## PRESENTING THE MYSTERY

*In the summer of 1985, five teenagers went missing from Deep Lake: Hutch Langley, Dieter Hoskins, Finn Carlson, Rachel Urieta, and Monique Jeffries.*

*Prior to their disappearance, the teens frequented the Galaxia Arcade, playing games from opening until close. One day they stopped, and when school started back up they were noticeably somber—even morose—all possessing a newfound obsession with death. The last picture taken of them before they vanished was featured in the school's yearbook; it showed the five teens sitting along the edge of the highway wearing t-shirts that had "The Styx Society" badly silkscreened on them.*

*To this day, no one knows what happened to them, and their families have long since left the desert behind in search of a fresh start.*

*Three years ago, the game discussion forum Vector Void exploded with activity over a thread titled "Does anyone remember* Xxaagreus*?" The original poster asked about an arcade game they vaguely remembered hearing of in the '80s, but had not been able to find anything about. Several users responded, each claiming to know details of this mysteriously niche game. Nothing was concrete, however, until a user called Sinkerly308 posted that* Xxaagreus *was developed by a company called Vertex Electronica, which closed in 1999. The user claimed to have interned there while the game was in development, though hadn't worked on it themself. Additionally, they said the game has "secret levels" that can only be accessed via "unusual methods," though they did not indicate what those methods are. When other users connected the location of Vertex Electronica's old office—Deep Lake, New Mexico—with stories of the Styx Society and their disappearance, an urban legend about a cursed arcade cabinet was born: you play the game, you disappear.*

**Direct the following to a Latchkey of your choice:** *You're still active on the Vector Void forum. Lately, a user named Ataphoi85 has been posting cryptic and hostile responses on any threads still discussing* Xxaagreus*. What harrowing message have you received from Ataphoi85 suggesting they aren't just some troll and may actually be a threat to your safety?*

*A* Xxaagreus *cabinet was found one week ago. Ephraim Goldman, the owner of the Galaxia Arcade, discovered it in a lot auction at the Me+My Self Storage facility on the outskirts of town. Immediately recognizing the popularity of its surrounding legend, he had it installed at the shop and advertised its existence on Vector Void. Enthusiasts have started traveling from all over the country to play it. What the hell, maybe you can see if it's worth the hype?*

**Keeper Note:** At a time of your choosing, Angelica Hoskins will approach the Latchkeys and ask them for help in finding a possible connection between Xxaagreus and her vanished brother, Dieter.

## QUESTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

**Question:** Who is Ataphoi85, and why are they doing this? (Complexity: 4)
**Opportunity:** Remove them as a Danger in this mystery by unmasking them, and then either convincing them to let this situation go, or otherwise neutralizing the threat they pose.

**Question:** How do you access *Xxaagreus's* secret levels? (Complexity: 2)
**Opportunity:** Unlock the new move, Press Start.

**Question:** What is the awful truth of the *Xxaagreus* disappearances? (Complexity: 6; locked until the Latchkeys complete the secret levels using Press Start)
**Opportunity:** Resolve the mystery by posting your findings online.

### Press Start

When you play a game of *Xxaagreus* in an attempt to beat a secret level, roll with Composure or Reason, your choice, minus the number of boxes marked below. On a hit, mark the first unmarked box below and collect that level's prize. On a 10+, you also find a Clue. On a miss, do not mark a box: you use up all your lives and take the Condition: Obsessed with Death. If you are already Obsessed with Death, turn a Key.

Once a secret level is beaten, it's beaten for any Latchkey who uses this move (in other words, the boxes below are shared by all Latchkeys and do not get unmarked).

