

The background is a dark, atmospheric illustration of a ruined city. In the foreground, two silhouetted figures are walking away from the viewer down a path. The path is flanked by tall, crumbling stone structures and arches. The sky is a pale, hazy greenish-blue, suggesting a misty or overcast day. The overall mood is mysterious and foreboding.

THE STALKER OUT OF TIME

A ONE SHOT FOR ALIEN RPG
ADAPTED FROM H.P. LOVECRAFT'S
"THE SHADOW OUT OF TIME"

ADAPTED BY
MARTIN V. PARECE II

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Cover art by WOMBO.

A word about A.I. “Art”. I do not, in any way, shape, or form, support the usage of A.I. Art for commercial products. Beyond the fact that it takes potential work and income away from human artists, it also must be trained with existing artists’ work, which in turn causes it to produce remarkably similar images. If I were to take another author’s work, change the title, all the character names and appearances, it is still plagiarism!

That being said... Yes, this IS an adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft’s “The Shadow Out of Time”. I’m pretty sure this is covered under the legal allowances for fan fiction and such. I’m not worth suing anyway!

City overhead by <https://watabou.itch.io>

Other maps by <https://newtbb.netlify.app/> and inkarnate.com

A word about Mr. Lovecraft – It is well known that Lovecraft’s views on race, religion, and ancestry were problematic at best. His blatant racism, support and admiration of Hitler (despite having a Jewish wife), and other distasteful beliefs are plain in his writing. As much as I detest his ideologies, no one can deny his contributions to the horror genre, and many modern writers would not be where they are today without him.

This scenario is meant for recreational use, and any reproduction and dissemination of this work is perfectly just fine and dandy. Any events, names or faces used are not representative of anything or anyone, and no one can prove otherwise.

A big thanks to Free League for such a phenomenal RPG, H.P. Lovecraft, Ridley Scott, my kids for being my guinea pigs for new scenarios, and the poor, smelly dung beetle!

Ver 10.30.23 – Fixed numerous typos, some grammatical and clarity issues.

Ver 10.24.23 – The first draft. Bite me.

NO MAN BUT A BLOCKHEAD EVER WROTE EXCEPT FOR MONEY.

- SAMUEL JOHNSON

I am sorry for the shameless, self-serving plug here. The above quote is often misquoted and misattributed to one Mr. Samuel Clemens (a.k.a. Mark Twain), though perhaps he at one point said something very similar. The fact is, I love producing Alien RPG content, and it is truly a labor of love. That being said, such labors take away from what little time I have with family or that I should be spending doing other labors, as my day job takes precedence.

I humbly ask, if you see any merit in these works, please consider purchasing my fantasy novels ([The Cor Chronicles](#)) or horror anthology ([Tendrils in the Dark](#)), all found in paperback or e-book on Amazon and other platforms. Details of those, as well as three new books coming in Spring of 2024, can be found on my website at <http://martinparece.com>

Thanks so much, and I look forward to the next scenario!

WARNINGS!!

IF YOU ARE A PLAYER, NOT A GM,
READ NO FURTHER!!

ALSO, THIS SCENARIO INTRODUCES A NEW MECHANIC. MADNESS AND INSANITY ARE A KEY INGREDIENT OF *THE UNIVERSE OF MADNESS* CYCLE, OF WHICH THIS IS THE FIRST SCENARIO. THIS CAN CREATE AN INCREDIBLY REWARDING BUT EXTRAORDINARILY INTENSE ROLE-PLAYING EXPERIENCE. PLEASE, KNOW YOUR PLAYERS, AND KNOW YOURSELF BEFORE RUNNING THIS SCENARIO OR ANY OTHER SCENARIO IN THE CYCLE.

WHILE THIS IS A GAME, MENTAL HEALTH IS NOT. PLEASE
SEEK HELP. IT IS OUT THERE. PEOPLE WHO DON'T EVEN
KNOW YOU CAN CARE ABOUT YOU.

LET'S TALK ABOUT STRESS, BABY. STRESS... AND MADNESS!

This scenario represents the first in a series of seven called *The Universe of Madness Cycle*, based on seven select works of Howard Phillips Lovecraft. Stress is an important, vital part of the Alien RPG, and madness is an important, vital part of Lovecraftian and cosmic horror. This adaptation introduces a new set of optional rules for stress mechanics, and while the exalted GM need not implement it, it will create an entirely new roleplaying experience for those who grow tired of the hum drum, “Oh look, it’s an alien. Gain stress, panic, and die,” experience.

Stalker Out of Time introduces the Madness System, which is fully interchangeable, overlaps, and coincides with the Stress & Panic System. Madness and insanity driven by incomprehensible entities and situations is key to Lovecraftian horror. In addition to their Stress pool, each player character also has a Madness Pool which the GM tracks secretly for each character. As a character’s Madness increases, it begins to affect them mentally and physically! The GM should never reveal the existence of the Madness Pool or how many points each character has.

Almost any time a character would gain Stress, the GM offers the PC a choice with these words, “You gain 1 point of Stress, unless you don’t want to.” If the PC chooses to not receive Stress, add 1 point to their character’s Madness Pool and consult the chart below for effects. The GM should use discretion, as there are times when a choice should not be offered, where either Stress or Madness take precedence. Here are some guidelines:

- PC takes damage from falling 20 feet. Stress only.
- PC takes damage from a physical attack from an alien. Stress only.
- PC takes damage from a bizarre, non-physical, or seemingly impossible alien attack or tech. Either.
- PC sees a new alien or alien ruins for the first time. Either.
- PC sees a piece of alien technology that defies known physical laws. Madness.
- PC actually comes to understand alien tech that defies known physical laws. Madness.
- PC comes across information that defies accepted universal history. Madness.
- PC pushes a roll. Stress.
- PC pushes a roll for the purpose of understanding something alien or something that defies accepted understanding of the universe. Madness.
- PC sees another PC in the grips of Severe Madness (see below). Either. Both? *evil grin*

Again, the GM has final discretion! The *cumulative* effects of the Madness Pool are below:

