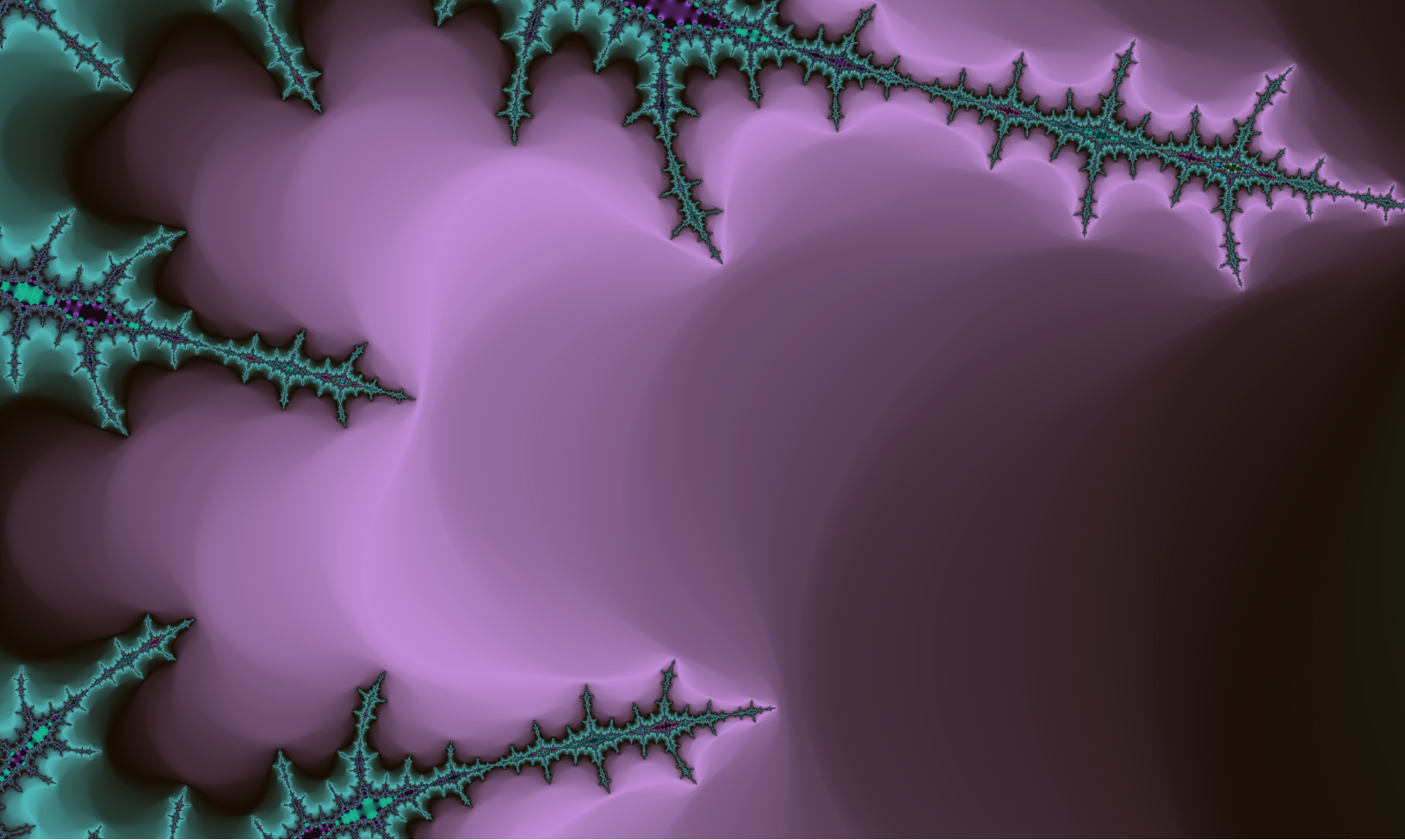




Alabastion Dominion Federal Archives



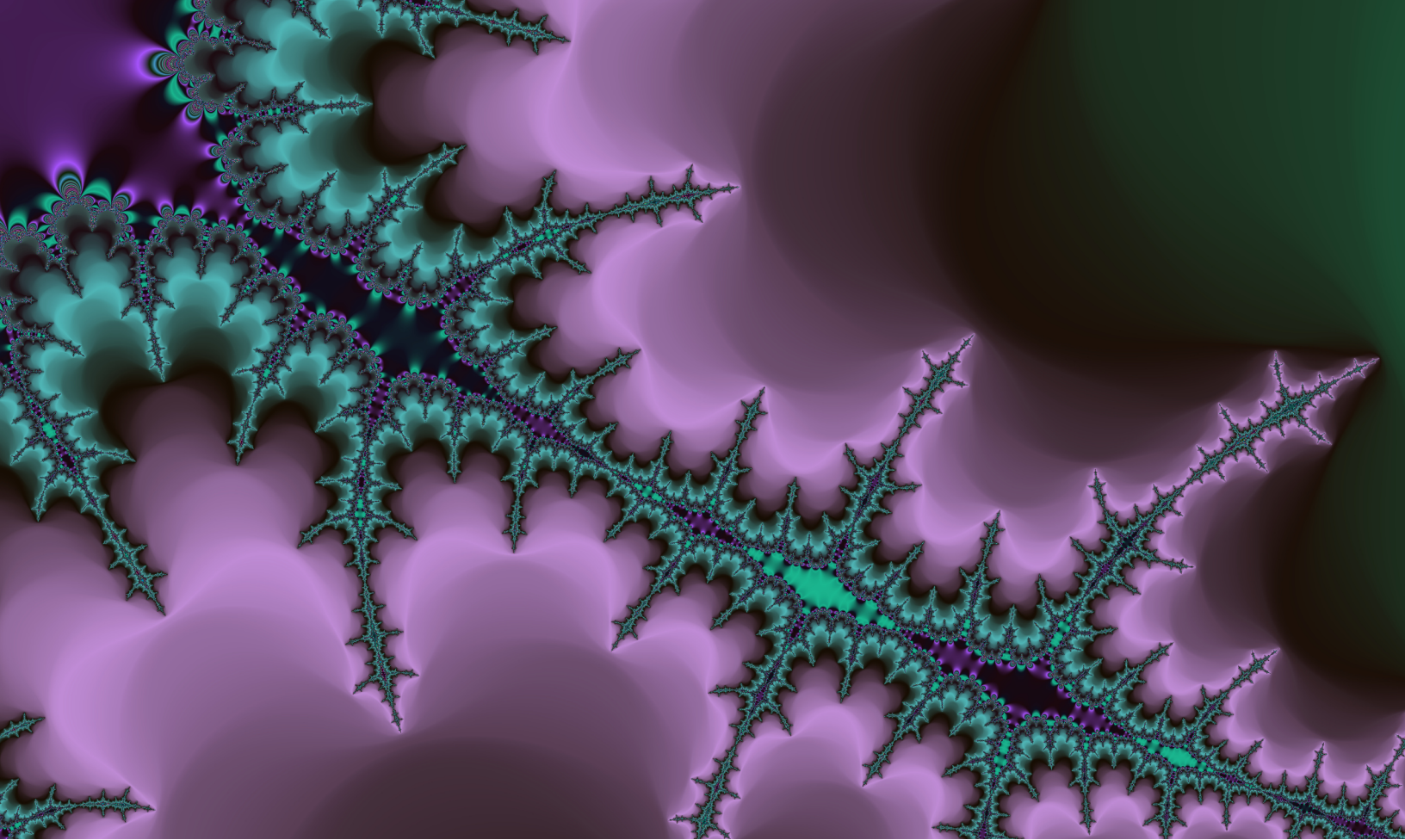
Esteemed Inquisitor,

Please see attached your request for records from our archive concerning the events on Tr4-NS.

May the twin star burn bright for you,

A. Klurp
Assistant Interpreter First Class
Alabastion Dominion Federal Archives





Alabastion Dominion Federal Archives



Tr4-NS has few animals, in the traditional sense. The brilliant purples and greens of the planet are split into a northern continent with patches of grassland sandwiched between desert and tundra, with plentiful and robust microbial activity. The southern continent is much the same but much larger, with several mountain ranges, and, notably, the occurrence of varied shrubs and— I would say trees, yet that fails to capture them adequately.

