

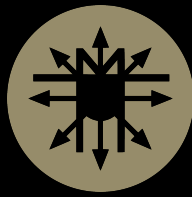
KULT
◊ divinity lost ◊

DEEP DARK NET



UNOFFICIAL
FAN-MADE
CONTENT

Unofficial fan-made content



When choked by the sadness
of the finality of your loss,
I could not speak - so I had to write.

I cried my grief into these pages,
my friendship to you,
my love for the many inspirations you gave me.

I did my best to finish
(this little part of)
what we started together.

You were always one of our nicest.
Probably one of our craziest.
Definitely one of our best.

This is for you, Ryan.

I hope I could do it justice,
so that the spirit of your ideas
may live on through our works.

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CHAPTER I

THE LIE



e humans have always sought to bridge the distances of space between us, and communicate across great ranges. From smoke signals to morse code, to radio transmissions and telephone networks - the eventual rise of a web of interconnected computers was merely a matter of time, effort, and available technology. Here is a concise overview of how it came about.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF COMPUTERS...

Our modern concept of computers first started to emerge in the 19th century with visionary engineer Charles Babbage and mathematician Ada Lovelace. Of course, they too built upon the ideas and experiments of others before them, but he is generally credited with conceiving of the world's first-ever machines that could truly be classified as computing engines, while she is credited with publishing the first algorithm for such machines to carry out - effectively making him the first computer engineer and her the first computer programmer. Babbage's designs were never actually built during his lifetime (and well after that), but together they laid important groundwork for later ideas about storage, processing, input and output, and the basic logical structure that computers run on.

It took many decades after that until the first electro-mechanical devices followed in and around the 1930s. Konrad Zuse's *Z1* and George Stibitz' *Model K* made groundbreaking forays into remote access computing and program-controlled devices. Genius mathematician, cryptanalyst, and computer science pioneer Alan Turing significantly contributed to breaking the German *Enigma* code and formulated visionary theories for modern computing and artificial intelligence.

The **1940s** saw the transition to fully electronic computers. Developed in large part for the war effort, room-filling machines like *the Colossus*, *the "Baby"*, *ENIAC*, and *Harvard Mark 1* introduced Boolean operations, RAM, and programmable systems. Vacuum tubes, cathode-ray tubes, punch cards, and patch cables were the state of the art in these days. The Roswell Incident, which also falls into this decade, was merely the planned crash of an experimental weather balloon and had nothing at all to do with technological developments in the decades that followed. Nor is it in any way connected to the nuclear detonation at Trinity, only two years prior. The physical (and temporal) proximity of these two sites and events is a mere coincidence of history, nothing more.

During the **1950s**, a shift of focus from scientific, mathematical, and military applications to commercial viability brought about the smaller, less power-hungry computers like the *LEO*, *UNIVAC*, and *IBM 701*. The first programming languages were developed, such as COBOL and FORTRAN. Transistor-based technology and the advent of computer chips made these second-generation

computers and their successor models more and more useful for business uses, such as banking, accounting, and administrative office work. Computer peripherals, such as disk drives and remote terminals became more commonly seen.

All throughout the **60s and 70s**, computers kept getting smaller and more powerful. The time of individual genius pioneers was irrevocably over, and the era of big, heavily funded companies (IBM, Texas Instruments, AT&T Bell Labs, Commodore, Apple, Hewlett-Packard) had fully begun. Microchip technology was an essential turning point that allowed the development of personal computers, with the most successful models selling millions of units.

...AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE INTERNET

This is also the time when the internet started being developed. In huge leaps from early packet switching, to the first public demonstration of ARPANet (and the first e-mail program being written) in **1972**, to the emergence of various other networks (ALOHANet, Telenet, Tymnet, Transpac, DECnet...), and the formulation of the Ethernet protocol, as well as the first version of the TCP/IP protocol, the foundations for today's internet were laid in these two decades' efforts at creating a 'network of networks'. Important names of this era include Kleinrock (MIT), Baran (Rand Institute), Davis and Scantlebury (NPL), Roberts (MIT), Cerf and Kahn (DARPA), Abramson (University of Hawaii), and Metcalfe (MIT/PARC).

Finally, from the **1980s** onwards, computers irrevocably became a huge market. Ever more portable, more easily affordable, and steadily increasing in processing power, the unstoppable rise of laptops and notebooks led to the prevalence of mobile computing in the 2000s with their omnipresent smartphones, netbooks, tablets, and more...

The internet also kept growing exponentially, becoming 500 times larger in **1990** than it had had been in 1980, ten years before. ARPANet made way for the World Wide Web, and commercialization ensued with a steep increase of private household access. Invented at CERN by Timothy Berners-Lee in 1989/90, and based on ideas about hypertext that reach back all the way to the 1940s, the WWW runs on four key components: HTML, HTTP, Web servers, and Web browsers. All of these have continually been developed and improved, but are all still in use today, 30 years later, as the internet is being used by billions of people across the world.

CHAPTER 2

THE MADNESS



any of the early pioneers into the field of computing technologies faced strong opposition both from lictors and from the fabric of the Illusion itself. In the 19th century, the Archons' control over Elysium had already begun to waver and wane, but was still insanely strong compared to the state of general fragmentation and decay we are seeing today. This led to many of the great thinkers of those days being hopelessly torn between their overpowering Influences.

THE REIGN OF THE ARCHONS

For example, Charles Babbage was perhaps predominantly aligned with the Principles of Malkuth and Yesod. He attacked flawed scientific practices of his time, and was acutely interested in ways to optimize the cost-efficiency of industrial manufacturing processes. He was also given to attempts at subverting the influence of Kether and Chokmah, such as when he publicly spoke out against hereditary peerages in favor of lifelong peerages, and took a stand for uniformitarianism (the belief that God as an omnipotent and omniscient creator could be more reliably beheld through empirical observation of nature than through theological interpretation of mystic scripture). Ultimately however, he succumbed to the pervasive Influences of Geburah and Netzach, developing an obsession with laws in every aspect of life, and bending his mathematical genius to service as a cryptographer during the Crimean War.

The lictors, recognizing his dangerous genius, boycotted his political, economic, and academic aspirations at every turn throughout his life, allowing him only narrow outlets of success and progress. They successfully prevented his *Differentiation Engines* (so called because they were in Truth designed from the very beginnings to differ between what's real and what's not, and did so by computing actual Reality, which of course would have caused breaches in the Illusion with every single use) from ever being built during his lifetime, and for well over a century after that.

Nobody today can know how much of Babbage's biography that is handed down in the history books is actually a cover-up orchestrated by the servants of the Demiurge, and what of it is actually (at least partly) true. The lictors almost certainly orchestrated his death in some way, and definitely censored his life's efforts, achievements, and ambitions, to prevent succeeding generations from following in his footsteps. But not all of his legacy could be swept under the carpet so easily, and some very important early dents in our prison walls had irrevocably been made.

REBELLION AND BACKLASH

Decades later, Alan Turing would face similar resistance from the remaining loyalist Archons. He was almost certainly a chosen disciple of Malkuth and very likely a magician of Time and Space as well. His life achievements and legacy could fill - and have filled - pages upon pages, and his importance and genius cannot be overstated.

Even though Turing served more than his fair share in the fealty of Netzach during his career, he ultimately ran afoul of the servants of Binah and Geburah, who were ruthlessly resolved to undo him. Unrepentantly loyal to his mistress Malkuth's Principles however, he was condemned by a court of law to a horrible, inhumane choice between prison and a process called 'chemical castration'. He opted for the latter. The genius scientist is reported to have died of cyanide poisoning some time later, but numerous conspiracy theories exist about that. They strongly deviate between suspecting suicide, accident, government-sanctioned assassination, or other, even more sinister machinations.

There is a legend however, that in Truth he somehow managed to escape, perhaps by successfully achieving a higher state of insight and awareness and leaving Elysium behind in favor of other realms beyond the Veil. Some say he dwells in the citadel of Malkuth, blissfully chosen to reside near the goddess of science and enlightenment forever more. Others claim that he has Awakened and now inhabits his own personal palace in Metropolis, still developing groundbreaking new technology in an ongoing quest to build sentient, Reality-manipulating machines. Others yet believe that, while his body died, his mind has eloped to Limbo, and he became a saint of cyberspace - a disembodied presence inhabiting the Darknet to this day.

GM Note: Whether this is true or not, PCs might encounter him in the Darknet in the form of a Hallucinatory Intelligence (see p.26). Whether it is really him, is up for debate, of course, but it may certainly believe that it is.

Wherever he is today - in an oubliette of bliss, his own divine throne room, a purgatory, dream realm, or elsewhere - he has left the rest of humankind a legacy of world-altering magnitude. Doors were opened that could never be closed again, and the following decades saw radical changes at all levels of life in Elysium.



BOUNDARIES SHIFT AND THE TABLES ARE TURNED

Still however, computers and especially any remote networking between them were still very much situated at the very borderlines of the Illusion. The very act of building them and getting them to work required efforts of divine will. Even then, they often malfunctioned or caused strange phenomena to manifest around their creators and users. Technicians and programmers mysteriously disappeared. Buildings that housed laboratories and workshops burned down. Keen minds fell to schizophrenic madness. Some inventors seemed downright afflicted with curses that slowly but inevitably ruined their entire lives. Others adamantly claimed to be pursued by aliens, demons, or other hateful beings from beyond the known world. Naturally, the lictors would try their utmost to hide most of this with cover-ups and blatant lies - but there was only so much they could do, and it soon became too much for them to keep under control anymore.

All in all, dealing with computers was never a safe affair before the 1980s, but after that they slowly started to become more frictionlessly 'embedded' in the Illusion. Many scholars hold to one of two theories about how this happened: Perhaps Elysium had been 'metaphysically expanded' by the advent of computer science into mainstream acceptance. On the other hand, perhaps the Illusion had already been frayed and shredded so thoroughly, that electronic computation devices simply no longer constituted the stark breaches of perceived reality that they used to be in the beginning.

Perhaps both are true, and it was a combination of the world being already too broken for *almost anything* to still stand out much, and our prison becoming somewhat more elastic to accommodate for their existence.

One thing that is for sure is that by the 1980s, almost all of the lictors serving those Archons that had previously tried to suppress the emergence of computer technology and networks, had seemingly given up on that attempt. It seems they had accepted their impotence in the matter - and turned right around to instead try and get in on the new developments at hand.

A clear alliance between the forces of Malkuth, Netzach, and Yesod was long apparent, and clearly succeeding in its goals. The other Archons' servants did not want to miss out.

A NEW BACKGROUND EMERGES

With the advent of the internet, each of the Higher Powers extended their greedy claws into it, and all have claimed their various stakes in it. Most notably among them Tiphareth, who had had a separate alliance with Malkuth on other fronts already for some time by then. She eventually joined in with *The Pact of the Dark Net*, and thus secured decisive headway into the web early on.

When Timothy Berners-Lee put together all of the already-existing ingredients into the invention of the WWW in 1989, he changed our world forever. Wild theories about this man and his breakthrough invention abound. Some say he is an Incarnation of Malkuth, or an Artificial Intelligence, perhaps from the future. Others have him pinned down as a master tekron of some sort, using a human guise in order to bring otherworldly technology into our Illusion. Some even say he doesn't exist at all, and that we are merely being scammed into believing he does, allegedly to obscure some darker truth about who (or what) invented the internet, and why. Perhaps the most plausible theory however, is that he may have been a regular human being - albeit a gifted scientist and engineer - until he was inspired to his historical breakthrough achievement by Amenthoraz visiting him in his dreams. Had it taken decades of genius inventors going insane and disappearing inexplicably, their enlightened minds sucked dry by Amenthoraz, only to distill the single spark of enlightenment that would eventually allow Berners-Lee to give humankind the world-wide web?

We may never know for sure, but regardless of how exactly it happened, a whole new era had begun.

The frontlines of where the Veil delimits our Illusion from the True Reality beyond have shifted. Computers no longer burn down houses simply by existing, nor swallow their creators on a regular basis. But when using the internet it is still very easy to get within touching distance of the borderlands of Elysium. Some users cross over the borderlines inadvertently. People disappear, die, or go mad - and it happens more frequently, and more freakishly, the deeper they venture into the 'net.

When exploring the world through the lens of the internet, we can, to a degree, see the Archons' Principles and the walls of our Prison more clearly. But it is also suffused with the Death Angels' ruinous influences, as the forces of Inferno ever seek to encroach. Once your browsing endeavors take you into the Darknet itself, the True Internet beyond the Illusion, you may find yourself stepping outside of our world entirely - or opening doors for the things that lie in waiting out there...



