

INTRODUCTION

This story takes place in the present and the far future. The characters have a chance to see ages come and go from contemporary times of enlightenment and judgement, to the first challenge toward the extinction of the human race, to when the Sun is blazing red, and Earth is dying in its own man-made shadow.

It is rules system agnostic, providing just the story.

PROLOGUE: THE LEAP

REVOLUTION

The characters are alive in our age, where only recently, research is published proving humanity's capability of enduring cryonic revival. A woman recently appeared on national television after having been pronounced clinically dead in the late '80s. Though she showed signs of discomfort, Ms. Angela Hadrami was able to recollect her name and some of her childhood. The chief surgeon, Dr. Luke Kalvis, becomes a paragon of limitless scientific progression. After a wave of inflated worldwide interest, the characters are among a large group of people who decide to apply for cryopreservation, but they are the few who are accepted.

Before character creation, each player must formulate a reason for undergoing the procedure, and the explicit conditions for their revival in the future. There are no other restrictions on their place in contemporary society. What the future holds for the world, none can say in the characters' time. The characters' time for the procedure may be years apart.

A FICKLE AGE

As each of the characters prepares to undergo the procedure of cryopreservation, they are confronted with some of the consequences of their own time's society. One character may have to deal with a reporter who insists on an exclusive interview. Any research done on Ms. Olive Leer will reveal her writing has so far ruined three careers by twisting words and pandering to sensationalism.

Another character may face a crowd of protesters on the way to the hospital. The police have either lost control or lost interest. Only violence will see a soul through the front door.

Others may face the challenges of a friend who tries to talk them out of it, a conspiracy theorist who slides a folder of uncorrelated evidence against Ms. Hadrami's story under their door, or a live broadcast interview. Any deeds in their situations might speak of the characters' inherent merits.

STORY: THE REACH

A stone's throw through time brings the characters to awaken, but not at their appointed time. Most were discarded and neglected within a few decades' time. Their resurrection is either too early, or it is too late. They have become pawns luckier than most in a compromise for the survival of the human race and a hopeful restoration of the planet.

Three physicians run a facility that has survived a cataclysm, each a native of Iceland as it was called in the characters' time. Two of them look up to their senior, a genius from before the great crisis. She holds the keys to humanity's survival, though she is far from selfless and uses it as a weapon rather than salvation.

PATIENTS' DORMITORIES

Centuries after their time, the characters awaken in agony. The muddled process of awakening takes them across hours of incoherent thought and excruciating pain in their limbs. Blurred faces pass over them, making comments, taking notes. By the time the characters can utter their first few words, they are soothed and given an injection to make them sleep again.

The characters next open their eyes in private rooms with walls of thick concrete painted white. There is little to see but their beds and a sliding door made of glass. There is a chart clipped to the bed, noting their name, blood type, a unique patient identification number, and a list of procedures they can't understand for the language used, culminating in their cryogenic revival on '2131-06-05.054'. The door does not respond to the characters, though they can see the room beyond holding a clock, wooden furniture, and another set of glass doors leading down into a hallway. Through the reflection of these doors, they may glimpse the other characters in the adjacent rooms. Both the walls and the glass are completely soundproof, however, such that they can only gesture to one another. Each of them wears an identical white gown. Further meticulous investigation may reveal bidirectional cameras mounted at the top of each set of sliding doors and the names of Dr. Magnusson, Dr. Einarsdottir, and Dr. Svenson on their charts.

Some time later, the characters anxiously watch a stout older woman approach from the far hallway. She pushes a cart along and leaves it in the center of the room. She looks up to see the characters, then turns around and walks back with a faster pace. A few minutes later, there is a noise from the walls. The characters' doors have been unlocked. In the room beyond, they may meet each other for the first time.

PATIENTS' COMMON ROOM

The common room offers a kitchenette, a toilet, and a shower. Brief moments just long enough for awkward introductions are interrupted by a voice broadcast from the ceiling. "Good morning, honored guests. My name is Dr. Svenson." The pause between announcements is just a little too long not to be unsettling. "It is 9:23 in the morning by the deprecated international standard time." "I am apprehensive of the many questions you may have. As your physician, I advise you to please take a deep, calming breath."

