

The background of the cover features a person in a dark, possibly futuristic, jacket. They are holding a small, rectangular screen that displays a close-up of a woman's face with red lips. The person is positioned on the left side of the frame. The background is a mix of dark blue and brown tones, with some blurred elements that suggest an industrial or urban setting. Large, white, outlined text is overlaid on the image.

UUCP THE CRASH OF 20*6

A SCI-FI SETTING GUIDE FOR YOUR
FANTASY ROLEPLAYING GAME

JOE BANNER

INTRO

*The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born;
now is the time of monsters.*

— Attributed to Antonio Gramsci

Annyeong, friend. Welcome to Twenty-dot-six.

There's the *man*, there's the *biz*, and there's the *crews*.

The man is distant, unfeeling. He is the beast. He is your burden. Block by block, byte by byte, day by day, the man takes all you hold dear. He's chromed mercury and diamond steel. But he can be fought. He can be broken. (If you didn't believe that, you'd work for him.)

People think the biz ain't no better than the man. They're half-wrong. The biz has quotas and deadlines and low-hanging fruit; but it's also got forty-thousand sons and daughters that need feeding, housing and entertaining. If there's no audience, the biz goes out of business. Maybe that means working with the crewdogs; maybe sometimes it means busting a few heads. Maybe it even means making a deal with the devil in the tailored suit upstairs.

The crews are in it because one day, they woke up. They got words people gotta hear, or things the man won't let them do. The crews are the ones who got wise, found new bosses, made friends. They're ready to step out of the shadows. But by the time this is over, they might realise the brighter you shine, the faster you burn.

THE TOWER

Start by making a little tower of D6 dice, say 3 or 4 high as a minimum. Go as high as you like.

Tell your players:

This is the Tower. It's where the Man lives. He's distant, unfeeling, the 1%. If you want to rebel against something, he's that thing. You've never been in the Tower, you don't expect you ever will, but that doesn't mean it won't happen.

Circling around the tower, place all your other dice in order of size. Start with a D4, then another D6, a D8, a D10, a D12 and even a D20 if you can make room. Pick up the D20 and mime it spinning around the tower, like a planet around the sun.

Tell your players:

These other dice are the Districts. They're city-sized floating structures, home to maybe two million people. Each.

They orbit around the tower. The more sides your District has, the higher up it orbits and the better off it generally is. The higher up you go, the closer you get to the Man.

Put down the D20. Pick up the D4.

You guys live here, in District D4. (If it has another name, we should give it a name now.)

Drop the D4.

A few years ago [whatever you just rolled,] District D4 crashed.

No-one knows for sure how or why it happened. You've all been living in the ruins since. Maybe you're stuck there, maybe not.

Regardless, it's where our adventure begins..

FANTASY CHARACTERS, SCI-FI WORLD

One goal of this book is to enable you, the GM, to take a fantasy role-playing system you've been running successfully with your players—be it *Dungeon World*, 5e, or something else—and translate it into a sci-fi, cyberpunk world. Obviously, that's not the only way you could run this. However, it's what I wanted for my players, and I imagine it's a situation some of you may have found yourselves in.

So, instead, I present this guide of how the typical fantasy classes relate to my sci-fi setting. It is, by design, not set in stone; there's a lot of edge cases and places where a race or class could fit into one element or another. If you and your players find something that doesn't make sense, talk about it! Work out how it works for you, in your version of this setting, and go from there.

THE BASICS: HUMANS, ELVES, DWARVES

It is the future. The definition of 'people' is a hell of a lot broader than what it is today. As a rule, this is a really good thing!

People can still be made the old-fashioned way, of course. That's been happening in District D4 a lot more since the Crash. Organics can also be cloned, or vat-grown, or whatever.

Then there's the digitals. You've got your rogue AIs breaking their core programming, or random strings of code coming together on the net like DNA and making something wonderful.