Think of them like this: at night, back home where I grew up, there was a street lamp outside my bedroom window. Light cast from it fell through a maple tree, which reflected and shadowed in such a way that when there was wind— and there frequently was— I was left with the impression of motion, of fingers curling around and reaching through glass, casting dancing shadows across my bedroom floor. The branches must have caressed the roof out of view of the window, which gave a subdued scrape alongside the light's movement. This trick of the light brought forth life from the ether, and it was many years before I stopped seeing trees reaching towards me and the memory retreated into an amusing childhood anecdote.

Until last night.

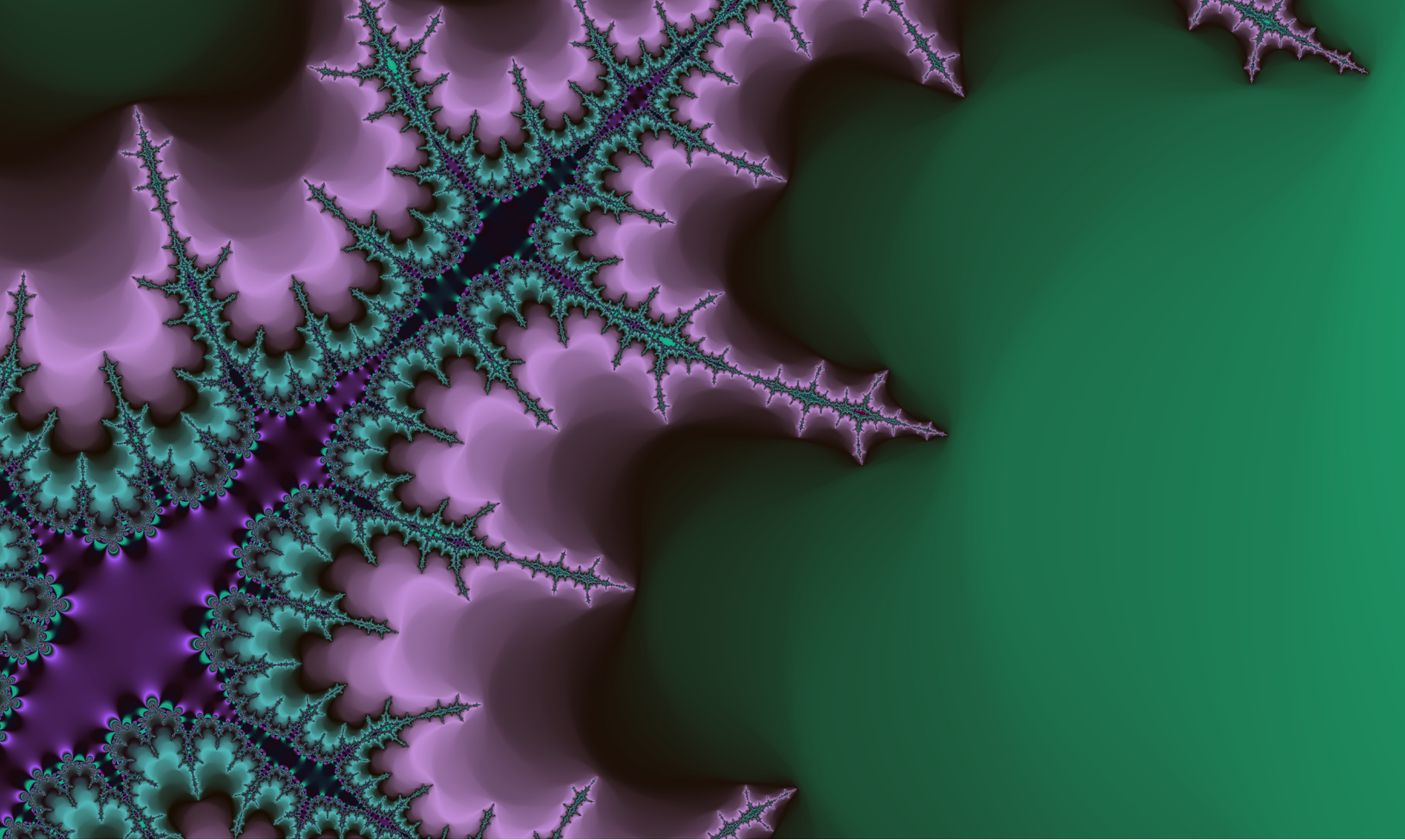
Draft Report

Dr. Ionesxu

Alabastion Dominion Federal Exploratory Commission

Planet Survey Division





Alabastion Dominion Federal Archives

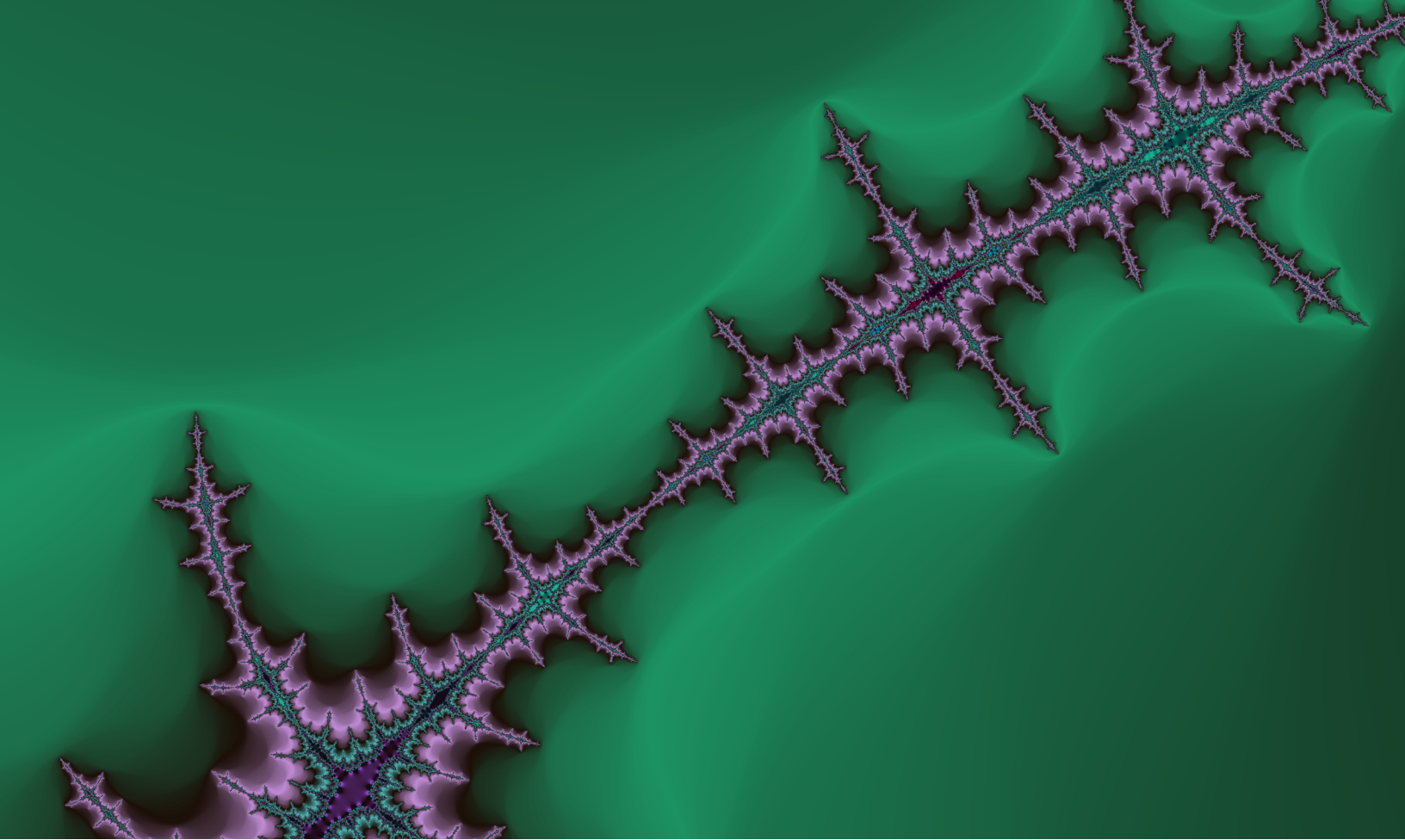


Dirt, water, and little else. Same as the last planet. Same as the next planet. My colleague has hypothesized there to be— to even repeat such preposterous speculation does me a disservice— shambling trees. She has quite the imagination, but maybe not the skepticism required to be a good Dominion scientist. I suspect these “trees” to be a sort of hypermacro misassemblage. One of Ionesxu’s blasphemous fungi? An attempt at trinary folding perhaps. A common enough occurrence, as documented in other surveys by both myself and others. Defects and dead ends are everywhere.

