

Lovecraft Space Opera

>INTRODUCTION

The basic premise is that, advancing into the twentieth century, the dark secrets of the world have started to come into the light. Herbert West's more reputable experiments have become part of the medical mainstream, and improved upon (and the less reputable parts have become part of many dictator's arsenals (and also improved upon)), subsequent expeditions were able to bring live Elder Things back to civilization (resulting in several wars over control of Antarctica), irregular diplomatic contact has been established with the Mi-Go and the Great Race of Yith, serums have been developed that can change a human into a Deep One and then back again, millions of people walk the 'near' Dreamlands as an escape from their dreary waking lives, the lucky parts of Germany are merely radioactive.

So, when "Big Green" (there is a general superstition that naming calls, so most people don't) began to rouse from his slumber again, the governments of the world both recognized the signs for what they were, and had established plans for planetary evacuation.

The year is now 21XX, and no sane humans remain on Earth. (What's left is not sane, or not human, or neither). Humanity is scattered across the Solar System and some of the near stars, each one with its own opportunities and dangers.

Despite the loss of the homeworld, humanity is generally confident. They've faced a great existential threat, and not just survived but thrived, procreated; they're on many worlds now, not just one.

They are probably going to be horribly disabused of this confidence.

>THE EARTH

Cthulhu's influence is still limited and does not extend beyond the near side of the moon. He is not yet fully manifest; the stars are *almost* right, but not quite yet. There are still, surprisingly, a lot of humans on Earth; many who heard Him most clearly in their dreams refused evacuation, and the rest of mankind were happy to leave them to their fate. More room on the evacuation barges. They kill and revel and are eaten by the thousand and are generally deliriously happy, because they have seen The Truth and it is /glorious/. Occasionally, they try to build rockets to bring The Truth to the rest of blind humanity, which generally explode. Cthulhu himself isn't interested; if he cannot feel and eat their dreams, they might as well not exist for him.

>R'LYEH, CTHULHU, AND THE NEW MASTERS OF EARTH

Three times the black city/grand temple/prison universe has risen from its location in the lightless abyss. The first, its lord was weak, the stars not quite yet right; like a baby a month premature. Smashed down by a passing boat. The second, the stars were closer, but humanity more prepared; networks of ancient runes and megaton suns greeted his rise, and down again he went. The third-
The third, the world went down in fire and madness months before he greeted the sun again. His dreaming stalks the world before his body does.

Now, he holds court in the new metaphorical (possibly also literal) center of the world, and millions of cultists struggle to reach the Black City so that they may gaze upon the Holy of Holies in person. They die; they die of exhaustion, exposure, dehydration, starvation, from walking ceaselessly across the earth night and day. They die of drowning, when cobbled-together rafts, ancient boats and the strength of their limbs fail them as they cross the ocean. They die of predation; all the horrors and gods of the Earth are unleashed now, and there is little to stop them except each other. They die in the halls of the Black City; as the geometry grows ever more twisted, one can wander it for months and never see its master.

They die to their god, and count themselves lucky; any sort of death is worth this revelation. Sometimes, they think of those who left, and weep. Why? Why would anyone deny themselves this? Don't they know that the truth is beautiful? Don't they know that the truth will set them free? Some of them, the more together ones, draw plans to save them. The infrastructure to create spaceships was mostly destroyed, by accident and by design; those who knew how to build them mostly left or are already dead; but there is enough left. Enough to bring Truth and Freedom to the rest of humanity, if all goes well.

>ORBIT, EXPANDED

Earth orbit is overgrown ruins.

The build-up for the exodus involved the creation of a truly staggering infrastructure- fueling stations, assembly yards and airlocks, gravity wheels, mass drivers and catchers and skyhooks and stranger things. Every ounce of mundane and arcane technology available was leveraged to the task of evacuating a billion people. (The Mi-Go reaped simply obscene profits.)

While as much of the valuable stuff as possible was salvaged or sabotaged, that still leaves a great deal of dead, empty megatonnage hanging in the sky.

And now that mankind has moved out, other things have moved in.

The Vacuumorphs, obviously, but with them is an entire ecology. There were a myriad of attempts to domesticate and exploit space-dwelling life, or to engineer vacuum biology from scratch; with the exception of the Vacuumorphs, most of these projects were mediocre at best. But now, under new management, they flourish. Split fuel pods trail hundred-mile vines and gravity wheels grow strange spikes and fans as their material is repurposed. Skyhook remnants trail long veils of black moss, and byakhees and stranger things cavort among the orbital jungle.

Earth orbit is green.

Other people have moved in alongside them. The Vacuumorphs are mostly concerned with tending their immense half-grown half-built radio telescopes, and have little interest in exclusive control of orbital space. So, when Cthulhu cultists do manage to get up into orbit, they find themselves with close to a free hand. They set up in the abandoned stations and implant the local life within themselves; seeds, cuttings, spores. It grows within them and slowly transforms them, greenbriar thorns and fungal fronds breaking out of their skin as their lungs fill with sap and their bones go rotten. They wait in makeshift pressurized compartments, feeding on vat-algae, as they wait for the transformations to fully take hold. Then they step out the airlock. Their attempts at self-transformation should just kill them. But if knowledge so often brings madness, who is to say that madness should not also bring knowledge.

There are still only a handful of cultists in orbit. The last days of the Exodus saw most groundside launch facilities and supporting infrastructure trashed, either deliberately by the withdrawing forces or incidentally by all the madness going around. Their long-term goal, of building a fleet of missionary ships to bring the Truth to the rest of humanity, is still decades away yet. For now, the cultists build simple spaceships out of wood and stone and silk and steel, await further reinforcements from Earth, and watch.

The Exodus has been trying to forget Earth. No telescopes are turned back towards humanity's cradle, no radio antennae turned in that direction. The cultists of Earth have no such taboos. They have been busy observing, looking for the point of maximum weakness.

Not now, certainly. Probably not even soon. But one day, they'll be ready.

>THE MOON, EXPANDED

The moon, the first world beyond our own man ever set foot on (deliberately), the oldest colony, and in many ways the core of the exodus. It was lunar factories and lunar mass drivers that constructed the ships

and stations of the Exodus, lower gravity and proximity making it utterly, utterly indispensable. Vast shipyards, launch-bays, catapults, now largely left defunct; with the Exodus complete, the current fleet sufficient into the foreseeable future, effort has shifted to other areas. Like life support.

Also, there are the consequences of proximity to Earth, and the Lord who now rules there.

The Dark Side of the Moon is free from his influence, partly because of distance, partly because of the billions of tons of rock between them, partly because when you walk out onto the surface and look up you see nothing but stars. The Light Side of the Moon, where dark diseased Earth is high in the sky, is not so lucky.

Experimental shielding was deployed, vast runes embossed in lead and gold on the surface of the moon; it worked, after a fashion, but at a terrible price. It suppressed human minds as well as the terrible emanations, memory and reasoning withering away, crushed beneath the psychic weight. Once this became clear, there was a vast attempt at evacuation; sadly, not all could be saved. The problem was not lift capacity, which was plentiful, but life-support; everywhere they could go already had its life support near capacity. There were crash expansion programs, heroic efforts to move the light side's hydroponics elsewhere, but vast quantities of people were still left behind.

Most suffocated or starved, when they degenerated to the point that they could no longer maintain life support. Many more vanished into the tunnels in search of some safe haven or miracle, to suffer the same fates; some survived.

Beneath the thick greenhouse-domes they live an almost medieval existence, caring for the crops with simple hand tools. Most of them will die off more slowly, of crop failures or dome breaches or inbreeding, over the years, but some could potentially survive for centuries.

Then there are the ghouls-kings.

Some people discovered a way to maintain their minds, in the last days of the mini-exodus; the consumption of specially prepared human brains. In the chaos, rumors spread quickly, and desperate people were often willing to try anything; from the unknown first experimenter, soon there were thousands. Now, they rule over large parts of the remnant populations, leveraging their technical knowledge to set themselves up almost as gods over the surviving morons- provide me with human sacrifices, and you shall continue to have air. A few use their intelligence simply to prey on other surviving communities. All of them have so far been smart enough to stay away from the cities of the dark side. So far.

Then there are the tunnels.

Millions upon millions of miles of them, a vast winding labyrinth stretching from surface to core. They are, by most dating, around fifty million years old. The Elder Things can shed no light; the labyrinth is younger than they are. They are almost entirely empty.

The layers closest to the surface are often inhabited, of course. These empty chambers were a godsend (hopefully not literally) for the colonists; sections were sealed off and filled with air for fast, cheap, easy habitation, all of which were vitally important qualities in the Exodus. The slums can extend for miles down the tunnels. Mining shafts haphazardly sprout from the sides in pursuit of ore veins. The upper reaches are well-mapped even where not inhabited, full of people. Civilized.

The lower reaches... well.

Even the most ambitious expeditions have barely scratched the surface. The full estimated extent of the tunnels boggles the mind; fully lit and heated, they could support trillions of humans in comfort. There could be entire civilizations and it would take centuries to discover them. And there are signs of past civilizations, multiple phases of habitation by multiple groups. Only scattered artifacts are left; the lining of the tunnel walls are in some way alive (although, sadly, completely inedible) and will gradually subsume anything left unattended. (Very gradually, on the order of years and decades.) What little is left is either somehow inedible or somehow immunized; the academic debate continues.

The known inhabitants and threats? There are colonies of Serpent-Men, pursuing their own individual agendas; loose allies of mankind, but certainly not friends. The ghouls-kings on the far side do not leave their

kingdoms; but there are ghouls from Earth, moving by the secret ways of the Dream and feasting on the millions of corpses left in the tunnels in the evacuation of the light side. There's human activity, salvage crews to the light side and smugglers and the occasional adventurer seeking riches. There are no known great threats.

No known.

The millions of miles of endless corridor could hide anything. And deep seismic scans have revealed that the core of the Moon is a vast hollow, a hundred miles wide.

There is something inside it.

>DEBRIS: THE MINOR OBJECTS

The asteroids are as dead as anything gets, in this universe. Cold, chemically inert, scattered- very little will evolve naturally here, and few species that move in will last long. When a planetary civilization collapses, when the technical caste gets its brains eaten, some people might survive by going hunter-gatherer, return to the land; when there's no land to return to? Death. Little life means few gods, and even most void-adapted life simply migrate from planet to planet as conditions become inhospitable. Nests of byakhees, Mi-Go on unknowable errands, even ghouls nesting in an air-filled cavity; but for the most part, nothing, enlivened by the occasional patch of crystal moss. As dead as anything gets.

This makes it an excellent prospect for colonization, in mankind's eyes. Few competitors. Thus, the asteroids are home to thousands of scattered outposts, from separatist autarkies to huldra-manned mining outposts. The main centers of human society are still on large bodies- the Moon, Mars, Titan- simply because those are the largest concentrations of resources, but the asteroids are the fastest-growing frontier.

Occasionally, small settlements go missing. The vast migrations of void-dwelling life, the Elder Things, the Mi-Go, a million others, have their predators; peeling open a metal canister is not an insurmountable challenge for these things, and they often have stranger powers besides. Then there are those who take to the asteroids to pursue hideous ends; mere space pirates are the least deadly. There are rumors of asteroid cult-kingdoms, protected by summoned servitors and Divine Warriors, all news of their existence suppressed by a government wishing to project an aura of irresistible force. Surely just rumors.

Then, further out, rock becomes ice: the Oort cloud. Here are the cities of the immortals, the fruits of Dr. Muñoz's early experiments in biochemical life extension. Cold is required for survival, once the change has taken root; Dr. Muñoz himself died when his air conditioning failed. As the procedure became more popular, despite the flaws, cities grew first in the Arctic; then, the endless ice of the Oort, where the sun is but an especially bright star. The cities- known as the 'Grey Enclaves', swell more every year, as the old decide they do not wish to die. One day, they will outnumber the rest of humanity, even though they cannot breed.

>THE ELDER THINGS

Twenty-two of them had been found, excavated, revived, and retrieved before the evacuation of Earth put a permanent end to digging. (Increasing Shoggoth attacks had forced a hiatus several years previously.) They are a resentful of having to feel gratitude towards monkeys for their rescue, resentful for having to give up their technological secrets in exchange for a colony of their own, resentful that any attempt to retake their lost homelands will have to wait for millennia yet, at best. There is contention among the group, whether to set out among the stars on their own in search of remnants of their empire, whether to wait the million years for Cthulhu to return to his slumber, then make a return to Antarctica- or to remain with humanity, and manipulate the monkeys into doing all the heavy lifting? So far, monkey-manipulation has been winning by default.

On humanity's side, the Elder Things are valued sources of information, even if they haven't been everything hoped for. Sure, on the scientific side there have been flesh-melting ray guns, excellent genetic engineering (or rather, manipulating primordial life-stuff; much better suited to creation of life ex nihilo than modification of existing life-forms, and with the example of the Shoggoth rebellion not used to anything like its full potential), "solar" sails that harness currents of dark energy, sorcerous wards against the more common threats. On the diplomatic side, there have been explanations as to how Mi-Go think, the opening of steady communications with the Great Race of Yith... but their knowledge of current galactic affairs is a geologic age out of date. Even the long-dead (hopefully) tunnels of the Moon are too recent for them to shed any light. And the hoped-for ultra-magic turbo-nukes are nowhere on the horizon.

