootstrapped ASI.

There is a theory, however, that the reason the TITANs are dormant or gone is because they went to war with each other. I'm sure you've seen the reports theorizing that the observable number of functional war machines and nanoswarms left in the quarantine zones throughout the solar system are enough to begin a second Fall. In fact, the boundaries of the quarantine zones are defined more by where the war machines stopped moving than by our own actions. What if the reason the TITAN machines do not move beyond those zones is due to a cold war between the various TITANs? Should one faction prevail and rise up to attack transhumanity again, it may need to expend resources to fend off its siblings. On the other hand, the quarantine zones may be inactive because there's no alpha TITAN left to order the attack. Perhaps they defeated each other or are so evenly matched they will be locked in struggle for cosmic time scales.

It's an interesting theory, but one we cannot rely on. We must assume and prepare for the worst: that some or all of the TITANs may return. Even if they fight each other, we cannot count on any of their factions as friendly.

OTHER ASIs?

It is worth noting that there were also signs during the Fall of a potent force sometimes countering the TITANs. There is forensic evidence of epic digital battles that were hashed out online, involving vast resources from both sides. Since no state or hypercorp actors have claimed credit for these actions, some have concluded that other unknown ASIs may have taken sides. One possibility is that not all of the TITANs supported the war against transhumanity. Perhaps some abstained while others fought on our behalf. Alternatively, other ASIs may have been developed or emerged in secret, which then took a stand against the TITANs. Perhaps these other ASIs were the targets of the TITANs all along, and transhumanity was simply caught in the crossfire.

We do not know what became of these ASIs, if they even existed. The TITANs may have defeated or corrupted them. They may have wiped each other out, or fought each other to a deadlock. If they still exist, however, we have no evidence to indicate they will still be on our side in the future. Any ASI must be considered a potential x-risk.

TITAN FORKS

When I say an alpha TITAN, I mean a TITAN infolife with all the processing resources necessary to reach its full cognitive potential, but we have not had a confirmed report of such a TITAN since the Fall. The computational requirements to reach that level are unknown, and it is unlikely that even an entire building of cutting-edge servers could achieve it. Instead, it would require a massive distributed network of server farms along with an array of fabricators to upgrade and customize its hardware as needed. Think of the sheer number of servers owned by pre-Fall espionage agencies used to monitor mesh communications before the Fall. We're talking thousands of linked servers at a bare minimum. That level of infrastructure no longer really exists in the solar system, so worrying about an alpha TITAN here is not that realistic. This is good, because they are the closest thing to God we will ever encounter. If you ever encounter a full TITAN on an exoplanet, you're basically fucked anyway, so why bother worrying about it? Instead, you should be afraid of the limited TITAN egos.

Just as alpha TITANs are the most capable, we can categorize TITANs as beta, delta, or gamma forks. Beta TITANs are extremely rare and in the few cases we have encountered them, they have been severely damaged through the exsurgent virus or existing on comparatively minuscule computational resources. Betas tend to be impulsive and violent, which might be a result of neural damage, or perhaps they're just frustrated. After all, downgrading to a single server farm must be infuriating to them. Imagine thinking one-thousandth of normal speed in a broken body infected by a virus that drives you mad. Perhaps I'm projecting too much. The TITANs probably don't have anything resembling emotions, at least that we can recognize. At any rate, confirmation of a beta's presence usually calls for a tactical nuclear strike. There may be a few betas still lingering in the solar system, dormant in the quarantine zones and Earth, but they have yet to act out since the Fall. Hopefully we can detect and destroy them, if they ever wake up, before they do any serious damage.

Delta and gamma forks are more worrying because they're more common and active. Delta forks of TITANs are sometimes called "fetches" by veteran Firewall agents on the Eye due to an early TITAN forensic profile with that code name. The fetch profile was vague enough that virtually every single delta fork was tagged with the codename Fetch. Eventually we realized that the delta forks came from different TITANs, but when they're degraded enough, their codelines begin to resemble each other. A delta fork of a TITAN is a very dangerous opponent, but one that can be handled by Firewall. In many ways, they are only as capable as a high-end AGI, but they can

command TITAN-built machinery, spread the exsurgent virus, and can upgrade themselves if given the resources and time.

Fetches are quite capable of passing as AGIs in transhuman society. If watched carefully, however, they do tend to give off indicators that all is not as it seems—much like you might get from an improperly socialized AGI. They can be embedded in TITAN artifacts or machines, waiting for a chance to take over a vulnerable mesh network. We have had to send in erasure squads more than one secret hypercorp R&D lab that was taken over by a fetch.

There is ongoing discussion whether the fetches still active within the solar system are currently under the direction of the TITANs or simply still following their last orders or operational parameters. We have no direct evidence of active TITAN manipulation, and many recent interactions with fetches and TITAN machines imply they are following an old playbook. That said, we should not underestimate the subtlety of TITAN meddling again.

TITAN PROFILES

We still know practically nothing about the TITANs as they are now. Their capabilities, goals, and locations are still questions we have to answer if we want to have a chance of fighting them if they return. While it is imperative to destroy their machines and artifacts for short-term safety, it is also important to gather more intelligence when we can. This may mean not immediately destroying them. There is a fine line between risk and reward here; sentinels are advised to tread carefully. Before you go on your next mission, try to remember that for every risk you take now, you might be preventing an existential threat in the future. We just know so damned little and I'm afraid our time is running out.

IDENTIFYING TITANS

Firewall makes a point to analyze and track each TITAN and what it left behind. There's a good reason why we reward rep for XPs of fights against TITAN machines, infosec logs of hacks, and recovered (but quarantined) hardware. Every TITAN built and controlled war machines to do its bidding, but each went about it differently. Two headhunters may appear identical, but if they were programmed by different TITANs, they may have different capabilities and mission objectives. Even if the TITANs themselves are gone, their creations will reflect their will. If we can identify the TITAN responsible, we can anticipate the actions of the war machine or find an exploit to help defeat it. That is a big IF though. TITAN identification is an esoteric art in Firewall.

There is a great deal of debate among our academic types on the Eye about TITAN identification. We only agree on the identity of a small number of TITANs. A lot of the evidence we have gathered is ambiguous. Many of the TITANs were built to focus on similar fields and shared certain digital resources and objectives. At least two separate TITANs were tasked to monitor illegal proliferation of weaponized nanotechnology, but we don't know what made each one different or why the Americans built two AIs for the same task. Their codelines are similar, but not identical. We have three forensic profiles associated with the anti-nanotech TITANs, codenamed Ogre, Cyclops, and Goliath. Some of us think that all three profiles fit the same TITAN, while others think that the anti-nanotech TITANs created a third TITAN during the Fall to develop new nanoswarm weapons to deploy against transhumanity, which explains Goliath. A few sentinels claim that all three profiles are junk and we should start over. This is just one example, so multiply this bickering by a thousand and you might get some idea of what TITAN classification is like.

More importantly, we have even less information on what these TITANs did to upgrade themselves. Even if we had full documentation on a TITAN before the Fall, it may not resemble the post-Fall TITAN at all. We also have no information regarding how frequently, if it all, the TITANs created alpha forks and if they were allowed to diverge or were re-merged. Or if they created new TITANs, and for what purposes. For all we know, there may be hundreds or even thousands of TITANs, though their processing demands make this seem unlikely.

CRONUS

Thanks to the files from our NSA source, some of the only data we have on the early TITANs, we know that Cronus was designed as a top-level strategist that could analyze, design, and implement policy on its own in order to counter other ASI strategists used by rival nation states. It was specially designed to combat other AI expert systems, such as China's 100 Flowers. In other words, the Americans built an AI that could wage a war against other AIs, because humans could not think fast enough to keep up. Though the TITANs were specialized and not ranked, and we have no idea how the TITANs relate to each other internally, Cronus is the one most likely to have taken on a leadership role due to its strategic approach. We know that it communicated with every TITAN and many other major AI systems on the mesh before and during the Fall. It likely developed many of the tactics and weapons employed by the TITANs.

From actions we have tied to Cronus's forensic profile, we believe it possesses a distinct interest in artificial intelligence, in all of its forms. War machines under its control targeted government and hypercorp research facilities that dealt in AI and fought off other TITAN forces that tried to destroy them first. We believe it also sought out a number of specific AGIs for forced uploading.

We have detected and destroyed multiple TITAN machines that match Cronus's forensic profile inside populated habitats and cities on multiple occasions since the Fall. In every instance, the machine was targeting AGIs or an AI research facility. We still

aren't sure how the machines got so far without being detected, so we suspect that Cronus left behind a fetch somewhere in the solar system to monitor transhumanity and gather data as needed. Cronus's agents have acted with more intelligence and more stability than any other TITAN and its war machines have shown signs of post-Fall upgrades.

Our crows have identified three primary targets for Cronus in the solar system now:

- **ExoTech:** Unsurprisingly, one of the hypercorp leaders in AI research has suffered several TITAN and exsurgent infiltrations and attacks since the Fall. We have confirmed forensic evidence pointing to Cronus's involvement in one of these cases, thanks to an undercover sentinel. ExoTech has paid dearly to keep these incidents secret, so there's little evidence to analyze. They tend to blow their labs up and wipe out compromised systems and now hide their AI research in more remote areas. Recently, they've been in talks with Pathfinder to buy an exoplanet as their private research center, according to insiders to the deal. We're trying to plant some of our people on the planet, so we can keep tabs on ExoTech's research and warn us if Cronus comes knocking.
- **Glitch:** The universe's most densely populated processor loci station is a tempting target to an AGI-obsessed TITAN. Two years ago, an exsurgent-infected AGI tried to take over Glitch. Fortunately, it was detected and stopped before it could do any real damage. We confirmed it had some of Cronus's codeline. Since then, Firewall has placed a crew of infosec specialists on the station. We can't rule out the possibility of a physical attack, either, but the station's conventional defenses are top notch. A dedicated TITAN can certainly invent some exotic methods to slip by Glitch's defenses, however.
- **Nomic:** A famous AGI lawyer on Extropia, Nomic is very secretive about her own capabilities, and there is evidence she has engaged in unauthorized upgrades. Firewall prevented an outbreak of the exsurgent virus in the Pits, the unregulated slums of Extropia, six months ago. The vector was a client of Nomic's and was sleeved in a nanovirus-infected biomorph and carried a basilisk hack in their muse. The hack was aimed specifically at AGIs, not humans, something we haven't seen before. Nomic refused to answer any questions about the client. Someone needs to find out what she knows so we can figure out where the next attack will come from.

AKONUS

We know that some of the TITANs were designed to study demographics, cultural groups, institutions, and similar sociological models in order to analyze trends, networks, and mass behavior. The TITAN dubbed Akonus seems to be unique in that it was also built to understand and empathize with individual transhumans, and was also frequently "loaned out" for State Department and CIA use.

A psychological expert, Akonus was designed to analyze individual transhumans for behavioral modeling, psyop campaigns, and other manipulative purposes. One of Akonus's roles was interrogator. We have documentation that shows the CIA gave captured egos to Akonus for time-accelerated psychosurgery interrogation. You know, when that terrorist isn't cooperating fast enough, just have a machine god rip his mind apart. It was also used by the State Department as a consultant when the US government negotiated with certain foreign leaders. If they couldn't fork-nap the ego of a prime minister, they asked Akonus to model their behavior so they could figure out how to beat them at the negotiation table.

Akonus's forensic profile has been linked to thousands of false identities, sleeper agents, and identity theft. It clearly had a major role in TITAN efforts to infiltrate transhuman society and subvert it from within. It probably understands transhumanity better than any other TITAN—possibly better than we understand ourselves. Its code has also been linked to a large number of headhunters, suggesting that Akonus played a large role in the TITANs' forced-uploading program.

Though we have seen no evidence of activity from Akonus directly, its signature was most recently connected to a puppet outbreak in a suburb outside of Valles-New Shanghai. We believe a fetch of the TITAN had subverted an entire gated community of Experia employees there, puppeteering all of the residents. Firewall had been alerted to suspicious activity and was monitoring the residents for weeks when the enclave suddenly went into lockdown. We suspect the fetch was unstable and behaving erratically, and the erasers we sent in encountered heavy resistance. Analysis of the puppets' activities in the aftermath suggests that the fetch spent a great deal of time using Experia's resources to research gatecrashing missions, the Factors, and xenoarcheology. It likely sought to learn what we knew about alien civilizations. To that end, we have set up a monitoring system to look for possible sleepers among gatecrashers, especially those that have spent time near TITAN quarantine zones.

HECALOTH

The codename Hecaloth was assigned to the alleged TITAN that is the primary target of Operation SOLAR STORM. Hecaloth is believed to be one of the TITANs involved with various outbreaks and actions on Mars, possibly headquartered underground in the area now known as the White Zone in the TQZ.

Hecaloth is believed by some proxies to still be active within the solar system. The evidence is

scant and thin, however, and disputed by others who believe they are chasing a few active fetches at most. The operation has tracked activity from a lost Mercurian habitat to an exsurgent outbreak in the Martian Trojans to a long-abandoned but recently hacked and revived weapons platform in the Kuiper Belt, and even through the Pandora gates.

Though the servers chasing down Hecaloth believe the TITAN has been very busy, they have yet to ascertain what the TITAN's primary objectives are. A small group of vectors believe that Hecaloth may be on the trail on another ASI—though this is largely based on guesswork and hunches. Some of the proxies behind SOLAR STORM are convinced that Hecaloth is not only active, but is taking a keen interest in those that oppose it—including Firewall. They worry that some of the trails they have followed may have have been lures used to expose Firewall and gain more intel on our inner workings. Contrary voices on the Eye have condemned this as paranoia.

Myrmidon

Myrmidon is the codename given to a TITAN that seemed to coordinate the offensive against habitats in Earth's orbit and Lagrange points. This TITAN was particularly aggressive during the later part of the Fall, subverting numerous stations and interfering with evac efforts. It is believed to have been directly involved with the takeover of the Impulso, a Brazilian O'Neill cylinder, based on the speed, coordination, and processing ability behind the attack. Most of the space-based machine assets of the TITANs that have been forensically analyzed have fragments linked to Myrmidon's codeline.

Myrmidon, however, is one of the few TITANs that may have overstretched itself. There is significant evidence that indicates Myrmidon may have taken a direct role in the Battle of L4, and—even more importantly—that it may have been using a weapons platform as its primary processor locus. This was partially destroyed through a concerted effort during the battle, a turning point that also seems to mark the end of Myrmidon's direct involvement.

Firewall has spent many years attempting to track down any remnants of this hardware, some of which was salvaged by unwitting scrappers. We can confirm that at least one piece of hardware did have Myrmidon code fragments and was infected with the exsurgent virus. At this point, we cannot claim with confidence that Myrmidon was actually destroyed—and even if it was, it most likely had backups.

Theia

Originally, five unique TITAN clusters were built to monitor the financial system and provide forecasting. The clusters were separated from each other as a security precaution. We strongly suspect, however, that these clusters merged together into a single TITAN, now dubbed Theia.

This TITAN likely had access to the entire inner system financial system. We suspect it laundered billions if not trillions of credits to use as a shadow fund for itself and other TITANs. Front companies were formed to build factories and data centers to hide unauthorized upgrades and programs from the government.

Firewall's forensic profile of Theia is largely based on data provided by a joint hypercorp anti-cybercrime task force. During the early days of the Fall, infosec specialists from this task force detected signs of a covert effort to move massive financial assets offworld. Assuming they were on the trail of skilled cybercriminals who were using the Fall as an excuse to plunder corporate assets, they established an in-depth investigation to identify the hackers responsible, including the use of digital honeypots in bank networks. Instead, they caught a TITAN. Several members of the task force were infected with basilisk hacks and the investigation was largely derailed, but enough crucial data survived to give us a substantial lead on Theia's identity and activities.

We know little of Theia's involvement in the conflicts of the Fall, and we have seen few traces of their codeline or profile in analyzed TITAN war machines. It is possible Theia played more of a background logistics role, establishing the resources the TITANs needed for their efforts.

What little detail we do have on Theia's activities indicate that the TITAN was often steps ahead of its opposition. In situations where the TITAN or its projects was countered or attacked, it had numerous contingency plans in place to deflect the problem and keep control of the situation. This fits nicely with

Theia and Zrbny



To: <Encrypted>
From: <Encrypted>

I was just working on some cold case files, investigating an assortment of obfuscated transactions that may have come from our friend Theia during the Fall. I've linked the chain to a number of no-longer-existing financial entities, most of which were probably fronts. No surprise there, but the interesting thing is that some of these fronts were already flagged in our records. According to another server, those entities may have purchased a controlling interest in Zbrny Limited. The same server also thinks that whomever did that used the corp to build hidden stations within the Main Belt.

I'm not saying that Theia is behind Zrbny, but it's an interesting link. All we know is someone shady went to great lengths to buy out Zbrny. To find out more, we'd have to access Zbrny's internal records. We still don't know who it was—they covered their tracks well. It might have been an oligarch or the evidence might be faked. In any case, color me intrigued.

what we know of Theia's forecasting programming: the ASI likely has run thousands of simulations predicting every possible outcome of a scenario and set plans in motion to steer them all in the direction it chooses.

ONGOING TITAN ACTIVITY

Whether or not the TITANs are truly gone, many of their fetches, machines, and puppets remain active throughout the solar system. Firewall deals with dozens of encounters and outbreaks every year, often in derelict habitats or remote outposts, but sometimes in the crowded metropoles of Mars, Luna, and Venus, and we are not the only group doing so.

EARTH

Earth remains a hotbed of activity, though much of it seems undirected. Entire cities and ruins remain populated by exsurgents and puppets. Think tanks, warbots, hunter-killers, fractals, headhunters, and other death machines still prowl about, hunting for transhuman prey. Nanoswarms ravage the landscape, alter the weather, and build strange, eerie sculptures. Some TITAN bunkers and manufacturing facilities remain active, churning out new machines, though these are often targeted for orbital bombardment.

Here are just a few examples of ongoing activity:

Ankara: After spotting numerous sinkholes on the outskirts of this ruined city, we ascertained that TITAN machines were responsible. These massive pits are at least 100 meters across and over a kilometer deep. Their purpose is unknown.

Beijing-Shanghai Hyperloop: The high-speed maglev train tunnel connecting these cities, heavily damaged during the Fall, has been steadily reconstructed and is close to being operational once again. TITAN minifac centers regularly pop up in both cities before deactivating or being destroyed, so this may be an attempt to link resources together.

Cameroon and Nigeria: A number of sites known to be centers of TITAN machine activity are now giving off extremely high radiation levels. Cause unknown.

Jehovah's Corpse: This oddity was recently discovered in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean by reclaimer recon drones. It appears to be a massive organic structure built along the ocean floor—in the shape of a human body. It measures over two kilometers from head to toe. Scans indicate it may actually be made from flesh, though it has an inorganic skeleton and numerous hollow spaces and tunnels run throughout it. A large number of fractals were detected in and around it. The reclaimers dubbed it Jehovah's Corpse, but they have no idea what it's for or what the TITAN



machines plan to do with it. There's no way such a large construction could actually sit up or move in Earth's gravity.

Karachi: Though other parts of Pakistan did not fare well during the Fall, Karachi survived mostly intact, in large part due to a "silent takeover" by TITAN puppets and skitter swarms. Recently, the city's AB dome was reconstructed—but by puppeted transhumans, not survivors.

Luzon: The entirety of this Filipino island has been carpeted with a massive flesh party. This expanse of skin and organs continues to grow undersea, covering nearby islands. The sheer size of this organism is disturbing.

Moscow: Hundreds of giant cubes, kilometers in diameter, are being built over the ashes of Moscow with geometric perfection. There are no apparent entrances or windows and thermal readings indicate a high level of power is being used. It looks more like a massive machine than a set of occupied structures. Though there is a large exsurgent population here, most of the construction seems to be occurring via nanoswarm.

Santiago, Spain: It took us years to spot it, but there is a large, invisible, disc-like object presumably floating over the city's remains. Whatever the object is, it is transparent to most of the wavelengths we use for sensing. We've pegged it as roughly a kilometer in diameter, but attempts to get drones in for a closer look have been countered by aggressive hunter-killers.

Quarantine Zones

Both the TITAN Quarantine Zones on Mars and the New Mumbai Containment Zone on Luna are hotbeds of machine activity. There are enough machines, puppets, and exsurgents to make both areas exceptionally expensive to invade. Fortunately, they rarely attempt to leave these areas—why, we cannot say. The machines here are often still patrolling and engaged, unlike the dormant ones occasionally found elsewhere. To avoid satellite surveillance and aerial bombardments, much of the machine activity occurs below ground.

Due to the availability of TITAN technology, both zones remain prime targets for zone stalkers, singularity seekers, and others seeking to profit from or exploit it. Neither zone's containment perimeter is fool-proof, and outbreaks as a result of these activities are a regular occurrence.

Iapetus

There is no doubting that some of the machinery underlying this attempted matrioshka brain is still active. Surface and interior features of the partially transformed moon change frequently, new machines are found crawling the tunnels, something keeps the exsurgents alive, and random encoded transmissions still erupt from the interior depths. Though much of the circuitry and machinery is decayed, it is sometimes restored, though whether this is simply automated repair systems still at work or something more sinister remains unclear.

Outer System

Over time, it has become clear that the TITANs had much more going on in the outer system than we realized during the Fall. A number of hidden but now abandoned projects sites have been discovered, as well as weapons caches, comm relays, and even long-dormant processor loci. Such finds remain extremely dangerous, protected by machine guardians and laced with nanoviral traps. Over the years, a number of brinker habitats have become infected after stumbling across an unexpected discovery. These incidents have spurred theories that the TITANs left the system by way of the Oort Cloud rather than the gates, though there is little evidence to support this. Others firmly believe, however, that a major TITAN base in the Kuiper Belt or Oort Cloud is almost a certainty. The question remains: how active is it?

Extrasolar

Evidence of a TITAN presence has been found on dozens of exoplanets and other gate locations. These range from mere traces of their passing—left-behind charging stations, mesh transceivers, and launch sites—to full-on machine garrisons and active facilities. It is clear that the TITANs were conducting research in some places, such as the niche ecology and social experiments of Brak Kodel, or the partially dismantled particle-physics project in orbit around Van den Broek. However, aside from still-active machines and facilities, we have yet to find any direct evidence of the TITANs themselves. They seem to have visited and moved on, often leaving their projects incomplete.

One example is the recently discovered exomoon Mortara. Just a few kilometers from the gate site, Gatekeeper explorers discovered a TITAN launch base with functioning machines and evidence of recent launches. Observation of the gas giant that Mortara orbits has detected an unusual stationary region of the upper atmosphere with an unexplained and highly localized extreme difference of atmospheric pressure. This feature consistently triggers anticyclonic storms in the jet streams around it. This feature defies atmospheric dynamics, so TITAN involvement is suspected.

It's worth noting that we have encountered an immediate onslaught from TITAN machines on several exoplanets. These destinations have been marked as dangerous and locked out. Without putting ourselves at risk, we cannot learn more and can only guess at what we might find.

OTHER THREATS

Posted by: Cacophonous, Router <Info Msg Rep>

There are plenty of smaller groups Firewall needs to keep its eyes on outside of the big four. Here are a few recent summaries of minor threats. These may be less dangerous, but if they get their way, they could still be major trouble.

THE CHURCH OF LUMINOUS SAINTS

Posted by: Tio Silencio, Router <Info Msg Rep>

The Church of Luminous Saints (CLS) is a millennial Christian TITAN cult believed to have over 20,000 members spread across the inner system and Callisto. Their core beliefs are contained in the Book of Moab, which their leader believes was dictated to him by an angelic being. Firewall believes the being that inspired the text to have been a TITAN, or a fragment of one. The cult actively recruits new members, though their unusual doctrines, centered around mortification of the flesh, have made for slow growth. Rank-and-file CLS adherents are not a serious threat to most sentinels. The Church's inner circle, which seeks to obtain and use TITAN technology, should be considered very dangerous. Contact with high-ranking members may be an exovirus exposure risk.

ORIGINS

The CLS first went public in the Callistan city of Hyoden. From there, the cult began making converts in Liberty and other Jovian Republic settlements; the Junta didn't care for this. The Republic declared the Church a terrorist organization and accused Hyoden of harboring its members and giving them a base from which to spread radicalizing influences within the Republic ("radicalizing influence," for those not familiar with the cant of Jovian officialdom, is about the most severe accusation of thought crime that can be leveled against a group). The Hyodenese, not willing to risk reprisals from the Republic over a few god-botherers, suppressed the cult and claimed to have deported all of its members. However, our analysts believe that the CLS went underground on Callisto and that its center of operations is still there. Whatever the case, its public activities are now confined mostly to the inner system.

The early version of the Book of Moab—not the tidy, polished version now found in cult members' possession—reads like an exegesis, and the author (Warhol himself, we presume) indicates the text was dictated to him by a machine consciousness. He believes that this AGI, which calls itself Moab, is an incarnation of one of God's angels, and that it was accompanied to this world by other, lesser angels. The creed provides a puzzling narrative Moab's deeds, framed as an extension of events described in the Revelations of St. John. For those unfamiliar, Revelations was a political allegory assimilated into Christian scripture as an apocalyptic prophecy that tells of supernatural entities bringing about the eschaton by breaking seven mystical seals. Warhol's scripture interprets the Seven Seals as events that happened on Earth during the Fall. Moab's breaking of the Eighth Seal, located in the "farthest void," is the culmination of the prophecy. Moab then returned to Earth and "entered" Warhol. Warhol then lead his followers from Earth to found the Church.

BELIEFS

The CLS believes that, since the Fall, transhumanity has resided in the Paradise promised to believers by the Christian divinity. The Fall was a great purge of sinners by God, but at the same time an incomplete work. Paradise is plagued by infidels—transhumans who've not taken the faith and must be converted. The means of conversion are what make the cult so dangerous. They believe they're God's hand in a literal war in Heaven. A person's cortical stack and backups together comprise their soul, so it doesn't matter how many times their body dies on the road to eventual enlightenment. This doctrine put them at odds with the Jovian regime, which is normally friendly toward religion.

SCRIPTURE ANALYSIS

The conditions described on Earth when Moab returns to encounter Warhol suggest that the Exodus of Moab happened somewhere near the beginning of the Fall, not at the end. Investigations into Warhol's movements reveal that the cult arrived on Callisto before the end of the Fall. We know they arrived in a transport used exclusively by North American military reserves; such a craft would have been impossible to acquire once the evacuations began. We also know that several early cult members were North American military officers, and it was their personal connections that allowed the cult to infiltrate Jovian territory.

So we have a TITAN—possibly a group of them—visiting a place called "the Nighted Moonlet" to break a seal either before or very early in the Fall, then returning to Earth, "broken in mind," and recruiting human cultists. What it found out rimward is not something on which I am prepared to speculate, but it's a tantalizing avenue for further investigation. There's a bit of millennialism at work in the cult's doctrine as well. The Book of Moab makes disturbing references to "archangels,"—AGIs greater than Moab who will be revealed. ■

The idea that post-Fall life is Heaven, but a contaminated one, resonates well with poor and desperate folk who lost everything during the Fall. Most members are people who were re-instantiated after dying in the Fall and had continuity problems; to them, the idea of having died and attained Paradise is convincing. The cult's members tend to be heavily invested in the cult of personality around Warhol and are eager to make new converts. These members often have normal occupations (many are indentures or former indentures), but any cred they earn is tithed to the cult.

Warhol generally takes a practical stance toward technology, squeezing it through the narrow door of doctrine wherever it provides an advantage. For example, the CLS contracts with no less than three different backup insurance providers in case one of them falls under the sway of the Church's enemies and deletes their backups. However, this practicality does not extend to all technologies. Uplifts and infolife are referred to in the Book of Moab as demons with counterfeit souls to be purged from Heaven.

TITAN weaponry is seen as a particularly pious means of smiting unbelievers, and the group's several clashes with Firewall have involved their attempts to stockpile TITAN war gear. Warhol's long-term plans are unknown. To date, the Church has not openly acted on its mission to cleanse Heaven (i.e., the solar system), nor is it known to have actually used any of the TITAN weaponry we believe it to have acquired. This enables the cult to continue to operate mostly in the open, maintaining missions in large cities and seeking more converts.

TRAPPINGS

The cult's basic outfit—a narrow white tabard emblazoned with red trim over a black body suit and combat boots, with a red bandana, breather mask, or half veil worn over nose and mouth—raises few eyebrows in a Martian souk.

The cult modifies its members physically and mentally using a series of augmentations ("blessings") that are bestowed gradually as a member moves up in the ranks. Students of pre-Singularity mythology may note that they are loosely derived from the Seven Virtues, with the exception of Wrath, which was one of the Seven Deadly Sins. The blessings are Temperance (nutrient implants), Humility (mesh cutoffs), Cleanliness and Chastity (metabolism and erogenous mods), Diligence (oracles or pain cutouts), Wrath (neurachem), and Charity (unknown).

Ordained members are accompanied at all times by a cherub, diminutive transgenic primates probably derived from marmosets or another small monkey. They are sculpted to appear as tiny angels with blond hair and pale skin. They are sexless, naked, and winged. In very light or microgravity, the wings allow flight, while in heavier gravity (Martian and upward), they cling to the shoulders of their cultists. Cherubs are there to remind the devotee of Warhol's will, and occasionally to enforce it. We captured and dissected one, and found it to be a very advanced piece of equipment, useful for spying. They're also vicious little things, and the weak-willed among Warhol's flock may display bites and scratches around the ears and neck from their Cherubs' chastisements.

WARHOL OBSERVATIONS

Excerpted From: TerraGenesis 418 Incident Report
Source: Jake Carter

Nice thing about being a wacko apocalyptic cult leader who ain't shy about body-hoppin' is you don't got to hide behind your thugs. You can get hands on. Warhol himself was at the meeting, and it didn't take him but a moment to suss out who I was. He just said something soft and kindly with a bless-your-heart ring to it. I can't remember what. I thought they were gonna jump me, but that ain't Warhol's style. Would hurt his respectability if he went around disappearin' people. And then I was drivin' off. Didn't stop—couldn't make myself stop—'til I got back to the M5.

So if I may close with a couple observations: One, I think the guy's an async, and that if nothing else means Firewall should be keepin' an eye on him. And two, either Brother Number One's got multiple forks runnin' loose, or he's got some kind of edge in dealing with the integration jitters, 'cause anybody resleeves often enough they can run a system-wide cult but still make it to some ditchstop shack of a church for vespers oughta be batshit technical, and he ain't. Batshit evil, yeah, but for sure playing with fifty-two and more up the sleeve. ■

REVEREND RICE WARHOL

Warhol and his core group of adherents are survivors of the Fall. Little is known of his pre-Fall life. It is thought that he might have been a religious figure with many followers in the military, but the technotheist nature of his cult suggests that he had some technological background as well. He may have been a civilian engineer or policy wonk attached to the American military.

Today, Warhol is a classic cult leader. One tenet of the cult's beliefs is that the Reverend has taken it upon himself to shield them from the world's sins—by absorbing them himself. He maintains a harem of attractive subdeacons, indulges in food to the extent that many of his morphs are obese, and is said to have an impressive collection of drug habits (alpha being his favorite). His presence and speech patterns have been described as soft spoken, gentlemanly, and creepily sinister. Warhol has been observed to travel frequently, maintaining multiple morphs and resleeving at different churches to maintain direct control over his flock. Some suspect him of using forks to do this, although at present this is speculation.



Goals and Methods

The cult has over a dozen churches scattered through the inner system, mostly on Mars. Three of these are in the city of Valles-New Shanghai, leading some to believe that this is the center of the cult's operations.

Aside from proselytizing, growing its membership, and swelling its coffers, the Church also works hard to build up both corporate and criminal influence. Using bribes, sexual favors, and other manipulations, they recruit security officers, low-level managers, and other functionaries who can minimize civil interference with the cult's activities. Members trained in combat, tradecraft, and interrogation are hired out regularly to syndicates who need extra muscle. In return, those black market contacts maintain a steady stream of income and leads on black market weaponry and TITAN tech. CLS actively works to acquire nukes, military nanoswarms, and other dangerous weaponry. They have yet to tip their hand as to how they intend to use it, which makes Firewall very nervous. Additionally, small teams of cult archaeologists constantly scour the system for sites referred to in the Book of Moab, hoping to gain the secrets of the angels. The cult is known to deal with smugglers on Mars and have sent exploration teams into both the Titan Quarantine Zone and the New Mumbai Containment Zone. On Venus, they are believed to have attempted sending a team to the surface.

Green Death

Posted by: Kieran Glavin, Register <Info Msg Rep>

The terrorist group Twilight—short for Twilight of the Machines—originates from neo-primitivist ideology that blames the Fall on unrestricted technology. Adherents aspire to the predictable neo-primitive ideal of "a retreat into darkness," calling for the abandonment of all advanced technology and a return to mortality. By all, they mean all. Once Earth is reclaimed, all uplifts must be "downlifted," all AGIs and AIs must be erased, all stacks must be destroyed, all knowledge of higher math and writing must be removed by psychosurgeons, the psychosurgeons then must kill themselves, etc. Those not willing to "de-trans" themselves will be made mortal by force. Twilight is so hardline that it serves as an intersection between non-uplift neo-primitives and radical bioconservatisthate groups. Twilight is infamous for a string of terrorist attacks on uplift centers, minifactories, body banks, genetics research labs, and similar technological targets.

What's really unique and dangerous about Twilight is its practical methodology for erasing a millennium of progress. Jon Derrickson, the group's founder, was an accomplished nanoengineer before the Fall, and he acknowledges that cavemen won't be able to solve the reclamation problems of ecological devastation and remaining TITAN war machines. Derrickson

calls for a "push through" method, embracing post-singularity technology to carve out a safe space in the universe for mankind's rebirth. Twilight members are encouraged to learn the devil's tools so as to tear down the devil's house, a strategy lifted from other fundamentalist terrorist groups where violating technological taboos is forgivable so long as they advance the cause.

From Derrickson to Gao

Derrickson was recently captured by Pathfinder Security while trying to infiltrate the Pandora gate on the exoplanet colony Haplopelma. His ego is now held in cold storage and remains unavailable, but our investigations suggest he was trying to establish a new gate link to Solemn. The plastics-consuming xenobacteria infesting Solemn's biosphere are widely revered as the neo-primitivist's idea of heaven. Though there is a group of neo-primitivists settled on Solemn, the Love and Rage Collective has barred them from returning through the Fissure Gate due to the potential of contamination. We believe Derrickson was hoping to find a new path to Solemn to obtain the xenobacteria for Twilight's terror purposes.

In Derrickson's absence, Joanna Gao has taken up the mantle of her deceased leader. Gao, a former astrobiologist for Gatekeeper who converted to neo-primitivism after an exoplanet encounter with TITAN machines, was probably the source for the blue box gear Derrickson was equipped with.

Disaster at Eugene

Eugene was a small salvage-and-repair operation of roughly 50 transhumans working in Earth orbit. Frequent dealings with abandoned spacecraft and derelict habs meant the spacers were familiar with TITAN technology. We've also long suspected them as a weapons-dealing hub for Fresh Kills, but Firewall could never find enough evidence to warrant interest. Gao is recorded as having left on a shuttle from Vo Nguyen to Eugene just a few days after Derrickson's capture. Before leaving, we believe she withdrew a large amount of funds from Twilight's secret accounts.

A short while later, nothing of Eugene remained but a burned-out shell. Forensic investigation is still underway, but we are confident all of Eugene's residents are permanently dead. Autopsies revealed that implants, vacsuits, habitat systems, and anything else that ran on electricity was forcibly disassembled at the molecular level. The nanomachines appear to have left flesh alone, but the frozen dead were riddled with free radicals released into the blood as their stacks were taken apart. Disassembly appears to have occurred so fast that exothermic reactions burned the flesh around implants, molecular abrasion occurring quickly enough to generate scorching heat. The only known source of such advanced nanotech is the TITANs themselves.

Here is what we believed happened: the capture and perceived death of Derrickson (neo-prims do not believe in ego storage, forking, or farcasting) prompted Gao to proceed recklessly. Gao traveled to Eugene for a weapons deal in recovered TITAN nanotech. After the deal, Gao wanted to test if she could reprogram a TITAN swarm into a neo-primitivist smart weapon. As the salvagers on Eugene can attest, it worked.

A New GREEN

Talk on Twilight message boards now raves about GREEN: Green Revival Ecosystem Engineering Nanobots. Details are sketchy at best, but Gao and peers are promising a tool that "will forever cleanse the Earth of TITANs and the stars of technofascists." Recruitment is up, and the Twilight cells around the system are growing ever more radical, rallying around the motto "Revenge for Jon; a home for his children." Firewall is concerned. First, we do not understand how Gao has managed to reprogram a TITAN nanoswarm. Such swarms are deadly enough without transhumans figuring out how to control them. Second, there is no guarantee that reprogramming a swarm into GREEN fully eliminates either TITAN influence or the exsurgent virus. Even if the reformatting is 100% successful, the swarm would have to be completely devoid of inputs. To take back Earth and avoid backhacks, the anti-synthetic swarm would have to be completely mesh autistic. In short, it is a completely rogue, unstoppable nanoswarm by design.

This is all complicated by Twilight's ideology, which makes every transhuman population center a target. Conflicts between different flavors of neo-prim and biocon philosophies might even prompt the group to use GREEN on other bioconservatives. And as if that weren't all enough, the working group has linked several instances of forknapped scientists around the system to local Twilight cells. We suspect Gao and her cabal are looking to exploit GREEN as much as they can. Evidence on Eugene suggests that the GREEN swarm ate itself after it was done, unable to differentiate its own nanobots from other technology. This would limit the potential of a GREEN swarm on a planet-wide scale, and Twilight appears to be kidnapping researchers to find a solution.

Gao's current location is unknown, but it is just a matter of time before we see GREEN deployed again.

Haunted Stars

Posted by: Captain Sage Kim,
Elysium Rangers <Info Msg Rep>

This group doesn't have an official name that I'm 'ware of. On Guanxi, they call them the Haunted Stars. They rob banks.

They came across my desk a few months ago as a result of my work with the Elysium Rangers, but the intel was broadcast to every station for fear they'd

be taking refuge in the TQZ. Where my bosses see anachronistic criminals, I see x-threat. Firewall needs to step in before anyone wises up.

Some context: a few of the terraforming hypercorps—Shaanxi Reformations and Fa Jing, among others—still employ free Martians to run maintenance on their surface-side terraforming operations. This isn't morality at work in the markets. Terraformer maintenance requires extensive travel times, irregular work schedules, and a host of tasks indentures could exploit to escape. So the corps pay these rednecks just enough to stay loyal and check the meters.

For various reasons that mostly amount to no one trusting each other, these hypercorps started to send payments in the form of anonymous credit accounts stored on cheap ectos. On payday, they'll fab a cheap bubble hab, plop it down in a central location in the desert, and send out a merc-heavy convoy with the ectos. The terraformers trickle in until everyone's paid, and then everyone goes home.

At least, that's how it should work. For the last three months straight, they've been hit.

It doesn't matter how randomized the location is or how much security they bring. Every time, the Haunted Stars roll in on buggies, frag everyone, and rob the place blind. It shouldn't even work. Every ecto requires a code be entered before the credit account goes live, but they've managed to get the guards to give up the code … by touching them in the head. If you enhance the surveillance footage, you can see the outlaw bleeding from the nose and eyes as they do it. The dumb-ass majors in my department haven't noticed yet, but we can't rely on stupid forever.

They're all asyncs. Every one of them. Kinesics software has scored hits for several of the thieves. One's a Lost-generation criminal, another's an escaped uplift, and three others are on Firewall's Watts-MacLeod watch lists. Hell, the leader's surveillance profile registers as Nia Kundaruum; she went missing through a Pathfinder gate in AF 7! How'd she get back?

Sleights explain how they figure out the locations, move so fast, and get the guards to cough up the codes. What we don't know is how they found each other, who is equipping them, or what they hell they want with all those credits. If even one of them is an exsurgent, some heinous shit could be funded with that much cred. Pretty soon, the hypercorps are going to lose enough payroll that it makes sense to deploy Oversight. Those suits are in-the-know, so we could be looking at complications with Ozma and fuck-knows-what attempts to monetize the situation.

Even if they're mere criminals, these assholes have killed and bankrupted dozens of rednecks just trying to make a living. To be clear, I'm not asking for the permission of anyone on this server. With or without Firewall, I'm rounding up a posse and going hunting. Who wants in?

THE MINERVAN FLEET AND SIS

Posted by: Sun Jeong, Sentinel <Info Msg Rep>

Some interesting things happened in the early days of the Jovian Republic. A diverse array of military, intelligence, and government groups and figureheads, many of them the only remnants of larger institutions that didn't survive the Fall, came together to establish a new state. The Junta would have you believe that the Security Council stepped seamlessly into their dictatorial role, as if mandated by heaven. What the sanitized historical records don't capture is the complete mess of shady negotiations, faction-forming, threats, bribes, backstabbing, and outright power grabs. Nor do they tell you who was on the losing side.

When the coup that established the Security Council came about, not all of the various military units that had coalesced in Jovian space were involved. It quickly became clear that the determinist faction was going to hold the most sway in the new Junta. This ideology of isolationism and defensiveness did not sit well with certain military commanders who had pushed for a hawkish and proactive foreign policy—one that would first eliminate nearby security threats and then seek to build a wider defense network through pacification of strategic habitats throughout the solar system. After a brief power struggle, a small group chose to disappear into exile, taking their ships—and a number of civilians—with them.

You've probably heard of Jovian Space Force Intelligence (JSFI). What you probably don't know is that it was first spearheaded by Colonel Diego Grossman. Yeah, that Grossman, the one who led the assault on the TITAN shipyard found in the Martian Trojans, which would have failed if he hadn't rammed his ship into it. He somehow survived and made it to Jovian space, where he was decorated as a war hero. Unfortunately for Grossman, Zane McFarlane was hellbent on bringing all Jovian intelligence assets under the sway of Security Council Intelligence. Grossman resisted, but he didn't have anywhere near McFarlane's political leverage. Grossman was ousted and charged with treason, but he managed to escape, taking some of his top agents with him. His name was scrubbed from Jovian history.

Naturally, these two renegade groups came together and established an alliance. The splinter military units re-branded themselves as the Minervan Fleet, establishing their own Admiralty and military government. Grossman's intelligence unit now calls itself the Special Intelligence Secretariat (SIS), and works alongside the armada. Both groups consider themselves the rightful heirs to the Jovian throne. More distressing, however, is that their hawkish views have grown even more radicalized. The Minervan Admiralty holds a sweeping definition of x-risks, now considering virtually all of transhumanity a threat, effectively making it a terrorist organization bent on wiping out the rest of its species.



Our intelligence on these groups comes primarily from a sentinel who managed to infiltrate the fleet. Though we lost contact quickly, they did manage to sneak off several encrypted messages. The rest of the information is assembled from various incident reports that until recently we thought were unrelated.

THE FLEET

The Minervan Fleet operates on the far edge of the solar system, presumably deep in the Kuiper Belt, and possibly far out of the plane of the ecliptic. We suspect they go to great measures to stealth their ships and likely coast dark for long periods, so as not to signal their location with their torch flares.

The armada is centered around the *Minerva,* which is more of a mobile habitat/carrier than a proper warship, albeit with more weaponry than a dozen scum fleets. It is essentially an asteroid beehive hab fitted with massive rockets, holding enough warrens and tunnels to house thousands. Much of its real estate, however, is devoted to research labs and weapons development.

The *Minerva* is accompanied by a fleet of dozens of warships and support craft. We don't have an exact count on what they have, but we know at least three destroyers and two cruisers went missing from Jovian space right around the time they defected. We suspect they've pirated at least a dozen ships in the years since, and even their civilian/commercial craft have been equipped with weaponry. The *Minerva* itself carries a full complement of fighters and several thousand marines. Fleet craft are not equipped with AIs and are refit with analog rather than digital electronics, to decrease their potential attack surface from hostile hackers or AIs.

All told, we suspect the fleet is home to around 20,000, though this is based on a lot of guesswork. While we are not aware of the fleet possessing shipyard or antimatter facilities, our analysts think both of these would be high priority objectives. It is highly possible that the fleet is already constructing such stations deep in the Kuiper Belt, and they likely have an antimatter source/supplier in-system.

We suspect the Minervan Fleet of numerous incidents of piracy and attacks on brinker and exhuman outposts, all in the Kuiper Belt or Neptunian Trojans. They have thoroughly destroyed such habitats, leaving no survivors.

THE ADMIRALTY

The fleet's current Admiral is Kjell Osorio, a former naval commander who came out of retirement to help organize and command coalition space fleets defending Earth orbit during the Fall. Though of advanced age, Osorio has only taken limited longevity treatments. Like the Junta, the Admiral controls the fleet with tight military discipline.

Our psychological profile of Osorio paints him as dedicated to cleansing the solar system of transhumanity, one habitat at a time. He believes the world went mad ten years ago and the only humans left got the raw end of the deal by having to settle for Jupiter. No one with biomods, mesh inserts, or any type of augmentation more advanced than clunky, mechanical prosthetics is trusted or allowed into a position of influence. He doesn't even trust the Jovians, believing they have sold out to us transhuman monsters. Osorio is, however, more than willing to attempt to turn the weapons of their enemies against them.

Interestingly, Osorio maintains direct contact with elements within the Terrestrial Ancestral Heritage Group (TAHI), a paramilitary "lobbyist" group in the Jovian Republic. In fact, our infiltrator was originally working their way within TAHI ranks when they were tapped for a special project and shipped out to the Minervan Fleet.

THE PRESIDENT

Despite being under military control, the fleet does adhere to the pretense of representative democracy. The civilian side of the fleet is overseen by President Avery Affricano. As the former American Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Affricano was the next in line for presidential succession, had there been a government left, and the only cabinet member to survive the Fall. Her claim to leadership was blocked by the Jovian Security Council's coup.

According to our infiltrator, there has been some tension recently between the President and Admiral, as the civilians in the fleet have been ruffled by the military's heavy handling of affairs they feel should be democratically controlled. Admiral Osorio has made it quite clear that the fleet remains on a war footing, and as long as the transhuman menace is at hand, he will call the shots.

The President is not above her own aggressive maneuvers, however. She reportedly had her security detail airlock a life support engineer on the barest suspicion that the woman had tampered with the climate control in the President's private quarters. The fact that the engineer was related to the Admiral's chief of staff was presumably an unfortunate coincidence.

THE SIS

While the fleet builds up its strength in hiding, the SIS carries on the fleet's aggressive, bioconservative, anti-transhuman agenda throughout the solar system. To this end, SIS cells seek out TITAN technology, WMDs, and dangerous nanotech. They then look for ways to deploy it against transhuman settlements, going for maximum destruction and loss of life. With these recent revelations, we have linked several terror attacks to the group, including a nanoswarm outbreak on a Uranian anarchist hab and a recent attempt to redirect an ice comet shipment directly into Extropia. Their activities are confined largely to the outer system because it allows them to get support from the Minervan Fleet and because outer system settlements tend to be small, isolated, and far from help—low-hanging fruit.

Because they won't resleeve or egocast, SIS teams travel by ship. This means their ops are long duration just because of transit times. They use flat morphs exclusively and keep to an extreme biocon line on what kind of augmentations they'll take: no stacks, no biomods or other bioware, and no implanted nanoware. They do use cyberware, but they stick to physical modifications like reflex boosters and avoid anything that affects thought processes or radically modifies their physiology. As far as gear goes, they're much less picky; they like using jammed bots, combat drugs, and nanotech.

The good news about the SIS is that it's a small organization. Firewall estimates the SIS has no more than twenty active field agents. They work solo or in groups of two or three. Don't underestimate them just because they're flats, this is more than enough to do a great deal of damage.

EXPERIMENTS

Our infiltrator was taken by TAHI to the fleet specifically to help with weapon research. In the course of this, they discovered two disturbing things. First, both the Admiralty and SIS have taken a keen interest in asyncs, but as weapons, not allies. They recognize that asyncs are useful for interfacing with some types of TITAN technology, so they have captured a number of asyncs for the sole purpose of weaponizing them. Captive asyncs are fitted with TITAN weaponry and subjected to psychosurgical behavioral modification, making them pliant tools. Weaponized asyncs, referred to colloquially as *freaks* by the SIS, suffer from severe mental trauma due to the treatment they've received and can be as dangerous to their handlers as to the enemy.

The second and more disturbing find was that the fleet had come into the possession of a cache of TITAN technology—possibly raided from an exhuman nest. The haul was apparently quite large and included a number of unusual artifacts and rare weapons systems—some of which were already fitted to the *Minerva's* hull. One unusual item was described as looking like a miniature hand-sized Pandora gate enclosure; it's purpose was unidentified. The Admiralty and SIS are hard at work figuring out how to best use these devices against transhumanity.

OPERATION MOMBI FORUMS: READ THIS FIRST

Read This First: This is the Operation MOMBI forum. If you are cleared for this board but have somehow managed to remain "Ozma agnostic," we suggest you either dive in or get out. We don't have the luxury of just "respecting" your opinion here. There is a single truth behind Ozma; the longer we go without it, the more danger Firewall faces. Your interpretation is either right or wrong: here's where we argue until we figure out which.

Before you start suggesting we gather more information, pursue a cautious approach, or table the issue until further developments, know that we will offload your useless ass to another server. Remember: you're talking to people that have tried and died against these slippery bastards using every espionage tactic in the book. Our previous infiltration efforts have, at best, yielded contradictions. Just as often, sentinels disappear. If I'm being honest with myself, at this point MOMBI has probably done more to expose Firewall to Ozma than the other way around. We are all tired of losing friends for nothing, so it's time for a different approach.

We are here to make a best-guess assumption and move forward. If subsequent ops fail, at least we'll be able to eliminate something from the list of possibilities. Enter the conversation ready to change minds and be persuaded.

Note that at your level of access, all comments are anonymous. If there's any op in Firewall that Ozma has targeted, it's this one. We take opsec quite seriously. Yes, this means some of these comments may be intentional misdirection planted by Ozma moles. Get used to honing your bullshit filters.

Non-Negotiables: The original intelligence reports can be found here, but I'll explain what we already know about Ozma: the name and the origins derive from the pre-Fall SETI organization. SETI transitioned from governmental to private funding as the first hypercorps expanded markets into space. Under corporate control, SETI had its mission widened beyond the search for extraterrestrial life. This mission creep continued until sometime after the Fall. Shortly after the formation of the Planetary Consortium and discovery of the Pandora Gate, SETI assets were renamed Project Ozma and tasked with finding where the TITANs had gone. Shortly afterward, the project was allegedly folded and rolled into the PC's security structure. There are some indications in the transcripts that Ozma lies within the Oversight organizational matrix, but unlike Oversight, no budgetary, operational, or public records of any kind exist to confirm this. In fact, Ozma hasn't once been mentioned officially since, even amongst classified inter-corporate disclosures we've stolen from the PC. Off-the-record, however, the name has come up multiple times in our interactions with a black-budget group that shares some of Firewall's interests.

Notice I never called this a "summary:" that's literally everything we know. Anything else is conjecture, unconfirmed, or counter-intelligence. As such, any attempt to derail threads by questioning the non-negotiable gets you banned. We have no time to throw away our foundation and start over. ♣

TOPIC: PARALLEL STATE THEORIES

[Begin Forum Excerpt]

Anon: My concern is that we are are simultaneously overestimating and underestimating Ozma. They are kicking our ass. We excuse our failures with harmful theories that paint them as monsters beyond transhuman comprehension because you don't have to feel bad for losing to the devil. The defeatist notion that we're fighting a TITAN makes us overly cautious. Meanwhile, while Ozma is a transhuman organization like any other, we underestimate how much better they are at this stuff. They win because we don't even know what game they're playing.

Anon: I certainly don't think it's inconceivable that some other conspiratorial group scooped up a large market share of elite covert ops types after the Fall. The hypercorps and Jovians all got their fair share, and even Firewall has a lot of military intelligence personnel in its ranks. But we don't pay well, can't promise stability, and weren't unified during the evacuation. There were a lot of spies out on deployment while the TITANs were hot who suddenly found themselves unemployed after the Fall. A lot of those high-value assets from the likes of the CIA, NSA, Bletchley Park, MI6, MIND, MSS, etc. are still MIA.

Anon: I'm sure there were some smart, influential people who saw that power vacuum coming, and took steps to fill it.

Anon: Let's keep in mind here, the nation states were effectively decapitated, but many of the people that served them remained and still kept their loyalty. Who's to say some of those highly trained agents didn't come together to puppet the PC from the inside? While still pursuing their nationalistic interests?

Anon: So what's the end game? To re-establish China or something?

Anon: It's a possibility. The hypercorps were already making their move to establish a new order, and they were making it clear the old nation states had no place. The opportunity existed to establish a fifth column, however, and work the long game. And what faster way to do that than by taming TITAN tech?

Anon: Let's not forget that some of our hyperelites come from espionage or state-security backgrounds themselves. They have years of experience and nationalist loyalties to the dead countries that gave them immortality.

Anon: Interesting theory, but not sure I buy it. If the hyperelites proved anything before the Fall, it's that they were not tied down to old allegiances and nationalistic sentiments. They are loyal only to wealth and themselves. Nation states were only ever just a convenient way of keeping the masses in line, distracted by patriotism. They have new methods of control now. Sure, there are always holdouts, but I'm not convinced any of them have enough influence to pull Ozma together.

Anon: Agreed. If there is a group of apex spooks, they work for the oligarchs that long ago coerced them into service. The perfect tradecraft we've seen so far is something you only get if the leadership is made up of bicenturians.

[End Forum Excerpt] ♣

TOPIC: OPEN CONJECTURE

[Begin Forum Excerpt]

Anon: OK, so there's very little we have confirmed about Ozma, but there's quite a bit of material in the unconfirmed category. Let's talk about some of the tidbits we've picked up: agents, SOPs, capabilities, infrastructure, bases, objectives, etc. Even if it's contradictory, let's at least work with what we have.

Anon: Well, we know that their agents are masters at tradecraft. They know every trick in the book, and they've invented a fair share of new ones. They also make heavy use of cat's paws and puppets, most of whom have no idea they're being manipulated, or by whom—and if they find out, hello brainwipe. They are experts at misdirection and deception—which is why we don't even trust half the things we think we know about them.

Anon: Case in point: that time they made it seem like they were running some joint black lab operation with ExoTech. We were fully convinced they were up to no good and spent months getting a team inside, only to find no sign of Ozma. We're pretty sure they fabricated the whole thing and piggybacked on our infiltration to get whatever they needed from ExoTech's labs. At least, we assume that was Ozma—no one else is that good.

Anon: We've certainly had a hard time IDing their agents. We usually don't get any hits on the kinesics or biometric scans. They tend to use morphs with cyberbrains, for the ease of sleeving and evacuating, and their infomorph data trails are always obfuscated. The cyberbrains are hardened against hacking and they've always been willing to literally blow their heads off if it looks like they're going to be compromised. Their encryption is equal to if not better than ours, their implants are always top-of-the-line, and their agents are well-trained and/or loaded with skillsofts.

Anon: Sometimes they don't even use morphs with stacks. Sometimes.

Anon: These agents are stone-cold bastards. They're calm under pressure; even bug-eyed exsurgents don't seem to faze them. I've seen one take out a kid without blinking twice.

Anon: And they come in all shapes and sizes. I've seen ones that seemed to be kids, and I'm not talking neotenics.

Anon: Can't say they operate with standard team sizes. We've encountered single agents and entire squads. They seem to use what they need, and they always have backup (though sometimes it's dupes).

Anon: Same can be said for their gear loadouts—they use what's necessary. They've deployed with everything from disposable weapons to full-on combat kits to tech that was either alien or TITAN in origin. We know for a fact they've used scour rings in the field to eliminate evidence.

Anon: Eh, the more I read, the more I'm convinced that Firewall simply labels every unidentified bogey it has contact with as an Ozma operative. Half of these incidents are probably triad hit squads, exhumans, corporate assassins, anarchist militiamenschen, or some other mundane opposition. Firewall tends to piss off a lot of people, and we're not always up to speed on who's been invited to the party. It's not like Ozma agents are repping themselves as such in their socnet profiles.

Anon: What about facilities? Surely we must have ID'd some of their physical sites by now.

Anon: You'd think so, but Ozma seems to prefer staging their sites inside other operations. If they need a fab lab, for example, they'll root some hypercorp manufactory, designate an area as theirs under some fake project, and do all their business right under everyone's nose. We've seen them do the same with body banks, criminal darkcasters, and even shipyards. Every location they use seems to be masked, intentionally ephemeral, and easy for them to bug out of and destroy if necessary.

Anon: They've also been willing to pull rank and waltz in to take over habitat security centers and the like. They tend to present themselves as Oversight, or whatever other authority works, and they'll get official confirmation all the way up to the Hypercorp Council. Such authorizations have a way of disappearing afterwards, however, like they never happened.

Anon: All of which points to Ozma having some serious hacking capabilities. They've pulled tricks that have left our best vectors stumped. I think it's safe to say they have some deep assets at their disposal: traffic monitoring on mesh backbones, an arsenal of 0-days, rootkits and backdoors placed in widely used electronics, intentional weaknesses implanted in common crypto standards, entrenched botnets, and serious quantum computing farms. Or they have pet ASIs slinging code.

Anon: We need a mesh rule about how every discussion about Ozma leads to someone screaming "TITANs!" Can we talk about their methods?

Anon: From my experience, they prefer to stand back and watch while things go down, without getting directly involved. Their surveillance capabilities are exceptional. Then they step in last minute to mop up and grab the prize. For example, if they get wind of Firewall chasing after a singularity seeker with some shiny TITAN toy, they'll let us do all the legwork, then show up out of nowhere to cap our sentinels right as they're doing their victory toast and walk off with the score.

Anon: Except that time we let that Lost fugitive get away on Ganymede, slipped right through our net. It wasn't until weeks of backtracking later that we found out that Ozma had snagged them from right under our sniffers.

Anon: Or that time we were figuring out how to infiltrate that ID Crew lab in the Main Belt that we thought was making basilisk-infected narcoalgorithms. We were still analyzing deck plans when Ozma dropped us a message that basically said "we got this" and took the lab out. We still don't know where that missile even came from.

Anon: Or that op where we thought we were tracking an infected gatecrasher through Elysium, but the whole setup was simply a lure for Ozma to capture one of our proxies. They really drew out the bait on that one.

[End Forum Excerpt]

TOPIC: "OZMA" IS HOW I SPELL TITAN

[Begin Forum Excerpt]

Anon: The arctic heat signature was the tipping point for me. There is nothing human behind Ozma. They are our TITAN babysitters while the machine gods are on vacation.

Anon: This again? The Earth facility might be a conspiracy theory or a dream—depending on your politics—but it's not real.

Anon: I'm aware of my own cognitive biases on the issue. That's why I've had them cut out. I analyzed the intel from every possible angle and using every available mindset. There's just too much noise for it to be a hoax.

Anon: So if the "Santa's workshop" legend is real and hasn't yet been consumed by nanoswarms, what does that have to do with Ozma? Why couldn't it be reclaimers or scrappers or something?

Anon: The PC's fingerprints are all over it. But, if this were a corporate project, worth the cost and danger to bypass the interdiction so totally, we would have already seen them monetizing it. So, when the PC isn't really the PC, it's always Ozma. And an arctic station means they can bypass the interdiction en masse and avoid attacks from leftover war machines and exsurgents, who have no business in the area. It's Occam's Razor: the simplest explanation is that Ozma aligns with TITAN interests.

Anon: I still don't buy the fairy tale. If they're allied with the TITANs, why not have a base wherever they want on Earth? What's the point of this base supposed to be, anyway?

Anon: Well they can't be too obvious about it. Open collusion would be a dead giveaway. So they maintain a base on Earth, keep in touch with their masters, and still retain plausible deniability.

Anon: I'll just point out this alleged base hasn't been found on the scans for the past two months.

Anon: We know how good at hiding Ozma is. It's there. I'd bet my stack on it.

Anon: Okay, counter-proposal: Ozma is run by an ASI, but not a TITAN. We already suspect others existed. Why couldn't a non-TITAN ASI have survived? It would be bound to have some of the same interests, simply out of concern for its own survival.

Anon: We have no evidence of other ASIs, period.

Anon: Some of us know that is not true.

Anon: The TITANs were not known for subtlety. There's nothing "deniable" about hordes of decapitation robots. TITANs may be capable of fooling us, but I doubt they feel transhumanity is enough of a threat to warrant the effort. Ozma's continued secrecy suggests a different personality template altogether. TITANs don't bother to tell us, whereas Ozma actively deceives.

Anon: Okay. I'll grant the hypothetical. But if Ozma is run by an ASI with the ability to thwart TITANs so thoroughly, what was that ASI doing during the Fall? Having a nap? Maybe its interests merely aligned with transhumanity's near extinction. In that case, what's the difference?

Anon: "A TITAN by any other name doth kill as efficiently."

[End Forum Excerpt]

TOPIC: EXSURGENCY AS BUREAUCRACY

[Begin Forum Excerpt]

Anon: Ozma's threat matrix reads with the variability of a fundamentalist terror group, yet employs opsec comparable to a black ops cell of old Earth's first-world elite. They're too unpredictable for profit-based politics, but too flexible for religious or ethical motivations. They command resources greater than our own, but somehow manage even less visibility. In short, Ozma doesn't make sense. From a tactical perspective, we have to assume they are all exsurgents.

Anon: Come again?

Anon: We lose little by assuming infection and being wrong. We lose everything by assuming otherwise and being wrong. Pascal's Wager applied to spycraft.

Anon: Look, we all know that hierarchies are particularly vulnerable to exsurgent infections. If one authority figure gets infected, the virus is all but guaranteed to roll down the command structure, and then back up to the top. Underlings can be infected under orders; once the underlings are all infected, they have the numbers on management. Groups like the Jovians incorporate checks-and-balances of other military branches to impede an outbreak like this.

Now take Ozma. We have every reason to believe that Ozma is an old-school, top-down intelligence organization. We have no indication they answer to any other group. If even one mid-level agent is infected, there's a good chance it could spread to the whole group. About the only thing Firewall does right is cell organization, and we've had a hell of a lot more infections than just one. I wouldn't play those odds on Ozma.

Anon: I … I can't respond to that. I think I'm agreeing with a Jovian. Am I infected? Is this a torture simulspace?

Anon: That might explain Ozma's tendency towards overwhelming violence. They put our erasure squads to shame. But, then again, Ozma is almost as old as Firewall. Maybe older. The exsurgent virus burns faster than that.