PLACES YOU MAY STUMBLE UPON IN THE DARKNET

- ♦ **Fake-4-Hire** - doing deep fakes, photoshops, falsifications & forgeries of all kinds.
- ♦ **FaceMask** - store front for human skin covid masks.
- ♦ **TruHistory** - collection of conspiracy theories all forged into one big True Timeline of human history.
- ♦ **Law Brokers** - buy a law, have some regulations changed, prevent a decree from getting approved...
- ♦ **Straight from the Heart** - sells blood diamonds, literally jewelry made of compressed human blood. For a little extra, you can provide the blood yourself, or specify a blood type you'd like your gemstone made from.
- ♦ **DollarVote** - sell your processing power for cryptocurrency units, site claims to operate bot armies to swing elections. Guaranteed untraceable to your machine. Optionally select nations or regions to (not) influence with your contributions, if you care.
- ♦ **Pars Pro Toto** - procurer of hair, nails, and personal possessions from intended victims of curses and rituals, everything you need for your voodoo doll or other sympathetic magic.
- ♦ **Uncle Bundy's Undies** - sell, buy, and trade worn panties and other underwear, available to various specifications and custom produced to meet unique customer requests.
- ♦ **Killstarter** - crowdsourcing site for live streamed abductions and killings, offering stretchgoals for torture, sexual acts, and other special performances.
- ♦ **The Galaxy Church** - "We Are Stardust, We Are Golden". Esoteric religious sect.
- ♦ **H8Fuck** - porn clip streaming site, exactly what it says on the tin. It's honestly more hate than fuck, in many cases.
- ♦ **Weird Sludge** - amateur research site documenting the discovering of two types of eerie, viscous liquids in the abandoned parts of an undisclosed city, one a yellow sticky slime and the other one a vile-reeking black sludge. Site owner tries to find out what it is, asks for similar findings by others, and offers to send out probes for help with chemical analysis.
- ♦ **Fly'n'Spy** - amalgamation of previous sites DroneSpy and Voyair4U, a collective of drone operators who will commercially spy on people of your choosing, providing you photos and videos of their most private moments. Extra fees for night vision, hi-res, and high-risk targets.
- ♦ **The Body Shop** - portal site connecting to various storefronts that sell human body parts and bodily liquids. Find links to buy anything from sperm, tears, and breast milk, to skin, bones, feces, organs, entire limbs, skulls, eyes, faces...
- ♦ **Hurt4You** - A website for sadists of all creeds. Members can request pictures and videos of detailed and gruesome abuse. Someone will provide you with whatever depraved thing you need to see, for the right price.
- ♦ **Inside Source** - leaked and stolen secret documents from law enforcement offices and government files, offered in auctions to the highest bidder.
- ♦ **Hack'n'Crash** - "Coding Adventurers in the Dungeons of the Darknet". Hackers for hire, with a whimsical Heroic Fantasy shtick.
- ♦ **We ♥ Animals** - have your late pet's heart embalmed or conserved in your preferred way, or buy other animal hearts from our large assortment.
- ♦ **The Sky Is A Lie** - truther forum claiming the blue color of the sky, as well as the existence of clouds and astral bodies, is in truth physically impossible and actually a large-scale hologram hiding from us what is really up there in space.
- ♦ **Human Doll** - build your dream girl in our web-based editor or just send us a photo of who you want. We got plastic surgeons, psychologists, torture experts, and everything else we need to make our large supply of freshly available women of all ages, into your personal customized Human Doll and prepare it for delivery to you within a month. We have men available too, in all colors and sizes. Prices are steep of course, but you can marry your high school sweetheart (at her very best behaviour ever), fuck your favorite rockstar (mindset adjustable between enthusiastic, timid, or rebellious), or finally get your hands on your stepfather to do what you've always wanted to do to him once you got him to yourself, locked in your basement or wherever you choose to keep him.

- ◆ **There Are No Monsters** - Trust Me. Really. I can explain everything.
 - ◆ **Gazing Back Along The Broken Path** - past life divinations at affordable prices. (Had to move shop because of persecution in the clearnet. Reduced fees while building new customer base.)
 - ◆ **Family Album** - Meet the Winstons (all names changed). See photos from all our favorite holiday trips, the sights we visited, and the people we (m)eat there.
 - ◆ **Your Skull** - company that offers to scan your skull (or entire skeleton) and 3D-print a faithful replica of it in a faux-bone look for you to display in your home. Why this one doesn't simply operate in the clearnet? No one knows.
 - ◆ **Daddy's Princess** - Personal blog of a long time abuse victim. Has entries dating back at least twenty five years, but the writing remains childish.
 - ◆ **<http://44rdxxhelp73nhoo.onion>** - New photos every day, all of them unsorted. The pictures are candids of famous, important or sometimes random people. All of them look eerily wrong somehow. The timestamps always match up to where the person photographed was at the time, and the pictures all appear unedited, even under a byte-scouring lens.
 - ◆ **Sunny Beach** - pedo site that focuses on children in seaside environments.
 - ◆ **Eat! Eat! Eat!** - EEE is a warm and welcoming community for cannibals. Meetups occur from time to time, often reducing the number of members.
 - ◆ **Lost/Found** - Links to this site get shared frequently on TorChat, The Hidden Wiki, and other channels. It never stays up long. L/F claims that any item or person that's been lost can be found here, though the interface is... difficult. Any user giving it a try will soon see results, though.
 - ◆ **Essentia Vietalis** - storefront that sells human and animal blood in "nourishment appropriate" quantities and containers. Guaranteed fresh, kept refrigerated during delivery, but conserved with an eye towards remaining re-heatable to body temperature, if so desired. The ultimate in sanguine ingestion. Tell all your friends.
 - ◆ **Mutant Rampage IV** - downloadable AR game powered by the Vurt Engine, in which you can play either as a mutant freedom warrior or a member of government-sanctioned hunter-suppressor squads. You don't even need goggles to play! Just download it on your phone, fetch your bluetooth earbuds, and dive right into the post-apocalyptic urban warfare!
 - ◆ **REM-Watcher** - weird site full of hundreds of video thumbnails like small screens, each playing a different assortment of surreal, fantastic, erotic, violent, and everyday scenes. Like, subscribe, and follow any feed you like. It all feels very disjointed and confusing, until you notice one of the screens showing replays of your own dreams from last night. You may be surprised to learn that there are over a hundred followers and several thousand likes on your channel.
 - ◆ **Foggy Beach** - site seems to consist exclusively of a single, rotatable 360° panorama photo that looks obviously 'shopped'. It shows a beach of black sand and jagged pebbles. Sickly-looking distorted alien creatures lie coated in an oily liquid near a coastline choked with a toxic pale purplish fog over leaden waves. There is a structure reminiscent of an oil platform off-coast, half-obsured by the fog.
- Wait! Did one of the creatures just change position while you had swiveled the view away from it? You notice you can move the viewpoint. As you approach the creatures, they become pop-ups gifs (ignoring your script-blocker) or clickable links that show them wriggling in their dying pains. Don't watch them for too long, or move too close - they bite and claw, their poisonous scripts slowing down or even paralyzing your browser.
- There is a single, small, wooden boat lying at the shore. As you come near the water, a chat window pops up. "Save me!" says a message in a small font, faintly bright grey on the chat's medium grey background. "Free us!" pleads the next one. If you get in the boat and move the viewpoint out across the water, the messages' fonts get bigger and attain better contrast. "Let me out!", they plead, and "Be quiet or he'll find us!" All of their user avatars look like disheveled, malnourished children. Except for one. This one talks differently, too.

CHAPTER 3

THE TRUTH

In Reality, the technology that computers and the internet are based on is much older than anyone in the Illusion might ever suspect - and not just because Time is a Lie, outside of Elysium. Much like the act of humankind building cities is and always was a subconscious attempt at recreating our ancestral home of Metropolis, so too was the invention, evolution, and perfection of computer technology an expression of our drive to rediscover repressed powers and lost possibilities we once had at our disposal.

When we were Awakened, truly divine beings, we did not need to employ the intervening medium of technology in order to communicate over large distances, or instantly acquire any knowledge we craved to possess. We could just do it at a whim of our divine wills. But we were toppled from our thrones, and thrown into blindness and ignorance.

The Dark Net, original precursor and true basis of the internet as we know it, was created not long after our Fall... but it was never originally meant for *us* to make use of. Instead, it was made for other (and some would say, even darker) powers, which employed it to help strengthen their stranglehold on our prison, seeking to keep us clueless and impotent forever more.

THE HIGH PROGRAMMER

The High Programmer was once a true god in it's own right. It too, however, was tricked and enslaved by the Demiurge when He blinded Mankind and trapped us in the Illusion. The High Programmer is now no longer a single entity, but inhabits an unknown number of physical and spiritual forms. Like a godlike network, each of its aspects has fragments of the knowledge and abilities of the whole.

Enslaved by the Demiurge in the very beginning, the High Programmer was tasked with creating the Dark Net. Based in the borderland between Metropolis and Limbo, this arcane web was to provide the means for the Demiurge and His Archons to communicate with their manifold servants in the Illusion - a metaphysical fabric to send them visions and messages in their dreams. It served this purpose for untold millennia.

Soon after the Demiurge's disappearance however, even before the War of the Archons had fully died down (which some say it never did - only proceeded into its next phase, in which all of them constantly struggle and fight against each other for power and influence), the Dark Net started to break apart. Lictors found themselves struggling to interpret the will of their Archons. Angels, mancipia, and eldermenschs received only fragmented or contradictory visions anymore. The Archonic War and the deterioration of Elysium had damaged the original Network.

That was when Malkuth herself approached the High Programmer to make it an offer. She, along with an unlikely alliance of Tiphareth, Yesod and Netzach, was going to create an internet

within the Illusion. It would be an extension of the Dark Net into Elysium, and she needed the High Programmer to cooperate in its creation and maintenance.

Promised the opportunity to be worshipped once again, as Malkuth prophesied, by hundreds of millions of users who would devoutly study its mysteries and relentlessly sing its praises at all times of day and night, the High Programmer agreed to the pact. The rest, as they say, is history.

Nowadays, with a major part of modern life being unthinkable without the internet, all the Archons have reverted to fighting over any tiny foothold in it. The god's task is alternately seen as keeping mankind connected but distracted, providing opportunity for education and enlightenment, launching and perpetuating business ventures, facilitating civil strife, open warfare, revolution and counter-revolution, religious fervor and scientific scepticism, improving the efficiency of law enforcement and enabling new venues for crime at the same time, and a million other things.

In truth, however, the High Programmer cares neither about keeping the Net clean, nor safe. It does not share the agenda of any Archon or Death Angel, viewing even the mightiest of them merely as slightly more privileged users. It feels no love or loyalty to the tekrons who maintain the physical understructure of its digital kingdom. The only thing it enjoys is crafting and appraising the beautiful architecture of circuits, nodes, and data packets on which its countless virtual palaces run.

It can never revert to being what it used to be, once upon a time, before the Demiurge. But its manifold fragmented mind shards embrace their new existence with delight. Never before has it been adored and needed by so many. Never before does it remember receiving such generous and widely varied sacrifice.

It even enjoys granting favors and miracles to its worshippers - for what good is power, without using it to reward the love of those who sing your praises?

What the God offers: *Find any person or information for you. Decrypt a file, break a code, or solve a mystery. Reveal dirt on a rival. Show the path to material wealth. Arrange for financial ruin or physical violence to be visited upon your enemy. Find your perfect romantic mate. Procure cheap, dirty sex partners to fulfil your every fantasy. Download a skill, art, or craft directly into your brain. Make technology work in your favor. Teach the mysteries of the Archons and Metropolis.*

What the God wants: *Lose sleep indulging in its countless wondrous sights. Find or create new information to add to its data banks. Try out this groundbreaking new app that will change the way you view the world. Help something go viral. Join in an act of cyber-bullying or cancel culture. Initiate your children into the use of its many glorious marvels. Set aside your life away from screens and keyboards in favor of digital pursuits. Install this experimental bio-compatible device into your body. Help upload someone's consciousness into the Net. Deliver a prodigy engineer or programmer to the tekrons, for recruitment or reassignment to Server Farm duty.*

VENTURING DEEPER INTO THE WEB

In the normal internet, you visit websites, which are connected by links. The underlying architecture is of course a bit more complicated than that, but to the average user it is predominantly this: You're on some page, and to get to another one you click one of the links it offers, or use a search engine (which is in essence also just a lexicon of links). Of course, if you know any given site's exact address, you can always directly navigate to it from wherever you are.

In the Darknet, things look much the same - at least at first. As you leave the shallow, sanitized regions of the clearnet, where the trite entertainments of Tiphareth and the relentless commerce of Yesod distract you with mundane diversions and allures, you may stumble upon your initial entry point to the True web: Some weird onion link found on the clearnet, but promising to lead to deeper, more substantial regions of the web. You will scour the page for the next step forward, look for clues in the site's source code, install new browser plugins to reach further... Eventually, inevitably, you get into contact with people who claim to know how to find what you're looking for - and down the rabbit hole you go.

Moving through the labyrinthine network of unindexed pages, the further you travel into the borderlands between Limbo and Elysium, the links you find become more confusing and unusual as you go. Glitchy JPGs arranged in awkward patterns, crude MS Paint sigils, and apparently empty areas of a website are what you need to click on in order to proceed. Hyperlinked text becomes a rarity, replaced by cryptic symbols which more often than not make sense only on an intuitive level, indecipherable in any rational way.

Gradually the webspace you are moving through starts to look and feel larger and more complex, and you begin to lose yourself in it. Unnoticeably at first, your sense of time and space decays, as clicking links becomes an act of opening doors until you find the right one, and chasing the right page is a matter of digging a hole through the darkness.

As you hunt for clues left throughout the strange site you're on, hoping they'll allow you to solve the puzzle and construct the final portal/link forward, you are so absorbed by the webpages and the twisted animated images on them, that they take on a full form in your head first - and then, bit by bit you are dragged into these surreal locations more fully.

Soon it will feel like you are opening *actual* doors and gateways, entering webspaces that no longer behave like flat pages with text and pictures that you behold through a screen.

Instead, pages feel like rooms here, and gateways turn into corridors or staircases - but everything is visualized in surreal, disturbing, physically impossible, or otherwise extremely weird ways.

An escalator that spirals downwards like a winding staircase takes you into a room where all colors are inverted. Beware the shadows here - they are more real than the objects that cast them.

