

ECLIPSE PHASE

ZONE STALKERS



*A Sourcebook for
The Roleplaying Game of
Transhuman Conspiracy and Horror*



Zone Stalkers is a gamemaster-focused sourcebook for Eclipse Phase:

- Send players to the most perilous place on Mars—for Firewall or for profit!
- **Perimeter Security:** How authorities keep the Zone quarantined—and how to get around it.
 - **Threats:** New monsters, NPCs, and environmental hazards to challenge players.
 - **Locations:** TITAN facilities, ruined habitats, and denizens' lairs.
 - **Plot Hooks:** Reasons to visit the second most awful place in the solar system.

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Part graveyard, part dormant beast, the TITAN Quarantine Zone (TQZ) is a wide swath of Mars that was never reclaimed from the TITANs after the Fall. When the hot war phase of the Fall ended, it became evident that the war machines and exsurgents that still range free in the Zone were no longer advancing on Martian settlements or attacking in any organized way. Some thought that the leaderless monstrosities should be encircled and wiped out. Instead, war-weary transhumanity settled on a contentious policy of quarantine that continues to this day. Now the Zone is a no-man's land, a source of sleepless nights to Planetary Consortium policy makers, and a major place of interest to Firewall—both as a target and as a source of knowledge about the TITANs and their works.

RAISONS D'ÊTRE

Why does the TQZ even exist? Ten years post-Fall, it's a fair question. In the early years of rebuilding, transhumanity didn't have the will or the resources to reclaim the Zone. Now, however, there's consensus among military analysts that it would be possible. A resurgent transhumanity, better prepared and armed with better weapons (many reverse-engineered from the machines themselves), could re-take the Zone—and they could do it without resorting to nukes or other WMDs that would disrupt terraforming.

One answer is that while physically capable of crushing the TITANs' surplus war machines and abandoned exsurgent hordes, transhumanity isn't psychologically prepared. The post-Fall faction wars that set up the present political game board were short and limited, typically fought using mercenary forces without trying to build any sort of *casus belli* with the public. Citizens aren't ready to volunteer en masse to fight the Zone's denizens, and the Consortium doesn't (yet) see any ROI in raising private armies to do it.

More than that, the Zone is actually useful to corps, crooks, spies, scientists, and engineers. The Planetary Consortium and their political puppets can wave the Zone around as a vague but ominous threat. Criminals profit off artifacts from the Zone and the cover it affords smugglers. Researchers can make a fortune reverse-engineering the stuff zone stalkers bring back—provided the provenance of their discoveries stays secret. There are even rumors of black budget hypercorp labs inside the Zone, although given the extreme risk and abundance of out-of-the-way places in the solar system, this seems unlikely.

Finally, some view the Zone as a sleeping dragon, and their admonitions against waking it have not gone unheeded. No politician wants to admit publicly to harboring fears that the Zone is merely dormant, but in private, quite a few do.

MISSION THEATER

The TQZ is a roughly triangular area with vertices running from the eastern slopes of Arsia Mons to just southwest of Olympus Mons on the Amazonis Planitia to Gale Crater, south of Elysium. It covers parts of Tharsis, the Amazonis Planitia, Lucus Planum, and the Elysium Planitia. Ma'adim Valles (location of the Martian Gate and Pathfinder City) is a little over 100 kilometers from the Zone's southern edge. Olympus City and the space elevator are almost as close. All of the major Martian cities would be within range of drone strikes if the TITANs attacked again.

GEOGRAPHY AND LANDSCAPE

Terrain within the Zone varies. The eastern extent is part of the Tharsis plateau, which consists mostly of rolling, rocky, windblasted highlands.

The northeast, at the foot of Arsia Mons, descends westward from the relatively smooth slopes of the great shield volcano into rolling lowland terrain, flat but rock-strewn. Much of the northern and western Zone is flat, interrupted by the occasional crater, ridge, or gully. Not all of the craters are natural. Some are from bombardment during the Fall, while others are comet impact sites. The lack of transhuman population means that ice asteroid bombardment for terraforming is a weekly event. The TTO's timetables of inbound water-ice bodies are publicly available and (mostly) accurate.

The southernmost edge of the TQZ, especially the area north of Pathfinder City, is rugged, with canyons and ridges punctuated by boulder-strewn lowlands. This region is also heavily cratered. The landscape here is dominated by Apollinaris Mons. Qurain's ruins, once a crossroads for highways and rail networks, stand blackened in the great volcano's caldera.

At the center of the TQZ is the White Zone. The White Zone is roughly coterminous with Amazonis Mensa, a plateau with cliff-like edges that's about 130 kilometers wide east-west and 75 kilometers wide north-south.

Like most of Mars, the mountains here are huge, isolated shield volcanoes rather than tectonic ranges. Where the terrain is rugged or heavily ridged, it's the result of long-extinct river systems cutting into the surface.

AREOLOGY

Mensa/mensae	A raised plateau, similar to a mesa on Earth.
Mons	A shield volcano.
Planum/planae	A flat plain .
Sulcus/sulci	An area of grooved terrain.
Tafoni	Holes or hollows in rock, carved by wind erosion (or by nanoswarms).
Yardang	A wind-eroded rock formation.

UNNATURAL FEATURES

Several features of the landscape result directly from the TITANs. These include fractal barrows, termite mounds, and disassembler aeolians (p. 127, *Sunward*).

Fractal barrows can be up to 30 meters high and twice again as long, but some are only 5 meters tall. The disc or fan-like iron protrusions making them up vary in shape and arrangement, and zone stalkers have given them nicknames evocative of their shapes. Sydney Opera House and The Isopod are two well-known ones. The latter is a landmark along the infiltration route stalkers follow from Pathfinder City to the hinterlands of Qurain, while the former overlooks the Mogura Bunkers southwest of Olympus Mons.

Termite mounds are smaller, more numerous, and occur in clusters. They look almost exactly like termite mounds from Earth, except that they range in color from gray to off-white, in stark contrast to the Martian landscape. This is because all of the iron giving the Martian surface its rust color has been extracted from the soil forming them. Termite mounds can be 5 or 6 meters tall and are rarely larger than 10 meters around.

Both mounds and barrows are usually surrounded by a wide radius where the soil has been stripped away to bare rock, having been gathered together into the mound or barrow. The machinery that creates these landforms has never been observed in action, and it's thought that outside of the White Zone, no new ones have sprung up since the Fall.

Disassembler aeolians vary widely in shape and size, but they have a common origin: erosion by massive swarms of wind-born nanobots. Some look like the hoodoos of the Utah deserts on Earth, while others are like yardangs—more sculpted, with top-heavy forms and smoothly bored holes passing through them. Not all aeolians are standing rock formations; others are places where the swarms carved numerous smooth holes in hillsides and rock faces, honeycombing them with tafoni.

MESH CONNECTIVITY IN THE TQZ

The Planetary Consortium uses satellite and ground based stations to jam radio signals in the Zone. Characters within half a kilometer of each other may communicate and set up local meshes by turning up the gain, but beyond this range, communication and

radar detection are impossible without a massively powerful signal booster. Most of the electromagnetic spectrum is jammed, so other forms of signals like microwaves don't work, either.

Tight-beam laser communications are possible, but only with line of sight or some form of relay to a station outside the Zone. Setting up a relay system is difficult, partly because of the rough terrain, and partly because both the Martian Rangers and the Zone's denizens are likely to destroy parts of it if they're detected.

MAPPING

The Consortium can't control observation of the Zone from outside. Satellite imagery of the Zone means that good maps are still available. Calling in a Level 3 g-rep favor yields map overlays marked up by zone stalkers; these provide a +10 bonus to Navigation and Infiltration Tests related to travel through the Zone.

Such maps are likely to be somewhat out of date, however. Getting one with the freshest details might not even be possible, but if the gamemaster allows it, it requires a Level 4 favor. A map that shows the location of untapped artifacts is a Level 5 favor, but data like this will only be shared within the same criminal organization.

INSERTION AND EXTRACTION

The Zone is a huge area with rugged terrain. Even so, the Planetary Consortium and the Martian Rangers have done an impressive job of blanketing it with sensors, patrols, and orbital surveillance. The strength of the surveillance mesh in a given area varies, as does the level of scrutiny with which it's monitored. Perimeter sectors closest to cities are the most closely monitored. The threat level of an area is also factored in, based on sightings of exsurgents or still-active TITAN war machines. Finally, the Rangers also pay more attention to an area if they suspect smuggler or stalker activity.

INFILTRATING ON THE GROUND

Use the Sector Surveillance table (p. 4) to determine how difficult a given section of perimeter is to infiltrate. Sector surveillance levels change from time to time, and are temporarily upgraded if heightened threat activity is reported.

PERVERSE ASSESSMENTS



Major Wu: Captain Kim, while the board commends your swift action in response to the latest exsurgent incursion, we have one question. How did you know where to position your units?

Kim: Swirsky Canyon's the only terrain cover in Omicron-A6f sector. Wastewalkers are smart enough they won't make a run on the perimeter over open ground.

Major Go: Yes, but how did you know it would be sector A6f?

Kim: I need to spell that out?

Go: Yes.

Kim: Anonymous tip.

Wu: An anonymous tip? On activity inside the Zone?

[Silence.]

Wu: Captain?

Kim: Got nothing to add.

Go: Captain, if the League Council knew we were using information from smugglers and zone stalkers to prioritize deployments ...

Kim: Pains me to say, but the Council's not stupid.

