



WHISPERS OF THE COSMIC WITCH

A ONE SHOT FOR ALIEN RPG
ADAPTED FROM H.P. LOVECRAFT'S
"DREAMS IN THE WITCH HOUSE"

ADAPTED BY
MARTIN V. PARECE II

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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!

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

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 11.05.23 – 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!

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WARNINGS!!

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

AS PART OF *THE UNIVERSE OF MADNESS* CYCLE, THIS SCENARIO CONTINUES ON WITH MY NEW MADNESS MECHANIC. 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 second 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 includes 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.

Whispers of the Cosmic Witch uses 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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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. It is still experimental and not readily available across the galaxy.

NOTE: For the purpose of Whispers of the Cosmic Witch, anyone who reaches 7 Madness (Insanity) is fully under the sway of the Witch. They are part of the cult, acting generally normal in most cases, but working towards the end of releasing her into the world whenever possible. If this happens to a PC, the character becomes an NPC, unless you're sure of two things:

- 1. The player is fully capable of playing this out without betraying the story.**
- 2. The other players will not resent the traitorous player or will in fact embrace it in the spirit of the game. Know your players!**

STORYTELLING — ALIEN AND LOVECRAFT

As with *The Stalker out of Time*, this scenario will push you to be your best as a storyteller. The impending, slow burn dread of Lovecraft combined with the stressful anxiety of Alien is an integral part of the *Universe of Madness* cycle, and it's time to be on your "A Game". If you pull this off, your players may just go home with nightmares, and what could be a higher complement?

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

Located at -6 Rimward and -4 Trailward, the United Americas colonized LV-371 some four years ago in 2130 as a joint venture with Argent Mining Co. A small planet in the goldilocks zone, it supports human life perfectly with no need at all for life support systems, and early surveys showed it had high potential for various rare minerals and metals. At the edge of the Frontier, the colony has grown very little with a population of about a hundred. Featuring a hand full of permanent families and Argent company people, most of the colony population consists of roughnecks on six month rotation.

About two months ago, Dr. Thaddeus Blackwood, the colony physician, noted a sudden rash of colonists and workers complaining of massive migraines and inability to sleep. As the complaints grew in number and severity, he began to hypothesize that mining operations might have caused a chemical or toxic mineral to leach into the colony freshwater supply.

He sent his first report of the incidents to the UA when Mr. Marcus Kline, colony head and Argent Mining Co employee, essentially brushed off and disregarded his concerns. Then the first disappearance occurred, starting with a man named Max Sullivan one of the first to complain of the mysterious symptoms. He was not the only one to go missing. A day later, Dr. Blackwood sent another message asking for help from Colonial Admin as he too had begun to have terrible headaches after awaking from a vivid nightmare he couldn't recall. It was the last message that he sent, and when Colonial Admin attempted to contact him, they discovered that he too had disappeared.

Meanwhile, mineral production has all but stopped. The last freighter returned from LV-371 at less than 20% capacity.

UACA has put your team together to investigate whatever is happening down on LV-371. Resolve the public health crisis, get the production back online, and find any missing personnel.

Your shuttle sets down easy on the landing pad about a kilometer from the colony, and the pilot comes over the intercom, "Thanks for flying the friendly skies. It's a sunny, beautiful 22 degrees Celsius, and the colony has a tractor coming to pick you up. Please remember to grab your luggage from the overhead compartments."

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON (GM ONLY)

Oh, if only it was that easy...

The mining operation started a new tunnel and broke into a large cave, but they quickly discovered that it wasn't a naturally occurring cave at all. Perfectly circular excluding one lateral wall and thirty meters across, four meter tall stone heads lined the wall, their lifeless eyes all directed toward the center of the room. In the center sat an alien device on an apparently indigenous stone stanchion. It glowed with a soft red light, emanating from what appeared to be a spherical ruby the size of a basketball, wrapped in bands of an unknown metal alloy. When touched, red brilliance exploded across the cavern illuminating a mural of some terrifying creature, vaguely feminine and standing as if crucified. Directly opposite the mural was a passage leading into the cavern, but its ceiling had long ago collapsed.

Of course, Mr. Kline had been informed, and he immediately ordered everyone out and had the area closed off. The device was packed up for study. He introduced a moratorium on any discussion of the findings, putting those who were there on an NDA threatening loss of all income, contracts, and a lawsuit. He also shut down all extra-colony comms, leaving only his terminal and Dr. Blackwood's capable of sending messages.

That night, several of the men present had terribly vivid dreams and nightmares, though many of them shrugged it off due to stress and shock of the discovery. In touching the device and causing it to activate, Max Sullivan awakened the Cosmic Witch, and she wants out of her prison. Billions of years ago, Engineers placed an XX121 Queen in an interdimensional prison that shares the same space as the mural. She is no ordinary Queen, but of a genetically modified stock with extreme intelligence and mental capabilities. With the link between dimensions active and the membrane growing thin, she broadcasts her thoughts to the colonists of LV-371 almost constantly. They manifest in wonderful nightmares and horrific dreams, causing undue amounts of stress and mental health issues among the colonists.

Driving many toward various mental disorders and neuroses, the Cosmic Witch has managed something else. She has managed to bend Mr. Kline to her will, and he now secretly worships her as a goddess. Many other colonists have fallen in line, and they too worship her in the shadows. Through the dreams, she has imparted enough knowledge to Kline to allow him to use the artifact, and that is when the disappearances began as the cult started sacrificing colonists to it. The queen balances this carefully. She needs the energies of the sacrificed colonists to power the artifact to let her into the universe, but she also needs as many alive as possible to provide hosts for her children. From there, it's as simple as keeping enough colonists alive long enough to spread across the universe the way only XX121 can.

LV-371 has a moon that shifts through its phases not unlike Earth's, though it stays full for three full nights. At this time, the membrane into the prison dimension is at its thinnest. Dr. Blackwood, Max Sullivan, and Connie Nielsen were sacrificed during the full moon last month, and the Cosmic Witch needs only three more sacrifices to bridge the gap. The artifact can only absorb the energy of one person per day, so the third night of the full

moon is it! The clock is ticking! The PCs must find enough information to connect all the dots in time to stop Kline, and Heaven help them if they don't do so before the Cosmic Witch enters our universe!

TRACKING TIME

LV-371 operates on four shifts just like Earth (Morning, Day, Evening, Night) the scenario starts with the PCs landing at the end of the of the Day shift on the first night of the full moon. This gives them a full Evening shift to investigate before nightfall, and the colony all but shuts down. It is very important to keep track of time. If the PCs don't stop Kline and his cultists, the Queen will come through when the last sacrifice is made during the Night shift of the third day during the final full moon.

