

A GATECRASHING NANO OP BETTER ON THE INSIDE

Gatecrashers enter an abandoned alien tomb and find the threat of death still viable.

BACKGROUND

Gatekeeper discovered the exoplanet Yetti two weeks ago. The gate opens into a tunnel system, apparently of intelligent creation. The environment is hospitable (if not breathable), at 0.8 g, 0.5 atmospheres pressure, 99% nitrogen, -4 C. Now Gatekeeper is sending a first-in team to explore the complex. Gatekeeper is covering equipment and morph expenses.

The Yetti complex is a sealed tomb created by a medieval, simian-like species. A century ago, a plague of opportunistic rodent parasitoids killed millions, ending a dynasty (and the species). The tomb commemorates the death of a great queen and quarantines the hibernating parasitoid eggs.

MISSION GOAL

The PCs will be rewarded for any alien technology, archeological relics, viable biological material, or living organisms they return through the gate.

THE CHARACTERS

The recommended characters for *Better on the Inside* are the Gatecrashing Ops team: Astika, Jinx, Shrike, Whisper.

STAGE 1: ENTRY

The clock starts as the PCs step through the pandora gate. It will open again exactly 2 hours for the party to return, staying open for 1 minute. Anyone who misses it will need to wait for the next gate opening—if there is one. Biomorph PCs must wear oxygen masks to breathe or they will asphyxiate ▶272.EP2.

GATE ROOM

The gate is situated in an unlit circular stone chamber. The simians revered the gate as an ancient thing (it has been here for centuries), but never managed to activate it. Faded wall paintings show creatures that look vaguely like six-limbed orangutans with digitigrade legs wearing metal armor and fighting with oddly shaped swords and spears. A Know: Astrobiology Test indicates the species that made the paintings likely could see in ultraviolet wavelengths.

GATE TUNNELS

Two tunnels exit the chamber. A passage sloping upward is blocked and impassable. The other direction curves down for 100 meters to the Journey Room. Halfway down is a section of extreme instability. A Perceive Test modified for visibility will note the cracked and bowed ceiling and walls. Passing through on foot triggers a partial collapse, inflicting DV 3d10, armor-piercing, to everyone within 5 meters; a Fray Test reduces this by half. This unstable area can be safely passed with an Athletics Test—but the last person through triggers a partial cave-in no matter what. A Know: Engineering or Geology Test indicates that passing this way again may trigger a complete collapse.

This cave-in opens unseen fissures to the surface above throughout the complex, returning a small amount of oxygen to the tomb's atmosphere, bringing the parasitoids out of hibernation (biomorphs without enhanced respiration will still asphyxiate). These fissures also allow a number of dodecapedes to enter the tunnel after the party has passed, leading to a hostile encounter later (see *Complications*).

JOURNEY ROOM

The tunnel leads to an oval room of cracked, polished stone. This room holds guarded supplies for an afterlife journey. It is packed with rows of spherical barrels covered by a red, waxy material. Inside are preserved but smelly cheese-like foods. A Know: Astrobiology Test suggests these are made of plant-based proteins. They are edible to transhumans.

Attached to the walls by aluminum bands on either side of the entrance are a pair of mummified six-limbed simian corpses dressed in metal and leather armor. They are not intentionally preserved; the high nitrogen content has slowed decay. A superior success on a Medicine Test notices signs of intense muscle contractions indicative of death by a nerve agent. There are no other signs of trauma. Iron glaives lie by their feet (DV 2d10, Reach, Two-Handed). A Know: Xeno-Archaeology Test suggests the technology is pre-industrial age.

There are no other visible exits. A secret doorway can be found opposite the entrance with a Perceive Test at -30, a Know: Engineering Test, or the use of radar. It must be manually broken open, requiring a SOM Check with a timeframe of 20 minutes (reduced by 5 minutes per superior success).

JOURNEY ROOM TUNNEL

The secret door leads to an upward-sloping tunnel. The walls are painted with murals, depicting a procession leading to a simian orgy in the center of the planet.

