

LEGENDARY PLANET



CONFEDERATES OF THE SHATTERED ZONE

BY RICHARD PETT

STARFINDER
COMPATIBLE



CONFEDERATES OF THE SHATTERED ZONE

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SPECIAL ELECTRONIC FEATURES

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

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WELCOME TO THE LEGENDARY PLANET ADVENTURE PATH

This product is a part of our line of sword-and-planet adventure products blending science fiction and traditional fantasy in an interplanetary epic that will take your characters to whole new worlds of adventure. Drawing from the pulp sci-fi tradition of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Jack Vance, and their contemporaries, this adventure saga spans exotic worlds filled with alien races and ancient secrets, as the heroes must confront interstellar conspiracies and unravel long-lost mysteries if they are to save the galaxy from annihilation, or even just find a way home. Whatever you favor the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game* or the 5th edition of the world's most famous RPG, when you see the Legendary Planet logo you'll know you are getting an adventure that is quite literally out of this world.

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

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

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

Legendary Games has brought together a group of authors, artists, and contributors—including industry veterans as well as talented newcomers—all in an effort to create products for your favorite roleplaying games that are both inspiring and unique. Combining rich story and background with beautiful aesthetics, we hope to create gaming experiences that are second to none. This product follows in that proud tradition, and we hope you enjoy using it as much as we enjoyed making it. Now go create a mythic surge of gaming! Your players deserve it!

Neil



CONFEDERATES OF THE SHATTERED ZONE

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

ADVANCEMENT TRACK

As in *Dead Vault Descent*, it's suggested that you level the PCs up at the appropriate story moments rather than tracking XP. If you track XP, characters will be higher level than intended due to the increased power of their legendary feats.

- 11—The characters begin this adventure at 11th level.
- 12—By the time the PC's have opened one gate they should be 12th level and have three legendary feats.
- 13—When they reach Zenith, the PCs should be 13th level
- 14—When they complete this adventure the PCs should be 14th level and have four legendary feats.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

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

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

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

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Unfortunately, each gate lies a perilous journey away from Beacon and is controlled by an opposing faction of the

confederacy. The most remote sits within a Purity base—the very base used to launch the expedition to Asteroid 113. The PCs must use their talents and decide how to undertake these journeys—as friend or foe, by word or sword.

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

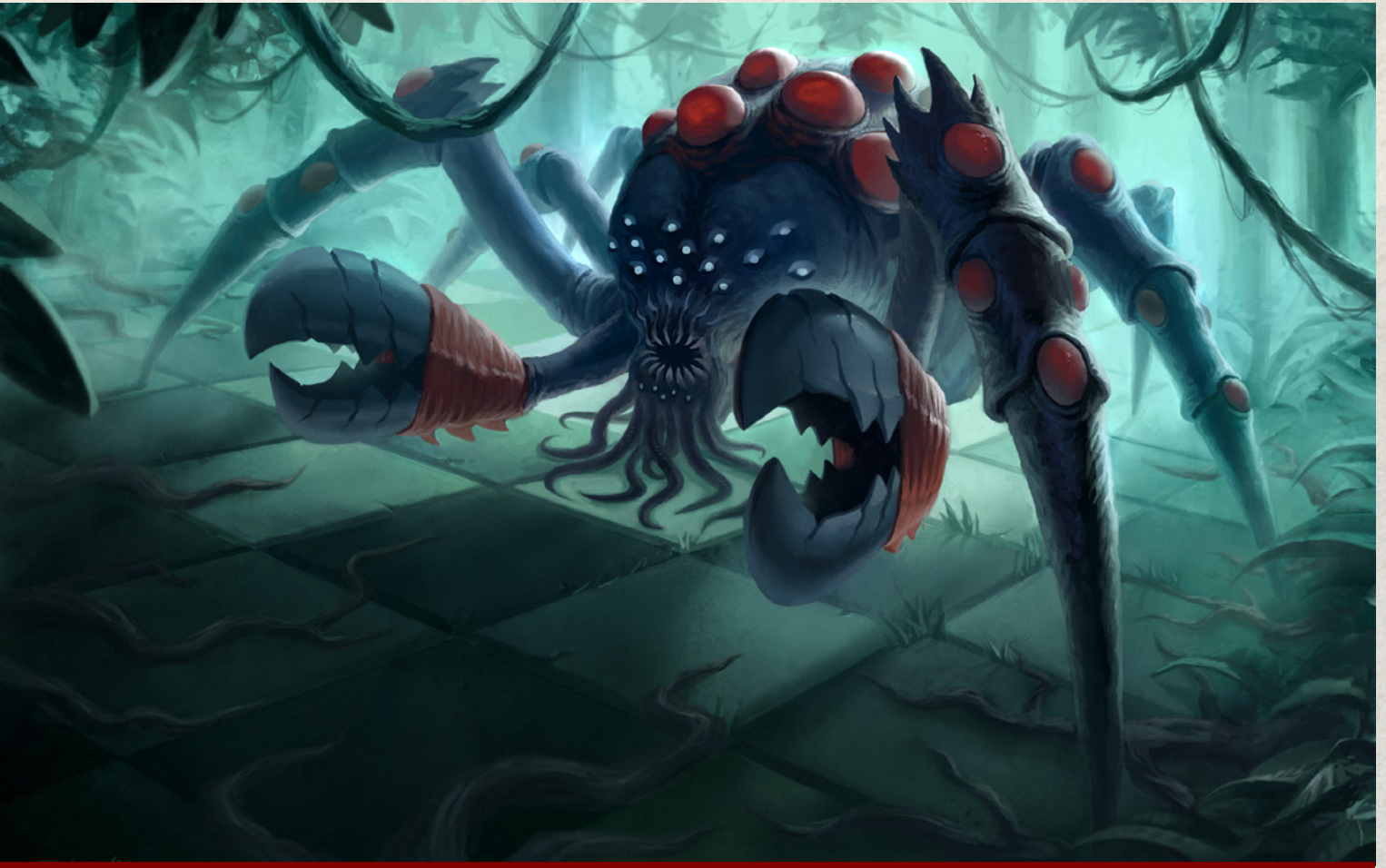
As they venture through the prison, the PCs realize the vast number of their enemy, they also stumble upon the remaining parts of the Purity dig, but during the battle Roth escapes. Confronting the kyton God-Seer, the PCs finally arrive at the entrance to the ancient cyst of knowledge, but the gateway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

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

INTRODUCTION—NO WAY HOME

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

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



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

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

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

PART ONE—AN UNPLEASANT PROPOSAL

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

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

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

Culture or Diplomacy checks gather the following information.

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

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

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

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

Entered through an ornate archway etched into an otherwise mundane wall, the palace is pocket dimension created by a permanent magical effect. The space is largely similar to the outside world, but is more attuned to sentient will, enabling its owner (and talented guests) to draw phantoms from its substance.

The entire pocket reflects the aberration's many alien moods—when she feels displeasure the chamber fills with a shrill sound, when she is pleased an overpowering, alien musk envelops the chamber. These effects are not, unless detailed, mechanical unless you wish to make them so.

The palace presently consists of a single large domed circular chamber wreathed in phantom flowers and enveloped by a quasi-real jungle, from within which can be heard insects singing and the growling of a distant phantom storm. Ha'vzeer has worked long and hard to fashion this environment—it is the work of many months, and although her moods offset these effects, the jungle remains in the background of this adventure. If the PCs try to move from this space they quickly see it is a veneer of illusion, characters succeeding at a DC 30 Perception check recognize this effect immediately.

Upon entry, the PCs sense something odd about the place, as though they were being *scryed*. The effect is actually the salient spirit of the mansion probing the PCs' minds; the PCs can try to manipulate this incursion in ways detailed below. Characters succeeding at a DC 30 Mysticism check also recognize this effect and are aware that they can manipulate the rooms to a certain extent. Doing so without permission from Ha'vzeer is a great break of etiquette and costs the PCs 3 Favor (detailed below).

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

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

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

A massive crab-like creature nests amid the cushions at the center of the chamber, its long-jointed legs stretching and cracking around its body. A lolling tongue emerges from a mouth ringed by asymmetrical teeth and runs over the dozen clear, fleshy sacs on the creature's back, each containing a humanoid brain.

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

HA'VZEER-NIIM-CHAAKOOR-HASAAM'M-ZHIN-NO-CHIIR-VAS-ASCH **CR 13**

XP 25,600

NE Large aberration

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; **Perception** +23

DEFENSE **HP 190**

EAC 26; **KAC** 27

Fort +12; **Ref** +12; **Will** +16

DR 10/magic; **Immune** confusion effects; **SR** 24

OFFENSE

Speed 10 ft., fly 40 ft. (perfect)

Melee bite +22 (6d4+19 P plus poison)



Spells Known (CL 13th)

5th (3/day)—*crush skull* (DC 24), *dominate person* (DC 24)
 4th (4/day)—*confusion* (DC 23), *fear* (DC 23), *hold monster* (DC 23), *mind thrust* (DC 23)
 3rd (at will)—*dispel magic*, *slow* (DC 22)

STATISTICS

Str +6; **Dex** +1; **Con** +4; **Int** +8; **Wis** +2; **Cha** +2

Feats Combat Casting, Mystic Strike

Skills Life Sciences +28, Mysticism +28, Sense Motive +18, Stealth +18

Languages Abyssal, Aklo, Celestial, Common, Draconic, Infernal, Protean; telepathy (100 feet)

SQ brain collection

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Brain Collection (Ex) A neh-thalggu can store up to seven humanoid brains and use them to enhance its knowledge and power. Each stored brain grants a neh-thalggu a cumulative +1 insight bonus to EAC, KAC, concentration checks, Will saves, and Intelligence-based skill checks. A neh-thalggu can extract a brain from a helpless opponent with a coup de grace attack, or as a standard action from a body that has been dead for no more than 1 minute. A neh-thalggu that has fewer than seven brains gains one negative level for each missing brain. These negative levels can never become permanent, but they can only be removed by replacing one of its collected brains. The stats presented here assume a monster with a full collection.

Poison (Ex) Ha'vzeer's bite is particularly venomous. **Type** poison (injury); **Save** Fortitude DC 21; **Track** Strength; **Frequency** 1/round for 6 rounds; **Cure** 2 consecutive saves.

Spells (Sp) Ha'vzeer casts spells as an 13th-level spellcaster. For each negative level she takes from missing brains, her caster level is reduced by 1. A neh-thalggu with no collected brains cannot cast any of its spells.

Treasure: Ha'vzeer keeps her personal valuables in a cyst hidden deep within the folds of her carapace. A Medicine check (DC 35) is required to locate it, although this DC is reduced by 10 if the alien's body is torn apart and a manual check is made of the flesh remaining. The cyst contains a fully charged *haste circuit* armor upgrade kept in a velvet purse, a beautiful snail-shell broach fashioned from platinum, death's head moth charms made of jacinth worth 12,500 credits, and the keys to both Thanex gates—both are circular disks about 5 inches in diameter. The first key is formed of scoured human bone with a number of interlocking dials like a clock mechanism, the second (the one for the gate to Beacon) is made of scoured emerald glass inlaid with intricate designs depicting fettered figures below a pitiless sun. Both are simple key mechanisms; the first has moving parts, but this is simply for effect. Putting a value on the objects is difficult as the Thanex coterie would do everything in its power to recover them if stolen, and everyone knows that.

DEALING WITH HA'VZEER

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

Any character with an Intelligence score of 18 or higher gains her immediate attention (characters specifically attempting to appear stupid must attempt a Bluff check opposed by her Sense Motive). Ha'vzeer believes that she is but a single fine mind from achieving a sort of enlightenment and transitioning to a new stage of existence. She extols their brain's fine virtues and unique capacity, while wrapping her tongue around the target's head if they don't resist. She turns to the other PCs present and makes an immediate offer of 50,000 credits worth of technological items, to be constructed to the PCs' specifications and delivered within 13 days, for the target's brain. Brain first—technology after, but she is happy to sign a Thanex document to honour the agreement if the PCs insist. If they press the deal, PCs can gain access to the gate as often as they wish. Note that *raise dead* will not replace the missing brain. If the PCs' refuse, she arranges for the PC in question to be attacked later in the adventure to secure her brain anyway (see Part Two for more details).

A suggested simple outline of events is proposed to enable to you to run the encounter. Although skill DCs and mechanical guidelines are provided, roleplaying should be rewarded at the same level or even higher to your group's taste. In either case, these awards are tracked in Favor—if the PCs gain a certain number they may not only gain access to the gate but potential rewards. The events that make up this encounter are detailed below.

A FORMAL EVENING WITH AN ALIEN BRAIN EATER

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

Firstly—and most importantly—her name is pronounced *Ha'vzeer-Neem-Chäkoor-Hasäm'm-Zheen-no-Chīr-Vas-āsh*. Pronouncing it wrongly is a grave insult to the PCs host and would-be-ally. Every time the PCs say her name incorrectly, subtract 1 Favor. For the first 5 times they say her name properly add 1 Favor for each time it is correctly pronounced.

Remembering and pronouncing the name correctly can be handled with a Culture (DC 15) or Diplomacy (DC 25) check. But if a player gets into the spirit and manages a close pronunciation, feel free to treat that as a success without requiring a roll.

Throughout the event Ha'vzeer uses her spells often. Some of these (such as *confusion*) may lead to injury, but to neh-thalgggu such spells are merely jests. A character succeeding at a Sense Motive (DC 30) check knows this. She expects to be the subject of spells back, but if any of these are directly offensive the encounter immediately becomes violent.

Ha'vzeer uses *confusion* and *fear* during the encounter. She uses these whenever she wishes to put off the PCs' attempts at impressing her by way of a special test.

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

LET THE EVENING COMMENCE

When the PC's arrive, the neh-thalgggu is reclining on a mound of cushions; she behaves in an intentionally off-putting manner (which can be verified with a DC 30 Sense Motive check, but costs 2 Favor to point out) and speaks in excited, rasping bursts. She has a, possibly annoying, habit of running her tongue excitedly across her teeth when she thinks she has got one over the PCs. If the PCs have brought gifts, award them 2 Favor for magic worth 5,000 credits or above or the same for 100 credits worth of opium (or similar powerful and addictive drugs).

Laid before her are three covered dishes; a Perception check (DC 20) notes that within one something moves and squeals. These light repasts are uncovered by *unseen servants* whenever you wish. The first dish contains segments of cerebriic fungi brain, and the second a curious soup within which float sherbet-flavored living starfish. The final dish is a rare delicacy: one screaming crab for each PC present. These crabs look like gobstopper-sized balls of carapace within which lurk small balls of fur that howl shrilly and taste delicious. Offering their portion to the host is the height of ill-manners and costs 4 Favor if suggested. Anyone succeeding at a Culture check (DC 20) realizes this is a breach in etiquette.

A PC eating one may attempt a Diplomacy check (DC 25) to impress their host (gaining 1 Favor) by eating it properly (biting open-mouthed and dribbling some of the contents down ones' chin). Failing the check costs 1 Favor. Not eating the food is an insult costing 2 Favor. Unfortunately, the crabs make an shrill yowling noise when crunched, and continue to do so of several seconds after being swallowed. After introductions—which gives the PCs' spokes person a chance to attempt a single Diplomacy check (DC 35 for 1 Favor)—she gets down to business, asking the PCs what she can do for them. She is aware of the PCs' sponsors and asks a few

innocent but barbed questions. She tells the PCs he does not like or trust their allies but is sure the PCs must have good motive to use them, so she will listen to what they have to say as etiquette requires.

At this point she pointedly asks some of the PCs what they think of the rest. The PCs can make a Bluff or Diplomacy checks depending on whether they are speaking the truth or not. If the Diplomacy check exceeds 25 or the Bluff succeeds Ha'vzeer chuckles and then asks the other PCs what their friends' best talents are—again use a Bluff or Diplomacy to arrive at the answer with the same checks above. For each check that succeeds award the PCs 1 Favor. At this point—as she does often—Ha'vzeer is simply playing with the PCs, but any character called out for their mental talents receives treatment as mentioned above for high-Intelligence characters.

After this brief discussion she calls for the tea ceremony to commence. Over the next half hour seventy-four vessels, utensils and objects are brought forth. The tea ceremony in an obscure and ancient ritual, and is completed by a single Diplomacy check by each PC (DC 30) over the course of an hour. The check is worth 2 Favor on a success or -1 Favor on a failure. The tea in question is rarest Koh-Froo tea grown on plantations in a distant world known as the Za and fed by ground human carcasses. PCs succeeding at a Life Sciences check (DC 35) are aware of its source; mentioning it is worth 4 Favor. On the other hand, PCs can notice certain flaws in their host's handling of the ceremony with a successful DC 40 Culture check but lose 2 Favor by pointing it out.

Finally, Ha'vzeer asks the PCs if they would join her in her game—becoming agitated and excited immediately. She even sweetens the pot by mentioning that the game came from the world they seek to visit. If the PCs' refuse the neh-thalgggu becomes angry, the mood in the chamber darkens, and unless the PCs reconsider the alien sulks. Unless the PCs change their minds, go to the end of this event and fail the PCs.

LET THE GAME BEGIN

The game is known as the sensoria id abstracta—a distraction she uses to amuse herself and any number of opponents. In essence, as the PCs may have already noticed, the entire pocket dimension is attuned to the aberration, to the point where she can draw phantoms from the air and give them flesh. These phantoms are temporary, however; they lack substance and are mere shadows a true summoning.

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



worth a penalty of 6 Favor.

She demonstrates the game as she explains the rules, shaping the roiling ball of flesh into it a likeness of all the PCs' faces in a single ball of angry teeth, a rippling mass of skin containing impossibly jagged bones that tear out with whale-song, or a screaming mass of fur, hair and mouths

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

The game involves the competitors struggling to control a morphic creature that responds to their will. She'll allow as many PCs to join the game as would like. In fact, if multiple players join and one makes a successful Bluff or Diplomacy check (DC 30) to convince her they're excited, they gain one Favor.

Each contestant is granted a round to attempt to control the creature. As a standard action, anyone may attempt to seize control of the creature with a Mysticism check (DC 30). By spending a legendary power point, the creature can be controlled even on a failed check.

The controller can then attempt a Intimidate, Life Science, or appropriately creative Profession check to twist the creature into a hideous shape. Be sure to grant circumstance bonuses on these rolls for appropriate descriptions. Any result that reaches DC 30 causes Ha'vzeer to rasp her legs together in approval and grants the group 2 Favor. After each contestant has had their turn, the highest result among these checks wins.

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

Contestants waiting for their turn and characters on the sidelines can cheer on contestants with Diplomacy to Aid Another or Demoralize contestants with Intimidate. They can even throw spells into the arena, which Ha'vzeer accepts begrudgingly as long as she is not damaged. Damaging her or the strange creature is a grotesque cheat, costing 6 Favor.

Ha'vzeer does not need to make a Mysticism check as she already controls the creature but does attempt Life Science in her turn as the other contestants. She will also cast spells (other than *crush skull*) during her opponents' turns, particularly if other contestants or observers are cheating.

The game ends after each contestant had a turn and is worth 6 Favor if the PCs' lose. If the PCs failed to make a good showing, never even controlling the beast, Ha'vzeer is disappointed and the group loses 4 of the Favor just gained.

AND SO THE RESULT

If the PCs get less than zero Favor, Ha'vzeer offers the PCs access via the gate for one trip but wants something in reward—the living brain of a sentient creature with levels or CR in excess of 13 or an Intelligence or Wisdom modifier of +5, an item one PC has, or magic to the value of 26,000 credits.

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

If the PCs score ten or more Favor she tells the party how impressed she is with them and their talents, and invites one PC to come back the day after for a reward. At this event (which is for the PC alone) the Neh-thalggu lays on a special feast of things she thinks humans may like. Have fun playing on her alien idea of what pleasure might be and use your knowledge of your players to make the event memorable. At the end of the feast she offers the PC the same reward as above, but also has a special gift for them from the coterie: a mk 3 synergizing symbiot personal upgrade.

BREAKING THROUGH THE GATE

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

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

If statistics are needed for the guards of the prison, use Purity Obersolders (see page 81), but they number in the dozens, so a more circumspect approach will serve the PCs better.

THE SLAVERS' GATE

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

The gate to Beacon is circular, made of some unknown alloy with an iris opening. The gate is Large in size and can only be triggered by use of the correct key. When open, a shadowy, cloying black phlegm stretches across the opening.

A close inspection reveals shadowy limbs reaching out of this space occasionally. The limbs are not inherently dangerous.

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

Those entering the gate feel a revolting pulling at their joints, as though they are being stretched on a rack. They feel sure they are surrounded by screaming people begging for help. One PC feels hands grasp at her neck and has the words 'welcome my child' whispered into their ear in a harsh female voice.

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

PUNISHMENT BY PROXY

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

The package is a leather and bone box, tied with hemp and the opening sealed with a Thanex blood seal. Removing the seal and replacing it with a false one is very difficult and requires a DC 35 Culture check. For details of Lady Kethi and interaction with the box see page 18. The box and contents are subject to a spell that against *detect magic*, but if this is bypassed or dispelled (caster level 13th) the box radiates strong necromancy and conjuration.

When the box is opened two effects occur: first, a *snuff life* spell is triggered on up to six creatures touching the box (the effect does not occur if the box is opened remotely), followed immediately by summoning a swarm of angry adamantine wasps who attack anyone nearby. The box is otherwise empty.

ADAMANTINE WASP SWARM

CR 11

XP 12,800

N Fine construct (magical, swarm)

Init +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision;

Perception +25

DEFENSE

HP 180

EAC 24; **KAC** 26

Fort +11; **Ref** +11; **Will** +8

Defensive Abilities swarm defenses; **Immunities** construct immunities, swarm immunities; **SR** 22

OFFENSE

Speed 5 ft., fly 40 ft. (Ex, good)

Melee swarm attack (2d6+14 P plus adamantine wasp venom and distraction)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

Offensive Abilities distraction (DC 17)

STATISTICS

Str +3; **Dex** +8; **Con** —; **Int** —; **Wis** +5; **Cha** +0

Skills Acrobatics +20, Stealth +20

Other Abilities mindless, unliving

ADAMANTINE WASP VENOM

Type poison (injury); **Save** Fortitude DC 18

Track Dexterity; **Frequency** 1/round for 4 rounds

Effect progression track is Healthy—Sluggish—

Stiffened—Staggered—Immobile; Immobile is the end state. At the Immobile state, the victim freezes solid for 1d4 hours as its body hardens into ice. If the victim is reduced to 0 or fewer hit points while frozen, it shatters into pieces and dies.

Cure 2 consecutive saves

PART TWO—FIRST STEPS INTO THE SHATTERED ZONE

Beacon is the largest asteroid in the system of the Shattered Zone, has a feeble but breathable atmosphere and gravity at about the same level as the PCs' home planet. It is also one city—every inch of its surface is industrialized or urbanized or swallowed beneath construction. This construction is robust but utilitarian, giving the city the feel of a single enormous factory. Both Beacon and the Shattered Zone are detailed further in the gazetteer (page 78).

WELCOME TO BEACON...

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

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

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

The PCs arrive at the Beacon branch of the Thanex Coterie slave trade when the slave prison here is at its fullest—just prior to an auction, due to take place in a few days. The figure—**G'uurul Faa** (LN male mercane operative) is overseer of the Thanex Slave prison here on Beacon.

If troubled, he can call on several dozen auttaine guards and a selection of golems. The prison holds over a thousand slaves destined for the salt and coal mines on the industrial asteroids of the Shattered Zone. The mercane hears the gate operating long before anyone steps through and is therefore expecting visitors. He politely asks for the PC's papers, which he inspects and, unless they received special dispensation, reminds them that they have a single return journey allotted. The mercane is not interested in the PCs but can direct them in an absent-minded way to the Mechanism.

The PCs may have met G'uurul Faa at the party during *Dead Vault Descent*. If they left an impression on the mercane, be sure to include that in their interaction. If G'uurul has reason to hate the PCs, he passes news of their arrival on to several local factions (providing an alternate reason for encounters like the one with Pigspring below). But if the relation was more pleasant, he waves them through without only a cursory check of their paperwork and may even provide further information on the Shattered Zone.

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

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

A wan ochre light falls outside; the night sky outside is stained with countless gaslights. The sick glare of these flickering flames is weak, barely touching the shadowy figures that walk the ashen streets. Above the claustrophobic constructions, nature soars. The sky above is filled with asteroids—some dark shadows, some gracefully lit—dancing through the heavens. These fractured mountains of stone and iron dance with impossible grace, some seeming to kiss in the night air and threatening to bring calamity upon those below. Yet there is one more madness to behold in this wondrous heaven: the

chains. Countless vast chains link mountain to mountain, satellite to satellite, creating a cat's cradle seemingly woven by the gods themselves.

WELCOME TO BEACON, FRIEND (CR 13)

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



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

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

PIGSPRING

CR 12

XP 19,200

Auttaine soldier

N Medium humanoid (half-construct, human)

Init +12; Perception +22

DEFENSE

HP 200

EAC 26; KAC 28

Fort +16; Ref +14; Will +11

Defensive Abilities keep ticking 3d6

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.

Melee grindblade +22 (4d10+19 S; critical bleed 2d8)

Ranged perihelion laser rifle +26 (5d6+12 F; critical burn 2d6) or incendiary grenade IV +25 (explode [15 ft., 5d6 F, burn 3d6, DC 19])

Offensive Abilities soldier's onslaught

TACTICS

During Combat Pigspring prefers to stay at range, letting the gang members take the majority of the attacks and using grenades and soldier's onslaught with his rifle to deal damage to as many targets as possible.

Morale Pigspring flees after three of his gang members fall or flee. He'll use his keep ticking ability if damaged himself but flees if he is reduced to less than 100 hit points.

STATISTICS

Str +5; Dex +8; Con +4; Int -1; Wis +0; Cha -1

Skills Athletics +27, Intimidate +22, Stealth +22

Languages Common

Gear superior iridishell, 2 incendiary grenades IV, grindblade, perihelion laser rifle plus 2 batteries, plague-mask, hefty trawlerman's wax coat with several deep pockets (contains a chaarskin wallet with 67 credits and the keys to his tenement, a small opium pipe, and a hipflask of gin)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Keep Ticking (Ex) As a move action, Pigspring can regain 3d6 hit points. He cannot use this ability again until after a 10-minute rest.

GEAR STREET GANG MEMBER (7)

CR 5

XP 1,600 each

N Medium humanoid (half-construct, human)

Init +3; Perception +11

DEFENSE HP 70

EAC 17; KAC 19

Fort +9; Ref +7; Will +4

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee sintered longsword +22 (2d8+7 S)

Offensive Abilities breath weapon (15-foot cone, 6d6 A, DC 13, 1/day)

TACTICS

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

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

STATISTICS

Str +5; Dex +3; Con +2; Int +0; Wis -1; Cha -1

Skills Athletics +11, Intimidate +16, Stealth +11

Languages Common

Gear estex suit II, sintered longsword, heavy dirty clothes, plague mask, 25 credits; **Augmentations** specialized dragon gland

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

CATCH 22

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

The groups maintain a false image of calm partnership to ensure that Purity (themselves stretched almost to breaking point) do not violently intervene and take over as they have in the past. Below this veneer, an endless battle is taking place—primarily through covert means such as spycraft, assassination, and duplicity. Agents vanish, managers go missing, and workers die with alarming frequency, yet open warfare never takes place.

A minor tiff is about to come to a head as the PCs arrive. Mayor Gryne's network of spies is good, and she is aware that V'ii Mzarr, a prominent treasure hunter, has laid his hands upon an Ancient artifact: a *darksphere* (see page 76), which is allegedly a weapon of great value. Unfortunately for V'ii, he has been betrayed (under duress) by his associate Aspon Klaa. Klaa has since fled.

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

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

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

AN OFFER OF EMPLOYMENT

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

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

A smartly-dressed auttaine male wearing a long fancy frock-coat showing a pair of pearl-handled pistols approaches the PCs. The auttaine, **G'ebb Pegg** (LN male auttaine soldier), has a partially mechanical face and most of his right side is clockwork; he speaks in a very calm slow way so he can be easily understood. The auttaine picks a place where he knows Purity patrols are regular—just in case he has trouble. He makes a friendly approach to the PCs, offering them drinks or food or whatever seems appropriate. He says he has an offer for the PCs—one he would like to discuss privately (but not somewhere where he can't shout a patrol readily enough).

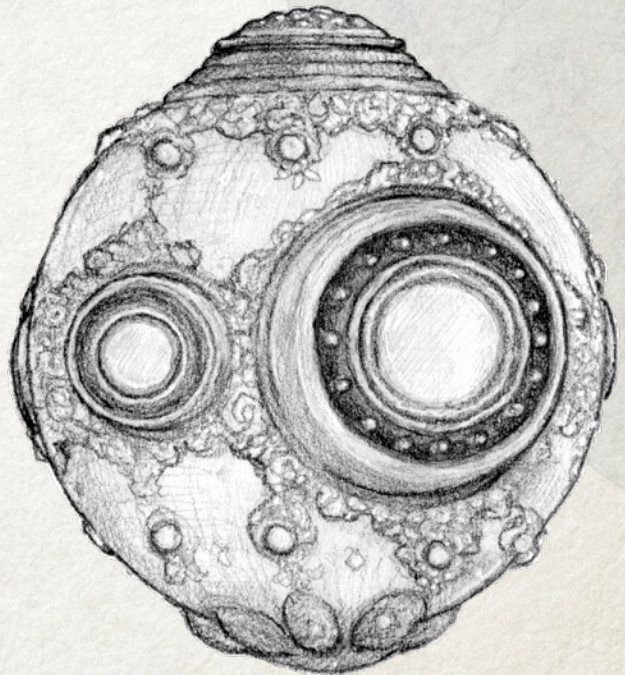
G'ebb tells the PCs that their recent exploits—so soon after their arrival—have come to the admiring attention of the mayor of Beacon, K'illiv Gryne. She is always on the lookout for new talent. G'ebb goes into some detail about the PCs arrival, the combat and anything else he can reasonably know, the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

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

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

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

Unfortunately for everyone, the meeting with the gunslinger is seen, noted, and discussed very rapidly by the Contraptors and Corrosive Ventures. Within the hour, **Aum** (LN male auttaine soldier), a hulking, rusty agent of Corrosive Ventures, arrives aboard a golem-rickshaw. Aum makes little effort to be subtle; the wiry auttaine simply tells the PCs that walls



have ears in Beacon, and he knows they have already been approached by G'ebb. He tells the PCs that they have a difficult choice ahead of them, as Corrosive Ventures leader T'ain Zick also wants the sphere and wants it badly. The PCs are to deliver it to Ventures' Headquarters where they will be rewarded.