THE DREAMS

When our PCs go to sleep, they will be subjected to the same dreams as the colonists. Have each PC make a straight Empathy check (no stress, cannot push). Anyone who doesn't achieve at least one success will have their dreams invaded by the Cosmic Witch. Several dreams have been provided, and please feel absolutely free to incorporate your own. Before play starts, you may even ask each player what their character's biggest nightmare is and then riff off of that or a key characteristic in their bio! Any PC subjected to one of the Witch's whispers will gain a point of Madness. Additionally, they will be considered Exhausted and unable to relieve Stress without pharmacological help or a solid Shift of sleep. Of course, sleep brings back the nightmares. The few doses of Naproleve and NeuroTic they have will become a precious resource!

Do not narrate each PC's dream for them but instead offer it as a handout. This should heighten the terror (or Stress or Madness *evil grin*) when the PCs realize they're having the same dreams! Also, some of the dreams are customized for specific PCs. Keep in mind that one PC does have a Neuro Visor, which for the purpose of this scenario operates on anyone whether in stasis or not.

The dream handouts can be found at the end of the scenario for ease of printing and distribution, and there is one for each night. Should the PCs make it to the Night 3 dream, they will awaken less than an hour into the Night shift, with only perhaps an hour before Kline and the cultists make the final sacrifice.

You may have PCs that constantly try to take a Shift to sleep, hoping to rid themselves of the Stress and Exhausted effects. Every time the PCs sleep, the Cosmic Witch invades their dreams. If you run out of dream sequences,

you can always just hit them with something like, “You wake up screaming, your clothes soaked with sweat. You realize you’re awake, and the nightmare fades away immediately, though your heart still thuds painfully in your chest.”

One last note about the dreams – every time a PC wakes from one of the dreams, have them make a straight Wits check (no stress, no pushing). If the check yields no successes, the PC cannot remember the details of the dream, only that he/she had one and maybe some flashes of scenes or feelings. Most of the colonists, excluding the cultists, are in this situation, their mental state having degraded so that they cannot remember any details about the dreams. The cultists, on the other hand, remember each dream distinctly in great detail, and they almost revel in each one they have!

THE ARTIFACT

Kline returned the artifact to his own quarters and spent a substantial amount of time studying it. While no scientist, he really is quite bright. His study of the artifact and the conclusions he came to, partially put there by the Cosmic Witch, brought him to 7 Madness far faster than the rest of the colonists, who had only the dreams to contend with. He knew the artifact must be returned to the cave, because it was there the Cosmic Witch would cross into our universe. He also knew that was where the sacrifices must take place.

Should the PCs somehow happen across the artifact before the final confrontation, they too will have to confront Madness as they begin to study it. While a touch for just a mere second is not enough to truly activate the device, it will draw the attention of the Cosmic Witch to whomever does so, and she will then focus her dreams more intently on that person, causing each dream to increase the Madness by 2 instead of 1.

The artifact has Armor 4 from the unknown alloy wrapping the ruby, and it can take 5 points of damage before the giant ruby shatters.

THE PLAYER CHARACTERS

LAURA REYNOLDS

UNITED AMERICAS COLONY ADMINISTRATION



STRENGTH 3

AGILITY 3

WITS 4

- Comtech 3
- Observation 3

EMPATHY 4

- Command 1
- Manipulation 3

Gear:

- Leather briefcase
- Hand radio
- Priority transmitter access card
- 4 doses of Naproleve

Talent: Cunning

Signature Item: One of your daughter's hairclips.

Humankind must expand into the galaxy; our survival depends on it. Earth has become too populated, too polluted, and resources too scarce. War between the major powers loomed constantly as competition for this scarcity of land, minerals, and food pushed them toward the edge, but space solves all of those problems. With the advent of FTL drives by Weyland Corporation several decades ago, human beings no longer have to fight each other. There's enough out there for everyone. Your true and ardent belief in this led you to joining the United Americas Colonial Administration, and your dedication meant a quickly ascending career. Now you're a Senior Administrator, overseeing a dozen colonies. Your ex-husband, Will, didn't agree with you, and he wasn't willing to go any further than the Martian colonies. Moreover, he put his foot down about you taking your daughter Gillian out into the great unknown, where death could happen a thousand unknown ways in mere seconds. In the divorce a year ago, he sued you for custody, stating that if you wouldn't stay on Earth or Mars, you had no right to take Gillian out there with you. It was your choice to pursue this dream, and his lawyers argued that you could easily take a job in the Sol System, therefore not putting your daughter in harm's way. You were surprised at how vehemently they argued the point, and you were unprepared for the case. The judge sided with Will.

You can fix it though, just like you fix everything. Fix LV-371, and it's another notch in your size 24 belt. Before long, you'll be running fifty colonies, and then after that, you'll make it to the upper echelons of Colonial Administration. That means a posh, secure position in the high rises on Earth and getting your daughter back. Maybe Will, too.

You admit to being worried about that Marshal Anderson – she seems like she's used to being in charge, and her job is just to determine if a crime has been committed. She'll try to take control of the investigation, and so far, this is not a criminal matter.

Buddy: Dr. Michael Chambers

Rival: Marshall Sarah "Sarge" Anderson

Personal Agenda: Figure out what the hell is going on down there, fix it, and get the colony back on track.

DR. ELIZABETH SANCHEZ
WEYLAND-YUTANI PSYCHOLOGIST



STRENGTH 2

AGILITY 3

WITS 5

- Comtech 2
- Observation 3
- Survival 2

EMPATHY 4

- Command 1
- Manipulation 1
- Medical Aid 1

Gear:

- P-Dat
- Neuro Visor
- Personal Data Transmitter
- 3 Doses NeuroTic

Talent: Inquisitive

Signature Item: A gold plated pen – your 10 year anniversary gift from Weyland-Yutani.

You're on loan from Weyland-Yutani to Argent Mining for this mission. Argent has a substantial operation across the Frontier, and take a guess who their number one customer is. Wey-Yu needs massive amounts of minerals and ores for all of their building and research projects. FTL drives, high tech AI computer systems, and the new Atmo Processors require extraordinary investments of both dollars and materials, and Argent's supply capabilities are of the utmost importance. Colonial Administration wanted someone with a strong scientific background in psychology, especially as related to dreams, and Wey-Yu was more than happy to volunteer you in the name of cooperation.

