

A Planeswalker's Guide to New Phyrexia

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The Machine Orthodoxy

The faction of Phyrexia aligned with white mana is organized around a grand hierarchy of belief known as the Machine Orthodoxy. The Grand Cenobite Elesh Norn, the Orthodoxy's highest-ranking Praetor, commands and guides this faction of Phyrexia, promising them a glorious future under the principles of the Argent Etchings. Everything the Phyrexians practice under the Machine Orthodoxy is designed to turn Mirrodin into a perfect new Phyrexian homeland, a kind of planewide phyresis. They see the native Mirrans as either lost unfortunates or willful sinners, deserving of reclamation and transformation in either case.

Misunderstanding of the Spirit. Phyrexia is a civilization based on physical qualities: flesh and metal. While Phyrexians have something like a spirituality, the vast majority of them don't seem to understand the mind, soul, or spirit the way other sentient beings do. The minds of sentient Phyrexians are certainly capable of abstract thought, but they appear to be largely disconnected from the transcendental. However, despite their physical-oriented nature, Phyrexians have fervently held, well-organized religious systems. The strange contradiction that results is a bizarre, manifest mockery of religion—an engineered religion, a faith of the physical: the Machine Orthodoxy.

Sects of the Machine Orthodoxy

There are several sects within Phyrexia's Machine Orthodoxy, each competing to realize their world-view. Three of the largest sects are described here.

The Flesh Singularity: The Sect of Total Unity

One sect of the Orthodoxy is founded on the ideal of the rejection of the selfish ego and the total unification of all things. Their twisted, almost naïve conception of the perfect community is the elimination of all barriers between individuals. The Phyrexian tendency toward literalism takes this to a frightening extreme: Phyrexians of this sect seek to literally connect all beings to one another and to become a single, vast, organic-and-metal organism, the end-state of which they call, among other names, the Flesh Singularity. (The term "flesh" here means both organic and inorganic matter; like most Phyrexians, they don't distinguish between living and dead things as potential materials for their form of life.) When all life is literally attached to all other life—by sutured skin, riveted metal, woven fur, whatever—only then will true, perfect unity be achieved.

Unreality of the Individual. Izathel, the high chancellor of a massive Phyrexian chancery inside the planar core, sees all life as a single, hierarchical organism, with each part serving a crucial role to the whole. The only value of any given part is to the whole organism; therefore, an individual is worse than useless—it's a threat to the unity of the Singularity. Individuals—especially those that aggressively defend their separation from the collective—are to be hunted down and made part of the whole by force. Many Phyrexians of this sect have a strange blind spot to individual behavior, almost as if they don't quite recognize the efficacy or even the existence of discrete, non-Phyrexian organisms. Guided

by this observation, some Mirran rebels have had success in perplexing and deceiving a few Phyrexians by acting in radically independent ways, keeping their behavior as unique as possible. These erratic tactics are now discouraged by Mirran leaders, however, as they are now recognized as sinful and highly aberrant by Singularity-Sect Phyrexians and can draw deadly attention.

“The last of the Not-Whole shall be discovered, though our eyeholes wince at their hideousness. Their bodies shall be absorbed and their imperfection shall be purged. The Machine Orthodoxy shall engorge the Not-Whole and their deficient isolation shall be obliterated in the Unity. Only then shall the last wounds in the Circle be healed. Only then shall this world compleat itself.”

—Izathel, High Chancellor

Dermatophobia. Phyrexians of the Flesh Singularity sect seem to have a special hatred for, or fear of, skin. To them, the skin (or whatever a creature has as its outer covering) is the ultimate boundary, the wall that divides the self from the outside world, and individuals from one another. Many deaths at the hands of Phyrexians of the Machine Orthodoxy involve brutal, almost ritualized flaying. It’s rare for these Phyrexians to leave a victim’s skin whole when compleating it; they often replace nearly all of a creature’s former hide with glossy, porcelain-like armor or some other material that is less emblematic of discrete individuality.

The Porcelain Legion: The Sect of the Ideal Form

The flesh of many native Phyrexians, particularly those of the Porcelain Legion sect, is often covered with a hard, white, bonelike metal similar in appearance to porcelain. While this substance is inflexible and iron-hard, the visual impression of a force of these Phyrexians is the appearance of an army made of delicate porcelain. Under the protective porcelain lie bone, metal endoskeletal structure, raw sinew, and sometimes sensory apparatuses such as eyes or auditory organs.

Only on core-born Phyrexians does this porcelain metal develop organically. For compleated Phyrexians (former Mirrans), the porcelain substance must be grown in special vats and implanted in the victim’s body. The porcelain metal tends to thrive best when embedded in dying or recently-dead flesh, spreading over the fertile tissue like metallic lichen. Extra tissue harvested from Phyrexia’s war victims is often used to help grow more of the hard, white metal in the porcelain vats.

Destructive Idealization. Despite the rising power of the Flesh Singularity sect, most Phyrexians of the Machine Orthodoxy are still de facto individuals, able to move and act somewhat independently. However, the agendas of other sects, such as the Porcelain Legion, still make their mark upon them. The ideal of the Porcelain Legion is the idealization of the physical form—and the Phyrexian concept of “idealization” is a ruthless one. To these Phyrexians, a being’s ideal form is that which perfectly serves the Phyrexian hierarchy. If the community is an organism, then every part must be designed and crafted to serve its role for the survival of that organism. Much of Phyrexia’s power and raw building material, however, comes from the races and creatures it subjugates. Before a newcomer can achieve its ideal form, therefore, it must first be relieved of its old form.

The Transformation Process. Take a captured leonin soldier for example. Like a porcelain doll, the leonin will be smashed into its component parts, its organs spread wide and its metallic sinew rearranged. It will be modified for its new purpose—its muscles tightened, its digestion rerouted, its mind scrubbed and readapted to its new objectives. Some parts may be deemed useless to the new Phyrexian’s purpose; most will be reused elsewhere. Some additions may be made to enhance its function, sometimes taken from other “newcomers”—extra arms, more teeth, and of course, seed-grafts of the “porcelain” armor plates made of the hard, white, bonelike metal. Then, as the final act of the new being’s transformation, the Phyrexian oil is introduced into its body. The oil magically spreads

throughout the organism, making changes at an invisible level, completing the conversion to Phyrexia and its journey to its ideal form.

"I don't care what horrors you've seen. I don't care how long you've traveled. There is always worse up ahead. That's the rule, I'm afraid. Today's worst is tomorrow's best."

—Faln, Mirran resistance

The Apostles of Karn: The Sect of the Creator's Destiny

Another sect of the Machine Orthodoxy is the Apostles of Karn, those who are concerned with restoring a centralized leader to Phyrexia. Although the Phyrexian civilization that has grown on Mirrodin was not the same as that led by Yawgmoth, the lack of a focal leader is felt on an instinctual level. This sect believes that Phyrexia is currently like a body without a head, a kingdom without a king, and has adopted the powerful silver golem Karn as their chosen leader. Currently Karn, in his erratic and unstable mental state, is incapable of taking true command over Phyrexia, but the Apostles do all they can to prepare for the day when he'll ascend to the throne.

Whispers of a Broken Mind. Karn flung himself to Mirrodin, the metal world he once created as Argentum, while simultaneously surrendering his planeswalker spark for the sake of the plane of Dominaria. Stranded on Mirrodin with Xantcha's Phyrexian personality matrix, Karn's mind came unhinged, and the influence of Phyrexia festered and grew inside him. Deep within Mirrodin's core, the trace of glistening oil within the silver golem became the seed for a reborn Phyrexian civilization, leaving Karn himself trapped within its widening web. Today the Apostles of Karn and other Phyrexians help to groom and nurture the mind-injured golem, plugging him into a specially constructed Phyrexian throne and harvesting his whispered ravings as scripture. At times, Karn is a full-blown Phyrexian leader, uttering commands to destroy the last vestiges of Mirran life; during these moments, the Apostles record and evangelize his Word with fervent excitement. Other times, Karn is lucid enough to struggle against his Phyrexian corruption; this is when the Apostles act as jailers, preventing his escape and traumatizing him back into submission.

Ambassadors to the Phyrexian Factions. The Apostles of Karn know that when Karn is ready to lead Phyrexia, Phyrexia must be ready for his leadership. They lament the ideological schisms that have divided Phyrexia and work to send ambassadors to negotiate unity among the other factions.

"When the final truths are known, a great and terrible peace shall befall this world. The suns above and the spheres below shall form a shining tower, and the Father of Machines shall rule from its pinnacle. Praise the scraping utterances of the Praetor, the oil-basked truth of the Orthodoxy, and the inevitable destiny of the Father."

—Ktat-Raal, Inquisitor Exarch

Roles and Beings of the Machine Orthodoxy

In Phyrexia, role and physiognomy are inextricably linked. If you are part of Phyrexia, you were created to fill a need, and your physical form was engineered and outfitted to do the job you were made to do. Form and function are stitched together into a seamless whole.

Cenobites: Machine Priests. Phyrexia is filled with countless orders of priests and chancellors. Cenobites are the priests in charge of the inquisition of non-Phyrexian life. Some remain in the Core, deciding the fates of the captured, whereas others can be found on the front lines, their serrated blades ready to inflict dogma on the heretics directly. Cenobites tend to be constructed of more metal than flesh, sometimes bearing religious iconography etched directly onto their oil-streaked "porcelain" metal.

