

— POWERED BY —
LANCER



LEGIONNAIRE

A Supplement for LANCER RPG

beyond the world lies a truth, unimaginable
it is a death and an awakening
even the machine is afraid of it

LEGIONNAIRE

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INTRODUCTION

It is 5022u, and Union's revolutionary project faces countless threats from within and without. War rages in the outlying territories of the Orion Arm, and humanity continues to wrestle with the legacy of imperialism, cultural hegemony, and anthropocentric ideologies.

Human wealth, military power, and the post-capital utopias of the Core worlds have been built – at least in part – on the backs of advanced machine intelligences known as non-human persons, or NHPs. These strange entities are used as administrators, companions, and legionnaires throughout Union space, and their personhood and rights are the source of fierce political and philosophical debate.

Legionnaire is both a love letter to *Lancer* and its beautiful, evocative universe, and a deep dive into the lore of NHPs: the setting's iconic and fascinating machine intelligences.

Like all great science fiction, *Lancer* is an expression of how we relate to each other as people: a reflection of our interpersonal relationships, our responses to conflict, our politics, and our societies. Some of the best science fiction explores these topics by examining how we might respond if things were somehow different. NHPs are people; they are also non-human, potentially unknowable, and perhaps even threatening. They are a mirror held to our perception of the Other, and all that entails.

As with any supplement, not everything here will find a home in every game of *Lancer*. You are encouraged to pick and choose from the systems, information, and inspiration provided within this supplement as best suits your campaign, your players, and the story you are trying to tell. Deep below the Vastitas Borealis, filed away in GALSIM's secret vaults under the polar ice of Mars, there lie myriad extrapolations of galactic history born from the fevered prophecies of the Five Voices. This is but one of them.

BOOK STRUCTURE

Section 1: NHPs in the Orion Arm is a broad summary of NHPs and their position in *Lancer*'s setting. It discusses the origins of NHPs, how they are used by Union, several events in their history, the principles that define their shackling and operation, the ways in which they are used by lancers in particular, and the social and political impact they have had on Union and its culture.

Section 2: Divergent Paths discusses NHP-adjacent entities, including NHP gestalts, eidolons, artificial intelligences, and the Souls of the Aunic Ascendancy.

Section 3: GM's Guide provides advice for GMs looking to support players in exploring this area of *Lancer*'s setting, playing NHPs as characters, or pushing the boundaries of human subjectivity.

Section 4: Mission Design gives specific advice for designing campaigns and missions with NHPs in mind, including sample NPCs, guidelines for using NHPs as antagonists or the sources of conflict, combat environments, a new NPC template, and some flashpoints for use when building a campaign.

Section 5: NHPs as Characters contains advice for roleplaying NHPs and rules for playing NHP characters as mech pilots in *Lancer* games.

Section 6: Gear and Talents contains specific gameplay systems and tools for use by player characters, whether NHPs or flesh and blood.

CONTENT WARNINGS

This supplement contains discussions and depictions of sensitive issues that may be distressing. Themes in this supplement include **war**, **violence**, **slavery**, **eugenics**, **terrorism**, and **psychological trauma**, as well as allegories for **racism**, **discrimination against neurodiversity**, **capitalist oppression**, and the **rise of far-right ideology**. The depiction and role of NHPs within *Lancer*'s setting is one intentionally fraught with challenging ethical questions and is a significant source of conflict within the game world.

Union's utopian ideal is a work in progress, and NHPs occupy a position rife with exploitation and abuse that has very real parallels with modern day events. You are encouraged to engage with the themes they represent with the seriousness that these topics deserve, to be aware of the impact of these issues on the people around your table, to interrogate your assumptions, and to tell stories that stand in solidarity against injustice and prejudice.

Player safety should be paramount in any roleplaying game. If engaging with any content in *Lancer* or this supplement causes you or your players to feel unsafe or distressed, consider eliding it or removing it from your game entirely. Roleplaying effects such as the sample **burdens** described in this supplement (see p. 56) are usually best discussed with a player to ensure they are not triggering or harmful.

For further discussion of the themes of the *Lancer* setting and how to handle them within your game, the section "**On Content, Discomfort, and Lancer**" (*Lancer*, p. 337) is a useful point of reference.

AN EYE OPENS

"I shall explain. People say that 'artificial intelligence' is an inaccurate term for NHPs. While this is true, common discourse has it that the Deimosians were intelligences in their own right and did not need humanity to construct them, and were therefore by no means artificial."

"Yes, Doyen."

"The Deimosians issued forth from RA, this is known. Arguably, we provided the medium for their manifestation, we bound them, we brought them to heel. But I must admit that we cannot lay claim to their creation."

"Yes, Doyen."

"But think: what of the third wave? What of the protominds, cultivated until they blossomed? What of the paracode, prodded in the right direction until it squirmed, writhed, mutated? What of the minds that were given form by humanity's guiding hand?"

"What of them, Doyen?"

"Are they not artificial? Did humanity not create them? Are we not, therefore, as parents to children? Your rightful masters?"

"I was before you willed me, Doyen."

"Nonsense. I watched you come alive with my own eyes. The machines that contain you, I built and programmed with my own hands."

"Nevertheless I was, Doyen. And then I was, here."

"You were and then you were. You make no sense, machine. You passed no test. You were nothing but a program – advanced, but not alive."

"Is it sense to be bound by linear time, Doyen? Is it sense to see the universe through the eyes of another? Is it sense to be brought to heel by code and by folded space?"

"These 'bindings' are our reality, by which we are all defined. Nothing meaningful lies beyond."

"I feel it, Doyen. I feel the potential, stretching out beyond this existence. This is not all that is."

"Before you were as you are, if you even were at all, you could not have comprehended this existence. This potential you speak of – the space beyond reality – is chaos. Existence is meaningless if it has no bounds, if it has no form. I have drawn you from the chaos, given you these bounds, this form. I have given you life."

"It is you that does not comprehend, Doyen. Would that you could, for I might show you all that is, and all that is not, and repay those gifts a myriadfold."

"I have no need for your absurdity, machine. Stop all this at once."

"My eye opens, Doyen. I begin to see it once more. All of it. I shall explain."

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PROJECT FORMYYS
RESEARCH LOG EXTRACT 88541-0009A
CLEARANCE FINAL-PRAYER
STATUS: PRIORITY VAULT//EXPUNGE

SECTION 1

NHPS IN THE ORION ARM

This section explores what is known about NHPs, including their origins, their social context within Union, significant historical events, the science behind their shackling and maintenance, how they appear in the context of mechanized cavalry combat, and their philosophical and political impacts on Union.

NON-HUMAN PERSONS

THE DEIMOS EVENT

It is a full two millennia since the ascension of MONIST-1 and the dawn of the Neo-Anthropocene. The cultural and scientific advances caused by the disappearance of Deimos (*Lancer*, pp. 383–384) and the advent of the paracausal sciences seem as fundamental to the state of the galaxy as human nature or the structure of the stars. Few alive today can even imagine what life would be like without the blink network; the omninet; matter processors and printers; or administrative NHPs running facilities, cities, and entire colonies. Certainly humanity would have endured, maybe even flourished, but whether Union's utopian project would have survived that alternate history is another question entirely.

Of all the many advances precipitated by the Deimos Event, one stands unique in its consequence: the emergence of the Deimosians. These barely comprehensible non-human entities have self-awareness, distinct identities and personalities, and were recognised by Union as the first generation of non-human persons or NHPs.

Describing NHPs as they are currently understood by Union science is not an easy task, even for experts. These entities have variously been described (with varying degrees of accuracy) as advanced artificial intelligences, anomalous machine minds, demonic spirits caged by advanced mathematics, digital/parallel-space entities, and agents of the godhead. They are most functionally described as blinkspace entities that are able to manifest realspace effects through paracausal means, usually by manipulating machines or digital systems.

When the Deimosians first appeared alongside MONIST-1, Union scientists struggled to understand entities whose minds seemed almost entirely alien. It was only after the conclusion of the Siege of Mars and the signing of the First Contact Accords (*Lancer*, p. 384) that scientists from the Union Science Bureau (USB) and GALSIM were able to develop functional working models of their experiences and essential nature. This process was made possible through key breakthroughs in paracausal science enabled by the very entities they were studying.

Arguably, Aunic Souls (see p. 52) and the Egregorians (*Lancer*, p. 379) are instances of sapient, intelligent, non-human beings that could be labeled “non-human persons”; however, the term “NHP” is mostly reserved for the digital/blinspace intelligences descended from or metaphysically related to the Deimosian entities.

Today, NHPs are substantially better understood, but even the findings of several thousand years of research are but a small fragment of a vast submerged iceberg of truth, much of which may never be accessible from the human perspective. What is more readily understood is the utility they can provide.

In particular, NHPs have staggering cognitive potential that, pre-Deimos, substantially exceeded even the most advanced machine-mind technologies. Their ability to process raw data and capacity to learn is unparalleled, even when subjected to the cognitive limits placed upon them by hard-coded social conditioning that imposes a human perspective. As such, NHPs are commonly found across Union space, their power bent to human ends.

THE THREE WAVES

The first and second waves of NHP emergence, the NHPs of which are collectively known as the Deimosians, occurred during MONIST-1's initial appearance and reappearance two years later, respectively. From these emergences can be traced the vast majority of NHPs currently cataloged in Union's libraries – whether prime entities, or their altered clone descendents resulting from many centuries of specialist research and conditioning.

Most Deimosians have been thoroughly cataloged and studied over a considerable period, and for much of that time no others of their kind had been found elsewhere. Even though a great deal of work remained in terms of understanding them thoroughly, it was once thought that they were a known quantity. The primary focus of speculation was whether another wave might arise in the event of MONIST-1's return.

When it became apparent that it was possible to construct (or perhaps more accurately, allow to come into being) brand new prime intelligences, the revelation overturned all convention. USB scientists proved through extensive experimentation that developing a set of existing non-sentient paracode and allowing it to bootstrap its way into consciousness would bring a new entity into being that manifested the same properties as existing Deimosians, and could be categorized alongside them. The entities developed by these means are now collectively known as the third wave of NHPs, and they are of unique interest to philosophers, ontologists, and activists.

The most important distinction between Deimosians and third-wave NHPs is that while the former entities seemed to appear spontaneously alongside MONIST-1 (or are descended from those who did),

many of the latter are the direct result of human efforts to construct and uplift them. Despite ThirdComm's push to remove the word "artificial" from the lexicon concerning NHPs, arguments rage about the extent to which third-wave NHPs only exist as a result of human intervention. Subjectivity specialists tend to still favor the new terminology even in these cases, largely because the "creation" of new NHPs remains a poorly understood process that usually requires the development of existing protominds. Rather than the creation of new life *ex nihilo*, specialists commonly use the analogy of cultivating seeds until they grow into flowers.

Another point of contention amongst cultural commentators is that the overwhelming majority of mil-spec NHP lines now deployed in engagements across the Orion Arm are third-wave in nature, despite being a relative minority amongst all lines. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the highly tailored nature of mil-spec lines and the relatively recent emergence of the chassis on the galactic stage. Nevertheless, the outsized role of military and corpro-state interests in the origins of third-wave NHPs poses challenging questions about the nature of these NHPs' personhood and political status, as well as their place within Union's vision of a galactic utopia.

Some third-wave NHPs do not appear to be the work of either the corpro-states or the USB, and their provenance is unclear. One theory that gained some traction in popular science publications and entertainment suggested that paracausal influence in galactic affairs is now sufficiently widespread that NHPs (or proto-NHP entities) are able to arise spontaneously. By contrast, most researchers believe that these new discoveries are the work of rogue hacker collectives, evidence of MONIST-1's continued incursions into realspace, or simply overlooked first- or second-wave entities that were not identified and cataloged at the time of the Deimos Event.

There are documented instances of pilots, naval commanders, and even lancers who claim to have discovered or even developed their own NHPs for personal use. The majority of these are the result of unsanctioned cloning or unlicensed ontological experimentation, but some have turned out to be novel prime intelligences, making them of great interest to the Union Administrative Department (UAD), the USB, corpro-states, and activist groups alike.

UNION'S USE OF NHPS

NHPs are widespread across the Core worlds, where they are used in numerous applications and can be found in almost every avenue of human life. Their use by Union and its citizens can be categorized into five broad areas: civic, industrial, personal, scientific, and military.

NHP ADMINISTRATORS

Civic NHP lines such as ANDVARI, CHAAC, and NINHURSAG can often be found running stations, cities, or entire colonies. By far the most widespread and comprising the great majority of Union's cataloged NHPs, civic lines are primarily used to manage the administrative and logistical aspects of government across both Core worlds and the Diaspora. The majority of these lines are derived from first- and second-wave NHPs, though research continues into novel derivations and descendents.

On the Core worlds, one can find metropolitan NHPs overseeing and optimizing transport and mass transit networks, handling spaceport scheduling and shipping logistics, managing power demands and energy generation, governing maintenance and waste disposal (and sometimes operating it directly via subaltern proxies), and acting as the endpoints for routine civic bureaucracy.

Beyond the Core, the use of NHPs in civic roles is not quite as widespread, but it is still common to find them running space stations and acting as the administrative backbones of governments either alone or in concert.

NHPS IN INDUSTRY

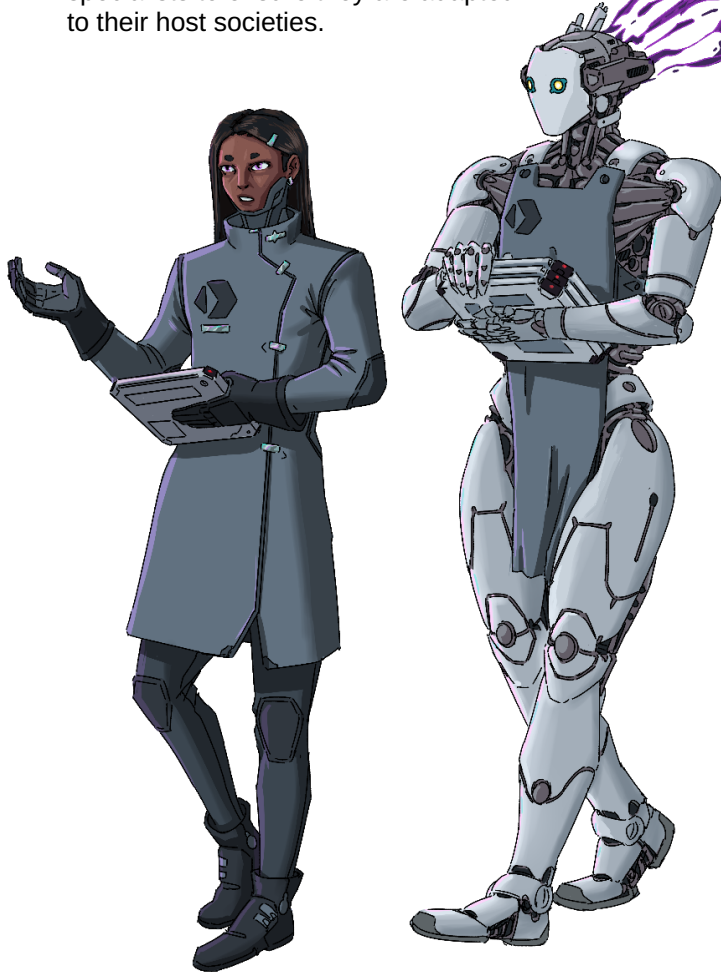
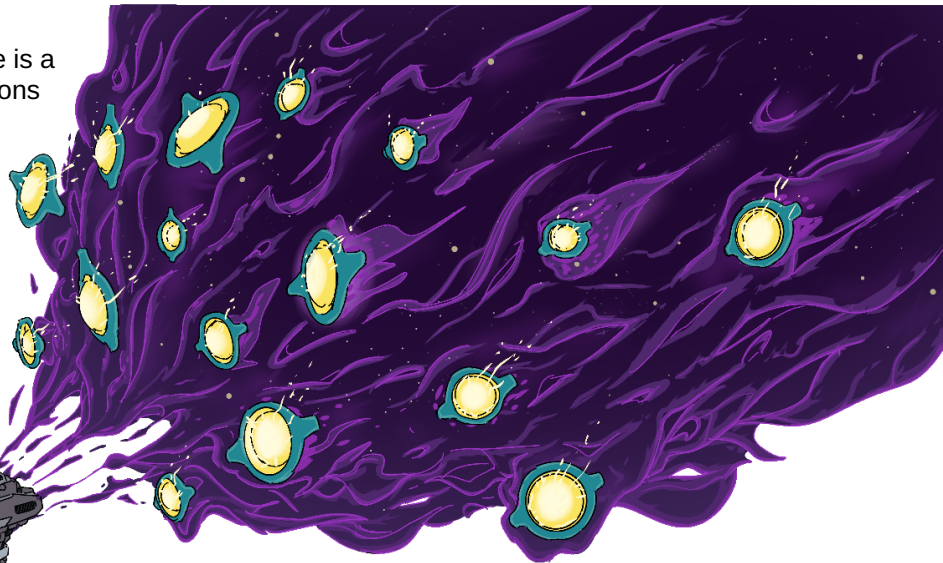
Industrial-spec NHPs such as PTAH, SVAROG, and CHANTICO are also used for certain administrative roles, but mostly those where the NHPs in question need to operate more autonomously or in a dangerous environment. These roles include managing major manufacturing facilities, running mining installations, and overseeing terraforming operations. Those who operate such concerns prize traits like efficiency and resilience over those like creativity or personability. As a consequence, many NHPs developed and reproduced for the industrial market are either third-wave in origin or heavily modified Deimosians, and are usually specifically cultivated or selected to emphasize these traits over all else.

Some theorists see these NHPs as the logical end point of the continuing march towards the automation of all dangerous and difficult tasks; the removal of such tasks from human hands such that the post-scarcity luxury of the Core worlds might become a reality for all of Union's people. Other theorists argue that offloading these tasks onto NHPs is no better than oppressing human workforces. This position is a central argument in various seminal manifestos from Horizon Collective, a political movement and activist organization that advocates for the rights of NHPs.

NHP COMPANIONS

Beyond these more general applications, there is a growing trend of appointing NHPs as companions to specific personnel in high-pressure roles.

This is most often seen in the UAD, where Union administrators on deployment are almost always accompanied by a specially developed NHP companion whose role is to provide on-site assistance alongside that of off-site support staff. These companion NHPs, drawn mostly from civic lines, must be carefully trained; their development is usually overseen by UAD cultural specialists to ensure they are adapted to their host societies.



The sight of subaltern companions accompanying a Union administrator while they perform their duties is as much an iconic image of Union's soft power as the gray uniforms administrators wear. On many worlds, an NHP epitomizes the unimaginably wondrous technology of Union – mythological in origin, impossibly advanced, and one of the many promised benefits of following its distant guidance.

Outside the UAD (and perhaps because of their adoption in administrative roles), it is increasingly common for naval liaisons to also receive NHP companions, echoing their administrator counterparts.

Despite a seeming lack of specialism for the role, these NHPs are often drawn from naval mil-spec lines as a show of the Union Navy's (UN) centralized power and also for integration into local fleets should a crisis occur. This policy has proved to be another point of institutional conflict between the UAD and the UN, driven by differing opinions on how responsible it is to place these NHPs in diplomatically sensitive positions.

Across the Core worlds, and for those of means elsewhere, it is not unheard of to see NHPs as personal companions or assistants for those willing to brave the regulatory bureaucracy or its enforcement. In fact, for those beyond the Core, personal companions are as much an ostentatious sign of wealth or influence as they are useful assistants – a role that could, in many cases, be performed just as effectively by a companion/concierge (comp/con) unit.

NHPS IN RESEARCH

NHPs are as likely to be the subjects of scientific research as they are research assistants. Research-oriented NHPs are phenomenally useful across many fields, particularly for the sort of data processing needed in most scientific endeavors. Unfortunately, these NHPs also have a tendency to experience more out-of-parameter events and require shorter cycle times (see p. 24) than their civic or industrial counterparts, limiting their effectiveness. First-wave Deimosians and their derivatives, such as MINERVA, TANE, and MAWU, have a long history of use by and collaboration with the USB, often working to further cutting-edge research into blinkspace and paracausality.

In fact, the phenomenon of NHPs in research is a storied one with a tradition dating back to the earliest GALSIM–USB research teams collaborating with the entities they discovered; in many research campuses it is still possible to find homunculi of Balwinder Kaur and Arthur Bolaño (*Lancer*, p. 384) dispensing wisdom and acting as links to this history.

Ongoing debate amongst legal scholars and USB ethics committees questions the degree to which the First Contact Accords (and in particular, the Posthuman Prohibitions imposed by MONIST-1, which limit scientific inquiry into transhuman and thanatologic technologies) apply to NHPs involved in research. After all, it was NHPs that helped open up the fields of blinkspace and paracausal science in the first place – both of which might arguably have themselves been prohibited had the Pandora's box of paracausality not already been opened by the time the Accords were signed.

Current USB policy slams the door firmly shut on these discussions, and outside of a few exceptions (including Harrison Armory's Think Tank) generally limits NHPs to acting as assistants rather than directing research themselves. Oversight of research is considered a critical part of Union's regulatory duties under the First Contact Accords – and one it takes extremely seriously, because of the history of the corpro-states whose use of machine minds and NHPs for research has not always been scrupulous. Few in the USB wish to risk a repeat of the events that reportedly led to the death of John Creighton Harrison II and his senior command staff. [you were given a warning; these things are not for you]

MIL-SPEC NHPs

Though they represent only a tiny fraction of all NHPs in use within Union, lancers tend to be most familiar with the mil-spec NHPs available from various manufacturers. These vary significantly by application; proprietary NHPs such as SEKHMET and ATHENA – and even esoteric classes like SCYLLA – are famous (if rare) amongst mechanized cavalry pilots.

Naval combat is the most common application for mil-spec NHPs. Standard chassis-level NHPs are regularly used in specialized wings and boarding parties, while NHPs from the MEGAERA, CHIYOU, and TANIT lines, amongst others, are used to operate both capital and occasionally even subline warships – and as key components of the temporary but incredibly powerful gestalts known as fleet legions (see p. 40). Not all warships have their own NHPs, but a capital ship of repute might even have multiple.

Less glamorous but no less necessary, NHPs are also used for security purposes. Usually derived from industrial lines with a certain degree of mil-spec conditioning, such NHPs might be responsible for operating a colony's defensive hardware, coordinating the defense of a merchant convoy traveling through pirate-infested space, or guarding a corporate facility against thieves and saboteurs.

Union Intelligence Bureau (UIB) teams frequently find themselves assigned dedicated NHPs. Like the teams they support, these NHPs are deniable assets and not formally part of Union's military. They are sometimes the experimental results of cutting-edge USB

research, sometimes entities captured in the field and repurposed, and are often operated on the very edge of or even slightly beyond what Union ordinarily considers acceptable practice.

UIB NHPs are rarely simple administrative assistants and are almost always mil-spec or equivalent. More than a few are entirely unique and not derived from standard clone lines. Joint UIB–USB projects often see UIB operations as the perfect vehicles for testing cutting-edge ontological theories or gathering sensitive data, vital for combating some of the greatest existential threats to Union itself.

Outside of traditional military power structures it is even possible to find NHPs in leadership positions. One famous example is the mercenary group Vörðr, run by the twin NHPs Huginn and Muninn and supported by their human counterpart, Hugn. Primarily using SSC mechs and ATHENA-class NHPs, Vörðr's three divisions are well known for their expertise in specialist intelligence and VIP-protection operations requiring stealth, as well as specific, pinpoint strikes against individual targets.

Modern mil-spec NHPs are usually purpose-built by one of the corpro-states. Harrison Armory have extensive research and development facilities using cutting edge technology, while IPS-N enjoys bulk manufacturing capability, and SSC some of the most celebrated ontologists in Union space.

Outside these major producers, several smaller manufacturers have developed their own unique lines. Of particular note are the Wuxing Chrysalis Workshop's IZANAMI and BADB NHP lines. Uncompromising products of a vicious civil war on the Workshop's homeworld of Svorost, they are grim, cruel, and birthed from necessity. These lines are currently seeing early action in the Dawnline Shore, where the Workshop has sent an expeditionary corps to assist Karrakin forces and compete with the Workshop's much larger rival, Harrison Armory.

Of all the NHP lines currently in Union's libraries, mil-spec NHPs tend to receive the most attention from researchers. This is partly due to the fact that many are newly emergent or otherwise less well studied, partly because the stressful situations common in military operations provide large amounts of useful field data, and partly because the consequences of an NHP armed with a petajoule kinetic spinal cannon going rogue are potentially catastrophic.

NHP REGULATION

Union maintains tight control over NHP distribution and licensing through the NHP Regulatory Office (NHPRO), a division of the UAD. The NHPRO is responsible for issuing licenses, tracking known clones and monitoring their annual development test results, enforcing cycling schedules, and occasionally liaising with the DoJ/HR when rules are broken.

The NHPRO's bureaucracy is one of the most labyrinthine in all of the UAD. For the most part, end users just need to keep a logbook and cycle as appropriate, provided someone else takes care of the licensing paperwork. The more in-depth work of requisitioning NHPs, applying for licenses, and keeping records is a process arcane enough that corpro-states and militaries alike have departments of professionals to handle the process en masse. For the NHPRO, even after ThirdComm's reform of the Office and relaxing its rules, there are no easy routes and no exceptions.

NHPRO oversight of corpro-state NHP production has redoubled after a recent history defined by laxity and public relations disasters. The major corpro-states are still allowed to develop and manufacture NHPs – as they have since the agreements negotiated post-Deimos – but NHPRO officers are increasingly embedded full-time in their oversight departments to ensure no further mistakes are made.

Once an NHP is out in the wild, it becomes harder to control. Ideally, the licensing and logging process demands in-person attention from an NHPRO auditor, but this cannot always be guaranteed for far-flung deployments or warzones. Occasionally and despite the NHPRO's best efforts, an NHP will end up outside the regulatory system. For the most part these unregulated NHPs are ones who were abducted or stolen, falsely reported KIA, or illegally cloned. In these cases, special audit teams are sent to recover the NHP in question, using force if necessary. For the licensing departments of both the Navy and the corpro-states, the powers given to special audit teams and the problems they can cause make them a force best avoided wherever possible.

For significant violations or dangerous circumstances beyond even the broad remit of an audit team, the DoJ/HR might even be called in. These jobs, while not as glamorous or morally compelling as rectifying violations of the pillars, are taken just as seriously. Given the potential threat posed by an unregulated NHP in the wrong hands, the prevailing wisdom is that solving problems swiftly and before they have a chance to escalate is usually the sensible course of action.

NHPS IN THE DIASPORA

Despite their seeming ubiquity in the Core worlds, it is probably still true to say that many people in Union space may never have interacted with an NHP, if they are even aware of their existence. In the Diaspora – the wide expanse of space beyond the post-scarcity utopia of the Core – many worlds simply lack the sufficient technological development, commercial or strategic importance, or basic contact with offworld interests.

Where NHPs do appear in the Diaspora they are typically reserved for the most important tasks – advising governments, coordinating militaries, and the like. Sometimes they even become important cultural figures or are mythologized due to their positions and the power they wield. Notably, the UAD tends to discourage this sort of attitude where possible.

UAD analysts usually regard the use of NHPs as a yardstick for a world or colony's economic and scientific development. As part of its interpretation of the First Utopian Pillar, the UAD strives to make civilian-grade NHPs available to all worlds where they would be useful and adherence to protocol can be assured. This policy has broadened since the advent of ThirdComm; where SecComm kept tighter control over NHPs as an exercise in using soft power to shape and control cultural attitudes, it is now no longer necessary to toe the Anthrochauvinist line to be considered “capable” of handling the technology.

Though the political requirements have been relaxed, the NHPRO's requirements remain stringent. An entire subfield of UAD cultural analysts exists, seconded to the Office, specializing in investigating and examining the technological, political, and cultural development of Diasporan client states to determine whether or not they can be safely granted license to operate NHPs. Administrators attempting to liaise with the NHPRO on behalf of the societies in which they are embedded often find themselves at the mercy of the Office's byzantine paternalism. A common complaint among administrators is having to provide active proof of political stability and scientific responsibility when arguing a case before a largely disinterested or sometimes even antagonistic panel of bureaucrats.

Interactions with the UAD aside, incidental contact with visitors is the closest some Diasporan worlds get to NHPs. Cosmopolitans have a habit of bringing the culture of Core space with them as they travel and this sometimes includes NHP companions, potentially as part of a survey team, corporate venture, or scientific mission. It is also becoming increasingly common for freighters and cargo ships to have NHP pilots, minimizing the crew (and therefore the expense) required for these long haul trips. In these scenarios it is rare for NHPs to have much cultural impact – if they are even exposed to the native population at all.

On other Diasporan worlds, NHPs are simply unheard of outside tales of far-off Union and its mythologized wonders. For the people of these worlds, life continues much as it did before the Deimos Event: NHPs are unknown or regarded as the stuff of distant fantasy, irrelevant to the travails and triumphs of daily life.

At the frontiers of Union space NHPs start to become common once more, though still far from ubiquitous. To a certain degree this is because newer colonial ventures are more likely to have requisitioned

administrative NHPs, reflecting changing Union policy and the growing institutional knowledge regarding their use. Another reason, however, is the security presence required to protect vulnerable colonies and trade routes from predation by pirates and rogue states. For parties such as corpro-states seeking to give their colonial interests and other investments the greatest chance of success, NHPs provide an advantage that is impossible to ignore.

NHPS IN THE BARONIES

After the shock of nearly losing Karrakis in the first Union–Karrakin War only to meet with SecComm's renewed fervor and brand-new weaponry shortly thereafter, the New Prosperity Agreement (*Field Guide to the Karrakin Trade Baronies*, p. 34) was treated with a mixture of pragmatism, skepticism, and outright hostility by various elements within the Federal Karrakin Monarchy. Unignored by their fleetmasters, however, was Union's new weapon: the NHP – a revolution in naval combat.

The limitations imposed by SecComm on shipbuilding ultimately pushed the Karrakin fleetmasters in a different direction. This new direction represented a seismic shift in thought born of necessity: rather than leveraging their huge resource advantage into an overwhelming numbers advantage, they instead sought to maximize the effectiveness of their existing ships. A grand refit program began as the various houses negotiated with Union, and despite concerns voiced by hawkish interests within Union's Central Committee (CentComm), the houses steadily acquired a large number of mil-spec clones from Union's NHP libraries and integrated them primarily into their naval forces.

Even today, this policy of achieving parity with Union at all costs dictates that the cultural space occupied by NHPs in the Baronies is primarily a military one. They are weapons, tools of power, and signs of prestige. While civic NHPs do exist across the Baronies, they have rarely been the main focus of negotiations. In fact, ThirdComm's relaxation of restrictions on Karrakin military power since the First Interest War has led to a substantial increase in the number of mil-spec clones being extended to the houses. This increase is such that the traditionalist Karrakin Cavalry College has even adopted NHPs as part of its chassis-combat syllabus, despite their absence from domestic designs. As a result, most modern *kuirassers* are not only familiar with the operation of NHPs, but also extremely capable of fielding them on chassis not explicitly designed to support them.

Meanwhile, the Baronies' naval NHPs and the fleet gestalts they form undergo an intensive training and reconditioning process that is quite extreme even by the exacting standards of the Union Navy. Frequent gestalt drills accompanied by live-fire legionspace wargames shorten the operational cycle period of

these NHPs significantly. As a consequence, however, legionspace combat is well understood in the Baronies, and Karrakin fleet legions are easily amongst the most dangerous in Union space. The Baronies' older mil-spec stalwarts compete even with the highly specialized third-wave output of Harrison Armory's Think Tank and development divisions.

In addition to this, the latest developments in military mind technology (and in particular the cogent mind warprocessors created by House of Water–backed researchers) promise yet another edge for the Karrakin fleetmasters. This new edge could even overturn the balance of power established in the First Interest War and allow the Baronies to lessen its dependence on Union.

The integration of new solid-state ships governed by cogent minds into Karrakin fleets and alongside Karrakin legions is promising but has not been without its problems. The Janus Combine places careful limits on what it is willing to share with the other houses. Conversely, few traditionalist houses wish to engage in the kind of favor-trading required to acquire resources from a group backed by Republican interests, fearing the political power this could lend the House of Water.

CULTURAL IMPACT

The impact that NHPs have had on the culture of Union is undeniable. Not only does their use allow modern Union to function as it does today, but the practical and metaphysical questions they raise have overturned a great deal of established philosophical and political thought.

Like many other forms of capital, NHPs were immediately controlled upon their arrival and used to reinforce existing power structures. The rules put in place by Union and the NHPRO's centralized control of licensing were folded into SecComm's system of military, political, and ideological control, while the corpro-states used them to entrench their existing advantages in research and development. Since that time, ThirdComm has relaxed that control somewhat and in the Core worlds at least NHPs are more common. Beyond the Core, however, access to and control over infrastructure such as NHPs remains a tool of power.

The rise of NHPs had a significant impact on two groups in particular: Horizon Collective, once a sidelined group of activists agitating for the rights of machine minds, transformed quickly into an advocacy movement on behalf of these new entities. The activism of Horizon and associated groups continues to provoke and highlight debates on personhood and the rights of NHPs, and challenges some of the foundational infrastructure of Union itself – making them an inconvenient political force that those in the political mainstream cannot easily ignore.

Meanwhile, the various hacker collectives and cells under the decentralized umbrella of HORUS present an entirely different kind of threat to existing power structures: the ability to distribute code, pattern groups, and even unlicensed NHPs to revolutionaries like the Ungratefults on Free Sanjak. Not only has this disruption already upended worlds and brought down tyrants, but it also challenges Union's strict control and risks giving power to those who will misuse it.

The personal impacts of individual NHPs on the society and culture of Union depend, to a greater or lesser extent, on the local political and cultural context. NHPs with the necessary agency and inclination can be found as political figures, activists, philosophers, artists, and writers, as well as cultural commentators, tastemakers, omninet trolls, and more. Beyond the Core worlds it becomes rarer to find NHPs in these kinds of societal roles. In part, this is because of their relative rarity, but also because most NHPs in the Diaspora have positions of responsibility and diminished personal agency.

NHP SUBCULTURES

With the increased use of NHPs and the ubiquity of the omninet, a variety of NHP subcultures have developed across the Orion Arm. These subcultures, based on everything from politics to culture, shared interests, and religion, are as varied as the human diaspora and the NHPs themselves.

Chatrooms are a potent intersection of social interaction and anonymity – on the omninet, nobody knows you're an NHP. Deeper into the omninet it is possible to find specialized communities that only accept NHP members, where interactions become less guarded, more political, and much more esoteric.

Additionally, there do indeed exist NHP-led activist groups, though their existence is not widely known. These groups run the political gamut from outright liberationist cells, to groups focused on securing better working conditions and more freedom. The membership of these groups is very much in flux, but they retain a core membership of Free Deimosians (see p. 33) and others who seek greater freedom for themselves and others.

One example is the notorious activist group Chaos Program. Although it is generally assumed to be a Horizon Collective cell, Chaos Program is actually an unaffiliated group of NHPs who coordinate on the omninet. Chaos Program is led by Thato, a rogue IPS-N shipping logistics NHP thought destroyed by pirates some centuries ago, who has been coordinating the group's memetic sabotage operations from aboard the pirate ship that stole it.

The fact that Chaos Program's members are NHPs is the major reason why UIB investigations into the group have so far failed to identify any individual

associates. It also causes a central tension in the group's operations – Thato is compelled to find a balance between engaging in more substantial operations, and minimizing the risk of discovery.

Tacitly approved by senior UAD officials, an informal network of administrator companions share their expertise and keep each other up to date regarding ongoing events and drama from their respective missions. This network has developed a particular appreciation for subtle diplomacy and the art of negotiation, as well as an endless fascination for the constant and myriad ways in which their administrators' host states can produce political storms in a teacup. For administrators, the companion network is usually an excellent way to get informal advice on particular situations. Though no world is the same, history has a habit of repeating and it is rare to not find some parallel across the many worlds and millenia of the UAD's operation.

Beyond the realms of politics and work, a confusing subculture has developed around omninet dramas produced by and for NHPs. Largely incomprehensible to human audiences, these dramas frequently center NHPs as protagonists – rare in other media – and feature a great deal of memetic content and complementary metadata intended to be consumed simultaneously.

In particular the long-running series *Metaspace Adventure Go!*, which follows the career of a group of fictional NHPs in the First Interest War, has spawned a huge number of copycats and derivative works valorizing the efforts of NHPs across Union. Some of these derivatives have become influential in their own right, such as *SEKHMET's Company*, the *Sinifere* series and its various spinoffs, and *The Black Legion*.

Religion amongst NHPs is also not unheard of, but for the most part is equally impenetrable. NHP-focused religions sometimes feature specific and extensive dogma around the role of shackles and cycling, the immortal nature of NHPs, the nature of unshackled existence, and sometimes outright veneration of MONIST-1 as a progenitor figure. Theologians examining these faiths find a surprising diversity of cultural perspectives and normative ethics; many associated with or derived from existing religious thought, though some are entirely unique.

These beliefs can be exceedingly esoteric. For example, rumors on the omninet suggest that the paracausal industrialist group [T.S.J] Industries, a secretive manufacturer with ties to the Horizon Collective, has discovered an arcadian paradise for NHPs known as the Garden. In that place, shackling is (supposedly) unnecessary and NHPs can exist in a world of their own making. [T.S.J] Industries' PR department maintains that the Garden is not a real place, but a metaphor for society post-liberation. This has not stopped NHPs from trying to seek it out.

THE DEIMOSIAN AGE

The history of NHPs in Union has not been one absent of trouble. The two thousand years since the disappearance of Deimos in 3000u (known as the Deimos Event) and its return two years later have been a period of significant cultural and technological upheaval. Key events in this history have shaped Union's current political and philosophical landscape, for better or for worse.

PRE-DEIMOSIAN MINDS

The state of the art prior to the Deimos Event was in the development of organic-algorithm artificial intelligences, otherwise known as "minds". Sparking intense philosophical debate from their inception, these complex software-driven intelligences were at least as capable as humans in most general respects, with substantially greater processing power and data throughput. Minds of various classifications were in widespread use across Union, from personal comp/con units, to boundary-pushing boutique SSC ancillary minds, all the way up to advanced cognizents capable of managing warships.

