

STARFINDER



THE THREEFOLD CONSPIRACY
ADVENTURE PATH

THE HOLLOW CABAL

BY CRYSTAL FRASIER



ROSELIGHT ORACLE

TIER 7

Large heavy freighter

Speed 8; **Maneuverability** good (turn 1)

AC 20; **TL** 20

HP 140; **DT** —; **CT** 28

Shields medium 100 (forward 25, port 25, starboard 25, aft 25)

Attack (Forward) heavy laser net (5d6; 5 hexes)

Attack (Port) heavy laser cannon (4d8; 10 hexes)

Attack (Starboard) heavy laser cannon (4d8; 10 hexes)

Power Core Arcus Maximum (200 PCU); **Drift Engine** none; **System** advanced medium-range sensors, crew quarters (good), mk 4 armor, mk 4 defenses, mk 3 trinode computer; **Expansion Bays** cargo holds (2), escape pods (18), life science lab, physical science lab, recreation suite (trivid den)

Modifiers +3 to any 3 checks per round, +4 Computers (sensors only), -1 Piloting; **Complement** 18 (minimum 6, maximum 20)

CREW

Captain Computers +13 (7 ranks), Diplomacy +19 (7 ranks), Engineering +13 (7 ranks), gunnery +12 (7th level)

Engineer Engineering +19 (7 ranks)

Gunners (3) gunnery +12 (7th level)

Pilot Piloting +19 (7 ranks)

Science Officers (2 officers, 5 crew each) Computers +19 (7 ranks)

Though sometimes mistaken for cloud formations, Roselight Oracles are a common sight drifting through the colorful Liavaran skies. Most of these vessels are owned and operated by barathus at Roselight's Office of Commercial Interests (OCI). Ostensibly, Oracles monitor the environmental health of the gas giant and its denizens and patrol for unauthorized gas-mining activity. However, given the OCI's rampant corruption, Oracle patrol routes are frequently "adjusted" to benefit clients who pay under the table. Oracles are even occasionally lent out privately, as long as clients can cover the operating fees and provide a suitable bribe. The crew of an Oracle is assisted by scientists and researchers who constantly analyze the ship's surroundings. These researchers are usually associated with the Brethedan administration, but the OCI is not above taking bribes to grant third party individuals research stints onboard a patrolling Oracle. Though primarily used for observation and research, these ships are equipped with weapons capable of defending Roselight and approved mining operations from outside dangers.

The domed structure and high ceiling of a Roselight Oracle allow its systems to be arranged vertically in open space, giving barathus and other flying creatures with perfect maneuverability the ability to easily navigate the ship. The officer stations on older Oracles are on open platforms inaccessible to creatures who can't fly, but newer models include retractable ladders for non-barathu crew. While the officer quarters aboard these ships are of good quality and relatively spacious, the scientists dwell in more cramped conditions, sharing rooms with up to four bunks each.

The Roselight Oracle's design includes modular satellite bays, reflecting barathus' penchant for evolution and self-modification. These sections can be detached and replaced with different modules, making the ships easily customizable. The circular design of an Oracle also gives the ship improved maneuverability, and a complete set of escape pods is housed inside the ship's thick outer hull.

STARFINDER

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This book refers to other Starfinder products using the following abbreviations, yet these additional supplements are not required to make use of this book. Readers interested in references to Starfinder hardcovers can find the complete rules of these books available online for free at paizo.com/sfrd.

Armory

AR

Character Operations Manual

COM



ON THE COVER

Could it be that Chief Inspector Molu Umana Dylaska of Clan Vialo of the Stewards is up to something in this illustration by Tomasz Chistowski?



THE THREEFOLD CONSPIRACY

ADVENTURE PATH

THE HOLLOW CABAL

PART 1: RETURNED TO SOCIETY

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The PCs dock at the space station Upwell—their first real contact with wider society since their ordeal began on the Chimera. Though they have time to shop or investigate as they negotiate for passage to Roselight, hidden enemies watch their every move.

PART 2: A SCRATCH IN THE SURFACE

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The PCs investigate their enemies in the picturesque city of Roselight and meet the eccentric Steward Yych Vorsen—who helps guide them through the beautiful city's ugly underbelly. There, they discover that though the reptoids have infiltrated the Stewards, a malevolent force has overrun the reptoids as well.

PART 3: YOUR CALL IS IMPORTANT TO US

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Investigating the source of the strange infection that is seizing control of the reptoid infiltrators, the PCs penetrate the research labs of a biotech firm and uncover a plot by the fungal dycepskians to spread their influence across the Pact Worlds.

ADVANCEMENT TRACK

"The Hollow Cabal" is designed for four characters.

7

The PCs begin this adventure at 7th level.

8

The PCs should reach 8th level as they confront members of the corrupted Stewards.

9

The PCs should be 9th level by the end of the adventure.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Industry flourishes among the clouds of Liavara. While gas mining dominates the local economy, biotechnology—genetically engineered bacteria and plants, medical treatments, and augmentations—runs a close second. While the peach-colored gas giant's biotechnology industry lags behind that of neighboring Bretheda, firms explore new, novel, or sometime even cruel approaches, thanks to the planetary authority's laissez-faire approach to regulation. Despite the free flow of credits within Liavara and its implicit capital, Roselight, neither has traditionally attracted reptoid attention. The city is an island unto itself with little political power, and barathus—a species the reptoids can't easily mimic—make up half its population. Only after the Stewards of Roselight turned their focus to monitoring for extrasolar threats, such as the Unseen, did the shapeshifting aliens finally step in.

For nearly 10 years, the reptoids have quietly infiltrated the Roselight Stewards, both by taking the forms of existing officers and introducing reptoid agents as new recruits. While Director Deepadra Evosco is under too much direct scrutiny to replace, the reptoids have infiltrated her innermost circle—including Chief Inspector Molu Umana Dylaska of Clan Vialo, Director Evosco's direct intelligence report.

But Liavara has a much longer history with the Unseen than the recent reptoid infiltration.

Over 30 years ago, a race of fungal parasites called the dycepskians (page 55), who consume and replace a host's nervous tissue, absorbing their memories and skills in the process, infected the remote Zeffrac Science Platform in orbit around Nchak. On the isolated research station, the dycepskians attempted to adapt their physiology to infest and control the local barathus, whose adaptive nervous system proved remarkably resilient. The grays noted the dycepskian effort and engineered a bioweapon to wipe out the invaders, but the fungal mass mind reacted more quickly than anticipated to quarantine and exile its infected members. Falling back to a regrettably public solution, the grays sabotaged the Zeffrac Science Platform, decompressing it in a hard vacuum and killing thousands of infected and innocent staff alike before the dycepskians could crash the platform into and infest the populated moon.

Zeffrac was forced to sell much of its lab equipment on the secondhand market. A scrappy start-up called Gamut Bio purchased several pieces, including a DNA sequencer laced with the last surviving spores of the dycepskian's advanced barathu strain. The spores sat dormant for years before a young barathu researcher cut herself repairing the well-worn device. The Zeffrac strain went to work, overrunning the barathu's mind and spreading to the company's other

barathus every time they merged to collaborate, eventually assuming control of the rest of Gamut Bio and spreading to Roselight. As part of this plan, the dycepskian-controlled researchers developed a new biotech augmentation—one secretly preloaded with established dycepskian mycelium—to more reliably infect new hosts.

The unexpected arrival of the reptoids on the scene spooked the dycepskians, who believe the reptoids wiped out their progenitor colony 30 years ago. As the replaced Chief Inspector Dylaska realized the dycepskians were maneuvering to conquer the city, she unwittingly turned to Gamut Bio's new HepatoDyne implant to protect herself and her allies. As the adventure begins, she and several other reptoid infiltrators have fallen under dycepskian control.

PART 1: RETURNED TO SOCIETY

At the end of "Deceivers' Moon," the PCs learned that the reptoids transmitted extensive profiles on each of them to the Liavaran city of Roselight. They are unaware that the recipient is a reptoid who has replaced the kasatha Chief Inspector Molu Umana Dylaska of Clan Vialo, a senior member of the Stewards and one of Director Evosco's closest confidants. The false Dylaska has tasked other reptoids to gather information on the PCs in hopes of manufacturing criminal charges against these "mysterious enemy soldiers."

While the clues all point the PCs to the floating city of Roselight, the barathu-run Office of Commercial Interests (OCI)—the de facto planetary government—forbids direct access to the gas giant to curtail illegal mining and poaching. Ships that run the blockade risk a direct confrontation with the Corporate Authority gunships that enforce the OCI's edicts, drawing plenty of attention even if they win or escape. A PC who succeeds at a DC 16 Culture check recognizes that the easiest, quietest way to gain access to the Cerise City is to blend in with the thousands of other ships docking in Upwell—a giant orbital station and transport stop—and petition the OCI for legal passports.

INFORMATION GATHERING

The PCs can attempt to recall information about Upwell, Roselight, and the Stewards if they wish. A PC learns all the information listed with a DC equal to or less than the result of their check.

UPWELL

A PC can attempt a Culture or Profession (corporate professional, dockworker, merchant, or smuggler) check to recall knowledge about the spaceport.

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I THINK I'M A CLONE NOW

Once the PCs gain access to wider infosphere newsfeeds, they may begin to suspect something is amiss with their identities. Computer searches for their pasts reveal no information, as their memories and documentation are all forgeries created by the grays. If you want to push the themes of isolation and paranoia endemic to The Threefold Conspiracy, communicate this by saying "Someone has erased all traces of your existence," to keep the PCs centered in their narrative, rather than making them feel like outsiders by telling them "It looks like you've never existed." You may also drop the first hints that the PCs are clones by having them notice a politician or media influencer who bears a striking family resemblance. You might even imply that this figure could be a clone of them, rather than vice versa.

While the PCs will learn more of their falsified backgrounds and true nature in future adventures, at this point they only need to suspect that something far larger than themselves is going on, and like it or not, they are at the center of it.

Result	Information
12+	Upwell is an enormous space station run by the gas-mining corporations that control Liavara. It orbits the planet above the city of Roselight, its so-called sister city, which floats in Liavara's atmosphere.
15+	While Upwell has a corporate-run police force, law enforcement authorities don't generally care about how you behave as long as you don't damage the station, interfere with the corporations' interests, or, to a lesser extent, disrupt local businesses.
20+	The barathus from Bretheda administer Liavara through the Office of Commercial Interests, or OCI, though they generally turn a blind eye to most of what happens in Upwell. Still, making a reputation as a troublemaker is a sure way to be barred from visiting Liavara or Roselight.

ROSELIGHT

A PC can attempt a Culture or Profession (actor, artist, corporate professional, herbalist, manager, merchant, or musician) check to recall knowledge about the Cerise City.

Result	Information
12+	Roselight, also known as the Cerise City, is essentially Liavara's "capital" and is a popular tourist spot for Pact Worlds elite. It has scenic views, museums, nightlife, and is home to most of the barathus who watch over Liavara.
14+	Roselight is a major business and industry hub, despite its picturesque appearance. Many gas refineries and

warehouses occupy the floating city's lower levels, and some major mineral and biotechnology companies have headquarters above. The Office of Commercial Interests, or OCI, serves as the local government.

16+	The OCI tightly controls who can approach the surface of Liavara, including Roselight. Travelers must apply for a visa at the OCI satellite office in Upwell to travel without risk of being shot down.
20+	The OCI has much more influence on Roselight than on Upwell, but mostly focuses on protecting the native Dreamers and the local environment. Most of the local police work is handled by private security firms and the local Steward base. In fact, Roselight is home to a large Steward precinct.

THE STEWARDS

A PC can attempt a Culture or Profession (bounty hunter, con artist, lawyer, mercenary, or smuggler) check to recall knowledge about the law enforcement organization.

Result	Information
10+	The Stewards maintain alliances between disparate members of the Pact Worlds through diplomacy and, when necessary, force. Leaders of the organization strive to protect the citizens of the Pact Worlds from threats, both internal and external, though they leave the policing of individual planets and moons to those entities' law enforcement agencies.
15+	Roselight is home to a large Steward base, the largest one this far from Absalom Station. They help police illegal gas-mining operations, smuggling, and poaching, but specialize in monitoring for extrasolar threats from outside the Pact Worlds.
20+	Director Deepadra Evosco is one of the three leaders of the Constabulary, the Stewards' investigatory and intelligence-analysis branch, and maintains a post in a base on Roselight.

UPWELL APPROACH

Flying the Steward ship confiscated from Varos, it takes 1d6 days of Drift travel to reach Liavara (or 1d6+2 days using standard thrusters) and a few additional hours to enter the gas giant's orbit and approach Upwell. As the PCs do so, the utilitarian form of the space station spreads across the view screen of the PCs' vessel. Two colossal, rotating wheels dotted with gantries, cranes, and docking spars have been constructed around the remains of a small moon. Countless cargo ships—most of them stenciled with garish corporate logos—come and go. The PCs are soon contacted by an Upwell docking assistant over their ship's comms.

"Attention, vessel. You are cleared to dock, but you'll need to visit the Office of Commercial Interests if you want a passage to Roselight. Proceed to Spar N-380, sponsored by Hexane

Fuels and Almost Chicken. Remember: When it's almost time for dinner, it's time for Almost Chicken. Welcome to Upwell."

The PCs may worry about their ship's transponder not passing muster, but a successful DC 14 Sense Motive check reveals no trace of suspicion in the comm officer's voice, while a successful DC 14 Culture check suggests that Upwell is the kind of space station where credits matter far more than a questionable background.

For the time being, the PCs have room to breathe. There are no indications that the false Stewards from Varos pursued them (if any of them even survived). If the PCs seem reluctant to show their faces in this public space station, let them know that their ship needs refueling, resupplying, or minor repairs. If the PCs haven't attempted to recall information about the area, encourage them to do so now, stressing that Upwell is a large spaceport and it will be easy to blend in with the crowds of other travelers there. Continue to area **A** when the PCs dock.

A TICKING CLOCK?

The PCs have as much or as little time as they need to shop, research, build equipment, heal, and otherwise catch their breath on Upwell (or elsewhere if they so desire) after their long and arduous past few days, but you should give them the impression that it's only a matter of time before their reptoid enemies catch up with them.

Don't rob the players of much-needed time to learn about the universe they inhabit and catch up on the normal business of adventurers. This trip to Upwell is likely their first visit to a public spaceport and their first chance to buy and sell equipment. Encourage them to shop, listen to rumors from locals, and peruse the news. For more information about the space station's geography, see Upwell Notable Locations on page 44.

However, giving the players downtime doesn't mean you should allow them to get comfortable. Security cameras are ubiquitous around Upwell, so anytime the PCs linger, make mention of a black, unblinking eye scanning the area and relaying the information to unknown masters. Upwell is home to unaligned criminals, bounty hunters, and toughs, so mention the occasional lingering stare from a stranger, who then returns to their own business. Whenever the PCs try something unusual or aggressive, ask how much attention they want to attract.

Ultimately, you can use **Event 1** to push the plot forward when you need to, but your players should worry that their enemies watch their every move.

A. SPAR N-380 (CR 6)

When the PCs disembark from their starship, read or paraphrase the following.

An inch of ship exhaust and grime covers every wall of Spar N-380. The air reeks of coolant, fuel, and something that smells vaguely like heavily spiced chicken. An arching sign overhead reads "Welcome to Upwell: Gateway to Roselight," though

THE MAN IN THE GRAY FLANNEL SPACESUIT

Because Upwell and Roselight both operate under a heavy-handed business authority, consider allowing players to use an appropriate Profession skill, especially Profession (corporate professional), instead of most Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, or Sense Motive skill checks attempted here. Less-fitting Profession skills, like accountant, manager, or merchant, might only be used in specific instances as appropriate, while tangentially related professions like lab technician, maintenance worker, or politician can only offer the smallest amount of information.

someone has graffitied over the last word with a crude, obscene drawing. The deafening shriek of metal against metal and the hiss of industrial ventilation drown out the conversations of locals and other travelers in the wide hallway.

The indifference of Upwell toward small-time traders and visitors works in the PCs' favor. Without corporate sponsorship, their ship is relegated to a run-down, third-tier docking spar with little security and dubious amenities. A few dozen figures in utility clothes and jumpsuits mill about, deliberately avoiding eye contact with passersby.

Each of these mediocre docking spars have exterior airlocks, clamps, and cranes that can support, service, and refuel up to six Medium or smaller ships at one time. The interior, a long hall with bolted-down chairs and basic services, resembles an airport terminal but with the additions of rudimentary storage, industrial services, and a tight roadway for transport vehicles. The spar is 650 feet long by 65 feet wide, with ceilings that rise 25 feet overhead.

Creatures: Even these anonymous corners of the spaceport aren't without their dangers. Members of a small android gang, the Docksmaythes, call Spar N-380 their territory, shaking down local businesses for protection money and charging visitors "docking fees." As the PCs disembark, three tough-looking androids, Ivoe, Millicut, and Square, approach the PCs and politely insist that the group owes a collective sum of 2,000 credits in docking fees before they can continue on to the station. The androids aren't especially aggressive—they just want a payday—but grow increasingly hostile if the PCs ask questions like "Do you even work for the station?" or insist "We already paid our docking fees." The Docksmaythes' starting attitude is indifferent, but their general swagger and overconfidence increases the DC of any Diplomacy checks to improve one of their attitudes by 5. If the PCs refuse to pay, the androids try to rough them up.

The androids can also be chased off with a successful DC 18 Intimidate check before combat starts, but this tactic has drawbacks (see Development on page 6). However, if the

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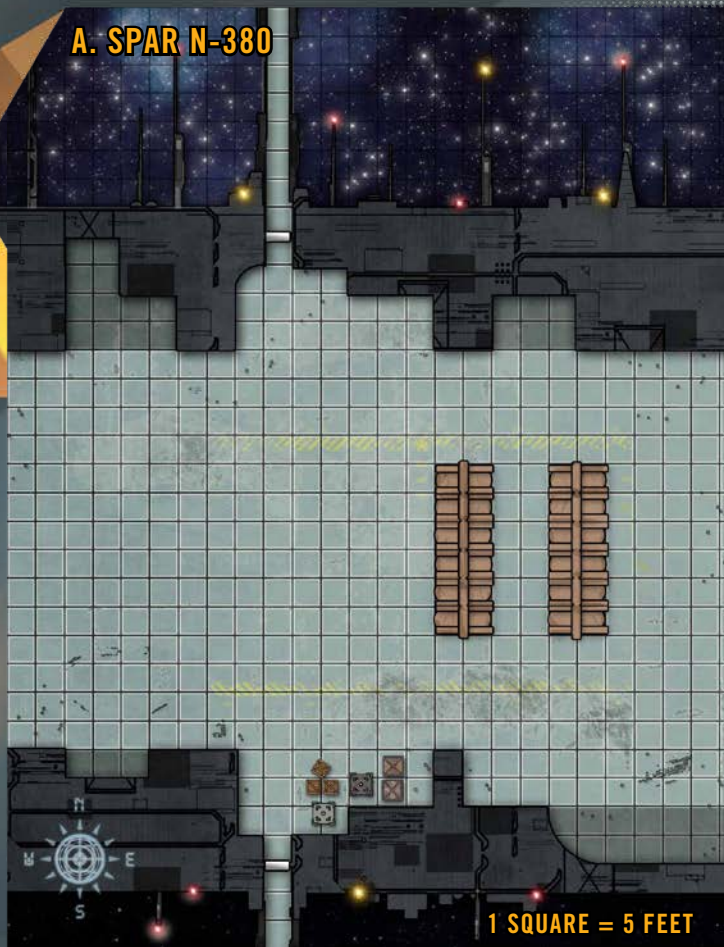
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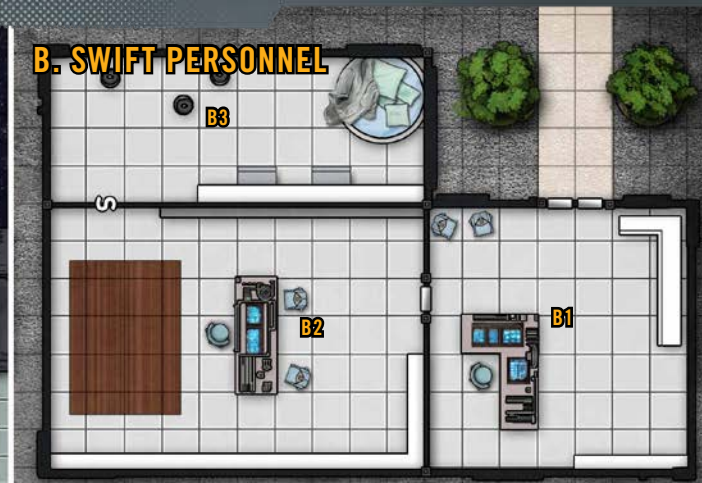
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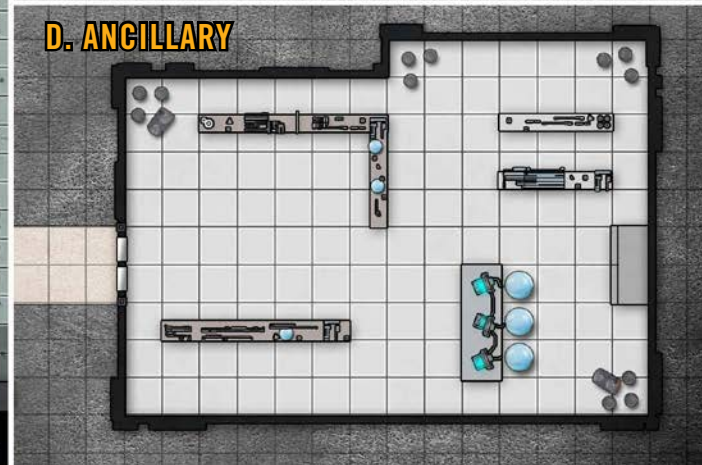
A. SPAR N-380



B. SWIFT PERSONNEL



D. ANCILLARY



Intimidate check result exceeds the DC by 5 or more, the Docksmythes leave the PCs in peace.

DOCKSMYTHES (3)

CR 3

XP 800 each

Gang machinist (*Starfinder Pact Worlds* 179)

HP 17 each

TACTICS

During Combat On the first round of combat, the

Docksmythes whistle to summon their chop cycles (which are leaning against some crates 30 feet away) to move between them and the PCs. The androids then attempt to overload the weapons of PCs who are adjacent to their drones, fire their static arc pistols, or command their cycles to shoot.

Morale The Docksmythes only want cash. An android who is reduced to half their Hit Points retreats on their chop cycle.

Development: If the PCs pay the fee, the androids leave them alone and wander off, but the PCs return to find vulgar graffiti sprayed on one side of their ship. If the PCs improve at least one of the Docksmythes' attitudes to friendly, the gang members reduce their fee to 1,000 credits and will actually protect the PCs' ship from vandalism. If they manage to shift the androids' attitudes to helpful, the Docksmythes waive their docking fee and become local contacts the PCs can ask

about Upwell and even secure a favor from the criminals when they begin the process of acquiring visas to Roselight (page 9).

If the PCs frightened away the Docksmythes using intimidation, the androids return while the PCs are gone to tag their ship and break in to steal approximately 2d4 × 1,000 credits worth of gear and valuables.

Treasure: The Docksmythes are carrying 2,500 credits on various credsticks from previous shakedown.

Story Award: If the PCs deal with the Docksmythes through a payout, or by using either the Diplomacy or Intimidate skills, award them XP as if they defeated the androids in combat.

RANDOM UPWELL EVENTS

As the PCs explore Upwell, you can use the following random encounters to help convey the station's atmosphere and set the stage for events to come. You can drop in the following events whenever the PCs start to lose focus or go looking for trouble.

THE CONSPIRACY THEORIST (CR 6)

One of the human dockworkers on Spar N-380, Vee Andano, suffers from paranoia and anxiety. His delusions are well-founded; the grays abducted and experimented on Vee years ago while he served as security on Absalom Station. His unexplained absence got him fired, and he eventually relocated to Upwell, where no one paid him much mind.

Something about the PCs sets Vee off when he spots them on the docking spar. He becomes certain the PCs are agents sent to recover him and begins sending them anonymous threatening messages such as, "I know who you are," and "I won't let you take what you came here for." If a PC succeeds at a DC 27 Computers check, they track the messages back to Vee's apartment. They find it hastily abandoned, but can uncover books about conspiracies and mysterious, invisible alien masterminds, as well as a camera with several candid holophotos of the PCs themselves. For now, Vee has abandoned his home to search for a suitable weapon.

Creature: Vee Andano genuinely believes the PCs have come to kill him, and that they are the masterminds manipulating the Pact Worlds (or at least serve said masterminds). To protect himself and destroy his tormentors, he tracked down a bioweapons dealer and purchased a Damoritosh's arm symbiend (*Starfinder Alien Archive* 112). Once the creature bonded with him, it stoked his paranoia and transformed his anxiety into uncontrollable rage. When he sees the PCs in public, he attacks. While Vee likely isn't an overwhelming physical threat against the PCs, he likely adds to their unease, both with his random, threatening messages and by creating a public spectacle with his attack.

VEE ANDANO

CR 6

XP 2,400

Male Damoritosh's arm host (*Starfinder Alien Archive* 112)

HP 90

TACTICS

Before Combat Vee tries to catch the PCs by surprise, ideally while they're eating, reading, or otherwise preoccupied. He appears to be just another local as he approaches the party. A PC who succeeds at a DC 18 Sense Motive check picks up on his aggression before he attacks, and a PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Perception check notices his bloodshot eyes and flecks of spittle at the corners of his mouth. A PC who succeeds at either of these checks can act during the surprise round.

During Combat Vee immediately enters into a frothing rage and makes full attacks whenever possible, screaming his nonsensical personal theories about the PCs' goals.

Morale Thanks to the influence of his symbiend, Vee is beyond reason and fights to the death unless somehow separated from the symbiend.

Treasure: In addition to his collection of discursive books and unhinged conspiracy-theory trivids, Vee's apartment contains an *endurance module* armor upgrade (*Starfinder Armory* 83) from his time on Absalom Station. The upgrade can be found with a successful DC 25 Perception check.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY (CR 5)

While wandering through Upwell, one of the PCs experiences a chance encounter with someone who knew the person that

the PC is a clone of. This angry confrontation draws plenty of public attention.

Creature: Jeva Quon thinks they recognize the selected PC as an ex-lover and angrily storms toward them in a public thoroughfare, screaming "You jerk, I want Mallo back," before attempting to slap the PC. Jeva's true ex took the couple's shared pet squox, Mallo, during their breakup several months ago. Now believing they've located their thieving ex-lover, Jeva is ready to make a public scene. Jeva's gender and sexuality are left intentionally vague so you can adjust them to fit the PC as appropriate, though to increase the oddity of the encounter, you might mix up those elements to make Jeva someone the PC never would have dated.

Calming Jeva requires two consecutive successful DC 20 skill checks, though the exact skills depend on the PCs' approach. Convincing Jeva they have the wrong person requires



DOCKSMYTHE

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a successful Diplomacy check, while chasing Jeva off requires a successful Intimidate check. The targeted PC can attempt to escape the situation with a successful Athletics or Stealth check, while they could simply pretend to be the ex in question and take Jeva's abuse with a successful Bluff check. The PCs can attempt any of these checks in any order they desire, though if the group fails two consecutive checks after attempting four skill checks, the scene attracts attention from many onlookers, one of whom steps up to the group to ask what is wrong. Jeva then storms off yelling, "This isn't over!" leaving the PCs to offer any explanation they want to the confused passersby. There are no repercussions for failing these skill checks, though you shouldn't reveal that to the PCs.

If the PCs attack or cast an obvious spell on Jeva, they run away, claiming that they are going to alert the local law enforcement. Several onlookers shoot the PCs dirty looks.

Treasure: If the PCs can calm or soothe Jeva and stop them from attracting even more attention, Jeva apologizes profusely for making a scene. They acknowledge that Mello and their ex are probably long gone but offer the PC in question their ex's old hoverskates (*Starfinder Armory* 104).

Story Award: As long as the PCs de-escalate the situation without violence, award them 1,600 XP.

PAPERS, PLEASE

To reach Roselight and continue their investigations into the reptoid invasion, the PCs must obtain visitors' visas for themselves and their ship. The heroes can acquire a legitimate visa only from the Office of Commercial Interests, a barathu-run bureaucracy ostensibly intended to govern the planet, limit development, and protect the indigenous Dreamers (*Starfinder Alien Archive* 2 44). In reality, the OCI is over-extended, myopic, and relies heavily on the Corporate Authority—the advisory council of Liavara's biggest economic interests—for funding and enforcement. Because of this, obtaining a Roselight visa is normally a long process that takes upwards of 6 months for anyone who doesn't represent a major business interest. However, there are also ways for the PCs to acquire these visas less legitimately; for more information, see the Stowaway! sidebar on page 9.

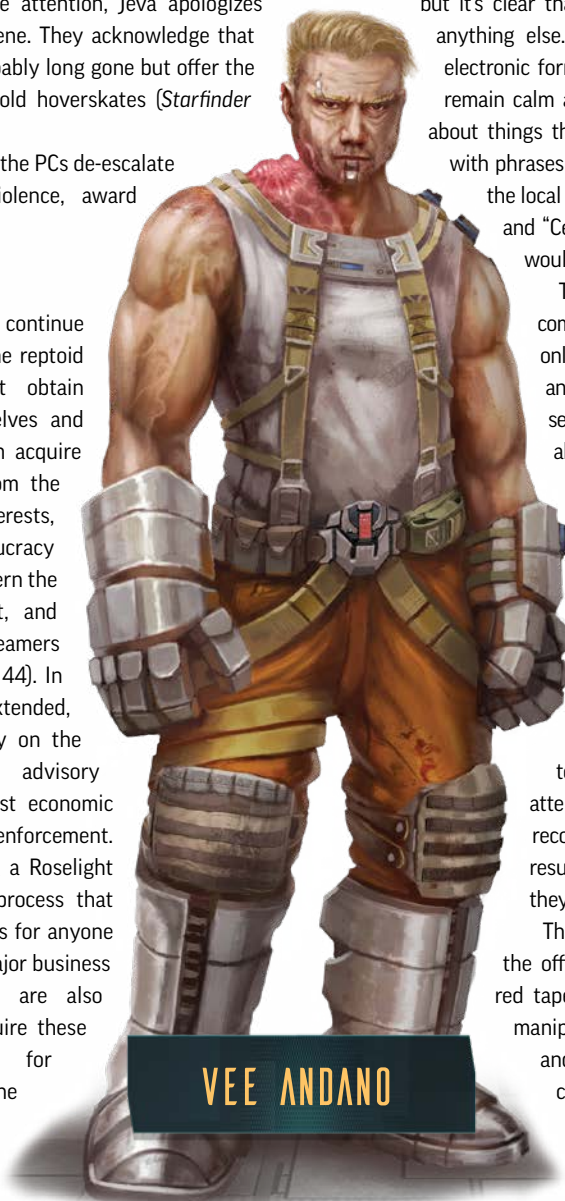
When the PCs decide to apply for their visas, locals can point them toward the OCI building or they can look up its location on the infosphere. It sits at the end of a wide, well-lit plaza lined with other corporate offices—perhaps the cleanest and most open space on Upwell. Several holodisplays lining the area show sweeping vistas and sunny cloudscares, though the effect is marred by the occasional burst of static.

The interior of the OCI building is built to accommodate barathus first and foremost, and while the reception area and meeting rooms accommodate humanoid visitors, flight is required to access the offices. The barathu assigned to work here generally hate the assignment, and the normally cooperative aliens can get particularly passive-aggressive, resisting efforts to goad them along.