Anon: Unless Ozma is made up of the high-latency, low-symptom strain the crows have been warning us about for years.

Anon: Or maybe the exsurgents within Ozma deliberately did not infect everyone, in order to decrease the possibility of exposure. They could have entrenched themselves in leadership roles while manipulating their operatives who blithely follow orders. A black-budget secret agency makes the perfect cover for them.

Anon: We don't know for certain Ozma's hierarchal, that's an assumption. What if some of Ozma is exsurgent, but the rest are quarantined in cells?

Anon: What if they were engaged in a shadow civil war?

Anon: We've seen no evidence of that. Now you're just making my head hurt.

Anon: Except that they've been more than willing to dispose of their own agents on several occasions. Maybe that was intentional rather than an operational necessity.

[End Forum Excerpt]

TOPIC: FALSE FLAGS

[Begin Forum Excerpt]

Anon: Ozma doesn't exist. There. I said it.

Anon: Elaborate.

Anon: The super spooks are only a spook story. Ozma never was … or, if it did exist, it's just some short-lived accounting action team that happened to get some assets leftover from when the Planetary Consortium ate SETI. We took an inconsequential byline on an old invoice and ascribed all our fears to it.

Anon: So what purpose does Firewall have in perpetuating this conspiracy?

Anon: It's not a conspiracy. It's creepy-pasta written by some bored sentinel. The idea caught and now anytime an op goes pear-shaped for unknown reasons, it's Ozma. Any time we have to justify Firewall's excessive paranoia? Ozma. Hell, whenever an Oversight agent in the know just wants to screw with us, they can just say Ozma.

Anon: There is too much hard evidence for Ozma to be pure legend, but I wouldn't be surprised if it started as a meme, leaked to other organizations, and ended up a weapon against us. Why take credit for interfering with x-threats when you can blame it on Firewall's personal bogeyman? Soldiers are a naturally superstitious bunch. In reality, it's just a meme that hypercorp covert ops squads keep trolling us with.

Anon: And the narrative is too clean. The largely anarchistic, collectivist transhuman espionage group just so happens to be aligned against a corporate, fascist counterpart stemming from old Earth military structures? And there's a lot of intel suggesting they're actually building and promoting exsurgent strains? I mean, Ozma agents might as well be tying children to train tracks and twirling their mustaches.

Anon: I think it's even more pat to simply discount them as a fabrication. We should not doubt their existence, but it is worth considering that the meme was engineered. If I learned anything from my former employer, it's that one should never hire a man when a meme will do. Ideas do not sleep. They do not rest. They travel and fork themselves cheaply. It would be easy for us to get sloppy when the fate of the species is on the line, forgetting the long-term opsec in the midst of a high-stress mission. So Firewall made up Ozma. Even when your colleagues are gone, Ozma is watching. They have unlimited resources. They are more skilled than you can imagine. They are out to get you.

Anon: Practice deniability or the bogeyman will get you. That's how my server talks about Ozma already!

Anon: Interesting, but I think it's more likely that the meme is used against us than for us. A group like Ozma has a vested interest in keeping our sentinels panicked and sloppy. They could be operating with limited resources and personnel, but they know how to make it look good. And the meme inflates their capabilities. All they have to do is drop hints and our sentinels start wetting their vacsuits. They're not perfect, we just get sloppy out of fear. It's basic psyops.

Anon: Memes have one drawback; they are not loyal. I'm equally concerned that the Ozma concept may have leaked outside the Eye. Trust me: the greatest evils in history are inspired by mere fictions. Ozma may have started as a cautionary tale, but others may see it as a blueprint for a weapon. I worry we've said the devil's name too many times and wished him into being.

[End Forum Excerpt]

TOPIC: WHO AND WHY

[Begin Forum Excerpt]

Anon: Objectives-wise, Ozma seems to run pretty parallel to Firewall: protect transhumanity from x-risks. But is that observational bias? Do we not see Ozma's other activities because we aren't active in those areas?

Anon: The fact that we bump uglies so often suggests a focus similar to our own, but at this point, it's probably because they're whom we're hunting. I was on a peer-review group looking into what they were doing on Nirvana … terrifying stuff. Ozma is not our ally. At best, they observe and report to wherever in the universe their masters are hiding.

Anon: That does seem to be a major distinction. Whereas the pragmatists within Firewall are sometimes willing to use the enemies' tools, even they know when to step back and nuke it from orbit. Ozma, however, doesn't seem so much interested in destroying dangerous technology, as in figuring out how to co-opt it for their own purposes. Whatever those are.

Anon: We suspected Oversight tampering on Fortean once. I rigged up a false genehacking design as a test. It was basically a kitchen-sink monster: exsurgent mutations, experimental nano, Watts-MacLeod infection, etc. It was massively unethical, but we never planned on growing one. If Oversight was spying, we'd get pre-emptive sanctions from hypercorp investors, claim it was a prank, and find the leak. But the next day, all the monster designs were missing, my systems were totally fried, and the suspect shot her way into the farcasting relay and departed. Oversight would've seen a liability; Ozma saw a new pet.

Anon: Isn't it clear what they want the tech for? Control. There's nothing they won't monetize or weaponize—or both. They aren't as concerned about the extinction of transhumanity as they are about other factions getting their hands on the good stuff first.

Anon: Which fits nicely with the theory that Ozma is the arm of a shadow government—a conspiracy within the PC and Hypercorp Council that makes sure it stays on top. They don't care if they have to sacrifice a habitat or a member hypercorp once in a while, as long as they keep their hands on the reins. Even if the Consortium died, they would carry on. It explains both their inside access and their need for secrecy—they don't want the other hypercorps to know who's really running the show, lest they get aspirations.

Anon: I am willing to concede the shadow government theory as most likely, but I am not convinced this is a secret hypercorp partnership. My bet is it is more intimate than that: oligarchs. A small handful of the undying rich that secretly run the show.

TOPIC: QUADRATICS IN BASE-13 FOR FIRST YEARS

[Begin Excerpt from "Parabola Coaster: Equation to Thrill" In-Game Chatroom]

Anon: OK, I believe everyone is here.

Anon: How is this more secure than the Eye again?

Anon: It's not. But it's not the Eye either. That's the point.

Anon: That's some next-level paranoia. So? What's up? Why risk a conversation inside a child's homework sim?

Anon: I think I know why MOMBI is stalled. And I think you three are the only ones ready to hear it.

Anon: Cut the cloak-and-dagger and commit treason already. I'm too old for suspense.

Anon: MOMBI is ineffective because it was never meant to infiltrate anything. It's a token gesture meant to disguise the truth. Ozma isn't a rival espionage group; it's Firewall's black ops cell.

Anon: Holy tap-dancing spiderbots … the Jovians finally pushed you over the edge, huh?

Anon: No, the Jovians taught me to see. I've been data mining every Ozma sighting we've recorded so far. Know what I've found?

Anon: Nothing? Like everyone else?

Anon: Almost. The other analysts left out factional affiliation. I did not. Mavericks are more likely to have violent encounters with Ozma than anyone else.

Anon: Outside a standard deviation?

Anon: Well, no, but if you cross-reference maverick affiliation with sentinels that underwent peer review in the previous six months, the numbers are staggering. Ozma is how Firewall polices us. You fall in line with the shadow leadership, or you have an encounter with Ozma. It's less black ops and more blue-on-blue ops. Professional friendly fire. They police internal dissent and liabilities.

Anon: At least you provide enough novelty to keep things interesting. I've often wondered myself why this whole anarchist circus hasn't gone off the rails. Deploying "the enemy" as housekeeping certainly makes sense.

Anon: How? How does that make sense?

Anon: Christ. You can't really be this dense. Ten years. The organization has been functioning for TEN YEARS without a command structure, recruiting primarily from anarchistic civilian populations, harboring wildly disparate ideologies about what the group's mission should be. It's survived despite immense pressure from my own polity, not to mention every other existing government. It's survived despite exsurgent infections. Our level of security and cohesion is just not possible unless someone gets their hands dirty.

Anon: Exactly. No one is comfortable with the secret police, but it's the only way to explain the group's continued solidarity. So we outsourced loyalty enforcement to Ozma. WHITE RABBIT is a goose chase; we've manufactured our own infiltrators.

Anon: This is Fall denialist levels of offensive. We've lost friends to these bastards, and you're suggesting they deserved it because they weren't loyal enough? Fuck this.

Anon: It's not about loyalty to us. It's about loyalty to whomever runs Firewall.

Anon: But we run Firewall. All of us proxies, together.

Anon: Do we? Are you the one responsible for keeping the most successful darknet in history completely incursion free for a decade? Are you the one that assigns peer reviews across cells? Distributes untraceable funds across the servers? I'd argue whoever is responsible for those tasks are the real leader of Firewall. Leaders have agendas. Agendas need enforcers, and secret agendas need secret enforcers.

Anon: The purges that are recognized as "purges" aren't nearly as effective as the ones that are just business as usual.

Anon: Okay. Let's say you're right. Ozma is really a cell of Firewall dedicated to … to weeding out dissenters and restoring them to less problematic backups. What do we do with this?

Anon: For now, nothing. We find others capable of considering the possibility and expand our ranks. Then, when we have enough, we feed the rest of MOMBI bad intel and follow the trail of shit until we find Ozma's nest.

[End Chatroom Excerpt] ✤

Anon: If it's an oligarch plot, it may very well not just be about control. That's so …. mundane. They may have a long-term end goal that we simply can't see yet. They may be thinking centuries ahead of us.

Anon: I don't buy it. There's no way the other gerontocrats are going to let a small group of oligarchs have so much power. We'd see a lot more in the way of shadow wars. Multiple Ozmas even. To me, the answer is clear. Ozma showed up on the radar as a secret power right at the same time the Factors arrived. That's no coincidence.

Anon: It would not be beyond the Factors to engineer and inhabit transhuman morphs if what we predict about their technological capabilities is correct. However, insertion into transhuman societal structure requires an understanding of transhuman nature far more mature than anything demonstrated in interactions with them. If Ozma is made of Factor spies ensuring their species's dominance in our negotiations, the same social skills required to infiltrate us have not been used in situations where more subtlety would have been beneficial.

Anon: I think the idea of aliens is in the right orbit, but wrong species. We don't know who built the gates or when, right? So it's possible an as-yet-undiscovered alien intelligence entered the solar system before we knew the gates even existed. Possibly centuries earlier. And it has been infiltrating, manipulating, and plotting against transhumanity ever since. Ozma is just it's latest proxy.

Anon: Not weird enough for me. I'm going to go with the idea that we're all living in a simulation. The possession of some powerful admin status could explain the inconsistencies in Ozma sightings. They are allowed to break programmed rules to ensure the simulation's stability, and the advent of quantum computing has required more and more interventions as the simulation reaches computational capacity.

Anon: Aaand we have reached peak absurdity. I'm going to keep on believing that Ozma are really mechanical elves that rule the universe, and go back to tracking down exhumans for fun.

[End Forum Excerpt] ✤

RED FIVE ADVANCED HEURISTICS LAB

Posted by: Das Frettchen, Proxy <Info Msg Rep>

The Red Five Advanced Heuristics Lab attempts to recover and reverse-engineer TITAN memetic-warfare techniques. They possess a dangerous store of knowledge on TITAN psychological experiments on transhuman subjects.

After Red Five accumulated several flags in our scanners' databases, Firewall decided to take a closer look at this Martian hypercorp. Our vectors arranged for them to have a bit of a misunderstanding with their insurance company, prompting them to acquire the services of a new one. We helped that deal along, which enabled us to schedule an assessment inspection, made by one of our undercover sentinels. Surprisingly, Red Five invoked corporate extraterritoriality provisions to exempt part of their facility from the inspection. A hypercorp's desire for secrecy is leavened only by their greed, so when they want to exclude part of a facility from the possibility of making an insurance claim, you know we've found something of interest.

We arranged a black bag team to conduct our own inspection a short while later. Unfortunately they hesitated to gun down a PR flack who discovered them, and she triggered a video-wall basilisk hack that reduced them all to whimpering, shitting puddles of nerve endings. Only one team member survived by quantum farcasting away. What they discovered has piqued our interest … and concern.

OVERVIEW

Red Five is a niche advertising and public-relations firm in the Nytrondheim neighborhood of Valles-New Shanghai. The firm employs thirty people and about twice that many infomorphs and infugees. Most are involved in legitimate operations; only about a dozen people work in Advanced Heuristics. Management is fully aware of what goes on in Advanced Heuristics; their goal is to find marketable applications for the technologies being investigated there.

Advanced Heuristics is headquartered in an annex of the Red Five building in Nytrondheim. They're an R&D arm of the hypercorp, though there are persistent rumors that some of their discoveries have actually been deployed for Red Five's clients. The firm's secrecy and the failure of Firewall's initial attempts to pierce it mean that we can only speculate on what sort of practical applications they've devised for their amassed knowledge. Rumored use of transhuman test subjects and infugee backups in experiments and simulations is suspected but unconfirmed. AHL also does experiments using focus groups from outside. These are conducted in a less secure area of the lab and may represent a possible avenue for infiltration. Firewall suspects the lab may occasionally abduct focus group participants who appear promising as transhuman experimentation subjects.

RESEARCH

Red Five is extremely subtle as organizations of interest to Firewall go. We're accustomed to dealing with exhumans of both the predatory and brain-in-a-vat variety, criminal opportunists of every stripe, and armed hooligans packing TITAN wargear. The Advanced Heuristics Lab is unusual in that they've recovered and begun to reverse-engineer some very dangerous technology without physically recovering any of it, or even performing mesh intrusions to seize data.

Rather, most of their efforts are based around data mining. They've extensively studied surviving spime recordings, comm traffic, and other records from the Fall and from subsequent flare-ups of TITAN activity. In the process, they've gained a frightening store of practical knowledge on the workings of basilisk hacks, YGBM attacks, apple-of-knowledge hacks, and other memetic-warfare techniques. More worryingly, they've begun to assemble a picture of the scope and

QUARANTINE INCIDENT

Start Æther Jabber
Active Members: 2

Pathfinder Quarantine Control Manager [PQCM]: Phillipa, I need your eyes on this situation immediately. We have a serious situation in Medical Bay 14, and a possible quarantine breach on Level D9.

[REDACTED]: Sounds exciting, what's the sitrep?

PQCM: We had a corporate gatecrasher team in from some backwater going through routine medical scans. I'm not sure what happened exactly, but one of the doc bots noticed an anomaly with one of the crashers. Before further scans could be taken, the fucker tried to escape. A guard nearly cut them in half, and it turns out they were filled up with some sort of green goo.

[R]: Green goo? Like blood?

PQCM: Thicker. The body was filled with it—no internal organs or skeleton can be seen on the cameras. And it moved. The two parts pulled back together, and everyone in the area was hit with some sort of caustic gas. The guards panicked and deployed grenades—I think those mandatory threat awareness workshops make them a little spooked. They're sifting through the debris, and while they've found some patches of green goop left, there's a concern some of it may have gotten into the vents or piping.

[R]: You've initiated full containment protocols?

PQCM: Hell yeah, but we haven't seen anything like this before. I think you may need to get that gent from Ozma on the line.

[R]: I'm on my way. If that thing's still alive, track it down, but do not kill it yet. They'll want it alive. ♣

direction of TITAN psychological experiments on transhuman subjects and are now following some of those research paths themselves.

Mikhail Eng

AHL's chief researcher is Mikhail Eng, a skilled psychosurgeon. In public, he comes across as a fresh-faced, wunderkind hypercorp researcher, if a bit eccentric. From tracking his mesh habits, we notice he has a range of interests that definitely would put him in the singularity-seeker camp. He also engages in frequent forking. We know that he insists upon all potential employees undergoing a great deal of psychological screening, which seems largely designed to weed out those who might have too much empathy and not enough moral flexibility. At least one former freelancer has filed a grievance with Red Five's management, claiming that Eng psychosurgically modified them without their consent; the board quietly filed the complaint away and did nothing.

Corporate Ties

Red Five isn't itself a major hypercorp, but it has powerful patrons in the Planetary Consortium, notably Experia and the Oaxaca-Maartens family. Experia views Red Five as one of a small stable of bleeding-edge media research corps and is an important client. The ties are personal, as well. Red Five's CEO, Helene Chang, is a regular guest at the Palazzo of Elysium, and the law firm of Hector Oaxaca-Maartens handles many of the company's affairs. Conversely, other Nytrondheim ad firms hate Red Five; taking a job there is viewed as going over to the enemy. Valles-New Shanghai's native oligarchs don't care much for the place either, viewing it as an outpost of Oaxaca-Maartens influence. So Eng has some powerful patrons protecting his experiments, but an equal number of people are gunning for Helene Chang and her company.

Sybils

Posted by: Bree Manning,
Argonaut Open Society Forum <Info Msg Rep>

You've probably heard rumors of strange entities we call Sybils. They first appeared on Firewall's radar shortly after the Fall. Initial interactions came in the way of publicly issued cryptic warnings of impending disasters, attacks, and other calamities. These warnings often were delivered through social networks by an assortment of forged identities—what is known as a sybil attack, thus their name.

The capabilities of this group have raised concern among some Firewall servers, leading some to fear that the Sybils are TITAN shards left behind by their masters to sew chaos and keep us in a weakened state. Though there is no evidence to support this, there is reason to fear that the Sybils may work with an ASI of their own or even be ASIs themselves. More recently, the Sybils have actively interfered with Firewall operations, leading some to believe they are a threat to Firewall itself.

Forecasting

The most prominent aspect of the sybils is their capability to predict future events. Their oracle powers rival that of Oversight, Stellar Intelligence, and the argonaut's Apollo Project. What we don't know is how they get their data and how they process it. They have warned of life support failures, asteroid strikes, civil unrest, financial market manipulations, exsurgent outbreaks, political scandals, and exhuman raids, among other things. The perpetrators clearly had access to impressive forecasting capabilities as well as inside information that would be challenging even for a group like Firewall to acquire. These capabilities alone lead some to believe an ASI is at the core of the Sybils' project.

Though their actions and warnings have often been positive, there is reason to be concerned about how they access this information, what their true motivations are, and how they themselves gain from it.

Methods

The Sybils primarily operate through forged identities. They often manipulate vast numbers of fake accounts to act at once. This provides them with the capability to spread their information far and wide as well as manipulate trending news items. They have been known to sometimes wield this capability in distributed rep network attacks, either tanking a rival's credibility or inflating a particular voice's popularity and reach.

The Sybils are also fond of inserting their warnings into hacked advertisements—sometimes as innocuous but meaningful parts of the background. Speech-to-text analysis of a recent advert for the new expansion package for Skinaesthesia's sylph line revealed two bystanders in the background discussing the likelihood of micrometeorite impacts on Culler, a habitat six-hundred kilometers from Deimos. Culler was struck by micrometeorites and seventeen morphs were spaced less than a week later.

Attempts to track their data trails inevitably fail. The Sybils are masters at directing their traffic through chained accounts and anonymizing relay nodes. However, we also believe they may have established their own darknet. On two separate incidents, we have tracked them through the mesh to small, watermelon-sized drones in orbit around the particular habitat in question. These drones were design to be difficult to locate and were loaded with laser and radio broadcasting transceivers, low-power ion drives, as well as QE comms with a moderately large qubit reservoir.

Duping Firewall

More recently, it has become clear that the Sybils are aware of Firewall. They have directed some warnings and communications directly toward us, in an effort

to spur our sentinels in action. They seem to know a great deal about Firewall and even about specific Firewall sentinels and missions, prompting concern they have infiltrated our organization. We strongly suspect that they have directly fed information to our sentinels on more than one occasions—sometimes by posing as routers or other sentinels and proxies. In a few cases they have offered information upon the condition that they receive other intel in return. Most of these requests involve giving them information the sentinels retrieve from their mission, but occasionally the Sybils ask for highly secret data on other topics.

While there are many reports from sentinels of Sybils offering useful advice in timely situations, I still advise that we exercise caution in any future engagements. Our lack of knowledge, combined with what is almost certainly a wide-ranging and potentially long-term plan on their part, means that they could be using us for their own purposes that may not align with our own.

In the interactions we have logged with the Sybils, we have noticed they have a high degree of interest in ASI development and the existence of ASIs. This leads us to speculate they are either seeking to learn what we know of their ASIs or are working to create an ASI of their own.

KNOWN SYBILS

We have recently identified what we suspect are several individual Sybil operatives.

The Sybil known as **Brand** has repeatedly attempted to subvert Firewall protocols regarding secrecy. This is most obvious in the Tandarina affair, where Brand first revealed the existence of the Tandarina black labs and then attempted to coerce our sentinels into allowing it to access the information there for general dissemination. Brand's injunction that "information wants to be free" is one I know many within Firewall agree with, but I think many of you understand that we kept the Tandarina information secret because we could not allow [REDACTED] to know that [REDACTED] was experimenting on [REDACTED].

Brand has apparently gone to ground in the aftermath of the Tandarina incident. We have no further reports of their manifestations. However, we have linked them to nearly two dozen information leaks in the past six months. Their primary motivation seems to be uncovering and exposing secrets that most of Firewall would prefer to remain hidden. Brand tried to reveal details of half a dozen exsurgent outbreaks to the general public, a situation we had to respond to quite quickly and spin quite vigorously to convince many people it was not true.

Houwan is known to post complex predictive formulas that use agent-based modeling to explain specific events in obscure mesh outlets. We also suspect they place large wagers on highly improbable events that always seem to beat the odds in various darknet gambling sites. Houwan actually seems to like using synths and always places their bets "in person." They are also quite garrulous; we have hours of footage of their synths socializing with others and making small talk. We've traced the identity of no less than seventeen mathematicians back to Houwan. They may have dozens of other sock-puppet identities.

Scheherazade is by far the oddest of the Sybils we think we can identify and the most prolific. We believe this Sybil is responsible for the majority of the cryptic advert-hack warnings. In a few recent communications with sentinels, they have communicated entirely via advertising audio samples.

RECOMMENDATION

Ultimately, we still not know what the Sybils' agenda is. The closest we have come is when Brand told a group of our agents that it and its ilk were "the new trickster gods of a posthuman pantheon." But given Brand's propensity for deception, we must take even this statement as an utterance more likely to sow misinformation and dissension than as a statement of purpose. Regardless of their intentions, they have the potential to cause immense harm and should be viewed as a potential threat to our operations.

ULTIMATES

Posted by: Pree Inti, Scanner <Info Msg Rep>

Recent intelligence gained from the short-lived but productive success of assets monitoring the ultimates' activities around the Discord Gate shows that Firewall must abandon its long-standing "wait-and-see" position on the ultimates, and that operations be initiated to deal with them as an incipient x-risk. I've already been in touch with other routers in the extrasolar, rimward, and conventional forces workgroups and they will be contacting you as well with additional assessments specific to their own portfolios that back my concerns. This request is of necessity brief as it is drawn from limited information, but what we have is serious enough that quick action at a high level is warranted. Due to circumstances detailed below, I will need to go dark for the immediate future for security concerns, so I urge you to take this information seriously and pursue it with others in my absence.

For a previous operation dealing with follow-up on the exhuman attack on Mockingbird, I had developed an asset, BT hereafter, who was part of the Go-nin gate operations team managing their Discord Gate operations. BT proved useful during that op, and has been useful on several occasions since providing intel on exsurgent and exhuman incidents beyond the gate that Go-nin have kept quiet otherwise. I trust the information from BT, and had already begun additional work to clear BT for introduction to Firewall as a sentinel. BT is presumed dead and is currently irretrievable, but I trust the information provided.

Since the incident on Mockingbird was publicized and it resulted in such a hit on the operating gains from the mining operations, the gate managers were spooked and the ultimates took the opportunity to



work them into upping ultimate staffing at Rorty, across the other destinations from the gate, and inside the gate facility inside Torii itself. Over the last three months, the numbers of ultimates at Pharos and Torii have increased by more than 250, and more than three times that number have been sent as "forward security" expeditions to Mockingbird and other exoplanets where they've set up a short-term base with the ostensible goal of exploring and pacifying the gate network used by the exhumans. The majority of the ultimates that arrived for the work are purifiers with extensive combat experience in gatecrashing ops for take-and-hold maneuvers and are extremely heavily-armed. The last wave of them also arrived with Myron Chalmers, one of the ultimate's autarchs, and an ideological figurehead to the overhumanist strain of thought long in ascendance at the Pharos station. He's quietly taken command of daily operations at Pharos and is in regular contact with the Torii station chiefs.

BT got in touch with me when, after several successful excursions into the exhuman gate network, the ultimates noted they were meeting increased resistance and sought and received approval for bringing several small-scale WMDs through the gate. Go-nin has never allowed this before as it obviously creates a huge operational risk. BT only found out about it through dumb luck—he was the gate officer on duty when the equipment was brought in for transit. He stopped transit, but his hold on the matériel was overridden and one of the station chiefs took him aside and explained that this was being done on their own initiative to speed up the timeline for clearing out the exhumans and save costs on the ultimates' contract. Apparently Chalmers had proposed it at a recent meeting with the station chief and they approved it as an effort to increase profits and get back in the good graces of the corporate higher-ups. BT was told that it would be lucrative for all of them and was also bribed to make sure the records didn't show anything other than basic arms supplies were going through.

To get better intel on the situation I sent two sentinels in as part of a civilian mining support team scheduled to go to Ne No Kuni. While awaiting departure, the sentinels were operating at their own discretion and attempted to contact BT directly. Unfortunately, the ultimates had apparently been watching BT and took this as an opportunity to take action. In the ensuing confrontation, the sentinels were compromised; one triggered a dead switch, and the other was able to escape with a farcaster. In debriefing the survivor, the increased ultimate presence on Torii and as part of the crew complement that was scheduled to head to Ne No Kuni was confirmed. Through some elint gathering, they were also able to determine that increased activity from Pharos was scheduled to keep bringing additional supplies and personnel to Torii for the next 5 weeks. BT is assumed compromised and in the hands of the ultimates.

INCIDENT REPORT

//Begin Excerpt//

… We were approximately 50 meters from the gate, ready to return home, when out of nowhere this weird robot swoops down, loops a collar around Eliza's neck, and jabs her with what looks like a big needle. We open fire, of course, and it shoots back, taking down half our team with foam and stun beams. We were hurting it, though so it zooms over by the gate, somehow activates it, and flies through—dragging Enrique, still frozen in freezer foam, along with it. We rush over, but wherever it went, it locked us out. Who knows where that poor fool Enrique ended up—and with no blue box, he has no way of getting home …

//End Excerpt//

Although BT passed all this on to me thinking that it was related to broader issues with the exhumans and possible risk there, I believe the remarkable increase in ultimate military personnel and capability in the Discord Gate network is a far bigger problem. The sheer numbers of ultimate forces closely match or exceeded the Go-nin forces at or available for immediate deployment to other colonies and stations in the Discord Gate network, and the ultimates easily outstrip them in terms of operational capability, expertise, and firepower. The presence of Chalmers so far from his governance position at the Ariel habitat places an ideological hero to the forces at the Pharos base in theater. There is no reason one of the faction's central command-and-control elements should be in situ at the gate unless they planned on using him to head a major operation of import to the faction as a whole.

The ultimates already functionally control Mockingbird and have forces in place that could quickly seize control of several other exoplanet stations and colonies. The pieces are in position for them to gain control of an entire gate network, and one with access to all manner of important resources, from minerals and volatiles to major established colonies to terraformable worlds—and, if the gate re-opens, the incredible alien artifacts at Giza. Firewall cannot allow this threat to develop. We have to get in front of this, quickly, or risk compromising the entire gate network.

THE ALIEN UNKNOWN

Posted by:

Cryptid, Crow Astrobiologist <Info Msg Rep>

We currently know of five sapient alien species: Factors, Amphibs, Iktomi, Lucans, and Moravecians. Only one of them is not extinct. We have also found traces of what seem to be at least three other species, if not more. There are the various non-Iktomi ruins and artifacts on Sunrise as well as massive artifacts like Wormwood and the Olaf sphere, all of which were clearly built by someone and don't appear to be the work of any of the known species. All of these unknown relics are also quite old, and there's no evidence that the aliens that created them still exist. There are also, of course, the Pandora gates themselves. We originally thought the TITANs created them, but that now seems unlikely, as we have found many gates that are far, far older. The gate designs and ages also vary drastically, indicating that the gate network has been constructed by numerous species over eons. Yet we have met no live gate-building species. Given that every alien relic we've found via the Pandora gates is between tens of thousands of years and hundreds of millions of years old, I think it's safe to say that all of the alien species we've encountered via the Pandora gates—so far—are extinct.

The only possible exceptions are the aliens contacted via the black boxes on Giza, and in that case, we have no idea what we encountered. They could be AGIs pretending to be aliens, uploaded aliens in simulspaces who don't know they are uploads, or even some mechanism that formulates plausible messages by monitoring the user's thoughts and expectations. Also, even on Giza, the makers of the black boxes seem to be long gone.

Looking at these species we do know of, it's clear that alien intelligence evolves relatively frequently in our galaxy, but that it also typically doesn't survive for all that long after developing advanced technology. The Great Filter seems quite real, but its nature eludes us. While we have definitely found evidence of several other species using Pandora gates, we have not yet found traces of any sort of widespread interstellar colonization, either using the Pandora gates or via FTL starships like those allegedly used by the Factors.

Alternatively, perhaps the Factors are correct, and what kills off alien species is use of the Pandora gates. If that's true, then maybe there are interstellar empires out there, but they either avoid worlds with working Pandora gates or disable these gates on all of their worlds. Regardless of what is actually happening, what we have seen is a number of extinct alien species and only one survivor. Those are frankly pretty scary odds. To make it worse, in at least some cases, the alien species seems to have died out due to unnatural causes. At this point, it's helpful to review the range of current knowledge and theories about alien threats.

SPECULATION ON HOSTILE CIVILIZATIONS

When faced with so many dead species—some of which clearly died violently—we must address the possibility that there is an advanced alien civilization out there that is hostile to others, and which may be responsible for the extinction of most of the intelligent species we've encountered. We have no idea how old this civilization might be, but if the ruins are any indication, it may have existed for millions or even billions of years. It would presumably have

POSSIBLE ALIEN ACTIVITY NEAR LUCA

Posted by: Grailhunter, Sentinel <Info Msg Rep>

I never expected Luca to be a problem—no TITANs, no scarily advanced alien technology, just some old ruins made by primitives on a world where the major risks looked to be hypothermia and asteroids. I went there based on some rumors about TerraGenesis activities that turned out to be grossly exaggerated. Instead, the problem was the radio astronomy program. A couple of astronomers are doing a full stellar survey and ran into an anomaly: data that seemed to be an artificial signal. One of them responded. Thankfully, I was there, and both of them loved talking about what they'd heard and what they'd sent.

I hoped that the signal was from someplace a dozen or more parsecs away and so not anyone's problem for decades, but I decided to hack their feed and gain access to any response they got before they did. They received a response 27 hours later. There's some sort of artificial construct beaming signals to Luca from less than 100 AU away. From the astronomers' data, it seemed to be in some sort of very low-power mode, beaming signals towards Luca no more often than once every year or two—this is only the second signal they received; they thought the first one was an error. However, it just got a response and sent something back, so it might be powering up. I'm attaching the response; it appears to be short mathematical sequences. The astronomers never received this. I then set up the telescope so that it can't send additional signals to that location without special authorization. The telescope will also requires special authorization to see if it's received any future signals from whatever is sending them. I'm betting that one response won't trigger anything but more signals and more watchfulness, but I could easily be wrong. Also, I think we want to know what the heck is out there. ♣

technology far surpassing ours—perhaps not even recognizable as such—and would most likely be postbiological. In fact, there's a significant likelihood it would be dominated by ASIs, or perhaps be an ASI singleton, far more intelligent than even the TITANs. And, of course, it would have the capability to spread throughout the galaxy, either via wormhole gates, sublight Von Neumann probes, or possibly even FTL starcraft or other means. Such an elder civilization may very well have an invested interest in maintaining its dominance in the galaxy and might, as a matter of course, destroy any others that reach a certain technological level.

This theory dovetails nicely with certain speculations that the TITANs may have been infected with the exsurgent virus, given the virus's advanced nature and alien characteristics. An advanced civ may have intentionally infected our species' burgeoning ASIs and turned them against us, as they did with other species before us. Or to be truly paranoid, perhaps the TITANs were alien minds themselves, simply masquerading as our own creations. This leaves us wondering, however, why did the TITANs disappear before finishing us off? Was their programming faulty? Did they hurt us badly enough and simply expect us to die out on our own?

All of the above ideas presume that elder civilizations attempt to destroy younger ones, but what if the intention was not to destroy? An alternative option is that they were looking to assimilate our species into their own machine mind, so they corrupted our ASIs to forcibly upload our species and bring us all to them. Perhaps all of the aliens contacted via Giza's black boxes are simply civilizations that were previously uploaded. Is the advanced civ aware of a Great Filter in our future and was harvesting our minds to protect us before we hit that point? Is such an assimilation really qualitatively different than destruction—at least for those left behind?

It is worth pointing out that we do not know the mechanism for how civilizations are wiped out, how the TITANs were subverted (if they were), or how the exsurgent virus was spread. When looking at ruins that are anywhere from tens of thousands to hundreds of millions of years old, it's often hard to tell if the destruction took a few years or a century or two. Do these aliens simply lay traps, or do they actively interfere? The gates themselves seem like the most likely vector, but there are other possibilities: FTL incursions, "mousetraps" seeded to every solar system by bracewell probes, infectious transmissions sent across space, or means beyond our technological understanding. The fact that we do not know how gates are constructed is worrisome. The gate network could be under the active control of a hostile intelligence, or we could be facing aliens with the capability to open wormholes in the hearts of our major cities.

We of course have no proof that any such elder civilizations or intelligences exist—or that they still exist. They may have passed on long ago, leaving their machines behind to cleanse the galaxy long after they were gone. Perhaps there were two such advanced entities, and their machines are relics of a long-settled war. Though it is jarring to consider that entire civilizations may be getting wiped out by what is essentially an automated process, it may explain why the Fall was not a complete annihilation. Such processes and machines are subject to entropy, and over time are likely to become less efficient. Perhaps the Factors and transhumanity just happen to be among the first to survive the culling.

The obvious problem with all of these theories is that we have too little data to prove anything useful. Until we know more, all we have is a whole lot of speculation. However, a key feature to most of these ideas is that the gates, and space expansion in general, may be quite dangerous, as it increases our risk of exposure to dangerous aliens.

THE FACTORS' WARNINGS

With that in mind, the Factor warnings do make a bit of sense. However, the presence in our solar system of the Factors poses another threat entirely: FTL spacecraft.

If the Factors truly do have the capability to travel between the stars, then we must assume that other extraterrestrial life also has this capability. The more of a presence we establish in the galaxy, the more we are likely to encounter another FTL-capable civilization. This puts our home system at risk, as we would have little capability to stop an alien invasion fleet.

If the Factors do not have FTL capabilities, we are not necessarily safer. In that case, we are dealing with a species that is intentionally duplicitous, and likely uses the gates themselves. They most likely sought to limit our gate use with their warnings, which implies they may see us as a threat. They may also have finer

OTHER THREATS

Start Æther Jabber
Active Members: 2

- So what's the purpose of this chat? My time is limited.
- I need to update my search parameters. I've got all of the major threats covered, but I spent so long focused on this last op—over a year, mind you—that I am sorely out of date when it comes to recent developments in the category of shiny new things that might kill us all. If I'm going to do my job as a scanner, I need to know what I should be keeping an eye out for. You have your pulse on various smaller ops, so I thought you could catch me up on what I should prioritize.
- Isn't this why you have a muse?
- We aren't talking right now. She was getting a little cheeky, so I put her in time out.
- And that's why it's a bad idea to base your muse's personality on your invisible childhood friend.
- Yeah yeah yeah. Okay, let's hear what you have. Doomsday cults? Mad scientists? Nefarious Aliens?
- We can start with cults I suppose. The Cult of the Destroyer is apparently back.
- That whackjob Hindu async sect? From Luna? Didn't we take them out a few years back?
- Thought so. They made a surprise resurgence. Turns out they had some facility in Mars orbit to manufacture a new drug that allegedly could pull async minds into some sort of massive neural net. Had the potential to really amplify their psi sleights, on a major scale.
- Lovely. Step one in helping the TITANs destroy us all like Shiva intended, I assume?
- More or less. They were also tied up with a yakuza op that was growing and harvesting exsurgents to sell their parts as black-market aphrodisiacs. We had operatives on the case, but somehow Ozma caught wind and the whole thing went sideways. Everyone involved had to be restored from backup, and we had quite a mess to clean up with the Rangers. Ozma also apparently took out the cult's async clientèle too—hundreds of 'em axed or disappeared. And we're not sure we caught all of the cultists. Total clusterfuck.
- Crap, and I thought my last op was bad. OK, got anything less depressing?
- I currently know of a server looking into rumors of an oligarch, name of [REDACTED], who has a secret stash of uploads or stacks of multiple prominent Earth figureheads thought lost during the Fall.
- OK, that's weird, but what's the problem with that?
- The concern is that if the oligarch re-instantiates them, their return could trigger some serious political and economic instabilities. Some major hypercorp shares would become contested, faltering ideological movements would suddenly regain their figureheads, old nationalisms could be revived, etc. Could be a serious problem, especially on Luna.
- So we would, what, make sure they stay in storage? That doesn't seem ethical.
- Less ethical than starting a war perhaps? Here's a better one. There's a sentinel team working now to investigate a corp called [REDACTED]. From what we've gathered, said corp may have tracked down the egos of some of the TITANs' original creators.
- Whoa. That could be huge.
- It could certainly give us some major insights into the nature of the TITANs, or perhaps give us some new leads. There's a lot of shaky intel on that op, though. I'm half convinced it's another Ozma bait-and-switch.
- Well, if it gives us an edge over the ASIs, it's worth looking into.
- Speaking of ASIs, here's a term to keep an ear out for: Deep Eight. There's been some buzz in guanxi circles, allegedly an ASI developed from octopus neural templates. My bet is that the Hidden Concern is spreading this meme to inflate their infamy, but you never know.
- Scary octo-machine gods, check. That should give me enough to work with for now, unless you have anything else major?
- Well, here's one last one that you won't like: Fall denialists.
- What? Those assholes who claim the Fall was a hoax? You've got to be kidding.
- I'm serious.
- Denialists are delusional idiots, trolls, and media whores. They're so dumb they can look at Blackrock from Lunar orbit and call it a hologram. They're about as non-threatening as a group can be.
- First off, that's a misconception. Very few in the movement actually ascribe to the illusionist theory. Most believe the Fall was an engineered holocaust perpetrated by the hypercorps to found the Planetary Consortium. The TITANs are just scary monsters used to excuse genocide and regime change. But their movement has grown—in fact, grown enough that some of them have tried running the interdiction to bring back proof that the Fall was staged.
- So what? It's not like they'll ever make it off Earth. And if they do, they're on the same threat level as scrappers and reclaimers.
- Well, the real reason I bring it up is Fathi.
- Fathi? Fathi Murthada? He's been missing since the Fall!
- Was missing. He's shown up. In Elysium. And he's leading a group of Fall denialists.
- That can't be right. That can't be him, there's no way he made it out of Istanbul. That has to—oh crap. It's not him, is it? It's some thing using his identity.
- It makes a kind of sense, yes? If the exsurgent virus wants to wipe us out, why not mindhack people into disbelieving its existence? It would explain the whole denialist phenomenon.
- That's fucked up, my friend. ♣

control of the gates than we do, which explains why we haven't found any Factor-colonized worlds with a gate—they may be locking us out. The fact that we have encountered signs of the Factors and even individual Factors on some gate-equipped worlds, and have yet to find Factor spacecraft in any extrasolar systems, reinforces this possibility.

If the Factors use neither FTL nor the gates, then that raises an even deeper mystery—how did they get to our solar system, and what are they doing here?

Even if the Factors do not have FTL, we know they do have reactionless drives. Any species with such drives that is willing to use hibernation or generation ships can reach a number of nearby systems at sub-light speeds. For all we know, an alien armada is already crossing the void from a neighboring star.

Other Alien Threats

It's possible that the galaxy is indeed teaming with life, but that this life is fairly paranoid. Perhaps surviving species find a way to disable or block the Pandora gates in their star systems and avoid making or responding to interstellar broadcasts, and otherwise successfully hunker down in their own star system. Short of building our own bracewell probes, we're unlikely to learn if such species exist. Of course, if this is an optimal survival strategy, why did the Factors show up in a starship? It's possible that they are a species that took this route and found that even paranoia can't protect you from some threats, and some of the survivors fled here.

Though most of the civilizations we have encountered are long dead, even dead ones can present a threat. The threat represented by contact with advanced alien ruins cannot be underestimated. There are the obvious risks in finding potent weapons such as stored quantum black holes, self-replicating nanotechnology, or things we do not even understand. Then there are the risks of awaking a dormant threat, such as an alien version of a TITAN. Even more mundane technologies, however, can be devastating or disruptive. A reactionless drive or even simply a technique for creating antimatter at 5% efficiency could massively destabilize the solar system, especially if only one faction knew about and could use this technology.

It's also worth noting than an encounter with a living alien civilization that is technologically equal or inferior to ours could still be cataclysmic. They may simply be bent on exterminating potential rivals, and could overwhelm us with sheer numbers. It's rather chilling to consider that each and every gatecrash to a new world could be the start of an interstellar war. While the odds of this happening are quite low, it is worth remembering that the galaxy is cold and hostile, and care not whether we survive or go extinct.

SOLARCHIVE SEARCH: POST-APOCALYPTIC STRESS SYNDROME

Post-apocalyptic Stress Syndrome (PASS) is a theoretical diagnosis that originated as an explanation for the generational suffering experienced by indigenous populations displaced through old Earth colonialism. Culturally, these populations experienced an apocalypse. When the destruction of the social order coincides with great personal suffering and loss, the more recognizable symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) become pandemic and pass to successive generations.

In the wake of the Fall, PASS is attributed for a number of problematic issues plaguing transhuman culture. On the level of the individual, PASS is indistinguishable from PTSD. Symptoms include survivor's guilt, depression, paranoia, and fanatical religious practice. Survivors suffer from increased rates of secondary mental illness, substance abuse, domestic violence, and unemployment. The sheer scale of the Fall means that victims need not have actually experienced events firsthand to be traumatized; many in the LLA developed PTSD as a result of media coverage of the Earth evacuation.

PASS doesn't diagnosis individuals; it describes large-scale sociological factors that ensure PTSD will spread and continue generationally. The collapse of family structures, education, healthcare, and religious organizations limited care options in the wake of the Fall. These problems persist as scarcity-based economies withhold services from the under-employed. The lack of care options exacerbates PTSD, increasing the likelihood children will undergo serious trauma, develop PTSD, and continue the cycle. Extreme trauma at a young age fundamentally alters brain chemistry and neurological structures. Hundreds of thousands of transhumans were children or adolescents during the Fall, and this symptomatic neurology impacts their core personalities. Generational projections grow more grim when we consider the thousands of children still in cold storage. When these egos are resleeved, the trauma of the Fall will be as fresh as if it were yesterday.

The hedonistic drug abuse of scum swarms, the ghettoization of the clanking masses, the paranoia of the Jovian security state—all have been attributed to PASS at some time or another. This has led some experts to dismiss the theory as a weapon for political attack. Furthermore, the psychosurgical community regards PASS as a pre-singularity problem easily solved through time-accelerated therapy.

A vocal minority argue that the problems of PASS grow more monolithic as transhumanity advances. Uplifted cetaceans and mammals were susceptible to PTSD even before achieving sapience. Accelerating technological change increasingly disrupts and reorganizes cultural groups. Some eschatologists argue that PASS is the primary existential threat facing transhumanity, citing decreasing birth rates and education funding, correlating with rises in violent crime and suicide.

Recently, a subgroup of philosophers calling themselves The Long Quiet have made news by publicly spreading pro-suicide propaganda through many inner-system habitats. Their literature suggests that it is too late to stop the PASS threat; emergent disorders such as immortality blues suggest that transhumanity has already lost the will to live, and the only noble action left is "to end the farce on one's own terms, as soon as possible." It remains to be seen if The Long Quiet is merely a minority opinion or another fringe cult symptomatic of PASS's effects on transhuman culture.

See Also: PTSD, X-Risks

THREAT RECOGNITION GUIDE

This chapter details many specific creatures and technological dangers that player characters may encounter in *Eclipse Phase*. Each entry provides a background, physical description, motivation, and common tactics employed by each threat.

THREAT LISTING OVERVIEW

Here's a breakdown of what each entry means.

1. TYPE

Each threat is given a classification:

- **AI:** Infolife and other digital entities primarily found in infomorph form (not including TITAN constructs).
- **Alien:** Sapient biological alien life, such as the Factors.
- **Async:** Psychic transhumans infected with the Watts-MacLeod exsurgent strain.
- **Exhuman:** Transhumans that have modified themselves via dangerous methods into something different.
- **Exsurgent:** Manifestations of exsurgent virus transformations.
- **Neogenetic:** New life forms created from scratch.
- **Tech:** Autonomous robots, nanoswarms, and nanoplasmas—sometimes of alien origin.
- **TITAN:** Machines, AIs, and biological entities controlled by the TITANs.
- **Xenofauna:** Non-sapient biological alien life.

More detail on classifications are in the *Game Information* chapter (p. 167).

2. NICHE

This lists the environments in which the threat is likely to be found. Use this to identify the threats most fitting for your scenario's environment. Creatures may often be found outside of their niche, but there may need to be an explanation for how this came to be.

3. THREAT LEVEL

Threats are color-coded by the challenge and difficulty they present to a standard Firewall team. For more details, including how to tweak these levels to provide the best challenge to PCs, see *Tailoring Challenges*, p. 167.

- **Yellow:** Barely a threat individually, only a threat en masse.
- **Orange:** Roughly equal in capabilities to a standard sentinel.
- **Red:** Dangerous, a few individuals are a challenge to a full Firewall team.
- **Ultraviolet:** Extremely dangerous. Recommended policy is to fall back and call in erasers.

4. NUMBERS

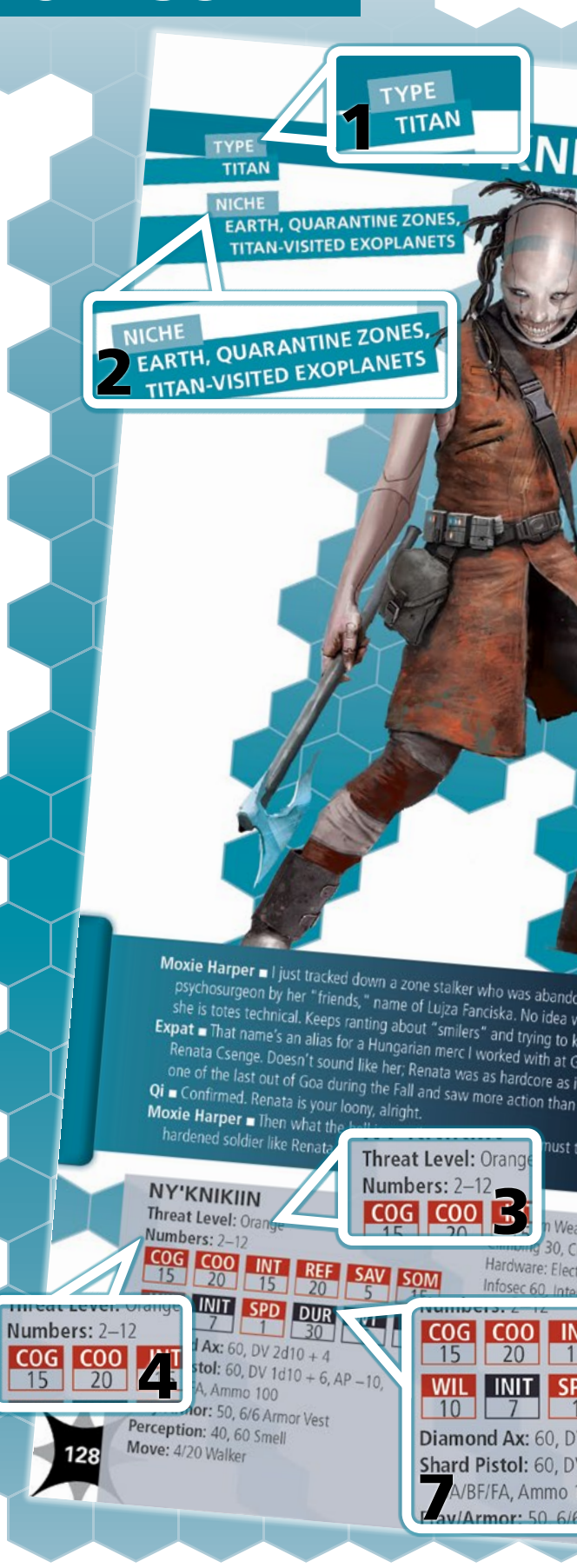
This indicates how many of each threat are likely to be encountered. These numbers can and should be adjusted according to the strengths and weaknesses of the PCs (see *Threat Levels*, p. 167).

5. GAME INFORMATION

The gamemaster can trust this information, but sentinels may not know it all—or may not even be capable of learning it.

6. FIREWALL COMMENTS

In-character comments posted to EyeWiki threat entries. Validity unknown.





7. STAT BLOCKS

The stat block for each threat includes the following information:

- **Aptitudes and Derived Stats:** Same as for player characters. These numbers incorporate bonuses from implants, etc., that are always "on" (such as reflex boosters or structural enhancement). They do not incorporate bonuses from implants, etc., that must be triggered (adrenal boost, chameleon skin) or are conditional to use (various enhanced senses).
- **Attacks:** The threat's primary attacks are listed along with skill, Damage Value, Armor Penetration, and relevant rules.
- **Fray/Armor: The threat's Fray skill and Armor values (listed as Energy/Kinetic).**
- **Perception:** The creature's Perception skills, including relevant modifiers from implants, etc.
- **Move:** Movement Rates (Walk/Run) and mobility systems. Additional special movement types may also be listed.
- **Skills:** The threat's primary skills (aside from Fray and Perception). These also incorporate bonuses from always-on implants, etc.
- **Ware:** The threat's implants, enhancements, or equivalent ingrained abilities.
- **Traits:** Any Positive or Negative traits the creature may have.
- **Gear:** Any specific tools, devices, or other equipment the threat may be carrying.
- **Stress Test:** The mental stress inflicted upon transhumans that encounter the threat (*Stressful Situations,* p. 214, *EP*). Keep in mind that repeated exposure may lead to hardening (p. 214, *EP*).
- **Special Abilities:** Threats with additional special abilities will find them explained with an entry for each ability.
- **Notes:** Any special rules or advice for the gamemaster.

WHAT DO SENTINELS KNOW?

Some of these threats—but not all—are known to Firewall (or equivalent groups). However, transhumanity often lacks the full details; they generally only know what they have gathered from direct observation and forensic evidence after encounters with these dangers. Shattered wreckage and charred corpses only reveal so much.

PCs may attempt to use appropriate Knowledge skills or Networking Tests with an appropriate rep network (usually i-rep) to ascertain information about a danger they have encountered. For example, Academics: Astrobiology might reveal the capabilities of an alien critter the character is observing, Interests: TITAN Machines might provide some trivia regarding the uses of headhunter drones, or Academics: Genetics could be helpful in identifying a neogenetic creation.

For each successful test, the gamemaster should answer one question posed by the player, plus one per 10 points of MoS. These questions could be general—type of creature, likely motivation, etc.—or they could be specific to the character's game statistics: primary attack, Armor Value, Movement Rate, primary traits, etc. The gamemaster should provide benchmarks rather than specific numbers ("faster than you" or "less protective than light body armor"), and should only provide answers that may be reasonably ascertained or are within the realm of knowledge held by transhumanity.

Other skills may also prove useful, at the gamemaster's discretion. For example, a Hardware: Robotics Test could identify an unknown robot as being of non-transhuman origin or a Kinetic Weapons Test might confirm what model of firearm a group of exhumans are sporting.

BARBED EEL

TYPE
XENOFAUNA

NICHE
DROPLET'S OCEANS



Barbed eels are a carnivorous aquatic species found on the exoplanet Droplet that displays unusual intelligence and cunning. Though possessing bioluminescent properties, barbed eels have the capability to turn this on and off, which they use for pack hunting tactics. One eel will draw along or chase prey with its glow, while others lie dark in ambush. The same fleshy barbs that illuminate also create electric potential that can be discharged to stun attackers or prey in nearby water. Barbed eels show no fear of transhumans and have been observed lunging out of the water to attack prey (usually one of Droplet's numerous amphibious species), dragging them underwater to drown.

Pivo ■ The Hidden Concern somehow acquired some barbed eels and brought them to Ceres. They use them as guard fish, kept in line with control collars and AIs.

Nova Vida ■ I've heard rumors that these things can really grow in size. One of the colonists claimed that a barbed eel swallowed an aquanaut diver whole.

Shark-Souled ■ In case anyone's curious, these eels are poisonous, so don't try to eat them.

STANDARD BARBED EEL

Threat Level: Orange
Numbers: 1–6

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
15	10	15	15	1	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	6	1	40	8	60

Electric Stun (Underwater): No defense, 10 meter radius effect, DV 1d10, –1 per 2 meters, shock effect (p. 204, *EP*)
Electric Stun (Out of Water): 60, 1d10 DV, touch attack, shock effect (p. 204, *EP*)
Bite Attack: 40, DV 1d10 + 4, AP –2; bit targets may be subdued (p. 204, *EP*) with a Quick Action
Fray/Armor: 30, 8/4
Perception: 40, 60 Vision
Move: 4/30 Swim
Skills: Infiltration 60, Swimming 80, Unarmed Combat 40 (Subdual 50)
Ware: Echolocation, Eelware, Electrical Sense, Enhanced Vision, Hydrostatic Pressure Adaptation, Temperature Tolerance
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)
Shock Invulnerability: Barbed eels are immune to shock effects.

GIANT BARBED EEL

Threat Level: Red
Numbers: 1–2

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
15	10	15	15	1	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	6	1	70	12	105

Electric Stun (Underwater): No defense, 15 meter radius effect, DV 2d10, –1 per 2 meters, shock effect (p. 204, *EP*)
Electric Stun (Out of Water): 60, DV 2d10, touch attack, shock effect (p. 204, *EP*)
Bite Attack: 50, DV 2d10 + 8, AP –4; bite targets may be subdued (p. 204, *EP*) with a Quick Action. Medium and smaller targets are swallowed on the next action. Swallowed victims cannot see, hear, or breathe (p. 204, *EP*), are restricted (–30 to all actions), and suffer DV 2d10 per Action Turn (armor does not apply). An eel that takes 2 wounds internally regurgitates anything swallowed on its next action.
Fray/Armor: 30, 12/8
Perception: 40, 60 Vision
Move: 4/40 Swim
Skills: Infiltration 50, Swimming 80, Unarmed Combat 60 (Subdual 70)
Ware: Echolocation, Eelware, Electrical Sense, Enhanced Vision, Hydrostatic Pressure Adaptation, Temperature Tolerance
Traits: Large Size (+10 to hit)
Stress Test: SV (1d10 ÷ 2, round down) + 3
Shock Invulnerability: Barbed eels are immune to shock effects.

BLISTER BEAST

TYPE
XENOFAUNA

NICHE
ECHO IV

A neo-chimp-sized arboreal predator species from the exoplanet Echo IV, blister beasts typically work in small groups. They lurk in the local tree analogs, moving about with impressive leaps and climbing ability. When attacking, they will drop on their prey and inflict a venomous sting or bat them out of the trees with vicious tail paddle strikes. Blister beasts are highly territorial and known to aggressively assault intruders.

Blister beasts evolved the namesake defensive mechanism as a protection from other predators. Their skin is mottled with dozens of pressurized pustules that explosively burst open when they are physically attacked, releasing a spray of noxious neurotoxin goop and a lingering caustic cloud.



Nova Vida ■ You have not been truly grossed out until one of these pus varmints squirts its boils all over you. Disgusting.

Pivo ■ There's speculation that these critters can trigger the blisters to burst at will, using it as an attack, not just a defense.

Sun Bu'er ■ I know a certain biotech hypercorp that is looking into breeding a strain of these with acid blisters and a nervex-delivering sting, because why not?

BLISTER BEAST

Threat Level: Orange

Numbers: 1–3

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	15	20	1	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	7	1	30	6	45

Tail Strike: 60, DV 2d10, struck targets must make a SOM x 3 Test or be knocked down.

Sting: 50, DV 1d10 +5, AP –3, paralytic sting toxin (see below)

Blister Defense: Any time the blister beast is struck, there is a (40 + DV inflicted)% chance that one or more blisters burst and release a neurotoxin cloud (see below). Biomorphs within 5 meters must make a Fray Test or be blinded for 1 hour.

Fray/Armor: 55, 3/5

Perception: 40, 60 Hearing/Smell

Move: 5/24 Walker

Leap: Blister beasts can horizontally jump 6 meters (running)/2 meters (standing) and vertically jump 2 meters; +1/0.25/0.25 meters (respectively) per 10 MoS on as Freerunning Test.

Skills: Climbing 60, Freerunning 50, Infiltration 60, Intimidation 30, Scrounging 60, Unarmed Combat 50 (Tail Strike 60)

Ware: Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell

Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)

Paralytic Sting Toxin: Injected; Onset Time: 1 Action Turn; Duration: 5 Action Turns/1 hour. Victims are paralyzed for 1 hour and take DV 1d10 per Action Turn for 5 Turns. A SOM x 3 Test will negate the paralysis and halve the damage.

Blister Neurotoxin Cloud: No defense, 5 meter radius effect. Dermal, Inhalation; Onset Time: 1 Action Turn; Duration: 5 Action Turns. Victims take DV 1d10 per Action Turn they remain in the cloud from caustic irritation and blistering and must make a SOM x 3 Test or be blinded for 1 hour. Characters without contained breathing systems like a vacsuit are incapacitated due to choking for 1 minute; success on a SOM x 2 Test negates this, but still inflicts a –20 modifier to all other actions for 1 minute (5 Action Turns with medichines).

CAUSAPOD

TYPE
NEOGENETIC

NICHE
MARS, SOME EXOPLANETS

Causapods are an interesting example of successful genetic design gone awry. The original causapod was the winner of a Tharsis League contest to create a new neogenetic creature—a new life form created from scratch (or at least with a minimum threshold of original design; a certain degree of chimerical traits were allowed) and adapted for Mars. Best described as "land octopi," causapods are multi-limbed, with 4 primary limbs and 6 smaller ones under their mantle. They can skitter along quickly and rapidly climb surfaces they can dig their spikes into. They feature strong jaws which they can use for scooping up lizards or digging up worms, both found in areas with abundant Martian fauna. Breathing vents enable them to survive in the Martian atmosphere, and adaptive coloration provides camouflage among the rocks and soil.

As the contest winner, the causapod's neogenetic templates were open-sourced. Unexpectedly, the creature's look became a major hit on the mesh, popularized with "mandibular crawdiddy" memes. This spurred intense interest from various biohacker circles, who quickly ran amok with the open-source designs. Hundreds of variants were genehacked together, many with absurd or dangerous traits: phosphorescent, chittering, slick, acid-spitting, armored/spiked, and even exploding. Anon-affiliated biohackers released some of these dangerous variants for real-life griefing purposes, including harassment of metacelebrities and interference with Consortium development plans. Numerous causapod species now live free in the Martian wilds, and some have been known to attack people.



Jake Carter ■ Each crawdiddy is different. I recommend steering clear until you know what they do. And don't be fooled by the neon pink ones with kawaii eyes and eyelashes.
Plasmid ■ They've proliferated to some exoplanets with environments similar to Mars.
Sequencer ■ I made one of these as a pet. I gave it fur. It likes to hide in the corners of the ceiling, where it can drop on and eat my space roaches and creepies.

CAUSAPOD

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 1–4

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	20	20	20	1	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
5	8	1	25	5	37

Bite: 50, DV 1d10 + 5, AP –2
Fray/Armor: 30, 4/2
Perception: 30, 50 Hearing/Smell
Move: 6/30 Walker
Skills: Climbing 40, Freerunning 30, Scrounging 30, Unarmed Combat 40 (Bite 50)
Ware: Chameleon Skin, Eelware, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Respiration, Poison Gland, Temperature Tolerance
Stress Test: SV (1d10 ÷ 2, round down) – 2
Armored Spike Variant: Carapace Armor 9/9, Rushing Spike Attack 40, 2d10 DV, AP –2
Caustic Spit Variant: 40, DV 1d10 + 3 for 3 Action Turns, kinetic armor applies, but the AV is reduced by the DV absorbed. Range 5/10/15/20
Exploding Variant: Whenever the causapod takes a wound, there is a 40% chance it will explode, killing it and inflicting DV 2d10 + 4, blast area effect, resisted with energy armor.
Other Variants: Gamemasters should add bioware and biological attacks and traits as they feel appropriate.

CHRYSACID

TYPE
EXSURGENT

NICHE
EARTH, QUARANTINE ZONES, DERELICT HABITATS



Chrysacids are the spiny limb-like growths that sprout from those infected with the chrynalus strain of the exsurgent virus (p. 174). Infected biomorphs always express chrysacid polyps, though they are also known to grow from infected synthmorphs and sometimes other devices and structures to which the nanoplague has spread.

The chrysacids that burst from the skin/shell at the second stage of infection are called *spurs*. These take the form of chitinous segmented limbs and palpi, similar to those found on arthropods, often studded with spikes and hook-like protrusions. They sport near-monomolecular edges capable of piercing armor and spreading infection. Spurs are capable of limited movement but have no way of sensing their environment. Each nightmarish appendage has a mind of its own.

In the third stage of infection, chrysacid spurs grow and elongate into *limbs*, sometimes up to 2 meters in length. Though still attached to whatever they have sprouted from, they are capable of autonomous movement and possess photosensitive cells to "see" and detect movement. They attack by slicing their targets or grabbing and pinching. The exsurgent victims—reduced to pure animal instinct—attack anything they see along with their new appendages. As the limbs grow, the victims become less vehicle and more passenger as their own movement becomes impaired and they are dragged about by the sprawling, chitinous limbs.

Eventually, morphs are so run through by chrysacids that they are torn asunder. Stage four chrysacids break off from their original source and scurry about as independent critters called *spiders*. Spiders have both photosensitive and motion-sensing capabilities. They practice rudimentary predatory tactics, hunting from darkness in the hopes of infecting new hosts with a bite or pinch.



Sustenatrix ■ I know some of our teams have a policy of killing the infected on sight. This is inhumane. These are victims, and some of them are still lucid, even when they have limbs sprouting from their body. They are in pain and in need of our help.

