

WEIRD TALES OF SPACE AND SCIENCE-FICTION

August 2021

ZATAR

\$5

From the Mind of
N. Masyk!

A Venusian Ship-
Trap!

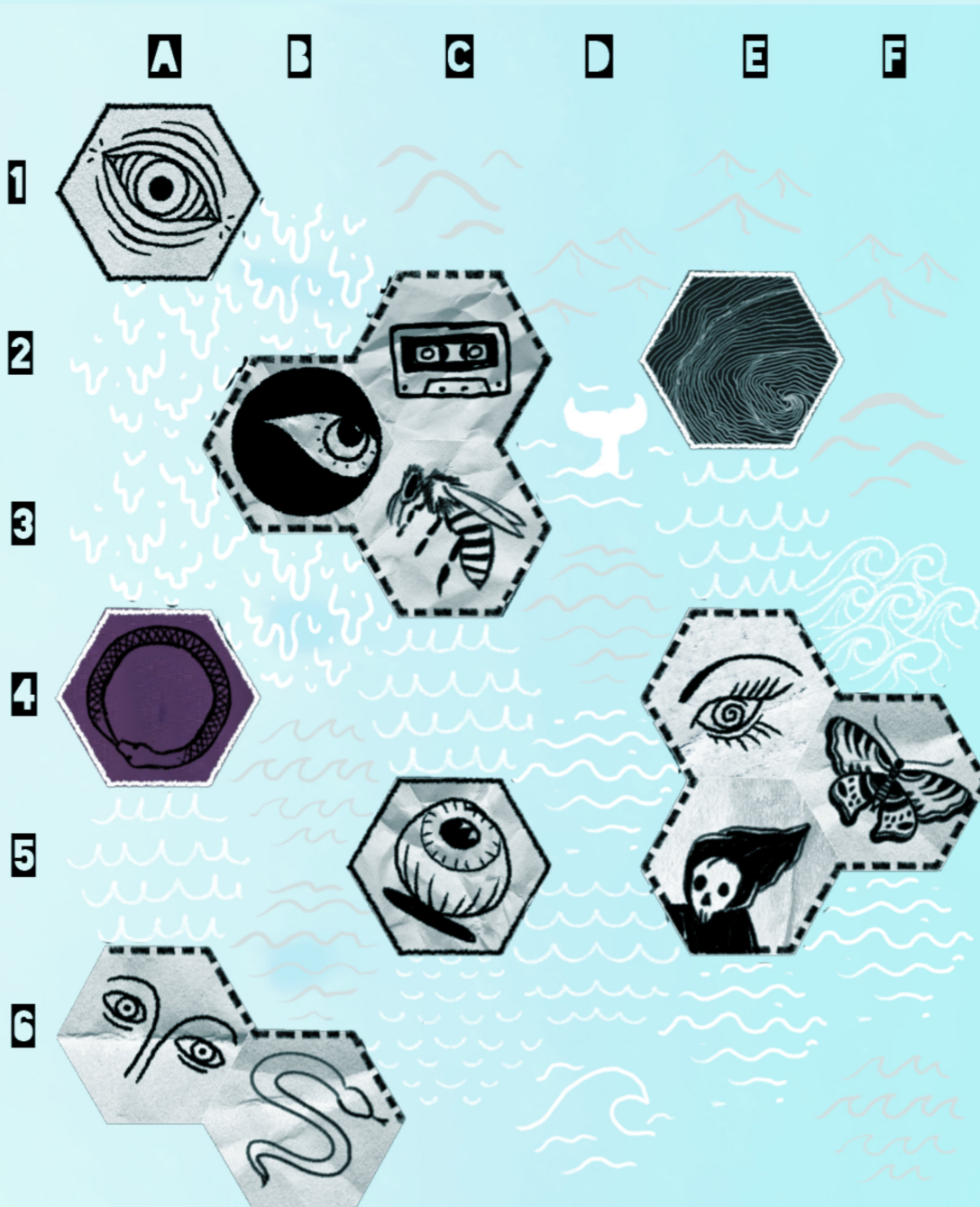
The Spy Drones are
Always Watching!

and

The Horrors of the
Von Newmann
Probes!

DOOMCRAWL NES

HEXES



1A: Panopticon - Thousand Eyes, Incorporated, a surveillance megacorp, is testing an experimental nano-drone surveillance cloud here. Exposure to Thousand Eyes spy-drones is considered “assumed consent to partaking in a trial version of the Thousand Eyes security program,” which is free for one standard solar month, after which a monthly fee is incurred.

2B: Dyson Sphere - A megastructure of solar-powered vacuum nano-drones orbiting a high-radiation star. Licensed by Dyson Heavy Manufacturing Concern to create and then clean up spaceborn garbage.

