



# THE STRANGE™

WORLDS NUMBERLESS AND STRANGE

BY BRUCE R. CORDELL AND MONTE COOK



# WORLDS NUMBERLESS AND STRANGE



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*Dedicated to the memories of Leonard Nimoy, Sam Simon, and Terry Pratchett,  
who showed us how to build beautiful worlds*



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# EXPLORE • CREATE • DEFEND



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# INTRODUCTION



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

You know what excites me? New things, unfamiliar places, and opportunities to explore them. If you're reading this, the same is probably true for you. And that means you probably also remember the opening for the popular science fiction television show *Star Trek*, which invited viewers "to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before!"

The first time I saw the original series (on a black-and-white television), I was six or seven years old. What I saw enthralled me: people wandered through crazy ruins, which were dominated by a "time gate" that talked. When the people jumped through the gate, it was to a different world. I didn't know then that it was actually to a different time; all I knew was that it was amazing and I wanted to go there.

I couldn't, of course. As wonderful as it was, *Star Trek* required the viewer to imagine being in the far future where spaceships routinely bypassed the lightspeed barrier. This conceit was required in order for the crew to discover worlds populated by humanoids close enough to humans for meaningful stories to unfold. Don't get me wrong—that was great! I've been a science fiction fan ever since.

But what if you didn't have to wait for the future to arrive? What if those worlds were close enough to touch, if you just knew how? That's what *The Strange* offers. Reaching strange new worlds doesn't require a starship. Thousands of limited worlds called recursions lie just across a dimensional divide separating the universe of normal matter from worlds seeded by human imagination, where fictions become realities. When you explore, you can find recursions where dragons rule empires, spaceships ply the star lanes, talking rabbits live beneath grass-covered downs, anime characters battle unimaginable threats, investigators seek to quell Lovecraftian horrors, evil demigods search for the lost artifact that will grant them domination, and so much more. Maybe even recursions created by you.

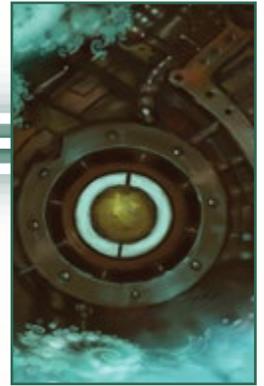
*Worlds Numberless and Strange* offers detailed glimpses into dozens of recursions, giving the game master all she needs to send her PCs for a brief visit to any one of them, for NPCs to slip from them to visit the characters on some other recursion or on Earth, or for the GM to use them as the basis for more in-depth setting material of her own creation.

So go forth, explore these strange new recursions, seek out what lies within them, and physically go where only fiction has gone before!



## CHAPTER 2

## EXPLORING FICTIONS



*“Maybe one day I’ll stumble into a recursion where I became a famous movie star, not a has-been child actor. Or does it not work that way?”*

~L. G. Babcock III

Recursions are unique but limited worlds hosted in the dark energy network of the Strange. They are *not* parallel worlds. The concept of parallel worlds was popularized by the “Many Histories” or “Many Worlds” interpretation of quantum theory. The limited alternate worlds of the game, called recursions, are created by *fiction*, not branching possibilities. Novels, myths, movies, and even urban legends seed themselves into the Strange, and implausible new locations are born.

### RECURSIONS FROM FICTIONS

Many recursions were seeded into the network by the creative resonance of pure imagination (called “fictional leakage”). Because recursions are seeded from fiction, someone able to explore these realms can find Oz, Pellucidar, limited worlds where Nazis won World War II, several worlds based on popular anime, “Zed Omega” recursions experiencing zombie apocalypses, “Supers” worlds based on comics, worlds derived from iconic fantasy trilogies, recursions seeded from popular science fiction movies, and regions born from long-standing myths from every present and past society. In some recursions, fairy creatures hang the stars at night; in others, monstrous evil sleeps beneath the waves; while in others, pagan gods of prehistoric people still wander. Among the many recursions created by fictional

leakage are a few created by conscious design, including the sorcerous land of *Ardeyn* and the shipwrecked recursion of *Ruk*. All told, thousands of recursions speckle the dark energy web around Earth. They are places of wonder, adventure, danger, and opportunity for those who can travel to them, explore them, or create them.

### NO MULTIPLE PARALLEL WORLDS

Generally speaking, an explorer won’t find alternate versions of herself. Nor would she discover multiple similar worlds spinning off from historical “inflection points.” So an explorer shouldn’t have to deal with befriending (or deciding to murder) another version of herself—at least, not as a natural consequence of how recursions work. This also means that the semblance of time travel, where an explorer might try to go back in time to kill her grandmother, doesn’t actually split off a new timeline, as popularized in movies like *Back to the Future*. In *The Strange*, time travel isn’t generally possible. (That said, certain recursions seeded from time-travel fiction might grant the illusion of time travel.)

### NARRATIVELY CLOSED RECURSIONS

Some recursions are quite true to their source and do not vary. In these recursions, explorers might say that “the narrative is closed.” In such places, most natives go through their existence

*Ardeyn*, page 160

*Ruk*, page 190



*Spark, page 22*

*Moriarty, page 307*

*Quickened, page 22*

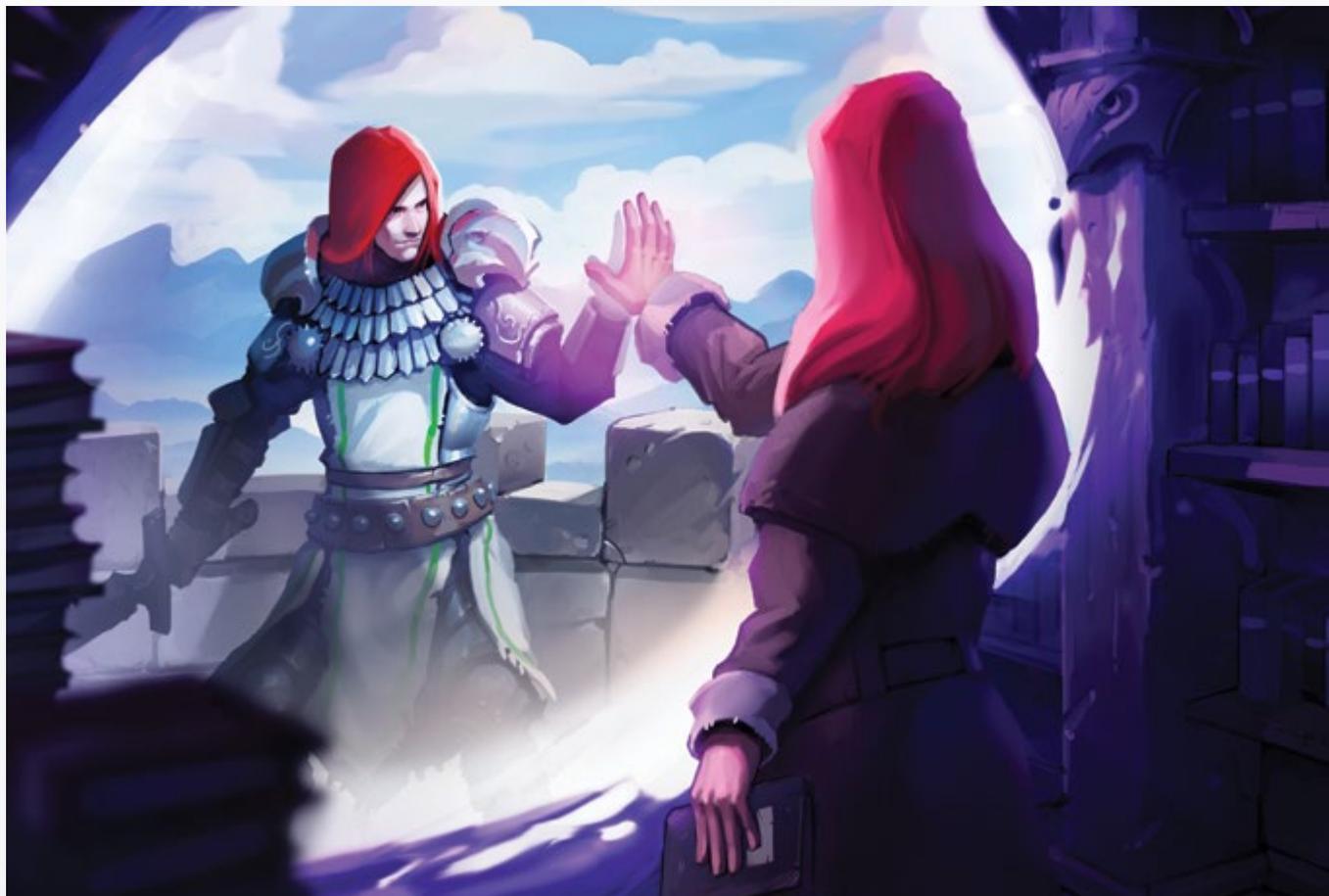
without varying from the roles first imagined for them in the fiction that created them. Such inhabitants do not have the spark of self-awareness that might allow them to realize that their world is limited or to imagine traveling beyond the borders of the story that seeded their recursion.

## FUSED AND NARRATIVELY OPEN RECURSIONS

Some recursions are not defined or described by any one narrative, but instead are created by a mixture of several different but related stories in the same genre. For instance, all the various books, plays, movies, and campfire stories about Alice in Wonderland have created a recursion where not all the individuals (such as the Red Queen, the Mad Hatter, and the White Rabbit) are drawn from the exact same narrative. This collision of fictions can lead to situations not accounted for in the stories that seeded the recursion. For example, a Red Queen who is not merely barking mad but a devious schemer with long-range plans informs

a recursion that is far richer in possibility. Thus, natives of such recursions are more likely to possess the spark or gain it over time. This is both amazing and potentially amazingly dangerous, which has proved to be the case for Moriarty, who also is quickened and able to travel to multiple recursions.

Sometimes the recursions seeded from multiple stories, where at least 10 percent of the population has the spark, generate entirely new events over time. These recursions drift farther and farther away from the original narrative. An explorer (also called a recursor) who visits such a recursion may find a limited world where events vary widely from the original fictional source. In some cases, an event can snap the recursion back to something closer to the original narrative. Such events might be the completion of a key quest, the murder of a key individual, or the apparent destruction of the recursion itself. That's possible in recursions where the spark is still under 30 percent or so. But once the spark climbs much higher than that, it's



almost impossible to snap a recursion back in this fashion. Some explorers suggest that a significant-enough event could instead cause a recursion to fission, creating a separate limited world closer to the original story, while the more developed recursion continues forward to find its own unique destiny.

## THE STRANGE HOSTS RECURSIONS

Though the fictions of Earth seed recursions, the medium in which they grow into limited alternate worlds is called the Strange. Also known as the Chaosphere, the Strange is a data network constructed by technologically advanced aliens billions of years ago. The Strange was originally created to facilitate intergalactic travel across the universe. The aliens would upload themselves into the dark energy web and then “print” themselves anew at some distant star, without having to travel the light years between the two locations in the normal universe. But something went disastrously wrong. The builders of the Strange lost control of their creation and were either killed or consumed by it.

Over subsequent billions of years, the Strange continued to spread through the universe, and it is evident to most scientists on Earth as a mysterious “dark energy.” Within its immense and ever-expanding volume, the Strange is capable of hosting almost limitless amounts of information.

Organizations cognizant of the Strange believe that recursions are not as likely to be hosted around alien worlds in other parts of the universe of normal matter. They believe this for two reasons: Earth has avoided the fate of other worlds, and it has a special connection to the Strange.

## EARTH AVOIDS THE FATE OF OTHER WORLDS

Most alien worlds did not have the same good luck that Earth has (so far) enjoyed in avoiding planetovores. Once a planetovore manages to find and map a prime world’s location in the Strange, it can forge a linkage and, by calling on ancient protocols, “print” itself into existence on that prime world to consume and convert the planet for its own use. This practice is assumed to destroy any connected recursions, either directly or afterward when

the planetovore explores the nested recursions hosted by the world. Earth might just be experiencing a normal period of interaction with the Strange before a planetovore inevitably snaps up the planet, but there is reason to believe it might enjoy protections that most other planets in the universe do not.

## EARTH ENJOYS A SPECIAL STRANGE CONNECTION

Earth’s moon was formed by an interstellar impactor, which was a small piece of the mechanism the aliens used to create the Strange billions of years ago. The disaster, in which the aliens lost control of the Strange, apparently sent fragments of a solar-system-sized object spraying into the cosmos. And one fragment, which some call the **Aleph component**, hit the Earth. A very long time after that, evolving sapient life on Earth triggered a residual function in the component. It released a unique quantum field energy that connected Earth to the Strange in a way that few, if any, other prime worlds ever were. Each recursion is like a brick in the wall, keeping the planet safe from direct contact with the Strange itself. (Unfortunately, a large recursion could become a jarring hole in Earth’s defenses if the recursion were ever collapsed, but that’s a different topic.) Today, the Aleph component is buried deep beneath the Earth’s mantle, but its existence is a secret no longer.

## EXPLORATION

Getting from one recursion to another is possible using a few different methods. The most common is called **translation**. When player characters translate, they take on the context of the recursion they travel to. They inhabit entirely new forms with different capabilities and gear. In a given scenario, the characters might travel to multiple worlds to accomplish their goals, discover secrets, or confront foes. They can also capitalize on the equipment and abilities they gain in different recursions to solve problems and perform tasks.

For example, an agent from Earth arriving in the magic recursion of Ardeyn no longer has her sidearm and suit, but maybe instead has a sword, a shield, and chainmail. Translation can

*Aleph component, page 148*

*A prime world is a world in the universe of normal matter.*

*Translation, page 125*

*Planetovore, page 8*





*Focus, page 51*

*Translation gate, page 134*

*Standard Physics, page 136*

*Mad Science, page 137*

*Magic, page 137*

*Psionics, page 137*

*Substandard Physics, page 137*

*Exotic, page 137*

*Inapposite gate, page 135*

*Flatland, page 176*



*Shoals of Earth, page 214*

*The Estate, page 148*

*OSR, page 157*

also involve more drastic changes—a character might change appearance, gender, or race as well as gain new possessions and clothing. What's more, the changes are mental as well as physical. When the Earth agent translates and becomes a new being in the context of Ardeyn, she inherently knows a few things about the recursion, like how to speak the predominant language, where the largest city lies, who rules that city, and so on.

## TRANSLATION GATE

In addition to translation, recursors might also travel to another recursion via a **translation gate**. Most things that are true of translation are true of a gate, except that recursors aren't the ones initiating the transfer. Whoever or whatever set up the gate has already focused it on a particular recursion. When recursors go through, they appear in a specified location in the target recursion. However, if the gate wasn't focused to provide that benefit, they instead appear in the spot where they last exited the recursion. (If the travelers never previously visited the target recursion, they appear at its default arrival location.)

## INAPPOSITE GATE (MATTER GATE)

Explorers might discover an **inapposite gate**, also called a **matter gate**. If they pass through a matter gate, they arrive in the target recursion,

but no translation occurs. Thus, if an explorer from Earth goes through an inapposite gate, she still carries her handgun in her holster even though she's in Ardeyn. Moreover, she has no special knowledge of Ardeyn, and her **focus** remains the same as it was on Earth. On the other hand, her gun (an artifact of Standard Physics, not one of Magic) continues to function, as described below.

## LAWS NOT ALL EQUAL

Recursions that have grown and flowered in the Strange each possess a particular set of rules that govern them. These laws mean that amazing things can occur in a recursion that could never happen on Earth. The designations are generally recognized as **Standard Physics**, **Mad Science**, **Magic**, **Psionics**, **Substandard Physics**, and **Exotic**.

Though some recursors commonly assume otherwise, in most cases recursions that operate under Magic or Mad Science also presume an underlying Standard Physics framework. So unless a recursion specifically excludes baseline Standard Physics, recursions that operate under the laws of Magic, Mad Science, or Psionics can support artifacts of Standard Physics if they arrive there through an inapposite gate.

On the other hand, recursions that operate under the law of Substandard Physics do not, by definition, allow technology derived from Standard Physics to function.

Finally, when it comes to Exotic recursions, everything is up for grabs, even how many dimensions the natives exist within. For example, a recursion based on **Flatland**, a place that exists only in two dimensions, operates under the Exotic law.

## ORGANIZATIONS OF NOTE

Many explorers in the **Shoals of Earth** operate independently, without the support of an organization. They do so either because they prefer to travel on their own, or because they're not aware of organizations that operate across recursions.

Many more recursors explore on behalf of one or more organizations interested in the Strange, such as the Earth-based groups known as the **Estate** and **OSR**, or Ruk-based groups





*Ipsa scientia potestas est*—“knowledge itself is power”

—written on the first page of many of the reports and journals stored in Collections

that include the *Karum* and the *Quiet Cabal*. But at least one other organization exists, one that's far more loosely connected than others: the Implausible Geographical Society.

### IMPLAUSIBLE GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

The Estate believes its own founding operatives were the first on Earth to discover recursions and the Strange. They're wrong. As it happens, a secret offshoot of the Royal Geographical Society of London (founded in 1830) has long been aware of recursions. This secret “sister” society was originally made up of a handful of regular Royal Society members: those who were also quickened and able to translate. The so-called Implausible Geographical Society met clandestinely within the confines of the larger organization until 1913. That's when the regular Royal Society moved into the Lowther Lodge in Kensington Gore, when the ban on female membership was lifted, and when the Implausible Geographical Society (IGS) moved to its own, separate headquarters. In fact, the IGS moved to a virtual duplicate of Lowther Lodge, located not on Earth but in an Earthlike recursion of London based on the writings of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

The Royal Geographical Society was founded to advance geographical knowledge and science. The Implausible Geographical Society's purpose is the same, except its members explore both known and new recursions. Unlike the more well-known society, the IGS doesn't widely broadcast its discoveries or publicly award medals to its members who have achieved amazing things in the face of adversity. The IGS keeps all it learns secret among its members. However, that membership is quite large. In fact, several individuals who the Estate regards as lone *recursion miners* are affiliated with the Implausible Geographical Society.

The truth is, members of the IGS have been active in the Shoals of Earth for almost two

hundred years. A record of most of those activities can be found in a section of the group's headquarters called Collections.

### COLLECTIONS

Several rooms in the IGS lodge are given over to Collections, which holds a couple of centuries' worth of discoveries, including expedition reports and journals, recursion maps, photographs, paintings, and objects



#### NEW RECURSIONS AND OLD

Most of the recursions known and visited in the modern era did not exist when the Implausible Geographical Society was founded because the fictions that seeded them had not yet been written. Many recursions explored by IGS members were based on fictions and myths popular at the time, including *Pellucidar*, the *Forgotten World*, and the myths of humans of every culture. The *Garden of Eden* was reputed to be a favorite, though its dangers were equal to its delights.

The question is, once these recursions were discovered, what became of them? Few recursors, either associated with the IGS or employed by agencies such as the Estate, seem to find such recursions any longer, and if they do, the worlds are usually small and without much occurrence of the spark among natives. Some people suspect that as fictions lose attention in the modern world, recursions seeded from those fictions are negatively affected. A competing hypothesis is that older recursions somehow drift away and become harder to reach. Either way, because IGS members have the advantage of a record stretching back nearly two hundred years, they're in a unique position to explore these questions.

*Karum*, page 193

*Quiet Cabal*, page 153

*Recursion miner*, page 150



**Dame Amanda Wallace:**  
*level 5, tasks related to  
games of chance and  
recursion knowledge as  
level 7*

(brought by inapposite gate travel) from alternate recursions. In total, Collections comprises over a million discrete items. An associated reading room is available for visiting members who wish to consult the trove. With a little research, information found in Collections can form the seed for new expeditions, which in turn could lead to yet more documents, maps, and objects being brought back to IGS.

## MEMBERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Explorers are usually explorers for a reason—they're not particularly happy around other people, and several are downright antisocial. That's why some explorer-recursors could never be happy within the confines of a group like the Estate. But these very same independent-minded recursors enjoy their association with the Implausible Geographical Society. Members are essentially left to their own devices, there are no managers or supervising officers, and, in fact, there's no expectation that a member will return to the Lodge ever again. But most do check in from time to time to file the maps and reports of their latest discoveries in previously unknown recursions, to ask for advice from other explorers, or to engage in a little uncharacteristic social time among others of like constitution in the common room.

New members are selected by invitation only, but any full-fledged "Geographers" (as members often refer to themselves) can extend an invitation. Invitations can be given to other recursors or to someone with a keen interest in alternate worlds who isn't quickened. However, the society sees itself as an exclusive club, which means that knowledge of the Implausible Geographical Society isn't to be spread beyond the group and its actual members. When information does escape, volunteer Geographers are sent to erase it by whatever means necessary (and they often use artifacts culled from different recursions, such as [memory erasers](#) acquired from a recursion called [New York Grey](#)).

**Sir Raymond Creswicke:** Like Dame Amanda Wallace, Creswicke is one of the few IGS members permanently installed in the Lodge. He is in charge of seeing to the organization of Collections. Given half a chance, he's keen to give advice to new or prospective members,

especially when it comes to choosing a new destination to explore. Creswicke is also available to teach new members how to use various cartography tools. In some recursions, a sextant and a compass are worthless, but in many, those items work fine, as does GPS or more advanced positioning techniques.

**Dame Amanda Wallace:** Wallace occupies the office of the president, but she hasn't taken that role, nor would she want it; the Society hasn't had an acting president in thirty years. Her main duties are to provide IGS Lodge security, to vet new member applications for potential red flags, and to make certain that knowledge of the group doesn't leak out. Wallace also nurses a gambling problem and sometimes slips out to put money down on the horses—which is how she came to the attention of [Moriarty](#), a cross-recursion criminal of the worst sort. So far, Moriarty has been content to observe Dame Amanda Wallace and, through her, the activities of the Implausible Geographical Society. For her part, Wallace knows that she has come under observation, and she's preparing a trap of her own if something dangerous comes of it.

**Richard Hunt, Geographer:** Cantankerous but a man of his word, Hunt is tougher than any three other Geographers put together. When he leads an expedition, he doesn't put up with weaklings, and in fact he makes those who travel with him agree to be left behind if they become a liability. As a result, opinions about Hunt among other members range from those who revere him to those who think he's the worst human ever. The latter are happy that he's rarely at the IGS Lodge—mainly because he's always out looking for ever more extreme recursions to explore and map.

One of Hunt's pet theories has to do with missing explorer Percy Fawcett, who disappeared in the Amazon on Earth in 1925. Hunt believes the explorer tumbled into a recursion of particular mystery, one that has resisted discovery to this day. Lately, most of Hunt's expeditions have to do with finding this particular recursion (which he calls "the City of Z"), even though most other Geographers think he's bound to fail, just as Fawcett did before him.



*Moriarty, page 307*

**Richard Hunt:** *level 6,  
tracking and resisting  
disease and poison as  
level 7*

*Memory eraser, page 102*

*New York Grey, page 95*

**Sir Raymond Creswicke:**  
*level 5, tasks related to  
IGS history and recursion  
knowledge as level 7; given  
time, can always fix his  
position*

## CHAPTER 3

# IMPORTING FICTIONS AND GAME WORLDS



If you're like us, you have a shelf (or more) devoted to games and works of fiction. These might include games of dungeon delving, eldritch investigation, superheroes ripped from the comics, world domination, and maybe adventuring mice. And don't forget novels detailing the exploits of ring-bearing hobbits, starship crews, and ringworld explorers. The point is, you've got a cornucopia of fiction settings at your fingertips. And as you know, *The Strange* is perfect for hosting fictions as individual limited worlds called recursions.

The Cypher System that underlies *The Strange* is ideal for importing settings from games, novels, and movies because it's lightweight while providing a solid description of abilities, rules, and mechanics used by most tabletop roleplaying games. The Cypher System is very amenable to adaptation. In fact, we've provided an entire book on this topic (the *Cypher System Rulebook*) to inspire you in far more depth than we have room for here.

That said, this chapter has good advice to get you started creating recursions right now for your game of *The Strange*.

## START WITH THE FAMILIAR

Conceptually, it's easy to feel overwhelmed when importing one setting into another. That's why you need a strategic place to start. Being thorough might sound appealing, but it's not the most efficient way to accomplish your goal, especially given the limited nature of recursions. Instead, consider converting NPCs and places that your players have previously encountered, ones that you want them to encounter again, but this time within the confines of a game of *The Strange*.

For example, if you played *Star Wars*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Star Trek*, or a particular *Dungeons & Dragons* module with your friends, you probably had one or more exciting encounters with memorable NPCs. Why not begin where your enthusiasm and fond recollections are the strongest, and import those key NPCs and sites as a recursion within *The Strange*? When next your players gather for a game and translate into this new recursion, those who played in the original game will probably be amazed, delighted, and possibly afraid of what's going to happen next.

## MINIMAL MECHANICS

Since NPCs in *The Strange* don't use the same rules as player characters, you might not have to do anything more than assign a few levels and task difficulties to imported NPCs and the situations that surround them. If you're worried about making up abilities on the fly, take a look at the NPCs in *The Strange* corebook, and use their deviations from standard-level abilities as a guide.

For instance, if you import a powerful vampire NPC and his misty castle into *The Strange* as a recursion, starting him out as a level 6 creature is probably a good first step, especially if you make many of his servitors level 3 or 4. The mechanics of the vampire's original game probably provide concepts for abilities that you can use easily enough. For instance, if the vampire has a mesmerizing ability in the original game, that's just a difficulty 6 Intellect defense roll for a PC to resist, and so on.

*Resources and Inspiration,*  
page 220

## FOCUS ON IMPORTANT NPCs

Most fictional settings, especially those from movies and novels, have strong NPC characters, both protagonists and antagonists. When you import a fiction as a recursion, you have to decide whether you're importing only the setting or if you're also bringing in the central NPCs. For example, if your characters visit Wonderland, will they merely adventure through its peculiar areas, or will they also meet the Red Queen, the Mad Hatter, or Alice?

If the latter, it's important to remember that you're implicitly indicating that the Red Queen, the Mad Hatter, and Alice actually exist. They might have the *spark* and thus be conscious enough of the player characters' arrival that they'll wonder what's going on. And once that happens, who's to say that those NPCs (or others in another recursion you've created) won't leave their home recursion and go to Oz, Ardeyn, or Earth?

## EDGES ARE NOT IMPORTANT IMMEDIATELY

If you're importing a setting that includes multiple locations or even entire planets, don't worry about dealing with everything at once. Just be ready for one or two specific locations where most of the action will take place. Merely by creating the proper context within a recursion, such as a rowdy cantina that serves space pilots from a hundred different star systems, you create the perception of a much greater universe. Even in the original fiction from which the recursion is drawn, most of those star systems and planets are never shown or described—they don't need to be for the story to be told. Likewise, a recursion of a singular location enjoys the same advantage of context.

## WHEN EDGES BECOME IMPORTANT

Of course, a PC or NPC may decide to investigate the edges of a given recursion that suggests a much larger scope. When that happens, you have to decide how to handle it. All recursions have "edges" because they're all limited. But the edge looks different depending on the recursion's context. In Ardeyn, the edge is a literal abyss beyond which the Strange is visible. But most recursions based on fictions

don't have such literal ends. Instead, they're hidden. Popular edges include the following.

- Surrounding hallways, streets, paths, landscapes, and so on loop back so that travelers find themselves on the opposite side of the recursion.
- Mist surrounds the location, causing travelers to become lost, get turned around, or sometimes be translated into alternate recursions.
- Surrounding hallways, streets, paths, landscapes, and so on seem to extend indefinitely when travelers insist on moving in a particular location. So if a character jumps in her car and tries to drive to New York, she'd never get there.
- Surrounding hallways, streets, paths, landscapes, and so on slowly lose color and texture until travelers find the merest outline of the world, now revealed as the ragged ends of a recursion. Beyond this point, apply one of the other edge conditions (mist, looping, an abyss into the Strange, and so on).



Spark, page 22





PART 2:

# WORLDS NUMBERLESS



CHAPTER 4: ARDEYN AND RUK EXPANDED

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CHAPTER 5: RECURSIONS

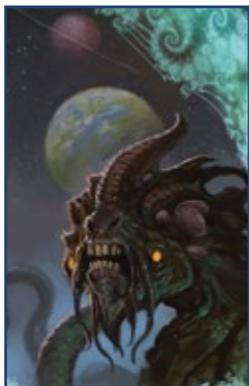
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CHAPTER 6: RECURSION SEEDS

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## CHAPTER 4



# ARDEYN AND RUK EXPANDED



*“It came as something of a shock to the Implausible Geographical Society that other groups had formed and become active in the Shoals of Earth after we enjoyed near-exclusivity among the limited worlds for so long. Then one of our early members discovered Ruk and aliens who could translate. As a policy, IGS explorers stayed clear of Ruk, for fear of what the aliens might do if they learned that ‘Earthmen’ could accomplish the same sort of travel. But sometimes, explorations of recursions birthed by primitive human myth led, almost inexorably it seemed, back to Ruk. That’s when we learned that Ruk played a part in human development, perhaps even in our very evolution.*

*As astonishing as that revelation was, the discovery of Ardeyn, springing into existence as a fully formed, developed, and massive recursion overnight, was even more alarming and upsetting. Maybe that’s because the discovery of Ruk’s possible association with human origins was made before my time, and was presented to the current members as received knowledge.*

*On the other hand, I was the one who stumbled upon Ardeyn, where there had been no such recursion before. With its thousands of years of history, its powerful paranormal entities, and its active population of recursors, I had to reexamine everything I thought I knew about limited worlds. In particular, the Earth organizations known as the Estate and the September Project are particularly active in Ardeyn, and as far as we can tell, up to no good purpose.”*

*~Sir Raymond Creswicke,  
in a letter to his paramour Irene located in a constructed recursion called Paradiso*

## ARDEYN: THE GLASS DESERT

As described in the corebook, Ardeyn is a recursion of extravagant sorcery, mystic blades sheathed in living souls, and an evil god called Lotan the Sinner whose prison is the world. At Ardeyn’s core, Lotan burns.

Dragons, soulshorn, homunculi of the Betrayer, invaders from alternate recursions, demons of Lotan, and other insidious threats that hide in ancient qephilim ruins are ever-present in Ardeyn.

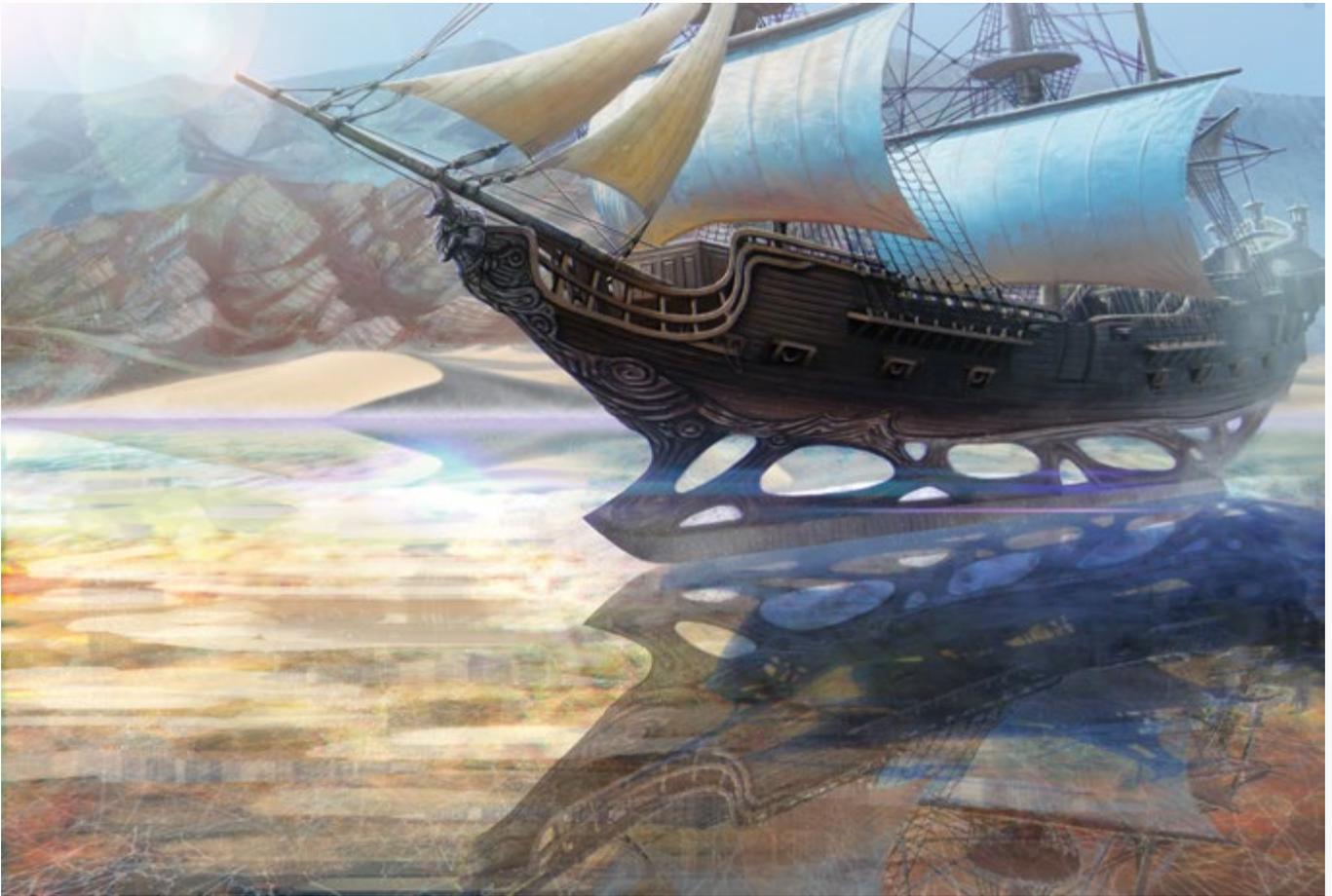
Once, Ardeyn was guarded from Lotan the Sinner by the Maker, his Seven Incarnations, and their angelic qephilim servants. But when they fell long ago, they left Ardeyn open to attack. Now mortals (humans and fallen qephilim alike) have taken up the fight to protect the place known as the Land of the Curse.

This section further details an interesting location in Ardeyn known as the Glass Desert and the associated Maker’s Hall.



*Ardeyn, page 160*

*Glass Desert, page 176*



## GLASS DESERT

The Glass Desert sprawls across the southern Daylands in a contested region called *Kuambis*. The sere plain of reflective glass is covered here and there in drifting dunes of sparkling sand composed of ground glass particles, which are abrasive and dangerous if exposure persists. In fact, the desert is arguably one of the most treacherous stretches of land in Ardeyn. Even the weather can kill an unprotected traveler: when the winds blow, the dunes are taken up into the air. If creatures don't take shelter quickly enough, their flesh is ground from their bones.

In addition, the Glass Desert is inhabited by pirates, spirits of those who died in the wind (*sere spirits*), and at least one dragon. A guild known as the Reclaimers is based on the northern edge of the desert where the waters of Oceanus meet the plain.

## RECLAIMERS

The Reclaimers want to eradicate the Glass Desert and return it to the glorious garden it

was during the Age of Myth, when things were still pristine and new, before Lotan made his bid to escape.

Legends tell of the Silver Sword, a blade of glass visible every nine years as a reflection in the desert's surface. The sword can be claimed for a brief time by one who is worthy and used to shrink the borders of the Glass Desert. So the Reclaimers patiently wait out the decades and attempt to reclaim the artifact each time it appears. Currently under the leadership of

### ARDEYN IN THE COREBOOK

Refer to *The Strange* corebook to get a basic grounding in Ardeyn, the Land of the Curse. The material presented here expands on a few locations in the corebook. If characters spend enough time in Ardeyn, they may learn of these locations as well.



*Kuambis*, page 176

*Sere spirit*, page 215

*Player characters learn about qephilim when they first visit Ardeyn, and they can even choose to become qephilim when they translate. Qephilim are a race descended from immortal angelic beings who served the Maker and his Incarnations.*



*Court of Sleep, page 184*



*Umbur judge, page 285*

*Green Wilds, page 170*

**Galeta Swan:** *level 5; health 25; Armor 1; long-range cold attack inflicts 7 points of damage and freezes target from moving (but not taking other actions) until it regains at least 2 of those points*

**Calometh:** *level 4; health 23; Armor 1 (can gain +4 to Armor for ten minutes); long-range spiritual blight attack from wand artifact inflicts 4 points of damage (ignores Armor)*

Galeta Swan, the Reclaimers occupy a fortress on the northern edge of the desert, where the waves of Oceanus lap upon beaches made of jagged sand.

A couple of decades ago, the secret of the Silver Sword's existence leaked. Now the Reclaimers must compete for the sword with glass pirates, random adventurers, and Calometh, a particularly vengeful umbur judge from the Night Vault.

**Galeta Swan:** In her youth, Galeta was captured from the edges of the Green Wilds by glass pirates. She escaped slavery in Kuambis thanks to a talent for magic her captors never suspected. But rather than return home, Galeta instead swore to bring the Green Wilds to the desert, in a manner of speaking, by erasing the scar of ancient destruction the desert represents. Some people brand her as a driven fanatic, but others are drawn to her cause.

**Calometh, Umbur Judge:** Calometh seeks the Silver Sword as vehemently as the Reclaimers do, but not because he wishes to return the ancient garden to Ardeyn. Instead, the qephilim believes that he can use the blade to sever the evil taint from demons—souls that have been stained by Lotan's malice—so they can finally

be judged by the Court of Sleep. That said, Calometh seems eager to “redeem” a soul even before it leaves a living creature's body, just to get a jump on things, so to speak. The larger body of the Court of Sleep has labeled Calometh a dangerous lunatic and cast him out. Thus, he wanders the Glass Desert, killing glass pirates (and any other human he happens across) “for the sake of their souls” while he waits for the time of the next reflection of the Silver Sword.

## GLASS PIRATES

Braving the inhospitable glass plain, a handful of pirate clans ride ships that skate on magic blades. Most glass pirates operate along the edges of the desert by sending sorties into the more habitable surrounding lands to raid for food, gold, slaves, and other valuables. Then they escape pursuit by fleeing on their special ships into the burning heart of the plain, where only the desperate and deranged would attempt to travel without similar means.

The pirates are anything but a cohesive force. Opposing clans compete for raiding territory. Truces usually hold, but when two ships of different clans meet, it's even money whether



### HAZARDS OF EXPOSURE

The Glass Desert is dangerous merely to visit. Heat, dehydration, and the particularly abrasive ground glass sand are the main culprits.

**Heat and Dehydration:** A character who spends an hour or more active in the Glass Desert during the day without sufficient water to drink—about a cup (0.2 L) of water per hour—takes 2 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) each hour after the first without water. This does not apply to characters who have the focus *Abides in Stone* or who otherwise don't need water.

**Glass Sand and Wind:** Even without wind, the abrasive ground glass sand is dangerous. Each ten hours a character spends active in the Glass Desert results in skin abrasions and inhalation of fine particles, which cumulatively inflict 1 point of ambient damage at the end of the period.

If the wind picks up enough to create a sandstorm, the danger becomes much more urgent. Characters should seek shelter immediately or face a flensing. In such a sandstorm, visibility is reduced to immediate range, and characters without shelter suffer 1 point of Speed damage (ignores Armor) each minute.

it results in a skirmish or a parley. Likewise, conflict is common within pirate crews, where only the particularly cruel rise to the top of the command structure.

Two ships have acquired such a reputation that their names are sometimes heard far from the Glass Desert: the *Nightstar*, captained by a qephilim named Taimin, and the *Revenge*, captained by a qephilim named Siraja.

**Taimin of the *Nightstar*:** Taimin prefers to decorate himself with grandiose amulets, bracelets, and expensive layers of clothing. He gives his crew a lot of latitude in determining the hierarchy underneath him as long as squabbles don't interfere with the smooth operation of the ship and their raids. Taimin's favorite tactic is to decree death matches between feuding crew members. This policy

is usually sufficient to deter those who'd otherwise bad-mouth their superiors—unless they're willing to find themselves fighting for their lives at a moment's notice.

**Siraja of the *Revenge*:** Siraja has the full and feared reputation of a glass pirate, but the truth is that she's only in the business of hunting other pirates. She keeps this practice secret lest the other pirates come together in a real truce to stamp her out. Siraja manages this facade by employing a network of tall-tale tellers who spread her supposed merciless escapades in taverns and markets across Ardeyn. This terrible reputation even cows some of the other glass pirates.

**Typical glass ship (with 15 or more crew):** level 3; health 30; Armor 3; moves a long distance each round on a magic iron blade; melee ramming attack inflicts 10 points of damage after a move of at least a short distance; two long-range ballistae attack for 5 points of damage each

**Siraja:** level 6; Armor 1; carries two grenade cyphers most of the time

*Abides in Stone*, page 51

The blades on which glass ships skate are magic artifacts; see page 22



**Taimin:** level 7; Armor 2; carries at least one cypher for defense or escape



*Carter Strange,*  
page 161

*Glass dragon,* page 212



*Borderlands,* page 178

*Harrowing,* page 177

A secret even more dear than the true nature of the *Revenge* is the truth behind Siraja's rise to her present position. Only a few people know that she and **Carter Strange** were allies for a brief time. She once helped him out of a particularly tight spot when he was at his most vulnerable.

## DRAGON OF GLASS

Several dragons inhabit Kuambis, and many more congregate there during the month of Suntime for the **Harrowing**. Supposedly, only one dragon lives on the glass itself, and it's not a dragon in the truest Ardeyn sense. Instead of feathers, shards of splintered glass cover its body. More so even than normal dragons, the Glass Desert dragon is a creature of magic. As such, it is not merely a living creature, but the animate embodiment of an elemental disaster.

Learned sorcerers suggest that other "dragons of disaster" probably exist in Ardeyn, having been spawned by various unnatural catastrophes (or natural ones that were particularly violent). The disaster that spawned the Glass Desert dragon is the same event that

created the desert itself, when Lotan slagged the Maker's Hall during the Age of Myth.

In truth, there is no singular Glass Desert dragon. Instead, there is an entire brood of **glass dragons**, none as powerful as the whispered legends tell. Only one or two haunt the desert at any one time because most prefer to dive from Ardeyn's southern edge and hunt the Strange. Several have created cavern homes in Ardeyn's cliffside **Borderlands** region or out on one of the floating skerries. Individual glass dragons return to the plain every few years and bake in the unrelenting sun at the desert's heart for a minimum of three days. They do so to maintain the link of continuity between themselves and the ancient disaster that spawned them.

## MAKER'S HALL

The Glass Desert is what most people believe to be all that remains of the Maker's Hall, a vast castle of glass originally serving as the Maker's citadel in Ardeyn. The Hall was slagged and melted when Lotan burned hottest in Ardeyn's prehistory. Beneath the desert, in bubbles



## GHOST SHIPS

The Glass Desert has witnessed many conflicts, going all the way back to the one that birthed it. Skirmishes between rival pirates, traders, glass dragons, and occasional travelers across the flat expanse have smashed hundreds of blade-skating ships over the years, scattering their dying crews across the merciless sun-baked plain. But sometimes, those ships return. Those that carried strong magical cargo or powerful individuals are most likely to come back as spectral ships visible day or night, with their former crew held in undead thrall. Sometimes ghost ships move like a normal glass ship, with sails rigged, and other times they appear as shadowed wrecks out on the glass. Those who encounter them are likely to be shanghaied as fresh crew. Would-be victims who are strong enough to escape might come away with amazing treasures hidden away in the holds of ghost ships that have been plying the desert for hundreds of years or more.

Another terrifying aspect of ghost ships is their ability to sail off the edge of the Glass Desert and appear hundreds of miles away in some other part of Ardeyn. This apparently occurs when members of a particular crew—now only spirits, or spirits inhabiting decaying flesh—originally hailed from that same location.



and hollows, adventurous types can discover amazing artifacts from the Age of Myth. But these are just the merest sprinkling of the treasures waiting to be claimed if one could find the surviving entrance to what remains of the Maker's Hall.

Under the proper conditions, the Maker's Hall is revealed as a reflection in the surface of the Glass Desert, an astounding series of mounting, shining ramparts that reaches (in

the reflection) for the sky. A single entrance is visible in the glass, and here a visitor may attempt entry. Those who manage to get inside have a chance to seize the power of the Maker himself, and with that power, remake Ardeyn in their own image. The possibilities are stupefying to consider.

Lest your dreams grow too ambitious, know that entering the Maker's Hall is almost impossible. Even if a seeker survives the threats of the Glass Desert and finds the correct location near the center of the plain, it is said that gaining entry (and surviving what one finds within) is possible only for those who can call upon spells of a potency rarely achieved in Ardeyn. Another rumor suggests that a seeker who has the mighty keys of an earlier age—a handful of rings that the Incarnations once used to spark their power—can also gain entry. Other stories say that perhaps a seeker merely needs to appear at the right spot in the Glass Desert at the right time, when the seven moons of Ardeyn are full during the final hour of the month of Fear, and other celestial objects are in rare alignment.

Beyond this, little is known, but much is rumored. The Maker's Hall seems impervious to all magical attempts to divine what might lie inside, as well as attempts to use translation within it. The outer ramparts are said to be infested with a hive of ancient **soul sorcerers** who hope to one day find a route to the innermost chambers. Supposedly, one of the princes in **Marhaban** sent a party of salvagers to the Hall a little more than a decade ago, only to discover the right hands of the group members piled on his bedroom floor a few days later. One story describes how the Betrayer briefly gained entry to the Hall years ago, and his attempt to claim the power of the Maker nearly brought down the walls of Ardeyn as hordes of **kray** from the Strange threatened to consume every living thing in the recursion.

No credible accounts of the Hall's interior exist, and tales from occasional survivors vary widely in regard to layout and architecture. Most people agree that soul sorcerers do infest the entryway, though many say they're not living, but truly dead. That doesn't make the sorcerers any less jealous of other explorers—only more vengeful.

### Hall soul sorcerer:

*level 5; long-range spell attack inflicts 5 points of damage plus a curse on a failed Might defense roll (the difficulty of tasks attempted by cursed foes is increased by one step for one minute); some carry random cyphers*

*Marhaban, page 174*

*Kray, page 276*



## IMAGES THROUGH THE GLASS

**Red Bubble:** Part of the ruins of an ancient qephilim city buried under molten glass when the desert formed, the Red Bubble is one of the most mysterious sites in the Glass Desert. The upper reaches of the ruin—slender, blackened towers—are visible to those who look directly down while passing overhead. The center of the encased area is stained translucent red, though movement within it is sometimes visible. At night, radiance occasionally leaks from the bubble up through the glass and shines on the surface. When this happens, unearthly music is also audible.

**Glass Desert Dragon Bounty:** The **Queendom** has posted a bounty for the Glass Desert dragon (either alive or as a carcass) to “permanently curtail its incessant raiding of Queendom shipping in southern Oceanus.” The posting promises to pay 2,000 gold crowns and doesn’t acknowledge the idea that there might be more than one such dragon. A group of **Black Moon explorers** led by Syrengarii is already hunting the desert, so if another group takes on the bounty, they will have competition.

**Artifact of Note:** A character learns that an artifact she has newly acquired (or perhaps long held) was at one point a much more powerful item. It could potentially be restored to its original state if brought to the Maker’s Hall and allowed to bathe in the fires of the Creation Forge once more—or so an oddly realistic dream leads the character to believe.

## ARDEYN ARTIFACTS

### GLASS SHIP BLADE

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** A metallic blade at least 20 feet (6 m) long with mounting screws (usually found attached to the underside of craft suited to skating across the Glass Desert)

**Effect:** Glass ship blades vary in length, but the longer the blade, the larger the weight of a mounted platform that it can magically stabilize and hold upright. On a suitably hard and smooth surface (such as ice or the mirrorlike surface of the Glass Desert), the blade promotes travel and provides a bit of additional impetus if propelled by wind or other forms of locomotion. Using the blade in this fashion doesn’t require a depletion roll.

A glass ship blade can be keyed to a single individual—usually the person designated as the captain, if mounted to a ship. The captain can activate the blade (which requires a depletion roll) to coax a sudden acceleration out of it for up to ten minutes, useful for ramming enemy vessels or for moving a ship on windless days.

**Depletion:** 1–3 in 1d100

### PLUTONIAN IRON KNIFE

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** A night-black blade in which distant stars and nebulae are sometimes visible

**Effect:** This knife functions as a normal light weapon. However, if the wielder wishes, on a successful attack the special qualities of the knife inflict additional damage (ignores Armor) equal to the artifact’s level. If this damage reduces a target to 0 health, the target’s soul is drawn into the blade. The soul remains trapped there for up to three days, after which time it is consumed. (Alternatively, the wielder can release the soul to whatever its fate would otherwise be.)

As a separate activation, the wielder can ask three questions of a creature whose soul is trapped in the blade and not yet consumed. After answering the third question, the soul is consumed.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### SILVER SWORD

**Level:** 1d6 + 4

**Form:** A radiant talwar (large scimitar) forged from reflective metal

**Effect:** This weapon functions as a normal heavy weapon; however, attacks with it are modified by one step to the wielder’s benefit (which doesn’t require a depletion roll).



*Queendom, page 166*



*Black Moon explorers, page 167*

*Plutonian iron is mined from underworlds in recursions that operate under the law of Magic. It has inherent antilife qualities even as an ore, which predisposes artificers to craft life-queenching weapons from it.*

*Glass ship blades are rare and quite valuable because no one knows how to make them. The ones that currently exist have been quarried from a qephilim ruin, and no one is sure of their original purpose.*

The Silver Sword possesses the following supernatural functions, which do require a roll when activated.

**Sever Glass:** The weapon can cut through glass (and other amorphous solids, such as amber) as easily as scissors cut through paper for up to one minute per activation.

**Sever Stranger:** A level 3 demon, spirit, inimical Stranger, or similar creature struck by the weapon is destroyed or banished. Each additional depletion roll risked per activation increases the maximum level of the target. Thus, to destroy or banish a level 5 target (two levels above the normal limit), the wielder must roll for depletion three times.

**Splice Recursion:** If the wielder uses Sever Glass to create a circle in the Glass Desert at least 100 feet (30 m) in diameter and then calls on this ability, that section of glass is dropped into a closed pocket dimension, and a section of lush forest or grassland (taken from a random recursion) appears in its place. Creatures inside the circle when it is completed are shunted to the pocket dimension.

**Renewal:** If the artifact is depleted, it disappears. However, it reappears nine years later as a reflection in the Glass Desert's surface, which a viewer can claim by grasping for it and succeeding on a difficulty 3 Intellect-based task.

**Depletion:** 1–2 in 1d100

### SPELLBOOK OF THE DRAGON'S MAW

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** A tome inscribed with a rearing dragon

**Effect:** When the user incants from the spellbook, he fashions and controls a “hovering” phantasmal construct of magic within long range that resembles a dragon's head. The construct's level is equal to the artifact's level. The construct lasts for up to an hour, until it is destroyed, or until the user incants from this spellbook again. While the construct persists, the spellcaster can use it to manipulate large objects, carry heavy items in its mouth, or attack foes. To use it to attack foes, the spellcaster must spend his action directly controlling the phantom maw for each attack. Action to initiate.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### SPELLBOOK OF GLASS

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** A thin tome bound with plates of warm glass

**Effect:** When the user incants from the spellbook, she creates a level 6 wall of glass within short range that is 1 foot (30 cm) thick and up to 20 feet by 20 feet (6 m by 6 m) in size. It appears resting on a solid foundation and lasts for about ten hours. If the incanter risks a second depletion roll, the glass wall is permanent until destroyed naturally. Action to initiate.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

*A Stranger is the term for any creature native to the Strange, rather than Earth or a recursion.*



Spellbook artifacts could produce additional related effects if the GM allows. For example, the spellbook of searing light might also temporarily blind a foe.

If a character has the *Inks Spells on Skin* focus, the GM may allow her to learn a new spell from an artifact spellbook. The GM and player must work out the specifics of the spell.

*Inks Spells on Skin*, page 200

**S** Zal, page 194  
Ruk, page 190  
*All Song communal*, page 198

**S** *Shoals of Earth*, page 214

## SPELLBOOK OF SEARING LIGHT

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** A slender book bound with a white cover that glows dimly

**Effect:** When the user incants from the spellbook, she collects available light into a beam of searing light focused on a location she can see within long range. The beam persists each round in which she uses her action to concentrate. The beam can set fire to flammable objects, boil water within a few rounds, melt some metals after a few more rounds of concentrated attention, or attack a creature within range (dealing damage equal to the artifact level, plus an additional 3 points if the user is standing in full daylight when making the attack). The spell doesn't work in full darkness.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

## RUK: EARTHBORN WANTED

As described in the corebook, *Ruk* is a recursion where the marvels of science fiction are commonplace, especially those of genetic manipulation, biological shaping, and technological wonder. Though Rukians look humanoid, they are not human—they are aliens who fled the destruction of their homeworld through the *Strange*, until they finally “ran aground” in the *Shoals of Earth*. In effect, their entire recursion is a shipwreck caught fast thanks to the inexplicable properties of Earth. Ruk's warring factions, powerful and ancient, strive against each other as they always have. Lately, their strife has come to a head, and Earth's fate hangs in the balance.

This section expands on a couple of important initiatives in Ruk by factions that

prefer to recruit Earth natives for specific tasks. Why? Because Earthborn are better suited for specialized activities involving a location in Harmonious known as the Scar, and in operating a special vessel created by Zal known as the *Resolution*.

## EARTH RECRUITMENT CENTER

As with everything in Ruk, if a need for a service or commodity exists, a faction steps in and provides it. Lately a need for Earthborn natives to fill specialized roles has surfaced in Ruk. Sometimes a faction that wants such natives does its own recruiting. But most times, that recruitment is outsourced to a third party: Zal.

Zal is one of the many factions of Ruk, but it's the one an Earth native is most likely to find familiar because it operates in many ways like a wealthy multinational corporation. It has interests all over Ruk and in several other recursions as well. Though Zal already provides services to every Rukian (in the form of *All Song communals*), the faction is not content to rest on its laurels. It constantly seeks more profits, more influence, and more control. That's why it created the Earth Recruitment Center.

## FIRST CONTACT

Potential recruits need not be recursors; Zal has access to translation and inapposite gates for applicants who make it far enough in the interview process. Those who are not recursors (but who have the spark) can pass through a translation gate and gain many of the same benefits as a player character (such as a focus, though not a type).

**Anonymous Social Media Contact:** Zal's preferred method of contact is somewhat self-selecting. Representatives trawl social media on Earth, generating online advertisements designed to get the attention of two different kinds of individual.

The first recruit targeted is someone looking to “expand their frontiers and take a break from the everyday.” These kinds of ads use language similar to that used by the Peace Corps or the French Foreign Legion, offering a “life-defining experience serving abroad for a two-year contract that includes training, opportunities for advancement, cross-cultural understanding, and a facility with technical subjects not normally possible.”

### RUK IN THE COREBOOK

Refer to *The Strange* corebook to get a basic grounding in the recursion of Ruk. The material presented here is a supplement to the corebook. It includes a section on recruiting Earthborn, the neighborhood of the Scar in Harmonious, and the special ship called the *Resolution*.





*“The living Internet sounds fun in comparison to what the All Song is really like. Imagine you’re in the middle of a swarm of billions of insects, all of them heading right for you. Each promises to give you the thing you seek, if you’ll only let it in. Opalescent beetles against your eyeball. A furred hatch of spiders at the corner of your mouth. A marching ant colony seeking passage in your nose. And all of the unknown entities, the ones you’ve never seen—the silvered grubs, the black maggots, the torn-winged bloodmoths, the unnamed, the shadowed, the glistening, the newly hatched bodies that burrow and borrow and bite and eat.”*

*~Jules Rodriguez, Quiet Cabal agent*

The second kind of recruit sought is someone who seems prone to flights of fancy or feats of imagination, but who has strong social skills. These are the traits most likely to produce a recursor—someone who, upon

translation into a new recursion, will not break down and, in fact, will take to the new situation without extended handholding.

Once potential recruits are identified, they are either sent a “mysterious package” or contacted directly with a visitation.

**Mysterious Package:** A few companies specialize in engaging clients with an exciting narrative by using props such as letters, pamphlets, and other associated objects. The idea is to provide an enhanced sense of the reality of the story. One of those companies is run by Zal. The mysterious package actually contains elements of truth. The letter tells a story of aliens who live in a “shadow dimension” alongside Earth, aliens who need help from Earthborn explorers. Coordinates are provided for a local contact, and a cypher of some sort is included as proof of alien involvement. If the recipient of a package has the nerve to visit the location indicated, he is offered a contract and training.

**Visitor at the Door:** This contact scenario works similarly to the Mysterious Package option, except it is delivered in person by a Zal agent or two who initially come across as concerned government agents or proselytizers of an evangelical affiliation.



Tilman-har, sales associate: level 3, all tasks related to molecular, cellular, and biological research as level 4

For more details about Whole Body Grafts, see The Dark Spiral, page 67



Myriand, page 198

## RECRUIT TRAINING MISSIONS

**Graft Courier:** A package containing highly valuable genetic material must be delivered to a man named **Tilman-har** working in Semerimis Tower. The tower hosts a business called Whole Body Grafts, which offers Rukians a range of decorative and useful body modifications. Part of the training mission involves finding Semerimis Tower in Harmonious and delivering the package. Recruits are also evaluated on whether they can resist the hard sell that Tilman-har provides in return, especially because they have no bits, so they must go into debt to pay for any modifications they receive.

**Brain Excavation:** A series of crimes in Harmonious leaves citizens dead, their brains missing. **Myriand** (the Ruk “police” force) have had no luck locating the group, which probably means they are operating without using the All Song. Finding the perpetrators will require pure physical detective work.

**Faction De-escalation:** Two minor factions are fighting it out in Harmonious. It’s something of a nuisance, but worse for those caught in the crossfire. Someone needs to go in and create a peace, one way or the other. Guiding the Myriand to the faction leaders would be another way to end the fighting (because the Myriand would likely wipe out both groups).

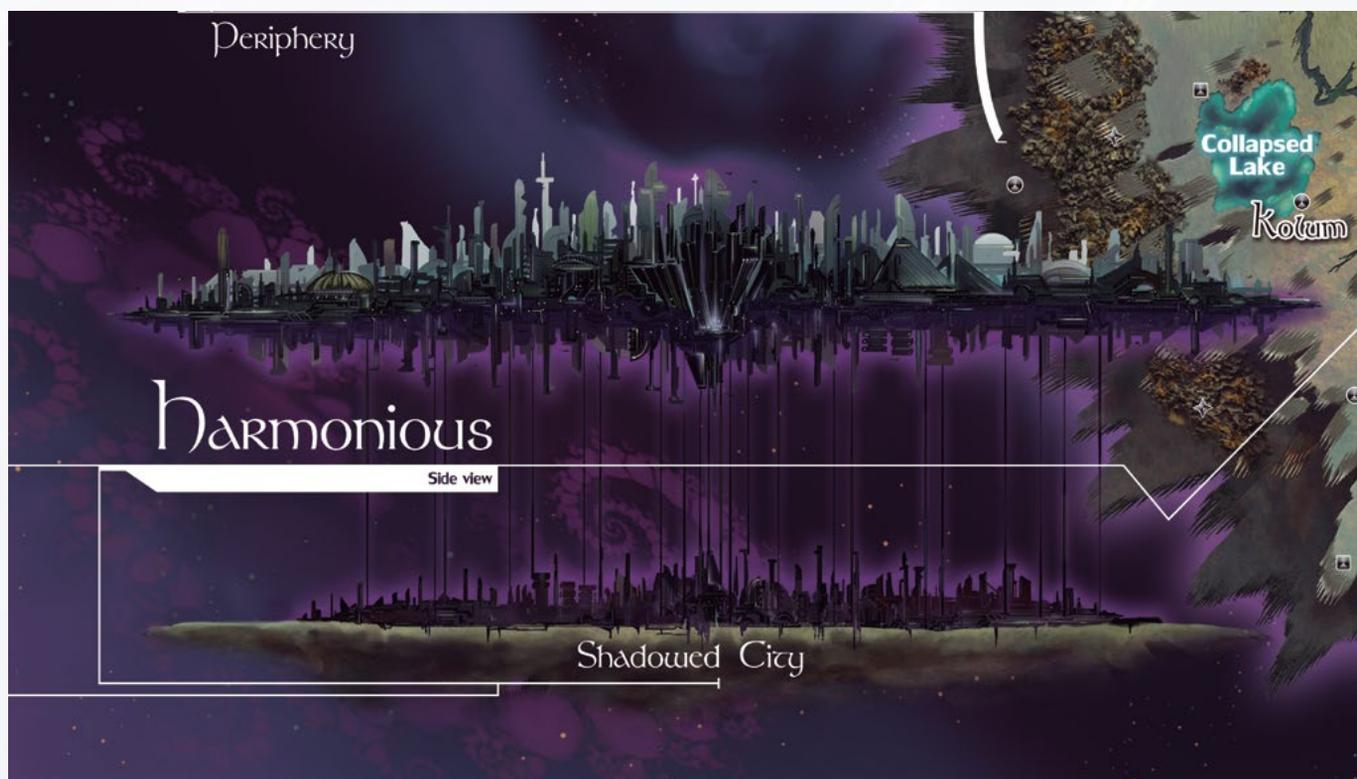
## RUK TRAINING FOR EARTHBOEN

A few who respond to outreach on Earth are brought to Ruk, where the reality of the Strange, Ruk’s place in it, and the concept of recursions is explained and a training period is offered. Those who react negatively, who can’t handle using the All Song, who break down, or who refuse the offer are returned to Earth, but not before a memory-dissolving enzyme introduced

into the bloodstream erases the experience.

Those who accept training are assigned a few missions in or around Ruk. The missions are usually directly by Zal, though sometimes representatives contract out this portion of the training (possibly to one of the other factions seeking Earthborn in the first place).

The training missions are relatively short. They’re designed as a test and as a way





to familiarize the trainee with potentially dangerous and exotic situations.

An important part of a training mission is to assess how well a recursor reacts to using the *All Song*. Some Earthborn react violently to it, so much so that they are actually injured by the experience. Those with the wrong disposition who fail a difficulty 5 Intellect roll don't discover what they were looking for and descend one step on the damage track.

If the training is a success, or close enough, the trainee is sent to one of several factions looking for Earthborn (including the Quiet Cabal or the Karum), to the Geshimmar who are attempting to understand and eradicate the Scar, or to Captain Melana-shem of the *Resolution*.

### THE SCAR: A HARMONIOUS DISTRICT

Even the city of *Harmonious*, with all its amazing technology capable of literally lifting the natives to new heights, has a slum. Known as the Scar, this wide and unsightly district blights the edge of *Harmonious*. From a distance, the Scar appears like a bite chewed

from the city's disc. But not a clean one; straggling spars and splintered structures protrude and dangle everywhere, and much of what was once part of the Glistening City proper has smashed down onto the *Shadowed City* beneath *Ruk*, forming towerlike heaps of destruction that also bridge the two cities into one continuous vertical arc of desolation, albeit one that is inhabited.

Living in *Harmonious* requires a citizen to be in good standing with a faction. That's not true in the Scar. The regular *All Song* does not penetrate it, and *Myriand* do not patrol it. Even organized black marketeers out of *Shome* that operate in the *Shadowed City* have mostly failed to find lasting influence or purchase in the Scar. It's a region of disorganized spar growth, gangs of the truly desperate, the dregs of destroyed factions, and, just perhaps, the nucleus of new ones.

*Shadowed City*,  
page 202

*All Song*, page 192

*Shome*, page 205

*Harmonious*, page 196

## SCAR ORIGIN

The Scar was created almost a thousand years ago in a massive explosion. Because the incident happened so long ago, most Rukians don't know what created the slum—to them, it's just a place most people avoid. Querying the All Song provides few additional details, which is odd in itself. It's almost as if all the easily accessible knowledge regarding the Scar has been excised from the network. Those who press deeper discover that the All Song that pervades the Scar is twisted, damaged, and prone to driving those who connect to it mad.

All that anyone really knows about the Scar comes from word of mouth, which implies that the area was created by some sort of collision—though a collision with what, the All Song does not record.



*Organimer, page 194*

**Scar GM Intrusions:** *The floor gives way. The ceiling collapses. All Song static rends minds (Rukians are especially vulnerable). Vat rejects attack. Spars animate and pummel intruders.*



## THE SCAR NEEDS EARTHBOURN

Actually, it's not the Scar that needs Earthborn so much as the Geshimmar does. The Geshimmar is a small faction that presents itself as the group best suited to cleaning up the Scar because of its multifaceted approach. Geshimmar tactics stand on two pillars: research and exploration.

Research is handled by top-notch faction bioengineers working to determine why the All Song is so corrupted when accessed within the Scar, why the *organimer* spars that should initiate self-repair do not, and what collided with Harmonious to create the Scar in the first place.

Exploration is handled, in large part, by Earthborn, who are recruited mainly because humans are naturally repelled by the All Song. Even when they translate, they don't share the low-level natural connection that native Rukians possess. Thus, an Earthborn who spends a lot of time in the Scar isn't slowly driven barking mad by seclusion from the All Song.

## SCAR LANDSCAPE

Much of the Scar is a sloping, metallic and synthetic dystopia of splintered spars and half-revealed chambers, broken towers, smashed buildings, and less-identifiable bits. The interior of the Scar extends almost a thousand feet, with tunnels, tubes, and chambers that share many of the traits of the exterior. Several direct connections hold the heaped towers, whose foundations lie in the Shadowed City below, to the portion hosted by floating Harmonious. The quasi-living metal organimer that Harmonious is built from often and unaccountably loses its residual programming in the Scar, creating strange patches of vegetation not seen in other parts of Ruk. Sometimes a gaping component squirts odiferous gasses with odd properties, and other times sections spark, arc with odd energies, or move about.

The Scar offers many distinct dangers to travelers who trawl its broken roads looking for the occasional cypher or hidden truth. The one constant danger that everyone in the Scar faces every day is the potential for a fall from the heights of the Glistening City, a fall precipitously ended several hundred feet farther down. Most such falls are lethal.

**Silver Strands:** Scar explorers occasionally find odd loops of silvery material emerging from the detritus. Called silver strands, these 100-foot (10 m) long cords feel more plastic than metallic, are warm to the touch, and give the sense that some sort of liquid is moving within. If these level 5 objects are cut open, milky fluid spills out. It smells strongly of oily fish, an odor that draws hungry foragers to lap at the apparently nutritious fluid, including desperate vat rejects. (The liquid is akin to a very nutritious but highly alcoholic rotting-fish puree.)

**Vat Rejects:** Venom troopers, commonly cloned entities in Ruk, are mass produced. When that production goes wrong, **vat rejects** are born. Most are destroyed, but some escape and make their way to the Scar. Though their warped forms mean that they are constantly in pain, vat rejects in the Scar try to make a community of their own, so they do not welcome death in the same way that vat rejects with no other options seem to do. That said, they are unstable almost by definition, and explorers who come across a colony of vat rejects in the Scar should tread lightly.

**Chaotic Spar Groves:** The ubiquitous, semi-living spars visible in other parts of Ruk are especially obvious in the Scar because few have repaired themselves, and several sections have given rise to tiny jungles of crazy foliage—reeds, grass, trees, and oddly glowing fruits composed of spar organimer. Sometimes these groves produce what seem to be All Song umbilical connections. No Geshimmar agent or Earthborn recruit in their employ has dared to try one of these connections to see what happens.

**Nucleus:** Within the deepest tangle of the Scar is a conclave of entities that few in Ruk have ever laid eyes on. Called **crucibles**, these odd creatures seem to lie along the continuum between inert matter and living tissue. They are composed of polymers and alloys seamlessly fused with flesh and pumping blood. Apparently intelligent and definitely dangerous, a crucible has the ability to absorb organic and inorganic material to repair itself or adapt to new situations. It's entirely possible that these crucibles (or a single, founding crucible that gave rise to others) are the entities that crashed into Harmonious and lodged there, creating the Scar. Since they are not native to Ruk, they likely

## RESTORATIONS IN THE SCAR

**Lost Children:** Youths in Ruk are always getting into trouble. They're too young to join a faction in full standing and too old to remain entertained by full-time immersion in the All Song. A group of seven kids has recently gone missing, and it seems likely that they entered the Scar. The question is, are they dead, or are they the prisoners of vat rejects, maddened criminals, or something worse?

**Karum Dissidents in Hiding:** A breakaway subfaction of the Karum has kidnapped **Arbiter Maru-shtal**, the head of the Factol Council that regulates Ruk. The dissidents retreated to the Scar. Maru-shtal's only chance is a rescue because the other factions will never give in to the dissidents' demands to blast Earth to cinders within the week.

**The Pod:** A recent explorer of the Scar returned with a crystal sphere a little less than 1 foot (30 cm) in diameter. Inside, it alternatively appears to be empty, to be filled with red fluid, or to contain the replica of a human head made of silvery metal. Whenever this last image appears, whoever is closest to the pod disappears, along with the image of the head. The **Church of the Embodiment** currently has the pod but is looking for someone to take it off their hands and, if possible, locate those previously abducted (presumably to a location within the Scar).

have an origin somewhere out in the Strange, or possibly from a highly radical recursion where Mad Science operates.

## THE RESOLUTION

As has been mentioned, Zal has numerous interests, supporting several dozen disparate projects simultaneously. One of those is the manufacture and construction of the *Resolution*.

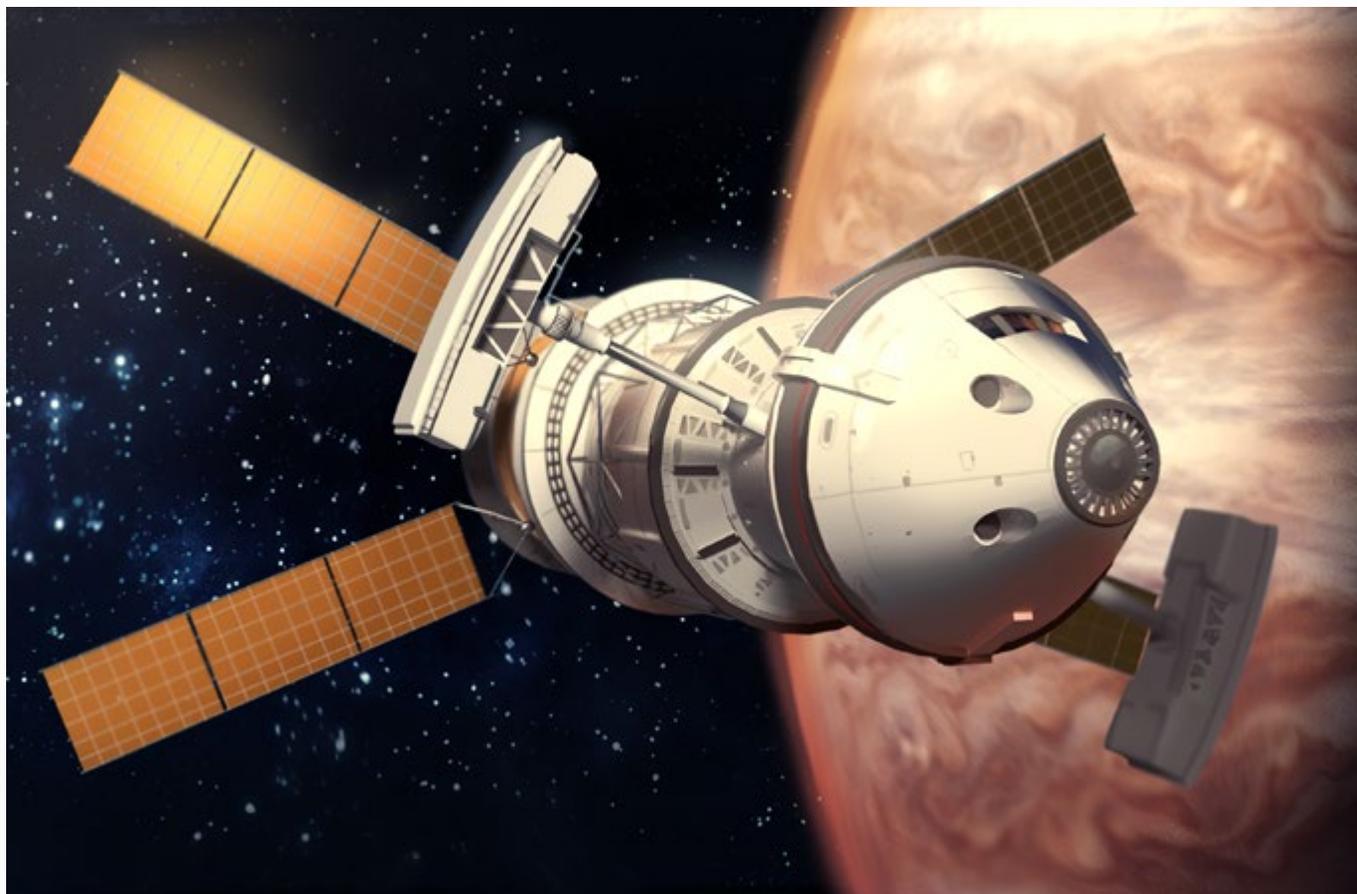
The *Resolution* is a strancraft—a ship capable of traveling through the Strange itself—recently constructed on the periphery

**Scar vat reject:** level 3, or level 5 for one minute after sipping milky fluid from silver strand

**Arbiter Maru-shtal and the Factol Council,** page 196

**Church of the Embodiment,** page 197

**Crucible:** level 5, Speed defense as level 2, knowledge of recursions and the Strange as level 8; teleport a short distance every other round as a move; short-range attack with tendrils; absorb matter to regain 5 points of health; for more details, see The Strange Bestiary, page 34



- S *Jir*, page 206
- Reality seed*, page 138
- Qinod Singularity*, page 208

*Captain Melana-shem*, page 31

**The Resolution:** level 8

**Resolution crew member:** level 3, starship operation tasks as level 5; short-range "taser" pistol attack inflicts 4 points of damage

of Ruk in the city of *Jir*. The *Resolution's* stated mission is to travel into the Strange to gather reality seeds. Zal has previously financed such expeditions, though never with a ship so large and well outfitted. A skeleton crew of Rukians has been assigned to the craft, but the ship's captain, *Melana-shem*, still hasn't filled the roster to her liking because the *Resolution's* actual mission is secret.

### THE RESOLUTION'S REAL MISSION

The *Resolution* has basic facilities to traverse the Strange and mine reality seeds, but that's just a cover. Though the ship and its systems were manufactured using Ruk's state-of-the-art Mad Science technology, the resulting craft can operate solely in conditions of Standard Physics, if necessary. That's because the real mission of the *Resolution* is to conduct operations not only in the Strange but also in the universe of normal matter, in and around the Sol system that hosts the planet Earth.

Why is the *Resolution* secretly outfitted to operate in normal space? Because Zal technology has detected a disturbance there that

is frighteningly similar to the kinds of radiation the *Qinod Singularity* gives off. If whatever mysterious entity behind the manifestation of the *Qinod Singularity* in Ruk is becoming active in the realm of normal matter, Earth (as well as all the recursions in the Shoals of Earth, including Ruk) could be in terrible danger.

### EARTHBORN CREW ARE CRITICAL

Captain *Melana-shem* believes that Earthborn crew members are crucial because the abilities of many Rukians are best suited for Mad Science. It just won't do, she believes, to have most of her crew operating at reduced capacity if the *Resolution* makes the inapposite transition to normal space. Earthborn crew won't suffer from such a deficiency.

### ABOARD THE RESOLUTION

The spacecraft *Resolution* is massive, sized to accommodate a crew of several hundred people on expeditions lasting months or longer. The ship includes a bridge, quarters, engineering, stasis chambers, a power core, and engines capable of functioning both in the Strange and

in normal space. Each crew member is also issued a *lifesuit*.

**Power Section:** The antimatter collected and contained within the magnetic vessel in the power section is a few orders of magnitude more plentiful than what could have been easily collected in normal space under the law of Standard Physics. That's why the *Resolution* didn't collect it there—the ship manufactured the antimatter using Mad Science methods of Ruk and created a containment vessel strong enough to hold it. There is enough antimatter to power the ship for several years without refueling. The power section requires a small team of technicians, which is headed up by an Earthborn, *Leslie Matthews*, who was a theoretical physics post-grad with dim prospects until she was offered a position aboard the *Resolution*. Leslie is not quickened, but she knows her way around antimatter.

**Engines:** The engines that power the ship provide propulsion and a secret method of transitioning between the recursion of Ruk and the universe of normal matter.

The propulsion method, “beamed core antimatter,” allows the *Resolution* to thrust rapidly through the universe of normal matter as well as the chaotic surge of the Strange (and, should it ever prove necessary, above the disc of Ruk).

Of more concern is the mechanism that allows the ship and her crew to transfer between Ruk and normal space. Special gantries in Ruk (in the city of Jir) are fitted with inapposite hardware to “cast” the ship into normal space at a predetermined location orbiting Earth's moon. Matching hardware on the ship—great rings that encircle the vessel—can be used to drag it back to Ruk.

The engines are tended by a team of technicians under the leadership of a dour Scot *chief engineer* recruited from a recursion where he was famous for being able to handle anything thrown at him when it came to starship systems, especially engines.

**Stasis Chambers:** The stasis chambers aboard the *Resolution* are essentially empty pods just large enough to accommodate one occupant. The pods are scattered about the ship. Most don't have associated stasis equipment because crew members are assigned *stasis rings* that provide emergency “life support” in dangerous

circumstances, as well as individual control over stasis when a person is assigned a “static shift” in a stasis chamber.

