

THE DARK

ANDRZEJ STÓJ

# Cultists

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CREED



 G A M E L



NEMEZIS

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The universe of Nemezis is a technological one. Omnipresent global networks and advanced technologies, including genetic engineering and nanoid treatments, redefine humanity and its limits. This makes humans on most planets think in terms of “here and now”. They put their faith in science, the half-life of elements, the heat death of the universe and the cloning of bodies. *This* world. Religion is almost dead. Churches aren’t exactly popular – they collect weak, broken, hopeless people, or ones raised on theocratic planets, little different from totalitarian hells. Most religions these days are essentially sects. Usually they’re run by strong leaders, able to control the acolytes.

Most planets simply don’t have a place for faith, nor do they practice religions. But many people, even though they don’t admit it openly, have some hope for a life after death. Even though the transfer of consciousness is fairly well known, it’s unclear why the soul can’t fully be reduced to data, and can’t be copied an infinite number of times. This so-called “clone decay” is the basis of the few large churches still in existence. Few scientists can explain this anomaly – and the handful who do, often use the phrase “something like the immortal soul”. Ordinary people might not believe in a creator deity, but quite a lot of them still hope that after death they will still exist in some way.

But this matters little for the game itself. In your games of Nemezis you want races, shootouts, politics, power grabs, advanced gadgets, space battles, psionic duels or exploration of the Galaxy. You can enjoy Nemezis without dark gods, cultists and black magic. If you want to rely on conflicts between Infinity, the nobles of Bariz and Thenard’s totalitarian government, you can play out an entire campaign without introducing a single Horde creature. You can even destroy a great adventure by introducing a guru of an evil sect who summons monsters. In fact, introducing the eponymous Nemezis of humankind might be problematic.

## I, Cultist

The common image of a cultist of an evil deity in RPGs is ghastly, grotesque and unreal. Imagine a drooling madman with bloodshot eyes, brandishing a poisoned dagger and babbling on about weird spells. And of course, inevitably their role is to die, whether by steel, lead or plasma. The cultists’ dark plans end just minutes before they can reach their nefarious goals – brave heroes inevitably stumble upon the cult’s HQ when the acolytes are unarmed, have no guardians and can’t defend themselves.

How about we abandon this approach?

Let's not call evil people "crazy" or stupid. They shouldn't just be motivated by the mere fear of death, greed for power and money or outwardly noble goals like the need to protect their friends. No, their system of values will inevitably be warped and their mind shattered when confronted with the evil of the dark gods – but an ordinary cultist might not even go insane, and they certainly shouldn't be stupid.

The mentally ill don't join cults. They have difficulty just living their lives. Most cultists try to form an organization. But are they fully aware what they worship? The end goal of Nemezis is not control, but the total destruction of mankind – and that is widely known, if disbelieved. Is there anyone reasonable who'd join such a cult wanting vengeance for some perceived slight? Would anyone honestly hope that a massive, star-eating snake flies into your star system to eat the boss who fired you? It's like tossing an A-bomb at a mosquito.

And there's of course the spiritual side. Most people don't accept the existence of magic; and so, if you're one that does, you probably believe that it means total damnation. If you want to sell your soul to "the devil", you must also believe that there is a good god. And that's no small thing to reject in the world of Nemezis.

So what does a cultist look like? Well, the less a potential cultist knows about his future patron, the greater the chance that they will find some common

ground with the sect. In Nemezis, cult membership is essentially a business deal – especially when only one of the sides knows the full conditions. The potential traitor to mankind doesn't actually have to be totally unaware. It's good if he or she knows what she's getting into – she'll be more careful and willing to care about the needs of the church. However, at the beginning the sect should seem harmless. What sounds more interesting: a group of people who worship a planet-eating snake or a circle who have discovered a strange method to bend the rules of the Ashian stock exchange? For the beginning cultist the organization is not a church – it's a club, a brotherhood, a secretive guild or a gang. They will mention dark gods, but not outright – and there will be other pretexts to act secretly.

Another reason cultists aren't crazy is because the cult selects prospective recruits carefully. There should be no unstable war veterans, ex-mainstream priests, unstable psis or wiccans. No, instead they should pick a mercenary bodyguard who simply wants the extension of his detective license, or a lawyer with strange sexual preferences. Someone with a certain amount of power and some money – and the willingness to get more, often by crossing lines – is a perfect candidate. The cult can easily give them some suitable tasks (provide protection for our night club, tell us what the attorney general is really guilty of), and provide them with solutions (concessions, illegal drugs, solving their amorous problems). With each month the demands and requirements will grow. After a couple of years (yes, years!)

in a sect, the cultist will have a warped sense of right and wrong and they will have no problems even in witnessing a ritual that works.

In fact, it's quite likely that they will want to gain this power themselves.

## Magic in Practice

Summoning monsters is useful – when you work in a strange circus or a gladiatorial arena on Sparta. Because, why would anyone bother to learn how to summon a slimy, tentacled monstrosity of the Devourer? The summoning rituals are overrated – sure, you can throw the beasts at player characters... but remember that the cult's plan should be to avoid being found by investigators in the first place!

Okay, the wounding rituals are better – but why do you need to gather acolytes and perform sacrifices when you can simply grab a plasma rifle and shoot pure energy? Perhaps a magic bolt has some advantages over a plasma pistol, but plasma weaponry is also available. If you're determined and intelligent enough to master complex spell formulas, and can keep sane when meeting the servants of the dark gods – you're probably smart enough to buy plasma weapons or hire a bodyguard. In the time a cultist needs to master the Incantation of Black Fire, he could probably hire a psionic assassin.

And speaking of psionics... it's available

and understood, which can actually be a point in favor of black magic. While a psi could bend the will of his victim, they can defend themselves against it, investigate it and discover the guilty party. But dark magic works in a different way. While a psi scan resonates with the thoughts of another person, a cultist will summon a demon which will poison the soul of the victim, and send interesting memories, ideas or decisions to its master. A Psi can telekinetically choke the victim – a dark mage will send a curse of slow rotting of the flesh... or simply cause an incurable cancer in an organism.

But still – these folks are using black magic as a tool. It's not a kind of religious faith. The sect is still a gentleman's club for mutual assistance, and the more experienced black magicians can now be more self-sufficient.

So when do you cross this invisible barrier? When does the reasonable (or at least rational) human being lose her mind and become a fanatic actively fighting to destroy humankind?

You need something more than a magically induced insanity. This isn't the 19<sup>th</sup> century – people do not go insane just after seeing a giant with a squid for a head. The human has to realize that going deeper, reciting a strange poem at the precise moment of sinking the obsidian dagger in the virgin's chest, will bring him palpable benefits he would not gain otherwise. Black magic is a shortcut – a secret way to help a young manager become a CEO, multiply your money, destroy the enemy base, predict

the next move of the rival family. The more benefits a cultist gains, the closer he will be to the end game – becoming a human-like beast, devoid of empathy, the faithful servant of a vile deity who has elevated him to the top.

And of course,  
there's a catch.

The dark gods aren't just "tools". Black magic is not a natural law. It's not psionics. Casting a spell a second time, in the same conditions, on the same target might cause an entirely different effect. The deities don't care that much about rituals – they want devotion and the destruction of everything humans hold dear. Black magic is Nemezis' psychological warfare. And it's not particularly easy for traitors to use. When you fail to use a psionic power you can cause brainburn at worst – but a failure while using a dark magic spell can cause a wound that never heals. A failure when using dark magic can create a spiky parasite to inhabit your guts. Every senior cultist should know this, but only the select few who have tried to cast spells believe it. Casting a spell to harm another might require only a ritual and faith in the Devourer, but summoning a powerful servant requires total devotion – born out of pain of failure, rage against the system and fear of greater punishment.

## High Priests

At the very top of the cult there's no place for people with doubts. Vile gods don't give humans their power because they like it, but to send mankind to its doom. All decisions made by high priests and their servants should eventually lead to destruction of humanity. Their effects should not always be immediately visible, but they're always in the service of pure evil devoted to the destruction of mankind.

So who are these vile traitors?

A few of them are humans faithful to their new masters. Studying the occult, learning new spells (often demanding vile human sacrifices), and just contacting the servants of the dark gods does not benefit the human mind. Month after month it's digested through the vile corrosion and eventually something just clicks in the human's mind, and he realizes that humanity is all fine and dandy, but the Devourer and its servants are closer to him. A small fraction of these traitors believe that they will be transformed into a powerful demon and receive an eternity of immortal inhuman existence. They are quite likely wrong.

Some cultists are possessed. Physically, they're humans, but mentally they're demons. Their awareness is subdued, the human part of the high priest is just now an observer. The demon is now able to

fully control the body, access the mind, and act effectively in the human world.

But the vast majority of the leaders of the cults have never been human. They are just constructs of Nemezis, shaped like human beings. They hide under false identities and never reveal their secrets. They're practically immortal, brilliant and patient. They don't feel human emotions, but can mimic them. They can't be intimidated, bargained or reasoned with. They just follow their orders.

## Cult Hierarchy

Every sect has its own form of organization, but most of them operate with certain levels of initiation. Some give their members fancy titles depending on their talents or skills: some are soldiers, some are spies, recruiters, priests. But in general what matters is the circle of initiation.

The outer ring is composed of everyone making deals with the cult. Few of them know anything palpable about it, most assume it's just some kind of club or lodge for rich people.

In the trusted circle are the tested members of the sect. They don't fear the dark symbols, but don't necessarily believe in their power either. Perhaps they suspect there's something more to the organization, but they don't fear their fate. Their dealings with the cult have given them so many benefits that



they don't dare cross it. Many of them subconsciously feel that they have crossed some sort of line already.

The circle of the blackmailed is somewhere between the regular members of the cult and the inner circle – they were careless enough to allow the leaders of the cult to control them, but not involved enough to show loyalty. No one openly threatens them, but they are aware that a single move against the cult will end their lives. These aren't rank-and-file troops, but often very influential people – often both within and outside the cult. They have their own tasks, are able to give orders to regular members, and are often protected by an armed escort (sometimes against their will).

The inner circle accepts only the most faithful followers, tied to the cult so strongly that they have no future outside the sect. Seemingly, they lead normal lives but this is just a facade – all their efforts are supposed to strengthen the cult. This level means learning some mysteries – spells, rituals, and often performing human sacrifices themselves. These people have permanently distorted systems of values by now – they believe themselves superior, and considering their influence, money and powers they do in fact stand above the masses. Many of them are, for the want of better term, insane; all of them are dangerous.

From the inner circle the high priest selects a couple of people who become his advisors. These are utterly devoted to the sect, but not necessarily to the dark gods. Some are actually sane enough to ignore the faith aspect and their loyalty

is to the brotherhood. But their psionic powers, intellect, influence, connections or magical mastery are too valuable to the priests to abandon (though some use their powers to possess the cultists). However, most are faithful followers of their dark faith. Some of them aren't fully human. In some sects their identity is somewhat open, but there are some where the advisors hide in the inner circle.

The sect is led by a high priest – often inhuman, with vast knowledge and planet-wide influence (the older and more powerful the cult, the more power the priest has). Some cults might believe that there's no single leader, but in reality the orders come from a single vile being.