"Feel free to search through the cart in the center of the room. There are various dried fruits and fresh water." "Please take your time and then take a seat." "I have studied the old English language so that I might converse with you. When we meet in person, I would gladly hear any suggestions you have for my improvement." "The reason for this unfortunate and impersonal greeting is that our institution must take precautions against any adverse affects of your resurrection, be they bacterial or psychological. If at any time you feel threatened by one of your fellow patients because of either cause, note that it is possible to lock your dormitory from the inside with a fingerprint sensor located on the left panel of the sliding doors just above floor level." "Please allow yourselves to become calm." "In one hour, we will conduct a series of tests of your faculties. Again, there is no need for concern."

Distrustful characters may decide not to sit idly by. In the time they have, though they are being observed, they may discover several things. The overhead speakers are embedded in a lowered ceiling along with microphones, all wireless. The technology is familiar, even if brands with the symbol of the Greek letter omega embedded in them are not.

There is a clock on the wall which uses decimal time instead of what the characters are used to. There is also an emergency button on the wall. These appear throughout the compound. Pressing any one will trigger an alarm followed by a 30 second time window. If someone in the facility's control room does not override the alarm, all doors within the compound will become unlocked. Characters with too much curiosity for their own good may even realize this by pressing the button.

ROOM 3A

The doors into the narrow hallway open suddenly. "My colleague Dr. Magnusson awaits you in room 3A for an assessment of your post-resurrection faculties."

The hallway features many locked doors other than the room marked 3A. Another doctor walks on an elevated platform in the room high above the characters. He wears a white coat, longer than doctors from the characters' age wore, and his face is mostly hidden behind long blond hair and thick round glasses. He smiles at them and uses a handheld device to broadcast his voice. "Hello. Let me be the first to say how excited I am to meet you. That is, unless my colleague Dr. Svenson said this already. In this case, I suppose I am the second to say it." He smiles and nods incoherently. "My name is Dr. Magnusson. For your first testing, please tell me each of your names."

"Good." Dr. Magnusson scribbles something on his clipboard. "Very good." A handful of minor tasks follow, including a test of fine motor function and short term memory. Any failures on the characters' part may indicate permanent flaws as a result from the procedures. Perceptive characters may realize Dr. Magnusson is excited by the results and that they exceed his expectations. Lastly, Dr. Magnusson directs the characters to open a cabinet and take a specific box each. Inside is a kit for taking a skin, blood, and saliva sample. They are asked to leave these in the room and return to their quarters. Dr.

Magnusson turns his back and leaves without another word. The characters might risk pilfering the cabinet for syringes, bandages, laxatives, and rubbing alcohol. There is even a single scalpel.

Shortly after, the door to the hallway is locked again and a figure covered in an airtight plastic suit enters 3A to collect the samples.

FACILITY ROUTES

Before their samples are processed, while the characters' unease grows, the alarm system of the facility will suddenly be triggered. A deranged patient has escaped from the quarantine area, himself a victim of the refinement process which led to the characters' resurrection. There is a short accidental announcement which betrays the doctors' panic. In the confusion, the override on the doors is not pressed and all doors become unlocked. Outside, they find colored lines on the floor marking routes to all the facility has to offer. Evidently, during the time of the facility's construction, the English language was still predominant. The characters have time to discover one of the locations below before Dr. Magnusson and Dr. Svenson find them, armed with sedatives and accompanied by others in strange uniforms. If the characters cooperate, the doctors will forego their psychological evaluation and consider the characters safe and sane. They will be allowed to visit the mess hall whenever they please, as well as the recreational facilities. Otherwise, the characters will have to endure the full suite of tests to earn the doctors' trust.

MESS HALL

The small dining area can seat about twenty people. There is no cook, only a well-stocked closet of dried and canned goods. Plastic spoons are the only cutlery. There are vitamin supplements and soluble coffee. Anyone is free to take what they need and no more.