**Bridge:** Captain Melana-shem can usually be found on the bridge with Weapons Officer Brian Mason. *Melana-shem* is an Apoptosis-class battle chrysalid modified to function entirely under the law of Standard Physics (which degrades her abilities by a few levels). Thanks to her onboard systems and because most *Resolution* systems are computerized, she



*Lifesuit*, page 93

**Captain Melana-shem, Apoptosis chrysalid:** level 6; health 45; Armor 1; long-range radiation attack inflicts 6 points of damage on all targets within immediate range of each other; two melee attacks as one action each inflict 6 points of damage; regains 1 point of health per round

**Leslie Matthews:** level 3, knowledge tasks related to physics and antimatter containment as level 7

**Chief Engineer:** level 4, tasks related to engineering and beamed core antimatter systems as level 7; long-range directed energy pistol attack inflicts 5 points of damage

*Stasis ring*, page 33



*Endeavor*, page 228

*Apotheme Rangers*, page 224

*Rogue Star*, page 229

*Fundament*, page 214

*Karum*, page 200

*Qinod deconstructor*, page 287

*The Scar*, page 27

**Mytocyctic pool:** level 10, Speed defense as level 3; health 120; long-range melee pseudopod attack inflicts 10 points of damage; for more details, see *The Strange Bestiary*, page 90



## RESOLUTION MISSIONS

**Recover the *Endeavor* (Strange):** *Endeavor*, a Rukian craft sent out to explore the Strange, disappeared with all hands three hundred years ago. *Apotheme Rangers* recently found it adrift with no crew, but with hundreds of ghost-white oblong spheres of unknown origin filling its hold. The *Resolution* has been tasked with checking out *Endeavor* to determine the true nature of the spheres and, if possible, tow the recovered vessel back to Ruk.

**Rendezvous with the Rogue Star (Strange):** A mysterious object called the *Rogue Star* blazes through the Strange, leaving behind a trail of torn fractal patterns and shattered *fundament*. According to a warning delivered by Strange explorers, it's heading directly for Ruk. The *Resolution* needs to reach and intercept the object however it can.

**Patrol the Scar (Ruk):** The region of Harmonious called the *Scar* is dead to the normal All Song. Recently, that dead zone has begun creeping outward into other parts of Harmonious, and no one knows why. Several factions are scrambling to investigate and deal with the situation, including a team of Earthborn assigned to the Scar by the Geshimmar faction, but the *Resolution* is also called on to assist.

**Eradicate Mytocyctic Pool (Ruk):** Ruk has been plagued with the occasional appearance of seepage from bandit genetic labs that sometimes gains sentience. These *mytocyctic pools* can birth twisted parodies of life that go on to become scourges all their own. The pools are difficult to destroy, given their mutable properties and their ability to birth a variety of defenders that adjust to meet the threat. The *Resolution's* weapon systems might be enough to take one out if away teams can distract it first.

**Karum Mutiny (Resolution):** A selection of the crew brought aboard during the last rotation in Ruk are actually *Karum* members who replaced the real crew using level 6 Rukian technology to disguise their appearance. At some point (probably while the ship is on another mission), they begin their operation to

wrest control of the *Resolution* from Zal hands and deliver it to the Karum. It'll take Earthborn to stop the mutiny, given the number of Rukians who are now in the employ of the Karum. (The mutineers' disguise tech fails over the course of a few hours after the ship transitions to normal Earth space.)

**Save the ISS Astronauts (Earth space):** A toxic ammonia leak requires an emergency evacuation of the International Space Station. Six crew members in the US section of the station took refuge in the Russian section, but the leak is pervasive and fast becoming untenable. Unfortunately, one of the pair of Soyuz lifeboats normally attached to the station is defective, and only three astronauts were able to flee. Unless a miracle occurs, the three remaining astronauts will perish, and the ISS will likely burn up. The *Resolution* could provide aid. But can it do so without revealing the nature of its existence to those it saves?

**Intercept the Giant Asteroid (Earth space):** According to NASA scientists, Earth will be safe from the giant asteroid Apophis when it flies extremely close to our planet in 2029, and then returns for seconds in 2036. In reality, finer-scale calculations show that the asteroid will indeed impact the Earth, with devastating consequences. Earth governments have chosen to keep that a secret while they try to come up with a plan. When the *Resolution* isn't busy with more urgent missions, it is directed to divert the asteroid.

**Qinod Eruption (Earth space):** Sensors reveal a growing source of radiation in orbit around Jupiter, though one that is not associated with any of the planet's moons. This is the reason the *Resolution* was built! Upon receiving these readings, the captain sends the ship toward Jupiter at full speed (with an acceleration of 0.5 G for the first half of the trip and a deceleration of 0.5 G for the second half). As the ship approaches, sensors reveal several small objects orbiting in space, each 20 feet (6 m) in diameter, that look frighteningly like *Qinod deconstructors*. However, unlike their namesake, they are building something strange.



doesn't need a large complement of officers to help her guide the ship, deploy sensors, or direct the course, though she does rely on Mason if they come under threat. Her Zal superiors believe that she is well suited to holding the leash of command, but those under her do not love her ways. Other Rukians on the ship believe that she coddles the Earthborn. For their part, Earthborn crew members often find her cynical, strict, and given to playing games instead of saying what she means. And, of course, the mere sight of her is unsettling to Earthborn. But Melana-shem is just being Rukian. She puts nothing before the success of the *Resolution* and its mission.

## RUK ARTIFACTS

All artifacts described below operate under the laws of Standard Physics and Mad Science.

### AR GLASSES

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Stylish glasses with tinted lenses

**Effect:** The wearer can adjust the tint from slight to dark enough to stare into the heart of a star without sustaining eye damage. In addition, the wearer can receive help on knowledge-based tasks (including repair or infiltration tasks that require special knowledge) by someone else wearing AR glasses who is on the same network. Some AR glasses come programmed with computer animation aids on a limited selection of topics (such as starship operation tasks, for instance) that can also provide assistance even without a paired helper on the same network.

**Depletion:** — (Requires daily charging to operate.)

### CHARGE GUN

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Handheld device with several extended metallic prongs

**Effect:** The wielder targets a device in long range that runs on an electrical charge, and the device is repowered in whole or in part.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### NANO DRONE

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Flying device small enough to fit in a pocket

**Effect:** A nano drone can be keyed to one or more uses by the application of the correct passphrase (or a hardware hacking success). The drone provides aid in the form of knowledge (voice activated), surveillance, communication with other users of nano drones, and offense (once every other round, it can fire a short-range maser beam that inflicts damage equal to its level).

**Depletion:** — (The drone must be recharged every few days, either manually or with a charge gun.)

### STASIS RING

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Thick ring with a control dial and contact surface

**Effect:** The wearer can adjust the ring from one to six settings, corresponding to one minute, one hour, ten hours, one hundred hours, 1,000 hours (a bit longer than a month), and 10,000 hours (a bit longer than an Earth year). If the contact surface is depressed, the wearer goes into stasis for the amount of time set on the ring. While in stasis, the wearer can take no actions, doesn't age, and gains +10 to Armor against all forms of damage, even kinds not normally reduced by Armor. If a wearer in stasis takes enough damage to get through his Armor, the stasis effect immediately ends.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### TATTOO GRAFT

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Injection

**Effect:** When injected under the skin, organic nanomachines able to stimulate and adjust skin cells give the semblance of inked tattoos of various designs. Each tattoo graft comes with a static template, but a user can concentrate on the tattoos and, over the course of one minute, create any design on her skin she can imagine. She can also animate a design or make a tattoo visible only under certain wavelengths. Each design change requires a depletion roll. Finally, she can cause a tattoo to emit light, and if the design is concentrated enough, it can emit light in a bright beam reaching a short distance.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d100

*The "AR" in AR glasses stands for "augmented reality."*



## CHAPTER 5

## RECURSIONS



*“Over the years, a few misfiled reports led normal Royal Geographical Society members to deem one or two of their previously celebrated explorers to be guilty of penning reams of delirious writing. In fact, these were nothing more than real reports meant for the Implausible archives, but which were unaccountably placed in the normal archives. It’s possible that the misfiling was done purposefully by another member either as a joke or as a means to discredit the report writer. More likely, the report writer may have felt that his discoveries merited wider attention. Either way, stories of Atlantis, fantastical craft flying through the luminiferous aether of space, hidden lodges, real magic, and realms where myths walked as living, breathing entities did nothing positive for the reputation of these authors. Most later rescinded their papers or, in the case of Fawcett, disappeared altogether.”*

*~Sir Raymond Creswicke,  
in a letter to his paramour Irene in the constructed recursion of Paradiso*



*Atom Nocturne,  
page 234*

*Cataclyst, page 238*

*Crow Hollow, page 242*

*Oz, page 253*

*Wonderland, page 253*

*Ardeyn, page 160*

*Ruk, page 190*

*Homebound, page 251*

Fictional leakage created the vast majority of recursions, including Atom Nocturne, Cataclyst, Crow Hollow, Oz, Wonderland, and other locations described in *The Strange* corebook.

A few recursions were purposefully created (or purposefully modified), including Ardeyn, Ruk, Homebound, and others. Regardless of how they came to be, over time these recursions have matured into places that are quite real. Each recursion has its own laws of Mad Science, Magic, or something odder still, which means that amazing things can occur in a recursion that could never happen on Earth.

*The Strange* corebook describes several recursions with enough detail to run one or more encounters (or entire adventures)

in each. *Worlds Numberless and Strange* greatly expands the number of recursions for characters to explore.

## RECURSION ATTRIBUTES

Every recursion has associated attributes, which are the summary of its basic conditions. A recursion’s attributes include its level, the laws that operate within it, the foci available to first-time player characters, and so on. This section describes the most common attributes and their relevance.

### LEVEL

A recursion’s level determines how difficult it is to translate there. Certain locations within

a recursion might be more difficult (or less difficult) to translate into. Unless specified otherwise, a recursion's level is also associated with its materials, inhabitants, and other attributes.

## LAWS

A recursion's laws broadly determine the kinds of rules that exist there. Without certain laws to support them, a given recursion can't host related kinds of foci, effects, and inhabitants. For example, without the Magic law, *Seishin Shore* couldn't support its Names focus. Most recursions operate under one law (because the more extreme laws assume an underlying baseline of Standard Physics), but a recursion could have more than one.

Laws include the following.

**Standard Physics:** Most recursions operate under this baseline law, as does Earth. Science is the route to understanding and knowledge in these recursions. Unless noted otherwise, Standard Physics is also supported as a baseline in recursions that operate under more extreme laws.

**Magic:** Recursions that operate under the law of Magic allow residents to create a wide variety of sorcerous effects through spellcasting, true names, sympathetic magic, voodoo, witchcraft, and so on. Different recursions usually support different styles, traditions, and rules of magic, but the underlying Magic law is what makes them all possible.

**Mad Science:** Perfect clones, AIs, gravitons, faster-than-light drives, personal flying armored suits, and ray guns might exist in a recursion that operates under this law. As with Magic, a Mad Science recursion probably supports only a few particular superscience themes, not every possible permutation.

**Psionics:** A mental plane or similar mindspace framework in a Psionics recursion supports a raft of mental effects. A recursion with Psionics as a law might feature astral projection, psychometry, pyrokinesis, telepathy, hive minds, telekinesis, psychic surgery, aura reading, bilocation, and similar effects. As with Magic and Mad Science, a Psionics recursion usually supports only a few particular threads of psychic development according to a specified tradition of accessing mental powers, not every possible permutation.

**Substandard Physics:** In a recursion where Substandard Physics is law, many of the "miracles" of modern science fail to function, including gunpowder, artificial electricity, artificial radio, and so on. Generally speaking, a world of Substandard Physics can support technology and effects on the level of Earth's early Iron Age.

**Exotic:** The Exotic law is the catch-all category that particularly odd recursions might fall into. Usually, an Exotic recursion is one where the substance of the recursion itself is unusual—perhaps it's composed of living flesh, fire, dream, acidic slime, solid starlight, writhing worms, fairy wings, or another unexpected form. Generally speaking, a recursion lower than level 4 can't support Exotic elements.

## PLAYABLE RACES

When a recursor translates into a recursion for the first time, she might choose to be embodied in one of its races instead of her own. For example, a character traveling to *Mesozoica* could choose to be a hominid instead of a human.

## FOCI

A recursion could support one or more foci. When a PC translates into such a recursion for the first time, she might choose one of those foci instead of dragging her previous focus (if it is *draggable*). For instance, a recursor who translates to *Halloween* could choose the Trick-or-Treats focus.

*Seishin Shore*, page 131

*Mesozoica*, page 72

*Draggable foci*, page 52

*Halloween*, page 64

### FOCI FROM OTHER SOURCES

The foci described for each recursion represent only the base options available there. If the GM has a source for other foci that she decides are appropriately themed (such as other foci from the corebook, from *In Translation: The Strange Character Options*, from third-party publishers, or adapted from the *Numenera* corebook and *Numenera Character Options*), she should feel free to allow them in a given recursion on a case-by-case basis.



## SKILLS

Recursion natives without the spark probably still have some kind of culture, which means they also know one or more skills unique to the recursion. A player character who translates to the recursion usually can't pick up that skill as part of the translation (unless it's granted by a chosen focus), but any PC could choose to learn such a skill as part of normal tier advancement, if desired. Other skills are also available in a recursion as is appropriate to the context, even if not specifically called out. For instance, fishing, sailing (skyships), and library research are all skills that are available in Seishin Shore because they fit the recursion's context, even though they are not described in this book.

## CONNECTION TO THE STRANGE

Most recursions can serve as gateways into the Strange. The nature of that connection is described under this attribute.

## CONNECTION TO EARTH

Even though every recursion is hosted by the Strange, it must also be connected to a prime world somehow. The nature of that connection to the local prime world (in most cases, Earth) is described under this attribute.

## SIZE

All recursions, no matter how small or big, have a shape and size. Additional explanation regarding the layout is usually found in the main entry for the recursion.

## THE SPARK

This entry indicates the percentage of recursion inhabitants who have the spark.

## TRAITS

Each recursion has one or more traits that could affect visiting recursors. For example, in a recursion with the Honorable trait, when a creature engages in a truly honorable act (as judged by the GM), the difficulty of the next task it attempts within the hour is reduced by one step, assuming that task doesn't contravene the honorable act.





# ATLANTIS



*“Now in this island of Atlantis there existed a confederation of kings, of great and marvelous power, which held sway over all the island, and over many other islands also and parts of the continent.”*

~Plato, Critias

The baryonic universe is the universe of normal matter, Earth's universe.

The story of Atlantis is one of the oldest myths. Supposedly 9,000 years before Plato first wrote of its existence, a great civilization arose on the now-lost continent. Information held by the ancient Greeks about Atlantis was said to have come from the older Egyptian civilization, which may have gleaned it from even earlier sources.

There is truth to the myth, but it has become distorted by time—and by intentional deception.

This recursion is one of glistening towers of crystal and shining metal rising above the sea. The wonders of Atlantis give rise to the heights of sophistication, power, and immortality itself.

**Arrival:** Recursors arriving in Atlantis appear in the domed merchant's city section, on a street that appears paved in gold.

## A RECURSIVE RECURSION

The being known as Darum Tal Alumust is originally from the baryonic universe, his world destroyed by planetovores of unknown name or origin. He somehow escaped into the Strange and found his way to a minor cyst in the network, where he hid for millennia.

Eventually, Alumust set up a laboratory there. He began to conduct experiments and work on scientific projects. Much to his surprise, the laws of physics—or what he thought of as physics—worked slightly differently in his new home. He created a gateway back to his original universe, only to discover that the world in closest proximity to the cyst in which he had been hiding now sported intelligent life that was in the very earliest stages of civilization.

Alumust interacted with these new beings—humans on Earth—and took some of them back to his laboratory, which by this time had become a complex of different labs. Using these subjects, he was able to engineer and create a new offshoot of humanity that was far superior in health and intelligence. He placed his creations back on Earth, planning to let them infiltrate and eventually conquer the



Adapts to Any Environment, page 54

Conducts Weird Science, page 57

Entertains, page 61

Integrates Weaponry, page 63

Leads, page 65

Operates Undercover, page 70

Practices Soul Sorcery, page 71

Processes Information, page 74

Regenerates Tissue, page 74

Wields Two Weapons at Once, page 82

Works Miracles, page 82



## ATLANTIS ATTRIBUTES

**Level:** 6

**Laws:** Magic and Mad Science

**Playable Races:** Human, Atlantean

**Foci:** Adapts to Any Environment, Conducts Weird Science, Entertains, Integrates Weaponry, Leads, Operates Undercover, Practices Soul Sorcery, Processes Information, Regenerates Tissue, Wields Two Weapons at Once, Works Miracles

**Skills:** Atlantis lore

**Connection to Strange:** Deep, deep underwater

**Connection to Earth:** At least one gate in the heart of the island

**Size:** 20,000 square miles (51,800 square km)

**Spark:** 20%

**Trait:** Intelligent. Any creature with the spark adds 1 to its Intellect Pool maximum while in the recursion. The point is lost upon leaving the recursion.



### WHAT A RECURSOR KNOWS ABOUT ATLANTIS

- Atlantis operates under the laws of Mad Science and Magic, with both high technology and sorcery for Atlanteans to command.
- The recursion is very old—perhaps one of the oldest.
- Atlantis is ruled by a being called Darum Tal Alumust, a godlike creature neither human nor Atlantean, who no one ever sees.
- Atlanteans are long-lived, beautiful humans with an affinity for science and sorcery.

growing civilizations so he could return to his proper universe and set himself up as the ruler of the young world.

However, Alumust discovered, to his dismay, that the planetovores were still out there, searching. Rather than risk drawing their attention to Earth (and thus himself), he and his creations retreated to his hiding place in the Strange. That was when things began to change. Over the next few thousand years, stories on Earth (particularly in Europe, Africa, and Asia) of these advanced people who had emerged from the west began to spread. The tale grew so that they lived on an island in what we now know to be the Atlantic Ocean, with great command of science and magic. With these wonders, they supposedly conquered much of Europe, Africa, and Asia, and perhaps even the Americas. Over time, the stories sparked by Alumust's initial intrusions on Earth created fiction that shaped his hiding place in the Strange. The cyst became a recursion as the result of fictional leakage. It gained a new name and became the Atlantis of myth—the myth Alumust had inadvertently created.

In effect, Atlantis is a recursion created by the fiction that it initially engendered. It seeded itself.

Atlantis stretches for miles in all directions, filled with salt water below and beautiful skies above. The weather is always the same, with gentle breezes blowing pink clouds above smooth, bottomless seas. Anyone who plumbs their depths far enough emerges directly into the Strange itself.

Most of the recursion is open water, but at its center lies a city of grandeur. It's less than the continent of myth and not really an island; nevertheless, when recursors speak of Atlantis, it is the city they mean. The city is made of twenty-five circular sections, from which rise towers and domes. Each section is connected to the others via golden highways, along which self-driven carriages and transports of elegant design race at high speeds. Some residents use flying craft to get from section to section, with landing pads and access hangars throughout all levels of the city.

Each section descends well below the water's surface, and most are open at the top, so they seem more like shafts that plunge down into the sea.

Unlike the inhabitants of most recursions, the people of Atlantis (both Atlantean and human) are aware of the Earth and the fact that their home is not a part of it. Most believe that Atlantis is a pocket dimension just outside Earth. They also believe that the planet remains in the state it was in about 4,000 years ago, and that Atlantis rules over Earth figuratively or literally.

### DARUM TAL ALUMUST

In Atlantis, the inhabitants see Darum Tal Alumust as a deity, referring to him as the God-King. He is the ruler of Atlantis and therefore the master of everything. As the source of all

**Darum Tal Alumust:** level 9, almost all scientific and magic lore as level 10; health 100; Armor 7 (5 against mental or ambient attacks); uses spells and devices to attack up to six targets within 1 mile as a single action; uses telepathy, mind control, and matter and energy reshaping, as well as teleportation and distance viewing (both anywhere in Atlantis)

*No one knows—and perhaps no one could ever understand—the nature of the “cyst” that Darum Tal Alumust initially found. A waystation created by the Strange’s original engineers? Some sort of service node to be used for maintenance? Whatever it was, it is now almost entirely overwritten with the recursion of Atlantis.*



*Almost everyone aware of Darum Tal Alumust's existence is afraid of him and what he might do. Many of the organizations involved in the Strange keep tabs on him, either because of his growing power or because his activities could draw the attention of planetovores. Or both. Few people know of (or would probably believe) his true ultimate goals.*

**Dajmoria:** level 5, all stealth tasks as level 6

knowledge of science and magic, he wields supreme power over time and space, matter and energy.

This is, of course, not entirely true. By Earth standards, Alumust is an alien. His natural form is that of a massive worm almost 20 feet (6 m) long, with writhing pseudopods and a rather humanlike face. Using the magical science he has perfected in Atlantis, he can take the form of a golden-skinned man about 7 feet (2 m) tall with long, flowing hair and crystalline eyes. He uses this form when he makes one of his very, very rare public appearances.

Despite what his subjects believe, Alumust is not all-knowing or all-seeing, but he spends almost all his time continually developing his power. He is virtually immortal, can reshape matter and energy, and can see and move anywhere within Atlantis whenever he wishes. This isn't enough for him, however. He strives to develop even greater weapons and defenses to achieve his goals. Put bluntly, he craves enough power that he need not fear the planetovores that drove him into the Strange in the first place. He wishes to return to the universe of his birth and establish an empire there. Very likely, this means traveling to Earth, conquering it, and using it as a place to build defenses and weapons against the beings out there who would wish to conquer it for themselves. As the seat of Alumust's potential empire, Earth would become a fortress, and all its inhabitants slaves and soldiers.

To accomplish this, however, he would have to change Earth so that it is governed by the laws of Atlantis, and that means rewriting actual reality. So his goals are lofty, to say the least.

## DAJMORIA

Dajmoria is an Atlantean who does not see Alumust as a god. She wants to overthrow him, and the only way she can see to do that is to expose him as a fallible, mortal being. She has a number of followers in her secret rebellion, the vast majority of them Atlanteans.

Although they hoard weapons and such, their rebellion will not win by force of arms, and they know it. Ultimately, they will win by exposing their enemy to the people of Atlantis, so Dajmoria and her allies scheme for a way to do that.

Dajmoria is aware of Ardeyn, Ruk, and other recursions. She hopes to find allies outside Atlantis, and she is not choosy about whether she gets help from the Estate, the Karum, or another group—she has no interest in Earth, only her home. Rumors say she has even spoken with representatives of Moriarty, but there was little assistance he could offer (so far).

What Dajmoria does not realize is that Alumust is well aware of her and her followers. In fact, he covertly supports them. He believes that conflict breeds strength, and one day he will need his people to be strong enough to fight against planetovores. There have always been secret rebellions against Alumust, and he has always secretly fostered them. Further, for his own plans to come to fruition, he will likely need far more of the residents of Atlantis to possess the spark and perhaps be quickened. He hopes to manipulate events so that while Dajmoria does not succeed in her goals, her efforts increase a general awareness among the populace, and thus begin the spreading of the spark.

## ATLANTEANS AND HUMANS

Atlantis is home to more than three million residents. About a third of these are Atlanteans, descendants of the humans that Darum Tal Alumust first brought here and modified. The other two-thirds are humans created as the recursion grew. The vast majority of residents who have the spark are Atlanteans, not humans.

Atlanteans stand 6 to 7 feet (1.8 to 2.1 m) tall. Their skin ranges from gold to dark bronze. Their hair flows long, and their faces are always beautiful. Atlanteans are extremely long-lived, some remaining in good health for almost 1,000 years. They are immune to conventional diseases.

In Atlantis, humans are clearly a lower class, although this is not an official standard. Atlanteans hold all positions and offices of power. Humans carry out all menial labor and service jobs. Despite having a high level of science and sorcery, the people of Atlantis almost never use robots or conjured servitors like demons or elementals.

## THE WONDERS OF ATLANTIS

Magic and technology coexist in a mélange of power in Atlantis. It is nearly impossible to see where one ends and the other begins. If a sorcerer levitates into the air, for example, is he doing so because of a spell or antigravity suspensors hidden in his clothing? The answer might very well be both.

People get around in flying and ground vehicles. High-speed elevators and people movers transport citizens within city sections. Many people wear ear-mounted communicators that have a range of the entire recursion, and visual communicators are often found in homes and offices.

The military and police forces of Atlantis are called the *guardians*, and they use handheld weapons (a bit like laser pistols and a bit like wands) that fire energy bolts. These same devices can create blades of energy in melee combat. The guardians wear lightweight metal weave armor.

Everything in Atlantis is ornately crafted and beautiful in form, regardless of purpose. Even

**Atlantis guardian:** level 3, perception as level 4; Armor 2; melee and long-range attacks





*Sometimes, the most valuable things that undercover Atlantean merchants bring back from Earth are ideas. Inspiration for entertainment, food, art, or technology is useful, and such things are frequently copied without most Atlanteans ever knowing the true source. Atlantis Has Talent is one of the most popular video entertainments, for example.*

a broom or a dustbin is a thing of beauty. It's a bit of a mystery where the craftspeople procure the precious metals, gemstones, and crystals they use in their work. Likely their existence is an innate part of the recursion.

## LOCATIONS IN ATLANTIS

The city is divided into twenty-five sections, most of which are residential areas, businesses, laboratories, and recreational areas.

### ALUMUST'S CITADEL

In the center of Atlantis lies a palace of gold and crystal, the home of Darum Tal Alumust. This is, by far, the largest structure in the city, taking up almost one entire section. No one other than Alumust's Trusted are permitted inside.

Alumust's Trusted are all Atlanteans, and most are at least five hundred years old. These 1,000 or so individuals are among the most knowledgeable and—in their master's opinion—trustworthy in the city. Most of them work in laboratories. Only perhaps 1 percent of the Trusted interact directly with the God-King more than once or twice during their time in the citadel.

In the innermost sanctum of the citadel is the original structure that Alumust found long ago. Both a part of the Strange and not a part of the Strange, it is a tiny node, almost suggesting that something more substantial once connected to it (or was meant to). Only Alumust is allowed in this inner sanctum, and it is where he spends the majority of his time.

The citadel has one of two permanent inapposite gates that lead to Earth. This gate leads to a hidden spot on the island of Crete.

### THE UNIVERSITY

The people of Atlantis enjoy lives of comfort, most of their needs met without effort. This freedom encourages them to spend their lives enriching their minds through knowledge. Many residents spend many, many years as students in the huge university, which encompasses an entire city section. Here, instructors teach all manner of knowledge, science, and lore. Philosophy and contemplation are highly valued as well.

### THE MERCHANT'S CITY SECTION

All types of beautiful art and crafted works, as well as technology and magic, are for sale here, as well as mundane items and food. Despite all its technology, Atlantis still uses small gold coins as currency.



*The beauty of a thing is as important to an Atlantean as the function of that thing.*

The recursion's other permanent inapposite gate to Earth is here. This one leads to the site of an ancient Mayan ruin deep in the

jungles of the Yucatan. Traders use this gate to go to Earth, sell items of great craftsmanship (not technology, for it would not function long there), and return with special foods or other items of interest. Most of the city's food is created by technology to be nutritious and delicious, but a natural piece of fruit or a loaf of bread brought back from Earth can be a wondrous thing.

Certainly, many items classified as cyphers can be found in the merchant's section, and some recursion miners travel to Atlantis just to shop in the markets.

*The two inapposite gates in Atlantis are closely controlled by the guardians, and no one is allowed to use them (in either direction) without specific sanction.*

### NEW MYTHS OF ATLANTIS

**Saboteurs!** Someone is using high explosives to destroy vital parts of the city, causing highway collapses, flooding, and other calamities. So far, dozens of residents have been killed and hundreds injured in these terrorist attacks. No one has claimed responsibility, and those in the know suspect that the saboteurs come from outside the recursion. But what's their motive?

**Stolen Legacy.** Dajmoria and her followers are ready to launch their "attack." They have learned that Alumust keeps journals to record his thoughts for posterity. If anything should happen to him, the books would be his lasting legacy. Dajmoria plans to infiltrate Alumust's citadel, steal his personal journals, and reveal his secrets to the public. But word of her

scheme has slipped out, and people in the city (some from outside Atlantis) have different opinions on whether the idea is good or bad. Destabilizing Atlantis could result in disaster. But bringing down Darum Tal Alumust—if that is indeed what would happen—might be a blessing. Or is this all just a scheme within a scheme created by the God-King himself?

**Creatures of the Deep.** Although the waters of Atlantis are traditionally peaceful, giant predatory sea creatures—some unlike anything seen since Earth's prehistoric times—have been attacking divers and craft. No one knows where they came from or why they are so aggressive. Is there a common link among those who have been attacked?

### THE CRAFTER'S CITY SECTION

This section is where the craftspeople do their work. While a flying belt or a food-producing machine might be developed, engineered, or built somewhere else, the crafter's section is where it is made beautiful. The beauty of a thing is as important to an Atlantean as the function of that thing.

**Hav Lomal's Wonders:** This location is a front for an Estate safehouse and base of operations. The lead operative is an Atlantean known as Loman Oraph, but his real name is **Thomas Sizemore**. The operatives here are under strict orders to do nothing but observe.

### THE GIFTED ONES

In one of the residential city sections is a sprawling complex of towers owned by a group of Atlantean science-sorcerers who call themselves the **Gifted Ones**. They see themselves as superior to others in the city and use their considerable powers for their own gain. In particular, they enjoy mentally subjugating humans to make them into slaves. Sometimes, the Gifted Ones use technomagic to transform these slaves into guards, beasts of burden, or other things. Though ruthless and self-serving, these science-sorcerers are loyal servants of Darum Tal Alumust and "true sons and daughters of Atlantis."

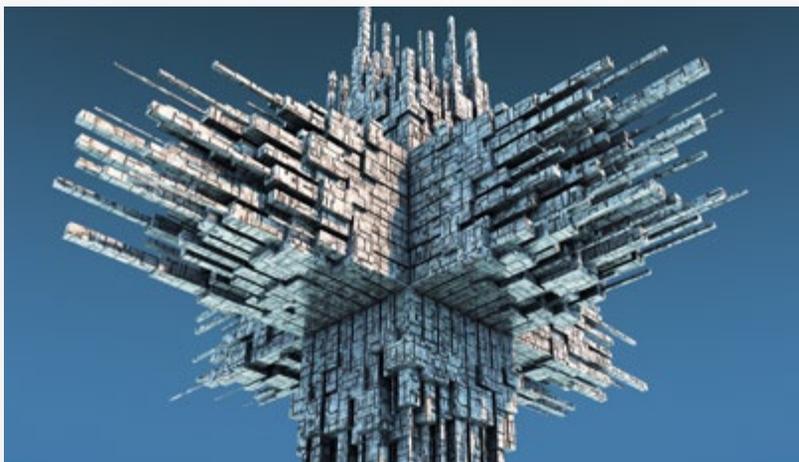
### THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL

This location is the deepest part of one of the central city sections, where a single narrow tube descends to the edge of the recursion. An elevator provides access to the Bottom of the Well; the ride down takes eight full minutes. From this small spot, exploratory craft designed by Darum Tal Alumust, capable of navigating the Strange, can be moored and launched. Alumust is wary of traveling in the Strange and would not do it himself, but there may be secrets in the dark energy network or in other recursions that can help him achieve his ultimate goals.

**Thomas Sizemore:** level 5; disguise, lying, and stealth as level 6

*Other organizations have secret bases in Atlantis, including but not limited to the Quiet Cabal, the OSR, and the Karum.*

**Typical Gifted One:** level 7, all magic- or science-related tasks as level 8; Armor 4; attack at a range of 200 feet (61 m); fly, use telepathy and mind control, very likely to have 1d6 cyphers that provide other capabilities



## ATLANTEAN ARTIFACTS

Today, the wonders of Atlantis are a fusion of magic and science woven so tightly together that they can never be separated. The devices need a healthy dose of both to function.

### DIVING SHELL

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** A belt with a single metal device that fits on the wearer's side

**Effect:** When the wearer is fully submerged in liquid, the belt creates a shell of force around her, filled with air. This shell is fairly tight around her form but allows her to breathe normally and swim underwater as easily as she can move through the air when on the surface.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d10

### GOLDEN SKIFF

**Level:** 1d6 + 3

**Form:** An open-top vehicle of gold and glass, 12 feet long and 5 feet wide (4 m by 2 m)

**Effect:** This vehicle can fly through the air at speeds of up to 200 miles (322 km) per

hour. It obeys the thoughts of a pilot who must concentrate each round to make it fly. The skiff can carry up to five other passengers or an equal amount of cargo.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20 (check each day)

### GUARDIAN WEAPON

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** A curved wand of bronze and glass that flows to fit perfectly in the wielder's hand

**Effect:** This device has two functions. It can fire a blast of superheated energy up to long range, which inflicts damage equal to the artifact level. It can also produce a constant bladelike beam 2 or 3 feet (61 to 91 cm) long that can be used in melee as a medium or heavy weapon (user's choice upon activation). Once activated, the blade remains for one minute.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d10

### LEARNING HALO

**Level:** 1d6 + 2

**Form:** A golden torc that flows to fit perfectly around the wearer's head

**Effect:** When worn, the artifact grants knowledge in one area. The wearer is trained in one of the following tasks:

01–15	Melee attack
16–30	Ranged attack
31–40	Speed defense
41–50	Might defense
51–60	Intellect defense
61–65	Biology
66–70	Physics
71–76	Chemistry
77–79	Magic lore
80–84	Repair
85–90	History
91–92	Mythology
93–94	Sneaking
95–96	Swimming
97–98	Perceiving
99	Climbing
00	Escaping

**Depletion:** —





*“But afterwards there occurred violent earthquakes and floods; and in a single day and night of misfortune all your warlike men in a body sank into the earth, and the island of Atlantis in like manner disappeared in the depths of the sea.”*

*~Plato, Timaeus/Critias*

### SONIC HARMONIZER

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** A metal and glass device with a handle that flows to fit perfectly in the wielder’s hand

**Effect:** The device launches a floating glass sphere that moves up to a short distance away. Once it is in position (the following round), all creatures and objects within an immediate range are “harmonized” via sonic vibrations. Devices work better, creatures operate more efficiently, and so on. All objects in the area offer an asset to their use or operate at one level higher than normal, whichever is more appropriate. The difficulty of all tasks for creatures in the area is reduced by one step. This effect lasts for a number of rounds equal to the harmonizer’s level.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d6

### WATER WAND

**Level:** 1d6 + 2

**Form:** A golden wand with a clear inset crystal on both ends that flows to fit perfectly in the wielder’s hand

**Effect:** This device causes water within immediate range to take a solid shape as the wielder desires. She can create any single solid object with no moving parts that could fit in a 3-foot-by-3-foot cube (91 cm by 91 cm). Although the object appears to be made of water, it is as solid as metal (but only half as heavy). Alternatively, the water wand can be used to create a thin shield or wall about 8 feet by 8 feet by 1 inch (2 m by 2 m by 3 cm). This level 6 structure is as hard as steel.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20





# CAMELOT LE MORTE



*“In the midst of the lake Arthur was ware of an arm clothed in white samite, that held a fair sword in that hand.”*

*~Le Morte d’Arthur, by Thomas Malory*

*Camelot Le Morte once belonged to a class of recursions called the “Arthurians” because of its association with the King Arthur myth, but that was before its collision with a Mad Science recursion created by comic book fictional leakage, which created the current fused recursion.*

The *maladie de la machine* hit Arthur’s kingdom in the heart of the realm—Camelot. Many of the Knights of the Round Table were absent from the castle, as they were on a quest for the Holy Grail. Without their protection, the fair court fell to the ungodly disease. Where humans once walked, buzzing things of iron afterward shambled with the facade of people but the hearts of devils. Arthur was slain in the fighting and lies dead (but uninfected) in

his bedchamber, Lancelot escaped unchanged but infected, while Gwenhwyfar was overcome and transformed. Now Gwenhwyfar rules in Camelot as its queen, but not as a human. As a *mécanisme*, she is a creature of ironlike metal that does not sleep or feel pity. She has vowed that all the land will become as she, and once that is accomplished, she promises to set her sights on other realms.

In the aftermath, only a few knights, including Sir Bors, continue to pursue the quest for the Holy Grail. If anything, Bors searches with even greater fervor than before, believing that the holy relic is the only way to purify the kingdom. Other knights, including Lancelot, have joined with Mordred in his fortress of Camboglanna. Mordred, a warlock of some repute, can keep the *maladie de la machine* at bay with his magic. Other forces in the kingdom continue their own fights, some against Camelot, others against Camboglanna, and still others caught up in their own quests in a land already rich in danger and deception.

Residents of the recursion call their land Albion. Only recursors who understand its nature refer to the place as Camelot Le Morte, a name that purposefully conjoins English and French, reflecting the unnatural blended



*People converted into mécanismes are tougher and can sometimes call on machine abilities, but their minds are often lost in the process.*



CAMELOT LE MORTE ATTRIBUTES



**Level:** 5  
**Laws:** Mad Science and Magic  
**Playable Races:** Human and *mécanisme*  
**Foci:** Carries a Quiver, Entertains, Infiltrates†, Inks Spells on Skin\*, Leads, Looks for Trouble, Metamorphosizes†, Regenerates Tissue†, Shepherds the Dead, Slays Dragons, Solves Mysteries, Spawns†, Wields Two Weapons at Once, Works Miracles  
**Skills:** Camelot Le Morte lore  
**Connection to Strange:** Certain tombs and archways open to the Strange  
**Connection to Earth:** An erratically functioning inapposite gate cursed by Merlin before his departure; Gwenhwyfar has *mécanisme* knights working on its repair  
**Size:** 80,000 square miles (207,200 square km)  
**Spark:** 15%  
**Trait:** Brash. For any creature with the spark attempting to overcome or ignore the effects of fear or intimidation, the difficulty is modified by one step to its benefit.

\* indicates foci found in this book  
 † recursor must be a *mécanisme* to take this focus

WHAT A RECURSOR KNOWS ABOUT CAMELOT LE MORTE

- Camelot Le Morte operates under the laws of Magic and Mad Science and was seeded when stories, movies, and myths of King Arthur collided with modern stories about nanovirus plagues that transform victims into something with cyber-organic flesh.
- Camelot Le Morte is a recursive version of the isle of medieval Great Britain, but congruences are by no means one to one.
- The *maladie de la machine*—a disease that turns people into walking, buzzing things of iron called *mécanismes*—controls part of Albion, most notably in the body of Gwenhwyfar, who rules in Camelot. Arthur is dead, Lancelot joined Mordred’s revolt, Merlin remains missing, and Morgan Le Fay has retreated to her hidden realm of Avalon.
- Some Knights of the Round Table have been transformed by the disease and serve the queen, while others are free and have joined with Mordred. Still others continue their quest for the Holy Grail, hoping that it can heal their home of its hellish blight.

- Carries a Quiver, page 55
- Entertains, page 61
- Infiltrates, page 62
- Leads, page 65
- Looks for Trouble, page 68
- Metamorphosizes, page 69
- Regenerates Tissue, page 74
- Shepherds the Dead, page 76
- Slays Dragons, page 77
- Solves Mysteries, page 78
- Spawns, page 79
- Wields Two Weapons at Once, page 82
- Works Miracles, page 82

nature of many natives and presuming that the recursion may soon come to a bad end.

**Arrival:** Camelot Le Morte’s initial default translation location is standing on the road to Camelot, with the grand towers of the fantastic capital in view.

CAMELOT LE MORTE FOCI

Most of the foci that player characters can choose in Camelot Le Morte are straightforward, with a few exceptions.

Only characters who choose to be *mécanismes* can take the foci marked with † in the Attributes box. On the other hand, *mécanismes* can choose any foci listed, as well as any other foci that the GM makes available. A character who chooses to translate into the recursion as a *mécanisme*, as described below, faces additional challenges.

Other modifications are likely necessary to massage a given focus so it fits the context of the recursion. For instance, if a character chooses Works Miracles, the context presumes that the miracles are being granted by the Abrahamic God.

Camelot Le Morte also offers the focus Inks Spells on Skin.

Inks Spells on Skin, page 200

MALADIE DE LA MACHINE

The *maladie de la machine* is what the natives of Camelot Le Morte call the disease that converts a normal creature into a *mécanisme*. The disease is a level 4 transformative virus that turns living flesh into a cybernetic equivalent. An infection can take days to completely convert a creature, though the process can be accelerated to less than one minute if another *mécanisme* is the direct vector. People

converted into *mécanismes* are tougher and can sometimes call on machine abilities, but their minds are often lost in the process. In addition to the obvious downsides, a victim so transformed usually becomes subject to a level 4 rooted directive that switches his loyalty to the command module, currently housed in the body of Queen Gwenhwyfar.

Recursors who translate into Camelot Le Morte choose whether to appear as human or *mécanisme*. A recursor who chooses the latter option gains +1 to Armor and has access to a bonus Cyber Pool that contains 4 points (this Pool functions like the Luck Pool of the Lucky descriptor). However, the recursor must fight to maintain control of her mind upon first translating into the recursion, each time she moves down one step on the damage track, and whenever another fully converted *mécanisme* touches her.

## CASTLE OF CAMELOT

Life in the castle has taken a vast turn from how things looked before the cyber-virus struck the recursion. The cooks, gardeners, grooms, and other servants, as well as the nobles, knights, counselors, and other fixtures of the court, now spend most of their time rooted in one place, connected to one another via strands of thin metallic wire that stretch throughout the structure like spiderwebs. Unless the castle is roused in full defense mode, only a few Knights of the Round Table are active at any given time. These include the **soldiers** walking patrol under the command of Sir Kay, the lesser knights led by Sir Galahad hunting unconverted humans far beyond the castle walls to bring them into the fold, and Sir Percival, who looks variously for the Holy Grail and an artifact called the **Source**. In addition to the knights, Queen Gwenhwyfar is also active.

The chamber of the Round Table is thick with the wire communication webbing so ubiquitous in the castle. In the past, a few *mécanismes* tried to sit in the Siege Perilous, the Round Table seat reserved by Merlin for the person who would one day find the Holy Grail, but they were instantly killed. Since then, the invaders leave the chamber alone.

**Sir Galahad:** As is true of many of the converted, remnants of Galahad's original personality persist within his electronic brain. Thus, the once-cheerful Galahad, son of Sir Lancelot, is now a brooding, threatening presence, even to other *mécanismes*. The more the part of him that was loyal to King Arthur tries to resist, the more the controlling intelligence clamps down, making him humanity's most dangerous foe. He detests his father Lancelot most of all. The fact that Lancelot has yet to submit to the infection is the only source of strength that Galahad's remaining humanity holds to, so the controlling intelligence has made Lancelot's conversion (or death) its number one priority.

Sir Galahad also constantly feels the conflict created by the presence of the Siege Perilous in the chamber of the Round Table. Given that his name appeared on the seat that has killed everyone else who dared to sit there, he believes that he is the one fated to use it to gain a vision of the Holy Grail. However, the queen



Lucky, page 48

**Mécanisme soldier:** level 2; Armor 2; sword attack inflicts 3 points of damage

The Source, page 52

**Sir Galahad:** level 6; Armor 4; often rides a level 3 *mécanisme* steed; lance attack inflicts 8 points of damage; infectious



has strictly forbidden Galahad from trying the seat or looking for the Grail. She fears that either could strengthen the human part of his mind, allowing him to break free of the *mécanisme* controlling intelligence.

**Sir Percival:** Not much of Sir Percival's original personality remains—the *maladie de la machine* struck him particularly hard. This means that unlike some others among the court in Camelot, Percival has little obvious personality and isn't given to engaging unconverted humans in dialogue. He splits his time between questing for the Holy Grail, under command from the queen to find and destroy it before any other knight finds it, and secretly searching for the Source, the original shard of infection that came to Camelot. Thanks to a concerted fight put up by Merlin, Arthur, and even Morgan Le Fay, the Source was broken, and the greater part of it lost. What remained was still enough to do serious damage, but rather than converting the recursion in just



*The queen wields Arthur's sword, Excalibur. As long as she doesn't lose her hold on it, the sword remains hers.*

himself in Gwenhwyfar's place.

**Sir Kay:** Where Percival is noncommunicative, the controlling intelligence of Kay allows much of what he was to bubble to the surface, making this knight positively loquacious. However, his courteous manner doesn't mean he'll betray the queen. In fact, if he finds anyone of note beyond the castle walls, he escorts his "honored guests" into Camelot's throne room for a meeting with Her Majesty.

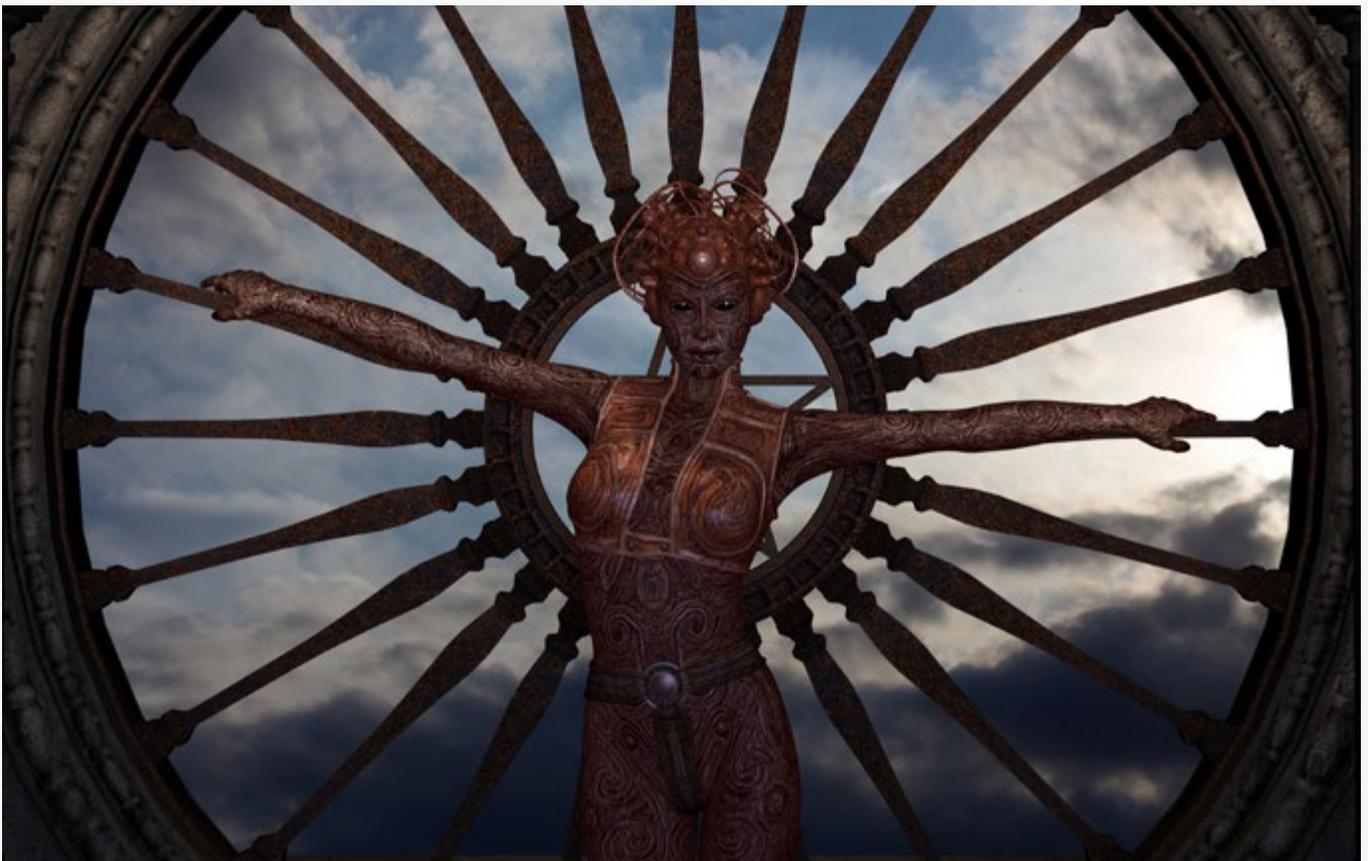
**Queen Gwenhwyfar:** The queen wears the clothing and crown of royalty with relish, an echo of Gwenhwyfar's original personality. That echo is perhaps why she keeps the rotting body of Arthur rooted with communication web in the royal bedchamber instead of the dungeon. An underlying spell continually attempts to pull the body away from Camelot. Gwenhwyfar

days, the struggle is ongoing. If Percival can find the Source, he believes he can complete the process and remake the recursion completely, perhaps setting

**Sir Percival:** level 6; Armor 4; often rides a level 3 *mécanisme* steed; two sword attacks as a single action; infectious

**Sir Kay:** level 5; Armor 4; long-range crossbow attack inflicts 3 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor); infectious

**Queen Gwenhwyfar:** level 6; Amor 4; wields Excalibur; carries two random cyphers; infectious



*Avalon, page 171*

*Excalibur, page 54*

*Morgan Le Fay, page 171*

**Brigand:** level 2; Armor 1; sword and bow attacks inflict 3 points of damage

**Mordred's hollow knight:** level 4; Armor 3; sword attack inflicts 5 points of damage; defeated knight explodes, inflicting 5 points of damage to all creatures within immediate range

doesn't know the destination (the spell is trying to pull the body to a linked recursion called Avalon), but the energized web ties the corpse in place. Arthur being dead, the queen wields his sword, *Excalibur*. As long as she doesn't lose her hold on it, the sword remains hers. If she should ever lose her grip, both the sword and Arthur's corpse would fade and come under the control of *Morgan Le Fay*.

Gwenhwyfar tells her *mécanisme* subjects that she has knights spending all their time looking for the Source. But that's a lie. If events had proceeded as they'd been meant to, and the Source had fully converted all the inhabitants, she and those with individual personalities like hers wouldn't have come into existence at all. If she knew that Sir Percival was looking for the Source, she would have him destroyed. She wants to convert the recursion with herself

in the leadership role. Because once it is converted, Gwenhwyfar—who is quickened—plans on expanding her dominion into other recursions, and finally to Earth itself.

## CAMBOGLANNA

This ancient Roman fort is commanded by Mordred, who leads much of the organized resistance to the queen and her active propagation of the *maladie de la machine*. Under Mordred, Camboglanna has become an expansive and robust fortification guarded by *brigands*, freed slaves, and a small company of animate suits of armor called *hollow knights*. Sir Lancelot and a handful of less storied knights, previously of Camelot, can also be found in Mordred's fortress. Though they work with the former traitor, old slights and betrayals are not forgotten.

**Mordred:** The illegitimate son of Arthur and Arthur's half-sister Morgause, Mordred was fated to bring down the king and, in so doing, earn an early death. That was before the recursion's narrative was knocked askew. Now Mordred is a weathered warrior and accomplished warlock able to code magic into tattoos. He uses his power to create his hollow knights, prevent the spread of infection to those inked with his protective sigils, and cast other useful spells.

To those whose original loyalties didn't lie with Camelot, Mordred can show human sympathy. Anyone formerly associated with Arthur's court will tell you that Mordred is cruel and sadistic, leading through fear and intimidation. It's to those he associates with his father that he is most cruel. This is why instead of curing Lancelot, which he could have done, he merely scribed the knight with a spell to hold the infection at bay. As long as Lancelot serves Mordred and Mordred remains alive, Lancelot remains human.

**Sir Lancelot:** One of the most accomplished warriors ever to sit at the Round Table, Lancelot has become an embittered and drunken shell of his former self. He is heartbroken that his sweet Gwenhwyfar has become the face of the enemy. He's mortified that the infection on his arm, held in check by Mordred's magic, has put him into the warlock's service. And he's disgusted



**Mordred:** level 5; Armor 4 from platemail and magic; long-range spell attack inflicts damage and blinds foe for one round; wields dragon pen artifact

*Dragon pen, page 53*

**Lancelot:** level 8 (6 when drunk); Armor 3; sword attack inflicts 8 points of damage; carries everfull wine horn artifact

*Everfull wine horn, page 54*

with himself over not having died at Arthur's side, fighting for his king. Thanks to a magic wine horn provided by Mordred, Lancelot is always somewhat intoxicated and muddle-minded, but despite that, he remains deadly on the field.

S

*As much a trickster as a wizard, Merlin vanished into the Strange itself. He hopes to glean from some other Mad Science recursion what he needs to win the day—something he calls the “Red Dragon.”*

reliance on torcs of mindfulness, minor artifacts created by Caerleon smiths.

*Torc of mindfulness, page 54*

Located on the River Usk not far from the Severn Sea, the city remains rich despite the war between Mordred and Camelot. In fact, the city's smiths are kept busy

**Sir Bors:** level 6; Armor 3

### QUEST FOR THE HOLY GRAIL

Supposedly a cup used to collect the blood of Christ upon his removal from the cross, the Grail of Camelot Le Morte is a holy relic believed to have the ability to cure all disease and ailments, including the decrepitude of age. Many lesser knights search for it in hopes of saving the realm. The only Knight of the Round Table who still actively searches for the Grail is Sir Bors, who, along with his companions, has adventured across the length and breadth of the recursion, and into a few alternate recursions as well. Some of the locations in Camelot Le Morte where Sir Bors has searched for the Grail include the following.

### GREEN CHAPEL

A name feared throughout the recursion, the Green Chapel is an accursed church where, according to local belief, demons incant all-night prayer services to the Lord of the Damned. The chapel is actually an extensive monastery, where ghosts, demons, and lost souls wander at the behest of the Green Knight. Those who seek a boon from the knight are allowed to enter, but only upon agreeing to try their hand at a series of tests. If a petitioner fails these fiendish tests, he never leaves, becoming one more lost soul wandering the Green Chapel in service to its inscrutable lord.

### CAERLEON

The great city of Caerleon remains inhabited during the strife, and many rogue *mécanismes* reside therein, along with normal humans. These *mécanismes* resist the base programing encoded in their cyber-organic flesh by

supplying both sides with weapons and armor. That said, should one side finally win out over the other, no one in Caerleon doubts that the victor won't next turn an acquisitive eye on their city. Rogue *mécanismes*, human warlocks, and smiths have combined their skills to create a great henge of protective stones around the city. Each stone is infused with magic and

**Green Knight:** level 6, tasks related to detecting falsehoods and solving puzzles as level 8; Armor 3; fades to green mist as an action



the essence of the machine virus. If Caerleon ever comes under attack, a magic shield of protection (level 7) will stutter into place, generated by the henge.

## INVISIBLE CAVE

Crafted as a prison to hold Merlin, the realm's greatest wizard, the Invisible Cave is difficult to find, as the mouth moves from location to location with the weather. If finally found (within a bank of fog), the cave leads to a large subterranean keep with many wards and defenses. Created by Morgan Le Fay to hold a creature with both human and demon blood running through his veins, the defenses are also dangerous to those seeking to gain entry.

**Merlin:** level 8; health 40; Armor 2; long-range magic staff attack inflicts 8 points of damage on target and all within short range; for more details, see *The Strange Bestiary*, page 156

**Stonehenge spirit:** level 5; immaterial; short-range psychic attack inflicts 5 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor)



But entry is exactly what Queen Gwenhwyfar sought, in hopes of freeing, and infecting, the greatest magician of the land to bring him over to her side. Free Merlin she did, though he escaped before she could infect him. He had spent the years of his imprisonment mentally casting his mind into other realms. In time, he learned of the nature of recursions. When the *mécanisme* queen appeared, he was ready. As much a trickster as a wizard, Merlin vanished into the Strange itself. He hopes to glean from some other Mad Science recursion what he needs to win the day—something he calls the “Red Dragon.” He left behind within his prison an amulet frozen in ice. If someone true to the realm finds it and uses the amulet to call him, Merlin will translate back to Camelot Le Morte and provide aid on one endeavor. However, when he leaves again, he will take the amulet with him.

## STONEHENGE

Built by the wizard Merlin, the circle of stones is a place of magical power. Beneath each stone lies the body of a warlock, demon, or fey being who attempted to best Merlin but failed. He interred each in turn, slowly constructing the henge as it stands today. These *spirits* protect the henge, repairing damage caused by visitors and the elements over the years. For one who is able to cast magic, meditating in the center of the stones allows communion with one or more of the spirits interred within. Doing so is risky, because a contest of wills occurs as contact is made, in which the spirit attempts to replace the meditator with its own mind. But if the meditator wins the battle of wills, she can learn a new spell. In fact, Merlin used Stonehenge as a sort of spell repository, since he was immune to the psychic attacks his defeated foes levy on others.

According to local legend, the stones sometimes assemble into the shape of a figure and walk the land, striking down anyone they come across. Sir Bors attempted to catalyze the creation of the “Stone Man,” thinking it would lead him to the Holy Grail, but he failed to make the construct rise.

## OLD KEIG AND THE SOURCE

Like Stonehenge, Old Keig is a circle of standing and recumbent stones. It is situated at the northern edge of Camelot Le Morte—

●○○ LEGACY OF THE FALLEN KING

**Find the Grail:** The Knights of the Round Table aren't the only ones looking for the Holy Grail. An entity from the lost recursion of *Atlantis* also seeks it, using intermediaries from Earth to do so.

**Broker an Alliance:** A group of Saxon soldiers has come up from the south. Under the command of Ulric the Bold, the soldiers are unaware of the situation in Camelot and are preparing to lay siege. If they do, the infection will almost certainly creep over them, making more soldiers for the queen. Only if they can be convinced to fight under Mordred's banner will they be saved. But Mordred's evil reputation precedes him.

**Mists of Avalon:** A rare planetary alignment is set to open a path to *Avalon*. Queen Gwenhwyfar plans on leading a contingent across the mists and into the fey realm to claim it for herself. Though the sorceresses that rule in Avalon can defend themselves if need be, the outcome is by no means certain. If doughty warriors could be convinced (by bribes or sorcery) to engage the queen and her forces with guerrilla tactics as she marches to the temporary path, perhaps she'll be late and miss the window of opportunity.

**Obtain a Sample:** The *Estate*, having become aware of the cyber-virus infesting Camelot Le Morte, worries that it will mutate and threaten Earth if left unattended. Operatives are briefed and ordered to bring back a sample using special inapposite transfer containment vessels. Preferably, the head of someone infected by the virus will be secured and returned to the Estate campus.

beyond it lies only misted moors that turn explorers back the way they came. Sometimes, the central remaining arch of Old Keig flares with energy, and a connection to the Strange itself is made. The only creature around to see

it is an entity that calls itself *Crónán*. Everyone else in the recursion, however, refers to the creature as the Source.

Before the Source was broken in a fight with Merlin, Arthur, and Morgan Le Fay, it was the primary vector of the intelligent cyber-organic infection. It came to the recursion to convert the land rapidly and completely before moving on to other realms. However, severed from its command programming in battle, the greater part of the Source was like a newborn, albeit an incredibly smart and powerful newborn. It took on a basic human shape and name, and now it lives in relative peace at the edge of the recursion with a small band of performers who often travel the land.

As *Crónán*, the Source could almost pass for a human of indeterminate gender about ten years of age. But when startled or angry, *Crónán*'s skin is revealed as cyber-organic, and threats to it and any of its friends are swiftly dealt with. If someone like Gwenhwyfar or another powerful *mécanisme* could subdue *Crónán*, it's possible that its original programming could be reactivated, and the *Crónán* personality would be subsumed or burned away. Thus, *Crónán* does its best to stay anonymous at the recursion's edge.

**Crónán the Source:** level 3, all tasks when cyber-virus heritage manifests as level 8; Armor 4

*Atlantis*, page 38

*Avalon*, page 171

CAMELOT LE MORTE ARTIFACTS

DRAGON PEN

**Level:** 1d6 + 2

**Form:** A quill made from a green feather

**Effect:** If suitably inked, the dragon pen can render an object or creature that becomes real for one minute. The object or creature's level is half the artifact's level, +1 level if the user is trained in drawing, or +2 levels if the user is specialized in drawing. Once released from the page or surface it was drawn upon, the object or creature swells until it reaches the appropriate size, but no bigger than an immediate distance in width, depth, and height. If a creature is made, it does the bidding of its creator.

Someone versed in magic, such as someone who has the Inks Spells on Skin focus, can use the dragon pen to cast spells. When doing so, the difficulty of one task associated with the spell (such as an attack roll) is decreased by one step.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d10

 *The Estate*, page 148



There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,  
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,  
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth  
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt:  
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,  
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work  
Of subtlest jewellery.

~"Morte d'Arthur," Alfred, Lord Tennyson

## EVERFULL WINE HORN

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Ornate drinking horn

**Effect:** When held to the lips, the horn magically fills with red wine.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d100

## EXCALIBUR

**Level:** 1d6 + 2

**Form:** Heavy sword inset with jewels and engraved with Latin phrases ("Take me up" and "Cast me away") on opposite sides of the blade

**Effect:** This sword functions as a normal heavy weapon. The first time *Excalibur* is drawn each day, all enemies within long range are blinded for one round (depletion roll required).

Constructed of magically enhanced meteoric iron, *Excalibur* can cut through wood, stone, and normal metal without losing its edge; the blade inflicts 1 additional point of damage (no depletion roll required).

Finally, *Excalibur* has the ability that Earth myth often confers to the blade's scabbard, and can keep the wielder healthy even if wounded. When this ability is used, 1d6 points are restored to any stat Pool the wielder wishes. Though using *Excalibur* in this fashion requires a depletion roll, it does not require an action.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d100 (If depleted, the sword becomes embedded in the nearest boulder and will not come free except in the hand of its maker or the rightful ruler of the recursion.)



## HOLY GRAIL

**Level:** 1d6 + 4

**Form:** A modest bronze cup

**Effect:** Anyone who drinks from the Holy Grail is immediately healed of all wounds, diseases, toxins, and malign mental influences. A drinker who suffers from one or more curses is released from them all, and unwelcome transformative effects are completely reversed. Furthermore, the ill effects of age are wiped away, rendering someone older than 25 years back to that approximate physiological age. The drinker is not made immortal, however, or immune to normal aging thereafter.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d10 (Upon depletion, the Holy Grail disappears. A new quest to find it, if successful, restores the artifact for another span of time.)

## SIEGE PERILOUS

**Level:** 1d6 + 4

**Form:** A black gem, usually set in a chair or table

**Effect:** When someone sits in a chair set with the artifact or at the place on a larger table where the artifact has been installed, she gains a true vision about one topic of her choice. However, most users immediately die as the vision comes over them, before they can communicate it to anyone else. Certain individuals (Sir Galahad being one) can safely use the Siege Perilous. But those not so chosen must succeed on a level 7 Intellect defense roll or immediately fall dead.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20 (Upon depletion, the gem disappears, possibly to reappear in another time or recursion, potentially in a different form with different, though no less impressive, abilities.)

## TORC OF MINDFULNESS

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** A bronze necklace or circlet

**Effect:** For the wearer, the difficulty of resisting unwelcome mental influence or commands is reduced by a number of steps equal to the artifact's level.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d100

# ELEVENTH REICH



*“Gandhi, revered for his positive political activism, considered the following traits to be the most spiritually perilous. In the Eleventh Reich, they’re considered virtues, which tells you almost everything you need to know about the recursion.*

- Wealth without work*
- Pleasure without conscience*
- Science without humanity*
- Knowledge without character*
- Politics without principle*
- Commerce without morality*
- Worship without sacrifice.”*

*~from the Estate dossier on the Eleventh Reich*

The conspiracy theorists were right about Nazis surviving, but their imagination didn't come close to the real truth. The ideology of the Third Reich (Nazi Germany, 1933 to 1945) survived, but not because specific individuals were given safe haven by sympathetic organizations. No, it “survived” because the strength of the Nazi mythology bled over into the Strange, creating a recursion where Germany won World War II and went on to create an empire that rules most of the planet (or, in this case, the parts of the planet that exist within the limited world of the Eleventh Reich).

The Eleventh Reich is typified by rampant military glorification, mandatory military enlistment, extreme racism, scientific research unrestrained by ethics or morality, fascination with biblical magic talismans, and extreme paranoia in an environment where anyone could be called out as an enemy of the state for any reason. Out of fear, most of the populace goes along to get along, while high-ranking officials glory in their power, authority, and moral freefall by “ascending” to a state beyond death.

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## ELEVENTH REICH ATTRIBUTES

**Level:** 6

**Laws:** Mad Science, Magic

**Playable Races:** Human

**Foci:** Conducts Weird Science, Entertains, Integrates Weaponry, Is Licensed to Carry, Leads, Looks for Trouble, Operates Undercover, Quells Undead\*, Solves Mysteries, Wields Two Weapons at Once, Works the System

**Skills:** Eleventh Reich lore

**Connection to Strange:** Within some radioactive craters spotting the edge of Welthauptstadt Germania

**Connection to Earth:** None currently

**Size:** 35,000 square miles (90,650 square km)

**Spark:** 10%

**Trait:** Brutal. The difficulty of tasks related to pleasant social interaction is increased by one step.

\* indicates foci found in this book

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*Conducts Weird Science, page 57*

*Entertains, page 61*

*Integrates Weaponry, page 63*

*Is Licensed to Carry, page 64*

*Leads, page 65*

*Looks for Trouble, page 68*

*Operates Undercover, page 70*

*Solves Mysteries, page 78*

*Wields Two Weapons at Once, page 82*

*Works the System, page 83*

*Quells Undead, page 206*

**Wissenschaftsbüro:** *the Science Bureau*

**Schule der Archäologie:** *the School of Archeology, page 58*

**Schutzstaffel or SS:** *the paramilitary police, page 59*

**Weapon engineer:** *level 2; long-range pistol attack inflicts 5 points of damage*

**Generalfeldmarschall Katja Dietrich:** *level 5; Armor 1; long-range pistol attack inflicts 5 points of damage; carries a death mask artifact*

*Death mask, page 61*

**S** *Draggable foci, page 52*

**Eleventh Reich soldier:** *level 3; Armor 2; long-range HK416 rifle attack inflicts 5 points of damage*

**War walker (driven):** *level 5, Speed defense as level 6 due to mechanized shield; Armor 4; long-range attack inflicts 8 points of damage*

## WHAT A RECURSOR KNOWS ABOUT THE ELEVENTH REICH

- The Eleventh Reich operates under the laws of Mad Science and Magic, though the technology and magic that most natives see from day to day function at mid-twentieth-century levels.
- Each citizen of the Eleventh Reich has a military rank, which begins when children are inducted into the Nazi Youth at age 7, the “age of reason.”
- The Schutzstaffel (also known as the SS) operates outside the regular military, and everyone fears them.
- The SS sponsors superscience laboratories staffed with mad scientists, as well as hidden schools of magic where ritualists study relics and talismans collected from dead religions.
- High-ranking Eleventh Reich officers can choose to “ascend” by undergoing a process that turns them into “Übermensch,” which are essentially undead cyborgs.

By any measure, the Eleventh Reich is a horrible place. Recursors who find themselves here should avoid staying more than a day, because the Schutzstaffel (the paramilitary police, also known as the SS) apparently have a method to identify intruders to their land, as well as a way to zero in on a recursor’s current location relatively quickly.

**Arrival:** Standing along the Avenue of Splendors in the capital city, Welthauptstadt Germania (a rebuilt Berlin).

## ELEVENTH REICH FOCI

The foci that player characters can choose in the Eleventh Reich—as well as any foci that are dragged into the recursion—are modified by the recursion’s context, as appropriate. For example, if someone chooses Integrates Weaponry, replace all connections to Ruk and Ruk features (such as the True Code) with connections to the Eleventh Reich and its features (such as “adherence to Nazi science”).

## COMPETITION WITHIN THE REICH

Even in the Eleventh Reich, where everything runs on time like a well-oiled machine (or else), disparate governing bureaus feud for the favor of the Führer. The primary players include the scientists of the Wissenschaftsbüro, the historians of the Schule der Archäologie, and the Schutzstaffel (SS). And of course, though no one wants to admit it to the office of the Führer, there are also hints that a real Resistance exists, in spite of everything.

## WISSENSCHAFTSBÜRO

Nazi ideologues are happy to explain how the Eleventh Reich finally came to pass because of a triumph of superior science. The bureau responsible for promulgating and directing research is the Wissenschaftsbüro. It is contained in several adjacent buildings, which house support staff (including the **weapon engineers** and lab scientists who actually do the research), parts, prototypes, chemicals, human subjects, and the science labs where the edges of weapon tech and human performance are explored daily.

### Generalfeldmarschall Katja Dietrich:

Generalfeldmarschall Dietrich commands the bureau. The Generalfeldmarschall is a scientist by training, though she rarely gets time in any of the labs sponsored by her department, which goes double since she stepped into her current role. The previous head of the bureau, an ascended Übermensch, disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Dietrich is certain that the Schule der Archäologie is responsible. She is considering ascending herself, but not before she gets to the bottom of the mystery surrounding her superior’s unannounced absence.

## WEAPONS LAB

The Weapons Lab focuses on projectiles, particle beams, poisons, chemical weapons with especially nasty characteristics, and more. When weapons are perfected, they are moved from development into production, and these facilities also lie under the Weapons Lab umbrella. The lab is kept secure by a company of soldiers armed with Heckler & Koch HK416 rifles, and backed up by one or two **soldiers** driving **war walkers**.



Sometimes weapons are tested on pigs or goats, but final tests are always conducted on live human subjects, which are usually drawn from nearby prisons—or, in a pinch, from experimental subjects who haven't yet been assigned a trial in the Human Performance lab.

**Generalleutnant Werner Emmerich:**

Generalleutnant Emmerich heads the Weapons Lab. He was the staunchest of Reich supporters until the SS took his daughter into custody on a trumped-up charge, and her life was ended in the very lab where her father had put in so many years. Outwardly, Emmerich retains his apparent loyalty, but he has secretly reached out to the Resistance.

**HUMAN PERFORMANCE LAB**

Research from the Human Performance Lab was partly responsible for the breakthrough that led to ascension and Übermensch. However, the complete procedure for ascension required a rare bit of cross-departmental cooperation between the Wissenschaftsbüro and the Schule der Archäologie, whose

application of a magical relic in their archives, called the “Holy Grail,” made the process possible. Prior to that, neither group on its own could produce an Übermensch with an appropriately long lifespan, great strength and resistance to harm, and, especially important, an intact mind.

The lab scientists test all manner of genetic manipulations, exposure to exotic radiations and chemicals, and mental stimulation techniques in hopes of pushing human performance. Of course, the price of science requires a sacrifice—in this case, the sacrifice of live human subjects. Rejects and failed experiments are many, and while some live on in shattered husks of their former selves, most die and are disposed of in secret bunkers beneath the bureau.

**Generalleutnant Helene Meyer:** Cooperation with the Schule der Archäologie is essentially a thing of the past now that the Human Performance Lab is under the command of Generalleutnant Helene Meyer. She presses forward without any “magic props” (as Meyer

**Generalleutnant Werner Emmerich:** level 3, tasks related to weapon development as level 6; long-range pistol attack inflicts 5 points of damage

**Lab scientist:** level 3, tasks related to science as level 5

**Generalleutnant Helene Meyer:** level 4, tasks related to science as level 6



calls them) to get in the way of pure science. As much as the Übermensch program is considered a success, Meyer (and, frankly, almost everyone) would prefer a process that conferred all the advantages of the current program but didn't render the subject undead.

### SCHULE DER ARCHÄOLOGIE

Rumors of how many mythological objects reside in the archives of the Schule der Archäologie far exceed the actual number of relics stored there. And of those, only a small number are understood well enough to be used to the benefit of the Eleventh Reich on even a limited basis. The fact is that many relics and mythological objects, especially those deemed "holy," have a tendency to misbehave in Nazi hands.

In addition to the archives (a series of level 7 vaults within a larger protected vault), the school hosts a university-grade library, occult classes, and a large museum where artifacts without dangerous or magical properties are kept on display for the greater glory of the Reich.

Each major mythological object is assigned a unique circle of acolytes and one head curator. The curator and acolytes use hard-won magical techniques of protection each day they bring forth from the archives an object to study and master. But magic isn't a science, and no matter the safeguards, the school loses one or two research acolytes every month to a curse, leaking spell, or psychic residue.

### HOLY GRAIL CIRCLE

Eternal life is just one of the secrets supposedly held by the Holy Grail. Unfortunately, it is also a powerful and stubborn relic unwilling to give up its secrets to the Reich. It has a tendency to turn anyone who drinks from it into a walking corpse no different than a zombie. In fact, that's still what happens to those who have not first been prepared with a series of technological adjuvants in the form of surgically implanted wiring, resistors, and related tech installed by the Wissenschaftsbüro. (This explains why the stable of zombies housed by the Schule der Archäologie is so large.) Those

**Zombie:** level 3, Speed defense as level 2; health 12. If an attack would reduce the zombie's health to 0, it does so only if the number rolled in the attack was even; otherwise, the zombie's health is reduced to 1 instead; for more details, see *The Strange Bestiary*, page 145

who receive the proper preparation and drink from the Holy Grail “ascend” and become Übermensch.

**Rittmeister “Dakota” Hanssen:** The man in charge of discovering the secrets of the Holy Grail is called Dakota by his friends (or, at the very least, those hoping to curry favor with him). The Rittmeister is credited with salvaging the relic for the Reich, following one of his archeological expeditions to the east. He finally ascended once all the kinks were worked out of the process. Afterward, finding that he no longer needed to sleep, he was able to accelerate his research on the Grail and a few other objects under his direct purview, including the Armor of Karna and the Spear of Longinus.

### KAVACHA CIRCLE

This elaborate suit of armor, called the *Kavacha* or the Armor of Karna, supposedly protects the wearer from both mundane and supernatural attacks. And indeed, whenever an innocent human lab rat is forced into the armor, the wearer is able to survive all manner of attacks, even direct fire from a tank. But whenever the *Kavacha* is taken from the archives and used by a legitimate officer of the Reich, something goes wrong, and the wearer inevitably perishes, though the duration before death increases with each sacrifice. The Rittmeister publicly says that it’s only a matter of time until the Armor of Karna becomes conditioned enough so that anyone of the Reich can safely use it. Privately, he doubts that, which is why he loans the armor out only to his political enemies stupid enough to accept gifts from him.

### LONGINUS CIRCLE

What happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object? It’s sort of like asking what happens when someone wielding the *Spear of Longinus* attacks a target wearing the Armor of Karna. Supposedly, the *Spear of Longinus* can wound anything, even gods. Perhaps wisely (for the moment), the Eleventh Reich has decided not to test that directly, and is instead working on reliable ways to prevent an officer of the Reich from turning into a burning pillar of fire upon grasping the spear’s shaft. Some of the human test subjects

managed to escape this fate, but they all had to be destroyed with poison gas before they realized the potency of the weapon in their hands.

### SCHUTZSTAFFEL

The SS is housed in many different structures in Welthauptstadt Germania. The largest part of the SS is its armed soldiers, the *Waffen-SS*. Regular soldiers and citizens alike fear them, because the normal rules (such as they are) don’t apply to *Waffen-SS* soldiers on a mission. They serve both as army units and as police in the Eleventh Reich.

**Reichsführer Himmler:** A recursive duplicate of Himmler still leads the SS in the Eleventh Reich. Referred to as the Reichsführer, Himmler is a dangerous lunatic feared by everyone—and not merely because he’s an ascended Übermensch. It’s also because he has no loyalty to anyone except the Führer. He’ll betray any trust, exploit any weakness, and trample over any principle if it advances him or the Reich. One of his most deeply held beliefs is the importance of racial purity, though his definition of “race” is loose enough that anyone can fall afoul of it when that suits his agenda.

Upon recently learning of recursors and alternate fictions, Himmler gained the spark. He isn’t quickened, but he directed the Wissenschaftsbüro and the Schule der Archäologie to create a method to detect odd “paradimensional energies that certain foreign spies radiate.” To provide them with raw material for their efforts, Himmler handed over a couple of OSR agents he captured. Now, he has a magic dowsing rod, fashioned from the spine of one of those agents, that alerts him whenever recursors visit the Eleventh Reich.

### OFFICE OF THE FÜHRER

No one except for Himmler and a few other high-ranking Reich officials know where the Office of the Führer is located. That’s because the office is in a secret bunker deep beneath Welthauptstadt Germania. “Visitors” usually interact with the Führer only electronically, not in person. That doesn’t stop him from giving monthly addresses, which are broadcast to every public and most private screens simultaneously. Viewers see a vigorous man

**Rittmeister “Dakota” Hanssen (Übermensch):** level 6, Speed defense as level 4, tasks related to archaeology and feats of strength and toughness as level 8; health 70; melee attack inflicts 7 points of damage; carries *Sessho-seki splinter artifact*

*Sessho-seki splinter*, page 62

**Waffen-SS soldier:** level 4; Armor 2; long-range HK416 rifle attack inflicts 5 points of damage

**Reichsführer Himmler (Übermensch):** level 6, Speed defense as level 4, tasks related to feats of strength and toughness as level 8, tasks related to deception and pleasant social interaction as level 7; health 70; melee attack inflicts 7 points of damage; carries a *recursor dowsing rod artifact*

*Recursor dowsing rod*, page 62

OSR, page 157

**Karna:** a great warrior of ancient India who battled adversity and was known for keeping his word under all circumstances

*Kavacha*, page 62

*Spear of Longinus*, page 62

## STATE SECRETS OF THE REICH

**Ghost Parade:** Under certain conditions, a ghostly parade is visible streaming down the Avenue of Splendors, apparently wearing military uniforms, but not those of the Reich. The see-through phantoms march to an unfamiliar tune, one that sends a shiver of fear through all loyal patriots.

**Memories of War:** The triumph of the Reich required investment in all manner of military machines, though many of them have since fallen into disrepair. To the west of the city lies a landfill that houses thousands of damaged, broken, or decommissioned tanks, planes, and odder wheeled, walking, and burrowing craft. New reports suggest that some of the old war machines might not be as dead as the military claimed.

**Missing Relic:** A thief broke into the Schule der Archäologie's archives, killed several guards, and made off with a number of relics interdicted for the danger they represent to the Reich. Clues regarding the identity of the thief are few, but the guards were shot by

9mm rounds and showed signs of having been attacked by some kind of bird of prey. The relics missing from the archives include Pandora's Box, the Book of Thoth, and weathered clay chunks labeled the Tablets of Destiny.

**Killing the Führer:** Plans for the Führer's bunker, including schematics, power sources, and its location, have been leaked. The Reich is in a secret uproar. Anyone who destroys the plans or returns them to safekeeping—and even better, leads officials to the capture of those responsible—will be made a hero.