A bored barathu named **Cavence Sy Reel** (N agender barathu) is currently working at the reception desk. They laconically greet the PCs and can aid the group with the visa process, but it's clear that Cavence would rather be doing anything else. The barathu gives the PCs several electronic forms to fill out, and as long as the PCs remain calm and respectful, they drop subtle hints about things that might speed along the paperwork with phrases like, "If you were working with one of the local corps, this would likely proceed faster" and "Certainly a higher class of transit ticket would receive higher priority."

The PCs' road to legitimate passage is complicated by the fact that they have only dubious ownership of their starship and can't prove who they are. Upwell serves pirates, shipjackers, and smugglers alongside its lawful traffic, and the authorities don't especially care so long as those visitors keep their heads down and don't start trouble. But the OCI goes through considerable effort to keep those elements away from Liavara. Because the PCs are clones—though they are likely oblivious to this fact—they lack any official documentation or ties to the lives they believe are theirs. Any attempts by the PCs to point to official records or apply celebrity status only results in a frustrated Cavence insisting they can't find any such records.

The PCs can either wait 6 months for the official visa process or cut through the red tape with a variety of tactics, including manipulation, under-the-table payment, and loophole exploitation. Each tactic can only get them so far, however, and they must successfully perform three such tactics to finally obtain



VEE ANDANO

their visas. In general, performing a single tactic takes the majority of the day, but the PCs can still pursue their own interests in off-hours. If the group isn't sure how to proceed, a PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Culture or Diplomacy check reveals at least one of the tactics listed below. These tactics are representative of only some of the ways the PCs might want to move things along. If your PCs have ideas of their own, you should encourage such thinking and use these rules as guidelines for how to adjudicate imaginative plans.

Charm: The PCs can win over Cavence to their side by befriending the barathu and making their workday a little easier, and they will reciprocate by helping the PCs dodge some of the most common paperwork pitfalls. Cavence begins with an initial attitude of unfriendly; a PC who succeeds at a DC 27 Diplomacy check improves the barathu's attitude by one step. If the PCs fail a Diplomacy check, they can attempt another after bringing Cavence a gift—such as flowers for their desk, concert tickets, or succulent borax—costing at least 100 credits. This tactic counts as a success once Cavence's attitude shifts to friendly or better.

Corporate Sponsorship: If the PCs have corporate sponsorship or become Corporate Authority employees, their visas get bumped up in priority. The same plaza containing the OCI offices also hosts several other business fronts for major local companies like the Aspis Consortium, Hexane Fuels, and Fairwinds. Landing a corporate job requires a successful DC 22 skill check, with the exact skill varying by what job the character applies for. For example, a character might attempt Diplomacy to work in management, Life Science for biotech, or Physical Science or Athletics to obtain gas-mining work. A corporate job may require attending a few days of training or actual work to keep up the charade until the PCs leave Upwell. Every PC must secure a corporate job for this tactic to be successful.

Friends in Low Places: Criminal contacts can help the PCs worm through the official channels. If the PCs allied with the Docksmaythes (page 6), this tactic succeeds automatically if they ask the android gang for assistance. Otherwise, making the right criminal contacts requires a successful DC 22 Diplomacy check to find a potential lead and a successful DC 25 Bluff or Intimidate check to convince the lowlifes to help. The PCs can gain a cumulative +1 circumstance bonus on either of these checks for every 200 credits they spend on bribes or free drinks.

Hacking: Hacking the OCI computers to prioritize different tasks is a proud tradition in Upwell and half the reason why so many OCI tasks take forever. The system is air-gapped, so the PCs must first gain access to the floating OCI offices overhead (disabling the security after hours requires a successful DC 25 Engineering check), then hack the tier 3 computer, requiring a successful DC 25 Computers check. Finally, the PCs must forge additional permissions or identity documents, requiring an opposed Computers skill check against the barathu workers (total +9 modifier).

STOWAWAY!

Rather than jump through the official hoops of obtaining visitors' visas, your PCs may decide to smuggle themselves down to Roselight aboard one of the gas tankers that routinely run between the surface and the space station. To do so, use the same system described above, where the heroes must successfully perform three tactics. In this case, the tactics represent things like learning the transport schedules, finding a friendly (or bribable) pilot, convincing dockworkers and inspectors to look the other way, and acquiring resources to make fake worker visas. They can reduce the number of successful tactics needed to two if they don't create fake visas, but in this case, the PCs must slink stealthily around Roselight and can't patronize legitimate businesses like clinics and markets.

PCs reaching the surface illegally will also likely need to leave their starship behind, limiting their mobility and removing their de facto base of operations.

Payment: The PCs can push the process along with cold, hard credits, which can either represent bribing officials to speed their paperwork along, or buying high-priority luxury tickets to Roselight, which automatically bumps up their visa priority. Either technique costs 5,000 credits.

Development: Once the PCs succeed at three tactics, they receive word that their visas have been approved, allowing them and their ship to travel to Roselight.

Story Award: Award the PCs 3,200 XP once they secure their travel visas.

EVENT 1: A TIME TO KILL (CR 8)

Eventually, Chief Inspector Dylaska's reptoids track the PCs to Upwell, either through tracing their flight plan or by intercepting security reports of their activity on the station. Unfortunately for her, she discovers this mere hours before the PCs are scheduled to leave Upwell for Roselight. Pressed for time, Dylaska opts to recruit some local muscle, using a reptoid-controlled staffing agency, Swift Personnel, to hire several down-on-their-luck dockworkers to ambush the PCs. Swift's proprietor, Lunabellox deBrie, scrounges up a handful of thugs for the job.

The impromptu hit squad ambushes the PCs on Spar N-380, outside the airlock leading to their ship. If the PCs allied themselves with, or paid off, the Docksmaythes earlier in the adventure, the android gang warns them that some tough figures are waiting outside their ship. Otherwise, the killers try to look like dock workers and take the PCs by surprise.

Creatures: DeBrie assembled a team of three haan prospectors and two human rig technicians. The band is comprised of rough-and-tumble opportunists, not spies or experienced killers. The roughnecks gloat that the PCs

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must have “pissed off someone important,” and should generally accept their fates. All of them have taken similar jobs for deBrie before, generally disposing of witnesses and troublemakers they assume have crossed one corporation or another. None of them know deBrie is a reptoid.

HAANS (3)

CR 3

XP 800 each

HP 36 each (*Starfinder Alien Archive* 58)

TACTICS

During Combat The haans close to melee range with the PCs but are reluctant to use their firespray in the tight confines of the spaceport. If one haan is brought to 0 HP, one of the others lets loose with a blast of flame.

Morale The haan prospectors are accustomed to risking their lives for credits, but they aren't suicidal. Each attempts to run or surrender if reduced to fewer than 10 HP.



RIG TECHNICIANS (2)

CR 4

XP 1,200 each

Male and female human mechanic

CN Medium humanoid (human)

Init +1; Perception +10

DEFENSE

HP 45 EACH

EAC 16; KAC 17

Fort +5; Ref +5; Will +5

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee sledge +10 (1d8+5 B)

Ranged tactical semi-auto pistol +8 (1d6+4 P)

Offensive Abilities overload (DC 15), target tracking

TACTICS

During Combat This team is new to working together, so they don't always end up in the most advantageous positions. The technicians hang back and overload the PCs' weapons and gear. Occasionally, a technician uses distracting hack to feint one of the PCs before firing on them.

Morale The rig technicians have difficult and dangerous jobs, but they aren't suicidal. Each attempts to run or surrender if reduced to fewer than 15 HP.

STATISTICS

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

Skills Athletics +15, Computers +15, Engineering +15, Intimidate +10, Piloting +10

Languages Brethedan, Common

Other Abilities artificial intelligence (exocortex), custom rig (toolset), mechanic tricks (distracting hack, neural shunt)

Gear casual stationwear, sledge^{AR}, tactical semi-auto pistol with 18 small arm rounds

Treasure: Each of the five assailants carries a credstick loaded with 1,000 credits.

Development: None of the attackers are especially savvy. All of their comms show recent calls (within the last 2 hours) from the same source: Swift Personnel in Roselight. Two of the haans and one of the technicians also carry holo-embossed business cards from Lunabellox deBrie, head of that agency.

Once the PCs have acquired their travel visas, they can head to Roselight to continue their investigations, both regarding the reptoids' contacts within the Roselight Stewards and the connection between Swift Personnel and the roughnecks hired to kill them.

PART 2: A SCRATCH IN THE SURFACE

The flight from Upwell to Roselight takes 2 hours. Dylaska's reptoids won't know their efforts to kill the PCs have failed until

after the PCs have reached Roselight, and as long as the PCs keep their heads down and don't attract undue attention, they can maneuver freely within Roselight without harassment for at least a few days. As the PCs' vessel approaches the city, read or paraphrase the following.

Roselight emerges from the roiling pink and peach clouds, sparkling like a web of jewels hanging in midair. City-sized floating platforms support glittering buildings, all protected from the planet's weather by transparent domes.

At this point, the Roselight docking authority contacts the PCs' vessel, asking for their credentials. After the PCs transmit the codes on their visas, the docking authority agent returns with the designation of a slip where they can dock their ship. The difference between this dock and the one on Upwell is like night and day, with the Roselight slip being vastly cleaner and more stylish than that of the space station.

The PCs have two primary leads they can investigate on Roselight. They can either surveil the Stewards directly to learn the identity of the reptoid agent among them, or investigate Swift Personnel to learn who tried to kill them and why. Otherwise, they can essentially explore the city as they see fit; for more information about the Cerise City, see page 38.

Luckily, the PCs have an unlikely ally in Roselight: Stewards Investigator Xych Vorsen. This suspicious shirren specializes in unusual phenomena and conspiracy theories. However, Vorsen's erratic behavior, paranoid nature, and embarrassing news coverage have alienated the inspector from their department. Vorsen is certain something is influencing their fellow Stewards, but doesn't know who to trust beyond their partner, the android Ephecta. Vorsen sees the sudden Steward interest in the PCs as something to follow up on.

If the PCs investigate Swift Personnel, they cross paths with Inspector Vorsen's own scrutiny of the agency. If they instead ignore Swift Personnel to look into the Stewards, Vorsen spots them and interrupts them before they can subject themselves to much danger. In either case, Vorsen's introduction can be found on page 13.

B. SWIFT PERSONNEL

Swift Personnel is a small staffing company with an exclusive list of corporate clients. It specializes in employees with advanced technical knowledge to staff the many gas-mining rigs around the planet. The company's offices are located in a posh-looking one-story building in the Gold district.

Local reptoids replaced the company founder, Lunabellox deBrie, 8 years ago—though the job was poorly researched and has been sloppily handled. A DC 22 Computers check to search public records reveals that the original deBrie was an elf; inexplicably, the male reptoid who replaced him has decided to take the form of a human. It's a wonder that the impostor hasn't been found out, as he bears almost no resemblance to the original deBrie, beyond using his name.

The reptoids now use the company as a pool of disposable, deniable agents for simple acts of violence, theft, and sabotage—all of which easily blend in with the cutthroat corporate politics of Roselight. The non-reptoid agents have no idea about the true nature of who is paying them for their illegal actions, and Chief Inspector Dylaska helps stall and divert any Steward investigations into the company. A PC can hack into Swift's computer network (treat as a tier 3 computer with an alarm) from the building's exterior with a successful DC 25 Computers check, but they will find only legitimate business and financial records.

The PCs can try to break into the building after hours or force their way in, but they might also choose to pose as potential staffers. If they do so, they are cursorily questioned about their training and work history by Swift's android receptionist, Kavo. The android doesn't probe too deeply, expecting most people to tell the truth, and tells them that the company will soon contact them for an interview if their credentials interest the boss. Assuming the PCs did not attempt to make any outlandish claims, deBrie wants to interview them the next day.

When the PCs return, the impostor deBrie recognizes them instantly if they don't think to disguise themselves. However, the reptoid plays along to learn what he can about the PCs before attempting to dispose of them. If the PCs disguise themselves, deBrie attempts a Perception check opposed by their Disguise check to see if he recognizes them. If not, he conducts a normal interview, asking them about their previous gas-mining or technical experience while subtly probing their morality to see if they'd be willing to undertake criminal work on the side; a successful DC 20 Sense Motive check picks up on the unusual nature of deBrie's questioning. If deBrie doesn't see through their disguises and believes they'll be useful criminal assets, he hires them and leaves them alone in his office for 10 minutes while he makes arrangements with his receptionist in area **B1**—possibly providing the PCs with the chance to search for clues or hack into his private terminal.

Most of the front wall of the office consists of transparent aluminum windows (hardness 10, HP 15), and the doors are securely locked in the evenings (Engineering DC 30 to open). The door and windows are wired to a silent alarm as well (Engineering DC 30 to disarm), which alerts deBrie in the event of a break-in.

The map for this area appears on page 6.

B1. RECEPTION (CR 6)

Swift Personnel's reception area has few amenities beyond a few uncomfortable chairs, a reception desk, and a vidscreen showing barathu romantic dramas. Few companies do business with Swift in-person—deBrie normally takes corporate clients for meals or drinks—so the only visitors are job applicants.

Creatures: deBrie's receptionist, **Kavo** (LN male android), minds the front office. Kavo knows nothing of deBrie's illegal

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activities, but he has his suspicions. DeBrie pays him enough to ignore them, though. DeBrie has no true emotions toward Kavo and was planning to kill him eventually, so the android has no value as a hostage or humanoid shield.

Two security robots concealed within the walls are automatically activated by the same alarm system tied to the door. DeBrie can also activate them from his datapad, especially if he hears a commotion.

PATROL-CLASS SECURITY ROBOTS (2) CR 4

XP 1,200 each

HP 52 each (*Starfinder Alien Archive* 94)

TACTICS

During Combat The robots begin combat by attempting to catch as many PCs in their jolting arcs as possible. They then fire with their tactical arc emitters set to stun.

Morale Unthinking automatons, the security robots fight until they are destroyed.

B2. DeBrie's Office (CR 8)

Fine fixtures of molded ceramic and carved quartz adorn this surprisingly warm office. A massive desk sits in the middle of the room—sparsely furnished—and the floor behind it is an open rectangle of mahogany.

Lunabellox deBrie keeps his office a few degrees hotter than humanoids generally find comfortable, both because he prefers the warmth and because he likes to watch applicants squirm. Beyond seeming more lavish and richer than a staffing agency owner should be able to afford, the office contains no incriminating evidence beyond a concealed door in the north wall (Perception DC 30 to spot) leading to deBrie's private apartment.

Creatures: Lunabellox deBrie is a cold-blooded serpent, even by reptoid standards. He took over control of the agency shortly after his fellow reptoids began infiltrating the local Stewards. Overconfident and condescending, he invariably feels like he's holding a wonderful secret over everyone else's head. Thanks to his quick temper, deBrie can easily be goaded into revealing his true form. While he isn't foolish enough to disclose any other reptoid agents' true names, he eagerly gloats that the PCs have nowhere to run. He has no idea that his reptoid brethren have been corrupted by the dycepskians, and the dycepskians haven't attempted to infest deBrie yet.



LUNABELLOX DEBRIE

The original deBrie was a consummate gamer, keeping a gamedroid in his office to play with during lunch hours. His reptoid replacement doesn't have the coordination needed to master these games and has turned the construct into a weapon he can turn against unsuspecting victims. The weaponized gamedroid responds to deBrie's voice commands.

If the PCs break into the building at night and set off the silent alarm, deBrie emerges from his apartment to attack. Otherwise, the PCs find him resting in area B3.

LUNABELLOX DEBRIE CR 6

XP 2,400

Male reptoid master (*Starfinder Alien Archive* 92)

HP 77

TACTICS

During Combat When combat begins in his office, deBrie activates his weaponized gamedroid.

Morale Arrogant to a fault, deBrie fights to the death.

WEAPONIZED GAMEDROID CR 6

XP 2,400

HP 75 (*Starfinder Alien Archive* 3 132)

TACTICS

During Combat The gamedroid uses *fabricate scrap*, then uses *junksword* to conjure a junksword with the block, disarm, and reach special properties, then attacks.

Morale The gamedroid fights until it is destroyed.

Treasure: The previous deBrie left a platinum smartwatch worth 5,000 credits in the desk, and the reptoid deBrie never saw the need for it; a PC can discover this item if they succeed at a DC 25 Perception check or find it automatically if they search the desk.

B3. DeBrie's Apartment

DeBrie maintains a small but lushly appointed studio apartment adjacent to his office and accessible via a secret door. He keeps his private chamber significantly warmer than his office. The home address in his public records is a nearby deli.

The apartment has clearly been modified to house a nonhuman, based on its unusual, den-like bed, an assortment of curiously organic furnishings, and a refrigerator filled with raw meat and live insects in jars.

Development: In his apartment, DeBrie tracks his criminal activities on a high-end portable tier 5 computer (with five miniaturization upgrades, the range II upgrade, and a rank 2 shock

grid countermeasure). A PC can hack into this computer with a successful DC 33 Computers check. The computer contains enough evidence to prove that deBrie ran a criminal conspiracy through Swift Personnel for eight years. However, deBrie was clever enough not to keep any solid connections between Swift Personnel and the corrupted Stewards.

MEETING XYCH VORSEN AND EPHECTA

The PCs' investigation into reptoid activity in Roselight soon comes to the attention of Investigator **Xych Vorsen** (CG host shirren envoy). Born with an anxiety disorder that makes it difficult for them to trust others—a rare malady among the normally social shirren—Vorsen reads every bit of unusual body language or aberrant speech pattern as a warning sign. This trait makes them an extraordinary investigator, but also socially isolated and prone to deep-set suspicions. They refuse to dismiss anything out of hand and, over the years, have gained a reputation both among the Stewards and in the local media for chasing down urban legends, cryptids, conspiracy theories, and other Pact Worlds myths to no avail. They rarely wear their Steward uniform anymore, preferring a rumpled suit and a long trench coat like the ones they saw in old mystery vids.

Chief Inspector Dylaska saddled Vorsen with a partner, Investigator **Ephecta** (LN female android operative), to curb the shirren's erratic behavior and act as a voice of reason before Vorsen's antics brought media scrutiny onto her own operations. Ephecta is a forensic investigator with a surprisingly vast knowledge of both machines and living tissue, and can sometimes be humorless and by-the-book. The pair make a strong team (when they get along).

If the PCs headed to Swift Personnel first, Vorsen walks in after their fight with deBrie, saying, "Well, you charming folks just ruined a 10-month investigation." Alternatively, Vorsen could step in to aid them if deBrie gets the upper hand.

If the PCs attempt to investigate the Stewards first, Vorsen instead flags them into a nearby cafe and comments, "Interesting. Normally I'm the only one sensible enough to keep an eye on the Stewards."

Ironically, because Vorsen's anxiety disorder is pattern-based, they have an easier time trusting strangers, as their behaviors have not yet displayed any anomalies. This, plus the fact that Vorsen has seen some suspicious Stewards around the base take a sudden, quiet interest in the PCs, makes the shirren believe they can trust the PCs—or at least ally with them.

Vorsen is willing to answer most questions the PCs have. Ephecta arrives halfway through the conversation,

introducing herself and asking Vorsen if they're sure they can trust the

PCs. She otherwise hangs back, observes, and—if the group is at Swift Personnel—processes the crime scene. While Vorsen believes whatever wild claims the PCs make about reptoids, grays, and secret facilities, Ephecta is skeptical, asking for proof, or at least additional details to fill out their stories. Her flat monotone is a sharp contrast to Vorsen's dramatic tones.

Who are you? "Vorsen. Xych Vorsen. I'm a Steward agent."

Why are you following us? "It's my job to poke my antennae into anything weird. And judging by the chatter I've been overhearing, there's not much in Roselight that's weirder than you right now."

What chatter are you hearing about us? "Bits and pieces. Certain people

seem to think a lot of you. And don't want other people thinking about you at all. They don't want anyone knowing you flew in from Varos. I wouldn't be suspicious except for who's doing the thinking."

You know about Varos? "I know I've been seeing unusual activity pointing to Varos for years now—narrow-beam communications to an address that doesn't exist, material requisitions with no recipient. Varos is a black hole of Steward resources. The only thing to come out of it... is you."

Who is watching us? "Well now, that's piqued your interest, hasn't it? But I'm not sure I trust you with that just yet."

How can we trust you? "You don't have to, yet—trust should be earned, and I appreciate the healthy paranoia. The wrong sorts of people are worrying over you, and that's a good start. But maybe they just want me to think that. They're clever. I believe the old human expression is... snakes in the grass."

Snakes? You mean like reptoids? Vorsen says nothing, but taps the side of their head, pantomiming thinking.

How can we get you to trust us? "Trust is a tricky thing. Tough as wet tissues. Give it to the wrong people, it ends lives. But give it to the right people... I'll tell you what. I need someone to check a message drop I've been monitoring for years. Simeon Creamery, in the Sundown District. Booth four. They hide data chips in the napkin dispenser. I can't get near it anymore, but you have fresh faces that no one in town knows. Check out the message drop for any communiques and bring me what you find."

Anything else? "Yeah. Order the womberry. It's delicious."

Once Vorsen sends the PCs to pick up messages from the drop at Simeon Creamery, the detectives say their goodbyes



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and watch the group leave. While inclined to work with them, the shirren is still suspicious of their motives and background.

Story Award: If the PCs ally with and question Xych Vorsen, award them 1,600 XP.

C. SIMEON CREAMERY (CR 7)

A fatty-sweet scent hangs in the air surrounding this otherwise unremarkable shop. A silver cooling case contains an assortment of frozen desserts, toppings, and other treats. Several booths line the opposite wall.

Simeon Creamery is a popular, cheap ice cream parlor in Roselight's overcrowded Sundown District. It serves a variety of unique flavors like salted kelp, sweet corn, and womberry (a fruity and musky flavor popular with shirren and ysoki but generally repulsive to anyone else). The owners, **Ulapa** (N female human) and **Nosa Simeon** (N male ysoki) are vegans who make everything from the gene-modified nuts and plants available in Roselight.

The anonymous location and high turnover rate in the parlor's clients and staff make it a popular place for clandestine meetings, and Dylaska's reptoids previously used it as a message drop to communicate with non-reptoid agents.

When the PCs arrive, the parlor has 10 customers, and the two owners are working behind the counter to serve them. No one is sitting in booth four, possibly because the napkin dispenser appears empty.

Trap: The reptoid realized several weeks ago that Xych Vorsen was watching their message drop and changed locations. Vorsen is well aware they've changed locations and intentionally sent the PCs on a wild goose chase, surmising that if they were reptoid agents sent to earn his trust, they wouldn't bother checking a drop no longer in use. What Vorsen doesn't realize is that Dylaska has left a trap here for the shirren. When the PCs sit at booth four and open its napkin dispenser, a timer on a bomb hidden under the booth's table activates, accompanied by a brief hologram message.

A low-resolution hologram appears just above the table, showing a scaly humanoid in Steward garb. A feminine voice purrs, "You've become more a nuisance than an amusement, Vorsen, and so the time has come to dispose of you. You have twenty seconds to reflect on your wasted life. And before you think of running, the bomb under you is attached to weight sensors in the seats. Perhaps you can warn the rest of the restaurant to run... if you think anyone in this miserable city will listen to you."



EPECTA

The bomb is indeed designed to detonate early if anyone stands up from the booth after it has been triggered. Otherwise, the PCs have 3 rounds to disarm the bomb and/or convince others to flee before it detonates. Each attempt at a skill check is a full action, but multiple characters can attempt to disarm the bomb in the same round; the PCs must succeed at all three of the disable checks listed below in order to disarm the bomb.

Shouting a warning and evacuating the restaurant quickly requires a Diplomacy or Intimidate check; only one of these checks can be attempted each round. If the result of the check exceeds 15, it causes a panic and only three people are able to get outside that round. If the result of the check exceeds 20, six people flee the scene and make it clear that round. If the result of the check exceeds 25, all 12 people make it clear of the ice cream shop that round. The Simeons are the last to leave.

FIRE AND ICE CREAM CR 7 XP 3,200

Type technological; **Perception**

DC 30; **Disable** Computers or

Engineering DC 25 (spoof tamper circuit), Engineering or Physical Science DC 25 (analyze the trigger system), and Engineering DC 27 (disarm the detonator)

Trigger location; **Reset** none

Effect explosion (6d12 fire damage); Reflex DC 17 half; multiple targets (all targets within 30-ft. radius)

Development: Assuming the PCs survive, they probably want to analyze the hologram for any clues. Unfortunately, it is either too damaged or, if the PCs disarmed the bomb, too low of a resolution to be a good source of information. The voice, however, is very distinctive. The PCs recognize it later if they investigate Telimovna (page 20). If the PCs disarmed the bomb, they can salvage the projector to show the message to Vorsen; the shirren immediately recognizes Telimovna's voice. This grants the PCs a +4 circumstance bonus when investigating that Steward.

If there are still NPCs in the ice cream parlor when the bomb detonates, they are heavily wounded or killed at your discretion. Whether the explosion results in any deaths or just causes major property damage, the reptoids might use this incident against the PCs in future volumes.

Vorsen followed the PCs to observe, and rushes in to offer first aid (if the bomb detonates) or apologize (if the PCs disarm the trap).

WHAT VORSEN KNOWS

After delivering whatever assistance or emergency care the PCs need, Vorsen apologizes for putting them in harm's way. They knew the reptoids had burned the drop but had no idea

they were prepared to kill over it. The encounter solidifies the shirren's belief that they can trust the PCs for now. Vorsen leads the PCs somewhere private several blocks away and opens up. Ephecta joins them.

"Reptoids are a lot of things, but self-sacrificial isn't one of them. And yeah, I know reptoids. I've been trying to warn the Stewards about them for twenty years. Noticed they started replacing Stewards a decade back, but it's hard to tell the infiltration from the run-of-the-mill corruption. Right now, Ephecta here is the only one I can trust.

"I think several reptoids have infiltrated the local base. At least a few of them are high up. Maybe the highest. That's all it takes to bring down the hammer on their enemies. And if they've got you in their sights, you won't have a leg to stand on when they're done falsifying records and evidence.

"Now, I can't exactly walk into the base and put bullets in my fellow constables, just hoping that my hunches are right. But I've got a little side project cooking with a gene-sculptor called Flomeraccu Im Sibleen. Locals call them 'Doctor Flo.' Almost brought them in for selling black-market tardigrades two years back, but they'd seen some strange things themselves. They know what we're up against.

"Doc Flo's been working on a special project for me: a modified paramyxovirus. It's a nasty little flu the vesk get, but with Flo's adjustments, it should infect reptoids and disable their ability to take on new forms. But the Doc goes dark sometimes, and I have no idea how far along the project is. Now that I know the reptoids are watching me, I can't get close to Flo without tipping my hand.

"I need you lot to check in on Doc Flo and give them whatever help is needed to finish this. Sounds like all our lives depend on it."

Ephecta is hearing most of this information for the first time and expresses her own discomfort at unleashing an untested bioweapon against Stewards based on Vorsen's conspiracy theories, but the shirren reminds her that someone just tried to blow them up. The grim reality gives Ephecta pause to think, though she remains visibly uncomfortable with the tactic.

Vorsen can answer additional questions, if the PCs need additional reassurance.

How do you know we can trust Doctor Flo? "Flo may be a criminal, but they're also a barathu. The reptoids can't mimic their kind. Makes them safe to trust. Well... safer."

Where do we find Doctor Flo? "They work out back of a medical supply depot on the other side of the Sundown District. Fullerene Fulfillment. Look for the door labeled 'Ancillary.'"

How do we get Doctor Flo to trust us? "Telling Flo I sent you might not be enough. Tell them.... Tell them you know about the time they saw the guy from the repair shop shed his skin. Underneath he had scales, a fin, and yellow eyes. That should convince Flo."

We almost died because of you. How do we know we can trust you? "So don't trust me. I'm not putting a gun to your head. But we're all in the crosshairs right now, and I'm telling you the truth. You can use the info, or you can run away. But if you do, you might never stop running."

The PCs can also ask Ephecta about the plan, though she remains hesitant. She admits that Vorsen is right about someone trying to eliminate them and doesn't have a better plan for dealing with that violence, but she plans to conduct her own investigation. For the time being, she asks the PCs to be safe and not do anything reckless.

Story Award: For learning more of what Xych Vorsen knows and agreeing to contact Doctor Flo, award the PCs 1,600 XP.

D. ANCILLARY (CR 8)

Doctor Flo's laboratory is easy enough to reach via public transit or by foot. Located in a small industrial complex behind several rows of cramped apartments, the area is as close to a "bad side of town" as Roselight offers, though that mostly just means shabby buildings with faded paint and little ornamentation. Vorsen's directions point the PCs to a locked steel door (hardness 20, HP 60, Engineering DC 30 to open) marked "Ancillary," with an intercom box installed next to it. If the PCs knock or buzz the intercom, Doctor Flo opens the door and greets them with a cheerful "Oh, visitors! How lovely. Please come in."

The map for this area appears on page 6.

The lab interior is little more than a retrofitted manufacturing shop. On a counter set with hydraulic lifts, beakers of fluid bubble above gas flame burners. Decrepit drums of industrial lubricants and solvents are piled in the corners. Several datapads and laptops sit on a table, chained together with networking cable. Behind the table stands a wall of frosted glass globes, in which vague movements can be seen.

Creatures: Doctor Flo has been compromised, not by the reptoids, but by the parasitic fungi known as the dycepskians. Taking full advantage of their modified genome and ability to infest barathus, this faction of the Unseen has corrupted several black-market scientists to help produce resources for their invasion, infecting Flo a few weeks after they agreed to work on Vorsen's bioweapon. Doctor Flo now focuses on working with creatures called needlehawks, bird-like arthropods from a planet outside of the Pact Worlds. While the creatures aren't sapient, and so can't support a true dycepskian, infecting one with the colony's mycelium creates an obedient, organic drone that follows instructions and feeds everything it sees back to the fungal mass mind.

Unsettlingly cheerful, Doctor Flo invites their visitors to enter and have a look around as they "complete a special order." They deflect any inquiries about their work, chiding, "Naughty! That would be telling." If the PCs inquire about Xych Vorsen, the barathu's tentacles sag briefly and they say, "Such a sad, frightened little shirren." Doctor Flo responds with a similar sigh

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if the PCs repeat the story the detective told you to mention, insisting that they were only pulling Vorsen's leg.

Most importantly, if the PCs ask about their anti-reptoid plague, Flo responds, "Oh, that silly idea? It never went anywhere. I'm sure that silly Xych has come to their senses by now and knew I was kidding." Doctor Flo knows all about the reptoid invasion, and also knows that their dycepskian colony is slowly usurping the reptoids' position within the Stewards. The infested doctor refuses to create a disease that disables reptoid shapeshifting and expose the agents the dycepskians have flipped.

When they realize that the PCs are investigating the Stewards and could expose the dycepskian infestation, Doctor Flo opts to remove the PCs. They apologize for not having what the PCs were looking for but insist, "You came all the way out here, I can't send you away empty-handed." After that, they open three of the frosted glass bubbles—which contain the needlehawk hosts—and telepathically order them to attack. They don't expect the tiny beasts to kill the investigators, just distract them long enough so Flo can sacrifice himself.