Suture Priests: Stitchers of the Flesh. The suture priest is a specialized cenobite whose job is the sacred act of binding the individual into the collective. This is accomplished in a ritualized but still quite literal process involving long needles and black, metallic thread. Usually members of the Flesh Singularity sect, suture priests are sometimes also called to modify Phyrexian creatures by altering their flesh components.

The Deep Faithful: Unseen Servitors. Although many Phyrexians are built for face-to-face combat and inquisition, some Phyrexians never leave the core of the plane. A sub-sect of Phyrexians called the Deep Faithful work tirelessly to preserve the infrastructure of the Machine Orthodoxy, carrying prisoners to be compleated, trading limbs or bits of flesh from one convert to another, and tending the porcelain vats. They appear as thin, spidery creatures that scuttle along any surface, apparently ignoring gravity, using their pincers and eyeholes to perform their menial work.

Shattered Angels: Phyrexianized Seraphs. Angels are just more rank and file to the Phyrexian machine, but to many Mirrans, there exists no more blasphemous sight than a Phyrexianized angel. Hollow and insensate, with the slack apathy of a broken doll, the so-called null seraphs follow no ideal. Their conscience and warrior zeal excised, they become winged sociopaths capable of unspeakable acts. Some Mirrans consider it especially virtuous to slay null seraphs, freeing the angels' bodies from committing the atrocities that their souls would never have permitted.

Porcelain Dolls: Low-Ranking Newcomers. The Porcelain Legion is always looking for new recruits. They favor prisoners of war from the Razor Fields, such as leonin, loxodon, and Auriok humans. Reconfigured Mirrans, sometimes called "shattered dolls," are literally broken down and built back up again, made to be loyal servants and soldiers for the very force they had fought before. The Porcelain Legion covers much of the newcomer's body with hard, porcelain-like metal, but the facial features are often left relatively intact to allow the new soldier's former comrades to recognize him or her in battle. These "dolls" rarely attain religious rank within the Machine Orthodoxy, but body parts can be recycled widely; parts of former Mirrans have even made it into the body of the Praetor Elesh Norn.

"Birth is inadequate. Maturity is inadequate. Even this world's false metallic life is inadequate. Perfection is only achieved through the lessons of metal. The merely born cannot reach this state, and in their misery they cry for our improvements."

—Xaldror, Tender of Vats

Tome Lackeys: Undependable Clerical Minions. Short-statured tome lackeys are creatures built to serve as mobile stands for Phyrexian arcane or clerical texts. They are singularly terrible at their job, distractible and hyperactive, possessed of a constant need to squirm and skitter about. They chitter annoyingly while priests try to read from the tomes they carry, often confusing the sermons or lessons being read.

Elesh Norn, Grand Cenobite. The Machine Orthodoxy faction of Phyrexia is led by a Praetor called Elesh Norn. The Praetor of Unity, preferring the title of Grand Cenobite, coordinates the war efforts of thousands of Phyrexian beings below her. Elesh Norn belongs to no particular sect of the Orthodoxy, but is recognized as the overseer or at least a respected figure under all faiths. Conniving and wise, Elesh Norn maintains an appearance of Phyrexian grace and respectability at all times, but secretly she manipulates Phyrexian dogma and the interpretations of the Argent Etchings to suit her own ends.

Annexes: Footholds of the Orthodoxy

As Phyrexia's orthodoxy spreads, it doesn't just transform living things to its nature. Phyrexia also establishes Annexes, buildings converted to the purpose of Phyrexian religious practice, incorporating

Mirran living spaces and outposts into the Phyrexian superstructure. Annexes are led by chancellors, sentient and usually roughly humanoid Phyrexian priests who have attained high rank in the Machine Orthodoxy. Many of these captured chanceries are organized with radial architecture, with a dais in the middle meant to elevate the position of the chancellor, or sometimes a monument to Karn. Some Annexes lurk within Mirrodin's core, grand cathedrals with nightmarish architecture that serve the deep faithful.

The Argent Etchings: Phyrexian Scripture

Phyrexia did not invade Mirrodin; the Phyrexian civilization on Mirrodin developed from the corruption inside Karn, the silver golem with a Phyrexian heart. Although Phyrexia may retain a dim "memory" of its forms on other worlds, Phyrexian life on Mirrodin has largely had to grow and adapt its own structures and institutions. One such institution is a collection of written religious law and scripture known as the Argent Etchings. The Etchings are scribed on a vast, silver sculpture said to have been fashioned in the shape of a bizarre cardiac organ, perhaps based on Karn's Phyrexian heart or some part of the Praetor Elesh Norn. The etched sculpture contains maxims and laws that are interpreted by religious leaders and Praetors to fit their ends.

Example maxims from the Argent Etchings

"Skin is the prison of the blessed and the stronghold of the heretic."

—Argent Etchings

The Machine Orthodoxy, especially the Flesh Singularity sect, sees the skin as a symbolic barrier that divides individuals from one another. It's the barricade that cleaves beings apart and prevents total unity. So the skin is both a prison from which a potential Phyrexian newcomer must be freed, and the last line of defense that must be torn down before the wicked can be rooted out and destroyed.

"Becoming is belonging."

—Argent Etchings

Transformation and membership are inextricably linked for Phyrexia, especially for the Porcelain Legion. Before a Mirran "newcomer" can be welcomed into the fold, the old self must be purged, forgotten, destroyed. Even native Phyrexians sometimes undergo radical physical transfiguration, feeling it to be a transcendental experience that gets them closer to their community.

"A hole prevents a sphere from forming."

—Argent Etchings

The absence of a leader distresses some Phyrexian factions. The Apostles of Karn see Phyrexia as a sphere that can't become entirely whole or stable while the hole in leadership exists. They work to install Karn as the new Father of Machines so that Phyrexia may compleat itself.

Naïve Literalism

Phyrexian belief can be excruciatingly literal. Many low-level Phyrexian priests, chancellors, and the Deep Faithful adhere to Phyrexian rules, maxims, and texts to the unvarnished letter. The distinction between symbol and referent is often lost on them, causing behavior that appears gruesome but is motivated by religious law. If scripture says "we must eliminate the self to accomplish unity," they start sewing people together. If a Phyrexian Praetor announces it's time to "harvest the soul of Mirrodin," they harvest bodies without consideration of the consciousnesses they may be attached to, perceiving nothing but the physical. It's a surprisingly self-consistent belief system—but at the same time, when applied, it becomes a cruel, genocidal mandate.

Deep inside the Furnace Layer of the Phyrexian core hides an unlikely collection of rebel outposts: a pocket of Mirran resistance. Resistance fighters keep hostile Phyrexians at bay while surface-raiders smuggle living holdouts to the camps. Some strangely tolerant Phyrexians have turned a blind eye to these refugee outposts, a welcome but likely temporary condition that has allowed these camps to exist so far.

The Razor Fields fell to the Phyrexians quickly, scattering the leonin prides and isolating the loxodon. The last major fortress of the Razor Fields that has yet to fall to Phyrexian integration is the Auriok community of Bladehold. The once-roving civil force known as the Accorders now serve as Bladehold's military, fighting off Phyrexian assaults as best they can.

The Razor Circle Passage. The refugees at Bladehold know of an effective but dangerous conduit to the Resistance strongholds in the Furnace Layer. Using a powerful spell, the loxodon artificer Ghalma the Shaper has turned a "razor circle"—a kind of crop circle carved magically in razorgrass—into a tunnel through Mirrodin's crust into the Furnace Layer. Only when the white sun is high overhead does this passage activate, allowing travel down into the refugee outposts. The entrance is in constant danger of discovery by Phyrexia, and the passage needs constant maintenance so that tendrils of mycosynth don't close it up again. But for many in Bladehold and across the Razor Fields, it's the only chance for survival.

The Progress Engine

This section describes the Progress Engine, the Phyrexian faction associated with blue mana.

"Our Purpose? Experiment. We are the engine that furthers Phyrexian progress by developing new life, new tools, and new methods that seek to attain sublime completion. Our Structure? We are an integrated network of facilities each in pursuit of perfection."

—From the Great Synthesis by Jin-Gitaxias

"BEHOLD, THE PROGRESS ENGINE."

"First, let us bless the sea."

During the onset of the invasion, Phyrexian engines began pumping untold quantities of glistening oil into the Quicksilver Sea, to propagate its infection. The oil sea can transmogrify flesh into metal and vice-versa with alarming alacrity. Any non-Phyrexian unfortunate enough to be tossed into its fluid finds itself quickly decomposed and reprocessed into raw material for completion.

"Within Lumengrid, let us create our masterpiece."

The former capitol city of the vedalken, Lumengrid now serves as a research center for the Progress Engine's most hideous experiments. Fueled by untold volumes of mana that emanate from the mana-charged lacuna, slaughterhouse-style laboratories investigate the most rapid and effective forms of completion for Mirrans of all races and species. Common disciplines include how to attain maximal lethality with minimal effort, how to preserve the body as a resource while eliminating the will, and how to mimic and improve upon the strengths and weaknesses of the plane's natural beings.

Jin-Gitaxias, Core Augur

Jin-Gitaxias dwells within the now fully Phyrexianized Lumengrid, and has converted the topmost chamber into his own personal laboratory and study. Glistening oil vats filled with special batches of growing newts and germs line the labs. Jin-Gitaxias personally oversees and perfects these labs in his efforts to bring about the ultimate Phyrexian creation: a representation of the philosophies he has presented in his "Great Synthesis."