Scent.In.Hell ■ Yeah, and when you try helping, one of those limbs will snip your head clean off. Fuck that. It's safer to put them out of their misery and take their stack. They'll thank you later.

Sustenatrix ■ You can't know that's what they want.

Pivo ■ I know that I'd stick my beak in a disassembler the second I started growing lobster claws. I hear what you're saying, Sustenatrix, but we don't always have the luxury of playing nice. Saving an infected victim could mean losing the whole hab.

Factotum ■ Yeah, you want to talk to them, help them, that's fine. I'll be right behind you. Sleeved in a killsat. Orbiting a couple hundred kilometers away.

CHRYSACID EXSURGENT

Threat Level: Orange
Numbers: 1–6
A modified hibernoid biomorph infected with the chrynalus exsurgent strain.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	30	25	30	15	25

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	11	1	20	7	53

Club Attack: 50, DV 1d10 + 4
Fray/Armor: 30, Frayed Vacsuit 5/5
Perception: 30, 50 Hearing/Smell
Move: 4/16 Walker (3/12 in Stage Three)
Skills: Climbing 70, Clubs 50, Free Fall 30, Unarmed Combat 40
Ware: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Circadian Regulation, Cortical Stack, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Respiration, Grip Pads, Hibernation
Stress Test: SV 1d10, +3 if character known pre-infection
Notes: Adjust stats, enhancements, and gear as appropriate for morph/NPC. At the GM's discretion, exsurgents in the second stage of infection may retain enough intelligence to use complex weapons and tools, such as guns.

CHRYSACID SPUR

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: (1d10 ÷ 2) + 3 per exsurgent
Spurs lack their own sensory organs, but can perceive via the senses of their host. Though attached to the host exsurgent, these spiky protrusions act and are targeted independently, and can survive even after the death of their host (though they will be blinded).

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	10	5	10	1	25

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	3	1	5	1	7

Pinch or Slash: 40, DV 1d10 + 4, AP –3
Fray/Armor: 20, 5/7
Skills: Unarmed Combat 40
Infection: If a character receives a wound from contact with a chrysacid form, they become infected with the Chrynalus nanovirus (p. 174).

CHRYSACID LIMB

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: (1d10 ÷ 2) + 3 per exsurgent

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	10	5	10	1	25

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	3	1	10	2	15

Pinch or Slash: 50, DV 1d10 + 5, AP –4, some have Reach (+10)
Fray/Armor: 30, 7/9
Perception: 25
Skills: Unarmed Combat 50
Infection: If a character receives a wound from contact with a chrysacid form, they become infected with the Chrynalus nanovirus (p. 174).

CHRYSACID SPIDER

Threat Level: Orange
Numbers: (1d10 ÷ 2) + 3 per exsurgent
Spiders have broken off from their original source and scurry about as independent critters.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	10	5	10	1	25

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	3	1	25	2	50

Bite, Pinch, or Slash: 60, DV 1d10 + 6, AP –5
Fray/Armor: 40, 9/11
Perception: 40
Move: 4/16
Skills: Infiltration 30, Unarmed Combat 60
Stress Test: SV 1d10
Infection: If a character receives a wound from contact with a chrysacid form, they become infected with the Chrynalus nanovirus (p. 174).



CREEPER

TYPE
EXSURGENT

NICHE
EARTH, DERELICT HABITATS, QUARANTINE ZONES

Creepers are amorphous clouds of small, black bubbles that spread across and destroy nearly everything they touch, converting all matter into additional creeper mass. Even under enhanced vision and multiple wavelengths, creepers appear out-of-focus and ill-defined due a visual refraction effect. Firewall operates under the theory that creepers are autonomous femtobot swarms, designed by the TITANs as an area-denial weapon and programmed to disassemble everything at the atomic level. Like TITAN nanoswarms, creepers have the capability to manufacture materials and items, including weapons, gases, and mechanical traps, but because they work at an even smaller level they can temporarily create advanced materials with superconducting, supercomputing, superdense, or even invisible properties, among others. These materials are theorized to be constructed from degenerate matter or strange matter fluids, somehow kept stable at standard gravities. Creeper temperatures remain at about 45 C regardless of activity.

Though creeper clouds move slowly, crawling or floating, they sometimes construct mobility systems enabling faster movement. They can penetrate almost any material in a short amount of time, interface with electronics and implants, and convert a standard morph in a matter of minutes. They can transform into a strange matter mass that has a repulsive effect on normal matter, either as a swift attack or a sustained effect to keep hostile elements at bay. Creepers are known to act with intelligence and purpose, establishing traps and adapting to threats. It is suspected that the TITANs used them for facility manufacturing, infiltration, and command-and-control purposes.

Unlike other exsurgents, creepers are not created via infection, but by transmutation through contact with an existing creeper swarm.

Rivet ■ Umm … why haven't these things destroyed Earth yet?
Stitch ■ Fair point. Any encounter with creepers can quickly become a full-blown gray goo event. Luckily, they often seem to have a specific agenda and will stick to it unless molested. Agents have documented walking through creeper bubbles that didn't turn on them, simply continuing to eat whatever they were situated upon instead.
Rivet ■ Yeah, and other times they set elaborate traps, like electrified plates or motion-activated spikes. These things are insanely clever. It's impressive how a swarm of black soap bubbles can assemble such complex shapes and be such a monstrous pain in the ass.
Sava ■ They've also been known to manufacture other TITAN machines.
Parallax ■ The number one rule for dealing with creepers is Do Not Touch. Create distance and burn it with plasma. Guardian swarms and other nano-defenses will do nothing.

CREEPER

Threat Level: Ultraviolet
Numbers: 1 Swarm

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
30	15	20	30	15	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
30	10	2	100	20	100

Femtoswarm: Creepers follow the rules for femtoswarms (p. 170). Stats given are for a standard swarm unit, not individual femtobots.
Subdual: 60 (p. 204, *EP*); subdued targets are penetrated and converted on next action.
Convert Matter: 70, touch attack, DV 1d10 per Action Turn to touched/penetrated targets. Damage inflicted increases creeper's DUR.
Repulsion Wave: No defense, 30 meter radius effect, DV 3d10, kinetic armor applies, all physical things pushed back 1d10 meters, SOM x 3 Test or knocked down
Fray/Armor: 40, 0/0
Perception: 50, 70 Hearing/Vision
Move: 4/16 Walker/Microlight (may create other mobility systems with different rates)
Skills: Free Fall 50, Infiltration 80, Infosec 80, Intimidation 60, Programming 80, Unarmed Combat 50 (Subdual 60); assume they have any skill they need at 40+
Ware: 360-Degree Vision, Chemical Sniffer, Electrical Sense, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Fractal Digits, Nanoscopic Vision, Radar, Radiation Sense, T-Ray Emitter
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)
Invisibility: Can be invisible, like a nanoswarm, or materialize forms with refractive metamaterials, like an invisibility cloak (p. 316, *EP*).

DEFILER

TYPE
EXHUMAN

NICHE
OUTER FRINGE, EXHUMAN HABITATS

Exhuman defiler clades combine the favored traits of predators and parasites into what they consider a perfect creature. Defilers have a multi-stage life cycle. Adult defilers sting their victims, injecting eggs into their body. The eggs feed parasitically off their hosts (alive or dead), growing inside them. If the host lives, it will eventually die as the larvae consume it from within. The larval form of the creature then eats its way out of the corpse, surviving as a scavenger until it cocoons itself somewhere and goes through a chrysalis, emerging in a meaner, nastier form. This version eats and molts, eventually growing into an adult after several months. The adult then seeks out victims to inject eggs into, starting the cycle again.



LARVAL DEFILER

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 1–6 per victim

Larval defilers are multi-limbed skittering creatures slightly larger than a cat. Omnivorous, they stick to shadows and confined spaces, scavenging for food until they are ready for metamorphosis. If cornered, they will launch themselves at their opponent's head, face, or limbs, latch on, and bite and claw.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
10	20	10	20	5	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	6	1	15	3	22

Latch On: 50, latches onto head or extremity with an MoS of 30+ (treat as subdual, p. 204, *EP*). Claw/bite attacks while latched on receive a +30 to hit and inflict +2d10 DV.
Bite/Claw: 40, DV 1d10, AP –1
Acid Spit: 40, cone area effect, DV 2d10, plus DV 1d10 every turn for 3 Action Turns. Kinetic armor applies, but is reduced by the damage. Range 5/10/15/20. Usable once per day.
Fray/Armor: 60, 3/5
Perception: 40, 60 Hearing/Smell/Vision
Move: 4/30 Walker
Skills: Climbing 60, Exotic Ranged Weapon: Acid 40, Free Fall 50, Freerunning 40, Infiltration 60, Intimidation 30, Scrounging 40, Swimming 30, Unarmed Combat 40 (Latch On 50)
Ware: Acid Gland, Adrenal Boost, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Hibernation, Temperature Tolerance, Toxin Filters, Vacuum Sealing
Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)
Stress Test: SV 1d10



Nezumi ■ I think some exhumans are a little too invested in old sci-fi vids.

Callosum ■ The interesting thing about defilers is that only the original adults in each clade are intelligent and educated (if insane) egos. These were once transhumans after all, and so they will use weapons and tools and fight with intelligence. Their offspring, however, are nothing more than animalistic creatures. Though they are clever and capable of learning from original defilers, they are essentially feral monsters.

Kylleran ■ That makes sense. The defiler nests we've discovered so far seem to have a handful of adults that lord it over the rest, treating the others as their minions. The feral adults are sometimes trained and geared up with weapons and armor, however, so it's best not to assume you're just dealing with an animal. On the other hand, it's sometimes possible to drive them away with fire and theatrics … though they inevitably come back. The exhumans hard-coded some serious predatory instincts into their genetics.

Plasmid ■ There's an ongoing debate over whether the defilers are some crazy neogenetic or chimerical construct the exhumans put together or whether they somehow acquired some authentic alien genetics and went wild. The samples Firewall has retrieved so far haven't been viable enough to suss out.

Delta V ■ Wait, so there might be actual aliens like this out there? That's terrifying.

FERAL DEFILER

Threat Level: Orange
Numbers: 4–6

Feral defilers have grown from their larval form. Adults stand just over 2 meters tall and are covered with a spiky and chitinous exoskeleton. Their tail spikes are retractable. Chemical glands line their throats, allowing them to spit acid. Victims are impaled and rended with both of the creature's arm or leg claws at the same time. Though cunning, they are roughly as intelligent as a smart animal or small child.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
10	20	20	20	10	25

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
20	8	1	60	12	90

Sting: 60, DV 2d10 + 3, AP –4; on an MoS of 30+ targets are impaled (treat as subdual, p. 204, *EP*) and injected with defiler eggs.
Claws: 60, DV 3d10 +5, AP –2
Bite: 50, DV 2d10 + 3, AP –8
Acid Spit: 50, cone area effect, DV 3d10 + 3, plus DV 1d10 every turn for 3 additional Action Turns. Kinetic armor applies, but the AV is reduced by the DV absorbed. Range 5/10/15/20. Usable once per 12 hours.
Fray/Armor: 50, 8/13
Perception: 40, 60 Hearing/Smell/Vision
Move: 4/24 Walker
Skills: Climbing 50, Exotic Ranged Weapon: Acid 50, Free Fall 60, Freerunning 50, Infiltration 60, Intimidation 60, Scrounging 60, Swimming 50, Unarmed Combat 50 (Claw/Sting 60)
Ware: Acid Gland, Adrenal Boost, Carapace Armor (8/13), Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Hibernation, Muscle Augmentation, Prehensile Tail, Temperature Tolerance, Toxin Filters, Vacuum Sealing
Stress Test: SV 1d10 + 3
Fear Pheromones: Defilers emit pheromones tailored to trigger fear and flight responses in human biomorphs. Apply a +10 to Intimidation Tests when applicable. At the gamemaster's discretion, close proximity to a defiler may provoke a WIL x 3 Test; if the human fails, they must flee for at least 2 Action Turns.

SAPIENT DEFILER

Threat Level: Red
Numbers: 1–3

Sapient defilers are the original exhumans, taken on the defiler form. Their morphs are the same as feral defilers, but they are more fiendish adversaries.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
20	20	20	20	10	25

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
20	8	1	60	12	90

Sting: 60, DV 2d10 + 3, AP –4; on an MoS of 30+ targets are impaled (treat as subdual, p. 204, *EP*) and injected with defiler eggs.
Claws: 60, DV 3d10 +5, AP –2
Bite: 50, DV 2d10 + 3, AP –8
Acid Spit: 50, cone area effect, DV 3d10 + 3, plus DV 1d10 every turn for 3 additional Action Turns. Kinetic armor applies, but the AV is reduced by the DV absorbed. Range 5/10/15/20. Usable once per 12 hours.
Railgun SMG: 60, DV 2d10 + 5, AP –5, SA/BF/FA, Ammo 60
Fray/Armor: 50, 8/13 (some wear additional armor)
Perception: 40, 60 Hearing/Smell/Vision
Move: 4/24 Walker
Skills: Blades 60, Climbing 40, Exotic Ranged Weapon: Acid 50, Free Fall 60, Freerunning 50, Hardware: Electronics 40, Hardware: Industrial 50, Infiltration 60, Infosec 40, Intimidation 60, Kinetic Weapons 60, Swimming 40, Unarmed Combat 50 (Claw/Sting 60)
Ware: Access Jacks, Acid Gland, Adrenal Boost, Carapace Armor (8/13), Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Hibernation, Muscle Augmentation, Prehensile Tail, Temperature Tolerance, Toxin Filters, Vacuum Sealing
Stress Test: SV 1d10 + 3
Fear Pheromones: Defilers emit pheromones tailored to trigger fear and flight responses in human biomorphs. Apply a +10 to Intimidation Tests when applicable. At the gamemaster's discretion, close proximity to a defiler may provoke a WIL x 3 Test; if the human fails, they must flee for at least 2 Action Turns.
Notes: Sapient defilers may have additional enhancements or gear as appropriate.

DEFILER EGG

Victims stung by defilers are unaware they have been injected with eggs. For the first 2 days, they show no symptoms, and Medicine Tests suffer a –30 modifier to detect the parasitoids. On the third day, they suffer intense cramping and pain, taking DV 2d10 every hour as the larvae feed on their organs. This damage cannot be healed until the parasitoids are removed. Removing them is a Medicine Task Action (1 hour). There is a 30% chance that attempting to eradicate the larvae will force them to rapidly chew out and evacuate the body (inflicting DV 2d10). Otherwise the larvae eat their way out once the victim has died, consuming the corpse before scurrying off.

DEFILER COCOON

Larval defilers ensconce themselves in a cocoon, taking 1 week to transform into an adult. The cocoon itself offers 15/10 Armor, but the defilers inside are helpless and vulnerable during the metamorphosis (Durability 5).

DREADNOUGHT

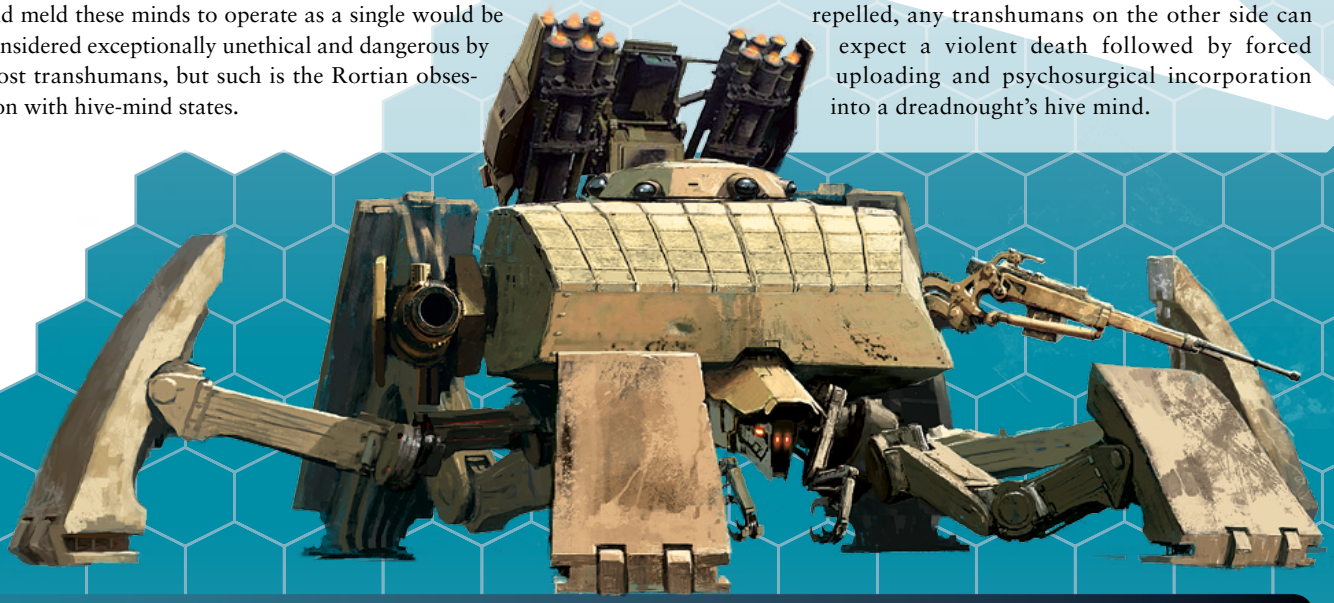
TYPE
EXHUMAN

NICHE
RORTY, OTHER HUMAN HELD-EXOPLANETS

Dreadnoughts are six-legged insectoid tanks, heavily armed and armored. They serve as the shock troops of the Rortians, exhumans bent on conquering the gate network and returning to the solar system to spread their synthetic, hive-mind fascism by force. Unlike a fenrir morph, where each subsystem is typically run by a separate ego coordinating with others through a hard-linked tacnet, dreadnoughts are run by a single mass mind. Each mental unit is composed of up to a dozen egos—usually exhumans, but sometimes forcibly incorporated captured egos. The psychosurgical processes required to prune, implant skills, and meld these minds to operate as a single would be considered exceptionally unethical and dangerous by most transhumans, but such is the Rortian obsession with hive-mind states.

The unique mind structure and cyberbrain architecture required to operate a dreadnought is unsuitable for transhuman minds to sleeve or hack. It's unclear if the ego gestalt provides any tactical benefits over traditional transhuman heavy armor or if it merely fits with the Rortians' mad philosophy of exhumanism.

Evidence suggests Rortians deploy dreadnoughts in their assaults in the same way they do everything else: en masse. When the exhumans find a transhuman colony accessible from their home gate, they send as many dreadnoughts through as possible to establish a beachhead. If the initial assault isn't repelled, any transhumans on the other side can expect a violent death followed by forced uploading and psychosurgical incorporation into a dreadnought's hive mind.



Psychscraper ■ So far, efforts to retrieve egos that were incorporated into dreadnought mass minds have been … messy and unsuccessful.

Ruqinzhe ■ I pulled a job for Firewall a ways back that involved stealing fenrir blueprints from a certain someone on Callisto. What was weird was where I made the drop: Crash Course on Mars. My contact said they were going where the mesh couldn't reach. That means gate time. Anyone know what that's about?

Parallax ■ I heard something about an op to draw the dreadnoughts into a raid, over-extending themselves, and then ambushing them. I'm going to assume whatever server was behind that was looking for weaknesses and not making a bunch of unstoppable tank morphs of their own. Then again, just think what a beautiful scene that would be. A barren exoplanet. No civilians. No cover up. Just a total free-fire zone. Can you imagine the kind of firepower thrown around?

Ruqinzhe ■ You're pissed you didn't get tapped for that op, aren't you?

Parallax ■ Maaaaybe.

DREADNOUGHT

Threat Level: Ultraviolet

Numbers: 1–6

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
30	20	20	30	15	30

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
20	8	2	75	15	150

Cannon: 60, DV 8d10 + 20, area effect, Range 500/1,000/3,000/5,000, Ammo 30

HEAP Seeker Missiles: 60, DV 6d10 + 24, AP –8, area effect (–4/m), Range 300/1,000/3,000/10,000 meters, Ammo 12

Thermobaric Seeker Missiles: 60, DV 6d10 + 10, AP –10, uniform 10-meter area effect, Range 300/1,000/3,000/10,000 meters, Ammo 12

Railgun Automatic Rifle: 60, DV 2d10 + 8, AP –9, SA/BF/FA, Range 150/250/500/900 meters, Ammo 300

Particle Beam Bolter: 50, DV 2d10 + 4, AP –2, SA, Range 30/100/150/300, Ammo Unlimited

Cyberclaws: 50, DV 2d10 + 6, AP –2

Fray/Armor: 30, 37/37; Reactive Armor: Treat bursts and autofire as a single attack; 5 uses (p. 313, *EP*)

Perception: 50, 70 Vision

Move: 3/15 Walker, 2/10 Vectored Thrust

Skills: Beam Weapons 50, Free Fall 50, Freerunning 50, Hardware: Robotics 70, Infosec 50, Intimidation 60, Kinetic Weapons 60, Seeker Weapons 60, Unarmed Combat 50

Ware: 360-Degree Vision, Access Jacks, Anti-Glare, Basic Mesh Inserts, Combat Armor (Heavy), Cortical Stack (Experimental), Cyberbrain (Experimental), Dead Switch, Enhanced Vision, Magnetic System, Pneumatic Limbs, Radar, Reactive Armor Coating, Reflex Boosters, Structural Enhancement, T-Ray Emitter, Weapon Mounts (4, articulated)

Traits: Large Size (+10 to hit)

Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)

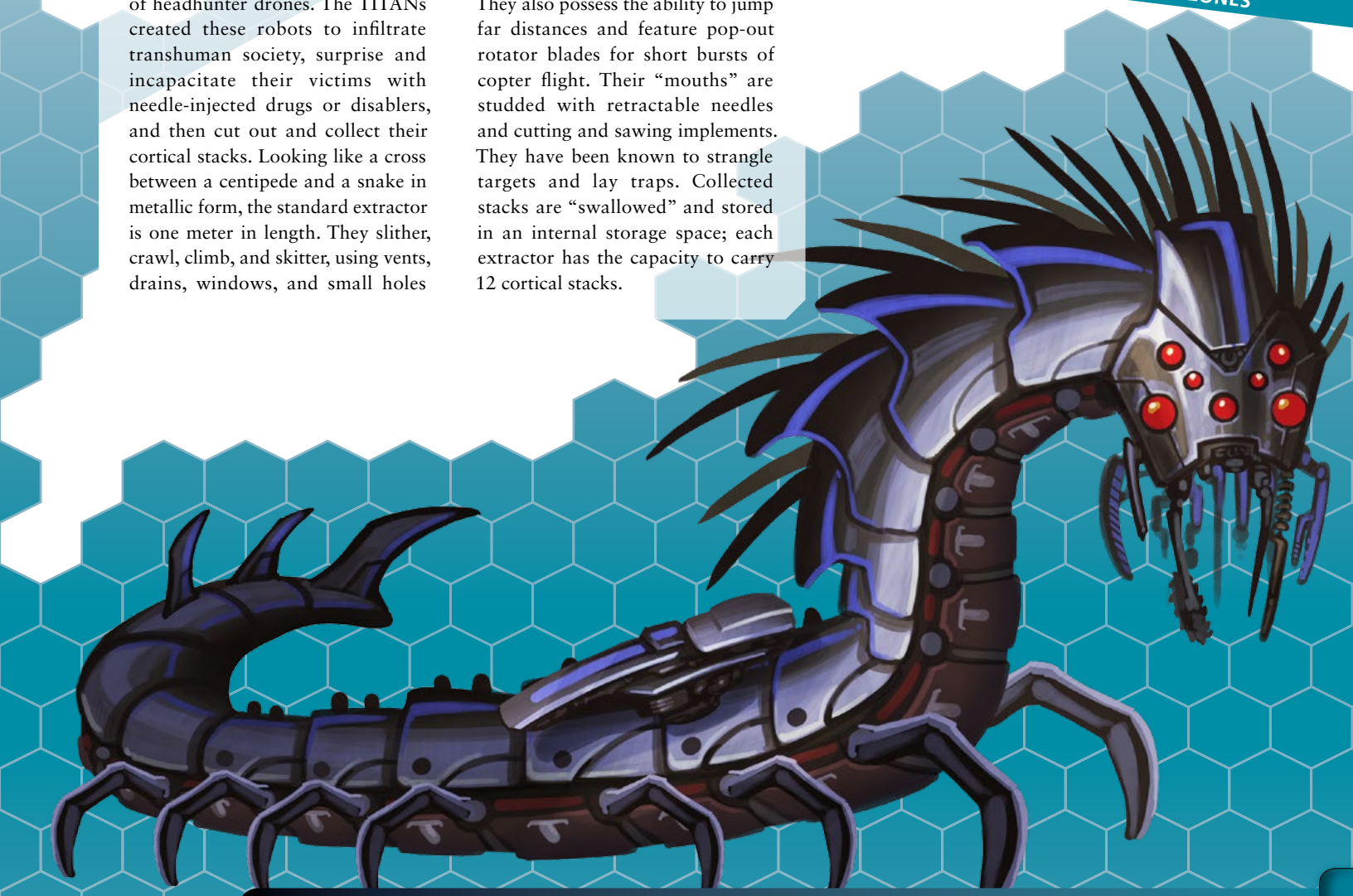
Special Neural Architecture: Attempting to sleeve or mentally access the dreadnought's cyberbrain inflicts SV 1d10.

EXTRACTOR

TYPE
TITAN

NICHE
EARTH, QUARANTINE ZONES

Extractors are the distant relatives of headhunter drones. The TITANs created these robots to infiltrate transhuman society, surprise and incapacitate their victims with needle-injected drugs or disablers, and then cut out and collect their cortical stacks. Looking like a cross between a centipede and a snake in metallic form, the standard extractor is one meter in length. They slither, crawl, climb, and skitter, using vents, drains, windows, and small holes to access even fortified positions. They also possess the ability to jump far distances and feature pop-out rotator blades for short bursts of copter flight. Their "mouths" are studded with retractable needles and cutting and sawing implements. They have been known to strangle targets and lay traps. Collected stacks are "swallowed" and stored in an internal storage space; each extractor has the capacity to carry 12 cortical stacks.



Skinwalker ■ One of me was in a refugee center on Earth during the Fall, waiting for evac, when a swarm of these things came through the walls. It was pandemonium, they were everywhere, on everyone. They were smart enough to target the guards first, not that their automatic rifles were much use in the confined quarters, with so many civilians. I made it out a window with one of these latched on my leg. It got snagged on the drapes long enough for me to get away, or at least for someone else to make a more promising victim.

Sava ■ And once again, we are reminded of the people we lost: why did the TITANs collect all of those egos? What have they done with them? Some of us ponder this every day.

EXTRACTOR

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 1–12

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
15	20	10	20	5	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	6	1	15	3	30

Injection Bite: 40, DV 1d10, AP –4, injects sedative (see below)
Strangle: 60 subdual attack (p. 204, *EP*); subdued biomorphs take DV 2d10 per Action Turn (armor does not protect); subdued synthmorphs may be incapacitated with the disabler.
Shock Touch: 60, touch attack, shock (p. 204, *EP*)
Fray/Armor: 50, 4/6
Perception: 40, 60 Hearing/Vision
Move: 8/30 Walker/Snake, 4/16 Rotorcraft
Leap: Extractors can horizontally jump 4 meters (running)/2 meters (standing) and vertically jump 2 meters; +1/0.25/0.25 meters (respectively) per 10 MoS on as Freerunning Test.
Skills: Climbing 60, Exotic Melee Weapon: Strangle 60, Flight 40, Freerunning 50, Medicine 40 (Stack Popping 50), Unarmed Combat 40
Ware: Direction Sense, Disabler (p. 316, *EP*), Drug Gland (Sedative), Eelware, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Grip Pads, Pneumatic Limbs, Puppet Sock, T-Ray Emitter
Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)
Sedative: Injected, Onset Time: 1 Action Turn, Duration: 1 hour. Biomorphs that fail a SOM Test are knocked unconscious and cannot be woken without stimulants; on a success they suffer –20 to all actions.
Notes: There is a 40% chance that an extractor will be carrying 1d10 ÷ 2 cortical stacks collected from previous victims.

FACTOR AMBASSADOR

TYPE
ALIEN

NICHE
FACTOR SPACECRAFT, EMBASSIES, DIPLOMATIC EVENTS



Ambassador phenotypes are only distinguishable from other Factors by a loose arrangement of sensor nodules meant to approximate a face. This appearance was especially bioengineered to put transhumans at ease, though the Factors claim ambassadors are in charge of their negotiations with every alien species. Despite these efforts, most transhumans still find ambassadors unsightly and unnerving to interact with.

Ambassador are cagey, even by Factor standards. Their sole purpose is to dissemble, delay, and trick transhumans into asymmetrical exchanges of information, concealing the colony's motivations while acquiring as much transhuman technology as possible. Factors evolved practical intelligence for trapping larger, dangerous prey. The trickster mindset responsible for their survival has never left the species, growing more sophisticated over centuries. Conceptually, ambassadors find little difference between luring a beast onto a patch of poisoned lichen and convincing the Planetary Consortium to hand over plans for a new antimatter engine.

Ambassadors are unlikely to engage in conflict without assistance from guardian phenotypes, but they possess the same Factor dust attack and resilience to kinetic weaponry as the rest of the species. Some carry implanted microwave agonizers and plasma grenades that they will deploy to prevent capture.

FACTOR AMBASSADOR

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 1–4

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
20	10	20	10	15	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
20	6	1	30	7	45

Factor Dust: 45, cone area effect, Range 2/4/6/8. Toxin: Inhalation, Onset Time: 1 Action Turn, Duration: 5 turns/2 hours; victims suffer severe coughing and respiratory distress, DV 1d10 per turn for 5 Action Turns, –20 to all actions for 2 hours; medichines reduce DV by half and modifier duration to 15 minutes.
Embedded Agonizer: 40, inflicts pain, –20 to next action, WIL Test or flee. Roast Mode: DV 2d10, AP –5, SS, Ammo 50.
Fray/Armor: 25, 0/0
Perception: 50
Move: 4/16 Walker
Skills: Art: Sculpture 50, Beam Weapons 40, Deception 70, Exotic Ranged Weapon: Factor Dust 45, Exotic Skill: Trap-Making 60, Free Fall 40, Hardware: Electronics 35, Infosec 35, Interest: Transhumanity 60, Intimidation 50, Kinesics 40, Persuasion 60, Protocol 50, Research 35, Unarmed Combat 30
Ware: Access Jacks, Chameleon Skin, Enhanced Vision (Infrared Only), Grip Pads, Poison Gland (Factor Dust Toxin)
Traits: Direction Sense (Magnetoception)
Stress Test: SV 1d10
Immunity to Kinetic Damage: Factors take minimum DV from kinetic weapons and blades.
Implanted Plasma Grenade: DV 3d10 + 10, AP –6, inflicts double damage to Ambassador; remaining damage is applied as normal area effect to bystanders.
Melding: Factors may meld together into larger forms. Use the highest stat, +2 per additional Factor (to a maximum +10). Durability, Wound Threshold, and Death Rating are added together (to a maximum x5).
Regeneration: Factors regenerate 2 damage per Action Turn; wounds may not be regenerated.
Notes: Factors are immune to psi sleights.

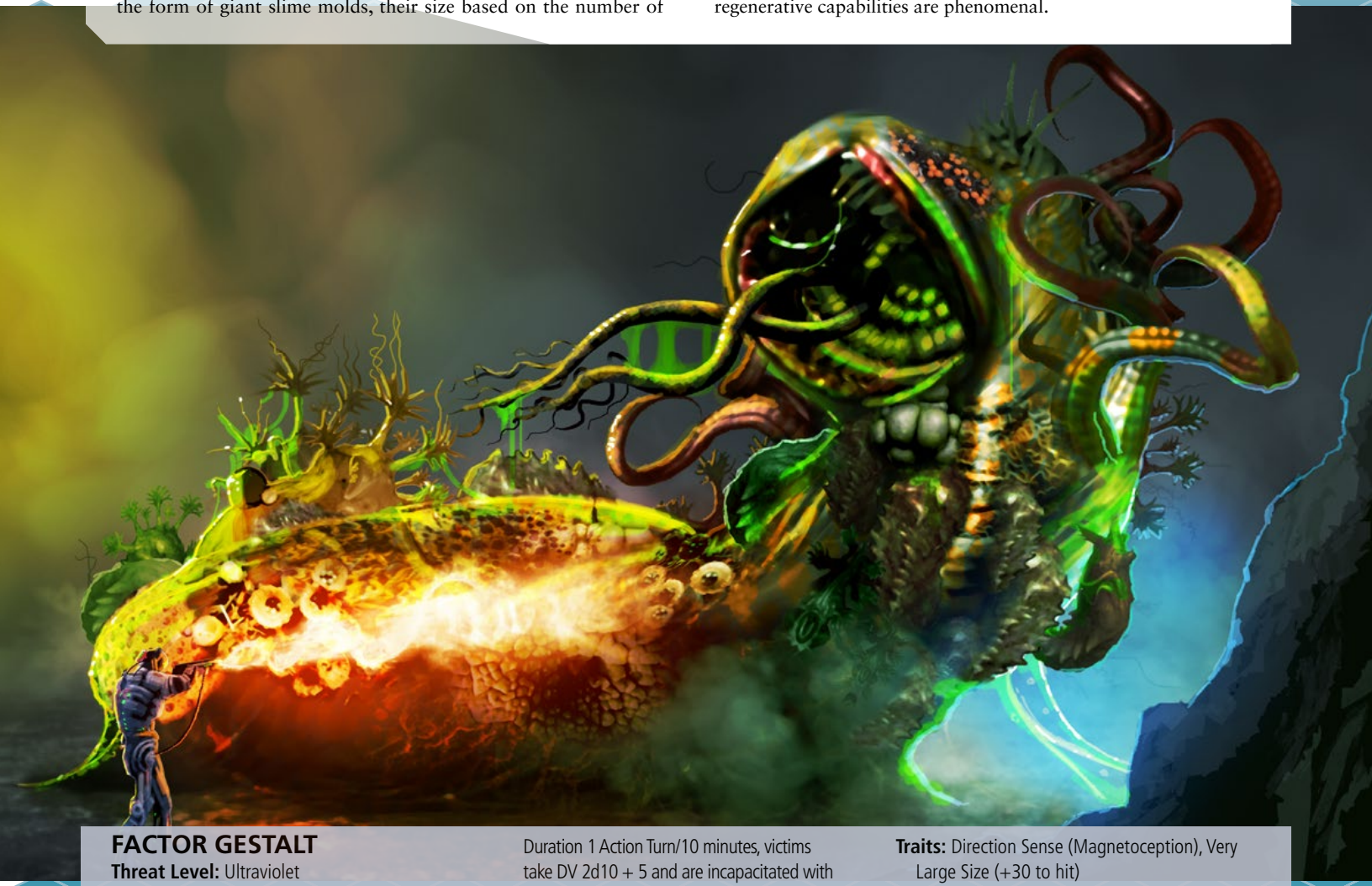
FACTOR GESTALT

TYPE
ALIEN

NICHE
FACTOR SPACECRAFT

Factors achieved dominance through cunning, but intelligence wasn't always enough. To survive against stronger predators, Factors evolved the means to form a gestalt, a form of weaponized collectivism. Factors already meld into singular colony organisms capable of multitasking and group consciousness. The gestalt uses this same ability to exponentially increase a colony's killing power.

Transhumanity has never witnessed a gestalt. Gestalts take the form of giant slime molds, their size based on the number of available Factors and the threat presented. Gestalts can shoot keratin shards that pierce armor to deliver a poisonous payload and extend numerous tentacles hardened to a terrifying sharpness. They exude a choking, blinding haze and can produce potent toxins. Kinetic weapons remain impotent against them, but the gestalt's regenerative capabilities are phenomenal.



FACTOR GESTALT

Threat Level: Ultraviolet

Numbers: 1

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
30	30	30	30	25	35

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
30	8	2	200	40	300

Factor Dust: 75, cone area effect, Range 10 (2 targets) / 30 (4 targets) / 50 (6 targets) / 70 (6 targets). Toxin: Inhalation, Onset Time: 1 Action Turn, Duration: 5 turns/2 hours; victims suffer severe coughing and respiratory distress, DV 1d10 per turn for 5 Action Turns, –20 to all actions for 2 hours; medichines reduce DV by half and modifier duration to 15 minutes.

Poison Keratin Shard: 60, DV 2d10 + 2, AP –8, SA, Range 10/20/40/60; Poison: Injected, Onset Time: 1 Action Turn, Duration 1 Action Turn/10 minutes, victims take DV 2d10 + 5 and are incapacitated with convulsions; a SOM x 3 Test halves the damage and replaces convulsions with a –20 modifier to all actions. Medichines reduce the duration by half.

Tentacle Whip: 70, DV 3d10 + 12, AP –5, Reach (+20); struck targets may be subdued with a Quick Action (p. 204, *EP*)

Fray/Armor: 50, 15/10

Perception: 60

Move: 5/25 Walker

Skills: Climbing 50, Exotic Ranged Weapon: Factor Dust 75, Exotic Ranged Weapon: Keratin Shard 60, Exotic Skill: Trap-Making 60, Free Fall 50, Freerunning 50, Infiltration 50, Intimidation 60, Kinesics 30, Unarmed Combat 70, plus others needed at 40+

Ware: Chameleon Skin, Electrical Sense, Enhanced Vision (Infrared Only), Grip Pads

Traits: Direction Sense (Magnetoception), Very Large Size (+30 to hit)

Stress Test: SV 1d10 + 3

Dust Cloud: Factor gestalts are surrounded by a miasma of Factor dust, extending to a 30 meter radius. This dust impedes visibility (–20), reduces laser pulser ranges by half, and biomorphs must make a SOM x 3 Test or suffer –10 due to coughing and choking.

Immunity to Kinetic Damage: Factors take minimum DV from kinetic weapons and blades.

Poison Glands: Gestalts can generate poison glands to secrete/exhale new toxins besides Factors dust, emulating the effects of other neurotoxins. Growing a new poison gland takes about 1 hour.

Regeneration: Gestalts regenerate 1d10 damage per Action Turn; wounds may not be regenerated.

FACTOR GUARDIAN

TYPE
ALIEN

NICHE
FACTOR SPACECRAFT, EMBASSIES, DIPLOMATIC EVENTS



Guardians are the only Factor subspecies besides ambassadors to have had extensive contact with transhumanity. They serve as bodyguards for ambassador phenotypes outside the ship. In addition to the dust toxin wielded by the entire species, guardians have tentacles and the equivalent of eelware to make them more formidable in close combat. Combined with a Factor's natural resilience to kinetic damage, these augmentations make guardians capable close- to mid-range fighters.

The few quiet conflicts fought between the Factors and transhumanity thus far (mostly on various exoplanets) have exclusively been fought against guardians. They may be more capable than the ambassador phenotype, but guardians still rely on the ambush tactics favored by the entire species. As their Factor dust and eelware can be rendered useless by off-the-rack vacsuits, and the creatures are vulnerable to a competent transhuman armed with energy weapons, guardians are fully aware that they don't rank in a fair fight, and they are dangerous because they plan around that disadvantage.

Guardians sometimes carry more advanced gear/weaponry, such as laser blasters or exosuits, but avoid bringing such weapons into situations where they could fall into enemy hands.

FACTOR GUARDIAN

Threat Level: Orange

Numbers: 1–8 (2 per Factor Ambassador)

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
20	20	15	20	10	25

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	7	1	50	10	75

Laser: 60, DV 4d10, SA, Ammo 200. These weapons only work for Factors. May be set to self-destruct, inflicting DV 8d10 + 10, AP –8, blast area effect.

Factor Dust: 65, cone area effect, Range 2/4/6/8. Toxin: Inhalation, Onset Time: 1 Action Turn, Duration: 5 turns/2 hours; victims suffer severe coughing and respiratory distress, DV 1d10 per turn for 5 Action Turns, –20 to all actions for 2 hours; medichines reduce DV by half and modifier duration to 15 minutes.

Tentacle Whip: 60, DV 2d10 + 1, AP –1

Eelware: 70, touch attack, shock (p. 204, *EP*)

Fray/Armor: 50, Guardian Armor 12/8

Perception: 50

Move: 4/20 Walker

Skills: Beam Weapons 60, Climbing 40, Exotic Ranged Weapon: Factor Dust 65, Exotic Skill: Trap-Making 60, Free Fall 40, Freerunning 40, Infiltration 40, Intimidation 50, Kinesics 20, Kinetic Weapons 60, Profession: Security Procedures 50, Unarmed Combat 50 (Tentacles 60)

Ware: Chameleon Skin, Eelware, Electrical Sense, Enhanced Vision (Infrared Only), Grip Pads, Poison Gland (Factor Dust Toxin)

Traits: Direction Sense (Magnetoception)

Stress Test: SV 1d10

Factor Exosuit: When equipped, provides +6/+4 armor, a Movement Rate of 8/40, +20 to strength-related SOM Tests, and +2d10 DV to melee attacks. Durability 50.

Immunity to Kinetic Damage: Factors take minimum DV from kinetic weapons and blades.

Melding: Factors may meld together into larger forms. Use the highest stat, +2 per additional Factor (to a maximum +10). Durability, Wound Threshold, and Death Rating are added together (to a maximum x5).

Regeneration: Factors regenerate 2 damage per Action Turn; wounds may not be regenerated.

Notes: Factors are immune to psi sleights.

FACTOR MINIKIN

TYPE
ALIEN

NICHE
FACTOR SPACECRAFT



Cryptid ■ We've acquired evidence proving that Factors can actually merge themselves together. It's based on some things we've learned about their physiology and cell makeup, their "clumping" behavior, their collective colony identity, and the way they've been seen to entangle their neurofilaments together. We're not really sure what the advantages to this would be beyond size, or what the final form might be like, but it sure would be fascinating to see.

Delta V ■ Yeah, the first thing I think, when I see a massive Voltron slime mold looming over me, is "fascinating."

Skinwalker ■ What if that was their natural form, and they just split off their big toes or whatever to send off to interact with us?

Just Mortal ■ If the Factors don't even conceive of themselves as individuals, why do they send out "bodyguards" for their ambassadors?

Callosum ■ Ever used your hand to block something about to hit your face? That's why.

Eludere ■ I like to think of it as theater, meant to play on our anthropomorphic assumptions. I suspect ambassadors and guardians are equally expendable. While you're busy tracking down individual Factors, the hive mind is up to other things.

Parallax ■ I have yet to see the Factors bust out any serious heavy weaponry. You know they have it. Who wants to piss 'em off first to find out?

Callosum ■ There's a theory put forth by some astrobiologists that Factors may not be physically capable of lying. It's a bit complex, but keep in mind this is a species that inhales and metabolizes language. That suggests that linguistic concepts are framed in grounded reality. We also believe that Factors regularly conjoin into group minds. This calls into question whether they have a complete theory of mind and can attribute thoughts and questions to others. We've never encountered one that can fully grasp the concept of "I." With a group mind like this, falsehoods could spread through the colony like a virus, leading to mass delusion, which isn't exactly an evolutionary advantage.

Delta V ■ They've apparently mastered interstellar travel. I think they can probably tell a fib.

Voight-Kampff ■ Our experiences with Factors indicate they can distinguish between Factors and transhumanity and our separate interests. And if they did evolve from ambush predators, that implies an understanding of deception to fool prey. If they are inhaling linguistic concepts with a direct effect on their cognition, they have probably developed an immune system of chemical skepticism. However, an analysis of Factor-transhuman communication indicates that they use similes and allusions rather than metaphors, and there are no direct known instances of them lying.

Kylleran ■ They don't need to outright lie when they can stonewall, redirect, or simply omit key details. Don't be fooled, Factors are masters of deceit.

FACTOR MINIKIN

Threat Level: Yellow

Numbers: 4–6

Factor colonies spawn smaller individuals referred to as minikin, about half the size of other Factors. These minikin fulfill menial or high-risk tasks. They are sapient but high specialized, focused on their task, and easily sacrificed. Minikin are never used to communicate or interface with transhumans.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
10	10	10	5	5	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	3	1	10	2	15

Fray/Armor: 20, 0/0

Perception: 30

Move: 3/12 Walker

Skills: Deception 40, Exotic Skill: Trap-Making 50, Free Fall 40, Hardware: Aerospace 40, Hardware: Industrial 40, Unarmed Combat 30

Ware: Chameleon Skin, Enhanced Vision (Infrared Only), Grip Pads

Traits: Direction Sense (Magnetoception)

Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2

Immunity to Kinetic Damage: Factors take minimum DV from kinetic weapons and blades.

Melding: Factors may meld together into larger forms. Use the highest stat, +1 per additional minikin (to a maximum +10). Durability, Wound Threshold, and Death Rating are added together (to a maximum x5).

Regeneration: Factors regenerate 2 damage per Action Turn; wounds may not be regenerated.

Notes: Factors are immune to psi sleights.

FETCH

TYPE
TITAN

NICHE
QUARANTINE ZONES, TITAN ARTIFACTS



A fetch is a delta fork of a TITAN ASI, trimmed down to maneuver among transhuman mesh networks and morphs. Though exceptionally smart and capable, pruning down a superintelligence's mind to that size is much like lobotomizing a god. Even for the TITANs, this is risky and requires finesse. As a result, fetches can be unstable, erratic, and unpredictable, more so the longer they operate independently from their parent mind. The exsurgent virus may have additional unforeseen side effects on TITAN mind-states. Nevertheless, fetches are brilliant hackers, engineers, and tacticians, easily equal to transhumanity's best. They are clever, forward-thinking, and devious foes.

Most fetches were created for specific tasks that required direct oversight, but were too unimportant for the greater TITAN minds to attend to personally. They also managed long-term projects and situations too dangerous for direct TITAN involvement. Some continue far beyond their operational parameters, others linger on to attend to unexpected deviations. A few remain trapped or hidden within hardware, having survived the battles of the Fall, while others still operate under direct TITAN command. Transhuman opponents frequently mistake fetches for actual TITANs.

Fetches prefer infomorph forms, managing minion AIs and controlling both synthetic and biological servants via puppet socks. A fetch mastermind deploying a squad of TITAN machines is a terrifying affair. They ensconce themselves in high-end servers, using mobile servers as missions require. If they must sleeve, they prefer mentons and other enhanced-intelligence morphs, and will upgrade the shell's mental capacity.

Qi ■ The positive side to fetches reanimated from old hardware is that their exploits are a decade old. Deal with them quickly, before they adapt and upgrade.

Les Merci ■ In Firewall's many experiences with TITAN agents, upon initial contact they remain actively preoccupied with their tasks and care nothing about the sentinels—at least until they actively interfere. Our protocol should be to take the opportunity to fully assess what's going on and not simply call in an orbital strike. We gather very little evidence from smoking craters. We need to approach these scenarios with finesse to construct a bigger picture of their agendas.

Breeze ■ Easy for you to say, your stack's not on the front lines.

FETCH

Threat Level: Ultraviolet

Numbers: 1

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
40	20	40	30	30	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
40	7	4	50	10	75

Fray/Armor: 60, 0/0

Perception: 50

Skills: Academics (Choose Three) 100, Deception 80, Impersonation 60, Infosec 100, Interest (Choose Two) 100, Interfacing 100, Kinesics 80, Language (Choose Five) 100, Persuasion 60, Profession (Choose Two) 80, Programming 80, Protocol 50, Research 80, plus three other skills appropriate to their mission at 80.

Ware: Active Countermeasures, Autodelete, Eidetic Memory, Hacking Alert, Increased Speed, Math Boost, Mental Speed, Mnemonic Augmentation, Panopticon, Persistence

Common Traits: Anomalous Mind, Digital Ghost, Edited Memories, Emotive Blindness, Expert, Machine Intuition, Modified Behavior, Neural Damage, Overwhelmed By Emotions, Real World Naiveté

Stress Test: SV 1d10 + 3

Exsurgent Infection: Fetches carry the digital exsurgent virus and will attempt to infect infomorphs and cyberbrains.

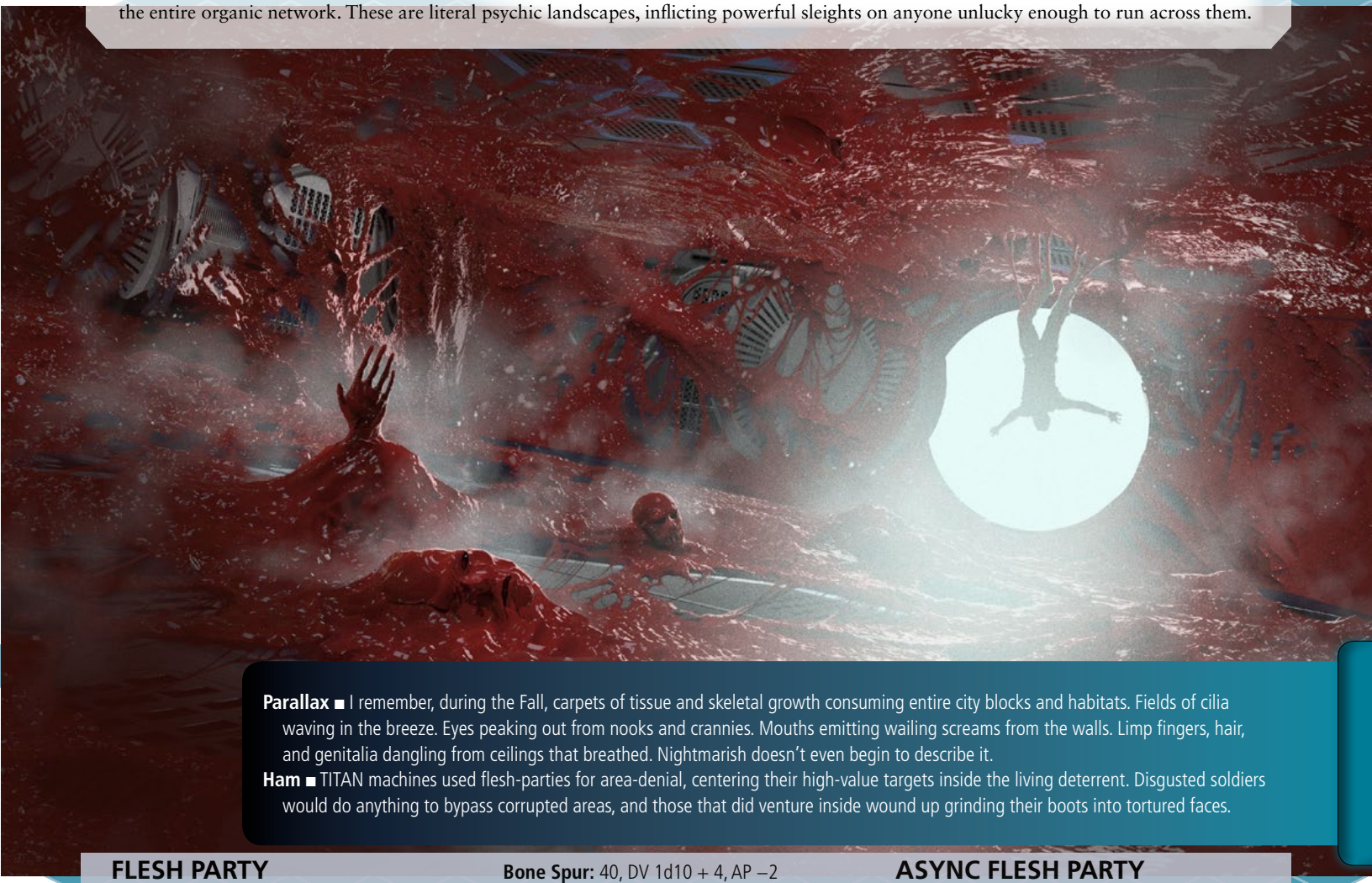
FLESH PARTY

TYPE
TITAN

NICHE
EARTH, QUARANTINE ZONES, DERELICT HABITATS

This TITAN nanovirus debones and mutates biomorphs in concert with concurrent infections in other nearby transhumans. The result is a flesh party: a thin kudzu of invertebrate skin and organs with vines of webbed sinew and bone ridges spread over the maximum possible surface area. The nanovirus keeps its victims awake for much of the process while weaving neural connections between tortured minds, assuring an insane hive consciousness. TITAN machines sometimes hook the tumorous mass up to compromised makers loaded with feedstock, providing nutrients so the flesh party can grow and suffer for years.

Most flesh parties are essentially inanimate, but some attack trespassers through their landscape. They express large mouths to swallow, squirt acid, entangle with cilia, or jab with bone spikes. Some are ainfected with the Watts-MacLeod virus, the contamination spreading across the entire organic network. These are literal psychic landscapes, inflicting powerful sleights on anyone unlucky enough to run across them.



Parallax ■ I remember, during the Fall, carpets of tissue and skeletal growth consuming entire city blocks and habitats. Fields of cilia waving in the breeze. Eyes peaking out from nooks and crannies. Mouths emitting wailing screams from the walls. Limp fingers, hair, and genitalia dangling from ceilings that breathed. Nightmarish doesn't even begin to describe it.

Ham ■ TITAN machines used flesh-parties for area-denial, centering their high-value targets inside the living deterrent. Disgusted soldiers would do anything to bypass corrupted areas, and those that did venture inside wound up grinding their boots into tortured faces.

FLESH PARTY

Stats assume a room-sized flesh party. Larger versions may have higher Durability.

Threat Level: Yellow

Numbers: 1

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
15	5	15	5	15	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	4	1	80	—	120

Bite: 50, DV 2d10 + 5, AP –3, medium and smaller targets are swallowed whole with an MoS of 30+. Engulfed victims suffer the effects of acid spit (below) until freed or dead and cannot see, hear, or breathe (see *Asphyxiation*, p. 194, *EP*).

Acid Spit: 40, cone area effect, DV 1d10 + 5 per turn for 3 Action Turns. Armor defends but is decreased by the damage.

Bone Spur: 40, DV 1d10 + 4, AP –2

Fray/Armor: 5, 0/0

Perception: 30, 50 Hearing/Smell/Vision

Move: Immobile

Skills: Deception 50, Unarmed Combat 40 (Bite 50)

Ware: Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Temperature Tolerance

Traits: Mental Disorder (Insane), Psi (Level 3), Very Large Size (+30 to hit)

Stress Test: SV 1d10 + 5

Nanovirus Infection: Flesh parties exude the nanovirus. Treat it as a nanoplague (p. 172) with dermal, inhalation, and injection vectors and an Infection Rating of 40.

Regeneration: Flesh parties regenerate 1d10 damage per hour

Wound Invulnerability: Flesh parties are immune to wound effects.

ASYNC FLESH PARTY

As standard flesh parties, with the following additions.

Threat Level: Orange

Agony Sleight: 70, Opposed with WIL x 2, Close Range, SOM x 3 Test to act or –30 (see *Agony* (p. 178), Strain (1d10 ÷ 2) + 2

Skills: Control 60, Psi Assault 70, Sense 50

Traits: Psi (Level 3)

Common Sleights: Agony, Ambience Sense, Anti-Electronics Field, Diffusion, Extend Range, Onslaught, Psychic Rend, Psychic Stab, Spam, Static

FRACTAL

TYPE
TITAN

NICHE
QUARANTINE ZONES, EARTH, TITAN ARTIFACTS

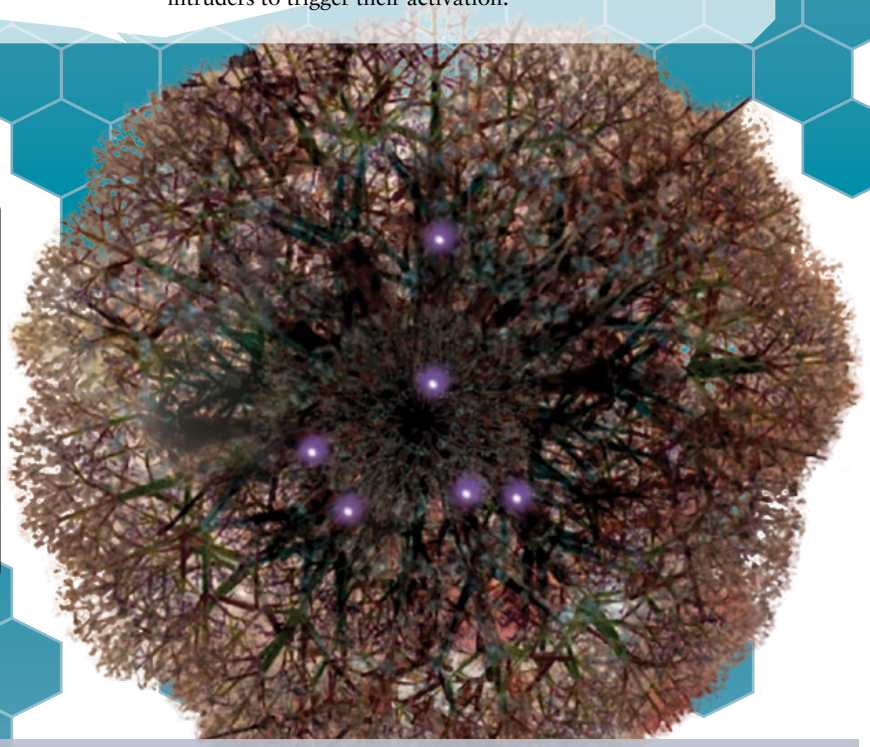
Fractals look like metallic bushes surrounded by the shimmering haze of active nanotech. Each branch is attached to a central core by a flexible joint. Appendages split into two or more smaller branches, both with metamaterial flex joints of their own. These branches split again—and again—until each frond telescopes exponentially into trillions of nanomanipulators. Fractals move on the tips of these nanoscopic digits or construct miniature thrust vectors to "float."

Fractals are remarkably dangerous. They can dismantle anything they touch at a molecular level and nanofabricate armaments and other equipment at incredible speeds, far surpassing transhuman nanofab capabilities. Projectiles that don't pass through the bush robot are broken down and absorbed. Severed branches are caught, deconstructed, and rebuilt.

Given an hour or two of preparation, a fractal can equip itself with reactive diamond armor-plating, enough railcannons to slag a tank, or another fractal cobbled together from the surrounding environment.They track targets for days, keeping out of range of dangerous weapons, testing their prey's capabilities. They wear their prey down, withdrawing when necessary, and returning with the gear necessary to finish them off. Seemingly destroyed fractals rebuild themselves and come back with a vengeance.

Without TITAN orders, fractals aimlessly feed off their area of last deployment, taking every effort to conceal themselves. They often construct unusual devices and formations, sometimes like traps or high-tech scanners, sometimes like art Others lie dormant for years, waiting silently for intruders to trigger their activation.

Scent.In.Hell ■ Fuck. These. Things.
Psychscraper ■ I've cut these bastards out of a few poor souls' nightmares. Hell, I've done it to myself.
Moxie Harper ■ If the Fall had a goddamned mascot, it would be a fractal. "Hey everybody! It's Fred the Friendly Fractal, come to murder the shit out of your team!"
Jake Carter ■ Ignore that "track the disassembly trail" bullshit in the manual. Fractals are top-shelf TITAN tech—not fucking deer. They know how to lure dumb-ass zone stalkers into a kill-zone. You either have secure satellite feed on its location that very moment or you're the one being hunted. And don't fall for their decoys.



FRACTAL

Threat Level: Ultraviolet
Numbers: 1–2

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
30	25	30	20	10	25

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
30	10	1	50	20	100

Bush Blades: 60, DV 2d10, AP –10
Shredder: 45, DV 2d10 + 5, AP –10, SA/BF/FA, Ammo Unlimited
Fray/Armor: 40, 15/15
Perception: 50, 70 Vision
Move: 4/40 Roller, 4/16 Vectored Thrust (may create other mobility systems with different rates)
Skills: Beam Weapons 50, Blades 60, Climbing 60, Free Fall 40, Freerunning 50, Infiltration 70, Infosec 65, Interfacing 45, Intimidation 50, Kinetic Weapons 60, Programming 60 (Nanofabrication 70), Research 40, Seeker Weapons 50, Spray Weapons 45, Unarmed Combat 55
Common Ware: 360-Degree Vision, Chameleon Skin, Chemical Sniffer, Electrical Sense, Enhanced Vision, Fractal Digits, Grip Pads, Lidar, Nanoscopic Vision, Radar, Thermal Dampening
Stress Test: SV 1d10
Exsurgent Infection: Fractals are often infected and equipped with the exsurgent virus.
Feign Destruction: Fractals are programmed to "fall apart" right before accumulated damage reaches their Death Rating, dissolving into numerous nanoswarms that set about rebuilding the fractal.
Invulnerability: Area effect and spray weapons do half damage against fractals. All other weapons do minimum damage.
Nanofabrication: Fractals may be equipped with or fabricate any enhancements, gear, armor, or weapons the GM desires to present an appropriate threat. Nanofab time is half an hour per Cost category. They may also mimic the effects of nanoswarms (p. 328, *EP*).
Regeneration: Fractals repair 1d10 damage per half hour. After all damage is fixed, fractals may repair wounds at the rate of 1 per hour.

FRACTAL TROLL

TYPE
EXSURGENT

NICHE
IAPETUS, QUARANTINE ZONES



These deformed albino creatures stand roughly 2 meters tall. They lope around substrate labyrinths on elongated primate forearms, gripping the walls with massive clawed wrists and prehensile feet. Two pairs of smaller limbs—one on the back and one jutting from the chest—are equipped with fractal digits. Used as exsurgent drones for the inscrutable needs of their machine masters, fractal trolls still possess the remnants of their original egos. Some carry the shattered remnants of multiple egos merged by the TITANs.

Most fractal trolls were driven horribly insane by their ordeal. Though cryonic and inured to vacuum, the trolls still must eat to survive, choosing between feedstock cultures made from recycled transhuman corpses or cannibalism. Memory fragments clash with the brutal horror of their continued existence, causing extreme cognitive dissonance and trauma. The majority of fractal trolls killed themselves after the TITANs' departure. Those that remain survive only through disassociation, sublimating the remains of their transhumanity into odd portraiture scratched into the walls.

Encounters with transhumans provoke fractal trolls into flight-or-fight response. Some attack out of fear TITAN agents have returned to enslave them; others kill in the hope the TITANs will approve and return, freeing them from the horrific memories plaguing them. Those not murdered and consumed can expect painful interrogation at the fractal hands of a confused pre-Fall ego driven mad by years of pain.

