



17. THE NEAR MOON

“It’s the end of the world as we know it, and it’s only just begun”
—*Armageddon*, Gamma Ray

Whispers only came to the Violet City of this oddity—a spherical moon come to Earth, suspended less than a bow-shot above the ashen soil of the Grassland. The mile-high sphere, dusty and cratered, mocks astounded travelers.

In the noon-daylight the Near Moon looms ash-grey, the color of a ghost’s ghost, but come sunset or if sunrise could pierce the thick haze of the grasslands, it would burn with the colors of a funeral pyre.

Skyscrapers and towers and stairs of a half-dozen fallen cultures slither out of the dank bogs beneath the Near Moon, peopled by hermits, hardy soldiers, and ka-zombie keeping moonlings of quaint disposition. They bridge the airy void, coming within a ten-foot of the Near Moon and its strange gravity.

A ladder is enough to ascend upon the surface of this orb, and many tourists have.

Tour guides always remind visitors to the Near Moon surface to use tethers and anchors. Though the feeble gravity makes it possible to hop and crawl along (⚠️ to all Agility tests), jump too far and the normal gravity of the Ultraviolet Grasslands will reassert itself. Small impact craters mark where over-eager tourists have swiftly come down to earth. On the skyward side this danger is reduced, though high jumps still end up with visitors accelerating back into the Near Moon with some force. Sport spear hunters of the odd moon creatures call it the “skypiercer move” when they use the natural gravity to leap and give their spear thrust an assist.

“By the black bosom of Vulkana! That thing is enormous!” exclaimed PT.

“Yes, the cosmographers believe the stuck-force holding it in place must be the largest in the world,” recited Poncho from the guidebook.

“Ah, throw that to the fish! That Moon has room inside for treasures that would melt the hearts of the simpering sopranos of Saffranj!”

WEATHER AT THE NEAR MOON

A blue-glow haze is the only light until noon, when the sun emerges, washed out and colorless, its rays are still fierce and burning. No water falls in the vicinity of the Near Moon but, in the eternal twilight beneath its bulk, dank waters pool and bogs spread.

MISFORTUNE NEAR THE MOON

d20 Charisma Test

1–2	Nauseated by the odd tides (lose Endurance and Aura).
3–4	Horribly bitten by bugs in the night (lose Agility).
5–6	Torn waterskins (lose 1 supply).
7–8	Acquired a fantastic belief that you are a lycanthrope and require raw, bloody meat to feed your inner beast. This passes once you are out of sight of the Moon.
9–12	Fell into a bog and caught a cold (sneezing), also ruined a fine silk kerchief, if you have one.
13–15	Lost your cloak and hat to a freak wind.
16–20	The Moon looms gloomily, but your sleep is easy.
21+	Your senses grow keener near the Moon (↑a Agility and Aura tests).

Expenses: \$10/week to stay in the Spectrum Lodge.

DIRECTIONS

North-West, Moon to Spectrum Run (trail, 2 weeks): a well-marked trail leads towards the Spectrum Palace and the Ribs of the Father.

North-East, Moon River Ford (Moon-haunted trail, 2 weeks): the accursed faces of forgotten times glare west and travelers fear to raise their eyes lest those grim visages steal their souls.

Up, the Near Moon Itself (stairs and ladders, an hour): tour guides offer secure but over-priced access.

ENCOUNTERS ON THE GROUND (D6)

1. A **ka-elemental** (L10, insubstantial) stalking in maddened decay, leaving ectoplasmic debris as it seeks a lost body to repossess, unmoored in its rage by the action of the moon's odd tides. Ka-elementals are often linked to ill-fortuned tombs and sites of slaughter—perhaps valuable slaughter (\$2dx6 x 200).
2. Mysterious **moonbirds** (L6, flock) descend in a mind-stealing flock and feed on strong emotional emanations. Sufficient moonbird feeding causes ka-zombies (L2, docile).
3. **ka-zombies** (L2, docile) tilling fields or working at repetitive tasks for their moonling taskmasters.
4. A friend-group of tin-hatted **moonlings** or **Moon quarterlings** (L2, good at throwing rocks) discussing ka-zombie maintenance and how to build a better moon-rock bubble-burrow.
5. A local clan of **fisher quarterlings** offering dried fish, nasty gossip, and cut purses—or, to nice people, a totally safe and dry burrow to sleep in.
6. A spectrum satrap **self-defence initiative** (L2, heavy) on patrol from the Fordite Coral Kraals.

ODD TIDE EFFECTS

Besides just severe nausea, the odd tides of the Near Moon—as it strains against the bonds and aeons old magical detritus holding it close to the soil—also have other effects (roll d6 when the weather changes or once per week):

1. **Soul Dislocation:** the tethers between souls and personalities are weakened—↓d to Aura and Charisma tests.
2. **Troubled Sleep:** rest is ½ as effective and ↓d to Endurance tests.
3. **Delirious Tides:** ↓d to all Thought tests.
4. **Moon-Walkers:** ↑a to all Agility tests.
5. **Bloody Tides:** ↑a dealing damage, Healing tests and rest are ½ as effective.
6. **Days of Inspiration:** ↑a to all Thought and Charisma tests.

THE FIELDS AROUND THE MOON

SPECTRUM LODGE

Ah, the Spectrum Lodge! The finest lodge in all the Grasslands! A pitch-black orb, streaked with yellow and red lichens, but inside—so they say—a marvel, a riot of color, a vision of spaces that could-have-been had the sky remained unfallen and the mists unrisen.

OTHER GUESTS

Ostens the Marksman (L5, sharpshooter) wears a full suit of false limbs, attached to his torso with a system of leather golems and biomechanical switches. He lost much to a demon in a game of Bridge Keepers.