On the surface, you don't know why you've been assigned to accompany Laura Reynolds, a doctor, and two marshals, but truthfully, you know that Wey-Yu execs know more about what's going on here. They didn't tell you much, but they believe the mining operation uncovered an alien artifact of some kind that is affecting the colonists. And where there's one, there's another and another. If this is something that can be somehow leveraged or even claimed by Weyland-Yutani, the boost to your career is immeasurable.

Buddy: You don't really have one, but that Deputy Marshall Mitchell seems eager to please

Rival: Dr. Michael Chambers

Personal Agenda: Find out what alien technology or artifacts have been found by the colony, and somehow claim it for Weyland-Yutani.

DR. MICHAEL CHAMBERS
MEDICAL DOCTOR



STRENGTH 2

AGILITY 3

- Mobility 2

WITS 4

- Observation 3
- Survival 1

EMPATHY 5

- Manipulation 1
- Medical Aid 3

Gear:

- Surgical Kit
- Medkit
- 4 Doses Naproleve
- Samani E-Series Watch

Talent: Calming Presence

Signature Item: The Samani watch your dad gave you when you finished your residency.

You hate space, you hate ships, and you hate strange new worlds. But you love helping people. You could've stayed on Earth, but Laura convinced you through her belief in and vision of a better world convinced you that Colonial Admin needed you on the Frontier. Your parents hated to see you leave, but they understood and supported you. Within a week of completing your residency, you were out on a transport to the Frontier. After a couple years, you found yourself posted on New Gateway with Laura where she is an Administrator over a dozen colonies. You think she probably requested you herself.

You've been fully briefed on Dr. Blackwood's reports from LV-371, and you think his concerns about the mining process are probably to blame for the odd symptoms. Regardless, Laura needs your help, and more importantly, the people on LV-371 need your help. You're a little concerned about Colonial Administration's need to send marshals, but that Wey-Yu psychologist really worries you. You've never seen anything from any of the companies that suggests they care about anything other than the bottom line. You're sure Laura will keep everything under control, as she usually does.

Buddy: Administrator Laura Reynolds

Rival: Dr. Elizabeth Sanchez

Personal Agenda: All that matters is helping these people, whatever it takes.

MARSHALL SARAH "SARGE" ANDERSON

COLONIAL MARSHAL



Talent: Subdue

Signature Item: An antique pill bottle you keep your stash in.

You've been on the job for thirty years, and you're about ready to retire. When the CMB began, there weren't exactly a ton of people signing up. After all, it was purported to be a thankless job with bad pay, worse food, and even worse accommodations. On top of that, no one in the colonies is ever happy to see a marshal coming through, especially the junior administrators who view their own little shithole as their kingdom. But you signed up immediately, because it was a chance to escape the Chicago slums and Earth.

Back then, Marshals didn't need fancy degrees or huge amounts of electronics knowhow. You needed only to be reasonably quick, reasonably tough, a decent shot, and know the law. Well-rounded so you could adapt. Everything was cut and dry, white and black, but as the years went by, the criminals and their crimes got more complex. It's all so far beyond some guy leaving his wife for dead in an alien canyon or sabotaging a rival's air supply. Now you've got to know everything about computers to find the administrator skimming or where the comms technician sabotaged the cameras to look like a normal system outage so whatever he did wasn't recorded.

That's okay, you're ready. This guy Slick represents the new generation. He's smart, knows a lot about a lot, and he and people like him will help carry the CMB into the second half of the 22nd century. They always said to get promoted, you need to find your replacement, and this guy might be it. He's a little full of himself, but that's okay.

Meanwhile, you know you're gonna have a dustup with that Administrator. She doesn't understand that Colonial Administration put marshals on this mission for a reason. It's an investigation, and it's your responsibility to investigate.

Buddy: Marshal Jerry "Slick" Mitchell

Rival: Administrator Laura Reynolds

Personal Agenda: Whatever's going on here, get it sorted out, and if a crime has been committed, bring the perpetrators to justice.

STRENGTH 4

- Close Combat 1

AGILITY 3

- Mobility 1
- Ranged Combat 3

WITS 4

- Observation 2

EMPATHY 3

- Command 1
- Manipulation 2

Gear:

- Shotgun w/ 2 reloads
- Hi-beam Flashlight
- Personal Medkit
- 6 Neversleep pills

JERRY "SLICK" MITCHELL
DEPUTY MARSHAL



STRENGTH 4

- Close Combat 1
- Heavy Machinery 1

AGILITY 4

- Mobility 1
- Ranged Combat 2

WITS 4

- Comtech 1
- Observation 3
- Survival 1

EMPATHY 2

Gear:

- .357 Magnum w/ 2 reloads
- Hi-beam Flashlight
- Stun baton
- Hand radio

Talent: Investigator

Signature Item: A large coin that always lands heads up.

You're smart, you're quick, you're strong, and you're awesome. And everyone knows it, because you make sure they do. You got your Associates in Criminal Justice, and immediately went into the Colonial Marshal's Bureau. You've skyrocketed through the ranks because of quality investigative skills and the fact that you're great at everything. Human relations? Surveillance? Luck? Precision? Electronics? They're your specialty. You rock at everything.

You suppose not everyone loves you, and you don't know why. But that's not your problem. They're just jealous of you. Or maybe they're envious. You don't remember the difference, and it doesn't matter. You're just going to keep being incredible.

Sarge seems to appreciate you and your work, and she's the key to the next step in your career. She thinks you're awesome, and if you can keep her thinking that, she'll put you in for her spot when she retires.

Buddy: Marshal Sarah "Sarge" Anderson

Rival: You don't really have one. Everyone loves you!

Personal Agenda: Do everything you can to help Sarge and keep her impressed. A top notch review from her, and you're making full Marshal.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

The colony complex on LV-371 is populated by about a hundred people, most of them working adults and roughnecks, but there are a few families. Every potential NPC is not represented here, but there are a few that will play key parts in the narrative. Beyond these, you may wish to flesh out a handful more just to have them handy, especially if you need backup PCs. *evil grin*

Keep in mind that almost every single man, woman, and child on LV-371 is suffering from some form of Madness. It may be one of the milder levels, or something more severe, but all of the colonists should be role-played with a degree of eccentricity, paranoia, or general bizarre personality traits.

Except the cultists. About thirty of the colonists are part of the cult, having reached Madness 7 under the loving ministrations of the Cosmic Witch's whispers. They have lost all of the side effects of Madness, appearing as perfectly normal human beings, which should misdirect our intrepid PCs nicely. However, when they are in the throes of their cultism, enjoying the ecstasy of their newfound love for the Cosmic Witch, they regain the +3 cumulative bonus to Strength and Agility and the -3 to Wits and Empathy. They are also completely immune to Manipulation or Command by anyone other than Kline. This also means that the PCs will NOT be able to catch them in a lie. If the PCs question a cult member, try to couch any answers so that they're true from a certain point of view.