Madness Pool	Madness Effect
1	Mild. The character adopts an odd quirk no one has ever noticed before. Perhaps they stutter on certain words now or a facial tick of some kind. This should be role-played or weaved into the narrative.
2	Mild. One of the character's personality traits is amplified exponentially, even to the point that it aggravates or annoys other characters. This should be role-played out.
3	Mild. The character picks up a minor neurosis or new compulsive behavior. This should be role-played out.
4	Moderate. The character is beginning to have difficulties with cognition and the ability to relate to others. Minor annoyances and irritants are heavily distracting and a source of anger. The character has a -1 modifier to all Empathy and Wits based rolls. However, the character also receives +1 to Strength and Agility based rolls as adrenaline and rage fuel their actions.
5	Moderate. As cognitive and empathic impairment continue, the character begins hallucinating – the voice of a crewmate calling them, a shadow cast over them as they work, or even other, far worse things... There are no safe places anymore. While the character can recover Health in the normal way, they cannot reduce stress except through drugs or sleep. The character has a -1 modifier to all Empathy and Wits based rolls. However, the character also receives +1 to Strength and Agility based rolls as adrenaline and rage fuel their actions.
6	Moderate. The character cannot sleep without constant, vivid, and intrusive dreams. Sleep is no longer restorative to the mind, and the character cannot alleviate Stress in any way without pharmaceuticals. The character has a -1 modifier to all Empathy and Wits based rolls. However, the character also receives +1 to Strength and Agility based rolls as adrenaline and rage fuel their actions.
7+	<p>Insanity. The character is completely compromised and has gone insane. The GM may choose to make the PC an NPC at this point, or let the player continue, depending on the group and its dynamics. If the PC reaches 7 Madness, roll on the d6 chart below to determine the type of insanity. If the PC gains additional Madness points, roll a d6 for each point they gain beyond 7!</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Paranoia. The character becomes extremely paranoid, seeing threats everywhere, including among friends. Constantly vigilant, they become distrustful of allies and turn on their fellows when triggered. 2. Hallucinations. The character's hallucinations have become real, even superimposing themselves over friend or foe. The PC must run screaming to a safe place or attack the first character they see. If they manage to spend a full Shift in a safe place or Break their target, lucidity comes back, dropping the character's Madness Pool to 6. 3. Psychotic Break. Their reality overwhelmed by all they've seen, the character's behavior becomes entirely erratic, destructive, and even murderous. Everyone and everything are out to get them, and they will attempt to destroy it all! 4. Catatonia. The character is completely incapable of acting, reacting, or responding to any stimuli at all. They cannot move or engage in any action, but they will not resist help. This is permanent without substantial and lengthy psychiatric treatment.

	<p>5. Suicidal. The truth of their universe shaken to the core, the character sees no need to continue. The only escape is self-harm, and the character will immediately pursue the most effective means of doing so. Once the character is Broken (assuming they survive), they will immediately regain lucidity and return to 6 Madness.</p> <p>6. Feral Behavior. The character has lost all sense of self and returns to a feral state. They may growl, hiss, or become hostile to friend or foe alike. They behave like an animal without reason, completely at the whim of their most base fight or flight reactions.</p>
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There are ways to reduce Madness, but unfortunately, none of them are available in this scenario! While two types of Insanity will reduce Madness to 6 when complete, Madness can be permanently treated with one month of intensive psychotherapy and psychiatry per point of Madness. Anti-psychotic, anti-depressant, and similar drugs can treat the effects of Madness to a degree, though they do not rid the character of the underlying causes. Finally, the stimulant NeuroTic, which was designed to treat NDD, will rid a character of all Madness effects for 1 Shift. Unfortunately, it is still experimental and not readily available across the galaxy.

WHAT'S THE STORY, MOTHER? (PLAYER/GM)

The year is 2132, and for almost thirty years, rumors have quietly circulated. Officially, Peter Weyland passed away on a space station orbiting Mars in 2092, but the rumors claim he died a year later while on a secret mission to investigate a long lost alien civilization. Of course, the belief in visitors from another world is nothing new, ranging back well into the 20th Century as man gazed at the pyramids and wondered how the ancients could ever engineer such gargantuan feats. While vehemently denying the rumors of Sir Peter's demise, Weyland-Yutani has added fuel to the fire for the last ten years by sending teams of scientists to unexplored regions of space, apparently searching for xeno-archaeological artifacts. None have been found.

Your team set out from Earth in March on a six month cryo voyage for a planet some 17 parsecs away designated XA-152. How Wey-Yu decided on this planet, only the big cheeses at corporate know, but your mission is simple. Find xeno-archaeological artifacts or ruins, collect all the information you can, and report back. Due to the extreme distance from Earth, Hell even the Frontier, you're well-equipped. Your modified *Bison*-class transport is loaded with a 2-man gyrocar, a Daihotai tractor modified with a drilling attachment, tons of food and water, cameras, and digital recording devices. You even have a PUPS! Wey-Yu must be expecting BIG results, because they've spent BIG money on this!

You awaken from cryo, the big dark blur of deep sleep fading into the big white blur of eye encrusting wakefulness. As your vision clears, you see your fellow crew members as they too rise from cryo with a wide range of reactions from quickly and spryly jumping from the tube to vomiting into a bucket kept nearby just for that occurrence.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON (GM ONLY)

The intrepid PCs are going to find an alien civilization all right, easily at that! Sensor scans of XA-152 will reveal a very life viable planet similar to Earth with all the biome, land, and water variations one can expect. However, they'll be led to one particular site due to intense energy readings, as if a dozen fusion reactors were all active at that point. They will land outside of a small, walled city – an ancient and deserted Engineer Outpost. About a hundred engineers lived here some five or six billion years ago (amazing that the city still stands and hasn't weathered away!), experimenting with Xenomorphs but also space and time. The experiments went awry, and the Engineers and their Xenomorph creations have all either died or been shunted throughout space and time. The PCs will explore this city, moving down below the surface in search of the strange and massive energy readings. They will discover massive stone heads and other statues, murals of Engineer life, evidence of Xenomorphs,

equipment and computers the use of which they cannot fathom, and a variety of artifacts as they attempt to unravel the secrets of this outpost.

But wait there's more... The time and space displacement equipment is still active, and there's one Xenomorph that is bouncing through time, seeming to stalk the PCs before suddenly disappearing. Was it their imagination? Is this bizarre place playing tricks on their mind?

As if this weren't bad enough, sometimes a displacement bubble appears, enveloping one or more PCs and moving them throughout space and time briefly before returning them within seconds. Is it really happening? Or are they going mad?

The PCs must solve all these mysteries while holding on to both their lives and their sanity!

STORYTELLING — ALIEN AND LOVECRAFT

This scenario will test your limits as a storyteller, which is why I am glad to be writing it and not running it! For the horror to build properly in either Alien or Lovecraft, one must be at the top of their storytelling game. And now, because of my own evil and sadistic tendencies, I have foisted both upon you, O Exalted GM. Though this is a one shot scenario, think of it as a three act horror. Act 1 – everything is fine. Act 2 – something weird is going on here. Act 3 – oh, we're in deep shit!

There's a lot to contend with here, as both a GM and as a PC. And since this is both Alien AND Lovecraft, there really is no reason why the PCs should "win"! Truthfully, they should only hope to survive, and not all of them at that.

Try to keep the Xeno in reserve until the middle of the scenario, making it an unknown, shadowy stalker the PCs never really see but only occasionally hear. Is it even there, or are their imaginations running off without them? When the Xeno finally does appear, it should be a terrifying shock that makes them ask, "OMG, WTF are we supposed to do now?" If your PCs somehow manage to kill the Stalker too easily, consider inputting another one OR simply play up the time displacement effects to a greater degree.

They will likely conclude that the only way to win will be to destroy everything, a course of action that at least two PCs should be against. But there are many, many alternatives here, and I learned a long time ago NEVER to underestimate the creativity of PCs. I could even foresee a PC at least trying to send a message with the Engineer equipment to Wey-Yu, setting the reactor to explode, and then shooting themselves forward in time to wait for rescue! In the end, give them agency, but make it really, really hard!

THE PLAYER CHARACTERS

ELENA WHELAN

WEYLAND-YUTANI CORPORATE REPRESENTATIVE



STRENGTH 3

AGILITY 4

- Ranged Combat 1

WITS 5

- Comtech 2
- Observation 3

EMPATHY 2

- Command 1
- Manipulation 3

Gear:

- Chrome Briefcase
- M4A3 Pistol w/ 2 reloads (hidden in briefcase)
- 5 Doses Neversleep
- Corporate Override Data Card

Talent: Take Control

Signature Item: A printout of the message awarding your first promotion.