## What Do They Want?

The current goal of Nemezis and the dark gods is the total destruction of mankind – and ultimately, of every life form that is not “of Nemezis”. They wish to eradicate all Earth-based life on all planets and even put the stars out. Well, in theory. It sounds great on paper, but it's pretty vague. The cult is a tool for Nemezis, perhaps as useful as the Horde of crawlers. The existence of cults is important for the Enemy – they use them to investigate mankind, to prepare defectors and to destroy mankind from within. But how realistic it is that a single secretive organization can doom a planet? A planet with a modern planetary network, constant monitoring and psionic cops? Well, as the example



of Alvernia shows, it's possible, but it takes decades.

People are great at self-destruction. If they're left alone, they can destroy the surface of planet with atomic fire. It has happened before even without the temptations of Nemezis. And nuclear holocaust is just one of many possibilities. You can release a nasty pathogen, poison the atmosphere, reprogram terraformers or introduce invasive species into the ecosystem. You can lead civilization to totalitarianism, and constant warfare until natural resources run out. You can ruin the planet economically... or make it beautiful, rich or harmless, ready for neighbors to invade.

Most cult leaders aren't human. They have their goals, an outside, inhuman perspective and are immortal – so they will work for decades to realize their goal. They need to recruit involved, smart, aware humans, and depend on them when building the sect. One planet may need a couple of years to be self-destroyed, others might need centuries. Time does not mean the same to Nemezis as it does to humans. The dark gods are patient – and they don't want to overuse the Devourer and the Horde.

And so, most of the time the cult acts like a business, syndicate, guild, psionic foundation or some other organization. In fact, some of its acts might seem beneficial – a cult might kill criminals, reveal corruption in political circles, save alien ruins. However, their ultimate goal is the destruction of their planet. They might buy a promising company,

promote nuclear weapons, or take over a medical corporation. Each step is seen by the cult as a milestone on the way to their ultimate goal. Bribes, assassinations, recruitment – everything ultimately serves the conquest.

The heroes can effectively work for a sect, even thinking that they do good, and not realizing the real goals of their employer. Their effects will be visible only in the next generation – but the high priest is not omniscient, and PCs can actually spot the thread and destroy the cult.

When running Nemezis you should treat the cult as an ordinary organization. There's no sense or need to show the sect as a group of mad idiots. The cult is growing in power without the use of monsters and black magic. It will use them when there's no other way, not at every opportunity. Ordinary cultists don't believe that their superiors even have magic – after all, psionics can read their minds. Why make an ordinary cult member participate in rituals? Wait until they prove their utter loyalty.

## Contact with the Cult

The first contact the heroes have with black magic can take place when they follow your standard cyberpunk/space opera mission. The employer won't warn the heroes about magic and monsters, assuming that the PCs won't want to work for a crazy person. However, it's inevitable that the party will encounter

supernatural elements and witness the true power of the cult. If they survive, the PCs will probably learn about the supernatural, the actual threat of the dark gods and the necessity of defeating them.

The contact with the cult will be a real nightmare for the characters. If the sect has some connections with the police, the army, politicians or special forces the party will land in real trouble. Sooner or later the government will find a way to get to the PCs – tax evasion, perjury, bribery, blackmail... Of course, they don't have to implicate the PCs in murder – it's easy to frame them in smaller-scale crimes. And for the characters themselves there's no real difference between three and thirty years in the slammer. Their reputation will be ruined, friends will forget about them, and any employers will wish the heroes luck in other systems.

Of course this should rarely be used – few parties can fight their way through the planetary police. The GM should scale the strength of the cult up or down to match the PCs. They won't drop an A-bomb to eliminate a group of murderhobos – they want to destroy the planet, and so they simply want to discourage the player characters from investigating. Unless their actions could lead to blocking or revealing the plans of the cult, the sect won't bother with destroying the heroes.

## Cult Generator

Looking for inspiration or help when creating a cult? Well, here's a simple generator for dark cults. Take four dice – d6, d8, d10 and d12. The results will help you create a dark sect. The more powerful organizations use two or three d10, reflecting the greater influence of the cult.

The generator does not show what dark god is worshipped by the sect. You could choose one of the gods described in the core Nemezis book or use the generator in the next section. Also you should determine the identity of the leader of the sect – is he or she a demon, a possessed being or traitor to mankind?

*Example:* We want to create a sect that's relatively influential. We roll five dice, with 2d10 for its areas of influence. Our results are: 3 on the d6, 5 on the d8, 1 and 6 on the d10s, and 9 on the d12. We have a lodge of the rich, who want to destroy the planet with a killer ecosystem. They have some influence in the media and science, but their biggest problem is their flawed arcane methodology.

I imagine a brotherhood of scientists fascinated with the Horde and the powers of the dark gods. They have managed to capture a couple of beasts and experiment on them – their data suggest a possibility of a real breakthrough in genetech. The brotherhood accepts only talented researchers who have no scruples about discovering the mysteries of the monstrosities. After three years of existence the group has achieved

a lot – mostly thanks to disgusting experiments, like vivisections or the deliberate infection of innocent people. The group, however, does not have an arch-priest. There's a single power-mad researcher who will soon become their

leader – but he has no supernatural powers of his own. Their goal - to create a perfect Horde-animal hybrid that destroys the ecosystem – seems to be quite distant.

Result	d6 – Structure	d8 – Ultimate Goal	d10 – Influence	d12 – Problem
1	Separate cells	World war	Media	Competition
2	Company cover	Global epidemics	Local politics	Poverty
3	A lodge for the rich	Totalitarian government	Global politics	Lack of faith
4	Criminal organization	Return to savagery	The military	Cor Alliance
5	Network cult	Killer ecosystem	Government agencies	History of defeat
6	Band of brothers	Global ecosystem	Science and technology	Psionic foundation
7	-	Horde invasion	Charities	Imprisoned high priest
8	-	Summoning a dark god	Transport and logistics	Resilient populace
9	-	-	Education	Flawed methodology
10	-	-	Economy and banking	Silent patron
11	-	-	-	The veil is broken
12	-	-	-	Political opponents

Below we present the definition of each idea in the table.

very strange silent partner, who doesn't shy away from sending monsters on hostile takeovers. The cult has rarely recruited all the workers – if this has happened, the company is just steps away from fulfilling its goal.

## Structure

**Separate cells** – the cult believes in deep secrecy. It exchanges information in small separate groups, thanks to networks, psi or some other medium. If one of the cells is discovered, the rest of the network will survive. The drawback is that it's hard to plan large-scale actions.

**A lodge of the rich** – a secret society of influential people. Most of them were already ruthless, immoral bastards before they joined. They will sacrifice innocents for their companies – and if they gain magic powers it's just a nice bonus. The truly rich are hard to oppose and often they stand above the law.

**Company cover** – a business with a bonus. It can have an R&D department investigating the effects of black magic on the human mind, or a board with a

**Criminal organization** – the dark cult demands violence and illegal action, and since a mob is already doing it, why not

gain control over dark magic? If you have to kill a shopkeeper that won't pay protection money, why not use her as a sacrifice? And you can make massive amounts of money trading in substances that are impossible to synthesize via natural means...

**Network cult** – sometimes the basic kind of human interaction on a planet is a network. The people use drones or surrogates to interact and live in their own bubbles. On some worlds human bodies are secondary to virtual reality – and skilled hackers can hide their identity. It's easy for them to gain new members using games, forums or communities – but they might find it hard to fulfill rituals.

**Band of brothers** – sometimes a cult does not recruit. A cult can be a family, a group of veterans that discovered a dark secret, or a circle of best friends. They love each other, know their capabilities and will do anything for their sisters or brothers – and their strange inhuman patron.

## Ultimate Goal

**World war** – The cult wants to start a global conflict using advanced technology. Most planetary governments can eradicate all life on their planets, and the few that don't can at least bomb the planet back into the Stone Age.

**Global epidemics** – a nasty, geneteched modified pathogen can eradicate an entire planet only if there is an

organization who can coordinate a global terrorist outbreak. If the cult creates a disease, it also needs to disable or eliminate people who would create a cure or vaccine.

**Totalitarian government** – Humans are humane in humane conditions, but you can create a hellish state where the insane elites will manipulate the masses – until there's no one left to be ruled. The few oligarchs remaining will fight for scraps and death will come sooner or later.

**Return to savagery** – remove the energy sources, healthcare, transport, communications, entertainment, industry... and everything goes to hell. Society breaks down, and savage hordes will roam the ruins, until a small group of cultists eradicates them.

**Killer ecosystem** – you can run away from the enemy, but what if the enemy is every animal and every plant? With genetic engineering you can twist the ecosystem so that its only goal is to devour human beings.

**Great depression** – the Galaxy is bound by a network of treaties, business deals and contracts. If the planetary government starts to break them, no one will deal with them again. Neighbors will become enemies and the local currency won't be accepted. If the planet is not self-sufficient, its economy will quickly collapse.

**Horde invasion** – the Horde is an unstoppable force. The monsters are

present in the Horizon system, but the dark gods can create more of them.

**Summoning a dark god** – this is harder, but more effective, than summoning the Horde. Humans can kill the Horde monsters. They can't destroy the deities. And few things would delight the cultist more than being one of the victims of the Wurm of the Void, the Devourer of Worlds.

## Influence

**Media** – many people don't think for themselves. They think what the journalists and politicians tell them to think. Control the media and you control the population's souls.

**Local politics** – most people don't care much about the planetary capitol. All they care about is whether they have a job, what to do about the chemical plant poisoning the area, or who will get rid of the youth gangs. Local leaders can have greater sway than the president or the senate – especially if they speak with a single voice.

**Global politics** – a single order of the president is enough to release the nuclear arsenal. To arrange this you need only win the election and provoke a conflict...

**The military** – a modern army is almost always professional, often cybernetically enhanced with at least a dozen true cyborgs per planet. They are killing machines, ready to unleash hell at a single order.

**Government agencies** – planetary police, security forces, investigators, prosecutors, health service, secret service... heck, you'd be surprised to learn how useful housing agencies can be for preparing a global apocalypse.

**Science and technology** – if the cult doesn't have the tools to fulfill its goal, these people will design, create, test, improve and mass-produce them.

**Charity organizations** – the dark gods don't do irony. But still, these people are honest, believe that they're doing good, and are willing to work for free – great tools to prepare nuclear destruction.

**Transport and logistics** – On the planet of the ground-bound the guy with a spaceship is king. Modern spaceships and planetary transportation are fast, allow smuggling, contact, and access to unusual wares. They're the perfect tool for the cultists.

**Education** – the youth are our future. So to destroy the future, you need to control the youth. Secret incantations hidden in textbooks, easy access to demoralized youth, creating student fraternities to serve as cult cells...

**Economy and banking** – everything is possible if you have enough money. Everything.

## Problem

**Competition** – there's nothing in the cult's unholy tenets about loving your fellow cultists. Two cults worshipping a

different dark god don't have to hate each other, and can sometimes cooperate... but this isn't such an example.

**Poverty** – a lot of people join the cult to improve their lot in life. This can lead to a situation where the sect can count on thousands of members, but they can't effectively achieve their goals due to poverty and pressure.

**Lack of faith** – sometimes the cult is disguised as a club, a brotherhood or a research society. In this case, the cult is more devoted to the cover story than to actual worship. There's no authority and discipline among the inner circle, and many initiates might defect.

