

SHADES

Shrouded in mystery, these inky black, quasi-biological entities seem to be born from the city of Mortasheen itself to perform various functions with a devotion not unlike colonial insects. It is currently unknown how Shades are actually created, but they typically emerge from somewhere deep within the bowels of the city with some singular directive to accomplish. Only a few develop a strong sense of personal identity, and even fewer display the ambition to pursue a path of their own choosing.

Barely Living, Faintly Human

A Shade consists mostly of a silicon-based polygonal skeleton that doubles as its brain, a few rubbery organs and a matrix of semifluid, semi-organic "skin" that utterly absorbs all ambient energy, appearing so utterly black that an unclothed Shade resembles a pitch dark, humanoid "hole" in space, except of course for its spherical, crystalloid eyebulbs, which vent excess energy with an intensely colored glow. Heat, light and other forms of radiation constitute most of a Shade's diet, converted into sustenance by the microscopic action of its matrix in a process similar to chemosynthetic bacteria, although a Shade can "eat" solid materials, even scraps of metal, for additional nourishment when energy levels are more limited.

Despite this largely abiotic physiology, Shades have a few scant vestiges of recognizable cellular matter - mostly in the mucosal lining of their organs - that exhibit unmistakably metahuman DNA. It is currently hypothesized that the creatures result from Mortasheen itself assimilating the first humans or metahumans it made contact with, refining and repurposing the information over the course of its evolution.

Simple Purpose

The vast majority of Shades are dedicated to only a single, straightforward function in direct service to the city itself, and will answer to absolutely no other entity. Some are defensive sentries that prevent damage to more sensitive biomechanical systems, some are plumbers or electricians that maintain the drainage lines and power grid, some perform a task as simple and monotonous as changing old light fixtures and some are so specialized, they may wait quietly in place for centuries until their obscure role finally becomes apparent. Many Shades also operate services that benefit Mortasheen's various inhabitants, from package delivery to food preparation, and it isn't always clear what the city is getting out of this arrangement. If forcibly barred or removed from its assignment, a Shade will calmly and impersonally take any action necessary, whatever the consequences, to return to its position.

The duty a Shade was "born" for is usually identified by its clothing, a weave of quasibiological fibers themselves that can slowly regenerate from damage and are often "rooted" to the Shade's siliceous spinal column. A "nude" Shade tends to feel uncomfortable chilly, and as its exposed matrix saps the surrounding heat from the air, it's not always the only one.

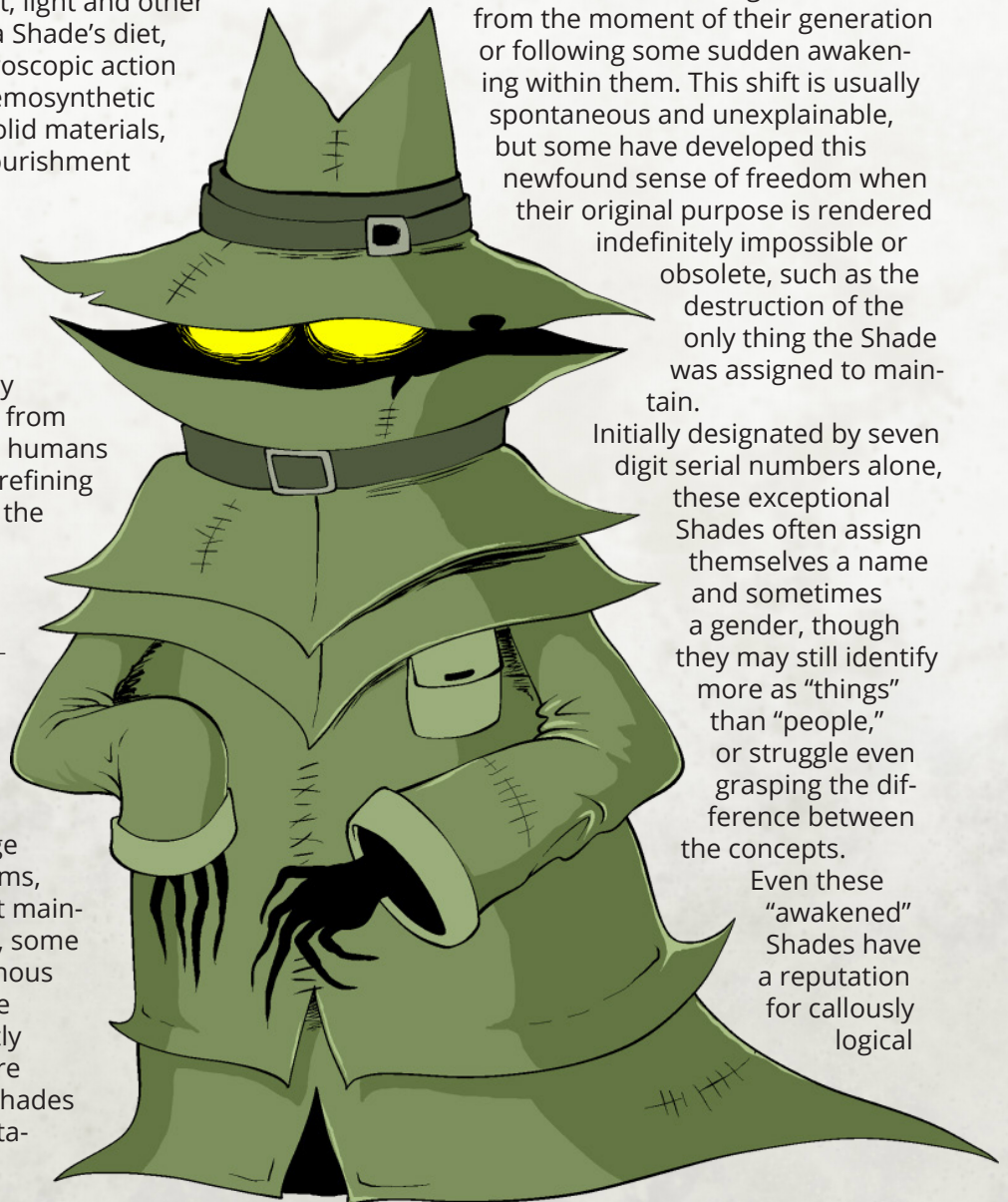
Number Five is Alive

Shades are usually content to fulfill the same duty indefinitely, exhibiting little to no emotion or independent thought and communicating only as much as is necessary to get their job done at all costs. Roughly one in ten thousand, however, are capable of imagination

or emotion to some degree, either from the moment of their generation or following some sudden awakening within them. This shift is usually spontaneous and unexplainable, but some have developed this newfound sense of freedom when their original purpose is rendered indefinitely impossible or obsolete, such as the destruction of the only thing the Shade was assigned to maintain.

Initially designated by seven digit serial numbers alone, these exceptional Shades often assign themselves a name and sometimes a gender, though they may still identify more as "things" than "people," or struggle even grasping the difference between the concepts.

Even these "awakened" Shades have a reputation for callously logical



thinking and sometimes insufferable humorlessness, but exceptions abound, and even the stuffiest may be hiding a capacity for affection, intense moral conviction or at least a dry wit that becomes increasingly evident to close enough associates. On the more extreme end of the spectrum are Shades that have become everything from passionate artists and spiritualists to ruthless assassins and murderous sadists.

Rarest of all are Shades whose “programmed” purpose is sometimes indistinguishable from a chosen lifestyle; Shades born with an actual directive to become celebrity figures, scientists or even sowers of chaos, spawning with entirely unique clothing. It is speculated that these are an attempt by the city’s hypothetical consciousness to better understand or subtly influence the culture of its denizens.

Shades and Monsters

Shades psychologically relate more to Monsters than to other metahumans, especially those created, like themselves, to fulfill specific functions in the interest of some other being. Feral monsters grow to tolerate local Shades with predictable behavioral patterns or even rely on them for some degree of protection, and Shades with somewhat above-average imagination may teach local monsters to assist them in their basic routines while others unwittingly accumulate a monstrous entourage that adopted the being as a familial figure.

The precise relationship between Shades and the monsters known as *Demishades* is still not totally understood, but the two tend to naturally sympathize with and look out for one another.

SAMPLE SHADE:

0023824

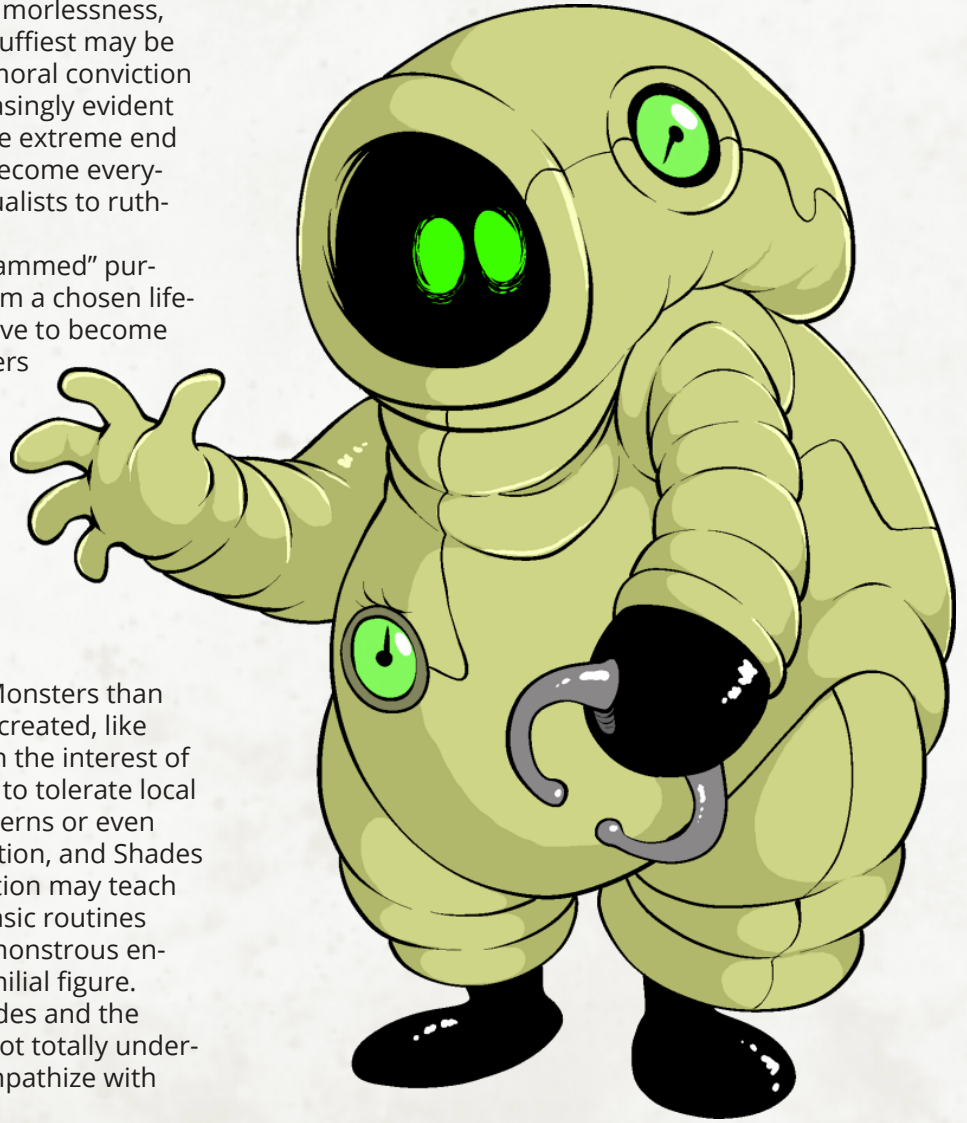
BIOTYPE: Shade (it/its)