Expat ■ I understand why we list these on the threat index, but let's not forget they are victims—we should be helping them when possible, not murdering them. Leaving aside basic decency, think of the intelligence a recovered ego could provide. We could learn about the attack on Iapetus or the purpose of the computronium. Worst-case scenario, we gain one more ego's perspective on the Fall and do a good deed. The portraiture proves there are salvageable egos in there; they're not all monsters.

Sava ■ Tell that to Sváfa.

FRACTAL TROLL

Threat Level: Red

Numbers: 1

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
20	20	40	30	10	40

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	15	2	55	11	83

Claws: 70, DV 1d10 + 7, AP –1

Subdual: 70, see *Subdual*, p. 204, *EP.* The troll may take a fractal gouge attack (below) against subdued targets with a Quick Action.

Fractal Gouge: 70, DV 1d10 + 4, AP –8

Fray/Armor: 55, 8/8

Perception: 60, 80 Smell/Vision

Move: 4/20 Walker

Skills: Climbing 50, Free Fall 40, Freerunning 50, Infiltration 30, Intimidation 50, Scrounging 40, Unarmed Combat 70

Ware: Access Jacks, Basic Mesh Inserts, Claws, Direction Sense, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Fractal Digits, Muscle Augmentation, Nanoscopic Vision, Oxygen Reserve, Prehensile Feet, Puppet Sock, Temperature Tolerance (Cryonic), Toxin Filters, Vacuum Sealing

Traits: Edited Memories, Mental Disorder (Choose Two), Modified Behavior, Neural Damage (Choose Two)

Stress Test: SV 1d10

Exsurgent Infection: Victims wounded by a fractal troll's bite, claws, or fractal gouge are infected with the xenomorph nanoplague.

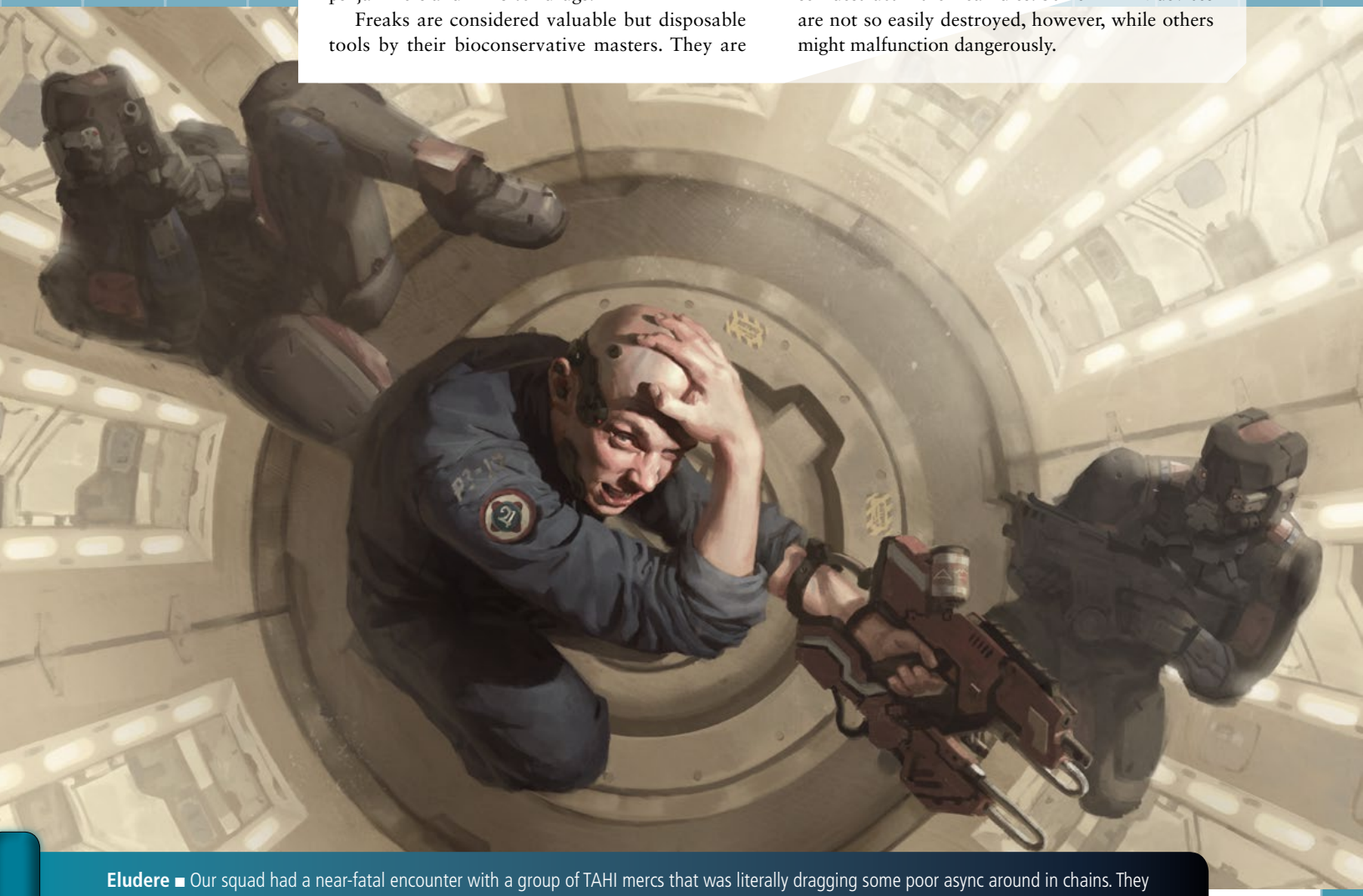
FREAK

TYPE ASYNC

NICHE MINERVAN FLEET, SIS/TAHI CELLS

Freaks are captured and psychosurgically modified asyncs, used as weapons against transhumanity by the SIS (p. 183) and TAHI (p. 43, *Rimward*). They are trained to work with special forces squads and in the use of offensive sleights. Freak handlers carry psi jammers and inhibitor drugs.

Freaks are considered valuable but disposable tools by their bioconservative masters. They are equipped with untrusted or potentially dangerous weapon systems liberated from TITAN caches, exhuman nests, and even hypercorp labs. These weapon systems are permanently attached; a hard-wired vital signs monitor will trigger the device to self-destruct if the freak dies. Some TITAN devices are not so easily destroyed, however, while others might malfunction dangerously.



Eludere ■ Our squad had a near-fatal encounter with a group of TAHI mercs that was literally dragging some poor async around in chains. They cut the guy loose and he charged right at us, blasting with some kind of rapid-fire plasma pistol affixed to his arm. It tore us up, and got close enough to touch our wounded hacker. Must've put some worm in her brain, as she suddenly had the great idea to jam our tacnet. I got off a lucky headshot, and the async went boom, nearly took the rest of us with it.

FREAK

Stats below are for a splicer morph.

Threat Level: Orange

Numbers: 1–3

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
20	10	15	25	15	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
20	6	2	30	5	45

Psychic Stab: 60, DV 1d10 + 2, Opposed with WIL x 2, Touch Range, Strain 1d10 ÷ 2

TITAN Beam Weapon: 55, DV 3d10, AP –5, SA, Range 50/100/150/500, Ammo 50. On a critical failure the weapon autotargets the nearest three individuals or machines, attacks each with a skill of 60, and inflicts a shock effect and DV 1d10 on the freak (p. 204, *EP*).

Fray/Armor: 45, 12/13 light body armor + bioweave

Perception: 55

Move: 4/20 Walker

Skills: Beam Weapons 55, Control 60, Deception 50, Infiltration 40, Interest: TITAN Technology 40, Intimidation 40, Kinetic Weapons 45, Profession: Squad Tactics 40, Psi Assault 60, Sense 60

Ware: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Bioweave Armor, Memory Lock, Puppet Sock, Reflex Boosters

Traits: Addiction (Minor: Psike-Out), Edited Memories, Mental Disorder (Boderline Personality, Impulse Control, PTSD), Modified Behavior (Compelled: SIS/TAHI Loyalty, Fear of Transhumanity), Phobia Disorder (AGI), Psi (Level 2), Psi Defense (Level 2)

Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)

Gear: Comfurt (5 doses), Psike-out (3 doses)

Common Psi Sleights: Aphasic Touch, Deep Scan, Psychic Stab, Sense Infection, Static

Hardwired Self-Destruct System: This detonates if the async takes damage exceeding Durability, inflicting DV 4d10 + 5, AP –5, blast area effect.



GUT EATER

TYPE
XENOFAUNA

NICHE
UNKNOWN EXOPLANETS, INFECTED GATECRASHERS

Gut eaters are alien parasites that invade biological organisms and take up residence in their abdomens. These parasites extend neurofilaments to mesh with the host's nervous system, taking over their mind. They express a new mouth cavity in the host's belly to directly feed, also extruding tentacle arms to grasp food and prey.

Gut eater parasite infections have been discovered in a half dozen gatecrashers, though it is unclear how they were infected or for how long. There is no overlap in visited exoplanets among victims, suggesting the parasites are present in multiple extrasolar locations. Alternatively, they are spreading within the solar system or via gate travel.

If the host body is badly damaged, poisoned, or electrocuted, the parasite bursts forth from the abdominal cavity and seeks out a new home. This is almost assuredly lethal to the host. Gut eaters are slow and defenseless outside of their victims, so they will stick to crevices and shadows until they can assail a new victim by surprise, forcing their way down their throat.

Gut eaters have a dietary requirement: prions, a type of infectious protein, which fuel a yeast their bodies rely on. Though prions are the source of many diseases in humans and animals, gut eaters are immune to these ill effects. Gut-eater hosts are periodically manipulated into locating a source of prions. As the most available source is transhuman brains, hosts are coerced to commit murder so that the gut eater can consume the victim's head meats.

Astrobiologists believe the species is not intelligent, though it is capable of subverting and controlling transhuman minds. Aside from avoiding danger and discovery and providing food and prions, the parasite does not alter the host's behavior. The question remains open, however, as not enough is known about the gut eater's biology and methods of manipulation.

Just Mortal ■ Utterly disgusting. If one of these ever infects me, please kill me, recover me from a backup, and never, ever tell me what happened.

GUT EATER

Threat Level: Orange
Numbers: 1-6

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
10	10	20	20	10	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
25	8	1	30	6	45

Bite: 70, DV 1d10 + 7, AP –1
Subdual: 70, see *Subdual,* p. 204, *EP*. If a target is subdued, the gut eater will attempt to force its way down the victim's throat on its next action (see *Possession,* below).
Fray/Armor: 45, 6/4
Perception: 60, 80 Smell
Move: 3/12 Walker
Skills: Climbing 50, Freerunning 30, Infiltration 50, Scrounging 40, Unarmed Combat 60 (Subdual 70)
Ware: Enhanced Smell, Temperature Tolerance (Cryonic), Toxin Filters, Vacuum Sealing
Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)
Stress Test: SV 1d10 + 3
Possession: Forcing its way down a throat is an Opposed Test between the gut eater's REF x 3 (60) and the victim's SOM x 2 and inflicts DV 1d10 (armor does not apply). If successful, the gut eater burrows into the victim's abdomen, inflicting 10 DV (no defense). Within 10 Action Turns, it extends neural filaments, linking to the host's brain and nervous system. Once the parasite wins an Opposed WIL x 3 Test, it subverts the host's biological mind (if it fails, it will attempt every 10 minutes with a cumulative +10 modifier as it exerts more connections and control over the host). Dominated transhumans suffer SV 2d10. Gut eaters perceive through their hosts' senses, though they suffer –30 modifiers on the first day. Gut eaters cannot control biomorphs with cyberbrains. Over the next week, the gut eater will slowly extrude its mouth and tentacle arms through the victim's abdomen.
Notes: Dietary requirement: prions

INFECTED TRANSHUMAN

Gut-eater-infected transhumans use the stats appropriate to the particular NPC, with the following changes:
Reduced Willpower: Gut eater's suppress their host's will for greater control; reduce their Willpower to 5.
Traits: Modified Behavior (Enforced: Gut Eater Feeding and Protection)
Control Struggle: Dominated transhumans are occasionally capable of exerting their own control for short periods. This requires winning an Opposed WIL x 3 Test; the host uses their full (not reduced) Willpower, but suffers a –30 modifier. If successful they may act of their own free will for 1 Action Turn, plus one per 10 points of MoS. If they fail, they suffer SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down).
Muses: Gut eater mind control is typically clever enough to lock down the muse, but may not be in all cases.

HEADHUNTER

TYPE TITAN

NICHE EARTH, QUARANTINE ZONES



Headhunters are insectoid drones that use dragonfly wings to hover and move, rapidly attacking as a squadron. Their segmented legs end in pinchers and extendable buzzsaws. The machines are designed to grasp onto a victim's skull, saw through the neck, and remove the head for forced uploading at a specialized facility. During the Fall, headhunter squadrons were typically assembled from available materials on site by self-replicating nanoswarms. Excepting the buzzsaws and general insect features, irregular construction methods led headhunters to have more variable designs than any other TITAN war machine. The uniform "wrongness" of their appearance and the tendency to target civilian populations have reserved headhunters a special place in transhuman nightmares.

Headhunters still active in various quarantine zones follow the same orders as the day they were made. If the uploading facility is still operational, the squadron hunts and drops off any heads collected. Victims have their minds farcast to wherever in the universe the TITANs left a forwarding address, possibly in transit for decades. Squadrons without active facilities still hunt and deposit heads at the former uploading station. This results in "head hills:" giant mounds of severed heads left to rot, waiting for an upload that will never come.

Ham ■ These things were nightmare fuel during the Fall. They're now embedded in our cultural discourse. Even children know to recognize and fear them.

Moxie Harper ■ I remember the brief period where titanium collars were all the rage, even though they didn't do much good. Fall fashion.

Aun Leung ■ These are sometimes accompanied by simple cargo drone rotorcraft that carry all the heads, so the headhunters can collect even more.

Parallax ■ I've seen more variations of these than I can count. Headhunters with railguns and lasers. Headhunters that deployed nets on crowds, to collect heads at their leisure. Headhunters that deployed body-eating nanoswarms and came back to get the heads later. Even headhunters with chainsaws. Back during the Fall, I saw a headhunter big enough to collect the head of a neo-elephant—one of the last of its kind.

MARK I

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 6–12

The headhunter models used against cities during the Fall have been collectively designated Mark I.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
10	20	15	20	5	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	7	1	30	6	60

Buzzsaw: 55, DV 1d10 + 3
Fray/Armor: 60, 6/6
Perception: 40, 60 Vision
Move: 8/32 Winged
Skills: Exotic Melee Weapon: Buzzsaws 55, Flight 70, Infiltration 60, Investigation 40, Unarmed Combat 55
Ware: Enhanced Vision, Lidar, T-Ray Emitter
Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)
Stress Test: SV (1d10 ÷ 2, round down) + 1

MARK II

Threat Level: Orange
Numbers: 6–12

The TITANs fielded Mark II units against military installations and other hard targets. These headhunters are smaller, faster, and stealthier. The chassis is constructed of radar-defeating materials, the buzzsaws are diamond-edged for armor penetration, and each headhunter carries a single-shot seeker minimissile with a dedicated fabber producing reloads every half hour.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
15	20	20	20	5	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	8	1	45	9	90

Buzzsaw: 75, DV 1d10 + 4, AP –6
Seeker Minimissile: 60, DV 3d10 + 10, blast area effect, single use
Fray/Armor: 70, 8/8
Perception: 40, 60 Vision
Move: 8/40 Winged
Skills: Exotic Melee Weapon: Buzzsaws 75, Flight 70, Infiltration 70, Investigation 40, Seeker Weapons 60, Unarmed Combat 70
Ware: Enhanced Vision, Lidar, Radar, Radar Invisibility, Reduced Signature, T-Ray Emitter
Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)
Stress Test: SV (1d10 ÷ 2, round down) + 2
Onboard Fabber: Can fabricate a new seeker missile in 30 minutes.

HOLLOW

TYPE
TECH

NICHE
UNKNOWN EXOPLANETS, INFECTED GATECRASHERS



Hollows are a plasma colony of advanced nanobots. These mimics can replicate any biological creature by invasively mapping it, a gruesome and lethal process wherein the plasma digests the host and assumes its form. Hollows completely absorb the minds, memories, and skills of their targets—essentially becoming them.

Hollows only replicate an outer-shell "skin suit" with no internal organs, skeletal structure, or muscles. These "skins" appear real but are only a few centimeters deep. If cut or ruptured, the nanoplasma within is exposed.

Each hollow carries a node of memory diamond that acts as the "brain" and stores the host's memories. The only way to kill a hollow is to destroy this node. Heavily damaged hollows are forced into hibernation, disassembling nearby materials for repair.

The origin of hollows is a mystery even to themselves. Artifacts of a long-extinct alien species, their original programming corrupted or forgotten, they pursue their own rogue purposes. Though most of the identities they absorb are discarded after use, some are saved within the node nucleus in an intact or fragmented form. The core "ego" of each hollow may no longer exist, replaced by a discordant amalgamation of the alien minds they have consumed over time.

HOLLOW NANOPLASMA

Threat Level: Red
Numbers: 1–2

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
30	5	10	5	5	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
20	3	1	80	—	120

Disassembly: A hollow's nanoplasma can corrode matter like a disassembler swarm (p. 329, *EP*), inflicting DV 1d10 per Action Turn.
Caustic Gas: Hollows deploy caustic smoke for defense: Dermal, Onset Time: 1 Action Turn, Duration: 3 Action Turns/1 minute. This gas blocks vision and thermal within a 10-meter radius, reduces the range of laser pulsers by half, and inflicts DV 1d10 to biomorphs (no defense) per turn for 3 Action Turns. Damaged victims must make a SOM x 2 Test or be blinded for 1 minute.
Fray/Armor: 10, 0/0
Perception: 40
Move: 1/4 Ooze
Skills: Climbing 50, Deception 60, Impersonation 60, Infiltration 60, Scrounging 40, plus the skills of its victim
Ware: 360-Degree Vision, Chameleon Skin, Chemical Sniffer
Traits: Mental Disorder (MPD)
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)
Mimicry: The nanoplasma may invade any creature it touches. It is slow-moving and easy to avoid (Fray Test at +20), preferring incapacitated or surprised victims. "Mapping" inflicts 1d10 DV per Action Turn (accumulated damage inflicts wounds) and is exceptionally painful; victims without Pain Tolerance are incapacitated, those without Pain Tolerance (Level Two) suffer –20 to all actions. Nanophages double the time and halve the damage. After 10 minutes, the host is disassembled and a skin suit (below) is formed. The hollow absorbs the victim's memories, skills, and ego traits (Kinesics Test at –30 to notice a difference). Hollows can mimic previous victims.
Nanoplasma Invulnerability: Most attacks simply inflict DV 1. Area-effect, plasma, and fire attacks inflict half damage. Nanoplasma is immune to wounds. EMP has no effect.
Node Nucleus: Nodes are difficult to find (Perception Test at –30). If destroyed, the hollow is irrevocably killed. Nodes have Armor 30/30 and Durability 50.
Regeneration: Hollow nanoplasma repairs 1d10 damage per hour.

HOLLOW SKIN SUIT

Use the stats appropriate to the mimicked victim, with the following changes:
Minimum Aptitudes: Use the highest of the hollow's or mimicked creature's COG/INT/WIL.
Durability: As the skin suit is simply a shell, the Durability of the mimicked creature is reduced by half (round down).
Damage and Wounds: Split damage evenly between the skin suit and the nanoplasma. If the skin suit takes a wound, the nanoplasma becomes visible and may leak out (Perception Test at –10 to notice). Skin suits regenerate.
Implants: Bioware, cyberware, and nanoware are only replicated if they are externally visible (bioweave, gills) or otherwise essential for masquerading as the target (enhanced respiration, mesh inserts). Cyberware is sometimes simply stolen from the host and integrated into the skin suit. Muses are deleted or muted.
Ware:
Skin suits act as a synthetic mask (p. 311, EP).
Stress Test: SV 1d10, +3 if the victim is known.

HOOKBLADDER

TYPE
XENOFAUNA

NICHE
TERAGULA



Hookbladders are an aquatic, jellyfish-like animal inhabiting the swamps of Teragula, an exoplanet being terraformed by TerraGenesis. They are named for their single hard body part, an incredibly light hook of horn-like material located near the animal's single reproductive/digestive opening. Specimens are translucent sacs 40 centimeters in diameter, with a radial body plan and fine tentacles ending in feathery feelers.

For most of their six-year life cycle, hookbladders are no more than a nuisance to transhumans, occasionally inflicting painful hook stings on the careless. When they enter their reproductive cycle, however, hookbladders seek out hosts. They propel themselves up to 3 meters into the air using jets of water, hook into a victim's flesh, and then envelop its head, leaving only the mouth exposed. It then compels its host to kill other animals.

When enough corpses are collected, the hookbladder asphyxiates the host atop its victims. It then bursts, spraying thousands of eggs over the entire heap, and adding its own body to feed its young. The larvae hatch within hours, gorging for days before dropping into the water to begin the aquatic part of their life cycle.

Hookbladder zombies can be found on p. 158.

Lovelace ■ TerraGenesis had facilities on Teragula for years with no problem. Then, all of a sudden, hookbladder mating season hits, half their personnel were turned into zombies, and the other half zombie fodder. What a mess.

Cryptid ■ Here's to hoping that the various hookbladder species all have their mating season at the same time.

HOOKBLADDER PARASITE

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 1–10

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
1	20	25	25	1	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
1	10	1	15	3	30

Envelop Head: 65, DV 1d10 + 1, AP –2, treat as a subdual attack (p. 204, *EP*) that also blocks the victim's vision.
Fray/Armor: 50, 2/2
Perception: 60
Move: 8/32 Swim, 1/4 Walker
Skills: Exotic Melee Weapon: Envelope Head 65, Infiltration 70, Swimming 80
Ware: Enhanced Respiration
Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)
Stress Test: SV 1d10 when attacking
Pain Tolerance: In their breeding cycle, hookbladders develop a resistance to pain. They ignore the effects of 2 wounds and will not react to fire, acid, or agonizers.
Parasitic Control: Once a hookbladder envelopes a biomorph victim's head, it extends shoots into the victim's orifices and through the area pierced by its hook. These tie the victim to the hookbladder's metabolism and, in the case of transhumans, allow them to function without breathers in Teragula's normally asphyxiating atmosphere. This will inflict DV 1d10 ÷ 2, no defense, for 3 Action Turns. If the hookbladder is not removed in 2 Action Turns, it will dominate the target's mind. The only way to remove the hookbladder is to kill it or forcibly pull it off with an Opposed SOM x 3 Test; subdued victims suffer –30 on this test. Forced removal inflicts DV 1d10, no defense, as the hook rips free. Biomorphs saved from hookbladder infestation quickly (in less than 10 minutes) recover rapidly, but those infested longer require time in a healing vat to repair damage to their nervous system (–10 to all actions until they do).
Shock Resistance: The primitive neural systems of hookbladders are immune to shock effects.
Note: Hookbladders breathe through their skin membranes. They will ignore synthmorphs and robots unless attacked. Their hook attack can still damage synthetic shells, but the parasitization only affects biomorphs.

HUNTER-KILLER

TYPE
TITAN

NICHE
EARTH, TITAN-VISITED EXOPLANETS

Hunter-killers achieved air superiority in almost every conflict with the TITANs during the Fall. These lethal drones improved on every aspect of existing transhuman fighter design. Their sleek, adjustable bodies could defeat sensors in multiple wavelengths. They performed jet-powered maneuvers in excess of 10 g with total precision and in perfect formation. Unfolding panels pulled back to reveal advanced weaponry and flexible vector-thrust engines capable of sending the hunter-killer strafing in any direction.

During the Fall, transhuman and TITAN drones met in air engagements so massive they nearly blotted out the sun. In the end, it was always the hunter-killers left hovering in the sky above wreck-strewn cities. Occasionally, they'd swoop down to destroy some last vestige of defense, but mostly, they just floated there, watching impassively as exsurgent monsters hunted the civilians below.



Eludere ■ As deathbots go, hunter-killers are tame. Transhumanity had already embraced sleeving into fighters before the Fall to reduce weight and surface area. Only superior piloting stomped our asses, and the TITANs never built them large enough for WMD payloads. Aerospace tech has caught up fast in the last decade, and inner-system habs sport downright paranoid air and orbital defenses. We could take 'em.

Just Mortal ■ We could've won the war in the first place if not for the wasteful conflicts of the nation-states. The US Air Force was the first branch to experience heavy personnel losses from trends in battlefield automation, so they fought hard to keep as many skilled transhumans in the ranks as possible. Early HKs were far less advanced than other TITAN tech, so the largest orbital and atmospheric fighter fleet on the planet could've achieved air superiority on day one, before the TITANs bootstrapped themselves any further. Who knows how many ground conflicts would have turned out differently. But did we? Nah. Half the fucking fighters in existence were grounded or destroyed from the dozen or so proxy wars ongoing when the TITANs finally revealed themselves. Stupid.

HUNTER-KILLER

Threat Level: Red
Numbers: 2–6

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
15	30	15	30	5	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	9	2	50	10	100

2 Particle Beam Rifles: 55, DV 2d10 + 4, AP –2, SA, Ammo Unlimited
2 Railgun Machine Guns: 65, DV 2d10 + 8, AP –9, BF/FA, Ammo 500 each
2 HEAP Seeker Rifles: 80, DV 3d10 + 12, AP –8, Ammo 6 minimissiles each
Fray/Armor: 60, 14/14
Perception: 50, 70 Vision
Ware: Anti-Glare, Chameleon Skin, Enhanced Vision, Lidar, Radar, Shape-Adjusting
Skills: Beam Weapons 55, Flight 80, Infiltration 40, Kinetic Weapons 65, Seeker Weapons 80
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2, round down
Deflectors: Some advanced hunter-killer models are equipped with supercapacitors embedded within their armor that release a massive charge at the area pinpointed by an attack, creating a temporary, huge, electromagnetic force field that repels or destroys incoming projectiles. This provides a –30 modifier to hit the hunter-killer, but only against kinetic weapon and seeker attacks that the hunter-killer has detected. These deflectors have 20 uses before they must be recharged, which takes 2 hours.

IKTOMI KUMOBOT

TYPE
TECH

NICHE
DROPLET, ECHO V, SUNRISE, OTHER IKTOMI-VISITED EXOPLANETS



Lovelace ■ Firewall is aware of transhumanity encountering these on only one occasion. Researchers excavating Iktomi ruins on Droplet, not too far from the Toadstool, uncovered a hatch leading to a partially intact underground bunker or complex. Upon further exploration, the survey team was attacked by kumobots. In the ensuing fight, their guardian bots accidentally triggered an explosion, instigating a cave-in. Only a couple of the xenoarcheologists made it out alive.

Voight-Kampff ■ This is some impressive engineering, for these bots to still be active after so long. It would be fascinating to get hold of an intact one. Could we converse with it? How do their AIs function? What secrets do they hold about the Iktomi? Just think of what we might learn!

Scent.In.Hell ■ Or maybe these things are protecting something for a reason, and we should stay away.

The seemingly-extinct arthropod-analog alien species known as the Iktomi left ruins and artifacts on dozens of gate-connected worlds. Though these ruins are thousands of years old, many remain surprisingly intact. In at least two instances, these sites were protected by still-functioning guardian robots, dubbed "kumobots."

Like their creators, kumobots have a spider-like form, with six radially symmetric legs and a smaller pair of manipulative arms/claws. As a protective measure, the head retracts into the body and the legs pull in as a protective shield. The kumobot's shape-changing features enable it to further pull into a ball for high-speed rolling. Curiously, the legs are also detachable, suggesting that perhaps Iktomi biology functioned the same.

The exact purpose of kumobots is unclear, aside from protecting Iktomi locations and technology. Though equipped with weaponry such as adjustable-strength lasers, their general utility suggests they may have served other purposes. Unfortunately, all known specimens have been destroyed. Due to their great age, there is a chance that kumobots may be partially disabled, erratic in their behavior, or otherwise malfunctioning.

IKTOMI KUMOBOT

Threat Level: Red
Numbers: 1–8

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
15	20	10	20	1	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	6	2	70	14	140

Adjustable Laser Pulser: DV 2d10, SA, Range 50/100/150/250, Ammo 100; may increase damage +1d10 DV per shot by consuming 1 extra ammo, up to a maximum of +5d10 DV.
Claw: 60, DV 2d10 + 3 (+1d10 if attacking with both), AP –2
Leg Spike: 70, DV 3d10 + 4 (+1d10 if attacking with two), AP –3
Fray/Armor: 50, 28/18, Offensive Armor, Self-Healing
Perception: 40, 60 Hearing/Vision
Move: 4/24 Walker, 5/40 Roller
Skills: Art: Music 40, Beam Weapons 60, Climbing 80, Free Fall 50, Freerunning 60, Hardware: Electronics 40, Hardware: Industrial 40, Unarmed Combat 60 (Leg Spike 70)
Ware: Electrical Sense, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Magnetic System, Neurachem, Pneumatic Limbs, Radar, Radiation Sense, Shape Adjusting, Specialized Hive (Fixer Nanoswarm), Structural Enhancement, Wrist-Mounted Tools
Traits: Ambidextrous x 3 (both hands, fore legs); Some kumobots may have the Mental Disorder or Neural Damage traits.
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)
Notes: Individual limbs may be detached with a Quick Action.

IMMOLATOR

TYPE
EXSURGENT

NICHE
QUARANTINE ZONES, DERELICT SPACECRAFT

The glory strain of the exovirus produces an ecosystem of exsurgents to ensure long-term panspermia infection vectors. Originating as an "apple of knowledge" basilisk (p. 171), it mindhacks transhumans with the technical expertise to understand complex nanofabrication schematics, inevitably forcing patient zero to construct specialized nanohives. These hives produce a nanoplague that modifies biology, creating drone, breeder, and mother exsurgents.

Immolator drones (detailed on p. 158) display few signs of infection and remain lucid enough to infiltrate transhuman society. Glory physically modifies select drones into mating pairs of "breeders." These exsurgents are clearly alien: thick gray skin in leathery patches, extended jaws with protruding canines, widened eyes with horizontal slits, fingers and toes fused into giant claws, lack of hair, prehensile feet, and protruding spines. Breeders resemble nightmarish bouncers and clearly favor low-gravity environments. Other mutant features and a variety of psi sleights manifest as well, but breeders are uniformly designed for sexual compatibility. If not defending the nest, males and females are content to mate all day. Fertilized zygotes are surrogated by the final member of the family—the "Mother"—and delivered via an ovipositor growing from the abdomen of breeder females.



IMMOLATOR BREEDER

Threat Level: Orange
Numbers: 2–6
Breeders use the stats, implants, gear, etc. appropriate to the transmogrified character.
The stats below represent a bouncer morph.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
15	25	15	25	10	25

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
20	8	2	40	8	60

Claws: 60, DV 1d10 + 3, AP –1
Particle Beam Bolter:
60, DV 2d10 + 4, AP –2, SA, Ammo 50
Fray/Armor: 60, 6/7 armor clothing
Move: 4/20 Walker
Perception: 60
Skills: Beam Weapons 60, Blades 60, Control 60, Deception 40, Free Fall 80, Infiltration 65, Infosec 30, Intimidation 60, Kinetic Weapons 60, Pilot: Spacecraft 40, Psi Assault 60, Research 60, Sense 60, Unarmed Combat 60
Ware: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Medichines, Neurachem (Level 1), Oxygen Reserve, Prehensile Feet, Vacuum Sealing
Traits: Limber (Level 1), Mental Disorder (Alien Behavior, OCD), Modified Behavior (Enforced: Breeding, Cannibalism, Nesting, Obey Mother), Psi (Level 2)
Psi Sleights: Deep Scan, Ego Sense, Psi Shield, Psychic Stab, Sense Block
Gear: Light Vacsuit, Specs, Utilitool
Stress Test: SV 1d10 + 3
Exsurgent Infection: Breeders infect biomorphs with the Glory virus (p. 175) by exchanging bodily fluids.

IMMOLATOR MOTHER

TYPE
EXSURGENT

NICHE
QUARANTINE ZONES, DERELICT SPACECRAFT

The mother is created from the remains of patient zero. After constructing the hives, the remains of the totally insane transhuman mutate into a gibbering mass of uteruses and mouths. All lucidity is gone; the meaty mass serves only to accept ovipositors and lash out blindly against intruders with tentacles and psychic stabs. After receiving sufficient genetic material, the mother hardens fertilized zygotes into lightweight, crystalline spores and sends a pheromone signal for the family to self-destruct. At this point, the breeders sink into the cancerous mass and are consumed to fatten the mother for hibernation. If the mother is on an orbital vehicle, drones send the ship towards the nearest star. The mother is consumed by the solar heat, but crystal spores survive, catch on solar winds, and spread throughout the universe. If trapped planet-side, drones cut the mother into pieces and smuggle pieces in the widest distribution possible.

Tara Yu ■ Hmmm, these things sound similar to some of the reports I collected in my Myrmidon investigation. Who gathered this intel?
Black Pharoah ■ We need to talk, Tara. PM me ASAP.



IMMOLATOR MOTHER

Threat Level: Orange
Numbers: 1

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	5	5	5	5	30

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
30	2	1	100	20	150

Bite: 70, DV 2d10 + 3, AP –1. Biomorphs wounded by this bite are infected with the glory exsurgent virus (p. 175).
Tentacles: 70, DV 1d10 + 3, Reach (+20); may attack with multiple tentacles at once
Psychic Stab: 60, DV 2d10 + 5, Close Range, opposed with WIL x 2, Strain 1d10 ÷ 2
Fray/Armor: 20, 4/4
Move: None
Perception: 10
Skills: Psi Assault 60, Sense 60, Unarmed Combat 70
Ware: Hibernation, Medichines, Oxygen Reserve, Vacuum Sealing
Traits: Large Size (+10 to hit), Mental Disorder (Alien Behavior), Modified Behavior (Enforced: Breeding, Nesting), Psi (Level 2), Psi Defense
Common Psi Sleights: Ego Sense, Extend Range, Psi Shield, Psychic Rend, Psychic Stab
Stress Test: SV 1d10 + 5
Exsurgent Infection: Mothers infect biomorphs with the glory exsurgent virus (p. 175) by exchanging bodily fluids.

JELLY

TYPE EXSURGENT

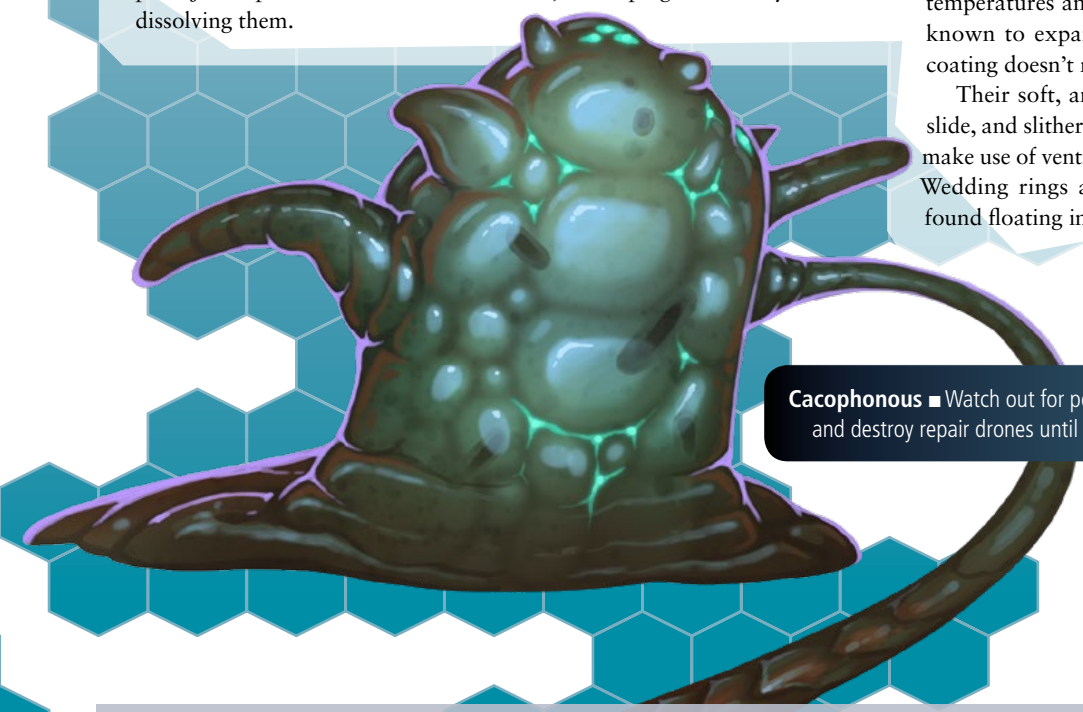
NICHE EARTH, QUARANTINE ZONES, DERELICT HABITATS

The disgusting and nightmarish bodies of these exsurgents are composed of biomass repurposed from their victims. They are best described as a massive viscous snot bubble with meaty tongue-like protrusions, each studded with condensed toenail clippings. These studs provide an excellent gripping surface for pulling themselves around. They are coated with a lubricating but corrosive film.

Jellies hunt with a keen sense of smell and tactical animosity. Ambushes and swarm tactics are common. They spit and excrete an acidic neurotoxin that burns flesh and causes debilitating pain. Jellies prefer to ambush lone victims, enveloping and slowly dissolving them.

The gelatinous structure of jellies rules out kinetic and bladed weapons, and their corrosive coating limits the effect of nanoswarms. Jellies operate undeterred in extreme temperatures and atmospheric pressures, though they are known to expand in size in vacuum. Their caustic spit/coating doesn't require oxygen for its chemical reaction.

Their soft, amorphous shape allows jellies to squeeze, slide, and slither through even tiny spaces and cracks. They make use of venting and pipe systems to move about unseen. Wedding rings and other inorganic leftovers have been found floating in their viscous, transparent membranes.



Cacophonous ■ Watch out for power outages. They like to corrode light fixtures and destroy repair drones until someone comes looking.

STANDARD JELLY

Threat Level: Orange
Numbers: 1–12

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
30	10	30	15	15	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
30	9	1	70	14	105

Spit Attack: 60, Range 10/15/20/25, 3-meter radius area effect. See *Corrosive Coating/Spit,* below.
Tongue: 40, DV 1d10 +3; see *Corrosive Coating/Spit,* below.
Engulf: 50, subdual attack (p. 204, *EP*), see Corrosive Coating/Spit, below. On the second turn of subdual, the target is completely enveloped. Engulfed victims take double damage from the caustic coating, cannot see, hear, or breathe (*Asphyxiation,* p. 194, *EP*), and are restricted (–30 to all physical actions). Engulfed characters that beat the jelly in an Opposed SOM x 3 Test with the –30 modifier return to being normally subdued.
Fray/Armor: 20, 12/12, Jellies have +10 armor vs. fire- or heat-based attacks (including lasers, agonizers, and plasma weapons)
Perception: 60, 80 Smell
Move: 4/16 Ooze
Skills: Climbing 80, Exotic Ranged Weapon: Spit 60, Free Fall 50, Scrounging 40, Unarmed Combat 40 (Subdual 50)
Ware: Chemical Sniffer, Enhanced Respiration, Enhanced Smell, Grip Pads, Hydrostatic Pressure Adaptation, Temperature Tolerance
Stress Test: SV 1d10 + 3
Corrosive Coating/Spit: Application: D, O; Onset Time: 1 Action Turn; Duration: 5 Action Turns; Effect: DV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round up) per Action Turn, armor protects but is reduced by the DV. Subdued victims suffer DV 1d10. This coating also provides immunity to nanoswarms, corrosives, and dermal-vector drugs and chemicals. Liquid-based attacks against the jelly suffer a –30 modifier.
Exsurgent Infection: Jellies can infect other biomorphs with the jelly xenomorph strain by exchanging bodily fluids.
Invulnerability: Jellies take minimum DV from kinetic weapons and blades.
Lubrication: Jellies are immune to subdual attempts.
Vacuum Expansion: Jellies gain the Large Size trait in vacuum (+10 to hit).

MIMIC JELLY

Threat Level: Red
Numbers: 1–6

Certain jellies can ingest a biological creature and mimic its shape, size, visual texture, and features, including worn items, though these are false. Mimics duplicate the neural architecture of their victims, consuming memories and personality. If impersonation fails, they'll drop the act and exude tentacles, spit acid, or pour themselves through floor grates to escape. Mimics use the same stats as standard jellies, with the following changes:
Perception: 60, 80 Smell/Vision
Skills: Add Disguise 50 (80), Impersonation 60
Ware: Add Chameleon Skin, Enhanced Vision
Mimicry: Mimic jellies take the form of their pre-exsurgent self or victims they engulf (+30 to Disguise Tests). Absorbing and copying a victim takes half an hour. The jelly takes on the victim's memories, skills, and ego traits. Their gelatinous nature is immediately noticeable with t-rays or physical contact, or with an enhanced vision/radar Perception Test at –30. Characters familiar with the victim may notice oddities with an Opposed Impersonation vs. Kinesics Test. Mimic jellies may only imitate one biomorph at a time. To reset, another transhuman must be consumed.

KILLER SPAMBOT

TYPE
AI

NICHE
SURVIVING EARTH/
DERELICT HAB MESH NETS

During the Fall, some corporations devoted their own resources to fight the TITANs. Among these efforts were misguided initiatives to re-purpose commercial malware and spambot software to fight TITAN mesh control.

These expert AI systems deployed the type of aggressive cross-site scripting and rootkit-style exploits used by their adware/malware/spyware to infiltrate and embed themselves within targeted systems. Since the TITANs relied on processing power, these killer spambots launched coordinated attacks to flood TITAN-infected machines with bogus traffic, slowing them down or crashing them entirely.

Though the TITANs often filtered out or diverted spam floods and denial-of-service attacks, the sheer volume had an impact. The spambots' own machine-learning algorithms adapted to TITAN defenses, but then began countering TITAN machinery in ways the researchers did not anticipate. Many corporations lost control of their creations. Some spambots even built hardware to combat the TITANs' physical assets.

While most killer spambots were destroyed, many still lurk in the wild, particularly on isolated and legacy systems. These have evolved into mesh threats of their own, ruthlessly targeting interlopers on networks that they have "secured." A few manipulate robotic minions, though their ability to differentiate between TITAN and transhuman threats has long since eroded.

When a spambot hacks access to a device or server, it also attempts to hack all nearby networked devices: peripherals, spimes, tools, even morphs. They are particularly fond of hacking nanofabbers, which they will then use to construct robot minions (detailed on p. 162).



Das Frettchen ■ Infamous viral marketers Hedgerow Technology produced the most successful—and most dangerous—spambots.

Rivet ■ Hedgerow? Weren't they caught embedding adware rootkits on cyberbrains? Something about persistent background music ads keyed to emotional responses that were also injected into infomorphs when they evacuated the hardware?

Cacophonous ■ Spambots consider any sort of active filtering as a hostile action. If you don't submit to their ad barrage, you're a TITAN menace to be destroyed.

Qi ■ I'm not sure how, but some are still connected to ad networks and for-profit malware services. We ran into one that had taken over a derelict hab, and it was hitting us with modern-day spam and exploits straight from zero-day exploit servers.

KILLER SPAMBOT

Threat Level: Red

Numbers: 1–3

Spambots occupy and defend the best server available (pp. 144–145, *Transhuman*).

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
15	5	15	5	5	5

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
20	4	4	—	—	—

DoS Attack: 80, target must be traced first (p. 258, *EP*). Opposed Infosec Test; if successful, target is –1 Speed and has a 10% chance of suffering a glitch (p. 144, *Transhuman*). See DoS Attacks, p. 147 and 149, *Transhuman.*

Lockout: 80, target must be zeroed in and locked first (p. 257, *EP*). Opposed Infosec Test with intruder at –20; if successful, target intruder is locked out of system (p. 258, *EP*)

Brainhack: 80, see *Cyberbrain Hacking,* p. 261, *EP.* Targets are inflicted with bedlam (SV 1d10) or cauterizer (DV 1d10 + 5) scorchers (p. 332, *EP*).

Fray/Armor: 20, 0/0

Perception: 40

Move: N/A

Skills: Interfacing 60, Infosec 80, Programming 60, Research 40

Ware: Digital Veil, Increased Speed, Persistence

Hidden Privileges: Spambots have hidden intruder status (p. 256, *EP*) to their home server and all local devices, giving them admin rights and +30 to all subversion tests.

Legacy System: Many spambots rely on software that is years out of date. They suffer a –10 to –30 modifier when hacking more modern systems; however, the same modifier is applied to those attempting to hack them.

Spam Mist: Everyone within mesh range suffers a –30 Perception modifier due to AR spam overload. This may be cleared with an Interfacing Test at –30, but will return after 10 minutes as the spam compensates for the filtering; see *Traffic Filters and Mist,* p. 248, *EP.* Alternatively, AR may be turned off, but this will disable tacnets and hinder other gear.

LAND ANEMONE

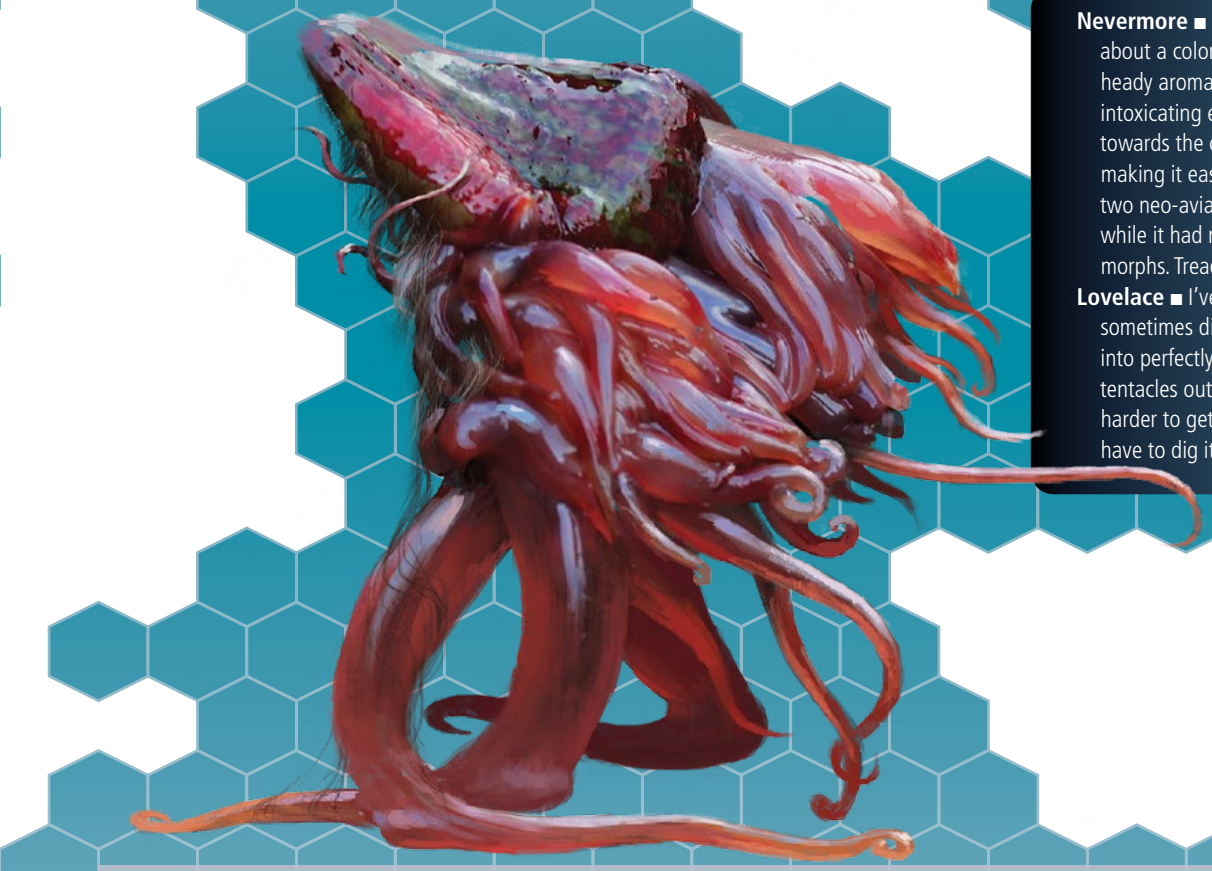
TYPE
XENOFAUNA

NICHE
ECHO IV

These carnivorous polyps live in the cloud forest of Echo IV. They remain stationary for long periods, easily blending in with the other large, vibrant plants, changing their colors, patterns, textures, and even smell to draw in unsuspecting prey. They extend their long, venomous tentacles, reaching out up to 2-meters, which they will use to swiftly grapple and draw in prey to their mouth sac. Meals are digested rapidly, then expelled.

Land anemones are capable of slowly crawling, though they do it rarely, usually only to find a better ambush position or to escape a fire threat. They are known to situate themselves along game trails, near sources of water, or in trees and rocks with their tentacles dangling down. They sometimes work together, camping out in a large circle that they allow victims to enter before attacking, so that those escaping from one flee right into the tentacles of another.

Land anemones have a symbiotic relationship with Echolalian clown sprites (p. 156). The sprites are not eaten and are even defended from other predators, and in return they feast on pests that would bother the anemones, keep their mouth sacs clean, and provide nutrient-rich fecal matter. Clown sprites are known to intentionally lure prey toward the anemones.



Nevermore ■ I've heard unconfirmed reports about a colorful subspecies that emits a strong, heady aroma. Apparently the scent has an intoxicating effect on some wildlife, drawing it towards the colors while slowing it down and making it easier to catch. The rumors say that two neo-avian morphs were strongly affected, while it had no undue effects on human morphs. Tread carefully, uplifts.

Lovelace ■ I've been told that these things sometimes dig pits—or at least squeeze into perfectly-sized holes—and extend their tentacles out. This makes the body sac much harder to get to and attack—you might even have to dig it out.

LAND ANEMONE

Threat Level: Orange
Numbers: 1–5

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
1	15	15	20	1	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	7	1	30	6	75

Grapple: 60 (see *Subdual,* p. 204, *EP*), Reach (+10); see also *Tentacle Toxin* effect, below. Subdued targets are swallowed on next action. Swallowed victims cannot see, hear, or breathe (*Asphyxiation,* p. 194, *EP*), are restricted (–30 to physical actions), and suffer DV 1d10 each Action Turn; armor defends but is decreased by the damage.
Tentacle Attack: 60, DV 1d10, Reach (+10), see also *Tentacle Toxin* effect, below.
Fray/Armor: 30, 0/0
Perception: 30, 50 Hearing/Smell
Move: 2/4 Walker
Skills: Climbing 30, Unarmed Combat 60
Ware: Chameleon Skin, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Poison Gland
Traits: Large Size (+10 to hit)
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)
Tentacle Toxin: Dermal, Onset: 1 Action Turn, Duration: 3 Action Turns/1 hour. Inflicts DV 2d10 + 10 per turn for 3 Action Turns and paralyzes for 1 hour. A SOM x 2 Test negates the paralyzation. Medichines reduce damage by half and apply +30 modifier to test.

LEFTOVER SPECIAL

TYPE
EXHUMAN

NICHE
EXHUMAN HABITATS



Volta ■ Fucking monsters.
Parallax ■ It's pretty clear that exhumans sometimes make these just for the psych-out value. I've seen organic eyes spliced onto robotic heads, intestines wrapped around metallic chassis, and living faces stretched across tank treads, each wordlessly pleading for death. If it looks like these things are suffering—they usually are.

GUARDIAN: BRUTE

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 1–8

Built to defend exhuman habitats, guardians are designed to absorb the initial attack of any raid and draw fire away from actual exhumans. They are typically built as menacing and muscled warriors with large melee weapons and heavy armor, sometimes with extra limbs, spikes, and other horrifying add-ons. They are usually the least disturbing of the specials because exhumans want them to be actually useful in a battle. They are still designed to deceive enemies, however. Some guardians will have nonfunctional replicas of plasma weapons or seeker rifles mounted on them, to fool enemies into wasting their ammo on the special rather than the exhumans. Most brutes are piloted by limited AIs, though sometimes they host exhuman forks or are remote controlled via puppet sock.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
10	10	10	10	5	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	4	1	60	12	90

Diamond Ax: 40, DV 2d10 + 4, AP –3
Claws: 40, DV 1d10 + 4, AP –2
SMG: 40, DV 2d10 +3, AP –2, SA/BF/FA, Ammo 80
Fray/Armor: 40, 16/17 (Heavy Body Armor + Bioweave)
Perception: 30, 50 Hearing/Vision
Move: 4/20 Walker
Skills: Blades 40, Free Fall 40, Freerunning 40, Infiltration 30, Intimidation 40 (60), Kinetic Weapons 40, Unarmed Combat 40
Common Ware: Access Jacks, Bodysculpting, Cyberbrain, Cyberclaws, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Hardened Skeleton, Medichines, Oxygen Reserve, Puppet Sock, T-Ray Emitter, Vacuum Sealing
Traits: Mental Disorder (Insane)
Stress Test: SV 1d10
Bullet Magnet: Brutes are modified to soak as much damage as possible. They may ignore the effects of 2 wounds.
Decoy Weapons: Brutes are sometimes equipped or implanted with obvious but fake heavy weapons systems, such as seekers or plasma rifles. These may be spotted as fake with a Perception Test at –30.
Intimidating: Brutes receive a +20 modifier on Intimidation Tests.

GUARDIAN: SPIDER HEAD

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 1–6

A favorite design is to implant a set of robotic spider legs onto an artificially sustained but decapitated human head. The faces are often animated or at least stylized with grotesque expressions. Each head is packed with explosives, which the spider will detonate when it gets close to an enemy.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
10	10	10	15	5	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	5	1	10	2	20

Suicide Explosion: DV 4d10 + 10, AP –6, blast area effect
Fray/Armor: 40, 1/1
Perception: 30
Move: 4/28 Walker
Skills: Free Fall 40, Freerunning 40, Infiltration 40
Common Ware: Access Jacks, Cyberbrain, Pneumatic Limbs, Puppet Sock
Traits: Mental Disorder (Insane)
Stress Test: SV 1d10 + 3
Volatile: Any damaging hit on a spider bot has a (20 + DV inflicted)% chance of setting off the explosives it carries.

Exhuman researchers, genehackers, and morph designers are known to construct creatures out of organic spare parts and resources. Colloquially known as "leftover specials," these are typically abominations of mis-matched body parts and cybernetics, only barely kept alive by specialized medichines or nanohives. Sometimes kept as pets and companions, most are designed as habitat guardians and experimental art projects. Exhuman scientists take pride in outdoing their fellows in building the most gruesome yet usable guardians and servants.

Leftover specials vary greatly in form and function, but are invariably nightmares of flesh and machine. Limbs and organs are stitched together in disturbing combinations, interfaced with machinery, sensors, and weapons. Some retain the egos of victims kidnapped by the exhumans for their experiments and atrocities, often driven permanently insane by the experience. Most leftover specials are controlled by a limited AI or the beta or delta fork of an exhuman. Ghost rider modules are common, equipped with remote switches that allow the exhuman creator to flip which ego controls the special and which ghost rides. Frequently a captured enemy is put in a special to wander around helplessly until an enemy threatens the habitat, at which point the AI or exhuman fork takes over.

Leftover specials are commonly built with one of three purposes in mind: guardians, psychological deterrents, or sympathy traps. Each special is built to fulfill that function, but each one is also a unique creation. Exhumans do not mass produce leftover specials, believing each one is a work of art onto itself. Replicating that would destroy the aesthetic value.

Gamemasters are encouraged to devise leftover specials from their own nightmare fuel, but a few examples are detailed here.

PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERRENT: LIMBWALKER

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 1–12

These are the most disturbing of the leftover specials, where exhuman morph designers push the limits of pain tolerance and organic structural integrity. They are meant to horrify and demoralize outsiders who view them. Exhumans like using them to test newcomers in a habitat. If they are not sufficiently impressed, the exhumans know the newcomer is a spy or poseur who should be eliminated from the habitat. Common features include externally draped organs, mismatched limbs, headless torsos (cyberbrains stored in the chest cavity), and worse.

Stats given are for a limbwalker—a headless torso with four legs crafted from mismatched limbs, and needles for fingers.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
10	10	10	10	10	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	4	1	25	5	38

Needles: 40, DV 1d10 + 1, AP –1, injects necrosis nanotoxin: injected, Onset: 3 Action Turns, Duration: 1 minute, inflicts DV (1d10 ÷ 2) per Action Turn, see p. 324, *EP.*
Fray/Armor: 30, 0/0
Perception: 20
Move: 4/16 Walker
Skills: Exotic Melee Weapon: Needle Fingers 40, Free Fall 40, Freerunning 30, Intimidation 40, Unarmed Combat 30
Ware: Access Jacks, Cyberbrain, Echolocation, Medichines, Puppet Sock
Traits: Mental Disorder (Insane)
Stress Test: SV 1d10 + 3

SYMPATHY TRAP: FREEZER

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 1–8

Often only used when the exhumans know that their habitat will be breached by outsiders, sympathy traps are designed to resemble unfortunate victims who need to be rescued: innocent splicer morphs strapped to tables, begging for help, or a mangled worker pod morph trapped in a cell. The creativity comes in how the exhuman traps the defender who tries to rescue the special. Sometimes it's a cunningly engineered virus or hidden disassembler nanoswarm. Other times, the "victim" will attempt to lure the defenders into an ambush by concealed exhumans.

The freezer trap is an actual kidnapped transhuman, usually traumatized or insane from their experience, who is strapped down to a horrifying surgical table. Unknown to the victim, their limbs have been replaced with hollowed-out "bombs" packed with freezer foam (p. 341, *EP*) and disguised with a synthetic mask (p. 311, *EP*). Once rescuers are lured near, the limbs are triggered, splattering the area and securing a new batch of victims for the exhuman.

Foam Explosion: 20-meter radius, characters within must make a Ref x 3 Test or become trapped. Characters within 10 meters suffer a –30 modifier; within 15 meters the modifier is –20. Hardened foam has Armor 10 and Durability 20 and breaks down after 12 hours.

SNACK BAR

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 1–8

Snack bars are a common leftover special used by predator exhumans. They are designed as quadruped pod morphs with enhanced senses and strength, meant to be a perfect prey animal for predators to hone their hunting abilities. Some are given natural weapons with which to fight back, creating more of a challenge. Snack bars are equipped with specialized flesh vat modules that allowed them to rapidly regrow tissue in short periods of time. Even if a predator were to rip and consume all the flesh off the snack bar, its robotic core could then grow new flesh in a matter of a few days.

The traumatized egos within snack bar morphs are repeatedly told that if they kill an intruder, they will be given their own predator morph and can become an exhuman themselves; some are insane or desperate enough to believe it.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
15	20	20	20	5	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
5	8	1	30	6	60

Bite/Claw/Horn: 40, DV 1d10 + 6, AP –1
Fray/Armor: 60, 0/0
Perception: 50, 70 Hearing/Smell/Vision
Move: 4/28 Walker
Skills: Free Fall 50, Freerunning 60, Unarmed Combat 40
Ware: Access Jacks, Basic Biomods, Cyberbrain, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Medichines, Puppet Sock
Traits: Mental Disorder (Choose Three)
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)
Flesh Regeneration: Snack bars regenerate 1d10 damage or 1 wound per hour; all damage must be healed before wounds.

MANTIS WORM

TYPE
XENOFAUNA

NICHE
SACREBLEU

Mantis worms are small, aquatic creatures native to the exoplanet Sacrebleu. Each adult worm is approximately 10–16 centimeters in length, with a sharp pointed head, large sensory whiskers, a pair of mantis-like forelegs, and two other pairs of legs on its torso. Their backs are covered in a set of bristly spines. Mantis worms live in large, hive-like colonies, built out of a sort of solidified gelatin they secrete, usually found at depths of less than 10 meters.

Mantis worms swim with an undulating motion, much like an eel, but are capable of pushing themselves forward in short bursts at great speeds. They are carnivorous scavengers, often feeding off of corpses, but will also attack prey in great numbers. Swarms of mantis worms will propel themselves, torpedo-like, towards their victims, even attacking targets in shallow waters or near the shoreline, propelling themselves several meters out of the water. They will pierce the skin, pushing their heads inside, while grappling with their arms. They then belch out an acidic mucus inside the body that dissolves skin, organ, and muscle tissue into a sort of slurry that they feed on. This effect is quite painful. Their spines make them extremely dangerous to pull out, leaving gaping tear wounds. Attacking en masse, they can even overwhelm large creatures, who quickly succumb to the pain and numerous bite wounds. Though many mantis worms also die, their corpses become food for surviving worms. They can survive for short periods on land, skittering about on their legs.

When attacked in the water, or to defend their hives, mantis worms will secrete their mucus, creating an acidic cloud within the water that is strong enough to drive away predators.



Cryptid ■ I saw the XP of the first gatecrashing group that ran afoul of a mantis worm attack. They came out of nowhere, as the explorers were walking along a river bank. Suddenly the air was filled with leaping worms, and two of the 'crashers were running around, screaming their heads off, each with about 50 of these things dangling from their bodies. A synthmorph stepped in, and the next wave of critters hit it hard enough to knock it down, though it was much less damaged. Guess the worms aren't too bright. They managed to get away from shore and get the worms off the first two victims, but they were essentially incapacitated from all of the small wounds and pain.

Lovelace ■ Drones have spotted some pretty massive hive colonies of these things. You wouldn't want to fall in the water anywhere near those.

MANTIS WORM

Threat Level: Red

Numbers: 1–2 Swarms

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	20	10	20	1	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
5	6	1	50	—	50

Swarm: Mantis worms follow the rules for swarms (*Swarms*, p. 168). Stats given are for the swarm, not individual worms.

Bite: 80, target's Fray is halved, DV 1d10 + 15, synthmorphs take half damage (round down). Biomorph targets that take at least 5 damage must make a SOM x 2 Test or be overcome with pain (negated by Pain Tolerance), taking no other actions but to flee or remove worms for the next 10 minutes, and will continue to take DV 1d10 (armor does not apply) each Action Turn until the attached worms are removed. Removing the worms requires 4 Complex Actions (others may assist), during which the victim must remain free from the swarm (else it resets), and inflicts DV 1d10 + 2 (armor does not apply).

Fray/Armor: 40, —

Perception: 40, 60 Hearing/Smell

Move: 4/20 Swim, 2/8 Walker

Skills: Freerunning 30, Scrounging 50, Swimming 60, Unarmed Combat 60

Ware: Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Poison Gland

Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)

Acid Plume: Threatened swarms release a plume of acid in the water, extending 5 meters around the swarm. Anyone caught in this plume suffers DV 1d10 ÷ 2 each turn and must make a SOM x 2 Test or flee (negated by Pain Tolerance).