**Cor Alliance** – the planetary government funds and participates in the Cor Alliance, sending soldiers and equipment to fight the Horde. In return, it receives experienced, smart officers familiar with the machinations of the dark gods... who would shoot anyone who'd even consider joining a sect worshipping the Devourer.

**History of defeat** – this isn't the first attempt to conquer the planet. The sect has been destroyed and reborn numerous times. The leaders don't believe in the cult's success, but young and eager neophytes can carry the dark flame.

**Psionic foundations** – Psi has numerous advantages over dark magic – especially when you remember that they can learn about the cult just by reading the minds of its members. They can learn the identity of the sect members

instantly, and quickly reach the high priest... without leaving a trace. The cult must involve psionics in their master plan now.

**Imprisoned high priest** – a beheaded dragon is helpless. The archpriest is imprisoned in a completely secure place, and contact is difficult. The cultists don't know her will and she can't guide them to her vision.

**Resilient populace** – the inhabitants of the planet have probably witnessed some great event, perhaps a planetary war. They have become jaded, and are hostile to any conspiracies, indoctrination or ideology. They just want to rebuild, recover and forget.

**Flawed methodology** – the cult might be numerous, rich and influential... but it lacks an occult component. Perhaps the high priest can't curry favor with the dark gods, doesn't know what they really expect, disbelieves the principles of dark magic, or maybe he just constantly mispronounces 'fthaghn'.

**Silent patron** – hundreds of cultists cut hundreds of hearts from the chests of their victims, and still the dark patron is silent. Is it angry? Offended? Does it exist?

**The veil is broken** – someone important knows. And they will soon use their knowledge. And this person is not easily removed, or it's an entire major institution. The world might learn about the existence of the cult soon... Unless the cult makes some kind of a deal.

**Political opponents** – they don't have to know the truth. It's enough that they have a conflicting goal and sufficient power. Democracy might be easily manipulated by the cult, but unpredictable election results might throw the cultists' plans in jeopardy.

## Gunsang

Gunsang could be a paradise, if not for one very annoying planetary trait – a highly active sun. There are a couple of planets like this, for instance Blue Wave – but unlike Blue Wave, Gunsang's atmosphere protects the humans from the high radiation. However, the asteroid belt around Gunsang resonates with this particle stream – and as an effect there's no wireless planetary network. There are no satellites, and spaceships need to be manually piloted. Gunsang has no radio, no jacks, and all communications networks are made using miles and miles of wires and cables.

Few people mind – and newcomers to Gunsang often decide that life here is simpler, and truer than on most other planets. On Gunsang face to face meetings are more common than on other planets – they could use computer terminals to chat via wire, but still they dislike virtual meetings.

The planet is inhabited by around fifty million people, focused in about a hundred cities on the smallest continent called Hijau. Gunsang, apart from the lack of a planetary network, is not

exceptional. The discharges in the asteroid belt protect the planet from mass organized invasions, and they are free from terrorism. Off-world imports and exports need to be carefully arranged, and there are smugglers and pirates around, but these are hardly exceptional traits. Apart from the lack of jacks, Gunsang is well-known for its cafes, restaurants and other places you can meet in public.

However, the planet has a secret – and it's called Taskari-Ra-Kasi. It's a name of a dark god who has been summoned and worshipped by a group of cultists. Few planets have their own private dark deity – and the Obsidian Snake is even more exceptional, claiming that he wants to protect the planet and its inhabitants.

## Life Offline

Many people go crazy during their stay on Gunsang. Imagine actually having to talk to people, unable to switch off their jacks... They tend to avoid company, use a locally made jack adapter and use the cable network to roam VR. Some actually go insane – but it's fairly easy to restore their sanity with a couple of weeks of therapy, psionic memory alteration and you'll be back to normal.

For other people the quiet is the reason to stay here. Runaways, burnouts, has-been celebrities, people whose reputations have been ruined – all are welcome here. Gunsangites aren't particularly interested in galactic gossip, fashion or the newest interplanetary reality show.

They will walk past a fallen priest, a crippled vet or teenaged junkie fresh out of rehab. Gunsangites tend to meet people in person and judge them when they have met them – yes, sometimes behind their backs. Even if Gunsangites hear some gossip... they will treat it as gossip, not something specific to base their judgments on.

Of course this is a generalization. Gunsang has her share of bounty hunters, who are often interested in the backstory of newcomers. There are fans of VR games, galactic soap operas, and network geeks. And sometimes a visitor will be infamous enough to be instantly recognizable even to Gunsangites. But without the omnipresent jacks, they won't be able to check who a person is and instantly learn his criminal history.

## The Ruins

The current civilization is not the first on Gunsang. When the first colonists discovered the planet, they found a world perfectly suited to human life, but also ancient ruins of a previous presence. It seems that ages ago, someone landed here, built terraformers, exploited some of the minerals... and disappeared. Most people assume that they were human colonists from the second colonization period. Gunsang was a terrestrial planet, but the human colonists could not use automated courier ship or interstellar communications – and so, they couldn't ask for help when some disaster happened. Eventually, the colony died out.

Of course, Gunsang has conspiracy theorists believing that the ruins were built by aliens, then destroyed by the Devourer and its servants. They clamor this despite the proof to the contrary – for instance those terraformers found here are very similar to early designs, or machines built millennia ago. They ignore these who claim that the Horde destroys all traces of life and human civilization – and that sometimes the monsters completely eradicate the planet. For them, the government is creating false evidence to hide the inconvenient truth.

At this point the ruins aren't particularly interesting. They have been scanned and analyzed. The remaining artefacts are in museums or in private collections. Of course, there's plenty of gossip about hidden bases, space-age technologies and underground cities full of hibernating aliens... but there's no proof. Especially given the number of delvers and would-be delvers in the ruins. After three centuries of colonization, someone should have found whatever any earlier expedition missed. The ruins seem to be empty.

## Hidden Societies

There are five states on the planet, and they formed a global union just a couple of decades after landing. They have separate customs, separate legal systems and their own small armies, but in practice the Gunsang Union is a planetary government. Officially the entire planet belongs to the five states, but in practice only a single continent is



inhabited. The only settlements on other landmasses are a few mines or tourist attractions – at least officially.

In practice, things are different. There might be hundreds of small villages isolated from the rest of the world and the Galaxy. The government sometimes sends flying drones or human scouts to monitor them, but without a planetary network or orbital satellites they can't be very effective. It often turns out that what seemed to be a logging or mining camp was actually a temple of a cult, a smuggler's base or a secret lab. The Gunsang government and the people hate it when someone uses their unclaimed land for their own nefarious purposes. Theoretically, the unsanctioned "colonists" are gently asked to leave, and if they're causing trouble they have their memories altered (at best) or are simply sent six foot underground (usually).

Again, the lack of a planetary network makes it hard to coordinate scouting efforts. Some communities easily evade surveillance – underground complexes under the ancient ruins, underwater bases, habitats in the arctic. The bases might be hard to locate – but the supply chain for them might be easier to find. Some bases are self-sufficient, but others need regular deliveries of supplies and fuel.

One such complex is a temple of Taskari-Ra-Kasi.

## The Obsidian Snake

The physical form of the Obsidian Snake has only been seen on scanners. It seems to have a snake-like body hundreds of meters long, as thick as a man's thumb – locked in a massive, eroded stone egg. The egg's surface was evidently once covered with strange writing, but time has eroded most of it. There are only some fragments left, describing the amazing power of the Snake, lord of a dimension where time and space are reduced to a single point.

This isn't the exact definition of hyperspace; probably the place where the awareness of Taskari lies is not the same "place" where starships disappear, but the Obsidian Snake seems to be tied to it somehow. When the cultists leave regular space, they can directly communicate with the deity and receive his gifts.

And the Snake is very generous with his gifts.

He claims to be the guardian of Gunsang, a being distinct from Nemezis. He claims to be imprisoned by the dark gods because he was a friend of humanity. In his velvet, telepathic speech there's a note of falsehood. The Snake doesn't seem to speak the truth, but it is not exactly lying. It is imprisoned somewhere on the planet, but not exactly to protect the Gunsang Union.

Taskari-Ra-Kasi can fold space. He can be very precise over small distances, especially on Gunsang. The further

you need to go, the more risky and painful it is. The Snake claims that he can reach the heart of the Galaxy, but the cultists have never left the volume of human-occupied space a couple of hundred lightyears across. He can also send inanimate objects – once, he sent an A-bomb into an enemy colony.

Once. To all attempts of the cultist to repeat this feat he has answered that this attempt would be detected and intercepted. It seems that the Snake is the master of time and space, and can perceive various events in the future. He sees the most beneficial outcomes in the future and can force his followers to act so that they come true. He can even bestow the gift of precognition on mortals – but their minds can't understand the visions. Eventually they lose their minds and become babbling madmen.

### Use in Play

The obsidian Snake is great for the role of a mysterious patron who will eventually become a nemesis of the PCs. The players certainly won't believe in the fairytales that this deity is just a guardian of the planet and will begin an investigation. After tracking down cultists and discovering hidden lore, the PCs might learn the truth – Taskari-Ra-Kasi is one of the Hounds created by Nemezis. When the Snake failed at the task, the Nemezis decided to reabsorb him – but in the meantime the Snake had managed to gain his own personality. He's not imprisoned – the “egg” is a protective shell, protecting him

from the Devourer. The Snake indeed protects Gunsang from the Horde – but only to ensure his own safety.

But how do you direct the player characters to Gunsang? Well, it's a great place for a hideout. Gossip seldom reaches here and most people ignore it. The heroes can run away from the law or become bounty hunters looking for criminals using pre-network methods.

## New Spells

The Nemezis core book describes a couple of spells from the arsenal of the dark priests. The following spells give them new capabilities, and hints on how to create your own. Remember, dark magic is powerful and hard to understand. It breaks the laws of physics, has strange side effects and bends reality in strange ways. You can present it in many ways other than simple descriptions.

### Banishment

**Modifier:** See description

**Range:** 10 km

**Casting time:** 1 hour

**Duration:** Instant

This ritual banishes a summoned beast. It has been created and written down in the books mostly to tempt ordinary people fighting the devourer or its allies. Sometimes it's the only choice when you're fighting the monsters and their supernatural powers – but it's a trap. If

you fail to correctly perform the ritual you are subject to all regular rules and you still need to train the relevant skill.

Therefore, the spell is simple enough – if cast correctly, any being summoned by the Summoning ritual is removed from reality. The modifier is increased by –2 compared to the difficulty of summoning the creature. *Example:* To summon a weak beast of the Horde you need to succeed at a Ritual roll at –2, and so the penalty to banish it is –4. You have an additional –2 penalty if you can't name or describe the target.

And of course, there's a catch. If you don't have the Cultist Edge, this spell might instead cause possession. If the caster fails a Spirit –4 roll, they will fall into temporary madness for at least one scene, or be possessed by a malicious spirit. The demon will depend on the power and abilities of the banished monster – it might be its malicious echo or total opposite.

