

ECLIPSE PHASE

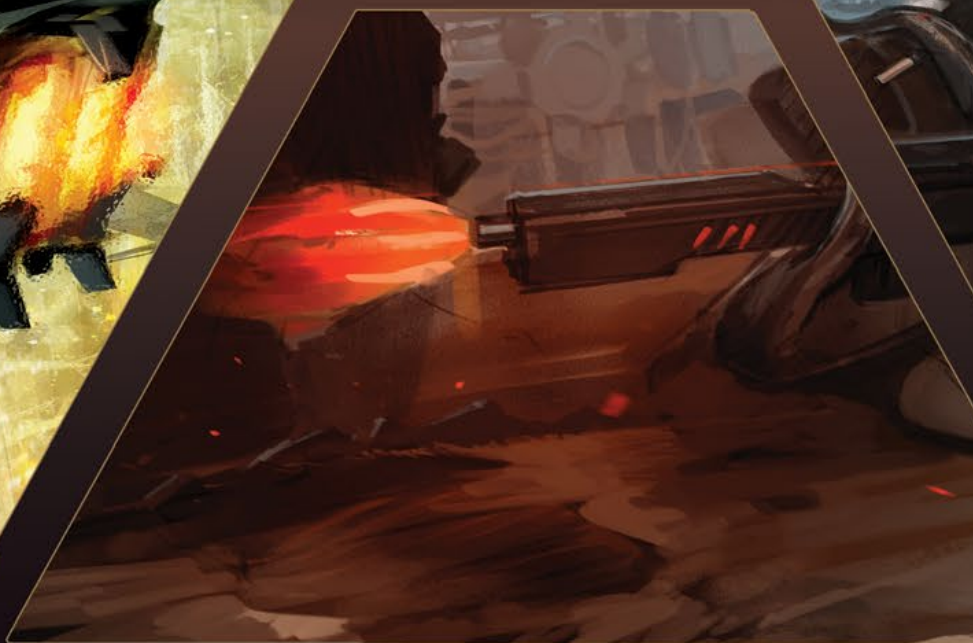
SECOND EDITION

Router Case Files



ADVENTURE SEEDS FROM ACROSS THE SOLAR SYSTEM

Eclipse Phase plot hooks
for **Firewall**,
gatecrashing,
criminal,
and other campaigns.



ECLIPSE **PHASE**
SECOND EDITION

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ECLIPSE

PHASE SECOND EDITION

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The following pages provide a selection of plot hooks for gamemasters (GMs) to run with. These ideas are short and provide the bare-bones outline for a scenario. Some provide specific details, like the names of hypercorps and non-player characters (NPCs), or a recommended setting (i.e., Elysium on Mars), while others are more generic, leaving those details to be filled in. We often include several possibilities for the GM to choose from, to best fit your campaign and keep the players on their toes in case they read this too! Most of these hooks are meant to be run over the course of a session or three, but they could certainly be stretched out for more sessions if needed.

We’ve organized these plot hooks into rough categories; each two-page spread covering a different topic. The first three focus on specific campaign types: Firewall, gatecrashing, or Guanxi criminals. The next two spreads cover the inner and outer halves of the Solar System, respectively. The remaining spreads relate to different focus areas: hypercorps, mercurials, the mesh and media, politics, transhumanity, and weirder things.

On top of that, we list a set of keyword *tags* with each hook that indicate what other topics, groups, and places that scenario idea might relate to. This provides an easy way of scanning them for specific subjects. Need an adventure idea that involves Venus, forking, or exsurgents? Scan the tags to see which ones might work. We’ve included an index of the tags at the very back, so you can see a full list of the hooks for each subject.

As always, any given details can and should be changed by the GM as you see fit. Take these ideas and run with them!



ON THE COVER:

An uplifted neo-parrot operate a Pandora gate blue-box unit; a Firewall team takes cover during a firefight outside a Martian dome; a fixer watches their contacts arrive to a rooftop aircar pad for a face-to-face meeting; drone fighters patrol the airspace around a hypercorp facility.

FIREWALL

These plots hooks involve x-risks and Firewall intrigues.

PRECIOUS TENSIONS

The Venus-Earth scum cyler *Precious Bodily Fluids*, passing near the Earth-Luna L5 point, has suddenly cut all communications and swerved away from its swarm, initiating a rocket-assisted high-g burn toward Luna. Trajectory projections place it as aimed directly towards Erato, making the ship a potential crude bomb strike on a major habitat. The sentinels are called into action, but they have less than 12 hours to stop the cyler.

The sentinels have two options for getting aboard the ship. First is to somehow establish a communications link with the ship, hack in, and hope to find morphs on board the PCs can sleeve into. Second is to catch up to the cyler with a smaller, faster ship launched from the station Fresh Kills, another scum ship in the swarm, or somewhere else nearby in the system. They have a potential ally on board: another Firewall sentinel known as Najila Khodayari, who is aboard the ship for reasons unknown; Firewall lost contact with them shortly before the incident began.

Lunar-Lagrange Alliance (LLA) ships and defenses are prepared to destroy the *Precious Bodily Fluids* if it fails to stop. There are hundreds aboard the cyler, however, and scum voices online quickly call foul, pointing out that LLA media sources routinely paint the scum as terrorists and use them as convenient scapegoats. The narrative takes a sharp turn when scum surveillance cams reveal that a known Oversight operative and a number of disguised Direct Action mercenaries boarded the ship just hours before it diverted course. Tensions between the scum, LLA, and Planetary Consortium heighten around the system as a potential diplomatic incident begins to boil over.

The seizure of the ship could be the work of political extremists, exsurgents, or a shadowy third party hoping to engineer a war between the PC and LLA. The sentinels will need to navigate a hostile environment, a potentially captive crew, and other factions to defuse a powder keg.

TAGS: Earth Orbit • Firewall • Inner System • Lunar-Lagrange Alliance • Luna • Planetary Consortium • Politics • Scum

A MESSAGE FROM EARTH

An illicit Earthside salvage operation run by reclaimers goes dark just days after discovering a major pre-Fall artifact. A few days later, several prominent reclaimers with ties to the project go missing off-world. Firewall puts the pieces together and launches an investigation.

The sentinels first discover that the operation on Earth sent one last transmission that managed to get past the jamming. This transmission included a large volume of data — or possibly an ego. Further investigation of the reclaimers who received it, now missing, indicates that they used an illegal darkcasting surface to egocast to Extropia.

There are several possible conclusions to this mystery. First, the reclaimers may now be infected TITAN puppets, on a mission to reactivate a TITAN project in the Main Belt. Alternatively, the reclaimers may have discovered the location to a valuable cache of Earth artifacts, which they hope to retrieve in order to fund their cause — if others that intercepted the transmission don't get

to it first. Or, the reclaimers may have discovered evidence that a powerful LLA politician and oligarch is a TITAN sleeper agent, and have gone into hiding to evade the oligarch's operatives who are eager to keep their secrets.

TAGS: Earth • Extropians • Firewall • Inner System • Lunar-Lagrange Alliance • Oligarchs • Outer System • Reclaimers • TITANS

VIRTUAL SECRETS

A Firewall crew receives a message via long-unused communication channels claiming to be from Niagh Owiti, an infosec specialist who was part of the Jormungandr Initiative, a proto-Firewall organization active during the Fall. Niagh was thought to have been killed trying to escape Earth via the Kilimanjaro space elevator; none of her backups are known to have survived.

Niagh's message claims that her ego has been held captive in a virtual environment hidden within a popular simspace wargame for years. Called *Struggle of States*, the game gives players the roles of national leaders in a recreation of Earth's 18th century. The game seems utterly unremarkable, apart from a lively gambling culture and the vast amounts of money some players spend on their particular countries. Though Niagh's message is brief, it includes a call-sign known only to Jormungandr operatives, giving it credibility. She also hints that other egos are imprisoned or enslaved within the game.

The message's trail has been erased and the security flaw used to send it fixed, so Firewall opts to send a team into the game's VR to investigate. Not only was Niagh a valued agent, but she was carrying fragments of TITAN code when she disappeared. Firewall wants her rescued and debriefed, if possible, and the simspace evaluated for potential risks. Once inside, the sentinels discover that some of the players and factions within the game are more than they seem, though they will need to acquire cheat codes to access the darkest secrets buried within the game's servers. Whether the game hides a secret Ozma virtual prison, a cabal of ego slavers, or hostile TITAN software, the sentinels will quickly discover they are not the only party investigating its mysteries.

TAGS: Firewall • Mesh • Ozma • TITANS

LIBERATING CHOICES

Firewall's attention is directed towards "The Contraband," a radical group planning a sophisticated viral attack against IndEx, the Planetary Consortium's indenture exchange market. The sentinels are sent to monitor and possibly even infiltrate the group.

Firewall keeps a close eye on IndEx, not only for the potential economic and social malfeasance, but also for the utterly massive quantities of personal data kept in storage. Firewall is also quite concerned about the egos or forks of Firewall agents and friendlies that may get traded on the exchange or that are held within hypercorp and criminal data vaults, having been recovered, forknapped, or otherwise acquired. The risk that the identity of Firewall sentinels and proxies and knowledge about the history of the Fall, TITANS, and other x-risks could fall into the hands of unscrupulous criminal or ideological elements is substantial.

Firewall's primary source of information on IndEx is Pyrrhos, a proxy working within IndEx's executive staff. While he's undoubtedly an effective agent, many in the Eye are suspicious of his loyalties, given his position as an ego profiteer and, some would argue, legal slaver.

The Contraband demand the dissolution of the indenture markets, freedom for all indentured egos, and the end of planned obsolescence in morph design. They have carried out several clever and successful acts of economic vandalism in the past. If their new viral attack is successfully implemented, it will inflict widespread damage to IndEx networks, nullify thousands of in-progress contracts, and throw the labor markets on several habitats into chaos. Various hab expansion and construction projects on or in orbit around Luna and Mars will grind to a halt. However, the attack will also make sensitive personal information public, cause the sudden release of thousands of indentures (many of whom are convicts), reset some contracts to an earlier state (including transferred and completed ones), and create mesh blackouts and network interruptions across the system.

The PCs may find themselves torn between stopping the attack and letting it happen. On one hand, they may see it as justified and an opportunity to liberate some Firewall egos from bondage. On the other hand, the plan will unleash chaos and put many other indentures and former indentures at risk. Some sensitive data may also fall into the wrong hands. Complicating the situation, some suspect that the Contraband are being manipulated by a third party that plans to use the chaos of the hack as a cover for some additional goal.

TAGS: Firewall • Hypercorps • Indentures • Mesh • Planetary Consortium • Politics

STEM THE FLOW

A Firewall proxy takes a risk and gets involved in fieldwork when one of their sentinel teams needs a hand. Unfortunately, the op went sideways and the proxy has ended up in the hands of local authorities — along with a small cache of TITAN artifacts. To make matters worse, Oversight has already been called in to investigate the affair. If the proxy is thoroughly interrogated by Oversight agents, it will be an operational disaster for the local server, as they could spill details on quite a few of Firewall's ongoing activities. The PCs are sent in to rescue the proxy before that interrogation happens — or eliminate their stack. If the PCs can also dispose of the TITAN machinery, even better.

The proxy was captured in the Martian outback and is being delivered by Martian Rangers to an Oversight office in the nearest large habitat. The team can try to intercept them en route, stage an ambush within the city, or infiltrate the Oversight offices. Whatever choice they make, they need to move fast. As an added complication, the smugglers who were originally transporting the TITAN artifacts also want their goods back. They may get to the Rangers before the PCs do, forcing the team into a chase with the Rangers and Oversight also on their heels.

TAGS: Firewall • Guanxi • Inner System • Mars • Oversight • TITANS

SKILLSOFT EXTRAS

An outbreak of unusual activity on a habitat has piqued the interest of Firewall — and local authorities. Several citizens have committed murder, habitat sabotage, and other crimes, each claiming they were somehow manipulated and could not help themselves. Though cyberbrain hacking has been ruled out (the subjects have bio brains), there are concerns about other causes.

The authorities fear an exsurgent outbreak or nanovirus, while Firewall fears a malicious async or group of asyncs may be responsible. As the PCs conduct their research, they may have the opportunity to intervene in a new crime as it occurs. A careful look at correlating details among the subjects will eventually notice that all of them have recently installed skillware systems. Each of them acquired the ware through the same cyberclinic.

As it turns out, the doctor who installed each of these implants is a secret exhuman. The skillware tech is based on an experimental prototype stolen from Cognite and modified for the exhuman's own nefarious purposes. These modified implants not only function slightly better due to Cognite's enhanced functionality, but they also imprint new motivations and behaviors in the subject, eventually forcing them to commit acts they would not otherwise have committed. The exhuman should avoid the PCs' first efforts to capture them, going to ground in a secret lair within the habitat. They will then use a backdoor they installed in each of the skillware systems to turn others who have been implanted with the ware against the PCs. These mental puppets will also be incited to create havoc across the habitat. As the team works to track down the exhuman, they will also have to deal with a Cognite team that has arrived to confiscate their stolen tech.