If pressed, Aum is very vague about the *darksphere*; if the PCs try to dupe him (his Bluff and Sense Motive skills are +8) they soon find out he is not even sure if it shaped like a sphere and knows only it is a weapon of the Ancients. He knows as much as his superiors do about the item.

The final approach is made by an auttaine leading a six-legged two headed clockwork dog who covertly approaches the PCs. This auttaine **Stet** (LN female auttaine technomancer), represents the Contraptors, and comes across as honest, taking the approach that the PCs have been spoken to already by the others and that is likely to lead to trouble for them. Stet tells the PCs that whatever G'ebb and Aum told them is a lie and likely to get them killed. The mayor has a reputation for toughness—that's how she's become mayor; Aum's lot are irrelevant. Stet tries to get the PCs to tell her what they have been told (her Bluff and Sense Motive skills are +12) and then makes a counter-offer.

The item, she tells them, is in truth no-one's, but as V'ii technically works for her employers the Contraptors (which was true until a while ago) it really belongs to her superiors, and they'd like it back. Stet assures the PCs that the Contraptor's help is also not to be dismissed casually, and that if the PCs present her with the object, she will ensure that their future in the Zone is very rosy and protected from the mayor's thugs. She tells the PCs to bring the *darksphere* to the Contraptors Headquarters, reminding them that they have less than 20 hours.

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

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

V'II MZARR

The PCs can check for information about this dubious treasure hunter using Diplomacy checks to gather information. Higher checks reveal the information for lesser results.

DC 10—V'ii would steal his mother's springs for a credit. Killed dozens, duped a score out of fortunes in digs, and stolen more artifacts than Zone has rocks.

DC 30—V'ii allegedly has friends in high places; at least he's been seen hanging around with Purity guards plenty of times over the years.

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

If something looks the part, it could keep an enthusiastic dupe going for several days. Remember that as far as technology goes, the primary skill for identifying the *sphere* is Engineering. If the PCs are good enough, however, even an expert can be convinced that something is 'almost impossible to crack.' Try not to revert to mechanics too much here, though—this is about a great story. If a



player comes up with a fantastic cover for their fake artifact, then remember to either grant a bonus accordingly or consider allowing an automatic success—for a time.

The PCs should already be aware that fortunes are made from found objects, so they must be fairly common in the Zone. Not all the items are powerful of course; some have ceased to function, others are petty, but everything has a value, so traders can be found here in Beacon who deal in such antiquities.

PCs looking for alternate “dark spheres” can make a Diplomacy check (DC 35) locate two such traders. Within one trading establishment is a skymetal alloy sphere about the size of a fist; the object is marred by a web of fine alien sigils (which require a Culture check (DC 40) to decipher as instructions to create a *nullspace chamber*—those using the instructions to create such an item reduce the number of skill ranks required to craft it by 2. It could pass as the *darksphere* for a short time. The trader wants 1,000 credits for it. Another trader has a dark, spherical Ancient object, which he claims was some sort of healing sphere. He wants 2,500 credits for it but, with a DC 30 Engineering check, it can be identified as having long drained its charges.

ARSENIC EDGE WORKS ASTEROID

VOID GONDOLA (CR 15)

V'ii is smart, and over-cautious. He has already arranged purchase of the *darksphere* by a quartet of denizens of Leng and already tested it a few days ago. When he returns to Beacon this time he has a feeling that something is up, and has sent word ahead to some friends of his that he'll need protection—over and above his own steamwerks golem (see page 67)—when he arrives back. Unfortunately for the PCs, these friends are Purity guards. The guards reach the void gondola's destination ten minutes before it is due to arrive and loiter about looking menacing. Unusually there are just 6 guards, and no other members of a standard watch. Characters making a Sense Motive check (DC 30) note the guards appear a little edgy—this is because they shouldn't be here. They have slipped away from their allotted duties and, if unmasked, would be in big trouble.

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

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

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

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

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

V'II MZARR

CR 13

XP 25,600

Human operative

CN Medium humanoid (human)

Init +9; Perception +29

DEFENSE

HP 210

EAC 27; KAC 28

Fort +12; Ref +15; Will +16

Defensive Abilities improved evasion, uncanny agility

OFFENSE

Speed 50 ft.

Melee ultrathin dagger +24 (4d4+17 S)

Ranged elite shirren-eye rifle +24 (4d10+13 P; sniper 750 ft; unwieldy)

Offensive Abilities quad attack, trick attack +7d8 (Sleight of Hand +28)

TACTICS

Before Combat V'ii is expecting ambush—he's paranoid, so he always has his shirren-eye rifle in hand, hefting the great thing while keeping his dagger at his waist. He keeps the golem at his back at all times, even during combat. V'ii's first thought is to use a *spell ampoule of invisibility* and get away—he knows his clients are not far away. He has the *darksphere* and knows how to use it, so if cornered he activates it.

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

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

STATISTICS

Str +4; Dex +6; Con +8; Int +2; Wis +1; Cha +3

Skills Culture +29, Diplomacy +24, Intimidate +29, Physical Science +24, Profession (miner) +24, Sense Motive +24, Sleight of Hand +28

Languages Common

Gear d-suit IV decorated with an iron eagle, ultrathin dagger, elite shirren-eye rifle with 12 rounds, heavy dirty clothes,

plague mask, 25 credits, *mk 2 serum of healing*, 2 *spell ampoules of invisibility*, *darksphere* (page 76) held in a folded cloth below his armor, black leather gloves, high black leather boots with steel and silver spurs set with small diamonds worth 800 credits, silver pocket-watch set with amethysts worth 1,300 credits, and a reptile-skin wallet containing 1,120 credits.

GOLEM, STEAMWERKS

CR 14

XP 38,400

hp 250 (see page 67)

PURITY SQUAD OBERSOLDER (6)

CR 7

XP 19,200 each

hp 64 each (see page 80)

DENIZENS OF LENG (4)

CR 8

XP 4,800

CE Medium outsider (chaotic, evil, extraplanar)

Init +4; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +16

DEFENSE

HP 100 EACH

EAC 20; KAC 21

Fort +7; Ref +9; Will +11

Defensive Abilities unusual anatomy; Immunities poison;

Resistances cold 30, electricity 30; SR 19

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.

Melee bite +17 (1d12+8 P plus Dexterity drain) or claws +15 (1d8+8 S)

Ranged corona laser pistol +15 (2d4 F; critical burn 1d4)

Offensive Abilities trick attack 4d8

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 8th; melee +15, ranged +15)

2nd (1/day)—*fear* (2nd-level, DC 17), *mind thrust* (2nd-level, DC 17)

1st (3/day)—*confusion, lesser* (DC 16), *detect thoughts*, *flight*, *holographic image* (1st-level, DC 16), *plane shift* (self only)

o (at will)—*ghost sound*, *psychokinetic hand*

STATISTICS

Str +0; Dex +4; Con +0; Int +6; Wis +0; Cha +2

Skills Bluff +21, Culture +16, Disguise +21, Intimidate +16, Mysticism +21, Stealth +16

Languages Aklo, truespeech

Other Abilities planar fast healing

ECOLOGY

Environment any

Organization solitary or blaze (3–6)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Dexterity Drain (Su) The otherworldly teeth and tongue of a denizen of Leng deal 1d6 points of Dexterity drain with a bite. Constructs, elementals, and other creatures that do not possess flesh are immune to this effect. A successful DC 18 Fortitude save reduces the Dexterity drain to 1 point.

Planar Fast Healing (Su) A denizen of Leng maintains a connection to Leng at all times, and when away from Leng, it has fast healing 5. It loses this ability on Leng or in areas where planar connections do not function. If killed,

a denizen's body dissolves into nothingness in 1d4 rounds, leaving behind its equipment. A slain denizen reforms in Leng, similar to a slain summoned creature; it can only be permanently killed if its fast healing is negated.

Unusual Anatomy (Ex) A denizen's internal anatomy varies from individual to individual and has a 50% chance to treat any critical hit or precision damage against it as a normal hit.



CROSSING THE CONFEDERACY

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

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

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

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

LADY KETHI (CR 15)

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

DUBIOUS EMPLOYERS, MORAL CHOICES

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

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

AYVA

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

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



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

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

LADY KETHI

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

LADY KETHI

CR 13

XP 25,600

Auttaine technomancer

N Medium humanoid (half-construct, human)

Init +6; Senses darkvision 60 ft.;

Perception +23

DEFENSE

HP 190

EAC 26; KAC 27

Fort +14; Ref +12; Will +16

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee ultrathin dagger +24 (4d4+13 S)

Ranged seeking aurora arc pistol +24 (3d6+13 E, stun; critical arc 2d6)

Offensive Abilities cache capacitor (darkvision, life bubble), spell cache, technomancer exploits (spell shot)

Technomancer Spells (CL 13th; melee +22, ranged +24)

5th (3/day)—flight, heat leech (DC 24)

4th (6/day)—corrosive haze (DC 23), dimension door, resistant armor, wall of fire (DC 23)

3rd (at will)—arcing surge (DC 22), haste

TACTICS

Before Combat Lady Kethi has darkvision and life bubble active in her cache capacitor. If

she's expecting trouble, she'll cast *haste* on herself and Ayva, followed by *flight* and *resistant armor*.

During Combat Kethi is a cautious combatant; she knows Ayva is much more powerful but worries about her daughter. She prefers to try to ambush if possible, leaving Ayva in the fray for as little time as possible. She supports Ayva from the rear with attacks and by laying down *walls of fire* to heal her daughter.

Morale Very cautious, Kethi never allows Ayva or herself to fall below half hit points without fleeing. She prefers to whisk both of them to safety with *dimension door*, but reserves uses of *flight* and *wall of fire* in case those might help her shake off pursuit as well.

STATISTICS

Str +0; Dex +6; Con +4; Int +8; Wis +4; Cha +6

Skills Sense Motive +23, Mysticism +23, Sense Motive +28

Languages Common, Dwarven, Giant, Terran

Combat Gear ready to wear echelon fashion, aurora arc pistol with seeking weapon fusion seal (14th level) and three batteries, ultrathin dagger; **Other Gear** long welder's coat containing deep pockets within which are a silk purse containing 200 credits, hidden compartment contains a *mk 3 serum of healing* in a steel-stoppered bottle, and a tiny gold and pewter tiger-like figure gripping a rock worth 250 credits.

AYVA, VARIANT IRON GOLEM

CR 14

XP 38,400

N Large construct (magical, technological)

Init +0; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +25

DEFENSE

HP 250

EAC 28; KAC 30

Fort +14; Ref +14; Will +10

DR 15/adamantine; Immune construct immunities, magic, unliving

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee slam +28 (8d6+22 B, critical knockdown)

Offensive Abilities

TACTICS

During Combat Ayva has a childlike joy at her new body, wading into combat and trusting her mother to tell her when it's time to stop.

Morale Ayva will fight to the death to protect her mother, but immediately grabs her and flees if Kethi is rendered unable to fight.

STATISTICS

Str +8; Dex +0; Con —; Int +0; Wis +4; Cha +6

Skills Athletics +30, Engineering +25, Sense Motive +25

Languages Common, Terran

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Immunity to Magic (Ex): Ayva is immune



to spells or spell-like abilities that allow spell resistance. Certain spells and effects function differently against her, as noted below.

- A magical attack that deals electricity damage slows her (as the *slow* spell) for 3 rounds, with no saving throw.
- A magical attack that deals fire damage breaks any slow effect on the golem and heals 1 point of damage for each 3 points of damage the attack would otherwise deal. If the amount of healing would cause her to exceed its full normal hit points, it gains any excess as temporary hit points. She gets no saving throw against fire effects.
- Ayva is affected normally by rust attacks, such as those of a *entropic grasp* spell.

LADY KETHI'S GIFT

Earlier in the adventure, the PCs are given the task of delivering a package to Lady Kethi.

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

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

HA'ZVEER'S SURPRISE (CR 14)

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

Ha'zveer sends a temeradaemon through the gate to do her bidding. Its instructions are to bring back any PC with a brain that interested her dead or alive (she can have any

such PC *raised* later), and then kill all the remaining PCs. The daemon—known simply as the Messenger—is one the coterie uses to carry out extermination and vengeance missions and has been bound to serve the slavers for decades. The daemon takes pleasure from simple annihilation and finds any mission to retrieve something (even a corpse) abhorrent—something Ha'zveer finds ironically amusing. When the creature appears, read the following text.

A misshapen abomination lurches forward out of the shadows on multiple arms and legs, its spine contorted into a painful curve with its hips higher than its head. Seemingly distracted and muttering to itself, the thing rarely looks up with its glowing red eyes, its hair composed of hundreds of thin, white tendrils that hang over its head like a veil. Strapped onto the crawling creature's body at various points are sacks and belt pouches stuffed with bizarre collections of objects, and its rear arms wield a wide, black bladed scythe, still coated with the blood of the fiend's last victim.

TEMERADAEMON

CR 14

XP 38,400

NE Large outsider (daemon, evil, extraplanar)

Init +0; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +30

Aura reaper's curse (30 ft.)

DEFENSE

HP 250

EAC 28; KAC 30

Fort +16; Ref +14; Will +16

DR 10/good and silver; Immune acid, death effects, disease, poison; Resist cold 10, electricity 10, fire 10; SR 25

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Melee integrated scythe +28 (7d6+20 S plus confusion)

Multiattack integrated scythe +22 (7d6+20 S plus confusion), 2 claws +22 (3d8+20 S plus confusion)

Offensive Abilities confusion (DC 20)

STATISTICS

Str +6; Dex +4; Con +6; Int +1; Wis +8; Cha +4

Skills Athletics +25, Intimidate +25, Sense Motive +25

Languages Abyssal, Draconic, Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Confusion (Su) Creatures struck in combat by a temeradaemon's claws or scythe must succeed at a DC 20 Will save or be confused for 1 round. This is a mind-affecting effect.

Reaper's Curse (Su) Non-daemon creatures in proximity to a temeradaemon are afflicted by a profound increase in self-inflicted and ally-inflicted wounds and similar accidental damage. A creature that rolls a natural 1 on its attack roll automatically rerolls the attack against its nearest ally (or itself if no ally is within range). Grenades and explode weapons have their radius doubled within the aura, but only for the purpose of harming allies. Skill checks that have serious consequences if failed by 5 or more have these consequences on all failed checks.

The Messenger revels in carnage, when it arrives on Beacon through the gate it questions G'uurul Faa for the whereabouts of the PCs. If the PCs have given him reason to appreciate and trust him, he may send them a note advising them of the danger and suggesting they track down a blessed silver weapon. As the daemon has been sent on a mission, and is bound by ritual, it cannot return empty handed and simply continues fighting until it or its prey are destroyed or dead.

NIGHTMARES OF THE MAD GOD-SEER AND DOTAN ROTH

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

So close to the God-Seer, Dotan Roth is also able to ride these interludes; his musings come as the Purity party explore the Kyton Panopticon (Part Four). Use Roth as the foul face of Purity; the leering surety of a master-villain, taunting the PCs' weak flesh, belittling them, laughing at them, telling them they are too late, too weak, too inferior to succeed. For more details see the entry on Dotan Roth (page 62).

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

PART THREE—DEAD GATES SLEEPING

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

Each of the gate's locations and journey to reach them is detailed below. The methods given for travel are the only ones available to each location. The only other viable way of travelling between Beacon and its sisters is via the spell *interplanetary teleport* (although not to Asteroid 113, as it is secured against such transport). As this is a 6th level spell it is an unlikely event, but the spell would function normally

THE DEAD GATES OF THE SHATTERED ZONE

Use Diplomacy checks to gather information, higher checks reveal the information for lesser results. PCs who have Lady Kethi as a friend can gain access to hidden archives and old mine surveys, granting +10 to all checks.

DC 10—Miners talk about the dead gates; almost always where a terrible alien *something* comes through, takes a miner and vanishes, usually leaving a hand or foot behind as the gate seals again. The miners don't know much about the gates—just that they are wreathed in alien rings that can move. Some have spent lifetimes trying to puzzle over them, sure they will lead somewhere that will make them rich, but all remain dead. The fourth gate—the one on Asteroid 113—is just rumor—few folk have ever dared reach the asteroid or had the wit to get there despite tales of fabulous Ancient artifacts littering it.

DC 15—The best-known of the dead gates is probably more infamous for its name—the Devil's Door. It rests in a distant part of an outtane nunnery known as Salvation, where the sisterhood keep watch upon a celestial clock of fathomless age said to have been created by Haymot Steel-Arm. The gate has been subject to tales of ghostly alien encounters and attempts to set up a communication station on the fragment of rock it rests within failed with repeated strange signals and ghostly noises. Harder miners point to the fact that getting to the signal station requires nerves of steel—it rests at the edge of an arduous, terrifying trek—and it is more likely that simple fear led to its disuse.

DC 20—A second gate is known to exist on an asteroid known as Hope; this asteroid is a repository for criminals—particularly thought criminals, who work its coal and salt mines. Purity has placed the running of the mine in the hands of Corrosive Ventures, who use worker giants in parts of the mines. The gate itself is in a volcano called Fury.

DC 30—The third gate has not been seen for many years; it exists within a Purity outer station known as the Zenith. Of late, Zenith has been locked down; since it rests right on the furthest edge of the Zone, there have been all kinds of rumors about what is going on up there.

DC 35—There is a fourth gate on cursed Asteroid 113, a place of terrible rumor said to house a portion of Hell. Only ever alluded to in miner's tales, this gate is said to be much larger than the others, and sigils upon its surface suggest it might be linked to the other 3 somehow, or possibly linking to another realm entirely.

to allow such travel if available. The PCs are can tackle the gates in any order.

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

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

GATE 1—HOPE MINE

LOCATION INFORMATION

Use Culture or Diplomacy checks to gather information, higher checks reveal the information for lesser results. The DC lowers by 5 for all checks made on the asteroid itself.

DC 15—Hope—probably the worst name you could call it. This place is a prison, a place where those who oppose Purity—or just happen to get in the way—end up. The asteroid, which has an atmosphere so thin you have to take ten breaths to get one, is rich in coal and salt, and is covered with what our benevolent rulers call correction camps. Hope has odd spells of day and night—right now its twilight for about the next year or so, but after that it'll start to get hot as day breaks.

DC 20—Not that they discourage independents here—and there's money to be made if you work day after day without stopping—but resources are hard to come by. Plenty head out from the main gondola base into the wilderness around the volcano Fury and are never seen again.

DC 25—There are rumors of a rebel camp amongst Fury's roots; they say a bunch of escapees have united under a banner run by a giant called the Prophet. Some say the escapees are pretty desperate and not above eating each other.

DC 30—The gate is a fickle one; the last miner who reported seeing it said it lay in a tear in the walls of Fury—in the caldera itself—almost as though Fury was trying to hide it.

1A. HOPE

Control: The Contraptors

Distance: 4 hours

Size: 885 miles diameter

Transport: Skiff

Cost: 800 credits

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

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

A little under nine-hundred miles across, Hope is quite large for an asteroid; its erratic orbit has been likened to a drunken dancer. The skiff that takes visitors to Hope has seen better days. A DC 25 Engineering check reveals it should have been mothballed years ago; her Purity flags and propaganda cannot hide that. It's rarely used now as most visitors come against their will in another, larger skiff not available to the public.

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





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

The journey seems to take much longer than it actually does. Remember the inherent gravitational abilities of the metal the ship is made of; this is a good moment to show that by having one outer panel of glass shatter and crack without any further effects. At this stage the other passengers can point out the inherent qualities of kallenite (see page 77).

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

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

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

HOPE

LN Small City

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

Government overlord

Qualities notorious, racially intolerant (all non-auttaine)

Maximum Item Level 6th

Hope has a tortured volcanic landscape pierced by salt lakes, deep coal mines and volcanic swamps, this surrounding wilderness is detailed in the area map. Although the PCs only briefly voyage across the surface, you might wish to create further perils or assign other suitably volcanic encounters

PART 3: DEAD GATES SLEEPING

on the way. The PCs find getting hold of a map impossible, but there are a number of rough warehouses-turned-hotels that serve the few visitors' needs.

The PCs can get rough directions from the handful of miners here with a Diplomacy, Bluff, or Intimidate check (DC 25); each 10 credits of bribery lowers the DC by 1. These directions are little more than a compass bearing and distance. Armed with this information the PCs can head out into the wilderness. They could also try for a guide, but the DC increases to 30 and the bribe amount needed to affect the outcome is doubled. The PCs can each make 2 attempts per day to get this information. The guide they locate—**Akgo** (N male auttaine operative)—is a rusty old pot whose skin is corroded with salt and acid rain, and who wheezes as he moves. If there is any trouble, he simply tries to flee.

PCs inquiring about the escapees by making a DC 20 Culture or Diplomacy check find that there is a reward of 5,000 credits for the Prophet's head.

ASH GIANTS OF THE ZONE

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

CONSEQUENCES (CR 14)

If the Contraptors are angry at the PCs due to the matter with the *darksphere*, they need to send out word that crossing them is not tolerated.

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

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

The first chance occurs at 60 feet; a Engineering or Perception check (both DC 35) note the clockwork is carrying the satchel—something very unusual. The satchel looks very heavy, and PCs beating the

check by 5 or more notice that the clockwork is looking at them and clutching something in its hand (the trigger). The second chance, with the DC at 30 for both skills now occurs at 30 ft. If spotted, the clockwork tries to move forward; while its primary directive is to trigger the bomb with the PCs nearby, it will do so to just a single PC if that is the only option.

The bomb inflicts 20d6 bludgeoning and fire damage in a 45 ft. radius. A Reflex save (DC 35 within 15 feet, DC 25 at up to 30 feet, and DC 15 at up to 45 feet) halves the damage.

CLOCKWORK SOLDIER

CR 6

XP 2,400

N Medium construct (hybrid)

Init +9; Senses darkvision 60 ft, low-light vision; Perception +13

DEFENSE

HP 90

EAC 18; KAC 20

Fort +5; Ref +9; Will +2

Defensive Abilities DR 5/adamantine; Immunities construct immunities;

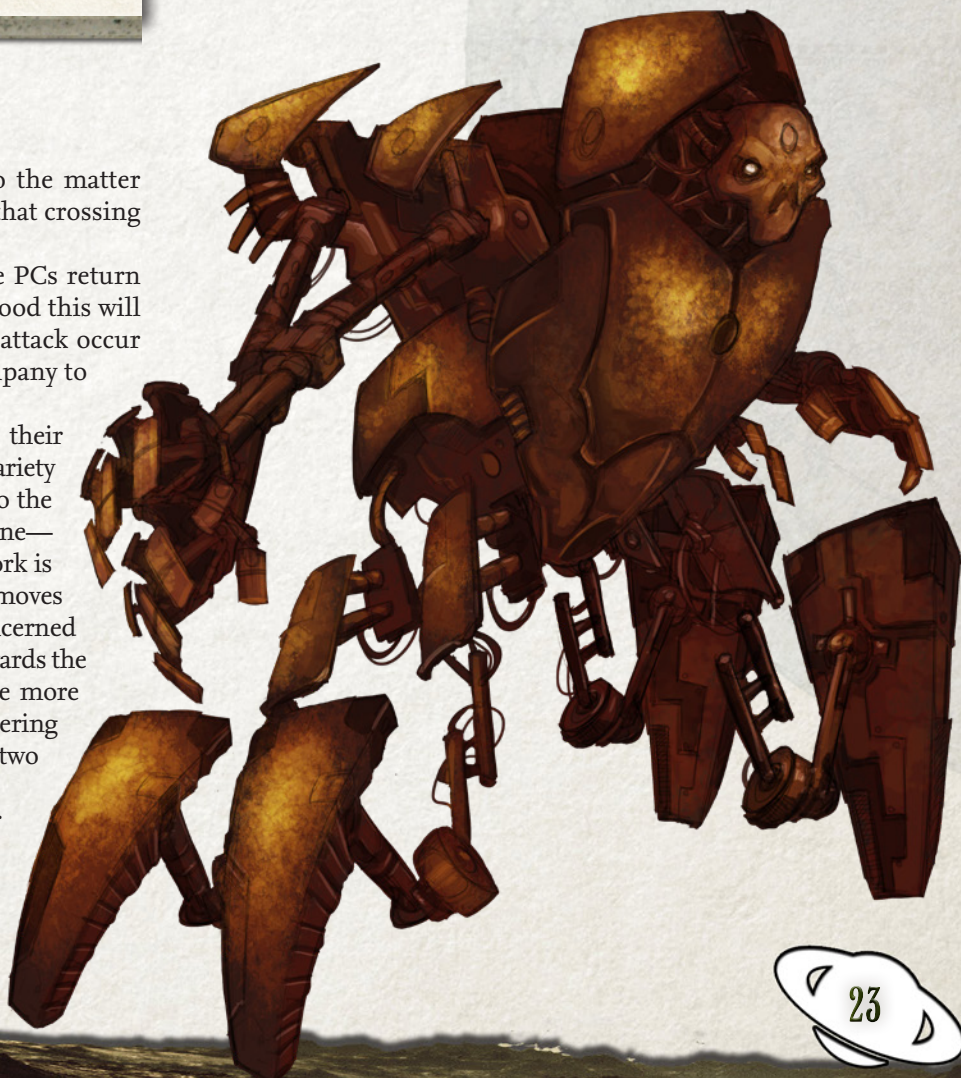
Weaknesses vulnerable to electricity

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft

Melee carbon staff +15 (1d8+10 B)

Ranged corona laser rifle +13 (2d6+6 F; critical burn 1d6) or frag grenade II +13 (explode [15 ft, 2d6 P, DC 15])



STATISTICS

Str +5; **Dex** +3; **Con** -; **Int** -; **Wis** +2; **Cha** -4

Skills Athletics +18, Intimidate +18

Languages Common (cannot speak any language)

Other Abilities efficient winding, mindless, proficient, standby, swift reactions, winding

ECOLOGY

Environment any

Organization solitary, pair, trio, troop (3-8), or company (9-12)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Efficient Winding (Ex) A clockwork soldier can function for a number of days equal to 2 x its CR every time it is wound.

Proficient (Ex) A clockwork soldier is proficient with basic and advanced melee weapons, small arms, longarms, heavy weapons, and grenades.

Standby (Ex) A clockwork soldier can place itself on standby as a standard action. While on standby, a clockwork soldier cannot move or take any actions. It remains aware of its surroundings but takes a -4 penalty on Perception checks. Time spent on standby does not count against the soldier's wind-down duration. A clockwork soldier can exit standby as a swift action—if it does so to initiate combat, it gains a +4 racial bonus on its Initiative check.

Swift Reactions (Ex) Clockwork constructs gain Lightning Reflexes and Improved Initiative as bonus feats.

Winding (Ex) Clockwork creations, must be wound up before they animate. The creator of a clockwork crafts a unique key for each creation. This key is typically inserted into the clockwork's back and turned clockwise to wind it. Turning the key counter-clockwise has the effect of winding the machine down, though only a willing (or completely helpless) machine will allow itself to be unwound in this way, meaning either its creator or someone its creator has specifically designated can normally do so. Since each key is totally unique, construction of a new key (or bypassing a key entirely) requires a successful Engineering check (DC = 20 + the clockwork's CR).

Development: The remains of the clockwork are spread over a large area, but if the PCs search and make an Engineering or Perception check (DC 35) they find a section that clearly bears a company logo—the four interlocking clockworks of The Contraptors. No other attacks are listed here, but you may wish to develop the local agents' attacks on the PCs.

The CR of this encounter reflects the danger of the bomb, not just the opponent.

INTO THE WILDERNESS

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

The air is so thin that unless they make arrangements to overcome this, PCs face a similar effect to altitude sickness at high passes, with a saving throw every day, not every hour, for fatigue. Note the armors' environmental seals will protect against this, as will magic like *life bubble*. The wilderness map shows how far the PCs must journey.

Every day the PCs are in the wilds they may face a danger. The base chance is 40%, but this is lowered to 20% if they have a guide or if a PC has 10 ranks or more in Survival.

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

Three possible encounters are detailed here, but feel free to expand or change them.

The first occurs when the PCs wander into an area of thin rock that hangs above a volcanic mire; steaming vents litter much of this area. The PCs can note something wrong on a Physical Sciences check (DC 25) or a Perception check (DC 30). Allow each PC a single check as they approach; if they make the check they are aware of a low rumbling ahead, seeing something strange in the countless geysers and vents in this area. Crossing this field is very dangerous, as the geysers regularly strike upwards. Twice as the PCs move across this area they erupt, showering everyone with boiling water. Characters in the hex at this time take 20d6 fire damage (DC 25 Reflex saving throw halves).

