

# THE STRANGE™



## THE ESTATE DOSSIERS

BY BRUCE R. CORDELL

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## BRIEFING HANDOUTS FOR ESTATE OPERATIVES



If you're a game master or player of *The Strange*, you're probably familiar with one of the game's core conceits: that player characters might start as operatives of (or soon join) the organization known as the Estate. The Estate's mission statement is to protect the Earth—and all of its life forms—from all threats from the Strange. As one of only a handful of organizations cognizant of the dark energy network, the Estate is uniquely positioned to deal with the threats the Strange represents.

To this end, the Estate has many resources, as described in *The Strange* corebook. Those resources include briefings from high-level staff covering commonly encountered mission backgrounds. The Estate provides these briefings to operatives to ensure that they have the best possible chance of success on assigned missions.

So why not give players actual handouts when their operatives begin play and as they follow up on evidence leading to recursions covered by these briefings?

The briefings in this book include the following: **Welcome to the Strange**, **Threat Assessment: The Quickened**, and **Translation: Your First Time**, as well as briefings regarding **Ardeyn**, **Ruk**, **Crow Hollow**, and **The Dark Energy Network of the Strange**. We've also provided **Estate Letterhead** for you to craft your own messages to your players, and an **Estate ID** in case you wish to create one or more for players (or, if you're a player, for yourself) as a prop.

To use a briefing, print out the one you want, drop it into a manila folder, and hand it to your players at the appropriate time during the game. Of course, you don't need a manila folder, and you might prefer to email the relevant briefing. Or maybe the characters are naive about the Strange when they begin, and you provide one or more briefings as part of a cache of clues they discover while playing. Whatever suits your game, these handouts and props are yours to use as you see fit.





# THE ESTATE FOUNDATION

## WELCOME TO THE STRANGE

### FROM THE DESK OF LEAD OPERATIVE KATHERINE MANNERS

Welcome. You're here because you've sworn to defend the Earth from all threats of the Strange. For that, you have the organization's heartfelt gratitude. Now it's time to get down to business.

As an operative of our organization, you're expected to commit certain critical and confidential pieces of information to memory. That information includes what you'll find in this briefing dossier. Please read the entire document, then read it again. You know what to do with it after that.

Thank you for your prompt attention,

Katherine J. Manners

# ESTATE EYES ONLY

### STRANGE PRIMER

The Strange is a network created by [REDACTED] aliens several billion years ago. Estate researchers believe the Strange was built to allow intergalactic travel. It's unknown at this time what went wrong, but the builders lost control of their creation. In the course of passing aeons, the Strange became something wild, chaotic, and without rules or laws (which is why we also call it the Chaosphere).

### NATURE OF THE STRANGE

Think of the Strange as its own boundless realm—as a separate universe underlying our own. The Chaosphere has no direct relationship to matter and space as we understand it: There is no up or down, there is no ground beneath a visitor's feet in most places, and merely gazing into its lawless void damages the human brain ("alienation" is the preferred term for the pain and derangement most operatives experience upon visiting the Strange).

### PLANETOVORES

Creatures live in the Chaosphere. The worst of these are called planetovores. They thrive on the fact that no rules bind them within the Strange. We call these creatures planetovores because a) the Estate has good evidence that one tried to consume our planet when Earth first discovered the Chaosphere; and b) because they [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Planetovores can't normally reach areas where natural laws restrict the environment, such as on Earth. But bridges up to Earth can be made, either accidentally or purposefully. Finding or constructing such a bridge seems to be the main goal of all planetovores and their intermediaries. Preventing that from happening, by whatever means necessary, is the Estate's primary mission.

### RECURSIONS IN THE STRANGE

Stable regions called recursions exist within the Strange. Recursions are like tiny, self-contained universes. Each one operates under a particular set of rules, which means that planetovores have almost as difficult a time entering a recursion as they do entering Earth. In fact, a recursion can act as a barrier for preventing a planetovore from getting to Earth, thanks to the presence of the recursion's rules.

Earth and the visible universe operate under a familiar set of rules, called Standard Physics. But different recursions often operate under alternate sets of rules. The Estate has classified the following additional laws under which recursions operate: Magic, Mad Science, Psionics, Substandard Physics, and [REDACTED]

#### Ardeyn

Ardeyn is a recursion where magic works, dragons live, and creatures that might as well be demigods exist. Ardeyn's creation was the unanticipated side effect of computer researcher Carter Morrison's discovery of the Strange, and the Estate was founded in his memory. Carter Morrison's whereabouts are unknown at this time.

Ardeyn is populated by humans and a race of people called qephilim—please ask your lead for a qephilim visual reference at this time. The Estate has several agents embedded in Ardeyn, and its largest field office covertly operates in the city of Hazurrium. One of our main activities is keeping tabs on the Betrayer. Though the Betrayer is not a planetovore, we suspect he aspires to become one.

[REDACTED]







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## Ruk

Ruk operates under the law of Mad Science, and it appears to be populated with Earthlings. Don't be fooled. Ruk comes from someplace else in the universe and has been hiding in the Shoals of Earth for thousands of years, possibly much longer. Ruk contains more factions than the Estate can track. We believe the most dangerous to be a faction named the Karum, who believe that if Earth were destroyed, Ruk would be free. Obviously, we—you—cannot let that happen.

## Other Recursions

Most recursions are created through what we've come to understand as "fictional leakage." The upshot of this is that you can probably find aspects of your favorite fictional universe rendered as a recursion. Yes, that means that somewhere around Earth is a recursion featuring Star [REDACTED]. Note: That is no excuse to [REDACTED].

## BADGES

As an operative, you are required to carry your Estate badge while on campus and off, unless you are working undercover. Your badge allows you to gain entry to Estate buildings and into areas of those buildings for which you are cleared. **Badges are to be displayed above the waist at all times while on campus.**

## TRANSLATION AND YOU

During your time with the Estate, you'll translate between recursions. Sometimes new operatives find the process of transforming into someone with different abilities and maybe a different shape to be disconcerting. If you become distressed or confused after translating, tell another operative immediately. Enemies of the Estate often target addled operatives first.

[REDACTED]

## CYPHERS

As a beginning operative, you've been issued one or more cyphers. A cypher is a small device that can create a single, often spectacular effect. A cypher may look ordinary, but each one is something special—a manifestation of the Strange that we don't fully understand. We expect you to use your cyphers to accomplish your missions. Hoarding cyphers is imprudent and a waste of needed resources; replacement cyphers are always around the next corner for someone with your abilities.

## OTHER QUESTIONS

Please bring urgent questions, concerns, requisitions for equipment, or vacation requests to one of the Estate leads or chiefs. For everything else, please rely on your own discretion. That discretion is why we invited you to become an operative of the Estate.





