

DEGENESIS

PNEUMANCERS



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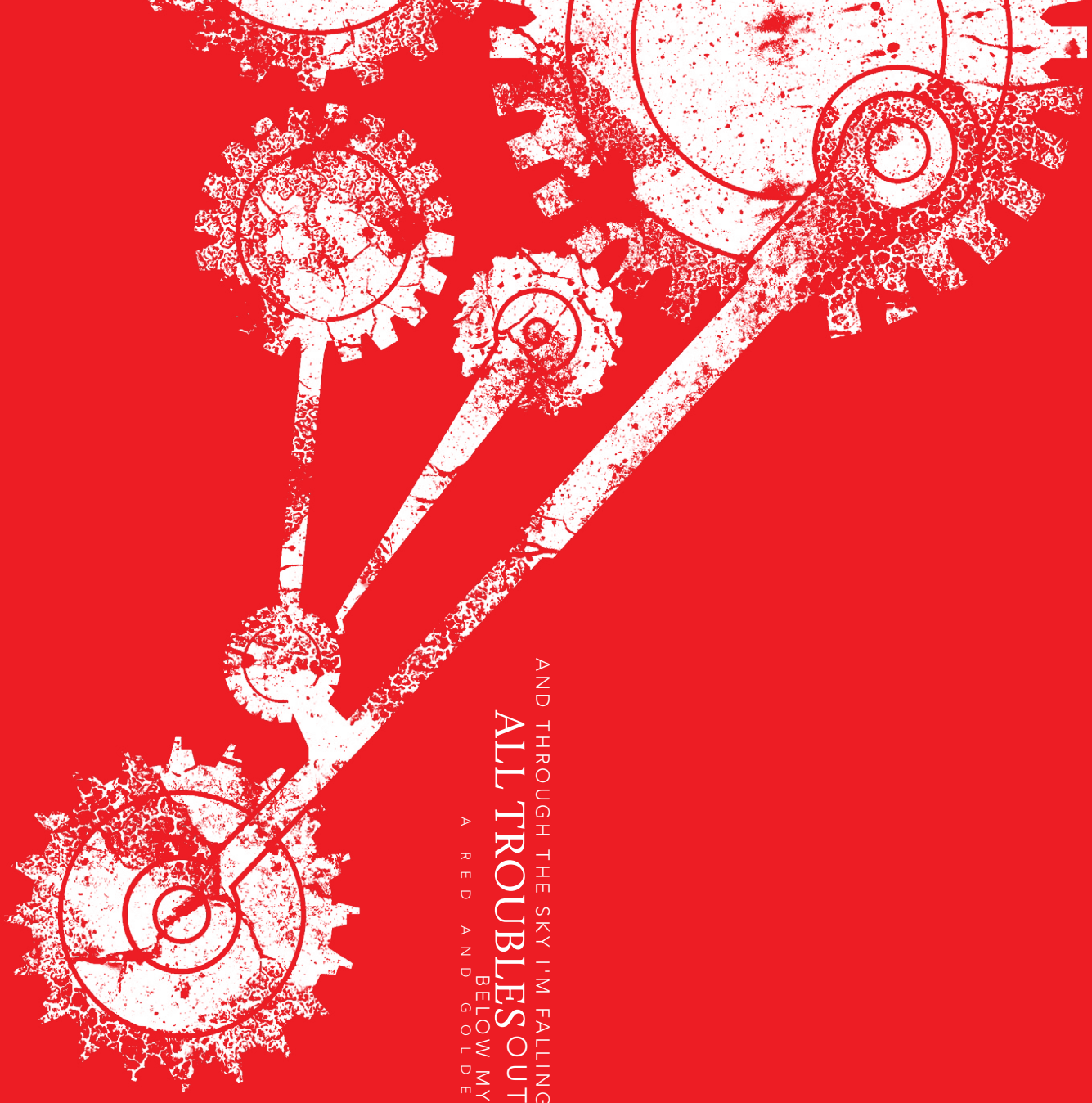
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ISBN: 978-3-949547-01-0

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AND THROUGH THE SKY I'M FALLING
ALL TROUBLES OUT OF REACH
[RMB]
BELOW MY W E I G H T L E S S B O D Y
A R E D A N D G O L D E N O C E A N S P R E A D S

CHRISTIAN GÜNTHER, MARKO DJURDJEVIC & LIAM FOLEY



ORBITAL

//RED ALERT...
//SYSTEM BREACH: SECTION 4-1000...
//TRIGLAW MALWARE DETECTED...
//IMMEDIATE ABORT...
//INITIATE REVIVAL PROTOCOL...

The red display flashed like the angry eye of God. Ultraviolet light flooded the capsule. Seconds later everything was drenched in darkness again. Her ears depressurized. The cooling fluid flushed from the Dispenser and fresh oxygen flooded her lungs, while a senseless cluster of life support systems galvanized her from cryosleep.

//ABORT IN 3-2-1...
//VENTILATION SYSTEMS ONLINE...
//REANIMATION SUCCESSFUL...

She gasped for air – for the first time in centuries. Spasms washed over her, followed by erratic jerking as she slammed the back of her head against the contraption that held her locked in place. Cannulas retracted from her naked skin. She felt something moving inside of her... or was it space that was moving around her? She clenched her jaw, her fists, trying to gain control of her senses.

“You know the drill, Agent MacGrath!” she recalled in an instant. Was that her name? What the hell was going on – where was she? She panicked, stressed, frenzied.

The capsule tilted sideways, weightless, floating on invisible currents through an unknown void. Through a tiny slit she saw the empty universe pass by. Then, suddenly, the maddening glare of the sun pierced her vision. She

squinted, shielding her eyes from the scorching rays – until the capsule slowly rotated into position to reveal Planet Earth below. Something accelerated, pressed her back into the surrounding mechanisms.

“Yes sir, no word to family and friends,” she said out loud, as if she was answering her own memories.

//CONFIGURING FLIGHT PATH...
//BOOSTERS ACTIVATED...
//NAVIGATION SYSTEMS COMPROMISED...
//MALFUNCTION...

At once, the air in her cell tasted like liquid chrome. Her body convulsed as the capsule rocketed towards a nameless destination. She trembled, gums bleeding, thick viscous liquid pouring from her nose, eyes widened in terror as the window slit exposed the chaotic, rainbow-colored smear of a passing aurora.

“You have to stay strong, agent! All of us will have to leave things behind.” She glimpsed at her instructor rising before her, bearing a frigid gaze, uniformed and decorated with medals of the Recombination Group, amidst a training facility with walls as bright and white as heaven itself.

“Is there really no other choice? I mean, don’t we have room for one more child?” she screamed at him, choking on desperation. There were no options. Denial was the new paradigm.

“You still have two full years on your clock. Soak it in. Watch your daughter grow. After March 13th, none of that will matter for a long, long time,” he answered calmly,

tapping the vein on her right arm and pushing the needle through her skin. Liquid chrome...

//ABORT VESSEL CONTROL SYSTEM FAILURE...

//APPROXIMATING DESCENT VECTOR...

//90 SECONDS TO IMPACT...

The alarm blared and the red display flickered with a monotonous stutter. Bright blue sparks zapped across the electronics, frying the circuitry, followed by a glistening array of buttons lighting up like cascading warning signs. Buried thoughts turned into total recall, condensed into a cloud of opportunities, and unspooled her memetic programming before her mind's eye. "You gotta get out!" she hissed in a moment of clarity, tearing her hand from its cuff, reaching for the control panel to hit the eject button, punching it into the frame. Again. And Again. Nothing. Instead the capsule began to spin on its own axis, blasting through Earth's stratosphere at breakneck speed. The Dispenser groaned from the supersonic forces tearing at its hull, lambasting the abort vessel, tossing it violently through the sky as it reached terminal velocity.

She tried to hold on, hold on to something. All she had were fragments. Faint, dull, hazy images, epiphanies of better days, of life, love, and birth. She felt the kiss of her mother against her brow, and witnessed the smell of her daughter, cradled in her embrace.

"I've explained this to you before. It's either you or her. It was your choice to check into the program," her instructor said.

Her scream was hollow. There was nothing else. Only her, and the unforgiving trajectory of the abort vessel. A straight line drawn in plasma from heaven to earth. A cosmic fall. Judgement for her sins. A spear of light. A dawn that would never come. And the monumental betrayal of all of mankind. An unignited engine of a revolution doomed to stay silent for all eternity. A failed plan. Nothing but a damn sullen moment to recount everything that was ever worth living for...

//30 SECONDS TO IMPACT...

//COLLISION IMMINENT...

A large piece of the hull broke off, catapulted onto a different flight path, opening her view toward the ground approaching at 1,300 kilometres per hour; 0.36 meters per millisecond.

"Mother, I loved you!" she cried, as foamy tears streamed from her eyes, milky white pus crystallizing like a second skin across her petrified face.

"Forgive me, I forgot your name!" she roared, as her bones cracked. A shock wave blasted across her body, bursting her blood vessels. Her chest caved inward, broken ribs piercing her lungs and puncturing her heart.

"Forgive me, I forgot my daughter's name!" she whispered, as her skull cracked along the meridian and her spine shattered into ossified dust. She was fire and lightning. She was a blazing star, destined to bring the end of an era...



The background is a dark, moody scene with a fire burning in the lower half, casting a warm, orange glow. The fire is partially obscured by dark, vertical structures that look like industrial pipes or beams. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and intense. The text 'PNEUMONICERS' is centered in a bold, white, stylized font with a 3D effect.

PNEUMONICERS



THE IRON KINGDOM

Beyond the treeline, hidden in a land of roving hills, lay the Iron Kingdom of Nullpellia; ruled over by the Taunar, a legendary bloodline of yore, administered by the priestlike Mechans, and defended by legions of fearless Pneumancers. A pocket realm, isolated and self-sufficient. What happened within rarely traveled without.

Those who crossed into this land did so to trade for valuables on the markets of Nullpellia, to exchange their goods for the highly valued Taunar coins that depicted the Allfathers of this foreign domain. When they returned they told stories of what they had witnessed beyond the borders. A sprawling city built upon a vast lake of concrete, vents jutting out from underground spewing black fumes into the sky, riches of jade and green marble, altars of granite covered in ancient runes, and luxuries untold. Others anxiously whispered about the piety of the place, and how the Mechans subjugated their peoples with the power of their word or the ingenious weapons they had created. Some stories spoke of strange sects that coagulated within the city, such as the Divine Hand, as well as of minor Clans like the Gethians, the Hungerons, and many more who occupied the southern hinterlands of Nullpellian territory and formed the polity of this kingdom, pleasing the Taunar Allfathers with their many tributes.

The oldest circulating legends depicted the so-called Cauldron Cities of Nullpellia, vast underground boiler networks capable of serving as autonomous bunker systems, and the people chained beneath the surface, ceaselessly toiling to appease their masters. This is where the Mechans and their armies set out from, conducting raids on neighboring regions, kidnapping wanderers, peasants, traders, children, and virgins, driving the slave caravans back from Black Lung into their strange chthonic realm, imprisoning them for life or offering them up as sacrifices to their morbid gods.

Above it all, the banner of Nullpellia flew invincible. A zero dissected by a lightning bolt, the symbol of their endless rulership. Until one day, it all came to an end...

KAGARAST

He came from the north, as legends would later retell, with towering glaciers behind him breaking like waves. They drove him across the Reaper's Blow and into the barren plains which would someday become known as the Black Lung. Little is known about his arduous journey, but he must have defied hostile cannibals and bone-gnawing dust storms armed with nothing but his mind.

When he finally reached the Ramein region he acted with purpose. He freed ancient industrial plants from the soot that covered them and breathed new life into the machines. Steam exhausts broke through the thick crust of top sediment, while the ground trembled to the beat of subterranean bolt hammers. It didn't take long for the savages to arrive. They warmed themselves in close proximity to the fiery breath of the turbines and studied the strange man, machinelike in his own way, as he went about mending broken pipe systems, exposing new generators and dragging them from the ground with cable winches, carrying salvaged parts off into his realm of steam, oil, and fire. Day after day more survivors crawled forth, casting their hopes onto this man who sleeplessly and implacably chain-linked the force of his labor to the next effort of will.