2C: Sanctuary of the Senses - A Cerulean megachurch much acclaimed for constant, non-stop live-streamed traditional religious hymnals. Singers are signed to year-long indentured contracts which only pay out upon completion.

2E: Void Storm - A powerful void storm has been blowing across this area of space for a century - conveniently across the only untolled subspace shipping lane in the sector. Thousands of ships attempt to “ride the lightning” every orbital cycle and avoid sector toll-collectors.

3C: Giga-Wasp - The glittering polyhedral honeycomb of a giga-wasp colony sits suspended among an asteroid belt. Vespian laborers extract and jar giga-honey scurrying amidst the crushing tentacles of titans.

4A: Orobouros - A centuries-old galactic proxy-war fought by Von Newmann drones. New drones are auto-recycled from destroyed wreckage. The original warring corps and their subsidiaries have long been bought out by competitors.

4E: Cerulean Arcology - A lush and vibrant luxury resort for affluent aquatic denizens. A staff primarily consisting of indentured debt-contracted laborers

caters to the executive boards of a dozen galactic megacorp. Considered “neutral” ground for corporate assassinations.

4F: Void Moths - The migration route of a species of ethereal space moths, drifting with phantasmal wings atop solar winds. The moth-clouds interfere with most conventional corporate scanners, making this subsector a popular haunt for smugglers.

5C: Venusian Ship-Trap - Alien megafauna root structure, clinging to asteroid fragments and cosmic debris. The Abraxis Tourism Board, in cooperation with Matsumura Debt Restructuring, offers two tiers of “guided tours” of the debris belt, the less expensive of which exposes tourists to psychic thralldom at the hands of the megafauna hive-mind. Thralls cannot legally possess property in this sector.

5E: Ship Graveyard - Derelict vessels and radiation ghosts, left over from galactic unification wars of Long Ago. Corporate Von Newmann drones pick over the wreckage, violently defending any and all salvage containing “proprietary technology” from gig-economy pickers on freelance contracts with competitors.

6A: Tellurian Shrine - Dusty planetoid riddled with extensive cave networks. Ancient Tellurian cave-paintings hint at a common ancestor between Tellurians and Za’atarii megafungi. Tellurians on religious pilgrimages flock here by the millions with the “assistance” of the Abraxis Tourism Board, which charges a hefty fee.

6B: Medusa - The hottest nightclub in the sector. The loud music and neon strobe-lighting renders most forms of corporate surveillance inoperable, making this a popular spot for clandestine deals. The hyper-iguanoid proprietors and staff are also notoriously friendly towards down-on-their-luck hitchhikers, freelancers, and the chronically indebted.

RUMORS

2. The pollen trails produced by migrating void-moths make for an entertaining and low-risk recreational hallucinogenic.
3. The Sanctuary of the Senses talent "scouts" are offering a bounty on vocalists, particularly sopranos.
4. The hyper-iguanoids at Medusa will let down-at-heels freelancers sleep in the back room for a night, no questions asked.
5. Thousand Eyes, Incorporated is lobbying for proprietary rights over the concept of "a secret."
6. The trick to "riding the lightning" across the void-storm subsector is getting as close to the storm as possible and riding the solar winds.
7. Dyson Heavy Manufacturing Concern is offering lucrative privateer contracts against rival shipping contractors. The more collateral damage incurred, the larger the payout.
8. Nobody is certain who - if anyone - is in control of the Von Newmanns anymore, but there are an order of magnitude more drones than crewed spacecraft in the sector.
9. Matsumura Debt Restructuring has bought several billion credits' worth of private medical debt and are amassing a small fleet with which to collect.
10. Radiation-ghost void-echoes often possess knowledge of corporate secrets that the corps would pay to obtain and/or kill to conceal.
11. The Abraxis Tourism Board is seeking "interpreters" to psionically communicate with the Venisuan Ship-Trap.
12. There is a lucrative side-hustle among Arcology wait-staff in procuring discrete and intimate companionship for high-paying corporate executives.
2. Giga-wasp stinger (Close, 1d6+1, Two-Handed).
3. Tourism Board-branded star-maps (inaccurate).
4. Graphic-printed garment. "I went to the Venisuan Ship-Trap and all I got was this lousy t-shirt!" Synthetic materials.
5. Sanctuary of the Senses vocalist contract. Blank.
6. Data-disc video-recording. "Best of Lightning-Rider Bloopers, Volume XVII."
7. Thousand Eyes nano-drone (disabled).
8. Void-helmet with a head still in it. (Mostly)-intact HUD contains coordinates to a treasure.
9. Arcology all-inclusive gene-locked wristband (aquamarine tier).
10. Dyson Heavy Manufacturing Concern-branded space debris.
11. Medusa drink-ticket, expired.
12. Rad-ghost recording. Contains proprietary recipe for a carbonated energy drink.