In an effort to attain the supreme synthesis, Jin-Gitaxias has moved toward the realms of the occult, dipping into both the necromantic and the “divine” in order to achieve the ultimate form and function for his super-strain newts. His behavior is increasingly being noted by members of the Phyrexian sectives, but few are ready to challenge his authority. His lab is stacked with arcane passages from the Phyrexian Scriptures, transcriptions from Sheoldred’s necromantic visions. Jin-Gitaxias attempts to produce the creatures from these prophecies and combine them with his vision of perfection.

“It is not a goal, but a process—the process of creating the perfect Phyrexia. Such an endeavor must be undertaken with great seriousness and discipline. Every step must be logged and every experiment transcribed so that we may have an ever-refined map that leads us toward the perfected form. Mistakes are only abhorrent if they go undocumented.”

—Jin-Gitaxias

“The Great Synthesis is the perfect vision of our goal.”

Jin-Gitaxias has modified the Phyrexian Scriptures in their mentioning of “The Grand Evolution.” He sees it as “The Great Synthesis” and has etched his own lengthy treatise about its merits. This came about due to his distaste of the word “evolution,” which has been so slobberingly thrown about by Vorinclex and his puppet-queen, Glissa. Jin-Gitaxias views Glissa and Vorinclex as naïve beast-creatures incapable of comprehending basic logic, let alone the true master plan of Phyrexian destiny as written by Gitaxias. He sees the selection of predators through survival of the fittest as a crude, aimless process.

“The Gitaxian Standard of Purity is our infallible metric.”

Within the Great Synthesis, Jin-Gitaxias laid out a guideline for the sectives who began work completing the Mirran population. This scripture is known as the Gitaxian Standard of Purity. Taking ideas from many lengthy discussions with Elesh Norn, the Gitaxian Standard of Purity gives Malcator and Uulbrek the basic rules and measures of compleation.

“The whole of Phyrexia hums along every nerve fiber, guiding my sense of design as I create a new breed of Phyrexian on this metallic world. The will of the Father of Machines shall be realized in every compleated creation that I deem worthy to receive the blessing of our scalpels.”

—Malcator, Gitaxian sective

Roles within the Engine

Praetor. Jin-Gitaxias emerged as one of the five Phyrexian ordinals before the invasion of Mirrodin’s surface. While acknowledging and appreciating Yawgmoth’s cunning, vision, and ambition, Jin-Gitaxias feels that Yawgmoth failed because he didn’t think things through. To him, compleation is a systemic process with a deliberate end: the creation of a perfect system.

Subpraetor. Analogous to generals on other worlds, subpraetors oversee different schools of Phyrexian thought, or oversee massive projects such as the Meldweb.

Pontiff. Phyrexian pontiffs are delegated with the authority to execute projects or systems of experiments given to them by the Praetor and subpraetors. They are typically of the sective that takes the raw materials and diagrams to carry out the designs of the Great Synthesis.

Exarchs. They are the elite of Jin-Gitaxias’ creations, disabling the will of the Mirran resistance through mental domination at a distance, generating a thought-field specifically attuned to the Mirran mind.

Vat-priest. The vat-priests oversee the conduct of an experiment from beginning to end and ensure its adherence to aims. Vat-priests monitor and supervise surgeons and servitors.

"Infiltration is the easy part. It's what I do. The hardest part, which I was not prepared for, was the horror of what I saw when I got inside Lumengrid. They have changed it. The walls are covered with pulsing, living tissue that is carrying various fluids throughout the complex. Tubes drape from the walls to the surgical theaters where all manner of abominations are taking place. What I saw there I don't have the stomach to repeat."

—Kara Vrist, Neurok agent

Surgeon. Surgeons conduct incisions, amputations, dissections, grafts, brain excision, nerve stripping, ocular resecting, blade grafting, phyretic implants, maxillary prosthetics, xenotransplantation, and so on. The responsibility for keeping test subjects alive or quasi-alive also falls to the surgeon.

Transcriptor. All Phyrexian experiments are precisely and antiseptically recorded by special servitors called transcriptors. They record all data of experiments, surgeries, excisions and all resulting pathology down to the time, the type of instrument used, sounds the subject made, blood loss, smell, and other ghastly pieces of information. Each ward has its own staff of transcriptors scuttling about.

Servitor. These creatures ensure that the equipment for a given experiment—everything from the room to the altar to the specific materials necessary to carry the experiment out—is available for the surgeon's ready use.

Chattel drone. Phyrexian drones are hulking, barely sentient specimens most often used as raw materials for higher Phyrexian life forms. They display overt and immediate hostility to outsiders—including other Phyrexians—and for practical purposes form a first line of defense between Gitaxian facilities and the rest of the system.

Skite. Judging the vedalken homunculi far too inefficient, Jin-Gitaxias engineered the skites to fulfill menial functions. Jar skites skitter from lab to lab, serum sloshing in their tanks awaiting consumption. Scalpel skites function as living implements, drawing their orders from various servitors and awaiting their summons. Roughly every inanimate tool has been co-opted by a skite of some form.

"It appears that they all seem to understand exactly what they are doing, even though there is little communication vocally. Only the occasional grunting and clicking of their disturbing language can be heard between the monsters, but mostly they move about in an eerie silence within Lumengrid. I wonder if it is the accursed oil coursing through them all that commands them?"

—Kara Vrist, Neurok Agent

Sectives

"Listen, how the Engine throbs with the glorious work of the sectives."

In order to process the Mirran population expediently and thoroughly, Jin-Gitaxias has organized his laboratories into "sectives," reminiscent of the vedalken sanctives. Each sective has a specific function and directive under the auspices of a subpraetor.

Malcator, Executor of Synthesis

He is the head of the executors of the Great Synthesis. He is in charge of determining what is deemed abomination and what is deemed ideal as per the scientific edicts and illumined scriptures of Jin-Gitaxias. The executors are interpreters of Scripture and executors of his will. They oversee all flesh created by the other sectives and make certain it adheres to the Gitaxian Standards of Purity.

Sarnvax, Gitaxian Sective

Oversees the sective of stitchers, splicers, and excisors who work in the creation of Uulbrek's horrors, compleated Mirrans and an assortment of other imaginings. His lab is a cross between a surgical theatre, an assembly line, and a slaughterhouse.

Uulbrek, Gitaxian Sective

Uulbrek's duties lie in xenomorphology and "compleation." The members of his sective envision and experiment to find the perfect anatomy for a variety of horrors. Uulbrek and his technicians dwell in a laboratory in which revolting etchings and schematics lie alongside metal tables and corpses.

Avaricta, Gitaxian Sective

Avaricta oversees and directs her virologists and biomancers in charge of perfecting phyretic infection and its virulence. They are also exploring new methods of proliferation throughout Mirrodin. Her latest creations are the crawl-needles, small, biting insectoids that have been released into the surrounding area by the thousands. They provide a formidable phyresis delivery system to any Mirran who roams within their territory. Her laboratories are located in one of the large spires close to Lumengrid. Pipes of failed, infected corpse matter and mycosludge run from her lab out to Quicksilver Sea to be disposed of.

Completed Mirran Creatures

"How quickly their shrieks of pain turn to enraptured adulation."

Glisteners. In the midst of the war between the Mirrans and Phyrexians, most Mirrans fought valiantly against the Phyrexian onslaught. A small few, however, submitted to the Phyrexians willingly, either resigning themselves to the inevitability of their fate, or perceiving in phyresis new opportunities for power, knowledge, and eternal life. Some of these individuals came to be called glisteners.

Vedalken. Vedalken have been compleated into skeletal husks, their distended brains looming over frail, but lethal and burr-pocked, bodies. In New Phyrexia, many vedalken have evolved into vehicles for intellect entirely, their brains literally brimming with knowledge. Phyrexian scientist-surgeons carry these new vedalken around by the spine, hanging them over their experiments to observe and opine. Other vedalken conduct lesser experiments in service to their masters, reporting results up the chain of command. Still others are frequently employed as envoys to Elesh Norn's temples, and as de facto diplomats when different factions decide to communicate openly with one another.

"Only now do I realize our grave error in logic. Such short-sighted and self-absorbed entities we were, squabbling among each other for scraps, while beneath our feet, the end of our world was breeding and festering like a fatal contagion. So small were our disagreements and so petty our wars. Now I see they only served to divide and weaken us. We could not work together. Now we suffer the consequences."

—Nunic, vedalken certarch

Neurok. While Phyrexia quickly recognized the potential value of vedalken intelligence, the Neurok were quickly dismissed as far less useful. Most were drained of their serum and tossed into the oil-choked seas to be recompiled into raw materials. Many that remained were folded into the Phyrexian rank-and-file. Some effectively serve as laboratory assistants, ferrying implements and bodies through the twisted tunnels of Lumengrid's labyrinthine halls. A select few are chosen to donate their bodies to new forms of Phyrexian life. A host's head is removed but its life and consciousness are preserved. Then the host is "infected" by the new life form, which uses its body to feed and propagate itself. After the infection has run its course, the new organism's consciousness takes control of the body and the transformation is complete.

Sphinxes. With the Phyrexian ascendancy, capturing the plane's elusive sphinxes became a top priority. Researchers were eager to dissect them to get a glimpse into their mystical physiology, and they hungered for the knowledge that every one of the beings seemed to harbor. Some researchers believed that unearthing sphinxes' inherent connection to magic could offer them insight into the very nature of the plane.

Disciplines within the Engine

“See? We are like the many nerve fibers that converge here into this single brain.”

Jin-Gitaxias is not monolithic in his goals, tactics, ideologies, or aims. Multifarious disciplines exist under the broad heading of “research,” and different factions within the same discipline carry out their experiments via different means.