The man never spoke, he didn't even seem to notice his observers. They understood regardless. The first few grabbed digging tools and began to imitate him. They forged scrap into gadgets, set themselves up in the tunnels and basements, and foraged the area for food and fuel. Soon after they ignited blast furnaces where they would roll red-hot iron into sheet metal: prefabricated components for machines that only existed within the man's head. It wasn't long before they referred to him only as "The Mechanist".

Over time, the community grew into a complex web of relationships, tore apart, formed anew, but their liaison with the Mechanist remained straightforward and immutable. He was inconspicuous, never displaying any domineering behavior – he never got drunk, never engaged in passionate love, and stayed calm without any vis-

ible trace of an overbearing personality. Nevertheless, he was a force of nature, the nucleus of an alternate future, one that led away from the senseless struggle for survival out there in the dust.

OBFUSCATION

The ground tears open as veils of dust patter into the circular darkness below. A man-high tower screws itself skyward and armor plates swing aside, revealing a battery of arm-long barrels bristling underneath, before smacking back into place. A sudden ejection of steam sends tremors through the structure, and the welding seams creak along their length. The first of an entire phalanx is operational, but it's just one of an uncountable number of defense mechanisms. Out there, on the border, a whole armada composed of motorized conveyor belts, high voltage steel barriers, and camouflaged rotary cutters lies buried, ready to make short work of Nullpellia's enemies.

All of these weapon systems are based on the Mechanist's designs, a human who is claimed by many to have been a benefactor to the lost and broken in the Era of the Beast. A more thorough reading of the legend might interpret his actions differently, questioning if the construction of this vaultlike industrial network and utterly complex defense system, along with the arming of legions of savages, only served the purpose of his own protection, and that his long journey from high up north, past Li-qua, Mobilis, and Exalt was in fact an escape – one which would end in finality.

Whatever his true intention was, all of his machines and his assembled followers were to no avail: in the year 2203 his corpse was discovered deep within the bowels of Nullpellia – a wide gash carved into his chest, the heart inside lacerated, possibly inflicted by some blade-like object. His followers didn't even have the chance to recover their fallen hero. A timed security purge of the Cauldron City, installed by the Mechanist himself, flushed his corpse out with the Tide. But his story doesn't end there.

RISE OF THE MECHANS

With their enigmatic leader gone, his followers had to decide on how to continue his work. At first they acted autonomously, as if there hadn't been any interruption at all. But with time they came to revere their maker, whose motivations were obscure and who had left them with so many unsolved riddles. The Mechanist became a divine figure, guiding them through the darkness ahead. They were his many hands, his acolytes, his Mechans.

The Mechans were brutally pragmatic. Anyone foolish enough to contradict them was sentenced to imprisonment for life. The same law applied throughout. If someone dared to steal from them, down he went. Treason, blasphemy, murder? Into the Cauldron City you go. Once all the criminals had been locked up in the underworld, the Mechans began hunting for slaves, and when there weren't any to be found, they began calling for human tribute from the neighboring tribes. Fresh blood for the Machine God.

If the boilers beneath the city weren't fired up at all times steam would condense in the pipes, the transmission wheels would stop with a sudden jerk, and the bitter Borcan cold would creep into the tunnels. Life would cease and Nullpellia would fade like the last breath of a dying man. The Mechans couldn't allow this. But trudging along and swinging the shovels themselves? Never.

They had lied, cheated, and murdered to get their hands on the Mechanist's blueprints, and they knew exactly what to do with them; in a landscape where a spear was considered a technical marvel, their knowledge of engineering turned them into gods. Like a plague they descended upon the Clans of the Ramein region and reaped those who stood in their way. They took slaves as tribute, and they took thieves and murderers alike. Deep down in the boiling heat of the Cauldron City and adjacent coal mines they would be all the same. Thus, Nullpellia entered its golden age.

Their area of influence grew but the number of Mechans stagnated. Driven by jealousy, they coveted the Mechanist's secrets and distrusted one another in equal amounts. Should they refill their ranks with children of Clans they had subjugated? Or with children of the "free", hah, Nullpellian population? They'd be better off exhibiting the Mechanist's writings on the doors to their Palace and waiting for the Chroniclers to loot their secrets. No way!

But on the outskirts of their realm, the tribes began to

revolt: a delegation of Disciples was ambushed and slaughtered to the last man. The Mechans had to respond, and do so immediately. They found the human material necessary for retaliation in their own Cauldron City below. They offered sturdy clothing, clean water in glass carafes, and fatty meat broth in exchange for military service – warning their own slaves in the same breath that if they disobeyed they would be disposed of in the combustion furnace. The slaves had no other choice. Serving at the frontline was the only way to ever see sunlight again. Within days the Mechans deployed the first wave of their new warrior caste.

However, arming them with wooden spears and recklessly throwing them against the enemy would be ridiculous. The original bolt throwers developed by the Mechanist were marvels in their own right, perfectly balanced, with a running carriage sliding across roller bearings that made them practically wear and tear-free, along with huge magazines and enough power to punch bolts through several layers of steel. Equipping their slave workers with such firepower could give them stupid ideas.

Instead the Mechans simplified the construction by adding a primitive pressure system. They removed the stud feeder and the bearings, along with the piezoelectric ceramics so the combustion chamber now had to be ignited by hand. The Pneumo Hammer in its current form was born, and the warriors-elect quickly learned to deal with its functionality. They knew their way around steam, heat, and pressure valves, and with fire and thunder they surged over the insurgent Clans – as the first Pneumancers.

HAIL THE TAUNAR

The Mechans were one-dimensional in their foreign policy: jealous towards the Chroniclers, distrustful of the Spitalians, and sycophantic towards the Exalters. Their safety was drawn from Mechanist's defensive emplacements stretching across their domain, not their non-existent diplomatic skills. To many of the powers that grew to size in neighboring regions, Mechans were simply considered a nuisance, best left to their own devices. Isolationism was two-sided. The Mechans, on the other hand, considered themselves conservationists, priests, or ideologues, but they weren't field marshals or generals eyeing on expanding their domain.

The Taunar were cunning. As one of the Clans falling under Nullpellia's aegis, they grew to power in the

slipstream of the Mechans. First, they were deployed as enforcers. The Mechans had grown complacent, studying manuscripts of the Mechanist instead of playing governors for their realm, and it was that complacency which the Taunar knew to abuse. In the hinterlands they struck deals with minor tribes, promising their leaders fiefdoms and riches if they'd provide their support in an uprising. Gethians were offered access to promiscuous harems, Hungerons were lured with canisters of cream and butter, and the followers of the Divine Hand were tempted with a temple in the center of Nullpellia, so they could worship their own gods in peace.

The Taunar played their game like master strategists, but they lacked the military strength and prowess to hammer the final nail in the coffin of the Mechans. They needed allies – and the most dangerous ones they could find were the Bale Lords of the Phosphorites settling in the deep south, far beyond the reach of Nullpellia. If they could be swayed to lead an attack on behalf of the Taunar, the upstarts would have an easy path to victory.

The plan of the Taunar is as simple as it is perfidious. They task the Phosphorites to stage a large raiding campaign across the Ramein region, forcing the Mechans to respond; the priests would send their Pneumancers out to deal with the threat, leaving Nullpellia undefended. The Taunar would then use the opportunity to strike the Mechans at the heart of their realm and wrest control from their technophilic hands, promising to split the empire with their Phosphorite allies. What they don't tell the Bale Lords is that the Pneumancers are a formidable army, one that the Phosphorites cannot hope to defeat on their own.

It goes down precisely as planned. The Taunar take Nullpellia swiftly in a sudden and vicious assault, surrounding the Mechan temple before the defenders even know they're under attack. With their army tied up battling the Phosphorites, the Mechan high priests have no choice but to surrender to the invaders. In an attempt to soothe the raging Taunar Allfathers and calm their rampage, the high priests quickly proclaim them the new ruling caste of Nullpellia, done and dusted.

Weeks later, the victorious Pneumancers return to find their home has undergone a massive shift. No longer are they at the mercy of the Mechans, now they will kill and do battle at the behest of the Taunar. Most of them don't notice much of a difference.

WATCHDOGS

Once they were just slaves, prisoners, people crammed together like cattle, driven underground by their Mechan masters, robbed of their identity and their past. Convicts for life. Mask up, along with a chain around the neck that tied each one to their neighbour. No names, just numbers. Five worked with Seventy-Six, Fourteen with Twenty-Two, and that was that. Eight hour shifts, four hours of sleep, then another eight, four, so forth and so forth. Slaves were allowed to breed, the Mechans even demanded it: new generations would keep the Cauldron City running. The gene pool had to be regularly refreshed with new convicts for their city, hush, hush, mask up and work. Work for food, work for rest, work for breeding.

But the slaves became more than just prisoners. First they were a family, then they were a tribe, and finally they grew into a Clan that shared a common fate. Each unit knew their task inside and out and could instruct newcomers to the plant: which lever to pull, which pipe to drain, which oven to fire up, which valve to shut. It was all they could ever occupy their minds with, and thus it became the centerpoint of their entire existence.

Holding together was the only morsel of humanity left to the Pneumancers, and anger was channeled through conflict. When they were released from the Cauldron City to fight in the name of their masters, whether Mechan or Taunar, it was their crowning moment of victory – even though they knew that their brothers and sisters remained in the vaults below, as leverage to keep the deployed Pneumancers from trying to escape.

As the decades crept on the best of the warrior caste was allowed more time under the sun, commanded to appease the Taunar Allfathers with public displays of force and raw strength. Pneumancers had to battle in the arena, against their own or against others whom the Taunar had sentenced to death. And fight they did. Like steaming, stomping beasts of fury, painless and numb, they fought for the illusion of freedom. The greatest of champions were allowed to spend time in the city and enjoy its amenities, before they were cast back down with the next new moon. Down in the Cauldrons, they told their brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, and children of the world above, of the gleaming disc that reigned in the sky, of the clouds, of the waxing and waning of the silver sickle, and the ocean of stars. They all held to one tenet: that one day, they'd all walk in freedom.

AGATHOPOIIA

Woven from distilled memetics in accordance with Getrell's purest ideals, Agathopoiia was destined to judge the Free Spirits, along with those who had risen from the aftermath of the Eshaton. As such, she was the nucleus in Getrell's codified blueprint of natural selection.

The Ambrosia of the Sleepers up to the 700 Cascade duplicates genetic information and gnaws its way through the cells like a benign cancer, mending mutations and damaged areas, striving for perfection but only capable of proceeding algorithmically and without proper understanding of the context, until a mistake triggers a barrage of secondary errors and a nanite low sets in. Agathopoiia and the others selected to board the Minerva orbiter had received different treatment. As one of only a few hundred chosen, her body was submerged in nanite gas, her genetic identity completely destroyed and reshaped by the aggressive treatment. Her organs decayed as they germinated from anew out of the nanite condensate, robust, sublime – and genetically identical to those of Getrell himself. Her mind burned up as the carbon and hydrogen atoms in her brain were metabolized by purified Ambrosia, while plaques diffused through her bones and skin and were exuded as tar seeping from her pores. She shone brightly when her brain matter, now arranged in dodecahedral compartments, was jump-started back into existence by an electrical thunderstorm. Her thoughts, her knowledge, and her mortal needs no longer reflected her old self. She was now physically part of the plan.