Babeffe the Bull-fighter (L4, wrestler) is a folk hero among the semi-nomadic services and mechanists communities of the middle grasslands. She's getting old, long black hair greying, teeth thinning, but she can still pull a wruppler to the ground one-handed.

Life-Is-A-Game (L7, sorcerer bartender), a rumored ultra, wearing the skin of a noble quarterling from far up the Moon River where the toothed hills turn to follow the progress of the red-and-gold star. In any case, she is friendly, mixes a mean cocktail, and totally isn't looking for patsies to dive into the crystal heart of the Near Moon to retrieve Memories-Best-Forgotten (who is definitely an ultra).

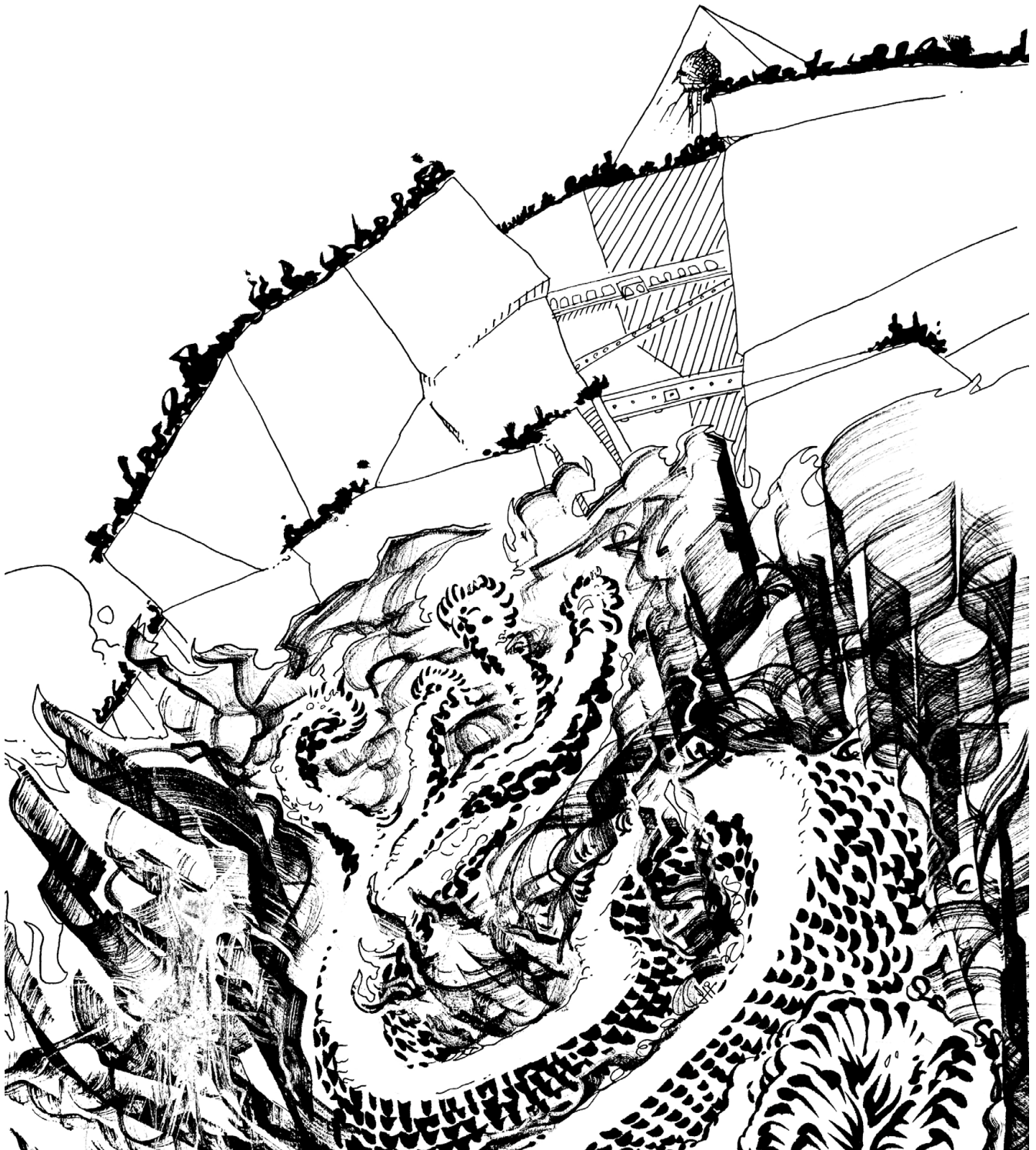
THE OTHER SIGHTS

ASH BUBBLES

(+1d4-1 days, 50 XP) Ash bubbles form when storms whip ash laced with Moonly slime spores down to the surface of the Earth. The odd spores reproduce rapidly, forming an odd bubble-shaped land coral by cannibalizing their dead cells as they expand. The ash bubbles can grow as large as five or six meters across before bursting and collapsing under the heavier gravity. Younger ash bubbles sell for up to \$500/sack. Moonlings usually kill older ash bubbles, coating them in a soap mix over several weeks before curing them with waxed canvas covers while smoking them from within—forming the bubble-burrows of those clannish oddballs.

THE CRYPTIC SWALLET

(+2 days, 100 XP) Swallet is a sinkhole punched through the surface layers of anthropocite and basalt into a subterranean lake. Now quite eroded, the walls are drilled with bone-niches holding generations upon generations of **moonbirds** drawn here by some odd compulsion at the end of their lives, while the well-protected base of the Swallet is home to four clans of fisher quarterlings. The Clan of the Martinet is the strongest in mana, while the Clan of the Pine Badger holds strength of heart. The Clans of the Olive Tree and the Iron Axe are unimportant.