It's possible to encounter personnel here. Once, the characters may even stumble upon all three doctors, Svenson, Magnusson, and their overseer Einarsdottir. The characters may overhear a conversation abruptly cut off between them, discussing their ultimate goal and agreeing that the success of their last operation has given them enough confidence to pursue a more crucial resurrection.

RECREATION AREA

There are no means of recreation in this room other than comfortable seats. There are framed pictures on the walls. The characters can recognize their doctors in some. They appear many years younger. Most are taken outside on unlikely landscapes of mountains, shores, and volcanoes. A tall woman features prominently in them. In some of the later photos, a large scar runs across the side of her face.

If the characters ever enter here when the doctors have some time to spare, they will encounter one engrossed in a novel and the other in handwritten transcripts. Both are written in a variant of Norse language that the characters are unlikely to understand. Neither of them minds answering some of the characters' questions. The facility they are in indeed lies in Iceland. It is indeed a little over a century later than the characters' time. The doctors refuse to answer the fundamental questions however, like why the characters were revived, or why they can't leave. An observant character may notice that Dr. Magnusson occasionally sneaks a drink from a flask.

COMMUNICATIONS ROOMS

Inside the nexus of all the facility's microphones, cameras, and lock overrides, the most curious thing the characters find is a script of the exact words Dr. Svenson was supposed to read out. "First encounter template" it reads in

thick letters on a worn and used manuscript. From this room, if the characters can learn to operate its complex touch-screen interface, any room in the facility can be made to unlock with their fingerprint. Also, it is possible to gain access to a live feed of every room, and with great apprehension of this futuristic mainframe, past records can be observed as well. One of the most horrifying discoveries is a room labeled 'quarantine', not marked by any trail, where camera footage shows raving mad men and women, infants and elders, trapped behind the same sliding doors the characters first saw when they awoke.

The communications room is never locked, but (with the exception moments of chaos and panic) always guarded. A pair of shifts overlap such that halfway during one shift, the other guard is off. There is a small window of opportunity for the characters to sneak into the communications room when one impatient guard leaves his shift before the next arrives and the remaining guard has need of a toilet break.

LABORATORY

The laboratory lies beneath the floor that houses the rest of the facility. There are rooms for various surgeries and researches and there have been more operations than personnel to clean up after them. The gore left behind in some is enough to frighten the characters, though they may push on to discover records of experiments and operations not unlike the characters' own resurrections. Even deeper down into the laboratory, they may find the vaults of vessels for cryopreservation, down to great depths in the earth. They recognize the conical vessels themselves from the surgery rooms above. One vessel has been brought and prepared for surgery. A bronze plate on its base reads 'Dr. Kalvis'.

ARCHIVES

The archives form over many interconnected hallways and disused rooms crammed with stacked boxes. The closest contain handwritten ledgers in Norse and the furthest contain scientific textbooks preceding the characters' own era. Somewhere in between, however, there are sections with boxes marked 'The Catastrophe' and 'Erebus'. Newspapers in the English language are included, as well as endless sheets of raw meteorological data. These boxes describe in painful detail how twenty years ago, a volcanic eruption in Antarctica defied man's understanding of its planet's geology and decimated its population over the course of a single season. The very last documents describe the dissolution of international councils, an anticipated collapse of all connectivity, and the beginning of a new dark age. Going further back reveals that human society leading up to that point had globalized fully and that practices such as eugenics were looked on favorably.

It's possibly for the characters to encounter Dr. Magnusson stumbling from an overhours visit to the laboratory, clearly drunk. He motions for the characters to come closer as he whispers to them that he thinks it's not right, that they are innocent people, that they at least deserve to know. His eyes go wide for a second before he vows that he will defy Dr. Einarsdottir and grant them access to the archives in secret. He stumbles off to the communications rooms and does as he promises, although he won't remember it in the morning.

QUARANTINE

Should the characters approach the raving patients locked in their cells, they will be overwhelmed by their violence, their desperate pleas, and their squalor, all unheard through the soundproof glass. Any attempt to release will be

met with intervention from Dr. Einarsdottir herself. She makes no pretense of their horrible living conditions, but instead impresses on the characters how they have been placed there for a reason. Each of them was either revived a host to virulent diseases, or suffered delusions which breach psychopathy. Despite all the distrust that is due to the head physician, anyone the characters free will prove her to be right about this.