Wu: The smugglers could throw you off one of their operations by sending you on a wild chase!

Kim: Hasn't happened, and it isn't going to.

Major Petrosky: And why not, Captain Kim?

Kim: One, because smugglers and stalkers rely on the threat assessments as much as we do. It's in the Guanxi's interest they're accurate. Two, because they know not to fuck with me.

Petrosky: [Laughs before catching himself.] That'll be all, Captain.

Kim: Majors. ❁

Infiltration Tests may be made for teams rather than individuals, assuming the team is on foot and designates one member to pick a route that takes advantage of the terrain to conceal their progress as much as possible. If team members don't follow their guide's directions or combat breaks out, the gamemaster may either call for individual Infiltration Tests or rule that the infiltration attempt fails entirely.

If the team is mounted, a single member may not direct more than one vehicle without breaking radio silence (which imposes a negative modifier on the infiltration attempt). More commonly, once team member in each vehicle will have to guide their own vehicle. The gamemaster may further rule that Pilot: Groundcraft Tests are required to traverse difficult terrain without exposing the vehicle or raising dust.

AERIAL INSERTION/EXTRACTION

Getting in by air is much more difficult, as aircraft tend to be bigger than land vehicles, with hotter exhaust signatures and greater radar visibility. Wise smugglers rely on Mars buggies; some zone stalkers even prefer to go on foot.

INFILTRATION DIFFICULTY MODIFIERS

CIRCUMSTANCE	MODIFIER
Team on foot	+0
Team on foot and wearing camo gear	as modifier for worst gear
Team in ground vehicles	-10
Non-camouflaged vehicles	-10
Non-radar-defeating vehicles	-10
Breaking radio silence	-10
Driving above 20 km/h	-10
Trying to exit zone within 200 km of insertion point after being detected during insertion	-10
Team in aircraft	-30, subtract MoF of Pilot: Aircraft Test (MoS doesn't grant bonus), add bonuses for radar invisibility and any other applicable stealth modifications on vehicle

SECTOR SURVEILLANCE

SECTOR SURVEILLANCE LEVEL	INFILTRATION MODIFIER	OPPOSING PERCEPTION SKILL	DESCRIPTION
White	+10	50	No-go zone; orbital surveillance only. However, all White sectors are deep within the TQZ, not on its borders.
Green	0	60	Adjoining region sparsely settled, no smuggler or stalker activity reported, and/or low threat activity.
Orange	-10	70	Zone perimeter is within 200 km of a mid-sized settlement (5,000–500,000 population), smuggler or stalker activity reported, and/or some threat activity.
Red	-20	80	Zone perimeter is within 200 km of a city (500,000 or more population), rampant smuggler or stalker activity reported, and/or hot zone for threats.

Unless they attempt to fly extremely low to the ground, aircraft trying to enter the TQZ will be automatically detected before they even get close to the perimeter and warned off. Those who ignore warnings will be interdicted (see *Ranger Pursuit and Interdiction*, below).

Attempting to fly low allows an Infiltration Test per the *team in aircraft* circumstance in the Infiltration Difficulty Modifiers table (p. 4). Flying low over the jagged Martian terrain, however, is very risky. Gamemasters should consider the terrain when assigning situational penalties, with considerable risk of a crash if the pilot blows their test.

For those determined to enter by air, judicious use of social engineering and Infosec skill may allow for a window of time during which a given sector is temporarily blinded, or at least too slow in its response times to intercept. The case of the *Hegira*, a massive airship that successfully ran the perimeter, is illustrative (see *Million Year Echo*).

SUBVERTING THE PERIMETER SENSOR MESH

Hacking sensor installations remotely requires subverting the sensor mesh for a sector and installing a back door to temporarily turn them off. If this approach is taken, the gamemaster should map out the network for the targeted sector and allow mesh subversion rolls for the hacker. These systems are actively monitored at all times, however, meaning the hacker will face opposed tests from human infosec specialists. Security AIs are never used to monitor the Zone perimeter.

Social engineering requires expending a c-rep or g-rep favor of at least Level 4 to get someone to look the other way. The person requesting the favor must specify a window of time for the infiltrators to go in and come out; if they miss their window, tough luck.

Up-close subversion using Hardware: Electronics is also a possibility, albeit a difficult one. Sensor hardware ranges in size from large arrays mounted on high towers to smaller arrays mounted at eye level on poles to taggants strewn on the ground. The latter are used mostly in areas suspected to be stalker routes and are of more use in identifying someone who's made an incursion after the fact than in catching them on the way in. Sensors may include some or all of radar, motion sensors, cameras, nanodetectors, and lidar arrays that sample the landscape in front of them, looking for changes in what they recorded previously. The biggest problem with hardware subversion is that sneaking up to the hardware to disable it is usually as difficult as just trying to sneak past it.

RANGER PURSUIT AND INTERDICTION

Ranger patrols consist of 1–2 rangers and 1–2 police baboons mounted in a security model flying car (p. 168–169, *Sunward*) upgraded with articulated machine gun mounts and a missile launcher. Patrols are typically deployed such that reinforcements are no more than 1–2 minutes away if called to fly in at top speed.

RANGER DEPARTMENTS

Four Martian Ranger stations watch over the TQZ perimeter. Each has a specialty based in part on the sectors they patrol. Learning about the characteristics of any of these Ranger departments requires a Level 3 c-rep favor (with other rep networks possibly coming into play based on a given department's characteristics).

PORTMANTEAU RANGERS

Captain Levi Oaxaca

Rep: c-rep 60, f-rep 50

Region: Northwest sectors, from Gale Crater to Erebus Montes

Strength: 80

Specialty: Some Nephew of Zevi's (20% of Rangers are cast members rigged for XP broadcast of a police reality show)

OLYMPUS RANGERS

Major Go Baozhai

Rep: @-rep 20, c-rep 60

Region: Northeast sectors, from Erebus Montes to region of Olympus Mons

Strength: 150

Specialty: Space Elevator Defense, Barsoomian Connections (all patrols are double strength and reinforcements arrive twice as fast; will sometimes bend interdiction rules based on @-rep favors)

NOCTIS RANGERS

Captain Kim Song Ok

Rep: c-rep 40, g-rep 40

Region: East sectors, from region of Olympus Mons to Arsia Mons

Strength: 40

Specialty: Termites in the Frame (20% chance Rangers will accept bribes to call off an interdict)

ELYSIUM RANGERS

Captain Sage Kim

Rep: @-rep 20, c-rep 40, i-rep 20

Region: Southern sectors, from Gale Crater to Arsia Mons

Strength: 60

Specialties: Eyes on the Ground, Firewall Connections, Barsoomian Connections (+10 Perception vs. Infiltration attempts; will sometimes bend interdiction rules based on i-rep or @-rep favors) ■

How Rangers respond to a perimeter run depends on whether it's coming from inside the Zone or out.

If from within the Zone, they'll shoot first and sort through the wreckage later. If the threat looks like it can be handled with the weaponry on their prowler, they'll open up with missiles and machine guns immediately. If they don't have the advantage, they'll retreat and call for back up while trying to keep the threat in sensor range, retreating completely only if they're fired on with weaponry that could take down their car. If the threat looks beyond what Rangers in flying cars can handle, they'll call for military support, possibly hanging around long enough to paint targets for missile strikes.

Should they spot a team running the perimeter from outside, they'll pursue, hailing via radio with warnings to desist. If the interlopers don't stop, the rangers will fire if not outgunned. They won't pursue zone runners more than 5 kilometers into the TQZ, instead noting the incident and descriptions of the perpetrators. Being detected on the way in makes it harder to get out via the same sector, as Rangers within 200 kilometers of the invaders' entry point will be on high alert.

THE BIG GUNS (AND MISSILES)

Direct Action has the contract for ground-based military defense around the TQZ. Their contribution consists of 27 missile batteries forming a belt 100–200 kilometers from the Zone perimeter. The missiles are a combination of surface-to-air and ground-to-ground, the latter being short range but carrying very heavy payloads of conventional explosives. They also have warheads that carry plasma, thermobaric, and other ordnance designed to be effective against swarms.

On high, Althauser Rocketry has the contract for maintaining orbit-to-ground weapons platforms capable of annihilating anything the ground-based missile stations can't. The Planetary Consortium continually denies that these stations have nuclear or even antimatter warheads at their disposal.

In short, if a sentinel team provokes a military response upon attempting to leave the Zone, they'll be needing new morphs. Given the infection risks to the planet, the defense contractors will happily blacken a 1-kilometer radius around a target, and they have the firepower to do so.

LEGAL PENALTIES

Teams apprehended entering or existing the Zone are looking at a quick trial followed by 1–2 years

as indentures or in dead storage if they can't call in the right favors. Coming out with TITAN artifacts or exsurgent lifeforms carries a penalty of 5–10 years. Getting off the hook for an unauthorized TQZ incursion is a Level 4 or 5 c-rep favor and is likely to come with other strings attached.

In the rare cases where exsurgents are captured and identified as such rather than simply being shot and then incinerated, they don't have the right to a trial. If Project OZMA doesn't want them as lab experiments, they're quickly and permanently disposed of.

OVERLAND TRAVEL

Thanks to RF jamming and rugged terrain, the Zone is one of the few big places in the solar system where getting lost is a real worry.

For each day of travel, have one character make a Navigation Test. In especially rugged terrain, calling for Navigation Tests twice a day or even more frequently is appropriate.