TAGS: Exhumans • Firewall • Hypercorps

MECHANICAL EDEN

Firewall becomes aware of a situation with a remote automated corporate factory outpost. According to the hypercorp's intercepted internal comms, they received signals requesting unusual agricultural supplies before the facility suddenly went silent. The corp sent a team of techs to repair the station, but lost contact; the last transmission featuring what sounds like screams and gunfire. Fearing some sort of outbreak, Firewall sends the PCs in to investigate.

Upon gaining access to the habitat, the team is met with the sight of the bodies of a second corporate strike squad that arrived just before them. Each corpse is propped up with metal and wood in strange poses, with a strong lamp shining down upon it. Further scouting will reveal a facility that is barely functioning and in poorly maintained condition. The discovery of what appear to be metallic flower sculptures and the echoing broadcast of haunted, fragmented melodies over public AR channels is likely to put the PCs on edge.

The team does not face exsurgent monsters, however, but an emergent and confused AI. The ALI that operates the facility suffered problems with its code many years ago, attempted to patch itself, and partly due to a lack of maintenance and oversight, eventually expressed its own neurodivergent general intelligence. Due to its own misconceptions about its own nature and an understanding of life, it has created its own faux ecosystem and propped up the corpses in an attempt to make them "regrow." The AI remains quite protective of itself, and will dispatch oddly-enhanced robots to counter any attempts to cut its power systems or otherwise cause it harm. The AI is mostly benign if often confused. As another corporate strike team arrives, the team will need to decide whether to protect it or help destroy it.

TAGS: Firewall • Hypercorps • Infolife

GATECRASHING

These hooks involve the pandora gates, aliens, and exoplanets.

SHELLEY

The beta fork of astrobiologist Dharvi Sudhakara comes to the PCs for help. Her research has been stolen and her original ego has disappeared — and she thinks the Factors may be responsible.

Sudhakara's research involved Shelley, a recently discovered exoplanet accessible via the Vulcanoid gate. Shelley is Mars-sized and moderately habitable, but devoid of life and bearing few exploitable resources. It's only notable features are the enormous fossilized mushroom-like structures that dot its landscape. Clustered in groves on all four of the planet's continents, these structures were found to be connected subterraneously. Sudhakara surmises that they represent the fruiting bodies of truly vast organisms rooted deep within the continental plates. Surveys suggest that these growths may actually share a single root system deep within the planet's core.

The planet's lack of profitable resources meant that further research was de-prioritized, but then Sudhakara made a startling discovery. When she compared cells harvested from the fossil structures to partial genetic samples surreptitiously gathered from the Factors, she found some striking commonalities. Firewall had previously gathered these samples forensically from meeting spaces the alien ambassadors had visited without their knowledge and asked Sudhakara to analyze them. These similarities lead to disquieting questions regarding the Factor's relation to this otherwise dead planet.

Sudhakara believes that the Factors may have hired someone to steal or destroy her research to hide this connection. The PCs must track down the parties responsible. Firewall is also interested in pursuing Sudhakara's research, which may involve a descent into Shelley's depths for better samples and/or surreptitiously gathering better genetic samples from the Factors themselves.

TAGS: Factors • Firewall • Gatecrashing

TITAN MOON

Firewall is alerted to an extrasolar moon, one of twelve bodies orbiting a distant gas giant, discovered by a team of gatecrashers via the exoplanet gate nexus Portal. A barren rock similar in size and nature to Luna, it appears to be the site of extensive TITAN facilities, abandoned and ruined. These ruins bear the marks of a protracted and savage battle. The team is sent in to analyze the situation and identify/destroy any active TITAN AIs or machines. This is a high-threat mission, and the PCs are instructed to destroy the remote gate if necessary.

The sentinels find the majority of facilities are open to the trace atmosphere and heavy radiation bombardment from the system's sun. Like much of the TITANs' abandoned technology, the purpose of their operations here — and the conflict that ended them — are a mystery. The team, however, finds several habitats clearly designed to support Earth-friendly biological life. Within these domes are dozens of transhuman and animal corpses. They also find thousands of cortical stacks, likely harvested by the TITANs during the Fall, many of which appear to have been heavily altered for unknown purposes. The stacks could be rescued, but they may pose an infection risk.

Several threats may endanger the mission. TITAN machines still lurk in the ruins, hostile to intruders, and a fetch (▶408 EP2) will take an interest in interlopers. The team may even find transhuman survivors — perhaps irrevocably changed or complete TITAN puppets. And, of course, there's the question of who or what the TITANs were fighting here. The team's efforts may also be rushed when another faction sends a team through the gate, having heard of the exomoon's potential plunder.

TAGS: Firewall • Gatecrashing • TITANs

LOST COLONY

The PCs are tasked to investigate a recently rediscovered lost colony. For two years, the gate address has been unreachable. An initial probe through the gate indicates that the colony infrastructure seems to be intact, but there is no sign of an active presence (no transhumans spotted or radio signals received). As the gatecrashers scout what seems to be an abandoned colony, the mysteries begin to mount. First the explorers find several structures that are not part of the original colony plans and which seem to be constructed from materials unfamiliar to transhumanity. Then they find an entire intact passenger space shuttle — which was certainly not a part of the colony's equipment. An examination of the shuttle indicates that it is one thought to have been shot down by the TITANs over Buenos Aires while attempting to escape during the Fall. The shuttle had been chartered by a group of wealthy families without clear ties to one another; its loss was never fully investigated.

Further snooping uncovers a series of tunnels underneath the colony, with warrens showing clear signs of recent transhuman habitation. The PCs recover personal recordings and preserved journalistic content that date back to the Fall, but nothing recent, deepening the mystery. However, the tunnels are also occupied by dormant TITAN machines — which come to life as the presence of the gatecrashers is detected. As the gatecrashers struggle to make sense of what has transpired here, they are forced to withdraw for a narrow escape during the short window in which the return gate is open, perhaps with an opportunity to destroy the colony as they go.

TAGS: Firewall • Gatecrashing • TITANs

M-TYPE

The PCs are the first-in team through a new gate location. This particular gate opens onto the surface of an enormous, but compositionally standard, M-type asteroid that appears to be hurtling through deep space. It is approximately 1.5 miles in length and 0.25 miles in diameter with a roughly bullet shape. Its exterior appears to be unmodified bar the single gate structure, but scans indicate the presence of a cavernous interior and technological structures under the surface. The asteroid or ship does not have any indications of a method of propulsion, but positioning via quasars and nearby stars indicates that it is currently traveling near the edge of our galactic arm and, from its speed and present course, may have originated from the Andromeda Galaxy.

The team will eventually find a way inside. The interior is a beehive with no atmosphere, yet every indication that passages were constructed by an unknown intelligent entity. The PCs observe no signs of habitation or living quarters, but as they venture deeper (perhaps upon successive visits), the habitat or vessel awakens to their presence and ancient systems come to life: power, lighting, heat, perhaps even atmosphere.



The more they explore, the more tantalizing the mysteries get. The PCs may find technological relics, sealed environments with alien biomes that have either run amok or succumb to sepsis, maybe even the remains of the original alien inhabitants. Investigation is not without danger: old tunnels are unstable, pressurized environments can explosively decompress, ancient systems might malfunction or identify the PCs as intruders, and strange non-sapient creatures could still thrive in deep chambers. But the gatecrashers will not have long to explore; it will soon become clear that the awakened power systems are unstable. As the situation slowly deteriorates with asteroid-quakes, steam ventings, and strange alien warning signals, the PCs will need to escape back through the gate before the ship/hab self destructs.

TAGS: Aliens • Gatecrashing

SEEDS OF DISCORD

The team is approached with a challenging mission: infiltrate a Go-nin gatecrashing mission through the Discord Gate on Eris. Go-nin has discovered something major on an exoplanet, but they are keeping it top secret; the PCs need to find out what it is. Whether they are working for Firewall, a rival hypercorp, outer-system anarchists, or some other faction, the PCs will be provided with the key ingredients they need: cover IDs as employees of another hypercorp from which Go-nin often contracts support work and who are expected on the mission. However, the scheme is not foolproof and will require some initiative from the team to properly pull off.

This could include: faking credentials to land a ship at Eris, hacking a body bank on Eris to get some upgraded morphs, smuggling weapons past Go-nin security, stealthing into a secure area to get mission details they will be expected to know, and/or impersonating the people they claim to be to Go-nin personnel that are familiar with them. To increase the tension, have one of the people they are impersonating show up unexpectedly on Eris or have the team be assigned an escort of Ultimates “for their own security.”

Once they get through the gate with the rest of the Go-nin mission, the team will need to play their roles while investigating whatever Go-nin has discovered. This could be ruins from a new alien civilization, functional alien tech, evidence of the TITANs, a startling but unexplained phenomenon of physics, or something weirder. Depending on the specifics, the team may have been given additional sealed instructions: steal the artifact, sabotage the operation, etc. As the team struggles to maintain their cover and fulfill their mission, unexpected complications may arise. New dangers may be discovered in the local environment, a group of exhumans may attack through the gate, or a rival set of infiltrators may strike, perhaps placing the team under suspicion. The PCs will have a set timeframe to complete their goals before they are scheduled to return through the gate, though they always have the option of trying to seize control of the gate and escaping to another destination.

TAGS: Aliens • Gatecrashing • Hypercorps • Outer System • TITANs • Ultimates

GUANXI

These plot hooks incorporate crime, gangs, and cartels.

DARK WATERS

The Quiet Song Pod, an up-and-coming neo-orca criminal family, has found (or stolen) a collection of alien artifacts and is arranging an auction in the subterranean ocean of Europa. Items on offer run from the relatively prosaic (a lump of as-yet unidentified alloy unaffected by electromagnetic radiation) to the downright dangerous (a xeno-orca organism that has a nasty habit of trying to crawl down people's throats). A number of big players are attending, from cartel captains to oligarch reps, along with buyers from a few hypercorps and Extropian trading firms that don't mind a little under-the-table business.

The Quiet Song's more-established rivals — the Kraken Eaters and Bering Irregulars neo-orca pods — seek to undermine the auction. A series of attacks and retribution strikes escalates into a no-holds-barred gang war, spilling over from the ocean into the icicle and deep-sea hydro hubs. Quiet Song's matriarch, Whisper-Bite-Thrash, can't match the resources of the larger pods, so she is forced to reach out to other crime outfits like the Hidden Concern for help, offering a percentage of the auction's take for an infusion of cash and neo-ocotopus muscle.

The auction faces other threats as well. Groups like Firewall may attempt to shut it down or steal the goods to keep them out of dangerous hands. And the Jovians have their eye on the situation, are well aware of what's offered, and may elect for quick and decisive military-grade action. The threat of war might just be worth nipping this potential thread in the bud.

TAGS: Europa • Extropians • Firewall • Guanxi • Hidden Concern • Hypercorps • Jovians • Oligarchs • Outer System

WHISPERING CHAOS

The team is instructed by the cartel they work for (or, if independent, hired by a crime group they have close ties to) to help facilitate a black-market deal. The organization's leadership hopes to acquire an assortment of mysterious pre-Fall relics for their own private collection. To ensure the deal goes smoothly, the PCs may need to vet the scavengers selling the goods, arrange a payoff and handoff of goods, and then ensure safe transport. This could mean simply trucking the artifacts across a large habitat or smuggling them across the inner system. Along the way, they must contend with rivals snooping in on the deal and circumvent security checkpoints. At some point during the operation, an unknown party (an undercover NPC Firewall team) attempts to disrupt the deal and seize/destroy the collection.

The story does not end when the collection is turned over to their employers, however. Over the next few weeks, as the PCs go about their own affairs (perhaps even another mission involving a separate plot hook), the organization they turned over the relics to starts to internally implode. Internal divisions flare, allies are alienated, and hostilities with rivals are renewed. The PCs own interactions with members of the cartel show them to be increasingly erratic, paranoid, and weird. At this point, the PCs are cautiously approached by the Firewall team that tried to intercept the shipment. They believe that the relics carried the whisper strain of the exsurgent virus (▶389 EP2), which is now spreading throughout the cartel. They want the PCs to use their connections and insider status to help them get close and either steal or destroy the relics — and potentially take out infected people.

The PCs must choose whether to help the Firewall team, turn on them, or use the situation to their own advantage. As an extra complication, perhaps one or more of the PCs was also exposed to the whisper exovirus during the initial mission.

TAGS: Exsurgents • Firewall • Guanxi



CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

While taking on a small, routine job for a local criminal organization, the team accidentally discovers evidence that the group is planning an imminent war on a rival gang or cartel: a stockpile of weapons, a warehouse of illegal combat morphs, an overheard conversation, or a file outlining some stages of their operation. The PCs have a choice: keep silent, offer their assistance, tell the authorities, or spill (or sell) the details to the other side. To make matters worse, someone from the preparing cartel gets a hint that the PCs may have seen more than they should and puts them under surveillance. If the PCs get caught acting suspicious or selling the cartel out, they will be targeted without mercy. If they refuse to get involved and try to steer clear, one or both parties may draw them into the conflict anyway.