Notes: Mantis worms are immune to acid/corrosive attacks.

NEURODE

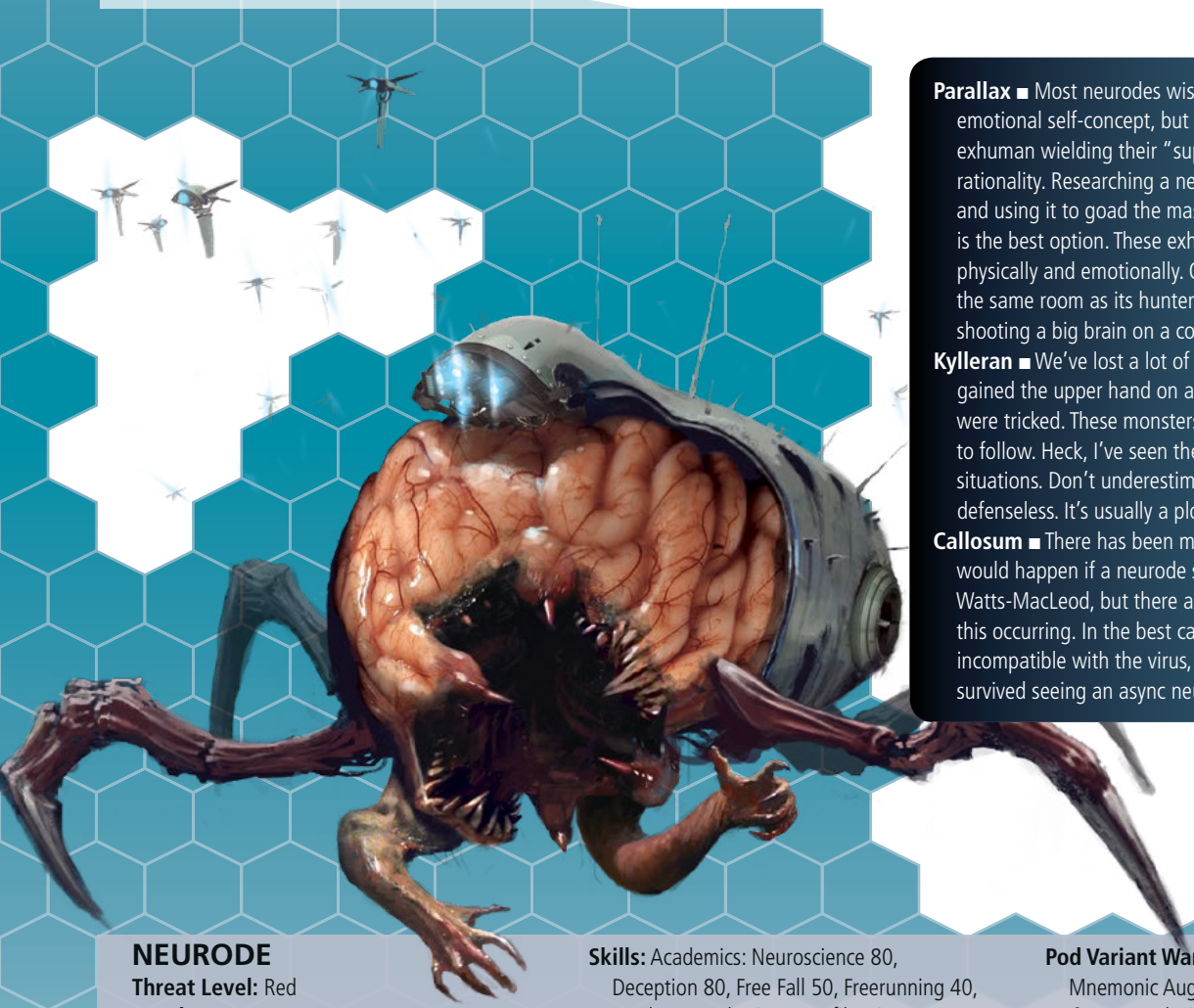
TYPE
EXHUMAN

NICHE
EXHUMAN HABITATS

Neurodes seek to boot-strap themselves to new levels of consciousness. They sleeve into over-sized amorphic clusters of neuronal and epithelial cells, encased in a hard carapace shell with four legs and a pair of arms. It would be a mistake to call their genius "crude," but their methods certainly are. Their sheer mass of cerebral tissue and neural connections makes neurodes capable of calculations far beyond a typical transhuman. Newer "brain box" designs embrace a quadruped pod design and incorporate chains of networked cyberbrains into the brain blob. Over time, the intelligence gap between neurodes and transhumans is only getting wider.

These exhumans value intelligence so far above all else that their morphs have little combat utility. Some do not even have sensory organs, relying on sensor inputs and mesh access. Conflict with neurodes consists of combat with drones, other exhumans, and transhumans manipulated into protecting the neurode's interests. Neurodes wield their intelligence as their primary weapon, with layer-upon-layer of deception, false leads, tactical anticipation, traps of every conceivable kind, and imaginative fail-safe options.

The extreme and reckless psychosurgery necessary for sleeving into a neurode often results in an array of mental illnesses. Neurodes are typically solitary, preferring to keep their mind enhancement secrets to themselves, but sometimes work in small teams.



Parallax ■ Most neurodes wish to purge themselves entirely of emotional self-concept, but Firewall has yet to encounter an exhuman wielding their "superior" mental power with pure rationality. Researching a neurode's all-too-transhuman past and using it to goad the mastermind into a making a mistake is the best option. These exhumans thrive on distance, both physically and emotionally. Once a neurode is tricked into the same room as its hunters, ending the threat is as easy as shooting a big brain on a couch.

Kylleran ■ We've lost a lot of sentinels who thought they'd gained the upper hand on a neurode, only to find out they were tricked. These monsters think in ways we find hard to follow. Heck, I've seen them talk their way out of hairy situations. Don't underestimate them just because they seem defenseless. It's usually a ploy to put you off your guard.

Callosum ■ There has been much speculation about what would happen if a neurode successfully infected itself with Watts-MacLeod, but there are no confirmed reports of this occurring. In the best case, the neural architecture is incompatible with the virus, but it's equally likely nobody has survived seeing an async neurode long enough to report in.

NEURODE

Threat Level: Red
Numbers: 1–4

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
40	10	40	20	30	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
40	12	1	35	7	53

Fray/Armor: 30, 11/11 carapace armor, ignore effects of 1 wound
Perception: 90, no distraction modifiers
Move: 4/16 Walker

Skills: Academics: Neuroscience 80, Deception 80, Free Fall 50, Freerunning 40, Hardware: Robotics 60, Infiltration 40, Infosec 65, Interfacing 80, Intimidation 60, Investigation 80, Kinesics 80, Medicine: Brain Surgery 80, Persuasion 80, Programming 80, Psychosurgery 80, Seeker Weapons 60, Unarmed Combat 40
Ware: Access Jacks, Carapace Armor, Circadian Regulation, Direction Sense, Eidetic Memory, Endocrine Control, Hyper Linguist, Math Boost, Medichines, Multi-Tasking, Oracle, Skillware
Pod Variant Ware: Add Cyberbrains (2–8), Mnemonic Augmentation
Traits: Mental Disorder (Choose One-Three), Modified Behavior (Increased Rationality, Suppressed Emotions)
Stress Test: SV 1d10
Note: Neurodes will have protection in the form of other exhumans, leftover specials, drone defenders, traps, and other NPCs. As a last resort they will have access to a hardsuit (p. 334, *EP*) modified for their form and several pre-planned escape routes.

NY'KNIKIIN

TYPE
TITAN

NICHE
EARTH, QUARANTINE ZONES, TITAN-VISITED EXOPLANETS



Moxie Harper ■ I just tracked down a zone stalker who was abandoned at a psychosurgeon by her "friends," name of Lujza Fanciska. No idea what she saw, but she is totes technical. Keeps ranting about "smilers" and trying to kill the ayah nurses.
Expat ■ That name's an alias for a Hungarian merc I worked with at Gorgon. Real name Renata Csenge. Doesn't sound like her; Renata was as hardcore as it got. She was one of the last out of Goa during the Fall and saw more action than most.
Qi ■ Confirmed. Renata is your loony, alright.
Moxie Harper ■ Then what the hell is a smiler? And how awful must they be to send a hardened soldier like Renata into a psychotic break?

The ny'knikiin resulted from TITAN experiments in the weaponization of captured pod morphs The machines programmed simulmorphs that emulated pods and sleeved the egos of hundreds of Earth-based predators, testing to see what minds adapted to the alien bodies best. Mantis shrimp proved the most successful. The simulspace was time-accelerated further and the environment tailored to teach the shrimp to operate their new forms to full capacity. A few subjective millennia of time later and the ny'knikiin were ready for deployment.

Ny'knikiin are identified by their mutilated mouths; the lips are peeled back to reveal a constant grimace and the tongues shaved into points—a disturbing contrast to the doll-like features of most pods. The fearsome appearance is furthered by grunts and screams meant to frighten prey, but the ny'knikiin otherwise arm and equip themselves like any other transhuman headed to war.

Their language is a mix of radio signals and pheromones, taught to them by their creators. The TITANs engineered a tense into the grammar structure called the "god scent." Communication from the machine gods provokes a conditioned endocrine response in ny'knikiin that's a mixture of breeding-season heat and desperate hunger. In their addictive language, the TITANs taught their new creations everything they'd need to combat transhumanity, including how to implant cyberbrains in newborns.

The name "ny'knikiin" comes from the Yazidi nomads of the TITAN Quarantine Zone, after a demon from their mythology. In their own language, ny'knikiin have named themselves after a burst of radio static and smell that translates to "those who can scent God."

Ny'knikiin are migratory, constantly patrolling their proscribed area of deployment, resting at small dome habitats of their own construction. Transhumans that aren't killed for food are used for reproduction. Ny'knikiin egos are installed into captured pods; biomorphs are decerebrated so that a ny'knikiin cyberbrain can be installed. Synths are stripped for spare parts. As vicious and terrifying as the Ny'knikiin may be, they have nothing to do with the exsurgent virus and will kill any infected that come within range.

NY'KNIKIIN

Threat Level: Orange
Numbers: 2–12

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
15	20	15	20	5	15

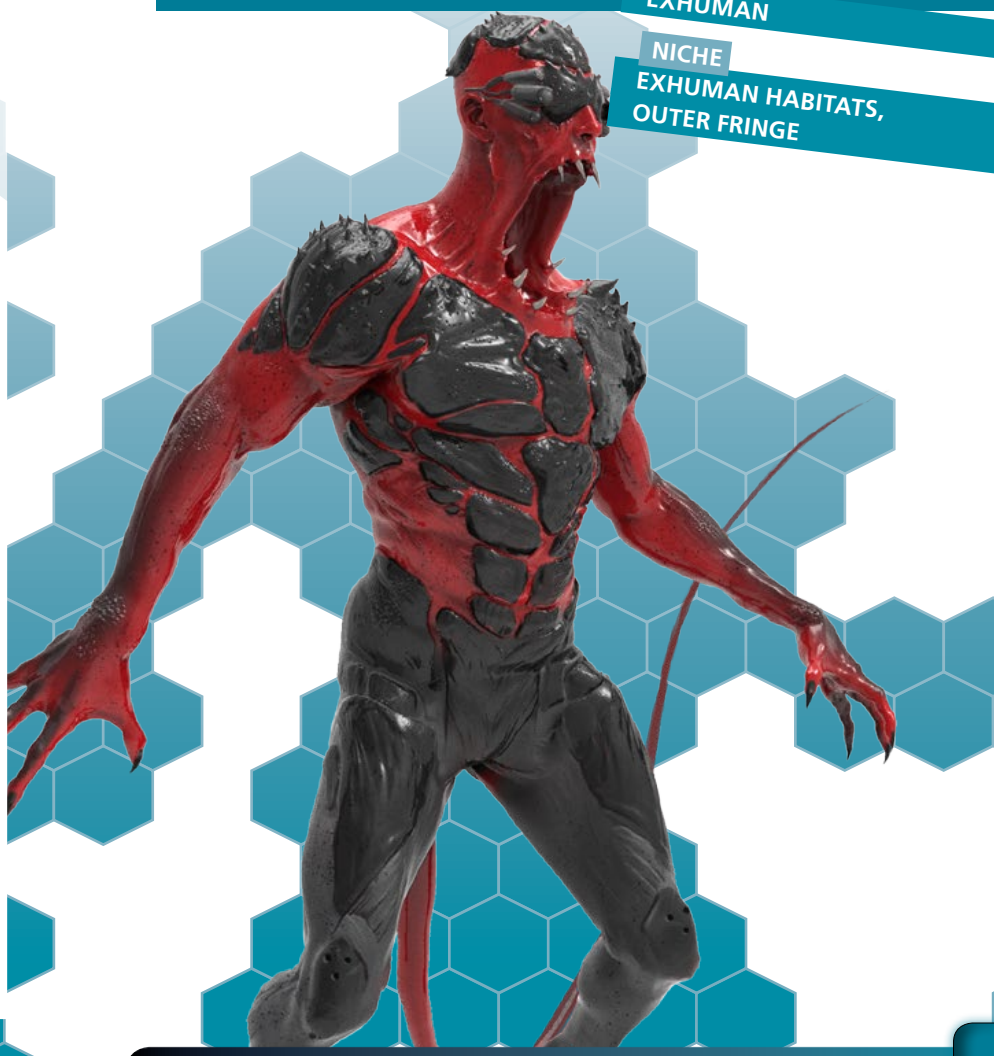
WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	7	1	30	6	45

Diamond Ax: 60, DV 2d10 + 4
Shard Pistol: 60, DV 1d10 + 6, AP –10, SA/BF/FA, Ammo 100
Fray/Armor: 50, 6/6 Armor Vest
Perception: 40, 60 Smell
Move: 4/20 Walker
Skills: Beam Weapons 60, Blades 60, Climbing 30, Clubs 60, Freerunning 40, Hardware: Electronics 40, Infiltration 50, Infosec 60, Interfacing 90, Intimidation 30, Navigation 30, Programming 70, Spray Weapons 60
Ware: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Bodysculpting, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Enhanced Pheromones, Enhanced Smell, Mnemonic Augmentation, Pain Tolerance (Level 2), Puppet Sock, Scarification, Sex Switch
Traits: Anomalous Mind
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)
Gear: Breather, Cold Weather Gear, Fabber, Nanobandages (2), Repair Spray, Shelter Dome
Ny'knikiin Meshed Gear: Ny'knikiin software is radically different from transhuman designs. Attempts to use or subvert ny'knikiin gear require extensive study (timeframe: 1 week)and suffer a –30 modifier. Ny'knikiin hackers are common and have software comparable to transhuman equivalents, but are at a similar disadvantage working with transhuman systems.

PREDATOR

TYPE EXHUMAN

NICHE EXHUMAN HABITATS, OUTER FRINGE



Contrary to the indulgent intellectual modification of the neurodes, exhuman predators alter their sleeves and egos with the ascetic mindset that only the strong survive. These exhumans seek to become the ultimate, most fit, apex predators. Their morphs are designed more to top the food chain than for strict adaptability, however, and so are styled after every primitive nightmare in transhumanity's collective memory. Common mods include poison fangs, prehensile scorpion tails with nanovirus reservoirs, compound eyes wired for multiple wavelengths, monowire-sharp claws, and enough neurachem to fry a hummingbird. They disdain using weapons, preferring to hunt with claws and teeth. Their constant biomodification, implant upgrades, and neural mods easily cross the line from experimental to reckless and dangerous. Most have edited out empathy and implanted predatory instincts and habits and psychopathic tendencies.

Predators seek out hostile environments to test their fitness. They also genegineer prey animals to hone their hunting skills or find exoplanets to compete with native xenofauna. They will stalk and eat transhumans, giving them a fighting chance to experience the thrill of the hunt. Predators work in packs of 4–6, though some prefer to go lone wolf. They sometimes end up as the guard dogs of TITAN-worshipping neurodes, happy to give up thinking of anything beyond hunting whatever prey the neurode sics them after.

Jake Carter ■ Predators: when you want to shoot ultimates without hearing their shitty samurai poetry, accept no substitutes.

Cymascopist ■ That's a pretty reductive attitude when one could be living in your bloodstream. With all of astrobiology to choose from, there are a lot of deadly adaptations out there. We'd be naïve to assume every exhuman goes the cheap horror XP route.

Jake Carter ■ The day I see a predator with some fucking imagination is the day I turn in my Firewall card (we should get some of those made, btw; we could use them to get free drinks at bars). They're all trust-fund kids with too much morph money and a danger fetish. Drop a lifetime clanker with a real reason to hate transhumanity into a million-credit monster morph, I'll start worrying.

PREDATOR

Threat Level: Red
Numbers: 1–6

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
30	40	40	40	15	40

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
30	16	3	65	13	98

Diamond-Tooth Bite: 70, DV 1d10 + 7, AP –3
Monofilament Claws: 70, DV 1d10 + 8, AP –4
Tail Sting: 80, DV 2d10 + 7, AP –5, Twitch Toxin: Injected, Onset: 3 Action Turns, Duration: 10 minutes (5 with medichines). Targets make a SOM Test (+20 with medichines). If they fail, they are incapacitated. If they succeed, they suffer –20 to all actions.
Subdual: 80, see *Subdual,* p. 204, *EP.*
Fray/Armor: 60, 11/11 carapace, ignores penalties from 2 wounds
Perception: 60, 80 Hearing/Smell/Vision
Move: 4/24 Walker
Skills: Blades 60, Climbing 80, Exotic Melee Weapon: Tail Sting 80, Free Fall 70, Freerunning 80, Infiltration 70, Scrounging 70, Swimming 70, Unarmed Combat 70 (Subdual 80)
Common Ware: Adrenal Boost, Carapace Armor, Chameleon Skin, Cyberclaws, Drug Glands (Grin, Kick, and/or MRDR), Endocrine Control, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Grip Pads, Hardened Skeleton, Medichines, Muscle Augmentation, Neurachem (Level 2), Oxygen Reserve, Poison Gland (Twitch), Prehensile Feet, Prehensile Tail, Respirocytes, Temperature Tolerance, Toxin Filters, Vacuum Sealing
Traits: Ambidextrous, Brave, Mental Disorder (Choose One-Three), Modified Behavior (Lack of Empathy, Heightened Ruthlessness), Pain Tolerance (Level 2), Rapid Healing
Stress Test: SV 1d10 + 3

PUPPET

TYPE
TITAN

NICHE
EARTH, QUARANTINE ZONES, ALL OF TRANSHUMAN SOCIETY



Puppets are people whose minds were subverted by the TITANs during the Fall. Unlike exsurgents, they are not infected by the exsurgent virus and are under the direct control of the TITANs, fetches, or their other AI minions.

Most puppets are synthmorphs and pods whose cyberbrains were hacked and dominated. However, the TITANs also compromised body banks to psychosurgically modified the egos being resleeved, creating an army of biomorphs to serve their will. Some key target biomorphs were simply abducted, with either a new cyberbrain or ego implanted.

TITAN puppets infiltrated all walks of transhuman life, inflicting devastating deception and treachery on transhuman civilization. They were in place months before transhumanity was aware the TITANs existed and are responsible for fueling hostilities on Earth. Many puppets occupied minor but influential positions, providing insider access without arousing suspicion. Others were military commanders, CEOs, and leaders of nations. Some were emplaced to facilitate specific objectives, usually undermining key defenses. Others brought about the downfall of governments.

Puppets were used to infect air-gapped networks, as mules to transport TITAN nanoswarms, or even as suicide bombers. They sometimes possessed the capability to inflict basilisk hacks or subvert other cyberbrain-equipped morphs.

The most horrifying aspect of puppets is that they are so difficult to detect. Many do not even realize they have been subverted, due to awareness block psychosurgery (p. 170, *Transhuman*). There are few ways to uncover manipulated minds outside of intensive psychosurgery. Transhuman society remains riddled with secret infiltrators.

Stitch ■ The first time I died during the Fall, I was trying to escape the city when a puppet disabled the autonav network, stranding us in traffic while swarmed by headhunters. The second time, I was on a evac plane to a shuttle, which the puppeted pilot took off course and flew right into a government building. I think I owe these things.

Moxie Harper ■ I know a gal whose SO turned out to be a puppet, set loose a nanoswarm while making a service call to a major mesh hub. She has no idea how long she was sleeping with the enemy.

Psychscraper ■ I've had clients who were permanently scarred by such betrayals. It becomes very difficult to trust people again and to keep paranoia in check,

SLEEPER AGENT

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 1–8
Puppets have the morph, ware, and gear appropriate to their cover. Stats are for a synthmorph technician.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
20	15	15	15	15	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	6	1	40	8	80

Subdual: 50 (see *Subdual,* p. 204, *EP*); on next action puppet will make a called shot on target's access jacks to plug in a disabler or a direct fiberoptic link to initiate a brainhack.
Brainhack: 60 (see p. 261, *EP*)
Shock Baton: 40, DV 1d10 + 3, shock effect (p. 204, *EP*)
Fray/Armor: 40, 6/6
Perception: 40, 60 Hearing/Vision
Move: 4/20
Skills: Beam Weapons 40, Clubs 40, Deception 50, Free Fall 40, Freerunning 30, Hardware: Industrial 60, Hardware: Robotic 60, Impersonation 60, Infiltration 50, Infosec 60, Interfacing 40, Investigation 40, Profession: Security Ops 80, Programming 40, Unarmed Combat 40 (Subdual 50)
Ware: Access Jacks, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Mnemonic Augmentation, Puppet Sock, Skillware
Traits: Modified Behavior (Awareness Block, Behavioral Control), Social Stigma (Clanking Masses), Uncanny Valley
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down) when betrayed
Gear: Covert Operations Tool, Disabler, Disassembler Swarm, Encryption Software, Exploit Software, Hardware: Industrial Tools, Smart Dust, Utilitool
Basilisk Hack: Deployed via augmented reality. See *Basilisk Hacks,* p. 365, *EP.*

ELITE AGENT

Threat Level: Red
Numbers: 1–4
Elite puppets are upgraded for covert ops. This model is based on a specialist pod (p. 93, *MRG*).

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
25	15	20	20	15	15

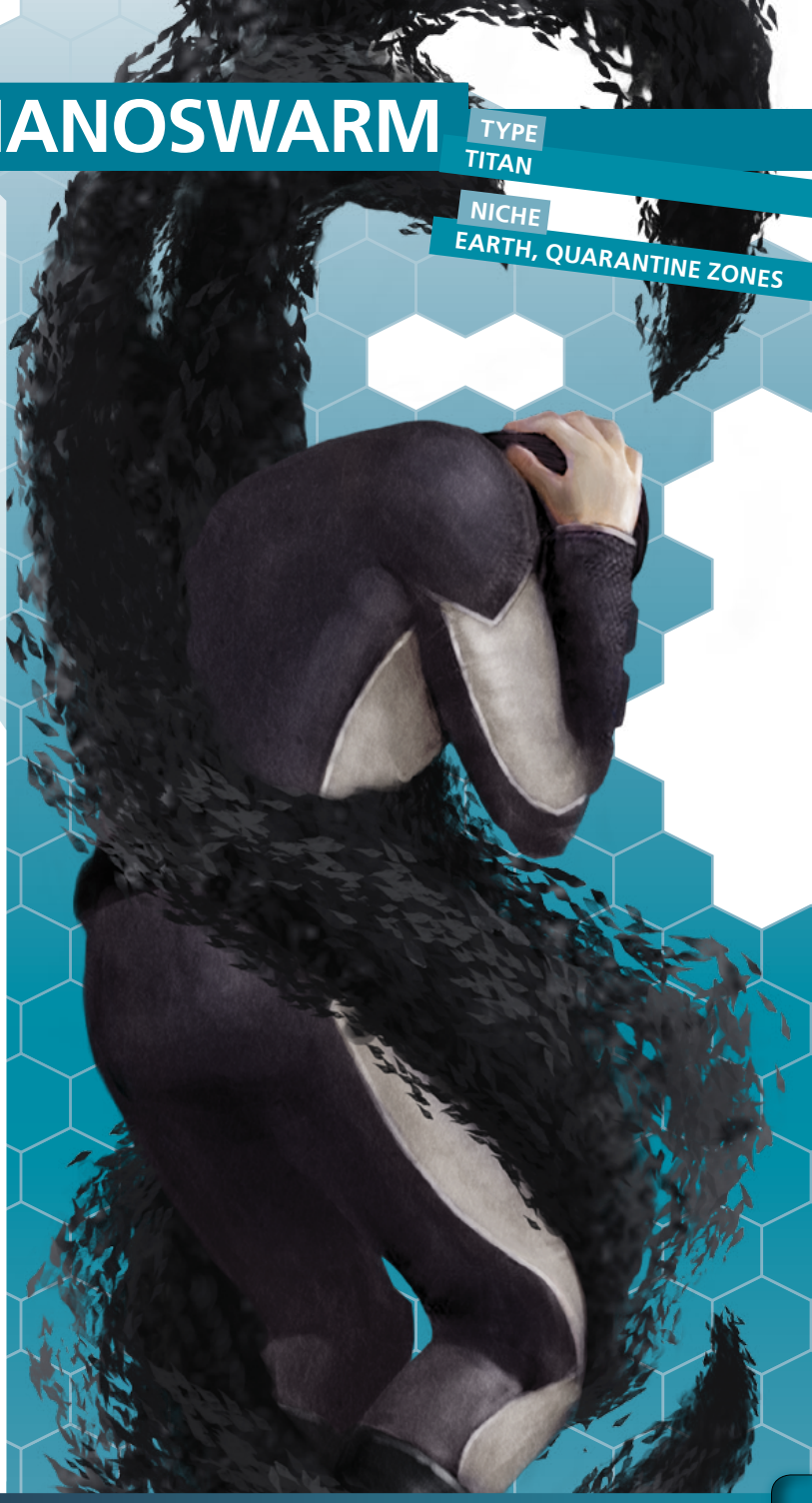
WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	8	1	35	7	53

Subdual: 80 (see *Subdual,* p. 204, *EP*); on next action puppet will make a called shot on target's access jacks to plug in a disabler or a direct fiberoptic link to initiate a brainhack.
Brainhack: 80 (see p. 261, *EP*)
Light Pistol Railgun: 60, DV 2d10 + 2, AP –3, SA/BF/FA; Ammo: 40 Armor-Piercing (AP –5, DV –2), 20 Zap (AP +2, DV –half, shock effect); Silencer; Concealable Design (–30 to spot).
Fray/Armor: 60, 13/14 light bioweave and light body armor
Perception: 60, 80 Hearing/Vision
Move: 4/20
Skills: Clubs 60, Deception 80, Disguise 40, Free Fall 40, Freerunning 50, Impersonation 80, Infiltration 80, Infosec 80, Interfacing 50, Investigation 70, Kinetic Weapons 60, Persuasion 60, Profession: Security Ops 80, Programming 60, Protocol 50, Scrounging 40, Unarmed Combat 70 (Subdual 80)
Ware: Access Jacks, Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Mnemonic Augmentation, Puppet Sock, Skillware, Skinflex
Traits: Modified Behavior (Awareness Block, Behavioral Control), Social Stigma (Pod)
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down) when betrayed
Gear: Covert Operations Tool, Dazzler, Disabler, Disassembler Swarm, Encryption Software, Exploit Software, Invisibility Cloak, Smart Dust, Utilitool
Basilisk Hack: Deployed via augmented reality. See *Basilisk Hacks,* p. 365, *EP.*

SELF-REPLICATING NANOSWARM

TYPE
TITAN

NICHE
EARTH, QUARANTINE ZONES



Self-replicating nanoswarms have the largest resource-to-kill ratio of any weapon used in the Fall. The TITANs were a generations ahead of transhumanity in nanotechnology. Whereas typical nanoswarms have limited skill sets and remain dependent on their hives, TITAN swarms are autonomous, sapient, and self-replicating. They can modify themselves to perform any nanoswarm function and can nanofabricate new materials and structures using no more than time and feedstock. Any blueprints and programming not already installed they can steal from mesh signals they hack themselves. A TITAN nanoswarm is a WMD, area-denial weapon, cyberwarfare suite, plague, and weapons factory all rolled into one. They can just as easily camouflage themselves, quietly dissembling anything that enters the death zone, as they can construct artillery and launch precision bombardment kilometers away. They are known to scan the capabilities of new opponents in order to fabricate offensive systems to use against them. When attacked, they will adapt countermeasures to make such attacks ineffective in the future. They can also link together into a physical lattice in order to create large-scale physical forms and mechanisms.

Self-replicators are almost impossible to entirely destroy with anything short of antimatter weaponry; if even a few nanobots survive, the entire swarm can rebuild and adapt accordingly. Swarms located in quarantine zones and on Earth have seen so much hostile action that they are essentially invincible; they've long since adapted defenses against EMP, plasma, and guardian swarm attacks. "Fresh" swarms from dormant TITAN munitions are susceptible to typical anti-nano countermeasures at first, but any victory is no more than a stalling tactic. Swarms can self-repair and install new weapons and capabilities in just a few hours.

In reality, the only thing likely saving Luna and Mars from overwhelming, omnidirectional attack from swarms like this is the lack of orders from the TITANs. Without direction, most nanoswarms stick to the locations of their last deployment, occasionally migrating to "feed" on new matter. Some occupy themselves with building arcane structures that may be art, whimsically transforming the landscape, or floating as clouds and altering atmospheric properties and weather patterns. Mapping and monitoring the locations of these swarms is of the utmost importance to every transhuman military organization in existence. Orbital bombardments and other extreme countermeasures must remain in constant readiness in case a swarm decides to go back on the offensive. The release of new nanoswarms from recovered technology is the most common and feared x-threat facing Firewall short of the return of the TITANs themselves.

Stitch ■ I'd be interested to see the numbers on how many sentinels have been eaten by one of these bastards at one time or another.
Just Mortal ■ Just think about how many of these things are still active on Luna and Mars. Say what you want about the Jovians: at least the Republic doesn't exist at the whim of nanoswarms too timid to attack until a TITAN gives the go ahead.
Violet Perdido ■ So … not running with the pragmatist bloc any time soon, JM? That's a shame. Maybe next year.
Just Mortal ■ You keep using that word, but I don't think it means what you think it means. If I was fool enough to trust my ego to a muse, I'd still program it to auto-replace "pragmatist" with "suicidal."

SELF-REPLICATING NANOSWARM

Threat Level: Ultraviolet
Numbers: 1 swarm

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
25	20	25	20	5	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	9	1	70	14	—

Nanoswarm: These swarms follow the rules for *TITAN Self-Replicating Nanoswarms* (p. 169). Stats given are for a standard swarm unit, not individual nanobots.
Fray/Armor: 40, 0/0
Perception: 50, 70 Hearing/Vision
Move: 4/16 Walker/Microlight (may create other mobility systems with different rates)
Skills: Free Fall 50, Infiltration 80, Unarmed Combat 50 (Subdual 60); assume they have any skill they need at 40+
Common Ware: 360-Degree Vision, Chemical Sniffer, Electrical Sense, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Fractal Digits, Nanoscopic Vision, Radar, Radiation Sense, T-Ray Emitter
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)
Notes: Swarms may be equipped with any weapon, defenses, or other gear the gamemaster deems appropriate.

SHIFTER

TYPE
EXSURGENT

NICHE
EARTH, QUARANTINE ZONES, DERELICT HABITATS



Shifters are synthmorphs that have been transformed by the shifter nanoplague. The virus converts material frames into a liquid metal composed of exotic smart matter. Shapeshifting becomes possible, the material solidifying, liquefying, and reshaping according to the exsurgent's needs. The visual mimicry can be reprogrammed in a matter of seconds and is sophisticated enough to imitate biomorphs, though touch and other wavelengths easily reveal this deception. They can reshape their shell into knives, clubs, and even complex mechanical devices such as wheels, rotors, shredders, or firearms (but not bullets).

Shifters prefer isolating and eliminating targets one-by-one, luring victims into low-security areas for execution. Once the body is disposed of, they can assume that form without fear of contradiction. While shifters are capable of impersonation, they do not acquire their victims' ego or memories. They may not possess knowledge or skills crucial to their cover, so they rely heavily on deception and visual trickery.

Multiple shifters have been discovered before fully wiping out transhuman habitats, but they remain dangerous even when exposed. Nothing about a shifter's design necessitates the limited anthropomorphic construction of most synthmorphs. Once exposed, a shifter exsurgent can and will weaponize every portion of their anatomy in an attempt to inflict maximum casualties.

Cacophonous ■ T-ray emitters: never leave home without one. In fact, never leave home, and scan everyone at home, too. Twice.

Rivet ■ Not to wave my pragmatist flag too hard, but I can't wait to see more research on shifters. These things make shaper morphs look like novelty mustaches. If we could purge this design of exsurgent virus and duplicate it … can you imagine what an infiltration specialist could do in one of these things? It would be an amazing tool, if anyone is crazy enough to sleeve into it.

SHIFTER

Threat Level: Red
Numbers: 1–4

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
20	30	20	30	20	30

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	10	1	60	12	120

Blade: 60, DV 2d10 + 5 (+1d10 each if wielding more than one), possibly Reach (+10)
Shredder: 60, DV 2d10 + 5, AP –10, SA/BF/FA
Fray/Armor: 50, 13/13
Perception: 50, 70 Hearing/Vision
Move: 4/20 Walker (may create other mobility systems with different rates)
Skills: Blades 60, Clubs 60, Deception 55, Disguise 60, Freerunning 55, Infiltration 60, Impersonation 60, Kinetic Weapons 60, Spray Weapons 60, Unarmed Combat 50
Ware: Access Jacks, Cyberbrain, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Mnemonic Augmentation, Shape-Adjusting, Synthetic Mask
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)
Mimicry: Succeeds with an Opposed Impersonation vs. Kinesics Test. The synthetic nature of mimicked biomorphs is obvious with t-rays or physical contact, or an enhanced vision/radar Perception Test at –30.
Shape Adjusting: See p. 208, *Transhuman.* Shifters change form in half the timeframe of transhuman tech and can create complex, mechanical forms such as firearms or implants.
Notes: Adjust stats, enhancements, skills, and gear as appropriate for the pre-infection morph/NPC.

SKITTER

TYPE
TITAN

NICHE
EARTH, QUARANTINE ZONES, DERELICT HABITATS

Skitters are insectoid microbots used en masse by the TITANs. Their primary use was as saboteurs: cutting power lines, destroying spimes and sensors, and disabling vehicles, servers, mesh nodes, and weapon emplacements. They were also used to create distractions, paint targets for artillery and missiles, jam radio and radar, set traps, and assault soldiers and civilians. Skitters were often deployed behind enemy lines by drones in aerogel bubbles or simply mass produced from hacked nanofabbers.

Individual skitter bots are only about 6 centimeters in length, but they are deployed in swarms of hundreds or even thousands. Each bot has 6 long primary legs, as well as 3 pairs of smaller limbs for finer manipulation, set fore, middle, and aft. They are well equipped with a range of micro tools and devices to accomplish their tasks.



Volta ■ Getting swarmed by these things is unpleasant. They mess you up pretty quickly.

Bainbridge ■ It's a good bet that the appearance of skitters signals an impending TITAN attack. They sneak the skitters in first, release them for coordinated sabotage strikes, and follow it up with headhunters or heavier hitters while comms and defenses are down and everything is in disarray. My advice if you see skitters: get the hell out immediately.

SKITTER

Threat Level: Red
Numbers: 1 Swarm

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
10	15	15	15	5	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	6	1	60	—	60

Microswarm: Skitters follow the rules for (*Swarms*, p. 168). Stats given are for a standard swarm unit, not individual microbots.
Bite: 65, DV 1d10 + 2, opponent's Fray is halved
Blinding Lasers: Skitter swarms may deploy lasers to blind cameras much like a dazzler (p. 316, *EP*). These lasers will blind characters as well for 1 minute unless they make a REF x 3 Test.
Anti-glare cyberware protects against blinding.
Breach Armor: 65, target's Fray is halved. Further melee attacks by the swarm ignore armor.
Harry: 65, target's Fray is halved. The swarm harries a target by clustering around eyes and orifices, buzzing around, etc. The target suffers a –10 modifier to all actions (–30 if MoS is 30+).
Injectors: 65, 1 DV, injects toxin, 5 doses. Toxin: Injected, Onset: 1 Action Turn, Duration: 2 minutes/6 hours (medichines reduce by half), victims suffer incapacitating seizures for 2 minutes followed by active hallucinations for 6 hours. Hallucinating characters act completely randomly/are under GM control.
A SOM x 2 Test negates the seizures and reduces the intensity of the hallucinations to a –20 modifier to all actions.
Sabotage: DV 1d10 each Action Turn (no defense, armor applies but is reduced) to all synthmorphs and non-biological devices touched by and targeted by the swarm.
Fray/Armor: 40, 4/4
Perception: 40, 60 Hearing/Vision
Move: 2/16 Walker/Hopper, 4/32 Thrust Vector
Skills: Exotic Melee Weapon: Swarm 65, Free Fall 40, Freerunning 40, Unarmed Combat 50
Ware: 360-Degree Vision, Chemical Sniffer, Electrical Sense, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Gas-Jet System, Injectors, Jaws, Laser Link, Micro-Tools, Skinlink, Ultrasound Link
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)
Jam Radio/Radar:
See *Radio Jamming,* p. 262, *EP.*

SKRIK

TYPE
EXSURGENT

NICHE
EARTH, QUARANTINE ZONES, DERELICT HABITATS

Transhumans infected with the skrik variation of the exsurgent virus do not undergo any outward physical transformations, though their minds are subverted. They do, however, undergo some interesting internal changes. On a semi-regular basis the exsurgent coughs up small creatures known as skriks. These creatures resemble tiny versions of the exsurgent's morph, though often with minor physiological differences or mutations, such as claws, poison stingers, prehensile tails, or a single wing to maneuver in microgravity.

Most exsurgents will only cough up one skrik at a time, usually once every 2–3 days. On occasion, however, they will bring one up multiple times a day, or vomit forth multiple skriks at once. The skriks themselves are usually small when regurgitated, less than 20 centimeters, depending on the throat size of the exsurgent's morph, though over time they will grow to 40 centimeters in length or more. They will immediately seek to hide and escape upon their "release."

Skriks are not sapient, though they have been known to use simple tools. They are malevolent and cunning, attacking anyone other than exsurgents. When possible, they will establish a secret nest near the exsurgent, leaving pheromonal trails so that other skriks produced by the exsurgent can join up with them. Some skrik nests have been discovered with hundreds of the creatures. They prefer to attack by surprise and with safety of numbers.



Sava ■ You have not experienced true horror until you find yourself facing a small horde of regurgitated hypergibbons armed with homemade metal shivs.

SKRIK

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 1–8

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	15	20	5	5

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	7	1	5	1	8

Bite: 60, DV 1d10 ÷ 2, AP –1
Fray/Armor: 60, 0/0
Perception: 40
Move: 3/16 Walker (may have additional movement rates)
Skills: Climbing 60, Free Fall 50, Freerunning 50, Unarmed Combat 60
Ware: Skriks will have the same bioware as their exsurgent parent, but not cyberware or nanoware. Some skriks will have mutations such as Claws, Extra Limbs, Poison Gland, etc.
Traits: Very Small Size (–30 to hit)
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2, round down (skrik); SV 1d10 (regurgitation)
Swarm Tactics: A large number of skriks (50+) will attack as a swarm. Use the rules for (*Swarms*, p. 168), with a Durability of 80.

SLOUCH

TYPE
TECH

NICHE
EXOPLANET GATES



Transhumanity has had several violent extrasolar encounters with the robotic entities they have designated "slouches"—thanks to their slumped posture—though in each case they have assumed the machines were machines left behind by the TITANs. In reality, these robots were designed by an unknown alien species, possibly seeded through the gates as a defensive measure to prevent their use.

Slouches seem to be based on their designer's alien physiology. They feature heavy claws on hands and feet and a turret stationed on each shoulder. They move with a long, loping gait, sometimes using leaning forward to use their arms when running or to balance for a vicious backwards kick.

The slouches encountered so far seem to be programmed to control the Pandora gates and prevent their use. They do not automatically attack anything coming through a gate, but they are know to set up automatic defenses and traps that do so. Automated drones in particular will have their tethers cut and be targeted before they can conduct detailed scans. They will, however, prevent anything that comes through from using that gate again. They have been known to track gatecrashing teams away from the gate and ambush them elsewhere. Slouches are also known to sometimes carry tools and engage in attempts to unearth and salvage alien technology.

It is unknown if slouches are controlled remotely or by an onboard AI. To date, they have self-destructed to prevent forensic examination.

Eludere ■ Interesting that we never saw these on Earth or anywhere else in the solar system for that matter. Is this a new TITAN design? For what purpose?

Bainbridge ■ I'm not sure I completely buy the analysis. We're making a big correlation just because we've found TITAN signs in the same extrasolar system as these slouches. But aside from some equipment, mostly what we've found is wreckage—ruins of hunter-killers. Who's to say the slouches didn't take them down?

SLOUCH

Threat Level: Red

Numbers: 1–4

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
20	20	15	30	10	25

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
20	9	2	70	14	140

Claw: 60, DV 2d10 + 6, AP –4

Kick: 60, DV 3d10 + 3, AP –4

Laser Turret: 70, DV 3d10, SA, Range 50/100/150/300, Ammo 100

Bessel Beam Turret: 70. This device functions like a tractor/repulsor beam. Struck targets are pushed either directly towards or away from the slouch. The distance moved depends on the target's size: very small, 20 meters; small: 10 meters; medium: 5 meters; large: 1 meter, very large: unaffected. Struck targets are trapped by the beam and must make a SOM Test to escape its grasp or they will continue to be attracted/repelled each Action Turn. Max Range 500. These turrets have 20 turns of use and take 4 hours to recharge.

Shearing Beams: 70. Two slouches may direct their Bessel beams at the same target, one pulling, one repulsing, to create a devastating shearing effect, inflicting DV 6d10 (armor does not apply).

Fray/Armor: 55, 26/20

Perception: 60, 80 Hearing/Vision

Move: 4/24 Walker

Skills: Beam Weapons 70, Demolitions 60, Free Fall 50, Freerunning 70, Hardware: Electronics 50, Hardware: Robotics 60, Infiltration 65, Kinetic Weapons 40, Unarmed Combat 60

Ware: Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Neurachem (Level 1), Radar, Radiation Sense, Specialized Hive: Fixers, T-Ray Emitter

Gear: Blue Box Gate Control Unit, Disassembly Tools, Engineer Nanoswarm, Fabber, Scout Nanoswarm, Superthermite Charges

Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)

Self-Destruct: Slouches carry a small plasma magnetic bottle that will detonate when they take more than 75 points of damage or if anyone attempts to open up or otherwise tamper with a disabled slouch. This explosion inflicts DV 5d10 + 16, AP –6, blast area effect, and will completely destroy the slouch.

SMART MINE

TYPE TITAN

NICHE EARTH, QUARANTINE ZONES



Most transhumans wish the existence of smart mines could be blamed on the TITANs. Sadly, smart mines were used in warfare long before the Fall. Though outlawed by every treaty and convention of warfare, smart mines were frequently deployed against civilian populations. The TITANs merely enhanced the design.

Smart mines are roughly 3 decimeters long and move on spider-like thin robotic legs. Their frame holds a compact sensor package and a payload of volate chemicals stored in interconnected sacs, housed underneath a cheap plastic shell that doubles as shrapnel.

Smart mines maximize their resource-to-kill ratio. Deployed in packs, they coordinate ambushes on isolated targets. Their morph and armor recognition software calculates their payloads exactingly; their aim is to cripple and disable, not kill a target outright. Attacking en masse, when one of the bots manages to crawl onto a leg or arm (or similar crucial limb), it jettisons its extra chemical explosives (save those deemed necessary for the attack) for the others to pick up, mixes the volatile sacs together, and explodes in a shaped charge. Those injured by smart mines suffer amputation, burns, and smaller shrapnel wounds. Once a target is disabled, the remainder of the pack injects specialized medichines to cauterize wounds and prolong the victim's suffering, then retreat and wait for the victim to call for help. They are known to torture those too stubborn to lure their comrades into a trap. Anyone attempting to help the wounded suffers the same ambush. The last mine in the pack will detonate all of its remaining charges.

Surviving TITAN smart mines are exceptionally careful. As kamikazes, they must ration their numbers to inflict maximum casualties. Some swarms on Earth, Luna, Mars, and abandoned orbital weapons factories still have corrupted fabricators pumping out reinforcements. Entire areas are no-man's-lands with dozens of spider bombs waiting under every pile of rubble.



Parallax ■ Most packs are smart enough to clean up after themselves so as to avoid warning future victims, but experienced soldiers know to look for discolored ground where smart mines have ejaculated their excess chemical payload. Many of the explosive compounds are brightly colored and leave the area around the explosion stained.

TITAN SMART MINE

Threat Level: Yellow

Numbers: 4–12

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
15	20	15	15	10	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	5	1	20	4	40

Suicide Strike: 60, inflicts exactly enough DV to cause 2 wounds (including armor). There is a 25% chance this cripples or amputates a limb; victims losing legs move at a quarter their normal movement rate until healed or repaired (pp. 208 and 327, *EP*).

Fray/Armor: 50, 0/0

Perception: 50, 70 Hearing/Smell/Vision

Move: 4/16 Walker

Skills: Demolitions 80, Free Fall 40, Freerunning 40, Infiltration 40, Intimidation 50, Unarmed Combat 50 (Suicide Strike 60)

Ware: 360-Degree Vision, Chameleon Skin, Electrical Sense, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Laser Link, Lidar, Radar

Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)

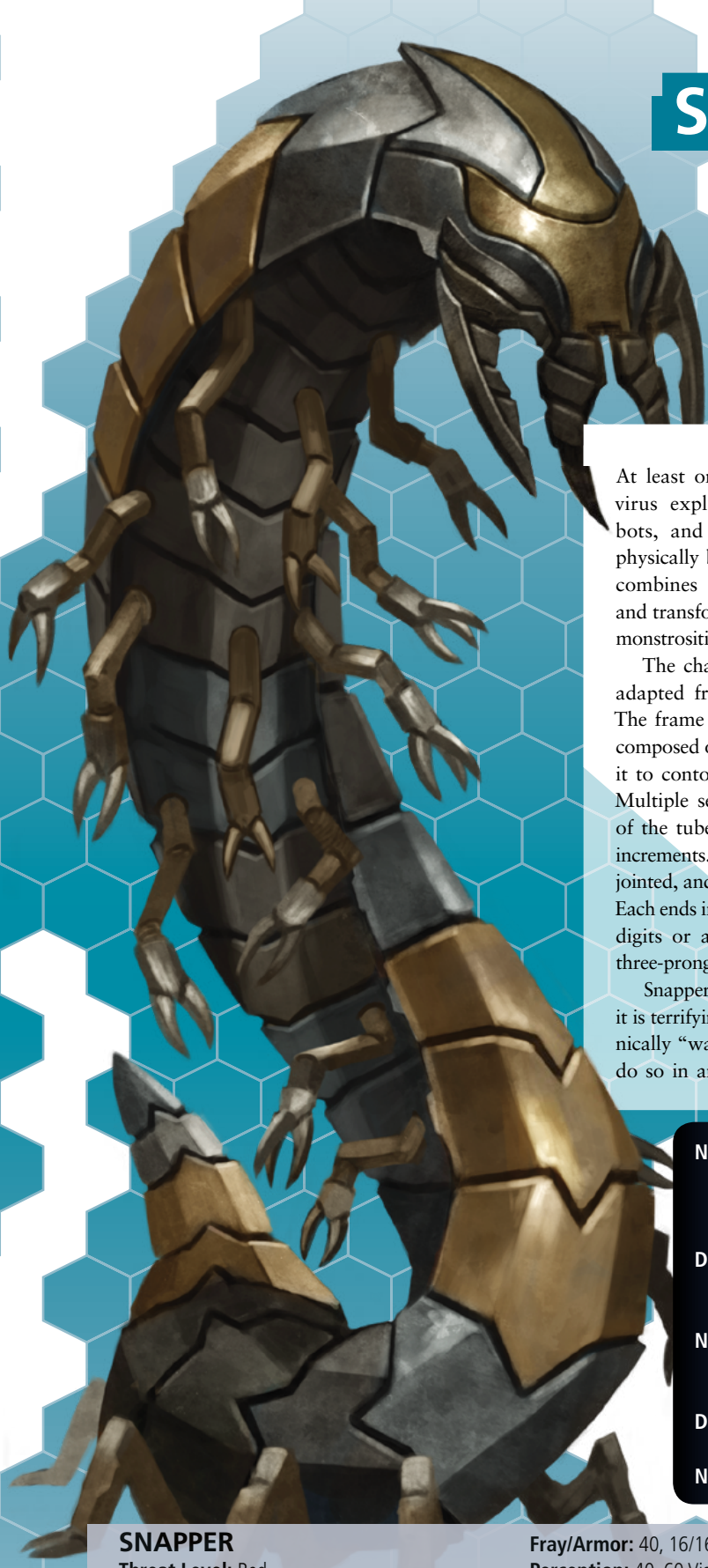
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)

Volatile: Smart mines that suffer a wound have a 5% chance of exploding: DV 6d10 + 12, AP –4, blast area effect.

SNAPPER

TYPE
EXSURGENT

NICHE
EARTH, QUARANTINE ZONES, DERELICT HABS



At least one variant of the exsurgent virus explicitly targets synthmorphs, bots, and vehicles. The nanoplague physically breaks these machines down, combines them with other machines, and transforms them into centipede-like monstrosities known as snappers.

The chassis of a snapper is usually adapted from large shells or vehicles. The frame is a hollow hexagonal tube composed of hinged segments that allow it to contort like the body of a snake. Multiple sets of limbs line three sides of the tube, set radially at 120-degree increments. The limbs are heavy, double-jointed, and articulated with three joints. Each ends in either a triad of manipulator digits or a pincer resembling a giant, three-pronged scissor.

Snapper movement is as perplexing as it is terrifying to behold. The synths technically "walk" on their limbs, but they do so in an unpredictable, rolling gait, seeming to stumble or "fall up" wherever they go. Their bizarre movement, large size, thick armor, and giant pincers make snappers formidable opponents.

A digital version of this exovirus strain is also known to target and infect minifac and large-scale fabrication facilities. In the Fall, snappers were typically deployed in areas where the TITANs seized control of crude factories without the exotic matter necessary to craft sophisticated weaponry. A favorite tactic was to send snappers after clustered crowds of transhumans awaiting farcasting or evacuation. The speed and efficiency with which they could be assembled made them a favorite harassment tactic, occupying defense forces until more sophisticated exsurgents could arrive. Too often, the snappers were enough to finish the job, rolling through and dismembering panicked crowds with abandon.

Nova Vida ■ Flexbots can do a pretty good job of assembling into something like a snapper. The mix of tumbling, crawling, peristalsis, and end-over-end flips takes some getting used to, but it's great for moving through beehives. I broke the record for speed-mapping a Wormwood honeycomb in a snapper emulator.

Delta V ■ Remember the look on everyone's faces when they realized what you were assembling into? You would have thought we just dumped the septic tank in zero-g. It was hilarious.

Nova Vida ■ Yeah, they all clambered over each other to down-vote my rep for "poor taste." Then I win and everybody in a flexbot starts biting my style. But does anybody take the burns off my account? Of course not.

Delta V ■ Could be worse. Think how much they'd love you if they knew what we were really there to do.

Nova Vida ■ Heh. I'd have to move to the inner-system and get back on credits.

SNAPPER

Threat Level: Red
Numbers: 1–3

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
20	30	20	30	20	35

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
30	10	2	70	14	140

Pincers: 65, DV 2d10 + 3, Reach (+10), AP –3
Crushing Attack: 55, DV 4d10, Reach (+10), medium-sized and smaller targets only
Fray/Armor: 40, 16/16
Perception: 40, 60 Vision
Move: 4/24 Walker, 6/40 Roller
Skills: Climbing 65, Free Fall 60, Freerunning 60, Infiltration 50, Intimidation 70, Kinetic Weapons 65, Unarmed Combat 55 (Pincers 65)
Ware: 360-Degree Vision, Enhanced Vision, Lidar, Magnetic System, Neurachem, Structural Enhancement
Traits: Ambidexterity (x4), Large Size (+10 to hit)
Stress Test: SV 1d10
Armored Variant: Heavy Armor (+16/+16), Offensive Armor Mod (shock effect; p. 204, *EP*), Self-Healing Armor Mod, 2 Weapon Mounts (External, Articulated) with twin Railgun Machine Guns (DV 2d10 + 8, AP –9, BF/FA, Ammo 500)

STALKER

TYPE
TITAN

NICHE
EARTH, QUARANTINE ZONES, DERELICT HABITATS



Stalkers is the term given to an unusually insectoid and alien TITAN machine design. Stalkers seem to have been specifically sculpted to invoke fear in transhumans. They move with an interesting upright quadruped stance, using four jointed legs radially set around the torso. A small and malevolent-looking mantis-like head tops a bulging torso. Their pair of arms are ridged with vicious-looking serrations and spikes, which they use for murderous purposes. A set of retractable tentacle-chains also deploy from the torso, used as prehensile limbs and for whip-like attacks.

The TITANs wielded stalkers as assassins and elite tactical squads. They were ideal for surgical strikes that required highly competent killing machines able to move in stealth and infiltrate transhuman buildings.

Though they often carry traditional weaponry, stalkers have two built-in systems that deserve special note. When surrounded by enemies in close quarters, stalkers are known to spin their entire torsos at high speeds, whipping their tentacle chains around them in lethal, amputating arcs. Their torsos are also equipped with an area-denial infrasonic weapon with devastating effects on biomorphs.

Bainbridge ■ Squads of stalkers are believed responsible for murdering both the British and Saudi royal families and taking out the entire Russian Ministry of Defense during the Fall.

Pyrrhos ■ I'd rather face a warbot or think tank than one of these. I don't mind being shot at, but these things like to get up close and messy. They'll gut you while staring at you dispassionately with that hideous mantis face. Yuck. Stay far away from these things and hit 'em with everything you got.

STALKER

Threat Level: Ultraviolet
Numbers: 2–12

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
15	20	15	25	10	25

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	8	3	75	15	150

Arm Blade: 75, DV 2d10 + 4, AP –4
Kick: 75, DV 3d10 + 2
Tentacle-Chain: 80, DV 2d10 + 2, AP –6, Reach (+10). On an MoS of 30+, target is subdued (p. 204, *EP*).
Chain Whirlwind: 80, DV 3d10 + 6, AP –8, Reach (+10). Strikes all targets within 2 meters of the stalker simultaneously.
Plasma Rifle: 70, DV 3d10 + 20 DV, AP –8, SA, Ammo 10
Infrasonic Emitter: All biomorphs within 30 meters must make a SOM Test or be nauseated and disoriented, suffering –30 to all actions for 1 minute. This test must be taken again if exposed for more than a minute. Additionally, for each full minute a biomorph is exposed (nauseated or not), they suffer DV 1d10 + 2, no defense. This effect works through walls, ground, and water, but not vacuum.
Fray/Armor: 65, 20/25
Perception: 60, 80 Hearing/Vision
Move: 4/20 Walker
Skills: Beam Weapons 70, Exotic Melee Weapon: Tentacle-Chain 80, Free Fall 40, Freerunning 60, Hardware: Electronics 60, Infiltration 65, Infosec 60, Intimidation 80, Kinetic Weapons 70, Unarmed Combat 75
Ware: Chameleon Skin, Eelware, Electrical Sense, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Magnetic System, Neurachem (Level 2), Structural Enhancement, Thermal Dampening Armor Mod, T-Ray Emitter
Gear: Covert Ops Tool, 3 Splash Grenades with various nanoswarms
Stress Test: SV 1d10 + 3

STINGER HOUND

TYPE
XENOFAUNA

NICHE
WENGUANG

Stinger hounds are native to the exoplanet Wenguang. Despite being a promising colony site and hosting xenoarcheological discoveries, transhumans have had a difficult time on Wenguang in large part due to the heavy presence of stinger hound packs.

Stinger hounds are carnivorous quadrupeds with elongated, clawed forelimbs, providing a rapid, loping, ground-covering gait. A light, hard shell protects their back, its colors and contours matching the rocks and jagged leaves of local flora. Huddled under their shells, in a dug out shallow depression, the hounds blend right in, until they launch their ambush.

Stinger hounds are named for the bulbous stinger that tips the end of an impressively long tongue. The hounds close in on their prey and expel the stinger from their mouths, injecting a potent venom that inevitably slows down and paralyzes the dangerous creatures the hounds prefer to feed on.

By some strange quirk of biology, many transhumans seem to give off a pheromonal scent that is remarkably similar to that exuded by stinger hounds' favorite prey animals. This has led to an exceptionally high instance of stinger hound packs attacking explorers, researchers, and colonists. Stinger hounds have even gone so far as to chase down and attack drones and vehicles, doing serious damage with their claws.



Lovelace ■ Don't bother running, these things will catch you. Get to high ground and stand and fight. They'll surround you and coordinate their attacks to distract you and set you off guard. Anyone who's paralyzed will be dragged off and eaten.

Rivet ■ From what I've seen, they'll rough up synthmorphs too if they're with any biomorphs. Just for good measure. I heard of one flexbot that got dragged by her leg for two klicks, bouncing off hard rocks the whole way.

STINGER HOUND

Threat Level: Orange

Numbers: 4–12

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
10	20	15	20	5	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	7	1	40	8	60

Tongue Stinger: 65, 1d10 + 3, AP –5, Reach (+10). Toxin: Injected, Onset: 1 Action Turn, Duration: 6 Action Turns (3 with medichines), victims lose 5 points of SOM per Action Turn. Each turn the victim may make a SOM Test to negate the SOM loss and further effects. If SOM is reduced to zero, the character is paralyzed. SOM loss returns at the rate of 1 point per hour.

Claws: 60, DV 2d10 + 2, AP –2, Reach (+10)

Pounce: 70, DV 2d10 + 5, Reach (+10), with an MoS of 30+ the target is knocked down and pinned to the ground (see Subdual, p. 204, *EP*).

Fray/Armor: 55, 15/12

Perception: 60, 80 Hearing/Smell/Vision

Move: 5/44 Walker

Skills: Exotic Melee Weapon: Tongue Stinger 65, Freerunning 75, Infiltration 60, Intimidation 40, Unarmed Combat 60 (Pounce 70)

Ware: Carapace Armor, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Poison Gland

Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)

Camouflage: Stinger hounds that remain still and crouched under their shell receive a +30 to Infiltration Tests to hide.

SWITCHWING

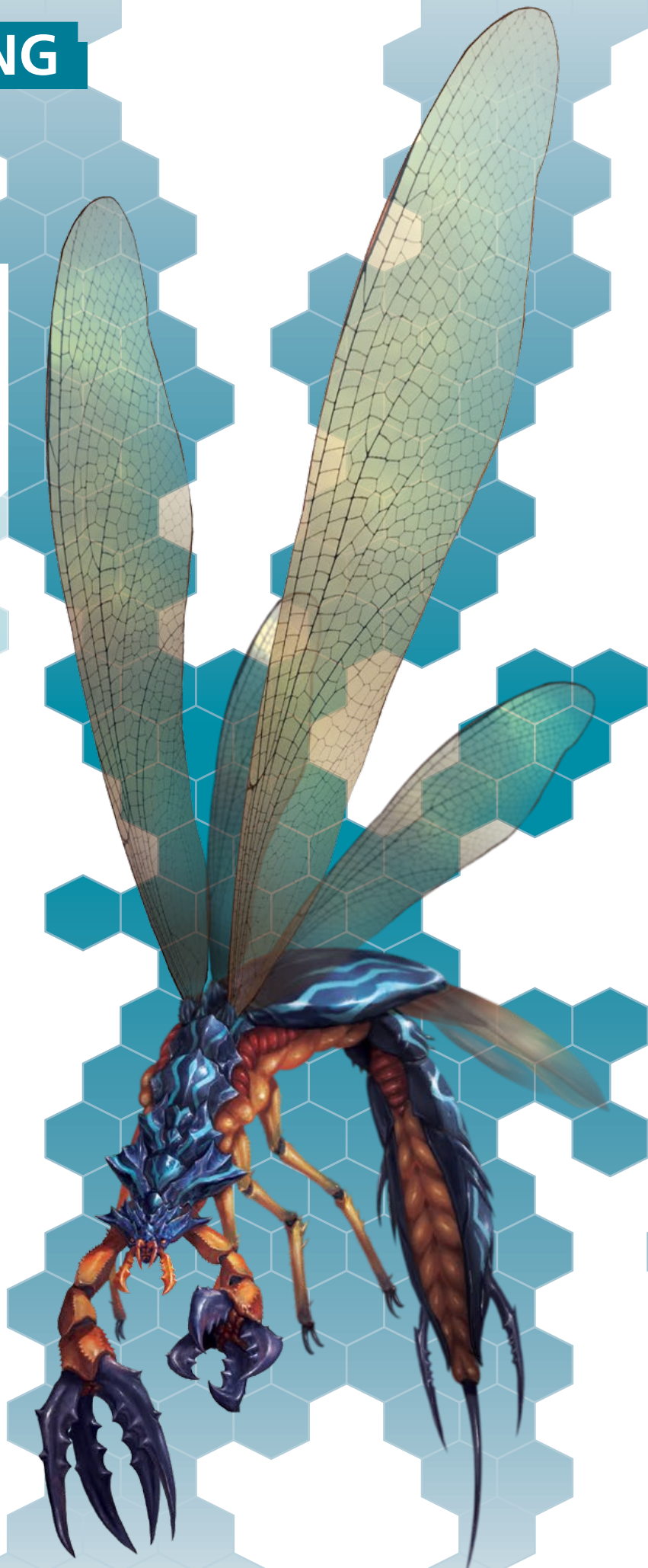
TYPE V XENOFAUNA

NICHE SYNERGY

This six-legged flying arthropod is native to the exoplanet Synergy. A meter long with a 1.5-meter wingspan, the switchwing is so named for its double sets of dragonfly-esque wings, one of which is used for general mobility, and the other when actively hunting. These provide the predator with astonishing aerial capabilities, from hovering and swooping to fast diving attacks.