Resourceful, intelligent, attractive and ambitious, you represent everything Weyland-Yutani wants in their company agents. At only twenty-four, you've become a rising star with the company, having leapfrogged into middle management with lightning speed. But now you've been assigned to this ridiculous deep space mission searching for little green men or, worse, long dead little green men. It's such a waste of your abilities. It's the kind of assignment that middle managers grow old in and retire from, never reaching their full potential.

But that's not going to happen to you. You're going to push this crew as hard as you can. They'll either produce results or they'll break. If you can bring back whatever xeno-archaeological (you can't even say that damn word) evidence the company wants, succeeding where everyone else fails, it should catapult you to the next level. Maybe even a Special Project Director position? If you don't find anything, at least you'll be able to show how efficiently you managed the team.

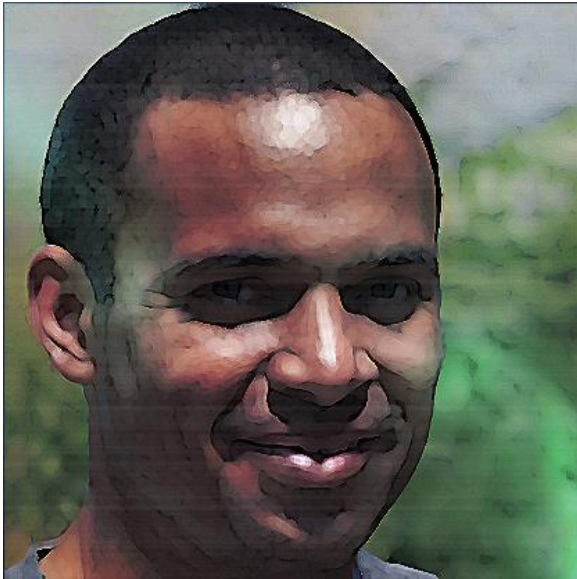
Liv Hawthorne should be on your side with this. She ditched the USCMC after her four years and signed up with Wey-Yu, and you found a kindred spirit in her about two years ago. She doesn't want to work security her whole life, and she knows that a big share of some major discovery will set her up for life. Your friendship with her has been the center of some... innuendos. Watch that damn Dr. Mercer, though. A typical fifty year old misogynist, he thinks his big brain makes him the most important person on the team. You need him, but don't let him take control of the mission.

Buddy: Liv "T.B." Hawthorne

Rival: Dr. Benjamin Mercer

Personal Agenda: Get results, get results, get results. Make sure everyone knows the mission, and results, are all that matters.

ALEX "ACE" ROURKE
WEYLAND-YUTANI PILOT



STRENGTH 3

- Close Combat 1

AGILITY 5

- Mobility 1
- Piloting 3
- Ranged Combat 1

WITS 3

- Comtech 2
- Observation 1
- Survival 1

EMPATHY 3

Gear:

- PR-PUT Uplink Device
- 5 Flares
- Mk.50 Compression Suit
- Hand Radio

Talent: Reckless

Signature Item: A set of keys to an old fast car, something called a “Mustang” that you plan on restoring.

You’ve been often called a jack of all trades and master of none. The fact is it took you a long time to figure out what you wanted to do. You tried going to college, then you tried the USCMC. Hell, you even tried being a nature guide for a month. None of it worked out.

Then one day it hit you. Fast. You like to go fast. You got into racing, and it was good. You were scratching an itch you didn’t know you had, but it wasn’t enough. Eventually, you found yourself in Wey-Yu’s flight school, and you were good! The company picked up your contract as soon as you graduated, and they pay pretty decent, too! Shuttle work is kind of boring, but you get to fly!

This team seems okay, a lot like other teams you’ve shuttled around. Though this time you’re not just taking them from Point A to Point B. You’re actually part of the crew, expected to help them when necessary, whatever that means. Whatever. The boss, Elena, is easy on the eyes, but that security chick is smokin’. She’s such a pain in the ass, with all her safety talk, but she’s a badass, stone cold fox, too. The scientist and the engineer are pretty much like all those guys always are.

Buddy: Liv “T.B.” Hawthorne

Rival: Liv “T.B.” Hawthorne. It’s a love/hate thing.

Personal Agenda: Faster is always better. Push the limits, scare the piss out of people, have fun!

DR. BENJAMIN MERCER
WEYLAND-YUTANI SCIENTIST



STRENGTH 3

AGILITY 2

WITS 5

- Comtech 2
- Observation 3
- Survival 3

EMPATHY 4

- Manipulation 1
- Medical Aid 1

Gear:

- Digital Video Camera
- Seegson P-Dat
- Seegson Systems Diagnostic Device
- Medkit

Talent: Breakthrough

Signature Item: Your violin.

You're an expert in Biology, Xeno-Biology and Xeno-Archaeology. You're brilliant, highly intelligent, and you know it, too. You're simply better than most people. Weyland-Yutani knew that. They knew it the moment *Biology* published your paper two decades ago. They came at you with a flush offer to join their Xeno-Biology department, and you took it without a second thought, leaving academia behind. The opportunities that company could provide with all their resources defied comprehension.

Twenty years later, you're still in the same position. Oh, you've seen, experimented on, and dissected large numbers of alien plant and animal species, but nothing too different or dissimilar from those on Earth. Evolution happens much the same way everywhere in the galaxy, which makes sense when considering the logical elegance of Darwinism. Unfortunately, you've never come across anything new, anything different, anything... astounding. The company came to you with the opportunity to leave, to go off into the galaxy, and you decided to take it. Your career is stagnant, and your greatest fear is that there is nothing left to discover. But even if that's the case, at least you'll be out there among the stars.

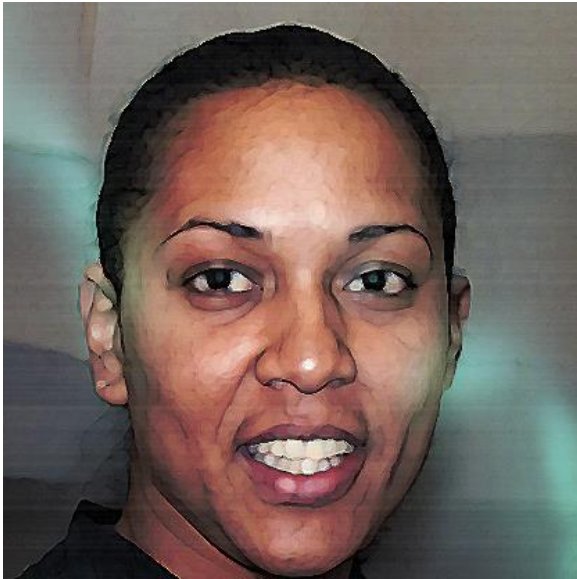
But... if you can find something. Some new alien life form or even the remnants of some long dead alien civilization (which you are beginning to believe to be myth and legend), well, the honor that would be heaped on your name... The key is this – don't let anyone else take the credit. Make sure the entire galaxy knows that YOU were the one who discovered it all! This whole crew seems like competition, except for the engineer, especially that Whelan woman.