# THE ESTATE FOUNDATION

## THREAT ASSESSMENT: THE QUICKENED

### PREPARED BY RESEARCH CHIEF HERTZFELD

My associates say I am on the autism spectrum. So I have been asked to apologize in advance, because of my social deficits and communication difficulties. Consider this that apology.

You are quickened if you are reading this. You are not like most people. You are different. Maybe that makes you afraid. But others share your talents, so you are not alone. Like you, some quickened can accomplish tasks that regular people cannot imagine. A few can surpass you by as much as you surpass normal people. These latter few are the ones who should actually make you afraid. If you are not quickened and are reading this, that goes double.

This report will brief you on quickened individuals and creatures, including the kind of abilities you can expect them to use against you. This report also discusses the sorts of disasters that could result if the dangerous ones are not contained. If you have questions after reading this dossier, come talk to me and I will try to make time.

  
Hertzfeld

ESTATE EYES ONLY

### QUICKENED

Quickened people wield ultranormal abilities because of their connection to the dark energy underlying the universe of normal matter. I should not have to tell you it is called the Strange. Many quickened do not know about the Strange. They just know that they can do things better than others, although [REDACTED]. For more about the Strange, request the brief "The Dark Energy Network of the Strange," prepared by Dr. Paldridge. Paldridge died because he was slow and stupid. Do not be like Paldridge.

### ABILITY DEVELOPMENT

I have several mental enhancements; I am neuro-superior. Ask anyone. But a quickened person might have one above-average ability, such as better hearing, a knack for math, or enhanced speed. If a quickened person develops his ability, he may gain additional capacities, including the ability to translate into alternate limited worlds called recursions. (For more on translation, request the brief "Translation: Your First Time," and [REDACTED].)

### RECURSOR

You should know this already, but in case you are slow: a quickened person who can translate to alternate recursions is called a recursor. True recursors rely on an inborn ability to translate. Fake recursors use special objects, like gates or cyphers. Quickened creatures can also move between recursions. Some recursors fall into one of three broad categories of quickened ability: vector, spinner, or paradox. I do not fall into just one of those categories. I span two of the three. I am neuro-superior.

### VECTOR

Vectors apply force to overcome whatever problem faces them. They are natural fighters. A vector could be large and strong, wiry and quick, or some combination of both. I am wiry. Ask anyone. More than anything, vectors are about direct action. When a vector uses an ability that relies on his connection to the Strange, the vector uses a "move."

**Estate Procedure for Dealing With a Vector:** If you face a quickened enemy or creature with vectorlike abilities, be prepared for being overmatched by strength or for attacks coming in faster than you can react, and be prepared for the likelihood of your suffering massive physical trauma. I suggest you call medical assistance.

### SPINNER

Spinners are compelling. This is the Estate way of saying that they are liars, and some can make others do as they suggest. My neuro-diversity does not extend to spinner abilities, even when I lose my temper and scream. If I have screamed at you, I have been instructed to apologize. I do not like spinners, but I appreciate that if anyone is going to make a friend of an enemy, bluff their way into a high-security compound, or mislead a planetovore, it is a spinner. So you should appreciate friendly ones, too. When a spinner uses an ability that relies on his connection to the Strange, the spinner uses a "twist."

**Estate Procedure for Dealing With a Spinner:** If you face a quickened enemy or creature with spinnerlike abilities, be prepared for distractions; the use of masterful disguises, forgeries, and bald-faced lies; and manipulation of your ideals and loyalties. I suggest you do not believe anything a spinner says.







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## PARADOX

Paradoxes break rules. Whether using science, the power of the mind, spells, or something else entirely, a paradox is not bound by what the nonquickened believe to be true. I have many paradoxlike abilities. I can tap into the Strange in ways that even other quickened cannot. When I use an ability that relies on my connection to the Strange, I use a “revision.”

### **Estate Procedure for Dealing With a Paradox:**

If you face a quickened enemy or creature with paradoxlike abilities, it is hard to know what to expect. A paradox could assault your mind with a psychic overload, rely on a premonition to uncover secrets you have hidden with military-grade encryption, or drop you into a recursion infested with demons or brain-eating robots. You might lose if you face a paradox. Ask anyone.

## AGGREGATE THREATS

One Estate analyst I managed to get fired mistakenly believed that recursions were too isolated from each other to pose a serious threat to Earth. She argued that with translation fitting recursors so well to the context of each new recursion, natives of one recursion could not truly impact another’s natives. Money, materials, artifacts—none of these things reliably make the trip between recursions during translation. She pointed out that only cyphers translate, that inapposite gates are rare, and anything exotic—and therefore dangerous—becomes “mundane” (in context) upon entering a new world, negating most threats.

This analysis fails in its limited scope, and it makes me happy that I do not have to put up with that analyst anymore. If the rules of translation were so tight and ensured Earth’s safety so entirely, the Estate could close up shop. To a person who is not quickened, accessing alternate recursions or the Strange itself is restricted and almost impossible. But we do not deal with the mundane.

## ANYTHING NOT FORBIDDEN IS MANDATORY

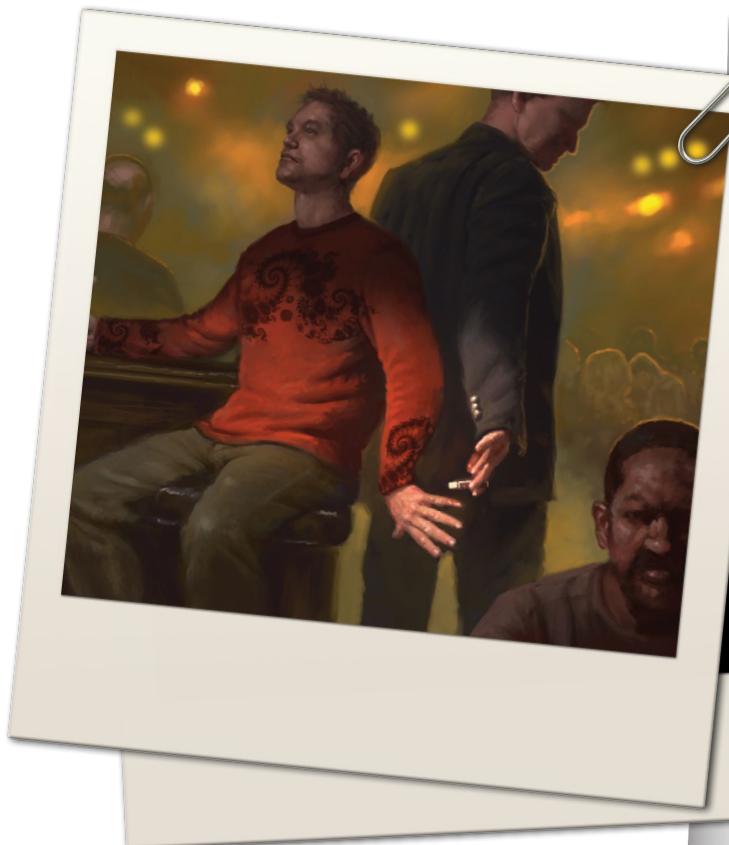
Recursors break rules. Anything can happen in the Strange. And if something can happen, it usually does. As the saying goes, anything not forbidden (given eternity, or infinity) is mandatory.