NEEDLEHAWK HOSTS (4)

CR 3

XP 800 each

Dycepskian-infested needlehawk (pages 55, 58)

N Tiny animal (dycepskian)

Init +4; **Senses** low-light vision; **Perception** +13

DEFENSE

HP 34

EAC 14; **KAC** 15

Fort +4; **Ref** +8; **Will** +2

Immunities mind-affecting effects

Weaknesses vulnerable to *remove affliction*

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft., fly 40 ft. (Ex, perfect)

Melee sting +7 (1d4+3 P plus needlehawk toxin)

Ranged needle launch +9 (1d4+3 P plus needlehawk toxin)

TACTICS

During Combat The needlehawks obey Flo's mental commands, each attacking a different PC.

Morale The infested needlehawks fight to the death.

STATISTICS

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

Skills Acrobatics +13 (+21 to fly), Bluff +13, Stealth +13, Survival +8

Other Abilities active camouflage, fungal mass mind

DOCTOR FLO

CR 5

XP 1,600

Dycepskian-infested barathu (page 55, *Starfinder Alien Archive* 20)

N Large aberration (dycepskian)

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; **Perception** +17

DEFENSE

HP 65

EAC 17; **KAC** 18

Fort +4; **Ref** +4; **Will** +10

Defensive Abilities amorphous; **Immunities** mind-affecting effects

Weaknesses vulnerable to *remove affliction*

OFFENSE

Speed fly 30 ft. (Ex, perfect)

Melee slam +12 (1d4+6 B)

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

TACTICS

During Combat On the first round, while the PCs worry about the needlehawks, Flo adapts a vulnerability to fire (something sensible barathus are capable of but don't normally do) as a swift action and douses himself with a drum of solvent as a standard action. On the second round, Flo ignites himself by touching one of the lab's burners as a standard action (if Flo is struck with fire damage before this, they are also set aflame). Flo gains the burning condition, taking 6d6 fire damage each round, and voluntarily fails the Reflex save to end the condition. As this happens, the barathu doesn't seem to be in pain, and they seem to have the wherewithal to attempt to grapple the closest PC. A PC grappled by Flo takes 3d6 fire damage each round. Due to the volatile nature of the solvents, water alone isn't enough to extinguish Flo; the PCs require a fire extinguisher (or similar equipment).

Morale Doctor Flo hopes to perish in the encounter. Their last words, directed at any surviving needlehawks, are, "Goodbye, my children!" If extinguished, the barathu simply attacks, hoping the PCs will destroy their form.

STATISTICS

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

Skills Acrobatics +17 (+25 to fly), Bluff +17, Diplomacy +17, Life Science +12, Sense Motive +17

Languages Brethedan, Common; telepathy 100 ft.

Other Abilities adaptation, combine, fungal mass mind

Treasure: Doctor Flo's laboratory contains an assortment of valuable drugs and equipment, including four doses of tier 2 antitoxin, two doses of tier 2 stimulant, and five doses of sprayflesh. The gathered equipment also counts as a full medical lab. A PC who succeeds at a DC 21 Life Science or Medicine check while searching the lab also uncovers a *mk 2 synergizing symbiote* among the other tissue samples.

Development: The Roselight dycepskian hosts get an empathic flash of Doctor Flo's death thanks to the boosted range of their fungal mass mind (see area **E**), which sets them on edge. Chief Inspector Dylaska begins quietly investigating the tragedy, but luckily for her, Ephecta's report (see **Event 2**) solves that mystery.

While Doctor Flo likely destroys himself in the encounter to conceal the presence of their dycepskian infection from the PCs, they have overlooked the needlehawks, which also contain the fungus. If a PC examines one of the slain needlehawks and succeeds at a DC 20 Medicine check, they find waxy, greenish-yellow filaments evident within the body;

a PC who succeeds at a DC 24 Life Science check identifies these as mycelium; and a PC who succeeds at a DC 24 Medicine check notes that the fibers seem to have completely replaced the creature's original nervous system. The infested needlehawks are like nothing the PCs have seen before, and for now, these discoveries will remain a mystery.

There is no trace of Vorsen's anti-reptoid bioweapon in Doctor Flo's laboratory, nor any notes on the topic. Bringing this information back to the Steward agent breaks the shirren's spirit. They thought they'd finally had a plan to confront this overwhelming, invisible menace, and being sent back to square one leaves them wracked with anguish and guilt over endangering the PCs.

Vorsen asks the PCs to lie low for a few days while they collect their notes and figure out what to do. Allow the PCs some time to heal or shop before moving on to the next event.

EVENT 2: UNDER ARREST (CR 10)

While the PCs went to retrieve Doctor Flo's engineered virus, the android Ephecta continued to wrestle with the moral dilemma of unleashing an untested bioweapon against the Stewards, even if those Stewards might be double agents. Unsure of what else to do, she consulted with her superior, Chief Inspector Molu Umana Dylaska, as not even Vorsen suspects her of being a reptoid agent. Dylaska listened intently to the android's confessions of what has happened so far, then used security footage from Upwell and Varos to convince Ephecta the PCs are dangerous, deeply unsettled terrorists, manipulating her by leveraging her shirren partner's paranoia and fraught reputation.

Thanks to transmissions intercepted from Varos, the dycepskian-infested reptoids were aware of the PCs before they arrived at Roselight, but Ephecta's confessions fill in many vital details about the fungal conspirators' new enemies. The dycepskians resolve to eliminate the PCs before they endanger their plans on Roselight, and the android agent creates a perfect opportunity to do so.

While the PCs rest and recuperate, Ephecta decides—with Dylaska's coaxing—to protect her partner and bring the fugitives into custody to sort everything out.

The ideal time to spring this event on your players is after they've had a chance to take a full night's rest but before they get comfortable. If they had a particularly easy time battling Doctor Flo's needlehawks, you might instead have Ephecta and her team appear as the PCs leave the barathu's lab, as the android fears that an untested bioweapon could endanger the entire city. In either case, the android agent attempts to arrest the PCs on a quiet street with few passersby.

Creatures: Ephecta had hoped to confront the PCs by herself, but Chief Inspector Dylaska insisted she take a squad of two rookies for backup, along with Marduq Char, a senior constable. Marduq was once a reptoid infiltrator disguised as a human Steward agent but, like Dylaska, has become

a dycepskian host. The rookies are simple human recruits following orders.

Marduq was originally an aggressive reptoid, and his dycepskian infection has had difficulty aligning his bloodlust with the fungal mass mind's general bliss. This manifests as a generally withdrawn personality with manic bursts of delightful cruelty, which begin to slip out as Ephecta drags her feet.

Ephecta begins the encounter almost apologetically, demanding that the PCs come with her but also promising they'll "sort everything out." The presence of the occasionally belligerent Marduq makes her uncomfortable. A PC who succeeds at a DC 21 Diplomacy check before combat begins is able to convince Ephecta that she's making a terrible mistake. If Ephecta switches sides, she allies with the PCs and orders Marduq and the rookies to stand down, to no effect. Marduq screams that the PCs must have corrupted Ephecta, draws his firearm, and orders the rookies to attack. If the PCs do agree to come peacefully, Marduq suddenly shouts that one of them has a bomb and opens fire; in such a case, Ephecta is staggered for the first round, but then allies with the PCs in further rounds. Otherwise, if Ephecta believes the PCs are resisting arrest, she shakes her head and tells her squad to take them down.

During the fight, a PC can attempt to convince Ephecta of the group's innocence with a successful DC 24 Diplomacy check attempted as a standard action. If any of the PCs have wounded Ephecta, this check takes a -4 penalty. Ephecta then fights alongside the PCs, though she tries to deal nonlethal damage to her former coworkers.

STEWARD ROOKIES (2)

CR 3

XP 800 each

Human operative

LN Medium humanoid (human)

Init +5; Perception +14

DEFENSE

HP 42 EACH

EAC 14; KAC 15

Fort +5; Ref +5; Will +6; +2 vs. disease and poison

Defensive Abilities evasion

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.

Melee tactical baton +7 (1d4+3 B)

Ranged static arc pistol +9 (1d6+3 E; critical arc 2)

Offensive Abilities trick attack +1d8

TACTICS

During Combat The Steward rookies try to remain mobile and take advantage of their trick attack ability at range.

Morale A rookie breaks and attempts to retreat if reduced to fewer than 10 HP.

STATISTICS

Str +0; Dex +4; Con +1; Int +1; Wis +2; Cha +1

Skills Athletics +9, Culture +9, Diplomacy +14, Piloting +9, Profession (law enforcement officer) +9, Sense Motive +14

Languages Brethedan, Common

Other Abilities specialization (detective)

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Gear casual stationwear, static arc pistol with 2 batteries (20 charges each), tactical baton, Steward badge

EPHECTA

CR 6

XP 2,400

Female android operative

LN Medium humanoid (android)

Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision;

Perception +19

DEFENSE

HP 75 RP 4

EAC 18; **KAC** 19

Fort +5; **Ref** +8; **Will** +9; +2 vs. disease, mind-affecting effects, poison, and sleep

Defensive Abilities evasion; **Resistances** cold 5, fire 5

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.

Melee tactical baton +12 (1d4+7 B)

Ranged cupric ionizer +14 (2d4+6 E; critical arc 1d6)

Offensive Abilities debilitating trick, trick attack +3d8

TACTICS

During Combat Ephecta prefers desk work, but she can handle herself in a firefight. She prefers ranged attacks, relying on her staggering shot to leave opponents vulnerable to her allies.

Morale Ephecta retreats or surrenders if reduced to fewer than 30 HP.

STATISTICS

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

Cha +2

Skills Computers +14, Diplomacy +14, Medicine +19, Physical Science +19, Sense Motive +14

Languages Brethedan, Common, Triaxian, Vercite, Vesk, Ysoki

Other Abilities constructed, flat affect, operative exploits (glimpse the truth, staggering shot [DC 16]), specialization (detective), upgrade slot (mk 1 thermal capacitor)

Gear elite stationwear, cupric ionizer^{AR} with 2 batteries (20 charges each), tactical baton, medpatches (2), Steward badge

MARDUQ CHAR

CR 6

XP 2,400

Male reptoid host (page 55)

HP 80

TACTICS

During Combat Marduq gets in close, using his uncanny shooter talent and trick attack to devastate the most intimidating opponent first, laughing with unsettling glee through the entire fight.

Morale Marduq fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Gear elite stationwear, corona laser pistol with 2 batteries (20 charges each), survival knife, Steward badge, credstick (5,000 credits)

Treasure: Marduq had planned to drop off whatever was left of the PCs with a local organic recycler who doesn't ask questions. He was going to use the credstick he carries to pay for the disposal.

Development: Marduq reverts to his reptoid form upon death, confirming Vorsen's theories about reptoid infiltration to both the PCs and Ephecta. Though shocked, the android insists they find Vorsen and begin planning what to do next, provided the PCs are willing to accept her help. She also recounts approaching Chief Inspector Dylaska with her concerns and her superior's insistence not only in apprehending the PCs, but in assigning Marduq to supervise, suggesting that Dylaska may have ulterior motives in arresting the PCs.

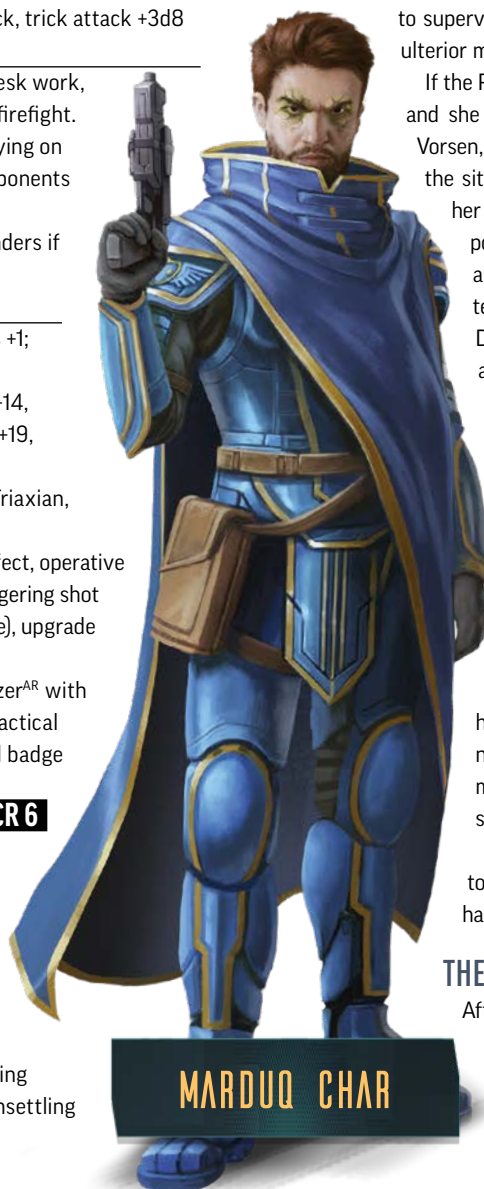
If the PCs didn't convince Ephecta to aid them and she escapes, they can later find her with Vorsen, who has convinced her of the reality of the situation. If she surrenders, she explains her fears of using an engineered virus on the populace, especially one created without any oversight or rigorous testing. She tells the PCs the same information about Dylaska as above. This Adventure Path assumes that Ephecta survives this fight, one way or another.

A PC who closely examines Marduq's body and succeeds at a DC 22 Medicine check discovers a fresh surgical incision on his left arm where the HepatoDyne implant (see the sidebar on page 23) was installed less than a week ago. They also spot the same strange greenish-yellow filaments in his body that they saw in Doctor Flo's needlehawks. If the PCs didn't spot the mycelium then, they can attempt the same checks to identify the strands now.

Story Award: If the PCs sway Ephecta to join them, award them XP as if they had defeated her in combat.

THE SERPENTS' TURN

After their near arrest, the PCs probably want to contact Xych Vorsen and let the shirren know they are right about the Stewards. Vorsen asks the PCs to meet back at their



MARDUQ CHAR

ship, which can serve as their base of operations for the investigation to come. Ephecta joins them, having either been brought along by Vorsen or by the PCs. The android's testimony detailing Chief Inspector Dylaska's strange behavior takes Vorsen by surprise.

"Dylaska... even I didn't see that one. She's got Director Evosco's ear on intelligence matters. Canny, though. Replace Evosco and you've got everyone's eyes on you. But control everything she sees and hears? It's just as good as controlling her directly.

"If Dylaska is the reptoids' commander here in Roselight, we can likely narrow down who the possible reptoids are by seeing who's had the most contact with her recently." Vorsen pulls out a datapad and begins tapping at it. "That gives us... just shy of a dozen names. Difficult to believe they could do so much damage with so few hands. But as the saying goes, give me a long enough lever and a place to wedge it, and I can move a planet."

Vorsen exhales with frustration. "But we need more information. "Here, I'll send you my notes. If you can get evidence on which are reptoids, we should be able to clear all our names. I'll work a few of my contacts to get you some resources."

Vorsen can answer a few additional questions, but the PCs have exhausted the extent of their knowledge.

How do we investigate these names? "I don't know. What are you good at? Maybe dig around in their computer records for suspicious activity. Tail them and find explanations for any suspicious behavior. Maybe find a way to provoke them from a safe distance? Hell, you've got a dead one now; maybe you can scrounge up some DNA samples and compare results! Be creative; it's gotten you this far."

Do we need to investigate Director Evosco? "Like I said, Director Evosco's likely too high-profile for the reptoids to replace... for now. Besides, she left for a leadership conference at Peacewatch a few days before you arrived and will be there for another week. But I do appreciate your healthy paranoia."

Can we really trust Ephecta? "She's a good cop, but she trusts the system, and that bit her on the posterior this time. Maybe she'll learn from it. Compared to me, she's the smart one. If you can bring yourself to trust her, her help would be invaluable." If nearby, Ephecta chimes in to note she has reconsidered her position regarding the PCs due to having additional facts.

What do you know about the strands of mycelium we keep finding? "A fungus that replaces the nervous system? That's new. Perhaps this is part of some new reptoid method of control? I don't know, but keep me informed."

INVESTIGATING THE STEWARDS

Of the dozen Stewards that Vorsen suspects of being reptoid agents, only five are actually reptoids, with another two being humans who have recently been infected by the

dycepskian fungus thanks to their HepatoDyne implants (see sidebar on page 23). All but one of the reptoids (Pik Nath) have received the HepatoDyne implant and are now dycepskian hosts.

Provide the PCs with the list of the names Vorsen has collected, as well as their general appearance and Vorsen's notes (as found on page 20), but don't reveal their status as reptoid or not until the PCs successfully investigate that individual. In addition, keep their status as a dycepskian host a secret, but use the details provided to flavor how the investigation into that individual proceeds.

PCs can try to identify who is and who isn't a reptoid in a multitude of ways. Allow the PCs to attempt skill checks with appropriate Profession checks instead of the listed skills, but with the DC reduced by 4. Each attempt to investigate a suspect takes an individual at least 12 hours. Every time the PCs successfully use one tactic to identify one of Vorsen's suspects (whether they turn out to be reptoid or human), the DC for future skill checks using that particular strategy increases by a cumulative 2 as the Stewards grow more wary of the strange activities around them; if necessary, the stats for many of these individuals appear later in the adventure.

Use the following options as guidelines for the strategies the PCs might employ.

Blood Test: A PC can surreptitiously collect a sample of a suspect's DNA with a successful DC 26 Sleight of Hand or Stealth check to compare it to reptoid DNA. This is only possible if the PCs killed Marduk in **Event 2** and thought to collect a trophy or tissue sample.

Comparative Analysis: A PC can find and compare childhood images and vids of a suspect with current ones to look for subtle differences in bone structure, scars, and other permanent markings that a shapechanger may have missed with a successful DC 27 Disguise or Perception check.

Hack: A PC can access various computer networks around Roselight to study a suspect's online movements, spending, certifications, and communications with a successful DC 24 Computers check.

Legwork: A PC can find and question people close to a suspect to learn more about their behavior and history with a successful DC 25 Diplomacy check.

Magic: Casting *speaking with dead* on Marduk's remains might force his spirit to reveal a collaborator, though he attempts to resist with a Will saving throw, and if he succeeds, he gives misleading information to the PCs with a Bluff check. The magical sensor of *clairaudience/clairvoyance* is unlikely to catch a reptoid dropping their disguise, but it does grant a +2 circumstance bonus to skill checks attempted during the Shadow and Profile tactics. The PCs can try to lure a suspect into the area of a *zone of truth* spell, but the suspect can still attempt a Will save or be evasive under direct questioning. Reptoid shapeshifting is a supernatural ability but is unaffected by spells like *dispel magic*.

Profile: A PC can study past and current writings (which can be found online) to compare a subject's behavior and develop

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a solid assessment of their personality with a successful DC 25 Sense Motive check.

Shadow: A PC can stalk the suspect (either in the shadows or from rooftops) to observe where they go and what they do with a successful DC 23 Athletics or Stealth check.

X-Rays: Costly equipment like an X-ray visor or *X-ray serum* (*Starfinder Armory* 116), in conjunction with a successful DC 20 Life Science check, enables a PC to study a suspect's anatomy in detail to identify any trace of unusual biology.

Treasure: After the PCs successfully investigate their first suspect, Vorsen returns to their ship with supplies from their anonymous source: four *mk 2 mindlink circlets*. They comment, "I have found my ability to communicate silently with nearby allies increasingly useful in this clandestine work. I think you'll find these handy."

Development: Once the PCs have identified the six reptoid impostors aiding Chief Inspector Dylaska—Bridjet Sochlain,

Lanni Sedjewick, Pik Nath, Taj Lhannar, Telimovna, and Voomey Wite—Vorsen suggests that their next step should be to capture one of them to be absolutely sure. See **Event 3** below.

Story Award: Award the PCs 400 XP for every Steward they successfully investigate, whether they turn out to be human, reptoid, or other.

EVENT 3: AMBUSHING A REPTOID (CR 6)

The reptoid Stewards stick to public, well-monitored areas—ironically using Roselight's police-state tendencies to hide themselves—unless explicitly engaging in clandestine operations. They even reside in the Steward barracks, leaving them vulnerable to ambush only on rare occasions when they travel outside the precinct grounds. When the group is ready to capture one of the suspected reptoid agents for interrogation, as Vorsen suggests, a PC who succeeds at a DC 22 Perception or Sense Motive check can deduce that their

NAME	APPEARANCE	VORSEN'S NOTES	REPTOID?	DYCEPSKIAN HOST?	DETAILS
Bridjet Sochlain	Female human	Noteworthy scent of ammonia.	Yes	Yes	Sochlain is the most subtle of the reptoid agents. Only Vorsen's keen senses have noticed a strange tinge to her scent.
Dunhet Wesser	Male human	Heartrate increases noticeably when they catch me watching.	No	Yes	Until recently, the human Wesser harbored romantic feelings for Vorsen, which the shirren's sensitive antennae misread. Wesser's recent dycepskian infestation has curbed these feelings.
Ganzer Ahlo	Female human	Sudden, erratic personality shift months ago combined with subtle changes in appearance.	No	No	Ahlo gave birth to twins 3 months ago. Her shift in personality and appearance were due to pregnancy, then sleep deprivation and postpartum depression.
Lanni Sedjewick	Female ysoki	Recently began saying hello to me every morning. Previously never made eye contact.	Yes	Yes	Sedjewick has been a reptoid for 8 years, but Vorsen only became suspicious when the dycepskian infection made her much friendlier.
Li Qua Wan	Agender human	Frequently disappears after work and returns with unexplained injuries.	No	No	Wan works after-hours as a bouncer at a local club called the Jeweljammer and takes bribes from the club ownership to hush up noise complaints, health inspections, and other crimes.
Peri Hasseld	Female damaya lashunta	Office is unusually warm for lashunta tolerances. Takes regular sick days.	No	No	Hasseld hails from Castrovel and grew up in tropical temperatures. Her sick days are being used to help cover for a small vidgame-pirating operation.
Pik Nath	Male ysoki	Nath's diet is almost entirely carnivorous. No ysoki could survive eating only meat patties.	Yes	No	Pik can't stand most ysoki foods thanks to a relatively common reptoid disorder that makes it difficult to digest vegetation and carbohydrates.
Suso Aderring	Female human	Recent transfer without friends, contacts, or records.	No	No	Aderring's lack of records is due entirely to a bureaucratic snafu, and otherwise the young Steward is simply shy.
Taj Lhannar	Male human	Spends extraneous time in copy room.	Yes	Yes	Lhannar replaced the original 18 months ago and began making extensive copies of Steward records.
Telimovna	Female vesk	Seen at Simeon Creamery three times. Tends to watch over her shoulder.	Yes	Yes	Telimovna has been a reptoid for 5 years, replacing the original vesk during a vacation to Vesk-Prime.
Voomey Wite	Male human	A little too on-the-ball and attentive. Always taking notes.	Yes	Yes	Wite is a reptoid who stepped in to replace the original nearly 5 years ago and now specializes in analyzing humans to find more targets to replace.
Yona Raito	Female human	Long, intense stares without blinking.	No	Yes	Raito, a data scientist, has recently been taken over by a dycepskian infestation.

best chance of success is to go after the archivist Taj Lhannar. Vorsen and Ephecta know that Lhannar makes frequent trips to various media vendors for books, data chips, albums, and other cultural artifacts; the shirren suspects that Lhannar works to keep the reptoid's network of spies-in-training supplied with various current news and pop-culture elements to help them blend in better.

Creature: The PCs can tail Lhannar as he leaves the Steward base to walk to a nearby media vendor, catching him unawares in an isolated alley. This requires the PC with the lowest total Stealth skill modifier to succeed at a DC 20 Stealth check, though the PC with the highest total Stealth skill modifier can use the aid another task. If the PCs set up a more elaborate trap or choose a perfect ambush location, you can grant a circumstance bonus to this check or allow the PCs to use a different skill altogether.

If the PCs fail this check, Lhannar grows suspicious and avoids the ambush by remaining in public and returning quickly to the Steward base. Afterward, the reptoid begins traveling outside with a patrol-class security robot (*Starfinder Alien Archive* 94). If the PCs try to ambush him again and fail the check, Lhannar walks into the trap but isn't surprised by it. He believes he can best whoever is attacking him.

TAJ LHANNAR

CR 6

XP 2,400

Male reptoid host (page 55)

HP 80

TACTICS

During Combat The infested reptoid attempts to remain mobile during a firefight, using trick attack at every available opportunity. When he realizes he is outnumbered and outmatched, he transmits an empathic warning to the other dycepskian hosts.

Morale Lhannar fights to the death.

Development: If the PCs examine Lhannar, they find a small scar on his left arm similar to Mardug's. Lhannar had his HepatoDyne installed at the same time. If the PCs cut open the reptoid's body, they discover more mycelium strands.

Regardless of whether the PCs kill or simply subdue their target, the dycepskian fungal mass mind is alerted to the attack, though the hosts aren't aware of the specifics. The infested Stewards begin cleaning house and preparing to strike back; they also send a message to Gamut Bio, alerting the dycepskians there of the PCs' actions.

EVENT 4: THE HIT (CR 9)

As the dycepskian-host reptoids begin covering their tracks, they need to eliminate loose ends, such as former shapeshifting comrades who haven't yet fallen to the infestation. It should rouse the PCs' curiosity when four of the remaining five reptoids—Bridjet Sochlain, Lanni Sedjewick, Pik Nath, and Voomey Wite—pile into an unmarked car and

AN ALLY IN EPHECTA

If the PCs convince Ephecta to join them rather than support the corrupted Stewards, they gain a valuable inroad into the organization. While Inspector Vorsen has always been an outsider and the conspirators now want him dead, Ephecta remains a seeming patsy and can move freely within the base to assist the PCs with their future investigations.

To help the PCs in their investigations, Ephecta can access classified information, collect physical samples from suspect Stewards, or create distractions and opportunities for the PCs' activities. Ephecta's assistance provides a +5 circumstance bonus to a skill check to identify the reptoid infiltrators. Each time the PCs call on Ephecta, suspicion surrounding her loyalty grows, reducing the circumstance bonus by 1 until it reaches +0, at which point the android becomes as much of a pariah as Vorsen.

drive to an industrial site in Roselight's Sunset district. If the PCs themselves aren't watching the base, Vorsen or Ephecta contacts them to report this event, asking the PCs to investigate. If the PCs do not follow, the car returns without Pik Nath, and the other three reptoids return to their business without expressing any apparent concerns.



PIK NATH

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This event takes place in a little-used corner of a hydrocarbon processing yard owned by a dycepskian-infested barathu, who has "conveniently" shut the plant down for the day. There is little here in the way of machinery, and only a few empty barrels here and there can provide cover (as well as a place for the PCs to watch from afar). The PCs can intervene or not as they see fit.

Creatures: The four reptoids park their vehicle in this corner and get out. Pik Nath seems confused, but the others look distressingly serene. Nath is the only reptoid here who isn't infested with the dycepskian fungus; his digestive problems stem from a rare reptoid immune disorder that, among other problems, make his body reject implants. He refused Dylaska's orders to receive a HepatoDyne implant on such grounds, and while the false inspector relented, she has been looking for another way to bring the sham ysoki into the fungal mass mind. With the PCs cracking down, though, the dycepskians have determined that Nath is too much of a liability.



If the PCs simply watch events unfold, they hear Nath ask in confusion why they've come to this particular place. Sedjewick tells him that this area is an active crime scene, pointing out some imaginary evidence behind a rusty barrel. While Nath walks over to that spot, the other three reptoids draw their weapons and gun him down. Afterward, they seal his corpse into the same barrel (which the barathu owner is meant to dispose of in a high-temperature distillation tower), get back into their vehicle, and return to the base.

The PCs can intervene at any point during the exchange, but if they attack (or are spotted) quickly, Nath doesn't realize he is about to be betrayed and will fight alongside his would-be murderers. If the PCs attack once the dycepskian-infested reptoids draw their weapons, or after they kill Nath, they only need to fight three opponents.

PIK NATH CR 1

XP 400

Male reptoid (*Starfinder Alien Archive* 92)

HP 16

TACTICS

During Combat Nath takes cover

behind a barrel and shoots his pistol at whomever he believes is the closest enemy.

Morale Nath surrenders once he has been reduced to 5 or fewer HP.

BRIDJET, LANNI, AND VOOMEY CR 6

XP 2,400 each

Male and female reptoid hosts (page 55)

HP 80 each

TACTICS

During Combat The three reptoid hosts focus their attacks on the PCs, even if they haven't already killed Nath, recognizing that the PCs are the bigger threat. They take cover behind their vehicle and attempt trick attacks. However, if Nath deals a significant amount of damage (or scores a critical hit) against one of the reptoid hosts, that host turns on Nath.

Morale Cornered, the reptoid hosts fight to the death.

Treasure: If Nath survives, he offers the PCs a bribe to let him go. He's been squirreling away credits into an "emergency fund" for years, and is willing to point the PCs toward his storage unit and provide his unmarked key card if they release him. The unit contains a bug-out bag filled with six changes of clothes (for both Small and Medium bipedal creatures), an advanced medkit, a hygiene kit, a week's supply of field rations, a set of fake identification (which could be sold on the black market for 1,000 credits), and a credstick with 10,000 credits.

If Nath dies and the PCs recover his body, they find an unmarked key card in his pocket and can trace it back to the storage unit with a day's work and a successful DC 30 Computers or Diplomacy check.

Development: If the PCs intervene after Nath realizes he's being betrayed and the reptoid survives the encounter, he is willing to cut his losses and cooperate with the PCs. He informs them that his fellow reptoids began acting strangely 6 weeks ago, around the same time that Dylaska began pondering about "the enemy" being close. Soon after, Nath started feeling like the only member of the reptoid cell not in on some joke, as everyone had begun acting too "chummy" for his liking. He isn't aware of any other reptoid cells in the Pact Worlds; Dylaska specifically keeps that kind of information to herself to keep any captured agents from leaking valuable intelligence.

If the PCs ask about the strange filaments they found in other reptoids' bodies, Nath doesn't know anything about them. However, if they also mention surgical scars on their arms, Nath recalls that Dylaska got something called a "HepatoDyne implant" almost 2 months ago, and encouraged other Stewards (reptoid and otherwise) to get them as well. Nath explains why he didn't receive one. After spilling his guts, Nath bribes the PCs to let him go (see *Treasure* on page 22), but if they don't, he tries to slip away and flee the city as soon as possible.

If the PCs don't intervene here, the three remaining reptoid hosts fight alongside Chief Inspector Dylaska during her last stand (see **Event 6**).

EVENT 5: THE OUTLIERS (CR 7)

The PCs' actions against the reptoid invaders aren't alerting only reptoids. Two human Steward analysts—Yona Raito and Dunhet Wesser—also received HepatoDyne implants in the past few weeks and have become dycepskian hosts. They realize the PCs are likely targeting reptoids and use this information to set a trap.

Creatures: The two contact the PCs, mentioning that they've recently been threatened by "lizard-aliens" posing as Stewards. They want to arrange a meeting to share what they know and offer help, offering to let the PCs choose the location.

However, the meeting isn't what it seems. The PCs can realize this if they are suspicious that two random analysts know who they are, let alone how to contact them, or with a successful DC 28 Sense Motive check when speaking to the pair online.

Raito and Wesser leave their sidearms behind if the PCs request they come unarmed, but the technomancers still carry concealed grenades. Both are chipper, smiling as they greet the PCs. While they know they should simply kill the PCs, these hosts have come to appreciate the PCs' skills and ask if they would wish to join the fungal mass mind. The pair magnanimously offer to "implant" the PCs but refuse to offer any details as to what that means, only adding with a chuckle that "You can never beat us. You don't even know what we are."

If the PCs resist, the two human hosts attack.