After 50 meters, the tunnel forks, leading up to the Retinue Room and down to the Crown Room (each another 50 m).

CROWN ROOM

The Crown Room entrance is blocked by a fitted stone that can be moved with a SOM Check at -30. Set in the room are twenty-four carved ivory blocks on which lie decayed bodies in repose. In the center of the room is a large sealed pot (see *Pot Artifact*). Around the walls are murals of lurid sexual acts and feasting.

The bodies are of different ages and body types, dressed in scarves and straps marked with intricate beadwork and gems. Set around them are toys, astrolabes, daggers, pots of chemicals and dyes, fertility totems, and scrolls of thin vellum.

A Medicine Test to examine the bodies reveals five died from brutal blunt-force attacks. Four bodies have soft-tissue trauma and appear to have undergone a post-mortem extraction of the thoracic organs, possibly a burial ritual. Four are too decayed for analysis. Eleven corpses are children, most of whom show signs of disease (but are no longer contagious). A critical success or extensive examination will discover parasitoid eggs inside the five bludgeoned corpses.

Four parasitoids lie dormant, hidden among the pots (*Stage 2: Friends*). They will awake from hibernation after approximately 5 minutes. If the PCs visited the Retinue Room first, then the rodents are already awake but hiding.

A single trapped exit leads to the Exit Tunnel.

POT ARTIFACT

The pot is 1.1 meters tall with small holes at its base. It is a trap, meant to lure the parasitoid rodents in with a honey-suckle scent and kill them with acid. Over the years, an interior buildup of gasses has transformed it into a pressurized time bomb. Any jostling or attempt to open sets it off. The explosion inflicts DV 3d10, area effect (-2 DV per meter), and coats everyone within 5 meters with an acid gel. This acid inflicts DV 1d10 for 3 turns, dissolving armor first (permanently reduce the armor value).

RETINUE ROOM

The doorway is blocked with a heavy stone, requiring an easy (+20) SOM Check to move. Moving it triggers a trap, spraying the doorway with a cadmium-colored exothermic smoke. Biomorphs within 3 meters suffers DV 2d10; reduce this by half with a Fray Test.

Inside the room lie rows of corpses, naked, with minimal jewelry and minor personal effects such as combs and icons. There are three rotted parasitoids; two by the doorway, the third snuggled with one of the simians. A Perceive Test reveals most of the individuals were killed by cutting their throats. A Medicine Test at -20 indicates a third of the corpses had organs removed post-mortem.

As the PCs explore, five of the rodent parasitoids will awaken (*Stage 2: Friends*). If the PCs visited this room second, they are already awake.

Another sealed doorway leads to the Exit Tunnel.

EXIT TUNNEL

The Retinue and Crown Rooms both have sealed exits into tunnels that join together and slope upwards towards the surface. The doors require a SOM Check at -30 to move. Doors have 6/10 AV and 200 DR. The Crown Room door is trapped; opening it triggers a stone slab to fall, inflicting DV 3d10; a Fray Test reduces damage by half.

The exit tunnel goes 60 meters with multiple switchbacks. It's undecorated, rough, and ends at a large stone cemented in place. The stone is too large to remove in the time allotted.

STAGE 2: FRIENDS

Several (9+) adult parasitoids hibernate within the tomb. The return of oxygen due to the cave-in wakes them up. There are no latent eggs. The parasitoids look like six-legged rodents. Their bodies are 0.3 meters long and their three fluffy tails add an additional 0.3 meters. Two of their tails contain psychoactive spurs and the third their egg-laying organ hidden in the thick fur.

At first, the rodents are lethargic and easy to kill if spotted. They will hide and observe until they are fully awake, then search for food, even climbing the PCs to eat their rations. Once fed, the rodents are gregarious. By the time the PCs reach the second room, the parasitoids there are already active and friendly.