Not all of those chosen survived. The few that persevered are all atop the Minerva at the side of their maker, all of them partial copies of Getrell, perhaps created to serve or replace him one day. But until then they are an active and driving part of the plan – one that Triglaw attempted to sabotage and destroy. The Marauder only managed to inject his malware into the peripheral systems of the orbiter via a weak hacking attempt powered by the subnet he had coated the Alpine Fortress with. There wasn't enough processing power to deliver the final blow, but it was enough to cause bedlam. Minerva's

security systems responded immediately: the emergency protocols decoupled the virus-ridden shuttle from its mainframe, turning Agathopoiia into a failure and sending her on her journey to the surface 500 years too soon. What was supposed to be a triumphant descent toward Earth as a radiant arrowhead, leading a swarm of descent shuttles and being cheered on by a Free Spirited humanity, came down as a vengeful fireball. Agathopoiia's spacecraft rocketed towards Nullpellia at a shallow angle, blasting rooftops apart and cutting through the Bygone airfield like a heavenly knife, smashing through ancient architecture and dragging pulverized ceramics and frayed tungsten fibres in its wake.

The shuttle hit the Taunar Palace dead-on. The explosion lasted less than a nanosecond. The nanite blast-wave crystallized before it could expand, hardening into a soaring orblike shell outlining an epicenter hundreds of feet in diameter. Splintered fragments and shattered debris rained across the alleys of the densely built city, slamming into exposed Cauldrons and causing secondary explosions, excess pressure discharging as steaming hot payloads of brass and copper shrapnel. Agathopoiia herself wafted through the streets as glittering crystal powder. Her nanites awoke. Breathed in by those Nullpellians who arrived to witness the godlike destruction at the center of their capital, Agathopoiia began her assimilation. Thousands fell on that day. A terrifying disease tore a swath through the survivors, Pneumancers, Taunar, and Mechans alike, causing boiling ulcers to blister from the bodies of the afflicted and physically spreading to bystanders with organic fibers. Nobody at Ground Zero endured to report what happened there. Agathopoiia was deconstructed, but the collective intelligence of her Plurality congealed quickly, weaving support structures from the absorbed carbon in an attempt to advance towards an approximate nexus. But the damage was too great. All that remained was a vibrating mass, a billowing foam of darkness. Agathopoiia herself, however, was still in there, and with her the knowledge of Getrell's plan.

CIVIL WAR

Nullpellia's surface was ravaged in the massive impact of the orbital craft, but deep beneath in the Cauldron City all that was felt was a sharp rumble as if the ground itself was heaving in pain. The sealed entryways leading into the underground network, at the very highest level, were cracked open – the prison gates shattered. The word spread quickly, but none of the Pneumancers knew what to do. None but their greatest champion, who had become a renowned hero in a recent Phosphorite conflict just a few years prior. Katechan.

He gathered his squad, ripping their weapons from the locked armories and surging to the surface. Their target: the Mechan Temple, and their former slave masters. Within minutes the city was drowning in slaughter. The Pneumancers nailed the high priests to the walls with merciless Pneumo Hammer bolts, hunted down the women and children to hurl them from the temple's roof, incinerated them with steam, beheaded them and impaled the remains on spikes.

The long-awaited retribution was not limited to only the Mechans, however. Most of the Taunar had evaporated in the cataclysmic blast centered on their palace, but not all. Every living Taunar Katechan and his growing revolutionary army came across was captured, before hooks were driven into their skin and they were flayed alive. The bodies of the ruling caste littered the streets, eyes gouged out, skulls cracked open, grey matter scattered all over the temple district. Anyone who refused to fight on the side of Katechan was a traitor. Punishment: execution.

Faced with the wrath of the upstart warriors, and observing the callous, cold-hearted brutality the former rulers had been met with, the chieftains of the minor tribes had no choice. They pledged allegiance to Katechan's cause and joined the purge. Nullpellia burned.

The fires blazed long into the next day as the new rulers of the city took stock. No one could know for sure how many Mechans escaped the inferno of revenge, but there couldn't be many. Pneumancer squads spread out across the former Taunar realm, hunting anyone who attempted to flee and delivering the same brutal retribution their counterparts in Nullpellia had received. The former warrior caste had emerged victorious, all that was left was to clean up the wreckage. So they hoped. They were wrong.

RECKONING

The Phosphorites watched the blazing line of plasma carve its path across the sky, and they saw the black cloud rising over Nullpellia. The gods had listened to their prayers, born aloft in blinding phosphorescent light. Now was the time of reckoning. The Bale Lords sounded the horns of war, and within days their warriors were marching towards the city sprawling across the lake of concrete to claim the prize

they had been denied for so very long.

The encroaching army painted in glowing runes was quickly spotted by the Pneumancers, and the steam-cleansing of their new capital city was forced to halt. The remaining entrances to the Cauldron City were blown open, with every able-bodied person inside given a weapon, no matter how crude – the defenders mounted the Firewall, the largest and most complex defense mechanism installed by the Mechanist, bristling with steam cannons, artillery batteries, and remote controlled ramparts. Meanwhile, ground troops met the enemy on the lake of concrete itself. The completely flat surface offered no cover, no respite for the invaders. Thousands were cut down from bolts driven through their skulls, while phosphorus bombs detonated in their ranks. The grey landscape turned red.

The Nullpellian warriors scrambled for any advantage they could find, their rear guard forces plundering the vaults of the Mechans for siege weapons to turn against their enemies, desperation giving birth to ingenuity as many of their number put the skills honed in the subterranean factory complexes to use. Giant steam-actuated catapults and lumbering vehicles with mounted cannons spewing boiling water tore swathes through the Phosphorite force. Finally, the enemy horde began to thin, and soon a retreat was sounded by the Bale Lords.

The Pneumancers had been eviscerated, less than half of their population remaining, and Nullpellia was in ruins – but they had their freedom. At last. Katechan, scarred beyond recognition from a Phosphorite shell and exhausted from the days-long struggle, strode into the Mechan temple, and lifted the first chunk of rubble to begin burying the home of their former masters beneath the wreckage of the uprising. His people followed suit. Soon, only a pile of debris remained, capped with the symbol of the new Pneumancers. The statue of the Mechanist.

THE DAY AFTER

Freedom was less than three months old when a Pneumancer scout spotted the armored carriages entering Nullpellia's territory on a freezing January morning in the year 2576. The colossal vessels came from the northwest, mobile fortresses striding on oversized wheels, the largest of them over two stories tall. The Convoy. Enmoi.

By that point the Clan's Silencers had already taken position on the roofs of Nullpellia. A battalion of eleven towering humanoids broke away from the trucks and loped towards the city, face plates painted blue and hidden under rags slowly revealing who, or rather what, was approaching: the Devastation of the Black Lung, Noret's Eternal Guard – AMSUMOs – unseen since the City Wars. The Machine Men silently acknowledged the assembling Pneumancers with their button eyes, staring into anxious faces, but they



paused. Behind them, a wall of steel opened, and a figure wrapped in bandages and a billowing black cape stepped forward. Shapes underneath his wrappings appeared to have a life of their own; like oversized tentacles caressing his frail body. Every step of the stranger was a testimony to the cruelest torment, every movement an act of resistance, lidless eyes gazing at his surroundings, and the dirty cloth covering his brow and cheeks soaked with pus. Nullpellia welcomed its foreign guest; Gusev, the Constant Gardener, had left his refuge in Noret.

Katechan was the only Pneumancer around in those days with enough respect from the people to resemble someone with official and diplomatic gravitas. Nobody envied him for it as the wounded soldier limped forward to greet the visitor. Pneumancer and Marauder locked eyes, patiently waiting for the other to act.

Katechan sensed the danger posed by the humanoid machines. Even with the vast numerical advantage of the Pneumancers any altercation would result in drastic losses for the already weakened defenders. The two did not speak for long. Gusev's movements grew increasingly erratic, his head jerking from one side to the other. Suddenly his voice dropped through the octaves and reached peak volume. Then everything was suddenly over. Katechan allowed the entourage to pass, and waved to his soldiers atop the Firewall to lay down their weapons. The Silencers hiding on Nullpellia's rooftops did the same, dismantling their ri-

fles and dispersing. Nobody was to die that day: Gusev had come with the gift of life.

Mere hours later the Orion drove down the path of destruction left behind by the falling star, issuing boxes full of seeds to the population. Some were marked with an X, and in the years that followed these would grow into highly resistant wheat stems, calorie-dense tubers, and resilient fruit trees. Other boxes featured an O with a dot in its centre. These were to be placed around the fallen Taunar Palace and were filled with pre-germinated saplings, which would be layered into a wide ring surrounding the rampant darkness of the star's impact site. It didn't take long for the saplings to grow into a thick and impregnable wall of thorns, which bore no flowers and was avoided by insects and animals alike, leaving only a single tiny path leading inside. Gusev's Garden was born...

THE PLURALITY

The Agathopoiia-Plurality has fallen into stasis. At its heart is a bubble of light-absorbing fibers hundreds of feet across, stretching inwards to the core, twisting and compressing into protocells. Reaching outward, the structure has frozen over, taking on the appearance of cross-hatched dunes that don't sway even in the strongest of winds. Here and there it contorts into a root-like network that crawls across neighboring structures and gropes for the nearby buildings. Its periphery has already begun to erode: entire



curtains of its carbon skeleton have crumbled and sunken into the dust. A few years from now, the wind will blow the remaining ash into the wall of thorns, and Gusev's saplings will collect the fallout from the ground.

But nobody should be fooled. The towering reef of black nanites is still active. Protoplasmic cysts have formed, biding their time for a stimulus to absorb energy and transfer it to a nearby nexus. It was one of these central nodes which Gusev punched his nanite-interface into, in order to read out the information hidden within Agathopoiia herself. Two days later he and his entourage left Nullpellia. They wouldn't be seen again for years to come.

ELLIPSOIDS

When Gusev sought out Nullpellia and forcefully entered the Plurality with his mind, he was searching for something: white ceramic cylinders, tapers at the top and base giving them an egg-like appearance, barely larger than a human fist. The outer shells were designed to shield the interior from external influences; inside they were tightly packed with glass storage cells, with an inductor network running across the top that could be utilized as both power supply and interface in one. Even though Gusev sensed the shadow of at least one such egg inside the Plurality, knowledge of its function was too fragmented; it would take centuries for the data compartments of Agathopoiia's mind to be reorganized to the point that he'd be able to

read them out. There was nothing left for him to do but pull the plug and wait.

Gusev and his creations were no enemies of Nullpellia. His gifts were a blessing. But can one trust a god? The Pneumancers didn't tell the strange visitor what they had discovered in the wreckage of the fallen star. Instead, they hid their discovery in the former Mechan temple behind an enormous portal, secured by multiple hydraulic bolt lock systems which used the Mechanist's Tide interval to submerge the treasure chamber deep underground where the Marauder could not sense the eggs.

Years later, after the Pneumancers had repurposed the temple as their own, the priestess Occaria lifted the eggs from their vault to study them. With access to original blueprints of the Mechanist, along with deconstructed Paler Sun Discs and salvaged Chronicle printouts which had been plundered from the remains of the temple, she began to realize that the eggs had fallen out of space at an inopportune time.

They weren't expected to arrive on Earth before the year 3073. Trapped within them were incarnations of a being, passed away and long forgotten, which would someday in a distant future awaken to decide if its work had been fruitful, or not. Which work that was exactly proved impossible to decipher, only that the final judgement would be conducted at all of the locations that once served as the birthplace of the immortals.

ENTOMBED

CAULDRON CITIES

Living, storage, and workshop facilities forged from prefabricated individual parts are grouped around a central boiler plant that provides both heat and kinetic energy via corresponding transmission wheels. Every Cauldron City is fully self-sufficient at a low level, but the true effectiveness comes when specialized units are connected together. Some are set up with production systems for upgrading tools, others equipped for making weapons, or woodworking, followed by factories designed to create agricultural machinery – the Mechanist in his 30+ years of activity planned and built a variety of such units.