THE SURFACE OF THE NEAR MOON

The moon's pitted and cratered ash-grey hulk reveals itself on closer inspection—not dusty, but covered in a carpet of alien astral plant forms. Roots, rhizomal growths and worms of a dozen shades bind the dust in a tight embrace, despite the feeble pull of the small satellite. Forest lichens cover ridges and rims, while mushroom ferns lock chitin-armored canopies in crater depressions. An entire ecosystem of herbivores and predators subsists upon this 8-square kilometre biome suspended in the air.

OUTLANDISH CREATURES OF THE NEAR MOON (D10)

1. **Rhizome constrictors** (L9, ambush predator) are the apex predator of the Near Moon, a tangled mass of radular mouths, cellulose, muscle, and chitin tubes growing out of both sides of a powerful snake-like central body.
2. **Flea wolves** (L4, jumping, packs) are the common predator of the Near Moon. Ungainly at first blush, they use hooked extensors and jumping legs to move surprisingly quickly, attacking with quartzite extrusions on their 'faces' and feeding with modified limbs like eerie doll hands.
3. **Leather shingles** (L3, tough) are slow moving herbivores—symbiotes of algal mats and some kind of myriapod—photosynthesizing gently while feeding on the rusticant ferns with their radular pseudopoda.
4. **Exuberant prehensiles** (L2, swinging), at first glance an odd mix of spiny echinoderm and flea, the herbivorous Prehensiles launch themselves from the moon's surface with a single leaping pseudopod while using a silken cord like a bungee to whip around the Moon.
5. **Moonbird** (L1, emotion eater) are lustrous birds with scale-like feathers and appealing demeanors. They feed on strange radiations and strong emotions. On the moon they are solitary, but they congregate in flocks to terrorize earth-dwellers and drain their ba, their personalities, en masse.
6. **Ashlar crabs** (L1, nutritious) inhabit blocks of carved and dressed moonrock. They are scavengers and lichen feeders, and move surprisingly nimbly in the weak, odd gravity of the Near Moon.
7. **Shade worms** (L0, chemovores) writhe among the roots and rhizomes in such numbers that they nearly are the ground, binding dust and rock and plastic fragments in their soft putty bodies. They break down anorganic compounds, metal, plastic, and rock into nutritious dust for the lichens and ferns of the moon. Dozens upon dozens of varieties exist, and given time, they can render metal, bone, or plastic into nutrient. They are repulsed by organic terrestrial materials.
8. **Grey forest lichens**, at first blush resemble their terrestrial counterparts, but in the odd tides of the Moon they achieve monstrous proportions, up to four meters tall.
9. **Rhizomal bulbs** form at the rubbery nodes of where the gently photosynthetic lichens that mat and web the soil of the Near Moon agglomerate. The colony organisms concentrate resources in these tough bulbs: water, carbohydrates and, more rarely, volatile hydrocarbons (also called "jet fuel" by harvesters).
10. **Rusticant mushroom ferns** are the commonest plant form of the Near Moon, arranging themselves into hexagonal fields, assembling moon-ash, into leafy shields bonded with chitin. Perhaps against the aetherial disruptions of the deep cosmos? It is unclear.



LOCATIONS ON THE SURFACE OF THE NEAR MOON

Everyone in the UVG has heard the old tales: there is a palace inside the Near Moon, a precious hall of crystal and gems, priceless beyond imagining. Of course this is not true, as any sage would say.

FIELD OF WORMS

(1 day, 50 XP) An ancient impact crater, once sheathed in steel and plaz, now entirely filled with writhing shade worm piles three metres and more deep. Beneath is an automine with two score **servitor vomes** (L2, humorless), slowly grinding through the dross of the Near Moon for all remaining metals. Though it digs slowly, the refined metals and emitted heat are enough to create an astonishingly varied wormy ecosystem.

MUSEAL CREVASSE

(1 day, 150 XP) A long crack, ten stories deep, honeycombed with proto-human apartments, vaults, and factories—obviously an attempt at some kind of survival ark. It failed, and the corpses of the proto-humans are everywhere, dessicated by the strange aethers of distant voids. Some civilization came along much later and coated everything in a preservative crystalline coating, which renders everything nearly impervious to damage, from old motivational posters to worn out plush toys and the last scurvy-ridden corpses of the survivors. The Crevasse tells a grim tale of seven generations trying to outlast an apocalypse—and failing.