Success indicates the team keeps its bearing and stays on course to their objective. Failure indicates they've lost their bearing and must backtrack to a familiar landmark. Backtracking costs 2 hours of travel time, plus 2 more for each 10 MoF, up to a maximum of 12 hours (or however long the team traveled since their last Navigation Test).

On a critical success or an MoS of 30+, the navigator has found a shortcut, cutting 2 hours off travel time. Alternatively, if the gamemaster is using the TQZ Random Encounter table (p. 8), the characters may bypass the Dust Storm result (p. 9).

LAND TRAVEL SPEEDS

The character doing the majority of the driving for a team should make a Pilot: Groundcraft Test once per day (or more if the terrain is extremely difficult). On a success, reduce travel time by 1–2 hours; this represents skill in picking an efficient path through obstacles. On a critical success, the team can also bypass the *Impassable Chasm* result if using the TQZ Random Encounters Table. If characters are riding in more than one buggy, use the Pilot: Groundcraft result from the lead driver, as they'll be the one watching for obstacles and blazing a trail.

Night driving in the Zone can be extremely hazardous—but then, staying put can be, too. Headlights don't illuminate all hazards perfectly, and worse, they draw attention. If the team lacks a driver with enhanced vision or other means of seeing the

TRAVEL SPEEDS

TERRAIN IS:	AVERAGE SPEED	KILOMETERS/DAY (12 HOURS DRIVING)
Rugged (flat ground, shield volcano slopes, old roads)	65 kph	780
Rough (hills and ridges)	45 kph	540
Chaotic (boulder-strewn, broken)	30 kph	240



terrain in the dark, halve travel speeds and apply a -10 to all Pilot: Groundcraft Tests.

Much of the TQZ is rugged terrain, and where roads once existed, they have in many cases been partially eaten or reduced to rubble by the Zone's denizens. Mars buggies and other offroad vehicles can negotiate the terrain, but at nothing close to road speed. Use the Travel Speeds table (p. 6) to determine travel times.

DISTANCES

Due to the many locations that characters in the Zone could be traveling to or from, it's not possible to provide a comprehensive table of travel distances. Gamemasters may choose to eyeball the distances, making travel as long or as short as works well for their scenario.

For those interested in more verisimilitude, the distance-measuring features of Google Earth are invaluable. The recommended procedure is to switch to the Mars view in Google Earth, use the ruler tool to measure the distance, and then fudge for terrain features visible in the satellite imagery.

Where terrain appears relatively flat, for example, use the *Rugged* speed in the Travel Speeds table (p. 6). A team of sentinels may move through several distinct segments of their journey where the terrain alternately allows swift travel or forces them to move at slower speeds—ratcheting up the tension and increasing the chances of running into something unpleasant.

THREATS

War machines and exsurgents aren't the only threats in the Zone. Transhuman interlopers here are of the most desperate sort, the artifacts left behind by the TITANs are not to be trifled with, and the land itself has in some places been altered in dangerous ways by both the TITANs and transhumanity's attempts to fight back against them.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE ZONE

Gamemasters may use the TQZ Random Encounter table (p. 8) as a cookbook for scenario-appropriate encounters that infiltration teams might have while traveling overland in the Zone or take an old school approach and let the d100 fall as they may. In the latter case, the likelihood of an encounter during travel should vary based on the area's threat level, from 1 in 10 per 100 kilometers traveled on the outskirts to 5 in 10 for the White Zone.

Some of these encounters may be avoided or modified by a successful Perception Test. Remember to apply modifiers for environmental factors (e.g., -20 for traveling at night with only normal human vision).

Where zone stalkers have a slang term for one of these hazards, it's given in parentheses in the description.

TQZ RANDOM ENCOUNTER TABLE

ROLL	EVENT
01–06	Wild Saucers (1d10) (p. 11)
07–08	Smugglers (1d10 ÷ 2) (p. 10)
09–11	Anti-Electronics Field (p. 8)
12	Stalker (1d10 ÷ 5) (p. 10)
13–15	Jelly (1) (p. 9)
16–20	Dust Storm (p. 9)
21–28	Headhunters (1d10 ÷ 2) (p. 9)
29–31	Whipper (1d10) (p. 11)
32–33	Yazidis (3d10) (p. 12)
34–35	Cryokinetic Anomaly (p. 9)
36–41	Wastewalkers (1d10 ÷ 2) (p. 11)
42–44	Tacnuke Blast Zone (p. 10)
45–46	Exhumans (1d10 ÷ 2) (p. 9)
47–51	Impassable Chasm (p. 9)
52–53	Shifter (1) (p. 10)
54–57	Airborne Feed (p. 8)
58–59	Snapper (1) (p. 10)
60–61	Wrapper (1) (p. 12)
62–65	Mark II Headhunters (1d10 ÷ 2) (p. 9)
66–69	Airborne Disassembler Swarm (1) (p. 8)
70–73	Fractal (1) (p. 9)
74–75	Thermal Charging Station (p. 11)
76–77	Casimir Perturbance (p. 8)
78–79	Active Bioagents (p. 8)
80–81	Creeper (1) (p. 9)
82–85	Subjective Time Distortion Trap (p. 10)
86–90	Hunter-Killer (1d10 ÷ 2) (p. 9)
91	Transmutation Zone (p. 11)
92–96	Nanovirus (p. 9)
97–98	Warbot (1) (p. 11)
99–00	Self-Replicating Nanoswarm (p. 9)

MODIFIERS

SURVEILLANCE LEVEL	MODIFIER
Green	–20 (max –60)
Yellow	0
Red	+20
White	+50

ACTIVE BIOAGENTS (CAKCK)

The team happens upon an area 10d10 square meters around in which (1d10 ÷ 5) specialized hives per 10 square meters are still pumping out injector nano-swarms. The entire area teems with injector nanobots loaded with toxins like BTX or pathogens such as trigger (pp. 323–324, *EP*). The hives were airdropped during the Fall as countermeasures against biological exsurgents. No one at the time gave much thought to how hard they'd be to clean up if transhumanity survived. Stalkers call running afoul of one of these swarms “getting in the cack.”

AIRBORNE FEED (BLUE FADE)

A weird atmospheric discoloration rolls in, fog-like, off the horizon, blanketing the landscape in mist and tinting everything in sight as if it were viewed through a blue filter. The “fade” is harmless in and of itself, being composed of a mist of plankton-like airborne micro-organisms. However, skin contact or breathing them is nutritious to biological exsurgents. Roll again. If the result is a biological exsurgent (including Yazidis), that encounter occurs. Asyncs making contact with blue fade experience an unlikely feeling of satiety coupled with mild euphoria. Blue fade occurs most frequently at dusk and dawn, but can appear at any time of day.

AIRBORNE DISASSEMBLER SWARM (NANO-BEES)

The team's path is blocked by a large self-replicating swarm of disassembler nanobots (p. 329, *EP*), 100 meters wide. A successful Perception Test by any character spots a weird shimmer in the air. Closer observation reveals a cloud within which stones and outcroppings are being almost imperceptibly eaten away. The nanobots were programmed to ignore organics, but they'll attach to and attack synths and vehicles that pass through the cloud. Stalkers call these swarms “bees” or “nano-bees.”

ANTI-ELECTRONICS FIELD (QUIET)

The team stumbles into an area d100 x 10 meters in diameter where electronics fail completely, as per the exsurgent psi sleight of the same name (p. 372, *EP*). These areas are not detectable from outside. They can be useful refuges from war machines once found and mapped; stalkers call this “chilling in the quiet.”

CASIMIR PERTURBANCE (SQUIRREL TRAP)

A TITAN physics experiment has left an invisible field in which a powerful force or repulsion either pounds matter to the ground (50%) or hurls it into the air (50%). The point person on a team may notice the occasional streak of windborn dust being born up or down with a successful Perception Test. If they fail and bumble into it, they or their vehicle will either be tossed into the air, before flipping backward out of the zone, or will be smashed into the ground and need to be pulled free.

If hurled, the person or vehicle is thrown 1d10 meters into the air and suffers falling damage (with vehicles probably not landing right side up). If smashed, they take 1d10 DV + (1d10 DV per 15 kph of speed) when they hit the perturbation and must be pulled free by a combined SOM of at least 30 (more, for heavy vehicles).

Casimir perturbances are fortunately small, no more than $1d10 \div 5$ meters across. They can be spotted automatically in dusty conditions and once found can be mapped by tossing pebbles into them.

CREEPER

A creeper exsurgent (p. 369, *EP*) billows relentlessly toward the team and attacks.

CRYOKINETIC ANOMALY (ZERO HOLE)

A cylinder 1d10 meters in radius and 100 meters high has been chilled to absolute zero. Characters not in vacsuits take 1d10 cold damage per Action Turn; those in vacsuits or with cold tolerance augmentations begin taking the same damage after 3 Action Turns in the field. The source of the anomaly is a pentagonal metal plate buried 3 meters underground, featureless but for several curvilinear markings characteristic of TITAN design. The unusual layer of frost in the anomaly may be spotted with a successful Perception Test. Cryokinetic anomalies are often found in five-pointed arrays, with one anomaly at each point.