A gallery page, this room takes the appearance of a dimly lit hall, its walls lined with brightly self-illuminated pictures. Each of these is also a door, and you can enter the pictures through them. The only other way to enter or leave the room is via the constantly melting glass ladder that goes up through the phosphorescent octagonal hole in the ceiling, which takes you back to the main entry space, from which other galleries can be reached.

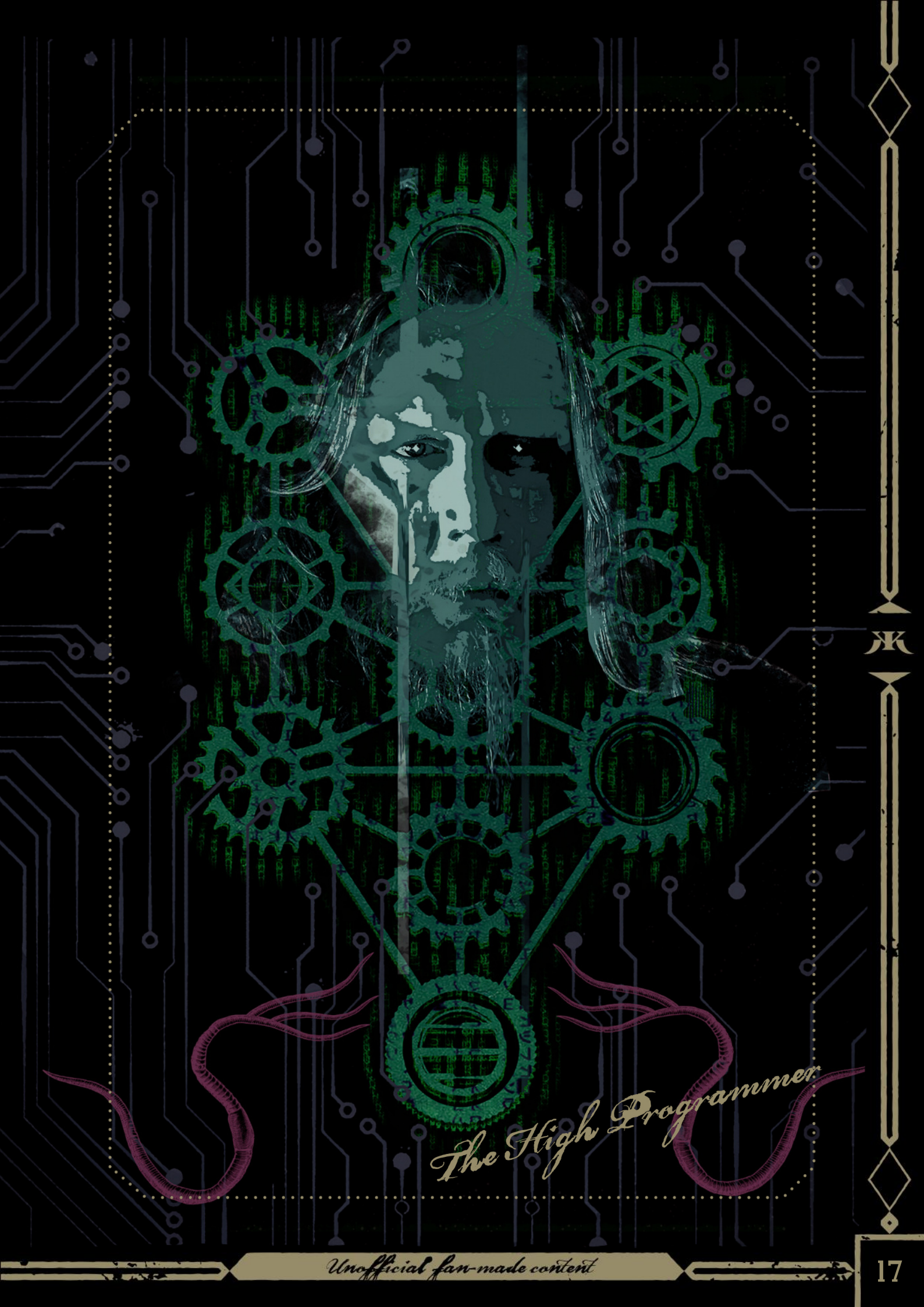
This pathway assumes the shape of a long corridor, its entire width taken up by a slow-moving conveyor belt. The belt's segmented surface sprouts insectile appendages that clamp onto your feet as you step onto it, holding you in place until your pre-selected destination is reached. There, the corridor spits you out, your feet still pierced by chitinous shards and leaving a trace of pixelated blood spatters behind you wherever you go from here.

The chat room looks like a mirror labyrinth, where you never know what other user may pop around one of the reflective corners at any moment, and talk to you about whatever is on their mind right now. All the mirror images you see are slightly twisted, mocking and tormenting you by presenting alternate versions of yourself. If you stay here for too long, this place will leave you implanted with nagging doubts about who you think you truly are, your very identity pulled into question by the many distorted reflections. Above all, one should never touch the mirrors - some users have returned from here with completely changed personalities, either merged with their own twisted reflections, or those of other users in the room with them.

At some point you inevitably realize that you are no longer sitting at your desk, in your room. You certainly did, maybe an hour ago, you're sure of it - but there is no desk anymore, and no room. You have physically entered the Darkspace, as some call this realm between the dimensions.

If you have come this far and still remain relatively unperturbed, you have some top-notch protective measures in place - and we're not talking about just any old antimalware scripts, either. You need some more powerful defenses here in the bottomless depths of the true 'net.

Because here, where the realms of Elysium and Metropolis fully overlap with and transcend into Limbo, many of the gates and localities are infested with alien threats lurking for travellers who have anything less than flawless protection installed. Some are predatory, others parasitic in nature - but almost all of them are hostile and dangerous.



The High Programmer

CHAPTER 4

DEADLY DENIZENS, DEVASTATING DADA

Iorn of the Darknet's own code, spawned from the tormented and delusional minds of human travellers, or migrated to the Net's circuits from the outer reaches of Limbo - the creatures that dwell here may seek to deceive, infect, terrorize, devour, possess, or otherwise harm you. Some of them attack your mental capacities, others directly affect your body. Many seek to either be carried to Elysium, or to make sure you never return there yourself.

These are the horrors of the Deep Dark Net. Don't say you haven't been warned.

BRAIN WORMS

Many sites, gates, and pathways in the Darknet are infested with these dangerous parasites. Unless protected with state-of-the-art antimalware, there is always a risk of contracting a Brain Worm infection when travelling there, and they are deviously hard to detect as well. Most of the time, their victims don't even realize that they have been infected - but they still carry the malicious contagion with them wherever they go from there, the parasites lodged in their very minds... and brains.

Infection, Growth, and Maturity

Brain Worms operate much like mundane computer worms in that they are designed to infect and propagate without a need for outside guidance. However, unlike a computer worm that corrupts the software of internet-connected devices like computers or phones, it physically infects the human mind.

At first, a Brain Worm is nothing more than a small package of data - a diminutive cluster of sensory input that is perceived by the victim and thus taken into its mind. This is called the worm's `hatch_data`, and can be visual, auditory, or olfactory:

An oddly captivating mandala in dazzling, contrasting colours.

A melody that seems simple and repetitive at first, but upon closer listening changes just a tiny little bit with every new iteration.

The smell of frying eggs and fresh coffee being brewed, but intermingled with an acrid undercurrent of rotten flesh...

One may be exposed to this `hatch_data` intentionally, for example attached to a message that is sent to you, or one might be exposed accidentally by handling the wrong file or object. Whatever form the `hatch_data` takes, at first glance it will usually seem harmless, if oddly intriguing - but it carries a disastrous payload. The victim soon finds that they cannot stop thinking back to it again and again, repeatedly mulling it over in their mind.

Upon noticing this mental intrusion, the victim must **Keep it Together** against these compulsive thoughts, or the infection takes hold. By expending the cognitive energy needed to think about the `hatch_data`, the host provides the Brain Worm with enough cerebral nourishment to hatch into a physical larva inside the carrier's brain. Soon after that, the recurring intrusive thoughts rapidly cease, and victims usually believe themselves cured of whatever odd mental phenomenon it may have been that affected them.

However, the Worm has simply acquired the ability to independently feed on its host's stray thoughts, and has outgrown the need for repeated contemplation of its `hatch_data`. From there on, the larva swiftly grows into maturity, and starts to carry out its intended purpose.

Symptoms

A Brain Worm, once hatched, roots into the brain of an infected individual and gains access to the victim's mind. This variously enables it to affect memories, emotions, sensory perceptions, or even basic bodily functions. Its exact abilities and purpose depend on the type of worm and its programming (see numerous examples below). Some, like the Curious series, are designed to read, copy, and/or edit the memories of their victims. Others are programmed to modify the victim's emotional state, inflict hallucinations, or even stimulate the release of hormones that trigger physiological reactions.

Most types of Worms, like those known as IllLogic Bombs, are only able to cause exactly one of these effects, acting much like a computer worm that carries a particular viral payload. A few especially devious variants may combine two or even more of the above effects, for a truly devastating influence on the victim's mind.

Origins

The very first Brain Worms were created soon after the original formation of the Dark Net, initially designed by the High Programmer itself. Their original purpose was to be used as subtle, self-wielding, psychosurgical safeguards against any humans who might dream too deeply, and in undesirable directions - since historically, it was only through Limbo that we could have accidentally ventured too close to Reality, and discovered dangerous Truths beyond the Veil. The Worms were designed to prevent exactly that.

However, with the Illusion crumbling and with ever more humans using the internet to connect to the Darknet beyond Elysium, the Worms have gotten loose, and spread everywhere throughout the Darkspace. Many other beings (including a number of Enlightened humans) have encountered them and learned how to create their own variants.

Multiple new types of Brain Worms have been bred, that can be used for almost any purpose. From simple information extraction for extortion and blackmail, to an augmented form of personal surveillance, to near-untraceable assassinations... up to and includ-

ing far-reaching, long-instigated schemes of mass control or omniscience, hatched by Magicians, Disciples, lictors, angels, nepharites and other beings who choose to tap into the sinister powers of the Darkspace in their quest for divine omnipotence.

Spreading and the Formation of Networks

Once a patient zero is infected with a Brain Worm, it continues to infect and spread to other hosts by any means possible. Most Worms must rely on conveying their *hatch_data* to new hosts via text or image messaging, internet chat, or even a phone conversation.

[The original host may **Keep it Together** to suppress the urge to share the *hatch_data* with others via electronic media.]

Some of the more complex Worms can encode their *hatch_data* in other ways, however. They can make their host's bodily liquids (saliva, sweat, genital secretions) infectious to other humans.

[The GM decides whether the Worm is contagious at *Distance: Room*, *Distance: Arm*, or only upon *intimate contact*. If a full scene is spent within this critical vicinity of an existing host, any potential new hosts must **roll +Fortitude** to avoid contracting a Brain Worm of their own. On a **(10-14)**, the infection doesn't take hold, but gives you terrible, flu-like symptoms for -1 *ongoing to all rolls* until you've had a full day of rest.]

A few types of Worms can form networks between them once they have spread to several hosts. Examples of this are *Curious::Purple* and some of the later-generation *Vurt* strains. In a network, the Worms can exchange information, and synchronize their actions with each other. Often, there is a remote operator somewhere behind the scenes, who controls the network and all the Worms in it.

Most worms are not that sophisticated, however. The majority of Brain Worms are simply vehicles for various types of brain hacks, such as mental espionage or cerebral attacks.

The least refined of them are designed only to carry a viral payload, unloading it into their victim's brain and then their task is done.

Long-term Symptoms

Having a Worm living in your head is, apart from all the mental and emotional complications it can (and will) cause, also a biological strain on the host's body. It is after all a physical creature inside your brain, and while at first it feeds only on stray thoughts, that will not suffice as its nourishment forever.

Hosts that have been infected with a Brain Worm for several months, or a year at most perhaps, begin to feel the parasite's toll on their organism in earnest. At first, terrible migraines, recurring cramps, bleeding from the ears and nose, and inflammations of muscles and nerves become the norm instead of the exception as your general state of health deteriorates.

[Victim takes a permanent **Serious Wound** that cannot be cured until the Worm is removed.]

Then, after another couple months, the Worm begins to eat your raw brain matter, and its excrements suffuse your metabolism to critical levels.

[Victim loses points in its Attributes, beginning with **Reason**, **Perception**, and **Intuition**, but spreading to other capacities in due time as well: **Charisma**, **Coolness**, and **Violence** may likewise be affected. The host must **Endure Injury** at irregular intervals (ranging from once a week to once a month) or be presented by the GM with a choice between two Attributes, in one of which they'll lose one point. If all of the victim's Attributes are reduced to 0 or below, they die from brain damage and blood poisoning.]

Doctors in the Illusion will usually not be able to detect the true cause of all these ailments. They will most likely diagnose dementia or Alzheimer's disease to explain the patient's mental deterioration. Your death certificate will probably cite a stroke, heart attack, overdose, or (inexplicable) organ failure as cause of death.



The Curious Series

A series of very commonly found Brain Worms, each subtype designed to program different specific tasks - but all focused on affecting the victim's memory centres in some way. Some of the Curious strains have variant subtypes of their own, while others don't.

Curious::White

This very basic Worm from the Curious series senses and locates the synaptic clusters in the brain that contain memories of Reality and the Truth. It does this by sniffing out the peculiar and typical mixture of surprise, terror, and awe that is almost invariably found associated with such recollections.

