

The Magnolia Archipelago

Strange things have always happened in the world we now call the Magnolia Archipelago. Even in the old days it was a twisted place where unexplainable things simply happened. Sometimes a thing would roam out of the woods that was a combination of animals. Sometimes a light would appear in the sky at night without warning. Sometimes a person would go white as they could do and then explode. These things happen. Unlike many worlds, whose cause-and-effect are fairly rational, the Magnolia Archipelago has always been a place that defies predictable patterns. It can easily fool you; the scientific method works most of the time, with its rote observations and predictions. Just when you get comfortable that things are proceeding as predicted, it will switch on you and suddenly defy all sense of explanation. As an example, science in the Archipelago had once postulated a theory of evolution, through which all living things evolved into more complex forms from simpler ones. In this way family lines can be traced for species and the fossil record does bare this out, for the most part. However, for all the proof of it, it does not explain the mutants, universally extreme of form, who periodically crop up with no ancestors found in the fossil record. From what tree does the Yeti and the Greys arise? Unknown. The strangeness extends into realm of physics, chemistry, and metaphysics as well; sometimes (and only sometimes) " $2 + 2 = 5$ ".

It so happens that, although science is incapable of making predictions with any reliable certainty, there are rare people born who seem to be capable of intuitively understanding where these "reality exceptions" are said to exist, and indeed, can compensate for them. In ancient times they called such people Prophets and there was once extensive literature written upon the subject. The Prophets are said to have lead mankind out of ignorance and into moral and worldly enlightenment. The Prophets fell out of favor in time and mankind turned to Science (note the capitalisation) instead. Unlike science, which relies on the predictability of observable phenomena (remember, phenomena cannot be accurately predicted) Science relies on inspiration and intuition. Science (unlike science) is therefore equal parts art and reason. It is a form of genius although those gifted with the sight are generally not recognized as such until generations after their death. Not everyone is capable of Science, it is true. Some people just don't have the spark. Some people have the spark too powerfully and sadly, their fate is madness and a 87.6% chance of human spontaneous combustion. From this point forward, when we refer to the word "science" in this document, we shall refer to it in the capitalised sense only (Science!).

History of the Magnolia Archipelago

A Materialist Cosmogony

The dominant ideology of the Magnolia Archipelago is Science which proposes a virtually rational, materialist origin of the universe. Since Science was unable to record the conditions under which the universe began, it is the realm of Theory. Theory carries more weight than Hypothesis for it has a basis in experimental evidence and mathematical truths. It is theorized that the universe began as a Brobdingnagian Bang, an explosion which contained all the matter and energy of the universe. Eventually, this matter cooled and condensed, forming stars and systems. Living things emerged in these systems and the world that is home to the Magnolia Archipelago is one of them. It is theorized that there is life in other systems and other dimensions but Science is conflicted on whether not such beings have been in contact with the Archipelago. Because the Archipelago is semi-rational, it may very well be the case that aliens have been contacted in some time-lines but not others meaning that by objective truth, both possibilities are simultaneously occurring everywhere all the time. Science is full of such paradox. Light is a particle and a wave? Time is absolute and relative? Yeti is both ancestor and descendant of mankind?

Ah yes, the curious case of the Yeti. There is no fossil evidence of Yeti before 5 million prior to the present and yet, immediately after, they are everywhere with no transition fossils indicating a terrestrial evolution. And yet, there is fossil evidence that Yetis may have evolved, perhaps even devolved, into human beings. Regardless, the human race evolved into the large-brained bipedal apes that we have come to know and love. Now, human beings are clever and noble things worthy of their footnote in history, certainly. But like Professor Fatheur's radioactive cat which is both alive and unliving, human beings can be both divine and simultaneously miserable sacks of crap. The earliest technological advances were fueled by a desire to kill each other in more and more efficient means. They treated the majority, their female population, as if they were merely chattel. They saw differences in each other's features and sought to exterminate what they thought was rival genes. They were barely animals. In fact, they never really stopped being animals, for animals they were, plain and simple. They were simply animals that knew how to heat their meals.

If you wish to be charitable, you can describe mankind's narrative as one of progress. Mankind rises out of barbarism, invents a bunch of very useful things, and then mellows out and reaps the rewards of civilization. To do so would really be too charitable. The reality is that the history of mankind is one of making mistakes of larger and larger scope until such time as their mistakes caught up with them. You see, someone, at some point, gained some semblance of self-criticism and realized it was really a bad idea to continue killing each other. This figure, whose nature and attributes are lost to time, would probably have been the first to be called a shaman or holy man. Really, beneath the charlatanism and superstition he was a Scientist. He was one of the few who recognized when $2 + 2 = 5$. Following his tutelage, and the tutelage of people like him, mankind built cities, founded agriculture, learned the secrets of long-term genetic engineering (breeding), and devoured half of the world's species into extinction. Later, the shamans fell out of favor and prophets emerged. The idea of nations came about again and the reasons for the wars changed from raiding to ideology. It was not a step in the right direction, for war harmed the long term prospects for survival. Politicians recognized this, and in time, drew their nations into a great alliance which abolished war. It was a step in the right direction. Mankind wasn't finished failing yet, though.

The Age of the Magnolia Confederation

The Magnolia Confederation was a very strong civilization because it encouraged diversity of beliefs and ways of life. It more equitably distributed the spoils of economic exchange between nations. Science had birthed all sorts of wonders into the world; refrigeration, motion pictures with sound, dish-washers, and Water-Fire Opposition Engines. These wonders could only be fueled by a single source, a greenish glowing energy known as Maia Energy. It was collected from the mantle of the earth by large stations called Maia Energy Collection Centers (MECC). A vast infrastructure spanned the world, like a great green spider's web, to deliver quanta of Maia Energy to businesses and citizens. Quality of life was at an all time high.

Multinational Alliances

Three great conglomerations of nations came together in the spirit mutual friendship and formed the Confederation, a one-world government. Each of the Multinational Alliances represented a distinct cultural group of nations, but all that remains are the big, sweeping details. The minutia are lost to time. Very little remains of any of these civilizations.

The Cotton Alliance

The Cotton Alliance was the breadbasket of the world, proud of their agro-industrial infrastructure. They were said to revere cotton as supreme among all crops for its benefit in

covering up the shame of nakedness. The Cotton Alliance never fully trusted the Magnolia Confederation and often threatened to leave. At the end of its existence a literary movement, known as Romanticism, captured the public imagination (attributes unknown). Lord Xyphoid originated from these people and his Victims were taken from their numbers.

The Deerhunter Alliance

The Deerhunter Alliance had a lot of dubious distinctions: Poorest and least educated of the Multinationals, the most populated, and the least united. There is evidence their nations were tribal in nature, but their names are lost. The Deerhunter Alliance benefited most from the Magnolia Confederation. It is said that Professor Fatheur was the most brilliant of these people and must be so for history makes them out to be a people of simpletons.

The Southern People's Alliance

The product of a revolution, the Southern People's Alliance used the red star as its symbol. As a people, they seem to care less about the importance of the One Book, and more about a red book (significance unknown). It seems their chief occupation was marching, looking imposing, and drinking distillations. Doctor Y was born to these people and their well-ordered society informed his decision to create an ideal mechanical utopia.

Technological Wonders of the Past

The Magnolia Confederation was formed with international unity in mind. A very large part of this strategy was to further Science and the politicians made this a priority. The decision was key in the development of technologies which increased the Confederation's reliance on Maia Energy.

Water-Fire Opposition Engines

Using esoteric principles of elemental opposition, pistons can be driven using only small amounts Maia Energy and ordinary everyday water. WFOE were used in most forms of transportation, industry, and in some medical devices. Essentially, these are the machines which turn Maia Energy into real work.

Maia Energy Collection Engines

At Maia Energy Collection Centers great engines toil day and night, dredging up the soft green energy that is so abundant in the bowels of the planet. These vast extraction machines made the Confederate way of life and peace possible. Eventually they dredged up so much Maia that it starting going sour. This had unintended consequences.

Elemental Transmutation Nodes

Using powerful Weak-Force Microscopes, Scientists of the Confederation were able to produce microscopic machines which run on Maia. Such machines were capable of flooding individual molecules with Positively Charged Anti-Nega-Neutrons which bind to specific points in the molecule and transform it into a different substance. Using Elemental Transmutation Nodes, Scientists could turn trees into aluminum, water into wine, and pork into steak.

Mathematical Engine

Using long reels of black magnetic tape and huge stacks of punch-cards, a Mathematical Engine can calculate Pi to the seventh decimal place. Not particularly impressive computational power compared to the vast power of the Scientist's modern Quantum Quantification Slings, to be sure, but it was quite advanced for the age. Mathematical Engines were often equipped with sound-making devices which could chirp out simple themes like a music box.