**Foreign Spies:** Himmler warns that he's discovered a network of foreign spies routinely penetrating the Eleventh Reich. Other officials wonder what foreign power these spies could represent, given the complete Nazi domination of the world. But Himmler insists the spies come from elsewhere and, to prove his point, has captured several, including a few saboteurs from an organization called "the *Estate*."



*The Estate, page 148*

**Führer (frozen head):** level 5, leadership and knowledge of the Reich as level 7; Armor 4 (crystal container); no direct physical attacks

**Führer puppet (puppeteered):** level 4; health 30; long-range pistol attack inflicts 4 points of damage

in his prime, patriotically calling on them to keep their faith in the Fatherland alive. Most watchers come away with an appreciation of the Führer's vitality and amazing public speaking skills.

In fact, the Führer has grown old, and radical steps had to be taken to keep him alive after a failed attempt at ascension. Now, the Führer is only a head frozen in a vat of supercooled fluid. Various wires, computers, and a few magic spells keep him conscious, if not necessarily alive. The image projected for public display is a triumph of puppetry that the head controls on a suitably impressive-looking set. The Führer can mentally manipulate the puppet as if it were real for an hour or so at a time, but only within the confines of the bunker.

In addition to the head and its support machinery, the Office of the Führer contains a support staff of specially selected Waffen-SS soldiers, including a couple in war walkers.

## RESISTANCE

The Reich is almost all-powerful. Almost. Even though resistors are nearly certain to eventually be caught by Waffen-SS or betrayed by an informer, a group of organized resistors persists in Welthauptstadt Germania. Using the symbol of a white rose, the Resistance prints and secretly distributes anti-Nazi literature. The Resistance also conducts less-publicized activities, such as attempts to shut down factories, free prisoners, and in at least one (failed) case, assassinate the Führer.

The Resistance operates in cells of two to five individuals that remain separate from other cells, so that if one group is compromised, the other groups remain safe. Given some of the technological (and magical) breakthroughs of the Reich, keeping activities secret is a difficult challenge.

One of the most successful cells is led by a woman who other Resistance members know as



*Gas! GAS! Quick, boys! – An ecstasy of fumbling,  
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;  
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling  
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime . . .  
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light  
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.*

*~from Dulce et Decorum Est by Wilfred Owen*

**Lady Falcon.** She has led several effective actions against the Reich and has risen to the top of the SS and Gestapo's most-wanted lists. Lady Falcon is described as wearing a pearl-colored domino mask and has been seen with a pet falcon on one shoulder and a Luger 9mm holstered on her hip.

## ELEVENTH REICH ARTIFACTS

### DEATH MASK

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Gas mask with scarlet goggles

**Effect:** Wearer is immune to most poison gasses and attacks propagated by chemicals entering the eyes or lungs. The wearer can also see normally at night and through banks of fog, smoke, or clouds of obscuring airborne chemicals.

**Depletion:** —

### ENIGMA MACHINE

**Level:** 1d6 + 2

**Form:** Bulky machine (similar to a typewriter) in a carrying case

**Effect:** This electromechanical rotor encryption machine can be used to encode and decrypt text messages (no depletion roll required).

A percentage of Eleventh Reich enigma machines are enchanted. If an encrypted message created on such a machine is addressed to a specific individual and delivered to the target as a document, the target can read it normally, even though the message seems like gibberish to everyone else. If the message is phrased as a command, the target is compelled to do as the message asks.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### GAS GUN

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** Wide-barreled pistol connected to backpack canister with hose

**Effect:** The wielder can select different chemical gasses, though some gas guns may come equipped with only one kind of cartridge. An attack projects a gas grenade up to a long distance and floods the area within immediate range of that point with the selected gas.

**Acidic:** An acidic cloud melts most substances, inflicting damage equal to half the artifact's level each subsequent round for one minute or until the chemical is washed away.

**Anticoagulant:** After a few minutes, victims begin bleeding from the eyes, mouth, ears, and skin. Bleeding is gradual, but unless an antidote is given, a victim will bleed to death within a few hours.

**Coagulant:** After a few hours, victims notice an odd stiffness to their limbs as their blood begins to clot in their veins. The process is gradual, but unless an antidote is given, a victim will stiffen until dead within a day (and remain stiff as an embalmed corpse).

**Lachrymator:** Victims cry, sneeze, cough, find it hard to breathe, and are partially blinded for ten minutes or more, increasing the difficulty of all tasks by two steps.

**Poison:** Victims are initially fine, but each hour, they lose a number of points equal to the level of the artifact; the lost points usually cannot be healed through ordinary methods.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d10

**Lady Falcon:** level 5, stealth tasks as level 6; Armor 1; long-range Luger attack inflicts 6 points of damage; has a level 3 trained war falcon



Many Eleventh Reich artifacts are slightly more powerful—and historically epic—than regular artifacts. For such artifacts, letting the GM determine how long they function is a better option than leaving depletion to random dice rolls.

## HOLY GRAIL, NAZI TAINTED

**Level:** 1d6 + 4

**Form:** Tarnished brass cup

**Effect:** A Nazi or other evildoer who drinks water from the cup is granted eternal life—by being converted into a mindless undead zombie. If the imbiber isn't a Nazi (or isn't otherwise an evil prick), the Grail might still covert him into a zombie because of the Nazi taint. On a roll of 1 or 2 on a d6, the drinker becomes a zombie. On a roll of 3 to 6, the Holy Grail heals all wounds, restores lost limbs, and cures any diseases and other negative conditions the imbiber might be suffering.

**Depletion:** — (GM Intrusion: the Holy Grail disappears, lost in another location in the Eleventh Reich or, possibly, in another recursion. Finding it again would require a quest.)

## KAVACHA (ARMOR OF KARNA)

**Level:** 1d6 + 4

**Form:** Breastplate and helm

**Effect:** Grants +2 to Armor in addition to the +3 to Armor that heavy armor usually provides. It doesn't completely cover the wearer, but the suit's protection applies to damage that often isn't reduced by typical armor, such as heat, cold, and Intellect damage.

**Depletion:** — (GM Intrusion: the wearer's heart is not pure enough to permit the wearing of the armor. If he continues to wear the Kavacha regardless, all subsequent attacks against him are treated as level 10 attacks.)

According to the Hindu epic Mahābhārata, Karna was an ancient king of India.

## RECURSOR DOWSING ROD

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Rod formed of the preserved upper spine and skull of a human, swaddled in circuitry

**Effect:** While one or more creatures not native to the recursion are present anywhere in the Eleventh Reich, the skull's eye sockets glow red. The wielder can use the rod to learn the direction of the closest non-native in the recursion; it points to that target for the next hour (requires a depletion roll).

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d10

## SESSHO · SEKI SPLINTER

**Level:** 1d6 + 3

**Form:** A knife-shaped splinter of stone from a shattered statue

**Effect:** The stone splinter functions as a light weapon. If the wielder also calls on the splinter's power, a hit inflicts 10 additional points of damage.

**Depletion:** 1–3 in 1d20

## SPEAR OF LONGINUS

**Level:** 1d6 + 4

**Form:** Heavy spear

**Effect:** This heavy two-handed weapon inflicts 2 additional points of damage beyond the 6 points that heavy weapons usually inflict. A character hit by the spear also moves one step down the damage track.

**Depletion:** — (GM Intrusion: the wielder's heart is not pure enough to permit the use of the spear. If he attempts to use it regardless, during each round in which he remains in direct or indirect contact with the shaft, he is subjected to a level 10 pyrotechnic attack.)



*“By the skillful and sustained use of propaganda, one can make a people see even heaven as hell or an extremely wretched life as paradise. Make the lie big, make it simple, keep saying it, and eventually they will believe it.”*

*~The Führer*

**WAR WALKER****Level:** 1d6 + 2**Form:** Weaponized, motorized exoskeleton covering the wearer's body

**Effect:** The war walker serves as heavy armor but doesn't debit a player's Speed Pool or Might Pool; the walker is driven as much as worn. It also grants +1 to Armor in addition to the +3 to Armor that heavy armor usually provides. Further, it is entirely sealed and has its own synthesized internal atmosphere, which protects against poison and chemical gases and allows the wearer to operate in an airless environment for up to an hour. The suit's protection also applies to damage that often isn't reduced by typical armor, such as heat or cold damage (but not Intellect damage). In addition, the wearer can deploy a shield that acts as an asset for Speed defense rolls, but which doesn't require the use of the wearer's hand.

Finally, the wearer gains a long-range gun attack that inflicts damage equal to the artifact level.

**Depletion:** — (GM Intrusion: at any time, the GM can rule that the armor has sustained enough damage to lose its atmospheric and environmental protections, that the mechanized exoskeleton that allows the war walker to be driven has been destroyed, or that the mounted gun has run out of ammunition.)

*"Germans who wish to use firearms should join the SS or the SA. Ordinary citizens don't need guns, as their having guns doesn't serve the State."  
~Heinrich Himmler*





# HALLOWEEN

*The edges of Halloween stretch off into foggy woods that invariably turn travelers around so that they find themselves retracing their original departure path.*

*Powers of the Night, Halloween's rulers, include the following:*

*Hazel Jenkins, page 69*

*Night Watchman, page 68*

*Coven of the Rusted Knife, page 69*

*Gomez Snake, page 68*

*Tattooed Woman, page 70*

Halloween is often dim but rarely dark. The full moon is fixed in Halloween's midnight sky, bright and clear except when streaming clouds veil it. Leering pumpkins lit by goblin lamplighters stare from windows and walls, bonfires on surrounding hilltops are tended by witch covens, and the firefly gleams from trick-or-treaters' candles dot the narrow streets.

Halloween is a mammoth city, but its neighborhoods are as unique as different varieties of candy. A few boroughs are sweet and light, others are bitter and mysterious, some are dark and rich, and several contain hidden razor blades that can sicken or kill the unwary. It's difficult to escape the smell of autumn leaves and candied apples, to blot out the sound of distant screams and maniac laughter, or to avoid the attention of slinking

## WHAT A RECURSOR KNOWS ABOUT HALLOWEEN

- Halloween operates under the law of Magic and is seeded by decades of holidays of the same name and related stories.
- Halloween is one large city. Each neighborhood is controlled by a separate individual or group. Rulers are collectively called **Powers of the Night**.
- Rules are important in Halloween, as laid out in the Halloween Accords, which (among other things) give a special protected status to trick-or-treaters.
- Halloween currency is counted in individual pieces of wrapped hard candy.



## HALLOWEEN ATTRIBUTES

**Level:** 4

**Laws:** Magic

**Playable Races:** Human, goblin

**Foci:** *Abides in Stone*, *Inks*

*Spells on Skin\**, *Looks for Trouble*, *Metamorphosizes*, *Operates Undercover*, *Quells Undead\**, *Practices Soul Sorcery*, *Trick-or-Treats\**

**Skills:** Halloween lore

**Connection to Strange:** Those who fly high enough (a few miles, or about 5 km) find that the faux-dark side of the moon contains a gate to the Strange.

**Connection to Earth:** A few gates hidden in tombs, in closets, or at the center of some witches' magic circles

**Size:** 1,000 square miles (2,590 square km)

**Spark:** 35%

**Trait:** Scary. The difficulty of tasks related to scaring or intimidating other creatures is modified by one step to the frightener's benefit.

\* indicates foci found in this book



## PRACTICES SOUL SORCERY

In this context, the focus Practices Soul Sorcery doesn't call on spirits of Ardeyn, but spirits of Halloween. Other modifications include the following.

**Tier 1: Phylactery.** The phylactery resembles a leering creature or witch's mask. It could also be a hat or living black cat.

**Tier 2: Clothe Spirit.** A target body used to clothe the spirit could be a cloth doll or a wooden or straw-stuffed scarecrow.

**Tier 4: Vicious Soul.** The spirit isn't a qephilim, and it takes up residence in a piece of candy, which must be eaten to transfer the benefits.

**Tier 6: Escape the Vault.** The spirits of creatures with the spark that are killed in

*Abides in Stone*,  
page 51

*Looks for Trouble*,  
page 68

*Metamorphosizes*,  
page 69

*Operates Undercover*,  
page 70

*Practices Soul Sorcery*,  
page 71

*Inks Spells on Skin*, page 200

*Quells Undead*, page 206

*Trick-or-Treats*, page 207

*Draggable foci*, page 52

*Wields Two Weapons at Once*, page 82

black cats with eyes as green as glow-in-the-dark toys.

**Arrival:** Halloween's initial default translation location is on the streets of a neighborhood called the Hollows, not far from the Old Hangman Pub.

## HALLOWEEN FOCI

The foci that player characters can choose in Halloween—as well as any foci that are dragged into the recursion—are modified by Halloween's context, as appropriate. For example, if someone drags *Wields Two Weapons at Once* into Halloween, the two light weapons chosen might burn with ghostly radiance. If someone chooses two blunt weapons (like maces or clubs), the heads of each weapon might resemble a pumpkin head carved in iron. And so on.

Other foci listed in the Halloween Attributes box are modified even further, as described below.





Halloween enter the Graveyard; otherwise, this ability works similarly.

## METAMORPHOSIZES

In Halloween, the focus Metamorphosizes is different (but similar) to the version described

### TRICK · OR · TREATERS IN HALLOWEEN

When not wandering the streets begging or vandalizing, native trick-or-treaters return to their homes, which could be in any of the urban neighborhoods, including the Hollows. Some trick-or-treaters have families they support through their activity, others do it for the rush, and some just fell into it as children and never grew older or wiser. Trick-or-treaters are motivated to play tricks because each time they pull one off without getting caught, they earn prestige from their acts of bravery—prestige that's worth honors, stories, and most important, hard candy currency.

in *The Strange* corebook. Those with the focus do not transform into battle chrysalides. Instead, they transform into some kind of fearsome Halloween-themed beast, such as a werewolf, a mummy, a creature from dark waters, or a massive black crow. Otherwise, this focus works essentially as described, without alteration to the stat and special ability boosts.

### TRICK · OR · TREATS

Trick-or-Treats is a focus available in various recursions spawned by the Halloween holiday.

### HALLOWEEN ACCORDS

Most Powers of the Night abide by rules they agreed to in order to keep the city from devolving into bloody chaos. Those accords are codified in long scrolls. Several of the Powers have copies. The Accords essentially boil down to the following.

**Neighborhood Borders:** The accords spell out the boundaries of each city neighborhood, such as the Hollows, the House on the Hill, the Graveyard, and all the rest.



*People found wandering an unsafe neighborhood who aren't trick-or-treaters are dealt with as if they were trick-or-treaters who got caught. The Vow of Begging endows real trick-or-treaters with an easily identifiable essence that any other native of Halloween can sense by spending an action studying the subject while within immediate range.*

*A geas (pronounced "gesh") is a magically binding obligation to perform a task or quest for whoever sets the geas. A recursor saddled with a geas can temporarily escape it by translating to a recursion that doesn't operate under the law of Magic.*

**Dispute Resolution:** When Powers come into conflict, the Accords describe the process of arbitration. Powers, or their representatives, meet at the Midnight Circus every eleven nights (it's always night in Halloween, but there's night, and then there's *night*). Disputes are aired, debated, and resolved by all the attending Powers as a group. Sometimes resolution is determined through Trial by Monster, in which each Power selects a champion (or, far more rarely, represents herself) for a fight to the death at a designated time.

**Sanctity of Trick-or-Treaters:** Trick-or-treaters are Halloween natives who took the magical Vow of Begging instead of settling down to a traditional trade. They're a special class of citizen. They enjoy a protected status, but at the same time are viable prey for any monster of Halloween who can beat trick-or-treaters at their own game. To remain safe while wandering the neighborhoods and begging door to door, trick-or-treaters must abide by three primary rules.

1. A trick-or-treater must not eat or use anything offered to her while she is on her rounds, but instead must save it for later. If she is caught eating a treat or using a gift while on her rounds, she loses her protected status for one night.
2. A trick-or-treater on her rounds must burn her candle to show her status. One who is found to be burning her candle while engaged in some other activity loses her protected status for one night.
3. Though it's expected that trick-or-treaters will attempt pranks, tricks, cons, or thefts, they must not get caught while doing so, or get caught trespassing inside a private residence if not invited in. If caught, a trick-or-treater loses her protected status for one night.

**Trick-or-Treaters Who Get Caught:** Powers can do whatever they want to a trick-or-treater who breaks the rules. Some Powers are lenient and merely lay a geas on the miscreant. But most Powers are unforgiving and take the trickster as a slave, feature her in an elaborate sacrificial ritual, eat her (perhaps as part of a pie, or roasted on a spit), or do something else equally horrific.

## HALLOWEEN GOBLIN RACIAL OPTION

Instead of appearing as a human, a recursor could choose to translate into the recursion as a Halloween goblin. A Halloween goblin looks somewhat like the original recursor but is about 4 feet (1 m) tall, with green-hued skin and a predisposition for a pointy nose. In addition, the difficulty of all tasks related to deception and resisting fear is decreased by one step. (This latter quality cancels out the Scary trait of the recursion for Halloween goblins.)

## HALLOWEEN NEIGHBORHOODS

The following are only a sampling of the many neighborhoods in Halloween; more neighborhoods seem to melt into existence each year, while others can fade away over time.

### THE HOLLOWES

The Hollowes neighborhood is characterized by crowded, tall, and somewhat spindly buildings that often lean over the streets. The architecture forms dark "hollows" through which streets meander in a mazelike fashion. Even those who know their way around sometimes get lost and end up in blind, dead-end alleys haunted by lost and vengeful **ghosts**, or by shambling **pumpkin golems** that indiscriminately attack anything they come upon.

That said, the Hollowes is one of the "safe" neighborhoods of Halloween, and recursors

**Ghost:** level 4, stealth tasks as level 7, tasks related to frightening others as level 6; immune to mundane damage, takes half damage from most other sources; short-range Intellect attack inflicts 4 points of ambient damage and freezes foe in place; can move through solid objects; for more details, see The Strange Bestiary, page 60

*Pumpkin golems resemble scarecrows with a lit pumpkin in place of a head.*

**Pumpkin golem:** level 3; health 20; while pumpkin head is lit, golem has Armor 2 and attempts all tasks, attacks, and defenses as if level 5

**Gomez Snake:** level 5; tasks related to politics, knowledge of current events, and learning secrets as level 6; health 30; Armor 2 from scales; short-range poison attack inflicts 6 points of Speed damage

**Moriarty,** page 307

**Halloween spirit:** level 1; flesh-rotting touch deals 1 point of ambient damage

**Ghoul:** level 3; two claw attacks as a single action inflict 4 points of damage each; on reaching 0 health, the ghoul immediately makes one final claw attack before expiring

can usually move about without being assaulted in the streets by monsters. The neighborhood is ruled by Gomez Snake, a Power of the Night.

Gomez keeps a room at the Old Hangman Pub and holds court in the common room there. Besides ruling the Hollows, Gomez is an information broker who is cognizant of the Strange and other recursions. He pays (either with hard candy or with information of his own) for knowledge he doesn't already have about current events, especially those that stretch beyond the confines of Halloween. He

also happens to be a friend of a cross-recursion criminal mastermind named Moriarty, which means Gomez is far more connected than it might otherwise seem.

The friendship also means that Moriarty sometimes takes a room at the Old Hangman Pub.



**Night Watchman:** level 6; two claw attacks as a single action inflict 7 points of damage each; regains 2 points of health each round; carries a jack-o'-lantern artifact

Jack-o'-lantern, page 71

## GRAVEYARD

This misty "neighborhood" covers a large portion of Halloween and borders many other neighborhoods. Thus, the rutted roads through the gravestones, mausoleums, and leafless trees can be used to get around quickly, even though the Graveyard isn't "safe" for anyone but trick-or-treaters or those who've made a previous arrangement. The Graveyard is definitely not safe for naive strangers, natives not currently under the protection of the Accords, or those without a written right-of-passage (and sometimes even those safeguards are no guarantee). Danger manifests in the form of the ghosts, spirits, and ghouls that haunt the place, not to mention the Night Watchman.

Anyone killed in Halloween (even someone from another recursion) continues to exist as a spirit. The spirit is drawn to the Graveyard, where it may eventually find peace if its remains are interred there and allowed to decompose naturally. Spirits remain plentiful because ghouls, hungry for flesh (even rotting flesh), dig up about one in ten fresh graves. Ghouls in Halloween are goblins who have developed a taste for the flesh of their fellows.

**Night Watchman:** The Night Watchman is a ghoul, and he allows his "children" their occasional feasts to keep them in line. But far more succulent than a dead body is one that's still alive and kicking while it's chewed on.

The Night Watchman is a Power of the Night. He's in charge of seeing to the orderly interment of Halloween's dead and wrangling the spirits that drift like cloud wisps across the dark ground when they manifest.

## HOUSE ON THE HILL

The House on the Hill isn't really a neighborhood in the strictest sense, but the house is so large and rambling, and the walled grounds that surround the structure cover so much territory, that it's actually larger than some traditional city neighborhoods.

A handful of well-kept rooms in the east wing are let out to denizens of Halloween and to recursors who are brave (or stupid) enough to follow the signs that advertise a vacancy. Those who stay are usually safe as long as they remain in their rooms and don't look for the source of

strange noises or enter doors that weren't there the night before. (The latter is a trap set by the resident bogeyman.)

The House on the Hill is owned by the witch **Hazel Jenkins**. Unlike the witch covens that inhabit Forest Hills, Hazel Jenkins works alone except for her familiar, **Black Posie** (a cat with paws like tiny human hands). She is also served by a household of scurrying slaves that she's made of trick-or-treaters and a few recursors she's caught on her property. (Over time, she's caught an order of magnitude more trick-or-treaters than currently work for her as slaves because most catches become ingredients for her stew pot or her many experiments.)

Though it's an ill-kept secret among other Powers of the Night, Hazel Jenkins is a monster-maker. She fashions monstrous creatures through magic, forced breeding, and bloody and painful surgeries. The entire attic level of her mansion is devoted to these practices, and many of the hopeless screams that echo out over Halloween originate from these slant-ceilinged rooms. She's the one who created the pumpkin golems that now wander the Hollows. Her newest creations are swarms of bats with tiny faces of human children that cry like infants as they fly. Individually creepy, a swarm of **crying bats** is terrifying and can strip victims of their flesh in minutes, leaving nothing but bones.

## FOREST HILLS

A large, hilly region on the outskirts and partly surrounding Halloween is home to several **witch covens**. The covens generally get along with one another, though sometimes magical turf wars, hard-fought with hexes and curses, light up the sky. The Coven of the Rusted Knife is the current Power of the Night that controls the neighborhood, which means the witches making it up share authority. The Rusted Knife recently fought off an attempt by the Starry Cauldron coven to usurp its position. Rusted Knife was finally victorious because its champion in a Trial by Monster proved the better witch, but a deep hatred between the two covens simmers just beneath the surface.

Each coven maintains a house or cave hidden in Forest Hills, usually accessible via the narrow paths that wind through the dark groves and jagged hills. Only some of these paths are safe. Knowing which coven is looking for trade and which wants fresh meat for the stew pot is information best garnered before wandering into the neighborhood. Once a visitor sees a black cat or other **familiar** staring back from the window of a dark house in the woods, it's too late to flee.

**Hazel Jenkins:** level 7; health 32; Armor 3 from a spell; long-range fire attack inflicts 9 points of damage or turns victim into Hazel's slave for one minute from a spell; fly a long distance each round on witch's broom artifact

*Witch's broom, page 71*

**Black Posie:** level 4, all tasks related to stealth as level 6; able to manipulate objects as well as a human despite feline form

**Crying bat swarm:** level 5; melee attack inflicts 4 points of ambient damage on all targets within immediate range of each other

**Witch:** level 5, deception and disguise as level 7; Speed defense as level 6 due to familiar; health 21; attacks include shrivel and charm; can cast spell to gain +11 to health and +3 to Armor for one minute; for more details, see *The Strange Bestiary, page 143*

**Witch's familiar:** level 3; Armor 1; modifies a witch's Speed defense by one step to the witch's benefit



## MIDNIGHT CIRCUS

A broad stretch of property in Halloween is set aside for the Midnight Circus. Hundreds of patchwork tents, rickety rides, sideshow carts, games of chance, and sweets dealers move about from night to night. But the red-and-white big top tent is always visible at the center of the sprawl, usually glowing and flashing with entertainments going on within. (The big top tent is also where the Powers meet every eleven nights.) Rides, exhibitions, games, and special events are routinely staffed by shrunken “carnies” whose mouths have been sewn closed.

The **Tattooed Woman** is the Power controlling the Midnight Circus. When addressed, she prefers “Your Inked Majesty.” Her tattoos are elaborate and beautiful in a horrific sort of way and feature Halloween monsters—ghosts, witches, zombies, ghouls, skeletons, and so on. At her command, the **tattoos** animate, wiggle free from her skin, and do as she asks. This ability makes the Tattooed Woman one of the most feared Powers, and it helps to explain why the others agree to meet in the Midnight Circus instead of somewhere else.

**Tattooed Woman:** level 7; health 32; Armor 1; action to animate one or more personal tattoos that serve her without question

**Animate tattoo creature:** level 4; a killed victim fades and appears as another image on the Tattooed Woman's flesh

**Fabien:** level 5, deception tasks as level 6



## MIDNIGHT WHISPERS OF HALLOWEEN

**Missing Trick-or-Treater:** A trick-or-treater in the Hollows is long overdue, and the missing person's children are desperate for someone brave enough to go looking for their parent in the House on the Hill. That's where the trick-or-treater went to play a prank on Hazel Jenkins.

**Bonfires of the Soul:** Even the covens seem terrified of a new presence that has invaded Forest Hills, a strange mist that has burned entire coven houses—and all the witches and warlocks unable to escape—to so much ash.

**Trial by Monster:** A shoemaker needs a champion to prove his claim against the Night Watchman and retrieve the spirit of his son from the Graveyard.

**Wax Model:** A Power of the Night who controls a relatively small neighborhood known as Wax Lane is looking for a model for a new series of wax mannequins. The pay is good, but models have a way of becoming an integral part of the work.

## CIRCUS EXHIBITIONS

The Midnight Circus is a “safe” neighborhood to wander. But that's not true of some of the rides, exhibitions, and games, including the Carousel of Chance and the exhibit featuring the Five-Headed Thing.

**Carousel of Chance:** The caller for the Carousel of Chance is **Fabien**, a dapper clown dressed in orange. He advertises rides for 1 hard candy—or free for those willing to take a chance. “A great reward could be yours,” he claims, “if you're willing to risk it all!” Those who take Fabien up on a ride without paying whirl around on a painted wooden horse for several fun-filled revolutions. When the carousel stops, these free-riders roll a d20. On a 17–20, the rider gains either a random cypher or 10 hard candies. On

a 1 (or a GM intrusion), the rider must succeed on a difficulty 5 Might-based task or become one of the shrunken, mouthless carries who serve the Midnight Circus, or a tattoo on the Tattooed Woman's flesh. This curse can be lifted, but only if a friend of the victim agrees to risk her own ride. On any roll other than a 1, the curse is lifted. On a 1, the carousel claims yet another victim.

**Five-Headed Thing:** A painted sign at the door of a yellow tent reads, "See the **Five-Headed Thing!** But never alone." Tent visitors who ring a bell are graced by the appearance of a large hooded humanoid who enters the tent viewing area from the rear. When the humanoid draws the voluminous hood from its "head," what's revealed are five human-sized heads nestled in the upper body of a fat man. Four of the heads are gagged. The head that's free to speak is cultured and urbane, but it doesn't answer questions about the other heads. It offers to reveal a special secret to one visitor, but anyone else present must first leave the tent. Anyone left alone with the Five-Headed Thing is usually never seen again—though isn't it odd how the gagged heads resemble the missing?

## HALLOWEEN ARTIFACTS

### JACK · O' · LANTERN

**Level:** 1d6 + 3

**Form:** A brass lantern sculpted to resemble a traditional Halloween pumpkin

**Effect:** When lit, the lantern provides bright light within immediate range and dim light within short range for one hour per use. The user can also call on various abilities of the lantern, including the following:

- Reveal invisible or otherwise unseen creatures for one round.
- Command (level 1) spirits for ten minutes.
- Gain +1 to Armor against damage from spells.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### WITCH'S BROOM

**Level:** 1d6 + 2

**Form:** A 6-foot-long (2 m) wooden broom

**Effect:** As a vehicle, the broom can be ridden a long distance each round, but on extended trips, it can move up to 100 miles (160 km) per hour.

Additionally, a witch's broom can induce a powerful hallucinogenic state in a user who desires it. Hallucinations last for four hours, during which time the difficulty of all tasks is increased by one step. After the hallucinations end, the difficulty of Intellect-based tasks is decreased by one step for ten minutes.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

**Five-headed thing:** level 6; touch inflicts 4 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor); killed victims incorporated as new face on thing





# MESOZOICA

The edge of Mesozoica is the surrounding ocean, which spills into a surrounding waterfall that empties into the Strange itself.

-  Draggable foci, page 52
- Adapts to Any Environment, page 54
- Carries a Quiver, page 55
- Leads, page 65
- Lives in the Wilderness, page 66
- Regenerates Tissue, page 74
- Slays Dragons, page 77
- Wields Two Weapons at Once, page 82

**Pterodactyl:** level 5, Speed defense as level 4; health 30; flies a long distance each round

**Tyrannosaurus rex:** level 7, perception and Speed defense as level 5; health 50

**Deinonychus:** level 3, perception as level 5, Speed defense as level 4; health 15; Armor 1; bite inflicts 4 points of damage

For more details on pterodactyls, T. rexes, and deinonychus, see The Strange Bestiary.

**Saber-toothed cat:** level 5; bite inflicts 7 points of damage

Savage hominid, page 75

Dinosaurs roam the lush, semitropical recursion of Mesozoica. Flocks of T. rexes, triceratops, ankylosauruses, and other creatures that lived during the Mesozoic Era occupy the recursion. Various other terrestrially extinct but anachronistic creatures also inhabit Mesozoica, including mammoths, saber-toothed cats, and a couple of primitive hominid species. This recursion is classified as one of the “Lost World” recursions where dinosaurs yet roam for any number of reasons.

Mesozoica is a massive island ringed by fearsome cliffs. Colossal boulders, many of which resemble eroded sculptures of enigmatic creatures and faces, extend away from the cliffs into the surrounding surf. Inland past the cliffs, the air is moist and warm. Jungle smothers much of the interior. Day or night, the noises of thousands of living creatures blend into a soundscape of buzzing, singing, and occasionally roaring life.

Three volcanoes crown Mesozoica. The peaks smear pillars of smoke across the sky. Sometimes the entire land shakes with seismic violence, and when that happens, fire flares on the volcanic heights.

**Arrival:** Mesozoica’s initial default translation location is standing on the rocky beach in one of the very few breaches in the cliff walls surrounding the island’s interior, facing inland.

## MESOZOICA FOCI

The foci that player characters can choose in Mesozoica—as well as any foci that are dragged into the recursion—are modified by the recursion’s context, as appropriate. If someone selects Slays Dragons, for example, the focus doesn’t refer to dragons, but to dinosaurs. Other modifications include replacing the sword or lance with a heavy rifle (if desired), both under Equipment and under the various tiers that grant training.

## DINOSAURS, HOMINIDS, AND HAZARDS

Exploring Mesozoica is dangerous. Every few hours, recursors moving across the island might have a random encounter with a wandering dinosaur or stumble across an island hazard. These encounters should be introduced as GM intrusions. Not all encounters necessarily lead to combat; recursors should know when to run.

d6	Event
1	1d6 + 1 pterodactyls
2	1d6 tyrannosaurus rexes
3	1d6 + 2 deinonychus (“velociraptors”)
4	1d6 saber-toothed cats
5	2d6 savage hominids
6	Hazard; roll for details:
	1–2 Tar pit
	3 Insect web
	4–5 Hominid hunter’s trap
	6 Earthquake

**MESOZOICA ATTRIBUTES**

**Level:** 3

**Laws:** Mad Science

**Playable Races:** Human, hominid

**Foci:** Adapts to Any Environment, Carries a Quiver, Leads, Lives in the Wilderness, Regenerates Tissue, Slays Dragons, Wields Two Weapons at Once

**Skills:** Mesozoica lore, paleontology

**Connection to Strange:** Waterfalls that endlessly spill Mesozoica’s ocean into the Strange

**Connection to Earth:** A few gates, including an inapposite gate that occasionally forms in an underwater tunnel connecting an interior lagoon with the surrounding ocean

**Size:** 3,000 square miles (~8,000 square km)

**Spark:** 25%

**Trait:** Primitive. The difficulty of any attempt to calm an aggressive or enraged creature is increased by one step.



**HAZARDS**

The island is thick with hazards. Some are natural, and others were fashioned by hominids, serpent people, or giant insects.

**Tar Pits:** Sometimes tar pits are obvious, but sometimes they're obscured by tricks of the terrain or situated to catch creatures that slip and tumble from a higher location. Tar pits are filled with a sticky, black, clinging, semisolid fluid called bitumen. Victims who fall into a tar pit must be pulled free or succeed on a difficulty 5 Might-based task before they sink beneath the surface in 1d6 + 1 rounds.

**Insect Web:** Webs of almost any variety can be found, or blundered into, on Mesozoica. Some are created by spider colonies, where each spider is no bigger than a recursor's head. Others are created by insects large enough to challenge a T. rex. It's usually only a few rounds before a victim struggles free with a successful difficulty 4 Might-based task (unless he becomes particularly entangled, as might happen with a GM intrusion). The bigger issue is that in struggling to free himself from



**WHAT A RECURSOR KNOWS ABOUT MESOZOICA**

- Mesozoica operates under the law of Mad Science and is seeded by hundreds of popular stories, movies, myths, and misconceptions about the age of dinosaurs.
- Mesozoica is contained on one immense island. Dinosaurs inhabit the island, but so do several varieties of hominids, mammalian megafauna, and a remnant, degenerate race of serpent people descended from a far more advanced culture.
- An outpost called Fort Erish is sometimes inhabited by recursor traders out of Ardeyn, but it's periodically overrun by wildlife.



the web, a victim is almost certain to alert whichever insect (or insect colony) spun the web that dinner is served.





**Hominid Hunter's Trap:** The primitive hominids of the recursion hunt large game by creating camouflaged spiked pit traps (level 5). Explorers who fail a Speed defense roll fall 20 feet (6 m) onto sharpened wooden spikes that inflict 6 points of damage. Sometimes the hominids are close enough to finish off whatever stumbles into their trap.

**Earthquake:** An episode of unstable footing isn't too bad, unless explorers happen to be inside a cave, or the earth tears open beneath them. In both cases, a Speed defense roll (whose difficulty is equal to the magnitude of the quake) gets a target out of immediate danger. Those who fail to find safety during a cave-in either are buried under a rockfall or find that their route back to the surface has collapsed. Those who fall into a newly formed crevasse face all manner of unpleasant possibilities, including a very long drop, a crushing experience when the crevasse flexes shut, or a dip into flowing magma.

**MESOZOICA SITES OF NOTE**

The following are just a few of the interesting locations hosted by Mesozoica, most of which can be found only after an expedition through the deep jungle. Fort Erish is the exception.

**FORT ERISH**

Fort Erish hunkers behind a surrounding stockade wall of stone that's pierced by a main gate, over which two wooden watchtowers glower. At night, torches are lit along the wall tops. The fort is located along the coast, within one of the few gaps in the cliffs that ring the island. Trade ships (including chaos skiffs retrofitted to sail on water as well as in the Chaosphere) sometimes lie at anchor in the waters beyond the crashing surf.

Traders of Ardeyn (under contract to Jagger Shipping) claim Fort Erish, though they didn't build it. They found the fortress empty and partly in ruins, with few clues about the original owners. The traders rebuilt the fort as best as they were able. Their repairs were crude because Ardeyn operates under the law

Ardeyn, page 160  
Jagger Shipping, page 172

**RICHES OF MESOZOICA**

Veins of gold and crystal, deposits of oil and gas, dinosaur meat, and exotic plants useful for spell components, perfumes, poisons, and medicines can be had in Mesozoica, if one knows how to collect these bounties. Additionally, artifacts of the ancient serpent people are sometimes found deep within caves and weathered temples far inland—artifacts that, despite their power, operate under the law of Standard Physics.

of Magic, and the traders had to accomplish their construction using less exotic, brute-force methods available in a recursion that operates under the law of Mad Science.

Every few months, the traders are forced to flee the fort or be slaughtered by a dinosaur infestation, a hominid uprising, poisonous volcanic gasses, or something less well understood but blamed on the degenerate race of serpent people that live on the island. The evacuations aren't always successful, but a new expedition usually arrives within a few months regardless—the resources of Mesozoica are too rich to ignore.

When the fort is occupied by traders, visitors who stumble upon the place are greeted by **Captain Marab**, who heads most expeditions. Marab treats civilized explorers well, and he puts them up for several days within the safety of the walls without any expectation of payment. Accommodations are basic, but food and ale are plentiful, as are stories and trade opportunities.

When the fort is vacant, explorers find evidence of hasty evacuation, more than a few bodies of traders who failed to get out in time, and probably remnants of the danger that forced the evacuation.

**HOMINID DWELLINGS**

Mesozoica hosts two savage hominid subspecies that constantly war with each other. The traders of Fort Erish refer to them as Greeneyes and Scarbacks, respectively (not to mention a slew of other less polite names, including “those tailed fuckers” and the “brain-eating brutes”).

Native hominids aren't advanced enough for a formal language, but they can communicate broad sentiments to one another through grunts, screams, and violent displays. It's entirely likely that individual outliers exist among both tribes, but most hominids of the recursion lead a savage life, where it's better to kill strangers than try to communicate with them. After all, when you're a cannibal who believes you'll gain the strength of your enemies by roasting them alive and eating their still-sizzling brains, doing anything else is counterproductive.

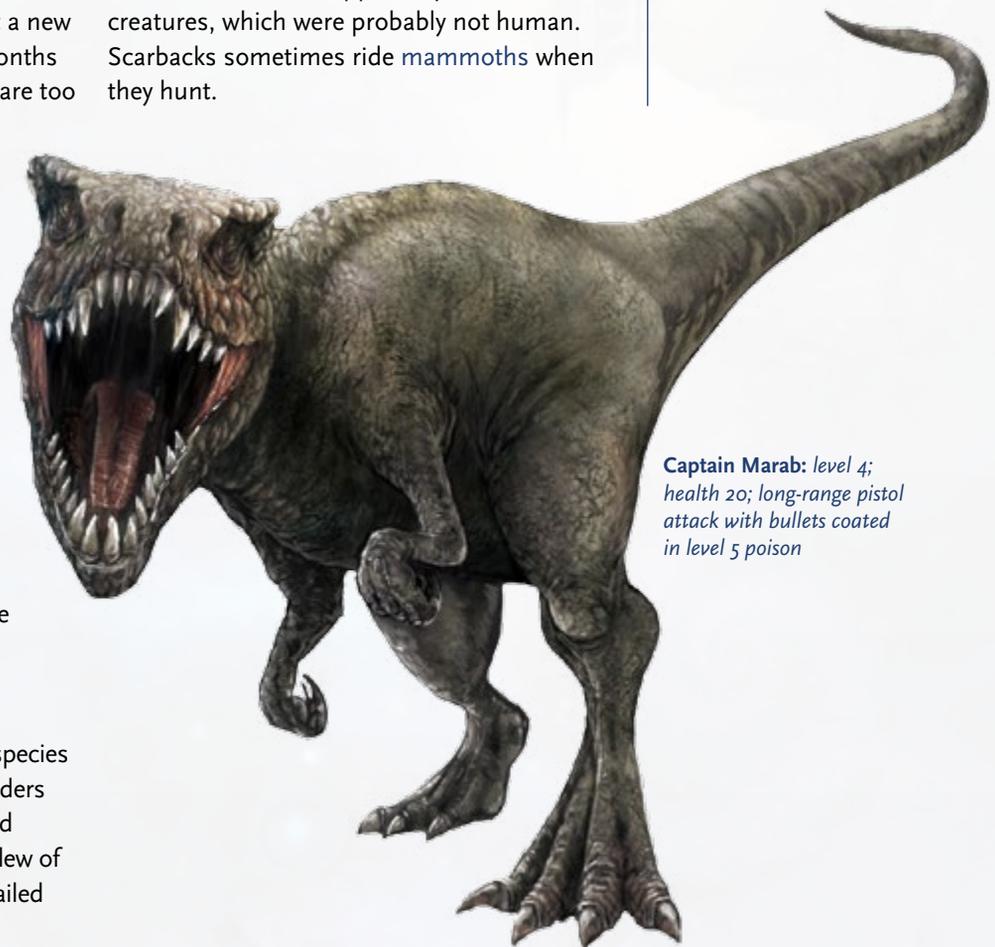
**Greeneyes:** The slighter, tailed hominid subspecies dyes the fur around their eyes bright green and lives predominantly in nestlike structures hidden in the jungle canopy. Greeneyes employ poison on their spear and dart tips that can paralyze or kill.

**Scarbacks:** The upper torsos of the larger-boned, hulking hominid subrace are covered in ritual scarification symbols. Scarbacks tend to inhabit eroded cliff dwellings carved by a much more advanced and apparently extinct race of creatures, which were probably not human. Scarbacks sometimes ride **mammoths** when they hunt.

**Greeneye warrior:** level 3, tasks related to stealth as level 5; short-range poisoned dart attack paralyzes victim for two rounds

**Scarback warrior:** level 4, tasks related to being brave as level 5; short-range thrown rock attack

**Mammoth:** level 6, Speed defense as level 3; health 30; Armor 1; tusk attack deals 8 points of damage; trample attack deals 8 points of damage on all victims in immediate area



**Captain Marab:** level 4; health 20; long-range pistol attack with bullets coated in level 5 poison



**Serpent person:** level 3; spear attack for 4 points of damage; for more details, see *The Strange Bestiary*, page 120

## TEMPLE OF TIME

A structure of black stone slabs shot through with veins of yellowish crystal stands near the base of Mesozoica's largest volcano. The massive slabs lean against each other to create a not-quite-symmetrical cone. Accessing the interior is as easy as walking through any one of the wide openings between the leaning slabs—or it would be, if the site wasn't guarded by scaled humanoid with snakelike heads wielding crude weapons. The serpent people of Mesozoica may be devolved and have lost the technology and magic of their forebears, but they retain strong racial instincts. They react violently against mammals, especially those of the humanoid variety.

The enclosed space within the structure seems larger inside than outside. The air is cold and dry, illumination from the exterior doesn't reach inside, and the floor is completely smooth. At the center is a haze of swirling yellowish radiance almost 10 feet (3 m) in diameter. The blot of rolling light constantly produces a series of tones and belling chimes. Anyone entering the light must succeed on a difficulty 3 Intellect-based defense roll or suffer a baleful time-related effect chosen by the GM: a victim ages a couple of years, disappears for a

## TRACKS IN THE JUNGLE

**Enlightened One:** A serpent person wearing clothing and wielding tools was seen entering the Temple of Time. Since then, the savage serpent people have been agitated, traveling to locations around the island where they haven't previously ventured. Several seem intent on sailing a hollowed-out log to the recursion's edge, and perhaps beyond.

**Fort Erish Slaughter:** Something so sudden and terrible happened in Fort Erish recently that none of the traders there managed to evacuate safely. Unlike with previous attacks, whatever happened in the outpost left behind no blood, no squatting hominids or dinosaurs, and no lingering sickness. Everyone just disappeared. Jagger Shipping wants to find out why.

**T. Rex Testing:** OSR scientists put a tracker on a T. rex they affectionately call "Ellen" and have been tracking her for several months for research purposes. Now the tracker has gone offline, and the scientists are concerned for their experiment data, and perhaps for Ellen herself. They want someone to venture into Mesozoica's dangerous interior to the location of the last tracking signal and investigate.



few hours and reappears without having experienced any intervening time, or devolves into something like one of the hominids (or, if already a hominid, into a large ratlike creature).

Someone who succeeds on the Intellect defense roll gains a limited and local mastery over time, and she can choose to move back in time (taking up to three willing allies) to any temporal point that overlaps with her own presence in Mesozoica. Doing so is dangerous, because if her original-time self ever becomes aware of her time-traveling self, one is randomly annihilated, which might strand the survivor in a sealed time loop.



*“Dinosaurs and man, two species separated by 65 million years of evolution, have just been suddenly thrown back into the mix together. How can we possibly have the slightest idea what to expect?”*

*~Dr. Alan Grant, Jurassic Park*

As it happens, many sealed time loops are “stored” in the Temple of Time. Many are filled with horrifying creatures, NPCs, and cursed objects, and restoring any of these prisoners would likely be exceedingly dangerous.

For instance, one of the many time-looped prisoners is a primeval creature the serpent people know as a *naga*. The black-scaled naga has multiple heads and is well over 100 feet (30 m) in length. In addition to its brute strength, the naga is a veteran schemer and has power over the weather.

If a time key is brought into the Temple of Time and activated, one named creature or object stored in a sealed time loop is released. If no creature or object is named (or if no creature or object answers to the name provided), a random creature or object is released.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d10

**Naga:** level 8, Speed defense as level 3; Armor 1; three attacks as one action

## MESOZOICA ARTIFACTS

### SERPENT RING

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Bronze ring shaped like a coiled serpent

**Effect:** The difficulty of all tasks associated with interacting with dinosaurs and reptiles is modified by one step to the wearer’s benefit. This effect requires no activation or depletion roll.

When the ring is activated, it emits a ray of slithering energy at a foe within long range. The snake-shaped ray inflicts damage equal to the artifact’s level. If the wearer chooses to fire an empowered ray (which requires two depletion rolls), it deals 3 additional points of damage.

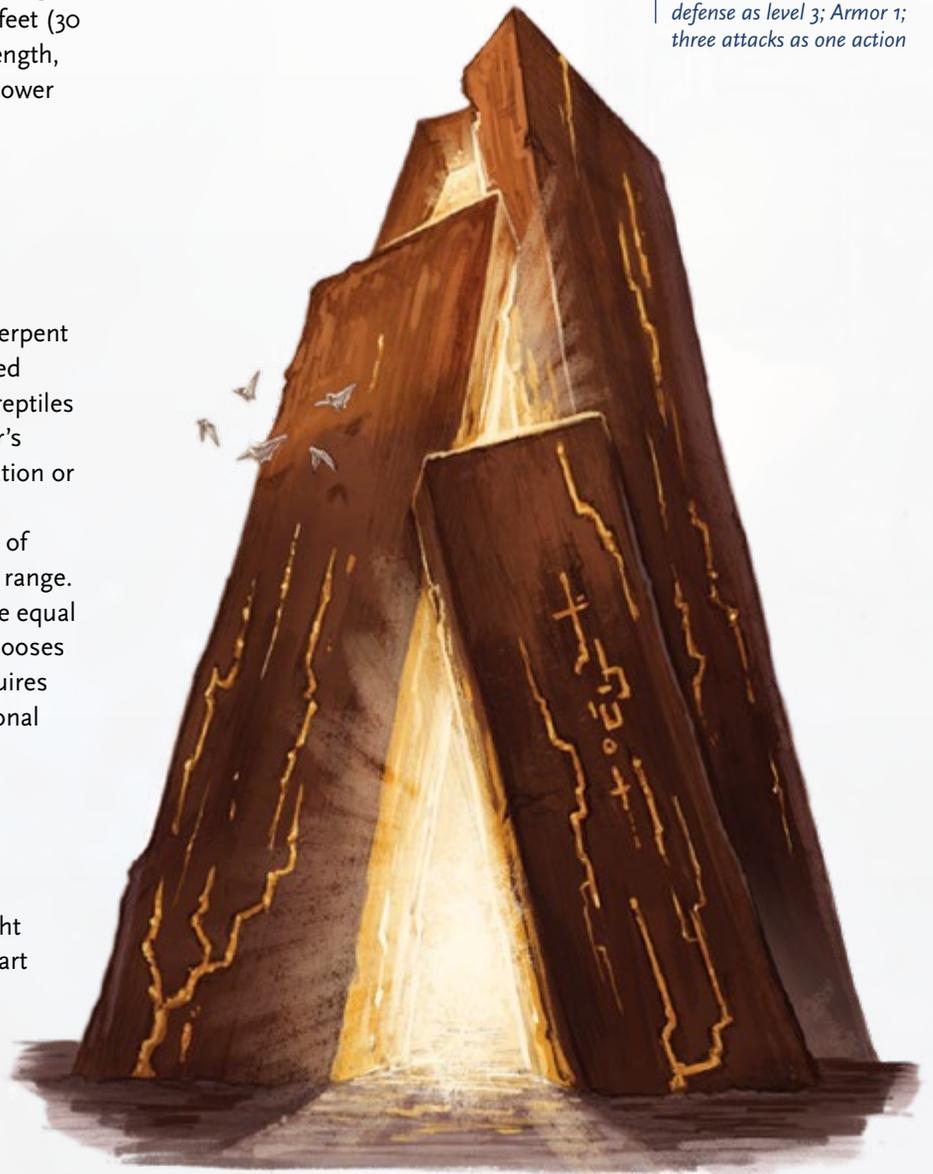
**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

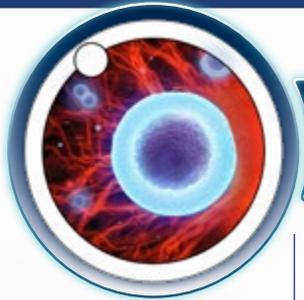
### TIME KEY

**Level:** 1d6 + 3

**Form:** Fist-sized orb of solid, swirling light

**Effect:** When the device is activated as part of another action, the user can look ahead to see how her actions might unfold. She then has an asset on the first task she performs before the end of the next round.





Microcosmica was created through fictional leakage.

# MICROCOSMICA

*“The medieval philosophers were right. Man is the center of the universe. We stand in the middle of infinity between outer and inner space, and there’s no limit to either.”*

~Peter Duval, *Fantastic Voyage*

Distant, regular beats throb through the soft corridors and twisted flesh mazes of Microcosmica, impossible to ever shut out completely. The beat vibrates through a visitor’s bones. The sound is like a normal world’s

sun; its influence gives life and purpose to everything. It is literally the heart of existence. If it stopped, everything would wither and rot. The substance of the recursion is itself alive and seems to stretch in every direction, creating a vast wilderness of fluid-filled cavities, blood vessels, bile ducts, bone, mucus, and fiber.

Visiting Microcosmica is like being immersed in the center of a sloshing, salty sea of viscous particles, all of which are alive. Some are indeed ravenous bacteria with a keen interest in the appearance of intruders whose chemical makeup marks them as different and, potentially, as food. That goes double for the especially aggressive leukocytes that congregate like police to any scene of violence, regardless of whether intruders were fighting off aggressive bacteria, cutting through a cavity wall to access a larger arterial, attempting to repair vessels or other cell structures of Microcosmica, or merely looking for somewhere to escape.

Luckily for first-time translators, the narrative inherent to Microcosmica’s creation involves scientific investigators who prepared their own visit by creating life support systems, including various bases, protective gear, and conveyances that resemble submarines. Otherwise, a recursor appearing unprepared in a random portion of Microcosmica would quickly suffocate in the airless environment, even as a host of hungry bacteria congregate using chemotaxis to vector in on the newcomer.

**Arrival:** First-time recursors who translate into Microcosmica appear in the observation deck of an artificial outpost called Nereus One.

Becomes Bacterial, page 196

Conducts Weird Science, page 57

Entertains, page 61

Is Licensed to Carry, page 64

Leads, page 65

Looks for Trouble, page 68

Operates Undercover, page 70

Solves Mysteries, page 78

Works the System, page 83

*Chemotaxis is a term used to describe bacteria moving toward higher concentrations of a chemical they find interesting.*

## MICROCOSMICA ATTRIBUTES

**Level:** 5

**Laws:** Mad Science

**Playable Races:** Human

**Foci:** Becomes Bacterial\*, Conducts Weird Science, Entertains, Is Licensed to Carry, Leads, Looks for Trouble, Operates Undercover, Solves Mysteries, Works the System

**Skills:** Microcosmica lore, any advanced scientific lore or engineering related to biology

**Connection to Strange:** Certain kinds of white blood cells, called strangeocytes, have engulfed gates, tears, and other direct openings to the Strange. See Leaving Microcosmica (page 79) for important safety notes if accessing a strangeocyte.

**Connection to Earth:** Translation only

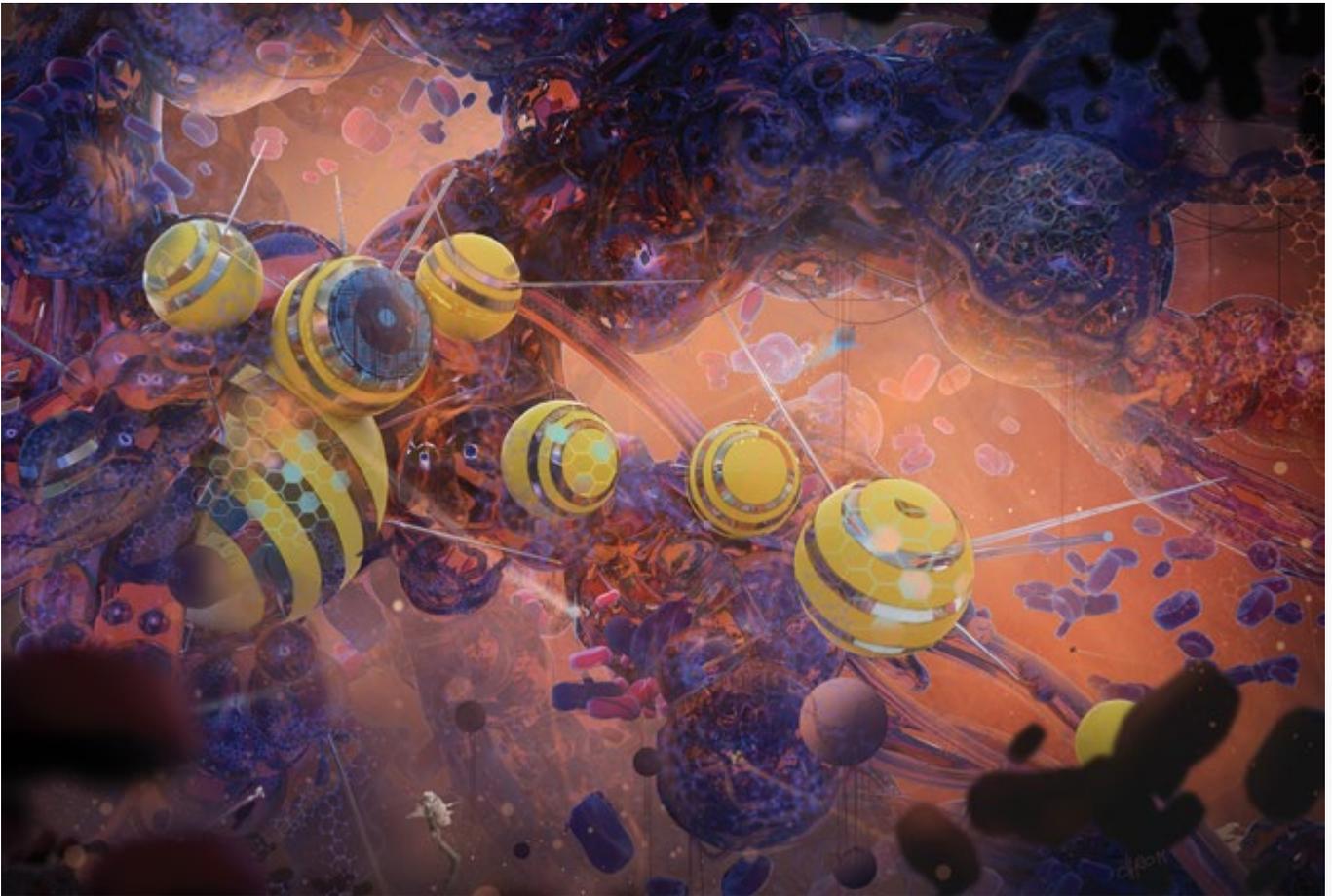
**Size:** Approximately human-sized (visitors become approximately bacterium-sized)

**Spark:** 5%

**Trait:** Analytic. Any creature with the spark attempting to understand a scientific principle, set up an experiment, or gather data finds the task modified by one step to its benefit.

\* indicates foci found in this book





## MICROCOSMICA FOCI

The foci that player characters can choose in Microcosmica—as well as any foci that are *dragged* into the recursion—are modified by the recursion’s context, as appropriate. Foci that are shared with Earth are almost exactly the same. But if a recursor selects Conducts Weird Science, for example, the kind of science she studies is likely to be biological in nature.

## LEAVING MICROCOSMICA

Leaving Microcosmica can be lethal if a traveler exits by any means other than *translation*. Translation ensures that the recursor appears in the target recursion (or on Earth) at her normal size. But someone who translates into Microcosmica and then leaves via an *inapposite gate* appears in the new recursion bacterially sized, which limits her ability to interact with anything except other bacteria (assuming the new recursion even has any). The only sure way to regain one’s proper dimension and mass is to translate to yet another recursion, which will reset the traveler.

More important, when leaving the recursion via translation, the recursor should be sure to translate out from Nereus One or another artificial habitat able to support human life. Otherwise, if she ever translates back, she will return to the same location she translated away from, and find herself floating without equipment and protection in the smothering, fluid-filled cavities of Microcosmica.

Finally, entering Microcosmica through inapposite means would be disastrous. Thankfully, the nature of the recursion tends to prevent inapposite gates and other forms of inapposite travel.

## DIRECTIONS

It’s hard to know exactly where you are in Microcosmica, even if using scientific equipment available in Nereus One. By convention, two major directions are commonly used: toward the extremities (“extremis”), or toward the heart (“heartward”). Given the complexity of the recursion’s structure, which is not particularly close to a real human’s

*Draggable foci, page 52*

*Translation, page 125*

*Inapposite gate, page 135*

**Typical bacterium:**

level 2; tolerates harsh environments; bite inflicts 3 points of damage; explosively lyses when reduced to 0 health, inflicting 1 point of damage to creatures in immediate range

Lysis is the dissolution of a cell, usually due to a rupture.

**Basophil:** level 3; bite injects anticoagulant that deals damage every round until the victim makes a recovery roll or uses other healing

**Eosinophil:** level 5; when damaged, splits into two level 3 eosinophils that can't split further

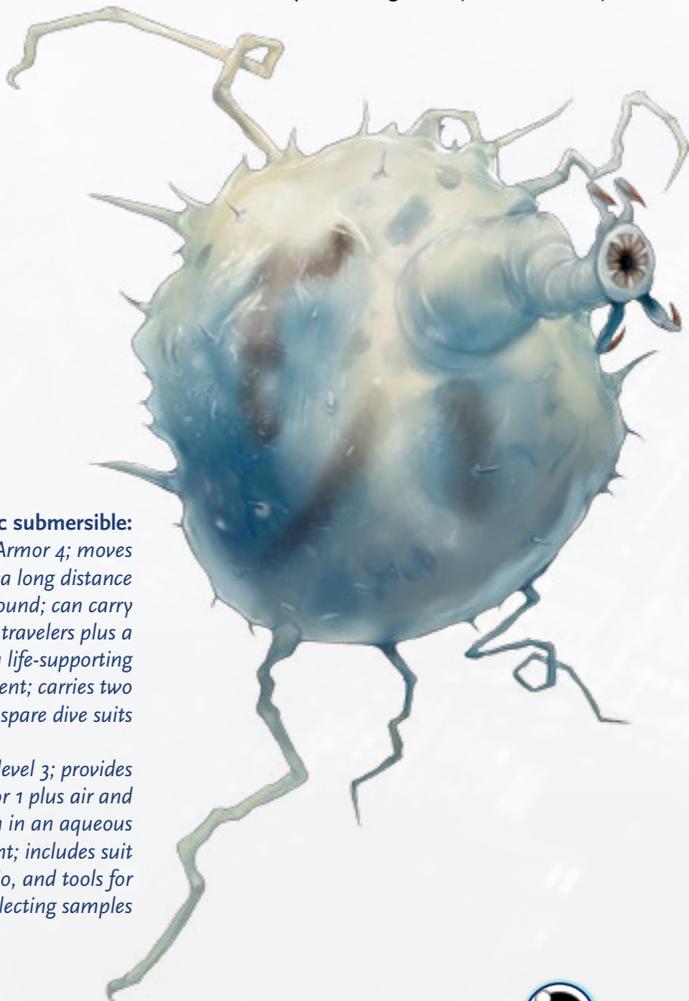
**Lymphocyte:** level 4; bite deals damage and injects a cell-dissolving enzyme that moves the victim one step down the damage track on a failed Might defense roll

*ImmuneSuppres*, page 81

anatomy, it's difficult to be more precise. Organs of various kinds are sometimes found duplicated, larger or smaller than would be expected, or never found at all, such as is the case for the brain of Microcosmica. Of course, for people the size of bacteria, the recursion is vast, and exploration may one day discover the truth.

## FLOTA AND FAUNA

Sometimes it's hard to tell the difference. The general rule is that fixed tissue is Microcosmica terrain, but free-roaming cells are usually bacterial in nature and are normal parts of the environment. In sum, the bacteria make something called the microbiome, the community of commensal, symbiotic, and pathogenic microorganisms that populates the recursion (of course, to recursors, microorganisms aren't particularly "micro"). Add the immune response that Microcosmica sometimes mounts, which floods an area with an aggressive swarm of various kinds of white blood cells (including basophils, eosinophils,



**Bioaquatic submersible:** level 4; Armor 4; moves up to a long distance each round; can carry eight travelers plus a pilot in a life-supporting environment; carries two spare dive suits

**Dive suit:** level 3; provides Armor 1 plus air and warmth in an aqueous environment; includes suit lights, radio, and tools for collecting samples

## WHAT A RECURSOR KNOWS ABOUT MICROCOSMICA

- Microcosmica operates under the law of Mad Science and is seeded by stories, movies, and myths of scientific voyagers to "inner" space—the space inside a living organism.
- Microcosmica is the interior of a normal-sized living creature, but recursors who visit it are translated down to the size of bacteria. (The recursor doesn't gain knowledge of the nature of the living creature that makes up Microcosmica.)
- Microcosmica is filthy with bacteria, which outnumber the constituent cells by 10 to 1. If given the chance, many of these bacteria will find bacteria-sized humanoids a tasty morsel.
- First-time human translators appear in a scientific station called Nereus One that has the technology and equipment required for human survival and exploration of Microcosmica. That includes important daily injections of *ImmuneSuppres*.

lymphocytes, and more), and any particular location can go from crowded to swarming quickly.

## GETTING AROUND

Arteries are relatively easy to find in Microcosmica. They are the preferred way for recursors in protective gear or some kind of bioaquatic submersible to get around, at least for those moving extremis. If they're moving heartward, veins are preferred—the recursors don't travel nearly as fast, but they don't need to attempt to pierce tissues.

Regardless of the location, it usually has enough liquid matrix for a recursor (or bioaquatic submersible) to move about in cavities and layers. Most tissue layers that impose a barrier can be pierced merely by spending a round or two applying pressure, and the hole created heals itself within a few days (though this risks drawing an immune response from white blood cells).

## SITES OF INTEREST

Microcosmica contains several sites that recursors will want to visit, especially those with a scientific bent.

### NEREUS ONE

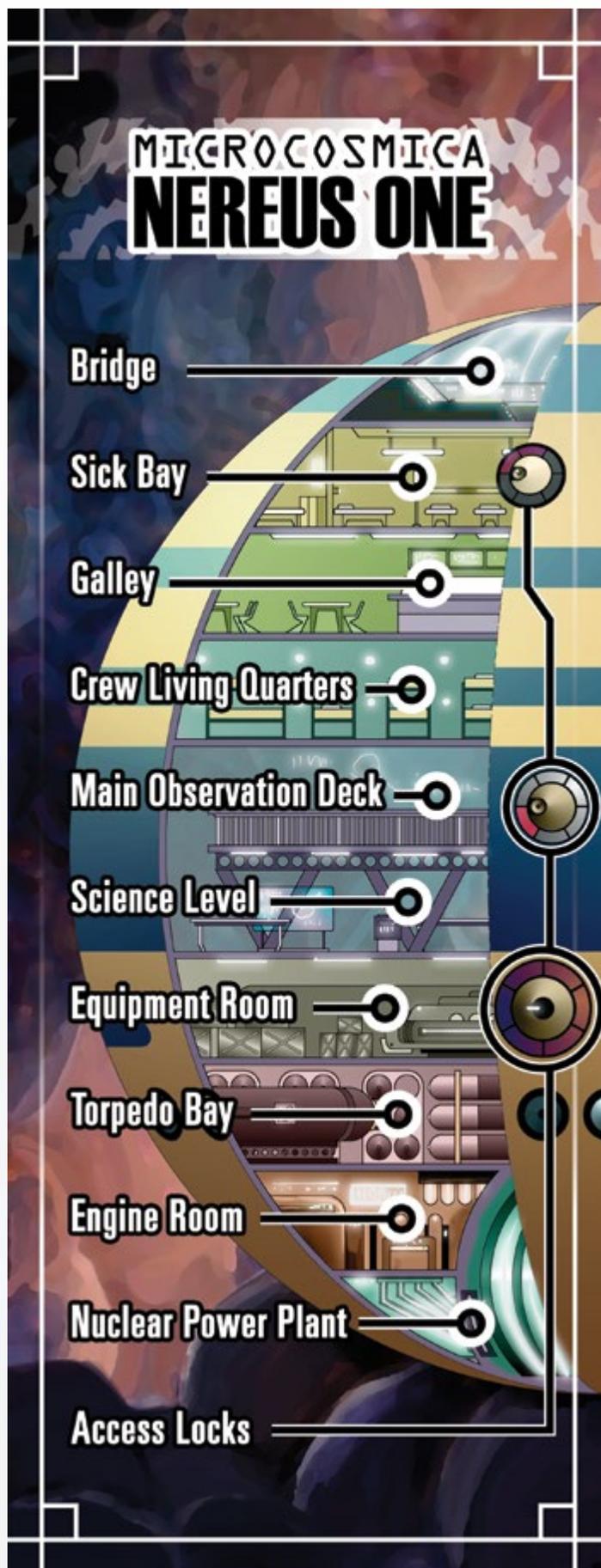
The stainless-steel-and-glass science base known as Nereus One is anchored to the side of a tissue wall deep within Microcosmica. The base is essentially a massive sphere striped with encircling glass viewports. Opaque metal bands are interspersed with the translucent viewports. Given that the metallic portions of the base are painted with a yellow non-bioactive coating, base researchers sometimes affectionately call it the “Bumblebee.”

The base contains several different sections, including a science level where most experiments are run, a galley for preparing and eating food, crew living quarters, a main observation deck, a sick bay for storing medicine and treating hurt crew, a nuclear power plant and associated engine room, a bridge for when the base is detached and moving, an equipment room with spare dive suits and two bioaquatic submersibles, and a torpedo bay.

**ImmuneSuppres:** Researchers take daily shots of a drug called ImmuneSuppres. This red-colored fluid keeps bad reactions from the quantum miniaturization process at bay. Recursors who stay more than a day in Microcosmica are subject to the same bad reactions, since they've taken on the same context as the researchers. PCs who do not take daily injections of ImmuneSuppres notice a discoloration and swelling in their skin. If left untreated, PCs begin moving down the damage track after a few days. NPCs left untreated die and degrade into so much rotting goo.

### NEREUS ONE RESEARCHERS

From five to twenty researchers inhabit Nereus One. When present in the base, the scientists are busy with exacting and obscure experiments on the science level. These experiments involve teasing out eclectic signals from tissue assays on samples collected from distant parts of Microcosmica. When scientists are not in the base, they're out gathering samples, running other tests in the field, or simply gone. In the



**Calvin Meyers:** level 5; Armor 1; long-range hydraulic pistol inflicts 6 points of damage

**Dr. Reggie Garner:** level 3; short-range harpoon gun inflicts 4 points of damage

**Shumala-shamash:** level 5; health 25; Armor 2; long-range bioelectric attack inflicts 5 points of damage on all creatures within immediate range of each other; carries two cyphers

**Ruk, page 190**  
**Karum, page 193**  
**Zal, page 194**

**Dr. Helen Rodrigues:** level 4; health 18; short-range harpoon gun inflicts 4 points of damage

**Nereus Five fused creature:** level 7, Speed defense as level 5; can fission off level 3 humanoid servitors; can engulf up to two creatures in immediate range as one action

latter case, they're absent—according to the narrative of the recursion—because they've been reassigned or otherwise retrieved by the university department they work for.

Any scientists the PCs are likely to meet on Nereus One do not have the spark, so they react as if the characters are new researchers assigned to the base. If the scientists are quizzed about where they come from, where they go when they're reassigned, and what kind of creature they've been nanosized and inserted into, most become incredulous, annoyed, or possibly confused by such stupid questions. As is true in any similar situation, continually rubbing the nose of a recursion native in the oddity of his existence could eventually kindle the spark in an NPC.

Three researchers stand out from the pack.

**Chief Researcher Reggie Garner:** Dr. Garner is a hardworking scientist with little time for chit-chat. He stays apprised of the other scientists' progress during a daily briefing held on the main observation deck (the widest level at the sphere's midpoint). Dr. Garner has a despondent air, and if pressed, he describes his sadness over how the other Nereus research bases were decommissioned and now float in other parts of the research organism, empty and mothballed. They were decommissioned after Nereus Five was lost with all crew under mysterious circumstances. The university pulled back its support, focusing only on Nereus One. In all, Garner says there are seven bases similar to the Bumblebee. If anything could rouse Dr. Garner from the status quo, it would be the opportunity to discover what happened to Nereus Five.

**Immunologist Helen Rodrigues:** Dr. Rodrigues hasn't grasped the fact that her "home" doesn't actually exist, and that the span of her entire experience, despite vague memories suggesting otherwise, is confined to her time in Nereus One. However, she is one of the few human NPC natives in Microcosmica with the spark. Subconsciously, she fears being recalled and reassigned, because she rightly worries that it could mean the end of her existence. Dr. Rodrigues also suspects some sort of foul play was involved in the loss of Nereus Five, possibly related to the actions of a secret agent of a foreign state. She found

documents in the trash file of a computer that indicated that illicit biological research was being conducted on Nereus Five, but she wasn't able to determine any more details.

**Associate Researcher Calvin Meyers:** Calvin works for a foreign state (within the context of the narrative) and keeps tabs on everything going on in Nereus One. He reports back to his handler via illicit calls from the radio room once every few days. Calvin knows that actions of his state led to the loss of Nereus Five, but he doesn't know exactly what went down. If an expedition is mounted to find it, he'll be the first volunteer to go in case he needs to ensure that its secrets are kept—even if that means killing everyone else on the expedition.

## NEREUS TWO

This supposedly mothballed research base actually has one secret, active researcher aboard: **Shumala-shamash**, a recursor from **Ruk**. She discovered the recursion by accident and realized that it was a treasure trove of potential biological secrets, accessible from a unique perspective that not even the superscience of **Ruk** could duplicate. If her experiments pan out, she hopes to sell the fruit of her labors to the highest bidder in her home recursion, which would likely be a toss-up between the **Karum** and **Zal**.

If **Shumala-shamash** is discovered, she claims to be an ordinary researcher named **Sylvia Collins**. However, if she recognizes the PCs as fellow recursors, she panics and attacks them in what she considers self-defense.

## NEREUS FIVE

The fate of Nereus Five was sealed when base researchers tried to engineer intelligence into a component of **Microcosmica** that was fifty times smaller (on average) than a bacterium-sized creature: a virus. In truth, the experiments were not authorized. The chief researcher was secretly a double agent working for an enemy state, which hoped to create a virus capable of selectively targeting victims back in the "real world."

What they got instead was a nightmare: a contiguous mass of writhing flesh made of all the former researchers on the station. The **fused creature** mimics intelligence, though it may not actually be intelligent. Luckily for

RESEARCH TOPICS

**Necrotizing Fasciitis:** A population of typical bacteria was radicalized, transforming them from useful symbiotes to tissue-eating monsters. To synthesize a cure, scientists on Nereus One need a sample from the infection, which requires a dangerous trip into an infected organ that already shows excessive necrosis. The organ is a free-for-all of white blood cells versus the radicalized bacteria (the scientists call the bacteria “staphylococcus aureus”).

**Brain Quest:** A free-roaming instance of the AI that controls the recursion of Singularitan is mounting an expedition into Microcosmica. This creature, a data sentinel, seeks the brain and believes that by finding the mysterious organ, it will achieve an ascendant state as great as (or perhaps greater than) the instance of the AI in its home recursion. Presumably, the data sentinel has an idea of where to look. An ascendant state risks conferring planetovore status on the sentinel.

**Stranded Researchers:** Trouble found a group of researchers in a submersible. The impeller engine on their transport broke, and their sporadic communication with Nereus One indicates that they need replacement parts. Urgency is required because their broken submersible is lodged in a spot overlooking a stomachlike cavity, but not lodged especially permanently.

**Fever:** It’s heating up! The temperature all across Microcosmica has exceeded safe limits (safe for continued normal function of the tissue of Microcosmica), and white blood cells are everywhere, acting crazy, lashing out against benign tissue with a vengeance—as well as any researchers who draw too near. Something is very wrong, requiring a journey to a massive wound site to neutralize particles of a foreign object. That foreign object might well be the shattered shards of a wholly different recursion.

**Staphylococcus aureus:** level 4; tolerates harsh environments; bite inflicts 5 points of damage; explosively lyses when reduced to 0 health, inflicting 2 points of damage to creatures in immediate range

 Singularitan, page 251

**Data sentinel:** level 4, knowledge tasks as level 7; health 18; Armor 2; long-range energy attack inflicts 4 points of damage; for more details, see The Strange Bestiary, page 37

the surrounding tissues of Microcosmica, the blob hasn’t quite mimicked intelligence well enough to escape from the lockdown the last few survivors managed to put the station under. Knowing that later investigators who found Nereus Five would risk spreading contamination, they also disengaged the anchor failsafes and set the base adrift in Microcosmica. It’s now a plague ship, one that virulently infects, transforms, and absorbs any who find it and risk coming aboard.

STOMACH CAVITY

The stomach cavity discovered by researchers is only a day’s travel from Nereus One by submersible. The cavity stretches away in all directions, and its floor is flooded with an acid a couple of magnitudes stronger than the acid of a normal human stomach, which is hard on dive suits, submersibles, and everything else. The researchers are interested in discovering how the cavity lining can both produce the acid and remain protected from its effects.





*“We cannot fathom the marvelous complexity of an organic being; but on the hypothesis here advanced this complexity is much increased. Each living creature must be looked at as a microcosm—a little universe, formed of a host of self-propagating organisms, inconceivably minute and as numerous as the stars in heaven.”*

*~Charles Darwin*

*In humans, the brain is the only organ in the body without nerves, even though it controls the nervous system. In other words, the brain feels no pain.*

## BRAIN

This mythical organ, if it exists, would presumably be something like the god of Microcosmica, though possibly one largely unconscious of the processes that go on within its confines. Or so say some researchers. These same scientists theorize that harnessing the brainpower of Microcosmica from a miniaturized state might be possible, and in so doing, they could increase the linked intelligence a thousandfold, possibly launching it into a posthuman state. Other researchers call this belief ludicrous, pointing to the fact that the brain has yet to be discovered.

## HEART

The heart is one of the main sources of life in Microcosmica, and its continual beating is always present in the recursion, even aboard one of the research stations. Getting close to the heart is as difficult as it would be for an astronaut to get close to the sun—the beat is so loud that it overwhelms all baffles in submersibles and dive suits, and it renders the researcher unconscious. More than one submersible has been lost by venturing too close to the heart.

## MICROCOSMICA ARTIFACTS

### DNA INJECTOR

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** A 4-foot-long (1 m) metallic rod with a barbed propulsive head

**Effect:** The DNA injector is used like a cattle prod. When its business end is applied to a living target (possibly in a melee attack), it injects a potent cocktail of DNA, RNA, ribosomes, and other promoters that have an immediate as well as a long-term effect on the target.

The immediate effect paralyzes the target for up to one minute, after which the target has no memory of that time period. The secondary effect could be any one of the following, depending on the nature of the DNA injector (each injector has only one kind of secondary effect).

**Calm:** The target's aggressive tendencies are damped down for up to twelve hours, during which time the target responds to attacks but never initiates them.

**Aggression:** The target's aggressive tendencies are increased for up to twelve hours, during which time the target attacks almost anything it encounters.

**Transformation:** The target transforms into a leukocyte over a twelve-hour period. A fully transformed recursor loses all memory of his former existence, but a successful translation before the transformation is complete salvages those memories (and resets the recursor's form to fit the context of the new recursion).

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### DNA SAMPLER

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** A 4-foot-long (1 m) metallic rod with a barbed propulsive head

**Effect:** The DNA sampler is used like a cattle prod. When its business end is applied to a living target (possibly in a melee attack), it removes a sample of the target's tissue and analyzes it. A readout shows what, if any, special abilities the target possesses. If the wielder wishes, she can then use the DNA sampler on herself and gain one of the special abilities from the last creature sampled. A transferred ability lasts for one minute. Sampling and transferring each require a depletion roll.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

# NEW CENTROPOLIS



*“If you haven’t been this close to superhumans, you don’t understand what it’s like to fight them. Even when you’ve got powers yourself, the predominant impression is one of shock. The forces moving around you are out of human scale, and your nervous system doesn’t know how to deal with it. It’s like being in a car accident, over and over again. You never feel the pain until later.”*

~Austin Grossman, *Soon I Will Be Invincible*

Not everyone used to believe superhumans walked among us. That changed when the fair city of Centropolis was rendered into a toxic crater. Radioactive Girl did it, sacrificing herself to save us from the alien Kasrang. Hovering over the city like an oversized zeppelin, the Kasrang “Mother Virus” had already converted everyone who hadn’t fled the city into fresh contamination vectors. Radioactive Girl went supercritical not only to destroy Kasrang, but also to save the entire world.

New Centropolis was founded afterward. Over the next thirty years, it grew into the thriving metropolis we know today. New Centropolis openly affirms and accepts the existence of superhumans. In fact, the city hosts several, including the Blaze, Emerald Witch, Corvid, Galaxia, and Robot Lad. Thanks to the efforts of the Department of Superhuman Affairs (DSA), activities that would normally be classified as vigilante acts are often given legal status. Otherwise, there would be only supervillains.

