

# The Reassuring Cacophony

This... apparatus... is currently located in the basement of an otherwise unremarkable-looking cement building in the middle of the Australian Outback (northwest of Maree). Despite its appearance, the building itself is remarkably resistant to damage, and is inexplicably outfitted with light, water, and HVAC. The power sockets in the walls assume plugs of a non-existent type, but somebody fitted adaptors to American and European plugs a while back. The first and only floor of the building can fit about twelve people in sleeping bags; there is a sink, toilet (which shows signs of being installed later), refrigerator (ditto), and a cube that, when turned on, can boil water and fry eggs. There is also a storage closet, stuffed with long-term staples like toilet paper and cleaning supplies. There are no windows; light comes from a flat circle on the ceiling, and is *almost* unremarkably normal.

But people come for the basement, not the self-evidently alien field bunkhouse above. In the basement is the Reassuring Cacophony. It is a complex, self-maintaining, and virtually indestructible Rube Goldberg contraption that plays a musical tune based on balls being shot out of air cannons at specific strings, then falling into hoppers to be

reused. There are cymbals, there are drums, there are chimes and bars and all sorts of musical instruments, and when everything works the way it's designed, the result is a recognizable melody.

Of course, nothing **ever** works the way it's designed. The balls miss, bounce off of each other, hit the right bar and then go off on a different trajectory, or sometimes get temporarily stuck on their way to the hoppers. There's no music down here; merely noise. It's not horrifically loud, but the resulting cacophony will set any competent musician's or musicologist's teeth on edge after a few hours. And it can't be fixed, or reset. Some extremely competent metaphysical engineers have been brought in to look at the machinery, and their conclusion was that, in about four hundred years, humanity *might* be at the point where they could hope to merely **break** the Reassuring Cacophony.

But nobody's going to do that. About ten years ago somebody happened to be on-site when the Reassuring Cacophony began to make sense. The balls stopped missing nearly as much, or bouncing quite as incorrectly afterwards. The observer reported that everything started getting significantly more deterministic in the area; randomness went drastically down, in precisely the ways

expected when global metaphysical energy fields are being drained. The almost-melody persisted for twenty hours, then abruptly stopped; later time-calibration exercises definitely established that the anomalous activity precisely mirrored the abortive summoning and successful dismissal of a Level 3 Hostile Extra-Dimensional Entity.

Ever since then, six people are on-site at the Reassuring Cacophony at all times: 2 to a shift, 24 hours a day. If and when anything happens -- something happens about three or so times a month, but never nearly at the same intensity as the original event -- the current team is to call it in on the spot, and call in every day anyway. Currently, an event has been matched with a known HEDE summoning or attempted summoning in 93% of cases, and the general assumption is that the other 7% are simply cases that fell through the cracks. In about a third of the known cases, early warning that the summoning was happening led to successful interventions, which has been of incalculable use. Nothing must happen to the Reassuring Cacophony.

Which is why the emergency meeting. Five minutes ago the team at the site did their daily call-in... only they didn't use the right keywords when calling in, and their entire affect was noticeably off. Hope your team has its shots up to date for Australia, because you're going to be

wormholed there just as soon as this briefing is over. Yes, we're ripping a hole in space-time to get you there **right now**. HEDE summonings are no joke. Trying to dismantle our early warning system is even less of one.

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