Each Cauldron City was located largely underground, to both reduce its profile to attackers and give the sprawling complexes camouflage. The surrounding layers of dirt and rock additionally helped keep the warmth inside. According to old speculative maps, a network of these cities was planned to completely cover the Ramein countryside, in order to establish a mutually supportive industry. Each additional ring of Cauldron Cities would increase the overall productivity, but also elevate the technology of the growing communities and increase the prosperity of the entire population through trade.

The earliest concept of the Mechanist envisioned aggressive expansion: the production of weapons and fortifications were paramount in the first stages of growth. The exact number of Cauldron Cities installed in that time is unknown; most were never even activated as the Mechanist's death also brought his expansionist agenda to a sudden halt. Sealed and buried under almost 400 years of dust and vegetation they are considered a motherlode for any Scrapper living today.

The last known Cauldron Cities were also the first to be constructed. In Nullpelia, the earliest boiler systems spread downwards into the bowels of the Earth, and it was here that the Mechanist experimented with new designs while his followers expanded the subterranean realm.

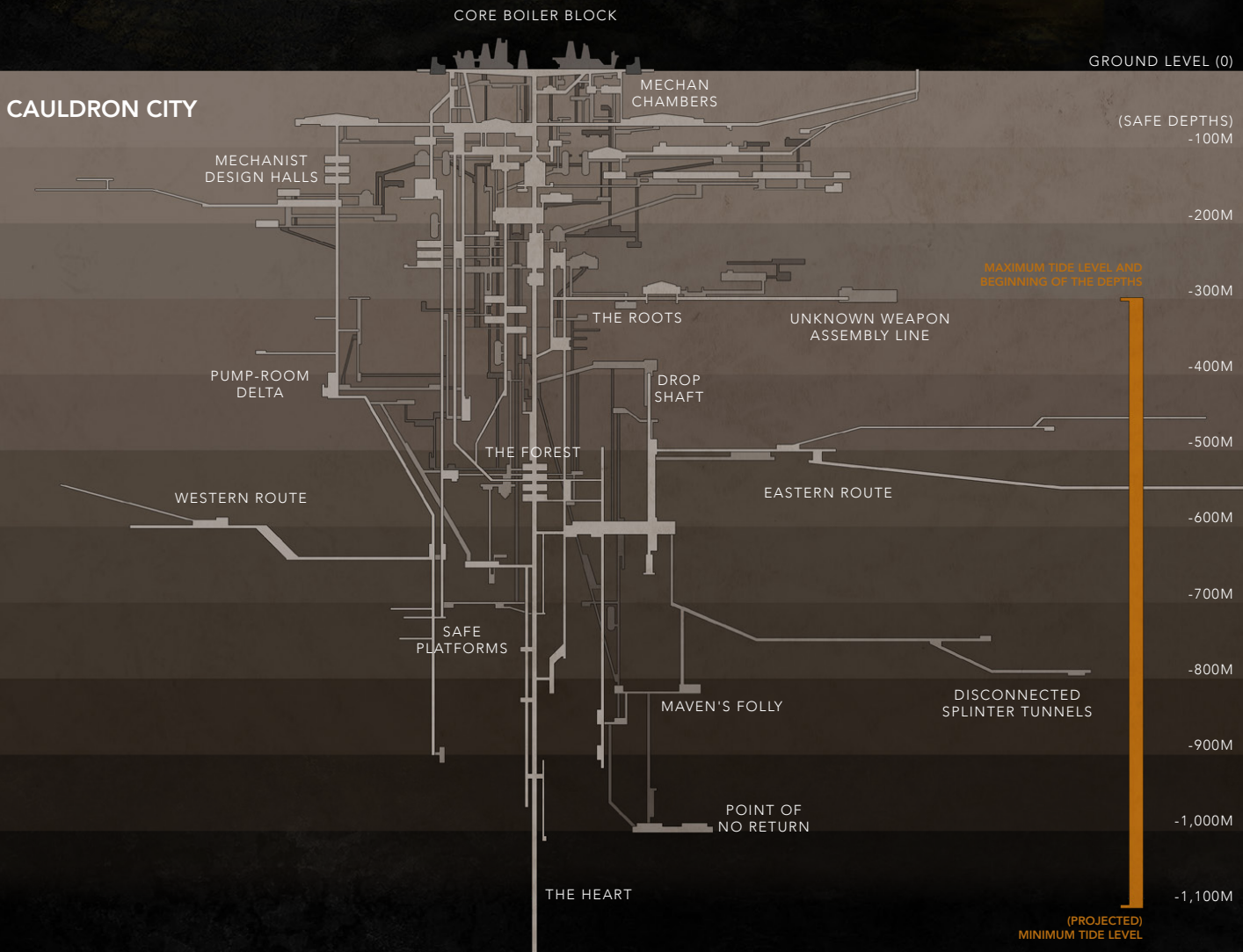
The original architecture, built around a massive central power station, is broken and disjointed in many places due to the uncontrolled expansion allowing for cells to collide with other cells. Over the years these chaotic additions continued to be connected to each other by a network of hallways and meandering side tunnels, leading to a massive, sprawling tunnel system with no defined layout or map. Today, only the first boilers and their adjacent units are still called Cauldron City in Nullpelia.

THE DEPTHS

The Taunar erected palaces on the surface and aspired towards the heavens. The Mechans occupied the ancient workshops in the depths of Nullpelia. The Pneumancers rested somewhere in between, living in the well explored limits of the original Cauldron City. But things have changed. Now they are drawn underground, towards the roots of their own history – and towards hidden and abandoned weapon systems.

In times of the Mechan rulership, these halls and tunnels were illuminated, pressure lines ran along the ceilings, and pump installations drained the rising groundwater levels. Now the Depths are flooded – a late revenge of the Mechans, but also a consequence of the star's impact. Entire boiler clusters detonated during the cataclysm, forming craters in the streets above. Oil poured out of pipes, mixed with freon, dirt, and body parts to create a toxic silt. The two largest entrances on both sides of the wounded area are exposed, revealing wide stairs leading deeper and deeper. At the base, the hazardous sediment was piled up into heaps and lit on fire; eternal braziers kept alive by the oldest Pneumancers left today.

Beyond this point lies the labyrinth. Large parts have already been mapped and way stations have been set up, but if one aims to still find valuable artifacts they must choose one of the hidden entrances in the ruins or descend even further into the bowels of the Cauldron City.



THE TIDE

The water level in the Depths is far from constant, due to one of the Mechanist's most ancient defense mechanisms. The labyrinth fills up in four-hour cycles, at its peak flooding the chambers at the 300-meter mark all the way to chest level, before draining away until only a trickle of water remains at the base. For those loitering around the entrance, the old chambers of the Mechans can be visited at low Tide, with some Nullpellians even guiding travelers through the history of the city for just a few bits of loose change. However, this easy, relaxed tour can only take place in the top levels. The true delvers must set out at the very beginning of the Tide cycle, keeping pace with the dropping water level all the way down, and they must be ever vigilant for the moment it begins to rise again – once they're down in the lowest reaches of the Depths, the ebb force of the rising Tide delivers a pull that no one can resist. Those who are caught cannot return. The labyrinth devours their corpse. As of yet, no Pneumancer has been able to find the outlet for the massive flows required to operate the Tide, nor the pumps required to move that much water.

What is known: the Tide is more than just a means of defense. Explorers have been able to find strange halls which trap the water long after the level has fallen below their floor, using the height difference to power large turbines and keep the Cauldron City operational.

THE HEART

Few Pneumancers have managed to reach more than 1000 meters underground, only the most daring or desperate Clanners even make the attempt. In the deeper levels in particular, they even advance ahead of the falling Tide, swimming from air bubble to air bubble to track down unexplored passageways and untouched machinery hangars. The best kept secret of these tunnels is this: there are secure chambers down below, manufactured diving bells which contain enough oxygen to wait out a single cycle before continuing on. Without these safe zones, it would be all-but impossible to bridge the distances in the Depths without diving gear, but only the Mechans knew the existence and locations of the resting grounds, and as of yet no Pneumancer has stumbled across them and made it out alive. As such, they have simply passed into legend, along with the treasures hidden within.

As the distance from the surface grows, the strangeness of the environment increases. Bizarre assembly lines spring into motion with no obvious trigger, machines monotonously dig tunnels in seemingly random directions and with no obvious power supply, and entire sections of the expanse shift with unknown hydraulic pistons. There is far more of the Mechanist's grand design still to be discovered.

The Depth-delvers who have managed to make it past the 1000-meter mark all share a singular experience. As



they walk through temporarily dried out halls, or desperately swim to the next pocket of air, they feel something when they touch the painted chamber walls. A repetitive vibration, beating like a heart, growing stronger and more forceful as they descend. If there is anyone who has been able to reach the origin, where the Heart lies, they have kept whatever they found to themselves.

THE FOREST

Efforts to map out the Depths are fraught with peril, and few of the great Pneumancer cartographers who have tried such an endeavor still survive, often lost to the Tide while making one frantic attempt to reach an unexplored area. However, one of the more well known sights in the labyrinth is the Forest. From the east tunnel, in the southern section, a large scaffold can be used to rappel down an iron-walled chasm to the 500-meter mark. From there, it's only a few more meters to descend through tight crawlspaces, which suddenly open up into a vast gallery. The ceiling rises six meters above the floor, connected by a forest of columns made from hundreds of pipes. Most are rust-eaten and dead, but a few are radiant with heat, creaking as the metal expands and contracts over time. Around these sources of warmth, life flourishes. Mosses grow on the surface, mushrooms on the ground eat their way through the rusted plates of the floor to point their caps towards the heat source. On

other pipes, made of white ceramics, a layer of hoarfrost has built up, and anyone touching them unprotected will find their fingertips peeling away.

These features are not entirely unique to the Forest, elsewhere in the Cauldron City there are systems which cause similar effects as they draw power from the heat of the Earth itself, with one pipe drawing hot water up to the surface, extracting the energy of the high temperature fluid, and returning it back down as an ice cold flow. The conclusion, then, is that there is a large machine of some kind in operation far above the Forest, one which requires a significant amount of energy.

Should one manage to keep their bearings in the tangled underground labyrinth and plot out the aboveground equivalent of the Forest they will realise they are standing directly beneath the ruins of the Taunar palace. But no one lives up there – no one can even survive either. So who is maintaining these ancient machines, pumping heat and coolant through the pipes? Another one of Nullpellia's magnificent riddles.

BLUEPRINTS OF THE MECHANIST

The Mechans have guarded the Mechanist's secrets for centuries. Was his knowledge passed down through stories, or had he written it down, drawn up plans? Behind steam



driven iris diaphragms taller than a man began a realm of myth and conjecture, where no facts could be discerned.

In the first days following the uprising against the Mechans, Katechan sent a detachment of his Pneumancers into the underground network. They took the expedition one barrier at a time, shredding the few remaining Mechans cowering behind their technological defenses in a hail of Pneumo Hammer bolts. Much of the chambers had already been destroyed or plundered, with evidence of escape tunnels reaching out into the wastelands being cracked open to gain entry, but the Pneumancers didn't leave empty handed. Hidden behind large gangways or buried in submerged antechambers, they found rounded rectangular sheets coated with etched symbols and scientific diagrams. They recovered as many as they could, bringing them to the surface for inspection.

Scrawled on the artifacts were technical drawings and plans for an immense array of creations. Some of the assembled examiners recognised the transport mechanism of the Pneumo Hammer, others saw explanations for the construction of bilgewater pumps, door actuators, complex timers, purely mechanical overpressure valves and sensors, and computational units created from intricate machinery. But, whenever a direct comparison could be made from the designs to the physical counterparts, the drawings were revealed to be far more refined. Far from a

lack of skills and tools, the Pneumancers realised that the Mechans had deliberately simplified the constructions. Another method of suppression.

The metal tablets have now spread across the region, extracted by Scrappers who snuck inside the Cauldron City and made off with the contents of the hidden chambers. Manufacturers from Tech-Central offer access to their elaborate workshops in exchange for just a glimpse of the designs, and copies of the etchings made with charcoal are more valuable than gold in the district.