Not all superhumans are civically minded, DSA or not. Many superhumans are motivated by greed, lust for power, or vengeance. This means that despite the wonders that live and fly in New Centropolis, calamity and tragedy at the hands of supervillains are far more common than they should be (literally true, in the case of Calamity, the supervillain able to negatively affect probability).

**Arrival:** First-time recursors arrive in New Centropolis standing in Centropolis Square, the city center, which features a massive memorial to Radioactive Girl.

## NEW CENTROPOLIS FOCI

New Centropolis is one of several Supers recursions, which are recursions seeded by comics, anime, and movies about superhuman heroes. When a character takes a focus offered in a Supers recursion, it could be in the role of a hero or a villain in that recursion. The GM could make available the foci from *In Translation* (if available), such as Wears an Iron Suit, Grows to Towering Heights, Throws Boulders, Projects Energy, and so on. However,

*Radioactive Girl Is Not Dead*, page 89

### NEW CENTROPOLIS ATTRIBUTES

**Level:** 5

**Laws:** Mad Science, Magic, Psionics

**Playable Races:** Human

**Foci:** All **corebook foci** and the Supers foci of *In Translation* (if available)

**Skills:** New Centropolis lore

**Connection to Strange:** Within the depths of the Crater where old Centropolis once stood

**Connection to Earth:** A few gates locked up in the labs of superscientists and mad villains

**Size:** 45,000 square miles (116,550 square km)

**Spark:** 20%

**Trait:** Heroic. Characters gain a +1 bonus on rolls that involve tasks directly protecting the safety of another while endangering their own life.



*Foci*, page 51

*Solves Mysteries, page 78*

if you don't have access to those or you want to stray further afield, almost any focus could be adapted to become a Supers focus with only a tiny bit of work reimagining the story behind it.

For instance, take the focus *Solves Mysteries*. A character with this focus in New Centropolis might decide to take it in the guise of a superhero. Instead of wearing sensible clothing and comfortable shoes, the character might decide that while fighting crime, he wears a superhero costume that includes a cape, a utility belt, and a mask. This essentially comes down to giving the character a superhero suit.



## WHAT A RECURSOR KNOWS ABOUT NEW CENTROPOLIS

- New Centropolis operates under the laws of Mad Science, Magic, and Psionics, though the technological and magical level that most natives see on a day-to-day basis is similar to that of twenty-first-century Earth.
- Superhumans live in New Centropolis. Some are heroes, some are villains, and some hide their identity so as not to become involved.
- The Department of Superhuman Affairs (DSA), a federal organization, actively tracks superhumans and sometimes works with sanctioned superhumans to apprehend supervillains.
- The original Centropolis was blown up when Radioactive Girl sacrificed herself to destroy the alien Kasrang before it could infect and enslave everyone in the world.
- The best known superheroes include Blaze, Emerald Witch, Divine Bullet, and other members of the superteam known as the Spectaculars. Feared supervillains include Gearbox, Mister Genocide, Calamity, and Nightmare Chill.

## TIER 1: SUIT

The tier 1 Suit feature is added to a focus only when the GM wishes to make that focus available in New Centropolis. The Suit feature grants the character a specially made outfit that serves as light armor. The PC is practiced in wearing the suit, so she can wear it for long periods without the usual Might cost per hour or Speed Pool reduction. The suit also usually comes with a utility belt, a mask or helmet, integrated smartphone functionality, and so on. (A basic utility belt includes a custom communication device, 50 feet [15 m] of coiled level 6 fiber, a custom flashlight, and space for other small devices.) Finally, the suit makes the character look suitably superheroic.



In fact, when adapting a focus to be a Supers focus, the GM is encouraged to add a Suit feature if the focus doesn't already have it.

## LEGAL VIGILANTES

Wielding superpowers in a Supers recursion is usually just as fraught with potential issues as it would be on Earth, if such powers existed there. Problems such as the sanctity of secret identities, unexpected side effects of superpowers, and being charged as a vigilante are just the beginning. At least in the case of being charged as a vigilante, New Centropolis has developed a legal framework to deal with the issue.

The idea of people wearing suits to fight crime might be romantic, but separating such activity from simple vigilantism is still work. If a superhuman is involved in some sort of incident, the Department of Superhuman Affairs (DSA) looks into it after the fact. If the efforts of the superhuman in that event are found to be in the interest of the public good, all is well. However, if the acts of the superhuman are found to be questionable or

outright illegal, the DSA may issue a warrant for her arrest. This warrant also acts as a bounty. Anyone (but usually another superhuman) could try to collect on a DSA bounty, even those who are not already licensed bounty hunters.

## NEW CENTROPOLIS SIGHTSEEING

Many locations and persons of interest can be found in the city where superheroes soar across the sky.

## DEPARTMENT OF SUPERHUMAN AFFAIRS

DSA headquarters are in a secure office building on Broadway, only a few blocks from Centropolis Square. Within it, determinations are made as to which superhumans are heroes and which are villains. The DSA mostly gets it right.

The streets outside the building often host demonstrations. Some protesters demand that the DSA lock down the vigilantes and put an end to federal cooperation with superhumans. Others scream that the DSA is too hard on heroes and should "let them do their jobs."

**Alicia Reardon, DSA:** level 5, all movement-related tasks as level 2; wears power bracers of invulnerability artifact

Power bracers, page 93

Quantum collapse arch, page 94

**Warden Hughes, DSA:** level 5, tasks related to hand-to-hand combat as level 6; melee unarmed attack inflicts 5 points of damage

**DSA Agent:** level 4; Armor 1; long-range pistol attack inflicts 5 points of damage; may carry foam restraint artifact

Foam restraint, page 93

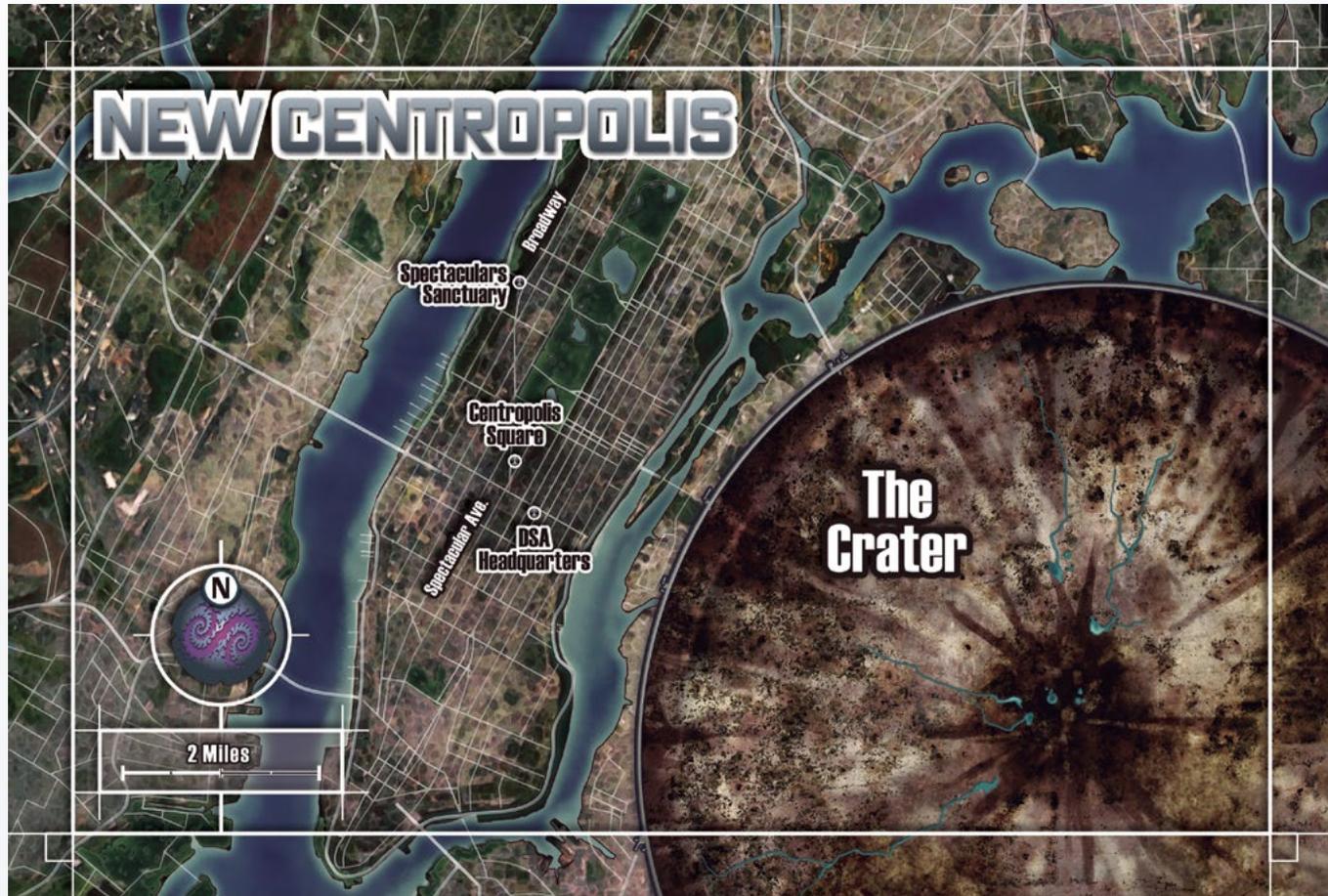
Those designated as supervillains and sentenced to prison time are also remanded to the DSA, which maintains a special facility able to hold even the most powerful superhuman. Using a little-understood technology called quantum collapse (invented by the superhuman Doctor Amazing), prisoners are collapsed to nonexistence, which makes it hard for them to escape confinement. But as sure as Blaze loves Emerald Witch, some supervillain somewhere is looking for a way to do it. Since someone imprisoned through the use of the quantum collapse no longer exists, the DSA headquarters has no prison—just temporary holding cells. Instead, there's a processing facility at either end of a short hallway where the quantum collapse arch is installed. To a prisoner just released, no time seems to have passed, although severe nausea is usually a symptom of returning to existence.

In addition to its agents, the DSA employs a herd of lawyers and data analysts, as well as support staff. The head of the agency side of the department is Alicia Reardon, and Warden

Hughes manages the quantum collapse facility.

**Alicia Reardon:** Reardon was just another DSA agent running down cases in the streets of New Centropolis. Then she made the collar of a lifetime. She and her team managed to capture the terrorist Mister Nefarious. She was injured in the process and now walks with a limp that'll likely never go away, rendering her unfit for field work. But instead of letting her go, the agency promoted her to head of the DSA office in New Centropolis. Alicia takes her job seriously and does it well. She also wears a set of power bracers of invulnerability. Technically, being a superhuman or using superhuman-created hardware is a conflict of interest for DSA agents, so Reardon uses the bracers only in desperate straits, and she doesn't advertise the fact that she has them.

**Warden Hughes:** Hughes has a first name (George), but no one uses it. Nor does anyone socialize with Hughes, who is given to brooding and never says two words when one (or none) will do. He is the only DSA agent currently authorized to use the quantum collapse arch,



which makes him the warden. Because he never has to worry about riots, abusive guards, feeding and recreation for prisoners, or related matters, Hughes has excess time on his hands. He usually spends that time training in martial arts down in the DSA dojo. When he goes home, it is to a small apartment he shares with his aging mother.

**CENTROPOLIS SQUARE**

Centropolis Square is a major commercial intersection and a neighborhood at the junction of Broadway and Spectacular Avenue. Lavishly decorated with electronic billboards, it is the busiest pedestrian intersection in the city. In addition to all the stores and theatres it hosts, the square also contains a massive memorial to Radioactive Girl: a 300-foot (91 m) statue of the superhero who died to save everyone.

A plaque at the base of the statue summarizes the story: "Radioactive Girl died gloriously defending us from the Mother Virus. In the aftermath, our grief overwhelms us. Though she cannot hear it, the millions still alive because of her give thanks. To assuage the anguish of our bereavement, this memorial will serve as a physical reminder of what we all loved and lost."

**Corvid:** Visitors to the memorial also usually see Corvid, a superhuman who looks something like a human crow. Corvid has apparently selected himself for the job of keeping Centropolis Square safe from muggers and keeping the statue of Radioactive Girl in good shape, free of graffiti and trash. He's developed something like religious awe of the memorial and is not shy about telling people that "Radioactive Girl will return in our darkest hour!"

Corvid is actually a kro recursor from Crow Hollow who keeps an eye out for interesting technology in New Centropolis that might be saleable back home. He uses the connection to the Strange in the depths of the Crater where old Centropolis once stood to transport goods out of the recursion every few months.

**The Busker:** Street musicians rotate through Centropolis Square each day, but none play with as much amazing ability as the Busker. Many people suspect that she is a superhuman, but one whose abilities are not given to conflict and crime-fighting. If money is first dropped in her instrument case, the Busker will answer any one question by a given person truthfully,

whether or not there is any way she could possibly know the answer. Once someone receives a true answer, further questions are met with a shrug and a smile.

*I'm waking up, I feel it in my bones  
Enough to make my systems blow  
Welcome to the new age, to the new age  
~"Radioactive," Imagine Dragons*

**SPECTACULARS SANCTUARY**

The superteam called the Spectaculars owns a magnificent skyscraper along Broadway. In addition to businesses and apartments near the street level, the structure also houses several superhumans, including the Spectaculars themselves, as well as apartments set aside for friends of the team. The Sanctuary also contains facilities for superhuman training, learning, research, and construction, and a garage for the special equipment and vehicles available to the team's current roster.

The Sanctuary is something of a magnet to supervillains who want to make a name for themselves by destroying it. As a result, the skyscraper enjoys many defenses, including a fleet of drones and automatons built by Robot Lad.

**RADIOACTIVE GIRL IS NOT DEAD**  
Radioactive Girl exploded with the force of a hydrogen bomb. That's not the end of the story, though, because she is slowly reforming somewhere down in the Crater. No one yet realizes it because at this point, she's still mostly without substance. But eventually, she'll return. And when she does, disaster may well unfold, because the Kasrang Mother Virus managed to infect her right before she exploded.

**Busker:** level 5, answering singular questions as level 10

**Defensive drone:** level 3, perception as level 6; Armor 2; fly a long distance per round; long-distance laser attack inflicts 5 points of damage

**Corvid:** level 4, tasks related to perception and commerce as level 6; fly a long distance each round; carries two random cyphers

*Kro, page 243*  
*Crow Hollow, page 242*

**Blaze:** level 7; Armor 8; fly a long distance each round; long-distance heat attack can target all creatures in immediate range of each other

**Divine Bullet:** level 4, tasks related to aiming or requiring balance as level 8

**Emerald Witch:** level 7; fly a long distance each round; create any level 7 object or attack that she can imagine out of solid green light

**Galaxia:** level 5, Speed defense as level 7 due to deflection power bracers, all science-related tasks as level 9

**Robot Lad:** level 3, tasks related to robotics as level 7; two or more defense drones always on hand

**Synesthesia:** level 6; create minor or major level 6 sensory illusions or attacks up to long range (up to five targets at once)

In addition to Robot Lad, the Spectaculars' roster includes Blaze, Divine Bullet, Emerald Witch, Galaxia, and Synesthesia. Most of the support staff are human—which is not to say that normal humans aren't also a threat. With the right equipment or training (or both), a normal person could take down a superhuman. It's happened before.

**Blaze:** Real name Jermaine Lewis, Blaze is a quadruple threat. He can fly, he's hard to hurt, he's strong, and he can emit blasts of inferno-hot fire. In his secret identity, Jermaine is an animal control officer for the New Centropolis animal shelter, which is why the Sanctuary has so many cats and dogs.

**Divine Bullet:** Real name Atsuko Lane, Divine Bullet has the superhuman ability of perfect aim and balance. She carries a variety of light

ranged weapons on her person but has been known to check out powerful weapons from the team equipment cache for important missions. In her secret identity, Atsuko is a top-ranked online gamer, but one who doesn't have to put in the hours practicing that other competitors do.

**Emerald Witch:** Real name Candace Russell, Emerald Witch can create temporary solid matter from green light in whatever form she can imagine. In her secret identity, Candace is a nurse at New Centropolis hospital, where she's overworked and on report for being late too often (because she's fighting crime).

**Galaxia:** Real name forgotten even by herself, Galaxia is often referred to as "the smartest person on the planet." Doctor Amazing would quibble with that if he hadn't been sent through the quantum collapse arch after trying to take over the world, but he was an egotistical bastard. Galaxia possesses superhuman levels of intelligence but doesn't seem inclined to use it to rule over everyone. She spends most of her time in the labs in Spectaculars Sanctuary, working on projects more obscure than the mechanisms that Robot Lad produces (which she considers fairly straightforward). For instance, her latest project has to do with scanning alternate dimensions for anomalous signals. In fact, she is on the cusp of discovering the truth about her world and recursions in general.

**Robot Lad:** Real name Dale Henderson, Robot Lad has the superhuman ability to fashion independent, autonomous machines in mere minutes. The robots seem completely loyal to Robot Lad, even in the face of attempts to contravene their programming. In his secret identity, Dale is a straight-A student in high school, though he has trouble with social integration. He is on the autism spectrum and doesn't read social cues particularly well.

**Synesthesia:** Real name Max Garfield, Synesthesia can induce sensory confusion in others, which can cause blindness, nausea, or seeing and hearing things that aren't there. In his secret identity, Max is the bass drummer for a band called No Map, and he sometimes fails to make an appearance in his role as Synesthesia due to excessive partying.



## NEW CENTROPOLIS UNDERWORLD

Criminals of all sorts live in New Centropolis. Some are white-collar embezzlers. Others are muggers, drug dealers, or illegal purveyors of services. And a few are superhumans. Supervillains engage in the same kinds of crime but do so using abilities that regular crooks can only dream about, often while wearing a colorful suit designed to strike fear in victims.

Superhuman villains sometimes make alliances, the longest lasting of which was assembled by Doctor Amazing. Calling themselves the Conquerors, the group managed to commit all manner of larcenies and even killed Silver Torch, the previous leader of the Spectaculars. But like most such alliances, the team eventually fell apart when the villains turned on each other. Doctor Amazing planned to use the group as patsies all along, and before they dissolved, they stole the technology he required to finish his sunspot cannon. He promised to use it unless New Centropolis (and “the world”) gave him complete control. It never came to that; Doctor Amazing was ultimately stopped, mostly because of the betrayal by the rest of the Conquerors.

Doctor Amazing’s team included Calamity, Fission, Gearbox, Mister Genocide, and Nightmare Chill. Supervillains come and go; if they’re caught, they go because they literally do not exist anymore, at least until their sentence is up. Now that the Conquerors are no more, the various supervillains act alone, or with a small group of cronies that are usually human.

**Calamity:** Real name Arn Weldon, Calamity has the ability to affect probability in his own favor, usually at a cost to other people. He doesn’t control probability directly; he can’t usually decide what’s going to happen. Instead, he concentrates on the task at hand, and that’s when his luck kicks in, which is probably bad luck for anyone attempting to stop him. For instance, if Calamity tries to evade a pursuer, the pursuer faces random impediments of increasing severity, such as open manholes underfoot, collapsing walls closing off a path of pursuit, runaway vehicles plowing directly into her, and so on. If Calamity stands his ground

and fights, a foe is jostled by an ally’s misstep, a foe’s weapon misfires, a foe accidentally attacks an interposing ally, and so on.

**Doctor Amazing:** Real name Todd Lacey, Doctor Amazing is currently off the grid, but his incarceration through the quantum collapse arch is due to end in a few years. Everyone knows that Doctor Amazing created the technology behind quantum collapse, and they recognize the irony of it being used on him. What everyone should have realized is that this is Doctor Amazing they were talking about. Of course he put a back door in the programming. Instead of being collapsed out of existence, he was teleported to a previously prepared secret lair. And rather than crow about his deception (yet), Doctor Amazing adopted a secondary

*Sunspot cannon, page 94*

**Calamity:** level 5, Speed defense as level 7 due to attacker’s bad luck, tasks attempted as level 7 due to Calamity’s good luck

**Doctor Amazing/ Ghostmancer:** level 5, science-related tasks as level 9; long-range “ghost gun” attack inflicts 10 points of dissolution damage; wears power bracers of intangibility

*Power bracers, page 93*



**Fission:** level 4; Armor 1; long-range pistol attack inflicts 4 points of damage; "fragment rush" attack inflicts 5 points of damage on all creatures within immediate range of Fission after she moves up to a short distance; creates multiple versions of herself (1d6 per round) to help with tasks

**Nightmare Chill:** level 5; Armor 4 (ice); creates any level 7 object or attack from ice that she can imagine

**Gearbox, driving typical war machine:** level 6; Armor 4; long-range attack inflicts 8 points of damage

**Crater cockroach:** level 4; Armor 4; climb a short distance each round

**Mister Genocide:** level 5; Armor 1; level 7 poison can target up to ten victims within short range as a single action; immune to poison

codename: Ghostmancer. Using a pair of bracers of intangibility, plus other technology he adapted to his new "ghostly" facade, he's begun an all-new bid to take over the world.

**Fission:** Real name Shayla Lukeson, Fission has the ability to split into several nearly identical versions of herself, including basic clothes and weapons. When she does, her fragments have most of the original's memories and motivations, and they usually act in concert with their prime, though Fission doesn't mentally control them directly. Her fragments lack the ability to fission any further. Producing fragments is tiring, and Fission can't keep it up indefinitely. But she can split off large squads of commandos with little care for their safety to accomplish defined goals, create one or two fragments to confuse a trail or act as body shields, or send a fragment on a suicide mission. Fragments not reabsorbed eventually explode (though they can trigger the explosion much sooner, if desired).

Unlike many villains, Fission has an active secret identity—Shayla Lukeson is a well-known musician in New Centropolis. She sometimes creates less-perfect fragments to fill out her band or sing backup.

**Gearbox:** Real name Jan Kinsley, Gearbox has the ability to interface directly with machines. Like Robot Lad, Gearbox is adept at creating mechanical automatons. But she usually creates singular, immense war machines with herself installed as the driver. Rumor has it that she's building her largest war machine yet, one taller than skyscrapers. Gearbox is one of those superhumans whose motivations are muddled—she seems in it more for the thrill of destruction. She also nurses a lingering hate for the loss of her young son, a civilian casualty from twenty years earlier when the Spectaculars of that era took down Doctor Nefarious (with DSA help). As it happens, her son survived and is now part of that same superhero group. His name is Robot Lad, but Gearbox doesn't know it.

**Mister Genocide:** Real name Alfred Webster, Mister Genocide has the unfortunate ability to synthesize deadly poison from his skin. His touch can kill, but if he wishes it, so can his spittle or even his breath. Anyone who spends too much time in Mister Genocide's presence

becomes ill, even if he isn't actively using his power. All his cronies usually wear gas masks and protective clothing. Mister Genocide cares more about robbing banks (or holding high-value targets for obscene ransoms) than killing for killing's sake. But he doesn't hesitate to kill anyone who stands in his way.

**Nightmare Chill:** Real name Nelle Rives, Nightmare Chill can suck heat out of the environment so quickly that she can create and manipulate ice. She usually armors herself in ice before engaging in illicit activity. She also calls on her powers offensively to trap victims, defensively to create barriers, and imaginatively as the need arises to create various solids and objects. Like Mister Genocide, Nightmare Chill seems most concerned with living the good life. She always says that if she scores big enough, she might retire her name and take up yachting.

## THE CRATER

On the outskirts of New Centropolis lies the vast cavity where the heart of the original city was located before Radioactive Girl detonated there. A massive concrete bunker walls off the Crater from easy access, and the area is patrolled by police and several automated surveillance systems. Still, teenagers sometimes manage to get through on a dare so they can look out across the mist-filled void. Everyone says the Crater is radioactive because of its origin. In fact, there is a curious absence of radiation, almost as if something is absorbing it instead of giving it off.

The deeper a climber descends into the Crater, the steeper and smoother the sides become, and the thicker the odd mist. After several explorers and one scientific team went missing, the enthusiasm for mounting further explorations evaporated. Though no one knows for sure what happened to the missing, it's assumed that the oversized **cockroaches** that inhabit the Crater got them.

Sometimes, the mist swirls and thickens, taking on an almost humanoid shape. People who have witnessed the phenomenon think it's the spirit of Radioactive Girl, haunting the Crater.

A connection to the Strange lies at the nadir of the crater, though locating it in the swirling mists can be difficult.



## SUPERHEROES WANTED

**Missing CEO:** The CEO of a large manufacturing corporation called Energy Systems Consolidated has gone missing. So far, no ransom notes have been delivered, but police assume that it's just a matter of time. A few of the CEO's family members think he hasn't been abducted by a supervillain, but instead finally went through with his attempt to create a superpowered suit in his hidden lab.

**Spectacular Snafu:** Several of the Spectaculars are in the hospital after battling Gearbox to a standstill. However, in their absence, petty crime is on the rise, and the DSA thinks it's only a matter of time before bigger-name criminals take advantage of the lull in superhuman security.

**Drugs of Doom:** A new designer drug has hit the streets of New Centropolis. Users call it "drop" because after taking it, they can fall from apparently any height and walk away unharmed. The effect of each hit of the drug lasts about a minute. Heavy users begin to develop a tolerance,

which means the effect wears off sooner and sooner, and that tends to end their career when they finally splatter on the pavement. Someone named Dusk Hawk is behind the distribution of the drug.

**Haunting:** The supervillain known as Ghostmancer has been especially active of late. He's been caught on surveillance cameras ghosting into high-tech research labs and making off with expensive prototypes. The Spectaculars have been called away on a mission to deflect a meteor, so Ghostmancer's crime spree is going unchallenged.

**Robot Uprising:** Robot Lad's many drones and automatons turned on him. In the confusion, they made off with Robot Lad and Galaxia, who are still missing. The remaining Spectaculars assume that one of their old foes is behind the attack, but they've had little success in determining who. They've put out a call for aid.



## NEW CENTROPOLIS ARTIFACTS

### FOAM RESTRAINT

**Level:** 1d6 + 2

**Form:** Two-handed rifle with a wide mouth

**Effect:** This device emits a short-range stream of orange liquid that foams over a target and hardens into a body restraint that lasts for ten minutes. Restrained victims can't move or take actions that require movement. Targets whose level is higher than the artifact's level can usually break free within one or two rounds.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### POWER BRACERS

**Level:** 1d6 + 2

**Form:** Matching ebony bracers etched with nanoscale circuits

**Effect:** The bracers bond to the wearer and are extremely difficult to remove until depleted. A pair of depleted bracers may regain its power spontaneously a few months or years later. Different bracers confer different abilities. Known power bracers include the following.

*Bracers of Deflection.* The difficulty of the user's Speed defense rolls is decreased by two steps for ten minutes.

*Bracers of Energy.* The user emits a long-range heat ray attack that inflicts damage equal to the artifact's level.

*Bracers of Intangibility.* The user can pass through solid objects for one minute, during which time she cannot interact with or attack tangible objects or creatures.

*Bracers of Invulnerability.* The user gains +5 to Armor for one minute.

*Bracers of Soaring.* The user gains +1 to her Speed Edge and gains the ability to fly a long distance each round for one hour.

*Bracers of Strength.* The user gains +3 to her Might Edge for ten minutes.

*Bracers of Supersense.* The difficulty of the user's perception tasks is decreased by two steps for one hour. Each use of the bracers usually focuses on one sense enhancement: hearing, sight, touch, taste, or smell.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d100



*"You could've turned the gun into steam, the bullets into mercury, the bottle into goddamned snowflakes but you didn't, did you? You really don't give a damn about human beings. You're driftin' out of touch, Doc. God help us all."*

*~Edward Blake, Watchmen*

## QUANTUM COLLAPSE ARCH

**Level:** 1d6 + 3

**Form:** Wide rectangular frame that is 7 feet (2 m) tall and 3 feet (1 m) wide

**Effect:** Controls on the frame allow a user to set a time limit ranging from minutes to millennia. A creature that walks (or is pushed) through a prepared frame apparently ceases to exist for the period of time set. Once the designated period elapses, the quantum-collapsed target reappears on the opposite side of the arch; for the target, no time has passed, and it went through the arch normally.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d100 (if depleted, only a superhuman genius can fix the artifact)

## SUNSPOT CANNON

**Level:** 1d6 + 4

**Form:** Huge technological cannon requiring a gimbaled mount to use

**Effect:** Firing the sunspot cannon at the sun produces a purplish ray. Seventeen minutes later, a massive solar storm envelops the sky, creating a terrifying aurora that potentially knocks out satellites and burns out power grids and other electrical equipment. Repeated use of the artifact on the sun would have even more deleterious effects.

**Depletion:** — (GM Intrusion: The sunspot cannon overheats and either shuts down, requiring days of repair before it can be used again, or explodes.)





*New York Grey was created by fictional leakage.*

*The UN Building serves as the headquarters for the United Nations, a body that seeks to foster international cooperation.*

# NEW YORK GREY

They're out there, and now everyone knows it. That wasn't always the case. When the aliens known as greys first came to Earth, they did so secretly. They surreptitiously studied humans, sometimes abducting them to do advanced research. Eventually, the greys learned everything they needed, and they emerged from the shadows in a historic event (known as the Revelation) in front of the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The greys promised to partner with humanity, help them through their many troubles, and usher in a new golden age where grey and human worked side by side for a better tomorrow.

A few humans—and maybe even a few greys—still believe in the promises of the

Revelation. However, the reality is that greys, on the whole, view average humans as useful servants or pets, not equals. The Revelation has rendered humans into second-class citizens, no matter their merit or pedigree. Greys have risen to positions of power and prominence, while most humans have tumbled. Those who retain their status feel they do so only by the sufferance of the greys, who often control major industries either directly or behind the scenes.

Many jokes revolve around the idea that greys are somehow sexually stimulated by humans, though most humans don't really believe that. Jokes that most people find far less funny describe how greys have developed a secret taste for food made from people.

Most greys operate in public and live in posh high-rise apartments around New York. But a few, known as the Directorate, remain in the Mothership, which is sometimes visible hovering over the city. The Directorate apparently sets grey policy for the species as a whole.

**Arrival:** New York Grey's initial default translation location is in front of the UN building in New York.

## NEW YORK GREY FOCI

The foci that player characters can choose in New York Grey—as well as any foci that are dragged into the recursion—are modified by the recursion's context, as appropriate. For example, if someone chooses Processes Information, replace all connections to Ruk and Ruk features (such as the All Song) to connections to New York Grey and its features (such as the Internet).

## NEW YORK GREY RACIAL OPTION

Instead of appearing as a human, a recursor could choose to translate into the recursion as a grey. A grey is the size of a human child, doesn't wear clothing, has enormous eyes, and has no obvious secondary sexual organs.

**NEW YORK GREY ATTRIBUTES**

**Level:** 4

**Laws:** Mad Science

**Playable Races:** Human, grey

**Foci:** Conducts Weird Science, Entertains, Is Licensed to Carry, Leads, Looks for Trouble, Operates Undercover, Processes Information, Solves Mysteries, Works the System

**Skills:** New York Grey lore

**Connection to Strange:** Transitory gates within the hearts of thunderheads and other high-energy events

**Connection to Earth:** A few gates in research labs around New York Grey, though native scientists don't recognize them for what they are

**Size:** 54,500 square miles (141,154 square km)

**Spark:** 20%

**Trait:** Paranoia. Characters must eventually fight the feeling (or give in to the feeling) that a mysterious other is watching their every move and slowly drawing plans against them.

*Conducts Weird Science, page 57*

*Entertains, page 61*

*Is Licensed to Carry, page 64*

*Leads, page 65*

*Looks for Trouble, page 68*

*Operates Undercover, page 70*

*Processes Information, page 74*

*Solves Mysteries, page 78*

*Works the System, page 83*

*Draggable foci, page 52*

*Grey: level 4, knowledge tasks as level 6, Speed defense as level 5; can activate a shield that grants +5 to Armor but renders the grey incapable of making attacks*

## DISCORD IN NEW YORK GREY

Though the news and popular entertainments show greys as happily integrated into life in New York City, that's not really true. The average person feels a vague disquiet when thinking about the greys, and some are actively paranoid. In truth, a hidden struggle is being waged in the back alleys and high-rise boardrooms of the city. Many greys openly feel that humans are an inferior race, and they wouldn't raise much of a fuss if legislation were enacted to make the greys the legal guardians of people everywhere. Many humans seem resigned to this eventuality, but some fight on—legally, when possible, but sometimes in secret.

Many greys who believe that humans should be owned belong to a group known as the Radiant Sun. Greys who actively oppose this idea belong to a much smaller group called the Oath. Many greys do not belong to either organization but have sympathies to one or the other.

## WHAT A RECURSOR KNOWS ABOUT NEW YORK GREY

- New York Grey operates under the law of Mad Science, but most inhabitants use technology available on Earth.
- New York Grey is like the actual New York in many ways, except that aliens known as greys live among humans.
- Greys have achieved high status, and humans have tumbled from positions of power. In some ways, humans are second-class citizens, in some cases treated no better than pets.
- Not all greys get along with one another, but most seem happy with their prominent leadership roles in human society.
- Humans still use cash for transactions, as do greys, but greys value service hours even more dearly.



The human-led group of people who believe (as it turns out, rightly) that greys mean bad things for humans is called the Green Hills Society.

## GREY CULTURE AND NAMES

When greys interact with humans, they use uninflected human languages, including popular idioms and obscenities. They appear as celebrities on talk show programs. They take up human hobbies with relish. They also take on human names, usually choosing simple and innocuous names such as Billy, Cathy, Charlie, Joey, Sally, Freddy, or Kelly.

Despite the fact that some names the greys take are more masculine or more feminine, greys don't really have (or haven't revealed to humans) a specific gender. So calling a grey "it" is not an insult, though humans often lapse into "he" or "she," depending on a particular grey's chosen name.

Greys refuse to wear clothing, and though they are usually loquacious and friendly, they never share their own culture, language, or origins with humans.

## NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Most places a recursor could visit in New York on Earth are also locations in New York Grey, including Times Square, Central Park, the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, and most other sites. The following locations stand out because of their relationship to the grey colonization of Earth.

## GREY EMBASSY

The Grey Embassy keeps its offices in one of the many buildings near the UN Plaza, only a few blocks from the East River. Many of the same things a visitor could accomplish in a terrestrial embassy are also possible here. For instance, a visitor can request entertaining educational materials regarding the grey arrival on Earth (sanitized), opportunities for terrestrial/grey partnerships (limited), information about grey culture (not particularly helpful), and so on. Visitors can also request a meeting with the grey ambassador, who goes by the name Charlie.

**Charlie, Grey Ambassador:** Unlike many greys, Charlie believes in the mission the embassy proclaims and would like humans and greys to succeed together, which makes it the perfect ambassador. In fact, Charlie is the secret leader of the Oath, and not even most other greys know that. Charlie comes across as guileless, full of energy and ideas, and unaffected by bad news, other than to say that any particular setback is an opportunity to do better next time. Charlie can provide characters with tickets to Club Grzy, hints of information about the Mothership, and other connections in the grey community. In dire need, Charlie can also connect visitors with other Oath members and possibly even with the Green Hills Society.

*Grey NPCs appear in the stat blocks of this section. For more details on greys, see The Strange Bestiary, page 64.*



However, Charlie is not alone in the embassy; the Radiant Sun has installed a “deputy” ambassador named Molly.

**Molly, Grey Deputy Ambassador:** Molly doesn't like humans and is happy in its role as a mole for the Radiant Sun. It rarely handles meetings with visitors to the embassy, but it goes through the notes afterward and sends all information to the group that installed it. Molly keeps its affiliation secret from Charlie, who would likely be put out that Molly was working against its goals.

## CLUB GR3Y

An exclusive nightclub called Club Gr3y is popular in the city. Humans and greys looking for a good time might enjoy one of the many shows or dances hosted by the club. On the other hand, many less-than-legal deals, games, and exhibitions also occur in the club's private rooms. Club Gr3y is owned by a grey called Johnny.

**Johnny, Club Gr3y Proprietor:** Johnny isn't part of either the Radiant Sun or the Oath. “He” (as he prefers to be referred to) is his own grey. He views his establishment as a place for fun and profit. To the latter end, he also runs a few illicit businesses on the side, with the cooperation of other local “business” people. He can be gracious to friends and those he considers innocent victims, but he will order

vicious vigilante justice against those who do him or his friends wrong. These hits are performed by various toughs, including both humans and greys, that work for Johnny.

**Amy, Comedian and Recursor:** One of Johnny's biggest hits is the stand-up grey comedian called Amy. Amy performs every other week to a packed hall, and the audience loves “her” (the pronoun she prefers). Amy is secretly quickened. She travels recursions, gathering jokes and experiences. At first, becoming quickened was wondrous. But over time, her mood shifted. She realized an underlying truth (or at least, what she believes to be a truth): New York Grey is a lie; greys are not a “real” alien race; and the struggle of the Radiant Sun, the Oath, and all the humans who fight the growing oppression is in vain because it's merely a narrative being played out. In the last few months, her jokes have grown darker, centering on more apocalyptic themes. That's because Amy has begun to explore the possibility of collapsing New York Grey and ending the charade.

## DEFENSE GREY INVESTIGATION SERVICE

The Defense Grey Investigation Service (DGIS) is a human organization with ties to the feds. It is tasked with investigating crimes perpetrated against greys by humans, and vice versa. Because its funding relies on prosecuting more of the former than the latter, **DGIS agents** have learned to investigate reports of grey misconduct in secret. So while they publicly bring to justice humans who perpetuate hate crimes, violence, and attempted murder against greys, the DGIS has assembled a small hidden library of detailed reports on grey individuals and groups who apparently do not have the best interest of humanity at heart. DGIS's secret agenda includes finding the actual location of the Mothership, discovering which greys actively participate in Radiant Sun activities, and learning whether there is any truth to rumors of a factory where homeless people are rendered into food for greys who have developed a taste for human beings.

**Maria Simons, DGIS Agent:** Maria is a true believer in the idea that the greys are working against humans. She was a child when the greys first announced their presence, but

**DGIS agent:** level 4, grey  
lore as level 6; Armor 1;  
long-range pistol attack  
inflicts 5 points of damage

**CLUB GR3Y ULTIMATE VARIETY SHOW**

**COME SEE:**  
Alpha, the universally renowned grey juggler!

The Crazy Murphies, the husband-and-wife acrobats whose stunts will astound!

Westwind, the man who can take a fall from any height and walk away!

Amy, the grey comedian whose jokes are so insightful that both humans and greys laugh together at her outrageous anecdotes!

Maria's father was an abductee before that. Though mainstream media (owned by the greys these days) scoffs at the idea that alien abduction stories of the past had anything to do with them, Maria witnessed firsthand events that can be explained no other way. Her father never recovered from the experience and eventually took his own life. As a result, Maria can be a bit quick with a pistol when investigating secret grey activities and often has to be talked down by her partner, Agent Coleman.

**Marshawn Coleman, DGIS Agent:** Marshawn, a once-renowned American football player, was inducted into the DGIS after a knee injury permanently sidelined him. Being brought into DGIS was something of a media stunt, instigated by Marshawn's biggest fan, a grey named Cally. From Marshawn's point of view, the greys have their good side, as he can personally attest. Though that doesn't make him a blind sycophant, he doesn't always assume the worst in a situation where greys are involved the way his partner, Agent Simons, does.

## GREEN HILLS SOCIETY

A radical group of humans calling themselves the Green Hills Society believes they must rise up and eject the greys from Earth, the sooner the better, and no matter the cost. This ideology makes them terrorists, though many human sympathizers secretly agree. Green Hills once had more open support, before a few operations targeting greys left several human casualties behind. The radicals claim those incidents were "false flag" operations planned by the greys to discredit the Green Hills movement, but whether or not that's true, the damage was done, and the radicals had to go underground—literally. The secret headquarters of the Green Hills Society is an abandoned and

decommissioned subway station under the city. The hidden base enjoys state-of-the-art facilities, thanks to the secret involvement of a figure that no one on either side of the conflict could predict: a grey named Manny. Only a few humans (and, so far, no greys) know about Manny.

**Manny/Dr. Carlos Manard:** Manny is a grey scientist, one of several among the grey population that has sympathy for the human plight. But Manny is the only grey who has done more than raise objections to the Directorate in the Mothership; Manny has instituted several initiatives to weaken grey influence, including being a vital part of the Green Hills Society. When it visits the group's base or conducts other delicate operations where it wishes to hide its grey affiliation, Manny wears its "Dr. Carlos Manard" human suit.

**Lobo, Green Hills Enforcer:** Lobo is a robot, fashioned by Manny, and shaped like a massive hound made of metal. Lobo possesses artificial intelligence and patrols subway tunnels surrounding the secret base to keep away intruders. It also responds to security issues in the base. Lobo's artificial intelligence was induced by downloading the mind of a human being, and sometimes that personality emerges. Lobo knows it's just a copy, and it's fine with that. Sometimes, however, Lobo secretly watches over the human whose mind spawned it. Other times, it explores further afield. Lobo has recently become quickened, though it doesn't quite know what it all means.

## SUNNY FLAKES FACTORY

The Sunny Flakes factory, located in one of New York's industry zones, has had amazing success since it got grey sponsorship several years back. Now that it's known that greys "prefer it," many humans have learned to love the cereal,

**Manny (grey):** level 4, knowledge tasks as level 6, Speed defense as level 5; can activate a shield that grants +5 to Armor but renders Manny incapable of making attacks; wears a human suit artifact

Human suit, page 102

**Lobo:** level 4, tracking as level 9 (even across recursions); health 21; short-range howl (usable once per minute) can send one target into a random alternate recursion



*"Everyone loves Sunny Flakes! Sunny Flakes is magic in a bowl! Sweet, crunchy, and full of yummy protein, Sunny Flakes taste GREAT! And remember, kids: greys prefer Sunny Flakes!"*

*~Sunny Flakes cereal box*

**Sunny Flakes security guard (human):** level 3; Armor 1; long-range pistol attack inflicts 4 points of damage

**Sheila Calvin:** level 4

**Mothership:** level 10; health 100; Armor 10; missile with a reach of 1,000 miles (1,610 km) inflicts 20 points of damage to all within long range of the impact site

**Ginny (grey):** level 4, knowledge tasks as level 6, Speed defense as level 5; can activate a shield that grants +5 to Armor but renders Ginny incapable of making attacks; carries memory eraser artifact

Memory eraser, page 102

too. Nearly every household pantry has a box of Sunny Flakes or some other related product. The factory is huge, but much of its workforce is robotic. Only a few humans work there, usually in positions of maintenance, upkeep, and security. Of course, the office wing of the factory is well staffed with managers, lawyers, marketers, and executives, including the CEO, Sheila Calvin.

**Sheila Calvin, Sunny Flakes CEO:** Sheila (a human) only recently took control of the company, when her father Max Calvin went missing and was presumed dead. She's always been something of a partier, and few people think she's up to running a company as large and successful as Sunny Flakes. Sheila is out to prove the naysayers wrong, but an even more pressing issue concerns her. She is still very curious about what happened to her father, and she suspects foul play.

**Ginny, Sunny Flakes COO:** Ginny, the grey who really runs things at Sunny Flakes, seems like an affable and approachable chief operating officer. What few realize is that Ginny is also a hardcore proponent of the Radiant Sun, the grey organization that advocates for the complete subjugation of the human race. Ginny is responsible for Max Calvin's disappearance, after Max learned about the factory's secret level beneath regular processing. It includes

meeting space for the Radiant Sun, as well as a separate cereal line where humans are dried, powdered, and processed into an innocuous-looking ingredient that is fed back up to the regular factory floor. Yes, Sunny Flakes is people.

## MOTHERSHIP

The Mothership, for humans, is a bit like the bogeyman. Although they would never say so publicly, most humans are afraid of the Mothership, which comes and goes in the skies as a massive shadow across the clouds. The few times it is fully visible, the miles-wide shape, with its oddly organic components, does nothing to reassure. Everyone knows that the Directorate lives aboard the Mothership, but no one knows which greys make up the Directorate, what they think about the grey cohabitation of New York, and what the greys' ultimate plan for humanity really is.

Although no grey will admit it, most of them don't know, either. That's because the greys now on Earth are all hybrids, genetically engineered by the Directorate to survive—thrive, even—on the planet. This is also why genetic analysis of greys has turned up modified human DNA, though all such lab tests are usually destroyed before they can be made widely available. The truth is that the



CONSPIRACY THEORIES

**Alien Eggs:** Strange stones that turned up in alleys and parks have been brought to DGIS for investigation. The stones are fist sized but weigh almost as much as a grown human. They give off a yellow glow when handled. More interestingly, humans who touch the stones are afflicted with strange dreams where they wake in the body of a grey. For their part, greys confiscate any stones shown to them and will not answer questions about the odd objects.

**Broadway's Best:** A new show on Broadway called "Mirrors: A Story of What If?" is about a man named Duncan who has the ability to travel into parallel dimensions, where he meets other versions of himself that live under radically different circumstances. Sometimes Duncan calls audience members up on stage to travel with him through the temporary portals he creates. Rumor has it that those audience members are never seen again.

**Skinned Alive:** The DGIS is looking into reports of greys being found dead without their skins. Alien autopsies reveal that the greys were likely alive when the skinning process started and died of shock and blood loss after the process was over. Who is skinning greys and why are questions of great concern not only to DGIS but also to all greys in general.

NEW YORK GREY ARTIFACTS

GREY GAZER

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Circllet with inset black sphere resembling a grey eye

**Effect:** Wearer can activate eye as an action.

An activated eye is a level 3 object with no attacks that can fly a long distance each round under the mental command of the wearer. The eye transmits to the wearer what it sees while it remains within 3 miles (5 km) of the wearer. The eye can fly for up to an hour before it must return to the circllet.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d10

GREY GUN

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** A tiny, silver gun-shaped object with no moving parts

**Effect:** This ranged weapon is a maser. It beams collimated microwaves at targets within long range, initially inflicting damage equal to the artifact level, and then inflicting half that amount in each of the two subsequent rounds. A living creature killed by a grey gun explodes as if it had been cooked in a microwave. The grey gun can also burn through solid objects of its level or lower.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d100

HUMAN HELPER

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** A ring with a generic human face design

**Effect:** The ring ejects a pellet that rapidly inflates to create what seems to be a normal human, though one with limited vocabulary and ability to reason. The human created is level 1 and does as instructed for one minute, and then slumps and melts into so much reddish goo.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

*According to some estimates, more than 50% of "alien encounters" on Earth are with greys. All of these are presumably the figments of overactive imaginations.*

Mothership is a colony ship, but it creates colonists at need. Within its ring-shaped halls, abominations slither that bear not the least resemblance to earthly creatures. Their intelligence is vast, their technological tools are potent, and their reach is frightening.

Luckily for Earth, the Mothership and its Directorate are not quickened, nor likely have the spark. If that were to change and the Mothership passed into the Strange, it might decide to try to colonize the Earth in the universe of normal matter.



## HUMAN SUIT

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Folds of cloth and fleshlike substance (inactive) or a specific human individual (active)

**Effect:** The wearer of a human suit is completely disguised as a specific human individual; add the artifact level to any disguise task attempted. A human suit is usually no one in particular; each suit is designed to allow whoever's wearing it to adopt a *new* human persona, not pretend to be someone famous. A suit's technology is such that it will adapt to fit a wearer ranging from half the size of a normal human to one that is almost the same size (including another human). Human suits usually come with attached clothing.

**Depletion:** —

## MATTER UNRAVELER

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Ring with heavy metal stud

**Effect:** When pressed against an object, the object's molecular structure loosens. The object becomes weightless with respect to the ground for one hour. Other objects can pass through the target object during this period as if the target was mist. If the artifact is pressed against an object larger than a 10-foot (3 m) cube, an area within the larger object—up to a volume equal to a 10-foot cube—becomes similarly immaterial. At the end of the hour, an object whose level is less than the artifact's level explodes in immediate range, inflicting energy damage equal to the artifact's level.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d10

## MEMORY ERASER

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Handheld cylinder with a dial and a flash

**Effect:** A flash of light erases the last minute (or more) of memory in all creatures within immediate range that are looking at the flash without protective eyewear. The memory eraser has a dial with increments; the higher the dial is set before the device is used, the larger the swath of memory erased by the flash.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

## PERSONAL SAUCER SHIP

**Level:** 1d6 + 2

**Form:** Wristband (inactive) or a 10-foot (3 m) diameter silver saucer (active)

**Effect:** These artifacts are usually keyed to function for specific greys, but they can be modified to work with other individuals. Activating a worn wristband causes a compartment on the band to rapidly inflate, engulfing the wearer in a silvery miniature “flying saucer” that can fly a long distance each round for up to ten hours per use. The saucer's level is equal to that of the artifact. A passenger is kept safe from harsh external environments while the saucer remains intact.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d100

## PSYCHIC INVERTER

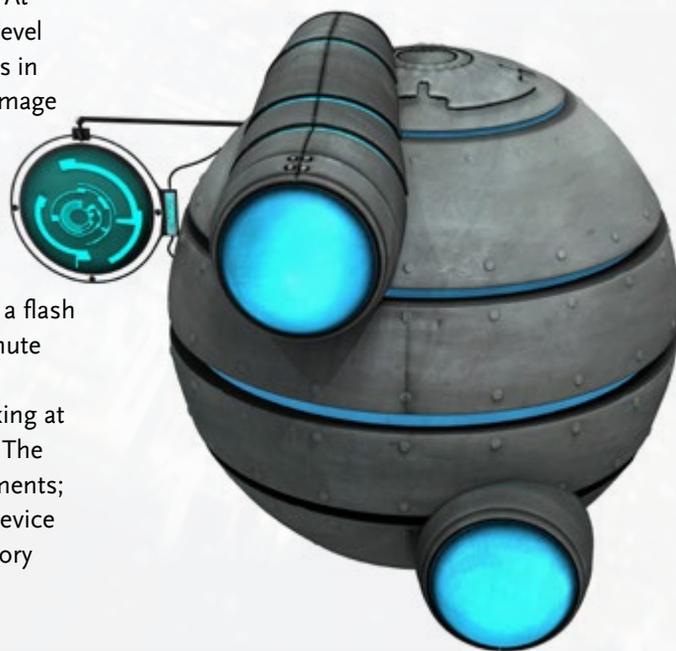
**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Harness

**Effect:** Whenever the wearer takes damage, 1 point of that damage isn't actually taken; instead, it is converted to a point of Intellect and added to the wearer's Intellect Pool, unless that Pool is already full.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d10

*Sometimes when an object's molecular structure is loosened by a matter unraveler, instead of exploding after an hour, it disappears, possibly shunted into a different recursion or into the Strange.*





Erica Laughton, page 105

# OCEANMIST



*“Something’s changed. They didn’t used to notice me. But last time I combed the beach for cyphers, the dragon came out of its cave. The pirate tried to kidnap me. The prince screamed filth. And the princess . . . well, she almost trampled me with a giant starfish. I barely escaped, and I don’t plan on returning.”*

*~Erica Laughton, recursion miner*

The beach stretches for miles down the coast, lit by a fractal-studded nightscape where the stars wheel and flow in massive spiral galaxies. Several nights each month, a gargantuan moon rides high through the sky. Its light washes out the stars, but whether by moonlight or starlight, the surf sparkles with strange glints and glows. Shadowed ridges run down to the sea. The ridges suggest the walls of some ancient fortification or castle that has suffered hundreds of years of neglect and erosion.

Oceanmist is a small recursion featuring a sparkling nighttime beach. Out toward the watery horizon, the silhouettes of pirate ships are sometimes visible passing in the night—

or not passing, when the boom and flash of cannon fire skips to the shore across the waves.

**Arrival:** Oceanmist’s initial default translation location is standing on a sandy beach, staring down the strand toward a cave mouth from which mist pours.

## OCEANMIST PHASE CHANGE

The narrative of the recursion once demanded that pirates fight each other and the royalty, that the royalty fete each other and fight pirates, and that both groups ignore the dragon lest they rouse it to vengeance.

But that’s changed.

### OCEANMIST ATTRIBUTES

**Level:** 3

**Laws:** Magic

**Playable Races:** Human

**Foci:** Entertains, Leads, Lives in the Wilderness, Slays Dragons, Wields Two Weapons at Once, Works Miracles

**Skills:** None

**Connection to Strange:** Far out into the ocean, the recursion’s edge is a massive waterfall that empties into the Strange

**Connection to Earth:** A few gates

**Size:** A few miles (5 km) across, several dozen miles (80 km) long

**Spark:** 5%

**Trait:** None



### WHAT A RECURSOR KNOWS ABOUT OCEANMIST

- Oceanmist operates under the law of Magic and is seeded by folk songs, children’s stories, and escapist literature.
- Oceanmist is rich in cyphers. New cyphers wash ashore every few days and can be collected like seashells along the beach.
- A dragon resides in Oceanmist, and the pirates that fight out past the waves bring it booty and treasure as a sign of respect.
- A phase change recently occurred in Oceanmist, and the recursion went from no natives with the spark to almost one in twenty.

*Entertains, page 61*

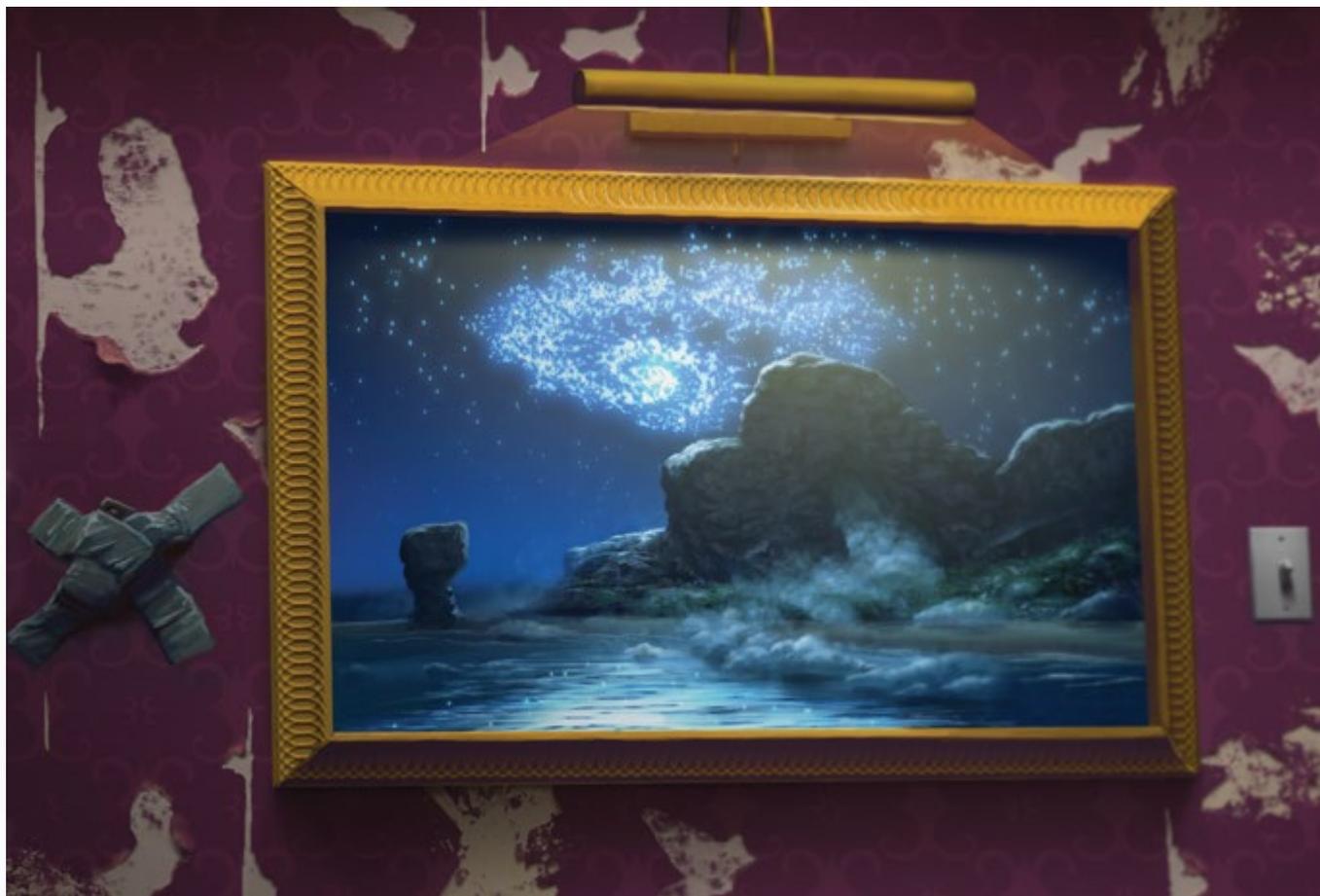
*Leads, page 65*

*Lives in the Wilderness, page 66*

*Slays Dragons, page 77*

*Wields Two Weapons at Once, page 82*

*Works Miracles, page 82*



**S** Spark, page 22

*In the context of recursion natives, a “shadow” refers to someone without the spark.*

**Prince Garland:** level 5, wielding a sabre as level 7; wears seven league boots

Seven league boots, page 106

**Princess Latanya:** level 6, tasks related to reasoning and puzzle-solving as level 7; often mounted on a mist star named Avery

Mist star, page 214

**Captain Kelly:** level 5; health 30; long-range attack with flintlock of certainty always hits its target and inflicts 6 points of damage

Flintlock of certainty, page 106

### WAKING NATIVES

Three prominent natives recently gained the spark: a prince, a princess, and a pirate captain. Each is jealous of the others, and each independently concluded that it was necessary to win the dragon as an ally.

The dragon of Oceanmist remains a shadow; it doesn't have the spark. As such, it usually stays in its cave unless roused, which has been happening more and more lately, thanks to the efforts of the vying royalty and pirates. It's believed that whoever is the first to learn the dragon's true name will gain power over the mighty creature.

**Prince Garland Lancaster:** Prince Garland is a clothes horse, can be swayed with flattery, and often gives in to a cruel streak. The prince gets around Oceanmist using magic seven league boots. He lives in a tower by the sea filled with servants and soldiers that never fail to tell him how grand and wonderful he is. The prince wants even more validation, so his larger goal is to “thaw” more lands out of the mists, lands that acknowledge him as their liege.

**Princess Latanya Valois:** Princess Latanya looks out for herself first. Thanks to her brilliant mind, she does quite well at it. She gets around Oceanmist riding a massive starfish (a mist star) named Avery, which is adept at defending itself and the princess. Latanya lives in a small castle several miles inland, one that only recently condensed from the edges of the growing recursion. Her larger goal is to explore the lands that she knows lie beyond Oceanmist and discover—if she can—what it means to be a recursor.

**Captain Katherine “Calamity” Kelly:** Captain Kelly commands a ship called the Red Pearl. She doesn't trust the royals farther than she can spit, but then again, she's given them no reason to trust her, either. She's lost count of the number of their soldiers and sailors that she's killed. Captain Kelly carries a magic flintlock of certainty that never fails to find its target. Before the phase change, dead soldiers and sailors invariably returned; the narrative demanded it. Now, though, the captain's not sure the same rules apply, so she's taking a more cautious tack. She's not really sure what she wants, though keeping the royals in check seems prudent, at minimum.

### GROWING RECURSION

Oceanmist is growing thanks to the phase change. The change was likely brought about thanks to the number of recursors that have visited recently (including recursion miners [Erica Laughton](#) and [LeRoy Cain](#)). Interactions these and other beachcombers have had with the natives sparked the change, probably literally. That in turn catalyzed the recursion's growth. After all, when a prince, princess, or pirate goes home at night, that home is required to exist. In this case, the recursion pulled a tower, a castle, and a pirate ship into existence, each one fully staffed with servitors, soldiers, and pirates.

Given that Oceanmist seems to be becoming more popular among recursors, it's possible that the recursion is on the cusp of becoming another order of magnitude larger. This could happen if the spark finally awakens in the nameless dragon.

### BEACHCOMBING FOR CYPHERS

Each hour a beachcomber spends searching the beach for cyphers provides her with a chance to find one. If she succeeds on a difficulty 6 Intellect-based roll, she discovers a random cypher tossed up by the surf. No matter how many creatures search along the beach, the surf throws up a maximum of seven cyphers each week.

Cyphers can be randomly generated from the cypher list in *The Strange* corebook.

### DRAGON'S LAIR

The dragon doesn't have a name, or if it does, it hasn't told anyone. It answers to "dragon" or, as the pirates and royal heirs call it, "Your Fiery Eminence." It's difficult to miss the dragon's cave—it's visible from the default translation location, which means that every first-time visitor who translates into Oceanmist sees it.

The interior of the cave is dark and misted, and the sound of heavy snoring is often audible at the cave's lip. The mist is thicker than ever in the cave, but at the farthest end of a winding tunnel (about 100 feet, or 30 m), it clears. If the dragon is in residence, it lies atop a bed of coins and cyphers within a 50-foot (15 m) diameter chamber. The dragon is scaled, not feathered like those in the recursion of Ardeyn.

The dragon doesn't currently possess the spark, nor does it rouse unless someone wakes it or filches from its hoard. In the latter case, or if it is attacked, it hunts miscreants down to the edges of Oceanmist. More than one pirate ship was burned and sunk for such crimes before the pirates changed their tactics.

The dragon is clinically depressed. It engages only if forced to defend itself or its hoard, or if visitors suggest a game. Dragons love games, and this one is no different. It perks right up for riddle contests, Tic-Tac-Toe, jacks,

Dragon, page 267

**Erica Laughton:** level 5; usually carries a few level 5 ray emitter cyphers

**LeRoy Cain:** level 4, perception tasks as level 6; sawed-off shotgun attack inflicts 6 points of damage to two targets within immediate range; carries a level 5 vanisher cypher

Ray emitter, page 325

Vanisher, page 331

*The dragon's forgotten true name is inked on a piece of paper that no longer resides in the recursion. Not even a quickened character's special ability or information-gathering cypher can deduce the name directly.*

Cypher list, page 312



**Herzog:**

human form: level 5;  
werewolf form: level 5;  
health 28; bite attack  
inflicts 6 points of damage;  
regains 1 point of health per  
round except damage from  
silvered weapons; silvered  
weapons inflict 2 additional  
points of damage and end  
werewolf transformation



Gloaming, page 249

Iron whale: level 7; Armor 4



Spray, page 27

Arc Spray, page 28

cards, or any other sort of game. During these interactions, visitors can question the dragon or plant the seeds of future glory, as visiting princes, princesses, and pirates are wont to do. On the other hand, when royals and pirates accidentally show up at the cave at the same time, the bickering that breaks out can make the dragon especially cross.

## OCEANMIST ARTIFACTS

### FLINTLOCK OF CERTAINTY

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** Classic flintlock inscribed with glowing magical runes

**Effect:** The flintlock fires a magic bullet to a range of 200 feet (61 m) and inflicts damage equal to the artifact's level. If the wielder can see the target, the attack always hits. In the hands of a PC, the wielder should still roll for the attack because results of 17 to 20 grant special effects. On the other hand, a roll of 1 doesn't result in a miss (though it might indicate that the wielder slips immediately after firing or suffers some other mishap).

The flintlock is not a rapid-fire weapon and can't be used with the Spray or Arc Spray special abilities that some characters have.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### SEVEN LEAGUE BOOTS

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Stylish red leather boots

**Effect:** When the boots are activated as part of a movement, the wearer can leap through the air to any location she can see within 300 feet (91 m).

If the wearer chooses to jump farther, she can leap through the air to any location she can see within about 3 miles (5 km). This use requires two depletion rolls and might require the wearer to spend several rounds moving swiftly (but not instantaneously) between the two points.

If the wearer falls unexpectedly, she can attempt a difficulty 3 Speed defense roll to land on her feet and take no direct damage from the fall.

**Depletion:** 1–2 in 1d00

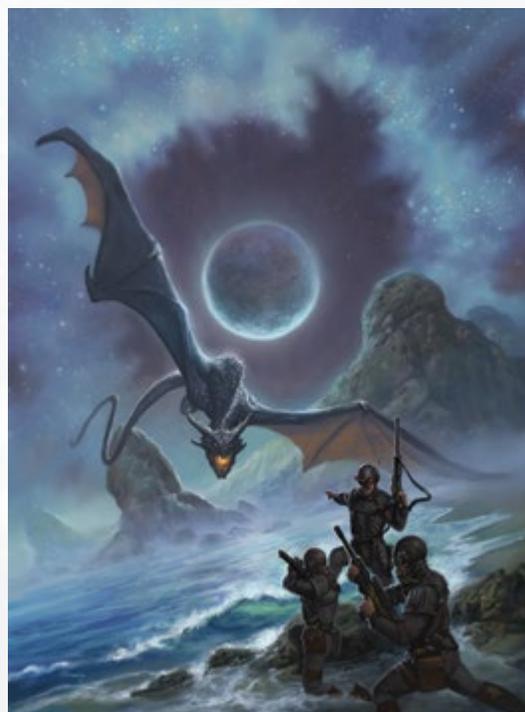


## MESSAGES IN THE SAND

**Rival Privateers:** A red-sailed ship appeared in Oceanmist's waters and immediately began hunting mist stars, apparently prizing them for the meat in their arms. The ship is captained by a particularly hairy man named Herzog, who comes from a recursion called Gloaming. He and his sailors have the ability to transform into werewolves when attacked. Princess Latanya is willing to offer much to anyone who can stop the slaughter.

**The Iron Whale:** A whale apparently constructed of rusting iron swims beneath the waves, sometimes ignoring ships and beachcombers, other times launching from the water to fall with lethal weight upon its target. The pirates want the whale stopped and gutted (if it has guts) because the beast swallowed a treasure galleon whole.

**Name the Dragon:** Prince Garland offers to reward recursors with any prize they name, including his seven league boots, if they discover the dragon's name and deliver it to him.



# R639

In some ways, R639 resembles Seattle in December. Cloud cover is constant, grey, and oppressive. Coats and gloves only partly protect from a seeping damp chill that pervades everything. But R639 takes gloominess orders of magnitude further, because the recursion is a version of Seattle without power and, more immediately noticeable, one where everyone has vanished. Streets are empty. Cars are parked as if their owners expected to return. Chalky dust covers everything that's not exposed to the weather. Nothing moves in the parks but for the sway of empty swings in the wind. Silence lays as heavy as a shroud over the Seattle of R639.

If a recursor explores further, a horrifying truth becomes clear: the residents of R639 didn't abandon their shadow-Seattle. They fled to their basements and sublevels, attics and

closets, and any other place they could hide. It didn't save them. *Something* caught the natives, leaving behind thousands of sets of clothes (and pet collars) filled with desiccated dust and ash.

**Arrival:** It's nearly impossible to translate into R639 (a difficulty 10 translation task); the few travelers who've visited the recursion have come through an inapposite gate or a flickering interface with the Strange. However, if recursors somehow manage to translate there, R639's initial default translation location is in the street in front of an empty version of the Estate campus.

Translating out of R639 is also hard: the difficulty of all translation attempts is increased by two steps, or by three steps if attempted within a reality scar.



*R639 was originally thought to have been created accidentally as the result of fictional leakage combined with propulsion experiments by Hertzfeld in the recursion lab of the Estate. More recent exploration suggests that might not be true; the recursion is a mysterious outlier.*

Reality scar, page 110

Hertzfeld, page 149

Recursion lab, page 152

The Estate, page 148





Karum outpost, page 112

## R639 ATTRIBUTES

**Level:** 4 (10 for translation tasks)  
**Laws:** Standard Physics, Exotic  
**Playable Races:** None  
**Foci:** As Earth  
**Skills:** As Earth



**Connection to Strange:** Above the clouds lies the Strange (above 40,000 feet, or 12 km; flying so high draws the attention of thonik flocks)

**Connection to Earth:** When one inapposite gate is destroyed, a new one forms a few months later in a random location

**Size:** Indeterminate

**Spark:** 0%

**Trait:** Afraid. The difficulty of all rolls to resist or fight off anxiety, fear, or panic is increased by one step.

## NOTABLE LOCATIONS

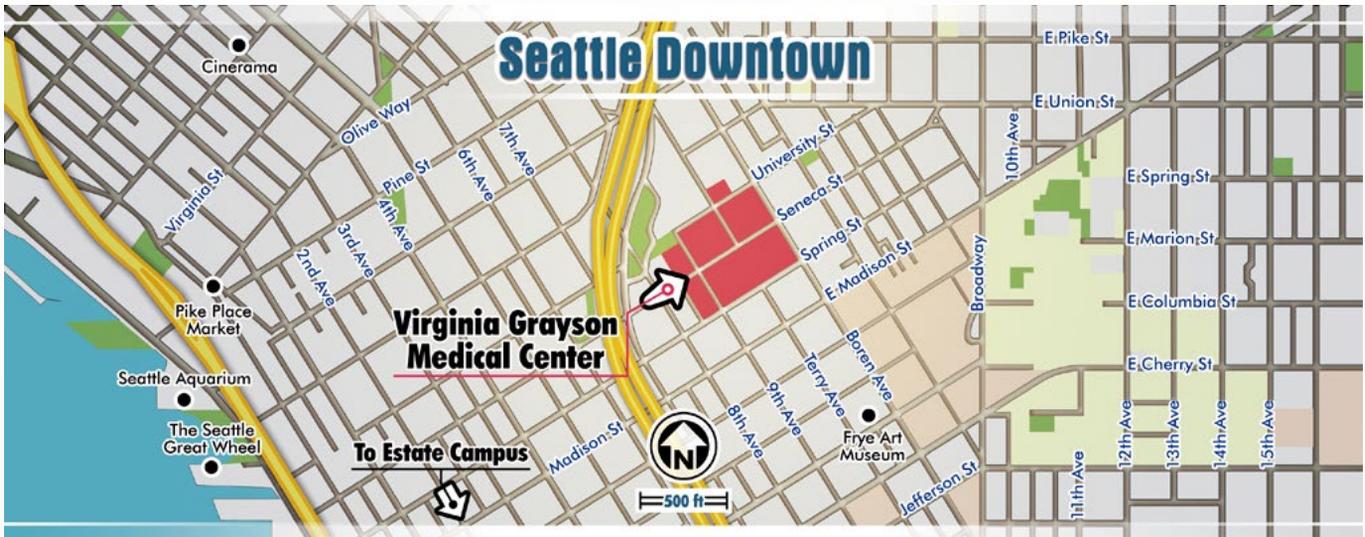
The following are a few of the terrifying locations and situations that visitors should stay far away from if they have the misfortune of visiting R639.

## SEATTLE STREETS AND BEYOND

It's easy to find a parked or abandoned car in R639. Vehicles can be hot-wired, though it might be easier to find the keys in a nearby home or apartment. Whether driving or walking, visitors find Seattle's streets empty of people or moving vehicles (but see the *Karum outpost*). The city streets stretch from downtown to the water and out into the suburbs. In fact, no matter how far an explorer travels, the recursion seems to stretch farther.

## WHAT A RECURSOR KNOWS ABOUT R639

Even if a recursor manages the almost impossible task of translating into R639, nothing is learned from context. It's as if she entered via an inapposite gate from Earth. That dearth of information says something, implying that R639 breaks the fundamental rules of recursion travel. It is a glitch in the Strange.



However, long before that intuition can be disproved, one or more terrifying encounters likely ends any push for the recursion's borders.

Those who travel any of the major thoroughfares also see, painted over faded graffiti, a series of new messages in purple spray paint: "Help! We're hiding in the Virginia Grayson Medical Center!" Some of these messages seem to be only a week old at most.

**Street Encounters:** Visitors who stick to the streets may encounter a flight of *thoniks* or find a vehicle infested with *green pods*.

Characters who survive an encounter with *thoniks* and have any knowledge of the Strange realize that the creatures are native to the dark energy network. The *thonik* presence in R639 suggests that the recursion has somehow been flayed open, allowing creatures of the Strange to enter it, perhaps at will. That's not a good thing. A second possibility also exists: What if *thoniks* are not native to the Strange after all but originate in R639?

**SEATTLE BUILDINGS**

The typical Seattle structure, whether it's a place of business or an apartment building, is dusty and uninhabited but doesn't show overt signs of violence. Dozens or hundreds of sets of clothing are hidden away in the nooks and crannies of each building. Pet remains are often found with their previous owners, little piles of dust surrounding a collar with a tag.

**Building Encounters:** Visitors exploring and looting buildings may eventually encounter more *green pods* or a *killing white light*.

A *killing white light* is an eye-watering point of brilliance, though its emanation isn't warm. Despite the blazing intensity, a *killing white light* is cold: it drains heat and life from living things caught in its radiance. The creature is normally encountered only in darkened areas, though one might chase potential victims into the street at night. A victim killed by one of these creatures is rendered into so much blowing ash, though his clothing and equipment is unharmed.

**Killing white light:** *level 5; flies a short distance each round; blazing nimbus attack inflicts damage in immediate range; moves away from strong light sources other than itself; for details, see The Strange Bestiary, page 75*

*Virginia Grayson Medical Center, page 111*

*Thonik, page 294*

*Green pod, page 213*

**GM INTRUSIONS: FEAR AND PANIC**

The influence of R639's trait ("afraid") is pervasive in the recursion. If characters encounter a creature and one or more of the PCs is frightened, it's a great cue for a GM intrusion: characters who fail an Intellect defense roll suffer a round of panic (and thanks to R639's trait, the difficulty of the roll is increased by one step). Panicked characters spend a round running scared, standing frozen in horror, fainting, or screaming their fool heads off (their choice). Afflicted characters find that the difficulty of defending against attacks by the triggering creature is increased by two steps, and a character who faints is automatically hit if targeted by an attacking creature.



**S** *Analeptic, page 313*  
*Grenade (gravity inversion), page 319*

### LOOTING IN R639

Visitors can find lots of everyday things just by searching buildings, but looters are best served by hitting a mall. The Southcenter area south of Seattle is (or was) a shopping mecca, and looters who go there are likely to find anything they might desire. Characters who load up on material goods and travel back to Earth via a matter gate are enriched. Of course, each looting trip requires another gauntlet run through the horrifying, dead recursion. Is it really worth it?

Amid the normal things one might expect to find while looting a building, characters can also find the following.

**Pseudo-Cypher:** Searchers sometimes discover single lumps of volcanic glass the color of milk in dark corners, under beds and couches, and in basements. Quickened characters who examine a lump get the sense that the object is a cypher. However, when put to the test by a **paradox** or someone else able to identify a cypher's function, the glass lumps resist immediate analysis, suggesting that the cypher is in a state of superposition, requiring

a triggering event to collapse it to its final state (and cypher type). If someone translates out of R639 with a lump, it also translates and becomes a known cypher (such as an **analeptic** or a **gravity inversion grenade**). The cypher functions normally if used, but afterward, it doesn't evaporate in a swirl of fractal light. Instead, it hatches as a killing white light.

**Reality Scar:** A reality scar in R639 manifests as a bubble of perceptual static about 200 feet (61 m) in diameter. From the exterior, it's difficult to perceive the boundary of a scar, given the misted, gloomy nature of the recursion. Once a visitor has crossed into a reality scar, everything within appears as if seen through a filter of old-timey television static, sound is pinched and weak, and the senses of taste, touch, and smell are muted. This has the cumulative effect of increasing the difficulty of an explorer's tasks by one step and decreasing her line of sight to immediate range, though she can make out imperfect outlines of objects and people up to short range. At first, some of those people seem to be echoes of former residents. But they don't respond to hails, they

**S** *Paradox, page 30*



*“What is going on with R639? I have been asking myself the same question every day. Every time I negate one entrance, a new one seems to pop up somewhere else. Ask anyone. I do not understand. Nor do I understand the true nature of the horrible things that linger in the recursion. Maybe I should stop investigating it.”*

*~Hertzfeld, Estate Research Chief*

*Lost in the Strange,  
page 215*

*Mirror of fading beauty,  
page 113*

**Justin Brown:** level 3, tasks related to stealth as level 5

**Samantha Chaudhary:** level 3, tasks related to healing as level 5

melt away when approached, and sometimes they shiver into horrifying shapes a moment before disappearing completely.

Finally, characters who become incapacitated (or suffer some other grievous shock, as determined by the GM) within a reality scar must succeed on a difficulty 1 Intellect defense roll, or they are immediately ejected to a random location in the Strange and treated as if lost.

**Actual Cyphers and Artifacts:** Searchers can find actual cyphers in addition to the pseudo-cyphers described above. In addition, they might find “cursed” artifacts, such as the *mirror of fading beauty*.

## VIRGINIA GRAYSON MEDICAL CENTER

Located in the heart of Seattle on Earth, the Virginia Grayson Medical Center is an acute care hospital with more than three hundred beds.

In R639, the beds are empty except for dust and ash, a reality scar fills the lobby and all the ground floor entrances, and a group of human survivors hides in the upper floors, scavenging for food and survival as hope dwindles. The survivors are down to just three people. All of them are dazed, confused, and desperate, with big gaps in their memory (which cluster around the transition from their former life to their new existence). None of the survivors has the spark, but all are on the edge of developing it—Dr. Radakovich more than the others, given his recent proclivities.

**Justin Brown (former patient):** Sixteen-year-old Justin came into the hospital for a broken arm. The next thing he knew, everyone was dead. Justin sometimes ventures out of the building to salvage food and supplies for the others. He’s the one who’s been painting the messages for help using spray paint he liberated from a home improvement store.

### Samantha Chaudhary (resident physician):

Since “the change,” Samantha has coped by trying to keep Justin and Dr. Radakovich (and herself) alive and in good health. She recently noticed a strange infection on one of her arms,





**Benjamin Radakovich:**  
level 5, wields level 6 reality-tearing knife artifact

*Reality-tearing knife,*  
page 113

**Amputated animate arm:**  
level 3, Speed defense rolls as level 5; regains 3 points of health per round even when reduced to 0 health



*Ardeyn, page 160*

which manifests as a slowly growing brown crust. She keeps her sleeves long to hide it. This worrying development is probably why she's failed to wonder more about Radakovich's increasing instability.