DUST STORM

The team spots a re-entry flare lighting up the distant horizon followed by thunder, some ground-shaking, and a mushroom cloud—a comet being dropped into the White Zone for terraforming. Teams who've set up a mesh relay system to outside the Zone, or who checked the comet timetables before going in, can make a Research Test to find out where the blast hit from the TTO's public records. If they then succeed at a Navigation Test, they can skirt the edge of the dust storm kicked up by the impact. If not, they'll be engulfed in a red-out dust storm that lasts for a full day, reducing visibility to zero. Other encounters may occur during the storm (roll again). Wastewalkers and fractals will take advantage of conditions to get a jump on prey. A lone Yazidi (p. 12) might seek shelter with the team. A result of *Impassable Chasm* could go very poorly indeed. All other encounters should be ignored.

EXHUMANS

A group of predator exhumans (p. 362, *EP*) has come to the Zone to test their strength against the exsurgents. Depending upon how badass the team looks, their reaction may range from avoidance to ambush to demanding that the team hand over one of their number and watch while the exhumans eat them alive before letting the survivors pass. If defeated or sufficiently intimidated, they may share information on the area, possibly even acting a bit fanboyish toward high-rep ultimates.

FRACTAL

A fractal (p. 382, *EP*) hunts the team. It's armed with an assault rifle railgun (Kinetic Weapons skill 60) and attached to a thrust vector (8/40) mobility system. It's an opportunistic scavenger; its strategy is to wear its prey down or pick up the pieces after something else attacks them. It will attempt to stay out of range of weapons that can damage it badly (e.g., spray and energy weapons), keeping the team in sight and taking occasional pot shots from extreme range. If they give chase in buggies, it flies across a chasm or otherwise uses terrain cover to evade, then starts following them again. It will break off the chase if it takes 50% or more of its Durability in damage.

HEADHUNTERS

A swarm of headhunters (p. 383, *EP*) appears from over a nearby ridge and dives in to attack. They'll carry off any heads they capture to a still-active recharging bunker, outside of which lays a grisly collection of heads in various stages of decay.

HUNTER-KILLER

A wing of hunter-killer UAVs (p. 383, *EP*) spots the team and moves to defend their territory. They are programmed to strafe and harass and will return to their distant launch bunker if they suffer losses.

IMPASSABLE CHASM

The team encounters a deep gorge. Going around it adds half a day to their trip.

JELLY (FUCKSLIME)

A jelly exsurgent (p. 370, *EP*) slinks about in the team's path. It's not fast enough to catch mounted characters, but it will come after those on foot, trying to absorb them.

MARK II HEADHUNTERS

Same as the *Headhunters* encounter, above, but with Mark II Headhunters (p. 12).

NANOVIRUS (WHITE CACK)

A tiny, burned-out habitat dome is surrounded by corpses, badly desiccated from laying in the dry Martian cold for a decade. Disturbing the corpses may activate a dormant nanovirus (p. 384, *EP*) that will then contaminate the area (and the characters). Other than having the good sense not to touch corpses in the Zone, there's no way to detect and avoid the nanovirus initially.

SELF-REPLICATING NANOSWARM (UNCLE VENGEANCE)

The team tops a rise. The floor of the next crater or depression shimmers with billions of tiny motes of light. The motes are a massive TITAN nanoswarm (p. 383, *EP*). It will lash out toward the team, seeking new feedstock.

SHIFTER

The team encounters a tiny crater or small depression filled with metal, as if it had melted and been deposited here. If approached, the shifter (p. 370, *EP*) moves like liquid, perfectly mimicing one of the team before attacking.

SMUGGLERS

The team surprises a smuggler crew loading or unloading a shipment from a SLOTV (p. 239, *EP*). Likely cargoes include cortical stacks, stolen morphs (possibly still with occupants), contraband non-fabricatables, or non-restricted microfacturing equipment. The smugglers won't interfere with infiltrators, preferring to get away as quickly as possible, but if approached correctly might have information about the surroundings, including warnings of threats. If statistics are needed, the *Arms Dealer*, *Criminal Enforcer*, and *Gang Member* (pp. 3 and 7, *NPC File 1: Prime*) and the *Extropian Smuggler* (p. 159, *EP*) may be used.

SNAPPER

A large, wrecked vehicle ahead promises shelter and possibly supplies, but when approached, it proves to be a snapper exsurgent (p. 370, *EP*) which shambles to the attack.

STALKER

The team interrupts a lone zone stalker or a small group plying their trade. They will be suspicious of having whatever claim they're after jumped, but will share information on the surrounding area on a tit-for-tat basis if convinced the team isn't competition. Both the *Covert Ops* (p. 6, *NPC File 1: Prime*) and *Zone Stalker* (p. 239, *Transhuman*) characters are good templates if statistics are needed.

SUBJECTIVE TIME DISTORTION TRAP (ECHO)

A 10-meter wide hexagon of thick glass buried under a thin layer of soil disrupts the subjective experience of time. Any character failing a WIL x 2 Test is caught in an endlessly drawn-out moment during which they're unable to realize they should continue to act. This is most dangerous to characters on foot, who may simply stand there until they collapse if not pulled clear by companions. A successful Perception test spots a glint of glass not covered by soil.

TACNUKE BLAST ZONE

This is a blackened zone several kilometers wide. Characters traveling through it without protection are subject to a sickness-inducing (but non-fatal) radiation dose (p. 201, *EP*).

DEATH VALLEY AF9



Chat Transcript, Jake Carter and Violet Perdido, Firewall Back Country VPN, no timestamp

VP: Have you seen this XP, lamb?

JC: Death Valley AF9? No. Should I have?

VP: It's gorier than the usual Experia pablum. The rest of their product this year is all Bollywood revivals and extreme sports on Tethys.

JC: Accountants on furlough betting their rent-a-morphs on bungie jumping ain't extreme.

VP: To my point.

JC: And you been paying attention to this why?

VP: I'm a whore, lamb. Would it surprise you how many fantasies derive from XPs?

JC: Reckon not.

VP: Anyway, this XP—it's well endowed in the spiky genitalia department. Loads of internal organs and cannibal mutants, as well. It's also ... very arty.

JC: So?

VP: It's a trend. There are dozens of XPs like this coming out now. Jaded kids run the Zone perimeter; horror show ensues. Often they're lead astray by a zone stalker or a smuggler.

JC: New meme? They wanna make the TQZ into a blood-and-tentacles art porn kind of thing? That's pretty fuckin' insulting.

VP: I don't think it's intentional.

JC: C'mon.

VP: Stay with me a moment. Tell me what it's like out there.

JC: Like any big stretch of open desert, least until you get deeper in. Only—no mesh.

VP: It must feel different.

JC: I guess. Termite mounds and fractal barrows look weird, but they don't do anything. The stuff you don't see coming is what'll murder you hard. You can't jump at shadows; the thing that'll kill you might be in the place you jump to. It's tense and ... tedious.

VP: So ... it's boring?

JC: Ha. Yeah, sort of. I mean, you want it to be boring. But going back to your XP feed, one that's all about being super tense about dyin' but also bored out of your skull probably wouldn't sell much.

VP: Maybe imagining it as exsurgent snuff helps people cope.

JC: What?

VP: 280 million people living on the same planet with that place. Everyone spends at least some time each day trying not to think about it.

JC: Most of 'em didn't have people out there.

VP: Yes, you're different. They came from Earth. And no one's making XPs like this about Earth.

JC: You think it's memetic warfare?

VP: Maybe the reverse. Healing.

JC: Ha! Fuck. Trade notes with Moxie, huh? This is her kind of scene. Let me know if anything smells off.

VP: Sure.

JC: Worst thing out there is the ruins. I don't like those.

VP: Worse than the monsters?

JC: Yeah, worse. Those you can point a gun at. Memories, you can't shoot. ❁

THERMAL CHARGING STATION (HOT PLATE)

A heat-based charging station for large TITAN war machines is embedded in the soil here. It is 1d10 ÷ 5 meters wide and otherwise similar to a cryokinetic anomaly (p. 9), except that it does heat damage instead of cold damage. A successful Perception Test spots the area due to slightly melted rocks.

TRANSMUTATION ZONE (BONE BOG)

This invisible, virtually undetectable zone 1d10 meters in radius transmutes matter as the matter transformation exurgent psi sleight (p. 372, *EP*). Bones in biomorphs are softened to a rubbery consistency, leaving limbs passing into the zone useless. This effect cannot be resisted but can be fixed by time in a healing vat.

WARBOT

A warbot (p. 383, *EP*) still defends a seemingly unimportant landscape feature, attacking anything that comes within 1 kilometer of it. It will not abandon its post to pursue anything that flees.