In case you still fail to understand, let me explain again: recursors *break* rules, even those who do not possess paradoxlike abilities. In the short time the Estate has operated, we have recorded hundreds of incidents that include criminal minds born from fiction waking to knowledge of the Strange (like Moriarty), organizations with cross-recursion reach pushing boundaries that have led to minor

and major disasters (such as OSR and the Karum), creatures birthed from fiction that can find ways into other recursions (like dragons), artifacts that can pass into alternate recursions, an increase in the number of inapposite gates that allow *anything* to pass between recursions without shifting context, new Strange phenomena that can rip holes in recursion boundaries without translation safeguards, and, of course, cyphers themselves, which grant one-time abilities that can do anything.

## WORST-CASE SCENARIO

If someone like Moriarty, the Red Queen, the Betrayer of Ardeyn, a Karum agent, or ██████████ collapsed a major recursion (purposefully or because even other quickened people can be idiots) or created a tunnel directly between Earth and the Strange itself for long enough, Earth would become accessible to planetovores. If even one planetovore gets a foothold on Earth, it would be the end for us and all the recursions Earth hosts in its shoals. Yet every day, quickened people or creatures threaten to tear the protective veil of recursions that shelters Earth from the naked Strange. You and everyone you know would die screaming if that happened. Ask anyone.





# THE ESTATE FOUNDATION

## TRANSLATION: YOUR FIRST TIME

### PREPARED BY RESEARCH CHIEF HERTZFELD

Some people need their hands held, Investigations Chief Lawrence Keaton told me. He explained he was using a metaphor, then asked me to hold your hand by writing this report, because of my experience and neuro-superiority. So pay attention. My time is limited.

I asked Keaton to write up what it feels like to translate. His quote was attributed to me in the new operative handbook. I would not write something so subjective. But other operatives say it is useful, so I repeat it here: "The walls vibrate, colors detach from your surroundings and begin to swirl, moments before the walls, floor, and ceiling, too, seem to liquefy and drain down and twist around you. Agony, sharp as an iron hook, snags your heart and pulls you inside out—you and the world. When the sensation fades, you're someplace else, and someone else."

That is what translation feels like. Ask anyone. If you have never translated before, you might fail on your first attempt. Keaton says you should not feel bad if that is your experience. This briefing will introduce you to the concept of translation and provide some guidance on how to proceed on your first few attempts.

  
Hertzfeld

ESTATE EYES ONLY

### THEORY OF TRANSLATION

As I covered in my report titled "Threat Assessment: The Quickened," which you should already know if you read it, recursors can travel to alternate recursions. As an operative of the Estate, you are required to be able to do the same. Otherwise, an entity of interest to the Estate would get away, and you would be of no use to our organization. I have gotten useless operatives fired before now, and you would go on my list if you fail in learning this task.

First, some background. My neuro-superiority has allowed me to discover underlying principles of the process. I discovered that recursors hijack functions of the ancient alien data network of the Strange. By accessing these functions, a recursor "uploads" herself into the network, and then nanoseconds later, "downloads" herself into a target recursion around Earth. It is akin to three-dimensional printing. (See, Lawrence, I can use a metaphor, too. Unless that is an analogy?) The network was designed by a Type III civilization on the Kardashev Scale to provide interstellar travel between different star systems and galaxies. The original functions and waypoints are gone. But the emergence of recursions around Earth a few hundred thousand years ago—co-emergent with protohuman imagination—created the opportunity for the data network to function as I have described. Instead of moving travelers between star systems, the data network translates travelers between recursions. For more about the Strange, request the brief titled "The Dark Energy Network of the Strange."

### TRANSLATION AND YOU

When you arrive in a new recursion, you take on the context of the recursion. (I hypothesize that this is an echo of the original data network's ability to adapt travelers to survive in alien biospheres.) In practice, this means if you translate to the magic recursion of Ardeyn, you will no longer possess your sidearm and smartphone, but instead find yourself with a sword, a shield, and some chainmail. You could undergo even more drastic changes if you desire. You could alter your appearance, your gender, or—if the context of the new recursion allows—even your species. For more on Ardeyn, request the brief of the same name written by Lead Operative Katherine Manners.

The changes you undergo are mental as well as physical. When you translate and become a new being in the context of Ardeyn, you find yourself knowing a few things about Ardeyn inherently, such as how to speak the predominant language (called the Maker's Tongue, which is close to English), that magic works there, and a few other items that vary by recursor. This knowledge could potentially extend to new abilities. If that happens, the abilities will probably feel subjectively familiar to you. That is because your neurochemistry and biology fit the new context, too. When this happens to me, I sometimes gain an appreciation for poetry, which I normally find insipid and pointless.

[REDACTED]







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## PREPARING FOR A TRANSLATION

You decide what recursion you will appear in when you initiate a translation. Unless you have not prepared sufficiently. I would lose my temper, scream, and call you an idiot if you initiated a translation without some preparation, because there is a chance you could end up going nowhere, or appearing in a recursion that is only *similar* to the recursion you actually wanted to visit. I would scream because if I were helping you and not initiating, then I would have no control over where I would appear.

The Estate suggests you take the following steps before attempting your first translation.

**Research the Target Recursion:** Find out about the recursion you wish to visit, including (if known) the default arrival location within the recursion. You should already know this, but try the Estate Library. That is where we keep dossiers on the major recursions, including Ardeyn, Ruk, and Crow Hollow. In order to initiate a translation, you must have a connection to the desired recursion, and the right briefing will provide it. A connection can take the form of knowledge of three specific and related details about the destination recursion. A connection could also be a likeness (such as art, a photo, or sculpture) of the destination that sufficiently evokes the actual recursion. For reasons I am still researching, a still from an Earth movie that helped shape a recursion through fictional leakage usually does not work—the likeness works best if it actually depicts the true destination recursion.

If you do not have either a likeness or sufficient knowledge, an object from the destination recursion or a translation gate will work. Check with the Recursion Lab to see if any objects or translation gates are currently in Stores or are connected with your target recursion. I am always working on several experimental gates in the Recursion Lab.