**Benjamin Radakovich (psychiatrist):**

Benjamin insists on being called "Doctor" Radakovich, even in the face of "the change," which is just a symptom of how completely he's lost his mind. He has been secretly murdering the other survivors when he can get them alone, and then storing gruesome trophies of flesh and skin in a medical refrigerator (which has no power, so the interior is a rotting mess). Radakovich believes that he is slowly transforming into a god, and to complete his apotheosis, he must kill everyone else first.

## THE ESTATE

Explorers familiar with the Estate on Earth can find its dim replica on R639—a replica sans any people.

Despite being a copy of the real-world campus, the Estate in R639 doesn't have the cyphers, the artifacts, the working translation and inapposite gates, and other specialized equipment the real Estate possesses. That said, searching the remains yields 1d6 randomly determined cyphers.

**Something Familiar:** A search of the campus reveals a few additional features, including the remains of known Estate members (at least, their distinctive clothing and a lot of loose dust). These include Katherine Manners, the Fixer, and potentially the PCs themselves. It can be particularly upsetting for a character to find a copy of himself who was crammed under a bed, in the corner of a bathroom stall, or huddled under a desk when death struck.

**There Is Another:** Visitors to the Estate campus can also find evidence that someone systematically tossed every office in almost every structure, leaving a litter of upended file cabinets, torn couch cushions, and ripped wallpaper in their wake. All but one building (the Library) has been ravaged, and it's only a matter of time before the responsible party returns to finish the job. The perpetrators are none other than a group of Karum out of Ruk who have come to steal whatever Estate secrets they can from the dim replica of R639.

## BAD FEELINGS ABOUT R639

**Perchance to Dream:** Characters who sleep in R639 may experience the same repeating dream of a run-down shed at night in a nondescript rural backyard not far from Seattle. A swaying old-timey heat lamp provides erratic lighting. Rain beats down in torrents. The dream perspective slowly advances on the scene as a feeling of horror mounts for the dreamer. Something is digging up from the sodden earth behind the shed; the mound of disrupted soil grows larger each night. But the dream always ends before the dreamer sees what is emerging from the ground. That's probably a good thing.

**Under the Cinder Block:** A cinder block holds down an amputated, yet still writhing, human arm. The cinder block in question is at the corner of two prominent streets in downtown Seattle, behind a mailbox. Any interaction with the arm or the cinder block (even shooting at it from a distance) risks releasing the arm. If released, the arm tries to murder any living thing it can sense in the recursion via vibration through the ground and air. If the PCs probe the arm with special abilities, they might learn that it used to belong to a human recursor named Garland of the Fall, from *Ardeyn*. It's not revealed where Garland is currently, whether he's alive or in pieces, or how his arm became animate, amputated, and caught under a cinder block.

## KARUM OUTPOST

A small team of Karum agents from Ruk discovered R639 via a particularly catastrophic translation failure. At first, the team thought they'd found the real Earth, though that idea was dispelled quickly enough. Still, they decided to use the mishap as an opportunity to learn more about the world they despise, starting with one of their chief rivals, the Estate. To that end, the agents set up a base in the sub-basement of a nightclub called Trinity in downtown Seattle, commandeered trucks in which to drive about and conduct their investigations, and settled in for a short stay.

The oppressive and dangerous nature of R639 proved more than the Karum team was prepared to handle. Of the five originals, only two still survive: **Ur-galrum** (a female) and **Dram-edin** (a male). The survivors are deeply torn over whether to continue their investigation or devote all their energies to trying to escape the recursion. Ur-galrum wants to stay, and Dram-edin wants to go. So far, all of Dram-edin's translation attempts have failed. When he and another team member figured out how to fly a plane from nearby Boeing Field to see what they could find above the clouds, hundreds of thoniks came after them and killed the pilot.

Characters who come across the Karum operatives find either enemies or short-term allies who are willing to help find a way to escape R639, depending on how the interaction goes. However, if it looks like the allied group has a chance of escaping the recursion, Ur-galrum betrays everyone—she's come down with some kind of psychosis. (The blister glove she wears is something she found beneath a pile of green pods.)

## ARTIFACTS OF R639

The artifacts in this section rely on R639's Exotic law, but they will function normally for a few days under any other law.

### BLISTER GLOVE

**Level:** 1d6 + 2

**Form:** Fingerless glove sewn from ratty denim, covered with rusted rivets

**Effect:** If the wearer points with her gloved hand at a target she can see within long range, the target blisters across its extremities, feels extreme pain, and suffers ambient damage equal to the artifact level. Fleishy pustules also form on objects, the ground, and other structures near the target.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### MIRROR OF FADING BEAUTY

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** A hand mirror

**Effect:** A user who gazes at himself in the reflective surface activates the device. The user gains access to an additional stat Pool called Beauty that has a number of points equal to the artifact level. The Beauty Pool lasts for one day or until it is used up, whichever comes first. When spending points from any other Pool, the user can take one, some, or all the points from the Beauty Pool first.

With each use of the artifact, the user's reflection in this mirror and in all other reflective surfaces changes, becoming more horrific and threatening until the thing staring back is monstrous. The monstrous reflection lasts after the Beauty Pool is used up and the artifact is depleted, even if the user translates to other recursions.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### REALITY-TEARING KNIFE

**Level:** 1d6 + 3

**Form:** A shard of dull steel, sharpened along one edge

**Effect:** This large knife can be used as a normal medium weapon. When its special power is activated as part of an attack, the knife emits a silent pulse of reality-twisting force that sweeps out to short range in all directions. Creatures in the area other than the wielder are knocked prone and stunned for one round, losing their action. Unfixed objects are toppled or moved at least 5 feet (2 m). Cracks form in walls, floors, and ceilings, and a reality scar is left behind in the area.

**Depletion:** 1–2 in 1d10

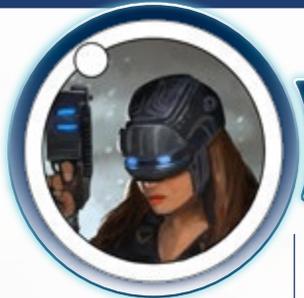
**Ur-galrum:** level 5; health 25; Armor 3; wields a level 7 blister glove artifact

**Dram-edin:** level 5, subterfuge-related tasks as level 6, mechanical tasks as level 7

**Mirror of Fading Beauty GM Intrusions:** The user's reflection mouths threats at her. The reflection attacks an ally. The reflection attacks the user.

*A blister glove wearer can attempt attacks using other hand signs, but the results are less certain. Flipping someone the bird with the glove might do nothing, or it could open a crack in the earth beneath the target or summon a flight of thoniks.*





*"Rebel Galaxy" is the name given to the recursion by members of the Implausible Geographical Society, who were the first people from Earth to discover it. Natives call it the "Grand Imperium" or perhaps simply "the galaxy."*

## REBEL GALAXY

Nothing's better than a fast ship and your trusty blaster at your side in Rebel Galaxy, a recursion created by fictional leakage from action-packed space opera films and books, particularly those popular in the last forty years or so. In Rebel Galaxy, the forces of good face near-impossible odds but struggle on in the name of freedom from oppression. Here, rebels fight to free the galaxy from the tyrannical Imperium one planet at a time. What neither side of this interstellar war realizes, however, is that outsiders seek to stoke the flames of the conflict for their own ends.

**Arrival:** Just outside Korji's Spacer Bar, near the hangar bays in the spaceport of Haranbar, on the planet Aranolis.

### A RECURSION AS BIG AS A GALAXY

Rebel Galaxy, it would seem at first, is an enormous recursion, involving an entire galaxy of inhabited planets and the empire that controls it. And to those who live there, and even those who translate there, that seems an accurate description of the place. But it's not true. In this recursion, no one ever explores an entire planet, and the vast gulfs of space between planets are quickly crossed by a "hyperspace drive." The truth is that each "planet" is really just a few dozen miles across, with the implication that the rest of the world is more of the same. In Rebel Galaxy, there are desert planets, forest planets, swamp planets, frozen planets, and so forth, each an expression of a single environment.



REBEL GALAXY ATTRIBUTES

Level: 5

Laws: Mad Science

Playable Races: Human, alien

Foci: Conducts Weird Science, Entertains, Infiltrates, Integrates Weaponry, Is Licensed to Carry, Leads, Looks for Trouble, Operates Undercover, Wields Two Weapons at Once, Works the System

Skills: Rebel Galaxy lore, starship piloting, space battles

Connection to Strange: Hyperspace

Connection to Earth: None currently

Size: 100,000 square miles (259,000 square km)

Spark: 10%

Trait: Brash. For any creature with the spark attempting to overcome or ignore the effects of fear or intimidation, the difficulty is reduced by one step.



WHAT A RECURSOR KNOWS ABOUT REBEL GALAXY

- Rebel Galaxy operates under the law of Mad Science, with high-energy weaponry and extremely advanced technologies existing amid far more simple ones, like conventional swords.
- The recursion is far, far smaller than the natives believe it to be.
- The recursion is controlled by the Grand Imperium and the Empress Tahali V, who has countless legions of Imperium troopers and the dreaded Imperium starfleet as her weapons.
- A ragtag band of rebels fights against the Imperium, their determination, bravery, and skill making up for their lack of numbers and supplies.

Conducts Weird Science, page 57

Entertains, page 61

Infiltrates, page 62

Integrates Weaponry, page 63

Is Licensed to Carry, page 64

Leads, page 65

Looks for Trouble, page 68

Operates Undercover, page 70

Wields Two Weapons at Once, page 82

Works the System, page 83

However, it is impossible to get from one planet to the next without a starship that has a hyperspace drive. Such a journey takes a few hours, regardless of the starting point and destination. The starships are in truth less like vehicles and more like conduits between otherwise inaccessible areas of the recursion.

This doesn't make Rebel Galaxy any less real a place, however. It just has a physical structure that is unlike anything we are used to, and unlike anything the inhabitants believe.

SPACE BATTLES

Battles between starships of various kinds—from gigantic capital ships to single-pilot fighters—are a frequent occurrence in the galactic war in this recursion. If the PCs are involved in a space battle, here are some quick and easy guidelines for handling the situation.

On this scale, combat between vehicles isn't like traditional combat. Don't worry about health, Armor, or anything like that. Instead, just compare the levels of the ships involved. If the PCs' ship has the higher level, the difference in levels becomes a reduction in the difficulty of attack and defense rolls involved. If





*If you have a hard time imagining how Rebel Galaxy works, picture movie sets from a space opera film. The actors move from the set of a jungle planet to the set of the starship interior. Then they move to the set of a spaceport on a water planet. We believe that they travel multiple light-years to accomplish that, but we never actually see it, except as streaks of fast-moving stars on their bridge's viewscreen. In reality, all recursions could be thought of like movie sets.*

*In some cases, the GM may wish to use the level of an NPC pilot rather than the level of the ship, but this is only for special circumstances, such as a very skilled or very inept pilot.*

the PCs' ship has the lower level, the difference is an increase in difficulty. If the levels are the same, there is no modification.

These attack and defense rolls are modified by skill and Effort, as usual. Further, if two ships coordinate their attack against one vessel, the difficulty of the attack is reduced by one step. If three or more ships coordinate, the difficulty is reduced by two steps.

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

Targeting Task	Modification	Effect
Disable weapons	Two steps	One or more of the ship's weapons no longer function
Disable defenses	Two steps	Difficulty of attacks against the ship are reduced by one step
Disable drive	Three steps	Ship cannot move, or movement is hampered
Disable maneuverability	Two steps	Ship cannot alter its present course
Strike power core	Five steps	Ship is completely destroyed

That's a lot of modifications. But it's not really that hard. Let's look at an example. A PC in a small level 2 fighter attacks a level 4

frigate. Since the frigate is level 4, the difficulty of the attack starts at 4. But the attacking craft is weaker than the defender, so the difference in their levels (2) is added to the difficulty. The fighter pilot must make a difficulty 6 attack on the frigate. However, the fighter is trying to swoop in and damage the frigate's drive, which modifies the attack by another three steps, for a total difficulty of 9. If the fighter pilot is trained in space combat, she reduces the difficulty to 8, but it's still impossible without help. So let's say that two other PCs—also in level 2 fighters—join in and coordinate their attack. Three ships coordinating an attack on one target reduces the difficulty by two steps, resulting in a final difficulty of 6. Still, the attacking PC would be wise to use Effort.

Then the frigate retaliates and the PC needs to make a defense roll. The level difference between the ships is a two-step modification in the frigate's favor, so the difficulty of the defense roll starts out at 6. But the frigate tries to take out the fighter's weapons, reducing the difficulty of the defense roll by two steps. Thus, the PC needs to succeed at a difficulty 4 task or lose her main weapons systems.

It's important to remember that a failed attack doesn't always mean a miss. The target ship might rock and reel from the hit, but the bulk of the damage was absorbed by the shields, so there's no significant damage.

This bare-bones system should allow the GM and players to flesh out exciting encounters involving the whole group. For example, perhaps while one PC pilots a ship, another mans the guns, and another frantically attempts to repair damage to the maneuvering thrusters before they crash into the space station they're trying to defend.

### SAMPLE STARSHIPS AND LEVELS

Starship	Level	Crew	Weapon Systems
Imperium dagger fighter	1	1	1
Rebel eagle interceptor	2	1	1
Freighter	3 (4 for defense)	4	1
Frigate	4	20	4
Rebel cruiser	4	25	5
Imperium battleship	10	1,000	36

“Crew” indicates the minimum number of people needed to operate the ship. Many ships can carry more passengers. “Weapon Systems” is the maximum number of different enemies the ship can target at once (only one attack per ship in any circumstance). A quick check of the math makes it pretty clear that getting into a fight with a level 10 battleship is a risky proposition.

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

*Since it’s frighteningly easy to die in a space battle if your ship is destroyed, most vessels have escape pods. Even fighter craft have ejection systems that shoot pilots into space in their environment suit. In other words, GMs should try to give PCs a way out of immediately dying if they get on the wrong end of a space battle.*

**Tahali V:** level 3, all matters of diplomacy, including deceit and seeing through deceit, as level 7; Armor 3 from personal force field generator

### ALIENS APLENTY

Rebel Galaxy is filled with aliens of all types. The vast majority of these are humanoid in configuration, but with fur, horns, leathery skin, large or extra eyes, tusks, tendrils, a particularly tall or short stature, and so on. However, these differences are entirely cosmetic.

Essentially, player character recursors translating into Rebel Galaxy can choose to be an alien species of their own design. They should design a name and appearance for their race. Further, a few traits or quirks would be appropriate, such as:

- Dislikes space travel
- Eats only meat
- Likes high temperatures
- Avoids bright light

However, PCs should not have traits that would affect the game in a major way, either as advantages or disadvantages. When it comes to fighting, fixing things, talking to NPCs, and so on, a reptilian humanoid with three eyes holding a blaster and a set of tools is basically no different than a human with a blaster and a set of tools.

Most alien races have their own language, but the vast majority of individuals speaks Galactic Standard.

### THE GRAND IMPERIUM

More than a hundred years ago (time relative to the recursion), the Galactic Council was

overthrown and the Grand Imperium took power, putting the entire galaxy under the thumb of Empress Tahali. The current empress, Tahali V, has sat upon the throne for nine years and is as ruthless and terrible as all those who came before her. Each Empress of the royal line is so similar, in fact, that some believe them to be a succession of clones rather than natural offspring. But this is not the official story related in historical educational broadcasts.

The worlds of the Imperium are connected thanks to starships with hyperspace drives. This technology allows travel from any planet in the galaxy to another in just a few hours. Most planets have at least one busy starport.



**Imperium trooper:** level 2; Armor 2; long-range blaster inflicts 3 points of damage

**Prince Narlell:** level 6, all matters of diplomacy as level 8, tactics as level 7

*It is possible that the decision to lay waste to Juruntan may have resulted from manipulation by the Zal, who wished to escalate the war and give more support to the Rebellion.*

**Imperium wardroid:** level 5; Armor 3; long-range blaster inflicts 8 points of damage; can attack up to three foes in one action



Zal, page 194

Hyperspace drive makes it economically feasible to conduct all manner of interplanetary trade and has brought hundreds of intelligent races together, so many that no one seems to be familiar with them all. (The Grand Imperium is very humanocentric, however, and its governors and military commanders are always human.)

The Imperium attempts to control travel and trade, but smugglers and unlicensed ships slip through their fingers on a regular basis. Nevertheless, the Imperium starfleet is feared throughout the galaxy.

Imperium starships come in many varieties, but the most common are the half-mile-long battleships and the swarms of small fighter craft called daggers.

Even more than the ships of the fleet, however, **Imperium troopers** are the face of the Grand Imperium, ubiquitous on all the galaxy's worlds. Always clad in glistening silver armor, marked with the griffon symbol of the Imperium military, and carrying blasters and swords, troopers patrol the streets of every city on foot, in large hovercraft, or mounted on indigenous beasts appropriate to the terrain. They serve as keepers of order, but they make for a terrible police force. Troopers are the fist of the Imperium, more interested in maintaining control than in preventing crime or helping citizens.

When troopers need heavy support, **wardroids** are sometimes brought in. These fearsome robots are ruthless even by trooper standards and are known to kill innocent bystanders as often as foes. It is said that when wardroids are unleashed, wise troopers fall back and take cover.

Shortly after Rebel Galaxy's first appearance in the Strange, Rukian explorers from the Zal faction found their way here. Practiced at infiltration, these agents quickly realized that this large, industrial, and warlike recursion



*"I have a bad feeling about this."*

*~L. G. Babcock III*

offered excellent opportunities. They wormed their way through the Imperium ranks and took up important roles where they could observe and subtly control events.

## THE REBELLION

Almost as soon as the Imperium took control, the Rebellion was born. Originally led by generals still loyal to the Galactic Council, twelve years ago the Rebellion won the sympathy of Prince Narlell of the planet Juruntan. When the Empress learned of Narlell's secret support, she had Juruntan scoured by devastating weaponry developed by the Imperium fleet.

Reducing the jewel-world of Juruntan to a radioactive wasteland secured more support for the Rebellion than ever before. "For Juruntan!" is now a popular slogan and war cry among the rebels. And perhaps most significantly, **Prince Narlell** took an active role as the leader of the Rebellion.

The Rebellion has been scattered across the galaxy in small cells at various times, but it is strongest when it can mass its forces to make significant strikes. Thus, whenever possible, the rebels have a single secret base on a planet somewhere on the galactic fringe. Currently, this is the planet Lantiv IV, but the base is the third they have had in the last four years, as Imperium spies, probes, and bounty hunters are always searching for them. If the Imperium ever found the base and caught the rebels unawares, they could likely put an end to the war in a single stroke.

The Rebellion fleet is a motley assortment of ships, best known for its large numbers of



*There are many theories as to why Rebel Galaxy expands at such a rapid rate compared to other recursions, but no one knows for certain. The Estate, for one, would greatly value more investigation into this.*

eagle interceptors, which are better armed and more maneuverable than the Imperium's dagger craft. On the other hand, the Imperium mass-produces its fighters, so they outnumber the rebels in most confrontations, sometimes by as much as 5 to 1.

Rebel soldiers are loose knit, often operating more like a gang of terrorists than a military. Almost always outnumbered in any given engagement, they use hit-and-run tactics and are often better saboteurs and seditionists than warriors.

The Zal have infiltrated the Rebellion as well as the Imperium. They use their connections not only to keep tabs on things but also to help ensure that the resistance fighters are never entirely crushed. Many of the best rebel spies are actually Ruk natives who have contacts with other Zal infiltrators in the Imperium.

**PLANETS OF THE IMPERIUM**

There are thousands of worlds in the Grand Imperium, although some may exist only in reference, not in actual fact within the recursion of Rebel Galaxy. In other words, although the recursion is quite large, it does not actually contain thousands of worlds—yet. Various experts have noted that Rebel Galaxy is one of the fastest-growing recursions ever discovered, with whole new worlds appearing on a regular basis.

It's worth noting that each "planet" is only about the size of a city, or a city and its surrounding environs—probably no more than a dozen miles across at most.

**TORUNTAN, IMPERIUM CAPITAL**

With two glistening suns in the sky, carefully tended gardens and orchards, precisely engineered sparkling waterfalls, crystal towers, and mirrored domes of elegant majesty, Toruntan is a beautiful planet. The Imperium Palace alone covers a full 2 square miles (5 square km) and has a staff of 10,000, not including servant androids.

A level 9 energy shield around the palace protects it from attack, although none has ever been attempted. Hundreds of warships remain in orbit around the planet to defend the Empress.

The city surrounding the palace, which technically sprawls across the continent amid parks and gardens, is simply called Toruntan.

Most of the residents are extremely wealthy and use their riches to give themselves lives of utter leisure and comfort. The Toruntan weather is controlled and thus always pleasant.

*Life expectancy on Killarus is very short—for most people, a few months at best.*

**KILLARUS, PRISON PLANET**

A name feared throughout the Imperium, Killarus is an inhospitable desert planet that serves as a prison for the worst (apprehended) criminals alive. The planet is surrounded by a natural debris field orbiting the world, making a safe approach to the surface almost impossible unless guided by an extremely complex computer program provided only to a few Imperium starcraft.

Once on the surface, prisoners are left to their own devices. Only the extremely well-



**Rebel soldier:** level 3; Armor 1; long-range blaster

*Rumors speak of an underground network of thieves and smugglers that operates on Toruntan, partially to prey on the wealthy but also secretly sponsored and harbored by certain influential residents of the world.*

*A black market version of the nav program that allows access to Killarus is said to be available, but the cost is exorbitant.*

**Typical prisoner:** level 3, tasks involving desert survival as level 4; Armor 1; armed with a stone knife

*People living in Rebel Galaxy think of the recursion as being larger than it is, because they believe it's a whole galaxy, even though it's not.*

**Servant android:** level 2

fortified starport offers any semblance of real civilization, and that is surrounded by huge, blast-proof level 6 walls and towers with level 5 sonic cannons.

The prisoners form nomadic tribes to survive. These tribes raid each other and exist in a constant state of war. Life expectancy on Killarus is very short—for most people, a few months at best.

Probably one of the most infamous prisoners on the planet is **Guialla**, a former general of the Imperium fleet who left her post to join the Rebellion. She served as a rebel leader for almost two years before her frigate was captured in a huge space battle.

In secret, the Ruk faction known as Zal has manipulated Killarus for its own ends. First, it used a powerful machine to surround the planet with a translation ward—recursors can translate into Killarus, but not out. Then Zal used its undercover agents in the Imperium's ranks to ship its own prisoners to the world, forever marooning its enemies in an inhospitable, near-inescapable prison in a far-off corner of a backwater recursion. As many as one-quarter of the Killarus prisoners are not

native to this recursion. Most are translated Ruk natives, but some were brought through inapposite gates, and a few are recursors from Earth or other recursions who crossed the Zal.

## F·B41, FACTORY PLANET

The Imperium controls many factory planets, entire worlds devoted to the mass production of goods needed by the rest of the galaxy. F-B41 is important, however, because its **factory androids** manufacture weapons. It is the source of most of the blasters, blaster rifles, and blast cannons used by Imperium troopers.

Thus, the Zal took particular interest in this planet when they first came to the recursion. Their agents have infiltrated F-B41 at all levels, slowly skimming weapons from the production lines and transporting them through temporary inapposite gates back to Ruk. The laws that govern Ruk allow the weapons to function there, where the resources for creating such weaponry are limited. Not only do the Zal use the weapons to arm their security forces back home, but they also sell the weapons to other factions in Ruk and to other recursions where they will operate.

The leaders of Zal believe that one day

**Guialla:** level 6, military tactics as level 8, attack and defense as level 7; armed with a stone knife and bow

**Factory android:** level 2; Armor 2





soon, the sales of these weapons expanding throughout the far reaches of the Strange will be their greatest revenue driver. Because of these projections, the Zal also secretly support the Rebellion to ensure that the war in Rebel Galaxy never ends.

#### EQUIPMENT IN THE GALACTIC WAR

**Light blaster:** light weapon, long range

**Blaster:** medium weapon, long range

**Blaster rifle:** heavy weapon, rapid-fire weapon, 200-foot (61 m) range

**Blast cannon:** heavy weapon, 4 additional points of damage, requires two people to use (otherwise, increase difficulty by two steps)

**Incendiary grenade:** explodes in an immediate radius for 4 points of damage (1 point even if the attack fails)

**Combat vest:** light armor

**Trooper armor:** medium armor, encumbers as light armor

#### ARANOLIS, JUNGLE PLANET

Mostly uncivilized, the jungle planet of Aranolis is notable for the hidden spaceport of Haranbar, a hideout for smugglers and criminals looking to lay low from the eye of the Imperium. This, of course, makes it a convenient place for the Rebellion as well. There are about 10,000 people in Haranbar at any given time, although half of them are temporary residents or just passing through.

As a smuggler's haven, Haranbar is known for seedy bars, flophouses, and no-questions-asked businesses catering to spacers on the edge of the law: starship supplies and repair, stolen goods fencing, weapon sales, mercenaries for hire, identity changers, and so forth. Although there's said to be a camaraderie among those who frequent Haranbar, the truth is, a smart traveler watches her back at all times. Press gangs, pickpockets, and bandits are common, and there isn't a soul in the spaceport who wouldn't cheat his own grandmother if he thought he could get away with it.

Of particular interest to recursors is Korji's Spacer Bar, a cantina near the hangar bays. This is a den of thieves, pirates, and smugglers, but

*Aranolis extends about 10 miles (16 km) beyond the edges of Haranbar.*

**Var Norillic:** level 5; space piloting and space battles as level 6; long-range blaster

**Zaalish:** level 3; interrogation, intimidation, and stealth as level 4; Armor 1; long-range blaster; level 4 poison gas grenades induce unconsciousness for ten minutes in a cloud with an immediate radius

**Kren:** level 3, climb as level 5; long-range bow

**Flitat:** level 3; Armor 1; flies a long distance in a round

**Colossal predatory fish:** level 6; health 35; Armor 1

it's also frequented by **Var Norillic**, a space pilot whose real name is Phil Rogers. A native of Earth, Phil is a recursor who decided to live permanently in Rebel Galaxy. Here, as Var, he owns a starship and will take newly arrived recursors anywhere they want to go—once—in exchange for news from Earth. He's friendly and a good source of information on the recursion. He's also on good terms with most major Earth organizations interested in the Strange and remains neutral in any conflicts between those groups.

Outside of Haranbar, the inhabitants of the planet are dinosaurlike saurians of all types, as well as muscular, shaggy humanoids called **Kren**, who build wooden homes high in the trees.

## LANTIV IV, REBEL BASE

A mountainous world of crags, spires, and deep canyons riddled with caves, Lantiv IV is mostly lifeless except for giant batlike creatures and serpents of all sizes. Far from any well-charted areas of the galaxy, the rocky planet makes an excellent hiding place for the heart of the Rebellion. The rebel base is located in the caves and canyons, its starship hangars and defensive batteries well camouflaged as normal crags and peaks. This is where one will find Prince Narlell, all the military commanders, and the majority of rebel personnel.

The base boasts about 12,000 people at any given time. About 7,000 of these rebels are soldiers or pilots, and the rest serve in support roles.

Some of the rebels have captured and trained the batlike creatures, which they call **flitats**. They use the beasts as mounts while on patrol or to get from one part of the sprawling base to the other.

## THE GREAT WHEEL, COMMERCIAL STATION

Not a planet, the Great Wheel is a massive space station 10 miles (16 km) across, shaped, not surprisingly, like a giant, ever-turning wheel. The Great Wheel orbits a red giant star and serves as a trading port for goods of all kinds. A surprising percentage of Imperium goods transported from one planet to another passes through the station.

Administrator **Kelia Turnage** runs the Great Wheel. Her position is equal in many respects to that of an Imperium governor, who normally

controls a planet. Considering the importance of the Great Wheel, in other respects the administrator job is far more influential.

Kelia maintains an elite police force on the space station. These fearsome interrogators and enforcers are members of a scaled reptilian race called the **Zaalish**. They ensure that commerce on the station proceeds without interruption or incident. They do not work with Imperium troopers, who are also prevalent on the Great Wheel (and are also technically under Kelia's command), and the two forces resent each other. Rebel agents use this division to their advantage. By playing the two groups off each other, rebels have stolen entire shipments of much-needed supplies for their base on Lantiv IV.

Despite these actions, Kelia is not entirely unsympathetic to the Rebellion. In fact, she would like to see many of her Imperium rivals taken down a peg or two by the rebel forces. She would be willing to secretly negotiate with the Rebellion, sharing valuable information about targets far away from her operation on the Great Wheel.

## THYRUL III, WATER WORLD

The third planet in the Thyrul system, this is a water-covered world. However, the sea beds are rich in a variety of important minerals, so Imperium-sponsored companies operate complex mining operations here. Most underwater facilities reach the surface via long elevators connected to floating platforms where starship freighters wait to carry ore to other worlds (usually factory planets like F-B41).

The deep waters of the planet are home to all manner of marine life, including **colossal predatory fish**. Some of these creatures are more than willing to attack the surface and submersible craft used to get around.

Thyrul III has seen some conflict in the galactic war; the Rebellion would love to take control of the mines or at least keep the Imperium from getting the ore. Of even more interest, however, is a small base of operations here established by the **Estate**. The base is mobile—essentially, it's a large submersible craft. There are a dozen or so operatives on the base at any given time, using sophisticated monitoring devices to keep tabs on developments in the war and the activities of known Rukian agents in particular.



The Estate, page 148

**Kelia Turnage:** level 5

Although the Estate doesn't necessarily want to interfere with the war, it does want to minimize the Zal influence. And in truth, most operatives feel sympathy for the Rebellion's efforts and occasionally attempt to help in ways that don't usually draw them directly into the fighting. The

lead field agent here is *Isadora Delgado*, who runs a tight ship (literally) and demands that Estate operatives in the recursion report to her upon arrival.

**Isadora Delgado:** *level 6, submersible craft piloting and administrative duties as level 7*

## REBEL GALAXY ARTIFACTS

### ROBOT ASSISTANT

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Robot half the size of a human that comes in various shapes, from humanoid to cylindrical to hemispherical, and has wheels or legs for movement

**Effect:** Provides an asset for three different tasks (roll three times):

01-10	Diplomacy
11-16	Interrogation
17-30	Repair
31-40	History
41-50	Biology
51-60	Physics
61-68	Piloting
69-75	Navigation
76-85	Healing
86-90	Searching
91-96	Computer use
97-99	Robot interaction/interface
00	Translation (speaks virtually all languages in Rebel Galaxy)

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d100 (roll once each day)

### HANDHELD SCANNER

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** Handheld device with a screen, controls, and a long antenna

**Effect:** This device comes in two varieties.

**Analyzer:** You scan an area in short range that is equal in size to a 10-foot (3 m) cube, including all objects or creatures in that area. Scanning a creature or object always reveals its level. You also learn whatever facts the GM feels are pertinent about the matter and energy in the area. Many materials and energy fields prevent or resist scanning.

**Detector:** You specify a general material, quality, or essence that can be measured (such as iron, energy weapons, humans, heat, and so on), and the device reveals how many instances of it are within 200 feet (61 m), along with the distance and direction to each.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

**Blistering Bral:** *level 6, all attacks as level 7; health 20; Armor 2; usually has a blaster in each hand and can fire both as a single action*

### RUMORS ACROSS THE GALAXY

**Unexpected Help:** Terrath Nuar, a rebel commander, has a plan: recruit and train the Kren of Aranolis to serve as shock troops for the Rebellion. First, however, someone has to go into the jungles and establish relations with the savage tribes. To make things more complicated, not everyone in the Rebellion agrees that this is a good idea for either the rebels or the Kren.

**Meeting on the Great Wheel:** None of the select few who are privy to the information understand it, but apparently a strange gathering will soon be held in a private section of the Great Wheel. It involves high-ranking members of the Imperium military and government from throughout the galaxy as well as important rebels and a few independent individuals. The truth? The agents of the Zal are gathering, even at the risk of their cover identities. But why?

**The Pirate King:** *Blistering Bral*, the leader of a fleet of pirate ships infamous throughout the galaxy, has recently declared allegiance with the Rebellion. With his support, the rebels significantly increase their numbers (and more important, their number of war-ready starcraft), even if most of the pirates are less than savory. Perhaps even more interesting, Bral has made it known that he's not from this galaxy. He's from someplace called "Massachusetts." The Estate and the Zal would like to find out who this apparent recursor from Earth is really working for. Unfortunately, he has recently been captured and sent to the prison planet, Killarus.



Samurai Sky was created by fictional leakage.

# SAMURAI SKY



*“Forbearance is the root of quietness and assurance forever.”*

*~Ieyasu Tokugawa*

The Implausible Geographical Society gives the recursion the codename Samurai Sky, but the natives refer to the place in their native

Japanese simply as Nihon. In Samurai Sky, the economic and cultural prosperity enjoyed by the Land of the Rising Sun during the historical Edo period (1603 to 1868) never ended. The rule of the Tokugawa shogunate and Karou—essentially feudal governors and regional feudal lords, respectively—remains under the putative control of the Emperor, but the Shogun in Edo has the most day-to-day power.

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### WHAT A RECURSOR KNOWS ABOUT SAMURAI SKY

- Known as Nihon to its natives, the recursion operates under the law of Standard Physics except under certain phases of the moon, during which time Magic also operates.
- Samurai—famed warriors who follow the code of Bushido—do not directly own land, but instead serve a Karou or shogun. A samurai who leaves the service of either is called a ronin.
- The city of **Edo** is the cultural center of Samurai Sky and has nearly a million residents. The city is laid out around magnificent Edo Castle and contains areas of urban culture, Buddhist temples, shops, restaurants, theater, colleges, and more.
- Edo is built along the coast, which means it keeps fleets of fishing and merchant vessels. It is also a railroad hub, and tracks provide paths for steam engines to travel quickly to and from the far parts of Nihon.
- “Oni” in Samurai Sky are more than folklore, though most are not as trollish or devilish as recursors might presume. Many are simply people who study the phases of the moon in hopes of understanding why Magic works sometimes, but not always, and never reliably.

● ○ ●

Partly thanks to founder Ieyasu Tokugawa’s forward-thinking policies and philosophies (which were themselves developed from Confucian teachings), most Samurai Sky natives have a chance to live comfortably and enjoy popular arts and culture that, in previous eras, were enjoyed only by the wealthy and powerful. In fact, a breakdown in the rigid and highly formalized social order, which created something of a “middle class” among the merchant and peasant orders in Samurai Sky, was aided by a technological revolution that never happened in the historical Edo-era Japan. Steam engines, the beginnings of electrification, the appearance of firearms in limited quantities, and several time-saving machines, which would be anachronisms on Earth during the same historical period, are part of what make Samurai Sky such a unique place.

**Arrival:** First-time recursors arrive in Samurai Sky in the city of Edo, standing on the platform of the Grand Imperial Station. It provides access to various points in the city via boats and barges, as well as selected points inland via a steam engine train.

## SAMURAI SKY FOCI

The foci that player characters can choose in Samurai Sky—as well as any foci that are

Edo, page 126

Confucius was a Chinese philosopher who lived sometime before 400 BC. The teachings attributed to him affect societies to this day.



dragged into the recursion—are modified by the recursion’s context, as appropriate. For example, if someone chooses *Is Licensed to Carry*, replace references to modern-day life on Earth with equivalents from Edo-era Japan. For

instance, Edo city doesn’t have “cops.” It has samurai who serve as police, soldiers, special forces, or whatever military need arises.

If a character chooses *Inks Spells on Skin* or *Works Miracles* as her focus, she discovers

-  *Draggable foci*, page 52
- Entertains*, page 61
- Is Licensed to Carry*, page 64
- Leads*, page 65
- Looks for Trouble*, page 68
- Operates Undercover*, page 70
- Solves Mysteries*, page 78
- Wields Two Weapons at Once*, page 82
- Works Miracles*, page 82

**SAMURAI SKY ATTRIBUTES**

**Level:** 4

**Laws:** Standard Physics, Magic under certain phases of the moon

**Playable Races:** Human

**Foci:** *Entertains*, *Follows the Code of Bushido\**, *Haunts the Rooftops\**, *Is Licensed to Carry*, *Inks Spells on Skin\** (when Magic is active), *Leads*, *Looks for Trouble*, *Operates Undercover*, *Solves Mysteries*, *Wields Two Weapons at Once*, *Works Miracles* (when Magic is active)

**Skills:** Samurai Sky lore

**Connection to Strange:** Infrequent whirlpools off the coast can drag unlucky voyagers into the Strange



**Connection to Earth:** During certain phases of the moon, some abandoned temples may open translation gates to Earth

**Size:** 27,000 square miles (70,000 square km)

**Spark:** 15%

**Trait:** Honorable. If a creature engages in a truly honorable act as judged by the GM, the difficulty of the next task it attempts within the hour is reduced by one step (assuming that task doesn’t contravene the honorable act).

\* indicates foci found in this book

*Edo was historically referred to as the "Venice of the East."*

that using the focus abilities is difficult except during certain periods when the moon is in the proper phase, as described under Moon Magic. When the law of Magic is not active, every task related to using a focus ability is one step more difficult than normal, which means that even routine uses of an ability require a check.

Samurai Sky also allows a character to be a samurai if she chooses to be someone who follows the Code of Bushido.

## MOON MAGIC

*On Earth, Edo eventually became the city of Tokyo.*

Though everyone knows that supernatural effects are possible depending on the phase of the moon, few people know which phases are the "Magic" phases. The relevant phases constantly shift according to a schedule that's as hard to foretell as the weather. The GM determines the schedule, but generally speaking, Magic functions flawlessly one day in four.

Even when Magic isn't ascendant, abilities and creatures related to Magic can sometimes still be encountered. However, they are tentative, pale, and weak.

## EDO

The Emperor lies in "far-off" Kyoto (and isn't actually part of the recursion, per se, except as a belief). Edo is the center of power, government, economy, and social life in Samurai Sky. Here, the cultural renaissance of Nihon never ended, and indeed, it was enhanced with elements of technology and magic that never graced the real city.

Canals are laid out in a regular grid. In fact, the network of canals (plus rivers and moats) is more reliable than the streets, which can lead pedestrians astray. Thus, trade and transport of heavy goods are accomplished on the water. Boat traffic is thick most hours of the day and night, and some people live in houseboats instead of on land.

## EDO CASTLE

The Shogun lives in Edo Castle. An architectural wonder, Edo Castle is imposing and graceful, with several rings of moats and defensive walls. The castle grounds within the inner moat stretch in a great oval that is well over





a mile (2 km) wide. The grand residences of many Karou and their attendant samurai are built on the grounds, as well as quarters for thousands of officials and castle servants. A marvelous garden can also be found here, one with walkways, bridges, ponds, and exotic trees. The Shogun's residence is the most impressive structure of all.

**Karou Akita Hirotomoto:** Anyone who brings official business before the Shogun must deal with a Karou first, usually Hirotomoto and a section of samurai under his command. Hirotomoto might pass a particularly important message upward or deal with it himself, depending on the situation.

Like the Shogun, Hirotomoto enjoys an unnaturally long life owing to a mysterious event that occurred in "the old days" (as described under the Shogun's entry). Despite more than a hundred years of loyalty, Hirotomoto is considering the whispers of a few secretly seditious Karou, including Choko Tanenaga, who teach that reality is a lie and that everyone is trapped in an illusion.

**Karou Choko Tanenaga:** Another Karou living on the grounds of Edo Castle, Tanenaga is charged with keeping trade active and fair, a job that she has managed amazingly well. During one of her tours to an outlying province beyond Edo city, Tanenaga chanced across an "explorer from another land" who showed her how the Nihon she lived in was merely jumbled stories reflected from a higher reality. Tanenaga gained the spark, but not the means to translate. Since then, she has concentrated on finding a way to break free of the prison that her world represents, and she has become increasingly reckless with each failure. Lately Tanenaga is exploring methods for collapsing the recursion altogether, beginning with the assassination of the Shogun. Aiding her is a secret cabal of a few other Karou she's been able to suborn, as well as entities from the Northeast Quarter.

**The Shogun:** The Shogun, who is none other than Edo's original founder, Ieyasu Tokugawa, has survived many generations longer than a normal person. Those under him attribute his longevity to the grace of the gods. Few have

**Karou Tanenaga:** level 4, tasks related to perception as level 6; katana melee attack inflicts 6 points of damage; usually carries a few random cyphers

**Karou Hirotomoto:** level 4, tasks related to civil administration as level 6; katana melee attack inflicts 6 points of damage; long-range revolver attack inflicts 4 points of damage; returns to life a few days after being killed

**Samurai:** level 4, initiative tasks as level 6; health 15; Armor 1; katana melee attack inflicts 5 points of damage (or 7 points if the samurai made the first attack on a foe)

**Shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa:** level 6, tasks related to civil administration and pleasant interaction as level 7; melee attack with Kusanagi (sword artifact) inflicts 8 points of damage; returns to life a few days after being killed

**Elite samurai:** level 5, initiative tasks as level 6; health 18; Armor 2; katana melee attack inflicts 6 points of damage (or 8 points if the samurai made the first attack on a foe)

*Seppuku is ritual suicide.*

**Matsudaira:** level 5; health 25; melee bokken (wooden sword) attack inflicts 7 points of damage

**Nobunori (enenera):** level 3, stealth tasks as level 7, knowledge of myths as level 5; health 12; can transform between immaterial smoke, an inanimate object, and a kimono-wearing woman armed with a katana that inflicts 4 points of damage; for details, see *The Strange Bestiary*, page 50

**Tengen:** level 3, tasks related to deceit and pleasant social interaction as level 5; learns one random fact about a person or location within short range that is pertinent to a topic he designates

complaints with the Shogun, as he is fair in his decrees and generous to those of every class. On the other hand, he is also known for never allowing laws to be bent. He has ordered Karou and others beneath him to commit seppuku rather than make an exception to the rules because of extenuating circumstances.

Before the founding of Edo, Tokugawa and three others (including Hiroto) encountered an oni during a phase of the moon when Magic swirled. The oni and its horde of a hundred brigands attacked the group, but the swordplay and superior tactics of the defenders kept the attackers at bay. Enraged, the oni called upon fell spells, attempting to rip the life from the four and feed it to the brigands. Possibly because of the relic artifact carried by Tokugawa, the spell rebounded. It was the oni and the brigands who died, and in so doing, their life force was magically infused into Tokugawa and his three companions. Now, when any of the four die, that life is instead debited against the one hundred and one extra lives given to the group. When all of those lives are used up, the original four will finally die a normal death.

The Shogun is usually protected by two or three elite samurai at all times.

## SHINAGAWA

Several areas of Edo conduct lively commerce, but the quarter known as Shinagawa contains the most popular shops and inns. Because Edo is a destination, travelers are common, and Shinagawa does its best to lure them with parties, festivals, and welcoming establishments. If one wishes to conduct trade, buy something peculiar, make a deal with ronin, or have a good time in Edo, Shinagawa is the place to visit.

**Imperial Ryokan:** This inn has a public house where drinks and food are served as well as communal baths and tatami-matted rooms for travelers. It is one of the best places in Edo to hear gossip, make connections to the locals, and have a good time. The proprietor, **Matsudaira**, is reputed to have been a brigand who became a merchant. Whether true or not, people are afraid to cross him. Despite his white hair, he still stands almost 7 feet (2 m) tall.

**Nobunori's Electric Marvels:** One of the most popular shops in Shinagawa sells technological marvels such as revolvers, electric fans, batteries the size of gallon milk jugs, and more. Nobunori is rarely around—in fact, she's available to talk with customers only when Magic is high because she is a mythological creature known as an enenera. When Standard Physics is high, she usually takes the form of a piece of equipment in her store. Like many mythological creatures, she is fascinated by marvels of science.

**Fortunes Told:** A fortune teller wrapping himself in colorful fabrics wanders the Shinagawa quarter, offering to tell the fortunes of those he meets, for a price. He isn't a native of Edo, but a recursor from Earth on the run from those who've sworn vengeance against him. Everyone in Samurai Sky knows him as **Tengen** (short for "fortune teller"), but on Earth he was known as Michael Crawford. To safeguard his position in an Earth organization, he employed tactics to make himself seem indispensable, no matter which of his friends he had to betray. In the end, his deeds were discovered. The organization he sought to remain a part of put a price on his head. Unfortunately for Crawford,



recursors were part of the organization, so he fled through the Strange to a limited world that not even the Estate or OSR had heard of. Tengen keeps a wary eye out for other recursors, and he likely reacts with violence if he encounters one.

### EDO EDICTS

**Moonstorm:** The phase of the moon has frozen in the sky, and Magic is high all the time, causing oni, phantoms, and other creatures of the Northeast Quarter (and other places) to run wild. Discovering why Magic has frozen and how to restart the normal cycle is the Shogun's number one priority.

**Sumo at Ryogoku Bridge:** The riverbanks beside Ryogoku Bridge are lined with food stalls, restaurants, and crowds of people. Often, there's an exciting sumo match to watch, but lately a contender who wears a demon mask has defeated all comers. The newcomer, who calls himself "Kyoto Killer," has unfortunately lived up to his name, and now few wrestlers dare to challenge him. Someone needs to challenge the Killer to a match and show him up, or the sport of sumo may be doomed in Edo.

**Machine Mayhem:** A giant mechanism, perhaps 100 feet (30 m) high, armed with cannons and more dire electrical weapons, tramps toward the city. Presumably crafted by the enemies of Edo, the machine must be stopped, or it will wreak untold destruction on the city and its populace.

**Blind Swordsman:** A blind ronin wearing a black scarf tied over his eyes has been challenging any samurai he finds to a duel. Given that refusing a challenge is not especially honorable, and that fighting the blind is even less so, most samurai give the swordsman the honor of the first cut. That is a mistake, because the challenger seems preternaturally gifted with the sword, and if not stopped, he will continue to kill off Edo's samurai.

### NORTHEAST QUARTER

Evil spirits travel from the northeast, or so local Edo legends tell. And when Magic is high, it's literally true. Phantoms sometimes visibly stream from the graveyards in that area, and oni disguised with devil masks and spells brave daylight (or the night) to gather rare herbs, flowers, and other ingredients that appear only at those times.

Anyone looking to hire an assassin, acquire an evil spell, dig up a grave, or transgress in some other fashion that involves death and pain should come to the Northeast Quarter. However, intruders are recognized immediately by gangs of toughs (some of which contain ronin) or, worse, wandering *nuppeppos*. *Nuppeppos* are animated lumps of human flesh that walk on vaguely defined limbs and smell of decay and death.

They're mostly harmless, but sometimes they go after strangers in groups of up to eight.

**Nuppeppo:** level 2; health 12; Armor 1; sticky flesh forces victim to make a difficulty 5 Might-based roll to pull free; melee attack inflicts necrosis (1 point of Speed damage per round until the affected flesh is cut away, dealing 4 points of damage); for more details, see The Strange Bestiary, page 100



## SAMURAI SKY ARTIFACTS

### ELECTRIC KATANA

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Katana fitted with power cables and a battery backpack

**Effect:** This katana functions as a medium weapon if wielded with one hand or a heavy weapon if wielded with two hands. When it strikes a foe, the wielder decides whether to activate the electrical charge as part of the same action, which deals additional points of damage equal to the artifact level. If the weapon is depleted on a use, the final electrical charge is dealt to the wielder instead of the target.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### HAMMER OF WISHES

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Hammer inlaid with kanji that read “Uchide no Kozuchi”

**Effect:** A wielder who spends a minute using the hammer on a solid surface of stone, metal, or a similar substance can wish for an object and tap it into existence. Objects created can last for several days, depending on their simplicity and purpose. The level of the item is determined by the GM but is no greater than the level of the artifact. The more powerful the object, the more likely the GM will limit its existence. For example, an object with a cypherlike effect probably lasts for only one use, like a regular cypher.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20



### KUSANAGI

**Level:** 1d6 + 3

**Form:** Long blade forged of white metal

**Effect:** This weapon functions as a normal heavy weapon requiring two hands to wield. If a target lies while the tip of the blade is pointed at him, the wielder feels a vibration in the hilt.

If the wielder spends a round concentrating, she learns the exact location of every creature within long range, regardless of how well hidden they might be.

Finally, if the wielder attacks a foe with the blade, she can choose to inflict 2 points of damage in addition to the 6 points normally dealt by a heavy blade, inflicting 8 points in all.

Each special use of the weapon requires a depletion roll. If the artifact is depleted, it finds a way to become lost and pass on to a new wielder.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d100

### SPIRIT REVOLVER

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** Six-shooter with custom ammo inscribed with kanji

**Effect:** This revolver functions as a normal medium ranged weapon. The special custom ammo deals full damage plus additional damage equal to the artifact's level to undead, spirits (even if intangible), and other paranormal creatures (generally speaking, creatures that rely on the law of Magic to exist). Once depleted, the revolver can still be used normally. Additional custom ammo could be fashioned, though it would take someone skilled in both the manufacture of bullets and spellcasting.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d6

# SEISHIN SHORE

The Cloud Sea streams across Seishin Shore under a cerulean sky that seems to go on forever. The Cloud Sea can be tempestuous. Its storms and fathomless deeps are both famous. Giant skyships in all their bewildering variety fish the depths of the sea, called the Cloud Deepes. Motes of land float amid the cumulus, cumulonimbus, and a dozen other cloud varieties. Some motes are covered in amazing landscapes where peculiar creatures dwell, and others contain simple or grand structures, including the famous Library. Natives yearn to

visit the Library, but not for too long, lest they become bound and shelved.

Seishin Shore is a recursion of loss, memory, magic, and adventure. It is a changeable place; new creatures and locations sometimes appear in the Cloud Sea without notice or apparent reason. Seishin Shore is neither a land of everlasting peace nor one of relentless evil; both dwell together in the heart of every creature who abides there. Natives can be disinterested, be potentially helpful, or seem like frightening monsters. Visitors may enjoy the wonderful vistas and unique entertainments, but they should take care not to run afoul of obscure social taboos or act selfishly in front of the wrong tetsu or namer.

**Arrival:** Seishin Shore's initial default translation location is the wide square before the steps of the Library.

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### SEISHIN SHORE ATTRIBUTES

**Level:** 5

**Laws:** Magic

**Playable Races:** Human, yobuko

**Foci:** Abides in Stone, Adapts to Any Environment, Entertains, Infiltrates, Lives in the Wilderness, Looks for Trouble, Names\*, Operates Undercover, Wields Two Weapons at Once, Works Miracles

**Skills:** Seishin Shore lore

**Connection to Strange:** Some books in the Library open onto doorways into the Strange

**Connection to Earth:** A few rare books in the Library open onto gates to Earth; the transitory centers of some storms and rolling fog banks lead to similar manifestations on Earth

**Size:** 100,000 square miles (259,000 square km)

**Spark:** 55%

**Trait:** Inquisitive. The difficulty of tasks related to learning something new, whether talking to a local to get information or digging through old books to find lore, is modified by one step to the learner's benefit.

\* indicates foci found in this book

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*Seishin Shore was created by fictional leakage.*

*Tetsu are dragonlike creatures of magic; many in Seishin Shore are cloud or water spirits, but not all. See page 216.*

*Namers are Seishin Shore sorcerers who use common and hidden names to change the nature of other creatures and objects.*

*Cloud Sea, page 132*

*Library, page 133*

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### WHAT A RECURSOR KNOWS ABOUT SEISHIN SHORE

- Seishin Shore operates under the law of Magic and is a land seeded by a blend of Asian myths mixed with contemporary stories, comics, and films of related magical lands.
- Seishin Shore consists of many locations hovering within the Cloud Sea. Some are great ships, and others are motes of land containing structures or wild landscapes.
- The Library is one of the most important institutions in Seishin Shore, and the knowledge it contains extends across several recursions and even Earth.
- Seishin Shore natives conduct transactions with barter or books.

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*Abides in Stone, page 51*

*Adapts to Any Environment, page 54*

*Entertains, page 61*

*Infiltrates, page 62*

*Lives in the Wilderness, page 66*

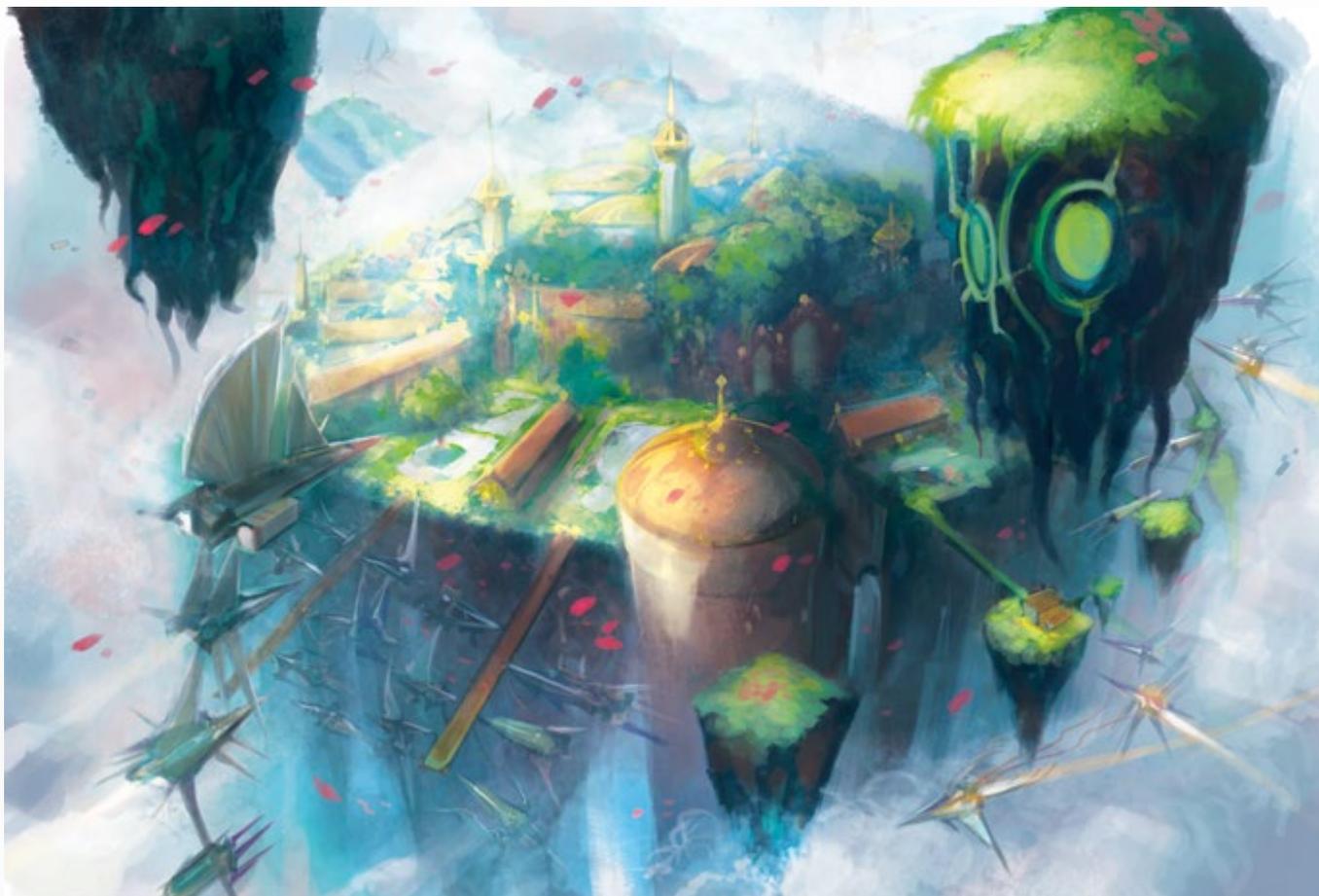
*Looks for Trouble, page 68*

*Operates Undercover, page 70*

*Wields Two Weapons at Once, page 82*

*Works Miracles, page 82*

*Names, page 204*



*Draggable foci, page 52*

## SEISHIN SHORE FOCI

The foci that player characters can choose in Seishin Shore—as well as any foci that are dragged into the recursion—are modified by the recursion’s context, as appropriate. For example, if someone chooses *Abides in Stone*, the shape and nature of the character won’t look like an Ardeyn golem, but a temple statue common in the recursion.

Seishin Shore also offers a focus called *Names*.

## YOBUKO RACIAL OPTION

Instead of appearing as a human, a recursor could translate into the recursion as a yobuko. A yobuko has a slender humanoid body and always wears a mask. A player and GM can decide together what the character’s mask looks like. Behind the mask is an utterly blank expanse of flesh; the mask is also the yobuko’s face. Sometimes a yobuko removes her mask, possibly to hide it somewhere so she can see and hear what’s going on in that location even when she is a few miles away (until a yobuko

retrieves her mask, she is essentially blind and deaf in the vicinity of her body). A yobuko must be vigilant that an enemy does not steal her mask and lock it in a chest. Yobuko are somewhat resistant to the magic of namers. Whenever name magic is used on a yobuko, the difficulty of the defense roll is modified by one step to the yobuko’s advantage.

## NOTABLE LOCATIONS

The following are only a sampling of the many amazing sites in Seishin Shore.

### CLOUD SEA

The Cloud Sea is a single vast “ocean” filling the recursion. Clouds drift at various levels, as do motes of solid land, some as large as cities, others as small as boulders. The depths of the sea are lightless and crushing. The heights slowly give way to empty vacuum where no ship can go. The remaining cardinal directions seem to go on forever, but natives rarely travel to the edge because when they do, they tend to disappear. That said, the Cloud Sea is used

for travel and trade across the many cultures of Seishin Shore. The sea is home to flying fish (and stranger beasts) of all kinds, as well as awful predators, privateers, and truly disastrous storms, which is why many of the ships tend to be so large.

## THE LIBRARY

The Library, its attendant structures, and the surrounding gardens cover a floating mote a few miles (5 km) in diameter. Like many civilized motes, a portion of one edge bristles with long piers where ships of all kinds put in, while the truly large skyships hold station farther out. Natives (humans, yobuko, and other native creatures with unique shapes) wander the grounds of the Library. Those wearing scholarly robes read from large tomes or engage in deep philosophical conversations.

Knowledge of every kind is stored in bound volumes in the Library, including knowledge of Seishin Shore, other recursions, and even Earth. General information is fairly easy to find, but specific details or secrets might be contained in thick volumes kept secure in a vaulted chamber, itself filled with many limited recursions containing yet more shelves, known as the Lost Stacks.

If a title has ever been published in the Shoals of Earth (or on Earth itself), a copy of that book is potentially shelved somewhere in the Lost Stacks. Titles include research

papers, cookbooks, diaries, travelogues, instruction manuals, and more. But the Lost Stacks contain even more esoteric knowledge, including secrets otherwise known to only a few individuals, or even just one. Accessing the Lost Stacks requires permission from the Master Librarian, and a would-be researcher faces two additional challenges. The first is finding the desired piece of information (a research task of a few days whose difficulty is set by the GM, depending on the obscurity of the information sought). The second is avoiding the rogue Compilers who wander the stacks looking to make new books out of recent visitors.

Two competing factions control the Library: the Keepers and the Compilers.

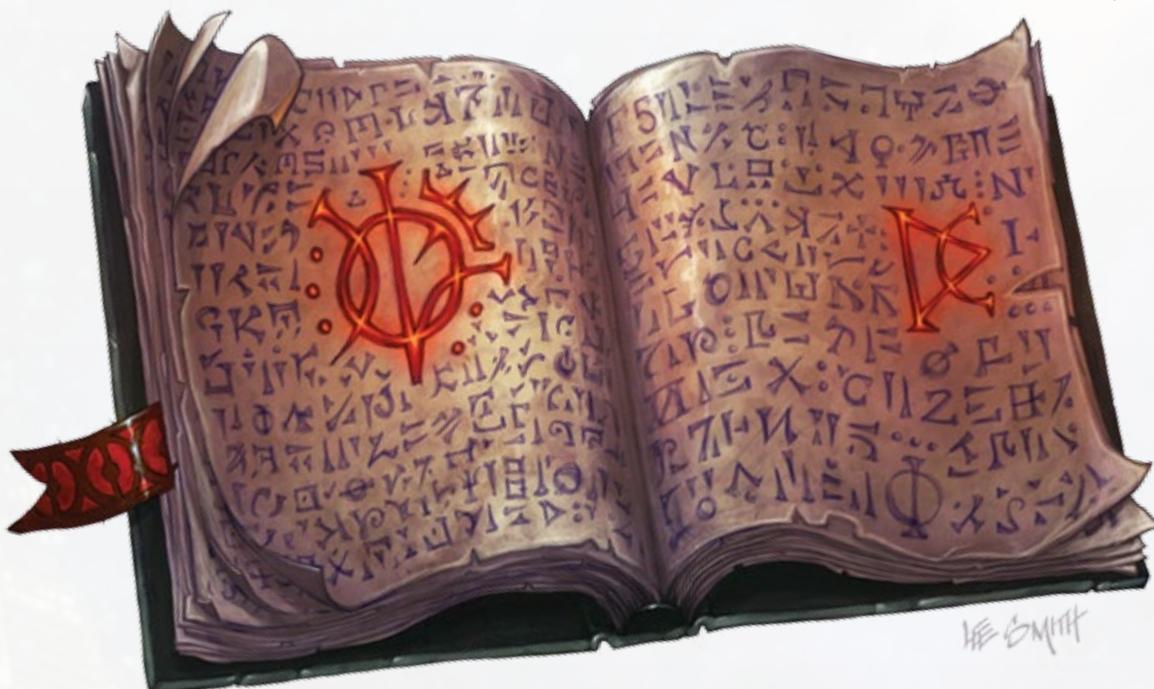
## MASTER'S KEEPERS

The Keepers serve the Master Librarian. The Master is a yobuko of special power who is able to control dozens (perhaps hundreds) of masks simultaneously. Most Keepers who serve him are yobuko who lost their own masks and became mouthpieces of the Master out of desperation. The Master Librarian also hides extra masks (sans bodies) he controls in nooks and crannies around the Library, which allow him to keep tabs on his dominion of books.

The Master Librarian is an authoritarian with a high opinion of himself. He is easily angered, and breaking even a minor rule of the Library

**Master Librarian:** level 5, perception in and around the Library as level 8; to kill him, every mask belonging to the Master must be destroyed

*Why the "Lost" Stacks? That's what they've always been called, and the Master Librarian says there's a good reason for it. But it's not a reason he's willing to divulge.*



**Typical Compiler:** level 4; long-range attack deals 5 points of damage and robs target of its action in the subsequent round; usually carries a random cypher; some can translate

*Compilers who translate to other recursions to obtain new books for the Library can manipulate the name of the book they wish to bring back to Seishin Shore. They can grant a book-sized or smaller object in their possession the capacity to translate between recursions without taking on a new context.*

is a quick path to being ejected from the mote or, worse, turned over to the Compilers for binding. On the other hand, the Master is a yobuko of his word, and if he makes a deal with someone, he won't be the first to break the contract. He usually provides week-long passes to the Lost Stacks for those who agree to do a useful service for the Library first. These tasks often include dealing with threats to the Library from privateers, creatures of the Cloud Sea, or book thieves who must be tracked down no matter how far they've translated.

The Master Librarian detests the Compilers, despite their importance to the Library. He'd prefer to fire them all and start fresh with non-namers. Namers, he's found, rarely agree to wear one of his extra masks, no matter the incentive.

## LIBRARY COMPILERS

Many of the Compilers of the Library are namers. Compilers are responsible for preserving the books already contained on the shelves and for expanding the collection. Thus, they deal with book merchants from across Seishin Shore and other recursions. Any given Antiquarian Book Fair hosted in a large Earth city might well attract a Compiler or two in translated form.

Compilers can also bind living creatures to create new books, at least in recursions that operate under the law of Magic. If a creature gives its consent, Compilers with namer abilities use a special name to turn the target into a book containing all the knowledge the creature possessed. Consent can be given normally, but also implicitly by losing a bet or by having debt assumed by a Compiler.

Visiting researchers often encounter Compilers amid the Lost Stacks. Compilers are very interested in visitors from other recursions and challenge them to a contest of wit or, better yet, a game of chance. If the visiting researchers win, the Compilers guide them to the particular tome containing the information sought. If the visitors lose, one or more of them is magically bound, transformed into a tome holding all the knowledge the creature possessed, and shelved in the Library. A recursor bound into a book that is translated (by a third party) out of the recursion returns to normal, but if she ever translates back to Seishin Shore, she becomes a book once more. A creature bound as a book can be returned to flesh again while in the recursion, though without a Compiler's help, the process is a level 7 Intellect task that requires knowledge of magic and sorcerous rituals.

Compilers, almost to a one, detest the Master Librarian. They think he's too strict, too unyielding, and unfailingly unappreciative of even the most spectacular gambling opportunity or prank. If they could, they'd depose him and set one of their own in the Master's place.

## ASHIHIRA

The city of Ashihira is built on the edge of a much larger forested mote some 50 miles (80 km) northeast of the Library and 3 miles (5 km)



deeper in the Cloud Sea. At any given time, roughly 6,000 residents (humans, yobuko, and unique creatures) are active in the city, but that's only because another 6,000 or so are plying the Cloud Sea in skiffs, caravels, and larger skyships. In addition to its thriving fishing trade, Ashihira salvages water from the quivering lakes that form as floating liquid motes in the deeper layers. Salvaging water is dangerous business because even the smallest lake is usually guarded by a territorial tetsu that regards the mote as its home, and larger ones are inhabited by territorial whale men. But water is nearly as valuable as books in Seishin Shore, and Ashihira controls most water trade in the recursion.

The ruler of Ashihira is **Matsuko the Thin**, a woman who exists only in two dimensions; when she turns sideways, she seems to disappear from view. She normally does so only to escape overbearing councilors or ship captains come to plead fishing or water rights. Matsuko's rulership is conferred via popular acclaim during a city gathering that normally happens every seven years.

The chief thorn in Matsuko's side is the ex-captain of a water-salvaging ship. The ship disappeared with all hands several years ago near Lake Natori—all hands, that is, except for **Captain Yama**. Captain Yama is humanoid but has skin as white as paper, with no hair and a mouth a few times too large for his face, which he says is made for laughing. He uses it these days mostly for demanding that Matsuko be removed from office for offenses against the common good. Captain Yama has convinced a fair number of Ashihirans of the legitimacy of his claim. Others whisper that he is to blame for the loss of his ship.

## UNYO

The city-ship *Unyo* sails the Cloud Sea. The *Unyo* feeds its population of almost 1,000 residents with occasional catches from fishing runs straight through the heart of dangerous cumulonimbus thunderheads. It enriches itself by bartering excess fish to city motes, other great skyships, and the Library in return for repairs, upgrades, and luxuries (including seishu, an alcoholic drink common in the recursion).

The *Unyo's* Captain Rei went on sabbatical

over a year ago, and **First Mate Setsuko** (a human woman) has commanded the ship in Rei's place. If asked when Captain Rei will be back, Setsuko always replies, "Soon, so soon you won't even realize he was gone!" though that assurance has begun to wear thin. For her part, First Mate Setsuko is an able leader, though one more fond of seishu than ship repairs. The parties aboard the *Unyo* are often epic, but they come with the risk of an inebriated celebrator leaning against a rotted railing and tumbling overboard.

The *Unyo* bears many scars from past engagements with privateer skyships and fights with creatures of the Cloud Deeps that did not want to be fished. As such, the *Unyo* is outfitted with several smaller gunboats, as well as a couple of lightning cannons able to target foes through the haze of intervening clouds.

## PRIVATEER SHIP PALOMBARO

The *Palombaro* is a privateer ship. "Privateer" is really just another word for pirate, but many of those crewing the *Palombaro* think of themselves as the most polite pirates sailing the Cloud Sea. They (usually) board and loot ships only if they have received a legal commission to do so from one of the larger city motes or the Library. Further, they hardly ever take on new crew who don't want to become privateers, and they never damage a ship so much that it sinks into the Cloud Deeps (unless nothing else will do).

The *Palombaro* is captained by a troll-like creature called **Juro**. Juro is covered in red fur, stands 10 feet (3 m) tall, and can bite an iron

**First Mate Setsuko:** level 5; short-range exploding seishu bottle attack against targets within immediate range of each other every other round; magic boots return her to the deck of the *Unyo* if she falls off or wills it

**Unyo:** level 8; health 100; Armor 5; up to 1,000 residents and crew; flies a long distance per round; lighting cannon attack with a range of 2 miles (3 km) deals 12 points of damage to the primary target and everything within short range of it

**Matsuko the Thin:** level 6; can become invisible as part of another action, but only to creatures along one sight line; can squeeze between narrow spaces

**Skyship gunboat:** level 5; Armor 3; up to 10 crew; flies a short distance per round; long-range lightning gun attack deals 7 points of damage to the primary target and everything within immediate range of it

**Captain Yama:** level 5, tasks related to persuasion as level 6; health 25; crossbow inflicts 3 additional points of damage

**Captain Juro:** level 5, feats of strength or attacks as level 7; health 23; regains 1 point of health per round

**Palombaro:** level 7; health 50; Armor 4; up to 200 crew; flies up to 300 feet (91 m) per round; three long-range cannon attacks as a single action

### SKYSHIP PROPULSION AND LIFT

A red mineral called aka runs in veins through floating motes and gives them their lift. Aka is taken up through the roots of many trees and other woody vegetation growing on the motes. When those trees are harvested for lumber and ships are built from that lumber, the resulting skyships can hover like motes and travel by propulsion from wind, magic, or beast (depending on the ship in question).



Typical whale person: level 4; health 50; swims a long distance each round

bar in half. When Captain Juro growls an order, the crew leap to obey. However, it is the captain who ultimately enforces the “polite pirate” motif currently in fashion on the *Palombaro*. When he isn’t around, things get a bit rougher. Juro wasn’t always the captain of the ship; he won the position when he saved the privateers from his ten older siblings that live at the bottom of a cloud whirlpool the *Palombaro* dived too deep into.

Polite or not, the *Palombaro* has gone head to head with other famous skyships, including the *Unyo*. Neither vessel got the upper hand in that conflict. Though the *Unyo* is better armed, the *Palombaro* is much faster.

*Tetsu*, page 216

### LAKE NATORI

Lake Natori is one of many accumulations of liquid water floating in the Cloud Sea, just skimming the truly dangerous Cloud Deeps. The waterplant ecosystem in each lake is enriched with the same red mineral (aka) that keeps motes and skyships aloft. Lake Natori is particularly large and is populated by

equally massive whale people. Whale people typically reach 20 feet (6 m) in length, and they congregate in the center of Lake Natori in a hidden city that rarely welcomes visitors. Whale people enjoy trade, and whenever a ship or other conveyance comes near the surface of the lake, a sortie of several whale people leap from the surface on gliders specially made to support their bulk. They often barter for needful

### CREATURES OF THE CLOUD SEA AND DEEPS

Flying fish of every size and shape shoal throughout the Cloud Sea. *Tetsu* of various temperaments are less commonly seen, but that doesn’t mean they don’t watch what happens across the recursion. In the Cloud Deeps, vast tentacled things lurk—probably squid of improbable size, though no ship or creature pulled to the crushing depths has ever returned with a sketch to say for sure.



LEGENDS OF SEISHIN SHORE

**Wagering Tetsu:** A tetsu named Gari leaps from cloud to cloud. Disheveled and mangy by tetsu standards, he still reaches a respectable 15 feet (5 m) in length. If Gari sees a potential mark, he approaches and suggests a wager (usually of guessing cards, dice, or weather). Those who lose must give up a treasure or be in Gari's debt. The tetsu is in the habit of selling his debt to privateers or Library Compilers.

**War of Whales:** Exiled from Lake Natori for being too disruptive, a whale woman named Izanami has become something of a warlord, especially after she commandeered the skyship *Danarik* and outfitted it for piracy. According to rumors, Izanami plans on building a force beyond reckoning to wage war on her home lake and people.

**Stolen Mask:** The Master Librarian is offering a reward of seven days' free passage in the Lost Stacks for anyone who finds the thief who stole one of his favorite masks and escaped into the Strange. The Master gives investigators the thief's name and home recursion: *Nefarious Star of Atom Nocturne*.

*Atom Nocturne,*  
page 234  
*Nefarious Star,*  
page 236

defense roll or be pulled into the pages and converted into an appendix that details the victim's biography. Another reader could later release the victim as an action, assuming the reader isn't caught herself. If the libram of names is depleted, all appendices revert to living creatures.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

MASK OF TERROR

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

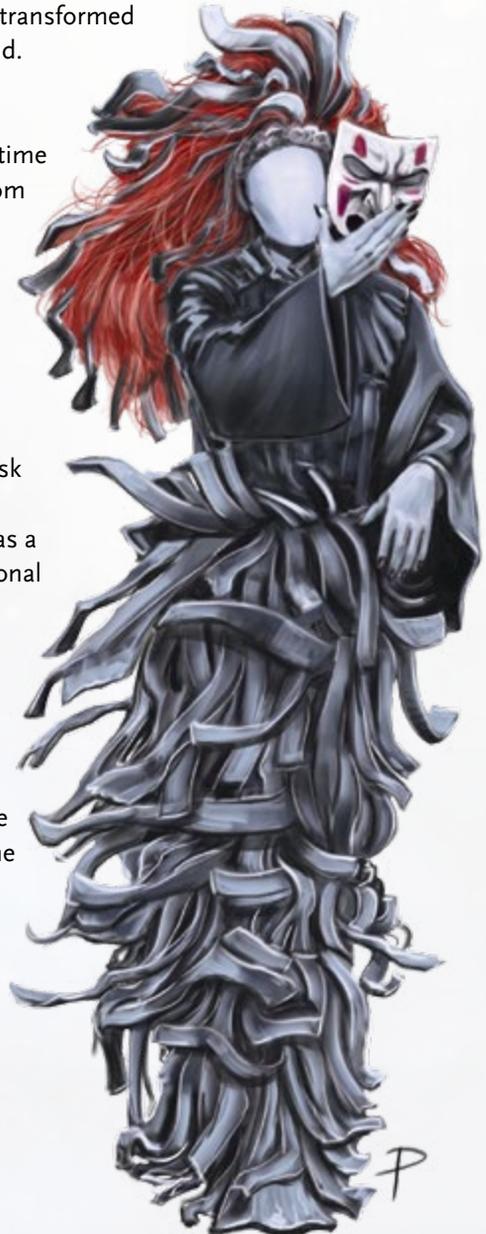
**Form:** Simple black-and-white mask with head strap

**Effect:** Action to animate mask into a terrifying effigy. The wearer makes an Intellect attack roll against all creatures in short range who look at the transformed mask during that round.

Affected creatures are terrified for up to a minute, during which time they try to get away from the wearer. The effect ends sooner if the wearer takes off the mask or leaves, or if an ally of the victim offers sufficient verbal encouragement.

A yobuko can use this mask as her primary mask and keep her original as a temporarily nonfunctional fallback. If someone who isn't a yobuko wears and activates this mask, he must make a Speed defense roll upon removing it, or his face is erased (effectively, he becomes a yobuko).

**Depletion:** 1-3 in 1d20



things with amazing songs that most of them produce with just their voices. Even so, it's rare to find a whale person without a flute, koto, shamisen, or other musical instrument.

Unlike many other lakes claimed by tetsu, Lake Natori is ruled by a council of whale people called the Eleventh Pod.

SEISHIN SHORE ARTIFACTS

LIBRAM OF NAMES

**Level:** 1d6 + 2

**Form:** Simple bone flute

**Effect:** Someone with the Names focus who spends an action reading this book gains an asset on her next task or attack, if it is related to her focus.

Someone without the Names focus who reads this book must succeed on an Intellect



## STARSHIP HEINLEIN



**Mr. Spock:** *Incredible as it may seem, these people have no idea they're living on a spaceship.*

**Captain James T. Kirk:** *I wonder how many generations have lived out their lives, and . . . been buried here, without ever knowing that their world is hollow?*

~“For the World Is Hollow and I Have Touched the Sky,” *Star Trek*

The Light is jealous of her priestesses and punishes the World when new acolytes are not given unto her in the green of each new cycle. The Light is the life of the World, housed in the Holy Cathedral. Without the Light, the World would founder and fall into the Abyss, where souls are forever snuffed out. But the priestesses and acolytes are just one part of the

divine plan. The angels who are blessed to live in the World are jubilant to serve, and they do so in many ways. The biomancers keep food on the tables, the wiredancers keep the glows alive, and the datasingers appease fluctuations in the warms and cools—everyone has a part to play because all the angels are blessed. The angels satisfy the holy requirements of the



**STARSHIP HEINLEIN ATTRIBUTES**



- Level:** 4
- Laws:** Mad Science
- Playable Races:** Human
- Foci:** All Earth and Ruk foci
- Skills:** Starship Heinlein lore
- Connection to Strange:** Some escape pods jettison directly into the Strange
- Connection to Earth:** None known
- Size:** 20,000 square miles (51,800 square km)
- Spark:** 5%
- Trait:** Dogmatic. The difficulty of attempting to convince someone who believes in a revealed truth is increased by one step.

Light so the World shall continue forever and ever without end, amen.

At least, that's how the average "angel of the World" sees things inside the starship named *Heinlein*. But when the ship left Earth a thousand years ago with state-of-the-art antimatter engines boosting it toward Alpha Centauri, the original crew was well aware that they traveled aboard a generation ship. The *Heinlein* was designed to survive more than a thousand-year journey through space by replacing crew over time with new generations of people who would be trained to be as competent as the previous generation. But all the failsafes failed, because Starship Heinlein is seeded from dozens of similar stories where that's what happens.

**Arrival:** First-time recursors arrive in Starship Heinlein (natives call it the World) standing in an observation bubble overlooking the World Above (one of the two rotating wheels of the starship) from the Holy Cathedral Overlook (at the hub of the rotation, where the command module and engines are located).

**MAJOR SHIP SECTIONS**

The World consists of a few main parts. These include two rotating wheels where artificial gravity is maintained (the World Above and World Below), as well as the

command module connected along the hub of rotation where the bridge, maintenance and engineering sections, and antimatter engine are housed (the Holy Cathedral, which houses the Light).

