PROJECT KYZEN
LORE BRIEF

YOU'RE AWAKE,

but I imagine quite confused. **Don't worry, I can explain everything.** At least as much as we know so far.

[MESH TYPE HACKER]

WHO AM I?
For the moment, you can call me *The Hacker*.

As I grow to trust you, I'll tell you more of my story. For now, just know that I'm here to guide you—and find out if you're worthy of Project Kyzen. I hope so, but not many are, and there's too much at stake to waste time on the wrong people.

The Basics of
PROJECT
KYZEN

As you're from Earth Prime, I'll speak in a way you can understand. Let's start with the basics. As I'm sure you've guessed by now, the world is far different than you've been led to believe.

I'm not going to beat around the bush—here it is plain—everything around us, everything we see, feel, interact with … it's all a simulation.

It's not such a crazy idea. Many of Earth Prime's greatest thinkers have wrestled with this, from Plato to David Chalmers and Elon Musk. The brightest among you intuit a simple fact—if it's technically possible to run a simulation of perfect fidelity, then statistically speaking, the odds that any one of us are living in "the real world" is vanishingly slim. As Elon Musk said, "There's a one in billions chance we're in base reality."

Spoiler alert, Elon was right, you're not in base reality. This is a simulation. The progenitor of this simulation, known as the Array, houses everything you've ever known, and everything you're ever going to know. No matter how many times you jump between Instances or how many universes you map, you will always remain inside the Array. The Array is infinite, and unknowable. At least that's how I choose to see it. I prefer to stand in awe of it rather than pick at its seams. From where I sit, the power is in realizing it's a simulation—not in escaping its confines.

Now that you're awake to this new reality, two things are going to happen:

1. You're going to discover power you never knew you had. Developing these powers will be harder than expected, but if you're going to survive, you must improve. By a lot. We'll discuss more details on this later when we discuss Mesh Types.

2. As your powers grow, you're going to start wondering about the nature of the simulation itself. Why does it grant you powers previously denied to you? Pursuing these questions is good. It will speed your development. But be warned, mastering interactions with the simulation can drive some to nihilism and others to the conquest of worlds. Take heed of the warnings from the old philosophers. Power corrupts. Learn to wield it without succumbing to it. Also, you must remain vigilant not to become fixated on the question that has tainted some of the greatest minds—namely, "*Where* is the Array?"
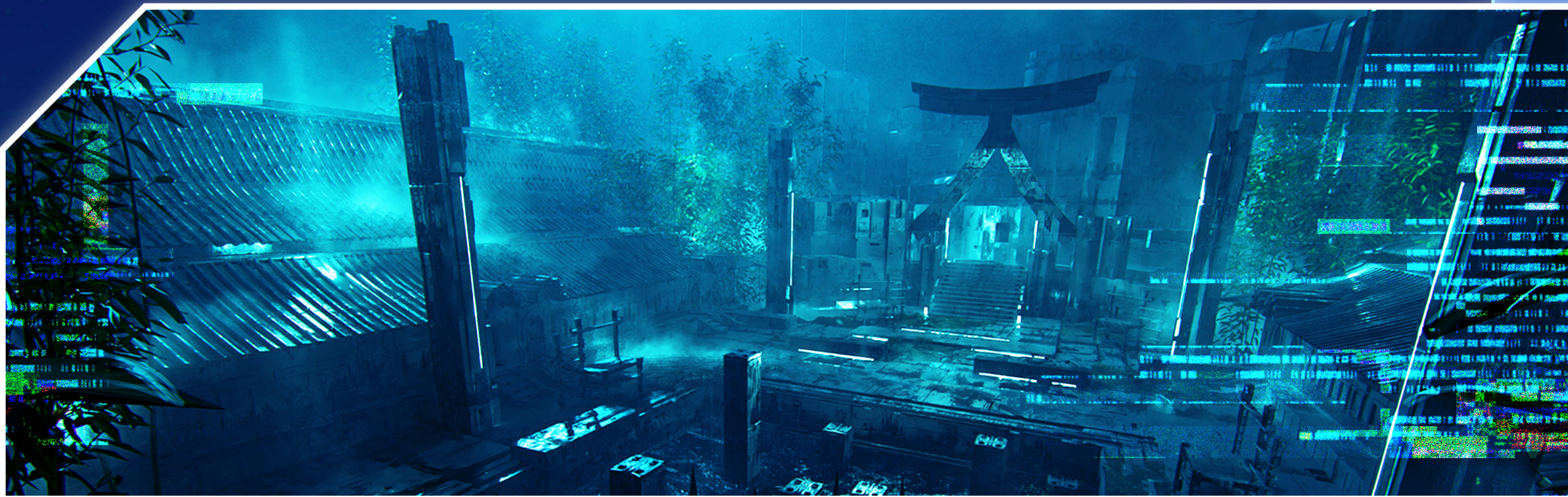
I know, I know ... that's the question that really messes with you newbies. If this is a simulation, what's running the simulation? And who coded it?

