

MUTANT CRAWL CLASSICS

EVIL OF THE ANCIENTS

#9: A LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE
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MULLEN

A LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE

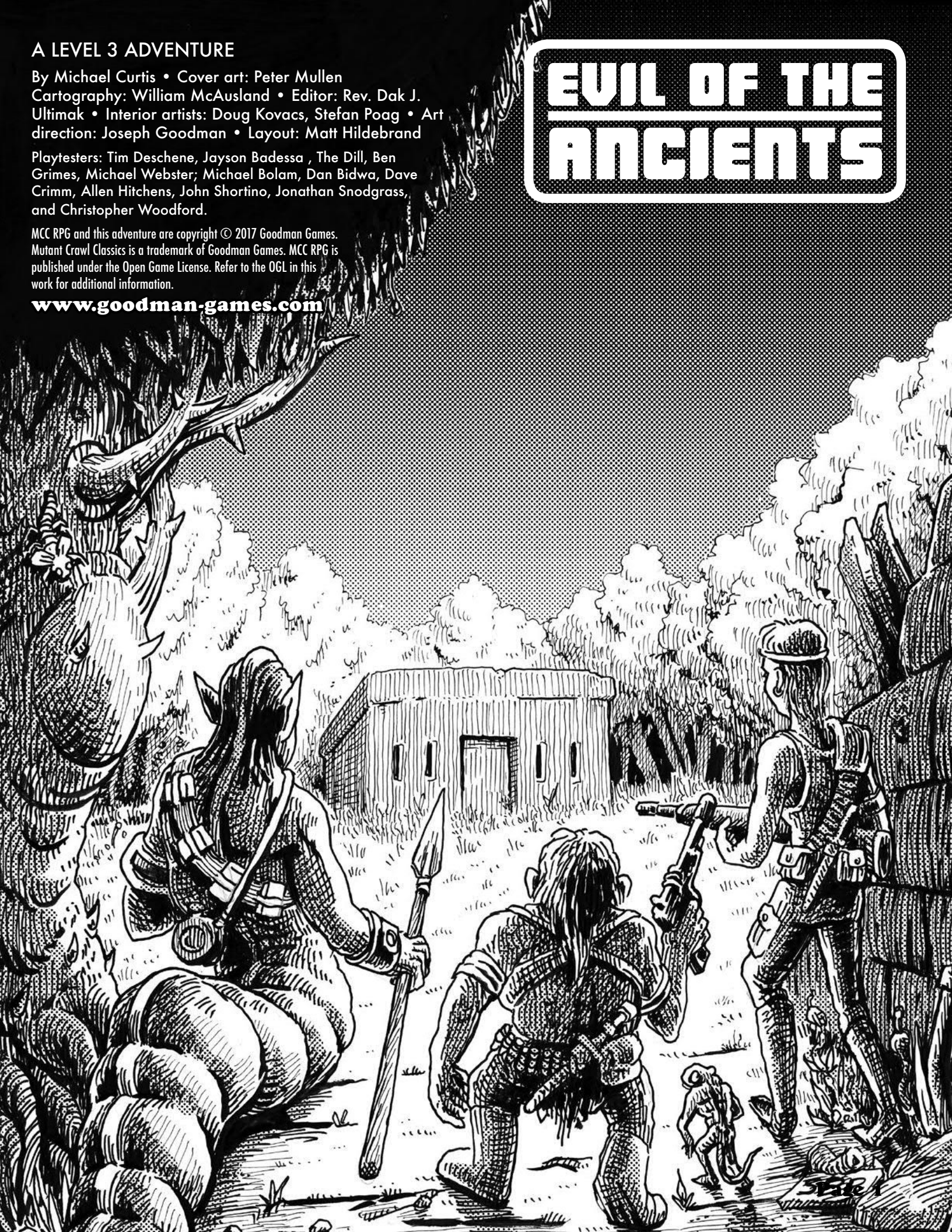
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EVIL OF THE ANCIENTS



INTRODUCTION

Remember the good old days, when post-apocalyptic adventures were full of super-science, robots that were there to be mastered, and the finale of every underground adventure was setting the fusion power plant to overload? Those days are back. Mutant Crawl Classics adventures take place in an ambiguous time period after a great disaster has ravaged the world, and it's up to your neolithic mutant tribesmen to go out into the hot house jungles and radioactive deserts of Terra A.D. (After Disaster) and collect the artifacts of the Ancient Ones in order to attain great personal power and savage glory.

Evil of the Ancients is an adventure for the Mutant Crawl Classics RPG and is intended for four to six 3rd-level PCs, but can easily be scaled for higher or lower levels (and can even be used as a zero-level funnel with only minor tweaking!). Although it has ties to a previous MCC adventure, *MCC #3 Incursion of the Ultradimension*, it is not necessary for the players to have experienced that scenario to enjoy this one.

In *Evil of the Ancients*, the party discovers an abandoned research facility where tears in time and space have left it infected with an unearthly intellect. Strange phenomenon and echoes of the past plague the PCs as they explore the installation, leaving them to speculate whether what they face is supernatural or super-science...or if there's any difference between the two at all.

Evil of the Ancients is unlike other post-apocalyptic adventures. It owes a debt of gratitude to both cosmic horror and gothic ghost stories. Hopefully, this adventure demonstrates there's more to be done with post-apocalyptic genre than just mutants, radiation, and mayhem.

BACKGROUND

Prior to the Great Disaster, numerous research installations around the world pushed the borders of knowledge to their limits, sometimes going beyond what was once believed to be impervious universal laws. One of the organizations behind this bleeding edge research was the Athena Project. The Athena Project staff was comprised of scientists working on the fringes of their fields, each dedicated to pushing humankind's knowledge to new heights.

The Athena Project funded several installations around the world, each dedicated to specific pursuits. One of these facilities, Minerva Station, was a small installation in comparison to its sister complexes. Its staff was comprised of researchers working on the borders of known physics. Unproven theories, specifically research in Loop Quantum Gravity, Entropic Gravity, and quantifiable experimentation with strangelets were the primary focus of this group's work. Assisted by a small staff of support personnel, the Minerva Station researchers conducted their work in a subterranean installation, which for safety and security reasons, had become the norm during the last perilous years of the Ancients.

In the months just prior to the Great Disaster, the Athena Project experienced a scientific breakthrough at one of their installations. An experiment at that complex caused a rift between dimensions, opening the way for alien creatures to enter Earth (as detailed in MCC #3 *Incursion of the Ultradimension*). This experiment also sent ripples through the entire Athena Project network of installations, producing widespread calamity and unexpected consequences in nearly every one of their complexes.

Far away, at Minerva Station, the dimension-tearing forces opened a tiny and brief tear between worlds. Through that fracture came intangible alien intellects, thought forms known by very few as the Orphans.

The Orphans entrance into this world went unheralded at first. The dimensional tear lasted only a moment, enough time to attract the Orphans' attention, lure them through, then strand them on this side of dimensional walls. The Orphans arrival, undetected by Minerva Station's staff, began to erode away at the sanity of its workers, infecting their minds by simple proximity to the entities' presence. Subject to the Orphans' malignant intellect, Minerva Station's staff turned violent and self-destructive, goaded on by both their mad project manager and the Orphans' contagious mental virus. Within a short time, everyone was dead. Before the matter could be discovered, however, the Great Disaster struck and Minerva Station was forgotten.

The Orphans have remained stuck in the world of Terra A.D. ever since, seeking a way to return to their home dimension. Their attempts to reopen the rift using Minerva Station's staff failed. The pre-disaster humans simply lacked the mental and emotional energy required to fracture dimensional walls. However, in an age of powerful mental mutations, the Orphans might find a suitable source among the inhabitants of Terra A.D. allowing them to tear apart the boundaries of the worlds once more and return home.

It is likely, however, those hapless sources will not survive.

THE ORPHANS

The Orphans cannot be understood by man or mutant, and the author makes no attempt to try and explain their nature, whims, or long term goals. Instead, it is the effects of exposure to the Orphans' presence and their immediate desire that concerns the judge and the PCs.

The Orphans, although present in the world of Terra A.D., do not exist on a physical level. They are best understood as a form of thought virus: intangible, but pervasive, existing throughout Minerva Station on a wavelength undetectable by any physical or mental means. Entrance into the installation exposes the PCs to the Orphans' omnipresence and makes them susceptible to infection.

The Orphans' thought virus not only contains strands of their own alien makeup, but the lingering emotions and memories of the complex's former staff. These residual memories, along with the Orphans' alien intellect, corrupt



the PCs' minds, causing them to experience the events that occurred therein as if they were present. Over prolonged exposure, the thought virus increases in severity and begins to undermine the characters' mental processes and attitudes. At best, the PCs succumb to a constant state of paranoia, but at worst they find themselves manipulated like automatons commanded to walk into a buzz saw. It is likely that only by escaping the installation before the Orphans completely infect their minds do the PCs have any hope of "winning" this scenario.

The Orphans' immediate goal is to return to their native dimension, but they're trapped in Terra A.D. until the proper psychodrama is produced, unleashing enough emotional and psychic energy that the Orphans can tear open dimensional walls. The staff of Minerva Station proved insufficient, but one of the PCs—perhaps one with a high Intelligence score, numerous mental mutations, or a specific mutation—might serve as an effective psychodrama generator and be sacrificed to aid the Orphans' escape. If not, the Orphans have waited a long, long time and can wait a while more.

MEMORY ECHOES

In a classic haunted house story, the protagonists often endure experiences which, while having little direct threat to their well-being, are nevertheless unsettling or terrifying. In a ghost story, these manifestations are supernatural in origin. In *Evil of the Ancients*, the PCs are subject to similar experiences, but instead of being ghostly manifestations, this phenomenon are in truth the memories of Minerva Station's former staff now conveyed via the Orphans' infectious presence. Although the origin is different, the results are the same: inexplicable experiences that erode the PCs' confidence and unnerve them. If the judge succeeds in frightening the *player* (not the character), she has done her job well.

Each area of the installation has several possible memory echoes the PCs might experience while exploring the complex. These sensations are listed in ascending order of intensity and shock value. Not every PC will experience an echo when entering a room and the frequency and the affected PC is generally left to the judge to decide. This allows her to best utilize the echoes to unnerve the players. If one of the suggested echoes is more likely to freak out a certain player, by all means make sure he or she is the one who experiences it!

The judge can also decide to randomly distribute echoes. Simply roll a 1d6 for each PC who enters an area. On a roll of 1-2, the PC experiences an echo. The judge should pick the appropriate manifestation from the list depending on the number of Willpower saves the character has failed in response to the Orphans' thought virus (see Appendix A). Characters who have failed one or two Willpower saves experience the first or second memory echo listed, while those who've failed three or more witness the third, fourth, or fifth echo noted in the area's description in the key below.

STARTING THE ADVENTURE

If the PCs have played through the events of *Incursion of the Ultradimension*, they may have discovered the map located in area 2-2E and decide to investigate the various points of interest noted on that map. Doing so eventually takes them to the location of this installation and once they enter the facility, they are in danger of succumbing to the Orphans' mental attacks. They must then deal with the alien thought virus and either escape or perish. Hopefully, they'll succeed in the former and emerge with some Ancient technology for their troubles.

A judge can also use this adventure with groups who've not played MCC #3. Simply introduce Minerva Station while the party is traveling. Few survivors of Terra A.D. will turn down the opportunity to explore an Ancient ruin,

one possibly filled with treasures of the distant past. The description of Minerva Station assumes it's found in a wooded area somewhere in Terra A.D., but the external description can be changed to accommodate other locations without impacting the adventure.

MINERVA STATION

Minerva Station was largely constructed underground for various privacy and security reasons. Only a single building stood at the surface, surrounded by security fencing and a parking area for ground and hover transports. Today, the surrounding wilds have reclaimed most of the parking area, leaving a mounded meadow around the building.