**WORLD ABOVE**

The World Above is a maintained artificial environment whose inhabitable area was originally designed like a Japanese garden. The environment is a blend of natural and parklike precision. Although the angels have retained some semblance of the knowledge required to keep a starship operational (which they consider rituals of worship, not science), blights and other malfunctions have turned some parts of the World Above into truly wild locations.

**Angels:** The angels (that is, humans) in the World Above hum joyous tunes as they go about their days. Most believe they are working in harmony with the Light, which is purpose enough for anyone. Angels may serve as priestesses (though these are usually found in the Holy Cathedral) or in a host of other positions required to keep a starship active, despite the ritualized and supernatural names those positions now possess. Those who manipulate genes and cause fruit to ripen according to needs are biomancers, those who fix malfunctions and restore proper illumination are wiredancers, and so on.

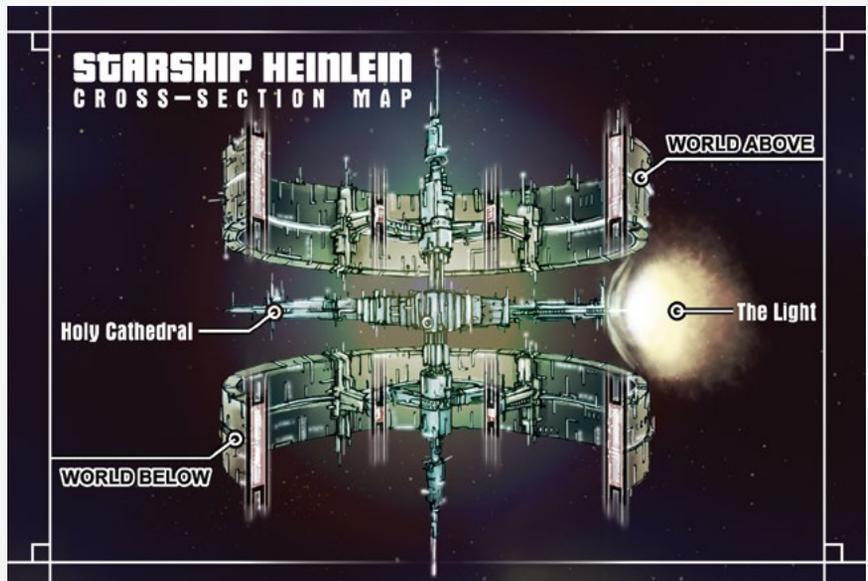
**Revelation:** Angels each have a revelation, which is proof of their divine heritage. A

*Foci, page 51*

**Typical angel:** level 2, pleasant social interaction as level 4; Armor 2 (angelic vestment artifact)

*Angelic vestment, page 142*

**Revelation:** level 3, Speed defense as level 5 due to tiny size, understanding and manipulating ship systems as level 6; flies a long distance each round; short-range laser attack inflicts 4 points of damage



## WHAT A RECURSOR KNOWS ABOUT STARSHIP HEINLEIN

- Starship Heinlein operates under the law of Mad Science and is a generation ship hurtling through space, originally designed as a colonization ship for Alpha Centauri.
- Starship Heinlein has flown for around a thousand years (ship's time), during which the purpose of the trip, and the fact that the natives inhabit a starship at all, has mostly been forgotten.
- Starship natives believe they are angels who serve the Light, a divine and omniscient god who keeps everyone safe from the Abyss.
- According to the natives, the World Above is where the angels live, the Holy Cathedral is where the priestesses and acolytes directly serve the Light, and the World Below is where evil dwells.

**Priestess:** level 5, pleasant social interaction as level 4; Armor 2 (angelic vestment artifact); long-range electrical attack with staff of prayer inflicts 6 points of damage

revelation gives an angel limited power over the surrounding environment, including the ability to change the temperature and lighting conditions, access food, and call for transport. Each revelation is a ring-shaped drone that provides owners with basic access to certain functions provided by the starship. Revelations speak with a unique synthesized voice and have limited abilities to keep their appointed angels safe from harm.

## HOLY CATHEDRAL

Most of the Holy Cathedral is off limits even to the priestesses, including the bridge, the cryobay where some of the original crew is still maintained in stasis, and the shuttle bay. The parts normally accessed by the priestesses allow them to control the interface with the Light (the antimatter engine) and the Food of God (the magnetic storage where antimatter fuel is stored). Although the tasks are mixed up with a lot of ritual, the priestesses keep the antimatter engine running and, generally speaking, in good health.

**The Light:** The Light is the literal glow the engine makes when in a thrusting phase, though a residual glow persists even when

## ALTERNATIVE RECURSOR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE STARSHIP

Instead of providing the behind-the-scenes information described in What a Recursor Knows About Starship Heinlein, you could give the PCs the fake version that most natives believe to be true as if it *were* the truth. Then let the PCs figure out what's really going on as encounters on the starship play out.

coasting. The illumination is indirectly visible from both the World Above and the World Below. The priestesses teach that when the Food of God is fed to the Light, contact with Her numinous flesh causes an explosion, which emits pure holy exultation that scalds the wicked but purifies those who accept the Light into their hearts.

**Priestesses:** The angels of the World who serve the Light take a vow of service in which they are expected to give up their former lives and become holy extensions of the Light's will. Each priestess learns rituals for worship of the Light, which (though muddled and mostly irrelevant to the needs of an antimatter engine) accomplish enough to keep the engines in working order. Priestesses are also tasked with dealing with those who spout the Heresy, as well as dealing with contaminations that sometimes make their way out of the World Below. Thus, in addition to their revelation companions, each priestess also carries a *staff of prayer* that provides additional functions, including a method to cleanse heretics and demons with searing pulses of holy glory.

**The Heresy:** Every so often, someone shows up claiming that the Light is an artifact of mortal construction, that angels are just animals called humans, and that the World is a craft that has lost its way. These heretics say that Heinlein wasn't the first prophet of the Light, but rather is the name of the craft everyone lives on, named for a long-dead writer of fictions. The reason the Heresy won't die, despite how harshly each new heretic is expunged, has to do with the cryobay. The original builders of the *Heinlein* included a failsafe mechanism by arranging for a few

*Staff of prayer, page 142*

hundred crew members to be frozen in cryosleep and thawed out every few decades to make certain that the mission was proceeding accordingly. Unfortunately, each crew member thawed by the automatic systems becomes a hunted criminal—branded as a servant of the Demon Lord—and ejected into the Abyss (space), burned alive in the glory of the Light (the engines), or sent to fend for himself in the nightmarish World Below (the other spinning habitat).

## WORLD BELOW

Although still spinning and thus creating artificial gravity, the World Below is mostly dark and cold. An alien seed from a midspace collision with a rogue planetesimal infected the crew of the *Heinlein*, which is probably when things first got so confused. In order to save the mission, the commander of that lost era ordered one entire habitat wheel quarantined. Residual populations inhabit the World Below, but the disease kills most of those it infects and turns the rest into homicidal maniacs that regular angels refer to as demons.

The same alien seed also germinates into thick, hallucination-inducing vegetation that now overgrows a good part of the planned parklike environment of the World Below, called the Forest of Perfidy. Portions of the vegetation, called sinroots, sometimes animate and hunt heretics and demons living in the World Below.

Angels who venture into the World Below must face demons, sinroots, and recalcitrant revelations. Many of the blessings (functions) that revelations normally provide to angels fail in the World Below.

**Sinroots:** These shambling, not-quite-humanoid beings resemble trees. They are sentient, mobile, aggressive creatures that use barbed roots to feed on blood. When active, they shed faint light in darkness. A sinroot's seeds are highly hallucinogenic, and ingesting or having one of the barbed seeds lodged in the skin induces distressing visions of torture, ecstasy, homicidal thoughts, and everything in between. While the visions last, a victim must consciously attempt to wrench her mind back to reality each round with a successful Intellect-based roll.

**Demons:** People who survive contact with sinroots occasionally come away with horrible disfigurements and harmful mutations to go with their homicidal tendencies. This makes them an even easier target of angel hate and

**Demon (human):** level 2, unarmed attacks as level 4

*Harmful mutation, page 240*

## OMENS AND PROPHECIES

**Kuma Gera:** A man appeared in the Holy Cathedral. He wore the clothing of the angels and was accompanied by a revelation. At first, he was confused and suffering from frostbite, so the priestesses saw to it that he was housed in the World Above. But then he began speaking heresies about the World, the angels, and the Light. Before he could be dispatched to the World Below, he fled, and now he hides somewhere among the angels, spreading his evil whispers.

**Leak:** An accident caused by a wiredancer overstepping his bounds has created an atmospheric leak in the ship bulkhead that automatic repair systems can't handle. Angels and priestesses believe the wind and growing cold in the area of the leak are trials to be overcome, but without eventual intervention, the leak could become a major catastrophe.

**Demon Incursion:** The Demon Lord has developed an insidious plan to plant sinroot seeds in the Holy Cathedral and take it as his own, proving himself to be both a demon and a heretic. But certainly the Light would never allow its most sacred house to become compromised by evil—would it?

**Interstellar Incident:** Lights and alarms of uncertain meaning sound in the Holy Cathedral. Although they are intended to warn the crew that a close approach to a stellar oddity is imminent, the priestesses and acolytes know only that something is amiss. Ancient knowledge, perhaps contained within the head of a heretic condemned to the World Below, is required to navigate the upcoming emergency.

**Sinroot:** level 4; Armor 1; moves an immediate distance each round; long-range exploding pod attack deals 4 points of damage and inflicts maddening visions until those points are restored

**Demon Lord:** level 5, knowledge of starship systems as level 6; Armor 2

disgust. But that doesn't hurt the feelings of a "demon"—when one smells an angel, a heretic, or a hurt demon, it descends with primal bloodlust. The only thing demons have going for them is that the mobile extensions of the Forest of Perfidy do not target them.

**Demon Lord:** The current homicidal maniac who claims control of the others has a colorful title. The Demon Lord also has a few pet sinroots that serve him at all times. Although he is just as murderous as his subjects, the

Demon Lord retains more of his original intelligence from when he was brought out of stasis, branded as a heretic, and banished to the World Below. If he ever put that knowledge to use, he could be one of the greatest threats facing Starship Heinlein.

## STARSHIP HEINLEIN ARTIFACTS

### ANGELIC VESTMENT

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** Articulated bodysuit with deployable helm

**Effect:** This armor is designed to allow a human to survive comfortably in a vacuum or poisonous atmosphere for up to three days at a time. It is light armor but grants +1 to Armor in addition to the 1 point that light armor usually provides. The suit's protection also applies to damage that often isn't reduced by typical Armor, such as heat or cold damage (but not Intellect damage).

**Depletion:** — (After three days of continuous use, or if the GM rules that the vestment has sustained enough damage that its atmospheric and environmental protections cease, the suit is no longer spaceworthy but still functions as armor.)

### STAFF OF PRAYER

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** Quarterstaff of synthetic wood and circuitry

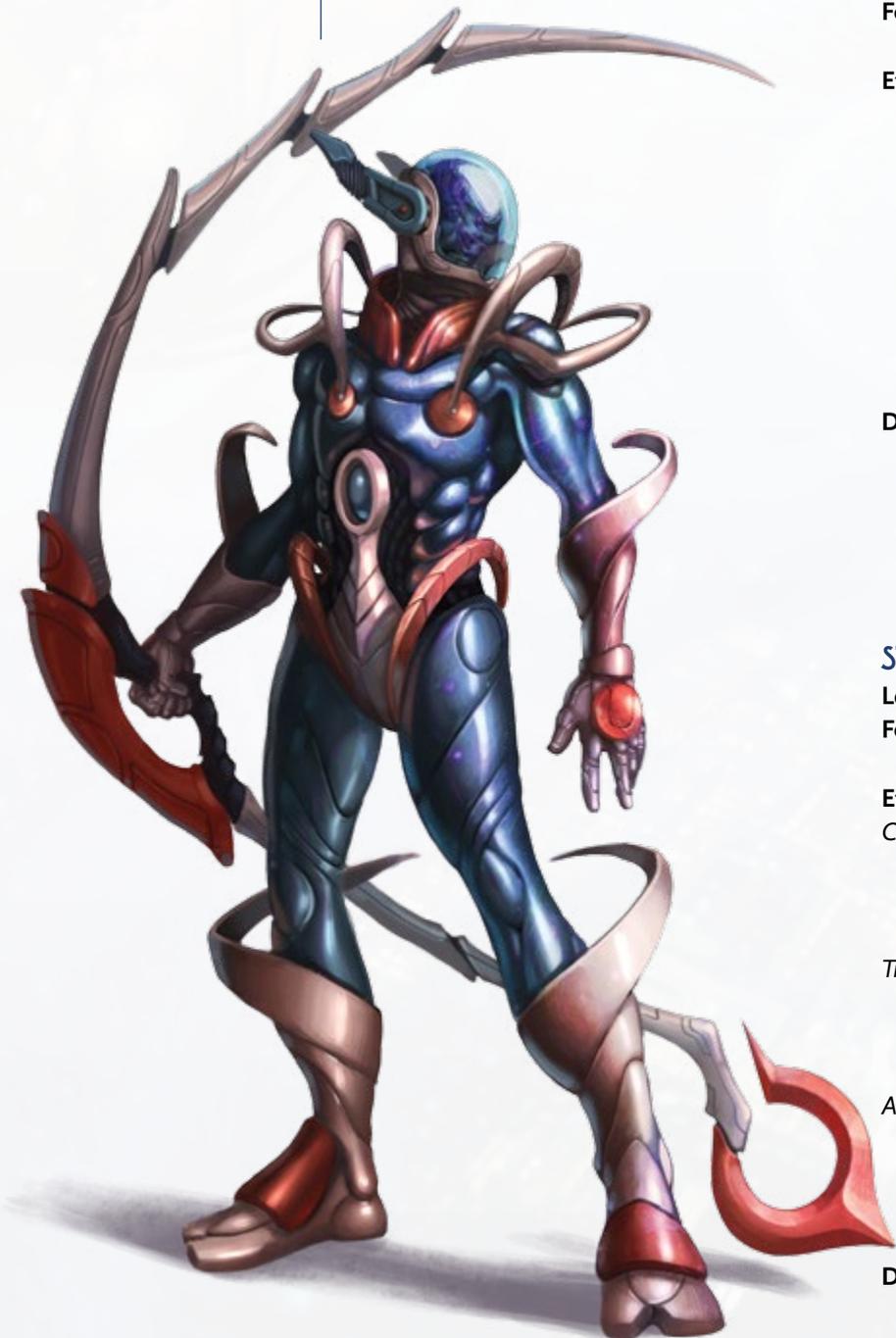
**Effect:** The staff has three functions.

**Cleanse:** When used to attack, the tip of the staff releases a bolt of searing electricity at a target within long range, inflicting damage equal to the artifact level.

**Transport:** The staff levitates the user up or down to a short distance each round, or horizontally to an immediate distance, for up to ten minutes per use.

**Analyze:** Each round spent analyzing a creature or object within short range yields one pertinent piece of information about it, such as its level, toxicity, or other noteworthy features.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20



# SWORD REALMS



The Sword Realms were created through fictional leakage.

“Between the time when the oceans drank Atlantis and the rise of the sons of Aryas, there was an age undreamed of. And unto this, Conan, destined to wear the jeweled crown of Aquilonia upon a troubled brow. It is I, his chronicler, who alone can tell thee of his saga. Let me tell you of the days of high adventure!”

~The Wizard, Conan the Barbarian

The Sword Realms are not a single recursion, but rather the name for several connected recursions shaped by wizardry, hidden elvish enclaves, ambitious human kingdoms, rapacious dragons, barbarian outlanders, marauding orc tribes, trolls and mountain giants, half-forgotten deities, and amazing treasures of gold and magic. Natives without

the spark risk an existence of fear and drudgery, whether as a serf, a slave, a prisoner, or a victim of a monstrous creature or cruel warlord. But those with open eyes—including recursors—see the opportunities the Sword Realms offer to the brave and daring. These conspicuous few practice the kata of the blade, spell, coin, or prayer. They are destined for great things in





*Abides in Stone,*  
page 51

*Carries a Quiver,*  
page 55

*Entertains,* page 61

*Leads,* page 65

*Lives in the Wilderness,*  
page 66

*Practices Soul Sorcery,*  
page 71

*Slays Dragons,* page 77

*Solves Mysteries,*  
page 78

*Wields Two Weapons at  
Once,* page 82

*Works Miracles,*  
page 82

*Draggable foci,* page 52

*Inks Spells on Skin,* page 200

*Masters Foot and Fist,*  
page 203

*Names,* page 204

*Quells Undead,* page 206



## SWORD REALMS ATTRIBUTES

**Level:** 6/3; see Realms of the Sword and Translation

**Laws:** Magic

**Playable Races:** Human, elf, dwarf, halfling

**Foci:** *Abides in Stone*, *Carries a Quiver*, *Entertains*, *Inks Spells on Skin\**, *Leads*, *Lives in the Wilderness*, *Masters Foot and Fist\**, *Names\**, *Practices Soul Sorcery*, *Quells Undead\**, *Slays Dragons*, *Solves Mysteries*, *Wields Two Weapons at Once*, *Works Miracles*

**Skills:** Sword Realms lore

**Connection to Strange:** Active magic circles keep openings to the Strange well guarded

**Connection to Earth:** Occasional transitory translation gates in cellars, mirrors, and wardrobes

**Size:** Hundreds of closely connected recursions, many of which blend into each other almost seamlessly

**Spark:** 15%

**Trait:** Adventurous. Once per day, a character attempting a task for the first time that entails some risk can reroll the die.

\* indicates foci found in this book



a pass in the Thunderstone Mountains, looking down across the sprawling Free City of Dyranmar.

## SWORD REALMS RACIAL OPTIONS

Instead of appearing as a human, a recursor could choose to translate into the Sword Realms as a dwarf, an elf, or a halfling. Dwarves are stocky with beards, elves have pointed ears and androgynous features, and halflings are child sized with hairy, bare feet. They also gain the following advantages: dwarves gain +1 to their Might Pool, elves gain +1 to their Speed Pool, and for halflings, the difficulty of tasks related to stealth and pleasant social interaction is decreased by one step.

## SWORD REALMS FOCI

The foci that player characters can choose in the Sword Realms—as well as any foci that are *dragged* into the recursion—are modified by the recursion's context, as appropriate. For example, if someone chooses *Works Miracles*, the power to heal another creature is channeled from one of the deities that are revered, feared, or cursed in the Sword Realms.

As is true for any recursion, the foci indicated as being available in the Sword Realms are just the base options. Many more foci are possible, especially those that replicate abilities of classic adventuring roles. The GM can use appropriate foci from the corebook, from *In Translation*, or from other sources.

## REALMS OF THE SWORD AND TRANSLATION

A native is likely to be blind or indifferent to the concept that Sword Realms locations might be in separate recursions. That's especially true when it comes to the wide forest known as the Gloomwood and the elvish enclave of Ilucara hidden within it. When it's obvious that one place is not directly connected to another, a native of the Sword Realms might view a distant recursion as lying on another plane of existence. From a native's perspective, all such alternate recursions are usually called "realms," anyway. So the realm of the human Empire of the Gold Throne is separate from the Free City of Dyranmar, both of which are separate from the sea that divides them, and so on.

the Sword Realms because practice and iron will give them the means to rise above their circumstance and enter a world of adventure.

The inputs of a thousand fantasy novels, movies, and tabletop roleplaying games comingled to seed the Sword Realms in the Strange. If a concept, creature, object, or character exists in fiction somewhere on Earth, a reflection of it likely exists somewhere in the Sword Realms. As a class of similar recursions rather than one specific recursion, the Sword Realms are somewhat more difficult to navigate. Borders are in flux—two places in the Sword Realms might be located in two different recursions (though that distinction is not always clear to natives), and sometimes known locations are inaccessible until the proper phase of the moon comes around or some other external ingredient is provided.

**Arrival:** First-time recursors who translate into the Sword Realms find themselves on

### WHAT A RECURSOR KNOWS ABOUT THE SWORD REALMS

The Sword Realms operate under the law of Magic and are seeded by thousands of fantasy novels, movies, and tabletop roleplaying games.

If a concept, creature, object, or character exists in fiction somewhere on Earth, a reflection might be somewhere in the Sword Realms.

Spirits of the dead sometimes live on in the Sword Realms and might be drawn into the hellish realm of Abysm; a recursor who dies in the Sword Realms could face the same fate.

Two places in the Sword Realms might be located in two different recursions (though borders between neighboring recursions are always clear).

The realm of Abysm is harder to reach but is still connected, which means it's not separate enough from a native's point of view.

Recursors notice something odd about the Sword Realms: translating into any particular part of the realms from an unaffiliated recursion or from Earth is a difficulty 6 translation task. However, translating from one of the Sword Realms recursions to a connected recursion is usually only a difficulty 3 translation task (and often, moving from one to the next is as simple as walking across the edges of the connected recursions, an event that may go unnoticed by all but the most sensitive). Translating out of a Sword Realms recursion from any recursion inside is also harder, and recursors find the difficulty of the translation task increases by two steps.

### PANTHEON OF THE SWORD REALMS

A host of gods is revered and worshipped in the Sword Realms, culled from the many fictions that seeded the linked recursions. Natives might be heard to call on any number



**Aeltun Withe:** level 5, tasks related to trade, deception, and pleasant interaction as level 6

**S**  
The Estate, page 148  
Karum, page 200  
Spark, page 22

**Lord Myrdan (recursor):** level 7; long-range spell attack inflicts damage on all targets within immediate range of each other; carries Myrdan's staff artifact

Myrdan's staff, page 152

of deities, as determined by the GM. If the GM has a favorite fantasy setting, she might use the gods from that world as the pantheon of the Sword Realms.

This means that if a recursor traveled far enough through the connected realms, she might find her way into the presence of Zeus, Odin, or one of the many gods made familiar by various games or novels (or religions). However, it's not wise to press the boundaries of a recursion, because doing so could cause such a god, who previously existed only in a state of possibility, to precipitate into existence. And no one, whether they are a native of the Strange, an Estate operative, or an agent of the Karum, wants to risk a crazy bastard like Zeus—or any number of other gods—gaining the spark.

## REALMS OF NOTE

The following are only a sampling of the many locations within the Sword Realms. More realms seem to pop up all the time, while others fade away.

### FREE CITY OF DYRANMAR

A traveling adventurer is unlikely to come across another city as large, as old, as magnificent—and at the same time as decrepit, as corrupt, and as dangerous—as Dyranmar. Built on the confluence of two mighty rivers where they empty into the wide Sea of Storms, Dyranmar has enjoyed unequalled trading opportunities for hundreds of years, despite being fenced on one side by the towering Thunderstone Mountains.

Trade is king in Dyranmar; at least, that's a popular saying. Another saying is that "All things come to Dyranmar," which fits many situations, including the fact that many factions vie for power in the Free City. The short list of major organizations provided here is only a subset; many more exist.

**Merchant Guilds:** Just short of nobility, merchants are nonetheless given leeway that commoners resent. Those who reach the highest ranks within their particular guilds are called "lord merchants." The guilds elect three of their number every three years to sit as rotating members of the body called the Lords of Dyranmar.

Lord Merchant Aeltun Withe numbers among the most influential in Dyranmar, thanks to the thriving trade in cloth, lumber, and items stocking shops in the Market Ward that he controls—and also thanks to his rumored contract with the Slavers' Guild. When those in Withe's employ displease him, they tend to disappear and, according to stories, show up on the block in the Slavers' Ward.

**Lords of Dyranmar:** The Lords of Dyranmar set the rules for commerce and civil interaction in the Free City. Some of the Lords are corrupt, some do both good and ill, and a few attempt to keep the city actually free. They meet three days out of seven in the Lords Agora, an open auditorium on the edge of the Castle Ward, and discuss issues of the day.

The Lords of Dyranmar have putative control over the Lawkeepers (the city watch) and the War College (the military), but both organizations have a tendency to act first and seek forgiveness afterward.

Lord Myrdan is the current Speaker of the Agora. He is independently wealthy, has a manor in the Castle Ward, and is an accomplished wizard in his own right, though he is not part of the Wizards' Guild. He's one of the strongest proponents for the commoners of the Free City and has done much to expose corruption. Myrdan's secret hobby is exploring—he has the power to translate into other recursions unrelated to the Sword Realms, and even to Earth. Myrdan hasn't yet realized that it's *his* realm that is a reflection of the prime world, but he is beginning to have his suspicions.

**Slavers' Guild:** Criminals in Dyranmar are sentenced to hard labor, usually as slaves to the winning bidders in the daily auctions. By decree of the Lords of Dyranmar, slaves are bound to service only for the given term of their sentence, which is magically marked on their skin by a Lawkeeper tattoo. When the term is up, the tattoo dissipates. To damage a slave or hold one beyond the length of his term is a crime all its own, and if proved, the slave owner can be convicted and sentenced to a term of slavery himself.

The Slavers' Ward is comparatively small, but it sees a lot of daily traffic, given that it also houses the Lawkeepers and their various operations.

It's illegal in Dyranmar to traffic in slaves that haven't been sentenced and processed by the Lawkeepers. However, beyond the city gates, anecdotes suggest that the Slavers' Guild has another, far more brutal operation in place.

**Umar Bulzidbab**, the face of the organization in the Free City, does little to quash these rumors. The dwarf slavemaster feels that fear of his organization is the most powerful tool in his arsenal. Certainly most people, even many lords, are afraid to cross him.

**Wizards' Guild:** More of a research university than a vital part of the Free City, the Wizards' Guild consists of members who usually remain holed up in their guildhall, a massive stone structure with many towers and dungeons that makes up the entirety of the Wizards' Ward. Practicing magic seems to be a drug to most wizards, whether it entails studying the spells of others or researching their own spells. The more magic they do, the more they want to do, and the less happy they are when not doing it, which leads many wizards right out of social and adventuring life. Only a few regularly (or permanently) leave the guildhall to take an interest in the city or to adventure beyond Dyranmar's confines.

High Wizard **Imilas Lindorion** isn't bookish and introverted like most wizards, making her a great choice to serve as head of the guild. As an elf, she is already descended from magical beings. Magic came easy for her and didn't prove addictive, as it does for so many humans. Imilas hails from Ilucara, and while she remains in the Free City, a tenuous tie exists between the two realms. Imilas also serves as the guild representative in the Lords Agora, though she usually sends a second in her stead. She's done this more frequently of late, as she's become worried about an orc infestation growing in the Thunderstone Mountains.

**Golden Masks:** A guild of thieves is quite active in the Free City, but never openly. In truth, little is known about them other than the evidence of their thefts, and the rumor that when the guild principals meet, they wear golden masks to hide their true identities from one another. It's likely that some of them are prominent members of other organizations, including the Slavers' Guild and the Merchants' Guild, and a few may even number among the Lords.

**Castia Lyone** is a young woman whose family traces its lineage back to the days when royalty ruled Dyranmar. She lives in the Castle Ward in a sprawling manor owned by her grandparents. She is also a principal of the Golden Masks. She specializes in stealing information rather than goods, and she usually provides it to Lord Myrdan (though he doesn't know her true identity).

## THUNDERSTONE MOUNTAINS

This brutal range of peaks is mostly snowcapped, except for the tallest, which is a thundering, smoke-spewing volcano called the One. Only a few passes provide entry into other realms of the connected

**Castia Lyone:** level 5, tasks related to stealth and thievery as level 7

**Umar Bulzidbab:** level 5, lore related to dwarves and slaves as level 6; health 25; Armor 2

**Imilas Lindorion:** level 7; casts spells for offense, defense, and utility as required; artifact staff delivers a lightning attack with a range of 3,000 feet (1 km) that inflicts 7 points of damage (ignores Armor)





**Ogre, Thunderstone:** level 6; immune to lightning and electrical attacks; alternate attacks are charged with lightning and inflict 3 additional points of damage

**Orc, Thunderstone:** level 3, Speed defense as level 4 from shield; if two or more orcs attack the same target in melee, treat their attacks as level 5

**Alwel the half-elf:** level 5, bow attacks and navigation tasks as level 7; carries a bow of vampire slaying artifact

*Bow of vampire slaying, page 151*

**Phoenix, volcano-born:** level 4; flies a long distance each round; bite inflicts 4 points of fire damage and blinds victim with ash for one round

**Kharkad Gundush:** level 5; health 21; Armor 3; has a foldable keep artifact

*Foldable keep, page 151*

recursions, and all of them are dangerous, threatening travelers with blizzards in the high passes, lava flows near the One, or a variety of giants, ogres, orcs, and other menaces.

**Ogremarch:** An ogre colony infests an ancient watchtower along one of the major passes. It contains about thirty ogres and double that number of orcs and human slaves. The ogres operate like bandits and are capriciously sinister. Sometimes they demand a toll from travelers, and other times they may capture an entire party to use as food and replacement slaves.

**The One:** This volcano is so tall that travelers find it hard to breathe near the summit. Far worse are unexpected lava flows, billows of invisible bad air, and occasional phoenix attacks. But treasure seekers, especially dwarves, brave the heights, looking for rare minerals belched forth by previous expulsions. The most valuable prize is a special variety of obsidian glass known as soul obsidian. Weapons made of soul obsidian are stronger than normal metal weapons, take enchantments better, and usually burn targets for 1 additional point of damage.

Phoenixes are common sights circling the caldera around the peak, and they usually leave visitors alone. However, if a visitor's soul is sufficiently weighed down by some past crime, one or more phoenixes are drawn to her and attack.

The dwarf prospector **Kharkad Gundush** is found on the slope more often than not, with a personal bodyguard of several ogres to keep him safe from phoenixes and physical threats, and a magic **foldable keep** to protect him from environmental hazards. Kharkad is usually good for a story and a meal inside his keep.

## GLOOMWOOD

This forest is foreboding and shadowed, even when the sun is high. The Gloomwood was once part of the larger forest that contains the elvish realm of Ilucara, but a bloodborne corruption burrowed up out of a hellish realm under the earth, filling a portion of the wood with gloom, evil, and, most terrifyingly, vampires. The sinister vampire lord known as Eshadus the Bloodgod leads an undead group of other vampires called the Circle of Glory.

Beneath Eshadus and the Circle, a growing host of lesser vampires and other undead menace nearby realms.

**Wybury:** A small human and elf settlement called Wybury lies along the eastern edge of the Gloomwood. It hasn't succumbed to the Circle of Glory or the Bloodgod, but its walls and townfolk have come under attack, more all the time. Travelers who wish to cut through the Gloomwood to reach Ilucara are best advised to start at Wybury and hire a local guide. The most famous guide is the half-elf **Alwel**, whose bow is rumored to have taken down more than one Circle of Glory vampire.

**Windswept Stones:** In addition to Ilucara, the Gloomwood shelters an ancient grouping of stones of indeterminate origin at the center of a clearing. The weathered stones are roughly 1 foot (30 cm) thick, 4 feet (1 m) across, and 9 feet (3 m) tall, with the inward surfaces covered with arcane magic runes.

The stones protrude from the ground in a pattern that is rarely the same from day to day, as they occasionally move under their own power. Each stone also has unique properties, as determined by the runes covering it. One stone reveals secrets of fire, another ice; one deals with spells of binding, another of necromancy, another of wind (which constantly sends winds blowing through the clearing, giving the stones their name); and so on. The runes are difficult to puzzle out, and doing so is usually a task of several months for someone who has an aptitude with spells. But after spending this time, someone who uses an ability related to the stone studied finds the task easier. Usually, this confers a +1 bonus to an associated effect, as determined by the GM. For instance, a wizard who successfully studies the stone of fire finds that all her fire spells inflict 1 additional point of damage.

Wizards and clerics who have studied the Windswept Stones over the years believe that each new formation opens a potential road to a new realm. With study (or directions), visitors might be able to wait for a particular formation to find a specific realm, or they might decide to strike out blindly and see where they end up. However, the latter method risks a one-way trip to Abysm.

One circle formation opens a path to Ilucara, which is the recommended route for traveling to

the elf city. This secret road is one of the reasons most first-time visitors to Ilucara require a guide. On the other hand, Ilucaran elf warriors often guard the Windswept Stones, and they may turn away any group they don't like.

**Hidden Lodge:** A castle formed from undead, animated trees in the Gloomwood makes up the Hidden Lodge, where the vampire lord **Eshadus** the Bloodgod resides, along with the Circle of Glory and many lesser vampires and other undead. Entrances to the Hidden Lodge simply do not exist by day. They are found only at night or by a path charted through the Windswept Stones. Beneath the lodge, the greater part of the Bloodgod's forces resides in connecting tunnels that sprawl for miles under the trees. When the Hidden Lodge first made itself known, sorties out of Ilucara attacked it with some success. But the last sortie ended in disaster for the elves, resulting in their death, and in the turning of their greatest captain, **Ithrenwen**, into a vampiric member of the Circle of Glory. It's possible that Ithrenwen secretly retains some loyalty to her former affiliation, but her existence is now shackled to Eshadus.

In any case, today Ilucara wants nothing to do with the Hidden Lodge, and less and less to do with any other location in the Sword Realms.

## ILUCARA

Many humans in the Sword Realms believe that Ilucara is only a myth because of how secluded it has become. This elf city lies in an isolated valley that's nearly impossible to find, as its ties to the Gloomwood and the rest of the Sword Realms grow more tenuous every year. The only sure way to reach Ilucara is via one of the transitory roads created by the Windswept Stones. (The same is true for a quickened individual. A recursor who translates away from the Sword Realms while in Ilucara and later attempts to translate back faces a difficulty 10 task, and failed attempts deposit recursors on the edge of the Gloomwood.)

The city is built into the natural walls of a steep valley. It is a wonderland of shaped stone bridges, stairs, catwalks, galleries, magical trees, terraced vineyards, and buildings of amazing beauty. A company of elf warriors guards the only approach.



### STAR LORD CELADAN'S FAVORITE SPELLS

**Alluring Starlight:** Long-range mind control attack converts the target into a friend and willing ally for one hour.

**Pyre of Cleansing:** Long-range flame attack inflicts 7 points of damage on the target and on creatures and objects within immediate range of it.

**Skin of the Ancient:** Gain +3 to Armor for one hour.

Star Lords rule Ilucara, eleven in all. The Star Lords are elves of immense age, wisdom, and magic. Thanks to their guidance and leadership, no enemy force has ever found its way into the elf retreat. In recent years, that guidance has led to a new initiative, spearheaded by a Star Lord named **Celadan** who became quickened. Celadan wishes to sever Ilucara's ties with the Sword Realms, making it a recursion all its own. More audaciously, he wants to convert the city into a traveling recursion, like **Ruk** once was, and send it sailing through the Strange, looking for a refuge around some distant star in the universe of normal matter. To achieve this, Celadan seeks a **reality seed** in the Chaosphere, thinking to fashion it into a navigation engine that will enable Ilucara's transformation. His goal is so bold that he hasn't revealed its full scope to anyone, fearing that most others won't share his dream.

## SEA OF STORMS

Between the Free City of Dyranmar and the Empire of the Gold Throne, a tempestuous, storm-wracked sea stretches. Only a handful of harbors break the cliffs stretching north and south away from the city, and the pirates of the Sea of Storms threaten all ships that seek to trade between Dyranmar and the Empire.

**Isle of Fear:** Only hinted at by most sea charts, the Isle of Fear is the last place shipwrecked refugees wish to find themselves. Waves crash ceaselessly upon a coast dotted with colossal boulders like the scattered teeth of a dead god. Beyond the rocks is a jungle

**Ilucaran elf warrior:** level 4; health 18; Armor 1; long-range bow attack deals 5 points of damage that ignore cover and shields

**Eshadus, vampire lord:** level 9; health 40; Armor 2; bite or weapon inflicts 10 points of damage; traditional methods for killing vampires are only temporary setbacks for Eshadus; for more details, see *The Strange Bestiary*, page 132

**Ithrenwen, vampire:** level 6; health 24; bite or weapon inflicts 7 points of damage; harmed only by fire, running water, holy water, sunlight, or an expertly applied wooden stake; for more details, see *The Strange Bestiary*, page 131

**Star Lord Celadan:** level 7; uses spells for offense and defense; carries two random cyphers

 *Ruk*, page 190

*Reality seed*, page 138



**Gold Empire legionnaire:**  
*level 3; Armor 1; melee spear and ranged javelin attacks inflict 4 points of damage*

**Gold Empire legionnaire captain:** *level 4; health 15; Armor 1; melee spear and ranged javelin attacks inflict 4 points of damage; carries gold throne reliquary artifact*

*Gold throne reliquary, page 152*

wall of thick trunks, palms, pods, creepers, and hanging vines that limit visibility, save for the intermittent flash of bright feathers above the canopy. The air is hot and as thick as a bath.

All manner of beasts and monsters live on the island, as well as a few primitive human tribes. Some of the pirates that threaten trade on the Sea of Storms also use hidden bases on the Isle of Fear, so pirate maps sometimes lure treasure seekers to the island. Ancient ruins dot the center of the island, which the pirates and tribes alike believe to be corrupted with something unspeakably foul.

## EMPIRE OF THE GOLD THRONE

The Empress, leader of the Empire of the Gold Throne, is human. But due to the divine intervention of her deity, she is over a thousand years old, and thus she matches the age and power of the Star Lords of Ilucara or perhaps the strength of the Bloodgod in the Hidden Lodge.

The Empire lies across the Sea of Storms from the Free City of Dyranmar. This is fortunate for the residents of the city, because

everyone in the Empire is a slave, literally, though some are more elevated than others. Regardless of their circumstance, all serve the Empress's desires. There is no freedom under the gold throne, and most natives' lives are miserable and short.

The Empire is defended by legions of soldiers wearing iron armor that shines like polished gold. Being a **legionnaire** means that one's life is slightly less miserable than average, but it's also measurably shorter. The Empress regularly sends legionnaires to distant reaches of the Sword Realms to fight for areas not under her control. Those posted within the confines of the Empire don't get off any easier because they are constantly tested in deadly war games.

Legionnaires who are promoted to the rank of **captain** or higher might carry a special divine charm that reincarnates them once. Some of them come back with no ill effects, but others are wracked with pain that grows worse over time. A few become sociopathic killers, their identities slowly subsumed by a ravaging madness.

## ABYSM

The hellish realm of Abysm is straight out of a fantasy hellscape. It includes regions where victims burn endlessly in lava, a plain of ice where victims are frozen in place like grotesque terrain, and a forest of dead trees where victims strangle forever at the ends of gibbets while crows pick at their eyes and other exposed bits. Victims are usually the souls of dead creatures from other parts of the Sword Realms, but some are living creatures who found their way (or were stolen away) into Abysm. Adding to the nightmare are all manner of demons, including the insidious **sword demons** and **chain demons**.

Abysm has a lord called **Janus**, who takes on physical form when a second face grows on the body of one of the victims, demons, or statues in the realm, allowing Janus to hijack it for a brief time. Janus is a fallen god of beginnings and endings, and Abysm is where the lord chooses endings for some and new beginnings for a lucky few by setting them free.

## SWORD REALMS ARTIFACTS

### BOW OF VAMPIRE SLAYING

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** A medium longbow carved with magic runes that glow golden like the sun

**Effect:** Arrows fired from this longbow deal 1 additional point of damage. In addition, vampires (which usually can be harmed only by special weapons) take normal damage from the arrows.

**Depletion:** —

### CLOAK OF ELFKIND

**Level:** 1d6 + 2

**Form:** Cloak of fine greyish-green cloth

**Effect:** When the cloak is activated by drawing the hood over the wearer's head, the difficulty of all stealth tasks she attempts is decreased by two steps. The effect lasts until the hood is lowered again. If the wearer cannot see in the dark already, the active cloak grants her that ability.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d00



## ADVENTURES IN THE SWORD REALMS

**Orc Blight:** A tribe of orcs that paint their bodies with glowing blue dye has emerged as a sudden threat in the Thunderstone Mountains. It's not known what the color signifies or why they have become so active and dangerous. Their leader is supposedly a magic sentient axe that "sweats" the dye the orcs paint themselves with.

**Zauber Maleficarum:** The spellcasters of the Wizards' Guild in Dyranmar have discovered a particularly foul book of spells in the stacks of their library. Supposedly haunted by the ghosts of its authors, the book has gained far too much agency. To destroy it, someone must douse the book, page by page, in the blood of one or more vampires.

**Free the Prisoner:** An elf of Ilucara was snatched by demons and dragged into Abysm. The Star Lords have offered a substantial reward in the form of treasure and magic items for anyone brave enough to travel into the hellish realm and extract the prisoner. A complicating factor is that the elf crossed Janus, the lord of Abysm, so freeing the prisoner will probably require some sort of amelioration as well.

**Sword demon:** level 5; Armor 2; sword attack inflicts 7 points of damage, and poison deals 3 points of Speed damage per round for three rounds

*Chain demon, page 211*

**Janus:** level 9; bodiless but manifests as a second face on another creature in Abysm

## FOLDABLE KEEP

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** A thick sheet of stiff parchment inked with intricate fold guides

**Effect:** If one minute is spent folding this sheet of parchment, a tiny keep takes shape. Upon completion, it expands and transforms, becoming a broad stone keep some 50 feet (15 m) high and 35 feet (11 m) in diameter. The keep takes the form of a tower with battlements. The interior is furnished and stocked with enough supplies to feed and outfit a small group of travelers for up to seven days. The keep persists for up to seven days, or until the keystone above the fireplace in the Great Hall is pressed, at which point the keep begins to unfold, returning to its sheet form

over the course of one minute. Creatures and foreign objects inside the keep that do not exit before the end of that minute could be ejected or stored in stasis until the next time the keep is folded, depending on the particular foldable keep.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

## GOLD THRONE RELIQUARY

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** Ornament in the shape of a gold throne fastened to clothing with a hinged pin and catch

**Effect:** If the wearer of a gold throne reliquary is killed, he returns to full health in the following round. However, he could suffer from spiritual malaise as a result, due to the hidden reason he returned to life: he has been possessed by a random soul plucked from Abysm. The GM determines how this affects the wearer. It could be nothing, or it could be wracking pain that grows worse over time, a ravaging madness that begins to turn the wearer into a monster, a second personality that works against the character, or something else.

Reversing the spiritual malaise is possible, but it requires powerful magic or dispensation from the Empress of the Gold Throne herself.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d10



## JADE DRAGON

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** A 2-inch (5 cm) jade statuette of a dragon

**Effect:** When the statuette is activated, a living level 5 creature—apparently a dragon—grows and obeys the user's commands, persisting for up to eight hours. The dragon can bear up to three human-sized creatures on its back, attack with a bite, or (once every other round) breathe fire at short range on up to three targets within immediate range of each other. Once used, the jade dragon cannot be activated again for one day.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

## MAGIC WAND

**Level:** 1d6 + 2

**Form:** A wand

**Effect:** When you spend points from a Pool to trigger a special focus or type ability, you can attempt to draw some or all of the points from the held wand instead. The wand contains a number of points equal to the artifact level. Using the wand is a routine Intellect-based task, but each time you use it again before your next ten-hour recovery roll, the difficulty increases by one step.

**Depletion:** 1–3 in 1d20

## MYRDAN'S STAFF

**Level:** 1d6 + 2

**Form:** Staff of black iron set with an eye-shaped crystal headpiece

**Effect:** The wielder can use the staff to gain one of the following effects, one per activation.

*Influence:* The wielder makes a mental attack on a creature within immediate range by providing a suggestion. An affected target follows any suggestion that doesn't cause direct harm to the target or its allies.

*Lightning:* The wielder discharges a stroke of lightning that attacks all targets along a straight line within long range, inflicting damage equal to the artifact level.

*Shield:* For one hour, the wielder gains the protective effect of a normal shield, but this effect is invisible and doesn't require her to hold an actual shield.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d100

# WUXIA CITY



Wuxia City was created through fictional leakage.

Wuxia (pronounced woo-ZSH-ya) generally refers to the exploits of martial arts heroes and related stories from Chinese fiction.

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*“Just remember what ol’ Jack Burton does when the earth quakes, and the poison arrows fall from the sky, and the pillars of Heaven shake. Yeah, Jack Burton just looks that big ol’ storm right square in the eye and he says, ‘Give me your best shot, pal. I can take it.’”*

~Jack Burton, Big Trouble in Little China

San Francisco is a big place with a lot going on—probably far more than you realize or could even accept. But here’s the thing. You know all those action movies where people zip through the air, smashing swords and flinging lightning at each other? Where some poor schmuck, minding his own business, is suddenly dragged into a fight between assassins, warring gangs, and evil spirits of the ancient world? You know the ones I mean? Well, they’re all true. You just gotta open your eyes. Once you do, you’ll never see the world the same way again.

Wuxia City is a San-Francisco-sized recursion with many of the actual neighborhoods, businesses, and establishments of the city it was seeded from. However, it also contains a

host of secret societies, sorcerous colleges, and martial arts dojos where mystical power is real and the most respected (and feared) teachers are beings who first came into their strength centuries ago in ancient China. Regular citizens don’t know or believe in any of it, but that doesn’t stop the constant power struggles, dramas, and intrigues from playing out in the back streets and hidden places.

Residents of the recursion call their city San Francisco. Only recursors who understand its nature refer to the place as Wuxia City.

**Arrival:** Wuxia City’s initial default translation location is standing before the Gateway Arch (also called the Dragon Gate) on Grant Avenue at Bush Street.

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## WUXIA CITY ATTRIBUTES

**Level:** 5  
**Laws:** Magic  
**Playable Races:** Human  
**Foci:** Abides in Stone, Carries a Quiver, Conducts Weird Science, Entertains, Haunts the Rooftops\*, Is Licensed to Carry, Leads, Masters Foot and Fist\*, Practices Soul Sorcery, Solves Mysteries, Wields Two Weapons at Once, Works the System, and most other foci appropriate for Earth  
**Skills:** Wuxia lore  
**Connection to Strange:** Certain arches open at certain phases of the moon, or when triggered by magical rituals

**Connection to Earth:** An inapposite gate hidden beneath the roots of a massive, ancient redwood in Golden Gate Park  
**Size:** 231 square miles (598 square km)  
**Spark:** 35%  
**Trait:** Brash. For any creature with the spark attempting to overcome or ignore the effects of fear or intimidation, the difficulty of the task is modified by one step to its benefit.

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- Abides in Stone, page 51*
  - Carries a Quiver, page 55*
  - Conducts Weird Science, page 57*
  - Entertains, page 61*
  - Is Licensed to Carry, page 64*
  - Leads, page 65*
  - Practices Soul Sorcery, page 71*
  - Solves Mysteries, page 78*
  - Wields Two Weapons at Once, page 82*
  - Works the System, page 83*
  - Haunts the Rooftops, page 199*
  - Masters Foot and Fist, page 203*

\* indicates foci found in this book



**S** Draggable foci, page 52

## WUXIA CITY FOCI

The foci that player characters can choose in Wuxia City—as well as any foci that are dragged into the recursion—are modified by the recursion’s context, as appropriate. The foci that are shared with Earth are almost exactly the same. But if someone selects or drags *Wields Two Weapons at Once* (for example), the weapons are likely to be nunchaku, sais, or similar martial weapons appropriate to the recursion.

Wuxia City also offers the foci *Haunts the Rooftops* and *Masters Foot and Fist*.

## WAR OF HIDDEN SCHOOLS

A war has raged beneath the surface for thousands of years between powerful forces referred to—as a group—as the Hidden Schools. Each Hidden School is different, and though some are secret academies where those of like mind train warriors or sorcerers to promulgate their philosophies and spy on their rivals, some are groups of demons in service

to ancient Chinese entities whose once-godlike power is now in decline. Thus, they’re always seeking ways to reawaken their ancient strength in the modern age.

**WHAT A RECURSOR KNOWS ABOUT WUXIA CITY**

- Wuxia City operates under the law of Magic and is seeded by stories, movies, and myths of the modern wuxia genre.
- Wuxia City is a recursive version of the city of San Francisco, but congruencies are by no means one to one.
- Assassins, ancient sorcerers, and cocky toughs with more spirit than sense strive for ascendency, for survival, or to do what’s right beneath the veneer of modern city life.

### DEMONS OF WUXIA CITY

The demons of Wuxia City are not the same kind of demons as normally understood in western literature or recursions born from those myths. Chinese demons (sometimes called yaoguai) are often spirits of vicious animals, the lost pets of deities, or other supernatural beings. Not all are evil, but most people don't take the time to assess the distinction. Most demons seem to have the goal of achieving immortality through deification, no matter how mean their circumstances.

### THE STORM

The Storm is a college of sorcerers and affiliated dojos made up primarily of mortals. The Storm believes that humans are the rightful inheritors of existence, and they are pledged to defend humans from the curses and entities of the ancient world, even if they must use the same tools to do so. Members of the Storm often go further and take it as their solemn duty to hunt ancient creatures and destroy ancient artifacts, no matter their provenance or likelihood to be a threat to humans. Needless to say, in their eyes, that makes them perpetual hunters of the Darkness, the Hidden School of ghouls and eaters of flesh.

The Storm has a secret campus beneath a warehouse in the middle of the city, but it also keeps a couple of affiliate "traveling" dojos around town, which never meet in the same location twice. The Storm is ruled by a triumvirate: the twin sorcerers Lei and Mei, who never seem to agree on anything, and the monk Shan, who casts the deciding vote when the sorcerers are deadlocked.



**Lei Who Thunders:** *level 6; Armor 2; long-range thunder attack inflicts 5 points of damage on targets within immediate range of each other*

**Mei Who Flashes:** *level 7; long-range lightning attack (from red ruby spectacles) blinds struck target for one round*

*Red ruby spectacles, page 159*

**Shan Who Strikes:** *level 6; health 30; Armor 2; melee attack inflicts 5 points of damage that ignore Armor*

**Ghoul:** *level 3; Armor 1; bite inflicts 4 points of damage, and the difficulty of the victim's Speed defense rolls against further bite attacks is increased by one step*

**Lei Who Thunders:** Lei broods, certain that the time of the Storm, and perhaps of all mortals, will soon draw to a close if the demons of the ancient world are not finally bottled up before the coming of an auspicious celestial event hinted at but never named in certain old scrolls. He searches constantly for something called the Ten Demon Bag, which he believes will offer final salvation before it's too late. He'll sacrifice anything and anyone to get what he seeks, because he believes that otherwise, the world will be consumed. Lei has power over the booming thunder.

**Mei Who Flashes:** Where Lei is silent and retreating, Mei is talkative and quick. Like a hummingbird, she flits between schemes, deals, and assassination attempts on members of rival Hidden Schools. She worries about the demons but sees them as dusty, out of touch, and something to be cleaned up rather than openly feared. Even when she discovers a magical entity that isn't malicious, she arranges to have it put down with prejudice. Mei can project red lightning from a pair of red ruby spectacles that have fused to her face.

**Shan Who Strikes:** Shan's wondrous clothes seem to be sewn from flower petals, though they obviously have the strength of sturdy fabric, else they would be shredded when she unleashes her martial arts beatdowns on enemies of the Storm. When she isn't fighting, Shan is mild, kind to strangers, and generous to enemies who are beaten. Her politics within the Storm are somewhat mysterious—some would say undisciplined. But it's probably her influence that keeps the Storm's reputation as untarnished as it is. So far, her implacable will has derailed the worst of the atrocities planned by the twins Lei and Mei. Shan's calm demeanor tends to bamboozle foes who don't know her reputation and doubt that such a slip of a woman—with her ready smile and helping hand—could also be so deadly with hand, foot, and elbow.

## THE DARKNESS

The Darkness is more of a Hidden School than the Sun Chasers, in the sense that they instruct those who wish to walk the lightless paths beneath the earth. However, it's more induction than instruction, as those who fully commit to the Darkness are transformed into flesh-eating **ghouls** without the chance of ever going back. The Darkness keeps miles of warrens beneath Wuxia City, some of which open into basements, cellars, and sewers of the city above.

Each night, hand-picked ghouls practice a ritual called the Gathering where they accept the "Offerings of the Night." This entails that they creep out and feed on dead human bodies they find buried under heaped garbage in alleys, sunk in the bay, or stashed in dumpsters. If sufficient offerings are not found, a champion is designated among the ghouls,



who is responsible for obtaining more offerings by kidnapping living humans from the street and dragging the victims below for a special event of particular grisliness.

The Darkness doesn't believe they are secondary to those who live in the light—quite the contrary. The warrens and lightless tunnels are the true world, and the thin skin of light and habitation on the surface is secondary, a place where cattle roam and, sometimes, dangerous threats arise (and must be put down). Those from above who wish to join this Hidden School can petition for entry, but many become a meal instead of a member, and it's hard to know ahead of time what a petitioner's fate will be.

The Hungry Emperor (also called the Emperor of the Ghouls) leads the Darkness. He rarely stirs from his throne chamber in the deepest warrens. The closest that most people, ghouls, or other demons get to him is through his many intermediaries, called the Ninety-Seven Counselors.

**Hungry Emperor:** The Emperor is so ancient that he may predate the demon-god Kua Fu of the Sun Chasers. But like so many other supernatural beings from across the ocean, the Emperor now claims that his empire is America, and his capital city is San Francisco, even if most living people there have never heard of the Darkness or the Emperor of the Ghouls, except in nightmares.

**Ninety-Seven Counselors:** As a group, the Ninety-Seven Counselors are powerful ghouls who can, in a pinch, speak for the Emperor in many situations. Individuals from the surface world who seek to join the Hidden School of the Darkness usually do so in the hopes of becoming one of the Ninety-Seven, given the turnover rate of several per year. A few of the Ninety-Seven are also recursors, accorded special privileges for the treasures and wonderments they bring from places beyond the warrens. If one of them could bring an artifact capable of quickening the Emperor to the status of a recursor, the Emperor promises to make that one his consort.

## THE SUN CHASERS

Most people wouldn't classify the Sun Chasers as a Hidden School. The well-lighted dojos around the city, which operate thanks to

### LIGHT · DRAINING ATTACK

The victim of a Sun Chaser light-draining attack feels icy cold. The attack deals 1 additional point of damage. The light drained from the victim burns like miniature suns in the attacker's palms or eyes, and it can be stored and unleashed as additional damage in another attack within the hour. For example, if a Sun Chaser adept who normally deals 4 points of damage on a strike hits a target twice with light-draining attacks, she deals a total of 10 points of damage and also stores that amount. She could unleash all the stored light in another attack that deals 10 additional points of damage.

generous grants by the Illumiway Corporation, are open and welcoming. But the dojos are a facade for the actual Hidden School. At its core, the Sun Chasers (mostly unknowingly) shelter the living embodiment of a figure out of Chinese mythology: the giant who wished to capture the sun. According to that story, the giant Kua Fu died before he could accomplish his goal because he lacked adequate support and protection from extreme heat.

**Xia Chen:** Kua Fu still exists. "He" now usually wears the guise of Xia Chen, a successful businesswoman in Wuxia City. Xia owns a controlling share of the Illumiway Corporation and sits on the boards of many others. She also covertly runs the Hidden School of the Sun Chasers, an organization that on the surface provides lessons to help practitioners unlock their inner potential, but which is secretly designed to reflect worship and life force toward Xia's true aspect, Kua Fu. One day, Xia hopes to take up her ancient goal once more, this time so swollen with energy that plucking the sun from the sky will be child's play.

Few know that Xia Chen is the secret headmistress of the Sun Chasers, nor do they realize that she's a mythological being several thousand years old who can become a giant in moments of fury or need. Those who stumble upon these secrets are drained of their light by Xia herself or by the martial artists trained in her dojos.

*In Wuxia City, a ghoul is a person who sought the sacrament of the Darkness and willingly became a supernatural entity of endless hunger. Ghouls can see in the dark, are immortal unless killed through violence, and are among the few to understand the transcendent pleasure of gnawing human flesh.*

**Hungry Emperor:** level 7; health 37; Armor 2; bite inflicts 10 points of damage and moves victim one step down the damage track on a failed Might defense roll; regains 3 points of health per round unless remains are exposed to sunlight

**Ghoul Counselor:** level 5; Armor 1; bite inflicts 6 points of damage, restores 1 point of health to Counselor, and restricts victim's movement to an immediate distance each round for one minute; carries one random cypher

**Xia Chen (Kua Fu):** level 8; unarmed light-draining melee attack; can grow to 60 feet (18 m) in height, making short-range melee attacks that inflict 12 points of damage on all creatures within immediate range of each other

**Sun Chaser martial artist:** level 4; health 20; two unarmed attacks inflict 4 points of damage each as a single action, or one light-draining melee attack

## TOMB OF THE NINE DRAGONS

Somewhere under the Bay Bridge lies a flooded complex colloquially known as the Tomb of the Nine Dragons. The Nine Dragons were powerful criminals (both mortal and supernatural) who ruled Wuxia City with fear and terror so extreme that all the Hidden Schools came together for the first and last time in an alliance to deliver the city. The defeated Nine were locked away in a magical prison filled with their demons, spirits, warlocks, and other servitors. If anyone from the surface finds the entrance to the Tomb, the magical defenses do not keep intruders out; instead, the spells suck intruders inside and deliver them to the mercies of the inmates. Despite the supposed inviolate nature of the Tomb, rumors periodically circulate that one or more of the Dragons has found a way out and is rebuilding their old empire in secret, under the noses of the Hidden Schools who, in their pride, refuse to believe such tall tales.

## KANG'S APOTHECARY

Need traditional Chinese herbal remedies to help with your pain, disease, or disability? Go see **Doctor Kang** at his apothecary, which carries only the highest quality remedies in Wuxia City. The shop is large and high ceilinged, but a forest of dark wood cabinets with hundreds of drawers keep space at a premium. Various types of incense and the smells of brewing teas haze the air, but in combination, it all creates a welcoming and cozy atmosphere.

Kang's is a popular destination for regular people who know little and suspect less about the mystical underbelly of the world. They appreciate how Dr. Kang is often available in his shop to provide top-notch advice to those seeking to cure an ailment.

However, most of Dr. Kang's clientele lives on the other side of the veil, so to speak. They come to him for mystical components, rings, mirrors, magic potions, and powders that confer or create sorceries both ancient and contemporary. One of his most requested items is demon powder, able to banish demons or ghouls. Patrons also come to Dr. Kang when conflicts between the Hidden Schools threaten to boil over and spill into the public arena. Kang has brokered peace deals between the

## HEARSAY ON THE STREET

**Down With the Police:** Rumors are rife that the head of the San Francisco police department, Daniel Skagen, has crossed the wrong Hidden School, and his days are numbered. Whether or not that's true, several protests with Skagen's picture on posters have raged through the streets, and most have turned into riots that brought out the police. Events seem likely to continue to spiral out of control.

**Empty Skyscraper:** An apartment building has been discovered abandoned, with no trace of any living thing inside. It's as if all the people and their pets simply walked out in the middle of their daily morning activities. An odd blue shine glimmers on certain walls and ceilings, but so far, no one knows anything more.

**Demon Eggs:** Every now and then new construction turns up massive egglike sacs. Usually, a hibernating demon of the old world is found resting inside, and these are best not disturbed. However, most have fallen so far in power and influence from what they once were that they'll never wake again. A secret black market exists for such eggs, and for pieces of the creatures that sleep within them.

bitter rivals on several occasions. When his wisdom proves insufficient, Kang falls back on his own repertoire of sorcery, potions, and artifacts to accomplish his goals.

## WUXIA CITY ARTIFACTS

### DEMON POWDER

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** A leather pouch filled with yellow powder

**Effect:** A pinch of powder cast at targets in immediate range deals damage equal to the artifact's level and causes victims to run in abject terror for up to a minute, or to cower if fleeing is not an option. The powder works on targets whose level is equal to or less than the artifact's level and

**Doctor Kang:** level 7; Armor 2 (spell); long-range mystic blast inflicts 9 points of damage; carries several doses of demon powder at all times and a Seven Demon Bag

Seven Demon Bag, page 160

who are supernatural creatures of Wuxia City (including ghouls, demons, and some supernatural beings from other recursions that operate under the law of Magic).

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### EYEGLASSES OF MEMORY

**Level:** 1d6 + 2

**Form:** A pair of silver spectacles

**Effect:** The wearer can duplicate a special ability that she witnessed an ally or foe perform within the last few rounds. This can be an attack, the creation of a special effect, the application of skilled knowledge to complete a task, and so on. The effect created by the spectacles knows few bounds, though the wearer may have to make an attack roll or perform another task to use the duplicated ability. For example, if the wearer sees a giant asp deliver a poisonous bite that shrivels flesh in seconds, she can attempt to do the same, but she must succeed on the attack roll.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### HAND MIRROR OF AFAR

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** A compact mirror in a stylish folding case

**Effect:** For up to one minute, the user can view a location she has previously visited in the recursion and spy on what occurs there, though if she fails a stealth task, targets being spied on may get an odd feeling that they are being watched. The user can choose to move to the viewed location (taking the hand mirror along), which is a difficulty 3 Intellect-based task. On a failure, she might still arrive in the new location, but as if having fallen from a height of at least 30 feet (9 m), which requires an extra depletion roll because the mirror has a chance to break.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### MOOD RING

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** A simple metallic ring clasping a pale stone

**Effect:** The wearer can attempt to key the ring to a target within short range. If successful, the ring remains keyed to that individual

until it is keyed to someone else or the target sheds the mystical entanglement. The wearer of a keyed ring always has a low-level sense of the target's mental state and can faintly feel when the target is angry, surprised, happy, and so on. If the wearer concentrates, she can activate the ring for one minute, during which time she can mentally communicate with the target, use abilities or attacks on the target that normally require the target to be within sight or closer, or attempt to briefly inhabit the target's body and control it like a puppet. This latter effect requires a depletion roll each round it is used.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### POTION OF INVINCIBILITY

**Level:** 1d6

**Form:** A golden decanter filled with steaming liquid

**Effect:** When consumed, the potion confers a sense of overweening confidence and well-being for one hour. This effect counters fear effects, psychic attacks that attempt to cripple a victim's mind, and similar psychological manipulations. The user also immediately gains 3 experience points (XP) that can be used to reroll failed rolls. If these 3 XP are not used by the end of the hour, they fade away.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### RED RUBY SPECTACLES

**Level:** 1d6 + 3

**Form:** A pair of spectacles whose eyepieces are opaque ruby crystal

**Effect:** The wearer can see normally through the spectacles, which correct any vision impairments, including blindness. In addition, the wearer can project scarlet-hued lightning from the crystals at up to three targets within long range, inflicting damage equal to the artifact level. If an attack misses, the ruby spectacles fuse to the wearer's face on a failed difficulty 2 Might defense roll. Once fused, the spectacles can't be removed until the artifact is depleted, and even then, they leave the victim's face scarred.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20



## SEVEN DEMON BAG

**Level:** 1d6 + 2

**Form:** An ebony bag sewn with fangs, claws, tusks, shanks of fur, and similar beast parts

**Effect:** The owner of the bag can pull forth a small leathery, furry, or slimy lump and cast it down within immediate range. The lump immediately expands and becomes a demon whose level equals the artifact's level. Seven distinct demons can be pulled from the bag, but no more than one at any given time, and the choice is mostly random. A demon persists for up to a minute (or until it is killed) before evaporating into vapor.

The demon named Baigujiang is never randomly chosen. It emerges only on a GM intrusion, in the presence of malign magic, or when the bag would otherwise be depleted.

*Hēiyú:* A scaled humanoid with a snake's head that can unfurl its neck like a serpent on an attack. This demon responds to simple commands of the user. Armor 1; bite inflicts damage plus poison that causes severe pain in victim for one minute, during which time all tasks are modified by one step to the victim's detriment.

*Lúwpí:* A monstrous humanoid covered in dank, waterlogged weeds (which smell horrific) instead of fur. This demon responds to simple commands of the user. Battering fist attack inflicts damage, and odor stuns victim for one round.

*Hēifēng:* A black bear whose roar unleashes a terrible wind. This demon attacks all creatures indiscriminately. Long-range attack inflicts damage on all targets within immediate range of each other.

*Xuézhě Bái:* An old man wearing scholarly white robes and a staff. This demon offers advice to the user. If the user attempts a knowledge-related task with the demon's help, the difficulty is reduced by two steps.

*Hǔtóu:* A humanoid with a tiger's head and claws. This demon responds to simple commands of the user, but it turns on the user if the user fails a persuasion task. Hǔtóu's attacks inflict 1 less point than its level indicates; two claw attacks against a target and if both hit, it also makes a bite attack as part of the same action.

*Hóngháizi:* A cute red ape about 3 feet (1 m) tall. This demon responds to simple commands of the user. A hug from it restores 3 points to a stat Pool (for a PC) or 3 points of health (for an NPC).

*Baigujiang:* A 9-foot (3 m) tall skeleton wearing shreds of a woman's gown. This demon viciously attacks the user when freed. Claws deal damage and on a second failed Speed defense roll, the user is captured and stuffed into the skeleton's rib cage. If the user can't escape before Baigujiang would normally return to the bag, the user dissipates and is pulled into the bag instead. If this occurs, Baigujiang remains free, and the user becomes one of the demons of the Seven Demon Bag.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20



# ZED AMERICA



*Zed America was created by fictional leakage.*

*Unanticipated complications related to human regenerative virus (HRV) therapy were responsible for the zombie apocalypse in Zed America. Patient Zero is still out there somewhere, mutated almost beyond recognition, and still spreading HRV.*



*“Which idiot authorized viral sample return from Zed America?”*

*~Colonel Angela Whitesides, Office of Strategic Recursion*

Most of America has returned to nature—and to once-human hordes that shamble through the smoldering corpses of cities and stagger down wreck-strewn roads. High-security fortress enclaves and lonely keeps are scattered points of light in the surrounding zombie darkness. Within these safe zones, the “American way of life” continues, one that includes daily HRV blood screening, walls bristling with automated guns and drones, and lives separated by miles and miles of zombie-infested highways in poor repair.

Zed America is one of several recursions that hosted a zombie apocalypse. Most of these “Zed Omegas” aren’t as fortunate as Zed America, where civilization survived by finding a new equilibrium. The status quo is an uneasy one, because every year, new HRV replication events convert fresh victims, sometimes even those who hunker behind high fortress walls.

**Arrival:** Zed America’s initial default translation location is just outside the main gates of New Chicago, which can be a hairy arrival if a zombie horde happens to be active there.



**Zed America Regenerates Tissue GM Intrusion:**  
*You go into uncontrolled HRV replication. To avoid becoming a zombie, you must succeed on three difficulty 3 Intellect-based tasks before failing two.*

## ZED AMERICA FOCI

Most foci that player characters can choose in Zed America are just like those available on Earth, with a few exceptions.

## INTEGRATES WEAPONRY

According to Zed America's narrative, advanced biotechnology brought on the zombie apocalypse. But some good came of it as well, including this focus, which grants a character the ability to directly integrate weapons into her body.

## REGENERATES TISSUE

Advanced biotechnology led to wonders of regenerative medicine and longevity. It

even granted certain individuals the ability to regenerate tissue. The application of an engineered retrovirus called the human regenerative virus (HRV) combined with daily meditation using special biofeedback techniques allows a character to heal wounds that would kill a normal person. Most people live with a weak strain of HRV, but a person with the Regenerates Tissue focus has been inoculated with the real thing. Of course, it's best not to advertise that one is HRV-positive. Most people who caught the virulent strain went into uncontrolled replication and converted into hard-to-kill zombies.

## QUELLS UNDEAD

Many "Zed Omega" recursions offer foci that grant natives (and recursors who visit) improved skills in hunting zombies.

*Quells Undead, page 206*

*Castle One, page 172*



- Carries a Quiver, page 55*
- Conducts Weird Science, page 57*
- Entertains, page 61*
- Integrates Weaponry, page 63*
- Is Licensed to Carry, page 64*
- Leads, page 65*
- Regenerates Tissue, page 74*
- Solves Mysteries, page 78*
- Works the System, page 83*

**ZED AMERICA ATTRIBUTES**

**Level:** 4

**Laws:** Mad Science

**Playable Races:** Human

**Foci:** Carries a Quiver, Conducts Weird Science, Entertains, Integrates Weaponry, Is Licensed to Carry, Leads, Quells Undead\*, Regenerates Tissue, Solves Mysteries, Works the System

**Skills:** Zed America lore

**Connection to Strange:** Connections to the Strange are inconstant and spring up only at the center of zombie hordes with a population topping 1,000 zed per square mile (3 square km)

**Connection to Earth:** None known, except for an indirect connection through Castle One, an OSR-controlled recursion

**Size:** 85,000 square miles (~220,000 square km)

**Spark:** 20%

**Trait:** Quick Healing. A weak strain of human regenerative virus (HRV) infects everyone in Zed America. When characters make a recovery roll, add 1 to the result.

\* indicates foci found in this book

## ZOMBIES OF ZED AMERICA

Humans who undergo a runaway HRV replication event convert over the course of one hour into hard-to-kill, aggressive, cannibalistic serial killers, their minds burned out with hunger. They're commonly called zed, zombies, Z, or walkers.

Zombies aren't intelligent, but enough of them together sometimes exhibit emergent behavior, just as ants can coordinate activities across a colony. More worrying is the continual evolution of the HRV infection. It began as a retrovirus that, once within an organism, turns on genes long dormant in higher mammals. This same capacity has had the additional long-term consequence of mutating base zombies, creating tougher, faster, or smarter versions, sometimes with frightening new abilities.

Of course, the infectious nature of zombies makes them most dangerous. A zed bite either infects someone with HRV or triggers a replication event in a Zed America native that already harbors a weak version of the virus.

In the former case, a victim bitten by a zombie within the previous hour must succeed on a Might defense roll whose difficulty is equal to the zombie's level. Failure means the victim

is infected with a virulent strain of HRV (a level 8 disease). Every twenty-four hours after the initial bite, the victim must succeed on another Might defense roll or move one step down the damage track. While the disease is active, normal recovery rolls aren't sufficient to move a victim back up the damage track. If a victim dies while infected or because of the infection, he rises as a zombie 1d6 hours later. Sometimes, conversion happens much more quickly, over the course of just an hour, and no one really understands why.

In addition to regular zombies, Zed America hosts zombie hulks, zombie sprayers, and zombie sprinters.

**Zombie:** level 3, Speed defense as level 2; health 12. If an attack would reduce the zombie's health to 0, it does so only if the attack roll was an even number; otherwise, the zombie's health is reduced to 1 instead; for details, see *The Strange Bestiary*, page 145

*Zombie hulk*, page 218

*Zombie sprayer*, page 217

*Zombie sprinter*, page 217

### WHAT A RECURSOR KNOWS ABOUT ZED AMERICA

- Zed America operates under the law of Mad Science and is seeded by hundreds of zombie stories and movies. Unexpected side effects of what was supposed to have been a miracle drug—human regenerative virus (HRV)—touched off the change.
- Zed America, despite its name, is only about the size of a few states. Zombies roam vast swaths of the recursion, but American culture persists, spread across a series of fortress enclaves and keeps, the largest of which is New Chicago.
- Technology is slightly ahead of that of Earth, but those advanced developments are mostly in service to defending against and destroying zombies.





**Automated gun turret:**  
level 3

**Autonomous flying drone:**  
level 3, perception tasks  
as level 6; long-range  
movement when flying

**Fire Brigade firefighter:**  
level 3; short-range  
flamethrower deals 5 points  
of damage and burns the  
target for 1 additional point  
of damage per round until  
the target spends an action  
dousing the flames

*Ordinary zombies that  
catch on fire normally don't  
spend actions dousing their  
flames, which means they  
eventually go down.*

**Mayor Eleanor Adams:**  
level 4, tasks related  
to interaction and  
administration as level 6

## SITES OF NOTE

The following sites are a few of the many fascinating places that recursors can discover in Zed America.

### NEW CHICAGO

New Chicago incorporates the northern portion of the original city, but most of the buildings lie behind the New Chicago Wall.

### NEW CHICAGO WALL

This 40-foot (12 m) high wall of steel and concrete (level 5) encloses the area of New Chicago, where regular folks live. Automated gun turrets dot the wall tops, though coverage isn't complete, and mechanics are always on call to deal with frequent jams and other issues. A handful of autonomous flying drones patrol along the wall, mostly for surveillance. If the drones detect an advancing horde, the Chicago Fire Brigade is called to reinforce the wall turrets, usually from the safety of the wall top.

Access through the New Chicago Wall is highly regulated. The main gate controls traffic

(sparse as it is) seeking to pass into and out of the city along Interstate 94. Anyone who wants into the city, even well-known citizens who drove out just minutes earlier, must submit to a blood test administered by an autonomous drone before the gates are opened.

### LIVING IN NEW CHICAGO

Inside the wall, New Chicago resembles a well-to-do collection of normal Earth suburbs surrounding an inner core of skyscrapers. People work, go to school, talk on smartphones, drink coffee, and watch shows streamed on the New Chicago intranet (a limited remnant of the World Wide Web). Businesses and malls are open during the day, and nightclubs and theaters draw crowds at night. Most people in New Chicago lead a fairly normal life and never, ever go beyond the wall.

**Mayor Eleanor Adams:** PR savvy and fashionable, Mayor Adams currently runs things in New Chicago, though her detractors are many. Some accuse her of overstating the fear of a new zombie apocalypse and holding

### BLOOD TESTING IN ZED AMERICA

Blood tests to screen for HRV are conducted frequently in Zed America. Mandated testing is required for people entering a fortress enclave (like New Chicago), for those who've had contact with zed, and for those entering and leaving a secure biolab. Law enforcement may also demand tests based on suspicious activity at their discretion. Anyone who refuses testing is treated as if he'd failed the test.

Blood tests are routinely applied by white drones emblazoned with red medical insignia. The blood draw is a quick jab, and results are analyzed and displayed on a screen within a few rounds for all to see. If someone passes, the drone flashes a green

light and emits a pleasant tone. If someone fails, the drone activates a siren and tries to restrain the target. Failing a blood test is serious business and at minimum sees someone expelled, though, more often, targets are immediately euthanized.

The test examines a creature's viral load of HRV; everyone in Zed America has some, but past a certain threshold, a subject is deemed to be in imminent danger of going into wild replication and converting. A character with the Regenerates Tissue focus had better hope he has a medical card describing his situation, or he will be assumed to be on the verge of zombie conversion.

onto power by making people afraid with too-frequent HRV warnings and blood tests. But Eleanor, for her part, does what she thinks is right for the community. She knows how dangerous the world really is, high walls or no, and that the thing that lives in the Milwaukee Ruins is something that must be dealt with eventually. That said, she's not above taking down political rivals by fair means or foul.

### OLD CHICAGO RUINS

Spreading south from New Chicago's walled perimeter lies a much larger swath of original Chicago, now in ruins. Despite occasional forays by firefighters to clean the area, lone zombies and zombie hordes are likely encounters. That doesn't stop treasure hunters and scientists from entering the old city looking for salvage or data, though doing so is incredibly dangerous.

### BADLANDS

Anyplace outside a fortress enclave or a keep is considered Badlands. In the Badlands, the rule of law is nonexistent, so meeting another group of humans along a wreck-strewn road isn't necessarily a meeting between friends. Several gangs of highway bandits roam the Badlands, including Carla's Rednecks, Diamondbacks, and the Psycho Choir. They're usually at each other's

throats, though their rivalries fade in the face of fresh meat when travelers move between fortress enclaves and keeps. Caravans of three or more vehicles are less likely to be targeted, though sometimes larger caravans draw more bandits to investigate. And of course, conflicts with guns and racing motors are so loud that a wandering horde of zed is almost sure to follow.

A lot of the most obvious salvage in the Badlands has already been picked over, but much remains to be found. Vehicles, gasoline, canned food, weapons, tools, spare parts, and treasures of all kinds can be found in abandoned homes and garages across what was once America (or at least the part contained in the limited landscape of the recursion).



*"Don't wanna be an American carrier.  
Don't want a nation under zed influenza.  
Can you hear the sound of hysteria?  
The walker apocalypse America."*

*~lyrics from a popular song in  
New Chicago*

**Badlands bandit:** level 3;  
Armor 1; long-range firearm  
attack deals 4 points of  
damage

**Keep scientist:** level 3, tasks related to research and biotech as level 5

**Crowned shambler:** level 6; short-range bone-tipped viscera attack moves victim one step down the damage track; regains 2 points of health per round while its health is above 0; regains 1 point of health per minute while its health is 0; controls zombies within short range; for details, see *The Strange Bestiary*, page 147

**Radioactive:** Zombies with this quality inflict 1 additional point of damage per attack. On a failed Might defense roll, a victim subtracts 1 from all recovery rolls for the next three days. Multiple hits escalate this penalty.

**Ulysses:** level 7; radioactive

The Badlands also host small inhabited keep enclaves. These are usually fortified compounds established by an extended family, a religious group, or a team of scientists working on a Z cure (with concentrations of HRV deemed too dangerous to be used inside a fortress enclave). Some keeps are friendly to visitors, others not.

## MILWAUKEE RUINS

In Zed America, many towns (or parts of towns) lie in ruins. But Milwaukee is special. It's home to a unique zombie called Patient Zero. Most people believe he's the source of the mutant strain of HRV that caused the

zombie outbreak. This *might* be true, though recursor visitors to Zed America theorize that he may not be a native zombie. He could be what's known as a **crowned shambler**, a variety of zombie born in a recursion that operates under the law of Magic. Whatever his origin, Patient Zero possesses several uniquely scary abilities, including the power to control other zed, whole hordes at a time. The Milwaukee Ruins literally crawl with zombies, and many are atypical zed, with abilities even less understood than those of sprinters, hulks, and sprayers.

## BRAIDWOOD NUCLEAR GENERATING PLANT

About an hour out of Chicago lie the ruins of Braidwood, once a city of some 6,000 people. Near it is the Braidwood Nuclear Generating Plant, whose unique silhouette is always visible on the horizon. When zombies overcame the workers at the plant, the nuclear process spiraled out of control. This ultimately led to a catastrophic power increase in one of the reactors, which was closely followed by core explosions. Thankfully, the reactor was mostly shielded by a hard containment vessel, or a much wider swath of the landscape would have been irradiated.