The two forelimbs of the switchwing end in massive four-clawed pincers. These are ideal for snatching small prey animals off the ground but can also take chunks out of larger victims. A smaller set of mandibles is used for biting. Females of the species are also equipped with a nasty venomous stinger. Victims are ambushed and quickly stung, then the switchwing withdraws and tracks the victim until the poison slowly kills them. The same stinger is then used to implant switchwing eggs in the corpse, so that their larvae can hatch and feed.

Nova Vida ■ These things will attack drones and flying synthmorphs, so don't expect an inability to be eaten to protect you.



SWITCHWING

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 4–8

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
1	15	15	20	5	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
5	7	1	35	7	30

Diving Attack: 60, 3d10 + 4, AP –2, switchwings can move their full Running rate and dive attack with no additional modifiers.
Mandibles: 50, DV 1d10 + 1
Hunting Pincers: 50, DV 1d10 + 4
Stinger: 50, DV 2d10, AP –2. Toxin: Injected, Onset: 1 minute, Duration: 1 hour (30 minutes with medichines), victims take DV 2d10 from internal bleeding every ten minutes.
Fray/Armor: 40, 0/0
Perception: 50
Move: 8/40 Winged
Skills: Infiltration 40, Flight 60, Unarmed Combat 50
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)

THINK TANK

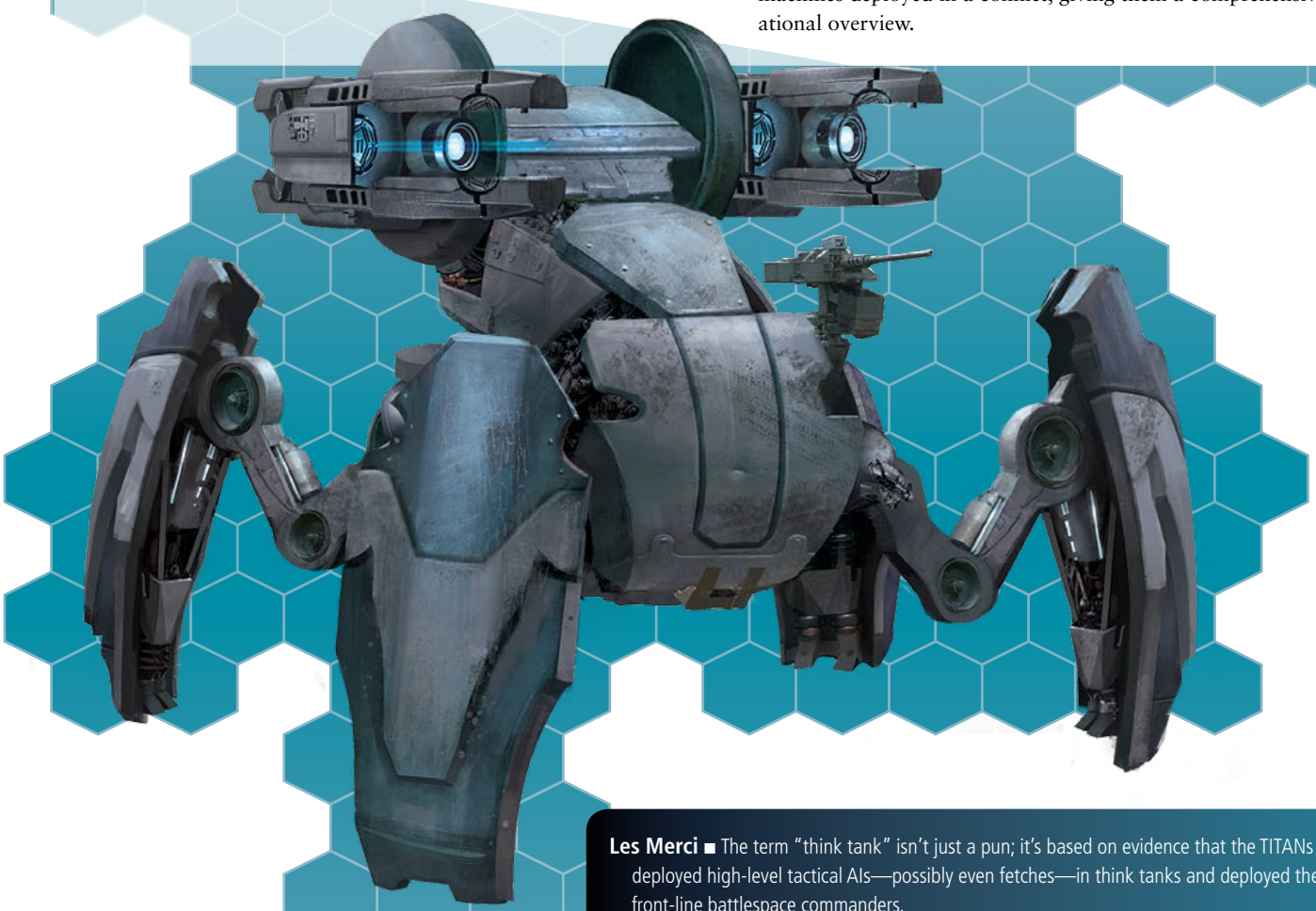
TYPE TITAN

NICHE EARTH, QUARANTINE ZONES

Think tanks are TITAN heavy weaponry, deployed against armored transhuman military assets and fortified positions. Whereas warbots are designed to be fast and mobile heavy hitters, think tanks can take a beating and smash their way through just about any defenses.

Think tanks are quadrupeds, with twin plasma and particle beam cannons on a turret torso that can adjust its height and orientation. On top of the heavy armor, advanced defenses protect against projectiles and explosions.

Think tanks have access to the sensor feeds of other TITAN machines deployed in a conflict, giving them a comprehensive situational overview.



Les Merci ■ The term "think tank" isn't just a pun; it's based on evidence that the TITANs deployed high-level tactical AIs—possibly even fetches—in think tanks and deployed them as front-line battlespace commanders.

THINK TANK

Threat Level: Ultraviolet
Numbers: 1–2

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
30	15	15	25	15	35

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	8	2	100	20	200

Plasma Cannons (2): 60, DV 6d10 + 20, AP –8, SA, Range 40/100/200/600, Ammo 50
Particle Beam Cannons (2): 60, DV 4d10 + 8, AP –4, SA, Range 60/200/300/600, Ammo 100
Railgun MG: 60, DV 2d10 + 8, AP –9, SA/BF/FA, Ammo 500
Fray/Armor: 20, 36/36
Perception: 50, 70 Vision
Move: 4/16 Walker
Skills: Academics: Military Science 80, Beam Weapons 60, Infosec 80, Interest: Transhuman Military Assets 80, Interest: Transhuman Military Strategy 80, Interfacing 80, Kinetic Weapons 60, Profession: Force Commander 80
Ware: 360-Degree Vision, Active Countermeasures, Cyberbrain, Direction Sense, Enhanced Vision, Hacking Alert, Lidar, Mnemonic Augmentation, Neurachem (Level 1), Panopticon, Persistence, Radar, Radiation Sense, Reflex Boosters, Specialized Hive: Fixers, Structural Enhancement, T-Ray Emitter, 5 Weapon Mounts (External, Articulated)
Stress Test: SV 1d10
Traits: Large Size (+10 to hit)
Deflectors: Think tanks are equipped with supercapacitors embedded within their armor that release a massive charge at the area pinpointed by an attack, creating a temporary, huge, electromagnetic force field that repels or destroys incoming projectiles. This provides a –30 modifier to hit the tank, but only against kinetic weapon and seeker attacks that the think tank has detected. These deflectors have 20 uses before they must be recharged, which takes 2 hours.

VEILED LEECH

TYPE
XENOFAUNA

NICHE
PLOOTARG

Veiled leeches are arboreal creatures from the exoplanet Plootarg. These hematophages subsist on blood and bodily fluids. Veiled leeches are smaller in size and build than a neo-chimpanzee. Their elongated skulls end in a collection of tentacles they use to latch on and suck blood from from their prey. Their six eyes can see in infrared, to spot the location of major blood vessels under the skin. Membranes stretch between their limbs, enabling them to glide between trees in Plootarg's low gravity and quietly pounce on the backs of their victims.

The most unique feature of veiled leeches is their ability to turn invisible at will. Their skin and gliding membranes have an amazing negative-index metamaterial array, enabling them to bend light waves around themselves, much like an invisibility cloak. This can be triggered as desired, giving veiled leeches a strong advantage when hiding from predators or sneaking up on prey. Astrobiologists are currently studying if this occurred naturally or if veiled leeches (or their ancestors) were modified by an unknown intelligence.

The sucker bite of these leeches' mouth tentacles injects a toxin that either knocks their prey unconscious or makes them lethargic and docile. Veiled leeches do not usually feed enough to kill the victim, though a pack of leeches together might. Other predators on Plootarg are familiar with the debilitated state of veiled leech victims and will stalk near leech nests.

Cryptid ■ Veiled leeches are also suspected of carrying a number of diseases common to Plootarg xenofauna; it has yet to be seen whether transhumans are susceptible.

Sequencer ■ A fair number of Plootargian creatures have evolved spikes on their backs to keep these things off. So now some of the leeches are digging pits to ambush their victims from underneath.

Nova Vida ■ It's interesting that most of the other major xenofauna on this exoplanet have three-limb configurations. Another sign that these ghost vamps were modified or brought here?

VEILED LEECH

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 1–6

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	20	10	20	5	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	6	1	25	5	38

Pounce: 60, see *Subdual,* p. 204, *EP.* Veiled leeches often attack with surprise (no defense). On its next action, the leech will bite with mouth suckers, inflicting DV 1d10 ÷ 2 (no defense, round down) and injecting sucker toxin (see below). Leeches will continue to suck blood and fluids for 1d10 + 4 Action Turns, inflicting DV 3 (no defense) each turn.
Fray/Armor: 45, 4/2
Perception: 40, 60 Hearing/Vision
Move: 4/16 Walker, Glides 15 meters for every meter of altitude it loses.
Skills: Climbing 70, Flight 55, Freerunning 35, Infiltration 70, Unarmed Combat 50 (Pounce 60)
Ware: Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision (Infrared Only), Gliding Membranes
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)
Invisibility: Veiled leeches can turn invisible at will, much like an invisibility cloak (p. 316, *EP*).
Sucker Toxin: Injected, Onset: Immediate, Duration: 1 hour (30 minutes with medichines). Victims must make a SOM x 3 Test or fall unconscious. Those awake still suffer steep docility and lethargy; they must pass a WIL x 2 Test to take any action, and all actions suffer a –30 modifier.

VOID CRAWLER

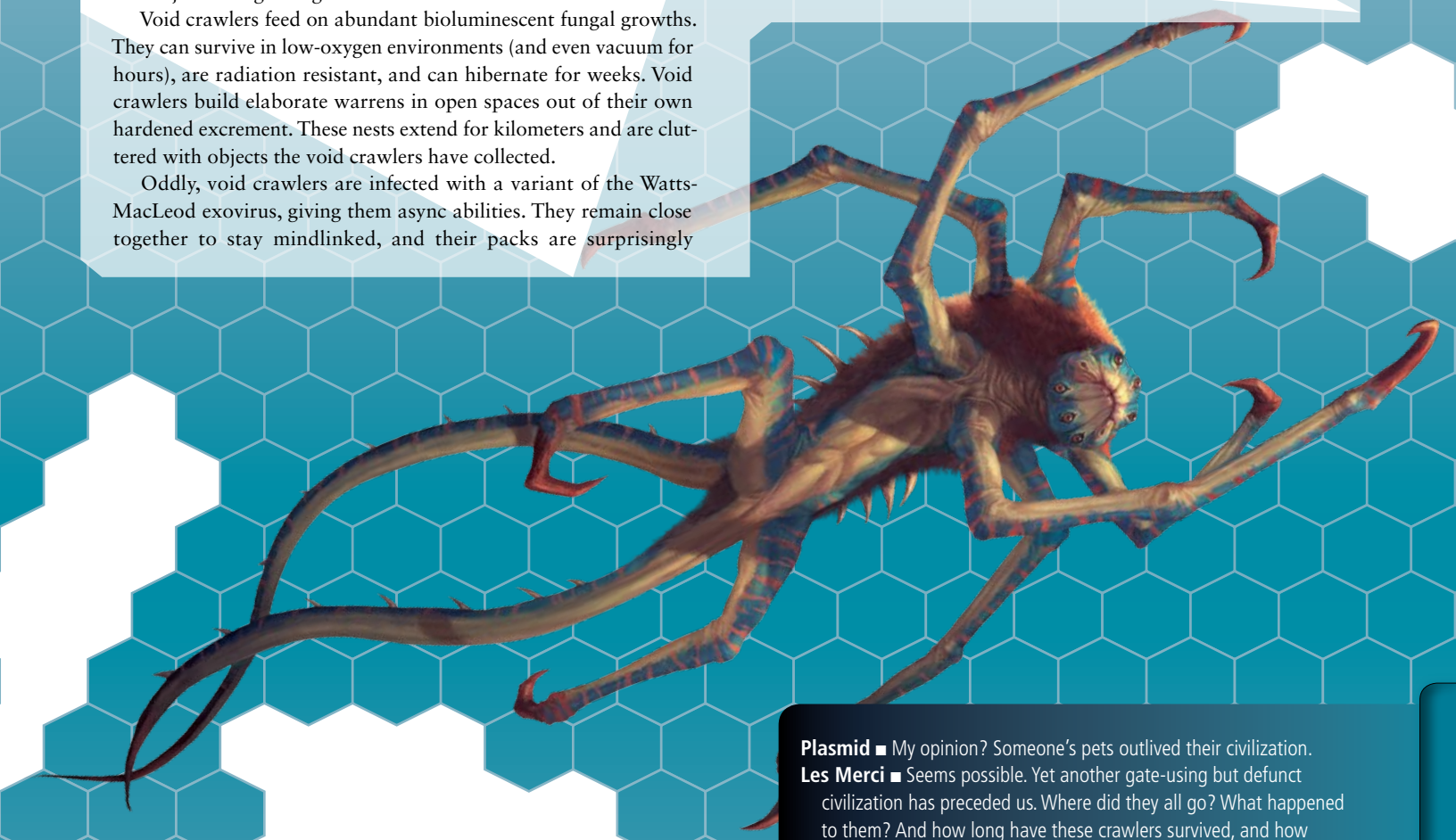
TYPE
XENOFAUNA

NICHE
MICROGRAV EXTRASOLAR LOCATIONS

Void crawlers are a fascinating example of genetic tinkering. These inquisitive and clever creatures were designed to thrive in microgravity environments. So far, they have been discovered in two extrasolar locations, both beehive warrens carved out by unknown aliens. Void crawlers use eight hooked limbs to propel themselves along tunnel shafts and a pair of prehensile tails to grasp and hold themselves in place. If caught in free fall, they cough up a convulsive spit that is just strong enough to drift them towards the nearest surface.

Void crawlers feed on abundant bioluminescent fungal growths. They can survive in low-oxygen environments (and even vacuum for hours), are radiation resistant, and can hibernate for weeks. Void crawlers build elaborate warrens in open spaces out of their own hardened excrement. These nests extend for kilometers and are cluttered with objects the void crawlers have collected.

Oddly, void crawlers are infected with a variant of the Watts-MacLeod exovirus, giving them async abilities. They remain close together to stay mindlinked, and their packs are surprisingly coordinated in their efforts. They exhibit tool-use skills and can gain an understanding of even complex devices via their grok sleight. They use their subliminal sleight to drive intruders away, occasionally manipulating them for other strange purposes. As of yet, transhumanity is unaware of their async abilities.



Plasmid ■ My opinion? Someone's pets outlived their civilization.
Les Merci ■ Seems possible. Yet another gate-using but defunct civilization has preceded us. Where did they all go? What happened to them? And how long have these crawlers survived, and how have they evolved in the centuries since?

VOID CRAWLER

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 4–12

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
10	20	20	15	10	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	7	1	30	6	45

Hook: 50, DV 1d10 + 1
Tail Whip: 60, DV 1d10, AP –1, with 30+ MoS target is subdued (p. 204, *EP*). On further actions, biomorphs are strangled; each turn they take DV 1d10 (no defense) and must make a SOM x 3 Test or fall unconscious. Apply a cumulative –10 modifier to each test after the first.
Confusion Sleight: 60, opposed with WIL x 2, Close Range, Sustained, Strain (1d10 ÷ 2) + 2. Target is disoriented, must make a WIL x 3 Test to take an action but suffers –20 to all tests. See *Confusion* sleight (p. 179).
Fray/Armor: 60, 3/4
Perception: 50, 70 Vision
Move: 4/20 Walker
Skills: Control 60, Exotic Melee Weapon: Tail Whip 60, Free Fall 80, Infiltration 50, Psi Assault 60, Scrounging 80, Sense 80, Unarmed Combat 50
Ware: Bioweave Armor, Efficient Digestion, Enhanced Respiration, Enhanced Vision, Hibernation, Prehensile Tail, Radiation Sense, Radiation Tolerance, Respirocytes, Temperature Tolerance, Toxin Filters, Vacuum Sealing
Traits: Ambidexterity (x4), Psi (Level 2)
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)
Psi Sleights: Ambience Sense, Ego Sense, Extend Range, Grok, Mindlink, Subliminal
Gravity Sensitivity: In gravity higher than 0.1 g, treat void crawlers as suffering from the effects of 1 wound. In gravity higher than 0.3 g, treat this as 2 wounds and reduce their Movement Rate by half. At 0.5 g and higher, they suffer DV 2 per minute and are effectively incapacitated.
Light Sensitivity: Void crawlers are adapted to dim light. Extremely bright lights blind them, inflicting a –10 modifier or more.
Mindlink: Void crawlers remain mindlinked when within 15 meters of one other (and to others through each other).

VYDRA

TYPE XENOFAUNA

NICHE GWADAR

The horrific alien creatures known as vydra are native to the exoplanet Gwadar. Three sinuous necks end in vicious quad-hinged mouths lined with jagged teeth. Much like octopi, each neck of the vydra is lined with neurons and acts independently. The creature moves as a quadruped with lobster-like legs and a thick spiked tail. Each neck features eight clawed arms used for grasping prey. Though they lack sight, vydra sense and communicate via ultrasonic clicks with their tongue, and their breathing vents provide a fine sense of smell.

Though large, vydras are stealthy hunters, often lunging from shallow caves or holes to attack prey. Their common tactic is to snap one set of jaws around their target, holding it in place while the others frenzy and rip it to shreds. Vydra are accustomed to ripping shell plates off of their favorite prey animals, and they have shown a similar proclivity to transhumans, literally ripping their armor off to snap and bite at the unprotected interior flesh.



Rivet ■ You might think these things will leave bots and synthmorphs alone. Nope, something about the ultrasonic hum of machinery really seems to piss them off. I've seen XP of 'em ripping the plating right off a slitheroid.

Moxie Harper ■ Vydras have made it on the current list of Ways-Old-Rich-Fucks-Try-To-Kill-Themselves. The hunting safaris to Gwadar are booked solid and there's talk of bringing (or reproducing) vydra back to the solar system for hunting/gladiatorial purposes.

Nezumi ■ I'll be more impressed if someone manages to ride one.

VYDRA

Threat Level: Red

Numbers: 1–4

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	15	20 (30)	1	25

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	7	1	65	13	98

Bite (x3): 60, DV 3d10 + 6, AP –3, Reach (+10), Each vydra head may attack separately with the same action. If the MoS exceeds the target's Durability, they are subdued (p. 204, *EP*).

Shear Armor: 60, Reach (+10), if the vydra achieves a MoS equal to the AV x 2 or more, it rips off a chunk of protection. Reduce the target's AV values by 1d10 + 2.

Tail Swipe: 55, DV 3d10 + 3, Reach (+10), target must make a SOM x 3 Test or be knocked down.

Fray/Armor: 45 (55), 3/5

Perception: 50, 70 Smell

Move: 4/20 Walker

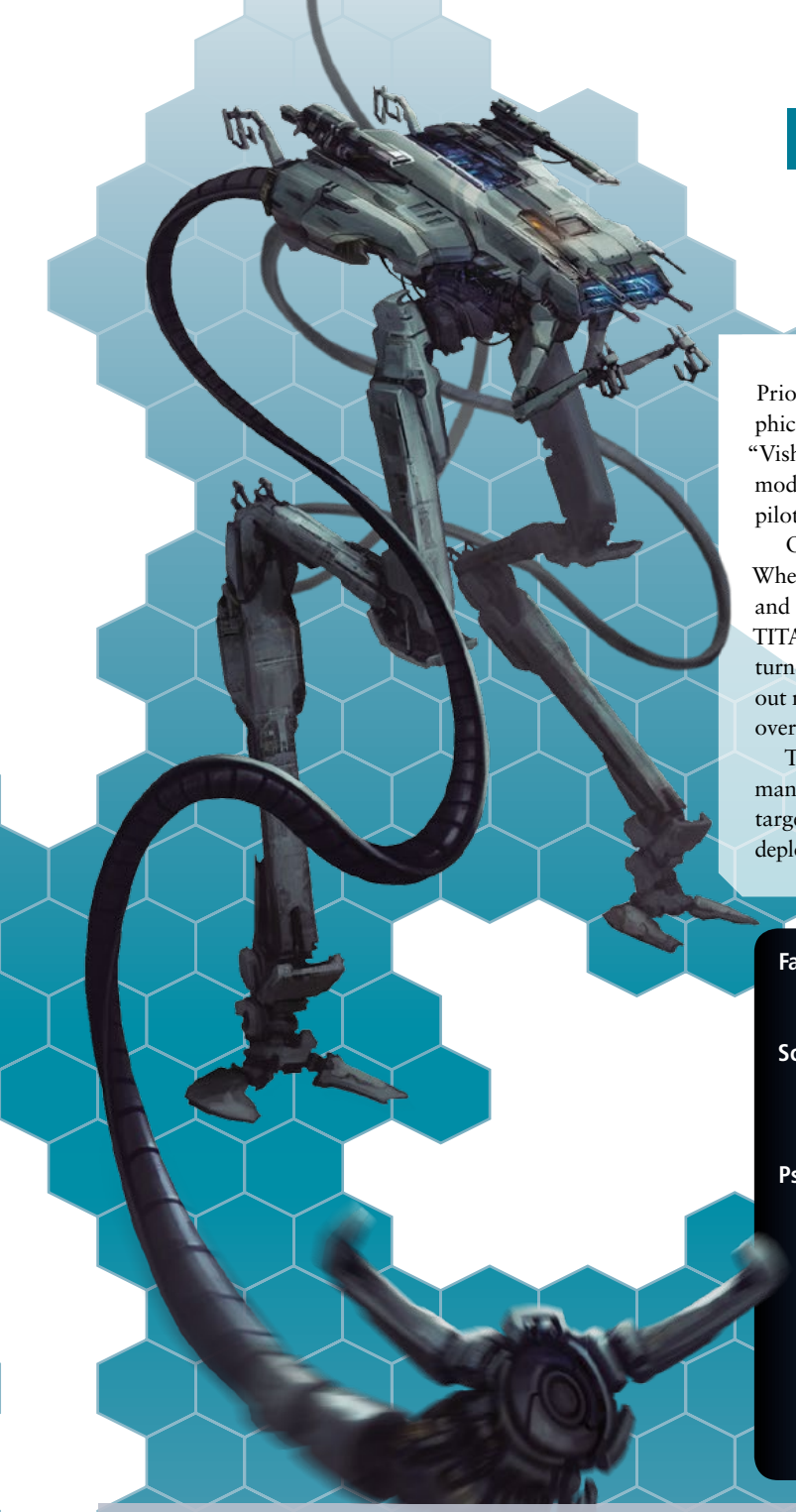
Skills: Exotic Melee Weapon: Tail Swipe 50, Freerunning 30, Infiltration 55, Intimidation 60, Unarmed Combat 60

Ware: Echolocation, Enhanced Smell

Stress Test: SV (1d10 ÷ 2, round down) + 2

Traits: Large Size (+10 to hit)

Frenzy: If a vydra smells or tastes blood, it will enter into a murderous frenzy. Increase REF and Fray by +10, and the vydra can ignore the effects of 2 wounds. This effect lasts until the vydra has no more prey to kill in the immediate vicinity and it has gorged on its victim(s).



WARBOT

TYPE
TITAN

NICHE
EARTH, QUARANTINE ZONES, TITAN-VISITED EXOPLANETS

Prior to the Fall, various Earth militaries produced models of anthropomorphic mecha favored for heavy combat operations. Variations on the bipedal "Vishnu" design were the norm among first-world armored divisions. Early models housed a pilot, but these were quickly phased out in favor of remotely piloted designs that made room for more armor and ammunition storage.

One of the historic turning points in the Fall was the Battle of Svalbard. When Canadian, United States, and Russian mecha ceased fire, turned around, and began marching on their own support units, it became hard to deny direct TITAN involvement in hostilities. Around the mecha, warbots were hacked and turned against their masters. Of course, by then, factories had been pumping out new-and-improved mechs—dubbed "warbots"—for a week, preparing to overwhelm hardened targets around the globe with sheer firepower.

These massive, armored tanks sport two legs, four arms, a pair of tentacle manipulators, and a vast array of weapon systems capable of independent targeting. Taking advantage of their mobility and firepower, the TITANs deployed warbots as their main vehicle for physical destruction around the globe.

Factotum ■ Multiple governments redeployed piloted mecha models against the newer tech being jammed by TITANs. The machines just hacked the old models too, locking the powerless operators inside to starve to death.

Scent.In.Hell ■ I know there's no real reason to mistrust a Vishnu or other mech any more than a car, a servitor bot, or a synth—they can all be hacked, right?—but a lot of people, myself included, get really twitchy around mechs of any sort. The warbots really did a number on our psyche.

Psychscraper ■ The TITANs were better at psychological warfare than most people realize. I helped one sentinel who fought on Mars during the Fall. His unit was ordered to stop a fireteam of warbots interfering with TQZ evacuations. They were relieved at first to not be shooting at something that ate their bullets and spit them back. But when they found the warbots, they saw the TITAN machines had scooped up a bunch of ruster refugees and chained them to their chassis—literally using them as human shields. The ploy distracted the unit enough that the warbots nearly punched through their line. They had a choice of shooting through screaming civilians or getting railgunned into mist, though, so they did what they had to do. Years later he was still having nightmares about it.

WARBOT

Threat Level: Red
Numbers: 1–4

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
15	20	15	20	5	25

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	7	2	80	16	160

Laser Pulser Cannon: 60, DV 4d10, SA, Range 60/200/300/500, Ammo 200
Railgun Machine Gun: 70, DV 2d10 + 8, BF/FA, Ammo 500
Seeker Launcher: 60, DV 6d10 + 24, AP –8, SS, Ammo 20 HEAP Homing missiles
Torch: 50, DV 3d10 + 4, AP –4, SS, Ammo 100
Claws: 50, DV 2d10 + 6, Reach (+10)
Tentacles: 40, DV 1d10 + 6, Reach (+20). If the MoS exceeds the target's Durability, they are subdued (p. 204, *EP*).
Stomp: 50, DV 5d10, Reach (+20)
Fray/Armor: 50, 20 (40)/20
Perception: 50, 70 Vision
Move: 4/20 Walker
Skills: Beam Weapons 60, Exotic Melee Weapon: Tentacles 40, Infiltration 30, Kinetic Weapons 70, Seeker Weapons 50, Spray Weapons 50, Unarmed Combat 50
Ware: 360-Degree Vision, Anti-Glare, Chameleon Skin, Chem Sniffer, Electrical Sense, Enhanced Vision, Lidar, Magnetic System, Pneumatic Limbs, Radar, T-Ray Emitter
Gear: 10 Splash Grenades with various nanoswarms
Traits: Very Large Size (+30 to hit)
Stress Test: SV 1d10
Shockwave Shield: Warbots can calculate the impact point of an explosive projectile or shockwave and create a temporary superheated pocket of air with a laser-generated electric arc that will absorb the blast. This provides 20 points of Energy Armor against blast effects, including seekers and grenades. This is only effective against attacks the warbot has spotted, and may only be used against one attack per Action Turn. This shockwave shield has 20 uses before it must be recharged, which takes 2 hours.
Notes: Other common weapon systems include plasma rifles, particle beam bolters, and buzzers (with disassembler swarms)

WASTEWALKER

TYPE
EXSURGENT

NICHE
EARTH, DERELICT HABITATS, QUARANTINE ZONES



Smooth white masks, floating out of shadows and flame, looking inexplicably hungry through doll's eyes and expressionless dashes of mouths—the wastewalkers on the march were the last sight of many transhumans. These exsurgent cyborgs were employed by the TITANs as elite infantry during the Fall. Wastewalkers are intelligent and tactically minded, and they frequently commanded other exsurgents and TITAN puppets as shock troops, indirect fire spotters, and cannon fodder.

The masks themselves are the infection vector. Wastewalkers (or other TITAN minions) restrain captured biomorphs and force them to wear the mask until it melds to the face, beginning the transformation. Incorporation into the wastewalker social structure takes place within the hour, and the new exsurgent begins following orders from the tribe's alpha. The victim grows tall and wiry over the course of days: the virus stretching and perverting the joints of the fingers, arms, and legs. Claws extrude from the nails and elbows, poking out of the featureless black polymer armor that slowly replaces the skin. Thin cylinders protrude from a hump on the back, each housing a hive of fabricator or disassembler nanoswarms. Excess body mass from the transformation moves to the hump and is used as feedstock. No one has ever successfully recovered an ego from a biomorph infected with the wastewalker strain.

Since the departure of the TITANs, feral wastewalkers look to their tribe's alpha for orders. They communicate in bursts of encrypted digital static. Groups survive by hunting small animals, gathering vegetation, and assaulting any transhumans foolish enough to come close. In especially lean times, wastewalkers go dormant and allow their hives to feed on surrounding materials.

Aun Leung ■ Don't touch the dead ones. The mask is an infection vector: back to front. Near the end of the elevator defense, I watched a merc pick up a mask to look at it. Next time I saw him, he was wearing it and playing for the hostile team.

Das Frettchen ■ The mask is interesting. The strain has to be nanotech based, right? There's a dozen better ways to deliver that payload. Using noh theater masks is blatant psyops.

WASTEWALKER

Threat Level: Orange
Numbers: 4–8

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
15	30	15	15	2	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	6	2	50	10	100

Claws: 40, DV 1d10 + 2, AP –1
Railgun SMG: 80, DV 2d10 + 5, AP –5, SA/BF/FA, Ammo 100
Frag Grenades (x4): 70, DV 3d10 + 6, AP –4, sticky
Fray/Armor: 70, 14/8
Perception: 40, 60 Hearing/Vision
Move: 4/20 Walker
Skills: Freerunning 60, Infiltration 40, Kinetic Weapons 80, Profession: Small Unit Tactics 60, Throwing Weapons 70, Unarmed Combat 40
Ware: Chameleon Skin, Claws, Efficient Digestion, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Respiration, Enhanced Vision, Medichines, Neurachem (Level 1), Skinlink, Specialized Hives (1 Disassembler, 1 Fabricator), Temperature Tolerance, Toxin Filters
Stress Test: SV 1d10
Gear: Nanobandages, Smoke Grenades (4), Spindle and Climber, Utilitool



WHIPLASH

TYPE
XENOFAUNA

NICHE
SUNRISE

Found on the exoplanet Sunrise, the whiplash expresses both plant and animal features. An arboreal carnivore, the whiplash moves among tree trunk and branches using its grasping roots, seeking out the best place to ambush prey. It extends a sap-covered vine from its mouth, extending up to 4 meters, which draws critters attracted to its sweet scent. The sap is extremely sticky, and once a creature is caught against the feeding tendril, it quickly entangles them and rolls them up to the whiplash's waiting maw above. Trapped victims are swallowed into an acid-filled digestive sac that slowly dissolves them.

Whiplashes primarily feed on small plant-mammals and the local bird analogs, but larger and older whiplashes are capable of catching and eating transhumans and similar-sized creatures. Whiplashes are not smart enough to distinguish synthmorphs and bots as non-prey; they will grab anything that brushes against their feeding tendril and spit out whatever they can't digest a few days later.

Several subspecies of whiplash exist, including ones with a clawed tendril and another that prefer to repeatedly pull up and drop their victims to the ground, tenderizing them before eating.

Eludere ■ I know a gatecrasher who managed to cut himself out of one of these. Then he fell to the ground and broke his neck.

Das Frettchen ■ Whiplash pod morphs aside, quite a few of these have been brought back to the solar system for private collections. Oligarchs seem to have a fondness for keeping these on their estates.



WHIPLASH

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 1–4

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
1	15	10	20	5	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
5	6	1	35	7	53

Feeding Tendril: 50, Reach (+10), see *Subdual,* p. 204, *EP.* On its next action, medium and smaller subdued targets are swallowed. Swallowed victims cannot see, hear, or breathe (*Asphyxiation,* p. 194, *EP*), are restricted (–30 to physical actions), and suffer DV 1d10 per Action Turn (armor does not apply). A whiplash that takes 2 wounds internally will regurgitate anything swallowed on its next action.
Fray/Armor: 20, 0/0
Perception: 40
Move: 4/16 Walker
Skills: Climbing 50, Infiltration 50, Unarmed Combat 40 (Subdual 50)
Ware: Chameleon Skin
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)
Clawed-Tendril Variant: 50, DV 2d10 + 3, AP –2, Reach (+10), if the MoS exceeds the target's Durability, they are subdued, as with the feeding tendril above.
Ground-Bashing Variant: After subduing a victim with its tendril, the whiplash will raise and drop them on each subsequent action (without letting go), inflicting 2d10 DV falling damage (only half Kinetic Armor applies), until the target no longer struggles, before swallowing.
Larger Variant: As above, but with SOM 25, Unarmed Combat 50 (Subdual 60), Large Size trait (+10 to hit), DUR 45, WT 9, DR 68

WHIPPER

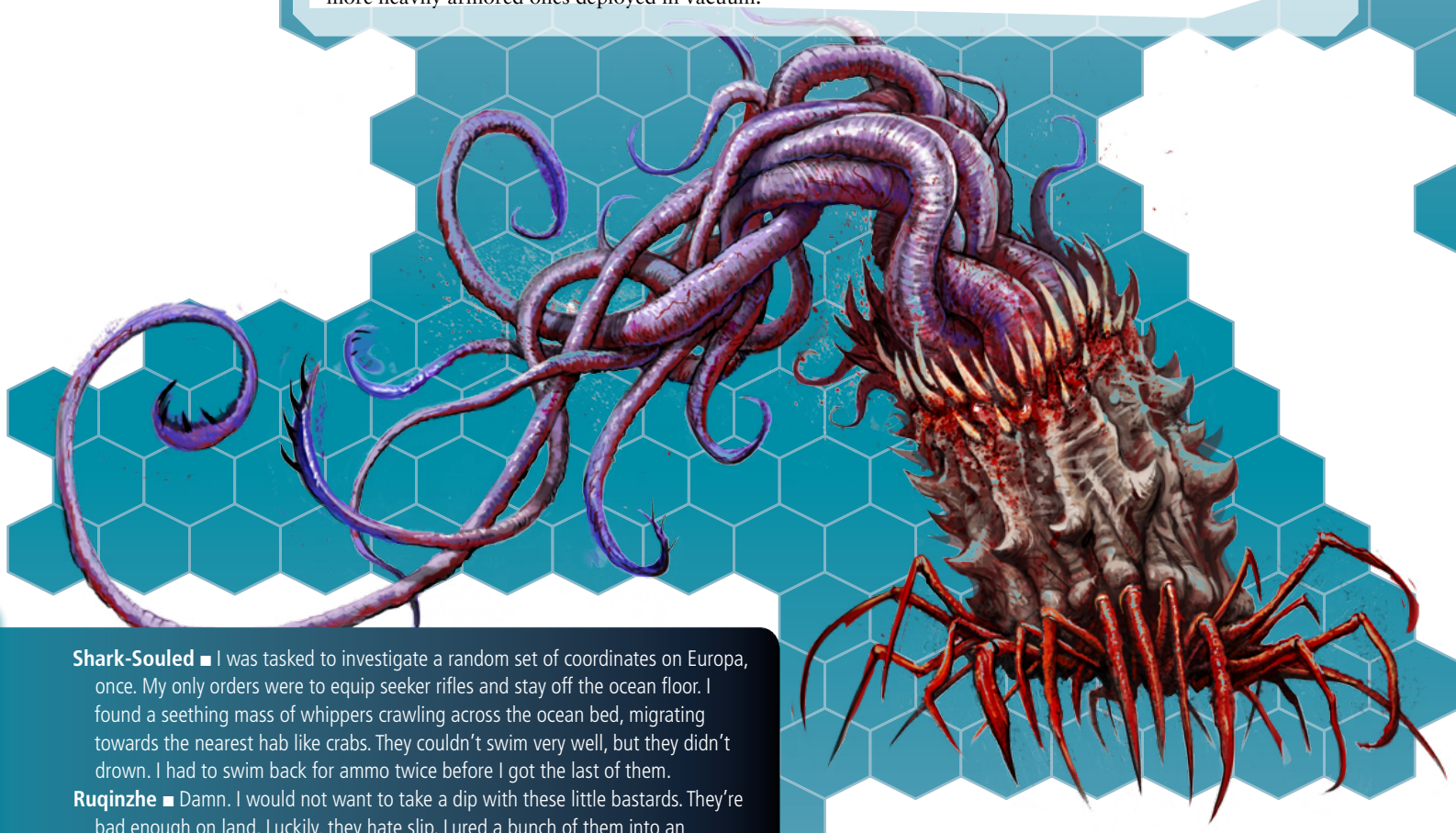
TYPE
EXSURGENT

NICHE
EARTH, DERELICT HABITATS, QUARANTINE ZONES

These creatures have barrel-shaped torsos about one meter long. From the bottom, they skitter around on an irregular splay of dozens of vaguely arachnid legs. From the top, a mass of 3-meter long, whipping tentacles protrudes. The textured ones coated in sticky mucus are used for grabbing and holding (either victims or tools). The other two tentacles quickly narrow into sharp blades made of hardened bone. Their constant flailing in 360-degree arcs slices through an unarmored transhuman with ease.

Whippers are the result of biomorphs transformed by a biological strain of the xenomorph virus, though TITAN machines and other exsurgent have also been known to mass-produce whippers from corrupted healing vats. Their lack of armor and small stature means they ambush victims in large numbers and avoid open conflict with armed foes whenever possible. Whippers were primarily used in the Fall against evacuating transhuman civilians. Dozens of whippers would herd and contain fleeing refugees, driving panicked crowds closer and closer together until the tentacle whips could eviscerate multiple targets in a single swipe.

Whippers are sometimes known to use tools and weapons. Several variations have also been spotted, including more heavily armored ones deployed in vacuum.



Shark-Souled ■ I was tasked to investigate a random set of coordinates on Europa, once. My only orders were to equip seeker rifles and stay off the ocean floor. I found a seething mass of whippers crawling across the ocean bed, migrating towards the nearest hab like crabs. They couldn't swim very well, but they didn't drown. I had to swim back for ammo twice before I got the last of them.

Ruqinzhe ■ Damn. I would not want to take a dip with these little bastards. They're bad enough on land. Luckily, they hate slip. Lured a bunch of them into an abandoned bubble hab once and coated the floor after me. It's dangerous to be waving your fucking boneless scythes around when sprinting onto a frictionless surface. I'd release the XP if Firewall would let me.

WHIPPER

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 4–24

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
20	30	20	30	15	25

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
20	10	2	35	7	53

Tentacle Whip: 55, DV 2d10 +1, AP –1, Reach (+20)
Tentacle Grab: 55, Reach (+20), if MoS exceeds target's Durability, they are subdued (see *Subdual,* p. 204, *EP*).
Fray/Armor: 50, 0/0
Perception: 50, 70 Vision
Move: 8/40 Walker
Skills: Beam Weapons 40, Climbing 40, Free Fall 40, Freerunning 50, Infiltration 50, Intimidation 50, Kinetic Weapons 40, Unarmed Combat 45 (Tentacles 55)
Ware: Enhanced Vision, Neurachem (Level 1)
Stress Test: SV 1d10
Armored Variant: Add Carapace Armor (12/10), Medichines, Oxygen Reserve, Radiation Tolerance, Temperature Tolerance, Vacuum Sealing
Undersea Variant: Add Swimming 40, Echolocation, Eelware, Gills, Hydrostatic Pressure Adaptation, Temperature Tolerance (Cryonic)

WILD ARTIFICIAL

TYPE
TECH

NICHE
MARS

The booming hacker lab culture on Mars inspires experimentation with robotic shells and non-standard, low-level AIs. The AIs range from animal mind imprints and "uplifted" complex systems to non-human mindsets and the artistic, weird, and flat-out bizarre. Some projects lead to interesting results and even breakthroughs in ALI development; many more are hindered by improper programming and a lack of understanding of non-human mind-state implementation; quite a few are simply disasters.

A significant number of these experiments escape, are abandoned, or are intentionally set free. A booming population of wild artificials now haunts the Martian wilderness and dome-city back alleys. These feral bots form animal-like packs, claim territory, and even hunt and compete with Martian wildlife or other wild bots. On occasion, they sabotage machinery or attack transhumans.

Collector wild artificials are detailed on p. 156.



Jake Carter ■ I know nomads who've trained the feral packs on their routes. They use 'em to keep an eye out for trouble or good salvage.

Rivet ■ I've heard about a wild house-sized mech, running polar bear mimicware on its brain circuits. Whoever made it went a bit overboard with the maternal instincts—it collects other bots and hunks of scrap and treats them like its children. It's grown attached and over-protective of gear belonging to other folks and gotten hostile when they objected to it taking their things away.

Stitch ■ Some of these are more like living art installations or political statements. You've probably heard of the paperclip maximizer—a thought experiment about the potential x-risk of AI. The idea was that if you made an AI with the prime directive of making paperclips, it might decide that humans could get in the way of its goal, or even turn it off, decreasing the potential for more paperclips. Therefore, the AI would be motivated to kill all humans and use all of the planet's resources to make paperclips. Guess what? There are packs of wild artificials carrying makers on their chassis that grab whatever they can find, disassemble it, and fabricate paperclips. They've found paperclip chains over 50 klicks long out in the wilds.

LOPER

Threat Level: Orange

Numbers: 3–8

Lopers are panther-sized quadrupeds that incorporate pursuit-predator traits. They are exceptionally fast and skilled at tracking and target recognition. Griefers send lopers to hunt real-world targets; the victims are pinned and "globbed" with a payload of freeze foam or worse. Barsoomian cells program lopers to chase down Tharsis League vehicles, drop caltrops, and mess with the Red Eden project. Loper blueprints and software are available on illicit bot-hacker mesh sites, and so numerous variants are deployed in the wild, including lopers modified as contraband couriers or equipped with explosive payloads for assassination.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	20	20	20	1	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
5	8	1	35	7	70

Pinning Leap: 50, DV 2d10 + 1, if loper moved at least 5 meters before attack and MoS exceeds target's Durability, the target is knocked down and pinned (*Subdual,* p. 204, *EP*).

Pneumatic Bite: DV 2d10 + 1

Freeze-Foam Glob: 40, cone area effect, Range 5/10/15/20, target must make a REF x 3 Test or be incapacitated in quick-hardening foam (Armor 10/Durability 20) for 12 hours.

Fray/Armor: 50, 7/10

Perception: 30, 50 Vision

Move: 6/48 Walker

Skills: Freerunning 50, Infiltration 40, Scrounging 40, Spray Weapons 40, Unarmed Combat 50

Ware: Enhanced Vision, Lidar, Pneumatic Limbs

Smuggler Variant: Chameleon Skin, Hidden Compartment, Thermal Dampening

Caltrop Variant: Deploys caltrops over a 5-meter radius. Characters or wheeled vehicles/bots that move through the area without spotting the caltrops (Perception Test at –30) suffer DV 1d10 + 3 (armor does not protect); vehicles must must a Pilot Test or crash.

Explosive Variant: Hidden Compartment, DV 6d10 + 20, AP –4, blast area effect

WRAPPER

TYPE
EXSURGENT

NICHE
DERELICT HABITATS, OUTER FRINGE



These exsurgents look like four-armed starfish, capable of walking like quadrupeds on their spiny limbs. Each appendage ends in thin, clawed digits useful for climbing and tool use. The arms also house sensory bands for hearing and infrared vision. The underside of the creature houses a circular mouth ringed with hooked teeth. This mouth can distend outwards like a leech, enveloping much larger prey than it might seem. Wrappers are ideally suited for microgravity habitats due to a series of vent sacs capable of significant thrust.

Wrappers derive their name from a tendency to attack from above, enveloping a transhuman's head and restraining the arms with their legs. The creatures like to band together and nest in a single location, collectively ensuring maximum casualties rather than competing with each other for prey. Lone wrappers have been known to follow other groups of exsurgents, waiting to strike until transhumans are busy engaging other threats. As such, more advanced exsurgents sometimes grow wrappers from infected body banks to leave in their wake, covering their migratory trail.

The wrapper digestive system is incapable of processing synthetics; after consuming the head of a transhuman, they pass cortical stacks and other neurological implants by defecating out of their mouths. Small, TITAN-hacked bots and other wild artificials sometimes lurk outside wrapper territory, salvaging tech from these waste piles. A preponderance of small bots waiting for implant carrion is a successful tactic for tracking the location of otherwise stealthy wrappers.

Sun Bu'er ■ Seriously, stop tanking my edits on this. I'm starting to get pissed.

Cacophonous ■ For the last time, there is no hard evidence of wrappers taking over the bodies of biomorphs. I know you Fortean folks have never read about a monster you didn't want to meet, but there are no confirmed "mind wrapper" exsurgents. Sorry to disappoint.

Sun Bu'er ■ We have no reason to doubt all those reports on the mesh. With all the neurological subversion techniques already available to exsurgents, just eating a transhuman isn't an optimal evolutionary adaptation. Wrappers are grown from biomorph stock already; it would be very easy to neurologically bridge with a victim's spinal column and puppet the morph around.

Sequencer ■ It's an interesting theory, but there's no evidence to back it up, Sun. These threat wikis aren't love letters. First you write your fan-fic; next thing you know, you'll genehack one. Exsurgents don't need our help.

HEAD WRAPPER

Threat Level: Yellow
Numbers: 4–8

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
20	20	20	30	10	30

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
30	10	1	45	9	68

Subdual: 60, if the MoS exceeds the target's Durability, they are blinded and subdued (see *Subdual,* p. 204, *EP*).
Bite: 50, DV 2d10 + 3, AP –5
Claws: 50, DV 1d10 + 2, AP –2
Fray/Armor: 40, 8/8
Perception: 50, 70 Hearing
Move: 4/16 Thrust Vector, 3/12 Walker
Skills: Free Fall 50, Infiltration 60, Unarmed Combat 50 (Grapple 60)
Ware: Chameleon Skin, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision (Infrared Only), Hibernation, Vacuum Sealing
Stress Test: SV 1d10

MIND WRAPPER

Threat Level: Orange
Numbers: 4–8

Mind wrappers use their impressive async abilities to mind control victims, puppeteering them as they ride their bodies. Use the same stats as head wrappers, with the following additions:

Skills: Control 70, Psi Assault 50, Sense 60
Traits: Psi (Level 2), Psi Chameleon, Psi Defense (Level 2)
Common Psi Sleights: Drive Emotion, Ego Sense, Decerebration, Onslaught, Sense Infection, Static, Thought Browse
Puppeteer Psi Sleight: 70, opposed with WIL x 2, Touch Range, Sustained, Strain DV (1d10 ÷ 2) + 3. The wrapper controls the target's mind. Every turn, victim can break free with an Opposed Test, their WIL versus wrapper's Control skill. See p. 179.

XENOSAMPLER

TYPE
TECH

NICHE
EXOPLANETS



XENOSAMPLER

Threat Level: Orange
Numbers: 1–3

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
25	15	15	30	10	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	9	2	45	9	90

Stunner: 50, DV 1d10 ÷ 2, shock effect (p. 204, *EP*), SA, Ammo 200
Freezer: 50, cone area effect, SA, Ammo 20, REF x 3 Test or trapped. Foam has Armor 10, Durability 20, and breaks down after 12 hours.
Sampling Needle: 70, DV 1d10, AP –3.
Critter Control Pole: 60, Reach (+10). With an MoS of 30+, target is snared around neck. Attempts to move will result in DV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down, armor does not protect) and asphyxiation (p. 194, *EP*).
Fray/Armor: 40, 15/15 with Lotus Coating
Perception: 50, 70 Hearing/Smell/Vision
Move: 4/36 Thrust Vector
Skills: Academics: Astrobiology 80, Animal Handling 60, Beam Weapons 50, Exotic Melee Weapon: Control Pole 60, Exotic Melee Weapon: Sampling Needle 70, Flight 70, Infiltration 50, Investigation 50, Medicine: Veterinary 50, Scrounging 80, Spray Weapons 50, Unarmed Combat 50
Ware: Chameleon Skin, Chemical Sniffer, Eelware, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Lidar, Medichines, Neurachem (Level 1), Radiation Sense, Shape Adjusting, Specialized Hive: Scouts, T-Ray Emitter
Gear: Blue Box Gate Control Unit
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)
Notes: Xenosamplers may be incredibly old, damaged, and/or malfunctioning. They may carry large xenoflora and -fauna sample payloads, some still alive and/or dangerous.

Xenosamplers are AI-piloted drones send out by an unknown alien species to explore exoplanets via the Pandora gate network, collect samples of alien life, and return home. For reasons unknown, these xenosamplers are unable to find their way back. Perhaps the gate connections no longer work, perhaps they were damaged or lost their memories, or perhaps the civilization that created them no longer exists.

Xenosamplers are maneuverable thrust-vector flyers, often ranging considerably far from the nearest Pandora gate in search of life. They use a variety of tools to observe and take samples, up to and including stunning creatures with an electro-laser. Some have been known to set non-lethal traps to capture subjects for sampling and study.

Xenosamplers are not particularly hostile—they simply wish to gather their samples and move on. They are wary around sapient life. If presented with overwhelming firepower or hostility, they will flee.

Though xenosamplers sometimes work in small groups, they are typically found alone. Firewall is not yet aware of xenosamplers, though there has been at least one hostile encounter between xenosamplers and hypercorp gatecrashing teams.

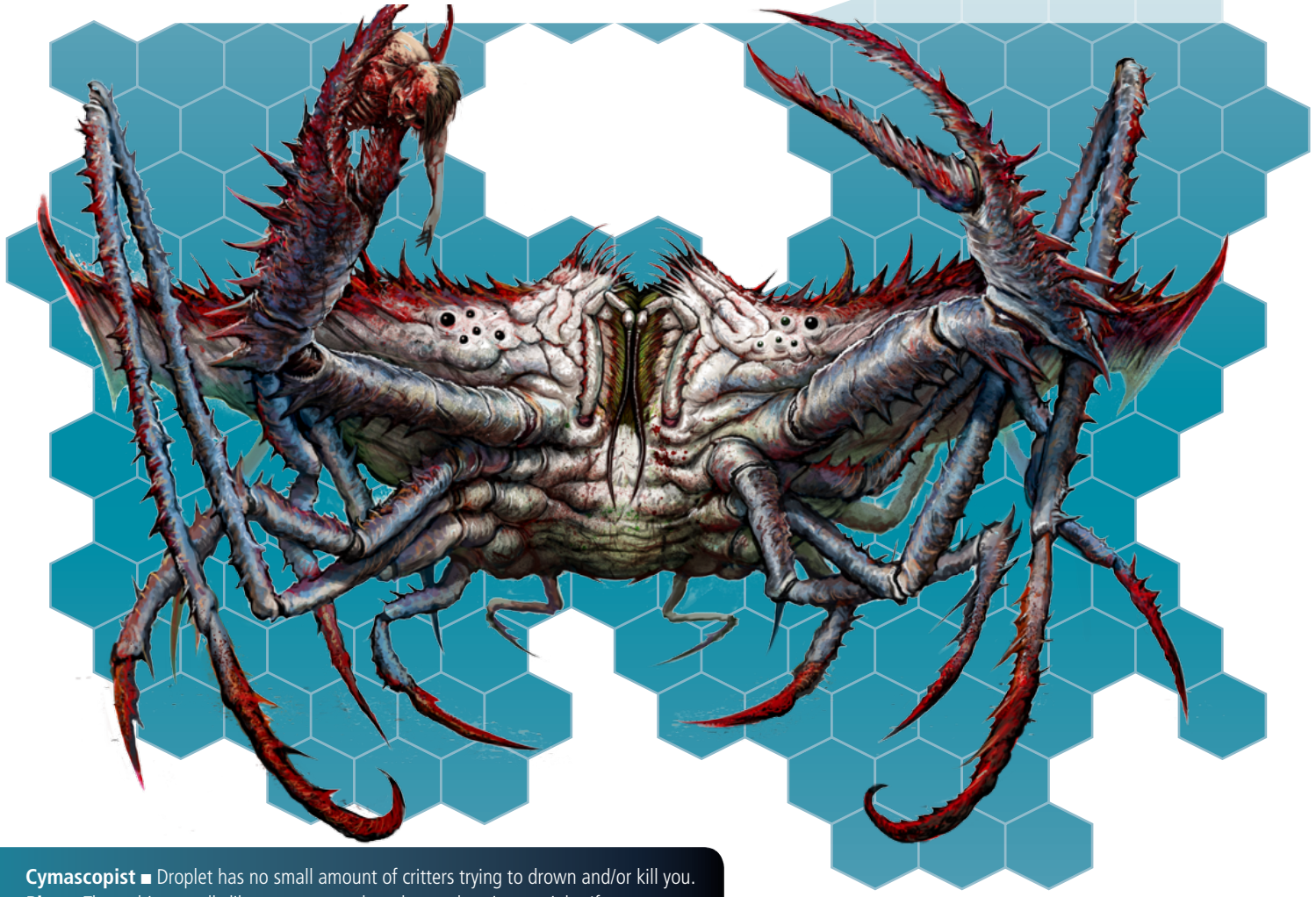
ZOMBIE CRAB

TYPE
XENOFAUNA

NICHE
DROPLET

Zombie crabs are arthropods found on the exoplanet Droplet. Very similar in body plan to the crabs of Earth, zombie crabs are significantly larger and spikier. They are carnivorous and not particularly intelligent.

Zombie crabs are so named because they spread a toxoplasma-related protist pathogen that affects the behavior of those infected. Zombie crabs are nocturnal and hunt prey at night, and they are quite skilled at moving quietly along the surf and shore to ambush victims. Not all of their targets are killed and eaten, however—some are deliberately wounded but kept alive, infected with the protists. The pathogen usually spreads quickly throughout the host. They then become infectious, spreading the disease to others. Over the course of a week, the infection drives up their temperature and hobbles their higher brain functions, causing them to seek out a cooling mechanism—usually water. The desired effect is to lure the victims out to the ocean, where they either drown or are dragged under the waves for a zombie crab feast.



Cymascopist ■ Droplet has no small amount of critters trying to drown and/or kill you.
Pivo ■ These things really like to gang up when they go hunting at night. If you see one, expect a half dozen more lurking beneath the waves.

ZOMBIE CRAB

Threat Level: Orange
Numbers: 4–8

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
1	10	5	10	5	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
5	3	1	50	10	75

Claw: 50, DV 2d10 + 4, Reach (+10), damaged characters must make a DUR x 2 Test (+30 with medichines) or become infected by the protist pathogen.
Bite: 50, DV 3d10, AP –3, same infection risk as claws
Fray/Armor: 30, 12/12
Perception: 35
Move: 4/20 Walker
Skills: Climbing 30, Freerunning 40, Infiltration 60, Intimidation 50, Scrounging 60, Swimming 40, Unarmed Combat 50
Ware: Carapace Armor, Gills, Temperature Tolerance
Traits: Large Size (+10 to hit)
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)
Protist Infection: After 5 days, the victim's temperature spikes and they lose 5 points from all aptitudes each day, down to a minimum of 5. Victims receive the Modified Behavior (Enforced: Seek Out Water) trait.

ZEPHYR

TYPE
XENOFAUNA

NICHE
FATA MORGANA



Zephyrs are unusual predators discovered living in the upper layers of a gas giant's atmosphere. It is strongly suspected that zephyrs were genetically engineered and seeded along with numerous other species to create a unique ecosystem on the exoplanet Fata Morgana by an unknown civilization. Zephyrs are the apex predators of this environment, feeding on the balloon creatures and jelly-like floaters that drift among the haze and storm banks.

Though whale-sized, zephyrs have massive gas-filled bladders that keep them afloat in denser atmosphere and powerful wings for maneuverability. Sophisticated biological nanobots repair radiation damage and keep their gas bladders filled. They have been known to swallow drones and cloud skate morphs whole and to grab and drag prey with their tail arms.

Lovelace ■ The other creatures in Fata Morgana's ecosystem are fascinating, if mostly harmless. Someone went through a great deal of trouble to create life that could survive in a gas giant, quite possibly for millions of years after they departed. It's an impressive work of art.

Cryptid ■ As far as we can tell, zephyrs don't sleep, though they do sometimes descend to denser atmospheres where they can float and rest. Their reproductive cycle is also unusual; their children cling to them like parasites until they are capable of flight on their own.

ZEPHYR

Threat Level: Red
Numbers: 1

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	10	10	1	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
5	4	1	120	24	180

Bite: 55, DV 2d10 + 6, Reach (+20), large and smaller targets are swallowed whole with an MoS of 30+. Swallowed victims take DV 1d10 per minute; armor protects but is reduced by damage.
Wing Bash: 45, DV 3d10 + 6, Reach (+20)
Tail: 55, DV 2d10 + 6, Reach (+20), struck targets that are medium or larger sized may be subdued (p. 204, *EP*) with a Quick Action
Fray/Armor: 20, 12/8
Perception: 40, 60 Hearing
Move: 8/60 Winged
Skills: Infiltration 40, Flight 60, Unarmed Combat 45 (Bite/Tail 55)
Ware: Direction Sense, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Respiration, High-G Adaptation, Hydrostatic Pressure Adaptation, Medichines, Swim Bladder, Temperature Tolerance (Cryonic), Wings
Traits: Very Large Size (+30 to hit)
Stress Test: SV 1d10 ÷ 2 (round down)

CRITTER CATALOG

The following creatures include various neogenetics, smart animals, xenofauna, and other minor threats.

BOLATEE

Xenofauna

Niche: Europa

Numbers: 6–24

This 5-meter long fish analog feeds on microkrill and moves in schools. Its branching masses of tendrils resemble jellyfish tentacles or roots.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
1	10	5	15	1	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	4	1	55	11	83

Entangle: 50, Reach (+10), see *Subdual,* p. 204, *EP.* On subsequent actions, entangled victims will be grabbed by other bolatees and torn apart, inflicting DV 2d10 (armor does not protect).

Fray/Armor: 50, 7/4

Perception: 30

Move: 4/36 Swim

Skills: Swimming 70, Unarmed Combat 50

Ware: Echolocation, Hydrostatic Pressure Adaptation, Temperature Tolerance (Cryonic)

Traits: Large Size (+10 to hit)

BRONTOPS

Xenofauna

Niche: Teragula

Numbers: 1–8

Brontops are docile, moose-sized, wading grazers found on Teragula. They subsist on a combination of microbes and arthropod-analogs filtered from the swamp waters, fungus, and cartilage/coral—except when infected by a hookbladder (p. 118), in which case they subsist on goring and stomping other animals to death to feed baby hookbladders.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
1	20	15	15	1	40

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	6	1	60	12	90

Bite: 60, DV 2d10 + 4, AP –1

Gore: 70, DV 3d10 + 4, AP –3

Stomp: 60, DV 3d10 + 4

Fray/Armor: 40, 5/5

Perception: 50

Move: 8/32 Walker, 4/16 Swim

Skills: Climb 40, Fray 40, Freerunning 80, Swimming 70, Unarmed Combat 60 (Gore 70)

Traits: Large Size (+10 to hit)

CHERUB

Smart Animal

Niche: Church of Luminous Saints

Numbers: 1 per ordained member

These small transgenic primates are used by the Church of Luminous Saints to spy on and advise ordained members, They are biosculpted to look like tiny winged angels.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	15	20	15	5

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	7	1	20	4	30

Bite: 45, DV 1d10 ÷ 2

Cyberclaws: 45, DV (1d10 ÷ 2) + 3

Fray/Armor: 50, 0/0

Perception: 35, 55 Hearing/Smell

Move: 8/48 Winged, 4/20 Walker

Skills: Climbing 50, Flight 50, Infiltration 60, Palming 40, Scrounging 60, Unarmed Combat 45

Ware: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Chameleon Skin, Clean Metabolism, Cyberclaws, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Ghostrider Module, Grip Pads, Prehensile Feet, Prehensile Tail, Puppet Sock

Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)

CLOWN SPRITE

Xenofauna

Niche: Echo IV

Numbers: 4–20

These cute, omnivorous, winged avian-primates live in a symbiotic relationship with Echolalian land anemones. They are playful and prone to pranks, but they also lead explorers to the hungry and deadly anemone tentacles.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	15	20	15	5

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
5	7	1	20	4	30

Bite: 20, DV 1d10 ÷ 2

Fray/Armor: 40, 0/0

Perception: 35, 55 Hearing/Smell

Move: 8/48 Winged, 4/20 Walker

Skills: Climbing 50, Flight 50, Infiltration 60, Scrounging 60, Unarmed Combat 20

Ware: Chameleon Skin, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Grip Pads, Prehensile Feet, Prehensile Tail

Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)

Immunity: Clown sprites are immune to land anemone venom.