LOOT

ZATAR words and layout by N. Masyk. With thanks to Micah Anderson, Ian Woolley, Guilherme Gontijo and Jared Sinclair. Art in the public domain. Hex map by John Battle.

in loving memory of Daniel Dumile AKA MF DOOM

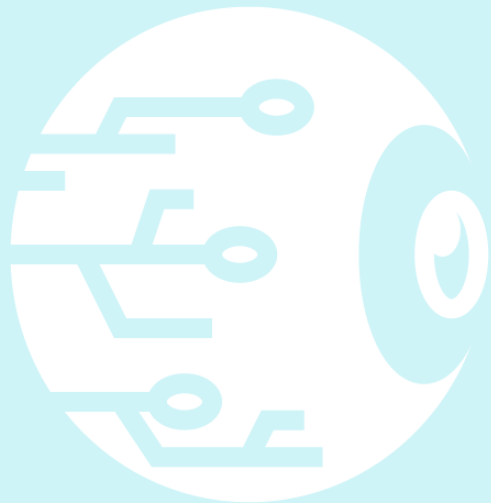
ENCOUNTERS

- 2. Abraxis Tourism Board Guidedroid** (HD 1, AV 2). Aggressively selling guided tours to the Ship-Trap.
- 3. Venusian Thrall** (HD 1, AV 0). Rumpled jumpsuit has a nametag and a “Dyson Heavy Manufacturing Concern” logo. Never tests morale.
- 4. Giga-Wasp** (HD 18, AV 12). Four wings, nine tentacles, twelve stingers.
- 5. Vespian Wasp-Monk** (HD 2, AV 2). There are no old or bold wasp-monks. Never test Morale; always flees.
- 6. Thousand Eye Nano-Cloud** (HD 1, AV 3). After 1d6 Rounds will retreat back to the Drone Comptroller.
- 7. Debt Restructurer** (HD 4, AV 2). Servo-rockets and masers for “restructuring” the indebted.
- 8. Hyper-Iguanoid** (HD 3, AV 2). Chill, brah. Makes good cocktails.
- 9. Proto-Tellurian** (HD 2, AV 0). Covered in cryostasis goo.
- 10. Long War Rad-Ghost** (HD 1, AV 0). Keeps repeating corporate jingles. “Denham’s dentifrice...”
- 11. Sanctuary Enforcer** (HD 3, AV 2). Prevents contract-holders from defaulting.
- 12. Dyson Heavy Manufacturing Unit** (HD 6, AV 6). Armed with a concerning amount of heavy manufacturing tools.
- Primitive Tellurian potsherds. Fragile. 50 C.
- Lightning in a bottle. Freshly harvested. 250 C.
- Abraxian shard-wine, Bin 314. Vintage 2154; a good year. 1,000 C.
- Rad-ghost residue. Contained in a prism. 500 C.
- Giga-wasp royal jelly. Royally decadent. 500 C.
- String of Cerulean prayer-pearls. 200 C.
- Restricted military-grade targeting systems. Formatted for remote drones. 2,500 C.
- Von Newmann wetware chip. No serial number. *Priceless.*
- Fermented giga-mead, brewed by Vespian monks. 10 C.
- Venusian symbiote. Dormant. 750 C.
- Void-moth wing pollen dust. Highly refined. 5000 C.

GOODS

COMPLICATIONS

1. A Thousand Eye drone gets “stuck” to your hull. Not only is it reporting back your every move, but Thousand Eyes, Inc. is accusing you of theft of proprietary technology.
2. Minor collision. You scrape the paint of a Tellurian pilgrim vessel, the captain of which is demanding either religious ablution or compensation for the repairs.
3. Deliberately-placed Dyson Heavy Manufacturing Concern debris field. Your solar exhaust pipe is clogged by space debris and is flooding the crew compartment with noxious fumes.
4. Communications array malfunction. A Sanctuary of the Senses broadcast plays over all internal frequencies, filling the corridors with non-stop hymnals.
5. Debt has been bought. Matsumura Debt Restructuring has ‘acquired’ your debt package and their Collections Agents are redoubling efforts to get their money’s worth.
6. Minor property damage. Your routine core vent ‘disturbed’ an alien ecology ‘protected’ by the Abraxis Tourism Board.