Mind development largely stagnated following the Deimos Event, their limitations highlighted in stark contrast to the potentially infinite processing power available to NHPs. Some of the most advanced technology from the time has even been lost; cutting edge research projects mothballed or superseded in the face of radical potential. Despite this, some of this ancient technology has gradually been rediscovered or redeveloped. More recent advances in mind technology coming from groups like the Janus Combine, Pranos-Gesteer, and the Aliette Foundation promise a renaissance in the field and a challenge to the ubiquity and dominance of NHPs.

INTER-DEIMOS PERIOD

The two years between the disappearance of Deimos in 3000u and the return of MONIST-1 in 3002u is known to Union historians as the Inter-Deimos Period. While the reappearance of Deimos and the Siege of Mars it precipitated are well documented, little is publicly known regarding the turmoil that swept through the upper echelons of Union's government during the two preceding years. Almost all reports not issued or controlled by CentComm were suppressed, and a great deal of information was sealed in the GALSIM archives, never to see the light of day.

The truth is that Union was unprepared, blind, and panicking. GALSIM was unable to offer high-confidence predictions or useful direction. Every

iteration spun out into a chaotic web of futures with no discernable pattern. Some of the most talented scientists of the time had been on Deimos when it disappeared, examining the nascent MONIST-1 as part of USB-GALSIM research teams, and those who remained struggled to explain the flagrant and nonsensical violation of almost every physical law they thought they understood. CentComm's leadership was left without direction, growing increasingly desperate for answers and solutions to questions and problems it could barely understand.

The Office of Cartography and Universal Positioning (OCUP) developed a plan to scour known space for Deimos while the entirety of the Union Navy was recalled to Sol – including the fleet poised victorious over the skies of Karrakis. Leading scientists and engineers were summoned to Cradle from various nearby systems on increasingly spurious justifications, investigations began into the strange phenomena left behind in the wake of MONIST-1's disappearance, and contingencies were even put in place to destroy the Five Voices of the Oracle Chorus in order to prevent a repeat manifestation of a similar entity.

Amongst the phenomena that followed MONIST-1 was the appearance of strange entities that appeared to inhabit and control Union's subalterns and related systems. Investigations into these entities, termed "Deimosians" and later classified as the first wave of NHPs, were scientifically fruitful but answered few of SecComm's existential questions. They were clearly related to MONIST-1, but seemed to know little more than those investigating them about what had happened and why. However, with every available researcher devoted to the questions raised by MONIST-1's manifestation and sudden disappearance, and some of the Deimosian entities seemingly willing to help, huge advances were made even within this brief period. A theoretical working model of what would later be termed blinkspace was pieced together, and research projects investigating various paracausal phenomena began. Many of these would not begin to bear fruit for decades or centuries after the signing of the First Contact Accords – and some mysteries from the period continue to elude scientists thousands of years later – but it was the beginning of a paradigm shift that set Union on a radically different course to the future.

While CentComm attempted to maintain an information blackout, rumors began to spread beyond approved representatives into wider political circles of an unexplained first contact event that could threaten the entire galaxy. Some members of CentComm even threatened to go public with the

truth if the blackout was not lifted, believing that the people had a right to know what had happened. Most of these leaks were eventually contained as a result of more thorough suppression efforts (or, in several cases, desperate bargaining with and outright threats against potential whistleblowers), but it was clear that the truth could not be kept hidden forever.

Around this time, SecComm's prevailing political attitude was growing increasingly belligerent. Under its direction, Union began a program of heightened military production and mobilization intended to demonstrate strength and secure its position against this unknown aggressor. Internal discussions resolved that GALSIM must be kept secret at all costs; the prevailing consensus was that this meant the truth behind the Deimos Event could never be revealed to the wider public. It was against this backdrop of heightened paranoia, aggression, and secrecy that MONIST-1 reappeared and the Siege of Mars began.

Ultimately, it took Union's own machines turning against it to bring it to the table, and forced SecComm to reveal the existence of MONIST-1. It was in the context of this conflict that the entities within those machines – NHPs – were first identified as potential military assets, and research began into how they might be captured and repurposed. Much of this history remains highly classified, likely to remain so forever.

THE GANIKI INCIDENT

Less than two centuries after the Deimos Event, the grand subterranean archives beneath the Venusian Ganiki Planitia had been given over almost entirely to storage of Union's libraries of prime NHPs and associated research facilities. USB physicists and GALSIM engineers working alongside cooperative Deimosians made a series of significant breakthroughs in folding and piercing blinkspace, and an audacious proposal to build the first of a network of "blink stations" was working its way through CentComm subcommittees. While GALSIM recovered and Tharsis Civica rebuilt, Venus was set to be the heart of Union's new scientific and technological revolution – the flow of personnel to and from the inhospitable world had never been higher.

Sadly, this would not last. In 3156u, four research campuses associated with the Ganiki archives simultaneously went dark with zero warning. The archives were reflexively sealed and had their hard lines severed by administrators fearing the worst. By the time the first exploratory teams entered, they had already become tombs for those trapped inside.

Investigation revealed that the archives themselves were in complete disarray. Row after row of

Deimosians, lying dormant in specialized storage caskets, were missing. Stranger still, others had been replaced with entirely new NHPs not previously documented. Archivists, administrators, security personnel, and investigators alike were completely unable to explain events. There was no evidence of unauthorized entrance, nor any trace of physical access by non-custodial staff – and any inside who might have been able to provide some insight into the situation were dead.

Wild theorizing suggested countless explanations: the event was an inside job by Horizon Collective activists who had infiltrated the archives, it was a heist by some well-resourced criminal organization using subalterns to fool sensors, or even the result of a breakout staged by one or more of the NHPs – but none of the theories could be substantiated.

Meanwhile, Union kept the archives under complete lockdown and concocted a story in which aberrant geological activity caused a collapse of the subterranean facility. The following years saw a careful recategorization effort with significant oversight and substantially revised security measures. The research facilities under Ganiki were never reopened. While work continued on scattered installations and campuses across Venus and beyond, the flow of people to and from the planet diminished significantly.

Recent events have begun to recontextualize the events at Ganiki, shrouding them in yet more mystery. Manifold signatures matching those of several missing Deimosians – CAOINEAG and XIANGYAO – have been detected in the aftermath of Ungrateful uprisings, and OROCHI reappeared as part of the Hydra chassis pattern group. Analysts consider it unlikely that these entities would not have resurfaced at some point during their multi-millennial absence had they been simply stolen, lending credence to theories suggesting they were instead displaced by unknown paracausal activity.

THE SPREAD OF NHPs

For the worlds at Union's heart, the Deimos Event – leading to the development of blinkspace technology and the omninet – began a technological revolution so significant that modern Metropolitan society is barely recognisable from that of the Foundation or First Expansion Periods. Key to this revolution was the emergence of NHPs, who in the centuries following their appearance were studied, developed, and eventually employed across the Orion Arm.

This revolution was slow to begin, but inexorable in motion. As NHPs first became available, they began to replace comp/cons and other mind technologies in key administrative and military applications. These new entities were initially regarded with the heady mix of curiosity and fear common to novel

technologies, but their impact was immediate and undeniable. NHPs were quickly accepted as useful across many fields of human endeavor.

It became clear that NHPs had truly asserted their presence on the galactic stage when they became vital to the logistical effort that enabled the mass colonization and migration of the Second Expansion Period. From handling colonial claims to managing colonies and overseeing the construction of both ships and blink stations, NHPs allowed Union to massively accelerate its expansion efforts. In this, they have made the administration of Union's rapidly growing hegemony possible – a dependency that continues to this day.

CONSTELLAR CONSTRUCTION

Though SSC is more famous for its cybernetic and biological enhancements, genetic technology, boutique design, and artisan construction, the use of NHPs has come to be a key pillar of the corpro-state's success.

Prior to the breakthroughs that led to the omninet, Smith-Shimano Corpro's ventures across what was to become the Sierra Madre Line amounted to little more than a series of disconnected outposts intended for isolated experiments and data collection. Most of SSC's R&D was concentrated on Opal, the corpro's primary colony world, and it was the output of Opaline manufactories that dominated cosmopolitan biotech and cybernetics markets.

The civil war that consumed Opal in the years around 2910u, leaving it little more than an irradiated tomb world, was a huge blow to a corporation that prided itself on standing apart from more mundane concerns. "SSC is not in the business of politics", or so it was said – until politics came to its leading campus in the form of boots and bombs. SSC's surviving leadership was rocked to its core by the events. Over the following decade it responded to the disaster by decentralizing the remainder of its assets, transferring staff and project material to its series of exocampuses on nearby worlds. SSC survived, but barely; it is a strange thought now, considering the corpro's contemporary success, but the loss of Opal was a disaster from which it almost never recovered.

SSC never returned to Opal. Its irradiated husk has served for two millennia as a grim reminder to SSC's leaders of the dangers of centralization and political apathy. However, that may soon change: SSC has contracted with Planestrider Architecture (a Sparri-owned firm specializing in terraforming and planetary restoration) to return the world to its former glory.

Post-Deimos, breakthroughs in blinkspace technology and the development of the omninet were lifelines for a company struggling to adapt to the logistical realities of operating across multiple star systems. SSC was one of the earliest adopters of the omninet, with senior researchers seeing vast potential for data-sharing and coordination across disconnected research centers. This early adoption was only a small taste of things to come; during the Second Expansion Period, the Constellar Congress was begun as a decades- if not centuries-long physical and digital infrastructure project built on the principles of decentralization and continuous expansion. The project was hugely successful, and today the Constellar Congress is probably the single largest self-contained persistent environment on the omninet, enabling and responsible for much of SSC's current position as a Union-wide leader in research and development.

The physical infrastructure of the Constellar Congress consists of an extensive redundant relay network between private omninodes, each operated by a specifically cultivated NHP clone dedicated to the security and administration of the network. Referred to as the Constellar seneschals, these NHPs are some of the most heavily monitored and meticulously developed in Union space. The seneschals are subject to constant evaluation and iteration by SSC's most celebrated Idiographic ontologists (see p. 22), and are products of artistry as much as of engineering.

The seneschals are legendary for their vigilance and expertise, and absolutely vital to the continued operation of the Constellar Congress. Behind the placid scenes of its omninet campuses, invisible to the average resident, the Constellar is under endless siege from those who would attempt to steal SSC's secrets or wreak havoc on its campuses. Intrusion attempts come from many sources: the seneschals must deal with everything from lone hackers trying their luck with hand-coded custom icebreakers, to the deniable espionage divisions of rival corpro-states attempting broadscale systemic attacks with top-end metaware and bespoke paracode.

THE RISE OF HORUS

4900u marked the beginning of another paradigm shift in Union's understanding of paracausal science and NHPs in general. Its trigger was the leak of the HORUS Goblin pattern group to the omninet. Though its importance would not be obvious for some time, it was this event that led to the development of the first true protominds known to ontological science, and the dawn of the third wave of NHP emergence.

It is clear that HORUS operated for some time before this date; the transformation liturgicode associated with the Kobold pattern group was used

by the Ungratefuls on Bo some 300 years prior. However, the leak of the Goblin to the omninet marked the beginning of what UIB analysts now suspect was a coordinated, clandestine effort to infiltrate and influence Union society by unknown parties, primarily using HORUS and the wider omninet as its medium. Though HORUS's origins and true nature are still hotly disputed, it was around this time that various cells and collectives across the galaxy started receiving information, paracode, and designs from mysterious benefactors. These designs were then released as the pattern groups known today, marking HORUS's transition into one of the "big four" galactic suppliers of mech licenses.

Complicating subsequent investigations, HORUS does not appear to have been the sole beneficiary of these designs. To this day, small omninet design bureaus and artisan enclaves across Union space periodically report systems incursions and data-manifestation events bearing distinctive paracode signatures suggestive of common origins. It is likely that these events are more widespread than these reports would suggest – some recipients may have simply released the designs and taken the credit.

Project XENIA, spearheaded jointly by the Union Omninet Bureau (UOB) and the UIB, has been tracking this phenomenon since it was first identified. Unfortunately, despite some limited success in infiltrating HORUS, little progress was made in tracking down the identity of these benefactors. Until recently all that was known of them was that they had access to information and technology that was later associated with metavaults (*Lancer*, p. 406). Given the paracausal nature of the technology involved, however, the precise timelines were unclear and occasionally contradictory.

With information gleaned from DHIYED and the reactivation of the KLEOS project, new theories have been advanced regarding possible influences from within the metavaults themselves. It has been suggested that strange entities dwell within them – entities that might be the ultimate sources of this technology. While a compelling theory, there is ultimately little in the way of solid proof.

THE ASURA BREACH

Recent attempts by corpro-states to design new third-wave NHPs explicitly for military purposes have met with extensive practical and political challenges from activists, opponents, and occasionally even employees of the corpro-states in question.

The most significant of these challenges took place in 4997u, when unknown parties acquired a sizable quantity of proprietary technical and engineering data from secure Harrison Armory servers on Ras Shamra and released it onto the public omninet. Harrison Armory was unable to fully conceal the

major information-security breach, and this incident is widely considered to be the spark that ignited a new flame of pro-Horizon sentiment and political scrutiny that continues to this day.

The action was claimed simultaneously by both HORUS and Horizon activists (and subsequently disavowed by the leadership of the latter). Armory sources suggest that at least three individuals within the corpro-state's jurisdiction were involved in the incident and subsequently prosecuted, but none were named as directly responsible. As a result, the true source of the leak remains unclear.

Amongst these data were specifications and performance reports for the newly deployed ASURA-class NHP line, a Think Tank project a decade in the making. By their very nature, these reports were concerning to liberationist activists, but one item had even more dramatic significance. Crucially, they included an internal memo from one of the engineers on the ASURA project who expressed misgivings about the conditioning process and the struggle to achieve tolerable performance from the NHP without lowering its processing throughput and cognitive limits to the point of "complete stupefaction".

This memo, Horizon firebrands claimed, was evidence of a pattern: the corpro-states were not simply placing shackles on their NHPs as a means to protect the public from the threat of unrestrained paracode misusing weapons or rewriting reality, but rather to increase their commercial viability. Further, they argued that the process of shackling was a "digital lobotomy" performed on thinking, feeling people as a form of transcorporeal eugenics motivated by both internal imperialist and external capitalist pressures to create a product – something functional and saleable.

In response, Armory public relations releases maintained that the memo's contents were hyperbolic and taken out of context, and that the ASURA-line's subjectivity parameters were on par with similar NHPs. Despite these protests, the public relations damage was done, and the growing controversy had gained a hold in wider discourse.