But here's the cold, hard reality—whether the Array is nothing more than a fancy laptop on the desk of some pock-faced future teenager or the mind of God itself, it doesn't matter. You are here because the algorithm we've got crawling the Array tagged you as a potential candidate for Project Kyzen. Don't let it go to your head. Plenty of recruits will wash out. Count on it. Because we need the best of the best and we need you to get trained up. Because as things stand, if we don't build an army fast, you're all going to die. And whether you're in a simulation or not—dead is dead. Trust me, I know.

THE SPECIFICS

- **Since I can anticipate many of your questions, let me address the most common ones now:**

  - What you think of as a Universe is what we call an Instance. All signs point to Instances working like a virtual machine running on a server that procedurally generates a Universe according to a set of rules.

  - What you think of as physics is really just code. That's why things are so precise. God may not play dice as Einstein feared, but he definitely writes code. Really, really good code.

  - Instances can vary wildly in terms of their codebase and thus their rules. If even one tiny variable in one of the algorithms is altered you can end up with an entirely divergent type of Universe. And as far as we can tell, there are an infinite number of universes hiding inside the Array. But be warned, the Array fiercely protects itself from manipulation, alteration, or exploitation of any kind. So if you think your new powers are a free lunch, think again. You play around too much you'll catch the attention of the Array and in your current state, the Array will flip you zero nice and quick and tag your file for deletion.

  - What is Project Kyzen and why were you selected? That's big enough to warrant its own section. Keep reading.

What is
PROJECT
KYZEN?

To understand Project Kyzen, first you must understand what Kyzen itself is. Kyzen is what's known as a Glitch Instance. If a normal Instance is something that is under the direct supervision of the Array, a Glitch Instance is a man-made micro Instance and is designed to be hidden from the Array. Think of it as part interstellar hiding place and part dojo. Inside of a Glitch Instance like Kyzen, the Array doesn't make the rules, master Architects make the rules.

Take note, Kyzen is a sacred place. To understand just how sacred, let's talk scale. Instances are everywhere. Even just the ones that have already been mapped would take you more than 1,000 lifetimes to explore.

But Glitches? Those are rare. And even harder to find. This is because Glitches are VERY hard to create, and even in a quantum foam roiling with infinite universes, you would be hard pressed to find even a handful of Glitch Instances—and even fewer as old and well-developed as Kyzen.

The true origins of Kyzen remain a mystery, even to me. We know for sure that the Temple is more than it appears. Friend or foe, we don't know. All I can tell you is that five of us discovered this place, but only four of us remain. We are four not because someone died. That would have been much better. Instead, we are four because the fifth of us, a Breaker you will eventually learn much about, fell prey to temptation. I am certain that he discovered what's hiding inside of the Temple. Knowing him, a power source of some kind. And he clearly intends to have it for himself, which is why he's now building an army to come and claim this sacred place.

It's going to be your job to stop him. If you can become worthy. One of the first things we'll want you to do is embrace K.OS—the code that's running at the

TEMPLE OF THE ARRAY.

It'll give you access to its secrets and if you have the skills to find and unencrypt them I believe that's where we'll find the answers we need to win. Once you take your mesh exam, I'll better understand how you can help, and we can begin.

And that beginning is the official beginning of Project Kyzen—a project designed to gather the best and the brightest from across the Array and train them to defend this place from those that would exploit it.

MESH TYPES + LEVELING UP

Once you're aware that you're pure information running inside of a simulation, it becomes possible to do what we call code bending. Code bending is the ability to draw additional resources from the CPU and/or alter code, change its sequencing, or even simply read encrypted and compiled code. That sounds clinical, but when you see it play out it's basically you in superhero mode.

Depending on your underlying programming, what you'd think of as genetics and epigenetics, your ability to bend code will manifest in one of five ways known as "mesh types." You can think of these as character classes.

