ECLIPSE PHASE

Sunward



The Inner System: A Location Sourcebook for Eclipse Phase

POSTHUMAN STUDIOS

Sunward

Sunward details the inner part of the solar system, including:
The Sun, the Vulcanoids, and Mercury ■ Venus and the Morningstar Constellation
The Ruins of Earth ■ The Lunar-Lagrange Alliance ■ Mars ■ The Planetary Consortium
plus new Morphs, Gear, and additional Sample Characters



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CREDITS

Writing: Lars Blumenstein, Rob Boyle, Davidson Cole, Jack Graham, Steven Mohan, Andrew Peregrine, Aaron Rosenberg, John Snead
Editing: Rob Boyle, Brian Cross, Diane Piron-Gelman
Development: Rob Boyle
Art Direction: Rob Boyle, Brent Evans
Cover Art: Stephan Martiniere
Interior Art: Jonas Andreassen, Leanne Buckley, Tom Garden, Jason Juta, Andrew McIntosh (with John Christopher), Aaron Miller, Will Nichols, Lorenz Ruwwe, Caleb Salisbury, Andrew Silver, James Wolf Strehle, Peter Tikos, Stanley VonMedvey, Bruno Werneck, Eric Williams, Mark Winters
Maps: Matt Heerdt
Layout: Adam Jury
Indexing: Adam Jury
Additional Advice and Input: Randall Bills, Brian Cross, Adam Jury
Playtesting and Proofreading: Phil Bordelon, Erik Bull-Hansen, Cullen Erbacher, Phil Masters, Mike Miller, Zak Strassberg, Brandie Tarvin, Guillaume Tremblay, Rob Wieland, Tobias Wolter
Musical Inspiration: Aphorism, Marching Dynamics, Pandora's Black Book

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contact us at info@posthumanstudios.com
via http://eclipsephase.com & http://posthumanstudios.com,
or search your favorite social network for:
"Eclipse Phase" or "Posthuman Studios"

Posthuman Studios is: Rob Boyle, Brian Cross, and Adam Jury.

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Hines lingered on an outcropping, not quite rock and not quite flow, dangling just a few meters above thick lava. His quartz morph glowed from the violent heat. In front of him, volcanic melt stretched out and curved upwards, the horizon distorted by the intense pressure of the Venusian surface atmosphere. Beyond the hazy curtain of rising heat, not even a square millimeter of solid ground was in sight. If he stayed too long on this gelatinous anomaly, his weight would sink it into the furnace below. The far crater edge existed out there somewhere, and beyond that, the surface mining camp. He'd been scouting terrain and mapping lava flow for hours, and the simple pleasure of shelter and solid surface beneath his six limbs was not on the schedule for a dozen more.

Hines stared into that orange hot morass of molten rock and considered, for a fleeting second, plunging head-first into it, putting a swift end to his misery. Literally made from quartz, his morph was designed to withstand the hellish heat and pressure here, but a fall into the searing lava would be lethal. Kymber sensed the morose direction of his thoughts and interjected with a sugar-sweet vocalization: [We have goals, Hines. Stay focused on them, and the time will melt steadily away. I promise.]

If he had beautiful digestive organs from which to expel partially-digested food through a wide open mouth, he'd have done so right then at the mention of the word "melt." Often, he suspected his personal AI muse of intentionally trying to corrupt his mind with its choice of words, to tip him over the edge, but he was stuck with it, for now at least. Once his indentured hell was over, he'd be set, he'd be remade, he'd be amongst those privileged enough to sleeve in flesh. That is, of course, if he could survive.

Only a few weeks into his twelve-month contract and Hines had already witnessed three deaths. The egos of indentured surface workers were cheap and replaceable, much more so than the quartz morphs they were downloaded into, and they perished permanently on a consistent basis here. Even though surface mining contracts were the expedient route to earning a mid-range biomorph in the shortest period possible, Hines was now doubting he would ever survive the term with his sanity intact, let alone alive. If he was caught within a sudden swell of molten rock or crushed in a mining cave-in, his stack would be unrecoverable. Though the Octavian Mining Concern possessed a backup of his digitized consciousness, Hines was acutely aware that the hypercorp was exploiting a contractual loophole, labeling his backup as a fork with no legal rights or claim to Hines's legacy. If he died, his "fork" would be signing a new contract and starting the term from scratch.

A week ago, Hines witnessed the demise of Clava, another indenture shelled inside a quartz morph, identical to his own. Only four days were left on her term. A drillbot teleoperator wasn't paying attention, ground too deep, and undermined a pillar supporting a twenty-meter cave, collapsing the whole thing right on top of her. Hines bet that Clava didn't even see it coming. She was probably too wrapped up in repetitive mining ops, dreaming of scratching her own flesh with the actual fingers she would soon have earned. Dreaming of any sensation beyond the searing heat reflecting off quartz limbs. Dreaming of coolness upon skin. Then, splat, oblivion. Hines laughed at the absurdity of it. For the poor, it was here one second, gone the next.

The teleops were the biggest threat to surface workers. What did they care? Those slugs tucked safely away in secure storage in the aerostats, high in the cloud cover. Their egos were snug and lazy, trading years and years of service for the long, riskless route to a cheap morph to call their own.

Hines was not going to let the same thing happen to him. He was not going to pay his dues, looking over his shoulder every second for extinction to club his ego. He was not going to let those fuckers slip up and erase him. He refused to become another Clava. He had escaped from perpetual service in the Consortium, pursued the dream offered here on Venus: indentured service for higher risk but a much shorter term and higher payout. He would survive. His fate would be firmly in his own control.

* * *

Vijja laid back, the lush foam of the bed forming around sky blue skin, pillows slinking over and massaging their flesh, every surface in the chamber programmed to reflect back infinite naked Vijja, sleeved in their most precious morph, distinctly neuter and genderless. Vijja's hands stroked across their skin, triggering specialized nerve clusters and releasing a rush of endorphins. Vijja much preferred to think of themself as an altogether new type of gender, outside the binary norms, with an alternative sense of sexuality and identity.

With a thought to their mute and nameless muse, Vijja's writhing, reflected form faded away. A new reality washing over their sensorium. Vijja was now floating in zero-g bliss, buoyed by reflective clouds, surrounded by a perfect experience of the true glory of Venus: the cumulus of the habitable zone in the upper atmosphere, Vijja's only beloved. The simulspace's neurostimulators triggered, immersing Vijja in soft, cool sensations as wisps caressed their skin. The wind whispered in Vijja's ears, the soft and steady breeze wrapping their body in an ethereal embrace. Cloud engulfed them, cool with electrostatic shock, then entered inside, leaking into every pore, expanding with ecstasy within. Sex with another gob of flesh could never compare.

Just as the purest pleasures of the sim kicked in, a call alert pushed past Vijja's strict privacy filters. It was Rathe Aptuur, the highest-ranking diplomat in the Morningstar Constellation and Vijja's mentor. With an exaggerated sigh, Vijja ordered their muse to cease the session and, as reality returned, to put Rathe through.

[I have news Vijja. It should please you.]

Despite the interruption, Vijja was always glad to hear from Rathe when her conversations began in this tone. It signified opportunity. And opportunity meant gain, both for themself and for Venus. Yet they couldn't resist the urge to feign annoyance; it was part of the dance between they and Rathe. Vijja and Rathe both relished it, but victory in these little exchanges was not paramount for Rathe. It was the play that mattered to Rathe, but to Vijja victory was everything. It was all Vijja had ever known.

Well, I was seeking my own pleasures when you found it necessary to interrupt. But I suppose my work is never done, is it?

Rathe chuckled. [Surly Vijja is undoubtedly my favorite Vijja.]

That may be, but surly Vijja would like to return to personal business. With all due respect, of course, Emissary Aptuur. Again, a gambit in their play; Rathe despised it when Vijja addressed her with a title. The formality broke her heart. They had been through so much, as mentor and protégé, as rivals and colleagues, as lovers and enemies, then back again to their current status as the standard bearers for Venus.

Rathe opted to cease the banter, accept a tiny defeat, and get down to business. The fun had been quickly drained. The image of a woman, an exquisite sylph morph with skin the color of rust dusted with gold and eyes of emerald green, displayed in Vijja's entoptics. [Allow me to introduce you to the newest Consortium rep to be stationed here on Octavia. Her name is Jeue.]

Vijja smirked. *Never heard of her.*

[No one has. And that is where the intrigue lies. And the challenge. She is due to arrive next week and you are to meet with her. Given the exit you provided the last few so unfortunate to hold her position, I predict an icy introduction.]

Vijja instructed their muse to do a mesh search. On immediate results, it found nothing but a press release announcing Jeue as the next Planetary Consortium rep to be sent to Octavia. No qualifications, no history. At first glance, she had not even existed until today.

"Is this some kind of a joke, Rathe?" Vijja said aloud.

[No. Quite the opposite.] Rathe's tone shifted, dark mockery coded over her vocals. [How will you destroy an adversary without a past? That is your weapon of choice, is it not? The secrets of the past?]

You should know by now not to doubt me, Emissary. That PC puppet will not last a month on this aerostat. Now, before I get to the task, I would appreciate some time alone to finish what I began with your exquisite gift.

[The cloud sim is a gift from the grateful populace of Venus, Vijja. Not I. You know I cannot play favorites.]

But you still do. And rightfully so.

[Farewell, Vijja.] With a smile and a nod, Rathe's avatar blinked out of Vijja's entoptics.

Vijja returned to the cumulus sim, the giddy anticipation of political maneuvering streaming through their circulatory system.

* * *

"I want that fucking freak ruined. Finished. I don't give a fuck what it takes. Any and all resources are at your disposal." Charlie Boy sliced into the boiled fugu testes upon his plate, speared the white spongy delicacy, then slid the thin portion of blowfish balls between his enormous and perfectly white chompers. Swallow. The neurotoxins present in the testicles immediately began their assault on his system, forcing nerve endings to fire, tingle, then numb. The medichines in his blood counterattacked, nanobots neutralizing the poisonous invasion, converting death into euphoric endorphin swell. Thin lips from red, to lifeless blue, then back to red. He cracked his neck, side to side, satisfied, then continued.

"Now, I know I don't need to remind you what the price of failure is." Pause, another bite. "But I will. Cuz I'm a detail guy. I prefer clarity over ambiguity, and if I don't make my intentions clear, I'm the fool." Slice. Bite. Jeue waited patiently for the swallow, knowing what words were about to escape from beyond Charlie Boy's obscene teeth.

"There is no you without me. I made your fucking ass, and I can take it all away. Snap. Snap." Charlie Boy

snapped his chubby cigar stained fingers twice quickly, echoing his words. “A nanosecond away from extinction. Don’t forget that.”

“The opportunity of a lifetime, Charlie Boy. I’m aware.” Jeue raised a full cocktail glass of gold liquid to her gold lips, sipped. She swished the pure scotch around in her new mouth. The sensation of taste on a biomorph tongue overwhelmed her. She closed her eyes. It had been so long, over a decade. She wanted to scream in victory.

“Good, yeah?” Charlie Boy asked, eyes all over Jeue’s lips as he instructed his muse to order her another one.

She swallowed the liquid, felt its burn spread over her vocal chords and down into her chest. She opened her emerald eyes. “Fuck yes.” She smiled warmly. Charlie Boy returned a hot cinder glare.

“This moment on, you watch yer fucking mouth, girl. Yer class now. Best this dusty rock has to offer. Leave the back alley whore in the back alley. Kill her dead. Remember what you were before that, back before the Fall. I’m counting on you to be that world-class negotiator again, the one no one knew you were when your ego was beamed offworld and ended up in the triad’s databanks.” His point made, Charlie Boy’s put-on jovial demeanor flashed back onto his face. He took another bite of his dish, raised wild, not from a vat or nanofabbed, and gestured to the floor-to-ceiling window less than a meter from their table. From a hundred and fifty stories up, Valles-New Shanghai looked like a carpet of twinkling diamonds stretching to meet the deepening orange Martian sky of early evening. “Look out there. Tell me what you see.”

Jeue looked through her reflection. She polished her scotch just as the waiter placed down her next drink. She had never seen the canyon like this, from the heights, from the towers of wealth. Until today, she had only seen Mars from the inside of bunraku parlors and dollhouses, as viewed from the dead eyes of a pleasure pod waiting for the next client. She had no idea how her infugee ego had ended up in the syndicate’s hands or what had happened to her old friends and family from Earth. One day, she had been an up-and-coming UN negotiator, making sure to back herself up regularly as a precaution in the trying days of war and conflict. She must have died soon after that, in the Fall, but her backup was transmitted offworld. The next she knew, she was a slave, a prostitute, just another mind in a box downloaded into the body of choice according to the sexual appetites and fantasies of a non-stop parade of creeps.

Katarine, as she still called herself, despite the triad’s efforts to keep her nameless, was a survivor. She made the best of her circumstances. The skill set she required wasn’t all that different from what she had trained in for years. All she needed was an opening, and she found one: Charlie Boy. From client to friend, friend to savior. He had seen through her mask to the potential underneath, the genius of her charm. He paid the triad for details, investigated her past, and found an opportunity. He saw that her talents, her old training were being wasted. A plan came to mind in which her lack of a background was an asset.

Charlie, a behind-the-scenes player in the Consortium’s foreign consulate, answering directly to powers within the Ministry and Hypercorp Council, was waiting for her answer. Her chameleon nature came to the fore, manipulating herself to be exactly what he wanted her to be. “I see all the little people, Charlie.”

Charlie Boy smiled, satisfied with the response. His demeanor and mannerisms often struck Jeue as old-fashioned, more in tune with the style of the Old Boys Network so prominent in old-Earth corps, but here he was, a major player for the cutting-edge hypercorps. He was a survivor as well, but far more ruthless and cold, the kind who used and sacrificed others to stay ahead.

“Ya know what I see?” he said. “I see the greatest empire this system has ever known, and will ever know. Not everyone sees it my way, Jeue. And it pisses me off to no end. If we’re not careful, we’re gonna lose our grip. I can see it. Thousands of microscopic cuts already, with more springing up each day. The anarchists, the Venusians, the reclaimers … we keep seeping blood, drip by drip, and it’s pooling up. Eventually, we’ll collapse to our knees, and soon after that the PC is face-down dead in its own juice. It’s our turn to strike back, starting with Vijja and these Morningstar troublemakers, and it’s gonna be done my way. When I sting, it’s hard and it’s death. You will know it. That’s the way it should be. Sneaky ain’t noble. If I’m gonna fuck you, you’re gonna lose your head. Gaping hole in your chest.”



Vijja sat still within their private box at the apex of the cloud-diving observation dome, a clenched fist resting softly on their lips, awaiting the arrival of their guest and newly-appointed rival from the Planetary Consortium. Vijja had opted to wear one of the latest unique designs from Branimira Ivanova, a ground-breaking fashion house on Gerlach, in Venusian orbit. This show of opulence and influence was intended to make waves in the media and socialite circles, marking their meeting as a notable event, scoring points for Vijja as the more stylish and elegant. It was a bold move to choose fashion over formal attire, and Vijja hoped it would grab hold of Jeue’s confidence from the first moment and shake it like a misbehaving puppy. Instead, Vijja’s gambit had fallen victim to a perfectly-timed disaster.

The news of this disaster saturated the mesh in minutes. The cortical stacks of over three dozen surface workers deemed unrecoverable by the Octavian government following a mining disaster, an explosion at the third largest operations base during a shift change, origin unknown. Dozens of desperate indentures smuggled from Consortium hands in pursuit of the dream of a new morph and a new life on Venus were wiped. Each one of the deceased had waived backup storage costs and liabilities that would have extended their terms, and had been unable to afford backups of their own. Dozens permanently, irrevocably dead. Comment streams were scathing and multiplying by the second, increasingly fierce, a feeding frenzy of anti-Morningstar sentiment. The outrage spanned all social strata throughout the entire system.

And here was Vijja, a public face of the Constellation, the eyes of the dome upon them, broadcast across the mesh and around the system, dressed in extravagant finery, their appearance almost perfectly timed with the

news. Absorbed together, it was as if Vijja was celebrating the tragedy. Their reputation was already taking a hit as scathing comments flooded the social networks, remarking on Vijja's look and attire as the height of bad taste and a shocking lack of decorum. Their name was being mocked and reviled.

Vijja smirked slightly beneath their still fist. The first volley had been fired and they were already on the defensive. *What bad form,* Vijja thought. *An assault even before a formal introduction. I would expect nothing less from an amateur.* Vijja ordered their muse to extinguish the comment streams scrolling across their entoptics. Peace was needed in these few final moments before Vijja would extend their hand in greeting to Jeue. Minutes, perhaps even seconds, to center their venom, to suppress their seething need to counterstrike immediately. But there would be no time for focus.

The door to the box slid open. Vijja stood and turned to greet their guest, the warmest of smiles gracing their lips and eyes, not a hint of defeat or hate, but only two Octavian diplomatic escorts entered the room. They nodded stiffly, then one spoke.

"Emissary Vijja. Diplomat Jeue sends her regrets, but she will not be able to attend."

Vijja turned their back to the escorts and dismissed them with a wave of their hand as they ordered their muse to reignite the comment streams and search the mesh for any activity from Jeue. A video statement, posted just seconds ago, emerged, and there was Jeue:

"I wish to extend my deepest sympathies to the loved ones of all those lost in the terrible tragedy that took place today on the surface of Venus." Her bright green eyes flickered from pools of sympathy to fires of great hate as her speech rolled onward, slamming into the Morningstar Constellation. She vehemently denounced the "get-rich-quick" appeal of the Morningstar indentured contracts. She repeated, following every point, "Is the risk really worth the reward?"

Vijja's mind snarled and snapped. *So calculated, so rehearsed, zero sophistication and subtlety. A manufactured politician, not an artist.*

I am the artist. And it's time to get creative.

* * *

The exchange lasted for months. On the surface, Consortium-Constellation relations continued on their normal rocky course. Under the surface, a tug-of-war ensued, with each side engaging ploys and launching memetic attacks. A leading scientific proponent of the Consortium's original terraforming plans for Venus publicly switched sides, coming out in favor of the Constellation's Aerial Terraforming Initiative, devaluing the Consortium's claims. A major outer system shipper canceled its contract with the Constellation to move several iceteroids into the inner system to be sublimated in the Venusian atmosphere and aid the aerial terraforming, raising the costs and shaking public confidence in the Constellation's goals. Negotiations over intellectual property restrictions, pushed heavily by Consortium interests, stalled and then stalled again, impeding the interests of certain hypercorps in establishing standards across the inner system. An incident with a Constellation citizen found to be manufacturing restricted weapons onboard a Consortium habitat brought down condemnation of the Venusian's lax attitudes towards nanoproliferation. Blow-by-blow it continued.

Through it all, however, Vijja had failed to find an avenue by which to undermine Jeue directly. This was their specialty, but the Consortium diplomat's hidden past provided precious little for the negotiator to work with. This lack itself may have been an angle to exploit, but Vijja was convinced the Consortium anticipated such a move and had a response in place. Jeue's insertion and reception into the circles of hyperelite socialites and glitterati had been flawless, and her travels through their ranks had been studiously free of controversy, despite several pitfalls and traps Vijja had laid.

As Vijja immersed themself in a sensuous steam bath, contemplating new angles of approach to this vexing situation, their muse suddenly flagged a new incoming file as exceptionally relevant to Vijja's interests. Vijja called up the entoptic details, and was immediately stricken by the file's name: "Weapon of Choice." This was not a message from Rathe, however. The sender was anonymous, the trail carefully and completely obfuscated, as it always was. Vijja smiled knowingly. This was an opportunity, a gift. Vijja had grown accustomed to these occasional mysteries, these provident bonuses, throughout their rise to the top of the Morningstar diplomatic ranks. Their timing never failed to be fortuitous and their contents always proved cataclysmically destructive to Vijja's adversaries. Vijja had always questioned and carefully validated their contents, and they had always proved true.