**Assemble a Team of Recursors:** Any recursor can initiate a translation. But different recursors have different translation strengths. A team attempting a group translation that includes a spinner, paradox, and vector finds translation faster, less likely to fail, and less taxing to everyone who appears in the target destination. Because of my neuro-superiority, I can provide all these advantages. Ask anyone.

(The remainder of this report was not written by me. I do not find it difficult to translate, but I do find it difficult to put myself in “your shoes.” So I asked Lead Operative Katherine Manners to send me a memo on the topic. I inserted what she wrote hereafter.)

**Tips for Achieving Trance State:** The mind’s an unruly place, and attempting to enter a trance isn’t easy if you don’t have any practice with meditation. You might close your eyes with the intention of concentrating on your target recursion, but a few minutes later realize you’ve been thinking about your groceries, your diet, your lover, or ██████████. Don’t worry—that’s normal. But to achieve a translation trance, you’ve got to quiet your mind.

For instance, try to keep your eyes open. Closing your eyes makes it easier for your thoughts to become unmoored. Just lower your eyes or settle your gaze on an object (especially if you have one from the destination recursion, or a likeness).

Rather than restate information that is available elsewhere, we suggest you merely do an Internet search on “tips for meditation” or buy an audiobook about mindfulness and see what works best for you.

**No Teacher Like Experience:** All the guidance in the world won’t completely prepare you for your first translation. This means that once you’ve read this dossier and acted on its recommendations, your next step is to just try it. Really. You can do this.

(Hertzfeld here: when you have returned from your first translation, file a report with your supervising officer. Goodbye.)



**WARNING: TRANSLATION TO MESOZOICA SHOULD BE ATTEMPTED ONLY BY EXPERIENCED OPERATIVES.**





# THE ESTATE FOUNDATION

## ARDEYN

### PREPARED BY LEAD OPERATIVE KATHERINE MANNERS

The first time I translated to Ardeyn, I wasn't ready. I didn't know I was going to make the trip, didn't even know yet what translation was, and I certainly wasn't ready to handle the information that surged into my head afterward. Being so unprepared negatively affected my performance on the ground, I'm embarrassed to admit.

For you, things will be different. If you're reading this brief, it's because you're planning a trip to Ardeyn. As an operative of our organization, you enjoy many advantages, including the information provided here. Think of this dossier as an inoculation against the shock of your first transition to the Land of the Curse.

In addition, this brief provides three related pieces of information about Ardeyn that will serve as a required connection to initiate your translation to the recursion.

Thank you for your prompt attention,

Katherine J. Manners

ESTATE EYES ONLY

### MAGIC WORKS IN ARDEYN

Spells are real in Ardeyn, as are curses, runeblades, magic wands, and entities that operate like demigods. It's not special or visual effects; it's real, with real consequences. As someone who is quickened, you might already regard your own special abilities as somewhat magical, and thus you appreciate how deadly magic can be. If you do, you've got a leg up on some of our operatives, whose unconscious disbelief in what they discovered led to the failure of their missions.

from immortal angelic beings. If you manifest in Ardeyn as a qephilim, you'll find yourself with a jackal-like head instead of your normal human features. Some first-time recursors find this transition so jarring that they are nauseous for several days, but eventually, adaptation occurs. If you find yourself reacting badly to qephilim form, the best thing to do is stick it out, and don't translate back to Earth before you've gotten used to the body. If you leave early, you'll find that returning to Ardeyn will always be more difficult for you, because you'll never really be comfortable there.

### DEAD IS NOT DEAD

If you kill someone in Ardeyn or are killed yourself, a transitional entity is generated: a spirit. Spirits are usually drawn into the subterranean Night Vault. So the good news is that if you're killed in Ardeyn, your essence continues. Under the right—albeit, very difficult—circumstances, someone could reinstall you in a living body, which would allow you to translate out of Ardeyn, good as new. The bad news is that, as a spirit, you're subject to the same rules of death as every other creature in Ardeyn, and most likely you'll find yourself judged by the Court of Sleep, unless your soul is eaten by ██████████ first.

### REGIONS OF ARDEYN

Ardeyn is a limited world, much smaller than Earth. However, it's actually more developed than most other recursions that you'll visit, and it hosts several landforms, including mountain ranges, forests, seas, and deserts; these are the Daylands.

The Daylands are where most living creatures of Ardeyn live. The Borderlands mark the transition from the Daylands to the cliff edges of Ardeyn, beyond which boils the Strange. The underside of Ardeyn is called The Fall. It's like a vast, jagged ceiling of stone with no floor beneath, and not much lives there. The tunneled interior of Ardeyn, the Night Vault, is densely inhabited, if mostly by spirits of the dead. Hopefully, you'll never go there.

### QEPHILIM AND YOU

When you translate, you could be a qephilim in Ardeyn if you're brave enough to switch bodies. In Ardeyn's context, qephilim are a race descended

Across its longest dimension, Ardeyn stretches some 900 or so miles (1,450 km). It has lost cities, secret shrines, sleeping demigods, magic swords,







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and forgotten wishes capable of waking even Lotan the Sinner, one of the entities of the recursion best not interacted with.

## QUEENDOM

The largest city in Ardeyn is Citadel Hazurrium, and its ruler is Queen Elandine. In fact, the region around Hazurrium is called the Queendom, which I appreciate. (Yes, I'm a feminist, so sue me.) The Estate has several operatives in the Queendom. One of the Estate's most closely held secrets relates to



### ARDEYN DEFAULT TRANSLATION SITE

The default location for first-time translators to Ardeyn is standing before the gates of Citadel Hazurrium in the Queendom.

**Gates of Hazurrium:** Hazurrium is an immense city-fortress, and its gates are equally immense, made of two great valves of magically reinforced bronze. The gates, usually open by day, are overlooked by guard balconies and yet higher levels and balconies that climb the amazingly tall sides of Hazurrium. If the gates are open, you'll see a many-storied interior composed of tree-lined streets, verandas and porches thick with hanging vegetation, spiraling stairs and catwalks, and brilliantly lit homes.

**Estate Field Office:** The Estate operates a small field office in Hazurrium, located in a bindery called the Scroll and Tome. Usually at least one operative is assigned to it in an undercover role. Different operatives come and go in the shop, and the passphrase is changed monthly. If you need to check in there, please see your supervising officer to get the current passphrase so you can identify yourself to the operative on site.

## NIGHT VAULT AND LOTAN

The entire land of Ardeyn is built upon the petrified body of a god called Lotan the Sinner. Really, unless you or a fellow operative dies, it's better to never visit the Night Vault. Our information about what it really means for a spirit to be judged by the Court of Sleep is utterly lacking. If you discover more, please file a report with your supervising officer.