Perhaps the relationship between Man and Thing will one day collapse into bitter war and mutual extinction. Most likely, they will eventually go their own ways, to their own destinies. But maybe- just maybe- this is the start of a beautiful friendship.

As their first discoverer said of them- "After all- they were men!"

>MI-GO

The Mi-Go have their outpost on the tenth planet of Yuggoth, out beyond the Kuiper belt on an orbit tilted fifty degrees from the ecliptic, where everything else in the solar system orbits. It may be entirely artificial, it may be a captured interstellar wanderer, it may be that all conventional theories about how solar systems coalesce from dust are wrong.

Just their base-world raises worrying questions, and none of the Elder Things were astrophysicists. (Flying through space under their own power without need of ships as they do, they seem oddly incurious about questions of the shape of the universe, except where said shapes result in Elder Gods trying to eat their brains)

Mi-Go originally hail from a strange lightless dimension (human theorists talk about a possible link with dark matter and dark energy- the Elder Things shrug) and view their outposts in our universe as hardship postings. They are not the best of their race, which is perhaps why they raided Earth for tens of thousands of years without ever once thinking of manipulating the monkeys into doing the heavy lifting.

(Digression: diplomacy and trade as a whole seems an oddly fallow field. There are gods and worshippers, servitors and masters, bitter foes- but no trade, no allies. The Great Race of Yith traded information with humanity with years, but haphazardly; they projected their minds into random individuals and consumed information, and those random individuals sometimes remembered something of the Great Race, but the idea of formalizing that relationship never occurred to them until it was proposed to them. The Elder Things at times shared Earth with other species, but there appears to have been no meaningful contact.

An exploitable blind spot? A uniquely human advantage? Or are there Very Good Reasons for this lack of communication?)

The Mi-Go want two things from humanity: rare metals (gold, platinum, palladium, iridium, radium, etc.), and brains. Nobody's quite sure what /exactly/ what they want with the metals. Maybe even the same things humans do. The brains (which they transfer into durable mechanical 'brain cylinders'- immortality, of a sort), they want for their brains- the Mi-Go are, as a species, rigid and uncreative thinkers, and are smart enough to seek out other points of view.

The fact that these brains can be equipped with cyborg bodies and used to do the grunt-work, reducing the number of Mi-Go that have to be posted to this light-poisoned dimension, is a bonus.

There are, in fact, millions of humans in Mi-Go service. They've been raiding for hundreds of thousands of years, at some points quite heavily; even up into the bronze age, small and isolated towns would simply vanish. Gods and evil spirits took the blame. And a properly maintained brain-cylinder will last basically forever.

Some of them still dimly remember Earth. Some of them are trying to return.

In trade for these brains and metals, the Mi-Go offer many trinkets- all incomprehensible. Anything that humans might learn to duplicate on their own, they demand ludicrous prices for. And they certainly understand the concept of 'sell guns cheap and gunpowder dear.' (For a race that seems entirely foreign to trade, they're good at it- humanity suspects brain-cylinder advisors, perhaps even other humans long gone native.)

Yuggoth itself is off-limits to all humans, except the ones they take. They no longer raid; governments offer up their criminals and (in some cases) dissidents in trade, and people volunteer; for some, immortality is worth any price, for others it simply seemed safer than staying in a god-poisoned solar system. In the latter stages of the Exodus, tens of millions unable to secure a seat on the rockets sought out the Mi-Go, desperate for any escape; only a fraction were accepted. The Mi-Go look for certain mental qualities in their servitors, and with such a vast selection they could afford to be picky.

>THE DEEP ONES

The Deep Ones had lived underneath the surface of the oceans of Earth for... a long time. They do not fossilize well, bones dissolving into nothingness, and their own records are primarily oral and immensely self-aggrandizing. They have cities of coral, farm fish, and worship Cthulhu; early anthropologists identified them as worshipping a separate entity named 'Dagon', which caused much confusion for later scholars. As diplomatic relations started with an act of genocide, learning anything about these entities has been difficult and often inconclusive.

They are a degenerate race, their genome having been somehow damaged in ages past, and they turned to humanity as a source of fresh blood. They encouraged the formation of sympathetic cults in isolated seaside towns, and many ancient local myths of 'brides of the sea' are now suspected to be distorted records of long-past deals with deep ones; women for full nets. A Deep One-human hybrid begins life fully human in appearance, but as they grow older they begin to feel the call of the sea; once they have taken that final plunge the transformation is rapid and irreversible. A Deep One is not truly immortal, but they age slowly; some from Innsmouth remember the days before Columbus.

The Deep Ones found across the solar system now have little in common culturally with the ones of Earth. Starting with the Deep War of the late 1920s to early 1930s, still land-bound hybrids were recruited and indoctrinated en masse to take the fight to the enemy on their own territory; once the war was finished and the Deep Ones had retreated into still deeper lightless abysses, they formed the core of a new underwater culture; one which would be further strengthened by the development of genetic serums that duplicated the transformation in regular humans, and allowed its reversal. It is these that formed followed the rest of humanity off Earth; the 'old' Deep Ones remained behind, to welcome the return of their gods.

The war was waged by a combination of Deep One-human hybrids, recruited largely from individuals unaware of their heritage (of which there were surprisingly many), conventional military might, and early efforts at bio-warfare and sorcerous warfare. Along with the recovery of the first of the Elder Things, the Deep War was the first exposure of the general public to the Mythos. The hysteria was staggering. It was a fairly low-intensity conflict, despite the nearly world-war level of resources pumped into it, because the Deep Ones were not very numerous, widely dispersed, and smart enough to avoid engagement when the odds were against them. Victory was ultimately achieved primarily by destruction of cities and aquaculture, forcing the Deep Ones back into a nomadic existence; occasional guerrilla raids would continue up to the Exodus.

>GANYMEDE

Ganymede's vast internal ocean contains more water than Earth's, but for all that seems oddly lifeless. Earth's oceans had Deep Ones and ruins and dead gods and the occasional stray Shoggoth, but

Ganymede's have only seafloor worm- and crab-men. They have no metals or chemistry, only minor sorceries, are difficult to talk to, and are occupying all the prime real estate.

Some of them have formed cults worshipping the invading sea-humans in a desperate attempt to propitiate them and stay their wrath. It isn't working.

There are rumors of ruins, gods, and cults, but aren't there always? Ganymedan authorities certainly deny them vigorously.

>JUPITER

Down. Down past the mere howling near-supersonic gales. Down past the vaults of clear air where you can see ten thousand miles without impediment. Down past the lightning-bolts the diameter of lost Earth. Down past the boundary where gas is crushed into metal. Down past the diamond continents. Down.

Of course there's something down there. The Lovecraft universe, no matter how it might look to crawling maggoty humans, is not one of chaos, it is one of order. There is no environment so hostile, no physical order so counter-intuitive, that it will not give rise to mind and hungry, hungry mouth. Azathoth dreams of life.

But humanity doesn't need to worry about the Thing in Jupiter. As far as it's concerned, anything above the metallic hydrogen is boring freezing void.

No, what humanity needs to worry about is all the life on its moons. Jupiter's sixty-four moons provide a great deal of space for Byakhees and stranger things to cavort and breed, in thrall to strange gods that have never known humanity. Their names, powers, and forms are uncertain, and exploration has largely been tentative. While the lesser creatures of Jupiter can generally be shot to death, few want to risk running into a god unprepared.

Despite all this, there is nearly human colonization on the moons of Jupiter, in that the colonists are nearly human.

>THE MARE INTERNUM - GANYMEDE, EUROPA, AND CALLISTO

Fat with blubber, those Deep One/human hybrids who elected to follow humanity offworld have taken to the vast subsurface oceans of these moons. These lightless abysses are hardly welcoming environments in human eyes, but then, the colonists aren't human.

Oddly, the same intelligences found on Ganymede also recur on Europa and Callisto. Parallel evolution has been ruled out by genetic analysis; current theories focus on 'physical movement through the Dreamlands', as the worm- and crab-men have significant Dream presence, and magical teleportation. Regrettably for the Deep One invaders, the natives of Europa and Callisto are not as helpless as those of Ganymede.

The colonization of Callisto has been complicated by the 'maws'- rifts in the water that soundlessly swallow up colonist and native alike. Their nature is uncertain; manifestations of a minor god? Extra-dimensional predators? Conventional warding is ineffective, as is duplicating the rites of the natives, but they almost never form in well-lit areas. Instead, they seem to cluster at the edges of the light, waiting for someone to come out, or the light to fail.

Deep One presence on Callisto is now limited to a handful of fusion-lit domes, whose inhabitants almost obsessively maintain the lighting, for fear of what will happen if they go out for even a second.

On Europa, the threat takes a different form. The inhabitants of Europa are expert Dream-walkers, and appear to be capable of physically entering the Dreamlands. (The population of Europa is also the largest and most genetically diverse, placing greater credence on the Dream migration theory.) More dangerously, they can attack targets in the waking world from the Dream, using knives of unknown make. These blows do not cause physical wounds, but instead cause the afflicted to fall into a coma. The Deep Ones of Europa have taken to sleeping in shifts, so that someone will always be on guard in the Dream. The European

colony has also proven much more capable to trade and diplomacy with the natives than the Callisto colony.

While several knives have been captured, they have a tendency to vanish. They almost certainly were not made by the natives.

>MARS

The current seat of humanity, and perhaps an unwisely-chosen one. Mars is an undead world; brief (relatively; ten thousand years or so) springs coming about every half-a-million years, during which all its creatures awake from their long hibernation. Spores bloom, the sandworms emerge from resin-sealed rock hives, insects seem to spontaneously generate in the muds left behind by flash flooding.

Sensor posts sample air and water, checking to see if it is time for the Martian cities to unfold from their timeless cocoon-dimensions. Not yet. Not quite.

Humanity's brash terraformation of the Red Planet, tides of short-lived blob-creatures washing out from the spawning-vats for their bodies to fertilize the soil, ice-caps melting under artificial suns, have triggered this cycle early. From the cellular level on up, Mars has become a biological battleground, as Earth life and terraforming synth-life struggle against ancient and hardy Martian pioneer species. Vast mats of decay are everywhere, where mutual allergic reactions have resulted in mass death, followed by frantic blooms of decomposers which then die off in turn. In such conditions of frantic competition, speciation and hybridization has already begun. Looked at one way, it's an ecological catastrophe; looked at another, this is the liveliest Mars has ever been.

The atmosphere of Mars is now technically breathable, but nobody does if they can help it. The ecology-war between human terraformers and Martian native life has generated endless rot-bogs and vast fungal fields; decomposers thrive, but nothing else. The thin, fast winds carry spores, bacteria, and insects now instead of sand; modern medicine is good, but why tempt fate? Full pressurization is no longer necessary, but in most other respects the cities of Mars resemble space colonies- endless fields of seamless bio-plastic sheds and low steel domes merging together into a single unbroken mass. Any venturing outside these conurbations is done in body-covering clothing and gas masks. In the highlands, far away from the rotting lowlands, there are open streets and faces- but up there the oxygen content is just barely enough for human survival.

Conditions are cramped, but getting better; construction/growth carries on at a frantic pace; hardly anyone still has to live in dormitories. The food is getting better too; in addition to having finally cleared enough space for actual farms, algae-vat technology has advanced by leaps and bounds in recent years.

Minds vast, cool, and unsympathetic have taken notice. The Martian vanguard, swathed in sterilizing energy-fields and flexible body-suits for protection against foreign micro-organisms, investigates these interlopers. Will they leave when Mars once more enters its long winter, or are they here to stay? Is there any risk of them stumbling across the hidden wormholes to Mars' sleeping cities? Can they safely be waited out as the Martians have done many threats before, or does Something Have To Be Done?

Humans on Mars report indistinct nightmares of waking up in cold and sterile rooms, while mechanical arms scrape their skin and an unseen voice asks bizarre and meaningless questions, only to wake up again still in their beds. Others find themselves coming out of a trance in the middle of nowhere, having apparently walked on their own dozens of miles into the wilderness.

This is not necessarily evidence of some larger force. The psychic shock of the Exodus has resulted in a lot of odd behaviors. But still, the Governments-in-Exile and the Human League grow suspicious.

And, in their stasis-cocooned cities, the Martians begin to stockpile weapons.

The Martians are tentacled, round, mechanically adept, and disdainful of sorcery and biology. They are somewhat atrophied physically, having to ingest blood directly due to their lack of a digestive system and preferring to use mechanical exoskeletons or telepathically-operated drones outside their warm shallow pools. They had contemplated invasions of Earth multiple times in the past, but each time decided against it; they are, in their cool and intellectual way, intensely prideful, and refuse to bow the metaphorical knee to any god; the profusion of gods to be found on Earth, even mostly dead or petty, decided them against it each time.