WASTEWALKERS

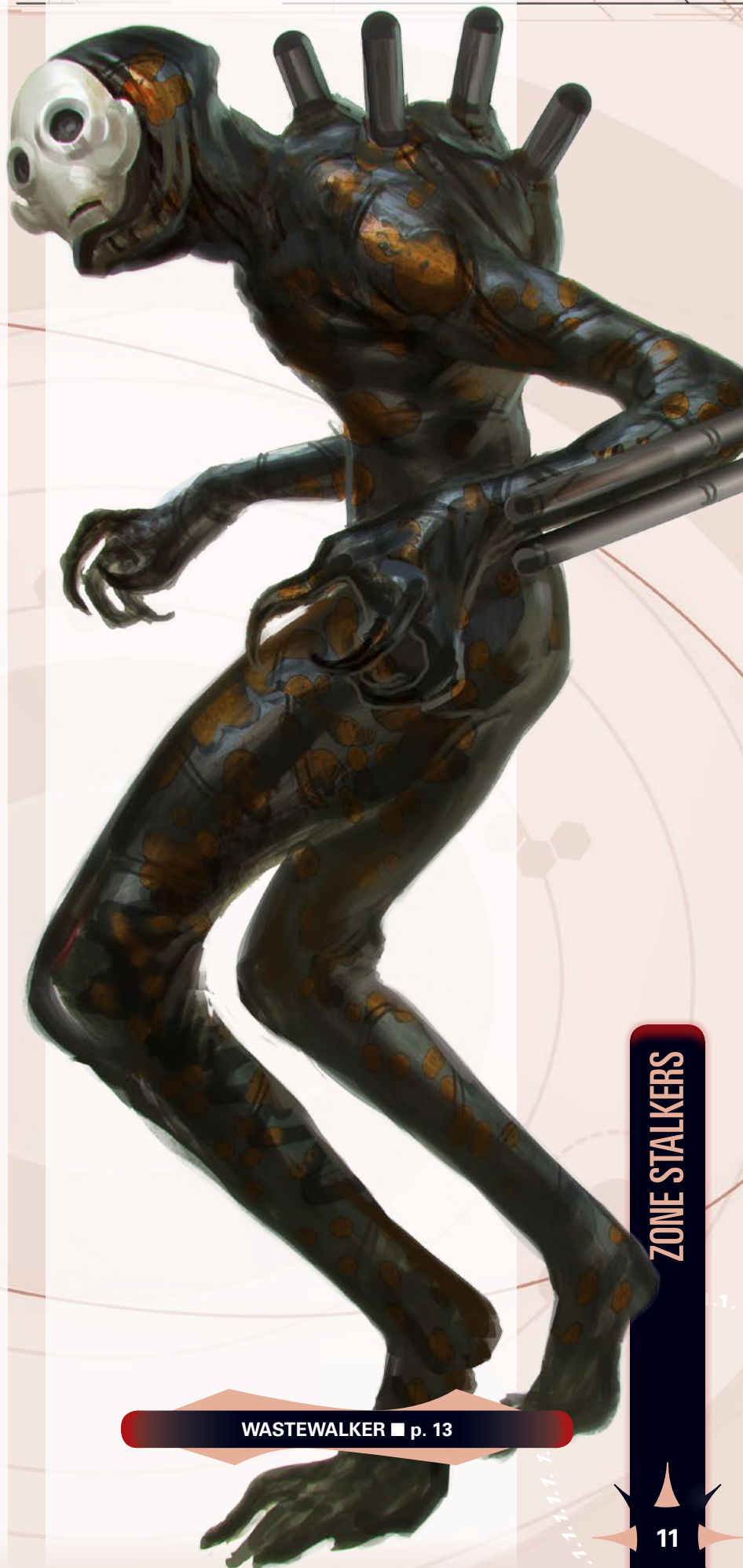
A pack of wastewalkers (p. 13) ambushes the team. A lone wastewalker will act as a spotter for the rest of the pack to fire missiles from behind cover, attempting to halt or disable the team's vehicles. They'll then attack from long range with their rifles, moving in only if they succeed in softening the characters up. Anyone who succeeds in a Perception Test at -10 opposed by the wastewalker's Infiltration skill sights the spotter before the team is in missile range.

WHIPPER

A pack of whipper exurgents (p. 370, *EP*) ambushes the team, trying to take advantage of terrain to close within melee range before being gunned down. They will eat any biomorphs they can catch, possibly stopping in combat to feed.

WILD SAUCERS

On a successful Perception Test, the team notices a group of disc-shaped objects clustered, barnacle-like, on a fractal barrow about a kilometer off—and on other barrows dotting the landscape along their intended path. The team may go around the infested area at the cost of half a day's travel time. Steering a path through requires a Pilot: Groundcraft Test and an opposed Infiltration Test versus the saucers' Perception of 50. Either may be made by anyone in the group. Failing the Groundcraft Test means it's impossible to pick a path through without passing close to one of the infested barrows. Failing the Infiltration Test indicates the group traveled upwind of the saucers, which are attracted to vehicle emissions. If either test fails, 1d10 saucers attack.



WASTEWALKER ■ p. 13

WRAPPER

A wrapper exsurgent (p. 370, *EP*) drops on a character from a rock overhang, trying to suffocate and digest them.

YAZIDIS

A band of Yazidis (p. 14) reveal themselves and offer to trade. There's a 25% chance that they have any item of Moderate cost or less, for which they'll accept barter on a 1:1 basis. They can repair vehicles or synths at a Low cost for every 10 points of damage restored. The only danger in dealing with them is in accepting their offers of "holy visions," which can infect the recipient with their peculiar variant of the Watts-MacLeod virus, compelling the victim to eventually return to the TQZ and rejoin the Yazidis. They also have a TITAN transponder mounted in their shelter that prevents fractals and self-replicating nanoswarms from attacking them while camped, but they won't even admit to having such an item and definitely won't part with it willingly. They flee if attacked. At the gamemaster's option, they may have other TITAN artifacts that they're willing to trade for goods from the outside world.

ZOMBIE MUSEUM: TQZ DENIZENS

The following are denizens of the TQZ. Some are exsurgents or TITAN war machines, while others are transhumans and their creations gone feral in the Zone.

CANYON CREEPIES

The virus-infected bots found in the *Canyon of the Creepies* (p. 17) use the same stats as a creepy bot (p. 345, *EP*), except that they're much faster (4/20 Walker speed, 4/12 Hopper speed, Fray 60) and have a nasty, diamond-edged bite (Bite Attack 60, DV 1d10 ÷ 2, AP -4). Their bite doesn't transmit the exsurgent virus. However, 1 in 10 canyon creepies can inject a toxin similar to twitch (p. 324, *EP*) that causes convulsions followed by loss of consciousness.

HEADHUNTER MARK II

The TITANs deployed these terrors selectively during the Fall against military installations and other hard targets. The baseline headhunter is unpleasant enough, but by comparison to the Mark II, it appears rough and basic, evidently designed for fast production and mass deployment against hapless civilians. The Mark II is smaller, has diamond-edged buzzsaws for use against armor, boasts radar-defeating fuselage geometry and materials, mounts a single-shot seeker missile for breaching structures and vehicles, and demonstrates greater combat skills. Mark II's contain a purpose-built fabber that can reload their single-shot seeker missile in 30 minutes with access to a source of feedstock.

"Mark II" is a transhuman designation, as with all names for TITAN war machines. Current transhuman radar invisibility technology came in part from reverse-engineering captured Mark II headhunters. Thankfully, they're considerably rarer than Mark I's.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL	MOX
15	20	20	20	5	15	15	15

INIT	SPD	LUC	TT	IR	DUR	WT	DR
8	1	—	—	—	45	9	90

Mobility System: Winged (8/40)

Skills: Exotic Melee Weapon: Buzzsaws 75, Flight 70, Fray 70, Infiltration 70, Investigation 40, Perception 40, Seeker Weapons 60, Unarmed Combat 70

Notes: Armor 8/8, Buzzsaws (1d10 + 4 DV, AP -6), Enhanced Vision, Lidar, Radar, Radar Invisibility, Reduced Signature, Seeker Missile (Single-Shot, High-Explosive, 3d10 + 10 DV, AP 0), T-Ray Emitter, Small Size trait

NY'KNIKIIN

Prior to the Fall, the TITANs experimented with ways to weaponize captured pod morphs. In one program, they scanned the central nervous systems of hundreds of Earth-based predators. They sleeved these "egos" into simulspace bodies that duplicated human pod morphs. Those that learned to control human bodies were allowed to run for millennia of subjective time, during which the TITANs tailored their environment to rapidly teach them to use their cyberbrains to full capacity.

Their greatest success were the ny'knikiin: a species of voracious predators derived from mantis shrimp. Ny'knikiin can run on any transhuman-built cyberbrain. Their simulmorphs, modeled on pleasure pods, had virtual mesh inserts, so the TITANs taught them a language employing their headware radios and pheromones. Then the TITANs began talking to them. These communications were preceded by the "god scent," a simulated burst of pheromones that prompts genitals-clutching lust and slaving hunger. The TITANs taught the ny'knikiin to use transhuman technology to fight, to heal, to fabricate gear, and to implant cyberbrains in their newborns.

The ny'knikiin's own name for themselves means "Those who can scent God." The Yazidis named them "ny'knikiin" after a demon in Yazidi mythology. Ny'knikiin use their cyberbrains and mesh inserts very differently from transhumans. Data structures in their cyberbrains are analogous to sensory and language centers in the human brain; these directly employ their mesh inserts to communicate.

Ny'knikiin are semi-nomadic, ranging in bands but also maintaining small domes. If they capture transhumans, they either eat them or steal their bodies. Pod cyberbrains are wiped to house a ny'knikiin ego. Biomorphs are decerebrated to make room for a ny'knikiin cyberbrain. Synths, they recycle. They're not exsurgents and kill or exile those who contract the virus.

Ny'knikiin have beautiful, doll-like features, but they trim back their lips to produce permanently bared teeth and sculpt the tongue to make it long and pointed. Their vocalizations are limited to wails and grunts made to frighten prey.