CONFRONTATION

The characters are likely to seek a confrontation with the doctors, which will escalate to Dr. Einarsdottir. With little to gain from deceiving the characters, she will confront them with her ultimatum. The facility's resources are finite and it has been determined impossible to sustain more than a handful of lives among the numerous generations required to outlive the consequences of the Erebus Eruption. Moreover, Dr. Einarsdottir was the last person in contact with other facilities like this one and claims to have been the architect behind a plan to save the human race. She refuses to detail the plan, claiming a right by her own survival instinct. She will only say that the plan requires her to be resurrected a century from now, when the Sun returns to them, and once again two centuries from now, when the ecosystem has an opportunity to rise from its cold prison.

For the characters, the ultimatum unfolds as follows. They can promise to help her convince Dr. Kalvis of this plan and she will allow them to be present at his reawakening, or they can be sent back to their quarters with reduced privileges. Dr. Einarsdottir believes the characters can prove crucial in negotiating with Dr. Kalvis, given that they were not only from his age, but were also once his patients.

ROOM 3B

When the hour comes, the characters will be called to sit by Dr. Kalvis' bedside in a wing next to the characters'. The characters remember their treatments with him and the interviews that preceded it. Here, he lies before them, gaunt and decades older than they remember him. His eyes still closed, his limbs still motionless, the first sign of life are whispered words from his mouth: "Is it time?" Then later, more coherently, "What is the time? When is now?" By the time he opens his eyes, the characters see his tragedy before he realizes, though it sinks in soon enough. His eyes are pale, dead flesh. Dr. Kalvis has been left blind as a consequence of the procedures. He confides his anger to the characters, citing futile vengeance on apprentices not fit to bear their master's tools.

All the while, Dr. Einarsdottir and her underlings are listening from the communications room. They will allow the characters to lead the negotiations until they misstep. Dr. Kalvis betrays very little emotion in realizing the extent of Earth's disasters. He makes it clear that the man who raised him to this age deserves no kindness from him.

FATE

It is entirely up to the characters' negotiations how things will fall out. There is a delicate equilibrium to find between Dr. Einarsdottir's ambitions to survive the cataclysm, Dr. Kalvis' blindness and contemptuously withheld knowledge, the characters' own plans, and the fate of the planet. If they are ineffective, they will be cast aside to perish in this age like the others in quarantine. If they carve out an ultimatum of their own, they may be cryopreserved once again themselves. If they are selfless, they may take part in the role of caretaker, to remain in the facility and educate next generations about their duties.

APPENDIX: THE FALL

Alternatively, a more distant future can be explored. What follows can be applied after the story above, or even in its stead as the moment of awakening after the prologue.

A dark age has passed and none can remember how it came to be that the planet has begun its death. Earth is blanketed in ice and permanently overcast. Yet, the Sun is large and bright, glowing ever in a hazy red just beyond the otherwise gray clouds.

The inhabitants of this dying Earth are evolved from humans. Most are completely white skinned and hairless. Nothing remains of the languages of the 21st century except in rare articles of history which might be studied. The posthumans have a language which consists of contrastingly gentle tones sung and whistled among harsh consonants. Their lifespans can account for several centuries.

One tribe of these posthumans follow a prophet who preaches of the past times she has studied. Her disciples dress in white robes and protect her and her mission fanatically. She has promised them salvation through the resurrection of their wisest ancestors, those who were cryonically preserved during the peak of the race's achievements. Whatever her beliefs may be, she is a genius who has not only studied the language and habits of the characters' age, but has also successfully studied the rituals of cryonic revival. This tribe holds many beliefs which are strange to 21st century sensibilities. Among these, they do not use names. Instead they believe in something they call the eternal consciousness, which also serves as their justification for cannibalism.