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

GHORAZAGH

CR 13

XP 25,600

NE Large aberration

Init +4; **Senses** bloodsense, darkvision 60 ft.; **Perception** +23

DEFENSE

HP 250

EAC 28; **KAC** 30

Fort +15; **Ref** +15; **Will** +15

Weaknesses vulnerable to sonic

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 40 ft. (su, perfect)

Melee bite +26 (2d12+20 P plus blood drain [1d4 Con]) claws +23 (3d12+20) tentacles +26 (2d12+20 plus grab)

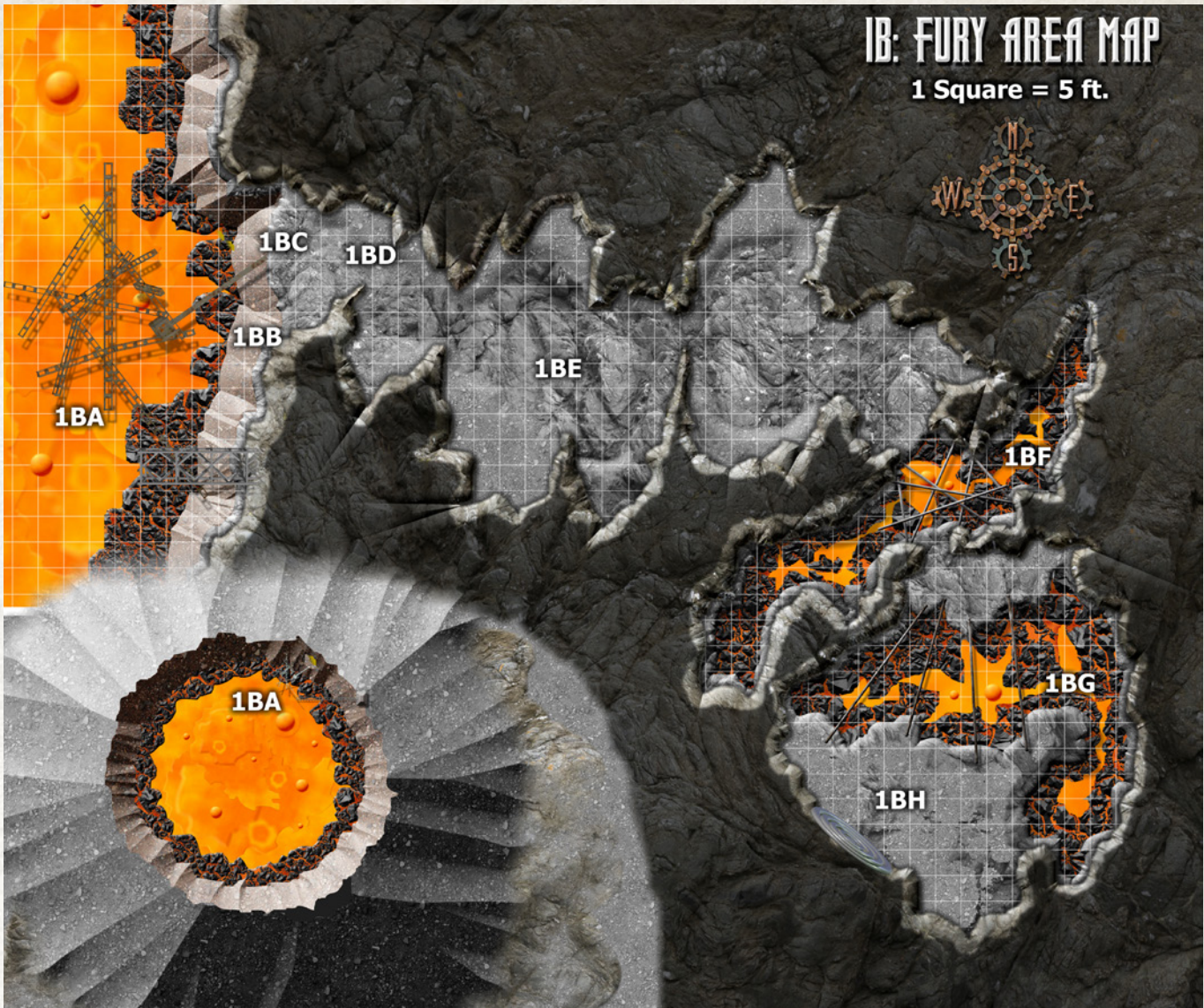
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Offensive Abilities blood drain, blood spray

STATISTICS

Str +8; **Dex** +4; **Con** +6; **Int** +0; **Wis** +0; **Cha** +0

Skills Athletics +23, Engineering +23, Survival +28



Languages Aklo, chemical communication

Other Abilities unliving

ECOLOGY

Environment any underground

Organization solitary, pair, colony (3-9), or hive (10-40)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Bloodsense (Su) A ghorazagh notices living creatures within 60 feet just as if it possessed the blindsight ability.

Blood Spray (Su) Once every 1d4 rounds, a ghorazagh can unleash a 20-foot cone of blood and eldritch enzymes. Any living creature struck by a ghorazagh's bloodspray must succeed at a DC 19 Fortitude save or be affected as by the spell *slow*. A slowed creature struck by a ghorazagh's bloodspray a second time must make an additional save or be paralyzed. These effects last for 2d6 rounds. A ghorazagh can also consciously alter its enzymes, producing a spray that removes all effects of this ability.

Chemical Communication (Ex) Ghorazaghs can communicate with other ghorazaghs within 60 feet via pheromone

transmission. In a ghorazagh hive, this range extends to cover the entire hive. This is a silent and instantaneous mode of communication that only ghorazaghs can understand.

The third and final suggested encounter is with an explosion from Fury itself scattering volcanic bombs over the area the PCs are in. Allow each PC a Perception (DC 30) or Survival (DC 20) check to see the gout of flame and molten rock tear into the air, allowing them a chance to get into cover. The bombs strike a huge area, anyone within it (including the PCs) takes 15d6 bludgeoning and fire damage (Reflex DC 25 for half). Cover grants a +4 to saves and automatically halves all damage (no damage on a successful save).

As the PCs come within the last half dozen miles or so of Fury, characters making a DC 25 Perception check notice the remains of old railway line beds. The rails have been removed and used by the giants in their lair high above in the volcano.

1B. FURY

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

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

Fury rises half a mile above the land. Climbing the outer slopes of Fury is not only dangerous, but exhausting. The slopes count as high peaks for altitude sickness and smoke wreathes everything, reducing visible to a dozen yards at best. The ash giants that lurk within make frequent forays out looking for food and victims, and the tracks are obvious to anyone who has the ability to track, even using scent. Otherwise, PCs notice them on a DC 15 Perception check. The huge footprints trail laboriously upwards to the caldera itself.

As the PCs move upwards lightning pounds the volcano, be sure to create a sense of impending drama here, the bolts lash at the growling peak. As the PCs move to the final summit a series of bolts hurl down, characters wearing heavy armor feel their armor spark; ask one of them to make a Reflex save (DC 25) or be struck by a bolt (10d8 electricity damage).

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

The giant initially believes the PCs are Purity soldiers, shouting at them to leave him alone. If the characters calm him with magic (+11 Will save) or Diplomacy (DC 35), he can describe the escapees' base in some detail, as well as the unpleasant events that are taking place there.

If he is forced into a fight, use the ash giant statistics below in 1BC but at -4 EAC and KAC. He's also suffered 40 points of damage from the bite wounds.

A character can determine that the giant's wounds are from members of its own species with a DC 15 Medicine check.

1BA. THE CALDERA

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

The raging volcano is petrifying up close, its molten heart raging in waves of melted rock that boil upwards, releasing clouds of choking vapor. Through this bitter mist you see some sort of structure hanging into the crater, swinging and grating above the boiling lava itself. This flotsam structure is made of scavenged rails, now rusted and hammered or bent together to form a makeshift tower suspended within the caldera. At the base of the tower a single rail sways outward to brush against solid ground.

The bridge is amazingly dangerous; not only is it brittle and red hot, but also surrounded by toxic gases. A Climb check (DC 20) is required to move on the bridge along its slippery red-hot rails, which inflicts 5 points of fire damage every round a character

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

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

Creatures: The guards (area 1BC) keep a look out for the escapee. If they spot anyone on the bridge (and remember the smoke reduces their Perception checks) they throw stones. One heads upwards while another alerts the other giants, who act accordingly. These giants, like all the others in the lair, have a number of long rusty hooks sewn into their clothing, they use these to hang themselves off the bridge (as a move action) and then have both hands free to fight. They usually move upwards, trying to fling intruders off the bridge (assuming them to be Purity members) before retreating back to the shelf to unleash the hounds (area 1BD).

1BB. THE RAIL

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

The rail is 30 ft. long and very well fixed to the bridge. As the bridge sways it moves up to 15 ft. further left on the map depicted, leaving a large gap. The rail, at just under 4 inches across, requires an Acrobatics check (DC 20) to balance across. The giants usually time their leaps and step off the bridge as it comes closest to the cave below.

1BC. THE GUARDS (CR 12)

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

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

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

PART 3: DEAD GATES SLEEPING

ASH GIANTS (2)

CR 11

XP 12,800 each

CN Large humanoid (giant)

Init +3; Senses low-light vision; Perception +25

DEFENSE

HP 185 EACH

EAC 24; KAC 26

Fort +13; Ref +13; Will +11

Defensive Abilities rock catching; **Immune** fire, disease, poison

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee club +23 (4d6+19 B plus ash leprosy) or slam +23 (3d8+19 B plus ash leprosy)

Ranged rock +20 (3d10+11 B plus ash leprosy)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Offensive Abilities rock throwing (120 ft.)

STATISTICS

Str +8; **Dex** +3; **Con** +5; **Int** -1; **Wis** +1; **Cha** +0

Feats Cleave, Deadly Aim (+5 damage), Great Cleave

Skills Athletics +20, Intimidate +25, Medicine +20, Survival +20

Languages Common

Other Abilities vermin empathy

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Vermin Empathy (Ex) An ash giant can use Survival to improve the attitude of a vermin. Vermin are normally mindless, but this empathic communication imparts upon them a modicum of implanted intelligence, which also allows the giant to rear a vermin from infancy.

ASH LEPROSY

Type disease (injury); **Save** Fortitude DC 18

Track mental and physical; **Frequency** 1/day

Effect no latent state; the victim takes all penalties from progressing on both the mental and physical disease tracks.

Cure 2 consecutive saves

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

1BD. THE HOUNDS (CR 13)

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

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

Creatures: The chains are entirely unnecessary, and don't even work, but the ash giants think they need to do something to prevent the chain worms from wandering off. The creatures have a limited empathic relationship with the giants and remain as guardians. If called into battle they help any giant and will not use their trilling when any giant is within its area.



CHAIN WORM (2)

CR 13

XP 25,600

Init +3; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +23

DEFENSE HP 225 EACH

EAC 27; KAC 29

Fort +17; Ref +15; Will +12

Immune sonic

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee bite +26 (3d12+21 B plus grab)
or sting +26 (3d12+21 P plus poison)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Offensive Abilities trilling

STATISTICS

Str +8; Dex +4; Con +6; Int —; Wis +1; Cha –3

Skills Athletics +28, Survival +23

Other Abilities mindless

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Trilling (Ex) By rapidly vibrating its carapace as a full round action, a chain worm emits a high-pitched trilling sound. Creatures within 30 feet that can hear the trilling suffer 6d6 sonic damage and are deafened for 24 hours (Fortitude DC 19 for half damage and reduce deafness to one minute).

CHAIN WORM STING

Type poison (injury); Save Fortitude DC 19

Track Constitution; Frequency 1/round for 6 rounds

Cure 2 consecutive saves

1BE. THE COMMUNITY (CR 17)

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

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

Creatures: There are seven ash giants here. Amongst the giants float three swarms of ticks that usually feed off the giants—the creatures vast flanks are covered in bite marks. When an alarm is raised the giants ready rocks and move to the furthest part of the tunnel near **Area 1BF**, while one of them warns the Prophet and then returns. When intruders enter they throw their rocks and then move in with clubs. The swarms, driven into a frenzy by the giants, usually attack a lone target.

ASH GIANTS (7)

CR 11

XP 12,800 each

hp 185 each (see page 27)

TICK SWARM (3)

CR 9

XP 12,800 each

N Fine vermin (swarm)

Init –5; Senses blindsight (thermal) 30 ft.; Perception –5

DEFENSE HP 145 EACH

EAC 22; KAC 24

Fort +4; Ref +0; Will –1

Defenses swarm defenses; Immunities swarm immunities

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

Melee swarm attack (4d6 P)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 0 ft.

Offensive Abilities distraction

STATISTICS

Str –4; Dex +6; Con +4; Int —; Wis +0; Cha –4

Other Abilities mindless

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Infest (Ex) If a creature leaves a tick swarm's square, the swarm takes 1d6 points of damage to reflect the loss of its numbers as several ticks cling to the victim. A creature with ticks clinging to it takes swarm damage at the end of its turn each round. A character can remove the ticks from themselves or a character within their reach with a DC 15 Medicine check as a standard action. The ticks are also killed if the infested character takes 10 or more fire damage or takes any damage from an area attack.

Treasure: Amongst the foulness are several objects stolen from autttaine, as well as quite a few autttaine body-parts. A DC 25 Perception check after ten minutes of searching reveals one useful object. These are: a *merciful comet hammer*, a light reaction cannon with no ammunition and a bite mark on its shoulder stock, a *lucky eye* (see page 86), a cardiac accelerator still attached to a heart it occasionally causes to spasm, and an incendiary grenade IV stuffed into the mouth of a Purity trooper's detached head.

1BF. CRAWL

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

The crawl is perfect for giants, but not so for Medium or smaller creatures, who face an awkward Climb (DC 22) up the slightly moist rails, which lie above a steaming side-vent. The climb is 100 feet in total and leads to **1BG**. Characters falling drop a further 30 feet below the floor level into a boiling pool some 20 feet deep, taking 10d6 fire damage per round of exposure.

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

The rails lead to a wide space, bridged by more hammered rails, sloping upwards through the chamber to a broad balcony some

PART 3: DEAD GATES SLEEPING

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

The rails rise at 45 degrees and require an Acrobatics check (DC 22) to cross, those who fall drop 120 feet into the boiling pool below (10d6 damage per round of exposure).

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

ASH GIANTS (2)

CR 11

XP 12,800 each

hp 185 each (see page 27)

THE PROPHET

CR 16

XP 76,800

CN Large humanoid (giant)

Init +3; Senses low-light vision; Perception +28

DEFENSE

HP 300

EAC 30; KAC 32

Fort +20; Ref +18; Will +14

Defensive Abilities rock catching; **Immune** fire, disease, poison

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee meteoric hammer +30 (11d6+26 B plus ash leprosy) or slam +30 (3d8+34 B plus ash leprosy)

Ranged heavy stellar cannon +27 (4d12+16 P, 30 ft. blast; critical wound)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Offensive Abilities rock throwing (120 ft.)

TACTICS

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

During Combat Until seriously threatened, the Prophet attempts to use his superior size and strength to knock

smaller creatures in the vent. He'll move, even provoking attacks of opportunity, to get good attempts in. Once he's reduced to half hit points or both of his followers have died, he becomes more serious and purts his all into the fight.

STATISTICS

Str +10; **Dex** +3; **Con** +7; **Int** -1; **Wis** +1; **Cha** +5

Skills Athletics +28, Medicine +28, Intimidate +33, Survival +28

Languages Common

Other Abilities vermin empathy

Gear meteoric hammer, heavy stellar cannon with 80 shells, selection of razors and knives in a giant scalp holder.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Vermin Empathy (Ex) An ash giant can use Survival to improve the attitude of a vermin. Vermin are normally mindless, but this empathic communication imparts upon them a modicum of implanted intelligence, which also allows the giant to rear a vermin from infancy.

ASH LEPROSY

Type disease (injury); **Save** Fortitude DC 18

Track mental and physical; **Frequency** 1/day

Effect no latent state; the victim takes all penalties from progressing on both the mental and physical disease tracks.

Cure 2 consecutive saves

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

The depictions are remarkably informative—this event (the PCs attacking the Prophet) is depicted, along with the Prophet's death at the PCs' hands (and which is depicted in vile detail). Another gate is watched by beatific creatures with halos. Characters making a Perception or Sense Motive check (DC 30) see that this gate hides a foul, many-faced demon. A third is shown in an iron fortress at the summit of the heavens. Depicted here, and noticed if characters make a Perception or Sense Motive check (DC 30), is a cannon golem. The Purity party on Asteroid 113 is also depicted, again a Perception or Sense Motive check (DC 30) counts four dozen or more Purity troopers, along with other members of the party, including the cannon golem. In the final scene, which does not require a check to decipher, the PCs battle a Purity symbol surrounded by angels and a vast field of abstract machinery.

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

1BH. THE GATE

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

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

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

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

Unless this is the last gate the PCs awaken, the shiny blackness repels attempts to enter it. If all three gates are awakened, it forms a link to Asteroid 113 as described in Part Four of this adventure. The PC who awoke this gate, however, feels a physical pleasure wafting over his whole body; an almost overwhelming feeling of one-ness. If this is the first gate the party has opened, each PC gains a legendary feat of their choice (see the **Legendary Feats** section of *Dead Vault Descent*).

2A. SIN

Control: Neutral

Distance: 1 hour

Size: 198 miles diameter

Transport: Skiff

Cost: 200 credits

SIN

N Large City

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

Government Council

Qualities Notorious, Prosperous, Tourist Attraction

Maximum Item Level 13th

Half a dozen skiffs regularly make the trip to Sin, all of which come with an exclusive upper deck that serves passengers needs for 1,000 credits, indulging them with sweet fragrances, luxurious seating, and curiously attentive clockwork servants.

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

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

GATE 2—SALVATION

LOCATION INFORMATION

Use Culture or Diplomacy checks to gather information.

DC 10—Salvation—a holy site under the care of a devout sisterhood of nuns of Haymot Steel-Arm—is ironically reached from Beacon via a short skiff plunge to a place called Sin, where all the miners go to spend their hard-earned cash. Sin is where auttaine go to unwind and is particularly noted for its clockwork horse races.

DC 15—You might have noticed that Sin is chained to Salvation—some say it is to ensure that virtue and vice are never separated, others that the holy Ancient relic within Salvation—the timepiece known as the Fable Orrery—is kept secure so that when the sisterhood finally work out what it is really for Purity can use it. They say the hundred bells—the lesser bells that make up part of the instrument—haven’t sounded for decades now, and of course the Great Bell—the central object of the device—has *never* sounded.

DC 20—They may be sister nuns, but they’re Purity through and through; their leader—the caustic Mother Metal—is a devout worshipper of Haymot Steel-Arm but is said to get her true pleasures from the Purity officers that visit the nunnery.

DC 25—Of course even the officers have to abide by the visitors’ rule—no visitor may remain more than 20 hours on Salvation so that they don’t taint it. The clock may be amazing but there’s not much else to see.

DC 30—Except the Devil’s Gate of course, although no one much goes there now, it’s so ridiculously dangerous to get to—an exposed path across cliffs so high they say that some folks who fell off still haven’t hit the bottom. The tornado-force winds tear people off, so that’s probably why they abandoned that signaling station up there.

PART 3: DEAD GATES SLEEPING

Sin is the pleasure capital of the Zone, a dark fairyland of vice where all the miners come when they want to relax or indulge—particularly in gambling. The lawful auttaine love to unwind with a reckless flutter, and there are over five-hundred gambling halls. The most popular at the moment are races between clockwork horses around the city streets, viewed from gambling halls using curious ocular devices. To reflect an evenings' entertainment, allow the PCs to bet up to 5,000 credits once per day (if you wish, more exclusive clubs allow bigger bets) and roll a d20 for a result—adding 1 for every 5 ranks in Engineering or Survival. If the PCs roll a 20 they win 10 times their bet, on a 18 or 19 they win three times their bet, and on a 10 or less they lose all that money.

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

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

Consequences (CR 14 or 16)

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

Corrosive have a number of local agents, and many of these have local allies that dabble in the darker sides of constructs. Once word reaches them of the PCs' deeds and presence, they arrange for the use of a pair of local air elemental constructs created by Corrosive Ventures. It's suggested that this consequence occurs when the PCs are in Sin—possibly after they have just arrived. Use your judgment on the best time and be prepared to improvise.

The elementals resemble gaunt and misshapen great cats, transparent and nearly invisible when remaining perfectly still; they have foul, acrid breath and scream with their horrible, alien echo-voices. Once instructed, they do not return unless they succeed in wiping out all the PCs.

Offensive Abilities wind blast (30-ft. radius, 14d6 B; DC 19, usable every 1d4 rounds)

STATISTICS

Str +6; **Dex** +8; **Con** —; **Int** —; **Wis** +4; **Cha** –4

Skills Acrobatics +28, Stealth +23

Other Abilities mindless, unliving

ECOLOGY

Environment Plane of Air

Organization solitary

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Air Mastery (Ex) Airborne creatures take a –2 penalty on attack and damage rolls against an air elemental construct.

Immunity to Magic (Ex) An air elemental construct is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against the creature as noted below.

- A *cosmic eddy* spell deals 1d6 damage per caster level to an air elemental construct. The construct can attempt a Fortitude save for half damage.
- *Flesh to stone* or *call cosmos* slows (as the *slow* spell) an air elemental construct for 2d6 rounds. Note, the *flesh to stone* spell does not change the construct's form, nor does a *call cosmos* spell actually damage the construct.
- A *rapid repair* spell heals an air elemental construct of all its lost hit points.

Insubstantial Form (Ex) An air elemental construct cannot run, wear armor, or enter water or other liquids. It can pass through holes and small openings—even cracks. It can also occupy spaces occupied by its enemies. Any piercing or slashing attack against an air elemental construct has a 20% miss chance. Bludgeoning attacks deal damage normally.

Wind Blast (Ex) An air elemental construct can transform the air in a radius around it into a forceful blast of wind and debris. This effect works similarly to a breath weapon.

Development: If the PCs made an enemy of Lady Kethi, she takes this opportunity to attack as well, helped by her daughter Ayva.

AIR ELEMENTAL CONSTRUCT

CR 13

XP 25,600

N Huge construct (air, elemental, extraplanar, magical)

Init +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision;

Perception +23

DEFENSE

HP 220

EAC 27; **KAC** 29

Fort +13; **Ref** +13; **Will** +10

Defensive Abilities air mastery, insubstantial form; **DR** 10/adamantine; **Immunities** construct immunities, elemental immunities, magic

OFFENSE

Speed fly 100 ft. (Su, perfect)

Melee slam +27 (3d12+19 B)

Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.

LADY KETHI

CR 13

XP 25,600

hp 190 (see page 18)

AYVA, VARIANT IRON GOLEM

CR 14

XP 38,400

hp 250 (see page 18)

2B. SALVATION

Control: Purity

Distance: 6 hours

Size: 45 miles

Transport: Void Gondola

Cost: 600 credits



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

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

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

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

SALVATION

LN Small Town

Population 199 (199 auttaine).

Government Autocracy

Qualities Holy Site

Maximum Item Level 7th

The nuns of Salvation are an ultra-strict arm of Purity, combining their political beliefs with fervent worship of Haymot Steel-Arm. The nuns are obsessively devoted to their deity, and work on a strict timetable of worship that runs by an exacting clock set by the divine timepiece. Visitors to Salvation are not uncommon and are generally made up of the higher echelons of Purity—there is an assumption that visitors observe and revere this devotion themselves, and the PCs may be able to play upon this.

Visitors have a curious brass and copper timepiece strapped to their wrists with amazing locks when they arrive—the timepiece counts down 20 hours from the moment it is worn, turning jet black when the time ends. This device is used to ensure no visitor spends more than 20 hours on Salvation, anyone who lingers beyond this time is sure to be met by an angry Purity patrol when they return to Sin and find themselves in a heap of trouble. Characters can add more time before the clock runs out with a successful DC 30 Engineering check, but a failed check will break the time piece.

The Fable is an Ancients' device, used to track momentous events within the heavens. The arrival of the PCs is a trigger for a truly momentous event—the shedding and imparting of

knowledge within the Ancients Repository in Part Five of this adventure. Be deliberately cryptic about this matter, however, it's for you to know why the bell is struck, but for everyone else—including all the NPCs in Salvation—to guess.

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

Sister Relea (LG female auttaine mystic of Haymot Steel-Arm) has seen the PCs—and one of them in particular—in her dreams. She has seen them open the fabled Devil-Gate in the mountains high above the nunnery and be bathed in joyful light.

Sister Relea is in the orrery chamber when the bell strikes, and instantly recognizes one PC; which one is irrelevant. Characters making a DC 30 Perception check notice her staring at one PC. The Sister follows the PCs, unsure of what to do. Within minutes it's pretty obvious that she is following the PCs, but unless the PCs make a Sense Motive check (DC 30) knowing that her attention is due to her wonder, not spying, is tricky to deduce.

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

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

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

Mother Metal (LN female auttaine mystic of Haymot Steel-Arm) is not quite the tyrant she seems but does support the

Purity for their successes bringing order to the Shattered Zone, so any attempts to coerce access work better if they come from a Purity member. Her day is one of strict prayer and worship, in line with the Fable; in the next 20 hours she has 3 periods when she may be approached—the PCs can find these out with a Diplomacy check (DC 15) or by asking Relea. The first occurs 2 hours after the PCs arrive, the second 11 hours after arrival and the last 17 hours after they reach Salvation. After this point visitors are required to leave. Any attempt to stay longer is likely to get the PCs into hot water.

All attempts to coerce Mother Metal are made at +4 by anyone appearing to be a Purity member (a uniform is required). The Mother listens each time to the PCs and has questions for them as detailed below—if they succeed in two checks, she asks one of her attendees to escort the PCs to the iris-gate and unlock it for them. As ever, do not overly rely on dice rolls; if the PCs come up with a great argument then allow them to succeed. The Mother has 3 questions, the check needed is detailed after each. In case you need them, her saving throws are Fort +11, Ref +5, Will +14.

Her first concern is the fable of the devil behind the gate—what will the PCs do if it is true? The PCs could show their might with an Intimidate check (DC 35) or showing their powers—the casting of any 5th level spell or the use of a legendary power suffices, as do other methods you deem suitable.

The second test is one of faith, she asks each PC this question—if more succeed than fail they have passed. She poses the PCs the question that if whatever lies beyond the gate is so powerful, do they swear to seal the entrance to the nunnery even if it costs them their own lives to protect the Fable? The Mother's Sense Motive is only +6, so the PCs may find it easy to lie. You can allow the PCs to make Diplomacy check (DC 20) to convince her they would if they honestly would or, if they are of such a selfless type, allow them to extoll this without a check. This test is very pertinent, as the PCs genuinely have to make this choice later in the adventure.

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

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

SI. THE IRIS GATE

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

VILIFICATION OF THE FAITHFUL

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

Perhaps the PCs can restore the auttaine's faith in Haymot, perhaps they can help her on some different path, but if she is seen with the PCs on Beacon she lowers all their checks for interaction such as Diplomacy by -8.



The gate (hardness 20, hit points 300, break DC 35) is locked by 2 amazing locks (DC 40 each), it is set in a thick wall of concrete and steel. If the PCs use force, Mother Metal is sure to raise the vandalism of the Fable with Purity officers.

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

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

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

The ladder requires an Athletics check (DC 20) due to the wind attempting to tear the PCs from the iron steps.

The walkway is a different matter; it is an act of faith as well as Acrobatics. The lower rails are not too thin (about a foot across) and above them, at the perfect height for a Medium creature, are fixed iron chains. Characters can cross them by making an Acrobatics check (DC 15) and an Athletics check (DC 15) to avoid being torn away.

The fall is about 2 miles. The return climb requires several hours and a DC 20 Athletics check, as the face has a slight overhang. Bearing in mind the ripping gales below, you may wish the PC to face multiple Athletics checks to return.

S2. THE LIGHTHOUSE

PCs can use the short remains of the ladder (Athletics DC 15) to get into the calm of the ruins of the lighthouse if they wish, but the place is little more than a shell decimated by the gales. The opening leads down a short corridor into a wider space which contains a dead gate, when the PCs arrive read or paraphrase the following description:

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

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

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

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

S3. THE PRISONER (CR 16)

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

THE PRISONER

CR 16

XP 76,800

NE Large outsider (daemon, evil, extraplanar)

Init +5; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +28

Aura oblivion (30 ft.)

DEFENSE

HP 300

EAC 30; KAC 32

Fort +20; Ref +18; Will +14

DR 15/legendary; Immune acid, death effects, disease, poison;

Resist cold 15, electricity 15, fire 15; SR 28

OFFENSE**Speed** 40 ft.**Space** 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.**Melee** claw +30 (3d10+26 S)**Multiattack** 4 claws +30 (3d10+26 S)**Offensive Abilities** cloud of misery, legendary surge (5 points, +1d6)**TACTICS**

During Combat The Prisoner leaps into combat, shedding its swarm of adamantine wasps almost as an afterthought. The creature does not merely look to slay; if it finds a downed opponent it moves close to them to use its oblivion aura ability.

STATISTICS**Str** +10; **Dex** +5; **Con** +7; **Int** +1; **Wis** +3; **Cha** +3**Skills** Athletics +28, Mysticism +33, Sense Motive +28**Languages** Abyssal, Draconic, Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.**SPECIAL ABILITIES**

Cloud of Misery (Su) The Prisoner can summon an adamantine wasp swarm as a move action by spending a legendary power point. It can only have two such swarms summoned at one time.

Legendary Damage Reduction The Prisoner's damage reduction is overcome by any attack that has a legendary power point spent on it.

Legendary Surge The Prisoner has a pool of 5 legendary power points. When he rolls a d20, he can spend a legendary power point as a reaction after the results are revealed to add 1d6 to the result of the roll. This can change the outcome of the roll.

Oblivion Aura (Ex) The call of death is stronger within 30 feet of The Prisoner. At the end of The Prisoner's turn, each dying creature within the aura must spend a legendary power point (if they have any) or instantly die. The Prisoner gains a legendary power point itself for any creature killed by this effect.