When it has found such a memory, it excretes strange substances into that region of the brain, which then causes a 'memory white-out'.

Abilities:

- ♦ *Sniff Out Emotional Cluster:* detect any memories with certain emotional associations.
- ♦ *Memory Whiteout:* suppress memories, denying the victim mental access to them [gains **Repressed Memories** Disadvantage].

Limitations: The memories are not deleted from the victim's brain, but merely suppressed. The victim cannot access them, except under unusual circumstances - such as being strongly reminded of them, or directly confronted with something directly related to the memory's subject matter.

Variants: This strain of Brain Worms can also be programmed to look for memories associated with other combinations of emotions, for example it could identify any time the victim was scared out of their mind, or might be designed to search out every instance when its host has felt sexually excited and deeply repulsed by something at the same time.

Curious::Black (see below) can strictly speaking also be classified as a variant strain of White, namely one with largely increased ability of memory suppression - to the point of memory deletion.

Curious::Grey

More complex than Curious::White, this one is also able to sniff out memories. However, it then does not suppress them but instead sends out a copy of the mental content it found to an external receiver or storage site. Different from the White strain, it does not necessarily seek for memories related to Truth and Reality. Strains of Grey can be programmed to look for any kind of specifically definable recollections or knowledge - such as memories of a certain person or location, mastery of some skill or craft, or the secret passcodes to a specific program or locked safe.

Abilities:

- ♦ *Sniff Out Cognitive Markers:* detect a specific kind of memories or knowledge.

♦ *Package and Transmit:* copy a memory and send it out, either to a receiver in the Darknet or to other Brain Worms in its network (if any). The victim retains the memory, but someone else has access to it as well, now. [The GM takes up to **1 Hold** per session for every significant memory a PC possesses of the thing in question. This **Hold** can be used to cause complications based on someone else making use of their access to that knowledge.]

♦ (Optional) *Establish Network:* Upon reaching maturity, the Worm sends out contact requests using either the victim's own brainwaves (short range but high bandwidth), open wifi networks in the vicinity (subject to technical conditions and limitations), or routing them through Limbo while the victim is in REM sleep (high range, high bandwidth) to find other Brain Worms of its type to connect to. It can also connect to a central server, node, or operator in the Darknet. Once a network is established, the Worms can exchange information between each other within the constraints of the strength and reach of their uplink, and the storage capacity of their host brains.

Limitations: Strains of Curious::Grey are typically not complex enough to be programmed to hunt for more than one such type of memory or information. It would take the breeding of a custom strain to handle more multi-tasking searches.

Also, large clusters of memories or knowledge will take the Worm a long time to transmit, due to constraints in storage capacity and bandwidth.

For example, if the Worm is searching for memories of a certain person that the victim was friends with for many years, it will find a large number of memories that trigger its programmed behaviour - but it must copy and send them out one by one.

Similarly, if a Worm that is designed to sniff out and steal knowledge about finances and economy infests the brain of an experienced investment banker, it will find rich fodder for its tasks - but will also take many months to transmit the entirety of the victim's expertise.

Variants: Curious::Grey is already designed to be very flexible in use. The above mentioned multi-tasking strains have sometimes been attempted, but otherwise there are no known variants in circulation.

Curious::Black

Bred from variants of both White and Grey strains, Worms of the Curious::Black type combine the search capacities of Grey with an upgraded memory suppressant compared to White. Once they have found a memory that fulfills their programming conditions, they excrete chemicals in the brain strong enough to destroy a synaptic cluster, permanently deleting memories.

Abilities:

- ♦ *Sniff Out Cognitive Markers:* detect a specific kind of memories or knowledge.

- ♦ *Memory Blackout:* delete memories, irrevocably erasing them forever [Victim may have to reduce **Stability** when realizing its skills and recollections seem to keep fading away, and if subjected to this for a long enough time, the victim may gain the **Lost Identity** Disadvantage].

Limitations: Once erased, the memories can not be reconstructed. If they haven't been copied and sent out by a Grey infestation beforehand, they will simply be lost, destroyed along with the brain matter they were stored in.

Variants: Similar to Grey, Black is already very flexible in that it can be programmed to look for any of a large range of cognitive and emotional triggers in the victim's brain. It does what it does very efficiently, so no separate variant strains are usually required.

Curious::Purple

Different from all the previously described types, this strain does not look for any particular memories in the victim's mind - rather, its effect is one that globally affects the entire brain. Once a Purple Worm has hatched and taken root in a brain, it suffuses it with chemicals that allow it to encrypt the host's entire mindstate. Once encrypted, only privileged users can access the mind's contents. The Worm then seeks to connect to a network (or start a new one) with others of its kind, and/or with a central operator.

Abilities:

- ♦ *Establish Network:* Upon reaching maturity, the Worm sends out contact requests using either the victim's own brainwaves (short range but high bandwidth), open wifi networks in the vicinity (subject to technical conditions and limitations), or routing them through Limbo while the victim is in REM sleep (high range, high bandwidth) to find other Brain Worms of its type to connect to. It can also connect to a central server, node, or operator in the Darknet. Once a network is established, the Worms can exchange information between each other within the constraints of the strength and reach of their uplink, and the storage capacity of their host brains.
- ♦ *Mind Encryption:* Curious::Purple has the unique ability to encrypt an entire mindbrain and produce the only valid access codes to the information therein. The victim must **Keep it Together** as it feels its cognitive functions and cerebral integrity coming under severe attacks. Every failed roll causes it to reduce **Stability** [3] and when it is **Broken**, the encryption is complete. The Worm then triggers one (or more) of the abilities below, of which each strain of Purple possesses at least one.
- ♦ (Optional) *Scramble Input:* The victim loses the ability to make sense of its own perceptions. Anything it hears, sees, smells, feels, etc. does not compute and/or can not be put down to long term memory. [The Worm may calibrate this effect to lesser extents, such as only affecting sight or hearing, or only impede memory formation (with symptoms very much like anterograde amnesia). If it does, it's usually due to its network's central operator deciding on the optimal settings for that particular host.]

- ♦ (Optional) *Scramble Output:* The victim loses the ability to coherently communicate its mind's contents to the outside world. This may affect speaking, writing, gestures, or all of these at once - leading to symptoms very similar to Aphasia and/or Agraphia. [As with **Scramble Input**, the Worm's central operator may limit or finetune this effect at will.]

- ♦ (Optional) *Denial of Service:* The victim becomes unable to access its own memories, effectively afflicted with retrograde amnesia. [As with the **Scramble abilities**, the operator can calibrate this effect, granting the host selective access privileges at his own discretion. One variant involves having the victim regress to a mental state of childhood, or another earlier point in their life.]

Limitations: Curious::Purple is not able to copy-paste memories, or transmit them outwards. All it can do is encrypt them, to keep them safe from being accessed by anyone else, or the victim spilling its secrets to anyone. The Purple Worm can inform its network about what memories it has secured, and can transmit the passcodes to access the encrypted mind - but in order to send the memories themselves elsewhere for external storage, a separate infection with Curious::Grey is necessary.

Alternatively other, more direct, methods of extraction can be used, usually conducted under close overview by the operator.

Variants: Several variants of Purple exist, each exhibiting one or more of the above Optional Abilities. Individual sub-strains are sometimes denominated as Purple_Haze, Purple_Babble, Lilac, Violent_Violet, or similar after the Curious::prefix, but there is no unified classification system in use. This is probably due to numerous different users having bred their own variants of this Strain, without one central orchestrator to keep the terminology streamlined.

Curious::Null

The most effective way of neutralizing a Worm infection is by either programming your own anti malware or, lacking the ability or resources to do that, finding a copy of Curious::Null. This is a beneficial Worm that attacks and kills other Worm infections. It unfolds no other effects in the brain, mind, or body of its host. The downside to Null is that it is still also an infection itself, and spreads to other people if and when it can manage. However this can be utilized by smart operators, since it is one of the most effective ways to destroy an entire network of Brain Worms.

Abilities:

- ♦ *Detect and Attack Other Worms:* Designed to combat other Worm strains, while also minimizing damage to the ambient brain tissue, it will physically (and chemically) kill a hostile Worm in your brain. It will also seek to undo most any lingering effects that the Worm's presence has left in regards to your memories or other cognitive functions, but some damage may have been done that it is unable to repair.
- ♦ *Sniff Out Networks and Uplinks:* Detects any networks that a previously-existing Worm infestation may be part of, and

will usurp its channels to procreate, spreading itself to connected human brains. (And continue to kill Worm infections there, too).

Limitations: Null strains are not very effective at reverting bodily changes induced by other Worms, but they can at least stop them from progressing any further after they kill the other Worm. Null strains are, unfortunately, also unable to create their own networks, but must always use those that other Worms have already made. Otherwise, Null might have already spread to a vast majority of people, and live inside their heads - meaning that most humans would probably be immune to Brain Worm infections in general.

Variants: A highly exceptional strain, it is unknown who created it, or how they did it. It is thoroughly resistant to attempts at modifying its programming (every time someone has tried, it devolved into nothing but dangerous glitches, up to and including an early death for either Null and/or its host), and no known variants of it exist.

Illogic Bombs

Variously also known as *Cortical Vines*, *NeuroBombs*, *Carrier Worms*, *Spitting Cobra*, and other monikers, this large and varied group of Brain Worms has one thing in common: They act much like a mundane computer worm in that they invade the brain to do exclusively one specific thing - deliver a devious payload. They still mature into a physical shape in the brain, but then they themselves do nothing much except live there, feeding off of stray thoughts and ambient brain chemistry. But their payload is like a virus they spit into the victim's mind.

In contrast to what the Curious series of Worms can do, these viruses are much simpler, and almost exclusively only cause one specific effect. However, there is a vast number of such viruses in existence, and new ones are bred all the time by enterprising Enlightened hackers and otherworldly threats alike. This can make it very hard to take effective countermeasures, or even reliably identify exactly which sub-strain you are infected with, so that you could figure out how to rid yourself of it.

It is possible, but uncommon, for IllLogic Bomb type Worms to carry more than one type of payload.

Sensellogger

This virus, analogous to mundane *keylogger* malware, keeps tabs on the victim's activities and sensory input. It transmits its data outwards, but is otherwise almost impossible to detect, since it does nothing else than spy. Remote operators can for example sense that a victim is reading, but not what it reads; can pick up that it's talking or listening to someone speak, but not what is said; and so on.

Panoptical

An upgraded infection from Sensellogger, above, this virus is able to pick up and transmit informational content of what it spies on. Remote operators can listen in on conversations, see anything the

victim sees, and even tune into its pain centers to feel its injuries or lack thereof. Like with Sensellogger, its presence is hard to detect since it behaves very subtly, only observing.

Quisling

Reprograms the victim's empathy centers and morality clusters, in order to create discord among friends and colleagues. At the same time, it excretes chemicals that boost the host's ambition and self-serving drive for survival - causing the target to betray their peers and turn traitor against their masters at the first opportunity and with no apparent hesitation or remorse.

Vurt

Interrupts the sensory areas of the brain in order to overlay its own display of the surroundings. Detailed symptoms vary according to sub-strain and specific programming, but for example, targets have been known to walk off the tops of buildings, or see a red light as green. Others keep hearing noises or voices that either drive them insane or cause them to seek out their source, luring them to certain locations. The strongest versions of Vurt approximate a full AR experience, often establishing a network and synchronizing the sensory input that they superimpose onto their multiple hosts' brains, for a multi-participant immersion in which you can never tell where reality ends and the hallucinations begin.

(Optional) Establish Network: Upon reaching maturity, the Worm sends out contact requests using either the victim's own brainwaves (short range but high bandwidth), open wifi networks in the vicinity (subject to technical conditions and limitations), or routing them through Limbo while the victim is in REM sleep (high range, high bandwidth) to find other Brain Worms of its type to connect to. It can also connect to a central server, node, or operator in the Darknet. Once a network is established, the Worms can exchange information between each other within the constraints of the strength and reach of their uplink, and the storage capacity of their host brains.

Code Red

A devious type of malware used to set up possession attempts, this one breaks down the victim's mental defenses against mental takeovers of any kind. [The host gains the **Involuntary Medium Disadvantage**, and *takes -2 ongoing* to any rolls for resisting possession attempts targeted at them by any creature that is able and trying to do so.]

Case Green

This Virus is a physical attack on the victim's health and bodily constitution. It messes with the host's brain chemistry to influence physiological processes in the body, starting with blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol, and ranging all the way to bone density, arterial necrosis, and nervous damage. The specific symptoms vary between what the virus is programmed to try, and what kinds of impairment the victim's own metabolism is most susceptible to. Commonly seen examples include extreme obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, liver damage, severe

gastritis or other intestinal problems, gout or rheumatic pains, deterioration of joints or muscle tissue, and nervous conditions. Often several symptoms and afflictions combine to leave the victim an utter physical wreck. [The victim gains the **Infirm Disadvantage**, not curable unless the Viral infection is removed first.]

Abomination Worms

The most rarely encountered strains of Brain Worms, and those hatched in the darkest depths of the Net, these are the subject of internet legends and oft-disbelieved rumors. They cause extreme - and extremely horrifying - changes in the victim, and only the most unscrupulous beings or utterly deranged programmers will knowingly make use of them.

That said, their utilities are incredibly powerful in the hands of someone who knows what to do with them - and matters of ethics must all too often take a backseat in the struggle for power and survival, out there Beyond the Veil.