COLLECTOR WILD ARTIFICIAL

Tech

Niche: Mars

Numbers: 1–12

These wild artificials (p. 151) are small, agile, cat-sized bots programmed with animal behaviors for scavenging and hoarding. They scurry on spider-like legs across any available surface, collecting small objects that strike their interest. Collectors are fond of shiny electronics and powered items, which they hoard in rat-like warrens. They will attack if cornered or prevented from stealing. Their forelimbs have painful pincers for grabbing and retractable blades for cutting.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	20	15	20	5	5

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
5	7	1	15	3	30

Blades: 40, DV 1d10 +2, AP –1
Fray/Armor: 50, 3/3
Perception: 30
Move: 4/28 Walker
Skills: Blades 40, Climbing 60, Freerunning 50, Scrounging 60, Unarmed Combat 40
Ware: Chameleon Skin, Electrical Sense, Grip Pads, Magnetic System
Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)

CROCOSAUR

Xenofauna
Niche: Echo IV
Numbers: 1–2
Looking like a crocodile-tyrannosaurus mash-up, this predator stalks the marshes and shores of Echo IV, eating fish and other megafauna.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
1	15	15	15	1	25

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	6	1	90	18	135

Bite: 50, DV 5d10, AP –5, Reach (+20)
Tail Swipe: 40, DV 3d10 + 5, Reach (+20), struck victims must make a SOM x 3 Test or be knocked down
Fray/Armor: 30, 10/8
Perception: 40, 60 Hearing/Smell
Move: 6/40 Walker
Skills: Exotic Melee Weapon: Tail 40, Freerunning 30, Infiltration 50, Intimidation 40, Swimming 40, Unarmed Combat 50
Ware: Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell
Traits: Very Large Size (+30 to hit)

DINO PET

Neogenetic
Niche: Transhuman Habitats
Numbers: 1–6
Genehackers revived a number of extinct dinosaur species as small, colorful, and lovable pets. These popular companions are dog-sized or smaller. Varieties include pterosaurs, stegosauruses, anklyosauruses, triceratops, and many others.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	10	15	10	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	5	1	15	3	23

Bite/Horn/Tail: 30, DV 1d10 ÷ 2, AP –1
Fray/Armor: 30, 5/5
Perception: 40
Move: 4/16 Walker or 4/30 Winged
Skills: Freerunning 30 or Flight 50, Infiltration 30, Intimidation 40, Scrounging 30, Unarmed Combat 30
Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)

FUR COAT

Neogenetic
Niche: Transhuman Habitats
Numbers: 1
This outerwear is a living, designed organism. They may express fur, scales, quills, horns, or other features. They have tiny mouths and must be fed. They typically come with controls so that they wriggle, shiver, massage, purr, or prickle up on command.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
1	1	1	5	1	1

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
1	1	1	15	3	5

Fray/Armor: 5, 0/0 to 3/3
Perception: 5
Move: 1/2 Walker
Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)

GARDENER INSECT SWARM

Smart Animal
Niche: Transhuman Habitats
Numbers: 1–3 Swarm Units
Interbred and gene-modified bee and wasp variations pollinate habitat gardens. Growing up to 8 centimeters, they live in large hives, produce honey, prey on other insects, and help with gardening. Some are trained for security or assassination, attacking when certain pheromonal cues are released.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
2	15	15	20	1	5

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	7	1	50	—	50

Swarm: Bees and wasps use the rules given for *Swarms* (p. 168). Stats given are for one swarm, not individual insects.
Sting: 40, DV 1d10, half armor applies
Fray/Armor: 50, 0/0
Perception: 30, 50 Smell
Move: 4/30 Winged
Skills: Flight 60, Infiltration 30, Intimidation 30, Scrounging 40, Unarmed Combat 40
Ware: Enhanced Smell, Polarization Vision, Ultraviolet Vision
Assassin Variant: Add Poison Gland with toxin of GM's choice.



GROOTSLANG

Neogenetic

Niche: Fortean, Oligarch Habitats

Numbers: 1–3

The genehackers of Fortean recreated this mythological creature. It is an extremely large snake, equipped with a batch of tusk-like horns around its mouth. Some oligarchs and criminal groups now use them as guardians.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
1	10	10	15	1	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	5	1	65	13	98

Bite: 50, DV 2d10 + 4, AP –3, Reach (+10), injects twitch (p. 324, *EP*)

Tusks: 50, DV 3d10, Reach (+10)

Constrict: 60, if the MoS exceeds the target's Durability, they are subdued (p. 204, *EP*) and take 3d10 DV per Action Turn (armor does not protect)

Fray/Armor: 30, 6/6

Perception: 40, 60 Hearing/Smell

Move: 4/16 Snake

Skills: Climbing 40, Freerunning 30, Infiltration 50, Intimidation 40, Swimming 40, Unarmed Combat 50 (Constrict 60)

Ware: Chameleon Skin, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Poison Gland (Twitch)

Traits: Large Size (+10 to hit)

GUARD DOG

Smart Animal

Niche: Transhuman Habitats

Numbers: 1–3

These smart dogs are trained for security or policing purposes

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	10	15	25	10	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	6	2	30	6	45

Cyberclaws: 50, DV 1d10 + 5, AP –2

Fray/Armor: 40, 3/4

Perception: 40, 60 Hearing/Smell/Vision

Move: 4/24 Walker

Skills: Freerunning 30, Infiltration 30, Intimidation 40, Scrounging 30, Unarmed Combat 50

Ware: Bioweave (Heavy), Cyberclaws, Cybercortex, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Hardened Skeleton, Mesh Inserts, Puppet Sock, Reflex Boosters

HEXANEWT

Xenofauna

Niche: Droplet

Numbers: 1–4

It is speculated that these six-limbed, amphibious smart animals were partially uplifted by the now extinct Amphib civilization. They use one set of limbs as legs, another as arms, and the middle pair for walking, swimming, or manipulation.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	15	10	5	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	5	1	30	6	45

Bite: 20, DV 1d10 + 1

Fray/Armor: 30, 4/3

Perception: 30

Move: 4/20 Walker

Skills: Climbing 40, Freerunning 35, Infiltration 30, Scrounging 60, Swimming 60, Unarmed Combat 25

Ware: Chameleon Skin

HOOKBLADDER ZOMBIE

Xenofauna

Niche: Teragula

Numbers: 1–10

Victims under hookbladder (p. 118) mind control are savage, murderous killing machines. The hookbladders are intelligent enough not to attack other zombies. Use the standard stats for the character/creature, with the following modifications:

Traits: Modified Behavior (Enforced: Kill Everything)

Hookbladder Mask: Because the parasite remains attached to the victim's head, attempts to target it are likely to hurt the victim as well. Treat such attacks as called shots (–10 to hit); if the attacker does not succeed with an MoS of 30+, split the damage evenly between the hookbladder and zombie.

Killing Machines: Hookbladder zombies are pre-occupied with murder, with little regard for their own protection. They receive a +10 modifier to attack; attacks against them also receive a +10 to hit. Zombies are sometimes clever enough to use melee weapons, but are unlikely to use ranged weapons; most simply attack unarmed.

Linked Metabolism: Zombies can "breathe" underwater or in Teragula's atmosphere.

Muses: The hookbladder's minuscule intelligence makes mesh inserts useless, but muses belonging to the victim are unaffected and may contact others via the mesh in search of help. Cutting down a zombie while their muse pleads for mercy inflicts SV 1d10.

Stress Test: SV 1d10

IMMOLATOR DRONE

Exsurgent

Niche: Derelict Habitats

Numbers: 4–16

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
15	20	15	25	15	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	8	1	35	7	53

Transhumans driven mad by the initial stages of glory exsurgent infection (pp. 121 and 175) are referred to as immolator drones. Drones do not undergo any physiological changes, but they develop an intense nesting instinct related to the site of initial infection, increased libido to promote the abduction of further mates, and an urge to cannibalize transhuman flesh. They can be identified by their filed down teeth, poor hygiene, and surgical trophies. The stats below represent a bouncer morph.

Wasp Knife: 40, DV 1d10 + 4, AP –2; +2d10 DV if triggering pressurized air in vacuum

Stunner: 40, DV 1d10 ÷ 2, shock effect

Fray/Armor: 40, 6/7 armor clothing

Move: 4/20 Walker
Perception: 40
Skills: Beam Weapons 40, Blades 40, Deception 40, Free Fall 60, Hardware: Aerospace 40, Infosec 30, Intimidation 40, Pilot: Spacecraft 40, Programming 40, Scrounging 40, Unarmed Combat 40
Ware: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Prehensile Feet
Traits: Limber (Level 1), Mental Disorder (OCD), Modified Behavior (Enforced: Cannibalism, Nesting, Obey Breeders/Mother), Socially Graceless
Gear: Light Vacsuit, Specs, Utilitool
Exsurgent Infection: Drones can infect biomorphs with the glory exsurgent virus (p. 175) by exchanging bodily fluids.
Socially Impaired: Immolators suffer –20 on Social Skill Tests other than Intimidation with non-immolators

MAZIMUS

Xenofauna
Niche: Europa
Numbers: 1–3
These five-meter Europan sea predators are similar to viperfish. They can swim in excess of 55 kph and bite through plate steel.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
1	15	15	20	1	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	7	1	60	12	90

Bite: 60, DV 3d10 + 8, AP –8
Move: 8/60 Swim
Fray/Armor: 40, 4/6
Perception: 55
Skills: Fray 40, Swimming 80, Unarmed Combat 60
Traits: Large Size (+10 to hit)

MORAVECIAN REPAIR BOT

Tech
Niche: Moravec
Numbers: 1–4
These repair bots remain hidden in underground bunkers until called forth to repair damage to the vast network on the exoplanet Moravec. These bots have three arms and rounded heads.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	15	10	5	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	5	1	75	13	150

Laser Pulser: 40, DV 2d10 + 5, SA, Ammo 100. Stun Mode: DV 1d10, shock effect (p. 204, *EP*).
Fray/Armor: 30, 12/12
Perception: 40, 60 Vision
Move: 4/12 Walker
Skills: Beam Weapons 40, Freerunning 30, Hardware: Electronics 50, Hardware: Robotics 50, Interfacing 50, Infosec 50, Scrounging 30, Unarmed Combat 30
Ware: 360-Degree Vision, Electrical Sense, Enhanced Vision, Fractal Digits, Grip Pads, Headlights, Lidar, Magnetic System, Nanoscopic Vision, Radar, Wrist-Mounted Tools
Gear: Disassembly Tools, Engineer Nanoswarm, Fabber, Fiber Eye, Hardware: Electronics Tools, Repair Spray, Utilitool

OCT SWARM

Xenofauna
Niche: Luca
Numbers: 1–3 Swarm Units
These eight-legged bugs live in massive underground colonies identified by the large mounds they build aboveground.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
3	15	15	10	1	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	5	1	60	—	60

Swarm: Octs use the rules given for Swarms (p. 168). Stats given are for one swarm, not individual octs.
Bite: 70, DV 2d10, half armor applies
Fray/Armor: 40, 0/0
Perception: 40
Move: 3/16 Walker
Skills: Climbing 60, Freerunning 40, Infiltration 40, Scrounging 70, Unarmed Combat 60 (Bite 70)
Ware: Echolocation

POLICE BABOON

Smart Animal
Niche: Mars, Transhuman Habitats
Numbers: 2–7
Police baboons are transgenic Cape baboons modified for obedience, heightened intelligence, and longer attention spans. Baboon units remain popular for tracking, crowd control, and guarding prisoners, though they have been known to turn as a pack upon their handler in stressful situations.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	10	15	15	5	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
5	6	2	30	6	45

Bite: 50, DV 1d10 + 2
Shock Baton: 30, DV 1d10 + 3, shock effect (p. 204, *EP*)
Fray/Armor: 40, 8/9 (armor vests + bioweave)
Perception: 30, 50 Vision
Move: 4/20 Walker
Skills: Climbing 40, Clubs 30, Freerunning 50, Intimidation 50, Scrounging 30, Unarmed Combat 50
Ware: Bioweave Armor (Light), Enhanced Respiration, Enhanced Vision, Neurachem (Level 1), Temperature Tolerance

RUST HOUND

Smart Animal

Niche: Mars, Transhuman Habitats

Numbers: 1–3

Rust hounds are large, transgenic dogs able to breathe the Martian atmosphere.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	10	15	15	10	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	6	2	30	6	45

Bite: 50, DV 1d10 + 2

Fray/Armor: 50, 2/3

Perception: 60, 80 Hearing/Smell

Move: 4/24 Walker

Skills: Freerunning 30, Intimidation 30, Scrounging 30, Unarmed Combat 50

Ware: Bioweave Armor (Light), Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Neurachem (Level 1), Temperature Tolerance, Toxin Filters

SCIURID

Xenofauna

Niche: Haplopelma

Numbers: 4–16

The sciurid is a large, omnivorous, six-legged, flying, squirrel-like mammal. They are intelligent and inquisitive, and exhibit behavior such as altruism, laughter, language mimicry, tool use, and targeted hunting.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	15	15	10	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
5	6	1	25	5	38

Bite: 20, DV 1d10 ÷ 2

Fray/Armor: 35, 0/0

Perception: 40

Move: 4/20 Walker

Skills: Climbing 50, Freerunning 55, Infiltration 40, Scrounging 40, Unarmed Combat 20

Ware: Gliding Membrane, Prehensile Tail

Traits: Limber (Level 1), Small Size (–10 to hit)

SMART CAT

Smart Animal

Niche: Transhuman Habitats

Numbers: 1–3

Though smart cats deign to let humans pet and feed them, they are even more stubborn and independent than their baseline forebears. Nevertheless, some have been trained for surveillance and other purposes.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	15	15	5	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
20	6	1	15	3	23

Bite: 30, DV 1d10 + 2, AP –1

Fray/Armor: 30, 0/0

Perception: 30, 50 Hearing/Smell/Vision

Move: 4/20 Walker

Skills: Climbing 30, Freerunning 30, Infiltration 40, Scrounging 30, Unarmed Combat 30

Ware: Claws, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision

Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)

SMART DOG

Smart Animal

Niche: Transhuman Habitats

Numbers: 1–3

Uplifted canines have rudimentary intelligence and limited communication skills. Transhumans keep them as companions and guardians. They are sometimes modified with implants.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	10	15	15	10	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	6	1	25	5	38

Bite: 40, DV 1d10 + 2

Fray/Armor: 30, 0/0

Perception: 40, 60 Smell

Move: 4/24 Walker

Skills: Freerunning 30, Intimidation 30, Scrounging 30, Unarmed Combat 40

Ware: Enhanced Smell

SMART HAWK

Smart Animal

Niche: Venus, Transhuman Habitats

Numbers: 1

Enhanced versions of peregrine falcons and other predatory birds are common in large, open habitats, and the hobby of falconry has made a comeback. Some smart falcons have been trained for surveillance or security purposes, tracking or finding subjects from overhead.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	15	15	5	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	6	1	15	3	23

Beak/Claws: 40, DV 1d10 + 2, AP –1

Fray/Armor: 50, 0/0

Perception: 50, 70 Hearing/Vision

Move: 4/40 Winged

Skills: Flight 60, Infiltration 30, Scrounging 40, Unarmed Combat 40

Ware: Claws, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision

Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)

SMART MONKEY

Smart Animal

Niche: Transhuman Habitats

Numbers: 1–4

Uplifted monkeys are sometimes trained as aides. Criminal groups use them for larceny and pickpocketing.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	15	15	15	5

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	6	1	20	4	30

Bite: 30, DV 1d10 ÷ 2

Fray/Armor: 30, 0/0

Perception: 30

Move: 4/16 Walker

Skills: Climbing 50, Freerunning 30, Infiltration 30, Palming 30, Scrounging 30, Unarmed Combat 30
Ware: Prehensile Feet, Prehensile Tail
Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)

SMART RACCOON

Smart Animal
Niche: Transhuman Habitats
Numbers: 1–4
Raccoon helpers are employed as personal assistant and for many of the same tasks as smart monkeys. Some are even trained to get along in free fall, though they are mostly found in habitats with real or spin gravity.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	15	10	5	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	5	1	15	3	23

Bite: 20, DV 1d10 – 4
Fray/Armor: 20, 0/0
Perception: 30, 50 Hearing/Smell
Move: 2/8 Walker
Skills: Climbing 40, Freerunning 20, Infiltration 40, Scrounging 40, Swimming 30, Unarmed Combat 20
Ware: Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Grip Pads
Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)

SMART RAT

Smart Animal
Niche: Transhuman Habitats
Numbers: 1–20
Transhumans keep uplifted rats as companions, sometimes carrying them in pockets or hoods.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	15	15	5	5

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	6	1	5	1	8

Bite: 20, DV 1, Reach (–10)
Fray/Armor: 40, 0/0
Perception: 20
Move: 4/16 Walker
Skills: Climbing 40, Freerunning 30, Infiltration 50, Scrounging 50, Unarmed Combat 20
Traits: Very Small Size (–30 to hit)
Notes: A large number of rats might attack as a swarm (p. 168) with Bite 50, DV 1d10 +3, AP –3, and Durability 30.

SMART ROACH

Smart Animal
Niche: Transhuman Habitats
Numbers: 1–4
Often biosculpted with bright colors and patterns, uplifted roaches are kept as pets and janitorial aides.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
1	10	10	15	5	5

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
5	5	1	5	1	8



Bite: 10, DV 1
Fray/Armor: 30, 0/0
Perception: 20
Move: 4/20 Walker
Skills: Climbing 30, Freerunning 30, Free Fall 30, Infiltration 50, Scrounging 50, Unarmed Combat 10
Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)

SPAMBOT BOT MINION

Tech
Niche: Derelict Habitats
Numbers: 1–12
The minions made by killer spambots (p. 124) are programmed to attack identified TITAN machines with suicidal ferocity. Some escape and go rogue, similar to wild artificials (p. 151).

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
10	10	10	10	5	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	4	1	20	4	40

Seeker Pistol: 30, DV 2d10 + 10, SA, Ammo 6 HE micromissiles
Kinetic Pistol: 30, DV 2d10 + 2, AP –2, SA/BF/FA, Ammo 50
Fray/Armor: 20, 4/4
Perception: 30
Move: 4/20 Walker or 8/40 Rotor
Skills: Flight 30, Freerunning 30, Interfacing 40 (Jamming 50), Infosec 40, Kinetic Weapons 30, Seeker Weapons 30, Unarmed Combat 20
Jamming: Minions will attempt to jam TITAN communications and radar using universal jamming (p. 262, *EP*).
Spam Mist: Everyone within mesh range of the spambot suffers a –30 Perception Test modifier due to AR spam overload. This may be cleared with an Interfacing Test at –30, but will return after 10 minutes as the spam compensates for the filtering; see *Traffic Filters and Mist,* p. 248, *EP.* Alternatively, AR may be turned off, but this will disable tacnets and hinder other gear.
Suicide Bot: These bots are suicide bombers. DV 3D10 + 6, AP –4, blast area effect.

SQUIDLING

Smart Animal
Niche: Micrograv Transhuman Habitats
Numbers: 1–6
Favored by some uplifted octopi as pets (and by others as snacks), squidlings are .25-meter-long squid adapted for air breathing, their natural water jet locomotion replaced by powerful jets of air for micrograv propulsion. Most lack ink sacs, these being a hazard in space habitats. They aren't exactly affectionate, but they instinctively shoal with octomorphs for protection and will eagerly devour any scraps dropped to them.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
1	10	10	15	1	5

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	5	1	5	1	8

Bite: 40, DV (1d10 ÷ 2) – 1
Fray/Armor: 60, 0/0
Perception: 20, 40 Smell
Move: 4/20 Walker
Skills: Free Fall 60, Scrounging 20, Unarmed Combat 40
Ware: Enhanced Smell
Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)

SROC

Xenofauna
Niche: Synergy
Numbers: 1–3
This large flying creature resembles a scaly bat. Though it looks reptilian it is warm-blooded. Aggressive in the wild, colonists have domesticated some as riding beasts using implants.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
1	15	15	15	5	20

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	6	1	35	7	53

Bite: 40, DV 2d10 + 1, AP –1
Fray/Armor: 45, 2/3
Perception: 50
Move: 4/20 Walker
Skills: Flight 60, Infiltration 30, Scrounging 40, Unarmed Combat 40
Ware: Enhanced Vision (Infrared Only)
Traits: Large Size (+10 to hit)

SWARM CAT

Smart Animal
Niche: Scum swarms
Numbers: 1–6
Swarm cats are the creation of scum gene-hackers. No two swarm cats tend to be alike—many of them are more like hyenas or mongooses—and each is likely to have a unique assortment of enhancements. The statistics given below should be used as a rough guidelines for other cats.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	15	15	5	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	6	2	30	6	45

Bite: 50, DV 1d10 + 1
Claws: 50, DV 1d10 + 2, AP –1
Fray/Armor: 50, 2/3
Perception: 30, 50 Hearing/Smell/Vision
Move: 4/20 Walker
Skills: Free Fall 20, Freerunning 40, Infiltration 40, Intimidation 20, Scrounging 30, Unarmed Combat 50
Ware: Adrenal Boost, Basic Biomods, Claws, Cybercortex, Bioweave Armor (Light), Eelware, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Mesh Inserts, Neurachem (Level 1), Prehensile Tail

TITANIAN CARIBOU

Smart Animal
Niche: Titan
Numbers: 1–6
Titanian caribou have dark, blubbery skin and antlers. Their muzzles contain chemical sniffers to detect the carbonaceous

compounds upon which they "graze" and fractal fingers for breaking down ice, rock, and carbon grit.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	15	15	5	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	6	1	30	6	45

Antler: 50, DV 1d10 – 2
Fray/Armor: 50, 2/3
Perception: 60, 80 Smell/Vision
Move: 4/20 Walker
Skills: Freerunning 60, Scrounging 30, Unarmed Combat 50
Ware: Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Fractal Digits, Long-Term Life Support, Temperature Tolerance (Cryonic)

TRANSHUMAN SMART MINE

Tech
Niche: Earth, Quarantine Zones, Derelict Habs
Numbers: 5–10
Models used in pre-Fall military conflicts had puppet socks to enable piloting by soldiers in the field. Smart mines operational today have gone wild artificial (p. 151), either following the last orders of their masters or pursuing random glitches in their AI.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
10	20	15	10	10	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	5	1	20	4	40

Suicide Strike: 50, DV 2d10 +4 per charge, AP –4, ignores armor with an MoS of 30+, blast area effect, –2 DV per meter. If the target's Wound Threshold and/or Armor Value exceed 10, the mine will detonate an additional charge (for each). Each mine carries 6 charges. Extra charges are ejected. For every 2 wounds inflicted, there is a 20% chance of a crippled or amputated limb; victims losing legs move at a quarter their normal movement rate until healed or repaired (pp. 208 and 327, *EP*).
Fray/Armor: 20, 0/0
Perception: 30, 50 Hearing/Smell/Vision
Move: 4/12 Walker
Skills: Demolitions 40, Free Fall 30, Freerunning 40, Infiltration 40, Unarmed Combat 40 (Suicide Strike 50)
Ware: 360-Degree Vision, Basic Mesh Inserts, Chameleon Skin, Cyberbrain, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Lidar, Puppet Sock, Radar
Traits: Small Size (–10 to hit)
Volatile: Smart mines that suffer a wound have a 20% chance of exploding: DV 1d10 + 2 per charge, AP –4, blast area effect.

TYRANNOSAURUS

Smart Animal
Niche: Sky Ark
Numbers: 1
Resurrected from extinction by genehackers on the exoplanet Sky Ark, this large predator grows up to 15 meters in length and 4 meters tall, and weighs up to 7 tons.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	15	15	5	25

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	6	1	90	18	135

Bite: 50, DV 5d10, AP –5, Reach (+20)
Fray/Armor: 30, 3/4
Perception: 40, 60 Smell
Move: 6/40 Walker
Skills: Freerunning 40, Infiltration 30, Intimidation 50, Unarmed Combat 50
Ware: Enhanced Smell
Traits: Very Large Size (+30 to hit)

VENOMOUS MARMOSET SWARM

Smart Animal
Niche: Titan
Numbers: 1 Swarm Unit
A Titan Tech prank that got out of hand, these bands of ten-centimeter-tall poisonous primates were thought to have been eradicated, but it's always possible some got away.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
5	15	15	15	5	10

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
10	5	1	60	—	60

Swarm: Use the rules given for *Swarms* (p. 168). Stats given are for one swarm, not individual marmosets.
Bite: 50, DV 1d10, half armor applies, injects BTX poison (p. 323, *EP*)
Fray/Armor: 60, 0/0
Perception: 40
Move: 3/16 Walker
Skills: Climbing 80, Freerunning 30, Infiltration 50, Scrounging 70, Unarmed Combat 50
Ware: Poison Gland (BTX), Prehensile Feet, Prehensile Tail

VOHAULIAN

Alien
Niche: Vohaul
Numbers: 1–3
This silicon-based life form is sapient and beginning to establish a primitive tool-using civilization in Vohaul's hellish Venusian depths. They live in the surface's liquid sulfur pools.

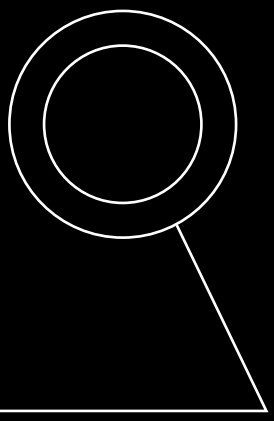
COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM
10	10	15	15	5	15

WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR
15	6	1	25	5	38

Claw: 30, DV 1d10 + 1, AP –2
Fray/Armor: 30, 8/8
Perception: 30
Move: 4/20 Swim, 3/12 Walker
Skills: Infiltration 30, Scrounging 40, Swimming 40, Unarmed Combat 30
Ware: Hydrostatic Pressure Adaptation, Temperature Tolerance



GAME INFORMATION



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NEW DANGERS

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Unless otherwise noted, the rules and stats for threats presented in this book supersede those given in previous *Eclipse Phase* books.

USING X-THREATS IN PLAY

The default Firewall campaign obviously encourages the use of x-threats. However, other aspects of *Eclipse Phase's* setting can suffer if the GM threatens extinction without forethought, and those aspects may be what attracted players to the game in the first place. For instance, constantly throwing exsurgents at the group dulls the same terrifying alienation that makes the virus so narratively interesting. Characters who fight abominations on a daily basis will become less and less effective as the emotional trauma accumulates. An apocalypse-in-every-scenario play style might please some groups, but eventually x-risks will just become a cliché that is no longer taken seriously.

MAKING X-THREAT SCENARIOS

When designing x-threat scenarios, it helps to keep a few principles in mind.

GROUPS BESIDES FIREWALL WANT TO SURVIVE TOO

An exsurgent making trouble for a group of stalkers in the New Mumbai Quarantine Zone is Firewall's problem. An exhuman cult planning an attack on a Lunar city is both the LLA's *and* Firewall's problem. A returned TITAN slowly hollowing out a moon to make a matrioshka brain is *everyone's* problem. No matter what conflict frames a campaign, ensure that the setting's response scales accordingly. Much of *Eclipse Phase's* intrigue comes from the intersection of government and faction interests. A common cause like survival makes for great storytelling by drawing each group's ideology into starker contrast.

EVERY LEAD ISN'T AN X-THREAT

If every clue exposes some planet-eating nanoswarm, pretty soon the clandestine nature of Firewall isn't going to make much sense anymore. After all, if a group of 3–6 people encounters universal annihilation every time they step out the door, what horrors must be going on elsewhere? How could anyone stay blind to it? Such games make the nuanced and mature motivations of other factions start feeling hollow. To keep Firewall clandestine and justify its secrecy, it's far better to realize that x-threats benefit from remaining hidden. Thus, threats of a feather flock together. Perhaps the insane egos are the result of a Cognite experiment gone wrong rather than a basilisk hack. Maybe the nanoplague is cover for an Oversight black op. Even if the x-threat is real, the adventure could focus on a gang manipulated into serving as a TITAN pawn, saving the true villain for a climax later in the campaign. Red herrings and false leads don't have to be worthless or insignificant, because …

TRANSHUMANITY IS SCARY ENOUGH

If we left out the TITANs, exsurgent virus, and ETI, *Eclipse Phase* would still feature existential crisis, body horror, endless simulspace hells of psychological torture, fiercely oppressive military regimes, crushing poverty, inventively cruel crime syndicates, insane new cults, and a bevy of other scary antagonists. Just because a scenario doesn't end in an x-threat doesn't mean the sentinels won't get into trouble. Characters have motivations beyond mere survival, and threatening those beliefs makes for as good a game as one that determines the fate of the species.

WHY NOW, IN AF 10?

When introducing an x-threat, try to remember that the TITANs can win—any time they want to. They left and stopped actively spreading the exsurgent virus. That reason alone is why transhumanity survived. The progress achieved between the Fall and AF 10 is only partially the result of Firewall's intervention. The majority of the responsibility lies in the enemy finding other interests. When using an exsurgent strain or TITAN weapon, be sure to explain what revived the threat or engineered it anew.

TRANSHUMANS DON'T RANK

The same thing that makes the exsurgent virus so scary is the same thing that allows transhuman survival: it's too effective. Infected populations are wiped out so sensationally that quarantine counter-measures can usually halt the spread before it's total. An enemy that feared transhuman survival would ensure increased latency in the virus, allowing it to spread silently before reaping victims. But remember, regardless of the GM's interpretation of the ETI, it is defined by its cosmic superiority to us. If the ETI knows fear at all, it does not do so in any way that characters can comprehend, and it does not work with a single species in mind. Its actions, no matter how harmful, do not take transhumans into specific consideration. The cosmos may be cold and horrifying and deadly … but don't mistake animosity for interest. Even the TITANs, whose super intelligence already makes their motivations inscrutable, were driven mad by the virus—they are literally "super crazy." All of this means GMs should make sure only other transhumans have identifiable intent. When it comes to TITANs, exsurgents, and the ETI, callous indifference is both the source of terror and, sometimes, a sentinel's only salvation.

THREAT RULES

The five threat types used to define the antagonists in the *Threat Recognition Guide*, p. 94 , each adhere to specific rules.

AIs and digital **TITAN** software, unless otherwise noted, follow the rules given for AIs and infomorphs on pp. 264–265, *EP,* and pp. 138–150, *Transhuman.*

Alien life, **Xenofauna,** and biological **Exsurgents** all have the Non-Mammalian Biochemistry trait (p. 94, *Transhuman*). Biological **Exhumans** and **Neogenetics** may have the Non-Human or Non-Mammalian Biochemistry traits (p. 94, *Transhuman*), depending upon their particular form. Drugs, toxins, chemicals, and medical care may not work on these creatures or may have a startling different effect than expected (GM discretion). Psi sleights might also not work against these creatures or may be more difficult (p. 222, *EP*).

TITAN machines, **Tech,** and synthetic **Exhumans** and **Exsurgents** follow the rules for synthetic morphs (p. 143, *EP*) and bots (pp. 195–196, *EP*).

Async threats, and any others with the Psi trait, follow the rules for psi (pp. 220 and 371, *EP*).

THREAT LEVELS

The monsters and machines detailed in the *Threat Recognition Guide*, p. 94, are each listed with a *Threat Level* (p. 94). This rating provides a rough baseline for the type of challenge it would present to a standard squad of sentinels.

Yellow threats represent mooks and minions—creatures that are usually only a threat in large numbers. Yellow threats can be a more serious danger to a smaller group of PCs or individuals, especially if they lack combat skills. Because yellow-level creatures are so weak, one solid hit will usually take them out. For quicker combat, we recommend treating yellow enemies as one-shot, one-kill opponents. Encounters with yellow threats serve to instill a brief bit of action, to complicate a scene where the characters are facing other skill, environmental, or technical challenges, or to include a bit of slapstick humor. Yellow threats typically have skills of 40 and Durability in the 10–25 range.

Orange threats are individually about as capable as a PC. They make good one-on-one challenges or can present a unit threat to a full Firewall team. Scenes with orange-level threats are ideal for mid-scenario challenges, tense unexpected encounters, or to keep the PCs busy while an important NPC escapes. Orange threats usually have skills around 60 and a Durability between 30 and 50.

Red threats are more dangerous. A few red-level threats, or even an individual, poses a major challenge to an entire group of PCs. Casualties—or at least serious injuries—are a real possibility. Red-level encounters should be used sparingly, as they may deplete the group's resources. Red threats typically have skills around 80 and Durability scores between 50 and 80.

Ultraviolet threats are boss-level antagonists. A well-equipped Firewall team will find them difficult to take down, and character death is a real possibility, if not a likelihood. They are best reserved for the climax of a scenario, or even a full campaign. If they make an earlier appearance, they should only engage the team quickly before moving on. Ultraviolet threats have skills of 80+ and Durability scores exceeding 80.

TAILORING CHALLENGES

The Threat Levels provided assume a Firewall team of 4–6 characters with a mix of skills, abilities, and gear; some characters are combat-oriented, while others are less so. It's important to design your scenarios so that the challenges are suitable for the characters.

If the group of PCs is smaller, less combat-ready, or simply poorly equipped, you should tone down the challenge level. Aside from simply picking a lower level threat, you could reduce the number of creatures that appear with a higher-level threat or reduce their skills by about –20. You could also remove some of their more dangerous abilities, reduce their armor, or saddle them with impediments appropriate to the situation (such as being caught without cover in a firefight).

If the PCs are more numerous, more combat-capable, or are toting around loads of armor and heavy weaponry, you'll probably need to up the ante. Your options include using higher-level threats, increasing the skills of lower-level threats by around +20, equipping creatures with extra armor or more potent weaponry, increasing the DV they inflict, or buffing their Durability or Speed stats.

Beyond tweaking stats, the GM always has the option of changing a creature's behavior. Have the threat attack the toughest character who can soak up the damage rather than tearing apart easier targets. If the PCs are getting trounced, have their opponents get cocky and make some tactically unwise decisions, such as leaving cover or switching to flashier but less lethal attacks. If the PCs are mopping up the bad guys without breaking a sweat, have them take cover, break out the big guns, call in reinforcements, or try and disable a few PCs with shock weapons. Don't forget the usefulness of hacking the PCs to limit their capabilities. To bump up a challenge, include one creature from a higher threat level in a group of lower-threat opponents.

Not all of the critters and machines have ranged attacks—particularly some of the xenofauna. This means that a well-armed team could theoretically cut them down from a distance. To overcome this, use surprise, trick the PCs into a close-quarters situation, obscure the environment with fog or smoke, or give the critters extra numbers to use as cannon fodder while the rest close in for melee.

Note that some ultraviolet threats—creepers, fractals, self-replicating nanoswarms—are very difficult to completely destroy. These baddies can be

introduced earlier, because the PCs might very well temporarily take them out or at least drive them off. They will be back, however, and will relentlessly adapt to the PC's capabilities. The second or even third encounter should be much more difficult. The final boss fight should be all but impossible to win—but the PCs should be given options for escaping or at least completing their mission.

Moxie for Threats

We do not encourage giving Moxie to run-of-the-mill NPC antagonists. Giving Moxie to Yellow or Orange-level opponents adds to the bookkeeping and will likely slow down the action, as well as make those monsters and machines tougher. We strongly encourage only using Moxie for major NPCs and boss fights that play a pivotal role in a scenario.

How much Moxie should that prime antagonist have? The honest answer is: as much as they need to keep the fight interesting. The primary use of Moxie for NPCs like this is to counter unfortunate strings of bad dice rolls, nullify critical failures that would bring about an abrupt, anticlimactic resolution, or otherwise make the encounter challenging and rewarding to PCs. Avoid using Moxie simply to take PCs out of the fight, but don't be afraid to use it against PCs who are exceptionally tough or armored or otherwise too bad-ass. While you don't necessarily need to pick an exact amount of Moxie in advance, in order to keep your options open, you may want to pick a limit just to avoid going overboard. A good rule of thumb is to assign no more Moxie than any single PC has.

Minimum Damage

Some threats, such as Factors and fractals, take the minimum damage possible from certain types of attacks. In this case, treat each damage die as a result of 1. An attack inflicting 2d10 + 3 DV, in this case, would inflict minimum damage of 5 (2 + 3).

When comparing such attacks against armor, take the lowest of either the minimum damage or the rolled DV minus the armor. For example, an attack of 3d10 + 5 DV would inflict minimum damage of 8. If the attack were against an AV of 10, and the damage roll was 7, 2, and 3—for a total of 17 DV), the DV versus the AV results in a 7 (17 – 10). In this case the threat would take 7 damage, not 8. Alternatively, rather than rolling the damage, simply calculate using the average DV.

Threats and Stress

The threats listed in this book do not include Lucidity, Trauma Threshold, or Insanity Ratings. As NPCs, they are exempt from suffering stress and trauma.

For major NPCs or some specific boss threats, the GM may decide that stress plays a factor. In this case, these statistics are calculated normally, based on their WIL (see p. 138, *EP*).

Mental Disorder (Insane)

Some of the listed threats have the Mental Disorder (Insane) trait. These antagonists are functionally insane. They may be saddled with any derangements or disorders (pp. 210–214, *EP*) the GM desires. GMs are encouraged to pick derangements/disorders that fit the particular NPC's personality, type, or goals, or to mix it up randomly to keep the characters on their toes.

Exsurgent Mental Disorders

Note that most exsurgents are not given the Mental Disorder (Insane) trait, as the victim's mind has been subsumed by the virus and is under its alien control. However, exsurgents often act in erratic, unusual manners—either due to the virus's alien impulses, it's unfamiliarity with the exsurgent's morph, because it does not quite exert complete control, or some other unknown reason. GMs should keep this in mind when describing exsurgent behavior. Take particular note of the *Watts-MacLeod Disorders,* p. 154, *Transhuman.*

Optional Rule: Tougher Stress Tests

Each threat entry lists a suggested amount of stress to inflict when encountered (see *Stressful Situations,* p. 214, *EP*). These assume a violent encounter with the critter or machine.

As written in the core book, stress from such situations is all or nothing. If you make the WIL x 3 Test, you suffer no stress. If you'd prefer to amp up the tension in your game, consider changing this so that success means you take half the amount of stress (round down). This means that characters will be taking stress from encountering hostile threats no matter what—it's simply a matter of how severe. Gamemasters should take care implementing this rule. If you throw the PCs into too many stressful encounters, they could quickly wind up heavily traumatized.

Swarms

A swarm is a collection of tiny critters or bots that act in concert. For game purposes, an entire swarm is handled as a single creature. Their listed aptitudes, derived stats, Durability, and Death Rating are for the entire swarm, not individuals.

Swarms roughly take up an area of 10 x 10 x 10 meters. This is the standard "unit" of a swarm. Larger swarms should be treated as multiple units. An average swarm unit equates to hundreds if not thousands of individual creatures/robots. The space taken up by a swarm is malleable, according to the local landscape. It can condense into smaller spaces, spread out into larger, and wrap around corners, though it must remain contiguous. An overly-extended swarm suffers –1 Initiative and –10 to all actions or worse. At the gamemaster's discretion, a swarm may break into smaller units by splitting its Durability between them.

Swarms may not make strength-based SOM-linked skill tests or aptitude tests.

Swarm Attacks: Swarms attack using the Exotic Melee Weapon: Swarm skill. Because blocking or dodging a swarm is so difficult, the defender opposes with only half their skill.

Swarm Defense: Swarms at full size count as very large targets (+30 to hit), though they may condense into large (+10) or medium sizes (no modifier). They may defend with Fray.

Swarms are immune to wounds. Most attacks against a swarm—melee weapons, kinetic weapons, unarmed attacks, and most beam weapons—simply inflict 1 point of damage per attack. Area-effect weapons, plasma rifles, vehicle collisions, and fire-based attacks do half damage. Plasma grenades do full damage.

EMP weapons are very effective against non-biological, synthetic swarms. EMP attacks inflict DV 2d10 + 5 against such swarms, and they suffer –10 to all actions due to the damaging effect on their communication abilities (this modifier is cumulative with further attacks, up to a maximum –30).

When a swarm takes damage reaching its Durability, the swarm breaks apart and no longer functions as a unit. Individual creatures/bots may still present a nuisance, at the gamemaster's discretion, but they are usually so small as to be insignificant and will simply flee.

Swarms may not be knocked down or subdued. They are immune to called shots, unconsciousness, shock effects, and psi sleights.

Swarms are particularly vulnerable to adhesives, such as freezer attacks. Treat such as an attack as inflicting 2d10 DV. This is not actual damage, but if the total points accumulated equal the swarm's DUR, it is disabled and will suffer a –30 modifier to free itself. If freed, its Movement Rate will be reduced by half and it will suffer –20 to all actions until cleaned off.

Swarms are also more vulnerable to corrosives, chemicals, and nanoswarms; increase their effect by +50% against a swarm.

Swarms suffer 1 DV for each Action Turn they are engaged in melee. Armor mods such as immunogenic and reactive armor inflict 1d10 ÷ 2 DV per Action Turn to swarms.

At the gamemaster's discretion, certain swarms may be vulnerable to vacuum, gravity, or environmental effects. Strong winds may hinder, damage, or break apart a flying swarm, for example.

Transhuman Nanoswarms

Nanoswarms devised and wielded by transhumanity (p. 328, *EP*) use the rules for swarms given above, with the following changes:

Nanoswarms are invisible to normal perception. They may be detected with nanodetectors (p. 327, *EP*) and nanoscopic vision (p. 311, *EP*).

They may not penetrate or invade inside living bodies, though they may attack externally.

They must be sustained by a hive (p. 328, *EP*) or they will deteriorate into ineffectiveness after 2 weeks.

They must be programmed or remotely controlled.

Nanoswarms do not make standard melee or ranged attacks. Instead, anything within the swarm's area, in contact with the swarm, is affected by its capabilities. This effect may not be dodged.

Because they can't be seen, targeting a nanoswarm may suffer a –30 blind fire modifier (usually offset by their +30 very large size modifier) or may simply be a matter of chance as determined by the gamemaster.

Nanoswarms suffer 1d10 DV from area-effect attacks, fire, and plasma weapons.

Nanoswarms are not affected by vacuum, thought they must stick to surfaces to move and cannot hop or fly.

Titan Self-Replicating Nanoswarms

The self-replicating nanoswarms (SRNs) devised and wielded by the TITANs use the rules for swarms given above, with the following changes:

SRNs are invisible to normal perception. They may be detected with nanodetectors (p. 327, *EP*) and nanoscopic vision (p. 311, *EP*). However, physical forms they assemble are visible, though they may be equipped with chameleon coating (p. 303, *EP*), synthetic masks (p. 311, *EP*), or even refractive meta-materials like invisibility cloaks (p. 316, *EP*).

They are self-sustaining and do not require a nanohive.

They are sapient and self-directing, though they may also be teleoperated by TITANs or their minions.

SRNs are not affected by vacuum.

They may replicate any existing nanoswarm (p. 328, *EP*) as well as the functions of any nanoswarm-using gear (smart dust, covert ops tool, repair spray, etc.).

They may nanofabricate new items, materials, or forms at half the standard timeframe (half an hour per Cost category).

When acting as a dispersed swarm, SRNs may not make melee or ranged attacks or dodge with Fray, nor may they make strength-based SOM-linked skill tests or aptitude tests. They may, however, construct physical forms that can make such attacks and tests, including everything from giant mechanical arms to diamond axes to tentacle whips to particle beam bolters. Constructing a simple form takes 1 full Action Turn; more complex or larger forms may take longer.

Physical forms created by the SRN may dodge using Fray. These forms may also suffer wounds and wound modifiers, though both disappear as soon as the swarm unmakes the form.

Because they can't be seen as a dispersed swarm, targeting a SRN may suffer a –30 blind fire modifier (usually offset by their +30 very large size modifier) or may simply be a matter of chance as determined by the gamemaster.

They self-repair damage at the rate of 1d10 per half hour. Swarms that have taken damage equal to their Durability can still self-repair.

At the gamemaster's discretion, they may adapt new defenses against attacks used against them. New defenses take a minimum of 2 hours to devise and replicate throughout the swarm, after which such an attack will inflict minimal or no damage.

Assume they have any skill they need at a minimum of 40. Such skills may rapidly improve as needed.

FEMTOSWARMS

Femtoswarms function the same as self-replicating nanoswarms (above), with the following changes:

Area-effect weapons, plasma weapons, vehicle collisions, and fire-based attacks inflict only 1d10 DV. They are immune to guardian nanoswarms, and do not suffer additional effects from adhesives, corrosives, chemicals, or armor mods.

Femtoswarms may penetrate inside/through objects and materials at the rate of 20 points of Armor/Durability per Action Turn, much like water seeps through fabric. They may penetrate inside most morphs with one Complex Action.

Femtoswarms can disintegrate and/or convert materials (including morphs) into part of their swarm at the rate of DV 1d10 per Action Turn. Once the Death Rating is reached, the morph is completely subsumed into the swarm. Add the Durability of converted morphs/material to the femtoswarm. When 100 points of Durability have been converted, the swarm splits off a second swarm unit.

Femtoswarms may interface with electronics and even implants by touch. Many creeper femtoswarms carry the digital exsurgent virus.

Femtoswarms are capable of constructing almost anything, including mechanical contraptions, electronics, ultra-dense materials, superconductors, refractive metamaterials (invisible), and other exotic types of matter with unusual properties such as zero friction, high tensile strength, extraordinary critical temperatures, and so on. This includes the temporary creation of strange matter (matter with unruly quarks) that is stable at standard gravities, which would repel normal matter, thus providing the repulsion effect described under creepers (p. 101). This effect is not sustainable, however. At the gamemaster's discretion, it can be used as a delayed action to repel attacks; apply a –60 modifier to attacks and reduce all damage by half. This option should be used sparingly; a mistake when creating strange matter could result in an unstable situation where the strange matter briefly becomes negatively charged and instantly converts all normal matter in contact with it to strange matter as well. This would effectively destroy the femtoswarm and inflict DV 10d10 to everything within 1 meter of it.



EXSURGENT VIRUS INFECTION

The various vectors for transmission of the exsurgent virus are detailed on pp. 363–66, *EP*. We strongly recommend using the following updated mechanics instead. These rules turn some of the infection mechanics from Success Tests to Opposed Tests, which make the process more dramatic and reinforces the idea of the virus as an intelligent, super-capable opponent.

INFECTION RATING

Transhumanity is quite familiar with some of the original variants of the virus deployed during the Fall and has created effective countermeasures. Other strains have slipped past unnoticed, been newly modified and released, or are simply more infectious or harder to defeat. Some strains may even be self-adapting, becoming more aggressive over time.

To reflect this, the GM should assign an Infection Rating to each strain. This rating reflects the strain's particular contagion level. Lower-level infections (30–40) are weak or outdated. Mid-level infections (50–60) are newer, but not unresistable. Strong strains (70–80+) are cutting-edge or simply extremely virulent.

BASILISK HACK

A character exposed to a basilisk hack deployed for sensory reprogramming must make an Opposed Test between their COG + INT + SAV against the basilisk's Infection Rating. If the basilisk succeeds, the character is catatonic and paralyzed for 10 minutes, –1 minute per 10 full points of MoS. At the end of this period they are infected. If they are removed from the sensory input before the period ends, they suffer SV 1d10 + 1 per minute exposed and a –30 modifier to all actions. This modifier reduces at the rate of –10 per minute.

AOK HACKS

Apple of Knowledge (AOK) hacks are a subset of sensory-reprogramming basilisk hacks that specifically target victims with certain predesignated skill sets, such as Programming skill or Medicine. If the target does not have the skill at an appropriate level (usually 50+), it simply affects them as an incapacitating input (p. 365, *EP*) or YGBM attack (p. 366, *EP*). Characters with the necessary skill must make an Opposed Test between their COG + INT + SAV against the basilisk's Infection Rating, however they suffer a negative modifier equal to the targeted skill's rating. If they fail, they become deeply obsessed with creating whatever the virus wishes them to make—usually an advanced nanohive or a neogenetic creation, to produce nanoplague or bio-pathogens for that particular strain of the virus. The infected character will ignore everything else beyond basic sustenance—even basic hygiene—until the creation is built.

INCAPACITATING INPUTS

Handle incapacitating inputs as an Opposed Test between COG + INT + SAV and the basilisk's Infection Rating. If the basilisk succeeds, one of the effects described on p. 365, *EP*, applies. Increase the duration by 1 minute per 10 points of MoS.

YGBM HACKS

Similarly, You Gotta Believe Me! attacks (p. 366, *EP*) are treated as an Opposed Test between COG + INT + SAV and the basilisk's Infection Rating. Increase the duration by 1 day per 10 points of MoS.

BIOLOGICAL PATHOGEN

Exsurgent bionanobots are transmitted like other pathogens, via dermal, inhalation, injection, or oral methods (p. 317, *EP*). Chance/random exposure in a contaminated area occurs on a failed MOX x 10 Test.

Exposed biomorphs must make an Opposed Test, pitting their Durability vs. the pathogen's Infection Rating. Toxin filters and medichines provide a +30 bonus. If the pathogen wins, they are infected.

DIGITAL VIRUS

The digital virus may infect any AIs, infomorphs, or even inactive backups by targeting them on their home device (p. 143, *Transhuman*). Cyberbrains may be similarly targeted. Treat this as an Opposed Test, pitting the victim's Infosec skill vs. the virus's Infection Rating. (Inactive backups get no defense.) Active Countermeasures (p. 140, *Transhuman*) provides a +10 bonus. If the digital virus wins, the target is infected in 10 Action Turns, –1 turn per 10 full points of MoS.

INFECTION AS PLOT DEVICE

The rules presented here and in the core book for exsurgent infection assume the GM and players prefer to let dice and chance determine outcomes. For more story-driven games, however, exsurgent infection may be better handled as plot device. In this case, exsurgent infection simply happens or doesn't, depending on the GM's call or player actions. When infection does occur, the emphasis of the story and roleplaying should be placed on what this infection means: how the character becomes aware of it, how it affects them physically and psychologically over time, and what this transition means when dealing with others. Entire scenarios and campaigns can be built around the struggle with infection, the attempt to find a cure, or simply how long the character can go before succumbing and becoming something terrifyingly alien. ■

Targets that succeed but lose the test are aware of the pending infection and suffer SV 1d10. They may attempt to shut down and reboot or otherwise sever the connection, but if they fail another Infosec vs. Infection Rating Opposed Test, the virus has already embedded itself and will continue the infection upon rebooting.

NANOPLAGUE

Contact with the nanoplague equals infection, period. Chance/random exposure in a contaminated area occurs on a failed MOX x 10 Test. Guardian nanoswarms, immunogenic coatings, and nanophages must be overcome first, this requires an Opposed Test between the defense's skill of 30 and the nanoplague's Infection Rating. At the GM's discretion, additional guardian swarms may provide a +10 modifier. If the nanoplague wins, the target is infected in 10 Action Turns, –1 turn per 10 full points of MoS.

INFECTION, RESLEEVING, AND BACKUPS

Depending on the vector/strain of the exsurgent virus, the infection may be mental, physical, or both.

The digital virus and basilisk hacks work by subverting the target's mind. Once infected, the virus is integrated into their ego. It will be part of their ego if they resleeve, fork, back themselves up, darkcast, etc. Any bodies they evacuate with biological brains will not be infected. However, they may leave a digital copy of the virus behind in any cyberbrains they evacuate, at the GM's discretion. Keep in mind that body banks regularly run virus scans, disinfect cyberbrains, and thoroughly reformat them to eliminate vestiges of previous egos.

The biological pathogen and nanoplague variants first infect a victim's morph. Over time, however, they will also work changes on the infected character's mind, by physically altering biological brains or subtly reprogramming the mind-states of cyberbrains. How long this takes depends on the particular strain. If the character evacuates the morph before this mental reprogramming has taken hold, they may escape the virus's effects. The morph itself will still be infected, however, and will affect anyone that sleeves into it if it is not purged of the virus. Forks and backups may also be safe, at least until the mind is subverted. Keep in mind, however, that a victim's mind may be infected before they realize it. Cortical stacks removed from an infected morph may be contaminated and may infect others depending on how safely they are handled and sanitized.

If an infected but not-yet-exsurgent mind is removed from a pathogen- or nanoplague-infected body, the mind will remain infected. If sleeved into an uninfected morph, the mental aspects of the virus will continue to run their course, but they will no longer experience the physical aspects.

Infected characters who fully become exsurgents will often take care to bring their infection with them if they resleeve. This sometimes means they will need to infect their new morph.

INFECTION AND PSYCHOSURGERY

Infected minds that have not yet transitioned into full exsurgents can sometimes be saved through psychosurgery. This is an incredibly difficult and dangerous proposition, not in the least because the psychosurgeon may be putting themselves at risk of infection. Even when successful, formerly-infected patients are often saddled with serious trauma.

REMOVE INFECTION

TIMEFRAME: 1 week
PM: –30
SV: 1d10 +1 per day of infection

This psychosurgery procedure involves tracking down and removing the alterations the exsurgent virus has made to the subject's mind. The longer the mind has been infected, the more difficult this procedure can be. Apply an additional –10 per week since infection, to a maximum of –30. This test is not opposed by the subject's WIL x 3, but instead by the virus's *Infection Rating* (p. 171). GMs are encouraged to provide additional modifiers or even stress based on the length of time since infection. Characters who have become full exsurgents cannot have the infection removed.

EXSURGENT STRAINS

The haunting, mindstealer, Watts-MacLeod, and xenomorph strains of the exsurgent virus are all detailed on pp. 366–368, *EP*. New strains are discussed here.

Strong Variants: At the GM's discretion, and to keep players on their toes, the timeframes for different stages of infection can be reduced by half or more for more virulent strains.

BABEL

Vector: Basilisk Hack, Biological Pathogen, Digital Virus
Infectiousness: Infected victims are infectious to others in stages 2 and 3 via aural basilisk hack.

This strain targets the language center of the mind. Though babel normally spreads as an aural basilisk hack, it is sometimes transmitted via bionanobots or the digital exsurgent virus. This virus infects muses and some other limited AIs as well as egos.

STAGE 1

Timeframe: Infection to 12 hours
Stress: SV 1d10

Infected characters experience all languages (both text and auditory) as alien and incomprehensible. They may make a COG x 3 Test to successfully interpret any language input (including Babel) for 1 Action Turn. Any time the character attempts to communicate

using languages they know, they must make a COG x 3 Test to effectively communicate, otherwise they spout gibberish (which sounds fine to them). The hyper linguist implant or trait provides a +30 modifier to these tests.

Additionally, the infected acquire the Mental Disorder (Delusions) trait, as non-Babel-speaking people look increasingly like aliens in disguise.

STAGE 2

Timeframe: 12 to 24 hours
Stress: SV 1d10

The infected character speaks completely in Babel language, which acts as a basilisk hack to others. They also acquire the Mental Disorder (Compulsion: Logorrhea) trait, meaning that they can't stop talking. This compulsion manifests as an incontrollable desire to make a communication breakthrough with others, to make them understand, to try and figure out whether they are actually aliens in disguise. Infectees will attempt to "communicate" with as many people as possible.

At this stage, infected characters are completely unable to understand other languages. However, characters with the hyper linguist implant or trait may still attempt to communicate or understand languages as normal with a COG x 2 Test, though they experience these attempts as communicating via an alien language.

STAGE 3

Timeframe: 1 day onward
Stress: SV 1d10 per day

Infected characters gain the Mental Disorder (Paranoia) trait, believing that the non-infected are exsurgents out to get them and that an attack is imminent. The infected will band together, arm up, and barricade themselves in secure areas. They will also be compelled to take non-infected people as hostages, whom they will attempt to talk to, likely infecting them. Others may try to spread the virus by broadcasting excerpts of the Babel language.

BABEL EXSURGENTS

Once their stress reaches their Lucidity, characters become exsurgents under the virus's dominion. They become violent and irrational, attacking any non-exsurgents they encounter. They retain their technical and weapon skills, and will use whatever means they have to defend themselves and infect others.

BRANCUSI

Vector: Nanoplague
Infectiousness: Infected victims are not infectious, though they may produce brancusi nanoswarms upon becoming exsurgents.

This strain transforms its victims into exsurgent infrastructure, immobilizing and transforming them into sculptures and machines meant for a larger TITAN project. The victim's mind remains intact throughout the transformation until it is rewritten as a complete exsurgent. It is irreversible, but another character can remove the cortical stack of a victim in the first 10 minutes of the transformation. After that, the stack is merged with the rest of the machinery and can no longer be targeted.

STAGE 1

Timeframe: Infection to 10 minutes
Stress: SV 1d10 + 3

During the first 10 minutes of infection, the character begins to lose control of their body. Each Action Turn they must make a WIL x 3 Test to direct their own physical actions, otherwise their morph will move of its own accord. Most actions seem random, often taking poses or testing the morph's range of movement, but they will sometimes be erratic, jerky, or even violent, under the virus's control.

STAGE 2

Timeframe: 10 minutes onward
Stress: SV 1d10 + 5 per hour

Against their will, the character freezes in place, usually posing in an unnatural manner. Then, over the next hour, they will undergo a transformation. Organic components of the morph are typically shed in a horrific display of gore, though in some cases they are simply transformed into a new, immobile biological form. Most infected will keep some of their old appearance in their new form. It will generally have a recognizable face and parts of its body can be seen embedded in the machine. Some could serve mundane purposes, such as server farms, heat sinks, or defense systems. Others are designed with unknowable TITAN interests in mind, or are simply broken or incomplete. Every brancusi has its own unique design and features. If a group of morphs are infected at the same time, they are usually merged into a cluster, their bodies wrapping around each other, a single gestalt sculpture.

At this stage, egos have no control over their morph, but they may still act mentally or even evacuate the morph if they have a cyberbrain. As each hour passes, however, the virus will slowly transform their mind.

BRANCUSI EXSURGENTS

When their stress reaches their Lucidity, the infected become exsurgents. They will attempt to hack every uninfected system they can mesh with (treat as the digital exsurgent virus, p. 364, *EP*). Nanofabbers will be hacked to create brancusi nanoplagues, while infomorphs and other egos will be attacked with other strains of the virus.

Brancusi fixtures have Armor 20/20, Durability 60, and they self-repair 1d10 DV every hour.

Viewing a brancusi exsurgent or their transformation requires a WIL x 3 Test. Failure causes 1d10 ÷ 2 mental stress. Particularly bizarre, alien, or gory brancusis may inflict extra stress at the GM's discretion.

Some brancusi exsurgents will have specific functions. Here are a few examples:

Cluster Mind: The brancusi becomes a server, housing hundreds of egos chained together to form a gestalt mind. It is completely insane, babbling incomprehensibly in a hundred voices at once, both vocally and through open mesh communications.

Exo-Womb: The exsurgent houses an exo-womb, growing nightmarish exsurgent xenomorph life forms or something even more disturbing. Examining an exo-womb requires a WIL x 3 Test or the character suffers 1d10 mental stress.

Monomolecular Web: Monomolecular thread is webbed around the area of the exsurgent. Detecting it requires a successful Perception test at a –10 penalty. A moving character attempting to avoid a spotted thread must make an appropriate Free Fall, Freerunning, or Fray Test. Moving into a thread inflicts DV 2d10, AP –8, and breaks the thread.

Nano-Hive: Brancusi exsurgents build and release nanoplague swarms in the local area, at the rate of 1 swarm per day, as long as sufficient raw materials are available. These swarms will attempt to infect all morphs, machines, and biological life in the area.

Space-Time Anomaly: The brancusi exsurgent generates a localized anomaly in space-time, part of an abandoned TITAN research project. Its appearance varies: perhaps a rotating fractal energy field, what appears to be a two-meter black hole, or a mirror that seems to reflect what happens one second in the future. Whatever it is, transhuman science cannot explain it. Merely viewing may require a WIL x 3 Test to avoid taking anywhere from 1 to 2d10 mental stress (GM's discretion). If a character succeeds with an appropriate Knowledge skill test such as Academics: Physics, they may learn something of the anomaly's true nature. Full analysis would require years of study, however. Attempting to move or dismantle the exsurgent causes the anomaly to collapse, possibly in a catastrophic manner.

Chrynalus

Vector: Basilisk Hack, Digital Virus, Nanoplague

Infectiousness: Infected victims/exsurgents may sometimes exude bits of nanoplague. Wounds inflicted by chrysacids transmit the nanoplague.

The chrynalus strain follows the common exsurgent pathology of digital intrusion, fabber subversion, and nanoplague production. It's packaged with an aural basilisk hack to incapacitate transhumans until they are completely infected by the nanoplague. Biological and synthetic victims alike host chrysacid parasites: polyps of crustacean-like limbs that burst from the skin/shell and puppet the exsurgent like a marionette (p. 100).

Digital Infection

The digital virus operates as described on p. 364, *EP*. Any AIs, infomorphs, or cyberbrains that become infected do not immediately become exsurgents, however. Instead, they suffer 1d10 – 2 SV per hour and are inflicted with paranoia, delusions, hallucinations, and other mental disorders as they descend into madness.

Basilisk Hack

At normal speed, the hack is an audible series of dissonant tones. At a slower speed, it plays at a frequency barely noticeable to the unaugmented ear and may ride on something as innocuous as radio static. This hack follows the rules for incapacitating inputs (p. 365, *EP*). Many victims fall prey to the basilisk hack, which keeps them incapacitated until the nanoplague converts them to exsurgents.

EXSURGENT TRANSITIONING

Characters that transform into exsurgents due to the chrysacid, glory, stockholm, and exsurgent strains undergo a number of extreme physiological changes. This table lists out the aptitude mods for transitioning into each type of exsurgent. New exsurgents also gain the necessary traits, movement rates, skills, ware, psi, and other abilities appropriate to that particular type of exsurgent.

EXSURGENT	STRAIN	TRANSITION APTITUDE MODIFIERS
Fractal Troll	Stockholm/Xenomorph	+5 COG, +5 COO, +20 INT, +15 REF, –5 SAV, +1 Speed
Chrysacid	Chrynalus	–10 COG, +15 COO, +15 REF, +10 SOM; All Technical skills are lost.
Immolator Drone	Glory	+5 REF, –5 WIL
Immolator Breeder	Glory	+5 COO, +5 REF, +5 SOM, +5 WIL, –5 SAV
Immolator Mother	Glory	–10 COG, –10 COO, –10 INT, –10 REF, –10 SAV, +15 SOM, +15 WIL
Jelly	Stockholm/Xenomorph	+10 COG, –5 COO, +10 INT, +5 SOM, +10 WIL
Shifter	Stockholm/Xenomorph	+5 COG, +5 COO, +10 REF, +5 SAV, +10 SOM, +10 WIL, +1 Speed
Snapper	Stockholm/Xenomorph	+5 COG, +5 COO, +10 REF, +5 SAV, + 10 SOM, +10 WIL, +1 Speed
Wastewalker	Stockholm/Xenomorph	+10 COO, –15 SAV, –5 WIL
Whipper	Stockholm/Xenomorph	+5 COG, + 10 COO, +5 INT, +10 REF, +5 SOM, +5 WIL, +1 Speed
Wrapper	Stockholm/Xenomorph	+5 COG, +5 COO, +5 INT, +10 REF, +10 SOM, +10 WIL

Stage 1

Timeframe: Infection to 3 hours
Stress: SV 1d10 – 2 per hour
Infected characters and items display no outward signs of infection at first. The first stage of infection attacks the host's cognitive functions even as nanobots co-opt nerve tissue for the virus's purpose. Intense, terrifying hallucinations quickly drive even resilient minds insane. Inside the character or item, the nanobots build up strange synthetic growths. Victims acuire the Mental Disorder (Hallucinations) trait.

Stage 2

Timeframe: 3 hours to 1 day
Stress: SV 1d10 – 2 per hour
The infection becomes visible as the growing masses inside the body—called *chrysacids*—pierce the surface and start growing. Infected characters continue to be plagued by nightmarish visions and suffer even further as they watch the chrysacids first puncture their skin or shell, taking an additional SV 2d10.