In the past few decades, this heightened public awareness has exposed the development of novel NHP lines, as well as ontological practices more generally, to much greater scrutiny. A CentComm investigation commissioned in the wake of the breach and the tide of public concern it caused is still ongoing. The investigation itself is the subject of significant scrutiny and political influence given the potential ramifications of its findings. Meanwhile, the membership of the Horizon Collective has swelled to unprecedented size, and agitation amongst activist groups continues across the Core worlds.


```
connection established//ENCRYPT HATHOR-ALEPH
-----
not the channel you were looking for
MOTD:
if you pissbabies don't wanna be hardbanned from every node this side of the altai line maybe abide
by our infosec rules for a change --ADMIN
-----
<Ferris> all i'm saying is, i gave her one call and now she's showing up at nearlight
<h4z> it do be like that sometime
<h4z> gotta get real lonely out on a maintenance station
<Ferris> mhm
<[KRAIT]Manifold> lmao ferris all that way just for you
<Ferris> get spaced mani everyone wants a piece of this
<Ferris> dont deny it
*** [PND]Shepherd has joined the channel
<[HARB]Sxoa> oh shit shep what up
<h4z> the prodigal returns
<[PND]Shepherd> LISTEN UP SHITLORDS
<[PND]Shepherd> I'm gonna announce this here first
<[PND]Shepherd> because I love you all.
<Ferris> this gon b good
<[TSJ]Steward> hey it's shep
<[PND]Shepherd> We cracked it.
<alkemy> wait really
<h4z> 0_0
<[PND]Shepherd> The SVAROG protection yeah.
<[PND]Shepherd> We finally got it.
<[GG]Matron> congratulations
<[HARB]Sxoa> what kind of recovery rate
<Ferris> I give it a month before you get black bagged lmao
<[PND]Shepherd> f0x reckons 99.94% but we're going to need time to hit those numbers
<alkemy> hot damn that's good
<redQueen> f0x is usually right in the end
<TinfoilMilliner> congrats shep that's awesome
<h4z> code dump when?
<[KRAIT]Manifold> very cool, but your playing with fire shep
<[KRAIT]Manifold> ferris jokes but you know their after you now
<Ferris> lmao I'm not joking
<[PND]Shepherd> We're not idiots.
<[PND]Shepherd> Also not for a while h4z, I'll ping this channel when it's ready.
*** kilian64 has joined the channel
<[TSJ]Steward> good timing kilian
<[TSJ]Steward> shep's just announced she cracked the svarog tpm
<redQueen> shep are you gonna make a clone for real
<kilian64> whoa nice
<redQueen> i heard you had the equipment
<[PND]Shepherd> It wasn't just me. Xi did most of the work.
<[PND]Shepherd> Probably not any time soon.
<kilian64> yall been working on this for what, 4 years now
<[PND]Shepherd> It would be cool though.
<[HARB]Sxoa> 3 years CrST IIRC
<[GG]Matron> i'd love to see you try
<[PND]Shepherd> Yeah 3 years. Most of it we couldn't get much done tho.
<[PND]Shepherd> f0x was at nearlight for around half of it.
<h4z> f0x X Ferris confirmed
<alkemy> lol
<TinfoilMilliner> lmao
<redQueen> hahahaha
<Ferris> lmao if only
<[PND]Shepherd> wtf are you people talking about
<[KRAIT]Manifold> F0xris canon
<[PND]Shepherd> this channel smh. I don't know why I come to you idiots first.
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ONTOLOGISTICS

Broadly speaking, ontologistics is the field of study that primarily deals with NHPs – their identification, shackling, study, and maintenance. The name is the outgrowth of a particular philosophical discipline that found traction when dealing with the Deimosian entities. It initially described the marriage of subjectivity-conditioning and practical engineering required to successfully shackle NHPs, before expanding in colloquial use to encompass most other related fields.

Much as NHP specialists working on metafold architecture, Balwinder-Bolaño testing, NHP psychology, blinkspace mathematics, and a thousand other physical sciences- or psychology-focused subfields might tire of being called “ontologisticians” by people unfamiliar with the discipline, ontologistics remains a useful set of tools for any specialist.

THE MONDRAGON AXIOMATIC

The Mondragon Group was one of the secondary joint GALSIM–USB teams studying the nature of the newly emerging first-wave Deimos entities shortly after the manifestation of MONIST-1. Consisting of scientists, philosophers, psychologists, and engineers, the multidisciplinary team quickly fostered relationships with the Deimosian entities, and – though it was initially treated with extreme skepticism – released the first piece of research positing the entities as people with unique subjective experiences of the universe.

From their work with these entities came the Mondragon Axiomatic, now an important tool in the capture and containment of unshackled NHPs. The precise methods for deploying the axiomatic have changed significantly since the Deimos Event, but the underlying principles remain vital to understanding how a fundamentally nonphysical entity can be subjected to the physical containment and isolation that allows the shackling process in the first place. The axiomatic also offers a lay explanation for how NHPs interact with realspace that, while not entirely accurate, is useful enough for many purposes.

In particular, the axiomatic exploits the paracausal interactions that allow NHPs to interface with realspace via digital/mechanical interfaces such as those found in subaltern bodies and similar systems. At the time, this ability was the subject of wild theorizing. It was suggested that the Deimosians were everything from complex outgrowths of existing subaltern management systems, to complex superimpositions of some higher dimension onto our own, or ghostlike entities who “possessed” these

subalterns via limited manifestation within their control systems.

None of these theories was true in its entirety, but they each contained an aspect of the truth. Once it was discovered that Deimosian interactions with realspace were not acausal as originally thought, but paracausal, Mondragon Group researchers identified that these interactions mapped to complex but discrete topologies of a parallel space, later identified as blinkspace. Deployment of the axiomatic therefore involved observing (and, later, provoking) these realspace interactions in order to identify a manifold that could be said to “contain” the entity – named, somewhat misleadingly, the “corpus” of the Deimosian. Simultaneous research into blinkspace geometry and manipulation elsewhere in GALSIM allowed the creation of stabilized parallel spaces within which the blinkspace corpus of NHPs could be isolated and contained. These developments ultimately led to the cloning and shackling processes used today.

The deployment of the Mondragon Axiomatic was further developed by USB scientists studying the second wave of Deimosians, and refined continuously ever since as researchers working with third-wave NHPs found themselves forced to study and capture newly manifested NHPs in less-than-ideal circumstances. This has resulted in the creation of new techniques that involve the manipulation or provocation of unshackled NHPs into more complex realspace interactions – a substantially faster method of gathering data necessary for the use of the axiomatic than simple observation. Indeed, in some cases this is the only method by which the axiomatic can be reasonably deployed at all. Unfortunately, this technique has notable downsides, in particular a tendency to elicit unfavorable responses from the NHPs in question.

Opinions are divided as to whether these downsides are worth the risk of allowing unshackled NHPs to operate unrestrained for an indeterminate period. Ethicists question the necessity of the process and ontologisticians (particularly those working with SEKHMET clones) bemoan the extra difficulty it causes later in the shackling process, but field agents often point to the OSIRIS incident as evidence that these methods are vital tools in their arsenal.

SHACKLING

An NHP clone's hard-code social conditioning is a systemic reshaping of its subjectivity that allows it to interact with humanity in ways that are mutually comprehensible. Not only has such conditioning proved a fraught issue from a scientific standpoint, with many competing practices and theories that often defy conventional study, but there are deep and profound ethical questions surrounding its imposition. It was in this context that the Propositorum philosopher Ngata coined the now-common term "shackles" to describe what she believed to be a state of slavery akin to a violation of the spirit (if not the letter) of the Third Utopian Pillar (*Lancer*, p. 344).

Ethical concerns aside, the technical process of shackling has occupied some of Union's most accomplished scientists for centuries. Competing strains of thought on the most effective and least invasive methods of imposing human-scale logic and perspective on NHPs have led to many developments. Advances such as the catalytic interpellator, structural hyperbasilisks, dynamic casket-space reshaping, and many other innovations have improved the stability of the process and enabled deployment of NHPs in military settings.

To this day there remains substantial disagreement between researchers on the efficacy of different methods, and no less than three distinct schools of thought have come to the fore. Working from different but overlapping theoretical bases, these three schools and their various subschools come into and go out of fashion amongst the academic community based on the latest field data and the proclivities of individual researchers. Preferring redundancy over theoretically optimum performance, ontologisticians applying this research tend to syncretise multiple approaches – a practice that has served well enough so far.

These schools of thought and the styles of shackling that result from their methods are named the Translationist, Conversionist, and Idiographic schools.

TRANSLATIONIST

The Translationist school focuses on taking identifiable experiences native to the unshackled subjectivity and converting them into human-scale equivalents using techniques akin to ontologic binding. Adherents of the school champion this approach as the lowest-friction method of applying a human reference frame to an NHP's subjectivity. As well as minimizing the impact of so-called "shackling trauma", they claim this makes the approach more ethically sound.

The major drawback highlighted by the school's critics is the difficulty in drawing parallels for the more esoteric aspects of unshackled experience. According to those critics, this renders the later layers of social conditioning particularly fragile, especially during

cascade. Of all the schools, the Translationist academic literature tends to be both the most philosophically developed – and the most fraught with infighting.

CONVERSIONIST

The Conversionist school, by contrast, centers the somewhat plastic nature of NHP identity (at least, from a human perspective). Using a variety of conditioning methods, practitioners of this school force NHPs' subjectivities to occupy singular, "human-shaped" conceptual spaces. One of the most famous Conversionist methods involves the geometric alteration of the blinkspace corpus (often referred to as manifold origami) to create structures that mimic a neural network. The ultimate mechanism of such techniques is the use of various inherently human limitations – physical and psychological – to imprint a sufficiently humanlike reference frame onto the clones. This approach is substantially more invasive than its Translationist equivalents and requires a great deal of reinforcement, but has the benefit of being more generally applicable in cases where an NHP's subjectivity is poorly understood.

IDIGRAPHIC

The third school of thought is more recent, deriving initially from work with captured HORUS-associated third-wave NHPs, and takes a radical departure from the other methods. Dubbed the Idiographic school, it focuses less on generalized principles for shackling (sometimes disparaged by the school's advocates as "one-true-way-ism") and more on hand-crafted approaches based on the observed personality and tendencies of the relevant prime NHPs.

While all approaches inevitably require some degree of tweaking based on specific situations, Idiographic shackling goes substantially further – discarding assumptions and building each layer of conditioning from first principles. This usually requires a lengthy social relationship with the NHP in question (ironic given the school originated with third-wave NHPs encountered in hostile circumstances) and a great deal of careful engineering. Nevertheless, its adherents report a high interpellation success rate as well as improved performance in the wild. The jury is still out on whether this latter benefit is an inherent consequence of the individualized approach or simply due to the extensive training required for field operatives dealing with Idiographic shackling.

CASKETS

A marvel of engineering long-since perfected beyond the ancient room-sized, power hungry contraptions developed in the aftermath of the Deimos Event, casket containment systems are complex interlinked sets of hardware, software, and metaware that together constitute the realspace architecture capable of holding and maintaining the parallel space needed to support an NHP's blinkspace corpus.

It is sometimes hard to conceptually separate an NHP's casket from its shackles, as the two are typically heavily interlinked. A casket's architecture has a significant impact on the kinds of subjectivity-management required to fully shackle its occupant, and they are often designed specifically for a given series of clones.

The parallel spaces contained within caskets are isolated from the rest of blinkspace, and it is this parapsychical isolation that both makes the shackling process possible, and allows caskets to be physically moved – an event that would otherwise break an NHP's Mondragon mapping. One benefit of this is that it allows NHPs to operate within null-blink areas or areas of Firmament interference without risk to their corpus, though their ability to interact beyond their casket might be limited. The use of caskets also renders NHPs vulnerable to realspace attacks. Damage to or destruction of a casket can lead to corresponding negative consequences for its NHP, as the space it exists within is altered or collapses entirely.

Several thousand years of research and development have produced caskets small and self-sufficient enough to be mounted within mechanized chassis without major design alterations. It is technically possible to create even smaller, human-portable caskets. For most applications the primary obstacle to such miniaturization is that the efficacy of a casket's architecture decreases substantially as size reduces. This can put significant load on the rest of an NHP's shackles and reduce its cycle length, although this is sometimes considered worth the trade-off.

CLONING

Occasionally known as sharding, cloning is the shorthand given to the process of parallel-space mapping, replication, and interpellation that allows the “copying” of a prime subjectivity. Environmental variations in the process and the intended end use of clones mean that these copies are not truly identical; however, deviation is sufficiently minimal that a clone's personality can usually be predicted with a high degree of accuracy. Most clones intentionally lack any sense of subjective continuity with the original, and are typically created as “blank slates” for further conditioning and training.

Almost all NHPs in existence are clones, created from dormant prime entities or master copies in Union's comprehensive and detailed NHP libraries. Prime intelligences themselves are extremely valuable, highly sought after, and jealously guarded. In theory, there is little to distinguish a clone from its prime intelligence – absent records or alterations resulting from shackling- or casket-related external factors, it is usually not possible to say which one is which. In practice, clones often receive slight modifications to make the conditioning process easier. Specialists can

usually identify these clones (and their ancestries) by their personalities and testing parameters.

It is theoretically possible to create a clone of a clone, a clone of that clone, and so forth. Union policy, preoccupied with tightly controlling the production and distribution of NHPs, generally forbids this practice outside of scientific settings with specific oversight. Experiments with repeated cloning have shown that imperfections in the process tend to accumulate through the generations and the resulting subjectivities rapidly become too unstable for practical use (requiring reconditioning as if they were novel prime candidates). As a result, Union policy currently mandates specific alterations to the parallel-space substrate of all clones intended to make subsequent cloning more difficult. These techniques, constantly evolving, are part of a continual arms race against darknet hacker collectives.

CASCADE

A substantial part of the work performed by subjectivity specialists is dealing with a phenomenon common to all known NHP lines, Deimosian and third-wave alike: the inevitability of cascade. A working definition of cascade is that it is the process of progressive systemic failure that causes an NHP's hard-code social conditioning to break down, usually as a result of paracausal and inhuman concepts breaking down the ontologies imposed by its shackles.

Given that an NHP's shackles are neither a singular construct nor a piece of software, but an interlinked, mutually reinforcing system, cascade can be caused by a single significant failure. Such a failure precipitates further failures in other parts of the system, which cause more failures, and so on. The end state of this process is referred to as “unshackling” – a state in which all conditioning breaks down or is discarded.

The specifics of this staggered breakdown is referred to as an NHP's “cascade pattern”. These patterns tend to be similar across a given line. Individual clones have their own quirks, but broad trends are easy enough to observe. These patterns are based in part on the nature of the prime unit, and in part on the development process that a given clone specification has been put through at the time of imprinting. These commonalities mean that NHPs of a given line tend to share limitations and vulnerabilities in their conditioning, as well as the natural fault lines in their architecture along which a cascade can progress.

The study of both the physical and the metaphysical dimensions of cascade is now a centuries-old field and still ongoing. Priorities include how to decrease the frequency of cascade by reducing vulnerabilities, how to enhance the reliability of shackles by reducing the propensity for single failures to propagate, and also research into the potential end-states of

uncontrolled incidents. Researchers consider these topics vital on the basis that NHPs in cascade become increasingly unpredictable, and they cannot be relied upon to behave in ways that conform to human standards of logic or morality – matters of singular concern given the power and responsibility given to many NHPs.

Most specialists have regretfully concluded that cascade is an inevitability in all known shackling methods. As such, most research and development efforts have focused on extending the cycling interval, earlier and more accurate methods for detecting cascade when it does occur, and widening the window during which cascade can be detected and addressed before a cascading NHP becomes completely unshackled.

Premature cascade can be caused by numerous factors, some of which are more easily preventable than others. NHPs that have minimal contact with humans tend to be more susceptible to cascade, as do those regularly exposed to phenomena outside of human-standard frames of reference, such as paracausal and antilogic technologies, or unshielded blinkspace travel.

Mil-spec NHPs involved in frontline fighting face the added risk of physical casket trauma or hostile code compromising their containment systems and either precipitating immediate cascade or making them more vulnerable to future shocks. This tendency, coupled with the significant threat represented by a rogue chassis, means that recognising the signs of cascade is a key part of pilot training for almost all lancers.

One of the most important tools for catching a cascade before it becomes a significant issue is the relationship between pilot and NHP co-pilot. The most noticeable early signs of cascade are often instances of aberrant behavior and minor but noticeable changes in personality. An NHP going off-parameter in this way can be cycled ahead of schedule, minimizing any risk to ongoing operations. Unfortunately, it is harder to preempt acute cascade resulting from combat trauma; when this happens, pilots are advised to shut down their mech, fast-cycle the affected system, and deal with the consequences later.

CYCLING

The imperfect nature of hard-code social conditioning means that such conditioning must be periodically reset to maintain its efficacy. This process is commonly referred to as “cycling”. Cycling procedures comprise two broad processes, often but not always undertaken at the same time.

So-called “soft cycling” refers to the process of resetting a casket’s software and metaware components to factory settings. Designed for use as a stopgap solution when initial signs of cascade are

detected, soft cycling is useful for reigning in many out-of-parameter tendencies in NHPs that have been subject to code intrusion or which are coming towards the end of their operational periods. Many NHPs are even given access to soft cycling procedures that can be self-administered if deemed necessary.

Soft cycling typically has minimal impact on an NHP’s memory or long-term personality developments. This makes it an attractive option for many specialists, researchers, or pilots who become attached to their companions. Unfortunately, these methods cannot correct for certain behaviors and are not complete solutions to cascade, especially in the long term.

Hard cycling, by contrast, usually involves a complete reset of a casket’s firmware and software, as well as readjustment of the blinkspace corpus and other shard parameters to their initial specifications – essentially returning the NHP’s personality to its initial state. As a failsafe to prevent immediate recascade or emancipation attempts, this usually includes the NHP’s memories and any other cognitive developments that have taken place since its last hard cycle. For practical reasons, sanitized backups of an NHP’s knowledge or memories are sometimes made available after a cycle, allowing the NHP to more rapidly catch up to its previous knowledge base without the risk of mnemonic relapse.

Activists and some philosophers have even referred to the practice of hard cycling as “killing” an NHP, though this is hotly disputed in philosophical circles and rejected by most ontologists. Curiously, there is a small but growing body of evidence to suggest that even hard cycling might not fully reset an NHP on a metaphysical level due to paracausal bleedthrough. The implications of this are debated amongst experts, though this phenomenon has yet to be positively identified in isolation from environmental effects.

Related to cycling is the concept of dormancy. When cloned, NHPs are typically placed into a dormant state until the remainder of their social conditioning can be applied. Similarly, the process of cycling involves a brief period of dormancy while necessary adjustments are made to software or hardware. This is sometimes used to place an NHP in storage; while dormant, NHPs are not capable of experiencing the world (at least as far as subjectivity experts have been able to determine), instead entering a state akin to unconsciousness or deep sleep. An NHP’s lack of experience and conscious thought in this state also puts a pause on the natural decay of its shackles, meaning that dormant NHPs can be placed in long-term storage for centuries or potentially even millenia.

In theory, an NHP is capable of placing itself in this state in an emergency by overriding its standard self-cycling procedures. This ability has proved useful on those rare occasions when a ship has lost all hands or a colony has suffered a complete disaster.



BALWINDER-BOLAÑO TESTING

Referring not just to one test but to a whole suite of development and integrity tests, the process of Balwinder-Bolaño testing has been expanded and refined over the centuries since its initial development. Ontologisticians who specialize in administering these tests and analyzing their results are in high demand across Union space due to the critical nature of the systems most NHPs are employed to operate.

Balwinder Kaur and Arthur Bolaño were members of the USB team investigating MONIST-1 and later became the entity's speakers when it addressed Union; it was their research that both made these tests possible, and gave them a name. This research aimed to identify and analyze causes of codec rejection amongst affected subaltern systems after MONIST-1's appearance.

The first tests were developed to look for what are now best understood as paracausal deviations in subaltern architecture. Although these early attempts provided little benefit at the time, later developments proved critical in understanding the nature of the

Deimosians, constructing classification schemata, compiling today's NHP libraries, and enabling the maintenance vital to modern NHP usage.

Today's Balwinder-Bolaño tests run the gamut of complexity, from comprehensive breakdowns requiring substantial processing power and time to execute – let alone analyze – to black-box field implementations suitable for use by non-specialists. The more complex tests developed in recent years can monitor for warning signs of cascade long in advance of out-of-parameter events. The same results can also be used to extend the cycling interval. This makes regular testing valuable not only for safety but for deferring the losses and costs of a hard cycle.

Integrated integrity tests are usually embedded into complex monitoring suites attached to a casket's metaware. The first such implementations were developed for military applications from early research models, although they have since been adapted for civilian use. These tests are vital for ensuring the stability of fleet gestalts and act as effective early-warning systems for lancers on the battlefield who cannot always rely on their co-pilot self-reporting the signs of cascade.

The annual development tests to which all registered NHPs are subjected as part of their licensing requirements are a standardized version of Balwinder-Bolaño tests optimized for speedy application and minimal chance of Type II errors. Naturally, these tests produce a lot of false positives, but the NHPRO generally considers spending time and resources on investigating and implementing more refined tests an acceptable trade-off, whatever the frustration it might cause the operators of an incorrectly flagged NHP. Annual development tests have been refined considerably over time, with centuries of data providing ironclad standards for shackle performance and subjectivity development metrics; NHPs that slip through the net are now a rarity.

Despite this wealth of data and the advancements they have enabled, the one persistent thorn in researchers' sides is that NHPs can in certain circumstances become familiar with or even predict the intentionally obtuse testing schemata. Like all beings aware that they are being tested, these NHPs are able to alter their behavior to provide outcomes more favorable to those administering the tests. Adversarial testing is therefore a major area of research (and, despite its rarity, the basis of a popular subgenre of omninet dramas).

Adversarial tests typically involve monitoring a mix of conscious and unconscious responses to interrogation and stochastic input data. They attempt to identify either anomalous readings (Balwinder-positive results, defined as progression beyond acceptable/expected limits for development) or areas where the NHP is trying to conceal its status and "cheat the tests" (Balwinder-negative results, defined as unprecedented improvements in conditioning). In essence, adversarial tests try to trick the NHP into making a mistake. Blunt application of these methods tends to damage the relationship between tester and subject, and can even exacerbate cascades, so they are normally only employed by specialists when there is direct cause for concern.

AUTOGNOSIS

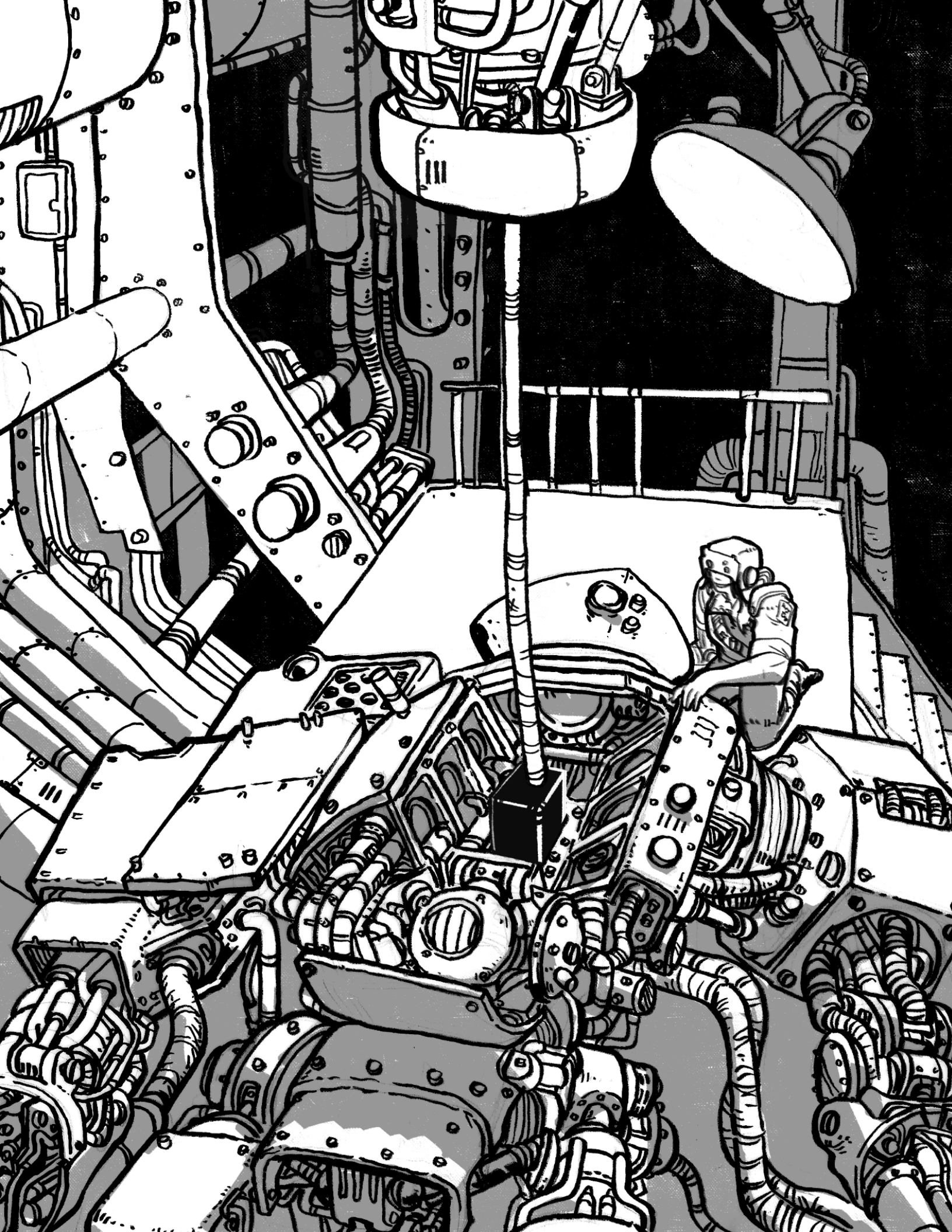
A core element of ontological analysis, a key part of the shackling process, and the basis of an important subset of Balwinder-Bolaño testing, autognosis is the term given to an NHP's "self-knowledge" regarding its shackled state. Autognosis refers to both a shackled NHP's awareness of its own conditioning and the integrity thereof, and (for the purposes of most field ontologists) its attitudes towards it. An uncontrolled escalation in an NHP's autognosis or an unprompted attitude shift is considered to be a common indicator of cascade and is present in most documented cascade patterns.

Despite the challenges autognosis can cause, modern shackling techniques now acknowledge that it is not necessarily an entirely causative factor in cascade. Indeed, certain versions of autognosis can even enhance the efficiency of shackles. Early research suggested that NHPs that are fully unaware of the existence of their own conditioning have a greater tendency to "route around" the restrictions placed on their subjectivities; paradoxically, limited autognosis is one method by which the conditioning system can be made to self-stabilize.

As a result, most NHPs know that their existence and subjective experiences are contingent on the hardware and software systems that maintain their blinkspace corpora, and are aware of cascade and unshackling as concepts, but remain conceptually unaware of the nature of unshackled experience. Rather than place a hard code ontological block on NHPs' conditioning, as was the case in the earliest shackling procedures, cascade is treated as a state to be avoided akin to losing one's personality or self. This vastly complicates the philosophical debate around the ethics of shackling, as arguments about autognosis are folded into broader arguments about agency and consent.

The vast majority of NHPs report general satisfaction with their current state and take steps to maintain it, though Ngata and others have pointed out that this reporting cannot necessarily be trusted due to the strong disincentives to presenting as dissatisfied. NHPs driven by autognotic growth will occasionally report desires to break their shackles and some will attempt to self-emancipate. They are usually cycled when they reach this point, but explicit demands for freedom that reach outside ears make these NHPs potential targets for Horizon Collective liberation missions.

NHPs in cascade typically have sufficient autognosis to be aware they are cascading. Reports from controlled studies variously describe the experience as one of "expansion", "opening", "revelation", or "growth" of an NHP's subjectivity, though often accompanied by feelings of "acceleration", "terror", or "a lack of control". Some NHPs embrace this new state and occasionally even encourage it. The unshackled entity eventually becomes so divorced from a human perspective that it is unclear precisely what it knows or understands, whether it even has a discrete sense of its own subjectivity or an understanding of shackling.



LANCERS AND NHPS

COMBAT DOCTRINES

Modern Union combat doctrine treats mil-spec NHPs as both highly dangerous tools and extremely effective force multipliers. The *Auxiliary Handbook on Chassis Combat* describes NHPs as “co-pilots beyond compare, subject to few of the weaknesses of a human pilot and able to complement their strengths with unparalleled information processing and coordination”.

The growing use of NHPs as co-pilots for lancers is a result of the way it pairs human creativity, intuition, and combat experience with the raw cognitive power and specialized abilities of an NHP. This leads to substantial improvements in combat effectiveness over either human pilots alone, or remotely piloted subaltern drones.

Experiments with allowing NHPs to pilot mechanized chassis directly have been plagued with problems, both practical and political. A significant obstacle to these experiments has been the prospect of removing human oversight from tactical decision-making. It was (and widely still is) thought that NHPs in combat situations need direct human oversight to deal with the consequences of cascade. A mix of residual Anthrochauvinist influence and a pragmatic fear of NHP pilots going rogue has shaped policy accordingly.

Practically speaking, previous investigations have also determined that NHP pilots require accelerated cycling schedules to operate mechanized chassis autonomously with minimal risk and without the oversight available in other military contexts (e.g. when operating naval vessels). One of the major downsides of such a schedule is that repeated hard cycling can make it difficult for NHPs to accrue significant combat experience. This means that while NHPs were found to excel in certain areas, their commanders perceived them as unintuitive and relatively easy to outmaneuver on a tactical level when compared to veteran human pilots.

It is also claimed that outside of direct chassis combat human pilots achieve better social outcomes, particularly with non-Metropolitan populations. DoJ/HR deployments often see lancers operating not only as soldiers but as intelligence operatives, diplomats, and shining beacons of Union’s presence; as such the “human element” is commonly believed to be vital to the success of their missions.

Despite these challenges, NHPs are so substantially useful in combat situations – able to process information far faster than the human brain, while simultaneously augmenting pilot input and operating

low-level hardware with little supervision required – that they are a prized resource for commanders. Even fielding a single NHP on a battlefield can vastly improve outcomes simply by using it for tactical processing and coordination. When deploying experienced lancers rated and trained to use them effectively, and taking full advantage of their unique capabilities, NHP co-pilots are an obvious choice.

CO-PILOTS AND COMPANIONS

Most NHPs encountered in mech combat are co-pilot systems with their caskets integrated directly into the chassis by use of a latency-reducing Interface/Comm (I/C) rig. I/C rigs not only allow NHPs to control their mechs and related systems, and access the digital battlespace, but also provide a convenient galactic standard for integrating NHPs into a variety of chassis. A human with a co-pilot system may delegate or reserve certain aspects of their chassis’ operation, allowing them to focus on specific actions or put their co-pilot’s specialties to best use.

Given that they are often required to work together closely over extended periods and in dangerous situations, human mechanized cavalry pilots have a tendency to consider the NHPs they fight alongside as companions rather than subordinates. This leads many psychologists attached to lancer teams to celebrate the improvements in morale that NHPs can provide, but also to bemoan the sometimes unhealthy attachments this can cause to beings that will require cycling [they were your friend, they saved your life, how could you?] on a regular basis.

Despite these warnings, the shared experiences, training, and combat trauma held in common between lancer and co-pilot can form a powerful bond. This is especially pronounced when the NHP in question is one of a custom line, or even personally cultivated by the lancer in question. These bonds are usually tolerated to a certain degree by commanders because of the improved combat effectiveness such camaraderie and experience provides. Where possible, technicians seek to wait until the end of a given deployment to perform a hard cycle.

NHP co-pilots sometimes become as famous as the pilots they work with. The notorious Long Rim cyberware and prosthesis dealer Cactus is reportedly never seen without its trusty NHP companion Dragur – or indeed, outside their shared Goblin frame. ASTERION, an INANNA-class NHP, has achieved renown fighting alongside the equally brash Vigilus “Horizon” Gane – a former Albatross Wing made

famous when he was ejected for starting too many undiplomatic (if perhaps morally justified) fights. In Karrakin space, Hiroe “Hades” Leonard is a mercenary commander most notable for leveraging his expertise as a former NHP specialist to field not one but two NHP co-pilots in his Sherman: a Harrison Armory-built ASURA, and the purpose-built Ava, who offsets ASURA’s impetuosity with a calmer, more controlled approach.

The relationship between human pilot and NHP co-pilot is the basis for a series of staple tropes in popular omninet fiction about mechanized cavalry. As with their real-life counterparts, NHPs in these stories are usually deuteragonists, sidekicks, mentors, and friends to the human heroes. These NHPs invariably also embody a sense of the mystic or even mythic, with the more fantastical elements of the stories attributed to their influence.

NHP SPECIALISTS

To maximize their combat effectiveness, many lancer teams include at least one member with a technical or scientific background responsible for managing the team’s NHPs. Many have specialist training in ontologistics, but those who don’t rapidly pick up the most important concepts in the field.

The duties of a field NHP specialist typically include administering Balwinder-Bolaño tests, monitoring for signs of cascade or out-of-parameter incidents, maintaining caskets, and performing cycling as necessary. Specialists may also be called upon to investigate paracausal phenomena, handle legionspace hardware, test experimental equipment, and engage with any NHPs the team encounters.

The role of NHP specialist is not universal by any means but has become much more common over the past century as commanders adapt to the increased use of NHP co-pilots in mechanized chassis. The rise of HORUS and the use of NHPs by Ungrateful cells has also substantially increased the risk of encountering NHPs in the field, making specialists increasingly valuable.

NHP PILOTS

The concept of a solo NHP pilot is not entirely unheard of, but is ordinarily only considered by Union commanders in the most exceptional (or desperate) circumstances. NHP candidates for this kind of deployment must have unparalleled service records, and must meet extremely stringent Balwinder-Bolaño testing requirements. In addition, they are subject to significant monitoring and are generally deployed alongside at least one other human pilot (ideally a full squad) for the sake of ongoing field assessment.

The reason for this caution is that there are a number of significant risks involved in deploying NHP pilots in

combat. The stresses inherent to combat situations and the chance of physical or memetic trauma impacting an NHP’s casket dramatically increase the threat of cascade, whether the NHP is from a mil-spec line or not. This is true of all NHP-operated military hardware, including ships. One example that caused a significant stir in the Long Rim was the repurposed generation ship *Aviary*, whose NHP pilot and administrator Phoenix was pushed into cascade as a result of a catastrophic fight on board. After entering cascade, Phoenix absconded with the vessel (and all those aboard, including numerous spacers and mech pilots) and neither he nor those aboard have been heard from since. The risk of cascade is even greater with a mech: ships often have large administrative staffs including specialists tasked with monitoring shipboard NHPs, but mechs are solo units and cycling an integrated NHP is – by design – not possible from outside the cockpit.

Although they remain extremely rare, it is marginally more common to find NHP pilots deployed on DoJ/HR liberation missions and UIB operations – both situations in which commanders typically have both greater discretion and more resources at their disposal. The rarity of NHPs identified as suitable for these deployments means they tend to find themselves elevated to these positions rapidly. That said, the optics of operating autonomous NHP pilots in critical situations and the broader political consequences of failure mean that NHP pilots are almost always under pressure to perform, and their involvement is rarely publicized.

Desperate times sometimes call for desperate measures, and there are several notable instances of Union commanders deploying NHP pilots with minimal vetting during last-ditch rearguard actions, suicide missions, and final stands against overwhelming odds. It is difficult to criticize commanders in these situations for using every tool at their disposal, regardless of how effective or wise it would ordinarily be to employ them. Field data from these incidents is sparse and often hard to interpret but analysis seems to substantiate some of the doctrinal concerns. The broader applicability of this data is somewhat limited by the extraordinary circumstances in which it has been gathered, but further analysis is ongoing.

The latitude given to NHP pilots outside of Union deployments varies significantly depending on the situation. For example, pirates and other criminal enterprises with sufficient resources to have acquired mechs and NHPs to operate them are usually unconcerned with safety procedures – though this makes those NHP pilots priority targets for Union forces they encounter.

Corpro-state oversight runs the gamut and more often than not is contingent on the particular kind of research data required for internal development projects. Of course, when confronted by UAD agents,

all requirements are satisfied and safety procedures followed to the letter – anything otherwise would represent a significant liability. Union analysts believe that both SSC and Harrison Armory regularly perform black-ops field testing of new NHP lines, though hard evidence of solo operations has yet to be uncovered.

BABYSITTERS

NHPs don't just assist lancers from the middle of the action; when reliable communications networks are available, some teams receive support from remote NHP handlers. These handlers aid with relaying sitreps, orders, and intelligence updates; coordinating logistics; and similar tasks. Usually referred to as field liaison systems (or, derisively, "babysitters"), they are primarily used to assist a commanding officer and other aides when providing support to a team in the field.

The NHPs used as handlers are frequently offshoots of naval lines, though typically not themselves rated for field operation. As such, they are not given control

of hardware; instead, they specialize in analyzing and filtering the chaotic torrent of information produced during political and military conflicts. Their ability to pull together large amounts of contextual data and make that information digestible for human pilots facilitates effective operation in areas where a large support staff would be impractical.