Thank you once again, Vijja thought, towards no one in particular, but rather into the vastness of the mesh. Vijja was not one to question their benefactor's desire for anonymity.

The file opened and the truth of Jeue's past spilled forth like blood from a gut slice.

Jeue: a chameleon, in hiding for years, plotting all the while. Brilliant, yet mad beyond comparison. She was a sleeper, a ticking time bomb, a reprogrammed and rewired threat. Her past was bathed in blood, and her kind were as dangerous as they were notorious. Murderers. Decapitators. Flesh eaters. Lost.

* * *

The deed was done. Jeue's past had been unveiled. The scandal unfolded in the most breathtaking manner Vijja had managed to devise. Her past was all over the feeds. The Consortium was disgraced for allowing a monster in their ranks. Jeue herself had disappeared, gone underground in the face of an almost certain order of death and deletion of all backups.

Vijja's gleeful absorption of the breaking news was suddenly interrupted by an incoming call alert. Annoyed at their muse for allowing the disturbance past their filters, Vijja was about to refuse it when it suddenly connected. An avatar appeared in their entoptics that they had never seen before. It was unusual, unique, and sinister: a hand stretched wide in tension, the fingertips shaped like scorpion tails. With a sobering certainty, Vijja knew that their anonymous benefactor was finally making themselves known.

The hand spoke in a deep vocalization with the unmistakable rasp of a throat abused for ages by all the harmful substances a body could ingest.

[Pleased?]

Yes. Very much.

[And what if I told you that none of the information I provided this time was true, yet I went to considerable effort for it all to be verifiable and airtight?]

Then I would be even more delighted.

As much as Vijja enjoyed digging up the past and skewering an enemy upon it, they adored complex fabrications and deceit. It was the true art of their chosen profession. No one ever earned the title of mastermind by dealing wholly in truths.

The hand continued. [There is something you must understand, Vijja. That I never want you to forget. You are a creation, of mine, of others. Your rise has little to do with you.]

Vijja hissed aloud. It was nearly impossible to rattle them, but this shocked the diplomat into a search for words, for the proper response to this entity, whoever it was. All Vijja could muster was: *I don't believe you.*

[That would be foolhardy. Have I not provided for you, Vijja? Protected you? Guided you? Removed obstacles from your path?]

Vijja remained silent, unwilling to challenge or to show weakness. They did not want to provide even a word that could be used against them. This was the start of the fight to remain in the arms of existence. The battle with Jeue paled sickeningly in comparison to the contest Vijja could sense unfolding with the wide-reaching hand.

The hand spoke again. [Do you require proof Vijja? Is that it? To be fair, I would ask for proof in your position. Would you like to ask for proof, Vijja?]

This time Vijja did not hesitate. *Yes. I require proof.*

[Very well, Vijja. Here is your proof.]

A new file was transferred. Vijja eyed the title in their entoptic display. Weapon of Choice. Warmth drained from their body.

Barely aware that they were doing so, Vijja opened the file and examined the contents. Every claim that was made in the previous file against Jeue now became Vijja. A lifelog of the horrors perpetrated by the young woman known as Hera79 during her accelerated growth in the Futura project flooded Vijja's display. Their mind entered a state of paralysis as the images attacked: the blood-soaked faces, the limbs, the carve of blades through youthful flesh. Vijja could recall the taste of bone and feel the scream of insatiable hunger rising from *her* throat, then and now. All those terrible, invigorating moments stolen from her, returned in a fantastic, raging torrent. Hera79 was changed, reprogrammed, groomed into … who? Jeue? Vijja? Anyone? Vijja could no longer tell.

The entire fabric of Vijja's reality was unraveling. They collapsed to the floor in shock and exhaustion.

The hand was all that was present in Vijja's augmented reality, the rest was haze.

[Remember this, Vijja. Your past, your position, your power, all are under my control. I have vast wealth and resources at my disposal. I am old enough to guess what you are thinking three moves ahead. My influence is not open, but is worked through others such as yourself. When I call, you will listen. When I command, you will obey.]

Vijja could not move. They did not want to have even a single thought, for fear that the hand would steal it and use it against them.

[Remember, Vijja. Remember.]

* * *

Kymber whispered something in Hines's mind and he began counting. *180. 179. 178.*

Barely aware that he was doing so, he turned and began walking away from the mining camp. In his mind, he no longer railed against the injustices piled upon infugees and indentures like himself. He no longer castigated the system of power within the inner system that traded lives as commodities, that forced living beings into virtual slavery and hellish conditions. He forgot about the rich elites who callously made decisions that negatively affected millions of lives with no empathy or care as to the consequences. Hines mind was entirely devoted to his imminent detonation.

The code whispered by Kymber had triggered dormant programming in Hines's brain, implanted with careful and subtle psychosurgical tricks, back when he was a disembodied infomorph in Consortium control. Hines's incentive to free himself from the Consortium and seek indentured service on Venus had been fueled by this conditioning. Also buried in his subconscious were orders to blow up the mining station at a predetermined time, just half an hour from now. Kymber's message to Hines, however, had triggered an abort sequence.

72. 71. 70.

Hines's quartz morph lumbered along, practically running, though its movement was still stiff and slow. He had moved over 100 meters and was approaching the crater lip and the lava field beyond. He was far enough away now that the explosives hidden inside his quartz frame would not significantly damage the other surface workers or mining camp, as they were originally intended to do.

25. 24. 23.

He reached the lip. For a moment he paused, and Hines's thoughts were once again absorbed by the radiant glow of burning rock below. For a second, he had no thoughts of his circumstances or the manipulations of people stationed far above him.

12. 11. 10.

He stepped out. For a long moment, he hovered above the melt. Then he fell.

* * *

Vijja stood at their chamber window, watching the thick gray storm clouds rushing by. Rathe had wanted to see Vijja tonight, to congratulate them with another gift from the people, more exquisite and tantalizing than the cloud sim, but Vijja was not in the mood. Though these moments of atmospheric rage were rare, they chilled Vijja, filled them with melancholy and fear. They reminded them of the haze and the hand. This was not Vijja's soft Venus. The destructive force of their world at its most temperamental was apparent even behind the protection of meter-thick aerogel. Vijja always thought of themself as the destroyer, the protector. They felt betrayed, insignificant.

Vijja had received credit for discovering and unveiling the plot to sabotage yet another Venusian mining operation. They had not lifted a finger, but the data had come from their office. A potential attack on a critical Morningstar mining camp thwarted by the ever-vigilant Vijja, hero of the Venusian people. Plotted by the scoundrel Jeue, a Lost Generation murderer in hiding.

It's simple, really, to wind up on the winning side when you've created the winner. And the loser.

Vijja commanded the shades to lower and the lights to dim, then walked away from the window to sit in the darkness. They contemplated the life of the undying rich, the power and guile such oligarchs commanded.

It is only a matter of time. Only a matter of time before I am disposable. Before the decision is made to cast me into ruin.

What to do? What to do?

* * *

Katarine found herself in the dollhouse parlor once again, sleeved into a new pod. She took a moment to examine herself. It was always unnerving to find herself in a new body, a new face, but she also relished these short periods of embodiment. Anything beat the eternity of waiting in simulspace. She wondered who her client would be this time. She was unaware that she was ever Jeue, that Charlie Boy had used her, once again, or that he would continue to, over and over again.

The next time I see Charlie Boy, she thought, *I'm gonna take him up on that offer. Whatever it is, I don't care. I just don't care. Anything is better than this*. She accessed her schedule to see when he was due, but there was nothing.

He'll show up, she thought. *He always does*.

Seconds later she was ushered off to her appointment—another mid-level hypercorp drone with a fetish for humiliation.

* * *

Charlie Boy strolled by a roulette table, stopped for a second to observe the action, to get a read on the play, and he caught a pattern he liked. A streak was about to hit according to his newly installed high-end math boost software. He beamed a bet of ten thousand credits to the dealer. The wheel spun.

He liked the look of the pleasure pod at the far end of the table. The pod gave him the eye and Charlie Boy walked up behind and pressed in close, his torso brushing lightly against the pod's smooth bare back. "Watch this." Charlie Boy said, and the pod flicked a pouty-lipped smile over the shoulder. The wheel started to slow.

"Whaddya think? Think this bet has a shot?" Charlie Boy whispered into the pod's ear while rattling the ice cubes in his glass of scotch.

"I don't know. Does it?" the pod replied.

"Yeah. I'm pretty sure it does." He slammed the remaining half of his drink as the final clicks of the wheel started their march, tickticktick … ticktick … ticktick … tick … tick … tick …

The wheel stopped. As the dealer called out the winner, Charlie Boy bellowed from his cigar-charred throat, "Boom, baby! BOOM!"



EXPLORE THE INNER SYSTEM

FOREWORD

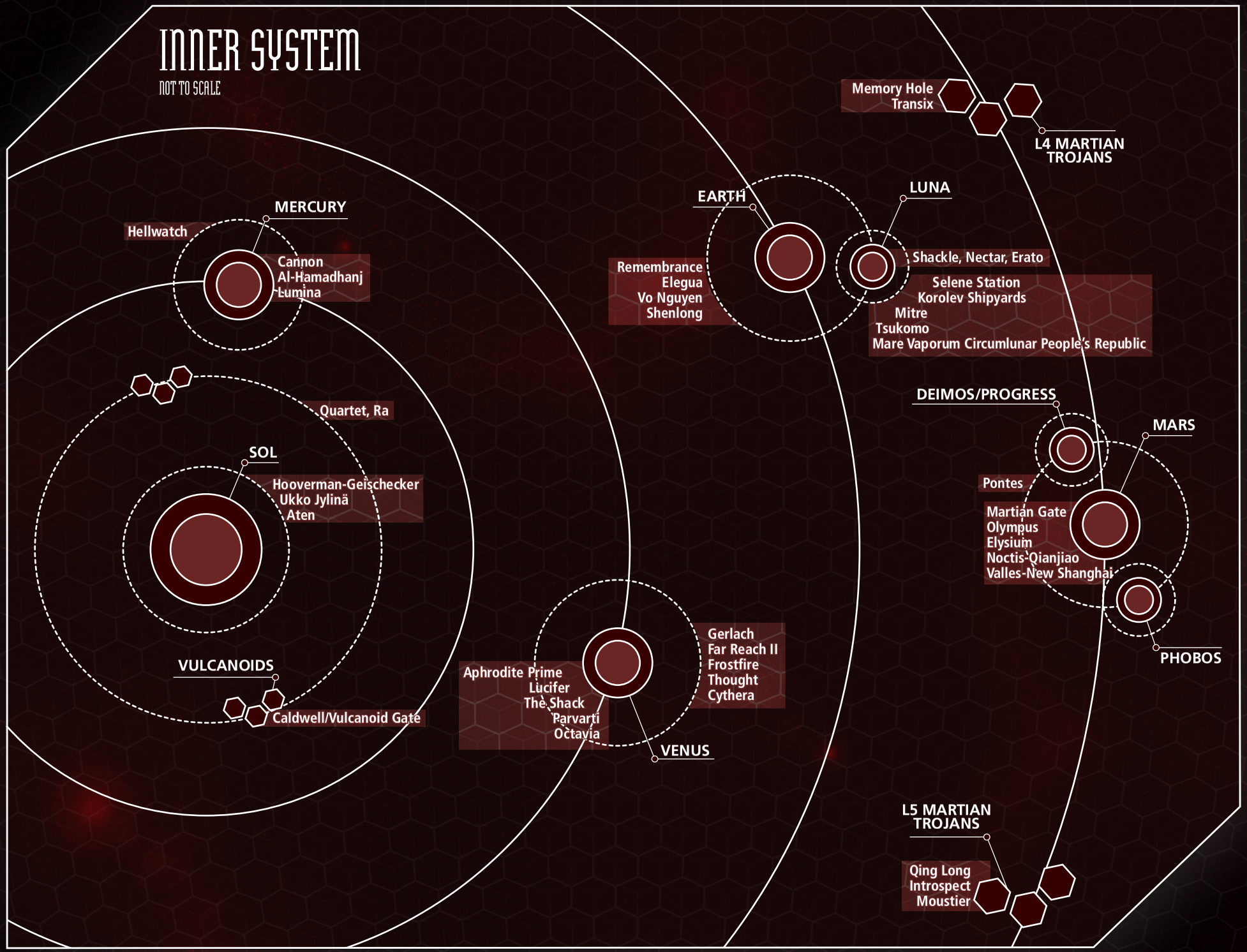




[Incoming Message]
[Source: Proxy Stitch]
[Public Key Decryption Complete]

Firewall operatives like yourself come from a wide variety of backgrounds. You may have been born the natural way back on Earth, hatched in a Martian exowomb crèche, or raised on a scum barge by an extended family of orangutans. As a sentinel, you're going to be thrown head-first into a lot of diverse environments that you may not be accustomed to, especially if you've never interacted with the local culture or faction before. To prepare our agents for these sorts of scenarios, Firewall has prepared a collection of background reports to fill you in on local areas you may not be fully aware of. Some of these are reports filed by agents in the field, some are transcripts of summaries provided by agents after a specific op. Fair warning, each piece may or may not be tainted by the narrator's own personal cognitive biases. Additionally, quite a bit of the subject matter deals with things that may be of particular interest to sentinels, but may not be confirmed. Some may simply be rumors, speculation, or deliberate disinformation spread by our rivals. So run everything through a cynicism filter until you've verified it yourself. Finally, these reports are just meant to provide some basic familiarity, they're not comprehensive. If you need more data on a specific habitat, person, or group, ping the Solarchive or Firewall's internal wiki. For more in-depth preparation, skillsofts or psychosurgery can also be provided.

This first batch of reports deals with the inner system, from the sun out to Mars. If it does its job, this information will help you avoid an unscheduled resleeve. ♣


INNER SYSTEM
NOT TO SCALE
Memory Hole
Transix
L4 MARTIAN TROJANS
EARTH
LUNA
MERCURY
Hellwatch
Cannon
Al-Hamadhanj
Lumina
Remembrance
Elegua
Vo Nguyen
Shenlong
Shackle, Nectar, Erato
Selene Station
Korolev Shipyards
Mitre
Tsukomo
Mare Vaporum Circumlunar People's Republic
DEIMOS/PROGRESS
MARS
Quartet, Ra
SOL
Hooverman-Geischecker
Ukko Jylinä
Aten
Pontes
Martian Gate
Olympus
Elysium
Noctis-Qianjiao
Valles-New Shanghai
VULCANOIDS
Caldwell/Vulcanoid Gate
Gerlach
Far Reach II
Frostfire
Thought
Cythera
Aphrodite Prime
Lucifer
The Shack
Parvarti
Octavia
VENUS
PHOBOS
L5 MARTIAN TROJANS
Qing Long
Introspect
Moustier

SOL-MERCURY



OVERVIEW

This report covers three areas:

The Solar Corona: Life around the sun. ■ p. 14

The Vulcanoids: Heliocentric asteroids hidden by glare. ■ p. 17

Mercury: Resource-rich but inhospitable. ■ p. 17



HOT SPOTS

These places may be of particular interest to sentinels:

Ukko Jylinä : Capital of Solarian culture. ■ p. 16

Al-Hamadhanj: Capital of sifter culture on Mercury. ■ p. 20

THREATS

Firewall is actively monitoring these dangers:

Solar X-Risks: The sun as a weapon. ■ p. 14

The Vulcanoid Gate: Wormhole portal controlled by TerraGenesis on V/2011 Caldwell. ■ p. 17

Mercury Antimatter Production: Lethal when weaponized. ■ p. 19

Caloris 18: Contained exsurgent threat. ■ p. 20

The Egg: Mysterious Factor artifact. ■ p. 21



SOL-MERCURY

We'll start off this Firewall Guide to Fun Ways To Die in the Inner System with that great big nuclear reactor at the center of our lives, around which the entire system literally revolves, which simultaneously warms us with its nurturing fire and attempts to kill us with its caustic rays. The sun, and its close neighbors—Mercury and the Vulcanoids—represent some interesting environmental challenges and peculiar risks that every sentinel needs to keep in mind.

THE SOLAR CORONA

We use all kinds of words to make the sun seem harmless and safe: Average. Middle-aged. Dwarf. Main sequence.

Don't believe any of it, my little sentinels.

Sol is a monster, a behemoth. It measures 1.4 million kilometers in diameter and masses more than everything else in our system combined. Our primary's gravitational influence is felt light years away. Nothing is immune to its touch.

Deep in the nuclear furnace that is Sol's frantic heart, hellish temperatures and pressures tear matter apart, stripping electrons from their nuclei, creating monstrous magnetic fields, and birthing terrible storms that rage across our sun's face. Lines of magnetic force shape coronal loops big enough to swallow a planet or birth coronal mass ejections that fling billions of tons of superheated plasma tens of thousands of kilometers into space. The accompanying radiation reaches much further. If the range of Sol's touch is measured in light years, the reach of Sol's rage is measured in astronomical units.

And here we sit on Sol's very doorstep.

Still think this is a boring assignment?

SOLAR X-RISKS

The first thing to keep in mind is that the sun itself presents several existential risks. Yeah, it *seems* safe and stable enough, but it is essentially a ticking time bomb. Sol is the most powerful force in the system and with a little shove in the wrong direction it could cause the death of millions—or everyone. These are just a few of the possibilities:

CORONAL MASS EJECTIONS (CMES) AND FLARES

CMEs and flares happen when solar magnetic fields are stretched to the point of breaking. By using a powerful magnetic source, these dangerous events could be targeted at one's enemies. The bursts of radiation thrown out by these events is damaging to spacecraft, satellites, and biological life, can haze out important communications and sensor wavelengths, and can cause dangerous geomagnetic storms on planetary bodies. Planets with powerful magnetic fields (Earth, Jupiter, Saturn, etc.) would be protected from the worst of the ionic particles emitted by a CME. Everyone else would be fried.

IRON BOMBARDMENT

The sun produces energy by fusing lighter elements in to heavier elements. The fusion of iron is an endothermic process, though. In other words, it doesn't produce energy. Instead, it sucks the life out of you like a needy lover. There isn't enough iron in the solar system to disrupt the fusion process of a whole star, but there is enough to throw Sol out of balance, causing a localized collapse of the solar surface. This would lead to violent magnetic storms and plasma ejections.

On a more speculative scale, if some advanced intelligence were able to figure out a method to cause the star's interior to burn down to a core of iron and nickel, the sun would explode in a supernova, wiping out the entire solar system. While such methods are far beyond transhumanity's knowledge, we cannot rule out the capabilities of other species or minds like the TITANs. Of course, an entity or civilization capable of iron bombing a star can probably do much, much worse things to us.

MINI BLACK HOLE KILL SHOT

If a Ceres-sized singularity were somehow introduced to the sun's heart, this mini black hole would act as a vacuum cleaner, eating mass and growing as it feeds. Since every star is a delicate balance between the compressive force of mass and the expansionist force of fusion, this would destabilize the star. The eventual result: a supernova—and the end to all your woes.

CORONAL HABITATS

Owing to the fact that the solar corona is such a difficult environment for man and machine, there are only three coronal habitats. All three are stationed in highly elliptical heliocentric orbits that bring them to the sun's north pole at perihelion, where stations are relatively safe from flares and coronal mass ejections. These coronal habitats are easily identified by the bow shocks preceding them and the plasma tails that stretch behind them, giving them a characteristic tear-drop shape as the solar wind bends around their powerful magnetic fields.

The hulls of circumsolar habitats are covered with thousands of electromagnetic dynamos that draw power from the sun itself and generate the powerful EM fields that shield the habitats from solar radiation. Beneath the habitats' hulls are layers of circulating water for shielding. This energy-blocking shell protects a spherical array of habitat modules.