- ☐ **The Descent:** Pastoral fields. A dark cave. Friendly NPCs. This level requires you to solve a series of simple adventure game puzzles to enter the underworld.
  **Paint the Screen:** *What do you see that makes you think the pixelated characters are in distress?*
  **Prize:** A new level appears on the select screen.
- ☐ **The River:** A black river with white pixel waves. Souls of the drowning damned, screaming in 8-bit tones. Just a buggy rip-off of *Frogger*. This level requires you to complete a navigational challenge to cross.
  **Paint the Screen:** *A pixelated object in the river makes you think of a deceased loved one? What is it?*
  **Prize:** You are visited by the specter of a deceased character in your dreams the next time you fall asleep. Describe them. You may ask them three questions; the Keeper will answer truthfully, though not necessarily completely.
- ☐ **The Garden:** Green hedge-rows and carnivorous plants. Half-birthed, shambling monsters. Bright red pomegranate collectibles. This level requires you to find a variety of hidden items and assemble a key to the palace.
  **Paint the Screen:** *Something in this level reminds you of Deep Lake. What is it?*
  **Prize:** An item you lost in your childhood miraculously turns up the next day. Describe how it is more disturbing than you remember and then add it to Your Corner of the House.
- ☐ **The Palace:** Pillared chambers. Masked courtiers. A shadowy king upon a blood-red throne. This level requires you to solve a complex rhythm game, all while avoiding the knives of the court.
  **Paint the Screen:** *Something about this level makes you think the game is aware of you. What is it?*
  **Prize:** The cabinet shows a prophecy of a fellow Latchkey's demise. In a future scene, when another Latchkey is getting ready to take an action that will require a die roll, you can warn them that *Xxaagreus* predicted their death if they take this action. If they go through with the action anyway, you both mark XP. On the die roll, the miss result is replaced with, "You are killed; the Keeper will describe how."

When all the boxes have been marked, the Latchkeys unlock the final level. When the players intend to use Press Start again, inform them that they do not need to make a roll. Instead, read the following:

- ☐ **dev/null:** *As you go to select the final level, the cabinet suddenly shuts off. After a moment of silence, the game comes back to life with the thrumming pulse of malevolent circuitry. The screen explodes into a multichromatic, glitchy strobe accompanied by shrill 8-bit tones. The* Xxaagreus *cabinet screams before shutting off. For good.*
  **Prize:** The locked Question is unlocked. Game Over.

## THE KEY OF THE PALACE

- ☐ Each Latchkey narrates a dream they once had of the Occluded King, sitting upon a blood-red throne, wearing a bramble crown, reigning over the realm of the dead.

## MOMENTS

- > For a moment, the world looks 8-bit.
- > The sound of ambient electricity: the hum of CRT monitors, the buzz of flickering fluorescents, the whir of a rusty desk fan.
- > A Side Character stares off in a deep, forlorn reverie.
- > The ground steadily vibrates for several minutes, as if stirred by underground movement or machinery.
- > You wake up in bed to a flash coming from outside your window. Someone just took your picture.
- > A nearby phone rings; an unknown caller. If answered, a kid's voice meekly says, "Don't play it." The line goes dead.

## XXAAGREUS

FOOLISH MORTAL, DARE YE FACE THE STYGIAN PERILS OF... XXAAGREUS!

*Xxaagreus* is an arcade game about a minor god attempting to escape the underworld. But that is not the *real* game. There exists an entirely different game hidden beneath the basic coding. In these secret levels, the player takes on the role of a featureless protagonist that descends into a Stygian nightmare for an unknown purpose. As the legend goes, those who play this hidden game become obsessed with death before ultimately disappearing. This is what the cabinet wants. It is wholly evil, but in an alien and otherworldly way. In reality, the game is actually playing you. And you don't start with many lives.