Carnitors. Phyrexia views every non-Phyrexian thing in the Multiverse as a resource to be consumed in order to fuel the continued spread of phyresis. The carnitors study the most effective means of harvesting these resources. Because other living organisms frequently resist phyresis, the carnitors devote a tremendous amount of time to figuring out how to kill efficiently so that the rest of Phyrexia’s work can continue unimpeded. The most gruesome battle-scythes, plague engines, torture implements, carapaces, and the newest evolutions of the glistening oil itself are all products of the carnitors.

Metatects. These workers study the nature of the æther itself, but they also conduct research into the mechanics of mana, summoning, and spellcasting. Prrackx was one of the higher-ranking metatect pontiffs. Another high-ranking metatect, Vrig, unearthed remnants of Memnarch’s soul-traps and is driven to reverse-engineer them.

Locations of the Progress Engine

“This world is merely a foothold for our expanding spheres.”

Panopticon. Resting at the heart of Mirrodin’s core are the ruins of Memnarch’s former command center, Panopticon. Here, Karn sits confused and delirious atop a throne designed to grant him access to the whole of New Phyrexia’s combined thoughts, mana, and power—and his inability to process the flow of information through him only furthers his delirium. Unbeknownst to Karn, however—as well as to Elesh Norn’s Phyrexian priests who oversee his sanctuary—this flow of information is not one-way. The overseers of Lumengrid have altered the throne itself so that they can monitor the inflow of information to Karn.

The Dome of Synthesis. A massive, corroded chromium dome sits within the oil slick that was once the Quicksilver Sea. These are the meditation chambers and meeting halls of Jin-Gitaxias and the subpraetors. The Dome is located a good distance from Lumengrid, and most visitors are ferried here by giant spider-walkers that carry their passengers on thin, chrome legs that rise up hundreds of feet above the sea’s surface.

Fathom Ward. In the deepest area of the Quicksilver Sea is an “underwater” facility known as the Fathom Ward where highly dangerous creatures are worked on: leviathans, sea serpents, and other monstrosities. Rumors abound about the experiments that go on here, supposedly splicing various creatures together to make a “super-weapon” to eradicate all who oppose the Great Synthesis.

The Sixth Spire. The Sixth Spire is a massive, corroded spire near Lumengrid where Avaricta works on perfecting and spreading the glistening oil and studying the effects, symptoms, and types of phyresis.

Servitor Warehouses. Many of the servitors—usually compleated Neurok—are kept in installations around the shores of the Quicksilver Sea. More often than not, these were Neurok villages that have now been transformed into Phyrexian facilities.

Notable Phyrexians

“Only the finest may lead the Engine.”

Politus, Gitaxian morphologist. During the assimilation of Lumengrid, Politus was captured and compleated. He then became integral in developing Lumengrid into the multi-tiered facility that it is

in New Phyrexia, while processing the rest of the vedalken and Neurok populations as a high-ranking member of Uulbrek's sective.

Unctus the Freed. Occasionally a particularly promising compleated Mirran specimen rises through the ranks into a position of true power. Unctus gave himself over to Phyrexia in the earliest stages of the invasion and ascended through the ranks of the subpraetors at an unprecedented rate, largely due to the numerous experiments he conducted upon himself. Transformed almost beyond recognition, with a brain-cavity spanning several feet, a body composed entirely of chrome and glass, and four long appendages bristling with instruments, he now directs all Phyrexian research into native Mirran organisms. He views himself as a hero, one of the true saviors of Mirrodin.

Sheudra. Sheudra is a surgeon who has been saving the choicest offal from her compleations to build a construct of her own sinister design. She is also the most outspoken against the Machine Orthodoxy and the fact that Elesh Norn and her theocracy weaken the primacy of the Great Synthesis.

Threx. Known to some Mirrans as "The Chromium Butcher," he has been known to be one of the only surgeons to wander from the walls of Lumengrid to personally harvest Mirrans from the surface and process them all the way through completion. He has been modified into a multipurpose tool of the Progress Engine.

Grgur and the Meldweb. Phyrexian "scientists" are driven by two goals: the perfection of phyresis and the drive to extend Phyrexia to every corner of the plane. Whereas the Knowledge Pool holds the collective result of all experimentation, it offers nothing in the way of processing power. A subpraetor named Grgur devised the Meldweb to remedy this problem. He robbed swaths of compleated vedalken of their bodies, stripped them of their will, and bound them together into a network that could harness the raw computing power of several hundred vedalken brains. His ultimate goal is to link this network with the Knowledge Pool and exponentially accelerate the pace of Phyrexian research.

Prrackx and the Argent Sphinx. The elusive creature known as the Argent Sphinx was so rare on Mirrodin that most Mirrans believed it a myth. It was said to disappear into the æther the second a creature caught a glimpse of it. A Phyrexian pontiff named Prrackx became obsessed with trapping the sphinx, reasoning that if the goal of compleation was to realize the maximum life form, and there existed another life form that compleated organisms could not conquer, then phyresis was itself fundamentally flawed. Cast out by his fellow Phyrexians and branded a heretic by Norn's priesthood, Prrackx became obsessed with the Argent Sphinx. Eventually he devised a trap for it and succeeded in freezing its connection between realities. Returning triumphant to Lumengrid with his prize—the sphinx in a cage appearing continually to flicker in and out of existence—Prrackx eventually transposed its essence into himself, and is now spoken about in the same reverent tones as the Sphinx he enslaved.

"It makes vocal vibrations while hyper-stimulating its nerve pathways, making its skeleto-muscular structures move about with no purpose. Perhaps it is not capable of comprehending the bonds which secure it so tightly, in which case the perceptual centers must be re-organized so that it is capable of understanding such factual input. Proceed with compleation starting with the eyes."

—Excerpt from a surgical transcription

"Puzzling. Their world has fallen and still they resist."

Setting aside their differences and traditional prejudices, the scant remaining vedalken and Neurok have bonded together for survival.

Kara Vrist. Desperate times breed desperate measures, and Kara Vrist is the master of the desperate measure. Trained as a spy, Kara Vrist is the only one who has seen the inside of Lumengrid and has lived to tell about it. She delivers intelligence to the healer Melira and her allies in the Furnace Layer.

Vy Covalt. Vy Covalt continued to elude the Phyrexians even after the taking of Lumengrid and the mass slaughter of hundreds of vedalken and Neurok. He shepherded many Mirrans through dangerous fields of Phyrexian death machines to relative safety in the Furnace Layer before being caught and dissected by Threx himself.

The Steel Thanes

This section describes the Seven Steel Thanes, the faction associated with black mana.

“Only those who possess the zeal to seize power from their lessers are worthy to wield the full might of Phyrexia.”

—Sheoldred, Whispering One

Since the beginning, Phyrexia arose from the fetid swamps and murky bogs, and they have played a part in defining the Phyrexian identity. But with the rise of New Phyrexia, its system has had to adapt to the availability—even abundance—of all manner of terrain, from mountain crags to expanses of razorglass covering the Glimmervoid. The swamp-dwelling Phyrexians of the plane have little reason to view this as a threat. They possess only a vague understanding of the past. Dim recollections of the old ways have been passed down to them through impressions in the glistening oil.

The rise of New Phyrexia began at Ish-Sah, the epicenter of the Mephidross. Many creatures native to the Mephidross were already Phyrexians, perhaps even during Memnarch’s day. Farther afield, the nim and Moriok serve as a foothold for Phyrexian corruption.

“How I escaped I don’t know. Perhaps they let me, but I find that hard to believe. There are so many of them, too many to count, pouring out of Ish Sah. I covered myself in the discarded carcass of some unlucky loxodon and snuck out of the lacuna mixed in with hordes of Phyrexians on their way to war, choking on my own bile. Their leaders are cunning and devious and their warriors are brutish and mindless. We don’t stand a chance.”

—Reconnaissance report from Mafa, leonin stalker

The Seven Steel Thanes

The seven thanes undeniably stand as the most powerful influences over the Phyrexian faction associated with black mana. Having claimed power during the war with the plane’s inhabitants, the thanes have managed to carve out territories around the expanding edges of the Mephidross and also in the burgeoning underworld of New Phyrexia’s core. Only one remains doggedly at the center of the Mephidross: Geth, the Gatekeeper, straddles the lacuna tunnel between the shadows of the surface and the darkness within.

“The feeble resistance of the flesh is all but over. Phyrexia spreads its shadows over all that is. Only Phyrexians can survive in Phyrexia, and only one Phyrexian can be father of all—Father of Machines. Yet a usurper sits upon the throne: Karn. To the thanes, this man of dumb silver cannot be the real Father of Machines. To be Father of Machines, one must survive a birth in its heart and the deaths of many brethren. The path to leadership is paved with the backs or the bones of one’s lessers. Survival is the Phyrexian way, and if this Karn cannot live through the attempts on his crown, he should never have donned it.”

Each of the seven thanes knows these truths, though they do not speak them aloud. To give whisper to such thoughts would weaken a thane’s chances at bringing plans to fruition. Truth is always a weapon in your enemies’ hands. No thane has friends, and foes owe fealty to the thanes only until they have a weapon to twist against them.

Each thane wages a secret war of succession, understanding with absolute certainty that he/she/it is the true Father of Machines. All that matters is the thane’s eventual ascension. Plots are made, alliances

formed, deals brokered, and armies marshaled. Upon taking leadership of all, the glorious brilliance of the methods by which it claimed power will be transformed from horrid treachery to holy doctrine. Yet the thanes have not gained their places through rash action. Smiles hide the purpose of teeth. At the right moment, the time for polite audiences and alliances will be over.

