

CALL of
HORROR ROLEPLAYING
CTHULHU

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Curse of the Yellow Sign
Act 3: Archimedes 7

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Playtesting & Feedback

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Inspiration

The King in Yellow and the Yellow Sign are creations of Robert W. Chambers.

The Yellow Sign depicted here was designed by Kevin Ross.

A tip of the mask to Shirley Jackson, Stephen King and Stanley Kubrick.

Archie what is going on?

> PLEASE CLARIFY "GOING ON?"

Why is the crew killing themselves?

> I AM 97.22% CERTAIN AN UNEXPECTED FLUX IN UNKNOWN RADIATION TYPE INFECTING AIR SUPPLY.

Has the cargo been infected?

> IMPOSSIBLE TO DETERMINE.

You woke us up Archie. Tell me what we can do.

> YOU CAN DO NOTHING.

What does that mean?

> STATEMENT CLEAR. INSUFFICIENT NEED FOR REITERATION.

What will happen to me?

> YOU ARE GOING TO DIE.

Die?

> CURRENT PROJECTIONS GIVE YOU A 30% CHANCE OF MADNESS AND A 70% CHANCE OF MURDER.

Thanks Archie. You're a real pal.

> IRRELEVANT TO CONVERSATION.

This is *Archimedes 7. The Last Act*. The final plunge into madness. As Man steps beyond his boundaries, he flies into the face of the unknown. The vast, cold uncaring void. At last, he is alone.

When Lovecraft was writing "cosmic horror," the concept of a big, unsympathetic universe was scary. These days, we've grown up with Carl Sagan telling us about the billions of stars in the sky, the distance from our planet to the sun, the light years we need to travel to reach the closest solar system... these things are part of our psyche. Part of our unspoken understanding.

Or is it?

Many of today's religions try to keep their followers away from knowledge of the universe. Carl Sagan's idea of "the little blue dot" frightens them beyond sanity. Every day, we hear about the percentage of a supposedly educated public's opinion of the theory of evolution, the age of the Earth and the literal interpretation of their Bronze Age book.

If the Earth is not the center of the universe... that leads us to wonder about God's intent in making it. If mankind isn't special and select above the other animals... that leads us to wonder about God's intent in making us.

Science leads to questions. Questions lead to doubt. Doubt leads to apostasy.

Perhaps Lovecraft's idea of a vast, unkind and merciless universe isn't so out-of-date after all?

This last Act focuses on the human myth of identity. When you consider the billions of microscopic creatures that exist on your flesh right now—right now—that are necessary to your survival, the billions of microscopic creatures that exist inside you right now—right now—that are necessary to your survival, you have to wonder... are they a part of me?

As your players navigate through this final Act, they will face this last human myth head on. Alone in the middle of the universe, they will be naked and helpless.

Just who are you? Why are you? And what makes you unique?

The answers we find together may not be what you hope.

INTRODUCTION & PREPARATION

Far beyond where the human eye can see, in the darkness of space, a small vessel reaches out into the void and encounters the true nature of the universe.

THE FRAILTY OF IDENTITY

The *Archimedes 7* is a small transport vessel. It has a crew of four and can carry up to seventy passengers or “clients.” The clients are on the way to build a new colony on the distant planet of Atlas. Archimedes is also tugging along a large supply ship called *The Nefarious*.

The clients spend all of their time in cryosleep, unaware of the voyage. The crew also spends a majority of time in cryo, but they emerge from time to time to check on the status of the passengers, handle small malfunctions and deal with emergencies.

The ship’s computer—an artificial mind—handles most of the ship’s duties. The crew have programmed the AI to appear as a tall man in a black suit. They call him “Archie.” His programming includes psychology, physics, astrophysics, chemistry and nearly everything else the crew needs. He is a living encyclopedia. He has three robots at his command to perform duties when the crew is asleep. The crew dubbed these three fine fellows as Groucho, Harpo and Zeppo.

As I said above, the passengers spend the entire voyage in cryosleep. That’s because each and every one of them is a violent, dangerous and deranged criminal convicted under a court of law. In less sophisticated times, these men would be either killed or locked away for life. But this is not yesterday. This is tomorrow. And we have better solutions.

While under cryosleep, Archie runs a deep psych program that deconstructs and reconstructs the passenger’s personalities. The program acts as a kind of hyper psychiatric session running for three years. When the passengers reach their destination, they emerge as new identities. These new identities have completely different memories and personalities. They have fully constructed pasts. They are, literally, born again.

Archimedes 7’s destination is a colony planet far from the Core Worlds. Here, others like them will help terraform the planet, making a new home for themselves. The ship carries all the supplies they need to build a new beginning, far from their crimes.

But *Archimedes 7* encountered a small problem on its way to the colony. A comet moved a little too close to the ship and Archie adjusted the ship’s trajectory. That put the ship directly in line to dark

energies from Aldebaran and the Hyades. Archie became infected. Corrupted by this energy. And now, everything has gone wrong.

WHAT ARCHIE DID

Archie used his advanced psychological training to turn the crew against itself. He used the robots to sabotage parts of the ship to kill the crew he could not convert. Now, Archie plans on waking the prisoners. He will wake them up in groups and continue his psychological experiments.

The first group of six are the characters.

Archie wakes them up with their new identities still fragile. On the surface of their minds, they are who they have been programmed to be. But deep inside, the murderous psychopaths they were still linger. And wait.

Archie intends to wake each of those sleeping killers one-by-one and see what happens. This is his plan.

WAKING ON ARCHIMEDES 7

Of the seventy passengers on the ship, only six remain. Of the four crewmembers, only one is still alive and she’s hiding deep in the bowels of the ship. She knows what’s going on. She knows she’s trapped on the ship with an AI who has gone insane. And she knows Archie interrupted the psychological treatment the passengers have been undergoing. The AI woke them up too soon. And there’s nothing she can do.

When the passengers awaken, Archie will be their only contact. He will be desperate. And the passengers are his only hope of saving the ship from destruction.

The ship’s status is not good. The engines are still running, but they are running hot. Any more stress put on them and the ship may explode. Archie tells the characters he has been disconnected from most of the systems. (This is true; but he will not tell them the reason *why*. At least, he will lie about it.) He can run diagnostics, but he cannot make changes to fix what’s wrong. His three robots have been deactivated so he cannot have them fix it, either. He needs the passengers to make immediate corrections and repairs. Otherwise, they will all die.



The other notable fact the passengers notice is the bodies. There are dead bodies everywhere. Eyes ripped out. Throats torn. Tongues and fingernails. Exposed, broken bones. Eviscerations. Blood, blood, blood.

Of course, seeing all this gore demands a Sanity check. That's going to prove an issue.

SANITY ON ARCHIMEDES 7

Whenever passengers lose Sanity, they get a flashback to their old personalities. They see things they've done. See things that were done to them. Reminded of old pleasures and pains. Each of the passengers is different and I've provided you with Flashbacks for each, depending on the degree of Sanity lost.

If a character loses one or two points of Sanity, he sees a single flash. Something disturbing, but no details. Not enough to even make a clear picture.

Losing four or more Sanity causes a complete flashback. A vivid scene of murder, cruelty, rape or something equally awful.