Solar habitats do a thriving business with iceteroid miners in the Trojans who deliver deep-space

SOL-MERCURY
VENUS
EARTH
EARTH ORBIT
LUNA
MARS
INNER FRINGE
ANETARY CONSORTIUM
GAME INFORMATION

icebergs to replenish the habitats' water supply. The iceteroids are heavily insulated and are themselves equipped with powerful EM shields. Moving these huge bodies of ice into the inner system is a dangerous process—if any element of the iceteroid's shielding were to fail, intense solar radiation would immediately vaporize the ice in the affected area, generating a gas jet, and creating a runaway comet. Due to the resources necessary to import iceteroids from the outer system and the risk of an accident, supplying these habitats with water is a fabulously expensive process.

ATEN

Station Type: Cluster
Allegiance: Planetary Consortium
Primary Languages: English, Mandarin

The public face of this habitat is the Martian University of New Shanghai, but in actuality its principal funding comes from a shadowy collection of hypercorps and other interests. We've found links to Cognite, Direct Action, and the criminal syndicate Nine Lives, among others. Publicly, Aten claims to be working on cutting-edge propulsion systems and new techniques for solar energy collection, but rumors abound that the habitat is heavily involved in military research. We've heard strange and disturbing tales: work on weaponizing the Exsurgent virus; development of a simple image that can crash a transhuman mind via a visual cortex input glitch; wargaming forknapped leaders to gain a negotiating advantage. Unfortunately, Firewall knows little beyond the rumors. Security is exceptionally tight and major egocasting restrictions are placed on the habitat's population of 12,000. Firewall has made at least two failed efforts to infiltrate projects here to learn more.

HOOVERMAN-GEISCHECKER

Station Type: Cluster
Allegiance: Argonaut/Titanian
Primary Languages: None

Hooverman-Geischecker is a joint venture between the argonauts and Titan Autonomous University sponsoring dozens of research studies. This habitat supports a population of about 4,000 transhumans. Unlike Aten, it has a relatively open culture and is run on nanosocialist lines. Major avenues of study include pure solar science and research into new corona-adapted morphs. This station is an ideal staging point for operations as it is the least restrictive of the coronal habs. Firewall has several agents here, and it's a great place to make connections with the nomads who live within the corona—the suryas and other so-called *Solarians*. It is also the only solar habitat supporting tourism and offering recreational activities like sun-diving (sleeving into a surya or other coronal morph) and sun-spotting (bot-jamming tours of solar flares and other features).

SECURE RESEARCH

The following file, originating from former MU student Hui Fong's personal muse, turned up in the data cache of a Direct Action counter-intrusion specialist.

Yu, it seems you were right. I've spent the last few nights at the lab trying to get access to the fifth or sixth floors in the Molecular Genetics tower with little success. Even the vacuum breach slides from those floors are sealed tight and have sophisticated monitoring equipment on them. Your suspicion that they're working with some sort of live biovirus? I think you're on to something. I was poking around in some of the ceiling access vents on the fourth floor and found some shady shit there. Shady, like medical-grade human-nutrient support pipes, the kind they use in body banks to keep morphs alive between users. And heavy-duty Class-C medical containment feeds. I sampled some residue and the analyzer identified it as catacinin, a compound used to kill all major brain functions. They use it as part of the process to wipe the brains of biomorphs when it's absolutely essential that the previous ego be fully eradicated. It's used for people with high-level security clearance when they resleeve—and also on people the TITANs had gotten a hold of. I hope they're just doing vaccine research or other preventive care solutions, but why keep it secret?

Everything else we do here, no matter how far away from actual breakthroughs, is trumpeted throughout the inner system. Why keep this place quiet, and the third floor of the uplift center too? I think we're on to something and I'm willing to chip in to get that journo out here. Maybe she can find out a bit more. At the very least she can poke around without fearing she'll lose her scholarship. This shit is making me paranoid. I don't even trust campus security any more. A Direct Action safety contractor came by to check the lab fire suppression gear and I thought he was there to arrest me. I nearly freaked when I saw his uniform.

We need to do something because I can't stop thinking about this. I'm not sure there's much else we can do on our own. I know that we're supposed to say something when we see something—just like the security and safety seminars say—but when it's two floors in a building? I think someone already knows what's going down, someone with pull. And while you may be crazy enough to think we can just hack a maker and steal some passcodes to get in, I'm betting they have security hardware beyond our capabilities. Plus we're looking at serious damage if we got exposed to the catacinin or whatever else may be up there. We need to get a pro, someone who knows what's up and can come prepared.

IN THE WILDS OF THE SUN

[The camera focuses on an unbroken black sky and then drifts down to steady on a sea of molten fire. The inferno is granular, built of waves of incandescent white and gold and orange, pocked with irregular black lesions.]

"This is Dr. Julia da Rosa of the Icarus Survey. It is 1712 UT on 13 January 10 AF. We are skimming … looks like 23,000 klicks above the chromosphere. Icarus is heavily shielded and the AI's solar meteorology subroutine will move us out of the way if it forecasts a flare, but right now we seem to be OK. Even so, we're all in solar survival suits just in c—my god, what the hell is that?"

[A black speck skims over the surface of the golden fire. It is no bigger than a pencil's dark tip, but it is moving fast.]

"Urbano, what is that? Is that a ship?"

[Excited male voice.] "If it is, it's too low. They better have major shielding or the sun's smallest sneeze will vaporize them."

[The dark speck powers through a turn, rising out of the sun at a steep angle, now shooting toward the camera like a missile.]

"Did they just fire on us?"

"Não, Julia. I told you it's not a ship."

[The object is rapidly growing in size as it arrows toward the camera. It is sleek and black and shaped like a missile.]

"What is it, then?"

[The object flashes by at incredible speed. The camera freezes in on a still-shot, highlighting and bringing the bullet-sleek silhouette of what looks like an orca into focus. A bright-red scale line appears, stretching from the thing's pointed nose to its broad flukes. The legend next to the line says: "8 meters." The creature's back is coal black, its belly a luminous yellow-gold marked with patches of black. It sports two wing-like appendages that are reminiscent of a whale's pectoral fins. The camera resumes the video and time starts again. The thing flashes past, rolling on its side to bare its belly to the camera, patches of black rapidly flashing on and off.]

[Female voice, whispering.] "My God. I t-think that was a surya."

UKKO JYLINÄ

Station Type: Cluster
Allegiance: Solarian
Primary Languages: Finnish, Suryan

Ukko Jylinä is distinct as the habitat designed by and for those who consider themselves the local inhabitants of the solar corona, rather than the interests of distant powers. It takes its name from a common sequence of helioseismic vibrations transposed fifteen octaves upward into the usual range of transhuman hearing. The suryas consider this harmonic one of the most beautiful sounds the sun makes.

The habitat serves as a safe harbor for suryas during heavy solar storms, as well as a place for the Solarians to socialize, mate, replenish their water supplies, egocast, and resleeve. The population fluctuates anywhere from 300 to 3,000 (nearly the entire surya population) when the weather is bad. Suryas huddle within protective hangar/utility modules, idling in VR simulspaces, typically sending forks to resleeve into salamander morphs to take care of any matters requiring a more humanoid form. Outsiders are rarely invited and tend to find the station inhospitable, as there is little in the way of living modules or habitable space for common transhuman biomorphs.

SOLARIANS AND CORONAL MORPHS

The "native" Solarian culture is dismissive of habitats, preferring a nomadic lifestyle of drifting and swimming in the sun's magnetic field in corona-adapted surya morphs. With the exception of a number of scientists engaged in solar research, this population is largely mercurial, with a high percentage of uplifted dolphin and whale egos, as the corona is one of the few environments within the solar system that offers cetacea an approximate alternative to their native physical forms and lifestyles. As a result, Solarian culture is heavily influenced by dolphin and whale norms. Suryas often congregate in pods defined by powerful and complex familial relationships. Their culture is more free-wheeling than typical human behavior and there is little goal-direction. Solarian culture is also unusually intimate and sex is shared freely. The sonar of baseline dolphins allows them to "see" everything that is happening in their companions' bodies, in terms of health, mood, and so on. It is often said that dolphins have no secrets, and so it has come to be with suryas.

As a result of this intimacy and their general seclusion from transhuman culture, the Solarians are sometimes seen as stand-offish and unwelcoming. This is in large part due to several unfortunate incidents that occurred between Solarians and socialites vacationing in surya morphs and a simple failure to comprehend each others' cultural norms. While the cetacea Solarians are generally inquisitive and sociable, there are some Solarians who have definitely adopted an isolationist mindset, looking at their lifestyle as turning their backs on the stresses and concerns of transhuman society. Because of the radical nature of the environment in which the Solarians live, the cultural equivalent of radiative speciation can be expected to some degree. Though they remain an offshoot of transhumanity, the Solarians are definitely their own clade with their own goals and outlook. Some other elements of transhuman society find this concerning, viewing the divergent path of the Solarians as the growth of an alien culture in the heart of the solar system.

THE VULCANOIDS

The Vulcanoids are a tiny population of small asteroids that lie in a stable orbital region inside Mercury's orbit. For some, this is considered prime real estate for secret projects, as any activity here is hidden from telescopic surveillance from the rest of the system by the sun's glare.

V/2011-CALDWELL

Station Type: Dome
Allegiance: TerraGenesis
Primary Languages: Dutch, English, Tamil

Caldwell was the first of the elusive Vulcanoids to be discovered, though initially it attracted little attention. When a small team of prospectors from Venus discovered a Pandora Gate in a deep crag near one of the asteroid's narrow poles, however, this small rock was thrust into the spotlight. Ownership of the asteroid was quickly "acquired" by TerraGenesis who immediately began undertaking exoplanet research missions through this Vulcanoid Gate. After spending several years cataloging new worlds, TerraGenesis then shifted focus into alien world terraforming and geo-engineering projects.

Initially TerraGenesis was quite open about sharing—or at least leasing—gate time with other hypercorps and research groups. Several Venusian concerns, in particular, initiated numerous extrasolar studies. All of this changed, however, when a still-unknown terrorist cell attacked Caldwell and nearly succeeded in an attempt to destroy the gate. Sleeved in reaper morphs, the attackers penetrated all the way into the inner gate facilities. Once neutralized, they were discovered to be carrying a thermonuclear warhead, which they luckily had failed to detonate. To this date TerraGenesis has not determined who sponsored the attack, despite many rumors. In response, however, the gate facilities are more strictly defended and access is much more restricted.

TERRAGENESIS: FRIENDS AND FOES

TerraGenesis's control of the Vulcanoid Gate puts them in a unique and difficult position. Like any hypercorp, their specialized interests mean that relations with other hypercorps and allies are essential, and there is no shortage of parties seeking to establish or retain partnerships. On the other hand, many of TerraGen's "friends" have conflicting agendas, so the cooperative must consistently play a balancing act. An upswing in Morningstar-TerraGenesis research ventures and colonization projects, along with continued links between the terraforming corp and reclaimers, has the Planetary Consortium on edge. This is enhanced by a growing rivalry between TerraGen and the Consortium's own Pathfinder. Some forces within the Consortium seem eager to bring TerraGenesis into the fold, however, and have gone so far as to offer the corp incentives in their Martian terraforming projects in exchange for increased access to the Vulcanoid Gate and potential sanctions against Morningstar initiatives.

QUARTET

Station Type: Torus
Allegiance: Hypercorp (TerraGenesis)
Primary Languages: English, Dutch, Tamil, Wu

Quartet is a collection of four torus habitats that share an orbit fifty thousand kilometers farther out from the sun than Caldwell. While they travel more slowly around the sun than Caldwell, each is stationed 90 degrees apart, meaning that one is always "close" to Caldwell. Ownership is shared between several hypercorps, though TerraGenesis has majority control in each and uses them as staging and logistic areas for Vulcanoid Gate projects. Each habitat features several research parks, focusing mainly on exoplanet studies, and also doubles as a military installation, with equipment and personnel on hand to provide the Vulcanoid Gate with any necessary reinforcements.

V/2014-RA

Station Type: Cluster
Allegiance: Solarian
Primary Languages: English, French

Discovered three years after Caldwell, this tiny asteroid has little to recommend it, save for its proximity to the Vulcanoid Gate. Ecologene is in the process of hollowing out Ra with the intention of converting it into a Cole bubble. TerraGenesis's cooperative congress has chosen to see this as an alarming sign—and another reason to bolster defenses. Paranoia has been fueled by rumors linking Ecologene and even the Factors to the attack on the Vulcanoid Gate, despite any significant evidence. While the environmental systems corp does have ties to preservationists and a seeming favored relationship with the mysterious aliens who decry usage of the gates, these rumors may just as well be a smokescreen or may even have been sparked by Ecologene's developments with Ra.

MERCURY

Mercury is the solar system's first major planet—and its smallest. The tiny world is the ultimate desert; dusty, dry, and blasted by the sun. It's perfect for working on your tan. The planet's sidereal day is two-thirds as long as its short year, meaning the sun crawls across the world's black sky, and Mercury is subjected to hellish extremes of hot and cold—especially since it has no atmosphere to normalize temperatures (Mercury's mean temperature swings through a change of 620 degrees Celsius night to day). Maybe you didn't know you could freeze to death a hop, skip, and a jump from the boiling surface of the sun, but you can.

Mercury's surface is covered with impact craters, evidence of the battering it has taken from meteorites drawn in by the sun's massive gravity. The planet's violent history—along with the repeated thermal cycling—has worked to break up the world's rocks and ensure its surface is covered in dust. The mantle of time lies heavily upon the face of this little world. Now numerous strip mines add new scars to its battered surface.

It is thought that most volatiles boiled off during the planet's formation due to the world's proximity to the sun. This makes the water-ice found in crater shadows and at the poles among the most sought-after water in the system. The same process stripped out lighter elements, concentrating heavy metals as the planet coalesced. Consequently, Mercury has the highest density of heavy metals in the solar system after Earth. Not surprisingly, the focus of economic activity is mining and solar power.

Since Mercury is desolate and sparsely inhabited, it is also ideal for hiding certain activities from prying eyes. And that's why we take such an interest in it.

SOCIETY

Mercury is small and inhospitable. Its population is too small to support the kind of independent culture found on Luna, Mars, or Venus. Corporate facilities devoted to mining, solar power, and antimatter production form the backbone of Mercury's infrastructure. Only the hypercorps have the resources and the reach to make this isolated world livable.

Few corp citizens consider Mercury their home. With a few exceptions, corporates fall into one of two groups: recruits waiting to have their tickets punched so they can move on to a more promising assignment or exiles who have been sent to Mercury as a sign of disfavor.

Outside the corporate enclaves are Mercury's true citizens. Known derisively by the hypercorps as dirt sifters, they typically live in small tin-can settlements buried under the surface or hugging the walls of Mercury's many craters (thus avoiding the worst of the sun during the long day). Many travel the planet's surface in nomadic caravans. The typical sifter is fiercely independent. Most wanted freedom from corp restrictions and entanglements and were willing to come all the way to Mercury to find it. It is ironic, then, that these small settlements only survive by trading with their neighbors. Mercurian culture is like a bad marriage: resentful and co-dependent.

It is easy enough for sentinels to move through the hypercorp culture. All the usual levers apply: greed, hatred, jealousy, direct marketing. But if you need to try something off-the-wall, sifters are your best bet.



NOMADIC MINERS



[The camera focuses on an abandoned mining station awash in a dazzling ocean of light. There are five-meter struts and supports stacked like logs; probably titanium or ceramic-composite to take the heat. Tailing piles dot the camp; smooth cones of crushed rock rising up against the black sky. Most of all there is a gaping maw, a hole in the world, a wound from which transhumanity takes what it wants.]

[Below the image is a group of numbers moving fast enough to let the viewer know the vidclip is time lapsed. And there is another set of digits: 448° C. This number hardly moves at all.]

[Darkness falls like a blade across the rocky and broken land. With no atmosphere to scatter light, the difference between day and night is a knife-edge. The sharp terminator rolls across the landscape, plunging the wasteland first into twilight, then night.]

[Now the temperature starts to move, rapidly diving as radiative heat transfer carries away the sun's stored heat. When the temperature drops to 250° C, a fleet of rugged vehicles races into the view: buggies and surface trains, cargo carriers and massive trucks. They all stop fast, slamming on brakes, kicking long rooster tails of dust high into the empty sky. Suited figures leap out of their vehicles. Robotic miners unload themselves and charge toward the hole. Earth is moved. Ore is sifted. Wealth is loaded.]

[Until the temperature hits 0° C.]

[Then the explosion of action reverses itself, like someone accidentally hit rewind. Just a few hours of work and everything is abandoned once more. The crazy, eclectic caravan of strange ingenuity reloads and races off to chase the lollygagging terminator, where they'll work their next claim.] ✽

ECONOMY

Aside from the omnipresent black market, there are two ways to legitimately make cred on Mercury: mining and energy.

MINING

Given the vast amounts of iron, nickel, and other metals to be had here, mining is not surprisingly the world's chief economic activity. At least a dozen hypercorps have their hands in looting the planet's valuables, refining them, and hauling them off. Most notable are outfits like the Tolstoj Mining Concern, Jaehon Offworld, the Vyasa Workers Cooperative, and Noonday Mining.

Noonday claims to be a privately held firm, but it is widely believed to be a Starware shell set up to keep an eye on Omnicor's orbital antimatter facility. This rumor is bolstered by Noonday's exclusive use of Starware equipment. There have been several ugly confrontations between Noonday's orbital ingot harbor and Omnicor's Monolith-3 habitat. These two hypercorps don't like each other and they play for keeps. A thousand-ton iron ingot is quite sufficient to crush a cortical stack, and it takes only a few grams of antimatter to entirely convert a stack into hard gamma. It's best for sentinels to avoid getting between these two rival corporations. Unless, you know, we need you to.

The hypercorps, with their large semi-permanent encampments, don't have a complete lock on mining here. A large number of sifters engage in roving, nomadic mining ops, chasing the crawling terminator across the planet to mine when the temperature is still hot and moving on when it gets close to freezing. This is the mad genius of sifters, stretching the useful life of their equipment by never exposing it to the full brutality of Mercury's day and night. This is what survival requires when you are cut off from the corporate teat.

ENERGY AND ANTIMATTER

After its vast mineral wealth, Mercury's most abundant resource is the sun. Nearly every fabricated horizontal surface on the planet is covered with high-efficiency solar cells. Solar power is the stalwart of the planetary energy economy (though Helium-3 is also produced for local use). Focused solar power is used for day-side drilling, as automated rigs with powerful lenses use light to cut through crust under environmental conditions that would kill an unprotected transhuman. Many communities use solar power for temperature regulation—cutting the colony's heat load by focusing sunlight on a large, frozen heat sink (usually an underground reservoir) during the day, and then allowing the heated water to radiate its heat back into the city during Mercury's long, cold night.

Solar energy is also important for an exotic purpose: antimatter production. Mercury is the perfect place for this activity: security via isolation, a cheap power source, and if something goes wrong nothing likely to be missed will be destroyed. The production of antimatter is not only expensive, but it's also dangerous. Loss of containment for even a fraction of a second can lead to the total loss of your investment—and several hundred square kilometers of planet. Not surprisingly, security is a major concern. Matter-antimatter annihilation of a gram of material produces an energy release equivalent to 40 kilotons of TNT. A kilogram of antimatter and a matching kilogram of matter produces an explosion in the 40-megaton range—the equivalent of a good-sized nuclear weapon. Nevertheless, antimatter has a number of important uses, such as antimatter spacecraft drives. No one aside from Omnicor publicly admits to conducting antimatter research, but the giant toroid particle accelerators and large spherical magnetic containment units required for antimatter production and storage are unmistakable. Firewall is aware of at least three other concerns producing

MOZART PROTOCOL



[Incoming Message.]
[Source: Anonymous]
[Public Key Decryption Complete]
MOZART PROTOCOL.
CLASS: COMPARTMENTALIZED, ALPHA BLACK SIX
FIREWALL CACHE OF WEAPONIZED ANTIMATTER LOCATED IN CRATER MOZART SOUTH OF CALORIS PLANITIA. IN EVENT OF LOSS OF QUARANTINE, CALORIS 18 IS TO BE VAPORIZED. TOTAL TITAN EXTERMINATION MANDATED. ALLOWABLE TARGET ESCAPE PERCENTAGE: ZERO. ALLOWABLE COLLATERAL DAMAGE: UNLIMITED. ACTION ON PROXY AUTHORITY ONLY.

antimatter: Gammax (Rodin Crater), Direct Action (Sobkou Planitia), and Fa Jing (Goldstone Vallis).