Buddy: Marcus Rodriguez

Rival: Elena Whelan

Personal Agenda: If there is something out there, find it! Understand everything you can, and make sure no one else tries to steal the credit!

LIV "T.B." HAWTHORNE
WEYLAND-YUTANI SECURITY EXPERT



STRENGTH 5

- Close Combat 3
- Stamina 2

AGILITY 4

- Mobility 1
- Ranged Combat 3

WITS 2

EMPATHY 3

- Medical Aid 1

Gear:

- Assault Rifle (+0, Dmg 2, Full Auto) w/ 2 reloads
- Assault Vest (Armor 4)
- M4A3 Pistol w/ 2 reloads
- M314 Motion Tracker

Talent: Past the Limit

Signature Item: A letter from a little girl thanking you for saving her daddy's life in combat.

You're known as one tough ass chick, to the extent that during your time in the USCMC, your squad mates began calling you "T.B." for Tough Bitch. You didn't re-up with the corps because you watched squad after squad, platoon after platoon get tossed into the meat grinder, fighting all sorts of battles and wars the purpose of which you just didn't understand. Weyland-Yutani started recruiting you before your time was up, and they sure as hell pay better. With Wey-Yu, you'll actually be able to retire with a little bit of money, unless you're on a mission that hits big. As a result, you've taken every mission they've offered.

Your job on these missions is simple. Provide security for the team and company property, support the project boss, and keep everyone safe. Everyone goes home. That's what matters in the end, and that's why that damn pilot, Ace, bothers you so much. He's reckless and dangerous, and he doesn't give a shit as long as he gets his rocks off. Keep him reined in.

Meanwhile, supporting the boss is easy on this one. You and Elena have been friends for a couple of years. She just struck up a conversation in the company cafeteria one day, and you found you liked her. She's kind of the physical opposite of you, which is cool, but her ambition and your goal of hitting big coincide well. The two of you have been target of some homophobic jokes, but screw those guys if they can't handle strong women.

Buddy: Elena Whelan

Rival: Alex "Ace" Rourke

Personal Agenda: Keep company property and personnel safe.

MARCUS RODRIGUEZ
TEAM ENGINEER



STRENGTH 4

- Close Combat 2
- Heavy Machinery 3
- Stamina 3

AGILITY 4

- Ranged Combat 1

WITS 4

- Survival 1

EMPATHY 2

Gear:

- Cutting Torch
- Maintenance Jack
- Mk. 50 Compression Suit
- Hi-Beam Flashlight

Talent: Resilient

Signature Item: Your master's diploma in Mechanical Engineering.

You came up as a roughneck, born into a family of roughnecks in a colony of roughnecks out on the Frontier. You aren't the biggest guy on the block, but you're pretty strong. You're good at the work, but you're a little different from the average bruiser. You're not the work your ass off all day, then go raise Hell all night at the colony bar kind of roughneck. You've always been a little more introspective, a little more thoughtful. You began to study not just how to fix machines, but how they work – the real, hard math and physics behind them.

This led a lot of the roughnecks to give you the cold shoulder, like you thought you're better than them or something. It's not that. It's just that you love the beauty of machines – gyrocars, tractors, drilling rigs. Hell, even the universe is just one giant, spinning machine. Someone in the company thought you were smart. Next thing you know, they're sponsoring you to go to school. Five years later, you've got a masters!

Wey-Yu needs guys like you. Guys who know how to work on stuff, but also know why stuff works. The pay is solid, and you're away from the drudgery of Frontier life, the obnoxiousness of Frontier roughnecks. If you can prove your worth, maybe one day you can work your way into a Project Manager's position. You'll have to work on your people skills. Machines are simple, people are complex. The crew seems solid, but that pilot aggravates you. Like most pilots, he seems to enjoy breaking shit.

Buddy: The equipment maybe?

Rival: Alex "Ace" Rourke

Personal Agenda: Work hard, keep everything working and running smoothly, provide your expertise wherever needed.

SHIPS STORES

Weyland-Yutani equips their ships very well. It's up to you what the PCs have in stores. Make sure they're well equipped, but don't overdo it! The ship has only one large cargo bay and two vehicle bays, one containing a two-person gyrocar and the other a Daihotai Tractor. The tractor also has a custom drilling rig attachment available. Give them no weapons, armor, or pressure suits other than what they have on their personal gear lists. Wey-Yu sends a Security Expert along for this purpose. Things they should certainly have:

- Plenty of food, water, and instant coffee
- A grapple gun with 200 feet of rope
- Video and digital cameras and other recording equipment (digital tape recorders and the like)
- Flashlights
- A set of PUPS
- Powerloader? Maybe? Might be overdoing it...

FLUTES AND EGGS - EVERYTHING YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU NEEDED TO KNOW

There are three important Engineer artifacts in the city, if your PCs can find them and if they can discern how to use them. It is up to you, O Exalted GM, where you wish to scatter these artifacts. Do not make them too plentiful or easy to find, but the PCs will want to have them to advance the story and exploration. Of course, you want them to have them as well to advance Madness. *evil grin*

The first is the all-important Flute. Seemingly made of some kind of ceramic, the Engineer Flute is necessary to operate their technology. The vast majority of the hieroglyphics around the city, especially any around doors or equipment, are in fact the musical sequence needed to activate them. Of course, your PCs will have to have determined that through long hours of study. A difficult Observation check (-2) with a solid shift of study would allow a musically and mathematically minded person to make the connection. Once understood, using the Flute requires a Manipulation check. Flutes should only be found where designated by the text.

The Egg, on the other hand, accomplishes less but is easier to use. About five inches tall, this egg feels squishy and gelatinous to the touch. It glows with a soft pink hue and turns green when touched. Any door will open automatically when approached by someone carrying an Egg, and it will stay open so long as they are within 3 meters of it. There should be a handful of Eggs scattered around the upper city, but force the PCs to come to a dead end before handing them one. Make them search, make them become confused.

The third is a weapon known as a Singularity Paddle. It hardly looks like a weapon though, appearing more like a 20th Century defibrillator paddle. A metal handle connects to a rectangular plate about three quarters of an inch thick. A tiny barrel protrudes from the other side of the plate by a quarter inch. It responds to the will of the user, firing tiny, invisible singularities that dissipate on impact. The weapon does 2 damage and ignores armor, making it a highly effective weapon against armored targets. It has a self-contained Power of 3 and can be recharged at an Engineer station, if the PCs can figure all that out...

ARRIVING AT XA-152

The PCs will come out of FTL and cryo right near XA-152, finding a very Earthlike planet. The first step will be to do a simple sensor sweep (Comtech check) of the entire planet as the ship orbits, requiring a full shift to complete the scan. Using the stunt “New and Unexpected Information” will quickly reveal the massive power output coming from one of the continents, equivalent to a dozen fusion reactors. You should let the PCs find it on a successful roll regardless, but using the stunt reveals it right away. The PCs should immediately feel a sense of success or empowered satisfaction!