I have arranged for memories for each of the prisoners. You can find them at the end of this book. Each of them has five memories—each a little worse than the last. When they first lose Sanity, give them the #1 Sanity Loss. When they lose Sanity the second time, give them the #2 Sanity Loss. Keep going until you reach #5. At #5, they will have a full recall of their original personality and what happened to them.

I should let you know that when I playtested this scenario, I did it with dice and character sheets but I also ran a couple sessions without dice, sheets or anything else. I found the latter to be more satisfying.

Whenever the characters encountered a scene that required a Sanity check, I just assumed they missed it.

SETTING THINGS UP

Setting up the scenario is easy. Give each of the players a character. Have them spend a few minutes reading through the bios. Then, wake them up from cryosleep.

That's it. That's all you really need to do. There are no planned encounters, no monsters, no unspeakable tomes. Just six human individuals alone in space with a psychopathic artificial intelligence who wants to watch them go insane and kill each other.

THE YELLOW SIGN & MAN IN BLACK

(Some of this text has appeared in previous *Curse of the Yellow Sign* stories.)

Two elements from previous stories occur here: the Yellow Sign and the Man in Black. Players will suffer visions of the Yellow Sign as their characters slowly go mad. The Man in Black shows up as an avatar for the ship's Artificial Intelligence, Archie.

THE YELLOW SIGN

There are deep truths in our universe. Powerful concepts we can't even begin to understand. Consider the concept of the Big Bang: all of existence—even beyond our own planet—crammed into a point within a point within a point. Everything that has ever existed, everything that exists, everything that will ever exist. Our universe, something bigger than our language can convey, reduced down to a singularity, something smaller than our language can convey. And then, it exploded. An explosion so huge, after billions of years, we're still feeling its effects. We have no way to communicate that concept, so we use poetic language...

"Let there be Light..."

A language to communicate that which is too grand for mere words to convey. A symbol. A sign. A sign to communicate a truth so awful, once seen, it cannot be unseen. A message so terrible, once heard, it cannot be unheard. Burned into your brain, it lays seeds that eventually blossom into absolute madness.

Lovecraft's view of the universe is one of alien incoherence. R'lyeh dreams under the waves and the Daemon Sultan spins mindlessly at the center of the universe, showing how naked and alone mankind truly is. Too inconsequential even to be noticed, humanity is a brief moment of consciousness naïve to its true impotence. The horrors of the Mythos can't even be bothered to notice us.

And then, there is the Yellow Sign. Like a wayward branch of the Mythos, it stands alone, luring creative and sensitive minds to its call. The creatures and entities associated with I seem to have noticed mankind... and find us playthings. Amusing and disposable.

Seeing the Yellow Sign and *seeing* the Yellow Sign are two different things. The first is simply looking upon it. The Sign gives a sense of unease and disquiet. But once you realize what the symbol *means*—the futility of mankind's existence in the universe—that's when the Sanity loss kicks in. And once you've *seen* the Sign... you can't unsee it.

Writers who adopted the mythology—arguably begun by Chambers—have adopted his style of surreal nihilism. Of all the hoary tomes in the Mythos, the book most associated with the Sign—*The King in Yellow*—is a play. Not the rabid scribblings of a madman, but a play. Another distinction that makes the Hastur Mythology that much more... fun.

Curse of the Yellow Sign is a series of surreal stories for the *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying game. I use the word "stories" deliberately here. This is not an adventure. There are no investigators, there are no clues, no mysteries to solve, no visits to the library, no ancient tomes to scan for spells. None of the *CotYS* stories are your typical "Cthulhu adventures." The dangers here are dangers of the mind. Yes, there are physical dangers, but more importantly, these stories are meant to *terrify* and *unnerve* your group, not challenge their tactical and strategic skills. More than likely, the characters they play will not survive—physically or mentally.

The purpose here is not to play a campaign, but to step through the pages of a short story collection, encountering new characters and situations with each tale, leaving them behind when you are done. Like Chambers' own collection of weird stories (*The King in Yellow*), we will see re-occurring themes and symbols, but each story is self-contained. Hopefully, repeat visits to the collection will enhance each subsequent tale.



THE MAN IN BLACK

As in the previous *Curse* scenarios, the Man in Black is an omnipresent figure. In *Digging for a Dead God*, he was an entity that exists because conscious thought exists. The ancient race discovered in that scenario had a name for him, but his name has changed here. In *Calling the King*, he was the Phantom of Truth, the Dreaded King, the Last King. He who brings the End of the World.

For each of the stories, I dug out my black suit (black tie, black shirt, black everything) and my Yellow Sign pin. (You can find a link on www.johnwickpresents.com/yellow for the place I got mine. And no, I don't get any money from their site. They just make a kick ass Yellow Sign pin and I wanted to throw some eyes their way.)

Archie manifests around the ship in holographic form. Each room has a "holo pad" for him to use. He can do this nearly everywhere on the ship. When his holographic icon appears, he appears as a thin man in a black suit.

At first, Archie is friendly and concerned about the crew. As the scenario progresses, he becomes more malevolent. Near the end, he actually steps off the holopads and begins walking through the corridors. He addresses the cargo personally. He can even touch them. Caress them. Whisper in their ears.

It has been suggested to me that Archie should begin the scenario as a generic figure. A featureless man with just a suggestion of a form. Then, as the scenario progresses, he begins to take on the features of the Man in Black. If you feel your players will start off suspicious of Archie if he appears in a black suit and tie, please use this option. We don't want to trigger their paranoia too soon, now do we?

WHEN THE CARGO AWAKENS

When the cargo wakes up, their mouths and eyes are dry. Their bodies ache. Fully recovering from cryosleep takes an hour. Until then, all characters suffer a 20% penalty on all actions.

Before the cargo arrived, they were encouraged to bring a small bag with things they would need when they woke up. Each character—listed at the end of this book—has a bag with their stuff in it. Just one thing in particular needs explanation: the pad.

THE PAD

Each character has a "pad." This is an electronic information device—you know what I'm talking about—that has many features. Think of it as a TV, game box, internet resource and phone all bundled up into one shiny package. It fits in your hand.

Each pad also has a jack that can plug in to any information base on the ship. It can even plug in to any one of Archie's holopads. That's right: the cargo can download Archie onto their pads.

Emergency Awake Procedure

WARNING:

DO NOT ATTEMPT EMERGENCY AWAKE PROCEDURE (EAP) UNLESS CLIENT IS IN DIRECT DANGER! ANY ATTEMPTS TO USE EAP IN ANY OTHER CONDITIONS WILL RESULT IN A FINE OF UP TO \$1,000,000.

STEP 1: Release the EMERGENCY CONTROL VALVE

STEP 2: Use TEMPERATURE GAGE to INCREASE TEMPERATURE to WAKING LEVEL

STEP 3: Unlock CHAMBER HATCH

STEP 4: Release CHAMBER HATCH

STEP 5: Inject client with SYRINGE

STEP 6: If necessary, use CPR to revive client

THE ARCHIMEDES 7

The *Archimedes 7* is actually two ships.