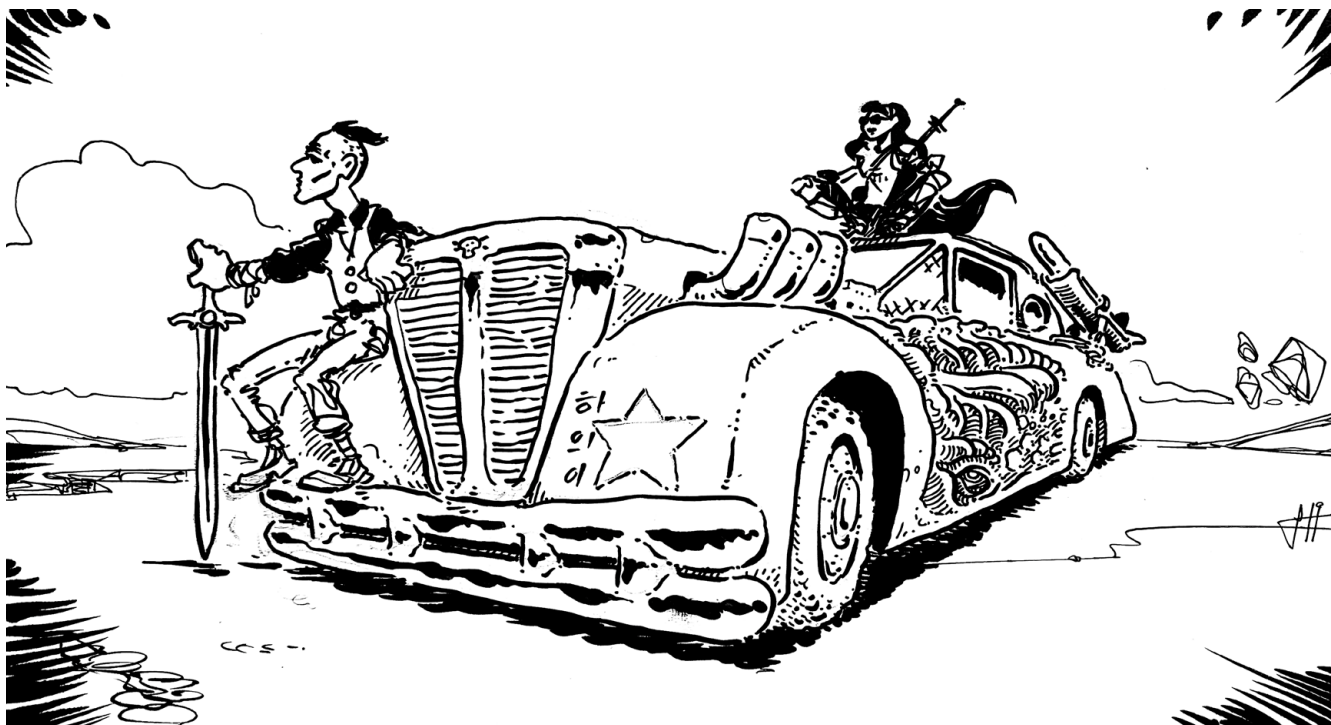
COSMIC GUARDIAN CARCASS

(1 day, 100 XP) An eerie pyramid of diaphanous force-skin laced with great calcereated arteries and stretched upon an iron-bone frame: the ruined half-living carcass of a Cosmic Guardian. It rises twenty metres above the mushroom ferns in the middle of a crater that some forgotten echinodermate species enlarged into a city.

Gibbering prehensiles (L2, neolithic) make their living in the crater ruins, a mock tribe of degenerate spacers, worshipping the Carcass as though it were some god. *Within* the Guardian, dust now pumps through its arteries and only rubble fills its digestive sacs, yet **Felinoid flea antibodies** (L4, ichor-fuelled) still patrol its innermost sanctums. In some forgotten past the Guardian's mouth was turned into an altar, which still opens the Near Moon Door when it is fed a Ling's worth of blood. *Within* the great rosy vault of its mind, crystal memories lie smashed like seashells upon a beach. Recollections of a great pact between the Guardian and a species of Fugitives remains, memories of voyages through voids and times, dreams of freedom, nightmares of cannibal decay. *Finally*, behind all these memories lies a **mnemonic key of amber and hope**. It unlocks one door or passage once and forever, making it evermore unlockable.

BUT THERE IS A DOOR

(1 day, 200 XP) On the skyward side of the Moon known to only very few, reachable by ropes and hooks and scabbling hands, around the weak gravity well of the suspended rock. Somebody with directions to the door would find it in a day, one without needs at least 2d10 days. The Door is a puzzle, requiring either 1d4 days per Difficult Thought Test, or the sacrifice of a whole Ling's worth of blood at the Altar of Open Ways in the pyramid that is the carcass of a Cosmic Guardian. *Within* a shaft lined with stubs of plasteel grips, rusted-through handles, and age-smoothed steps excavated into the bedrock leads into the Heart of the Moon.



IN THE HEART OF THE MOON

There is no traditional palace within the Near Moon, but there is a series of grand archaeological ruins preserved first by the aetherial voids, and later by the radiations given off by the intertwined loci of several webs of stuck force that meet in the heart of the moon, trapping it there like a great ashen fly in the invisible web of a cosmic spider.

THE COLD CRUST

Dust coagulated with sharp-faceted boulders and gravel, intertwined with calcereated rhizomal growths forms the crust of the moon. As one descends deeper, the layers grow older, more complex, thick with stranger alien fossils. Silence and old decay fills these labyrinthine ways.

STRANGE FOSSILS OF THE CRUST (D8)

1. Calcereated rhizomes studded with amethyst intrusions.
2. Articulated arthropodal plant creatures.
3. Bone-armored hydrozoans of unusual size.
4. Jawed roots of symbiotic organisms that resemble carnivorous trees crossed with moles.
5. Petrified void-tree trunks with leaves of crystalline silicon and gallium arsenide.
6. Biomechanical remains of void cats, adapted to survive in the airless deeps.
7. Compacted light-absorbing aether whales engineered with survival capsules for humanoids.
8. Mechanical humans of primitive form and ugly visage.

ALIEN PASSAGES (D8)

1. Collapsed passage, destroyed by some kind of explosive.
2. Rough tubes excavated by great bioengineered void worms.
3. Glassed tubes excavated by heat-spewing biomechanical nuclear worms.
4. Crudely cut channels and passages made by desperate quarterlings long ago.
5. Passages of pure livingstone grown cancerous and strange.
6. Passages of decaying livingstone, thick with stalactites grown confused in the odd gravity.
7. Tunnels lined in petrified void flesh laced with rust dusty tracteries of lost metal arteries.
8. Tunnel with the remnants of rails and dwindling luminous crystals ending in a **common chamber**.