CLASS: Independent

YGORE: Emeyebec (“0023824B”)

PASSION: Anomalous Phenomena

0023824 bears the many-layered, dull green suit of an Investigator Shade, one of the rarest of all documented non-unique roles, typically spawned to resolve any unexplained, persistent interruption in the activities of other Shades or city functions. Over time, 0023824 developed its own sense of curiosity that blossomed into an almost fanatical obsession with the unknown, tirelessly roaming the city in a never-ending mass investigation of every “mystery” to cross its path - whether a Zombie child has lost her favorite eyeworm or a recovered scrap of ancient retrohuman media suggests the existence of a “Sandy Claws.”



SAMPLE SHADE:

PROFESSOR FORBOS

BIOTYPE: Shade (he/him)

CLASS: Geneticist

YGORE: Nemateuthis (“Moby”)

PASSION: Marine Biology

Forbos is an especially poetic soul among Shades, fascinated by the beauty and wonder of the ocean. His pressurized diving suit is modified from that of the Plunger Shades, who perform delicate repairs in conditions even Shade physiology cannot withstand indefinitely, and he is known to disappear into the deepest abysses for years at a time. His data feeds are critically acclaimed as both scientific documentation and fine art, but he doesn’t care for fame; he only wants to know more about the lives of his many aquatic friends, from the blind snottfish of the greater Oil Blot to the titanic elder vampires slumbering in The Great Charybodian Trench. Just don’t let him hear you call a sea star a “starfish” if you can’t clear your schedule for an evolutionary lecture.



MUTANTS

Among all metahumans, “mutants” remain biologically closest to the original retrohuman species, but they display a staggeringly wider physiological diversity; polypous masses of excess flesh, crooked multi-jointed limbs, oversized eyeballs and vestigial secondary heads - with or without personalities all their own - are just a few of the infinite physical deviations that make every mutant truly unique.

Ambiguous History

Any living organism can be “a mutant” in the broad sense, but *The Mutants* carry this term as their designated moniker with great pride. Evidence suggests that the name was bestowed upon them by none other than ancient retrohuman civilization, presumably as a term of endearment, but the finer details of their past are shrouded in mystery. It’s as if Mortasheen’s first mutants were forced to take refuge in an environment inhospitable to their unmutated human brethren...but why?

Some have suggested that early Mutants were actually rejected and persecuted by humanity, a theory supported by the curious behaviors of some modern-day retros, but most Mutants reject this hypothesis. After all, what mere retrohuman wouldn’t beam with pride to produce offspring blessed with more fingers and toes than they ever dreamed of?

Organized Chaos

All mutants look fundamentally human, but are virtually

SAMPLE MUTANT:

JACQUES

BIOTYPE: Mutant (he/him)

CLASS: Geneticist

YGORE: Beeblezug (“Marzu”)

PASSION: Cheesemaking

This exceptionally tall, long-limbed mutant regards himself as a brilliant if misunderstood culinary artisan, employing his extensive knowledge of microbiology as well as his own modified strains of bacteria, fungi and insects to experiment with fermentation, particularly the research and development of increasingly extreme and unusual cheeses. He is best known for *Schlargengax*, billed as the first carnivorous cheese, owing its acrid flavor to an active microbial culture that attacks any available organic matter and can consequently trigger a progressive, life-threatening intestinal necrosis to which it owes its popularity.

Depending on his state of hyperfocus, any hapless interloper may become a part of Jacques’s latest experiment; approach with caution.

never symmetrical, and no two ever share the same peculiarities. One mutant might have be gaunt and bony, with highly elongated arms and vestigial, shrunken legs. Another may be lumpy and flabby with an oddly long neck. Some don’t even seem like their bodies should be functional, with mangled and broken looking limbs or vital organs contained in delicate, pulsating sacs of skin.

But whatever their distorted forms, Mutants don’t just survive - they thrive. The typical Mutant either doesn’t age past early adulthood or ages at a veritably glacial pace, they can go without sustenance or sleep for far longer than any classic-flavor human, they routinely shrug off injuries and maladies that should be immediately fatal and they can safely ingest substances that would dissolve their way back out of most human stomachs.

They’re so well adapted to Mortasheen’s chemical-rich atmosphere, Mutants actually feel a bit unwell in cleaner conditions, exhibiting signs of fatigue and depression under prolonged exposure to fresh, crisp mountain air, and the taste of pure water is wholly unpleasant to them.

Naturals at Science

Another nearly universal difference between the average Mutant and the average retrohuman is an intellectual one. Mutants have larger, more accelerated brains that can have difficulty keeping focus on a single subject at a time, but can process and memorize topics of interest in excruciating detail.

Mutants are so scientifically minded, even those that take interest in artistic pursuits tend to be most en-

thrilled by the *chemistry* of the paints, the *physics* of interpretive dance, the *neurology* of what makes poetry appealing or unappealing, but stronger still than this love of scientific law is their urge to break it.

True to the spirit of mad science and to the anarchy of their very anatomy, their boundless curiosity can drive them to dig deeper and push boundaries regardless of the consequences; even after thousands of infamous failures, a leading cause of death among mutants is the often disastrous pursuit of faster-than-light travel.

They know not everything is possible, but still...*what if?*

Flights of Fascination

Mutants have no cohesive cultural practices of their own, but their highly adaptable minds tend to pick up new lingo, aesthetic tastes and philosophical ethos wherever they go with an almost childlike wonder. A mutant always seems to have that “new thing” they’re all about, whether they’ve just bought a portable deep fryer or they’ve joined the latest doomsday cult.

SAMPLE MUTANT:

JILLIAN NIKRIB

BIOTYPE: Mutant (she/her)

CLASS: Independent Studies

YGORE: Pestode (“Wiggles”)

PASSION: Urbex

Jillian is distinguished by her small stature of under a meter in height, excepting her significantly enlarged left arm, which also bears the similarly magnified left eye situated in its shoulder.

As an urban explorer, she seeks to understand and document the diversity of city architecture, how it varies both geographically and chronologically, and the complex relationships between both deliberate construction work and Mortasheen’s unguided biotechnic growth patterns. She has plumbed depths of the metropolis few metahumans have returned from alive, and she is widely renowned for her unparalleled skills as a guide, assuming one manages to actually find her.



Making Mutants

Other Metahumans are relatively easy to conceive of, but mutants are variable enough that you may want to generate their physical features at random.

If you do, roll 2d10 and take the lower for number of mutations, and then 1d6 for category and 1d10 for a specific mutation.

EYES:

- One or all eyes exceptionally gigantic
- Eyes protrude completely out of their sockets
- Only one eye, or all eyes are in a single socket
- Flat, “fishy” saucer-like eyes
- Eyes not necessarily located on the head
- Eyes absent, vestigial or covered by skin
- Eyes on prehensile, snail-like stalks
- Deep, dark skull-like eye sockets
- Re-roll for total number of eyes plus 2
- Re-roll for total number of eyes times 2

MOUTH:

- Lipless, exposed teeth and gums
- Lips extend into a short trunk or soft “bill”
- Jaws and/or lips open vertically
- Teeth and/or lips are circular
- Very long or large teeth
- Mouth is not located on head
- Lower jaw opens in two halves
- Many rows of clustered teeth
- Extremely wide or large mouth
- Tongue too long to fit inside, or multiple tongues

OVERALL BODY:

- Extreme hunch, may even move on all limbs
- Lumpy, swollen looking form
- Thin, bony with taught skin
- Gnarled, twisted like driftwood
- Loose, saggy skin or “melted looking” flesh.
- Thick, cracked, leathery flesh, crocodile-esque
- Stretched and elongated features
- Shriveled “mummified” appearance
- Wormlike, sluglike or blob shape, with or without limbs
- Round or short toadlike body, may be neckless

SKIN GROWTHS:

- Many lumpy warts
- Pointed or finger-like warts, may or may not twitch
- Bloppy cysts throughout body, may pulsate
- Skin covered in highly visible veins
- Exceptionally hairy
- Irregular, scattered, spine-like thick hairs
- Transparent bubble-like growths
- Many deep but harmless holes in skin
- Oily or slimy skin secretion
- Thick keratin spikes, teeth, or nodules of bone

LIMB ODDITIES:

(apply to at least one)

- Absent, vestigial or fused to body
- Two or more knee/elbow joints in the same limb
- Boneless and prehensile, may taper like a tentacle
- Flat and flipperlike, or fleshy pincer-like mitten
- Branching into two or more ends
- Extremely long or large
- Frighteningly clawed
- Hand/foot somewhere other than the end of a limb
- Re-roll for total number of limbs (arms and legs) +1
- Re-roll for total number of limbs (arms and legs) +2

MISCELLANY:

- Half of body resembles normal retrohuman
- Headless, all facial features elsewhere
- Not headless, but most or all facial features elsewhere
- Additional head, face, or “parasitic twin”
- Spinal column extends into a misshapen “tail”
- Translucent or fully transparent flesh
- Additional body organs pulsing harmlessly outside body
- Capelike or cloaklike secondary skin
- Large thick shell-like mass of flesh
- Long, possibly retractable neck

SECTILIANS

Unlike the complete hybridization of an Arthropoid-class monster, a Sectlilian is a chimeric metahuman that acquires scant arthropodal features through a ritualized metamorphosis. Often cryptic and mysterious, they're stereotyped for less scientific, more philosophical thought.