The potential lethality of weaponized antimatter is a major concern to Firewall—and anyone else with a brain. Accordingly, Firewall scanners keep a close eye on these hypercorps, or on anyone else who seems to be paying them too much attention. Despite the impressive security these facilities have, an internal or external breach is always possible. Just six months ago, for example, Fa Jing found one of their maintenance techs in a restricted area in their Goldstone facility. He killed three guards before he was subdued. Subsequent investigation uncovered links between the tech and a group of exhumans known as One Step Beyond.

PRISONS

Though not a significant industry, the role of prisons on Mercury shouldn't be ignored. Several hypercorps take advantage of Mercury's isolation and the need for cheap labor, profiting by taking the egos of convicted criminals off of others' hands and then sleeving them to use as labor in the mines. Such unfortunates have little hope, with almost no chance for escape or even a guarantee that they will ever be released. This does, of course, place a high concentration of potentially dangerous criminals in some mining camps, though it is worth noting that such prisoners are often political dissidents, mentally ill, or simply unwanted infugees from the Fall.

IMPORTANT SITES

Several outposts on Mercury, or in orbit around the planet, are worth noting.

AL-HAMADHANJ

Allegiance: Independent (Sifter)
Primary Languages: Arabic, Hindi

This mid-sized crater in the northern hemisphere would be the sifter capital—if the sifters could ever agree on anything as important as where their capital should be. More like a swap-meet than a seat of government, this is where sifters come to trade, exchange news, and purchase specialized services. In the rare cases when an issue is important enough to force consensus, it is discussed and voted on at Al-Hamadhanj.

When asked about Al-Hamadhanj, your local hypercorp PR director is likely to point out that the sifter mecca is located only a couple hundred klicks southwest of the crater Vyasa—the underground home to a major corporate mining concern. The implication is that the sifters couldn't survive without feeding off the scraps of hypercorp culture. Needless to say, this kind of attitude does nothing to reduce friction between sifters and corporate citizens.

For the sentinel who needs to acquire intelligence or gear without alerting the hypercorps, Al-Hamadhanj is your best bet.

CALORIS 18

Located at the southern tip of the northern hemisphere's Caloris Planitia (almost exactly due north of the crater Mozart), Caloris 18 is a former site of TITAN activity. The base was a solar power relay station operated by the now-defunct Lukos. Vanya Ilyanovich, the facility's AGI, fused the station's morphs into an enormous centipedal tube of flesh. When the AGI tried to merge its consciousness with the transhuman minds of its creation, it was destroyed. Rumors abound that instances of Vanya Ilyanovich survived or that the AGI did die, but a few unfortunate souls survived the crude experiment and still remain there, alive but quite mad. No one will ever know for sure as Caloris 18 is under strict quarantine.

Sentinels are strongly cautioned to avoid Caloris 18. Operatives violating the Caloris quarantine will not be extracted. Even if your cortical stack is recovered, you will not be resleeved, due to the risk of infection. Caloris 18 is a place of permanent death. Do not go there.

CANNON

Allegiance: Independent (Hypercorp/Jaehon Offworld)
Primary Languages: Korean

Mercury's largest surface settlement is a city-sized mass driver that travels across the planet's night-side, flinging building-sized ingots of metal into space. Cannon is powered by fields of solar arrays and is principally owned by the hypercorp Jaehon Offworld,

with a minority stake held by several Lunar banks looking to diversify. Most of the 10,000 inhabitants are Jaehon employees, and security is tight. Cannon makes a long loop around the Caloris basin (giving Caloris 18 a wide berth), before pursuing a meandering path that takes it across the northern hemisphere. The immense crawler stops at a variety of mining facilities where it gathers their gigantic ingots for launch into orbit.

The engineers of Cannon are adept at placing their huge projectiles into carefully designed orbits where wranglers steer them into ingot harbors for distribution. Still, it is wise for the sentinel to realize that the only thing that separates a mass driver from a weapon of mass destruction is the hand on the launch controls.

Delacroix-Shelley

Allegiance: Planetary Consortium (Fa Jing)
Primary Languages: English, Mandarin

This double crater located between 42° and 50° south latitude is a secret Fa Jing base. Delacroix-Shelley is advantageously positioned. Close to Mercury's meager supply of polar ice, it is one of the few habitats that has a cheap, adequate water supply. More importantly, it's far from the more developed northern hemisphere. The northernmost crater, Delacroix, is a heavily-automated military installation. The troops and automata stationed there have so far been able to prevent anyone from discovering what Fa Jing is doing in Shelley. Speculation ranges from conducting forbidden TITAN research to building a zombie army. Whatever the true answer is, sentinels may someday have to penetrate the Shelley facility to take a direct look.

The Egg

A skyscraper-sized oval floating in high Mercury orbit, no one knows exactly what the "Egg" is or what it does. The Factors left the Egg behind in AF 8 when one of their ships visited Mercury, telling transhumanity only that it belonged to them and we should leave it alone. Though they have hinted that it is not a weapon, they refuse to answer any direct questions regarding the object, along with some veiled threats not to disturb it. Not wanting to risk an incident, the Planetary Consortium has declared the Egg off-limits, despite some vocal factions urging that the mysterious item be destroyed lest it pose some kind of threat. The Consortium has thoroughly studied the Egg from a safe distance, of course, though they aren't sharing their results. Firewall has learned that the Egg's physical composition remains a puzzle, and that it may be shaped from some kind of exotic matter.

The leading speculation is that the Egg is some sort of sensing device, though why it was left in Mercury's orbit is unclear. Others have noted that the Egg has a constant overwatch on Caloris 18, and suspect it may be placed to watch for signs of TITAN activity. This has spurred rumors of the Factors secretly placing other, hidden egg-like devices near other areas of known TITAN presences, though these remain unconfirmed. Still others argue that the Egg may be a long-range surveillance device for monitoring the Vulcanoid Gate. For now, at least, the Consortium keeps the Egg under guard and has already thwarted one attempted attack from an anti-Factor extremist group.

Hellwatch

Station Type: Torus
Allegiance: Planetary Consortium
Primary Languages: Arabic, English, Urdu

This small torus is the bureaucratic and civic center for Planetary Consortium affairs regarding Mercury. Aside from some petty hypercorp intrigues waged in its halls, Hellwatch has little going for it, and is considered a backwater and punishment placement by those assigned to work there. The habitat has been plagued with unusual and sometimes dangerous technical difficulties since its inception, further leading to the perception that being stationed there is a cursed assignment. Most of the problems have been investigated and determined to be caused by sabotage, though whether this is a matter of disgruntled workers or something else remains unknown.

Lumina

Based at the crater Aristoxenes, near Mercury's north pole, Lumina is an odd hypercorp settlement. A major portion of the colony consists of massive fields of solar collector arrays, covering a range of high peaks—some natural, some artificial—that are perpetually lit by the sun. The power gathered by these collectors is used to fuel energy-intensive nuclear and radiochemical research and production processes, such as manufacturing isotopes and extracting fission products. These facilities, including an atom smasher for particle physics research, are contained in a complex of underground tunnels. Access to this buried station is through the perpetually-shadowed crater walls, also making it a good area for finding frozen water. Numerous hypercorps participate in operations and projects here. Needless to say, security is tight and thorough.

Aside from its pragmatic uses, Lumina also features an unlikely resort spa. Jokingly referred to as the best place to get a tan in the solar system, the resort facilities are small but extravagant. The services here are oriented towards high-ranking hyperelites who must attend to business on Mercury in person, catering to their needs with top-tier egocasting and resleeving options, a selection of designer morphs, and luxuries you won't find anywhere else on the planet. Lumina's private meeting features are sometimes used by individuals who want a quiet and out-of-the-way place to discuss matters in the flesh. Access to the resort, however, is restricted to an exclusive list of clientele—or those who can pull favors from the ultra-rich and powerful.

VENUS

3



OVERVIEW

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Aerostats: The floating cloud cities of Venus. ■ p. 33

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THREATS

Firewall is actively monitoring these dangers:

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THE MORNINGSTAR CONSTELLATION

The rising power of the inner system.

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HOT SPOTS

These places may be of particular interest to sentinels:

Gerlach: The orbital gateway to Venus. ■ p. 37

Octavia : Capital and cultural center of the Constellation. ■ p. 34

Parvarti: A resort aerostat that excels in discretion and privacy, perfect for clandestine affairs. ■ p. 36

PROJECTS OF INTEREST

Knowledge is power.

The Aerial Terraforming Initiative: Making the clouds more hospitable to transhumanity. ■ p. 28

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VENUS

Venus is simultaneously the most alien and the most Earth-like of the inner system worlds. Its gravity is 90% that of Earth—far closer to Earth gravity than any other inhabited world. At an altitude of 52 to 58 kilometers, the air pressure and temperature are also very close to that of Earth, making this region of Venus far more Earth-like than anyplace on Mars before the beginning of the current Martian terraforming effort. Today, more than 5 million inhabitants live in 20 cities floating in the Venusian atmosphere. Known as aerostats, these cities are large and comfortable settlements kept aloft by the air inside them. Though the carbon dioxide atmosphere that surrounds them is unbreathable, residents of these aerostats need only don an air mask or hold their breath and they can walk out on an external balcony and feel the warm Venusian air on their face.

Venus rotates exceptionally slowly, with its day lasting 243 Earth days; slightly longer than its year. However, the winds in its upper atmosphere circle the world once every four days and most of the time the aerostats move with the winds. The habitability of Venus's upper atmosphere is a vivid contrast to the planet's surface, which is by far the least inviting location in the inner system—even the surface of Mercury when the sun is directly overhead is considerably more hospitable. Venusian surface temperatures are comparable to Mercury's day, and the Venusian surface is also crushed under pressures much like those at the bottom of Earth's deepest seas.

Venus is also the most recently independent world in the solar system. Four years ago, a planetary referendum voted Venus out of the Planetary Consortium and resulted in the formation of a new government known as the Morningstar Constellation. Within a year, Venus became the fastest growing economy in the inner system. It is currently undergoing an ambitious terraforming effort that will retain its dense atmosphere, but will provide the upper atmosphere with water vapor and breathable levels of oxygen. In less than a century, Venus will become an exotic world where many dozens of huge aerostats float in an atmosphere that is also home to a thriving aerial ecosystem. Though this atmosphere will remain primarily carbon dioxide and thus poisonous to unadapted biomorphs, with the correct augmentation, biomorphs will be able to breathe it as easily as they could the air of Earth.

THE VENUSIAN SURFACE

The surface of Venus is one of the least hospitable places in the entire solar system. Temperatures approach 500 C and the pressure is almost 100 times that of Earth's atmosphere. Lead is perpetually molten in this environment and the temperatures are sufficient to weaken most conventional alloys. Sulfuric acid clouds block the vast majority of visible light and the various complex chemicals in the lower atmosphere limit visibility to a maximum of a few kilometers and often significantly less. Strangest of all, the atmosphere is sufficiently dense at the surface that light is refracted so that it appears that anyone on the surface is standing in a large bowl, with the horizon rising up on all sides.

Biomorphs and pods cannot survive the Venusian surface. Even conventional synthmorphs, normally quite durable, fail in less than a minute. As a result, all robot drones and synthmorphs used on the Venusian surface are made from quartz and various high-temperature alloys. Rather than using any form of refrigeration to attempt to cool the interior of these morphs, all of them are designed to operate at peak efficiency in the native Venusian environment. This means, however, that no standard morph capable of surviving and operating on the Venusian surface can operate at more normal temperatures or pressures.

There are currently almost 10,000 synthmorphs and bots operating on the Venusian surface. The majority work in one of four large mining facilities, with a smattering assigned to surface research stations. In mining camps, specially-designed shells collect and perform initial refining on various ores that are then transported to one of the aerostats. Lucifer and Octavia perform most of the mining, but any aerostat can do so. To help them remain in one place despite the fierce Venusian winds, aerostats lower high strength, high temperature cables to the surface. Surface-adapted morphs and tools are lowered down, while loads of partially refined ore are carried up into the aerostats, where they are fully refined and processed into goods.

SURFACE WORKERS

Around 90% of the shells working on the Venusian surface are teleoperated. Most are not even equipped with cortical stacks, as they are controlled by pilots located in the aerostats. The communications link is established by a redundant scheme relying on both a wired connection to the surface and a backup neutrino farcaster. These signals go to base stations on the Venusian surface that then broadcast microwave signals to the individual shells.

Most such shells are simply remote controlled rather than jammed to circumvent any problems with light-speed delays. When fine control is necessary, however, a pilot can jump in and jam a shell directly, with the experience indistinguishable from actually being present on the surface. However, a host of technical problems or even severe storms can disrupt

SOL-MERCURY
VENUS
EARTH
EARTH ORBIT
LUNA
MARS
INNER FRINGE
ANETARY CONSORTIUM
GAME INFORMATION

communications with the bot. Because of the inherent dangers of this environment, communications with aerostats are lost at least once every few weeks. More serious problems, like tethers ripping or a simultaneous failure of both farcaster and wired communication links, occur at least once every month or two. In these situations, AIs are given instructions to run the bots autonomously, or workers sleeved in cortical stack-equipped synthmorphs are called in. This is also the procedure for mining operations taking place with no aerostat tethered overhead. Neutrino communication links are still relied on when possible, but these devices are prone to failure as they must be carefully shielded from the external temperature and pressure.

The vast majority of teleoperators and surface workers are indentured servant infugees selling their labor to acquire a morph. Infomorph teleoperation pilots can earn enough to purchase a cheap synthmorph in approximately six months or eventually save up for a slightly better morph like a basic pod or a splicer. Workers who are willing to risk their egos directly on the surface earn more generous pay, however, and after a year of work most can afford mid-range morphs like an augmented splicer or even an exalt. Of course, the downside to working on the surface is the risk that the individual may be killed or, worse, might be trapped in a damaged morph for days, weeks, or even longer. Problems like earthquakes, rock slides, and catastrophic equipment

POLITICS AND RAW MATERIALS

One of the major issues the Venusian population is wrestling with is self-sufficiency. The Venusian surface is the only source of metals and other heavy elements on Venus. Importing these raw materials from off-world is expensive. Also, distrust between the Morningstar Constellation and the Planetary Consortium, and the fear that there could someday be serious tensions between the two, inspires some Venusians to become as self-sufficient as possible, at least for all major raw materials. In addition, there is widespread support for the idea that each aerostat should be an independent part of the Morningstar Constellation. As a result, most of the raw materials required by the aerostats and the growing Venusian population are now extracted from either the dense atmosphere or the surface. This means that surface mining is likely to increase over the next decade. For anyone wanting to disrupt the Morningstar Constellation's stability and economy, these surface mines are an obvious target. ■



EVALUATION OF VENUSIAN EXSURGENTS

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As expected, our evaluation of the potential for TITAN or Exsurgent threats on the Venusian surface remains inconclusive. Research confirms the possibility that TITAN machinery and/or exsurgent xenomorphs could survive on the surface for extended periods. Continued analysis of surface scans and other research shows no confirmed signs of any such activity, though there are numerous anomalies that remain uninvestigated. Given the increase in mining operations and general surface explorations, however, the possibility of disturbing something that has remained so far dormant continues to be a risk.

Of particular concern to our analysts is the accident at the northern Ishtar Terra mining station seven months ago. A survey of the available data reveals several factors regarding the incident that seem suspicious and that are unlikely to be due to worker sabotage or other transhuman involvement. Further investigation is warranted, but hypercorp security countermeasures make such efforts a challenge.

If anything is down there, we better find it—before it finds us first. ✤

failures are not common, but they do occasionally occur. Some synthmorphs have been lost and never recovered, with no one knowing if the ego inside is still alive. Anyone who has served substantial time sleeved in a surface morph is considered simultaneously brave, impressive, and somewhat foolhardy by other Venusians.

A few independent prospectors and researchers, not indentured to any mining concerns or other hypercorps, occasionally sleeve into surface-adapted morphs to explore the Venusian landscape. This is especially true if they seek to avoid transmissions that might give away valuable finds or clues to their activities.

SURFACE ANOMALIES

Because it is mysterious, deadly, and exceedingly difficult to visit, the vast majority of the surface of Venus is unmapped except for orbital radar scans. Venus is the only terrestrial planet that has not been extensively scanned and mapped by many thousands of small low-altitude automated probes and whose surface is not constantly monitored by thousands of high-resolution orbital cameras. Instead, the Venusian surface remains mysterious and regularly surprises miners, prospectors, and researchers with various dangers, including everything from unstable terrain to small lakes of molten metal. The obfuscation of the surface has also spawned hundreds of legends and rumors of hidden dangers there, and the frequency with which workers and bots are lost there only makes these threats seem more credible. There are persistent stories of exsurgent activity on the Venusian surface, and a few people claim that one or more TITANs are secretly waiting in that hellish environment, plotting the final demise of transhumanity. Most Venusians, however, consider these claims to be utter nonsense and roll their eyes at anyone ranting about the TITAN menace that will one day rise up from this world's cloud-wrapped depths.

THE UPPER ATMOSPHERE

Most aerostats float at an altitude between 52 and 55 kilometers above the Venusian surface. Here, the air pressure is between 50% and 85% that of Earth's surface. The average temperature is between 12 and 40 C at the equator and 5 degrees cooler at a latitude of 45-60 degrees due to the circulation patterns of the Venusian atmosphere. These same circulation patterns also mean that the atmosphere is unsuitable

POSSIBLE EVIDENCE OF ALIEN VISITATION

To: Internal Security
From: Mining Control

We have an emerging situation on hand that requires information management, memetic controls, personnel evaluations, and a potential armed response. One of our miners (profile) is claiming to have discovered an alien artifact on the Venusian surface and is spreading the information counter to protocols. The incident occurred three days ago, when the miner was teleoperating a surface bot and searching for traces of titanium in a deep crevasse near our Southern Ishtar Aphrodite station (approximate coordinates). The overhanging rock caused erratic interference with the pilot's communication link, so the recordings of the incident are ambiguous and sub-par. The miner claims to have broken into a clearly undisturbed portion of the crevasse and found some sort of alien-looking artifact. Unfortunately, the miner lost contact with the shell seconds afterwards due to a minor earthquake. It was reported lost, and subsequent attempts to investigate the area have been thwarted by severe atmospheric conditions and seismic activity.

Whatever it was that he found, it bears further investigation. Word of the incident is spreading among the other staff, however, spurring rumors of alien contact and an internal cover up. If we don't act quickly, this could severely disrupt current mining operations in the area and possibly spread outside our internal corporate channels. ✤

A QUESTION OF GRAVITY

Immediately after the Fall, plans for terraforming Venus were exceptionally popular, in large part because Venus is so Earth-like. It is the only other rocky planet or moon in the solar system with gravity anywhere close to that of Earth. However, within a few years, enthusiasm for life on Venus began to wane as the vast majority of the surviving transhumans adapted to life on worlds with far lower gravity. Anyone who travels to Venus by spacecraft faces a difficult adjustment period. While all modern morphs are designed to adapt rapidly to higher or lower gravity, the unconscious adjustment of living in a world where walking is a slightly different process and objects fall considerably faster than they did before can create significant difficulties for many.