### *If the Latchkeys ignore the game...*

After two Night phases, Ataphoi85 murders Ephraim and steals *Xxaagreus* from the arcade. Read the following to the players at the end of the Night phase when this would trigger:

*Ephraim Goldman is closing up shop at the arcade, sweeping after-hours and shutting down the various games. After he walks into his office to count the day's earnings, the* Xxaagreus *cabinet inexplicably turns back on, pulsing audibly with a steady thrum. Investigating the noise, Ephraim returns to see the cabinet turn itself off, and walks over for a closer look. He raps on the monitor with a bony knuckle. Nothing. A figure steps behind him, hidden beneath dark clothes and a mask. When Ephraim turns around, they drive a switchblade into his heart. He collapses to the floor, gasping in horror, as dark blood pools around him. The figure steps over Ephraim to the cabinet, and stares deep into the reflective void of its dormant screen.*

Tell the Latchkeys that the Press Start move is no longer available, but they have access to a new Question:
**Question:** Where is Ataphoi85 hiding the *Xxaagreus* cabinet? (Complexity: 2)
**Opportunity:** Track it down and regain access to the cabinet and the Press Start move.

## *DANGERS*

### *Ataphoi85*

Black hoodie and baggy jeans. Uncanny cartoon bull mask. Modulated voice. Ataphoi85 is more than a troll on some internet forum; they are a real and present threat to the Latchkeys and anyone else who goes prying into the truth of Xxaagreus. Though they prefer to stalk the Latchkeys from afar and send threats, Ataphoi85 will utilize whatever weapons are best suited to the task if the situation calls for violence. Their identity and motivations for doing all this may be discovered during the course of play (see Questions).
**Quote:** *"You never should have gone looking."*

### The tunnels beneath Deep Lake

Against all logic and good sense, there is a network of utility tunnels beneath Deep Lake. Their existence suggests an apparent purpose—after all, why would there be steam tunnels if the town did not have use for them—but closer inspection reveals that the wiring, pipelines, and drainage do not connect to any works of public infrastructure in Deep Lake. They simply exist; an underworld labyrinth that connects the whole town in strange ways.
**Paint the Scene:** *The tunnels are covered with graffiti. Which image are you drawn to most? What about it frightens or amuses you?*
**Special Rule:** The first time a Latchkey finds a Clue in a Location from this mystery, they also find an entrance to the tunnels.

## *LOCATIONS*

### Galaxia Arcade

A line out the door. Pervasive smell of dust, old sweat, and cheap pizza. The stuttering grind of underperforming AC units.
**Paint the Scene:** *This was the place to be for any tween or teen in late 1980s Deep Lake. What is your favorite memory from the Galaxia Arcade, and what still persists into the present day that reminds you of it?*

### Me+My Self Storage

A dimly-lit labyrinth, prone to outages. Peeling, off-white paint and rusty roll-up doors. The occasional knocking of old pipes.
**Paint the Scene:** *As you walk down corridors filled with shuttered doors, what do you imagine to be stored behind them? How does it make you feel?*

### The offices of Vertex Electronica

Disconcertingly damp gray carpeting, dusted with asbestos. Black mold growing in the corners. A mess of leftover materials: desks with broken computers, piles of graph paper, and scattered notes.
**Paint the Scene:** *This office looks like it was never cleaned out. What do you see that suggests the place was abandoned in a hurry?*

### × Vertex Electronica break room

Round, formica-top table with steel tube chairs. Vending machine with snacks you've never heard of: Razzamatazz, Crisp-o's, ChipsPLUS, Sneakers bars, Twinx, and Powdered Dunettes. A TV mounted from the ceiling has a VCR duct-taped to the underside of it.
**Paint the Scene:** *What about this space makes you think it was not just a break room, but a rare place of refuge for the employees of Vertex Electronica?*
**Special Rule:** If you watch an Odyssey tape here, the last scene is a Vertex employee inputting a sequence of commands on a Xxaagreus cabinet: Down, Up, Down, Up, Right, Left, Right, Left, A, B, Start. If the Latchkeys then input that command on the ***Xxaagreus*** cabinet, a super-secret level is unlocked and available after The Palace level:

- ☐ **The Labyrinth:** A masticating maze of gnashing teeth. Countless traps and dead-ends. An unkillable beast hunting you. This level requires you to find the center under a harsh time limit.
  **Paint the Screen:** *Something about this level reminds you of the Vertex Electronica offices. What is it?*
  **Prize:** The next time the Latchkeys are facing grave harm, you can avoid it by narrating how a previously nonexistent door appears nearby.