The next obvious move is to make Planetfall (Piloting check) and close in on the coordinates. Once they break through the cloud cover, the PCs should be able to see a small city from the air. It measures three hundred meters wide (about the length of their ship), is made of white stone, and has a thirty meter wall wrapping it. Most of the buildings are short, only 5-10 meters tall, but there is one that dwarfs the others, standing 100 meters tall and half as wide with a domed roof. A Difficult (-2) Observation check during a flyover will reveal that the construction looks brand new, but there is no sign of any inhabitants.

Also, a huge mechanical apparatus of gray and black metal shaped like a gargantuan scorpion’s tail rises a thousand meters into the air. Set directly into the ground just outside the city wall amongst the southeast cluster of buildings, this is a docking collar for Engineer ships, but the PCs have no way of connecting their own vessel to it.

A WORD ON THE ENVIRONMENT

The biome and season are completely the dealer’s choice. The planet is extremely similar to Earth, so it is completely up to you, O Exalted GM, what this particular area is like. Consider something comfortable, something generally not terrifying. If your players will be with you for quite some time and you intend to play

other *Universe of Madness* adaptations, your players will later encounter tight, dark caves, windswept barren mountains, sub-zero arctic environments, and even underwater cities. Instead consider sunny, rolling hills or bountiful plains.

Also, the environment is perfectly safe, and the PC's scan should reveal that!

THE STALKER

Besides Stress and Madness, there is one major threat in the city. Six billion years ago, this Engineer outpost conducted extensive experiments on Xenomorphs as well as time and space displacement. There is one Xenomorph Soldier (*Core p.310*) roaming around. All of the others, as well as all the Engineers, have been permanently shunted to other points in time, except for this one poor little guy. You see, he's still bouncing around, permanently being moved forward and backward through time. This creates some interesting shenanigans. The PCs might hear the Xenomorph around a corner or in the next room, but when they investigate, it's gone! Or it may appear behind them as they puzzle over some equipment or Engineer glyphs, casting a huge shadow as it blocks the light, but when they turn, there's nothing there. It might even suddenly disappear in combat! It may suddenly appear, perhaps with bullet wounds they haven't inflicted upon it yet before vanishing again. Have fun with it, warp space and time, and drive the PCs mad!

Also keep in mind, the Stalker knows it is alone, it's primary goal should be to capture PCs and bring them to the Hive for Ovomorphing. It will not attack the entire group, unless it thinks it can snatch one PC and get away before the others can react. As deadly as it is in combat, it is also sneaky and has time bubbles causing all sorts of havoc!

One last thing – the Stalker can go anywhere. The same bio-mechanical DNA the Engineers used to make the Eggs is encoded in his genome. As a result, every door in the city opens for our friendly neighborhood Xeno, which should be quite a surprise when the time comes. *evil grin*

BUBBLES OF TIMEY-WIMEY-NESS

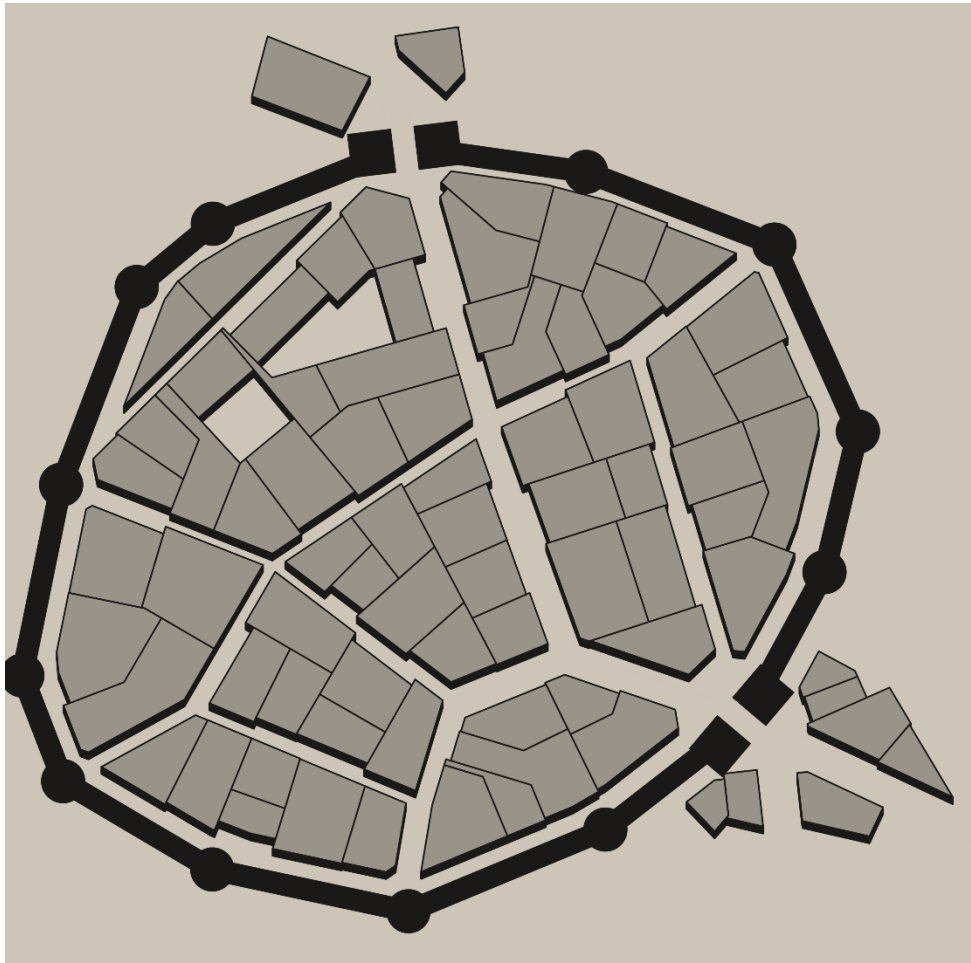
The Engineers lost control of their experiments, eventually causing the end of this outpost. However, the time displacement equipment is still active down on the lower levels under the city, and it's causing bubbles of time

displacement to appear and then pop. This will move our Xenomorph friend around through time, but it will affect the players as well. Careful how much you use this – too little and it doesn't matter, too much and it loses its effectiveness to build spine tingling horror with the players. Consider having only one effect happen per shift to any PCs in the city above, with more frequent occurrences down below. As far as effects are concerned, you are only limited by your imagination! Here are some examples to help ramp up the Stress and Madness:

- A bubble appears (they're invisible by the way) to envelop a PC while talking, and they disappear to the group's horror. They reappear 10 seconds later and continue talking as if nothing happened, because from their point of view, nothing did.
- A PC vanishes, reappearing in the same place 3 turns later. Hopefully, the group didn't leave them behind!
- A PC suddenly finds him/herself in the distant past. Giants with bluish-white skin in strange, ribbed jumpsuits (Engineers in Biosuits) are walking about their daily tasks (or they're in the middle of an emergency of some kind!). They see the PC and start shouting at him/her in an unknown language. One aggressively approaches, and the PC vanishes just before the Engineer reaches him/her. This can be used many times in diverse ways to tell the story of the city's fall. Perhaps the PC sees an army of Xenomorphs, the Engineers desperately trying to fend them off with Singularity Paddles. Or they get zapped back to the first activation of the time displacement devices or witness an Engineer using a Flute.
- Half the team is caught up in a displacement bubble for a minute or less, time speeding up for them. From the others' points of view, the affected PCs are suddenly walking and talking much faster, to the point that their speech is unintelligible. After a few seconds, a minute, whatever, they come out of the bubble and don't understand why the fellow party members stare at them so strangely.
- What if (careful with this one) the PC finds themselves in the middle of a massive crater. The city and everything under it are gone. The PC takes a radiation point unless they're wearing a suit. In this case, they're in the future where a major catastrophe has wiped everything out!
- A time bubble envelops a player and suddenly ages them $d6 \times 10$ years, either younger or older! What effects does this have on them! Is it permanent? Or does it dispel with the bubble in a turn or two?