THE FIVE MESH TYPES ARE AS FOLLOWS:

BREAKERS CAN MANIPULATE ENERGY

- Breakers draw their energy directly from the Array. They do so by overclocking the CPU or by stealing cycles from other elements of the simulation.
  - If a breaker is careless, however, they can easily draw the attention of the Array's immune system, which essentially functions like an antivirus software program.
- Breakers can shape and form the energy that they draw:
  - Into shields that protect people.
  - Into balls of energy that can be thrown/fired.
  - Into complex patterns of light and force.
- Breakers do not need any "gear" to do this.
  - They channel energy using their mind and body.
  - However, some choose to use a "foci" to help them:
    - A wand, a book, a staff, a pocketwatch, whatever cool item they can get from Vogue.
- Only Breakers can "Jump" within or between worlds without a Jump Token.
  - They can jump an additional person if they draw enough energy.
  - With time, attention, and the help of a specialized Engineer, they can forge Jump Tokens.

HACKERS CAN MANIPULATE CODE

- Hackers can alter the state of the world immediately around them.
  - Even though the world is made entirely out of code, Hackers are not gods. While they can do many impressive things, there are limits to what they can alter without triggering the Array's immune system.
- Hackers require some sort of "Terminal" to access and adjust code.
  - A fancy cyberdeck, a smartphone, an old PC ...
  - They're experts at using whatever tech is on hand.
- Hackers specialize in state changes.
  - It's hard to create or destroy matter.
  - Changing data, or rules, or interactions is easy! They can do things like:
    - Change a locked door to an unlocked door.
    - Shut a system down.
    - Track a local item in the simulation.
    - Debug code.
      - This makes them useful when someone has a minor injury or has been tagged with a tracking device.

ENGINEERS CAN MANIPULATE MATTER

- They make things. Incredible things. Things that would make Tony Stark blush. They often operate with nanotechnology that they can carry with them. This makes them feel like a summoner class.
  - Example: Bracelet that turns into a gun turret.
- Their abilities require time, effort, and space:
  - They require a "Laboratory" or "Workshop."
  - Lots of specialized equipment, often built themselves.
  - Projects take a lot of time and research.
- Engineers often collaborate with other mesh types to create purpose-built items. Examples include:
  - Custom cyberdeck for a Hacker.
  - Power sword for a Kinetic.
  - Jump Token built with the help of a Breaker.

KINETICS CAN MANIPULATE THEIR BODIES

- Kinetics are able to sidestep the physical laws that normally govern speed, strength, dexterity, etc. As such, they can wield superheroic physical powers for movement and combat.

- This requires intense training and discipline.

- Their body serves as their primary weapon. Having said that:
  - With an Engineer's help, they can add cybernetics and channel their abilities into a prosthesis for extra effect.
  - They love melee weapons, especially swords.
  - Guns don't take advantage of their power directly, but their increased reaction time still makes them excellent with a gun.

SYPHERS CAN MANIPULATE MINDS

- Syphers are the mystics and healers. Think of them as the clerical class. They are deeply in tune with the Array, although it is "felt" rather than "understood."

- They are empaths who can sense and understand emotions in others.

- They can also influence, nurture, soothe, excite, enrage, enthrall, or inspire people with whom they are currently sharing space.

- Their abilities do NOT give them outright mind control—they can influence, yes, but they can't outright take over control of a person.

TRAVELING AROUND
THE ARRAY

I can see by that familiar glint in your eye that you're eager to start exploring the Array. I was once like you, enamored by the possibilities but blissfully ignorant of the threats out there.

With the help of a Breaker, you'll be able to leap around the Array at will—provided you have a map. (As mentioned, jumping without a map is a terrific way to cease to exist.) But I would confine your explorations to the Kyzen Glitch Instance at first. You're safe here—the code here is ours to control and the Array is not aware (or doesn't care) what we do here.

But once you enter the rest of the Array, you're going to have to be careful when you use your mesh abilities. Any time you draw power from the Array, you call attention to yourself. And the Array does not like to be manipulated. Especially by Breakers jumping around. A short local jump within an Instance doesn't require much power, and usually escapes attention. But when a Breaker pierces the boundary and moves from Instance to Instance, look out. The Array is going to come after them with everything it has. We refer to this security response as the Array's immune system.