Firewall is unaware of the ny'knikiin, although once discovered, a Research Test in the Eye's archives may turn up reports of "exsurgent-infected" pods that might have really been ny'knikiin. It's also possible the TITANs seeded them on exoplanets.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL	MOX
15	20	15	20	5	15	10	—

INIT	SPD	LUC	TT	IR	DUR	WT	DR
7	1	—	—	—	30	6	45

Weapons: Diamond Axe or Shock Baton, Microwave Agonizer or Shard Pistol

Armor: Armor Clothing (3/4) or Armor Vest (6/6)

Skills: Beam Weapons 60, Blades 60, Climbing 30, Clubs 60, Fray 50, Freerunning 40, Hardware: Electronics 40, Infiltration 50, Infosec 60, Interfacing 90, Intimidation 30, Navigation 30, Perception 40, Programming 70, Spray Weapons 60

Notes: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Bodysculpting, Breather, Cold Weather Gear, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Enhanced Pheromones, Mnemonic Augmentation, Pain Tolerance (Level 2), Piercings, Puppet Sock, Scarification, Sex Switch, Smartlink, Tattooing, plus Chemical Sniffer or Enhanced Smell

Gear: Nanobandages (2)

Ny'knikiin Meshed Gear: Ny'knikiin software is radically different from transhuman designs. All Infosec, Interfacing, and Programming Tests to use or subvert ny'knikiin gear are at -30. Groups making first contact with ny'knikiin require extensive study of their meshed gear to even attempt tests to operate it, a task with a timeframe of 1 week. Ny'knikiin hackers are common and have software comparable to transhuman equivalents, but are at a similar disadvantage working with transhuman systems.

WASTEWALKER

Wastewalkers are exsurgent cyborgs designed by the TITANs to fill an infantry role in ground operations. Unlike many exsurgents, they're intelligent and employ sophisticated tactics. During the Fall, they used waves of lesser exsurgents as shock troops and indirect fire spotters while providing fire support from the rear. "Feral" wastewalkers survive without TITAN control in places like the TQZ. There they run in packs, with an alpha dominating and coordinating the others.

Wastewalkers are tall and wiry. They wear smooth, white masks that completely cover the face and may in fact be part of it. Their masks are starkly minimal, with circles for eyes, a narrow slot at the mouth, and short, horn-like protrusions that curve up from

the cheek bones to one side of the eyes and end in rounded-off nubs.

Their arms, legs, and fingers are elongated and spindly, with jagged protrusions at the joints that give their bodies a sketchy appearance. Wastewalker hands end in long, sharp claws. They're covered in a hide-like, patterned, black material that might be skin or might be polymer armor.

Humps high on their backs, from which several long, thin cylinders protrude vertically, house hives of fabricator and disassembler nanobots. The humps hold feedstock and nutrients and fabricate ammunition for the weapons growing from wastewalkers' arms.

Wastewalkers communicate with each other in bursts of noisy, pulse-modulated sound, like static blasting out of a distorted speaker. The few recordings of this sound have never been decoded; linguists believe they are encrypted. Wastewalkers are known to emit signals on radio frequencies used by the TITANs, so perhaps there's an unspoken component to this horrid language.

Post-Fall, wastewalkers are thankfully rare, but many still range the White Zone or lair in ruined habitats such as Qurain. Lacking orders from the TITANs, they've taken to defending the territories they've staked out, alternately cooperating with or hunting other exsurgent types. They still need organic nutrients, but the terraforming of Mars has helped them to survive. They've taken to hunting small animals, gathering vegetation, and preying on the occasional zone stalker. When not patrolling or hunting, they may sit immobile for long periods, feeding by letting their nanohives forage for raw materials.

Wastewalkers replenish their numbers by restraining transhuman victims and placing a mask on them, which quickly fuses to the face. Once masked, the new recruit metamorphoses into a wastewalker within a few days. It's not known whether the process is reversible, nor what the result would be if an uplifted animal were masked. It is known that it works only on biomorphs; synths are immune.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL	MOX
15	30	15	15	2	15	10	—

INIT	SPD	LUC	TT	IR	DUR	WT	DR
6	2	—	—	—	50	10	100

Weapons: Some type of firearm; possibly limited grenades

Armor: Wastewalker Hide (14/8)

Skills: Fray 70, Freerunning 60, Infiltration 40, Kinetic Weapons 80, Perception 40, Profession: Small Unit Tactics 60, Throwing Weapons 70

Notes: Chameleon Coating, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Medichines, Skinlink, Specialized Hives (1 Disassembler, 1 Fabricator), Toxin Filters

Fabricator Hive and Nanobots:

See *TITAN Artifacts* (p. 15)

WILD SAUCERS

Wild saucers aren't war machines, but wild artificials—robots gone feral away from human control. Originally, they were units of a deluxe saucer bot model that included integrated skinlink on their hulls in place of access jacks. Abandoned in the TQZ after the Fall, they mutated, and the skinlink nanobots gained the ability to consume any material the bot was touching, convert it into feedstock, and use it for self-repair.

If taken unawares, wild saucers are typically found clustered on rock formations containing elements they need or on fractal barrows, slowly feeding.

Wild saucers are a very primitive case of AI emergence. They lack the processing power to make themselves any smarter, but as is, they're as smart as dogs. Like dogs, they exhibit pack hunting behavior. If they notice approaching people or vehicles, they'll attempt an ambush. All that sets them apart from animals is the ability to reproduce—which, if they ever gained it, would make them a dangerous nuisance.

Why they've never contracted the exsurgent virus is a mystery. These and similar wild bots aren't unique to the TQZ. Wild bots outside the Zone, however, tend to be quickly exterminated or rounded up by transhumans.

Gear: Disassembler Nanoswarm (works only on stationary/helpless targets)

MELEE Shock Baton (1d10 + 1, shock)

Armor: 6/6

Skills: Clubs 60, Flight 80, Fray 70, Infiltration 50,

Interest: Ambush Spots 60, Perception 40

Notes: 360-degree Vision, Chameleon Skin, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Radar, Skinlink

YAZIDIS

Yazidis are a religious sect of Kurds abandoned in the TQZ during the Fall. Rather than perish, they became infected with a mutant strain of the Watts-MacLeod virus, in effect becoming exsurgents. Other exsurgents and many TITAN war machines simply ignore them.

They've since adapted to live among the dangers of the TQZ. Laden with survival gear, they dress in ragged, desert-patterned ghillie suits purpose-built to foil the senses of TITAN warbots. Their lifestyle revolves around subsistence nanofabrication and maintaining concealed greenhouses (much like the nomads of the Martian north). Yazidi gear is unusual in that everything has access jacks. To avoid detection, they only use wireless meshes within shielded camps.

The Yazidis were already a close-knit community before the Fall, most having emigrated from Germany, but religion now occupies a central place in their lives. They revere Tawûsê Melek, the Peacock Angel, whom they believe granted their async powers to help them survive. Peacock and sun motifs are common on their clothes and gear.

Yazidis aren't hostile. Usually they hide from outsiders. Many have been killed by the Rangers when they went too near the Zone perimeter. On occasion, they approach transhumans who go deeper into the Zone, offering to barter. A few zone stalkers are rumored to get most of their artifacts this way, but if true, the details of their arrangements with the Yazidis are well guarded.

When Yazidis do make contact, they sometimes offer visions of Tawûsê Melek to guests using the scenario sleight (p. 371, *EP*). Those who accept are shown the Yazidi story of the Fall, including their survival, which they attribute to the Peacock Angel and other heavenly beings. Visions last an eyeblink, but are much longer subjectively. A character who submits to a Yazidi vision must make a WIL x 2 Test. If they fail, they're infected with the Yazidi variant of Watts-MacLeod. They gain the following traits: Psi (Level 1), Mental Disorder: Cosmic Anxiety Disorder, and Mental Disorder: [player's choice]. They don't initially gain any psi sleights. For each week spent living among the Yazidis and practicing their lifestyle, the character may ignore the effects of the cosmic anxiety disorder for 1 month. Because this requires a dangerous trip in and out of the TQZ, many of those infected stay with the Yazidis permanently. Finally, within the boundaries of the TITAN Quarantine Zone on Mars only, exsurgents are neutral to the character, only attacking if the character takes hostile action first. War machines only attack if "hungry" (e.g., fractals scavenging for raw materials).

Stats below are for an average Yazidi nomad. Skills and gear should be adjusted appropriately for specialists.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL	MOX
15	15	25	15	10	20	20	—

INIT	SPD	LUC	TT	IR	DUR	WT	DR
8	1 (2)	—	—	—	40	8	80

Weapons: Varies; Sniper Rifles and spray weapons are common

Armor: Light Vacsuit (5/5), Yazidi Ghillie Suit (7/6)

Augmentations: Access Jacks, Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Direction Sense, Enhanced Respiration, Temperature Tolerance (Cold)

Gear: Electronics Tool Kit, Fiberoptic Cables, Muse, Repair Nanoswarm, Yazidi Ghillie Suit (+10 to Infiltration; +30 vs. TITAN war machines)

Skills: Control 50, Fray 50, Freerunning 40, Infiltration 50 (60), Interest: TQZ Hazards 70, Interest: Yazidi Boltholes 80, Hardware: Electronics 40, Hardware: Industrial 50, Kinetic Weapons 50, Language: German 60, Language: Kurdish 80, Navigation 40, Sense 70, Spray Weapons 50

Traits: Psi (Level 3)

Psi-Chi: Ambience Sense, Time Sense

Psi-Epsilon: Scenario (special; see above)

HALCYONS



Message from Choey Nicaragua, zone stalker, the night before her last run

Three days in, three days out. Budget for vat time when you get back. You're going to be running a drip of klar the entire time; your morph's nervous system won't like it. No, let me be clear: you will be running klar. You think you're that sharp, stalk with someone else. Or stalk alone and come back dead. Two runs proves you're not bad luck; now you shut up and start learning.