There is so much that can be done with this, and if used correctly, it is both an effective storytelling tool and a way to fully exercise the Stress/Madness mechanics. After all, every time a PC experiences these displacements, it should cause them to gain one or the other, especially if these displacements challenge their views of what is real!

THE CITY



Of course, the PCs will decide to land and investigate. The city astounds them, as it is a contradiction of reason. Entirely made of stone, it would appear to be the work of a paleolithic society. Every building is made of the same white stone, but on closer inspection there are no seams or creases where the masoned blocks meet. Instead, every building, every wall, every doorway appears to be chiseled straight from living stone, as if the entire city is one enormous sculpture chiseled from the largest piece of stone ever

Quarried. All of the buildings, many of which are connected, have open doorways, each ten or more feet tall, and the streets are paved with the same homogenous white stone. Statues – three to five meter stone heads with massive, hairless craniums and exaggerated facial features – are spaced every so often throughout the city, also part of the giant sculpture. Every building's façade and every interior room contains hieroglyphic or cuneiform writings, all very orderly and carved directly into the walls, their meanings entirely unclear. The city appears almost new in its construction, as nothing has degraded from age or weathering, but dating tests will show the city to be over 6 billion years old. The streets are free from trash, dust, dirt, and debris, and the buildings from all manners of personal effects as if no one ever lived here. But there is a wide array of furniture, all of it spartan wood construction or stone that is part of the city itself with little no elegance or comfort apparent in design. There is no drainage or sewer system but no standing water either. Every angle is sharply geometric with no sign of wear. Or people.

The actual layout of the city and the way the PCs explore it doesn't really matter. That's a narrative issue for you, O Exalted GM, and it's for you to decide how long you want the PCs to gaze in awe at this place. Keep in mind that if you are using the Madness system, there are a couple of opportunities during the exploration. There are two obvious features the PCs will want to explore, and they are described below.

The Scorpion's Tail.



Planted in the ground amidst the buildings just outside the southeastern gate, this immense device curves upward and away from the city before turning back to terminate directly over the city's center with a barbed end. On an alien world with an alien city of white stone, this giant device seems completely out of place. It is made of some sort of metal, with a gray-black, armor plated appearance toward the base and ribbed as it begins to bend and rise. The PCs will find the metal completely resistant to any sort of cutting, damage, or sampling, and it is completely free of wear or oxidation of any kind. Their best guess would be that it is some sort of Titanium alloy. Roughly circular, the tail is over a hundred feet in diameter at its base, and there is a door set into it, though this will not be apparent. The door will open automatically in proximity of anyone holding an Egg or who plays the correct notes on a Flute.

The room inside is entirely made of metal, and though the floor is perfectly smooth and flat, even polished, the walls seem to consist of metallic ribs and plates, meeting and overlapping in an eerily organic appearance like bone or even chitin. The metal floor covers the first half of the room. Soft and dim, white-blue light is provided by egg shaped objects set high on the wall, spaced about six feet apart. These cannot be removed and are shockingly easy to damage. Anyone attempting to dismantle one or doing one point of damage to it will

cause the covering to shatter. The light will go out and gray ooze will drip from the broken light.

The other half is further divided into two metallic plates that hover in place level with the floor. Thirty seconds after anyone steps on a platform, it will immediately, and at great speed, hover off to its predetermined destination. The platforms are not secured by anything, and the PCs will likely decide it is some sort of magnetic or anti-grav technology. Neither of these are correct. They function by bending space, causing the platform to move at great speed. This science is completely beyond human understanding, and attempting to figure it out is cause for Madness.

The right side platform will shoot up to the top of the “tail” coming to an apparent dead end where a half dozen plates overlap each other in a circular pattern about ten meters across. A PC may note it looks disturbingly like a sphincter. Of course, an Egg or the correct notes played on a Flute will cause the wall to open faster than the eye can blink, likely causing a PC to almost jump out of their skin. The next series of rooms, despite its alien appearance, looks suspiciously like a loading dock (Observation check to make the connection), and another huge sphincter wall can be opened to look out across the city and landscape from a dizzying height. Returning to the platform will send it back downwards.

The left platform will drop twenty meters to a natural but smooth cave floor. There is another door here, this one more conventional, though it slides open and closed by moving up and down instead of side to side. It also moves as fast as someone can blink with a slamming, echoing thud when it opens or closes. This door requires an Egg or the proper notes on a Flute and allows access to the first Sub-Level (see below). Returning to the platform will send it back up.

Either platform can be called back with the correct notes played on a Flute.

The Temple Complex.

This massive building surely seen from the air is located on one of the main roads, though not in the center of the city. It stands 100 meters tall and is constructed no differently from the rest of the buildings, seemingly carved straight from the rock. A thirty meter wide and tall staircase, each step a foot tall, climbs upward from the street to a plain, porticoed façade. Under the twenty meter deep awning of stone, the PCs will find three seven meter tall doorways surrounded by writing carved in relief. As they pass through the doorway, they’ll enter a wide plaza that lays open to the sky. Stone benches surround multitiered fountains that lay empty of water. The great stone head statues are plentiful here, and there is nowhere one can stand in the plaza without at least one set of petrified eyes casting its disapproving gaze upon them.

There are other statues as well – standing upon two meter tall columns of curious, almost Greco-Roman design are statues of three meter giants. Though overall human in appearance, they have the same enlarged, hairless craniums of the head statues with exaggerated facial features. The quality of workmanship and detail reminds you of the ancient Renaissance works, but these works are not nude, instead wearing a sort of form fitting, ribbed jumpsuit. There are ten in all, women and men and each one marked with writing near the feet on the top surface of the column.

On the far side from where they entered, the PCs will see another set massive steps, rising another thirty meters in darkness. More statues line the steps as they traverse upward, and the staircase ends in a solid wall with a metal door that opens upward. The PCs need an Egg or a Flute (there is a Flute inside) to continue.

The interior is shadowy, lit only by more of the egg shaped lights around the floor. There are eight cryo-tubes (though the PCs may not identify them as such right away) arrayed in a circular pattern around a huge platform.

The tubes are made from the same gray-black metal as the docking mechanism, and look more like sarcophagi, though built for giants instead of humans. They all have a slightly translucent (but not transparent!) panel on the top surface that lights up when someone comes near. If anyone carrying an Egg touches one of the tubes, it will slide open with a snapping hiss, revealing the interior. All the tubes are empty except for an attached rebreather mask that looks like a truncated elephant's snout. Still opening the tubes should make their purpose plain.

An enormous device (the back portion is 3 meters tall) sits in the middle of the tubes atop a gray metal platform, and it is surrounded by apparent computer equipment. This is a telescope and communications device that breaks all the laws of space and time as humans know it, providing a live look at any star system in the galaxy, and it even gives the ability to open live, no delay communication. The computers appear dead and dormant – no amount of touching the bizarre egg-like



contraptions or rows of gray, fleshy spheres will garner any reaction.