Everyday Wonders

The good and pious people of the Confederation didn't have access to the high-end technologies listed above, but they had about a thousand other devices to help in their everyday life. This list includes, but is not limited to: running water, automatic can-openers, coffee making machines, blenders, range ovens, clothes-washing machines, telephones, vibrating beds, beard-trimmers, radios, and a host of manufactured consumable products. Most of these either run on Maia Energy or were manufactured under conditions which require Maia Energy. Without the green gold, these wonders ceased.

Social Institutions

The Confederation had five layers of government, from the order of neighborhood, province, nation, multinational federal government, and Confederate government. Consequently, the various levels of government employed huge numbers of people for a diverse set of purposes. The governments enacted public works, kept the streets clean, and was ever vigilant for the threat of International Anarchists, whose expansionistic conspiracies were said to be the doom of nations.

Although there were a hundred Churches with a hundred mutually exclusive theologies, they all derived their spiritual teachings from a single document. It was known as the One Book, a series of parables and teachings from the innumerable Prophets who were canonized in the mythological prehistory. What Science now regards as the "2 + 2 = 5 Principle" is accounted for in the One Book as miracles, unpredictable events which defy logical explanation. Certain sects preferred the teachings of certain Prophets. No known copies of the One Book exist, but fragments wash up on shore occasionally. Modern Victims of Science sometimes make collections of religious icons and kitsch representing the various prophets. Known icons of the Prophets include images of reclining fat bald men, jolly white-bearded fat men in red, and depictions of medieval tortures.

Industry was the main source of employment. This was the age of capitalism, the age of collective bargaining, the age of the One Party, the age of the ticker tape and the telephone. There were industries devoted to niches within other industries. There were manufacturing sectors devoted to making the machines used in making other machines. Not all places operated on capitalistic principles; some places found a state-owned means of production was more efficient for their people. Neither method was sound, for both of them used Maia Energy as their fuel.

Children attended schools during the year and attended wilderness (what are assumed to be) labor camps in the summer. Children were indoctrinated with the prevailing social, religious, and Scientific ideas of the time and many were not correct. In the modern age, its unclear what these attitudes and theories were.

Negative Consequences of Maia Energy Use

The invention of the Maia Energy Harvesting Engine ushered in an era of prosperity that had been unthinkable otherwise. In fact, without Maia Energy, such wonders are impossible. They thanked the Red-Coat White-Beard Fat Man or whoever it was they thanked for such things every single day for their gift of Maia Energy. After several generations, the scientific method had shown that Maia Energy was clean, safe, and nearly inexhaustible. Because of Maia's utility, mankind overcrowded the planet with just too many damn people. Each one born was more useless than the last, a bottomless hole fed by Maia Energy. Sometimes a billboard will wash up on shore at the Promontory with the smiling image of a sprite who was designed as a personification of Maia Energy. This character was used as an artificial spokesperson, but

you would have to be able to read the Old Tongue to know what it is that plucky green guy was saying. It seemed as if Maia harvesting was the best thing the world had ever thought of.

The reality of Maia Energy is well known now but back then they had no reason to suspect that it spelled lingering doom. The first suspicions that Maia Energy was not what it seemed began surfacing about 210 years in the past. The Confederation had discovered a link between Maia Energy and malignant lymphoma in those who worked closely with the energy. With further investigation it seemed that Maia Energy was getting more and more toxic by the day. Powerlines were causing plants and local wildlife to mutate into giant forms which would inevitably go on a rampage. If nothing were to be done, it was altogether possible that it could get so hostile to human life that children might be born with heads of axolotl. Household appliances might come to life and oppose their previous owners. There were already horror stories of reheated food coming to life and eating the person it was intended for. Desertification was spreading at the tropical band due to atmospheric change wreaked by Maia. Some factions of the Confederation wanted to quit Maia Energy entirely while another wished to stick with it until such time as an alternative was found. A third faction argued for widespread euthanasia to curb population and cut down Maia consumption. Because of the high stakes it was possible war might break out over the matter. Each of the three Multinational Alliances brought forth their greatest minds to find an alternative that might preserve the peace.

The Summit of Supreme Progress The Three Greatest Minds Summoned

If you asked the common citizen of the Magnolia Confederation what the greatest threat to their people was, they would probably have said it was something called "International Anarchism". This "Anarchism" is thought to be a political movement, but the people of the Archipelago were wrong about what the real threat to their security was. They had no means of knowing that they were about to accidentally create the deadliest moment in human history.

It is well noted that brilliant people tend to march to their own drumbeat. They have a clear vision of the nature of things for they have undoubtedly spent a great deal of time thinking upon the subject. Their points of view are usually radically different than that of the prevailing attitudes, for highly intelligent people are absolutely never supporters of the status quo. Rather, they are ahead of their time in a radical way. They are often called scattered, eccentric, and yes, sometimes mad. There is clearly a link between off-beat thinking and brilliance. As the genius increases, so does the crazy. If we are to accept this principle as true, then the three Scientists, who will shall presently come to know better, are on the far side of the crazy/eureka scale (perhaps of the scale entirely).

In response to the Maia Energy Crisis, each of the three Multinational Alliances brought forth their three greatest minds. The politicians needed a means to show that they were on top of the situation. Social chaos began to creep in through the cracks and preachers began giving sermons about the end-times where there are wars and rumors of wars. As mentioned before, in the Magnolia Archipelago/Confederation insanity and brilliance seem inseparable. All three Scientists had a reputation for being a little kooky. They were well known monologists, often speaking in sinister and threatening tones to their captive audiences. Each was known to experiment upon themselves in lieu of the legal prohibitions against human experimentation. All three had likewise been drummed out of the University system for "ethical lapses". This gave them each an inborn sense of having been persecuted which figures prominently later in this dreary tale.

Their task was to combine talents, for each was a true authority of their various disciplines

(biology, physics, and metaphysics) and discover a new, viable source of energy to fuel the Confederation. However, as soon as the Summit of Supreme Progress began, it was clear that something dark was brewing rather than something helpful. Each of the Scientists seemed more interested in pilfering their fellow's research than actually doing anything about the Maia Energy conundrum. They had trouble staying on task, spending as much time experimentally disproving each other's pet theories and philosophies. When someone would push them in the direction of new energy sources, they would become most irate. As the project wore on into its fifth year, the Scientists no longer really appeared human. Their work-spaces were so sloppy and disorganized that they sprawled out into the hallway of their labs. Unbeknownst to anyone, the Scientists were each planning their own methods of exterminating the human race.

The Seeds of the End Planted

Even though all three Scientists hated each other and despised their theories, they had each come to the conclusion that human life had run its course on this planet. The answer to the question of whether to stop using Maia Energy was obvious: stop the humans and you stop Maia harvesting. Having compared notes and reinforced each other's already low opinion of Homo Sapiens, they collectively realized that mankind had to be destroyed and a new species made to take its place. This new race, the Homo Superior, would live in harmony with the world, not drain it of its essence. They would be an enlightened people, educated by their Scientific Overlord. This is where the three Scientists differed, however: they could not agree on what form Homo Superior would take. Would it be flesh or machine? Child-like or immortal? Manufactured or born or somewhere inbetween? The argument consumed them, drowning out all considerations. For years it ground on, while each of the Scientists secretly built their doomsday projects. It was difficult to disguise operations of this magnitude, but the Confederation was desperate for what only the Scientists could offer. Civilization would be impotent without the juice to make it go. What choice did they have? All the same, it must have been difficult to explain to the grant-writers why the production of a radioactive, super-intelligent army of killer bees was germane to the discovery of new energy sources. Someone signed off that project, all the same.

It was morning when the three Scientists, completely independent of one another, sprung their world-ending terrors upon the Magnolia Confederation. They had no idea that their fellows were planning on doing the same. This ensured that the world was most thoroughly annihilated. The first course in the feast of devastation that followed was, of course, the radioactive, super-intelligent army of killer bees. Compounding surprise with confusion, a terrible mutant virus spread through the countryside, turning its victim's blood into formaldehyde. The dead were perfectly preserved against the elements and predation so that they could be claimed later. Even now, 200 years later, formaldehyde-laden bodies wash ashore on all the islands of the Archipelago. The final nail in humanity's proverbial coffin was the activation of a device which temporarily made the planet sit still in its rotation. This caused every object on the surface of the planet to tumble over. Although the rotation was returned to normal by the same device, the momentary jerk-to-a-stop caused a tidal wave so large that it washed over the planet a total of three times before eventually dissipating. At the end of the day, there was no Confederation. Luckily, Professor Fatheur had protected a small Archipelago from the tidal wave through the use of solid chunk of gravitons he happened to have laying around. That chunk saved the Archipelago but it was the only remaining habitable landmass. It was called the Magnolia Archipelago thereafter. It didn't take the other Scientists long to realize that they all needed bases in the Archipelago. In time, each island would be remade in the vision of its ruling Scientist. Revenge would eventually give way to Science!