GENERAL FEATURES OF THE STATION

In general, the complex is partially-powered by a self-contained nuclear pile (buried beneath the installation and unreachable by the PCs). Some areas and devices still have power, while others are dead and non-functioning. In keeping with the science-fantasy genre, the judge need not explain why some things work and others do not, and can make alterations to the status of machines within the complex as desired.

Minerva Station once housed a resident A.I. in its central computer network to assist the research scientists. However, between the destruction imposed by the insane staff members and as a result of the Orphans' alien vibrational energies, the A.I. was long ago erased from the computer system. If the players begin to blame the events that happened inside Minerva Station on a mad A.I., do nothing to discourage them. The truth—if they ever discover it—is far more terrifying.

DOORS

Doors in the complex either open by pushing a button or require an identification card to operate. These "locked" doors are indicated on the adventure map. Without a proper I.D. card, a locked door can be opened by a rover (DC 15).

Regardless of opening means, each door has a small panel adjacent to the frame containing either a small rectangular button (approx. 3" wide by 1" tall) or a button with a thin horizontal slot beneath it. Normal doors are opened by with a simple press of the button. Inserting the correct identification card into the slot and pressing the button opens the complex's locked security doors.

I.D. CARDS

While com-badges were used in many places during the Ancient days to grant access to security facilities, Minerva Station was poorly-funded and employed a simple I.D. card method to control access. There are three types of I.D. cards found within the complex:

- Gray cards were used by the installation's security team. One gray card can be found in the above-ground

portion of the complex on the dead security guard. Gray cards allow access to all areas of the complex.

- White cards with yellow chevrons were used by the complex's non-resident staff and allow access to all areas except the personal apartments inside the complex (areas 2-7A through 2-7D).
- Blue cards were used by the on-site, resident physicists at the complex. In addition to accessing all common areas, they also open the door to their owner's quarters as indicated in the complex's description.
- Silver cards with red chevrons were used by the custodial staff and allow access to all areas of the complex (including personal quarters) but not to areas #11 and #12, as the physicists did not want their intricate experiments inadvertently damaged.

ARRIVAL AT MINERVA STATION

The PCs may arrive at Minerva Station by sheer happenstance, stumbling across it in their travels, or seek it out if they've survived the events in *Incursion of the Ultradimension*. Regardless of what brings them here, read the following when they arrive:

Your travels have been weary and you've overcome many of the hazards of Terra A.D. in your journey. For the last two days, you've traversed a wild wood of bright blue trees, electrified vines, and snarling grawcats that circled your fire at night. Nevertheless, you've endured.

After traveling several miles today through the forest, you suddenly come across a line of metal poles set into the earth. Each stands taller than a pure strain human and strands of corroded metal still cling to some of the posts, indicating this was once a barrier erected by the Ancients. Whatever power it might have once possessed, however, is lost to the ages. They are mere relics of a mythical time.

Pushing beyond the poles, you quickly come to a break in the woodland. Beyond the edge of the forest lies a large meadow filled with silver and green wildflowers and iridescent knee-high grass. Several low hummocks break up the clearing's otherwise level surface. At one location near the edge of the clearing, a heap of stone-like blocks and shattered glass stands, almost hidden by underbrush. In the center of the meadow stands a squat building. Trapezoidal in shape, the structure is made of the chipped gray softstone so many Ancient buildings are crafted from. Windows are visible in the wall facing you, but the glass is dark and scoured by wind, grit, and time. A single door is set in the building's front, closed and holding its secrets tightly behind it.

The meadow holds no hidden dangers; its flora are harmless mutated varieties. The nine mounds dotting the field's surface conceal the decayed remains of surface transports, now little more than rusted metal, rotted rubber, and tattered cloth upholstery. The heap of duracrete blocks and glass was once the installation's gatehouse, but it has long since succumbed to time and the elements. There is nothing of interest or value in the ruined vehicles.



THE INSTALLATION

Area 1-1—Minerva Station Exterior: *The Ancient building measures 50' square and rises 15' above you. Its trapezoidal structure is dirty, chipped, and weather-beaten. Several large panes of scoured and polarized glass line the sides of the building, their surfaces opaque with filth and abrasion. A pair of dark glass double doors stand at the building's front, a narrow gap visible between the doors.*

Anyone peering into the gap sees only darkness. If illumination is provided, they can see into area 1-2 beyond.

The doors were once powered, but no longer function due to age and neglect. Three or more creatures working in concert or a single PC succeeding in a DC 13 Strength check can force them open, causing a terrible screeching sound as the doors slide into recesses in the walls on either side. A second, smaller door of similar construction stands at the back of the building. However, this door is sealed, but may be opened with any I.D. card found inside the complex or by a rover (DC 13).

Area 1-2—Reception: *The carpet of this dark interior area is greatly decayed, subject to eons of weather leaking inside the building. A handful of now-skeletal chairs are positioned about the room. Mildew and rot have caused the paint on the walls to darken and flake away. A large desk, its surface covered with curious protrusions, stands to the left of the door, positioned on a rotting carpet of gray. A grim figure, a mummified pure strain human, slumps behind the desk. A darkened corridor leads deeper into the building. Granular grit glitters in trails and piles around the room, seeming to be sand or glass.*

Although the area appears empty of danger, the upper floor of the installation is the lair of a silicate slug, an 8' long, 3' wide mollusk comprised of living glass. It is currently resting beneath the desk, but activity in this area stirs it to attack the PCs.

Silicate Slug: Init -1; Atk glass rasp +3 melee (1d6+2) or shard spray +1 missile fire (2d10+1); AC 9; HD 4d10; hp 35; MV 10'; Act 1d20; SP vulnerable to sonic attacks (suffers double damage), immune to heat attacks, stealthy (transparent body grants it +10 to stealth attempts), shard spray attack (fills a 15' long, 10' wide cone directly in front of the slug with glass shards; all within the cone are potentially injured. Make attack rolls on each individual), amorphous (can slither through gaps as small as 3" wide); SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will -2.

The desk was once a communications and neural net console and the protrusions visible on it are all manner of network inputs, 3-D holographic communications displays, and similar work-related equipment. None of it functions anymore.

The body behind the desk is that of a pure strain human, its flesh tight over its bones and yellow-brown with age. A careful inspection of the skeleton reveals a small hole in the side of the skeleton's skull near the temple. A successful DC 10 Intelligence check suggests the hole is the result of a self-inflicted wound.

Scraps of gray uniform cling to the body and a rotted leather belt encircles its waist. Hanging from the belt is an empty holster and a thin pouch sealed with snaps. The pouch contains a gray identification card. PCs literate in the languages of the Ancients discern the words "Athena Project" emblazoned on the card next to the symbol of a stylized owl. This card allows the PCs to operate the lift down to the complex and opens any doors therein.

Underneath the desk, amidst the small piles of glass and grit, residue produced by the silicate slug, is a lazer pistol. The C-Cell it contains is drained, but the weapon functions if recharged.

Area 1-3—Lavatories: *A dingy room of soiled tiled surfaces and ceramic basins resides beyond the door. Cubicles line one side of the room, each enclosed by a shut door.*

These are common lavatories. The cubicles are bathroom stalls. The plumbing and power no longer functions in either lavatory and they contain nothing of interest (unless the judge deems otherwise).

Area 1-4—Lift: *A ceiling panel begins to glow as you enter this small room, stuttering to life as if welcoming you. The grimy panel reveals a roughly 15' square chamber, its floor covered in decayed gray carpeting. One wall is made entirely of burnished metal. A closed door is set into the metal wall; a thin slot with a white button below it is built into the door frame.*

The ceiling panel is motion-activated and sputters and flickers as long as anyone is in this area.

The slot and button combination activates the lift. Anyone insert an I.D. card into the slot causes the button to illuminate. Pressing the button summons the elevator from the lower level, 50' below the surface. It arrives moments later. A rover can also activate the lift by succeeding in a DC 10 activate doors check.

The 10' square elevator car itself is constructed from burnished metal and drab plastic, and a thin, musty synthetic carpet covers the car's floor. Four white buttons line the operating panel beside the car's double doors. Two buttons bear up and down arrows, a third shows an octagon shield (the emergency stop button), and the fourth is marked by a stylized drawing of a mouth (the intercom button). A thin slot exists beneath the buttons, large enough to accept an I.D. card. Only the up and down buttons still function, but activating the elevator requires an I.D. card to be inserted into the slot or a DC 13 activate doors check. Once this is done, pressing the down arrow starts the lift on its journey to the installation below. If the players think to check, there is no emergency trap door in the lift's ceiling (security trumped safety in the paranoid years immediately before the Great Disaster).

The magnetic field generators that raise and lower the car work in fits and starts, and the elevator descends in a jerky, shuddering fashion. At one point, the generators fail com-

pletely, resulting in a brief but terrifying freefall of 20' before emergency brakes abruptly arrest the plummeting car and guide it safely to the bottom of the shaft. Upon arrival, the elevator car doors open only halfway, accompanied by the sound of grinding metal and the faint smell of fried circuitry. The lift may no longer function (see sidebar).

TRAPPED!

One of the classic tropes of the horror story is that the protagonists cannot escape from their environment. If the judge wishes to introduce this trope into this adventure, the lift is the perfect method to do so.

After reaching the bottom of the shaft, the lift malfunctions and loses power. Even a gifted rover finds it impossible to restore function to the elevator, and with a lack of a ceiling hatch, the party is stuck unless they can get the lift working again or find alternate means of egress. The judge might want to allow the party a DC 10 Intelligence check to let them determine that accessing one of the Station's computers might allow them to re-route power to the lift or that finding spare parts and tools could get it working again (such as in area 2-10) with an hour's work and a DC 12 Agility or Intelligence check. Either of these options gives the party a goal to pursue while exploring and makes their slow, inescapable decline into madness and paranoia even more terrifying.

THE LOWER LEVEL

Area 2-1 — Atrium: *The lift's doors open to reveal a straight corridor running off into the distance. Glowing panels set into the ceiling function erratically, plunging the passageway into gloom before strobing to life once more to throw weird shadows on the walls. The air smells of dust, rot, and exposed earth. A whiff of organic decay assails your nose and the faint sound of dripping water echoes down the corridor. A carpet of stained, gray material covers the floor. Patches of mold, the color of an old bruise, grow among the carpet's threads. Three doors, two on one wall, and one on the other, are visible along the length of the corridor.*

Soon after the PCs enter the complex, the installation's environmental conditioning unit kicks on, accompanied by a rattling sound within the walls and in the ceiling overhead and a weak current of air begins to flow. The judge should play up this mundane occurrence, giving it perhaps a sinister connotation and using it to begin the process of unsettling the PCs as they explore the installation.

The carpet mold is sickly looking, but not dangerous. When the lights strobe bright, the PCs can see the corridor ends in a T-shaped intersection at its far end. There is nothing of value in this area.

Once the PCs enter the corridor, they are subject to the mental infection of the Orphans and the judge begins the pro-

cess of making Willpower saves for the PCs as described in Appendix A. Characters that fail one or more saves are subject to experiencing the following memory echoes.

Memory Echoes:

- The PC briefly smells a whiff of cologne or perfume in the musty air.
- The PC feels something brush his arm, as if someone had passed him in the corridor.
- The PC hears a whisper of conversation, too soft and short to comprehend.
- The PC sees a flitting movement out of the corner of his eye, as if someone disappeared through a doorway or around a corner at the edge of his vision.
- The PC hears the short, staccato footsteps of someone moving purposefully towards an unseen destination echo down the hallway.

Area 2-2—Break Room: *An oddly dust-free room lies beyond this door, opened with the push of a button. The floor is covered with gray carpeting and the stench of rot hangs heavy in the air. A large gleaming metal box stands against one wall, a rust-colored stain visible in the carpeting around it. Several oddly-shaped chairs are positioned around a table littered with flat rectangular shapes. Two bigger seats covered in glossy animal hide rest against the walls. Four dark rectangles hang on the walls and a garishly colored box as tall as a person is positioned at the far end of the room.*

The gleaming metal box is a refrigeration unit, long neglected. The stain on the carpet beside it is dried blood, but easily mistaken for a coolant leak or similar spill. Opening the refrigeration unit reveals a grotesque colony of mold inside and a fetid cloud of nausea-inspiring decay fills the room. All present must succeed in a DC 10 Fortitude save or become violently ill, suffering a -1 penalty to all rolls for 1d3 turns. Note that this can affect the PCs' Willpower saves against the Orphans' infection.