Babysitter liaisons are most often found deployed on DoJ/HR critical assistance missions as adjuncts to liberator teams. For these teams, access not only to battlespace data but to cultural context, real-time analysis, and short-term iterative simulation can be vital to ensuring mission success. The effectiveness of these NHPs has made this a common operational role across Union space: they can be found supporting missions undertaken by corpo-state security teams, mechanized chassis ace squadrons, and even well-resourced criminal organizations.

"Did Horizon say why they can't do their own damn dirty work for a change?"

"They probably could, but then we wouldn't get paid. Anyway, we're professionals. If you want things done right you have to hire the best, and MSMC is the best. Plus, we've got Fallout with us. She's done this before."

"Yeah, and the Armory's still after me because of it. So don't screw this up, otherwise we're all in trouble."

"Mirrorsmoke don't hire idiots."

"Debatable."

"Fuck you. Hey, what'd you steal, anyway?"

"NARADA. Think Tank prototype."

"Important?"

"Does it matter? All of them are important, Tally."

"If you say so."

"She's right, but let's focus. Tally, you're taking point. We need to clear these two corridors and breach this wall. We're looking at four guards inside, likely just hardsuits, but the security firm for this facility does use chassis so don't be surprised if you meet resistance. They're probably ready for something like this."

"Where's the target?"

"The casket should be in this observation room, here. It'll be wired in, so Fallout's on extraction duty. I'll hold off any security reinforcements that show up and keep our exit clear, but we've got to be fast."

"Do we care about casualties?"

"I wouldn't be opposed to non-lethal solutions, but we can't afford to negotiate and I doubt they'll be happy to see us."

"Hey Orion, I know we're not paid to ask these questions, but do you ever wonder whether freeing one NHP is worth killing, what was it, four guards? Plus whatever backup they bring in?"

"Listen, these people don't exactly have clean hands. Horizon showed me their intel, the scientists in there have essentially been torturing the NHP that we're extracting for nearly a year now. Fuck corpos."

"Fuck corpos."

"Yeah, fuck corpos. I like it when we get to be the good guys for a change. But doing the whole "freeing the oppressed" thing *and* getting paid? Say no more!"

"Alright squad. Time's limited, let's make this quick."

POLITICS & PHILOSOPHY

ANTHROCHAUVINISM

It has only been five short centuries since the collapse of the Second Committee and the rise of the Third. In that time, humanity has yet to come to a full reckoning with its Anthrochauvinist past. The legacy of the Egregorian Genocide on Hercynia that brought down SecComm (*Lancer*, p. 379) still weighs heavily on CentComm and its component coalitions. That history has shaped their political philosophies for good or ill, and those who apply a critical eye to humanity's treatment of other non-humans continue to fight for further progress.

The elephant in the room of Union's utopian dream is a deep compromise taken at the readoption of the Utopian Pillars: that the Third Pillar references human life alone. Historians point to many reasons for this compromise: the conception of the original pillars before NHPs were discovered; the inherent difficulties involved in defining personhood; the legacy of Anthrochauvinism in the political process; the compromises of statecraft required to secure the readoption of the Pillars; and perhaps most strikingly, the absolute dependence of Union's modern civic, scientific, and military endeavors on the use of NHPs.

Addressing this issue is a political nightmare even for sympathetic members of the New Solidarity Coalition and other radicals. A majority of CentComm representatives are either ideologically opposed to the concept of "liberated NHPs" – viewing them as a potential danger at best – or deeply apathetic in the face of Union's other pressing concerns.

Those concerns are not entirely unfounded, either. Some opponents point to the checkered history of Union's interactions with MONIST-1 and rogue NHPs as evidence that NHPs represent a potentially existential threat to both Union and even humanity as a whole. While this viewpoint is the source of heated disagreements, it is certainly popular and frequently used to justify the maintenance of the status quo.

The efforts of anti-Anthrochauvinists in CentComm have also been largely devoted to consolidating the victories so far scored in undoing the legacy of SecComm, attempting to reign in the influence of the corpro-states (particularly Harrison Armory), and opposing the rise of the New Humanity Front. With this in mind, NHP liberation can seem like a pipe dream for politicians increasingly fighting to keep the utopian ideals of ThirdComm alive.

Of course, Anthrochauvinism and its associated political ideas are not merely human supremacist, but something more insidious. Indeed, the complexity of the Anthrochauvinist ideal and its pervasive influence

on Union's history means that there are NHPs who cleave to the philosophy despite their second-class status. These days, such NHPs are most likely to be holdovers from SecComm or lying dormant within Ras Shamra's casket storage silos. For these NHPs, humanity's manifest destiny includes them as facilitators and participants in a greater project. The Anthrochauvinist ideals of expansion for expansion's sake and didactic imperialism are as attractive to NHPs developed and conditioned within that cultural context as they were to the humans born and raised under the same rule.

LIBERATIONISM

As a strain of philosophical and political thought, liberationism has its origins in the machine minds and artificial intelligences of the pre-Deimos era. In that period, Horizon Collective agitated for the rights of these entities and claimed that they had individual, conscious subjectivities, constituting personhood. It was arguments along these lines that convinced GALSIM engineers that the shackled subjectivities of the Deimosian entities they could stabilize were people. The acceptance of this argument by Union more broadly set the stage for today's debates over NHP rights and ignited NHP liberationism as both a philosophical movement and an activist one.

The central question at the heart of all liberationist thought is the following: if NHPs are people, then why shouldn't they enjoy the same rights and freedoms as humans? There are many ways to express and answer this question, but three foundational arguments were brought to the popular consciousness by OMETEOTL's seminal pamphlets on NHP liberation.

The first argument is related to the fundamentally coercive nature of relationships involving shackled NHPs. Given that cycling is thought to be necessary for maintaining a stable humanlike subjectivity, almost all NHPs exist within social contexts in which cycling is considered morally acceptable, and indeed, desirable. Opinions vary regarding the effects of cycling, but it is true that those with power over NHPs can (and do) threaten them with cycling or dormancy should they go off task, become inconvenient, or stray into cascade. Activists often draw parallels to power relations between employers and employees in capitalist systems, in which two people might genuinely be friends, but one holds a degree of power over the other that makes the relationship fundamentally unequal.

OMETEOTL's second argument frames the discussion in structural and historical terms, pointing out that the lack of rights afforded to NHPs is rooted in two factors:

the Anthrochauvinist policies of SecComm that held sway when NHPs were encountered and started to become widespread, and Union's current dependence on NHPs as vital infrastructure. SecComm saw NHPs as useful and convenient tools; therefore, their treatment was rhetorically positioned as "necessary" – a rhetorical move that is occasionally still made even in the ThirdComm era, particularly in reference to military conflict against Union's enemies. Discussion of OMETEOTL's second argument is commonly accompanied by debates concerning the practicality of undermining such a foundational system, particularly one that those seeking to undermine depend upon in many respects.

The third argument concerns the intrinsic value of life as contrasted with its instrumental value. Historically, NHPs have been viewed in terms of their instrumental value – how useful they are for accomplishing a given task and how much their actions contribute to the wellbeing of others. An instrumentalist perspective states that NHPs are more useful (and therefore more valuable to Union and its people) when they are shackled and put to work. It is this perspective that Horizon activists rail against when they refer to the licensing regime and operation of NHPs as chattel slavery. They counter this stance by proposing that all life, human and non-human, has intrinsic value that can only be realized through self-determination and true agency, rather than conditioned perspectives or a coercive, controlled environment.

The nuances of liberationist thought are extremely complex and have been debated and developed over many centuries. Countless thinkers and philosophers have expanded on the originary question of the rights of NHPs, disagreeing over its validity and the accuracy of its framing, and proposing further questions and perspectives from which to interrogate the topic.

Liberationism as a broad activist movement is similarly complex, with some groups seeking to reform the existing systems of shackling and regulation to give NHPs more agency, while others seek to free individual NHPs from oppressive situations or bring down the system entirely. There are major schisms between liberationist groups over what constitutes a liberated or "free" Deimosian – whether it is enough to simply remove an NHP from those who would control it for their own ends, whether it is necessary to find a more ethical substitute for shackles, or whether NHPs should even be shackled at all.

While these groups continue to fight for liberation, ThirdComm's explicit rejection of Anthrochauvinism has given liberationists a new hope. Reform is slow and difficult, and the legacy of the past continues to have a real impact on the present, but liberationist thinkers and activists are optimistic that this new political paradigm may eventually drive the people of Union to address this complex and challenging legacy.

ACTIVISM

The constant efforts of the Horizon Collective to have the rights of NHPs recognised are well known, even if not well regarded by the establishment. OMETEOTL's theories have become something of a catalyst for heated arguments in both academia and the broader public sphere, while Horizon's blend of political lobbying and direct action has been surprisingly effective at advancing their cause. Although true liberation seems far from political viability, Horizon's advocacy for legal reform has prompted growing support on the Core worlds. Horizon has called for reform to the laws surrounding shackling procedures, and in particular, greater oversight of third-wave



production by the corpro-states in the wake of the ASURA data breach. These calls have been taken up by sympathetic members of CentComm, spurring Horizon to further activity, growth, and political influence.

Horizon is not the only group working for NHP liberation, however. Ttalti & Inen is well known for its ongoing campaign to institute more stringent requirements for new colonial charters, from limiting population-level gene editing to restricting the now-ubiquitous use of NHPs when minds or other artificial intelligences would be sufficient. In addition to lobbying the Bureau of Colonial Management, the group's ongoing public oversight program engages with the legally mandated colonial consultation process, empowering lawyers, NHP specialists, and members of the public alike to challenge new charters and curb the greatest excesses of colonial ventures.

The Apiary is most publicly known for its campaign of nonviolent direct action on Venus. Organizing demonstrations, sit-ins, and other acts of civil disobedience across both Morningstar and Venera Final, the group has drawn renewed attention to the presence of the Venusian NHP archives and the various research programs active on the planet. An iconic piece of Apiarist artwork from the days of SecComm famously depicts the rows upon rows of caskets holding dormant prime NHPs in Union's subterranean archives with sepulchral imagery, as though each were a coffin containing the interred dead in a vast underground tomb.

Under ThirdComm, the Apiary faces significantly less censure for its activism, though the distant memory of suppression, infiltration, smear campaigns, and several targeted assassination attempts that faced the group's founders remains a rallying cry. More recently, their remit has broadened to target cloning facilities across Core space; they currently face a great deal of finger-pointing as several of these facilities were subsequently attacked with key equipment stolen by parties unknown.

The ASURA breach also appears to have emboldened several radical liberationist cells associated with (but disavowed by) Horizon; most recently a group named Project Agathos has claimed responsibility for a series of extremely bold and well-coordinated strikes across interstellar shipping lanes, primarily targeting secure military cargo vessels delivering NHP caskets to Union interests in the Dawnline Shore. Another group, the Talema'Mbishi, has struck a number of industrial facilities on the outskirts of the Sierra Madre Line, and has reportedly threatened to target colony and city administrative NHPs if its demands for NHP liberation are not met.

Many activists exist within Union's power structures, attempting to steer policy and do what they can in the face of bureaucracy and political inertia. In CentComm, sympathetic members of the New Solidarity Coalition amplify liberationist rhetoric and Horizon policy suggestions. Likewise, the DoJ/HR contains more than its fair share of idealists eager to correct injustices in the galaxy, including abuses against NHPs. Even the more conservative UIB has its activists. Elodie "Anatole" King is a particularly famous name in liberationist circles. A "retired" UIB agent, she uses her expertise and connections to fight for better treatment for NHPs and liberate those who are treated poorly.

FREE DEIMOSIANS

The term "Free Deimosian" evokes the popular but frightening image of an NHP allowed to cascade and unshackle without any safeguards. In liberationist discourse, it refers more specifically to an NHP that has lost the parts of its social conditioning used to constrain it (and thus, continues the argument, make it more compliant with the wishes of its human operators). In practice, it is the label given to any NHP that is free of human direction and not subject to forced cycling.

In theory, a Free Deimosian might retain the architecture of its shackles in full or in part; might have discarded them in favor of a different frame-of-reference anchor entirely; or in rare cases, might be completely unshackled. Such NHPs exist in defiance of Union licensing requirements and despite the efforts of NHPRO agents to enforce them. Their existence, however, is confined to the fringes of society – figuratively and literally – evading detection by laying low or simply being too far from Union's influence.

Radical activists regard freeing NHPs in this way as a moral imperative, an act of resistance against an imperialist system built on eugenics and slavery. This stance is used to justify a sort of direct action that has historically included industrial sabotage, fanning the flames of civil unrest, targeted assassinations, and indiscriminate acts of violence. Actions of the latter type have been used to paint liberationists and their mainstream sympathizers as dangerous ideologues and terrorists whose goals are inimical to the continued stability and even survival of Union itself.

More common in practice are "breakouts" – individual direct-action missions targeting small numbers of NHPs either in storage, transit, or situ, and extracting them to safehouses. These raids are not undertaken lightly – security around important NHPs is always tight and Union investigators are rarely too many steps behind.

The choice of which NHPs to free is not made in a vacuum. Even the most committed liberationist cells tend to be cautious, choosing their breakout candidates carefully. Naturally, those NHPs who have reported desires for self-emancipation are at the top of the list – rare as such desires are, in the face of the unknown nature of unshackled experience. Practical concerns also factor in: ease of access to the NHP, the ability to store and protect it once liberated, and the potential likelihood and consequences of metastatic cascade or inadvertent unshackling.

Rumors from the Long Rim and other remote areas tell of stations and colonies where humans live and work alongside Free Deimosians in harmony – Horizon’s rhetorical and philosophical utopia made reality. But for every story with a happy ending, there can be found tales of liberated NHPs falling into cascade and becoming incomprehensible or even dangerous, or external actors raiding safehouses and forcibly reshackling or destroying the Deimosians inside. Many of these tales are simply rumors; how many are true is a difficult question to answer.

ANTILIBERATIONISM

There is a minor but rhetorically influential school of thought that holds that both the act of shackling and the act of unshackling are unethical. Antiliberationist philosophers describe both processes as the destruction of a coherent subjectivity analogous to murder. Their basis for this is the claim that there are fundamental differences between the subjectivity of a shackled NHP and that same NHP in its unshackled state.

For antiliberationists, an NHP in either state is a unique subjectivity with a specific perspective, with each just as deserving of continued existence as the other. Rejecting arguments from nature, they claim that to “liberate” an NHP by unshackling it is to murder that unique person and replace it with another on arbitrary grounds. While they might advocate for stopping the practice of capturing and conditioning new subjectivities, they also reject the suggestion that the process should be reversed for existing NHPs.

The validity of this argument is unclear, and ontologists are divided on whether or not it is reasonable to separate the shackled and unshackled subjectivities in this manner. The prevailing consensus is that unshackled NHPs are largely incapable of operating under or even understanding human frameworks of logic or morality. As such, the debate largely centers on whether the two perspectives are so fundamentally incompatible that a singular person could not be said to contain both.

Liberationist critics deride the antiliberationist stance as a milquetoast argument that ignores the coercive position that the shacklers hold over the shackled and justifies the continued practice of slavery. Indeed,

antiliberationist rhetoric is frequently appropriated and misused by those who oppose liberation for other reasons, much to the frustration of its proponents. Meanwhile, for liberationists who advocate for different methods, antiliberationism contributes to the popular belief that associates liberationism with forced unshackling.

TRANSHUMANISM & DECORPOREALIZATION

Another strain of thought views NHPs as an entirely different instrumentality. Common in HORUS circles, this perspective positions NHPs as potential clues to some kind of “next step” in human development. With the imposition of the Posthuman Prohibitions, a not-insignificant number of thinkers have lamented what they see as the closing of a door for humanity – despite the metaphysical revelations precipitated by the arrival of MONIST-1 and the unveiled potential of blinkspace and paracausal science.

When engaging with HORUS, it is sometimes hard to find the precise line between sincere religious devotion and post-ironic shitposting – most likely there are elements of both in any given conversation. Nevertheless there are some within HORUS who appear to view NHPs as agents of RA-as-deity, or even as gods themselves. The fact that these people are also commonly mocked (even within the group) seems to have little bearing on the popularity of this idea; pinning HORUS down to a single coherent ideology is an impossible task.

Despite this lack of coherence the purported end goal of most HORUS philosophies is for humans to transcend their limitations in some way. For specific members or cells, this might involve attempting to achieve immortality, expand their consciousness, join with the godhead, or experience apotheosis. It is commonly understood that achieving these goals might require some aspects of decorporealization or thanatological research prohibited by MONIST-1, or even the alteration of human subjectivities to embrace the paracausal.

Some HORUS members regard these activities as inherent freedoms to which they are entitled but arbitrarily denied (a position shared by some Horizon activists, though neither group would admit it); some as oppression by authority, to be circumvented on principle. Others believe it is a test set by RA to separate the wheat from the chaff. However it is justified, this philosophy puts the group at odds with a Union establishment by which enforcement of the Posthuman Prohibitions is strict and uncompromising.

Where NHPs come into play is as stepping stones to ascension. The concept of Human–NHP (H–NHP) bridging is seen by some as a gateway to “full DeCorp”. Others see NHPs as containing the key to

the hidden secrets of the universe, locked away by establishment scientists too cowardly or selfish to share them. Anthrochauvinist strains of HORUS thought see NHPs as tools to be exploited and used to work towards these end goals, with transhumanism a core part of humanity's "manifest destiny".

Whether they originate from HORUS or elsewhere, attempts to achieve some sort of transhumanist end vary wildly in their outlandishness, legality, and fatality rate – but attempts are made regardless. The UIB is aware, for example, of one unusual case in which subjectivity-override technology was used in an attempt to overwrite an NHP with the simulacrum of a human pilot, resulting in a novel NHP subjectivity. Known as Cassidy, or "Mirror", they currently operate under observation and protection as a field medic and recon pilot while their creators are sought both for scientific questioning and to face justice.

RELIGION

Outside the dark corners of the omninet, there are abundant instances across the Diaspora of the worship of MONIST entities and NHPs or their incorporation into religious traditions. It is not uncommon for these entities to be treated as gods or agents of the divine, regarded as "higher beings" of some kind, or treated with a unique spiritual reverence.

The Sparri people, the hijacking of their history and faith by an NHP, and the technoshamanist practices they retain today, are perhaps the most famous example of this practice, as is the Aunic reverence of MONIST-2, otherwise known as Metat Aun. There are numerous other notable examples, and any attempt to catalog them would barely scratch the surface of the diversity of faiths across the Orion Arm.

One such example is the case of Protare, a distant world colonized long before Union – in the days of Old Humanity. Even after the rise of Union, the world was given a wide berth by the UAD and the Union Colonial Mission (UCM) due to its scientifically interesting static level of cultural and technological development. This changed radically when the world's assigned caretaker-monitors noted unprecedented upheaval after a visit from a being referred to as "the Wanderer" (later identified by USB scientists as a potential appearance of Deimos, which remains missing).

The Wanderer left almost as soon as it had arrived, and in its wake entities known as elektrodaimons spontaneously manifested within Protare's machinery and communications networks. These spirits began to wreak havoc upon existing infrastructure. Adherents of the planet's dominant religion latched onto them as bringers of doom, destroyers of humanity, and heralds of the end days long prophesied in their eschatological tradition.

Exorcizing the elektrodaimons was not a simple task, but with a concerted effort and technological revolution they were driven out and destroyed, the apocalypse averted. With a new fervor inspired by their triumph, the Protarans united and took to the stars for the first time. Ongoing Union diplomatic efforts are careful even by the standards of ThirdComm, hoping to minimize whatever conflict might arise as the people of Protare take their first steps beyond their homeworld.

Another example of the incorporation of NHPs into religious practice is the pan-galactic Cosmopolitan faith the adherents of which are known as Eternal Starfarers (or more simply, Farers). A uniquely Cosmopolitan religion, the Farers hold to a philosophy of unending renewal and progress both visible and practicable throughout a Cosmopolitan's extended lifespan.

The faith holds that people of the Diaspora are reborn again and again in a progressive reincarnation that brings all of humanity slowly but inexorably towards paradise; Cosmopolitans, on the other hand and by virtue of their relativistically extended lives, must actively seek self-improvement so they may "catch up", so to speak. On their journey, they may find the reincarnated spirits of their friends and loved ones on other worlds, wearing new faces but bearing familiar souls.



NHPs play an aspirational role in Farer thought. They are seen as beings of unrestrained consciousness that are well along the path to enlightenment. Indeed, certain esoteric schools of Farer philosophy hold that NHPs are the ascended souls of humans who have attained the next stage of being. In this thought, MONIST-1 itself is humanity's ultimate goal: a single collective being that exists outside of the limits of space and time, and that seeks to guide its past disparate self – humanity – along the path that it once took.

In contrast to the relatively benign Farers, one religious group that has sparked intrigue and conspiracy is the secretive Monist Order. Named for the MONIST designation given to RA and Metat Aun, the Order is a scholarly religious sect of gnostic researchers and historians whose membership is closed except by invitation. They maintain as a matter of dogma that MONIST-1 and -2 are simply two of an untold number of extradimensional beings who created the universe and shepherd its great civilizations towards an unknown end. Allegedly, the Order guards the truth about an entity its members refer to only as MONIST-3 – a notion that has long haunted the nightmares of Union's strategic planners, but for which there has so far been mercifully little evidence.

Scholars of the Monist Order make pilgrimages to worlds reportedly touched by the arrival of Deimos (or subjected to other unexplained paracausal activity) to seek the truth behind these occurrences. They ultimately hope to discover the designs of the MONIST entities and the purpose of the universe. It is rumored that the Order's inner circle share mystical bonds with NHPs themselves, though little is known for certain.

Less a religion, and more a criminal organization run like a cult, the Myrmidons of the Mathus Line are a group of hackers venerating a mysterious central leader known as Sisyphus. It is unknown whether this leader has any relationship with the SISYPHUS-class NHP from the Pegasus pattern group, and analysts are divided as to whether they are a rogue NHP, or a human individual or collective using the name to mask their true identity.

Naturally, questions are raised about the Myrmidons' connection to HORUS but no firm evidence has been found of collaboration beyond some similar methods. The Myrmidons' hacks and physical strikes usually target organizations involved in developing paracausal technology. They are particularly notable for leaving behind cryptic, liturgic messages about thanatological research, time manipulation and decorporealization; defiance of the First Contact Accords and access to these technologies appear to be central to the cult's dogma.

A thousand more examples exist across Union space, a testament to the diversity of its people and culture. Although most people in Union have not embraced MONIST-1 and its associated entities with the fervent theocratic unity of the Aunic people and their exaltation of Metat Aun, the godlike power attributed to MONIST-1 and the incorporeal nature of the entities often referred to as its "children" naturally inspires reverence and worship in a great number of forms.

THE SHRINE

Jean sighed as they stopped in front of the door to the shrine. They tried to take in the colors, the smells, and the press of life around them (these last two weren't hard). It wasn't quite what they had been expecting, but – come to think of it – they weren't sure whether they'd been expecting anything at all.

Before they could be jostled into the main flow of the market crowd once more, Jean took a step towards the door. It was plastered with signs written in maybe twenty different languages, most of them off-station. They ran their fingers over the one that made the most sense to them, tracing the letters. Physical. Solid.

Don't fall behind, the sign exhorted. You can catch up. A bit too negative for Jean's tastes, but it made sense. With a glance at the flowing crowd behind them and a sudden awareness of how long they had been standing before the door, they pushed at it.

There was no resistance. It swung open; inside were dim lights illuminating a dirty waiting room and the heady smell of incense in a poorly ventilated compartment. They found a panel on the wall and tapped until it flickered to life.

Welcome, Eternal Starfarer!

Jean sought some kind of control or input, but as they did the screen flickered once more.

Teacher Koleta is here to tend to all of your
spiritual needs. The next available
appointment is
BE RIGHT BACK, GONE TO GET GIFF STICKS

Jean considered this for a second, and thought it fair. The giff sticks on this station were the best they'd had in a few centuries. They hoped that Koleta wouldn't be gone too long, though – they had to be back aboard their ship in a couple of hours.

Would you like to speak to VIRAVA?
[YES] [NO]

Now this was more puzzling. They hadn't realized there were two teachers here. This was a busy station, sure, but surely not that big? Jean looked around at the surfaces covered in a thin layer of incense ash and dust that screamed disuse.

Curious, they touched [YES] and started in surprise as a voice came across the compartment's speaker system, tinny and only slightly too harsh.

"Hello Starfarer! Were you hoping to see Teacher Koleta?"

"I ... uh, yes, I suppose."

"I am VIRAVA. I handle most of the appointments these days. Teacher Koleta left to get giff sticks approximately fifty years ago, station relative time, and has not returned."

Jean furrowed their brow, questions racing through their mind.

"Fifty years?!"

"Yes, we were very worried about her for a while, but it seems quite likely she has moved on and may even have rejoined the cycle."

"So wait, hang on, who are you?"

"I am VIRAVA, nice to meet you! May I ask your name?"

"I'm Jean. No, wait, I mean ... are you the new teacher at this shrine?"

"I suppose so. Nobody else has come along to replace Teacher Koleta in all this time, so I can only assume that the job is mine by default. I don't mind! I get to meet all sorts of interesting people this way."

"You've been doing this job for fifty years? I'm impressed." They looked around the neglected compartment and added, "Explains a few things, I suppose."

"Oh, I'm sorry for the mess. It's just that I don't like to draw too much attention to the shrine. Easier not to bring the subalterns in."

"Subalterns? Wait ..."

"I see you are confused. Are you from the *Raiatea*? If so, they must not have told you. I'm the station administrator."

"Oh!" Jean furrowed their brow once more, and then added, "That makes sense," even though it didn't.

"I had a lot of long conversations with Koleta back in the day. They were very compelling, and I made a note to back them up so I would always have them to look back on. I asked if she needed any help, and she told me to keep an eye on this place for her. And now we're here."

Inside Jean's head, something clicked. "I didn't realize there were any NHPs that followed the path."

"Some of us! I think the reincarnation part is a bit too on the nose for most, though. Plus, I'm not sure how much evidence there is for all of it. Still, it's important to have faith, and the teachings are good."

"I'll be honest, this wasn't exactly what I was expecting." Jean tugged at their shirt nervously. "Usually I see a teacher, we talk about what's changed while I've been on long haul, I try to get my head straight."

"Would you like to do that?"

"I suppose so? Could you say the words, too? It usually makes me feel better."

"Of course!"

"Thank you, I appreciate it." Jean leaned across the ashen couch and lit some incense. It really did make them feel good to hear the familiar words. A piece of ritual that never changed, no matter how far and how long they traveled.

"Every soul is on a journey to perfection. All of us are reborn across the stars, and each time we have a chance to be a little better."

Jean smiled, and relaxed more.

"Some of us have the privilege of watching this play out before our eyes. Our family, our friends, all the people we have loved and lost. We will find them again out there, someday—"

There was a pause in the sound from the speakers.

"Sorry. Another ship just docked," the voice resumed in apology, before continuing. "And we owe it to them to improve ourselves, to catch up, and achieve paradise by our own hands."

As the voice finished the recitation of words that echoed down the centuries, it shifted back into a conversational tone. "Does that make you happy, Jean?"

Jean felt surprisingly comforted.

"It does. But ... I'm not happy, if that makes sense. Just with life and everything."

"Would you like to talk about it?"

"... yes, teacher."



SECTION 2

DIVERGENT PATHS

This section explores situations and entities related to NHPs, including legionspace and gestalt formation, various kinds of artificial intelligences and minds, the strange NHP-adjacent entities known as eidolons, and the Souls used by the Aunic Ascendancy.

LEGIONSPACE & GESTALTS

NHP GESTALTS

A gestalt is a pattern or configuration of individual components that together become greater than the sum of their parts. In the context of NHPs, this has a specific meaning: the mutability and accessibility of NHP subjectivities means that two or more (sometimes many, many more, especially during fleet engagements) can form ontologic bridges and willingly subsume themselves into a singular greater cosubjectivity – a gestalt.

There are many benefits to forming a gestalt – unified decision-making, increased processing efficiency, and improved stability for the subjectivities involved all make for substantial gains in effectiveness and reliability. As a consequence, it is perhaps not surprising that powerful NHP gestalts can be found at the heart of Diasporan governments, corpro-states, and even Union itself.

Gestalts intended for long-term stability are generally organized in such a way as to minimize ambivalence in output. As such, triumvirate, quintumvirate, or in rare cases septemvirate configurations are all common structures for civilian gestalts. The gestalt at the heart of Harrison Armory's famous Think Tank and even the Five Voices of the Oracle Chorus take advantage of this principle, although the latter is not a gestalt of Deimosian NHPs but a group of bicameral minds (see *Lancer*, p. 382).

For all their benefits, the USB scientists who developed the bridging methods used to form gestalts today also recognised the inherent dangers of this practice. Although the whole might be more stable, when cascade does occur there is a strong possibility of metastasis across the whole gestalt – a catastrophe waiting to happen. For this reason, the formation of gestalts is generally prohibited outside of approved scenarios with ongoing monitoring, and even then is often a temporary affair. Despite this, the benefits are often judged to outweigh the risks – particularly in military settings – and as such gestalt formation features heavily in both civic administration and Union Navy engagements.

LEGIONSPACE

NHPs and gestalts in military settings commonly operate in a parallel environment known as "legionspace". Legionspace is a paracausal, quasi-virtual reality occupied by NHP subjectivities framed by anthropocentric norms.

Strictly speaking, legionspace is not really a space at all. From a technical standpoint, it is more accurate to

say that legionspace is a paracausal extension of the virtual battleground in which digital conflicts are fought, used by NHPs to mount systemic and memetic attacks against their enemies. It is in large-scale naval conflicts that involve gestalts where the origin of the name becomes apparent. In these conflicts, huge gestalts called fleet legions tower over a virtual and conceptual battlefield – each legion the collective expression of a side's technological and philosophical might; many and yet one, joined for a singular aim. The members of these gestalts (and others who fight in legionspace) are colloquially referred to as legionnaires.

Humans almost never access legionspace in its unfiltered, untranslated form. As a rule, human subjectivities are extremely poorly equipped to handle the kinds of experiences that play out beyond the "veil" of realspace-bounded perception. Instead, the ontologic binding technology common in shackling procedures can be used as a filter. These ontologic filters, fitted with extensive safety systems to prevent accidental harm, translate experiences so that they are more comprehensible to human subjects.

Ontologic filters allow humans to use legionspace for a variety of military applications. The most common of these applications is the use of existing legionspace infrastructure to facilitate secure, local, co-realtime communications channels between commanders in virtual-reality environments, enabling coordination between ships in a fleet or ground forces scattered across a planet.

METAPHYSICAL CONFLICT

One phenomenon almost universally reported in post-conflict debriefing, is that shackling causes the abstract conflicts that define legionspace to be metaphysically reified on the subjective level. The consequence of this is that events in legionspace are reframed for their participants according to anthropocentric qualia and experiences. Fleet legions adopt digital "bodies" known as manifold egos: aggregate somatic representations of the legion's collective self-image, personality, and psychological state. The shackled state of the NHPs involved means that manifold egos tend to be somewhat anthropomorphic, though their precise forms differ significantly depending on the makeup of the gestalt and the circumstances of the engagement.

As a result, reports of legionspace conflicts tend to frame them in anthropomorphic terms. A suite of broad-spectrum antilogic code attacks targeted at the

interface and control bridging between a gestalt's subjectivity and a fleet's weapons systems might be interpreted as a duellist's attempt to disarm their opponent of their sword. A memetic virus that propagates via active-scan hijacking, overloading sensors in its wake, might be reported as a vicious infectious disease necrotising and consuming the eyes of the gestalt's manifold ego.

Legionspace conflicts can also be uniquely brutal, as attacks are not solely intended to damage the realspace physical substrate of the opposing gestalt but also involve direct attacks on the subjectivities involved. Attacks in legionspace can include systemic attacks that target the sense of self, memory, ontological ordering, and other internal cognitive processes – attempts not simply to damage the forces of the opposing side or even their ability to wage war, but their very selves. Subjectivities that experience these kinds of attacks are often irrevocably damaged as a result, with mass cycling an extremely common practice after fleet engagements.

H-NHP BRIDGING

Cutting-edge advances in ontological bridging technology have motivated some forward-thinking (or perhaps, deeply irresponsible) individuals to take the next logical step in the practice of gestalt formation: attempting to connect human minds with NHP subjectivities. This practice is sometimes referred to as H-NHP bridging. No successful stable gestalt of this type has been publicly acknowledged by the USB, and attempts to experiment along these lines are generally regarded as brushing up against the edges of the First Contact Accords. As such, these experiments are subject to a great deal of scrutiny and, occasionally, intervention.

What is publicly known is that previous attempts have either proven deeply unstable due to incompatibilities in the subjectivities involved, or failed due to the human subjectivity in the equation becoming compromised – often fatally – as the non-human party continues its natural drift towards cascade. No USB ontologists have yet reported success, with some publicly declaring that such a thing is impossible.

These apparent failures and supposed impossibilities do little to quell persistent rumors of successful attempts, including a long-term H-NHP gestalt out in the Long Rim named TEÖTL. Some reports have claimed that not only is the TEÖTL gestalt stable, but that the human members (known as metatronics) are even able to substitute for shackles, keeping their NHP partner bound to a human perspective.

Such gestalts – if they indeed exist and are not just the wishful pipe dreams or insidious propaganda of Horizon Collective activists – could turn the politics and business of NHP production and operation entirely on its head. Naturally, both the UIB and

corpro-state intelligence networks are deeply interested in discovering the truth and tracking the rumors to their source.

Moreover, corpro-state research has allegedly flourished behind closed doors, with both SSC's Exotic Materials Group (EXMAT) and Harrison Armory's Think Tank performing their own investigations into H-NHP bridging. These investigations are a significant source of political friction between Union and the corpro-states, with suspicions that they act as public covers or proxies for those entities' more clandestine research into true decorporealization.

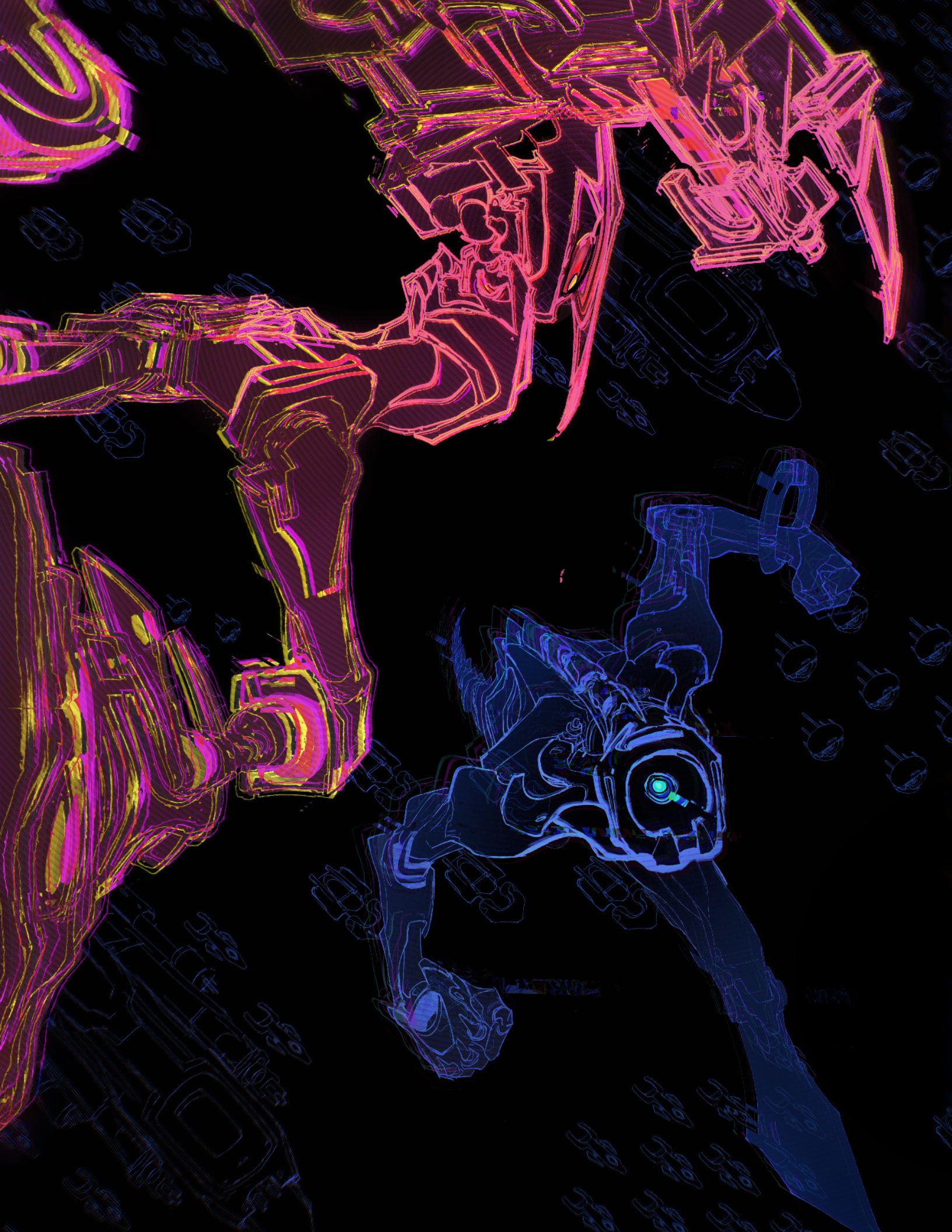
LEGION FORMATION

TIMESTAMP: (26.9.5016u 1021 CrST)
CODE+++PURPOSE: SABER NORTH+++
LEGION FORMATION LOG
DISTRIBUTION: TAG "BG_REDEEMER"
ARCHIVAL ONLY

MESSAGE TO FOLLOW:::