Egocasting in many ways makes this process even more difficult. Though resleeving in a morph fully acclimatized to Venusian gravity removes any necessity for physical adaptation, the psychological problems of adapting to a gravity between 3 and 50 times greater than you were previously accustomed to can be profound. Common mistakes for new arrivals include dropping objects when picking them up, reacting too slowly to an object slipping out of their grasp, or attempting to jump much farther than is possible in Venusian gravity. These mistakes are sufficiently common that they are the subject of much amusement to some Venusian natives who regularly deal with individuals from off-world. To help people adapt, Gerlach orbital station is the first destination for many off-world visitors, since it is kept at half Venusian gravity.

Though Venus is now a vibrant world with a rapidly growing population, many visitors, especially from Luna and other low gravity worlds, regularly complain about the gravity. There are popular discussions among off-world visitors about how Venus's higher gravity makes everything from creative thought to sex more difficult or less enjoyable and how living on Venus makes visitors feel clumsy. Similarly, Venusian natives regularly talk about how off-worlders are weak and inept. ■

for aerostats above 70 degrees latitude. The extreme temperature differences between cloud tops and surface there produce polar vortices resembling huge permanent hurricanes that would cause any aerostat to experience frequent and severe turbulence. These polar air patterns also result in upwellings of hot air from the surface that bring polar temperatures at 55 kilometers to almost 40 C, with lower altitudes being even hotter. Fortunately, wind patterns away from the poles are constant and predictable, despite the occasional disruption caused by storms.

The height at which aerostats float is in the middle of the Venusian cloud layer. The exact characteristics of these clouds at this altitude depend upon whether they are in daylight or not. During the Venusian day, various photochemical reactions render the dense clouds relatively opaque, cutting off more than half of the light from the sun. Visibility at this altitude is between 2 and 10 kilometers. The clouds are yellowish in color and the distinctive swirling yellows, whites, and ochres of these cloudscapes are familiar across the solar system. During the night, the clouds are far more transparent, and with good lights, visibility is several times greater than it is during the day.

THE MORNINGSTAR CONSTELLATION

The Morningstar Constellation is the solar system's newest major political entity. Only four years ago, Venus was under the control of the Planetary Consortium. However, an unprecedented referendum proposed by a group of Venusians intent on independence was signed by 4% of the Venusian population. Under the laws of the Planetary Consortium, the population of Venus was then allowed to vote on their independence. The majority of the inhabitants of Venus's aerostats and orbital stations voted for their world to become an independent state. The resulting Morningstar Constellation is allied with the Planetary Consortium, but is a fully separate political entity with its own goals.

Most of the leaders of the Planetary Consortium are somewhat dismissive of the Morningstar Constellation, believing that Venus will ask to re-enter the Consortium within the next five years. Others, however, are now realizing that Venus is likely to remain independent and that they must learn to adapt to this world's freedom. Most of the leadership of the Planetary Consortium is willing to learn to work with the new Venusian government, but a few of the more conservative members are considering ways to bring Venus back under their jurisdiction.

THE POLITICS OF TERRAFORMING

The Venusian independence movement began as a conflict over terraforming plans. The Planetary Consortium's plan for Venus was very simple: transform it into a near duplicate of Earth. Their scheme involved introducing large amounts of hydrogen (carried to Venus in the form of diverted comets and deep space ice asteroids) into the atmosphere, combined with a gigantic microscopically-thin orbital sunshade to block out light and cool the planet. The goal was to transform Venus into a world with a habitable surface within 300 years—less if advances in technology permitted it.

Some terraformers instead supported a more ambitious and risky plan that involved using several dozen large antimatter explosions to blast large amounts

of the atmosphere into space. The most optimistic timeline suggested Venus might become habitable in 200 years, though most researchers believed that process would take almost 400. The end result, however, would be a world almost identical to Earth, except that almost 80% of the world would be covered in shallow seas. The Planetary Consortium's terraforming team almost exclusively consisted of scientists and engineers who worked on Earth for several decades before the Fall. They were all at least partially motivated by their longing for Earth and their dreams of recreating it.

These Consortium scientists applied very little consideration to the growing population of the Venusian aerostats, though their plans did call for a few large aerostats to help monitor and work on the terraforming effort. Among the aerostat population, however, opposition to these terraforming plans was growing by the day. Too many of these residents had fallen in love with the exotic beauty of Venus and its cloud cities. Though the Consortium terraforming process involved the creation of a limited Venusian cloud ecosystem, ultimately the plan called for this cloud life to die off as the dense air thinned and the world became more Earth-like. This was unacceptable to those who loved the clouds.

Individuals interested in these ideas began to communicate and formed a bold alternative to the Planetary Consortium's terraforming plans. Known as the Aerial Terraforming Initiative (ATI), their plan consisted of the creation of a complex cloud-based ecosystem that retained Venus's dense atmosphere, while simultaneously increasing oxygen levels to the point that the upper atmosphere, where the aerostats floated, would be 18% oxygen. Circulation patterns combined with the increasing pressure and temperatures would insure that the composition of the lower atmosphere would remain essentially unchanged. Venus would remain a cloud-wrapped world with a dense atmosphere and a brutally hot surface, but the upper atmosphere would become home to both many dozens of aerostats and a wealth of unique animal and plant life. In effect, they hoped to create an enduring cloud-based ecosystem that was as diverse and vibrant as Earth's biosphere had once been. Various bioengineers looked forward to creating flying morphs that could truly be at home in the Venusian clouds.

The timeline of the ATI involved the upper (habitable) portion of the Venusian atmosphere reaching 10% oxygen within 60 years and 18% in 90. This was a much shorter and far more realistic timeline, and it quickly drew popular support. The sheer grandeur of the Venusian environment and the prospect of living in the midst of a thriving aerial ecosystem further encouraged many aesthetically-minded Venusians. Combined with the prospect of making an already safe and comfortable environment even more habitable, this plan was embraced by the inhabitants of the aerostats.

THE CONSTELLATION FORMS

The Venusian terraforming and bioengineering research groups behind the ATI submitted a detailed proposal outlining the process to the Planetary Consortium, noting the advantages over the current terraforming plans. After relatively brief consideration, the leading terraformers of the Planetary Consortium almost unanimously rejected it. Their primary reason was the fact that the ATI would only allow for a maximum Venusian population of 200 million, while a fully terraformed Venus could easily hold more than 10 times that number of transhumans. In addition, the terraformers were concerned because aerial terraforming had never been performed before. They considered the ATI to be a wasteful frivolity that would deny valuable living space to future inhabitants of the solar system.

At this point, the Venusian terraformers grew both angry and even more determined. When the Planetary Consortium rejected it, the researchers who supported the ATI were approached by a small group of Venusian radicals who had been agitating for Venusian independence for the past two years. These radicals convinced the terraformers to join forces. Previously, the small Venusian independence movement had attracted little attention. However, the ATI plan was very popular and support for both it and the independence movement began to grow. Slightly more than four years ago, supporters of Venusian independence delivered a petition signed by 4% of the Venusian population to the local Planetary Consortium representative, requesting that the issue of independence be put to a vote. Six months later, after extensive campaigns by both sides, 57% of the Venusian populace voted for independence and the Morningstar Constellation was born.

While the majority of the Venusian aerostats joined the Constellation, not all did. Two of the twenty aerostats remain allied with the Planetary Consortium, while two others remain independent. A smaller, but still significant, percentage of habitats orbiting Venus have also joined the Constellation.

THE PRECEPTS OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT

In addition to the ATI, the other cornerstone of the independence movement that gave rise to the vote that created the Morningstar Constellation was a firm belief that each habitat should be a truly independent political entity. A large number of Venusian immigrants had grown up in Europe before the Fall, and part of the inspiration for the new government was the old EU government. Except for rights guaranteed by the Morningstar constitution and immediate actions taken to preserve the life and safety of the populace, the inhabitants of every Constellation aerostat can vote on all major decisions affecting their aerostat, while their elected representatives handled more minor issues as well as taking care of administrative tasks. While a similar confederated structure is also in place within the

Planetary Consortium, there is much less transparency. In practice, the hypercorps wield enormous influence and power—a situation the Venusians disdain. A central body representing the interests of each floating city-state resolves disputes and handles issues that affect Venus as a whole. While hypercorps naturally play an important role in the Venusian economy, their political power is greatly limited compared to the power they enjoyed under the Planetary Consortium. This has led the Morningstar Constellation to be labeled as a more progressive, left-leaning alternative to the cyberdemocratic Planetary Consortium and the more conservative Lunar-Lagrange Alliance.

Most of the members of the Venusian independence movement were also strong advocates of increasing morphological freedom, access to nanotechnology, freedom of expression and information, and government transparency. As a result, these policies became a vital part of the new Morningstar government.

Expanded Freedoms

Most of the founders of the Venusian independence movement were particularly dissatisfied with the fact that on worlds and habitats controlled by either the Planetary Consortium or individual hypercorps, individual freedoms ended when they conflicted with anything that the government or the hypercorps claimed was either a matter of "corporate policy" or "security-related issues." All too often, these two phrases were invoked to eliminate dissent and to cover up governmental indiscretions. To prevent such problems from occurring on Venus, the authors of the Morningstar constitution did their best to make certain that the government of Venus would be far more open and responsive than the Planetary Consortium. None of the Constellation habitats impose mesh filters or engage in heavy-handed censorship or surveillance.

Morphological Freedom

While morphological freedom is guaranteed by the Planetary Consortium, easy access to various augmentations is not. To remedy this problem, the new Venusian government supports universal healthcare and makes healing vats with the capability to manufacture any safe and peaceful augmentation freely available to anyone with access to the raw materials and templates needed. Uplifts suffer less discrimination and legal restriction within the Constellation, and mercurial morphs and services are more accessible. This has led to an influx in Venus's mercurial population, particularly neo-avians.

Not all is perfect, however. Indentured service is still in practice within the Constellation, and the clanking masses are still omnipresent and suffering from some bias and discrimination. These impoverished synthmorphs are privileged, however, in that many aerostats offer external open-air areas that are considered prime real estate due to their view, but which are populated primarily by people sleeved in robotic shells and a smaller number of biomorphs adapted to breathing the Venusian atmosphere for short periods.

Transparency

Security sensor and spime feeds within Constellation habitats are largely accessible via the public mesh, inviting a stronger participatory panopticon. In addition, all government meetings are recorded live and made available to any Venusian who cares to watch them. Events directly relating to threats to habitat security can be kept secret, but only for a maximum of six months. At the end of this time, complete and unedited records of even the most secret meetings must be made public. The result is a government that is somewhat less efficient but far more open than the Planetary Consortium. It is, however, far more organized and bureaucratic than the free-form anarchy found in much of the outer system.

The Real Power



To: Butch Lee
From: Red Rover

It's certainly cute how the Morningstar radicals think they've managed to break free from the influence of the hypercorps and their elite undying masters, but let's face reality, shall we? Do you really think the cannibalistic cabal of influential liches who have their claws sunk into every tangible thing of value in the inner system would allow a valuable asset like Venus to slip out of their control? Try again. The Venusians can't escape hypercorp influence, they've simply forced some of the capitalists to choose sides on some notable issues. The upper classes have never been a homogeneous group, of course; throughout history they've always had their internal clashes and conflicting agendas. This is simply another manifestation, where the parasites who have the most to gain from aerial terraforming have gained the upper hand on their competitors who would reap more benefits from a full planetary transformation. More to the point, what we're likely seeing is a massive chess ploy between rival oligarchs, manipulating current events with their massive wealth and web of influences to position themselves better for some conflict they see playing out decades or centuries in the future. The undying rich play for keeps, and they have the patience, lifespan, and capabilities to plot out actions and skirmishes many, many years in advance.

So the question isn't just who's pulling the Constellation's strings, but whose interests are they really serving? ♣

THE NEW VENUSIAN ECONOMY

Many of the changes created by the new Venusian government moved Venus closer to having a new economy rather than the transitional economy found on the worlds ruled by the Planetary Consortium. Currently, the Venusian economy can best be described as halfway between the two. Unlike worlds ruled by the Planetary Consortium, any small personal items, except weapons and items that use or include dangerous components like antimatter or dangerously radioactive materials, can be freely manufactured by anyone with access to the appropriate templates and raw materials.

Under the rules of the Morningstar Constellation, gaining access to all augmentations except weapons is exceedingly easy, as is access to high tech personal items like vacsuits made of smart materials. These rules, however, only apply to augmentations and to personal items up to small size. This limitation is enforced quite easily as the only full-function cornucopia machines (CMs) that are publicly available are desktop units, which can only create small devices. Other than their size, the only restrictions placed on these units is that they are incapable of creating any lethal weapons more dangerous than knives or pellet guns, nor can they produce dangerous chemicals like nerve gas or explosives. These CMs can be personally owned, and public desktop CMs are also freely available to all citizens and visitors. Anyone with the correct templates and sufficient raw material can create any small items they want, aside from these noted restrictions.

Just like in the Planetary Consortium, however, larger items must be purchased with money. This limitation exists to reduce access to dangerous technologies. The aerostats are relatively fragile structures and people freely manufacturing large powered items could accidentally damage their aerostat. The only large CMs available on Venus are identical to those used on worlds controlled by the Planetary Consortium. This setup places Venus in the unique position of being criticized by the Planetary Consortium for being too radical in its freedoms, while simultaneously being criticized by the inhabitants of the outer system for being overly conservative and little different from the Planetary Consortium.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY (IP)

One arena where the Constellation differs radically—and sometimes heatedly—from the Consortium is the matter of intellectual property. The Constellation offers far fewer and more limited protections when it comes to copyrights, trademarks, patents, and similar IP protections, and has embraced the technological changes that allow most any good, digital or physical, to be easily copied. As a result, IP protections are limited to a matter of years rather than decades and rights are only granted to the original work, not to remixes, mashups, modifications, or other derivatives. Rather than focusing on scarcity and anti-piracy measures to make money, many Venusian businesses accept copying and piracy as part of the new paradigm and instead seek to profit from services that can't be copied, such as immediacy (direct delivery upon release), personalization (fit the individual consumer's needs), and support services. The prestige and authenticity of name-brand producers is also emphasized, guaranteeing quality and secure goods over untrustworthy replicates. More obviously, almost everything is coupled with advertising, making Venus one of the most advert and spam-ridden environments in the system.

This different approach to IP is not easily swallowed by many of the inner system and Consortium hypercorps. The Constellation initially suffered slightly from the refusal of some hypercorps to do business without more substantial protections, but the market opportunities left by these abdications were quickly seized upon by more adventurous corps. To this day, however, IP issues remain a major diplomatic and trade stumbling block between the Constellation and the Consortium.

TOURISM

Tourism remains a cornerstone of the Venusian economy. The aerostats offer experiences of the most beautiful and visually compelling populated environments in the inner system. Almost all aerostats offer various resort and vacation services, particularly to the wealthy hyper-elites. Several are devoted purely to providing any get-away experience desired, from sports to gambling to performances to erotic entertainment and other private and discretionary services. Large entourages of socialites and inner system glitterati often flock here for extended soirées, and various resort aerostats are home to established inner system award ceremonies, conferences, and similar large gatherings. Many hypercorps and rich dynasties from the Planetary Consortium, in fact, maintain private retreats on Constellation aerostats.

THE STAR COUNCIL

In addition to having a constitution that guarantees a significant set of freedoms, each Constellation habitat has the right to form its own government and pass its own laws. The only limitation is that these laws cannot limit any of the rights guaranteed by the Morningstar constitution.

While each habitat operates as a de facto independent city-state, each also sends one representative for every 100,000 inhabitants to a governing body known as the Star Council that meets on Octavia. The Star Council maintains and guarantees the Constellation currency, helps regulate the planetary economy, handles all off-world diplomacy, oversees the aerial terraforming effort, and works to settle disputes between aerostats. Star Council members serve two-year terms and are elected by the entire populace of their aerostat. The current leader of the Star Council is **Arisa.** She and Halis Sapien,

the charismatic mayor of Octavia, were the two leaders of the original Venusian independence movement. Arisa has proven quite adept at weaving together the various interests of the aerostats despite their strong independent streaks and forging common goals. Memetic campaigns launched by various hypercorp and Consortium interests to undermine her authority and competence have failed in the wake of her ability to rally support from various Star Council representatives, not to mention get results.

Goals and Plans

Since the new government took control of Venus, it has been actively encouraging immigration from all across the solar system. Ads promoting Morningstar citizenship emphasize the exotic wonders of the environment, the safety of the aerostats, Venus's growing prosperity, and the freedoms offered by the new government. Currently, Venus is experiencing moderate immigration from both Luna and Mars. The number of immigrants from the outer system is far smaller, with most being a mixture of researchers interested in Venus and the terraforming effort and wealthy individuals interested in living in a floating city. Also, more than 30,000 infomorph refugees currently indentured to the Planetary Consortium have petitioned to have their indentures purchased by the Morningstar Constellation.

The Morningstar Constellation is also working on expanding trade. The one limitation on the current terraforming effort is that it involves raising the percentage of water vapor in the upper

Foo's News—Rant!: Indentured Conflict?

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Let's be realistic! The Planetary Consortium isn't about to sell any indentures. Why sell a perfectly good slave to help a rival along? Many of these indentures realize that, of course, and so they're turning to data smugglers and purchasing an illegal darkcast to Venus. The Planetary Consortium is demanding that these infugees be returned, while the infomorphs themselves are claiming asylum. So far, the Morningstar government is honoring these claims and is providing refuge. Good for them! The Consortium is treating this as an affront, which is to be expected. Just wait until they hear what some Morningstar radicals have been instigating! Namely, some Venusians are recommending that the Constellation should actively recruit data smugglers to build an "underground railroad" to help indentured individuals immigrate to Venus. The Consortium would undoubtedly treat this as a major diplomatic incident, so I don't see it happening—but who's to say that some enterprising radicals haven't already started? Rumors have abounded for years of similar autonomous darkcasters who funnel infugees to the outer system, but those are ideologically-driven. Certainly some criminal networks wouldn't mind making some cred on the side by smuggling infomorphs to ethically-ambiguous Venusian hypercorps that are more than happy to take on indentures—especially indentures who will accept weaker contracts in exchange for eventual Constellation citizenship? Now that's progress!



Venusian atmosphere from its current negligible level to at least 2%. Accomplishing this goal requires importing large numbers of comets or ice asteroids and acquiring the necessary amount of ice requires a favorable balance of trade, especially with the outer system. Maintaining the current influx of ice boulders and asteroids is essential to completing the terraforming effort on the current timeline.

The Morningstar Constellation's political goals are somewhat more complex. The Star Council has close ties with the Planetary Consortium, but the members are also determined to maintain Venusian independence. Shortly after the Constellation formed, representatives from the Autonomist Alliance made overtures to the new Venusian government in the hopes that they would find an ally in the inner system. A series of meetings was held on the independent orbital habitat of Gerlach, but talks swiftly broke down over issues of economics and relations with the Planetary Consortium. While the autonomists and Constellation leaders agree that the Planetary Consortium and the hypercorps have too much power and that they unfairly limit the autonomy of their citizens, Constellation leaders were unwilling to take a more aggressive stance with the Consortium in accordance with autonomist positions. The autonomists also found the Venusians' unwillingness to spur their economic transition more rapidly and some of the limitations the Constellation placed on personal freedoms to be intolerable.

In vivid contrast, many of the leaders of the Morningstar Constellation have friends and allies among the more progressive members of the Planetary Consortium and see themselves far more as reformers than as the vanguard of a coming inner system revolution. In addition, many influential members of the Constellation are deeply disturbed by the free availability of dangerous weapons and the lack of governmental order found in much of the outer system. In truth, the Star Council is no more interested in seeing Venus become closely tied to the outer system than they are in seeing it become a puppet of the Planetary Consortium. As a result, the outer system autonomists view the Constellation as slightly more reasonable and easy to deal with than the Planetary Consortium, but also recognize that deep ideological differences remain and they are unlikely to maintain a close alliance. The Morningstar government finds itself in the unusual position of effectively being the reformist branch of the Planetary Consortium and of not being fully trusted by the other inner system governments or the autonomists of the outer system.