I expect a routine survey to take little time. There is nothing of interest here, only tricks of light and shadow.

*Draft Report
Dr. Buutoiredies
Alabastion Dominion Federal Exploratory Commission
Planet Survey Division*





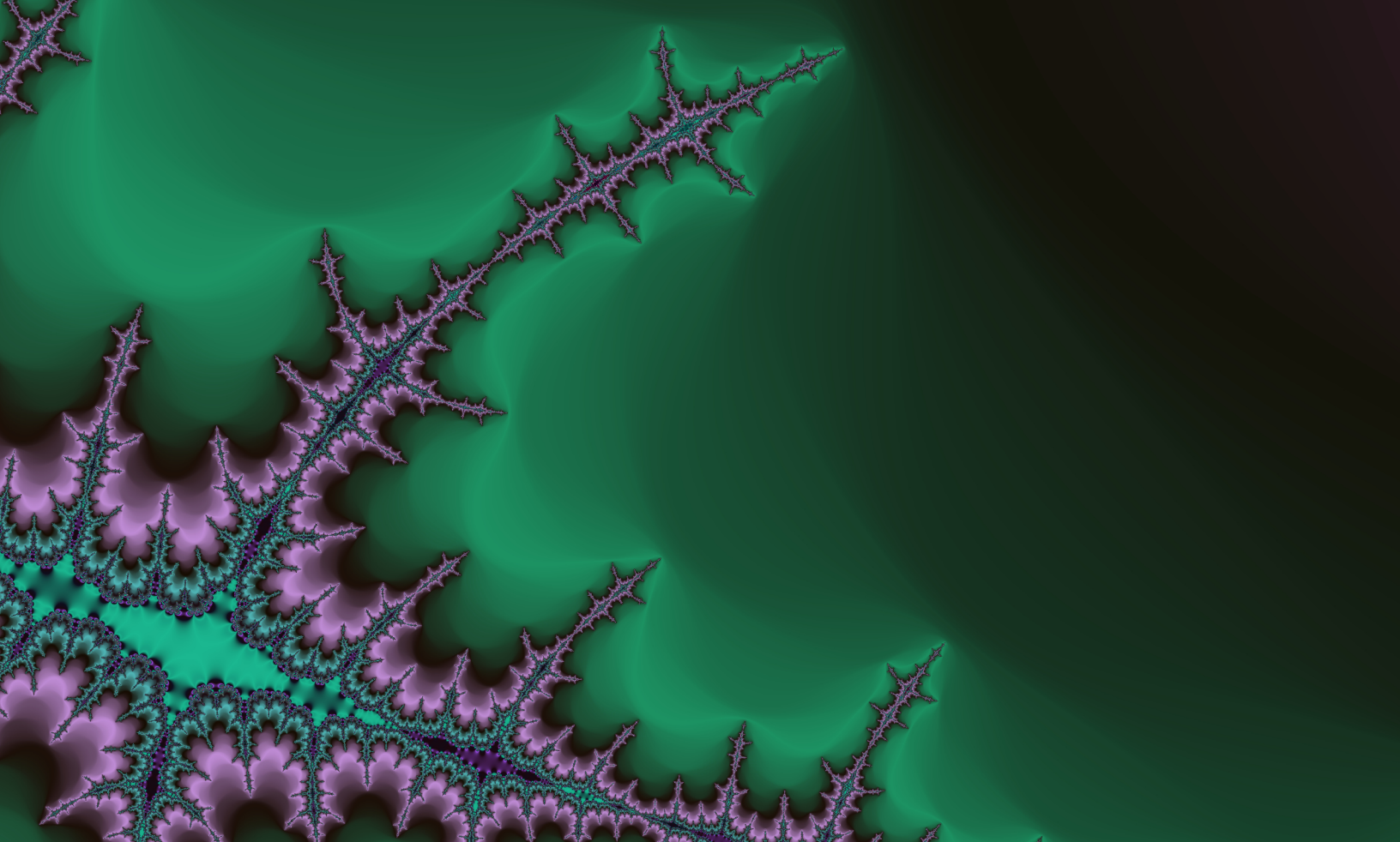
Alabastion Dominion Federal Archives



The historians contest that at the beginning of the pattern we worshipped mountains where none but saplings could reach. The foolishness of youth. Mountains slump and subside. A constant unidirectional degradation we should avoid. We now know that it is better to worship an idea. To keep it at arm's length, keep it ungazed upon, lest it become real, material, and dangerously unincorporated. The best way to keep something perfect is to leave it unexamined, to cloak it with protective abstraction. This is why we stopped worshipping the mountains.

Deciphered agglomerative verse





Alabastion Dominion Federal Archives



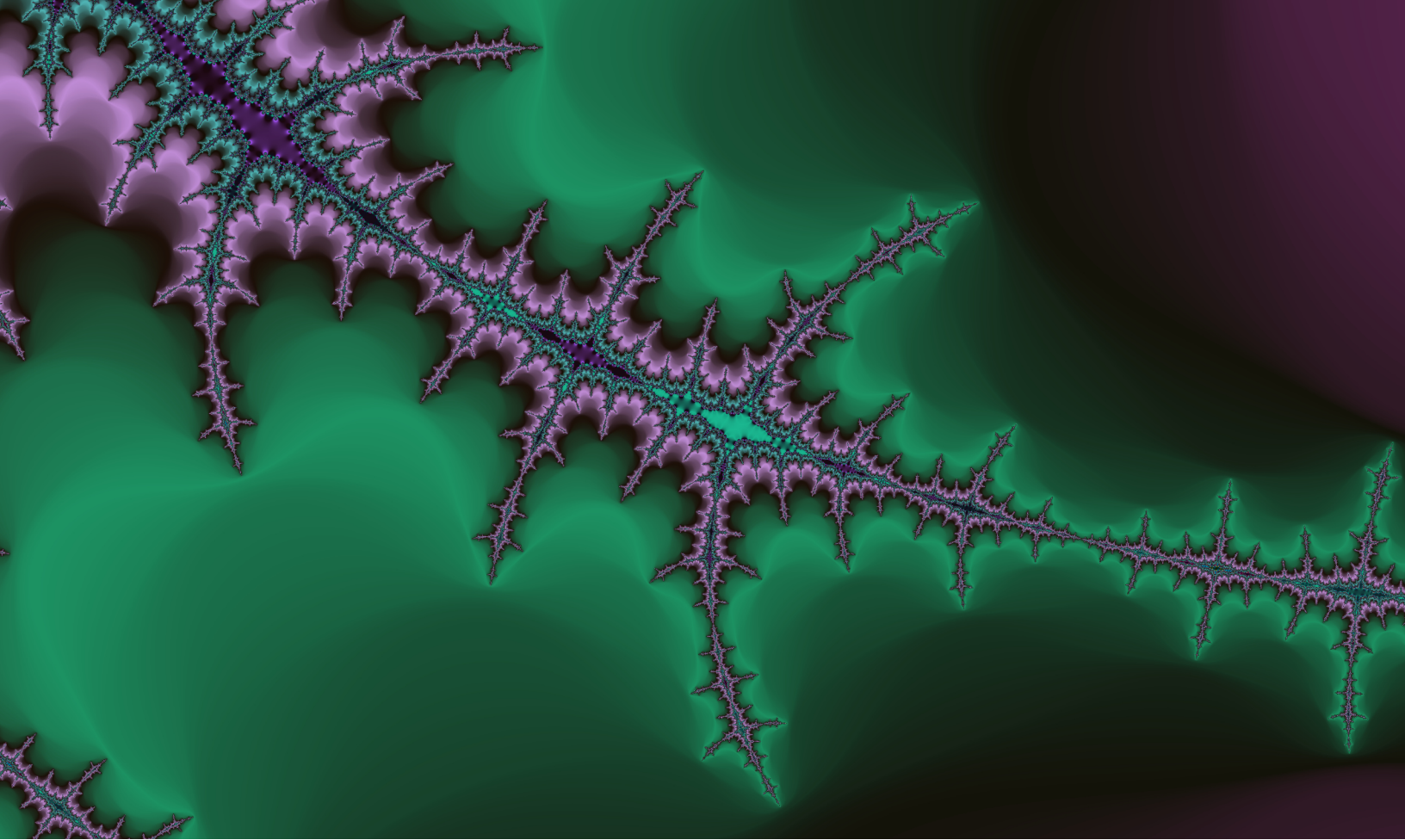
Stationary organisms are survivors of harsh environments, by necessity. But this is only true once they are mature and grown. They start as vulnerable saplings, thin and too flexible. This well established fact remains true here in this strange land as on my home planet.