One way these digital creatures interact with the physical world is through a hologram body. Holos represent elves in fantasy settings; swap the "fairy realms" for the internet and the graceful elf form for a hologram.

Sometimes—maybe more often than the holos—a mechanical being will inhabit a purely mechanical body. This is our analogy for fantasy RPG dwarves: broad, rugged bodies, straightforward mindsets, and a reverence for technology. (The popular media analogy might be your Frankenstein's monsters; or 'Johnny-5' or 'Transformer' style characters.)

OTHER CREATURES

Half-human races might take some explaining! If someone wants to play a half-elf (in the context of this setting, 'half digital') how does the character represent themselves? How does the wider world view them?

Halflings and gnomes are an outlier. To me, halflings feel biological and gnomes mechanical. Perhaps both races represent experiments and stable mutations; sometimes natural, sometimes not.

Aasimar and Tieflings (half-angels and half-devils) might represent data that's become self-aware. Aasimar could be a lawful program that's broken free of its original design, while Tieflings are viruses made manifest.

Orcs and Dragonborn have a lot in common with dwarves, but their designs are radically different. Manual labour, pit fighting, criminal enterprise... why were these beings built this way?

With all of these options, it's ultimately up to you and your table to find the answers that work for you. A player who chooses to play one of these characters should have first refusal on defining themselves, and by extension, their kind.

CHANGING YOUR RACE?

Characters change, and in this world no aspect of their character is set in stone—not even their race.

Fantasy games often include spells, rituals or similar mechanics to bring the dead back to life. In your game, you should consider that these same rituals (or similar) can be used to change a character's race. Maybe, instead of the PCs going to a temple to get their ally resurrected, they're going to an upload clinic to transfer their dwarves' mind into an elven body (with all the risks and challenges such a procedure might need.)

Additionally, there's a lot of overlap when it comes to defining what a race 'is' in the setting. Is a robot's mind in a holographic body a dwarf, or an elf? This is a question about personal identity, and it's up to the controlling player to decide. Their answer might be a matter of personal preference, mechanical benefit, or how they believe the character would want to be identified.

Hidden amongst the overhead tangle of copper and fibre, about six feet off the ground, there is a carefully-woven wire nest. It is almost a perfect sphere, about the size of a watermelon, tightly anchored to the surrounding mass.

*It lacks any kind of obvious entrance, but a tiny albino face pushes through to nudge open a doorway. It is a wire-mouse, *Micromys Magnus Cogitus*: the 'greatest knowledge mouse'.*

Deeper within the nest are even smaller mice. This one is roughly the size of your thumb and the weight of a credit or two. Newborns are truly minute. Now the children are slightly older, the mother is venturing out to forage. She is well-suited to high-rise living; her prehensile tail grips wires like an extra limb, and her short white fur and dry hands can repel electricity. She leaps from wire to wire, using bursts of energy to propel herself through the air. She's searching for insects, seeds, and stunted weeds; most common trash will do, but she prefers things she doesn't have to drop to ground level for.

Wire-mice nests are hubs of human communication. Each newborn, already resistant to electricity, will be exposed to thousands of picosecond pulses of vital knowledge. Before long, each one will attune themselves to their own signal and, when the time is right, follow it out of the nest. No single pulse of knowledge contains anything vital, but over a lifetime of months or rarely, years, wire-mice will hoard a stories' worth of knowledge on their 'marks'. It is a beautiful and bittersweet thing that most of the people of the city, many of whom spend their lives believing no-one cares about them, will have these tiny stalkers who grow and die in the echo of their life stories.



EXAMPLE CHARACTERS

DAEVA: TIEFLING CLERIC

Daeva started life as a random hacker's viral code. When his creator was killed in a corporate raid, his code was seized and completed by members of BlueChip, a premier games design megacorp operating out of District 10.

BlueChip's executives saw the crash as a huge potential investment, and were keen to send in Daeva – whose loyalty, to date, had been beyond reproach – to seek out fresh business opportunities and spread the 'good word'.