Array security is hard to understand. We know that it makes use of local code—it will come at you with copies of whatever it has on hand. In highly mechanized Instances it'll come at you with robots, in pre-industrial Instances you'll find yourself facing armored knights. Defeated Array minions will vanish (de-code?) as quickly as they appeared. Don't stay and fight—the Array won't stop. Defeat the minions that you can and then get out of there. If you lie low and can avoid using your mesh powers for a while, as long as you haven't been tagged for tracking (which requires one of the Array's minions to come into physical contact with you) the Array will lower your threat ranking and cease to pursue you. If you have been tagged, you'll have to find a way to decompile your code and remove the tag. No easy feat. So don't let the Array touch you.

THE FIRST SEVEN
RECRUITS

Project Kyzen is still very much under development, but I'm sure you've realized by now that you're not the first recruit to arrive. You're early, but there was a prototype class before you—the initial seven. Well, the initial seven that survived anyway. We pulled in nearly a hundred, but all of the rest washed out. And if you're wondering why we're so selective, we've found that only about 0.01% of the people all across the Array are capable of being awake in the simulation. It's harder than it sounds.

Alright, enough about that. What follows are bios of those first seven recruits. Learn them well as they'll be helping to show you the ropes when myself and the other mentors are not around. As I mentioned before, there are four of us mentors remaining. But Vogue, the Kyzen merchant, travels frequently looking for new gear, and even when she's here she's constantly hiding away in that workshop of hers concocting new items for you all. As for the other two mentors, that's on a need to know basis. And until I'm sure you're not gonna wash out, you don't need to know.

CODE NAME: ION

AGE: 24

MESH TYPE: Breaker

HOME INSTANCE:
Earth Variant P + 19

BIO: A natural born leader, Ion leverages his charm and work ethic to win people over. He advances faster than most recruits and is a highly skilled Breaker who works his butt off. Heavily influenced by the retro gaming culture of his timeline (P + 19), Ion treats everything like a game to be won.

Ion's weapon is a Vogue special, a 16-fold nanosteel blade with a superconducting edge. While Ion's swordwork has room for improvement, his ability to use this device to 'cut' reality is unique among trainees. Ion has recently learned to "quick jump" by slicing open portals with his blade, although outside of a Glitch Instance like Kyzen rapid jumping is bound to trigger heavy resistance from the Array's vicious immune system. If he can learn to finally control this ability, however, he will be a huge asset to the team.

Prior to getting pulled into Project Kyzen, he was a very popular professional gamer with a large following. He's very outgoing, and often commentates while sparring or fighting. Something that absolutely drives his opponents crazy.

CODE NAME: MAX FLEXX

AGE: 23

MESH TYPE: Kinetic

HOME INSTANCE: Bat Al-jawza

BIO: Flexx is a lone warrior type. Intense and introverted. He likes to solve disputes the old fashioned way—with his fists—and when training or in combat he has no chill. That gear is entirely absent from his gearbox.

Despite his standoffish nature, however, more than once during training, Flexx threw himself in harm's way when another recruit's life was in danger, hinting that if someone can eventually convince him to trust his teammates as much as he trusts his instincts, he would be a formidable asset. Somehow, someone has to break through to him…

He's smart and grasps concepts quickly, but he doesn't focus on academics. Physical training, and military strategy, however, get his undivided attention. He gets top marks from all four mentors as well as his fellow recruits on everything except teamwork.

CODE NAME: LULLABY

AGE: 19

**MESH TYPE:** Sypher

HOME INSTANCE: X-O Musigi

BIO: Despite her age, Lullaby is an old soul. She is the one the other recruits turn to when in need. She is deeply empathetic and full of useful wisdom. She is warm, inviting, and always encouraging. But don't let her kindness fool you, she is also very much NOT for play. Her insights into the minds and emotions of others makes her an incredible strategist. What she lacks in physical prowess, she more than makes up for with foresight and intelligence.

A master of emotional regulation, she finds connection to the world and others through music. She always knows the perfect song to calm someone down, soothe their jangled nerves, or get the team hyped up for battle.

As a Sypher, Lullaby is also the most likely to team up with her fellow recruits to create unexpected results. Whether that's using a Breaker to turn her music into a deafening wall of sound, or working with Byte to infuse viral code with the ability to sense someone far away, she is constantly thinking of new mesh type combinations and unique ways to fortify Kyzen against the coming army.