### http://www.vectorvoid.com/forum

Perfectly preserved web aesthetics of the late 90s. A nest of advertisements and solicitous pop-ups. Active and often heated discussion threads.
**Paint the Scene:** *The forum requires an account to view and post topics. What username and avatar have you chosen for yourself?*
**Special Rule:** The first time a Latchkey discovers a Clue on the forum they take the following Condition: Marked by Ataphoi85. This Condition cannot be cleared until the mystery is resolved, or Ataphoi85 is dealt with (see Questions).

## *SIDE CHARACTERS*

### Ephraim "Eff-Gee" Goldman, a small business owner

Old and wiry. Jaundiced eyes. Four-barrel coin changer on his belt. Ephraim is the owner of the Galaxia Arcade, and has been since it first opened in the '70s. While he's aware of the rumors surrounding the *Xxaagreus* cabinet, he has no idea of the danger it actually poses to his customers, and just wants to breathe life back into his business.
**Quote:** *"I couldn't believe my luck! Been almost twenty years since we featured it, and we've got lines out the door. Of course, back then kids barely wanted to play the thing, even before all that unpleasantness in '85. But now that it's aged into one of those urban legends? It's gangbusters! Oh, one moment... Hey folks, are we having a good time? If you need some quarters, here—a few games on me, your ol' pal Eff-Gee!"*

### Angela Hoskins, a determined sister

Shoulder-length hair, splitting at the ends. Red leather jacket and black jeans. Dark circles under her eyes. A barista from Ohio, Angela was six-years-old when her brother Dieter went missing. Her family moved away after the tragedy, but she has recently returned to Deep Lake in search of answers. She'll help the Latchkeys however she can, even if it puts her life in danger.
**Quote:** *"It was hardest on my parents at the time, I was too young to really understand. I'm pretty sure I would've forgotten his face, but the night before he went missing he woke me up and just said, 'When I'm gone, I'll be waiting for you.' He looked so sad. I didn't understand and just started crying. Then he hugged me, and left. I've uh... I've never told anyone that before. Sorry, do you got a light?"*

### Tim Kralie, the storage manager

Brown canvas jacket. Nicotine stained teeth and fingers. Greasy hair and tired eyes. Tim has an interesting history in Degoya County, having suffered some kind of strange incident in his childhood that not even he remembers, though rumors certainly persist. As the current manager of the Me+My Self Storage, Tim is responsible for the lot auction where the *Xxaagreus* cabinet was discovered, though he knows next to nothing about it.
**Quote:** *"Lots of weird shit you can find in here, if that's your thing. No one knows what they're getting at an auction here. I don't even know."*

### Charlie, a homeless guide

Thick, bushy beard with streaks of gray. A shopping cart full of assorted collections. A band shirt for Karen and the Psychopomps. Charlie is a common sight in Deep Lake, a vagrant that most people can remember seeing for as long as they've lived in town. He is wise beyond his years, and in his explorations of the town has grown to be familiar with many secret places, especially the utility tunnels.
**Quote:** *"Hey man, you got a quarter? I'm happy to point you in the direction you're lookin' for. Maybe even the direction you ain't lookin' for, but a way to where you're goin' all the same."*

## SIDE CHARACTERS (continued)

**Sam (Sinkerly308) Dawson, a forum-user**

Galaga profile picture. Location listed: San Bernardino, CA. Member since 1994. Sam is working at an independent game studio in California, and is completely unaware of current events in Deep Lake. He prefers to communicate through the Vector Void forum, but can be convinced to speak over the phone.