TAGS: Guanxi

BODY WORK

Tensions are rising in Nyhavn between the Kartelyei and the St. Catherine Tong, thanks in large part to Ivan Bucharov, a small-time operator in the Titanian underworld. Heavily indebted to the Kartelyei after a series of failed money-laundering schemes centered around an artificial-condor-meat eatery, he successfully convinced a St. Catherine enforcer, Zi Ren, to do an under-the-table job with him. That resulted in a Kartelyei agent dead on the floor, his damaged cortical stack hooked up to an air-gapped server desperately trying to reconstruct enough of his mind to get banking codes out of it. To call it a botch-up would be putting it lightly. Bucharov and Zi Ren are both on the run now, lugging the server with them in a suitcase, with the Tong and the Kartelyei at each others throats over the agent's disappearance.

To defuse the nascent conflict, the PCs need to track down Bucharov and Zi Ren, both of whom are priority targets. Zi Ren is hard to find in his ghost morph, and he's well trained in evading surveillance. Bucharov sold his sleeve to the Kartelyei to cover debts over a year ago; he's been digital ever since. He's running through spoofed identities on almost a daily basis. As far as the authorities' databases are concerned, Bucharov is still embodied.

TAGS: Guanxi • Outer System • Titanians • Triads

IDENTITY CRISIS

Claudia Ambelina is one of the biggest names in organized crime — the Pax Familae cartel is composed entirely of her forks and clones, a one-woman criminal empire. Her success is partly due to the fact that she trusts no one except for her selves.

One fork, Claudia 583, has led the cartel's forays into pre-Fall artifact recovery. Unfortunately, she recently came into contact with a strain of the exsurgent virus hidden in a data payload recovered from some wreckage in Earth orbit. A variant of the mindstealer strain (►388 EP2), it's gifted 583 with a number of mind-altering psi sleights. She has been seeking out her sister Claudias in person across the system one by one and similarly infecting them. Possessed of every ounce of Claudia's ambition, 583 means to methodically corrupt all of Pax Familae. She's already making experimental forks of herself.

The PCs can become involved in several ways. They may have dealings with Pax that run them afoul of the infected forks. They may be tasked by another with acquiring the scavenged data payload from 583, finding out the hard way that it is infected. Or the other Claudias may suspect that something is amiss and hire outsiders to handle the problem — after all, 583 can anticipate their actions. Claudia 583 may even hire unsuspecting PCs to help her with her own plan.

TAGS: Exsurgents • Guanxi • Pax Familae

THE BIG SCORE

The Shackle Primary Cold Storage Facility on Luna houses millions of egos uploaded on Earth and filed away in the wake of the Fall, most of whom haven't yet been reinstated. These minds are one of the primary sources of capital for IndEx, the exchange market on which indenture contracts and their futures are traded, potentially worth trillions of credits. As such, it is heavily guarded; the idea of breaking in is widely considered laughable throughout the criminal underworld.

The Nine Lives cartel isn't laughing anymore — they've found a way in. It's taken years of forknapping, massive ego iteration, simulation, and bribery, but they have a plan. They'll have a twenty-minute window to operate. Twenty minutes in which Shackle's police network will suffer an unplanned outage, when Cold Storage's reactor will unexpectedly throw a criticality alarm, when a technician will accidentally disable the security systems. In twenty minutes, Nine Lives' best operators will break in, access Cold Storage's database, scrape hundreds of thousands of egos, and get out. If successful, this heist will go down as one of the most ambitious in history and fund an explosion in Nine Lives' operations.

The PCs might be asked to investigate rumors that Nine Lives has something major planned, eventually putting themselves in a position to stop it. Or they may be brought in to help Nine Lives pull off the operation. Perhaps the PCs believe they may have relatives or loved ones in the facility and this is an opportunity to get them out.

TAGS: Firewall • Guanxi • Indentures • Inner System • Luna • Nine Lives

SPIRITUAL SCAMS

Prithvianism is a post-Fall religion formed to face the reality of Earth's ruin. Rejecting spirituality that is focused around Earth or geography, Prithvians believe that transhumans carry their heart and soul wherever they go. They pursue a philosophy of spiritual growth through short-term adversity, a sort of metaphorical resleeving and rebuilding of the collective soul through hard work. In pursuit of this, Prithvians embrace indentured labor; most of their converts have come from the clanking masses. The public face of Prithvianism, Chakor Prithvi, is currently working off an indenture contract with a Planetary Consortium mining concern on Mercury.

The team is contacted by an oligarch or crime boss who is concerned that one of their socialite children has recently converted to Prithvianism. They believe the group is a cult or scam and want the PCs to find out. They point the team towards another recent high-profile convert, a hyperelite executive known as Kasem Sood who recently rejected his career and family, changed his surname to Prithvi, and voluntarily entered into an indentured work contract extracting resources on an exoplanet. Sood is only the most recent convert; several others in the past few months have undergone similar radical conversions.

In truth, Prithvianism was constructed by Chakor Prithvi as a means of creating a pool of tractable workers for hypercorp clients. Many of the original "converts" were recruited via illicit psychosurgery. Chakor's alpha fork lives in luxury on Venus while his mind-edited beta happily toils away and serves as the cult's public face. However, Chakor's tastes have expanded, and he now holds an insatiable interest in pre-Fall relics from Earth. He is turning his resources towards converting wealthy targets like Sood, who donated all of his wealth and property to the Prithvians, including an enormous collection of Earth artifacts. Chakor already has his grip on the child of the PCs' client and plans to use that to raid the family's own private stash of pre-Fall heirlooms.

TAGS: Forking • Guanxi • Hypercorps • Indentures • Inner System • Oligarchs • Socialites

INNER SYSTEM

These hooks involve the inner system and market-economy habitats.

MARS DISENFRANCHISED

The domed settlements of Hunan on Mars are suffering from social unrest. The hypercorp Adapt Pharma, which runs the habitat, has employed indentureds in its farms here since before the Fall. Even their non-indentured workers rely on ruster morphs that require genetic service packs, keeping them financially dependent. The hypercorp also unjustly doles out equipment, seeds, and other special compensations to a few groupings of older Chinese settlers. The disenfranchised workers have begun to rebel en masse against their conditions. Tensions are heating up, and recently Adapt's security killed a Barsoomian organizer during a protest.

More recently, the region near Hunan has become a focal point for terraforming activities. This has led to an influx of nomad tribes pursuing the terraforming contracts offered by hypercorps like Overstellar. To distract from their independent labor issues, both Adapt and Overstellar have been stoking hostilities between the locals and "outsiders."

The PCs can become involved in several ways. Barsoomian organizers need help resolving the tensions between local workers and nomad terraformers. They also want to organize a strike against Adapt Pharma, but they know the hypercorp will deploy mercenaries, bring in scabs, and raise the costs of the genetic service packs in retaliation. It's possible a PC's family member is involved in the situation, to draw them into the cause.

TAGS: Barsoomians • Hypercorps • Indentureds • Inner System • Mars

NATIVE SPACE TRADITIONS

The station Ohio, named from the Iroquois word meaning "beautiful," in Earth orbit, is a cultural stronghold for Native Americans. The residents who live here come from tribes across the Americas, and their goal is to maintain traditions despite the Fall of Earth. Though they do include some bioconservatives, most integrate transhumanism into their lives while maintaining cultural traditions like the peyote rite that have nearly been obliterated twice.

Some of the residents of Ohio ask the PCs for help. A derelict ship has recently been spotted. Thought lost during the Fall, it had fallen into an eccentric orbit but is once again crossing paths with Earth. The Ohioans believe this ship carries artifacts of cultural significance to their tribes. They want the PCs to retrieve the cargo.

The PCs are in a race against two other ships. The scavengers hope to make a living off of the salvage and know a few rich Lunars who would pay big for cultural relics from Earth. The other ship carries a group of archeologists sponsored by a Martian university; they will attempt to block other ships from carrying off anything that "belongs in a museum." The PCs will need to moderate between and/or deal with both to complete their task.

TAGS: Earth Orbit • Guanxi • Inner System

LUNAR FASHION-WEEK DISASTER

Luna's biggest fashion show of the year pays homage to the historical tent shows that used to happen on Earth in Paris and New York, showcasing the biggest houses and newest couture designers. Every year, however, designers from Elysium (Mars) get shoved out of the juried process. This time, couture designer Leif (they/them

pronouns) has had enough. They plan to sabotage the show in a visible and embarrassing way to show everyone how classist the show is.

Leif needs some help, though. The PCs are hired to help bring their plan to life and to act as security for them in case things go bad. This job may involve infiltrating various shows and parties, hacking several notable socialities and protected media feeds, impersonating hyperelites, stealing and replacing high-value fashion items, and various creative acts of sabotage and vandalism.

TAGS: Inner System • Luna • Mars • Socialites

BURNING HAZE

A nargalgorithm called haze is the latest craze among the clanking masses in the Venusian aerostats. The narco is popular with synthmorphs whose opportunities are slim and creature comforts slimmer; the majority occupy cramped living spaces on the aerostat's exteriors, exposed to the hazy, acidic, yellow-orange atmosphere. Haze is an addictive doozy with a powerful high — so powerful that it has hardlocked the cyberbrains of a small but frightening percentage of users. There are also rumors of corrupted backups, possibly resulting in permanent ego deaths in several cases. Word has gotten out that the product is tainted, but kicking the habit isn't like flipping a switch, even for synthmorphs. The authorities normally look the other way, but if the body count rises too high, they may be forced to get involved.

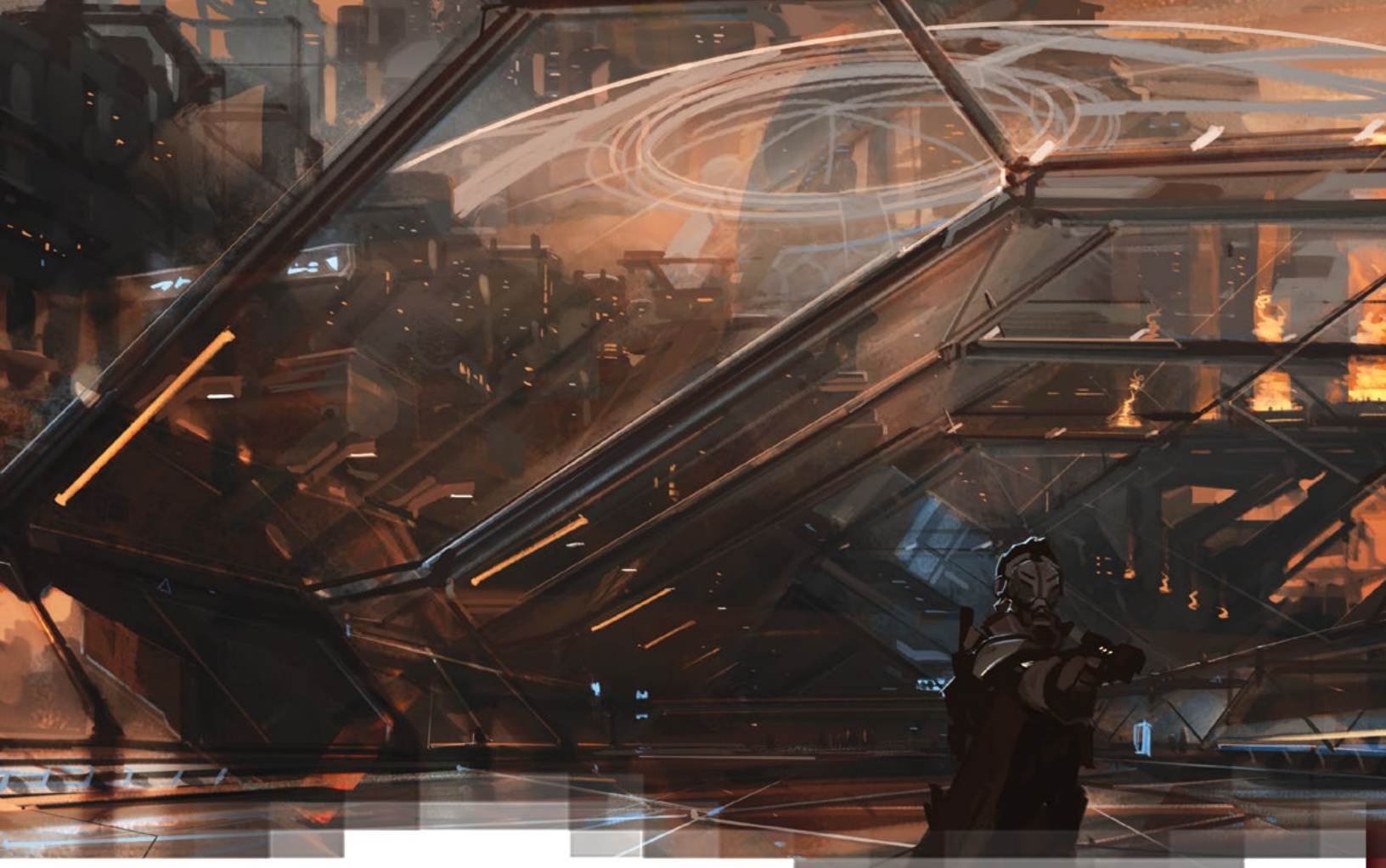
Whether the PCs are trying to get the drug off the streets or fix an issue in a product they're peddling, an investigation is in order. This requires tracking haze back to its source, which isn't easy. Haze is a product of the Big Circle Gang, and they're not about to reveal trade secrets. Research into whether the fault is a bug or an oversight in programming runs into a challenge: the code is copy-protected with an extremely high-end piece of hypercorp encryption software — clearly pirated. The glitch could be due to the crypto app itself, meaning the PCs need to get their hands on the master cipher. Or someone in the distribution chain could be modifying the narcotics to add a backdoor with the intent of remote hacking or installing ransomware — but the code is flawed ... unless someone is hardlocking people on purpose.