AWAKENING

More than hundreds, more than thousands of years later, the character are painfully revived on sheets of thick metal, covered in a blanket of thin leather. They find themselves in a chamber of natural white stone similar to marble except for its luminescence and heat radiation. The only other thing in the chambers is a neat stack of worn books written by Dr. Kalvis himself, which have been preserved with some kind of coating on each page. A single narrow corridor leads up and out of the chamber. Careful inspection will reveal there is a script of some kind etched on the metal sheets, but none the characters can understand.

Upstairs, the Colonists of the Dying Earth await the characters' awakening. The sounds they make only work to terrify the characters. Eventually, one of them will come down to investigate.

COLONISTS OF THE DYING EARTH

Aboveground, the characters suffer an eerie greeting with the tribe of posthumans and the prophet who revived them. They stand on a mountainside with a windless snowfall under a blood red sky. The prophet stands taller than any of her kind and wears a veil over her face. She is the only one who can understand the characters and with some difficulty, she imitates the English language herself: "I speak now to you, Holy Ones." "Fewer than four-times-thousand-times-thousand-years before the time that was of you, the Sun was young. The Sun was weak, one-in-four less strong than the time that was of you." "We forget. We forget the counting of years. We forget the old ways. We forget the wisdom of the time that was of you." "Years of dedication and learning. Now, we revel. We succeed. Today we have brought back the wise ones to show us the way through the great hardship, through the time that is of us."

Their induction in the colony involves a drink which tastes both bitter and sweet, tough and

salty meats of a pale color, clothing of the same white leather as the posthumans wear, and many small children fascinated by stroking the hair on the characters' heads while making a strange gurgling or purring sound.

Characters who investigate carefully may find bones buried beneath the snow, scraped recently. Further away, on the other side of the mountain peak, blood and offal show the place of butchering. All belonged to posthumans.

SOJOURN

Before long, the colony has gathered its few belongings and starts a long march. When the characters ask after their destination, the prophet reveals that they are heading for what she describes as her tower. It supposedly is a place which contains her life's work, her race's salvation, and the characters' ultimate responsibility. She intends to surround the characters with the salvaged miracles of their age so that they may prove to be their salvation. Should the characters voice any sign of doubt about the prophet's intentions for them, the first cracks in the prophet's sanity will show themselves.

EXPOSURE

While wading through half-frozen rivers and stopping to get warm only when the red Sun has gone, the tribe surpasses physical challenges the characters cannot fathom. When they start to show signs of hypothermia, the prophet intervenes. She indicates the tree line in the distance and one tree in particular that has been felled in a peculiar way, evidently a sign of the beast she calls the Longtooth. Before long, a hunting party is assembled. Although its flesh is poisonous, the prophet intends for its hide to protect the Holy Ones from the elements. The hunt will be dangerous and she says it does require their blessing, asking who among them will join in.

The Longtooth beast fells trees with its jaws and survives by eating its leaves, bark, and core. The trees themselves are peculiar enough specimens to shock the characters, with hard leaves like those of palm trees, but bark as black as pitch and hard as iron. The beast's tracks lead to a cave in the mountainside. The cave demonstrates the same luminosity and heat as where the characters awoke, but its intensity is almost too much to bear. A thick shaggy coat covers a mostly bear-like body, though its size reminds one more of a mammoth. It is unlikely all of the hunters make it back alive, though curiously, the colonists make it a priority to salvage their bodies with a minimal loss of blood.

On a sled made of the beast's own stockpile of trunks, it is hauled back to the colony. Hours of labor follow to result in full-body coats made of its hide and fur scraped clean. Only one of these has been made of especially tough hide and made to include the beast's own cartilage, granting armor as well as protection from the elements.

VIRULENCE

By the time the characters' journey has descended into dried-up river beds with the mountain's peak looming over them, they become aware of the misfortune that has struck the colony. The very children who displayed an innocent fascination by stroking their hair have fallen ill, a disease whose symptoms are entirely alien to the posthumans. While the characters may play a part in the diagnosis, there is no cure available to them.