An Age of Science!

Each of the Scientists had taken with them (by honeyed words or force) a number of humans with which to experiment. The creation of the Victims of Science occupied the better part of a hundred years and comprised about five generations of individuals. Unfettered by the ignorance of the masses, the Scientists were free to perform their experiments as they saw fit. No oversight. No grant-begging. No Boards of Ethics. Pure, syrupy Science slathered over a pancake of pure Reason. The remaining population was subjugated and used as fodder for the Scientist's transhumanist experiments.

After the first hundred years, the Scientists had perfected, as much as they cared to, their version of the Homo Superior. We will speak more of them later, but suffice to say that the result was distorted and altogether something new. Therafter, the Scientists began branching out. It seemed that whenever a Scientist had a truly revolutionary breakthrough that might allow them to oppose their fellows and conquer the Archipelago, the other two Scientists would make the exact same discovery at the exact same time. This has happened enough times so that the Scientists expect it now, having seen the pattern emerge. Which means its about time for that pattern to break.

Satisfied with the preliminary versions of Homo Superior (Y's Mechanical, Xyphoid's Chimerical, and Fatheur's Necrotic) the Scientists began to alter themselves to surpass the human form. Right on cue, each of them completed their various ascensions. Lord Xyphoid styles himself as the Prime Organism, a material supreme being. It is said that his flesh occupies the shape he desires. When he works, he looks like a simple man in a lab coat. When he sleeps, great masses of flesh rush out and fill his quarters. Although sessile (his tendrils anchor in the walls to take the weight off his great girth. Doctor Y is thoroughly dissatisfied with his transformation for it yet has too many biological elements for his taste. Currently, he exists as a brain in a mechanical brain support apparatus. He has a variety of cyborg bodies to choose from and keeps a hanger deep underground of machine bodies. His doctrine teaches that, ultimately, he and his followers will become perfect machine gods with no biological elements. Professor Fatheur simply arrested his cellular reproduction by means of a selectively permeable time field. On the surface, he seems the same upright, angular Professor as always. Yet, it is clear he is no longer human but something altogether alien to it. His features are a little too sculpted and his head and body hair follicles are just a little too precisely spaced. Although he may have been seen at some point without his suede coat and cravat, the image seems an impossible one; they are inseparable.

Experiments in Quantum Mechanics

Thrown classical mechanics out the window because here comes Quantum Physics. Particles are waves and waves are particles. This revelation came to the Scientist about the same time and they set about trying to find ways to exploit these strange phenomena. It was far more difficult than expected. Quantum Mechanics is a spooky, abstract discipline. You can't even say where an electron is, let alone the nature of the observable universe. According to Quantum Mechanics and the Y Uncertainty Principle, the act of observing the universe is itself an action that alters the universe. From this period, the Scientists went even a shade more mad than they had been. From this fugue emerged new computational devices, called Quantum Quantification Slings, which are said to have near-infinite computational power. In layman's terms, the device "slings" a subatomic particle such that... well, really there is no layman's terms for such a machine. Ultimately, the technology was abandoned. The Scientists discovered that their own genius was a far superior form of computation far more in tune with the eccentricities of this reality.

Experiments in Space Travel

Recognizing that the waterlogged ball that is the planet is only a sliver of the greater universe, the Scientists devised methods by which to chart the open spaces outside the atmosphere. When they got wind that the others were doing the same, they immediately shifted the focus of their studies away from space exploration to space armament. Consequently, nothing was really accomplished by the endeavor. No real “travel” exactly. At the height of their space war the Scientists attracted the attention of beings known as “Grays”. Consequently, no one really talks about space anymore. At all. Ever. Still, sometimes a Victim of Science will stumble upon key documents from that era and dream sad dreams of living on far off planets.

Experiments in Psionics

The discovery of the thaumaturgion subatomic particle, unsurprisingly, occurred simultaneously on three islands. The discovery sparked intense interest in the field of Psionic Theory, which had the potential to give mankind conscious control over the material world. The arms race intensified tenfold, as the Scientists vowed that this would be the last technology they would pioneer only to immediately settle into the same old stalemate. The product of these labors was a technique called the Ontologies of Power, developed at roughly the same time. They are studies of the self and of consciousness that brings forth psychic phenomena. When performed correctly, subjects could produce force with their mind or divine events happening in other locations. The Scientists created a panoply of gear meant to enhance psionic ability. Among these items are thaumaturgion-injecting helmets, form-fitting body suits, and some sort of patch that slow-releases psionic stimulant. Using such devices is itself a skill requiring some understanding of thaumaturgion manipulation. Some individuals are attuned to the vibrating hum of their own thaumaturgions. The Scientists altered their Homo Superior populations so that they would progress in their psionic training faster. Even still, cultivating this connection as a natural talent is more difficult than practicing the Ontologies of Power and is less versatile. However, there are key reasons why one might want to avoid studying the Ontologies.

In fact, thaumaturgions are bad news, it turns out. When they meet, they combine and become what is called a superthaumaturgion. The Ontologies basically sweep them around and inevitably a certain number of them collide. If a subject's superthaumaturgion count gets too high, survival is not guaranteed. In fact, nearly all subjects spontaneously vaporize at some point or another. Again, no one speaks of the survivors and if a Victim happened upon such information they would without a doubt be sent to the lab for vivisection. Another dead end. No final victory.

Experiments in Dimensional Science

Dimensional Science has unlimited promise. Quantum mechanics explored the possibility of different dimensions or realities. Not all realities are evenly dispersed. Some are right on top of each other or even superimposed. Scientists started their research by rigging test subjects with sensors that transmit data as they are entering an alternate reality. The closest such place is described as being “immaterial” because things there are invisible, but superimposed with our reality. Both worlds are copies of each other except for a very small number of differences. Oddly, there are people who can see these differences in the so-called Immaterial Plane. This connection can be cultivated as a natural talent, and like psionic conditioning, the Scientists wanted their population to be well armed for any “Immaterial Invasion” scenario. They also developed machines which could project a soldier (or hapless mook) into this Immaterial realm where they would starve (immaterial air nourishes the blood but immaterial food does not digest). Drawing on this data, the Scientists had planted the seeds of a technology which would allow them to travel to entirely different realities, not the carbon copy realities they had been forced to probe.

As of this moment, Dimensional Science occupies most of the Scientists' thoughts. They cannot collect enough Victims from the Cnidarian Promontory to fuel their experiments so inevitably they simply send Victims from their own stock who they feel have transgressed against their Vision. Anyone making a "mistake" in the presence of their Science-Lord can expect to take the long trip into the unknown. The fate of these individuals is unknown. The Scientist's sensors only function for a fraction of a second before cutting out once the subject is through a rift. This is enough for the Scientists to refine their methods but it reveals nothing of what lies on the other side of these "fractures" in reality. Really, the Scientists seem uninterested in that aspect of their subject. Rather, they want to perfect a means to bend space and send armies of constructs to slay one another.

The Horrors of Epiphyte Island

Seen from the ocean, Epiphyte Island is a dark treeline teeming with the glowing eyes of wildlife. The trees here are live oaks, gray-barked and broad leafed. They teem with air moss, a life form categorized as being an epiphyte (a plant which grows upon other plants). The jungle is thick with pamellos and bromeliads blossom from rocks. The beach here is white and clean. Strange experimental creatures dart between the beach grass looking for sand fleas to eat. This is the only immediate clue that something might be wrong with this particular place. Inside the forest canopy, nature continues unspoiled in the darkness. This ring provides a defensive buffer against attack from rival Scientists as serves the function of a nature preserve. A mile inland, there are places where the oaks have been clear-cut for agriculture. Here, Chimera toil on plantations to produce the herbal and industrial ingredients for Lord Xyphoid's experiments. Clearly, the Chimera are Victims of Science; their bodies are twisted combinations of animal, plant, and man nature never intended. Many are asymmetrical, given haphazard grants that healed in horrifying ways. Lord Xyphoid tells the Victims that their forms are exalted, but it is hard to see such aberrations as anything other than distortions of the human frame. Epiphyte Island, in the interior, has an artificially inflated biodiversity. There are bear, walrus, elephants, panda, a triceratops, and a yeti named Magog. Chimera are dispatched to feed these creatures, frequently at their own expense.