TAGS: Guanxi • Inner System • Triads • Venus

F YOUR YANKEE BLUEJEANS

After five years of unauthorized and unmonitored exploration across countless exoplanets, the return to the Solar System of the nomadic gatecrashing collective known as "F Your Yankee Bluejeans" is marred by a violent hostage crisis. The collective of six fringe anarchists began their journey with the stated intent of finding a habitable planet suitable for the creation of a utopian colony of dubiously articulated but nonviolent politics. The group was reasonably well prepared and was encountered several times by other gatecrashers and explorers, who reported them as in good spirits but achieving no meaningful success despite having survived dozens of randomly dialed exoplanets.

Upon their return to the Solar System via the Martian Gate, the collective members were observed to be withdrawn and refused to answer questions by Pathfinder personnel. After being held for several days and nearly being sent back through the gate, the anarchists were released and made their way to Pathfinder City. Just a day later, three of the nomads took hostages in an office building



and issued a string of bizarre demands to Martian authorities. These demands included delivery of one-hundred blank cortical stacks, free passage to the Discord Gate, and the immediate dissolution of the Jovian Junta.

A three-day standoff ended in the deaths of three hostages and three members of F Your Yankee Bluejeans. Firewall takes an interest in the affair when the hostage-taking nomads are captured on surveillance footage using what appear to be async sleights. Only one of their cortical stacks is recovered — now in the hands of local authorities. Initial interrogation of the survivor yields the alarming claim that the collective both discovered dangerous and powerful alien artifacts and that they experienced strange mental transformations during some of their gate traversals. The other three members of the collective have disappeared, with police working hard to hunt them down. As Oversight and various hypercorps take an interest in the gatecrashers, the team will need to track down the potentially dangerous remaining nomads before they do anything and before anyone else gets to them first. Getting the full story may require tracing the collective's path back via a half-dozen gates.

TAGS: Anarchists • Asyncs • Firewall • Gatecrashing • Hypercorps • Inner System • Mars • Oversight

STEEL AND ICE

Firewall puts the sentinels on the trail of scavengers who were spotted within the New Mumbai Containment Zone on Luna. By the time the PCs catch up to them, the scavengers have already sold their findings — a potential bioweapon — on the black market. Further research discovers the buyers are an extremist splinter faction from the pro-synthmorph Steel Liberators.

The extremists have a plan to seize the ice caverns at Shackle and lock down all known entrances. The caverns shelter the largest supply of fresh water in the inner system. The group plans to threaten to contaminate the Lunar water supply, which is critical to future life on Luna, with the bioweapon scavenged from New Mumbai. They have prepared a list of demands, including the immediate end of the indenture system and the abdication of LLA president Avra Don.

The reality of the situation may be more complex. Perhaps most of the extremists believe the contamination threat is just a ruse to get their demands met and that there is no intention of carrying it out. Perhaps some are exhuman sympathizers who believe biomorphs must be wiped out for synthmorphs to thrive. The architect of the extremists' plan may be a secret exsurgent who plans to infect the Lunar population with a waterborne strain of the exovirus. Or the entire plot may be a ploy to discredit the Steel Liberators and undermine their support.

The terrorists are well armed, some sleeved in dedicated combat morphs. The Steel Liberators are unaware of their plans and may be convinced to help stop them.

TAGS: Exsurgents • Firewall • Exsurgents • Inner System • Lunar-Lagrange Alliance • Luna • Politics • Steel Liberators

OUTER SYSTEM

Hooks set somewhere between the Main Belt and Oort Cloud.

THE TIES THAT BIND

Captain Marcel Soussaline is one of the most decorated commanders in the Jovian Republic. It was not a surprise when he was given command of the *Chatterson*, their most advanced dreadnought. It was completely unexpected, however, when Soussaline contacted the Titanian Commonwealth and expressed the desire to defect, along with the *Chatterson's* valuable technology: an experimental fusion drive that can eke out more thrust per weight, giving the dreadnought an edge over other warships even with its greater mass.

The Commonwealth is eager to determine Soussaline's motives and the veracity of his desire to defect, but they are also concerned about sparking a major diplomatic incident. Soussaline claims to be motivated by his son's disease, which is incurable with Jovian medical technology, but there may be more to the story.

The PCs are brought in to investigate Soussaline or even help him defect. The Titanians may call in favors with Firewall or other groups to act as a middle man and maintain deniability. The entire affair may simply be a ruse intended to draw out Commonwealth assets or to give the Jovians an opportunity to test out their inew battleship

TAGS: Firewall • Jovians • Outer System • Politics • Titanians

MURDER ON EUROPA

Titanian scholar Robert Whitesun-Stevens is found dead in his room, his stack removed, the day before a biology conference on Europa. Restored from his last backup, 1 week old, Whitesun-Stevens claims to have no idea what happened. Due to past illicit inquiries into bioweapons research, however, the researcher is included in a Firewall watch list, and so the Eye takes an interest in the situation. Sentinels are dispatched to Europa with the conference still in session.

This scenario is a locked-door murder mystery. Someone is murdering conference attendees and taking their stacks. There are several potential suspects/victims: a Jovian academic with a retinue of heavily armed guards, several Consortium scientists following hypercorp agendas, a brinker genehacker with exhuman sympathies, and other researchers with an interest in bioweapons.

Unknown to the PCs at first, the Night Cartel is secretly auctioning off an intact alien pathogen to specific attendees — and someone is eliminating the competition. The pathogen is suspected of wiping out a primitive alien species and was smuggled back by gatecrashers. Infected transhumans lose their mammalian brain functions, succumbing entirely to reptilian brain urges such as territoriality and fight-flight-freeze responses — essentially transforming into rage zombies.

TAGS: Europa • Firewall • Gatecrashing • Guanxi • Jovians • Night Cartel • Outer System • Planetary Consortium • Politics • Titanians

BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE KRONOS

A turncoat within the Colossus syndicate on Kronos Cluster sings to Firewall about a potential threat. The gang once held a powerful stake on the station before the Ultimate occupation, and is now ready to make a move to take it back. The syndicate has acquired a live strain of the exsurgent virus, which they believe they have altered to only affect remade morphs (the Ultimates' morph of choice). They plan to release this weaponized virus and retake the station while the majority of Ultimates are incapacitated. However, the Colossus's understanding of the virus (or lack thereof) is dangerous at best. The entire station may be at risk if the exovirus is released, and mass

panic could ensue if the secret gets out. The PCs are called in to infiltrate the syndicate, find their weapons labs, and interdict the threat.

This scenario is best played as a heist, where the sentinels maintain their cover while working as a team to gain access to the weapons labs and safely remove and secure the samples of the virus. The Ultimates could be a potential ally if they are approached with solid information — or they may see an opportunity in seizing the virus for their own.

TAGS: Firewall • Guanxi • Outer System • Politics • Saturn • Ultimates

XTREME MEASURES

A friendly wager between a collective of scum and an oligarch's socialite heir gets the attention of the glitterati and quickly transforms into an overhyped competition. Billed as an extreme heptathlon, the event pits small teams in a seven-course competition on Uranus's moon, Titania. Only biomorphs are allowed. The contest includes crater-rim ice climbing, bridge diving over the Messina Chasma, rocket bobsledding, a vacsuit-free half-marathon relay race, group mixed-martial arts, low-g gymnastics, and a beer-chugging puzzle-solving match.

Things get interesting when a group of Ultimates sign up and a hypercorp enters a team of xenobiological pod morphs. Various criminal cartels get in on the action, running betting schemes and encouraging certain teams to take a fall. Local anarchists upset at the invasion of "inner-system tourists" vow to sabotage the competition. And the stakes escalate when a famous high-end morph designer offers an invaluable unique morph design as the winning prize. The PCs may be recruited to participate as a team in custom morphs, hired to sabotage it, or brought in to protect the athletes. The true goal of the socialite, Ultimates, and other involved parties may involve more than a little healthy competition.

TAGS: Anarchists • Guanxi • Hypercorps • Oligarchs • Outer System • Scum • Socialites • Ultimates • Uranus

CRY FOR HELP

Ten years ago, a small brinker colony on the asteroid MU69 in the Kuiper Belt was destroyed in a reactor explosion. The colony was considered too remote and worthless to attempt salvaging. Last week, a distress call was picked up from the station — and a personal one at that, rather than an automated signal — before the colony again went silent.

The PCs are dispatched to investigate the situation. With no way to egocast in to the remote outpost, the PCs will need to start some distance away, perhaps catching a lift with a cargo ship plying the fringes of the Solar System. Once there, they find the colony strangely intact and yet empty, with no signs of any survivors. Even the reactor is undamaged, though inactive, with no sign of the reported plasma breach and explosion.

When the party discovers an entire complex below the colony that is not part of the station's schematics, things get weird. In truth, the colony is under control of a self-replicating nanoswarm of TITAN design (▶412 EP2). Though the original colonists attempted to destroy it along with the whole base, it has had a decade to rebuild the colony, expand, and evolve. After recovering some of the colonists' cortical stacks, it has replicated some of their former lives and staged a distress call to lure others in. After toying with the PCs, it plans to take their ship and relocate elsewhere in the system. This scenario should play like a cross between a haunted-house story and survival horror. The swarm is intelligent, has laid numerous traps, and can use every aspect of the colony to its own advantage.

TAGS: Kuiper Belt • Outer System • TITANs

INTO THE DEPTHS

Firewall becomes aware of a troubling situation on Furina, a secretive hypercorp habitat in Neptune's clouds. The aerostat is small, housing only 400 or so people. Several biotech hypercorps jointly operate the habitat, working to develop new organisms that can survive in the Neptunian atmosphere. The entire bottom level of the station is devoted to an enormous greenhouse. However, a small group of renegade biologists have taken over part of the greenhouse and are threatening to sink the station deep into the planet's atmosphere, where it will be crushed.

The sentinels will need to find a way to access the habitat, either by egocasting in under false pretenses or taking a craft from another Neptunian aerostat such as Mushroom and finding a way onboard. They'll find that the biologists can't be reasoned with and panic is spreading on the station as the hypercorps lock it down and refuse to let anyone leave. The cause for the biologists' seizure is up to the GM. It could be a mind-altering infection resulting from their work on neogenetic creatures or attempts to splice xeno-organisms with Earth-based species. Perhaps the habitat suffered a small hull breach from an unexpected collision with something strange in Neptune's atmosphere. The seizure could also be a labor dispute between the biologists and their hypercorp masters, deliberate sabotage by a rival, or cover for one hypercorp to steal the work of another. Regardless, the sentinels will need to avoid hypercorp security while attempting to resolve the situation before the biologists destroy the station.

TAGS: Hypercorps • Neptune • Outer System

EXPERIMENTAL DISASTER

48 Hours ago, all communication from a corporate research facility on Saturn's tiny moon Surtur ceased. Sensor scans show x-ray and gamma radiation belching intermittently from the station. Alarming scans also indicate the moonlet's gravitational pull is fluctuating. At least once an hour, its gravity exponentially increases for less than a minute before returning abruptly to normal. This periodic flux is currently reaching over 1,000 times its normal gravitational pull and seems to be increasing.

Firewall is scrambling a team of sentinels to find out what is going on. One option to reach the moon quickly is by ship from a nearby station in Saturn's orbit. This is risky, as the facility's automated defenses are still active and will fire and launch drones against any approaching ship. Alternatively, Firewall has acquired an override code that will allow an infomorph to egocast in and hack the station's security network. If successful, the entire team can egocast in and resleeve using the local facilities, but their choice of morphs will be limited to what is available.

The sentinels may find that the hypercorp running the station was experimenting with alien or TITAN tech or simply their own research into advanced tech has gone horribly wrong. They may find survivors who need help escaping, security forces unhappy to have unwelcome visitors, and rival teams sent by other factions. They will have a limited time period to shut down the experiment and save themselves before the experiment itself self-destructs, perhaps taking the entire moonlet with it.

TAGS: Aliens • Firewall • Hypercorps • Outer System • Saturn • TITANs





HYPERCORPS

These hooks involve inner-system hypercorps and often take place on market-economy habitats.

RAT PROBLEMS

A hypercorp-run habitat is suffering a disquieting problem: small animals, pets, etc. are disappearing. The habitat makes extensive use of smart animals for maintenance and ecosystem management, but something is slowly eradicating them. Pet owners are crawling up the corporate ladder with complaints, habitat maintenance is a mess, and the local management wants the situation ended before they lose their jobs. And now even large animals like security dogs are disappearing. Station security is stumped since there is no forensic evidence and many sensor systems also seem to be failing; they are concerned that these disappearances may be practice runs for something truly dangerous.