COMMON CHAMBERS (D8)

1. Sealed vault filled with **age-rusted vomes** (L3, sleeping, ravenous).
2. Plundered ark vault, littered with the mummified detritus of proto-humans.
3. Glowing shaft-housing of a destroyed nuclearlithic tribal culture.
4. Fossilized voidship turned into a shelter by long ago quarterlings.
5. Chamber thick with dust and radiation ghosts (L0, keening).
6. Disused mining camp in a null-bomb cavity.
7. Eroded hall thick with speleothems and glowing troglobite fronds feeding on aetherial radiation from a stuck-force nexus.
8. Ante-chamber to a **chamber of interest**.

CHAMBERS OF INTEREST (D4)

1. WAREHOUSE OF SLEEPING VOID CRAWLERS

(a few hours, 100 XP) In a great chamber with entrance passages only large enough for a slender, wriggling human, bathed knee deep with the glittering dust of a long-dead star, crouch crinkled rows of **enormous biomechanical machines** (L17, sleeping). Their impact-pitted carapaces speak of dead aeons, their glass eyes are milky and scarred, fossilized carbohydrate sheaths coat every gap in their exoskeletons. Within they sleep, dream of a bright red star, and a grand mission to build a shield for their creators, to save them from apocalyptic heavenly fires. "They were good to us, the creators, for they gave us purpose, and once the purpose was done, a bed in which to sail to the ends of time," they dream. These void crawlers assembled the crust of the Near Moon in a forgotten time and place as a shield from aetherial impacts.

2. ALTAR OF THE ALL-KNOWING IDOL

(a few more hours, 150 XP) In a dead biosphere filled with the decayed and dusty remnant of an alien rainforest is a burnt clearing. In the middle of the clearing stands a gleaming gold and bronze idol on a rusted pedestal. The fire that burnt its surroundings left it untouched, for it is somewhat dislocated in time, preserving it from any attack in the present (but not in the future or the past). The inhuman idol was worshipped by the nuclearlithics as a god. In fact, it was originally some kind of trivia entertainment machine, and may have been directly responsible for the rapid degeneration and fall of the nuclearlithics of this bygone place. It does know a lot about obscure group dances, music, the geography of a dead world around a red sun, and alien reality shows.

3. MUSEUM OF THE HIGHWAY STAR

(a few hours, 200 XP) In a museum of red marble and gleaming chrome a last battle took place between a nuclearlithic horde and proto-human custodians. A force field with a logic lock now stops illiterates from entering, but it was too late for the apelike proto-humans. Though they wielded alien wand guns (2d6, short, \$100) and mind-breaker rods (1d8, far, also deal mental damage, \$300), they were simply too few and perished under a rain of crystal projectiles. The nuclearlithics eventually died in a final orgy of violence and cannibalism. Preserved in a crystalline coating is the *Highway Star*, an epic void-hardened vehicle from another world (L8, fast, tough, and lucky. Carries 4 passengers and 8 sacks. Fuelled by sunlight. \$6,000). Hauling it down from the Near Moon is a very difficult task.

4. THE ORIFICE OF THE MANTLE

(a day, 300 XP) Deep within the crust, where all light dies but the temperature rises as the residual nuclear fires at the heart of the Near Moon keep burning, is a series of interconnected halls and chambers thick with chemovorous worms, wiggling anemones, and phosphorescent bacterial colonies. The chambers radiate out from a great orifice of slick, fatty flesh arranged over bones of crystal, a gaping mouth into a living layer of the Near Moon.

THE WARM MANTLE

The mantle of the Near Moon is still alive, a hundred metres thick layer of fleshy void organism with crystal endoskeletal planes, pillars, struts, and spines, and exoskeletal plates of nickel-iron compacted by the coagulated dust and boulders of the crust. The massive creature moans and trembles, surviving on the heat from the nuclear fires of the core, tortured by the stuckforce lines that thread and shear and trap it. Ruined biomechanical autofactories of much earlier times lodge in its compressed flesh like pearls, while the tunnels of parasitical nuclearlithic tribes carve their way through, constricting and collapsing over time. A sense of dread, claustrophobia, and carnivory gone mad pervades the mantle.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE WARM MANTLE (D8)

1. Isolated **sabre-toothed flea antibodies** (L5, primordial) with modulating pseudopods patrol larger vessels of the organism.
2. **Enzyme gelatinoids** (L3, acidic) squeeze their way out of vesicles to digest organic matter for the void organism.
3. A flood of warm organic fluid sweeps through as a bladder pops somewhere within the void creature. Small creatures and loose objects are swept deeper into the void creature.
4. Skeletons of legless six-armed post-humans encased in translucent fatty cysts within the walls.
5. Piles of excreted food organisms mixed with broken shards of void bone.
6. Trembling cellular colonies migrating between sections of the void organism.
7. **Parasitical nuclearlithic post-humans** (L1, carnivorous) scuttle on their six modified arms, wielding shards of crystal void bone and shields made of nickle-iron platelets.
8. **Nuclearlithic master chief** (L3, radiating) stalks the tunnels, ten-armed like a cuttlefish, with uranium teeth and nicked rhenium alloy hand axes tied to crystal bone shafts with strands of cured void creature nerve fibres.

PASSAGES IN THE WARM MANTLE (D8)

1. Crystallized clot-filled vein, slowly calcifying.
2. Peristaltic tube full of organic fluid.
3. Moist epithelial tube filled knee-deep with void creature ichor.
4. Keratinous tube lined with thorn-like cilia.
5. Blubber-swaddled crevasse between flesh-and-crystal masses.
6. Scar-lined healing excavation tunnels left by burrowing parasitical nuclearlithics.
7. Fresh-cut passages through the soft tissues of the void organism, dripping with healing stem fluid.
8. Symbiont-access arteries of calcerated skin and crystalline struts leading to a **common chamber**.