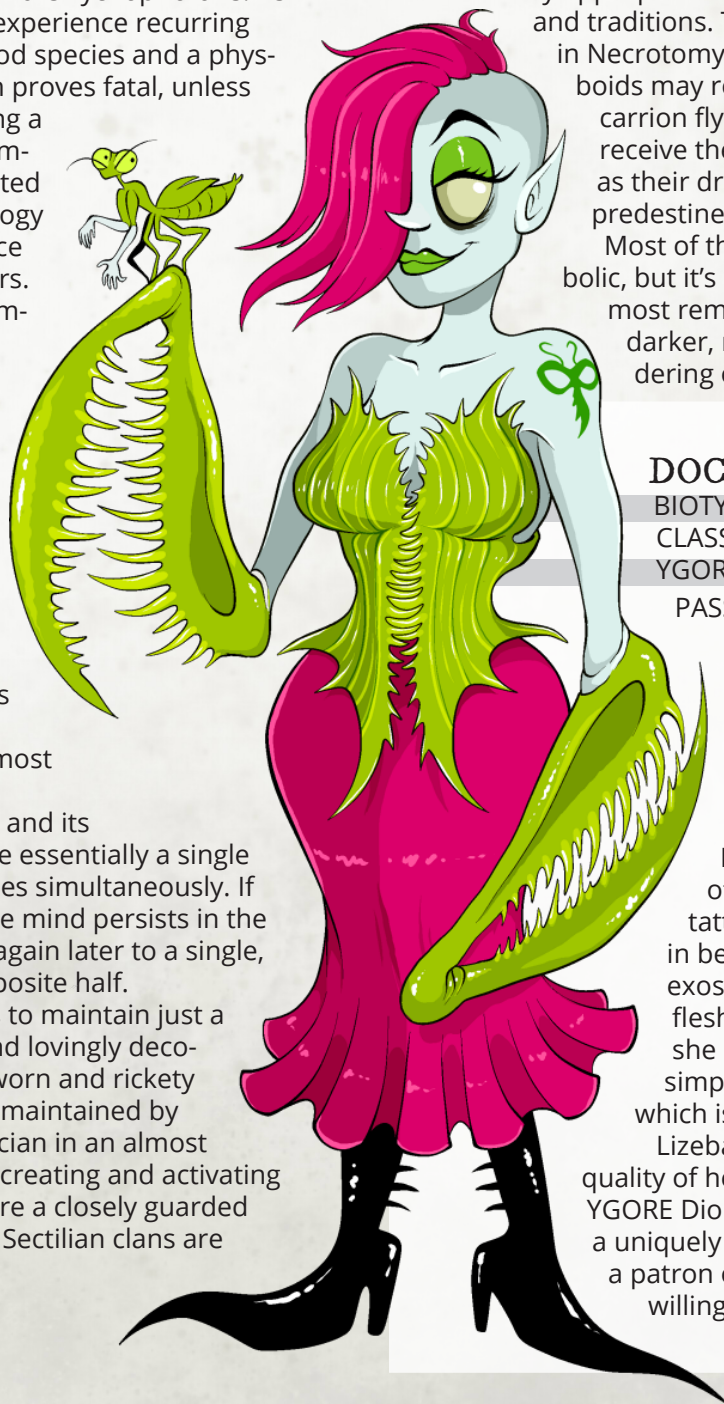
As Gregor Samsa Awoke One Morning...

An infant sectilian is born strongly resembling a retro-human, albeit with solid-colored eyes and subtle limb abnormalities. At the genetic level, Sectlilian bodies are libraries of arthropod genomes, from insects and arachnids to Pycnogonids and Onychophorans. As they near adulthood, they experience recurring dreams of a single Arthropod species and a physical deterioration that often proves fatal, unless the young Sectlilian can bring a living sample of their "dreambug" into a properly calibrated *Sectopod*, the same technology responsible for the existence of Arthropoid class Monsters.

The Sectlilian and its dreambug will emerge from the *Sectopod* chamber transformed, but not quite combined. Externally the two appear to have "traded" portions of their bodies, typically either the limbs, head, facial features or contiguous body segments. Internally, these features are comprised mostly of tissues natural to their respective species, save for the outermost layers of skin or chitin.

Neurologically, a Sectlilian and its counterpart arthropod have essentially a single mind, utilizing the two bodies simultaneously. If one body dies, the complete mind persists in the other, and it can be linked again later to a single, exact bioreplicant of its opposite half.

Each Sectlilian clan tends to maintain just a single, carefully guarded and lovingly decorated *Sectopod*, the often worn and rickety fusion chamber constantly maintained by a senior engineer or electrician in an almost priestly role. The means of creating and activating an entirely new *Sectopod* are a closely guarded secret, and one that not all Sectlilian clans are necessarily privy to.



Cultists of Chitin

Because Sectlilian "puberty" is fatal without outside intervention, their adolescence is by necessity carefully monitored and highly insular. Over centuries, their many isolated communities have developed a dizzying array of strange cultural practices, superstitions and even spiritual beliefs centered on principles of ecological and evolutionary science. These beliefs range from a more agnostic reverence of natural forces to an occult deification of those forces as abstract "entities" themselves, with arthropods acting as the physical manifestations or agents of these ambiguous beings.

The typical Sectlilian community or "clanhive" chooses at least one Arthropod genus as a heraldic symbol, usually appropriate to their core beliefs, history and traditions. Those that tend to specialize in Necrotomy or the husbandry of Zomboids may represent their clan with a carrion fly, for example, and any who receive their clan's patron organism as their dreambug are often said to be predestined for greatness.

Most of these practices are only symbolic, but it's rumored that Mortasheen's most remote crevices are home to darker, more hostile clanhives bordering on religious fanaticism.

DOCTOR LIZBAX

BIOTYPE: Sectlilian (she/her)

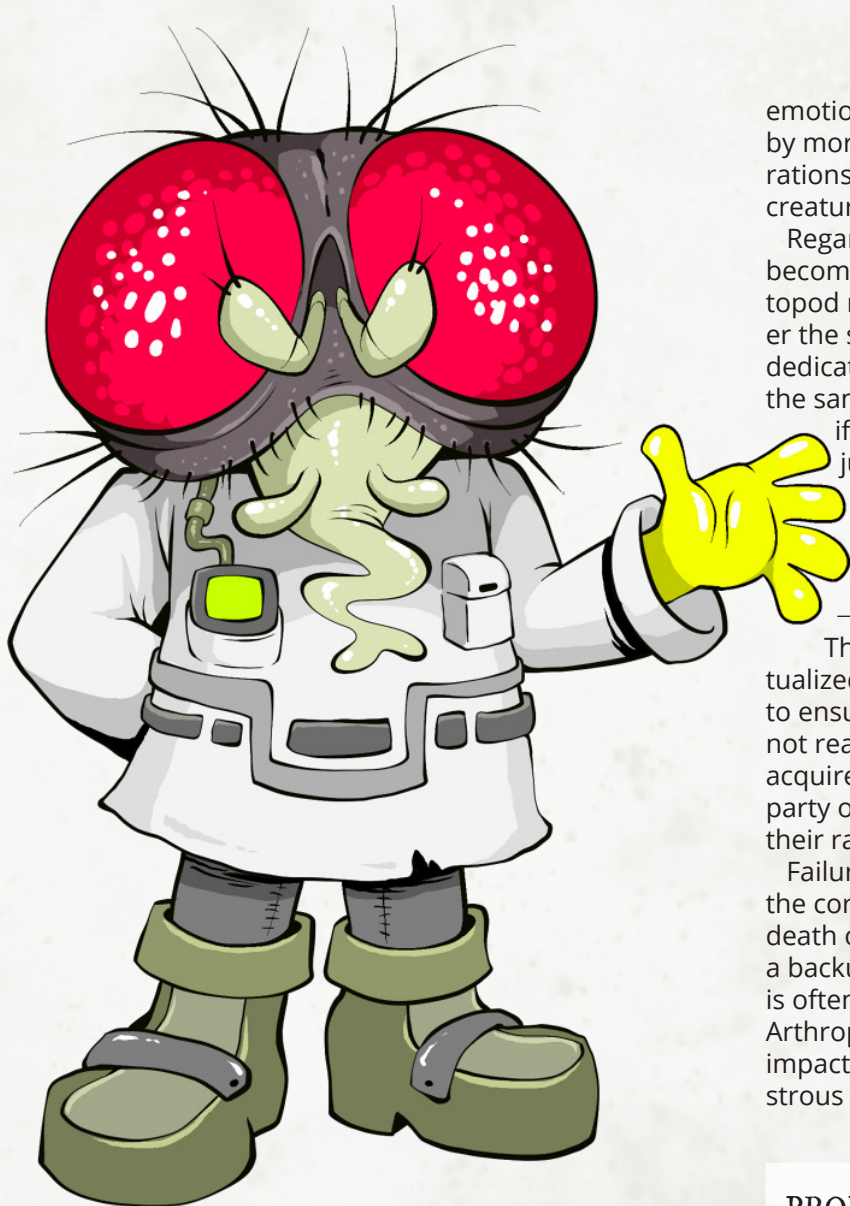
CLASS: Surgeon

YGORE: Lascivenus ("Diona")

PASSION: Tattoo Art

"Be as it may that inner beauty is more important than outer, that's no reason not to upkeep and decorate the temple of the body," so sayeth Doctor Lizbon Lizbax, one of Mortasheen's premier tattoo artists, specializing in bespoke epidermal and exoskeletal illustration with a flesh-back guarantee, though she herself bears only a single, simple piece, the meaning of which is known only to herself.

Lizbax is also known for the quality of her waiting room, where her YGORE Diona serenades guests with a uniquely jazzy vocal style and eats a patron only rarely, a risk many are willing to take.



The strongest evidence for any of these mythical Sectilian “deephives” thus far documented are a number of deserted ritual chambers in the lower sewers, each characterized by crude effigies of a fantastic cockroach-like figure, its two heads consistently represented by the skull of a corvid on the left and the skull of a rat on the right.

Sectilians and Arthropoids

Scant evidence suggests that the first Sectilian was the unintended result of an unrelated experiment by an ancient retrohuman electrician, and while it is not known what precisely this individual intended to create or how exactly this discovery led to the development of the Sectopod some centuries later, it is thought that the first Arthropoid monsters were in turn an accidental by-product of early Sectilian efforts to improve this technology.

Arthropoids remain the go-to monsters in Sectilian society, admired by most Sectilians for their superior physical power and more integrated hybridization. Arthropoid minds, however, are significantly more monster than metahuman, lacking the Sectilian imagination,

emotional complexity or sense of self, and are regarded by more ruthless Sectilians as somewhat pitiable aberrations, however useful and aesthetically endearing the creatures may be.

Regardless, it is possible for an adolescent Sectilian to become an Arthropoid either willingly or by rare Sectopod malfunction. Whatever the reason and whatever the species, the resulting monster is exceptionally dedicated to the protection of its clanhive and retains the same designated seat at all family gatherings, even if these irrational Metahuman traditions now feel juuust a little sillier to the more calculating mind of this new creature.