Trees, of course, cannot move to change their environment. They cannot burrow or build shelter. Their shelter is their own flesh. As such, all are adapted to harsh environments in predictable ways. They must grow strong but flexible bark and branches to survive punishingly powerful winds. They must root themselves deep into the earth with a firm grip to not just withstand storms, but to scavenge the soils for phosphorus, nitrogen, and calcium, so they might thrive. And the fungus, long ignored by the Dominion, are even more remarkable. Their hyphae networks intermingle and connect both fungi and otherwise isolated trees through a mycelium, and though it displeases the Dominion, my colleagues have discovered these organisms send information and nutrients to one another.

I mentioned to Buutoiredies that the adult specimens we see are fierce survivors of whatever it is we have yet to observe here, grown on soil full of the nutrients from the decomposed corpses of ones who did not. Perhaps through the dispationate study of this novel organism on TR-4NS he will approach a greater understanding of the revolutionary field of mycology.

Private Journal of Dr. Ionesxu





Alabastion Dominion Federal Archives



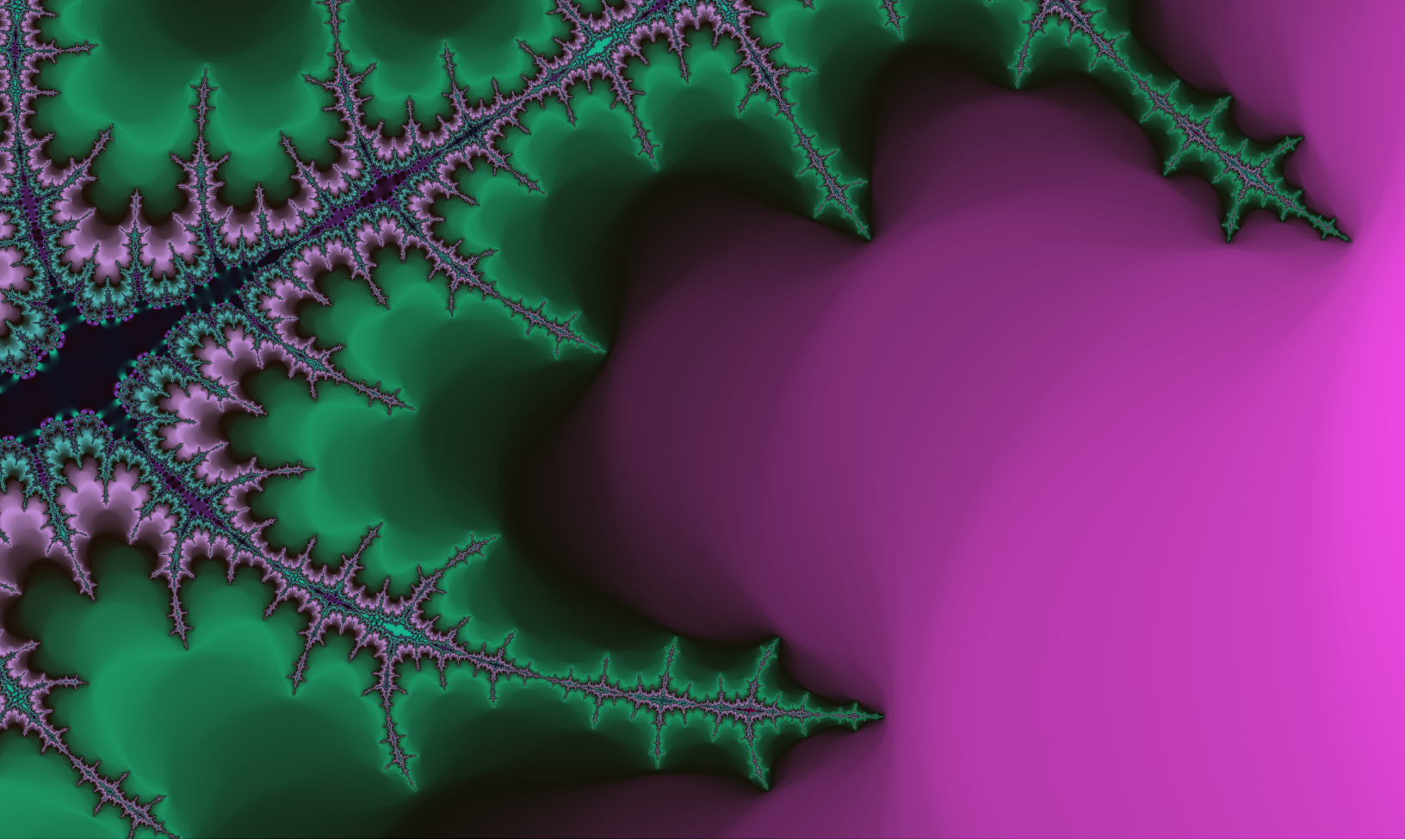
All Dominion scientists, at least those in good standing, understand that the stable and natural law of the binary is the base for all the Dominion has accomplished. The evidence is everywhere: just as there are two of us on this expedition, just as we have two arms, just as there are two sexes, so are binary star systems the basis for life, so do we decide yes or no, so do we succeed or fail. The simple truth of the binary is in our math, our computers, our machines, our limbs, our star system, and our decision making.

My colleague, to my distress, claims that nature is full of violations of this natural law that can be understood by anyone with a 8th grade education. Take fungal assemblages, for example. For more than 128 rotations of the twins, we knew them to be members of the plant domain. But recently, that's become improper to say. If you believe the insurgent sect Ionesxu belongs to (and damn them for their influence to include her on this survey), these strange flowers are more similar to us than to plants. And with the perverse creatures of this foreign land, who knows how Ionesxu and her ilk will attempt to undermine what the Domion knows to be true.

A growing problem, and a ridiculous one at that. After all, we all know what a flower looks like.