ADAMANTINE WASP SWARM**CR 11****XP** —**hp** 180 (see page 10)

Development: The PC who awoke this gate feels an intense joy which envelops over her whole body. If this is the first gate the party has opened, each PC gains a legendary feat of their choice (see the **Legendary Feats** section of *Dead Vault Descent*).

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

GATE 3—ZENITH**LOCATION INFORMATION**

Use Culture or Diplomacy checks to gather information, higher checks reveal the information for lesser results.

DC 20—It's an outpost, the furthest place in the Zone. It has a Purity fort on it but has been used by reckless miners and treasure seekers to get to Asteroid 113 as it is the closest place—not that the journey is easy.

DC 25—Access to Zenith is strictly controlled by Purity, and only comes via Pestilence—an abandoned asteroid that has a ghost city wiped out by a plague. A void gondola links the two. There are stories that the plague has left horribly mutated survivors. Many miners think Pestilence was deliberately infected and the creatures were unleashed as part of a Purity plot to keep intruders far away from the secretive base.

DC 30—The suspicious amount of vast horribly mutated worms below the streets over the past few years to mop up any survivors merely adds to the story. There are still plenty of scavengers prepared to risk accessing Pestilence via its old void gondolas, however. One name in particular always crops up—Drom Brak—he's always coming back to Choke with things to sell he's scavenged from Pestilence.

DC 35—Rumor has it that Purity have sent a mission to Asteroid 113 in the past few days—it is said to be led by an infamous Ancients' treasure hunter and archaeologist called Dotan Roth and his sadistic leader, the infamous Obercommander Aspa Corrosa—the so-called Iron Lady. Corrosa is responsible for more atrocities than even the Kronen, and some have said she has her many eyes set on rulership herself.



A. CHOKE

Control: The Shattered Zone Mining Company

Distance: 7 hours

Size: 1903 miles

Transport: Skiff

Cost: 1,400 credits

CHOKE

LN Large City

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

Government Overlord

Qualities Notorious, racially intolerant (all non-auttaine)

Maximum Item Level 10th

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

THE CHOKE

Type poison (inhaled); **Save** Fortitude DC 15

Track Constitution; **Frequency** 1/day for 6 days

Cure 1 save

Those who wear plague masks make these saves at +4; miners and other locals often wear scarves drenched in wine across their faces to ease the effects, making saves at +2. Saves are made once every 24 hours. Armor's environmental protections delay the saves as long as they are used.



The PCs quickly find that there are no transports to Pestilence; however, those who ask around are made aware that methods to reach the asteroid still remain in place. Succeeding at a DC 25 Diplomacy check reveals that Purity are so over-confident about the plague on Pestilence that they have all but stopped watching these routes, which are only generally officially used by those heading to Zenith, or by scavengers—who use all six remaining void gondolas often. Control of the transports rests with a group of treasure hunting scavengers and smugglers who have interest across the Zone. The smugglers can be learned of with any promise of work or even show of wealth, as they have ensured bribes are paid to the officials of Purity to allow ongoing work. They are not so easy to find, however.

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

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

Drom has lived as long as he has by keeping a low profile and bribing officials. A rusting, lizard-skinned old salt who dresses like an upper-class auttaine of old is currently spending a lot of time relaxing in Choke, visiting the low gaming clubs that thrive here. The PCs can learn his current whereabouts by making a DC 20 Bluff, Diplomacy or Intimidate check which can be attempted once per day.

The PCs meeting with Drom takes place during a mass dogfight organized by local auttaine to break the tedium of factory work. These locals are a grim lot; tough, metallic workers with eyes deadened by back-breaking work and endless poverty. Drom is as sour as the rest of them—more so in fact. The auttaine cares nothing for the PCs' motives and is interested purely in money. He can arrange transportation

via his contacts to Pestilence; tickets are one-way and cost 1,000 credits each. If the PCs want a return ticket, the price is tripled—it's risky hanging about the surface. If the PCs approach other smugglers they're likely to get a similar price, but such smugglers may be more secretive than Drom and harder to find.

Drom can pick the gondola closest to the Purity base—he asks no questions—and can give directions to the base if asked.

Essentially this gondola arrives at one end of a long boulevard once called Majesty Way (now little more than a dune-scoured ruin); it's a three mile hike up this broad, 200-yard-wide street to the Purity base.

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

CONSEQUENCES (CR 14)

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

Creature: The summon devils do not dally but are competent tacticians. One devil attempts to grab the largest PC, hoping to disable them with their fearful barbs ability, while the others focus their attacks on the weakest looking party member.

BARBED DEVIL (3)**CR 11****XP 12,800**

LE Medium outsider (devil, evil, extraplanar, lawful)

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness; **Perception** +20**DEFENSE****HP 180****EAC** 24; **KAC** 26**Fort** +13; **Ref** +15; **Will** +10**DR** 10/good and silver; **Immune** fire, poison; **Resist** acid 10, cold 10**OFFENSE****Speed** 30 ft.**Melee** claw +24 (4d6+18 S plus grab)**Ranged** throw flame +21 (3d6+11 F, range 60 ft.)**Offensive Abilities** fearful barbs (DC 18, 4d6 P)**Spell-like Abilities** (CL 11th)At will—*hold person* (DC 16), *teleport* (self plus 50 pounds)**STATISTICS****Str** +7; **Dex** +7; **Con** +3; **Int** +1; **Wis** +2; **Cha** +4**Skills** Intimidate +20, Sense Motive +25**Languages** Celestial, Common, Draconic, Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.**SPECIAL ABILITIES**

Fearful Barbs (Su) When a creature begins its turn grappled by the barbed devil, it must succeed at a DC 18 Will save or spend its actions struggling in panicked horror, tearing its flesh on the devil's barbs and suffering 4d6 piercing damage. A creature who succeeds on this save can act normally for the round but must attempt a new save next round if it is still grappled. This is a mind-affecting fear effect.

B. PESTILENCE

Under the influence of Dotan Roth, Obercommander Aspa Corrosa ordered the cleansing of Deliverance to cover their work on Asteroid 113. Purity soldiers delivered dozens of chemical devices containing a mutagen that would warp the bodies of the locals, mutating them and turning them into monsters. Corrosa knew this alone would not be enough to

render Deliverance a wasteland, however, so she also ensured that several hundred juvenile purple worms were released into the city's sewage system.

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

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

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

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

B1. THE BEAST OF THE STREETS (CR 15)

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

AMPHISBAENA WORM**CR 15****XP 51,200**

N Gargantuan magical beast

Init +0; **Senses** blindsense (vibration) 60 ft., darkvision 60 ft.;**Perception** +31**DEFENSE****HP 275****EAC** 29; **KAC** 31**Fort** +19; **Ref** +19; **Will** +13**Defensive Abilities** split (28 slashing damage)**OFFENSE****Speed** 20 ft., burrow 20 ft., swim 10 ft.**Melee** bite +29 (8d6+24 P plus swallow whole; critical staggered [DC 21])**Space** 20 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.**Offensive Abilities** double bite, swallow whole (8d6+24 A, EAC 29, KAC 27, 68 HP)**STATISTICS****Str** +9; **Dex** +0; **Con** +7; **Int** -3; **Wis** +5; **Cha** +0**Skills** Survival +26**ECOLOGY****Environment** underground**Organization** solitary



SPECIAL ABILITIES

Double Bite (Ex) An amphisbaena worm can make a full attack without the usual -4 penalty if its bites are targeted 15 feet or more apart, whether two separate creatures or one target more than 15 feet wide.

Split (Ex) When an amphisbaena worm suffers 28 or more slashing damage from a single source, it splits into two worms. These worms each have half the remaining hit points of the original and only one mouth, losing the double bite and split ability.

B2A. THE GONDOLA FORT (CR 14)

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

The fort has iron walls a foot thick, and concrete foundations ten yards deep. The only exit—itsself a foot-thick iron door—has been welded shut for years. The domed wall (Climb DC 25) rises steeply at first, and then slowly eases and comes to the opening above the central courtyard that holds the gondola.

Trap: To deter worms (and the occasional mutant), the squad has trapped the outer 30 feet of the fort. The large grasping blade traps are able to grip like a bear trap, holding anything up to Gargantuan size and then slicing it apart with huge blades worked with clockwork motors. When

primed, the things resemble evil-looking 5 ft. metal spheres. The whole area around the fort is riddled with them. PCs crossing the area will face at least two, but they can be easily avoided if they're noticed in time.

GRASPING BLADE TRAP CR 14

XP 38,400

Type analog; Perception DC 30; Disable Engineering DC 36

EFFECTS

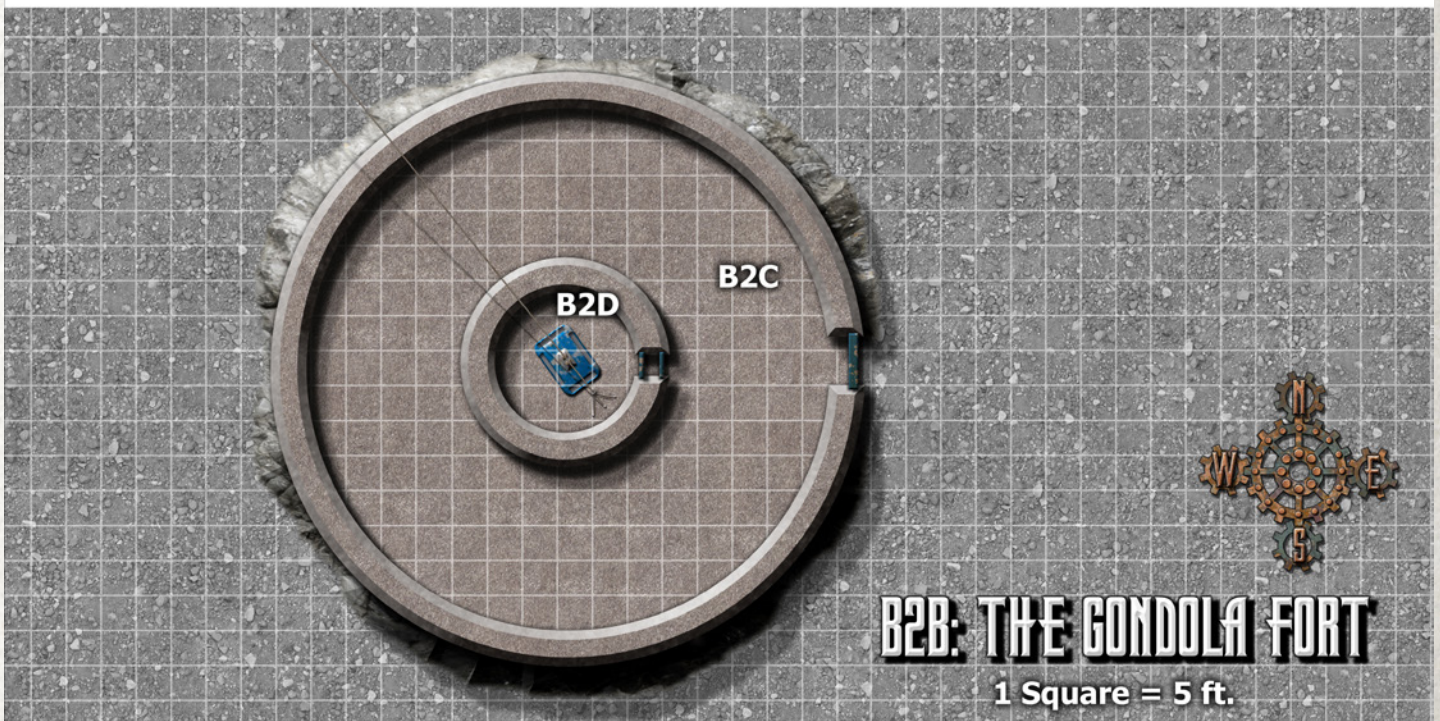
Trigger location; Reset manual

Effect All creatures within 20 feet attempt a DC 22 Reflex save. Those who fail are trapped by the teeth, taking 12d6 slashing damage per round until they can escape a grapple with a DC 20 Acrobatics check.

B2B. THE LOST POST (CR 16)

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

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



trouble and readily surrender if the golem or half their number are overcome.

One, however, grabs the elite crossbolter (see treasure) and stays at range for as long as he can. There are no spare arrows for the crossbolter so, after the third shot, he abandons the weapon and becomes just as prone to surrendering as his colleagues.

MITHRAL GOLEM CR 16
XP 76,800

N Huge construct (magical)
Init +6; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +22
DEFENSE HP 300
EAC 30; KAC 32
Fort +16; Ref +16; Will +12
Defensive abilities evasion; DR 15/adamantine; Immunities construct immunities, magic
OFFENSE
Speed 50 ft.

Melee slam +31 (6d10+23 B)

Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.

Offensive Abilities fluid form, quickness

STATISTICS

Str +7; **Dex** +10; **Con** —; **Int** —; **Wis** +0; **Cha** +0

Other Abilities mindless, unliving

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Fluid Form (Su) A mithral golem's body can take on a form like liquid silver or leave that form as a move action. While in this form, the mithral golem's reach increases to 30 feet and it is immune to critical hits that do not deal energy damage. A mithral golem in this form can also move through any crack or hole in a wall or door, no matter how small, without impeding its movement. A mithral golem in fluid form that suffers 30 cold damage in a round suffers an additional 10d6 damage and cannot use fluid form for 24 hours.

Immunity to Magic (Ex) A mithral golem is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against a mithral golem, as noted below.

- A *slow* spell causes the mithral golem to lose its quickness ability for 1d6 rounds.
- A *haste* spell heals the golem for 5d6 hit points.
- While in liquid form, the mithral golem is not immune to any spell causing cold damage.

Quickness (Su) During the mithral golem's turn, it can take an additional move action. If it is making a full attack, it can take this move action before, after, or between the attacks.

PURITY SQUAD OBERSOLDER (6)

CR 7

XP 3,200 each

hp 105 each (see page 80)

Treasure: Amongst the oddments here are an unarmed grasping trap identical to those outside, an elite crossbolter, and the chymic telegraph—a curious chitin and metal object surrounding a bone horn speaking-piece like a wide funnel, below which is a bone and steel winding wheel (Engineering DC 22 to identify its purpose and use).

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

B2C. THE GONDOLA

The gondola lies in the courtyard of the fort. Within it is luxurious, with walnut, velvet, and steel fittings and six leather seats arranged in a central circle about a foot-thick brass rod. Its portals are two foot round, and by one is the driver's machinery—essentially a simple control atop a brass

post 3 ft. high with the words “chain halt”, “dead slow”, “slow”, “half”, and “fast.” These relate to the gondola's speed.

PCs examining the gondola and making a Engineering check (DC 15) realize it is badly in need of repair. It presently has 150 hit points. PCs can repair the gondola with Engineering or magic up to a maximum of 250 hit points. Each repair attempt with Engineering takes 1 hour and, while the gondola is running, has a DC of 30.

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

ATTACK 1—THE MYRMIDON (CR 15)

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

The Myrmidon is able to cross space in incredible haste and is potentially incredibly dangerous to the PCs aboard their tiny void gondola. The attack occurs when the PCs have completed half of their journey. If the gondola is destroyed, the PCs are stranded along the chains, with the climb taking one day through the airless void for every hour it would have taken in the gondola.

Each face of the orb has a 5 ft. wide opening hatch that allows escape. Remember that air is trapped by the gravity of the device so PCs can open hatches and attack.

The gondola is the Myrmidon's main target. If your party enjoyed the chases in *The Scavenged Codex*, feel free to run this as a vehicle chase with the zones below. The gondola can be operated with Engineering or Piloting, mostly by carefully speeding up and slowing down to avoid obstacles. Other players can help by throwing their weight around at opportune moments, using Athletics to Aid Another.

VOID GONDOLA ZONES

D12	Complication
1–2	Tangled Chain. All aboard the gondola must succeed at a DC 25 Reflex save to avoid being knocked prone. Anyone failing the check by 10 or more is rattled inside the gondola, dealing themselves and a random other player 4d6 damage.
3–4	High winds. The gondola is not impeded, but the Myrmidon is –4 to Piloting.
5–6	Rusty chain. As a trick, the gondola pilot may kick up a cloud of rust, giving the gondola and its passengers concealment this round.

PART 3: DEAD GATES SLEEPING

7-8	Chain worm. A massive worm is sleeping tangled with the chain. As a trick, the pilot may attempt a Survival check (DC 25) to have it lash out at the Myrmidon, otherwise the worm lashes out at the gondola. Either way, it deals 8d6 piercing damage to its target before falling into the void.
9	Micro asteroids. The gondola, the shantak, and all players near open doors suffer 4d6 piercing damage.
10	Gravity fluctuation. All vehicles in this zone are automatically engaged.
11 - 12	Clear chain. No special effect.

On the other hand, if you prefer a straight fight, run the attacks normally between PCs and shantak using the gondola as a setting and cover.

THE MYRMIDON

CR 12

XP 19,200

CE Huge magical beast

Init +4; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; **Perception** +22

DEFENSE HP 200

EAC 26; **KAC** 28

Fort +14; **Ref** +14; **Will** +11

Defensive Abilities slippery; **Immunities** cold, disease; **Resist** acid 15, electricity 15, fire 15

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft., fly 80 ft. (su, average)

Melee bite +19 (6d4+20 P) or talons +16 (2d10+20 S plus grab)

Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.

Offensive Abilities legendary surge (6 points, +1d8)

STATISTICS

Str +8; **Dex** +5; **Con** +4; **Int** -1; **Wis** +3; **Cha** +0

Skills Acrobatics +22, Piloting +27

Languages Aklo

Other Abilities no breath, share defenses, starflight

TACTICS

During Combat The shantak focuses on the gondola unless it can grab a PC with its talons. It enjoys holding creatures and biting them repeatedly, relishing the idea of throwing the eviscerated body back into the gondola.

Morale The Myrmidon will not flee, but underestimates humanoids ability to survive in the void. It will leave the party to its fate once the gondola is destroyed.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Legendary Surge The Myrmidon has a pool of 6 legendary power points. When it rolls a d20, it can spend a legendary power point as a reaction after the results are revealed to add 1d8 to the result of the roll. This can change the outcome of the roll.

Share Defenses (Su) As a free action, a shantak can extend its no breath ability and cold immunity to a single creature touching it. It can withdraw this protection as a free action.

Slippery (Ex) A shantak's scales seep slippery slime. This grants the creature a +8 bonus on Acrobatics checks to escape

grapples, pins, and restraints. It also imparts a -5 penalty on all Acrobatics checks made by creatures attempting to ride a shantak.

Starflight (Su) A shantak can survive in the void of outer space. It flies through space at an incredible speed. Although exact travel times vary, a trip within a single solar system should take 3d20 hours, while a trip beyond should take 3d20 days (or more, at the GM's discretion)—provided the shantak knows the way to its destination. Shantaks speak in a shrill voice that sounds like glass grinding against stone. They are intelligent creatures and cannot be trained as mounts—a would-be shantak rider must use diplomacy or magic to secure a shantak's cooperation as a mount, and even then, shantaks have a tendency to deliberately strand riders in dangerous areas.

ATTACK 2—PURITY (CR 14)

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

The Purity troops, led by their oberfahn, jam metal into the gondola's chain mechanism on their side when the gondolas are 30 feet apart, slowing the two to 10 ft. per round. They use ranged weapons and then leap across between the two gondolas as they pass (the gap is 10 feet) using the gravity and atmosphere of the two. The oversolders have a total of +14 Acrobatics and the oberfahn has +22. Characters who fail the check continue into the void and begin to suffocate.

The troops are interested only in killing intruders and do not surrender. If the Myrmidon is engaged with the PCs, the oversolders split their attacks between the PCs and the creature, even though their attacks on the creature are inconsequential.

PURITY SQUAD OBERSOLDER (8)

CR 6

XP 2,400

hp 105 each (see page 80)

PURITY PATROL OBERFAHN

CR 12

XP 19,200

hp 185 (see page 81)

C. ZENITH

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

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

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

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

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

Metal suspension bridges link the various parts of the fort; these are made of 1" thick steel cables in a mesh (Hardness 10, 30 hit points, break DC 26) with low steel cable handrails. If these bridges take 20 hit points of damage one rail is severed, leaving a single wire left; an Acrobatics or Athletics check (both DC 20) is then required to use these icy perilous links. The icy outer walkways are made of stone with 2-foot-high parapets.

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

Roth has an *interplanetary teleport* scroll with him; it's their only way back.

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

Z1. THE GONDOLA BALCONY (CR 13)

A wide-open amphitheater of stone embraces the gondola as it

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

The balcony edges do not have handrails—the gondola simply reaches the area and fills it. The struts, however, have 3-foot-high rails.

Creatures: If the alarm has been raised, four *obersolders* and an *oberfahn* are here. They use ranged weapons against the PCs, supported by those in the Barracks (Area Z3). Without such an alarm, a pair of *obersolders* watch here—they are unused to visitors and likely to raise the alarm if they see movement of the chain connected to the gondola.

PURITY SQUAD OBERSOLDER (4)

CR 7

XP 3,200 each
hp 105 each (see page 80)

PURITY PATROL OBERFAHN

CR 12

XP 19,200
hp 185 (see page 81)

Z2. FIRST SUSPENSION BRIDGE

A steel bridge hangs across a frightful drop.

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

Z3. BARRACKS (CR 14)

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

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

Creatures: The Purity troops gather here and train and enjoy recreation—usually some sort of gambling. At full strength, there is room for 5 full squads (65 *auttaine*), but only 10 *obersolders* remain here. These troops support comrades in the event of attack with ranged weapons and melee





as necessary. They are backed by the golem and Commander Storr (Area Z9), who rushes over to take command. The troops are disciplined and fight a sensible but flexible action based upon the PCs' own methods—in general troops fire to cover a small number of troops who move into melee. The troops are aware of the inferno grenades, but only use them if commanded to. Commander Storr does not like to overuse rare technology, fearing punishment. He only issues such an instruction when a third of his troops are dead, then allowing their liberal use and joining in himself.

PURITY SQUAD OBERSOLDER (10)

CR 7

XP 3,200 each

hp 105 each (see page 80)

Treasure: Within the barracks are the following items: a ceremonial auttaine Purity uniform embedded with obsidians and gold wire worth 1,200 credits, a ceremonial *axiomatic sintered longsword* with a platinum, ruby, and black steel pommel held in a leather and ermine scabbard (itself worth 2,700 credits) and etched with 'Pure Forever', and a case of 12 frag grenade IVs.

Z4. OBERFAHN'S BARRACKS

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

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

Creatures: Generally, two oberfahn will be sleeping here. If the base has gone on alert, they have donned their gear or even have left to patrol the area.

PURITY PATROL OBERFAHN (2)

CR 12

XP 19,200 each

hp 185 each (see page 81)

Treasure: Amongst the furniture is a magnificent Dollgor table (an auttaine variation on backgammon) set with obsidian and ebony, with polished jet and marble pieces, with dice made of carved pearls worth 2,000 credits. The room contains scores of military manuals, history tomes and maps from military conflicts across the known universe. This collection is 10 bulk but is worth 4,500 credits to the right collector. If used as a reference in its entirety it grants +4 circumstance bonus to any Culture check related to military history.

Z5. SHORT BRIDGE

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

Z6. WORKSHOP

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

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

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

Treasure: The workshop is a treasure trove of engineering tools, including enough tools to make up ten masterwork engineering specialty tool kits. There is also a *hand of all trades* (see page 87) waiting for someone to install it and sufficient tools to install augmentations if any PC has the appropriate skills.

Z7. THE ANGEL (CR 17)

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

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

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

OOZE, CHOKE

CR 17

XP 102,400

hp 380 (see page 71)

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

Z8. AWFUL EXPOSURE

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

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

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

Z9. OFFICERS' QUARTERS (CR 16)

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

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

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

COMMANDER STORR

CR 15

XP 51,200

Auttaine soldier

LE Medium humanoid (half-construct, human)

Init +7; Perception +26

DEFENSE

HP 275

EAC 29; KAC 32

Fort +19; Ref +15; Will +15

DR 3/—; Resist acid 5, cold 15, fire 15

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.

Melee human-bane storm shock truncheon +28 (3d12+29 E, stun; critical arc 3d4 or stun human)

Ranged white star plasma rifle +25 (4d10+15 E & F, line; critical burn 2d8)

or shock grenade IV +25 (6d12 E, explode 15 ft., DC 21)

Offensive Abilities soldier's onslaught

TACTICS

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

During Combat Storr believes in his racial superiority; he is an overly confident fighter, and wades into combat, leading

from the front.

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

STATISTICS

Str +9; **Dex** +7; **Con** +3; **Int** -1; **Wis** +1; **Cha** +5

Skills Athletics +26, Intimidate +31, Mysticism +26

Languages Common

Combat Gear *serum of healing mk 3*, 2 shock grenades IV; **Other Gear** golemforged plating V with filtered rebreather and thermal capacitor mk 3, *human-bane storm shock truncheon*, white star plasma rifle, four high-capacity batteries, magnificent uniform replete with a dozen medals made of a combination of silver, platinum, and gold worth 3,000 credits in total.

CANNON GOLEM

CR 15

XP 51,800

N Large construct (magical)

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; **Perception** +26

DEFENSE

HP 275

EAC 29; **KAC** 31

Fort +15; **Ref** +15; **Will** +11

DR 15/adamantine; **Immunities** construct immunities, magic

OFFENSE

Speed 50 ft.

Melee slam +26 (5d8+24 B; critical blasting critical)

Ranged cannon +29 (5d8+15 B & F)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Offensive Abilities fluid form, quickness

STATISTICS

Str +9; **Dex** +7; **Con** —; **Int** —; **Wis** +0; **Cha** +0

Other Abilities mindless, unliving

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Blasting Critical When the cannon golem critically hits a target with its slam, it may make a cannon attack against the target without provoking attacks of opportunity from that target or spending an action.

Cannon The golem's cannon has a range increment of 100 feet and automatically loaded with cannonballs created within the golem's body. The cannon can be used as a heavy weapon with bulk 3 when detached from the golem's body but the cannonballs must be manually loaded. The cannon has a capacity of one cannonball, which can be crafted as a level 5 item costing 25 credits and has light bulk.

Immunity to Magic (Ex) A cannon golem is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against a cannon golem, as noted below.

- Any spell with the water descriptor disables the golem's cannon for one round.
- An *entropic grasp* causes the golem's cannon to backfire, dealing the golem 6d6 fire damage and

staggering it for one round (no save).

Treasure: A magnificent long-case clock worth 4,500 credits depicting Death chasing a devil on a six-legged goat. Hidden in the case is a *spell ampoule of flight (3rd level)*, a walnut and porcelain pedal-organ worth 6,750 credits depicting angels with scythes but which weighs 10 bulk, and a superb wheel barometer (permanently set at dull) worth 2,900 credits with copper and gold handles depicting angels. The ornate telescope cannot be moved, but parts can be salvaged from it with 2,500 credits.

The bookshelves are largely empty, containing a collection of military history books like those in **Z4** and Storr's log. This log details Roth's growing influence over Corrosa, culminating in Corrosa's extermination of Deliverance and sending an expedition to Asteroid 113. Included in the notes are Roth's arguments that Asteroid 113's prison conceals some vast store of the Ancient's power. This information is valuable to the PCs for understanding who they're up against, but Storr is also well-liked and his personal objections to the operation in Deliverance might help sway auttaine back in civilization against Purity.

Development: The telescope in the room is pointed at Asteroid 113; if the PCs view through it they see the asteroid in all its spiked fury (for more information see part four).





Z10. ROTH'S OBSESSION

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

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

Development: Like the others, there are 6999 symbols depicted on each ring, and 5 concentric rings in total. These symbols are subtly different from the others, and vary little amongst themselves, making using them confusing. Characters attempting to resurrect the gate must make a

Culture check (DC 30) to correctly align each of the 5 outer rings. A character referencing the *Opus Aeterna* (from *The Scavenged Codex*) may use Engineering or Mysticism instead. If the PCs fails the check they must make a Will save (DC 25) or be struck with terrible foreboding, refusing to touch the ring for 4 hours. If a character fails this Intelligence check twice she is consumed with dread as above, but sure that if she fails again something terrible will happen.

If this is the first gate the party has opened, each PC gains a legendary feat of their choice (see the **Legendary Feats** section of *Dead Vault Descent*). Unless this is the last gate the PCs awaken, the shiny blackness created within the opening repels attempts to enter it. If all three gates are awakened, it forms a link to Asteroid 113 as described in Part Four.

Z11. THE IRON LADY'S QUARTERS

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

The Iron Lady is obsessed with devils and has two as her infernal slaves. The portrait is of her, and if examined, it is possible to see with a DC 30 Perception check her two handmaiden devils reflected in her pupils.

Treasure: Amongst the variously ugly and disturbing objects are the preserved fetus of some revolting thing about the size of a lamb but consisting of congealed limbs and

mouths. The thing is in a sealed jar and has a beautiful lesser gluon crystal within. There is also a distended alien skull that functions as a *shadow orb* and a very detailed, but untitled, book in *Infernal* about evil outsiders (anyone who references the book during a ten-minute rest can reroll a failed attempt to identify an evil outsider at +4, this ability can only be used once per person on a given type of outsider). The portrait of the Iron Lady is worth 1,200 credits; the remaining perverse objects and curios are worth 500 credits per bulk (up to 20 bulk).

Z12. TO THE SKIFF

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

PART FOUR—THE GOD-SEER'S CHILDREN

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

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

All the PCs suddenly become aware that something momentous is happening, an event caused by them that will have repercussions across the universe—they do not know why they know this, or what may happen; they just *know*. Each PC may choose another legendary feat at this point (see the **Legendary Feats** section of *Dead Vault Descent*).

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

OBLIVION

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

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

Here is a broken landscape of black smooth stone and metal rising to giant spires—almost as though seared by fire into its present

form. There is the sudden awful sound of a whole world unmaking itself, and the horizon changes. A metal spike mountain somehow seems much closer now than it did a moment ago; miles closer in fact. Nearby, you can make out the shattered remnants of a skiff, while all around you are scattered signs of habitation.