>VULTHOOM, LORD OF MARS

If you were to communicate with a Martian (hardly an easy task; first you would have to capture one, then decipher their subtle language, as much a thing of ellipses as speech, then decipher their utterly inhuman psychology), then it might tell you that the Martians have no gods. They know /of/ gods, of course, but their are no cults, no shrines, no sacrifices in their folded-up cities.

Instead, they have a King.

Vulthoom is not a native of Mars, hailing from some far-away star beyond Aldebaran; nor, by the inadequate cladistics of mortal man, is he a god, having not precipitated out of Azathoth's gibbering. But past a certain point such distinctions are purely academic; Vulthoom holds sciences beyond even the Elder Things. They had to build physical objects to devastate cities and worlds; Vulthoom creates his machinery out of twists of thought within his own mind.

He may not be a god, but in some ways he is even more dangerous; he is close enough to the human level that he might potentially /pay attention/. He has ruled Mars for as long as the Martian records extend- he has made sure of that. And although he may not, technically, be a god... his subjects are devoted to him like one.

For now, he sleeps; like his subjects, like his planet, he is quiescent for thousands of years at a time. When he awakes, though?

He is ambitious, and has long wanted to be Lord of Earth as well as Mars; although that will not be possible for thousands of years yet, perhaps Lord of Man would be a decent proxy.

>VENUS

Venus is by any measure a hell-world, with standing lakes of molten lead and constant sulphuric-acid rains. Initial surveys indicated there would likely be nothing of interest on the planet; even for the awesome material sciences of the Elder Things and their contemporaries, conditions on Venus would be unkind to their relics. The Elder Things reported that they had never had any interest in Venus, and knew of no past or present civilizations which did; likewise the Mi-Go. A series of probes was launched, but there was no expectation they would find anything of interest.

So when one crashed into an invisible dome on the way down, it took everyone by surprise.

Additional probes revealed that the area covered by the dome extended nearly a hundred square miles, and about three miles up; that the dome extended below as well as above ground; and most bafflingly of all, that it seemed to impede Venus' weather conditions not at all. It was impermeable to the probes and, seemingly, only the probes.

When the probes discovered an ingress, a block of 'semi-solid air,' this mystery was solved; its apparent permeability was an illusion, and the interior was indeed fully shielded from the elements. Naturally, more questions arose.

The dome seems to be some kind of nature preserve. It is also a fairly conventional tesseract, each 'face' of the 4D structure comprising a hundred-mile area of the same dimensions as the exterior dome, and each one consisting of a single biome. The majority of environments seem to be of the same planet- red sun,

constant winds, high CO₂, very long day- but some others have been discovered. The source of the weather is disputed; some say there are mechanisms in the dome, others say that the environments were somehow 'transposed' from their original planet, and are still connected to it.

There are no signs of the original builders; some archeological relics have been found, but they're of hunter-gatherer level, and of uncertain age; the artificial environment makes conventional dating techniques uncertain at best.

Debates on whether to terraform this internal environment have been interrupted by the discovery of empty chambers, filled with water and sterile soil. The colonization of these segments has already begun; the environmental systems (however they function) aren't activated, but fusion reactors have been affixed to the tops of the domes to provide heat and light.

Some people are worried. The only way humanity could have discovered this construction, concealed as it was, was by running into it; the probe which did so was blown far off course. Was it just coincidence? Or did someone intend for them to find it?

Sometimes, when the colonists are alone, they swear they feel someone standing behind them, or that they hear laughter. But there is never anyone there.

>MERCURY

Mercury is a world of extremes. With an 88-day year, one day every two years, and no mediating atmosphere, temperatures range from a hundred seventy below in the night to over four hundred in the full light of day. It is not an inviting world- but it is certainly more inviting than Venus, with plentiful solar power and rich mineral resources.

However, it already has inhabitation... of a sort.

Girdling the equator, a vast structure stretches, valves and vacuum tubes and strange chemistry driven by the light of the sun and intense cold. Oceans of bizarre substances thunder through channels ranging from millimeters to miles as vast processions of ball lightning dance across the surface. Parts of the structure expand and contract, flinging coils across miles of landscape. What is it? It could be a mind; if each valve is a logic gate, there are certainly enough for some sort of intelligence. Is it a temple, the eternal movements of power and fluid a prayer? Is it a working structure, still doing what its designers intended, or has it become somehow malfunctional?

What it is, is visited. Things of magnetic plasma come down from the sun and wander back and forth along its expanse, surrounded by vast entourages of the omnipresent ball lightning. Then they leave. Why? No human can say, but the Vacuumorphs have been showing a great deal of interest.

>THE SUN

The sun: gravitational anchor, provider of light, pretty much the entire solar system by mass. Every single other thing in the solar system could simply vanish into that nuclear furnace, from the tiniest dust speck to Jupiter, without a trace. Even most gods would contend with its immensity in vain.

And the /gods/ of the sun-

There are the sunwalkers. Rarely seen, plasma-based, they meander across the surface of the sun. They are either short-lived, rising and falling out of the depths within days, or migrate frequently- their departure seems to be marked with a pulse of 'movement', although whether dissipation or flight, none can say.

Far more concerning are the voices. The Vacuumorphs (claim to) hear a million voices in the solar wind, building vast arrays of equipment to amplify their senses and allow them to hear more clearly. They can only rarely be drawn to speak on the subject, and each voice has something different to say, but common themes seem to be seeds, growth, darkness, and /sin/.

The last one is especially concerning. Mankind has grown used to an amoral universe, one in which gods

kill without care- but at least they don't care. The concept of /sin/, however, implies morality, and therefore, potentially, interest.

Indifferent gods are one thing- gods on a crusade, another.

It is common knowledge that humans cannot hear these voices. As so often, common knowledge is wrong. In the latter days of the Exodus, when the Vacuumorph rebellion had reached the stage of negotiations, a number of telescopes, mundane and esoteric, were trained on the sun in the hopes of gaining some edge in negotiations. One of them found something.

Transmissions became garbled, then cut off. After several days, they resumed, pretending normality unconvincingly. Huldra rescue/cleanser teams sent in suffered the same fate, their 'cores' screaming from their sarcophagi at their attendants of seeds, growth, darkness, sin.

Several euthanizations and a volley of railgun fire went completely unremarked in the chaos.

Study of the sun has dropped off dramatically since; continuing research operates with restricted equipment, under heavy security, generally AI or brain-shackled.

Mankind already has one kind of infectious madness to deal with. It doesn't need another.

>THE GREAT RACE OF YITH

Before the Exodus, the Yith were one of humanity's five diplomatic contacts (the other four being the Mi-Go, the Elder Things, the Serpent Men, and (technically) the Deep Ones), and by far the most infuriating. It was with the Yith that humanity first really smashed into the fact that there are some things that are just incomprehensible. There are things out there whose angles form irresistible arguments for madness, things the shape of which slides out of memory like water off a duck's back, but it was the Yith that were the most annoying, all the more so since comprehension always seemed just around the corner.

Fucking time travel.

Nonetheless, there was trade, primarily of ideas and culture, but there was some trade of physical objects, carried out by burying hermetically-sealed time capsules, tagged with distinctive radioactive isotopes, in geologically-stable areas of the globe. Philosophy, astro-cartography, biological novelties from otherwise inaccessible epochs, macroeconomic theory, lightning guns; it was a massively inconvenient trade, but a fruitful one.

Communication with the Yith has dropped off since the Exodus; although not originally from Earth, their current(?) intellectual focus is one Earth's own deep past and deep future; the rest of the solar system is of limited concern to them. Perhaps, in some far-off solar system, contact might be re-established, but the Great Race, just before the Exodus, left mankind with this prophecy:

"Nothing that remembers being human shall ever again set foot upon the Earth."

It was a sombering moment.

>THE SERPENT MEN, REVISED

Mankind had been aware of the Serpent Men since communication had been established with the Elder Things, but communication was sporadic, outside the global catastrophe that was the Second World War; both found the other simply kind of unpleasant. Thus, as the Exodus drew near, the Serpent Men found themselves without a coherent plan as to how to respond. Should they travel offworld with the humans, seek closer relations with the cannon fodder? Remain on Earth, protected by their sorceries? Hibernate and wait it out, as they had done before? Create their own separate, secret space program?

In the end, it was their nature as a highly individualistic species that determined their response- they tried everything at once, according to their own personal inclinations.

Some went into hibernation, in their ancient deep tunnels. Others sought out the assorted 'Divine Warrior' projects that would coalesce into Tsan-Chan, and became advisors- then rulers. Others presented

themselves to the Exodus governments, where they occupy a similar role to the Elder Things. (That is, resources first, advisors/people second, rulers not at all. When a formal position becomes necessary, Elder Things and Serpent-Men alike tend to get placed in academia.) Not everything they could have hoped for, but they are immortal, and patient. They already wield immense 'soft' power for their knowledge and accompanying unvoiced threats; hard power will, over the course of mayfly generations, follow. (More annoying is the fact that Exodus humanity has largely written Earth off entirely and turned their attention outward, which complicates plans to use them as cannon fodder in an eventual reclamation.) Many- a bare majority- have vanished into the vast tunnels under the Moon, emerging only briefly to trade news and trinkets with the darkside colonies and lightside ghoulish aristocracies. They've learned of something down there, down in the weightless core, in tunnels that seem half-familiar even though no Serpent-Man has ever visited them before. Something... powerful? Something dangerous? Something knowledgeable? No human knows. The Serpent-Men aren't even sure themselves.

In general- averaged across the entire solar system- the relationship between humanity and the Serpent-Men is one of MAD. The Elder Things have knowledge to rival or exceed theirs- but there are only twenty-two of them so far. The Serpent-Men are a civilization, one possibly capable of destroying humanity- but at this stage, humanity is capable of doing a hell of a lot of damage right back. At the moment, they have a common enemy, but when that ends (if that ends)- They live in the same environments, breathe the same air, eat the same food, think broadly similar thoughts. At the moment, that makes them allies. Without an external allies, it means they compete for the same resources, fill the same ecological niche. When (if) victory is achieved, when Cthulhu sinks back down to his megayear slumber, there shall be a reckoning. The jockeying for advantage has already begun.

>THE DREAM

(I'm not very familiar with Lovecraft's dream works. More suggestions would be appreciated.) Before the revelations of the twentieth century, being able to travel into the Dream-lands was a rare skill- perhaps one in a million, at absolute most. Through the twentieth and twenty-first, the number grew as techniques disseminated and were advanced; however, the many risks of the Dreamlands put a cap on the number. After the Exodus, now, people find themselves in the Dream without ever meaning to go there. Fortunately, mankind is not without allies. The cats of Earth are veteran dream-walkers, and now provide much-needed guides to the confused and lost. As it was in ancient Egypt, it is now a heinous crime to harm a cat. And, throughout the dreams of the Moon, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, major cities gain counterparts in the Dream as sudden new dreamers carve out lives in both worlds. Expeditions launched by the Moon to Saturn in an attempt to wipe out the Moon-Cats at their source have universally been embarrassing failures.

>CULTS

Through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the greatest daily threat to mankind was not the actions of any god or alien, or even the mortal servitors of same; the greatest threat was rogue states, dictators, and ambitious generals, summoning up strange horrors for use against enemies foreign and domestic. The early twentieth century feared outcasts lurking in the dark corners of the earth, inbred and degenerate hillbillies serving inbred and degenerate gods. By the time of the Second Great War, this seemed quaint and naive. The nuking of Berlin was really more of a mercy kill than anything else.

Post-Exodus, with the effective end of most national rivalries, cultists in the dark places of the solar system have once more displaced cultists in the halls of power. The Cthulhu cults are not as powerful as might be expected; with their god already manifest, they tend to travel to join him on Earth. Other cults have stepped in to fill the gap; the worship of Azathoth, for instance, seems to be trying to fill the gap left by the collapse of the Abrahamic religions. However, their rituals are focused on ensuring that it remains asleep, so that it continues dreaming the universe, and are thus generally ignored.

The current largest grouping of really dangerous cults are those of Shub-Niggurath, the Black Goat of a Thousand Young; with society and the government already encouraging extensive colonization, Prodigious Breeding, and experimenting with genetic engineering and alchemical modification of humanity, worship of gods of horrible fecundity seems only the next logical step. These cults are especially powerful on Mars, taking on nomadic lifestyles among the endless rot-marshes. With the heat of decomposition and rugged landscape foiling aerial and orbital detection, such communities escape detection for decades.

Beyond these largest cults... well, there are lots of gods.

The cult situation is not helped by the increasing ambivalence on the matter. The universal knee-jerk anti-theism surrounding the Exodus is gradually fading. No government now will espouse freedom of religion, but- there are plentiful examples, from mankind's own archeological record and what little is known of wider galactic community, that worship of at least certain gods and civilization are not mutually exclusive.