A Profile of Lord Xyphoid (Also Known as the Prime Organism)

Lord Xyphoid once had another name it but has passed out of memory. He assumed the title of Lord as a part of his philosophy, believing that he was the Alpha of Alphas, ie, the Fittest. His origins are likewise shrouded, but we do know that he was the Scientist sent by the Cotton Alliance to the Summit of Supreme Progress. Given their reputation as an agricultural people we can presume his background may have involved that industry. His early philosophy centered around the idea of survival of the fittest. Consequently, he uses the word "adaptive" to mean "good". In the past hundred years or so, he now claims the title of Supreme Organism. In this capacity, he believes himself to be the meaning of life, which is to say, the meaning of all living things leading up to his creation. In time, he claims, all living things will exist within him as their own perfect ecosystems, free from the meddling of mankind. His Chimera are, of course, his chosen creatures, made in his image as a multitude of forms in one.

Lord Xyphoid can take a male or female form but his attempts at birthing a child have ended only with the poor creature begging for death before it had even been fully born. Xyphoid is a true shapeshifter, as you can see. He can assume a form which one would be inclined to say was his original body. However, he spends much of his time as a sprawling, sessile mass of fatty tendrils. This form was created for Xyphoid to extend his life through hyper-regeneration. He has specialized glands which produce various nasty things; viruses, acid-spitting hummingbirds, even human kidneys. This is only one of his many incarnations. Future

iterations will no doubt be even more horrid in their glory.

A Study of Homo Superior Chimerical

Chimera are sterile. Lord Xyphoid creates more by combining the gametes of Breeder Chimera. The reason they are infertile is because their chromosomes are scrambled up like a ball of genetic twine. The amount of data encoded therein is absurd. In fact, it contains the genetic code of the entire world's species of plants, animals, and fungi. Chimera, with deep meditation, can alter their internal tissues to adapt to their environment and unlock new capabilities. They call upon these various forms. Their metabolism is such that they can spontaneously grow or absorb tissues as needed. In order to "teach" a Chimera to initially accept and incorporate alien tissues, Chimera are grafted with a host of animal and plant structures. These serve as a reminder to the immune system that alien tissues can and do form inside a Chimera and it is nothing to freak out about. Once these grafts are made, the body can never again return to a human state. If the grafts are removed, the immune system will return with a vengeance, unravelling the Chimera from the inside out (Hazarmaveth Syndrome). Upon puberty, Chimera are required to report to Lord Xyphoid's lab for mandatory alteration. The Chimera is infused with a substance called ZaAt (Z-sub-A, A-sub-T) which gives a Chimera a greater degree of body-control. In a minority percentage of subjects it causes a terrible malady called Hazarmaveth Syndrome. The person's body and innards blossom outward as a mass of tumors. If left "unchecked" they could expand to fill an entire room.

The limits of Chimera lifespan are thought to be around 200 years as it has only been a decade since the original Chimera were first grafted. Death by old age, like death during youth, is usually by the terrible Hazarmaveth Syndrome. Chimera are incubated in mechanical wombs that feed nutrients and oxygen through a synthetic umbilicus. It is during this process that their chromosomes are turned into huge knots of information. In utero, each Chimera is given neurological stimulation that trains the pathways which give Chimera their strange physiologies. Their brain is programmed before it is even fully formed. Once the child is considered viable by the technicians, they are cracked out and are given the tissue grafts described formerly.

Chimera are not smarter, faster, stronger, more social, or psionic than normal humans as a universal rule. Furthermore, Chimera are not prodigies of all talents. Their range of inborn ability is comparable to humans. However, Chimera have triggers that prioritize the expression of genes which give Chimera far more potent talents than natural humans, provided they train at all. Chimera who are smarter than average are generally significantly smarter than similar human geniuses. Chimera that have keen senses instead have near-animal senses. This extends even into the realm of the social, for Chimera leaders (referred to as Alphas) are far more persuasive than human counterparts. Those compassionate souls who tend to the spiritual needs of their community (if indeed spiritual things exist at all) have an innate understanding of how to make people feel better. In light of this, how could anyone deny their superiority? Mankind was ever destined to be driven to extinction.

Chimera Transhumanism

In quiet repose, Chimera are able to probe the depth of genetic knowledge contained within their bodies. Without the proper training this technique is slow and clunky. Meditation techniques are very helpful, including visualization exercises and bodily exercises. A specialization in the field of Biology is likewise helpful, for with a knowledge of what is being done, the visualization is much, much easier. The most easy alterations can take as little as months to learn but the advanced techniques require a full time devotion to progress. Chimera can create nerve clusters to more accurately transmit sensory information. They can sprout claws of wood or keratin. They can even heal themselves to a limited extent, provided they

are seen to for even a moment. They can gain some control over their bleeding, for blood is a tissue like any. They can even develop new talents thought impossible, becoming creatures truly adapted for all situations. The most skilled gain true body control and are able to absorb their grafts without ill effect. They can be as alien or human in appearance as they desire. They can even incorporate animal elements in ways that are potentially... beautiful. This is what Lord Xyphoid always intended his evolutionary upgrades to be like: the will in harmony with nature. However, his creations simply do not often have the time to play through the trillions of genes present within themselves. Worker Chimera from Xyphoid's laboratory do not have any more time to spare than any other Chimera but they do have the expertise to quickly sort through genes and experiment with the results. Consequently, the Chimera who have the greatest comforts of society are the most adapted to life without them.

Xyphoidist Culture and Chimera Society

Lord Xyphoid believes that the meaning of the universe resides in the field of biology and that survival is the only true morality. It is natural that the strong should predate upon or enslave the weak. If the weak perishes, its faulty genes will not be a template for further failures. Xyphoid has no use for human beings, it is true, but he does not despise society. Indeed, society is just one of a myriad of adaptable forms found in nature, from the termite to the elephant. And, like all forms, it has its limits and its strengths. Xyphoid has set out to promote adaptability and inborn talent in his chosen people and he has succeeded. He does not believe in dogma as a general rule, and does not promote rigid social systems. Rather, his Chimera fall into their places in society by birth, community, aptitude, and their own drive for dominance. Xyphoid does not teach his people of afterlives or mysticism, but he does promote a near-religious devotion to the principles of ecosystems and of the element of carbon from which all life derives. In particular, makes much of the fact that carbon is constantly cycling out of our bodies at all times, mingling the environment and other living things. In time, that carbon is completely cycled out of the body and new carbon taken in to replace it. In this way, we are always in a state of one-ness with the things around us and even in death, we live on in the carbon that moves through the world.

Alphas

Alpha is not a birth title, a legal distinction, or other construct of society. It is a fact of Chimera behavior that some will command the respect of other Chimera. The method by which this title can be claimed is undefined by design. Alphas are often revealed by the people who serve under them. Amongst the Herd people, they are fierce warriors and hunters. In the Agriculturals, communication and empathy are more important. The Alphas among the Workers are the most specialized in a given craft who are approached in matters of leadership. Such Alphas possess not only social skill, but technical knowledge and experience. Lord Xyphoid is known as the Alpha of All Alphas who cows even the most savage warrior-king. Alphas settle all matters of law in essentially the manner they see fit. However, Alphas rarely intercede in matters of justice on half of individuals. If a person has something stolen or whose mate has been slain is very unlikely to get any justice. They are expected to mete out justice on their own. However, Alphas come down on individuals who are harming society as a whole. If a person is known to spoil a water source or draw down the ire of the Prime Organism, they can expect severe punishment.

Agriculturals

Lord Xyphoid's ideology is deeply environmentalist and rejects industrialism wherever it can. He sees early hunter-gather lifestyles to be the most ethically defensible. However, he needs agricultural products in order to circumvent a reliance on industrial methods. Therefore, he employs Chimera on specific parcels of land to grow various crops and foodstuff. Their culture,

from all indications, was probably closest to that of the Cotton Alliance from the Confederation days. In exchange for crops they get medicine and tools. Not a great life, really. Herds don't have a lot of respect for Agriculturals or their Alphas. Agriculturals are mostly vegetarian, simply because they do not raise livestock and they are not hunters. Agriculturals use no instruments, for their music is meant to be sung in the field where hands are occupied in labor. Agriculturals sometimes leave scarecrows to mark their boundary of their territory.

Herds

The Herds live in the wild places of Epiphyte Island. Native melons, nuts, figs, and a host of prey animals are the food of the Herds. Herds are created when extended family units merge with one another. When they meet another herd, some families will switch Herds or even part ways as three separate Herds following different Alphas. Herds have little use for technology but they understand what it is, generally. They understand that Lord Xyphoid is the Prime Organism who makes foodstuffs and chases sickness away. Herds generally do not raid but families will sometimes walk out of the woods to bully Agriculturals. Some elder members of the Herds will experiment with taking conscious control over their flesh, giving them unique abilities. The music of the Herds are usually pounded out on hollow logs and blown through reed flutes. Herds have warriors among their kind who are brought forth to do battle against the horrible cast-off experiments banished to the surface.