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

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

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

NO TIME TO LOSE

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

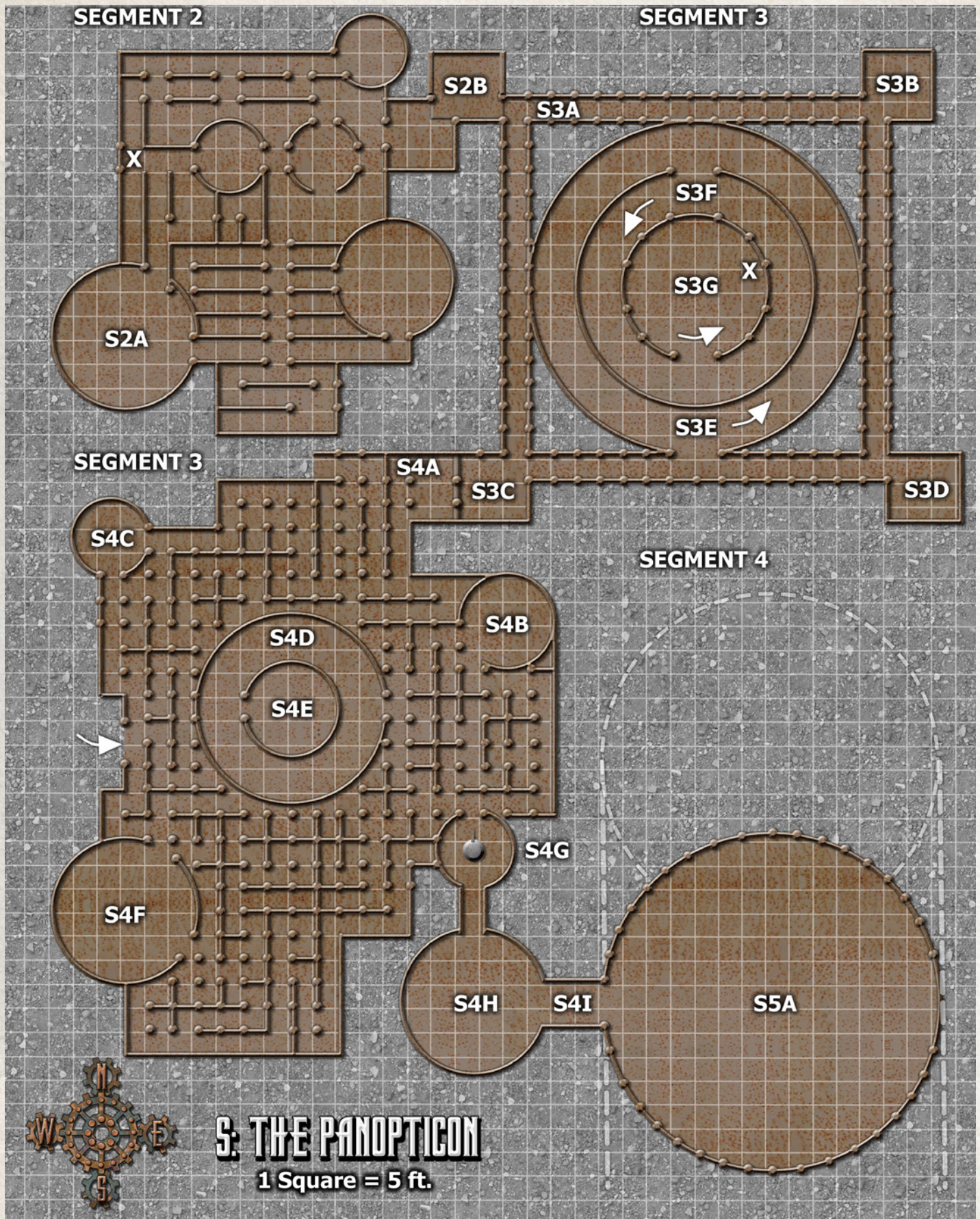
You should also make sure that a feeling of impending danger is engendered into events—if the PCs dawdle they should be attacked by kyton seeking escape, and these should be frequent—backed by a quickly moving landscape. Do not worry about throwing kyton at the PCs—there are a million here to play with,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



THE KYTON PANOPTICON

SEGMENT 1—THE RUINED SKIFF

The crash site lies about 200 yards from the gate. When Roth and his party arrived he deliberately aimed for the gate, hoping that its position was indicative of something important. He was able to slow the skiff as it arrived, but



2 troopers still died in the crash. They are buried not far from the wreckage of the skiff. Characters making a DC 20 Engineering check on the vessel realize that it could only come one way, and that the crew must have known this. The skiff has been regimentally emptied of all contents, although a Purity flag still hangs within the crushed port side.

The landscape of the area is undulating; cruelly spiked mountains rising through foothills to the seemingly endless iron spires that dominate the landscape. A set of tracks leads away over a low hill. Characters making a Survival check (DC 15) count about 40 sets of auttaine tracks in the soft ground.

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

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

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

PANOPTICON FEATURES

Endless days of cruelty are etched into the walls of this vile place, home to around a million kytons, imprisoned as though they were all subject to a *planar barrier* spell. This barrier can only be pierced by the same technomagic that created it. The gateway passes through the barrier without problem and a PC, imbued with the same power, can spend a legendary power point to ignore the barrier's effects for one round.

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

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

Now the entire panopticon is alive—the arrival of the legendary PCs has triggered its guardian to reawaken. Equal parts mechanical and divine, the Machine has waited eons

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

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

Constantly remind the PCs that the whole asteroid is on the move—they may be crushed flat at any moment. The more you can make them feel imperiled the better. Play the panopticon as harshly as you can—it's been populated by the kytons for countless years; its history boils with pain and torment.

This is one bad place.

SEGMENT 2—GHOSTS OF BATTLE

The surface shaft opens onto this wing of the prison. Despite first appearances, this place is empty. There is blood—and lots of it—but little else. The kytons dismantled the dead on both sides for parts, to serve both as food and the raw materials for artistry. Beyond this area, the echoes of movement and a million screaming kytons echo constantly through the panopticon. Use this space to create tension, the fleshy walls the PCs walk past suddenly cry as something falls, something bangs on metal. The only things the PCs find here are listed below.

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

S2A. EMBRACE

The shaft narrows as it descends and is only sixty feet across at its base. This floor echoes like dull metal, as though it is merely a covering. Near the bottom, the walls are covered with flesh, which have been smeared layer upon layer over endless generations to create a deep hive of skin punctured with bloodless holes and grotesque decorations. In places, long strings of alien writing have been etched into the flesh and scarred over as though the flesh may still be living.

The writings are descriptions in Infernal of generations of attempts to escape intermixed with details of experiments, first in an attempt to create creatures that could sail through the void of space, then slowly devolving into flesh crafting for the sake of artistry. Notes like this, along with hymns exalting the God-Seer, can be found throughout the tunnels.

S2B. DESCENT

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

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

SEGMENT 3—THE FRAGMENT

This tiny corner of the prison is very much occupied, but its kyton occupants are lurking within the fleshy walls. They do not openly attack the PCs, hoping to lure them into the central area where something terrible stirs. Perception checks (DC 35) are required to see the kytons, although if attacked all kyton in that area emerge from the walls to take victims. They do not seek to kill, just to keep.

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

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

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

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

slight that only those attuned to such slight changes notice them.

At any given time, the PCs are far more likely to hear the revolving of Areas S3E, S3F, and S3G.

S3A. ECHOES OF TORMENT (CR 14)

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

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

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

FERAL KYTON (6)

CR 9

XP 6,400 each

hp 145 each (see page 70)

Treasure: Emerging from one of the walls is the fragments of the body of an auttaine long dead. A PC succeeding at a Perception check (DC 35) spots this body, and the dull metal *ring of evasion* that did its owner no good.

S3B. CHAPEL OF ONE

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

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

S3C. THE UNSEEABLE ESCAPE TO PAIN

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

This section of the panopticon connects in a complex way to Segment 4; however, it is half an hour after the PCs arrival that the two areas touch, the arched entrance between opens

and the event described further below occurs. Before that moment, PCs listening here (and making a Perception check (DC 35)) hear the slightest of a breath of movement beyond this chamber.

Treasure: Most of the weights here are worthless stones or cast-off bits of clockwork. However, a character examining the weights and succeeding at a DC 30 Physical Science check can identify one of the weights, dangling from the lower jaw of a long-dead kyton, is actually a lump of adamantine ore. The entire boulder is 31 bulk and worth 500 credits per bulk.

S3D. THE FRESCO OF FACES (CR 14)

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

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

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

INTERLOCUTOR PRIME

CR 14

XP 38,400

LE Large outsider (evil, extraplanar, kyton, lawful)

Init +4; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness; **Perception** +25

DEFENSE

HP 250

EAC 28; **KAC** 30

Fort +14; **Ref** +14; **Will** +13

Defensive Abilities regeneration 10 (silver or good-aligned weapons and spells); **DR** 10/silver or good; **Immunities** cold, pain; **SR** 25

OFFENSE

Speed 50 ft.

Melee claw +28 (4d6+22 S)

Multiattack 4 claws +22 (4d6+22 S)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Offensive Abilities sculpting rend (2 claws, 3d6 bleed), unnerving gaze (30 ft., DC 21)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 14th)

1/day—*overload systems* (DC 19), *rewire flesh* (DC 19)

3/day—*healing junkbot*, *inflict pain* (DC 17), *lesser restoration*, *mystic cure* (2nd-level)

At will—*shadow walk* (from the Material Plane to the Plane of Shadow Plane, self only), *stabilize*

STATISTICS

Str +8; **Dex** +4; **Con** +6; **Int** +3; **Wis** +3; **Cha** +4

Skills Athletics +25, Medicine +30, Stealth +25

Languages Common, Infernal

ECOLOGY

Environment any (Plane of Shadow)

Organization solitary, pair, or gang leader (1 plus 2–8 interlocutor kytons)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Sculpting Rend (Ex) If the interlocutor prime hits a single target with two more claw attacks in 1 round, the target gains the bleeding 3d6 condition. The interlocutor prime can also immediately cast one of its spell-like abilities targeting that creature as a swift action that does not provoke attacks of opportunity.

Unnerving Gaze (Ex) A creature that fails its Will save against an interlocutor prime's unnerving gaze becomes staggered for 1 round.

AREAS S3E-S3G.

These areas form circular rings that turn a half-turn in the direction indicated every 4 rounds, accompanied by a dreadful grating wail. Characters caught in any open doorways at that time must make a Reflex save (DC 25) or take 20d6 damage. Those creatures within here are used to the movement, but others must make an Acrobatics check (DC 10) to avoid falling when this happens, unless they are anchored in some way to the fleshy walls.



S3E. EMBRACE OF SELF-MUTILATION (CR 14)

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

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

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

FERAL KYTON (6) CR 9

XP 6,400
hp 145 each (see page 70)

S3F THE WORK OF THE MASOCHIST (CR 14)

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

The second work is a cacophonous giant of suffering flesh that never ceases its screams. Anyone coming within 30 feet of the fleshy wall must make a Will save (DC 25) or be affected as per *confusion* (caster level 15th). Once the save is made no further saves are required for 24 hours. The flesh may be living, but it is fragmented, broken. Those who come near may be touched, pawed, or even caressed but otherwise the Second Work is unable to hurt anyone but itself.

Creature: The First Work is different, however. Made by the Masochist, the First—an special kyton known as the Interlocutor Prime—tends the great Second, readying it for further work.

THE FIRST-KYTON, INTERLOCUTOR PRIME CR 14

XP 38,400
LE Large outsider (evil, extraplanar, kyton, lawful)
Init +4; Senses darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness; Perception +25

DEFENSE HP 250

EAC 28; KAC 30
Fort +14; Ref +14; Will +13
Defensive Abilities regeneration 10 (silver or good-aligned weapons and spells); DR 10/silver or good; Immunities cold, pain; SR 25

OFFENSE

Speed 50 ft.
Melee claw +28 (4d6+22 S)
Multiattack 4 claws +22 (4d6+22 S)
Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.
Offensive Abilities sculpting rend (2 claws, 3d6 bleed), unnerving gaze (30 ft., DC 21)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 14th)

1/day—*overload systems* (DC 19), *rewire flesh* (DC 19)
3/day—*healing junkbot*, *inflict pain* (DC 17), *lesser restoration*, *mystic cure* (2nd-level)
At will—*shadow walk* (from the Material Plane to the Plane of Shadow Plane, self only), *stabilize*

STATISTICS

Str +8; Dex +4; Con +6; Int +3; Wis +3; Cha +4
Skills Athletics +25, Medicine +30, Stealth +25
Languages Common, Infernal

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Sculpting Rend (Ex) If the interlocutor prime hits a single target with two more claw attacks in 1 round, the target gains the bleeding 3d6 condition. The interlocutor prime can also immediately cast one of its spell-like abilities targeting that creature as a swift action that does not provoke attacks of opportunity.

Unnerving Gaze (Ex) A creature that fails its Will save against an interlocutor prime's unnerving gaze becomes staggered for 1 round.

S3G. PALACE OF THE CONSORT MASOCHIST (CR 16)

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

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

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

THE CONSORT MASOCHIST-KYTON, EPHIALTES CR 16

XP 76,800
LE Huge outsider (evil, extraplanar, kyton, lawful)
Init +2; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +28

DEFENSE HP 300

EAC 30; KAC 32
Fort +18; Ref +18; Will +16
DR 15/good or silver; Immune cold, pain; SR 27

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.
Melee bite +31 (6d10+23 P; critical bleed 2d10) or chains +31 (2d10+23 S plus grab)
Multiattack bite +25 (6d10+23 P; critical bleed 2d10), 3 chains +25 (2d10+23 S plus grab)
Space 15 ft.; Reach 15 ft. (30 ft. with chains)
Offensive Abilities animate chains, breath weapon (30 ft. cone, 10d10 S plus pull, DC 22, usable every 1d4 rounds)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 16th, melee +31)
3/day *planar barrier*, *shadow walk* (DC 22)
At will *resistant armor*, *rewire flesh* (DC 20)



STATISTICS

Str +7; **Dex** +2; **Con** +10; **Int** +0; **Wis** +1; **Cha** +5
Skills Athletics +28, Intimidate +28, Survival +33
Languages Infernal

ECOLOGY

Environment any (Plane of Shadow)

Organization solitary or team (2–8)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Animate Chains (Su) The ephialtes can animate any unattended chain or cable line within 30 feet, allowing it to make its chain attacks from those chains' locations rather than from its own. A character carrying a chain or cable line must attempt a DC 22 Will save at the beginning of the Ephialtes's turn or the kyton can use their items in the same way. A character attacked by an item they are carrying is flat-footed for the purpose of that attack.

Breath Weapon (Su) The ephialtes exhales a writhing mass of chains, then begins swallowing them to expel again. Any character that fails their Reflex save against the breath weapon is entangled by the chain. The entangled condition lasts until that chain is destroyed (EAC 30, KAC 24, 30 HP), the character escapes with a DC 32 Acrobatics check, or the ephialtes uses its breath weapon again. At the beginning of

the ephialtes's turn, it drags each entangled creature 10 feet towards itself. Destroying these chains in no way harms the ephialtes.

Development: Bound to its mundane hunting, the Masochist is always looking for new prey. It positively quivers in glee, glistening with excrescences if it finds a new form to work on. The creature leads with its breath weapon, seeking to entrap foes so it can tear them apart very slowly.

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

Treasure: The space above can be accessed by climbing the chains (Climb DC 10). Among a deluge of chains are the following items: a silver and adamantine case containing weights and measures worth 2600 credits, the *storm of chains* (see page 77), and jars containing a large amount of preserved bioware. Included in the jars are a flayed-off skin of the chameleon, a standard dragon gland (electricity), and two *mk 2 synergizing symbiote* personal upgrades.

SEGMENT 4—WHAT IS LEFT OF PURITY

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

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

TERROR APPROACHES (CR 12)

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

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

DAXX, PURITY SQUAD OBERSOLDER CR 7

XP 3,200

hp 105, presently 12 (see page 80)

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

KYTON, AUGUR CR 2

XP 600

LE Tiny outsider (evil, extraplanar, kyton, lawful)

Init +4; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness; **Perception** +7

DEFENSE **HP 23 / RP 3**

EAC 13; **KAC** 15

Fort +3; **Ref** +5; **Will** +2

Defensive Abilities fast healing 2 (silver or good-aligned weapons and spells); **DR** 5/good or silver; **Immune** cold, pain

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft., fly 50 ft. (Su; perfect)

Melee gore +10 (1d6+2 P)

Space 2-1/2 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

Offensive Abilities bleed out (DC 11), unnerving gaze (30 ft., DC 11)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 5th)

1/week—*divination*

At will—*psychokinetic hand*

STATISTICS

Str +0, **Dex** +4, **Con** +1, **Int** +2, **Wis** +0, **Cha** -2

Skills Acrobatics +7 (+15 when flying), Sense Motive +7, Stealth +12

Languages Common, Infernal (cannot speak)

ECOLOGY

Environment any (The Shadow)

Organization solitary, pair, pack (3-5), or squad (6-8)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Bleed Out (Su) Augur kytons have an unending thirst for blood and can manipulate it in those who can't resist. As a standard action by expending 1 Resolve Point, an augur kyton can attempt to disturb the blood of one unconscious living creature within 30 feet. That creature must attempt a Will saving throw (DC 11); if it fails, it immediately loses 1 RP as if it had been attacked. Furthermore, if it was stable, it immediately regains the dying condition.

Fast Healing (Ex) An augur's fast healing is suppressed for 1 round when it is dealt damage from a silver or good-aligned weapon or spell.

Unnerving Gaze (Ex) A creature that succumbs to an augur's unnerving gaze becomes shaken for 1 round.

FERAL KYTON (3) CR 11

XP 12,800

hp 145 each (see page 70)

SEGMENT 4 FEATURES

The Glorious One has perfected the use of impaling and is able to keep his victims alive for days, weeks, or even years. This segment festers like the back of a porcupine with spines, needles and iron spears that have grown somehow from the hateful walls—although moving carefully with the Step action deals no damage, other movement along the floor or walls deals 1d8 for every 5 feet moved. The corridors form an honor guard of misery—kyton corpses are everywhere, but in this region their forms do not make a layer of skin.

Many of the kyton are still alive; perhaps reveling in their pain or at the threshold of death. These mutilated things are not generally referred to in the text, but you may decide to use them as an added dimension to events here—perhaps they paw or scream, or maybe still have the ability to attack.

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

S4A. EMBRACE

This area seems to have a different aspect—spikes. Every inch of the walls are pierced with spines, spikes and iron spears, creating a claustrophobic, bristling ceiling. These spines are not empty, however—with many of the fleshy forms hanging from them still bleeding or even coughing out rasping breaths. The floors are smooth like melted glass.

S4B. PIERCED MANY TIMES (CR 13)

This vaulted chamber is crisscrossed by scores of long iron spears that cross from one side to another, moving together like clockworks to create an ever-shifting maze of pain. You can hear wordless cries reverberating from deeper in the maze, but it's difficult to tell whether they are screams of pain or shouts of joy.

This chamber is where kytons come, or are taken, to suffer.

Trap: The spears are driven endlessly by some cogs deep in its mechanism.

THE RAPTURE OF ENDLESS IMPALEMENTS CR 13

XP 25,600

Type hybrid; **Perception** DC 0; **Disable** Engineering DC 35 (see below)

EFFECTS

Trigger proximity; **Reset** automatic, continuous

Effect Anyone moving through the chamber or ending their round in the chamber must contend with countless barbed spears. If they fail a DC 21 Reflex save, they suffer 4d6+20 piercing damage and are pinned against the nearest wall, cancelling any further movement. As a standard action, a character can attempt an Acrobatics check (DC 21) to pull themselves off of a spear, a Medicine check (DC 21) to extract a spear from an adjacent ally, or tear themselves loose, suffering 4d6+20 damage.

Special Finding the connecting gears between the Rapture and the greater clockworks requires a standard action to search from within the room and a successful DC 35 Engineering check. The trap can be disabled from inside the room with another Engineering check or dealing 125 damage to the gearworks (which have a hardness of 15 and are immune to electricity).

S4C. THE AFFLICTED

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

The feral kyton within is trying to achieve rapture and become a sacristan, much like the heralds (see Area S4E). It can be killed by as little as jostling the needles and poses no threat to the PCs.

S4D. THE INFESTATION (CR 17)

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

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

Creatures: There are a dozen feral kytons herein. These feral kytons are particularly aggressive, worked into a frenzy by their difficulty holding back killing the auttaine.

FERAL KYTONS (12)

CR 9

XP 6,400 each

hp 145 each (see page 70)

Development: The Purity soldiers are reduced to a handful of hit points; they are unspeakably traumatized and do little but weep, even if released. They can be cured only by *psychic surgery* or years of dedicated therapy.

Treasure: Amongst the blood and misery of this room are an HFD sonic pistol with 20 charges remaining, a leather and silver case holding 24 adamantine long arm bullets, and 3 incendiary grenade IVs.

S4E. THE GLORIOUS ONE (CR 18)

Hanging in the center of the chamber a pair of prisoners—auttaine—who have been impaled again and again by thin filaments of wire. They hang in the dome of the chamber some twenty feet above, their bodies swarming with countless wounds. These threads appear to have some give in them, so that they cut in deeper with the prisoners' movement. Above the door, impaled on long spears encrusted with blood, are three huge creatures as much steel as flesh, the spears emerging from their distended, still mouths. Tenderly maintaining this scene is a four-armed creature, its skin slashed and pierced so many times that wound and skin are indistinguishable.

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

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

GLORIOUS INTERLOCUTOR

CR 17

XP 102,400

Interlocutor kyton mystic

LE Medium outsider (evil, extraplanar, kyton, lawful)

Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness; **Perception** +29

DEFENSE

HP 285

EAC 30; KAC 31

Fort +17; **Ref** +15; **Will** +20

Defensive Abilities regeneration 15 (silver or good-aligned weapons and spells); **DR** 15/silver or good; **Immunities** cold, pain; **SR** 28

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.

Melee torturous claw +28 (6d6+28 S nonlethal plus torturous claw)

Multiattack 4 claws +22 (4d6+28 S)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Offensive Abilities rend (2 claws, 4d6+28 S), unnerving gaze (30 ft., DC 24)

Interlocutor Spell-Like Abilities (CL 17th)

1/day—*overload systems* (DC 24), *rewire flesh* (DC 24)

3/day—*healing junkbot*, *inflict pain* (DC 22), *lesser restoration*, *mystic cure* (2nd-level)

At will—*shadow walk* (from the Material Plane to the Plane of Shadow, self only), *stabilize*

Mystic Spells Known (CL 17th; ranged +26)

6th (3/day)—*mass inflict pain* (DC 26), *mystic cure*

5th (6/day)—*resistant aegis*, *dominate person* (DC 25), *greater dispel magic*, *mind thrust*

4th (at will)—*hold monster* (DC 24), *enervation*

STATISTICS

Str +11; **Dex** +5; **Con** +5; **Int** +4; **Wis** +2; **Cha** +8

Skills Athletics +29, Culture +24, Medicine +34, Mysticism +34

Languages Celestial, Common, Draconic, Infernal, Terran

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Unnerving Gaze (Ex) A creature that fails a Will save against a glorious interlocutor's unnerving gaze becomes staggered for 1 round.

Rend (Ex) If the interlocutor hits a single target with two more claw attacks in 1 round, it deals an additional 4d6+28 slashing damage.

Torturous Claw (Su) When it takes its time, the glorious interlocutor's can use one claw to deal nonlethal damage, but untold amounts of pain. Those damaged by this attack are dazed for 1d4 rounds (Fortitude DC 24 negates). Targets immune to critical hits or pain are immune to this effect.



PART 4: THE GOD-SEER'S CHILDREN

KYTON, SACRISTAN

CR 10

XP 9,600

LE Medium outsider (evil, extraplanar, kyton, lawful)

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness; Perception +19

DEFENSE

HP 116

EAC 22; **KAC** 24

Fort +14; **Ref** +10; **Will** +10

Defensive Abilities fast healing 5 (silver or good-aligned weapons and spells); **DR** 10/good or silver; **Immune** cold, pain; **SR** 21

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee microerrated longsword +23 (2d10+17; analog; critical bleed 2d6)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Offensive Abilities shadow scream, unnerving gaze (30 ft., DC 17)

STATISTICS

Str +7, **Dex** +3, **Con** +1, **Int** +2, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +5

Skills Bluff +19, Intimidate +24, Stealth +19

Languages Common, Infernal

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Fast Healing (Ex) A sacristan's fast healing is suppressed for 1 round when it is dealt damage from a silver or good-aligned weapon or spell.

Shadow Scream (Su) Once per hour as a standard action, a sacristan can burst the bonds that seal its mouth and unleash a cacophony of darkness and soul-shaking howls from the Shadow's darkest depths. This functions as the create darkness universal creature rule, with the following differences. The darkness stays centered on the sacristan, and creatures with darkvision cannot see in this darkness; only creatures with the see in darkness ability (such as kytons) can see inside. All non-kyton creatures within the area are deafened for as long as they remain in the area and must make a DC 17 Will saving throw or become confused for as long as they remain in this area and for 1d4 rounds after leaving. Any creature that falls unconscious while under the confusion effect must succeed at an additional DC 17 Will saving throw or suffer from the curse of shadow shakes (this is an insanity effect). A sacristan's shadow scream lasts for 3 rounds, and ends early either if the sacristan wills it or if it is affected by the spell *planar barrier*.

SHADOW SHAKES

Type curse; **Save** Will DC 17

Effect Whenever the victim is in dim light, it becomes shaken. If the light becomes any darker, the victim becomes panicked and attempts to move away from the darkness as quickly as possible. If the

victim has darkvision, it does not function for as long as this curse lasts.

Cure The victim must spend 24 hours in an area of darkness.

This curse can also be cured in the same manner as an insanity effect.

Unnerving Gaze (Ex) A creature that succumbs to a sacristan's unnerving gaze becomes staggered for 1 round.

AUGUR KYTON (4)

CR 3

XP 1,600

hp 23 each (see page 70)

Treasure: The Glorious One has spent long ages gathering objects from within the prison, as well as those taken from rare visitors. These objects adorn the chamber and are easily spotted. They are various made up of parts of creatures impaled onto others to form twisted artwork and generally of no value despite their vast number, however, also within this cruel display is an astonishingly punishing but beautiful bodice. Made of iron rings and clamps etched with gold and platinum figures of sexual cruelty, the whole is set with obsidians of great size and worth 4,500 credits. Also here are a matched pair of paragon semi-auto pistols, a kyton head with two *dark blue rhomboid aeon stones* instead of eyes, a curiously shaped kyton headdress with a broad shoulder arch set with fine rubies and the fingers and eyes of kyton worth 6,400 credits, and a black metal puzzle box containing a *mk 3 ring of resistance*.

S4F. ECHOES

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

This section of panopticon is very close to the beating heart of the Machine. Characters listening can hear a vast but distant something



echoing like a metal beating heart—this is the body of the Machine endlessly repairing itself and tending to its own needs in readiness for its deliverance. For more information see Part Five.

S4G. THE CANNON (CR 15)

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

Creature: Purity has positioned a cannon golem at the junction of corridors here, it fires at anything unless given a verbal instruction by the Iron Lady (and only her).

CANNON GOLEM

CR 15

XP 51,200

hp 275 (see page 45)

S4H. PURITY (CR 18)

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

Purity skulk here, desperate to finish their quest. They know that Dotan Roth is puzzling over a doorway (Area S4I) and hope he'll open it soon. The group is ready to fight to the last. The fixed iron mesh outside (hardness 8, 100 hit points, break DC 34) is used to defend against the kyton. Characters can try to crawl through using an Acrobatics check (DC 35), those who fail the check take 3d6 damage.

Creatures: The troops use the barrier as cover and fire through it. They are jaded and weak, but desperate now. The Iron Lady sends her devils into combat, preparing herself for a final grand battle.

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

The two devils are utterly devoted to their charge—they obey every command (up to and including self-destruction)—and are utterly enraptured by her, despite her fall under queborrin control. This makes the duo very dangerous if Corrosa is in any way injured or imperilled.

OBERCOMMANDER ASPA CORROSA —THE IRON LADY

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

OBERCOMMANDER ASPA CORROSA

CR 16

XP 76,800

Queborrin-infested auttaine solarion

NE Medium humanoid (half-construct, human)

Init +5; Perception +28

DEFENSE

HP 300

EAC 30; KAC 32

Fort +20; Ref +16; Will +16; SR 27

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.

Melee solar weapon +30 (6d10+23 A & S; critical severe wound)

Ranged tactical gyroget pistol +27 (3d12+16 B; critical knockdown)

Offensive Abilities stellar revelations (hypnotic glow, sunbolt), zenith revelations (solar acceleration, supernova)

TACTICS

During Combat Corrosa knows she is formidable opponent, but regards herself as far, far more important than anyone else—Roth included. Corrosa effectively leads from the back, shouting, ordering and sacrificing lesser beings to ensure that what is left for her to fight is weaker. While her troops outnumber the enemy, she works from the back with her solar acceleration zenith revelation, sunbolt, and pistol. Once their numbers are whittled down, she joins the fray with her solar weapon and, if she becomes surrounded, supernova.

STATISTICS

Str +7; Dex +5; Con +4; Int +2; Wis +2; Cha +10

Skills Acrobatics +28, Intimidate +28, Mysticism +28, Sense Motive +33

Languages Common, Infernal

Other abilities queborrin host, stellar alignment (photon)

Combat Gear 3 *serums of healing mk 3*; **Other Gear** elite hardlight series, standard gluon crystal with *corrosive fusion seal*, tactical gyrojet pistol with 16 minirockets, *ring of cosmic alignment*, Purity officers' uniform including medals of honor worth 2,000 credits in rare metals, hipflask depicting alien birds worth 125 credits.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Queborrin Host Corrosa is controlled by a queborrin. When she dies, the queborrin slithers from her body as described below in **Pure Ambition, Impure Heart**.