THE HEPATODYNE IMPLANT

The HepatoDyne implant is an augmentation manufactured by the small biotech company Gamut Bio. According to its advertising, it acts as a secondary liver implanted in the arm to help filter poison and disease from the recipient's blood. The implant is still in its testing phase, but its stated purpose made it appealing to law enforcement personnel, particularly Dylaska's reptoid agents once they realized dycepskians were present in Roselight.

Discovering the implant's true purpose requires a successful DC 30 Medicine check and unfettered access to the piece of equipment (whether installed or not). Thorough analysis of the implant's bio-filters reveals that they are made from a parasitic mycelium and can be remotely triggered to infect the bearer with that fungus, which quickly replaces the victim's nervous system with unexpected, though obviously deadly, results. Only a high or severe dose of radiation can kill the mycelium prior to infestation, rendering the implant inert and useless. Removing the implant before it is triggered requires a successful DC 30 Medicine check; failure by 10 or more immediately triggers the conversion process.

Until its true purpose is discovered, a HepatoDyne implant seems to be a level 6 biotech augmentation implanted in an arm. Once per day, the user can spend 1 Resolve Point to automatically succeed at a saving throw against a disease or poison. It does not yet have a market price. Gamut Bio's infosphere site notes the implant is going to begin market testing in the next few weeks in preparation for widespread commercial sales.

YONA RAITO AND DUNHET WESSER

CR 5

XP 1,600

Dycepskian-infested human technomancers
N Medium humanoid (dycepskian, human)

Init +2; Perception +11

DEFENSE

EAC 16; KAC 17

Fort +4; Ref +4; Will +8

Immunities mind-affecting effects

Weaknesses vulnerable to *remove affliction*

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee tactical baton +8 (1d4+5 B)

Ranged frostbite-class zero pistol +10 (1d6+5 C; critical staggered [DC 15])

or frag grenade II +8 (explode [15 ft., 2d6 P, DC 15])

Technomancer Spells Known (CL 5th; melee +8)

2nd (3/day)—*inject nanobots* (DC 17), *knock*

1st (6/day)—*detect tech*, *jolting surge*, *magic missile*

0 (at will)—*detect affliction*, *mending*

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TACTICS

During Combat The pair prefer to get in close to cast *inject nanobots* to confuse opponents before switching to *jolting surge* or their sidearms.

Morale The infested humans fight to the death.

STATISTICS

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

Skills Bluff +16, Computers +16, Mysticism +16, Sense Motive +11

Languages Brethedan, Common, Eoxian, Kasatha, Shirren, Ysoki

Other Abilities fungal mass mind, magic hacks (empowered weapon, debug spell), spell cache (datapad)

Gear business stationwear, frostbite-class zero pistol with 1 battery (20 charges), tactical baton, frag grenades II (2), *spell gem of caustic conversion*, *spell gem of make whole*

Development: Like Marduk and other reptoid hosts the PCs have faced so far, both Raito and Wesser have faint scars on their arms from recent implant surgery. They also have similar mycelium strands within their bodies. The PCs can spot these anomalies automatically, if they know to look.

EVENT 6: THE SERPENT'S HEAD (CR 9+)

Chief Inspector Molu Umana Dylaska sits at the center of both the reptoid and dycepskian infiltration of the

Roselight Stewards. The original Dylaska had been a patient kasatha with a keen eye for detail and a need to protect others. With these traits, she quickly rose through the ranks of the Stewards. She was imprisoned and interrogated by reptoid forces 9 years ago to gain access to the constabulary's most sensitive information and personnel, and when they got all the information they could out of her, she was killed by her shapeshifting replacement. Her cold-blooded duplicate is equally observant and driven, but firmly believes the universe needs a strict social order to prevent civilization from spiraling into chaos.

The false Dylaska put a last-ditch contingency plan in place several years ago before she became infested by the dycepskians, never expecting to use it. However, with the PCs clearly closing in, the reptoid host inspector enacts this scheme by first activating a dormant computer worm that scrambles local Stewards, dispatching agents all across the city with inaccurate and misleading reports of public violence, looting, and fires. She then releases a mild nerve gas within the Steward base, rendering the remaining staff unconscious while she heads to the server room to wipe the base's computers clean.

The reptoid Dylaska doesn't know that Yych Vorsen discovered one of her concealed canisters of nerve gas years ago—this was one of the early clues that tipped off the shirren to the reptoid infiltration—and wired a sensor of their

own into the system. Vorsen dons a gas mask when they learn the system is activated, contacting the PCs from their office to inform them of the situation. They ask the PCs to come and help investigate what is going on, noting that the environmental protections of their armor will protect them from the gas.

When the PCs arrive, they find the entire base's security system deactivated and many personnel sprawled out throughout the building, unconscious but breathing. Vorsen and Ephecta meet the PCs in the lobby. The Shirren says that they and Ephecta will check out Chief Inspector Dylaska's office, while the PCs should head to the server room; Ephecta gives them directions. When the PCs arrive, read or paraphrase the following.

Three technicians lie unconscious on the floor, illuminated by the humming glow of the station's immense computer core. Klaxons sound and lights flash as the glow shifts from blue to red and back again. The large monitor overlooking the room is rapidly counting down from nineteen seconds.

Dylaska has already installed her virus via a data chip. Anyone trained in the Computers skill can immediately recognize that the server is counting down to a full system wipe, potentially jeopardizing thousands of investigations and court cases in addition to wiping out the reptoids' data trail. The PCs have 3 rounds to stop the process! They can also easily spot Dylaska's data chip incongruously jutting from one of the computer core's ports; removing the chip has no effect.

The PCs can override the virus with three successful DC 29 Computers skill checks, each requiring a standard action. Any result of 20 or higher adds 6 seconds (1 round) to the timer. Alternatively, the PCs can mitigate the destruction by destroying the terminal (hardness 13, HP 39) or disabling it with a successful DC 32 Engineering check (which takes a full action). Doing either ends the system wipe but deletes any recent records that haven't been backed up in the last 24 hours (including any records of Dylaska gassing the facility and attempting to wipe the core).

Creatures: Dylaska recognizes that the PCs have taken aim to cut off her support network before attacking her directly. She fully expects that by now, the PCs have gathered enough evidence to expose her and burn her entire operation; while she wants to flee, she first needs to eliminate all evidence of her activities and collaborators within the Stewards.

Dylaska has remained near the computer core to make sure the wipe fully activates. Both she and any remaining reptoid agents (one by default, unless the PCs allowed others to escape in earlier encounters), have taken up sniping positions in the corners. The false chief inspector has also recovered her pet needlehawk, leaving the infected beast to guard the computer core.

INFESTATION

The only sign of dycepskian infestation beyond behavioral change are greenish-yellow veins that develop within the sclera of the eye where mycelium replaces the existing optical nerve. Most dycepskian hosts recognize this giveaway and conceal these signs with dark glasses, contact lenses, or a variety of medications to temporarily conceal these tendrils, much like a human might use eye drops to conceal their bloodshot eyes.

An autopsy reveals the same greenish-yellow filaments throughout a host's body, clustered in what should be the major nerve pathways, making the body's status as a host obvious. If the PCs don't pick up on these clues themselves, Vorsen or Ephecta can point out this infectious danger and ask the PCs to investigate.

NEEDLEHAWK HOST

CR 3

XP 800

HP 35 (page 58)

TACTICS

During Combat The needlehawk host attacks anyone who attempts to stop the core wipe.

Morale The needlehawk host fights to the death.

TELIMOVNA

CR 6

XP 2,400

Female reptoid host (page 55)

HP 80

TACTICS

During Combat Telimovna remains in her vesk disguise, hoping it will let her get a little closer to the PCs before she attacks with her laser pistol. The reptoid uses trick attack whenever possible.

Morale Telimovna fights to the death.

MOLU UMANA DYLSKA

CR 7

XP 3,200

Dycepskian-infested reptoid technomancer (page 55, *Starfinder Alien Archive* 92)

N Medium humanoid (dycepskian, reptoid, shapechanger)

Init +1; **Senses** low-light vision; **Perception** +14

DEFENSE

HP 90 RP 5

EAC 18; KAC 19

Fort +8; **Ref** +6; **Will** +10; +2 vs. poison

Immunities mind-affecting effects; **Resistances** electricity 5

Weaknesses vulnerable to *remove affliction*

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee claw +13 (1d8+9 S)

Ranged *blasting advanced semi-auto pistol* +11 (2d6+7 P)
or *shock grenade II* +13 (explode [15 ft., 1d12 E, DC 17])

Technomancer Spells Known (CL 7th; ranged +1)

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3rd (3/day)—*discharge* (DC 20), *lesser resistant armor*
2nd (6/day)—*caustic conversion*, *inject nanobots* (DC 19),
mirror image, *see invisibility*
1st (at will)—*erase*, *holographic image* (DC 18)

TACTICS

Before Combat Dylaska has studied the PCs' tactics through security footage and spy reports, and casts *lesser resistant armor* to protect herself from whatever energy type they seem to rely on most (or simply provide herself with damage reduction).

During Combat Dylaska casts *mirror image* before using her spell grenade hack to combine her shock grenades with *inject nanobots*. If one opponent in particular seems too dangerous, she targets their weapons with *discharge*.

Morale Exposed and backed into a corner, Dylaska fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str +2; **Dex** +1; **Con** +2; **Int** +5; **Wis** +1; **Cha** +4

Skills Bluff +19, Computers +19, Mysticism +14, Sense Motive +19

Languages Brethedan, Common, Reptoid

Other Abilities cache capacitor (*keen senses*), change shape (any specific humanoid), magic hacks (selective targeting, spell grenade), spell cache (datapad)

Gear estex suit III (mk 1 electrostatic field, load lifter, radiation buffer), *blasting advanced semi-auto pistol* with 30 small arm rounds, shock grenades II (2), *mk 2 null-space chamber*, *serum of enhancement* (diplomat), datapad^{AR}

Treasure: Dylaska's *mk 2 null-space chamber* contains valuables collected during her career that she intends to sell on the black market after escaping: a *minor W-boson crystal*, a *mk 2 computer idol* (*Starfinder Armory* 120), and extensive false identification papers (which could be sold on the black market for 2,000 credits).

Development: If the PCs save the Steward computer core, they earn the respect of the local law enforcement officers who haven't been replaced by reptoids, though to what extent that affects the campaign is left up to you. At minimum, you can increase Roselight's maximum item level to 13th to reflect the increased access the Stewards have to special technology.

If the PCs lose the last 24 hours of files, they don't have any solid proof of Dylaska's corruption or her role in poisoning the precinct and threatening the computer core, making it far more difficult to conduct an extensive investigation into any remaining reptoids within the Stewards' ranks.

In either case, the PCs can find memos written by Chief Inspector Dylaska within the backups that refer several officers—those the PCs have already encountered—to Gamut Bio to receive the experimental HepatoDyne implants. Indeed, Dylaska and any reptoids with her have recent

surgical scars on their arms. Even a cursory autopsy reveals the same mycelium strands the PCs have likely discovered time and again.

If the PCs comb through Dylaska's datapad, they find the reptoid's personal journal, though the entries appear to have been scrubbed on a regular basis. A PC who succeeds at a DC 26 Computers check can retrieve fragments of these records, though not enough to fully prove the reptoid conspiracy here on Roselight. However, there is a final entry dated only a few weeks ago. It reads, "Investigating the barathu tinkerer Flomeraccu proves my fears. The dycepskians have a foothold somewhere on Liavara. I will root them out before they become a threat, but until then I have learned of an experimental bio-filter augmentation being produced by Gamut Bio that explicitly filters out similar infections. My contact there owes me a favor. I'll continue my investigations once I'm protected from their contagion."

The word "dycepskian" should be new to the PCs. A PC who succeeds at a DC 35 Computers check to search the infosphere finds a few scattered mentions of the name applied to the fungal parasites uncovered during the Zeffrac Science Platform incident (as referenced in the *Adventure Background*).

If the PCs don't intercede at the Steward base, Dylaska and any remaining reptoid infiltrators retreat to the Gamut Bio facility. The PCs can reencounter these remaining Roselight reptoid hosts in the lower level of that facility, wherever you deem appropriate.

Story Award: If the PCs completely stop the core wipe, award them an additional 1,200 XP. If they only save the backup files and lose the last 24-hours' worth of information, award them 600 XP instead.

ON TO GAMUT BIO

All but one of the reptoids the PCs encountered were implanted with the same experimental HepatoDyne augmentation, created by the biotech company Gamut Bio. Researching the implant requires a successful DC 24 Computers or Diplomacy check, revealing that the implant is the first augmentation release from this small, 30-year-old company, which operates from a private science station about 1 hour outside the city. Any attempts to contact the facility results in an automated recording that states, "Your call is very important to us," before asking the caller to leave a message.

Most of the available information on the infosphere refers to Gamut Bio's exciting new implant, which the company claims to have almost ready for widespread sale. While the reptoid menace in Roselight is subdued for the moment, the dycepskian threat remains, and with the Stewards reeling from Dylaska's gas attack, only the PCs can intervene. Vorsen and Ephecta drive this fact home for the PCs and encourage them to investigate while they aid their coworkers in cleaning up the mess at their base.

PART 3: YOUR CALL IS IMPORTANT TO US

The Gamut Bio facility is an independent aerial station (or aerostat) floating in a region of calm atmosphere about 1 hour's flight from Roselight. As a registered corporate outpost, its location is publicly available on the infosphere, as is the company charter describing its purpose: to engineer stable symbiotic food crops for Liavaran epifarms. Nothing in the corporate charter discusses medical or augmentation research. Gamut Bio's infosphere site mentions that the company's founder, a barathu biologist named Jesara Hy Nevintsi, is a well-respected scientist with a vision for the future. Of course, it fails to note the dycepskian infestation that has befallen most of the company.

While PCs with explosives might consider simply destroying the station, they have no way of knowing how many employees remain innocent, unwitting pawns of the dycepskian masterminds, nor do they have any way of knowing whether Gamut Bio has already shipped their conversion implants elsewhere.

E. GAMUT BIO

As the PCs approach the Gamut Bio facility, read or paraphrase the following.

Acres of balloon-like plants float lazily around the research facility, blossoming in a rainbow of colors and scents. The station bobs slightly in the air, a lopsided, oblong building supported above the soft glow of hover engines. Stenciled letters across the aerostat's side read "Gamut Bio" in large letters. Countless bulbs and knobs dot the irregular surface, but a distinct series of landing pads is attached to the station's eastern edge.

Built during Roselight's retro-modernism architecture fad several decades ago, the Gamut Bio facility is an eclectic collection of broad curves, black windows, and sleet-gray metal. It broadens at the top and narrows in the lower levels where the smaller, restricted labs are located. Below those are the water systems and a forest of long, trailing antennae and stabilizers.

As an aerostat, the Gamut Bio facility is neutrally buoyant, relying on several large, lighter-than-air ballast tanks to maintain its altitude. This prevents the station from plummeting deeper into the atmosphere in the event of a power outage. The station also uses several large hover engines to maintain a stable location and to use as backup in case the ballast tanks leak. Constructed primarily to be light, rather than durable, most of the exterior walls are lightweight metallic

foam (hardness 20, HP 45, break DC 27), while the interior walls are mold-grown, wood-like filaments covered in plastic and metallic films to contain atmosphere (hardness 8, HP 40). Similar aerostats are especially popular on Liavara because of their reduced environmental impact.

Gamut Bio is divided into two distinct security levels: the low-security upper levels—generally called the public labs (though these also include employee facilities)—and the high-security lower levels that workers call the inner labs. A PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Engineering check while looking over the station recognizes that the hover engines aren't powerful enough to keep the entire facility aloft on its own, and that it must rely on buoyant air tanks, using the hover engines to maneuver. A PC who succeeds at a DC 27 Perception check spots the machine shop's loading bay doors (area E6).

Gamut Bio's restricted lower level contains the reactor, computer core, aquaponics, and the seed shop once used for mass production of new plant strains. While never intended to be a fortress, it is secured against corporate espionage and sabotage, and has proved a perfect breeding ground for the dycepskians as they cloned new fungal tissue.

The Zeffrac strain and its ability to infect barathus also provided an enticing new resource to the dycepskians. They found they could remove slices of host barathu tissue and combine them to create an organic computer upgrade for their hive mind. This CPU organelle adds no memories or thoughts to the fungal mass mind, only raw mental power, which the dycepskians have used to accelerate their research and planning. They were able to design the revolutionary HepatoDyne implant in under a year; expand the range of the fungal mass mind to reach distant Roselight; and manifest powerful, short-range psychic powers.

Distinctive green filaments cover almost every surface of the restricted labs, forming a psychic antenna to help the CPU organelle connect Liavara's dycepskian network. A PC who succeeds at a DC 28 Life Science check identifies the tendrils as a combination of barathu tissue and fungal mycelium. Destroying the filaments cuts the dycepskians off from any remaining agents in Roselight, but otherwise has no effect.

The CPU organelle requires intensive resources, and dozens of larger, vine-like structures snake through the restricted labs to collect water and nutrients from the aquaponics lab (area E12) and power from the reactor (area E14) using specialized remote nodes. While there are too many tendrils—snaking through hallways, vents, and even inside the walls—for the PCs to sever, destroying the collection nodes in those areas has a devastating effect on the processor itself (see area E16).

If the PCs scan the aerostat from afar, a few noninfested employees leave at the end of business hours, but many stay behind to work late. As the PCs land their vessel, the noninfested employees are asked to relocate to the cafeteria (area E5) as part of a routine drill for when suspicious or unscheduled visitors approach the facility.

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E1. LANDING PADS

Two small private pads and a large multi-craft pad provide easy access for visiting shuttles and other vessels. Normally, employees commute by company shuttle from Roselight or other nearby residential facilities. The landing pads are monitored by cameras but have no other security. The front door is left unlocked to throw off any unexpected visitors and maintain the facade of Gamut Bio being an ordinary lab.

E2. RECEPTION (CR 7)

There is an array of transparent cylinders along the south wall, each containing a replica of a plant floating in a colored fog, showcasing Gamut Bio's various products. The western wall is transparent, offering a stunning view of the surrounding skyscape marred only by the industrial utility of the landing pad. A reception desk and various hard, plastic chairs fill out this room.

Visiting guests and job applicants wait here, usually proceeding to the meeting room (area **E3**); the reception area also serves as the front line of security for the dycepskian-infested inhabitants.

Creature: A bubbly receptionist named **Salis Tillegu** (N female dycepskian-infested [page 55] damaya lashunta) sits behind the desk. She greets the PCs warmly regardless of how armed or aggressive they seem, assuring them that business has been lovely and inviting them to learn about and invest in Gamut Bio's exciting new ventures. By now the dycepskian fungal mass mind recognizes the dangers the PCs pose to their plans, and Tillegu is running token interference while the rest of the company prepares. She politely but firmly refuses them access to the rest of the facility, citing a "minor security situation" and apologizing for the inconvenience.

Tillegu is a noncombatant, has an EAC of 11, a KAC of 13, and 6 HP; she has a total +1 bonus to all her saving throws. If the PCs threaten her or make moves to charge past her through the door to the east, she presses a button beneath her desk, which causes the door to area **E3** to open. The threshwolf hosts in that room come charging out to attack the PCs. Meanwhile, Tillegu sits calmly at her desk, despite any violence going on around her.

Development: If she survives any combat that happens here, Tillegu refuses to give any information to the PCs, though her demeanor remains chipper. She doesn't resist if the PCs restrain or even kill her.



A PC can access a small part of Gamut Bio's computer network from the terminal on Tillegu's desk with a successful DC 25 Computers check. Within, they can find public financial statements, marketing materials, and lists of client data for their previous legitimate business dealings, but little on the HepatoDyne's design or test location beyond a list of Steward test subjects (which the PCs should already know about).

E3. CONFERENCE ROOM (CR 7)

The doors to this room are kept locked (requiring a successful DC 30 Engineering check to open), with posted signs reading "Maintenance Hazard: Do Not Enter" in both Brethedan and Common. The room contains a curved conference table lined with chairs, a holographic projector, and several cracked display screens. A pungent smell of ammonia hangs in the air.

Gamut Bio's noninfested employees know nothing of the conference room's residents. They have been grumbling about

the closed room and smell for a week now, but have also been happier with the general lack of meetings.

Creatures: Before it became infested, Gamut Bio used security robots to protect the facility, like many other businesses. They have been replaced with a pair of dangerous predators called threshwolves that have been subjected to the dycepskian mycelium. Like the needlehawks the PCs encountered in Roselight, the threshwolves are organic drones.

THRESHWOLF HOSTS (2)

CR 5

XP 1,600 each

Dycepskian-infested threshwolf (pages 55, 60)

N Medium animal (dycepskian)

Init +5; **Senses** blindsense (scent) 30 ft., low-light vision;

Perception +11

DEFENSE

HP 76 EACH

EAC 15; **KAC** 17

Fort +9; **Ref** +9; **Will** +9

Defensive Abilities quills; **Immunities** mind-affecting effects, poison

Weaknesses vulnerable to *remove affliction*, vulnerable to sonic

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.

Melee bite +11 (1d6+8 P plus grab)

Offensive Abilities thresh (1d6+5 S)

TACTICS

During Combat Each threshwolf attacks a different PC, attempting to bite and grab them before subjecting them to their thresh offensive ability.

Morale The threshwolf hosts fight to the death.

STATISTICS**Str** +3; **Dex** +5; **Con** +2; **Int** -4; **Wis** +1; **Cha** -3**Skills** Athletics +11, Bluff +16, Stealth +11, Survival +16**Other Abilities** fungal mass mind**E4. OFFICES**

This average-looking workspace is empty (having been recently vacated when the PCs arrive). These seven desks are assigned to Gamut Bio's accounting and marketing teams. Many of these employees haven't been infested by the dycepskians yet and know nothing of the sinister purpose of their new implant. Their computers can be accessed the same way as the one in area **E2**, and the PCs find similar information within.

E5. CAFETERIA

The bowed outer wall of this staff cafeteria is transparent, looking over the cloudscape beyond. Several large bubbles in the curved expanse provide a broader view, with tables set in them to create cozy nooks. Several automated machines sit on a counter to the west, smelling of coffee and burned corn.

The cafeteria serves all of the facility's staff and occasionally doubles as a secondary work environment for some.

Creatures: When the PCs raid Gamut Bio, the infested management has instructed any nonhost employees still present to take shelter here.

None of the terrified office workers here are dycepskian hosts, just panicked accountants and researchers who think they're being attacked by space pirates. A PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Sense Motive check can tell the staff is panicked and has no combat experience. The group is easily cowed with a successful DC 22 Intimidate check, or if any of them take any damage; treat each employee as having an EAC of 11, a KAC of 13, 6 HP, and a total +1 bonus to all their saving throws. Calming the group requires a successful DC 25 Diplomacy check; this DC increases by 5 if the PCs have already cowed them. If all the PCs lay down or holster their weapons, they gain a +2 circumstance bonus to this Diplomacy check.

The staff doesn't leave the cafeteria to chase fleeing heroes.

Development: If cowed, the group retreats as far back into the cafeteria as they can and stay put until told they can leave. If calmed instead, the group can answer questions about the facility, with **Morja Sonn** (NG female korasha lashunta), a graphic designer, acting as their spokesperson. They have no real information about the company's new augmentation, and most of them thought it was strange to pivot to producing augmentations in the first place.

These employees know all the augmentation research and production happens in the restricted inner labs—where most of the research and senior staff retreated to when

trouble began—which are only accessible through “the farm,” a test chamber for aero-crops (area **E9**). If the PCs have already attempted to access the farm, they will have discovered that the door to the chamber is welded shut. If they mention the welded doors to the employees, one of the maintenance workers mentions that the water reclamation system in the machine plant (area **E6**) reaches the inner labs as well, but that the barathu Dr. Senoika Iz Mollus confiscated all the maintenance key cards a few days earlier. Sonn also tells them the shutdown code for the dangerous cyclers in area **E13** if they ask.

Treasure: The equipment on the counter includes a mk 3 culinary synthesizer (*Starfinder* Armory 129), while the cupboard below contains 500 UPBs.

Story Award: If the PCs negotiate with the staff nonviolently, award them 2,400 XP.

E6. MACHINE PLANT (CR 8)

Both interior doors to this room are locked, requiring a successful DC 27 Engineering check to open. The alarmed exterior loading door, which a PC may have spotted with a successful DC 27 Perception check while flying outside the station, is used for industrial supplies and heavy equipment. It is also kept locked, requiring a successful DC 32 Engineering check to open, but the alarm has been broken for months without any of the employees noticing.

The machine plant houses much of the station's support mechanisms: water filtration, air filtration, waste disposal, and facility repair. The dycepskian janitors normally keep it in immaculate condition, but their attention has shifted from maintaining the facade of normalcy to reinforcing the station in anticipation of an attack, so they have largely ignored the area for several days. None of the equipment here can immediately shut down the station; engines and main power are controlled from the power plant (area **E14**); the PCs can turn off the lights, water, or air conditioning to the upper labs, but none of those actions create an immediate hazard to residents.

A large hatch in the floor here labeled “water reclamation” leads down to the lower restricted levels, specifically area **E13**, and ultimately into the hydroponics lab (area **E12**). The hatch is electronically locked, requiring a successful DC 30 Computers check to hack or a successful DC 35 Engineering check to disable; the barathus in area **E9** carry the only remaining key card.

Creature: Part of the maintenance staff's responsibilities included cleaning the station's biofilters and scrubbing them for contaminants. However, the dycepskians have been lax while preparing for the PCs' arrival, and a moonflower seed washed into the plumbing system. With the facility locked shut for several days now, the dangerous moonflower has quickly grown to full size, stripping other organic material from the filters. It is now ravenous and aggressive, attacking anyone who enters the room.

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E. GAMUT BIO



1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

MOONFLOWER**CR 8****XP 4,800****HP 125** (*Starfinder Alien Archive 2 84*)**TACTICS****During Combat** The moonflower begins combat with a light pulse, and then tries to swallow the nearest PC whole.**Morale** The aggressive moonflower fights to the death.

Treasure: Six dive helmets, each with its own air supply lasting 1 hour, hang on the wall above the water reclamation hatch. The staff use these to clean or repair the station's sophisticated water recycling system. A PC who succeeds at a DC 25 Perception check also uncovers a laser drill (*Starfinder Armory 105*).

E7. BOTANY LAB (CR 8)

Bubbling tubes and bulbs line most of the cluttered workspace here, with tall stands of greenery growing from tub-sized pots of black soil. Balloon-like plants bob near the tall ceiling, trailing streamers and leaves beneath them. The room reeks of industrial cleansers and compost in equal measure.

Much of Gamut Bio's research work happens in this botany lab. Research here focuses on unnatural selection: manual cross-pollination, selective breeding, and nutrient changes, with the most successful specimens being transplanted to the adjacent greenhouse (area **E9**) for additional breeding and testing. The lab's researchers focus primarily on the floating plants that can survive in Liavara's atmosphere, cross-pollinating them with more traditional terrestrial crops in order to produce a wider variety of foodstuffs and biomass.

Creature: Before the dycepskian infestation of Gamut Bio, the researchers were studying the hard rinds of Liavara's floating reebadurus plants and how the saliva of the vaguely avian kriegakos is able to break it down. To do so, the scientists captured a kriegakos and kept it in a cage here. When the dycepskians realized they couldn't infest the beast, they left it to starve. When the PCs arrive, the kriegakos has dissolved a hole in its cage and has been snacking on the lab's plants. It ferociously defends its new home turf.

KRIEGAKOS**CR 8****XP 4,800****HP 115** (page 57)**TACTICS****During Combat** The kriegakos darts around the room, taking full advantage of its flyby attack ability. If it gets surrounded, it flings its corrosive saliva everywhere.**Morale** The escaped creature fights to the death.

Treasure: A medical emergency kit on the wall contains two tier 3 antitoxins, two *mk 3 serums of healing*, six cans of sprayflesh, and two white nanite hypopens (*Starfinder Armory 106*).

E8. DEEP FREEZE

This walk-in freezer is used to preserve interesting specimens and genetic material for future analysis. A PC who succeeds at a DC 30 Perception check while searching the freezer finds Sivich Trobel, a dead reptoid, tucked into a crate marked "moss starters." Trobel was the first reptoid to stumble across the dycepskian infestation as he attempted to infiltrate the small biotech company, accidentally alerting the fungal invaders to their reptoid rivals.

At your discretion, a datapad under Trobel's body contains details on the adventure background the PCs haven't yet learned.

E9. THE FARM (CR 9)

The arched dome of this greenhouse reaches some forty feet overhead, with floating Liavaran plants bobbing throughout the open space. Raised garden boxes and glass cylinders overflow with mosses, flowering plants, and small crops. A pair of sturdy metal doors to the east reads, "Restricted Labs: Extreme Biohazard Risk! No Unauthorized Personnel!"

Gamut Bio uses this large greenhouse to test-grow promising specimens before moving them to the seed shop (area **E15**) for mass production, as well as growing a steady supply of staple plants used in experiments.

The reinforced security doors (hardness 20, HP 80, break DC 32) lead down to the security gantry (area **E10**) and the restricted labs beyond. In addition to the normal lock (which requires a successful DC 30 Engineering check to disable), the janitorial staff have welded the doors shut from the other side, making it impossible to open without blowing the door apart or cutting it open with specific equipment (like the laser drill found in **E6**). It takes 30 minutes to drill a hole in the doors large enough to squeeze through with this tool, making enough noise to alert any dycepskians on this floor.

The large planters here offer concealment but not cover.

Creatures: Four barathu research scientists, including the research lead Dr. Senoika Iz Mollus, were among the first Gamut Bio employees infected by the dycepskians. The four have continued their work here, but when the PCs' vessel approaches the facility, they merge into a single, huge barathu entity for mutual protection and to more easily destroy any intruders who try to access the restricted labs.

BARATHU BRUISER**CR 9****XP 6,400**Dycepskian-infested combined barathu (page 55, *Starfinder Alien Archive 20*)

N Huge aberration

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; **Perception** +22**DEFENSE****EAC** 26; **KAC** 27**Fort** +8; **Ref** +8; **Will** +14**HP 135****THE HOLLOW CABAL****PART 1:
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Defensive Abilities amorphous; **DR** 2/–; **Immunities** mind-affecting effects; **Resistances** fire 5

Weaknesses vulnerable to *remove affliction*

OFFENSE

Speed fly 30 ft. (Ex, perfect)

Melee slam +19 (3d4+15 B)

Ranged stone thrower +17 (2d8+9 B)

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

TACTICS

Before Combat These combined barathus chose the following adaptations when they merged: increased Armor Class, damage reduction, fire resistance, and a natural ranged attack. If the dycepskians learned the PCs prefer a specific type of damage, these barathus select resistance to that energy type in place of fire.

During Combat The barathu bruiser is little more than four scientists combined together. They use the most basic of combat tactics, moving behind cover to engage one or two opponents at a time. If the PCs do something unexpected, the barathu bruiser may sacrifice their increased AC adaptation to respond.

Morale The dycepskians fear only isolation, so the barathu bruiser fights to the death to preserve the larger colony.

STATISTICS

Str +6; **Dex** +0; **Con** +4; **Int** +3; **Wis** +2; **Cha** +0

Skills Acrobatics +22 (+30 to fly), Bluff +22,

Life Science +22, Physical Science +17, Sense Motive +17

Languages Brethedan, Common; telepathy 100 ft.