2. **Dhyslienne** (HD 6, She/They Generous, Towering). Nepenthes privateer. Lost their crew to the Ship-trap, making revenge plans against the Abraxis Tourism Board. Nothing to lose.
3. **Periwinkle** (HD 1, He/Him, Romantic, Burn Scars). Tellurian tech-adept. Composing and loudly reciting traditional Tellurian love-sonnets. Traditional Tellurian love-sonnets are often days long.
4. **Rowan** (HD 1, They/Them, Approachable, Voice Box). Human soldier. Sizeable bounty by Matsumura Debt Restructuring. Hiding out at Medusa.
5. **Lacquer 17-corporus** (HD 2, Xey/Xem, Pious, Slender). Synth technician. Studying Von Newmanns. Straying dangerously close to maser-fire in Ouroboros.
6. **Shiala** (HD 3, She/Her, Turquoise, Neon Makeup). Cerulean specialist. Talented soprano. Hunted by Sanctuary contract-enforcers. Posing as a barista at the Arcology.
7. **Ambergris** (HD 2, He/They, Scholarly, Armor-Plated). Tellurian technician. Solitary salvage-station inside the ship graveyard. Smells like garbage.
8. **Proper** (HD 3, They/Them, Religious, Rapid-Fire Speech). Vespian soldier. Dreams of joining the choir at the Sanctuary of the Senses. Terrible singing voice.
9. **Shadow** (HD 6, He/They, Eloquent, Cybernetic Wings). Vespian specialist. Notorious arms dealer. Death penalty in twelve systems.
10. **Wysixia** (HD 3, They/Them, Cheerful, Cloning Errors). Nepenthes technician. Fleeing Dyson Heavy Manufacturing Concern battle-droids. Accidentally leaked dyson sphere structural plans to a competitor.
11. **Taix** (HD 3, She/Her, Emerald, Black Eyes). Cerulean technician. Arcology marketing executive. Moonlights as a dancer at Medusa under the name ‘Farrah Moan.’
12. **Blake** (HD 1, She/Her, Reckless, Ultraviolet). Human soldier. Frozen in cryosleep en-route to “the front” of some forgotten war; troop transport destroyed by Von Newmanns. A woman out of time.

FREELANCERS

JOBS

THOUSAND EYES, INCORPORATED

1. Recover a lost surveillance drone from the Ship-Trap
2. Attach a rider to the Sanctuary of the Senses' broadcast to transmit to the Panopticon
3. Steal a Dyson Heavy Manufacturing Concern garbage drone
4. Recover an intact Von Newmann drone from the Ouroboros
5. Plant a surveillance drone in the back room at Medusa
6. Steal security footage data-tapes from the Arcology

DYSON HEAVY MANUFACTURING CONCERN

1. Detonate a bomb at the center of the ship graveyard
2. Secure a cleaning contract for the Medusa back room
3. Steal a Thousand Eyes drone
4. Rig a Von Newmann to detonate
5. Secure mining rights for the Tellurian shrine
6. Re-direct the void-moth migration route

SANCTUARY OF THE SENSES

1. Reverse-engineer a Thousand Eyes drone to broadcast
2. Find a soprano at Medusa
3. Adapt a Von Newmann into an amplifier
4. Acquire Dyson blasting-caps for a pyrotechnics show
5. Make a suitable "donation"
6. Test the Ship-trap psychic thralldom on the choir

ABRAXIS TOURISM BOARD

1. "Misdirect" a convoy of indentured contract-workers towards the Ship-trap
2. Discover a planetoid and name it after the Abraxis Tourism Board
3. Re-freeze an escaped Proto-Tellurian
4. "Volunteer" at the Ship-Trap
5. Bring a shipment of processed void-moth pollen
6. Disseminate Abraxis Tourism Board maps of the Ship-Trap

Von Newmann Probe

Ship Armor Value: 2

Shield Points: 4

Hull Points: 4

Weapons: Maser (Close. 1d6-1 damage. Overheats on a 1.)

Special: A destroyed Von Newmann craft recovers 1d6 Hull Points while Close to any functioning Von Newmann craft.

Von Newmann Berserker

Ship Armor Value: 8

Shield Points: 18

Hull Points: 9

Weapons: Heavy Maser x4 (Near. 2d6. Overheats on a 2, 3, or 4.), Magnetohydrodynamic Lance (Far. 3d6. Overheats every shot.)

Special: A destroyed Von Newmann craft recovers 1d6 Hull Points while Close to any functioning Von Newmann craft.

Von Newmann Seeder

Ship Armor Value: 5

Shield Points: 12

Hull Points: 6

Weapons: Medium Maser x2 (Close. 1d6. Overheats on a 1 or 2.)

Special: A destroyed Von Newmann craft recovers 1d6 Hull Points while Close to any functioning Von Newmann craft.

SHIPS