When the Herald Luren was sent to Justitian, his foremost instruction was to establish a rapport with the Judges, but almost as important was his task to retrieve the stolen treasures of the Mechanist which have washed up in Tech-Central. He has resoundingly failed at this. Far more successful are the Pneumancer squads who roam the Ramein region, delivering death to anyone who dares to try and smuggle the tablets out of the territory.

Much has been snatched from Nullpellia's body over the years, but there is just as much still waiting to be discovered. When the Pneumancers examine the tablets, it only reveals more of the Mechanist's incredible foresight. In the hazardous conditions of the Cauldron City, over the centuries it has been inhabited, normal paper would have rotted away to dust. The metal tablets could go for 1000 years without even a speck of rust appearing on their face.

FORGED OF FIRE

IN THE CROSSHAIRS

Culturally, the Pneumancers are exposed to thousands of relentless influences. In response, a tight network of military drills and guard duties is spun around the youth to defend them from falling prey to the alluring false promises of Apocalyptic, running away with passing Scrapers, or perishing to the musket volley of a trigger happy Judge squad.

They are urged to honor the liberators and emulate them. Everyone is told how the old ones fought to the last man and died a hero's death against their oppressors. Therefore, the Pneumancers must create their own epic tale, striving for greater and greater deeds to pass on to their descendants, brothers and sisters alike. A Pneumancer only truly dies when no one can remember him, when the fire of his boiler finally fades.

Just one issue: the Pneumancers have no one to fight. Their enemies keep backing away or baiting with half-assed trade offers to keep them complacent while they prepare to gouge out the juicy meat of the Protectorate. Better deal with that before wasting resources on struggles they have no hope of winning.

In comparison to their wartime prowess, the Pneumancer Heralds are laughably inexperienced at diplomacy. Today they guarantee some passing Cockroach vanguard free passage in exchange for a cart of scrap metal, tomorrow they threaten some pompous Advocate with the destruction of his entire bloodline for a misunderstood proverb. They're not finding it easy to make friends.

PREDATORS

The Taunar would let everyone pass through their domain with African fabrics, works of art traded from the Mechanist's workshops, seedlings purported to be from the Eternal Oases, and countless other treasures. Hardly any merchant was even asked to pay any sort of tax. The Mechans, on the other hand, claimed every damn rusty screw recovered from the ruins in Ramein, using the Pneumancers like watchdogs to chase away any Scrapper who dared to put his spade into the region's dust. The entire area was practically cordoned off. Then Nullpellia imploded, and the line fell.

The dust was literally yet to settle back down from the impact of the falling star by the time the vultures swarmed in. The Cartel staked their claim, putting down a camp on the northern side of the city. Bosch had dispatched his

most trusted Officer, Saggs, one of his original Mice, who immediately started to spread his roots. Not to be outdone, a delegation of an Apocalyptic Flock called the Border Gnats under the direction of the Woodpecker Brass moved in shortly after, seeing Nullpellia as a safe port on the edge of the Protectorate to move product through.

The two lords of vice quickly realised that there were more opportunities here than just scrap or Burn trading. The Pneumancer warriors are hot-headed and desperate for a good brawl, but are struggling to find opponents – well, let them see how they do in a pit fight. Recruitment is carried out by any means necessary, Saggs sending Boilers to Ambassador Luren's side to learn the virtues of civilization, or rather, the virtues the Cartel can deliver, while Brass deploys her Magpies to entice the warriors and enlighten them to the fact that there's more to do in a bedroom than just breeding, promising them free access to the Carrion Birds' brothels if they enter the fights on their behalf. Both strategies are effective.

These predatory groups have come into clashes with the traditionalist Pneumancer factions opposing this blatant exploitation. Saggs can still delay the retribution by tying up the leaders of the Clan in long-winded sessions explaining in dry, monotonous detail exactly what he is doing with his Cartel detachment – conveniently glossing over the pillaging of the Mechanist's blueprints and artifacts going on right beneath his feet, a few hundred meters down. Meanwhile Brass builds up her Flock's relationship with the Pneumancers by any means necessary, whispering lies into the ears of the young warriors to ensure that any of the old guard who speak out against their efforts are disregarded as overly conservative.

This balance won't last long. Warcrafter Deus Volt will eventually grow tired of these charades and swat the outposts like flies, calling upon the loyalty of many of the Pneumancers. Saggs has already accepted that, but has no intention of leaving early. The maggots in the Ramein ruin fields just need to eat faster.

TRIBUTE

Gusev's gift of life has made Nullpellia erupt with greenery. Wild wheat grows in the ruined streets near the old palace, and fruit adds much needed nutrition to meals in summer and autumn – but Pneumancers are not farmers. Three-cycle

crop rotations or the correct use of a plow are unknown concepts to them. They don't even want to know. Even before the great uprising, during the rule of the Taunar, the Pneumancers were fed from the tribute of the villages and farms falling within their sphere of influence. It's only since their independence that they have been forced to realise the fine balance they've perched on until now.

Justitian has gobbled up many villages as its rulers carry out their own expansion, blocking any access from the Nullpellians, and when the savage Clans rose in the south it made the whole situation just so much worse. The warrior caste has enough stores to last for some time, and even their inept methods are sufficient to extract some food from Gusev's plants, but there are more and more bottlenecks being placed around their throats, limiting any future supply.

The elderly are no help in this matter. Katechan the Liberator was, is, a great warrior with an unmatched knack for tactics and strategy. He is still highly regarded, his word carries just as much weight as his Pneumo Hammer once did – but he remains a child of his time. He is reluctant to even admit that Nullpellia's sphere of influence is slowly collapsing inwards, and even in the territory still under control the tributes have begun to thin out. He doesn't understand. Everything he was taught dictates that a great victory must be followed by a golden age, so where is it?

FRAGILE UNITY

Compared to the Judges with their codified rules of conduct and expansive lists of laws, or even the Spitalians with their Hippocratic Oath, the Pneumancers might as well be a pack of feral Gendos wrestling over scraps of meat. However, the Pneumancers, once held as slaves in the Cauldron City, still wear the stigma of that imprisonment in their culture and their practices. They're just waiting for the right person to step up.

From the perspective of an outside observer, the Clan seems to be almost completely uniform – an observation hardly helped by their habit of wearing masks and using only numbers to refer to themselves, a trait passed down from their history. Only a closer look will reveal a far different reality, one of internal disagreements and struggles. The Pneumancers are still unused to freedom, and can hardly

agree on whether they should choose leaders at all, let alone what those leaders should be doing. They gather around iconic figures who they trust to decide on a course of action: wise Albeh leading Glow, Pressure swarming under the auspicious and experienced eye of Katechan the Liberator, Vow following the guidance of Occaria the Steamlord.

One constant holds true throughout all of the disagreements and arguments rumbling beneath the surface of the Clan. The outsiders cannot be allowed to know of their internal conflicts. Such a decree was put into place by the most influential of the political figures active in the city, and the most likely direct successor to Katechan: Deus Volt, the Warcrafter. Most of Nullpellia is already aligned with him, and even if the other factions squabble and bicker, when the defense of the city is in question all disputes are set aside and the Pneumancers fall into line behind him until they are once again secure.

And fall into line they must, because despite the success of the great uprising the Pneumancers have not truly bought themselves peace. Roving Scappers, whether aligned to the Cartel or otherwise, have set their eyes on the valuable ruin fields of Ramein, and some of them overstay what little welcome they have. While many of the priceless artifacts beneath Nullpellia have already disappeared into the Manufactories of Tech-Central or the temples of the Pneumancers, rumors of even grander hauls remain. Deadly rumors, for anyone who looks into them will quickly come into conflict with Deus Volt's patrols. They watch over the cultural and technological heritage of the Clan, and bolt every Scrapper caught looting to the nearest wall.

If that were the only threat, the Boilers could rest easy – a few dirt diggers are nothing to be concerned about – but a dire revelation struck the Clan just a few years prior, near the outbreak of the great Clan War their neighbors in the Protectorate have been engulfed in. The Mechans survived. They emerged from hidden tunnels beneath the Ramein region to overwhelm the town of Wetzlar and make their presence once again known. Now, they harass Pneumancer squads with guerrilla tactics, advancing into Nullpellian territory to retrieve old equipment and assassinate high-ranking Boilers and Heralds with precise kill teams. It's only a matter of time before Katechan himself heaves his ancient and broken body from his resting place and leads an army to bring down his oppressors once more.

NULLPELLIA

LIFE IN THE WORLD ABOVE

Under the guidance of the Pneumancers, Nullpellia is swelling with activity. The streets are flooded with residents and foreigners alike, whether their business is forming alliances with the new rulers, or simply exploring the remains of the former Taunar Kingdom in all its grandeur – as long as they can ignore that large parts are in shambles from the uprising, many of the sites now being torn down and rebuilt in an effort to cleanse the past.

Meanwhile, at the northern end of town, the twin camps of the Cartel and Apocalyptic squatters stick out like a sore thumb against the regular architecture of the city, the main corpus of which is based on an ancient Bygone set of halls and hangars. Under normal circumstances, this area is considered off limits for younger Pneumancers, yet one can find Pickers and Boilers who are curious to poke into Officer Saggs workshop to collect information about the pit fights in faraway Justitian they've all heard so much about. It is here that they come into contact with alcohol for the first time. The Cartel has imported distillate from the Anabaptists, and the Pneumancers fall for the devil's brew, quickly becoming addicted and developing a craving for the drink. It's a dangerous game that worries the older generation all the more, who'd love nothing else but to have the moonshine banned city-wide.

Rumors and gossip spread quickly – the Pneumancers had no concept of secrets during their time in the Cauldron City, only secrets from their Mechan overlords. A squad of bald-headed Famulancers wearing strange outfits showed up at the gates, looking to establish a field hospital and recruit fighters for their conflict against the Cockroaches? Bugger off, the Pneumancers won't win your war for you! A cloaked, masked technophile reveals himself at the temple of the New Dawn, demanding entry to the Taunar palace to inspect the wreckage? A flurry of bolts tearing through that fancy cloak sends him scurrying away in an instant. Nullpellia is never boring, that's for sure.

FOREIGN TRADE

Even before the star fell, Nullpellia was known as a hub for trade. The Taunar were generous with merchants, and luxuries of all kinds entered the city's markets. There has been a lull in this flow following the turmoil of the Pneumancer uprising, but recent years have brought back traction – and the more cunning traders are beginning to realise something. The Pneumancers have absolutely no understanding of trade and value. They do not impose taxes of any kind on goods passing through their borders,

and have no interest in how much anything is worth, beyond the point of whether it's useful militarily, or whether it is related to the Mechanist. The city is now swiftly turning into a hotspot for hawks looking to make a quick buck, and the reputation is spreading far and wide.

The minor tribes under protection of the Pneumancers, the Hungerons, Gethians, and a dozen more backwater families, take advantage of this fact. They dig up old Taunar coins and jade artifacts, selling them off as historical relics to passing Neolibyans, while others set up trading posts on the roadside into and out of the city, melting down old fragments of artifacts into silver and copper bars. The past is in motion, and it can be turned into profit – for now. Eventually the Pneumancers will get wise to the rampant theft of value from under their noses, but for now even the most fastidious of Heralds can be brushed aside with the correct application of distillate mixed with fruit juices.

Only a few Neolibyans even set their sights on Borca, so used to the Chroniclers obstructing and harassing their efforts that they simply accept they're better off elsewhere, but of the few that have, one has fully recognized the potential of Nullpellia. A Merchant by the name of Albreez has set up supply lines for resources the Pneumancers desperately need in order to keep their war machine running, such as engine oil, or insulating components made from rubber trees in Africa. In exchange, he promises these warriors a journey to faraway Tripol, where he plans to exhibit them as one of the great warrior Clans of the North. They'll bring in plenty of Dinars as tourist attractions, if nothing else, and he can work on reducing his dependence on the Scourgers as guards. Win-win.