Maturation Rites

The Sectilian maturation process is a deeply spiritualized event, and a clan will do everything in its power to ensure its success. If a young Sectilian’s dreambug is not readily available, they may be sent on a “quest” to acquire the appropriate specimen, often assisted by a party of Sectilians and Arthropoids carefully selected for their range of skills.

Failure is fortunately rare, but a child unable to obtain the correct specimen may choose to either accept death or to undergo fusion into an Arthropoid, utilizing a backup specimen chosen at the outset. This backup is often of a species not yet documented among the Arthropoids, ensuring the child makes a meaningful impact on the world as the first of an entirely new monstrous species.

PROFESSOR GETZ

BIOTYPE: Sectilian (he/him)

CLASS: Electrician

YGORE: Lazaroid (“Gog”)

PASSION: Technological Anomalies

Professor Getz Alwinton was formerly an electrician-priest until an unprecedented Sectopod malfunction produced a previously undocumented monstrous organism that subsequently obliterated his entire clanhive.

Escaping only with the aid of his faithful Biomecha, Getz became obsessed with isolating precisely what error could have triggered the disaster. His efforts have taken him down an unexpectedly maddening rabbit hole as he continues to unravel (or attempt to unravel) the true inner works of the Sectopod and by extension the true history of Mortasheen itself.

Getz is reluctant to share his many interwoven, sometimes contradictory hypotheses, but he has more recently turned to the study of the Warped and interdimensional physics, believing these may harbor some profound connection to his people.

MERROW

Among the oldest metahumans alongside zombies and mutants, the Merrow are hybrids of hominid and various gilled vertebrates, originally created by vampires as experimental vassals. No two express their hybridization in quite the same manner, and they can be found around the world wherever there are sizable bodies of water.

Looks A Little Fishy

Merrow are recognizably Metahuman, almost always with at least a fully humanoid upper torso and more commonly a fully bipedal anthropoid body plan, but the genes of countless animal species are encoded in their unusually abundant and lengthy chromosomes. As far as these convoluted genes have been mapped, they encompass several hundred genera of ectothermic (“cold blooded”) and predominantly water-breathing tetrapods including bony fish, cartilaginous fish, agnathans and a few amphibians, mostly newts and salamanders, though there do exist Merrow with frog or toad features.

Externally, a Merrow exhibits only a few characteristics from these organisms, but even the most humanlike at least have slick, slimy skin, wide mouths and enlarged eyes, but most will additionally have at least some scales, webbed digits, epidermal spines or less humanoid facial structure. Somewhat rarer are those with nonhumanoid lower bodies, and rarest of all are those whose upper torsos or heads resemble those of component animals entirely.

Whatever their appearance, the one constant among Merrow is that all possess both lungs and at least one set of gills, typically located somewhere on the upper or lower torso. They are always more comfortable immersed in water or in very wet conditions, such as under heavy rain, and are susceptible to desiccation if exposed to dry, warm air for too long, but this is typically compensated for by an artificial secondary slime coat, a biotech enhancement available as ointment, spray or dietary supplement.

Merrow are also known for their own ancient biotechnology; a plethora of parasitic crustaceans or “sea lice” modified into tools, weapons, body armor and prosthetics.

Ex-Vassals

Merrow are known to have been created from retrohumans by the vampire lords centuries before the development of the *Orlok* or such monsters as the *Hagonizer* and *Barnaclops*. Unlike the Orlok, however, the Merrow were products of a darker and more brutal era when the mightiest vampires preyed upon retros, metas and monsters with no regard for their autonomy or even



SAMPLE MERROW:

CORALLINE, SIREN QUEEN

BIOTYPE: Merrow (It/Its)

CLASS: Independent

YGORE: Sourtrout (“Roly-poly”)

PASSION: Sashimi

Coralline had a mundane upbringing in Mortasheen’s largest Merrow neighborhood, but grew obsessed with its people’s darker past. It now roams coastal waters in search of new “flavors” of raw meat, by which it means only the most interesting *people* it can find out in the wastes. It is said by some to be a ruthless stalker of retrohumans, orlok and even fellow merrow, while others say it simply pilfers as little as a finger or toe from humanoids it reels in with a little romance. Still others say it targets only those it deems cruel or destructive towards innocent creatures.

All that’s certain is that Coralline should be considered unpredictable and quite dangerous, its logic a bit more mad than even most of Mortasheen is comfortable with. Coralline and its Sourtrout are also known to be accompanied by an ever-changing entourage of marine monsters, even a few vampires who find the Merrow’s grisly antics entertaining.

ecological sustainability. Far from living in mutual symbiosis, Merrow were essentially a "slave race" to early vampire lords, kept ignorant through isolation and obedient through fear. The old Merrow colonies believed vampires to be god-like entities or "**Deeplords,**" ritually sacrificing themselves to appease the monsters and regularly raiding Retrohuman communities for more appealing offerings...or simply fresh meat.

The shift from this barbarism to the more diplomatic conduct of modern vampires was a gradual one, and by now Merrow have lived free for many generations, sometimes even in harmony with younger vampires who, like them, have no immediate memory of their bloody history. Many living vampires, however, are older enough to remember having Merrow supplicants of their own. Whether they cringe with embarrassment at this phase in their youth or still pine for the good old aeons depends upon the vampire, but Merrow find elder vampires impossible to trust on a level so reflexive, rumor has it this reaction was deliberately engineered into them as some final "parting gift."

Monsters of Myth

Merrow are proud to have inspired countless legends among Retrohumanity, both before and after the days when more Merrow were dragging the air-breathers to watery graves. Merrow, in turn, are often fascinated by mythology, folklore and all things fictitious. Writing, storytelling and acting are among their most common personal pursuits, with entire communities sometimes weaving complex fantasy worlds together, generation after generation, more likely to keep record of one another's original characters than their actual family tree.

Some Merrow have a tendency to blur the lines between reality and imagination, believing in the existence of such forces as magic, spirits, gods and demons, sometimes even conflating such mundane scientific phenomenon as vampires, zombies and ectosaurs with these supernatural fancies.

Like Retros, Merrow also thrive in isolated, ancient communities scattered around the world, from mountainside bogs to deep-ocean caverns, but their familiarity with the world beyond is just as variable, and some have changed relatively little since the reign of the deeplords. Some may even remain under the control

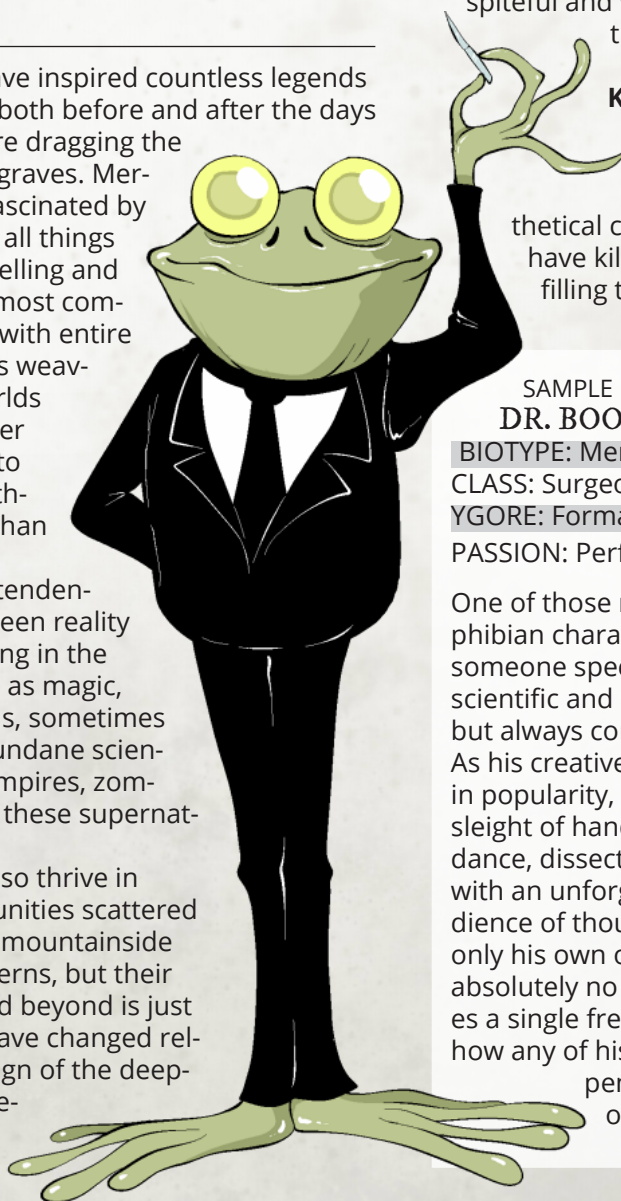
of less modernized vampires, other powerful monsters, or still darker forces of their own concoction, shunning the outside world and rejecting scientific truths in favor of various deities. A few of the known "gods" worshiped by these reclusive communities include:

Deepmother: depicted in various carvings as a fractalized eel with an unlimited number of heads. An associated poem suggests that when the deepmother awakens from sleep, she will flood the universe with an infinite sea.

Ploodooblip: described as a Merrow with the head of a horseshoe crab, and a fickle sea goddess that can bring either disaster or prosperity depending on the quality of various offerings. It has been suggested that the original followers of Ploodooblip were ignorant of other metahuman biotypes, and were taken advantage of by some crafty Sectlilian.

The Thirsting Eye: a belief that the sun is the eye of a great being that "drinks" through its gaze. A jealous, spiteful and violent figure that must be appeased through ritualistic mummification.

K'reenya: central to a cosmology in which the world is the petrified body of a great whale-like beast. The name K'reenya evidently refers to a hypothetical cloud of poisonous algae vast enough to have killed thousands of these giant animals, filling the universe with habitable worlds.



SAMPLE MERROW:

DR. BOOPHIS, SURGICAL MAGICIAN

BIOTYPE: Merrow (He/Him)

CLASS: Surgeon

YGORE: Formaldejekyll ("Gherkin")

PASSION: Performance Art

One of those rare Merrow born with entirely amphibian characteristics, Boophis has always felt like someone special, studying under many different scientific and medical disciplines throughout his life but always coming back to a love of showmanship. As his creatively entertaining surgical methods grew in popularity, he began to combine surgery with sleight of hand, slapstick comedy and interpretive dance, dissecting cadavers and transplanting organs with an unforgettable flair that can now draw an audience of thousands. His fantastic illusions are not only his own original innovations, but executed with absolutely no technological assistance. He promises a single free request to anyone who can deduce how any of his tricks are performed, which has happened only three times across hundreds of performances.



ORLOK

Clawed, fanged, bat-eared and leathery, the Orlok live in colonies under a single reproductive "queen" and are at first glance the beastliest of the Metahumans, easily mistaken for monsters themselves. Orlok are eusocial creatures evidently engineered by more civilized vampires as a form of livestock, but the two live in a mutually peaceful symbiosis.