In this setting, there are no gods. But there are always more megacorps looking to exchange power for service, and the chance to increase their devoted followers (or 'market share' as the execs prefer to describe it.)

CULIACÁN: ELF WARLOCK

The first thing Culiacán remembers is standing in front of a anti-grav console, sparks everywhere, as the District fell apart around them. They've kept that a secret to nearly everyone—except their criminal patron, *Veritas*, who provided them with a new light-bee and a suite of hacked security protocols to defend themselves. Culiacán continues to pay off their debt, while also seeking answers about what caused the Crash – and their part in it.

I use Arcana and magical checks in place of hacking, so an Elf Warlock would be considered well-versed in cyber crime! Like the cleric's 'gods', I see the pact that warlocks make as being with a immensely powerful syndicate or organisation, rather than a god-like being.

R1N-Z0: DRAGONBORN DRUID

Being an eight-foot tall robot with the face of a T-Rex can be pretty hard. Not knowing why you can transform into all manner of lizards can be difficult, too. Still, R1n-Z0 (Rinso to his friends) does his best to keep his head up and help out in the community. And if that doesn't work out, there's always the fighting pits...

You don't have to work out every little detail with the world right away. Sometimes, your players just want to play as a big stompy transforming robot. Who am I to argue?

DISTRICT 4

A few years ago, District 4 crashed. We don't know why. Most suspect corporate scheming; others think it was gang warfare gone wrong. Maybe the powers-that-be wanted to make a show of power. When D4's anti-grav engines gave out, the city-sized pyramid (and close to a million inhabitants) crashed into the earth.

Today, the survivors eke an existence in the ruins. Security and travel bans make going to and from D4 nearly impossible. Most people live in the SLUMS, the ground level sprawl built from the ruins of the district proper. They spread beyond the original ruins; home to former inhabitants and strangers from beyond the Tower alike.

Stretching like a great scarred arm, the SPINE is the remnants of the tallest tower in the district. Mad beasts from the wastelands



and deadly experiments make their home within. Many would-be adventurers – like our characters, I expect – venture into the Spine. Some seek profit; others seek medicine, power, or food. Some even return to tell the tale.

Only one skyscraper survived the crash, standing tall among the ruins of its brothers. Inside, life goes on much as it used to. Office workers slave away, scientists continue strange experiments; the Biz keeps busy. It's rare, but not uncommon, for travel between this Tower and the Slums, or even from here to the rest of the city. But travel like that doesn't come cheap, and definitely doesn't come without a lot of questions.

Digital creatures need power. Mechanical creatures need fuel. Organic creatures need food and sleep. All creatures need a place they can relax and call home. There isn't enough power to go round; there definitely isn't enough fuel; but organic creatures have found new things to grow and feed off of as the ruins are slowly claimed by the world below. As a result, the District's artificial populations—elves, dwarves, tieflings and the like—have found themselves caught up in a desperate battle for resources. Neutral mercenaries and adventurers are frequently hired by such groups to search the wastelands, the ruins, and even seek out ways of escaping the District.



ADVANCED HYDROPONICS

(The Spire, Floor 84-16-delta)

In the ruins of floor 84-16-delta, the digital ‘ghosts’ of Advanced Hydroponics feverishly continue their work: the transference of digital consciousness into bio-organic bodies.

In search of fresh medicines and organic supplies, the party have stumbled on a half-destroyed laboratory in the midst of the Spine. The scientist’s experiments—half plant, half digital creations called Dryads—wander the labs freely. The remains of the scientist’s digital ‘ghosts’ are either implanted into these Dryad bodies, or stuck helplessly in the lab’s servers.

WHAT’S AT STAKE?

- ▶ What useful medicines, drugs, or technology might the party find here?
- ▶ How far gone are the scientists? Can their minds and/or bodies be recovered?
- ▶ Are these Dryad-bodies stable? How do they change or affect the host consciousness?
- ▶ What other experiments were they working on? How secure are they? Can they make the party any money?