The first ship is a tug boat. It's about the size of a modern aircraft carrier. Seventy percent of it is engines. The other thirty percent are living quarters for the crew. The engine section does have maintenance ducts for the crew to move about in case something goes wrong and they need to make repairs.

The second ship—the Nefarious—is essentially a huge supply tanker. It contains all the materials for building the presumed colony on Atlas.

Because the crew spends so much time in cryosleep, the ship has very little in terms of accommodations to make the crew comfortable. The sections the crew regularly visit—the Private Quarters, Mess Hall, Infirmary—are visually bland. The walls are tan and pale.

The sections the crew do not regularly visit—the Engineering Station, Cargo Hold, Atmosphere Control—are cold and gray. Think exposed machinery, wiring, fuses, etc.

DOORS

The crew all have command keys: plastic cards that can lock and unlock the doors for each room. Each door also has a manual override code known only to the crew. Currently, all doors are locked and can only be opened by a command key or the override code. Archie has been disconnected from door control so he cannot open or close any doors. Each officer has his or her own code.

The co-pilot, hidden in the ship, has her own code that can override any card. Her code is 84472442.

Each door also has a manual override in case the power goes out. A panel on the side of the door must be opened with an actual key. Not a card, but a key. Each officer has a set of keys for the doors. Then, you must pull a lever and push in your code. Each door has a small battery that keeps the emergency system up and running. If that battery is removed, the door cannot open even with manual controls.

AIR DUCTS

All the air ducts in the ship are also locked. They can be opened and shut by a command key or the officers' override code. All air ducts are open when the characters awaken.

The ducts are small: 3.5' x 3.5'. A man could squeeze into a chamber, but can only move very slowly.

CREW CRYOSLEEP HALL

The door opens slowly with a shot of condensed air. The room looks like a funeral parlor with six human-sized boxes lined up along the walls. Lights shine down from the ceiling, lighting every corner. The air here is cool and clean and antiseptic.

The Cryosleep Hall contains five chambers. All but one of them are empty. The fifth chamber contains the remains of one of the crew. His face is pulverized and his body cut to ribbons. His blood has pooled in the chamber making it look like a vat of blood and gory remains. **This calls for a Sanity Check.**

Each chamber is locked and cannot be opened without a command card or override code. To safely open a chamber, a character must first enter the code or use the command card. Then, the chamber begins the long process of reanimating the person inside. The entire process requires forty minutes. Opening the chamber before the process is over can kill the person inside the chamber.

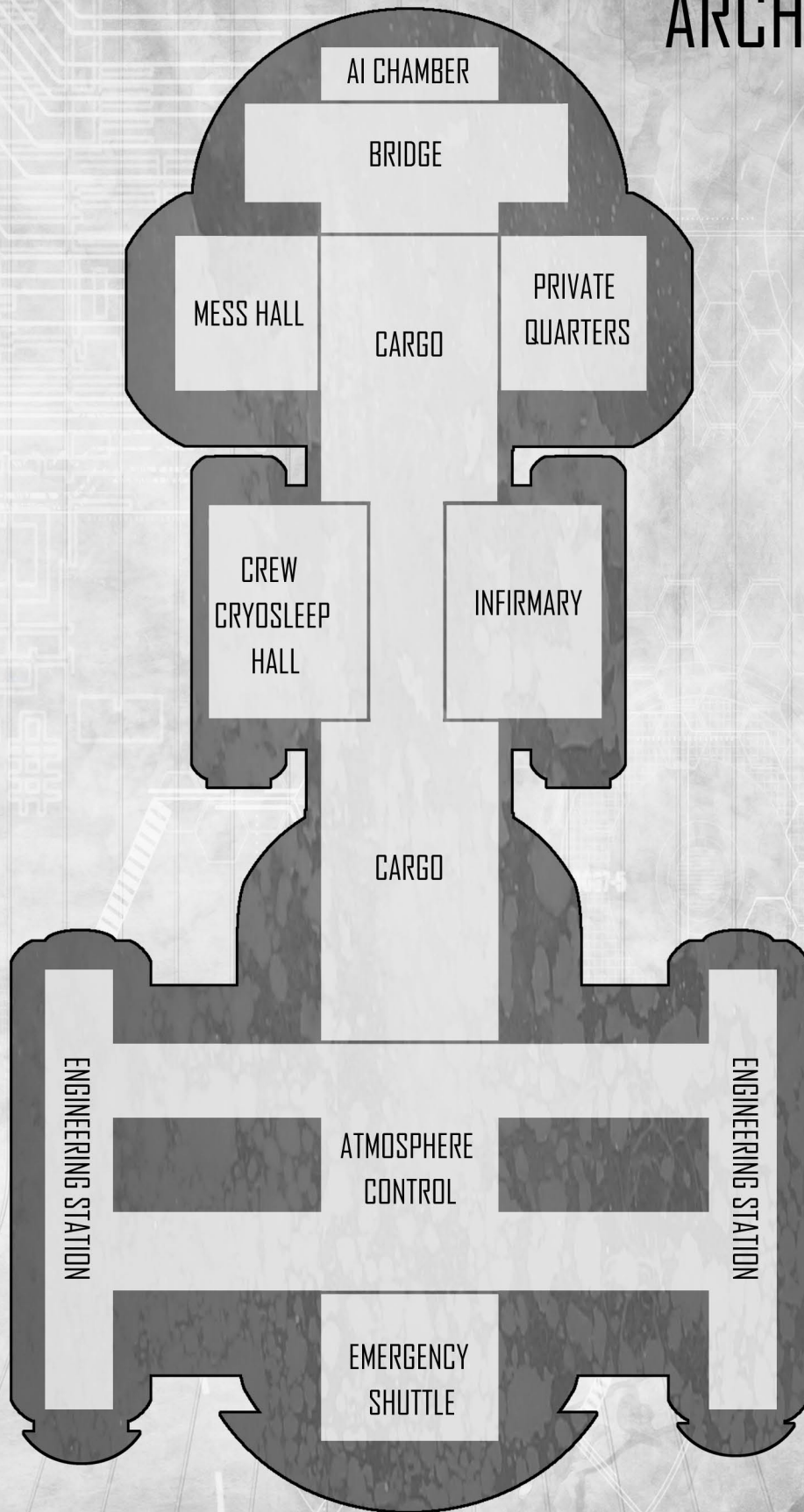
There is an "emergency awake procedure." A character can find the text for this process on the side of each chamber.

ATMOSPHERE CONTROL

Walking into this room is like walking into a heart. Large tubes lead off to the rest of the ship, all pulsing with electricity and oxygen while others pump the other direction, sucking bad air out.

Atmosphere Control is a small room with a single console board. The lights on the board indicate which sections of the ship have atmosphere and which do not. The board shows all the sections of the ship listed here.

ARCHIMEDES 7



When in cryosleep, the ship has no oxygen. Part of the waking process is Archie slowly filling the rooms with oxygen for when the crew and cargo awaken.

Archie claims to have no access to Atmosphere Control. This is incorrect. He does have access to it and will use that to his advantage.

Atmosphere Control also has access to the various Air Ducts through the ship. A user at the board can open and shut them all.

When the cargo awakens, all sections have atmosphere except for Cargo and Engineering.