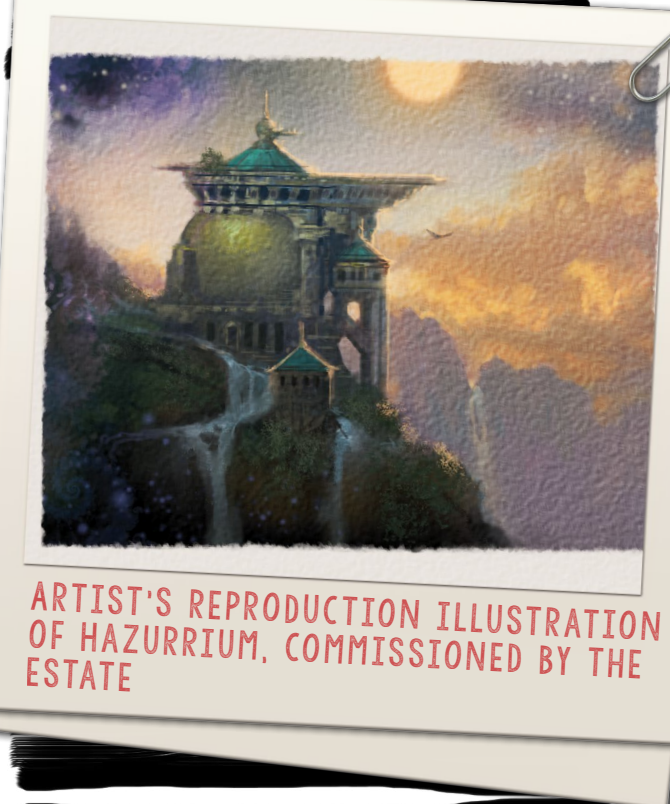


## MEGEDDON AND THE BETRAYER

Once, Ardeyn was guarded from Lotan the Sinner by the Maker, his Seven Incarnations, and their angelic qephilim servants. But the Incarnation of War murdered the Maker long ago. Now called the Betrayer, he alone remains in Ardeyn, living in a realm called Megeddon. If you have questions about Megeddon, speak with me directly.

## BORDERLANDS OF THE STRANGE

The edges of Ardeyn, called the Borderlands, are abrupt. If you leap off or set sail in a chaos skiff, you'd voyage into the Strange itself; for more, request the brief titled "The Dark Energy Network of the Strange." Creatures of the Strange continually test Ardeyn's borders, and they sometimes find cracks through which to enter. I fought kray—creatures of the Strange—once. It was an experience I would not wish on anyone.



ARTIST'S REPRODUCTION ILLUSTRATION OF HAZURRIUM, COMMISSIONED BY THE ESTATE





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## RUK

### PREPARED BY THE FIXER

If you're reading this, pat yourself on the back, friend. A fair percentage of operatives who receive dossiers on upcoming missions only skim these. Those dumbasses will be the ones looking to you for answers when the shit hits the fan. And if you're translating to and from Ruk, it probably will.

Last time I went to Ruk, I almost splattered my brains across Harmonious, the Glistening City, while pursuing a Karum fugitive. I'm not sure a brief like this would've helped prepare me. But who knows? Maybe it'll help you, and I'll be saved the hassle of cleaning up after your mess.

In addition, this brief provides three related pieces of information about Ruk that will serve as a required connection to initiate your translation to the recursion.

Good luck. You'll need it.

The Fixer

# ESTATE EYES ONLY

## RUKIANS KNOW THEY INHABIT A RECURSION

In recursions birthed by Earth fiction, natives don't usually realize they live in a limited world. That's not true in Ruk. The bastards are aliens. They built a vessel capable of operating and traveling through the Strange—a strangecraft—to flee their homeworld, which they don't remember, when it got wrecked by disaster, which they also don't remember. They traveled through the Strange for a few hundred thousand years (they don't know the exact figure themselves) and eventually ran aground in the Shoals of Earth. Rukians have made the most of it since then.

## RUK IS OLD

When I called them bastards, I meant sneaky bastards. Ruk has hidden in Earth's shoals since before humanity evolved. Creatures that were never human populate Ruk. The disaster I mentioned wiped a lot of the truly primeval history from Ruk's cultural memory. You might ask why people in Ruk look so much like humans, except for all their insane biomodifications. I've asked it but never received a good answer. Those fuckers are cagey. Best guess: the original Rukians modified both their own DNA and that of hominids on Earth to bring the two lines visually close together. Why? I'm still asking.

## MAD SCIENCE WORKS IN RUK

One of the biggest issues the Estate has with Ruk is that crazy science-fiction scenarios are not only possible in Ruk, but commonplace. So common that superscience artifacts from Ruk find their way to Earth via matter gates more often than they

should—usually because some dumbass recursor gets a “genius” idea. Luckily, most of these things function for only a short time, but that's usually just long enough to cause a major shitstorm. Don't bring artifacts back from Ruk, even if you find an inapposite gate. If you feel you have to, do *not* keep it a secret from your supervising officer, and file a report with me straightaway. Then I'll know to expect the worst.

## THE TRUE CODE VS. THE ALL SONG

Some mumbo-jumbo called the True Code was once the repository of all knowledge in Ruk. But it was damaged almost beyond salvage. The All Song was developed to repair that damage. Of course, in Ruk, where everyone is always looking for a new argument, the dominance of one or the other is just another thing the natives can kill each other over.

**Accessing the All Song:** Take it from me: forget about the True Code. Focus on the All Song. It's a biological data network. Rukians use it to store information and communicate over vast distances, sort of like our Internet. Grab an umbilical to tap into the network more directly. You'll find an umbilical in your equipment after you translate—it's not a snake, like one dumbass thought the first time he translated. Find a connection point (they're called communals) and plug in. Be ready. The experience is like dropping acid on a roller-coaster. You might puke in your boots the first time.

## FACTIONS RULE RUK

Feuding factions rule Ruk; a faction is like a religion, a corporation, and a governing body rolled into one. Sneaky bastards, like I said. The factions are always working against each other, even if some of them







# THE ESTATE FOUNDATION

make a show of being allied. And at least one faction, the Karum, thinks Earth's continued existence is the biggest problem facing the recursion.

## KARUM

I'd burn these fuckers in a fire if I could. These bastards are trying to destroy the Earth, because that'll force Ruk to abandon its "hiding spot" in Earth's shoals and continue on its original path through the Strange to ██████████. Thankfully, the Quiet Cabal—another faction of Ruk—opposes the Karum. Karum agents travel to Earth, pretending to be scientists studying high-energy particle physics and quantum computers. What they're really attempting to do is create conditions that might result in a planetovore finding and destroying the prime world. What is it with some people?