“Geth. That little cur whose acid tongue licks the feet of all those foolish enough to be lured in by his sycophantic whimperings. I shall have his jabbering, Moriok head on a platter to dissect and consume, but for now his feckless ambition has its uses for me.”

—Sheoldred, Whispering One

Sheoldred, Whispering One

“To Know Is To Rule.”

Sheoldred, the thane that currently hold the tenuous position of Praetor, sits at the heart of a vast network of spies, scouts, blackmailers, and informers. Each face leads a different wing of her multi-layered organization: corruption, observation, distortion, extortion, obfuscation, and dissemination.

For Sheoldred, information is power. The ignorant fail without really knowing why, but with enough knowledge, you cannot fail because you accept no outcome that does not advance your goals. Without doubt, Sheoldred is one of the most knowledgeable and intelligent Phyrexians on the plane.

From her hidden seat within the planar core, Sheoldred schemes to gain control over all Phyrexia. Patient and cautious, she makes moves of layered subtlety. Using her knowledge to aid and hinder foes, Sheoldred keeps them constantly wondering if she is friend or foe.

Geth, Lord of the Vault

“Everyone Should Owe You Something.”

The undead head of the once-Moriok Geth protected the secret of the Phyrexian threat beneath the surface of the world, and for his complicity in their invasion he was rewarded with a new body. Since then he has steadfastly maintained his position at the Vault of Whispers, defeating challengers through a mix of might, wit, and guile. Geth’s most powerful weapon is the influence he can exert through brokering deals and alliances, both for himself and others. Using eldritch contracts, he forces others to abide by terms or become his slaves.

Geth’s main frustration is that his position on the surface hems him into the center of the Mephidross, forcing Geth to face the other ambitious thanes on all sides.

Azax-Azog, the Demon Thane

“Inspire Fear in All.”

The thane Azax-Azog is a demon of terrible physical power and heinously depraved intellect. Of all the thanes, he retains his power most through cruelty and fear. Through brute power and the actions of his terrified followers, Azax-Azog has carved out a realm that extends from the Mephidross into much of the Oxidda Chain. Azog’s minions constantly battle Urabrask’s Phyrexianized monstrosities that now reside in the mountains, often press-ganging them into his armies or enslaving beasts to fight for him.

Azax-Azog knows that fear is the only real power in the world. A stronger opponent can be so weakened by fear that it simply accepts defeat and death. A weak warrior might tear through dozens of braver enemies when it fears them less than its leader. Azog’s realm inspires fear with every step. Azax-Azog acts always to make more fear him, for when their terror outweighs other thoughts, he will rule and prove he is the true Father of Machines.

"Look upon me and despair. I bring your doom upon my wings. I shall feast upon your corpses and from your bones I will make a magnificent throne that will rival Ish Sah. I will be the Father of Machines who will move the Great Work of Phyrexia forward upon this metal world and crush all who oppose me. Look deep into the pit that is my soul and know this to be true."

—Azax-Azog, the Demon Thane

Roxith, Thane of Rot

"The Machine Will Be Pure."

The thane of rot hates all flesh. Flesh is a sickness that infects Phyrexia and is the primary reason to destroy or compleat the repulsive creatures that Phyrexia found scrabbling about the exterior. Roxith himself has rid himself of visible flesh and bone, replacing it with tubes and metal structures and attaching what remains of his body to the chest of a great golem, as though crucified across its front. This golem obeys Roxith's screeched words as if they were its own thoughts, and is constantly followed by a pack of scavenging imps that hope to feed upon any flesh Roxith cuts away from a Phyrexian.

Roxith believes in the purity of Phyrexia, and believes that flesh represents an enemy to that purity. It is his desire that all such unclean elements of Phyrexia be expunged. Only then will Roxith deign to take the throne and claim his rightful place. Until the putrid parts of the world have rotted away, Thane Roxith allows others to think themselves leaders. Lords of lepers, dukes of disease, viceroys of vomit—Roxith will be Father of Machines, not the disgusting offal that others hug to themselves.

Kraynox, the Deep Thane

"Rebuild What Was."

Kraynox, a massive, many-limbed Phyrexian slick and dripping with oil, never emerged onto the surface for the war against Mirrodin's natives. Instead he built up his power among those within the world and began his great project to weave a new layer between the mycosynth pillars, between the completed Furnace Layer and the core of the world. He now lords over a web-work of platforms and dangling structures that slowly close together and spread like an umbrella between Mirrodin's core and the floor of the Furnace. Kraynox's domain is a shadowed world saturated with oil. Sluices and living vessels lift black liquid up among the hanging buildings and a webwork of aqueducts and pipes carry it around where it is needed. Inevitably, it drips down into pools and marshes on the ground where collectors work to suck it back up again.

"Let them vie for power and carve each other up for a seat closer to the Father of Machines. I will watch them and laugh as their greed and ambition overpowers their patience and will. They will fall, one by one, and then I will rise and claim my power. My roots run deep into the oil, and I have learned much from it."

—Kraynox, Deep Thane

Vraan, Thane of Blood

"Death to All Enemies."

Thane Vraan survived the war with Mirrodin's natives as a compleated vampire. Although not a true Phyrexian from the core, he managed to prove quite useful to the Phyrexians as an assassin and a leader of assassins. Once a leader among the Bleak Coven, Vraan managed to roughly approximate that mercenary organization among the new Phyrexian order. As the Phyrexians gained control, he also offered his services and those of his followers as an executioner. Now open and secret members of the Bleak Coven can be found all over the world, working as assassins and executioners for many different Phyrexian leaders.

Vraan sees the path to the throne of the Father of Machines littered with the bodies of his enemies. Through spies, assassinations, and weakening others by their sacrifices for his agent's services, Vraan hopes to gradually eliminate all power sufficient to oppose him.

Thrissik, the Writing Thane

"Destroy Everything and Rebuild."

Phyrexia exists to spread and gain control, but what should it do when there is nothing left to take? Thrissik knows. It must give birth to its destroyer. That destroyer must then take control of Phyrexia, and from it must a new destroyer be born. The cycle must continue because Phyrexia must always be improved and strengthened. With each resurrection from its own ashes, Phyrexia will be stronger than before. Thrissik seeks the Destroyer and wants to place himself as the Father of Machines because he believes he will recognize the Destroyer when it arises. He hopes that he is the Destroyer that will bring about Phyrexia's rebirth, but either way, a new Destroyer must eventually rise.

Vile Feudalism

Creatures under the thanes exist in two broad social strata. In the lower strata are the savage nim, bestial creatures, compleated Mirrans, and mercenary undead. Pure Phyrexians of intelligence and the most resourceful of the compleated Phyrexians form a higher caste.

The relationship is not unlike some feudal societies, with the lower caste as the serfs and conscripts in armies, while the higher caste serves as the nobility in the courts and the knights and officers of the thanes' armies. Yet this structure takes a uniquely Phyrexian form.

For example, a thane might express a strange civility in welcoming the emissary of another thane, speaking cordially with the messenger while the emissary's bodyguards are flayed alive. The herald of an important Phyrexian lord might announce the arrival of its patron by cutting his name into its own skin. Such displays aren't custom among the feudal Phyrexians; instead, each thane or petty warlord acts within the bounds of its own brand of courtesy—until the sham is no longer useful.

"Was that me laughing just now? Oh my, what you must think. I was about to find out what you have in that tiny, little brain of yours with my big, shiny hook here and I couldn't contain myself. You must feel that I am not appreciating the full gravity of your situation, but I can assure you that I take my work quite seriously."

—Geth, Lord of the Vault

Native Phyrexians

Obliterators. These massive horrors are the next generation of Phyrexian Negators. In the endless pursuit of perfection, the Phyrexian splicers and stitchers have created their latest lethal masterwork.

Ripper Scarab. Swarms of these bladed and beetle-like creatures with infantile metal faces scurry around the realm of Thane Roxith. Many travel in his wake or those of his followers on the battlefield, scraping flesh from the fallen (or simply the weak) and mincing it with their tiny jaws. Ripper scarabs then expel a dark red pulp that rots.

Vault Skirge. These are created by Geth and his cohorts to bring back vital flesh and fluids to Ish Sah for use in creating his Phyrexian monstrosities. They fly in and attach themselves to their prey with a powerful claw, they then either bite a chunk of flesh off or suck a victim's blood before flying off to their master, delivering their stolen payload.

Wrack Imp. These Phyrexian imps flit or caper about with fear-masks screwed over their normal faces. They are often servants of Azax-Azog, and their appearance always heralds some dire or frightful event. They inspire terror just by screaming past overhead or gibbering underfoot.

Exarchs. They are the elite of Sheoldred's forces devoted to repurposing the dead for use. They are also responsible for seeking out information and then destroying all evidence or source of it, making certain that only Sheoldred knows.

Ichor Worm. These massive worms slide through the gel of the glistening dunes and the waters of the Darkslick like sea serpents.

Compleated Mirrans

Nim. The nim are much as they were. They act as roving killers unless marshaled into a fighting force by more powerful Phyrexian lords. The thanes and other Phyrexians often modify nim to better suit their purposes, such as by replacing arms with blades or legs with stilts.

Moriok. The Moriok that survived were compleated to be self-sacrificing executioners. Their eyes being deemed useless, they were rendered blind. Now they sense movement and objects around them through a permanent out-of-body experience, puppeting their own actions and watching themselves as if in a dream.