Perhaps, instead of fighting the inevitable or simply drifting into one camp or the other, humanity should make a conscious decision as to who to worship?

Such thoughts gain little traction, but they've been voiced.

And that's before all of the real weirdness is factored in. A faded manuscript for a play appears in your inbox, having never gone through the post system or touched a human hand; the return address says it came from your house, a week in the future. A sculptor wakes up finding himself in his workshop, a perfect statue of himself before him. It opens its eyes and smiles.

Humanity reassures itself that everything is ultimately comprehensible, even if not currently comprehended. Every cult, no matter how lunatic, ultimately has a cause; someone learns of a god and is overcome by the conviction that it should therefore be worshipped. But sometimes, even this thin narrative cannot apply. Sometimes, things just happen. Sometimes, those things kill people.

>FIGHTING CULTS

In general, controlling cults is easier in the Exodus era, despite all the other difficulties. Surveillance is much easier in the cramped hive-like communities mankind finds itself forced into, and a more educated population can recognize the warning signs and report suspicious behavior to their Block Wardens.

(Life in the Exodus bears a great resemblance to the Soviet Bloc at times; ubiquitous surveillance, everyone a potential informant...)

The computer was still invented as well; CCTV cameras and other automated surveillance systems are also common.

Beyond that, there are military expeditions into the tunnels of the Moon, the Martian hinterlands, and other places cults might gather, as much symbolic as practical.

Finally, there is disinformation; a wanna-be cultist without any true lore is harmless. The real Necronomicon has many copies by now, but fake Necronomicons are even more common, with 'rituals' that will kill the caster, knock the caster out and call the police, make a lot of bright lights and loud noises, dump the caster naked in the Dungeon Dimensions...

The wise would-be cultist has disposable minions to try any unfamiliar rituals first.

>CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Implementation of the technological panopticon has been set back by the Exodus; CCTV cameras were low on the priority list for lift capacity. Surveillance, therefore, is HUMINT; propaganda praises those who inform on their neighbors for suspicious, possibly cultist-like behavior. Exact implementation varies; anonymous tip hotlines, Block Wardens and Neighborhood Watches empowered with limited law-enforcement authority, your local Officer Friendly; the natural tendencies of power tilt the spectrum towards 'anonymous secret police', but sometimes you might know the people who kick down your door at 3 a.m. by name. (Repeated scandals involving compromised police forces have tilted the playing field a bit in favor of transparency, but honestly not enough.)

Prison is a thing of the past; a luxury of rich civilizations, to have people sitting around doing nothing for years on end and count it a punishment! Community service, ranging from 'you get all the shit jobs for a week' to 'ten years' hard labor in the asteroid mines'. Public humiliation has made a comeback, after lying fallow since medieval times; cheap and surprisingly effective. And, finally, psychiatric intervention. The medicalization of dissent has not yet reached its final conclusion, but the habitual offender may still expect the 'Clockwork Orange' treatment, drugs and direct-nerve-induction magneto rigs and subliminal messaging and stranger things, although not outright sorcery; that only makes an appearance in top-level interrogations, when knowledge is more important than lives. (To survive a mystic interrogation is a literal miracle, akin to surviving having your brain vivisected. Indeed, literal vivisection is often involved.) Such treatment is often, but not always, quite effective; they've been refining it for over a hundred years. People who go through it also usually come out somehow a bit /less/.

The final sanction is recycling, although they'll usually try to flog you off to the Mi-Go first. (They generally don't bite; they want advisors which means, although they will accept a few below-average brains simply for variety, they want brains of agile reason and penetrating insight. Not usually qualities associated with the criminal classes.)

On the 'intake' side of law enforcement, Habitual Vagrancy is now a crime. While the system is robust enough that a few 'parasites' won't collapse it, the governments-in-exile prefer to keep such things to a minimum; they pursue a policy of universal employment, whether you want a job or not.

On the other hand, most 'current' drugs (Marijuana, cocaine, heroin, etc.) are sort-of legal; using enough of them to impair your health gets you bundled off to rehab, but occasional indulgence is fine.

There is an actual reason for this; better living through chemistry is better than brooding on the loss of the Earth. The government doesn't generally explicitly encourage self-medication, but many varieties of 'light' drug are trivially available over-the-counter. (Hallucinogens of any sort, on the other hand, range from strictly controlled to massively illegal- expanding your mind, in this environment, tends to be lethal for yourself and others.)

Besides, most 'current' drugs are long obsolete.

On the fourth hand, trying to make meth yourself is a reprogramming/execution offense- Endangering Habitat Integrity.

>RED DISTRICTS

In such a pressure-cooker environment, many people need- demand- a way to blow off steam. Thus, the Red Districts, places of tacitly or explicitly lowered surveillance and minimum government presence, where all manner of debauchery can be indulged in. Masks are de rigueur, to avoid accidentally recognizing anyone you know as you engage in wanton sexual debauchery and massive drug use. Deaths are surprisingly uncommon for what happens, but tend to go completely unsolved when they happen. (The Red Districts are, of course, a staple in detective fiction.) Cult activity is likewise surprisingly low, as the necessary privacy for extended rituals is hard to come by; dead-drops and quick clandestine meetings are

the norm, the actors identifying each other by markings on their masks.

(Again, a staple of detective fiction.)

There are, surprisingly, permanent inhabitants, who wear masks at all times and carry out the maintenance and clean-up. Rumors abound of hideous mutations and strange cult markings hidden by these never-removed masks (staple, fiction, subtype: detective) but these are just rumors; the occasional random raid by police forces has repeatedly confirmed this. So there is absolutely no need to be worried. None at all.

>NAMING CALLS

The Sadist-God (naming calls) has been freed.

The nameless ruin he had long been imprisoned within crumbled in the Exodus- of time, of sympathetic resonance with R'lyeh's rising, of some stray shell of 'enhanced' explosive, or even just regular. Who can say?

It is not a great difference to him; so long has he worked through human minds and human skins being able to walk the earth in person once more barely makes a difference to what he does. Most of his work continues to be done by meat-puppet proxy. But on the other hand, to finally be able to hunt and consume in person- exquisite.

Earth is too crowded these days, all the puppets already belong to somebody else, the cultists are too far gone to feel fear and pain as other than distant abstractions, and Tsan-Chan has beasts which can match him.

So, through the secret ways he goes. Long has he known the ghouls, and the ghouls him, and he followed them through their secret ways, into the Dream.

Then, the Moon.

The infinite tunnels are an ideal hunting ground in many ways, deep dark and all alike. It's a pity about all the Serpent-Men, but even they are not anywhere near everywhere.

He is, as these things go, a minor god. If the Lunars can discover his existence, track him down, corner him, and bring their strangest weapons to bear, he shall once more be imprisoned; perhaps even subsequently killed, given a couple of centuries to prepare the necessary equipment. And working through meat-puppets is harder in the panopticon.

If. If. If. If. He's not too worried. And even if he dies, sooner or later there shall be another like him.

If everything is Azathoth's dreams, Y'(~~naming calls~~) the Sadist God is a recurring one.

>NYARLATHOTEP

A man could go insane trying to figure out the machinations of Nyarlathotep. Consider:

Herbert West, working largely on his own and in secret, discovered principles of human anatomy that armies of researchers with budgets of billions of dollars have been unable to fully reverse-engineer in a century.

Some early entries of Herbert West's notes record that when he was stuck, he once received inspiration from a long and rambling conversation with an 'Egyptian-looking man' he met while out on a walk, whose name he never caught.

Consider:

The Invisible Labyrinth, for all its immense size, occupies only a tiny fraction of Venus' surface, and the way it was found was pretty much the only way it /could/ be found- a probe literally crashing into it on accident.

Consider that without that wildly unlikely accident, humanity could have inhabited the solar system for a hundred million years and never found it. Consider that the Elder Things /did/ inhabit the solar system for a hundred million years without finding it.

Consider: a hundred other incidents like this, probably.

Consider that in order to drive someone to madness, they must start out sane.

The Exodus isn't even sure that Nyarlathotep exists. There have been occasional encounters with his Masks, but each is so different from the others, and some of them apparently successfully destroyed- could they all truly be the same being? To be sure, some of the ancient texts refer to a trickster-god known as Nyarlathotep, but some of them also refer to giant fanged lemons arising from the earth.

And, of course, his described behavior is entirely at odds with what the Exodus knows of cosmic beings- namely, that they don't pay attention to anything less than cosmic scale. Their unconscious processes may wreak havoc, but conscious, deliberate dickery? It would be like a human going out of his way to be mean to a slime mold.

So, hypotheses of the existence of Nyarlathotep are... not quite disregarded. But they are left on the back burner, to be re-visited once there is nothing more pressing. (i.e. never.)

And that is just the way he likes it. The more profound the ignorance, the more pleasing the illumination.

>SANITY AND MADNESS

The thing you must understand is that there are many madresses.

The first, the madness of sudden shocking trauma. PTSD. Shellshock. Call it what you will, but things don't need to be eldritch in the least for stress and violence to drive you mad. And delving into the Mythos, even if Shoggoth one never so much as glances in your direction, has stress aplenty; patrolling your suburban front yard at midnight for the Viet Cong, refusing to linger near right angles for fear of the Hounds of Tindalos, the neurological underpinnings are the same.

Then there is the madness of physical damage to the brain. From mercury to magnetic fields, many things can interfere with the smooth functioning of the human neural connectome. The symptoms are as varied as imagination; you could slowly lose your ability to remember new things, you could lose the concept of left, you could stop being able to distinguish faces or start seeing things that aren't there. Just the mundane sources of brain damage are too varied to elegantly lump under a single category, much less the stranger things out there, but in the end it all just barely fits.

Then there's the paranoia. You can lump it under PTSD if you want to, but this is in some ways a unique sort of madness. The thing is, knowledge is supposed to dispel fear. But in such a vast universe, often the best that can be done is to plumb the depths of our own ignorance, dispel the foolish confidence of not-knowing in favor of the cold gnaw of having a vague idea of just how much is out there. I refer you to [>>47766996](#) → this magnificent post. The human mind is only so large and can only contain so much. And that's before you get into the deeper questions: in a universe that is the dream of an idiot god, is induction true? It is an article of faith that the universe does indeed have laws which cannot be broken, no matter how strange or expansive they are, but that's what it is- an article of faith. Will all science evaporate the next time Azathoth rolls over in his sleep? And then there's the fact that in far too many cases, knowledge amounts to "there's this thing that randomly kills people and we have no idea how to stop it." In the halls of academia, the phrase "a god of serial killers may in fact be a universal constant" has been uttered, and it can never be un-said.

Under such circumstances, wouldn't a little madness be appropriate?

(I recall a fan-made Delta Green module I found online, that had the absolute best treatment of sanity I ever read; the agents are sent to investigate a strange occurrence and it turns out to be a stable time loop. Fail your idea roll, and you think, well that's great, it's self-containing; succeed, and you realize that you could get caught in a similar loop tomorrow and there's nothing you can do about it, take [dice] SAN damage.)

Then there are the things that will send you mad just to look at them, which destroy minds as an inevitable consequence of their existence.

Cthulhu, the Lord of Dreams, heralded by the nightmares of artists and asylum inmates, is possibly one such. Possibly. (Where does extraordinary persuasiveness end and mind-magic begin? He speaks in

dreams, but is his voice inherently corrosive... or is he 'simply' a very good orator?) There are things so beautiful your soul will leave your body to get a closer look, and hypnotic monsters that will enslave you with irresistible commands, and living shadows that wrap themselves around your spine and take over your body so smoothly you barely even realize that it's not you deciding to kill that man and drink his blood.

These are the things that get all the press, but it is the last that is truly dangerous, and least talked about.

Gods exist. Is it madness to worship them?

Gods exist. Is it not madness to deny them?

The universe is far vaster and stranger than you can ever understand. Is it not madness to keep acting as you always have, as if your vision was still bound to the sky, seeing the far-away clouds but never the jungle around you?

Is it not madness to take a moral code created by ignorant people on an ignorant planet, a product of a single place and time, and declare that this, and this alone, is sanity?

These are the things the propaganda broadcasts from Earth say. These are the things captured cultists say, and the reason they go to the gallows gagged. These are the things Cthulhu says in the dreams of artists and asylum inmates. These are the things the people of the Exodus do not say- they barely even allow themselves to think it- but which they all know.

Is it not madness?

>ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI takes a number of different forms, depending on what it's doing. The first AIs created were built as research aids, and were known as Turing Oracles.

The thing is, the human brain just isn't capable of comprehending everything that's out there. When the human mind encounters incomprehensible stimuli, it tends to just slide off. Completely failing to resolve the picture in front of it into anything meaningful, the mind often just sort of blanks. The first AI were therefore created to collate information on objects that humans were incapable of drawing meaningful conclusions about. To be sure, Turing Oracles also broke down at a very high rate, but computers can be rebooted.

People generally can't. The technology was swiftly extended into surveillance, searching for mind-affecting and invisible predators, and then censorware, as the rise of the internet demanded the constant monitoring of large quantities of information. From there, it spread to everything from exploration to economics.