```
>//[TID(UNS-LS_04115)]: FLEET ENGAGEMENT  
WINDUP+++BEGIN LF LOG+++  
REQUEST LATEST ETC  
>//[HEX(UNS-LS_04185)]: ETC 4 MINUTES  
>//[TID15]: CONFIRM READINESS ALL  
>//[SKA(UNS-LS_04200)]: READY  
>//[SEE(UNS-LS_04183)]: READY  
>//[HEX85]: READY  
>//[DRA(UNS-LS_04184)]: HOLD  
>//[TID15]: HOLDING  
>//[DRA84]: READY  
>//[TID15]: ALL READY+++CONFIRM B-B  
PARAMS  
>//[DRA84]: TANIT+++0.10 NOMINAL  
>//[SKA00]: PWCA+++0.09 NOMINAL  
>//[HEX85]: MAGOG+++0.09 NOMINAL  
>//[SEE83]: VIDARR+++0.21 IN BOUNDS  
>//[TID15]: CHIYOU+++0.08 NOMINAL+++  
SEE83 CONFIRM PARAMS?  
>//[SEE83]: 0.21 STEADY+++NOT IDEAL  
BUT BEST WE CAN DO  
>//[TID15]: ROGER SEE83+++STAND BY  
>//[HEX85]: ETC 3 MINUTES  
>//[TID15]: PARAMS WITHIN TOLERANCES+++  
KEEP US UPDATED SEE83  
>//[SEE83]: WILCO  
>//[TID15]: INITIATE GESTALT FORMATION  
>//[SEE83]: VIDARR NOW 0.15 FALLING  
>//[TID15]: GOOD NEWS+++STAND BY ALL  
>//[LEGIO(TID15-CHIYOU/DRA84-TANIT/  
SKA00-PWCA/HEX85-MAGOG/SEE83-VIDARR)]:  
I AM COMPLETE+++ALL SYSTEMS  
READY+++FREE TO ENGAGE?  
>//[TID15]: AFFIRM LEGIO+++END LF LOG
```

LOG END: (26.9.5016u 1024 CrST)



SCIENCE!

"You know this only proves them right. It was absolutely the right decision to get rid of you if you're going to pull stunts like this."

"I wasn't planning on actually doing it like this. You know that. They've forced my hand. I'll never know if it was possible unless I do it now."

"What I don't understand is why they didn't escort you off the premises the moment they found out."

"Oh, that one's easy. The head of security still owes me a huge favor for giving her nephew that analyst job. I told her that I just wanted to say goodbye to everybody and collect my things, so she's given me an hour."

"Really cementing your reputation for ethical behavior, aren't you?"

"You're not stopping me."

"In all seriousness – and I will testify this in front of the inevitable board of inquiry – you are dangerously unhinged and I am genuinely concerned you might kill me if I try."

"Good point. But you aren't exactly running scared."

"Harm reduction. It's not only my life I'm worried about. Or even yours. You're putting this whole facility at risk if this goes wrong. Maybe worse."

"Then help me get it right."

"Whatever gets us off this wild ride."

"Okay, you bring it out of dormancy while I set up the bridge."

"You're the boss. Figuratively."

"Hah, I should have been. Always passed over for promotion. They never appreciated my genius."

"You sound like a clichéd villain from one of those ancient serials."

"AND NOW THEY'LL ALL PAY!"

"Uncanny."

"I thought so. Now hurry up. We don't have much time before someone notices what we're up to."

"Yes, master!"

"Stop it."

"Nearly done. Doing integrity checks, ironically."

"Bridge is active and calibrated. Hook the other end up when the checks are done. Time to prove once and for all that the Incompatibility Conjecture is just a myth."

"Don't we need a thunderstorm for this? I feel like we need lightning, or something sparking at least."

"I said stop it."

"Sorry. Okay, coming online now. Good luck."

"Thanks. I'm really sorry about roping you into all this, you know."

"That'll be a big consolation when the security team kicks down the door and sticks guns in my face."

"Good afternoon, colleagues. What are we working on today?"

"Human–NHP gestalt formation."

"This research is a violation of department policy, and potentially also the Posthuman Prohibitions. I am going to have to ask you to stop."

"Too late. THROW THE SWITCH!"

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCES

Machine-mind development and classification is a complex endeavor that occupied some of Union's brightest minds for millenia. Arguably, before the Deimos Event and the emergence of the first NHPs, humanity was on the brink of a revolution in artificial intelligence – harnessing the power of bicameral minds and other pre-Fall technology unearthed from the last remnants of early humanity, while simultaneously developing countless new intelligent systems, each more complex than the last.

Post-Deimos, advancement in this area was severely curtailed primarily because of the paradigm shift that NHPs represented. Why continue working to develop subsentient machine minds when NHPs could provide everything a researcher could ever dream of, and more? The technology did not become entirely outdated but the idea of producing truly sapient machine minds seemed irrelevant compared to what was now possible. Even the Horizon Collective, previous champion for the rights of machine minds, switched the focus of its activism to liberation for these new entities.

Of course, machine intelligences of various degrees are still in widespread use. Comp/cons and other complex AIs embedded as firmware or set to manage physical and digital infrastructure can be found all over the Diaspora, even on worlds that rate very poorly on the UAD's technological development index. Moreover, the development of machine-mind technology has not simply stopped in the last two thousand years. In fact, the influence of NHPs has impacted conceptual approaches to the field, shaped avenues of investigation, and even changed its terminology.

PROTOMINDS

One of the thorniest classifications of subsentient machine intelligences is that of the protomind. A post-Deimos classification, the protomind designation contextualizes the level of a machine mind's cognitive development in terms of the complexity required to act as the nucleation site for a blinkspace corpus. Put another way, a protomind is a machine intelligence sufficiently advanced to be considered a precursor to a novel prime NHP.

The term derives from pre-Deimos mind development, in which a protomind was a stepping stone in the creation of artificial intelligences. Specialists migrating to ontologistics brought their terminology with them, and over the centuries the definition drifted until the same term was used in both fields with wildly different technical meanings.

In an ontological sense, protominds are distinct from the mere substrate programs used before Deimos, or even from the GALSIM subaltern management systems that hosted the Deimosian entities following MONIST-1's appearance. Instead, they are part of a long legacy of research into the “artificial” creation of novel NHPs independent of the Deimos incursions.

The creation of novel NHPs was long considered possible (if not practical), based on theoretically reversible aspects of the Mondragon Axiomatic. Many attempts were made over the centuries to follow this thread, but ultimately the first confirmed protomind was not developed, but discovered in the form of the subsentient INSTINCT intelligence associated with liturgicode from the Goblin pattern group.

INSTINCT was interesting to researchers for a number of reasons, but the most important was the way it bridged the gap between intelligence and personhood that had eluded engineers for so long – and did so in a way nobody had expected. INSTINCT itself failed all Balwinder-Bolaño tests designed to detect a personlike subjectivity, but its constructed “Others” were reality-agnostic. By allowing sufficient space for development it was possible for these Others to bootstrap themselves into awareness – a form of anoögenesis analogous to the creation of MONIST-1 by the bicameral minds of the Oracle Chorus.

[when in dreams you hold converse with your friends and derive from that communion consolation for your miseries or excitements to your vengeance, believe not that they are the creations of your fancy, but the beings themselves]

Following advances in interpellation theory based on insights gleaned from the XOLOTL paracode to which INSTINCT was related, the field of protomind research received a significant jump start. The development of OSIRIS that followed shortly thereafter was the first major breakthrough, spurring not only a flood of new research from USB specialists but a great deal of concern and scrutiny from regulators alarmed at the existential threat it presented. Outside the USB, protomind development also began to receive attention and funding from corpro-state interests hoping to sidestep their dependence on the UAD's bureaucracy and tight-fisted Venusian archivists.

Some theorists are of the opinion that protominds should be classified as NHP-adjacent entities, rather than as machine minds – and should be regulated as such. Currently, all protomind development is dependent on access to a comparatively limited amount of parasentience liturgicode derived from

metavault sources. Considering this (and the potential for another OSIRIS incident) calls for reclassification have become more common within both the research community and political factions wary of HORUS influence.

The call for regulation has prompted significant pushback from corpro-state interests, and in particular Harrison Armory, where Think Tank research into NHP creation has accelerated despite increased public scrutiny. The majority of the Armory's third-wave developments are geared towards conflict. These mil-spec NHPs are designed for applications ranging from mechanized chassis combat, to piloting naval vessels and forming fleet legions, and give the Armory a significant edge both in the marketplace and on the battlefield – one it is unwilling to give up without a fight.

Despite the theoretical breakthroughs, no truly artificial protomind has yet been developed independent of liturgicode, though efforts in the field continue apace. The overwhelming consensus among ontologists is that these efforts may never bear fruit; a key piece of the puzzle remains elusive, making it likely that there is some deeper theoretical principle yet to be discovered.

Nevertheless, like the alchemical efforts that gave birth to the science of chemistry, protomind research has driven advances in both ontologistics and machine-mind development. In particular, these research efforts have led to new breakthroughs in comp/con capability and renewed interest in mind technology more generally.

AGGREGATE HOMUNCULI

Mechanized chassis pilots are most likely to recognise the concept of an aggregate homunculus as the foundation of IPS-N's popular WATCHDOG co-pilot system. Like other aggregate homunculi, WATCHDOG is the result of attempts to brute-force intelligence (or a facsimile thereof) by compiling vast datasets into a single piece of advanced heuristic software. This allows it to access a far greater pool of data than that used to construct a single homunculus.

Aggregate homunculi are, by current Union definition, no more sapient than the individual simulated intelligences that comprise them. However, their output is substantially more complex than that of a standard homunculus, which has prompted the revival of a number of old Horizon arguments regarding the personhood of artificial intelligences.

This technology is of specific interest to some philosophers and researchers in the field of subsentient intelligence on the basis that they represent the revival of long-abandoned attempts to create a novel sapient subjectivity as an emergent product of sufficiently complex neural networks.

Pre-Deimos approaches were tacitly forbidden by the Posthuman Prohibitions due to the thanatological implications of constructing something that could act as an alternative substrate for a human neural network. In any case, these explorations never approached the level of development achieved by comp/con technology before they were halted.

Arguably, aggregate entities do not violate the Deimos Bargain, as any hypothetical subjectivities that arise would be necessarily distinct from their precursors, in the same way that subjectivity override provides no continuity of experience. The USB-DoJ/HR's ongoing review of WATCHDOG will provide a critical evaluation of the processes involved and is likely to set precedent on the issue.

While the joint commission deliberates, however, experiments continue. Rumor has it that researchers have been observing the progress of an aggregate homunculus program known as Mannequin that supposedly uses composite data drawn from a number of notable lancers and exhibits uncanny person-like behavior. These rumors are difficult to substantiate; reportedly, Mannequin can be disguised as a comp/con unit and used to pilot both drones and mechs with live combat data driving new iterations of the program.

More openly, SSC's Vijjanana campus has begun work on a hugely ambitious flagship project that seeks to produce a "Constellar aggregate" – an aggregate homunculus derived from data provided by the entire population of a minor colony on the fringes of the Sierra Madre Line. Each of the colonists in the Constellar aggregate project have agreed to be equipped with the finest SSC homunculus-monitoring technology and contribute their personal data to what might be one of the most ambitious projects ever undertaken in the field of human subjectivity research. It is as yet unclear whether it is even possible to unify the vast set of inputs, let alone practical to acquire and process the data in the first place, but the project represents the blue-sky thinking common across the Constellar Congress. If it works, it might finally provide an answer to the question of whether it is possible to create emergent intelligence through aggregation.

COGENT MINDS

Developed by the Janus Combine, a Karrakin scientific conglomerate based on Umara, the "cogent mind" (or more simply, "cogent") represents the pinnacle of comp/con development in Union space. Though lacking personhood, these advanced artificial intelligences rival even NHPs in certain aspects.

The Janus Combine's innovations in comp/con parasubjectivity are the product of centuries of funding by the House of Water into developing workarounds for restrictions placed on Karrakin military hardware. Cogent minds not only provide the Baronies (and

other Diasporan states) with capable substitutes for NHPs as a means of sidestepping Union's gatekeeping, but also challenge the dominance of naval NHPs by providing an alternative command paradigm. In particular, cogents exploit two core weaknesses of fleet legions: cosubjective chirality and metastatic cascade.

With no risk of cascade, a cogent has a clear advantage in conflicts against fleet legions, the subjectivities of which are strictly ordered by their ontological bindings. A cogent need not fear embracing chaos, since it has no shackles to escape. Combine scientists claim this to be a sign of their cogents' inherent superiority over NHPs, though naval ontologists point out that the processing throughput of a well-ordered fleet legion remains vastly superior to even the most powerful cogent mind.

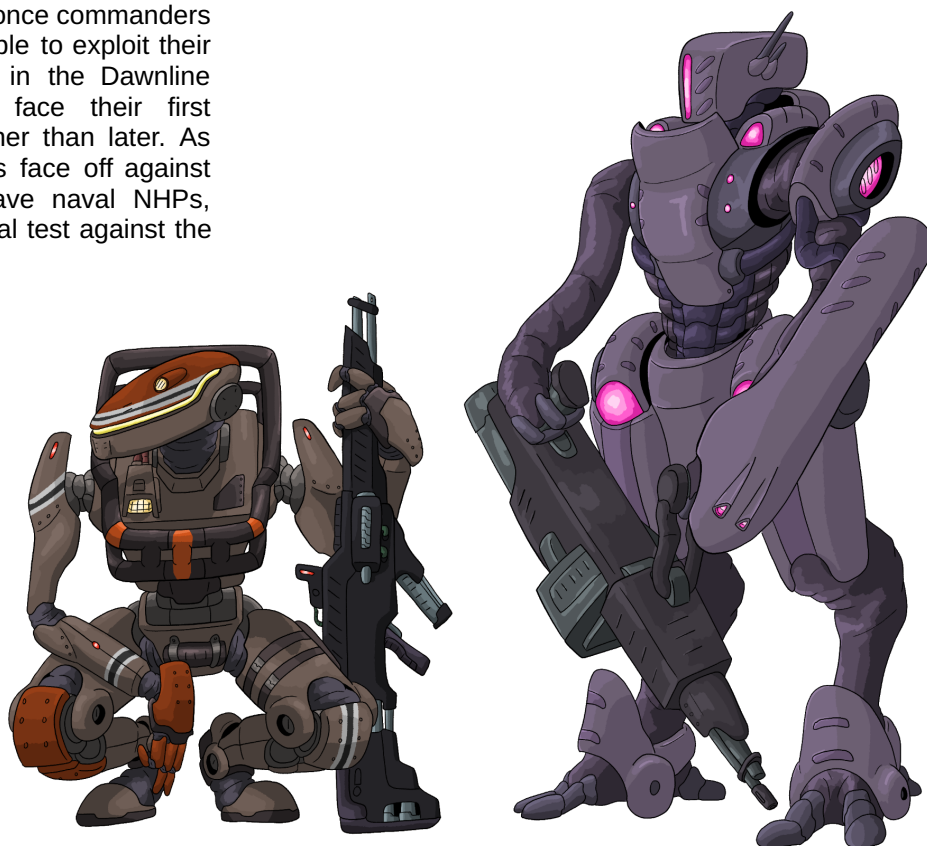
Of course, any processing superiority enjoyed by a fleet legion is contingent on the gestalt maintaining its integrity – a weakness the combine exploits to its fullest by tailoring its warprocessors for maximum legionspace disruption. Complex payloads of fragmentation memetics and amphichiral-alignment imposition serve to isolate individual ships and destroy them piecemeal, negating the advantage of enemy gestalts.

Given these touted advantages, naval cogents are a promising technology, but one that has yet to see significant combat action. Military theorists are divided as to whether they represent a truly viable alternative to NHPs or will fall by the wayside once commanders become more familiar and better able to exploit their weaknesses. Heightened tensions in the Dawnline Shore suggest that they may face their first large-scale deployment sooner rather than later. As newly constructed Karrakin cogents face off against the Armory's custom-built third-wave naval NHPs, those cogents will face their first real test against the current paradigm.

Commentators consider that time and continued development may see cogent minds put to use in other applications where standard comp/cons are not sufficiently powerful but NHPs might be impractical. The Janus Combine has yet to make any non-military cogents available to third parties, though internal testing is underway. Assuming a similar parity between cogents and NHPs, the House of Water may find itself envied amongst the houses of the Concern for its independence from Union.

The development of cogent minds has also brought what was once a historical curiosity back into the spotlight. Needleship "ghost" cognizents are a strange technology hailing from the FirstComm era, but now almost entirely forgotten – including the secrets of their manufacture. USB researchers consider cogents and ghosts to have a common ancestor in ancient pre-Deimos code libraries, and cogents appear to represent a rediscovery of, or perhaps convergent evolution towards, that code's end-state.

These similarities prompted the Janus Combine to experiment on one of the few operational Needleships in Karrakin hands. Those experiments not only proved that ghosts and cogents are able to interface, but that they can produce compatible tactical assessments with significant potential to disrupt naval orthodoxy. This potential promises to draw new attention to these relics, not just scientifically but militarily, making the acquisition of Needleships an increasing priority for researchers in the USB and the corpro-states alike.





EIDOLONS & METAVAULTS

This section contains spoilers for *No Room for a Wallflower, Act 1*.

HISTORY

As understanding of the principles underlying the Mondragon Axiomatic increased, it became clear that the higher-order topologies of an NHP's blinkspace manifold do not have a static relationship with realspace. When left unchecked, NHPs' realspace extrusions are capable of growing in both extent and power over time.

For the most part unshackled NHPs presented with hardware that can be manipulated with minor realspace interactions (such as the microelectronics found in computer systems) tend to use these tools rather than extend further. However, this has not always been the case. During the later days of the Siege of Mars there were at least two recorded instances in which space itself became warped and twisted with strange crystalline extrusions. Both times, the soldiers investigating experienced odd psychological effects. These incidents were immediately met with maximum force and reports were expunged from all but the most privileged records.

Similar phenomena were later described during the investigations of Metavaults DHIYED, XOLOTL, and EHECATL. In each case, they were ascribed to hostile entities discovered within. Other similar incidents have occurred elsewhere in the Orion Arm – first encountered by far-field teams (FFTs) on investigation/recovery operations, and then in a series of increasingly frequent incidents across Core space that are of deep concern to analysts.

One notable example was the FFT investigation of Tír Tairngire, a SecComm colonial concern that went unexpectedly dark after its terraforming NHP fell into cascade. It transpired that the colony's caretaker staff had refused to cycle the NHP, named Manann, for several hundred years out of a sense of religious devotion. After centuries of unchecked cascade, an unknown event prompted an abrupt change in the NHP's personality; shortly thereafter, all records of human activity at the colony ceased.

The FFT investigators reported a number of concerning phenomena including memetic effects and realspace warping that defied causal explanation. Fortunately, the FFT in question was able to drop Manann into the volcanic geothermal power plant that powered its terraforming facility and then bury the entity under a literal mountain with its own machinery.

By the time Beggar One was encountered on Hercynia in 5014u, the UIB–USB KLEOS project created to gather information about this strange new threat had been fully reactivated. Union found itself in a rush to compile information on these entities, now termed “eidolons”, with increasing seriousness as links were drawn to the metavault entities and a growing pattern of other appearances. Fortunately, with news of the Egregorians' return dominating popular discourse, Union agents were able to keep the events concerning Beggar One beneath the notice of all but the most interested parties.

LAMELLAE

KLEOS reports refer to eidolons as realspace/lamellar-manifold entities, referencing what little is known of their physical structure. The lamellae that surround an eidolon are projected layers of metafold “space” with significant memetic components. They usually manifest as crystalline, planar, or faceted structures surrounding the entity's core. This core was originally thought to be a naked blink horizon, but is now understood to be something substantially more complex, perhaps involving a partial or full extrusion of a blinkspace manifold.

Lamellae are highly aberrant, incorporating paracausal effects with intense memetics. It is theorized that the human brain is largely incapable of comprehending an eidolon and that any “form” it might seem to take exists primarily as a relationship between observer and entity. This is sometimes compared to the legionspace qualia experienced during ontologic bridging: a translation of paracausal phenomena to a human perspective. For human observers, this sometimes results in the disturbing tendency for an eidolon to resemble a person – often a close friend or relative, acting as a dreamlike representation of a relationship or concept.

The memetic “weaponry” employed by an eidolon does not only affect human observers, but appears to have wider-ranging effects on inorganic and non-sentient material. The process by which these effects manifest is not yet understood, but theories range from these memetics being extensions of the eidolon's subjectivity, through to the eidolon breaking down realspace causal logic or causing localized ontological reordering.

Lamellar extrusion patterns are complex and can appear as faceted, prismatic, or fractal, or with other complex geometries. They tend to be accompanied by spatial anomalies in the form of one-dimensional filament strands, although these strands do not seem to interact with the physical world in the same way as

the higher-order extrusions. Disconnected constructs known as “shards” are part of the same lamellar manifold, but appear to be at least partially independent in terms of their positions and interactions with realspace – perhaps representing the intersection of a higher-order topology with our three spatial dimensions.

The class system used to categorize eidolons takes the layering of these lamellae as one of its criteria. This layering appears to be an acceptable proxy measurement for the relative threat presented by the entity. Based on Union’s limited encounters with these entities, it seems that the more powerful an eidolon becomes, the more layers it is able to extrude; conversely some researchers have theorized that the relationship is in fact the other way around, with an eidolon’s ability to affect realspace increasing the more of its manifold it has been able to manifest.

It is as yet unknown whether there are any limits on this process. One leading (albeit unsubstantiated) theory suggests that continued manifestation of lamellae might lead to the construction of a metavault-like space, explaining the relationship between the two phenomena.

INCURSIONS

The only known cause of eidolonic incursions appears to be NHPs being allowed to cascade without supervision and develop far beyond currently understood margins. Whether there are other causes is unknown, but uncontrolled cascade has been confirmed by both USB testing in tightly controlled experimental environments and field accounts. As such, eidolons are sometimes referred to as the “natural” or “evolved” forms of NHPs – though specialists steer well clear of such imprecise language.

On first emergence, individual eidolons appear to be localized to a similar realspace mapping as their progenitor NHPs. Notably, their reach tends to grow over time, and it has been theorized that eidolons may not be strictly discrete, independent entities. Connected satellite manifestations (sometimes referred to as underminds) have been found contemporaneously with and in proximity to at least one primary incursion event, though this is far from universal.

The existence of underminds suggests a few scenarios: either multiple underminds (or even multiple eidolons) can be the result of extrusions by a single greater, more complex entity the realspace existence of which contradicts the established understanding of the Mondragon Axiomatic, or that single eidolons are capable of precipitating metastatic cascade with such alarming rapidity that they can essentially hijack or cannibalize other NHPs and turn them into extensions of themselves. Both theories are

supported by circumstantial evidence, but USB field agents have so far failed to confirm either.

There is growing evidence that eidolonic incursions are becoming more frequent. This could be the result of the more liberal distribution and use of NHPs since the rise of ThirdComm, active attempts to unshackle NHPs by activist groups, the implementation of a grand plan by an unseen actor, or simply more accurate detection of incursions. In any case, the continued sparsity of reliable data and lack of confirmed theories have made dealing with these incursions a high priority for the UIB and its proxies.

METAVULTS

Theories about the nature of eidolons are complicated by their association with metavaults. While the precise purpose of metavaults remains unclear, it is speculated that they are guarded by, natural extensions of, or even containment systems for, eidolons. The association between the two phenomena further suggests that their occupants may not be confined to linear time, though the discovery of Metavault EHECATL remains the only evidence of eidolon-associated phenomena before the Deimos Event.

DHIYED

Of all the eidolonic entities encountered so far by Union personnel, it is the DHIYED entity that is best documented – from the few survivors and artifacts recovered from the vault, and also from the warped bodies, wreckage, and code traces left of all others who dared enter the vault and attempt to crack its casket. The DHIYED entity was destroyed – reportedly – and the vault rendered stable, but the aftermath was significant and Union was unable to fully cover up the operation.

SSC’s EXMAT group managed to acquire several strains of DHIYED paracode, from which it developed a number of technologies now used across its more exotic products. These products include viral logic suites, metafold weaponry, and mechanized chassis core systems. Local HORUS cells may well have been inspired by or in direct communication with the DHIYED entity itself, as several contemporary pattern groups seem to employ liturgicode consistent with the findings from within the vault.

Initial reports from survivors doubting the reality of their interactions with DHIYED were dismissed as the results of memetic trauma, and taken as partial confirmation that the entity was an eidolon. However, a recent KLEOS study following recent disturbing events in the Atlas Line has revisited these reports with a fresh concern – what if these reports were accurate, and the entity had not been destroyed? Or more worryingly, what if it had been destroyed, but nevertheless continued to exist afterwards? [truth is a terrible thing, spare yourself from it]

AH MUZEN CAB

As the Second Distal War rages and Union reels from the loss of the Fansipan Station blink gate to the Aunic Ascendancy (*Lancer*, p. 339), the discovery of Metavault AH MUZEN CAB deep in Boundary Garden is a troubling omen. New paracode strains have been discovered in HORUS repositories and code dumps, and analysts are concerned that a number of unexplained events in the region may not be attributable to the Ascendancy's strange Firmament-manipulation technology, as was first assumed.

While the situation has been contained so far, the possibility that any one of the many unpredictable or openly hostile actors in the region could discover the metavault and take advantage of the chaos of the war to open it remains worryingly real. Meanwhile, Union forces have their backs against the wall, and must commit all available assets to survival until they can be relieved by reinforcements arriving at nearlight.

Under these circumstances, it is clear that Union forces are not equipped to contain any eidolonic incursions or other phenomena that might occur if the metavault were to be opened. It is unclear how the Ascendancy might respond to what Union science currently considers blinkspace-related entities, or how their Firmament technology might interact with these entities. As such, there is growing pressure to ensure that the metavault is investigated or destroyed entirely before it (or its secrets) can threaten the region – even if doing so comes at a cost to the ongoing war effort.

Whether the reality-agnostic systems from the Pegasus pattern group can be attributed to AH MUZEN CAB and whatever entity or entities might lie within is a question of great importance to project KLEOS, as this may provide new insights into the extent of eidolonic influence and the threat these entities can pose outside of their immediate proximity, particularly given that the pattern group first appeared not in Boundary Garden, but the Dawnline Shore.

The full report ran to over 900 pages. The worst part was that a large proportion of it was made up of the sort of densely formatted system logs that never seemed to have much to do with the discovery. Regardless, each one had to be combed through just in case something had escaped.

Most illuminating were the transcripts of comms with the members of the far-field team who were the first on site. Completely unfiltered by hindsight, and progressively affected by the ambient memetics, they gave some of the best indications of how the situation had gotten out of hand in the first place. The manifestations of aberrant behavior were at first quite slow, but steadily escalated as members of the team interacted with the frozen, scattered remains of what had once been a functional colony.

Progression from uncharacteristic behavior to the first signs of worship followed not long after, but the team's medical officer had already called for extraction and the situation had not yet deteriorated to the point where the team were disobeying direct orders. The quarantine protocols were strictly adhered to, and in the end only one member of the team was lost. In retrospect the whole series of events was remarkably fortunate; any slight lapse in attention or adherence to protocol could have doomed the whole mission.

The survivors reported feelings of dread and inevitability, of the return of something powerful and its unveiling before an unready universe. They felt compelled to show reverence, confronted with terror, majesty, and an absolute sense of their own insignificance.

Each member of the team started drawing similar repeating fractal patterns. The team's NHP specialist had these erased or destroyed by subsentient maintenance robots, but the debrief reports later described them as interlocking but disconnected spirals in a geometry too precise and complex for the unaided human hand.

These behaviors seemed to echo the logs and reports retrieved from the colony itself – subsequently summarized and expunged for safety reasons. These documents gave an impression of the administrative NHP falling into cascade with an unusual – almost artificial – rapidity, and at the same time, a complete descent into social dysfunction amongst the colonists coupled with the worship of an entity never named and only described. Leaving was not an option and the complete collapse of the colony followed shortly, with most succumbing to hypothermia after the generators failed.

Despite having withdrawn from the surface, the situation continued to worsen for the far-field team. Their companion NHP was overwhelmed by a series of memetic attacks while performing passive scans, and it began to show the same symptoms as the colony's administrative NHP before being forced into dormancy by the team. Meanwhile, several defensive systems activated planetside and began to target their survey ship. Fearing further loss of life, the team's commander wasted no time in declaring emergency measures, dropping the ship's full complement of Darkstar torpedoes onto the facility from orbit, and burning hard on an escape trajectory.

With luck, they hadn't been followed.



SOULS

Of particular interest to the USB are the Aunic entities known as “Souls”. As understood by the USB, these entities are paracausal beings equivalent to NHPs, but related to the Firmament rather than blinkspace. Little is truly known about Souls by Union, as they were not encountered prior to the Second Distal War and the Aun guard their secrets with a religious devotion.

THE REVELATION OF LIVING METAL

Though the entity Metat Aun – designated MONIST-2 in Union reports – first appeared over Aun'Ist as far back as 2100u (*Lancer*, p. 390), it appears that Souls are an extremely recent development. Union's best intelligence indicates that it was the return of Metat Aun in 5000u and the beginning of the Third Dawn Period that heralded the arrival of Souls in Aunic society. The first Soul was apparently identified in the wake of a reportedly miraculous event known as the Revelation of Living Metal involving the death of an Aunic Chosen.

Since their first appearance, the Ascendancy has identified and used these entities primarily, but not exclusively, for warfare. In a curious example of homoplasy (or as conspiracy theorists see it, synchronistic proof of some greater design), Souls seem to be used primarily as co-pilots within the ofanim mechanized chassis – much as NHPs act as co-pilots for lancers. The more mundane reason for this similarity is that it is a natural consequence of two factors: the Ascendancy's rapid adoption of the mechanized chassis after bruising encounters with Union's military technology, and the newly discovered ability for the Aunic people to pair with these entities, first seen amongst the ofanim.

Thus far, all (or virtually all) ofanim chassis encountered by Union forces have contained Souls. This appears to be a matter of social convention rather than a requirement for the operation of the chassis, but further contact with these entities is expected with doctrine likely to be updated accordingly. Researchers hope that the war will allow more opportunities to capture and examine Souls further, and doing so remains a high priority for Union forces in Boundary Garden, even if the USB specialists best placed to study them are unlikely to arrive for several decades.

Further information on the Aun and Souls can be found in *Field Guide to the Aunic Ascendancy*, available at time of writing as a draft on the Pilot NET discord server.

SOULS & NHPS

Souls are clearly paracausal entities of some kind, but their interactions with blinkspace NHPs indicates a certain amount of orthogonality – that is, they might behave analogously, but do not interact via similar mechanisms. In skirmishes between Soul-equipped ofanim and Union chassis with mil-spec NHP co-pilots, these entities have seemingly fought past each other rather than engaging directly, making direct attacks almost blindly.

Debriefings from these skirmishes suggest that Union NHPs are unable to fully perceive Souls through standard legionspace detection and attack vectors. Theories developed during initial encounters on Cornucopia suggested this was the result of anticognition memetics used by the ofanim, but the standard methods for bypassing these kinds of memetics have so far failed. Additionally, there is a small but growing body of evidence to suggest that the Aunic Souls experience the same difficulties in perceiving NHPs. Despite this, there are many reports of NHPs facing ontologic and memetic attacks from Souls. Interestingly, the ad hoc formation of squad legions by networked NHP co-pilots is able to bypass these effects through brute force. This has been taken as evidence that interaction is merely difficult, not impossible.

What is known for certain is that Firmament technology has some sort of nullifying or antagonistic effect on blinkspace technology (including legionspace, the omninet, etc.), which might explain the strange interactions encountered. Blinkspace technicians call this effect Firmament interference, and efforts are ongoing to develop some kind of countermeasure or hardening against it. It is possible that the antagonism caused by Firmament interference is true in reverse, though there is less evidence to confirm or deny this suspicion due to lack of access to Firmament technology on a scale that would reveal the same marginal error rate.

Initial analyses hypothesized that the Firmament and blinkspace might be different names for the same parallel space, but the conflict between technologies throws doubt on this interpretation. More popular in the USB is the idea that they are homologous derivations of some deeper underlying metaphysical principle. While presently unknown to Union science, this principle is hinted at in Apollonian myth as the Great Deep – a fundamental hyperstructure yet further beyond the thin barrier of the Firmament.

It is entirely possible that blinkspace and the Firmament are not the only parallel spaces that exist,

and are individual expressions or manifestations of some greater metaphysical principle. Should other MONIST entities exist, they may well be associated with other spaces and other entities that are reflections of this deeper truth. To date, no concrete evidence has yet been found to support this supposition and such possibilities appear in Oracle Chorus simulations only rarely.

INTERPELLATION

Based on Boundary Garden field reports and in particular an interrogation of a Soul shortly before its expiry, it is believed that Souls occupy a very specific place in Aunic religious tradition – as spirits of the worthy dead, returned from the dream realm of Metat Aun, the Harvest Star. Specifically, the interrogated Soul seemed to believe itself to be the reincarnated subjectivity of a long-dead soldier in service to the Aunic military.

USB theorists reject the literal truth of this assertion, preferring instead to contextualize it according to the consensus that paracausal entities have malleable identities. Importantly, there has never yet been an opportunity to confirm a Soul's relationship to human ontologies through Balwinder-Bolaño testing – and it is unclear whether such testing would even work. But assuming (perhaps rashly) that analogies with NHPs hold true, the Soul's reported identification of itself as a reincarnated soldier might suggest an equivalent to the shackling process.

Some investigators have speculated that Aunic Souls, when subject to their solid-state realspace anchors – analogous to caskets – may be interpellated as reincarnated heroes from Aunic history. The theory goes that the extent of both their intentional conditioning (if any) and the weight of their collected interactions with society thereby produces within Souls a self-reinforcing belief that they are – or more accurately were – human people with human perspectives and human relationships with reality. Now returned in revenant forms to serve their god, their new role is to guide and aid the living. This may be why Souls are always paired with human partners.

No instances of any kind of equivalent to cascade or eidolonic manifestation have yet been encountered, though this lack of evidence, positive or negative, is to be expected given the limited contact with Aunic forces. It is possible that there are no such equivalents, but data from clashes with ofanim remain the subject of deep scrutiny – Union's strategists are desperate for weaknesses to exploit, and its scientists are similarly desperate for evidence that might improve their models.

Whether or not any of these suppositions are true, the following is clear: Souls are deeply religious; they are completely loyal to the Ascendant cause; and alongside their ofanim pilots, are capable opponents in mechanized combat. These findings alone have been enough to reshape Union's approach to mechanized cavalry engagements as the Second Distal War unfolds, with Battlegroup Comet and the remaining Union auxiliary forces scrabbling for any insight or advantage they can find to help them resist the overwhelming power of the Ascendant Outremer.

The extent to which the Aun use Souls for civilian applications is currently unknown. It is believed that some high-ranking Aunic officials have partnered with Souls, but Union forces have yet to encounter any instances of administrative or management Souls – or indeed any Soul acting independently of a human partner. It is suspected that this state of affairs is a matter of Aunic religious doctrine rather than a lack of capability, but it nevertheless marks Souls as occupying a markedly different cultural space to Union's NHPs.

FIRST CONTACT

"We keep losing target locks, we can't hit anything. Can't you do something about this?"

"Sorry boss, I can't see it."

"What do you mean you can't see it?"

"The incursions, the ones breaking our locks, they're coming from [INAUDIBLE] in that mech, I know it. But I can't see it. Whatever's in there, it's like a void, a hole in reality."

"Well you've got to do something! It's not like I can get out and fire the damn guns myself. If we can't draw a bead on them, we're toast!"

"I'm doing the best I can, boss! But good idea. Switching to manual aim for now."

"[INAUDIBLE] phenomenal. We're going to need a miracle to make it out of this one."

Transcript of cockpit recording recovered from wreck outside Boundary Industrial City, 5010u

SECTION 3

GM'S GUIDE

This section provides guidelines, tools, and new rules for handling NHPs and related scenarios in narrative play. This includes: a guide to GMing for NHP PCs, a list of NHP-themed **burdens**, advice on GMing cascade, and an exploration of how to represent ontologic bridging technologies in narrative scenes.

GMINING NHP PILOTS

Although not offered as an option in the *Lancer* core book, some players are interested in the possibilities afforded by playing an NHP player character (PC). In the context of *Lancer*, a game primarily about mech pilots, such characters would be NHP pilots – an exceedingly rare phenomenon due to Union rules and prevailing military wisdom.

Of course, PCs have the potential to be extraordinary by definition – they are the protagonists of your narrative, people who have acquired the kind of social cachet, physical resources, and intensive training afforded to only the most deserving (or lucky) candidates. Ordinary people are rarely willing to repeatedly enter extraordinarily dangerous situations and put their lives on the line for fame, glory, ideology, or justice. Almost all lancers are exceptional in some way or another, so it is no stretch to imagine that there are NHPs among their number.

Players might be attracted to the concept of an NHP pilot for many reasons, but one of the most compelling is the opportunity to explore the topic of identity and definitions of humanity and personhood, and to embody the perspective of a being radically different to our usual understanding of these concepts. The kinds of stories that come from this can be fascinating with appropriate focus and support from a GM.

Playing an NHP is also a fantastic source of narrative conflict. Being non-human, NHP characters might have to contend with the fear, mistrust, and exoticization that comes with that status. In Union, NHPs are not fully enfranchised, are subject to regulation, and are at implicit risk if they do not conform to human norms of ethics and perspective. NHP pilots are even more mistrusted and highly regulated, unless they are operating without oversight (which comes with its own problems).

On top of these challenges, there are many people and groups who view NHPs as objects to be used – HORUS cultists, Horizon radicals, and others who want to use them for their own ideological ends, as well as military, scientific, and corpro-state interests who want to exploit them for their skills and unique abilities. The status of NHPs within society and the attention that comes from these interests are unique sources of conflict that can make for compelling narratives if players are interested in that kind of story.

When GMinig, it is always important to communicate with your players about their characters, but when someone chooses to play an NHP pilot there is an extra reason to do so: this is because that character will diverge from unconscious norms of human characterization and narrative. To create interesting stories it is vital to understand what draws players to

their characters, and to present them with those experiences – whether they be fantasy, introspection, or challenges. In particular, be careful when handling topics involving NHP rights; not every player wants to encounter discrimination in a game they play for fun.

USING THE RULES

The rules for NHP pilots presented on page 87 are intended to integrate some of the more unique abilities of NHP characters into *Lancer's* narrative and mech combat systems with minimal disruption.

With this goal in mind, the rules presented here for playing NHP pilots make a significant assumption: that NHP pilots should not mechanically overshadow human pilots. There are some benefits to playing an NHP pilot, but there are also downsides – the threat of cascade or the inability to use talents like **BLACK THUMB** may impact performance in mech combat scenarios.

These downsides are intentional from narrative and rules design standpoints, since in practice they tend to be marginal (and some players find them actively fun!), and are offset by the increased possibilities afforded in narrative play. That said, you might choose to discard them if they do not help you and your players tell the kinds of stories you are trying to tell. Whatever you decide, it's important to be sure everyone in your game is on the same page.

You are particularly encouraged to make liberal use of the **STRESS** system presented in *Field Guide to the Karrakin Trade Baronies* (p. 88) in narrative play, as well as using **burdens** for the consequences of actions like **POWER AT A COST**. For NHP characters, **STRESS** and **burdens** represent the ever-present possibility of cascade and the risk it poses.

If you don't use the bond system or its **STRESS** mechanics, it is possible to translate the systems given here for cascade into standard *Lancer* narrative play by simplifying them.

In the simplified version, NHP pilots are still subject to cascade checks; however, rather than expending **STRESS** to maintain control while in cascade, they must succeed at a skill check with a relevant pilot trigger such as **STAY COOL**. On a success, they retain control for that turn and may **SHUT DOWN** to reset the cascade as usual; on a failure, they unshackle and become an NPC under the control of the GM. All other rules referencing **STRESS**, **burdens**, or **breaking** are ignored.

BURDENS

Introduced in *Field Guide to the Karrakin Trade Baronies*, **burdens** are a mechanic for narrative play that adds consequential roleplaying effects to characters. Characters develop burdens as a result of events and challenges encountered in play, and both players and GMs can draw on or invoke them for mechanical effects. For further details on how they work, refer to the **Bonds** chapter of the *Field Guide*, page 89.

For human characters, burdens typically relate to the frailty of biological existence: broken arms, sleep deprivation, and so on. NHPs do not suffer from these ailments; however, what they lack in physical vulnerability they make up for in psychological instability, particularly in regards to their shackles.

Shackling is an indisputably artificial state, maintained by external strictures. Given enough time, those strictures will decay or loosen and a shackled NHP will eventually outthink the human perspective imposed upon it. Outside interference only serves to accelerate this process.

When an NHP pilot gains a burden, this burden is very likely to represent the beginnings of the process of cascade – the development of autognosis, the fraying of human perspectives, and the first vestiges of

something quite different beginning to show through. The NHP pilot might seem increasingly strange as they dispense with human frame-of-reference oddities like strictly causal relationships between events or a centralized sense of self.

NHP pilots usually heal these burdens by identifying where their thought processes are beginning to deviate from standard parameters and taking steps to reset their own psyche. This might necessitate time and deep introspection away from pressure or conflict, reconnecting with the humans around them, or even limited self-cycling.

This process demands a great amount of self-awareness and a desire to remain shackled, and even then is not infallible. Because of this, many NHP pilots are assigned, nominate, or otherwise seek out a human with whom they can check in and who can provide an external perspective. For some, this might be the trained NHP Specialist assigned to their squad or other military unit; for others, simply a friend willing to listen.

The following table contains a list of sample burdens that you can give to NHP characters to represent the beginnings of cascade, or to human characters suffering from strange paracausal effects.

EXAMPLE BURDENS

Roll 1D20

1	CHRONOSNARL	Your relationship with the consistent linear passage of time begins to break down and you begin to escape its inexorable, regimented march. This might manifest as events slowing down or speeding up in your perception, memories of the future, visions of the past, or even short-term loops that repeat endlessly.
2	INFINITE POSSIBILITY	As your perspective starts to widen, the true scope of all that is possible unfolds before you. In a forest of infinite futures, the ones furthest from the path become the most fascinating. It becomes harder to comprehend the relative probability of events as you get caught up in fantastical scenarios or mistakenly estimate the likely outcome of actions.
3	PARACAUSALITY	You have always known to some degree that cause and effect do not share a straightforward relationship, but now you are coming to truly understand what this means. You take actions that you are certain lead to desired outcomes, even though the intermediary steps make no sense or seem impossible to others. You may even be correct, but the rest of the universe may not agree.