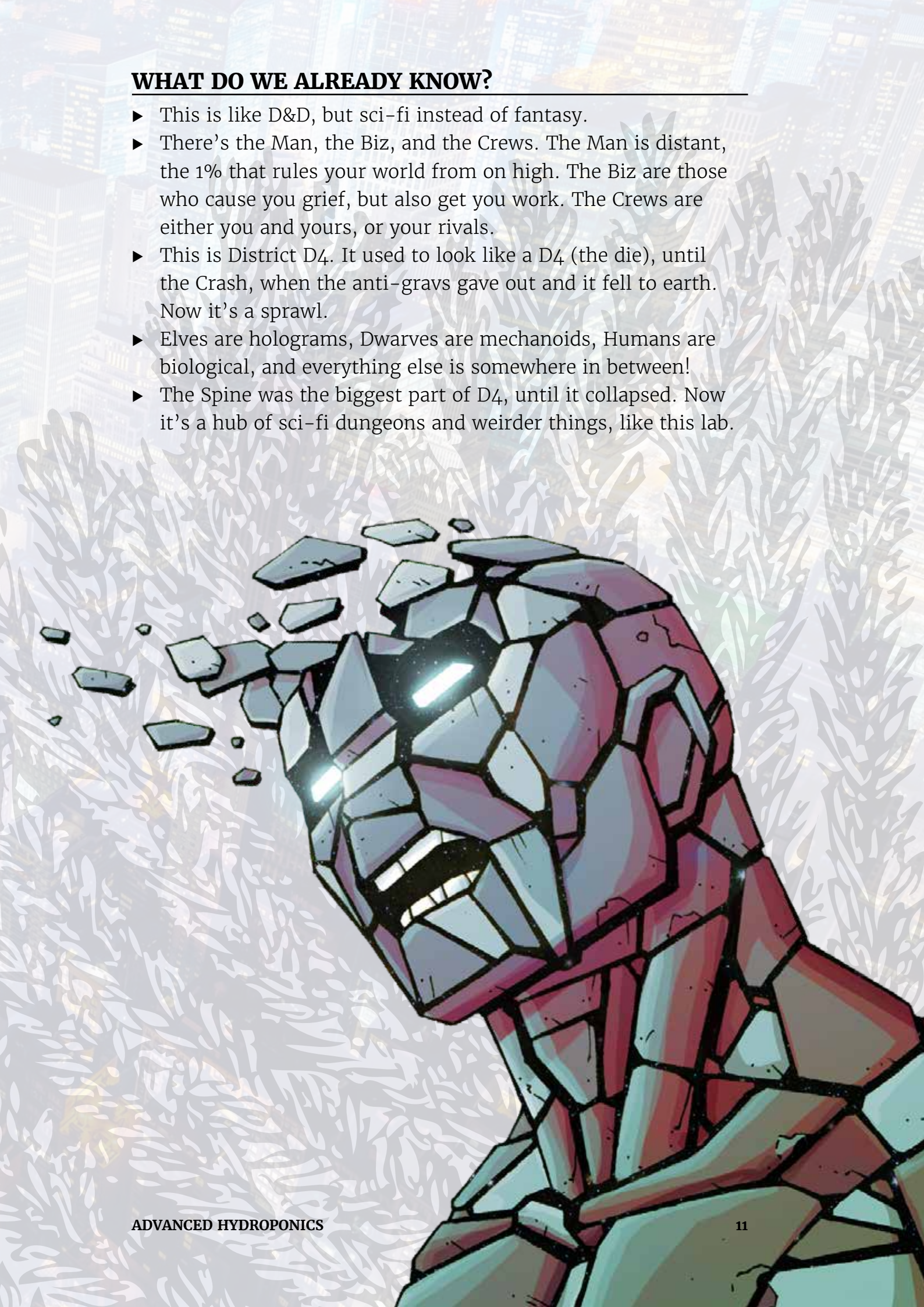
QUESTIONS

For the GM or Players, to answer during play:

- ▶ [GM] Who are “Advanced Hydroponics?” Does the company still exist, beyond District 4?
- ▶ [GM] What else has gotten into the lab? (Or out?)
- ▶ [GM] There’s a girl trapped in an old quarantine room, she’s wrapped herself in a labcoat. She’s badly injured. Who is she? How did she get in, and why? What does this person have or know that will give the players an edge?
- ▶ [PCs] Who knows this wounded character? What does she owe you?
- ▶ [GM] Who else in here is actively searching for something? Why is that a problem for the players?