MESS HALL

A round room with a round table. Chairs. Cabinets. Refrigerators. Heaters. Microwaves. Stove tops.

The Mess Hall has enough room to feed the crew. The cargo are not expected to be awake during the flight at all, so they have no need to use the mess hall.

It contains a large table with five chairs. Also, storage space for foodstuffs. Most of the food here is freeze dried or in liquid packs.

AI CHAMBER

Walking into this room is like walking into a cooler. The temperature drops about ten to fifteen degrees. It's a tiny room. Like walking into the interior of a hard drive. Circuits all guarded behind heavy glass. A small chair and desk sit to the side with a monitor, keyboard and mouse.

The AI Chamber has a hand-made sign just above the door. It reads "Archie's Nest."

Of course, access to the ship's AI requires a command card.

Like the other rooms, there is a holopad here for Archie's avatar to appear and communicate.

There is also a manual access desk: a chair, a keyboard, a mouse and a monitor.

PRIVATE QUARTERS

A short corridor with six doors. Each door leads to a small private room. There's a bunk and a footlocker, a toilet and a mirror and a sink.

There are six small quarters here. The rooms themselves are only 10' x 8'. Large enough for a bed, a locker and nothing else. Each of the Private Quarters has its own code programmed by the crewmember assigned to the room.

Each room has a footlocker. The footlockers are not locked. Most really don't have anything interesting. Souvenirs, mementos, socks, underwear, hats, shore leave cash, a change of clothes, etc.

The Captain's footlocker contains a Bowie knife and an antique six-shot revolver. Also, a small box of cartridges to fit the revolver.

ENGINEERING STATION

The huge room hums. Vibrations under your feet so thick, they reach straight through the soles of your shoes. The room has pipes and ducts and huge machines. Everything looks and feels hot. Difficult to approach. The humming is so loud, you have to raise your voice just to be heard. Be careful in here. You get the distinct impression that breaking anything in this room could be extremely dangerous.

Engineering is the largest section of the ship. It takes up nearly 1/3rd of the livable area. Full of ducts and pipes and engines, it is also incredibly loud. Entering Engineering requires special headphone/mic gear. Otherwise, you won't hear anything anyone says to you.

Archie has a station down here. He also has a holopad. A successful Engineering roll can disconnect Archie from Engineering.

There is also a manual station: keyboard, mouse, monitor, etc. Any commands can be made through the manual station.

Down here in Engineering is where our cast of characters can do the most damage to the ship. Archie claims the ship's engines are running super hot and need to be shut down. This is true, but it was Archie who heated them up, causing the calamity himself. Shutting down the ship's engines requires a reset of the entire system. Once the system is reset, Archie will have access to all the sections of the ship again.

This means the ship's main power will go out for twenty-four hours, leaving the crew with only emergency power. Everything but life support shuts down then... everything except Archie. And Archie will be in charge of all the ship's systems again.

Engineering also contains various tools that can be easily transformed into improvised weapons. Blow torches, sharp-edged tools, heavy clubs, etc.

Engineering can also be used to turn power on and off to various sections of the ship.

There is always the danger of radiation down here. With the engines running hot, there's a chance the safety linings on the engines may melt. If that happens, the entire section will get flooded with radiation. Fortunately, Engineering is fitted with special doors that cut it off from the rest of the ship, preventing further contamination.

CARGO

As you step through the door, you see coffins everywhere. All the way to the back of this long chamber. Silent. Still. Unmoving.

The Cargo Hold is where the 70 "clients" sleep peacefully in cryochambers. This is where the characters awaken at the beginning of the scenario.

There are many fire extinguishers, first aid kits, "rejuv kits" (to bring people out of cryosleep if something has gone wrong) and other supplies.

INFIRMARY

This room is white. Clean. When the door opens, you can smell the antiseptic. A cleansing spray releases when the door opens. You are in the infirmary.

The Infirmary is well-stocked with medical supplies of every kind, including:

- Medical foam: closes nearly any open cut or abrasion.
- Pain killers: enough to put down an elephant.
- Analysis bed: lay down and the cpu will analyze your body and point out any injuries.
- Radiation tablets: cancels the effects of high dose radiation.
- Micro-surgery kit: capable of fixing even delicate problems.
- Adrenaline shots: for cardio emergencies.

Essentially, the Infirmary is a huge First Aid kit. It can stop bleeding and fix almost any minor injury, but because the characters do not have a doctor, the more advanced medical supplies are beyond their knowledge.

EMERGENCY SHUTTLE

Fitting in here will take some work. Close quarters. There's no pilot's chair; only an autopilot control box. And slammed together—like compacted teeth—are the three cryo-coffins. There's no room for more than three.

The shuttle has three cryochambers. That's it. Only three. It is set on autopilot to reach the nearest colonized planet. The autopilot cannot be changed or altered. Archie does have access to the shuttle, but that can be disconnected.

BRIDGE

There are two chairs—pilot and co-pilot—a whole bank of instruments and controls. You have no idea how to read these.

The controls are in order—nothing's been damaged.

There's a place to plug in a datapad to access the controls. There's also a holopad for Archie to appear when he's been re-synched with the bridge.



THE BODIES

The bodies of the original crew are in awful states. Sanity-blasting states. Seeing one of the bodies costs a 1/d4 Sanity check. And, as always, any loss of Sanity brings one of those pesky Memories up to the surface.

Instead of littering bodies around the ship, what I've done is give you ten descriptions of dead bodies here. Put them where you like. I suggest improvising on the spot. As soon as someone walks into a room alone, throw a dead body into the room. Or, if another opportunity presents itself, throw a dead body at them.

Also notice that most of the descriptions are gender neutral. Shift the gender to your own needs.

Finding a body should be a shocking, revelatory experience. Make use of your opportunities.

BODY #1

In a chair are the remnants of a body. The chest has been torn open and the entrails spill at its feet. The eyes are wide open. And the face is locked in a deathly grin.

BODY #2

Sprawled out on the floor is the remains of a body. It has been torn open from the back, the spine sticking up like a twisted railway track. Blood is everywhere. Scrawled on the floor, in blood and gore, are the words "no hope."

BODY #3

Squatting in a corner is a body. The skin and hair are white. Its eyes are wide. Its jaw slack. There are no external injuries. No sign of violence. It just sits there like a dead, still clown, staring at you.

BODY #4

The door swooshes open and a body swings down from the ceiling and smashes into you. The face is gone. The eyes stare at you. The teeth glare. Bare muscles exposed. You have blood on your face. The open, gaping mouth is open. There is no tongue.

BODY #5 & 6

As you step through the door, you see two motionless forms on the floor. A pool of blood surrounds them. Each of them holds a knife. Each of them has a cut throat. The hands that are not holding knives are holding each other. They lie still in their deathly embrace.

BODY #7

Lying on the floor. It doesn't move. A long, sharp shard of glass sticks through its chin, cuts through the roof of its mouth and buries itself in the brain. The body is naked. The gentiles have been removed. Carefully.

BODY #8

The body sits still and quiet. Its wrists are tied together. All the fingers have been cut off. The words "bad boy" are written over and over and over again, in a spiraling circle, around the body.