MARCUS KLINE COLONY MANAGER LV-371, ARGENT MINING CO



- STRENGTH 3 (6)
- Heavy Machinery 1
- AGILITY 3 (6)
- WITS 5 (2)
- Comtech 3
 - Observation 3
- EMPATHY 3 (0)
- Command 1
 - Manipulation 3

Gear: Whatever you need him to have.

Talent: Take Control

Mr. Kline is a good project manager, an asset to Mining Argent. He has always been able to juggle the needs and objectives of the company with the desires and expectations of its employees and contractors, often at the expense of his own personal life. As such, he has never married or had a family, having left all his relatives behind in the Sol System. Upon discovery of the cave and the artifact, he immediately took possession of it, and therefore was the first to fall under the Cosmic Witch's spell. He will do anything to bring her into the universe, which he fully intends to do, no matter who he has to sacrifice to do it. If the PCs poke around too much, he'll seek to capture one of them. He knows that, eventually, they will all become the Cosmic Witch's children, but she will need him in his present form for quite some time. Coming into the universe is one thing but leaving LV-371 is another. Once he has made it so she can spread the love for her progeny across the galaxy, he knows she will allow him to join her.

Kline will profess no knowledge of Dr. Blackwood's whereabouts or either of the other two missing colonists. He'll shrug it off and say people disappear all the time in any populated area. He doesn't know why, and he doesn't have the resources to mount an investigation. If questioned about the low production of the mining operation, he'll claim their mines went dry, and they're currently prospecting for new veins. The truth is that he shut down the existing mines, declaring them useless, so no one other than the cultists would stumble onto more evidence of the Cosmic Witch or other alien artifacts.

Kline should be played as a busy, busy man, with technicians, roughnecks, low level managers, and all sorts of colonists vying for his time. He will publicly welcome the PCs' help while using his cultists to keep a close, close eye on them.

MARIA TORRES REGISTERED NURSE



STRENGTH 3

- Stamina 2

AGILITY 4

- Mobility 2

WITS 3

- Observation 3

EMPATHY 4

- Medical Aid 3

Gear: A scalpel (+0, Damage 2) and whatever else you need her to have, probably basic medical supplies.

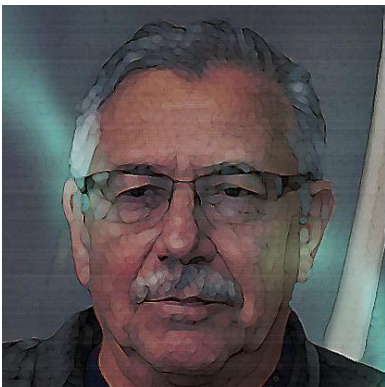
Talent: Field Surgeon

Before his disappearance, Maria helped Dr. Blackwood in the colony medbay, alternating shifts with him so that they could each manage just a little time off the clock. Of course, that all changed as soon as he went missing. She is terribly worried about him, the other two missing colonists, and the colony as a whole, but her inquiries have been stopped cold by Mr. Kline, who has not so gently suggested that she's buying into the hysteria.

Unfortunately, this may seem true to the PCs. Maria is at 3 Madness, causing a number of side effects. The right corner of her mouth often ticks upward as she's talking, especially when the subject is something that makes her anxious. Her normally outgoing, almost boisterous personality has been amplified to the point that she is almost yelling anytime she speaks with someone. Any time she is in the medbay, she will be compulsively opening the surgical kit, checking and doublechecking its contents, before closing it and starting over.

She knows nothing about the cult or the artifact, but she has been having the same dreams and nightmares as everyone else. She knows something is wrong, suspects that Kline has something to do with it, but in her compromised mental condition, she should come off as paranoid or hysterical.

TOBIAS MCCAFFREY LEAD MINING ROUGHNECK



STRENGTH 5 (8)

- Close Combat 3
- Heavy Machinery 3
- Stamina 3

AGILITY 4 (7)

- Ranged Combat 1

WITS 3 (0)

EMPATHY 2 (0)

Gear: Whatever you need him to have, but probably a lot of tools.

Talent: Resilient

Tobias currently runs the mining operation, and he answers directly to Kline. He always disliked Max Sullivan, since the guy always put the workers and the union before the company, and he cannot be more thrilled that Sullivan ended up the first sacrifice to the Cosmic Witch, ridding the world of both a troublemaker and advancing her emergence! He will never speak highly of Sullivan, and he appears highly committed to Argent Mining and its operations here. If interviewed about the lack of production, he'll blame Sullivan's shit performance and his lack of discipline regarding the workers. He'll say the man knew the mines were running dry and didn't bother to prospect elsewhere. Now they're rushing to catch up, and Tobias doesn't know if he will ever make up the deficit! When actively under the Cosmic Witch's spell, Tobias acts swiftly and without remorse, almost as a mindless automaton! He is often found in Ore Processing or the Vehicle Depot.

JENNY NIELSEN MISSING COLONIST'S DAUGHTER



STRENGTH 2

AGILITY 4

- Mobility 3

WITS 4

- Comtech 1
- Observation 3
- Survival 2

EMPATHY 4

- Manipulation 1

Gear: Whatever you need her to have, but probably nothing useful.

Talent: Dodge

Jenny has been staying with a neighbor named Meghan Clark for a month now, ever since her mother Connie went missing. While she too is subject to the dreams, she has avoided most of the effects of Madness, having only an extraordinarily amplified fear of the dark. She is uncomfortable in her neighbor's home (who is a cultist assigned by Kline to keep an eye on her, and often crawls under her borrowed bed or even backs into the corner of a closet to sleep. Quick and smart, she knows something is wrong in the colony, and she knows her mother knew it, too. In fact, her mom had just been talking about it to Meghan the day she disappeared. If Meghan hears her say anything of the sort, she'll admonish Jenny by saying, "Now Jenny, don't go spreading those kinds of things."

CHRISTY SULLIVAN MAX'S WIFE



STRENGTH 5 (6)

- Close Combat 2
- Heavy Machinery 1
- Stamina 3

AGILITY 3 (6)

- Mobility 1
- Ranged Combat 3

WITS 3 (2)

EMPATHY 3 (2)

Gear: Whatever you need her to have, but she keeps a pulse rifle under the bed!