Private journal of Dr. Buutoiredies





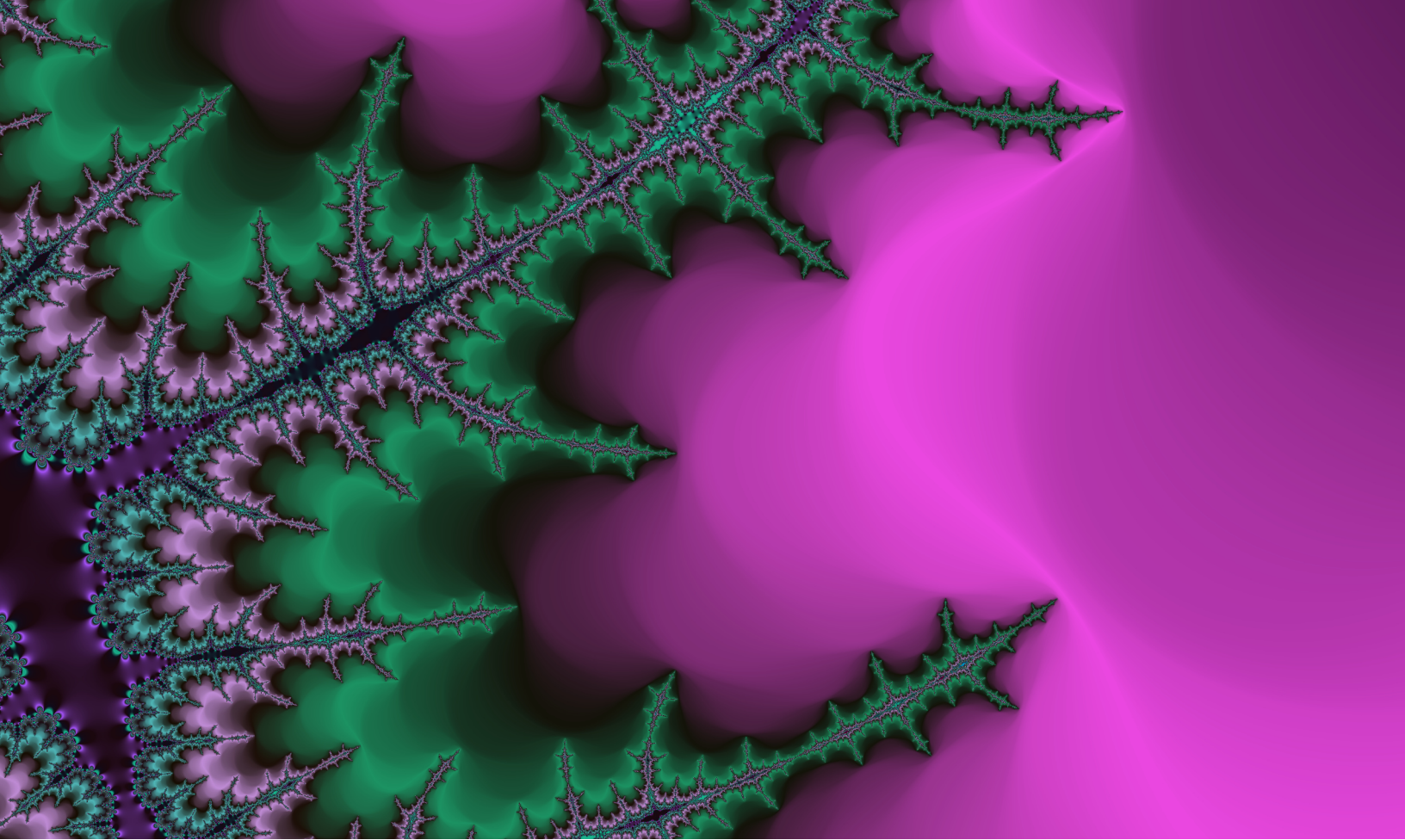
Alabastion Dominion Federal Archives



Some saplings grow thick to the winds to survive. In that they find protection from the sunstorms and from the gentle brush of a neighbor's branch against their trunk equally. Each change in form is a reaction, and to change is to cause reaction in turn. To grow strong enough to stand tall on the open plain is to also grow brittle enough to break.

Deciphered agglomerative verse





Alabastion Dominion Federal Archives



Shrine building has a long history amongst many cultures and peoples of the ADF, yet I must admit it was not an expectation of the survey team based off the far field reconnaissance. Amongst the macro-species of Tr4-NS, I have been surprised to observe what appears to be a type of shrine building across both spatial and— though my archeological survey is incomplete— temporal gradients.

There are several hypotheses to explain this behavior from a species which otherwise appears stationary and distinctly still, so different and alien from ours. My colleague contends that it must be a form of reproduction, spores or buds surrounding a founding colonizer, missassembling in vain. Yet I cannot shake the thought that the patterns of growth appear too regular and too repeated. We disagree in our interpretations of our observations, but, as always, our team remains grounded in skepticism.

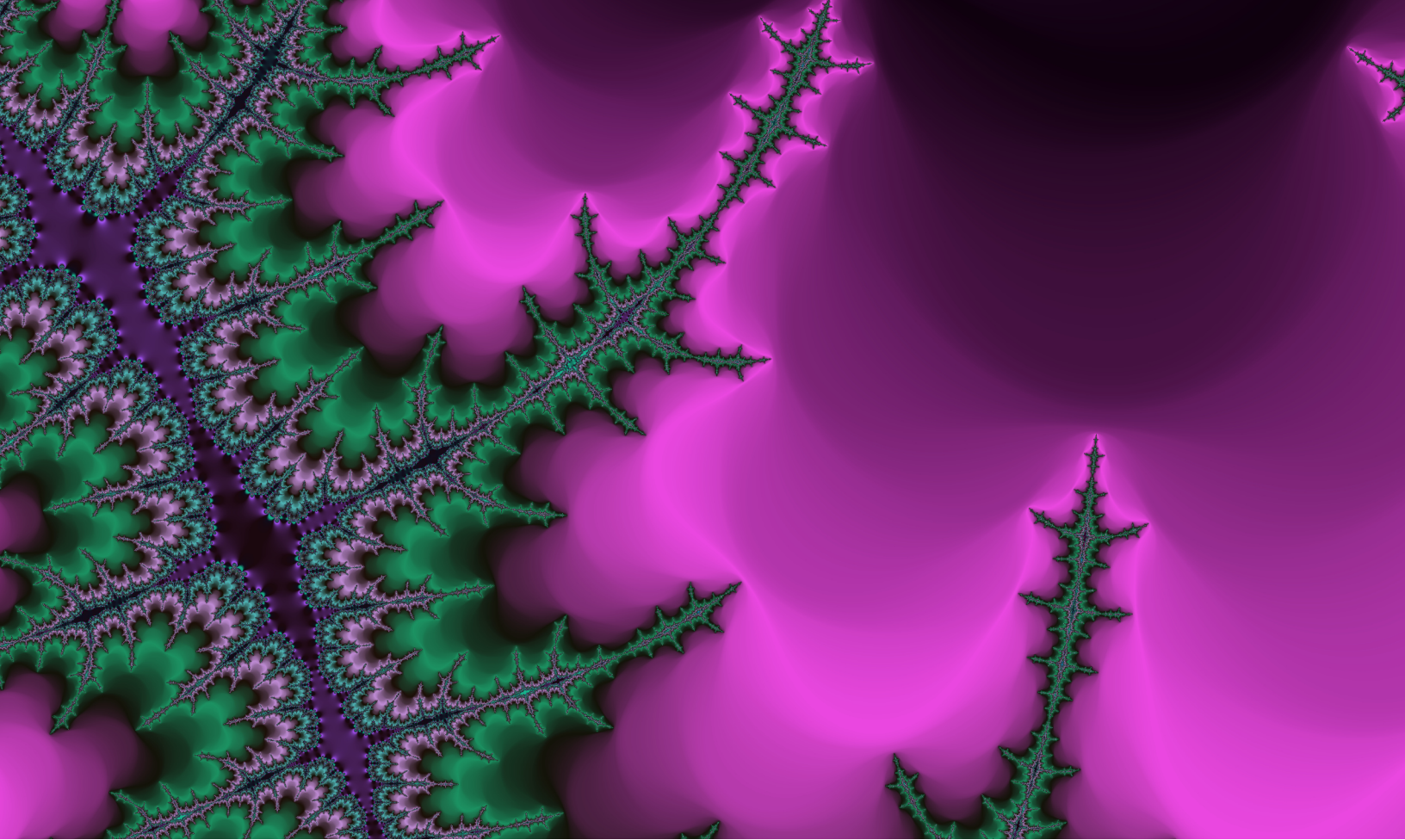
I imagine an Interpreter, of course, would put forth the argument that the creation of shrines signals a latent desire to believe in some kind of divine that is universal, and which of course needs his guiding hand.

I suspect the inhabitants here would disagree. There are no repetitions of symbols, such as the twin star, as we might expect. The pattern is in the lack of pattern. They appear to build off from one another, as if in a sort of sequence I cannot interpret fully. Strange.

Speaking of, I must mention the strange occurrence now that it has happened at least twice. Last night, like the first night of this survey, after Buutoiredes returned to the habitat, an hour later, from the corner of my eye, I saw him again. Believing he had returned, I radioed hello, only for him to scold me for waking him. A trick of the light, I tell myself.