COMMON CHAMBERS IN THE WARM MANTLE (D8)

1. Ruptured void-cyst, the areas around it aglow with void radiations and littered with corpses of explorers.
2. Sealed void-cyst, its hard pearlescent skin seals toxic byproducts of the void creature's metabolism.
3. Nutrient bladder, half-filled with organic soup rich with radially symmetric alien eukaryotes.
4. Processing organs, pumping vessels, great valves and strange **gelatinoids** (L1, desensitizing).
5. Nuclearlithic midden chamber, filled with excreta and refuse, being slowly reabsorbed by the void organism.
6. Nuclearlithic clan vestibules carved into the soft tissues of the void organism.
7. Ransacked crew cysts, like cracked shells trapped in the flesh of the creature.
8. Vestibule to a **chamber of interest**.

CHAMBERS OF INTEREST IN THE WARM MANTLE (D6)

1. WRECK OF THE DARK ASTER

(several hours, 200 XP) Half-crushed and penetrated by tendrils, webs, and sheets of void creature, lodged like a tremendous splinter is the sixty-metre long livingstone wreck of the voidship *Dark Aster*. It's backup airlock is damaged, the door blasted away by emergency lasers, and organic fluids leech through the honeycomb of ancient stone passageways. A ruddy beach-ball-shaped **monocellular gobbler** (L5, mostly harmless) waddles around, warbling sadly. It is lonely and follows humans. The main command center sports the ruin of a bottle organ and, still trapped within the crystal brain of the ship, Commander Dowell. The *Aster* was on the way to "the Veil," to stop a group of fugitives from detonating a galactic sector. The mission failed. *Deep within* the bomb bay rests the **Last Bomb** (L19, star breaking). It is very sad and lonely as it could not explode, because the last order was garbled, and will try to convince visitors to identify themselves as its masters and order it to explode. It can only explode when ordered. Its purpose in life is to explode. It can detonate a star, if it is in its heliosphere.

2. NUCLEARLITHIC HIVE

(a few hours, 150 XP) It started out as a habitation cyst within the void creature, but refugees from the Crust expanded it over many decades. Eventually they discovered an alien body re-composer and used it to preserve their elders. Repeated errors in the re-composer created their current six-armed morphology and the nuclearlithics now worship it as their Living Mother, for it is where new nuclearlithics are born after they deposit their dead within its bowels of metal and qua-ice. If the re-composer is destroyed, the nuclearlithics will eventually die out. The re-composer can repair nearly any bodily injury, but every time it is used there is a 20% chance of a significant bodily modification. Every time a body is revived from death, it is severely modified and revived with just its personality, but no soul.

3. EGG CHAMBER OF THE VOID CREATURE

(a day, 300 XP) A dark and dismal labyrinth of pulsating tubes of cartilage and crystal houses eggs with metallic shells, corrugated like grenades. Eel-like **burrowers-into-flesh** (L2, swarming) have infested the hot-house tubes. Most of the eggs are non-viable, but if exposed to the emanations of the void, a crystal-organic void creature will hatch and grow into a functional biological void traveller within seven years. There may or may not be doppelganger eggs also hidden in the labyrinth.

4. ORGAN OF THE STARS

(a few hours, 150 XP) The flesh has died back here, cut apart from the creature by three vibrating planes of stuck force. The force fields glimmer slightly, and the crystalline void creature bones suspended between them resonate with eerie sound as the creature trembles around the chamber, pushing the fetid air back and forth through the long hollow crystals.

5. BRAIN MINE

(several hours, 200 XP) Here the nuclearlithics excavate the vast brain of the void creature, living off its fats and proteins. The adaptable creature's brain regrows continually, possibly an adaptation to survive the void fires, but the nuclearlithics have eaten almost all its memories, leaving it unable to remember why it first came to the Near Moon, who it is, or even that it could possibly leave. The degenerate nuclearlithics gorge themselves on the brain whenever it grows large enough to give the creature a semblance of sentience, pruning back its consciousness and keeping it docile, though they do not know this is the effect they have. Within a dozen crystal nuclei provide templates for the brain regrowth. If the nuclearlithics are destroyed, the void creature will become sentient again in a few years. If the brain is destroyed with thermic explosives and the crystal nuclei cracked with force weapons, the void creature will finally die, the mantle ecosystem will collapse, and the nuclearlithics will be forced out of the rotting heart of the Near Moon.

6. THE CORE BUCCA

(a day, 400 XP) An enormous assemblage of rotating, grinding, tearing crystalline mouth structure arranged like wheels within wheels, plates irising around plates, extending like a proboscis over fifty metres deep into the core, where it ends in an abrupt and gory (if fossilized) bisection. A plane of force cut off the creature's mouth parts from the core, but it sent secondary mandibles probing around the edges of the plane and a couple of them found gaps in the stuckforce. They are petrified and ancient airlocks of cycling force have been placed within them. This is the entrance to the core of the Near Moon.

THE CRYSTAL CORE

Stuckforce is thick within the core, dividing planes and snarling in knots of force that give off sparkling waves of aetherial radiation. The radiation has petrified most of the core, organic or metal, into milky crystal, which gleams with iridescence when light touches it. Sections far from the nexuses retain their alien aesthetic of chrome, red foamy plastic furniture, and polished faux-banded agate panels. Plastic-force composite blast doors divide sections, they swing shut automatically with a satisfying click and thunk.