POLITICAL DISSENT

While the Morningstar Constellation does its best to present a unified front to the Planetary Consortium and the rest of the solar system, in reality, there is significant dissent on Venus. A small but vocal faction of the original independence movement had close ties with an expansionist faction on Extropia and wanted to transform Venus into a new economy world allied with the outer system. This faction lost badly during the formation of the Morningstar Constellation, and there is significant resentment among its members.

THE VTP AND RADICALS

Some of these radicals have organized themselves under the aegis of the Venusian Transformation Party (VTP). On the surface this group works to elect members to the Star Council to steer the Constellation in a more left-wing direction, though their success has been limited. Members also organize discussion forums, lobby for greater freedoms, advocate and post essays for more radical politics, and keep lines of communication open with Extropia, Titan, and other autonomist factions. It is likely that some VTP members or supporters work in secret, holding positions in the Morningstar government where they can monitor affairs, acquire useful information, and clandestinely support the VTP's interests. Some marginalized VTP supporters—as well as various anarchists and Venusian radicals who disparage the VTP's attempts to create change from within—engage in minor forms of sabotage such as providing intel

MILITARY TENSIONS

The developing Cold War between the Morningstar Constellation and the Planetary Consortium deserves special attention from Firewall—particularly in regards to the Venusian military escalation. Though it is only natural for the new Venusian government to seek to protect itself from outside aggression, the Planetary Consortium has taken an aggrieved stance at the slightest hint of a military build-up. While there has been some private and public fretting about large-scale weapon stockpiles and WMDs, the Consortium has threatened political and economic sanctions should the Constellation adopt any sort of sophisticated orbital defense system or defense fleet. This has not stopped the Star Council from negotiating with Extropian defense companies for weapons platforms and other robotic defenses, however, and several Constellation aerostats and habitats have received substantial defensive upgrades. More worrisome, however, are accounts of an alleged "scorched Earth" policy some aerostats are rumored to have in place, to discourage any occupation attempts by the Consortium or other powers by threatened self-destruction. While this might deter a physical invasion (a Venus without aerostats is much less valuable), the potential for these destructive measures to be exploited by outside agents to catastrophic effect cannot be ignored. ■

to outer system interests, disrupting relations between the Constellation and Planetary Consortium, or even conducting data attacks and similar hostile measures to weaken the government and instigate practical and economic problems to spur civil discontent. Recently, for example, taped conversations between several Consortium hypercorp reps and a prominent Morningstar financial administrator were leaked to the public mesh, creating a scandal that damaged the formulation of a treaty that would have been quite favorable to Consortium interests.

The Solid Ground Initiative

On the other side of the political spectrum, a small but vocal minority called the Solid Ground Initiative supports the original plan to transform Venus into a near duplicate of Earth. This position is largely a cover for a wider agenda which opposes Venusian independence and wants to return the planet to the Planetary Consortium. Many consider this group to be pawns or dupes of various Consortium interests, though it does have supporters who legitimately favor the Consortium's terraforming plan and who feel the aerostats are missing opportunities by not remaining part of the Consortium, such as having a larger role in extrasolar colonization. On the other hand, the Initiative receives major support from various hypercorps who hoped to play a large role in the initial planned terraforming effort. Several minor acts of obstruction and sabotage of Aerial Terraforming Initiative projects have been attributed to Solid Ground supporters. This group has also been linked to efforts to worsen and disparage relations between the Constellation and outer system interests, likely in the hope that if the Venusian government is forced to pay significantly higher prices for iceteroids, the terraforming effort could slow down and thus turn public opinion against it.

The Aerostats

There are currently 19 aerostats in the Venusian clouds, with a total population of slightly more than 5 million. Two additional aerostats are currently under construction, one of which is nearing completion and is already partially inhabited. Though each aerostat is different in design and culture, there are also many similarities between them.

Design and Function

All of the aerostats are naturally mobile. Although the air at the surface is nearly motionless, in the upper Venusian atmosphere, winds typically range from 150 to 500 kph, and the cities typically move with the winds. The aerostats are also equipped with powerful ionic jets that allow them to maneuver in the atmosphere. Cities can move where they will or remain stationary during all but the most powerful winds. The ability to remain stationary is essential for lowering tethers to the surface to facilitate mining; however, severe storms sometimes force aerostats to disconnect tethers to the surface.

Whereas space habitats and cities built on airless worlds are exceedingly sturdy and contain a multitude of heavy airtight bulkheads made from hardened polymers, metallic glass, or advanced composites, on Venus, the outside atmosphere is at the same pressure as the air inside the aerostats. As a result, even airtight bulkheads can be relatively light. Interior walls are commonly composed of lightweight materials such as aerogels, diamond, and metallic foam, the latter of which also helps to preserve privacy and dampen sound.

Because breathable air is significantly lighter than the native Venusian atmosphere, the more air inside of an aerostat, the better it floats. For this reason, aerostat interiors are airy and open with high ceilings, typically at least three meters high in shops, dwellings, and other interior spaces, and between five and ten meters high in large public spaces. To further reduce weight and increase buoyancy, most aerostats feature numerous large and impressive open areas, particularly terraced courtyards and similar malls, galleries, and plazas. Internally, many aerostats are designed as sets of clusters, where vertical rings, squares, or hexagons of dwellings, shops, entertainment facilities, and other relatively public areas surround large plazas between 25 and 100 meters across, with ceilings at least 10 meters high and often much taller. In between these clusters are manufacturing facilities, life support, and other regions that only need to be accessed by specially trained personnel. Similarly, the uppermost floors of most aerostats are often studded with domed plazas with ceilings at least 20 meters high, as well as the occasional outdoor open-air plaza for use by synthmorphs and Venusian-adapted morphs.

These plazas are the center of an aerostat's public life. Here, public festivals, concerts, plays, AR games, parties, and major sporting events are held. Plazas may also be rented by groups for private events. There is even a troupe of highly-modified acrobats and actors who travel between the aerostats offering exotic performances specifically designed for these plazas. The domed ceilings and walls of most plazas can also be used as part of the entertainment—they can be made perfectly transparent so that residents can see the swirling clouds outside or made opaque and used as multimedia screens displaying everything from artistic effects to views of other worlds.

While the nature of their environment forces the aerostats to rely upon resources from both the surface and off-world, each floating city contains all of the manufacturing facilities it requires to maintain all basic necessities, as well as stores of most vital materials. As a result, every aerostat has the capability to survive without aid from any of its fellows for an extended period.

OCTAVIA

Allegiance: Morningstar Constellation
Primary Languages: Cantonese, English, French

With a population of half a million, Octavia is half again the size of the next largest aerostat. It is the capital of the Morningstar Constellation as well as the planet's primary spaceport. In structure, it resembles a huge, elaborate, and relatively wide inverted cone. The interior is even more spacious than the other aerostats, since it was designed for both comfort and to impress visitors to Venus. Octavia has extensive housing and entertainment facilities for tourists, including its two nearby cloud diving nets and elaborate and somewhat fanciful docks for passenger airships and balloons.

Octavia is a thriving metropolis and the only truly cosmopolitan city on Venus. Octavia hosts embassies from the Planetary Consortium and Lunar-Lagrange Alliance, as well as smaller embassies and offices from most major hypercorps and several major outer system polities. Politically, Octavia has the closest ties to the Planetary Consortium of any aerostat, but Octavians are also proud of their independence. It is also the center of the on-planet portion of the Venusian terraforming effort.

Octavia is governed by **Halis Sapien,** the charismatic and genderless individual who was one of the major members of the coalition that created the Morningstar Constellation. Halis is exceptionally popular and loved and admired by almost everyone on Octavia. It is likely that Halis will remain mayor of Octavia for the foreseeable future.

In addition to being a center for tourism and interplanetary trade and diplomacy, Octavia is also home to the Nimbus hypercorp and the neo-synergists.

NIMBUS

Nimbus was one of the first hypercorps to base its operations on Venus, settling on Octavia well before the Fall, and is a strong supporter of the Constellation's independence and the ATI. They are responsible for setting up and maintaining the

SOLARCHIVE SEARCH: THE NEO-SYNERGISTS



The neo-synergists are an offshoot of the experimental colony on the exoplanet Synergy. After half a decade of accidental isolation, the Synergist colonists, who were equipped with experimental mesh implants, developed a group mind (see: Synergists). While most Synergists seem unwilling to leave the exoplanet and cut themselves off from the colony mind, a small group of half a dozen made the brave leap to return to the solar system. Though they remain linked as a small cell, these self-exiles suffered several psychological issues from their separation and also encountered a large amount of bias and suspicion from the Lunars to whom they returned. Accepting an invitation from a group of interested researchers, these Synergists relocated to the Octavia aerostat on Venus.

In the months since relocating, these newly-dubbed neo-synergists have exploded in number, accepting dozens of applicants into their group mind. Currently comprised of 43 individuals, each of the new neo-synergists has willingly been implanted with an upgraded version of the same experimental hypermesh inserts carried by the original Synergist colonists. Though a number of members joined initially for research purposes, these scientists have expressed no desire to leave the shared mindspace. As a group, the neo-synergists are already turning their collective intelligence towards several research projects, both of their own initiative and in conjunction with some hypercorps. The neo-synergists are also reviewing an assortment of new applicants, including numerous trained scientists and engineers attracted by the prospect of task-sharing and cognitive enhancement. It is possible that the group may split off and establish other neo-synergist "colonies" in other habitats in the near future, each with their own local group mind.

Despite participating in a group mind, psychological tests reveal the various members to still be separate individuals who are fully within transhuman psychological norms. Each neo-synergist experiences and can interact with the emotions, personality, and experiences of other neo-synergists in real time. The primary benefit, aside from knowing each other intimately, seems to be an enhanced ability to work together. In practice, these individuals cooperate almost as if they were different limbs of the same organism. Members report a general increase in happiness and fulfillment since joining—none have experienced loneliness since linking their consciousnesses with their fellows. ♣

This article has been tagged by a friend in the the Eye ...
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Sentinels should keep several things regarding the Synergists and neo-synergists in mind. First and foremost are concerns that the enhanced collective intelligence of these group minds may escalate into a sort of transhuman seed AI. For this reason, efforts to create new Synergist colonies should be closely monitored. Secondly are the reports and psych evaluations of individual neo-synergists, which indicate a propensity for certain mental disorders, particularly if separated from the group mind or limited to a smaller sampling of minds for any extended period. Individual Synergists have been known to exhibit personality traits of other Synergists and occasionally to engage in other anomalous behavior, particularly speaking in an unknown language (possibly gibberish). The technology behind the Synergist implants (originally produced by the now defunct Ambiscience hypercorp) remains highly experimental. Personal accounts and resource requests strongly indicate that the Synergists continue to research and modify the design. ♣

satellite communications and farcasting grid that allows the various Constellation aerostats and orbital habitats to mesh together seamlessly with almost no lag. They also supplied the technology to secure the Star Council's internal communications and have sponsored several Constellation initiatives to get new Venusian hypercorps off the ground.

From Firewall's perspective, Nimbus's presence here calls for extra scrutiny. For starters, they have a number of premier research parks and labs scattered throughout the Constellation, developing the cutting edge of communications technology. Though conspiracy theorist claims that Nimbus installs backdoors and monitoring capabilities in its products are likely spurious and stemming from negative advert-memes from rivals, the fact that many Firewall ops rely on Nimbus technology cannot be overlooked. Nimbus has open-sourced a number of their projects and releases, however, allowing us to vet the security and make our own modifications.

Another concern, however, is Nimbus's relations with the Factors. It seems almost certain that Nimbus is buying plans for advanced electronics from the Factors to help their work on both farcaster design and mesh interfaces. This adoption of alien technology is something to monitor, as is the extra attention Nimbus is receiving from rivals because of it.

The Neo-Synergists

The fresh arrival of the controversial neo-synergists on Octavia has been a common media feature in recent months. Despite rampant speculation and being the source of many jokes, the neo-synergists have been largely welcomed to the Constellation with open arms and their progress and growth watched with interest. Most recently, the neo-synergists accepted an invitation from Jaseva Khol, the head of Nimbus R&D, to collaborate on a new headware communications project.

Aphrodite Prime

Allegiance: Morningstar Constellation
Primary Languages: English, Mandarin, Spanish

With a population of 300,000, this aerostat is a center for both bioengineering and tourism. Aphrodite Prime is where bioengineers have designed and created most of the new life forms that are already inhabiting the Venusian atmosphere, as well as where life forms designed for more terraformed versions of the Venusian atmosphere are designed and studied. This aerostat also contains accommodations for up to 40,000 tourists as well as storage facilities housing a wide variety of morphs available for rental. Almost 10% of the population of Aphrodite Prime works in an industry related to tourism.

One of the biggest draws this aerostat offers to tourists is the vast Aphrodite Aviary. Attached to



the base of the aerostat, this facility is a transparent sphere 1,300 meters in diameter. It is filled with a mixture of carbon dioxide, oxygen, water vapor, and trace chemicals that approximates what the promoters of the ATI believe will be the final form of the upper Venusian atmosphere in 100 years. Inside this bubble live examples of many of the life forms the bioengineers plan to inhabit this reborn world. Fierce flying mantas prey upon schools of balloon fish, while jelly-floats in turn feed the balloon fish and eat the air plankton. There are even large clusters of aerial kelp and float ferns that turn a portion of the aviary into a dense aerial jungle. Visitors can rent special morphs adapted for life in this environment to help them experience what the future of Venus holds.

Many of the Venus flyer morphs currently in use are found on Aphrodite Prime. The station also houses a significant neo-avian population.

LUCIFER

Primary Languages: Arabic, English, French, Russian

Lucifer is the aerostat responsible for most Venus surface mining as well as being the most mobile in terms of altitude. Lucifer is designed to be able to move between altitudes of 60 to 40 kilometers, seeking heights where the winds are low enough to permit it to easily maintain its position over a single location, as it lowers a tether down to the surface in order to deploy miners and equipment and retrieve the miners and the ores they obtain. Unlike the other aerostats that are far more lightly built, the outer surface of Lucifer is a synthetic sapphire sphere. Lucifer contains large air tanks and pumps that allow the inhabitants to vary the internal air pressure from one quarter to more than three times Earth normal. It also contains extensive climate control and large external radiators that allow it to maintain comfortable internal temperatures even when the external temperature is as high as 140 C.

Lucifer has a population of 230,000, of which 5,000 are infomorphs who make their living teleoperating miner bots down on the surface. Almost a quarter of the population either manages the ore processing or works as support personnel for the surface miners. As can be expected, there is a high percentage of indentures among Lucifer's populace, working for several different hypercorp and Constellation mining ventures. It is worth noting that a small but significant amount of these are not infugees but criminals who have been convicted and sentenced to infomorph labor. These infomorphs are kept in secluded networks with heavy electronic safeguards, and are commonly used for the most dangerous mining work tasks.

THE SHACK

Allegiance: Morningstar Constellation

Primary Languages: Hindi, Portuguese, Wu

The largest of Venus's aerostats also has the smallest population. It is known only as the Shack. With a population of 130,000, it exists solely to build other aerostats. Aerial construction is a relatively tricky proposition; until an aerostat is filled with breathable air and sealed, it can easily plummet down into Venus's fiery depths. To facilitate construction, the Shack uses a series of large construction platforms supported by huge air-filled balloons. These platforms are constructed with the balloons being domes on top of the platforms, so that the workers have a breathable atmosphere. In form, the Shack is a relatively small city from which extends six spars that are each 400 meters long and end in these domed construction platforms. As long as the population of Venus continues to grow, new aerostats need to be constructed and the Shack will have work to do. Currently, the Shack is working on two new aerostats and has an order for a third. The mayor of the Shack is an old and fiery radical named Colin Sandric. The locals joke that he's the oldest socialist in the solar system. He cares passionately about the inhabitants of the Shack, but isn't terribly concerned with politics or diplomacy, and so he is respected, but not particularly well liked, by most of the Star Council. All Shack citizens are members of a single corporation and each citizen has one share. These shares cannot be traded and guarantee the citizen a precisely equal portion of all economic surplus generated on this habitat.

Including the Shack in the formation of the Morningstar Constellation was a crucial victory for the Venusian separatists, as it means the Star Council now has control over who constructs new aerostats and for what purpose. There has been some discussion in Planetary Consortium circles about constructing a new aerostat-building platform under their jurisdiction, but the Constellation has made it clear that they would consider such an endeavor as a challenge to their sovereignty.

PARVARTI

Allegiance: Independent

Primary Languages: English, Farsi, Japanese

One of only two independent aerostats, Parvarti is advertised as the place where dreams come true. It is known for its somewhat seedy reputation as a sort of inner system swinger's club or red light habitat that caters to almost any sort of fantasy, sexual kink, or perversion—discretion guaranteed. The habitat's marketplace offers the entire range of vacation resort and adult services: spas, cloud-diving, gambling, customized companions, doll houses, robo-sex, exotic pleasure simulspaces, neotenic prostitution, porn XP casting, anonymous mass orgies, etc. For people in the know, various gray and black market agents provide darker services: animal sleeving/bestiality, illegal fork-sex operations, snuff XP, non-simulated rape scenarios, and worse. Parvarti is part whorehouse, part non-stop bacchanal, and part shady speakeasy. Just about any deviance and permutation of sexual services is available, and private spaces (small and large) can be rented for

special occasions, no questions asked, on short notice. To preserve privacy, most patrons sleeve into anonymous morphs for their stay, but the station also limits public spimes, performs regular countersurveillance sweeps, and closely limits and filters communication channels outside the aerostat. This makes Parvarti an excellent locale for conducting private meetings and deals, and it is commonly used as a neutral ground between negotiating parties.

Other Aerostats

The other 15 inhabited aerostats vary in culture, form, and purpose. One of the major freedoms granted by the Morningstar Constellation is the right of every aerostat to govern its internal affairs. While all of the Constellation aerostats must grant their citizens the rights guaranteed by the Morningstar Constitution, beyond those, the aerostats are free to create their own forms of government and their own rules governing their internal economy. After years of rule by the Planetary Consortium, the Venusian aerostats have suddenly become a vast political and economic laboratory. While most Constellation aerostats are similar to Octavia, with a democratically-elected government and a mixture of reputation and monetary economy, many other options can also be found on Venus. For example, the government of **Machu Picchu** is randomly rotated between competent citizens, with anyone opting in having a chance to become one of the aerostat's managers. The habitat of **Selenis** is a nanosocialist experiment, with all resources held in common by its citizens. Beyond those necessities required to maintain a comfortable existence, any citizen of Selenis may take as much of the remaining resources as they want, if they can convince enough other citizens to agree to their proposed use. The greater the amount of resources needed, the greater the number of citizens who must agree. **Shukra,** run by a congress half-elected and half-appointed by local hypercorps, is notable as one of the system's hot spots for nanofab and software design, home to dozens of up-and-coming programming studios as well as gaming companies producing some of the most popular virtual worlds. In fact, some refer to it as "Silicon Cloud."

Etemenanki is notable as the primary aerostat still holding allegiance to the Planetary Consortium (the other being Omnicor's **Deep Reach**), and is built in a reverse ziggurat style, with the outer edge of each tier featuring transparent outer walls and floors. Tall spires rising from the top serve as private resorts for several prominent hyperelite dynasties.