The chairs are of ergonomic design and the comfortable couches are upholstered in faux-leather. The rectangular shapes on the table are a dozen pieces of data-flimsy (paper-thin LED displays that had replaced paper by the time the installation was constructed), their surfaces black and no longer functioning.

The rectangles on the walls are flat screen displays that once bore rotating images of uninspired art.

The garishly colored box is a beverage and food dispenser. It is unpowered and contains 2d20 cans of assorted drinks if broken into. The liquid inside the cans is poisonous due to age. Anyone consuming the stuff must make a DC 14 Fortitude save or suffer 1d3 temporary Stamina damage from poison.

Memory Echoes:

- The PC monetarily hears the sound of rustling data-flimsy.

- The PC sees a static piece of art of the judge's choosing on one of the displays. The image fades quickly before the PC's eyes.
- The PC hears a worried voice ask "Did you hear?"
- The sound of hysterical laughing and wracking sobs is heard by the PC. These noises rise in volume and then abruptly cease.
- The PC has a vivid hallucination of a severed human head inside the refrigeration unit or jammed in between the rails within the beverage dispenser if either is opened. There is no sign of it moments later.

Area 2-3—Kitchenette: *A small room contains a basin, stained with rust, boxy metal appliances resting upon and beneath a countertop, and a series of small doors set above it. A table and two chairs rest near one wall, a plate containing what appears to be small, old bones lying atop it. The air here is rife with old rot and other fainter smells.*

This small room was used by the complex's non-resident staff for meals and contains a microwave unit (non-functioning), a simple sink (the faucets still work but produce rusty, foul-smell water), a garbage disposal unit (see below), cabinets filled with plastic dinnerware, ancient coffee bags, and inedible condiments, and three drawers containing eating implements. An inspection of the implement drawers reveals the trays inside are missing knives.

The plastic plate on the table holds a dozen small bones. Anyone inspecting the remains can attempt an Intelligence check to acquire more details. If Intelligence check results in 10 or higher, the observer notices the bones are all scored by small cuts as if hewn apart by a knife or saw. If the check result is 14+, the character also identifies the bones as those of a human female's right hand.

The garbage disposal unit is a small pull-out drawer set at knee level and containing a 2 cubic foot space within. There is a gold ring lodged in a gap in the metal grating that covers the bottom of the disposal's interior space. Several innocuous-looking lenses are set into the walls of the cavity as well. These objects create a low powered energy field that completely disintegrates organic material over a short period of time. Although numerous safeguards exist to prevent harm befalling the user, those safeguards have failed.

Any organic matter placed within the disposal unit must make a DC 20 Fortitude save or suffer 2d6 damage as their flesh is seared by the energy field. If the saving throw roll is a natural "1", the matter is completely disintegrated in a flash of white light and the smell of cooked flesh.

The gold ring bears an inscription on the inside of the band. It reads "To Laura, My love for you is a hunger I cannot sate."

Memory Echoes:

- The PC detects the faint rattle of silverware. The noise lasts but a moment.

- The PC tastes bitter black coffee of questionable quality.
- The PC hears a women's voice speaking quietly and cattily, as if sharing gossip. The voice asks "You know she's cheating on him, right?"
- The PC tastes coffee, but it has the thick, coppery taste of blood as well as roasted beans.
- The PC witnesses the microwave unit running and catches a momentary glimpse of a severed hand spinning on the carousel tray inside. The flesh cracks, spitting fluids on the microwave's window, obscuring the PC's view. The fluids fade swiftly, revealing an empty and still microwave.

Area 2-4—Supply Closet: *Shelves line the walls of this tiny room. Bottles, jugs, and boxes rest under a thick layer of dust on the shelves. Various stick-like implements and wheeled buckets are tucked away under the shelves and in corners. A dull-colored metal orb is positioned by the door, its exterior covered with cryptic writing in the Ancient tongue.*

A common janitorial supply closet, the contents of this room are an array of cleaning supplies, spare illumination bulbs, and other ordinary items related to the maintenance of Minerva Station.

Anyone searching through the shelves uncovers a silver identification card with red chevrons. It is a custodial identification card that opens all the complex's doors except area 2-11 and 2-12.

Beside it is a 5" long metal tube with a clear window set into one side. A reservoir of pale blue liquid is visible behind the window. This is a Caffeitine™ vaporizer which, if used correctly (Tech Level 3/CM 2), allows the user to inhale a pleasant tasting cloud of vaporized chemicals. The PC using the inhaler gains a +1 bonus to Reflex saves for the next hour. The vaporizer can be used nine times before the liquid Caffeitine™ is depleted. The janitor used to sneak his Caffeitine™ breaks in the supply closet.

The search also uncovers a rag smeared with faded red lipstick and other dried fluids hidden behind a jar of disinfectant. The supply closet was also used by two of the installation's staff as a rendezvous place for their illicit affair. The rag is the evidence of their adulterous meetings.

The metal orb is 3' in diameter and the Ancient writings identify it as a "Turbolux 6000." It is a robotic vacuum and floor polisher unit, currently unpowered and inoperable (unless the judge deems otherwise).

Memory Echoes:

- The PC hears the soft sound of a man whistling tunelessly (a habit of the custodian while working).
- The PC tastes lipstick and sweat on his tongue. The taste lasts only a second.
- The PC smells the faint odor of vaporized Caffeitine™ lingering in the air.

- The PC experiences a fleeting moment of frenzied, but furtive amorous relations from the standpoint of a gender opposite his or her own. Feelings of anger and guilt are mixed in with the emotional release that accompanies the experience.
- The PC's eyes burn with pain as if exposed to a caustic substance, rendering him blind for 1d3 turns. This blindness is psychosomatic and the PC's eyes show no signs of damage.

Area 2-5—Invasive Roots: *A gnarled mass of thick, pale roots descends from a break in the ceiling, running down one wall and partially covering the floor of the corridor. Water drips from the split ceiling above, forming shallow pools of dirty stagnant water around the base of the roots. The smell of earth and rot is strong here.*

The ceiling here buckled during the cataclysm and in time earth and the roots of the trees above grew down, seeking nourishment. The roots possess a grim, hunger to supplement their diet of earth and water. They lash out with gripping tendrils and mental assaults if any creature approached within 15' feet.

Invasive Root Mass: Init +1; Atk root tendril slam +2 melee (1d6) or death field (see SP); AC 10; HD 3d8; hp 20; MV 0'; Act 3d20; SP death field generation (1/day, mutation check modifier +1), roots can reach targets up to 15' away from main mass; SV Fort +2, Ref +6, Will -2.

During the battle, any PC in close combat with the roots

can make a DC 10 Intelligence check. If successful, they notice the skeletal remains of a pair of legs partly buried among the root system and barely visible amidst the writhing pale tendrils.

If either due to noticing the legs during the battle or by clearing away the roots after they're defeated, the party discovers three skeletons grouped together in a sitting position along the wall. All show evidence of violence (torn clothes, broken and gouged bones, etc.). These three unfortunates died in the violence that erupted when the Orphans came through. The mutated roots detected their decaying flesh and bones and grew down to feast. A com-badge is mixed in amidst the bones.

Scraps of faded clothing still cling to the bare bones. Among the clothes can be found a blue identification card (opens most doors and area 2-7D), a white identification card with yellow chevrons (opens all doors except areas 2-7A through 2-7D), and an unpowered multitool.

Memory Echoes: Because this section of corridor held no importance during the installation's operating days, there are no lesser memory echoes to be experienced here. Only those PCs who've failed four or more Willpower saves versus the Orphans' infection have a chance of experiencing an echo at this location. Both are horrific.

- The PC sees himself attacking an unknown person dressed in ancient clothing. The PC stabs the victim relentlessly with a steak knife until his victim dies from his numerous wounds. The PC then nuzzles the corpse,



smearing blood across his face and nipping softly at the cooling flesh. The hallucination then mercifully ends.

- The PC hallucinates himself being attacked by a deranged human male dressed in bloodstained clothing of ancient style. The PC's body is torn with pain as his assailant stabs a steak knife into his chest again and again, throwing streamers of blood against the wall and floor. The PC suffers 3d6 points of damage (this damage is psychosomatic and the PC's flesh is unmarred) and must succeed in a DC 15 Willpower save or be knocked unconscious for 2d6 rounds. The unconscious character can be awoken by the efforts of others. Once awoken, allow the PC to attempt a DC 12 Personality check. If the check succeeds, he realizes he's taken no real injury (damage suffered from the hallucinated attack is instantly cured). On a failed check, the PC remains convinced he's been stabbed and the damage remains. Only medical attention can restore the lost hit points.

Area 2-6—Unisex Lavatory: *A pair of small cubicles with closed doors line one wall of this tile-floored room. A closed sliding door stands beyond them at the far end of the room. A single glow panel flickers weakly in the ceiling overhead, making the room a gloomy cell that echoes the slightest noise you make.*

This area consists of two bathroom stalls each containing a toilet and ultrasonic bidet (both non-functional), a pair of sinks (functional, but producing rusty water), and two portrait-sized mirrors. If the room is better illuminated or the PCs make a DC 11 Intelligence check, they notice a series of rust-colored stains resembling foot prints leads from the entrance to one of the sinks. That basin's porcelain is similarly discolored. A sliding door beyond the toilet stalls leads to a dressing room containing a shower and sink (both nonfunctional), and several hooks on the walls for towels and robes.

Memory Echoes:

- The PC hears the sound of a running faucet which ends with the squeaking of the handle.
- The pungent smell of excrement is smelled by the PC.
- The PC experiences a brief moment of drunkenness followed by the urge to vomit. If the PC fails a DC 10 Fortitude saving throw, he throws up and the odor of alcohol is evident amidst the stink of regurgitation—even if the PC has not consumed alcohol recently—but only the PC can smell it.
- The PC hallucinates the sound of splashing water, kicking feet, grunting, and gasping breath. Visible beneath the wall of one stall he sees two pairs of legs. By their positioning it is apparent that one of the individuals is drowning the other in the stall's toilet. The stall is empty if opened.
- The PC sees the reflection of a blood-smeared face in one of the lavatory's mirrors. The face smiles contently, breaking its crimson mask with a row of pearly white teeth. The face vanishes with a wink, but whether the gesture is towards itself or the PC is impossible to discern.

Areas 2-7—Staff Residences: The Athena Project was overseen by five physicists who lived at the installation full-time. These four apartments served as their living quarters. Each has an identical layout consisting of a living room/dining room space, a bedroom, kitchenette, and private bathroom. Minor differences are detailed in the individual descriptions below.

The living room/dining room area contains a coffee table, dinner table, faux-leather sofa, and several ergonomic chairs. Insipid landscapes and watercolor paintings hang on the walls, and a synthetic carpet of dull rose covers the floor. The apartment's bedroom holds a dormitory-style bed (either full or queen-sized, depending on occupancy), dresser, computer terminal (non-functional), faux-leather recliner, walk-in closet, and even more insipid artwork. A large black flat-screen display hangs on the wall. This display once showed 3-D images of the outside world, providing the illusion of a window and life at surface level, but no longer works.

The apartment's kitchenettes are similar to the one in area 2-3 (a non-working microwave unit and garbage disposal; cabinets and drawers holding eating supplies), but contains a refrigeration unit (functioning) as well as small appliances such as toasters, can openers, coffee makers, and the like. The bathroom holds a toilet, ultrasonic bidet, shower stall, sink, and medicine cabinet. Robes and towels hang from rods on the walls, and the lighting panels in the ceiling are triggered when the door to the room opens. Soft, New Age music accompanies the lights.