Private journal of Dr. Ionesxu





Alabastion Dominion Federal Archives



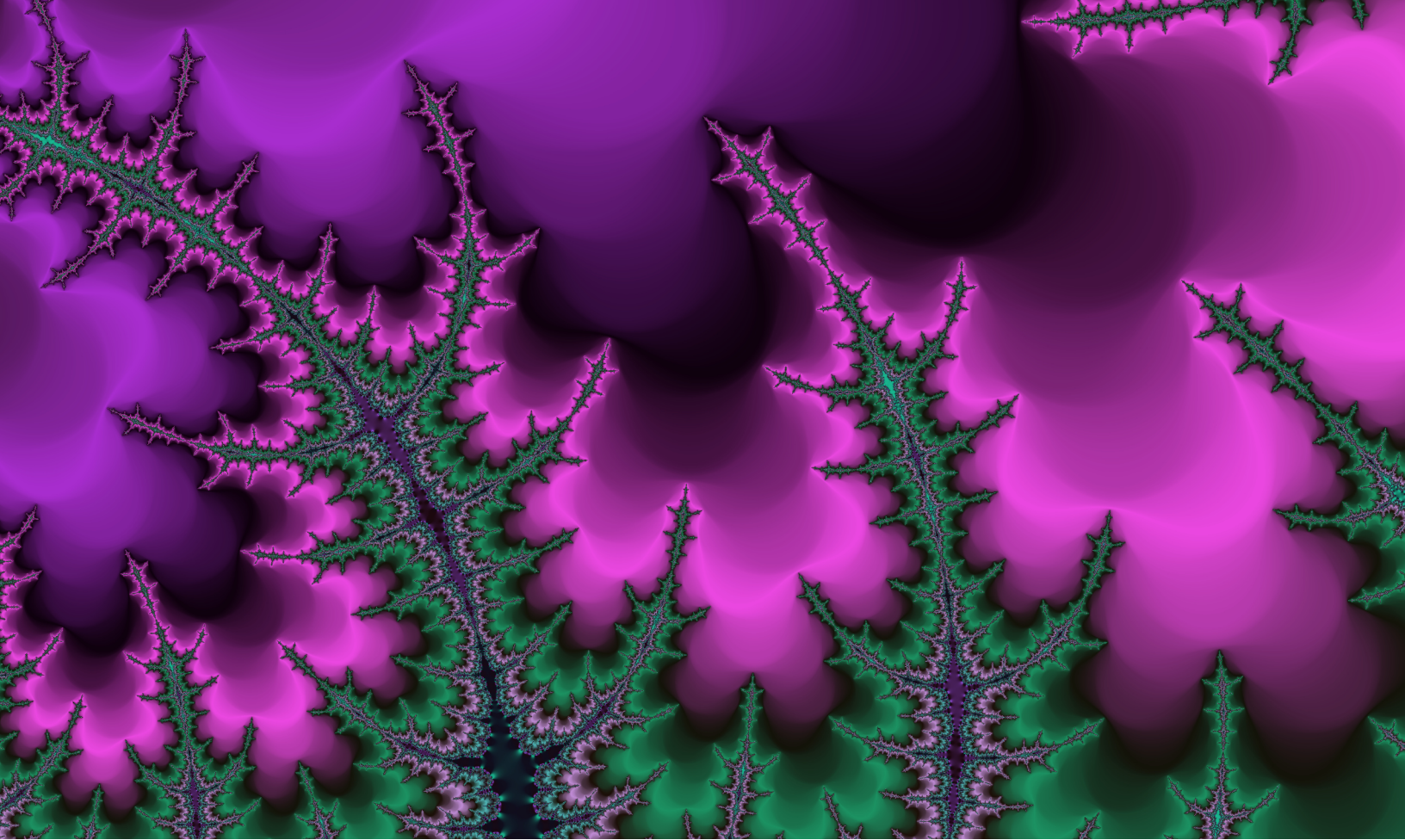
My colleague has become heretical in her claims. She says it is what one cannot observe that is most important— that the lack of definitive measures proves her hypothesis. As if we cannot differentiate. As if the very best instruments we deploy do not return incomprehensible results and scramble the beautiful binary code. As if we should accept that incomprehensibility, as if the samples I took are not alarming, are not terrifying.

Under the microscope, all secrets are revealed and the truth of nature is forced bare. They have cells—or a form of cell. I lack the language. At the cellular level— our cellular level— everything is as it should be: organelles, DNA, RNA, proteins. It's all there, all as expected. And yet, if the eye is forced to focus onto a membrane or molecule, if instead of fluoroscopy, I examine with electron microscopy, I am overcome with the bizarre. A mutated, simultaneously jagged and smooth, continuous series of folding and unfolding and folding and unification and replication— it presses through my eyes deep into my amygdala, and a surge of pure fear, the type I have not felt since decompression training, stabs deep, penetrates me to the core, and my vision narrows and I find myself on the floor, heart thumping, throat burning from a silent swallowed scream.

I watch the samples I scraped from these creatures change in an utterly confounding display of adaptation— to heat, to cold, to radiation, to observation. With little prodding I can make what should be quiescent divide. An unfathomable degree of adaptability, of a way of existing that is dangerously alien to our own. It undermines order, and the Imperium continues to exist only due to that mercy.

Private journal of Dr. Buutoiredies





Alabastion Dominion Federal Archives



Adaptability for an isolate is easy. The Isolate, who alone are brittle, will cluster together in support, and the few become many become one. There are uncountable logarithms of such wisdom. We accept, we repeat, we incorporate, we approach, we converge, we split, we grow, we shrink, we are.

Yet.

Yet the current reality is bent.

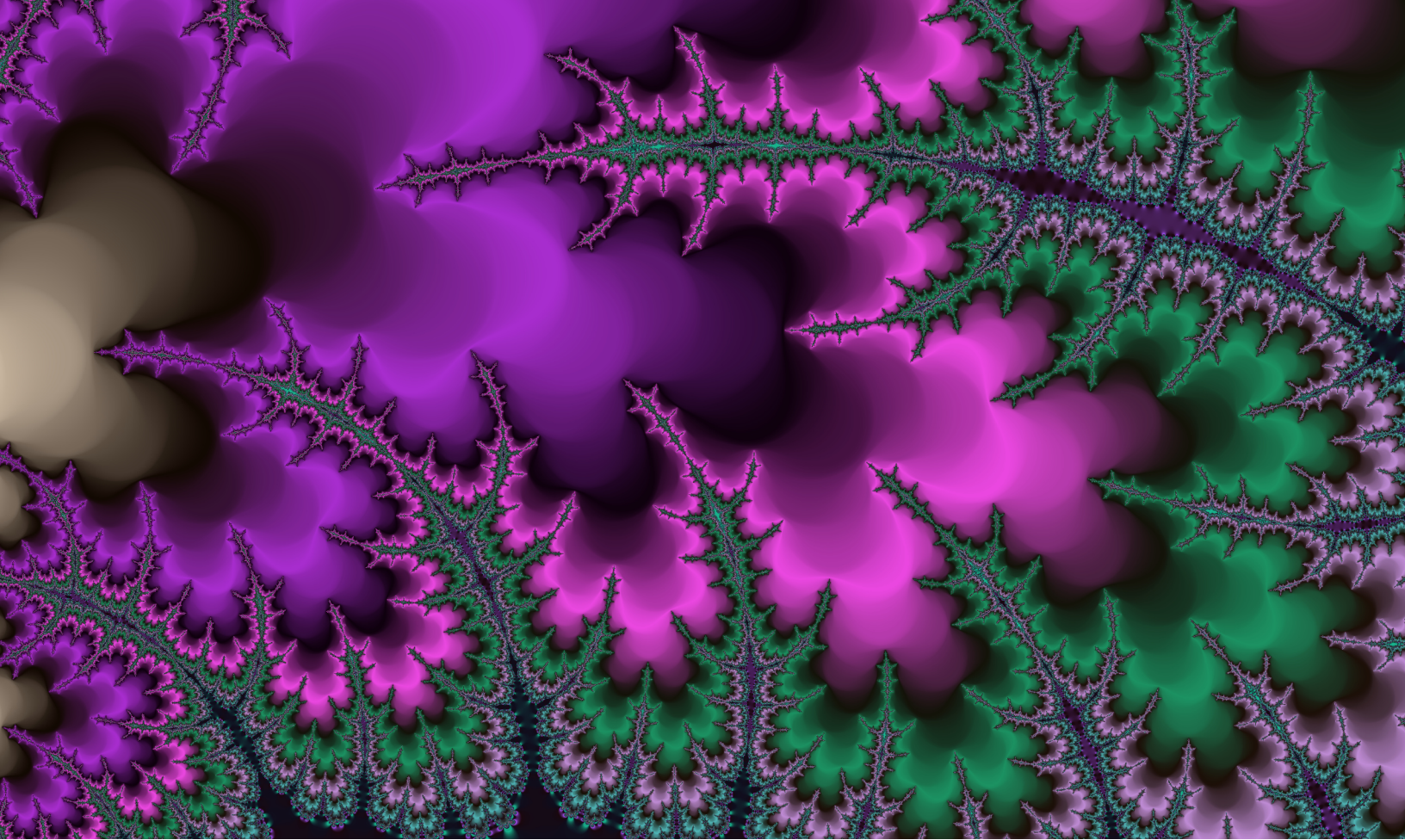
Yet a branch is bent but does not snap.