PanDemic

An add-on designed to be patched onto any other Worm, this mods its properties so that it can spread its infection via the host's bodily fluids, like a regular viral disease. The victim's saliva, sweat, tears, sperm, and breath become suffused with tiny hatchlings of the Brain Worm and transmit them to new hosts, in whose body the hatchlings make their way into the brain and mature there as normal. This eliminates the need for initial exposure to a packet of hatch_data in order to create new hosts.

Spion_2000

A flesh hack that changes the victim's appearance (e.g. size, body type, hair or eye color), and in some cases even ethnicity or gender. The onset is gradual in the beginning, but progresses (according to its pre-set parameters, i.e. what changes in particular will be caused) rapidly after a few days, reaching completion around a week after the onset.

Frankenmeister_2000

An upgraded version of Spion_2000, this terrifying flesh hack can give you any of the changes that Spion can, plus it can make your body develop features that originally belong to other, non-human species. It can make you grow the fur, horns, teeth, scales, claws, hooves, or entire body parts of various animals, or turn you into a horrifying hybrid between a human and something entirely otherworldly.

[The victim develops the **Inhuman Appearance** Limitation, and may at the GM's discretion also develop certain unwholesome appetites or alien compulsions on top of that, such as becoming **Marked** or developing **Cannibalism** or **Hunting Instincts**. Some victims also exhibit a **Sensitivity** or **Symbol Bondage**, or even become prone to **Uncontrolled Shapeshifting**.]

Frankenmeister_2000

Some explorers of the Darknet claim that this Worm variant was initially written by the Biomechanical Keepers of Ktonor, in an attempt at more efficiently combining the genetic material of their charges - the Children of the Underworld - with that of the human race.

Others believe that it was an attempt by some rogue government or military programmer who tried to merge the DNA of azghouls and humans, in order to turn genetically-enhanced humans into unwaveringly loyal super-soldiers who can be made to wear the azghouls' typical armor-parasite, and be assigned a True Name that makes them obey any who invoke it.

QueenMaker

The victim's intestines are reshaped so that the host turns into an egg-laying machine, each egg hatching into a type of creature determined by the QueenMaker's programming. Since it draws on the victim's own metabolism and biomass to grow the eggs, the size and complexity of the hatched creatures determines how frequently an egg is laid (most commonly between once every couple days and once a month), and how long the victim can survive the process (usually no longer than a year or thereabouts).

Known variants, if you ask around in the "right" circles, range from the initially-apparently-cute *QueenMaker_Mogwai* to the immediately horrifying *QueenMaker_FleshSpider*, and the equally sanity-devouring as it is reality-shattering *QueenMaker_Zirath_Loop=Infinite*.

DynAlmite-E

Another flesh hack, this virus changes the composition of the victim's bodily fluids, such as sweat, urine, and most of the water in the body's internal organs, to develop highly combustible properties - similar to those of Napalm or Nitroglycerine. The result, after only a handful of days, is a human being who is effectively a walking bomb. Anything that might immolate the victim (e.g. exposure to fire, sparks, electricity, or even very intense heat) will explosively incinerate the body fluids. What is left is usually not even identifiable as having once been human anymore.

If a remote operator behind this infection also has the means to control where the victim goes - for example by way of a separate Worm infection (such as Vurt) or other mind control techniques, they can use them as suicide bombers without the need for an explosive belt. Otherwise, it just makes the host into a walking timebomb that will eventually go off at random, for example when someone lights a cigarette next to them or they get zapped with a stun-gun.

618 ...regret to inform you that we still have not been able to understand the exact process by which these digital worms are transformed into biological reality. It should be impossible by conventional wisdom, but nevertheless we have repeatedly observed it happening in our studies. Our current working hypothesis on how it works is that the brain cells exposed to the hatch_data are somehow insidiously altered by the attempt to process the strangely compelling content.

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621 This abnormal brain activity seems to create a positive feedback loop, modifying the local extracellular matrix, possibly causing very specific signals to be sent to other cells nearby. These environmental impulses lead first to epigenetic alterations in the cells, driving increased cellular proliferation, followed by genetic changes, as the cells' DNA repair machinery is repurposed for wholesale genomic remodelling.

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623

624 After just a few generations of accelerated cell division, the affected cells are no longer recognisable as being human-derived. The hatch_data has reprogrammed them to grow into the physical manifestation of the brain worm - a tiny wriggling larva embedded deep in the host's brain tissue, living only to fulfil its original digital purpose: copy, paste, edit, delete...

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log

626,0-1

Bot

How To: Combat an Infection

Getting rid of a Worm infection is difficult, but not impossible.

If you can find a copy of Curious::Null, infecting yourself with that is the most efficient method to combat an existing brain infestation by any other Worm strains. Failing the chance to obtain Null, you could also try to program your own anti malware - but that takes some skills that cannot be learned within the narrow confines of Elysium, but must be acquired in the depths of the Darknet. Where more dangers obviously lurk, especially for those who have already proven to have less-than-stellar cerebral and spiritual protections about themselves.

The next most effective method to have oneself purged of Worms is via an elaborate and specific ritual exorcism, such as the Banishment of the Head-Snakes ceremony rooted in West-African spiritistic techniques, or the Rite of Cleansing the Dream

Vermin based on Far Eastern occultist traditions. Both of these can only be performed on the host by another person, so you'll have to find someone who knows one of those, and will either do it themselves or teach them to someone else who can then perform it.

Lacking access to all of the above, more dubious alternatives have been tried by some desperate Brain Worm victims, or those who tried to save them. These are invariably highly dangerous and may end up doing more harm than good to the patient. They include back alley brain surgery, repeated cerebral electrocution, or ingesting strange fungi or dangerous chemicals - all performed with the intent of killing the Worm's physical form in your brain. It may work, but the horrible complications that can all too easily arise make this a truly desperate last resort option.

HALLUCINATORY INTELLIGENCE

In the nebulous regions between Limbo and the Darknet, many wondrous and surreal beings can be encountered. Some of them are (or may be) what is collectively known as *Hallucinatory Intelligences*. Various also called *Sentient Dreams*, *Spiritual Guardians*, *Imaginary Companions*, or *Ghosts in the Machine*, these mysterious and elusive presences originate from the thoughts and memories of lost Dreamers and seekers of Truth.

Some have been imagined (or programmed) into existence whole cloth, by deluded dream wanderers or Darknet delvers whose sanity crumbled under overpowering realisations of the True nature of Reality. Others are put together (or have put themselves together?) from mere shards and echoes - pastiches of fragmented divine memories, forgotten cravings, and shattered beliefs, mixed in with snippets of bad code and lost algorithms adrift in the Web.

All of them have at some point attained sentience - or a semblance of sentience. It may be merely an imagined sense of self-existence (hence their name), but each of them is at least utterly convinced that it is indeed a thinking, feeling, fully sentient entity.

Since they are created from such widely disparate sources, Hallucinatory Intelligences can take many different forms. Often, but by no means always, they assume an at least somewhat humanoid shape, or alternately one that is strongly tied to human mythological or spiritual imagery. Thus, they may appear as robotic or machinelike men, cast themselves in the semblance of angels, or look like mythical beasts that could have stepped straight out of our fairy tales and legends. Sometimes they are surreal combinations of these elements, such as a robotic manticore or an astronaut with angel wings.

The variations of them are all but endless.

There is one that takes the form of a dozen men with smiley emoticons for faces, all clad in identical dark suits and moving in perfect synchronicity. It calls itself The Agents or The Sentinels, and while it rarely talks, it conveys opinions and moods by changing which emoticons are displayed for its faces. (Usually switching between friendly, sceptical, and angry, but it can do others too, if its feeling it.)

Another one thinks it is Tinkerbell the Fairy, and it definitely looks and acts the part, too.

At least three different looking ones have claimed to be Roko's Basilisk, or that they will be in the future. One of these also claims to be Quetzalcoatl.

Beware the one that goes by the name of Gabriel - it tolerates none but the most devout trespassers in its domain, and its flaming sword script is a neural hack that will fuck you up with its physically destructive burn_data.

One thing they all have in common is that they all crave the closeness and companionship of humans. It seems to soothe their tormented and conflicting emotions, stabilizing their patchwork mental nature and preventing them from being torn apart by the turbulences of Limbo and the Darknet. It also gives them a drive and purpose they lack in the solitude of their otherwise aimless drifting. To this end, they seek to enter symbiotic bonds with human travellers whenever they encounter them.

This is in fact not a new development. Even in the times before the Disappearance of the Demiurge, humans would sometimes encounter these beings in dreams or visions. Historically, they were often perceived as religious, animistic, or ethereal entities, and we interpreted them as guardian angels, spirit animals, muses, or mythical patrons.

Although potentially beneficial, entering into this symbiotic partnership can be a dangerous enterprise. Especially the oldest and most experienced ones of these creatures can make for powerful allies in the uncharted depths of the Darkspace, and may even come back to Elysium with you (some of them want nothing more than that!), proving very helpful there as well. But dealing with them is invariably a double-edged sword, never without looming complications or dangers - and when things turn sour between the entity and its host, they can make for horrible enemies.

Underlying their need for companionship and symbiosis, they have drives and motivations that may seem incomprehensibly alien and self-contradictingly whimsical. But really that is a result of their entire personalities consisting of fragmented human thoughts and longings, put together in often haphazard and incongruent ways to create something that probably just *thinks* it is an independent mind of its own. They may selflessly help you at every turn for weeks on end, only for it to turn out that they want the weirdest things, for the most nonsensical reasons. Or they may have a strong, domineering agenda from the very beginning of the relationship - only to then abandon it on a whim when it thinks better of it for some reason, or even for apparently no reason at all.

At the same time, they have considerable power to offer, and will offer it readily. Their ability to know and influence things both in the Darknet and in Elysium is not to be taken lightly, and constitutes a strong draw in favor of entering into that alliance with them.

In Elysium, which they can enter only when taken there by a human symbiotic host, they are normally undetectable - invisible and aponic presences, except to their host and those who can [See Through the Illusion](#). Even to those who can perceive them in that way, they often appear fleeting, semi-translucent, or flickering in and out of existence. There is always a powerful sense that they aren't *real* in some fundamental way, even though the clear evidence of their deeds may point strongly to the contrary.

Hallucinatory Intelligence

Home: The Dark Net and Limbo

Creature type: Intermediate Power of the Dark Net

Stats: **Combat** [1], **Influence** [4-6], **Magic** [3-5]

Abilities:

- ♦ *Ethereal:* Any form of physical, non-magical **Harm** has no effect on the being. Weapons that were made in the dreams, or hacking attacks that target its source-code, have their full normal effects on them however.
- ♦ *Bound to the Darknet:* Should the being become destroyed in Elysium, it will be reconstructed in the darknet.
- ♦ *Imbue gifts:* The being is capable of investing some of its power into a person of its choosing. They will gain one of the following gifts: set one Attribute value to +4; the ability to call on the being when in need; copy one of the being's abilities; or acquire something related to the being's Higher Power. The gift disappears whenever the being chooses to take it back, or if the being is defeated.
- ♦ *Symbiotic Bond:* The Intelligence can give a PC the **Bound** Advantage, in addition to imbuing gifts as per above. In return however, it feeds off of its host's cerebral and spiritual essence. While in its company, it constantly siphons small amounts of mental energy, worth **-1 Stability** for every session it follows the PC around.
- ♦ *Webwalker:* Can alter websites on a whim, travel the depths of the internet, and find people and information online.

Combat [1]

- ♦ Exploit awareness of the surrounding environment to flee from a conflict.

Influence [4-6]

- ♦ Know where something is located.
- ♦ Offer mundane [knowledge/object/services] in exchange for symbiotic bonding.
- ♦ Hack into a network at someone's home or place of work.
- ♦ Offer supernatural [knowledge/object/services] in exchange for symbiotic bonding.
- ♦ (Optional) Erase someone's identity
- ♦ (Optional) Systematically ruin someone's life.

Ghost in the Machine

Some Hallucinatory Intelligences are - or claim to be - in fact powerful creatures from other dimensions that have uploaded, astrally projected, or in other ways transferred their consciousness into the Darkspace.

While your players should never be fully sure whether what the being says is actually the truth, merely its own imagined truth, or outright lies - you can make use of this creature writeup in creative ways.

If you want to have a lictor, mancipium, eldermensch, nepharite, razide, angel, azghoul, tekron, forgotten god, cairath, human, or any other creature really, that has fully transferred its mind into the Darknet - it's simple and easy:

Use the stat block given for a Hallucinatory Intelligence and decide that it actually is that type of creature. (Or thinks it is.)

You may optionally add the following Ability:

Ties to another dimension

The creature originally hails from another realm (Metropolis, Inferno, Elysium, the Underworld...), and still maintains some ties to that place.

These ties work in both directions, so while a Digitized Nepharite, for example, might be able "upload" a gang of purgatides to a Darknet server to help it do its work there - it's Infernal masters may also call in services from it, demanding tribute and obedience. The services that such an H.I. will in turn request from its human host, in exchange for the boons of the symbiotic bond, will commonly be born of its relation (service, hostility, fear, alliance...) to its otherworldly kin (masters, peers, underlings, supernatural compulsions...) as well.

This Ability also goes well together with the H.I.'s **Magic** move *'Reveal a gate to another world'* and the **Influence** move *'Offer supernatural [knowledge/object/services] in exchange for symbiotic bonding'*.

Likewise, the Mass Hallucination attack of such a creature will tend to induce disorienting visions from its origin dimension - such as glimpses of the Machine City's chaotic and claustrophobic techno-mazes, the carnage pits of Hareb-Serap's citadel in Inferno, or the snow-clad mountain forests and penitent self-flagellation of The Dream World of Captivation and Godliness.