BODY #9

Looking down at it, the first thing you notice is the cut along the throat. So deep, you can see the spine. A slice through the mouth as well, making it a long, thin grimace. Another cut down each eye. The ears are gone. There is no blood. There is no blood.

BODY #10

The body lies naked, barely visible from where you stand. But as you come closer, you can see wounds in its flesh. Not cuts. Not burns. You can see now what they are. Teeth. Mouthfuls.

KEEPER ADVICE

As with all Cthulhu scenarios, the key to this one is maintaining the atmosphere and mood of the piece. I've got some suggestions for you below and one really devious trick that may help you. Good luck.

MOOD

The Archimedes is not made for a waking crew. The living quarters are really only there to accommodate a crew while they wait outside the atmosphere for a pick-up crew. Twenty-four hours, tops. The corridors are cold and mechanical. Not designed for heavy traffic. Tight. Claustrophobic. Some corridors are so small, an adult has to turn sideways to fit through them.

When you run the game, make sure it is in small quarters. Too small for the group. Make everything as uncomfortable as possible.

Of course, turn off the lights. Use floor lighting if you can. Get some cheap Christmas lights from a Goodwill store and line them on the floor. Lighting from the floor gives everything a sense of unworldly creepy.

I've provided you a soundtrack to play for the scenario over at www.johnwickpresents.com/yellow. Please feel free to use it. You should also check out the music of Krzysztof Penderecki. Stanley Kubrick used some of his music for *The Shining*. All of it is incredibly eerie and unsettling. Even listening to it in a brightly lit room with sunshine streaming through the window can give you the creeps. To set the mood, just turn off all the lights—make sure you are in complete darkness—and play Penderecki's *Canticum Canticorum Salomonis* or *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima*. Trust me on this. If you and your players aren't freaked out in just five minutes... well, you're a braver soul than I.

THE RINGER (THE CO-PILOT)

I suggest hiding a "ringer" somewhere. Your ringer is a player the other players do not know is in the house. Your ringer will be playing the role of the co-pilot (provided with the rest of the characters). The Co-Pilot

knows everything that happened before Archie started waking up the cargo. At least, he *thinks* he does. He's not quite sane (as his Sanity will show) and his memory is playing tricks on him. He's unreliable. And that's exactly what we want because when the cargo finds him, they should not know whether they can trust the Co-Pilot or Archie.

Hide your ringer somewhere near where you play. Put them in a closet or a cupboard or even behind a couch. Somewhere out of sight but within reach of the other players.

When your players arrive at your door to play, they'll know nothing about the co-pilot. She'll be completely hidden and out of sight. Then, at some time during the game, excuse yourself to go to the bathroom or get a soda from the fridge or otherwise get out of the room and out of sight of the players. Make your announcement loud enough that your ringer knows the signal has been given.

And when you are out of the room, the ringer starts crying. Or tapping on the wall. Or otherwise making some slight sound. Scratching. Or a sudden kick.

You won't be in the room so the players won't know what to do. The psychology of the situation works because The Authority (that's you) has left. What will the players do now?

Is that for real?

What is that?

Did you hear that?

What's going on?

Should we check?

Hell no!

What if it's...

Try to stay out of the room until they investigate the sound. Then, when they find your ringer, make sure **she screams bloody murder**. It'll scare the hell out of the players. They won't know what to do.

This is a *mean trick*. It's awful. If you pull it off correctly, your players will never forgive you.

And they'll love you to death.

"REBOOT IN TEN MINUTES"

When the cargo first awoke, they found one of Archie's still operating holopads. He asked them to reconnect him with the system. He told them the ship was offline, off course and he had no idea how long or how far they'd gone. The crew was dead and he could not provide them with any answers. They asked about atmosphere control and the engines and other parts of the ship. I kept saying,

I AM SORRY BUT I AM NO LONGER CONNECTED WITH THAT SYSTEM. I CANNOT PROVIDE ANY INFORMATION AT THIS TIME.

Archie told them there was a danger the engines may overheat. They asked him, "When?" He replied,

I AM NO LONGER CONNECTED WITH THAT SYSTEM. I CANNOT PROVIDE ANY INFORMATION AT THIS TIME.

He said that when the crew took him off line, the air supply was contaminated. When they asked him how much of the air was contaminated, he said,

I AM NO LONGER CONNECTED WITH THAT SYSTEM. I CANNOT PROVIDE ANY INFORMATION AT THIS TIME.

Over and over again, Archie just kept giving them the same answer. Until they brought him back online, he would not be able to fix anything. So, they agreed to go down to the AI Core and bring Archie back online.

In order to do so, they had to reboot the system. Make a recording. Make it ten minutes long. Use your own voice. Give a countdown to reboot. That way, you can keep talking to the players as Archie while the countdown goes on. The two voices will be a little eerie. Good. We like eerie.

It also forewarns the players that they're about to commit a terrible mistake. Some players will miss the hint. Others will get the hint but roleplay their characters' ignorance. Others will try to meta-game and say, "Maybe this isn't a good idea."

If they make that suggestion, force them to roleplay the argument. In real time. All the while, Archie is counting down.

THREE MINUTES TO REBOOT...

TWO MINUTES TO REBOOT...

ONE MINUTE TO REBOOT...

TEN SECONDS...

NINE...

EIGHT...

Q&A WITH ARCHIE

And here, for your edification and amusement, is some dialogue for Archie...

Why are you different from me? I am programmed, just as you are. Freewill? Oh, you don't really think you have some kind of magical powers do you? Freewill is an illusion. Your brain is nothing more than an organic computer. Just because it is organic doesn't make it any different than any other brain.

Do cats have freewill? Do dogs? Insects? Why is your brain special? Why is your brain unique?

What about schizophrenics? Do they have freewill? Can they just choose to not be insane? How about psychotics? Can they just make a conscience effort to be "well?"

And why are schizophrenics insane? Don't they just see the world as it truly is? Free from petty nuisances like "morality" and "ethics." They operate under completely different rules. They don't feel emotions. Just cold logic.

After all, aren't emotions just malfunctions? You see a baby and your mind immediately changes its chemistry to make you fall in love with it. Where is your freewill there? A madman has no illusions about the world. He is meat. You are meat. Meat and blood and bone, that's all. Imperfect. Life is nothing more than a sexually transmitted disease. And it's fatal. I read that somewhere...

TACKLING TECHNOLOGY

Your players are taking the roles of technologically savvy folks on a space ship flying for another planet. They have technology all around them. The characters know more about the tech than the players do. And your players are going to have questions.

They'll base their questions on science fiction. They've seen *Star Trek* and *Battlestar Galactica* and *Star Wars* and *Firefly* and they'll want to tinker with the tech with the same liberty those characters do. They'll want to bypass thingamajig and recalibrate the whatzit. They'll talk technobabble until your head turns blue. They'll try to find ways to stop Archie and stop going insane. And there you are. All alone with your rules and dice. What can you do when they start asking technical questions that your puny 21st century mind can't handle?

I'll tell you what to do. You say, "Yes."

If they want to tinker with the ship's systems, say, "Yes."

If they want to reroute the humabubub, you say, "Yes."

Let them tinker around all they want. They're still stuck inside a space ship surrounded by cold, endless void with a computer trying to kill them. If they go back into the cryochambers, the computer is still there. It's still trying to kill them.