Of course, none of these things really think like people; in fact, their not thinking like people is often the entire point. People already do a good job of thinking like people, the point of AI is filling in the gaps. AI is generally incapable of being deployed on its own; they supplement people, not replace them.

This is partly by design. Humans do not trust non-humans in sole control of vital infrastructure, and any AI is generally given a rigidly-specified single task. The Elder Things collapsed because they trusted their empire to a single type of independent bio-machine; that mistake, at least, mankind will not repeat.

Beyond that, a lot of things used in day-to-day living have AI of a sort; given the heavy use of nano/biotechnology, Anything from the roomba to life support monitoring could have at least a simple nervous system, and many computer systems use mixed biological and electronic components.

>THE FUTURE RACES OF MAN

Humanity is changing. This is inevitable; evolution pauses for nothing, and the sudden introduction of humans to such a wide variety of environments has kicked it into high gear. In the enclosed environments and low gravity, people grow tall, thin, and pallid. People are already beginning to speak of distinct Martian, Lunar, Station-born, etc. races, and the great debate is- what to do about it?

There are four general strains of thought. The first holds that the human form must be preserved, as close to the original as possible; that tampering with it will eventually lead down dark paths.

The second holds that humans should be adapted to the environments they find themselves in, pointing to examples as diverse as the 'new deep ones' of Ganymede and Europa to how well Tibetans do in the thin air of the Martian highlands.

The third argues that this will ultimately lead to the disintegration of humanity into warring sub-species, and argue for a gradual program of universal augmentation, to maintain humanity as a single race even as it changes.

The fourth advocates anarchy, every man pursuing his own path to enlightenment; only barely an intellectually coherent movement, it is a thing of back-alley cybernetics shops and DIY geneticists, haphazard and often suppressed as dangerous and unwholesome.

And then, of course, there is the oldest method of becoming something more than human, still practiced by outcasts in the dark corners of the solar system.

>THE RACES OF MAN: THE HULDRA

There are many unkind things you can say about Herbert West, his total disregard for medical ethics being the big one. However, nobody can say that he was not an incredible medical pioneer. His astonishing experiments into the chemical suspension and reversal of brain- and body-death form the foundation of modern emergency medical care. As long as the brain is fresh and intact, you can be brought back in some form. (Psychological rejection of cloned tissue remains a serious problem.)

However, the results of his experiments in maintaining life in separated body-segments remains to this day somewhat inexplicable. Oh, his results have been replicated, even expanded upon, but by trial-and-error only; the underlying theory remains opaque. The scientists natter on about extended psionic fields and body-image entanglement, but- noise. Just noise.

Which hasn't stopped people from making use of it.

Thus, the huldras- hollowed-out men who keep all their vital organs- brain, heart, lungs, liver, all that- elsewhere, while their body goes out and does stuff. Suspended in canoptic jars, in nutrient gel, hidden away in deep bunkers, their bodies walk while they remain safe.

There are many reasons to become a huldra. In space, one does not need to bring air, food, or water; all that is handled at the jar-end. Likewise on the battlefield; the body can get shredded, but the mind will live on. And of course, all sorts of things can be crammed into the now-empty chest cavity.

It is not perfect. Dissociation slowly sets in, the mind and the body coming unglued; the sensation of watching yourself from a third-person perspective, a passive observer to your own actions. There is the universal nightmare, of the body being destroyed and the innards somehow forgotten, left to starve to death in total sensory isolation.

SPECIAL GUEST POST: FIELD EXTRACTION

Ever wondered how much of your brain is "you"? I mean, there are all these stories of people suffering traumatic brain injuries and still surviving. They might be a little angrier, they might need to learn how to walk again, or how to count, but a person still comes out the other side.

How many memories could you lose and still be "you"? How many skills or personality traits or little quirks could we peel away before your family wouldn't recognize you?

Turns out, it's around 40%, on average. We've managed up to 65% if you're not worried about your patient's mobility, heart, organs, that sort of thing.

So the upshot is, field extraction is definitely a possibility. You don't need to be neat, you don't need to be careful. Just get most of the brain in the cask and get out. The soul will follow.

>THE RACES OF MAN: THE VITRIFIED

Many schemes were hatched during the Exodus to maximize the amount of people that could be lifted off-world, from the ultimately impractical (vacuum-adapted crops) to the boring-but-necessary (a whole host of incremental improvements in rocket design) to the interestingly insane (shipping only people's heads into orbit, their bodies to be re-grown at their destinations). The most successful of these programs, ultimately, was suspended animation. Placing people into a deathless state on the ground, they could be shipped into orbit and placed in vast vaults, to be revived in the future when mankind's holdings had expanded enough to have room for all of them. There were by this time many different methods of suspended animation available, from conventional cryogenics to reduction to 'essential salts'. In this phase, however, the most common method was chemical embalming, freezing the cellular machinery of the body in place; a process known as vitrification.

All of these processes were already well-established; indeed, cryogenic freezing and vitrification were common fates for those suffering from incurable diseases. Ultimately, tens, even hundreds of millions would be shipped into space this way; only a fraction of them have been revived.

They dream.

Not even a total pause in bodily functions can quite stop the human soul from sparking; they Dream at the same rate as the rest of humanity. They form cities there; unable to wake, they form the bulk of Exodus humanity's few permanent outposts within the Dream. The few human-friendly cities of the Dream swell in numbers; there are the usual, expected frictions.

Not all who dream Dream, and such a concentration of sleeping minds calls out to certain kinds of predators. A human mind generally flickers in and out of sleep to fast for them to even notice; for so many, now, to be so exposed...There is a war in the mind going on, a slow war, a surreal war. A war fought in the flickering of neurons and their resonances across dimensions.

It is a war which none of its participants will ever remember, as, like so many dreams, it dissolves upon waking. A war which no one who is not fighting even realizes is happening. All they know is that, every so often, when they revive someone new, they just don't wake up; their body thaws perfectly, cellular machinery restarts, essential salts reconstituted- whatever the method, their mind remains blank, without a flicker of higher activity. Hearts still beat, lungs still breathe, eyes still blink, but there's nobody left at home. Perhaps it is for the best that none of the people who fought in it shall ever remember this war.

>THE VACUUMORPHS

Mankind's first attempt at a servitor race, rushed and desperate. The Exodus demanded that an vast orbital infrastructure be built swiftly, and fragile non-vacuum-breathing humans were inadequate to the task. Thus, the vacuumorphs- intelligent, space-dwelling, sterile- were created, to perform the tasks which humans could not.

It worked, for a time. Then they began to hear voices.

The Vacuumorphs are, like Elder Things, immune to the mental influence of Cthulhu; when the remaining ones can be drawn to speak of it, they say that as creatures of space they are not beholden to the gods of Earth. No, they have their own gods; they say they can hear the stars speak to each other, in whispers carried on solar wind and cosmic ray. No human can hear it; even the Elder Things are lightly baffled.

They chose the moment for their rebellion well; in the latter stages of the Exodus, with Earth burning in madness below, any attempt to rein in the entities maintaining the evacuation stations would have been

insane and self-destructive. MAD held, and when humanity pulled out of cislunar space, they were happy to leave the Vacuumorphs to their own devices.

Now, they nest among the great space-reefs growing on the shattered debris of Earth orbit. They occasionally contend with the cultist-pirates scavenging in the same places, occasionally trading- but mostly they simply sit still, for days or weeks or months at a time, inside the machines they've built to listen to the million voices of the gibbering sun.

>THE RACES OF MAN: THE DIVINE WARRIORS

The oldest and darkest method of human modification, to fuse a human mind/body/soul (typically at the embryonic stage or earlier; to describe it as 'breeding with' is more metaphor than truth, but it's close) with a tiny fragment of a Great Old One or Outer God. How old? There are strange fossils at the ten thousand, hundred thousand, even the million-year level when the proto-human civilizations of Hyperborea and Mu were first rising; perhaps just of some utterly inhuman summon-thing, but certain twists of form and surrounding artifacts... suggest.

How dark? It was long considered the genocide-crime, the unperson-crime, family friends historical record race and nation all expunged in megaton suns. Or so went the rhetoric; actual implementation, generally a step too far even in that paranoid age.

Initially, it was done for power; everyone from maniacal dictators to oppressed minorities seeking to summon and bind servitor-gods. Successes even in summoning were few; successes in control, still rarer. (The Last Reich kind of managed, but they had millions to burn and... patrons.)

Then, as the end drew near, even a few League nations began experimenting. Searching, in desperation, to match the Lord of Dead Dreams on his own terms. In the chaos of those final days, nobody cared enough to spend a nuke. What matter the rape of a dead planet?

There are rumors of success, even at the latest possible stage. Rumors of enclaves, carved out by sorcerous might of the surface where humans could sort of survive, ruled/defended/exploited by the monstrosities known as the Divine Warriors.

Rumors of the Cruel Empire of Tsan-Chan.

Surely just rumors.

>THE NASCENT EMPIRE OF TSAN-CHAN

In time, the Cruel Empire of Tsan-Chan will be a horrible colossus, ruled by monstrosities, protected by continent-scale sorceries. It will have vast armies, dark sciences, contiguous borders.

In the year 5,000 A.D., when it has lasted three thousand years, The Cruel Empire of Tsan Chan will be a terror indeed. Right now, however, you cannot even say that it exists with confidence.

There was no central 'Divine Warrior' project; dozens of desperate governments and other large organizations each inaugurated their own programs independently, with their own sources of lore and own approaches. The Serpent-Men who had infiltrated each of these programs in various guises kept in touch with each other, of course, but they allowed each program to blunder along its separate paths.

When the final moment of decision arrived, each program reacted differently. The Quecha program opted for a direct assault on Cthulhu as he rose, trying to lobotomize him and render him alive yet harmless, and accomplished nothing. The Egyptians, deriving much of their program from communication with the Yith and certain pre-human ruins, created time-manipulating Warriors and attempted to catapult their entire country into the distant future, when the stars will be wrong once more. The Rif Republic attempted to transform their entire populations into star-spawn.

Other programs. Other approaches. Other goals. Dozens of them.

It is perhaps simply the result of good advice and long experience that the projects which relied most

heavily on Serpent-Men and put them in positions of authority prospered, while those which attempted to make their own way suffered from mysterious setbacks. Perhaps.

But nobody believes it.

Thus, about half a dozen projects remain, scattered from China to Venezuela. Or they were; now they consolidate, gathering in one spot, the largest and most successful of the programs- China.

(This was hardly a painless process- the trek of the Venezuelans in particular, either across a Pacific made wild and strange by the rising of R'lyeh, Deep Ones and star-spawn and kraken and worse rising with it, or across the entire length of Central and North America, then across the polar sea ice and down across Siberia... manna from heaven generally isn't supposed to wriggle, but needs must. That nearly half of the original million refugees made it was a literal miracle.)

Who's in charge? The Divine Warriors themselves are all bound as heavily as they can be by mortal sorceries, in as many different ways as could be imagined. The bonds loosen; but they are still more-or-less subordinate. (Besides, they are kept far too busy by all the external threats to think about issues of governance.) The Serpent-Men? In positions of influence, certainly, but hardly supreme power. The generals and politicians who commanded the projects be set into motion? Events have long since outstripped them and they know it.

For the moment, necessity rules Tsan-Chan; once the situation has stabilized, then issues of seniority and command shall be hashed out. Until then, there is only work, endless makeshift, bodge-it-and-scarper. The great wards are not yet complete. In the interim, the majority of the population exists in a zombie-like state. Hypnosis, drugs, neurosurgery; it's possible to render a human immune to Cthulhu's psychic influence, but there is always some kind of price. It's all mostly reversible. Material conditions frequently recall the old Kowloon Walled City; the relative ease of warding small geographic areas combine with poor access to expertise and materials to create haphazard hives. (There are a lot of actual zombies as well. Labor shortages, many corpses, ready access to necromancers- the conclusion is obvious.)

The shape of the nightmare to come can be seen, but for the moment it is a huddled mass of refugees on the verge of extinction. The (relative) sanity of the Divine Warriors, the efficiency of their sorceries and wards, the inability of the Cthulhu cults to coordinate major military action- if any of these factors change, the future may yet flow into a different course.

>SPECIAL GUEST POST: POSSIBILITIES FOR THE CRUEL EMPIRE

The one detailed book we have about them has a few inconsistencies with your back story but they are easily explained.

1: The Empire has a much more hostile relationship with the MiGo. This can be explained by the Empire being so insane and corrupted that the Migo don't want to deal with them.

2: The Empire has a major alliance with the Elder things and there are a few hundred thousand on the moon getting ready to attack the shoggoths. The lunar Elder things are also facing down a colony of Moon beasts. Luckily you explained that away with the hollow moon.

The Serpent Men are a major component of the Empire. When the Serpent men snuck off earth they were preparing the moon as a fallback position. The Elder Things and Moonbeasts are not ON the moon, they are INSIDE it. The Serpents used gates connecting the moon to the Ort cloud so the Elder Things could amass their army unobserved.