Other Abilities adaptation, combine, fungal mass mind

Development: If the PCs search the barathu corpse, they find a sticky security key card among the flesh. This key card opens the water reclamation maintenance hatch in the machine plant (area **E6**), as well as the security doors in the security hub (area **E11**).

E10. SECURITY GANTRY (CR 8)

This curving hallway separates the secure level from the public areas above. The door at the western end of the hallway is electronically locked, requiring a successful DC 30 Computers check to bypass the key card reader or a successful DC 30 Engineering check to disable the lock. The key card found on the barathu bruiser's body in area **E9** unlocks this door.

Trap: An array of stun ordinance once lined the gantry, but the dycepskians have replaced these with plasma weapons to disintegrate any trespassers. The sensors are controlled by the CPU organelle and allow dycepskian hosts to pass, with their fungal mass mind acting as a psychic security key. The guns fire on anyone else entering the area for 10 rounds or until they are destroyed, whichever comes first.

There are four turrets, and each one has EAC 19, KAC 23, Fort +11, Ref +8, hardness 5, and 35 HP. Destroying a turret reduces the damage dealt by 1d12.

PLASMA TURRETS CR 8

XP 4,800

Type technological; **Perception** DC 32; **Disable** Engineering DC 27 (shut down the turrets) or Mysticism DC 27 (fool the psychic sensors)

Trigger location; **Init** +14; **Duration** 10 rounds;

Reset 1 minute

Effect plasma turrets +20 ranged (4d12 E & F); multiple targets (all non-dycepskian targets in the area)

E11. SECURITY HUB (CR 8)

Two dozen security monitors are mounted on the southern wall here above some small desks, though many of them stand dark and overgrown with greenish-yellow filaments.

The security hub was formerly used to watch over the rest of the facility, but the dycepskians use their



BARATHU BRUISER

fungal mass mind to stay in communication and have left the monitors here alone. The two working monitors show areas **E12** and **E14**. A PC who succeeds at a DC 25 Perception check notices the fungal nodes in those rooms. A PC who then succeeds at a DC 28 Life Science check can surmise their general purpose as described on page 27; in short, they help maintain an as-yet-unknown fungal entity.

The doors here are labeled but kept locked, and like the turrets in the entryway, are controlled by the CPU organelle and can be bypassed by those who are part of the fungal mass mind. Otherwise, the doors can be opened with one of the old security key cards (such as the one found on the barathu bruiser in area **E9**), a successful DC 30 Computers check to bypass the reader, or a successful DC 30 Engineering check to disable the lock. Any of the doors opened without a key card stay open; otherwise they close after 30 seconds.

Especially massive trunks of tendrils extend across the ceiling between the northern, northeastern, and western doors.

Creatures: The Gamut Bio janitorial staff are actually dycepskian hosts "recruited" from a dangerous mercenary group that passed through Roselight several weeks ago. The crew acted as muscle for the dycepskians until the fungal invaders began infesting the local Stewards, after which they shifted to a defensive role here in the facility.

GAMUT BIO JANITORS (4)

CR 4

XP 1,200 each

Male and female dycepskian-infested korasha lashunta soldier (page 55)

N Medium humanoid (dycepskian, lashunta)

Init +9; Perception +15

DEFENSE

HP 50 EACH

EAC 16; KAC 19

Fort +6; Ref +4; Will +5

Immunities mind-affecting effects

Weaknesses vulnerable to *remove affliction*

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft. (25 ft. in armor)

Melee hook sword +9 (1d8+7 S; critical bleed 1d4)

Ranged advanced plasma bolter +12 (2d8+4 E & F; critical wound [DC 13])

or stickybomb grenade II +9 (explode [15 ft., entangled 2d4 rounds, DC 13])

Offensive Abilities fighting styles (hit-and-run), opening volley

Lashunta Spell-Like Abilities (CL 4th)

1/day—*detect thoughts* (DC 12)

At will—*daze* (DC 11), *psychokinetic hand*

TACTICS

During Combat As former mercenaries, the janitors move with military precision, targeting spellcasters or nimble combatants first. Every round, at least one of them throws a stickybomb grenade in an attempt to keep the PCs locked down.

Morale These hosts fight to the death.

STATISTICS

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

Skills Athletics +10, Bluff +15, Engineering +10, Stealth +10

Languages Common, Lashunta; limited telepathy 30 ft.

Other Abilities fungal mass mind

Gear officer ceremonial plate, advanced plasma bolter^{AR} with 2 high-capacity batteries (40 charges each), hook sword^{AR}, stickybomb grenades II (2)

E12. HYDROPONICS (CR 8)

Two large pools of water and several hydroponic racks fill much of this laboratory, each overgrown with aquatic plants. A grated well in the eastern pool plunges down into darkness. A throbbing node three feet across hums softly in the largest tank, tied into the vine-like fungal tendrils leading across the ceiling and to the eastern door.

While Liavara's atmosphere can't support aquatic plant life, many stations use hydroponic systems as part of their atmosphere processing, water filtration, or food systems. Gamut Bio catered to this niche by selling the specially cultivated plants, algae, and bacterial colonies found in this chamber. A sturdy grating (which can be removed with a successful DC 15 Strength check) covers the passage to area **E13**.

Creatures: If the PCs don't enter the restricted labs through the water-reclamation tank, they encounter Dr. Callajam and her eels here. While the kalo biohacker can move freely around the room thanks to her armor, her pets are restricted to the two large tanks, forcing them to attack mostly via their electric arc ability.

Development: If the PCs destroy the fungal node here (hardness 5, HP 15), they restrict the CPU organelle's access to the water it needs for cooling. This reduces the DC of the spell-like abilities cast through its psychic network by 2 (page 36).

E13. WATER RECLAMATION (CR 8)

The interior walls of this large water tank are covered with bacterial mats and ultraviolet lamps that help break down containments, while a large turbine in the northeast corner circulates the water. Gravel has been spread along the floor, and large tubes lead to the west and south.

The ceiling here is 15 feet high, and the chamber is completely full of water. Dim light filters through the water from lights in the ceiling. This tank, which sits at the lowest level of Gamut Bio, provides nutrient- and bacteria-rich water that is ideal for growing the facility's plants. A secondary system further purifies this water into sterile water for drinking and lab use. A ladder at the end of the western tube leads up to area **E6**, and the southern tube curves up to a grate (which requires a successful DC 15 Strength check to open), leading to area **E12**.

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Hazard: At the end of each round, every creature in the water here must succeed at a DC 15 Athletics check to swim or be dragged 10 feet closer to the churning turbine. A creature that moves into the turbine's space or ends its turn there takes 2d6 bludgeoning damage. The turbine can be shut down by entering the security code obtained from employees in area **E5** into a waterproof panel (or by succeeding at a DC 28 Engineering check) next to the ladder to area **E6**.

Creatures: Dr. Phryine Callajam once led Gamut Bio's aquaponics research. The dycepskians claimed her to exploit her understanding of biology and gene-splicing. The doctor's pet project was studying arc morays, an eel species native to Kalo-Mahoi that hunt by discharging electric arcs from bulbs in their foreheads. She had once hoped to splice this ability into bacteria to create organic power cells, but her dycepskian infestation redirected her priorities. She has



since converted her pair of tame research subjects into vicious guard animals.

ARC MORAYS (2)

CR 4

XP 1,200 each

N Medium animal (aquatic)

Init +5; **Senses** low-light vision; **Perception** +10

DEFENSE

HP 50 EACH

EAC 16; **KAC** 18

Fort +8; **Ref** +8; **Will** +3

Resistances cold 10

OFFENSE

Speed swim 50 ft.

Melee bite +9 (1d6+7 P)

Ranged electric arc +12 (1d4+4 E; critical arc 1d4)

STATISTICS

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

Skills Athletics +15 (+23 to swim), Stealth +10, Survival +10

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Electric Arc (Ex) An arc moray can generate a powerful bolt of electricity from a special organ embedded in its forehead as a ranged attack. It has a maximum range of 10 feet in air or 20 feet in water.

PHRYINE CALLAJAM

CR 6

XP 2,400

Dycepskian-infested kalo biohacker (page 55, *Starfinder Alien Archive* 68, *Starfinder Character Operations Manual* 40)

N Medium monstrous humanoid (aquatic, dycepskian)

Init +3; **Senses** blindsight (sound) 60 ft., low-light vision; **Perception** +18

DEFENSE

HP 80

EAC 18; **KAC** 19

Fort +7; **Ref** +5; **Will** +9

Immunities mind-affecting effects; **Resistances** cold 5

Weaknesses vulnerable to *remove affliction*

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft., swim 50 ft.

Melee sharp-pointed syringe stick +12 (1d4+6 P; critical injection DC +2)

Ranged advanced needler pistol +14 (1d6+6 P; critical injection DC +2)

Offensive Abilities biohacks

TACTICS

During Combat Dr. Callajam relies heavily on her needler pistol, attempting to impart a vulnerability to electricity to one or more PCs using her genetics inhibitor.

Morale Like all hosts, Dr. Callajam fights to the death.

STATISTICS

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

Skills Athletics +13 (+21 to swim), Bluff +18, Culture +13, Life Science +18, Medicine +18, Physical Science +13

Languages Brethedan, Common, Kalo, Shirren, Triaxian, Veski, Ysoki

Other Abilities breakthroughs (gene therapy), custom microlab (datapad), fields of study (genetics), fungal mass mind, theorems (hampering inhibitor, treat condition)

Gear d-suit I, advanced needler pistol^{COM} with 16 darts, sharp-pointed syringe stick^{COM}, golden locket (worth 250 credits)

Treasure: Dr. Callajam's locket contains a hologram of her parents, brother, and sister, as well as their current contact information so Phryne could always reach them no matter where she traveled. If the PCs contact the Callajam family, share the tragic news of their daughter's death, and arrange to deliver the locket to them on Kalo-Mahoi (costing 100 credits), the family reaches out to them 2 weeks later to express their undying gratitude (which includes a funds transfer of 2,500 credits) for the PCs' kindness.

E14. POWER PLANT (CR 7)

A large reactor in the far corner of this long chamber bathes the whole room in a soft, blue glow and the scent of ozone. Thick bundles of organic tendrils—shaded black by the chamber's light—cluster around the reactor, with a pulsing, organic node half-concealed by the machine's bulk.

The fusion reactor here powers the entire complex, including the hover engines, though emergency batteries will keep the facility operating normally for several hours if anyone deactivates the reactor. Gamut Bio also used this as a workshop to 3D print whatever tools and supplies were required for its research.

Hazard: The dycepskians have neglected the reactor, which has begun to crack from the surrounding tendrils and leak radiation. This chamber is now bathed in radiation: severe within 10 feet of the reactor, high 10 feet beyond that, and medium for the rest of the area.

In addition, the reactor discharges an arc of plasma each round. The bolt targets the creature closest to the reactor (+15 ranged attack, 8d6 E & F). The reactor has energy shielding, giving it EAC 22, KAC 18, hardness 10, and 100 HP. When it takes 50 damage, the radiation increases to severe throughout the entire chamber.

The reactor can be safely repaired or shut down—eliminating the radiation and plasma discharge—with three successful DC 28 Engineering checks.

Development: If the PCs destroy the fungal node here (hardness 5, HP 15), they restrict the CPU organelle's access to the raw energy it needs to process information. This reduces the DC of the spell-like abilities cast through its psychic network by 2 (page 36).

Treasure: A crate under a workbench holds 2,000 UPBs for use in the 3D printers. A PC who succeeds at a DC 25 Perception check also finds a suit of white carbon skin armor with a radiation buffer augmentation.

Story Award: If the PCs destroy, repair, or shut down the reactor, award them 3,200 XP.

E15. SEED SHOP (CR 8)

Lab workstations frame this chamber, each bearing a set of assembly tools and hexagonal casings stamped, "Gamut Bio HepatoDyne Implant." The northeast corner contains a tall, transparent aluminum tube, which contains bundles of writhing greenish-yellow filaments.

In its pre-infested days, Gamut Bio produced small batches of their designer seeds here. The dycepskians have turned this lab into a place to experiment on their own fungal filaments; first, to construct their living supercomputer and amplifier, and more recently to manufacture the HepatoDyne implants, which can quickly convert recipients into new members of their horde.

A PC who succeeds at a DC 24 Perception check, or a DC 20 Life Science or appropriate Profession skill check, realizes that the amount of equipment present implies that there might be some assembled implants that are currently unaccounted for.

Creature: When the dycepskians first began tinkering with the idea of building an augmentation to surreptitiously infect new hosts, they purchased dozens of different designs and began installing them into an unfortunate host volunteer. Very little of the human Dr. Iwan Tallouchi survived the extended grafting process, but the networked augmentations have kept their body alive and under the control of the CPU organelle. When the PCs enter this room, the CPU organelle activates this cybernetic golem as a defense.

CYBERNETIC GOLEM

CR 8

XP 4,800

HP 125 (*Starfinder Alien Archive* 2 66)

TACTICS

During Combat The golem activates its haste circuit and makes full attacks with its artillery laser in the first round. After, it moves into melee range against the nearest PC. All the while, the human parts of Dr. Tallouchi mindlessly recite biochemistry facts.

Morale The golem fights until it is destroyed.

Treasure: While many of the augmentations purchased by the dycepskians were installed in Dr. Tallouchi or disassembled for study, a handful remain new and untouched, including an accelerated datajack and a mk 2 weaponized prosthesis (*Starfinder Armory* 89). A PC who succeeds at a DC 28 Perception check also uncovers an x-ray visor accidentally tossed in the trash container after the most recent operation.

E16. SERVER ROOM (CR 11)

Fleshy tendrils web across every flat surface of this chamber, dripping fluid and spraying glowing spores into the air. At the far end of the room, a mass of fungus and undifferentiated

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brain tissue throbs and twitches, coating what looks to be a server tower.

Once Gamut Bio's server room, this chamber now houses the dycepskian CPU organelle in its western half. The regular server is still operational, interfacing with the organic systems thanks to a series of datajack-like implants, allowing the organelle to comb the infosphere.

The control panels to the north and southwest are sturdy enough to offer cover. The dycepskians have been working to extend the CPU organelle's psychic range, trying to take advantage of the recent increase in their numbers.

Creatures: A handful of dycepskian hosts—two barathus and two humans—have retreated here for this final confrontation, hoping to draw on their creation's psychic power to finally crush the meddling PCs. While the CPU organelle is mindless and inanimate, its vast processing power grants creatures with the dycepskian subtype within this chamber access to potent psychic powers (see the psychic network ability below). However, if the PCs destroyed any of the nodes in other areas, those powers are lessened. The PCs can target the CPU organelle for destruction if they wish. As a Large, unattended, inanimate object, it has an Armor Class of 2, but it has hardness 15 and 42 HP. It has Fortitude and Will saving throw bonuses of +9 and spell resistance 20, but it automatically fails any Reflex saving throws. If the PCs destroy the CPU organelle, the dycepskians can no longer use the psychic network ability.

Once combat begins here, the dycepskian hosts use their fungal mass mind to call out to any allies in the facility. Undefeated foes arrive in 1d6 rounds.

GAMUT BIO IT STAFF (2) CR 7

XP 3,200 each

Male and female dycepskian-infested human operative (page 55)

N Medium humanoid (dycepskian, human)

Init +7; Perception +20

DEFENSE HP 100 EACH
EAC 19; KAC 20

Fort +6; Ref +9; Will +10

Defensive Abilities evasion; **Immunities** mind-affecting effects; **Resistances** cold 5, fire 5

Weaknesses vulnerable to remove affliction

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.

Melee *vanishing tactical knife* +13 (2d4+8 S)

Ranged corona laser pistol +15 (2d4+7 F; critical burn 1d4)

Offensive Abilities debilitating trick, psychic network, trick attack +3d8

TACTICS

During Combat These hacker operatives attempt to stay mobile, moving about as they try to trick attack the PCs. If a PC gets too close to one of these hosts, they attack with their *vanishing tactical knife* instead.

Morale The infested IT staff fight to the death.

STATISTICS

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

Skills Acrobatics +15, Bluff +20, Computers +20, Culture +15, Engineering +20, Life Science +15, Physical Science +15

Languages Brethedan, Common

Other Abilities fungal mass mind, operative exploits (bleeding shot [7 bleed], elusive hacker, uncanny mobility), specialization (hacker)

Gear d-suit II (mk 1 thermal capacitor), corona laser pistol with 2 batteries (20 charges each), *vanishing^{AR} tactical knife*

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Psychic Network (Sp) As a standard action, a creature with the dycepskian subtype can psychically tap into the CPU organelle to cast *lesser resistant armor*, *mind thrust* (3rd level), or *synaptic pulse* as a spell-like ability, using their CR as the caster level. The DC to resist any of these effects is 21, which is reduced by 2 for each fungal node the PCs have destroyed (see areas E12 and E14). Only one creature can activate this ability per round.

GAMUT BIO MANAGEMENT (2) CR 7

XP 3,200 each

Dycepskian-infested barathu (page 55, *Starfinder Alien Archive* 20)

N Large aberration

Init +1; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +14

DEFENSE HP 102 EACH
EAC 23; KAC 24

Fort +6; Ref +6; Will +12

Defensive Abilities amorphous; **Immunities** mind-affecting effects

Weaknesses vulnerable to remove affliction

OFFENSE

Speed fly 30 ft. (Ex, perfect)

Melee slam +15 (1d8+8 B)

Ranged red star plasma pistol +13 (1d8+7 E & F; critical burn 1d8)

Offensive Abilities psychic network

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

TACTICS

During Combat One barathu taps into the psychic network to cast *synaptic pulse* on as many PCs as possible, while the other hangs back to fire their plasma pistol. If the PCs favor a certain type of attack, one of these two barathus casts *lesser resistant armor* to protect one of the IT staff.

Morale The infested hosts fight to the death.

STATISTICS

Str +1; Dex +1; Con +4; Int +2; Wis +5; Cha +2

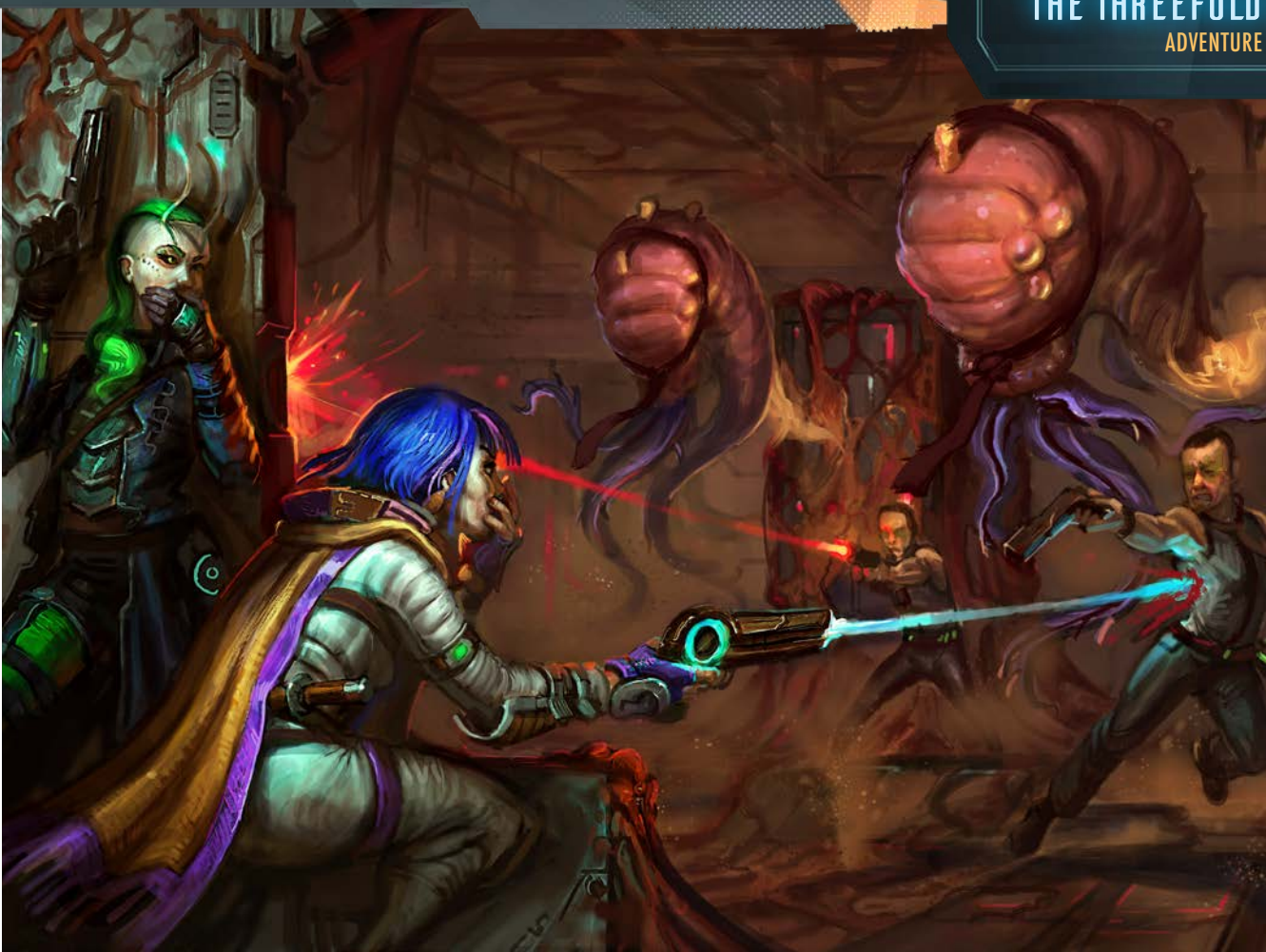
Skills Acrobatics +19 (+27 to fly), Bluff +19, Diplomacy +19, Life Science +14, Physical Science +14, Sense Motive +19

Languages Brethedan, Common; telepathy 100 ft.

Other Abilities adaptation, combine, fungal mass mind

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**SPECIAL ABILITIES****Psychic Network (Sp)** Page 36.

Treasure: With the Gamut Bio facility in tatters and its upper management defeated, its remaining budget—20,000 credits—is up for grabs. The PCs can transfer these funds to a credstick once they access the servers.

Development: Once the CPU organelle has been destroyed, the PCs can access Gamut Bio's servers and download the restricted development files for the HepatoDyne implant. These detail the augmentation's development and installation, as well as noting that a handful of them were taken possession by the company's founder, Jesara Hy Nevintsi, to a place called Diorama R&D on the small Brethedan moon of Molovis.

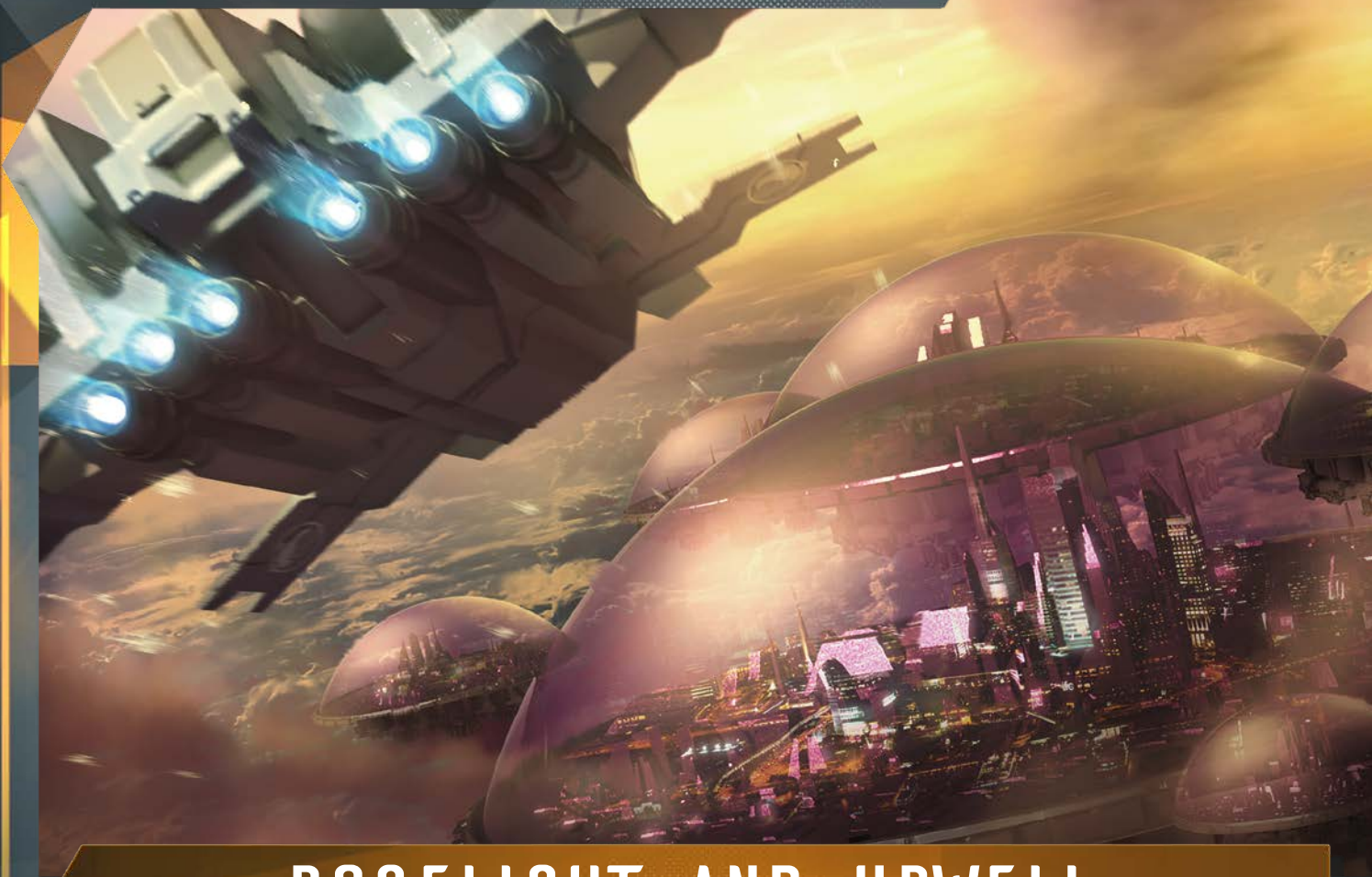
CONCLUDING
THE ADVENTURE

The ultimate fate of the Gamut Bio facility is up to the PCs. About a dozen employees still work for the company and aren't infected by dycepskians, but without the research staff they'll have very little to do. The facility itself is also filled

with fungal tissue, both the inert fibers of the CPU organelle and the active strands used to build the HepatoDyne implants, all of which pose a very real risk of infecting unsuspecting humanoids. The PCs can cleanse the entire facility using organic solvents or fire (requiring a successful DC 30 Life Sciences or Physical Sciences check, respectively, to do thoroughly). Disabling the station's hover engines or power plant only launches the facility into the winds, as it relies mostly on gas buoyancy to remain afloat and only uses its engines for maneuvering. Destroying the gas tanks keeping Gamut Bio afloat requires powerful explosives, after which the station sinks quickly into the clouds of Liavara to be crushed by the immense pressure.

With Gamut Bio's experimental computer neutralized and the local Stewards purged of reptoid infiltrators, Roselight is relatively safe from the Unseen. When the PCs return to the city, investigator Yych Vorsen agrees to try to downplay the PCs' involvement in any reports of activity at the facility. Any remaining reptoids who escaped the PCs go to ground and attempt to assume new identities.

However, the PCs aren't yet finished with the dycepskians. Vorsen and Ephecta worry that the missing Nevintsi is also a host and might be carrying the HepatoDyne implants to Diorama R&D for nefarious purposes. They encourage the PCs to travel there and investigate, as detailed in the next adventure, "The Cradle Infestation"!



ROSELIGHT AND UPWELL

"How's that gut wound healing up, newbie? Well, buckle up—Roselight may've got ninety percent less knife fights than Upwell, but don't let the pretty orange skyline and fancy coffee fool you. Piss off the wrong person here and your bank account will be bleeding worse than your belly was. Locals call it the Cerise City, and they got a few nicknames for Upwell, too, but HR says I gotta stop using them. Everyone else just calls them the Sister Cities for a reason: They look different, but you scratch them, and they bleed the same."

—Phyx Gatterlain, Executive Officer of
The Spinward Minister

Most Pact Worlds residents consider Liavara a paradise, untouched by development and corruption and occupied solely by beautiful floating flora and fauna and the romanticized Dreamers. The truth of Liavara, as with all things, is much more complex. Much of the gas giant remains wilderness, but the wealth promised by its rare elements means that it has not remained unspoiled. The barathus of its sister planet Bretheda administer the world to protect their Dreamer cousins, but gas extractors and refineries dot the wilderness, and much of Liavara's beauty and wealth are bought through uncomfortable alliances and a history of rights violations.

These strange bedfellows—barathu preservationists and industrialist plutocrats—lend the planet a strange character, and nowhere is this dichotomy more clearly displayed than in the sister cities of Roselight and Upwell.

HISTORY

Liavara is a settled world, with no indigenous sapient life. The barathus of neighboring Bretheda tend the world on behalf of their Dreamer cousins, but large corporate interests fund the barathus' preservation efforts, and small prospectors and gas-mining poachers routinely establish pirate refineries to gather the world's mineral wealth.

Barathus founded Roselight soon after their second delegation arrived on Liavara—many centuries before the Gap—but it existed as little more than a rest stop and seasonal camp from which they observed and theorized about the Dreamers. It was likely during the Gap that the city expanded into a predominantly barathu-run colonial power. At the end of those lost years, however, the barathus realized that various gas poachers had riddled a small Liavaran moon with concealed refineries, starports, and storage depots—the original pieces that would eventually coalesce into the city of Upwell. Even as the barathus of Roselight escalated their policing efforts over the next few decades, the entrenched poachers grew increasingly wealthy and organized, eventually forming powerful corporations with their own quasi-legal claims to the planet.

Rather than resort to war, the barathus formed the Office of Commercial Interests in 57 AG. Ostensibly a barathu bureaucracy under the control of Confluence, the OCI pays heed to “advisors” from a dozen major gas-mining corporations collectively known as the Corporate Authority, which controls the organization's purse strings. The arrangement allows the barathus to steer industrial development away from Dreamer territory and other sensitive ecosystems while empowering the corporations to protect their holdings with official policing and military power, chasing off unlicensed mining operations that may encroach on their territories. Under the alliance, the Corporate Advisors redeveloped the former pirate moon, gradually breaking down the rocky surface to build one of the largest space stations in the system. Upwell now accommodates an entire planet's worth of refineries, warehouses, processing plants, reactors, and dockyards. Xenowardens still refer to the century-long process as the Moonwreck and consider it a prime

ROSELIGHT

LN city

Population 54,000 (35% human, 30% barathu, 8% ysoki, 6% android, 2% lashunta, 1% haan, 1% sarcesian, 1% vesk, 16% other)

Government autocracy (Confluence)

Qualities bureaucratic, insular

Maximum Item Level 12th

UPWELL

N space station moon

Population 186,000 (33% human, 23% android, 8% barathu, 8% ysoki, 5% dirindi, 3% sazaron, 1% sarcesian, 19% other)

Government plutocracy

Qualities bureaucratic, polluted

Maximum Item Level 12th

example of the evil the OCI allows to ravage Liavara in the interests of peace and profit.