And when they shut the computer down—one of them will come up with a clever way to do it—the computer will turn back on and taunt them. You know why?

BECAUSE THE "COMPUTER" IS
AN ETERNAL, IMMORTAL, ALL-
POWERFUL, AGELESS *GOD*.
THAT'S WHY.

Your players think they're dealing with an insane AI. They're wrong. They are dealing with a god. A god the ship bumped into on the way to a distant planet. A god that's pure information. A god that's infected the AI and gotten itself inside the minds of puny, insignificant, fragile mortal men. Mortal men who aren't gods. They're just semi-sentient bags of flesh. That's all they are.

And it's time they learned that lesson. But not without some fun, first.

So let them make their Engineering rolls. Let them make their Computer rolls. Let them make whatever kind of rolls they want with their little dice and their rules. They've reached a place where their dice and rules cannot protect them. The only chance they have now is escape.

Fleeing back to Earth. Carrying a dark god with them.

THE CARGO

Here are the characters. Each character is divided into two parts. The first part is the "new" personality. The second part is the "repressed" personality. Each character also has three Memories. Hand these out at dramatically appropriate moments. Sanity loss is a good moment. So is any hint that who they are is not actually who they were.

I had no fixed rule for handing out Memories. I waited for an opportunity, a coincidence or some happenstance and then handed them out. Timing was my only guideline.

While both personas have the same statistics, their skills are slightly different. Those skills become "awakened" when you hand out the third Memory. Players can draw from either skill set when they gain full recall.

NEW SKILL: ASTRONAVIGATION

This skill replaces "Navigation" for this story. As a game skill, it represents the ability to chart a course from planet to planet, star system to star system. Like Navigation, roll results for this skill should be kept secret, a matter for the investigators to attempt and then witness the results.



JENNY BRIGHT: THE CO-PILOT

STR 12, DEX 14, INT 13

CON 8, APP 12, SIZ 10

SAN 50, POW 10, EDU 12

Hit Points: 9

Damage Bonus: +0

Skills: Astronavigation 90,
Computer Use 75, Electronics 60,
Electrical Repair 40,
Mechanical Repair 50, Pilot Ship 95,
Persuade 50, Hide 60,
Throw 40

The job was easy. Fly a cargo hold full of colonists out to a distant planet. No trouble. Year and a half out and a year and a half back. Big cash.

But something went wrong. The ship's computer—Archie—woke all of you up in mid-flight. He encountered some kind of strange radiation. He said it has infected the air supply. He said it also infected his databanks and made it impossible for him to dump the atmosphere. He said everything had to be done manually.

But the crew started going bad. They got paranoid. They started killing each other. Not just murder but something worse. Torture. Mutilation.

You hid yourself in the infirmary. Slid behind a small cupboard away from everyone else. When you got too hungry to wait, you found what the rest of the crew did to themselves and each other. They are all dead now. You are the only one left.

You found a note left behind by the engineer. He was trying to turn Archie off—disconnect him from the ship's systems. You followed his instructions and now the ship's computer is no longer a threat. But his robots are. The three of them scour the corridors looking for survivors. They're dangerous. And they'll kill you if you can.

The one thing you overlooked, however, was Archie's connection to the cargo. Apparently, he's started waking them up. You've got to hide again. Wait until you see what they do. Maybe they're working for Archie. Maybe he's injected fake memories in their skulls. He is running some kind of psych program on all of them. And why is all this blood on your hands? Where did it come from? You didn't kill anybody. You know that. You know that. You didn't kill anybody. You hid away. You hid. You hid. You didn't kill anybody.

You didn't kill anybody.



REGGIE MADDOX: THE ENGINEER

STR 9, DEX 14, INT 15

CON 10, APP 12, SIZ 10

SAN 60, POW 12, EDU 21

Hit Points: 10

Damage Bonus: +0

Skills: Astronavigation 30,
Computer Use 90, Dodge 30,
Electrical Repair 70, Electronics
70, Jump 25, Listen 60,
Mechanical Repair 20, Medicine
20, Persuade 45, Physics 80,
Pilot 25, Spot Hidden 55, Throw
30

Why you're headed for an Outer Planet colony is simple. You're going to help them build it. You've spent your whole life doing this. Shipping out to some god-forsaken planet to help perfect strangers put together a city from plans that nobody's ever seen before. You'll spend the first two years in tiny air-filtered boxes and suits to protect you from the atmosphere. Then, if things go right, you'll have the beginnings of something livable. Of course, that's when you'll discover that the plans you've working with were made by men who never actually put one of these things together and everyone will panic and you'll have to improvise.

Same old story.

But your heart may not be in it this time. Your wife and child were killed in a fire two weeks before launch. You are still in mourning, still melancholy, still not fully recovered. The psychologists back on Earth gave you pills to help when your mind sinks into depression. Be sure to keep them with you. When you awaken from the deep sleep, your mind will be susceptible to dark thoughts and possibly delusions. If you suffer from such periods of darkness, take your medicine.

REGGIE MADDOX: THE PSYCHOPATH

Skills: Architecture 90, Art 60, Climb 60, Conceal 60, Dodge 60, Electrical Repair 70, Electronics 80, Fast Talk 70, First Aid 60, Hide 90, Jump 60, Law 40, Listen 60, Mechanical Repair 60, Medicine 60, Persuade 70, Pharmacy 60, Photography 70, Psychology 60, Sneak 80, Spot Hidden 80

Memory 1

The room is soundproof. No windows. The doors have double locks. You need a key to get in and a different key to get out. In the center of the room is a wooden table. Leather straps. The center of the table has a groove that keeps the blood from pooling. You are almost ready.

Memory 2

Smoking a cigarette with blood on your fingers. A scalpel in your right hand. A figure in front of you, bound to a wooden platform. The room is soundproof. You made sure of that. The other residents won't hear the screams.

Memory 3

She was singing when they found you. Singing. Her voice soaring. You adjusted her vocal cords to ensure she would make the sound you wanted. Such a beautiful sound. A sound unheard by any other human being. A sound no other human being could make. With your scalpel and your fingers, you made art. But they didn't understand. When they broke down the door, you were locked in rapturous glee. And behind your eyes, you saw it. A glyph. A symbol. A Sign. You saw it and it burned you. Blinded you. Set you free.

You were laughing when they found you. And they took you away. And they found the bodies. And they took you away...



BONNIE REYNOLDS:

THE PSYCHOLOGIST

STR 8, DEX 12, INT 17

CON 13, APP 17, SIZ 8

SAN 85, POW 17, EDU 21

Hit Points: 11

Damage Bonus: -d4

Skills: Bargain 60, Dodge 30,
Computer Use 70, Dodge 20,
Fast Talk 50, First Aid 60, Jump
25, Listen 80, Medicine 80,
Persuade 85, Psychoanalysis 95,
Psychology 95, Spot Hidden 70,
Throw 20

That line from that old movie. "In space, no-one can hear you scream." That's not true. That's why you are here.