**Dadanum-Tal (Dr. Gavin Bixby):** The Karum agent with the best record advancing the cause is Dadanum-tal; on Earth he goes by Dr. Gavin Bixby, professor of nuclear research. I've tried (and failed) to snuff him three times so far. If you learn of his current whereabouts on Earth, in Ruk, or in some other recursion, alert the Estate immediately, along with the nearest Quiet Cabal agent or contact.

## QUIET CABAL

We like to think of the Quiet Cabal as the good guys, but that's a mistake. They're sneaky bastards, too. They're as ruthless as the Karum. They've done things that would make a seasoned operative cry. Which would be me. Their only saving grace, as far as the Estate is concerned, is that the Quiet Cabal believes Earth's continued existence is vital for Ruk. So do what you can to work with them if you must, even if you have to compromise your ethics a little. All of Earth could eventually fall otherwise. Yeah, I know, it's a shitty deal.

**Udam-magir (Maggie Lawrence):** The Estate interfaces with a Quiet Cabal agent named Udam-magir—Maggie Lawrence on Earth. She and I don't get on especially well, but your mileage may vary.

## OTHER FACTIONS

A few other prominent factions include the following.

**The Church of the Embodiment:** These dumbasses think that bringing back the True Code is the answer to all their problems. Too conservative by far for my blood.

**The Unified Choir:** These guys preach unity, harmony of the True Code and the All Song, and everyone getting along. It all seems a little too perfect in my book, and I wonder what they're really selling.

**Zal:** The only difference between these guys and Enron, besides the obvious, is that Enron got caught.

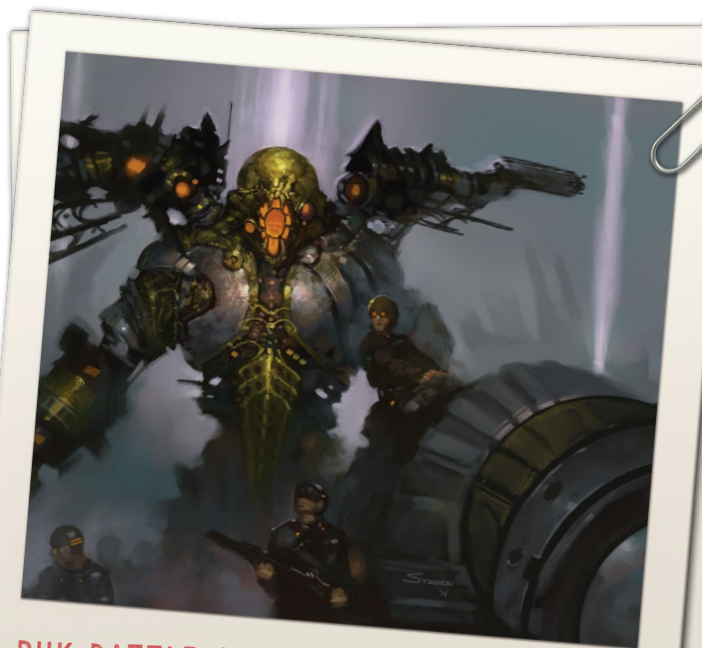
## HARMONIOUS

If you visit Ruk, Harmonious is where you'll likely spend all your time. Harmonious floats above the surface. It's a multileveled, horizontal metropolis that defies gravity via massive and ancient technological engines. The first time I saw it, I was thinking someone had gotten their *Blade Runner* in my *Jetsons*.

### RUK DEFAULT TRANSLATION SITE

The default location for first-time translators to Ruk is in a wide public lobby of Harmonious, the Glistening City.

**Harmonious Public Lobby:** The open-air platform secured by organimer trusses between several tower structures streams with Rukians sporting body modifications of every kind, some of them extreme. A public All Song communal is available here. Plus a lot of body-modification shit that you should steer clear of. We've lost too many operatives to mind-altering brain pods.



RUK BATTLE CHRYSALIDES ARE THE WORST.





# THE ESTATE FOUNDATION

## CROW HOLLOW

### PREPARED BY INVESTIGATIONS CHIEF LAWRENCE KEATON

Hey. I've developed something of a reputation around the Estate. Sure, I like to take a drink occasionally. It's not a crime. But throw it in my face, and you'll regret it. Yes, I'm leaving that in. Who's writing this brief?

I'm what passes as the Estate expert on Crow Hollow. I visit every few months. It's a magical place. You can buy pretty much anything you can imagine there, if you sift through the offerings long enough. What's not to like? But you can get in trouble there if you're not careful. So pay attention.

In addition, this brief provides three related pieces of information about Crow Hollow that will serve as a required connection to initiate your translation to the recursion.

Lawrence Keaton

# ESTATE EYES ONLY

### KRO, NOT CROW

The natives of Crow Hollow are called kro. Yes, it sounds the same as *crow*, but the natives somehow know it when you confuse the terms, which you will. Speaking of which, when you translate, you could be a kro in Crow Hollow if you want to try something different. It's what I do. It takes some getting used to, but it helps you fit in. By fitting in, you're likely to get a better deal if you try to buy something in the Glittering Market. And if you're going to Crow Hollow, it's because of the Market, am I right?

### CROW HOLLOW DEFAULT TRANSLATION SITE

The default location for first-time translators is right in the middle of the Glittering Market.

### CROW COIN

Read this, and you won't be surprised like I was when I learned about the currency of the realm. Prices in Crow Hollow are paid in crow coin (CC), which I discovered after my first purchase. A contractual handshake sealed the deal for me on some Saurian brandy, but when the shop owner pulled her hand back, the amount of "coin" we'd just agreed upon lay glittering in her taloned palm, and I felt like I'd just given a quart of blood. The thing about crow coin is that it's debited directly from your life force. So don't agree to anything exorbitant if you don't have a chest of the stuff already set aside! The Beak Mafia will usually spot you a couple of chests, but the interest is killer.

### BEAK MAFIA

The Beak Mafia is Crow Hollow's surprisingly large underworld. Despite outward appearances of solidarity, a bunch of different crime families make up the mafia. Some are allied, and others just want to pick a fight. Which isn't good for business, but there you go. The head of the largest Beak Mafia family is Don Wyclef. He employs a flock of muscle to collect protection money. Wyclef's largest rival is the Cornaro family, led by Donna Ilsa Cornaro. She's got her own security, too.

If you want my advice, I wouldn't mess with either group. They're called *crime* families for a reason.