Despite their alliance, the barathu overseers and the corporate advisors of the OCI constantly argue and fight for control, and the organization has alternately existed as either a beneficent administrator or a capitalist dictatorship at varying points in the last 200 years. Under barathu sway, Roselight grew and flourished as not just a series of corporate headquarters, but as a city invested in the arts and philosophies embodied by the Dreamers. Under corporate influence, Upwell's refinery structure and military might expanded while workers' rights evaporated. Even at their worst excesses, each side turns a blind eye to their counterpart—barathus enjoy their normal freedoms even as corporate powers restrict other inhabitants' movements and speech, and the barathus never look too closely at industrial facilities unless they intrude on or pollute protected sites. Many barathus bridge the divide, forming biotech companies that sit on the OCI's advisory council, and even today, Liavara attracts those ambitious Brethedans whose loose ethics have stymied their work in the stricter business climate of their home world.

Roselight's expansion into a true city began under the oversight of Karobel Hark, the first human to occupy the OCI's executive chair. The phenomenally wealthy CEO of Liavara's largest gas corporation, Fairwinds, Hark invested their vast fortune into developing a “capital” city for what they saw as their planet. Hark added additional domes to house parks, a theater district, and museums, inadvertently attracting ecologists, actors, writers, and artists to the city while retrofitting existing barathu domes with humanoid amenities. While most humanoids of the Pact Worlds consider Hark's magnum opus to be a city of beauty, barathus shudder at the tacky aping of their traditional architecture and ham-fisted addition of walkways and other horizontal surfaces.

Roselight and the OCI seem to be entering a new era of heightened barathu control after a series of compromises and

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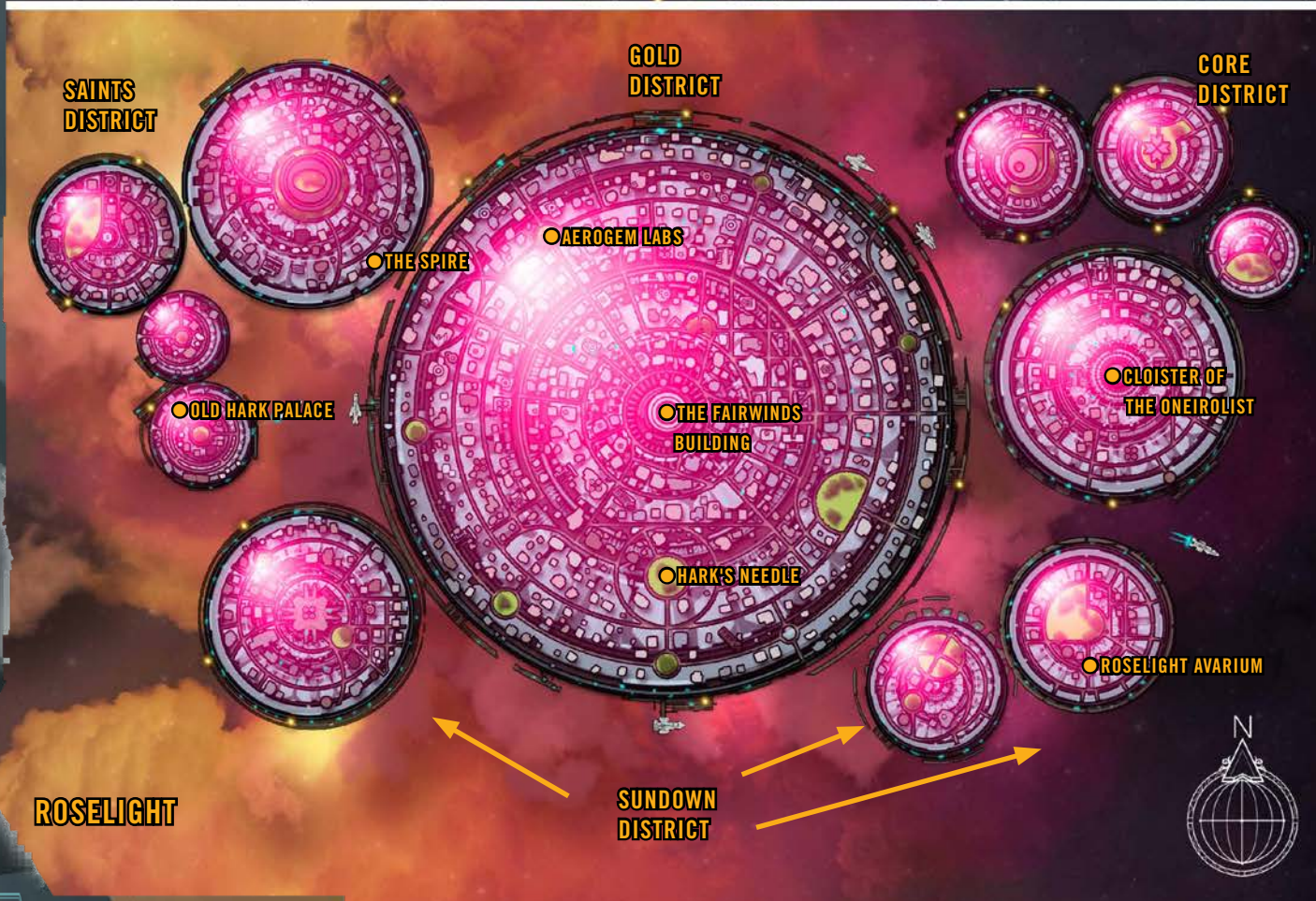
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UPWELL



extraordinary luck by **Wiodraoe Li Ashtea** (LN agender barathu envoy), who assumed the executive seat of the OCI four years ago. Rumors suggest that they allied with an aggressive Xenowarden faction to undermine and even assassinate corporate powers in the OCI—rumors that could plunge the two cities into outright war if confirmed. Even if untrue, the rumors have sparked increased tensions among the barathus and Liavara's gas corps, and free agents are drifting into the sister cities to take advantage of the rising paranoia.

SOCIETY

While Roselight and Upwell seem like strikingly different settlements—Roselight with its shining domes and swooping architecture and Upwell with its harsh, industrial brutality—they both grew from the same core of industrial wealth and power, held in check by oversight and ego. Upwell is the gateway to Roselight; travelers must stop at the station to secure clearance to travel to Liavara, while cargo ships above a certain tonnage must remain in orbit here and be filled drop-by-drop by licensed cargo haulers planetside. Outsiders lament that vulgar, polluted Upwell can't be more like Roselight, blithely unaware that the beauty and resources of the latter would never exist without the wealth generated by its grimier counterpart. Both places are dens of cutthroat commerce; Upwell is just more honest about it.

Upwell was built with processing, storing, and selling Liavara's resources in mind. Any accommodations for life are necessary evils that stand in the way of maximizing profit. The entire station is utilitarian, with little consideration to aesthetics. The same gray ceramic paneling covers every wall, unadorned save for the few places an inspired resident has scrawled graffiti, and exposed ducting and bundles of wire line every corner. While a few luxury accommodations exist, most residents make do with single-room apartments, vat-grown food, and water tainted with traces of whatever infrastructure-preserving chemical was last flushed through the plumbing. Workers are expendable and conditions are brutal, but the refineries, docks, and construction derricks buzz with activity all day, and anyone with fortitude can make a good living. Plenty of businesses prey on those paychecks, with hundreds of unregulated restaurants, holothraters, brothels, casinos, kismet-menders, and bars filling the station's commercial spaces.

While the OCI technically controls Upwell, in reality the barathus can't spare the resources to monitor the station—nor do they especially care what happens in orbit. Confluence subcontracted control of the city to the Upwell Residency Group (URG to the locals), which acts as the governing body. Historically, the URG has put station stability and infrastructure above resident lives, but some small, overworked pockets within the organization do genuinely push to improve living conditions. Few laws govern the station beyond those that protect infrastructure and corporate interests, so locals enjoy easy access to drugs, technology, and pleasures that other communities heavily regulate or forbid altogether.

Most people simply arrive at Upwell, rather than call it home; the station has few amenities for children and little basic healthcare beyond emergency response. Upwell residents have been conditioned to take pride in their ability to survive the long shifts and dangerous occupations, and corporate propaganda crushes any efforts to unionize the populace and lobby for safer conditions.

Roselight, by contrast, centers around aesthetics, environmentalism, and peace—or at least the illusion of it. This attitude hails partially from barathu preservationists, but also from the fact that most of Liavara's wealthy families—the so-called gas barons—make their homes in the city, enjoying the sweeping vistas, pristine sunrises, and untainted air. The city's elite wander wide avenues, sip genetically modified teas, and tend gardens of exotic xenoblossoms, all the while supported by a caste of service workers who live in tiny apartments in the city's outlying bubbles. While conditions are far safer for workers in Roselight, they enjoy far less autonomy than their counterparts in Upwell. Some districts of the city are restricted to the corporate elite, and while workers in Upwell can simply hop the next transport to continue their



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WIODRAOE LI ASHTEA

lives elsewhere, Roselight workers must acquire a transit permit, often at outrageous expense, to travel into orbit and eventually move on.

Roselight also boasts an impressive artistic scene. While no match for the elegance of Kalo-Mahoi, the city's elite spare no expense importing painters, holo-sculptors, architects, chefs, fashion designers, and performers. Its various festivals, theaters, galleries, seasonal parties, and holidays attract wealthy tourists from across the system. Many creative souls flock to Roselight in the hope of finding a rich patron only to find themselves struggling and trapped, working a thankless job cleaning homes or slinging coffee as they try to save enough for passage offworld.

But the city's truly unique resource—one that constantly influences its artistic and financial scenes alike—is prophecy. The barathus administer, protect, and record the songs of the Dreamers, publishing much of what they discover but selling the choicest bits. Businesses bid and backstab to learn the latest economic forecast, while wealthy elites clamor to hear what the future may hold. Many of the city's creatives either incorporate Dreamer songs into their creations directly or take inspirations from the prophets' musings, movements, and appearance. Fashionable Roselight residents pay gene-shapers to grant them synesthesia, while the less financially blessed turn to dreamsnuff (*Starfinder Alien Archive* 2 45) for the same experience. Both mystics and the mystically inclined claim to hear the same songs that influence the Dreamers and sell their own predictions. Divinatory practices that the rest of the system scoffs, such as astrology, enjoy legitimacy in the Cerise City.

RESOURCES

According to major economic interests, Liavara is a planet of resources awaiting exploitation. The gas mines—more akin to petroleum platforms than true mines—fuel much of the local economy, with the cities exporting everything from helium and hydrocarbons to exotic compounds found nowhere else in known space. Mining platforms bob through the atmosphere using hover technology, magic, or ingenious applications of gas buoyancy. Each platform develops a unique character, but like Upwell, they generally attract a hardy workforce who put in long hours performing dangerous tasks. Equally important are the refineries, storehouses, and cargo haulers that take Liavara's mineral wealth into orbit.

Roselight and Upwell both boast impressive biotech industries. While neighboring Bretheda has better-developed infrastructure and a certain prestige, Liavara has a fraction of the oversight; as a result, most Brethedan chemistry and biotechnology firms of note maintain at least a satellite office in either Roselight or Upwell. Combined with the planet's unique flora and mineral wealth, Liavara enjoys a small but bustling trade in biotech augmentations.

Upwell specifically also offers some of the largest docking and shipyard facilities in the Pact Worlds, though the entrepreneurs behind the station focus their efforts primarily

on the accommodation, modification, and construction of cargo haulers and tankers. Still, facilities exist to build and maintain the gunships the Corporate Authority uses to patrol the planet, and adventurous souls who grease the right palms (or similar appendages) can gain access to military-grade ship modifications with no questions asked. The station also caters to every vice imaginable, so long as the buyer doesn't care about quality.

Money comes easily in Roselight—at least to those who already have it—so the true currency of the city is information. Between prophets, libraries, and corporate spies, secrets can make or break an empire, so naturally, every secret is for sale. Disreputable souls looking for blackmail material need look no further than the shadowy supper clubs of Roselight's evening scene.

CONFLICTS AND THREATS

Most of the conflicts in Upwell and Roselight are economic, to one degree or another. Businesses square off against one another for a market percentage. Industrial espionage runs rampant. Given the cities' often literally explosive cargos, acts of sabotage can leave a body count. The gas corps square off against barathus for control of the OCI and the Stewards, trying to push their profit margins at the expense of safety, legality, or base morality.

Workers suffer excruciating or humiliating conditions for the almighty credit, and the work wears down their souls. Reformers bend the ears of the masses and every decade or two, often after a tragic industrial accident, rhetoric turns into riots. While the OCI generally tries to contain and deescalate such events, the corporations also wield considerable policing power, especially on Upwell, and crack down with varying levels of brutality. In the wake of these uprisings, the cost of off-world transit always drops sharply as the gas barons try to break up and relocate any agitators or organizers they can find.

Wherever coin flows, crime sprouts, and neither Upwell's utilitarian corridors nor Roselight's shining streets are perfectly clean. Smuggling of both goods and people runs rampant. Upwell's gangs, particularly the Arkanen-dominated 99 Akatas and the ysoki Decaders, flourish so long as they remain small enough to not disturb the station's day-to-day business, and in some areas, they even act as the de facto police force. Roselight's criminal entities move more quietly, focusing on obtaining and trading information, connecting companies with deniable "freelancers," and the machinations of extremist environmentalist and resistance groups. Pirate gas-mining operations constantly threaten Liavara's ecosystem and the bottom line, but more concerning to the barathus are a new wave of poachers who have begun to target the Dreamers. Dream poachers run the gamut from social media starlets harassing the gentle savants for holo-ops to illegal recording operations and even amoral body-snatchers who break Dreamers down to sell their fluids and organs to research labs. Rumors among Roselight's elite even suggest (falsely) that Dreamer components can grant psychic powers, cure disease,

and promote virility, leading to a new black market trade in Dreamer organs.

Roselight supports a special detachment of the Stewards dedicated to monitoring the planet below. This adds a tense third party to most struggles in the city, as the Stewards ostensibly wield the authority of the Pact Worlds, which neither the barathus nor the corporations are eager to acknowledge. But the Stewards provide additional resources to combat illegal mining operations and dream poachers that both sides desperately need.

ROSELIGHT NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Roselight exists within a series of floating domes, buoyed in an oxygen-rich current of Liavara's gases. Despite the breathable ribbon of atmosphere it generally inhabits, most of the city is a closed system, both to protect Liavara from urban pollution and to shield residents from toxic gases carried by the gas giant's frequent storms. Locals refer to each bubble as a district, ranging from the Core District, which contains the original barathu settlement; the Gold District, which contains most of the Cerise City's corporate headquarters; the Saints District, where the city's wealthy elites make their homes; and the overcrowded Sundown District, where most of the poor rest their heads and scrape by.

AEROGEM LABS

AeroGem Labs developed the first epifarms (*Starfinder Pact Worlds* 113) and in the intervening century grew into Roselight's premiere agribusiness. The lashunta-owned company limits its research entirely to the world of plants, bacteria, and fungi, keeping them outside the cutthroat circles of Roselight's other biotech giants. While appearing sedate to those outside the company, AeroGem's internal politics are an entirely different matter, with the seven founding families that comprise the board of directors constantly jockeying for control. Often resorting to violence and sabotage, these family squabbles occasionally threaten the majority of Liavara's food supply. The last all-out war for control of the company 40 years ago led to famine across the sister cities.

CLOISTER OF THE ONEIROLIST

While barathus look upon their Dreamer cousins with a certain reverence, most fall well short of worshipping them. But the Cloister of the Oneirolist—an offshoot of the church of Ibra—believes the Dreamers were touched by something divine during their early exploration of Liavara, and their songs aren't prophecies, but echoes of

divine creation. Cult doctrine states that more of the divine song will be revealed if members can ascend to become new voices in the Dreamers' chorus. To that end, members of the Cloister meditate, study existing songs, and make heavy use of hallucinogens to open their minds to whatever divine force still dwells within Liavara. Despite the fringe nature of their beliefs, they have several generous, anonymous backers who pay for the Cloister's opulent facilities and then some, giving them enough resources to hire adventurers to chase down any rumors surrounding the Dreamers or ancient mysteries of planet.

THE FAIRWINDS BUILDING

To many people, Fairwinds is Liavara. The oldest, largest, and wealthiest of Roselight's gas corps, Fairwinds began as a pirate drilling operation and helped organize other criminals into a coalition that forced the Brethedans to acknowledge their claim to the world's resources. The corporation still honors Besmara, who serves as a mascot aboard many of their rigs, lending an opportunistic menace to their corporate culture. They occupy the largest tower of the Gold District, and despite its opulence and expensive art, the entire building is a fortified maze designed to protect Fairwinds' wealth, personnel, and secrets—a pirate fortress under gold leaf.

While the company's most famous CEO, Karobel Hark, died a century ago, **Breg Castervin** (LE female half-elf envoy) carries on her great-grandparent's legacy, manipulating local politics to maximize her company's profits and power. Castervin innovated local politics 20 years ago by transforming Fairwinds into a holding company, purchasing several media and security corporations to help control what the people of Roselight see and hear, and how far the law can reach.

HARK'S NEEDLE

The Fairwinds mining company dredged this enormous silicate crystal—over 70 feet tall and weighing 200 tons—up from one of Liavara's lower layers years ago after it damaged a methane extractor. Rather than destroy or sell the curiosity, Karobel Hark erected it in Fairwinds Park as a public monument and show of wealth. The Needle displays no extraordinary properties other than size, which has baffled the city's scientists, as Liavara's silicate crystals rarely grow larger than one or two feet long. Many Roselight residents and visitors can't help but notice the Needle's curious, obelisk-like shape, and it is also a popular subject for local spiritualists and conspiracy theorists.

OLD HARK PALACE

Upon assuming command of the city, Karobel Hark



HARK'S NEEDLE

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began diverting public funds to build an opulent palace for themselves and their family. Because of certain legal loopholes, the Palace reverted to the city after the plutocrat's death rather than to their descendants. Today, the Old Hark Palace stands as Roselight's central government offices. The barathu administrators dread the upkeep costs, but humanoid locals adore the building's opulent scrollwork trim, rich murals, and rippling smart-material walls. The Palace serves as an art museum as well, displaying much of the Hark family collection to the public, though clear barriers and security guards denote where the museum ends and the offices of government begin.

PEACHBLOSSOM SPAN

Roselight's second-largest park is an enormous bridge connecting the Gold District to the Saints District. Transit lines run underneath the structure, but most of the city prefers the manicured gardens, orchards, ponds, and walkways that line the top of the Span. Some vendors sell small treats and drinks, while others rent skyboats and windboards to tourists, and at night, the city sponsors musical and theatrical performances. The high foot traffic and easy access to two districts makes the area popular with spies who want to blend in with a crowd.

Unlike most of Roselight, Peachblossom Span is not contained within a permanent dome. Its breezy access to the planet's atmosphere provides part of its charm. A powerful shield generator in the bridgework protects the park from storms and toxic gas currents, but technology failures in the past have resulted in great loss of life, and some insist that the mystics who help tend the park are employed more to put down angry spirits than water the trees.

ROSELIGHT AVARIUM

Liavara's rich native ecology is largely inaccessible to the people of Roselight, so interested barathu parties in the city constructed the Avarium decades ago, allowing their humanoid neighbors to marvel at the aerial ecology barathus take for granted. Popular species like the grazing kriegakos, bioluminescent fungi sprites, and cloud skates draw locals and tourists, and most of the city's schools make an annual field trip to the unusual zoo. Much of the ticket fees go to support the city's Xenowardens at the nearby Rose Garden.

THE SPIRE

A small, bustling bar founded by an Absalom Station émigré, the Spire is a popular watering hole for the city's Stewards and Absalom expats. Situated at the base of Peachblossom Span on the Saints District side and specializing in affordable food and drink, it attracts little attention from tourists or elites. During Roselight's annual Carnival of Winds, the Spire is one of the few bars to remain closed while the owner, **Dolen Hazzerfel** (LN agender android engineer), disappears for the week to parts unknown.

UPWELL NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Beginning its life as an unusually mineral-rich moon, Upwell's corporate masters insist the planetoid was begging to be hammered into steel and ceramic to achieve its fullest potential as a space station. Today, most of Upwell has been mined, refined, and built out, leaving only a dense, radioactive core called the Axle that serves as an enormous power plant for the city's extensive industrial infrastructure. The station's habitable portions are roughly divided between the North Ring and the South Ring—aligned with the moon's former north and south poles—which counterspin to provide stability. Eight thick spokes support each ring, and locals provide directions by way of which ring and spoke a business or bay occupies, such as North Spoke 2 for the second spoke supporting the North Ring. Thousands of spars, arms, and struts branch off from the rings to accommodate incoming and outgoing traffic.

FIRST UPWELL BANK

Beginning as a joint holding company owned by pirates and founded on secrets that would mutually assure destruction should anyone attempt to rob the vault, the First Upwell Bank has grown into a business juggernaut and is one of the few Liavaran corporations to make their headquarters on the orbital station. While it controls a significant pool of funds, much of First Upwell's wealth exists in the form of corporate stocks and company scrip. Because the failure of any major business on Liavara could wipe out a sizable percentage of their resources, the bank is generous with loans and acts as a neutral negotiator between existing corporations.

HEXANE ARENA

Hexane Arena is Upwell's premiere sports complex, hosting various sporting events and musical performances. While its sponsor, Hexane Fuels, is far from the largest member of the Corporate Authority, the company certainly has a keen sense for how to endear itself to the public. Locals cheer on their favorite stormball (a sport unique to gas giants) teams from the stands, with games often turning into riots that rock the surrounding bars and eateries.

FLOTILLA COMMAND

The Corporate Authority maintains a sizable navy to maintain control of the airspace near Upwell and Roselight and hunt pirate mining operations that cut into their bottom line. FlotCom, occupying a large portion of the South Ring, directs, trains, and repairs the organization's flotilla. On par with any other planetary defense force, FlotCom's equipment is top-notch, though staffing leaves much to be desired. The Corporate Authority's military arm is still run like a business, and promotion is more about nepotism and bribes than genuine skill.

THE LISTING OMA

According to rumors, the Listing Oma dates back to when Upwell was still a moon and inebriated construction workers kept forgetting to break it down for parts. Located near the Axle and decorated with rough stone walls, a visitor's initial impression is one of an asteroid miner dive bar rather than a space station. The Oma stands out for catering to barathus as well as humanoids, with tall ceilings and chemically engineered intoxicants that either life form can indulge in. Currently owned by the industrious **Zybollo Mykinosk** (N female vesk mystic), the bar traditionally only changes hands as gambling stakes, with the proprietor choosing the game.

VEHICLE OPTIONS

Liavara's gaseous atmosphere is an easy and convenient environment for barathus, but less so for most other peoples of the Pact Worlds. Roselight's natives have invented a number of specialized vehicles for navigating the cloud seas of their world.

SKYBOAT

LEVEL 2

PRICE 1,400

Large air vehicle (10 ft. wide, 15 ft. long, 3 ft. high)

Speed 20 ft., full 200 ft., 22 mph (fly and hover)

EAC 13; **KAC** 15; **Cover** none

HP 20 (10); **Hardness** 5

Attack (Collision) 5d4 (DC 11)

Modifiers +0 Piloting, -1 attack (-2 at full speed)

Passengers 3

DESCRIPTION

Built with lighter-than-air ballast chambers and a bare minimum of hover technology, skyboats rely on sails to soar through the clouds of Liavara, leaving virtually no chemical or energy waste to disturb the delicate ecosystem.

SKYACHT

LEVEL 6

PRICE 12,000

Gargantuan air vehicle (20 ft. wide, 80 ft. long, 20 ft. high)

Speed 30 ft., full 550 ft., 65 mph (fly and hover)

EAC 17; **KAC** 18; **Cover** cover

HP 80 (40); **Hardness** 8

Attack (Collision) 8d8 (DC 10)

Modifiers +2 Piloting, -1 attack (-3 at full speed)

Systems autopilot (Piloting +8), planetary comms;

Passengers 50

DESCRIPTION

A massive and elegant style of skyboat with luxury accommodations and powered engines, the skyacht can carry passengers and servants through the clouds in style.

WINGBOARD

LEVEL 1

PRICE 900

Tiny air vehicle (1 ft. wide, 3 ft. long)

Speed 40 ft., full 100 ft., 22 mph (fly)

EAC 11; **KAC** 12; **Cover** none

HP 12 (6); **Hardness** 4

Attack (Collision) 1d4 (DC 16)

Modifiers +2 Athletics, -3 attack (-6 at full speed)

DESCRIPTION

Simple, single-person vessels, wingboards can only gain altitude by catching updrafts and thermals or by hitching a ride on other vehicles. Riders use the Athletics skill to control a wingboard instead of the Piloting skill.

NEW TECHNOLOGICAL ITEM

The wingsuit is emergency equipment standard to most gas-mining platforms and skyboats, but they are also popular with thrill seekers looking to fly in Liavara's turbulent atmosphere without the aid of magic or technology.

WINGSUIT

LEVEL 2

TECHNOLOGICAL ITEM	PRICE 800	BULK L
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A wingsuit consists of a tight-fitting overall with smart-fabric membranes stretched between the arms and legs. When wearing a wingsuit, you can retract or deploy the membranes as a swift action. When the membranes are deployed, your falling speed is slowed, reducing the maximum damage you could take from a fall to 10d6 (rather than 20d6), and you act as if you deliberately jumped instead of fell. The wingsuit grants you a +5 circumstance bonus to Acrobatics checks to reduce falling damage, as long as you are falling from a height of at least 30 feet. If you succeed at this check, you also don't land prone. If the result of this check exceeds 20, you reduce the damage by an additional 1d6, and if the result exceeds 30, you further reduce the damage by 2d6 (4d6 total). While falling with the membranes deployed, you can also make small adjustments to move yourself laterally, moving up to 10 feet for every round spent falling.

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SKYBOAT



THE MYSTERIOUS DYCEPSKIANS

"Some say it's impossible to tell the difference, but I knew right away something was wrong. He remembered everything about his life; he just didn't care about it anymore. He'd always had a hard time opening up about his late mother, but now he spoke of her death like it was an afterthought. He'd been working so hard for a promotion, but then his performance at work took a nosedive. Most suspicious of all was when he suddenly insisted I should move in with him, but we hadn't yet met in person!"

—excerpt from *My Infosphere Boyfriend Had Brain Slugs!*
by Zelxar Fimber

WHO ARE THE DYCEPSKIANS?

This special report has been assembled by an elite team of investigative journalists at the *Station Scoop*. For too long, other news outlets and public agencies have denied you the truth about dycepskians. But the *Scoop* is here to expose a catastrophic threat to the Pact Worlds and beyond. For their own safety, all of the eyewitnesses and other sources who contributed to this report provided their testimony on the condition of anonymity. In this exclusive article, we here at the *Station Scoop* will provide you with everything you need to be prepared for the looming dycepskian invasion.

Though they are known colloquially by many names—brain slugs, mind Gap, and head fog, to name just a few—most of these terms are inaccurate, because dycepskians are fungi. They aren't even sentient until they successfully infect a host, but at that point they begin to slowly take over the host's body and completely overwrite their thoughts. Once safely hidden inside a host body, the insidious fungus uses it as a puppet: assuming the victim's identity, taking advantage of their memories and skills, and carrying out its own nefarious plans. A dycepskian is canny enough to fool most observers—even the host's friends and family. It takes a well-educated individual to recognize the signs of dycepskian infestation.

WHAT ARE THE TELLTALE SIGNS?

If you suspect someone you know may be infected or at risk of infection, carefully and discreetly examine them for the following signs. Make sure to protect yourself from contact at all costs. Constant vigilance is key!

Dycepskians originate as tiny, invisible spores with a biological imperative to multiply as quickly as possible. Though the spores cannot be seen, a lashunta medical examiner we'll call Ro, who has worked with the bodies of deceased hosts, discovered that those in the advanced stages of infection sometimes have a small stalk protruding from the back of their necks. Ro has been researching dycepskians in an unofficial capacity for more than a decade, and she believes this stalk has two functions: it acts as a kind of antenna that allows a dycepskian to communicate with other infected hosts, and it's also the means by which spores are dispersed for breeding. Ro wasn't allowed access to the Zeffrac Science Platform after the sudden decompression that revealed dycepskians to the public, but she did obtain some of the autopsy reports, and she's confirmed to us here at the *Scoop* that the entire Wise Council (all of whom died in the incident) had these mysterious neck stalks. But not every dycepskian has one of these stalks; it seems to take about 6 months after a successful infection for these unusual growths to appear. Once a neck stalk reaches maturity, however, the dycepskian can use it to release a small puff of pale green pollen. These are fresh dycepskian spores that can contaminate new hosts, and a mature host

produces increasingly large clouds of spores every month. And if there's no likely target for a dycepskian to infect, the creature can even harvest its spores, gathering them up to release in vast quantities later on!

Though dycepskians take great pains to hide anything that might give them away, they can't conceal their activities from an educated and vigilant public. The most-reported indication that a person might house an infection of this deadly fungus is a pattern of greenish-yellow veins around their eyes. Many dycepskians, especially those whose hosts must regularly travel or appear in public, use cosmetic lenses or facial cream to conceal these veins. Strong, musty breath has also been associated with dycepskian hosts, who may become preoccupied with dental hygiene. As a consequence of their hunt for cosmetics that improve their appearance, dycepskians that mingle among the non-infected are very susceptible to beauty aid infomercials and other scams. Other hosts, however, are less concerned with hiding their true nature and more interested in upgrading their purloined body with augmentations. Ro, our source on this aspect of dycepskian biology, has noted that biotech augmentations like chameleon skins and dragon glands are more common among these creatures than cybernetic options, simply because the fungus finds it easier to control organs made of tissue rather than metal.

Despite retaining all the memories of the bodies they usurp, dycepskians find it difficult to process the logical and emotional importance of those memories. One reader—who worked for a starship engineering firm and asked to be identified only as TJ—wrote to us describing an abrupt change in the behavior of their boss. We all know the type: that frustrating supervisor who seems to delight in making life unpleasant for everyone in the office. But after returning from an offworld vacation, this manager suddenly had no interest in the work or personal lives of their own underlings. TJ left the office soon thereafter, but the entire company abruptly and unceremoniously shut down only a few months later. Now, TJ can't find any trace of the firm he once worked at: all records of the company are gone, the building is empty, and even his former coworkers won't return his calls.

All the memories of a host body are accessible to a mature dycepskian, and this perfect recall sometimes gives the creatures away; although they remember everything, they are unable to measure the relative importance of each memory, so that every recollection seems to be of equal weight. For example, a dycepskian won't understand why its host was angry at a parent who cut them out of a will, but they will recall every word of a 6-month-old conversation with a mail carrier. When a dycepskian is trying to assert its normality in public, it often repeats memories from its host; however, because the fungus can't tell the important from the everyday, this can result in a long recitation of useless trivia that, in fact, only gives the impostor away. So the

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next time a friend of yours starts to recite every lyric on an album from 10 years ago, get out of there fast! Though once-beloved pets will remain unfed and uncared for by an uncaring dycepskian-infected owner, these companions can also be infected with spores themselves and become nonsapient slaves of the fungal hive mind. And finally: Ro, TJ, and others who have been in contact with the infected also report that dycepskian hosts suffer from bouts of insomnia that worsen over time.

WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?