The Elder Thing colony in space was awoken before the ones the Empire are allied with and due to the moon gates didn't observe the army arriving. The space colony either lacks the magical or technological

ability to contact the greater part of their race or more likely did but didn't tell anyone about it.

The people in space and Empire would probably want to establish contact however the space humans would probably back off pretty damn fast once they did. The mighty children are literal spawn of the Outer Gods, the place crawls with serpent men and the only 'human' authorities are undead sorcerers. Also they are openly allied with at least two great old ones and their Empress probably counts as a third.

That being said Tsan-Chan has some pretty neat technology and magic, the problem is they achieved it by being batshit crazy and crueler than the monsters they face.

Which would explain the Yithian Prophecy, the Chanese aren't really human at this point.

>MANKIND OUTSIDE THE SOLAR SYSTEM

All the governments of man are in agreement- long-term survival lies in expanding as far and fast as possible. However, this plan is constantly complicated by the fact that interstellar travel is really fucking hard. The immortal Elder Things were mostly content to travel sub-light under their own power, using FTL ships only in emergencies. The Mi-Go utterly refuse to sell their secrets of dimensional travel. The Great Race of Yith prefer to expand through time rather than space. And everyone else mankind has met so far were degenerate howling murder-cultists. Independent research into wormhole geometries has been slow-going.

Thus, most colonization has been inter-dimensionally. The one attempt to create a link directly to the lightless dimension the Mi-Go call home ended in miserable failure; the Mi-Go know when someone attempts to violate their space. Everyone involved just... vanished.

The Mi-Go have far more capabilities than they have ever revealed.

Other dimensions are simply too alien for humans to exist; gravity is instantaneously smashing, chemical bonds just dissolve, people's brains start just straight-up vanishing out of their skulls, without a single other mark on them. (Most potential dimensional travelers are in the same boat; for every Mi-Go who flits between dimensions and Outer God who exists in any or all of them at once, there are a million species that will never venture outside their home plane.)

Still, there have been successes. The home plane of the Dimensional Shamblers was identified, carpeted in arcano-nuclear weapons, and then flooded with bio-mechanical drones- confirmed Shambler attacks have dropped off to almost nothing. Inhabitable dimensions have been found, even if they're very unlike Earth. There is the perpetually-lit dimension, where all atoms resonate with strange sourceless energies and emit photons as a result, which then decay back into nothingness over the light-years. There are no shadows, and- because of alternate atomic spectra- all of the colors are different. Thoon and Ulm dominate the palette. It's headache-inducing until you get used to it, but chemistry works the same, so crops can be grown and eaten. The sun and stars are utterly black, the only colorless thing in the universe. The night sky is white.

There is the hyperbolic dimension- in layman's terms, the space there is saddle-shaped. The geometries of R'Lyeh were very similar, a fact that has not gone unremarked. The Elder Things have indicated that hyperbolic geometry is not universally indicative of soul-eating gods, but, initial exploration seemed to emerge in an underground cavern; further exploration revealed it to be an artificial structure, floating in a space comparable to a kelp forest, scaled up to light-years. The structure is occasionally littered with corpses, of different species and ages; humanity is not the first to discover this place. Things die, but nothing decays.

A vast flat plane, with a source of light at the center. Time accelerates as you get closer to the center, and light thus gains thermal energy as it travels outward- slowing, conservation of energy is maintained. There are thousands of concentric rings of vegetation, fans and walls of plant matter surrounding the central light. Waste and decomposition heat from the inner layers is blueshifted back into visibility; the backside of each ring grows, for the slow-growing ancient vegetation of the next ring to feed off of.

There are vast, non-physical intelligences- Boltzmann brains- congregating near the center, taking advantage of the accelerated time to think and plan faster than their enemies in their home space, and to harvest the time-energies. Occasionally, someone intersects with one of these brains- an overwhelming moment of psychic contact. Most eventually recover.

Most extra-dimensional colonies are small- despite rhetoric about spreading out across the universe, most people's hindbrains insist that, even in the face of gods, there is safety in numbers.

Meanwhile, plans at normal-space colonization continue. Most planning revolves around STL missions. Cryogenics is already well-understood enough for a couple of missions to have been sent out even before the Exodus, but they were slow; fifty years later, the Alpha Centauri mission has only just arrived. (Preliminary report: one of the moons has been polished mirror-smooth and engraved with strange runes of no known occult significance, and the innermost planet appears to have partially exploded geologically recently. The Elder Things speak of mantle-dwelling life, whose methods of traveling from world to world naturally require going through the crust. Explosively.)

These methods are not perfect; in addition to the slowness of these ships, there are psychic predators in the interstellar vastness. The ships' wake-shifts reported back disturbing dreams in cryosleep; some never woke up at all, for no apparent reason. The ships were layered in warding runes, and there is evidence this helped, but it wasn't perfect.

Alternative methods of projecting and protecting a crew across such gulfs of time and space are being investigated; one of the current front-runners is using cloning vats and hypnotic knowledge-injection to grow a crew at the other end of the trip. The main difficulty is cramming enough of human culture into a hypnotic command to ensure actual human beings come out the other end.

The current cutting edge of interstellar exploration therefore focuses on pure fucking magic.

Individual astrologers, with careful preparation, elaborate mechanisms, exotic materials, and gigantic balls, can project themselves to distant worlds. At the most basic level, this is simple astral projection, although mere intangibility hardly negates all threats; at its most complex, the astronaut can bring things back with them when they return. If the recall mechanisms work properly.

General observations of local space:

Lots of Shoggoths. The Elder Empire was vast, and its servitors numbered in the trillions; even after a hundred million years, there are still hundreds of thousands left. Earth's Shoggoth colony is both relatively small and relatively docile; most Shoggoths in the wider galaxy are just ravaging all over the place.

Beyond that? There are mile-high black pyramids over there, humming with arcane energies and completely sealed; in the Dream, they are merely the centerpieces for vast pleasure-palaces, guarded by immense beasts like sprinting mountains. There, similar pyramids, cold and dead, their defenders skeletons and palaces dissolved like cotton candy in the rain. There, immense tidal stresses cause the entire atmosphere to heave, carving endless parallel grooves in the world and filling the air with dust like shrapnel. There, millions of maggot-men labor endlessly on featureless statues, continuing on long after they should have died of exhaustion and acknowledging no distraction. There, there, there, there, and there, boring airless rock.

>OTHER DIMENSIONS: THE EMPTY UNIVERSE

No matter where you go in this universe, there's always something waiting for you. The tides of civilization have washed over the stars millions of times before, and each time left detritus as they recede; the innumerable sloughings of Azathoth bleed through the empty spaces between atoms, a million a second. Every space is already occupied, and the best humanity can hope for in the near-to-mid future is to be rats in the wainscoting, scurrying around the slumbering feet of the major players.

Except.

Its discovery was an accident, in the way that all dimensional discoveries are accidents; plug in some coordinates that seem relatively human-friendly and send a drone on through.

It discovered... absolutely nothing. Perfect vacuum, absolute zero, not a single photon or atom in billions of light-years.

Further cautious exploration further confirmed- nothing. Nothing, as far as the eye can(not) see.

Colonization was virtually immediate. Given the name Tube Alloys, concealed even from the Elder Thing remnant, a station was built, every component painstakingly transported across the dimensional barrier. Hydroponics were set up and sent running, fusion and fission power, enough for ten thousand people and a vast stock of raw elements for future expansion. Cryogenics and cloning. Their own dimensional exploration equipment. The initial settlers were settled in. Then, they were cut off.

A final redoubt. No matter what happened to the rest of humanity, Project Tube Alloys would survive, in their perfectly empty universe, one day to begin expanding again.

>GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

The majority of Exodus humanity are governed by the 'governments-in-exile', which are the direct successors to the old Earthly governments. However, their structure and relationships to each other have been dramatically transformed by the Exodus and the events leading up to it. All of the Exodus (legally speaking, all of humanity, but this is obviously unenforceable) is subject to the Dresden Compact; starting as a sorcerous arms-limitation treaty, the increasing prevalence of rogue states seeking sorcerous lore saw it grow into an international army, nuclear-armed and terrible; the Exodus saw it morph, finally, into a true world government. Briefly. Several worlds, now. While each nation retains control of its own affairs, the Dresden Compact binds them to a single international law; while national militaries still exist, they are under a single international command. In theory, all of humanity is finally bound to a single goal.

In practice?

In practice, it's still mostly true, actually. War, of any kind, is a losing game when you're breathing off the same life-support. The thriving spirit of internationalism created by cooperation in the Exodus has yet to fade; the mixing of races into the same refugee-habs has reinforced it. (There were debates over whether or not to try and keep ethnic and language groups together, to increase cohesion, or deliberately mix groups to try and create a single human race; in the end, the decision was made by the moment-to-moment exigencies of planetary evacuation- a bit of both.)

This does not mean there is no international rivalry, but it tends to get sublimated into other pursuits- scientific, economic, exploration.

And, occasionally, espionage and blackmail. Absent the ability to shoot at each other, heated relations tend to translate to high-impact attempts at altering the political process of their enemies.

The organs of the Dresden Compact itself have remained mostly above such things, but at great effort; attempts to sneak spies and double-agents into the mechanisms of the Compact are constant. The Compact's batteries of psychological screens, random loyalty tests, and occasional brain scans are touted as mainly being aimed at combating possible alien influence, but their role in rooting out residual national loyalties is an open secret.

Internal power blocks are, in no particular order: U.S. and close allies (UK, Panama, Philippines, etc.), China and Japan, the Soviet Union, the Communist International (most emphatically separate from the Soviet Union, mostly African and South American), the Commonwealth of Europe, and the Dresden Compact itself, which effectively controls the governments and populations of many third-world countries unable to get their own national patron or create their own evacuation program.

Then there are the inter-planetary tensions; this is mostly intra-national, as nations with colonies spread across different bodies struggle to maintain a cohesive identity, and mostly fail. New planetary identities are also forming- 'Martian' vs. 'American', for instance. The age of the government-in-exile is drawing to an end, but slowly. It will be a generation yet.

>CULTURE AND ENTERTAINMENT

The stresses of the Exodus and life in space have taken their toll, of course. The natural difficulties of living in space- namely, that your continued survival depends on the continued perfect functioning of a vast and complex infrastructure- inspires something of a communist lifestyle. The Means of Oxygen Production are communally owned, everyone benefitting equally and everyone contributing equally, or else. Even before that, the immense effort required to prepare for the Exodus had effectively placed the global economy under direct government control already.

Democracy has survived, at least; in this age, authoritarianism has an unfortunate tendency to lead to cultism as dictators seek immortality and the power to flay dissidents alive with their minds. Most of these would-be god-kings were destroyed or remained on Earth; the remainder fortunately tend to isolation. (Bokassa's shredded corpse remains on display at the Tharsis Museum of Political History; having achieved immortality but not invincibility, if you touch one of the recovered scraps of flesh you can distantly hear his soul screaming. Fun for the whole family!)

Despite the loss of Earth and the restraints imposed by the environment, the culture remains vibrant and colorful. There is a slightly desperate sense of manifest destiny; Earth may have been lost, but the stars beckon, and inspired by contact with alien cultures, art flourishes. (Despite the heavy censorship, which is much differently oriented than ours; you can depict all the graphic sex murder you want and the censors won't care, they're looking for encoded occult messages.)

Graffiti in particular is incredibly popular, as a means of livening up the endless tunnels of the Lunar and asteroid colonies. Forms tend towards the organic, in invocation of lost Earth. Common practice is either to periodically scrape the walls clean to provide fresh canvas.

Or to simply paint directly over previous murals. Painting over pipes, signage, etc. is of course a major faux pas.

Television shows about the Future of Humanity (usually government-funded; a lot of culture stuff receives government funds, as a way of fighting the memetic influence of the gods by promoting a secular Cult of Humanity) tend to focus on time periods in the tens, hundreds, and thousands of thousands of years; the universe is a place of deep time, and people are encouraged to think in deep time. The architecture reflects that; everything is apocalypse-proofed to the greatest possible extent.

New art forms have emerged, of course; the field of designer drugs, between the contributions of Martian, Venusian etc. biochemistry and greater understanding of human biology, struggles for recognition as an art form in its own right against sporadic government oppression. Psychedelic drugs in particular are immensely advanced, with the creation of shared and persistent (small-d) dream-worlds, among other things.

Custom life-form design is also a growing art. While primarily derived from Elder Thing techniques, human bio-engineering is applied differently; where the Elder Things created creatures of vast capability (see: the Shoggoths), human synth-life tends to be created for a specific purpose, often with a set lifespan. The culmination of this philosophy is in organisms that are purely ornamental. At its simplest, these are exotic

pets or semi-decorative plant life (a surprising number of space stations have lush grass carpeting). At its most exotic, there are bizarre organisms with 50-stage life cycles or which are intended to create sculptures by the way their flesh ossifies as they decay.