PART 4: THE GOD-SEER'S CHILDREN



Stellar Alignment (Su) Corrosa is aligned to the cycles of solar systems. When using stellar revelations, she is always considered attuned. However, she's not always considered fully attuned, so she normally can't always use zenith powers. When you roll initiative for Corrosa, roll 1d3. Once that many rounds have elapsed, she is considered fully attuned and gains access to her zenith powers. After she uses a zenith power, it's no longer fully attuned and you roll 1d3 again to see how many rounds it will take to recharge.

HANDMAIDEN DEVIL (2)

CR 14

XP 51,200

LE Medium outsider (devil, evil, extraplanar, lawful)

Init +7; Senses darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness; Perception +25

DEFENSE

HP 250

EAC 28; KAC 30

Fort +18; Ref +16; Will +12

DR 10/good; Immune fire, poison; Resist acid 10, cold 10; SR 25

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee claw +24 (5d6+18 S)

or tentacle +27 (3d6+18 B plus grab)

Multiattack 2 claws (5d6+18 S), 2 tentacles +21 (3d6+18 B plus grab)

Offensive Abilities tentacle cage

Spell-like Abilities (CL 14th)

At will—*disguise self* (humanoid or outsider), *holographic image* (4th, DC 19), *teleport* (self plus entrapped creature plus 50 pounds)

STATISTICS

Str +5; Dex +6; Con +5; Int +4; Wis +4; Cha +4

Skills Acrobatics +25, Diplomacy +25, Bluff +25, Mysticism +20, Profession (singer) +20, Stealth +25

Languages Celestial, Common, Draconic, Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Tentacle Cage (Ex) If a handmaiden devil successfully grapples a creature of Large size or smaller, she transfers that creature into her lower body's nest of cage-like tentacles. The trapped creature can see and be seen, but the tentacles provide cover in both directions. The entrapped creature takes 3d6+18 bludgeoning damage at the beginning of its turn. If it can escape the grapple, it escapes the cage. It can also cut its way out of the cage by dealing it 60 damage. The cage has an EAC of 28 and KAC of 26. If the cage is breached in this way, it heals in one round, but the victim is able to escape.

PURITY OBERFAHN

CR 12

XP 19,200

hp 145 (see page 81)

PURITY SQUAD OBERSOLDER (4)

CR 7

XP 3,200 each

hp 105 each (see page 80)

Treasure: The defense has all the gear they are carrying, as well as trio of backpacks containing spades, flashlights, rope and smaller objects such as saws, hammers and crowbars.

PURE AMBITION, IMPURE HEART

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

The queborrin is one of many of its kind slowly infesting Purity, the creature’s own movements a subtle part of the Ultari Hegemony—the queborrin being one of the Principalities’ children. This particular creature has the latent ability to communicate with its kind over considerable distances, an ability known as hive-minded—it sees what Corrosa sees and reports back to its hive brothers and sisters far away. When the PCs finally meet her—and probably kill her—they will be seen doing it, something that marks them as special targets for future adventures.

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

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

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

QUEBORRIN

CR 5

XP 1,600

hp 65 (see page 72)

As soon as it emerges, the queborrin immediately seeks another host amongst the PCs.

S4I. THE EMPTY PLACE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A vast cathedral shape finally slithers and booms into place with a fanfare of chains, iron, and tolling steel. This domed space is overlooked by hundreds of arched recesses. The arches are filled with countless mutilated forms. Below, the cathedral’s interior is alive with chains—thousands of them, some twitch with living victims, others striking as though alive. And at their center is a mass of flesh and steel, a mockery of the female form that seems utterly at home in this cathedral. Her blood spills on the floor as two faceless creatures tear themselves from her body. For a moment amid the chains and blood, you see the opening of the golden circular portal once more.

The larger form looks down at you with a smiling human face, barely visible among the metal, and says “Come, my blessed children, you have come so far to free me. Let us embrace.”

PART 5: THE FORBIDDEN CORE

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

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

TERMAGANT GOD-SEER

CR 19

XP 204,800

LE Large outsider (evil, extraplanar, kyton, lawful)

Init +25/+5, dual initiative; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; **Perception** +37

DEFENSE

HP 415

EAC 32; **KAC** 34

Fort +20; **Ref** +20; **Will** +18

Defensive Abilities rupture; **DR** 10/good and silver; **Immune** cold, disease, pain, poison; **SR** 30

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft., fly 40 ft. (Su, perfect)

Melee claw +32 (6d12+27 S; critical bleed 3d12) or
or tentacle +32 (2d12+27 B plus grab and flux infusion)

Multiaction claw +26 (6d12+27 B; critical bleed 3d12), 3 tentacles
+26 (2d12+27 B plus grab and flux infusion)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Offensive Abilities flux infusion (DC 24), unnerving gaze (30 ft.,
DC 24)

STATISTICS

Str +8; **Dex** +5; **Con** +11; **Int** +3; **Wis** +8; **Cha** +5

Skills Acrobatics +32, Medicine +32, Mysticism +32

Languages Common, Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.

ECOLOGY

Environment any (Plane of Shadow)

Organization solitary

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Dual Initiative The termagant god-seer gets a turn both on its initiative count and on its initiative count –20.

Flux Infusion (Su) Any time a creature is grappled by the termagant god-seer, they are exposed to the termagant's poison.

Rupture (Su) When killed, the termagant god-seer explodes in a blast of its flux infusion poison. All living creatures within 15 feet must succeed at a DC 24 Fortitude saving throw or be afflicted.

Unnerving Gaze (Su) A creature that fails a Will save against a termagant's unnerving gaze becomes nauseated for 1d4 rounds as its mind attempts to comprehend the horrors it's witnessed.

FLUX INFUSION

Type poison (contact); **Save** Fortitude DC 24

Track Constitution; **Frequency** 1/round for 10 rounds

Effect If a creature dies while suffering from the poison, their body unravels in an explosion of gore and poison, exposing every living creature within 15 feet to flux infusion and leaving behind a fully grown feral kyton (page 70).

Cure 2 consecutive saves

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

PART FIVE—THE FORBIDDEN CORE

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

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

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

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

MONSTERS FROM THE ID (CR 20)

Roth is busy trying to absorb the Machine's many gifts, including the fabrication of creatures that frequent the structure. Roth has re-imagined these creatures in a form more suited to his understanding—as mechanical angels. However, as his wrath turns on the PCs the servitors become more perverted—grizzly skeletal visages replace smiles as they attack and their wings darken with rust.

This battlefield is 100 yards wide over a fall of 20 miles.

The PCs immediately sense confusion in the air—this comes from the Machine itself, which is conflicted by the arrival of legendary people that wish to fight each other. It does not side with any group, but its confusion and eagerness to spend its purpose is palpable. PCs making a DC 30 Perception or Sense Motive check realize that Roth is guiding the mechanical angels, although they may at first think they are something he summoned. However, PCs making the check quickly realize the similarity between here and events right at the start of the adventure with Ha'vzeer and her own id monsters.

The PCs can wrestle for control similarly to contest with Ha'vzeer (see page 6). As a standard action, a PC can attempt a DC 37 Mysticism check to seize control of one of the angels, taking that creature's move and standard action immediately. By spending a legendary power point, the creature can be controlled even on a failed check. After taking its actions each controlled angel is then dazed but considered an ally, including for use of its Guarding Wings, until the beginning of that PC's next turn. Once Roth is dead, the creatures revert to their natural form (four armed faceless humanoids floating in the Machine's vastness) and stop attacking the PCs.

Creatures: The final battle of this adventure takes place between Dotan Roth and a trio of creatures he has brought from the Machine.

COMMANDER DOTAN ROTH

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



COMMANDER DOTAN ROTH

CR 18

XP 204,800

Male auttaine technomancer

LE Medium humanoid (half-construct, human)

Init +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., *detect radiation*; **Perception** +31

DEFENSE **HP** 240

EAC 31; KAC 32

Fort +18; **Ref** +16; **Will** +20

Defensive Abilities legendary reconstruction

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft. (Su, good)

Melee molecular rift dagger +28 (10d4+18 S)

Ranged zenith laser pistol +28 (8d4+18 E; critical burn 4d4)

Offensive Abilities legendary casting, legendary surge (5 points, 1d6)

Technomancer Spells Known (CL 18th; melee +26, ranged +28)

6th (3/day)—*chain surge* (DC 27), *greater resistant armor*, *true seeing*

5th (6/day)—*control machines* (DC 26), *greater dispel magic*, *heat leech* (DC 26), *teleport*, *unwilling guardian* (DC 26)

4th (at will)—*corrosive haze* (DC 25), *rewire flesh* (DC 25), *wall of fire* (DC 25)

TACTICS

During Combat Roth is an incredibly powerful opponent, but he is most dangerous because he is cautious. He tries not to get caught in melee at all if he can manage, hiding behind his angels as he tosses his most powerful spells at the PCs. His care extends into his spell casting, preferring to protect himself with *greater resistant* armor, unwilling *guardian*, and *wall of fire* to more offensive options. He tries to keep an angel near him at all times to have access to guarding wings, saving a legendary power point for legendary reconstruction. Once his protecting angel has died or turned against him, he'll consider direct damage like *chain surge* and *heat leech*.

STATISTICS

Str +0; **Dex** +8; **Con** +6; **Int** +11; **Wis** +6; **Cha** +4

Skills Culture +31, Engineering +36, Mysticism +36

Feats Agile Casting

Languages Common, Draconic, Giant, Gnome, Undercommon

Other Abilities cache capacitor 3 (*detect radiation*, *darkvision*, *flight* (3rd))

Gear bespoke echelon fashion, molecular rift dagger, zenith laser pistol plus one super capacity battery, Purity medal of honor made of platinum and gold in worth 1,200 credits, Purity commander uniform, battered leather journal containing Roth's lifelong studies of the Ancients (and Asteroid 113 in particular), an Ancients' collection of curious jade and skymetal game pieces depicting the very animals the PCs have seen on the gates here worth 1,400 credits.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Legendary Surge Roth has a pool of 5 legendary power points. When he rolls a d20, he can spend a legendary power point as a reaction after the results are revealed to add 1d6 to the result of the roll. This can change the outcome of the roll.

Legendary Reconstruction (Ex) When Roth is reduced to zero hit points, he can spend a legendary power point (see *Legendary Surge*) to rebuild and rewire his body, immediately healing 120 hit points and permanently changing his creature type permanently to construct (gaining the construct immunities defensive ability). He can use this ability once per day, but the change in creature type is permanent.

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

PURITY

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

PURE KNOWLEDGE

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

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

PURE ARCANE

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

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

MECHANICAL ANGELS (3)

CR 16

XP 76,800

N Large outsider (native)

Init +7; **Senses** blindsight (legendary power) 120 ft., darkvision 60 ft.; **Perception** +23

DEFENSE

HP 300

EAC 30; **KAC** 32

Fort +18; **Ref** +18; **Will** +16

Immune critical hits, poison; **SR** 27

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., fly 40 ft. (Ex, good)

Melee wing +24 (10d6+26 S)

Ranged fiery ray +27 (7d6+16 F; critical burn 2d6)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

STATISTICS

Str +10; **Dex** +5; **Con** +7; **Int** +0; **Wis** +0; **Cha** +0

Skills Acrobatics +28

Languages Aquan, Auran, Celestial, Elali, Ignan, Infernal, Terran, Ultari; telepathy 100 ft.

Other Abilities guarding wings

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Guarding Wings (Ex) While an ally is within 10 feet of the mechanical angel, they are +2 to AC and Reflex saves as the angel deflects attacks with its wings. If that ally would suffer damage from an attack, that ally may spend a legendary power point as a reaction to redirect all that damage to the angel. Critical hits redirected that way deal full normal damage to both the target and the angel, with neither suffering from special critical effects.

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

When Roth finally dies, read the following description:

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

Then all is blank, perhaps mercifully so.

THE MACHINE

The Machine has fulfilled its purpose, forcing its information into the weak flesh of the PCs. As they awaken—perhaps several days later—the PCs become fully aware of the purpose of the thing—to spill its secret to those who may be worthy to complete the task of the Ancients.

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

- In a past so far away its years are beyond reckoning, two great Ancient species—the Patrons and the Principalities—made war on each other for eons.
- In simple terms, the Patrons were basically good, while the Principalities showed all the characteristics of evil. Even in learning this, the PCs realize that their morality is woefully simplistic but essentially right.
- Each scattered their children—species created by both to further their own ends over millennia across the universe.
- In time, however, the Patrons foresaw that the Principalities would defeat them. Their worlds were falling to the aggression of their enemies, and they themselves were fading. Yet, they also foresaw the rise of their own children, realizing that if the war were to pass only to the scions and progeny of the Ancients (on both sides of the conflict), “good” could still triumph.
- So, in an act of defiance, the Patrons lured the Principalities into one final battle, drawing them into a trap constructed as an interdimensional prison formed from the fused psyches and dreams of all that remained of their species, all in an effort to buy time for their children.
- In the wake of this intergalactic purge, the homeworlds’, colonies, and outposts of these two Ancient societies have lain dormant. But the Patrons planned their departure with precision and patience unmatched. They left behind the seeds of evolution on untold worlds beyond the borders of the remaining children and proxies of the Principalities. And in those cradles of civilization, the Patrons knew the multiverse would find its salvation. As the greatest creators and makers of their time, they essentially put the building blocks of life in place for the young species of the multiverse to have a chance to mature, find their footing among the legendary planets, and eventually rise up against the scions of the Principalities.

- It's taken millennia for this plan to come to fruition. And the children of the Patrons haven't always gotten along. Some have worked to eliminate one another or remain solely focused on conquering their individual worlds rather than working together. Others actually have managed to reach the greater stage of the multiverse but haven't yet come into direct conflict with the "evil" children and Elder species of their longtime enemies. Most have no idea what awaits them yet.
- A day of reckoning is coming, and the legends of those who'll stand at the dawn of a new era will be forged in the destiny laid down by the Patrons long, long ago. For better or worse.
- The PCs may be the weapon of deliverance.
- One final truth dawns on the PCs; that Relstanna must have known about the Machine, or suspected it, and merely sent the PCs here on a promise of escape to awaken it and learn its secrets. She has been lying.

Finally, the PCs know that the Machine—in emptying itself of its secrets it has begun its own collapse—knew the secrets herein could be allowed to be taken, and that even its components must be sacrificed to prevent enemies from taking it and somehow using it. Within 20 hours the asteroid will vaporize. It could, theoretically take the PCs with it if they've closed the gate and aren't able to use Roth's *interplanetary teleport* he brought here for safety. Particularly desperate parties will likely find some means to escape, such as a months-long trip through the void with *air bubble* or jumping into the gateway of the *darksphere*. How these play out is left to you, but obviously it's best for the adventure if the PCs do not all die here.

If the PCs are utterly stuck, they can spend their last hours exploring the collapsing interior of the Machine, likely finding a piece of ancient gateway technology to assist in their escape. Where exactly that technology takes them is up to you, as long as they're eventually able to return to the Shattered Zone or Zel-Argose.

CONCLUDING THIS ADVENTURE

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

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

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

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



BEYOND THE ADVENTURE

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

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

BESTIARY

GOLEM, STEAMWERKS (CR 14)

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

STEAMWERKS GOLEM

CR 14

XP 38,400

N Large construct (magical)

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; **Perception** +22

DEFENSE **HP** 250

EAC 28; **KAC** 30

Fort +16; **Ref** +16; **Will** +12

DR 15/adamantine; **Immunities** construct immunities, magic

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.

Melee integrated mach I swoop hammer +27 (5d10+22 B; critical knockdown)

Ranged spear strut +24 (5d10+14 P)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Offensive Abilities spear struts

STATISTICS

Str +8; **Dex** +6; **Con** —; **Int** —; **Wis** +0; **Cha** +0

Other Abilities mindless, unliving

Gear integrated mach I swoop hammer

ECOLOGY

Environment any

Organization solitary or team (3–4)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Immunity to Magic (Ex) A steamwerks golem is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against a steamwerks golem, as noted below.

Any spell that would cause electricity damage instead causes the golem to be *slow* (as the spell) for 2d4 rounds.

Any spell that would cause fire damage instead removes any *slow* effect from the golem and heals it 1 hit point for every 3 damage the spell would have done.

Entropic grasp and any effect that causes rust has its normal effect.

Spear Struts (Ex) The steamwerks golem can pull a strut from its body once a round as a swift action, dealing itself 1d4 damage that ignores DR. It can be thrown as a spear dealing the listed damage but is destroyed on impact.

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

Certain companies use steamwerks golems for harder work and create larger specimens as a result. Many specialize in work such as deep mining or dangerous security work. Tales abound of vast steamwerks golems the size of small towns that are used to coordinate various tasks into a single entity. That these creatures sometimes go berserk is a fact few like to admit.

Steamwerks golems can have alternate melee weapons integrated rather than their typical hammer, such as security golems with shock truncheons. Combat models are also sometimes seen with integrated ranged weapons, but most owners are satisfied with the golem's spear struts.



IRONROT LICHEN

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

IRONROT LICHEN

CR 7

XP 3,200

N Small plant

Init +5; **Senses** blindsense (vibration) 60 ft., low-light vision; **Perception** +14

DEFENSE

HP 105

EAC 19; KAC 21

Fort +11; **Ref** +9; **Will** +6

Immune cold, plant immunities, vacuum

OFFENSE

Speed 10 ft., climb 10 ft.

Melee tentacle +17 (1d10+9 A plus ironrot)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Offensive Abilities spore cloud (usable every 1d4 rounds)

STATISTICS

Str +2; **Dex** +5; **Con** +4; **Int** —; **Wis** +0; **Cha** +0

Skills Athletics +19

Other Abilities mindless

ECOLOGY

Environment any non-aquatic

Organization solitary, pair, or carpet (3–8)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Ironrot (Ex) The corrosive touch of ironrot lichen is devastating most technological items. When the lichen hits with a tentacle attack, the victim must attempt a DC 15 Reflex save or it corrodes an item of up to five bulk they are carrying. The corroded item drops to half hit points and immediately gains the broken condition. A broken item touched is seized by rust, being reduced to 1 hit point and rendered unusable until repaired. Being mindless, the lichen will generally go after the highest bulk item it can first.

Spore Cloud (Ex) Every 1d4 turns, ironrot lichen can expel a cloud of spores, exposing all living creatures within 10 feet to the Ironrot Plague.

IRONROT PLAGUE

Type disease (inhaled); **Save** Fortitude DC 15

Track physical; **Frequency** 1/day

Effect Whenever an infected creature fails a saving throw against the disease, a random technological item they're carrying is affected as though they failed a save against the Ironrot ability. When the infected creature reaches the dead condition, their corpse sprouts a fresh patch of ironrot lichen.

Cure 2 consecutive saves

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

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



KYTON, FERAL

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

FERAL KYTON

CR 9

XP 6,400

LE Medium outsider (evil, extraplanar, kyton, lawful)

Init +4; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +17

DEFENSE

HP 145

EAC 22; KAC 24

Fort +11; Ref +11; Will +10

DR 10/good or silver; Immunities cold, pain

OFFENSE

Speed 50 ft., climb 50 ft.

Melee bite +22 (2d10+15 B)

Offensive Abilities distended bite, swarm gaze

STATISTICS

Str +6; Dex +4; Con +2; Int +0; Wis +1; Cha +1

Skills Athletics +22, Stealth +17

Languages Common, Infernal

ECOLOGY

Environment any (Plane of Shadow)

Organization solitary or swarm (6–120)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Distended Bite (Ex) The mouth of the feral kyton contains a second spiked maw that is able to erupt from its primary mouth, extending the kyton's reach to 10 ft. during its turn.

Swarm Gaze (Su) When three or more feral kytons are within 10 feet of each other, they can each take a swift action to collectively unnerve a single target within 30 feet, causing it to be frightened for 1d3 rounds (Will DC 15 negates). If the kytons instead focus as a full action, this affects all creatures within 30 feet of any participating kyton. A target that succeeds at this Will save is immune to all feral kytons' gazes for 24 hours. Creatures without a sense of sight and other kytons are immune to this effect.

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

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

The feral kyton exists within the pack, but also hates it—it despises its need to have others of its kind nearby to use its gaze attack. It also hates those above it; fears and loathes their power and that of the mother that bred it; a figure it regards as divine yet hates and envies. The feral kyton has one big advantage, however, over its less-common kin; if it is able to rise through the festering sweating mass of its brood, it is truly a figure of power. A microscopic number of feral kytons rise to become more powerful kytons—revoltingly animalistic versions of interlocutor or sacristan.

Some ferals rise to form particular new types of kyton that can come only from feral heritage. These feral kytons have horrific powers to call and command other kytons, able to bend them to their own will or take away their will to the point of self-destruction.



OOZE, CHOKE

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

CHOKE OOZE

CR 17

XP 102,400

N Colossal ooze

Init +5; **Senses** blindsense (vibration) 120 ft., blindsight (vibration) 60 ft.; **Perception** +29

DEFENSE

HP 380

EAC 29; KAC 31

Fort +19; Ref +15; Will +15

Defensive Abilities seething skin (2d12 A); **Immunities** acid, ooze immunities

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee slam +31 (4d12+28 A plus envelop; critical corrode 2d12)

Multiattack 3 pseudopods +25 (3d12+28 A; critical corrode 2d12)

Space 30 ft.; Reach 20 ft

Offensive Abilities breath weapon (70-ft. cone, 9d12 A, DC 22, usable every 1d4 rounds), envelop (4d12+28 A, EAC 29, KAC 27, 95 HP)

STATISTICS

Str +11; Dex +5; Con +8; Int -2; Wis +0; Cha +0

Skills Athletics +34, Survival +29

Other Abilities air production

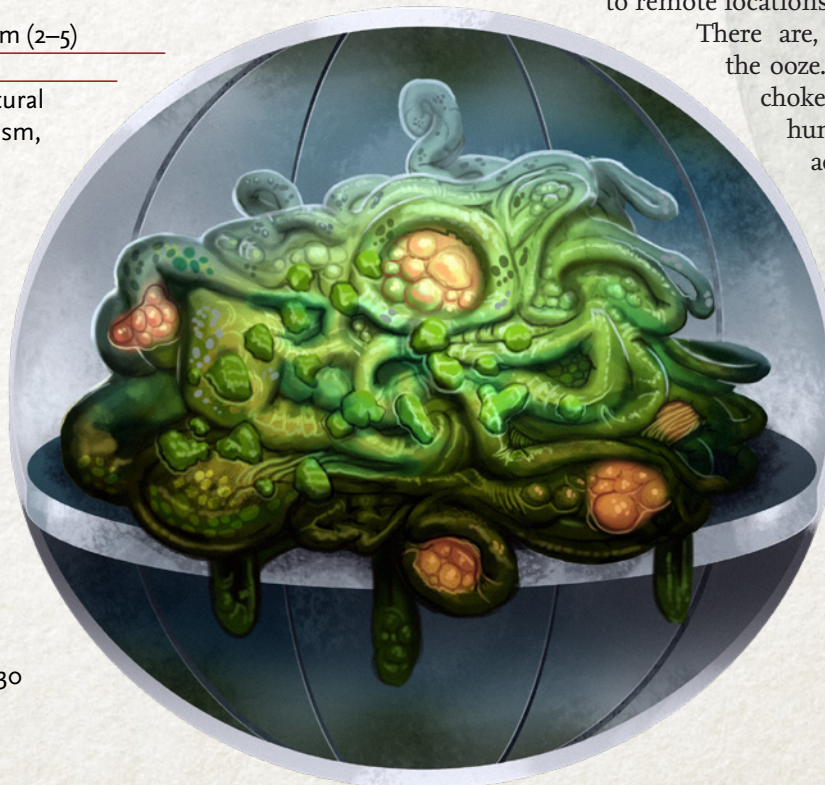
ECOLOGY

Environment any

Organization solitary or farm (2–5)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Air Production (Ex) As a natural byproduct of its metabolism, a choke ooze constantly discharges breathable air into its surroundings. This provides breathable air within 30 feet of a choke ooze even in a vacuum and diminishes the effectiveness of gases and clouds within 30 feet. Creatures within 30 feet of a choke ooze gain a +2 circumstance bonus on saving throws against gaseous effects and duration of such effects are halved within 30 feet of the ooze.



Envelop (Ex) This ability functions as swallow whole, except that the choke ooze can continue using envelop normally after a creature cuts its way out.

Seething Skin (Ex) A creature that hits the choke ooze with a non-reach melee weapon is dealt 2d12 acid damage. Any kinetic melee weapon that strikes the ooze is dealt the same amount of damage, ignoring half of its hardness.

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

It's rumored that the first true choke oozes were distilled and filleted by the aboleth, used to create vast sub-oceanic domes of air for visitors and air-breathing slaves. Another conjecture has the drow creating them through alchemy. Whatever caused their creation, there seems little doubt that choke oozes were conceived, not discovered.

Their fundamental purpose—and the reason for their being found in such vast quantities when they are met—is their ability to convert sustenance into breathable air. In general, consuming a creature produces enough breathable air to supply a similarly sized creature for a month. This boon not only causes their profligacy, but also may explain why they are so rarely encountered in the wild or randomly met. So great is this boon that the choke ooze is greatly prized, and even an immature specimen may fetch a king's ransom amongst those with a vested interest in bringing air to remote locations.

There are, of course, dangers with the ooze. The first is its hunger—a choke ooze is never sated, its hunger a constant gnawing ache that is never satisfied.

This need makes securing the ooze of the greatest importance, since they are drawn to flesh—any flesh—to consume. Unless held within an appropriately tough—usually ceramic or glass—container, they soon run rampant.

QUEBORRIN

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

QUEBORRIN

CR 5

XP 1,600

NE Tiny aberration

Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; **Perception** +11

DEFENSE

HP 65

EAC 17; **KAC** 18

Fort +4; **Ref** +4; **Will** +10

DR 5/magic; **SR** 16

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.

Melee bite +12 (1d4+3 P)

Space 2-1/2 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

Offensive Abilities infest (DC 15)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 5th)

1/day *dominate person* (DC 18), *modify memory* (DC 18)

3/day—*deep slumber* (DC 16), *suggestion* (DC 16)

STATISTICS

Str -2; **Dex** +5; **Con** +3; **Int** +2; **Wis** +2; **Cha** +2

Skills Culture +16, Mysticism +16, Stealth +16, Sense Motive +11

Languages Queborrin

Other Abilities enhance host

ECOLOGY

Environment any

Organization solitary, community (up to several hundred infested hosts), or planet (up to entire planet's population)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Enhance Host (Su) A creature infested with a queborrin gains the queborrin's spell resistance, except that it does not apply to any spells cast by the queborrin.

Infest (Ex) As a full round action when it is in the space of a larger humanoid, the queborrin can make a bite attack. If the bite deals damage, the humanoid must succeed at a DC 15 Fortitude save or become infested by the queborrin. An infesting queborrin has no special control over its host, other than that provided by its spell-like abilities and can be noticed with a thorough medical examination (including a DC 20 Medicine check). The infestation can be removed with *remove affliction* or similar magic, which kills the queborrin. Removing the creature through an hour-long surgery is possible with a successful DC 25 Medicine check, but failure kills both the queborrin and the host.

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

A queborrin resembles a revolting long green worm with distended legs, it has cluster eyes and is covered in fine hairs that, when attached to the host's spine, grow and infuse within the skeleton of the host to prevent removal. Its mouth is designed for swift burrowing and has a circular row of razor teeth. Queborrin speak their own language; a revolting series of screeches and high-pitched whistles that can be pitched so high that they pass the hearing of most humanoids. In this way, queborrin are able to communicate with each other even in the most dangerous of circumstances and do so secretly.

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

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

ECOLOGY

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

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



HABITAT AND SOCIETY

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

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

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

HIVE-MINDED

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

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

METAL-CLAD

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

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

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

VOID GRIM

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

VOID GRIM

CR 6

XP 2,400

LN Large monstrous humanoid

Init +0; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +18

DEFENSE

HP 110

EAC 18; KAC 20

Fort +8; Ref +10; Will +7

Defensive Abilities rock catching; Immunities cold, radiation;

Resistances fire 10

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft. (clumsy)

Melee heavy pick +17 (1d8+11 P) or slam +17 (1d4+11 B)

Multiattack heavy pick +11 (1d8+11 P) and 2 slams +11 (1d4+11 B)

Ranged rock +13 (2d6+6 B)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Offensive Abilities irradiate, rock throwing (120 ft.)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th; melee +17)

1/day—creation, entropic grasp (DC 15), resilient sphere (DC 16)

3/day—force blast (DC 14)

STATISTICS

Str +5; Dex +0; Con +3; Int +0; Wis +2; Cha -1

Skills Intimidate +13, Profession (miner) +13, Stealth +13, Survival +13

Languages Common

SQ glide, no breath

ECOLOGY

Environment any land

Organization solitary, pair, enclave (3–12), colony (13–20 plus 1 soldier and 1 technomancer)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Glide (Ex) In airless environments, a void grim can fly without difficulty. However, in areas with atmosphere, a void grim automatically fails Acrobatics checks made to hover and must descend at least 10 feet each round. If a void grim flies at faster than half speed, it must succeed at a DC 15 Reflex save or tear its wing membrane, causing it to fall. A torn wing membrane heals naturally in 2d4 days, or it can be repaired immediately with *regenerate*.

Irradiate (Ex) Every 1d4 rounds, a void grim can release a burst of cosmic radiation it has stored in its body. All creatures within 5 feet of the void grim when it uses this ability are exposed to a medium level of radiation, and all creatures between 5 and 20 feet away from the void grim are exposed to a low level of radiation.