"We were already the predators of this plane long before the arrival of the Father of Machines. I know this world and its scurrying rabble more than even Gitaxias and his feeble minions, and it is I who will take the throne. I have eyes in the dark and my reach extends from the Father's throne into Norn's precious cathedral. Soon, I will drink all their lives and consume their power. Phyrexia will know a new Father of Machines."

—Vraan, Thane of Blood

Artifacts, Items, and Locations

Contract of Geth. Contracts created by Geth bind their signers not by word but by will. Those who break a contract of Geth fall utterly into his power. This has made the dangerous contracts a standard for compacts between distrusting parties. Thane Geth sends these eldritch metal tablets all over the world in the hands of parading guarded retinues, ensuring the secrecy of the signers.

Kraynox's Orrery. This object represents the most detailed conglomeration of Kraynox's theories of what Phyrexia should look like. Nine half-spheres nested within each other whirl about on a central axis, each pierced by holes marking the paths of various lacunae. Around this structure spin the five suns of New Phyrexia. It's said that Kraynox can use the orrery to divine the future as well as recall his visions of what he believes to be the "past."

Crypt of Keepsakes. Vraan and his servants often claim the heads of their victims as proof of death or as trophies, but many of them actually end up in the hidden Crypt of Keepsakes. There the heads are shelved in a library of ghosts. Vraan or his compleated Moriok spirit-talkers use soul siphons to suck the souls of the victims out of their heads and place them into vessels—victims strapped down for the purpose of being possessed, then tortured for information.

The Wailing Cairns. Throughout Azax-Azog's realm and in any place he conquers, he has his followers build weeping cairns. These tall spires are piles of the skulls of victims that weep quicksilver tears and emit a cacophonous mix of whispers, cackling laughter, screeches, and moans.

Astral Coffers. These irregular polygons contain the thoughts of Sheoldred. To open them, a different secret word must be whispered to each side, and they must be spoken in the correct order by turning the shape in the proper direction each time. When properly opened, an astral coffer transports the opener to an astral space where no others can hear the thoughts of Sheoldred. Improperly opening an astral coffer can result in being told a lie or in meeting something other than Sheoldred's thoughts in that astral space. Many who improperly open an astral coffer simply never return.

The Quite Furnace

This section describes the Quiet Furnace, the Phyrexian faction associated with red mana.

“What is our purpose? To reforge. Nothing more.”

—Urabrask the Hidden

The vast majority of red-aligned Phyrexians dwell in the so-called Furnace Layer, a relatively new, interstitial layer between Mirrodin’s outer surface and inner core. This layer’s creation was one of the first steps in transforming Mirrodin into New Phyrexia, built from the ancestral memory embedded in the glistening oil.

Effect of the Red Sun

In its original incarnation, Phyrexia had access only to black mana. It did encompass concepts beyond those central to black mana, such as hierarchy and flame, but without access to the vital red mana behind those concepts, its core ethos was unified and unchallenged. Access to all five of Mirrodin’s mana-rich suns has led to diversification and disunity, damaging the Phyrexian singularity of purpose. Of all the energies Mirrodin introduced to the Phyrexian ethos, the mana from the red sun has been most challenging, because it’s the force that lies behind the concepts of individualism, compassion, emotion, and freedom.

The mana from the red sun gave rise to Phyrexians who had just a glimmer of concern for other lifeforms—not full-blown compassion, but enough empathy to cause hesitation, a phenomenon more or less alien to Phyrexia. Beings of varying levels of sentience reacted to this impulse differently. Among nonsentient creatures, this primitive empathy simply caused moments of confusion before action, but fully sentient Phyrexians found themselves deeply conflicted and even ashamed of their concern for others. Make no mistake—Phyrexia, even when influenced by the red sun, is still a brutal and horrific system. Most Furnace Layer denizens do what they were created to do: tend the molten slag and turn the scraps of Mirrodin into the hellish landscape of New Phyrexia. But the influence of red mana has caused this part of New Phyrexia not to fall in lockstep with the other factions.

“The fiend had me in its grasp, and I could feel the heat of the furnaces. I was resigned to meet my death, but then something strange happened. It paused for a moment and then unclasped its pincers, releasing me. I slumped to the ground, exhausted, too wounded to run. It regarded me for a time, and although it had no features familiar to our world, I felt as if it was confused. Then it turned and left me there. I’ll never understand why.”

—Kardem of the Spear

The Safety of Industry

Faced with impulses and hesitations they didn’t know how to cope with, the Phyrexians of the Furnace Layer cleaved tightly to their function: to keep the fires of the furnaces burning, to incinerate dead and failed organisms, to reprocess the metals of former Mirrans, and to turn those metals into the raw materials for new Phyrexians and new nested layers of the plane. This adherence to labor afforded the conflicted Phyrexians a measure of resolve in the face of their sublimated dissent against the broader Phyrexian disregard for individual beings.

For the least sentient of them, apathy toward other beings became the norm. For the most sentient, industry became a means of demonstrating to other Phyrexians that they were part of the system, that they were functioning correctly, that they had a use, despite their secret doubts.

Then the Mirrans came.

A Secondary Invasion

The furnace denizens cooperated with the Phyrexian invasion of Mirrodin's surface world; they aided exactly as much as asked and no more. When the Mirrans on the surface found themselves outnumbered and outgunned, a few did the only thing they could do to survive: they retreated into the lacunae, especially through Kuldotha and Taj-Nar, but also at Lumengrid and the Araneas Altar. Only Ish-Sah was blocked off completely to Mirrans.

"Their forces are unknown to us. The Moriok or the nim that emerge from the necrogen bogs—those we understand. These horrors which pour out of the canyons use weapons, tactics and magic that are alien to even our most capable generals and seasoned warriors. Our armies are scattered. We have no choice but to hide and survive."

—Jor Kadeen, the Prevailer

In the initial days of the appearance of Mirrans at the lacunae, the furnace Phyrexians killed and incinerated them. But as the days passed and more and more refugees appeared, a hesitation grew. The sentient beings appealed to their praetor, Urabrask, for guidance. Urabrask took days to reply. When he did, his three-word decree stunned the others: "Let them be." But none dared challenge his decision, and most tacitly agreed, although their subordinate nature prevented them from voicing that agreement.

Urabrask the Hidden

Urabrask is called "the Hidden" because he seeks no audience with other Phyrexian leaders or with Karn. He will cooperate when his presence is requested or demanded but speaks as little as possible. His responses to questions about the Furnace Layer operations are detailed and thorough, but he never elaborates or speculates. Urabrask is quick to anger, and his might and temper deter others from prodding.

Neither Sheoldred, the other thanes, nor Vorinclex give Urabrask much thought—or the Furnace Layer generally, for that matter. Elesh Norn and her orthodoxy see Urabrask as nothing more than a glorified factory boss, serving the Great Work in toil and fire. Only a couple of key researchers under Jin-Gitaxias suspect that Urabrask has any other agenda beyond tending the furnaces, and this suspicion is still formless and hasn't yet prompted any action.

Urabrask himself lacks a grand plan; foresight is not his strong suit. For now he has commanded the furnace legions to turn a blind eye to the Mirrans among them. But more Mirran refugees arrive every day, and as they do, his status inches from neglect to betrayal of Phyrexia. To buy some time, Urabrask has made only one thing clear to the other factions of Phyrexia: No others are to enter the Furnace Layer, lest the metal be made impure, the Great Work disturbed, the grand system interrupted. For now, the rest of Phyrexia respects his territory and heeds his command.

"Destruction purifies. The furnaces cleanse. Words can always be twisted, but the fire cannot."

—Urabrask the Hidden

Mirran Sanctuary

The Mirrans had a choice on the surface: Flee into the hearts of the capitols and down into the lacunae, or die screaming. The first of them that entered the lacunae fully expected to die and were instead awestruck and terrified to see the hellish landscape that had developed under their feet. Many were killed by Phyrexians that saw them as a threat to their forges, an impurity to be cremated. In the initial days, scores of Mirrans were killed as they tried to enter the Furnace Layer.

But after Urabrask's decree, things abruptly changed, and from the Mirran point of view, the sudden change in behavior was bewildering and inexplicable. The furnace dregs simply passed by the Mirrans

as though they weren't there. The towering virons wouldn't change their paths to avoid Mirrans or their makeshift shelters, but they wouldn't they change their paths to crush them, either. It seemed as though the Furnace Layer suddenly found the Mirrans invisible.

Slowly at first, the Mirrans set up camp amid the furnaces and Phyrexians. They were then joined by more refugees, and more. Through trial and error they learned quickly to settle near but not too near the lacunae, and away from the largest furnaces. They also learned to keep their encampments small—settlements too large for the Phyrexians to ignore were destroyed.

"We blindly stumbled into the crevasse and hauled our wounded far into the dark interior of the mountain. We did not care where we were going, only that we were fleeing a horrific death and the echoes of our comrades' screams. After what seemed an age, we arrived here, this giant hollow space filled with lakes of fire. It's not home—home is gone. But for the moment, we are safe."

—Sakasha, Leonin sunspear

Phyrexian Roles in the Furnace Layer

Because industry is the primary purpose in the Furnace Layer, Phyrexians there have been adapted from their prototypical forms to more specialized functions.

Ogre menials are compleated ogres who have found new purpose in gathering scrap and ore from both the surface and the core and bringing it to the furnace. They are stupid, violent and dangerous. Urabrask favors them because they rarely speak, never question orders, and are quite willing to smash anything that gets in the way of their task.