Talent: Banter

Christy met Max when she was on tour with the Colonial Marines on a humanitarian aid mission to his colony. They hit it off, and as soon as her time was up, she came back to him. He got her a Roughneck job with the union, and before long they married. That was six years ago. The union brought them to LV-371. Christy has no idea what Max saw down in the mines, only that he had to sign an NDA about it. He wouldn't even tell her for fear that they were somehow bugged and would lose everything if he blabbed.

She has reached 4 Madness and is suffering from it. She is inordinately aggressive, has severe trouble focusing on anything for long, and has a tendency to tell extremely inappropriate jokes at the wrong times. She has been released from duty for now and spends her nights searching for Max with her pulse rifle throughout the colony and beyond the walls.

DOT SYNTHETIC BARTENDER



STRENGTH 7

- Heavy Machinery 3

AGILITY 8

- Piloting 3
- Ranged Combat 1

WITS 3

- Comtech 3

EMPATHY 2

Gear: Really not much of anything.

Talent: Bypass

Dot is an old model synthetic originally purchased by Argent Mining from Hyperdyne as a support unit for off world mining operations. She is proficient in all sorts of equipment usage and repair, electronics, as well as piloting or driving a wide range of vehicles. Unfortunately, as such an early model android, she is also easily damaged, and as rumors of android malfunctions with potentially deadly consequences began to make their way through the Frontier, less people wanted to work with her. Argent eventually moved her to a bartender's position, since they know keeping a bar on site helps keep the colonists calm.

Dot has an oddly unsettling personality, and her body, head, and face move very mechanically. Her smile is constant, ever present, and unnerves many people. She is almost incapable of reading human emotions or moods and takes statements literally. She knows nothing about what is going on, and if she is asked if she has noticed anyone acting oddly, she'll answer, "Humans always act oddly."

As an older model, she has no behavioral inhibitors that prevent her from harming humans, though why would she want to do such a thing? Also, due to the older design and lower quality components, she receives a Critical Hit on the android table any time she takes damage.

ROUGHNECK CULTISTS

STRENGTH 4 (7)

- Close Combat 3

AGILITY 4 (7)

- Ranged Combat 1

WITS 3 (0)

EMPATHY 3 (0)

Gear: May be armed with weapons from the arms locker in Admin, with a tool (Improvised Club +0, 2 Dmg), a cutting torch, or bolt gun.

NON-ROUGHNECK CULTISTS

STRENGTH 3 (6)

- Close Combat 1

AGILITY 3 (6)

- Ranged Combat 1

WITS 4 (1)

EMPATHY 4 (1)

Gear: May be armed with weapons from the arms locker in Admin, with an Improvised Club (+0, 2 Dmg), or not at all (basic punch, 1 damage per success).

Other skills the cultists have are generally unimportant and should be handled as part of the narrative. Roughnecks, when actively involved in cult activities will act as automatons and follow orders to the letter with no will of their own or spark of life.

THE INVESTIGATION

When the PCs are picked up from the landing pad, the tractor driver will inform them that he is taking them straight to Mr. Kline. Kline will appear happy to have the help investigating the disappearances, but will not offer much in the way of information. He will explain that the first to vanish was Max Sullivan, a union man and the head roughneck in charge of the mining operations. Sullivan lived in habitation with his wife. The second was a woman named Connie Nielsen who left behind a ten year old daughter, and Dr. Blackwood was the final disappearance. It seems the three disappearances occurred on three consecutive nights a month ago. He will not mention the full moon, but if the PCs ever bring it up to him, he'll at first act surprised and then scoff at the apparent superstition. He has launched no investigation into the disappearances, because he has no resources to do so, but it is known that all three people seemed to be suffering from mental health issues. These things happen, especially on the Frontier, but the United Americas lose something like 3 million people every year, many of whom are never found.

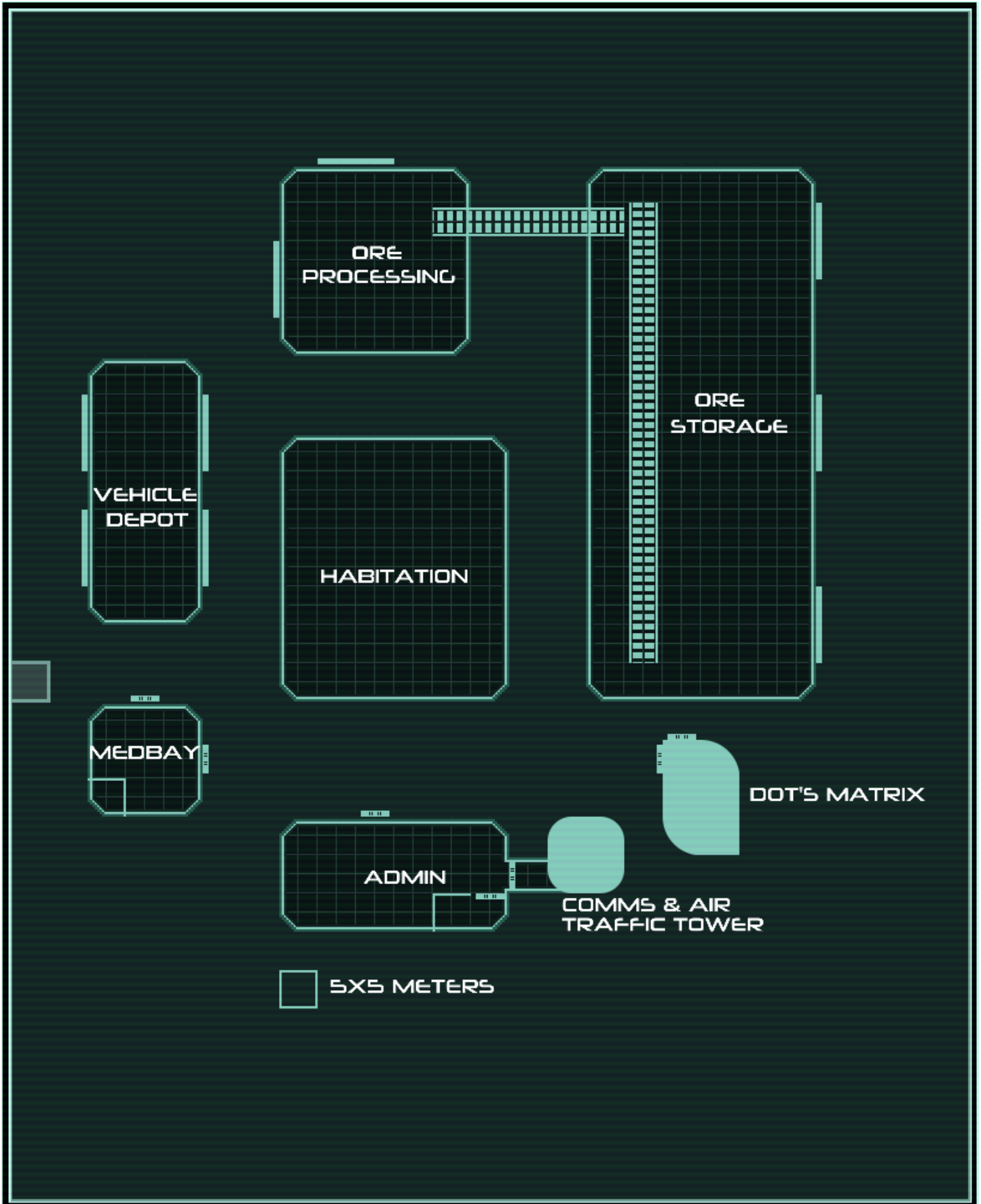
This should at least get the PCs started, but they will no doubt find the entire affair very frustrating, as no one seems to know or volunteer any information. They will likely find small pieces of information, circle back around to Kline or other NPCs to confirm them, and again find themselves at a dead end. In the end, it is hacking Kline's terminal that will give them what they need.