Some of the living quarters contain artifacts as described below. The judge is free to add any number of interesting devices to the residences as well, perhaps using Table 7-2: Everyday Artifacts of the Ancients on p. 169 of the MCC RPG rulebook for inspiration.

Area 2-7A—Apartment A: *Small statuettes and idols stand on the shelves of this living quarters and colorful banners hang on the walls. Many of the banners display images of pure strain humans and manimals. The rooms are messy and the stink of mildew and other darker smells is detectable in the air.*

The physicist who lived in this apartment was an avid sports fan and his quarters reflect that fact. Amateur sport trophies decorate the shelves, 3-D team banners and athletic portraits hang on the walls instead of art, and a number of sports jerseys are present in the bedroom's dressers.

The bathroom is that of a messy bachelor: numerous tubes and bottles of men's care products clutter the sink and a pile of towels, rotted with mildew, lies on the floor.

The bedroom walls are splattered with dried, flaking blood, evidence of the brutal murder that occurred there. The physicist's body, now no more than broken bones with bits of mummified flesh clinging to them, lies upon the bed. A bloodstained carboluminum baseball bat (1d6 damage) protrudes from under the bed. On the dresser is blue identification card (opens this apartment's door) and com-badge

Memory Echoes:

- The PC briefly tastes beer and Cheez-Bits.
- A feeling of intense vicarious triumph overwhelms the PC (his favorite team just won the Big Game). The PC must make a DC 10 Willpower save. If successful, the PC is filled with self-confidence and gains a +1 bonus to his rolls for the next 1d3 turns. If the save fails, this sense of victory passes quickly and no bonuses are received.
- The PC hears a ghostly echo of a man's voice. The voice says, with rising volume, "go...Go...GO...GOOO!!"
- The PC experiences an intense feeling crippling despair and must make a DC 14 Willpower save to shake off the effects. If the save fails, he suffers a -1 penalty to all rolls for 1d6 turns.
- The PC feels himself attacked brutally with a blunt object as blows rain down upon his body. A DC 13 Willpower save must succeed or the PC suffers 4d6 points of psychosomatic damage. On a roll of a "1," the PC's experience is so severe that he loses a permanent point of Intelligence.

Area 2-7B—Apartment B: *These quarters are immaculate. The furnishings are arranged at precise angles and the wall hangings are hung level-straight. Tastefully decorated, there are no signs of clutter or disarray. The dust that covers all the quarter's surfaces almost seems an affront to its otherwise tidy nature.*

These quarters housed the youngest member of the Athena Project team, a gifted graduate student whose achievements earned him a place on the project. Despite his talent, pervasive low self-esteem and doubt plagued him throughout his time at the instillation. His rooms are indicative of his self-doubt, as if the occupant compensated for his fears by presenting an outward appearance of perfection.

The air here smells faintly of decay, strangely at odds with the apartment's meticulous appearance. A neat pile of data-flimsy sits atop the coffee table in the living room (formerly numerous academic journals) and several academic achievement plaques hang next to the watercolors on the wall. The refrigeration unit in the kitchenette contains rows of energy drinks (24 in total) and little else. Each drink acts as an accelershot with a 30 minute duration.

The bedroom is immaculate and atop the dresser in precise order are a com-badge, a blue identification card (opens this residence's door), and a neuroshot. The clothing in the dresser is neatly pressed and arranged in alphabetical order by color.

The bathroom is an affront to the rest of the apartment's cleanliness. The medicine cabinet is smashed and its door hangs askew. Fragments of mirrored plastic litter the floor alongside spilled men's care products and generic analgesics. A dark form is visible beyond the pebbled glass shower door. Inside the shower stall is the long-rotted body of the apartment's resident. Dried blood covers the shower floor and a fragment of mirrored plastic lies beside the

body. There is a desiccated, bloodstained sponge gripped in the corpse's right hand as if, even while dying, he strove to clean up the mess his suicide created.

Memory Echoes:

- The PC must succeed in a DC 10 Willpower save or be overcome with the urge to straighten his own possessions, personal appearance, and surroundings for 1d6 minutes.
- The PC hears pacing footsteps across the carpeted floor as if an invisible occupant was making rounds around the apartment.
- A sickly sweet taste fills the PC's mouth. If any of the energy drinks in the refrigerator are sampled, the taste is identical.
- An overwhelming self-doubt suddenly plagues the PC and unless a DC 12 Willpower save is successful, he automatically fails his next 1d3 actions.
- The PC must succeed in a DC 15 Willpower save or succumb to an irresistible self-destructive mania. The PC attempts to kill himself using the most formidable weapon or mutation available to him. Others can attempt to prevent him from acting, but the judge should require initiative checks to determine whether the PCs allies can act before he does. This urge passes after 10 minutes, but if left unattended prior to that time, the PC again attempts to commit suicide.

Area 2-7C—Apartment C: *These living quarters appear untouched by the calamity seen elsewhere. The rooms are clean and orderly, and little dust is present. There is a staleness to the air, however, that suggest they've been long sealed.*

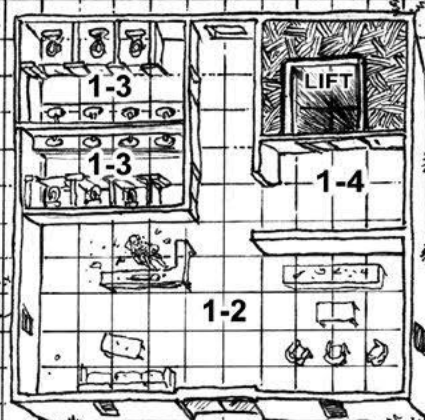
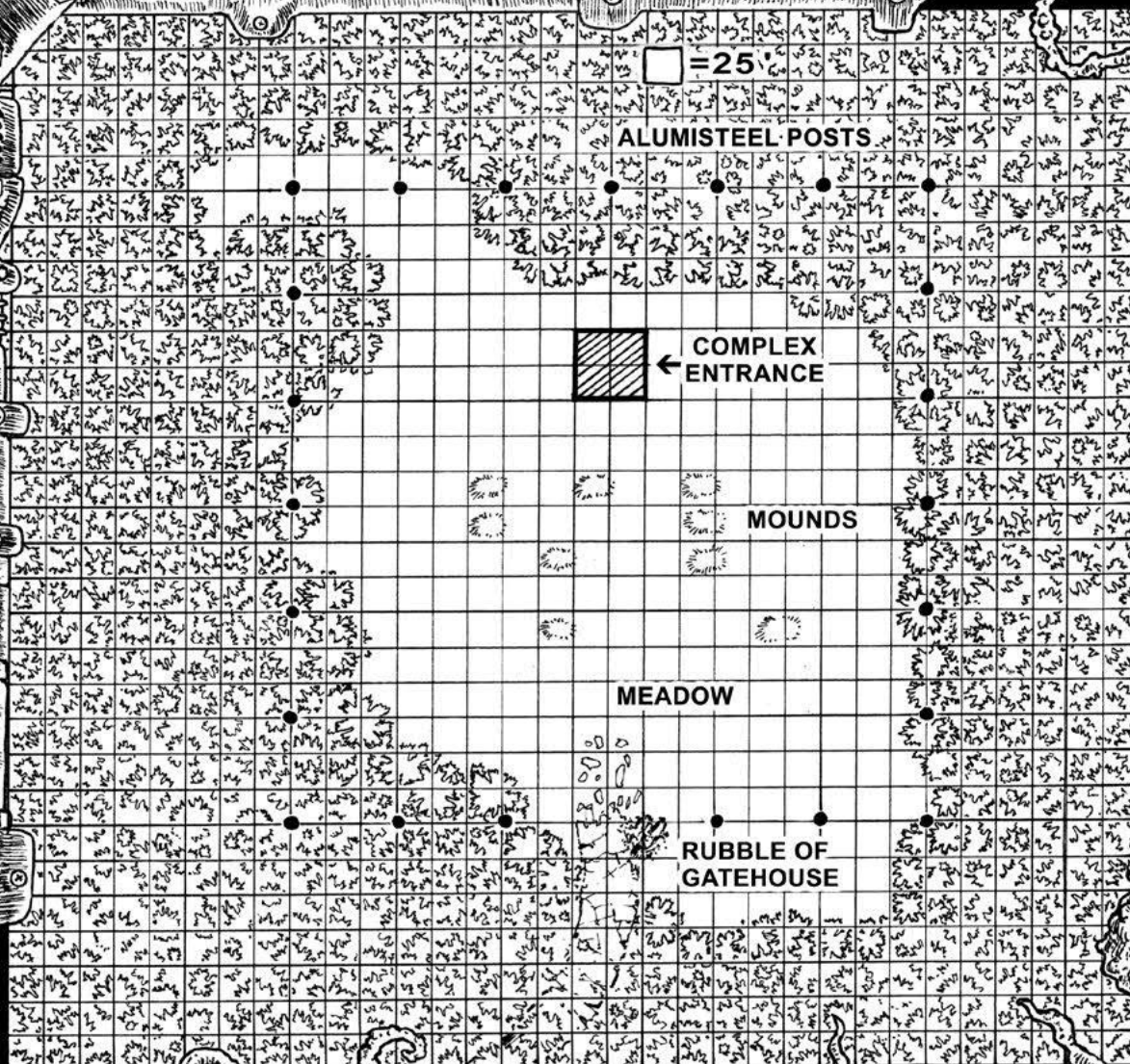
This apartment belonged to Minerva Station's lead researcher and program head and has been untouched since the Orphans' arrival. The interior rooms show signs of occupancy by an older woman: stuttering holographic photos of married children and beaming grandchildren are on display amongst the art, the bedroom contains conservative woman's clothing, and the bathroom holds a number of medicines and hygienic products suitable for a woman approaching her twilight years. Among the medical supplies is a medishot.

Although seemingly empty, the apartment is not unoccupied; the project head's pet, a synthetic cat still prowls the quarters. The artificial animal is a ragged, pitiful thing. Its synthetic fur is mangy, one of its eyes is dark and non-functional, and the creature walks with a lurching, uneven gait as its servo-motors are failing. The cat is not a threat to the PCs, but the judge is encouraged to use the animal to startle and/or unnerve the characters. After all, what's a good haunted house without an old-fashioned cat scare?