Rat-Bat-Toad-Lizard-Mole People

Orlok genetics hint at a chimeric mix of many different zoological lineages, most prominently Hominid and Chiropteran, but with additional aspects of Rodent, Squamate, Amphibian and Talpid. Their hairless, slightly oily skin is most commonly green tinged, but countless other color morphs have been documented, and some colonies are devoid of all pigmentation, with veiny translucent skin and pale pink eyes.

Orlok are nearsighted, but their batlike ears and noses are extremely sensitive to smell and especially sound, to the point that they can crudely echolocate. They are omnivores, but their favorite foods are mushrooms and snails.

Orlok colonies are structured not unlike those of such eusocial organisms as termites, molerats, bonelice and

chickens, though their biological caste system is far more chaotic. The most clearly distinguished are the incredibly rare queens, which mature into gargantuan, largely sedentary forms who birth new Orlok, or loklets, from the gelatinous blisters coating their warty backs. Any male can sire a new colony, but the act is fatal, making "kinghood" a posthumous honor.

SAMPLE ORLOK:

PRINCESS BONESNAG

BIOTYPE: Orlok (she/her)

CLASS: Necrotomist

YGORE: Hanivire ("Mumsy")

PASSION: Adventuring

Like all future queens, Bonesnag was given the choice to experience the outside world before deciding whether she truly wishes to settle down and live forever in a state of continuous spawning. Respecting her decision but terrified for her safety, her colony's vampiric council assigned one of their finest hunters to accompany and guide their beloved princess. Thrilled by the danger and anarchy of the world outside the colony, Bonesnag is a constant source of anxiety to her dutiful guardian, but the unusually stuffy and persnickety Hanivire is still willing to follow her princess - almost an adopted daughter, in her mind - into whatever death-defying adventure she gets herself into next.

Bonesnag is most fascinated by the nature of death, extinction and the many cataclysms that created her world, most of all the history of her species, vampires, and retrohumanity.

Social Disorder

Besides their queens, Orlok can vary from delicate, diminutive tinkers and surgeons to towering, hyper-muscular tunnelers or tusked, menacing hunters and dozens of forms in between. Their purpose is usually expressed through a subtle behavioral bias - a fixation on mushroom cultivation, a natural love of smashing rocks or some irresistible urge to write music - but the lines between these specialized forms are often blurred, and they are free to express these compulsions or apply themselves however they see fit. Far from some dystopian, tightly controlled "ant farm" society, an Orlok colony tends to be a diverse community of inventors, artisans, scholars and hobbyists whose biological instincts are more likely to only influence, rather than

rule, their personalities and lifestyles.

The one thing Orlok do have in common with many social insects is that males tend to be rare, especially among the larger, more formidable castes. Whether this leads to a cultural gender divide varies by colony, but for the most part, Orlok have no strong opinions about either biological or psychological differences, amongst their own kind or otherwise.

Soylent Greenish

Orlok are thought to have been the final, perfected effort by ancient vampires to create their own reliable food supply, and almost all Orlok colonies continue to live in partnership with isolated pockets of more “civilized” vampires - those that prefer not to hunt unwilling retrohumans, or at least save it for the holidays.

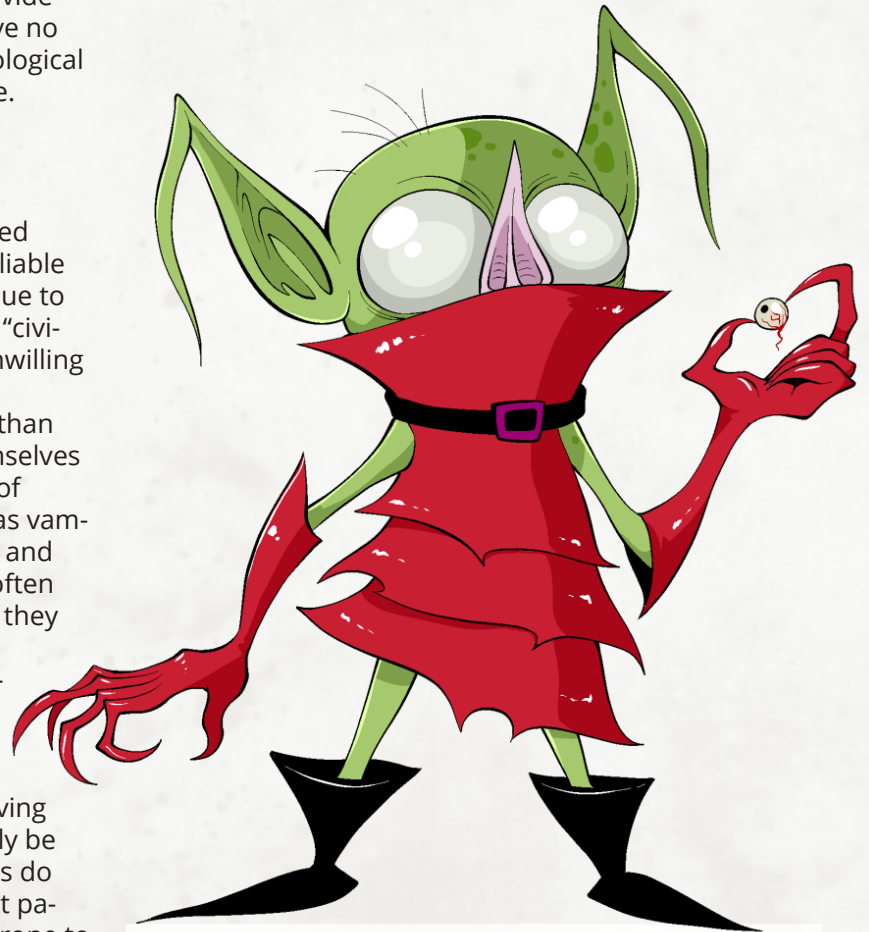
Orlok bodies not only produce far more blood than they need, but feel an innate urgency to rid themselves of that excess on a 25 hour cycle. The sensation of having their blood drained by such sanguivores as vampires or lampreys is deeply soothing to an Orlok, and even those independent of an Orlok colony are often drawn to parasitic monsters, or at the very least, they tend to keep a few leeches handy.

The role of these intelligent creatures as essentially cattle may sound unsettling to some, but colonies enjoy the literally undying protection of their vampire symbiotes and any other services the monsters can provide, their arrangement having long reached such a balance that neither can truly be said to hold power over the other. Their vampires do have some tendency to be overprotective, almost paternal towards Orlok, but Orlok are meanwhile prone to (accurately) view themselves as the more practical and responsible of the two, each side certain that the other would be lost without them.

Ghouls & Goblins

..Or gremlins, or ogres, or troglodytes, trolls, kobolds, tommyknockers or simply “the dwellers.” These are just a few of the colorful and often affectionate folk names given to Orlok by their retrohuman ancestors and, to this day, frequent neighbors. Orlok are more common far outside Mortasheen, their seaside or riverside colonies peppered around the world, and that puts them more in contact (or conflict) with surviving retrohumans than any metahuman that doesn’t literally spawn from their corpses. Depending on the education and sophistication of the Orlok and retros in question, they may enjoy everything from open cultural exchange to fearful rivalry.

There are even rumors of more distant, more ancient Orlok colonies that no longer (or perhaps never did) live in their usual harmony with either vampires or retrohumans.



SAMPLE ORLOK:

YEG

BIOTYPE: Orlok (he/him)

CLASS: Geneticist

YGORE: Zyghast (“Gertrude”)

PASSION: Attention

As a drone male, Yeg is desperate to prove that he has greater purpose than to father a new colony and die, having fled from his nest to pursue the study of monster creation in Mortasheen city. He is intent on creating ever more powerful bioconstructs, and will likely never rest until he has crafted a monster that exceeds any and all others.

Yeg’s creations actually remain fairly average, and the cause of his aggressive insecurity is unclear, since he has the unconditional love and support of his entire family. He will, however, show them all. Show them what, exactly, he’s still working out, but they will definitely be shown something, eventually, and at long last, whenever they tell him they’re proud of him, they’ll be going by empirical evidence of how great he is, rather than empty assumption.

ZOMBIES

When a retrohuman dies more or less intact, their body begins to regenerate and undergo a rapid metamorphosis into a new being. The phenomenon affects no other known biotype, resists replication of any kind and has even evaded all efforts to pinpoint a single clear cause, but it has been an evidently universal law for at least millions of years. Originally flavor humans never truly die, but undergo a form of biological rebirth.

Dead and Alive

A zombie isn't truly a "dead body," per se, bearing little resemblance to the biotech of Necrotomy. Rather, a Zombie can be considered something akin to a colonial organism inhabiting and controlling a corpse, its tissues undergoing a constant cycle of decomposition and re-growth in creeping, branching patterns that more closely resemble fungal hyphae or slime mold plasmodia. It's just



enough living biomass to "puppeteer" the non-living biomass, and even their minds are at least partially backed up throughout this slimy framework for those days when too much of the brain is in a putrefied state.

This unusual physiology makes zombies incredibly difficult to destroy. If cut into pieces, the largest remaining portion usually retains the being's complete personality, and smaller portions will be drawn instinctively back to this new central brain as its body gradually regenerates.

Cannibal Corpses

Like several other Metahumans, Zombies are sustained first and foremost by their microbiome. Symbiotic fungi, bacteria and even photosynthetic algae flourish in their decaying tissues, providing constant nourishment to their efficiently minimalistic living matter. This process is unfortunately not adequate enough to sustain higher neurological function, and a zombie living on microbial activity alone will revert to instinctive, nearly unconscious behavior comparable to a dreamless "sleepwalking."

It is in this state of "shambling" that a zombie craves meat, most especially brain tissue and even moreso retrohuman or metahuman brain tissue. The more animal protein it ingests, the clearer the shambler's mind, and the longer it can subsequently function off the reserves before "falling to shambles" again.

Only a slim portion of zombies seem capable of true self-awareness to any degree, and it isn't clear exactly what determines this capacity, but it most commonly reveals itself in the wake of their first feeding frenzy.

SAMPLE ZOMBIE:

SCURVING

BIOTYPE: Zombie (he/him)

CLASS: Manager

YGORE: Spexecutor ("Dexter")

PASSION: Paperwork

Like all conscious zombies, Scurving's memories of his own past identity are foggy, but one thing is certain: he has absolutely always loved administrative work of any kind, and has made it his unlife's mission to establish and maintain a registry of all known zombies, self-aware or otherwise.

He knows it's an impossible task, even with the aid of a fully mobile office and vast network of Spexecutor assistants, but an almost uselessly Sisyphian registry is better, in his view, than no registry at all, and it's all worth it for the smell of a freshly laminated identification card... even when the recipient most often simply eats it.