Workers

Workers serve in the laboratories of Lord Xyphoid. They are the most cosmopolitan but are not permitted any cultural niceties. No paintings. No music. They are expected to be creatures of the realm of pure abstraction, devoted solely to Science and Biology, its supreme sphere. Workers know the secrets of Biology and most are accomplished researchers and chemists. Even though it of less utility to Workers, they are the most likely to experiment on altering their own form. Only they have the Scientific background to really "take it out for a ride" so to speak. Workers eat a fermented kind of vegetable matter that is said to be "nutritionally perfect" but tastes you would expect a three course meal to taste like if it were blended in oatmeal. Workers often trade with outsiders for more natural fare. Workers are not permitted to make music, for it is seen as too much of the human world. Workers usually take names from the old One Book of the Confederation, although their cultural memory does not remember them as such.

The Madness of Island X

Island X is a thick green mess of jungle vines. Taller than the forest canopy, a large bubble-dome rises over the trees, encompassing perhaps half of the island itself. The jungle is absent in patches, where the sounds of chainsaws and drills drone nonstop. Smokestacks also rise above the trees, belching ash into the sky. There is no animal life, but there are mechanized automatons who plant trees in the wake of the logging squads. These automatons aren't purely mechanical: some of them are humanoid. Its the kind of sight that is anticipated and dreaded. They have mechanical things interspersed through their bodies, coming to the surface in some places, deforming the skin in others. Entire organ systems are replaced in this way (an arm, a spine, a face). Patches of their skin are sheeted over with metal and reacts like a magnetic ferrofluid in the shape of the human form. They are not mere machines, commanded by remote control. Rather, they have free will. They have sentience. They are aware of their state. They can see in others what has been done to themselves. Although it is all they know, it is a simple piece of logic to sit and wonder "Why do not have eyes of flesh like the others?"

Doctor Y: A Portrait of Obsession

As a boy Doctor Y suffered a series of organ failures which kept him in a state of near-

death for most of his childhood. He obtained his first PhD at the age of 9 from his hospital bed. He developed a habitat for himself which allayed his symptoms. It was during this time that Doctor Y began his experiments with Positively Charged Anti-Nega-Neutrons and Transmutation Nodes. I can't explain the Science of here (it is highly Scientific) but suffice to say that he discovered a means to transmute inorganic cynerbetics in such a way as to later allow it to return to its original state. He experimented on himself and discovered that he could, at a whim, completely replace every faulty organ system in his body. To accomplish this mighty feat, he would need to experiment on test subjects first and would require a vast amount of infrastructure. He was denied, he believes, because he was unable to leave his apparatus, and therefore, was unable to make the academic connections he needed to get such an ambitious program off the ground. Revenge was a forgone conclusion, but Doctor Y, as he is now known, would make his retaliation the event that would give birth to a new race of beings: the Homo Superior Mechanical. In this way, his act of destroying the humanity is really an act of creation.

This kind of cognitive dissonance is one of the hallmarks of Y's genius. His philosophy is replete with it. He thinks flesh is evil and yet he very much wishes his machines to act more organically. And yet, the machine is his ultimate goal with all pieces moving in perfect self-interested harmony. This vision is referred to as Y-Topia, a perfect mechanical society. In this way, he sees the organic world as being a step on the ladder of human ascension. In his mind, it is clear that organic life is doomed to extinction. It would ever the framework around which true mechanical "life" would originate. This is why he disdains the Science of his fellows; their Homo Superiors are built to be organic. It is unclear just why the Doctor dislikes organic life so much (outside of his own personal experiences). Periodically, he draws up plans to determine how feasible it would be to simply burn down the jungle. He cannot, however, because organic life is the only power source which can fuel his operation (besides Maia Energy, which obviously is off limits). For all his posturing against living things, though, he doesn't want his creations to merely be cogs in a machine. He wants them to be self-sustaining, replicating, dynamic, learning, thinking things. And yet, even with the vast computational power arrayed before him, he finds himself returning again and again to the human brain. It is maddening to him. Especially now, when all that is left of his original material being is his brain. His other organ systems have all been replaced.

The Man-Machine: The Quasi-Organic Physiology of Homo Superior Mechanical

Doctor Y's Homo Superiors are referred to as Model Y-2s in some literature and 2-Y's in other. This is because the Doctor uses the terms interchangeably. This has caused some controversy amongst the Y-2's (or is it 2-Y's?). The problem is that the designations stand for different things. 2-Y is short for "Series 2, Designation Y" meaning "Homo Superior constructed by Doctor Y". Y-2 is short for "Series Y, Model 2", meaning "Homo Superior Made in the Image of Doctor Y, Model 2". Each interpretation seems to have a radically different interpretation of their relationship to and creation by Doctor Y. The Doctor sheds no light on this imprecise use of terms. Indeed, he has even said that in the perfect Y-Topia, such disagreements would be moot. And yet, he continues to use the terms interchangeably, giving fuel to the controversy.

The physiology of of a Model 2-Y begins like that of a human. They are born the normal way inside Y-2 mothers who are chosen to bear the next generation by artificial insemination. When the child is born, they are given Subcutaneous Transmutation Nodes (STNs), which will give them some measure of conscious control over their body's physiological make-up. Because Doctor Y is always trying to improve his techniques, children undergo their transformations in groups, called Batches. Each Batch undergoes the same process becoming Y-2s so that

they can be studied throughout their life to determine which tweaks are keepers and which cause a swift descent into Metalosis Maligna. Y-2s of the same Batch consider each other in the manner of sisters and brothers. During their childhood, 2-Y's have a series of operations which place electrical wiring through-out their bodies, creating a secondary nervous system. This gives them the ability to interface more closely with their STNs. STNs temporarily, and importantly, reversibly, can transmute organ tissue series into a synthetic, mechanical equivalent for momentary bursts of capability. In this way, Y-2's can speed their synaptic response by using electrical signals, rather than chemical ones. They can temporarily transmute their arm muscles into pistons and reinforce their skeletal system to withstand such force. They can telescope their eyes or create chemical-detecting nodes within their nasal passages to enhance their senses.

However, there are limitations, mainly human, for the application of this technology. While Model 2-Y's clearly can take their talents more easily into the realm of human excellence, their brains can only be trained to utilize the benefit of three or four areas of talent. Some 2-Y laborers have trained their electrical nervous system for physical might and speed and these ones would not be able to calculating machines in the cerebral cortex like their engineer brethren. Likewise, Y-2's who trained their talents to the mental realm would not also have the processing power to alter their physical attributes. In this way, Homo Superior Mechanical does not possess more talents than most human beings. They are simply possess and internal toolbox that enables them to take their talents to greater heights.

Normally, Y-2's do not need to eat or sleep, provided they spend an hour a day in a Recharge Station. However, these only exist in the Bubble City, and there are many Model Y-2's who do not have access. When they do not have access, they are simply forced to eat and sleep as normal. The Defectives (exiles from the Bubble City) are delivered a brick of cake-like synthetic meal-stuff. Doctor Y, being unconcerned with matters of fleshly nutrition, does not provide vitamins or protein in this meal-stuff, forcing Defectives to scavenge on their own. More civilized Y-2's simply think that their rural kin are simply "lazy" but the reality is that they are not as well upkept. A very small percentage of 2-Ys who do not have access to a Recharge Station are afflicted with a disease called Metalosis Maligna. In its early stages, a Y-2 loses control of their STNs which transmutes whole limbs or other large-organ systems into machine-parts. Such adaptations are not the elegant, over-engineered machines of Doctor Y. Rather, they are very much like tumors on the inorganic body, with massive tin-whiskers extending out of lesions in the skin. In the later stages of Metalosis Maligna, the subject goes irrevocably insane, fleeing to the wilderness to attack and eat healthy 2-Ys. It is believed that subjects are driven to eat their fellows in an attempt to absorb their healthy STNs, thus prolonging their life.

Y-2 Inorganic Transhumanism

With hard study, deep focus, and keen powers of visualization, Model Y-2s were designed to be able to engineer mechanical and electrical systems within their bodies to increase their capabilities. The basics of this technique is hard-wired into every Homo Superior Mechanical, but the advanced techniques require time and research. A background in engineering is most helpful in this regard, for one must visualize the machine one wishes to bring forth. Many 2-Y's discover that learning meditative techniques aids greatly, but such things are discouraged. Engineering is a useful, applicable skill; meditation is self-centered and wasteful. With long hours of experimentation, Y-2s can create blades and drills for self defense. They can turn their hands into whirling repair mechanisms, obviating the need for external tools. At the higher end, they become nearly immune to disease entirely, for their mechanical immune system is far superior to the flesh-and-blood kind. Ultimately, Y-2s can surpass human talent, refining one area of human excellence more than a human is capable. The organic nervous system simply

cannot be refined to such a degree.