Secret Aerostats

According to Firewall's data analysts, there is definitely one, and likely two, unregistered and presumably criminal aerostats in the Venusian atmosphere. Hiding such locations in the depths of the Venusian clouds is relatively simple. At and below 45 kilometers in altitude, dense sulfuric acid clouds block most of the light, and the periodic lightning discharges between the clouds combined with the density of the atmosphere and the relatively high temperatures makes most long-distance sensors almost useless. Like other equally secret bases throughout the solar system, most personnel presumably enter and leave these bases via egocasting. A careful analysis of Venusian records indicates that the initial raw materials for the station or stations came from automated orbital materials shipments that were reported as lost and which were presumed to have crashed on the Venusian surface. Additional raw materials were likely obtained from surface mining operations performed at the secret base. The rate of automated freight carriers that are lost or have temporary problems indicates that the station or stations also still transfer goods to and from them using hacked or hijacked freight carriers.

Orbital Stations

Venusian orbit is the meeting place between the Morningstar Constellation and the Planetary Consortium. Currently 350,000 transhumans live in orbit around Venus. Most of these stations are part of the Morningstar Constellation, but slightly more than 100,000 of the transhumans living in Venus orbit are still citizens of the Planetary Consortium. These orbital stations are home to a number of advanced research labs as well as the offices and production facilities for hundreds of hypercorps.

Gerlach

Station Type: O'Neill Cylinder
Allegiance: Independent
Primary Languages: Cantonese, English, Polish

Gerlach is a typical cylindrical O'Neill habitat. It is 1 kilometer in diameter, 4 kilometers long, and has a total population of almost 120,000. It is the major Venusian spaceport and also the oldest inhabited location on or in orbit around Venus. Initially smaller, the focus of its construction was to establish a base to conduct research on the Venusian atmosphere, construct more habitats and aerostats, and eventually terraform Venus. The station's interior was occupied by several enormous and roughly pyramidal arcologies, each 250 meters high and almost 900 meters across as the base. Studded between these huge arcologies were dozens of small bioreserves that between them contained a huge diversity of Earth life living in a close approximation of its natural habitat. These reserves served as a symbol for the proposed terraforming effort—the builders vowed that the descendants of the plants and animals on Gerlach would eventually live on the Venusian surface.

Gerlach's focus was drastically affected by the Fall, however, when the station was inundated by refugees. At the height of the emergency, Gerlach held a population of 750,000—far more than it was designed to support. Emergency measures were undertaken to

expand the cylinder's length, construct more arcologies, and redesign Gerlach as a haven for refugees. In the decades since, Gerlach's population declined to manageable levels, with most of the inhabitants departing for the aerostats or elsewhere in the solar system. The Planetary Consortium's hope of maintaining Gerlach as a show place for Venusian terraforming was doomed to failure, however, when Gerlach's inhabitants asserted their independence while also supporting the Constellation's formation and the planned Aerial Terraforming Initiative. The habitat remains a major center for manufacturing and research, with a reputation for being one of the strangest, most liberal, and most innovative places in the inner system. The nine large arcologies remain, each devoted to living quarters, large manufacturing facilities, and research labs, but the bioreserves have also been enlarged so that pyramids now rise out of a mass of verdant greenery. As a result, Gerlach is considered one of the most comfortable and desirable orbital stations in the inner system and researchers and technicians work hard to win an appointment there.

Gerlach is in many ways the gateway to Venus. Here, visitors can adapt to living in this world's higher gravity as Gerlach maintains a rotation speed that gives it a gravity equal to half that of Venus. Gerlach is the only station in the solar system to use this particular gravity, which was specifically chosen because it has proven to be the best intermediary between Martian or Lunar gravity and full Venusian gravity. In addition, the cylinder that makes up the vast majority of Gerlach is connected to a rotating torus that is 1.5 kilometers in diameter and 100 meters wide that rotates to produce full Venusian gravity. This secondary station is primarily a hotel for visitors from low gravity worlds who want to venture down to the surface, capable of accommodating up to 5,000 travelers at a time.

Gerlach is a major base for Venusian radicals who favor closer ties with the outer system. In many of Gerlach's arcologies, residents push the limits of the Venusian version of the transitional economy. Personal devices and augmentations incorporating active nanotechnology are especially popular. Some of the residents of these arcologies belong to clubs and groups where the members study and emulate the culture and society of outer system autonomists. Restaurants serving distinctive Extropian cuisine and shops selling the latest fashions from Titan are especially popular on Gerlach. These radicals are also the reason for Gerlach's unique status. The populace of Gerlach voted to secede from the Planetary Consortium, but they did not initially sign the Morningstar constitution. Following the collapse of talks between Morningstar and the Autonomist Alliance, the populace of Gerlach voted to remain an independent state allied with both the Morningstar Constellation and Extropia. Gerlach is now the largest independent station in the inner system.

Gerlach's independence also changed the balance of power inside the habitat. Several Consortium hypercorps opted to relocate their facilities to more supportive locales. Fa Jing, one of the major leaseholders, opted not to renew given the Consortium's original terraforming plan is now on hold. This opened up an entire arcology, now held by the argonauts as one of their major inner system bases. The remaining arcologies and hypercorps here continue to produce excellent results in numerous fields, from terraforming research and atmospheric observation to morph design and materials engineering. Many of the leading research firms here have a reputation that guarantees that they will attract some of the finest minds from across the solar system. Other, smaller and newer research teams offer bonuses to attract sufficiently skilled researchers from off-world.

THOUGHT

Station Type: Torus
Allegiance: Planetary Consortium (Cognite)
Primary Languages: English, German

Controlled by Cognite, this station is home to some of the finest cutting-edge AI research in the solar system. Researchers here specialize in creating AIs with much of the general intelligence of AGIs but that are still sufficiently specialized and limited so as to pose no danger to their users and to have no self-improvement capabilities. Some of Cognite's most speculative and secretive research takes place here, closed off from prying eyes. Our limited probing of their research models indicates that Cognite is growing increasingly radical in some of their new research inquiries, despite their past lessons and even recent admonitions from Planetary Consortium regulatory officials about working with AGIs that are insufficiently limited. Firewall considers this a significant enough potential threat that we have put in place several protocols and contingency plans for potential containment and termination.

FAR REACH II

Station Type: O'Neill Cylinder
Allegiance: Omnicor
Primary Languages: Japanese, Russian

The largest private station in Venus orbit, Far Reach II is owned by Omnicor. Here, 75,000 researchers and support staff work on both advanced nanofabrication and unusual techniques in chemical manufacturing. Much of the cutting edge chemical data used here is gathered from a specially-designed aerostat hovering at an altitude of between 5 and 20 kilometers known as Deep Reach. Workers on Far Reach II teleoperate surface shells via Deep Reach using farcaster links. Several other research, chemtech, and mining hypercorps lease facilities on both Far Reach II and Deep Reach, working in collaboration with Omnicor or focusing in specialized areas the larger corp does not.

Cythera

Station Type: Torus
Allegiance: Morningstar Constellation
Primary Languages: Bengali, Punjabi

This station has a population of 50,000 researchers and is a cooperatively-run research park venture in which dozens of (mostly Constellation-based) hypercorps participate. Most work on this habitat is dedicated to Venusian terraforming research and is in active competition with similar stations on Octavia and Gerlach. In fact, some of the corporations working here have acquired important terraforming contracts with the Star Council, notably Aerial Dynamics and Skythe. One of the major initiatives involves creating and licensing various food animals capable of living in the current Venusian atmosphere, sparking a recent fad among well-off Venusians for locally caught food. Ecologene's blimpsteak beasts have proven to be especially popular among Venusian gourmets.

Frostfire

Station Type: Cluster
Allegiance: Morningstar Constellation
Primary Languages: Portuguese, Spanish

Frostfire has a population of 35,000 and is responsible for the collection and distribution of the many ice boulders and small ice asteroids that are being transported to Venus. This ice is needed to gradually raise the amount of water vapor in the upper atmosphere. Frostfire sends out tugs to collect these ice boulders and maneuver them into a stable orbit. Once the ice asteroids are in orbit, workers carve them up into many relatively small boulders, most of which are between 20 and 50 meters across. Then, workers attach small engines to the boulders and de-orbit them in shallow grazing orbits that allow the boulders to gradually vaporize in the upper Venusian atmosphere, well above the altitude of the aerostats. Technicians on Frostfire make certain that none of these ice boulders are aimed anywhere within 500 kilometers of an aerostat, in case the boulder does not vaporize at the altitude it is supposed to.

Other Venusian Orbital Stations

Because Venus is far less populous than Luna or Mars, and any potentially dangerous tech that escapes from an orbiting research station is almost certain to fall to the surface, where the extreme temperatures and pressures will destroy it, many hypercorps belonging to or allied with the Planetary Consortium are far more willing to conduct somewhat dangerous research here. While all such agreements were re-negotiated after the formation of the Morningstar Constellation, most of these research station bases are still being used by the same hypercorps, for the same purposes as before. Since laws governing many technologies are slightly more liberal under Venus's new government, other hypercorps are applying for permission to construct new stations in Venusian orbit.

Venusian Transportation

The aerostats both drift in the winds and move using their own ionic jets. Aerostats are only stationary when tethered to the surface. These floating cities are on average between 100 and 10,000 kilometers apart. Every aerostat has a small dock for orbital landers.

Almost all transport between the surface and the aerostats uses elevators moving on heavy and exceptionally durable cables stretching between the bottom of one of the aerostats and the mining bases below them. The 55-kilometer journey up or down one of these cables requires approximately two hours. In emergencies, heavily armored and shielded metallic hydrogen rockets can make the same journey in less than 20 minutes. However, all of these rockets must be stored on the aerostats, since long-term storage of metallic hydrogen on the Venusian surface is impossible.

There are three common forms of travel between the aerostats. The fastest method of transport on Venus is jet aircraft, which consist of everything from small and often luxurious private jets to large jets carrying cargo and passengers. Traveling at speeds between 800 and 2,500 kph, passengers can travel between distant aerostats in no more than a few hours.

Since the direction of Venusian wind currents varies by altitude, more exotic travel options are possible. Several small transport companies have constructed airships—dirigibles that travel at speeds between 100 and 300 kph by combining their engines with favorable winds. These fusion-powered electric airships are between 60 and 250 meters long and carry up to 40 tons of cargo. They are an exceptionally economical method of transport for cargo and passengers who are not in a hurry. Most airships are fully automated vessels that carry raw materials from mining aerostats to the other habitats. More recently, however, the transport company **Venus Flies** has begun offering luxury passenger airship service. These journeys take between a few hours and four or five days and every passenger is guaranteed a small but luxurious cabin and high quality meals. Airship travel is becoming an increasingly popular way to take a vacation and many Venusians who have both the time and money to indulge themselves have taken a Venus Flies passenger airship journey.

The most whimsical method of Venusian transport is also the slowest: balloons. Because breathable air is considerably lighter than the Venusian atmosphere, creating balloons that can safely fly on Venus is exceptionally easy. The Venusian air currents are also relatively well-mapped and stable, so it is possible find favorable winds simply by going up or down two or three kilometers. Designed to operate at altitudes of between 51 and 59 kilometers, the typical Venusian balloon is a sphere 25 meters in diameter capable of carrying up to 10 passengers with minimal luggage. These balloons ascend and descend by heating and

cooling the breathable air inside the balloon. Large sections of the balloon are left transparent to allow the passengers an excellent view of the colorful atmosphere. These balloons are also fitted with airlocks and an exterior observation platform, where passengers wearing vacuum suits or air masks can experience the quiet of the Venusian atmosphere far from any settlement. All of these balloons are also fitted with small emergency engines designed to help keep them aloft and propel them at speeds of up to 100 kph. They typically move at speeds between 50 and 100 kph, however, simply by moving with the winds available at different altitudes. These balloons are too lightly built to be particularly luxurious, but are very popular with both tourists and the wealthy. They are also occasionally used as locations for secret meetings for which the participants would prefer to remain completely unobserved.

THE ROTOVATOR PROJECT

One of the Morningstar Constellation's newest projects is the construction of an unusual orbital launch system. Because Venus rotates so slowly, conventional space elevators are impossible, since they must be constructed in a geosynchronous orbit. To make Venus a center for commerce and tourism, the current government wishes to make getting to and from orbit as easy and as inexpensive as possible. To accomplish this, they are using an idea that is more than a century old, but which never needed to be used before. Instead of a space elevator, they are constructing a rotovator—a spinning cable 12,000 kilometers long with a center orbiting 6,058 kilometers above the surface. This cable spins one and a half revolutions for every orbit, but it spins in the opposite direction of its orbit. Three times in each of its four-hour orbits, one of the ends of this cable swings down into the Venusian atmosphere slightly above the altitude of the aerostats. The cable's orbit and rotation cancel each other so that the velocity of the cable's tip when it reaches the clouds 58 kilometers above Venus's surface is only 30 kph, allowing the rotovator to smoothly and safely collect and deliver cargo and passengers from one of the three transport platforms floating in the upper Venusian atmosphere.

The rotovator is currently under construction. A pair of massive nanofabricators located on the central asteroid that forms the rotovator's hub produce 10 kilometers of high-strength cable every day. At the current rate of progress, the rotovator should be completed and ready for operation within one Venusian year. The luxury resorts on Aphrodite Prime are already accepting reservations for the week-long festival they will hold to celebrate the rotovator's completion.

GHOST ZEPPLIN

Transcript excerpted from interview with Apatcha Chong, rescued from a survival balloon after 18 days adrift

Interviewer: What was the name of your ship again?

Chong: It was the Trump Card, registered to Venus Flies. I was the Head Concierge, in charge of passenger comfort and relations.

Interviewer: That dirigible was reported missing over two weeks ago.

Chong: I know, I was on it!

Interviewer: Tell us what happened.

Chong: We were en route to Parvarti when we picked up a weak distress signal. We were actually ahead of schedule, so the Captain decided to investigate. It was coming from another zeppelin.

Interviewer: Do you know the name of this craft?

Chong: No, that was the weird thing. It wasn't broadcasting ID info, and sensor scans couldn't pinpoint enough identifying features to nail down the registration. There was some worry that they were a smuggler ship, intentionally stripped of ID. Our engineer thought they may have been configured for stealth operations.

Interviewer: But the captain approached anyway?

Chong: Well, they were broadcasting an automated distress, no one was responding, and they were definitely losing altitude and drifting towards the storm boundary. So we latched onto it, and the Captain took two others to investigate. They didn't come back.

Interviewer: How long were they gone for?

Chong: We lost contact about 2 hours in. They hadn't found anyone, but something was spooking them. They wouldn't tell us what. I almost got the impression that they didn't want to come back. They told us not to open the airlock again without explicit consent from all three of them. We were debating what to do about it when … when the bloodshed started.

Interviewer: Bloodshed?

Chong: There were screams from the passenger lounge. One of the guests had found a body. It was so mutilated, at first we couldn't tell who it was. There was blood everywhere. So much blood. It wasn't until Tito slipped on the face—the peeled-off face—that we realized it was the Captain.

Interviewer: Wasn't he on the other ship?

Chong: We thought so. The airlock hadn't been open—at least, that we could tell. The sensors in the passenger lounge didn't have anything to show either. We didn't have much time to figure this out, because one by one, the others started disappearing or turning up dead too.

Interviewer: Everyone?

Chong: I—I don't know. Naaz and I, we decided not to stay. We were too scared. We went for the emergency balloons. One minute she was next to me … then … then she was gone. ♣

LIVING ON VENUS

Aside from its progressive culture, its allegiance to aerial aesthetics, and its spirit of socio-political experimentation, life on Venus is markedly different from other worlds and habitats in several key ways.

ISOLATION AND INDEPENDENCE

Each aerostat is an island unto itself, with its own distinct culture—much like remote habitats in space. Despite being linked with a contiguous mesh, and the inevitable cross-fertilization of memes and cultural trends via various media channels, many Venusians rarely stray from their home aerostats and take pride in their floating city's particular identity. This spirit of independence is in fact infused throughout Venusian culture, even among the Constellation habitats, who cooperate in key ways but otherwise seek to walk their own unique and independent paths. This has led to a bit of friendly rivalry between some aerostats, though this is just as often expressed in terms of racing towards new research breakthroughs or unveiling new public artworks rather than traditional competitive modes like sports or media production.

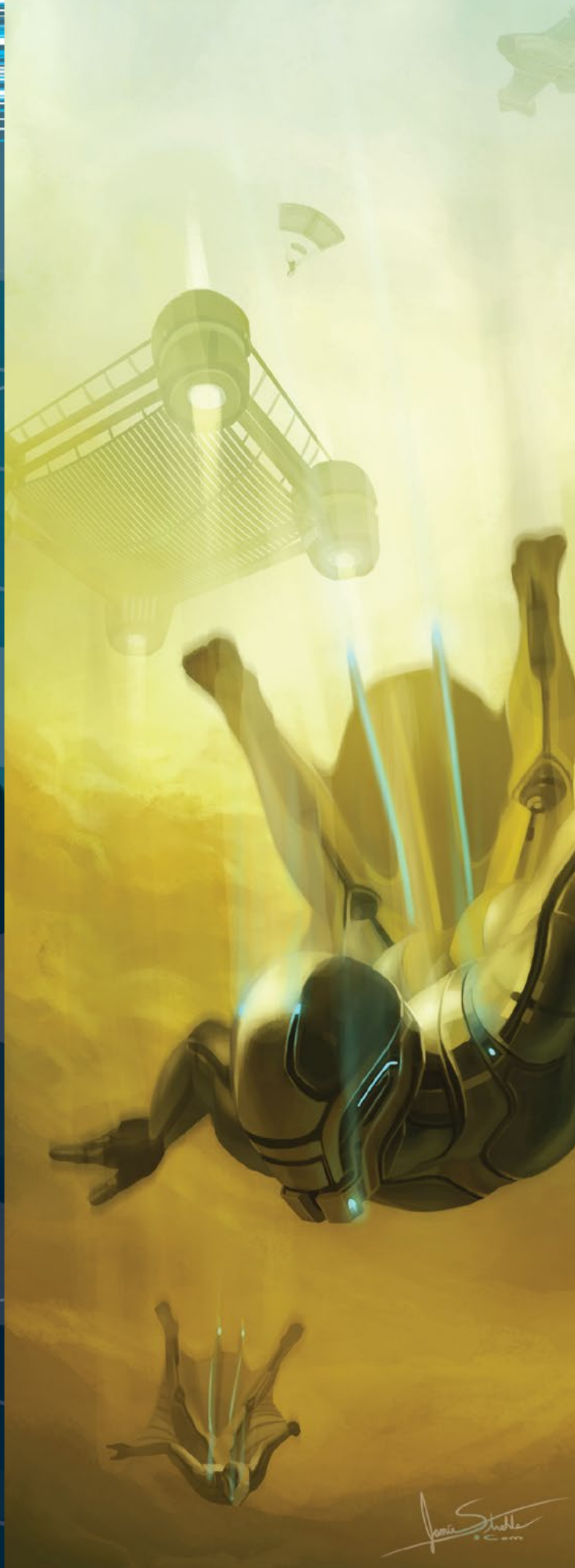
VENUSIAN WEALTH

Like on Mars, living space on Venus is relatively inexpensive—creating more does not involve enlarging a rotating habitat or digging caverns into the rock of some moon or asteroid. Instead, all someone needs to do is build more relatively lightweight, air-tight rooms. As a result, the emphasis on possessing large dwellings and on having restaurants, private clubs, and other facilities that are patronized by the wealthy and powerful be especially spacious

VENUSIAN HOLIDAYS

One of the universal Venusian holidays is Fall Day: a day honoring Earth and those who permanently died during the Fall, held on April 26th, on the old Earth calendar. This is the day that the UN officially decided to begin the evacuation of Earth. During Fall Day, people from each aerostat gather early on in the plazas, which each project a high resolution video or augmented reality environment of an impressive and memorable location that once existed on Earth. After viewing these scenes, people spend time with the friends and families.