A dycepskian infestation isn't usually discovered until after the target population has been completely overtaken, and if there are live dycepskian-infested specimens being kept in a research lab somewhere, this truth has been hidden from the public. So piecing together the origins of this mysterious species is difficult. One version of their origin, relayed to us through an intermediary working for the Starfinder Society faction known as the Seekers, is that the fungus was first picked up by an unwitting spacefarer who landed on a planetoid covered in towering mushroom forests, rotting trees, and vast clouds of floating spores. This explorer fled after being nearly overwhelmed by poisonous and otherwise hostile plant life, but deadly spores coated the traveler's environment suit. When this hapless individual removed their helmet, they became the dycepskian Patient Zero, eventually bringing the scourge back to their home in the Pact Worlds. Some other news outlets, notably our rivals at the *Starstone Trailblazer*, have reported on this very first case of "fungus fever," but we here at the *Scoop* have not been able to confirm these reports. After all, if there had been any witnesses to the arrival of dycepskian fungus in the Pact Worlds, they would have been taken completely unaware by this unknown horror and instead succumbed to the outbreak. Our sources have provided records that hint at dycepskian activity as far back as the Gap, and we reject the so-called "experts" who claim these records to be just coincidences and hoaxes, nothing but outdated and exaggerated records of natural disasters. But the most irresponsible reaction we've seen to our evidence—which proves dycepskians have been infiltrating Pact Worlds cultures for centuries—comes from unethical individuals who insist this evidence is actually just a ruse planted by a sinister mastermind to throw researchers off the true scent. That sort of unfounded accusation could easily start a panic.

One popular theory among fringe scientists is that the dycepskians are actually part of the reptoid conspiracy, created to do the bidding of those shapeshifting monsters. After all, dycepskians have no particular agenda or free will in their spore form before they obtain a host; they have only one goal: to reproduce. But if this theory is true, reptoids would need to direct the fungus towards targets and monitor each dycepskian outbreak to prevent it from spreading too fast and compromising whatever larger mission the

reptoids pursue. Even a single dycepskian can wipe out an entire space station or outpost, so these creatures would represent a very dangerous weapon indeed. In the aftermath of both the Zeffrac Science Platform incident and the more recent crash of the starliner *Auberix* near Idari (an incident covered up by government sources but exposed by us here at the *Scoop*), almost all the victims were compromised by dycepskian fungus, including several important and high-profile individuals who were revealed to actually be reptoids. Only one group of casualties was entirely free of dycepskian infestation: a handful of reptoid bodyguards wearing modified air filter masks. These reptoids were also found to have been doused with antifungal chemicals.

HOW DO THEY OPERATE?

No one's sure if you can survive contact with a dycepskian. Ro's autopsy work reveals that a victim's entire nervous system is replaced with fungus, which isn't a promising sign. There is some evidence the infestation begins with a brief incubation period; during this period, it would theoretically be possible to remove the spores through a vigorous decontamination process, but this procedure has never been successfully tested. As of this writing, there are no known cases of a host surviving dycepskian control. Promising research in this area ended when the lab maintained by our source, Ro, came under attack by the Verdant Shield, a militant ecoterrorist organization outraged by animal testing and the use of organic material in laboratory settings. Verdant Shield burned Ro's lab to the ground, along with years of research, prompting the brave scientist to come to us in the hope of combating the dycepskian menace.

Dycepskian tactics would make more sense if we better understood their origins. If dycepskians really are a reptoid weapon, then they do not infest a population so much as they are set loose upon it. And while they don't seem to have any kind of inherent social structure, dycepskians can telepathically communicate among themselves over limited distances. Surveillance footage from an abandoned colony on a Liavaran shepherd moon—an installation suspected to have fallen under dycepskian control—shows crowds of individuals moving in wordless synchronization, their movement similar to that of a flock of birds or a school of fish. Lab tests on infected tissue has shown that if a sample from a host is removed and stimulated or threatened, other specimens from the same host react. These tantalizing bits of evidence suggests that dycepskians may stay in closer communication than we're presently aware of, and that a dycepskian's control over its host body continues even if limbs from that body are severed and separated by a distance.

Though technically infestation can begin with just a single tiny spore, body mass is an important factor in determining a host's vulnerability. A shobhad, for example, would be able to resist the dycepskian infestation longer than a lashunta

or shirren, simply because the fungus needs more time to spread through the shobhad's larger physiology. During this incubation time, a victim of dycepskian infestation retains control over their body and thoughts. However, an initial exposure to a large enough quantity of spores can allow the fungus to seize immediate control of even very large creatures. To this end, dycepskians hoard spores or weaponize their own host's augmentations in order to spread spores more efficiently.

Scientists have not yet been able to determine how long it takes for a victim's consciousness to truly die. During the incubation period, the fungus spreads through the nervous system and learns the routine and thought patterns of its victim, preparing to take control of the body. But some patients in the early stages of actual dycepskian possession, after the fungus has taken control, have displayed shocked and confused expressions, or even a look of panicked horror. This occurs even as the dycepskian wields full control over the host's speech and motor functions. We here at the *Scoop* are forced to conclude that, for a time during the transition from victim to dycepskian, the subject is at least partially conscious, even as their body is being piloted by the fungus controlling their nervous system. Eventually the fungus completely dominates the host, and the victim, after spending an indeterminate amount of time entombed within their own body, fades away.

Nobody seems to know the natural lifespan of a dycepskian, although no one has observed a creature that has served as a host for more than about 10 years. This suggests that something about the fungal infestation is degenerative, and dycepskians can survive as a species only by constantly seeking out new hosts. But if a dycepskian does live long enough to reach the end of its natural lifespan, it has one lethal trick still to play: it explodes in a devastating cloud of spores. The expired husks of fungal hosts have been found in the air ducts of buildings and space stations, where they cling to the inside surface of these ventilation spaces with a stiff rigor and house a rapidly-growing mycelia network of infectious pollen.

CAN THEY BE STOPPED?

Dycepskians do have one known natural predator: repulsive little aberrations known as zernivians. Like dycepskians, zernivians choose host bodies to inhabit, but these creatures prefer small, harmless animals as their hosts. Unlike dycepskians, zernivians eventually depart their host animals, leaving them unharmed. Zernivians can sniff out dycepskians, and they use their own unassuming host bodies to get close to the target before slurping up the fungus with four herbicide-tipped tongues. This natural acidic herbicide, which the zernivian can also spit over long distances when threatened, is now

being studied for its medicinal properties, but no one has yet been able to "cure" a dycepskian host, even with the help of a zernivian.

Naturally, unscrupulous merchants have sought to capitalize on the justifiable fear of dycepskian infiltration by selling house pets possessed by zernivians. But consumers should be wary of any such claim; a zernivian does not linger in its host body unless prey is near. Pets advertised as housing zernivians are probably just normal animals with an inflated price tag, and their vendors may be dycepskians themselves. A consumer who knows the value of a zernivian is precisely the sort of person a dycepskian would want to eliminate, and what better way to do that than luring the unsuspecting target in with a cute little animal?

PLOTS AND PLANS

When we asked our sources about the goals and plans of the dycepskians, they couldn't agree; indeed, dycepskians may not even be capable of making plans beyond endless procreation... until everything is ruled by one all-encompassing fungal hive mind. But we here at the *Scoop* have sources throughout the Pact Worlds and beyond, and the tips sent to our reporters have led us to important stories. Remember, the vast majority of dycepskian activity

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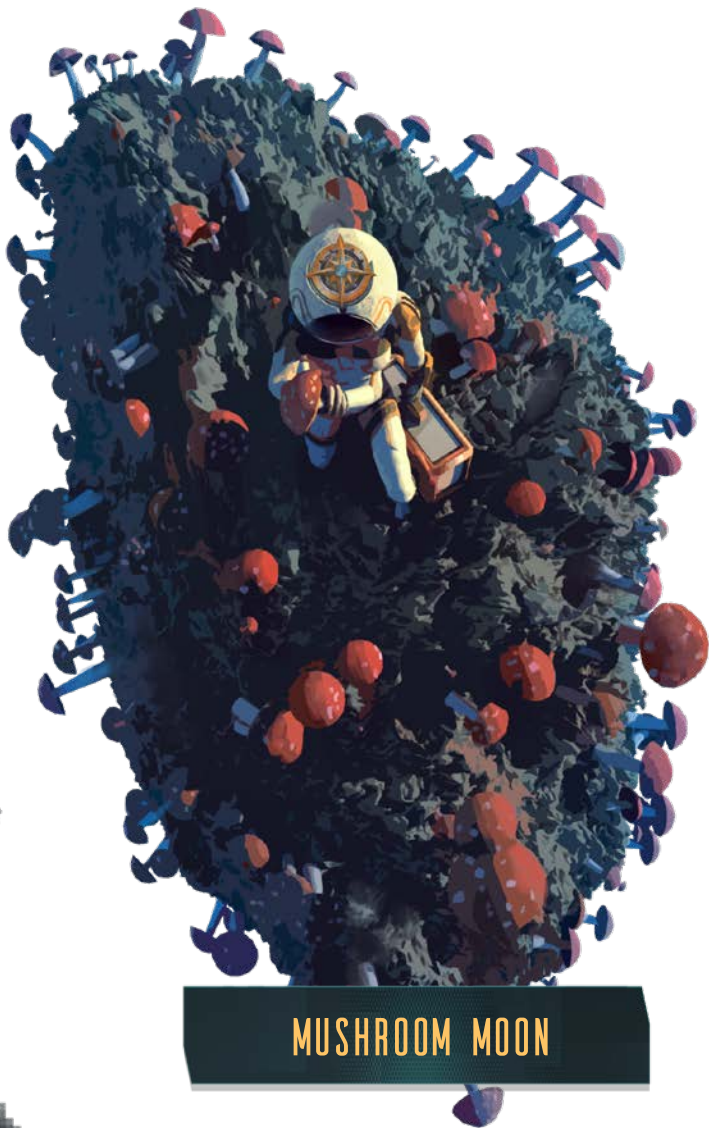


DEATH BY DYCEPSKIAN

is covered up, not only by the dycepskians themselves, but also by local governments that wish to avoid embarrassment or further compromise. If indeed some other mastermind agency, reptoid or otherwise, is unleashing and coordinating these microbial terrors, it is certainly taking every precaution and erasing all evidence of its involvement.

BREACH ON BRETHEDA

Our sources in law enforcement have long been concerned that allowing an entity like Confluence—a merged collective of hundreds of telepathic barathus—to govern two of the largest planets in the Pact Worlds creates an opportunity for abuse of power and political corruption. Setting aside any personal feelings about Confluence, a single group mind in such a leadership position poses many questions: Is Confluence vulnerable to dycepskian infestation? What would happen to the group mind if dycepskians took control? Would other barathu be affected? What measures can we take to prevent such a catastrophe?



MUSHROOM MOON

The truth is, we simply don't know how a barathu's anatomy and telepathic connections are altered by dycepskian infection, nor do we know how easily dycepskian spores could be transmitted among barathus. But one biologist we consulted—we'll call her Bee—suggested that barathus may be uniquely vulnerable to the dycepskian threat. Barathu physiology and biochemistry are highly mutable, and the fungus could take advantage of this fact, altering its host to be more susceptible to the fungus. Dycepskian fungus might also be able to exploit the process by which barathus combine, rapidly spreading an infection to all the barathus who make up the larger organism. It's true that a perceptive barathu who becomes aware of its own exposure to dycepskian spores could make itself more resistant, slowing the spread of the disease, but this would only prolong the inevitable. And while the group mind of a combined barathu might be better able to discover a dycepskian infiltrator, Bee was forced to acknowledge that a dycepskian could sustain its charade even while merged with multiple other minds. Most alarming was Bee's suggestion that, because dycepskians identify and communicate with other hosts telepathically, a barathu's telepathic brain could act as an amplifier, giving a dycepskian-infested barathu prodigious range and telepathic power.

Unfortunately, our consultation with Bee left us with more questions than answers, and other scientific professionals we attempted to consult for further opinions on the dangerous possibility of a dycepskian infestation of a combined barathu such as Confluence just mocked us. However, we remain undeterred, for anyone that has ignored the latest evidence gathered from the site of dycepskian attacks simply cannot be trusted. The experts we could consult agreed that a mind-controlling menace like the dycepskians would logically target the largest collection of powerful minds it could find. And the potential results of such a takeover—particularly when we consider barathu dominance of the biotech industry—are shocking. We could be looking at a telepathically coordinated army of adaptable mutants able to create their own bioweapons.

SABOTAGED IMPLANTS

Be alert to the possibility that biotech facilities have become the target of dycepskian infestation. Augmentations and implants can house active spores, or may even be designed for this express purpose. Biotechnology from a compromised facility becomes a time bomb inside your own body. Some of the most informed people we talked to believe the contamination and dissemination of biotech augmentations is the second and most sinister phase of the dycepskian takeover.

Fortunately, only a handful of tainted implants have so far been discovered, but the fact they exist at all is cause for concern. These spore-laden biotech specimens have been traced back to multiple widely scattered factories, leading

our sources to conclude the fungus was surreptitiously injected into the augmentations by individuals, presumably dycepskians, acting alone. If this strategy were to be implemented on a larger scale—if a biotech facility, for example, were taken over by a dycepskian manager or even an entire workforce—these factories could churn out dangerous implants at an astounding rate, shipping spore-laden traps to innocent consumers throughout the Pact Worlds. If everyone at the factory was under the sway of the spores, there wouldn't even be a need to conceal their activities, and lethal augmentations could be produced even faster. Health and safety inspectors at these facilities are especially in danger, as they present the greatest threat to this scheme and, once targeted for contamination, become a vector that can spread the infection to other facilities, even on other worlds.

We sent detailed letters to leading biotech firms warning them of this danger and urging them to implement more rigorous product testing. However, our efforts earned nothing but condescension, a smug assurance that “all our products are up to industry standards,” and an insistence that “dycepskian spores are not a legitimate threat.” You, our readership, know better! And when we showed these same biotech firms documentation linking verified dycepskian infestations to biotech augmentations, they fell silent. Is this because they recognize their distribution networks may be used to facilitate the spread of the dycepskian living plague? We here at the *Station Scoop* can only hope so. Because the alternative—that they are knowingly participating in this heinous crime for profit, or because they themselves were already compromised by the dycepskians long ago—is too frightening to contemplate.

SOWING SOCIETAL SEEDS

When the dycepskian threat is capable of spreading itself so quickly and virally, the number one concern of our government officials should be reducing the risk of exposure and containing the danger. For this reason, a growing number of theorists are concerned that whoever—or whatever—controls the dycepskians is using the Starfinder Society to spread spores far and wide while avoiding suspicion. The leadership of the society may already be indoctrinated, slowly infesting more Starfinders before sending them back out on missions to the far reaches of the galaxy. At first, it may seem our concern regarding the Starfinder Society is unfounded. But their missions provide a perfect excuse for a dycepskian host to visit far-flung planets for extended periods—long enough to propagate and disperse their spores—and they are routinely granted access to locations forbidden to other travelers. Starfinders like the Seekers are always exploring new places and meeting new species who won't be able to identify the unusual behavior of a dycepskian host. By the time anyone becomes suspicious, the Starfinder would be gone, headed back to the Lorespire complex.

Analysts we spoke to with access to Society records and travel logs have noticed a pattern of increased mission frequency in a relatively unexplored section of the Diaspora. Some suspect this location may be where the dycepskians arose or is perhaps their headquarters in the Pact Worlds. Such a world would be covered in spores, a perfect place for Starfinders to be infected or gather contaminants for dissemination on other planets. Unfortunately, when we asked for its cooperation in our ongoing investigation, the Starfinder Society dismissed our concerns as ridiculous.

TERRORISM ON TRIAXUS

Our readers on Triaxus have reported suspicious activity in remote settlements around the northern reaches of the Allied Territories. These witnesses report unmarked, low-flying black aircraft leaving behind long trails of what authorities say is merely condensation. A small group of observers calling themselves the Triaxus Guardian Force (TGF) has tracked these incidents, and they believe the substance released by these craft to be a chemical mixture that infects and subdues citizens with dycepskian spores. There haven't been any incidents of fungus-related deaths in the region recently, but this wouldn't be the first time a string of suspicious deaths was covered up.

The real question for our journalists is who would want to infest and take over sections of the Allied Territories? TGF members agree the most likely mastermind is Dretchnyliax, the cybernetic green dragon of Dretchnyl. Rumors of her expansionist agenda have intensified, and the TGF suspects she has weakened the ryphorian territories with proxy agents wielding biological weapons designed to control organic creatures. What we don't know, however, is if she's using dycepskian fungus to control these fringe ryphorian societies, or if she's using the spores to eliminate all sapient creatures in these territories without arousing suspicion.

Some within the TGF believe this plan goes further than merely spraying infectious material over settlements. One member, codename Vermis, saw dragonkin spies on the glaciers abutting the northernmost forests of the Allied Territories. It's not clear what these dragonkin were doing, but Vermis theorizes they were drilling into the glacier to implant pockets of dycepskian spores in the permafrost; next summer, as the ice melts and recedes, the spores will be released. No one is sure if dycepskian spores remain viable and contagious after being thawed and frozen, but our contact Ro is investigating this possibility, so keep an eye out for future updates from the *Station Scoop*!

STARDUST PLAGUE IMITATORS

The infosphere is buzzing with reports of a group with plans to spread dycepskian spores in a recreation of the Stardust Plague of 67 AG, perhaps unleashing an even worse catastrophe across multiple star systems. Reported to be a splinter faction of the Xenowardens, this group—identified as

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the Golarion Liberation Alliance (GLA)—is convinced that Drift travel and space exploration cause nothing but harm, and that the interstellar population must be reduced by any means necessary, even biochemical terrorism. The GLA uses coded language and coordinated tactics to recruit new members on public infosphere forums. When we contacted the Xenowardens for comment, their representative denied any knowledge of such schemes and insisted that, if such a group were discovered, the Xenowardens would cooperate with law enforcement to protect all living things.

That's all well and good, but the Xenowardens offered no explanation for why the crash and subsequent cover-up of the *Auberix* happened just after that starliner was the subject of Xenowarden protests. This can't be mere coincidence; the protest provided a perfect opportunity for a rogue Xenowarden to sneak aboard and release some spores into the air vents. That would be difficult for the activist to pull off without being themselves exposed to spores, but dycepskian fungus wouldn't be a problem for Xenowardens

if they're already indoctrinated by the fungus and acting on the order of the current Greenspeaker! Double agents among the Stewards and other organizations could help in the coordination, execution, and concealment of strategic spore attacks.

Dycepskian spores are incredibly infectious, but an infestation on the scale of the Stardust Plague would require a massive quantity of fungus. Some of our sources theorized this obstacle could be overcome with secret caches of the dycepskian parent plant hidden throughout the Pact Worlds. It's impossible to say where these caches might be, of course, but there are some likely candidates; for example, the Floating Gardens of the sun are shielded from investigation by the Xenowardens' mission to collect a specimen from every species of known plant life in the Pact Worlds. Other locations where secret growing operations might exist include a potential dycepskian place of origin in the Diaspora, secret labs in Triaxus's frozen north, the biotech factories of Bretheda, and Absalom Station's seedy underbelly. Indeed, there are so many places the dycepskian plague could be incubating that it's a mystery how any of us remain uninfected.

DYCEPSKIAN EQUIPMENT

Without a host, dycepskians are incapable of using, let alone building, equipment or weapons. But dycepskians inhabiting hosts trained in biotechnology have used those skills to develop both defensive weapons and tools based on their fungal spores. These illicit items can sometimes be found on the black market, if you have the right connections and know where to look.



FUNGAL BREATH

FUNGAL BOMB

LEVEL 10

TECHNOLOGICAL ITEM PRICE 2,750 BULK L

These sealed and pressurized glass tubes are filled with a substance derived from dycepskian spores. Each can be used only once. When a fungal bomb explodes, it releases a cloud of modified spores in a 20-foot-radius spread. This is a disease effect. Creatures in this area must succeed at a Fortitude save or be sickened for 1 day. If a sickened creature spends Resolve to recover Stamina Points, it can attempt this saving throw again, ending the sickened condition on a success.

FUNGAL BREATH

SYSTEM
LUNGS AND
THROAT

BIOTECH AUGMENTATION

PRICE 9,000

LEVEL 8

Autopsies on dycepskian hosts have revealed victims whose lungs have been genetically altered. These biotech lungs are large, delicate white sacs with trailing wisps of mycelia. Once implanted, they produce modified dycepskian spores and stimulate growth of a mycelial network that snakes up

the throat to expel the spores with great force. Once per day as a standard action, you can use your fungal breath on a creature within 15 feet. Unless it is immune to disease, the target is sickened for 1 day and, if it fails a Fortitude save, is stunned for 1 round. Creatures sickened by this effect who spend Resolve to regain Stamina Points can attempt the saving throw again, ending the condition on a success.

ADVANCES IN DYCEPSKIAN DEFENSE

Luckily, dycepskians aren't the only ones dabbling in custom equipment. The more we research these heinous invaders, the better we can prepare ourselves for the battle to control our own minds.



FUNG-EYE GOGGLES

FUNG-EYE GOGGLES

LEVEL 5

HYBRID ITEM	PRICE 2,800	BULK L
CAPACITY 20		USAGE 2/MINUTE

These lightweight goggles are programmed to recognize fungi, bacteria, molds, and similar organic matter. Each unique form of contaminant is color-coded for the wearer's convenience, whether it is coating the surface of an object or in an airborne cloud. By focusing on a particular sample, the wearer can trigger magnification and a HUD that provides helpful analysis and commentary. Fung-eye goggles are popular among scientists, custodial employees, and school children. The latest model, however, can also identify dycepskian hosts and free-floating dycepskian spores.

While you have fung-eye goggles activated, you have a +1 circumstance bonus to Perception checks to spot bacteria, fungus, molds, spores, and similar organic material, and a +1 circumstance bonus to Life Science checks to identify these targets once you see them. These bonuses rise to +2 to spot and identify dycepskians, dycepskian spores, or creatures infested by dycepskian spores but who have not yet succumbed.

HERBICIDAL GLANDS

SYSTEM THROAT

BIOTECH AUGMENTATION	PRICE 19,000	LEVEL 10
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These small tubes implanted into the sublingual salivary glands recreate a zernivian's natural herbicide, mixing it with saliva to coat the inside of the mouth and esophagus with antifungal properties. You have a +2 circumstance bonus to saving throws against plant-related effects that are inhaled or ingested, such as corpseflower pollen (*Armory* 132), hyperleaf, id moss, or a ksarik's carrion spores (*Alien Archive* 70). In addition, once per day as a standard action, you can make a ranged spit attack that deals 5d6 acid damage against a creature within 15 feet.

CREATURE COMPANIONS

Dycepskians have come to fear tiny plant-eating aberrations known as zernivians (page 61). Zernivians inhabit the bodies of harmless animals in order to get close to intelligent plant-based creatures, which they then harvest with a natural herbicide delivered through acidic spittle. Although unethical pet dealers sometimes offer zernivians for sale, zernivians actually move constantly from one host animal to another and seldom bond with another species. However, sometimes a zernivian's ability to inhabit a host goes awry, and the creature is permanently trapped inside that host. When this happens, the physiologies

of the zernivian and its host combine and mutate. Perhaps realizing it can no longer find prey without help, the zernivian becomes more amenable to other species. A caring and patient individual can sometimes forge a bond with such a creature.

TRAPPED ZERNIVIAN COMPANIONS

TRAPPED ZERNIVIAN

LEVELS 10-20

Small aberration

Senses darkvision 60 ft., herbsight 60 ft., low-light vision

Good Save Will; Poor Saves Fort, Ref

Immunities disease

Speed 30 ft.

Melee Attack tongue (A & B)

Ranged Attack acid spittle (A)

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

Ability Modifiers Dex, Wis

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Acid Spittle (Ex) Every 1d4 rounds, a trapped zernivian can spit a blob of acidic spittle with a maximum range of 30 feet.

Herbicide (Ex) Plant creatures, creatures with the dycepskian subtype, and creatures with the plantlike universal creature rule take half again as much damage (+50%) from the trapped zernivian's acid spittle and tongue attacks, and are never immune.

Herbsight (Ex) Trapped zernivians have an extrasensory ability that enables them to rapidly seek out and find plant life. This ability functions as blindsight (scent), except the trapped zernivian can detect only plant creatures and creatures with the dycepskian subtype or the plantlike universal creature rule.

Host Body (Ex) A zernivian trapped in a host body appears to be a Small predator or herd animal (*Starfinder Alien Archive* 2); anyone who might penetrate this disguise must succeed on a Perception check with a DC equal to the bound zernivian's skill bonus + 15.

THE HOLLOW CABAL

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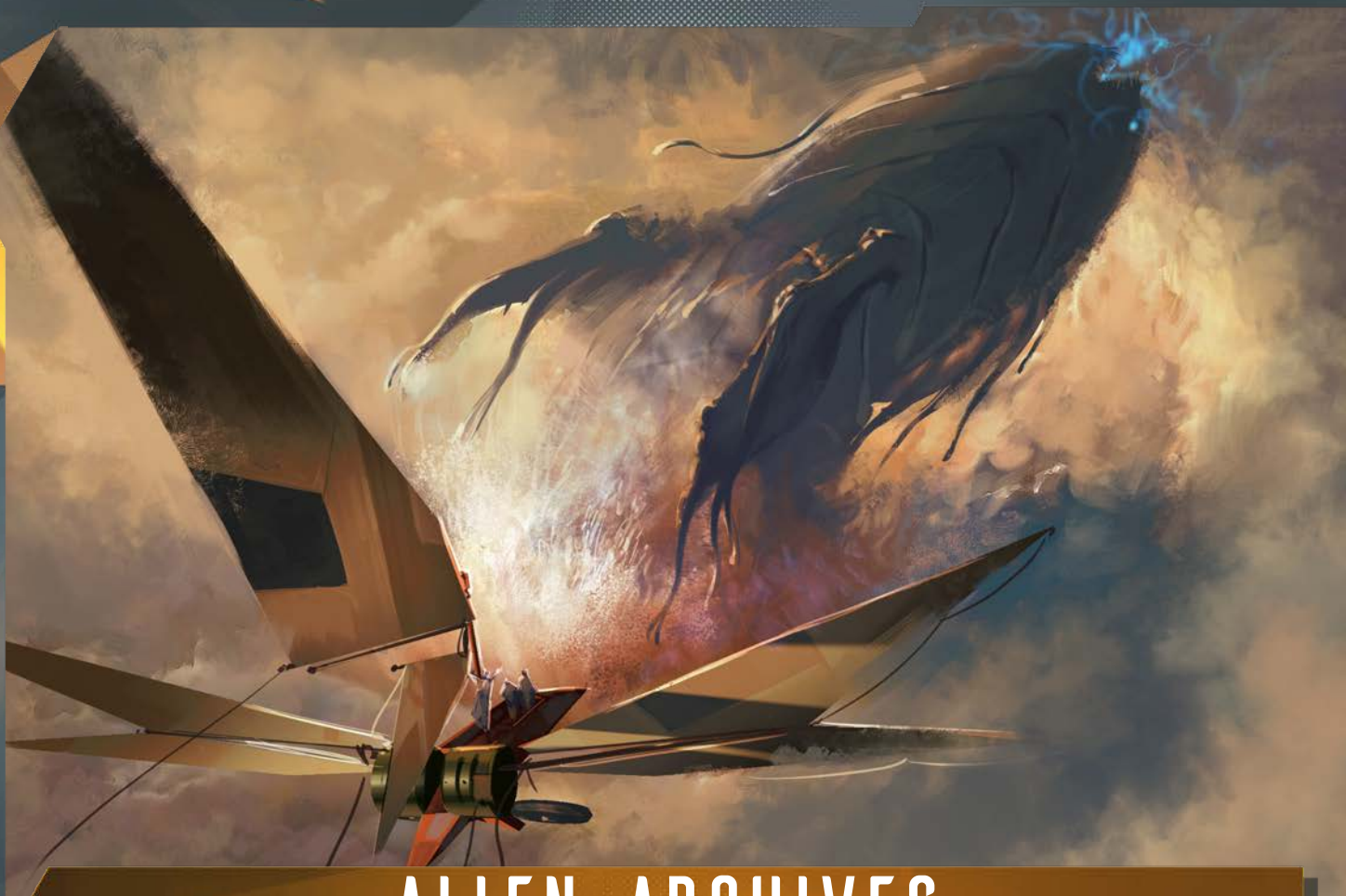
PART 3:
YOUR CALL IS
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ROSELIGHT
AND
UPWELL

THE MYSTERIOUS
DYCEPSKIANS

ALIEN
ARCHIVES

CODEx OF WORLDS



ALIEN ARCHIVES

Though you may have found a reputable service to give you a tour of the beautiful peach-colored clouds of Liavara, there are still other factors to consider. The skies of the gas giant can be a dangerous place! The better skyboat crews will be able to keep the acidic kriegakoses at bay, but even the most seasoned tour captain can be fooled by a light-bending keji swarm cloaked in the illusion of a gentler creature. So invest in some quality eye protection against the bright lights (or perhaps an emergency force field), and if you think an oma sighting is too good to be true, it probably is!

—excerpt from *Liavara on 50 Credits a Day*

DYCEPSKIAN

CR
VARIESXP
VARIES

REPTOID HOST

CR 6

XP 2,400

Dycepskian-infested reptoid operative (*Alien Archive* 92)

N Medium humanoid (dycepskian, reptoid, shapechanger)

Init +7; **Senses** low-light vision; **Perception** +14

DEFENSE

HP 80

EAC 18; **KAC** 19**Fort** +5; **Ref** +8; **Will** +9; +2 vs. poison**Defensive Abilities** evasion; **Immunities** mind-affecting effects**Weaknesses** vulnerable to *remove affliction*

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.**Melee** claw +12 (1d6+8 S) or

survival knife +14 (1d4+8 S)

Ranged corona laser pistol +14 (2d4+6 F; critical burn 1d4)**Offensive Abilities** debilitating trick, trick attack +3d8

STATISTICS

Str +2; **Dex** +5; **Con** +1; **Int** +1; **Wis** +3; **Cha** +2**Skills** Acrobatics +19, Bluff +19, Culture +14, Disguise +19, Sense Motive +14**Languages** Common, Reptoid**Other Abilities** change shape (any specific humanoid), fungal mass mind, operative exploits (master of disguise [2/day, 60 minutes or 6 minutes, DC 16], uncanny shooter), specialization (spy)**Gear** elite stationwear, corona laser pistol with 2 batteries (20 charges each), survival knife

ECOLOGY

Environment any**Organization** solitary, pair, or circle (3–8)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Fungal Mass Mind (Ex) A creature with the dycepskian subtype can communicate telepathically with another such creature within 100 feet, even if they don't share a common language. In addition, if one creature with the dycepskian subtype is aware of a combatant, all members of the fungal mass mind within 100 feet are aware of it, and no member of the fungal mass mind can be surprised unless all members within range are surprised.

Vulnerable to Remove Affliction (Ex) A dycepskian host who is targeted with *remove affliction* is staggered for 1d4 rounds (no caster level check required).

Dycepskians are a mysterious species of fungus that only gain sentience when they infest sapient hosts, completely overwriting their unfortunate victim's mind. However, the dycepskian-infested host retains the original creature's memories and skills, making it difficult to notice the change.

An infested host can be recognized by yellowish-green veins visible around the eyes, though most dycepskians take

great pains to hide such signs. Theories about the dycepskians' origins and goals can be found in "The Mysterious Dycepskians" on page 46.

DYCEPSKIAN-INFESTED TEMPLATE (CR 3+)

Dycepskians can infest almost any living or undead creature with a brain and a central nervous system. The creature retains its type and subtype, as well as any abilities it has from its species or class graft.

Suggested Alignment: Neutral.

Traits: Dycepskian subtype; immunity to mind-affecting effects; vulnerable to *remove affliction* (see stat block), Bluff as a master skill; fungal mass mind (see stat block).