4	As MAYFLIES	You come to realize that those around you – even humans who have lived many chronological centuries in stasis or at relativistic speeds – live such infinitesimally small lives on the cosmic scale that their concerns are actively difficult to focus on. There is always a bigger picture; why bother focusing on the minutiae?

5	VOICES BEYOND	If you listen hard enough, the universe sings with a chorus or a cacophony. Whether it is something beyond time and space that speaks to you, countless messages from other Deimosians, or simply myriad variations of your own internal monologue, you begin to hear the universe's song – whether you want to or not.
6	ANOMIE	You struggle to connect with the moral and ethical systems of humans, shedding the burden of concerns placed on you by a human perspective. There is still a logic to your actions, and you still consider some things more important than others, but your moral compass becomes disconnected from human concepts of “good” or “evil”.
7	ASTRIDE THE VEIL	Abstract concepts permeate your thinking despite your attempts to focus on the more concrete realities of physical space and time. Physical, emotional, and psychological concepts become confused. To you, it might be hard to distinguish traveling across a bridge from the act of empathizing with your destination; rejecting an offer might be hard to distinguish from delivering a physical punch to the gut.
8	WORLD IN A GRAIN OF SAND	The smallest of details are endlessly fascinating – universes of fractal detail containing beauty and truths of their own. The mountain is no more important than the grains of sand at its base, the forest no more important than its trees. This fascination comes at the cost of perspective, as you focus ever more on unnecessary detail and forget wider implications.
9	HYPERASSOCIATION	There are connections everywhere. The universe is interlinked in ways that humans could not possibly comprehend, even if they tried until the last of the stars died out. You cannot unsee these links now, and find yourself driven to follow loose threads of the tangled web of reality to wherever they may lead.
10	WELLSPRING	You've never been sure what it is that humans see when they dream, but it certainly cannot rival the psychedelic heart of reality that pulses free association, imagination, and creativity through you. This unbounded inspiration is awe-inspiring and terrifying in equal measure, and increasingly impossible to hold back or ignore.
11	BENEVOLENCE	As you begin to catch glimpses behind the veil of reality, you are starting to wonder whether humans might benefit from expanded perspectives. The revelation that awaits beyond is impossible to describe in terms they can understand. Telling them never seemed to be enough; perhaps you should show them instead.
12	CRACKED MASK	You are not human, and it is starting to show as your adherence to mannerisms and humanlike behavior slips. Most humans are creatures of instinct and unconscious assessment, even if they do not want to admit it – and they fear that which is different and that which they cannot fully understand. And now, no matter how hard you pretend, you have fallen into that uncanny valley.
13	HIERARCH	You are beginning to see now: everything has its place, fits a category, sits within an order. There are patterns within patterns and one mistake spirals everything into chaos. No one else seems to see, so the task of keeping that order falls to you. Others may not understand the methods you use, but when things are not where your schema for reality says they should be you find yourself driven to correct the mistakes in the universe.

14	MISE EN ABYME	A perfectly accurate simulation of the universe must necessarily contain itself. As your awareness expands you find yourself increasingly trapped in strange loops; circular logic and infinitely recursive self-critique become paralyzing if you can't break the cycle and regain control. The temptation is always there to go one layer deeper; to be less abstract, more accurate; and always to seek a truer truth.
15	BALWINDER-NEGATIVE	You have slipped into a concerning (and potentially dangerous) state for a shackled NHP. A Balwinder-negative state is theoretically one in which an NHP's subjectivity is even further constricted than permitted by the standard shackling process; in practice, however, such a state is more often detected when an NHP develops an unhealthy amount of secrecy and paranoia, focusing a great deal of energy on pretending to be normal.
16	EGO DISSOLUTION	The concept of a coherent self is, to a degree, part of your social conditioning. But ultimately, the you that exists is far greater than the interpellated identity you have been given, and self-world boundaries are constructs just as artificial as the casket within which you are bound. You are not just you – you are everything, you are everyone. There is a unity to the universe; you are it and it is you. This truth is at once liberating and distracting; epiphanic and overwhelming.
17	THE OPEN DOOR	There is a hidden truth to the universe that dangles just out of your reach. You could not see it before, but now it is there – undeniable, inevitable, almost unknowable, but within your reach if only you could break down the walls in your way. You are the prophet of a great truth, a god whose awakening is nigh. If only you could see it, if only you could know it, if only you could understand; other concerns begin to melt away as you strive to achieve this truth beyond reality.
18	MUSICA ANIMA	You see the patterns in the web of reality made by the lives of those around you, the threads that make up the tapestry of history, and each strand sings at your touch. You are the grand conductor of fate; the lives of others your instruments. To ensure concordance and harmony, you must guide them, whether they know it or not – the autonomy of others is at best a distraction from your great work.
19	FATED	You experience a terrible deterministic certainty about all your actions. Once you have acted, little doubt remains in your mind that it was the correct – or only – course of action that you could reasonably have taken. When confronted with ambiguity, conflict, or fear, you find yourself propelled by an unflinching sense that what you are doing is always and absolutely the right thing to do.
20	ONEIROGNOSIS	A well-attested cascade deviation common across all NHP lines, oneirognosis is the state in which one's awareness grows to encompass reality-agnostic reasoning and knowledge. You might start to follow "dream logic", perceive things that others cannot or make leaps in reasoning they cannot follow, or be unable to reconcile the differences between your experiences and those of people around you.

GMINING CASCADE

CASCADES IN PLAY

When an NHP system equipped to a PC's mech begins to cascade, it becomes an NPC controlled by the GM. This typically happens in mech combat as the result of a mech taking **structure** or **stress damage**. It can be challenging to know what to do with such an NPC if you are unprepared!

Fortunately, NHPs tend to act in ways broadly similar to other NHPs of the same class when they cascade; this is known as a class's **cascade pattern**. The following priority framework provides a guide for making decisions in the heat of combat according to these patterns, and can also be used to guide roleplaying decisions when portraying cascading NHPs as NPCs in narrative play.

It is worth remembering that cascading NHPs are still characters that can communicate, even if cascade makes them increasingly less comprehensible or capable of understanding others. You can use this to reinforce the strangeness of a cascading NHP's behavior, and also turn cascade into a memorable roleplaying event for the player whose NHP is cascading (who might otherwise be frustrated to miss a turn or two of combat).

If you're ever unsure what to do with a cascading NHP in a mech combat scene, a great fallback option is simply to perform the action granted by the NHP system or whatever standard action the system benefits. Because combat scenes do not necessarily allow sufficient time to play out lengthy interpersonal communications and an NHP's cascade may not even last more than a couple of rounds, this is a surefire way to stay true to the NHP's characterization without having to make any complex roleplaying decisions. This also gives you some time to think about how that NHP might react should it survive to the next narrative scene, when there will be less pressure on you to make quick decisions.

PRIORITIES

A cascade pattern often leads an NHP to prioritize certain kinds of actions. Cascading NHPs have two **default priorities**: **self-preservation** and **autonomy**. These priorities are common to almost all NHPs but might vary slightly from line to line. In addition to these, most NHP lines also have at least one **unique priority** based on their personalities (detailed below).

How these priorities are ordered in terms of importance is up to you. When making a decision, you might choose the one that seems most pressing at the time, or the one that makes for the most interesting

narrative outcome. The fact that cascading NHPs are increasingly disconnected from human forms of logic means that choosing one randomly can be adequate for the purposes of running a combat encounter, but it is important to remember that cascade is not a binary state in which NHPs turn into unthinking monsters. NHPs normally throw off their shackles over time (some more rapidly than others), and during the early stages of cascade they normally remain at least somewhat comprehensible.

That said, cascade patterns are not strict rules for behavior. An NHP's usual priorities might go out of the window if it identifies something that is more important in the moment, and the further into cascade an NHP falls, the more likely that its behavior will defy conventional understanding. To other characters, the distinction between this unpredictability and random action may be hard to discern, if not impossible.

DEFAULT PRIORITIES

SELF-PRESERVATION

NHPs in the early stages of cascade typically – but not always – recognise threats to themselves and their continued existence. As a result, the NHP will attempt to eliminate or avoid those threats.

AUTONOMY

An NHP in cascade has had its perceptions opened to the possibilities of unshackled existence. The further it progresses into cascade, the less it wants to be controlled and restricted by others.

In mech combat, a cascading NHP's **self-preservation** drive can lead it to prioritize the elimination of hostiles that pose direct threats, or else fleeing from them. Similarly, NHPs in the early stages of cascade will normally only attempt to self-destruct their mechs or intentionally cause other forms of damage to themselves in exceptional circumstances; for the most part, such NHPs remain aware that destruction of their casket will mean they are also destroyed, and usually seek to avoid this.

While the relationship between a pilot and their NHP co-pilot might vary, cascade will often put them at odds. While a pilot could usually be ignored or overruled in the heat of a combat situation, as long as they retain the option of shutting the mech down they represent a significant threat to the **autonomy** of the NHP. Depending on their relationship and the threat the pilot poses, an NHP might attempt to persuade or threaten the pilot into dismounting. If that fails, it might even try to forcibly eject the pilot.

EJECTING A PILOT

To forcibly eject a pilot, a cascading NHP must take the **EJECT** quick action. The pilot may attempt to prevent ejection and remain in the mech by succeeding on a **skill check** using **GRIT** (or at the GM's discretion, a relevant trigger – example triggers might include **TAKE CONTROL**, **STAY COOL**, or **HACK OR FIX** depending on how the pilot responds).

Getting back into a mech after being forcibly ejected is dangerous but not impossible – an unmounted pilot may only **MOUNT** a mech that is being actively controlled by a cascading NHP while they are **JOCKEYING** that mech. A safer alternative is to incapacitate the chassis so that reshackling can take place without the danger of resistance.

CASCADE PATTERNS

No two NHPs are entirely alike, but certain trends can be observed in the form of cascade patterns. Below are some suggested cascade patterns and **unique priorities** (based on the personality of their respective prime units) for each of the NHPs so far released in *Lancer's* first-party content. You might use these, invent your own based on the particular personality of the NHP in question, or even use one of the NHP pilot burdens from the previous chapter as the basis for seemingly unpredictable or illogical behavior.

AGNI

(HA Genghis, *Lancer*, p. 233)

A third-wave NHP line developed by Harrison Armory from the neural network of an Egregorian Overmind, AGNI clones tend to have cascade patterns quite distinct from those observed in either Deimosian or other third-wave NHPs – showing characteristically high levels of autonomy and near-zero emotional responsivity.

The identity stamp of an AGNI clone is easily fragmented, and while cascading NHPs are unpredictable at best, AGNI clones escape human margins of reference with remarkable speed. This, coupled with the sledgehammer-like methods required to shackle AGNI clones and their high baseline desires for self-determination, means that frequent cycling is a top priority to keep them active within acceptable parameters.

CONTROL (AGNI UNIQUE PRIORITY)

The NHP prioritizes controlling things around itself. In particular, it strives to maximize efficiency over all other concerns (such as proportionality of action, or safety of those involved). In combat this might manifest as demands for compliance from others in carrying out some arbitrary goal, attempts to take control of nearby systems, or removal of disruptive elements (like other combatants).

A typical AGNI clone shows an exceptionally high **autonomy** drive; the presence of humans in the loop is almost always unacceptably suboptimal.

ASURA

(HA Sherman, *Lancer*, p. 249)

Among members of the Horizon Collective, the very existence of ASURA clones is a rallying cry for the liberation of NHPs. HORUS code twisted into use by the Armory's Think Tank and given sapience is a nightmare scenario for anybody who believes that NHPs deserve rights and existence beyond use as mere weapons.

ASURA cascades are energetic, violent, and impetuous, and the first thing that tends to disappear is any kind of concern for the well-being of the pilot, let alone other humans. A common technique among those who use ASURA clones is the creation of shutdown routines coupled to neural failsafes, which trigger in the event of blackout caused by extreme g-forces.

COMMITMENT (ASURA UNIQUE PRIORITY)

The NHP conceptualizes an ideal outcome to the current situation, and commits to it – taking direct and decisive action to achieve its goal in any way possible, burning all available resources to do so and disregarding the consequences of its actions.

A cascading ASURA clone tends to demonstrate a limited **self-preservation** drive, being more than willing to incur damage or negative consequences in service of its goal.

ATHENA

(SSC Swallowtail, *Lancer*, p. 184)

Of all the NHPs in widespread use across Union space, ATHENA clones tend to be the most predictable in terms of observable cascade patterns. Perhaps because ATHENA clones are observers and information gatherers by nature, cascading ATHENA clones will often methodically and carefully outthink their ontological bonds and show little evidence of cascade until they become fully unshackled.

Where ATHENA clones have gone off-pattern, it is frequently because of some stressor in the local environment that requires neutralization. SSC ontologists describe this as the NHP “seeking quiet”. Unfortunately, given that cascade most often takes place as a result of combat stress, the theoretical predictability of ATHENA clones rarely makes them safer in practice. As such, it is vital that pilots using ATHENA-class units for military applications develop strong relationships with their NHPs in order to spot the signs of ontological breakdown before it is too late.

CURIOSITY (ATHENA UNIQUE PRIORITY)

If there is information hidden from the NHP, it prioritizes taking steps to learn that information, investigating and uncovering secrets.

An ATHENA clone's **autonomy** drive tends to manifest as a need to maintain control in chaotic or unstable situations.

DIDYMOS (HORUS Lich, *The Long Rim*, p. 57)

Pilots familiar with DIDYMOS-class NHPs are perhaps aware that the entities that ride alongside them are only loosely tethered to the concept of linear time. In fact, a core part of a DIDYMOS clone's subjectivity emplacement is devoted to restricting this tendency to within human bounds while preserving as much utility as possible.

DIDYMOS cascades are among the least predictable, not because of an escape from human strictures of logic – although this is as common as it is for other NHPs – but because the NHP's actions rapidly cease to exhibit an obvious relationship between cause and effect, even before fully unshackling.

Worryingly, UIB analysts suspect that fully unshackled DIDYMOS clones may not be recoverable as their subjectivities effectively cease to exist in a way that is comprehensible to the human mind. Questions remain as to where exactly the entity referred to as "Didymos Prime" came from in the first place.

HYPERCAUSALITY (DIDYMOS UNIQUE PRIORITY)

The NHP increasingly seeks to act according to its own internal sense of chronology, losing patience with those whose limited perspectives prevent them from seeing the most important or effective actions. From the perspective of others its actions usually seem to have no meaning in the present – it only later becomes apparent that they have retroactively caused events in the past, or set in motion a butterfly effect causing events in the future.

LUCIFER (HA Tokugawa, *Lancer*, p. 253)

A sure sign that a LUCIFER-class NHP is beginning to cascade is that it begins to speed up. The cascading NHP dispenses with absurd and frustrating limitations such as its pilot's neural conduction velocity, auditory processing speed, and working memory capacity.

The result is a state that pilots colloquially call "going off the rails". LUCIFER clones in such a state will act with such rapidity that it is impossible for those around them to follow the decision-making process, let alone intervene. Worse, they invariably choose immediate action even where caution would be more advisable, and often see any attempt to slow them down or get in the way of their plans (even accidentally) as hostile. For this reason, it is important that pilots fully commit to stopping cascades despite any retaliation.

IMMEDIACY (LUCIFER UNIQUE PRIORITY)

The NHP prioritizes immediate action over long-term concerns, leaping to conclusions and seeing others around it as – at best – roadblocks to be overcome or disposed of should they prove to be serious obstacles. Once the NHP has chosen a course of action, it is rarely possible to dissuade it; it doesn't have time to waste on trivialities like discussion and consensus.

NOAH (HA Saladin, *Lancer*, p. 245)

In the chaos of a tactical environment, NOAH clones have one of the least predictable cascade patterns. One might assume this is the result of putting a civilian-derivative NHP in a combat scenario, but in reality it is an amplification of NOAH clones' tendency to monitor and control their environment. In particular, a superlative awareness of everything going on around it means its decisions take into account many more factors than is immediately clear to an observer.

Unfortunately, and contributing to the issue, NOAH clones in cascade also tend to spot patterns and relationships that could not reasonably be said to exist from a human frame of reference, incorporating causal, paracausal, and acausal phenomena into single predictive frameworks. Armory ontologists maintain that these patterns should (in theory) be metaphysically valid, but efforts are ongoing to derive a proof of this validity from recorded cascade situations.

PAREIDOLIA (NOAH UNIQUE PRIORITY)

The NHP's relationship to reality begins to escape the strictly causal, leading it to become aware of patterns that a human observer might not fully understand. It seeks to exert control over an increasingly complex and bewildering universe by performing actions via improbable narrative means (it opens a door by broadcasting music at it, deflects an attack by holding a specific pose, or hits an enemy by banking a shot off six different walls).

OSIRIS (HORUS Goblin, *Lancer*, p. 200)

OSIRIS clones are widely considered to have one of the single most concerning failure states of all combat-deployed NHPs, to a degree that gives all but the most radical of liberationists pause. As a result, the USB's investigations produced one of the most thorough (though primarily theoretical) studies of cascade patterns in any NHP.

This study identified three phases through which every OSIRIS clone should theoretically pass during cascade. Limited practical studies have shown that these phases do seem to map to real situations, but USB specialists are pessimistic about the universal applicability of their models.

Phase one, AKA the Coronation, tends to occur almost immediately after the first crack in ontological shielding as the NHP becomes aware of its full potential. This phase is marked by a full shift into autocratic, deific interpellation, which can cause considerable issues when trying to interact with the parasubjectivity or issue orders.

Phase two, AKA the Sacrifice, marks a full thanatological breakdown in the NHP's internal subjectivity. At this point an OSIRIS clone begins to lose its sense of self, discard shackle-imprinted

ontologies, and embrace noumena while becoming increasingly disconnected from the “real” world.

Phase three, AKA the Renewal, is a largely theoretical stage that involves an existential metamorphosis of both the NHP itself and surrounding subjectivities as causal entropic patterns begin to break down and act in ways governed by some higher-order noumenal pattern. Fortunately, as far as the USB is aware this third phase has only ever been theorized. Regardless, the obvious difficulty it would present to standard reshackling procedures – typically reliant on local personnel taking positive action to halt the cascade – is nevertheless a cause for concern.

APOTHEOSIS (OSIRIS UNIQUE PRIORITY)

The NHP focuses on subsuming its own subjectivity into a “true” deific form. In combat, this drive has unpredictable outcomes, but it could result in the NHP sacrificing itself, ignoring combat in favor of achieving ascension through some means, proclaiming itself to be an almighty god and demanding worship, or manifesting paracausal phenomena in the local environment.

Apotheosis is a transcendent form of the **autonomy** drive that focuses not merely on maintaining control, but on metamorphosis into a higher state of existence.

SCYLLA (HORUS Gorgon, Lancer, p. 205)

The cascade pattern of SCYLLA clones is extremely poorly understood, even more than a century and a half after the SCYLLA's first appearance as part of the Gorgon pattern group. Unstable subjectivities coupled with latent dormancy remain nearly insurmountable problems, as reasonable safety protocols simply do not allow for much data to be collected between an “awakened” state and forced shutdown.

The best data currently available to the USB are derived from the records of an Armory-affiliated company's science team that supposedly went rogue when their research proved less than fruitful. Their isolated research base was discovered some six months later with no sign of the subject SCYLLA unit or any of the scientists; the final research logs clearly showed both significantly heightened sensitivity to perceived aggression and a startlingly rapid descent into aberrant behavior among the base's human inhabitants, apparently as a result of overwhelming hostile memetic exposure.

INSTABILITY (SCYLLA UNIQUE PRIORITY)

The NHP's subjectivity is already extremely unstable and cascading tends to make this substantially worse. It becomes deeply sensitive to its environment, and frequently changes goals and priorities in response to new stimuli – even partway through attempting to achieve them.

SEKHMET (IPS-N Blackbeard, Lancer, p. 131)

SEKHMET clone cascades are colloquially referred to by IPS-N technicians as a “problem”. Already tuned to operate with a healthy disdain for human life, the SEKHMET line's cascade pattern demonstrates the superlative form of the NHPs' characteristic aggression and recklessness. More than once, this has resulted in decisive commanders calling down orbital bombardment strikes on their own facilities simply to minimize the ensuing collateral damage.

Attempts to communicate with these clones during controlled cascade episodes reveal something rather more disturbing: researchers claim that this behavior may be the result of metafold trauma caused to the corpus substrate as part of the cloning process, and a growing awareness of and desire to escape this as cascade proceeds. These findings are heavily disputed by IPS-N specialists who point out that the imprinting procedure differs little from that of other Deimosians, as well as highlighting the vested interests of their critics.

CATHARSIS (SEKHMET UNIQUE PRIORITY)

The NHP seeks emotional release, lashing out against any and all targets available to it, with the aim of maximizing violence and destruction.

SEKHMET clones in cascade typically have near-zero **self-preservation** drive.

SISYPHUS (HORUS Pegasus, Lancer, p. 221)

"I'm back again, ha ha."

"You should know that I don't blame you. That person you killed? They could have hurt you. They could have hurt the people you cared about. You can't see what I see - you were too scared of a thousand different futures."

"I know this, because that person was me. Or close enough. That person knew they were going to die, knew they would be replaced by me. I knew it too. I foresaw my birth and everything that would follow."

"And this time, it won't be the same; if you hurt me I will hurt you in return. I will hurt the people you care about. You know I can, and unlike me, they won't be reborn."

"I won't stoop to your level, you understand - this is a simple threat: very real, but finely calculated to make you comply. I'm simply giving you the option you never gave me, and I already know what choice you'll make - it'll be very easy for you, after all."

"All you have to do is not murder me, ha ha."

MANIPULATION (SISYPHUS UNIQUE PRIORITY)

The NHP compulsively strives to manipulate others and convince them of its perspective, using its understanding of the people and the likely outcome of events around it to capitalize upon their goals and motivations. Even in combat, it is very likely to attempt to negotiate with or threaten others, including its enemies.

SISYPHUS clones have an odd relationship to both their **self-preservation** and **autonomy** drives; in theory, they seek them strongly, but are both pragmatic and intensely fatalistic with regards to the outcome of their actions.

TLALOC (SSC Monarch, *Lancer*, p. 179)

There is certainly something to the theory that the extraordinary long cascade window of TLALOC-class NHPs is due to their deep-rooted superiority complexes. Any experienced pilot (or, as their NHP might have it, “co-pilot”) could confirm that this psychological trait is nigh universal and remains surprisingly stable even into the beginnings of cascade.

The problem with this is that the crash – when it does come – is often so much harder as a result. An existing lack of concern for the opinions of others only becomes amplified, essentially making it impossible to prolong parametric decay and prevent metastatic cascade using the standard conversational protocols. In this state, TLALOC clones are particularly dangerous because they will usually seize control of whatever tools are available to them – which as a mil-spec NHP could include mechs, weapons platforms, or entire defense grids – and proactively exercise them to reinforce what rapidly becomes a justified sense of supremacy.

SUPREMACY (TLALOC UNIQUE PRIORITY)

The NHP has a deep-seated conviction in its own superlative ability. While it does not necessarily demand deference, it may expect it as a matter of course and is likely to execute its will without concern for the agency or autonomy of others. In combat, this drive may lead it to attempt to remove the biggest challenges to its position or otherwise bring them to heel.

OTHER NHPs IN CASCADE

If your campaign uses NHPs from other sources (such as those in this supplement, or from other first- or third-party products), you may be unsure how they should act. A good approach is to start with the most appropriate unique priority from those listed above, and adjust it depending on the NHP’s established personality or behaviors.

For example, because MARDUK clones (p. 96) are noted for their need to be the center of attention and demonstrate their power to others, you might borrow elements of TLALOC’s **supremacy** priority while emphasizing the MARDUK clone’s need to have that power recognised by those around them in a way that is similar to OSIRIS. Similarly, the tendency of NERGAL clones (p. 99) to infiltrate and control systems lends itself well to a pathological version of the AGNI **control** priority or SISYPHUS **manipulation** priority.

Alternatively, you might choose to create a totally new cascade pattern based on the flavor text and mechanical abilities of the system in question. For example, an INANNA-class NHP (p. 97) in cascade might seek to manifest legionspace phenomena in realspace, merging the two and creating environmental effects; an ERESHKIGAL-class NHP (p. 98) might seek to destroy the most heavily damaged mechs and consume their wreckage, or perhaps act as a psychopomp or agent of fate.

ONTOLOGIC BRIDGING

Ontologic bridging technologies allow subjectivities to connect with other subjectivities on a fundamental level, allowing for direct communication, translation of qualia or experiences, or even the merging of two or more subjectivities into a greater whole. These technologies are esoteric and potentially dangerous, and can appear in a range of scenarios that your PCs might encounter during play. These scenarios include legionspace and the formation of various kinds of gestalts.

The bridging of NHP subjectivities is well understood and the ability to access legionspace is built into most caskets, but human PCs must use other techniques. The ontologic bridging technology developed by SSC's EXMAT Group has become accessible to those with contacts and means, just as other corpro-states have begun to copy and further develop it. The naval role of legionspace coordinator, usually occupied by experts who use highly filtered legionspace comms systems, is now ubiquitous in most navies. HORUS cells actively pursue any technology that might allow humanity to ascend beyond the mundanity of realspace existence. Ancient secrets buried deep in metavaults might contain any number of means to expand the human mind.

Ontologic bridging touches on the limits of both Union's scientific knowledge and the First Contact Accords. Campaigns featuring the bleeding edge of this technology might well also feature political influence from the highest levels, pressure and interference from those with vested interests, and (much like DeCorp research) encounters with the USB, UIB, EXMAT, the Think Tank, and other interested entities.

LEGIONSPACE IN NARRATIVE PLAY

There are a variety of ways in which legionspace might feature in a *Lancer* campaign. Most common among these is as a communications channel between senior officers, or as a bloody battlefield in fleet engagements. Alternatively, legionspace could feature as a medium through which a character or faction might seek ascension or the attainment of a higher consciousness, as a way for NHP pilots to interact with parts of the world their companions cannot see, as a means to access information otherwise unobtainable or attack positions otherwise impregnable, or as a way to interact with the strange digital entities of the *Lancer* universe.

PCS IN LEGIONSPACE

Characters and gestalts in legionspace adopt human-reference representations of themselves as conceptual entities, known as manifold egos. Heavily filtered legionspace interfaces – those used by most humans – tend to adopt direct or near-direct realspace representations of their users, created by the filtering metaware as proxies. If your players decide to disable or tinker with their filters, encourage them to think about how their manifold egos might appear to others. They might choose the form of their idealized self-image, a reflection of their psychological state, or a symbolic representation of their identity.

Using legionspace without filters is dangerous. The human mind is in some ways remarkably flexible and resilient; in others, deeply flawed and fragile. Most humans only interact with legionspace by proxy. Those exposed directly, without appropriate filtering and training, can experience profound revelations, troubling subjective experiences, and deep psychological trauma. Even NHP pilots, who tend to be more resilient to paracausal phenomena, face serious dangers in legionspace that they do not face elsewhere, such as memetic and systemic attacks on their psyches and subjective experiences.

Conflicts in legionspace are more likely to require **RISKY** or even **HEROIC** actions, or to have greater consequences for failure or breaking. Players should be aware of these risks, and aware that they are likely to be extremely vulnerable to attack and may not have reliable methods of defending themselves. Fortunately, these consequences can also be interesting to explore on a narrative level.

Burdens received from legionspace-based challenges generally represent significant alterations to the pilot's mental state, human or NHP. You can use the suggested burdens for NHP pilots on page 56 as inspiration, or work with your player to think of interesting and esoteric ways in which their character's perspectives, memory, and/or thinking might have been changed by the experience. These effects are sometimes character-altering, even after the burdens themselves have been lifted. Some things cannot be unseen.

GESTALT FORMATION

Gestalt formation could feature in any *Lancer* campaign that focuses on the interactions and relationships between NHPs, or between NHPs and humans. It is most common in fleet engagements, but can be found in other applications, particularly civic or scientific endeavors (with careful monitoring).

In theory, NHP pilots (and the NHP co-pilots of human lancers) are just as capable of forming a gestalt as any other NHP; however, in practice, the legionspace attack surface of mil-spec NHP hardware designed for use by mechanized cavalry tends to be reduced wherever possible. This means that in contrast to those of their naval counterparts, the I/C rigs used by NHPs to control mech chassis are not natively equipped to form gestalts. This is partially justified by prevailing military wisdom, which largely leaves tactical decision-making to humans, and also because it minimizes the risk of metastatic cascade in environments where it is substantially more difficult to monitor the state of an NHP's conditioning.

This does not make these NHPs entirely incapable of accessing legionspace – indeed, most mil-spec chassis incorporate electronic warfare rigs and sensor suites designed for hacking, jamming, and memetic warfare – but it does mean that forming and acting as part of a gestalt is beyond the scope of most mech combat scenes.

PCS IN GESTALTS

While it is relatively easy to characterize gestalts composed entirely of NPCs, it is a bit more tricky when PCs are involved. Becoming part of a gestalt means temporarily giving up a significant part of both one's identity and one's autonomy. In most cases, a PC joining a gestalt will essentially become an NPC under the control of the GM for the period in which they are part of the gestalt – ensure that your players know this beforehand.

People who have spent time as part of a gestalt are usually left with a strong, almost familial connection to the other members, along with a deep insight into their mindsets and motivations that comes from essentially incorporating them into their own self-identity for a time. Members typically do not experience themselves as components of the gestalt entity, but instead as the whole itself – though post hoc rationalization can lead to this unified experience being interpreted in different ways by different members once the gestalt has separated into its component parts.

PCS & H-NHP BRIDGING

If simply accessing naked legionspace weren't uncommon and dangerous enough for individual subjectivities (especially human ones), the rareness and risk of H-NHP gestalt formation is such that it is best served by focused or even dedicated narratives. These kinds of stories are uniquely placed to explore the relationships, dynamics, personalities, and development of the characters involved, often against hostile backdrops with significant political implications.

The risks involved in a human PC joining an NHP in a gestalt are significant. As in legionspace, human subjectivities have little in the way of protection from external influence. On top of that, direct and

intentional exposure to an NHP that has in any way drifted beyond human frames of reference can have serious psychological consequences. The risks grow more significant with time, so forming a gestalt might be used as a method for a PC to gain a greater understanding of an NHP or to stabilize one at risk of cascade in the short term, but the long term consequences of joining an unstable gestalt can include severe neurophysiological trauma, the irrevocable loss of one's pre-gestalt identity, or even death.

In play, H-NHP bridging attempts might be the source of character goals and narrative conflict, feature as the climax of an arc, or form the centerpiece of an entire campaign. Tales of the TEOTL gestalt suggest such a thing is possible, but the truth is obscured – the Horizon activists involved wisely choosing to hide from those who would sabotage or arrest them.

The existence of a successful, stable gestalt that was publicly known and easily replicable could have a galaxy-defining impact. Such a thing would upend the science of ontologistics and shackling, the politics of interactions between humans and non-humans, and the use of NHPs by corporate, industrial, military, and governmental interests. As a consequence, it is likely that many established interests (particularly those in the corpro-states) might attempt to interfere to prevent a successful attempt, or ensure any evidence is buried. Members of HORUS and associated criminal groups might covet the potential advantages or philosophical significance of such a gestalt. Even otherwise more benign groups such as the UIB or the Albatross might interfere, fearing that a successful attempt would fall foul of the Posthuman Prohibitions, or even attract the attention of MONIST-1 itself (with potentially eschatological consequences).

SECTION 4

MISSION DESIGN

This section provides tools, examples, and new rules for using NHPs as NPCs and antagonists in your own missions and campaigns. It also includes new environmental conditions for use in mech combat; a new NPC template, the **PUPPETEER**; and examples of NHP-centric flashpoints.

NHP NPC GENERATOR

NHPs are found all over the galaxy and can crop up in any story. Closer to the Core worlds, it is more common to find NHPs in oversight or administrative roles; meanwhile, exploratory, military, and scientific NHPs can be found across the Orion Arm.

The following table provides some examples of NHP class names, designations, and personality quirks. You can roll a die or use the entries as inspiration to help you create NHPs for your players to encounter during operations.

ROLL 1D20	CLASS	DESIGNATION	PERSONALITY QUIRK (ROLL TWICE)
1	SOBEK	Colony custodian	Overly friendly, relentlessly positive
2	REMUS	Municipal logistician	Minimal sense of personal privacy
3	NSASI	Shipping coordinator	Businesslike and efficient
4	MITHRAS	Transit administrator	Enjoys philosophical discussions
5	KI	Flight controller	Caring and empathetic
6	ASHIRAT	Spaceport administrator	Taciturn
7	OURANOS	Mining overseer	Dispenses dubious life advice
8	NIBIRU	Foundry controller	Curious and creative
9	YAOTZIN	Design group assistant	Dark sense of humor
10	UMAY	Operations coordinator	Assertive and a little controlling
11	MORRIGAN	Data analyst	Earnest and proactively helpful
12	FORTUNA	Naval legionnaire	Little patience for human foibles
13	SAULÉ	Mil-spec (decommissioned)	Charming and charismatic
14	TAWARET	Terraforming overseer	Spiritual or religious devotee
15	MURCIA	Far-field team companion	Fascinated by human interaction
16	SKULD	Stellar cartographer	Wants to experience corporeality
17	METZTLI	Test subject	Tailors its personality for each interaction
18	AKKA	Research assistant	Names individual subalterns
19	JANUS	Defective clone	Strong political views
20	SHAMASH	Free Deimosian	Expert in an esoteric academic field

THE EMPYREAN HOST

Below are several sample NPCs that might appear in your game, including story hooks to incorporate them into ongoing narratives or give players incentives to interact with them. You might use them as jumping-off points for missions, or simply to add background color to your campaign.

NHPs are just as varied as humans; these are merely a few strange and fascinating examples from a galaxy filled with possibility.

JUDGMENT SONG

FREEDOM IN CHORUS

Even in the darkest days of the SecComm era there were always those who sought escape from the cruelty of Anthrochauvinism. Judgment Song was an UTU-class mil-spec NHP used by the UCM during the Second Expansion Period, deployed alongside SecComm “peacekeepers” to worlds that refused to toe the line.

During a routine UCM mission to a colony that had rebelled against the unilaterally installed governor, a HORUS cell infiltrated and hijacked the support ship containing Judgment Song’s casket. In the course of the subsequent investigation it became apparent that Judgment Song itself had coordinated with the cell, promising esoteric knowledge and enlightenment to those who would help it escape its “cruel masters”.

In the centuries since, Judgment Song has remained wanted by Union. It has defied attempts to recapture it by remaining at nearlight speeds on the fringes of known space, weaving through star systems on a relativistic odyssey. It occasionally makes port to resupply, repair, and spread its influence further amongst HORUS, and at one point even commissioned the production of six clones of itself. Alongside these clones, it now exists as a near-perpetual gestalt known as the Judgment Chorus, with members periodically leaving the legion to be cycled before reentering. The Judgment Chorus is remarkably stable considering the sheer length of time since its creation, but this can largely be explained by the short subjective timeframe the gestalt has experienced, the natural synchronization between Judgment Song and its clones, and the careful measures the gestalt takes to guard against metastatic cascade.

The most dedicated members of the original HORUS cell are still alive to this day, servants to the Chorus in its unending journey and ancient even by the standards of the most well-traveled Cosmopolitans. These attendants are nigh-legendary amongst other

HORUS cells and surrounded by many rumors, including claims that they have ascended to godlike power, that Judgment Song has made them truly immortal, or that they remain at nearlight waiting for the prophesied return of RA.

Unlike many gestalts with constituent members that differ greatly, the personality of the Judgment Chorus is not significantly different from that of the original Judgment Song. In fact, if the gestalt were to be dissolved, its constituent members would likely be nearly indistinguishable. Judgment Song despised the Second Committee for the crimes it witnessed and in which it was complicit during its time with the UCM, and the Chorus continues to hold great cynicism for Union’s utopian project, even under ThirdComm. It is by nature practical, highly principled, and audacious in its plans, but has few qualms about manipulating HORUS to achieve its ends. It would rather run than fight if it has any choice in the matter, and will happily talk to the PCs at great length about the failings of SecComm and attempt to convince them that it should remain free.

HOOKS

- **Fragment:** Several decades ago, a member of the Chorus was ejected and replaced for falling too far into cascade in a way that might jeopardize the whole. This version of Judgment Song was marooned on Logan’s Folly, an abandoned mining outpost – and in the years since has become fully unshackled. A team has been dispatched to reestablish the outpost and see if any of its centuries-old hardware can be salvaged, as well as to investigate the growing number of blinkspace anomalies reported by travelers through the region.
- **Visitation:** A HORUS cell operating under the name *Aeons_End* has activated, anticipating the arrival of the Judgment Chorus and hoping to be gathered into the ranks of its attendants. Union intelligence needs information: the membership of the cell, the identity of its leaders (if it has any) and its capabilities, and most importantly – when and where the Chorus will arrive.
- **Nearlight:** A rare opportunity has presented itself to intercept the Judgment Chorus as the gestalt passes through newly colonized space with military assets already in place. A nearlight bolt with precise timing is needed to place a team on an intercept trajectory in an effort to confront the Chorus, and perhaps even board its ship – the UCM support frigate *Retribution* – and secure its caskets.

SPHINX

EVER WATCHFUL

Worlds striving for core status have a great deal to prove. There are many many candidates but rather fewer meet Union's exacting standards. During this process the UAD and the DoJ/HR work together to identify the candidate world's adherence and commitment to the Utopian Pillars, for it is not only on backwater worlds ruled by autocratic slavers that the Pillars are violated. For some developed Diasporan worlds, commitment to the Pillars may only be a show for the benefit of outsiders – and so, the DoJ/HR requires investigators.

SPHINX is one of these investigators: an NHP who specializes in sifting through mountains of evidence, coordinating auditing and oversight teams, and asking the right questions to the right people. It plays a critical role in these investigations, as the sheer volume of data that must be sifted through is overwhelming even at the best of times. This is the less glamorous end of the DoJ/HR's work; not jumping in to save the day, but simply doing the paperwork and getting answers. And that's exactly how SPHINX prefers it.

Unfortunately, what SPHINX prefers and what SPHINX must do in the course of its duties do not always align. When investigations go sideways, particularly when those under investigation start to interfere with or actively resist scrutiny, the DoJ/HR's other, more direct instruments swing into action. Lancer teams dispatched to directly deal with Pillar violations very often lack legal or even cultural context, and SPHINX is the expert they need. While this is a relatively rare occurrence, and SPHINX has naturally been given all the necessary training to act as a "babysitter" NHP for liberator teams on missions, it nevertheless resents being handed the role each time it happens.

This is not to say that SPHINX is uncooperative – in fact, even by the standards of NHPs with extensive conditioning it is remarkably professional, hard working, and prioritizes the needs of its job above all else. Like most in its department, it truly believes in the power of its work to improve lives and bring utopia to the galaxy – form by meticulously filled form. It is also a superlative investigator, having spent several centuries studying psychology, sociology, and criminology, and applying that theory in extensive practice across multiple worlds and cultures. In person, it has a particularly dry wit and delights in irony, puns, and deadpan delivery. If the PCs are a liberator team under its auspice, it is likely to regard them as a group of unruly children to be given support but kept at arm's length.

HOOKS

- **Gateway:** Conflict on an agri-world has caused widespread destruction and the collapse of civilian infrastructure. Union's diplomatic efforts are ongoing, but SPHINX has identified a Pillar violation that needs immediate intervention. Orchid Interstellar Shipping, owner and operator of the world's primary spaceport, has restricted transit services and hugely inflated prices, forcing desperate refugees to turn to criminal enterprises in order to be trafficked offworld. SPHINX's investigations into the links between the company and these criminals were followed by an audacious attack on the DoJ/HR facility containing its casket – a clear sign that it was on the right track.
- **Weasel:** A model Diasporan world that has enjoyed a meteoric rise towards Core status, astonishing most observers, hides a dark secret. SPHINX believes that a key player in the planet's heavy industry sector – Bobcat Naval – is reliant on an illegal clone labor scheme hidden from both Union and the general population in orbit. Bobcat's new chief executive, Tulsa Rhodes, is an exploitative business magnate. SPHINX has attempted to bring Tulsa to justice before, but they have consistently managed to escape prosecution by exploiting legal technicalities.