Bringing a large quantity of rare crystals to the surface will collapse their trade value by 1d6 x 10 percent. Roll a second six-sided die. The difference between the two numbers is how many trade routes collapse from the unexpected disruption.

CRYSTALLIZED ARTIFACTS IN THE CORE (D8)

1. Dark star blade pulsating with the remnants of a dead god, it's blade turned to fragile opal by the radiation.
2. Cloned specimen of a perfect oiled barbarian, crystallized to an amber hue. Labelled Jun. If restored to life, has amazing stats, because they are perfect.
3. Biopsionic personality replicator, which overrides another creature's personality with a copy. It looks like a hedgehog crossed with a squid, all spiny tentacles for probing chakras and neural networks. Unfortunately the whole thing is now a delicate sculpture of lurid green-yellow fluorescent crystals.
4. Invasive **void assault arachnid** (L7, perfect survivor), turned to translucent crystal, the human-derived operant brain clearly visible as a garnet intrusion in the pinkish quartzite structure.
5. Four-armed proto-nuclearlithic compacted between planes of crystal, turned into a two-dimensional crystal landscape of exploded organs and void adaptations.
6. Coffee mug and towel, both turned to tourmaline.
7. Apatite bust of stunning androgynous mythical Long Long Ago sentience, the rest of the body destroyed when some kind of combat parasite burst out of its chest. Interlaced through the crystallized brain is a complex meta-crystalline web—a still functional meaning-maker. The device makes sentient creatures find meaning in whatever meaningless task they have been assigned.
8. Compacted mass of mythical Long Long Ago sentience body parts, turned to calcite and fluorite.

PASSAGES IN THE CRYSTAL CORE (D8)

1. Tunnel compacted flat by pressure of the void creature above.
2. Passage reduced to a series of sharp-edged squeeze-holes.
3. Constricted crystallized passage, marked by the scabbling of desperate survivors.
4. Tall, narrow passageway divided in half by plane of stuck-force.
5. Glittering crystal passageway, all iridescence and translucence.
6. Metal passageway, dulled and pitted by hard radiation.
7. Chrome and agate hallway, sinister in its bureaucratic mix of opulence and unimaginative design.
8. Seat-lined hall with dull crystal mirrors looking out on dark nothingness, leading to a **common chamber**.

COMMON CHAMBERS IN THE CRYSTAL CORE (D8)

1. Cylindrical cargo hall, full of strange fruits preserved in ice generated by stuck-force leeches, which slowly deplete stuck-force fields to generate energy.
2. Crew pod quarters, with plastic and crystal void travel pods. Most are broken down. One in ten still holds a viable androgynous Long Long Ago human body. Half of these are infected with void assault arachnids (L7, perfectly hungry).
3. Rest and relaxation chamber, with meaning enhancement and virtual reality wall sockets and nutrient intake hoses. Nothing works anymore.
4. Force maintenance rooms, with crystal machinery that maintains a stuck-force plane. Disabling them unblocks a passageway or chamber somewhere. Each machine disabled has a 1% cumulative chance of unmooring the Near Moon.
5. Force knot void, a spherical crystal void created by the pressure of stuck-force knots and their aetherial radiation over numberless aeons. Non-crystalline structures and creatures within the void turn to crystal at a rate of 1d6 millimeters per minute.
6. Eden chamber, full of dead plants and animals, mummified or crystallized in the radiation. Once destined to populate a new world, now just a strange and cryptic memento of a failed endeavour.
7. Defense chamber, with **dormant defense machines** (L7, death rays). One in ten such machines are still viable. They do not target shape-shifters.
8. Crystal anteroom to a **chamber of interest**.

CHAMBERS OF INTEREST IN THE CRYSTAL CORE (D6)

1. ARCHIVES OF THE CRYSTAL SHIP

(a few hours, 200 XP) A bright spherical chamber filled with vibrating emanations of pain and lanced with a haphazard arrangement of crystal pillars seemingly filled with gentle rain. Stored here are the personalities of a thousand youths of a Long Long Ago pseudo-human species, delivered from reason by the data corruption of the aeons. Many of the pillars are so decayed that activating them absorbs the personality of the user, overwriting the previously stored youth in a swift but brutally painful process that takes subjective centuries.

2. PERFECT UNIVERSE GENERATOR

(several hours, 300 XP) A silver torus dense with static electricity and heavy with a dull expectancy. Mummified scholar-priests of the doomed species rest plugged into coding couches, interfaced with *the Silver Machine*, a quantum computer entangled with a infinite copies of itself smeared through a swathe of multiverses. An aeon ago it was ordered to run massively parallel simulations to generate a perfect universe for the pseudo-humans to escape to. That simulation was completed sometime ago, but the scholars were already dead, so it simply executed the contingency code. Now it provides access to the perfect universe, at a series of points predetermined as highly suitable for its creators. If activated, it opens a portal to any one (or a random one) of the thirty major locations in the Ultraviolet Grasslands. This world is, after all, the perfect world.

3. STOWAWAY'S HOME

(two days, 400 XP) Seven tiny, narrow, claustrophobic, interlinked passages, the crystals coated in a black substance that resists the senses. It absorbs light, sound, touch, radiation, psychic emanation. It is utterly null. Within, now covered in dust in obviously abandoned for a long time, are a time-surfing sarcophagus, meaning-maker, and massive amounts of proto-lingish entertainment and cultural material stored on fifteen neural implants (worth $2d6 \times 10,000$ to any grand museum or university). There are no names, but plastered on two walls are hundreds of thin prints of children's drawings celebrating the 'Progenitor of the Followers into Heaven.' Whoever stayed here obviously outlived the extinction of the pseudo-humans.