EVENTS

There are certain things that **MUST** happen during this scenario, and other optional events. Use any or all from the list below and certainly add any of your own!

- After their first night, a commotion wakes the PCs, and they discover that another colonist is apparently missing. The PCs may even get blamed just for virtue of showing up at the wrong time!
- After their second night, another colonist has disappeared, and if the colony wasn't blaming the PCs for this already, they certainly are now. Kline's people are quietly pushing the narrative that it's the PCs' fault.
- On every Night shift, Kline and his people gather in the cavern to sacrifice one of the colonists (or PC! *evil grin*). The PCs may interrupt this (see Final Confrontation).
- Every time the PCs try to sleep, they're subjected to the Cosmic Witch's whispers, the dreams that drive them mad.
- (Optional) A PC who is left alone or separated from the group is accosted by several of the witch's children. Perhaps he/she fights them off or escapes, but more likely the PC is abducted to be the final sacrifice. This could also happen at night when the PCs are asleep.
- (Optional) If the PCs decide to leave before solving the mystery, they find their ship sabotaged and their pilot missing!
- (Optional, if the PCs are well and truly stuck) A PC awakens from one of their dreams to find a dark form hovering over them in the night. The PC makes an immediate panic roll, and regardless of the outcome, the dark figure runs out the door and into Habitation. The PC never finds the person, but they do find a handwritten note saying, "Kline is the firstborn." This figure has somehow regained some sense of sanity, just enough lucidity to try to give the PCs a lead. While Kline will never break under interrogation, this should tell the PCs they need to look deeper into him.

THE COLONY



Admin

About a dozen junior managers work in cubicles in this 30 x 15 meter building. A door to the east leads to the Comms & Air Traffic Tower, and Kline maintains his own office with a small cot here. He can almost always be found here, explaining that he is needed so often that he basically finds it easier to live here.

He has a private terminal which can only be accessed with his data card or a Difficult (-2) Comtech Check. Should the PCs manage to hack the terminal, they will find a wealth of information. Most of it is boring mining reports until a log entry detailing the finding of the cavern. They will find all of his notes regarding the artifact, as well as several documents that ramble on about the Cosmic Witch. They go on and on about how much he loves her, how she will fix all the wrongs in the universe, and how much she loves her children. He will say that he knows how to free her from her prison, but he will give no other details. Finally, the PCs will find full and detailed maps of the mines, including plans for a new branch.

During the day, Kline has the artifact locked in his bottom, oversized desk drawer. It is wrapped in fabric and contained within a biometric sealed lockbox. It cannot be hacked, but it can be cut or broken open with tools or a cutting torch.

The Admin building does have a small armory in a sealed cabinet, just in case of aggressive fauna. It can be opened with Kline's security data card. A Heavy Machinery check at -2 will allow a PC to break the mechanisms that keep the cabinet closed, and any PC succeeding in a Comtech check at -2 can hack the lock. Inside, the PCs can find 2 M4A3 Pistols with a total of four reloads, 2 long rifles (+0, 2 damage) with 4 reloads, and a shotgun with 2 reloads. If it is night, the arms locker will be empty as the cultists have all the weapons.

Comms & Air Traffic Tower

The lower level of this building is Comms control, and at least one technician minds it constantly. If the PCs come here to try to send a message, they will find that they can only bypass the security lockouts with either Kline's or Reynold's access card. For that matter, any techs on duty will tell the PCs that they are not to send messages; the colony is on blackout by order of Kline, and all the techs here are also part of the cult. They will avoid violence unless they outnumber the PCs, instead opting to inform Kline of the PCs' actions.

An elevator leads upward fifty meters to Air Traffic Control, and this room stays empty except when ships are actively coming or going.

Dot's Matrix

This place is the definition of a shithole Frontier bar. Hastily erected prefab walls with no sense of style at all and a simple glowing pink neon sign outside announce this place as the only place in town. If you don't want bug juice or prefab meals, this is the only place to get something resembling food. The beer is watered down, the cigarettes are ridiculously expensive, and the rotgut will burn out your brains cells or make you go blind. But its something beyond the dreary halls of Habitation, and at least a couple vid walls play six month old sporting events, their broadcast having finally made it through the network. Dot is always here. As many as two dozen colonists can be found here during the day, but as night falls, it tends to be just a small handful, hoping that a drunken stupor will free them from the whispers of the Cosmic Witch.

Habitation

This 11000 square foot building contains living quarters for everyone in the colony, though Kline's are unused. Most rooms are little more than a closet, especially when it is just one occupant, with bigger spaces reserved for couples or families. There's nothing luxurious about it, but it's life. There are two small pantries where the colonists can have all the bugjuice, prefabs, water, and coffee they want, and there's a small rec room with a pool table (missing two balls, and has only one cue), an antique jukebox that barely functions, and a couple ancient video game machines. Jenny Nielsen will almost always be found here, as will Christy Sullivan (except when she's hopped up on Neversleep out looking for Max).

Max and Connie's tiny two room suite does contain a terminal that Max kept all his progress reports on. If the PCs hack it with a Comtech check, they will find months and months of mine production reports, efficiency ratings, complaints from union guys and responses from Argent, and much, much more. There is nothing about the cavern or artifact, but three days before he went missing, he talks about starting a new branch of the mine that seemed promising. There are no maps of any kind. If Kline, or any cultist, is asked about the new mine tunnel, they'll reply simply and with a shrug, "It was a bust."