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

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

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



ALIEN TREASURES

DARKSPHERE (HYBRID ARTIFACT)

PRICE PRICELESS LEVEL 20 BULK 1

A darksphere is a small spherical object about the size of a human fist, covered in ancient symbols representing peculiar animals. The sphere is equal parts weapon and construction tool, projecting a destructive gateway lasting 6 rounds before collapsing under its own power, after which the darksphere must recharge for 24 hours.

The gateway requires a standard action to begin, manifesting within 40 feet of the *darksphere*, and the gateway can be moved up to 10 feet with another standard action. Either use of the *darksphere* requires a successful DC 30 Mysticism or Physical Science check. On a failed roll to move the gateway, it instead moves 10 feet towards the bearer of the *darksphere*.

Any non-artifact object is destroyed by contact with the gateway, a 2-foot-wide gouge being taken out as the projection passes through. Creatures may attempt a DC 30 Reflex save when the gateway enters their space to avoid it, but any creature touched must spend a legendary power point or be instantly consumed. If a creature spends a legendary power point this way, the projection is disrupted and its duration immediately ends.

The other end of the gateway is unknown, but characters passing through the gateway can be assumed stranded or dead. A careful reading of the *Opus Aeterna* (with a DC 30 Society check) suggests that material passing through the gateway is somehow recycled at the far end.

DESTRUCTION

The *darksphere* can be destroyed with if the correct alignment of symbols, described in the *Opus Aeterna*, is dialled into the *darksphere* and it is thrown into its own gateway.



FIST CANNON (SMALL ARM)

A fist cannon is a small iron sphere sized to be gripped by a humanoid hand. It consists of four short, ugly barrels and is easily concealed; granting a +4 circumstance bonus on Sleight of Hand checks to conceal it. A fist cannon uses standard small arm bullets but has a reputation for being wildly inaccurate when used above short range; range penalties are doubled to -4 for each range increment after the first.

Weapon	Level	Price	Damage	Range	Critical	Capacity	Usage	Bulk	Special
Fist cannon, scrap	1	110	1d4 P	20 ft.	—	4 bullets	1	L	See below
Fist cannon, gang	7	6,200	2d6 P	30 ft.	—	4 bullets	2	L	See below
Fist cannon, professional	14	63,000	4d8 E	30 ft.	—	4 bullets	4	L	See below
<i>Storm of chains</i>	15	140,000	5d6 S & So	—	Wound	—	—	3	Reach, see below

STORM OF CHAINS (TWO-HANDED ADVANCED MELEE)

A *storm of chains* is a spiked chain favored by many elite kyton warlords. The links are carved with thousands of cruel many-barbed hooks resembling tiny mouths. When wielded, these mouths make an unsettling crying noise, like a vast hungry alien horde, granting the wielder a +4 bonus on Intimidate checks against any creature that can hear this grisly moaning.

STEAM RICKSHAWS, CLOCKWORK SEDANS, SKIFFS AND VOID GONDOLAS

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

Many of the asteroids in the Zone have gravity, pretty close to that of the PC's own home world, and this caused a problem initially. Expensive rockets made exploration—even across the countless close neighbors here—rare.

Luckily, one of the ores found in the Zone—kallenite—has a peculiar buoyancy that greatly helps to escape gravity and yet retain it within. That kallenite must be mined in liquid form and this, combined with its nasty habit of being evaporating and suffocate its miners, simply makes it more expensive. The metal is much in demand in the vicinity, and it is impossible to mine the ore fast enough to meet demand—much like most things in the Zone.

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

Skiffs are generally circular, with passengers finding a seat where one can amongst supplies—some of the posher ones have belts at their edges to be worn for safety. Outwardly, both skiffs and void gondolas (q.v.) are spherical and ringed with iron buffers allegedly able to crumple and

absorb impacts. Such claims are ridiculous but provide psychological help to those terrified of flying this way.

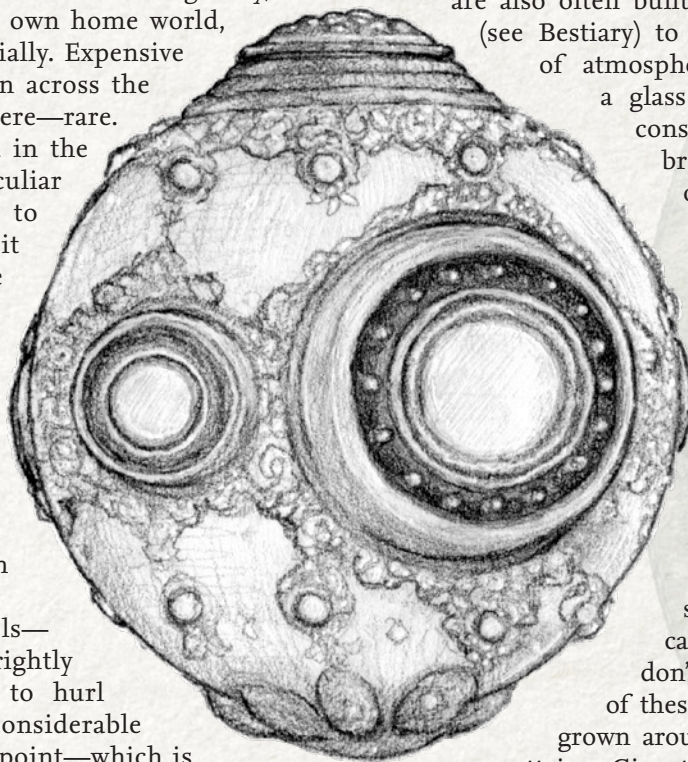
Kallenite inherently holds and absorbs gravity, often retaining it for several days. This beneficial side-effect has enabled vessels to withstand exterior impacts and breaches whilst in the void of space and retain a superficial envelope of air—the air within the vehicle kept in place by its own inherent gravity.

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

are also often built around a small choke ooze (see Bestiary) to provide a renewable source of atmosphere—these are fed through a glass tube. The air within such constructions can even survive a breach, where doors and breaks open onto space a bubble of air about 30ft. wide remains whilst ever the choke ooze remains alive.

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

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



GAZETTEER

BEACON—ANGEL OF TOIL—AND THE SHATTERED SONE

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

BEACON

LN Clockwork Metropolis

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

Government Overlord

Qualities Polluted, Notorious

Maximum Item Level 16th

Beacon is the largest asteroid in the system of the Shattered Zone and its de-facto capitol. Like many asteroids in the Zone, it has a breathable atmosphere (albeit a feeble and asthmatic one). It is also one city—every inch of its surface is industrialized or urbanized and swallowed beneath construction. This construction is robust but practical, giving the city the feel of one vast factory. Between the working parts are slums; the clockwork shantytowns of workers come to Beacon to make fortunes.

Beacon is the main focal point of the adventure Confederates of the Shattered Zone, although some information is also given for other locations in the Zone, to enable you to include them in this adventure if you wish, or use them as a base for future adventures or adventure paths.

DANCE OF THE CHAINED

One of the most notable of all features that assault the senses of visitors to the Zone are the chains that grip across vast empty space between the asteroids here. Many—but not by any means all—of the Zone's asteroids are kept in position by vast chains that tear above the sky of Beacon and other asteroids that make up the region. This vast project—begun almost two-hundred years ago—was done at the behest of elders within the Zone who foresaw the potential for a terrible calamity: so close are many of the asteroids within the Zone that should one asteroid stray from its path that the entire Zone may become like a vast bag of marbles, scattering one against the other.

The colossal work of tethering is still far from complete, but the tensions created across the vastness is a reassuringly visual confirmation that all is well. There are doubters—anarchists many would say—who have pointed out that the tethering may actually results in a worse catastrophe than the mere collision of two spheres. Such cynics are now seldom seen or heard from, thanks to the vigilance of Purity.

BEACON AND THE SHATTERED ZONE

Use Diplomacy or Society checks to gather information, higher checks reveal the information for lesser results.

DC 10—The Zone is mainly populated by auttaine—half humanoid constructs—who mine the almost 10,000 asteroids that make up the Zone. This is dirty work, and the Zone is given over entirely to industry.

DC 15—A group called Purity—who believe auttaine are the pure race of the universe—rule the Zone, with a festering group of companies below vying for power. Purity has brought order to the failing Confederacy made up of disparate mining companies, clubs, and cabals who at one time threatened to bring civil war to the Zone. Purity's iron fist stopped that. Purity's most popular project is seen everywhere—the vast iron spheres hanging over the city which contain the Angels—actually vast, pale oozes that are able to use their considerable appetites for flesh to create breathable air. There are said to be scarcely enough pigs to keep them fed—some say alternative feed has been found to placate them.

DC 20—The ruler of Purity—the terrible and revered Her Enlightenment, the Steel Queen of the True Path, the Kronen Abaff Harr; known more commonly as The Kronen—represents all that is respected by the Purity. Her face leers from every wall, and her slogans are chanted out by curiously fleshy constructs known as the Visionaries that lurk at street corners. The Kronen engenders almost divine following by the auttaine—particularly the young.

DC 25—Although as orderly as they advertise, Purity is diseased by power, and partially owes its rise over the past few decades to its diabolists, who use devils to punish and terrify the populace—although such devils are of course never allowed to be publically associated with Purity. The upper echelons of Purity are known for monstrous excesses; they like their air purer, for example, and regard atmosphere created from Angels fed on auttaine flesh to be the finest.

THE SHATTERED ZONE [AREA MAP]

● Asteroid 113

Choke
Pestilence

Salvation
Sin

Beacon

The Mechanism

Hope

Harns Arch

The Descent

— Void Gondola
1 Hex = 1000 Miles

PURITY

Over the past few decades, a powerful political faction has united the various divisions of the Shattered Zone into a confederacy—Purity; so named because of its members' conviction that auttaine are the purest race and will eventually unite the cosmos under their rule. Purity's ideals appeal to many locals; they have brought order, unity, and status to auttaine within the Zone. Although even some auttaine consider the faction's methods to be harsh, few are brave enough to speak against them, let alone take up arms.

In truth, Purity represents a monstrous oppressor, punishing an increasingly wide group of its own citizens as abnormal. Under the flag of Purity, tens of thousands have been sent to correctional facilities across the Zone. The leader; **Abaff Harr** (LE auttaine technomancer)—the so called Steel Queen, more commonly called the Kronen—is aggressively idolized by the indoctrinated youth of the Zone, her words seen as almost divine, her vision for order and supremacy of the auttaine unquestioned. The youth genuinely love her; the older generation less so, but they tend to keep quiet and get on with their lives, preferring to forget rumors or put them down to foreign spies. Harr's followers dominate every street, flags are waved proudly, and the so-called Visionaries (see sidebar) shout out the words of the Steel Queen throughout the day.

Foreigners are viewed with broad smiles masking secret fears and loathing.

Purity has also attracted a type of alien parasite that thrives on talk of purity and race-supremacy. The queborrin, have occupied several higher ranking Purity officer's bodies, and are always looking for more to infest.

PURITY AND DIABOLISM

"Power is everything, and everything is power." The words of the great Purity philosopher Straum K'all are learned by every child who passes through the Factory of Allegiance—Purity's greatest school. The true meaning of these words is hidden, however; Purity sees everything as a resource, even devils. Purity does more than dabble in diabolism—many of its founder members rose to power because of it; forcing the miners to do their bidding by nighttime visits by summoned devils.

This hunger to harness devils was perfected by subsequent generations of auttaine to become an art-form, and now many of the upper echelons of Purity have their own devil guardians, spies, and cohorts—in fact, they are essential for survival. Diabolists thrive in upper Purity society and the use of devils is an accepted part of life amongst those in power.

THE VISIONARIES

One of the most revolting but effective communication devices of Purity, the Visionaries began as steel and flesh constructs that heaved out party slogans day and night. However, science has improved them, and now to show how cured they are, former political anarchists have *donated* their mouths, lungs, vocal pipe, larynx, esophagus and other organs to the cause. These are specially treated and now hang high above many street corners—all the street corners in a place like Beacon. The voices call out, day and night (although mercifully quieting during the smaller hours), quoting the party lines: "Purity of Thought, Purity of Purpose, Purity of Race", "Watch out—there's a foreign spy about!", and the more common "Our Children are Our Destiny!" The visionaries do not see or react, they simply repeat, and the true manner of their creation would probably revolt even the hardest of Purity members.

Harming or hindering Visionaries is seen as a terrible act—a treasonous one in fact—and is swiftly reported to a local patrol, who are sure to follow up the vile act of political vandalism. Such vandals are treated very, very harshly and are usually found hanging from their own street corner soon echoing the words of Abaff Harr.

These patrols walk the streets day and night, and have carte-blanche to ensure the Kronen's orders are followed and obeyed. Disobedience is anarchy, and anarchy is death to all! They are made up of 6 obersolders and a steamwerks golem, led by an Oberfahn.

PURITY STANDARD PATROL (CR 16)

PURITY SQUAD OBERSOLDER (6)

CR 7

XP 3,200 each

Auttaine soldier

LN Medium humanoid (half-construct, human)

Init +5; Perception +14

DEFENSE

HP 105 EACH

EAC 19; KAC 21

Fort +11; Ref +9; Will +6

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.

Melee LFD pulse gauntlet +14 (2d6+11 B & So)

Ranged red star plasma cannon +17 (2d10+7 E & F; critical burn 1d8, explode 5ft., unwieldy)

or cryo grenades +17 (1d8 C, staggered, explode 10 ft., DC 15)

TACTICS

During Combat Obersolders are trained to attack with ranged weapons first, then close in as a team, surrounding and flanking their enemies.

Morale Obersolders know that they are being watched and judged, only retreating if they are the last standing, but will also break ranks and flee if half their number begins acting erratically.

STATISTICS

Str +4; **Dex** +5; **Con** +2; **Int** +0; **Wis** +0; **Cha** +0

Skills Athletics +14, Intimidate +19, Medicine +14

Languages Common

Combat Gear 2 cryo grenades I; **Other Gear** commander ceremonial plate, LFD pulse gauntlet and two batteries, red star plasma cannon with high capacity battery

PURITY PATROL OBERFAHN

CR 12

XP 19,200

Auttaine envoy

LE Medium humanoid (half-construct, human)

Init +5; **Perception** +22

DEFENSE

HP 185

EAC 26; **KAC** 27

Fort +13; **Ref** +13; **Will** +15

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.

Melee ultrathin dueling sword +21 (3d6+16 S)

Ranged elite semi-auto pistol +23 (2d6+12 P)

Offensive Abilities envoy improvisations (get 'em, hurry, improved get 'em, improved hurry)

TACTICS

During Combat Oberfahn prefer to direct from the rear, using ranged attacks and envoy improvisations.

Morale Oberfahn are fanatical, only fleeing if they are the last standing.

STATISTICS

Str +4; **Dex** +5; **Con** +2; **Int** +2; **Wis** +0; **Cha** +8

Skills Athletics +22, Diplomacy +22, Intimidate +27, Medicine +22, Sense Motive +27

Languages Common

Combat Gear 2 *serums of healing mk 2*; **Other Gear** platinum corporate travel suit, elite semi-auto pistol with 36 rounds, ultrathin dueling sword

GOLEM, STEAMWERKS

CR 14

XP 38,400

hp 250 (pg. xx)

THE CONFEDERACY MEMBERS

Below Purity, twenty-seven separate companies, concerns, and factions make up the confederacy, each representing some historic group. In some cases these groups have been formed through alliance, fear, and greed. Others have arisen from single members. For example, the necromantic affairs

of Ashko industries ruled (allegedly) from its creation by the same master, **Korlas Ashko** (NE mystic). Some say Ashko has become a form of hybrid undead, more machine than corpse.

Regardless of these disparate groups and their various political make ups, two things are certain—firstly things are more profitable since Purity took over—slave workers (almost all of whom are incarcerated because they disagreed with Purity in some way) are in abundance, and free labor is something everyone who runs a company on Beacon wants. And secondly, power fluctuates—it's always someone's day. Presently the top of the crop are the Shattered Zone Mining Company, Corrosive Ventures, and the Contraptors. Next week it will be someone else.

The Confederacy changes like the wind, with its twenty-seven parts vying for power. Newcomers are not tolerated. Behind this loose confederation, true power comes through careful business backed by shrewd power-plays.

POWERFUL FRIENDS, DANGEROUS ENEMIES

At any given time, the PCs may wish to make enquiries about the ruling groups of Beacon—particularly when they learn about the complexities of their journeys locating the dead gates. Use the following table as a guide to the simplest of information, give more, if you wish.

DC 10— Beacon is run by Purity—a political iron fist that rose some time ago and now binds the confederacy together with wire. Some 27 groups make up the confederacy—mostly companies, with a few religious groups thrown into the mix.

DC 20—The most powerful of these groups is probably the Shattered Zone Mining Company, run by the present Mayor of Beacon K'illiv Gryne, an auttaine woman known for her fiery temper and her past as a spy.

DC 30—Just below this company fester two other powerful groups: their bitter rivals the Contraptors, run by the corpulent Lazlo K'tivv, and finally the least of the trio, Corrosive Ventures, run by the charmless T'ain Zick. Both these auttaine have reputations for being emotionless in business. These companies control the vast network of transport links between asteroids, as well as carving up the majority of the mines and resources on them. Only a few of the outer asteroids—and those used for obscure military purposes—are not linked by transport or have links obsessively controlled by Purity.

THE ANGELS—LUNGS OF BEACON

Many of the asteroids in the Zone have retained a thin atmosphere from the days when the whole place was one massive planet, but many didn't. This is bad for business. One of the first and largest improvements introduced by Purity was the proliferation of angels. Angels (named after the celestials but having no relation)—held within huge iron spheres for the reasons detailed below—are Gargantuan or larger oozes that have a peculiar ability to produce breathable air as a by-product of their biology. Unfortunately, to produce air these more-accurately-named choke oozes need to eat, and they eat flesh. The official story is that pigs are used—there are a lot of pigs in the Zone, something visitors comment on since auttaine don't eat unless they feel like it. The true story is a little darker—Purity leaders believe that angels produce different qualities within their air, and some say that air made by angels fed on sentient humanoid flesh tastes cleaner.

Unfortunately, these angels are ravenous, and if they get out their great size and hunger causes carnage, so they are almost always encountered in the vast metal spheres that dominate the skylines of places such as Beacon. If they aren't fed enough, however, they have been known to break out and consume whole districts—their power and appetites are legendary, used as cautionary tales told by auttaine to their offspring.

PLAGUE MASKS—A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

Visitors to the Zone are often initially alarmed to find locals wearing what appear to be plague masks—vast elongated things that make their wearers resemble demented birds. These masks are used by locals to filter out corrosive air in the Zone, and are often instilled with a refillable scent gland that masks the industrial stench of the Zone.

Auttaine who do not wear these masks run the risk of picking up a latent rusting acid, which lurks unseen in the air. Once struck, this acid (known as rustplague to the local auttaine) begins an irreversible and dreadful corrosion which slowly ossifies and dissolves its host. Visitors notice the bleach and iron tang in the air but, unless they have construct components, are unaffected. The corrosion is clearly visible in constructs seen across the city—particularly the clockwork and steamwerks golems that are commonly seen in the belt and used for labor and security.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

The vast asteroid city has countless streets, interesting locales, and dubious dens. To visit them in any kind of detail would require a work at least the same size as this whole publication. Four districts are very briefly detailed below.

The Clockwork: A single vast slum that touches the intricate parts of the city, the Clockwork is so named because many of its locals envy those simple mechanical devices. Although

disordered, the iron grip of Purity and the innate order of the auttaine make the slum a remarkable place, with its own laws, elite, and etiquettes. There are parts of the Clockwork so breath-taking that they put the greatest architecture of other planets to shame. It's so called Cabinets—incredibly complex interlocking shanty buildings—make the greatest use of the least space and have been likened to the most complex maze ever devised. Visitors have literally been lost for weeks within them—if they ever escape at all.

Gaslampers District: This district—named because of its lit streets—is the ironically dark soul of Beacon. It's here that the gates linking Beacon to the outside worlds arrive, and where the most void gondolas are linked to. The district has tastes that cater to visitors as well as auttaine, and a thriving number of gambling dens, places to stay, and indulgences thrive here, tolerated by Purity.

The Great Cog: One vast part of the city is in perpetual motion—its various parts constantly moving one side against another. This structure enables industry to work more effectively over a given period of days, distributing components more effectively by bringing the places of manufacture to their suppliers.

The Mechanism: The Mechanism is where visitors (known variously as Outsiders or, even less kindly, Underpeople) come to find normality. Constructed within an old factory, the Mechanism is all things rolled into one for a visitor—hotel, bar, store, hospital, brothel. The owner of the Mechanism, the frightfully rusted **Mother Kog** (N female auttaine envoy) is one of the most unpleasant looking creatures in the Zone; her entire body is slowly dissolving as a result of a terrible case of rustplague, and now she resembles something hollower than living. Staff move about the Mechanism using a series of complex clockwork creatures that resemble twisted things from demented merry-go-rounds. The Mechanism is massive, and it's possible to wander about it for a few days without seeing the same place twice. The central core of the building, known fondly as the Startsette (an old auttaine word for hearth), is an enormous metal skeleton holding a gigantic clock in the central area; itself almost one-hundred feet square.

The Mechanism is theoretically where everything on Beacon can be purchased, although prices can run high. One wing of the building is given over to traders, and an impromptu market regularly occurs there, with scavengers bringing in what they have found on asteroids.

The Works: Some say Beacon is hollow, and that this brittle heart hides the true power of Purity—a vast and complex machine that truly rules the surface. That the machine is part devil and part auttaine is just a wild rumor, of course.

THE SHATTERED ZONE

Scattered over an area of approximately 12 million cubic miles, the Shattered Zone is comprised of 9,871 asteroids that are the scattered remains of a former planet. Most—if not all—of these asteroids are inhabited in some way by something, and many have breathable atmospheres; many which do not are presently being considered for installation of choke oozes by Purity. Some of the asteroids are already overrun by these creatures, and a few have been abandoned because of this.

Each is unique in some way, and almost all bear some form of life—even if that is just a few lonely miners in some hurricane-scoured tin town. A very brief description of a few of the more interesting places is given below.

ASTEROID 113—OBLIVION

Also known as Oblivion, Asteroid 113 has a dubious reputation as a treasure trove of Ancient artifacts, as well as a brooding mass of terror. Miners venture there occasionally—the lure of a quick fortune proves too much for some—but few ever return. Those who do tell of iron and stone spires, and a dreadful dark presence—something dwells below the surface, something terrible and unseen.

THE DESCENT

Hanging at the very base of the Zone, on the longest void gondola journey—almost three days—the Descent is a kind of hell. Here hangs a foul asteroid groaning with coal; its veins run rich with black gold, and its core is honeycombed by mining shafts. The Descent is the dirtiest, deepest and richest asteroid, and the jewel in the crown of the Shattered Zone Mining Company. Although terrified naked flames and obsessive about profits, the company has few other rules—corrupt foremen and mine managers revel in the profits and still have ample funds to send to the company and their Purity masters.

With so many miners in one place, the Descent lives up to its nickname in other ways. What vices the auttaine have are all fatuously displayed here, from the body shops that bend and modify the auttaine, through to darker places where the law of the surface unravels in excess.

HAR'NS' ARCH

A vast hollow asteroid in the shape of an arch, Har'ns Arch is an object lesson in greed. The asteroid was so deeply mined, so much exploited that eventually parts of the place literally fell in on themselves, killing thousands.

THE GREAT MECHANISM

“Auttaine ingenuity knows no boundaries,” said the Kronen when this project was completed less than 12 years ago. A lashed mass of 27 asteroids brought together as one titanic mine and ore refinery, the Mechanism was quite literally made on the sacrifice of auttaine. Many auttaine are embedded into its structure to act as living components of the Great Mechanism, keeping its 27 component parts in a fixed station to one another. Great steam trains and huge void gondolas journey between these parts, and it is said that the Mechanism is rivalling Beacon as the center of population in the Zone. Soon—they say—it may become its shining capitol, something the Beaconers—as they like to be known—prefer to not think about.

AUTTAINÉ PHYSICAL AUGMENTATIONS

In the years leading up to the death of the auttaine's desert planet, members of that race devised hundreds of different kinds of body modifications and prosthetics to protect themselves from the magical storms ravaging their home world. Even though the auttaine home planet is long gone and the storms' magic has permeated auttaine parents such that they pass on their clockwork augmentations to their kin, the craft of physical augmentations is still a time-honored tradition among the auttaine people.

Though most auttaine are miners first and foremost and have all but forgotten the origins of their "gears," a number of auttaine artisans and smiths still practice the old ways of their home world, manufacturing prosthetics and body augmentations not limited solely to their species. Interstellar adventurers of all stripes turn to the auttaine when they find themselves in need of a prosthetic limb (a frightfully common need among the perils of space) or special physical augmentations to aid their galactic quests. Money is not the most difficult part of acquiring coveted auttaine body modifications—indeed, finding the means to travel to the Shattered Zone and locate a willing artisan is the biggest hangup for most interested buyers.

Physical augmentations created by auttaine for trade differ greatly from the gears that make up their own bodies. For one, these handcrafted prostheses are designed to be worn by any race with the proper limb to replace, not only auttaine. Secondly, the auttaine society's Geargiver does not preside over the creation or distribution of these goods—instead, small guilds within major auttaine cities determine the market and establish standards for crafting. Finally, while an auttaine's gears are fully integrated into her body and are treated as a part of her Build Points racial trait, auttaine-crafted physical augmentations are, unless otherwise stated, mundane or magical items that must be equipped like standard equipment and thus occupy an item slot on the body.

Physical augmentations created by auttaine for purchase by outsiders come in two varieties—prostheses and body modifications. These physical augmentations may be mechanical or magical in nature, though prostheses are for the most part mechanical (i.e., mundane) and body modifications are much more likely to be magical. Each of these physical augmentation types is covered in more detail on the following pages.

PROSTHESES

Prostheses are designed to replace a specific limb or body part, which must be removed from the host body before the prosthesis is installed. Unless otherwise specified, prostheses have the following rules associated with them.

A prosthesis cannot be "overlaid" on top of an existing body part—it must replace the body part in question, which entails all the penalties associated with losing the functionality of

MISSING BODY PART PENALTIES

These rules for missing body parts expand those found under the wounding weapons table in the *Starfinder Core Rulebook*. GMs interested in using the rules for auttaine physical augmentations in this section can use the following table as an expansion of the effects from the wounding weapons table.

The GM may rule on a case-by-case basis whether actions not listed here are or are not affected by the penalty associated with a missing body part. The GM may also rule that certain actions are simply impossible for a character with a missing body part without an appropriate prosthetic replacement (such as a character with a missing eye trying to wink to his ally).

MISSING BODY PART	ASSOCIATED PENALTY
Finger	-1 penalty on attack rolls with a weapon held in that hand
Hand	Cannot hold or wield items in that hand
Arm	Cannot hold or wield items in that hand
Foot	-5-foot land speed
Leg	-10-foot land speed
Eye	-2 on Perception checks
Ear	-1 on Perception checks
Tongue/teeth	10% chance of failure while casting spells with verbal components

prosthesis description, a prosthesis does not resolve or negate the penalties associated with loss of body part.

Prostheses that modify unarmed attacks can have weapon fusions and fusion seals applied to them as though they were weapons. These fusions apply to the user's unarmed strikes utilizing that prosthesis.

EQUIPPING AND REMOVING PROSTHESES

The owner of a prosthesis may equip a prosthesis in place of an appropriate missing body part; prostheses cannot be equipped in place of different limbs or missing body parts (for example, a prosthetic leg cannot be equipped at the shoulder to replace a missing arm). Unlike true augmentations, equipping or removing a prosthesis is a full-round action.

APPENDIX: AUGMENTATIONS

Other creatures can generally not attack or remove prosthesis unless their ability would normally allow them to affect that part of the body. Prostheses that are being used as weapons can be sundered or disarmed as normal.

SIMPLE PROSTHESES

The following prostheses may be created by a humanoid of any race using the standard rules for crafting and are found even on the most backwater of worlds.

BLADE LEG

REPLACES LEG

Price 30 **Level** 1

This metal leg prosthesis features a sharp, curving blade where your shin and calf would be, allowing you to make slashing attacks with your leg as unarmed attacks. These attacks deal 1d3 lethal slashing damage. The blade leg also reduces your land speed penalty from missing legs by 5 feet.

GAUNTLET HAND

REPLACES HAND

Price 10 **Level** 1

This prosthetic hand is shaped like a gauntlet, and the fingers and palm of the gauntlet can be adjusted to hold a weapon or make a fist. Drawing a weapon with that hand requires a standard action instead of a move action, but you wield weapons with it. A battleglove (or similar weapon) can be integrated with the gauntlet hand by adding 10% of the battleglove's base cost.

HOOK HAND

REPLACES HAND

Price 5 **Level** 1

This prosthesis replaces a missing hand with a wide metal hook. A hook hand generally does not interfere with routine activities, but you cannot use this hand to hold a weapon. However, the hook hand itself can be used to make unarmed attacks dealing 1d3 lethal slashing damage.

GLASS EYE

REPLACES EYE

Price 10 **Level** 1

This ceramic orb fits under the eyelid of a missing eye, and can be painted to match a variety of eye colors or even decorated for special occasions.

PEG LEG

REPLACES LEG

Price 10 **Level** 1

Made of a simple wooden dowel that fits snugly over the knee of a leg amputee, the peg leg is a staple among pirates at sea as well as in space. The peg leg your land speed penalty from missing legs by 5 feet.

STEEL FINGER

REPLACES FINGER

Price 5 **Level** 1

These hollow finger prostheses are made of light and delicate metal. Price listed is per steel finger.