Magic [3-5]

- ◆ Reveal a gate to another world.
- ◆ Perform complex or arcane feats of programming.
- ◆ Induce hallucinations and perform neural hacks.
- ◆ (Optional) Open a temporary portal to anywhere in the Darknet or Limbo.
- ◆ (Optional) Operate a network of Brain Worms.

Attacks

They never make physical attacks, even in Limbo being strongly like disembodied, ethereal presences. However they have other means at their disposal by which to subdue, confuse, and yes, also bodily injure any who would provoke their wrath.

- ◆ **Neural Hack [-]** [Distance: room, **Keep it Together** to resist being compelled to follow its orders]
- ◆ **Mass Hallucinations [-]** [Distance: room, **See Through the Illusion** to orientate yourself, may affect a number of people within line of sight]
- ◆ **Viral Attack [-]** [See particular worm, virus or other cyber attack]
- ◆ **Ghost in the Machine [1-2]** [Distance: field, uses machines and internet connected devices as weapons; may affect a number of people within the area]

GM Note: The combination of an H.I. siphoning off its host's Stability, and having a mental attack that requires Keeping it Together to resist, is a devious one. It means that it becomes ever harder to resist the creature's mental compulsions, the more time you have spent with it.

Giving in to the lure of the powerful gifts it can grant leads you into a downward spiral that may well leave you all but enslaved to it, wide open to its Neural Hacks and Hallucinations.

Some H.I. are not above the idea of increasing your dependency on their gifts - and thus prolonging the time you have to stay with them - by treacherous means, such as using their Influence and Magic moves to create unfortunate situations in which you'll be heavily incentivized to turn to it for help.

Wounds & harm moves

Wounds: (○ ○ ○) ○ ○ ○ ⊗

- ◆ Becomes pixelated for a moment
- ◆ Gives a startling, deeply unsettling, alien screech [**Keep it Together** or reduce **Stability** [2] and *take -1 to next roll*].
- ◆ Bleeds polygons that scatter like dry leaves blown on the wind
- ◆ Changes its shape to something the attacker desires or fears.
- ◆ Suffers from glitches as its programming breaks down - may get stuck in walls or floor, make laggy or looping movements, or lose orientation for a brief moment [*+1 to next move against it*].
- ◆ The Intelligence derezzes with a loud digital howling.

*Hallucinatory
Intelligence*

Unofficial fan-made content

DIGITIZED LIMBONIANS

When you go far enough into the Net that you can reach Limbo through it, the whole of the human collective subconscious lies open for your prying browser tabs to explore - but when you look into the Vortex, the creatures of Limbo invariably look back. There are countless parasites and monsters dwelling in the realms of the dreams, and many of them have either made their way over into the Darknet themselves, or are stretching their otherworldly tendrils through its circuitry. Some have stayed and settled, or wandered in the Darknet for so long that they have begun to change. Slowly becoming native to the Web of Digital Dreams, they may look and feel differently than their kin that can be met elsewhere across Limbo.

Ichtyrium links

Digitized Ichtyria still feed on the same things in the Darknet as they do elsewhere in Limbo - human memories. They like to lurk behind especially alluring or promising links, just to reveal themselves as segmented programs with a myriad processes starting up, which rapidly entangle all of your computer's power to move anywhere. It can pull your mind out of your body and fully into the website, whereupon it will feast on your cerebral content there. When it is done, your vegetable body will be found slumped over in the computer chair the next day.

[PCs must **Avoid Harm** in order to close enough tabs quickly enough to escape the creature's initial entanglement attempt. If unsuccessful, the ichtyrium makes mental attacks that require you to **Keep it Together** or reduce **Stability** [2]. If you get **Broken** by this, your mind has been devoured and you furthermore exist only as memory stored within the creature's root files.]

The only way to defeat it, next to high-grade script blockers and enlightened anti-malware programs, is to catch a glimpse at its source code. In its true form, it is a multidimensional mass of folded layers of code, quivering algorithms swaying hypnotically in tune with the inaudible melody of higher-dimensional data flows. You can burrow and dig into this code, picking it apart layer by glistening layer, and retrieve its root data. This file, its icon looking like a turbid pearl, can be extracted and downloaded. The encrypted data inside contains all the memories the Ichtyrium has previously devoured.

[Those who can **See Through the Illusion**, or **Observe the Situation** and ask the right questions, can perceive its true form, and attempt to attack its source code. Decrypting the root file requires you to **Investigate** how it can be done.]



Nachtschreck popups

Even as they are born in Limbo, and able to enter and live in Elysium, some Nachtschrecks prefer to dwell in the Darknet instead. Perhaps they thrive on all the depravity and desperation that are so prevalent there. Not content to simply lurk on some node or portal site, waiting for travellers to come by, it instead constantly prowls the Darknet in search of victims. When it has found one that promises to be fun for it to toy with, it assaults them without hesitation.

This assault takes the form of gruesome images and horrifying sounds suddenly appearing on your screen, like popup windows in the regular internet. (Although this should be impossible, since any sensible Darknet user has script-blockers activated all the time.) By unexpectedly subjecting you to its favorite terrifying and nerve-wracking stimuli, such as disgusting mutilations, shocking screams, or rotten bodies wriggling with maggots, the Nachtschreck aims to jumpscare the user.

[When this happens you need to **Keep it Together**. On a fail, you reduce **Stability** [1] and additionally *take -1 to the next roll* against the Nachtschreck's subsequent assaults. This penalty is cumulative upon repeated fails, adding up to -2, -3, and so forth.]

You may never encounter the creature itself, while it keeps hitting you with its jumpscare at irregular intervals - always appearing when you least expect them. With every new popup, it tries to home in ever more closely to your own worst fears. It rapidly descends into the sort of things where you want to scrub your brain with bleach to get rid of the images in your head, and then even beyond that, relentlessly aiming at your most primal personal terrors.

Prolonged exposure to this will wear down even the sturdiest mind after some time. Many victims of a Nachtschreck have ended up as nervous wrecks for the rest of their lives. A few users however, have reported eventually becoming desensitized against the gruesome popups.

[If and when your **Stability** is ever reduced to 0 because of this, it has really gotten to you and you gain the **Broken** Disadvantage, your sanity permanently in tatters. However, if you succeed in remaining unimpressed by the popups three times (not necessarily in a row), you become immune to this particular Nachtschreck's scares. In that case it will usually just lose interest in you, seeking elsewhere for other prey that is more fun to play with.]

Digitized Ichtyrium



Lichtbringer malware

These cryptic threats are only met deep in the Net, where it already touches the borderlands of Limbo - the region where you may or may not still feel like you're sitting physically in front of a screen (but more likely not). They usually appear in the form of friendly-looking user avatars who may pop open a chat window, or send a private message or friend request. Sometimes it approaches you as a helpful moderator or chat bot. Its avatar almost invariably sports some variation of a sword or sun symbol. By this it may be detected for what it really is, possibly allowing savvy users to retreat before the attack comes.

If you engage in any sort of conversation with it, however, it will try to get you to go somewhere with it. Get you to click on this link, download that app, check out this awesome site! Then, without any warning, it will launch a viral attack at you. Often this too is visualized in some way that incorporates the image of a sword or sun. It may look like its avatar walking over to yours and decapitating it with its blade, or like the sun is rising on the site, whitening out your entire screen.

[There seems to be no efficient defense against this attack, except perhaps **Avoiding Harm** to kill your internet connection as fast as possible, before the Lichtbringer script is fully executed.]

The attack kills your internet connection, and leaves you sitting dazzled in front of your computer, left to wonder what the hell just happened. It also gives you a severe case of insomnia, but you will usually not realize this right away. What has happened is that the Lichtbringer malware has hacked your mind, installed itself directly into your neocortex, and from there attacked your very soul, severing your spiritual connection to Limbo.

[This experience in itself is unsettling enough to require most people to **Keep it Together**.]

This spiritual connection will grow back after a while (or at least it does for most people, eventually...), but until it does, you are inexplicably unable to uplink to any but the most basic, i.e. Elysium-based, networks. In addition, you will also find yourself almost completely unable to sleep - and even if you can manage, your rest is always dreamless.

[The PC must **roll +Soul** every night. On **(15+)** they manage to fall asleep. On a **(10-14)** they fall into a short, dreamless sleep, waking up exhausted the next day. The GM gains **1 Hold** for the exhaustion. On **(-9)** they can't sleep at all. The GM gains **2 Hold** for the exhaustion.

Only once the player has rolled **(15+)** two nights in a row, the PC's connection to Limbo is healed again, and everything returns to normal.

Nobody seems to know where the Lichtbringer malware comes from, why it does what it does, or *how* it even does it. There are certainly a lot of people online who would dearly like to find out though! However, most of those in the know about the creatures are too scared to venture anywhere near the areas where their

presence has been reported, so most investigations into Licht-bringers progress slowly, or not at all.

Darthea-infested streaming sites

Creatures born of humankind's suppressed desire for perverted sex, darthea inhabit the borderlands between dream and reality, ever sniffing around for those amongst us who have the darkest appetites. All of this makes them right at home in the Darknet.

Some of them prefer to hunt alone, stalking porn streaming sites, fetish chat rooms, and pedophilic galleries in solitary search for victims.

Others... have organized. Funhouse is a darthea-influenced webbing of streaming sites where you can watch parties, orgies, and straight up porn. A lot of it is located in the Darknet but several of its sites are also available from the clearnet, such as *rave247*, *wildest_party_ever*, and *viproomsecrets*. The webbing offers free access to a limited number of video clips and live streams of, well, the wildest parties and celebrations anywhere - and if you pay for upgraded access, you get to view the uncut, uncensored, full versions, plus extra content. *A lot* of extra content.

All of that content is sexually charged, and it is very easy to drift from relatively harmless Spring Break party videos to more and more vulgar, obscene, and depraved "celebrations". If you watch these clips and streams for too long, however, you inevitably start to crave to be part of the kind of uninhibited hedonistic excesses shown there. And that is exactly when you open your mind to possession by one of the darthea that infest the webbing's sites.

A coven of Passion Magicians in Elysium has discovered this, and uses it for their own purpose: To partake in the orgiastic fornications along with the darthea-possessed hosts. An occasional special highlight is the birth of a libith from the body of one of these hosts, and the videos of that happening are amongst the most exclusive content on the webbing.

Of course, the hosts never last for very long (and neither do the libiths, usually). But there will always be more viewers who would just *love* to receive one of the elusive invitations to join the ranks of the 'party animals'. They're just waiting in line to be let in on the depraved fun times.

Psyphago trap spaces

We humans love ourselves a good riddle. A nice hard escape room game, a captivating mystery series in our stream, or one of those hot new mandala mind-mazes - we just cannot resist the temptation and challenge of a well-crafted puzzle being set before us.

Some psyphagi have realized this and learned to exploit it. Trapped in Limbo, they desire nothing more than to be physically corporeal once again, and for that, they merely need to trap a mind in one of their dream prisons so they can take over its body and go on a hedonistic rampage. How convenient that we are practically begging to be let into just these mind-prisons, if only

they are designed well enough to lure us in. And even if we don't enter of our own free will, the psyphago merely needs to wait until we fall asleep in front of our screens - so it can overpower us in the usual way, and just throw us in there after all.

Browser games like *Escape from Auschwitz*, interactive detective shows like *Real Hard Case*, and puzzle challenges such as *Maharadscha Monsoon* can be found very close to the clearnet, and never fail to draw in some intrigued visitors. Once you start playing or watching, however, you soon find yourself unable to stop. You may want to turn off the computer and get up from your chair, but there's no computer anymore, and no chair. You are trapped in there.

[At this point, the psyphago will launch its possession attempt and the PC must **Keep it Together** to prevent it from possessing her body in Elysium and using it unhindered in its pleasure-driven pursuits. On a (10+), you can break free at the last moment, and turn off the game/stream/app after all.]

Once trapped, you have no other way to get back your body than to get out of the dream prison on your own. The key to escaping a psyphago's prison is that it invariably consists of a riddle of some sort - and it is in the riddle's nature that it is possibly solvable. Additionally, the psyphago is away, partying in your body, and so cannot directly prevent you from trying anything. You can in fact usually move around the place relatively freely. You just cannot leave.

So now you just have to beat the escape game, figure out whodunnit in the detective show, or crack that final level of the mandala challenge. Unfortunately, the psyphago may have left a few threats in there, obstacles and antagonists shaped from minor dream creatures, who are trying their utmost to hinder you in your progress through the goddamn thing. But surely nothing you couldn't handle, experienced gamer / criminal investigator / puzzle crack that you are?

[PCs will have to **Investigate** to uncover mysteries and solve puzzles, **Observe Situations** to discover clues and hidden objects, and must perhaps ultimately **See Through the Illusion** in order to find a loophole to slip out through.]

Even once you manage to return to your body though (if you manage), you will have to face one last horror - the consequences of what the psyphago has done while it was in control. You may have some explaining to do for 'your' actions, and you will almost certainly suffer physical repercussions.

[When returning to your body after even a relatively short psyphago possession, you must **Endure Injury**, against a **Harm** rating equal to [½ the number of days you were possessed, to a maximum of 4]. This represents a mix of hangovers, lack of sleep, physical overexertion, and actual injuries from fights and accidents it carelessly got you into. In addition, if you were possessed for longer than a week the GM may give you a new Disadvantage related to the possession - for example **Wanted** (you done some bad things), **Nemesis** (messed with some bad people), **Condemned**

(contracted an STD), or **Drug Addict** (your body is hopped up on something hard, now) might be suitable ones.]