The Synthetic Society of Doctor Y's Vision

The perfect Y-Topia has yet to be implemented. Under the current paradigm, where two rival Scientists are using up badly needed resources, such a system is impossible. Furthermore, it can only exist when a non-organic society emerges. However, in the meantime, Homo Superior Mechanical is instead given an ideal, called The Vision (as in, the Vision of Doctor Y), which outlines a bridge to the Y-Topia. Y-2's do not have a rich cultural tradition. Culture is utterly frowned upon by the Scientists. They do not permit celebrations of any sort or really, any sort of expression at all. Machines do not sing or paint. Doctor Y's Victims take the only names they know, their Batch Designations, which are a letter followed by random five numbers. Most Y-2's have nicknames based upon the phonics produced by speaking their Batch Designation Code aloud. The Doctor does not permit music, made by electronic chirp, to be played once a week if all production quotas are met.

Foremen, High Technicians, Theoricians, and the Division of Organic Resources

The Y-Topia has, literally, millions of social classes and stratifications which would provide the thought-labor necessary to operate the Machine. The Vision is less grand and far less efficient. Instead, there is an intellectual class that forms the elite. Foremen operate Crews which enact various projects as directed by High Technicians. High Technicians have degrees in multiple fields and are expected to make decisions for long-term wellbeing. Theoricians are, like the Scientist whose works they emulate, experimental researchers who attempt to invent new technologies to bring the Y-Topia into being. The powerful Division of Organic Resources (whose name refers to the human parts of 2-Ys) is the most powerful cog in the Machine. They have the power to reprogram (lobotomize) any Y-2 who they feel is a danger to the Vision. More likely, however, is that they merely label an individual as being defective and banish them to the jungles outside the Bubble City. Needless to say, the elite exist only in the Bubble City, except for Foremen, who can spend days in the dangerous outside world. Extensive testing determines who is fit to serve in this capacity. Elites have their own quarters and are permitted potted plants as an indulgence.

Crews

An overwhelming majority of Y-2's serve in Crews. Entire Batches are pressed into the Crews. Crews have a designated purpose and are kept on task by a Foreman. A majority of responsibilities are simple things like keeping vines from growing up the glass of the City. Many are designated as gatherers, sent to the jungle to gather tubers and minerals used in industrial lubricant production. Crews are often sent on extended missions to the jungle to disrupt Defectives attempting to organize or seize resources. Crews do live in the Bubble City normally in a single room with the rest of their Batch-mates. They are issued styrofoam pillows and vinyl blankets and few other personal affects.

Defectives

Defectives live on the largess of the Scientist. They cannot exist on their own; there is no means of subsistence on Island X. There are no animals, certainly, and very few barely edible plants. Defectives live off of meal-bricks delivered by the uncaring ministrations of Y's Crews. This is because they serve no function in the Machine. They have been declared Defective for whatever reason. The machine has no place for them. Their only purpose is as a buffer against attack by less enlightened Scientists. Many Defectives suffer Metalosis Maligna.

Raiders

A very small number of Defectives become Raiders and attack not only settlements of

Defectives, but even the Scientist's Crews delivering meal-brick. Many Raiders are barely restrained and in the grips of severe Metalosis Maligna. Raiders are the only Y-2's who have survivalists worth their salt. The wilderness is supposed to be anathema to the good followers of Doctor X.

The Lamentable Nature of the Dead Reef

At first, the Dead Reef would not seem to be an island at all, for it is very, very long and narrow. It is a rocky place, covered in broken pieces of coral. It would seem at first to be devoid of life but it does have small, scuttling inhabitants that pick at a few clumps of dry grass. Crabs and seagulls play about the rocky sandless beaches. In the center of this reef-like strip is a civilization of sorts. Structures of all kinds, in an old-fashioned Confederation style, dot the landscape in gothic splendor. It would seem to be a resort town for rich weirdos, but upon closer inspection, one finds playgrounds, amusement parks, and an abnormally high number of schools. There is an odd whimsy to these places set amid a dead land. What seem to be giant dodo birds wander the streets. There is a zoo with cheerfully painted cages. The animals seem happy enough until you realize that they are stuffed. Not simply stuffed though, for they are animated. They wag their tails and sharpen their claws. This does not seem to be a problem for the onlookers, for they too seem to have undergone the same treatment. They are stitched together pieces of different people, animated again. This is no zombie horde, though: they laugh and play. They make faces at the eyeless monkeys. They laugh at the turtles who are "doing it". These are Professor Fatheur's Children, Reliving bodies reanimated for his experiments regarding the human soul.

The Godlike Genius of Professor Fatheur

The Mad Professor, as he was once known, was born in the Deerhunter Alliance. He must have been a bright young lad, but having been bullied by the less enlightened peers and authority of his time, he became bitter and resentful. It was clear he was a bright lad, and his poetry won several cash-prizes. His first conquest was the subject of literature, whose study his techniques altered forever. He went on to revolutionize the all of the fields of the liberal arts (especially philosophy). Although his background was in interpretation and aesthetics, so colossal was his intellect that he was sought out by physicists and chemists. His final works, the most controversial by far, were in the field of medicine and involved techniques forbidden by the bullies on the Board of Medical Ethics. His social circle worshipped him as a god of pure Enlightenment. To them and himself, he was a god of fire, illuminating, warming, and purifying. Periodically, his follows would disappear, never to be seen again. By the time he had joined the Summit of Supreme Progress he had already gone through forty-five research assistants and seven inner circles. Eventually, he participated in the extinction level event that ended mankind. Using a chunk of solid gravitons, he transported structures from the mainland to his reef fortress, which he rose from the bottom of the ocean using the same technology. Professor Fatheur is said to have a submarine fortress, but no one has provided credible evidence of having seen it. Aside from his Children, the Professor also created a race of nannies from the remains of giant flightless birds. Their stupid expressions and witless friendliness, the very quality that made them go extinct, is thought to inspire comfort and joviality in Children. These Dodos wander the streets and hallways of the Dead Reef, seeing to the well-being of Children.

Songs of Innocence

Professor Fatheur was at his core a spiritual man, perhaps not religious. He was disgusted at the venal and decadent ways of the Confederation. He envisioned a world of perfect beauty, unfettered by industrialism and the animal nature of human beings. He would fill the world with his Children, creatures free of the drives towards sin. This spiritually perfect society would

redeem mankind and give meaning to the millenia of suffering previously endured. Each of his Children, called the Reliving or Homo Superior Necrotic, are made of reanimated body-parts which are believed to be imbued with a new, innocent soul. Because, it is reasoned, they are created outside of sexual union, they are not stained with an original sin. They are purified beings. Because this innocence is so central to the Professor's theories, his experiments focus on it exclusively. He wishes to quantify this admittedly subjective trait so that he can create it in synthetic form. In this way, he could create a perfect morality which could be distributed to the masses in the form of a pill or enema.

A poem is inscribed in the Dead Reef's city square, detailing his view of the world:

"For these great ends hath Heaven's supreme command
Brought the modern savage from his native land,
Trains for each purpose his barbarian mind,
By slavery tamed, enlightened, and refined;
Instructs him, from a Science-Lord, to draw
Wise modes of polity and forms of law,
Imbues his soul with faith, his heart with love,
Shapes all his life by dictates from above"

The Gift of Fire: The Eternal Innocence of the Reliving Children

Reliving is a type of living. In a material universe, the consciousness would seem to be a sort of an illusion, like a thing looking in upon itself. A material thing looking at a material thing. Such an ordered system, it turns out, is not tremendously difficult to replicate, especially if all of the primary components are already there in the brains of the deceased. This system once held that quality called consciousness and could be made to do so again. The process causes tremendous chemical and physiological change in the body itself. Most importantly, it requires a complete "restructuring" of the brain's neurons, essentially erasing anything present. As it turns out, this formats the brain for further techniques which refine memory and pattern recognition. Reliving learn in the manner of children their whole lives. Their bodies, once dead, become more alive. They suffer no decline at any point during their lives even if permitted to exist for upwards of 200 years. In order to gain the best qualities of multiple subjects, Reliving are assembled from a number of individuals. Not all are given equal attention either; someone has to get the less-than-good parts. The bad parts are cast away, to face the fate of flesh before Science made bodily death a matter of history. Professor Fatheur believes that consciousness is a quality which should more appropriately be called a Soul. Rather than viewing the world in a merely materialist way, all of Fatheur's research has brought him to the conclusion that the universe has a spiritual dimension as well as physical one. Therefore, his Reliving subjects are not only new bodies each time they are reassembled, they possess an entirely new consciousness or new Soul.