The PCs will be given closet sized rooms here, one for each of them.

Medbay

Argent maintains a well stocked Medical Center. An Observation check should find the PCs d6 doses of any standard medication (except NeuroTic) or any other normal medical equipment needed (like medkits or a surgical kit). It has a sterile area for operations as well as multiple exam tables. Maria Torres has taken to sleeping in the tiny office, the scalpel from the surgical kit always in her hand. The office also contains Dr. Blackwood's terminal, which requires either his access card (nope, it's gone!) or a difficult (-2) Comtech check to access and bypass. The PCs can find medical reports – physicals, minor emergencies and injuries – going back to the founding of the colony, but it seems that Blackwood kept minimal logs of the recent strange happenings. There are multiple entries regarding different colonists with the same complaints – massive headaches, vivid dreams and nightmares. He seemed concerned at the sudden rash of these issues, even noting new or extreme personality traits in colonists he'd known for months or even years, and he hypothesized that something had gotten into the air or water supply. The next day, he logged that he awoke screaming in the night, but couldn't recall from what. He said he could no longer sleep in habitation because at night it was filled with the cacophony of a 19th century madhouse. The day after that, Torres came into medical to find it empty, and no one has seen Blackwood in the month since.

Ore Processing

This large building is full of equipment that sends ore from the mines through a complex process to prepare them for shipping. About five roughnecks work here at any given time, some of whom are suffering the effects of Madness, some of whom are cultists. A quick investigation will show that the facility has processed less than 5000 tons of ore in the last thirty days, down to about ten percent of its normal production. The Madness affected roughnecks will blame the loss of Max Sullivan, that Kline doesn't care that they're all suffering from mental health issues, and his new right hand, Tobias McCaffrey, could care less. The cultist roughnecks on site will yell at the other guys, "Shut up with that stupid shit! Nuthin's wrong! They're just lookin' for new places to drill is all."

Ore Storage

This is one enormous warehouse at over 20,000 square feet. The conveyor system from Ore Processing leads here and runs the length of the warehouse, separating the order into different storage containers. Three huge vehicle doors on the eastern side of the building allow the giant mag-sleds to pick up the containers and lead them to the waiting ships one kilometer east. The place is almost empty, and men are just standing around waiting for something to do.

Vehicle Depot

The Vehicle Depot contains two standard Daihotai tractors, as well as two more that have been modified to carry drilling rigs. There is powerloader, a couple of two-person electric ATVs, and three mag-sleds for transporting ore from storage to the landing pad. Any tool the PCs could want can be found here with a successful Observation check. There are always roughnecks and technicians here. Some are under the spell of the Cosmic Witch, but most are not and dealing with various Madness effects.

THE MINES

No map has been provided of the mines which start about two kilometers northwest of the colony. Labyrinthine tunnels spread for miles below the surface of the Minehead, and the PCs should quickly realize that they will never find anything down there without help.

If the PCs know investigate the tunnel that broke into the cavern chamber (by hacking Kline's terminal or some other inventive means), they will be warned off by five cultist roughnecks stationed there by Kline to keep people away. The men seem helpful at first, saying the area is unsafe and unstable. If the PCs insist, regardless of their Manipulation successes, the roughnecks will not give way. If the PCs try to go past, the men will get physical, all the while saying, "It's not safe! Stay back!"

If the PCs ever investigate this area at night, they will be jumped by armed cultists as they near the cavern. The PCs can spot this ambush with a contested Observation check versus the cultists' Mobility, with the PCs receiving a -2 due to darkness. Even a hi-beam flashlight doesn't help but so much, casting bizarre shadows and leaving plenty of dark corners for someone to hide within.

If the PCs make it past this challenge, they will find their way into the cavern from the southwest. The cavern is perfectly circular except for the northern wall, naturally domed, and the perimeter is ringed with the stone heads of the engineers. The northern wall has a giant mural of some terrible creature, something vaguely familiar to the PCs in a pose of supplication or perhaps crucifixion.

If the PCs make it here during the day, the place will be completely empty except for the stone stanchion in the middle that usually holds the artifact. At night, the artifact will be there, as will Kline, a number of his followers (dealer's choice as to how many), and a sacrifice. See The Final Confrontation below.

THE FINAL CONFRONTATION

This should happen at night, preferably on the third night to ramp up the tension. The PCs stumble into the cavern to find Kline and the rest of the Cosmic Witch's children preparing to make a sacrifice. It would be epic if this happened to be a PC. Most of the cultists are not armed and are not in a hurry to confront armed PCs, doing so only under the orders of Kline. It is up to you how many are here and how they are armed.

Kline will try to force the sacrifice's hand to touch the artifact (handle this narratively or with opposed Close Combat), and it must remain there until the end of the NEXT round. As this happens, the poor sacrifice feels as if their blood is boiling away and their flesh on fire as the orb sucks the lifeforce right out of them. If he is successful in doing so, the doorway into the pocket dimension will be complete, and the mural will disappear to be replaced by a twenty meter diameter undulating circle of darkness. The Cosmic Witch, an Alien Queen (Core, p.313), will enter through it on the next round and take Initiative on the round after that, and then the PCs are probably well and truly fucked. At this point, all of Kline and his people will fall to their knees in worship of their Cosmic Witch, and she will not attack the PCs unless attacked first. She wants as many hosts as possible for the eggs she will soon begin laying.

If the PCs make a run for it, she will scream a terrifying hiss, and the cultists will give chase. This should make for a wonderfully tense sense as the bad guys are always on the PCs' heels as they try to escape the mines. Heading for the colony, they will come across other cultists trying to stop them, as well as confused colonists who only get in the way. Let this play out in the most cinematic, dramatic way possible, hopefully ending with either a showdown with the PCs using whatever weapons they can lay hands on, or a last minute escape on their shuttle. Of course, where is their pilot? And did Kline stowaway some of his people on board? Or worse – did he sabotage it? *evil grin*

If the PCs somehow prevent the sacrifice by fighting off Kline and his people, he will instead order one of his faithful to be the sacrifice. It's unfortunate, but Mother must be free!

It is very likely that the PCs will try to destroy the artifact. Do not tell them how much damage it can take. Let them pursue that course of action without any confidence that it will work. If they manage to pull this off, the Cosmic Witch will loose a deafening psychic scream as it occurs, causing everyone in the colony 1 Madness *and* 1 Stress, but her hold on all of the colonists is now broken.