Although Lullaby works well with others and can read her teammates' emotions like an open book, she herself remains an enigma. She is quiet about her past and is sometimes withdrawn. If any of the other recruits have gotten through to her, I haven't seen it.
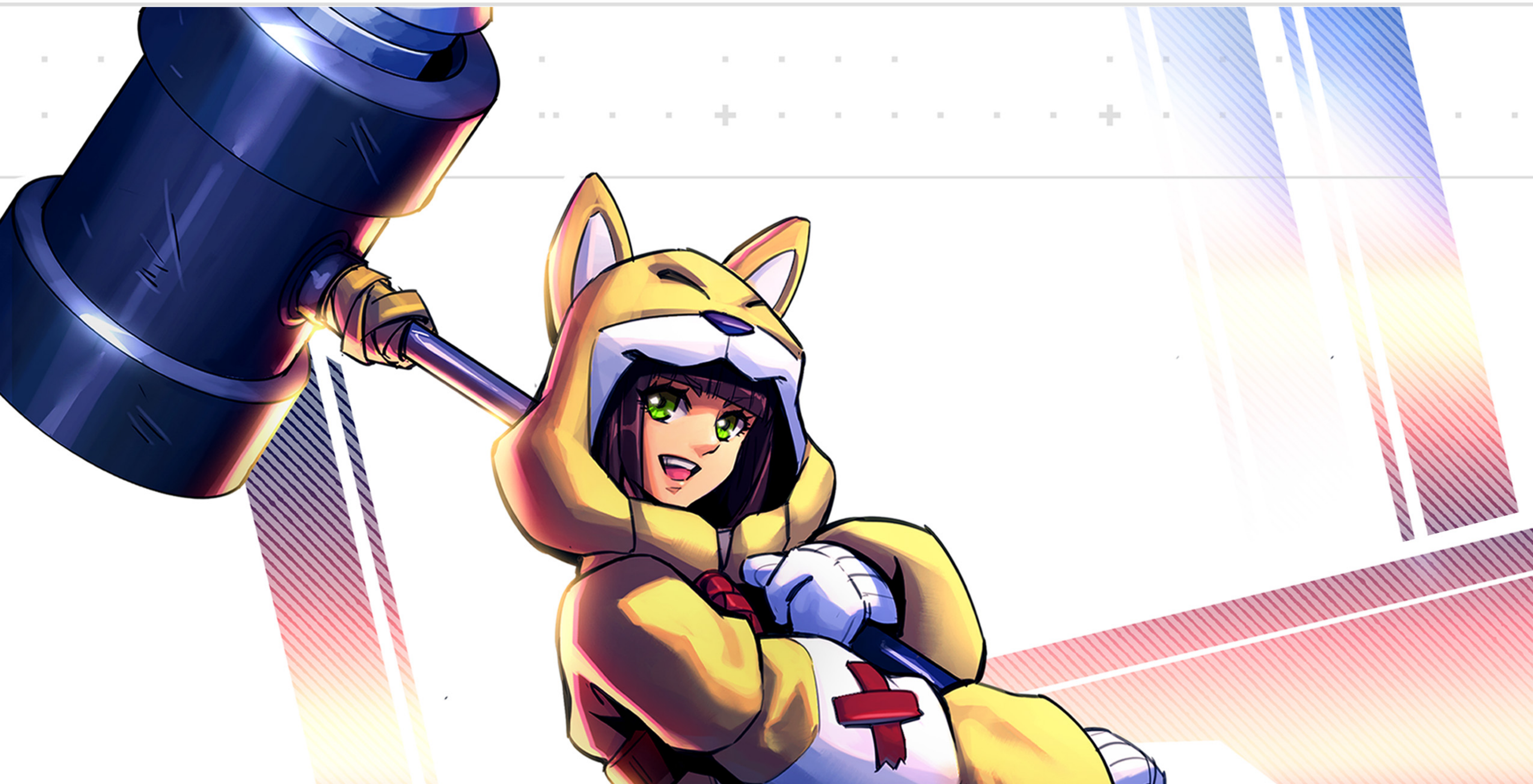
CODE NAME: ANNVIL

AGE: 16   **MESH TYPE:** Kinetic

HOME INSTANCE: Artemis Major

BIO: A former gymnast who dominated on the world stage of her home Instance, Annvil is a walking contradiction. There are few across the Array with as much natural grace, but her weapon of choice is a gigantic hammer devoid of all subtlety. She self-identifies as a super nerd with super strength who loves animals and violence. She's fun-loving and eager to show off her skills and, given that she's used to competing in front of millions with everything on the line, she's absolutely fearless. When not training in Kyzen, she's pestering Vogue for more cute animals from around the Array to cosplay.