### GLITTERING MARKET

If you know anything about recursions, you've heard of the Glittering Market. The always-open bazaar is *the* place to buy stuff, cheaper than you can find elsewhere, and with stuff you can't find anywhere else. Yeah, you can pick up loads of mundane crap, but why bother when you can get stuff that's so much more amazing? You can find products from nearly any recursion created by fictional leakage you care to name. Want a lightsaber? You might find one in a stall. A love potion? A pill to lose weight? A bottle of Arcturan Mega-gin? A gallon jug of Mudder's Milk? I've picked up all of these in the market.

The branches of a mind-blowingly large tree host the market. Seriously, the tree is miles high. Gaudy and spectacular, it's sort of like Vegas. Shops compete to draw the eye, and magic, flashing firefly lights are everywhere. Kro are everywhere too, and few kro ever saw a gaudy piece of clothing or costume accessory they didn't like.

If it wasn't for the Beak Mafia constantly shaking down shop owners for protection money, the place would be an idyllic consumer wonderland. Try to







# THE ESTATE FOUNDATION

steer clear of these clowns if you can. For some reason, I've been put on their hit list, damn it all.

## PLACES TO SHOP

Crow Hollow is a recursion supporting both Magic and Mad Science, and in the confines of certain special shops, Psionics and Exotic, too. The kro buy from strangecraft that ply the recursions via physical travel through the Strange itself; the outer branches support a fairly massive port facility, I hear. I've never visited the outskirts. The shops are where the action is. I've listed a few of my favorite places. But nearly any stall has something of interest. Sometimes including cyphers! Tell Betha I said hello.

**Donal's:** Specializing in high-quality fashion footwear and leather goods. Maybe even magic boots.

**Cryptic Ink:** Kro go in for dyed feathers, but if you translate to the recursion as a human, you can get a tattoo. Some of them even move.

**Betha's Lounge:** Want to try fermented fruit juices gathered from prehistoric recursions, ambrosia from a Greek recursion, or the Arcturan Mega-gin I mentioned before? Try Betha's. Though I warn you, some of her specialties pack a wallop.

**Garington's:** Think of it as a pawn shop where people from 1950s science-fiction recursions get cash for their gadgets. Shrink ray? Check. Rocket pack? Check. Ray gun? You get the idea.

**Summer Night:** Need sensual lingerie and exciting novelties? This is your shop. They also sell a range of erotica and related goods.

**Just Hats:** A wide range of hats. If you ever wanted a derby, or a crown, or one of those big pope hats, try here.

**Hour Times:** A wide variety of amazing wrist and pocket watches, plus a selection of accessories, jewelry, and clothing. Not to mention a few freestanding grandfather clocks.

**Fraser and Barrett:** [REDACTED]

## ESTATE FIELD OFFICE

The Estate owns one of the shops in Crow Hollow—a place called Curry Hut. It sells just one thing: decent curry. So also not a bad place to go if you're hungry. Or hungover. I used to eat there all the time before the Beak Mafia put a price on my head. Operative Nadine Mawal usually works undercover in the shop, tracking events in the recursion. If you identify yourself, she may take you for a tour of the shops.





# THE ESTATE FOUNDATION

## THE DARK ENERGY NETWORK OF THE STRANGE

### PREPARED BY DR. SEYMOUR PALDRIDGE

The phenomenon we're calling the Strange is completely new to science! But we've learned a lot, mainly from a resource who claims to be an agent of Ruk's Quiet Cabal. I won't lie. The concept of the Strange terrifies me. I'm so completely out of my depth that I can't believe I've been asked to write a report, one of the first ever to be written on behalf of our fledgling organization: the Estate. On the other hand, as I type this, no one—at least no one on Earth—knows more than I've been able to piece together. I hope this helps you gain a greater appreciation of the wonders the universe keeps hidden from us. . . and the terrors walled away from us. I take sleeping pills to keep the dreams away.

*Seymour Paldridge*

Dr. Seymour Paldridge

ESTATE EYES ONLY

Addendum: Seymour Paldridge is deceased. His original report has been updated to reflect the latest findings. We keep this dossier in circulation to honor Dr. Paldridge's sacrifice during the Estate's founding years.

### DARK ENERGY

If regular cosmologists knew what I know, there'd be a revolution in science. But of course, this information will be shared only with friends and operatives of the Estate. Like you, I hope. Dark energy is actually an alien data network that underlies the universe of normal matter. This dark energy network—which we call the Strange or the Chaosphere—is what makes it possible for Earth to host recursions. Recursions are “virtual” worlds seeded by Earth's myths, stories, novels, and imagination. The Strange itself delivers the amazing processing power to manifest those limited worlds into something so close to physical reality that it's not worth making a distinction.

### ORIGIN OF THE STRANGE

The Strange was intentionally constructed by the Precursors. That's my name for the technologically advanced aliens we really know nothing about. I wish I'd come up with a better, less popular term, but live and learn. Anyway, billions of years ago, the Precursors created the Strange to facilitate intergalactic travel across the universe. The aliens would upload themselves into the dark energy data web, and then “print” themselves anew at some distant star, without having to travel the light years between the two locations in the normal universe. The Precursors eventually lost control. But the Strange has continued to spread through the universe, and it's evident to most scientists on Earth only as mysterious dark energy.

Within its immense and ever-expanding volume, the Strange is capable of hosting almost limitless amounts of information. In addition to recursions

hosted by various prime worlds (such as Earth, which is really the only one we know anything about), a much wider region lies between the recursions, and that's the Strange itself.

### THE SHAPE AND NATURE OF THE STRANGE

The Strange is a chaotic flow of spiraling fractal patterns forever iterating in upon itself without end. The area immediately around Earth and its recursions usually appears primarily bluish-purple and sometimes dark green, but other areas are gold, orange, or even blood red. Although vast and expanding, the Strange has distinct regions within its chaotic twists and turns. We have firsthand accounts of ever-shifting landscapes, some resembling swirling fractals and others like impossible spacescapes with stars and planets that form and disappear in the blink of an eye. Other explorers describe areas that move like vast creatures, as though portions of the Strange have gained sentience or are inhabited by immense intelligences that wear its essence like flesh.

### Estate Procedure for Accessing the Strange:

Normally, it's not possible to translate into or find a gate that directly accesses the Strange from Earth, nor should you attempt to do so. The best way to enter the Strange is to first translate into a recursion, and then use its connection to the dark energy network.







# THE ESTATE FOUNDATION



## ALIENATION

Minds that evolved within the universe of normal matter and linked recursions were not designed for the naked, unprocessed, near-infinity of the dark energy network. Those exposed to it suffer mental and physical consequences called alienation.

**Estate Procedure for Limiting Alienation:** Though it sounds like an excuse, I find that a couple of stiff drinks helps. Attempt to limit your direct exposure over long periods. Spend at least one day in recuperation for each day spent directly exposed to the naked Strange.