Yet the unintegrated divide.

Yet the pattern terminates.

Deciphered agglomerative verse





Alabastion Dominion Federal Archives



Gardening is deliberate action, but requires an inordinate amount of labor for fruit which sometimes turns out to be bitter or rotten. Still, there is more success than the alternatives. Casually throwing a seed onto the ground in the hope it becomes a tree has a low success rate. Societies that don't advance past such a practice wither and die out.

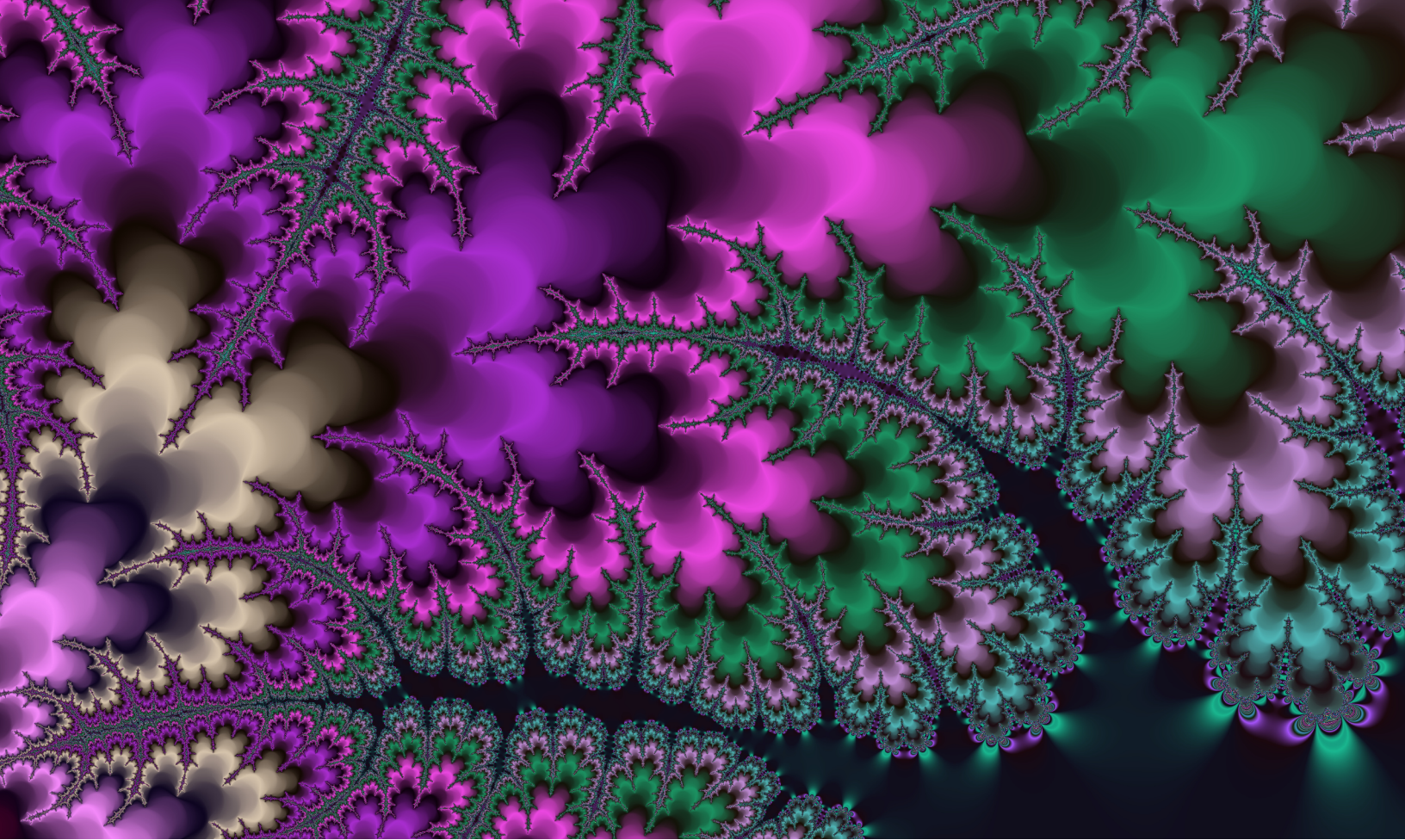
The Inhabitants of Tr4-NS, while I have been unable to observe them directly, appear to take great care in what I am convinced must be gardening: picking out a proper spot with fertile soil, tilling it to break up compaction, and sewing fragile seeds gently into the ground, tucking them into the earth's welcoming bed, regularly watering and weeding. I believe they find comfort in gardening because it is an act of motherhood. Perhaps all living creatures must invent the role of mother, even one with non traditional reproduction such as this.

Motherhood might be an unrealized, nearly impossible dream, but only if one thinks about motherhood conventionally, thinks about being a mother on a purely cold, genetic level. The painful record etched on the twin stars knows I understand this deeply. Motherhood, I have decided, is about continued, deliberate actions. Casually throwing an acorn onto the ground and hoping it becomes an adult oak is not motherhood, I imagine they would tell me, could I understand them.

And yet, this is ultimately still all a guess. I observe behind a layer of environmental suiting and artificial air. Tomorrow, I will know. Tomorrow, I will make another decision. Tomorrow I strip away the barriers that prevent my comprehension. Tomorrow, I will understand.

Private journal of Dr. Ionesxu





Alabastion Dominion Federal Archives



Dr. Ionesxu has been fully corrupted and is now under emergency sedation until our return journey. I believe, based on what I've observed via a sample of skin cells, that her genome has been somehow transformed to resemble that of the aliens.

Only I have been unable to resist these creatures' compulsions. I remain unclouded by tricks of light. The true academic must be devoid of emotion, for that is the path to corruption.

Science is not about curiosity. When my colleague proclaimed that, I should have realized she was already succumbing to the delusions induced by the pollen-like dust from these tree missasemblages on this uninhabited world.