This is your first pro run, so we'll be after halcyons. Study this; it's a dead one. Yes, looks a bit like a bird, doesn't it? Hence the name.

"How's it work?" If I knew that, I'd be retired, mei mei. I can tell you what it does, though. Machines used 'em to juice up their zombies, make happy workers. Some rich asshole bought a batch off a lucky stalker a year back, and now they're the "in" party drug. Why anyone'd be dumb enough to shoot up one of these is the question of all time. But they're worth 100 cred each, and the bunker we're cracking is full of them. ❁

TITAN ARTIFACTS

The lack of TITAN activity over the last ten years, coupled with the public's poor understanding of the dangers of exsurgent virus infection, means there's a thriving black market for items recovered from the Zone. Some items sell to corps or crime syndicates looking for an edge over rivals, while others go to rich collectors.

BREEDING CRAB

Biological exsurgents often have functional genitals but lack the libido to use them. The breeding crab is a symbiote that temporarily provides one, latching on to the exsurgent's head and brain stem. Researchers hypothesize that the crab is more than a fluffer for zombies, though. The TITANs would never have bothered with the randomness of normal sexual reproduction. It's thought that the crab actually tailors the chromosomes included in exsurgent sperm and eggs, eliminating randomness.

When allowed to attach to a human biomorph, they send the wearer into a frenzy of uncontrollable lust. This makes them a hit at certain types of parties. The crab can be removed with a jolt from a specially modified cattle prod. The wearer usually doesn't contract the exsurgent virus, but there's always a chance that the crab had been used previously on an exsurgent. [Expensive (Minimum 40,000)]

FABRICATOR NANOSWARM

Found in canister-shaped hives, these swarms are a somewhat more tame version of self-replicating nanoswarms (p. 383, *EP*). Rather than indiscriminately breaking down everything around them for feedstock, they appear to have some criteria regarding how much entropy an object possesses. They ignore structures, working devices, and organisms, but will absorb things like a pile of dirt, a corpse, or spent ammunition. No one has learned how to program them yet—a task complicated by the swarms' attempts to establish compatibility by installing the exsurgent virus on nearby systems when activated. Left to their own devices, they'll start building things their programming deems useful (for some TITAN-skewed value of "useful"). Despite this behavior, inactive swarms are prized by researchers. [Expensive (Minimum 100,000)]

HALCYONS

These tiny, vaguely bird-shaped injectors each hold 1d10 doses of a powerful euphoriant. Its psychological effects are similar to comfurt or juice, with a bit of hither's tactile effects (see pp. 319–321, *EP*). Halcyons can sometimes be extracted from the rest cradles in TITAN bunkers where they were used to keep exsurgents docile. Needles previously used on exsurgents are an infection risk. Weirdly, undepleted halcyons "breed." If two or more are left in a sealed container where they can't be observed, a third will eventually appear. This has driven down the price of

TQZ DRUGS

NAME	TYPE	APPLICATION	ONSET TIME	DURATION	ADDICTION MODIFIER	ADDICTION TYPE
"Bred" Halcyon	unknown*	Injected	1 minute	6 hours	-10	Physical
"Wild" Halcyon	unknown*	Injected	1 minute	12 hours	-20	Physical
Halftone	unknown*	Dermal	1 minute	36–48 hours	—	Mental

*Neither toxin filters nor medicines prevent any of these drugs from taking effect. Characters with both may attempt a SOM x 2 Test to shake off the effects.

halcyons even as their numbers have been depleted out in the “wild” of the Zone. Still, there remain some aficionados who claim “wild” halcyons give a better high and will pay more for them. Characters on halcyon get a +10 on WIL Tests against fear or stress (+15 for wild-caught halcyons). [Moderate] to [High]

HALFTONES

Found in small ampoules at some TITAN sites, the original use of halftones are unknown, but they’ve developed a following among jaded drug users. When rubbed on the skin, halftones induce visual hallucinations in shifting halftone patterns, while at the same time visibly creating the same patterns in subdermal smart pigments on the skin of the user. Characters on halftone get a -20 on all Perception Tests due to disorienting visual input but a +10 to WIL Tests against fear or stress. [High]

MORPHGROW

Highly profitable for stalkers yet notoriously difficult to transport, the milky ochre substance dubbed morphgrow is always found in either 20-liter glass bulbs or 20,000-liter tanks. Its apparent purpose was as a rapid growth agent for biological exsurgeants, and it works just as well on biomorphs. 1 liter once per month is enough to triple the speed at which a biomorph develops. Morphs fertilized with morphgrow aren’t automatically exsurgeants, but they’re very prone to tumors and unsightly somatic mutations. The TITANs invented the stuff for rapidly replacing zombie casualties, not for growing exec-model sylphs. [High] (bulb) or [Expensive (Minimum 60,000)] (tank)

SPORTS

The TITANs experimented extensively on human genetics, and the by-blows of these experiments may sometimes be found held in stasis in the Zone. Some of these mutants are of no use to science, while others suggest new lines of research. In rare cases, sports possess features that can be adopted whole cloth by transhuman genehackers. Given that most sports carry the virus, incorporating it into genetic modifications intended for sale to the public is high-risk. Firewall knows of at least one case in which the junk DNA of a sport contained a copy of the exsurgent virus that would be triggered to express itself at a later time.

Especially distinctive or grotesque sports are also prized by wealthy collectors. Famous specimens, such as the Lamb Baby and the Porous Conjoined, have changed hands for tens or even hundreds of thousands of credits on the black market. Some of these mutants might be a threat if ever released from stasis. [Moderate] to [Expensive (Minimum 60,000)]

LOCATIONS

Much of the Zone is known only from orbital photography. Smugglers operate mainly in a handful of areas known to be relatively safe from exsurgent attacks. Stalkers have extensively explored the outskirts of the Zone, but they gravitate heavily toward places where surface features suggest bunker or tunnel entrances. Neither group ever goes farther in than they must to do their work. Much yet remains hidden out there, either in bunkers the stalkers haven’t reached yet or in tunnels hidden from view.

CANYON OF THE CREEPIES

Firewall followed up on reports of ravines inhabited by mutated creepy bots and discovered a disquieting possibility. Sites like this do in fact exist, and the wild creepies have definitely succumbed to the exsurgent virus. They appear to be actively engaged in spreading the virus—not by directly spreading infection themselves, but by infecting extremophile organisms that are part of the terraforming plan. Creepies swarm forth from their ravines at night, hunting for small extremophiles such as bio-engineered lizards. These they capture and bring to collection points in the massive, twisting tunnel system connecting the canyons, where they’re dumped into healing-vat like devices that infect them with the exsurgent virus. They’re then either bred to create more like them or released to creep across the desert—a slow, tiny vector for spreading the infection.

Whether the creepies are under the direction of some other entity or simply continuing to carry out instructions they were given during the Fall is unknown.

THE MOGURA BUNKERS

The Mogura Bunkers are a cluster of 29 ground-hugging, heavily armored domes huddled between two small mensae. Some are of TITAN manufacture, while others are transhuman structures that were taken over and repurposed. The bunkers are much farther into the Zone than stalkers usually travel but are considered worth the risk because no one ever comes back empty-handed—if they come back, that is. The Bunkers lie about 200 kilometers north-by-northwest of the Gordii Dorsum, and about 800 kilometers south-by-southwest of Olympus. The fractal barrow nicknamed the Isopod looms above the site on the mensa to its north.

About half the bunkers have entrances designed to admit human-sized exsurgeants; these are the ones being most actively worked by stalkers now. The other half either have no apparent entrances or weren’t designed for entry by anything as big as an adult human. Some of these bunkers exhibit damage from (mostly unsuccessful) attempts to cut into them, while others have been worked by neotronics, neo-avians, small robots pre-programmed to scuttle in



and retrieve anything interesting, or contortionists with the Limber trait.

Several of the bunkers connect to an underground breeding and genetics lab. Stalkers have retrieved breeding crabs and sports from this area. A fair amount of the lab's equipment is still active and represents a serious infection risk.

Other bunkers connect to underground barracks with resting cradles for exsurgents, many of which have yet to be stripped of halcyons. Packs of wastewalker exsurgents have been spotted coming and going from these bunkers, but just as often they're out roaming the desert, leaving a window of opportunity for stalkers.

The purpose of the bunkers with small or no entrances is less clear. None of them are the type used by headhunters, but the track-like ridges running down some of their narrow entrances suggest that they were either manufactories or charging stations (or both) for some type of bot. Others have even smaller openings that are probably missile launch tubes, but no one's plumbed to the bottom of one yet.

Those who've been persistent enough to squeeze into the claustrophobic depths of these bunkers haven't much to show for it. Some have never come out, possibly torn apart when they ran afoul of still-working machinery in the bunkers' guts. Others had to stop at hatches that couldn't be cut open in such cramped confines. Those who sent in small bots report that none of the spaces in these bunkers are any bigger than they absolutely need to be to admit whatever type of bot they were designed for, but that they're

riddled with tiny access ways apparently designed to allow movement by small maintenance bots.

One stalker claims to have seen a creeper exsurgent billowing out of the opening of one of these bunkers, at which point he bugged out of the area. This report is considered unreliable, though, as creepers are normally encountered deeper in the Zone.

QURAIN

The ruined city-state of Qurain is in the patera of Apollinaris Mons, 800 kilometers north of Pathfinder City. Qurain is detailed in the scenario *Million Year Echo*.