Furnace dregs are perpetually half-molten humanoids responsible for taking the scrap, ore, and other materials from the ogre menials and loading it into a variety of furnaces and smelters. In a pinch they also protect the raw materials from interlopers. As a last-ditch effort, a furnace dreg can detonate itself, sending out a semi-directed spray of molten metal.

Squealstokes, a kind of compleated goblin, have gleefully seized the task of stoking the furnace fires both at Kuldotha and within the furnace layer. They frantically race about, building spiny contraptions to fan the flames. They sometimes fuel the furnace with a little too much zeal, occasionally throwing each other into the furnaces, or anything else that happens to be lying or scurrying around. If their efforts fall short, they will throw themselves into the furnace, achieving the dual purpose of feeding the fires and avoiding more painful punishment at the hands of their overlords.

Ingot slaves are the native Phyrexian humanoids, hooded, leather-clad, and mostly faceless, who cast and extrude the metal from the furnaces. They vary somewhat in size and shape, but all speak minimally, and when they do speak, the sound is a guttural scratching that only other ingot slaves can understand. The ingot slaves have recently been curious about Mirran humanoids, particularly Vulshok, who they furtively observe while working when possible.

Slag harvesters are large, brutish creatures that gather up the dead for reprocessing. They begin the smelting process on their way back to the furnace dregs by eating most of what they find. The flesh is digested and the metal sits in the gut. It's later regurgitated for the furnace dregs, who load it into the furnaces. Slag harvesters also escort the largest living furnaces through the Furnace Layer, clearing debris that would pollute the resulting metal from their efforts. They're also quite capable of combat, although not quite as quick to anger as the ogre menials.

Virons, the towering, spindly creatures that wander the Furnace Layer, struck abject terror in the hearts of the Mirrans who first encountered them. In reality, although these creatures are many stories high, they are not among the deadliest threats in the Phyrexianized mountains. The most dangerous aspect of the virons, beyond getting crushed underfoot, is the tendency of mana-storms to gather

around their upper bodies. These creatures' purpose is to keep the floor and ceiling of the Furnace Layer richly charged with mana, and they do so by creating a kind of "mana microclimate" around them. These pseudo-electrical storms discharge into their bodies and the charge then flows upward and downward into the metal of the layer.

Kuldotha

The Great Furnace on Mirrodin's surface is now fully Phyrexian. It serves both as the main access point for Urabrask's Phyrexians to reach the surface and as the main conduit of molten iron from the surface to the Furnace Layer below. As expected, squealstokes run amok here, and the whole structure is filled with vaporized oil and smoke at all times.

The unexpected development at Kuldotha is that the structure itself has begun to demonstrate biological traits, likely as a result of the Spore bound up in the metal it melts down. It already had a sort of digestive system, and as time passes it seems to have moods and tempers as well. Too many impurities sicken it, and a steady supply of rich, pure ore and metal keep it quiet. How this quasi-alive state will evolve is anyone's guess.

Phyrexians in the Oxidda Chain

Although the denizens of the Furnace Layer are specialized in purpose, they are not the only mountain-dwelling Phyrexians on the plane. Urabrask has encouraged the development of a wide variety of predators and territorial constructs to prowl the Oxidda Mountains. These creatures are morphologically divergent from the Phyrexians in the furnaces; they vaguely ape the forms of Mirran life before the taking of the surface. This deployment of monstrous, animalistic creations around Oxidda is no folly for Urabrask—these creatures kill indiscriminately but don't kill each other. In other words, they serve as intrusion countermeasures. They protect Kuldotha from Phyrexians of other factions and enable the furnace-dwellers to come and go as they please between the surface and Furnace Layer. The free-roaming creatures meet with the approval of Vorinclex, who sees them as an adaptation of his own methods.

The number of survivors scraping out an existence in the Furnace Layer is small, and the number of those who remain uninfected by Phyrexian corruption is even smaller. Those in the middle to late stages of infection will likely die, but are cared for by those less sick in the meantime. Those in the earliest stages of infection live in hope that they will join the ranks of the Incorruptible before it's too late.

The Incorruptible

The last hope for Mirrodin is a small group of individuals who have become immune to the effects of phytosis. Some of this group are Auriok and Vulshok humans. Others are leonin and goblins, and the rest are a broad assortment of lost Mirrodin's other humanoid: elves, Sylvok, Neurok, vedalken, loxodon, and even several Moriok. With no other choice, these refugees have become resistance fighters. They eke out a life in small encampments close (but not too close) to the lacunae, where they can make forays to the surface to search for food and additional survivors. Their immunity stems from a single woman on whose life the future of Mirrodin may depend: the healer Melira.

"Why I am different I do not know, but if I can save a single life from being corrupted by the oil, I will gladly do it. My life belongs to the people of Mirrodin."

—Melira

Resistance Encampments

Slagmaw. This is the largest of the camps, situated near the Great Furnace. A place at this camp is coveted because it's thought to be the safest because it's the most distant from the other lacunae (through which Phyrexians pass regularly). It gets its grim name from the fact that it is situated inside a large, dead creature that was once a "living furnace"—a husk that the Phyrexians tellingly don't reprocess. Because of its substantial shelter from the surrounding environs, this camp is much better outfitted and protected than the others.

"As long as we remain on Mirrodin, there is a shred of hope that our world will one day return to its rightful occupants. Maybe these rotting tyrants will grow weary of one another and eat their own. These hopes may be foolish, but for now, we cling to whatever lies keep us going, and we work to ready the minds of the young ones for the future they face."

—Jor Kadeen, the Prevailer

Lowlight. Named by surviving leonin abunas, this encampment is as close as the resistance dare settle to the once-sacrosanct Cave of Light. The camp is shielded from the blistering heat by a cluster of enchantments that surround it like a shimmering bubble. Inside are simple lean-tos of scrap, skins, and geomantically raised crests of the floor's metal. The camp is occasionally beset by squealstokes looking for things to burn, and its residents have no choice but to let them take what they want, lest they draw reprisal. They make furtive journeys to the surface to replace what they've lost.

Seedling. The sylvok Melira described something to the others that Thrun had described to her: a young tree that grew skyward. She called it a seedling, and this camp was named after that concept, alien to Mirrans but representing a new beginning and a new natural world. Seated near the site of the Radix, this camp is dangerously close to a group of ingot slaves who are curious about the life that struggles to grow within the Furnace Layer.

The Vicious Swarm

This section describes the Vicious Swarm, the faction associated with green mana.

A native Phyrexian beast known as Vorinclex rules the Tangle, but since the war began, he cloistered himself in the ruins of Tel-Jilad. Surrounded by his advisors, he is rarely seen by anyone else. His closest advisor is Glissa, formerly a Viridian elf, who was compleated during the years that Phyrexia lurked in the core. Now, she has become the de facto ruler of the region.

Both Vorinclex's and Glissa's beliefs are in line with the fundamental ideology of Phyrexia: flesh is weak. All other lifeforms should be eliminated or subsumed into Phyrexia, the ultimate "species." But unlike other Phyrexians, they believe this should be accomplished through an accelerated natural selection—a monstrous simulation of the predator-prey cycle in which all prey are predators themselves.

Glissa's power developed during the years she refers to as "the Deadlock," when Phyrexia was confined to the inner core of the planet. During the Deadlock, there was much discussion among the Phyrexian hierarchy about how and when to proceed with the attack of the surface. At the time, the praetors were building up their forces for a full-scale assault in which all Mirrans would either be killed or converted in a short time.

Glissa was opposed to waiting until Phyrexia had the forces to wage a full-scale assault. She thought waiting was a sign of weakness. Instead, Glissa believed the Phyrexians should immediately move to the surface and begin converting and/or killing the Mirrans and changing them into full-scale Phyrexian predators. This was the way to advance the great work.

In the Deadlock years, Glissa whispered to her allies and followers: The Phyrexian hierarchy has stagnated. Its leadership is soft and weak. Building on other Phyrexians' discontent—and surviving several assassination attempts with the help of Vorinclex—she constructed a powerful faction through cunning and strength.

Even before Phyrexia's attack on the surface began, Glissa sent her enforcer-beasts on killing missions into the Tangle. They were among the first to set up nodes of control on the surface and by the time hordes of Phyrexians emerged from the core, the forest of Mirrodin was firmly under her control.

"The other praetors cower in the dark and mince words with their false king. Come, Vorinclex, let us split the ribcage of this pitiable world and unleash its fearsome heart."

—Glissa

Dominance Without Organization

Glissa's goal is to create a system where the strongest and deadliest will dominate. Her faction opposes anything that would prevent that from happening. There are few hierarchical orders in the Tangle. There are distinct roles and niches, but little in the way of an organized system of governance. Any attempts at a societal structure are ruthlessly eliminated by Glissa and her enforcer-beasts. Predatory instinct is the highest value, and there is no need for any ambition or sense of self. Domination of the strongest is all that matters in the Tangle now.

There is no single cult of personality in the Tangle. The green-aligned faction doesn't revere Yawgmoth's memory. They believe his defeat is a sign that he was not the true Father of Machines, and faith or reliance in a single leader was a bad idea. They also believe that the having a single focal point of leadership contributes to stagnation.

While Glissa keeps her contempt of the other praetors secret, she is vocal about her hatred of Geth and his "decrepit, slathering idiots." Glissa calls Geth "a decaying sack of flesh who sits idle on his mortal throne."