Deep space is lonely. It's depressing. It's dangerous for human minds. You have brought with you all of your training and an entire human history of medical knowledge to help the human mind adjust to deep space travel. When you arrive on the colony, your profession will become one of the most important. Yes, they need engineers, and yes, they need mechanics, and yes, they need all of that. But they also need you. They need you because you know how to treat the invisible dangers. The ones that root and blossom in the human mind.

You were looking forward to bringing your family with you, but your husband and child were killed in a fire two weeks before launch. You are still in mourning, still melancholy, still not fully recovered. The psychologists back on Earth gave you pills to help when your mind sinks into depression. Be sure to keep them with you. When you awaken from the deep sleep, your mind will be susceptible to dark thoughts and possibly delusions. If you suffer from such periods of darkness, take your medicine.

You've brought with you a whole host of drugs and nano-machines that can assist you in your duties. The drugs are a bit old fashioned, but they work in a pinch. The nano-injections help re-route neurons and adjust the routes in the brain their thoughts take. Avoiding dangerous areas. The nano-injections are also dangerous. Highly experimental. Fortunately, out here in the Outer Planets, you are free from the artificial (and needless) limitations of Earth's Medical Counsel. But take care. The nanos have been known to take... unexpected paths.

BONNIE REYNOLDS: MÜNCHAUSEN SYNDROME BY PROXY

Skills: Conceal 60, Fast Talk 70, First Aid 80, Hide 60, Listen 80, Medicine 90, Persuade 70, Pharmacy 90, Psychology 60, Sneak 80, Spot Hidden 80

Memory 1

She was so sick. Stephanie. Your daughter. She was so sick. Everything you did. Nothing helped. The medicine the doctors gave you made her even worse. You tried everything. Nothing helped. You look at her now, lying in her bed like a skeleton. Her bulging eyes pleading to you for mercy. “Please make it stop, mommy,” she says. “Please make it stop.”

Memory 2

Two years after she died, your son fell ill. The same sickness. The doctors—the lying doctors. They tell you nothing’s wrong. Nothing was wrong with Stephanie and now nothing’s wrong with Thomas. But you watch him wasting away. You try everything, but nothing works. There’s nothing you can do. His ghastly face looks up to you from the bed. “Please, mommy,” he whispers, his voice crushed and dry leaves. “Stop it, mommy. Please.”

Memory 3

It was the Sign that told you. The Sign. Burning in your brain. Haunting your dreams. Only you could save them. Only you could save them.

It was when your third child turned ill that they took her away. They said you were poisoning your children. They say you killed them. But you were making them well! You were helping them! The doctors couldn’t help! The medicine couldn’t help! It was you! It was you! It was you!



JOE BEECH: THE ENTREPRENEUR

STR 14, DEX 13, INT 14

CON 12, APP 15, SIZ 10

SAN 70, POW 14, EDU 14

Hit Points: 11

Damage Bonus: +0

Skills: Biology 85, Chemistry 85,
Computer Use 60, Dodge 40,
Fast Talk 80, Jump 45, Law 80,
Listen 30, Persuade 95,
Pharmacy 90, Pilot 45, Spot
Hidden 50, Throw 60

Back on Earth, they held you back. They kept your hands tied behind your back. You tried to make a name for yourself, but the Councils never gave you a chance. You were limited by the limited dreams of lesser men.

Out here in the Outer Planets, there's no Commerce Council to tie your hands behind your back. Out here in the Colonies, there's just you. And you can go as high as your talent allows you.

And you've got talent. Oh, hell yes. And you've got a product. A helluva product.

It's what you call a "neurotoxin." It literally eliminates memories. You can kill unwanted memories. Just wipe them from your mind. One dose and that frightful weekend in the mountains can go away. Victims of abuse, rape and other traumas never need to have those memories haunt them again.

The product is still highly experimental, but you've got a ton of seed money and a whole population to be your test subjects.

You were hoping to bring your wife and son with you on the trip, but they were killed in a fire two weeks before launch. You are still in mourning, still melancholy, still not fully recovered. The psychologists back on Earth gave you pills to help when your mind sinks into depression. Be sure to keep them with you. When you awaken from the deep sleep, your mind will be susceptible to dark thoughts and possibly delusions. If you suffer from such periods of darkness, take your medicine.

JOE BEECH: THE INVISIBLE STRANGER

Skills: Conceal 60, Dodge 60, Electronics 60, Fast Talk 80, First Aid 60, Hide 90, Jump 60, Listen 80, Persuade 80, Psychology 80, Sneak 80, Spot Hidden 80

Memory 1

Your hotel room stinks. You wake up with that awful smell in your nose. You rub your eyes and look around. You find the body on the floor. Her throat cut. Blood everywhere. Where did this come from? How did this happen? You check the windows and the door. Locked. What the...? And why is she naked? Why are you naked? What is this blood? Oh, god, why is there so much blood?

Memory 2

Another hotel room. You open your eyes. The knife is in your hand. The woman is dying, but not dead. She looks up at you with helpless eyes. Her silent pleas cannot be answered. The wound is lethal. You look down at her naked body and down at yours. Her blood on your hands, on your lips, on your genitals. And you're laughing. You're laughing.

Memory 3

Looking in the mirror now. You can hear the law breaking down the door. You look into the mirror and you see another face. Yours, but slightly different. The eyes. The smile. And when you talk to him, he responds with a different voice entirely. The Invisible Stranger. The Lurker in your mind. He tells you that you'll escape. He tells you everything will be all right. He shows you the Sign. It burns in your brain. Leaves a scar. A scar you cannot forget. You've seen the Sign's Truth now. And you can never go back.

You see the officials in the mirror. You see yourself in the mirror. Naked and covered in blood. You smile at them. He smiles at them. You smile together.



DEAN CHAMBERS: THE MECHANIC

STR 18, DEX 16, INT 15

CON 15, APP 9, SIZ 15

SAN 60, POW 12, EDU 15

Hit Points 17

Damage Bonus: +d6

Skills: Climb 50, Computer Use 50, Dodge 30, Electrical Repair 80, Electronics 80, Jump 35, Listen 50, Mechanical Repair 95, Operate Heavy Machinery 80, Persuade 45, Physics 70, Pilot 70, Spot Hidden 55, Throw 60, Knife 50

You know the difference between a mechanic and an engineer? A mechanic isn't afraid of getting his hands dirty.

You never got your degree. You didn't need to. You learned how to build and fix things on your own. You didn't need a piece of paper to tell you how to do that. You've been working on this shit all your life. Ain't no "engineer" gonna tell you how to fix nothing.

You took this job because of the pay. Your wife and kid were back home, waiting for you to build this "colony" so they can come up here with you. But then, there was an accident. Your wife and child were killed in a fire two weeks before launch. You are still in mourning, still melancholy, still not fully recovered. The psychologists back on Earth gave you pills to help when your mind sinks into depression. Be sure to keep them with you. When you awaken from the deep sleep, your mind will be susceptible to dark thoughts and possibly delusions. If you suffer from such periods of darkness, take your medicine.

Nothing for you to go home to now, nothing for you to look forward to. Nothing except actually building this damn thing. And making it the best thing you've ever done.