It cannot be accessed or used without the correct notes played on a Flute. If the PCs somehow manage to get it working, they will have control of the cryo-tubes as well as the machine in the middle. When the device activates, a holographic display of XA-152's solar system will come to life, filling the room. With proper coordinates entered, the chair will rotate, spin, and adjust to display any star system in the galaxy. The device of course has an insert to be sat in, and with a Flute, the user can bring up a live view of the displayed star system which shows as a tear in reality five meters wide. The user can then even send a live communication instantaneously to that system! If the PCs figure out all of this, the implications should be nearly driving them mad! *evil grin*

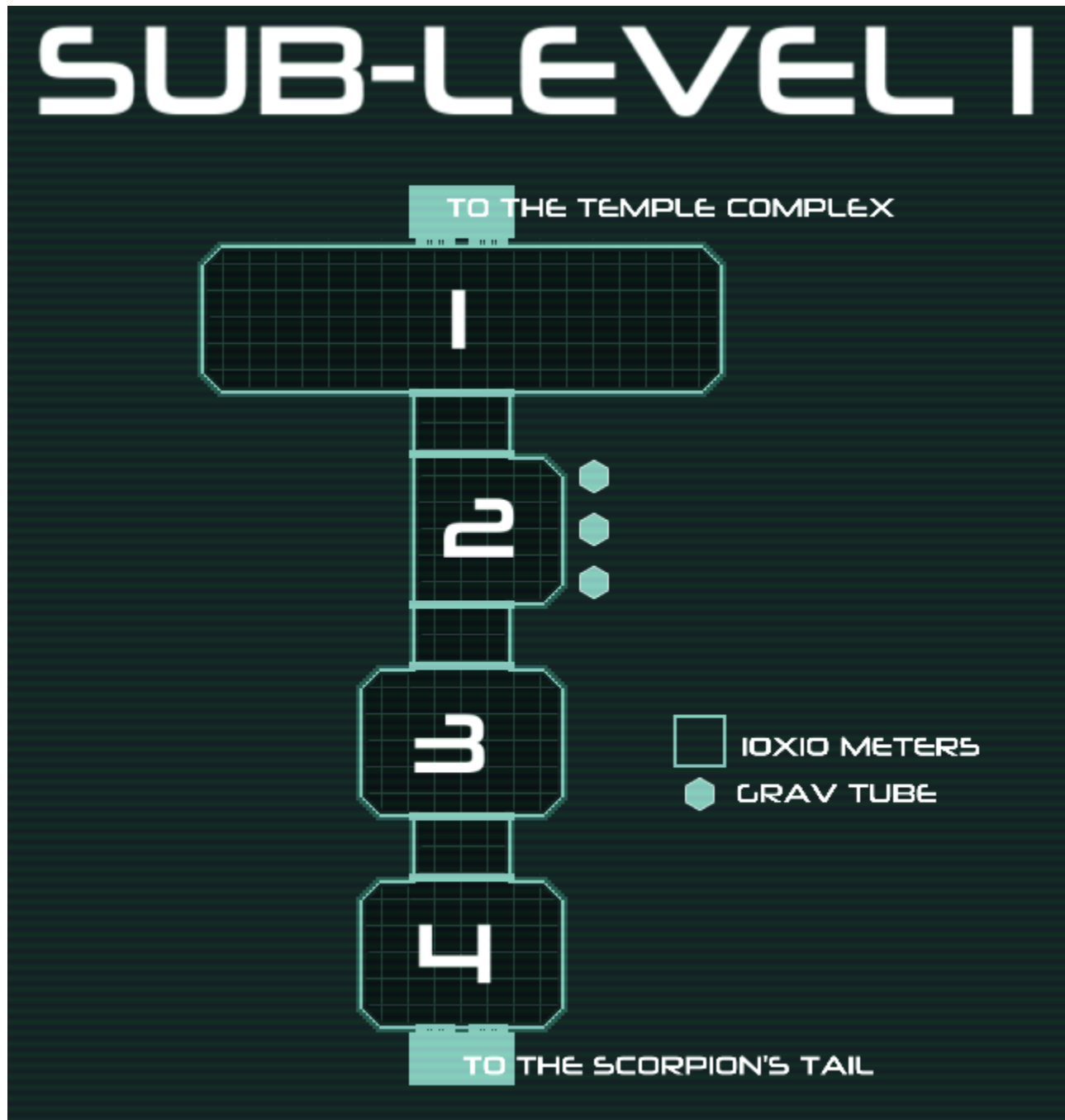
Oh, there's a Flute sitting in the command chair.

In the back corners of the room, two staircases descend downward a few steps before turning hard left and then hard left again. They both empty into a five by ten meter anteroom, half of which is another floating metal plate serving as a lift down to the first sublevel. Dealer's choice if the lift is up or down. If it's down, the PCs will need a flute to bring it back or find another way to traverse the sheer fifty meter drop. Of course, the platform will come back up 30 seconds after someone steps on it, so that could create a dangerous situation!

Sub-Level 1.

Sub-Level 1 is the first level of the Engineer laboratory, and two enormous doors are at either end. One leads into the temple complex and the other to the docking collar, "The Scorpion's Tail". The entire complex is made of metal

and gray stone. You've seen Prometheus, right? You know how to describe it. There are four main rooms, and they've all been compartmentalized from each other with blast doors. Unfortunately, our Engineers didn't realize the Xenomorphs very DNA would open the doors for them!