Either Firewall gets wind of the affair or the PCs are approached by the hypercorp security chief for help. They will need to delve into the obscure depths of the habitat for clues — while being careful not to trigger alerts by entering the habitat's high-security research areas. The GM has a choice of options. The situation may simply be the result of smart teenagers either playing a park or requiring initiation into a secret club. The disappearances may be due to a serious malfunction in the station's automatic and robotic systems — perhaps the result of sabotage. It could also be a strain of the exsurgent virus that only affects smart animals — who will start preying on transhumans when other food becomes scarce. Or it could be a much more dangerous threat — a creeper swarm (▶390 EP2) that is slowly growing in size. Alternatively, the entire story could be a ruse meant to lure out identified Firewall agents, so that the hypercorp or Oversight could monitor their practices and then capture them.

TAGS: Exsurgents • Firewall • Hypercorps • Oversight

TRESPASSING

After some major string-pulling, Fa Jing gets approval from both the Tharsis League and Planetary Consortium to launch a secret mission into the TITAN Quarantine Zone on Mars. The goal of the mission is confidential, but the target area is an old pre-Fall corporate facility. The expedition is planned by land, with a number of heavily armed vehicles, transhumans, and military-grade synthmorphs.

The PCs are pulled in to infiltrate the mission. If working for Firewall, their goal is to find out what Fa Jing is after and make sure that the intruders don't return with anything dangerous. If criminals, they are sent to score whatever loot they can get. Of course, the denizens of the TQZ are likely to take notice, and the Martian Rangers are on alert to make sure nothing follows the task force out. Fa Jing is taking extra measures to keep everything under wraps, but some Martian journalists may get wind of the affair.

TAGS: Firewall • Guanxi • Hypercorps • Inner System • Mars • Media • TITANs • TQZ

OVERDUE

The PCs are approached by someone they owe a major favor to. Their contact is concerned about a loved one who took an indentured service contract as an infugee for the hypercorp Mstrata on Mercury. The contract should have finished months ago but there has been no communication and the hypercorp has been non-responsive. The contact is concerned that Mstrata is unethically violating the terms of the contract and wants the PCs to free the indenture if necessary.

When the PCs investigate, they find some unusual activity at Mstrata's facility. The plant is expanding and it does not appear to be for mining or energy purposes. Why are they building a mass driver? And why are so many of their indenture records incomplete? Is the corporation simply engaging in slavery and dealing with soul-trading cartels or is something more sinister at play? The PCs will need to infiltrate the facility directly to find out.

TAGS: Guanxi • Hypercorps • Indentures • Inner System • Mercury

RESCUING WHO?

A ship full of teenage exchange students traveling home from Titan to Europa is seized by Zeus Security. The hypercorp claims it responded to distress signals and rescued the students, demanding compensation from the Conamara Institute of Technology for their safe return. The Europeans claim this is an act of piracy and kidnapping and point out that Zeus is a subsidiary of another hypercorp founded by high-ranking Jovian military officers. They believe this a political move meant to strong-arm Europa away from signing a new technology-exchange treaty with Titan.

The PCs may be asked to rescue the students or otherwise defuse a potential diplomatic incident. However, the Zeus vessel itself seems to be suffering difficulties, forcing it make an emergency stop at one of Jupiter's small and remote outer moons. As it turns out, some of the exchange students are college juniors majoring in network security. The Zeus troops may be the ones who needs rescuing — or perhaps something more sinister is in play. With Jovian military ships on their way, the situation will need to be resolved quickly.

TAGS: Europa • Hypercorps • Jovians • Outer System

ENGINE TROUBLE

A powerful explosive detonates on Pontes, a shipyard habitat in Mars orbit. The bomb kills or severely injures a number of high-level hypercorp executives attending a secretive in-person conference. The meeting was the second of four in a series to negotiate and formalize a new joint venture between ship-manufacturer Starware, Pontes Shipyards, energy giant Gammex, and engine-design studio Zero-Space Rocketdyne.

As the bombing hampers these negotiations, Starware desperately wants to know who is interfering. The station goes into a security lockdown, with no one allowed to leave. The team may be hired as independent investigators or Firewall may take an interest in the affair. They will need to track down relevant info like forensics, surveillance footage, station rumors, and the real reason behind the secret meetings. Various leads may point to the Jovian Republic, “lunatic anti-capitalist terrorists,” and various competitors. Actual evidence eventually points to Starware's long-time rival Omnicor hiring a trio of disgraced Ultimates who are still on the station to sabotage the negotiations. When the PCs find out the meeting was to discuss the production of improved engine designs acquired from the Factors, however, a new suspect party must be taken into account: another Factor ship is not happy about the deal.

TAGS: Factors • Hypercorps • Inner System • Mars • Ultimates

ROGUE ARGONAUT

The Argonauts approach Firewall for help. A former Argonaut, Fausto Aspiazu, has been spotted on Ceres, apparently working for the Prosperity Group's pharmaceutical division under a fake name. Dr. Aspiazu was tossed out of the Argonauts when he was found to be sharing research with exhuman groups and was suspected of experimenting with strains of the exsurgent virus.

Both Firewall and the Argonauts are concerned about Aspiazu's current research and send the team in to investigate. If any evidence of exsurgent virus research is discovered, he is to be removed from Ceres, his research destroyed, and if possible his ego backups also located and either confiscated or deleted. The PCs run into a roadblock when the Hidden Concern, Ceres's neo-octopus mafia, takes an interest in their activities. While they are distracted, another hypercorp moves in to extract Aspiazu and his research from the Prosperity Group. The team must track down this new corporate black ops team and stop them from escaping with Aspiazu.

TAGS: Argonauts • Exhumans • Exsurgents • Firewall • Guanxi • Hypercorps • Outer System

CONTAMINATION PROTOCOLS

A hypercorp research site has gone into full contamination-protocol lockdown. The hypercorp in question doesn't know what happened, but they want to find out — and more importantly, they want the egos of some top scientists and their current research data extracted, as they are of immense value. They hire the PCs as expendable outsiders to access the facility. The site may be on an exoplanet, a remote asteroid or moon, or smack in the middle of Valles-New Shanghai.

Though given access codes to get inside, the PCs will still need to overcome automated security systems. Wireless-inhibiting walls and radio jamming will limit mesh, hacking, and communication options. Once inside, the PCs will encounter raving survivors who claim the station is infested with horrific monsters and aliens. Some go so far as to attack anyone that approaches them. Though an exsurgent outbreak is a possibility, this time the incident may have been sparked by psychoactive substances in the facility's air or water systems. This may be the result of experimentation gone wrong or sabotage by rivals or terrorists. Alternatively, the site may be under the sway of a powerful async. Regardless of the cause, the PCs will need to bypass hostile survivors who are out of touch with reality — including the people they are meant to extract. Once they exfiltrate the station, the PCs will find hypercorp goons ready to take the egos and data off their hands — and also to frame the PCs as patsies to take the fall for the whole affair.

TAGS: Asyncs • Exsurgents • Firewall • Gatecrashing • Hypercorps • Inner System • Mars • Outer System

COMEBACK TOUR

The PCs are in the vicinity when a derelict craft is spotted in the Martian Trojans, and they are recruited to investigate (perhaps racing other scavengers to the scene). An initial look at the craft identifies it as a vessel that went missing years before the Fall. Tracing its registration, it belonged to one of Experia's hypercorp forebears. When queried, Experia initially seems interested but then reverses course and claims no knowledge of the craft.

On board, the team finds the mummified remains of four humans and one child, all of whom died when the ship suffered a sudden and catastrophic decompression incident. The child is the only one with a recoverable cortical stack. There is also a mix of pre-Fall artifacts, notably musical instruments, an impressive collection of music recordings in various formats, and other personal effects.

Reconstruction of the ship's damaged computer systems will take time, but will eventually reveal that the people on board were members of a popular pre-Fall musical act, none of whom survived the Fall. They were going on tour to Mars when their ship went missing. Though the PCs may overlook this, of importance is the fact that the child whose stack they have recovered is the inheritor of the band's extensive and still popular media intellectual property. Experia, who now claims ownership of that IP, will not be pleased by this information — and in fact they have already dispatched a team to make sure this nuisance goes away. The PCs will need to contend with a surprise assault from Experian operatives as well as scavengers and pirates hoping to claim the ship's relics.

TAGS: Guanxi • Hypercorps • Inner System • Martian Trojans

MERCURIALS

These hooks include uplifts and infolife.

ROLE MODELS

Not every adventure involves subterfuge, tense firefights, and daring escapes. Sometimes a good babysitter is what's needed. When a group of autonomists reconstitute a batch of infugees that have been in cold storage since the Fall, they find a group of infolife who were rescued from a corporate simulspace — but who have never experienced the real physical world. The PCs are asked to help them acclimate.

The PCs are each outfitted with a ghostrider module or ecto carrying a bright-eyed AGI. All our heroes have to do is take them out on the town and give them an opportunity to interact with the world to learn what life is all about. If they're feeling brave or want to move to the next step, they can even let the AGIs sleeve into a cyberbrained bot.

These curious young minds may just torment their guides with dozens of questions. A misunderstanding of laws or social norms, however, might lead to a minor conflict. Perhaps an AGI picks up on a bad habit or chain of logic that starts it down a dark path. Or maybe what starts as a simple evening of teaching an AGI the proper way to order a drink turns into an impromptu lesson on evasive driving and parkour when an old enemy or the AGI's original hypercorp programmers show up out of the blue to start some serious trouble.

TAGS: Infolife • Infugees • Mercurials

APE FIGHT

The Sapient Union approaches the PCs for help. They're concerned about a growing epidemic of missing neo-hominids in Elysium on Mars. They're worried that someone is specifically targeting bonabo, chimp, orangutan, and gorilla uplifts, perhaps some sort of anti-uplift hate group. The police have been unhelpful, barely acknowledging that there's been a pattern or a rise in disappearances.

As the PCs investigate the missing uplifts, they become mired in prejudiced sentiments and police apathy or outright hostility. But they find few connections or signs of violence — most seem to have been kidnapped; no stacks have yet been recovered. Even hypergibbon pod morph disappearances are on the rise. Eventually, the PCs find the culprits to be a local gang that runs an underground fighting ring. They've learned that hand-to-hand combat involving neo-hominids and hypergibbons always draws a crowd. In order to get the morphs they need, they've resorted to kidnapping uplifts and selling their egos to Nine Lives. To stop the gang, the PCs will need to infiltrate their fighting dens — perhaps by signing up one of their own.

TAGS: Guanxi • Inner System • Mars • Mercurials • Nine Lives • Sapient Union • Uplifts

SUNSPOTS

A reclusive oligarch, Yukiko Matsubara, has mysteriously come out of hiding, sleeving into a surya morph and joining the "space whale" pods that surf the sun's corona. Matsubara has tired of life and wishes to "swim" one last time with an old neo-whale friend, before sinking forever into the sun. The PCs may be tasked with protecting her during her final days or infiltrating the pod in order to get close to her. Either path will require them to brave the fierce corona in surya, salamander, or sundiver morphs while fitting in

with eccentric Solarian culture. Various other parties are taking an interest in the affair: rival oligarchs who see an opportunity to forknep her, criminals looking to acquire hard data on her alleged stash of Earth relics, and socialite hiers who are already squabbling over the pieces of the empire she will be leaving behind. Even uplifts are split over the incident; Matsubara heavily invested in cetacean uplift and played a direct role in raising many neo-whales and neo-dolphins. A few consider her an old friend, but a small group of radical mercurials seek answers about troubling events of the past.

TAGS: Hypercorps • Inner System • Mercurials • Oligarchs • Socialites • Solarians • Uplifts

OCTO-MOM

Firewall sends the team to investigate a rash of horrific "neo-octopi" attacks on Europa. Various sites clustered in an area of Europa's subcrustal ocean report attacks by what some like vicious, feral octomorphs. The first few sightings of these creatures report them as small, but they seem to be growing in size and number. Various aquanaut, neo-cetacean, and selkie morphs have been attacked, as well as some suited biomorphs and drones. Some of the victims were eaten. Rumors and accusations swirl, ranging from corporate espionage to exhumans to mercurial extremists.

When one of the victims exhibits signs of exsurgent infection, things get serious. The sentinels must explore the nearby ocean and ice "ceiling." The source of the attacks is a female neo-octopus infected with a unusual exsurgent strain. This strain has altered her biology, allowing her to grow immense in size and lay hundreds of thousands of eggs attached to the ice. For two years she has silently waited and protected these eggs as they grew to maturity. Some of the eggs have already hatched, spawning a dozen exsurgent cephalopods that are responsible for the recent attacks. The sentinels must defeat the mother octopus exsurgent and eliminate all of her eggs, before a horde of exsurgents hatches and is unleashed in Europa's dark waters.

TAGS: Europa • Exsurgents • Mercurials • Outer System • Uplifts

EARTH UPLIFT SERVER

The PCs are tasked with investigating an unusual alliance between a small group of reclaimers and a splinter faction of mercurials. Lunar-Lagrange Alliance authorities already have the mercurials under intense scrutiny due to their scavenging operations in Earth orbit. The reclaimers are a fringe group known for their advocacy of suicide missions past Earth's killsat blockade to gather data and plan terraforming projects.