### ***Blessing of Chance***

**Modifier:** -2

**Range:** Touch

**Casting time:** 10 minutes

**Duration:** 1 month

This spell shows the cultists how profitable worshipping the dark gods is. The target receives a free reroll (two with a raise), and can use it in any roll – including a Trait test, a damage roll or a roll on a table. The spell manipulates probability – the cultist can also use the reroll to win money on a lottery or a stock exchange. He gains 50% chance to

win 1d6 x 1000 Eagles (\$) or 1% chance to win the main prize – 1d6 x 50 000 Eagles.

You can receive a *blessing of chance* once per year. If you cast the ritual twice on the same person, she becomes unlucky, and the GM gets “anti-rerolls” to make him reroll a successful test, or make him lose money when he risks them. The hero can resist the spell if he's a victim, by succeeding at a Spirit –2 roll.

### ***Kiss of Memory***

**Modifier:** -8

**Range:** Touch

**Casting time:** 10 minutes

**Duration:** Instant

This innocently named spell is a powerful ritual able to force even the toughest merc to submit. The cultist kisses the victim, stealing their most precious memories. And despite the kiss, the warlocks seldom focus on emotional moments. They steal the more powerful memories – training, experiences, or successes.

The spell is resisted by a Spirit –2 roll. Each success and raise can reduce the victim's skill by 1 die step, and every two successes can allow the caster to increase his own skills by one die step, but not above the victim's level. The loss and gain are permanent, but you can restore memories using mnemonic implants or by restoring backup copies of your own mind. A character can retrain lost skills, and this costs him only half the normal advances.

## **Rejuvenation**

**Modifier:** -12

**Range:** Smarts

**Casting time:** 1 hour

**Duration:** Permanent

This spell is more bait for the desperate. This spell makes the target 1d6 years younger. It does not remove Wounds or other damage (you won't regrow that arm you lost three months ago), but it could remove the Elderly Hindrance. If

you recast the Rejuvenation ritual again within a year of an earlier casting, you automatically age 6d6 years – this is the punishment for a mortal who dares to abuse the divine grace.

This spell requires a human sacrifice, and the murderer needs to be the person to be rejuvenated.



# Demons: The Dark Breed

The Nemesis of the human race are the dark gods, vile monstrosities. They're a swarm of tentacles, claws, maws, fangs and wings. Blasphemous, grotesque, and unnatural. Disgusting sacks of flesh overgrown with a forest of constantly mutating limbs, covered with parasites, boils, blood, ooze, and scales. Constant ululating, howls, the inhuman sounds of screaming victims. Just a single gaze is enough for a man to turn insane and be forever transported into madness.

That is what people found scary at the beginning of the twentieth century.

But we live in 2016, not 1916. Space is not scary, it's something we'll explore. Strange creatures are animals we study, and atomic horrors are something we tamed. And in our sessions we can pretend our characters are scared, track down dark cults who wish to summon their blasphemous overlords, or roleplay how our investigator goes insane. But frankly, it's mostly affectation; we pretend to be writers of a Lovecraftian story. While this horror is still popular in the 21st century, it can't be treated fully seriously – at least not in Nemezis.

Dark gods with vile shapes do exist in the game world, but they're not supposed to frighten the players. Their heroes can face many monsters safely. A typical opponent is a Horde monstrosity which

appears on screen only to be shot with a plasma barrage and evaporate. There are other beings like nemotics, which are more dangerous and unsettling – but their role is to act as opponents for the player characters. They're an enemy which can be stopped, studied and defeated.

## Terror from Space

Most gamers would probably agree that every role-playing setting needs a conflict or two. It requires some opposing factions, places where enemies clash fighting for power, influence, territory, resources, magic or faith. Nemezis would work without dark gods – it could be a game about humans, their desires and ambitions. The Horde, the Devourer and other deities can be simply an element that enriches your galaxy, giving the players and GMs some other campaign models. If your PCs are corporate couriers, free psis or terrifying smugglers, the players will certainly get into trouble – but you don't always want to cut through genetically modified soldiers or chase drones run by a mad cyborg. Dark gods are another layer, the next axis of conflicts. Thanks to them, you can change any other space opera into Nemezis.

## The Monsters are there to Be Shot At

The vile, blasphemous deities are the perfect enemy. They're essentially pure evil, want to destroy mankind, have an unlimited supply of servants (including traitors in normal society) and they're not omnipotent or omnipresent – they don't have to appear in the game if you don't want them to. They're also inhuman, and there are no negative consequences for destroying their servants. The monsters don't need motivations or goals – and no one will put you in prison for killing a crawler. If a weird monstrosity kills colonists on a backwater world, killing it is not a crime but a heroic deed, even if the heroes destroy a unique terraformer in the process (although Thénard and its corporations would love to hold the heroes responsible).

The Horde and the gods' servitors are unnatural, ruthless and definitely opposed to human civilization. When you blast through them with your plasma rifles, you are a hero. And it's different with humans. Sure, your heroes could be violent but heroic vigilantes hunting only the psychos, serial killers, terrorists, rapists and dictators – but this would get boring very easily. Nemezis is based not around "good vs. evil" but around conflicts of interests, where you can't point to one side and say "these are the bad guys". The corporation vs the government. The government vs. the military. The military vs. the media. Media vs government. Corporations vs. Gangs. Gangs vs. Nobles... We can play this all day long. In these human vs. human conflicts the heroes can actually

take sides, adapt the point of view of one of these factions, and can help them achieve their goals. They have real, actual alternatives. With the Horde the only choice is turning into a cultist or a monster, and that's hardly a choice.

## Learning the Secrets

One of the histories which can interest the players is the nature of the dark gods. What are they in reality? Who created them, how and why? Why did they awake so suddenly? Why do they want to destroy mankind? The heroes can ask dozens of questions with no answers. Questions about how to protect oneself, how to imprison the vile gods once again or how to destroy them. And they will probably investigate black magic, too.

Once the players start asking these questions, you should start thinking about the answers. You have a lot of leeway concerning the nature of the Enemy. The official vision is just a vague outline you can ignore and replace with something else. Besides, you can ignore the deepest secrets of the Horde – it's unlikely that the player characters will face the Nemesis itself, and they probably won't encounter the beings which existed before the Devourer arrived. They can, however, if they're determined enough, learn some core facts that will allow them to create some image of the dark gods – their goals, motivations and capabilities.

The heroes can at least encounter ruins older than mankind. The vast majority

of humanity will assume that humans have never – until the awakening of the dark gods – encountered sentient alien life. Some will know that many planets had terrestrial climates, with ecosystems, but they have never evolved intelligent beings. Most of the media ignores mentions of strange structures, which could be remnants of cultures existing millions of years ago. Only a handful of people know, for instance, that the Great Pyramid of Black Iron, the tomb of Mesu, was found before the Devourer awakened. The people in the know – governors, rulers, delvers, agents or masters of psionic foundations – are mostly aware that humankind is not alone and it's endangered. They decided not to investigate the alien constructions too closely, but they were too much of a temptation – and so, Earth was destroyed, and civilization gained an almost invincible enemy.

While delving in the ruins the heroes will definitely learn one thing – this isn't the first time the dark gods have invaded civilizations. They will discover prehistoric fossils of beasts resembling Horde monstrosities, strange structures which could be monuments of some alien race, disgusting scars visible on strange extinct worlds – all of these will be a clear sign that similar wars have taken place before.

And the Horde has won them all.

## Dreams of Power

For an average human, the Enemy is a vague presence. These who portray it,

show a massive black worm devouring suns. It could be a weird crawler ripping the body of a screaming, dying civilian. And sometimes it can be a humanoid mutant shrouded in darkness, eyes blazing with hate. This is how Nemezis is shown in media, how the people are warned against the cultists, and that's how armies prepare for Horde attacks.

People tend to think in terms of ancient classical mythologies. The Devourer is an avatar of destruction, Lij is the Poisoner of Technology. An average person – especially an inhabitant of the Horizon system who knows more about the Horde than propaganda portrays – has some vague idea of a pantheon. Every god has some role and specialty. All this is very vague and imprecise – among the beings that really seem to exist there are cults of imaginary creatures or beings taken from Earth history (indeed some cults worship Tezcatlipoca or Gozer the Gozerian, taking an ancient Earth picture as a divine truth), and the gods that do exist are imagined to have human-like motivations and new powers.

## So what's the dream of the dark gods?

Of course, the total extinction of humanity. The destruction of all the civilizations of humankind, down to the final, smallest colony. The Galaxy must remain “pure”, and no other species outside Nemezis must be allowed to exist. This is not a matter of morality – the Galaxy's resources are finite, and the coexistence of many advanced

civilizations would inevitably end in war. From Nemezis' point of view, it's better to pull the weeds up before they start taking roots. But it seems that humankind isn't a weed – it's a young tree that is very quick in rooting itself.

It is hard to actually determine the common traits of the entire “species” of the “dark gods”. Some of these beings are sentient, others aren't. Some can ignore spatial distances – others must use some sort of spaceships. Some of them have physical bodies, others seem imperceptible by regular means. And others yet actively communicate with humans. Some of the dark gods even used to be humans – but did they actually become gods or are they just transformed servants?

Their main common trait is the finite effectiveness of their form. They're not omnipotent. They have their weaknesses. All of them are technically mortal, though humans at this point might not have access to ways of killing them. But they don't perceive the world as humans do. They don't have emotions (although some of them can be quite good at simulating them), they act according to some complex algorithm, subject to an ultimate goal. If necessary, they run away – but not in fear, only logical effectiveness. This is somewhat rare, though, and applies to only the weakest gods – the stronger ones act almost

solely through their servants: monsters and humans.

The heroes probably won't encounter one of the dark gods directly (unless maybe in the finale of an epic campaign). They can, however, meet their creatures, cultists and possessed victims. These shouldn't be just regular fanatics dreaming about the destruction of civilization. You don't want to introduce more world-eating monsters or another plotting schemer. These aliens see the world in another way than humans – they don't grow old, don't eat, and don't need anything to survive. This doesn't mean that they can't change – they can change shape, lose and gain new powers, learn new tricks. They can even cooperate with humans if they can gain something by doing so.

## Godlike Generator

This generator is supposed to inspire you to create your own vile deity. You can build its stats from the ground up, but it's better if you work on the results of the random rolls, adjusting them to your campaign, conventions and the specifics of the group.

Take one d6, one d4, and at least two d10 to determine powers of the being – the more d10s, the more powerful the being is. Start with some basic idea about your dark god, and use them to shape the generator rather than roll blindly.



Result	Form – d6	Awareness – d4	Power – d10
1	Demon	Predator	Possession
2	Human	Genius	Destruction
3	Spirit	Hivemind	Temptation
4	Swarm	Nothing	Transformation
5	Massive object	-	Divination
6	Technological	-	Warlockry
7	-	-	Legion
8	-	-	Labyrinths
9	-	-	Cocoon
10	-	-	Reproduction

## Form

**Demon** – a massive, giant silhouette; hatred, evil and darkness. Bat-like wings, wolf-like maw full of steel teeth. Black fire, dark iron, muscles and claws.

**Human** – more or less a mortal. Usually it's invulnerable, perfect in every aspect, with strength and agility beyond even the artificial bodies of true cyborgs.

**Spirit** – an immaterial being, able to interact with the world only indirectly, using followers, creations or unholy places.

**Swarm** – unity in multiplicity. Each piece of the swarm has a tiny sliver of power, and taken together they're greater than the sum of their parts. You can't destroy them all, and this deity can easily be reborn if even a single part of the swarm survives.