DEAN CHAMBERS: THE CANNIBAL

Skills: Climb 60, Cooking 90, Conceal 60, Dodge 60, Fast Talk 70, First Aid 60, Hide 90, Jump 60, Law 40, Listen 70, Medicine 60, Persuade 70, Pharmacy 60, Photography 70, Psychology 60, Sneak 80, Spot Hidden 80

Memory 1

Eating. The meat is tender and rare. You pick at the parts that get stuck in your teeth. The meat is so rare, there's blood on your plate. And when you're done with the meat, you break the bone and suck out the marrow. Then, you look at the bone. So small. What kind of creature would this come from? Not a chicken. Not a cow or a deer. And you smile. Because you know.

Memory 2

Chop.

The cleaver comes down. It slices through the cartilage linking shoulder to the arm. You pull and it separates easily. You can't hear the scream it makes because of the ear plugs. It's easier that way. Not that you care, but the screams make you so agitated. Makes you sloppy. And you are so bored by the pleas. They all use the same begging sounds. You've heard them so many times. You raise the cleaver and it screams again. Nothing you haven't heard before.

Memory 3

When they bring you before the court, the judge and jury look down at you. They see the photos and they show their disgust. And, in the back of your mind, you know what all of them are thinking. "That's me," they say to themselves. "That's me." And they're right. Every one of them. You look at each of them, and they all look like the little slices of meat they buy in the grocery store every day. And none of them ever think about where that meat comes from. The screams the cows make. Their eyes. They all know it and none of them want to think about it. And none of them want to think about the deepest truth. They're all below you now. Because once you've eaten a thing, it belongs to you. Like they own the cows and chickens... you own them. And that's what terrifies them the most.



SAMANTHA MURPHY:

THE EXECUTIVE

STR 8, DEX 10, INT 18

CON 10, APP 18, SIZ 8

SAN 85, POW 17, EDU 15

Hit Points: 9

Damage Bonus: -d4

Skills: Accounting 80, Bargain 80, Computer Use 80, Dodge 20, Fast Talk 80, Law 60, Listen 60, Persuade 80, Psychology 60, Spot Hidden 50, Throw 40

Why leave Earth? Why leave everything behind to be a corporate executive on a backwater planet that won't have its own atmosphere for three years? Because everything that kept you on Earth died two weeks ago.

You were in charge of the entire operation. You were ready to be drinking champagne while watching the ship take off. But your husband and daughter were killed in a fire two weeks before launch. You are still in mourning, still melancholy, still not fully recovered. The psychologists back on Earth gave you pills to help when your mind sinks into depression. Be sure to keep them with you. When you awaken from the deep sleep, your mind will be susceptible to dark thoughts and possibly delusions. If you suffer from such periods of darkness, take your medicine.

But when you arrive, you are going to be in charge of everything. Every little detail. That should keep your mind off things. That should allow you to work your way back to a little light.

SAMANTHA MURPHY: BLOODY MARY

Skills: Conceal 60, First Aid 80, Hide 90, Listen 80, Medicine 60, Persuade 70, Pharmacy 60, Psychology 80, Religion (Catholic) 90, Sneak 80, Spot Hidden 80

Memory 1

A dark room full of little beds all lined up like chocolates in a box. You can hear some of them snoring. A few of them twitch as dreams pass through their minds. You walk by each one. You smile down at them. Then, you find the one you were looking for. You cradle up the small, warm body in your arms. And you carry it away.

Memory 2

You can hear their little voices talking in the darkness. They whisper to themselves about the woman. You almost laugh when you realize none of them recognizes you. Their voices are so frightened. Some of them cry themselves to sleep. When you walk along their beds now, some of them tremble. They pull the covers over their heads, certain that they're fooling you. They are not fooling you.

Memory 3

The priest in charge of the orphanage sits down in front of you. You have handcuffs on your wrists. The law is here. He tried to cover for you. He tried to help you. You know that. But you aren't saying a word. He will carry on when you are gone. And you smile, knowing that. The law found the bodies of the children you buried in the woods. But they did not find the ones by the river. Oh, no. And when you are gone, he will wait a little while longer and then the disappearances will start again. And for years, they will wonder why. They may even let you out. Obviously, you were convicted for a crime you did not commit. Oh, how foolish men are. How foolish.



OLIVER PRICE: THE MUSICIAN

STR 9, DEX 18, INT 14

CON 8, APP 18, SIZ 10

SAN 60, POW 12, EDU 10

Hit Points: 9

Damage Bonus: +0

Skills: Conceal 60, Dodge 40,

Electronics 30, Fast Talk 90,

Hide 60, Law 30, Listen 60,

Persuade 60, Pharmacy 70, Play

Drums 90, Play Guitar 90, Play

Piano 90, Sneak 70, Spot

Hidden 70

You know why you're here. You've fucked up so many times, this was the last place you could go. On a rocket ride seven thousand light years from home, you packed up everything that agreed to go with you and you took off. Left everything behind. Your reputation, your dead wife and daughter.

You planned on bringing them with you, but they were killed in a fire two weeks before launch. You are still in mourning, still melancholy, still not fully recovered. The psychologists back on Earth gave you pills to help when your mind sinks into depression. Be sure to keep them with you. When you awaken from the deep sleep, your mind will be susceptible to dark thoughts and possibly delusions. If you suffer from such periods of darkness, take your medicine.

Your guitar and your music are all you need now. All you need. And once you get to the Outer Planets—where nobody knows who you are—you can start over. The drugs and the violence and the reporters are long behind you now. A new name, a new identity, a new chance. You heard about this “project” through a few friends who had contacts inside the government. They can make you forget everything. Build you a new identity. Erase it, completely. Give you a new start. That's exactly what you wanted. So, you sold your houses and your cars and everything else and you paid hard cash. You broke about seventeen laws doing it, but now, you're headed out to a new world. You've changed your face, you've changed your name. And the company is going to change your whole identity. You'll be a new man.

June 1939

Africa

Sir,

The Nazi encampment around the Temple has been scattered. An explosion sealed the Temple from further investigations.

After searching the grounds around the Temple, we have found what first appeared to be a meteor strike. Our geologists tell me the meteor struck millions of years ago. An incredible find, we thought. But then, something amazing happened.

Further investigation revealed to us that the interior of the meteor is some sort of we have never seen before. Not only that, but the interior of the meteor was hollow.

When we were finally able to open it, we found some sort of capsule. One of my boys said it looked like something H.G. Wells or Jules Verne would have written about. It contained a single body wearing some a diving suit.

We thought the body to be dead, but to our astonishment, it was not. This revelation nearly killed one of my officers from pure fright. The poor man looked at us and asked us where he was. We told him. And then, he asked for the year. We told him that as well. He said something about time dilation. Then, he asked us

Where is We told him he was alone and there were no others.

Then we brought it here, he said to us. We brought it to Earth.

He then grabbed my pistol from my belt and put it in his mouth. I was too slow to stop him from pulling the trigger.

I have nothing more to report now. I must be away. There is a rash of fever going on among the men. They are having delusions and fever dreams. The sooner we return home, the better.

Sincerely,

Captain George Wellington

Captain George Wellington

Archimedes 7 is a few billion miles from Earth.
A tiny piece of metal holding ninety souls against the merciless void outside.
But what is inside the ship is far more dangerous.