THE DIVINE HAND

Their processions are audible from all across the city, every fifth night. A long chain of robed figures, moving from one exhaust of the Cauldron City to another, gathering around the colossal pipes jutting out from the ground. Their prophets place their heads against the hot iron surface for as long as they can bear, before breaking away and proclaiming their divine insight to the adoring crowd.

One of the oldest sects of Borca still in existence, tracing their own history back almost five centuries to when the underground egg that held their people cracked open, the Divine Hand is said to worship the sleeping gods of the earth, and see themselves as their instrument on the

surface. In order to listen to the idols below, they pressed their ears against the exposed exhaust pipes of active Cauldron Cities, listening to the creaking and rumbling of the metal and machinery inside to determine a course of action. In their deep mythology they all came from the same network of underground tunnels, but as they had to make do with the few active facilities in the wasteland they diversified into a myriad of different factions, each gathered around a single tower stack.

When the Taunar offered them a temple in the home of the original Cauldron city, though, they couldn't help but unite and back them in their quest to take over Nullpelia. Since then, they have been a benign presence in the city, avoiding the major conflicts and keeping to themselves in their search for the bodies of the sleeping gods they worship. A curiosity, for the Pneumancers, but not a threat.

BORDER DISPUTES

The reports coming in from the northern edges of the Nullpelian territory are strange, and at first glance make little sense. Warriors wearing floppy hats and coats charging headlong into battle with Boiler patrols, waving sheet-metal swords and maces haphazardly, like they've barely been trained. Riggers passing through valleys coming under slow, inaccurate musket fire, before seeing a face masked with crooked eyeglasses disappear over a ridgeline. From a cursory overview, the conclusion seems obvious: Judges attacking Pneumancers, in stark disregard for any concept of an alliance. Katechan, when faced with these reports, grows pensive, pondering the inconsistencies – why do they not use their trademark hammers? Why would they be fighting here when they so desperately need manpower on the frontline? He peppers the spineless Protectorate delegate with questions to try and track down an answer; finally, a use for the scumbag.

When one of the Voltaics brings the story to Deus Volt, the response is explosive. The impulsive Warcrafter flies into a frenzy, pulling out his assault plans for the Protectorate, examining the report locations and tracing the likely setting-off point for these bandits back to Siege. From what little information he has been able to wrangle from the Cockroaches, the walls are far thicker than any of their weapons can hope to even scratch, and not even the full strength of their host would be able to make headway. Deus Volt's eyes drift up from his desk, towards the Firewall, and the artillery battery at its crown. Perhaps it's time to reconsider the Pneumancers' alignment.

FACTSHEET NULLPELLIA

CITY: Nullpelia, Tech-Level IV

PROVINCE: Former Taunar Kingdom (Borca)

INHABITANTS: 25,000 / recovering after sharp decline

POPULATION STRUCTURE: Pneumancers / dominant, Minor Clans (Hungerons, Gethians) / dominant, Scrappers / present, Apocalyptic / present, Neolibyans / present

LEADER: Katechan, the Liberator

GOVERNING FORCE: Warcrafter Deus Volt

FEATURES: Former crown jewel of the Taunar Kingdom. The Taunar Palace: Walled pyramid where the ruling caste resided, until the Star fell and left it in ruins. The Cauldron City: An expansive, underground network of factories and workshops. The Firewall: Massive defensive fortification

TRADE / GOODS: Forged goods from the Cauldron Cities, coal in huge volumes, old Taunar relics, gemstones and precious metals, steam contraptions, pit fighters and mercenaries, genetically engineered foodstuffs

CITY GUARD:

- ◇ 1,000 Boilers divided into 6 Piston brigades, commanded by War Herald Ignis, keep the Firewall manned at all times and keep the peace within the city
- ◇ The Voltaics: 12 Assemblers under the direct command of Warcrafter Deus Volt ensure that the Pneumancer siege weapons are ready to be deployed with maximum effectiveness
- ◇ Katechan's personal Engine Guard, 8 elite soldiers handpicked to protect the venerable war hero

ARTIFACT TRADE: Expansive ruin fields. Little trade with Chroniclers at present, but some Neolibyan traders have spied an opportunity

COMMUNICATION: Repurposed Mechan radio equipment for communication to forward outposts near the Protectorate, Pneumancer runners who have been trained for marathon distances, high powered radio link from the Cartel camp to Tech-Central





PNEUMANCERS

“Will you remain out of the conflict?” Ritano, the boyish Advocate working on behalf of Judgement Hall, skulked around old Katechan, sunken on his throne, barely able to keep his chest upright. The veteran Pneumancer followed the foolish youngling with his remaining eye, watching every step.

“There’s nothing for us to gain. The Clans that ravage your home today have come for retribution. They have their reasons. If you oppressed them, you deserve nothing less.”

Ritano sighed with relief. These self-serving Nullpellian bastards were playing their honorable game of neutrality, which at least meant that Justitian wouldn’t have to fear another front opening along the border. For now. “Of course, great Liberator,” Ritano smiled, “Archot appreciates your wisdom.”

ETERNAL SERVICE

The oldest surviving Pneumancers still remember the days toiling in the burning heat of the Cauldron City, keeping the factories running, ensuring the lifeblood of Nullpellia never ceased to pump. They recall the degradation of their rulers, the indignity of being denied even a name, or the right to remove one’s mask. In those days, the only way to break out as an individual was to excel in combat and be granted that privilege as a reward. All Pneumancers dreamed of a day that they might be permitted such things, and many hoped that a great revolution against the Mechans would be the turning point that would allow them to take off their masks – but it hasn’t happened yet.

Pneumancers may be free now, but the road out of hell is long and strenuous. The years since the uprising have revealed that their service in the Cauldron City, while humiliating, was absolutely necessary. All it took was a single incident in which the boilers shuddered to a halt, causing the steam exhausts to jam and clog, for the higher ranking Pneumancers to realize that they couldn’t discard the old way of life yet.

Therefore, the drudgery of the Pneumancers is neverending. The young, nimble ones are cast into the guts of dangerous machinery where a larger worker could never hope to reach, the adults are sent into battle, whether on the frontlines against the enemies of Nullpellia or the intellectual conflict of deciphering the Mechanist’s teachings, and even the old cannot rest, chosen to train and guide the younger generation in the ways of their Clan.

Similarly, the tradition of not being allowed to remove one’s mask and take on a name was kept and codified into the blossoming Pneumancer culture. Names are to be earned, personal identity must be achieved through struggle and accomplishment. Until that point, where their peers deem them ready to step out and become a true individual, the only thing a Pneumancer has is a number and a mask to obscure their face.

TEMPERING THE SOUL

History has taught the Pneumancers well. The desperate fight for survival as the Phosphorites launched their assault on Nullpellia, and the uprising directly beforehand, has shown them one core ideal that is fit to guide the whole Clan. Fear kills. Only through relentless perseverance, no matter the pain or torment, will one unlock true heroism. Katechan proved this when he stepped forth from the Cauldron City to break the chains of the Mechans, and countless others did the same when they rushed through the blinding phosphorus smog to charge into enemy lines and came back in one piece.

Fear must be banished from the souls of the Pneumancers, and their Heralds have developed rituals and methods to do so. Children of the Clan are drilled to lose their inborn fear of fire by touching a searing hot plate in a display of courage, while military drills are carried out in burning hot Smog Chambers; training facilities set in the exhaust path of the boilers churning beneath the surface, where every breath is torment and the skin is at the very brink of being scalded off. Other rites of passage are carried out under the watchful eyes of the New Dawn, where a Pneumancer’s body hair is singed off, to purify the subject. Undergoing the Singeing ritual is recognised as the true path of a Pneumancer, and marks one worthy of receiving a name.

POTENTIALS THROUGH ADVERSITY

The Pneumancers view all resistance as character forming, and shine brightest when they are overcoming the odds through sheer force of will and tenacity. When a Pneumancer succeeds on a roll which was affected by negative penalties, he regains a number of Ego Points equal to the dice penalty, up to a maximum value of the Potential level.

APNEA

PREREQUISITE: BOD+Stamina 6

Through murderous training sessions in the Smog Chambers, where every breath threatens to combust the lungs, the Pneumancer’s diaphragm has adapted to extended periods of held breath. Utilizing enhanced internal breathing patterns, along with the proper mental fortitude to push through the pain of aching lungs and the panic-inducing effects of suffocation, they can hold their breaths for a number of minutes equal to their Stamina Skill per Potential level, unless they take more than their Stamina Skill in Damage and are forced to exhale.

SKILL BONUSES

For Pneumancers, the following skills are considered preferred at character creation (MAX +1):

- (BOD) Force
- (BOD) Toughness
- (AGI) Crafting
- (AGI) Projectiles
- (INT) Engineering



1 - PICKER

PREREQUISITE: -

EFFECT: The first lesson in life is pain. The second, how to endure it. Every day they are led to the hot plate already sizzling in the center of the training chamber. They are lined up on one side, and on the other a door is opened leading to the mess hall. Time to act.

The agonizing event burns itself into their minds, but they will overcome their fear. A child will only receive food if they repeatedly touch the plate week after week until all fear of fire is purged from their soul. Then, they may advance. By the time they reach adulthood the Pneumancer warriors have trained in this way enough to push through the most painful injuries, and ignore up to -3D of Trauma penalties.

Pickers are yet to do enough to even consider being worthy of a name, and fulfill only idle roles in the Pneumancer society. They are the nameless, faceless underlayer of the Clan.

EQUIPMENT: A mask, which will become their surrogate face for the years it takes to earn the right to use their own

2 - SMOGGER

PREREQUISITE: BOD+Force 6, BOD+Athletics 4

EFFECT: Check the barometers, refeed the conveyors. Good. Pressure building up in section 3-43. Release the valves, pump the steam, then clean up the main turbine. The Smogger knows every section of the Cauldron City by heart, and he knows that every engine requires its fuel. The monstrous boilers nestled beneath the city guzzle coal like a colossal beast devouring black, soot-coated nuggets of meat, and the Smogger is part of the workforce to keep it well-fed. He works in the sprawling coal mines buried deep beneath the surface, untapped since the Bygone days, shoveling the city's lifeblood into carts and dragging it back to where it is needed.

Smoggers are far from just mere miners, however. When the Pneumancers go to war, they are called up from their claustrophobic mineshafts to supply the Clan's siege engines, along with providing fresh ammunition for the Boilers and their Pneumo Hammers.

EQUIPMENT: Pickaxe; Coal sack; Slicer; Mask modified with dedicated filters for coal dust

2 - BOILER

PREREQUISITE: AGI+Projectiles 7, BOD+Toughness 6

EFFECT: Boilers are the core of the Pneumancer host. Once, they were the frontline warriors thrown into conflicts across the Ramein region. They trained hard, and fought harder, all for the promise of a glimpse of freedom.

The warriors of those days passed their ideals to the next generation, who continue to carry that fighting spirit on in their hearts. One problem – what are they supposed to do with no war to fight?

Nowadays, a Boiler's life is far more complex. He works in Nullpelia as a ground trooper for the Pneumancer armies. Farther from home he ventures out to collect tribute from villages under Nullpelia's aegis, or offers himself up for hire in countryside militias across Ramein and beyond to protect against overeager Scrapers, pestering Cockroaches, poaching Phosphorites, or reckless adventurers of all kinds. It's a far cry from the glorious days of yore, but it's a start.

EQUIPMENT: Pneumo Hammer; Free access to coal and bolts for ammunition

3 - ASSEMBLER

PREREQUISITE: AGI+Crafting 8, INT+Engineering 7, INT+Legends 7

EFFECT: The Assembler works alongside the Warcrafter, cracking ancient blueprints containing hints of the Mechanist's grand designs and building the machines that keep Nullpelia running, whether on the battlefield or in the Cauldron City. He is constrained by the limitations of the Clan's technological understanding, forced to use steam-based substitutes in place of many of the advanced electrical systems present in the Mechanist's works, but constraints are the mother of invention.