They Say it Was a Graveyard Smash

Scattered retrohuman records seem to suggest that the emergence of Zombies played a key part in the very downfall of their once globe-spanning civilization. The veracity of this is still heavily debated, and even retrohumans seem divided on the subject, with some sources citing vampires, early wormbrains, extraterrestrial activity, self-aware digital technology or a viral pandemic as the true catalyst. Still, retrohumans commonly display an inexplicable phobia of their very own dead merely regaining biological functionality, and still pass down stories of a time when everyday zombies are said to have driven them nearly extinct.

Some retrohuman pocket societies wastefully burn their dead before the transformation can even begin. Others simply live where they can easily set the dead adrift or roll them down a slope no shambler can hope to reascend. Retrohuman attitudes toward more cognizant Zombies, sometimes known to them as “revenants,” differ from one culture to the next, but typically fall somewhere between a cautious respect to fully amicable tolerance; they have, after all, had a very long time to get used to the new status quo.

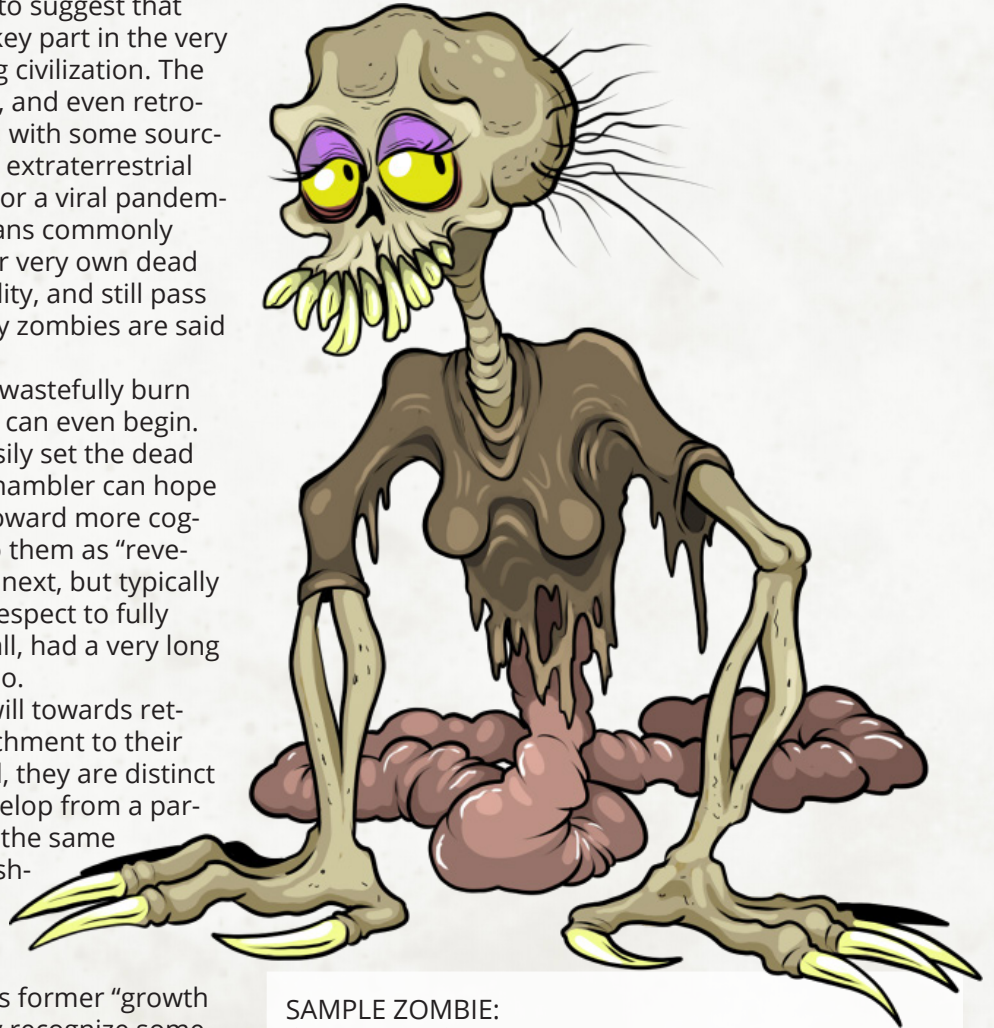
For their part, Zombies have no ill will towards retros, but neither do they feel any attachment to their past lives. As far as they’re concerned, they are distinct organisms that just so happen to develop from a particular variety of dead biomaterial, in the same sense that a particular species of mushroom might require the decaying wood of a particular species of tree.

On the other hand, retros once personally acquainted with a zombie’s former “growth medium” are often insistent that they recognize some glimmer of the same personality, and there are cases in which a zombie feels emotionally drawn to one particular person or place it doesn’t otherwise have any memory of. Sometimes, these zombies are welcomed back into “their” former community and experience a distinct sense of pleasant, nostalgic *deja vu*, accepting the mantle of the deceased and growing quite fond of their new, old family.

Zombies in Mortasheen

As Mortasheen city is inhospitable to retrohumans, nearly all zombies who dwell there are transplants, and as such they are a rarer sight than such endemic metas as Shades, Mutants or Sectilians. They are most concentrated near the outskirts of the city, still fond of the outer wastelands they once called home.

Zombies are well known for their laid-back, friendly attitudes, preferring to take unlife nice and slow. Their preferred monsters are Arthropoids, Fectoids, and of course Zomboids, which they are easily endeared to and often treat more like immediate family, whether or not they were the given Zomboid’s incubator.



SAMPLE ZOMBIE:

ABSCETTA

BIOTYPE: Zombie (she/her)

CLASS: Necrotomist

YGORE: Escarghoul (“Sheldon”)

PASSION: Modeling

Abscetta spent her first few millenia as an exceptionally formidable wasteland hunter, known to local retros as “The Pit Hag” or “The Slitherwitch” and bearing the sort of warped anatomy that can only come from countless cycles of destruction and regeneration. By the time she learned that there was a world outside her irradiated canyon, this scuttling corpse had become distorted enough to be the envy of Zombiekind and an instant celebrity of Mortasheen culture, renowned for her beauty and elegance as much as her ruthless lethality and rugged personality.

Having long retired from the life of a mythical horror, Abscetta now enjoys a more luxurious existence as a highly sought fashion model and media starlet, but when she’s not on the runway, there’s still nothing she’d rather be seen in than the familiar comfort of tattered, blood-soaked rags.

MUSHMEN

Not to be confused with zombies (but they get that a lot), Mushmen are a metahuman race whose soft tissues are up to 80% fungi, algae and sometimes even symbiotic plant life. They're the most biologically sensitive Metas in some ways, the hardiest in others, and nearly always the most attuned to nature.

More Than Their Mush

Anatomically, a Mushman is a hominid biotype consisting only of a skeleton, a brain, a loose framework of tendons and a few organs pulsing away in a rubbery sack of slime. The rest of the body mass is mostly fungal and hybrid fungal-animal tissues, the "mush" of their namesake, but they also frequently host a thriving biome of bacteria, algae, protozoa, microfauna and more. Almost anything that can grow and thrive in an organic medium can take root in a Mushman's mush, and thousands of forms of biota

are entirely unique to their bodies, all of them subject to unpredictable mutation and hybridization throughout the Meta's long life.

A Mushman can "eat" in the traditional sense, if it feels like it, but mostly lives off the by-prod-

ucts of its symbiotes. It feeds dead biomatter directly into its mush, the constant growth and decay of mush sustains everything else in its community, and the collective nutrient waste of both the mush and its epiphytes is enough to sustain the Mushman's few purely animal tissues.

Even reproduction among Mushmen is based more on their fungal than animal heritage; after exchanging samples of their complete genome in packets of spores, one or both participants may choose to develop an embryonic Mushman in a specialized fungal pod anywhere within their mass...or carefully plucked and replanted in a suitable compost heap.

Walking Gardens

A Mushman inherits its first biome from its parents and picks up more biota throughout its life, but some growths are more resilient than others, or the Mushman may carefully "weed" itself of unwanted hitchhikers while tending and nurturing its favorites.

The result is as much aesthetic variation as any synthetic fashion sense; some are dripping heaps of chlorophyllic pond scum, tangled roots and luminescent liverworts. Others can be encased in a single massive fungal formation, like a walking mushroom with the vestiges of bony facial features. Still others may trim



SAMPLE MUSHMAN:

JENNY TOOTHCAP

BIOTYPE: Mushman (she/her)

CLASS: Alchemist

YGORE: Blobtle ("Agarica")

PASSION: Soup

Jenny has long lived the almost textbook Mushman life; deep in outer Mortasheen's Pumpkin Bog, she spent most days in the tiny house she carved from a single gourd, diligently tending to a single pot of perpetual soup. Flavored with local pumpkin flesh, a secret blend of spices, a variety of rare local insects and nodules of her own unique fungal coat, the broth was prized by locals not only for its flavor but for the lucid visions it induced only once per subject, a unique experience that has always lead to some great personal epiphany; the big "Eureka Moment" every scientist hopes for.

As the very source of these psychotropics, however, Jenny cannot enjoy the benefits of her own recipe. Wishing to experience the visions for herself, she hopes the answer may lie in some new, more potent fungal compound, and she has at long last left her cottage to search far and wide for the perfect addition to her broth.

themselves so meticulously or live in such harsh climates that they resemble little more than living skeletons under a thin film of mold and branching clumps of lichen.

With such an affinity for nature, the majority of Mushmen are found beyond Mortasheen in swamps, jungles and fungus caverns around the world.

Funguys

Mushmen have a widespread reputation for their positive attitudes. Most live quiet, peaceful lives of solitude, but the hospitality they show towards strangers is almost legendary, while those with more active social lives are often the life of every party. They just plain love to be alive, perhaps because they're so alive they leave a little smudge of life on everything they touch.

This is not to say that Mushmen are never antagonistic, of course, but a Mushman is more likely to be the kind of nemesis that sends a friendly gift basket to your recovery room, and those very few to have made a more ruthless, fearsome name for themselves tend to abide by some strict sense of honor.