Glissa is aware of Karn, but during her completion, much of her former identity and memories were lost, including the knowledge that Karn is the creator of her world. Now she denies that he is the Father of Machines, and views the silver golem with scorn and ridicule.

Although Glissa is the de facto leader of the Tangle, she refuses to identify herself as such. Glissa believes that a predator's natural instincts are far superior to any intellectual capabilities. She creates sentient beasts only to aid in her mission, and she extols the state of "instinctual ignorance." Eventually, she intends for the Phyrexianized elves and Sylvok to rid themselves of sentience, forget language, and remove independent thought.

Glissa's believes in "natural evolution" and less controlled development. She thinks that the vat priests and other "architects" are meddling too much with adaptation and survival, taking the innate strength and power out of their designs. There is too much "nurturing," and not enough reliance on power and instinct.

"Consume, propagate, and let the strongest emerge as dominant."

—Glissa

During the Deadlock, Glissa was unhappy with the slow maturation of "life" within the vats. She and Vorinclex pioneered a method of escalated growth using an amalgamation of tendon, fat, and brain matter. In her "gardens," she created a fungus-flesh hybrid, which breathes, bleeds, and grows alarmingly fast. She named these flowering flesh creations "crotus blooms."

The crotus blooms were so effective that she pleased the Phyrexian hierarchy and earned their trust in her abilities. Over time, she warped the crotus blooms into crotus beasts, which become her enforcers. Most were mindless predators, but others had varying levels of intelligence and could obey her orders and enforce her will as necessary. Unaware of Glissa's clandestine movements in the Tangle, Phyrexian leadership decreed that the forest be under Vorinclex's rule and assigned Glissa to take care of the completion of Mirrans in the area.

The New Tangle

Although the appearance of the Tangle has been altered by the emergence of Phyrexia, the basic structures are the same. The forest is a dense area of towering "trees" made of copper and verdigris that resemble branches and vegetation. Metal vines stretch from tree to tree.

The lamina—the dark green, fleshy strands of vegetation-like fungus—have overtaken the floor of the Tangle, which is the area of the forest that has been altered the most. Some areas are now completely swamp-like, as if the Mephidross has spread beyond its borders. Everywhere else, the floor has become spongy and mossy as the lamina contaminates the metal ground and inches up the trees. The ground seeps a substance like yellowish pus, which emits a rotting stench like overripe fruit. Only the largest beasts can navigate the rotting floor of the Tangle. The rest of the forest's native creatures must adapt to living in and navigating the tree limbs.

After the initial surface assault was complete, much of the Phyrexian leadership dismissed the Tangle as an inconsequential wasteland compared to the rest of Mirrodin. They mistakenly believed the elves and Sylvok to be wholly converted, and the native Mirran beasts to be easy fodder for Phyrexia.

The Sylvok were indeed hit hardest by Phyrexia's emergence. They were ill-prepared, and many were betrayed by their vedalken cohorts. Over half were killed in the first wave following Glissa's arrival in the Tangle. Under Ezuri's leadership, however, many of the Viridian elves were able to hide and escape the Phyrexian onslaught. Now, they have established a small but potent resistance. The resistance fighters live in the treetops and a network of tunnels and garrisons they've carved inside the trees themselves.

In most of the Tangle, the upper reaches are mostly unaffected, although it's just a matter of time before everything is consumed. The exception to this is the Cambree Garden, which is located at the top of a massive tree near what was once Tel-Jilad. The Cambree Garden has become home base for Glissa and her minions. It is from here that she facilitates Phyrexia's great work by encouraging nature to run its course. The strongest will emerge as dominant, she insists. Natural selection will determine the shape of the new Phyrexia without the harness of stagnation and the cumbersome adulation of Yawgmoth's memory.

Under Glissa's leadership, the Tangle has become overrun with beasts. Some resemble former Mirran creatures, but many more are a strange amalgamation of organic bodies and Phyrexian metal, lamina, and harvested flesh. Both Glissa and Benzir, the puppet leader of the compleated Sylvok, are "accelerating" natural selection in their own ways, resulting in ever deadlier and ferocious creatures wandering both the floor and the canopy.

The strongest predators carve out a niche for themselves in the Tangle and battle with each other for supremacy. In typical Phyrexian fashion, the predatory urge remains even though the need for sustenance is gone. Predation is the goal in and of itself.

Stewards of the Tangle

Glissa and her enforcers view themselves as "stewards" of the forest. She sees herself as encouraging the forest's natural state, which is predation. If anything gets in the way of the instinct to kill, she

removes it by force. The way to further the Great Work is to continue to accelerate the “natural selection” process so that ever more powerful and deadly beings can emerge.

“The perfect Phyrexian predator does not evolve from experimentation. Jin Gitaxias will never find the right formula from one of his vats. We can facilitate predation, but any more interference will ruin the specimen.”

—Vorinclex, Voice of Hunger

Field Notes from the Steward of Tangle Section 34-2

- Remove brain matter from a creature and replace it with either a Phyrexian cortex or crotus-born brain that permits the body to function and kill but not actually think independently.
- Predators need to be able to move quietly to stalk their prey. Replace hooves with clawed paw-like structures.
- Camouflage helps predators hide and ambush prey. Grow varying hides for different terrains. Remove and affix hides with metal barbs and hooks as necessary.
- Predators need good hearing, eyesight, and smell. Because there is no need to masticate food, the structure of the mouth changes dramatically. Existing teeth are extracted and the lower jaw removed. Teeth can be attached to joints not made for chewing.
- One sense is greatly enhanced at the cost of others. Every Phyrexian predator has superlative hearing, or smell, or vision, but only one of these.
- Add tails made from spare vertebra to serve as a rudder when leaping among the Tangles’ trees.
- Bones are punctured and the marrow removed to reduce weight and improve agility. Skeletal structures are plated to compensate for the lack of solidity.

Benzir, Leader of the Phyrexian Sylvok

Many Sylvok died during Glissa’s initial occupation of the forest. The small group of humans who survived and became Phyrexians continue to follow Benzir, their former leader. Like Glissa, Benzir believes in the supremacy of predatory instinct, but he has pursued a different tactic to achieve that aim, independently of Glissa and the Phyrexian leadership.

A young man in his 20s, Benzir was the archdruid of the Sylvok before the Phyrexians invaded. Under Benzir’s leadership, the Sylvok became a veritable cult of animal worship in which animals were revered as near deities and vessels of the lost souls of their kin. Attempts were made to communicate with the spirits of the animals. In the aftermath of his completion, Benzir retained a much-altered version of this belief. His splinter group believes in the soul, which is practically heresy to the Phyrexian system. Benzir is adamant that animals, or what’s left of them, possess the collective consciousness of Phyrexia and will reveal how best to perfect the flawed design and achieve perfection.

Ezuri, Renegade Leader

After the Fifth Dawn, there was an initial period of confusion and terror among the elves. Their world had been irrevocably changed, their leaders had vanished, and the focal point of their civilization, Tel-Jilad, the Tree of Tales, had been called into question. As a result, the elves retreated inward, taking refuge in natural niches inside the massive trees of the Tangle. In their fear and confusion, they began to turn on each other, blaming others for their predicament as they waited for the next tragedy to befall them.

Then a leader emerged. A young elf named Ezuri began to unify the Viridians and direct them toward productive tasks. Before the Fifth Dawn, Ezuri was not a particularly distinguished warrior. But once he took command, he urged the elves to stop cowering in the cracks like vermin. He organized them and gave the Viridian elves new purpose.

His leadership proved crucial in the days after the Phyrexian assault began. While the Sylvok were almost entirely assimilated or wiped out, Ezuri was able to save many of his people and keep them hidden in their safe havens high in the treetops of the Tangle. Eventually, he organized them into a resistance movement and contacted other survivors across Mirrodin. Hope was dwindling, but Ezuri was one of the leaders who refused to let it die.

Melira, Sylvok Outcast

Melira is called “the Fleshling” because unlike everyone else on Mirrodin, she was born without any metal anatomy. She is unique in another way: she is immune to the Phyrexian contagion.

Melira was born a Sylvok, but she was abandoned in the Tangle as an infant for her so-called deformity—a fully organic body with no trace of metal. Alone in the Tangle, the baby would have died. But she was saved by an unlikely hero: the last troll living on Mirrodin.

The trolls that populated Mirrodin during the Fifth Dawn era had been brought to Mirrodin in Memnarch’s soul traps. Many died in the battle with the Kaldra warrior. Any that remained in the Tree of Tales soon disappeared with the dawning of the green sun. Most inhabitants of the Tangle assumed they were all dead even before the invasion. But there is one left: Thrun. Thrun lives like an ascetic in a tainted area of the Tangle. He’s tattooed his skin with the story of Glissa’s innocence and Memnarch’s treachery. He feels like a coward because he’s done nothing to spread the truth about what happened years ago. During the time he lived in hiding, Thrun discovered evidence of a possible Phyrexian threat, and because of his age and wisdom, he knew exactly what the Phyrexians could do to the world. But still he did nothing.

And then he discovered Melira, an outcast like himself. Thrun adopted her, instilling in the girl the knowledge of Mirrodin’s distant past, along with the skills she would need to survive its present day. Somehow, through an accident of nature, Melira was born immune to the effects of the Spore, the gas produced by the mycosynth that enables the metal anatomy of Mirrodin’s life. Eventually, Thrun recognized the extent of her unique ability. She was not only immune to the Spore. As the Phyrexian threat spread, and she was unaffected, he realized that she was also immune to phyresis. Melira just might be the key to saving all of Mirrodin.