THE WHITE ZONE

What lies beneath the Amazonis Mensa is left to individual gamemasters to detail. The White Zone is the blasted heart of TITAN activity on Mars. It's likely to be where discoveries can be made about the nature of the virus, the TITANs, and perhaps even the ETI. As such, some areas in the White Zone are described here, but their purposes are left to the gamemaster to connect—or not—with their own conception of the TITANs and ETI.

BUNKERS AND TUNNEL ENTRANCES

Amazonis Mensa covers an orderly grid of tunnels that go deep into the Martian crust. The entrances to these tunnels are in some cases like those described in *The Mogura Bunkers* (p. 16). In other cases, they're more like mineshaft entrances or fortified bunker doorways.

LIZARDS

Capt. Sage Kim, to new Rangers on the Zone perimeter

This detail is a joke.

You were maybe expecting a strict talking-to, a recitation of policies, right? We'll get to that in a minute, but first, let's talk reality. There are 60 of us in this station. We cover a region with over 1,000 Klicks of perimeter. Smugglers, stalkers, wild artificials, mutants, we can stop. Giant warbots, we can paint targets and call down the thunder. But have a look in this jar.

Yeah, it's a lizard. Glad to see we're only hiring the best talent. It's your typical desert critter. It can take being frozen solid, lives off one meal a month, and keeps crawling along in temperatures just above zero. It's also an infection vector. No, not this one, but we've found them before—tiny lizards, 12-centimeters long, crawling through our perimeter with the virus in their little brains. It won't be one of the big ones that gets us. It'll be one of these little bastards or something smaller.

So go out there; do a good job. Interdict some stalkers and have a pot shot at the mutants once or twice a year. Our job is important. But keep your eyes peeled for the small stuff—and don't fool yourself into thinking we'll always win. ❁

The tunnels beneath are monotonous in their design, extending both horizontally and vertically, based on a regular grid pattern. The extreme regularity and lack of adornment make navigation difficult without direction sense, tacnet mapping, or other external aids. Basic rooms off the tunnels are always 5 x 5 x 5 meters. Larger spaces are always multiples of these dimensions.

COMET CRATERS

The Zone is pockmarked with ice asteroid impact craters, 100 meters to 2 kilometers in diameter. The freshest may still have molten or superheated rock nearby, but most are quenched quickly by the ice that made the crater. Occasionally these craters intersect with the extensive tunnels beneath Amazonis Mensa, providing points of entry to deep passages.

MEMORY GRIDS

These hexagonal grids of smoky, impact-proof glass hold the imprisoned egos of asyncs. Touching or walking on any of the panes triggers their powers—perhaps along with tortured pleas for release. A handful are found on the surface, but they're more common below ground, where the comet strikes can't destroy them.

WASTEWALKER TOWN

Wastewalkers have carved out a town of sorts here. The town itself is several levels deep in the tunnels, but the most-used entry points are at the foot of the mensa, where comet strikes are uncommon. These entries vomit forth midden heaps of scavenged refuse stripped of useful elements. They're surrounded by

orderly grids of ramshackle buildings—an odd combination of military camp and shanty town.

The town is unknown to Firewall, and so what goes on here waits to be discovered. Why would an exsurgent species whose basic social units are packs of hunter-nanoforagers have a gathering place? Do they come here to increase their numbers through the pleasures of the breeding crabs? To wait for a sign from their silent creators? To make plans for their own place in the solar system? Is “town” even a proper description for this gathering place; might it have purposes very different from those for which transhumans build settlements?

What of the things underground? Is there any truth to the rumor of the Seethe, a massive, computationally dense pool of gray goo somehow held in confinement here? What of the thing seen in a satellite photo of the breach opened by a comet impact, controversially interpreted by one Firewall analyst as a massive, photosynthetic, grub-like organism, tended by other exsurgents in a deep chamber so that it would exhale breathable atmosphere?

FIREWALL AND OTHER GROUPS

Firewall's policy toward the TQZ should be familiar to members: observe, contain, investigate, and occasionally destroy. Which of these goals is the priority on a given mission depends on the goals of cliques within Firewall, and often on the beliefs of proxies and the teams they send in. If Firewall has one article of faith, though, it's that in the end, all remaining zones of TITAN activity must be cleansed.

Other organizations, though, don't agree.

EXHUMANS AND SINGULARITY SEEKERS

To the exhuman, the Zone is part test of strength, part *wunderkammer*. The number of Zone incursions by exhumans are few, but they're of special interest to Firewall. Singularity seekers are almost always going in after something that should stay buried. Predators may have schemes, too, but often they're just there for a good fight. Stalkers and smugglers hate exhumans, as more than a few parties have been slain by exhumans who wanted their goods or who were just itching for some slaughter. This makes stalkers and smugglers an enthusiastic source of information on exhuman doings.

EXSURGENTS

Like exhumans, exsurgents from outside the Zone often have business within. Some seek resources, others new orders from their dormant masters, and still others simply feel drawn there by inexplicable compulsions.

MARTIAN RANGERS

To the Rangers, the Zone is a job—a difficult, deadly, stressful job. On the whole, the Rangers don't have

a lot of political power, but those who do lobby for scaling back their role as the first line of defense against exsurgent and war machines. Go Baozhai, commander of the Olympus Rangers, has argued in hearings to Tharsis League representatives that the defense contractors should be doing more of the patrol duty. The rank-and-file generally agree; they'd rather be catching smugglers than chasing heavily armed zombies. The League has no real military, however, and the Rangers are much cheaper to field than Direct Action mercenaries. Until there's a major incident, Go's arguments will continue to fall on deaf ears.

PROJECT OZMA

Ozma leads the faction within the Planetary Consortium that urges both caution and opportunism in investigating the Zone. Yes, the Zone must be cleansed, but it should be done gradually. No more nuking the place from orbit; this is disruptive to terraforming anyway. The TQZ's contents should be cataloged, analyzed for any tools useful to transhumanity, and then gradually neutralized once their secrets are understood. Anything less would be an inexcusable missed opportunity.

SMUGGLERS

Smugglers don't like the Zone, but it's a useful cover for their activities. Operating out there is high-risk, but to many, it's a better deal than what the authorities will give them. It's also a useful place to do business away from the eyes of other gangs. Many a guanxi double-cross starts with a secret meeting in the TQZ.

ZONE STALKERS

It takes a special kind of nut job to risk dead storage, death, or exsurgent zombification to spend a week crawling over the rust drinking their own piss from a filter straw in search of artifacts that might just sell on the black market—or that might instead turn their hemoglobin into swarms of microscopic biting robots. Most stalkers are downright technical—addictions and disorders are common—but the toughest and luckiest end up rich.

Stalking is a specialized skill set, a black art with its own rich jargon. The terms “fractal barrow” and “termite mound,” for example, come from stalker slang. Stalking's very nature makes it resistant to control by syndicates—not that they haven't tried. Syndicates may control the secondary market for their goods, but zone stalkers don't take orders from crime bosses. The people who buy from stalkers and sell to the syndicates are all former stalkers themselves—those who either hit a lucky strike and capitalized on it well or who retired from the game with a good rep among fellow stalkers. Even these still go out in the field from time to time, in part to keep the rep among peers that they need to stay in business, and in part because the danger itself is addictive.

TQZ PLOT HOOKS

Gamemaster can use the following quick scenario ideas as the kernel for one-shot missions or including the TQZ within larger campaigns.

FIELD SCIENCE

BioTeka, an ambitious hypercorp startup, seeks a leg up on its competition by collecting specimens from the Zone for study. A caravan of heavily armed BioTeka vehicles (mostly crusher trucks) ran the Zone perimeter and spent several weeks tracking and trapping wild artificials and exsurgents. They've bribed key Ranger and League officials to look the other way when they exit a few days from now. This leaves it to Firewall to prevent them returning the contraband monstrosities to BioTeka's labs on the outskirts of Noctis-Qianjiao. Possible complications includes exsurgents escaping from the caravan en route, Ozma taking an interest, and divided loyalties for Lost Generation player characters when research reveals that the company's young executives share their origin.

HOSTILE MEMES

Bored rich kids have been running the Zone, doing video and XP shoots in the ruins, and sneaking back to civilization (see *Death Valley AF9*, p. 10). Aside from representing an infection risk, they've set in motion a meme that trivializes the dangers of the TQZ, breeding complacency and even dangerous copy-cats. Can a counter-meme then be crafted to undo the damage they've done?

RANGERS DOWN

What should have been a routine patrol ends with a Ranger flyer wrecked in a dust storm—20 clicks inside the Zone. The Rangers are prepared to deploy a search team to its last known position, but someone high up in government has other ideas. The patrol officers saw something they shouldn't have, and now the Rangers are being ordered to leave their comrades to their fate. Hands not quite tied, the Ranger officer calls in a marker—one with a Firewall proxy's name on it. Firewall's interest is only heightened by the possibility of a coverup. Can the team reach the downed Rangers in time—and keep them alive long enough to learn what they saw?

TURN AND BURN

The PCs are approached with an offer from an unusual client. Several unknown organisms have been stolen from a colony of Factors visiting the solar system (they refuse to identify the exact nature of the specimens). The thieves have taken them to a lab inside the perimeter of the TQZ. Will the humans be so kind as to locate this facility and burn it thoroughly? Recovery of the missing organisms is not requested and in fact undesirable; the infection risk is too severe. Returning with the identities of the perpetrators and information as to the nature of their research is worth a bonus. Utmost discretion is, of course, required.