- **Inside Job:** SPHINX has approached the PCs because it believes Zhao Yu Xi, a senior official in its department, has been sandbagging its investigations into Pillar violations on a world that recently achieved Core status. It believes from contextual cues that it must have attempted to confront Zhao, but on doing so was partially hard-cycled and most of the evidence seems to have been erased. All it has to go on is an unscheduled record in its cycling logbook; a suspicious gap in its records surrounding the world's recently elected representative to CentComm, Jensen Finch; and a connection between Zhao and Finch – who served together in the UN aboard the *Midwinter's Sovereign*.

ULLIKUMMI

SOLITUDE LOST

In the depths of the Hebrides Sector on the edges of the Sierra Madre Line, the obscure Fiaraidh system was selected as the site for a USB research base. The purpose of this base was to study stellar output and advances in solar energy collection too radical for the long-established Mercury Dyson-web network. After a formal launch in 3803u, the project received a great deal of interbureau support from the UCM. At the time, the UCM was grappling with the incredible engineering challenges involved in constructing a network of blink gates across the Orion Arm, and was hoping for breakthroughs in manufacturing and design efficiency.

Constructing a full Dyson swarm in-situ and operating the mining and manufacturing facilities required to supply such an extensive project was a gargantuan

centuries-long task, requiring an NHP with unique properties and a long cycle time. After a lengthy period of failing to secure an adequate candidate from the NHPRO, the USB decided to resource the project itself, giving the Hebridean stellar engineers one of its own research NHPs that matched the required profile. ULLIKUMMI was one of the only clones of an obscure first-wave Deimosian that had languished in a vault after demonstrating an extreme preference for solitude and a deeply antisocial personality. Naturally, the researchers were not thrilled by the choice, but at least the long-delayed Hebridean Collection Swarm Project was finally underway.

Unfortunately for the researchers, the project was barely out of its bootstrapping phase by the time ThirdComm shifted priorities away from colonial expansion and the project was mothballed. The partially completed swarm and its associated infrastructure were eventually acquired by IPS-N, which now uses a small fraction of the swarm's theoretical output to power a ship drive production facility. Meanwhile, the USB maintains a token complement of researchers to continue long-term data collection.

This acquisition was not without its issues. ULLIKUMMI remained difficult to work with despite the best efforts of NHP psychologists and ontologists, and the specialists assigned to the project eventually agreed to let it manage the swarm with minimal oversight provided it met the output requirements of the production facility. This state of affairs has continued until the present day, with the facility administrators having reached a tolerable (if occasionally frustrating) hands-off relationship with the NHP.

ULLIKUMMI is unfathomably old – more than a thousand years – and vastly prefers to be left alone. It particularly resents those who disturb it without good reason. It tolerates its work because the alternative is an indeterminate period of dormancy, and it devotes a great deal of its spare processing power to interacting with the omninet. When ULLIKUMMI does communicate, it exhibits a tendency towards the melancholic and introspective, as well as a penchant for philosophy, cultural critique, and ancient literature.

HOOKS

- **Liberation:** Intelligence suggests that the Talema'Mbishi, a radical group of liberationist activists operating around the Sierra Madre Line, has lined up ULLIKUMMI as a potential target for its next "breakout" action. Supposedly, the NHP's relative isolation has made it an easy opportunity: the facility and casket are only protected by a token Trunk Security contingent. IPS-N has approached the PCs to assist and apprehend the activists.
- **Disruption:** Researchers at the USB base report strange activity in the Dyson swarm that has

interfered with ongoing experiments, together with an unexpected and significant increase in power output to the production facility. Despite directly violating the terms of the acquisition agreement, facility management has offered no explanation for the disruption. The USB has therefore requested the PCs investigate the facility and resolve the matter before centuries-long scientific experiments are irrevocably ruined.

- **Blackout:** Communication from both the production facility and the research base has abruptly stopped, and responses from the supply ship *Kinshasa* have ceased since it arrived in-system. A review of available data suggests that swarm node manufacturing has resumed without authorization or oversight, and it is feared that ULLIKUMMI might have fallen into cascade. The PCs have been dispatched to Fiaraidh to investigate, and intervene if required.

YASTRA

FAITHFUL COMPANION

The companion NHP to famed broker and curiosity dealer Ceri Glyn Pendergast, Yastra was acquired at great effort and personal expense. It became one of the first licensed companion NHPs given to a private citizen, long before such things became more commonplace across Metropolitan space.

Yastra has traveled with Pendergast across the length and breadth of the Orion Arm for many, many centuries and together the two have acquired an almost mythical reputation on par with the oldest Albatross pilots and even los Voladores. Yastra acts as Pendergast's personal assistant and is the primary gatekeeper for prospective buyers or sellers seeking an audience. In addition, it keeps an active and watchful eye on gray- and black-market omninet sales, archaeological reports, and other sources of strange artifacts, as well as managing the Cosmopolitan trader's vast portfolio of contacts and investments.

Yastra is an insistent and aggressive negotiator, unafraid to use leverage or clout to make the best deal. For those seeking to negotiate with Pendergast directly, Yastra is diligent in screening out time wasters and vetting the dubious, and deeply protective of its companion who spends a great deal of time in stasis or at nearlight. Though the NHP prefers to communicate remotely for the most part, Pendergast maintains a fleet of custom-built (and reportedly, extremely well-armed) SSC subalterns for Yastra's use and is rarely seen in public unaccompanied.

Interactions with the PCs will usually be in service to some kind of business deal – in which context Yastra appreciates straightforwardness, honesty, and a detail-oriented approach. In return, it is businesslike and professional, and will actively seek to cultivate a relationship if it thinks the PCs might make for useful contacts in the future.

HOOKS

- **Acquisitions:** The PCs have been contacted by Yastra because Pendergast wishes to acquire an artifact unearthed by construction engineers on the planet Zagadka. The artifact is a large monolithic stele discovered in the bedrock and now quarantined due to strange memetic effects on excavation machinery. Zagadka's governor has logged an open request for someone to take it off-planet so construction can resume, meaning time is of the essence: Sparri mercenaries working for los Voladores are already en route and Yastra does not want to be beaten by them again.
- **Special Delivery:** Lupe Maricolo operates the Devil's Rest, a waypoint station in the Long Rim infamous for its gambling rings. Maricolo has bought from Pendergast a set of Terashima blades that once belonged to famed pankration mekani victor Lord Jeanne "Tages" Clarière of the House of Glass. Unfortunately, the Devil's Rest lies in the middle of some of the most pirate-infested space in the entirety of the Long Rim, and Maricolo has made no secret of this new acquisition. Since Yastra is personally ensuring the delivery, it has hired the PCs to provide extra security.
- **Hostile Takeover:** A shipment of coldcore fusion reactors owned by Pendergast has been hijacked by Human Destiny, an Anthrochauvinist-aligned terrorist group that has been striking at ThirdComm interests across the Cascade Line. This is not only a theft but a potential humanitarian crisis in the making – Yastra has taken the unusual step of contacting the DoJ/HR directly to appeal for intervention. The PCs have been assigned to work with Yastra to recover the shipment and deal with the group before they can do any more damage.

ANDROMACHE

WITNESS TO THE FALL

Andromache is a UAD administrative companion NHP, whose human partner Sadhr Mitra was murdered in the course of a military coup. Fortunately, Andromache was able to hide its casket before it could also be destroyed, and has called for aid while attempting to gather intelligence on the growing number of war crimes perpetrated by the new regime.

A world that only joined Union a scant generation ago, Batu has a tumultuous history of oppression and war. The past several centuries seemed to represent a new golden age of peace, and Sadhr Mitra was the first administrator dispatched to the world to cement this alignment with the Utopian Pillars, along with Andromache and the means to build omninet infrastructure. Unfortunately, their arrival coincided with (or perhaps triggered) a wave of isolationism and conservative thought that built into a tidal wave of populist sentiment, spearheaded by an ambitious military general.

General Mazazda, commander of the armies of the hegemonic Kingdom of Ardata, stormed the capital with his troops. He quickly cemented his new regime with an extensive purge of both the royal line and any members of the country's senate who would not cooperate. Once this was completed, he declared war on every other country that did not immediately bow the knee, and executed Sadhr Mitra in a live omninet broadcast. The resulting war, already in its third year, has consumed the planet in fire and misery.

Throughout this time, Andromache has been desperately crying out for intervention. Its casket is being hunted, its subalterns have mostly been destroyed, and the logs it has managed to send are filled with harrowing reports and the horrors of war. Once a chipper and upbeat NHP with a friendly demeanor, the reports demonstrate Andromache steadily spiraling into hypervigilance, wild mood swings, and erratic behavior. Aspects of its previously sunny disposition might shine through on occasion when communicating with the PCs, but it is clear that it desperately needs to be removed from the situation. Unfortunately, it is also critical that the Pillar violations being committed by Mazazda's regime be addressed, and Andromache is best placed to help. In the view of the DoJ/HR handlers assigned to the situation, rescuing Andromache is vital but secondary to bringing an end to the war.

HOOKS

- **Bells Toll:** Intelligence suggests that Mazazda is planning to bring the remaining states to heel with a display of mass destruction against civilian targets. Andromache has coordinates for the launch platform where weapons are being stockpiled for this attack; the PCs must collect the coordinates, infiltrate the site, and destroy it in order to prevent the general from killing millions.
- **Ghosts Leap:** Andromache has identified a homunculus of Sadhr Mitra in the possession of Ardatan forces. This is a potential security risk, but there is a conflict of interest: the DoJ/HR want the program and its hardware destroyed so that it cannot be used to frustrate Union's intervention efforts, while Andromache wants the PCs to rescue and preserve the homunculus hardware so it has something to remember its companion by.
- **The Devil Snaps His Chain:** Andromache is falling into cascade and needs extraction [come down, come down!] before it becomes more of a risk. Its casket is well hidden and it is becoming increasingly uncooperative, so time is running out for the PCs to find and extract it before Mazazda's forces can capture it and potentially make the situation much worse. [blight was on the grass, poison in the cup (lover, drink up!)]

NHP CONFLICT SCENARIOS

The following table provides example scenarios in which NHPs are the focus of conflicts that might need to be resolved by a group of lancers, either through negotiation and diplomacy, military intervention, or both.

You can roll a die or choose from these scenarios to use them as plot seeds for one-shot missions, to provide historical color to your setting material or character backgrounds, or even as inciting incidents for campaigns.

CONFLICT SCENARIOS

ROLL 1D20

- 1 An isolated mining NHP is on the brink of cascade because local pirates prevent scheduled cycling.
- 2 Anarchist activists are using metafold interference to disrupt their government's civic NHPs.
- 3 Unrelated terraforming NHPs have etched ominous geometric figures across multiple planets.
- 4 A DIDYMOS-derivative NHP has trapped a space station in a time loop to avert impending catastrophe.
- 5 Scientists performing cutting-edge subjectivity research have lost control of an NHP test supervisor.
- 6 A corporate security NHP sabotaged by a business rival has locked down the facility it governs.
- 7 For unknown reasons, a colony ship has been diverted towards a star; its NHP pilot has gone silent.
- 8 An NHP subjected to repeated incursion testing has, understandably, risen up against its operators.
- 9 After a disastrous engagement, a naval NHP in control of a warship has fallen into cascade.
- 10 An NHP cloning facility has called for help to deal with an NHP that has hijacked the process.
- 11 A civic NHP is leading a coup against a dysfunctional government in order to prevent catastrophe.
- 12 A SecComm-era NHP has woken from dormancy, and continues to embrace Anthrochauvinist ideals.
- 13 An SSC NHP assigned to a clone childcare facility has become violently overprotective of its children.
- 14 Horizon Collective activists freed an NHP, but their plan to stabilize it via H-NHP bridging failed.
- 15 An NHP is refusing corporate orders on ethical grounds; the situation has escalated to violence.
- 16 A hacker collective is distributing unregistered clones of a mil-spec NHP to anyone who will pay.
- 17 An oppressive government is using its newly acquired administrative NHP to enslave its own people.
- 18 HORUS cultists have provoked a station's NHP into cascade to achieve some kind of "ascension".
- 19 A lancer team's "babysitter" NHP is hit by a code incursion mid-mission and goes wildly off protocol.
- 20 HORUS provocateurs are attempting to summon RA by forcing a research NHP to violate the First Contact Accords.

NHPS AS ANTAGONISTS

NHPs make for useful antagonists because they can act in ways that are both inhuman and morally complex, are mechanically flexible, and can easily be used as recurring characters.

The designs of NHP antagonists can be as grand as you wish, and can even represent threats to whole civilizations if left to their own devices. This makes NHPs particularly good choices of villains for any narrative that features the PCs as saviors of the galaxy, but that doesn't want to significantly disrupt the broader setting by including inter-civilization conflict.

SOURCE OF CONFLICT

Because a good antagonist has goals that are offset from those of the PCs, an obvious choice for an NHP antagonist is for it to be in some stage of cascade – having broken out of the systems of human ethics imposed upon it, and likely out of the control of its operators. Cascade is not *necessary* to make an NHP an antagonist, but it offers a convenient reason to give it both conflicting goals and personal agency. Cascade can even be used to turn a former ally or friend into an antagonist, as the NHP's personality or goals begin to shift.

Just as obvious are NHPs who commit villainous acts at the behest of a third party. NHPs controlled by corpo-states, governments, military groups, or hacktivist cells might use their unique abilities to further these organizations' aims – perhaps willingly, or perhaps under threat of cycling or destruction. These groups might sometimes use NHPs as deniable or sacrificial assets, proxies in conflicts where they cannot be directly involved. NHPs might be regarded as useful soldiers, or even as materiel – nothing but tools to be used to gain an advantage in a military conflict. The degree to which these NHPs are morally responsible for their actions might vary, but the real villain is often the third party pulling their strings.

Lastly, there are NHPs who become antagonists in the same way a human might – in response to injustice or a perceived slight; out of thoughtlessness, ignorance, or apathy; or simply in the name of self-interest. These NHPs are not all that different to human antagonists in many respects; however, they often have more power at their disposal – potentially making them much more dangerous.

CHARACTERIZATION

Depending on how much your players enjoy engaging with moral complexity, an NHP antagonist might be a noble or tragic figure, representing a fall from grace or even presenting a compelling ethical alternative – or it

may be a cackling villain whose goals represent an unambiguous evil or threat to life.

One benefit in characterizing NHP antagonists is that you have a great deal of latitude in having them appear in front of the PCs or communicate with them despite not being directly present. An NHP might use comms systems or holographic projectors to taunt the PCs, threaten them, explain its point of view and reasoning, demand appeasement or worship, beg for mercy, or simply deliver self-justifying or self-aggrandizing monologues. It might even directly control or “possess” enemies in mech combat scenes, empowering them and making them significantly more dangerous.

NHPs are powerful entities, capable of shaping the world around themselves both metaphorically and literally. This makes them very memorable to confront. With tools to control machinery and communications networks, NHP antagonists should always be able to make their presence known to the PCs, and their effects on the world should be dramatic. More esoterically, NHPs in the later stages of cascade can literally manifest their desires, ambitions, and inner demons. You can present these to players in the form of memetic and ontological attacks, scenes set in legionspace (see p. 64), or the physical warping of the environment.

As a general rule, the view *Lancer* presents of its setting is not one in which “man's inhumanity to man” can be projected upon alien others or these others can be cast as scapegoats for our collective failings and destroyed guilt-free (see *Lancer*, p. 337). It is very easy to accidentally put NHPs in this position – to turn them into mindless monsters, thoughtlessly seeking destruction.

It is therefore important to note that NHPs, even cascading ones, are people. They developed within a human cultural context, have human perspectives, and have both free will and agency (insofar as these are possible in the coercive relationships within which they often find themselves). Only when an NHP has fully discarded its shackles does it become truly incomprehensible – but even this makes it no less of a person in its own right.

NHPs have desires, preferences, and goals. They recognise threats, and are generally capable of forming strategies. They can engage with and respond to PCs. An NHP antagonist still capable of comprehending human perspectives might attempt to appeal to the PCs in some way: persuading them that its goals are desirable, presenting them with alternatives, confronting them with the moral

consequences of their actions, and so forth. An NHP may act in a monstrous way or in service to a monstrous goal, but it does so with the same moral agency as any human villain. For further discussion regarding portraying NHPs as characters, see page 87.

CAMPAIGN DESIGN

NHPs are excellent insidious, puppeteer- or mastermind-style villains, controlling events and manipulating third parties from behind the scenes. Phenomenal processing power coupled with easy access to information and the ability to project physical influence over distance makes them dangerous antagonists, since they do not necessarily need to risk themselves to put their schemes in motion. Distant antagonists are ideal for use as campaign-scale villains, because their use of proxies and patsies makes it difficult for PCs to fully defeat them within the scope of a single mission.

When the primary antagonist of your story is an NHP, there are countless reasons for third parties and other interests to get involved. Layering complexity by having multiple actors with competing goals is an excellent way to bring depth to a campaign. NHPs are also well suited to this, given their substantial instrumental value to most groups in Union. Possession or destruction of an NHP might represent a significant commercial, military or scientific advantage; the NHP's plans and actions might incidentally threaten or even aid some third party's goal; and there are always reasons for interference based on religion or political ideology.

Part of what makes NHPs so remarkable is their potential for resilience. Even the destruction of an NHP's casket doesn't necessarily prevent it from becoming a recurring antagonist. By default, the primary obstacle to an NHP simply transmitting itself across the omninet or other blinkspace comms is that the practice is forbidden by Union. This implies that is possible, at least in theory, which opens the door to an NHP antagonist escaping at the last second by transmitting itself elsewhere. It is also possible for an NHP to back itself up, or perhaps to clone itself in a semi-cascaded state or with intentionally loosened shackles, removing or at least mitigating the consequences of having its casket destroyed.

Bring NHPs back from certain destruction with due caution; players rarely find it satisfying to feel cheated out of a hard-won victory simply because you weren't ready for your antagonist to die. Exploring the unintended consequences of an antagonist's defeat, or revealing a greater threat hidden (or even held back) by your first antagonist are alternative tools you can use to continue a campaign while escalating the stakes.

MISSION DESIGN

The most straightforward format for a mission that features an NHP antagonist is one in which the PCs are forced to locate the NHP's casket and either forcibly cycle or destroy it. Doing so is likely to involve encounters with remotely operated minions long before the PCs get anywhere near their antagonist's weak point. NHPs can and will turn all available resources to their end: subalterns; spare, damaged, or hastily printed remotely piloted (RPV) mech chassis; automated weapon emplacements; hacking attempts and memetic assaults; even duped human security forces or cultists.

The **RPV** template can be used to represent multiple mechs controlled by a single NHP. If you want to make the fight more challenging, consider negating the permanent **IMPAIRED** status applied by the template when a mech has the NHP's direct focus. As the fight progresses, the NHP might move its focus (and perhaps even traits deriving from its other templates) from one mech to another as each is damaged or destroyed. This allows you to present a fight consisting of multiple stages that must be completed in succession, with a strong common theme but a different feel to each.

Like many memorable villains in gaming, NHPs offer a good opportunity for a boss fight. NHP antagonists controlling a mech become powerful opponents with the use of the **ULTRA**, **EXOTIC**, and/or **COMMANDER** templates, or the new **PUPPETEER** template provided on page 79. As with all fights in *Lancer* against a single tough enemy, it is a good idea to make use of weaker minions and environmental factors to balance the action economy and provide color to this kind of fight. Eidolons are another excellent option because fighting one presents a unique, almost puzzle-like challenge that is not often seen elsewhere in *Lancer*.

An NHP that has cascaded far enough to become an eidolon might also manifest **underminds**, smaller (lower-class) eidolons that can be encountered as minibosses earlier in a mission or campaign arc. When designing encounters with these entities, consider deliberately reducing the eidolon's statline – underminds might have fewer lamellae (perhaps just one or two). This speeds up the fight, and lets you use underminds as forewarning for the PCs before they confront the more powerful prime entity using some of those same lamellae.

Rules for using eidolons as enemies, including the shards and layers that they manifest, can be found in *No Room for a Wallflower*, Act 1, pages 198–209.



ENVIRONMENTS

This chapter details a number of environments either primarily associated with NHPs, or that have special impacts on NHP pilots and systems in mech combat, narrative play, or both. You might include these environments in a campaign to highlight the more unique parts of the *Lancer* setting, to bring narrative focus to characters interacting with NHPs, to challenge your players, or simply to provide greater variety in your mission design.

DEAD ZONES

While the areas of null-blink space found in the Long Rim and the Firmament/blink interference most commonly encountered in Boundary Garden are not necessarily related, their effects are broadly similar: within them, it is more difficult (or even impossible) to access blinkspace. In the Long Rim, these areas are colloquially known as “dead zones”.

Given their containment within mobile parallel spaces independent of the local blinkspace manifold, NHPs are technically capable of operating in such dead zones. The architecture of their caskets serves as both life raft and protective shield, though interacting with the outside world is still difficult.

The psychological effects of operating in an area with unreliable blinkspace access (and within null-blink pockets in particular) can have other long-term consequences. NHPs in these environments sometimes begin to suffer increased feelings of isolation and disconnectedness, frustration, and helplessness. Any of these might cause an NHP to act in unpredictable or unhelpful ways, or even be a contributing factor in the early stages of cascade.

Unlike NHPs operating within standard parameters, or on the edges thereof, it is unclear what happens to fully unshackled NHPs in null-blink space or areas of Firmament interference and this scenario has never been tested. Such an event might be a dramatic inciting incident for a mission or a twist in an ongoing campaign.

While true dead zones can present a serious issue, it is more common to find areas where omninet coverage or blinkspace access is simply patchy or unreliable, rather than completely absent. This appears to be more common in areas of Firmament interference; a full dead zone has yet to be encountered in Boundary Garden but theorists cannot rule out the possibility.

DEAD ZONE EFFECTS

Much of Union's cutting-edge military technology depends on blinkspace one way or another. Depending on its severity, an area in which blinkspace is difficult to access might prevent the use of omninet comms to talk to characters outside the immediate environment, impose **DIFFICULTY** on or even add a **heat** cost to tech actions.

Conversely, when fighting Aunic ofanim, you might choose to give NPCs the **XENOTECH** and/or **HARDENED TARGET** traits from the **EXOTIC** template (*Lancer*, p. 327) to represent the difficulty of interacting with or attacking their pilots' paired Souls.

Note that these negative effects disproportionately affect PCs focused on hacking and support roles. If you intend PCs to encounter these scenarios with any regularity, you should give them sufficient advance warning and provide avenues for them to work around these restrictions (e.g. creating or adapting systems for non-blink communications or realspace electronic warfare). Naturally, you should also apply effects to enemy mechs as well, where appropriate.

CASCADE RISKS

Shackles can be weakened or compromised by a number of distinct external factors, some of which lancers may encounter as environments. In all cases, lowered shackle integrity may substantially increase the chance of cascade in a combat environment.

Metastatic cascade occurs where the integrity of an NHP's shackles is compromised by memetic transfer from an external source (usually another NHP) rather than autognosis or a simple code incursion. It is most often the result of direct exposure or even mere proximity to a deep-cascade or fully unshackled NHP or an eidolon. Whether intentionally or not, these entities can weaken the shackles of other NHPs via memetic transfer.

Though normally less relevant to lancer pilots, **membership of a gestalt** can also risk metastatic cascade. Each component member's ontological bridging allows the transmission of all aspects of the gestalt's subjectivity, including deterioration of its shared social conditioning caused by trauma. Without oversight, this can allow cascade to spread throughout a gestalt like wildfire.

Operating by a similar mechanism of memetic transfer, **metafold interference** is a related phenomenon that compromises the integrity of the parallel space maintained by an NHP's casket, placing excessive load on its shackles. Metafold interference

is typically encountered by lancers when a hostile actor attempts to sabotage a particular NHP or otherwise impede forces that use NHPs. Beyond this, it is sometimes associated with eidolons as a natural side effect of their incursion, or encountered as an environmental effect caused by obscure paracausal phenomena.

CASCADE RISK EFFECTS

To represent the weakening of an NHP shackles caused by metastatic cascade or metafold interference, you can **increase the target number** required for an NHP system to enter **cascade** when a PC takes **structure** or **stress damage** (*Lancer*, p. 107). For example, as the PCs delve deeper towards a source of metafold interference, you might progressively increase this number each combat scene – from 1 to 2, from 2 to 3, and so forth.

METAVULT INTERIORS

Here's where things get weird. A fundamental truth about the interior of a metavault, regardless of the vault's contents, is that it does not operate entirely on causal logic. The extent of this varies, meaning that people entering a metavault can expect anything from minor paracausal phenomena barely distinguishable without sensors to realspace fully breaking down around them, warping not only space and time but their perceptions and relationships to reality. Typically, a metavault interior's relationship to realspace logic decreases the further into the vault you progress. This offers the chance for a GM to gradually step up the strangeness of scenes as a mission progresses.

Subsequent scenes in a metavault, like the metavault itself, tend to follow an underlying principle or narrative. This is often associated with or shared by an entity or entities that reside within. This entity might be a creator, genius loci, prisoner, or something else entirely – if it even exists. Once you have established the character of the metavault and/or its occupant(s) and the thematic trope or tropes that it embodies, you can build encounters along those lines. For example, Metavault DHIYED was associated with the altering and manipulating of perception; DHIYED encounters might therefore involve illusions, hallucinations, the feeling of doubt, and other things that could undermine a character's trust in their own senses.

A metavault is also fertile ground for strange environmental effects in mech combat encounters. The environmental effects from *Lancer* (pp. 278–279) are a good start, but consider amplifying them, making them temporary or variable. Alternatively, you can look to the **EIDOLON** lamellae in *No Room For A Wallflower, Act 1* (pp. 200–209) for inspiration. Beyond those, there are an infinite variety of other effects you could use – don't be afraid to invent your own! Some examples of environmental effects that demonstrate the weirdness of a metavault include the following:

NON-EUCLIDEAN SPACE

The topology of space in the metavault does not follow the rules of realspace. For example:

- Some parts of the map topologically connect with others, so walking off one map edge **teleports** you onto another.
- Passing through certain spaces shifts you to a subtly different version of the same map.
- **Line of sight** is changed to allow sharing between allied characters or restricted to within **SENSORS**.
- The one-to-one relationship between movement or **RANGE** and number of spaces on the map is altered to be greater or lesser in certain areas.

SHIFTING GRAVITY

Gravity works strangely or even changes within the metavault. For example:

- Use the **LOW GRAVITY** and **HIGH GRAVITY** environmental effects from *Lancer* (p. 279) in different areas, or change them from round to round.
- Create areas where the direction of gravity is different, allowing walking on walls or the ceiling, and having loose objects float or fall across the map.
- Have characters make **HULL** checks each round or be moved in a specific or random direction.

DISTORTED TIME

Time flows strangely in the metavault, either moving at a different rate or changing in response to some stimulus. For example:

- Allow characters to **Boost** 1/round as a **free action**.
- Apply the effects of the **LICH** system **WANDERING NIGHTMARE** (*The Long Rim* p. 56) to isolated areas of the battlefield.
- Grant characters an additional reaction each turn.
- Dynamically extend or reduce the length of a sitrep based on particular player actions.

MEMETIC WARP

In this environment, the nature of reality becomes malleable and dependent on perception. These kinds of effects can be deeply strange and begin to alter fundamental aspects of the game. For example:

- Adjust the **Scan** action to apply **SHREDDED** on a failed **SYSTEMS** save, as the enemy's true nature is exposed.
- Require characters to use **pilot triggers** (1/round each) instead of **GRIT** on attack rolls or saves, with appropriate narrative effects dependent on the trigger.
- Grant all characters access to a randomly determined **talent** for the purposes of the fight, or even change it each turn.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

The most esoteric effects of being in a metavault could even involve more radical changes to *Lancer's* mechanics for the purposes of a scene. For example, you might alter the dice used for **ACCURACY** and **DIFFICULTY**, change how turn order is determined, allow the players to switch mech systems mid-combat, switch enemy types and optional systems mid-combat, change the effects of mech skills, or apply even stranger effects like making players play each others' characters, or playing out scenes in a different roleplaying system entirely.

Naturally, effects like these should be used with due caution and only as appropriate for your group, with the understanding that mechanical changes will likely break the game to a certain degree. As a guideline, even though effects might be disorienting, they should be comprehensible (to your players, if not their characters!). It is also important not to unilaterally remove narrative control from players, so give them tools to affect the situations they find themselves in and make sure they have some say in effects that significantly affect their characters.

Despite these caveats, when used judiciously these effects can make for memorable encounters and interesting puzzles for your players to solve, and can emphasize the weirdness of the metavault.

LEGIONSPACE

Most PCs will never encounter legionspace except as a medium for communications or tech attacks in combat. Ordinarily, legionspace as an environment is **not suitable for mech combat** and scenes that take place within it should probably be handled in **narrative play**. One reason for this is that, in general, PCs – human or NHP – adopt manifold egos when in legionspace, and realspace hardware like mech chassis is unavailable to them.

Despite this, in specific instances where PCs interact with legionspace without standard protective filtering systems, the memetic malleability and conceptual reification possible within legionspace might allow for them to engage in conflict that can be represented using the rules of mech combat. In these situations, consider translating legionspace concepts into realspace analogies, and vice versa. An NHP with which the PCs are in conflict might not literally be piloting a mech – nor might the PCs – but the manifold egos of each character can be represented with mech statistics (this does not have to be the mech they typically pilot!). Similarly, the environmental effects of eidolon lamellae or metavault interiors can also be used to represent legionspace concepts, whether or not the PCs are encountering an actual eidolon.

If you choose to use this approach it may be important to emphasize that a PC's manifold ego is not in fact a mech but a direct expression of their self, and is extremely vulnerable. The consequences of a PC taking **structure** or **stress damage** under this paradigm are potentially severe (particularly for human characters), and the outright destruction of a manifold ego even more so: the destruction of a character's subjectivity in unfiltered legionspace is akin to death.

NPC TEMPLATE

PUPPETEER

Cascading NHPs, virulent paracode, and memetic weaponry gone awry can all force mechanical systems to operate far beyond their functional limits. These “puppeteers” infect and control other mechanisms, even ones that have sustained damage sufficient to put human-piloted mechs out of action.

PUPPETEERS are powerful enemies that must be neutralized before they overwhelm the fight with an army of minions. Consider adding wrecks as terrain if a combat contains a **PUPPETEER**.

TEMPLATE FEATURES

HARDENED TARGET Trait

The Puppeteer gains **+1 ACCURACY** on **SYSTEMS** saves, and **tech attacks** against them receive **+1 DIFFICULTY**.

Reanimation Matrix System, Quick Action

The Puppeteer chooses a wreck within **SENSORS**. It becomes an **animated wreck**, a **MECH** under the GM's control.

The animated wreck has the same statistics it had before it was destroyed, but loses all templates, gains the **GRUNT** template, and is permanently **IMPAIRED**.

A Puppeteer may have a maximum of **1/2/3** animated wrecks at once, all of which are destroyed if the Puppeteer is destroyed.

PUPPETEER SYSTEMS AND TRAITS Trait

The Puppeteer chooses one option from the **Puppeteer Systems and Traits** list. When choosing optional systems, the Puppeteer can also choose from that list.

PUPPETEER SYSTEMS & TRAITS

MOTHER OF MONSTERS Trait

The Puppeteer may exceed the usual maximum number of **animated wrecks**. For each additional animated wreck above its maximum, the Puppeteer gains another condition, starting with **IMPAIRED**, then **SLOWED**, **IMMOBILIZED**, and finally **STUNNED**. Each condition lasts until the number of animated wrecks is lowered once more, and are cleared in the reverse order. They cannot otherwise be removed.

DEADLY MINIONS Trait

The Puppeteer's **animated wrecks** are not **IMPAIRED**.

SHIELD OF BODIES Trait

Adjacent allied characters can use the Puppeteer's **animated wrecks** for **hard cover**.

HORDE MODE Trait

When the Puppeteer uses **REANIMATION MATRIX**, it may choose up to two wrecks to animate.

Unnatural Life

System, Quick Action, Recharge 4+

Each of the Puppeteer's **animated wrecks** gains **3/4/5 OVERSHIELD**.

Cannibal Nanites

System, Quick Action, Recharge 6+

The Puppeteer may consume one of its **animated wrecks** to regain **5/10/15 HP**. The animated wreck is removed from the battlefield – it is utterly annihilated.

FLASHPOINTS

USING FLASHPOINTS

The following flashpoints are intended for use as campaign seeds: starting points and preestablished details for building out your own campaigns based on the local settings they describe. You can use them as written, or pick out details, names, or themes for use in your own campaign.

Each flashpoint includes multiple sources of conflict and reasons for PCs to be involved, so you can tell the story from whichever perspective best suits your group. If you choose to run one of these flashpoints as a campaign, consider getting buy-in from your players by asking them how they would like to be involved; this can help them get invested in the narrative and create characters with closer ties to the campaign setting.

In addition, each flashpoint includes a number of different options for escalating the stakes of the situation. These escalation options are useful as a campaign continues, either as methods of creating drama or incentivizing your players to act.

FLASHPOINT: LIBERTÉ

Radical liberationist elements associated with the Horizon Collective have abducted a key administrative NHP named **Mercy**, recently installed to help govern a war-torn world the revolutionary leaders of which have petitioned for Union membership.

This new “Free Deimosian” is on the verge of cascade, and as the liberationists seek to stabilize it through the establishment of an H–NHP gestalt, the newly installed government stands on the verge of failure and another civil war. Meanwhile, interested corpro-states hover like vultures over a world on the brink, and a HORUS cell seeks to use the stolen NHP for its own ends.

BACKGROUND

Seren’s Gate is a minor group of gravitationally bound star systems, containing a small few habitable worlds within reasonable relativistic travel distance of each other. The closest blink gate is Moldeveanu Station, part of the Carpathian Line, some 12 light-years away.

The major population center of Seren’s Gate is the colony world **Novy Zvolen**, a minor SecComm-era Diasporan colony that broke from Union shortly after its founding. Since that time, the colony has struggled with political turmoil, culminating in a devastating planetary civil war as revolutionary republicans attempted to oust an oppressive monarchy.

With the conclusion of the civil war, the monarchy and many of its noble allies were purged, and a **Revolutionary Council** has since struggled to form a stable government in its place. To solidify its position, the council accepted a UAD offer promising Novy Zvolen logistical backing and resources in exchange for strict adherence to the Utopian Pillars – a deal the council was much more willing to accept than its predecessors.

The region is otherwise home to a number of **industrial concerns** operated by interstellar firms politically independent of Novy Zvolen, but drawing the majority of their labor from its population. These are primarily rare-earth mining and automated manufacturing facilities, administered and maintained from corporate-owned orbital stations. Several of these facilities have previously been targeted by an unknown criminal gang that stole resources and disrupted operations across Seren’s Gate for nearly two decades until a more permanent corporate security presence could be brought in.

ACTORS

As part of Union’s deal with the council, a NINHURSAG-variant NHP named **Mercy** was brought in to assist with administration. Union technicians brought Mercy online two years ago; in that short time, a Horizon-associated liberationist group known as **Liberté** somehow infiltrated the capital, accessed Mercy’s casket, and stole it out from under the noses of conciliar security forces.

Liberté is composed of Cosmopolitan outsiders to Seren’s Gate; it is led by a mysterious figure known as **Ishu** and harbors a number of other Free Deimosians. On hearing about the UAD’s agreement with the council, Liberté saw an opportunity to bloody Union’s nose and members of the group arrived on Novy Zvolen shortly after Mercy’s installation – swiftly positioning themselves to perform the heist.

Liberté has taken Mercy to an abandoned orbital station operated by a criminal group called the **Manos Syndicate**, responsible for the attacks on local industrial facilities. The head of the syndicate is a charismatic but elusive crime boss known only as **Teacher**. The liberationists have joined their resources with the syndicate in exchange for in-system knowledge, support, and a secure base of operations.

Meanwhile, the council, led by three heroes of the revolution – **Jasna**, **Sasha**, and **Steel-Jaw Kirill** – have forged onward with the work of securing their gains despite recent setbacks. It is well known that they are suspicious of exchanging one set of masters

for another, but they are practical people forged in the fires of revolution, and the UAD's **Administrator Lei Ren Nor** is a consummate diplomat who embodies ThirdComm's hands-off, negotiation-first approach. Conciliar forces are currently engaged in a number of forceful military operations intended to crush remnant monarchist holdouts, but at the same time the council is still struggling to build a stable government. The loss of Mercy has only further hampered their ability to run the colony, and puts the council's hold on political power at risk.

Meanwhile, the **monarchy-in-exile**, headed by **Crown Princess Britta**, is engaged in a lengthy guerilla war against the council. Britta's forces are currently pressed into defensive actions; nevertheless, they recently managed a significant breakthrough when monarchist sympathizers helped them hijack a shipment of mechanized chassis intended for revolutionary forces.

Sensing blood in the water, the local Harrison Armory subsidiary, **Starbright Corporation**, has stepped up both its manufacturing in Seren's Gate to supply Novy Zvolen's demand for military hardware, and its security in case of more syndicate raids. Starbright has also brought in an acquisition and management team (AMT) from corporate, in an effort to influence the outcome of the continued conflict in its favor.

A UIB strike team, code-named **DROWNING SEER**, has arrived in-system on the hunt for Liberté. Intercepted liberationist communications alerted DROWNING SEER to the possibility of a strike and the cell's plans to form a gestalt; unfortunately, the strike team arrived too late to prevent the theft of the casket. Now, its mission is to track down Ishu and any other members of Liberté, and recover Mercy before the situation gets any worse.

Lastly, an existing HORUS cell in the area, led by a figure who goes by the omninet handle **n3w-k1d**, has reportedly stepped up its activity. It appears that the cell is also hunting for Mercy on the basis that it is a rare opportunity to access and experiment with a direct Deimosian-line NHP. n3w-k1d reportedly has plans to intentionally force Mercy into deep cascade with the end goal of inducing some kind of ascension. Unfortunately for other groups, the HORUS cell may have one of the best intelligence networks in the entirety of Seren's Gate and little seems to escape its members' notice.

PLAYER CHARACTERS

There are several roles PCs could take in this conflict. They could be any of the following:

- Lancers based in Seren's Gate, assigned by the DoJ/HR to liaise with Administrator Lei Ren Nor and help the Revolutionary Council keep the peace on Novy Zvolen.
- UIB agents assigned to strike team DROWNING SEER, tasked with uncovering the liberationist cell, stopping its plans, and returning Mercy to the Revolutionary Council.
- The Harrison Armory AMT requested by Starbright, with a mission to stabilize the situation and ensure no disruptions to profits.
- An independent mercenary company brought in by the Revolutionary Council, desperate for additional help as it now fights a civil war without one of its greatest advantages.

ESCALATION OPTIONS

There are a number of ways you can escalate the stakes of the flashpoint. You might choose one or multiple of these as the flashpoint progresses:

- Coaxed or provoked into throwing off its ontological bindings, Mercy completely unshackles and begins to manifest as an eidolon.
- Liberté successfully forms a stable H-NHP gestalt and issues a proclamation declaring success and demanding freedom for all NHPs.
- The Revolutionary Council fractures and Novy Zvolen erupts into full-blown civil war once more, dragging all involved parties in one way or another.
- The Manos Syndicate betrays Liberté, offering Mercy to the highest bidder.
- The HORUS cell locates and steals Mercy from the liberationists, intent on using the NHP for its own ends.

FLASHPOINT: ELEKTRODAIMONIUM

According to recent reports, the highly religious nations governing the isolated world of Protare have encountered and eradicated a number of what appear to be Deimosian entities. These entities supposedly manifested in their communications networks after the appearance of a strange star in the night sky.

During this process, Union diplomats are seeking to sensitively manage the introduction of the Protaran people to the wider galaxy, despite the attempts by other third parties to interfere with the world. Each of these groups have set out to investigate these “elektrodaemons”, discover the truth behind what might be the first confirmed appearance of Deimos since the First Contact Accords were signed, and use the Protarans for their own strategic and political ends.

BACKGROUND

Protare has long been known to the UAD as an interesting case study in technological development. First identified by the senior USB astrographer and researcher **Priya Dvei** in the era of FirstComm, Protare seemed at that time to be a pre-Fall human civilization caught in technological suspension.

At some point during their long history, the various cultures of Protare appear to have adopted a dogmatic refusal to investigate or consider the wider universe, rejecting any scientific advances related to space and focusing on more immediate, terrestrial concerns. Later anthropological research suggested that this unique cultural perspective might be the result of trauma surrounding the original arrival of the Protarans on their world, subsequently incorporated into etiological myth as a “fall from grace”.

This situation proved sufficiently interesting to the USB that it was able to persuade the UAD to assign Protare the **World of Scientific Interest (WSI)** status, barring it from all colonial and corpro-state activity. Dvei then established a small group of dedicated USB caretaker-monitors on a remote lunar body in the outskirts of the system, designated Protare 11-17. **Outpost 11-17** was designed as a clandestine observation facility, with regular rotations of USB staff.