Rodent Parasitoids (9+) >>>>>

Stress Test: SV 1d6

Initiative: 6 • **Fray:** 60 • **AV:** —
WT: 1 • **DUR:** 5 • **DR:** 7
Threat Pool: 4

Weapons: Bite (DV 1d6),
Sting (DV 1d10 + 2, Armor-Piercing, Psychoactive Drug)

Perceive: 40
Move: Walker (Slow 4/12)

COG: 5 ¹⁵ • **INT:** 15 ⁴⁵ • **REF:** 20 ⁶⁰ • **SAV:** 5 ¹⁵ • **SOM:** 5 ¹⁵ • **WIL:** 5 ¹⁵
Skills: Athletics 50, Infiltrate 70, Melee 60, Survival 40

Notes: Very Small Size (-30 to Perceive or target)

Psychoactive Drug Effects — Onset Time: 10 minutes, **Duration:** 48 hours. The target's senses are amplified (+10 Perceive) and they acquire the Enhanced Behavior (Protective, Level 3) trait (p. 78, EP2). They are compelled to protect the parasitoids and will take any measure to defend the rodents or their eggs from harm—this includes accommodating parasitoid advances and being willing surrogates for their eggs. If unable to protect or forced to do harm, they suffer SV 1d6.

The parasitoids are non-sapient, but curious. They will sniff and play with everything the PCs touch and otherwise be "helpful" and cute. They do not attack unless cornered or in self defense. They view synthmorphs suspiciously. A trapped rodent will make every effort to escape, potentially killing itself in the process.

Once a PC is befriended, a rodent will move to reproduction. It will surreptitiously sting its chosen surrogate biomorph. The sting is barely painful, inflicting only 1 DV, but doses the target with a psychoactive drug that makes them extremely protective of the parasitoids. Once the surrogate is amiable, it will use its egg-laying tail to deposit up to three ping-pong sized eggs inside the PC's body cavity. The eggs take several weeks to gestate.

COMPLICATIONS

Some PCs are unlikely to take kindly to their friends becoming hosts to parasitoid eggs, but the infested PCs will do their best to protect the rodents and eggs. The GM should not force a confrontation, but should remind players that Gatekeeper pays far more for healthy living samples. The PCs' bodies are disposable, but their bank balances are not.

Dodecapedes (6) >>>>>

Stress Test: SV 1d6

Initiative: 6 • **Fray:** 60 • **AV:** —
WT: 1 • **DUR:** 5 • **DR:** 7
Threat Pool: 2

Weapons: Bite (DV 3d6, Acid Bite, *see below*),
Sting (DV 2d10 + 3, Armor-Piercing)

Perceive: 40
Move: Fast (4/32)

COG: 1 ³ • **INT:** 15 ⁴⁵ • **REF:** 20 ⁶⁰ • **SAV:** 1 ³ • **SOM:** 10 ³⁰ • **WIL:** 5 ¹⁵
Skills: Athletics 60, Infiltrate 60, Melee 60, Survival 40

Notes: Small Size (-10 to Perceive or target)

Acid Bite: Dodecapede bites contain acid. Each bite inflicts an additional DV 1d6 per turn for 3 action turns. Armor protects but is reduced in value.

Acid Burst: Each time a dodecapede takes damage in combat, there is a 10% chance its acid gland ruptures and explodes; 30% if it takes a wound. This kills the dodecapede but inflicts DV 3d10 to everyone within 3 meters; reduce this by half with a Fray Test. Armor protects but is reduced in value. Anyone struck by the acid spray continues to take damage as per the bite above. Other dodecapedes are immune to the acid.

When the PCs move to return to the gate, or if they linger too long in the tombs, a group of six dodecapedes will attack. These twelve-legged centipede-like creatures find the parasitoids extremely tasty and will move to attack them (and PCs protecting them) first.

RESOLUTION

If none of the PCs return to the gate on time, a retriever bot ▶ **347 EP2** is deployed to find them. The gate will open once again in 12 hours for the bot and any survivors to return. If the bot fails, the location is marked hostile and not visited again for several years, by which point the PCs' backups have already been restored, their previous versions assumed lost.

Any PCs who return are amply rewarded for artifacts, samples, corpses, and especially living creatures or eggs.

**BETTER
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