RESOLUTION

You're going to have to think on your feet for the end of this one, but it is important that the PCs do not feel like they won. Maybe they saved some colonists and kept the Cosmic Witch from making her way into our universe, but did they really win? The cost should feel great, like an immense weight bears down on them, a cold and heartless victory at best.

APPENDIX: DREAMS

Night 1:

You float in darkness, your body completely weightless as if you are on a spaceship without artificial gravity or perhaps you're on an EVA. But you have no pressure suit, and you can breathe normally, though as you wave your hand you feel no sense of air. You turn your head, at least you think you do, but you have no sense of direction – left or right, up or down – as there is just nothing to see in the weightless void. You touch your hand to your face, assuring yourself that both are still there, but you can't even see your fingers as they hover in front of you.

Time passes. How long you can't be sure. Minutes, hours, days? Unknown eons pass in the abyss. You count, trying to keep in time with the rhythm of your heart, knowing that each three hundred count may be four minutes or so, but somewhere after 1200, you lose track of the numbers. You become so relaxed, so calm that you doze off.

But your consciousness rushes back to you suddenly, as if something out there screamed in agony or frustration, but you're not even sure you heard anything. Your heart rushes and a roaring fills your ears, as you wait for a terrible monster, some thing from childhood nightmare to charge at you from out of the darkness. But nothing happens, and you continue to float, lost in the depths of the universe.

A soft red glow awakens you from the living death, and for a moment, you think that your eyes deceive you. Your mind plays tricks on you, creating a mirage in the desert of darkness, giving you something, anything to help your sanity hold on. The glow approaches, and it seems to be more of a halo, a glowing of light behind some immense, terrible thing. It illuminates or, rather, outlines a fantastically enormous head away from which dark antlers or horns spread like an ancient Earth deer. The size of the creature dwarfs anything you've ever seen, and as it approaches, you know it will consume you. It hangs above you, threatening you with its terrible greatness, and yet, somehow you know not to fear it.

The red glow suddenly begins to fade away, and you scream out into the void, "No! Please don't leave me!"

Darkness reigns again, and forlorn loneliness takes hold of your very soul. A voice calls out, soft and comforting, "I'll never leave you. I am here, always have been, and always will be. I am the mother of creation."

An orb of soft blue light appears before you, growing in intensity until its center glows almost white, casting blessed rays in all directions. As the image coalesces, you realize the orb is a moon, gray and lifeless not unlike Earth's own, and it hovers just above a set of soft, feminine hands whose wrists disappear into the deep blue or perhaps purple sleeves of a robe. A face is illuminated underneath a hood upon which sits a fanciful headdress of some sort, what you thought were the terrifying antlers of some great creature. The woman under that hood is beauty incarnate, glory defined, and her slightly parted, full red lips match a set of ruby eyes within which is knowledge and understanding so ancient that your mind threatens to dissolve into their seas. You hear her soft breathing, in and out, comforting like your mother's heartbeat.

"I love you, as all mothers love their children," her soothing voice says, filling your mind though her mouth doesn't move, "but I am trapped in this place. Free me, I beg you, and you will know love greater than any before."

With that, she's gone, and you sit upright with a gasp, empty sadness filling you even as the dream fades.

Night 2:

“I need you, my child,” calls a voice from somewhere beyond.

You’re in the void, and it beckons to you. It begs for you to join it, to become nothing. It tugs at your mind, your heart, and your soul. It promises to take away everything that hurts in life – pain, heartbreak, frustration, anger, loneliness. You need only do nothing, you need only float into the blackness of nothingness, and it will all end.

But mother’s voice rises over the deafening white noise, pleading with you, “No, my child. Do not go! Do not leave me to this! Please, I need you!”

The longing in her voice, the forlorn fearfulness of being alone for all eternity tears at you. It threatens to split you in two, as you desire the peace of emptiness but feel you must save her. You must save Mother. The will to act permeates your every muscle, every fiber of your being, and you know that is all you must do. But the void demands a sacrifice. It is the only way to free the one and only thing in the universe that has ever truly loved you. You would do this for her, you would do anything for her.

“No, my child!” she says, her voice rising to encompass a gale that menaces you, that drives you away from her though that is the opposite of her intent. “It must not be you. I need you. Together we will set the universe to rights. Come to me. Save me from this place. Together we will bring love to the universe. There will be no hate, no loneliness, no famine, no poverty, only the truth of Mother’s love for her children.”

She begs, “Love me as I love you!”

Mother’s warmth suffuses your flesh, bones, and blood, and you feel at peace. No one and nothing could care for you more than she, and the glowing globe of the full moon appears. With it comes her wonderful, glorious presence, and she looks upon you with caring but also need.

“We haven’t much time,” she implores softly, “for when the full moon is lost, so will I be.”

A sharp sound, some loud report intrudes from outside the voice, and it startles you. Had you been standing on solid ground, you feel as if you would have leapt from your skin. Instead, you turn your head away from Mother to see what shocked you so, and as you do so, she loses an anguished, almost hissing scream.

Night 3:

You kneel before Mother in a cave of sorts, though it has been worked smooth by intelligent hands. She stands before you in all her beauty, her robed form holding the full moon as it always does while the moonlight illumines her deific face. Her love for you, for all of those who kneel assembled before her, washes over you like warm, salty seas, cleansing you of all human evils. You feel no hatred or anger or fear, only love for the glorious mother as she steps through a solid stone wall from the darkness of the void.

“I love you my children,” she declares in an upraised, “and together we will remake the universe with my love!”

You reach up and touch the glowing red orb, the great gemstone wrapped in metal that rests on the stone stanchion and provides the only other light in the cave. Your hand burns, and that volcanic warmth spreads up your arm and into your torso, suffusing every part of you. Your blood boils with desire, an affirmation of your love of Mother, and before your eyes melt from your sockets, you behold her true form.

As she enters the cave, her dark robe falls away, revealing the hard black carapace that is her flesh. Her arms, no longer obscured by the fabric, end in terrific, clawed hands. The hood reveals a shining, sable skull that reflects the infernal light of the artifact that drains your very essence, and the great headdress is in fact a crown of black anointing and proclaiming her Queen of all creation. Creation and life from death and destruction. She opens her mouth and releases a horrible hiss, an affirmation of her love for all of those assembled, and she shows her deadly, eviscerating teeth and a hidden mouth within the mouth.

She is glorious. She is terrible. She is death. She is life. And you love her.

APPENDIX: VISUALS