**Quote:** *"I interned at Vertex back in the summer of '82. Harsh place. Long hours without breaks, incoherent meetings from the senior dev team, and just a real creepy vibe. I was glad when they let me go, but for months afterward I had the same dream every night, that I was still working at the office and programming for their games."*

**Bart Kincaid, an enthusiast**

Coke bottle glasses. "All your base are belong to us" t-shirt. Legend of Zelda lanyard. Bart traveled all the way from Billings, Montana to play Xxaagreus. He is a major fan of the legend, personally attributing it to aliens instead of supernatural forces.

**Quote:** *"First contact, baby! It makes perfect sense that an advanced civilization would choose our most sophisticated form of art to establish a connection with the chosen few."*

## REWARDS

- ☐ An arcade token; add it to Your Corner of the House. If you are ever forced to mark **The Pure-White Signal**, you may instead use this item to "continue" as long as it isn't already marked. Afterwards, remove the item from Your Corner of the House.
- ☐ A unit at the Me+My Self Storage; add it to Your Corner of the House. You can take the time to access your storage unit and place a reasonable item from You Corner of the House inside it to prevent the Keeper from removing it as a reaction. You must take the time to retrieve the item if you wish to have it again.
- ☐ Ataphoi85's bull mask; add it to Your Corner of the House.
- ☐ The utility tunnels become a recurring Location; you get 1 extra Clue on the Meddling Move when you explore the tunnels for hidden access points.
- ☐ A memento from the investigation; ask another Latchkey what it is and then add it to Your Corner of the House.

## CLUES

- ☐ Arcade tokens in an unusual place.
- ☐ Claw marks and chipped fingernails left behind in an unusual place.
- ☐ Evidence that the cabinet was built with wood salvaged from (pick one: a 19th century whaling ship/a sacred desert tree/a burned-down school/something else).
- ☐ Rumors of people in black robes setting up the *Xxaagreus* cabinet.
- ☐ Manufacturer blueprints showing the inner-workings of the *Xxaagreus* cabinet, its circuitry forming occult symbols.
- ☐ Dreams of being trapped in a dark pit filled with screaming (pick one: people/animals/dead gods/something else).
- ☐ A key, tagged with the name of a Side Character.
- ☐ An article on the three types of restless dead in Greek mythology: the ataphoi (unburied dead), aoroi (premature deaths), and the biaiothanatoi (violent deaths).
- ☐ The obituaries section of a newspaper with notes written in the margins.
- ☐ A battered 1980s McKids Sears shoebox; it contains a well-preserved heart.
- ☐ A photograph of the Galaxia Arcade from 1985; a ghostly figure is barely visible next to the Xxaagreus cabinet.
- ☐ Crumpled-up flier for a missing person, dated 1992. The details are scribbled out, and a skull is drawn over the face.
- ☐ Repeated drawings of a labyrinth; each one is different from the last.
- ☐ Notes detailing ideas for a game descend into rambling nonsense and feverish scrawlings.
- ☐ A bloody knife.
- ☐ Hutch Langley's Walkman; the cassette only plays a staticky recording of chanting voices.
- ☐ Monique Jeffries' sketchbook; several pages depict the Xxaagreus cabinet and an unidentified figure.
- ☐ Finn Carlson's battered camcorder; distorted footage of dark tunnels.
- ☐ Rachel Urieta's journal; she writes about unstoppable forces of entropy in the universe.
- ☐ Dieter Hoskins's map of Deep Lake; several "x" marks have been placed at seemingly random spots.

## GAMES BY VERTEX ELECTRONICA

- × *Snack-Man* (1981)
- × *Mrs. Snack-Man* (1982)
- × *Mouse Puncher* (1983)
- × *The Astral Void* (1984; never published, but would become the foundation of Xxaagreus)
- × *Xxaagreus* (1985)
- × *Mouse Puncher 2: The Return of King Rat* (1987)
- × *Serpents & Sepulchers: The Arcade Game* (1988)
- × *GamesPLUS* (1990)
- × *Warriors of History* (1993)
- × *Warriors of History 2: Warriors of the Future* (1994)
- × *Cybertrax: Racing in the Far Future* (1997)
- × *Crazy Tuk-tuk* (1999)

NOTES