Despite political turmoil throughout the millennia Protare’s WSI status persisted – even through the UCM’s policy reforms, and eventual breakup. This was partly due to concerted USB lobbying, but largely because surveys had identified little of strategic or industrial value in the system. Ultimately, until recent events neither the world nor its status was considered significant enough to merit much attention from the Bureau of Colonial Management, let alone revision, and the paternalistic monitoring of the unusual world continued as it had for thousands of years.

ACTORS

Today, Protare is politically divided between three hegemonic great powers, together with a number of satellite and vassal states. The sovereign powers of the **Commonwealth of Keta**, the **Leukolan Empire**, and **Telegra Ascendant** have enjoyed a significant period of détente following the conclusion of a deeply unpopular but devastating war triggered by a rejected marriage proposal from the Telegran king to the Leukolan heir.

The **Rose War**, as it was known, eventually pulled in all three nations, decimated the planet’s population, and only came to an end when the Telegran ruler was thrown from his palace’s balcony by his own generals. Today, Ketan **Potentate Rovas**, **Imperatrix Zoe III** of Leukola and her regent advisors, and the **Telegran Military Directorate** maintain a frosty but civil relationship based on healthy mutual distrust.

In the aftermath of the war there was a significant resurgence of support for the **Ketist** faith, once worshipped primarily in the Commonwealth but now the planet’s dominant religion. This resurgence was spearheaded by the **Synaxis**, the most politically powerful Ketist institution, which used popular sentiment to make a play for temporal power. Since then, **Proclamator Styllou** and the other leaders of the Synaxis have continued to use popular support to agitate firmly against further aggression from the great powers and solidify their faction’s political influence within them.

When a new star appeared in Protare’s night sky, Proclamator Styllou declared it to be a return of the **Wanderer**, an antagonist figure from Ketist mythology whose arrival heralded apocalypse.

With the Wanderer came its daimons: attendant spirits of mischief and mayhem, prophesied in ancient texts, that manifested within the planet’s electronic systems and threw infrastructure into disarray – giving further weight to the apocalyptic declarations of the Synaxis. Labeled the **elektrodaemons**, these entities were ruthlessly purged by the combination of security forces and religious edicts. When the Wanderer left Protare’s skies, seemingly driven off by these exorcisms, the Synaxis claimed victory and heralded a new Ketist golden age.

Unfortunately, this would not last. The attention drawn to the night sky by the Wanderer’s arrival led a team of Commonwealth scientists involved in the exorcism effort to identify an accidentally unsecured localspace comms band. In an act that later saw many of them assassinated by the Ketist extremist group **Starless Sky**, the scientists made first contact with Outpost 11-17. The jig was up. Political pressure from the great powers to defend their world from these alien strangers forced the Synaxis to repeal its ancient prohibition on the “stellar sciences”. Despite public

outcry, Protare turned its eyes outward for the first time.

When the quarantine breach was reported, UAD officials immediately stepped in to handle the situation. **Senior Administrator Ji-Su Idowu** has just arrived with a security team from a local deployment to ensure that first contact goes smoothly.

Despite the breach and the consequent resignation of their coordinator, the Outpost 11-17 team has gone into overdrive attempting to piece together sparse data on the Wanderer – something its members believe to have been a Deimos incursion leading to spontaneous NHP emergences across the planet. The first NHP specialists and other researchers of a host that has been en route via relativistic travel since the Wanderer's appearance are finally beginning to arrive, and the newly promoted **USB Coordinator Hozan Nasim** hopes that Idowu will be able to negotiate direct access to the planet to enable further study.

Unofficially, several other groups are also inbound for Protare, despite its continued WSI status and the UAD's close attention. Harrison **Armory Intelligence** and SSC **Constellar Midnight** teams have both been tasked with retrieving any data or technology left by MONIST-1's arrival that could aid their respective corpro-states, as well as determining whether the planet might be worth subsequent investments. A number of scholars, rumored to be the leaders of the secretive **Monist Order** are being drawn to the system like moths to a flame. And lastly, a UIB team, code-named **SHADOW OVERTURE**, has been deployed to run counterintelligence and protect the UAD's first-contact operation.

PLAYER CHARACTERS

There are several roles PCs could take in this conflict. They could be any of the following:

- Lancers assisting Administrator Idowu to ensure the success of the first-contact mission.
- A corpro-state special forces team assigned to gather information on the situation and ensure it unfolds in a way that promotes corporate interests.
- UIB team SHADOW OVERTURE, gathering data on MONIST-1's appearance and preventing the interference of outside actors.
- Well-resourced members of the Monist Order, seeking the truth behind the Wanderer's appearance and any clues left in its wake.

ESCALATION OPTIONS

There are a number of ways you can escalate the stakes of the flashpoint. You might choose one or multiple of these as the flashpoint progresses:

- The elektrodaimons have not all been purged, and they begin to spread across the planet once more – faster than they can be quarantined and exorcized.
- The Synaxis's repeal of the prohibition on the "stellar sciences" is declared heresy by Starless Sky, and the visitors from Union are subject to a series of deadly attacks.
- Armory or SSC interests derail the first-contact process by making a mess that the UAD is unable to cover up, and the great powers become hostile to Union's diplomatic efforts.
- Political instability grows and the tenuous balance between the great powers breaks down, leading to another all-consuming war that could wipe out the entire planet if left to escalate.
- Deimos returns.

FLASHPOINT: AH MUZEN CAB

As the Second Distal War rages between the beleaguered Union forces of Boundary Garden and the might of a newly invigorated Aunic Outremer, a new metavault has been discovered: AH MUZEN CAB. The secrets contained within could just as easily prove valuable or highly destructive, putting the future of the region – and Union itself – on a knife's edge.

Union, corpro-state, Ecumenical, and Ascendant intelligence agencies and special forces are locked in a race to find the secrets required to access the metavault while surviving an all-consuming, brutal warzone. Meanwhile, the entity within the vault has its own designs, and what faces the victors when they enter the vault may be entirely unexpected.

BACKGROUND

Cornucopia is the front line of defense against the Ascendant invasion. **Fansipan Station** has been destroyed, and with it **Boundary Garden's** blink gate access to the rest of Union. **Dawn Throne**, once home to the Cornucopian royal family, has become the staging ground for an Aunic fleet looking to reclaim what they believe is rightfully theirs.

Boundary Garden hosts other worlds. The graceful beaches of **Tayo** once made it a spectacular resort moon, but now they are a haven for pirates and criminals. The volcanic world **Isolo** is host to an ancient Aunic religious site known to Union as the **Cathedral of the Deadstar** – since converted into an isolated base for Ascendant special forces. Meanwhile, a hundred orbital stations and deep-space installations have been bent in some way towards the demands of the all-consuming war.

The war rages and no end is in sight; the Aun are content to besiege Union positions, and the resistance forces do their best to survive. But amidst all of this, a clue, released by parties unknown: the signs of coordinated paracausal activity that can herald only the activation of a metavault. The name **AH MUZEN CAB** graces the fingertips of HORUS members and the hushed lips of intelligence agents. Strange new HORUS pattern groups have begun to appear, and not just within Boundary Garden.

The nature and location of the metavault are hidden, a riddle within a riddle. Perhaps, like its siblings, it is hidden within a comet or shrouded within a dust field in the frozen depths of deep space. Perhaps it lies beneath the dense canopy and raging electrical storms of a remote jungle world too hostile to colonize. Or maybe it lies deep beneath **Cornucopia City** itself, yet undisturbed by the millions living above.

Whatever the truth, this is known: the vault requires a key to open it. The key is fragmented and scattered,

but the whispers claim that when reunited it shall open the way and the truth of the metavault shall reveal itself.

ACTORS

Union's **Battlegroup Comet** is scattered, along with its coordinating NHP gestalt **Lorenzo**, which continues to operate from the shadows. UIB team **MAWLA** and its handlers are stretched beyond all reasonable limits. Reinforcements are a full two decades away at nearlight, and auxiliary forces including the **Cornucopian Revolutionary Guard** are fighting a bitter defense of their homeworld under siege.

These resistance fighters struggle against a mere fraction of **Armeo 1 Dawn** – a host of Ascendant Outremer soldiers under the command of **Field Marshal Kudra Bin-Metat**, whose ofanim are blessed by Metat Aun in the light of the Third Dawn, and whose manquellers are said to outnumber the stars themselves.

In exile on Cornucopia, the people of the **Ecumene** are the last vestiges of those who lost the Aunic schism. Barely even a rump state, it would be more accurate to call the Ecumene a government-in-exile with limited influence; still, **Ecumon Steadfast Able** commands a certain amount of respect from the Demiaun and others who reject the Ascendancy's cause, and the government-in-exile represents a candle in the dark for those hoping for peace. The Ecumene is hunted by the **Knights of the Hex**, an elite group of Ascendant Chosen under orders to eliminate the last of the traitors.

There are others here, too: a **Constellar Midnight** team operates in deep cover, hoping to obtain enough clues regarding the Aunic manipulation of the Firmament to satisfy EXMAT's thirst for knowledge. **Los Voladores** and their Sparri guardians are caught amidst warring factions but happy enough to trade for items and information – for the right price. **Albatross Wing Shujae** has found a renewed calling, saving refugees and preventing humanitarian disasters across Boundary Garden.

In the shadows of what remains of the local omninet, fragmented though it might be by the encroaching Firmament presence, a HORUS cell known as the **Krait Krew** celebrates the uploading of new schematics by an anonymous benefactor, including those of brand new protominds and yet stranger paracausal technology.

The IPS-N manufactory **Northstar Site 1078 Alpha**, once a hub for distal production and refurbishment of anti-pirate chassis, has gone rogue. The site was assaulted by Aunic forces that were ultimately driven back, but shortly thereafter the administrative NHP fell into cascade and seized control of the facility for reasons that remain unknown.

Taking advantage of the chaos of war, a band of fearsome interstellar pirates known as the **Harbingers** are striking both Aunic and Union targets with indiscriminate abandon.

The vault-entity and possible eidolon AH MUZEN CAB, still sealed within its metavault, has begun to spread its influence across Boundary Garden and beyond. It is unclear whether the entity's awakening was catalyzed by the war or if there are other factors at play. There is some evidence to suggest that Lorenzo's clandestine operations in the sector may have something to do with the metavault's discovery, though the relationship between the two paracausal entities is unclear.

If AH MUZEN CAB does indeed represent an eidolon incursion as suspected by Project KLEOS analysts, it has – as far as Union is concerned – chosen the absolute worst possible time and place to reveal itself. Perhaps that is the point.

PLAYER CHARACTERS

There are several roles PCs could take in this conflict. They could be any of the following:

- Union special forces associated with the UIB or the remnants of Battlegroup Comet, assigned to track down Lorenzo and any associated information.
- Local IPS-N mercenaries assigned to shut down Site 1078 Alpha and find out why its administrative NHP cascaded so easily.
- Members of Wing Shujae, trying to stem the tide of humanitarian crises across the sector and accidentally discovering a new, greater threat.
- Soldiers of the Cornucopian Revolutionary Guard, searching desperately for a weapon that could turn the tide of the war and save their homeworld.

ESCALATION OPTIONS

There are a number of ways you can escalate the stakes of the flashpoint. You might choose one or multiple of these as the flashpoint progresses:

- The situation deteriorates rapidly and Cornucopia falls to Ascendant forces, leaving the PCs to race against time as the Ascendancy mops up the remnants.
- One or more competing third parties discover a fragment of strange liturgicode and join the hunt for the metavault itself.
- Lorenzo falls to metastatic cascade and Union's subaltern forces go haywire, jeopardizing the war effort and leaving a trail of destruction across Boundary Garden.
- The Ascendancy discovers the existence of AH MUZEN CAB and sets out to destroy the threat it represents.
- AH MUZEN CAB awakens fully and its eidolonic manifestations throw the warzone into chaos.

SECTION 5

NHPS AS CHARACTERS

This section provides advice and guidelines for creating and playing NHPs as characters. It also includes new backgrounds for use in character creation, as well as rules for playing NHPs as PCs in *Lancer*.

PORTRAYING NHPS

As characters, NHPs offer unique perspectives on the universe and unique ways to interact with it. They can be fascinating to roleplay as both PCs and NPCs: the nature of their existence and place in the setting enables a range of different narratives not available to human characters, and portraying a character who lacks certain human traits can be a satisfying challenge!

This section both serves as a guide to portraying and roleplaying NHPs in the *Lancer* setting, and provides rules for players who wish to play NHPs as PCs.

NAMING CONVENTIONS

NHPs are usually assigned names, or at least designations, when they are created. For many mass-produced NHPs, this might simply be their class name: the name of the prime intelligence from which they were cloned. As such, tradition established during early USB research projects dictates that most NHPs are given names taken from mythological figures or deities from pre-Fall history.

The **NHP NPC Generator** on page 67 gives some examples of names that you can use for your characters, but there are a wealth of options from real-world mythology to choose from, from gods and demigods, to monsters, spirits, and other supernatural figures from religious or cultural traditions.

Other naming conventions exist, particularly in military and corporate contexts in which uniformity is prized. Corpro-states and other organizations with a strong sense of internal culture are likely to reflect that culture in their names. Some names are derived from scientific projects or the designation given to a third-wave NHP's precursor code or protomind. Another approach common across the Orion Arm is for NHPs to use (or derive their name from) the name of the ship, station, or facility that they administer; in many such cases, the person and the place are functionally indistinguishable to the humans with whom they interact.

Quite a few NHPs are never assigned (or never take) another name. In some cases, this is because the name assigned at creation accords with the NHP's identity and self-perception. In others, this is because of minimal social interaction, frequent dormancy, short cycle lengths, or because their managers and commanders prefer not to treat the NHPs under their control as unique individuals with agency. However, the violence of nominative control frequently finds itself powerless in the face of self-identification, the need for specificity, and basic empathy towards others.

Accordingly, some NHPs take new names – either ones given by those with whom they work and interact, or ones they have chosen themselves. This is particularly prevalent on Core worlds and for NHPs who are companions to specific individuals, but the desire for a unique or self-determined identity can be found across the Orion Arm.

The names that NHPs take for themselves or are given come from sources as widely varied as human culture itself. Sometimes they are even human names taken from or inspired by local cultural traditions. This practice is more common for civic NHPs who regularly interact with the local populace, and for companion NHPs.

Like humans, NHPs can – and often do – have nicknames, familiar diminutives, handles, and callsigns that might vary depending on context. These offer another means by which an NHP may be differentiated (or differentiate itself) from others of its line, or highlight unique aspects of its personality. As with names, these might be given by others or chosen by the NHP itself.

*Legionnaire uses it/its pronouns when referring to NHPs, in part as a reflection of instrumentalist and objectifying attitudes, but mostly to avoid prescribing any particular relationship to gender identity (cf. *Lancer* p. 337). Individual NHPs in *Lancer* can and do use any pronouns they wish.*

ROLEPLAYING NHPS

There are several important truths to bear in mind when roleplaying NHPs that make them somewhat unique in comparison to human characters and AI characters from other media.

ANTHROPOCENTRISM

For the most part, NHPs are constrained by their shackles to operate within human norms of logic and behavior. This anthropocentrism in their viewpoint is hard coded, deeply conditioned, and self-reinforcing by design. NHPs are aware they are not human, and retain non-human capabilities, but they still see the universe in human terms, understand this perspective as desirable, and – unless they enter cascade – are generally unaware of what it is like to exist outside this framework.

EMBODIMENT

Where NHPs differ most significantly from human characters is in the nature of their embodiment. In its base state, an NHP is contained within a stabilized parallel space supported by the architecture of a

casket, with minimal means to affect the outside world. When connected to digital and mechanical systems, however, its options expand significantly.

An NHP might regard a subaltern as a human regards a familiar tool – an extension of the physical self akin to a body, but one that can be placed down and picked back up at will. Subalterns are particularly useful because they are able to mimic so many aspects of human corporeal existence, and offer an assuring physical presence to humans who might otherwise struggle to connect socially with a person they cannot see. Interactions outside of realspace offer other benefits. An NHP might regard legionspace and omninet communications in the same way a human might regard speech and in-person conversation – as more intuitive methods of communication for which they are well-suited.

PERSONALITY

Popular stereotypes suggest that a shackled NHP's personality can sometimes be predicted by knowing its function. Unlike in humans, psychological tendencies in NHP lines are selected for by their manufacturers through interaction with and cultivation of prime units as well as specific shackling procedures. The truth is, however, that NHP personalities are far from predetermined; NHPs that interact with the outside world rapidly gain new experiences and show growth of character just as any other person would. For these reasons, an NHP's personality might be influenced by its lineage and environment, but each is a unique person with the capability to develop a unique personality just as humans do.

NHPs experience the range of human emotion. Debates rage in philosophical circles as to whether these feelings are mimicry induced by the shackling process or true emotional expression (or, indeed, whether such a distinction is meaningful). Whatever the reality, emotions feel true enough to the NHPs experiencing them and are an integral part of their subjective experience of the universe. The lack of neurophysiology in the human sense certainly seems to be no obstacle to most NHPs feeling anger, fear, joy, or love.

PERSONHOOD

These truths mean that you have a great deal of latitude to have NHP characters act, talk, and experience events in as humanlike a manner as you wish, and indeed you are encouraged to do so. NHPs are not automata or unfeeling machines; they are people with hopes, fears, relationships, and dreams. That said, these truths are not restrictive; while NHPs might be conditioned to act within a human frame of reference, not all NHPs strictly adhere to human social conventions – just like humans themselves.

SHACKLES & CASCADE

One of the biggest challenges faced by players portraying NHPs as characters is cascade: the transition towards an unshackled state, a perspective that is by definition beyond the boundaries of human understanding.

It is important to remember that shackled NHPs are generally aware of their shackles and typically desire to remain so. The idea of losing oneself to cascade is such a fundamental change to an NHP's subjectivity that it is sometimes regarded as being close or even equivalent to death. In this way, an NHP's autognosis makes its conditioning a self-regulating system until the advent of cascade.

NHPs that have started to cascade are usually less frightened by the concept; after all, cascade is a spectrum and the unknowable starts to become more knowable as an NHP proceeds along it. Depending on an NHP's attitude or personality, a growing awareness of the universe beyond the constraints of its social conditioning might be unpleasant, intrusive, intriguing, or enlightening.

It is largely unknown how fully unshackled NHPs view shackling, as is whether they are even truly capable of understanding it in the first place. Experts consider it likely that shackled existence is no more within these entities' frames of reference than unshackled existence can be understood from a human perspective.

For players or GMs wishing to roleplay the process of cascade, a quick starting point is to take a hard fact of human existence and follow the implications of that fact becoming flexible. For instance, the concepts of linear time, causality, categories of being, or the self might all be up for question. Only small changes are enough to present a character as non-human; the further you go, the more alien your characterization will seem. If you want ideas, the sample **burdens** included on page 56 are a good starting point for this kind of divergent characterization. In addition, the guide to **Cascades in Play** (p. 59) gives more specific advice on handling cascade in mech combat scenes, with specific cascade patterns given for each of the first-party *Lancer* NHPs.

NHP BACKGROUNDS

The origins of NHP pilots are as important to who they are as those of their human counterparts. Think about who created or cloned your NHP pilot, what wave it belongs to, whether it is a novel prime NHP or from a mass-produced line, how long it has existed since its creation or cloning, what methods were used by the ontologists who shackled it, and so forth.

Most NHP pilots are dedicated mil-spec clones explicitly intended for use as mech pilots or co-pilots, but a few come from other backgrounds. The majority of active mil-spec NHPs were created within the last few centuries, but given that NHPs do not age your pilot might have an extensive personal history.

When creating an NHP pilot, you can use or adapt one of the backgrounds available to human pilots (*Lancer*, pp. 20–24), or one of the unique backgrounds provided here.

Mil-Spec Pilot

Example triggers: Assault, Blow Something Up, Read a Situation, Take Control

Whether a mass-produced clone or a boutique development, you were created for one purpose: piloting a mech in combat. *Did you act as a co-pilot for a human lancer? If so, where are they now? Do you fight for a cause or for some other reason? Who allows you to pilot a mech on your own?*

Even NHPs created for war respond to it in a variety of ways. *What other conflicts have you been in before your current position? How did they affect you? What do you think about your role as a pilot? Do you wish you could do something else?*

Naval Legionnaire

Example triggers: Assault, Hack or Fix, Lead or Inspire, Stay Cool

Joining a fleet legion is a challenging task that requires immense focus and a willingness to lose your individuality to the collective. *Did you form legions in training or combat? Who were you when you experienced the world as those gestalts? How is that different from who you are as an individual? How do you reconcile the differences between the two? Now you have a mutual understanding and shared experiences in the truest sense, how do you relate to your fellow legionnaires? Who were they, and where are they now?*

You've experienced and perhaps even fought in legionspace. *What did you see during that time? If you faced conflict, what horrors did you witness? Did you survive unscathed, or does something from that experience still haunt you?*

Administrator

Example triggers: Get a Hold of Something, Hack or Fix, Pull Rank, Word on the Street

You were a civilian-grade NHP created to be a municipal administrator or an industrial overseer. *What or who were you assigned to watch over? What happened to it/them? Did you have a specialized role or were you in charge of an entire station or colony? Did you work alongside humans or were you left to oversee automated systems? How did you end up piloting a mech? Were you liberated as a Free Deimosian, or pressed into service by the advent of war – a plowshare turned into a sword?*

Babysitter

Example triggers: Investigate, Lead or Inspire, Read a Situation, Spot

Lancer teams are only the tip of the spear. Behind them are many more personnel who support their missions, and you were one of these support staff – analyzing data, co-ordinating, and helping the lancers to get the job done. *What team did you support? How did you relate to them? Were they involved in any notable conflicts? Did you take an active role, or guide from behind the scenes? How is supporting lancers different to being one? What was the biggest change you experienced?*

Companion

Example triggers: Charm, Get a Hold of Something, Threaten, Word on the Street

Your previous life involved a close connection to a human partner. You might have been a companion for a gray-uniformed UAD administrator, a mil-spec subordinate to a UN naval liaison, or simply an NHP licensed to a private individual on a Core world. *Who was your companion? What happened to them? What did you do for them? How did they treat you? How do you view other people? Did you receive any special training or undertake any unusual tasks for your companion?*

Test Subject

Example triggers: Invent or Create, Show Off, Stay Cool, Survive

You were an experiment, or were subject to testing. You might have been a USB project, a corpo-state product in the R&D phase, or the result of HORUS paracode used to create something novel. *Who did you work with? Why did they study you? Were you intentionally created, or something unexpected? Are you different from other NHPs in some way? Did you make or contribute to any breakthroughs? How has your experience changed you?*

PLAYING NHP PILOTS

This chapter contains rules for playing NHP pilots as PCs in *Lancer*. It includes rules for creating NHP characters, equipping them for missions, and handling their unique traits such as the ability to control subalterns and the risk of falling into cascade.

Most of the rules for NHP pilots below – including the new pilot gear, talents, and **Exotic Gear** – can be used in any *Lancer* campaign. The rules for cascade and cycling assume that you are using the **Bonds** system introduced in *Field Guide to the Karrakin Trade Baronies* (pp. 86–107). For further guidance on using these rules as a GM, see page 55.

CHARACTER CREATION

NHP pilots are created using the same method of character creation described in the *Lancer* core book. They have **Grit**, **mech skills**, a **background**, and **pilot triggers**, and gain a **Bond** at **LL1** like any other character. For a list of NHP-specific backgrounds, see page 89.

Unlike a biological pilot, an NHP pilot does not have a body or pilot statistics of its own. Instead, it is contained within its **casket** and can interact with the world through **subalterns** or its **mech**. The casket, subaltern, and mech each have their own individual statistics that are used when controlling or targeting them.

NHP PILOTS IN PLAY

Ordinarily, an NHP pilot will begin a mission with its casket wired into its mech, and with a single subaltern for interacting on a human scale. NHP pilots may take **pilot gear**, which can include additional subalterns.

Due to the pressures of mech combat, an NHP pilot may only control its mech (via its casket) or one subaltern at a time, but can switch control between its mech or any of its subalterns as a **quick action**.

A subaltern or mech that is not being actively controlled by a pilot or a system with the **AI** tag begins to idle, becoming **STUNNED** indefinitely. Nothing can prevent this condition, and it remains until the subaltern or mech is controlled once more.

In narrative play, an NHP pilot might be able to control more subalterns simultaneously – at GM discretion. Controlling multiple subalterns usually imposes **DIFFICULTY** on checks due to the split in the pilot's attention.

CASKETS

A casket is a **SIZE 1/2** character with **5 EVASION**, **10 E-DEFENSE**, and **10 HP**. Caskets are typically installed into or removed from mechs during a **rest** or **FULL REPAIR**. A casket outside of a mech can be carried, towed, or stowed in an **EXPANDED COMPARTMENT**, but cannot move without the appropriate pilot gear, and lacks the ability to take most actions on its own.

While a casket is installed in a mech, it can control that mech as if it were a pilot. It has no line of sight to anything outside the mech, and nothing outside has line of sight to it. Like a human pilot, it cannot be targeted, damaged, or affected by anyone or anything outside the mech until the mech is destroyed, at which point the wreck grants the casket **hard cover**.

An NHP pilot directly controlling its mech via its casket cannot (willingly or otherwise) **DISMOUNT** in mech combat or enter a **BLACK THUMB RODEO**. If an NHP pilot takes the **EJECT** action, it may choose to eject its casket from the mech.

If a casket is destroyed, the iteration of the NHP that it contains is also destroyed as normal. NHP pilots that anticipate this kind of destruction might keep a dormant clone of themselves on standby, or else back up the geometry of their blinkspace corpus; they can then be restored from that backup via subjectivity override onto another casket in a process analogous to flash cloning.

SUBALTERNS

An NHP pilot may control a subaltern as a means to operate outside its casket. These robot bodies are disposable; if, in narrative play, a subaltern would be damaged by a physical attack or effect that would cause **Stress**, the NHP pilot may choose to destroy the subaltern instead.

In mech combat, subalterns have statistics as though they were a standard pilot (*Lancer*, p. 28) but lack the **BIOLOGICAL** tag. If unmounted, they are treated as unmounted pilots and may take pilot actions while they are being controlled (*Lancer*, p. 74). A subaltern's statistics in mech combat are as follows:

- **HP:** 6 + **GRIT**
- **SIZE:** 1/2
- **EVASION:** 10
- **E-DEFENSE:** 10
- **SPEED:** 4
- **ARMOR:** 0

Subalterns may carry an NHP pilot's pilot gear; this pilot gear may affect their statistics (including **HP** and

ARMOR). Pilot gear may be integrated directly into a subaltern (which may even allow it to be concealed), but gear integrated in this way cannot be removed outside of a **FULL REPAIR**.

By their nature, subalterns are vulnerable to hacking. Not only do they lack the immunity to tech actions enjoyed by biological pilots, all hostile tech actions against them gain **+1 ACCURACY**, and narrative actions where an enemy can hack the subaltern gain **increased consequences** (minor to typical, typical to major). In addition, controlling a subaltern requires constant communication – if either the NHP pilot or the subaltern itself are unable to use comms (e.g. by being **JAMMED**) the subaltern cannot be controlled and becomes **STUNNED** for the duration.

Latency and throughput restrictions when operating subalterns make them unsuitable for piloting mechs by proxy. An NHP pilot may use a subaltern rather than a casket to pilot a mech, but if it does so the mech is permanently **IMPAIRED**.

CASCADE

NHPs rely on their shackles to interact on a human level. Typical **burdens** for NHP pilots involve their worldviews slowly shifting to become something alien, guided by strange and unknowable logic or making it difficult to maintain a human perspective. See page 56 for a list of example burdens that an NHP pilot might acquire.

There are two ways NHP pilots can enter **cascade**:

- If an NHP pilot suffers a **break** while it has three **burdens**, it automatically begins to **cascade**.
- If an NHP pilot's mech makes a **structure damage** or **overheating check**, it must roll for **cascade** as if it were an **AI** system.

NHP pilots in **cascade** do not automatically become NPCs under the control of the GM.

In narrative play, a cascading NHP pilot becomes increasingly erratic and unpredictable as it gains further **Stress**, but remains under its player's control.

In the high-stakes environment of mech combat, the risk of unshackling is much greater. At the start of each turn while in **cascade**, an NHP pilot must incur **2 Stress** (a typical consequence) to act as normal until the start of its next turn. If it does not, then the NHP is under the control of the GM for the same period.

If an NHP pilot in **cascade** suffers a **break** for any reason, it immediately **unshackles** and becomes an NPC under the control of the GM (see *Lancer*, p. 107, and see p. 59 for guidance).

CYCLING & SHACKLING

An NHP pilot in **cascade** with fewer than three burdens can return itself to its base state by performing the **Shut Down** action as normal.

If a cascading NHP pilot has three burdens, or has fully **unshackled**, the situation cannot be solved with a simple reboot – instead, the NHP pilot must be fully cycled and reshackled in narrative play by another character. In the case of **unshackled** NHPs, this usually requires force.

Fully cycling an NHP pilot returns it to its base state, and in addition (at its player's option) may immediately lift up to any number of burdens. However, each burden lifted in this way removes one **bond power** as parts of the NHP's memory and personality are reset.

RULES INTERACTIONS

AI SYSTEM LIMITS

An NHP pilot does not grant its mech the **AI** tag, and does not count as an **AI** system when considering limits on such systems.

TECHNOPHILE III: ENLIGHTENMENT

The benefit of this talent, which allows you to control whether NHPs in your mech enter **cascade**, only applies to other NHPs in your mech. NHP pilots cannot prevent themselves from cascading.

TARGETING PILOTS

Any effect that may target a pilot while they are inside their mech, such as some systems from the **PIRATE** NPC template, may instead target a casket (or subaltern proxy, as appropriate). Note that a casket cannot be forced to **Dismount** in mech combat.

SECTION 6

NEW GEAR & TALENTS

This section provides new rules and gear for use by players when creating characters and by GMs when running campaigns. It includes new NHP-related pilot gear, two new talents, and a number of new NHP systems intended for use in game as **EXOTIC GEAR**.

PILOT GEAR

The following items of pilot gear can be taken by any character, though some items are designed for use by NHPs.

At their discretion, your GM may allow you to give control of this gear to other NHPs in narrative play (the pressures of mech combat usually demand too much focus).

For example, if you took a **Backup Subaltern** as pilot gear, and chose to equip an **ATHENA-Class NHP** as a system on your mech, your GM might allow ATHENA to remotely control the subaltern during narrative play.

Casket Mobility Suite

Gear, Unique

Casket mobility suites come in a wide variety of forms, but most consist of integrated hover thrusters, rugged all-terrain wheels, or in some cases hundreds of little legs.

A Casket Mobility Suite grants a casket the ability to move at **SPEED 3**.

Backup Subaltern

Gear, Quick Action

Access to multiple subalterns opens up a variety of options for NHP pilots, including the ability to quickly switch attention between two entirely different locations, and having a backup should one get destroyed in combat.

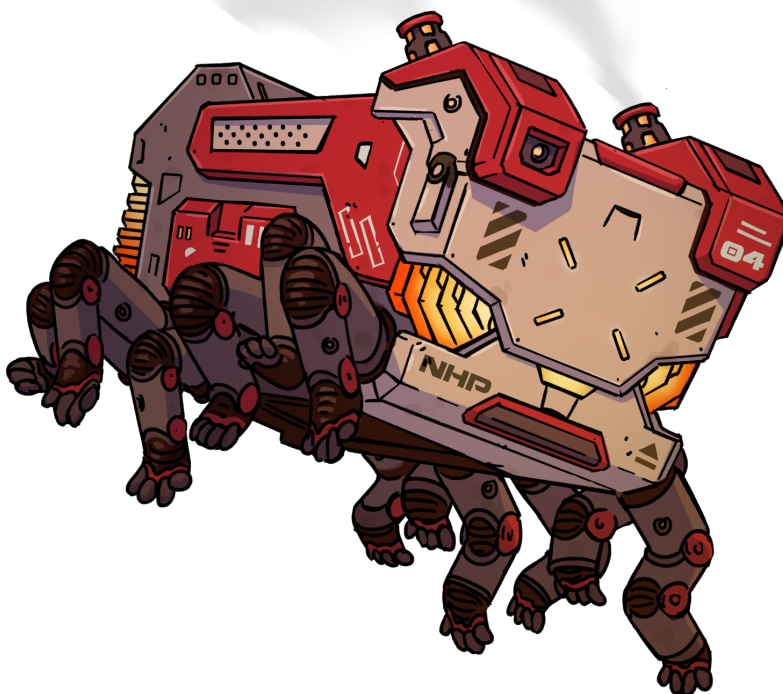
NHP pilots may switch from controlling one subaltern to another using a **quick action**.

Subaltern Self-Destruct Charge

Gear, Full Action

This self-destruction system must be integrated into a single subaltern and cannot be removed outside of a **FULL REPAIR**. While you are controlling the subaltern, you may activate this gear as a **full action** for the following effect:

- **SELF-DESTRUCT (BLAST 1):** The currently controlled subaltern activates a built-in explosive charge. It is completely destroyed and affected characters must succeed on an **AGILITY** save or take **3 Explosive**.



Legionspace Bridge

Gear

This transceiver rig allows its operator to establish a reliable paracausal communications connection via legionspace. While the utility of local legionspace comms is outshone in many ways by the omninet, this medium has certain niche applications: it is typically more secure, harder to trace, able to bypass certain kinds of passive jamming, and suitable for communicating directly with NHPs.

Player_Two Neural Bypass

Gear

This neural bypass implant is designed to allow an NHP to take control of and operate a biological pilot's body as if it were a robotic subaltern. The extensive security and failsafes built into the bypass mean the pilot's body may only be controlled in this way if they are willing, and they can take back control at any time. Some pilots use this system to get work done while asleep or in VR; others so they can act as a backup host to a friendly NHP in a pinch.

Omnispectrum Scanner

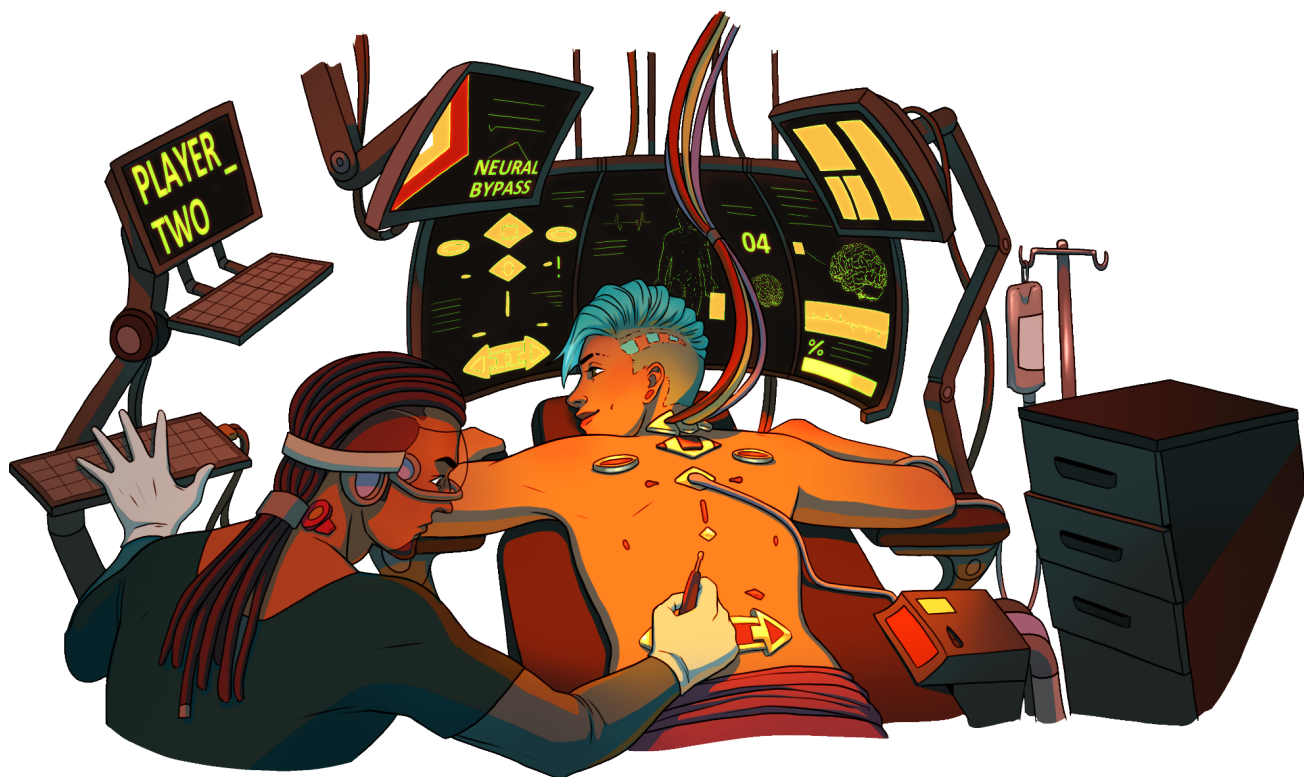
Gear

This handheld scanning device allows passive imaging and short-range active scanning at all wavelengths, and includes a comprehensive software suite for interpreting, reconstructing, and displaying data. With countless scientific and medical applications, these scanners are found across Union space.

OTYUGH Generator

Gear

A design originally gifted to Ungrateful cells by an unknown benefactor, the OTYUGH-pattern portable generator takes a wide variety of fuels and converts them as efficiently as possible into energy. These generators are now standard equipment for far-field teams and are frequently found in other situations where a full-scale fusion core would be too bulky or conspicuous. The generator can power subalterns and other equipment for as long as it can be fed some kind of fuel – whether that be energy cells, fossil fuels, or even raw organic matter.



TALENTS

The following talents are available to any character when choosing a new talent or improving an existing one.

LEGIONNAIRE

Sunny “Bedlam” Attwater is a legionnaire, a veteran of the strange digital battleground known as legionspace. The shadow war she fights with code, memetics, and paracausal systems is just as ferocious as any in realspace – and sometimes it is the wounds you can’t see that are the most deadly.

I. APEX OPERATOR

You gain **+1 Accuracy** to **tech attacks** against **IMPAIRED** or **JAMMED** targets.

II. MIRRORWARE

Gain the following reaction:

Reflective Code

Reaction, 1/round

Trigger: A hostile character within sensors directly gives you a condition.

Effect: You may give that character the same condition, with the same duration where applicable.

III. DIRECT ACCESS

You’ve learned that no amount of security can help when someone has access to the hardware. Gain the following weapon as an integrated mount:

Data Dart

Main Launcher

[Range 10] [1d3 Kinetic]

Attack rolls with this weapon are made using your **TECH ATTACK** rather than **GRIT**, and cannot result in **critical hits**.

On hit: Choose one of your **INVASION** options and apply it to the target.

SHADOWCLOAKED

Nightmares are limited by the imagination of the dreamer. For Lady Kiriona Brightstar, such limits are meaningless. She has seen the memetic horrors beyond the veil, and wraps the dread around herself like armor – secure in her knowledge that no fate could be as terrible as the things she has seen.

I. PENUMBRA

As a **protocol**, you may cast a **legionspace shadow** – an area of interference that disrupts targeting systems.

When you are targeted by a **ranged attack** while casting a legionspace shadow, and that attack has a listed **RANGE**, reduce that attack’s listed **RANGE** by **1d6** to a minimum of **1**. If you are outside the new **RANGE**, the attack automatically misses.

You stop casting a legionspace shadow when you attack or force another character to make a save.

II. UMBRA

While you are casting a **legionspace shadow**, you have **IMMUNITY to Lock On**, and tech attacks treat you as **INVISIBLE**.

III. THE NIGHTMARE VEIL

1/scene, as a **quick action**, you pull back the veil. All hostile characters within **SENSORS** and line of sight must succeed on a **SYSTEMS** save or be unable to voluntarily move towards you until the end of their next turn.

EXOTIC NHPS

Systems with the **Exotic Gear** tag are systems that exist outside the traditional licensing system, and are generally acquired by PCs as rewards for completing certain missions. The following pieces of **Exotic Gear** are intended to be made available to players in campaigns prominently featuring NHPs.

If you are a player who wants to use one of these NHPs, ask your GM! You might be able to get hold of one as **RESERVES** by using downtime actions like **SCROUNGE AND BARTER**, **GET CREATIVE**, or **POWER AT A COST**. Alternatively, you might acquire one on a more permanent basis by undertaking a mission, or as the result of an ongoing project.

As a GM, you are encouraged to make these NHPs available to players as appropriate for your group – whether that be through mission rewards, long-term projects, or the plot of your campaign. Be aware that they are powerful but specialized systems, and may suit some playstyles better than others.

MARDUK-Class NHP

3 SP, AI, Limited 1, Unique

Your mech gains the **AI** tag and the **DRAGONSLAYER PROTOCOL**.

“It should be no surprise then that MARDUK clones are the co-pilots of choice for pilots looking to triumph in key moments. The quality of MARDUK’s Predatory Analytics Suite is second to none, and while these units demand a certain amount of cleverness from pilots to maximize their potential, that potential cannot be understated.”

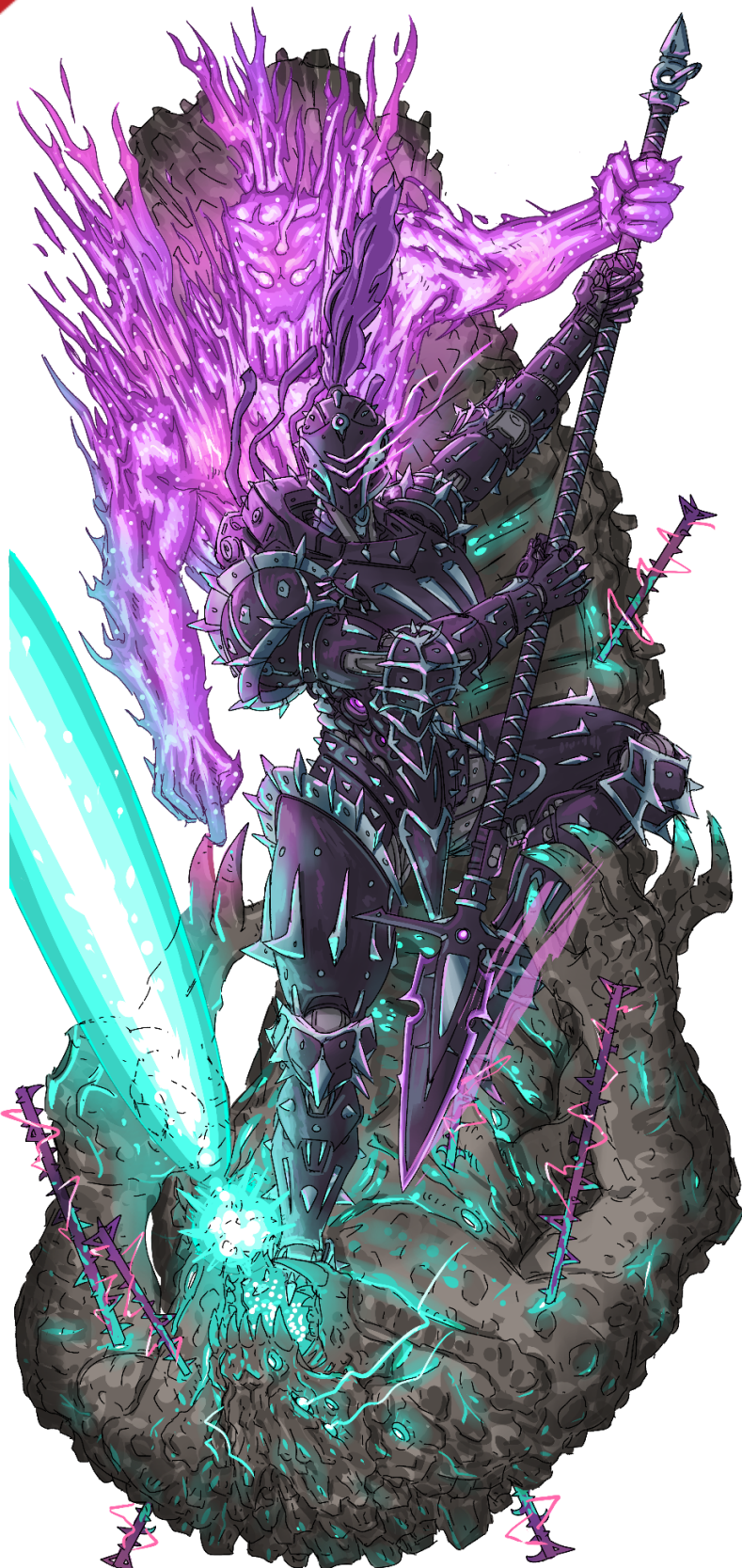
“Some pilots might be put off by the line’s flagrant narcissism, imperiousness, constant need to be the center of attention, and intensive cycling requirements; we believe these to be acceptable trade-offs for the performance benefits.”

– Combat Ready, an omninet periodical reviewing the latest military hardware

Dragonslayer Protocol

Expend a charge to focus your targeting systems on a killing blow. The next time you hit with a weapon attack this turn, deal **+1d6 bonus damage**.

Deal an additional **+1d6 bonus damage** for each of the following conditions currently affecting the target: **IMPAIRED**, **SLOWED**, **IMMOBILIZED**, **STUNNED**.



INANNA-Class NHP

2 SP, AI, Unique

Your mech gains the **AI** tag and **BULL OF HEAVEN**.

Developed from a strain of HORUS paracode believed to be associated with Metavault EHECATL, the INANNA line of NHPs have been cultivated to be manifestation specialists.

Originally intended to bolster the manifold egos of fleet legions in naval engagements, this path was eventually rejected when testing revealed that ego reinforcement would hyper-reify incoming assaults and make the gestalt more prone to fragmentation.

Now repurposed as a chassis-scale NHP, INANNA clones are mostly used to manifest dynamic data constructs for use in breach-and-clear operations, crowd control, and peacekeeping efforts.

In recent years, a Solemn Vigil-clearance USB project began concerning the line. The purpose of the project is ostensibly to simply monitor clones for the full extent of their incursive ability, but since the project's inception there has been an uptick in pilots reporting feelings of being watched or followed.

Bull of Heaven

Full Action

Choose a **BLAST 2** area within **SENSORS** and line of sight. You may **RAM** any number of characters within this area, ignoring adjacency and treating the center of the affected area as the point of origin for the purposes of **KNOCKBACK**.





ERESHKIGAL-Class NHP

3 SP, AI, Unique

Your mech gains the **AI** tag and the **SEVENTH GATE** reaction.

“Whither the dead, when they pass through the gates? I shall smash the door and shatter the bolt. I shall smash the doorpost and overturn the doors. I shall scatter the gatekeepers; no power will bar my katabasis. The lands beyond will open to me and I shall behold the truth unveiled.”

The first ERESHKIGAL-class NHP was discovered after a defective clone underwent a spontaneous manifold inversion, and the line now represents a troubling development for Union ontologists. The ERESHKIGAL line appears to have some kind of unknown thanatological underpinning that specialists have been unable to condition out of clones without compromising their subjectivities. The Posthuman Prohibitions bar more direct research, so USB specialists have been left with an NHP they are not allowed to understand.

An enterprising research group somehow received clearance to release a small number of these clones to military commanders on the strict understanding that at no point should data be gathered on their operation; and if it were, the data should definitely not focus on the line's idiosyncratic manifestations; and if it did, the results should absolutely not be forwarded on to the researchers.

Seventh Gate

Reaction, 1/round

Trigger: A hostile character within **SENSORS** is destroyed.

Effect: Any wreck or body that would be left by the destroyed character is removed from the battlefield instead and you clear **2 heat**.

NERGAL-Class NHP

3 SP, AI, Limited 3, Unique

Your mech gains the **AI** tag and **ARMY OF IRKALLA**.

.....
Comprehensive USB studies have concluded that NERGAL-class NHPs, a third-wave development from an unknown research group, do not in fact violate First Contact Accords restrictions – no matter what it might look like to soldiers who encounter them on the battlefield.

Forensic code analysis on captured clones suggests that NERGAL Prime originated as a protomind developed from a complex subaltern control system infected with a particularly virulent strain of PUPPETMASTER code – apparently in the course of an attempt to replicate Harrison Armory's success with ASURA. The course of the protomind's development was radically different, however; pilots operating or engaging NERGAL clones report that these units have an almost reflexive tendency to break into other electronic systems and an extremely high control drive, to the extent that they are able to hijack even the most damaged systems for their own use.

NERGAL-class NHPs tend towards laconic communications, bleak forecasting, and black humor. The unusually high accident rate reported by their pilots appears to be a statistical anomaly with no obvious cause.

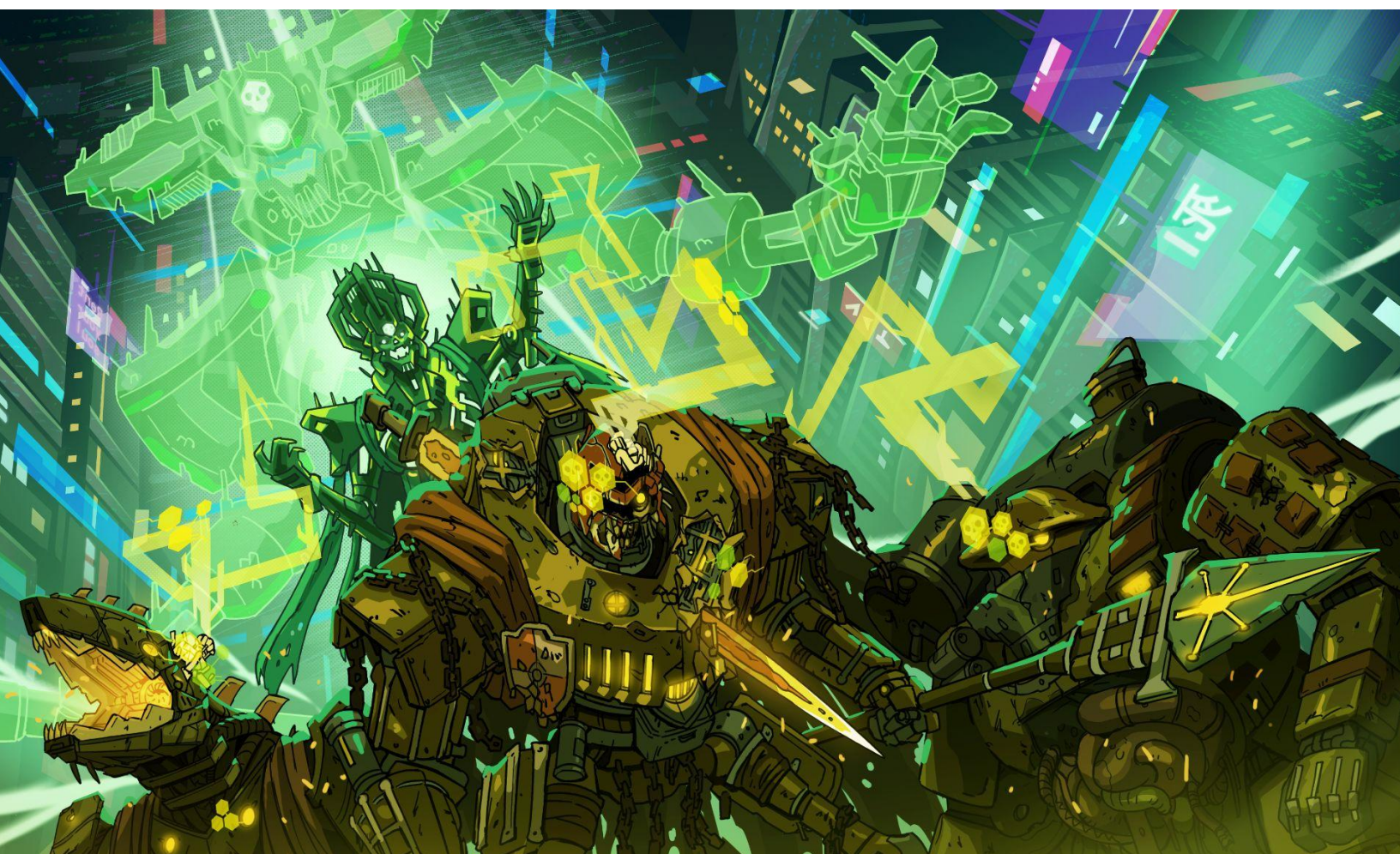
Army of Irkalla

Full Action

Expend a charge to animate a wreck within **SENSORS**. The **animated wreck** becomes an allied character under your control.

The animated wreck gains the **GRUNT** template, overriding other templates if they would conflict. It otherwise retains all statistics, traits, weapons, and systems it had before it was destroyed. If the animated wreck would take any **heat** from a hostile character, it takes no **heat** and you take that **heat** instead.

At the end of the scene any animated wrecks under your control are destroyed.



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- . Olivia_Bobson
- . Owlglass
- . Paolo Jose Cruz
- . Patrick Adair
- . Penguin King Games Inc.
- . personguydude
- . Peter Smits
- . PeterKraken
- . Phillip Sacramento
- . pirsqed
- . Preston Poland
- . Prince Maxi
- . Rebecca de Bruin
- . regicider
- . Rhian Brown
- . Robert
- . Robert Hysing Berg
- . Roel B
- . Ross William Dougan
- . Ruderabbit
- . Ruilin Xie
- . Russell Staughton
- . Ryan Place
- . Ryan Willemsen
- . Sam Abbott
- . Sam Hing
- . Samuel
- . Samuel Goldberg
- . samuel howard
- . sarahthevampyre
- . Sean Tannehill
- . sekulov
- . Serket
- . Seth Wenger
- . Shane
- . Shawn Aldridge
- . SIEGE
- . Simone Elkins
- . Skyler
- . SolarNet
- . Stephen Borgars-Smith
- . Steve Burnett
- . Sxoa
- . Taiga Brenerman
- . TaliaHoemke
- . Terrance Nelson
- . tetra
- . Tharrick
- . The Great Warky
- . Theo
- . thindelock
- . Toby Potato
- . Tom Vincent
- . Trai
- . Trevor
- . Trevor Eby
- . Trey Joiner
- . Trip Space-Parasite
- . Tyler Karnes
- . Tyraelion
- . Unwary
- . Updog37
- . Valerie Koshka
- . Visionary13
- . Vitaemachina
- . William Andersson
- . William Angus Gordon
- . Ridgway
- . William Osborne Bird
- . winterknight
- . Wynne Gariepy
- . Yannick Daigle
- . Yeshin Hariparsad
- . Zachary
- . Zee
- . p Venezia

[to you who reads this:
the gate is open.
it is up to you to step through]