Healers and Herbalists

Mushmen by necessity tend to have extensive practical knowledge of at least the flora populating their bodies if not their entire local ecosystem,

SAMPLE MUSHMAN:

PROFESSOR CRIMINY

BIOTYPE: Mushman (they/them)

CLASS: Geneticist

YGORE: Scarecrawl ("Sherbert")

PASSION: Horticulture

Every Mushman knows a little horticulture, of course, but Criminy is interested only in developing their own cultivars of exceptionally rare and novel new Flora. With the help of their many loyal monsters, they roam distant ecosystems in an endless quest for specimens and have discovered hundreds of new species, though their life long dream is to identify some entirely new *kingdom* of life, even if it's nothing but some useless biofilm tucked away in a single dank cavern. Hoping to add this hypothetical lifeform to their body, they obsessively keep their personal biome as stable and pure as they can.

and by extension, they tend to know their way around at least a little pharmacology. Whether you're showing signs of tickpox on a trek through the Skitterwood, spleenworm in the Sluckways or just a bad hangover, a Mushman might know just the right combination of slime-cap plasmodia, rotwort sporangia and good old moldy bread to break your fever, flush your parasites or at least send you on a psychedelic adventure wacky enough to forget about your headache.

Those Mushmen living the hermit life in far-off forests and fens are almost always happy to help out a traveler in need, whether it's for critical medical attention beyond the scope of their own equipment or a cup of the best home-brewed coffee you'll have ever tasted, and even wild monsters may come to know the creature's moss-draped shanty as a safe place to seek aid.

Other, less scrupulous individuals may instead peddle their own pseudoscientific "cure-alls" and "miracle tonics," formulated to simply *feel* like they're having the desired effect...or leave the user so high as a kite they would never know the difference. Some of these

traveling swindlers even prey upon the ignorance of retrohumans living in the outer wastes, assuming they're the kind of retros who will give an oozing skeleton the chance to make a sales pitch.



BORG

Except perhaps the Shades, Borg may be the most physically extreme Metahuman biotypes, having shed virtually everything but their brains and spinal columns. They are capable of surviving independently for some time, but get their name from their preference for purely mechanical bodies.

From the Day They Were Borg

The art of keeping any given brain both alive and conscious in vitro is child's play - literally one of the first experiments many youth practice on the brains of laboratory specimens or younger siblings for a bit of lighthearted fun. Anything with a brain can therefore technically "become" a Borg, but most long-term Borg have always been Borg, having sprouted directly from the brainstems of their Borg parents across thousands of consecutive generations and hundreds of family lineages or "brainlines."

A Borg is mostly helpless without an artificial body, capable of only inching along on its stem, highly susceptible to dehydration and dependent on a chemosynthetic feeding process similar to that of a Shade, albeit slower. Enclosure in an organic body, however, is uncomfortable to most Borg, as are any dark and cramped confines where its microflora can't detect light.

At minimum, a Borg prefers to inhabit a proper Brainpod, a containment capsule equipped with more advanced artificial sensory systems, built-in biotech nutrient farms and some halfway decent media connectivity. More ideally, the majority of Borg operate their own customized cybernetic mechabodies.

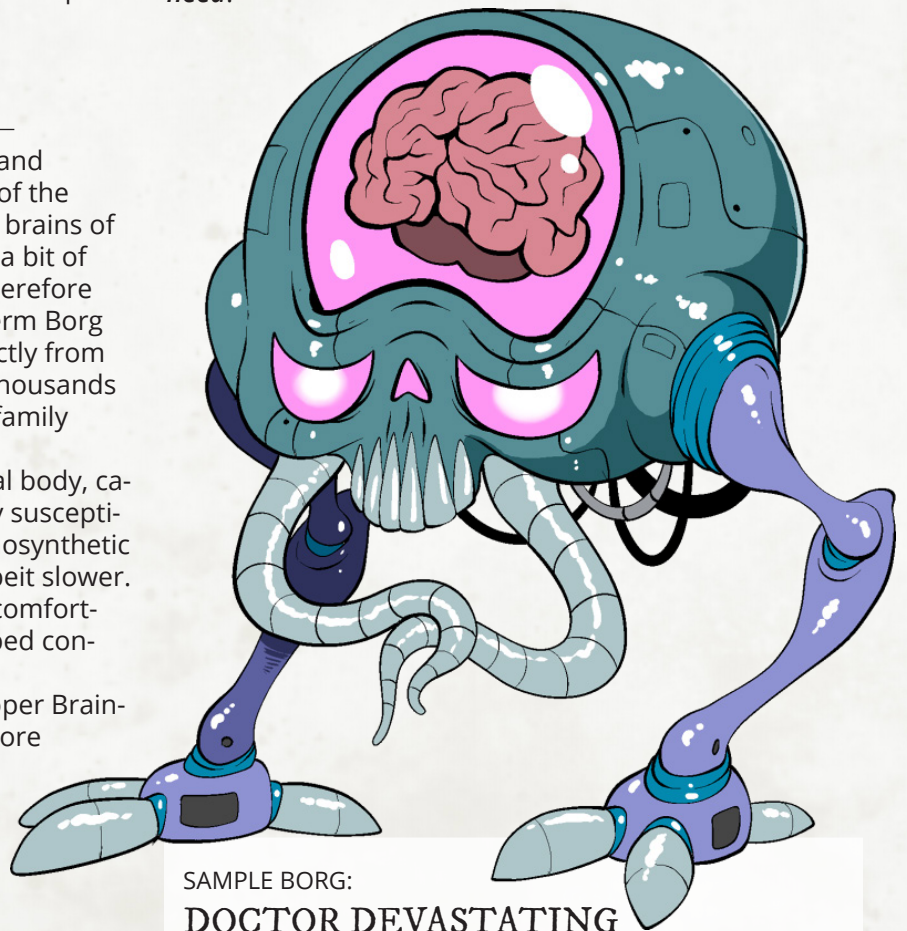
Bigger isn't Always Better

Borg are generally notorious for their inflated egos and their attitude of intellectual superiority. This even rings true for Metahumans that became Borg artificially, since this tends to be the same kind of person who thinks their own brain is their only thing of value...But the funny thing about a brain is that it doesn't magically work better just because you threw out everything else.

Borg have a tendency to feel like the cleverest thing in the room - especially among other Borg - but they don't really average any smarter than anything else with a brain, and the more confident someone is in their presumed brilliance, the more prone they are to rash or foolish decisions.

Some Borg are competitive, ego-maniacal schemers whose desire to one-up their peers can take priority over all considerations of personal safety. Some are obsessive, vindictive fanatics who mercilessly terrorize all who cross them. Others are simply loud, obnoxious blowhards who have unfortunately spent more time showing off, flirting and partying than actually studying.

This is not to say that Borg as a whole are bullies, troublemakers or buffoons, of course - plenty of them are the thoughtful, humble, rational bookworms they all like to believe they are, but more importantly: sometimes a bullying, troublemaking buffoon might be exactly the kind of person you *need*.



SAMPLE BORG:

DOCTOR DEVASTATING

BIOTYPE: Borg (they/xe/it)

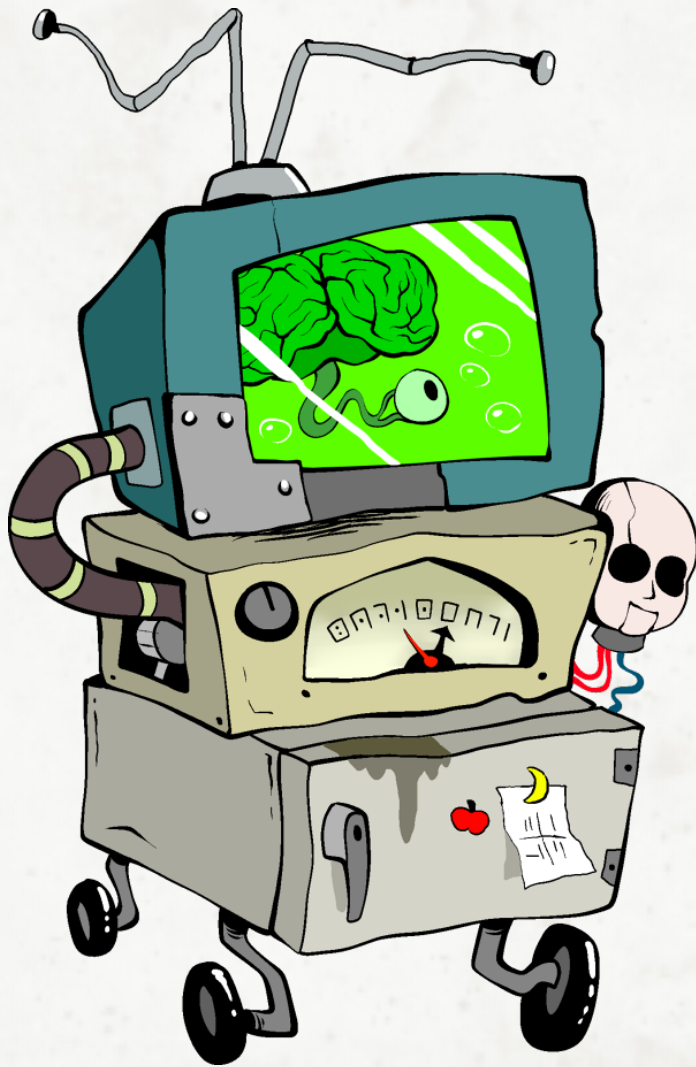
CLASS: Independent Studies

YGORE: Painchild ("Croker")

PASSION: Mischief?

Operating alone with their monsters, Devastating's scientific background, areas of expertise and ultimate goals are known only to themselves, but whatever they may be, they evidently entail making life harder for everyone else in their path. You never know when, how, or why xe might show up to interfere with someone else's business, whether it's an attempt to steal a scientifically valuable discovery and claim it as xer own or rig a research site with explosives just to stop a "rival" from succeeding, the only upside to the Doctor's crackpot capers is that they're usually too ineffectual to do any real, lasting harm, but don't make the mistake of pointing this out to it, or you'll find yourself on its ever-growing enemies list, and you'll never get their theme music out of your head.

It bears mentioning, there's theme music.



Friend Without a Face

Regardless of personality, Borg tend to have a powerful sense of friendship, or at least allyship. Perhaps it's rooted in the omnipresent background knowledge that they'll need emergency help if anything goes wrong enough with their mechanical systems. Perhaps it's a subconscious sense of isolation that comes from being cut off from natural physical contact with other living things.

Whatever the reason, all but the most truly conceited and callous Borg will dive headlong into danger to save anyone they have any respect or deeply hidden affection for, if sometimes under the guise of "preserving a valuable asset" or "fulfilling a professional obligation." Even the most hostile and antagonistic Borg may go out of their way to save their supposedly most hated rivals from certain death, adamant that only they should be the one to end the miserable life of their arch-nemesis... but it's hard not to notice just how consistently they squander every obvious opportunity to finally do so.

Borg are, if nothing else, predictably dependable and staunchly ethical. In the literal physiological sense, they may be mostly brain. In the social and philosophical sense, they're really all heart.