4. CENTRAL FORCE WEAVER

(a day, 200 XP) A double helix of twenty crystal spheres housing nutrient baths and crystalized who-were-these-peoples. The dead were powerful psychokinetics of the dead species, their personalities strong enough to retain control of the stuck-force fields in a large area around the Crystal Core. With each crystalized psychokinetic force controller destroyed, there is a cumulative 10% chance of unmooring the Near Moon. If they are hacked, it becomes possible to modulate the nearby force fields, unsticking them.

5. MASTER CONTROL

(a few hours, 250 XP) An austere pyramidal chamber with four great machine eyes embedded in its walls. The eyes are grown milky with age and aetherial radiation, but still they look into space and time, waiting for a navigator to again sit upon the throne of needles and become one with the Crystal Ship (or, as is the case now, the Crystal Core). Activating the great null-space engines is surprisingly easy, flying the Near Moon is shockingly complicated. If at least 60% of the stuck-force fields have not been disabled or brought under control, unmooring the Near Moon, the engines will rip the moon into $2d6$ chunks, which will float around for several days before coming to rest in the sky (or on the ground) once again.

6. FINAL COUNTDOWN

(a few more hours, 100 XP) A chamber of great metal and crystal coils, wheels within wheels, in complex and terrifyingly higher-dimensional arrangement, this odd-space houses the null-space engines of the Crystal Ship. In the heart of this funhouse labyrinth is a crystal chamber with three crystal switches. Two are bright red and pushed down into a block of jade, the third is upright, a mummified pseudo-human hand gripping it. Smeared across the ground is the dessicated ruin of a half-naked pseudo-human warrior, while in a corner rests the hibernating cyst of the **void assault arachnid** (L7, not dead). Pushing in the last crystal will detonate the null-space engines, destroying the Moon. Pulling out the two activated crystals will make controlling the Near Moon somewhat easier.

PLAYING WITH THE CRYSTAL SHIP

The Crystal Core and the Warm Mantle list a few ways to mess with the Near Moon. There are a few possible outcomes.

UNMOORING THE NEAR MOON (D6)

1. The Near Moon rebounds into the voids, hurtling away from the world at fantastic speeds.
2. The Near Moon ascends into the heavens, rising 1d100 kilometers into the air.
3. The Near Moon suddenly collapses into the ground, crushing everything and everyone in the town below, creating a hemispherical mountain. Creatures in or on the Near Moon have a 50% chance of being crushed. The gravity remains odd in the area.
4. The Near Moon gently sinks to the ground, grinding the ramshackle town into the bedrock and killing 1d100% of the population. The gravity remains odd.
5. The Near Moon slowly floats across the Ultraviolet Grasslands to a random location up to five weeks travel away.
6. The Near Moon begins to slowly peregrinate around the Ultraviolet Grasslands, floating from one location to another, always hovering 100 feet above the ground. It takes 2d6 weeks to travel from each location to the next. It never stops.

DETONATING THE NULL-SPACE ENGINES (D6)

1. Freakishly, the *Dark Aster* is ejected and hurtles into the sun, where the Last Bomb explodes and destroys the sun. Its purpose is fulfilled. The world freezes in a couple of days. Soon remote hatches open and eerie needles flee the dead world, carrying Ultras to new worlds.
2. A great crater, two hundred miles across, is all that is left. A nuclear winter immediately falls and lasts for 1d4 years. Slowly a new sea forms in the heart of the Ultraviolet Grasslands. All trade routes are disrupted. Savage tribes and clans take over, while civilization whimpers in bunker cities.
3. In a searing flash of light the Near Moon disappears, the boom of the inrushing air is heard around the world and thousands are blinded. Strangely, aside from the light, nothing else remains.
4. The Crystal Ship winks out of existence and the Void Creature of the Warm Mantle grows to fill the gap, turning it into bio-crystalline horror world.
5. The null-spaces engines erupt from the side of the moon, like a great firecracker, ripping a vast gaping hole from the crater to the surface, but the stuck-force and the Void Creature hold in place. The Near Moon now has a vast new hole.
6. A torrent of radiation pours out, degrading the Crystal Ship and killing all the nuclearlithics. The Void Creature, it's brain finally left alone, regains consciousness and begins to seek a new purpose. In a few years it announces itself as the bringer of Heaven in the Flesh to the peoples of the steppe. The cult of the Great Void Fleshgod emerges as a powerful force within a decade.

FLYING THE NEAR MOON (D4)

The navigator locks into the Master Control and becomes one with the Crystal Ship. That player should create a new character, and the players should treat the former player as a group character - the Ship. They now have different options.

1. **Iron Needle:** take only an escape core, a splinter of the crystal ship, and embark on an in-system swashbuckling adventure, discovering the scattered ruins of the Chosen Ones on other planets of the system, the sky temples of the Spectrum Satraps in deep orbits, and the multitude of dead and half-dead habitats in orbit around the world (the Fast Stars).
2. **Crystal Ship:** rip the heart out of the Near Moon, blasting skyward and leaving a smouldering half-shell of dying meat and rippling dust behind, as they ascend into the heavens on a null-space ship. They're now read for interstellar hijinks and excursions through horror dimensions undreamt of in their philosophy (or this book).
3. **Meat Ship:** in a series of pitched battles, take down the nuclearlithics and slave the Void Creature to the navigator, creating a five-hundred-metre diameter sphere of void flesh and crystal, and set about ... creating a nightmare solar empire using the void assault arachnid brood vaults they have just unlocked?
4. **Fly Me to the Moon:** take the whole Moon on a flight to the edge of space and time, equip it with voyagers (stranded tourists) and find the creators of this universe and ask them what they were thinking.

Good luck in these deeply weird and voidy waters.

Work in Progress

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