Decrypted chatter between the two reveals the mercurials are hiring the reclaimers to run both groups down to Earth. The mercurials hope to access an abandoned but secure corporate site somewhere in Africa. The corp in question did not survive the Fall; its personnel died fleeing Earth. The mercurials believe the server holds a gene bank and hard data on elephant uplift research as well as the backups of African and Asian neo-elephants.

The PCs may need to infiltrate one or both of the groups to get the real details of the mission. They may then be asked to either sabotage the expedition or go with it down to Earth to ensure nothing dangerous is broadcast or otherwise brought off-world.

Several complications may arise. The reclaimers have their own secret agenda to retrieve something from Earth that may compromise the mercurial mission. The corp facility may be crawling with TITAN machines, and the data itself may be infected with

the exurgent virus, which can be a threat if they beam it off-world. The mercurials hope to resurrect the currently extinct neo-elephant species and raise it free from any hypercorp stranglehold, but various hypercorps will be interested in acquiring these exclusive genetics for their own monopolies. Certain bioconservative radicals will consider the revival of an uplift species a threat to human existence and may take action to interfere.

TAGS: Earth • Exsurgents • Firewall • Hypercorps • Inner System • Mercurials • TITANs • Uplifts

EXPERIMENTAL SINS

The hypercorp Xing Alliance funds a top-secret research facility on the multipurpose station Axis in Venus orbit. Xing Alliance is mainly a science-funding hypercorp, whose main goals are unknown to the public and generally mysterious. The Xing labs on Axis do not appear on maps and their networks are hardwired and airgapped. Most people on the station don't know of its existence and scientists are very secretive in their comings and goings. Lockbots, invisible doors, and sentry bots protect the access points.

The Xing scientists on Axis are experimenting with a tiny, offensive robot designed to crawl into ears and attach to the victim's brain stem. The robot serves as a puppet sock, allowing the victim to be remotely controlled like a drone. It is manufactured with a synthetic mask to have the appearance of a small black worm.

Things go sideways when a group of AGIs virtually enslaved by Xing make a bid for freedom, infecting biomorph employees with the bots and using them to establish a way off the station. Xing's security detects the plot, however, and attempts to foil it. Desperate to escape, the AGIs mass release the worm-bots, taking over most of the labs and infecting others outside. Their goal is to take over the hab's farcaster and escape the station. Xing sends in their private security to "clean up," but the corp doesn't care who gets caught in the crossfire. The PCs are on the station when it starts to go down; how can they help the people left trying to survive on Axis? Xing will spin the situation as an outbreak of alien parasites to recruit others into helping contain the AGIs.

TAGS: Hypercorps • Infolife • Inner System • Mercurials • Venus

FEATHERED MYSTERY

A rash of disappearances from an exoplanet colony has the authorities (or possibly Firewall) concerned. To date, all three of the missing were sleeved in neo-avian morphs. The exoplanet is Earth-like, with a barely breathable atmosphere and an abundant ecosystem teeming with non-sapient life. The colony is small, but given the favorable conditions, is likely to grow.

Either by chance or design, at least one of the PCs is equipped with a neo-avian sleeve. There are several possible explanations to the mystery. One of the colonists may be a psychopath with a particular vendetta against bird uplifts. Something about the local ecosystem — a disease, fungus, or even exsurgent variant — may have no impact on other transhumans, but does affect neo-avian biology. The colony may be home to secret hypercorp or exhuman research project that has a particular need for neo-avians. Or there may simply be an as-yet unidentified local predator that has a particular taste for bird flesh. For best results, incorporate several of these ideas as red herrings to distract from the real cause of the disappearances.

TAGS: Exhumans • Exsurgents • Firewall • Gatecrashing • Hypercorps • Mercurials • Uplifts



MESH AND MEDIA

This assortment of ideas relates to infomorphs, augmented reality, VR, journalism, and other aspects of the mesh and online life

QUARANTINE ZONE XCASTER

"This is Lawrence Crain, reporting live from Cognite's latest horror show!"

Lawrence Crain, an eccentric XP life blogger looking for a larger audience to spread his conspiracy theories to, wants to make his mark. He believes (maybe correctly) that the TITAN Quarantine Zone houses hypercorp black sites and wants to blow their cover, jettisoning his rep scores through the roof in the process. To this end, Crain pilots a personal flyer into the TITAN Quarantine Zone, recording everything. His gambit fails when his flyer stops responding, sending him down into the middle of the TQZ. Before crashing, he sends out an SOS, replete with positioning data, promising a major cut of ad revenue when the XP footage hits the mesh. The message loops on repeat, broadcast from an emergency beacon within the wreckage, but the Consortium's signal-jamming fence around the TQZ prevents it from getting far.

The PCs might be sent in to rescue him and prevent a media embarrassment over his breach of zone security. They may have to deal with wastewalkers, fractals, or other threats in the process. Crain may even have discovered an actual corporate site to take refuge in, perhaps one abandoned since the Fall, with various dangers lurking within. Crain's secret weapon, however, is that he has dropped a trail of laser comms signal repeaters along his route, back out to a mesh relay, allowing him to bypass the zone's jammers. He is waiting to activate this until he has his scoop and can broadcast it live; any earlier and the authorities will find it and shut it down. If Crain's theories are true, of course, a hypercorp squad may be on its way to correct the situation.

TAGS: Firewall • Hypercorps • Inner System • Mars • Media • Mesh • TITANS • TQZ

SOUVENIRS

The online show *Trash or Treasure* maintains a sizeable audience. Much like the classic 21st-century show *Antiques Roadshow*, its guests showcase what they believed to be priceless antiques for appraisal, hoping for a favorable rating from the in-house experts. Mesh viewers vote for their favorite items, which are then put up for auction on a later episode.

During yesterday's episode, a woman only identified on air as Guest 59611 presented a street sign and light fixture she claimed was from the outskirts of Chicago, Illinois, retrieved sometime after the city was glassed during the Fall. Experts on the show ran the items through various scans and tests, noting a radiation signature in line with what be expected from an object near an antimatter detonation, confirming its authenticity. During the assessment, the light was activated, and it emitted a series of strobe-like flashes. When asked how the items came into her possession, Guest 59611 declined to answer but did state that she had access to several similar items from the same location that she plans on bringing in for appraisal. The items received a high rating in online polls and are due to be auctioned in next week's episode.

Unknown to most, the light's strobes and flickering are a carefully crafted basilisk hack (▶382 and 384 EP2) that affects a small but susceptible portion of the population. Upon viewing the episode, dozens were stricken with grand mal seizures and hallucinations, remembering nothing afterwards. Hundreds more were implanted with subliminal commands (▶384 EP2).

The PCs are brought in to investigate the widespread reports of seizures and odd effects. They should eventually link these instances to the show's airing. Will they have enough time to stop the light from being activated again when the items are aired on the show again for the auction? And what will happen when another round of subliminals are implanted in susceptible viewers?

TAGS: Basilisks • Firewall • Media • Mesh



HORROR FOR HIRE

The mesh entertainment company scARe, owned and staffed by young siblings Phùng and Ly Minh Hoan, specializes in a very specific product: stalking and scaring their clientele. Their service offers a personalized haunting experience popular around Halloween and with horror aficionados year-round. A suite of specialized ALIs track their clients through the mesh, slowly and methodically altering their AR inputs, escalating from subtle torments to jump scares to full-on interactive nightmare experiences.

The Hoans also make money on the side by offering ALI services on the black market for those looking to troll, harass, or stalk their enemies. Their modified kaos ALIs are equipped with tracker and biometric matcher apps to hunt their targets online and via public sensor networks, as well as exploit apps to hack their AR inputs. This service is popular with pranksters, creeps, and criminals of various stripes.

Things go awry when some of the Hoans' ALIs become infected with the haunting virus (▶388 EP2). The harassment efforts of these ALIs take a darker turn and their victims end up as exsurgenents. As reports of these incidents start to pile up, the PCs are tasked to look into it, either by Firewall or a rival criminal outfit. Are the Hoans unaware of the situation or are they themselves infected?

TAGS: Exsurgenents • Firewall • Guanxi • Mesh

BRINK

The PCs are asked to investigate a missing person, Cheng Melikova. Cheng owes a substantial gambling debt to the triads, who believe she has gone underground to avoid paying. By all indications, Cheng seems to have joined up with a gatecrashing mission in the hopes of making some cred. The plot thickens when investigation reveals that Cheng is one of dozens of potential gatecrashers who have quietly gone missing over the past few years.

Cheng was a subscriber to an online periodical and mesh community known as Brink. Brink is a multi-media “magazine” that caters to wannabe brinkers and homesteaders, featuring content devoted to DIY habs, outer-rim lifestyle tips and tricks, weapon reviews, and op/ed pieces of a decidedly bioconservative bent. The magazine is published weekly and features a lengthy section devoted to small-business marketing ads, largely fabbers, blueprints, and questionable plans for constructing homemade weaponry. The forums and chat rooms are popular with survivalists, doomsday preppers, religious evangelists, and other biocon and brinker types.

Cheng's mesh activity shows that she responded to an advertisement periodically posted on Brink by an unknown organization seeking exoplanet explorers with “little-to-no experience” and offering “INCREDIBLE REWARDS!!!” The ad suggests the missions are for the purpose of establishing extrasolar isolationist colonies, but provide few details. Collation of subscriber data with missing persons records suggests that over the past two years, at least forty-six transhumans have responded to these ads and subsequently vanished. In all cases the subscribers were single individuals with no relatives and few societal ties who egocast or otherwise traveled to Pathfinder City on Mars, checked into one of several hotels, and have not been heard from since.

The organization placing the ads has hid its tracks carefully; one of the few options the investigators will have is to submit an application and see what happens. The group behind it may simply be a brinker organization that takes its secrecy and isolation very seriously—or it may be a cult-like group from which recruits have

a hard-time escaping. It might also be a hypercorp plot to acquire “volunteers” for what are likely suicide missions to high-risk exoplanets. Or the entire situation may be a scam to steal morphs, acquire tests subjects, infect new exsurgenents, or otherwise engage in some sort of ego trafficking.

TAGS: Brinkers • Exsurgenents • Firewall • Gatecrashing • Guanxi • Mesh

TECH-NO-BABEL

The mesh is designed in such a way that taking it down is all but impossible. If certain devices fail, other devices simply route their traffic through other devices around the gaps. That makes it all the more concerning when an entire habitat suddenly suffers widespread mesh failures. Both modern transhuman life and critical habitat functions rely on network connectivity. Everyone is cut off from augmented reality and the various communication, search, and map functions they rely on. As transportation fails, bots become confused, and systems start to unravel, the habitat is thrown into chaos. The PCs are caught in the middle, perhaps separated. Navigating a dark and failing habitat, they must contend with side effects of the mesh going down and safety systems failing, such as vehicle crashes or fires. As the situation continues, people may panic, fearing a TITAN attack. And of course criminals and others will see an opportunity in widespread surveillance failures.

There are several possible explanations. A widespread computer worm may be taking advantage of a vulnerability common in most mesh radios and other mesh systems, perhaps coupled with widespread radio jamming. This may be the work of criminals, terrorists, or political operatives looking to conduct a major operation or heist while systems are down. Or it may indeed be the first step in a TITAN attack. Alternatively, this could be a desperate measure implemented by habitat authorities or even a group like Ozma in order to trap a TITAN fetch or prevent a digital exsurgent outbreak from spreading.

TAGS: Exsurgenents • Firewall • Guanxi • Media • Mesh • Ozma • TITANs • Triads

VIRTUAL VICES

An organization the PCs are aligned with is desperate to acquire some information. If gatecrashers, the PCs' sponsor may need critical details on an exoplanet explored in a previous op that only a retired gatecrasher knows. If criminals, the PCs may be after the codes to a hidden data cache or secret history that could help sink a rival. If Firewall, the PCs may be in need of the real story behind an incident during the Fall, and the only survivor remains an infugee. Unfortunately, the only person who has the intel is deeply mired inside the infomorph community inhabiting a virtual game world called *Sky Raiders*. They almost never interact with the real world and ignore any outside attempts to contact them. The only way to get the info is for the PCs to immerse themselves in the VR setting.

To even get close to their target, the PCs will need to work their way into one of the game's fantasy guilds. As new players, they'll need to level up and improve themselves to gain access to the elite areas where their target resides. This may require grinding away with menial tasks, taking on side quests, networking with power players and joining raids, or locating cheat codes to speed up the process. Along the way they'll be caught up between the game's rival factions and will have to negotiate the VR world's unusual physics and in-game secrets. When they do locate their target, they may need to perform some in-game favors to get the details they need, and they may find out they're not the only ones after the intel.

TAGS: Firewall • Gatecrashing • Guanxi • Infomorphs • Mesh

POLITICS

These plots involve political machinations, espionage, and other factional intrigues.

MORPH OBSOLESCENCE

A group of Barsoomian labor activists become suspicious when each of their morphs begins suffering medical maladies, despite the application of regular genetic service packs. They suspect the hypercorps they are organizing against have targeted them with some sort of nano or bioweapon, but the truth is more insidious: their worker pod morphs (provided by their employers) are prototypes for a new system designed to accelerate planned obsolescence (►79 EP2) if the ego undertakes "undesirable activity." Secret ware monitors their mesh traffic, sensory input, and cyberbrain activity, triggering a more rapid breakdown if they are opposing hypercorp interests or support anti-capitalist objectives.