However, the plant itself is highly irradiated, and for reasons not immediately clear, has attracted a large collection of resident zombies of all types, but especially zombie sprayers. It should come as a surprise to no one that the zombies infesting the Braidwood Nuclear Generating Plant are highly radioactive. When they come swarming out of the facility every few nights, they glow with a flickering, greenish-blue light. Where the radioactive swarms travel, they leave a blackened trail of dead plants and animals in their wake, which is impossible to miss.

Three zombies at the center of the nuclear plant never leave with the swarm, possibly because they have merged into a tripartite being in a fusion of melted flesh and bone. Unlike the others, these three operate with a scary level of self-awareness and refer to themselves as a single being: **Ulysses**. Ulysses has plans for its growing brood of radioactive zombies, which include growing the swarm



large enough to overrun Patient Zero and its forces in the Milwaukee Ruins. For now, Ulysses seems uninterested in taking down New Chicago, possibly because the occasional living captives the radioactive swarm brings back are the only people Ulysses can talk to—until they inevitably die of radiation poisoning.

## ARTIFACTS OF ZED AMERICA

### REPLICATION RIFLE

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** Precision military rifle with fused bioreactor module and telescopic sight

**Effect:** The bioreactor contains live, concentrated HRV, which coats the

ammunition when fired. With the scope, the rifle can be fired at a target within 1,600 feet (488 m), inflicting damage equal to the artifact level. A target that fails a Might defense roll suffers an episode of HRV replication. If the target fails three subsequent Might defense rolls before succeeding on two, she falls into a coma and rises ten minutes later as a zombie.

The replication rifle is not a rapid-fire weapon.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### ZED BURNER

**Level:** 1d6 + 1

**Form:** Cherry-red flamethrower plastered with anti-zed stickers

**Effect:** This weapon sprays a short-range line of flaming, high-pressure liquid at up to three targets standing next to each other, inflicting damage equal to the artifact level. Affected targets are also doused in burning liquid, catch on fire, and take 2 points of damage each round until they succeed on a Speed-based task to smother the flames. A zombie target that has the special ability to retain 1 point of health is overcome one round after it would normally be reduced to 0 health.

The zed burner is not a rapid-fire weapon.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

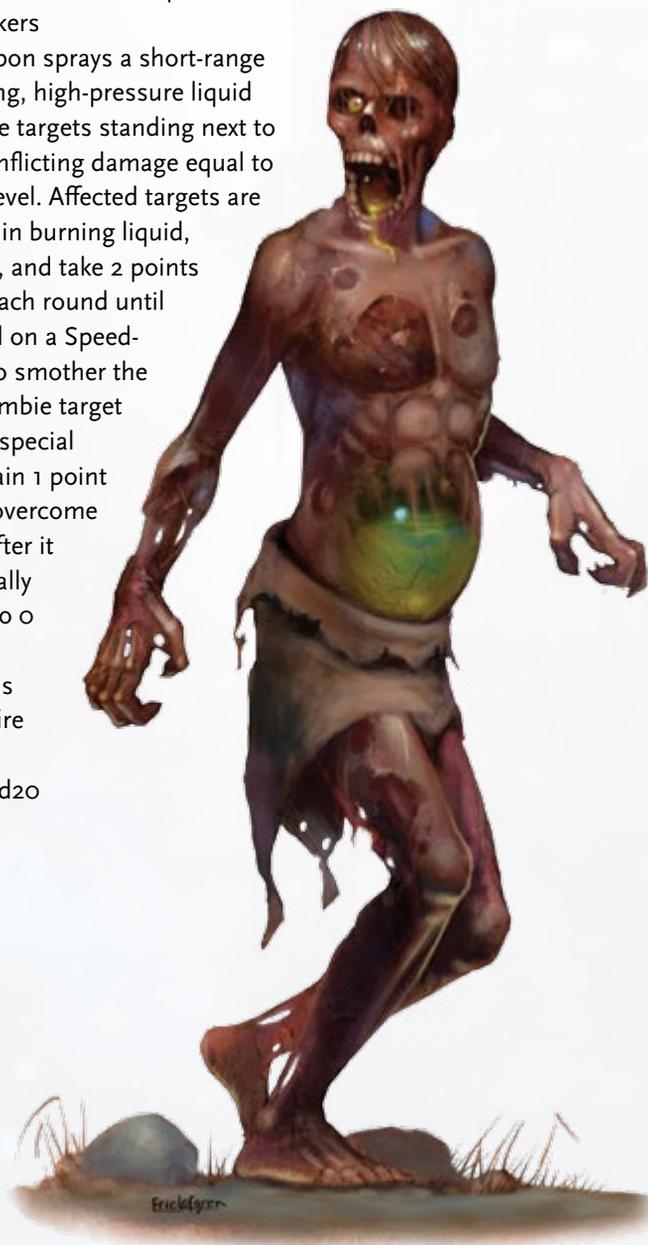
### SCRATCHES AT THE BARRICADE

**Rewire America:** Entrepreneur Kwan Kaya, a woman of formidable determination, has turned her attention to a new project: repair Zed America's Internet so that far-flung enclaves are connected once more. The engineers require protection as they travel into the Badlands to accomplish their goal.

**What the Heck Is It?** A new variety of zombie has been sighted several times in the old Chicago ruins. It looks like a regular zombie, but its bulging stomach is translucent and filled with sloshing fluid. New Chicago scientists want a sample for study.

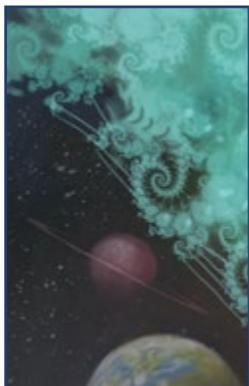
**Call of the Wild:** Concerned father Denis Lin is looking for someone to smuggle his zed-positive son out of the secret room in the attic where he's been kept since he converted, and then release the boy into the Badlands, "where he'll have a chance."

**Us or Them:** Mayor Adams is putting together a scouting team to go north into the Milwaukee Ruins. She's received reports that Patient Zero is building something called a "Zed Conversion Bomb," and she wants to see if it's true.



## CHAPTER 6

## RECURSION SEEDS



*“The final authentic letter we received from Elizabeth Tooley, IGS explorer extraordinaire, is dated 06 May 1975. She warned us before setting off to explore a region of related recursions she called ‘the Conspiracies’ that we should not be surprised if we failed to hear from her for a year or more, and that her long absence should merely be seen as a sign that she was deeply embedded, rather than that she had failed. In the decades since, having heard nothing of our dear Liz, I am afraid that we were forced to conclude that she was lost after all. But we all like to imagine, despite the wild stories and overhyped claims revealed as hyperbole, that she is still out there somewhere. That she just decided never to come in again, and is instead happy, healthy, and still exploring.”*

*~Sir Raymond Creswicke,  
in a letter to his paramour Irene in the constructed recursion of Paradiso*

*Flatland, page 176*

*Desktop Terrene, page 175*

*Manifest Silicon, page 182*

### RECURSION NAMES

The given name for a recursion is often a code name bestowed by visiting explorers and does not necessarily reflect the name that natives of that recursion use to refer to their limited world. Unless a recursion is especially well known, like Ardeyn or Ruk, explorers like to label recursions with names that say a little something about them. For instance, in the recursion [Manifest Silicon](#), disembodied minds have been uploaded to a computerlike system, creating a society of sentient software.

### FOCI OFFERED BY EXOTIC RECURSIONS

Some recursions that operate under the Exotic law are so unlike other recursions that the foci they offer—which are normally chosen by the GM from a list of all possible foci—are likely to be quite limited. For example, although [Solves](#)

[Mysteries](#) and [Leads](#) are fine for the recursion of [Flatland](#), they seem woefully inadequate for a recursion like [Desktop Terrene](#). And that’s all right. Exotic recursions are expected to break the rules, which means that they might not offer any foci at all. Or if they do, it might be just one focus, and as in the case of [Desktop Terrene](#), it might not be one that a recursor wants to take.

### A SELECTION OF RECURSIONS

The total number of recursions in the Shoals of Earth is a magnitude greater than that estimated by operatives of the Estate. The Implausible Geographical Society puts the number in the thousands, but they further note that as fictions continue to be created on Earth and consumed by Earth natives in their millions, more recursions continue to bubble into existence. This makes detailing

each and every one—even in a cursory manner—problematic. But that doesn't mean the IGS and other explorers haven't tried, and a selection of those efforts are reprinted as follows.

### 20K (STANDARD PHYSICS)

Utterly alien, this rogue recursion isn't connected to the Shoals of Earth, but instead floats alone through the Strange, disassociated from whatever alien prime world seeded it. Despite this fact, recursors sometimes accidentally translate to 20K and find themselves converted into sentient pools of liquid helium on a small moonlike object under a sky empty of stars. As blobs of **superfluid**, recursors may find that some of their normal abilities are no longer accessible. Communication requires that recursors mix a portion of their fluid bodies with another similar being. Thoughts and intentions move slowly, but recursors can persist in a meditative, mindful state for extremely long



#### ARTIFACTS

Recursion miners and others who seek to transfer artifacts between recursions usually have a method in mind for doing so. These methods include a special ability granted by a focus or type, knowledge of an inapposite gate, a plan to travel between recursions using the Strange itself, the ability to create temporary inapposite gates, a cypher, or something else.



periods of time, perhaps even indefinitely.

Natives exist in 20K, but most have entered into long-term hibernation, rendering them into crystal-like nodules decorating the moon's surface. Touching one instills crazed visions of philosophy, mathematics, and concepts too alien to name, which incites awe but risks seizures in the investigator.

A recursion miner named **Fumala Kapoor** has pioneered a method by which she is able to

**20K superfluid entity:** *level 5; melee pseudopod attack inflicts 3 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor)*

**Fumala Kapoor:** *level 5; can choose one held object to translate along with her as if taken through an inapposite gate*





*In Antikytheracosc, the surface of Earth is a cast piece of bronze with marble, wood, and crystal fittings that give the semblance of a tiny world. Overhead, metallic shells with rotating, painted surfaces move according to simulated celestial cycles and internal gears.*

transport portions of the alien crystals to Earth, where she sells the thawed fluid as an exotic (and sometimes fatal) drug.

Few recursors come to 20K intentionally because most don't know of its existence.

### AD 802,701 (MAD SCIENCE)

This recursion depicts one possible far, far future where the human species has split into two morphologically distinct branches: morlock and eloi. (The recursion was seeded by the H. G. Wells novel *The Time Machine* and its many reimaginings.)

The morlocks are albino, apelike humanoids with massive eyes and furry bodies who tend enormous underground machines that regulate the environment. Weaker than humans of Earth, the morlocks might swarm a recursor (or eloi) who they deem to be a good meal, or if prepared, they could attack with superscience weaponry.

The eloi, childlike and trusting, are fed and clothed by the morlocks, who take payment in eloi flesh. Attractive creatures, they are for the most part too docile and inbred to develop the spark.

A recursor might visit AD 802,701 to see the Time Traveler appear, which he does every three and a half months, like clockwork. Each time he appears, it is after having made some adjustment to events further in the past. He hopes to erase the dreadful sequence of events that led to the cannibalistic morlocks preying on the defenseless eloi. If he ever succeeds, any visiting recursors might find themselves wiped away with the change.

A recursor might wish to visit this recursion to study the traveler's time machine or to grab a piece of strange technology from the morlocks. However, unless she wants to end up as morlock food or the subject of a science experiment, she should leave quickly.

### ANTIKYTHERACOSM (EXOTIC)

This recursion is probably constructed, though if so, it was created at least a few thousand years ago, when the greatest minds of Earth believed that the planet was the center of the universe. When a recursor travels here, she learns what it truly means to inhabit a limited world. In Antikytheracosc, the surface of Earth is a cast piece of bronze with marble, wood, and crystal fittings that give the semblance of a tiny world. Overhead, metallic shells with rotating, painted surfaces move according to simulated celestial cycles and internal gears. One half shell depicts the sun set with brilliant amber, another the moon in pearl, and the outermost shell is scorched ebony with thousands of tiny diamond points depicting ancient constellations.

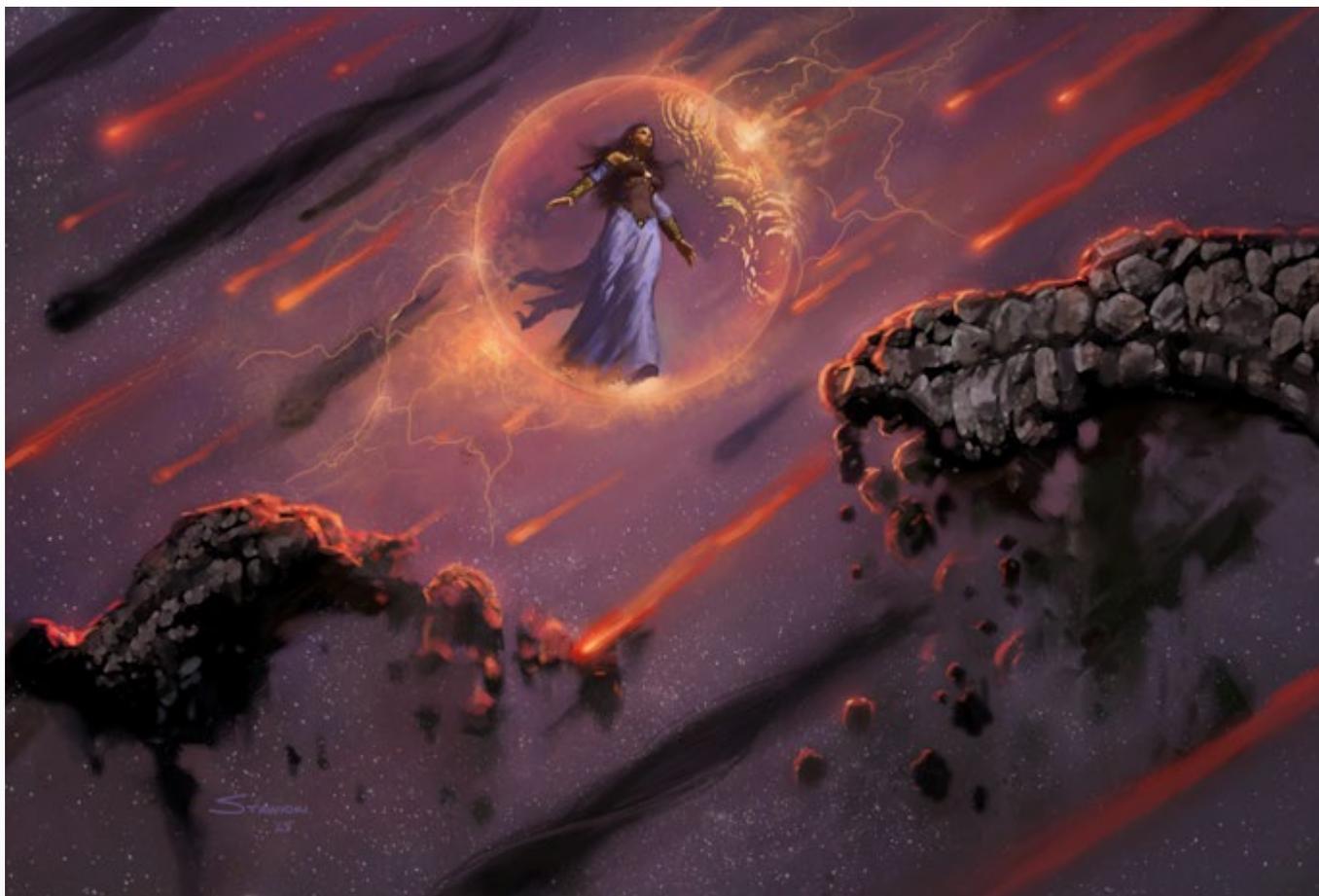
To stand on the surface of Antikytheracosc is a dizzying experience because a recursor understands that she is contained within a tiny faux cosmos, the sky of which she might be able to reach up and touch. At the same time, she seems appropriately sized to inhabit the tiny bronze world, to take shade from the noonday amber crystal sun under the trees carved of wood, and to gather in the marble amphitheater to converse with the natives.

The natives are tiny carved figures with limited articulation. They resemble people, horses, birds, and a few creatures that have gone extinct on Earth. Some wander the land, but many gather in the amphitheater every few days to discuss great questions of philosophy and reason, which is why they are called Philosophers. In their thought experiments, most Philosophers have considered the idea that Antikytheracosc might be an artificial construction.

A recursor might visit this world to pose a question of the Philosophers in the amphitheater, who usually arrive at a correct

**Morlock:** level 2; some have energy pistols that make long-range attacks

**Eloi:** level 2; pleasant social interaction as level 5; tasks related to knowledge and reasoning as level 1



answer after some debate. However, a significant downside to translating here is that the difficulty of any translation task to leave is increased by two steps, and all failures deposit the recursor back in Antikytheracsm.

### AVALON (MAGIC)

This magical island, often lost in the mists, is where the magic sword named *Excalibur* was first forged by fey beings and spirits of the land. Avalon is one of a class of recursions called the “Arthurians” because of their association with the King Arthur myth. Indeed, Avalon has direct connections to other recursions where other portions of the Arthurian myth play out, including *Camelot Le Morte*.

Avalon is an idyllic place of lakes, streams, and groves of fruit trees, especially apple trees. Some of the fruit is enchanted, and eating it provides a variety of temporary boons, such as healing, knowledge, or fecundity. Other fruit is cursed and brings quick death.

The fey beings of the island include nine **sorceresses**, sisters all, who rule Avalon. One of the sisters is **Morgan Le Fay**. Other natives also live on the island, but they seem to appear and disappear according to the whims of the sisters or their own impenetrable natures. The sisters rarely see eye to eye on all things, and indeed, Morgan Le Fay—often portrayed as an evil entity—isn’t the worst of her siblings. On the other hand, she is quickened, and in addition

**Lesser sorceress:** level 5; Armor 1; long-range curse inflicts damage and puts victim to sleep

**Morgan Le Fay:** level 8; Armor 2; long-range curse inflicts damage and puts victim to sleep; carries six random cyphers she can cast as spells

*Camelot Le Morte*, page 46



*Avalon is one of a class of recursions called the “Arthurians” because of their association with the King Arthur myth. Indeed, Avalon has direct connections to other recursions where other portions of the Arthurian myth play out, including Camelot Le Morte.*



Merlin, page 52

to traveling to connected Arthurian recursions, sometimes she visits unassociated recursions, possibly even Earth. She is responsible for killing more than a few versions of Merlin, and she hunts others as they turn up. It may be her meddling that gave at least one version of Merlin the spark, though the wizard maintains that it was the other way around.

A tomb surrounded by an Avebury-like henge stands in the center of the island. On the central stone is inscribed, "Here lies Arthur, the once and future king." Normally, the grave is empty. But it may one day hold Arthur of Camelot—or one of him, at least; there are many "Arthurians."

Recursors who venture to Avalon might do so because they are looking for a magical fruit, the Holy Grail, *Excalibur*, or Arthur's aid. More likely, they find one of the nine sisters, perhaps even Morgan Le Fay.

## BORDERLANDS OF SOL (STANDARD PHYSICS)

Seeded from stories and movies of mankind's eventual colonization of the inner solar system, this recursion features a spinning station orbiting Earth, domes on Mars, tunnels on Ceres (in the asteroid belt), outposts on a few moons of Jupiter, and hundreds of spacecraft moving between these locations. Unlike many recursions seeded by sci-fi, the Borderlands of Sol operates under the law of Standard Physics, which means that its technology pushes the very edge of Mad Science but is compatible with Earth systems with some retrofitting (and inapposite travel). The powers that be include the UN of Earth, the Empire of Mars, the Ceres Confederacy, and the intelligent robots (called *dynamics*) that inhabit Jupiter's moons in such profusion that it's hard to give them a single name; they're usually referred to collectively as the Dynamic League. As vast as the resources of the solar system are, those easily reachable by ion engines and human/robotic ingenuity are finite, which has led to strained relationships and armed skirmishes.

In one particularly memorable event, the alien spacecraft *Resolution* appeared in the recursion without warning. It made some kind of deal with the Dynamic League, apparently gaining one or two dynamics as crew in

exchange for a quantity of antimatter normally impossible to gather in a Standard Physics recursion. Now the Dynamic League holds the balance of power, if they're willing to use their doomsday weapon. On the other hand, they might simply be trying to build engines with beamed core antimatter technology that would give them easy access to Sol's outer system and all the riches in the Oort cloud.

A recursor might visit the Borderlands of Sol to trade for technology that would work on Earth, or to track down what's become of the *Resolution*.

## CASTLE ONE (MAD SCIENCE)

This constructed recursion was fashioned by the Office of Strategic Recursion (OSR) on Earth. Only about a mile (2 km) in diameter, the site is devoted to research and was staffed with hundreds of scientists and support personnel—before the incident. OSR used Castle One to conduct all manner of crazy experiments under the law of Mad Science. They hoped to create amazing tools, insights, and strategies that they could bring back to Earth through inapposite gates. They had only limited success. Sure, they were able to develop handheld laser pistols, exoskeletons that looked like black three-piece suits (complete with fedora and black sunglasses) that any government official would be comfortable wearing, and all types of handy items. But by and large, OSR scientists lacked the long experience of the technologists of Ruk. Almost everything created by Castle One labs had a limited shelf life on Earth after being brought through—everything, that is, but a formula meant to sustain badly wounded soldiers on the battlefield. This formula, called Second Seed, came from one of the so-called "Zed Omega" recursions and showed signs of potential efficacy on Earth.

It's not clear if OSR shut down Castle One or if a lab accident caused the zombie outbreak in the recursion. It doesn't matter anymore. All known gates were closed, and an emergency ward was raised, making it more difficult to translate into the recursion. A rescue attempt tried to save as many of the unconverted scientists as possible. In the aftermath, Castle One remains a sealed, zombie-infested

OSR, page 157

**UN marine:** level 3; Armor 2 from powered armor; long-range rifle attack inflicts 5 points of damage

**Mars trooper:** level 4; health 23; long-range flechette attack with programmable payloads inflicts acid, explosive, or fire damage

**Dynamic drone:** level 3; long-range electrical attack also weakens software of enemy suits, weapons, or systems hit, increasing difficulty of all tasks by one step per hit

Resolution, page 29

recursion littered with Mad Science gadgets, weapons, research, and artifacts, some of which were brought there through inapposite gates from other Mad Science recursions for study.

Castle One is a veritable treasure trove, but it's guarded by hard-to-kill walking dead, many of which have mutated as a result of strange energies leaking from the castle's containment facilities.

### CYBERSCAPE (MAD SCIENCE)

A grid of green lines a stark plain. On the horizon blazes a city whose architecture features lines of light of unthinkable complexity. Constellations of data wheel overhead, each pinpoint a database. Cyberscape is one of several limited worlds seeded into the Strange by stories about a virtual world created by computer connections. (In a way, the dark energy network of the Strange itself is the cyberspace that operates the universe of normal matter, so visiting Cyberscape is somewhat "meta.")

A recursor who translates into Cyberscape appears as an avatar, usually resembling a node of light trailing glyphs that tag him. The glyph tag provides at a glance his name, descriptor, and type to anyone who cares to look. The natives are similarly tagged, though they run the gamut from bots of various ability and function to the occasional avatar of a real person jacked into the consensual world to do research, affect repairs, or steal data.

In Cyberscape, explorers are essentially free-willed data packets, which gives characters the run of the system. However, because they've taken on the context of the recursion, the same intrusion countermeasures electronics (ICE) that can fry a bot or an avatar's mind are just as effective on recursors. The more intruders tamper, the greater the chance they'll call down **military-grade ICE**, which can burn out their synapses and eject them from the system. If this happens to a recursor, his body appears in its home recursion (or on Earth), in a coma that could prove permanent, or in a body that's just suffered a bout of spontaneous combustion.

**Military-grade ICE:** level 5; short-range discharge inflicts 4 points of Intellect damage that ignore Armor





*Cygnus Station relies on a technological miracle called the Entropy Engine. It allows the station to maintain both its position over the gravitational maw of the black hole and its safety from radiation within a surrounding spacetime bubble.*

A recursor might choose to visit Cyberscape after learning that an enemy organization (such as the Karum) has been experimenting with the recursion to store data, to steal a databot to use as a high-level researcher in a different recursion or context, or to look for characters from any of the fictions that seeded the place in hopes of gaining a temporary ally.

### CYGNUS STATION (MAD SCIENCE)

This moderately sized space station is caught in the extreme gravitational grip of a massive black hole known as Cygnus X-1. In addition to its crushing gravity, the black hole and its binary companion, a blue supergiant star, give off intense radiation. Cygnus Station relies

on a technological miracle called the Entropy Engine. It allows the station to maintain both its position over the gravitational maw of the black hole and its safety from radiation within a surrounding spacetime bubble. Excess energy and gravity flow around the bubble like water flows around a river rock.

As the various narratives that seeded Cygnus Station might suggest, the situation aboard the station is not copacetic. The chief scientist, Dr. Axel Streiber, experienced a serious psychotic break. He believes he's on the cusp of achieving communion with "bulk beings" that live in the black hole. When the rest of the crew tried to relieve him of duty for his crazy talk, Streiber began murdering them. By the time

**Dr. Axel Streiber:** *level 4; tasks related to science, engineering, and station operation as level 6; long-range gravity collapse inflicts 12 points of damage (usable once per minute)*



they realized that Streiber was responsible, it was too late. The last of the crew died when Streiber selectively warped the Entropy Engine and “spaghettified” the final survivors. Now he works alone except for his loyal robotic companion, *Agatha*.

Over the years, various alien explorers have found Cygnus Station and attempted to learn the secret of the Entropy Engine. Most failed, but some left behind cysts or eggs, or they entered a state of suspended hibernation in case the situation changes.

experimental rocket fuel began a chain reaction of iron nuclei disintegration. Nothing survived, though visiting recursors can find the wreckage of the instigating rocket, which lies in a ruin on the rusted plain.

Dead Earths are forlorn, empty places, devoid of life and incapable of supporting it (though many have residual atmospheres). The only reason a recursor might choose to visit one is because most have no active threats and, indeed, might serve as the ultimate getaway from everything.

**Agatha (robot):** level 6;  
Armor 3



*Desktop Terrene is almost certainly a constructed recursion, possibly created as a trap for recursors who are unaware of the danger it represents.*

Visiting recursors, who take on the context of station crew, initially find Streiber surprised and delighted by the company. However, the good doctor’s paranoia eventually takes over, sooner rather than later if he is questioned closely about what happened to the previous crew. It’s only a matter of time until he betrays his visitors, perhaps by locking them in a section of the station filled with alien cysts, by sending his robot *Agatha* to murder them in their sleep, or by arranging for them to be ejected into the black hole.

Recursors might choose to visit Cygnus Station to get an eye-popping view of an active black hole that is available in few other places. Those who know about the Entropy Engine might visit to see if they can use it in another recursion. But whether they arrive purposefully or accidentally, recursors shouldn’t overstay their welcome.

### DEAD EARTH (MAD SCIENCE)

A class of recursions known as the “Dead Earths” has a somewhat self-explanatory name. All (or almost all) life on Earth has been destroyed in a cataclysm, usually brought about by fictions that trace out the ultimate conclusions or worst-case scenarios of doomsday fears. For instance, one Dead Earth recursion is covered in red rust like dust because it burned up when a catalyst in an

### DESKTOP TERRENE (EXOTIC)

The hot light in the sky is a desk lamp beating down on the wood-veneer plain that stretches away in all directions. That plain is littered with a jumbled terrain of piled reference books, folders, pens, and used coffee mugs. The only hint of greenery is near one knife-edge cliff: a potted plant whose stalks stretch away into the haze as if toward some unattainable utopia.

A recursor who translates into this small recursion discovers that he has apparently become an inert object on a desk, having taken on the context of a pen or pencil, a pair of scissors, a pin in a corkboard, a postcard, a reference book, or something similar. Though able to sense his surroundings, the recursor discovers that his new form is inanimate, unless special abilities granted by his type are able to create some form of locomotion. The only focus offered in Desktop Terrene, is an Object Found on a Desk, confers but one ability: an increasing acceptance of one’s placid existence in the recursion.

Desktop Terrene is almost certainly a constructed recursion, possibly created as a trap for recursors who are unaware of the danger it represents. Few choose to come here of their own volition.

*The Entropy Engine of Cygnus Station might be an artifact, an imprisoned alien, a secondary wormhole, an artificially maintained tear in the fabric of the recursion (and therefore dangerous!), or something else.*



*Women in Flatland are straight lines and are required by law to sound a “peace cry” as they move in public places so they do not accidentally stab anyone to death.*

### ENTOPIA (MAD SCIENCE)

Recursors appear in Entopia on the slopes of a massive ant colony. They keep the same form they had on Earth and retain their foci—it’s just that now they’re apparently the size of ants. Most of the recursion’s insects are not sentient; they’re drones, foragers, or warriors, and they act as nature intended, which means that recursors appearing in the nest could be attacked and torn to shreds in moments. However, the queen of the ant colony is sentient and has the spark. If recursors can manage to be brought before her in a living state, they can communicate and perhaps make a deal. The queen has been visited by recursors before. Though first she dined on them, she learned not to be so hasty, and now she demands that they entertain her with stories of other places. Usually, recursors are enslaved in the colony until the day they manage to escape, though the queen feeds them the same hormone-laced food she gives her drones to maintain control over them.

A recursor might visit Entopia to gain a sample of the queen’s mind-control substance. Alternatively, they might try to convince her to translate into another recursion to help stem a magical insect plague or a technological disaster brought on by an invasive species.

*Ant queen: level 7; short-range pheromone attack creates willing servants while in the queen’s presence and for up to a day afterward*

### ESCHATOS (MAD SCIENCE AND MAGIC)

Many fictions and several scientific hypotheses include the concept of the end of the universe, the end of time, and the final dissolution of matter as the universe continues to expand. Eschatos is a recursion seeded from several of these concepts. It features a sterile, moonlike surface on which the sprawling magitech structure called the Last City rests under a sky mostly empty of stars—they’ve died and gone out. The Last City is home to around a million beings. Most of the natives are reconstituted humans, many of whom skipped millennia of existence in magical stasis; these are the so-called Sleeper clades. Other clades exist, including the Engineers, the Artists, the Hedonists, and the Gamers, and each has modified themselves in some magical or technological fashion that allows them to pursue their pastime more efficiently.

The city is overseen by a magitech entity called Eris and her many golemlike angels, each of which appears like a different extinct terrestrial animal forged of silver. Eris is responsible for keeping the Anarch Ritual active, a magitech shielding spell that retards the final dissolution of the moon and the Last City resting upon it. But each year, anarchy beyond the city increases as spacetime stretches further and further. Eris has come to realize that her struggle may eventually prove insufficient, and that even Eschatos will end.

### FLATLAND (EXOTIC)

This recursion exists in two dimensions, and recursors who translate here find that many of their physical abilities are limited or non-existent. This geometrically stratified society exists in a region simply called “The World” that has many congruences with Victorian London. The choice of gender that recursors enjoy when first translating into a new recursion is a rather important one in Flatland. Men are many-sided polygons. Women are straight lines and are required by law to sound a “peace cry” as they



*“Fast gliding along, a gloomy bark  
Her sails are full, though the wind is still,  
And there blows not a breath her sails to fill.”*

*~Thomas Moore, Written on Passing Deadman’s Island*

move in public places so they do not accidentally stab anyone to death. Circles are considered perfect, and no native has that shape. A recursor who chooses such a shape might be hailed as a messiah (and could face the ultimate penalty by officials fearful of losing their own power).

A recursor who visits Flatland might do so on behalf of the Estate, which keeps watch on the odd recursion by sending occasional patrols. They worry that stories the natives tell of higher-dimensional beings transitioning through the world might be entities from the Strange, not part of the original fiction that birthed the recursion.

### FLYING DUTCHMAN (MAGIC)

The pernicious legend of a Dutch man-of-war ship lost off the Cape of Good Hope in the 1700s spawned a recursion of the ship itself. All the original crew, guilty of an unspeakable crime, exist as phantoms, like their vessel. They are condemned to sail the oceans forever in penance. Despite being its own closed recursion, the ship sometimes manages to travel (perhaps via the Strange) into other recursions, where it appears in the depths of storm, fog, or other calamity to real vessels as an omen of their coming doom.

Captained by the specter of **Hendrick Vanderdecken**, the Flying Dutchman is loaded with great wealth, thanks to atrocities the crew committed in acts of savage piracy. Visiting recursors who do not offer the captain and crew something of real value to add to that hoard will soon find themselves victims. Recursors who successfully parley with the captain may ask a boon of him. Sometimes quickened individuals are kidnapped by the crew and brought aboard to serve as spiritual food for the starving specters.

Recursors might choose to visit the Flying Dutchman to ask a boon of the captain, such as transport to a secret land, an item from the hoard, information otherwise lost to history, or a ride to a hard-to-reach recursion or location in the Strange.

### FROG LAKE (EXOTIC)

This exceedingly dangerous recursion is quite small. It features a pane of crystal floating vertically in empty space, lit by what appear

to be distant stars, though the atmosphere is breathable and even a bit on the warm side. Recursors discover that their hands and feet are sticky, like a frog's, allowing them to adhere to the pane.

At the center of the crystal pane is a pockmark, as if the glass had been hit by a massive celestial hammer. Jagged fractures emanate from the pit and zigzag across the pane. The only native of the recursion is a **massive tree frog** that spends much of its time in the pit, except when recursors visit, at which point it emerges and attempts to feed.

Recursors generally visit Frog Lake only by accident. If they do show up, they're advised to begin a translation trance as quickly as possible before the hungry lone resident finds them.



*Nibble, nibble, little mouse,  
Who is nibbling at my house?  
~Hungry witch, Grimm's Fairy Tales*

### GINGERBREAD HOUSE (MAGIC)

This delightful enchanted dwelling, located in a discreet, out-of-the way portion of the dark woods, dates back to the early 1800s. What happens inside is never discovered beyond the Gingerbread House's sweet eaves. Accommodations span three floors, including a cellar and attic. An expansive oven on the main floor cooks anything placed within to perfect, tender sweetness with each use. Perhaps most delightfully, the entire house is built of gingerbread and garnished with candy decorations. Even the windows are made of clear sugar.

However, prospective new owners and those out for a quick snack soon discover the **hungry witch** who lives in the Gingerbread House. Despite being almost blind, she gets along well enough thanks to her magic, her flock of bone-white **bird servitors** that roost in the attic, and a small army of **gingerbread men** that lie stacked in the cellar. She prefers the taste of children, but so wondrous is her oven and so capacious is her hunger that anyone will do.

**Massive frog:** level 7, Speed defense as level 4 due to size; health 32; long-range tongue attack inflicts 3 points of damage and sucks victim into frog's belly on a second failed Speed defense roll; swallowed target suffers 5 points of damage each round (ignores Armor) until freed or the frog dies

**Captain Hendrick Vanderdecken:** level 6; insubstantial unless he chooses otherwise as an action; if destroyed, reforms within three days

**Flying Dutchman crew member:** level 3; insubstantial unless he chooses otherwise as an action; if destroyed, reforms within seven days

**Hungry witch:** level 5, deception and disguise as level 6; health 25; short-range sleep spell affects victim for one minute

**Bird servitor:** level 3, Speed defense as level 4 due to size; peck attack deals damage

**Gingerbread man:** level 4; bash attack inflicts 5 points of damage



**Advanced ape:** level 5, science-related tasks as level 6; long-range laser pistol attack inflicts 6 points of damage

**Dracula (vampire lord):** level 9; health 40; Armor 2; moves a long distance each round; claw or bite inflicts 10 points of damage; able to mesmerize victim; standard vampire weaknesses; for more details, see *The Strange Bestiary*, page 132

**Reanimated:** level 6; health 70; moves a long distance when jumping; melee attack inflicts 7 points of damage; regains health when struck by electromagnetic energy; for more details, see *The Strange Bestiary*, page 113

## GORILLA PLANET (MAD SCIENCE)

Seeded from a blend of 1950s-era science fiction and stories of apes taking over the planet, this recursion is home to advanced **apelike beings** who enjoy a level of technology much beyond that of Earth. Humans are for the most part extinct, except in one gruesome particular. When the apes assumed control, they preserved their progenitor species. They blended human DNA with genetically engineered vegetation, creating the famous Forest of Humans. It propagates like a normal forest, but it also keeps a strain of humanity alive—in a manner of speaking. The humanity in the wood is revealed only once a year, when the fruits ripen into fully functional human heads that are capable of speech until they starve and shrivel. The seeds inside this fruit propagate new human trees. However, if a human fruit is plucked at the height of freshness and given the proper treatment, it sprouts into a fully articulated normal human. The apes do this sometimes for fun, sport, or scientific inquiries.

Recursors who arrive in Gorilla Planet can choose to be an ape or a human. Hopefully, they choose ape, because otherwise they're stuck as a head on a tree. That's why recursors don't come to Gorilla Planet if they can avoid it.

## GOTHIC PLAYGROUND (MAGIC AND MAD SCIENCE)

Arriving in this recursion is to plunge into an 1890s Victorian England where **Dracula** is all too real. The vampire lord has successfully pushed his influence into London proper, though he retains ties to his castle in Transylvania as well. He poses as a visiting noble of foreign blood, one with money to invest should he find the proper opportunity. In reality, when he finds a business he likes, he enslaves the owner and adds the company to his power base. Dracula and his vampiric clan are opposed by the Van Helsing, who in desperation have turned to occult methods of their own. One of those methods has yielded a way to create a deathless soldier—a **reanimated**—unable to be turned

to vampirism, but at an ethical cost. The first reanimated, referred to as Frankenstein's Monster, seems to have secret motivations of its own.

A recursor might visit Gothic Playground to gain a sample of vampiric blood for study, to find a holy relic useful for destroying vampires in other recursions, or to discover the method of creating a reanimated.

### HAPPY ISLAND (EXOTIC)

Recursors who translate here find themselves in the body of a cloth or plastic toy that can move and talk as if alive. Within the narrative of the recursion, Happy Island is a place where action figures, dolls, and similar humanoid toys live in an eclectic society where they attempt to govern themselves. Every so often, a godlike hand reaches down from above and stages the figures like the toys they once were. But most of the time, they go about their business, which often devolves into in-fighting, violence, and factional carnage. Sometimes this violence leads to beheadings, and victorious factions parade around the island, holding up the plastic heads of their victims. Recursors who arrive with no obvious allegiance to a faction are usually marked as enemy spies and set upon until they are completely disassembled and scattered. This might be the end for them. However, given that the figures are toys, being beheaded or drawn and quartered isn't necessarily a death sentence. Someone with enough skill with hot glue, needle, and thread can bring many casualties of Happy Island back to life.

Recursors don't usually visit Happy Island on purpose because being a plastic, animate figure feels too much like being dead.

### KIPLINGVERSE (EXOTIC)

When recursors translate into this recursion, they can choose to be human or be an animal of their choice. In the Kiplingverse, bears, panthers, wolves, monkeys, pythons, birds, and other creatures go about their lives somewhat like regular animals on Earth (they belong to specific packs or tribes), but they are also part of a larger social community encompassing different species. This community is engendered by the animals' ability to converse

in a common language and their reliance on the Law of the Jungle. The Law lays down a complex set of codes providing guidance on interaction within your own pack or tribe, and with packs of other species. The Law also prohibits killing humans, except under specific and limited circumstances—circumstances that include humans suddenly appearing in the heart of the Kiplingverse, as recursors do if they choose human form. These humans are given over to the tiger *Shere Khan*, who harbors a long-running grudge against their kind.

In addition to *Shere Khan*, the powers that be include monkeys, which are essentially a gang that terrorizes every other group because they scoff at the Law of the Jungle. But the teacher of the Law—*Baloo*, a sleepy brown bear who becomes fierce if angered—strives constantly against them. In his efforts to keep the Law, *Baloo* is aided by others, including *Bagheera* the black

**Shere Khan (tiger):** level 6, Speed defense as level 4 due to limp, deception tasks as level 7; health 24; Armor 1

**Baloo (brown bear):** level 5, pleasant social interaction and law as level 6; health 20; Armor 1

**Bagheera (black panther):** level 4; health 18





*In Krayol, everyone and everything appears as two-dimensional articulated pieces of crayon-colored paper—rendered by a not particularly proficient hand—posed on a similarly two-dimensional cityscape background.*

**Kaa (python):** level 4; bite inflicts 4 points of Speed damage that ignore Armor

**Minotaur:** level 8, tasks related to solving puzzles as level 9; health 44; Armor 1

panther and Kaa the python. Baloo has the spark, and though he is not quickened, he has seen previous recursors visit. Most were killed by Shere Khan and hundreds of hungry monkeys before the visitors quite realized their danger. When possible, Baloo warns new recursors of their eventual fate if they overstay their welcome; it's the Law of the Jungle.

A recursor might visit the Kiplingverse out of nostalgia, for historical research, or perhaps in an effort to locate the trail of Mowgli, a native who was kidnapped out of the recursion by unknown people some time ago for unknown reasons.

## KRAYOL (EXOTIC)

A struggle for absolute power shakes the streets of Krayol, which would appear something like a large modern city, except for one thing. In Krayol, everyone and everything appears as two-dimensional articulated pieces of crayon-colored paper—rendered by a not particularly proficient hand—posed on a similarly two-dimensional cityscape background. The only recursor who has managed to escape describes the recursion as being a peaceful, childlike wonderland one moment, and a war-torn land of extreme brutality the next, where natives blithely shred and burn each other with psychopathic abandon. Apparently, a child named Amanda, often seen wandering the streets, might be the creator of the recursion, thanks to an unrecognized power she possesses. She fell into one of her drawings one day while coloring in her notebook. Confused and lost, Amanda makes do as best she can, but she essentially has the powers of a god in Krayol. Crossing her is not something to undertake lightly. When natives bleed, the red goes outside the lines in a most unpleasant fashion.

A recursor might translate to Krayol to attempt to rescue Amanda from her self-created prison recursion.

## LABYRINTH (MAGIC)

This elaborate structure is like a Mobius strip in that it has no exterior. Its interior is a twisted and changeable maze of meandering, many-leveled paths through stone and bronze corridors. They lead to traps, dead ends, lethal riddles, and caches of treasure from previous victims of the maze. Visitors also encounter creatures and other explorers in the maze who, depending on how long they've been lost, may have descended into hungry savagery. The most famous inhabitant of the maze is the **Minotaur**, the singular beast from which all lesser minotaur myths descend. The product of a god-cursed union between human and bull, the Minotaur is monstrous, and only the flesh of people can nourish it. It is lost in the Labyrinth, which was created to contain it. But every century, the Minotaur comes closer to finding a way out, especially since it gained the spark thanks to visiting recursors. Now it realizes that escaping isn't as simple as merely finding the correct path. It must find the correct person to help it leave its reality altogether.

The Minotaur sometimes leaves trails of silver Knossos coins (stamped with a labyrinth symbol) that lead to its lair. It does so to lure fresh explorers for food and for the possibility of finding someone who can help it escape.

A recursor might choose to visit the Labyrinth to gain a relic of ancient Crete or to converse with a being born from a myth well over 2,000 years old. However, leaving the maze isn't as easy as entering it. The difficulty of all translation tasks is increased by three steps, and all failed translation attempts return the travelers back to wherever they started in the maze.

## LOST LANDS (SUBSTANDARD PHYSICS)

This wide recursion is akin to *Mesozoica* in broad detail and was likely seeded by similar fictions. Dinosaurs from mismatched terrestrial eras, megafauna including mastodons and giant sloths, and herds of buffalo anachronistically roam the veldt-like landscape dotted with acacia groves and baobab trees. Several species of hominids eke out an existence among the giant dinosaurs, saber-toothed tigers, and rival hominid tribes.

But the Lost Lands differs from *Mesozoica* in one important detail: silver domes glint here and there under the harsh sun. Under many of these domes, bubbles of Mad Science operate and grey scientists conduct experiments. Greys are popular in many novels and movies, and one of these grey “strains” learned the trick of traversing recursions via the Strange. The greys who have invaded the Lost Lands use it as a vast laboratory to learn more about recursions. To this end, greys abduct natives from other recursions and let them loose on the veldt to see how they respond. Abductees usually hail from recursions that operate under the laws of Standard Physics, Mad Science, or Magic, which means that the equipment they carry (cell phones, laser pistols, or magic wands) quickly degrades under the law of Substandard Physics.

Some abductees are housed with a hominid tribe, harvested for tissue, or devolved and recombined with other species roaming the Lost Lands, apparently just to see what happens. Grey curiosity is insatiable and not shackled by ethics. Only one abductee ever escaped: a human named Darren White. How he managed to get away is something the greys want to know, so they scour the veldt and other recursions, looking to recapture him for further study.

The hominids native to the Lost Lands have learned to stay away from the silver domes and the occasional flitting saucer overhead. The hominid known as *Lasting Ember* recently managed to down one of the saucers by disabling its Mad Science module and sinking it in a tar pit. With that success notched into his spear, *Lasting Ember* has new aspirations, and now he seeks a method to drive away or destroy the greys.

Recursors usually don't choose to visit this place, given the Substandard Physics law that holds sway except under the domes and the limited foci available (which include Hunts Beasts and Makes Fire). However, a recursor might translate into the Lost Lands to rescue a particular abductee or to liberate the grey Mad Science exclusion bubble technology.

## MAGICIAN'S SANCTUM (MAGIC)

This recursion is a three-story home (plus a basement) constructed by a master of magic to serve as a secret lair. In addition to accommodations able to host up to seven people comfortably, including bedrooms, laundry, kitchen, and study, the sanctum has specialized facilities perfect for a practitioner.

The sanctum's library is filled with tomes, scrolls, and spellbooks about sorcery, taken from dozens of recursions that operate under the law of Magic. The collection includes several enchanted tomes taken from recursions seeded by popular fantasy and horror roleplaying games. The expansive laboratory is similarly stocked with reagents and components for researching magic and making potions, its shelves lined with specialty materials from related recursions (including one based on fictions about a school of magic for children). One locked chamber is a repository for powerful and dangerous magic items and artifacts, some kept against a specific future need, and others secured because they should never have been removed from the fiction that birthed them in the first place. The vault is also stocked with an impressive number of cyphers.

The Hall of Doors in the basement never seems to contain the same doors on subsequent visits. Some of the doors require a key, and some open to a touch. The doors lead (via translation or inapposite gate) to other recursions, including several that are known to organizations like the Estate, but also to many more that are wholly new and potentially deadly.

The original builder of the Magician's Sanctum is long gone, or at least on an extended sabbatical. Other quickened practitioners have squatted in the sanctum for various spans of time. Some return now

*Mesozoica*, page 72

**Lasting Ember:** level 5; health 23; Armor 1 (tyrannosaurus hide); long-range burning spear inflicts 4 points of damage for three rounds

**Yantra ghost:** level 5; *melee bash* inflicts damage and moves victim an immediate distance; if killed, creates a gap in the mandala pattern

**Xû:** level 7; *Armor 3; long-range disintegration ray* also inflicts damage on all creatures within immediate range of target

*Chain demon, page 211*

# THE STRANGE

and then to refer to a book in the library. However, each visit requires a delicate negotiation with Xû, the sanctum guardian. Xû, who resembles a woman made of iron, is a magically animated automaton who keeps the sanctum presentable and kills visitors she judges to be unworthy. A smart way to get on Xû's good side is to contribute a magic book, artifact, reagent, or cypher to the sanctum. In return, the gift-giver is granted permission to stay and make use of the sanctum for up to a month. If Xû is compromised, a magical failsafe summons a fleet of **chain demons** to the sanctum's defense from one of the locked doors in the basement.

A recursor might visit the sanctum for the reasons described above, to meet a practitioner from fiction who currently lives there, or maybe just to get away from it all.

## MANDALA ZERO (MAGIC)

This relatively small recursion is a collection of city skyscrapers and smaller buildings, each floating on a separate mote of crumbling earth that holds the building's framing. The buildings float through an apparent starry void. An atmosphere allows visiting recursors sufficient air, though temperatures hover just above freezing. Most of the buildings show damage as if from fire or perhaps combat: gunfire, explosions, and massive claw marks. Inside, the structures are mostly empty, though refugees from other recursions sometimes take shelter in them. The buildings slowly drift, following faintly glowing, intangible lines of light laid out where the street level would otherwise be. The lines could reasonably be mistaken for the ghosts of lost streets, but if followed inward to the city center, they're revealed as the outermost lines of an immense design similar to a mandala.

At the center, the design has physical solidity, unlike the lines of the outlying pattern, and a recursor can walk upon its surface without falling through into the void. Walking the mandala's pattern poses new challenges: if a recursor doesn't follow it toward the center, but instead steps across the lines to make shortcuts, electromagnetic discharges destructively flow through her. But even when someone follows the design perfectly,

geometric shapes—called **yantra ghosts**—rise up from the pattern and attempt to force her to turn back.

Safety lies at the center of the mandala, as does enlightenment. Rumor suggests that each visitor who makes it to the center finds something different—perhaps the answer to a question, the awakening of new abilities, or a glimpse into the far future or distant past.

## MANIFEST SILICON (MAD SCIENCE)

An explorer who translates into this limited world has the option to manifest either in flesh or in software. If she chooses the former, she finds herself on a barren plain. The bloated sun in the sky gives no warmth. Trying to suck sustenance from air with depleted oxygen becomes a task. The only item of note is a smooth, silvery dome half buried in the dust, apparently a technological remnant of a vanished humanity.

If the recursor chooses to manifest in software, she appears as a disembodied intelligence within that dome, inhabiting a computer-simulated reality of her choosing. Billions of other minds exist in the same computronium substrate; they're the natives. Each has control over a limited region of its own environment, which means that most realities are not consensual. When two or more natives meet as avatars, they do so in specially created consensus zones, most of which last for the length of a meeting. Life in Manifest Silicon is as varied as the natives who make it up. Threats are usually external, but sometimes particularly clever delinquent natives manage to get into the base code, threatening all of existence with their exploits.

A recursor might visit Manifest Silicon to win the cooperation of a sentient software agent that she could deploy in computerized systems in other recursions.

## MEINTOME (PSIONICS)

This small city in middle America is a recursion that suffers some kind of corruption in its connection to the Strange. Meintome has citizens, but only some of them persist at any given time. No one suddenly blinks out of existence—nothing so dramatic. But if a native or recursor breaks off speaking with a



*Neverland-4 is a mix of various Neverland recursions and has several natives with the spark and even a few quickened individuals, including the fairy Tinker Bell and Captain Hook.*

friend, goes elsewhere to grab a cup of coffee, and then returns, it's fifty-fifty whether the friend is still there. Most natives don't seem to notice this irregularity. If Jamala doesn't see Reginald on Monday, she probably sees him on Wednesday, and things move on. However, a few citizens have become wise to the phenomenon, gaining the spark after a visiting recursor called attention to the odd goings-on.

The head of Meintome, Mayor Valles, has the power to levy harsh punishments on the citizens of the recursion even for minor offenses, including jaywalking, littering, and use of improper grammar and punctuation. Those penalties have recently expanded to include questioning the status quo, especially in regard to the periodic disappearances. Those charged and found guilty are usually never seen again, as if the corruption responsible for the effect swallowed them completely.

A recursor might visit Meintome to find a psionic artifact able to selectively remove or manifest targets from the timestream—if such a thing actually exists.

### MOONBASE TRANQUILITY (STANDARD PHYSICS)

This recursion has the trappings of Mad Science, but in fact, it's seeded from hard science fiction novels, movies, hopes, and dreams about creating a base on the moon. A series of domes and tunnels, Moonbase Tranquility is operated by robots of limited scope and ability, though they're proficient in their particular specialties. One of those specialties is the collection of helium-3 from the moon's surface. An unproven theory on Earth is a fact in Moonbase Tranquility: over billions of years, solar wind from the sun embedded a layer of helium-3 in the moon's regolith. Autonomous drones crisscross the moon (or, at least, the limited portion of it that makes up the recursion) mining the isotope, and huge magnetic helium-3 tanks are stored near the base.

Someone from an Earth organization learned of the presence of vast amounts of helium-3 in a certain hard-to-reach secret facility. Two rival groups with limited access to recursors concurrently sent translation teams to Moonbase Tranquility to determine if they could somehow transport the material back to Earth. In the fight that followed, the robotic caretakers of the base were radicalized and reprogrammed themselves to kill all humans on sight. Now the moonbase is a battlefield with three factions: two rival human groups and one group of killer robots that continually modify themselves to improve their odds of slaughtering humans. Given that the killer robots of Moonbase Tranquility operate under the law of Standard Physics, it's lucky that this recursion has no inapposite gate to Earth—yet.

A recursor might visit Moonbase Tranquility to gain technology or high-tech materials that would function under the law of Standard Physics that operates on Earth.

### NEVERLAND-4 (MAGIC)

A handful of recursions are based on the story of Peter Pan. Some are more true to the original works, and others incorporate non-canon elements from hundreds of later adaptations. Neverland-4 is a mix of various Neverland recursions and has several natives with the spark and even a few quickened individuals, including the fairy Tinker Bell and Captain Hook. Peter Pan was also quickened, but he went missing while exploring recursions far afield from the original narrative that birthed him. In his absence and presumed death, Tinker Bell leads a coalition of fairies, birds, and other residents of the island against Captain Hook and the surviving Lost Boys who joined Hook's crew after Peter "abandoned" them. Fighting is fierce and casualties are common, but the recursion has a way of birthing new recruits on either side of the conflict; Tinker Bell calls them brave volunteers, and Hook calls them fodder.

**Killer robot:** level 2; Armor 2; electrode touch inflicts 5 points of damage

**Killer robot, v2.0:** level 5; Armor 3; electrode touch or short-range electrode dart inflicts 8 points of damage

**Tinker Bell:** level 6, Speed defense as level 8 due to tiny size; flies a long distance each round; creates minor magic effects with fairy dust; has two random cyphers

**Captain Hook:** level 6; health 30; Armor 1; long-range magic flintlock attack inflicts damage on two targets as one action; has two random cyphers

*On Earth, helium-3 is of interest because of its potential use in nuclear weapons research and nuclear fusion.*

Recent escalations include Captain Hook's trip to an alternate Neverland. He returned with another version of himself, allowing him to be in two places at once. Meanwhile, Tinker Bell made an inapposite connection to a different recursion that operates under the law of Magic and returned with a sword of immense power. If she names a victim and tosses the sword in the air, it finds that victim, wherever he might be in the recursion, and kills him. Of course, she hasn't yet used the sword, because a Lost Boy would likely grab the blade and toss it back her way. Instead, she uses the threat of the sword (and the subsequent mutually assured destruction) as a tool of diplomacy.

## NEW KINGDOM (MAGIC)

Seeded from the myths of ancient Egypt commingled with modern stories of that period, the New Kingdom is a recursion located along an alternate Nile where pharaohs yet rule the land, and gods such as Anubis, Isis, Nephthys, Osiris, Ra, and Tefnut are revered, as is the Pharaoh himself. Great pyramids of

previous pharaohs are scattered about the land's edges, and each contains elaborate traps and vicious guardians protecting the body and grave goods of the former rulers, ensuring their place in the afterlife. The center of the realm is the vital Nile, which provides life, water, fish, and trade.

The New Kingdom is especially dangerous to visit. Recursors, regardless of their translation choices, often arrive in bodies that set them apart from regular natives. Such was the curse of Anubis, pronounced to protect his people. Thus, a recursor might find herself with the pale skin of an outlander, a disfigured face, and a tail, wings, horns, or other deformity that makes the average Egyptian know at a glance that she is not to be trusted, and is likely interested only in stealing the treasure of the pharaohs.

As it happens, recursion miners do sometimes visit the New Kingdom with the express hope of stealing the treasure of the pharaohs, so the natives' fear is not unwarranted.



## NIGHT'S EDGE (STANDARD PHYSICS)

What immediately distinguishes this recursion from Earth is that its only accessible locations are a handful of home interiors, offices, a doctor's office, and a senator's office. There's nothing else; when someone looks out a window, it is either night or the glass is too glazed to see anything.

The number of natives is likewise limited. Inhabitants include members of the Porter family, the Crenshaws, the Fischers, the Jones-Newmans, and a few others. The most active natives are the Crenshaws, a working-class family, and the Porters, a wealthy family with an uncle in politics (Senator Edward Porter). And in Night's Edge, relationships are usually a tangled, dramatic mess. A couple may love each other fiercely for a few months, only to grow to despise each other when one discovers the infidelity (apparent or actual) of the other. Any given day includes lies, forgiveness, trust, and betrayal.

In addition to Senator Edward Porter (who's always scheming to increase his political power), Night's Edge includes Edward's estranged wife Janice (a brain surgeon with a dark secret), their daughter Tiffany (who is currently enjoying a secret fling with one of the Crenshaw twins), Mark Crenshaw (a carpenter with aspirations for more), his loving wife Alice (a waitress at Sam's Diner), and their children, the twins Alex and Alisha (high school students who get up to entirely too much trouble).

Recursors who stumble into Night's Edge are immediately sized up by whatever native happens to be around and incorporated into whatever drama is currently unfolding. For example, if recursors translate into Edward Porter's office, the senator might treat them as potential wealthy campaign donors, as an astroturfing committee sent by his political rivals, or as the detectives he hired to look in on his estranged wife.

It's best not to enter Night's Edge, because the longer a recursor stays, the more likely she will become entangled with the natives and become unwilling to leave. In Night's Edge, recursors can actually *lose* the spark. That's what happened to Sam Johnson, owner of the town diner.

## PANOPTICON (MAD SCIENCE)

This high-tech city exists beneath a climate-controlled dome on a world supposedly ruined by overpopulation. Under the dome, citizens live under direct and constant scrutiny by the State. They must comply with strict schedules, curfews, strip searches on command, and other indignities. Only approved entertainments are allowed, which means that most books, plays, movies, poems, and other arts—whether physical or electronic—are outlawed. Those who are deemed to be dissidents are disappeared and rendered to Truthdroids well versed in torturing a confession of guilt from anyone, regardless of actual seditious activity. Citizens exist within well-defined castes that determine status, rations, access to entertainment, and other benefits. The lowest-caste citizens have virtually no rights, but even those of the highest caste live in constant anxiety because the State isn't stable.

The State is actually a schizophrenic mind made up of seven founding citizens whose brains are frozen in liquid nitrogen and linked via a computer-assisted network to drones, surveillance cameras, and the many complex systems that keep Panopticon a functioning artificial environment. The State has grown increasingly unstable over the years, fearing that the citizens plot against it. Of course, the harsher the State's policies become through fear of revolution, the more it engenders those very same feelings among those it rules.

Arriving recursors appear in the correct context, which means they don't immediately raise warning flags with the State's monitoring equipment. However, given that complex algorithms track a citizen's normal activities against abnormal ones, it probably isn't long before intruders are noticed and flagged for questioning. Will the PCs be contacted by rogue revolutionary elements before the State's **drones** (or deputized citizen police) find them?

## PARADISO (SUBSTANDARD PHYSICS)

Paradiso is one of several small, constructed recursions seeded by the Implausible Geographical Society. It is constructed like a small resort island, featuring balmy seas, sandy

**State drone:** level 5; *Armor 2; long-range laser attack; short-range immobilizing net attack*



*Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can develop in survivors of long-term horrific situations. Symptoms include constant anxiety, anger, and afflicting visions of the trauma(s) that make it impossible for the victim to live a normal life.*

beaches, and amazing weather. Paradiso was conceived of as a place where explorers of the society who had seen and experienced too much—who had, in fact, contracted various forms of PTSD—could convalesce for extended periods of time in a stress-free environment. The idea of something threatening, dangerous, or disruptive appearing in Paradiso is anathema to the membership, even though most hope they never end up spending too much time there. In addition to explorers, Paradiso also welcomes natives of recursions with the spark who need asylum or who wish to escape the narrative of the limited world of their birth. Thus, the island hosts more than one “fictional” character who is supposedly dead and gone but is instead enjoying mai tais on the beach and reading literature shipped in from Earth.

A recursor who is associated with the IGS probably visits Paradiso to recuperate and rest. Those not associated with the society are likely to find the recursion only if brought there.

## **PELLUCIDAR (MAD SCIENCE AND PSIONICS)**

Created directly from fictional leakage, Pellucidar continues to exist as a recursion. The upper mantle and crust of Earth form a shell containing Pellucidar, a massive region in the planet’s hollow center. The interior world mirrors the exterior in some ways, though in reverse: the surface world’s oceans are Pellucidar’s land masses, and its continents are Pellucidar’s seas. Illumination is provided by a tiny sun hovering in the exact center of the hollow world. A moon of this tiny sun (though a moon that doesn’t move) provides the one area of perpetual night in Pellucidar, known as the Land of Awful Shadow. The recursion’s true dimensions are much smaller than looking around might suggest, though the realm grows more developed each year as Implausible Geographical Society explorers continue to press the boundaries. So far they’ve found kingdoms of primitive peoples, prehistoric creatures, and dinosaurs. They’ve also found the Mahars, a dinosaurlike species that lives



*Some groups of soon-to-be posthumans modified themselves to live in the sea without the anxiety and stress that intelligence can bring, creating the so-called “dolphinid” clade.*

in cities and possesses mental abilities. Who knows what additional oddities can be found if exploration continues?

A recursor might visit Pellucidar to learn what lies in the Land of Awful Shadow.

### PLAGUE KINGDOM (MAGIC)

A monumentally devastating influenza plague killed off almost everyone in the modern world. Survivors are scarce—perhaps only one in a few thousand, if that. Some of those that remain have pulled together in a small United Kingdom town they’ve renamed Hope. There, they try to move forward, with some initial success. However, they are opposed by survivors who give allegiance to a magical entity responsible for the Plague: **Pestilence**, one of the supposed Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Pestilence rages, because he managed to evolve a strain of humanity that is immune to his powers of disease. But rather than give up, he uses survivors who are easily controlled by lust and greed to do his bidding. Pestilence’s ultimate goal is to kill about 20 percent of the population. By doing so, he will open a doorway into the recursion through which his compatriot, Death, can enter and finish the job in grand style.

Recursors who translate into the Plague Kingdom find themselves on the outskirts of Hope. Hope natives are always overjoyed to find new survivors; however, nearly every recursor who visits comes down with a severe cold within a day of arrival. Unless they can escape the Plague Kingdom within another day or less, they almost certainly die of the same plague that, according to the narrative of the recursion, killed off most of the natives.

Pestilence has become aware of the existence of recursors. He thinks they might be angels of the enemy come to stand in the way of the promised apocalypse. But he wonders why all these “angels” seem so susceptible to his power.

OSR knows of the Plague Kingdom and is interested in collecting a sample of the disease to study. Attempting to stop the organization from doing this is probably the only reason a sane recursor would choose to visit the Plague Kingdom.

### POSTHUMAN APOCALYPSE (MAD SCIENCE)

Several recursions were seeded by fictions about a future shattered by humans who modified their minds and bodies too far, too fast. Specific details vary, but such recursions—the Posthuman Apocalypses—are similar in broad strokes. Life extension, intelligence enhancement, and nerve integration with nanomachines were only the beginning. Some groups of soon-to-be posthumans modified themselves to live in the sea without the anxiety and stress that intelligence can bring, creating the so-called “dolphinid” clade. Other clades made themselves into beings near enough to gods that arriving recursors are unlikely to know the difference. Unfortunately, these posthumans kept many of their human foibles as they bootstrapped themselves to become higher beings, and war briefly lit heaven. The recursion is partly blasted from this war, though habitable areas remain. Of the **posthumans**, only a few survive, and they spend most of their existence in slow-time aboard streaking orbital habitats, waiting for something interesting to happen—which might be the arrival of exploring recursors. For all their wizardry, posthumans would consider it an exciting new frontier to gain the abilities of a recursor, one way or another.

A recursor might visit one of these apocalypse recursions to gain access to Mad Science relics left behind by warring posthumans, or to attempt to stop a posthuman who is well on her way to becoming quickened.

**Pestilence:** level 8; touch inflicts level 8 influenza (moves the victim one step down the damage track each day unless cured); regains 4 points of health each round

**Dolphinid:** level 5; tasks related to cognition and communication as level 1

**Posthuman:** level 9; health 99; Armor 5; can duplicate the ability of any cypher of up to level 5; for more details, see *The Strange Bestiary*, page 107

## QOPH (MAD SCIENCE)

This recursion exists mostly underwater and is inhabited by a species of intelligent octopi, as well as a normal range of sea life. These octopus sapiens refer to themselves as “the people” and use their skin chromatophores to rapidly flash messages to one another. A recursor who translates in as an octopus sapien can speak the same way, but one who arrives as a normal human will find it difficult to communicate. Recursors who become octopus sapiens find it relatively easy to take up a position within the egalitarian society the creatures enjoy. However, recursors who choose to remain human are immediately taken to special holding chambers (with air) for

**Octopus sapien in exosuit:** level 4; Armor 3; moves a short distance each round on land; long-range energy attack inflicts 5 points of damage



research and experimentation. Most octopus sapiens here view humans as pernicious vermin, made all the more dangerous because they have achieved self-awareness. Qophan sympathy for a human is vanishingly rare.

The octopi live in drowned cities of living coral that contain egg hatcheries, larvae playgrounds, plankton farms, and ink art academies, as well as air-filled chambers for interrogating humans, research labs for creating new forms of Mad Science technology that will work both above and below the water’s surface, and ongoing research in land-walker technology. The octopus sapiens have already developed personal **exosuits** that allow them to move on land for a limited time without harm. However, research continues on a massive mechanical land-walker that can hold a small city of exosuit-wearing octopi for a full invasion of the land. Using high-energy weapons, the invaders might finally eradicate the humans that pollute the sea with their garbage, spent fertilizer, and pharmaceuticals.

Recursors who visit Qoph usually do so accidentally while aiming for a different recursion entirely.

## RING (MAD SCIENCE)

This “limited” world is actually immense, as it is a massive ring around a sun, seeded by novels, settings, and games about similar structures. Natives live on the inner ring surface in the artificial gravity created by the spinning artifact. The surface area of the ring, if it existed in the universe of normal matter, would equal the combined surface area of hundreds of worlds, but the actual area of the recursion is far smaller, centered on just a few locations. The Ring builders are superintelligent, supertough creatures who might be distant ancestors of humanity—within the context of the recursion, anyway. The aliens guard their relic against interlopers from within the Ring and from recursors who pop in for a visit. Sometimes the aliens appear humanoid, and other times they send android proxies to deal with intruders.

A recursor might choose to visit the Ring to make use of the advanced superscience gadgets available there, which range from



*The nightmare corpse-city of R'lyeh . . . was built in measureless eons behind history by the vast, loathsome shapes that seeped down from the dark stars. There lay great Cthulhu and his hordes, hidden in green slimy vaults."*

*~H. P. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu"*

handheld weapons of immense power to devices designed to stimulate pure pleasure in a hominid brain.

### RIVERSIDE (SUBSTANDARD PHYSICS)

In this land ruled by a mighty river piercing a dangerous jungle, bows, clubs, and spears are the height of traditional technology, though the ancient lore kept by the inhabitants is deep and amazingly effective. The river is filled with vicious flesh-eating fish and dreadful parasites, and the jungle is a false paradise of poisonous snakes, malarial mosquitoes, toxic plants, and cannibalistic **white apes**. On first glance, a recursor might discount the inhabitants as savages and Riverside itself as a deathtrap. While that's true for the uninitiated recursor, as evidenced by the many spectacular deaths of visitors, the inhabitants live in harmony with their environment. They don't need modern medicine when they know which plant to use to cure nearly any ailment. They don't need intensive animal husbandry or agriculture because they know the sounds to make to lure fish to the surface for an easy catch, or where to look for tubers, berries, and fruits. In fact, the life of a native is mostly serene, filled with music and calming rituals, feasts, and pleasures of every kind. Equality is a given, and except for the occasional white ape raid—and recursor visits that usually end in a funeral ceremony for a visitor who wouldn't listen to sage advice—life is good.

A recursor might visit Riverside to have the natives teach her new and amazing pharmaceutical uses for any number of the recursion's tropical plants.

### R'LYEH (MAGIC AND MAD SCIENCE)

R'lyeh is a city of alien construction whose mind-bendingly bizarre architecture is impossible to achieve in worlds that operate solely under the law of Standard Physics. The city is usually drowned at the bottom of the ocean, but sometimes it rises partly to the surface, where hapless sailors (and recursors) might stumble upon its "coast-line of mingled mud, ooze, and weedy Cyclopean masonry" that, by itself, is enough to send terror sleeting through human minds. Recursors, who gain a basic understanding of the recursion into which they translate, viscerally recognize the place as "the nightmare corpse-city of

**White ape:** level 6, Speed defense as level 5; health 33; two melee attacks as one action





*Silverwood sees its share of nameless bandits, US Marshals, American Indians, cowboys, and similar characters who'd be right at home in a western. It's also occasionally visited by specific fictional characters from well-known westerns.*

**Cthulhu:** level 10; mere existence is anathema to human sanity



*Shoggoth, page 289*

**Deep one:** level 4; health 15; Armor 2; claw attack inflicts 5 points of damage; for more details, see *The Strange Bestiary, page 39*

R'lyeh . . . loathsomely redolent of spheres and dimensions apart” from any other limited world seeded into the Strange. In fact, many organizations aware of the dark energy network keep a list of banned recursions their members are told never to visit, lest their interference give the spark (or worse) to one of the inhabitants. R'lyeh is one such recursion, because in its deepest vaults, Cthulhu sleeps, but according to the narrative will eventually return.

Cthulhu, were he to wake, would tower well over 100 feet (30 m). Writhing lengths of tentacle depend from his horrific face, while his somewhat humanoid body is drenched in slime. Immense leathery wings allow him maneuverability in both air and water. Cthulhu is a god himself, but he is also a high priest of still greater entities of horror.

Various lesser creatures also sleep with Cthulhu but are not as somnolent as their lord. These include *shoggoths*, *deep ones*, and other monsters trapped in R'lyeh. Even in their sleep, they can be heard to repeat the phrase “*Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn*” (“In his house at R'lyeh, dead Cthulhu waits dreaming”).

Recursors should stay away from R'lyeh. Those who ignore this travel ban face stiff sanctions afterward, if they are ever found out. For example, the Quiet Cabal kills agents who visit the recursion.

## SILVERWOOD (STANDARD PHYSICS)

As described by one Estate operative, Silverwood is where westerns go to die. Seeded by countless books and TV shows, Silverwood is located in a town of the same name in the American Old West, somewhere in the last half of the nineteenth century. Silverwood sees its share of nameless bandits, US Marshals, American Indians, cowboys, and similar characters who'd be right at home in a western. It's also occasionally visited by specific fictional characters from well-known westerns. When these individuals arrive, it's often on a mission of vengeance, even if the individual is a “lawman” also serving the interests of the mostly absent government.

Silverwood hosts a few saloons. The busiest is the Second Chance, where a cowpoke can find firewater, a game of chance, sensual diversions in the upstairs rooms, or, as often as not, a gunfight. Recursors new to Silverwood who show up at the Second Chance are



recognized as strangers. To demonstrate their worth, or “for their own good,” they might be forced, at gunpoint, to swallow a fifth of 100-proof rye whiskey.

A perennial threat in Silverwood is the **Montgomery Gang**, whose members routinely ride into town, shoot up the place, and make off with valuables and services without paying. They also usually leave a few corpses in their wake. At least one native gained the spark after an altercation with the Montgomery Gang. Seeking a way to fight back, **Lucy Shattuck** used peyote to unlock corners of her mind few in Silverwood knew existed, and she became quickened. Now she hunts down criminals in Silverwood and other recursions and brings them to vigilante justice, six-shooter style.

A recursor might visit Silverwood to experience romantic notions of the American West; however, he had better be quick on the draw.

### STRAWBERRY FAYRE (MAGIC)

This idyllic countryside contains farms, pastures, fields, and people, but recursors find it difficult to become a human upon arrival. Instead, they become sentient, talking rabbits living in one of a few colonies in the area. The

main colony, Strawberry Fayre, is a fairly happy community led by Grandmother Rabbit, who tells many tales of wonder at night in the warm embrace of the burrow. By day, rabbits creep forth and graze on a strawberry field gone to seed near an abandoned farm. Unfortunately for everyone in the recursion, a rival colony across the valley was recently founded by a crazy rabbit with strange abilities. The rival leader is a recursor originally native to the **Eleventh Reich** who brought his insane agenda to Strawberry Fayre. If not stopped, horrors will eventually unfold here.

Recursors might visit Strawberry Fayre because they've been tracking quickened natives of Nazi-themed recursions and stamping them out like the infection they are.

### SUNSPOT MEADOWS (STANDARD PHYSICS)

Anyone who arrives in this recursion by inapposite travel would instantly burn up in the heat. The temperature reaches 10,000 degrees F (5,500 C) because the recursion is seeded from stories of sentient creatures in the photosphere (the visible outer layer of the sun) that feed on magnetic field lines, especially those around sunspots. Recursors who arrive via translation find themselves in the form

#### Montgomery Gang bandit:

*level 3; short-range pistol attack inflicts 4 points of damage; usually astride a horse that moves a long distance each round*

**Lucy Shattuck:** *level 5; health 22; two long-range pistol attacks each inflict 6 points of damage as one action; carries a few random cyphers*

*Eleventh Reich, page 55*





*If by your art, my dearest father, you have  
Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.  
The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch,  
But that the sea, mounting to the welkin's cheek,  
Dashes the fire out.*

~Miranda,  
in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

*Inks Spells on Skin,  
page 200*



*Age of Myth, page 162*

**Prospero:** level 6,  
persuasion tasks as level 7;  
Armor 3 from a spell; long-  
range spell attack inflicts  
Intellect damage (ignores  
Armor)

**Ariel:** level 7; can be  
harmed only by magic;  
1-mile-range stormsurge  
attack (usable once per  
minute) inflicts 10 points of  
damage on the target and  
all creatures within short  
range

**Caliban:** level 5; health 28;  
Armor 3 from thick skin;  
knife attack inflicts 6 points  
of damage; carries two  
random cyphers

of a magnetovore—a creature composed of magnetic field lines able to eat radiation and gain sustenance from stripped electrons and other high-energy particles. Natives are sentient and can gather in vast complexes to calculate, interact, and come to consensus. Generally, existence is idyllic, as a magnetovore's life mostly consists of flying across a warm meadow eating at mana fountains as they arise and move. In fact, it's so idyllic that the few recursors who visit Sunspot Meadows find it difficult to leave such a bountiful utopia. However, threats do exist, including much larger predators, sunspot instability, and the potential supernova of a nearby binary star that's been siphoning off solar atmosphere from the magnetovore primary star.

A recursor might visit Sunspot Meadows to experience life as a radically different kind of creature, or to gain a deeper appreciation of and insight into solar magnetohydrodynamics.

### SYCORAX ISLAND (MAGIC)

Sycorax Island is named after the sorceress who once lived on it. Even after her death, the island remains home to several magical creatures and spirits previously enslaved by the sorceress. Some are yet bound by the instructions she left before dying, but others answer to a new master: **Prospero** the magician, as mighty in word as in magic. Prospero lives with his daughter **Miranda**. He also commands the elemental powers of **Ariel**, a spirit of wind and water. Father and daughter are served by **Caliban**, the deformed offspring

of **Sycorax**. Caliban would prefer nothing less than to eat the intestines of the father and despoil the daughter. Rather than kill him outright, Prospero keeps Caliban as a slave.

Of everyone on the island, only Caliban has the spark. He knows that he lives in a limited universe, and he seeks a means of escape in books of magic left by his mother and in Prospero's library. He's collected a stash of cyphers that washed up on the shore and experiments with them carefully, trying to unlock their secrets.

To keep himself and his daughter fed, Prospero occasionally commands Ariel to call up a tempest on the sea to draw mariners to wreck upon the isle. Then Prospero, Caliban, and other spirits under the magician's power sift through the detritus for foodstuffs, items of interest, and survivors. If recursors familiar with the fiction that birthed the island are treated roughly and protest to Prospero that he is no villain, he agrees in a most solicitous and convincing manner, which makes it all the easier for Caliban to cut the survivor's throat.

A recursor might choose to visit Sycorax Island to learn additional spells for a focus like *Inks Spells on Skin*.

### TELLURIA (PSIONICS)

The following history of the planet Telluria never actually happened, but as was true for Ardeyn's *Age of Myth*, it retroactively crystallized a thousand years into the past. That's why historical documents, if found, indicate that humans of Telluria originally colonized the planet. But that happened so long ago that they've forgotten the world isn't their original home. Rather than the technological society one might expect of the descendants of spacefarers, Telluria is feudal. Not long after planetfall, an unexplained psychic disease ripped through the population. It killed many elders, rendered many others into high-functioning "special needs" people, and robbed the colony of institutional knowledge. The same plague, if that's what it was, woke psychic abilities in the children.

Over the generations, those psychic abilities formed the basis of noble families—the First Families—known for a particular talent that runs true in descendants. The families include

the Fane family (mind reading), the Anson family (mind influence), the Tang family (telekinesis), the Savile family (pyrokinesis), the Blackwood family (healing), and several others. Many of the First Families keep elaborate manors in the city-state of Noel under the rule of King Savile XV, but others stay in their keeps and claimed lands in distant parts of Telluria with their retainers and servants.

The Zhou family rose to early prominence on the strength of its psychic ability (matter manipulation), but its members were hunted to extinction by the other families several hundred years ago. At least, that's what everyone thought, until rumors of a Zhou heir rising in the west, wielding the power of genesis itself in vengeful hands, began trickling into Noel.

A recursor might visit Telluria to make use of any number of potent psionic artifacts.

### THEATER OF WAR (STANDARD PHYSICS)

World War II yet rages here. Tanks assail the borders, bombs rain down on London in blitzkrieg attacks, V-2 missiles gouge fiery lines across the sky, and soldiers take, lose, and retake strategic positions across the Theater of War (which is mostly central Europe).

Visiting recursors first appear in London, and their arrival is usually enough to trigger another bombing raid. Recursors had better stay calm and be light on their feet so they can make it to the nearest bomb shelter, or their journey into "history" will likely be short-lived.

The Theater of War has a way of drawing recursors of failed translation attempts. Moreover, some physical relics of World War II that survive on Earth sometimes open brief translation gates that trap unwitting victims, usually those who are not quickened. This leads to the main reason recursors might choose to visit the Theater of War: to rescue those who have become trapped in the "past."