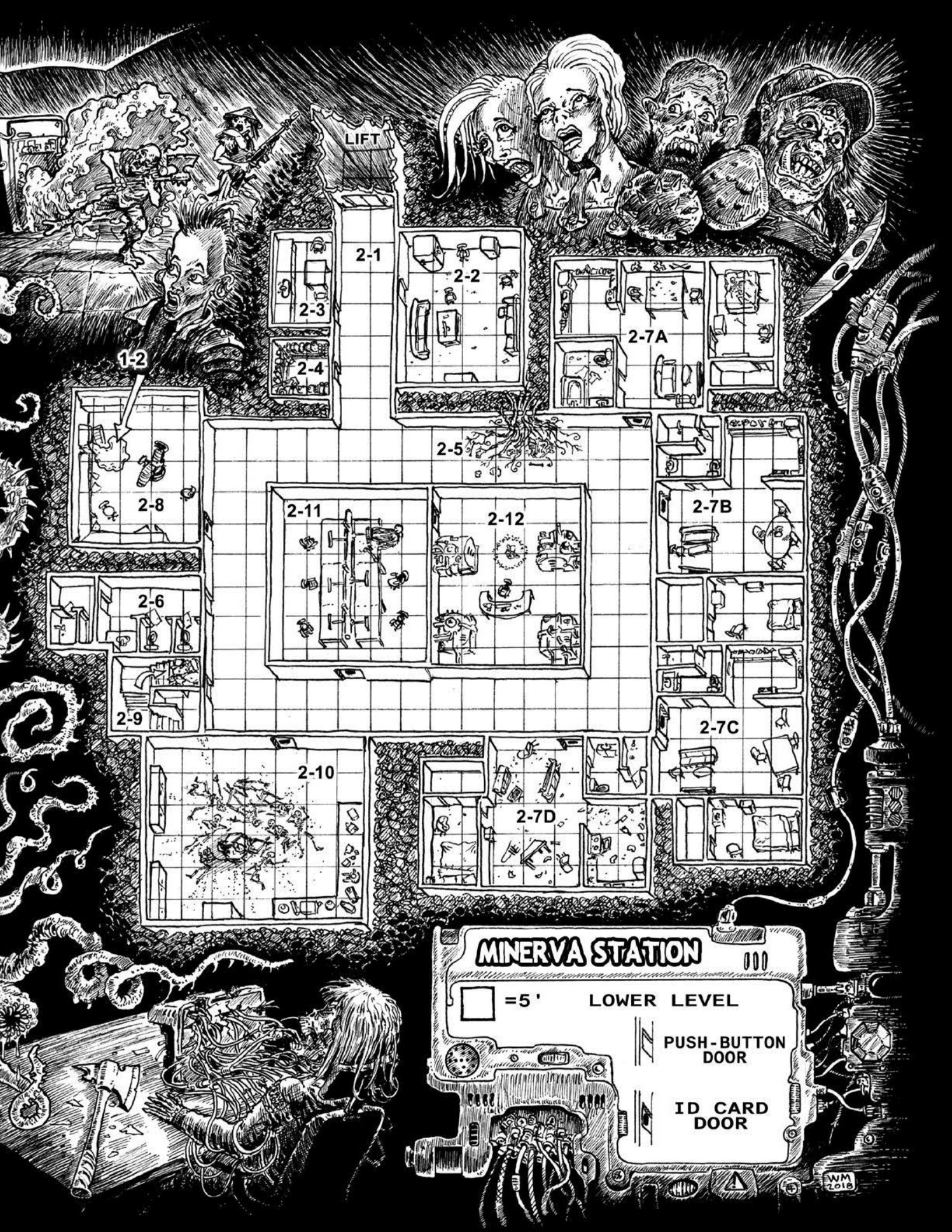
Synthetic Cat: Init -4; Atk none; AC 12; HD 2d8; hp 10; MV 20'; Act none; SP none; SV Fort -2, Ref +1, Will N.A.

Once its presence is revealed, the synthetic feline slithers around the PCs' ankles, mewling with a coughing, me-

MINERVA STATION



SURFACE LEVEL
□ = 5'



LIFT

2-1

2-2

2-3

2-4

2-7A

1-2

2-8

2-5

2-11

2-12

2-7B

2-6

2-9

2-10

2-7C

2-7D

MINERVA STATION

000



= 5'

LOWER LEVEL

PUSH-BUTTON
DOOR

ID CARD
DOOR

WM
2018



chanical whine and generally making itself a nuisance. It follows the PCs around the complex if allowed and the judge is free to continue to use the animal as a red herring or to lead the PCs into hazardous situations.

Memory Echoes:

- The PC detects the faint smell of lavender perfume. If the bathroom is searched, a bottle of perfume with the identical scent is discovered.
- The PC feels the brush of ghostly fur across his palms as if stroking an animal. This echo may or may not occur before the party discovers the synthetic cat.
- The PC experiences a sharp, chalky taste in his mouth as if dry-swallowing medicinal pills (the project leader was on a regular regiment of medications).
- The PC feels a phantom ache in his joints and hands as if wracked with arthritis. This condition lasts for 2d6 turns and imparts a -1 penalty to attack rolls, Strength and Agility checks, and a -2 penalty when making artifact checks.
- A feeling of mind-numbing fatigue creeps over the PC as if he has spent many nights without a restful sleep. Unless a DC 15 Willpower save succeeds, the PC suffers a -1 reduction to his Stamina and Personality, and a -2 penalty to mental mutation checks. This fatigue lasts until the character leaves the installation.

Area 2-7D—Apartment D: *These living quarters are in a state of violent disarray. Clothes slashed to ribbons are scattered about the floor, artwork has been torn from the walls and thrown violently to the ground, furnishings are overturned, and foodstuffs and condiments are slathered on the walls, some of which seem to spell out messages in the Ancient language.*

These quarters were occupied by the only married couple working at the installation, and the rooms show signs of double occupancy. The bed is larger, there is a mix of both masculine and feminine hygiene products in the bathroom, and the dresser contains clothing for both sexes. A small number of 3-D holographic photos show the couple at various events (their wedding, parties, scientific award ceremonies, etc.).

Anyone examining the pictures and succeeding in a DC 11 Intelligence check detects a growing sense of distance and dissatisfaction between the couple as the photos advance chronologically. Their expressions aren't so loving and they don't stand quite as close in later images. The arrival of the Orphans tore their already fragile marriage apart. Already a violent and controlling man, the Orphans' thought virus drove the husband to horrifically violent acts and ultimately the need to literally consume his wife. These rooms show signs of that unbridled, insane violence.

The apartment is in a state of violent disarray. In his rage, the husband slashed his wife's clothing, destroyed her possessions, and upturned the apartment. The hygiene products in the bathroom are scattered across the floor, the mirror broken and stained with blood. Crude epitaphs and invectives are scrawled on the kitchenette's walls in rotted, dried condiments and foodstuffs. Despite the violence, the apartment is empty of human remains.

Most of the belongings in the living quarters are destroyed, but a search of the rooms does uncover an energy cloak and three C-Cells in one closet, overlooked in the destructive rampage.

Memory Echoes:

- The PC experiences a flash of anger and jealousy as if one of his allies has betrayed him. The sensation passes quickly, but the judge might wish to capitalize on this fervent emotion by passing notes as suggested in Appendix A or otherwise further the paranoia amongst the party's ranks.
- The PC hears the echo of a heated argument that lasts only a few moments. Although the voices are incomprehensible, he detects both a male and female voice raised in anger.
- A gnawing hunger assails the PC, forcing him to make a DC 12 Fortitude save or be overcome with the urge to consume a hefty portion of whatever food he carries. Eating causes the hunger to subside, but still the PC feels unsatisfied as if the food was not what he truly craved.
- The PC must succeed in a DC 13 Willpower save or experience unrelenting anger. If the save fails, the PC attacks another character in a berserk rage. The PC assaults the character that he trusts, loves, or respects most above all others. Due to the ferocity of the attack, the assailant gains a +2 bonus on his physical attack and damage rolls (but not mutation checks). The PC

continues to attack until restrained, slain, or removed from this apartment and 1d6 rounds elapse.

- The PC automatically attacks those around him as if overwhelmed by the Orphan's thought virus. All those in his immediate vicinity are considered viable targets and the judge does not need to make d% rolls to determine who is a potential enemy as described in Appendix A.

Area 2-8—Infirmary: *The walls of this room are painted white and accented by steel fixtures. Closed cabinets hang from the walls and beneath a metal countertop. An upholstered chair/reclining table dominates the center of the room. A large metal disk inset with glass lenses, hangs from the ceiling above the chair/table combination.*

This infirmary was well-stocked and staffed to treat minor injuries and stabilize more serious cases until emergency personnel could be summoned. The room contains several cabinets and drawers holding bandages, topical ointments, antiseptics, pain-relievers, and minor medical tools such as tongue depressors, swabs, tweezers, suture thread and needles, and the like. Oddly, there are no cutting tools present in the drawers and every pair of scissors or scalpel is missing.

The chair/reclining table combination is a treatment unit and it occupies much of the floor space. Several touch pads and panels adorn the device, which when used correctly, provides diagnosis and treatment suggestions for subjects sitting/reclining within the device. The lens-covered disk hanging above the treatment table is a diagnostic sensor array and medicine applicator. The treatment bed is still

powered and functional, and is Tech Level 5 and CM 6. If properly used, it provides the benefits of a medipac up to four times before shorting out.

A small refrigerator here once held perishable medicines and specimens, but it is no longer powered. The microscopic organisms and cultures within have achieved a strange new form of life over the centuries. A pool of viscous goo spills from the open refrigerator door onto the floor. This goo is actually smart mud. The mutated goop is normally in a state of hibernation when food is not available, but stirs to life when it detects the PCs presence in the room.

Smart Mud: Init +1; Atk pseudopod +3 melee (1d12 plus suffocation); AC 10; HD 6d6; hp 30; MV 20'; Act 2d20; SP grapple to suffocate (DC 12 Fort save or suffocate in 2d5 rounds); SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +1.

In addition to the mundane medical supplies present here are two cureshots, a medishot, a radshot, three accelershots, and four medipacs.

Memory Echoes:

- The PC feels cold, latex-covered hands probing his body.
- The smell of antiseptic suddenly assails the PCs nostrils.
- A sharp sudden pain strikes the PC's arm as if he's been injected with an unknown substance. He must make a DC 10 Willpower save. If failed, the PC believes he's been injected with a harmful substance and he temporarily loses 3 Stamina as his body fights the psychosomatic injection.



- The PC believes himself subject to numerous small lacerations as if from a scalpel and must make a DC 12 Willpower save to avoid suffering 2d6 points of psychosomatic damage. If the saving throw fails, the PC “sees” the wounds on his body and cannot be convinced he’s uninjured. He may even use or demand healing to address the wounds, but any such treatment has no effect.
- The PC becomes convinced he’s been exposed to a deadly virus (not far from the truth) that must be treated immediately. Unless stopped, he begins consuming random medicinal substances in this room regardless of intended use (swallowing topical ointment, for example). The PC must succeed in a DC 15 Fortitude save or suffer 1d4 points of Stamina loss and take 2d5+3 damage from consuming harmful chemicals. The PC loses 1 point of Stamina and takes 1d4+1 damage on a successful save.

Area 2-9—Emergency Exit: *A flight of stairs rises into the air, perhaps leading back to the surface. However, the stairs and shaft have undergone partial collapse and the upper part of the 15’ square shaft is choked with rubble. Exit via the stairs is impossible unless the debris is somehow cleared.*

This area was once a simple 50’ high shaft rising up to a sealed trap door on the surface, accessible by the winding staircase. It was intended as an emergency escape route in the case of catastrophe or if the lift malfunctioned. Since the Great Disaster, the shaft has partially collapsed. Unless cleared, the stairs offer no escape from the installation.

A desperate party might attempt to blast a path through the massive rocks and broken duracrete chunks that clog the shaft. Doing so requires inflicting 300 points of damage from energy weapons or explosives. However, if the PCs are standing at the base of the shaft when attempting this, there is a 65% chance the whole mass comes crashing down on their heads. A DC 15 Reflex saving throw must succeed in order for a PC to leap to safety. If failed, they take 20d6 points of damage from the collapse.

If successfully cleared, the trapdoor at the top of the shaft opens with a simple push-bar, but the door is buried beneath 2’ of dirt and loam and requires a DC 20 Strength check to push open. From the outside the trapdoor cannot be seen as it is obscured by earth, but if somehow discovered and the loam cleared away, only a red identification card (a type used by emergency response personnel and not present in the complex) or a gray identification card opens the door from the outside.

Memory Echoes: As this location was never used, there are no memories associated with it and therefore no echoes occur in this area.

Area 2-10—Maintenance Shop: *The smell of oil and less wholesome lubricants foul the air of this dim space. In the gloom, tables bearing strange machines, tools, and other unidentifiable devices are placed about the room. A trio of storage lockers stand against one wall. However, the room’s most noticeable and*

terrible feature are the piles of skeletal and mummified bodies littering the floor. An ocean of dried gore surrounds them, turning them into ghastly islands in the middle of a blood-stained sea. The bodies are pierced with tools, knives, and other sharp implements, and are clustered near a large unidentifiable machine.

This former maintenance area turned slaughterhouse houses a number of small worktables holding devices in various states of disrepair. Two large, non-functional diagnostic machines, each the size of an office photocopier, flank the workbenches.

The three storage lockers contain replacement machine parts, wiring, and other materials used in machine repair (and capable of repairing the lift if currently inoperable). Amidst the normal tools and supplies are a multitool, sonic spanner, and fusion torch. A plastic crate containing six charged C-Cells sits at the bottom of one locker.