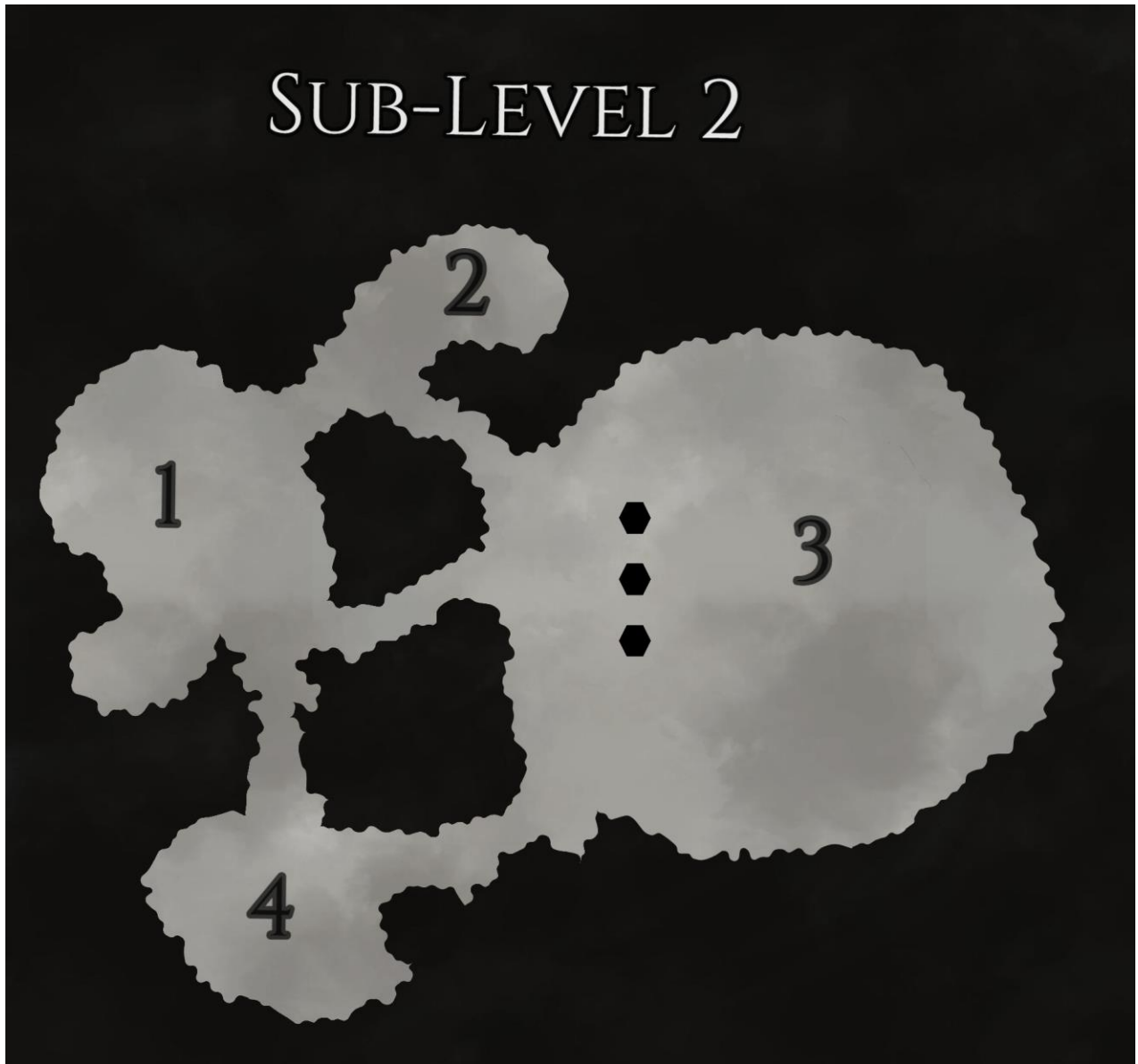
1. **The Archives.** The door from the Temple Complex opens into a massive 120 x 30 meter wide room, filled with Engineer computer stations. This room contains the entire recorded history of the outpost, including all their scientific experiments and findings. Of course, the fall of the outpost is recorded as well. If the PCs manage to access it with a Flute, ghostly apparitions, holograms will re-enact any point of history they wish (or manage) to view. The PCs cannot simply click "Download All" here. There is far more data recorded here than will fit on all their recording devices, PDATs, and even their ship's hard drives.

2. **Observation Deck.** Thirty meters square, the eastern side of this room is a balcony that overlooks **The Temporal Nexus** (see below) and provides access to Sub-Level 2 fifty meters below. The western side of the room looks like it once stored pressure suits, as the alcoves for them are not too dissimilar to those humans use. There are five empty alcoves. Next to these are what curiously looks like a weapon rack, but again, it is empty. A simple Observation Check would probably reveal the nature of the alcoves and rack. There is another piece of mind-bending technology here. The PCs will likely want to get to the lower level, probably with a grapple gun and rappel down. If a PC looks down to the lower level, they will see three hexagonal plates on the floor. If someone climbs over the rail above one of these plates, they're immediately pulled down below and vice versa. Have any PC using it make a Mobility check or stumble and fall when they "land", taking one point of damage, and forego any additional checks once they pass one. Either way, this should make for some interesting shenanigans, and keep in mind your Stress and Madness!
3. **Temporal Anomaly Chamber.** This defunct chamber has the original time displacement equipment, though it is now inoperational. A circular metal plate shaped like a roulette wheel is set into the floor with a center "spot" that created the time displacements. It is no longer functional, but the success of these first experiments led the Engineers to make the **Nexus**.
4. **The Chamber of Shadows.** This 40 meter wide, 30 meter deep room is the first sign of destruction in the entire outpost. It was once the control center for the Anomaly Chamber, but all the computer interfaces have been destroyed by a mix of Singularity Paddle fire and Xenomorph acid blood. Mummified Xenomorph and Engineer corpses litter the room, and all of them simply crumble to dust if slightly disturbed. A single light touch or even an air current by a passing PC will cause this. The Engineers have had parts of them eaten away by something caustic, have horrible puncture wounds in their heads and chests, or simply terrible and deadly claw marks on their biosuits. The Xenomorphs, their black chitinous carapaces now faded to dull gray, are missing limbs or have huge gaping holes blasted through their torsos or oblong craniums. Besides all the Madness and Stress inducing carnage, the only thing of any use is a Singularity Paddle with 3 Power left, still in the dead hands of the Engineer that used it. As a side note, this would be a wonderful opportunity to have a time anomaly shunt a scene overlaying the carnage. The PCs could watch in horror for ten or twenty seconds as shadowed forms engage in combat, all the while the real Xenomorph is preparing to strike!

Sub-Level 2.

Yet more horrors await the PCs on the lower level, which appears to be a natural cave system that has been smoothed away by the work of alien hands. There are four chambers that concern us here.

SUB-LEVEL 2



1. **The Nest and Hatchery.** About halfway into any of the three passages that lead to this chamber, the smoothed, natural rock passageways will give way to hard black resin. It coats every surface – floor, ceiling, walls – and it is very brittle to the touch. This Xenomorphic residue has been here for billions of years. The main cave itself is full of eggs. Hundreds of petrified Ovomorphs are here, turned so by the ages of time, and they are completely inert. Of course, a particularly evil GM could have a time displacement effect drop a live one into the chamber. In the back part of the cave, the PCs will find fresh, strong resin where our Stalker friend calls home. If any PCs have been captured, they will be cocooned here for Ovomorphing. Dealer's Choice on whether the process has started or not.
2. **The Engineer Laboratory.** Clear jars or vats, not unlike those found in a human biology laboratory, line the walls of this chamber. Inside them are Xenomorphs of all stages, dead, preserved and partially dissected. There are even two Engineer corpses in the vats as well, their chests exploded outward by something incomprehensible. A metal 2 x 3 meter metal table sits in the middle of the room, and a large metal apparatus hangs from the cave ceiling above, ancient knives and other appliances of unknown use awaiting a specimen.

3. **The Temporal Nexus.** This is the heart of the time displacements. A dish like that in Room 3 above, though 70 meters in diameter fills the room. Every so often, the “time spout” seems to almost blow a bubble before it is shot off in some random direction. Every time this happens, the cavern shakes for a couple of seconds. The control panels that operate the device have been destroyed, melted into slag by Xenomorph blood. There is no way to shut down the machine.
4. **The Reactor Room.** The PCs enter this room to find a miniature star twenty meters in diameter hovering here, held in a sort of stasis by impenetrable force fields. This powers the entire complex, and it produces at least ten times more power than the PCs’ own ship’s reactor. It is possible that the PCs could learn how to manipulate this, with proper usage of a Flute of course, though learning the technology would take more time and brainpower than they have available. However, learning how to lower the forcefields and cause the sun to overload and destroy everything might be much easier!