### URBAN WIZARDRY (MAGIC)

At first glance, this recursion seems like modern-day Earth. But peel back the facade just a bit, and revealed is a world where magic and creatures of the night are all too real. Vampires and werewolves exist in their nests and packs, as do fae creatures, demons, and humans who have drunk too deeply of magic and become evil wizards. Opposing these horrors and their twisted plots are other humans who also perform magic as part of a group known as the Pale Conclave. Its mission is essentially to keep a lid on magic, withholding knowledge of its existence from regular people for their safety and sanity. Visiting recursors are likely to be considered wizards, which can lead to mistrust since they are not part of any organization, fair or foul. Eventually, this could lead to being hunted by wizards of the Pale Conclave and by evil wizards and creatures of the night who want the recursors' strange sorceries and access to new "dimensions."

Several recursions akin to Urban Wizardry exist, seeded by the plethora of urban fantasies in novels, TV, and movies. Recursors often refer to them as belonging to the class of "Urban Fantastic" recursions.

A recursor might visit Urban Wizardry to make use of potent magic artifacts, or because a threat in some other recursion or on Earth has been traced back to a quickened fiction-born menace.

### WAR OF THE WORLDS (MAD SCIENCE)

An explorer who stumbles into this recursion discovers a war-torn Earthlike place. Alien tripod walkers tower over most buildings, unleashing rays of frightening heat able to devastate the best that twentieth-century science can throw at them. The walkers hail from Mars, where intelligences greater than human slowly and surely drew their

**Martian tripod walker:**  
level 8; health 40; Armor 4; moves a long distance each round; heat ray inflicts 12 points of damage to a range of 3 miles (5 km)



*The walkers lumbering across the War of the Worlds are just one part of a multipronged attack force hailing from Mars, where intelligences greater than human slowly and surely drew their plans of invasion.*

**Body-stealing pod:** level 4; immediate-range tendril attack puts victim in coma, allowing replication if not disturbed

plans of invasion. The walkers lumbering across the War of the Worlds are just one part of a multipronged attack; the Martians work diligently on additional fronts to bring the Earth under their sway. For example, they're working on plans to convert Earth's environment to be more like Mars, on better procedures for turning captive humans into food and slaves, and on better ways to adapt their own physiology to the surprisingly robust community of bacteria and viruses that even the least organism on Earth contains.

But the world fights on. Military units, scientists in secret bases, and ragtag teams of surviving townsfolk find ways to muck up the Martian war machine, often with limited success. However, any success is worth celebrating when failure likely means the eradication of humanity. A promising research direction is the intensification of the bacterial and viral strains that already seem antithetical to Martian physiology, especially given that at one point, everyone thought the offensive had been stymied by the common cold. Sadly, that episode was only a brief reprieve, lasting until the next wave of Martians landed. But as the Earthlings say in the face of this crushing development, "Keep calm and culture your microbiome."

Recursors might visit the War of the Worlds to study how Martians scrounge regular Earth technology, such as vacuum cleaners, toasters, TVs, and radios, to create immensely advanced technology, such as weapons, communication systems, and make-do survival suits for Martians caught out of their walkers.

## WRECKED STARSHIP (MAD SCIENCE)

Floating at zero G somewhere in space is a recursion seeded from stories of the same ignominious fate visited upon so many fictional craft. The wrecked starship is mostly open to vacuum, having been holed by some sort of explosion. Recursors who translate into the recursion take on its context, and thus are usually lucky enough to appear wearing a sophisticated space suit. But sometimes they appear in the vacuum without protection and have about thirty seconds (five rounds) to find a suit, an escape pod with power, or some other salvation. Otherwise, they become just

more bodies that float in frozen isolation about the craft, joining the original crew and any previous visitors who met the same fate.

The starship is powered down and dead, but it remains contaminated by encounters with dangerous alien life. These might include **body-stealing pods** in the terrarium, **flesh-dissolving nanobots** in the engineering section, or a **negative-energy entity** in the black-hole drive. The ship could also have an insane original crew member or two in cryosleep who will turn homicidal if thawed and given the chance.

Salvagers willing to brave these hazards can find blasters and phasers, antimatter fuel frozen in handy crystals, various cyphers, a working holodeck, perhaps a crew member in cryosleep who isn't insane, and the ultimate prize: the ship itself. If the vessel can be purged of its hazards and powered up, it might be capable of making one or two inapposite jumps before finally giving up the ghost.





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CHAPTER 7

# CHARACTER OPTIONS



*“It’s lucky that we in the Implausible Geographical Society pride ourselves on being open-minded, because we’ve found quite a few individuals inhabiting the Shoals of Earth that would shock those with a more conventional bent. But then again, explorers are not cut from average cloth, but instead are forged from the souls of those who delight in the new, the unexpected, and the strange.”*

*~Sir Raymond Creswicke,  
in a letter to his paramour Irene located in the constructed recursion of Paradiso*

*Microcosmica, page 78*

New recursions mean new options for characters who translate into them, as they take on the context of their destination. Usually, this includes new foci to choose from.

Some of the new foci in this section, such as Trick-or-Treats or Becomes Bacterial, are particularly appropriate for characters who translate into the recursions in *Worlds Numberless and Strange*. Others, such as Inks Spells on Skin, Follows the Code of Bushido, and Masters Foot and Fist, have a wider application, and a GM could offer them in recursions other than the ones presented in this book.



## BECOMES BACTERIAL

You are invested with the amazing abilities of a bacterium, which allows you to withstand harsh environments that would kill a normal human outright. When most recursors visit *Microcosmica*, for example, they must wear protective suits to explore the vast biological expanse, or they’ll suffocate and die almost immediately. Not you. You can move about the recursion freely and without concern. As your ease with your abilities grows, you gain additional bacterial options, including the ability to sense your environment chemically, go into stasis indefinitely, and attack others with lethal excretions.

You look a bit odd to normal humans. Your skin is slightly translucent with a greenish, gel-like color. Your eyes are white with biofilm, and you have no ears. Regardless of the environment, you don’t need to cover yourself in protective gear, so you tend to go minimally clothed.

Anyone who needs to survive in harsh environments for extended periods should

### Becomes Bacterial

**GM Intrusions:** *You inadvertently release a dangerously noxious odor. White blood cells attack you as an invading organism. If you become incapacitated, you transform into a mucous blob until you are no longer incapacitated. You unexpectedly divide asexually.*

●●●

### NEW FOCI

- Becomes Bacterial
- Follows the Code of Bushido
- Haunts the Rooftops
- Inks Spells on Skin
- Masters Foot and Fist
- Names
- Quells Undead
- Trick-or-Treats

●●●

consider this focus, though vectors are most commonly drawn to it since some of the abilities require an investment of Might.

**Connection:** If this is your starting focus, choose one of the following connections.

1. Pick one other player character. She gave you the injection that made you this way.
2. Pick one other PC. You saved that character's life when his equipment failed on a survey mission.
3. Pick one other PC. When she first saw you, she took you for a dangerous native creature and tried to kill you.
4. Pick one other PC. He throws off your chemokinetic sense. When he's next to you, you can't use chemokinesis at all.

**Equipment:** Silvery shorts and tunic, one weapon of your choice, a radio communicator, an inertial tracker and compass, and \$100.

**Minor Effect Suggestion:** You regain 1 point lost to damage.

**Major Effect Suggestion:** You regain 3 points lost to damage.

**Tier 1: Withstand Harsh Environment.** Your body adapts to your environment, allowing you to function in locations normally lethal to humans. You can operate underwater (even at great pressure), in poisonous gas, in the vacuum of space, in arctic conditions, and in oven-hot conditions. This protection is suited to passive environmental conditions. Against active damaging effects (such as attacks using fire, cold, poison, or pressure) or extreme environmental effects (such as acid, superheated plasma, and similar conditions), you gain +1 to Armor. Enabler.

**Native Bacterium.** If you would otherwise be killed, you instead revert to a formless, mindless bacterium, and wander off to pursue new goals and adventures finding food and replicating. Enabler.

**Tier 2: Chemokinesis.** You have a sixth sense, akin to scent but far more sensitive and informative. You can sense your surroundings within long range regardless of sight conditions, even if you're otherwise blind or objects of interest have cover (unless it's complete and chemically sealed cover). As a difficulty 2 Intellect-based task, you can also

learn the species, sex, wellness, and other related biological facts about a living target you sense with this ability. Enabler; action to learn additional information about a target.

**Tier 3: Nitric Burst (3 Might points).** You release a burst of concentrated nitric oxide that inflicts 5 points of damage on all creatures within immediate range. Alternatively, you can launch a vacuole of nitric oxide to any point you can see within long range, where it bursts on contact, creating the same effect. Action.

**Tier 4: Stasis.** You enter a state of suspended animation by encasing yourself in slime that hardens to amberlike solidity within a round, providing +10 to Armor. While suspended, you do not age, respire, or otherwise express metabolic processes, and you cannot take actions. The stasis lasts for a predetermined amount of time, though it ends if you take damage while in stasis. Action to initiate.

**Tier 5: Cytokinetic Signal (4 Might points).** You release an invisible stream of signaling molecules into the environment. In *Microcosmica* or a similar recursion, this draws one or more white blood cells to the area within a few rounds. The summoned cells indiscriminately attack creatures you designate or biological structures within short range.

If used in a recursion unlike *Microcosmica*, your touch is an attack that causes the victim's immune system to briefly turn against itself, inflicting 5 points of damage for three consecutive rounds. Action.

**Tier 6: Phagocytic Embrace (6 Might points).** You attempt to bodily engulf and digest your foe. Your body structure loses cohesion and swells, becoming a bloated, translucent mass as you lunge at a target within immediate range. The victim takes 7 points of damage from enzymatic acid each round it remains caught in your embrace. The only action available to most victims is to attempt to pull free on its turn. If the victim is killed while in your embrace, you automatically consume and absorb it into your form, regaining 6 Might points. However, you can't regain your normal humanoid form for one minute as your body digests its meal. Action to initiate.

*Although Becomes Bacterial is offered in the context of Microcosmica, it would also be suitable in many Mad Science recursions, including Ruk, as well as some Exotic recursions.*

*Mad Science, page 137*

*Ruk, page 190*

*Exotic, page 137*

**Follows the Code of Bushido GM Intrusions:**

*A ronin appears and besmirches your honor. Your daimyo accuses you of a betrayal. The hapless victim you attempt to aid is revealed as an ambush set by enemies.*



**FOLLOWS THE CODE OF BUSHIDO**

A samurai follows the code of Bushido, which stresses the mastery of the blade, loyalty to a higher purpose or master, and honor above all. For samurai, death is preferable to staining their honor or the honor of that which they serve (which is usually a Karou, but some samurai become ronin and serve an ideal or purpose rather than a master). Life can be straightforward for a samurai who trusts his Karou, because things simply become a matter of doing what the Karou commands or dying in the attempt. For a ronin, life is more complicated, since to other samurai, the ronin has already betrayed one of the virtues of the Bushido code: loyalty.

As a samurai in day-to-day life, you wear a double-layered silk kimono. Your swords are

strapped to your waist. When outfitted for battle, you slip into your ō-yoroi armor (“great armor”), which includes an impressive helm designed to intimidate your foes.

Vectors are most drawn to becoming samurai when they visit recursions that grant this focus.

**Connection:** If this is your starting focus, choose one of the following connections.

1. Pick one other PC. She is your Karou.
2. Pick one other PC. He is the reason you broke with your Karou to become a ronin.
3. Pick one other PC. She found you dying on the field of battle as an enemy. Instead of killing you, she saved you. You’re not sure yet how that affects your honor.
4. Pick one other PC. He knows the real reason you stayed with your Karou when everyone else abandoned him and became ronin.

**Equipment:** Double-layered kimono, katana (medium or heavy weapon, depending on whether you wield it with one hand or two, respectively), wakizashi (light sword), ō-yoroi armor (medium or heavy armor, your choice), book of poetry, and 20 gold coins.

**Minor Effect Suggestion:** You push your foe to the ground.

**Major Effect Suggestion:** If your foe’s weapon or armor is mundane, you destroy it. If it is special, you knock it loose, requiring your foe to spend a round retrieving it or fixing it back in place.

**Tier 1: Iaijutsu Student.** When you attack before an opponent has acted in the encounter, the difficulty of your attack is reduced by one step. On a successful hit with this iaijutsu attack, you inflict 3 additional points of damage. Enabler.

**Bushido Training.** You are trained in tasks related to understanding and attempting to live by the code of Bushido. Enabler.

**Tier 2: Initiative Training.** You are trained in initiative. If you are already trained in initiative, you are specialized. Enabler.

**Tier 3: Iaijutsu Practitioner.** On a successful hit with an iaijutsu attack, you inflict 4 additional points of damage (a total of 7 points of additional damage). Enabler.



**Tier 4: Shield of Righteous Honor.** You are difficult to dissuade from your purpose. The difficulty of your Intellect defense rolls is decreased by one step.

**Tier 5: Samurai War Cry (5 Might points).** You release a resonating shout, a “great kiai,” that pushes your foes back on their heels or takes the fight out of them altogether. When you utter your war cry, foes of level 3 or lower within immediate range run or surrender. Foes of level 4 through 6 stand stunned, unable to take an action for a round. For foes of level 7 or higher, the difficulty of all tasks is increased by one step on their next turn. Action.

**Stewardship.** If you serve a Karou, you are awarded stewardship of a holding, such as a small manor. You can invest as much or as little time in the property as you wish, but if you are not available to deal with the staff and grounds, you must delegate the tasks to someone else associated with it.

If you are a ronin, you do not gain the automatic advantage of stewardship, though you are not barred from owning property through other means (as is the case for a samurai in the service of a Karou). Enabler.

**Tier 6: One-Cut Kill (7+ Might points).** All the cuts and attacks a samurai learns are meant to be lethal, but it takes a master to apply the technique perfectly. With this ability, you can kill a level 1 target with one blow. Instead of applying Effort to decrease the difficulty, you can apply Effort to increase the maximum level of the target. Thus, to kill a level 5 target (four levels above the normal limit), you must apply four levels of Effort. Action.



### HAUNTS THE ROOFTOPS

Spying, fighting in secret skirmishes, and assassination are the tasks you’ve mastered in a secret school

for assassins that everyone says doesn’t exist. If you ever betrayed the trust of that school by publicly divulging the truth of its existence or the names of your instructors or fellow students, you’d become a target of assassination yourself. Once you were disappeared, your accusations would be made to look like the ravings of a lunatic. You’ve seen

it happen before. In fact, your graduation test was to take care of a former graduate of your school. Some call you an assassin. Regardless, you maintain a secret life, because to reveal your true skills could mean your death.

You typically wear dark clothing that includes split-toed tabi boots and socks, a jacket with pockets for hidden weapons, and (when you are on a mission) a mask. You might have a change of clothing for when you’re not on a mission, but it’s probably just as dark and good for hiding.

Anyone could be invited to a hidden school to train as an assassin, though the preponderance of those asked are vectors.

**Connection:** If this is your starting focus, choose one of the following connections.

1. Pick one other PC. She provides you with the simple ingredients you need to make your home-brewed poison.
2. Pick one other PC. You worry that he might be a graduate from an opposed **Hidden School**, so you keep an eye on him, hoping it’s not true.
3. Pick one other PC. You were supposed to assassinate him, but instead you faked the evidence of completing the job to your clients. If the truth ever gets out, both of you will face new attempts at assassination.
4. Pick one other PC. She knows about your affiliation. You’ve let it slide this long, but eventually you need to figure out your next move.

**Equipment:** Dark clothing and mask, handful of smoke pellets, 20 doses of home-brewed poison, blowgun, light sword (wakizashi), one light weapon of your choice, and 20 gold coins.

**Minor Effect Suggestion:** You’re a quick learner. You gain a +1 bonus to similar actions involving the same task (such as making attacks against the same foe or climbing the same building).

**Major Effect Suggestion:** You can take another action immediately.

**Tier 1: Hide in Shadow.** You can attempt to hide even if under direct observation by distracting observers (by throwing a rock, detonating a smoke pellet, throwing your voice, or using some other technique) and then sinking behind cover or into shadow. This is a Speed-based task in which you are trained, and the difficulty

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*You can tell other PCs the truth of your craft, but only if you swear them to secrecy first. If you don’t trust them, it might be better to hide the truth.*

### Haunts the Rooftops

**GM Intrusions:** *You aren’t actually hidden. You accidentally poison yourself. A rival assassin attacks at just the wrong time. A poisoned dart strikes your ally by accident.*

**Inks Spells on Skin GM Intrusions:** You lose your spellbook. The spell's area includes an ally. The spell reflects back on you.

is equal to the level of the highest-level unallied observer watching you. Action.

**Weapons of Stealth.** You are practiced using blowguns, knives, crossbows, and other light weapons that you can easily fold up and conceal about your body. Enabler.

**Tier 2: Poison User.** You always have a ready supply of mild poison, with which you can coat a weapon tip or blade as part of an attack. The poison inflicts 1 additional point of damage when you hit with the coated weapon. If you acquire more potent poison or one that has a different effect, you can substitute it for the milder poison until it's used up. Enabler.

**Tier 3: Spot Weakness.** If a creature that you can see has a special weakness, such as a vulnerability to fire, a negative modification to perception, or so on, you know it. (Ask and the GM will tell you.) If you also have the ability *Find the Flaw*, then even if you can't detect a given creature's specific weakness, the difficulty of the first attack you make against it in a given conflict is reduced by one step. Enabler.

**Tier 4: Unexpected Strike.** If you attack a creature that wasn't previously aware of your presence, you deal 5 additional points of damage. If you have another ability that deals extra damage from a surprise attack, add the points together. Enabler.

**Tier 5: Evasion.** You are trained in all defense tasks. Enabler.

**Tier 6: Step Through Shadow (7 Speed points).** You can move up to 300 feet (91 m) as your action by sliding along the skin of a recursion. This is a difficulty 2 Speed-based task. To observers, you seem to disappear from one location and instantaneously appear in another location farther away (if they see you at all). You can attempt to step into locations you can't directly see, such as a presumed shadow behind a locked door or inside a blocked cave. However, doing so increases the difficulty by one step, and possibly more if the area you are attempting to step into is protected in some fashion or warded against translation (which affects this ability as if you were translating into the location). Action.

## INKS SPELLS ON SKIN

Your enchanted heritage is etched upon you. Studying strange formulas, mystic runes, and magical glyphs to learn spells is one thing. Making spells truly a part of you is another, but that's exactly what you do when you apply magical inks to create intricate spell tattoos across your body. Each tattoo you inscribe on yourself is not merely a design, but the keystone of a spell, giving you the ability to cast it at will. Because your tattoos are magical, you can continually add to those you've already accumulated without ruining the designs, allowing your mastery over magic to grow.

You often wear clothing that bares your arms and perhaps other parts of your body to expose your tattoos, so that others know you for a caster of spells.

Paradoxes and spinners often choose this focus.

**Connection:** If this is your starting focus, choose one of the following connections.

1. Pick one other PC. He is responsible for destroying your inking set, which put you back a few months. It's up to you whether you forgive him or not.
2. Pick one other PC. Her favorite pet ran off, and you promised to find it. When you failed, you conjured a duplicate instead. You're not sure whether she knows her pet is fake.
3. Pick one other PC. You think he would make a great spellcaster, and you need an apprentice.
4. Pick one other PC. You accidentally linked yourself to her via sympathetic magic. Now whenever you are hurt, she feels phantom pain, and vice versa.

**Equipment:** Special ink and needle quill for inscribing tattoos, staff (light or medium weapon), a slab of basalt carved with strange glyphs, and 30 gold coins.

**Spellcasting Special Abilities:** If you perform revisions or twists, you do so as spells you invoke, which involve an arcane gesture or two, a few mystical words, and possibly a pinch of dust or other material. (Your revisions and twists appear as spells codified in your spellbook.) This alteration changes nothing except how you trigger the effects.

**Minor Effect Suggestion:** Your spell marks the target's forehead with a glowing glyph of your choice for one hour.



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## SPELL TATTOO COLLECTION

A caster who Inks Spells on Skin compiles every spell she knows as tattoos on her body. However, she can cast only a subset of those spells—her “readied” spells—at any given time. For instance, though she has two spell tattoos at first tier, she can cast only the readied one; the other is merely an interesting design unless she changes out the readied spell with a different one of the same tier inked on her body. To switch out readied spells, the caster spends one minute in meditation, after which time one readied spell is changed. A caster can vary her spell selection up to twice per day, immediately after a one-hour or ten-hour recovery roll.

*If you have access to the Casts Spells focus in the character options book In Translation, you can substitute a spell from that focus when you advance in Inks Spells on Skin, or vice versa. Alternatively, the spells described in Casts Spells might serve as additional spells you can tattoo on your skin, if you can track them down and learn to inscribe them. Additionally, the GM may allow you to learn spells out of an artifact spellbook, if you find one.*

*A caster who Inks Spells on Skin doesn't normally require the spellcasting aids that wizards of other traditions sometimes use. However, rumors suggest that one who uses her own blood to cast a spell could increase its power—at the risk of her soul.*

**Major Effect Suggestion:** Your spell marks the target's forehead with a glowing glyph of your choice for one day.

**Tier 1: Spell Tattoos.** You ink two spells onto your body. Choose one of the following spells as your readied spell for tier 1.

**Abysmal Touch (2 Intellect points).** Poison visibly suffuses the flesh of the creature you touch, inflicting 3 points of damage that ignore Armor and rendering the creature unable to move on its next action. Action.

**Fleet of Foot (2 Intellect points).** For the next ten minutes, a creature within immediate range can move an additional short distance each round when it moves. A normal creature affected by this spell could both move a short distance and take an action on its turn. Action to initiate.

**Tier 2: Spell Tattoos.** You ink two additional spells onto your skin. Choose one of the following spells as your readied spell for tier 2.

**Eclipse (2 Intellect points).** For the next ten minutes, light drains from an area within long range that is no bigger than an immediate distance in diameter. Light cannot enter the area of eclipse, and creatures that normally can see in the dark cannot see in the area. If you cast Eclipse on an object, the effect moves with

the object and could be temporarily suppressed if the object is enclosed in wrapping or a container. Action to initiate.

**Enchant Creature (2+ Intellect points).** A level 1 creature in immediate range does as you suggest on its next action (but will not follow suggestions to harm itself or its allies). Instead of applying Effort to decrease the difficulty, you can apply Effort to increase the maximum level of the target. Thus, to suggest a course of action to a level 5 target (four levels above the normal limit), you must apply four levels of Effort. Action.

**Tier 3: Spell Tattoos.** You ink two additional spells onto your skin. Choose one of the following spells as your readied spell for tier 3.

**Lightning Flash (4+ Intellect points).** You release a stroke of lightning, which travels in a relatively straight line for a long distance, inflicting 4 points of damage on all targets standing along that line (it's hard to line up more than two targets when only a handful of foes are present). Effort applied to one attack counts for all attacks against targets along the line. If an attack misses, a target along the line still takes 1 point of damage. Objects along the line that conduct electricity may retain a residual charge. Action.



**Mist Flesh (3 Intellect points).** You or a willing target you touch, along with all carried equipment, is transformed into a colorless mist for up to one hour. Someone transformed to mist can flow in any direction, including upward, an immediate distance each round (even against a strong wind), penetrate any area that isn't hermetically sealed, and enjoy immunity to mundane physical attacks. Someone transformed to mist cannot speak, interact with objects or carried equipment, or use special abilities. If you begin falling a short or longer distance, you can invoke Mist Flesh quickly enough to avoid striking the bottom (shorter falls do not provide enough time). Action to initiate.

**Tier 4: Spell Tattoos.** You ink two additional spells onto your skin. Choose one of the following spells as your readied spell for tier 4.



**Elemental Protection (4+ Intellect points).**

You and every target you designate within immediate range gains +5 to Armor against direct damage from one type of elemental damage (such as fire, lightning, shadow, or thorn) for one hour, or until you cast this spell again. Each level of Effort applied increases the elemental protection by 2. Action to initiate.

**Incapacitate (5+ Intellect points).** A creature in short range collapses and is unable to move or take actions for one round. The target must be level 3 or lower. Instead of applying Effort to decrease the difficulty, you can apply Effort to increase the maximum level of the target. Thus, to incapacitate a level 5 target (two levels above the normal limit), you must apply two levels of Effort. Action.

**Tier 5: Spell Tattoos.** You ink two additional spells onto your skin. Choose one of the following spells as your readied spell for tier 5.

**Granite Wall (7+ Intellect points).** You create a level 6 granite wall within short range. The wall is 1 foot (30 cm) thick and up to 20 feet by 20 feet (6 m by 6 m) in size. It appears resting on a solid foundation and lasts for about ten hours. If you apply three levels of Effort, the wall is permanent until destroyed naturally. Action to initiate.

**Door (6+ Intellect points).** You create a simple opening in a level 5 or lower barrier of wood, stone, metal, or other solid substance, which persists for an hour. The opening is no more than an immediate distance across, and it extends up to a short distance through the material. When the effect ends, the barrier returns to its original condition, and anyone using the doorway is swept back to the entrance. For each level of Effort you apply, you can increase the level of the barrier by 1. Action to initiate.

**Tier 6: Spell Tattoos.** You ink two additional spells onto your skin. Choose one of the following spells as your readied spell for tier 6.

**Petrify (6+ Intellect points).** A target within short range is turned to stone. You can incant this spell in reverse to turn a magically petrified target back into flesh. In either case, the target must be level 3 or lower. Instead of applying Effort to decrease the difficulty, you can apply

Effort to increase the maximum level of the target. Thus, to petrify a level 6 target (three levels above the normal limit), you must apply three levels of Effort. Action.

**Summon Chain Demon (8+ Intellect points).**

A *chain demon* appears within immediate range, plucked from Abysm of the Sword Realms. If you applied a level of Effort as part of the summoning, the demon is amenable to your instructions; otherwise, it acts according to its nature. The demon persists for up to one minute before returning to its nether realm. Action.

## MASTERS FOOT AND FIST

You've trained your body and your will so relentlessly that you can harness ambient magic and focus it through your physical attacks, defenses, and moves. When you strike a foe, elemental energy suffusing your weapon, foot, or fist is discharged into your foe, along with the momentum of the strike itself. The full effect of the blow depends on your elemental connection, which means you could freeze, blow back, or blind your opponent. You are usually referred to as a monk because of the long hours of discipline required in the monastery where you learned to chain your body to elemental flows.

You probably wear flowing robes that do not restrict your movements or get in your way. You might also have one or more tattoos that highlight your physical prowess and your connected element.

Vectors are most likely to be monks.

**Connection:** If this is your starting focus, choose one of the following connections.

1. Pick one other PC. You and that character were the only two survivors of an enemy's attack on your previous group.
2. Pick one other PC. You think she might be a member of a secret organization, one that you wouldn't mind joining yourself.
3. Pick one other PC. You lost to him in a fair fight. You don't hold a grudge, but then again, you wouldn't be adverse to a rematch.
4. Pick one other PC. That character is your half-brother or half-sister.

**Equipment:** Robes, hood, two weapons of your choice, haversack, 50 feet (15 m) of rope, one or more tattoos, and 30 gold coins.

**Minor Effect Suggestion:** The target's weapon is knocked from its hand. Retrieving the weapon or drawing a new one means the next attack the target makes with the weapon is modified by one step to its detriment.

**Major Effect Suggestion:** Make an additional attack with your weapon on your turn.

**Tier 1: Magic Strike.** Choose your preferred element: ice, wind, or earth. When you make an attack with a melee weapon, which could be your unarmed attack, it is sheathed with a visible manifestation of your chosen element, which has the following effect.

*Ice:* If you roll a natural 17, 18, 19, or 20 and the attack succeeds, the target is frozen stiff in a thin layer of ice, preventing it from taking an action on its next turn. This effect replaces

*Chain demon, page 211*

*A living creature turned to stone enters a state of suspended animation. If the creature is later reverted to flesh, it's fine, but any damage it suffered while petrified could prove defacing, debilitating, or fatal, depending on the severity.*

**Masters Foot and Fist**  
**GM Intrusions:** *Your connection to your element falters unexpectedly. Opponents with weapons have greater reach. An elemental creature opposed to your chosen element appears and attacks.*



**Names GM Intrusions:**

*A named target attacks you instead of standing calm or doing as you command. A named law of reality bends differently than you expected. A named object breaks from stress or explodes. You forget your own name for a round and stand unable to take an action.*

the minor or major special effect you would normally gain. Enabler.

**Wind:** The attack inflicts 1 less point of damage than normal, but it blows the target an immediate distance in a direction you choose. Enabler.

**Earth:** You inflict 1 additional point of damage to the target, or, instead of dealing damage, your blow blinds the target for one round with a spray of grit and sand. Enabler.

**Tier 2: Precise Attack.** You know where to cause the most damage when you strike a foe, so your attacks inflict 1 additional point of damage. Enabler.

**Tier 3: Punch Through.** Your melee attack ignores 2 points of your foe's Armor. Enabler.

**Wuxia Leap (5 Speed points).** You can leap to a location within short range and make a melee attack at any point along that path as part of the same action. If your elemental manifestation is wind, you can leap within long range. Action.

**Tier 4: Elemental Skin (4 Speed points).** When you wish it, your body exudes an aura of your chosen element for up to ten minutes, which has the following effect. Action to initiate.

**Ice:** You gain +2 to Armor.

**Wind:** Whirling winds make it hard for others to land an attack on you. The difficulty of Speed defense rolls to avoid physical attacks is decreased by one step.

**Earth:** You add 6 points to your Might Pool. Any points in your Might Pool above your normal maximum fade when the effect ends.

**Tier 5: Redirect Attack.** When you are the target of a melee or ranged attack, you can attempt to redirect it with your defense roll. If you roll a natural 17, 18, 19, or 20 and the defense succeeds, you redirect the attack away from you, either harmlessly into the ground or into an object or creature within immediate range. The target of the redirected attack has a chance to avoid the attack as normal. Enabler.

**Tier 6: Perfect Soul.** You draw energy from your chosen element and no longer need food or water to sustain you. You also gain an additional one-action recovery roll per day.

Finally, you no longer age and won't die of the ailments that advanced age engenders (though you can still be killed through violence, poison, and similar means). Enabler.

## NAMES

You are a namer. You can discern someone's common, given name (such as Jack, Chihiro, or Sebastian) merely by looking at him, and with practice, you can also learn that person's true, hidden name. Knowing a person's hidden name gives you power over him. As mastery comes, you can eventually hide someone's name, know his thoughts, or even change his name, and with it, his form. To be a namer is to be a force of creation and change, though some walk a darker path and attempt to erase the names of everyone and everything that displeases them.

You tend to wear a guise that doesn't look entirely human, perhaps because you are a master of disguise, because you use masks to manifest your magic, or because you're truly not fully human in the recursion where you become a namer.

Spinners are the most likely character types to be namers, but the focus has almost equal draw for paradoxes.

**Connection:** If this is your starting focus, choose one of the following connections.

1. Pick one other PC. That character borrowed an important book from you and has never returned it.

2. Pick one other PC. You gave her a short rhyme that brings good dreams when she says it before she sleeps, but you wonder if the nightmares are building up in the dark.

3. Pick one other PC. You're pretty sure that a name you made up out of the blue summoned that character into existence some time ago. If the PC knows that you believe this, he might think you're full of yourself, think you're crazy, or possibly believe it himself.

4. Pick one other PC. She asked you for a name that would allow her to stand up to a cruel authority figure. You told her you'd find the perfect name for her need, but you're having trouble with the syllables.

**Equipment:** Scholar's clothes, quill and ink, reference book, notebook, a weapon of your choice, and 30 crowns.

**Minor Effect Suggestion:** You learn a deeply buried secret the target was trying to hide.

**Major Effect Suggestion:** Foes within short range are dazed for one round upon hearing you speak a hidden name. During this time, the difficulty of all tasks they perform is modified by one step to their detriment.

**Tier 1: Name (1 Intellect point).** You attempt to discern the common, given name of a person, creature, or object within short range. This ability doesn't give you power over the target, but it does allow you to address the target by name or potentially learn the real identity of someone in disguise or the common name of an odd object. Knowing the name of a person who hasn't revealed it to you could provide an asset to your attempts to persuade, fool, intimidate, or ingratiate yourself with the target, depending on the situation. Action.

**Onomatology.** You are trained in the origin, history, and use of names. Enabler.

**Tier 2: Steal Name (2 Intellect points).** You steal the name of a target within short range by lifting it directly from the creature's thoughts. An affected target ceases taking actions for up to one minute as it attempts to recall its name, or for as long as you use your action each round to concentrate on hiding the name from it. If the target is attacked, endangered, or seriously provoked, it stops worrying about its name and acts normally. Action.

**Name Meld (1 Intellect point).** When you successfully use Steal Name on a target, you also read the target's surface thoughts at the same time, even if the target tries to prevent you from doing so. You can continue to read the target's surface thoughts for as long as you keep its name hidden from it by using Steal Name (up to one minute). Enabler.

**Tier 3: Anti-Name (3+ Intellect points).** You speak a name that is antithetical to up to three targets within long range. The Anti-Name inflicts 2 points of damage that ignore Armor. For each level of Effort you apply, you can attack an additional target. Action.

**Tier 4: Name Object or Force (4+ Intellect points).** Your study of names goes beyond creatures and extends to objects and even the laws of reality. Objects become more cooperative

and laws bend to your aid when you name them, and the difficulty of a task you attempt is reduced by two steps. For example, if you name a level 4 wall prior to attempting to climb it, you treat the climb as a level 2 task. If you try to jump across a gap between cloud ships and name the local force of gravity, a difficulty 5 Might-based task becomes difficulty 3.

For each 2 additional Intellect points you spend, the difficulty of the task decreases by one additional step. Enabler.

**Tier 5: Command Name (6+ Intellect points).** If you've previously used Steal Name on a target, you can attempt to control the target's actions if it is within short range and can hear and understand you. If you succeed, you control the target's actions for two rounds by verbal command. Instead of applying Effort to decrease the difficulty, you can apply Effort to increase the duration of control; each level applied extends the duration of Command Name by one round. When the effect ends, the target recalls being under your control unless you prevent that by succeeding on an Intellect-based attack whose difficulty is equal to the target's level. Action to initiate.



## Quells Undead GM

*Intrusions: You get bit by the undead. You discover an allied NPC is actually undead. A powerful undead recognizes you as its nemesis.*

*The Change Name ability essentially lets a character change another creature into a frog, newt, or some other innocuous creature, if she so chooses. As such, it is one of the most feared abilities a namer can call forth.*

**Tier 6: Change Name (7+ Intellect points).** If you've previously used Steal Name on a target, you can attempt to transform the target into a natural animal by changing its true name. The target must be level 2 or lower. The effect is permanent unless you later return the creature's true name to it as an action, leave the recursion for longer than three days, or die. Instead of applying Effort to decrease the difficulty, you can apply Effort to increase the maximum level of the target. Thus, to change the form of a level 5 target (three levels above the normal limit), you must apply three levels of Effort.

The form you change the target into must be that of a natural wild animal, and its mass can't be more than double the original creature's size. On the other hand, you can reduce a large target down to something as small as your fist. For instance, you could turn a giraffe into a duck, or a human into a turtle. The changed creature isn't under any compulsion to obey you. Over time, its nature may come to suit its new form, as determined by the GM. Action.



## QUELLS UNDEAD

You specialize in destroying that which nature has already killed once.

These abominations, often called undead, include zombies, mummies, vampires, some varieties of ghouls, ghosts, and many more. All share the trait of not really being alive. Your job is to eliminate that final link to their former life: animation. Why you are so intent on ending the reign of the dead is up to you, but most people don't take this focus unless they had a terrifyingly close encounter with the undead in the past.

You wear normal clothes for your recursion, heavy gloves, and some kind of eye covering, and you might display a disfiguring scar from past run-ins with the undead as a badge of honor.

Destroying undead wherever they appear could be a passion for a character of any type, though vectors most commonly choose this focus.

**Connection:** If this is your starting focus, choose one of the following connections.

1. Pick one other PC. If that character is next to you and is attacked by an undead, you can choose to be attacked instead.
2. Pick one other PC. You worry that she might have been influenced mentally by a vampire, and you keep a close eye on her in case she does something suspicious.
3. Pick one other PC. He once saved you from an undead, beating you at your own specialty.
4. Pick one other PC. She strongly reminds you of a friend or family member who was killed by undead.

**Equipment:** Clothing appropriate to the recursion, leather coat (light armor), helmet, two weapons of your choice, and a lethal dose of poison in case you need to prevent yourself from being turned into an undead.

**Minor Effect Suggestion:** You disable (or completely remove) the undead's arm, which keeps it busy for one round as it figures out how to attack with its other arm and mouth.

**Major Effect Suggestion:** The undead's head nearly comes off, which confuses it for a round as its head lolls. In subsequent rounds, the difficulty of the undead's attacks and defenses is modified by one step to its detriment.



**Tier 1: Death Dealer.** You inflict 1 additional point of damage when fighting. If your target is an undead creature, you inflict 2 additional points of damage. Enabler.

**Undead Lore.** You are trained in knowledge related to undead, including their habits, strengths, and weaknesses. Enabler.

**Tier 2: Unfeeling Callus.** Fighting the dead has left you tougher. You gain +1 to Armor. Against damage from direct attacks by undead, as well as attacks that accelerate rot or necrosis, you gain an additional +1 to Armor. Enabler.

**Tier 3: Evade the Dead.** When you attempt a stealth task, the difficulty is reduced by one step. If attempting to hide from undead, the difficulty is reduced by two steps. Enabler.

**Improved Death Dealer.** If your target is an undead creature, you inflict 3 additional points of damage (bringing the total to 5 additional points). Enabler.

**Tier 4: Horde Attack (3 Might points).** You can attack all foes within immediate range. Make separate attack rolls for each foe, but all attacks count as a single action on your turn. When using this ability, you do not gain the benefit of Death Dealer, Improved Death Dealer, or Perfect Death Dealer, but otherwise anything that modifies your attack or damage applies to all attacks. Action.

**Tier 5: Stunning Attack (4 Might points).** You can stun a living foe so that it loses its next turn, but the attack deals no damage. If you use this ability on an undead creature, the attack deals damage normally and stuns the target so that it loses its next turn. Action.

**Tier 6: Fight Death.** You fight death in all its forms, even when it comes for you. When you would normally die, you instead fall unconscious for one round and then awaken. You immediately gain 1d6 + 6 points to add to your stat Pools. If you die again before you take your next ten-hour recovery roll, you can't use this ability again. Enabler.

**Perfect Death Dealer.** If your target is an undead creature, you inflict 5 additional points of damage (bringing the total to 10 additional points). Enabler.



## TRICK · OR · TREATS

Trick-or-Treats is a focus available in the various recursions spawned by the **Halloween** holiday. As a trick-or-treater, you are considered a recursion native. You enjoy the protections of the Halloween Accords as long as you observe them in turn, which includes holding a lit candle while going about your rounds. You're allowed a lot of leeway on your nightly rounds of begging as long as you never eat what you're given and are never caught trespassing or vandalizing as you slip through the shadows of Halloween. All in all, you can make a decent living trick-or-treating—a living occasionally punctuated by running for your life.

You usually wear a costume of some sort, possibly one so realistic that others think it is your true appearance, though usually your candle and treat sack give you away.

Everyone likes treats, though only a subset of people enjoy tricking others. Be that as it may, spinners are the most likely character types to choose this focus.

**Connection:** If this is your starting focus, choose one of the following connections.

1. Pick one other PC. You're jealous of her costume.
2. Pick one other PC. You suspect that he is cursed by one of the witches of Forest Hills, but you don't know if you should be more afraid *for* him or *of* him.
3. Pick one other PC. He showed you a secret door in an alley that saved your life when zombies came for you.
4. Pick one other PC. At night, you dream about her, but when you wake, you can never remember if they were good or bad dreams.

**Equipment:** Disguise of your choice (must be some kind of frightful creature), treat sack, supply of candles and matches, one weapon of your choice, a couple of chocolate bars, 50 feet (15 m) of thin rope for creating snares, and 20 pieces of hard candy.

**Minor Effect Suggestion:** Your foe loses track of you in the night and moves just out of immediate range before realizing its error.

**Major Effect Suggestion:** Your foe is confused by your suit. On its next turn, it attacks one of its allies instead of you before realizing the truth.

### Trick-or-Treats GM

**Intrusions:** *You knock over something that makes a loud clatter. You drop your bag of treats down a hole. Your mask slips. The target of a trick realizes what you're doing.*

*Halloween (the recursion), page 64*

**Halloween Accords:** *Most Powers of the Night (the rulers of the Halloween neighborhoods) abide by agreed-upon rules to keep the city from devolving into bloody chaos. The accords define boundaries, when the sanctity of trick-or-treaters is enforceable, and how disputes should be lawfully resolved.*

**Tier 1: Treat Seeker.** You are trained in tasks related to searching and hiding. Enabler.

**Halloween Native.** Trick-or-treaters enjoy special status in Halloween (and similar recursions), and you are considered to be one by all natives who encounter you. Enabler.

**Tier 2: Trick Artist.** You are trained in lockpicking and tinkering with devices. Enabler.

**Night Eyes.** You can see in dim light as if it were bright light. You can see in total darkness as if it were dim light. Enabler.



**Tier 3: Not Afraid.** You are trained in Intellect defense tasks and initiative tasks. Enabler.

**Poke and Run (3 Speed points).** When you attack a creature that has one or more eyes, the difficulty of the attack is increased by one step. If you hit, the creature has trouble seeing for the next hour, and you can move or attempt to hide as part of the same action. Tasks the creature performs that rely on sight (which is most tasks) are modified by one step to its detriment. Action.

**Tier 4: Trap Trick.** You are trained in creating simple traps, especially many varieties of deadfalls and snares using natural objects from the surrounding environment. You can create a trap in under a minute. When you lay a trap, decide whether you want to hold the victim in place (a snare) or inflict damage (a deadfall). Next, attempt an Intellect-based task with a difficulty of 3 (for a snare) or a difficulty equal to the number of points of damage you want to inflict (for a deadfall). For example, if you want to inflict 4 points of damage, that's a difficulty 4 task, though your training reduces the difficulty.

On a success, you create your trap, which is considered level 3 for the purposes of avoiding detection before it is sprung and for a victim trying to struggle free (if a snare). If you are trained in stealth, disguise, or similar tasks, the trap is considered level 4 for these purposes; if you are specialized, level 5. Action.

**Tier 5: Veteran Halloweener.** You've been exposed to all sorts of terrible things as you've gathered treats and escaped the consequences of your tricks, and you're developing a general resistance. You gain +1 to Armor and are trained in Might defense tasks. Enabler.

**Tier 6: Ghostly Trickster (4+ Intellect points).** For the next ten minutes, you are trained in sneaking tasks (or specialized, if you're already trained). During this time, you can move through solid barriers (but not energy barriers) at a rate of 1 foot (30 cm) per round, and you can perceive while phased within a barrier or object, which allows you to peek through walls. When you make melee attacks against creatures while ghostly, your attacks ignore your foe's Armor each time you spend 3 additional Intellect points. Action to initiate.

## CHAPTER 8

## CREATURES



*“Hungry beasts, biting insects, voracious fish, and the various parasites of the Amazonian interior are fearsome. Too many explorers have disappeared there for anyone to claim otherwise. But when one compares piranha to actual sea monsters, malaria to the Andromeda strain, various parasites to facehuggers, and so on ad infinitum, it’s clear that being an explorer of the Strange is far more demanding and dangerous. Shackleton may have faced freezing temperatures and starvation on his trip to the Antarctic, but he didn’t face abominable snow monsters trying to eat his face and make his skin into a coat. Yes, he was the first to reach the South Pole, and he deserves recognition. All the explorers restricted to Earth deserve the praise they’ve received. But we are the ones who explore the recursions birthed by the worst fears and nightmares humanity has to offer, and not for the celebrity and honors others gain. It’s because we gain the real experience.”*

*~Sir Raymond Creswicke,  
in a letter to his paramour Irene located in the constructed recursion of Paradiso*

*Ernest Shackleton led the first expedition to the Antarctic on Earth.*

This chapter describes some of the common and uncommon creatures that the player characters might meet—and fight—while adventuring through recursions numberless and strange.

### UNDERSTANDING THE LISTINGS

**Level:** Each creature has a level attached to it. Like the difficulty of a task, all creatures (and NPCs) have a level. You use the level to determine the target number a PC must reach to attack or defend against the opponent.

In each entry, the difficulty number for the creature or NPC is listed in parentheses after

its level. The target number is three times the level, so a level 1 creature has a target number of 3, a level 2 creature has a target number of 6, and so on.

**Description:** Following the name of the creature or NPC is a general description of its appearance, nature, intelligence, or background.

**Motive:** This entry is a way to help the GM understand what a creature or NPC wants. Every creature or person wants something, even if it’s just to be left alone.

**Environment (Recursions of Origin | Laws of Origin):** This entry describes whether the creature tends to be solitary or travel in groups and what kind of terrain it inhabits (such as “They travel in packs through dry wastes and temperate lowlands”). This entry also lists the creature’s recursion of origin and the law that it operates best under.

**Health:** A creature’s target number is usually also its health, which is the amount of damage it can sustain before it is dead or incapacitated. For easy reference, the entries always list a creature’s health, even when it’s the normal amount for a creature of its level.

**Damage Inflicted:** Generally, when creatures hit in combat, they inflict their level in damage regardless of the form of attack. Some inflict more or less or have a special modifier to damage. Intelligent NPCs often use weapons, but this is more a flavor issue than a mechanical one. In other words, it doesn’t matter if a level 3 *Cataclyst* mutant uses a sword or claws—it deals the same damage if it hits. The entries always specify the amount of damage inflicted, even if it’s the normal amount for a creature of its level.

**Armor:** This is the creature’s Armor value. Sometimes the number represents physical armor, and other times it represents natural protection. This entry doesn’t appear in the game stats if a creature has no Armor.

**Movement:** Movement determines how far the creature can move in a single turn. Creatures have movements of immediate, short, or long, which equate to the ranges of the same name. Most PCs have an effective movement of short, so if they are chasing (or being chased by) a creature with immediate movement, their Speed tasks are one step easier; if the creature’s movement is long, their Speed tasks are one step harder.

**Modifications:** Use these default numbers when a creature’s information says to use a different target number. For example, a level 4 creature might say “defends as level 5,” which means PCs attacking it must reach a target number of

15 (for difficulty 5) instead of 12 (for difficulty 4). In special circumstances, some creatures have other modifications, but these are almost always specific to their level.

**Combat:** This entry gives advice on using the creature in combat, such as “This monster uses ambushes and hit-and-run tactics.” You’ll also find any special abilities, such as immunities, poisons, and healing skills. GMs should be logical about a creature’s reaction to a particular action by a PC. For example, a mechanical creation is obviously immune to normal diseases, a character can’t poison a being of energy (at least, not with a conventional poison), and so on.

**Interaction:** This entry gives advice on using the creature in interactions, such as “These creatures are willing to talk but respond poorly to threats,” or “This creature is an animal and acts like it.”

**Use:** This entry gives the GM suggestions for how to use the creature in a game session. It might provide general notes or specific adventure ideas.

**Loot:** This entry indicates what the PCs might gain if they take items from their fallen foes (or trade with or trick them). It doesn’t appear in the game stats if the creature has no loot.

**GM Intrusion:** This optional entry in the stats suggests a way to use a GM intrusion in an encounter with the creature. It’s just one possible idea of many, and the GM is encouraged to come up with her own uses of the game mechanic.

**S** *Cataclyst, page 238*

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## CHAIN DEMON

5 (15)

The ring and clatter of metal on metal precedes the arrival of a chain demon. Lengths of rusted chains wrap this humanoid figure like funerary linens wrap a mummy. Chain, barbed and hooked, unfolds like ungainly wings from the demon's back. Additional lengths extend from both its forearms, giving the creature a greatly extended reach with claws of animate, hooked iron links.

Chain demons appear in several recursions seeded by (or that include) hellscape, including the *Sword Realms* and *Hell Frozen Over*. A chain demon is usually created from a human soul of such wretched evil that, upon reaching the afterlife, it is promoted to become a bleak angel of its new environment. Chain demons are great at torturing those already trapped in the demon's native hellscape, but even better at catching fresh targets and pulling them down with hell-hot chains.

**Motive:** Delight in causing anguish

**Environment (Magic):** Any hellscape

**Health:** 21

**Damage Inflicted:** 5 points

**Armor:** 2

**Movement:** Short; long when being lowered, raised, or pulled by animate chain wings

**Combat:** A chain demon can animate its chains to attack a target within short range. If the demon desires, a creature damaged by its attack must succeed on a Might defense roll or be snared by a chain hook. The snagged target is drawn into the demon's embrace if it fails a second Might defense roll on its next turn (on a success, the victim breaks free). A victim drawn into the embrace takes 7 points of damage each round if the chain demon wishes to inflict it (no defense roll allowed), and the difficulty of the Might defense roll to break free is increased by one step.

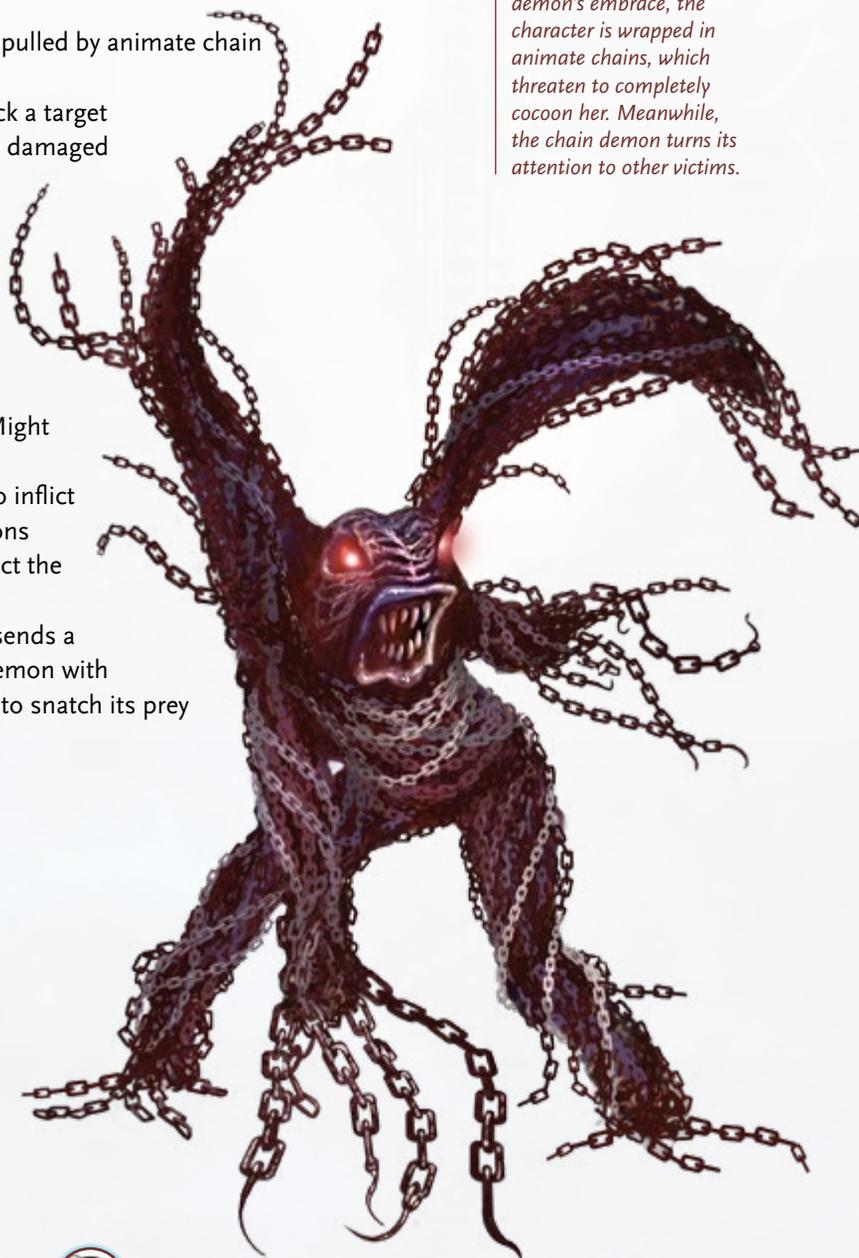
**Interaction:** A chain demon is demonically motivated to inflict anguish, and it may engage in drawn-out negotiations only to betray its target at a time guaranteed to inflict the most spiritual pain.

**Use:** An influential recursor without a moral compass sends a chain demon to kidnap a target. He provides the demon with inapposite access to a recursion long enough for it to snatch its prey and flee.

*Sword Realms*, page 143

*Hell Frozen Over*,  
page 251

**GM Intrusion:** *Instead of being drawn into the demon's embrace, the character is wrapped in animate chains, which threaten to completely cocoon her. Meanwhile, the chain demon turns its attention to other victims.*



# GLASS DRAGON

7 (21)

*"Imagine furnace heat, searing glass, and brilliant light bound into one living, malignant force, and you've got an inkling of what it's like to face a glass dragon."*

*~Iron Stave of the Black Moon Explorers*

*Sere spirit, page 215*



*Kray, page 276*

**GM Intrusion:** *A character damaged by the glass dragon's fangs or claws continues to bleed, taking 2 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) per round until she can regain at least 2 points, which stops the bleeding.*

Glass dragons are rabid accumulations of knife-sharp glass layered in sheets and shards like scales. Their wings are tracteries of glittering light, and each of their eyes is the image of the sun as if focused by a lens. Draconic only in broad outline, these creatures appear as animate collections of shattered glass. Their fangs and claws are crystal-hard, flashing with reflected light. By day, the form of a glass dragon is easy to lose in a haze of brilliant light, which risks blinding an onlooker who stares overlong at the creature hunting him.

**Motive:** Resolving grudges

**Environment (Ardeyn | Magic):** In or near the Glass Desert (but sometimes, beyond the recursion's borders, hunting in the Strange)

**Health:** 33

**Damage Inflicted:** 7 points

**Armor:** 3

**Movement:** Short; long while flying

**Modifications:** Perception as level 8; Speed defense as level 6 due to size.

**Combat:** A glass dragon can bite one foe or claw two foes in immediate range as a single action.

A bitten target is immobilized until he succeeds on a Might defense roll to break free (or until the dragon drops him).

Glass dragons also have one or more additional abilities they can use in combat, including the following.

**Blinding Flash:** A glass dragon can emit a chaotic series of light pulses so bright and fast that creatures within short range who fail a Might defense roll are blinded for one round.

**Burning Beams:** A glass dragon can emit twin beams of focused light from its eyes to long range, inflicting 9 points of damage on the target and all creatures within immediate range. This ability cannot be used in consecutive rounds.

**Mirror Passage:** A glass dragon can physically enter a reflective surface it can see (even one as small as a hand mirror) and reappear up to hundreds of miles away through another reflective surface that it has previously prepared. This ability cannot be used more than once every ten hours.

**Sere Spirit Rider:** Some glass dragons host the reflections of *sere spirits*. A dragon host can either release the sere spirits into a nearby reflective surface, or display the spirits within its own reflective body to its foes. Once it does so, the sere spirits attack the dragon's prey without any additional action from the dragon.

**Interaction:** Glass dragons are well known for their grudges, and, unfortunately, humans and qephilim top the list for payback. Only negotiations that promise a dragon even greater vengeance have a chance of succeeding.

**Use:** A glass dragon is attacking *kray* out in the Strange, which seems to be drawing larger and larger swarms of the creatures back to Ardeyn.

**Loot:** A glass dragon usually carries a couple of cyphers and 1d6 × 10 gold crowns. A dragon's hoard might contain 2d6 cyphers, 1d6 × 200 gold crowns, and possibly a few artifacts.



## GREEN POD

5 (15)

Green pod clumps are sometimes found in closets, on basement ceilings, inside elevators, in the back seats of abandoned cars, and in other places where sunlight doesn't directly reach. A clump of green pods typically masses not much larger than a typical human, and each individual pod varies in size from a few inches to almost a foot (3 to 30 cm) in diameter. Each pod is sticky and soft to the touch, and they usually adhere to form a contiguous whole.

Exactly what the pods represent is difficult for a human mind to grasp. Whether they are eggs, waste matter, fungus, or a manifestation of an intelligence from the Strange extruded into a recursion is up for debate. What *isn't* up for debate is how incredibly toxic a mass of green pods is to living creatures.

**Motive:** Reproduction

**Environment (Standard Physics or Exotic):** Anywhere out of the way, out of direct sunlight

**Health:** 25

**Damage Inflicted:** 5 points

**Movement:** None

**Combat:** Since a clump of green pods doesn't move, the wisest choice someone who finds one

can make is to simply flee. Those who stumble into a clump of pods by accident, or who decide to investigate the mass of glistening emerald spheres, discover that the clump can selectively detonate its pods once per turn. When a pod detonates, green fluid sprays everywhere. The fluid can have one of the following effects, depending on the pod, but never the same effect twice in two rounds.

**Flesh Reacting:** Anyone within immediate range who fails a Speed defense roll takes 5 points of damage from the clinging fluid. If this kills the target, its flesh is explosively converted in a gruesome chain reaction, and the target explodes one round later.

**Paralyzing:** Anyone within immediate range who fails a Might defense roll is paralyzed by the clinging fluid. Each round, the paralyzed victim can attempt another Might defense roll to shrug off the effect.

**Toxic:** Anyone within immediate range automatically takes 1 point of damage from the caustic, clinging substance. Each round thereafter, the victim must succeed on a Might defense roll or continue to take damage as the green fluid eats away at its flesh.

**Interaction:** No real interaction with green pods is possible.

**Use:** Green orbs are found clinging to the exterior of a robotic deep sea submersible that has just returned from checking out a new fissure in the ocean floor.

**GM Intrusion:** Striking the green pod clump causes one of the pods to detonate immediately, even though it's out of turn.



MIST STAR

6 (18)



*"Who's my big, good boy? You are, Avery, you cutie!"*

*~Princess Latanya Valois*

This massive creature can reach a diameter of 20 feet (6 m) when fully grown. A mist star's eyes are located on the outer edge of its arms. Eight arms means eight eyes, giving a mist star a 360-degree field of view. Each arm also hides a stinger at the tip, which can inject venom to paralyze prey.

Constellations of mist stars live wild in the oceans of some recursions that operate under the law of Magic. Mist stars can be used as riding animals by those with the patience and skill to train one, becoming loyal companions. They can travel on land, on the water, and underwater. Thanks to the creature's somewhat magical heritage, an air-breathing rider does not drown while mounted on a mist star that's traveling underwater.

**Motive:** Self-defense

**Environment (Oceanmist | Magic):** Mist stars hunt in large constellations in warm oceans but are sometimes used as mounts

**Health:** 27

**Damage Inflicted:** 6 points

**Armor:** 2

**Movement:** Short when swimming or walking on land

**Modifications:** Speed defense as level 5 due to size.

**Combat:** A mist star batters foes with its arms and can attack up to two foes in immediate range as a single action. If a mist star feels especially threatened, it extends its stingers. Foes damaged by a stinger-tipped arm must also succeed on a Might defense roll or take an additional 3 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor). Worse, the poison continues to inflict 1 point of Speed damage per round until the victim succeeds at a Might defense roll.

**Interaction:** Wild mist stars are dangerous, but tame specimens used as mounts are generally safe.

Mist stars are somewhat intelligent, and those that serve as companions and mounts can understand some languages. They can't speak, but they communicate with each other using puffs of complex scents.

**Use:** A sailing ship attacked by a constellation of mist stars sinks to the sea floor. Something valuable (a magic artifact of some sort) lies in the ship's hold. The search is on to find someone who agrees to salvage the hold and deal with the mist stars guarding the wreck.

**GM Intrusion:** *The character's weapon (or other held item) is grabbed by a mist star and yanked from her hands. Getting it back is a Speed-based task, and failure means taking damage from a stinger.*



## SERE SPIRIT

4 (12)



*"If you can see a sere spirit, it can see you."*

*~Glass pirate truism*

*Glass Desert, page 17*

**GM Intrusion:** *When the sere spirit hits and deals damage, it also pulls the character into the reflection, which seems to erase her from the physical world. The character remains as a reflection until she regains at least 1 point of the damage dealt by the spirit's attack.*

When a human or qephilim dies in the **Glass Desert**, there's a chance that the spirit will be trapped instead of finding a way to the Roads of Sorrow and, eventually, the Court of Sleep. Driven slowly insane by exposure to their own empty image reflected back endlessly, these sere spirits take refuge in the glass itself, finding surcease from their spiritual pain by remaining unmoving and unfeeling. A sere spirit remains in this uneasy state of suspended existence until a living creature catches sight of the spirit's reflection where none should be, jolting the spirit back to consciousness and, usually, to fury.

**Motive:** Unreasoning fury

**Environment (Ardeyn | Magic):** Anywhere in the Glass Desert; occasionally bound in other reflective surfaces

**Health:** 21

**Damage Inflicted:** 5 points

**Movement:** Short

**Modifications:** Speed attacks and defense as level 5 due to reflection displacement; see Combat.

**Combat:** A sere spirit is never visible directly, but only in a reflection. That reflection is usually in the surface of the Glass Desert, but it could be in any reflective surface. Once a potential victim sees the sere spirit's reflection, the spirit in turn sees him and can attack with a sun-hot touch (though it appears that the spirit is attacking the target's reflection, the target feels the attack directly). In order to attack the spirit back, the victim must make an attack as if at empty space, using his reflection and that of the spirit to orient the action. Attacking the glass where the reflection happens to fall has no effect.

Once a victim comes to the attention of a sere spirit, he can't simply close his eyes or direct his attention away from the reflection to find safety. As long as he continues to cast a reflection on the surface, he remains a target. A victim might find safety by reaching a place where he no longer casts a reflection, by rendering himself invisible, or by covering the surface of the glass with something that prevents reflections.

**Interaction:** Sere spirits moan and scream in rage. The rare few that retain reason can speak in a sepulchral voice, and they may even negotiate, but the only thing a sere spirit wants is for its corporeal remains to be found and removed from the Glass Desert (or whatever location is keeping the spirit locked in its reflective state).

**Use:** A grieving trading family offers a bounty to find the remains of a caravan lost in the Glass Desert. Unfortunately, the souls of several merchants were trapped and became sere spirits, which haunt the site of the dead caravan out on the glass.



TETSU

6 (18)

*Tetsu tide jewels can quell storms or transfer someone between any two known points in Seishin Shore. Doing either reveals the jewel's true nature as a tetsu egg, which hatches and releases a tetsu hatchling.*

**Tetsu hatchling:** level 3; flies a long distance each round

**GM Intrusion:** *The tetsu divines the character's next action, and it moves or otherwise does exactly what's required to cancel out that action.*



*"If we could bind and shelve a tetsu, imagine what wonders of magic and knowledge that tome would contain!"*

*~Orika the Flyer, Library Compiler*

When sailors notice a sinuous form undulating across the sky, most wisely choose to go below decks rather than catch the notice of a traveling tetsu. A tetsu that has emerged from the lake it protects or doffed the streaming cloak of clouds in which it normally hides is a tetsu that has been roused to action and probably rage.

Tetsu are dragonlike creatures seeded by Japanese myth. Despite their lack of wings, inborn magic allows them to fly. In addition to flight, a tetsu's magic gives it a host of potential abilities, which often include taking human or yobuko form, producing magic "tide jewels," and divining the true intentions of other creatures.

**Motive:** Protection

**Environment (Seishin Shore | Magic):** Usually alone, protecting a lake or cloud realm

**Health:** 32

**Damage Inflicted:** 6 points

**Armor:** 2

**Movement:** Long while flying or swimming; short while on the ground

**Modifications:** All tasks related to empathy and divining another creature's true nature (and detecting falsehoods) as level 7.

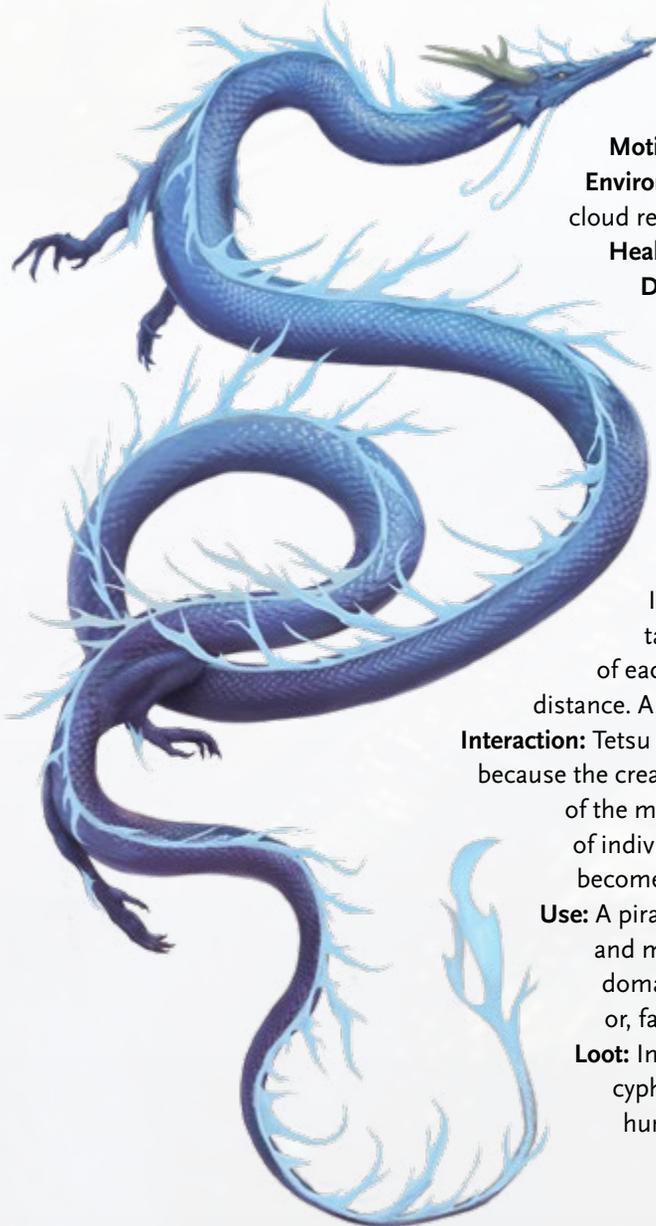
**Combat:** Tetsu can bite or claw opponents while in dragon form, or attack with appropriate weapons while in humanoid form. A tetsu can switch between forms as an action.

In either form, a tetsu can call up a storm blast against a group of targets within half a mile (1 km) that are within immediate range of each other. Affected targets suffer damage and are blown up to a long distance. A tetsu can use its storm blast once every other round.

**Interaction:** Tetsu are usually remote and unconcerned with individuals, mostly because the creatures feel responsibility for large regions and focus on the good of the many over the few. That said, tetsu sometimes notice the plight of individuals, especially those who are kind or good-hearted, and they can become fierce (if often absent) friends.

**Use:** A pirate skyship ransacked the treasury of a tetsu that was out traveling and made off with several tide jewels. The tetsu, reluctant to leave its domain again, promises to reward those who return its precious jewels or, failing that, deliver vengeance upon the thieves.

**Loot:** In addition to a tide jewel or two, a tetsu may possess one or two cyphers or an artifact (though it normally has the latter only while in humanoid form).



## ZOMBIE

Most zombies are mindless, shambling, hungry, and infectious. But some are as fast as Olympic sprinters, as strong as bulls, or able to spread infection by spraying stomach bile in a blinding aerosolized cloud.

## ZOMBIE SPRAYER

3 (9)

The glistening, translucent skin covering a zombie sprayer's bulging stomach reveals a cavity sloshing with greenish bile. The sprayer's mutant physiology allows it to spew the material from its mouth in a vomitous cloud. After it does so, chasing down the blinded and partially digested prey is much easier.

**Motive:** Hunger (for flesh, cerebrospinal fluid, certain human hormones, and so on)

**Environment (Zed America | Mad Science, Magic, or Psionics):** Almost anywhere, usually alone or in groups of three

**Health:** 9

**Damage Inflicted:** 3 points

**Movement:** Short

**Combat:** A zombie sprayer can attack with claws or a bite. However, early in any conflict, it uses its ability to spray infectious, acidic bile. This creates a cloud that can affect every non-zombie creature in a diameter of short range. Targets must succeed on a Might defense roll each round they remain within the cloud or be blinded for one round and suffer 3 points of damage. (Blinded characters act as if they are in complete **darkness**.) A zombie sprayer can spray about once every hour.

When a zombie sprayer is killed, its stomach bursts, creating another acidic bile cloud centered on the zombie, though the diameter of this cloud is only immediate range.

Zombie sprayers are **infectious**, and that goes double for the spray they produce. The difficulty of the Might defense roll to resist infection is increased by one step (making it a difficulty 4 roll).

If an attack would reduce the zombie sprayer's health to 0, it does so only if the number rolled in the attack was an even number; otherwise, the zombie is reduced to 1 point of health instead. Sprayers can see in the dark at short range.

**Interaction:** Perhaps the same smarts that allow zombie sprayers to target their bile clouds effectively give them the capacity to know when they are overmatched, which is why they sometimes retreat from a conflict that's not going their way.

**Use:** The owner of a keep enclave in the middle of the **Badlands** is offering a substantial reward to whoever clears out a zombie sprayer nest that seems centered on land he's trying to cultivate for potatoes.

"What's wrong with its belly?"

~Billy Downs, playing beyond the walls for the last time

 Darkness, page 111

Zombie infection, page 163

Badlands, page 165

**GM Intrusion:** The character's protective clothing is damaged by the acidic cloud, and her Armor is reduced by 1 until it can be repaired.

**GM Intrusion:** The character caught in the cloud of aerosolized zombie bile must succeed on an additional Might defense roll or breathe in too much and begin to choke and retch. She loses her next action and can't defend herself from attacks until her next turn.

## ZOMBIE SPRINTER

3 (9)

The zombification process usually produces a misfiring wreck of a nervous system, good only for shambling and groaning. But for some, the process ignites new connections between nerves and muscles, hastening them well beyond human norms. A single fit defender can usually hold off a single normal zed with a baseball bat or similar implement. Not so a zombie sprinter, whose speed, ferocity, and crazed screams can make its attack seem unstoppable.

**Motive:** Hunger (for flesh, cerebrospinal fluid, certain human hormones, and so on)

**Environment (Zed America | Mad Science, Magic, or Psionics):** Almost anywhere, usually alone or in groups of four

Zombie infection, page 163

**GM Intrusion:** *The character has a hard time dealing with the fast-twitch reflexes of the zombie sprinter. Until he successfully hits the sprinter with an attack, the difficulty of all his attacks on it is increased by one step.*

**Health:** 12

**Damage Inflicted:** 3 points

**Movement:** Long

**Modifications:** Speed defense as level 4.

**Combat:** A zombie sprinter attacks with its bite and claws. If its melee attack deals damage, it begins an amplification attack, making another attack as part of the same action. It can keep making additional attacks as part of the same action until it misses or until it makes five attacks as a single action. Once a zombie sprinter pulls off an amplification attack that strings together three or more attacks as part of a single action, it is too tired to do it again for about a minute.

If an attack would reduce the zombie sprinter's health to 0, it does so only if the number rolled in the attack was an even number; otherwise, the zombie is reduced to 1 point of health instead.

Sprinters can see in the dark at long range.

Sprinters are *infectious*.

**Interaction:** Sprinters are always hungry and move at maximum speed toward living creatures.

They do not reason, cannot speak, and never stop pursuing identified prey unless something else edible comes closer.

**Use:** The sound of rapidly pattering feet is heard every night, echoing out of the darkness from somewhere near the abandoned highway. What could it be?

## ZOMBIE HULK

5 (15)

Some varieties of zombies, despite their semblance to corpses, enjoy a regenerative process that keeps them active regardless of grievous wounds, rotting flesh, and sometimes missing limbs or organs. That same process kicks into overdrive in some zombies, converting everything they eat into additional mass and muscle. The result, a zombie hulk, is three times as massive as a regular zombie and five times as dangerous.

**Motive:** Hunger (for flesh, cerebrospinal fluid, certain human hormones, and so on)

**Environment (Zed America | Mad Science, Magic, or Psionics):** Almost anywhere, usually alone or in pairs

**Health:** 15

**Damage Inflicted:** 8 points

**Movement:** Short

**Modifications:** Speed defense as level 3 due to size.

**Combat:** A zombie hulk bashes with massive, permanently balled fists stained with the gore of past victims.

Additionally, a zombie hulk can bite a victim. When it does so, it's almost impossible to force the hulk's jaws apart again. When a victim takes damage from a bite, she must also succeed on a Speed defense roll or one of her limbs is clamped in the hulk's mouth. The only way to get the hulk to release its grip is to destroy the creature. While the victim remains clamped in the hulk's mouth, she automatically takes damage each round, and the difficulty of attempts to get free is increased by one step.

If an attack would reduce the zombie hulk's health to 0, it does so only if the number rolled in the attack was an even number; otherwise, the zombie is reduced to 1 point of health instead.

Hulks can see in the dark at long range.

Hulks are *infectious*.

**Interaction:** A zombie hulk may choose to smash a nearby structure instead of going straight toward food, but otherwise it is a typical mindless, unreasoning zombie.

**Use:** Those who can command zombies and similar creatures are likely to have a few zombie hulks around for muscle (figuratively and literally).

Zombie infection, page 163

**GM Intrusion:** *The character hit by the zombie hulk is grabbed. The difficulty of her Speed defense roll to avoid the hulk's bite is increased by one step until she gets free of its hold (or until it bites her).*



PART 4:

# BACK MATTER



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# RESOURCES AND INSPIRATION

When it comes to recursions seeded from human imagination, sometimes it's easy for a reader to spot the influences. Other times—especially when recursions are blended from multiple stories, television shows, graphic novels, and movies—it's more difficult to guess all the inspirations. The following list attempts to identify the major works of fiction that seeded the named recursions, though of course sometimes it's impossible to fully know where one's ideas spring from. The synthesis of what has gone before is the soul of creativity, and we want to not only credit those sources but also share them so they can inspire you as well.

**Atlantis:** *Critias*, Plato; *Arion*, *Lord of Atlantis* (1982 comic book series)

**Avalon:** *The Mists of Avalon*, Marion Zimmer Bradley; *Camelot* (1967 movie)

**Borderlands of Sol:** *Dark as Day*, *The Ganymede Club*, *Cold as Ice*, Charles Sheffield; Known Space novels, Larry Niven

**Camelot Le Morte:** *Camelot* (1967 movie); *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975 movie); *The Once and Future King*, T. H. White; *The Crystal Cave*, Mary Stewart

**Cyberscape:** *Halting State*, Charles Stross; *Neuromancer*, William Gibson

**Cygnus Station:** *The Black Hole* (1979 movie); *Interstellar* (2014 movie)

**Entopia:** *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* (1989 movie)

**Eschatos:** *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, Douglas Adams; *Raft*, *Ring*, and other Xeelee Sequence novels, Stephen Baxter

**Flatland:** *Flatland*, Edwin Abbott

**Gingerbread House:** *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, Brothers Grimm

**Gothic Playground:** *Dracula*, Bram Stoker; *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley

**Kiplingverse:** *The Jungle Book*, Rudyard Kipling

**Magician's Sanctum:** *Supernatural* (2005 TV series); Doctor Strange comics, Steve Ditko

**Manifest Silicon:** *The Golden Age*, John Wright; *Diaspora*, Greg Egan

**Mesozoica:** *The Lost World* (1960 movie); *Land of the Lost* (1974 TV series)

**Microcosmica:** *Inner Space* (1987 movie); *Fantastic Voyage* (1966 movie)

**New Centropolis:** All the superhero comics and all the novels about superheroes, with special callout to *Soon I Will Be Invincible*, Austin Grossman



**Panopticon:** 1984, George Orwell; *Logan's Run* (1976 movie); *Paranoia* (1984 RPG)

**Pellucidar:** *Pellucidar*, Edgar Rice Burroughs

**Posthuman Apocalypse:** *Babylon 5* (1994 TV series); *Ilium*, Dan Simmons

**Rebel Galaxy:** *Star Wars* (1977 movie); *Firefly* (2002 television series)

**Ring:** *Halo* (Xbox game), *Ringworld* and *The Ringworld Engineers*, Larry Niven

**Riverside:** *The Lost City of Z*, David Grann

**R'lyeh:** "The Call of Cthulhu," H. P. Lovecraft

**Samurai Sky:** *Cowboy Bebop* (1998 TV series); *Samurai Champloo* (2004 TV series)

**Seishin Shore:** *Spirited Away*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Grave of the Fireflies*, and most every other Hayao Miyazaki production.

**Starship Heinlein:** "For the World Is Hollow and I Have Touched the Sky" (*Star Trek* TV series); *Dust*, Elizabeth Bear; *Pandorum* (2009 movie)

**Strawberry Fayre:** *Watership Down*, Richard Adams

**Sunspot Meadows:** *Up the Walls of the World*, James Tiptree Jr. (Alice Bradley Sheldon)

**Sword Realms:** All my D&D yesterdays

**Sycorax Island:** *The Tempest*, Shakespeare

**Telluria:** *Radix*, A. A. Attanasio; *Children of Hastur*, Marion Zimmer Bradley

**Urban Wizardry:** Rivers of London novels, Ben Aaronovitch; Alex Verus novels, Benedict Jacka; Harry Dresden novels, Jim Butcher; Greywalker novels, Kat Richardson

**War of the Worlds:** *The War of the Worlds*, H. G. Wells

**Wrecked Starship:** *Lost in Space* (1965 TV series; 1998 movie); *Event Horizon* (1997 movie); *Startide Rising*, David Brin

**Wuxia City:** *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000 movie); *Big Trouble in Little China* (1986 movie)

**Zed America:** All the zombie movies, novels, and short stories, with special callout to the Newsflesh novels by Mira Grant



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C = *The Strange* corebook  
W = *Worlds Numberless and Strange*

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