The eight bodies are in various states of intactness (some are stripped to bare bone, while others are clothed in dried flesh), but all show signs of violent death and dismemberment. Bones are broken and sawed in half, and kitchen knives and scalpels are lodged in the empty eye sockets of skulls or trapped in cartilage. There are two dozen blades present, which can be used as knives (1d3 damage).

Beyond the bodies is a lazer drill press, still faintly humming with power. The desiccated form of a pure strain human male lies before the machine, his back arched in an uncomfortable position, one that places his skull directly beneath the drill press arm. A nickel-sized burn hole is visible in the corpse’s forehead, his gray matter cauterized by laser, and a second hole is burned through the back of his head. Most unnervingly, the body’s mummified hand rests on the press’s controls, indicating that the victim himself activated the machine.

The lazer drill press is Tech Level 3 and CM 3. Given the obvious function of it, the PCs can easily determine where the dangerous part of it is. Artifact checks made to determine how to operate the machine treat results of 2-8 as if they were rolls of 9-11 on Table 7-1: Artifact Checks on p. 168. Anything placed directly under the laser press or that passes through a functioning beam suffers 8d6 damage.

The unfortunate who killed himself on the press was once the project’s assistant director. He was present in the room when the Orphans broke through. Assailed by this unintelligible intellect from beyond, the assistant director suffered the brunt of the entities’ thought virus, swiftly succumbing to madness. Although many of the project’s staff went insane with the Orphans’ arrival, this man orchestrated their madness in no small part, encouraging them to lash out at one another in horrific acts designed to placate the Orphans. Ultimately, he himself died to please the ineffable entities who sought to utilize his ritualistic death to return to their home. The effort failed, but the Orphans are patient things and the PCs arrival represents a new opportunity to escape.

Memory Echoes: If Minerva Station has a dark heart, this place is it. The memory echoes in this area are more dan-

gerous than elsewhere in the complex, even to those who are only slightly affected by the Orphans' mental infection.

- The PC's ears ring with sounds of screams and the sonic drone of power tools applied to flesh. Unless a DC 10 Willpower save succeeds, the PC's brain recoils at the audio assault and he flees from the place in terror for 2d6 rounds. The PC races back towards the lift, attacking anyone who attempts to stop him using the most readily accessible weapon or mutation available.
- The PC experiences the pain and horror of those who died here. A DC 14 Willpower save must be made to avoid taking 4d6 points of psychosomatic damage. If the saving throw roll is a natural "1" the PC also falls comatose for 1d6 turns. Nothing will rouse him from his stupor during this time as his mind effectively shuts down to escape the experienced horrors.
- The PC feels an overwhelming bloodlust and hatred for his fellow party members unless a DC 15 Willpower save is made. If failed, the PC begins to plot their deaths, with an eye towards taking one of them alive to sacrifice on the laser drill press "altar" to the Orphans. The judge should secretly inform the player of this desire and reward the player with 4 bonus XP if he initiates (but not necessarily achieves) his goal. If he succeeds, he also gains a permanent 2 points of Luck. Should the player fail to role-play this homicidal impulses appropriately, the judge is free to take control of the PC until the mania passes or the character is slain by his fellows. The bloodlust lasts as long as the PC remains in the installation and for 24 hours after leaving Minerva Station.
- Assailed by the horrific death experiences of nine people, the PC must succeed in a DC 15 Fortitude save or die, a victim of his body's own belief it should be dead.
- If the PC who experiences a manifestation possesses the highest Intelligence score in the group or three or more mental mutations or the phase shift mutation he finds himself drawn to the lazer press, intent on reenacting the same suicide as the assistant director. No saving throw is permitted; the PC automatically succumbs to this compulsion. Other PCs may attempt to prevent his death, but the judge should require initiative rolls to determine the order of each PC's actions. It takes up to two rounds for the PC to place himself beneath the press (one round to remove the body if it is in place and another to position himself and activate the press). The Orphans provide mental visions of how to operate the lazer drill and no artifact check is required by the PC to operate it. On the third round, the laser drill pierces his skull, requiring a DC 20 Fortitude save to avoid being instantly killed by the machine. Even if this save is successful, the PC suffers 8d6 points of damage and permanently loses 1d4 points of Intelligence. The PC must continue to make a Fortitude save each round to avoid dying, but may still perish due to damage. This process continues so long as the PC remains beneath

the drill. If the PC dies, see Concluding the Adventure for further details.

Area 2-11—Operations: *Six table-like consoles comprised of chairs facing angled black panels supported on rigid posts run down the center of this room forming a double row of three. Thin, dark rectangular sheets litter the table tops, some stained with dried liquid. The sixth console is heavily damaged, hacked apart by a large axe lying nearby to expose the various wires, strange boards, and other innards. The desiccated corpse of a woman sits facing the terminal. Wiring from within the unit have been inserted into her mummified flesh, turning her into a human switchboard. The body appears to have suffered further mutilation, but it is difficult to discern what without closer inspection.*

Computer operations and neural network interfaces were conducted in this room. Ergonomic chairs face each terminal. The rectangles atop the units are data flimsies, now dark and blood-stained. The terminals are currently inoperable, victims of age and neglect, but it is possible to restore function to them (see below).

The sixth terminal is a macabre sight. The unit has been hacked open with a fire axe (1d10 damage) that lies beside it. The circuit boards and wiring are pulled out in a spider's web of filament and electronics. The wires runs to the corpse sitting before it, turning her into a ghastly marionette.

The corpse is that of a pure strain human woman in her early sixties. She wears a bloodstained laboratory coat. Naked wiring, their protective insulation stripped away, are inserted beneath her skin in more than fifty places. Her eyes are gone, the sockets filled with shards of broken circuit boards that stare blindly towards the ceiling. A DC 12 Intelligence check horrifically suggests that the woman did all this to herself.

This is the body of Minerva Station's head physicist. Driven insane by the Orphans' presence, she attempts to acquiesce to their demands to return to their native place by bodily interfacing herself with the complex's computer. She did not succeed. A search of her body uncovers a blue identification card (opens area 2-7C) hanging on a lanyard around her neck.

The terminals are in poor repair, but it might be briefly restored to life with an artifact check that succeeds with a 20+. The terminals are Tech Level 5 and CM 6, and it takes a full hour instead of 3 turns of experimentation before the artifact check can be attempted (during which time Willpower saves must be made for the PCs against the Orphans' thought virus as normal).

If operations are restored, the complex's neural network comes online briefly (10 minutes) before shorting out completely. During this time, the PCs can access the information stored in Minerva Station's data banks. Most of the information is unintelligible to the PC and consists of schedules, experimental data, and other mundane details.

However, buried amongst this dross is a complete inventory of videos recorded by the installations security cam-

eras prior to and after the catastrophe that brought the Orphans' to Terra A.D. PCs viewing the recordings see the staff degenerate into madness after a seemingly unspectacular day's work at the complex. The Orphans arrived without fanfare, their intrusion consisting entirely of psychic backlash undetectable by the camera. The videos show a number of obscene acts and horrific violence culminating in the deaths of the entire staff, but no clue as to the origin of this insanity exists.

In addition to accessing the security recordings, PCs able to operate the terminal can restore function to the complex's lift system if it has failed. This requires a DC 10 Intelligence check.

Memory Echoes:

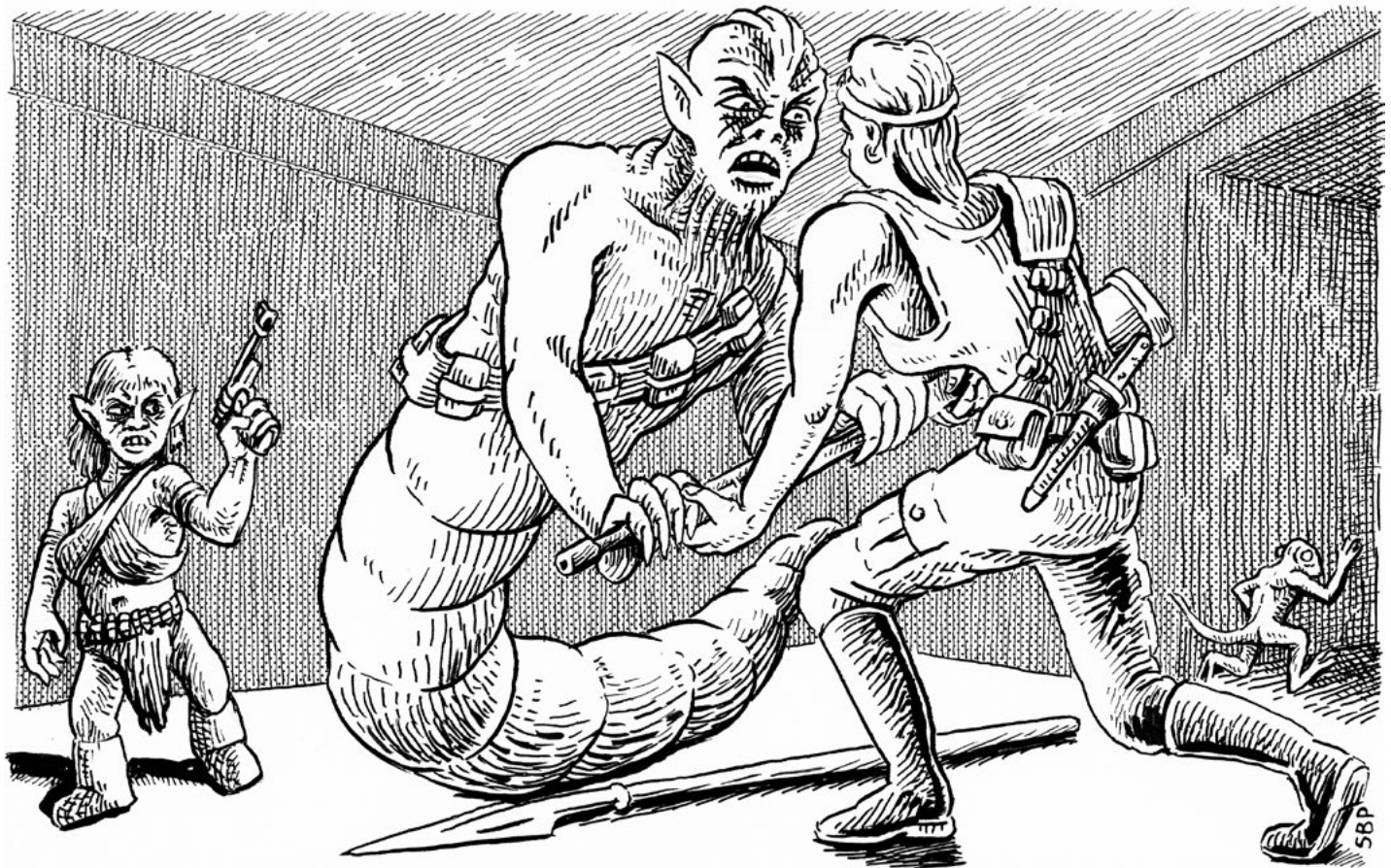
- The PC has a momentary flash of ghostly, blue-white data streams, faces, and other such phenomena visible on one or more of the room's dead monitors.
- The PC's skin crawls as if long, thin worms slithered across it. This tactile memory is that of the project head pulling wiring from the terminal.
- The PC become maniacally focused on one of the terminals and dedicates himself to understanding its operation. Unless a DC 13 Willpower save is successful, the PC continues to experiment with the console to decipher its operation until he either succeeds in restoring function to the neural network (as detailed above) or is

physically dragged away from it by his allies. There is a 25% chance that the PC uncontrollably attacks those attempting to separate the character from the object of his mania.

- The PC's eyes are wracked with pain as if they'd been torn violently from their sockets. Unless a DC 15 Willpower save succeeds, the character suffers from hysterical blindness for 1d4 hours. Mutations that supplement or replace vision (extra senses, for example) are unaffected, but vision-based mutations such as ultravision cannot be utilized during this "blindness."
- The PC must make a DC 20 Willpower save or violently rip his own eyes out. Unless prevented, his efforts succeed, permanently blinding the character. Vision-based mutations are lost along with the PC's sight.