The Reliving begin life knowing virtually nothing. They have the minds of infants. However, they have the physiology of individuals in their prime. Their ignorance and helplessness lasts only for the briefest period. Fatheur's Children absorb knowledge and skills with the greatest of ease. They need very little training to excel at their natural talents. Those Children who are smart are very smart. Those that are athletic are very athletic. Fatheur's Reliving attend classes their whole lives and learn trades with ease. This quality allows them to take full advantage of their inborn abilities. They are not the walking dead of mythology and nightmare. They are Homo Superior Necrotic, the next step in human evolution. Or perhaps, in another light, they are the next step in human extinction.

Each one of the Children is thought of as being a single experiment. Each one is monitored

on a daily basis and tested in various ways. Each one is a lesson in Innocence. Yet, around the age of thirteen or so, Fatheur begins to doubt the Innocence of his Children. Rather than hem and haw over when one of the Children is Innocent or not, he simply sets the date they are to be remade at age thirteen. This process is a fatal one but is not believed to be a true and final death. Not of the body, at least. It will be made Reliving once more. Therefore, the Dodo caretakers escort thirteen year olds to the Chamber of Untold Fancy Funmaking where they are humanely laid to rest. They are subsequently remade on building over in the Professor's Reliving Lab.

Psychology of the Children and Reliving Transhumanism

The process Professor Fatheur now uses to construct the Reliving is quick and easy. Put simply, wave-altered electricity is pumped into the subject's forebrain and creates neural pathways which stimulate life in preserved cells. The result has the mind of an infant for a few weeks, but will progress to an intellect reasonable for someone of age 10 or 11. They remain this way for some time. Professor Fatheur nourishes their intellect this schooling and museum trips. He organizes them to play sports and perform obstacle courses. Although they have an intellect that goes from average to superhuman, their emotional maturity and experience is limited. They know very little of survival scenarios and although they are educated on proper morality, they do not always have a means of determining what the right choice is in a given situation. Rather than being helpless things, the Children have a heroic streak about them. They are taught from their moment of cognisance that they are superior beings.

Children are given a moment each day to unwind, meditate, and enjoy sensory deprivation. In this time, they are instructed to reflect on their spiritual nature, reflecting on what they find. What the Children find is a dark, empty place. It is seductive and like the quiet reflection it is peaceful. It very much like drifting in a meaningless void. This is because the brain is shutting down very much in the manner of death. Children come back from these experiences changed. Some prefer to study their own nature, unlocking interesting tricks that allow them to mimic or take the useful properties of being a corpse. Dead things do not suffer poison and do not feel pain. Nor do they have a conscience.

The Children are given names by the older Reliving Children, usually taken from their "reader" books. Consequently, they generally have names that are easily understood and single-syllable, such as Jane, Bob, Joe, Jill, Ralph, and Liz.

Classes and Dormitories

The Children are organized into three categories, the last of which is further divided into Dormitories. Classes work essentially like grades in traditional schooling. However, Children do not graduate from their class for many years (when there is room in the next Class due to vacancies).

Early Class

Children of the Early Class are encouraged to focus on their inborn talents, rather than learning professions or skills. They are the least experienced and youngest class and are subordinate to their seniors. Members of the Early Class are non babies, though, and are not permitted to even begins classes until they've reached a certain level of maturity.

Trade Class

Trade class is made up of Children who have mastered some of their inborn talents are expected to learn skills and trades to be useful to their Scientist and fellow Victims. Scholars, healers, performers, and crafters all belong to this class, having learned an applicable skill.

Upper Class

The so called “name takers”. Children in the upper class serve Professor Fatheur in a much closer capacity as his enforcers, personal attendants, and disciplinarians. They are also expected to act as spies, seeking out those who seem to be having doubts about their eventual trip to the Chamber of Untold Fancy Funmaking. Members of the Upper Class belong to one of three dormitories.

The Green Dormitory

The Green Dormitory houses those Children who exhibit strong spiritual talents, such as psychic awareness or inspiring leadership. Members of this Dormitory are trained to use their power to control the sometimes unruly Children, by talking them out whatever confusion has gripped them or by pounding them with psychic force until such time as they are no longer a threat.

The Red Dormitory

The Red Dormitory is the only one in which combat takes place. The Red Dormitory trains fanatical forces in service of Professor Fatheur. In case of invasion, this force, whose focus is in physical fitness and combat training, would be unleashed. Members of Red Dormitory make daily oaths to the Professor and are made to fill out worksheets detailing the limits of their fanaticism.

The Brown Dormitory

Members of the Brown Dormitory serve the Professor in his experiments. Members of this Dorm are chosen for their insight, creativity, and willpower. They are expected to sift through data for patterns and anomalies, repair infrastructure, research minor projects, and above all, serve the will of the Professor.

The Many Lost Souls of the Cnidarian Promontory

The Cnidarian Promontory is shaped very much like an incline. It is, essentially, a vast cliff that juts out of the ocean and into the sky. There is jungle on top. The Promontory defies the erosive force of a vast current that plows directly into its cliff-face. In the tidal swirl left in its wake, unthinkable vast amounts of Confederation Culture debris accumulates. To describe or categorize the diversity of useless crap that heaves onto the beach would be impossible. Suffice to say that any scavengers would find it to be the perfect place to be. An overwhelming majority of the stuff is trash, but trash is armor. Kischy bric-a-brac can serve as a Gang's totem. A sign of their fitness. Well prized are images of the Red-Coat Fat-Man.

The people who live here do so in the manner of the Promontory itself; in defiance of the current. They wear what they can scavenge, not what they are issued. They look how they want to look, often aggressive and gaudy. The Promontory has no rules, essentially.

An Egalitarian Revolutionary Force

The first citizens of the Promontory were Unliving subjects of Professor Fatheur fleeing his Chamber of Untold Fancy Funmaking. Working in secret in the jungles of the Promontory, where the Scientists cannot easily target individuals, the Unliving created a fleet of rafts to ferry more of Fatheur's children to safety. In time, the Promontory took in members from the other islands, but this caused some strife. It was only when they shared their experiences with one another and overcame the barrier of their horrifying looks that they understood just who they were exactly: Victims of Science. This term was part of the propaganda of the Scientists. Each one claimed that the creations of the rival Scientists were in fact Victims of their master's

Science, rather than the beneficiaries of technology. Once the Promontory refugees started comparing notes, it became clear that the propaganda wasn't entirely truthful. Sure, Homo Superior was better in some ways than the Sapiens. But they didn't suffer the scourges of Hazarmaveth Syndrome or Metallosis Maligna. Human lifespans were shorter at the top end certainly, but citizens of the Confederation lived longer on average, even ignoring the 13-year lives allotted to Fatheur's Children.

From the wondrous trash they collected they discovered that the Scientists destroyed their people and enslaved the survivors. They rightly understood that the true culture of the Magnolia Confederation had been annihilated and replaced with a form of quantified madness. The Victims deliberately forged a new way of life that accepted all Homo Superior as being essentially the same sort of being, united in the goal of opposing the Scientists. But, because of their lack of resources and general lack of organization, this goal has yet to materialize in any way whatsoever. There are sentiments, bold and belligerent, that echo the agitprop of the International Anarchists who were greatly feared by the Confederation. Little is known about this political faction, if indeed such a faction did exist. What is known of them is from a book, discovered in a sealed-capsule for later generations to discover. This book, "How to Identify International Anarchists in Your Community" was indeed seized upon by later generations. However, even though the Promontory rebels sought out the cultural relics of the Confederation, they identified more closely with the International Anarchists, who it seemed had come from three different cultures to oppose the prevailing hegemony. Therefore, "How to Identify...", seen through the lens of the Victims becomes the tale of noble rebellion.

This zeitgeist was shortly after broken forever, when the Scientists got wind of colonies of their Victims who were, it seemed, planning to overthrow one or all of the Scientists. The Scientists sent all sorts of drones and supersoldiers to disrupt their operation. However, the Scientists recognized that the Promontory could be of use to Science. It is a place to test theories on sociology in an unfettered environment. It can be a source to capture the Victims of another Scientists to test or torment in their master's absence. Whenever Scientists need subjects, they scour the Promontory for fresh meat. Only the jungle, a small patch, really, offers any protection from abduction drones and living lysosomes. The rest is open rock face with a small network of caves. Very small. The jungle of course is the prime real estate and when the cybermummies start assaulting the beach, everyone wants brush-cover. The problem is that there just isn't enough space for all the Victims. Someone has to lose at this game of musical chairs. This scarcity regularly corrodes notions of the common good and open rebellion. In good times people talk a lot of game about their struggle. But, in reality, the Promontory is still filled with Victims, not revolutionaries. When things get bad, the people look for leaders. Thus, gang culture rules the Promontory.