A TORCH FROM THE SKY

The prophet announces to the characters that they are getting close to her tower when a bright light appears in the sky. A deafening roar accompanies the blazing streak of flame as it

descends like a comet. The colonists deliberate only briefly before setting off at a fast pace. The characters may notice they reroute the journey to keep a distance from what is now falling fast and disappearing behind a ridge. Highly perceptive characters may be able to correlate noises and additional lights with the idea that it was no simple comet, but instead a vessel of some kind entering the atmosphere. Indeed, there is no crash or shockwave after it has come down. In fact, only a short while later, barely enough time to have reached the site, the characters may see it rise again in straight fuel-propelled line before it disappears into the cloud cover. Again, highly perceptive characters may have heard shouting in the distance before the vessel started its ascent.

If the characters ask the prophet about their suspicions, she will not lie to them. Instead, her fragmented sanity is exposed further. She will say the vessels are a curse and an insult. They lead posthumans to the same heresy as their creators. These heretics abandoned Mother Earth to die, instead preferring the mockeries of the genius of the characters' age that they use to survive among the stars. They rejected the dream of saving their heritage and history. Here, the prophet sheds tears of manic joy, saying that if but gets the characters to her tower and reunites them with the works of their age, they will be able to do the impossible, reverse the failures that led to the heretics, reverse the fate that led to the flawed posthumans in the first place. She motions to the cloud cover itself as one of the failures of this age. There is a strong connotation that she expects the characters to be able to reverse time itself.

SCHISM

Food has been rationed for a few days when something happens among the colonists. It takes the characters some effort to understand a ritual or conclave of sorts is being held from which they are excluded. Their debate carries across the snow-swept winds like so many voices in a choir of throat singing. The discussions turn ever fouler and after seeing their gestures and the tools openly laid before them, the characters may guess at its horrible topic. At last, the prophet ends the debate with a growl and a long, ululating speech. All grows quiet and one by one the colonists each come to stare at the characters.

The prophet walks over to them to explain. The colony was indeed discussing who among them would give up their flesh to save the rest from starvation. This appears to be a common practice for them, if not a lighthearted one. The prophet refers to it not as cannibalism but instead joining the eternal consciousness. In the face of this burden, she takes comfort in the characters. She phrases it as having walked alone in darkness for this past century, that she now feels blessed in the characters' presence, and that she wishes to bask in their ancient and true wisdom. She asks they decide whether it should be the eldest of the tribe, wise yet frail, or the youngest, innocent yet falling ill recently, to enter the eternal consciousness.

Regardless of their choice, one half of the colony will start to despise them. To their horror, the characters will not only come to realize what they have been eating since awakening, but also what the white leather robes are made from. In a few more days, the characters will be greatly surprised when one of the colonists other than the prophet speaks a single word they can understand, albeit glaring and baring stained teeth. "Liars."

BAD WEATHER

The colonists see something in the sky that the characters cannot. They are told that a storm is coming. Soon, another detour takes them back into the foothills of the mountain range. The

colonists seem to know the way through a path that leads to another cave that the characters recognize belongs to the Longtooth beast. Strangely, this cave contains steel sheets similar to the ones the characters awoke on. It seems all the colonists avert the characters' gaze in this place.

The prophet will evade most of questions by first commenting on the Longtooth beast's saliva being responsible for the coating on the cave walls. Intent on spiking the characters' curiosity, she attempts to lecture. The same powers that make the beast's flesh poisonous to eat provide the chamber with its unnatural heat. Both the luminosity and the heat in this chamber are fading because of the long absence of the creature. The chamber where the characters awoke was only recently vacated just for the purpose of their awakening.

With enough persistence, the characters are able to get the truth out of the prophet. There have been more attempts at reawakening than just the characters. None of these are alive now. It took the prophet many lifetimes of the characters' race to succeed and she attributes this to the slow joining of the eternal consciousness, slowly inheriting the wisdom of the past. They did after all, consume the flesh of her failures. If the characters push further, they may learn they still are not the first successfully revived. Others joined her in eternity because they were uncooperative.

After the storm has passed, the characters uncover their ears from the deafening roar outside. The prophet grew increasingly nervous as its intensity rose. Outside, they are astounded by the devastation. All plant life in the area has become ashes drifting like black snow. The entire mountainside shed its snow into great rivers now cascading towards the valley. A treacherously cold wind blows to slowly freeze it all over again. The prophet mentions in passing that the artificial clouds have repaired themselves.