## CREATURES OF THE STRANGE

I wish I didn't know about these creatures. When my bad dreams come, despite the pills, these are the things that fill them.

### Inklings

Inklings are a serious scourge in the Strange and seem to be everywhere, once you know to look. Lesser inklings have about as much substance as regular shadows (and are about as dangerous), but the more inklings that pool somewhere, the greater the chance that the dangerous types will appear. When allowed to feed on other creatures, they can drain the color and substance until nothing is left. I still feel the pain in my side where one bit me.

### Estate Procedure for Dealing With Inklings:

Bright light (as bright as direct sunlight or brighter) drives a lesser inkling back. An inkling that cannot escape bright light evaporates after half a minute's exposure.

### Nuls

Nuls are distorted, mangled reflections of creatures around the Shoals of Earth. They seem to bubble into existence in the Strange and sometimes in recursions whose connection to the Strange is particularly lax. Once, a few appeared on Earth in the Recursion Lab that Hertzfeld and I set up, which was where we got this photograph. Like rats, they exist in dark places, feeding on residual energy given off where a limited world ends and the Chaosphere begins. If threatened, cornered, or surprised, nuls viciously attack.

### Estate Procedure for Dealing With Nuls:

If sufficiently startled, a nul colony may disperse instead of attacking.

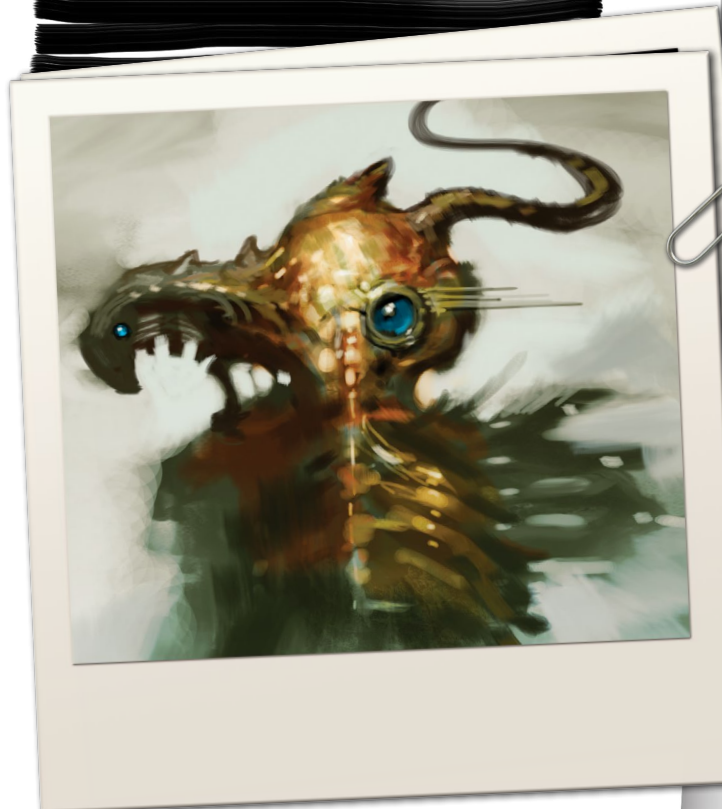
### Planetovores

And then, of course, there are the planetovores—creatures in the Strange able to find and access inhabited prime planets, and then subsume them. Some are alien artificial intelligences (AIs), aliens displaced into the Strange (perhaps put there by

other planetovores), or once-fictional creatures birthed in recursions of distant star systems who broke free of their original conception and have come looking for sustenance. Sustenance such as planet Earth.

### Estate Procedure for Dealing With Planetovores:

Bend over and kiss your ass goodbye, if it comes to it.





# THE ESTATE FOUNDATION

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# DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATION



# ESTATE



THIS CERTIFIES THAT THE SIGNATURE AND PHOTOGRAPH HEREON IS AN APPOINTED  
**SPECIAL OPERATIVE** \_\_\_\_\_  
OF THE ESTATE OF CARTER MORRISON, FOUNDED TO PROTECT EARTH FROM THE STRANGE.

SUCH IS CHARGED WITH THE DUTY OF INVESTIGATING TRANSGRESSIONS OF EARTH BY STRANGERS, EXPLORING NEWLY DISCOVERED RECURSIONS, AND DEFENDING HUMANITY FROM THE THREATS DISCOVERED THEREIN.

*Katherine Manners*

LEAD OPERATIVE

ORDER OF: THE ESTATE BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND CHIEFS



# Estate Campus Map



## MAP KEYS

- G** Garage Entry
- L** Loading Area
- B** Bicycles
- M** Major Site Entry

## VISITORS

- 1 Service Entry
- 2 Ball Courts
- 3 Central Plant

## LIBRARY

- 10 Computer Lab

## OFFICES

- 11 Analytics
- 12 Communications
- 13 Auditorium
- 14 Briefing

## SECURITY

- 4 IT
- 5 Drill Field
- 6 Underground Dojo, Gun Range, Training

## LODGING

## GATE HOUSE

- 7 Holding
- 8 Vault
- 9 Recursion Lab

Visitor's Center



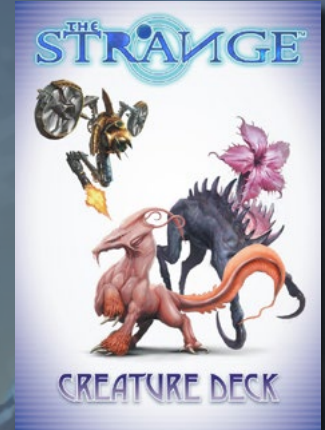


# THE STRANGE™



## THE STRANGE BESTIARY

Monument spiders, data sentinels, octopus sapiens, extereons, blobs, kaiju, and killer robots: *The Strange Bestiary* features more than 150 lavishly illustrated creatures and characters native to Earth, Ardeyn, Ruk, Crow Hollow, Atom Nocturne, and others. It also facilitates creating your own worlds by providing scores of creatures that will work in any recursion you can dream up, including those created by fictional leakage and operating under the laws of Magic, Mad Science, Psionics and more.



## THE STRANGE CREATURE DECK

100 Strange, scary, dangerous, and just plain weird creatures from the Shoals of Earth! Build encounters quickly and easily, or create them randomly on the fly. Then give your players a look at their foes before plunging into combat.

## ALSO AVAILABLE:



The Strange corebook



The Strange Player's Guide



The Strange XP Deck



The Strange Cypher Deck



The Dark Spiral



Eschatology Code

The Strange PDFs are also available on [DriveThruRPG](https://www.drivethrurpg.com/).