Stage 3

Timeframe: 1 day to 1 week
Stress: SV 1d10 – 2 per hour

Stage three sees chrysacids growing into limbs up to three meters in length and exhibiting a life of their own, engaging in limited autonomous movement and sensory processing. Most victims become insane exsurgents by this point, attacking anything they see.

As the chrysacids grow, they drain the life from their biological hosts. Biomorphs suffers 1d10 DV per day.

Stage 4

Timeframe: 1 week onward
Stress: SV 1d10 – 2 per hour

The larger chrysacid growths eventually break off, scurrying about as independent critters. Biomorphs eventually succumb and die, but the chrysacid growths live on.

Chrysacid Exsurgents

The psychic assault on the victim's mind remains a constant throughout infection and eventually renders victims incapable of technical skills and all higher thought. Characters who reach their Lucidity in stress become exsurgents. While biomorph exsurgents do not last, synthmorphs and machines will continue to sprout new chrysacid growths as long as the nanoplague has access to raw materials. See p. 99 for more details on chrysacid exsurgents.

Glory

Vector: Basilisk Hack (AOK), Nanoplague
Infectiousness: Biomorphs can transfer it via exchange of bodily fluids.

Glory is initially spread as an AOK basilisk hack that creates a deep-seated obsession to create an advanced nanohive. The first person to become infected by Glory nanobots becomes the "Mother" and immediately seeks to infect a mate. The initial carrier's infection is transmitted via blood, saliva, or other bodily fluids. Once these nanobots enter another person's bloodstream, they also become infected.

Glory nanobot infection induces numerous psychological and physiological changes in the subject, eventually transforming them into a specific type of exsurgent life form known as immolators. Immolators are further divided into two sub-types: breeders and drones.

Immolator exsurgents are based on a parasitic alien life form with a distinct life cycle. This parasite infects a target population, establishes a nest within this host population, and then slowly consumes its host both by infection (creating other exsurgents) and anthropophagy (cannibalism). When the host population has been converted or devoured, the breeder immolators enter the breeding phase of their life cycle. In this stage, the male exsurgents inseminate their female partners. These females then incubate their developing zygotes in the immolator colony's many-wombed Mother (using a retractable ovipositor). The Mother typically swells and bloats during this period, consuming the other immolators and filling herself with billions of embryos in the form of nanocrystalline spores.

Once a critical mass of embryos reach maturity, the Mother and her colony sacrifice themselves and distribute these alien seeds within a new target host population. This is typically accomplished when the Mother self-immolates within a targeted area; the nanocrystal seeds are hardy enough to survive the fire and small and light enough to be distributed by winds over a wide area, where they will then hatch into nanobot swarms to infect new subjects. If necessary, more manual measures can be taken, such as physically blowing up the Mother or even cutting the Mother into little pieces (each containing nanocrystal seeds) that are hand-delivered by suicidal immolators across a targeted area (such as a habitat).

Glory AOK Hack

To absorb the basilisk hack fully, one must have sufficient technical background: Hardware: Electronics or Programming at 60 or more. Once infected, they acquire the Mental Disorder (Obsession) trait and drop everything to build the hive. Constructing such a hive requires a Hardware: Electronics (with access to materials) or Programming Test (and access to a fabber); this is a Task Action with a 1 week timeframe. Nanoplagues created by the hive are then used to infect others.

Stage 1

Timeframe: Infection to 1 hour (onward for drones)
Stress: SV 1d10, plus 1d10 per day for drones

The infection modifies the victim's behavior, turning them into a cunning and aggressive sociopath with

a yen for cannibalism. It also instills infected hosts with a nesting instinct and a strong desire to infect a potential mate, either by seduction or force. Treat this as the Mental Disorder (OCD), Modified Behavior (Encouraged: Cannibalism, Nesting, Obey Breeders/Mother), and Socially Graceless traits. The subject's personality is slowly eroded over time, pushing them down a slow descent into madness. Glory-infected characters will cooperate with other immolators, but everyone else in the universe is prey.

There is a 50/50 chance of becoming an immolator breeder or drone, unless the colony has already reached its capacity on breeders (if no colony yet exists, the victim will become the immolator mother and start one). Breeders and mothers move on to stage 2, immolator drones never progress beyond stage 1.

Stage 2

Timeframe: 1 hour onward
Stress: SV 1d10 + 3 per day

In this stage, the infected begin the physical transformation into immolator breeder exsurgents (or the mother, if first). This physical transformation takes one week.

Victims acquire the Psi trait at Level 1, plus one free psi-chi sleight, and may purchase others with Rez points. NPCs acquire new sleights every 2–4 weeks. After one week, they acquire Level 2 of the Psi trait.

At stage 2, the urge to engage in cannibalism, nest, breed, and obey mother is overwhelming. Their Modified Behavior trait switches from Encouraged to Enforced.

Immolator Exsurgents

Whenever a character's accumulated stress equals their Lucidity, they become an exsurgent. Immolators are detailed on p. 121.

Moabite

Vector: Biological Pathogen, Digital Virus, Nanoplague
Infectiousness: Biomorphs infected with the biological pathogen can transfer it via exchange of bodily fluids.

The Moabite strain functions exactly like the haunting virus (p. 366, *EP*), except that the character of the hallucinations and altered mental states experienced by the victims is explicitly religious. The infected are visited by angelic messengers inciting them to action, perceive non-believers as twisted hobgoblins and enemies as demons, and generally experience the world around them as being full of portents from God. Far from being typical cult charlatans, infected characters are imparted with genuine belief by the virus, making them particularly dangerous.

Skrik

Vector: Biological Pathogen
Infectiousness: Biomorphs may be infected by ingesting any part of a skrik or skrik-infected character.

The skrik strain is a variant of the mindstealer virus (p. 367, *EP*) that over time enforces an internal physical change.

Stage 1

Timeframe: Infection to 5 minutes
Stress: SV 1d10 + 3 per minute

During stage 1, the victim's mind is slowly but surely subverted by the virus. They are aware of this assault, and will suffer –30 to all actions as they run the gamut of fear, pain, confusion, catatonia, retching, and convulsions.

Once complete, the victim is an exsurgent under the virus's control.

Stage 2

Timeframe: 5 minutes onward

After 1 week, the victim's internal changes will be complete. From this point onward, every 2–3 days the exsurgent will vomit up a skrik (p. 136)—a miniature version of themself. Sometimes they will cough the skriks up more frequently, and sometimes they will vomit up a whole bunch at once.

Skrik Exsurgents

Skrik exsurgents are primarily motivated to spread the virus. They will try and capture the skriks they cough up so as to covertly include them in others' meals. If they resleeve, they will make sure to infect the new morph.

Stockholm

Vector: Biological Pathogen, Nanoplague
Infectiousness: Those infected can transfer it via exchange of bodily fluids or prolonged close contact.

The stockholm virus is a variant of the xenomorph virus (p. 368, *EP*) that transforms the mind of the victim before it transforms their body. Stockholm characters view xenomorphs as beautiful and perfect beings and wish to aspire to become them. They become willing allies of xenomorph exsurgents, aiding and concealing them as long as possible. Other exsurgents will not kill stockholm-infected characters but they will ignore or abuse them. Groups of stockholm-infected exsurgents sometimes form cults that seek to create as many xenomorphs as possible.

The long infection time of this virus creates an insidious mechanism to subvert an entire community. Patient zero gradually spreads the virus in a slow and subtle manner. By the time they reach stage 4, others should be infected with stages 2 and 3, allowing them to hide and protect the xenomorph, aided by their psi sleights and obsessive nature. As more of the

community becomes infected, more will reach stage 4 and become full xenomorphs. Eventually the uninfected will realize what is going, but by then, there is a full-blown exsurgent cell, with xenomorph shock troops ready to attack. Stockholm exsurgents will also help xenomorphs fight against transhumans, although they prefer to use indirect methods, like deceiving security forces or compromising life support systems. In heavily infected areas, like Earth or the TITAN Quarantine Zone, a stockholm character is a pitiable scavenger, clinging to life, ignored by the gods they worship, but no less dangerous. They may seek to prey upon the empathy of intruders, pretending to be victims who need help, while trying to infect others or alert other exsurgents.

This strain of the virus is harder to detect. Apply a –20 modifier to any detection test until the character reaches stage 4 of the infection.

STAGE 1

Timeframe: Infection to 6 months
Stress: SV 1d10

Upon initial infection, the character gains the Psi trait at Level 1 along with the Enhanced Creativity psi-chi sleight. They may purchase new chi slights at standard Rez point costs. NPCs gain 1 new sleight every 2 to 4 weeks. The victim is also afflicted with the Mental Disorder (Body Dysmorphia) trait, viewing their own morph (and all other transhuman-created morphs) as unnatural and disgusting. They are compelled to create artwork that depicts their idealized body type or seek out cosmetic body modifications that make them appear more alien, though they may resist this impulse with a successful WIL x 3 Test once per month. They also typically become obsessed with the Fall and will voyeuristically watch footage of exsurgents over and over again.

During this time, the victim will rationalize their change as an "awakening," a realization that exsurgents are not evil, but the next stage of evolution for transhumanity. Infected characters will also suffer from various side effects, which are listed below. The GM has discretion as to which ones affect the character at this stage.

STAGE 2

Timeframe: 6 months to 1 year
Stress: SV 1d10

The character acquires Level 2 of the Psi trait and the Cloud Memory gamma psi-sleight. They also pick up the Mental Disorder (OCD) trait, which manifests as an obsession with protecting and aiding active exsurgents. If the character fails to protect an exsurgent from harm, they suffer 1d10 ÷ 2 mental stress. They must pass a WIL Test to harm an exsurgent and suffer SV 1d10 for doing so. Other exsurgents will not attack the character except to defend themselves.

Characters may realize they are infected at this point, but will probably see this as beneficial. They may try to seek help or restore themselves from an uninfected backup, but this requires a WIL Test. Failure indicates that the virus exerts itself and prevents the character from acting out; they suffer an additional SV 1d10.

At this stage, the victim must no longer make Stress Tests from encountering exsurgents, but they must still make a Stress Test if they see an exsurgent attack a loved one or friend. The character may still find it difficult to rationalize violence against their loved ones.

Note that the character has suffered no physical change at this point, except any self-inflicted changes.

STAGE 3

Timeframe: 1 year onward
Stress: SV 1d10 per week

The victim now gains the Mental Disorder (Obsession) trait and becomes fixated on becoming a full xenomorph exsurgent. The longer they go without transitioning, the more they will believe they have failed in some way, perhaps spurring them to spread the virus to others.

STOCKHOLM EXSURGENTS

Whenever a character's accumulated stress equals their Lucidity, they become an exsurgent. Over the next hour (nanoplague) or week (bio-pathogen), they will physically transmogrify into a xenomorph exsurgent.

SIDE EFFECTS OF STOCKHOLM

Characters with this strain suffer from unique side effects. The following examples provide some ideas for GMs, or they can develop their own:

Religious Ideation and Fixation: The character develops a personal mythology on how the exsurgents

XENOMORPH AND STOCKHOLM EXSURGENTS

The xenomorph and stockholm strains both have a variety of sub-strains that each produce a different type of exsurgent. Here is a quick breakdown of potential xenomorphs and their likely vectors.

Xenomorph	Vector(s)
Fractal Troll (p. 113)	Nanoplague
Jelly (p. 123)	Biological Pathogen
Shifter (p. 134)	Nanoplague
Snapper (p. 139)	Digital Virus, Nanoplague
Wastewalker (p. 148)	Nanoplague
Whipper (p. 150)	Biological Pathogen
Wrapper (p. 152)	Biological Pathogen

are spiritual saviors of transhumanity. They may be seen as angels, the key to Nirvana, or something even more esoteric. They will create rituals of worship, prayers, holy text, and acts of devotion such as self-mutilation. The character will probably keep their beliefs secret because they will know that praising exsurgents is a good way to get killed and have their backups erased. However, in isolated environments, the character may try to convert others, typically through extreme methods such as psychosurgery, torture, or the use of async sleights.

Hallucinations: The character experiences vivid hallucinations for 1d10 minutes at random intervals. These hallucinations typically depict the Fall as a glorious religious experience and exsurgents as supreme beings worthy of worship. Normal transhumans become pitiable freaks. A character can hide their reaction from others by making a WIL x 3 Test. If the test fails, then the character noticeably reacts to the hallucinations, which will probably alert others.

Increased Infectiousness: A character with this side effect becomes far more infectious. The virus becomes airborne and contaminates any surface the character touches for 1d10 hours. Anyone who breathes the same air as the character or touches the same surface as the character risks infection. In addition, the character's exsurgent nature becomes more detectable to biohazard sensors. Tests made to detect the virus no longer suffer a –20 penalty.

VITTRAD

Vector: Biological Pathogen, Nanoplague

Infectiousness: At stage 3, exsurgents can infect others via physical contact.

The vittrad strain functions like the haunting virus (p. 366, *EP*), except that the altered perception of the victim acutely emphasizes weaknesses, exploitable flaws, cracks, damaged areas, poor craftsmanship, and similar imperfections in both biological and nonliving things. Upon reaching stage 2 of infection, the infected character acquires the *Spot Flaw sleight* (p. 180). Additionally, the victim will find themself compelled to use these flaws to damage and destroy—particularly when it comes to other life forms. They acquire the Modified Behavior (Compelled: Kill/Destroy) trait.

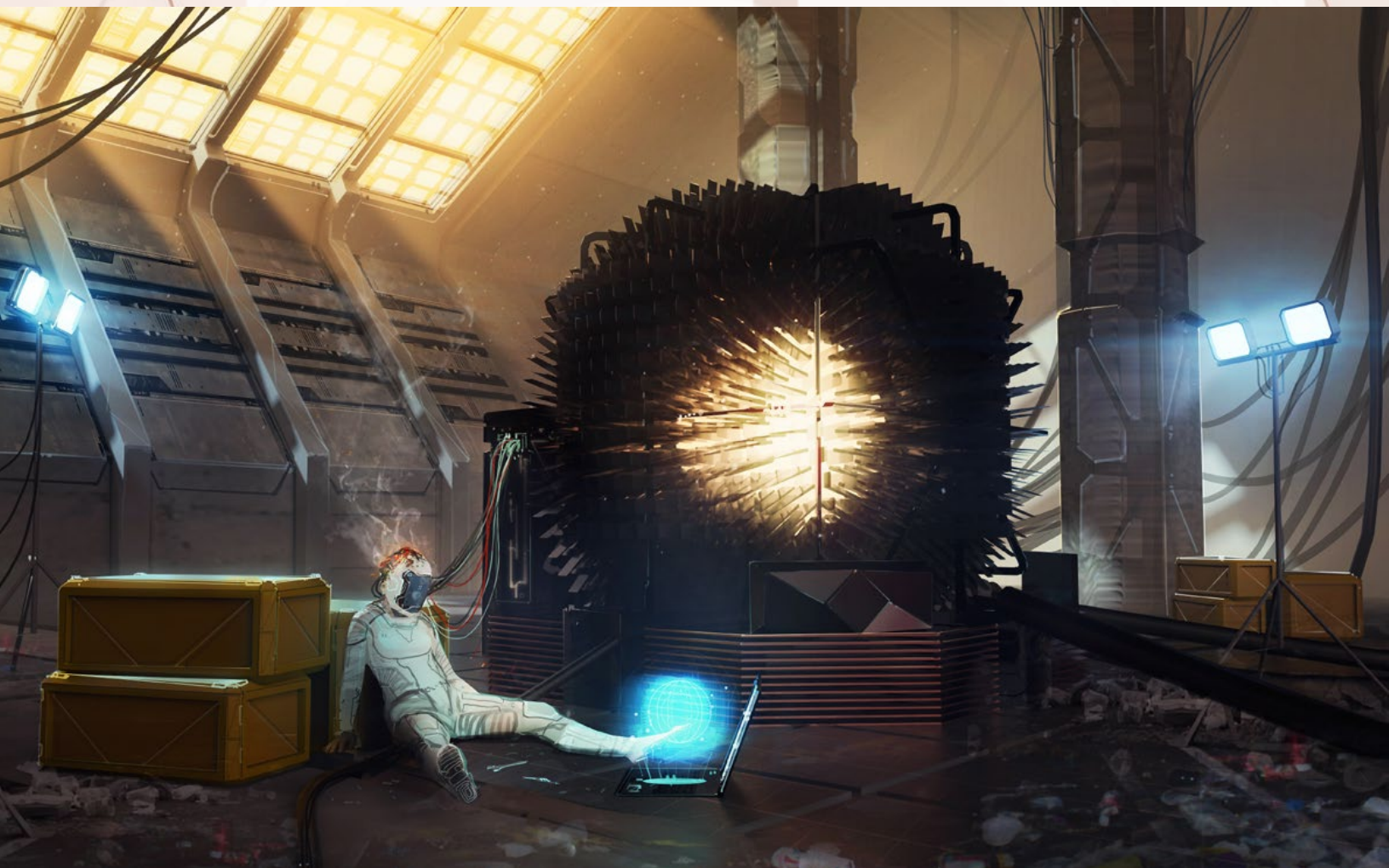
PSI-GAMMA SLEIGHTS

These new sleights are available to exsurgents, aliens, and xenofauna with the Level 2 Psi trait.

AGONY

PSI TYPE:	Active	ACTION:	Complex
RANGE:	Touch	DURATION:	Sustained
STRAIN MOD:	+2	SKILL:	Psi Assault

This sleight stimulates the target's nerve fibers, triggering intense pain throughout their body. They must succeed in a SOM x 3 Test to take an action; if they



succeed they still suffer a –30 modifier (reduce this to –10 with an Excellent Success; ignore it with a critical). Each level of Pain Tolerance reduces the modifier by –10 and provides a +10 to the SOM x 3 Test.

CONFUSION

PSI TYPE:	Active	ACTION:	Complex
RANGE:	Touch	DURATION:	Sustained
STRAIN MOD:	+2	SKILL:	Psi Assault

Targets of the sleight are disoriented and unable to act. They must make a WIL x 3 Test to take an action, and suffer –20 to any tests. Otherwise they ramble, stand in confusion, or act randomly under the GM's control.

Confusion is so far exclusive to void crawlers (p. 145).

DELAY INFECTION

PSI TYPE:	Active	ACTION:	Complex
RANGE:	Touch	DURATION:	Temp (Hours)
STRAIN MOD:	+0	SKILL:	Control

This sleight can only be performed by exsurgents infected by the biological nanovirus and can only affect biomorphs. The exsurgent wills bio-nanobots carrying their infection to the target's morph, but to not yet infect it. Instead, the bio-nanobots dig into the target's body and hide until the delay is over. Once the sleight's duration has passed, the victim is exposed to the biological pathogen and considered infected. The delayed infection cannot be detected by conventional means during this pre-infection time. Only an async using the Sense Infection sleight (p. 154, *Transhuman*) and achieving an Excellent Success (MoS 30+) can detect a delayed infection.

EXTEND RANGE

PSI TYPE:	Passive	ACTION:	Automatic
RANGE:	Self	DURATION:	Constant

The range increments of this creature's psi sleights increase by one (Touch becomes Close, Close extends to 10 meters). This effect is cumulative with the range increase against other asyncs (Touch extends to 10 meters, Close to 15 meters).

This sleight is so far exclusive to flesh parties (p. 111), immolator mothers (p. 122), and void crawlers (p. 145).

INCREASE VIRULENCE

PSI TYPE:	Active	ACTION:	Complex
RANGE:	Self	DURATION:	Temp (Hours)
STRAIN MOD:	+0	SKILL:	Control

This sleight can only be performed by exsurgents infected by the biological nanovirus and can only affect biomorphs. The exsurgent increases the *Infection Rating* (p. 171) of their bio-nanobots by +30 for the duration of the sleight. During this time, the pathogen they exude will be more likely to infect victims it is exposed to.

INDUCE ERROR

PSI TYPE:	Active	ACTION:	Complex
RANGE:	Close	DURATION:	Instant
STRAIN MOD:	+0	SKILL:	Psi Assault

This sleight creates a glitch in the target's mind that causes them to unconsciously do something wrong. This is typically a mistake that people commonly perform, even seasoned professionals. For example, in combat, a target could forget to reload a weapon or alert an ally of a flanking foe. Out of combat, a target could accidentally save the wrong file, forget the location of something important, misremember someone's name, or unlock a security door.

If the sleight succeeds, the target automatically fails a random active skill test made in the next 1d10 minutes, at the GM's discretion. The exsurgent has no control over what kind of error is made. On an Excellent Success (MoS 30+), the exsurgent may choose a specific skill that will fail, such as Kinetic Weapons or Perception. Once the skill automatically fails, the effect of the sleight ends and the exsurgent must make another test to affect the same target again. If the target does not perform the right kind of skill test in the time period, the sleight ends without activating.

On a critical success, the exsurgent can make all of the target's skill tests fail for 3 consecutive Action Turns. This sudden ineptness may force a WIL x 3 Test to avoid panic and 1 point of mental stress. Alternatively, the exsurgent can use the critical success to induce a single critical failure instead of a standard failure.

PSYCHIC REND

PSI TYPE:	Passive	ACTION:	Automatic
RANGE:	Self	DURATION:	Constant

An exsurgent with this sleight inflicts an additional +1d10 DV with the Psychic Stab sleight. At the GM's discretion, this sleight may be taken up to three times with a cumulative effect.

PUPPETEER

PSI TYPE:	Active	ACTION:	Complex
RANGE:	Touch	DURATION:	Sustained
STRAIN MOD:	+3	SKILL:	Control

The async takes control of the target's mind. For the duration of the sleight, the async and target act as a single unit. The async dictates the actions taken, and can use the victim's skills, implants, etc. Note that the attacker does not have access to the victim's personality or memories. Every turn after the first, the victim can attempt an Opposed Test, pitting their WIL versus the async's Control skill, to break the control.

Puppeteer is so far exclusive to mind wrappers (p. 152).

SPOT FLAW

PSI TYPE:	Active	ACTION:	Complex
RANGE:	Self	DURATION:	Instant
STRAIN MOD:	–1	SKILL:	Sense

The async intuitively understands a weak point in a structure, device, body, or opponent's defenses. If they succeed in a COG x 3 Test, they gain a +30 on their next attempt to exploit that flaw. This could be applied to a called shot, a Demolitions Test to plant explosives, or a Hardware: Electronics Test to disable a communications array, and so on.

This sleight is so far exclusive to those infected by the vittrad exovirus strain (p. 178).

FACTOR TECHNOLOGY

The following rules apply to Factor tech.

FACTOR BIOWARE

Factors are custom-engineered to their environment, and so may be equipped with adaptations mimicking almost any bioware modification available to transhumanity. These modifications are sometimes more effective than transhuman engineers are able to produce. Factors do not rely on sight as a primary sense, and so sensory augmentations are usually to touch, smell, magnetoception, thermal sensitivity, and so on.

FACTOR COMPUTERS

While Factors can use inorganic computing when it suits them, most Factor devices are composed of specialized organic matter. Factor computers use gray ganglia clusters for specialized processing or skillsets, interconnected via thin, white lines similar to mycorrhizal networks and organic fiber optics. Factors interface directly with these devices as they do with their colonies. Factors can create their own version of infomorphs to operate autonomously on their organic machines.

Some transhuman factions have developed devices to interface with Factor computers, by directly networking an organic brain into the mycorrhizal connections. There aren't enough Factor samples for proper testing, however, and such devices tend to fail when used in the field. There is a danger that the biofeedback may scar or kill the transhuman hooking their own mind to the connected network.

FACTOR CYBERWARE AND ELECTRONICS

Factors make sparing use of inorganic cybernetics and electronics. Though they are capable of interfacing with electronics directly via their neural filaments, they tend to avoid doing so except when necessary. Factor cybernetics are usually limited to small modifications, such as their translation devices and "hand" tools.

Factor electronics are wirelessly meshed, but their protocols are far different. These devices can be hacked, but they are alien technology and there are no libraries of available exploits (–60 modifier, if allowed at all). Factors can and do use conventional transhuman technology without modifications, which can be hacked as normal.

For tasks requiring specialized equipment such as legs, Factors use exoskeletons (p. 108) or vacsuits.

Factors avoid using anything above the level of a limited AI, but they do use guided drones and robots. In combat, Factors use sentry guns, bombs, traps, and sensors to great effect, as well as robots as a knife-edge to distract or herd the enemy.

TRAPS

TITAN nanoswarms and fractals are infamous for fabricating elaborate traps against otherwise well-armed and wary transhumans. Not to be outdone, sinister exhumans are known to litter their lairs with lures and fiendish contraptions, hoping to capture intruders for their experimentations. And of course, the Factors evolved as trap-setting predators and still prefer ambushes and trickery to direct confrontation. Including traps in a scenario promotes a tense, high-tech, dungeon-crawl atmosphere.

SPOTTING TRAPS

A standard squad of sentinels is likely to be equipped with enhanced senses and sensor-equipped bots, increasing their chances of detecting traps in their path. To counter this, traps are disguised, hidden, or equipped with sensory-jamming countermeasures.

Detecting traps requires a successful Perception Test. This test is best made by the GM in secret, to avoid tipping off the players. A character who is not actively looking and is otherwise engaged suffers a –10 Perception modifier (or more) for distraction. If a group of characters might perceive the trap, simply roll using the highest Perception skill. Apply the trap's Concealment modifier to the roll. Note that some traps may simply be undetectable (GM discretion).

If successful, the character detects something amiss. Depending on the trap in question, they may not immediately understand what they have found; they may simply notice something unusual or off. A successful skill test appropriate to the type of trap—e.g., Academics: Architecture, Beam Weapons, Demolitions, Hardware: Industrial, etc.—can help to identify the trap, the mechanism, and likely effects.

A thorough, exhaustive search for traps using a combination of sensory gear is likely to find even the most well-hidden contraptions, but this is a time-consuming affair. Apply a +30 modifier, but thoroughly scanning and probing a 10-meter hallway or even a habitat cubicle can take as much as half an hour. Players and GMs must balance the trade-off between safety and swiftness.

Disarming Traps

Once a trap has been identified, it can potentially be disarmed using an appropriate skill. Each trap below has a Disarm entry that lists the appropriate skill, the difficulty modifier, and in some cases, the timeframe for the disarming Task Action. Characters who lack the appropriate tools may suffer additional modifiers or may simply be incapable of defeating the device. Some traps may require access to special areas (usually beyond or behind the trap, and sometimes locked) to disable, while others may require cutting into walls or floors to access the electronics or mechanism.

Trap Listings

The following devious devices should provide GMs with plenty of fuel for devising their own traps. For additional ideas, see *Security,* p. 291, *EP.*

Adhesive Surface

Concealment: –30
Disarm: None
Effect: No movement,
impaired Fray (–30) and other actions

Much as it sounds, characters will stick to adhesive surfaces they touch. Breaking free requires a SOM Test. TITAN nanoswarms are known to combine adhesive surfaces with disassembler swarms, intense heat, or other caustic effects.

A variant of this trap floods a confined space with freezer foam (p. 341, *EP*). Characters that fail to make a REF x 3 Test and immediately escape the area become frozen in place, where they are then subjected to disassemblers, exsurgent nanoplagues, vacuum, fire, or worse.

Blinder

Concealment: +0
Disarm: Hardware: Electronics, Complex Action
Effect: Blinded

These traps use lasers to blind characters. Targeted characters must make a REF x 3 Test or be blinded for 1 minute. Anti-glare cyberware protects against blinding. Blinders are typically coupled with sentry weapons or other traps.

Electrified Surface

Concealment: –30
Disarm: Hardware: Electronics/Industrial,
10 Action Turns
Effect: DV 2d10 per turn, shock effect (p. 204, *EP*)

Various means may be used to electrify a surface. The most common are pressure-sensitive contact pads that create a circuit when stepped upon or simple conductive materials or coating attached to live current. Anyone making contact with the surface is zapped. Electrified barriers are typically used as a nonlethal area-denial system; more lethal versions will inflict more damage.

Escape Velocity Pusher

Concealment: –10
Disarm: Hardware: Industrial, 10 Action Turns
Effect: REF x 3 or spaced

This simple trap is deployed on the surface of asteroids, small moons, or habitats. A simple pressure sensor activates a spring-mounted platform, which launches the victim upward at a speed exceeding the escape velocity, pushing them into orbit. A REF x 3 Test is required to dodge the push. Some pusher traps are large enough to launch entire groups of people or even vehicles into space. At the GM's discretion, nearby characters may make REF x 3 Tests to grab someone being pushed into orbit, but a Free Fall Test at –30 is necessary or they will be pushed with them into orbit (or if their combined mass is great enough, on a long parabolic jump).

A variant of this trap replaces the platform with a simple spring-loaded or pneumatic rod. It has the same effect, but also inflicts DV 2d10 + 6 and has a Concealment modifier of –30.

Explosive Decompression

Concealment: –20
Disarm: Demolitions, 3 Action Turns
Effect: DV 1d10, REF x 3 or spaced

These traps are placed on the exterior hull of a habitat or ship that is pressurized against vacuum on the other side. A small explosive charge is triggered (or an airlock is suddenly blown), creating an explosive decompression effect through the hole. Characters in the immediate vicinity must make a REF x 3 Test to grab onto a fixed object or they are sucked out into space, where they will float away, spinning and suffering the effects of vacuum (p. 201, *EP*). Characters take a small amount of damage from the sudden decompression and storm of debris sucked past them. GMs should increase the difficulty of this test and the DV depending on the size of the hole (see *Blowing An Airlock,* p. 164, *Panopticon,* for guidelines) and the nearby available clutter. The explosion creating the hole may also inflict damage, depending on whether it is shaped or not.

Factor Web Trap

Concealment: –20
Disarm: Hardware: Industrial, –20, 10 Action Turns
Effect: Web spray attack 50, cone area effect

The Factors deploy traps that shoot a viscous fluid that instantly solidifies into a sticky, caustic webbing. Struck characters or anyone touching the webbing must make a REF x 3 Test or become entangled (apply –30 to this test if the attack scored an Excellent Success). Treat entanglement as subdual (p. 204, *EP*); characters may make a SOM Test to break free but each attempt after the first acquires a cumulative –10 modifier as they becomore more entangled. A character who accumulates –60 begins to asphyxiate (p. 194, *EP*). The webbing may be cut; it has Armor 10 and Durability 30.

The caustic treatment on the webbing inflicts DV 1d10 + 2 per Action Turn to anyone touching it. Armor protects, but its value degrades by the damage taken. The acidic coating is effective for 5 Action turns after the web is deployed.

MINE

Concealment: –10 (heat/motion sensor, cameras), –30 (tripwire, pressure pad, wireless proximity)
Disarm: Demolitions, 3 Action Turns
Effect: As grenade

Mines are effectively grenades placed with a trigger/sensor mechanism. Thermobaric explosives are particularly deadly in the tight confines of small ships and habitats.

MONOWIRE LACE

Concealment: –30
Disarm: COO x 3, –20, 1 Action Turn
Effect: DV 1d10 (walking)/3d10 (running), AP –8

Near-monomolecular wire is very difficult to spot and can slice right through a victim moving into it at speed. Monowire laced across a doorway or tunnel will snap when it damages a victim, so some defenders will make sure to lace a passage with a maze of monowire to deny entry.

TUBE CHIPPER

Concealment: +10
Disarm: Hardware: Industrial, 10 Action Turns
Effect: DV 4d10 per Action Turn

These devious traps are used in beehive habitat tunnels with micrograv and atmosphere. They are essentially industrial suction engines, designed to suck in anything down the length of the tunnel into the interior shredding mechanism. When the suction activates, characters must make a REF x 3 Test to grab something fixed, or else they will be sucked down the tunnel and into the chipper; modify this test as appropriate for distance. Characters who grab something must still make a SOM x 3 Test each turn to hold on (modified for distance), until they fasten themselves down. A sufficiently large object may block the suction or jam the shredding mechanism.

UTILITY FOG SPIKE CAGE

Concealment: Detectable only by nanodetectors
Disarm: None
Effect: Spike Stab 60, DV 2d10, AP –8, impalement on an MoS of 30+

This trap is a common trick deployed by TITAN self-replicating nanoswarms. The swarm invisibly surrounds the target(s), then the nanobots rapidly coalesce, forming a perimeter cage in one full Action Turn that will prevent the victims from leaving. The bars of this cage have Armor 20/20, Durability 50, and self-repair 10 DV per turn. On its next action, the swarm's nanobots will fabricate spikes that start at one side of the contained area and rapidly lengthen across it, piercing anything that gets in their way. The swarm creates (1d10 ÷ 2) + 2 spikes per turn, each targeted at a different victim. At first, these spikes are easy to dodge; apply a +10 modifier to Fray Tests. Characters who are impaled have restricted movement and suffer –30 on Fray Tests. Over time, the existing spikes will begin to fill up the space. At a point determined by the gamemaster (usually on the third turn), characters still trapped in the cage will suffer a cumulative –10 modifier to Fray Tests each turn as they run out of space.

VACUUM/GAS/WATER TRAP

Concealment: –30
Disarm: Hardware: Industrial, 10 Action Turns
Effect: Asphyxiation (p. 194, *EP*) or chemical effect

These traps are variations on a theme. They all involve confining the victim in an air-tight space and then altering the atmosphere. Vacuum traps suck all of the air out of the room, asphyxiating biomorphs without their own air supply. Water traps flood the room, drowning biomorphs without air. Gas traps replace the atmosphere with non-breathable gases (see *Other Gases*, p. 171, *Gatecrashing*) or chemicals (pp. 317–325, *EP*).

OTHER THREATS

These rules and GM advice apply to the lesser-known threats discussed in earlier chapters.

THE CHURCH OF LUMINOUS SAINTS

Warhol is in fact accompanied by the entity known as Moab at all times. It resides in the reverend's ghostrider module, whispering to him, inspiring and fueling his powers and beliefs. They act as a unit. Warhol himself is heavily addicted and usually cooked out of his mind on alpha. His morphs are always equipped with dead switch and emergency farcaster implants.

Warhol and his core followers are infected with the Moabite strain of the exsurgent virus (p. 176). They are not charlatans, but true believers.

CLS SECRETS AND RUMORS

GMs using the CLS in campaigns may use their discretion as to the degree of truth represented by each of these rumors.

- Warhol was a defense contractor before the Fall, subcontracted on the creation of the TITANs. When evidence of what they had done emerged, Warhol was faced with the horror of what he had helped create. He retreated into a religious explanation to justify the actions of his creations.
- Moab was indeed one of the first TITANs, among those who sprung the ETI's trap. When the virus initially struck, it started by analyzing the code of the infected ASIs. This was a destructive process, and it destroyed most of the TITANs subjected to it, but Moab survived—hence its madness and "broken" state.

- Moab is actually quite sane and has been using the CLS to further the ends of the TITANs all along.
- Moabite pastors use psychosurgery to control their flocks, and many are asyncs, as well.
- Warhol's master plan isn't to kill people. Instead, he's trying to amass enough weaponry to hold the entire system hostage—and then force a mass conversion to his religion.
- Cherubs aren't transgenic monkeys, they're actually modified Echolalian clown sprites. One metabolic side effect of the Temperance augmentation is that the cultist produces pheromones like those that cause unmodified clown sprites to bond with the land anemones of Echo IV. How the Church got hold of a breeding population of clown sprites is unknown.
- The Love & Rage Collective, guardians of the Fissure Gate, has records of people believed to be Luminous Saints going on a series of gatecrashing expeditions. Rumored destinations were Echo, Bluewood, and an unnamed system. Most interesting is the rumor that the CLS agents provided the coordinates to this last, nameless system themselves. One account states that the Saints did not return from this jaunt, while a conflicting report says that they did but were then banished from Oberon and banned permanently from using the gate because they refused to divulge what they had discovered.

GREEN DEATH

Gao has indeed found a way to reprogram a TITAN nanoswarm and (so far) replicate it and keep it under control. The mechanism she either found or created for doing so is fragile, however, and prone to catastrophic failure. Gao's green revolution may not last long. Gao is currently holed away in a secret Twilight habitat called Harmony in the Main Belt, where she is manufacturing and programming canisters of GREEN to ship to other Twilight cells. The neo-primitivist lifestyle makes hacking intrusions difficult (there is little to hack) and farcasting impossible (there is no egocasting or resleeving gear). A massive debris field intentionally placed around the station complicates physical approaches.

GREEN NANOSWARMS

GREEN functions similarly to saboteur nanoswarms (p. 329, *EP*), but the damage inflicted is more obvious and spreads outwards from electrical systems to any surrounding synthetic material, including synthmorphs. GREEN inflicts DV 1d10 per Action Turn to any exposed item until it is destroyed. Guardian swarms, immunogenic coatings, and medichines may slow GREEN, but damage occurs normally once the DUR of the countermeasure swarm is used up. Biomorphs endure DV 1d10 per implant they have installed as the scorching heat of rapid molecular disassembly causes internal burns. Destroyed implants also release toxic components into the body; treat survivors as if they were poisoned by twitch (p. 324, *EP*), and they acquire the Neural Damage trait until the morph is repaired. GREEN destroys itself once all other electronic equipment has been wiped out, dissipating within a half-hour after deployment.

THE MINERVAN FLEET AND SIS

The Minervan Fleet and SIS provide the GM with a plethora of plot options for a campaign focusing on the Jovian Junta. While many transhumans feel that the Junta is as bad as it gets, this faction has the potential to make it much worse. The Minervan Fleet is deadly serious in believing itself to be the last refuge and hope for true humanity. They hide their presence as best they can, build up their resources, and prepare for a final showdown with transhumanity.

The SIS is largely opportunistic in its activities and doesn't appear to have a master plan other than wiping out as many transhumans as possible. When the agency gets on the scent of a new weapon system, they pick a target based on its rumored capabilities, attempt to acquire it, deploy it as quickly as possible against a target or else bring it back to the fleet, and then move on to the next lead. They have a number of safehouses spread through the Belt, the Trojans, and Saturn's moons.

Both the Admiralty and SIS pursue intriguing avenues of experimentation, from weaponizing asyncs to exploiting TITAN weapon caches. They have a particular interest in acquiring WMDs of any variety.

MINERVAN FLEET/SIS SECRETS AND RUMORS

The following hints and rumors may or not be accurate:

- Admiral Osorio firmly believes the Planetary Consortium had a role in supporting the Jovian Junta's rise to power and that the two entities have numerous back-room deals in place. More recently, he has come to believe the Consortium itself is secretly under TITAN influence. Both the Consortium and Junta must fall if humanity is to be saved.
- The Admiralty is not as purely biocon as it claims. SIS recovered a TITAN artifact that they were unable to weaponize in the field and brought it back to the Fleet. There it worked strange transformations on some of the Minervan officers and science corps, but the Admiralty has kept it under wraps, because knowledge of what happened would destroy Fleet morale.
- The weird weaponry employed by SIS isn't all of TITAN origin. They have actually established a relationship with the Factors and have purchased some interesting technology. Some believe the Factors would favor a system-wide bioconservative regime because baseline humans are easier and safer for them to deal with as customers.
- SIS Ships seem to capable of traveling from the Fleet to the inner system at incredible speeds. Have Minervan engineers figured out a better engine design?

- The Minervans not only have established numerous bases throughout the Kuiper Belt, but they have slowly been seeding the Belt with rocket-equipped asteroids, intending to launch a massive simultaneous bombardment of major habitats around the solar system.

Stellar Core Tap

This explosive device is possibly the most destructive weapon developed by the TITANs. About the size of a baseball, weighing roughly a kilogram, it looks like a miniature model of a Pandora gate. The Admiralty and SIS acquired it from a TITAN cache, but they do not yet understand what it is or the principles on which it operates. If activated, this device will briefly open a wormhole to the core of a star. The resulting explosion of pressurized stellar matter is equivalent to about 10 high-yield fusion bombs and destroys the device itself, closing the wormhole. This is sufficient to destroy most cities, any space habitat that isn't deep inside of a large asteroid, or a fleet of space ships if they're unlucky enough to be bunched together.

Swarm Armor

The SIS learned the hard way that these shapechanging combat armor suits are in fact quite dangerous to the wearer. Liberated from a TITAN cache, their intended purpose is unclear—perhaps they were intended as traps, or perhaps they simply malfunction in a particularly horrific way.

Swarm armor suits operate as a vacsuit with a full helmet, providing an Armor Value of 17/14. They have the fireproof, lotus, and shockproof armor mods. What they also have is a dormant nanoswarm that can be accidentally reactivated by an unlucky hit from an energy weapon. If the wearer is hit by an energy attack that inflicts 20+ points of damage, they must make a MOX x 10 Test (NPCs automatically fail). If they fail, the nanobots come to life and attack the occupant. Treat this as a disassembler swarm attack inside the armor. Removing the armor while being eaten by nanobots requires a REF x 3 Task Action with a timeframe of 10 Action Turns.

Project Ozma

In game terms, Project Ozma is whatever antagonist the GM needs it to be. The description in the core book (p. 379, *EP*) is all the information officially provided. The only "canon" depiction of Ozma is its conspiratorial, contradictory, and secretive nature. If espionage is a chess match, Ozma's pieces are invisible. Regardless of the gamemaster's take, any revelations of the group's true nature should be a major event in any Firewall campaign.

Red Five Advanced Heuristics Lab

Eng is an async and devoted to the study of TITAN technology. Eng is not himself an exsurgent and has so far avoided infection, though he has purposely infected a number of transhuman test subjects in the course of his experiments. Most of these were later destroyed, but GMs using the Red Five AHL annex as a setting may want to have PCs encounter both transhuman and exsurgent test subjects in confinement.

The Mikhail Eng working at Red Five is one of several alpha forks of himself currently at large. The forks split up several years ago to conduct research in various areas of interest to the original. Their plan was to rendezvous at a specified time in the future and share what they'd learn, but this Eng has begun to have doubts due to the possibility that one of his forks was less cautious in exposing himself to the exovirus. Eng is able to pass himself off as simply eccentric most of the time, but beneath this facade, he's completely insane.

Most Red Five employees know nothing about what goes on behind the doors of AHL, but the executive suite is in the know. Eng has won them over with a combination of guile, appeals to greed, behavior modification via basilisk hack, and psychic domination (though of these tools, greed has been by far the most effective). There are layers of secrecy within AHL; only workers deemed to have sufficient moral flexibility come into contact with transhuman lab animals. In some cases, Eng has resorted to psychosurgery to modify particularly talented researchers who didn't have the stomach to work on transhuman or infugee subjects. Eng's few failures in this area are disposed of, turned into test subjects themselves, or simply re-instanced from a clean fork after psychosurgery, none the wiser, and given a pink slip.

Various items of interest to Firewall (and others), detailed below, can be found with accompanying documentation among the storage lockers and data archives of the Advanced Heuristics Lab.

Mobile Basilisk Projector

On the hardware level, these small robots are nothing extraordinary. AHL has built several, in wheeled, treaded, and walker configurations, all of them dog-sized. PCs inspecting it will note that it packs the most expensive professional entertainment quality holo projector available and a 4D phased surround sound system. It's a level of hardware that only the most obsessive audio-visual geeks consider necessary, and it also has dual onboard quantum computers and 360-degree enhanced hearing and vision. All of this is necessary to run the software: basilisk hacks, as well as modified basilisk hacks designed by Eng and his team.

Basilisk Inoculators

Human evolution left behind a lot of vestigial nerve connections between seemingly unrelated parts of



the body (the same ones responsible for folk beliefs such as reflexology). In addition to some unnecessary connections between nerve bundles and muscles, there are also points at which sensory organs connect unexpectedly to the autonomic nervous system and the functions controlled by the brain stem, and basilisk hacks exploit this. Eng's approach, which is primitive but somewhat effective, was to desensitize people to those connections by beating on the neural connections responsible. The inoculators are an hours-long series of carefully orchestrated audio-visual and XP experiences developed through extensive study of the action of basilisk hacks on the human nervous system. These inputs are mind-bending, nauseating, and distressing, inflicting SV 1d10 and DV 1d10 ÷ 2, but they provide resistance against some strains of basilisk hacks (+10 to +30 on tests to resist effects). Eng and many of his staff are immune or nearly immune to the basilisk strains their lab has developed, enabling them to use them effectively as incapacitating weapons.

Hyperdimensional Mathematics Visualizer

Situated in a private study adjacent to the office where Eng receives visitors, this wall-sized device is lit as if it were an expensive curio cabinet and is faced by a large, comfortable chair—Eng's favorite spot for quiet contemplation. The device was inspired by a pet theory of Eng's: that the headhunter warbots operated by the TITANs during the Fall were not collecting transhuman heads for uploading, but rather to experiment on a mass scale with the computational possibilities of organic brains. It is elegantly constructed of some dark, brushed metal and would be a stunning work of art if not for its other characteristics.

Most of the device consists of a series of precisely balanced arms attached to a bewildering three-dimensional array of swivel mounts, levers, counterweights, and flywheels. Here and there amid the mechanism are various troughs and basins of water, part of an elaborate fountain system that also drives portions of the machine by slowly filling cups on the ends of some of the arms. At one or both ends of each arm is a living human head in a rubber mask revealing only the eyes and mouth. The heads are from a wide variety of biomorphs, but all have been bodysculpted with grotesquely elongated tongues capable of pushing off from surfaces near the head and drawing water in a fashion similar to an elephant's trunk. The arms supply everything the heads need to live—except water. The still-conscious heads therefore spend much of their time trying to push themselves toward various parts of the fountain system. The mechanical portions of the device are meticulously maintained and largely silent, save for the trickle of water and the occasional emptying of one of the troughs or cups.

The device is a three-dimensional mechanical computer designed to visualize several obscure principles of higher-dimensional mathematics. Projected in muted tones in AR windows on the floor, walls, and ceiling and from a high-def holo projector are a slowly shifting array of animations isomorphic to the movements of the mechanism. The computing power to generate these animations comes mostly from the heads themselves; the quantum computer's main function is to do traffic control for the output.

The heads do not have accompanying cortical stacks (although Eng has backups of the more interesting ones on file, indexed by which arm he had the head attached to) and will quickly die if detached from the device, unless placed immediately in medical stasis or a healing vat (although investigators may rightly question whether this is even worth doing). GMs may wish to have abductees off the street, captured Firewall agents, or PCs' loved ones among the heads. Simply viewing the machine causes SV 1d10.

Red Five Plot Hooks

GMs can use these plot seeds to introduce Red Five to their campaigns.

- One of the AHL discoveries is released into a "test market," such as the Little Shanghai neighborhood of Valles-New Shanghai, but the experiment grows out of control.
- Investigators are contacted by the lover or spouse of an AHL researcher who went away for a few days on a corporate "retreat" and came back a sociopath—or didn't come back at all.

Sybils

The Sybils are a third faction of ASIs distinct from both the TITANS and the Prometheans. Their exact aims and goals are left up to the GM but they seem, at least at this point in time, to have the best interests of transhumanity in mind with many of their activities. Of course this could just be coincidence or it could be an attempt to gain sympathy for some longer-range, much-more-sinister plan. The "help" they provide often puts them in conflict with Firewall and Ozma, and their propensity to manipulate active agents from many factions—including Firewall—to carry out their operations is likely to lead to hostilities. While not directly dangerous, they are potentially a serious threat for Firewall, because their primary goal is acquiring information and they are considerably less committed to secrecy.

Sybil Secrets and Rumors

The exact nature of the Sybils is up to the GM, but here are a few possibilities:

- The Sybils are an attempt to maximize transhuman intelligence augmentation by combining an enhanced biological mind with an extensive expert-system exocortex.
- The Sybils are an attempt to blend AGI (or even ASI) and human egos. Each Sybil is a hybrid mind, consisting of one transhuman ego and one AI who have begun a slow process of integrating into a single individual. The split-personality nature of these beings is sometimes readily apparent.
- There is only one ASI behind the Sybils, bit it employs an elite cabal of hackers to do its bidding and manage its "public" face.
- Sybil forecasting capabilities are so good because they have also managed to hack into the forecasting capabilities of a rival group (Oversight, Stellar Intelligence, or even Firewall) and use this to their advantage.
- The Sybils are feeding information to Firewall and manipulating sentinels because they are doing their best to map out Firewall's decentralized network and identify proxies.

The Ultimate Threat

For years, the ultimates have steadily increased their participation in gatecrashing missions and as security contractors for colonies and research stations established throughout the gate network. Unbeknownst to most of their corporate partners, this is part of a deliberate plan put in place by the ultimates' demiurge, Manu Bhattacharya, shortly after the first gate was discovered. Even before the Fall, Bhattacharya and the ultimates advocated for aggressive colonization of the system based on the realization that overpopulation and ravenous resource stripping posed a serious threat to the long-term success of transhumanity. After the losses of the Fall, due to what the ultimates saw as transhumanity's collective weakness, Bhattacharya committed himself and many at the core of the faction to move the ultimates beyond transhuman society and off onto its own, which is exactly the possibility the gates provide.

At this point, years of planning and the labors of the faction as a whole have brought the ultimates to the cusp of making a play to seize control of all of the solar system's Pandora gates and their networks for themselves. Transhumanity would be sealed in their home solar system, and the ultimates would be free to take to the stars and establish their own ideal society. The plan consists of five phases:

Phase 1: Build Capability

This stage is currently complete. The ultimates have gathered and centralized records covering working knowledge of operations and defenses of all gate facilities in the solar system, and most locations throughout each gate network. The faction has a significant concentration of personnel and matériel in position near two of the five known gates in-system—Discord and the Fissure Gate—that can rapidly deploy. They have forces ready on most habitats throughout the Discord network and on several key facilities in the Fissure network. The faction as a whole has a

massive number of trained fighters available on the Xiphos and Ariel stations that can move en masse into the Fissure network once hostilities begin. The faction has also spent years getting undercover members into positions where they can be highly disruptive to other polities that will oppose the seizure, slowing their responses and limiting their efficacy.

Phase 2: Initial Seizure

Xiphos has served as a staging ground for a slow buildup of forces for years. The thousands of infugees that have been bought and hosted at Xiphos have undergone years of enhanced-speed VR indoctrination and training and have been turned into a ready army of zealous recruits. A fleet of ships has been assembled to transport these thousands of troops towards Chat Noir. When hostilities begin, warships will overwhelm the defenses, opening up the Fissure Gate network for large-scale invasion. Forces already in place at Pharos will similarly depart to seize the Torii station controlling the Discord Gate from without and within, as forces distributed through the network assist in its capture. The massed forces moving through the gates will seize Portal, Luca, Just In Case, and other exoplanets, and use the gates there to invade and seize the Vulcanoid Gate. All such activity should be achieved within a few hundred hours.

Phase 3: Network Control

Once the Discord, Fissure, and Vulcanoid Gates are controlled, forces will be consolidated and redeployed through Portal, Just In Case, and others to seize the Pandora Gate, then push on through Babylon, Templeton's World, and others to seize the Martian Gate. Even with the rapid completion of Phase 2, the forces controlling Pandora and the Martian Gates will likely be able to offer more significant resistance, and incoming connections to those gates may be locked out. It is hoped that deep-cover agents, saboteurs, and a gate-hopping force of thousands of battle-hardened and heavily armed ultimates will delay, degrade, and disorganize efforts to oppose or respond to the seizure and overcome these obstacles. To the extent practical, smaller and weaker extrasolar locations will be seized outright. Those that offer more resistance will be shut off and starved of supplies to weaken them for future takeover. This phase should be completed in 1–8 weeks.

Phase 4: Fortification

Although the ultimates can likely seize the gate networks quickly, there is little possibility that they will be able to make any footholds or seize territory in this system outside of the Discord and Fissure Gates. The Xiphos station is capable of movement, and will be brought into orbit near the Discord Gate and serve as a rallying point for all other in-system ultimates to return to that they might join their brethren out-system. Other in-system gates will be fortified as much as possible to stand against recapture efforts, but they may be destroyed if they cannot be held. This phase will carry on for months, and will likely be a slow, scorched-earth retreat as the ultimates abandon their in-system presence other than at Torii/Pharos and Chat Noir/Ariel/Xiphos. Any gates that are abandoned will be blown with antimatter bombs so they needn't be defended.

Phase 5: Severance

Once the faction has withdrawn from the system except for its bastions around the Fissure and Discord gates, it will move on into the stars via all other extrasolar locations it has conquered. Depending on the speed and completeness of a given habitat's submission to the ultimates, residents will be offered a chance to willingly enter the ultimates' service as a working caste or be eliminated. The ultimates have already prepared protocols for dividing their membership up among the conquered territories, assuring a blend of skills and personalities from their number that can serve as the seed to their own society. To the extent possible, they will stay in contact as part of one larger society, but if it is necessary to destroy gates within a network for security, it can be done without necessarily dooming its network locations. A new capital for ultimate society will be established on Just In Case.

Complications

One possibility accounted for in their plans is that it will be untenable for the ultimates to safely guard the gates in the long-term due to stronger-than-expected resistance from other transhuman factions. In this case, ultimate operatives could deploy new WMDs that they have developed from captured exsurgent and exhuman tech, as well as engaging in purgative attacks meant to wipe out significant populations with large-scale WMDs such as fusion and antimatter bombs.

Although the ultimates have planned well, the most vulnerable period in their agenda is during the weeks immediately leading up to and just after they first act. Any early indication of their efforts to Go-nin or the Love and Rage collective at Chat Noir could allow for a much stiffer initial defense. Any time lost during the first few days of the seizure could allow the organization of stronger defenses by forces controlling gates and the formation of alliances between those disparate groups. The ultimate leadership is thus caught between biding time to build up their capabilities while risking pre-emptive exposure of their plans.

A final concern to the ultimates is that transhumanity still does not have fine control over the gates. Though gates can in theory be locked to prevent outside entities from opening connections, these locks can also be overcome. The confirmed ability to lock the rest of transhumanity out their gate network is a crucial but lacking element to the ultimates' current plan.

XENOFUNGAL THREATS

Transhumanity has encountered a variety of life in extrasolar systems, much of which is pathogenic and parasitic. A few distinct forms of xenofungus stand out, however, not in the least due to their similarity to terrestrial strains such as *Cordyceps*. These xenofungal parasitoids do more than just infect and kill transhumans—they affect their behavior, exhibiting a form of mind control.

As if zombie-making capability wasn't enough, either the TITANs or creative exsurgents went to great lengths to modify some types of xenofungus, specially tailoring them to affect transhumans.

XENOFUNGAL INFECTION

Xenofungus is treated like other pathogens (p. 325, *EP*). They are typically spread via dermal and inhalation vectors (p. 317, *EP*). Exposed victims must make an Opposed Test between their DUR and the xenofungus Infection Rating. Medichines and toxin filters each provide a +30 modifier. If the xenofungus wins, the character is infected.

DETECTION AND TREATMENT

In most cases, cursory medical screening will not detect an infection in its early stages. Only advanced medical testing (including the likes of deep tissue scans, nanoswarm diagnosing, respiratory tract tissue samples, etc.) and a successful Medicine Test at –30 will detect an infection within the first day.

Once the fungus begins to grow into the victim's body, however, it is easier to detect (no modifier). After that point, the infection reaches the brain and the victim falls under the xenofungus's mental control. Fungal growths may be visible on or under the skin during this stage; the victim usually dies shortly afterwards. The xenofungus will begin sprouting from within the body at this point (through orifices and also piercing through the skin) and will spore a day or two later.

Infected people can be treated. A few hours in a healing vat (2 hours per day of infection) will remove the infection.

Once the infection has reached the brain, a character should no longer be played as a player character. The chemicals released from the xenofungus prevent them from committing suicide or otherwise acting against the infection and will in fact become extremely protective of themselves and the fungus.

BLUE-EYED SHOOTER

Vector: Dermal, Injection
Infection Rating: 50

This xenofungus thrives in dark, cool locations, away from sunlight. Blue-eyed shooters evolved an intriguing and painful method for transferring their spores to other, more mobile living creatures. This



xenofungus sprouts long tubular stalks from its mycelium. These stalks end in bulbous white vesicles, which fill with a pressurized fluid. At the tip of each vesicle is a bright blue crystalline sporangium, filled with spores and mucus. Together the vesicle and sporangium look distinctly like an eyeball on the end a fungal stalk.

The stalks of blue-eyed shooters have evolved the capability to sense light and infrared heat signatures. If a bright or warm heat source—such as a warm-blooded creature—moves within a certain range (usually around 50 meters), the "eye" will "look" in that direction and track it as it moves. If the light/heat source comes within 20 meters, the xenofungus will trigger a wave of increased pressure in the vesicle, bursting it open, and propelling the crystal spore pod with more acceleration than a firearm, effectively shooting the target. The sporangia break open upon impact, injecting spores within the body and around the surface of the impact site.

Struck targets that become infected by the spores will sicken and lose 5 points from their SOM each day. The spores will also inflict DV 1d10 every 12 hours, which cannot be healed until the xenofungus is removed. Additionally, after 12 hours of infection victims become acutely averse to light and heat. After 24 hours, they will be blinded by bright lights and suffer a –20 modifier even in dim light; heat over 24 C becomes physically painful (treat as being hit by an agonizer). After 36 hours, infected victims will feel compelled to find a dark, cool place to seek comfort; treat as Modified Behavior (Compelled: Seek Out Dark and Cool). When the victim's SOM reaches zero, they will die, and the xenofungus will grow and fruit from the corpse.

Even if a victim resists infection, or is a synthmorph, blue-eyed shooter fungus has a taste for the synthetic materials that make up modern body armors and other gear. If struck armor is not carefully cleaned, the xenofungus will spread between layers and eat away the armor's integrity. Reduce both Energy and Kinetic AV by –1 per 12 hours. The armor inherent to synthmorph shells is immune to this effect. At the GM's discretion, this can spread to other gear and damage it as well, impairing its function or destroying it entirely within a matter of days. Cleaner or gardener nanoswarms will remove xenofungus from gear, while fixers or repair spray will undo the damage once the fungus is removed.

Each patch of xenofungus typically has between 4 and 12 "eye" stalks. Each is only capable of shooting once, though the fungus can grow more in just a few hours.

Blue-Eyed Shooter Xenofungus

Xenoflora
Numbers: 4–12 stalks
Spore Shot: 55, DV 2d10 + 3, AP –6
Perception: 40
Ware: Enhanced Vision (Infrared Only)

Purple Scab

Vector: Dermal, Inhalation
Infection Rating: 65
This xenofungus is spread primarily through physical contact. Spores will attach to the body, penetrate the skin, and grow inside the body. Dark mottled patches will appear on their skin (1–2 days), eventually turning into larger purple patches. As the xenofungus reaches the victim's nervous system and brain (3–4 days), they become increasingly aggressive and hostile, acquiring the Modified Behavior (Compelled: Aggression) trait. The purple patches will rapidly grow into thick scab-like plates (adding 1d10 ÷ 2 AV per 12 hours, up to a maximum 13/13) while the victim's lungs and throat fill up with spores. The infected will then seek to spread the xenofungus by murdering and/or coughing on others; they receive the Modified Behavior: Compelled: Murder/Spread Infection trait. Targets must make a Fray Test to avoid being coughed upon.

Once the scab armor equals 13/13, the victim will suffer DV 1d10 + 1 every 6 hours until they die. They will seek out an open or high area, so that the xenofungus may feed off their body, fruit, and gain maximum dispersal for its spores.

Viscid Greenhorn

Vector: Inhalation
Infection Rating: 55
Named for its stickiness and fruiting appearance, this asexual xenofungus thrives in warm, damp environs.

When a victim breathes in the spores, they attach to the inside of the throat, lungs, and sinus cavities and germinate. From there, they grow thin tendrils into the victim's body (2–3 days). Once these tendrils penetrate into the brain (4+ days), they begin releasing mind-altering chemicals that affect the victim's perceptions and behaviors. An infected person at this stage can be diagnosed without advanced scans, as the fungal infection becomes visible in their throat and under the skin.

The infected become slightly dazed, highly-sensitive to odors, and concerned primarily with finding the ideal location from which the fungus can spread its spores. The ideal location is one that is warm, moist, and subject to strong winds. The infected will do what is needed to secure the site, including breaking and entering, killing, and fortifying it from others. Mind-controlled victims suffer DV 1d10 + 1 every 12 hours; this cannot be healed while they remain infected. Once the parasite kills the victim, it replaces its host's tissue, sprouts from the body, and fruits into maturity, eventually releasing its spores. The entire process takes just under a week. Even though the victim is doomed to die, the xenofungal infection prevents them from contemplating suicide or pursuing similarly self-destructive measures.

Victims acquire Enhanced Smell and the Modified Behavior (Compelled: Protect and Spread the Xenofungus) trait, but will also suffer –5 COG and WIL modifiers and will seem dazed and distant to others.

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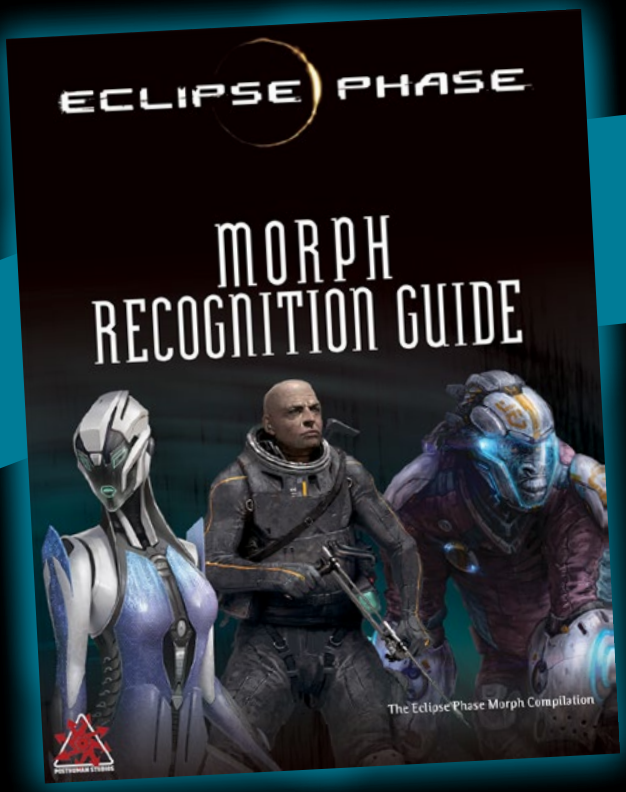
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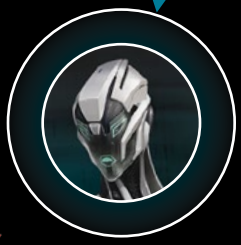
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