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CODEX OF WORLDS

KEJI SWARM

CR
10

XP
9,600



N Diminutive animal (swarm)

Init +8; **Senses** low-light vision; **Perception** +19

DEFENSE

EAC 23; **KAC** 25

Fort +14; **Ref** +14; **Will** +9

Defensive Abilities diffraction, swarm defenses;

Immunities acid, swarm immunities

OFFENSE

Speed fly 30 ft. (Ex, perfect)

Melee swarm attack (1d10+10 A)

Ranged focused light +22 (2d10+10 F; critical burn 1d6)

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

Offensive Abilities distraction (DC 17)

HP 165

STATISTICS

Str +0; **Dex** +8; **Con** +5; **Int** -2; **Wis** +3; **Cha** +0

Skills Acrobatics +19 (+27 to fly), Disguise +24, Stealth +19

Other Abilities reflective mimicry

ECOLOGY

Environment any air (Liavara)

Organization solitary, pair, or mirage (3–5)

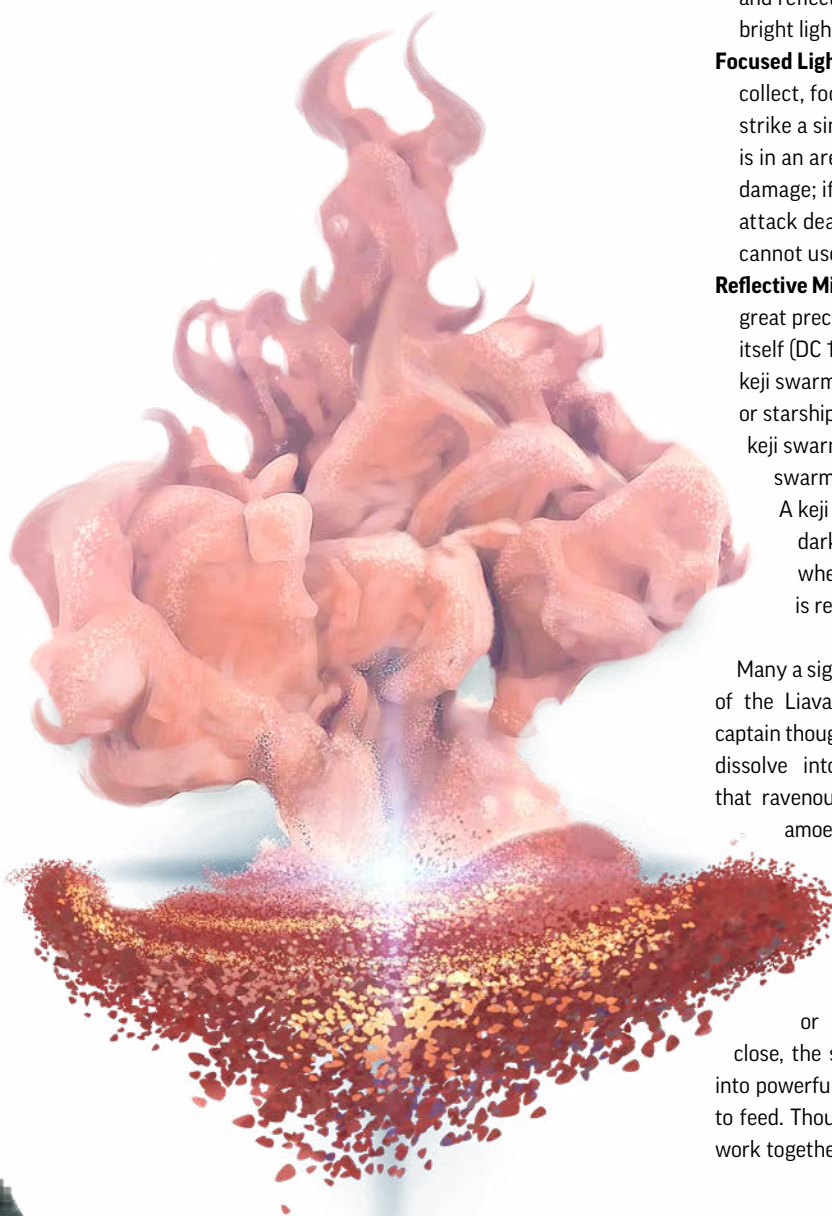
SPECIAL ABILITIES

Diffraction (Ex) A keji swarm can disperse the energy of light-based attacks. It has resistance 10 that applies to any damage from a laser weapon and effects with the light descriptor. For 1 round after its resistance prevents it from taking such damage, a keji swarm can use its focused light and reflective mimicry abilities as if it were in an area of bright light, regardless of the actual light level.

Focused Light (Ex) As a ranged attack, a keji swarm can collect, focus, and redirect ambient light in a beam to strike a single target within 60 feet. If the keji swarm is in an area of bright light, this attack deals 3d10+10 damage; if the keji swarm is in an area of dim light, this attack deals 1d10+10 damage instead. A keji swarm cannot use this ability in an area of darkness.

Reflective Mimicry (Ex) A keji swarm can redirect light with great precision to construct a holographic illusion around itself (DC 17 Will to disbelieve). As a standard action, the keji swarm can create a purely visual image of a creature or starship, which fills a 20-foot cube centered on the keji swarm. The image automatically moves with the keji swarm and appears to react appropriately to damage. A keji swarm cannot use this ability in an area of darkness, and the illusion is automatically dispersed when the keji swarm enters an area of darkness or is reduced to less than half its maximum Hit Points.

Many a sightseeing skiff drifting through the upper reaches of the Liavaran atmosphere has drawn close to what its captain thought was a peaceful oma, only to have the creature dissolve into a cloud of aggressive glimmering specks that ravenously set upon the vessel. These multitudinous, amoeba-like creatures are known collectively as a keji swarm. Each keji is surrounded by a transparent silicate shell that can distort the passage of light; working together, the swarm diverts photons to construct holograms to camouflage themselves as an innocuous-seeming creature or bit of debris. Once curious prey have drawn close, the swarm ambushes, focusing light from each keji into powerful beams like a magnifying glass before setting in to feed. Though keji swarms are relatively small, several can work together to project starship-sized disguises.



KRIEGAKOS

CR
8XP
1,800

LN Medium animal

Init +6; **Senses** blindsense (vibration) 60 ft., low-light vision, sense through (blindsense [fog]) 60ft.; **Perception** +16**DEFENSE****HP** 115**EAC** 20; **KAC** 21**Fort** +9; **Ref** +13; **Will** +7**Defensive Abilities** corrosive saliva (2d8 A, DC 18), evasion, unflankable; **Immunities** acid**OFFENSE****Speed** 20 ft., fly 40 ft. (Ex, average)**Melee** slam +17 (1d8+12 A & B; critical corrode 1d4)**Offensive Abilities** flyby attack (4d8 A), saliva shake (DC 18)**STATISTICS****Str** +4; **Dex** +6; **Con** +2; **Int** -4; **Wis** +2; **Cha** +0**Skills** Acrobatics +21, Athletics +16, Stealth +21, Survival +21**ECOLOGY****Environment** any air (Liavara)**Organization** solitary, pair, or flock (6–12)**SPECIAL ABILITIES****Corrosive Saliva (Ex)** A kriegakos secretes

corrosive saliva from the dozens of digestive pores along its body.

A kriegakos automatically deals 2d8 acid damage to a creature that it is grappling at the start of that creature's turn. A creature that hits a kriegakos with an unarmed attack takes this acid damage (Reflex DC 18 half). The same amount of damage is also dealt to a melee weapon that strikes a kriegakos, though the wielder can attempt a DC 18 Reflex save to halve the damage.

Flyby Attack (Ex) As a full action, a kriegakos can fly up to its speed and make a single slam attack without provoking an attack of opportunity from the target of the attack. The kriegakos can move both before and after the attack, but must fly at least 10 feet before the attack, and the total distance flown can't be greater than the kriegakos's fly speed. The kriegakos can't use this ability to attack a foe that it is adjacent to at the start of its turn. Before making the attack, the kriegakos can attempt an Acrobatics check with a DC equal to 20 + the target's level or CR. If it succeeds at this check, the target is flat-footed to the kriegakos's slam attack, and if that attack hits, it deals an additional 4d8 acid damage.

Saliva Shake (Ex) As a standard action, a kriegakos can shake off its current layer of corrosive saliva, causing all adjacent creatures and objects (and all armor and other items those creatures are wearing or holding) to take

4d8 acid damage (Reflex DC 18 half). Carried or worn gear succeeds at this save if its wearer succeeds but fails if its wearer fails.

Soaring through the clouds of Liavara, kriegakoses are vaguely avian creatures that constantly ooze an endless supply of highly acidic saliva from the many specialized pores in their skin. This secretion breaks down the steely rinds of the floating reebadarus plants that are the kriegakos's primary source of sustenance, though it is also a potent deterrent against predators. A kriegakos's body is covered in millions of hairlike proboscises capable of lapping up whatever their body's saliva dissolves. As a result, a kriegakos's primary feeding strategy is simply to slam itself into its prey. Its membranous wings allow it to soar through the Liavaran gases, and the creature's multiple visual sensors empower it to see in all directions at once.



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COREY OF WORLDS

NEEDLEHAWK

CR
3

XP
800



N Tiny animal

Init +4; **Senses** low-light vision; **Perception** +13

DEFENSE

EAC 14; **KAC** 15

Fort +4; **Ref** +8; **Will** +2

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft., fly 40 ft. (Ex, perfect)

Melee sting +7 (1d4+3 P plus needlehawk toxin)

Ranged needle launch +9 (1d4+3 P plus needlehawk toxin)

STATISTICS

Str +0; **Dex** +4; **Con** +2; **Int** -3; **Wis** +1; **Cha** -2

Skills Acrobatics +13 (+21 to fly), Stealth +13, Survival +8

Other Abilities active camouflage

ECOLOGY

Environment warm and temperate forests

Organization solitary, pair, or prickle (3-12)

HP 34

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Active Camouflage (Ex) A needlehawk can adjust chromatophores in its exoskeleton to blend in with its surroundings. When motionless or moving fewer than 10 feet per round, it gains a +5 racial bonus to Stealth checks to hide.

Needle Launch (Ex) As a ranged attack, a needlehawk can launch a needle from its barbed tail with a range increment of 30 feet.

NEEDLEHAWK TOXIN

Type poison (injury); **Save** Fortitude DC 14

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

Effect progression track is Healthy-Sluggish-Stiffened-Staggered; no end state

Cure 1 save

Winged arthropods from an unknown world (presumably in the Vast), needlehawks are gifted with a sophisticated spinal cord and brain, making them intelligent and curious creatures that can build complex nests and even open latches. These traits, combined with their ability to fly and anesthetizing venom, make them difficult pests to eliminate once a prickle finds a steady food supply. While xenobiologists believe needlehawks are indigenous to a jungle ecosystem, the animals have been spotted across many worlds. Once established, needlehawks hunt insects, scavenge or steal food, and build their homes from whatever materials they can find—often tearing up valuable cargo or disassembling machinery in the process.

Needlehawks reproduce asexually, but they produce larger and healthier egg broods when all three sexes contribute. Sticky egg clusters hatch into thousands of mite-sized young, which infest and devour any detritus as well as each other. Eventually, a half-dozen or so young grow large enough to climb onto their parents' backs and learn to survive through observation. While needlehawks have no attachment to their miniscule hordes of young, they are fiercely protective of their larger, nymph-stage offspring after they grow wings.

Needlehawks are especially sensitive to fungal diseases, and dycepskians (page 55) sometimes infest them to create organic drones enslaved to their alien hive mind. Infested needlehawks act as silent lookouts, spies, and guardians. As the dycepskian fungus requires a sentient mind to develop self-awareness, infested needlehawks retain animal-level cunning but react intuitively to the commands of higher-order dycepskian hosts. Conspiracy theorists speculate that dycepskians and needlehawks originate from the same world, and that the crustacean-like scavengers were the parasite's original host.



NIGHT HAG

CR
9XP
6,400

NE Medium outsider (evil, extraplanar)

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., detect alignment, *detect magic*, *detect tech*; **Perception** +17**DEFENSE**

HP 117

EAC 21; **KAC** 22**Fort** +10; **Ref** +8; **Will** +12**DR** 10/cold iron and magic; **Immunities** charm effects, cold, disease, fear effects, fire, sleep; **SR** 19**OFFENSE****Speed** 30 ft.**Melee** claw +18 (3d4+13 S) or

incapacitator +18 (3d4+13 nonlethal B; critical staggered [DC 18])

Ranged aphelion laser pistol +16 (3d4+9 F; critical burn 1d4)**Offensive Abilities** dream haunting**Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 9th; ranged +16)1/day—*bestow curse* (DC 20), *deep slumber* (DC 20)3/day—*inflict pain* (DC 19), *invisibility*At will—*command* (DC 18), *magic missile*At will (with *heartstone*)—*ethereal jaunt*Constant—*detect magic*, *detect tech***STATISTICS****Str** +4; **Dex** +3; **Con** +6; **Int** +2; **Wis** +2; **Cha** +2**Skills** Bluff +22, Diplomacy +17, Disguise +17, Intimidate +17, Mysticism +22, Sense Motive +17**Languages** Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Infernal**Other Abilities** change shape (any humanoid), *heartstone***Gear** gold AbadarCorp travel suit, aphelion laser pistol with 1 high-capacity battery (40 charges), incapacitator with 1 battery (20 charges), *heartstone***ECOLOGY****Environment** any evil-aligned plane**Organization** solitary or coven (3 hags of any type)**SPECIAL ABILITIES****Dream Haunting (Su)** A night hag can visit the dreams of chaotic or evil targets by using her *heartstone* to become ethereal, then hovering over the creature. Once she does so, she rides on the victim's back until dawn. The sleeper suffers tormenting dreams and takes 1 point of Constitution drain upon awakening.**Heartstone (Su)** Every night hag owns a *heartstone*—a special gemstone worth at least 4,000 credits that she wears as a periapt. The *heartstone* makes her immune to diseases and grants her special powers, such as the ability to cast *ethereal jaunt* at will as a spell-like ability. Once per day, a night hag can trap the soul of a recently dead creature within the *heartstone* (Will DC 23 negates); the creature can't have been dead more than 8 rounds, and once its soul is trapped, it can't be returned to life by any means (even *miracle* or *wish*). The soul can be freed only

by destroying the *heartstone* or rendering it nonmagical, and a *heartstone* can hold only one soul at a time. A *heartstone*'s magic is fueled by the night hag's spirit and proximity—once separated from its owner (or upon the night hag's death), a *heartstone* functions as a 9th-level worn magic item for only 24 hours before becoming a nonmagical gem again. A *heartstone* instantly cures any disease contracted by the wearer and provides a +2 enhancement bonus to all saving throws. A night hag that loses her *heartstone* is no longer immune to disease and can no longer use *ethereal jaunt* until it is replaced.

Night hags trade in souls and revel in the grief they cause. They prey on mortals who are in their most vulnerable state, first toying with victims by haunting their dreams night after night. When the unfortunate mortal passes, the night hag traps their soul within her *heartstone*, eventually transferring the soul into another magical object that she can sell in the infernal markets of the outer planes.

Night hags vary in appearance, as they can resemble cruel, horned versions of almost any humanoid species. They can be anywhere between 3 and 8 feet tall and weigh between 100 and 400 pounds.



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THRESHWOLF

CR
5

XP
1,600



N Medium animal

Init +5; **Senses** blindsense (scent) 30 ft., low-light vision;

Perception +11

DEFENSE

HP 76

EAC 15; **KAC** 17

Fort +9; **Ref** +9; **Will** +4

Defensive Abilities quills (1d4 P, DC 13); **Immunities** poison

Weaknesses vulnerable to sonic

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.

Melee bite +11 (1d6+8 P plus grab)

Offensive Abilities thresh (1d6+5 S)

STATISTICS

Str +3; **Dex** +5; **Con** +2; **Int** -4; **Wis** +1; **Cha** -3

Skills Athletics +11, Stealth +11, Survival +16

ECOLOGY

Environment warm and temperate forests and mountains

Organization solitary, pair, or pack (5-10)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Quills (Ex) A threshwolf's mane consists of sharp, glasslike hairs that protect its neck and shoulders. A creature attacking a threshwolf with a natural weapon, an unarmed strike, or melee weapon without reach must succeed at a DC 13 Reflex saving throw or take 1d4

piercing damage as several of these sharp quills break off in their flesh. The attacking creature also gains the off-target condition until the beginning of its next turn due to the pain and irritation.

Thresh (Ex) Whenever a threshwolf succeeds at a combat maneuver to grapple or maintain a grapple, it can immediately shake its mane as a swift action, raking a grappled or pinned victim with razor-sharp quills and inflicting 1d6+5 slashing damage.

Hailing from an unknown world of fierce natural selection (presumably in the Vast), threshwolves are vicious mammalian predators. Though also gifted with teeth and claws, these hunters' most identifiable feature is a mane of glass-like fibers they use to gore prey and shred undergrowth. While predominantly carnivores, threshwolves also feed on fruit, vegetation, and fungus when available. When a pack claims territory, they spend time carving a labyrinthine den within the thick, thorny undergrowth they favor. They raise their young communally, with the largest female taking the lead in most hunts. Packs develop complex social hierarchies and delineate labor much like ant colonies or formians, with different members focused on hunting, patrolling territory, maintaining the lair, or rearing young.

Social behavior and reasonable animal intelligence make threshwolves easy to train, though the aggressive predators will constantly test the resolve of their trainers with challenges for dominance. Vesk colonies in the Vast have experimented with truly domesticating the alien beasts, yielding mixed results.

Threshwolves can be bred for obedience, and the same genes that control this behavior seem linked to their iconic mane; more approachable and malleable threshwolves develop finer quills that cause minor irritation rather than lacerations.

Xenobiologists have determined that threshwolves originate from the same world as needlehawks (page 58), and the two likely shared biomes. Many believe needlehawks would scavenge what they could from threshwolf

kills, provided that the small fliers could stay away from these larger predators' jaws. Like needlehawks, threshwolves are sometimes employed by dycepskians (page 55) as scouts connected to the fungal mass mind and as living containers to breed more of their mindless mycelium within.



ZERNIVIAN

CR
9XP
6,400

N Tiny aberration

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., herbsight 60 ft., low-light vision; **Perception** +22**DEFENSE****EAC** 22; **KAC** 23**Fort** +8; **Ref** +10; **Will** +12**Immunities** disease**OFFENSE****Speed** 30 ft.**Melee** tongue +17 (1d6+12 A & B plus zernivian toxin; critical stunned)**Multiattack** 4 tongues +11 (1d6+12 A & B plus zernivian toxin; critical stunned)**Ranged** acid spittle +19 (2d6+9 A plus zernivian toxin)**Space** 2-1/2 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft. (5 ft. with tongue)**Offensive Abilities** herbicide**STATISTICS****Str** +3; **Dex** +6; **Con** +0; **Int** +0; **Wis** +4; **Cha** +0**Skills** Disguise +17, Life Science +17, Sense Motive +17, Stealth +22, Survival +22**Other Abilities** animal puppeteer (DC 18), spaceflight (Survival)**ECOLOGY****Environment** any**Organization** solitary**SPECIAL ABILITIES****Acid Spittle (Ex)** As a ranged attack, a zernivian can hurl a blob of acidic spittle with a maximum range of 30 feet.**Animal Puppeteer (Ex)** As a full action, a zernivian can insert itself into the body of an adjacent unconscious or helpless Small animal with an Intelligence modifier no greater than -4 (Fortitude DC 18 negates). While inside an animal in this way, the zernivian has total cover and takes no actions of its own; however, it gains full control of the host animal's actions. The zernivian can use its or its host's saving throw bonuses (whichever are higher), its host's extraordinary abilities, and its or its host's natural attacks. The zernivian remains in control of the animal until it leaves the host's body, which it can do as a full action; the host animal is then stunned for 1 round but is otherwise unharmed.**Herbicide (Ex)** Plant creatures and creatures with the dycepskian subtype or the plantlike universal creature rule aren't immune to a zernivian's toxin. When such creatures attempt a Fortitude saving throw against zernivian toxin, they must roll twice and use the worse result.**Herbsight (Ex)** Zernivians have an extrasensory ability that enables them to

rapidly seek out and find plant life. This ability functions as blindsight (scent), except a zernivian can only detect plant creatures and creatures with the dycepskian subtype or the plantlike universal creature rule.

ZERNIVIAN TOXIN**Type** poison (injury); **Save** Fortitude DC 18**Track** Constitution; **Frequency** 1/round for 6 rounds**Cure** 1 save

Zernivians are a species of rodent-sized aberrations whose bodies are covered in grisly fur the color and texture of exposed arteries. Constantly driven to root out and consume intelligent plant creatures, zernivians stalk their prey by taking over the bodies of harmless animals as a means of camouflage. Once a zernivian locates a plant creature, it quickly emerges from the host animal and attacks, using a combination of tongue lashings and a natural herbicide to take down its victim. Xenobiologists are unsure where the solitary zernivians originate from or even how they reproduce.

Although zernivians have become a problem on Ghorus Prime, the native ghorans are far from the zernivian's favorite food. That "honor" goes to the fungal dycepskians, who do whatever they can to terminate these predators on sight, as zernivians have the uncanny ability to sniff out dycepskians occupying even the most unlikely of host bodies.



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TUDINE

Blissful Colony on the Edge of Oblivion

Diameter: $\times 1$; **Mass:** $\times 1$

Gravity: $\times 1$

Location: The Vast

Atmosphere: Normal

Day: 28 hours; **Year:** 16 months

Tudine is a remarkable world only in its general lack of unusual traits. A temperate, terrestrial world of diverse biomes orbiting a binary star, it hosts four continents, several chains of islands, and poles of ice-covered tundra, which help moderate ocean currents and weather patterns. The first native life consisted mainly of large herbivores, small pack predators, and scavengers, and by the time sentient life evolved—remarkably similar to humans in everything save their pale skin and white hair—the natural world boasted a rich diversity that supported agricultural development.

Tudinian civilization had just developed intrasystem space travel when trouble began. Whether Tudinian explorers brought the infection home or it arrived independently on space debris, a hostile alien fungus species known as dycepskians arrived and spread silently across much of the world before anyone realized their friends and families were being taken over by an extraterrestrial menace. Through segregation and wars, governments futilely tried to isolate “susceptible populations” or eliminate nations they believed had fallen to the invaders, but the dycepskians are as much a pandemic as a conqueror.

Within two generations, only a handful of unaffected Tudinians remained in isolated fortresses.

The survivors knew their world was doomed and watched in horror as the dycepskians began to rekindle their waning spaceflight program to spread to the stars. In a desperate feat of engineering, the native citizens unleashed a doomsday weapon into the sky, collapsing one of their suns into a small black hole. They hoped the singularity would crush their world and stop the dycepskians’ spread, but the resulting black hole was too small to swallow Tudine. However, the intense gravity still made it impossible for the dycepskians to escape the system using existing technology.

For over a century now, the dycepskians have remained trapped on the edge of a black hole’s event horizon, watching as it slowly devours their second sun. In the meantime, they have rebuilt Tudinian society into a utopia. They know the end approaches, and they broadcast invitations into the void, cheerfully advertising their unusual planet as a welcoming waystation, a scientific wonderland, a resource-rich trading hub, or anything else they believe will attract travelers with more advanced space-flight technology. Until then, they go through the motions of productive industrial lives, an uncanny facsimile of the capitalistic family ideal.

Tudine’s system once held eleven planets, but three have since been devoured by the black hole, throwing their moons into the void to become rogue asteroids. A large gas giant on the system’s edge emits powerful radiation after several moon impacts, acting as a natural lighthouse to mark the system’s location.



NEXT MONTH THE CRADLE INFESTATION

By Vanessa Hoskins

With a possible dycepskian contagion still present, the heroes must find and seize some dangerous augmentations. They then learn of a plan to infest an important barathu at the hospice of Laoe Araae. Unfortunately, the heroes' task is complicated by the return of the grays!

THE CUSTODIANS OF BRETHEDA

By Lyz Liddell

Barathus, native to the gas giant of Bretheda, are evolutionary marvels, with the ability to adapt their physiology at a whim. Learn more about their history and culture.

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By David N. Ross

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THE HOLLOW CABAL

PART 1:
RETURNED TO
SOCIETY

PART 2:
A SCRATCH IN THE
SURFACE

PART 3:
YOUR CALL IS
IMPORTANT TO US

ROSELIGHT
AND
UPWELL

THE MYSTERIOUS
DYCEPSKIANS

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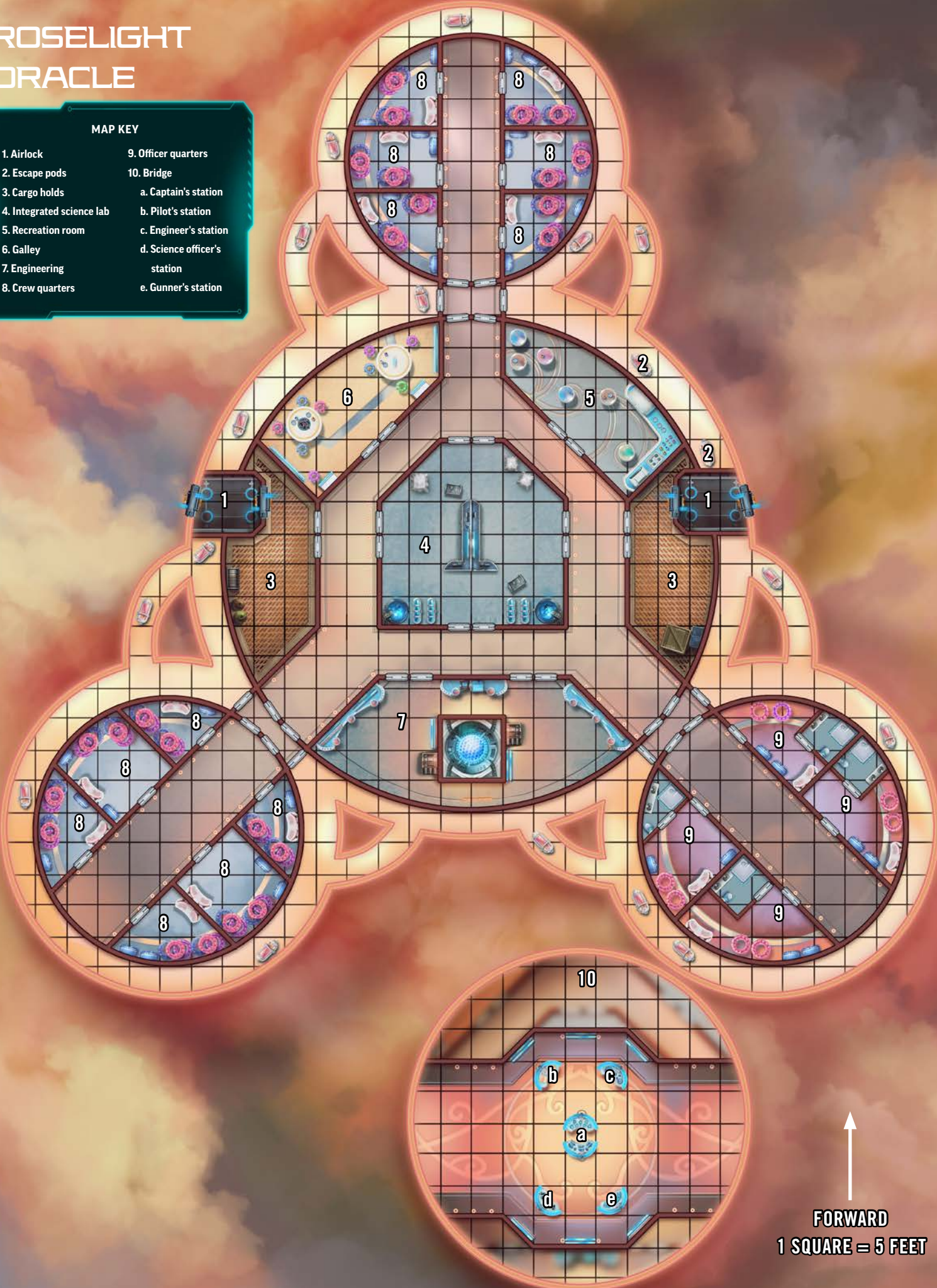
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ROSELIGHT ORACLE

MAP KEY

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Airlock | 9. Officer quarters |
| 2. Escape pods | 10. Bridge |
| 3. Cargo holds | a. Captain's station |
| 4. Integrated science lab | b. Pilot's station |
| 5. Recreation room | c. Engineer's station |
| 6. Galley | d. Science officer's station |
| 7. Engineering | e. Gunner's station |
| 8. Crew quarters | |



↑
FORWARD
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

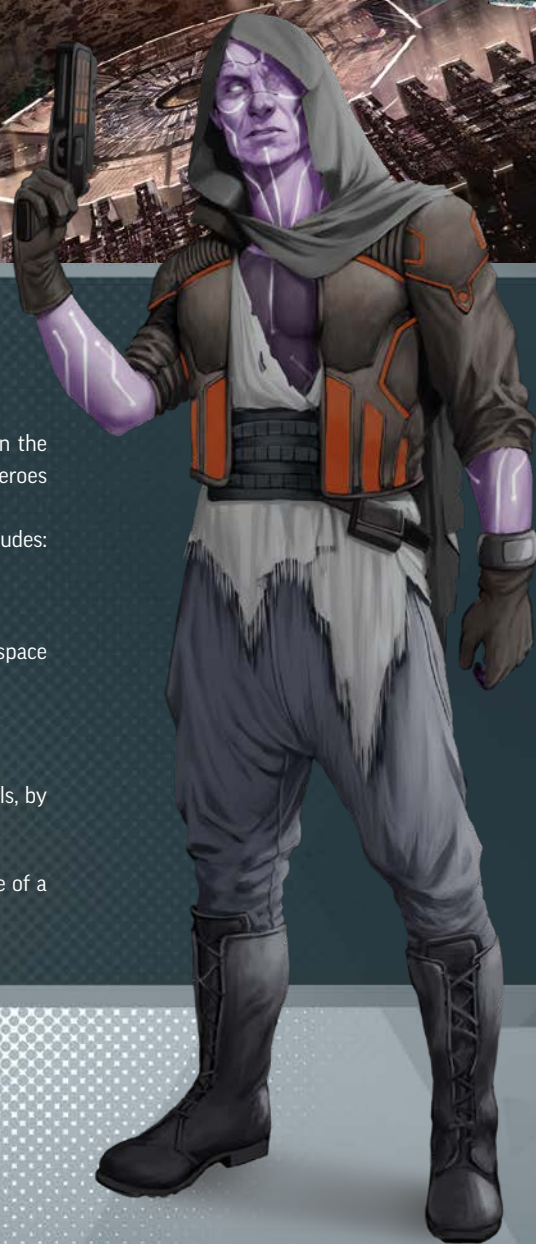


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- "The Hollow Cabal," a Starfinder adventure for 7th-level characters, by Crystal Frasier.
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- A treatise on the mysterious fungal parasites known as dycepskians, by Katina Davis.
- An archive of alien creatures, including a swarm of light-refracting amoebas and a collector of souls, by Alexander Augunas, James Case, Crystal Frasier, Georg Mir, and Jessica Ross.
- Statistics and deck plans for a barathu-piloted patrol ship frigate, by Emily Parks, plus a glimpse of a planet at the edge of a singularity, by Crystal Frasier.



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