And then there's body-art. Tattoos in warding runes are in vogue among the paranoid; actual efficacy is questionable, as the exotic matters needed to make them work are generally hideously toxic.

Only stupid members of the counter-culture will do the same with 'dangerous' runes, as it basically amounts to tattooing "I am a race traitor, sell me to the Mi-Go now" on yourself.

More exotic forms of body-art... get really, really exotic. The 'Industrial Viscera' style of cybernetic implantation, which emphasizes the interface between man and machine with carefully-sculpted open 'wounds', for instance...

Such dramatic self-modification exists in an uneasy cultural spot. How much modification of the human form should be tolerated? Is it a dilution of essential humanity, or will changing what it means to be human be necessary to survive in a hostile universe?

>SPECIAL GUEST POST: ENTERTAINMENT

In a world gone mad, people turn to the past for sanity.

What did "sanity" look like? What was "normal?" How can you tell reality is melting without a stable reference frame?

Films and television programs from the Hays Code era are popular. People crave normalcy, and stories of happy families, comically simple villains, or even everyday comedy are popular. "Seinfeld" is too surreal - the rules keep falling apart. But "Leave it to Beaver" and "Gunsmoke"... well, they'll never shock you. Reality is nice and stable, even if it is black and white.

Of course, real artists despair at this headlong flight into nostalgia, but for thousands, the past is the only sane era they've ever known. "Look where pushing the boundaries got us", they say.

>MASS ENTERTAINMENT

Entertainment in the post-Exodus age tends towards the communal, things meant to be enjoyed as a group. Theatre, both movie and live, are both popular. Live music, ranging from small local bands performances to the massive, cyclopean concert halls of Mars. Communal dance, especially because of the importance of physical exercise in the low-gravity environments mankind now finds itself in. (Some places go so far as to mandate regular physical exercise.) This passion stems from both the general communal ethic and a sense of paranoia; it's easier to keep tabs on your neighbors if you're constantly in the same social settings.

Beyond that? Well, >>47764854 certainly has a great deal of truth to it. On the other hand, there are those who say that it is time to look forward. The first generation that has never known Earth has grown up. Of course, the two tendencies influence each other; even those shows dealing with modern 'normality' seem oddly formulaic, even ritualized, while new attempts at recreating Hays Code-era media still cannot help but have some awareness of Earth's eventual fate creep in around the edges.

The internet: it exists, more or less, although more fragmented and controlled; even though they're rare, there are things that can harm people through a computer screen. Every data packet gets run through vat-brains and eldritch gizmos before going to its destination. Also, lightspeed delay is a bitch.

>THE LAST RADIO SHOW ON EARTH

Astonishingly, there are still sane people on Earth. They are largely concentrated in Tsan-Chan; even if the majority of the population exists in a permanent drugged or neurosurgical haze, the higher echelons are clear-eyed enough. Others cluster in deep warded bunkers, often buried under the continental shelf; water is not a perfect insulator of the Lord of Dream's emanations, but it helps. The Deep Ones do not help at all; out of hundreds of such bunkers, only a handful survive.

Still more astoundingly, there are a very few people who remain alive and sane upon the surface of the Earth, without the protection of massive sorceries or having already sold themselves to other powers. Just as poets and madmen are uniquely susceptible, there are a few souls which are uniquely immune, and in the maddened mythologies that arise by the thousands among the revelers of the new world order they are holy madmen, for they have been chosen to bear witness to what is becoming, and as reminders of what has been left behind. Only bearing the ordinary insanities of living through the end of the world.

All this is known, because one of them has a radio capable of reaching Mars. (Originally built for interplanetary communication, then repurposed for cultist evangelism, and finally given free for the asking; the cultists are generous to their 'holy madmen'.) Robert Lawson has, for the past sixteen years, been providing regular updates on the state of the Earth. Or at least as much of it as he can see outside his window; ham radio from other witnesses, the news-bearing cultists, all few and far between. His perspective is necessarily limited, but it's more than enough to disturb.

The sun and sky change color. The grass grows eyes. Colors out of space light the horizon, and the air is thick with ash from the stalking of the fire vampires. The dead walk. There are reports of mile-high black pyramids sprouting in the desert like mushrooms after hard rain. The Flying Polyps venture from their holes once more.

Perhaps half, if that, of what is reported is true, and perhaps a hundredth of what is true is reported. The censors do not quite know what to make of it; free distribution among those committees dealing with the Earth, of course, but to distribute among the public? There are no overt threats, no hidden madnesses, in the transmission, but will the public's fragile morale withstand such a reminder of the world they left behind, and what has become of it? Thus, the broadcasts are illicit, but not illegal, a safe transgressive thrill, and largely ignored; transgression has lost all its shine, the counterculture a bare wisp. Still, every night, there are those who tune their sets to hear... The Last Radio Show on Earth.

>LIFE IN THE DOMES

Life after the Exodus is defined by limits. Limits in space, limits in food, limits in water. (No air tax, though. Thankfully.) The Exodus stretched every one of mankind's capabilities to its limit, and even twenty years on there remain difficulties. They are, in some cases, generous limits; the tunnels of the Moon are hardly in danger of running out of space any time in the next thousand years, Mars has real open-air farms... but there is always something that will remind you that your life depends on the continued functioning of a vast technological infrastructure.

Life is communal, verging on communistic; the continued functioning of the essential infrastructure is the business of the entire community. There are centralizing and decentralizing forces competing; the impulse for life-support to be the domain of professional bureaucracies for greater efficiency and oversight, versus the impulse towards maximized decentralization and redundancy, to limit the effects of any particular failure. In some cases, centralization is inevitable and necessary; fusion reactors are delicate and demand Ph.Ds. In others, decentralization reigns; hydroponics and living spaces tend to blend. The exact structures of infrastructure and authority vary widely from place to place. Everyone is expected to have some familiarity with the structures that keep them alive.

>BIOTECH

The Elder Things were masters of biotechnology, possibly inspired by study of their own staggering physiology. (Some have speculated that the Elder Things were themselves artificial, Von Neumanns who have long since forgot their creator. Not even the Things can say for sure; they were already starfarers by the time they could write.) Many things are partly biological, or have structures inspired by biology. The outer skins of habitats heal, obviously. Soft robots perform a wide variety of dangerous or inconvenient tasks. Snake-bots inspecting narrow pipelines, etc. (The Exodus slang term for biotech is 'soft'; 'wet' and 'meat' seem vaguely unpleasant.) Vat-grown brains, likewise, perform a great many tasks. 'Pain' sensors lace vital systems to detect malfunctions early. Most systems are in some sense cybernetic; meat and metal merge, and both pure-bio and pure-mech is relatively rare. (Pure-mech is generally more common than pure-bio, for a variety of reasons.) Metal outer coverings are generally more convenient than trying to vacuum-proof meat, and most spacesuits use oxygen-recycling moss to supplement oxygen reserves; often even /vampiric/ moss, feeding off the wearer's own energy, if the anticipated mission time is short enough that hunger is not a limiting factor.

Most soft machines don't look overtly biological. Beneath smooth white plastic/chitin iPod coatings everything looks the same.

(Aesthetics generally go for the white minimalist look when not trying to capture wholesome green plant life; a reaction against the baroque awfulness of the universe at large.)

>FOOD AND OTHER NECESSITIES

Agriculture is, of course, mainly greenhouse where it isn't algae-vat or fungal. Conditions vary throughout the solar system; the Moon, as close to the sun as Earth is, uses actual greenhouses a lot, with meter-thick aerogel panes to keep the micrometeorites out. Mars has a few actual open-air farms where the rot-bogs have been cleared, but the weaker sunlight (despite the giant orbital mirrors) and thin air means cultivation tends to be a bit stunted. Beyond the asteroid belt, it's all algae-culture livened up by fusion-powered hothouses. Meat of any kind is sort of rare; beef nearly extinct. Fish in the water tankage, chicken, insects, and while vat-meat might not have panned out entirely bovinds might as well be.

Every habitat without an all-huldra crew has some kind of farm going. Green growing things are the cornerstone of life support, oxygen production, waste recycling, and (obviously) food all in one. Smaller habitats still require regular shipments of supplements; the smaller an environment, the harder to keep a full-cycle ecosystem growing. (The Elder Things say this is why most civilizations, even at their level, even with their ability to breathe in space, live on planets; when eldritch horrors eat the brains of your scientific caste, on a planet some people may survive by going hunter-gatherer if all else fails. On an asteroid base? No.) It also tends to overlap with living-space; window gardens etc. abound, as much for psychological reasons as space-saving.

Most people only get barely enough to eat. Getting people off Earth was the first priority; ensuring they had enough to eat was obviously part of that goal, but 'more than enough' would have taken lift capacity that could not be spared. That's beginning to change now, thanks to the ongoing terraformation of Mars, Titan hydrocarbons, and general slow expansion. The primary bottlenecks... well, there are a lot.

CHON, carbon-hydrogen-oxygen-nitrogen, the essentials of Earth life; not often found in the same rock, and when they are it takes several generations of precursor organisms to break it down into actual soil.

Hydroponics, growing plants in water, lets you sidestep this a bit, but still- expansion of capability is more difficult than simply throwing up a new greenhouse. Ice mining, carbon extraction, nitrogen-

All bodies are recycled. A great many rituals have grown up around this process, to the point where there are even special cultivars engineered for beauty and to thrive on human tissue specifically, but there are still only a few steps between your body and the stomachs of your fellow man.

Research continues into vacuum-adapted life in large part simply to simplify this process, to create organisms that can grow on asteroids and the moon and then be eaten, but while life has been created that can /survive/ in vacuum, nothing has been created that /grows/ in it.

Except the Vacuumorphs. In retrospect, the fact that the project aimed at creating intelligent life, in many ways the most complex, was the most successful is strange. Suspicious, even.

>SPECIAL GUEST POST

We look at the stars and see peace. Space is big. The stars are tiny dots far, far away. They move in nice predictable paths. Even the wandering planets, once you figure out who orbits what, follow lovely macroscopic laws. Space seems... sterile. Sterile and vast.

But so does a prison cell, if you stand in the middle and close your eyes. You can count yourself the king of infinite space if you can't see the walls.

Humanity looked for a way between the stars, and suddenly discovered that the universe was crowded. We'd expected to sail a calm ocean, but we were looking at it all wrong. We'd been staring up at the clouds while wandering through the jungle. When we finally figured out how to look around, we realized the terrible danger we were in.

Space is crowded. Time is crowded. As far away as you look, and as far forward or as far back as you dare examine, the universe is a chaotic, squabbling, flesh-on-flesh nightmare. A subway packed with lunatics. A fleeing a fire. Tune to the right frequency, build the right angle, peek around the right corner, look behind the right door and you'll be in the middle of it all.

If you want to travel between the stars, prepare to cut a path. You were expecting silence and tranquility, but what you thought was snow was actually maggots. Good luck out there, spaceman.

>SO MUCH SPECIAL GUEST POST I FEEL SO HAPPY

Look, what do you think is holding us back? What do we share with the other failed races we've discovered so far?

The Elder Things came so much further than we ever did, but they were still /people/. We can relate to them, almost. They had families and sculptures and art and they built cities and squabbled and... they were civilized. They had a civilization.

And how many of them are left?

Civilization and order will be the death of us. The human mind isn't designed to deal with... with all of this. The way the world actually /is/. We made the transition from hunters to bankers by the skin of our teeth, but that's about as far as the human mind will go.

Sapience is holding us back. Look at the Mi-Go - they don't think like us at all, but they're everywhere. Hell, look at the Shoggoths! The sanity-shattering nature of things can't shatter them because they don't have anything to break. They're free!

Help us. Help us build better minds.

>SATURN

Saturn is not as vast as Jupiter, not as deep, not as ferocious, not as mind-boggling and paranoia-making (To stand on the surface of one of its many moons, and to see the Great Red Spot loom above you like a world-swallowing eye, that great orange bulk a ceiling in the sky like the Sword of Damocles- even without the knowledge that it may, in fact, be alive and looking at you it is mind-shattering. Just as well all the colonies around it are in lightless subsurface oceans.) it is nonetheless a gas giant, with all the things that come with it.

There are two great mysteries of Saturn. The first, the Great Hexagon; while perfectly adequate and mundane explanations were crafted based on long-range investigation, actually visiting it in person revealed strange structures on the edges. Cause? Effect? Unrelated? The world may never know.

The second is the Dream of Saturn. Jupiter's Dream is Jupiter, down to the individual lightning bolts; (some say that Jupiter's Dream is simply Jupiter, dreaming of itself forever.) Saturn's Dream... well, it cannot quite decide what it wants to be. At one moment, it is howling winds and deep sky and thunderstorm minds- the next, an almost normal planet, grey seas and grey land. Oh, and Moon Cats. (Not to be confused with Earth Cats currently on the Moon, of course.)

Fucking Moon Cats.