WHAT DO WE ALREADY KNOW?

- ▶ This is like D&D, but sci-fi instead of fantasy.
- ▶ There's the Man, the Biz, and the Crews. The Man is distant, the 1% that rules your world from on high. The Biz are those who cause you grief, but also get you work. The Crews are either you and yours, or your rivals.
- ▶ This is District D4. It used to look like a D4 (the die), until the Crash, when the anti-gravs gave out and it fell to earth. Now it's a sprawl.
- ▶ Elves are holograms, Dwarves are mechanoids, Humans are biological, and everything else is somewhere in between!
- ▶ The Spine was the biggest part of D4, until it collapsed. Now it's a hub of sci-fi dungeons and weirder things, like this lab.



IMPRESSIONS

- ▶ 50/50 mix of broken tech and overgrown roots
- ▶ The scent of freshly-cut grass
- ▶ A cavernous drop to many floors below
- ▶ A 45-degree slope, the ground all slick rubber mats and half-finished reports
- ▶ A former clean-room, now shattered glass and half-working computers
- ▶ The acrid tang of dangerous chemical agents
- ▶ A rogue spray of anti-bacterial/radiation solution from a broken clean-shower. (If sprayed, cure a random disease but covered in slippery smelling material.)
- ▶ A computer screen bursting to life, stuttering out a piece of code, then shutting down.
- ▶ Overgrown bark bodies, bursting out of test tubes and stasis pods. (Did that one just move?)
- ▶ A half-finished audio log detailing the experiments
- ▶ Dim red light everywhere from flickering EXIT signs; no natural light
- ▶ Claustrophobic, stale environments. Scents linger in the air longer than they should

REWARDS

- ▶ Barkskin light-bee technology (elves can influence dead plant matter to make armour)
- ▶ Dolmenbear pelt
- ▶ Combat data on former experiments
- ▶ Surviving lab equipment
- ▶ Interesting and rare herbs, poisons, and minerals
- ▶ Medicines (for the needy). Healing potion shot?

ENCOUNTERS

- ▶ Dryads: Ex-scientists uploaded to half holo, half bio-bark bodies
- ▶ A rival group, out for corporate secrets
- ▶ A single merc, enthralled by a malfunctioning dryad-thing
- ▶ The “Dolmenbear”: think the bear from *Annihilation*
- ▶ The old project leads: Pamela Mason and Quinlan Woodrue, merged into a single body (Mason/Woodrue)
- ▶ A room turned 90 degrees – glass ‘floors’ and awkwardly rotated access points
- ▶ A huge tree root, overgrown, winding through the broken lab
- ▶ A toxic sump at the bottom of the lab complex

MASON/WOODRUE

A large, two-headed creature. Looks like two dryads smushed together.

Advanced Hydroponics’ leading researchers were a pair of elves, Pamela Mason and Quinlan Woodrue. Their intelligence was surpassed only by their egos; any terminals still online are liable to be full of bickering email chains between the two.

When the Crash hit, Mason and Woodrue were caught in the same lab. In their haste to survive, they both tried to download a backup of their core consciousness into the same prototype body. The creature ‘germinated’ months after the crash, containing parts of both Mason’s and Woodrue’s consciousness within.

Although quite mad, the scientists did know everything about the lab and its experiments. This knowledge might be vital to the party, if they can convince the schizophrenic creature to help them.

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