SAMPLE BORG:
PROFESSOR TRICIA GLOTTIUS

BIOTYPE: Borg (she/it)

CLASS: Engineer

YGORE: Garboid ("Rusty")

PASSION: Garbology

Most of Mortasheen's inhabitants prefer to avoid the brutal, unsanitary dangers of the Garbage Sea if they can help it, and that often goes double for Borg, who tend to dislike getting dirt on their nicely polished chassis or just feel too important to be trudging through other people's waste.

Not so for Glottius, whose fascination with the things discarded by civilization extends to a profound compassion for the lowliest and most disrespected living beings. Operating from a shanty laboratory on a mountain of scrap, she mines the sea of refuse for any artifacts that might shed further insight into Mortasheen's enigmatic history, even constantly modifying her machine body with some of her more interesting finds.

In recent decades, it has become fixated to an obsessive degree with its certainty that retrohuman civilization reached a biotech level far more advanced than conventionally believed, and that this connects directly to Mortasheen's very existence.

Tech Heads

Regardless of profession, the life of a Borg necessitates some familiarity with inorganic technology or "abio-tech," at least enough to repair, maintain or modify their own bodies if they don't wish to rely on the mechanical knowledge of someone else, which is usually a significant blow to their egos.

Any gadgets, tools or artificial systems any Metahuman typically has access to on their person may be integrated directly into a Borg's body, and some even opt for a cybernetic or fully mechanized psipod if they don't simply add a psipod brain to their own containment tank.

Unsurprisingly, the psychoweb tends to play a much bigger role in a Borg's life than it does for most other beings, and in fact, media connectivity is regarded as a basic necessity to a Borg's psychological health. A Borg must engage in at least three to eight hours of inner mental activity per 25 hour cycle to maintain its neural pathways in a similar phenomenon to REM sleep, and web activity has proven the easiest, most effective means of achieving this rejuvenation. Many Borg live an entire secondary life as a gamer, journalist, brainhacker, pslogger or virtual socialite through these regular resting periods, or at least spend a few hours a "night" testing their debate skills on unsuspecting strangers.

ABOUT RETROHUMANS

If they lose an arm, it never grows back. If their head is separated from their body, both die in minutes. They require a constant intake of at least 20% oxygen and apparently no more than 4% carbon dioxide. They are the most vulnerable creatures still capable of fluent communication or reasoning skills, and the latter can be almost as unpredictable as those of Jokers.

And yet, the impenetrably illogical, impossibly fragile creatures known as retrohumans - or, to themselves, just "humans" - once dominated the known world as its *only* technologically advanced organisms, and they are believed with near certainty to be the biological precursors of all known metahumans as well as countless monsters.

How did our world change hands from this single, lonely empire of primates to the rich diversity of creatures that now call it home? The timeline of events, and even the events themselves, are a convoluted and buried mystery none have yet managed to unravel.

Evidence suggests that they spent most of their reign waging cruel and gruesome war with themselves, even knowing that their lives were so ephemeral and that death, if you can believe it, was once utterly and absolutely irreversible for virtually all known lifeforms. And yet, they simultaneously enjoyed centuries, possibly millennia of technological progress that should have rendered these wasteful massacres irrelevant.

The end of the retrohuman era appears to coincide with the rise of the earliest monsters and metas, but the gaps in our understanding of this transitional period span centuries at a time. Did their fall indeed begin, as some say, when the very first zombies awakened from retrohuman remains? Was it brought about when they themselves began to dabble in their own biotechnology, not yet grasping what it was they were dabbling with?

Perhaps it all began with a meteoric impact. Perhaps their world was attacked by something foreign to it. Or, perhaps, it was a gradual and steady decline with no single catalyst, and nature did as it always has: it filled the holes back in with new life.

By the Skin of Their Teeth

The world today would be an almost unimaginable deathtrap to the retrohumans of the past. The very air and water in most environments can kill them outright, one gentle bite from an overly friendly zombie can send them into septic shock and even biogarbage can put up a halfway decent fight against the average unarmed retro. It doesn't help matters that their astonishingly low levels of such common materials as ammonia, chlorine, sulphur dioxide or arsenic lends a delicate sweetness to their flesh that most monsters could only dream of tasting, and vampires especially find their blood still more delectable than that of the Orlok.

What we do know of the eons between their world

and ours is not the prettiest picture. There were once scattered, dwindling colonies throughout the wastes that still, against all common sense, fought to extinguish one another. There were brutal eras marked by retrohuman experimentation with biotechnologies that survive to this day, but left virtually no trace of their own foolhardy creators. Recovered artifacts hint at violent military empires cobbled together from the ruins of their ancient cities, and grim cults that sought to end all life they deemed undesirable. When they weren't kicking and squirming to evade near total annihilation at the hands, fangs and tentacles of something else, it would seem that they spent the rest of their time seeking novel new ways to finish the job themselves.

...But against all odds, they are still here, and all things considered, they're finally doing fairly well for themselves.

Those Nice, But Just *Slightly Odd* Neighbors

Retrohumans strictly cannot survive direct exposure to the brutally (from their perspective) poisonous miasma of Mortasheen City nor in many other thriving ecosystems and civilizations throughout the world, but they've found ways to persist in stable, isolated colonies just about everywhere. Most live in small "towns" peppered throughout the deserts, canyons and swamps beyond Mortasheen's borders. Some lurk in artificial catacombs far below ground. Others inhabit their own microcities built with both modern biotech and ancient abiotech. Whatever the case, retros can only survive the omnipresent threat of hungry monsters (and, regrettably, less scrupulous metahumans) through some combination of rigorous survival training, protective gear, lethal weaponry, or even symbiosis with monsters of their own.

It sounds like a bleak, precarious and stressful existence, but things have been this way for long enough that retros are long past the point of huddling in terror, pining for a long lost past or dreaming of some utopian future. They've now spent more than half of their existence as a species in a world crawling with what their ancestors might have called demons, abominations and horrors. Those that aren't living out their lives in a cozy, high-tech vault surrounded by computers are learning how to mask their scent from a hungry *Zyghast* or boil the spines off a freshly butchered *Bleedouch* by the time they can speak in complete sentences, and neither would really have it any other way.

Those lucky enough to get to know these rare beings often find them to be almost irrationally optimistic and suicidally fearless. As easily and as permanently as they can lose their lives, they still approach every situation with an attitude that "we all have to go someday" or that "life's too short" to waste any of it living in fear, sentiments they express almost as if they're assumed

to be the universal and unavoidable status quo. It's not that they are unaware of what biotechnology can do for their survivability or life expectancy, but rather that the vast majority of retrohumans express only limited interest in augmenting their biological processes or physiology. They may rid themselves of disease with some carefully processed Salivite slime, partner up with a more benevolent cerebral parasite or two and seek more modern intervention if their offspring are suffering a terminal illness, but with overwhelming consistency, retros say they "love being human" and that the ephemeral nature of life only lends it all the more personal meaning to them. Even as they slow down, both physically and mentally, and approach natural death in sometimes as little as a century and a half, they often seem satisfied enough with the "wild ride" of their short existence, "ready to move on" after "having a good run" even if they expect death to be a permanent oblivion.

As long as you aren't looking for a tissue sample (at least without asking first - another of their quirky customs) retros can be jovial, welcoming hosts and dependable, selfless allies.... but sometimes, it's probably best not to get TOO attached to the little guys.

Retrohumans and Monsters

Despite their historical significance and many enduring mysteries, the majority of Metahumans are actually impartial to Retros; they're faded relics of a bygone world, at best a niche subject of academic curiosity one may get some novel opportunity to observe on the right research expedition. To monsters, on the other hand, they can be the stuff of legend.

In Mortasheen city, monsters swap all manner of tantalizing rumors about the fabled "un-mutants" or "pre-zombies" lurking the outside lands; that they're a kind of animal, like rats, that nobody created, but that they walk and talk in the same silly way as any monster's scientist companion. That somehow these mere animals created their entire world, but they're as feeble as a sootmoth and wilt as quickly as a mushbloom. Most have also heard, of course, that you could never hope to sink your suckers or plunge your proboscis into anything more exquisitely *delicious*.

With the mentalities and personal priorities of monsters varying as outrageously as their anatomy, there's no telling how far these rumors may go; perhaps your YGORE heard from a Doomboros that humans are benevolent guardians who protect defenseless, innocent monsters from harm. Perhaps the local Eyedra believes it has seen humans with its very own eyes, hiding in plain sight and surely up to no good! "One bite of a human heart, and you'll live forever" says a Zokar. "My buddy's cousin touched one once, and all his hair fell out!" says a Hisscreant. Depending on the monster, it's equally likely to daydream about befriending a real live human or eating one alive, and unfortunately for humans, those concepts aren't always mutually exclusive

to a given monster's psychology.

Metahumans largely pay no mind to these harmlessly amusing fancies, unless of course they happen to know a thing or two about the subject (or at least believe they do) and can't bear to let misinformation go uncorrected in their presence, but it ultimately doesn't matter; a monster isn't likely to change its mind just because its pet science-ist says so, and even a close encounter with a real, live retro isn't always guaranteed to sate its curiosity, assuming it even accepts that the distinctly non-magical biped is the genuine article at all...no matter how succulent its spleen was.

Some monsters, of course, live where Retrohumans are as unremarkable a presence as any other creature they may hunt or be hunted by, depending on relative strength. Others may enjoy the same mutual arrangements with Retros as practiced by city monsters and their Metas.

Vampires, across the board, tend to have the most straightforward, unembellished understanding of the species: without a drop of Green Goo in them, they're simply filled with the finest blood of any beast, and that's all they feel the *need* to know.

Retrohuman Characters

Nothing we've covered in this section is a universal rule, especially when it comes to human attitudes about their world; these are only the common trends you're most likely to run into. For every human content to live the life of an artinsal barricader is a human who would rather dive headlong into the zombie hordes just to see the world, and no shortage of those who feel inexorably drawn to the mystery, wonder and terror of the one place they've always been told never to go. The place where some say all monsters were originally born. A city that can eat you alive if you aren't careful...and, oh yeah, so can lots of the things living in it.

Life in Mortasheen is obviously harder for a Retro than a Meta, but it's far from impossible. Environmental exosuits, constant biochemical intake and even certain handy parasites can shield them from the toxic atmosphere, while even the crudest disguise and flimsiest lie can protect them well enough from the toxic residents. A strange eccentric who appeared out of nowhere with an inconsistent story, ambiguous motives, and an impractical costume they never take off? In Mortasheen, that could describe practically anyone's third cousin.

The extreme vulnerability of a retrohuman character need not translate into any penalties or disadvantages as far as gameplay is concerned - one can assume any number of technological solutions at work - but there are times when their unique situation could complicate or even hijack the narrative. It's up to the proctor and all players to decide whether a secret, human identity is an appropriate option for a given campaign, or ultimately no more disruptive than the unique eccentricities of any everyday mad scientist.