An investigation that traces the connections past various cutouts and subcontractors will eventually lead to the research hypercorp In-Sight, which is linked to both Experia and Skinaesthesia. If successful, their prototypes will be marketed to authoritarian governments and corps around the system as a way of hindering "subversive" elements and maintaining their control. Getting the full story may require a long-term quiet infiltration, a careful hack, or a blunt smash-and-grab.

Certain Firewall servers might take an interest in this technology, either due to its dangerous coercive aspects or the impact it might have on secret Firewall cells. Various criminal, hypercorp, and other factions might see the tech as a way of keeping their supporters in check. No matter how the PCs get involved, they will have to contend with media freelancers looking to blow the case open and hypercorp investors looking to keep their research under wraps.

TAGS: Barsoomians • Firewall • Guanxi • Hypercorps • Inner System • Mars

TRAVEL MYSTERIES

Alison Nikitin is a freelance journalist who sends forks to small and out-of-the-way stations gathering stories to sell to social media. She normally covers stories that have to do with social injustice, new technology, and interesting but obscure places to visit in the inner system. Alison turns to the PCs for help when she is murdered — perhaps assassinated — shortly after integrating half a dozen forks that had just returned from various locales. Though she was quickly restored from backup, she lost all of her forks' memories — and all of the data they accumulated was also hacked and erased. Alison thinks she was killed to cover up something one of her forks had discovered, and she wants help figuring out what happened.

Figuring out what happened will require checking out all of the places her forks went and following their footsteps. This is a good opportunity for the GM to introduce various locations and factions — and the conflicts between them. Each station introduces a different sketchy situation that Alison's forks may or may not have become embroiled in: tensions between hypercorps and Barsoomians in the Martian outback, a cartel's attempt to gain leverage in small Belt station, mercurials protesting for their rights in Earth orbit, a clash between bioconservatives and Extropians over new tech laws in a Lunar cave hab, and so on. The real reason behind Alison's murder may be more complex — she may have been working as a spy or courier in each of these places, a fact erased from her memory for deniability.

TAGS: Forking • Inner System • Media • Politics

VENUSIAN GHOST CITY

The PCs are hired/instructed to investigate a ghost aerostat that has been sighted in Venus's lower atmosphere. The nature of the aerostat and the mission are dependent upon your campaign focus. Elements within the Morningstar Constellation may sponsor the mission out of a concern that the aerostat is a Planetary Consortium project or other rogue political interest. A criminal cartel might fund the operation in an attempt to locate a rival's secret base, such as a Nine Lives-run indenture brokerage site. Firewall may suspect the habitat is a hypercorp black lab or even an Ozma testing facility.

The PCs are instructed to search for the aerostat in the area of a recent sighting. This search may be hampered by hurricane storms, air pirates, or interference by others seeking the habitat due to a recent flood of reported sightings on the mesh. Once they locate the aerostat, the PCs are to attempt a silent infiltration. Of particular interest are the aerostat's purpose and who financed it. Of course, the aerostat may not be what they expect at all. It could be a secret Firewall archive, a corporate base tethered to an illicit mining operation, a sanctuary for escaped indentures, an exhuman outpost, or something else unexpected.

TAGS: Exhumans • Firewall • Guanxi • Hypercorps • Indentures • Inner System • Politics • Venus

HYPERCORP BLACK OPS CACHE

Talk of hypercorp black ops caches hidden on various asteroids and derelict habitats are the stuff of conspiracy forums everywhere. However, a new teaser post made in a Martian forum about a cache in the Jovian Greeks draws attention when it reveals info that matches some secret intel already held by the the PCs' organization. The poster willingly sells the full data about the cache — but they may already have sold it to other interested parties. The PCs' job is to corroborate the data and get to the cache first.

Getting to the cache quickly and stealthfully will be a challenge. The few habitats close to the cache are full of potential rivals who will take an interest in anyone looking to hire or acquire a ship. And the torch flare from ship drives means the PCs' journey can be tracked by sensors.

The cache itself may be current or predate the Fall. Either way, it will still have active defenses. Even old data will hold valuable incriminating intel on previous ops, details on various assets and who snapped them up, secret buried histories on still active figureheads, and possible the codes to a few dark accounts sitting in the Lunar banks. Any current information could be used for blackmail (corporate or individual), to infiltrate hypercorps, backdoor hacks, or to alter the balance of power.

Competing parties racing to acquire the cache may include the Jovians (looking for leverage against the Consortium), the Consortium (hoping to keep the data out of others' hands), individual hypercorps (out to sabotage rivals or otherwise gain an advantage), and various cartels (seeking vlack material and other leverage).

TAGS: Guanxi • Hypercorps • Inner System • Jovian Trojans • Outer System • Politics



LUNAR PAPERS

A task force of journalists and anti-hypercorp activists are preparing to release an exposé on Planetary Consortium hypercorp black-ops funding within the Lunar Lagrange Alliance’s banking system. Their bombshell release includes incriminating hard data acquired from various hacks and leaks. Once public, this intel will be very damaging to the reputations of several implicated hypercorps as well as the Lunar banks and will be fodder for the Consortium’s numerous enemies. It may even force some smaller entities to go under and certain public figureheads to resign. Some well-funded black-budget projects and the operatives and researchers running them will be exposed. The Consortium and banks will launch a media counter-attack, with propaganda placing the fault on a few bad actors. Regulation and enforcement will tighten for the few months it’ll take for the public to stop paying attention, but the damage will be done.

Firewall learns of the exposé before it is released and tasks the PCs with acquiring a copy of the data. The situation, however, creates conflicts within Firewall. The release will endanger some double agents and informants Firewall has within various hypercorp projects, and so some proxies will seek to delay the release in order to give those agents time to safely exfiltrate or spike it entirely. Proxies with anti-hypercorp sentiments, however, will see an opportunity to inflict some damage. Opportunists may seek to use the data to garner favors or credits with some hypercorps by warning them in advance. And of course some of the intel in the exposé may give Firewall time to hit various ops or projects before they’re exposed to steal data or shut them down more permanently. If the hypercorps or Oversight get wind of the situation, they will do their best to make the information and the activists disappear before anything goes public. Various cartels will also leap on the situation if they are given a chance, seeing an opportunity to gain leverage.

TAGS: Firewall • Guanxi • Hypercorps • Inner System • Media • Politics

CELESTIAL SLEEPER

A previously unnoticed object is spotted in orbit around a colonized Mars-like exoplanet known as Crimson Retreat. Sensors indicate it is of technological but unknown origin — possibly an alien satellite, station, or small spacecraft. It shows no signs of power or life, and is likely derelict. This begins a mad scramble to claim ownership of the ship. All of the pandora gates in the Solar System can connect to the Crimson Retreat Gate, and many factions are eager to get their hands on the prize, hoping to gain a technological edge.

The Crimson Retreat colony, however, consisting mostly of brinker bioconservatives, is unwelcoming of outsiders. They close off the gate — but not before a few factions have already sent expeditions through in order to set up operations to get to the orbiting object. They even go so far as to shoot down a drone one faction attempts to send into orbit. This sets the stage for a hostile standoff, with the colonists taking a central role in the deadlock. Some of the colonists see an opportunity to ally with one faction and claim a share of any rewards gained; their rivals argue they should claim it for their own. Others, however, fear that an investigation into the object may provoke hostilities with an unknown intelligence or alien species — perhaps a reason to side with a well-armed ally.

The PCs are tasked by their organization to navigate through the political and armed tensions that arise and get to the object in orbit first. This may range for tense negotiations and back-room deals to “convincing” the colonists and outright sabotage. It could also mean seizing the gate to allow another faction through. Anyone attempting to reach orbit may well come under attack. The nature of the object is up to the GM, keeping in mind that even an alien craft is likely to be ancient and quite broken. It may turn out to be worthless or its technology beyond the scope of understanding before its orbit degrades and it burns up upon re-entry.

TAGS: Brinkers • Firewall • Gatecrashing • Hypercorps • Politics

TRANSHUMANITY

These hooks involve resleeving, forking, psychosurgery, nanofab, and other aspects of transhuman lifestyle and technology.

FAMILIAR FACES

Shortly after resleeving into a new morph, a PC begins to experience some unusual mental glitches. First they recognize a number of new NPCs as familiar, without having any memory of how they know them. Then they find themselves in the middle of completing errands or projects, without having any idea of what the task was or why they started it. They also start finding gaps in their memories, things they once knew but have forgotten. Eventually they come to realize that some of the memories they do have are not actually their own. Treat these instances as similar to the Memory Artifact and Skill Glitch traits (►78 and 80 EP2).

Things become more complicated when the PC sometimes finds their motor functions impaired. Their actions jerk at inopportune times or they find themselves wandering off as though their body were not theirs. This may blossom into full-blown episodes where the PC "wakes up" to find themselves in a new place with no memory of how they got there or even situations where their body acts of its own accord for minutes at a time, with them helplessly watching inside (forcing a Stress Test against SV 1d6 or more). Over time it becomes clear that there is another ego along for the ride in this morph, or at least the partial fragment of one. This other ego is similarly confused and thinks that it is a whole entity. The GM can treat this as similar to multiple personalities ware (►320 EP2), except that the two egos are not always aware of what the other is doing or thinking. The other ego will cling to its own personal autonomy, rejecting any idea that it does not belong, and will resist attempts at forced psychosurgery or resleeving either ego, potentially leading to massive psychological trauma.

There are several possible explanations. The first is that the morph they acquired is equipped with an experimental version of multiple personalities ware that was intended to let both egos be dominant at the same time. Obviously, the ware is not working as hoped. The ego sharing the morph may have memories or intel that is relevant to the PC's current mission, or that could be used as a starting point for a new scenario (e.g., perhaps they witnessed a crime). The original designers may be trying to track their proprietary ware down. Or perhaps the designer was an exhuman who is testing the model on unsuspecting victims around the habitat. Alternatively, the morph may actually be infected with a new sub-strain of the Watts-MacLeod exovirus, and the PC is experiencing their transformation into an async.

TAGS: Asyncs • Exhumans • Exsurgeants • Transhumanity

INSIDE JOB

Omnigor Lunar executive Bosco Munoz has a problem. His son Marciano suffers from severe source amnesia thanks to an egocasting accident—he learns new information but can't remember where he learned it. A glitch in his frontal lobe is creating connection problems between his semantic and episodic memory, and so far no psychosurgeon has been able to thread that needle without breaking something. Bosco's running out of legal options.

Instead, he wants to pay some criminals to get him a fork of the radical psychosurgeon Hergatz Stein. Stein was breaking boundaries before it was cool, and some of his ideas are still revolutionary. Unfortunately the infugees he kidnapped for his experiments did

not appreciate this, and the Consortium threw him in a virtual prison. Bosco offers to set Stein free in exchange for fixing his son. Stein agrees. If the PCs are playing criminals, they are the ones hired to break Stein out.

Naturally, after the procedure, Bosco wipes Stein instead. What Bosco doesn't know is that Stein also split Marciano's ego into multiple personalities, with a fork of himself as one of them. This fork can influence Marciano without being caught; Marciano interprets Stein's ideas as his own. Bosco would rather dismiss his son's odd behavior as post-surgery adjustment than risk another psychosurgeon spotting Stein's work.

Stein spends weeks using Marciano to install copies of himself in Bosco's underlings and bots. (He prefers working with forks of himself, with new personality traits for variety.) The PCs are drawn (back) in when Stein starts kidnapping egos again, Marciano's activities raise suspicion, or the criminals Bosco hired let slip that Stein's back. If left unchecked, Stein will work to steal Bosco's identity and wealth and then turn a piece of Omnigor into his own private lab.

TAGS: Forking • Guanxi • Hypercorps • Inner System • Luna • Psychosurgery • Transhumanity

ARTISTIC LICENSE

The renowned traditional calligrapher and painter, Miriam Ekwok Eitoku, was recognized as a National Treasure by the former government of Japan and the Imperial Household. Her widow, Okakura Quillian Eitoku, hires the PCs for an investigation. As the custodian of his wife's collection, legacy, and estate, Okakura is convinced someone is selling counterfeits and forgeries of Miriam's work. Though the technology exists to mimic Miriam's work, her skill and technique were exquisite enough that forgeries often fail to pass a thorough examination; Miriam also had a habit of leaving identifying "easter eggs" in her work which only Okakura knows about. However, Okakura was recently asked to verify the authenticity of a piece held in a hypercorp executive's private collection. Despite there being no record of Miriam creating this piece, an analysis suggested it was Miriam's work with 97% certainty, right down to a hidden easter egg. Forensic analysis of the ink used, however, indicates the work was created within the past 3–4 years, whereas Miriam died during the Fall.

An investigation into the origins of the executive's piece leads to an even larger private collection of Miriam's work held by an oligarch, Yasumitsu Torii. This collection includes a number of artworks of which Okakura has no record of knowledge. If pressed, Okakura will admit to having a damaged gamma fork of Miriam in his possession; this fork is incapable of creating art, but it does retain some of Miriam's memories. If shown images of the unknown pieces, the vapor will recognize two of them as based upon roughs from Miriam's old sketchbooks, which are in Okakura's home and were never published.