Assemblers are the most open-minded of the Pneumancers, and actively search for contact with Scrapers and Chroniclers, trading tidbits of information from the Mechanist's teachings for electrical components or lessons in circuit design. Inch by inch, the Pneumancers are clawing their way from the technological lull the Mechans condemned them to, and rising to become the true heirs to the Mechanist.

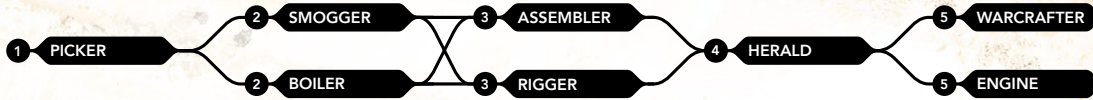
EQUIPMENT: The right to remove his mask and take a name; Assembler's tools (+iD to AGI+Crafting and INT+Engineering); Right of first refusal on any scrap or artifact from the Depths

3 - RIGGER

PREREQUISITE: AGI+Projectiles 8, AGI+Navigation 6, INT+Engineering 5, Authority 2

EFFECT: The Pneumancers have grown up in a land of technological wonder far beyond anything anyone alive in the world today has ever seen, passed onto them by the Mechanist himself. The Rigger doesn't understand how to

HIERARCHY AND RANKS - PNEUMANCERS



design the varied siege engines and sophisticated machinery of Nullpellia, but he's damn good at operating them. He is tasked with resetting the border defenses and traps, leading squads of Boilers out to patrol the limits of their current territory, along with piloting the Pneumancer weapons of war.

Due to their duties out on the edge of Nullpellian territory, it's the Riggers who come into contact with the Cults of Borca and elsewhere the most, and as such they are tasked with listening to the stories of the world beyond Ramein, the political events, wartime gossip, anything and everything they can take in, and bringing it back to the city to ensure the Heralds can keep an up-to-date view of the world around them. Sometimes, Riggers are even hired out as bodyguards or mercenaries to travelers and trade caravans passing through Borca.

EQUIPMENT: The right to remove his mask and take a name; Option to use a Pneumo Cannon or Thundermaul in battle, unless assigned to operate a siege weapon

4 - HERALD

PREREQUISITE: CHA+Expression 8, CHA+Negotiation 6, INT+Legends 9, Network 3

EFFECT: The Heralds originally emerged from the faceless masses of Pneumancers in the depths of the Cauldron City as lorekeepers, distinguishing themselves with their oratory skills. They rekindled the stories of heroes past, ensuring they would not be forgotten as the generations crept onwards. They recounted the tales of the Mechanist and his divine wisdom, and began to form rituals in his honor. Now that the Clan has clawed its way to freedom, the Heralds must take on a very different role – one for which they are not nearly as equipped.

There are dozens of Clans and Cults, large and small, that the Pneumancers must now interact with directly. It is the Herald's task to venture out and facilitate these interactions, making friends and soothing enemies. Additionally, they have expanded their role as the keepers of the past, many finding work in the temples of the New Dawn as priests in honor of the Mechanist's legacy.

EQUIPMENT: Official Pneumancer medallion (If visibly displayed, First Impression (+1D)); Free access to the Mechanist's tablets for examination and study

5 - WARCRAFTER

PREREQUISITE: Public demonstration of exceptional engineering work; INT+Engineering 10, INT+Science 9

EFFECT: The ingenuity of the Mechanist is mythical, tales

of his deeds and creations spreading far beyond the Nullpellian territory to filter through Scrapper halls and tap-rooms as legendary stories. For the Pneumancers, these are more than just mere yarn and fables. They believe that the skill and creativity of their city's founder passes directly through their ranks, generation after generation. The Warcrafter inherits his talent for design and engineering, and is tasked with creating the Clan's most brutal and effective weapons of war.

The current Warcrafter, Deus Volt, rose to prominence by laying down the plans for extensive upgrades to Nullpellia's Toll, a siege weapon designed to break through even the thickest gates based on an upscaled version of the original Pneumo Hammer designs, the Mechanist's roller carriage allowing the massive bolt hammer of the weapon to move smoothly in its track.

As a Warcrafter, Deus Volt has access to the treasure chamber of the temple of the New Dawn, where he can study every recovered blueprint of the Mechanist with his own eyes, and examine every piece of equipment plundered from the Mechans during the uprising.

EQUIPMENT: Full cooperation of the Assemblers should he wish to have one of his designs built; Cogwheel key to the hidden armory beneath the Firewall, containing a preserved store of Bygone munitions, for emergencies

5 - ENGINE

PREREQUISITE: Katechan must pass away – he will not step down; CHA+Leadership 11, PSY+Domination 10

EFFECT: The Pneumancers are a terrifyingly powerful force, well trained and fearless, but when the Cauldron City gates were first blown open, they were frozen. They needed an impetus to set themselves into motion, driving them towards their freedom. They needed an Engine. Katechan the Liberator took that role, leading the first attack squads onto the surface and into battle with the Phosphorites, and it was a natural choice for him to continue his path after the conflict settled.

Katechan is the rock-hard iron core of his Clan, and his willpower and strength is the driving force behind its actions. His word is backed with experience and heroic deeds taught to every one of the Pickers in the Cauldron City, and his every proclamation ripples through the ranks. When the Engine commands, the Pneumancers act.

EQUIPMENT: The Engine has unlimited access to the weapons storage of the Pneumancers, and can requisition any and all of the Clan's equipment in times of war. His Resources Background is permanently set to (6)

EQUIPMENT

THUNDERMAUL

This ponderous maul is cumbersome, but when it strikes, bones shatter. Mounted at the head is a pneumatic cylinder kept under high pressure, which is triggered by impact to expand at rapid speed and obliterate its target. This mechanism requires an Action to manually recharge, along with a successful BOD+Force (3) roll, but when primed it adds (4) additional Damage.

DEATH HISS

A mounted weapon named after its sound can't be a good sign. Its charging sequence is quickly followed up by screams of anguish of those caught in its path. The Death Hiss ejects boiling water from the combustion chambers of steam-powered siege engines over any enemies trying to surmount one of these lumbering weapons, the superheated fluid seeping through armor and cooking attackers alive, along with knocking them out of their boots.

SLICER

First developed as a portable, high powered cutting tool for the delvers looking to explore further into Nullpellia's Depths, this handheld waterjet cutter was quickly recognized as a brutally effective last-ditch weapon – a stream of pressurized water capable of slicing through steel will carve into flesh just as easily. Today, Pneumancers are equipped with one of them as means of self defense.

PNEUMO CANNON

The Pneumo Hammer is by far the most recognized and renowned weapon of its time, but it didn't take long for the Assemblers to start dreaming bigger. They took the tried and tested mechanism and simply scaled it up, leading to the Pneumo Cannon: a shoulder-fired variant with a far larger pressure chamber, lobbing chunks of burning coal at rapid speed into the enemies. In order to make it man-portable, though, the shielding around the high-pressure compressor was removed, rendering it vulnerable to outside attack and rupture.

WAR CHARIOT

These squat, wide, heavy vehicles were left to languish in the underground hangars of the Cauldron City for centuries, kept preserved by their isolation from the elements while the world above turned on its head and descended into chaos. Their original purpose is unknown to the Pneumancers, although the Assembler who discovered them theorised about their engines being designed to move a massive, heavy object of some kind. Instead, they have found a new purpose as repurposed chariots for the Pneumancer armies, their old, broken down, Petro-guzzling engines replaced with new steam engines, allowing them to carry squads of up to 10 Pneumancers across the Nullpellian terrain at pace matched only by the cavalry squadrons of the Judges.

SAND GRENADE

When these small, thin-walled iron containers are launched towards enemies a primer charge within their body is set off. Superheated steam is released from an internal container, which quickly diffuses through the fine sand particles encapsulated within the grenade, heating them beyond the boiling point of water. On impact, the sand mutilates nearby warriors – tiny, burning hot particles carving their way through armor and visors leaving blistering welts and third degree burns wherever they hit the enemy.

STEAM-FLAIL

At first glance, this weapon occasionally wielded by Heralds when they wade into battle looks like nothing more than a smooth, polished ball attached to a long chain, along with a cylindrical handle to properly whip it into an opponent. However, when an igniter on the handle is released, a lump of finely ground coal is ignited in the central chamber, which immediately begins to heat up the water held inside the weapon's head. When the flail is swung, boiling hot steam is spewed from the openings in the surface to scar anyone it hits.

IRON JAWS

One of the most common defensive mechanisms lying in wait beneath the dusty surface of the Ramein region, the Iron Jaws are also the most brutally simple. A hidden pressure plate is set into the surface and coated in a layer of fine substrate, connected to a subterranean pneumatic cylinder held with a latch. After the unfortunate victim steps on the plate the cylinder is released, surging upwards and actuating the serrated jaws of the trap. They slam shut on the interloper's legs, carving through flesh and bone alike. The Iron Jaws appear to have been randomly placed, but a Chronicler analysis would reveal they have been laid down in the most statistically likely positions for an invading force approaching Nullpellia from the direction of Exalt to walk.

KINGDOM COME

The centerpiece of the Firewall is visible from all across Nullpellia, its six barrels held aiming at the same location it was last fired towards – the back-line of the Phosphorite host during their attempted siege of the city. Only used in the most dire of circumstances, Kingdom Come is a colossal artillery battery, formed from a number of Bygone gunship cannons combined into a single, devastating piece of destruction. The maximum range, as calculated by Deus Volt during his last inspection, would allow it to launch its barrage of high explosive shells all the way to Wetzlar. The supply of ammunition for the weapon is limited, and so it can only be used with the personal authorization of the Engine or Warcrafter – in exchange, it guarantees the end of anything it hits.



LEGACY OF THE MECHANIST

Name	Effect	Enc.	Tech	Value	Res
Thundermaul	Hand. -2D, Dist. 2m, Damage 1+F, Slots 1, Impact (3T), Blunt, Special	2	III	4000	3
Death Hiss	Mounted weapon, Hand. +1D, Dist. 10/30m, Damage 12, Mag. Unlimited, Only Sealed armor protects	-	III	10000	4
Slicer	Hand. -1D, Dist. 1m, Damage 7, Mag. 4, Piercing (8)	1	III	2000	2
Pneumo Cannon	Hand -2D, Dist. 20/60, Damage 13, Mag. 4, Thunder Strike, Fire Hazardous, (4+) Damage to tank causes (14) Damage Explosion	3	III	10000	4
War Chariot	Max. Speed 3, Acc. 1, Brake 1, Armor 4, Body 10, Structure 5, Slots 2	-	V	8000	3
Sand Grenade	Dist 10/40, Damage 8, Cloud (6m, 1 Round), Only Sealed armor protects	-	III	1000	2
Steam-Flail	Hand. -1D, Dist. 2m, Damage 4+F/2, Blunt, Out of Control (3), Additional (3) Damage on impact which only Sealed armor can mitigate.	2	III	2500	3
Iron Jaws	Hidden (4C), Damage 12, only full body armor can protect. Only Riggers carry the tools to reset.	-	IV	-	-
Kingdom Come	Hand. +2D, Dist. Min. 500m, Max. 50km, Damage 20, 30m radius impact zone	-	V	-	-

THE STATE OF AFFAIRS



VOLTAICS

Deus Volt has not forgotten the Assembler team that first helped him ascend to his current rank by upgrading Nullpellia's Toll. They have been reformed into the Voltaics, an elite engineering squad first called when advanced design work or complex blueprints are necessary. When off-duty, they are found delving into the Depths, trying to uncover more of their people's technological history.