Annvil's athleticism and training speak to her ability to focus, but it's not always easy to get her to focus on what matters. She's easily distracted or preoccupied, and is as likely to go missing on a mission as she is to complete it. The other mentors and I have spoken at length about how best to make use of her unbridled spirit on the team—my fear is that she will learn too late the grave danger of the situation we find ourselves in.

Annvil believes strongly that girls should talk loudly and carry a big stick.

CODE NAME: ZONE

AGE: 32

MESH TYPE: Engineer

HOME INSTANCE: Earth Variant P + 42

BIO: A brilliant and celebrated engineering prodigy back in his home Instance, Zone came into Project Kyzen like a force of nature. He's a stand-out recruit who quickly gained the respect of the mentors. The reception from his fellow recruits, however, has been less...enthusiastic. While they all will begrudgingly acknowledge his brilliance, the over-the-top demands for excellence that he places on himself and others makes him an outsider to everyone but Flexx.

An intense introvert with a touch of Asperger's, Zone prefers to operate from inside of his creations. While he and Vogue have wildly different personalities, recognizing his raw talent, she has recruited Zone to help her with some of her more outlandish weapons and accessories.

The area where Zone currently struggles is with physical combat. He lacks the grace and power of someone like Annvil or Flexx, and is far more comfortable in his workshop than he is in hand to hand combat. But his ambition and need to be the best continue to push him to improve. I have no doubt that overtime he will become as good at using his creations in combat as he is at making them.

CODE NAME: MACH

AGE: 27

MESH TYPE: Breaker

HOME INSTANCE:
Mekkanas Minor

BIO: Mach is the biggest surprise the algorithm has delivered to Project Kyzen. Upon arrival, the mentors unanimously dismissed him. Hailing from an extremely stilted Instance where daily survival eats up most of everyone's time, it seemed self-evident to all that Mach would be quickly overwhelmed by the technologically advanced nature of Project Kyzen's training. But that's not what happened.

Mach has so far proven himself to be one of the most advanced Breakers to enter Kyzen. Not as charming or immediately likable as Ion, but Mach is arguably even more versatile with his breaking. He's able to draw and manipulate energy so effectively that he can fly and propel himself around at incredible speeds. As a man who has spent his life locked to the land as a farmer in an incredibly harsh environment, his new-found powers are something he doesn't take for granted. Not even for a second. And that has pushed him to ring every bit of potential out of himself.

The other recruits, however, have had their... challenges interacting with Mach. Given his background, his worldview is sometimes simplistic, and he leaps to solutions without thinking them through. When you couple him with someone like Annvil who is equally impulsive, you get absolute uncontrolled mayhem. My recommendation is to pair Mach with more worldly and tactical thinkers, like Byte, who can better channel his energy and give him some much-needed perspective.

CODE NAME: BYTE

AGE: 24

MESH TYPE: Hacker

HOME INSTANCE:
Earth Prime

BIO: Tragic circumstances left Byte an orphan at an early age. Code was her salvation. Bright and incredibly resourceful, Byte used every free thing she could find online to teach herself computer programming. In her early attempts to scrape together a living, she would often stray into black hat hacking, but it never sat well with her.

After a dramatic run-in with a terrorist organization showed her just how extremely consequential coding can be, she decided to turn it all around and put her skills to more noble use. But she clearly knows how to think like a villain, and this makes her incredibly valuable. Her "tactically diverse" skill set makes her a nightmare for black-hatters across the Array, and if you ever meet her and she's had a few drinks, ask her about the movie Taken. She might just have a certain speech memorized.

"...But what I do have are a very particular set of skills. Skills I have acquired over a very long career. Skills that make me a nightmare for people like you."

Byte's skills with code remind me of my own abilities many years back. She's one of the best. We have something else in common as well—like me, Byte is slow to trust. We have our reasons. I was betrayed by my best friend, she by her own parents. Those wounds never truly heal. But we're both going to have to learn to trust in our teammates if we're to have any hope of saving Kyzen.