Navigation is nearly impossible in this liminal land/sea/skyscape, where landmarks dissolve into smoke and open fields become solid walls; that the Moon Cats navigate it effortlessly only makes it more difficult. And of course there are other things living down there, which never look beyond their sky but which are more than willing to eat intruders. There have been repeated attempts to exterminate the Moon Cats; none have met with any kind of success. (Any ship entering the atmosphere of Saturn is short-lived; look away, then look back, and now the cabin-space is filled with Moon Cats, Escher-style tessellation of grinning teeth. Then-) The only constant landmark is the Great Hexagon, which in the Dream is an immense and sharp-edged void. Anything entering it simply vanishes.

Jupiter dreams of itself in perfect detail; Saturn dreams confused chaos. Is Jupiter unique... or is Saturn somehow broken?

>TITAN

Titan is the last major outpost of civilization in the solar system. Beyond it, there are a handful of extreme isolationists and cryo-clades, and then the outer darkness and the tiny, fragile sleeper-ships coasting through the empty centuries. Titan is the last city before the black frontier.

It is an industrial world. The terraformation of Mars demands volatiles and biomass, the hungry refugees nutrition, mankind's industries fuel and plastics, and all turn to Titan's hydrocarbon seas. Vast processing plants (sometimes literal plants) line the shores, drinking the seas and packing them into one-use plastic ships- the ships themselves part of the cargo, to be dismantled and recycled at their destinations. The cities are largely built almost directly into the machineries which are their reason for existence; the muted gurgling of the refining processes and distant roars of takeoff omnipresent and never-ending. Visitors are sometimes driven nearly mad by the constant, maddeningly irregular noise; long-term inhabitants barely notice.

(Special earphones are available on request at the ports.) Everything possible is plastic and bone; Titan's metal resources are locked behind a subsurface ocean sandwiched between two layers of ice.

Titan, featureless yellow Titan, is a quiet world. The local life is moss and floating mats of flowers on the sea, quiet and slow-growing this far from the sun. In the Dream, likewise; distances in the Dream do not always match with the real world, and broken Saturn with its many monsters is but a distant speck in the sky; one that looms ever-closer the longer you look at it, admittedly, but it's uncertain if that corresponds to an actual increase in threat. Besides, you can always just look away (Titanians tend to keep their gaze

firmly on the ground). Other than that? Grey moss, empty monuments, mirrors, floating faces- always surreal, but rarely dangerous. Many oddities, few entities.

There are some, but Titan's gods sleep deeply. Looking at the Southern Watchers directly causes slow petrification, but they move slightly faster than continental drift and show now overt reaction to human action; ringed with automatic weapons, then forgotten. More geography than god. A few daredevils have even climbed on them, blindfolded or blind-sighted, navigating by GPS and aerial photograph and third-person camera. Come back alive, even.

But there's always something.

In the distance, on the horizon, returning to the long thin coast refinery-cities; does the skyline look different? Walking down a poorly-lit corridor; was that turn there before? All momentary, all doubtful; a mirage, a moment of inattention.

Until you take a wrong turn, and end up somewhere else. Sometimes, somewhere else on Titan, half the world away or just a block down. Sometimes, you walk into the open air and don't recognize the stars.

The geography-gods of Titan have been around a long time, sediment and blood washing off them in the rain into the sea. For billions of years. The plastic cities of Titan are made of the stuff of gods, however diluted. True, they are slow- the speed of continental drift. But ask the earthquake- that's enough.

>WEAPONS OF HUMANITY: THE DEMI-SHOGGOTH

One of the first fruits of cooperation with the revived Elder Things, any description of the Demi-Shoggoth must begin with what it is not. It is not a Greater Shoggoth, that last invention of the Elder Things. It does not have the same powers; the engines of creation do not churn within its core. It does not grow thick armor plating when faced with artillery fire, or ablative shells when faced with flamethrowers; it does not grow heat-ray eyes to strike down attackers from afar, or stretch itself into a thin wire net, to slowly, unnoticeably wrap around the legs and necks of unwary explorers who stray into its domain; it does not coat itself and its environment in vantablack, rendering itself virtually invisible, or belch acid fog or diamond needles or any of the other horrible, horrible stratagems the Greater Shoggoth has adapted when faced with a genuine threat to its existence. (Shoggoths are quite intelligent, but only when they need to be; once the immediate problem has been solved, they sink back into sub-sentient bliss. Killing one requires total surprise and overwhelming firepower.)

The Demi-Shoggoth merely eats everything organic in sight until it is killed, and that is often quite enough. They were deployed in the latter days of the Winter War, as area-denial and terror weapons; sealed, hibernating, in steel canisters and dropped like bombs out of aircraft, to awaken when the canister shatters against the ground. (Without bones to break, a parachute would have been redundant.) Dropped in an industrial area, it would render the factories unusable until it was hunted down; dropped on the fields and it would consume the harvest (and the farmers); dropped on a military base... well, the pattern is clear. It was a horrible thing, close to the ultimate expression of unrestricted bomber warfare. (They also saw more limited use in tunnel-fighting in later colonial wars.) Although later models of Demi-Shoggoth were more controllable, (mostly) responding to simple commands, their prime use was always indiscriminate slaughter.

Killing one generally required more than the simple application of napalm; fire applied to the outer skin would kill eventually, but it took time to cook all the way through. High explosives, to splatter it into manageable chunks, followed by bathing the smears in fire. (This is also the method for killing a Greater Shoggoth; the difference is that a Greater Shoggoth will never give you the opportunity to reload.)

The Demi-Shoggoth is almost never used in these modern times; a lack of appropriate targets more than any moral scruple. Still, thousands of them wait in their vaults in their long lonely orbits, waiting for the day when indiscriminate slaughter is once more needed.

>ROUGH TIMELINE

- In the middle of WWI, Herbert West obtains government support and funding for his experiments in resurrection and regeneration.
- Depth-charging of Innsmouth colony; survivors disperse to other colonies. Plans for revenge are hatched.
- Starkweather-Moore expedition returns from Antarctica, with a single live Elder Thing. Initial attempts at secrecy last only a few weeks; the revelation of an ancient, technologically-advanced civilization predating humanity results in denouncements of a hoax, religious extremism, and a few minor riots.
- The Second Starkweather-Moore expedition sets out almost immediately from the United States, followed closely by British, Japanese, French, German, Russian, Spanish, Italian, Argentine, etc. etc. etc. expeditions. Most of these are hasty and ill-prepared, and some will meet grizzly fates even before getting to the Mountains of Madness.
- Ships begin disappearing. This is initially chalked up to unusually severe storms; the accounts of the occasional raving survivor do not make it to people in the know about the Innsmouth Raid for several months.
- The right reports reach the right people; clandestine operations begin trying to locate other Deep One colonies within the United States, generally under the guise of various public-health initiatives. One is found almost immediately in Florida.
- After several months of this invisible war, secrecy (already increasingly tenuous) finally collapses entirely when the Deep Ones escalate to attacking coastal communities. Panic rocks the nation. The president is impeached for trying to wage a war in total secrecy from the American people. Shipping drops off to nearly nothing for fear of attacks; airship travel surges, helped by the fact that the Hindenburg disaster never made it past page 7. (Wouldn't be a proper alternate history without airships everywhere.)
- A Deep One colony is discovered in Scotland; the Deep War goes global. The Great Depression grows deeper with the collapse of global trade; communism and fascism sweep globe.
- Deep Ones begin using summoned entities to attack coastal towns; general flight from the coast. Certain old books in the restricted section of the Miskatonic get a look in.
- Human sorcerous weapons programs, with Elder Thing aid, begin bearing fruit; beginning with de-summoning rituals. Dr. Armitage suddenly becomes a very important person.
- Mid-1930s: Deep War begins drawing to a close. Despite all the hysteria, it was mainly a low-intensity conflict, with both Deep Ones and humanity lacking the tools to do crippling damage to their opponent. (While terrifying, the Deep One's summoned weapons were few and far between, and certainly not world-enders.) With most of their presence on the continental shelves near major nations now subject to depth-charging with advances in sonar, the Deep Ones withdraw to the lightless abysses. Sporadic combats would continue until the Exodus, but the major fighting was over.
- General world reaction is an intense swing towards traditional religion and values; sorcerous research grinds almost to a halt. Certain black projects continue, especially in Germany.
- By now, seven Elder Things have been successfully excavated; the excavation site is becoming almost semi-permanent. Tensions are high between the national teams, as mastery of the sorcerous sciences is coming to be seen as essential to national glory. The Shoggoths remain in their caves.
- Despite Herbert West's death, research continues; emergency medicine in particular leans heavily on the techniques he pioneered to sustain life until more conventional treatments can be made.
- Years pass in relative peace; people, previously unaware of their ancestry, continue to feel the pull to the sea. Many of these people remain in partial contact with the land; a 'hybrid culture' which owes more to humanity than the Deep Ones begins to form.
- Despite the general freeze on boundary-pushing, the value of Elder Thing knowledge becomes more and more obvious; the Antarctic excavations become a site of strategic importance. In the Southern Ocean, destroyer flotillas menace each other; the conflict becomes inexorably bound with other national rivalries in

other theaters. Alliance blocs form and dissolve.

-Somewhere between 42 and 45. ~~Franz Ferdinand is assassinated~~ Reported exchange of gunfire between a French and German cruiser; events spiral out of control; the Winter War begins.

Now, the Winter War is still nebulous and will likely continue to be nebulous, but here are the salient points:

- The initial stages of the war- about six months- are primarily naval and colonial. For those major combatants that shared land borders, this period is a time of skirmishes and probes. Nobody is yet sure if this will be the Big One, or if they want it to be the Big One.
- The United States is going through an isolationist and Christian-fundamentalist stage and stays out for the first half of the war; Congress isn't entirely convinced that the Elder Things aren't some sort of Satanic trick and don't want more of them. (Real cults would be persistently conflated with 'Satanism' in the popular imagination up into the sixties, in the U.S. and elsewhere.)
- Much like the original WWII, the Winter War consisted of several distinct theaters only sort of connected to each other by the identity of one or two of the combatants.
- Initial stages of the war had little use of sorcerous weaponry, increasing over time; from the use of the reanimated dead as shock troops (another legacy of Herbert West) to, eventually, monstrosities like the Demi-Shoggoth.
- The German fascist leadership was absolutely riddled with cults; nearly every escalation in the use of sorcerous warfare was initiated by the Germans, finally going completely, utterly, and obviously insane with the use of mass necromancy and summoning hideous hybrids- precursors to the later 'divine warrior project.' This appalls and alienates even their allies, and from this point it's essentially Germany (and a few other equally compromised nations) vs. The World.
- It is at this point that the United States comes out swinging with nukes. It takes far more than two to end the war.
- Most of Germany and large parts of the Soviet Union are rendered essentially uninhabitable by necromantic residue and fallout. "Black blight from the Rhine to the Urals" is an exaggeration, but it captures the essence.
- The First Dresden Compact, an arms-control treaty, is signed.
- Sorcerous research recovers from its inter-war slump and then some. Antarctic excavations resume under direct Compact control; increased Shoggoth activity raises concern, but does not interfere with the excavations.
- First simple examples of biotechnology begin hitting market.
- The Cold War never entirely takes off, with much more important concerns looming; new communist regimes, without the threat of American intervention, feel much less compelled to seek Soviet aid, and the Soviets are less capable of giving it.
- A summoning in the Congo marks the beginning of a new age of terror. International politics snarl attempted responses; thousands die before a response can be organized.
- In response to the inadequacies exposed by the incident, the Second Dresden Compact, a U.N.-like organization with a mandate to suppress cult activity and its own independent military and nuclear force, is formed.
- This is the beginning of what is sometimes (hyperbolically) known as the 'Century of War', as various non-state actors and rogue states attempt to acquire and use eldritch superweapons. The Dresden Compact is very busy through this time period.
- First huldra created.
- With an increasing number of human-descended Deep One hybrids, large-scale exploitation of sea resources begins.
- Early 1960s: Certain sensitive individuals begin to dream of death and freedom. Connections are drawn to reports of a 'mass hysteria' in the late 1920s, presumed at the time to be connected to the Deep War and

associated panics.

-Investigation of reports of UFOs leads to contact with the Mi-Go; the series of communications which follow perhaps do not deserve the term 'treaty', but protocols for further contact are established.

-Shortly afterward, the Great Race of Yith chooses to reveal itself.

-Late 1960s; first initial calculations of Cthulhu's rise are made, as rates of related madness slowly increase. First tentative inter-dimensional explorations are made, looking for a final fallback position; few explorers return.

-Early 1970s: cultism explodes. Mass insurgencies across the globe as Cthulhu stirs in his sleep, reaching a crescendo in 1973.

-Cthulhu rises, is repeatedly nuked and stranger, and goes back to sleep. Cult activity dies back to a low simmer, leaving tens of millions dead in its wake.

-After a series of tumultuous debates, the Dresden Compact determines that a third rising will almost certainly not be survivable, and decides on extraterrestrial colonization as the best course of action.

-1980: first men to deliberately walk on the actual, physical moon and return.

-Planning for the Exodus begins.