



EX NIHILO

A LOVECRAFTESQUE
SCENARIO BY JOSH FOX

THE WITNESS

Captain Trayvon Clay, a washed-up former Mars colony pioneer, B-list celebrity and officially in command. Clay was a hot-shot astronaut back in the day but is now well past his best, more comfortable on the chat-show circuit than in the cockpit. Clay's name was instrumental in ensuring the mission got funded, but he is viewed as a liability by the NASA elite. Clay is possessed of boundless confidence but tends to fall back on the hard stuff when things get really difficult.

OTHER CHARACTERS

Temple, an experimental synthetic human, supposedly twice as smart as the world's leading scientists, stronger than an olympian and able to operate in conditions lethal to humans. It is programmed to obey the crew, but protects human life as its first priority.

Professor Liu Choi, astrophysicist, inventor of the Choi field, Time Magazine Person of the Year, and reputed to be the world's smartest person. The mission is Choi's brainchild and she simmers with resentment at not having command.

Major Carrie Daley, a skilled pilot trained by the US Air Force. Physically fit but also a talented scientist in her own right (top of her class at MIT). She keeps to herself.

Felipe Aguilar, the designer of the ship and its chief engineer. He is an obsessive perfectionist and constantly fiddling with various aspects of the ship.

LOCATION AND ERA

Theseus, a unique deep space vessel designed to travel the vast distance to a black hole and then withstand the crushing pressure of its gravity well for as long as possible. The year is 2083, thirty years after the first manned expedition to Mars. This is the first flight into a black hole in history.

OTHER LOCATIONS

The Hub, comprising the helm, navigation centre, and the "nerve centre," where all sensory data is received and analysed. Each crew member has a station, a comfortable seat from which they have access to a wide range of information.

The Choi field generator, a large structure which generates the Choi field, the only thing preventing those on board from being atomised once the ship approaches the black hole.

The crew quarters, a cramped living space arranged in a thin crescent next to the Choi field generator. The air is slightly too warm, everyone is pretty much on top of each other, and the place smells of stale sweat.

The engines, storage and the **communications array** are all packed efficiently into a small space, and each really only accessible by one person at a time.

The sensor array, protruding from the front of the ship and only accessible via a narrow crawlspace in zero gravity. The sensor array is relatively unprotected from the bizarre and powerful forces expected as the ship approaches the black hole.

V616 Monocerotis, "Mon", and its immense gravity well, the closest black hole to Earth. It is invisible and detected only by the effects on the ship and its crew, and the appearance of other celestial objects. The ship is flying straight towards it, and will soon pass the event horizon. In theory the Choi field may allow it to break previously understood physical laws and return afterwards.

BLACK HOLE PHYSICS

There are a whole host of reasons why flying into a black hole would be a terrible proposition. As one approaches the black hole, time and space begin to distort. Everything slows to a crawl, effectively freezing you in amber while the rest of the world moves on - though from your perspective everything seems normal. Once you cross the event horizon, you are drawn inexorably towards the black hole - it is impossible to return. Beyond the event horizon, nobody outside can even observe you, and vice versa. As you get closer, the immense forces and distortion of space will rip you to pieces, a process evocatively referred to as "spaghettification," to say nothing of the massive amounts of radiation, far beyond a lethal dose.

In this scenario, we hand-wave away many of these problems with a fictional invention called the Choi field. In theory, everyone inside the field is safe from the effects of the black hole and it is even possible to leave the event horizon.

Of course, that's only theory, tested for the first time in this scenario - what happens in practice is up to you. We suggest you don't worry too much about black hole physics, but feel free to riff off those effects to introduce creepy pseudo-scientific strangeness. Messing around with time and space, or otherwise unleashing strange physics, is very much on the table here - just don't get hung up on being "realistic." Equally, you can take the scenario in a completely different direction, leaving the physics angle as mere window dressing.

CARDS

A Bizarrerie

Spatiotemporal Distortions

Strange Location

Warped Bodies

SAMPLE CLUES

These system failures, initially thought to be random, appear to be following a pattern.

A chunk of an unknown mineral hits the ship. Its shape and structure don't appear natural.

An unpleasant sensation, like something squirming just beneath your skin.

Footage clearly shows who did this sabotage, but nobody saw them leave their bunk, where they swear they were the whole time.

Part of the Theseus becomes completely inaccessible. Whenever anyone tries to go there, they somehow get turned around and end up back where they started.

A distant tugging at the back of the mind, growing stronger as time goes on. It is calling you towards the black hole.

The Theseus picks up a signal that is undefinably disturbing, and even after the receiver is switched off it seems faintly audible, like a tune you can't forget.

A stasis field appears on the ship. From outside nothing appears to move, except for a patch of shadow that has definitely changed position in the last hour.

A powerful feeling you are not yourself, that you have somehow been duplicated and you are the doppelganger.

One of the crew vanishes from the ship. There is literally nowhere they could have gone and no way to leave the ship without triggering dozens of alarms. But they are gone.

One of the ship's systems has stopped functioning. On inspection, it has corroded away to almost nothing.

A loud and unnerving sound, wrenching and popping, apparently originating from the ship's hull.

The other crew members' body language and voice tone is subtly off, like they're extremely convincing actors playing themselves.

You can find out more about Lovecraftesque by going to www.blackarmada.com