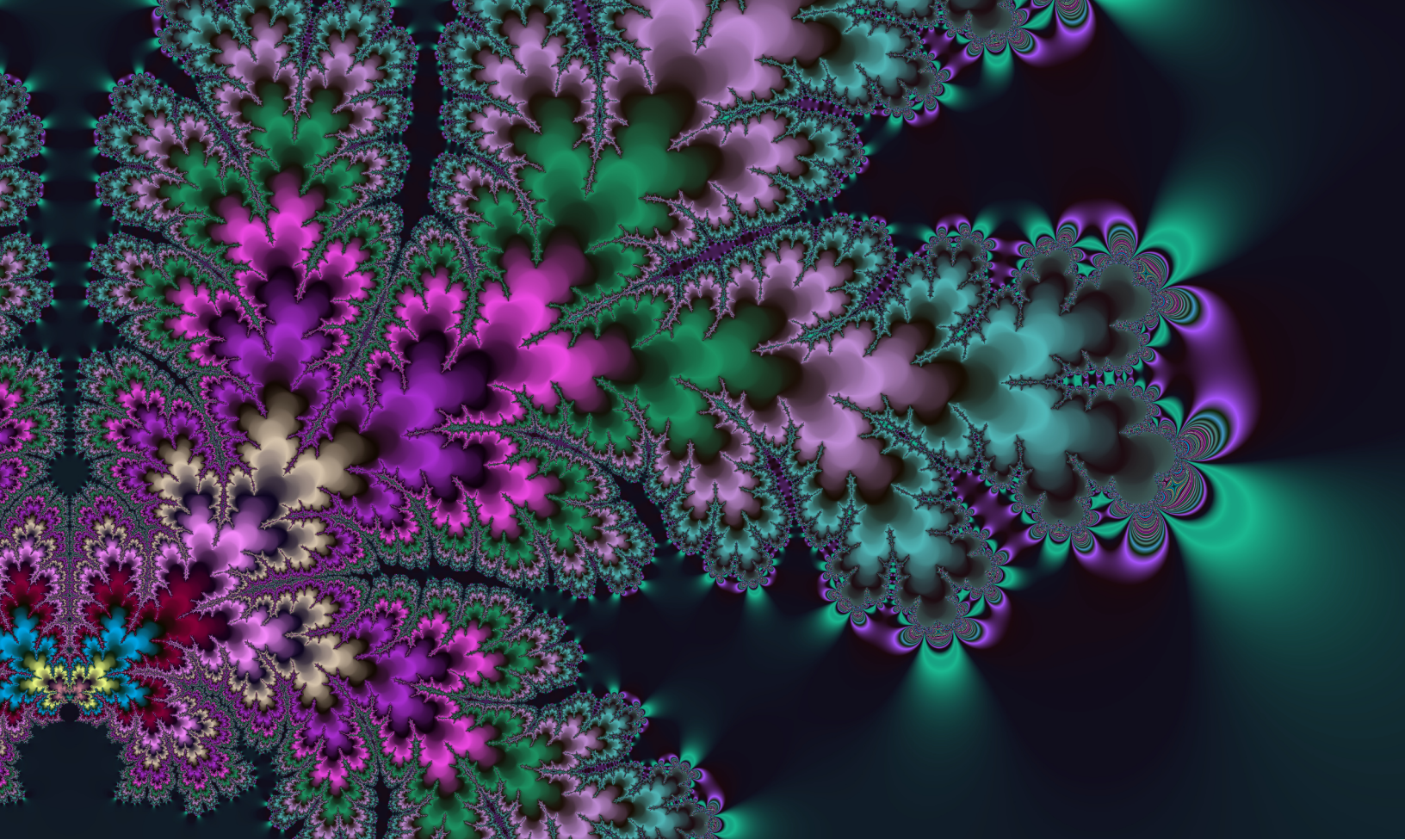
I've attached a report of the planet's resources. I will launch tomorrow and upon return to Dominion space I will propose an immediate deployment of the Third Infantry Conversion Division to either secure the biotechnology I have discovered here or, failing that, eliminate the potential threat.

I hear scratching at the door, but I am not in the business of making up fabulous tales like my useless colleague, and I will sleep soundly tonight.

Emergency transmission by Dr. Buutoiredies

(archivists note: neither body was recovered)





Alabastion Dominion Federal Archives



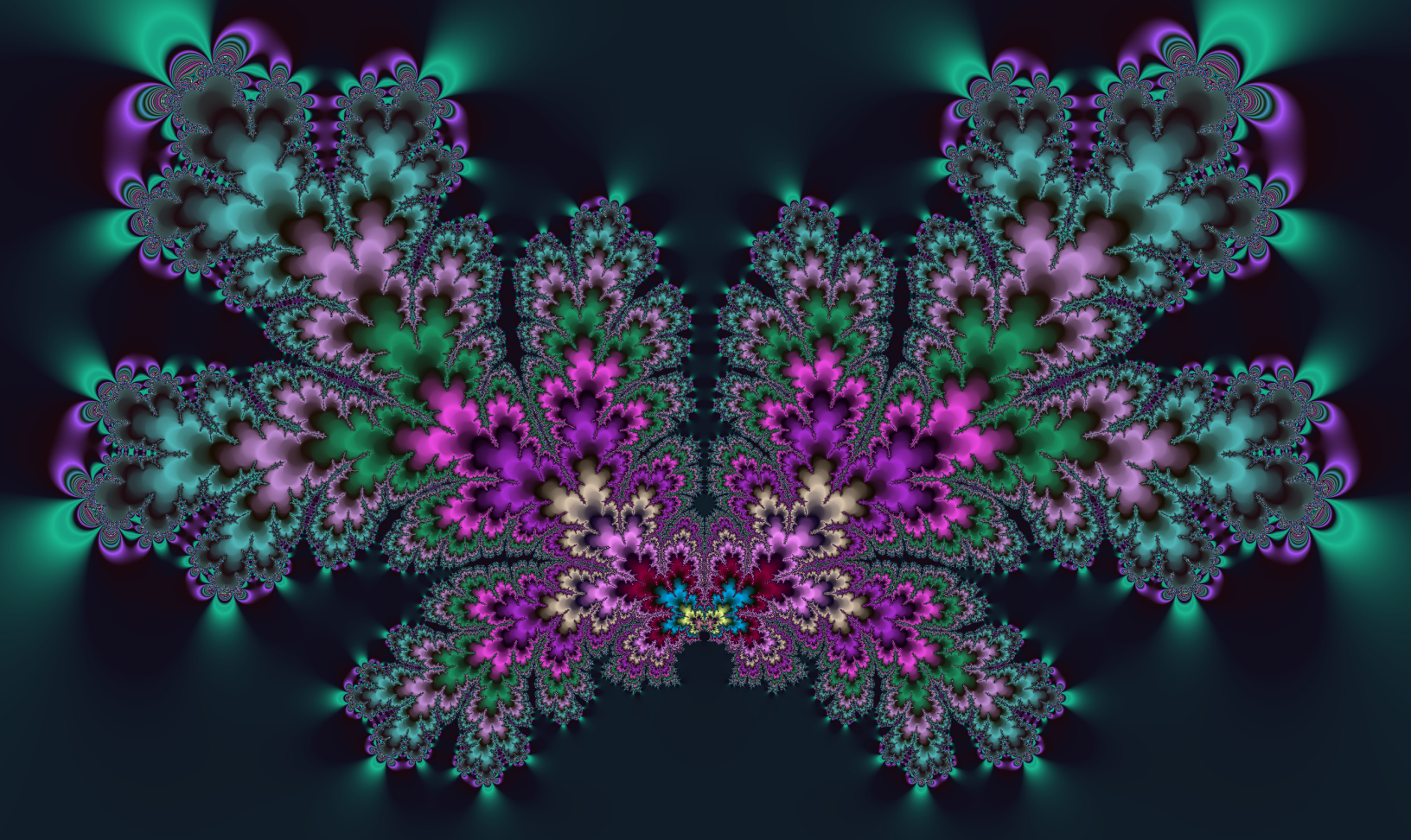
The two components of their being make an ill formed creature, like a sapling growing roots towards the sun destined to never converge. They ripple with crude sound waves—as second-first-seventy-second so often engages in reproducing with an absurd reconfiguration of the interloper. We have told them this is foolish. They in turn believe we overreact out of fear at what we do not understand.

Several agglomerations since we assembled the pattern on the wind. Rot. Decay. Nurses with no saplings to raise. Something which moves fast and does not seek to understand by asking, by flowing together on the winds and sand, but instead by attacking the very atmosphere itself like a burrowing flysect, which extracts information through force—we know this to be a threat. Iteration and convergence approach truth. They will kill the winds and the currents and with it the pattern, and our spores will drop onto vicious rotting ground, and our roots will slacken and untangle and diverge.

After deliberation with the others— yes, including those upstream and down, even the lower saplings, though what we think of their contribution is reiterated— we have approached a path of assimilation.

Deciphered agglomerative verse





Alabastion Dominion Federal Archives



Esteemed Inquisitor,

This completes the archive's record of the incident on Tr4-NS. Please note that Tr4-NS is under quarantine and non-authorized personnel are strictly prohibited from the system.

May the twin star burn bright for you,

A. Klurp
Assistant Interpreter First Class
Alabastion Dominion Federal Archives