**Massive object** – a massive form, building- or even planet-sized, traveling the Galaxy contrary to the laws of physics. It contains swarms of beasts, temples of servants or ancient ruins.

**Technological** – a possessed monastic

ship. A corrupt Dyson sphere. This is usually a man-made object awakened thanks to rituals, mankind's misdeeds or intervention by other deities.

## Awareness

**Predator** – a savage beast driven only by instincts.

**Genius** – a being considering itself a free-willed individual. It has some major goals, but it is free to choose for itself.

**Hivemind** – a group of minds thinking together. A collective usually takes action thanks to a majority "vote".

**Nothing** – pure energy. Pure force acting according to some laws or directives. There are no emotions, goals or soul.

## Powers

**Possession** – the deity can enter people's minds and talk directly to them. While it can't just "make humans serve it", it can slowly whisper to them, corrupting them and changing them into inhuman creatures. Multiple rolls of this result

allow the being to gain stronger influence, directly control a human's body, or influence groups – even entire planetary populations.

**Destruction** – the deity can annihilate matter, including living tissues. It doesn't "cause damage", it doesn't give you a sporting chance. It simply kills. It can disintegrate you instantly. Multiple rolls of this result allow the beings to extend the range or area affected, or to affect multiple targets at once.

**Temptation** – this being is a prince of lies. It appears amazingly trustworthy, and could transform a fanatic inquisitor into a faithful follower. If you roll this power multiple times, the deity can bestow this power upon its followers or can manifest it through media (a video recording works as well as meeting the god in person).

**Transmutation** – the power can change the bodies of living beings, reworking them into crippled mutants... or superhuman physiques. Multiple instances of the power widen the range of changes or allow them to affect other targets (reanimate dead, manipulate inorganic matter), or affect a larger mass at once.

**Divination** – the deity can see the future. Usually, it can see one of the paths the future holds, and learn what should happen for that variant to become true. What it sees is not 100% accurate, but quite likely. Multiple rolls of this power allow the god to see further into the future, or include more variables (including the actions of player characters).

**Warlockry** – the god can bestow black magic on its followers. The more rolls of warlockry, the more varied and powerful are the rituals. On the other hand, the Nemezis black magic system assumes that it's the cultists that generate magical power – so the more ritual adepts, the better.

**Legion** – many deities have only mortal followers. This power allows the being to create and command a large number of monsters, alter their abilities and change them according to its whims. The more results of this power, the larger and stronger the legion.

**Labyrinths** – the deity can warp space: make corridors twist and turn, move you to extradimensional mazes, create sub-space tunnels to travel instantaneously between distant planets. Multiple results allow the deity to create permanent portals, bestow this power on followers, or transfer more and more matter.

**Cocoon** – if necessary, the deity creates some sort of protective shield and transforms itself. It wakes up as someone or something different – not necessarily more powerful, but better adjusted to the mission it's about to undertake. It can change its powers – and the form and awareness of each occurrence of this power. More rolls of this result allow faster and easier transformation.

**Reproduction** – depending on the conditions, the deity is able to create offspring, another powerful being desiring to destroy human civilization. The child will not be as strong as the ancestor, but that's no consolation. If

this power is rolled again, the “birth” is easier and faster, or the deity can transform its faithful followers into other powerful beings.

**Example:** *For my next campaign I want a relatively weak deity which could be destroyed by the player characters. Therefore I've already decided it's human-shaped. I roll 3d10 to determine powers, and 1d4 to determine its intelligence. I rolled 2—genius and 1, 3 and 6 on d10. This being has the power of “temptation”, “possession”, and “warlockry”. That's pretty funny – it's an archetypical devil in human form. I like it. A powerful CEO, a patron of the arts, or maybe the head of a religion?*

## Let's Get Scary!

Dark gods, frightening monsters, demons, black magic, ancient iron pyramids... While Nemezis is meant to be an action game, it could work as horror. Perhaps not exactly like Lovecraft's or King's, but more like “Alien” or “Event Horizon”. This is not a classic horror story, but in a fantastic space opera, it's hard to play out adventures assuming that the party is going to go insane or be devoured by monsters.

## Toys and Terrors

Let's start by stating the obvious. If you want to scare the players (or at least make them afraid that their overpowered cyborgized merc will die), don't use another brainless Horde monster who just wants to feast on warm flesh. The scary creature must be intelligent (or at least have a

great amount of cunning), know and understand the customs of humans, be able to use their environments creatively, and still manage to be dangerous despite the characters having access to advanced technologies (not just arms and armor, but also instantaneous communication or detection systems).

Making such a monster indestructible is unfair to players – it should be dangerous, but also have a couple of weaknesses at least. It should be dangerous to the players, overpowering them with speed, supernatural powers, or vitality. Direct confrontation with the creature should carry a risk of death for the player characters – and so the players should start thinking strategically.

You can always gift the beast with powers and skills allowing it to disappear, pass through barriers, avoid detection – and simultaneously be able to observe the actions of humans. A daemon of Lij could travel through fiber optics, control sensors, create holograms, or attack heroes' cybernetics. A powerful beast should have some capability to hide, have amazing combat skills, and be fast, tough and strong. A brain parasite could pass through most barriers, control its victims and have some black magic spells... but all of these should also have weaknesses. The first should be entirely dependent on human technology, and be harmless outside the infrastructure. The second should be fairly easily shot with plasma weaponry if cornered in a trap. And the parasite needs to be detected and removed from the carrier, and subsequently squashed like a bug.

If the monster is supposed to be a challenge it needs to fit the environment. A massive creature won't work when skulking in the corridors of the spaceship. A brain parasite is useless in scenes where apart from the PCs there are only one or two other characters. And a stealthy creature won't work in open, well-lit spaces. If that seems obvious, it's because it is. Nevertheless, the environment is almost as important to the adventure as the monster itself.

For instance if the heroes have to face an immaterial Lij daemon, let the adventure take place in a medical complex where the minds are waiting to be transferred into cyborg bodies. There's plenty of dangerous machinery daemons can possess... and the heroes struggle not only to remain alive, but to save the mind of an important ally. What if a newly resurrected cyborg preserves both his mental abilities and a terrifying Lij-altered body?

Or consider another alternative. The heroes land on a sun-burned planet, where the human colonies are deep underground. Arrival and departure is possible only during the night – once per four standard weeks. The party lands shortly before the dawn... and a Horde spawner arrives there too. The heroes can escape – leaving the colonists to the mercy of the Horde predators. The heroes must fulfill some other mission (deliver a message, activate a device), dodge the Horde monsters, and decide whether and how to save the colonists.

Sometimes the environment is there for the heroes to defend, sometimes it limits

their mobility or forces them to make an uneasy choice. And there are other ways to use the environment. If the adventure is set in a jungle, desert or some other inhospitable area, the heroes are cut off from technology. In a city, a humanoid enemy can stay anonymous. In the narrow confines of a space station, you can't use plasma weaponry, and fighting in close confines limits the effectiveness of ranged weapons. Open space, poisonous atmospheres or volcanic dust force the players to use space suits, limiting their communications and perception. A shape-shifter at a charity ball on Bariz will probably will limit the PCs' eagerness to use plasma weapons, grenades or flamethrowers (although we are talking about RPG characters here...).

Skills, supernatural powers and environments are three crucial elements of the world which you can use to introduce horror to your campaign. The entire environment can be adjusted to your desired conventions – for instance, the surrounding society. If you want a dark monster to devour people, add some NPCs to the mix (even as a buffer, before the creature starts hunting the PCs). And what if the victims aren't helpless civilians? What if you set the adventure in an army base full of veterans of battles on Cor? The monster appears and starts killing the vets, one after another. How is this possible? How do the PCs defeat it when the pros are gradually being killed?

Or maybe set the game on a space ship, where the heroes discover that most of the crew and passengers are in fact cultists...

and that a rival sect has summoned a supernatural predator aboard the vessel. The heroes can't face it on their own, but the local archpriest could banish the creature if protected (by the PCs) and able to make a nasty human sacrifice...

### Hypercube (Wild Card)

*These creatures are from another space, where angles, distances and other relationships between objects are fluid and malleable. Here, they manifest as grey cubes made of something like matted metal. They're able to alter their shape, based on lengths and angles – create mono-nuclear blades literally one atom thick or massive heavy cylinders hitting like clubs, reduce themselves to two dimensions to enter any narrow opening etc. They move by shifting their center of mass. They don't have sense organs – but they are able to detect air vibrations like sounds, and electromagnetic radiation ("seeing" in a wider spectrum than humans).*

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d10, Strength d8, Vigor d10

**Skills:** Notice d10, Fighting d10

**Pace:** 10; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 13 (6)

**Edges:** No Mercy, Level-Headed, Sixth Sense.

**Special abilities:**

- ☉ **Adaptable Build:** Hypercubes can't be Shaken.
- ☉ **Armor +6:** Mystical aura (protects from plasma weapons).
- ☉ **Fearless:** Hypercubes are immune to fear and Tests of Will.
- ☉ **Improved Frenzy:** The hypercube can make two attacks per turn, with no penalty.

☉ **Pseudopod Bash:** Str+d6.

☉ **Transformation:** Hypercubes can freely change their shape, being able to shift any dimension from 1 mm to 10 m. They can even reduce their thickness to that of a single atomic particle – and thus bypass most natural barriers.

### Breaking the Laws of Nature

As long as the creatures act exactly according to the same rules that constrain the player characters, the players can stay in their comfort zone. They know that the monster can't pass through walls, replicate instantly or jump through hyperspace, and thus they are, if not in control, at least able to create a plan to protect themselves or destroy the enemy.

So what happens if the monster starts breaking these laws?

What if it can travel through time, being able to jump to the past and future? It could split into several copies, and killing it wouldn't solve the problem – what if it had jumped into the future and it was some future copy that got blasted? What if it's a two-dimensional shadow which can be affected only through the material on which it's projected? What if it absorbs the energy of plasma bolts and regurgitates it... as gamma radiation?

With the powers like that, you need to give the beast some limitations, some weaknesses players can use to defeat it. Perhaps the beast is immune to energy barrage, but it's wounded by

low temperatures. If the players discover this secret, they can use it to prepare an ambush – and evict the creature into space or freeze it in liquid nitrogen. And you can even plan a sequel, where it will turn out that cold merely makes the monster hibernate. Some time later, someone unfreezes the monstrosity – which then returns, ready for vengeance.

## Taking Them Out of Their Comfort Zone

Okay, so those were the basics – taking the players out of their comfort zone, forcing them to confront a monster which breaks the laws of physics. Let's do something more advanced and start breaking other unwritten rules to create horror. Most players hate it when the monster can permanently twist their character – her image, character traits or skills. Sometimes they'd prefer their character to die rather than become mutated or limited in some other way. It's worth using.

The monster doesn't have to claw/claw/bite or shoot lasers from its eyes. It can for instance be able to shape matter (including living tissue) like plasticine. It can affect one of the PC's friends and deform his body. The victim will suffer, maybe even ask for quick and painless (or painful) death. Will the players be ready to take on the creature after such an encounter? And what if you limit the heroes, setting the monster loose on a space ship? Remember that the monster doesn't have to shape just human skin, flesh and bones – it could also make holes in the ship's hull! The corridors

are narrow and you can't prepare an ambush... and even airtight enclosure in the hold won't protect the heroes.