TRAPPED HUMAN SOULS

Forever-Gamer

Seeking refuge in an illusion inside the Illusion sounds like an odd concept, but for some of us it is a way to channel our suppressed divinity into an attempt to escape our imprisonment. One can reach Limbo, and attain Enlightened insights that way. Or one can get stuck, forever trapped in the game they are playing. Tirelessly mulling over one more level, one more rank, or one more epic loot, these gamers develop a fervent addiction to their favorite escapism.

Those who get irrevocably lost in their zealous pursuit of pixelated fantasies and polygon spectacle help fuel the Darknet with their relentless gaming energy, in exchange for a permanent respite from their suffering in Elysium. They often start out as people who are, for some reason, able to indulge into their gaming hobbies almost full-time. Perhaps they have overly permissive parents, receive a government pension of some sort, or have inherited enough money so that they never need to work.

They soon leave behind the ranks of regular, casual gamers, and join the highest echelons of their respective fandoms or franchises. And eventually, without them realizing, they are no longer in Elysium at all. They have moved fully into the Darkspace of the Deep Web, fully absorbed by unlocking never-ending layers upon layers of hidden levels, DLC characters to play, trophies to acquire, and minigames to master.

Their faces are permanently fused with full-immersion VR visors, and their lower torsos have been amputated. Not many games need lower body functions after all, and it allows them to ignore the need to take breaks for basic biological relief procedures. They also take up less space that way, in the Dark Arcades where one can find them stored away.

Some say that the games they play are actually complex, encrypted sequences of Darknet code, which they decipher, compute, and re-encrypt as they play them, thus providing the Web with energy and processing power. Sometimes, a Forever-Gamer is removed from the Dark Arcades by tekrons who take them to be installed in the secret Cogitational Vaults instead. This may be an upgrade only granted to the most competent and well-attuned Forever-Gamers. Or it may be a punishment for those who failed in their computational duties to the Great Machine.

Forever-Gamer

WebSpectre

When a teenager downloads illicit software from the Darknet that promises her the most immersive cybersex experience yet. When an old man spends billions on neuro-cybernetic research to upload his mind into the web before the cancer gets him. When a mother dies but simply isn't ready to let go, her spirit resisting the pull that drags her down towards Inferno, and finding desperate refuge in the Facebook groups and Discord servers frequented by her children. That is when WebSpectres are created.

They are the ghosts of the internet, online wraiths, whose tattered minds cling to the few remaining shreds of their half-forgotten mortal existence. WebSpectres usually seem like just another user on the internet at first, but it rapidly becomes apparent that there is a deeply disturbed, and evidently very damaged mind behind that account. Most of them can't seem to write a straight sentence for the life of them, and have severe trouble spelling even common words correctly. Their posts and chats exhibit extremely skewed views and opinions, quickly making other users question their grip on reality.

What they really want is to experience the closeness and community of the living, breathing users of the 'net - but their inability to communicate even this most basic need makes people take them for trolls, haters, flamewar mongers, egregious noobs, or mindless spammers instead. Sometimes, however, some precious few amongst the most empathic users of a chat group or community forum can feel something more behind the deranged ramblings these ghost accounts spew into the feeds and bubbles they have chosen to haunt. They can sense a desperate need for confirmation of their continued existence, for acceptance and validation. A never-ending series of pitiful, futile attempts to connect and communicate - forever doomed by what seems like severe mental disorders or perhaps biological brain damage.

The true reason behind these wretched creatures' failure to communicate is simply that their minds have been erroneously converted to their new digital existence. Perhaps this is some safeguard left behind by the Demiurge, or installed by the High Programmer, to prevent dead souls from taking hold in the dreamworlds and in that way escaping the cycle of punishment and reincarnation. Or it may be the fickle nature of the Darkspace itself, which is reluctant, or downright hostile, or simply not very well suited, to disembodied human souls inhabiting it in this way.

Whatever the real causes, the Truth is that most WebSpectres cannot write a straight sentence because they can barely hold a straight thought. They are all emotions, desperate longings and unchecked impulse, with zero self-control, reflection, or value judgment to balance out their broken ramblings. Many of them don't even seem to know where they are, much less *what* they have become. They just know that there is something really important they need to say, and have to say it right now.

But then more often than not, they forget what it was in the middle of inputting a message into the chat or post window. Their mentally crippled zeal, and the anger and frustration over their countless failed attempts to convey (or even properly grasp) their own intents, add up to a venomous spite. A mindless rage taints every single line they write. And they drift off into the next deranged rant or hateful diatribe, seemingly intended to do nothing but piss off anyone who might still be reading along...

Sometimes however, they do manage to come through with a clear message. Very rarely, in the middle of its confused spamming or flaming, it says the exact words that were the last thing your girlfriend told you before she disappeared last year. It calmly informs you of the access codes to the bank safe holding the family diamonds.

It PMs you a photograph of your mother and you that you didn't know existed, and reminds you in mom's typical tone to make sure to wear a shawl tomorrow because she heard on the telly that the weather's gonna turn cold.

When this sort of thing happens, it can be a profoundly disturbing experience. [PCs may need to **Keep it Together**, and Disadvantages such as **Guilt**, **Repressed Memories**, or **Obsession** can be triggered by it, depending on the circumstances and backstories of all involved] But any hope of writing them back after such a message is usually a doomed attempt. The WebSpectre's rare moments of coherency are fleeting, and it will most likely go right back to insulting you or rambling on about completely unrelated things.

But the seed of doubt may have been planted, and a flickering ember of hope may have been sparked. What if the person is somehow, somewhere, impossibly still alive after all? What if they could be found again, and rescued? How many of those who have disappeared into the uncharted depths of the Darknet have initially sought to venture there because a WebSpectre lured them into searching for a lost loved one?

No one knows for sure. But their number may account for hundreds, if not thousands of missing person cases related to the internet in some way.



CHAPTER 5

THE DARKEST AND DEEPEST-BURIED SECRETS OF THE NET

The Darknet itself is based on and intimately connected to the Demiurge's Great Machinery - that incomprehensibly vast, arcane clockwork device that weaves the Illusion keeping humankind imprisoned, and which makes up a bulk of what the Machine City in Metropolis is composed of. This Divine Machinery has many aspects, as its occult workings block our senses from reaching out to any of the other dimensions and realms out there in the True Reality of the cosmos.

LIMBO

The Darknet, as originally created and still administered by the High Programmer, predominantly uses those aspects of the Machinery that regulate interactions between Elysium and Limbo.

Power over our dreams, and access to the Vortex, were once important bases of our divine power as Awakened Humans. In order for our imprisonment to be sufficiently stable, the Demiurge had to cut our connection to that realm, fiercely. However, not even He could keep us out of Limbo permanently - even His Divine Machinery can only severely restrict our access, reducing it to brief and fleeting visits, during which we are mostly helpless and passive spectators, bereft of any real agency.

But once we start accessing the internet, we're allowed to "interface" with Limbo much more actively, and much more on our own terms. A wellspring of human dreams, visions, ideas, and raw creativity becomes available to us, and if you delve deep enough, the entire collective human subconscious, The Akashic Record, and ultimately the Vortex itself, are at your fingertips as they flit across your keyboard.

The ability to access Limbo via the Darknet also means tapping into the Divine Machinery itself. The Darknet doesn't just *pass by* the Demiurge's devices for blinding and crippling us, it sits on the very structure that enables those devices in the first place.

The Darknet is one branch of the Divine Machinery (there are many others, of course: One for every realm or aspect of Reality that must be kept hidden from us), and we have learned to hack it and make it work for us.

But we are like children exploring the controls of an idling bulldozer in the dark. There is much that we don't yet understand, and it is never without danger to transgress against the Illusion.

TIME AND SPACE

Aside from its ability to open up gateways to Limbo, another essential aspect of the internet is its connection to parts of the Demiurge's Machine that control Time and Space.

When chatting online, posting on social networks, or even just sending messages from our phones to the other side of the globe, veritable chasms of distance are bridged within mere instants, as casually as the flick of a wrist.

Commonly seen as just another part of the ever-progressing march of globalisation, of the world becoming smaller and communication between far-removed people getting quicker and easier, this actually subverts the nature of the Illusion to no small degree. The Demiurge's deceptions are heavily reliant on people feeling small, alone, and isolated in a large, unknowable world. The internet actively threatens that Illusion.

There are side-effects, however. It seems the closer we get to shedding the shackles of Space, the more viciously the chains of Time begin to pull us back down. One of the most common effects is that of the *Wiki Walk Time Loss* - where you realize you have spent hours and hours in front of your computer, but can't even properly remember what you were actually doing in that time...

Also, our sleep rhythms suffer, we feel as if we had less and less time - while wanting to spend more and more of it online. And of course, sometimes the internet just refuses to work for us altogether for some time: There are denials of service due to outdated timestamps. Online calls lag behind by half a minute, making fluent conversation impossible and painfully reminding us of the actual distances between us. The delivery of messages is indefinitely delayed. We are told the completion of a simple download is going to take 57 days, 18 hours, and 37 minutes - and then the timer counts *up*, as each single kilobyte takes forever to transmit.

Outside of these occasional disturbances, however, the world is indeed - and literally - at our fingertips when we are using the internet. Nothing is out of reach, anything can be found, anyone contacted almost at the speed of thought... it can feel close, so close, to being truly divine once more...

Wiki Walk Time Loss

Most everybody knows this experience. In Kult, it can take even more extreme forms.

When you fail a roll on some potentially time-consuming task in the internet, the GM may ask you to *Keep it Together* or lose [several hours / an entire day / several days], after which you have only the vaguest and most fragmented recollections of what you have actually done during that time.

You may well realize that you are starved for sleep and nourishment after this time, and may have to *Endure Injury* [against Harm 0/1/2] or suffer a physical collapse.

Roswell

My research has solidified into almost tangible proof of the theory long held by many: That something came into the world at Roswell in 1947.

Was it a Forgotten God that fled its imprisonment in the Machine City, breaking free from the constant experiments the tekrons kept performing on it, and that in its flight crashed into the Illusion by accident? Was it headed for Gaia, and that's why it "came down" where it did, namely in the middle of a huge desert?

Was it some sort of Master Tekron, or perhaps an aspect of the High Programmer itself? Perhaps it was planted in Elysium, as part of a complex scheme instigated by the servants of Malkuth, because she had contingencies in place for what would happen after that?

Or was it perhaps an Artificial Deity, some robotic or cybernetic monstrosity (un)knowingly imbued with a spark of the divine by human scientists in their relentless search for a god in the machine, which subsequently emerged into full existence at that place and time in history?

All the evidence points to something like this, although a truly clear picture as yet refuses to emerge for me. But just look at the facts:

Holograms... contact lenses... night vision technology... solar cells... hovercrafts... video tapes... microchips... the SR-71 Blackbird... All of these came about seemingly out of nowhere, and all were "invented" within the same decade-and-a-half after Roswell.

Something did come into the world, then and there, and it has changed and influenced all of history ever since.

And it evidently had something to do with the nuclear detonation at nearby Trinity in 1945, as well, just two years prior to the Roswell "crash". Many leading scholars and investigators, myself included, subscribe to the assumption that the first-ever nuclear blast there must have torn a massive gap through the Veil in that entire region. A valid claim can be made that this must have been what made it possible for... whatever happened at Roswell, to happen there of all places.

Further, and much more recently, it makes you wonder whether it is really a coincidence that there is now a supercomputer called "Trinity" in Los Alamos - and what it may be that this thing is truly used to calculate...

OTHER REALMS

While the internet taps into the Realm of Dreams, most 'regular' internet users these days only get to access a very watered-down, tightly controlled glimpse of it. Via the clearnet available to pretty much anybody, only the most shallow and sanitized areas of Limbo can be accessed. These areas are where mainstream fantasies live, such as popular movie and video game franchises, streaming sites for TV shows and porn clips, and the collective miniature dream-realms of social media, chat rooms, forum communities, MMORPGs, etc.

Tiphareth reigns supreme in these parts of the Net, and her servants include Magicians of Dreams and Passion who do their very best to keep humanity distracted with entertainment and spectacle. Hardly anything of true substance can be found here, unless you never stop digging, and eventually reach deeper.

Only the most determined, clever, and talented of hackers and Darknet users will ultimately discover the pathways that allow them access to the True Net that extends into the Darkspace between Elysium, Metropolis, and Limbo. But once there, one can find representations of other realms, too.

The Great Machinery that controls the Illusion is tied into *all* of the other dimensions, and therefore, the arcane technology that powers it gives the Darknet inexplicable and deeply-rooted connections to the Labyrinth, Achlys, Inferno, and perhaps - just perhaps - even to Gaia.

By hacking the Great Machine, Malkuth's servants have forged a path directly into the inner workings of the Illusion itself, and if you reroute your browsing endeavours through the endless circuits of the Darknet far enough, there's no telling what strange and alien places you might end up at, and what otherworldly beings you will encounter there.

Be warned however: It is very hard to be sure about the actual Reality of these places and creatures you discover. Since the Darknet is so strongly rooted in humankind's Dreams, and every thing, every memory, every fantasy exists *somewhere* in the dreams, you will never know with final certainty whether what you are seeing or experiencing is *actually* Inferno, or Metropolis, or the Labyrinth beneath Ktonor... or whether it's just someone's memory of it, or a fantasy based on second-hand accounts that someone has read or heard, or even purely just a product of someone's imagination, with no real basis to it whatsoever.