Area 2-12—Laboratory: *Four bulky machines, each taller and twice as broad as a pure strain human and covered with protrusions, projectors, and tubes, stand near the corners of this area. Another table-like console similar to those found in the previous room sits at the center of this white colored room. On the wide, empty floor beyond the terminal, the dried corpse of a pure strain human male sits cross-legged. It is turned away from the room's entrance, obscuring its face. Complex symbols are drawn around the body on the floor in a dried, rust-colored substance.*

If area 2-10 is Minerva Station's dark heart, this area is its insane mind. It was here that the catastrophic reverberations



throughout the Athena Project's network manifested, giving the Orphans entrance into the world. All creatures entering this room are subject to another Willpower save against the Orphans' infection with a -1d penalty to the roll. If the saving throw fails, taking the character above or beyond the five failed save threshold, the Orphan's thought virus overwhelms them in a slightly altered manner (see sidebar).

The corpse is that of a pure strain human male, still dressed in a tattered, dusty lab coat. It rests cross-legged on the floor. A small drift of mummified flesh lies beside its left hand. Its right hand holds a kitchen knife. These scraps of skin have been stripped from the corpse's face, leaving a yellowed, grinning skull in the wake of the self-mutilation. A semi-circle of complex mathematical formulae is drawn around the body, inked in congealed blood. If the judge desires a traditional adventure climax to this scenario, the formulae may provide it (see **Concluding the Adventure** below) or they may be incomprehensible to post-apocalyptic minds, a legacy of the higher math that led to the Orphans' arrival.

The four large machines are futuristic technological devices that replaced the miles-long ion colliders and other massive devices once required for experimental physics research. Each is the size of a modern refrigerator and covered with 3-D data projectors, motion-capture sensors, and

other unidentifiable protrusions. They have no power and are inert (but this may change if the judge decides to allow the adventure's alternate ending).

The computer console may or may not be powered. If the judge decides to provide the alternate ending to this adventure, it is operational and can be used to enact the final steps needed to confront the Orphans in this dimension (see **Concluding the Adventure** below).

Memory Echoes: As the origin point of the Orphans' arrival, none of the memories associated with the site are pleasant, and all potentially have horrific repercussions even at low exposure levels.

- The PC experiences terrible anxiety as if something is about to go horribly wrong. A DC 12 Willpower save must succeed or the character collapses in a helpless state, unable to act or even defend himself if attacked. This incapacitating anxiety lasts for as long as the PC is present in this area and for 1 turn after leaving it.
- The PC flesh crawls and writhes as if a multitude of loathsome creatures have burrowed beneath his skin. Unless a DC 13 Willpower save is successful, the PC begins tearing at his flesh, inflicting 1d3 points of damage (possibly more if the character possesses natural weapons such as claws or similar mutations) each

SUCCUMBING TO THE ORPHANS IN THE LAB

Any PCs who fails their fifth or more Willpower save while inside area 2-12 does so close to the center of the Orphans' domain and the thought virus manifests in a slightly different manner.

Instead of succumbing to the blood-lust that typically results at this level of infection, the thought virus-infected PCs gain an incomplete understanding of the Orphans' goal to escape and their need of massive mental and emotional power to achieve that goal. The characters understand that something is trapped in this world and it requires a sacrifice to depart it, but what that something is remains unclear. Despite this lack of comprehension, the infected PCs, instead of turning upon one another, feel compelled to work together to provide that offering to these unknown forces.

The thought virus-infected PCs are compelled to choose one of their number (including non-affected PCs) as this sacrifice. The infected subconsciously know that a character with either the highest Intelligence score, three or more mental mutations, or, most desirably, the phase shift mutation is the most appropriate sacrifice. Allow the players to choose amongst their ranks the

subject to go under the knife (or, in this case, the lazer drill). Should one of the affected PCs meet the criteria, the judge can allow the PC to make a DC 15 Willpower save to ignore the compulsion to offer himself up, but if failed the character willingly volunteers. Non-infected PCs can resist in any manner they choose. Combat is likely at this point and thought virus-infected PCs know that capture or incapacitation is desirable over killing. Allow the battle to play out and let the dice fall where they may.

Once a subject agrees to or is coerced into offering himself as a sacrifice, the thought virus-infected PCs are compelled to bring the subject to area 2-10 to offer the individual up to the Orphans upon the lazer drill press. If the subject dies beneath the drill, see **Concluding the Adventure** below to determine the result of the PCs' death.

If the sacrificed PC fails to free the Orphans, the compulsion to offer up a victim continues and the affected PCs must provide another victim to the lazer press. This compulsion persists until either the Orphans successfully escape, no suitable sacrifice remains (see below) or the entire party dies under the drill.

round for 2d6 rounds. Intervention by the other PCs can stop this self-abuse, but otherwise the PC continues injuring himself until the duration elapses.

- The PC feels as if his mind has been subjected to a horrific violation, one that eats away at his synapses and corrodes his thoughts. A DC 14 Willpower save must succeed or the PC immediately becomes a walking shell of his former self. His Personality is immediately and permanently reduced to 3.
- The PC glimpses ineffable forms lurking at the edges of his vision. So incomprehensible are these entities (the Orphans' true forms) that the character's mind reels in horror, requiring a DC 15 Willpower save to avoid sudden and complete insanity. The PC becomes an NPC under the judge's control. Only extremely advanced technological or mutational healing can restore him to his right mind (judge's discretion).
- The PC experiences the cosmic horror of the Orphans' entry on a physical level. So powerful is this emotional, physical, and psychic onslaught that the character must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or die. Even if the save is successful, the PC permanently loses 1d3 points of Stamina, Intelligence, and Personality, plus takes 4d6 points of damage from physiological trauma.



CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Evil of the Ancients is firmly set in the lethality of both the post-apocalyptic and cosmic horror genres. It is very possible the adventure ends with the PCs turning upon themselves and only a few (if any) survivors making it back to the surface. The best way for the party to "win" this adventure is to flee Minerva Station before they are completely overwhelmed by the Orphans' thought virus, perhaps with a few looted artifacts for their troubles. They may never know what they faced in the bowels of Minerva Station and, in the cosmic horror tradition, the judge has no obligation to enlighten them.

Parties that persist in exploring the installation once they've succumbed to the Orphans' infectious thought virus face a grimmer end. It is probable that, either through the infection's compulsion or simple player paranoia, the party turns on one another. Given their access to powerful artifacts and deadly mutations, the PCs may wipe themselves out through intraparty combat. If this occurs, let the dice fall as they may. The Orphans are patient and eventually another foolhardy group will enter the installation and free them.

In the event that the PCs do incur numerous fatalities as a result of combat amongst their ranks and only one or two characters survive, the Orphans may choose to allow them to leave the installation as unwitting pawns. The extra-dimensional entities no longer seek to infect the survivors'

minds and the remaining PCs can leave Minerva Station. However, upon leaving the installation, the PC(s) continue to have dreams of the place.

A nagging desire to return to Minerva Station plagues them, but they can ignore this desire if they choose. However, whenever the PC encounters another creature, either a PC or NPC who possesses an Intelligence of 16+, three or more mental mutations, or the phase shift mutation, they must make a DC 12 Willpower save or be overcome with the urge to bring that person back to the Minerva Station by whatever means necessary. This compulsion continues for as long as the PC(s) live or until the Orphans depart this world. The PC automatically knows when an encountered creature possesses the above criteria, seemingly psychically alerted to the fact by some lingering echo of the Orphans' mental infection.

PCs that leave the installation gradually shake off the thought virus (but not the compulsion to bring another there if applicable). Every 12 hours after exiting the complex, the PC "heals" one failed save gradually reducing the infection threshold until it is gone completely. Over time the PC is no longer in danger of attacking his allies or experiencing the more potent memory echoes should they return to the installation. PCs that do return, however, are once again subject to the Orphans' influence and must make Willpower saves as usual.

POTENTIAL RESOLUTION 1: THE ORPHANS DEPART

If a PC dies beneath the lazer drill press in area 2-10, either as a result of succumbing to a memory echo, submitting to the infection's compulsion, or unwillingly at the hands of his former friends, his death possibly results in a tear in the cosmic fabric that allows the Orphans to leave this world. The chance of a tear occurring is dependent on the PC's Intelligence and Personality scores, plus any mutations.

The base percentile chance of the tear occurring in the wake of the sacrifice is equal to the sum of the victim's Intelligence and Personality scores (a PC with an Intelligence of 11 and a Personality of 14 has a 25% chance of freeing the Orphans, for example). If the PC also has three mental mutations a bonus +30% is added to this base. For each additional beneficial mutation beyond three, an additional +10% bonus is applied. If the character possesses the phase shift mutation, the rupture automatically occurs and the Orphans depart back to their native place in the time/space continuum.

If the Orphans successfully escape, the thought infection swiftly fades and each PC "heals" one failed Willpower save they've accumulated every hour. PCs within Minerva Station no longer have to make Willpower saves and, with the infection's healing, experienced memory echoes are reduced in potency until all the PC's accumulated failed saving throws are removed. From that point forward, the characters no longer experience memory echoes or other compulsions inside the installation and are free to explore and loot Minerva Station at their leisure. Of course, the Orphans' departure does nothing to mend the party's (and perhaps players') relationships after attempting to kill one another!

POTENTIAL RESOLUTION 2: CONFRONTING THE ORPHANS

Some MCC groups might desire a more physical climax to the adventure, a chance to confront and potentially destroy the Orphans rather than succumb to madness and intra-party conflict. If the judge suspects the group might not appreciate a more subtle ending, this optional resolution can be used.

If the PCs enter area 2-12 and discover the body there, one of them experiences a memory echo of the researcher's final moments. The PC feels blood dripping down his or her face as they frantically compute a complex mathematical formula, writing it down in their own blood. They know these arcane symbols are the key to reversing what has gone wrong and that they must be entered into the system! The PC suffers 1 point of temporary Personality damage and 1d4 damage from the psychosomatic injuries incurred by the memory of peeling apart their own face and using their blood as ink.

Entering the formula found around the corpse into one of the Station's computer terminals (either in areas 2-11 or 2-12, assuming they figure out how to operate these systems with an artifact check), causes the quartet of machines

in area 2-12 to spring to life. A hum fills the air and fields of energy scintillate in the air between them. After a few moments, something is visible within the energy fields. It is the Orphans.

A blaze of blue light fills the room, seemingly originating from the hulking and formerly silent machines placed here. The light is not blinding, but when you glimpse what lies within it, you wish for a moment it were.

Visible within the scintillating light are a cluster of growths writhing and pulsing, rugose and pallid, like a malignant cancer mated with decaying fungi. Nodules swell and open, revealing fleshy orifices containing hundreds of needle-like spines. Membranous growths filled with jellied matter emerge from its foul, wrinkled shape, perhaps serving as eyes or other sensory organs. The thing, which may be comprised of numerous smaller things merged together like a nest of serpents, fills the entire field of light. Yet, you somehow sense this is only a small part of a greater and terrible thing. The form is slightly translucent, as if it is not entirely present in the room...or perhaps even this world.

Anyone glimpsing the Orphans in their manifested state must immediately make another Willpower save against their infectious mental presence. Assuming the PCs don't succumb to the thought virus and begin selecting potential sacrifices (as described in area 2-12), they can turn their powers and weaponry on the now-visible Orphans. The Orphans don't attack unless attacked first, but their alien nature and thought process makes it impossible for them to communicate with the party and vice-versa.

The Orphans: Init +0; Atk mutations (see SP); AC 13; HD 12d12; hp 100; MV 0'; Act 2d20; SP only partially manifested (non-powered physical attacks do ½ damage, artifacts and mental attacks do normal damage), mutations (Orphans make mutation checks by rolling 1d10+12; *cryokinesis, death field generation, life force reflection, mental blast, mental shield, mental reflection, molecular disruption, temporary invulnerability, and life force drain*), alien composition (immune to gaining defects, no need to eat, sleep, or drink); SV Fort +8, Ref +0, Will +10.