And let's return to the monster able to jump in time. What if it's smart, able to affect the world around the heroes? The party is protected by mercs in power armor? Well, what if the monster jumps 3 months back and assassinates the merc leader, and the bodyguards are now somewhere else. The heroes have a spaceship full of fuel and can safely escape from the haunted planet? Well, actually the price of the fuel was artificially heightened, the characters didn't want to overpay, and they filled only one quarter of the tank. This kind of monster doesn't have to be a powerful beast, it works equally well as a humanoid, or a possessed man. It could be even a cultist who, instead of physically travelling in time, can send his own awareness to the past or alter the minds of people he observes. Although, if the time paradoxes this creates are permanent and the heroes find themselves in an entirely different the universe, this can be very uncomfortable. After defeating the opponent, the changes it made should be undone – the players might hate this one-sided change of the setting, especially if they fought to protect it for a long time.

## Altering Perceptions

Hallucination. Ghastly sounds. The feeling of being watched. The distortions of perceptions are a great tool for creating the horror atmosphere, but they

need to be used wisely. While a movie character will be freaked out by walls covered in blood or a small girl crawling out of the TV, the RPG character will reach for her plasma gun. Don't even try to deny it – that's not the way to go.

While the players might appreciate this kind of atmosphere, roleplaying their fear to show that they're having fun, it ultimately ends with drawing cards and rolling for damage. Use hallucinations to confuse the players so that claiming "I shoot it" would be the ultimate choice. Let's consider a simple example – the heroes find themselves in a desert settlement next to a terraformer – out of which a strange beast crawls. Only singular victims die. The attacks always occur outside the village, but it's not clear why the victims leave the safety of town. It will turn out that the monster can create realistic illusions in the heads of the heroes. When the monster tries to manipulate one of the heroes, singling him out with this mirage would be pointless – unless you try to manipulate all the players. For instance, one of the heroes notices a potential victim – a wounded villager outside the town. She asks other characters to follow her, but when they get close to the victim – all the characters except the one targeted by the monster disappear. They've never been there, they were part of the mirage. Of course, the players shouldn't know that they are illusory in this scene, until the monster attacks.

Let's try another way to mess with sight. Imagine a marketplace in the center of a big city. A group of monsters attacks – humanoid beasts with jaws full of sharp

fangs! The crowd rushes, panicked, to the heroes... and suddenly they all look like monsters. The party sees that over a hundred beasts roam the city, they clearly know it's an illusion and that there are only a couple of enemies, but they're unable to distinguish them in the crowd.

Hallucinations should make the players question what GM is telling them. For instance, a character answers her communication jack, hearing the voice of her greatest enemy who claims that he will attack her today. Or another hero turns the TV on, and instead of the race he expects, he sees a recording showing his best friend fighting – and eventually getting devoured – by Horde monsters in a secret arena. Or the team leader logs in to his banking account to see that all the party's assets have been deleted, withdrawn by the hero himself just a few minutes ago. Of course, the players will start doubting their heroes' senses, but the problem is not them seeing through the lies – rather that they might ignore the truth. If they ignore unusual things, eventually they will get into real trouble. If a character starts seeing a swarm of crawlers in every alley, they will eventually stop checking whether they're an illusion. And the hero who has to face phantom threats every day will eventually dismiss similar threats to the boss of the Syndicate.

## Voices in your Head

The character who gains the attention of the dark gods might gain a constant companion – a voice in his head. It

should only rarely appear (we don't want a session to change into a monologue by an immaterial spirit). It might speak of tortures, which await the character after death if she doesn't worship the Devourer or some other deity. It might offer him great power – for the small price of his immortal soul. It will give them access to secrets of black magic, betray the darkest secrets of their foes, warn about threats, or tell them about traps and surprises.

The voice in the head needs not to be a hindrance. The player should be able to quiet it down, for instance by making a Spirit roll – but the voice should also speak things which will cause the whole party to listen. Sometimes it's an opportunity for you to pass the players some knowledge that can't be given in any other way – and will prove true later. The voice can give out good advice without any explanation of how it knows things. It should also make an effort to protect its carrier from damage – especially if it's other people that are a threat. If someone wants to sell them an Old Earth relic, the voice will warn them that's a forgery. A corporate drone gives them a mission? The hero with the voice will also hear that there's a hidden agenda and tell them the truth.

Of course, there is a catch.

The being inside the character's head doesn't really want to help him, but turn him into another slave of the Enemy. And naturally, the player will always ignore any temptation for power, wealth or influence, since well, the game would

be over for him, unless the entire party turns evil. So don't tempt the player to act evil – let the voice offer something interesting, valuable or necessary completely for free. No small print, no strings attached. Of course, the voice will do some of the spiel about terror, power and magic, but this is just because it's expected. The real goal of the demon is to make the heroes depend on its knowledge and advice. The player will be careful, especially at the start. You need to make it clear: the voice will tell the truth, and that truth will be valuable. It will start twisting the truth when the players take it for granted. Initially everything will go smoothly – it will tell the hero the access codes to the account where a gang launders their dirty money. In reality it will be the life savings of an honest man... Or the voice will lead them to a murderer who did really kill his wife (but who was, however, an agent of Infinity living under a secret identity). Their mysterious benefactor doesn't care about the figurine for its value – but for the memory chip hidden inside containing a couple of weird rituals. The voice will serve the hero with half-truths, things not so easy to verify. It will say things to warp the perceptions of the character and to change how she is perceived. The hero will think of himself as the same person he used to be – but to others he'll gradually change into a ruthless, greedy and ambitious bastard.

Then there will be time for a harder hit. The party will accept a task, the voice will tell them how to solve it, and in the end it will turn out that the heroes have become the villains. Their employer was a cult leader, their opponents – harmless



victims, and everything was recorded and reported to the authorities. The heroes will stop being bounty hunters, mercenaries or Syndicate enforcers and will turn into dangerous criminals. And this will be the time when the voice will be open, tell them exactly what's happened, and will show them the only way of survival – the cult. And if they refuse? The voice will disappear to help those who hunt the PC.

This is an extreme scenario. It won't work for every party (a tale of the fall is not a universal theme in Nemezis), and many players will distrust the voice from the start. There's nothing wrong with that. The voice is supposed to be a background element, showing that the capabilities of the dark gods are beyond human cognition. Where does the knowledge of the voice come from? How does it know everything? And what exactly is it? Of course, it's a demon.

## Demons and Possession

Possession in space opera? Well, it's hard. It's not enough to watch an old movie – because when something goes wrong, the heroes will just shoot the possessed. And when the demon threatens something the party cares about, possession in the game will be resolved simply, boiling down to using the plasma weapon on the victim - and there's nothing wrong with that!

So how to show the real horror of possession? Just take the players' favorite NPC and throw him into the heart of

the cult – as a sacrifice or a follower, whatever. As the result of a terrible ritual, he will become the carrier of an alien, bodiless intellect which will transform a sympathetic character into a horrible villain. The characters can free their friend, but the sect can also let him loose; after all, he's a fellow worshipper. And further developments depend on the style of the campaign. The players could suspect the existence of the demon, but it should not manifest from the first moment. A possessed cultist is not a monster waiting to receive a beam of energy from a CW laser. He will act normally through two or three games, being helpful to the players... and then he will start his nefarious activities. To achieve his goals he will need allies, money and influence – so he will start earning money, hiring workers, organizing parties for businesspeople and politicians. He will start low, but thanks to demonic powers and inhuman determination he will become a major player on the planet. And then his inhuman nature will show – his parties will be ever more decadent. He will start a club for VIPs and offer “strong experiences” to his customers – and use the materials for blackmail. And if he doesn't find any leverage, he will hire thugs to get rid of his opponents. And what will it lead to? Well, that depends on how much power he gets. He could create his own cult, try to cause more degeneration, introduce a dictatorship. Anything that will cause the planet to fail and strengthen the cults of the dark gods.

Yes, don't think of possessed humans as monsters. They don't turn their heads

180 degrees, they don't look like zombies nor do they have nine inch long claws. If the players confront them directly, the demon might reveal its presence, but why would it do this?

So when can you use a dangerous, possessed monster with fire in its eyes? In specific conditions, on the chaotic worlds overrun with anarchy – on Copernicus, torn by war, or in the slums of Ash. There, a possessed isn't a slick businessman, but a nasty killer who doesn't need to hide his nature, goals or capabilities. And so, imagine a party of tough, cocky bounty hunters who don't believe in hellfire – and need to reassess their beliefs when the possessed use their amazing powers.

The possessing demons aren't killers – the Enemy has other tools for that. They're schemers, and they won't risk trouble just to kill a mortal, however powerful. It's better for them to wait it out – escape, leave the foe's empire. After all, it will be able to regain its power, but it might not return to the human world if the carrier dies or it becomes exorcised. And this is a good time to consider what the demons really are. Are they nanoids that infect the body and reconstruct the brain? Immaterial beings that devour the souls of the victims? Beings from another dimension controlling humans like puppets? Consider this before statting up the demons in your game and deciding how to defeat them. Can the demons be destroyed or just exorcised? If they leave the body of their victim, do they retain the memories and knowledge they absorbed? How hard it is to summon the same demon again? Do you just need the gift and the power

or are there other limitations? You don't have to have the details for all demons, but you should have answers for that one specific demon. And will it return to have its vengeance?

## Game Mechanics of Possession

The demon needs just a couple of traits. It has only Spirit and Smarts, can have only social or mental skills like Gambling, Persuasion, Streetwise, Taunt or Intimidate, and the Possession arcane skill, based on Spirit. You can add any non-physical Edges and Hindrances if necessary. Demons are Wild Cards.

To enter the mind of the character, the demon must maintain eye contact with it (if it's in some other's being body) or be summoned. This is an opposed Spirit roll – if demon succeeds, the character has a major problem. The monster can speak to him; the voice is quiet but irritating. In any scene during which the demon speaks to the PC it needs to spend one power point. During action scenes like combat, quieting a demon down requires spending an action and defeating the demon in another opposed Spirit roll. Outside combat you can easily silence the spirit after a minute of concentration.

The demon can directly take control of the character – treat this as using its *puppet* power, which will work until the end of the scene.

It's not easy to get rid of the demon. You can exile it using plot-related methods

(exorcisms), but you can also muster your own will and get rid of it with a series of psychic duels. To start this combat, you have to spend a Benny. A success and a raise means that the monster permanently loses 1 Power Point. When the PP drop to 5 the monster is exiled. A player character can automatically exile a demon by forgoing an advance.

### **Arcane Background (Possession)**

**Arcane skill:** Possession (Spirit)

**Power Points:** 10

**Initial Powers:** Puppet plus two others.

Possession is the most powerful weapon of demons, allowing them to turn an ordinary being into a faithful servant of the vile deities. Each demon is different, and has different abilities – some can empower their carrier, others cure, others can cause wounds. Most of them use their abilities to help the carrier, but if they are running the show, they can wound and even kill his friends.

**Overpower:** If the demon rolls 1 on his Possession skill die (regardless of Wild Card), the awareness of the demon is crushed by the host's mind. It can't spend Power Points until the end of the session (including whispering to its victim).