A DREAM IN RUIN

The prophet's worst imaginings have manifested when the colony reaches the site where the tower once stood. A large part of the construction made of steel and quarried stone breaks off and crashes down from where they can all see. It must have once stood to an impressive height. The damage seems to suggest not just fire, but some sort of whirlwind was born in the storm.

When they stand in the ashes and rubble, the prophet is motionless and expressionless. Some of the colonists start to salvage what they can. The characters recognize more books, cables, touch-screen devices, surgical tools, and lenses. One of the colonists advances toward the characters and pushes a large circuit board into their hands. "Do," he demands and repeats as the other colonists gather. Most bare their teeth at the characters and form a ring around them.

If any of the characters are knowledgeable enough about the technology, they may realize it is a system with as many field programmable gate arrays as processors. Either there is no dedicated memory on board, or they cannot recognize it. There are no manufacturers they recognize from their own time, though the most prominent one is branded by a large letter omega. The board is also certainly heavily damaged.

Before things start to accelerate, the characters may catch early signs of another vessel descending to Earth. Before its trajectory can be guessed, the colonists will have pushed the prophet into the ring with the characters. Howls follow and a ritual which the characters remember from the night when they were made to choose the victims. All the while, the prophet has said nothing. The characters may postpone

their fate by making sure the ritual favors the prophet. They may make a run for it if they are strong enough to overpower the posthumans. They may sacrifice one of their own for the others to escape. They may even manage to influence the angered mob through the prophet if she can be made to recover from her shock. Whichever desperate act leads them there, the characters only chance of survival is to make for the vessel.

HERESY AND SALVATION

The vessel has landed surprisingly elegantly in a clearing that was spared the storm. Seen from up close, it can be recognized as a highly sophisticated machine. It's made of sheets of white metal in a conical shape with a single entrance at the base. A flashing light around its perimeter increases its frequency rapidly, indicating a time to departure. When the first of the characters enters the vessel, two posthumans approach from under the cover of distant trees. One is older and male, the other younger and female. The man is limping and seems to urge his ward to run, but the sight of the characters halts her in her steps. The characters' actions can risk their own chance at escape, but also save either or both lives.

Inside the vessel, the floor is covered in long-dried blood. There are straps all along the cramped inner walls for fastening passengers. Quick-witted characters may realize there are no facilities on board to support life whatsoever, neither oxygen, nor water, nor food.

When the vessel launches, a screen turns on inside the conical head of the vessel. Slowly drifting symbols on the display can be recognized as the solar system as the characters knew it, though it is not identical. Not long after they have left the dying Earth's orbit, tubes and needles will drift out of the very walls. It is possible to resist the instruments, but not the rapid drop in temperature. The vessel can cryonically preserve its passengers, but only if they submit willingly.

It is possible to continue the story. Whether they were preserved since the 21st century, since the 22nd, or since willingly entering the vessel to leave the dying Earth, all cryopreserved time could lead a character to a journey intent on saving the race by an interstellar civilization. The journey will take several centuries of itself. The destination may be ruled by a mystical council directing the exodus. The posthumans would revere them, but these ancients' prolonged lives and numerous cryogenic revivals have driven them insane through the ages.

Issues of the age would involve terraforming a nearby planet. Exodus vessels are coming in not just from distant perished Earth, but also from failed colonies on other planets. The diaspora has led to evolutionary divergence and many different species of posthumans.

All the while, the identities of the inner council members are a mystery. Their goal, however, is slowly unmasked not to be the salvation of its refugees. Instead, the vessels sent out to collect survivors are a way to sample mutations and evolutions. They may seem to perform grotesque experiments to prolong their own lives, but in the end, they envision a new iteration of humanity's vector. The failed colonies have shown that mortality is the last leash on their kind. They believe mortality was the price for the gifts that would lead to intellect, the power to create, and the power to dominate environments. It is this fall from grace that must be corrected.