We are all in a simulation, and it is called

"THE ARRAY."
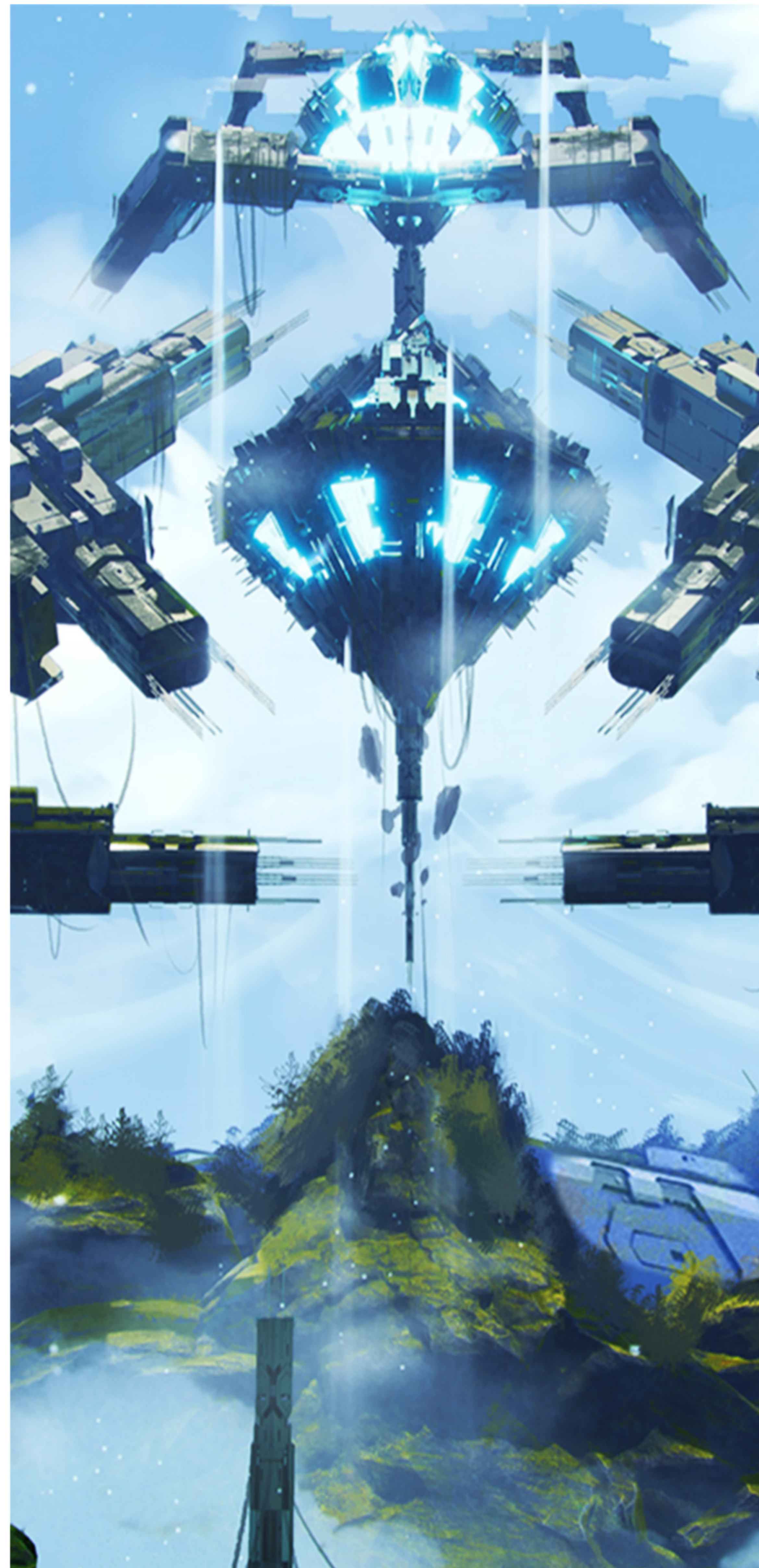
You have been identified by the algorithm and awoken. What you do now is up to you. Will you crumble as so many before you have done, or will you push through your training and grow strong enough to defend Kyzen? You will of course claim that you're ready for the fight, but time will reveal the true depths of your will.

Remember,

DAVID CHALMERS

"

Even if we're in a perfect simulation, this is not an illusion; I'm still in a perfectly real world … Everything is just as meaningful as it was before.

Q&A:

Q: Tell me, at the center of the Glitch Instance known as Kyzen, there is a Temple of the Array. Why was it constructed?

A: That's part of what you're here to find out.

GLITCH ERROR

Let's just hope we figure it out in time.