The Gangs

A turf war is fought over the jungle because the jungle is where Victims of Science can most easily hide from the Scientists and their horrible, no-good minions. Listed here are the four dominant gangs and their relevant theming. A clear, concise aesthetic is the most important element of starting a gang. If you don't look cool, no one will want to join. There are gangs besides these but they simply don't have the membership to gain big-time turf.

The Holi-Rollers

Members of the Holi-Rollers wear gang regalia in imitation of the holiday characters found in Confederation kitsch. They dress like Red-Coat White-Beard Fat Man, the Baby Chicken of Great Fertility, and New-Year-Diaper-Creature. Since the meaning of these holidays and their associated characters are entirely lost, the Holi-Rollers make their own rituals. Did you know

it was customary to eat dehydrated pizza rations on Chalky Heart-Candy Day? Neither did anyone else until the Holi-Rollers said it was so. They do know one real legacy observance, however: they travel to nearby settlements and demand a tribute of fruit and Confederation artifacts be placed in a ritual satchel. As long as they are treated, they vow not to play tricks on their fellows in the form of raids.

The Steel-Grilles

The Steel-Grilles scavenge for the left-over parts of Water-Fire Opposition Engines, which they wear as armor or jewelry. In the prehistory of their people, they had hoped to build a Water-Fire Opposition Engine but gave up when they realized that there was no way to drive off of the Promontory. The Steel-Grilles are the most heavily armored force in the Promontory and they like to throw their weight around as a result. Most of them are strong and also craftsmen capable of repairing their armor in case of violent episodes.

The Tiki Tumblers

Tiki Tumblers are identified by their grass skirts and gaudy, torn up floral shirts. They seem tropical enough to almost be mistaken as a native, rather than post-apocalyptic, culture. They erect stone heads on the borders of their land to ward off challengers. They are quite fond of distillations and cultivate patches of tobacco to smoke out of their stylish pipes. Their goal is a nebulous state known as "Ease" which is the best possible life attained with the least possible effort.

The Skullkids

Its easy to tell who is and who is not a member of the Skullkids. Obsessed with the image of the skull, Skullkids compete to see who can fit the most images of a human skull on their personage. Its not hard to find one floating in the surf. They draw skulls everywhere as graffiti, as well. Something about it speaks to their soul, perhaps because of the death of Homo Sapiens, perhaps because of anxieties of their own deaths. Although it would initially seem that the Reliving would be most commonly drawn to this gang, it has an equal number of the various Victims of Science.

Confederation Cultural Revival

To the extent that the refugees can discern cultural movements, they attempt to reclaim mankind's artistic, culinary, and leisure accomplishments. The language of Science is what people speak in modern times, but the Confederation had its own language. Many of the words were the same, although most of them weren't. They might also be the same word but have a completely different meaning. For instance, what they call "physics" we would call "an enema". This makes translations very difficult and only skilled researchers get very far. It just so happens that the Cniderian Promontory has a few of such scholars who can identify the strange language on the found objects that wash up on shore. This handful of plucky rogue investigators is attempting to piece together what is true and what is not true about Confederation culture. Certainly, they did use Maia Energy. They spent a lot of resources on advertising for it, to keep people calm. That much of the Scientists' telling of events is true. Some nations seemed religious while others were concerned with what appears to be naked consumerist greed. The second most common found object aside from trash are plastic knic-knacs, usually in the form of so-called "super-deformed" animals. Using what they can find amongst the wreckage, the Gangs see themselves as the inheritors of the Confederation culture, essentially writing their own narratives of how things went down. They each have their own aesesthetic and mythology taken from found objects.

Food

For ten years, large quantities of freeze dried ice cream washed up on shore, completely edible if a little musty. It was a welcome relief from the steady diet of crab and purportedly edible bark. A brief period of "freeze dried ice cream mania" persisted where individuals attempted, through various means, to influence event such that more of the good stuff would wash up on shore. Luckily, cooler heads prevails just short of human sacrifice to the Pantheon of Vacuum-Sealing Gods. Since then, there have been waves of other dried products. Jerky, mango, and something called "fruit leather". Mostly, the diet is still crab.

Fashion

There are a number of styles considered "traditional" in the Promontory. They are taken primarily from a collection of hand-published magazines written by, evidently, bored teenagers from the Cotton Alliance. The most popular style could be was called "Greaser," for they used some sort of animal lard to keep their hair high. Actually, its unclear if animal lard was their chosen styling material, but its what they use now. For the loners and broken Victims, "Punk" is a popular style. As far as anyone can tell, it is simply a desire to be angular. The ideal, therefore, is to be as thoroughly encrusted in spikes. This, of course, causes tears and rips. There are other styles; Nicks, who wear turtlenecks and pencil mustaches, Joths, who were apparently an austere religious order, and Zoots, a warrior culture who wore intimidating coats.

An Out of Play Discussion of the Magnolia Archipelago

Make-Up and Prosthetics

Chimera must include a prosthetic element drawn from animal or plant forms. Unliving must appear Frankensteinian, with pale faces and obvious stitching/signs of reanimation. Model Y-2 characters must have a patch of their person colored in metallic tones such as gold, bronze, or silver. They must also include a prosthetic element which hints at inner mechanical workings (nothing too space-age, please; Robbie the Robot and Metropolis-type).

A Note on Chimera

Chimera prosthetics are intended to evoke horror and derision. They are meant to be distortions of the human form that are hideous to behold. It is inappropriate to adopt animal features that are intended to be cute or for comedic effect. Neither are characters intended to be a single animal-human hybrid. Chimera often have multiple deformities, including structures normally found only in plants. Don't go too terrifically elaborate, though. Too many prosthetics can be a barrier to play.

Infantile Behavior is Impermissible

The Unliving Children in this setting are meant to be child-like innocents. They absorb knowledge. They possess talents no mortal could dream of. Please do not roleplay them as helpless and annoying babies.

As a tonal note, the following are good guideline characters from popular sources:

Ang from "Avatar: the Last Airbender"

Arthur from "The Sword in the Stone"

Tintin from "Tintin"

Alice from any version of Alice in Wonderland

The Five Things Every Victim of Science Knows

The Victims of Science (Homo Superior), whether Child of Fatheur, Chimera, or Model Y-2, know...

...although the universe has strange occurrences, it is purely material.

Victims of Science don't believe in spirits or sorcery or any such mysticism. They generally use the word "spiritual" to mean "fantastical". Psionics and Science(!) are deadly serious, though, and purely material.

...that they are the next evolutionary step up from human beings.

Humans rarely achieved the heights of physical, mental, and social prowess that Homo Superior considers the norm. Some may be sentimental about the loss of their old culture, especially the gangs and punks, but few would trade it (assuming they believe the stories told about the frail human condition).

...2 + 2 usually equals 4, except those rare instances in which it equals 5.

The ideal of Science is to explain and rationalize the world but not to reject those moments and instances in which reality simply does not conform to expected norms. The Scientific Method is useful, but sometimes inspiration is more elemental.

...their feelings about the Scientists.

A larger percentage of Victims of Science love their overlords than despise them, but the overwhelming majority of Victims fall somewhere in the middle. Even the punks of the Cnidarian Promontory have an opinion on the bastards they escaped.

...that Homo Superior can become more than it is.

Children, Y-2, and Chimera alike all have methods by which they can experiment upon themselves and unlock new capabilities. The prime skill for this, as with all Science, is scholarship. Victims are taught from a young age that they are expected to surpass their human ancestors.

Setting Inspirations

The Warriors (Movie)

The tribalism of the Cnidarian Promontory is pretty much taken from this movie. Every gang has a ridiculous theme and their struggles have mythological significance (its based on the Odyssey).

The Isle of Doctor Moreau (Movie)

An island of human animal hybrids. Obvious influence.

Metropolis (Movie)

This is the technology level/style of Doctor Y and his Model Y-2. It is not Terminator-style cyborgism. It is more mechanical and less digital. Take heed!

Carl Sagan's Cosmos (TV Series)

One thing you can say about Carl Sagan. He could explain the universe in materialist language without being pessimistic. I didn't even attempt it here!

The Church of the Subgenius (Unadulterated Madness)

I can't really describe this. Hail Bob!