### **Show Me What You Can Do**

Any GM worth their salt knows better than to describe the monster directly. The effects of the monsters' deeds should be more visible than the monster itself. A dead patrol of marines, a transient fried to a crisp, a nosy reporter driven mad. Strange trails on the walls, acidic holes in the floor. Screams of murdered

victims coming from the other end of the starship.

And what do the players think? Well, if you're good, it might be unsettling. But why would a typical RPG character be afraid of a monster? We have plasma weapons! And that's entirely an intended effect. The basic horror rules won't work in 100% in Nemezis. You can spin a yarn about claw markings on the wall, pools of acid and screams of victims, but at the end of the day the players know that they will draw the initiative cards and roll to hit the monster.

But consider another thing – let the monster show its disgusting deeds to the players. This is a high-tech environment: the characters can watch camera recordings, send scout drones or use psionic powers to observe the world. It's hard to hide the monster – so let it demonstrate its power and toss Extras around like rag dolls. Honestly, in *Savage Worlds* you don't even have to break the rules – you can even give the players some Extras to play out with d6 in most stats. After all, a monster that leaves deep claw marks on spaceships' steel bulkheads won't be a weakling.

Of course, you shouldn't overdo it, or eventually the party will take a couple of dozen Extras in red shirts on every adventure. But if you provide the players with other actions besides hunting the dark gods, the horror will turn into grotesque comedy.

# Nemezis: The Dark, Freed

I believe that there is some reason why mankind still exists, not some mere coincidence. True, we do not have the technology able to compete with the creations of the Poisoner or Mesu.

We aren't even able to understand their powers, and most of people simply call them magic. Are we better than some other civilizations - because I'm sure that there were others - that were destroyed by the spawn of the Wyrms? Perhaps we're different. We exist only because we're individuals who can never rescind their identity. I believe that we can survive the war with the gods only because we have souls.

**Fabio Capella**

All information concerning the secrets of Nemezis has been presented so as not to directly influence events in the campaign. They're supposed to be elements of the background and a set of instructions for the Game Master. Therefore, if the GM has a different

vision of the nature of the vile gods, he can introduce it without significantly changing the cohesion of the world. The notes below can be used during games, or as an inspiration to design your own adventures - their purpose is to explain not only the abilities of the gods, but

also their goals and the reason of their war with mankind.

## Nemezis

No one can understand the true nature of Nemezis. The origins of the most destructive force in the Galaxy were forgotten millions of years ago, before the human race existed. No one knows whether this is a supremely developed civilization, whose energy needs are so strong that it's able to destroy all life so that no species will ever threaten its superiority - or maybe an ancient evil force, created during the first moments of the Universe. For the purposes of gameplay there's no difference which version is considered canonical. The following version is the "official" one, created for the GMs who want to be 100% compatible with the author's vision.

The evil emerging from the dark between the stars has never encountered beings similar to humans. For untold eons it has destroyed all the intelligent life which has appeared on any of the planets of this Galaxy. Wonderful civilizations, not knowing the ideas of war or death, have been defeated by tool of this evil force, the Wyrms of the Void. This dark power is called Nemezis.

Whenever it perceived any potential threat, it used all its arsenal of weapons, and destroyed all the intelligent lifeforms which could in time threaten

it. It kills to survive, and all resistance is futile. This vile being was powerful enough to eradicate young, often very peaceful, societies in a matter of a few decades.

However, never before in the history of Galaxy had there emerged a species the members of which had such separate, individual identities. At a certain level of development each previous culture has created a collective consciousness, able to decide the fate of the entire community. These collective decisions, optimal for the entire race, allowed them to develop much faster than humans, but in the war with Nemezis they became the cause of their doom. When an entire culture is driven by a single idea, there can't be surprising, insane, even suicidal - but brilliant - decisions. Humans argue, fight each other, are primitive, cruel and merciless - but they're free. They're able to commit thousands of mistakes just to make the right choice at the right moment and win. They're able to fight even where there's no chance to win. Hope, tenacity, passion - these are the greatest weapons of mankind. Without these, we're destined to fall.

A tale of dark gods put to sleep for eons is a lie. Landing on Nyx was not the true cause of destruction of Earth. Nemezis has been observing the Galaxy and detected humanity at the beginning of their era of colonization - luckily for them, it focused on destroying another race, much more developed, which had colonized almost an entire dwarf galaxy in Canis Major. Since humans were a fledgling species, Nemezis decided to destroy the more threatening opponent.

This decision gave humankind enough time to build their own galactic empire.

Nemezis noticed humans again when they colonized the Eclipse system. It remembered Mesu and the conflict which had once destroyed its unity – and it realized how dangerous the human race had become. It could not allow Mesu to be freed. The decision of starting an invasion of human colonies was only a matter of time. And yet, Nemezis is weak. A destructive conflict with the Canis Major galaxy has drastically decreased its options. However, the available arsenal of weapons should allow it to destroy the young human race.

The Devourer of Worlds (or maybe even a couple of other beasts like that), the Poisoner, Nnyrt and the Horde are the most powerful basic tools of the enemy. They are mindless tools with only one priority – the destruction of all life. Fear and suffering are deemed by Nemezis to be as effective as direct attack, and that's why it uses them so often. It seems that the beasts have somehow reached the consciousness of humans and reflect their deepest fears – the vile monsters assume shapes so monstrous that it's hard to believe that they've been created by intelligent beings.

Nemezis might seem simply the oldest, the most developed form of life in the Galaxy – but the truth might be even more frightening. Would nature create a civilization so vile, whose entire purpose is destroying other thinking beings? Nemezis behaves more like a virus destroying everything it encounters –

and not everything it creates using its black magic can be explained rationally. If the cultists are able to spawn vile creatures thanks to nanotech, why doesn't Nemezis create an entire army of spawn? If the Devourer can destroy stars, why doesn't Nemezis destroy all other systems? Why can neither Nemezis nor its creatures use psionics? Perhaps the answer to these questions is not understandable by the human mind. Or maybe Nemezis is pure evil, a vile, malicious force whose only goal is to destroy good? Perhaps human science is not the answer to all our questions? If there actually exist creatures which don't have to conform to universal laws, will humanity be able to accept the nature of the evil gods?

**Use in play:** Nemezis is so powerful that the dream of freeing humankind from the clutches of the dark gods is as beautiful as it is impossible. The GM shouldn't even suggest the possibility of defeating it. Why, even perceiving Nemezis in its natural form – reaching one of its remote, dark planets – is beyond the reach of any human. In no supplement or splatbook are we going to describe what Nemezis looks like, feels or thinks – it's an alien, purely evil force which needs to be an element of background, and will never appear directly.

However, while humans can't destroy Nemezis, this doesn't mean that they are doomed to failure. Millennia of war with the Canis Major galaxy have drained its forces. The war with mankind has been started by an attack of the Devourer of Worlds and the Horde – primitive tools

it hasn't used for hundreds of thousands of years. Nemezis is powerful and immortal, so even a unified human race won't be able to destroy it, but they will be able to defend themselves.

The basics of the Nemezis universe, and one of basic assumptions of the makers, was the thought that the evil gods fought by the human race are a supernatural force, coming from primeval ages when the laws governing the world were not fully shaped yet. Ideas like good, evil, life or death did not have any meaning back then – the universe was inhabited by strange, almost omnipotent beings. Nemezis has retained parts of this power until today. It wanders the universe, destroying intelligent life whenever it meets it. Its vile power is driven by the pure hatred of beings with souls – while it delights in destroying their bodies, it's aware that it can't destroy their immortal spirits. The only way to do

so is voluntary sacrifice by a mortal – a creature that gives its soul as a sacrifice to the gods, dies forever when it dies.

The future of mankind is dark. The aliens from the neighboring galaxy have been eradicated. There is no good, mystical force which would intervene to save human civilization. Human technology is nothing compared with the dark powers of the gods, their servants and cultists. The fate of mankind isn't set in stone – but if they don't unite against Nemezis, they will disappear within the next thousand years.

## Death

The claim that the aliens don't understand the concept of an individual person isn't exactly true. They lost their

More and more soldiers stationed on Cor begin to worship Mesu. They claim that the god imprisoned in the Pyramid is our savior, and will protect the faithful from the vile powers of the Devourer. Some have even tried to enter the Pyramid, to free the forgotten deity. I send these people to the front lines – not to fight the Horde but the undead. If they want liberation so much, let the servants of Death toy with them – then I drop napalm on the entire battlefield.

John H. Webber

own individuality so long ago that each sign of independent thought is treated as an evil, one that needs to be completely uprooted. Hundreds of thousands of years ago in the Nemezis collective there appeared a new thought: not to destroy the attacked races immediately, but enslave them – investigate, use them, and when the slaves have nothing left to give – only then should they be destroyed. The new dissidents named themselves Mesu – the Death. A strange name, given that Nemezis is immortal, but perhaps they referred to the death of unity.

The “civil war” of the Mesu and main body of Nemezis went on for millennia – and the majority won, and locked the minority in five graves hidden throughout the Galaxy. So far people have encountered only one of them.

Mesu is hardly an ally of humankind. If it ever breaks free it will turn humans into its puppets. What it really wants is the destruction of the part of Nemezis which has enslaved it – a simple, all too human revenge, with all the associated emotional scars. Death can't liberate itself from its prison – but the Great Pyramid of the Black Iron can be destroyed by humans, if there were someone insane enough to do it. Mesu believes that General Marrow is that person.

Just the existence of Death is proof that Nemezis is not a monolith, and that it's able to make mistakes. Yet, the fact that Mesu has been imprisoned gives hope to humans – if someone managed to shackle a powerful deity,

perhaps humans would be able to repeat this feat? A discovery of technology or a ritual which would allow them to shackle the Devourer, Poisoner, or other vile gods would give mankind a chance to survive. Sadly, there is practically no chance to understand how Nemezis has imprisoned Mesu. Perhaps humans could copy some elements of Death's prison, but such an artifact could shackle only the lesser tools of the vile race, or perhaps the stronger ones for a short period of time.

The Pyramid will not be Mesu's prison forever – and not just because in a few billion years Cor will be destroyed when the natural lifecycle of Eclipse-2 comes to an end. Even now, the vile deity is able to communicate with its followers, send dreams and nightmares, and raise the dead and Horde beasts as undead. It's a clear sign that the seals on the gates of Death's prison won't be able to hold it forever. Sooner or later they will be broken – and humans would do well to prepare themselves for that.

**Use in play:** Mesu is the most powerful creature able to appear in sessions of Nemezis. The Cor part of the Death is far more powerful than the Devourer, and all the vile gods combined wouldn't be able to defeat all five parts – only the Nemezis has greater power. The awakening of Mesu is the easiest way to destroy Eclipse and hundreds of other systems. Playing in a galaxy torn between the Death and Nemezis would have its own charm – titanic clashes of two powerful forces would destroy star after star, while humans travelled the universe in search of a safe place to save themselves from



extinction. If you find this a good theme for a campaign, you can safely base it on the destruction of the Black Pyramid – but remember that this will be an alternate reality, and future materials for Nemezis will follow a different route.