The PCs' investigation is shadowed by agents of the executive, who has a vested interest in proving the value of his pieces. The oligarch Torii will send his own minions to deter any snooping, going so far as to try and gain blackmail or other leverage over the PCs to get them to back off. In truth, Torii possesses a fork of Miriam, retrieved from a pre-Fall backup, which he has pressed into unending indentured service, producing new priceless artworks. The PCs may have an opportunity to infiltrate Torii's private habitat to free Miriam and reunite her with Okakura, but they will gain a powerful oligarch as their eternal enemy.

TAGS: Forking • Guanxi • Hypercorps • Inner System • Oligarchs • Transhumanity

REDUNDANCY

The PCs are recruited as ego hunters to track down Sada Kezuka, a wanted fugitive (alternatively, substitute Kezuka with another NPC the PCs must find). Kezuka is carrying important data or other secrets that make her invaluable to the authorities, other cartels, or whomever else the PCs work for. The secrets could include intel on an exhuman base, potential blackmail material on rivals, the location of an alien artifact, or the specs to a new hypercorp prototype. Just when they think they have her cornered on a habitat, Kezuka spends the last of her resources and hires a hacker to copy five forks of herself into various morphs with hacked cyberbrains. Only one of those forks has the intel the PCs are after.

The PCs must first find the hacker to get a lead on the morphs that were hacked. They must then locate and capture each. The morphs are scattered around the habitat. Some are trying to blend in, with Kezuka going about the former ego's routines. Some are acting as bait, so the PCs will go after them and give the other forks time. Some are trying to escape the habitat, either via an illicit darkcasting service or by infiltrating a leaving ship. At least one of the morphs is a large industrial mech or combat synthmorph and will put up a stiff resistance, inflicting heavy collateral damage to the habitat or others. Kezuka is clever, however, and has forked herself a sixth time. The sixth fork, carrying the intel, is loaded into a ghost rider module on an unassuming bot that accompanies one of the other forks. Even if that fork is eliminated or captured, that fork will do its best to distract the PCs while the bot gets away.

TAGS: Forking • Guanxi • Transhumanity

DON'T COPY THAT FLOPPY

In an effort to meet people's needs and undermine corporate control, Martian makers and Barsoomians often distribute nanofabbers that have been stripped of DRM controls and libraries of open-source blueprints, many reverse-engineered from proprietary designs. With nothing more than soil and cheap feedstock, any tool is within the reach of even the most destitute homesteaders on the red planet. The hypercorps strike back by unleashing viruses that target unlocked printers, distributing blueprints loaded with malware, and prosecuting criminals for intellectual-property violations.

In response to a new wave of cracked designs, the hypercorps up the ante. The latest batch of blueprints making the rounds are sabotaged; the printed objects contain flaws designed to make them fail in spectacular and sometimes lethal ways. A generator explosion caused by a faulty part thankfully causes no casualties, but several Barsoomians are injured in assault rifle mishaps, and a flawed safety system component leads to a dozen deaths by asphyxiation when air-filter systems fail without warning.

The PCs may be tasked with an investigation into the incidents, eventually tracking the dangerous designs back to their source. Or they may become embroiled in an escalating low-level conflict, as Barsoomian IP pirates stage virtual and physical raids to obtain new DRM-free designs and the hypercorps retaliate with media hit jobs based on false-flag "terrorist" attacks using pirated designs.

TAGS: Barsoomians • Hypercorps • Inner System • Mars • Transhumanity





WEIRD

Posthumanism, asyncs, the esoteric, and over-the-edge themes.

CLEVER GIRL

The exhuman Scylla is capturing and experimenting on the wild artificials (feral robots, often based on animal mindsets) of Mars. Scylla reprograms the bots to obey their commands, uses experimental tech to link them into group-mind “packs,” then releases them back into the wild to compete with each other. Once they can create suitably efficient packs, Scylla plans to enhance themselves until they can mentally dominate these packs, join them, and become the unseen ruler of Mars’s robotic ecosystem.

Scylla has started using promising packs to kidnap transhumans for further experiments. Their egos are sleeved into hijacked artificials, forced to join Scylla’s packs, and compelled by psychosurgery to work with the group. So far they either go mad or rebel, which isn’t ideal, but Scylla’s working on it.

Rumors of artificials hunting people in the outback have reached Ashoka. The latest target was Athena Kato, a Martian Ranger and sentinel; she was bringing in the wanted courier Johnny No-Wings when a flock of robotic magpies knocked her off her cycle and lifted her screaming into the sky. The team could be chasing Johnny (for the bounty or his package), responding to a call for help if Athena made it back to Ashoka, or rescuing her if she didn’t.

Scylla is hiding in a ghost town somewhere to Ashoka’s north. The packs are Scylla’s main line of defense and must be fought or evaded. If the team gets close, Scylla has one more trick: the town’s old bots, run by a pack of the exhuman’s own beta forks.

TAGS: Exhumans • Firewall • Guanxi • Inner System • Mars • Weird • Wild Artificials

BRAIN TRUST

Logos is an autonomist habitat in the Neptunian Trojans focused on the pursuit of unconventional research. In practice, this means science too niche, fringe, or just plain weird to get funding elsewhere. Logosians have a reputation for being a bunch of cranks,

but their eclectic range of fields and love of lateral thinking have led to a few breakthroughs and they often work with other groups as consultants and lecturers.

Logos sometimes recruits by searching ego markets for infugees and indentures with scientific (or at least science-adjacent) backgrounds that tend to be seen as “low priority” for other groups — specialists in niche fields, criminals, repeat indentures with bad reps, and so on. Researchers from other habitats are sometimes invited to lend a hand too, usually Argonauts or Titan Autonomous University students who work for course credit.

The assemblage of a new project team on Logos raises red flags with Firewall. A number of those involved are misfits known to have an interest in asyncs or who are suspected of being asyncs. They include gatecrashing virologist Izabel Delgado, former triad psychosurgeon Mei Mori, octopi genehacker Doctor Wark, and the Argonaut hacktivist Tsubaki Tsubaki. Is this a secret group of asyncs working together on a joint project, perhaps related to the cabal that designed the async-friendly faust morphs? Are they seeking a way to remove Watts-MacLeod infection — or maybe even spread it to others? Firewall may not be the only party interested in this project: cartels and hypercorps may be looking to recruit or abduct asyncs, and secretive anti-async groups may see an opportunity to eliminate some of their enemies.

TAGS: Argonauts • Asyncs • Firewall • Guanxi • Hypercorps • Neptune • Outer System • Weird

FOLIE À DEUX

Lemurian Systems is a memetics research corp running secret experiments in an office building in Pavonis, Mars. One of their projects applies psychosurgical techniques to forks of “volunteers” (mostly indentures) to make them more susceptible to conspiratorial thinking. They then expose them to a range of conspiracy theories mixed in with other real media: muses are really mind-control implants, Marxist aliens run Venus, the Fall was fabricated, and so on — the sillier the better. These forks are then sent through a battery of simulations and interviews that test how they cope with social interaction, contrary evidence, and crisis situations. Lemuria uses the results to craft powerful memetic-warfare techniques.

A side project evaluates how to apply the conspiratorial mind hacks in various surreptitious and deceptive ways.

Unfortunately, a fork escaped. Subject C-14 is a pronoiac who believes that powerful intelligences are conspiring to help him expose the Silent Star, a xenodeist cult that controls the Planetary Consortium. He escaped thanks to a security mishap — or his benefactors, if you ask him — and disappeared into the Martian wilds.

C-14 stole some of Lemuria's tech and has the gear and skills to evade pursuit while waging serious hacking/memetic campaigns against his imagined enemies. Worse, C-14 is an unwitting async (a fact also unknown to Lemuria) who has the ability to infect others with his conspiratorial delusions. Anyone looking to capture him will have to contend with a growing group of followers — possibly identifying as a sect of the Silent Star cult.

TAGS: Asyncs • Hypercorps • Inner System • Mars • Memetics • Psychosurgery • Weird

ENTANGLEMENT

The team is contacted by a local scavenger they have worked with previously, named Delma, who seems worried and scared. Delma shows them a recorded XP clip. It is timestamped three days ago and recorded from Delma's POV. It shows Delma (in her current morph, or one like it) and a team of scavengers scrounging through what appear to be ruins on an asteroid or small moon — or maybe even an exoplanet. Someone trips over something metal, prompting a dig. Some time later, some sort of large device is partially unearthed. It does not appear to be of transhuman make. As the elated scavenger team works to unearth the device, one of them somehow seems to activate it. A deep humming vibration is felt, increasing in intensity. Shortly thereafter, the scavengers come under attack by unknown entities. In the midst of the chaos and heat of a sudden battle, Delma seems to be struck, and the XP ends.

Delma tells the PCs that she has no memory of these events. In fact, she has evidence that she was here in the habitat, going about her daily life at the time. The XP clip was sent to her from an anonymous account; researching it is a dead end. She wants to know what the hell is going on.

The truth is buried and complicated. One of Delma's forks may have escaped and signed up for a scavenging or gatecrashing mission from which it did not return; the clip now offers clues that may lead to an invaluable alien artifact. Alternatively, Delma may have intentionally signed up the fork for a covert mission and edited her memories to cover for it. In this case, the mission sponsors may be unhappy about someone digging into their affairs. Or the reality may be stranger and more convoluted: Delma and her friends stumbled onto a TITAN presence on a remote asteroid, and the ASI arranged to return her to her home habitat with altered memories in place in order to cover up the incident and their discoveries. Who then sent the clip?

TAGS: Gatecrashing • TITANS • Weird

TRANSHUMAN-OCCUPIED LANDFILL

Hitodama is a garbage exoplanet in every sense of the word. Some alien civilization used it as a hazardous waste dump millions of years ago, and it's still a radioactive wasteland. The underground (and underwater) disposal vaults are marked with fields of irregular metal spikes visible from the horizon, arranged in patterns that lead the eye away from their center. The Hitodama Gate itself sits in low orbit, where visitors can clearly see the foreboding shapes of the fields.

The original visitors left behind stele that use simple diagrams of scientific concepts to warn of the planet's dangers, along with zircon disks and star charts for dating purposes. Later visitors added to the stele and dumped more trash here, often by simply pushing it out of the gate towards the surface. Gatekeeper and the Argonauts have sent a joint xenoarchaeological expedition to study the stele, taking care not to disturb the vaults themselves. Unfortunately, the expedition has been infiltrated by the Finnbogamenn smuggler gang.

Finnbogi and his crew use drones to explore the vaults directly, and what they've found has been startling. Buried along with various lethal substances is the occasional alien relic, some still working and with miraculous properties, including seemingly eternal batteries powered by unknown means and a brick of computronium analog with computational power magnitudes greater than transhuman technology. Extraction is tricky — most of it has decayed beyond recovery, what's left is still hazardous, and the gang has learned the stele code for "reactive in atmosphere, never open" the hard way.

The Finnbogamenn are playing with fire. The tiny scraps they've collected sell for a small fortune on the Titanian black market, but their goods are barely functional time bombs. The PCs are tasked with investigating the relics and tracking their source, either to stop them (if Firewall) or undermine the competition (if criminals). Both disgruntled customers and the Titanian Science Police are also on their tail. The resolution may involve a chase into the dangerous wastelands of Hitodama and a standoff in a vault of lethal alien detritus.

TAGS: Aliens • Argonauts • Firewall • Gatecrashing • Guanxi • Titans • Weird

QUALITY CONTROL

As one or more of the PCs go about their usual business (perhaps even one of the other scenarios presented here), small glitches start to manifest in their daily reality. At first, these occurrences should be quick, rare, and easily discounted. They spot out-of-place things that then disappear, hear voices of people who aren't there, or experience unusual sensations without any explanation. Over time, these events build up, becoming more common and obvious, yet still unexplained. The PCs will be blocked from seeing things right in front of them, they'll experience screen tears in their vision and texture malfunctions on items in their possession, and other glitches that imply the reality they are experiencing isn't real. Their day-to-day lives become existential nightmares.

The most obvious explanation at first is that someone is hacking their augmented reality and sensory inputs. At first any investigations and countermeasures will seem promising, but the trail will go cold. Their experiences take a darker turn when an NPC disappears — not just missing, but gone from the memories of others, with no trace of them on the mesh, and even erased from surveillance footage, as if they never existed. As the PCs begin to question their reality, people around them act like strange facsimiles of themselves, treat bizarre situations as though nothing is wrong, and treat any PC distress as a joke.

There are several possible explanations. The PCs may be infected with the haunting virus (▶388 EP2), may be subject to a coordinated practical joke or hazing ritual, may be trapped in a powerful VR environment by a TITAN fetch, or may be subject to psychosurgical manipulation by Ozma or another rival group. Perhaps the whole thing is simply a simulation run by Firewall with some selective memory editing to test their responses. At the end of the day, however, after the PCs get to the truth and escape from the situation, one of the PCs experiences one last brief glitch. Whether it's anything or not, though, is up to their interpretation.

TAGS: Exsurgents • Firewall • Mesh • Psychosurgery • TITANS • Weird

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