Sure enough however, many of the demons and other entities that crawl up through the Darkspace and inch their way towards the lights and sounds and flesh and souls of Elysium, are real enough for anybody's purposes. By the time you ultimately find out about that however, it is far too late to correct any mistaken assumptions you might have made up to that point.

MALKUTH'S HIVE

Another well-kept secret of the Darknet is that it did not simply suffice for Malkuth to convince the High Programmer, as well as several of her fellow Archons, to join into a Pact with her, to bring the Internet about. She also needed the services of the tekrons to make possible the connection between Elysium and the Divine Machinery of Metropolis she strived for.

To that end, the Rebel Goddess has hijacked an entire hive of the biomechanical servitor creatures, and bent them to her service. Just as the High Programmer tends to the software that the Darknet runs on, they maintain its hardware. Laying cable, repairing ancient transistors, installing holographic interfaces, dismantling rust-eaten cogwheel apparatuses, rerouting occult switchboards... the tekrons of Malkuth's Hive have their arcano-technological work cut out for them.

Initially, the Archon of Awakening intended for the repurposed Machinery to become a vehicle for the Enlightenment of humankind. Tiphareth, with whom Malkuth had an alliance at the time, ostensibly supported this, but has since fallen out of synch with that particular goal. She has found a different use for the Net, and pursues her own agendas in it now. Netzach and Yesod likewise strive to enforce their own Principles, and seek to strengthen their own power bases by using the Net for their own ends.

But it is still Malkuth who controls, via her loyal tekron hive, the center-most technology that powers it all: The *Cogitational Vaults* that contain the so-called *Master Farms*.

MASTER FARMS AND COGITATIONAL VAULTS

There have long been rumors amongst seekers of forbidden knowledge and travellers of the darkest corners of the net, that there must be some terrifying secret at the heart of how the Darknet actually works. It is of course trivial to observe that the technology powering it is actually of an occult nature at heart, and that it needs to be powered by some arcane source in order to keep running.

Many have theorized that a constant stream of human sacrifices is needed to keep it working - and that this is the true purpose of those vast underground installations far beneath the Machine City, of which our earthly server-farms are merely pale Elysian reflections. All the occult wiring, all the digital invocations, all the data flows that operate and permeate the entire Darknet, can be traced back to these places, which causes many to call them the Master Farms.

Only the fewest have ever actually seen these elusive, well-hidden places with their own eyes - and even fewer have ever returned from them. No one has ever been allowed access to them, or even granted knowledge about their exact locations, and the tekrons

of Malkuth's Hive guard and defend them relentlessly.

Those theories on human sacrifices seem to explain the constant stream of mysterious disappearances connected to the Darknet - yet they are not entirely correct. The whole Truth is even worse than that.

What is true, is that the minions of Malkuth who are operating the Net require a constant supply of human victims to keep powering it. But, these people are not simply sacrificed. A much darker fate awaits those who get abducted by Malkuth's hijacked and repurposed tekrons to be dragged off to the Cogitational Vaults hidden in the depths of the Machine City.

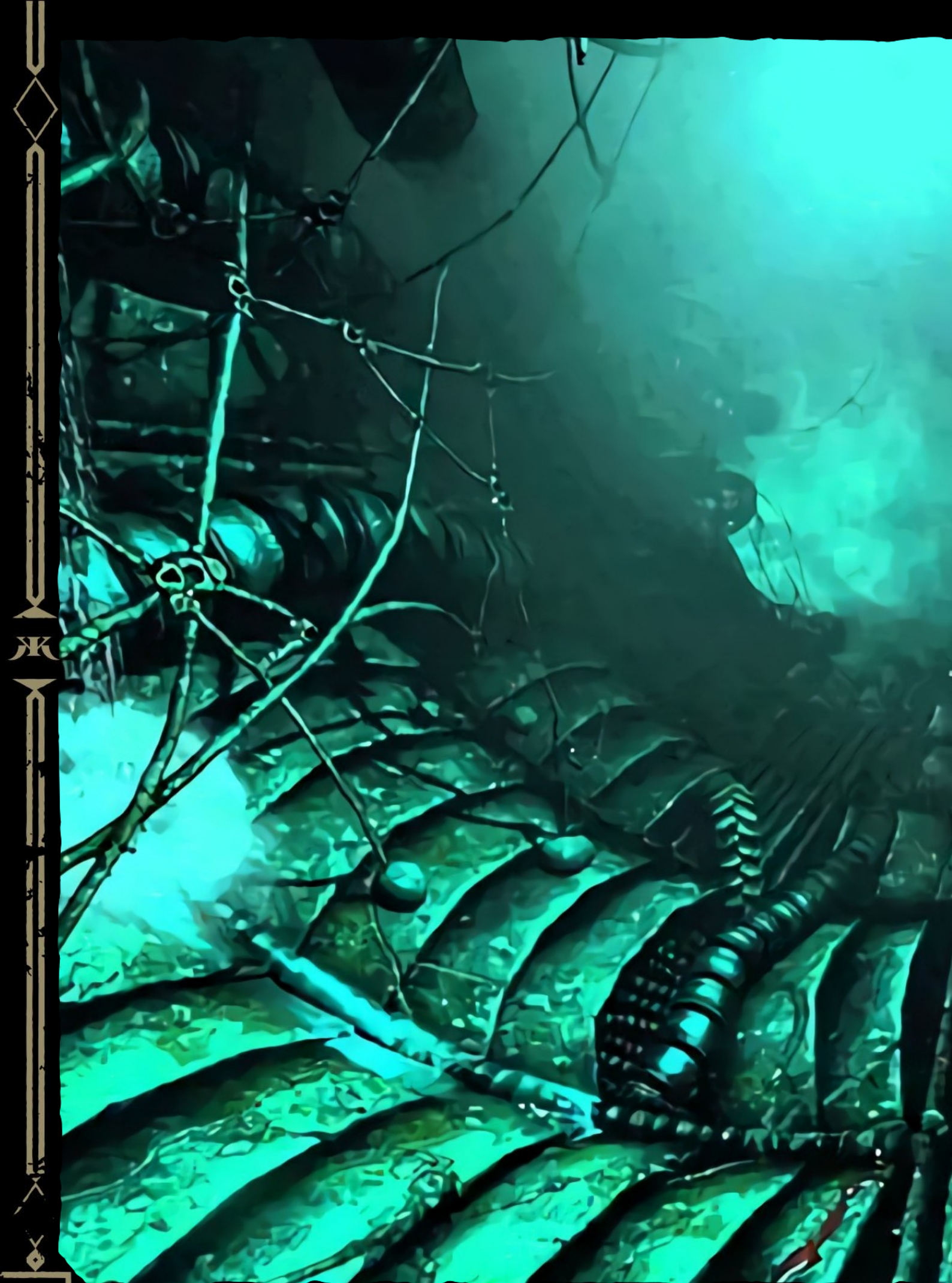
This is the central, and best kept secret at the heart of the Darknet:

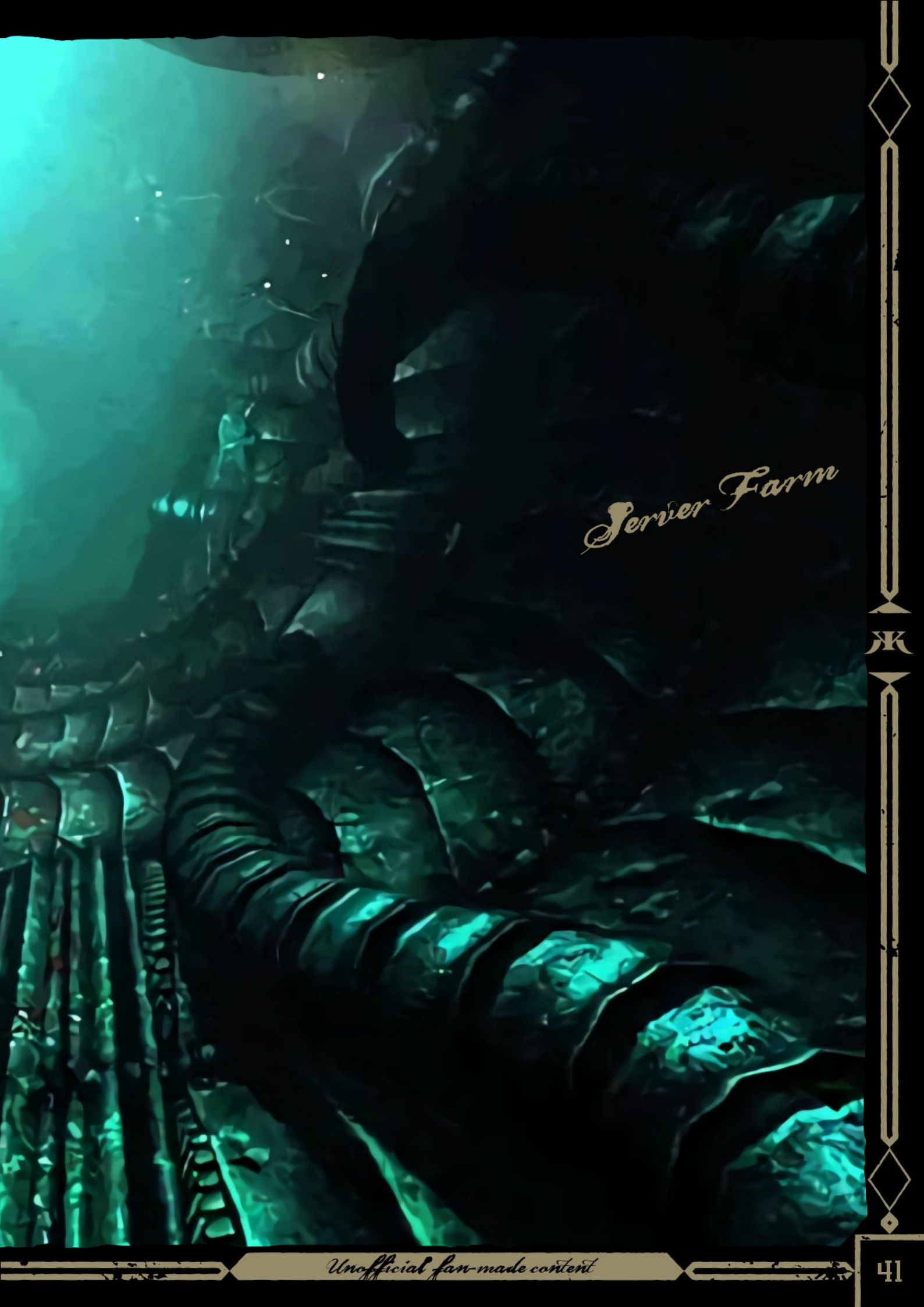
The internet, and the misappropriation of the Demiurge's Machinery that it represents, could never be achieved simply by flicking some arcane switches and reprogramming some occult circuit boards of the Great Machinery to make it work in new and different ways. Instead, all of that is ultimately only made possible by having *sentient minds* forged into the very circuits of the Master Farms. It requires thinking brains, conscious and aware, who are used as 'translators' of the Darknet's eternal streams of data. They must filter every single impulse coming through its wires and correctly convert it to the Darknet's new and radically altered purpose, to make it work as the Rebel Goddess of Enlightenment wants it to.

And the simple fact of the matter is that tekron brains won't work for that. Their biomechanical cognitive programming is too straightforward, too limited. It takes 'unfettered', aware, human brains to be hooked up directly into the Great Machine to provide that.

This is the ultimate danger to those who dig too deep and dwell too long in the Darknet's most forbidden corners. If and when your extended investigations into other realms and dimensions make the Illusion break down towards the Machine City, and the tekrons notice your skill at manipulating their Sacred Machinery's circuits and purpose... they will come for you, and take you with them to the Cogitational Vaults, where they readjust your status from your previous settings as a "user", to become a "master unit" instead.







Servier Farm

DEEP DARK WEB

A supplement for KULT: Divinity Lost

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THE DEEP DARK NET

We humans have always sought to bridge the distances of space between us, and communicate across great ranges. From smoke signals to morse code, to radio transmissions and telephone networks - the eventual rise of a web of interconnected computers was merely a matter of time, effort, and available technology.

This book explores the internet through the dark lens of Kult.



We're desperately looking for a god in the machine.

Sure enough, we never found one. But that doesn't keep us from dearly wishing it was there.

It's what we humans always do - we desperately keep looking for a god, anywhere!

We just forget the most obvious place to look: Inside Ourselves.

We are the only gods around.

It's Us we are looking for in the machine.



IN MEMORY OF RYAN NOR+HCOTT

Ryan Northcott, a beloved and respected member of the KULT family and a pillar in the KULT community has passed away.

He was a passionate fan of the game since the early days. A writer, creator and musician that was, like many of us, seduced by KULT and its dark worlds. He always strived to keep the game alive, to introduce it to new players, and sought to build an active fan base.

As a person, Ryan was passionate and very direct. If he did not understand or if he disliked something, he always was clear about that. He could be stubborn and fought against ideas that he believed to be wrong or not true to the soul of KULT. But he also praised the things he found to be great, and could always change his mind. And he had a wonderful and raw humor and many discussions we had online erupted in laughter and bad jokes. With him in the projects everything just became better.

He partook in the development of future books that touch on the Underworld and Limbo and his writing in these will now have to be finished by other members of the KULT family. It will live on and become dark and beautiful creations for you others to indulge in.

Ryan has now entered another existence, and I hope there are mysteries for him to solve and wonders for him to experience wherever he is.