The key to the survival of mankind (and Eclipse) is learning the nature of Mesu. No one, except the most powerful cultists, is aware of Nemezis' existence. For Infinity, the Founder Families or the Syndicate the vile beasts of Horde, Devourer and Mesu are different faces of the same, foul power. They think that the attack on Cor was intended to free the Death. Humans need to learn the truth that the Horde is supposed to keep Mesu imprisoned, and that the Wyrms of the Void and monsters thought to be his spawn are just dumb tools of some far greater power. Once humans are aware of the existence of Nemezis and its goals, they can research possible methods of survival.

## The Outcasts of Nemezis

During untold millennia of existence of this foul race, it has many times experienced the cancer of dissent. The

only time the offshoots became powerful was the first time, when the Death was imprisoned. Only in a few examples were such beings allowed to exist in a weakened, castrated form. Now, when it feels threatened, the evil has let its slaves loose, to terrorize mankind. The human race knows names of two such beings – Gryt, Lord of War, and Zei-Aes.

Even though they have access to amazing powers, they're nothing compared with the power of the Devourer, the Horde or Nemezis proper. An ordinary human is just a mote of dust which they can destroy in a second, but they're no threat to human civilization as a whole. The aliens sent them to sow fear in the hearts of mortals, so just a single thought about the power of dark gods filled them with terror. Many people aren't brave enough to stand and fight the dark spawn. Some are too overwhelmed by the power of the Enemy and would rather sell their souls and join one of the cults. And yet, fear is not enough to defeat mankind. There are millions of brave men and women throughout the galaxy, ready to pick up a weapon and go to the front lines to kill the Horde beasts.

The greatest weakness of these outcasts is their intelligence. Even though on the human scale they're monstrously

I've seen a lot of weird things in the war, but if I spotted one of those bastards on the battlefield, I'd immediately order my men to pull back and call for support troops. It's not heroic to die fighting something that won't even notice shots from TPC, so I'm not going to send my men to certain death. And that's why when some kind of weird creature appears and starts massacring platoon after platoon, I always call for the Haunts and order a retreat.

Kate Rush

smart, able to create complex plans and use humans to further their own goals, you could predict their movements and counter them. An ordinary human probably couldn't outdo these beings, but maybe a group of experienced strategists assisted by advanced AIs and a group of psionics could equal these lesser deities.

**Use in play:** Destroying even one of the Outcasts is a task far beyond a group of mortals – even heroic ones. If an Outcast appears during the adventure, it should be a visible signal for players that something has gone very, very wrong, and their last resort should be escape. If the players fight these things, they're on their own. A GM can design some stats, but that'd be mostly a pointless endeavor: reaching 500 points of Toughness or withstanding an attack dealing  $d12+100$  damage is beyond powers of ordinary characters.

However, if the party can select the place and circumstances of the combat, it's a different kettle of fish. If during the campaign the player characters obtain technology able to imprison one of the Outcasts and are able to trap the monster, they should be able to free the Galaxy from it. But even if they are able to surprise it, there's still a significant

chance that the vile creature will outwit the characters and doom them.

## Madness and Hounds

The tools of Nemezis aren't able to understand the human mind. They can understand certain behaviors, are able to sense weaknesses, or understand what the average person fears, but they're unable to think exactly as a human would. Nemezis has lost many battles because the enemy behaved differently than the vile force predicted. The key to victory seems to be understanding the human soul – and that's possible to achieve only with the support of traitors.

The three Hounds and Madness are creations that the Enemy created to understand its new enemy. Madness is a construct created to analyze the human mind, and simultaneously reshape it to resemble the identity of Nemezis, while Hounds are the first cultists who sacrificed their own identities to the Devourer. In both cases the aliens have failed. The Unnamed one can't understand the human mind nor can it change it so that it functions like

The first time I heard about him was during a hunt – I was supposed to off one mean bastard, a head of some kind of gang or a sect. The cultists called him the Hound, and I don't know what he was, but he certainly wasn't human. He looked normal – just a big black guy with lots of implants – but when I pushed him against the wall, he changed into some kind of a goddamned snake. We blasted him with TPCs, rockets and plasma grenades, and he ran away. So, yeah, he was strong – but me and my lads are way tougher.

Nathan Crow

that of Nemezis. Just a touch of this creature drives humans insane – but the Madness can't see the difference and investigates the subject until he or she dies. Hounds received numerous powers and their bodies became more appropriate to their tasks – but they lost their souls. They don't think like humans anymore – instead, they behave more like machines with a complex, self-improving algorithm. Initially they were supposed to gather memories, but when they failed to do this, Nemezis changed them into spies. They gather information, sabotage the war effort and support the cults. They aren't a serious threat to mankind – sooner or later the Hounds will be destroyed.

Use in play: The Hounds have been created especially for the players who like to hurt the Big Bad. They're doomed to fail, and exist to be destroyed by the PC team. This is a demanding opponent – tracking down and confronting one of the Hounds is more a matter of entire campaign than a single adventure, yet it's still within the reach of experienced characters. The Hounds won't be significant players in the development of the entire universe.

## The Ancient One

The Poisoner picked the Ancient One as a target many years ago. Shortly after the beginning of the war with mankind, the venom of Lij started to poison nanoids, creating the body of Infinity's CEO. The fight lasted for decades – sometimes the goddess won, but often the human's willpower overcame her. Lij is the source of the evil infecting Eclipse. She's responsible for the damage done to the terraformers on Ash, and for allowing the Horde beasts to infect Cor. The Poisoner eventually lost. The Ancient One proved to be stronger. He destroyed the nanobots infected with evil, and exiled Lij from his mind; currently, he wants to exile her from Eclipse.

The Poisoner has left a visible mark on the boss of Infinity. The war with vile gods became his obsession – victory over the Devourer of Worlds and its spawn is a goal to be achieved at any cost. That's why he doesn't even treat humans as individuals – he uses them as tools and discards them when they're unnecessary. Even though he's an ally of mankind, it's hard to label him as “good” – the Ancient One himself claims that at his degree of advancement the ideas of good and evil have no meaning. What matters is

For many years I thought that the Ancient One is a myth, invented ages ago to justify the decisions of the council. Now I know that he really lives... if you want to call being stuck in a hundred-year-old crippled shell 'life'. I know that he's monstrously intelligent – and insane. How else could you explain the policy of Infinity? We can pretend that we don't know who has damaged the terraformers, but it doesn't change the truth – the most powerful corporation in Eclipse is ruled by a madman. I'm moving away as soon as I pay off my debts.

survival – us vs. them. It's easy to see similarities to Nemezis in his behavior – the destruction of the enemy is the most important objective, justifying even the most cruel and despicable deeds.

The Ancient One does not just want to destroy the Poisoner. He wants to uplift the human race, to advance to a higher level of development and transfer human consciousness into nanoid swarms. Sadly, he has no idea that such a move will not protect humanity from destruction – dozens of other species have done this already, and all of them have been eradicated by Nemezis.

**Use in the game:** The Ancient One is the key to the survival of Eclipse. Purified of Lij's venom, with great intelligence and the massive resources of Infinity, he's able to purify the system and eliminate the influences of the Horde and the dark gods. However, human feelings are completely alien to him. If he considers that destruction of Bariz is necessary to save Ash and Cor he will sacrifice the planet without hesitation – a few million deaths is nothing to him compared with the horror of a freed Mesu.

The Ancient One can also be a great curse on mankind. He's almost completely lost his humanity – perhaps during his centuries of existence within microscopic machines he's lost his soul? He has defeated the Poisoner, but the victory could've come too late and now his mind might resemble that of Nemezis rather than a human being. He certainly won't become another servant of this vile race, but he's closer to the enemies of the human race than anyone

else. Perhaps he would like to “civilize” the primitive monkeys and start to shape more and more beings in his own image?

## Alternate Visions of Nemezis.

### Join or Die

The ultimate goal of Nemezis is still to be the only being in the Galaxy, but its preferred method is not eradication, but assimilation. From the perspective of a human who's just had his family eaten by crawlers this might make no sense, but from the perspective of the Nemezis collective, humanity needs to be “formatted”. Prepared. Ready to accept what seems to be “black magic” and is really the change of the universe.

Some humans need to be terrified into submission – hence the existence of the Devourer. It is also just a tool for Nemezis, devoid of consciousness. Some of the Horde monsters are also mindless creations, but more powerful ones like nemotics are actually remnants of other species previously absorbed into Nemezis. The same goes for Hounds and some of the gods – many of which were basically the unified consciousness of their species, with Lij, for example, being a collective civilization of machines.

Some of the cults are right in this approach. This does mean a degree of immortality – but also the death of the

individual. Humans must also become a collective... and the plans of Nemezis might mean leaving a single human being alive to merge with the swarm. Some cults might be somewhat saner, and they might even be right – they want to coexist with Nemezis. Convincing it to study humans until they unify is impossible... but hiding the human race from it might work.

Mesu is somewhat of a special case here. Mesu is another alien collective – now united into a singular will, but like humans it is “incompatible” with Nemezis. While it might seem that this is beneficial, the main goal of Nemezis is assimilation. The main goal of Mesu is destruction and recreation – which explains its preference for zombies. This offers some hope for mankind – you could try let loose Mesu on Nemezis, and make these two forces damage each other in a cycle of violence. Such a titanic clash could destroy the Horizon system.

The goals of the Ancient One are ambiguous in this scenario – he might study Nemezis without much risk to himself. What would be his end goal? Maybe he would want to merge with Nemezis himself? Or become a host for it?

## Born of the Dark

Nemezis is truly our Enemy. Ours, no one else's. When the first ape started to dream and have nightmares, on the opposite end of the Solar System a dark force became aware. Some people call

it Gryt, lord of War, others point out the duality of Zei-Aes. The Enemy has many masks, and thorough our history it has tempted us to destroy and embrace the darkness. And when humans landed on its homeworld, it unleashed its true power.

Nemezis is simply a vile force, a materialization of capital-E Evil. Monsters it creates are drawn from human nightmares. The gods are aspects of its destructive might. And the more advanced the capabilities of humans, the more powerful the Nemezis becomes.

This scenario seems bleak, but at least it's straightforward. Nemezis is evil, and we need to fight it. Does that make us good? Well, to an extent. Nemezis can't be defeated as long as humans are free-willed creatures. However, here Nemezis has an obvious heart – the actual Nemezis homeworld, still drifting near the remnants of the Solar system. Destroying this world would not destroy Nemezis... but it would reduce it to several strange alien creatures, without a single will behind them.

Other alien races before us all faced their demons. All of them were destroyed, and all of the previous Nemeses perished in the moment when the last sentient enemy died, not realising this consequence. And many species will face their Nemezis after us...

Well, except Mesu. Mesu is what happens when a species finds balance with its evil twin. It's reduced to a force, a snake eating its own tail. Mesu is not sentient as we understand the term. It's

two mutually exclusive consciousnesses locked in eternal conflict – and the psychic waves emanating from this cause madness and nightmares in Corisian soldiers. There's little hope of “releasing” Mesu – the destruction of its prison would probably destroy all sentient minds on the planet and cause madness on Ash and Bariz. However, a psionic collective could at least try and

delve into Mesu's consciousness, and fathom the motivations of Nemezis. With time, protection against insanity and determined leaders like the Ancient One, we could lock some parts of Nemezis away – but we would have sacrifice some of our humanity.