The Orphans still desire to utilize the PCs to tear open the dimensional rift and return home, and will not initially attack to kill, preferring instead to injure or incapacitate. If one or more of the PCs has succumb to the thought virus and intends to sacrifice one of his fellows, the Orphans do what they can to aid that PC. The Orphans only use their power to try and slay the party if it is clear the PCs pose a severe and imminent threat to their existence.

Destroying one or more of the four machines generating the energy field (each is AC 15 and has 50 hp) causes the field to collapse and the Orphans cease manifesting. They return to their normal imperceptible state, immune to damage from the PC and vice-versa.

Slaying the Orphans permanently destroys the alien thought form and clears Minerva Station of their presence as if the rift was reopened and they returned to their home dimension. See Potential Resolution #1 above for details on an Orphan-free Minerva Station.

APPENDIX A:

THE ORPHANS' INFECTION

The PCs are subject to the subtle influence of the Orphans' presence and their infectious intellect battering upon the characters' psyches so long as they are inside Minerva Station. As the intensity of the attacks increase and the PCs succumb to them, the installation becomes more and more unsettling. A PC or PCs who fall completely under the Orphans' power might perish by their own hands. This section details the Orphans' infection and how it impacts the PCs. The judge can print it out for easy reference while running the adventure.

THE ORPHANS' INFLUENCE

In game terms, the memory infection manifests as a regular series of mental attacks against the characters. On a successful attack, the PCs severity of infection increases and they become open to experiencing the worst memories the installation has to offer. At the highest level of infection, their minds are completely corrupted by the Orphans and free will becomes a distant dream.

Infection works as follows:

Every three turns (30 minutes) spent inside the installation, the judge secretly makes a Willpower save for each PC. The DC is based on the characters' genotype. If the judge doesn't wish to track time this precisely, make a Willpower save for each PC each time they enter a new area. At the judge's discretion, he may allow the players to make their own Willpower saving throws, but should NEVER reveal why they make these saves or the DC they need to meet. The PCs can spend Luck to increase their roll results, but must do so blindly without knowing if they succeed or fail once the Luck is spent.

- Pure strain human PCs must succeed in a DC 14 Willpower save due to the Orphans' prior exposure to human thought processes and brain structure.
- Mutants face a DC 12 Willpower save since there are shared, but not complete, similarities between their minds and those of their human forebearers.
- Manimals and plantients must succeed in a DC 10 Willpower save due to their inhuman brain patterns.

If the character has the *mental shield* mutation in effect when the Orphans infectious attack occurs, he automatically succeeds in his Willpower save. The *mental reflection* mutation cannot be triggered to resist the infection as the thought virus is so insidious and subtle the PC is unaware of the attack.

Additionally, any time a PC utilizes the mental mutations *domination*, *empathy*, *mind control*, or *telepathy*, they automatically expose themselves to the Orphans' thought virus by opening their minds and must make another Willpower save.

EFFECTS OF INFECTION

Each failed Willpower save by a PC increases their level of susceptibility to the Orphans' presence in the installation. Beginning with the first failed save, the PC starts experiencing physical and emotional sensations stemming from the events that occurred around the time the Orphans entered the world. These experiences occur as memory echoes (described above), unsettling manifestations that "haunt" Minerva Station. As the PC fails more and more Willpower saves, the severity (and possibly lethality) of the memory echoes increases as well.

AFTER 3+ FAILED WILLPOWER SAVES

Once a PC fails three or more Willpower saves, a creeping sense of paranoia overtakes them. Rather than utilize game mechanics to represent this state of overwhelming suspicion, the judge should engage in the time-honored roleplaying tradition of passing notes to the player, ensuring other players cannot read the missives given to one of their number. The notes can be almost anything: a small detail that only one PC notices ("You detect a small bloodstain in the corner of the room. Do you wish to let your companions know about it?"), a personal choice ("You spy a strange looking artifact at the bottom of the drawer you're ransacking. It looks like it might be a weapon of some sort. Nobody is paying attention to you and you can slip it into your pocket without them noticing. Do you do so?") or a complete fabrication ("Omar seems distracted as if he's hearing voices only he can understand. Are you comfortable with that or would you like to continue to keep a sharp eye on him?").

Memory echoes themselves can also be conveyed in written form to the player whose PC experiences them. Whenever possible, it's important that these messages ask a question to the player, requiring him or her to write a response and pass the message back to you. Once you begin the process of passing notes and receiving responses, it's a good bet that the other players will begin writing their own messages to pass to you. With so much information passing *sub rosa*, it's only a matter of time before the *players* (not their characters) start experiencing the same paranoid delusions their alter egos are manifesting.

AFTER 5+ FAILED WILL SAVES

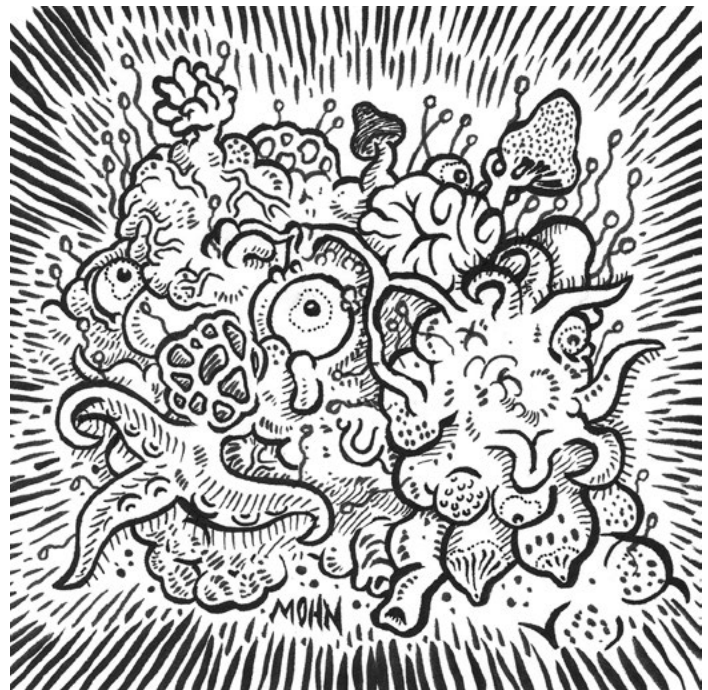
Once a PC fails five or more Will saving throws, they develop a something akin to the delusional defect. This phenomenon is not a mutation per se (and thus even pure strain humans are susceptible), but a mental condition spurred on by the Orphans' infection. This defect manifests as an ir-

rational hatred and dark suspicion of all those around him.

After a PC reaches this threshold, there is has a 25% chance the irrational PC attacks one or more creatures within 90' of him. The judge should check once for each creature present. If the d% roll is greater than 25%, the urge to attack that individual passes, but if the individual who passed the check ever leaves the PC's presence and later returns, a new check is made.

On a roll of 25% or less, the PC is overcome with bloodlust and attacks the individual or individuals concerned, utilizing their most accessible weapon or mutation to do so. PCs with an Intelligence score of 16 or better under the effect of this condition are allowed a DC 13 Willpower save to suppress their murderous rage. If the check fails, they attack the creature(s) that angered them. Only slaying, incapacitating, or assuming complete control over the attacking PC (via mutations or other means) stops the affected character from attacking. Note that mutations which cause the user to experience the subject's emotions (*empathy*, for example) exposes the acting mutant to this same irrational rage affecting the target, requiring them to make checks as above to avoid indulging in the same wholesale slaughter of their comrades.

For each failed Willpower save beyond the fifth, the chance the PC attacks his comrades grows. After six failed saves, there is a 50% chance he goes mad and assaults the others. After seven failures, the chance increases to 75%, and if the character ever fails eight Willpower saves, he automatically



turns on his friends. Each time the chance of attacking one's allies increases, a new check is made to determine if the PC engages in bloodshed.

An infected PC can only recover from the thought virus by leaving Minerva Station and removing themselves from the range of the Orphans' influence. See **Ending the Adventure** above for more on this.

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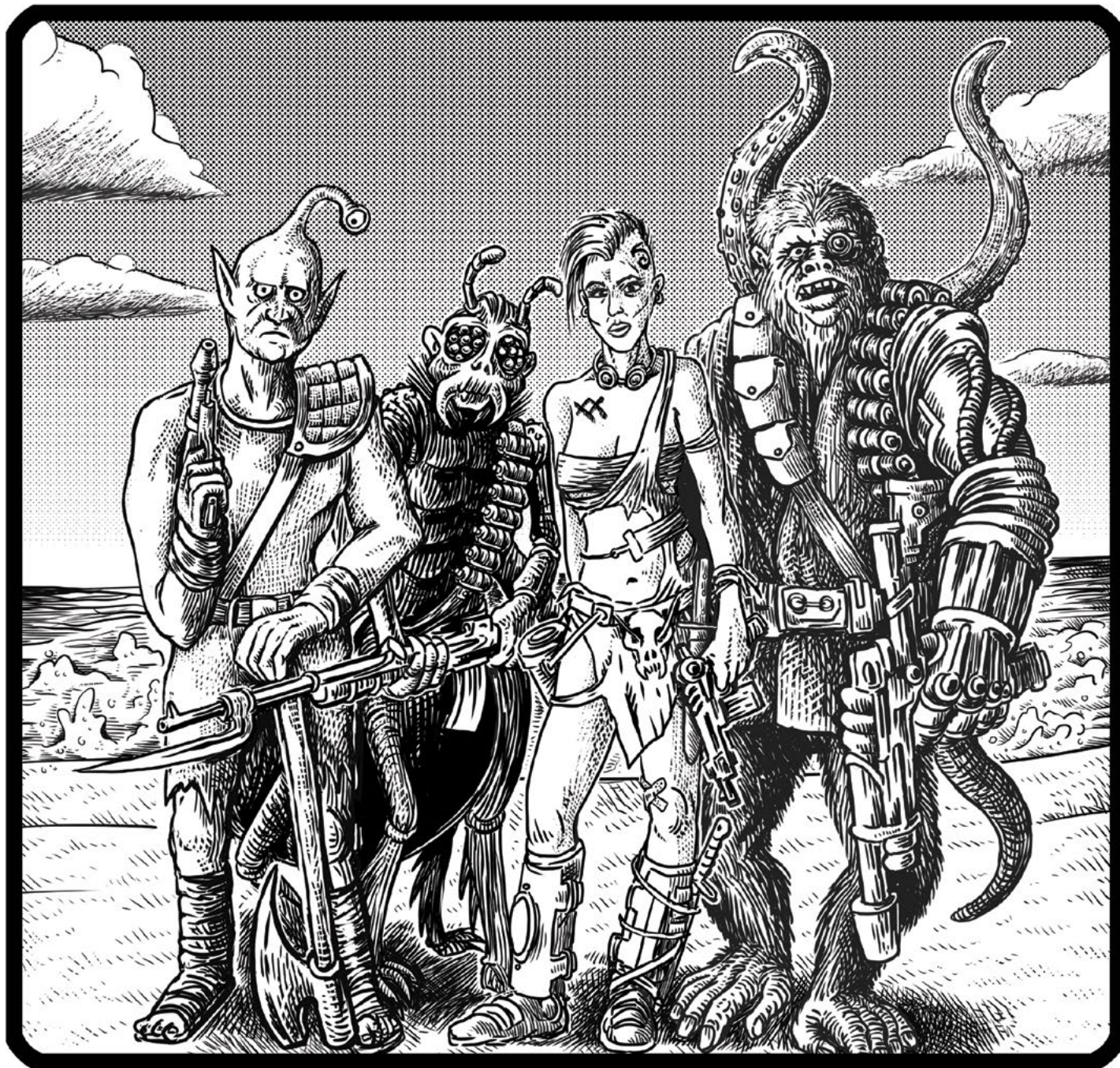
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