THE DELEGATE

When Katechan sent that insufferable Herald Luren out to Justitian, after fending off months of requests and pleas to open diplomatic links to the Moloch, he should have known it wouldn't be the end of his problems. The Judges sent their own delegate, an Advocate called Ritano, to negotiate in turn – and the Liberator can't get rid of this weasel while Luren remains on mission.

DEUS VOLT

The Pneumancers are moving on. An entire generation has been raised free from the tyranny of the Mechans, in an environment unlike anything they'd known before, despite all the attempts of the old guard to keep things safe and stagnant. Deus Volt was born on the day of the uprising, and has grown to maturity watching the struggles of his people to find their place in the world. Early on, he showed a prodigious talent for mechanics and designs, and rapidly advanced through the ranks, becoming the youngest Assembler to earn his own name. He was a natural choice for the role of Warcrafter, but his ambition is not yet satisfied.

Deus Volt knows what must be done. The Pneumancers are stumbling to find their place only because they insist on passivity, avoiding the imperialistic tendencies of their old rulers. If the Clan is to survive they must carve out their niche, with steam and bolt-fire. This is the righteous path the Pneumancers must take to the future.

The Warcrafter is ingenious, but hot-headed. In private, he's drawn up elaborate plans to arm his brothers and sisters to the teeth and march on the Protectorate, retaking the land once stolen from them in Wetzlar, eradicating the Mechan pests once and for all, and pushing onwards into Justitian's territory. He has had Heralds explain to him where the greatest resources of the Black Lung are concentrated, and he sees so many opportunities: Cathedral City with its water reserves, Mobilis, Cavernis, the Spital. Foreign powers have poached in the Mechanist's realm for long enough, and the Pneumancers are a force like no other. Why should they not turn their gaze outwards?

However many followers Deus Volt gathers, Katechan will not allow for the Pneumancers to become a reflection of their former slave masters. But the rivalry between the new champion and the hero of yore is evident.

KATECHAN, THE LIBERATOR

Stories of the great works of Katechan the Liberator are regurgitated all throughout Nullpellia: He trampled on the Phosphorites and fed them their own blazing ammunition. He waded into the glowing bodies, a steaming and furious machine of destruction carving through the enemy lines, where others did not dare to tread. Single-handedly he cracked open the Mechan temple during the great uprising, painting the end of an era with broad red brushstrokes as he smashed the heads of the priests against the walls, excelling at the art of death.

His feats have elevated him to an almost mythical level in the minds of the Nullpellians who align with his struggle. His followers adore him, lighting shards of coal to commemorate his exploits, some even branding themselves with them to, in their own small way, show their support for his battle scars. They see life as a struggle against entropy, and reject any sort of weakness – liberation, emotionally or otherwise, is only ever achieved through hardship. Many of the more militaristic Heralds and Riggers celebrate themselves as Katechan's followers. None of them have accepted the bitter truth yet.

Katechan is dying, his body ravaged. It could be any moment now that the wounds collected in his long life take their final toll. His Riggers have bartered for medicine, and his Assemblers try their best to tend to his festering wounds, but Katechan casts them all out from his throne room. The only thing keeping him alive is the dream of a final pursuit: tracking the remaining Mechans from their temporary hideout in Wetzlar to their true stronghold, assembling a force powerful enough to overcome any opposition, and launching a siege on his ultimate foe. If only the greatest hero can hold out long enough to charge into battle one last time. Dying alone, in his bed, would be a disgrace.

OCCARIA, THE STEAMLORD

The life of a Pneumancer used to be a simple one. Shovel coal, tighten bolts, maintain the systems underground, occasionally venture to an unfamiliar surface and fight on behalf of their rulers, before returning home. Not anymore.

Ever since their ascent, the Pneumancers have been toiling to understand the world surrounding them and the true nature of their existence. Some simply shrug, keep their eyes on the ground, only worry about their terrestrial counterparts, and are content with leaving it at that. But not all. Occaria the Steamlord was the most devout follower of the Mechanist in the days below the surface, and her worship has only grown as she explores more and more of the true origins of her people. She knows there are riddles in her hands which she is inadequately equipped to solve herself, she doesn't even have the context to comprehend the question, let alone the solution. She has catalogued every treasure excavated from the former Mechan temple, along with the strange Ellipsooids that came down from the star. She, along with the Vow, her closest followers, have even ventured far into Gusev's Garden wearing bulky protective gear, standing just meters away from the bizarre growths of the Plurality, getting lost in the fractal whorls and knots of its outer surface.

Occaria cannot hope to grasp this puzzle on her own. Against the will of both Deus Volt and Katechan she has sent her Riggers out to make contact with the Exalters of Liqua, despite the legends which paint Exalt as a stalwart enemy of the Mechanist. She is convinced that they will have the answers she is hunting for, and if not, then the Halos amongst them surely will. The source of her conviction is a Mechanist tablet coated in numerical values which she was able to decode, revealing a coordinate system pointed straight towards Liqua, and ciphers which spell out "Enceph" when converted into letters.



THE NEW DAWN

The Pneumancers have found some solace in religion, over the years. The temple of the New Dawn cares for the Pneumancers who have either fallen in combat or sustained injuries from their singeing rituals, creating healing gels for burns from water, starch, and clay, or providing what medical attention they can based on the few writings of the Mechanist dealing with the topic.

A BRAND NEW DAY

Every morning, Nullpella sees new warlords fight their way out of the ranks of the Pneumancers. Pneumo Hammers spit bolts and a merchant convoy's cart explodes in shrapnel, Scrapper gangs are beaten down and robbed for overstepping their bounds, even the smallest victories are transfigured into grand founding myths with the help of a belly full of distillate. Sometimes, even a taproom brawl is enough for a winner to strut around with bare chest and raised fist as the hero of the day, until the next biggest bastard slugs him in the jaw and knocks him into the dust to impress a handful of followers. This is no way to build a people. There must be another path.

Albeh was a slave longer than most sur-

living Pneumancers, and even though she was never called to the surface to fight on the frontlines she still fought for more than her life every day. She had seven children down in the Cauldron City, and she defended her brood with tooth and nail, fought against the Mechans no matter how they punished her, all to keep her offspring safe.

During the rest cycle, she would tell them the story of the Mechanist, like her own father used to – even the sad parts, about their founder's death. It was the part of the story she hated most, but her father always introduced with "Wait, listen to it, this is important. This is who you are." She didn't understand until much later when she retold this to her own children and looked

into their tense eyes: death only legitimized the ideals of the Mechanist.

After the uprising, she and her family pulled themselves up out of the glowing underground, and began to propagate the old ways of the Mechanist. Small communities, specializing in their own work – families! – bound together by respect and trade and the promise to stand at each other's side. They were quiet, confident, and led by example. If you follow Albeh's way, you follow the Glow, a reminder of the eternal firelight of the old Cauldron Cities. The Glow never submits. They are a small faction, for now, but their ideals are infectious. They will form a new, unified Pneumancer Clan, just as the Mechanist wanted.

ROAD TO THE
NORTHERN RUINS

THE LAKE
OF CONCRETE

BORDER GNATS
HOUSING

OFFICER SAGGS
WORKSHOP

HUNGERON
SETTLEMENT

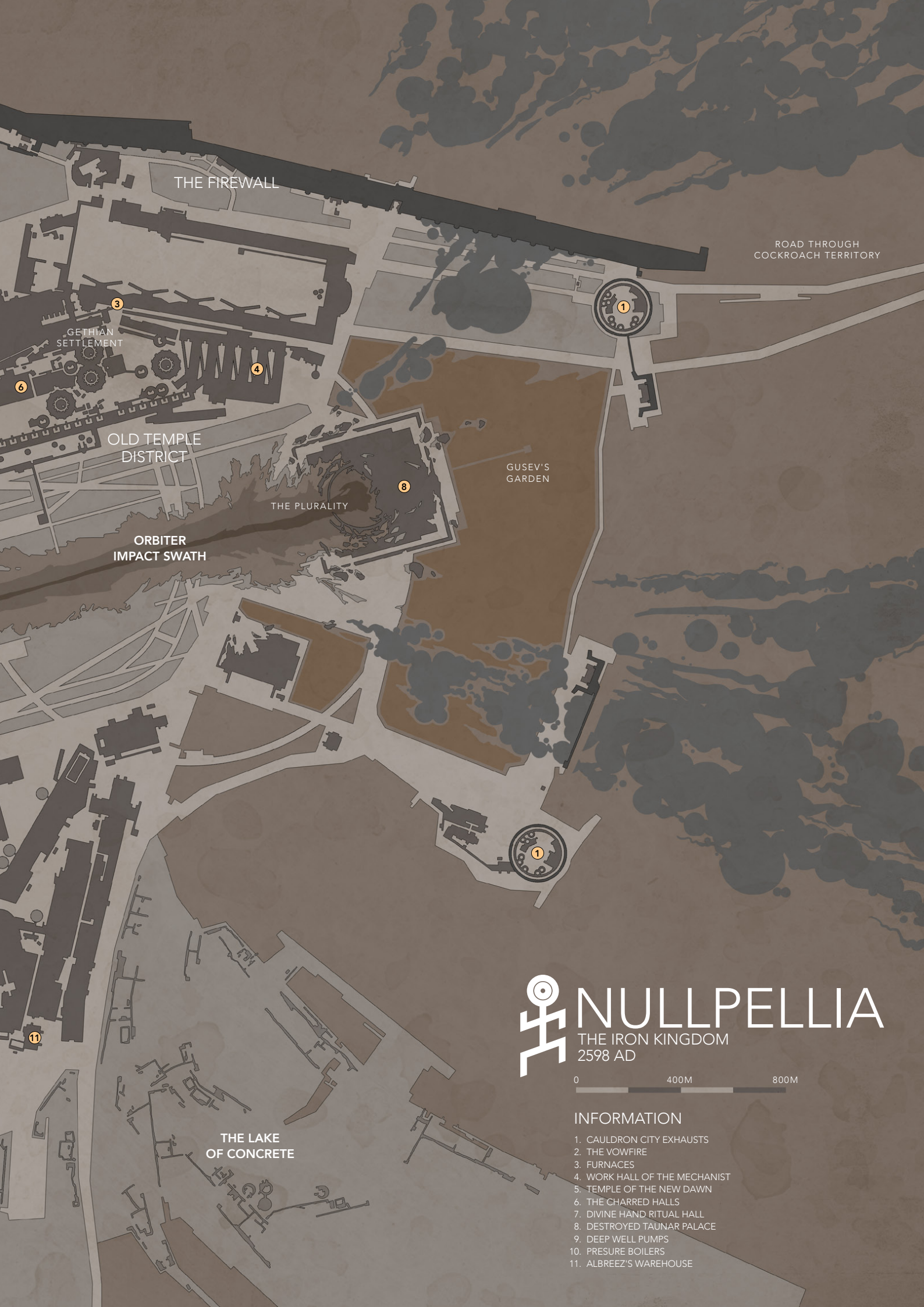
PARALLAX

REBUILT
BRIDGES

SCRAPYARD

THE LAKE
OF CONCRETE





THE FIREWALL

ROAD THROUGH
COCKROACH TERRITORY

GETHIAN
SETTLEMENT

OLD TEMPLE
DISTRICT

GUSEV'S
GARDEN

THE PLURALITY

ORBITER
IMPACT SWATH

THE LAKE
OF CONCRETE



NULLPELLIA

THE IRON KINGDOM
2598 AD

0 400M 800M

INFORMATION

1. CAULDRON CITY EXHAUSTS
2. THE VOWFIRE
3. FURNACES
4. WORK HALL OF THE MECHANIST
5. TEMPLE OF THE NEW DAWN
6. THE CHARRED HALLS
7. DIVINE HAND RITUAL HALL
8. DESTROYED TAUNAR PALACE
9. DEEP WELL PUMPS
10. PRESURE BOILERS
11. ALBREEZ'S WAREHOUSE

ENSLAVED. ENTOMBED. EMPOWERED.