WAX EAR

REPLACES EAR

Price 5 **Level** 1

This simple prosthetic ear is molded from wax. It reduces the penalty to hearing due to a missing ear by 1.

MAGIC PROSTHESES

These prostheses are enchanted, replacing the missing body part and negating any penalty. Like other worn magical items, a character can only actively benefit from a total of two such items.

HAND OF HAYMOT

REPLACES HAND

Price 179,000 **Level** 15

This mechanical prosthetic hand is made of finely crafted steel and hardened brass, and complex machinery connects the digits, palm, and wrist. Once per day, the wearer may activate the *hand of Haymot* to transform the prosthesis into parallax laser pistol (having internal power for 80 charges per day), a zero edge dagger, or its normal form as a swift action. Any weapon held in this hand, including any it transforms into, gains the *axiomatic* fusion.

HONING EAR

REPLACES EAR

Price 1,400 **Level** 3

A *honing ear* is an enchanted prosthetic ear that gives its wearer supernatural control over their hearing distance and ability to tune out distracting sounds. At will as a swift action, the wearer can tune out distracting sounds—such as a bustling marketplace or nearby roaring waterfall—and train her ear to single out other sounds—such as an ally whispering to her or a conversation across the river. This action gives the wearer a +5 insight bonus on Perception checks to hear sounds she is trying to amplify and prevents her from hearing sounds related to the source she has deemed distracting. For example, using the *honing ear*, she may be able to hear the conversation across the river by tuning out the sounds of the water, but she would then also not be able to hear a log hurdling downriver toward her. This effect persists until the wearer ends it as a free action.

INSTRUMENTAL LIMB

REPLACES ARM OR LEG

Price 3,400 **Level** 5

An *instrumental limb* is a magical arm or leg prosthesis (chosen at the time of creation) that grants a +2 competence bonus on Profession (musician) checks and may be played as a string instrument for the purpose of those Profession checks. A compartment built into the limb allows the wearer to store a bow to play with the instrument.

Three times per day, the wearer can slide a bow along the highest end of the *instrumental limb* to create a consistent note that allows any allies within 60 feet to enter a state of deep concentration. As long as the wearer holds the note (a standard action each round), his allies gain a +2 morale bonus on skill checks. If an ally attacks or takes damage during this time, the

effect ends for that ally; once the effect is broken for an ally, she cannot reenter the state of deep concentration until the next time the *instrumental limb's* wearer activates this ability.

LUCKY EYE

REPLACES EYE

Price 15,000 **Level** 9

This magical prosthetic glass eye is painted to look like a simple clock face rather than an iris. Once per day, the wearer can wink as a swift action to activate the *lucky eye*, causing the hand on the clock's face to spin and point toward a random number (roll 1d12 to determine the number). The wearer gains a +5 morale bonus on a specific action on his next turn, as determined by the randomly rolled number. The wearer forfeits the morale bonus if he does not take the specified action during his next turn.

- 1-3 Skill check
- 4-6 Saving throw
- 7-9 Damage roll
- 10-12 Attack roll

AUTTAINE BODY MODIFICATIONS

In addition to the normal modifications found in the *Starfinder Core Rulebook*, auttains have invented a wide variety of technological and hybrid augmentations. For rules purposes, both categories count as cybernetics.

These body modifications can typically only be purchased from or crafted by auttaine, although the GM can of course make exceptions for characters that have received special training.

MUNDANE BODY MODIFICATIONS

The following mundane body modifications can be purchased for installation from skilled auttaine body grafters.

IRON KNUCKLES

SYSTEM HAND

Price 200 **Level** 1

These fine metal plates are inserted beneath the user's hand's skin and wrap around the knuckles and finger bones. This modification removes the archaic and nonlethal traits from your unarmed attacks when you choose to use the iron knuckles. Weapon fusions and fusion seals can be applied to the iron knuckles as though it were a weapon.

MAGNETIC FINGERS

SYSTEM HAND

Price 500 **Level** 2

Small magnets installed in the tips of your fingers grant you a +2 circumstance bonus on Sleight of Hand checks with metallic objects, and you gain a +2 circumstance bonus to your KAC against disarm attempts while wielding a metal weapon. However, you take a -1 penalty on attack rolls with ranged weapons that have metal components (including all weapons that fire bullets).

NICTITATING MEMBRANESYSTEM EYES

Price 1,000 **Level** 3

This translucent "third eyelid" protects and moistens your eyes while allowing you to maintain vision. With this body modification, you gain a +4 circumstance bonus on Fortitude saving throws against non-magical items, attacks, and effects that would blind you or impair your vision, and your range of vision is unhindered by murky water. This modification does not protect you against spells and magical effects that affect your vision.



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RUBBER JOINTS

SYSTEM LEGS

Price 300 **Level** 2

This modification encases the joints in your knees and ankles with a synthetic rubber that reduces the impact of falls and tumbles. You may ignore up to 3 points of damage any time you take falling damage (reducing the damage taken to a minimum of 0 points of damage).

STEEL DENTURES

SYSTEM TEETH

Price 500 **Level** 2

This modification replaces the user's teeth with an artificial set that spans both the upper and lower jaw. The user's unarmed attacks deal 1d6 bludgeoning and piercing damage and are no longer archaic or nonlethal. Weapon fusions and fusion seals can be applied to the steel dentures as though it were a weapon.

MAGICAL BODY MODIFICATIONS

These magical body modifications are often the results of masterful *auttaine* crafters or *auttaine* technomancers. All magical body modifications count as hybrid items but are not worn items and do not count against the limit of worn magical items.

ADAPTABLE SCALES

SYSTEM SKIN

Price 7,500 **Level** 7

These shining metal fish scales cover the wearer's body and defy description, shimmering a rainbow of colors depending on how the light hits them. The scales help regulate the wearer's body temperature in hot and cold environments, functioning as a *mk 1* thermal capacitor armor upgrade.

FILTERING GILLS

SYSTEM LUNGS

Price 300 **Level** 2

This augmentation allows the user to breathe both underwater and on land at will, as the *water breathing* spell. In addition, the wearer can extract oxygen from poisonous gasses while filtering out toxins, making him immune to inhaled poisons. This does not protect the wearer from magical gases or vapors, nor does it allow the wearer to breathe in a vacuum.

HAND OF ALL TRADES

SYSTEM HAND

Price 4,000 **Level** 6

This body modification integrates a number of small tools into the wearer's palm and fingers and makes the wearer's hand look like a patchwork of overlapping metal plates. The user may transform the hand into an engineering specialty tool kit of their choice or back into a function hand as a standard action. If they are holding anything in the hand when it transforms, they drop that item.

IRON GUT

SYSTEM DIGESTIVE

Price 100 **Level** 1

By replacing the wearer's stomach and intestines with this aramid sack of intricate machinery and self-sustaining microbes, the wearer becomes immune to food-borne illnesses. An *iron gut* grants the user immunity to ingested poisons as well as the effects of food poisoning and spoiled food or water. The user must still eat and drink to live (assuming she needed to do so before installing the *iron gut*), but she can stomach food that has significantly expired or rotted, as well as most food goods that usually require cooking or processing before consumption (such as curdled milk or raw meat). This does not grant the user the ability to chew foods she could not otherwise.

LEGS OF SPRINGING

SYSTEM LEGS

Price 360 **Level** 2

This durable yellow elastic fuses with the muscle tissue in the wearer's legs, making the limbs look impressively lean but slightly sallow as well. *Legs of springing* allow the wearer to leap to greater heights and survive the impact of some falls. The wearer gains a +5 competence bonus on Acrobatics checks to jump. The wearer takes no damage from falls of 50 feet or less and takes half damage from falls from greater than 50 feet.

LEGS OF SPRINGING, GREATER

SYSTEM LEGS

Price 4,000 **Level** 6

The elastic in *greater legs of springing* is so strong and physically taxing to implement that it turns the wearer's legs a sickly shade of green. This body modification functions as *legs of springing*, except the wearer gains a +10 competence bonus on Acrobatics checks to jump, takes no damage from falls of 100 feet or less, and takes one-quarter damage from falls from greater than 100 feet.

SILVER TONGUE

SYSTEM THROAT

Price 340 **Level** 2

This body modification allows the wearer to speak with greater versatility in languages she knows, effectively enhancing her persuasive, coercive, and diplomatic skills. At will, the user can emulate any accent or dialect she knows, as long as the accent or dialect is in a language she can speak. The user cannot emulate accents or dialects she has never heard before; she must spend at least 1 minute listening to the accent or dialect, whether by overhearing townsfolk or speaking directly with someone, in order to emulate it using the *silver tongue*.

The user's voice is also particularly clear and precise, increasing the range of their Demoralize attempts and sense-dependent *envoy* improvisations by 30 feet.

EXAMPLE BODY MODDERS

Body modifications can be installed only by skilled medical technicians called “body modders.” The multiverse’s best body modders come from the ranks of the auttaine, making the auttaine’s home in the Shattered Zone a prime location to find new mundane or magical body modifications.

Each of the following descriptions includes the name of an example body modder, their location in the multiverse, a short description of the body modder, a summary of their products, adjustments (if any) to the price of body modifications installed by the modder, and any special bonuses or penalties associated with augmentations installed by that body modder.

ARIN THE REMAKER

Rookie Auttaine Body Crafter

Location The Shattered Zone

DESCRIPTION

Arin “the Remaker” (his own term) considers himself an artist when it comes to crafting custom body modifications, but his exaggerated skills and absentmindedness make anything resembling “art” purely accidental at best. His detractors are many and sport misaligned or outright goofy body augmentations to support their claims of malpractice. Whether he’s installed a prosthetic eye of the wrong color or given a patient literally two left feet, Arin has knack for making his customers wish they’d sought a more practiced augmentser.

STATISTICS

Maximum Item Level 5th

Price Modifier —

CRAFTING

- 30% chance of installing a modification backwards or incorrectly (such as a hand with the palm facing up)

KATTICA PENETZ

Benevolent Auttaine Surgeon

Location Zel-Argose

DESCRIPTION

When Kattica lost her own arm to infection after a botched body modification procedure, she dedicated her life to ensuring others did not suffer the same fate. Customers often come to her after their own ill-fated operations go awry, and many are reassured by her deliberate but gentle touch. She wears the stress of her occupation on her face and has the eyes of someone who has seen many tragedies, but she keeps her purpose at the forefront of her mind at all times.

STATISTICS

Maximum Item Level 10th

Price Modifier +15%

CRAFTING

- Body modifications installed by Kattica have a 25% chance of gaining the

benefits of the Lifelike Prosthesis feat (see below)

- Patients have no risk of complications or infections

XERB HIFLORN

Four-Armed Tretharri Body Shopper

Location Shattered Zone

DESCRIPTION

A roguish brute who abandoned his own tribe to seek fortune as a mercenary body modder, Xerb is difficult to get along with even on the best of days. His greatest friend is his canine companion Ja’ma, who slumbers fitfully on the floor of the grimy workshop Xerb calls home. Customers complain of the rashes and infections they pick up after getting a modification in his ill-maintained workshop, but as long as they pay up front and their complaints don’t negatively affect business, Xerb could care less about his patrons’ ailments.

STATISTICS

Maximum Item Level 11th

Price Modifier -10% (-25% for anyone who helped Ja’ma in *Dead Vault Descent*)

CRAFTING

- Offers arm and hand body modifications up to 2 levels above his normal maximum
- Crafting time halved for creating custom arm and hand body modifications
- Patients must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or gain a persistent rash around the augmentation



PHYSICAL AUGMENTATION FEATS

The following feats may be used in conjunction with the rules for attaining physical augmentations and missing body parts (see sidebar on page 84).

ABLE AMPUTEE

You are so accustomed to your missing limb or body part that it hardly hinders you at all.

Benefit: Choose one missing limb or body part. The penalty associated with that missing limb or body part is reduced by 1 or by 5 feet of movement. The penalty can be reduced further by equipping a prosthesis.

BODY MOD EXPERT

As your body becomes more machine than flesh, you become increasingly resistant to maladies that target living tissue.

Prerequisite: Con 13.

Benefit: You are +1 to saves against disease and poison for every cybernetic augmentation you have installed. This bonus cannot be greater than your Constitution modifier.

BODY MOD VETERAN

You are so used to body modifications that your mind has begun to accept its machine enclosure.

Prerequisites: Con 15, Body Mod Expert.

Benefit: Your bonus from Body Mod Expert also applies to mind-affecting effects and sleep.

GREATER ABLE AMPUTEE

You no longer suffer any penalties associated with your missing limb or body part.

Prerequisite: Able Amputee.

Benefit: You no longer suffer the penalties associated with your chosen missing limb or body part.

LIFELIKE PROSTHESES

Your prostheses are so realistic and your attunement to them so strong that onlookers scarcely notice the aids.

Benefit: You gain a +5 bonus on Sleight of Hand checks to conceal the properties of your prosthetic limbs or body parts, and creatures must succeed at a Perception check (DC = 10 + your Sleight of Hand modifier) in order to identify a prosthetic you are wearing. Creatures farther than 15 feet away from you cannot identify your prosthetic body parts.

Normal: Most intelligent creatures can immediately identify a prosthetic limb or body part just by looking (if 15 feet or closer and the body part is visible) or succeeding at a Perception check (DC = 10 + your Sleight of Hand modifier). Unintelligent creatures can make a Perception check (DC = 15 + your Sleight of Hand modifier) to identify a prosthetic, though this may have little to no effect on how they interact with you depending on their level of unintelligence.

SKILLED BODY MODDER

Your experience and agility make you an able body modder for your patients.

Prerequisite: Medicine 3 ranks.

Benefit: You can install augmentations in ten minutes per item level. Also, when replacing a cybernetic augmentation, you can salvage 10% of that augmentation's cost in raw materials.

Normal: The installation takes one hour per item level and you cannot salvage any materials.

SWIFT PROSTHESIS

You are more accustomed to your prosthesis than most.

Benefit: You can equip or remove prosthesis as a move action.

Normal: Equipping or removing a prosthetic item is a full-round action.





PLAYING APPROPRIATELY

Fantastical universes—including that of the Starfinder RPG—often play on themes of body modification and augmentation beyond the venue of reality. Amputation and prosthetics are also common themes in certain worlds, as anyone who has run a pirate-themed adventure can tell you. However, when playing with these themes, it is important to remember where to draw the line in terms of what is appropriate for roleplaying exploration and what is offensive to other members of the group.

“Appropriation” is a term that gets thrown around a lot in certain circles, but it is worth mentioning in this section due to the sensitive subject matter around which these rules revolve. Many people in the real world suffer from debilitating conditions that cause them to lose function of certain body parts. Keep this in mind as you create and play characters that have their own physical or mental limitations, and be aware of how your depiction of these characters may impact the players at your table.

When creating a character with physical augmentations such as prostheses, consider the following questions: Is the character’s physical disability or augmentation his or her sole defining attribute? If I removed this element from the character, would he or she still be a compelling NPC? Does anyone at the game table have or know someone who has a physical disability or handicap? How would this player feel about how I’m depicting physical disability in our game world?

It is important to recognize when and why you are using rules for amputation, prostheses, or augmentations. Appropriation occurs when you carelessly portray real peoples’ experiences—especially experiences that dramatically affect their day-to-day lives in some way—for your own entertainment or gain. When in doubt, do some research on your own and read about the experiences of affected people. Though it may seem like a good idea to ask affected people you know about their experiences, only do so if you’re sure they’re interested in sharing—affected people, including people with disabilities or handicaps, are usually tired of explaining their circumstances to others, and should not bear the responsibility of reliving their experiences for your benefit, especially when so many resources already exist for you to gain a better understanding of the subject.

At the end of the day, consider your own limitations—physical, mental, or otherwise—and consider how you would hope someone portrayed a character with similar abilities. Chances are you’d like the role-player to appreciate and understand your experience and portray it with kindness and humanity. When you take the time to give characters more thought than simply “the peg-legged space swabby,” you may quickly discover that just a little bit of care goes a long way when it comes to writing compelling and creative characters in a sensitive way.





SHARDS OF HOME

By Chris A. Jackson

Home...

Most people never really understand the significance of that word. For someone who's never really had one, it takes on a whole new meaning. I had one now. I'd earned it. And I was making the most of it.

A distant tremor reverberated through the edge of my bath and into my skull, stirring me from my lassitude. My place might not be palatial—Asteroid 632 belonged to a minor criminal before he ended up on the wrong end of a sword—but it's comfortable, stuffed full of amenities, and best of all, isolated. The massive industrialized planetoid of Beacon is barely a mile away, but it's a mile of hard vacuum. Nobody could walk up and break in without going to some serious trouble. The tremor that had roused me continued in a rhythmic cadence. I had a guest, but they wouldn't be here for a quarter hour. The void trams aren't very fast.

My home is secured to Beacon by one of the massive iron chains that keep several hundred rocks, most inhabited, mined out, or industrialized, from drifting away into the void. Several thousand more orbit in a chaotic dance within a few hundred miles, while the rest of the 9871 pieces of my homeworld drift in the void. The nearby rocks can be reached only by catapult-skiff or void gondola, but those secured by chain are accessed easily by slow, noisy void tram.

The vibrations continued. *Bother...*

I rose from the bath and stood for a moment, letting the light mineral oil slide off my body into the tub. With

my machine parts well-lubricated and my fleshy ones slick with oil, I stepped out and towed off, wondering who was coming to visit me. I didn't get many visitors.

I dressed, stomped my feet into my boots and went upstairs to the main salon. My favorite room, the salon sported a huge picture window with a stunning view of the Temrael nebula. I'd arranged the whole room around that view, chairs and divans situated around low tables to take it in. The dining area and kitchen were nestled off to the left, and a short hall to the entry vestibule branched off opposite the window. I'd left the walls bare rock, still sporting the marks of chisel, pick, and hammer that had removed ore before I was even born. There were still a few tiny veins of silver and mithril visible, but not enough to mine. The treasure of this rock was long gone; its only value was its seclusion, and now that too was about to be invaded.

Okay, so maybe it wasn't quite an invasion, just a visitor, but I like my privacy.

I peered out the view port of my door into the void. The tram approached, clambering along in a dance of legs, rollers, gears, wires, and springs. No two trams are alike, except that each maintains a reasonably stable pressure inside. I couldn't see who was aboard. The clockwork contrivance sported only three tiny view ports in the nose.

Unsure of who I'd be receiving, I pulled my duster from the closet beside the door and put it on. I left my rapier hanging there; wearing a sword to greet a guest seemed rude, but I had enough surprises squirreled away in the pockets of my jacket if there was trouble.

The tram clanked into the vestibule, its entry port matching my door with mechanical precision to ensure no loss of precious atmosphere.

"Air doesn't grow on trees," my father used to say. "It has to be farted out by the angels, and every puff costs meat, which costs money." I guess that was the Shattered Zone equivalent of "Don't leave the lamp burning; oil isn't free."

The tram's door opened and I recognized my visitor immediately from his maroon robes and headdress, the gold cord girding his waist, and his distinctive dark brows and immaculately trimmed facial hair.

I opened my door wide. "Pan-Jhe! What in the names of all the slumbering gods are you doing here?" I greeted him with the customary two-handed grasp and ushered him inside. The air from the tram brought in a smoky haze, thicker with industrial waste than my own. I'm not bothered by bad smells, only breathing when necessary anyway, but organics like Pan-Jhe often find odors unpleasant. "I hope you didn't damage your lungs looking for me."

"Well met, Anasya." He smiled and nodded respectfully as I closed the door. "No, I had no trouble finding you. A few questions and a few coins."

"Well, it's good to see a familiar face, though I hardly expected you to visit." I waved him into the salon. "Can I get you something? Wine, coffee, water..." Just because I'm half machine doesn't mean I don't enjoy food and drink.

"Wine would be welcome, thank you." He looked around as I filled two glasses from the sideboard. "You've done well for yourself, Anasya. I'd heard you struck it rich."

Of course he had. I'd spread that rumor myself. "I got lucky." I handed him a glass and indicated the room and the view out the window. "Now I get to enjoy my money."

"Well-deserved." He sipped and furrowed his brow. "I hope that doesn't mean you're no longer interested in earning even *greater* wealth."

"That depends." So that was his reason for visiting. He had a job. "I'm not exactly hurting, so I'm pretty selective now. I don't want to risk what I've got by doing something *too* dangerous or illegal."

"This wouldn't be illegal at all and it's right up your alley." He sipped his wine again and cleared his throat. "In fact, it would be good for you in more than just *monetary* compensation."

"Oh?" I sipped my wine and inspected my guest. He'd always been the type to cut right to business, but the last time we had dealings he'd been outright rude. Now, he had work for me and had come all the way to the Shattered Zone to make the offer in person. This was no small job. "Good for me how?"

"The work involves an excavation being conducted by the governing body of your own world, your Purity, as they call themselves."

"You're recruiting for Purity?" I stifled both my surprise and derision. Purity definitely governed most of the Zone, and they wanted to control every rock, ounce of ore, and artifact in it. But I didn't care for their totalitarian practices and I'd heard stories that chilled the lubricant in my mechanical joints about what happened to people who opposed them.

"Indirectly, yes." Pan-Jhe turned and strolled to my window, taking in the view. "They're excavating an asteroid, a rather far flung one that has some type of...remnant within. As with most large organizations, they're choked by graft and bureaucracy, and are proceeding clumsily, but there are a few who are more...prudent. I learned they wish to recruit someone who has experience recovering buried artifacts, is *careful*, and knows the Shattered Zone." He turned to face me

and smiled. "I immediately thought of you."

"Thank you for the complement." I raised my glass to him, sipped, and frowned, though it wasn't the wine I found distasteful. "Where's this asteroid they're digging into?"

"I've no idea." He shrugged, blinked, and looked away from my gaze. "Only that it's a distant journey from Beacon."

You're lying to me, I thought, strolling a slow circle. "Well, I'll need some specifics before I sign on." I'd also need several planes of Hell to freeze over. Helping Purity on a secret dig on a faraway asteroid sounded like a quick way to end up as spare parts and food for the angels. "If you can't give them to me, I'm going to have to pass."

"*Pass?*" His dark eyes snapped up, brows furrowed and mouth set in a downward crescent. "That would be... imprudent of you, Anasya."

"*Imprudent?*" I chuckled. "How so?"

"I already gave...my Purity contact your name." A muscle in the side of Pan-Jhe's face twitched, but it wasn't a smile. "They won't be pleased."

"Then they'll have to be displeased." I finished my wine and put the glass down. "Purity's been pretty hostile to independent operators like me from day one. You'd best be careful working for them, my friend."

"Oh, I'm being *careful*, my friend. It's you who's not." Pan-Jhe lifted his glass and poured the rest of his wine onto my floor, then dropped the glass to let it shatter. "There's only *one* power in the Zone. Opposing it is foolish."

"I'm not opposing anything." His abrupt rudeness startled me, but I'd seen it before. "I think you should go before we stop being *friendly*."

"So you can run off to report this conversation to your friends in the Bellianic Accord?" His face contorted into a sneer. My shock must have shown on my face. "Yes, I know who you've been working for, Anasya. I thought to bring you over, to give you a chance to do the right thing, the *smart* thing."

"The smart thing for you right now, *friend*, is to leave my home." My hand twitched and two throwing stars fell into my palm from the sleeve of my jacket. I blinked my clockwork eye into recording mode; someone would want evidence of Pan-Jhe's treachery. "Now."

"Oh, we'll *both* be leaving, Anasya, but not the way you think." Pan-Jhe pulled open his robes to reveal a row of tall hourglasses mounted around his waist in a heavy steel belt, blue and red liquid in their top and bottom halves. A golden wire entwined the thin tubes where the colors met, and his hand reached for a ring bound to that wire.

"You motherless..." My shock resolved into action the instant before he pulled the ring.

My throwing stars flew as the crack of breaking glass reached my ears. One caught him in the arm, the other in the chest. He contorted with the paralytic poison, but it was too late to stop him. The liquids of the vials had already mixed, bubbling and smoldering with sudden violence.

I dove for cover an instant too late.

The explosion blew Pan-Jhe in half and riddled the room with pieces of metal, glass, and my former friend. I tumbled with the shock, slamming into the heavy stone counter between the salon and kitchen. Several pieces of shrapnel had hit my picture window. The thick glass cracked and popped like thin ice on a pond. I shook my head and tried to stand, then caught a glimpse of something that shocked me even more than the explosion.

Pan-Jhe's eviscerated torso twitched, then some...*thing* burrowed out of the mass of bloody meat. Eyes like rows of green gemstones fixed upon me, tiny legs like barbed hairs all along its length flexing their fibrous tips for an instant. It writhed in the viscera, a mouth like an anus opening to reveal a circular row of teeth as it slithered toward me.

As I scrambled back, panic and revulsion rising in my throat, my picture window shattered.

I never thought being blasted into the void would be a good thing, but it got me away from that horror readily enough. I reached out reflexively, trying to grab something, anything, but the explosive decompression blasted me through the window in a shower of debris.

I stared into my destroyed home as I fell away and saw that thing wrapping around the heavy stone pillars of my foyer. My door opened and then it vanished within. Gone...

Silence, pain, and the fogging vision in my fleshy eye told me I was in very deep trouble. My flesh was freezing, or at least the moisture that boiled from my pores was freezing. I'd been exposed to void before, though fleetingly. I didn't have to breathe, which kept me from dying instantly, and my clockwork parts would work until the lubricant in their joints froze solid, but I was drifting outward with no way to stop or alter my course.

I flew in a cloud of debris from my home, shattered furniture, bottles, cups, artwork, and a few personal items. The network of chains linking hundreds of asteroids to Beacon stretched around me like a three-dimensional spider web, but my trajectory—as straight as a plumb line—would not intersect one.

But maybe...

I flailed around, grasping a few pieces of floating junk. I caught a large piece of my favorite chair and flung it away from me, trying to keep the force of the throw centered in my chest to keep from tumbling. I drifted in the opposite direction. I looked over my shoulder and threw another piece of junk, a table leg, at a different angle. I drifted...and my mechanical fingers closed upon the neck of a bottle of wine I'd been saving for a special occasion.

I gauged no occasion more special than this.

I placed the bottom of the bottle against my abdomen and twisted the cork free.

The wine boiled, spewing out the mouth of the bottle, providing a tiny amount of thrust. I directed the neck carefully, picking up speed. Another look over my shoulder with my clockwork eye—my flesh one wasn't working at all anymore—and I flung the bottle away to turn myself around.

I smashed into the massive chain linking two asteroids hard enough to rattle my teeth. Clamping on with my mechanical hand, I quickly got my bearings and clambered along at my best speed toward Beacon, which wasn't very fast. My flesh limbs were stiffening and my lips had gone numb, but my metal joints were still working. How long had I been drifting? How long did I have left? My head hurt and I wondered if it would explode. *That would be messy...* My thoughts were getting as blurry as my vision.

I clanked into something hard.

A door? Yes, it was a door. But I had to get through it.

The picks in my mechanical fingertips delved the simple mechanism and the seal finally popped open. Air started rushing out, but I levered my way through the crack against the hurricane-force of it. The door's edge scraped frozen flesh from my cheek. Then gravity took hold and I fell to

the floor. I kicked clumsily at the door and the hurricane stopped as it resealed itself.

Heat...warmth...air... I was alive, but as the ice crystals coating my flesh thawed, and my thoughts with them, my pain redoubled. I was hurt...badly. Shards of home riddled my flesh and frozen blood had blocked my ears, nose, and mouth. I'd still die if I didn't do something fast.

I only had one chance.

I rolled onto my back and tore open my shirt, touched my serpent tattoo at its eyes and tail, then the corners of my hidden stash in the sequence that would open the tiny extradimensional space I used for smuggling. Fortunately, I also used it to sequester emergency supplies. Reaching inside, I found the bottle I wanted, but popping the cork with my thumb, I wondered if I could still swallow it.

I clenched my teeth hard on the frozen blood and saliva filling my mouth and spat. A wad of bloody ice fell out along with a couple of teeth and part of my tongue. I wedged the neck of the bottle between my frozen lips and tilted it back.

Pain fled before the elixir's magic like mice before a wildfire. Pins and needles lit my extremities and my vision cleared. I was alive.

"Barely..." I struggled to my hands and knees, still shaky and racked with pain. My thoughts cleared, and with them the memory of Pan-Jhe's suicidal attempt to murder me, and the thing that had crawled out of him and escaped through my door. My panic and revulsion returned full force.

"It's going to come for me," I said, glad there was nobody around to hear. *I've got to move.*

But where could I go?

My home was destroyed, everything I'd worked for—gone. I couldn't go back. Whatever that *thing* had been, it would come for me, and it had already told Purity about me. They'd hunt me, as well. I only had what I wore and the few items I'd stashed in my inner vault. Fortunately, that included quite a bit of money.

I struggled to my feet and ran a hand through my hair. A handful came away from my scalp with a mass of frozen blood. My skin had frozen, and my hair was gone...maybe it would grow back, but bald, I certainly didn't look like myself. That would actually work to my advantage. I had to get cleaned up then think of someplace to go...but where?

I could think of only one person who might help me.

"Tarenia..."

But she wouldn't aid me for free, and I had nothing left. Everything I had had just been shattered and blown into the void, except... I replayed the recording from my clockwork eye. The scene of Pan-Jhe's suicide and what crawled out of his corpse might be worth something to the Accord. There were spies in the shapes of people we knew, assassins posing as friends, possessed by these...creatures.

That ought to buy a few favors... That, and the information about Purity's excavation of some far-flung asteroid.

Besides, I had nothing left. I raised my twisted, half-frozen right hand, felt the gash of missing flesh in my cheek, my bloody bare scalp, tasted blood. Someone was going to pay for this, and by all the demons of the Abyss, I wanted to be the one to hand them the bill.

I limped down the corridor, already planning my next move. I had to get to Zel-Argose again, and I needed to get there without the Hegemony or Purity finding out I'd survived.

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