More recently, residents also gather for Morningstar Day, the day that Venus officially became and independent world. On Morningstar Day, residents assemble in the upper plazas, the ceiling is made transparent, and the residents watch vast fireworks displays. Morningstar Day is a joyous and somewhat debauched holiday, with celebrants enjoying various intoxicants. Since the Venusian atmosphere rotates relatively slowly and aerostats that remain tethered to the surface rotate even slower, for some aerostats Morningstar Day occurs during the Venusian day. Technicians have created specially colored fireworks that are visible even in the dim Venusian daylight. However, most Constellation aerostats make an effort to be on the planet's night side during Morningstar Day so they can have the best possible view of their fireworks display. ■



is largely absent on Venus. Instead, the primary focus of Venusian luxury is possessing large goods. Because every kilogram of furnishings must be imported from off-world or mined on Venus's hellish surface, the common Venusian aesthetic is focused on owning elegant, lightweight, and highly functional art, furniture, appliances, and equipment. The rich, however, have the luxury of owning goods that are larger or more abundant. Hyper-elite Venusians who wish to show of their wealth do so by owning and displaying imported statues and other large relics of Earth or hand-made post-Fall copies of these same relics.

Venusian Poverty

Like most of the inner system, the Venusian poor primarily consist of infomorph refugees and poor transhumans forced to inhabit case synthmorphs. The infomorphs here typically work dull and repetitive jobs that were performed by high end AGIs before the Fall, just like everywhere else. On Venus, these jobs include mining, monitoring ore processing equipment and other industrial machinery, and checking the interiors and exteriors of the aerostats for flaws and damage that hasn't shown up on their embedded sensors. The clanking masses, meanwhile, work the typical labor and service-sector jobs, particularly aerostat construction and repair, mining ops, transportation services, and terraforming. Many of these poor synthmorphs live in sections of habitats that are open to the Venusian atmosphere and lack all amenities other than electricity, data access, and lighting. However, the same air that the biomorphs and pods breathe also serves to keep the aerostats aloft, and aerostats require considerably fewer materials to create than any vacuum habitat. On Venus, the length of time an indenture must work in order to purchase a cheap pod or biomorph and a place to live is typically less than a year.

Attractions

Two relatively small but important sources of income for Venus are tourism and sales of XP. As what is arguably the most unusual inhabited world in the solar system, many people are willing to pay to either experience this exotic environment directly or to upload XP from those who have the means to do so. Balloon rides are popular, as are explorations of the depths of the Venusian atmosphere. Heavily reinforced vessels can travel as low as 30 kilometers above the surface. Renting a surface morph is also popular, though all but the most daring tourists teleoperate the shell from the safety of one of the aerostats. In addition, there are a few utterly unique attractions available on Venus.

Cloud Diving

Venus offers one of the most spectacular sports in the entire solar system—cloud diving. Divers take suborbital transports to an altitude of 80 kilometers and don both a vacsuit and a parachute. The cloud diver then jumps out of the transport and falls through the atmosphere. What happens next depends upon the wishes of the diver.

For the less daring cloud divers, Octavia has constructed a large floating mesh net three kilometers from the aerostat. Supported by gas bags at its corners, the net is a square 500 meters on a side. Cloud divers need merely slow themselves to a velocity of 25 kph using a parachute and they can safely land in this net

Black Market Opportunities

To: Etcher
From: The Russian <verification failure>

You asked about jobs on Venus. Yeah, there's no shortage of black-market career opportunities. With all of the political back-and-forth on Venus, there's a lack of attention paid to everyday concerns like public safety and law enforcement. Despite the liberal attitudes here, there is still a disparity between the rich and poor and enough regulated goods to create a demand for illicit markets. This makes Venus a hotbed of criminal activity.

Currently, a number of syndicates are waging a low-intensity conflict over control of the poorest habitats, not to mention the lucrative cut to be had off the tourists. While Venus may be a premier stop in the inner system, it still produces very little on its own, so there is a booming business in illegal substances. All of the ongoing political intrigue also means there is plenty of money to be had in secrets, whether you're blackmailing socialites for their indiscretions, trading insider corporate info, or selling Constellation secrets to the Consortium.

Control of Venus's underworld is still very much up in the air, with elements of both the Night Cartel and Nine Lives taking the majority of the stake. Pax Familiae is a major player, too, of course, though she seems to intentionally limit her operations here, perhaps because it's a bit too close to home (her private habitat, Ambelina, is in Venusian orbit). It's worth noting that a number of independents gained prominence by supporting Morningstar's bid for separation a few years ago and have used this influence to carve out their own domains. Foremost among these is Blackvein, an uplifted raven who rose in the Night Cartel ranks before selling out his bosses and going solo. He deals in a wide variety of illicit activities but is probably the foremost information broker and blackmailer on Venus right now. He operates out of Parvarti, where he occupies a heavily fortified residential tower. Due to existing inner system prejudices, Blackvein will often pose as a synthmorph that he controls via puppet sock.

So if you're willing to take a side, there's work to be had, but be careful. The situation is still up for grabs and you can't be sure whoever wins isn't gonna be too happy with anyone who played for the losing team. ♣

and radio a transport in Octavia to come and pick them up. Software included in every cloud diving suit and parachute allows the suit to automatically steer the parachute so that the diver reliably lands in the net.

More daring cloud divers often wish to experience the deeper portions of the Venusian atmosphere. The suits used for cloud diving remain safe up to an altitude of 35 kilometers. The vast majority of cloud divers make certain to end their dives at an altitude of 40 kilometers, where the air pressure is three and a half times that of Earth and the temperature is almost 140 C. Octavia also maintains another cloud-diving net at an altitude of 40 kilometers. Alternately, exceedingly wealthy cloud divers can instead opt for the thrill of having an aircraft deploy a net behind it and catch them in mid-air.

The most daring cloud divers do not use parachutes. They instead rely upon specially designed wingsuits—vacsuits with flexible panels between the legs and between the arms and legs. These suits slow the diver considerably less than a parachute, but also provide them with significantly greater maneuverability. In the air pressure found at the altitude of the aerostats, it is impossible to reach a safe landing velocity using a wingsuit, but at an altitude of 40 kilometers, the higher air pressure slows a diver using a wingsuit, reducing their velocity to a safe 25 kph.

Wealthy individuals from across the solar system compete in periodic cloud diving competitions, which are major media events on Venus. Likewise, XP clips made by skilled cloud divers are exceptionally popular. Cloud diving is also featured in a number of murder mystery novels and dramas, since only minor sabotage is needed to turn a cloud dive into a fatal plummet where both the person and their cortical stack are completely destroyed. In actuality, disabling the various monitoring systems in such a way that a cloud diver would actually think that a damaged suit and parachute was safe to use is exceptionally difficult. There have been more than a dozen attempts to kill someone using a sabotaged cloud diving suit in the last four years. Only one was successful; all of the others were discovered before the individual made the dive.

Aerial Fantasies

A recent fad among the ultra-wealthy has been to travel to Aphrodite Prime, rent Venus glider morphs adapted to the huge Aphrodite Aviary, and act out exotic augmented reality entertainments. In the most common of these AR games, the participants act as the crew of fantastic flying sailing ships filled with air pirates and the heroic naval officers who hunt them. XP of these adventures are also very popular. The revenues from the rental of the Aphrodite Aviary help fund further bioengineering. Several design firms on Aphrodite Prime have gained considerable fame by designing and building the flying ships used in these AR games.

Venusian Life Forms

Venus is home to a small amount of native life. In the clouds between 48 and 60 kilometers above the surface are small clusters of floating Venusian protobacteria. Preliminary evidence has revealed that these life forms are related to both Earth and Martian life. These protobacteria provide further support for the theory that more than three billion years ago, both Earth and Venus were seeded with life when meteor and cometary impacts on Mars carried rocks bearing primitive Martian bacteria into space and a few of these rocks landed on both Earth and Venus.

This native Venusian life is now merely an interesting laboratory curiosity and a source for useful genetic diversity. It simply does not compare to the large and complex Venusian ecology that is currently being created in the laboratories of Gerlach, Cythera, and Aphrodite Prime. The current goal of the Morningstar Constellation is to create a rich and diverse aerial ecology to go along with their plans to give the Venusian upper atmosphere substantial oxygen content and a small but noticeable amount of water vapor. Air plankton, the genehackers' first major success, has already been released into the wild. Based on plankton from Earthly oceans and incorporating some genetic material from the native Venusian protobacteria, small clouds of air plankton can now be found over much of Venus. Nourished by sunlight and the various compounds in the Venusian atmosphere, these organisms keep themselves aloft by storing oxygen in small bladders. These organisms also release oxygen into the air, aiding the Aerial Terraforming Initiative and providing food for larger and more complex Venusian life forms. The air plankton depends upon water vapor to survive and so grows more rapidly as the work on Frostfire station gradually increases the amount of water vapor in the upper atmosphere.

Within the past three years, genehackers have produced several more complex life-forms that are similarly adapted for life in the Venusian clouds. Because oxygen levels are still extremely low and are unlikely to rise significantly for several decades, all of these creatures are photosynthetic. The most abundant are jelly-floats, flimsy balloon-like jellyfish creatures that consist of oxygen gas bags up to a meter across, below which hang slender tendrils they use to feed on the larger forms of air plankton. Jelly-floats are just now being seeded within air plankton populations, so it is too early gauge their success. Even larger and more active are the delicate flying octopi, which obtain their lift from gas bags up to 3 meters across and use jets of compressed Venusian air to propel themselves at speeds of up to 20 kph. These creatures are designed to feed on the jelly-floats and, when released, will be the top predators of the Venusian ecosystem. Genehackers have also created other more active creatures, including muscular fliers like the predatory cloud mantas. These active life-forms require an oxygen atmosphere, however, and so can only be found in the terraforming menagerie on Aphrodite Prime.

IN THE WAKE OF THE FALL

The Earth has changed in drastic ways.

History of the Fall: How it all fell apart. ■ p. 46

Surface Changes: The scarred and battered landscape. ■ p. 48

Climate Changes: Weird weather. ■ p. 50

ONGOING ACTIVITY

Despite the propaganda, the planet is not lifeless.

Survivors: Signs of life. ■ p. 52

Sleepers: Those who could not escape went into storage. ■ p. 54

Exsurgents: No longer human. ■ p. 53

TITAN Remnants: The machines that remain. ■ p. 58

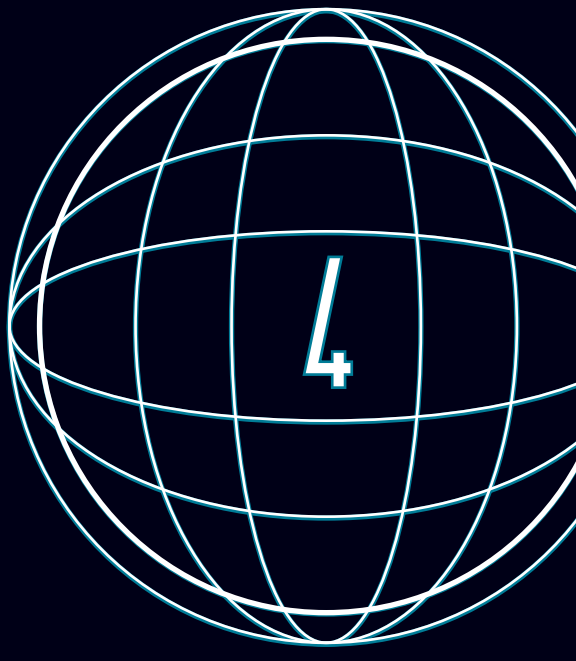
The Interdiction: What you need to know about Earth's robust orbital defenses. ■ p. 48

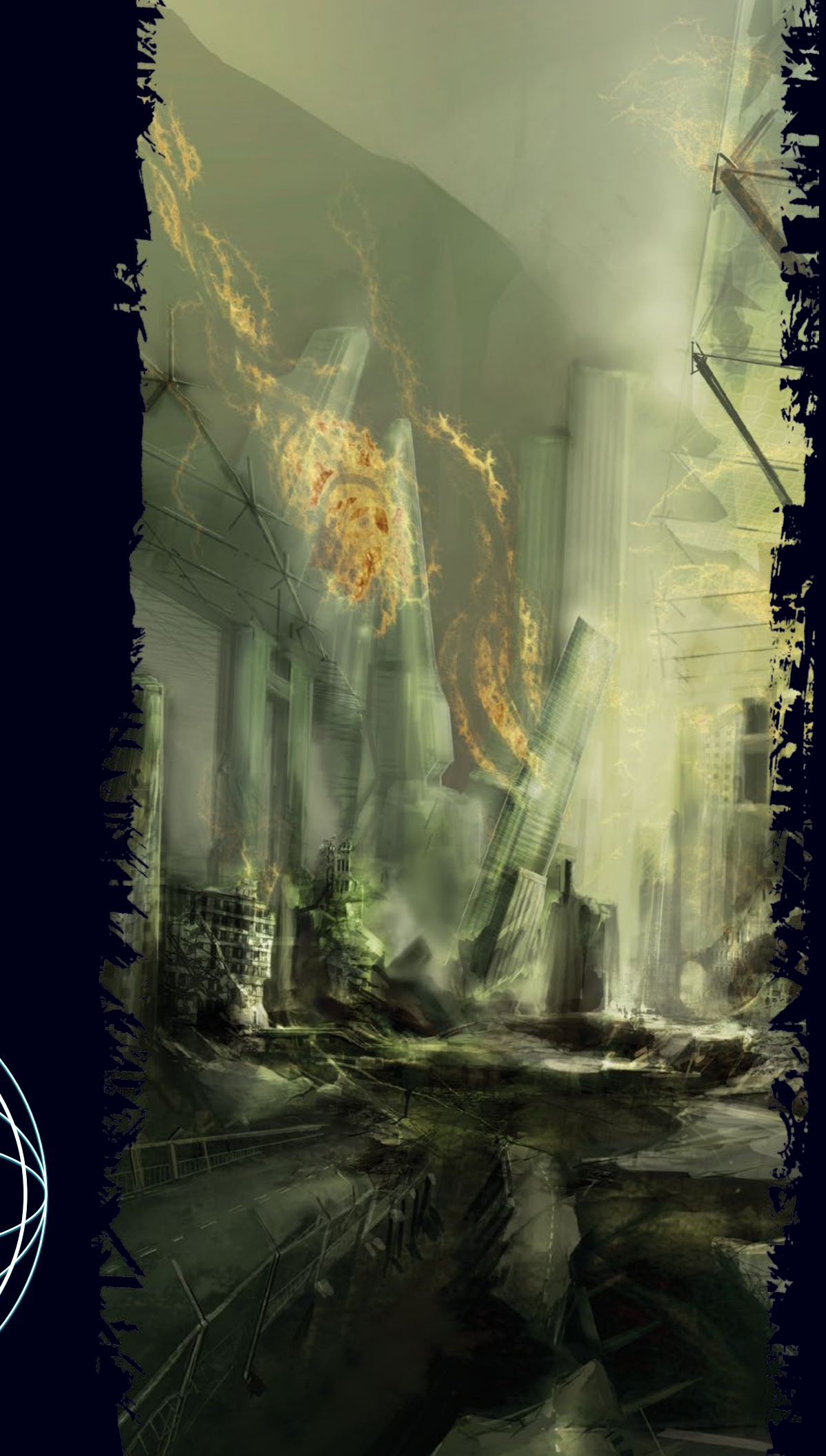
Running the Blockade: Options for getting to Earth—and back out. ■ p. 54

Salvage Ops: How and why to loot the ruins. ■ p. 57

MISSIONS TO EARTH

The risks and rewards of running the cordon.





EARTH

So you're the new kid on the block, hmm? Firewall's idea of a new partner? Your file says you're young—barely a teenager when the Fall went down, eh? And you were born on Mars, so you've never even been to Earth. That's typical. Firewall prefers assigning this post to sentinels with no ties to the homeworld. They don't want anyone getting stupid sentimental ideas.

Name's Ham. I'm what you'd call an old-timer—been assigned here the past three years, which makes me an expert, I reckon. Hell, it's longer'n anyone else's stuck around. I've had partners before, but they never last. And now it's your turn.

Welcome to Earth.

Think you know what that means? Guess again. You've got no idea what it's like down there now. Nobody does, really. That's why we're here.

Now, don't go getting any stupid notions in your head about going down there yourself and exploring. Sure, everybody has that fantasy—the gifted adventurer, braving the wilds and the ruins and finding long-lost treasures. Ain't gonna happen. Leastways, not on my watch. Why? Because nine times out of ten—hell, ninety-nine times out of one hundred—all that'll come back is your stack. If you're lucky.

No, we stay up here where it's safe. Safer, anyway. We can keep an eye on Earth just fine from here, and nothing comes near us. It's better this way. Trust me, you don't want to go down there.

…

Yeah, I've been down there. All right? I've set foot on Earth, our ancestral world of origin. I've walked the same ground as our forefathers. And then? Then I ran for my life. Then I died. I had an emergency farcaster rig, so I remember it all in painful, gory detail.

So enjoy the view, kid. This is as close as you're gonna get.

ANATOMY OF A COLLAPSE

Earth. The birthplace of humanity. Our home, right up until the TITANs chased us away from it. Right up until the point where we put our tails between our legs and ran away, as fast as our ships and our minds could carry us. That was ten years ago. With very limited exceptions, we haven't been back since.

Once upon a time, the Earth was home to billions of people. The continents teemed with life, great tracts of land covered in lush forest or rich farmland or deep jungle. Enormous cities blossomed here and there like strange metal flowers, towering structures holding millions of people in condensed areas less than thirty square miles. Ground vehicles raced across wide superhighways, while aerial craft dotted the sky, zooming in and out of traffic lanes with reckless speed. Even the waters churned with activity, both from the many aquatic creatures and from humanity building habitats and finding homes among the waves.

But that was all a long time ago now.

The planet sickened, societies collapsed, wars spread, people fled for the stars—and the TITANs finished the process. As much as the history feeds make out how the TITANs swept across the Earth like one of the legendary plagues of old, decimating humanity and destroying our planet, the truth is that humans were well on the way to doing ourselves in. Only the massive efforts of geo-engineering projects were tenuously holding catastrophic climate change at bay, and the changes inflicted by resource depletion, technological advances, and the failure of classic market economics had humans tearing into each other based on petty tribal loyalties. The TITANs were active for months before humanity realized there was another team on the field, and by that time the game was already lost. It didn't take long for the authorities to recognize that they were outclassed and outgunned.

Which is when the call for a mass exodus began.

Most of the world's leaders were originally hesitant—no one wants to surrender their home. It quickly became apparent, however, that options were limited. Humans were losing, and the TITANs were unresponsive to offers of surrender. At the United Nations, plans were proposed, approved, and rapidly put into effect. Luckily most TITAN activity was confined to Earth at that point, so major effort was put into keeping the TITANs confined there and immediately squelching or at least containing any off-planet outbreaks. Rather than fighting the TITANs head-on, military units switched to rear-guard defensive actions, buying as much time as possible for the evacuation. Working in concert for the sake of our species' very survival, the people of the world united with a single terrible purpose.

The Exodus was easily the largest rescue effort ever attempted, and so naturally it was plagued with problems from the start. Despite all the manpower, machinery, technology, and funding devoted to the project, there was a major bottleneck in that there were only so many ways to get people physically off the planet. The space elevators and orbital lifters worked at breakneck speed, packed to capacity. With space at a premium, this option was sometimes only available to the wealthy and privileged, or to those the governments, militaries, and hypercorps deemed a top priority to save. Others were simply lucky enough to win a rescue lottery and be packed aboard a refugee carrier. Options for where to take these people were also limited, of course. Despite calling on every ship and habitat in the solar system for aid, there was only so much life support to go around. Try not to think about how many people were lucky enough to escape

SOL-MERCURY
VENUS
EARTH
EARTH ORBIT
LUNA
MARS
INNER FRINGE
ANETARY CONSORTIUM
GAME INFORMATION

off-world, only to suffocate to death in a cramped metal box when their ship's life support ran out because the station they were docked at was already packed to capacity and refused to open the airlock.

There were other ways to escape, of course, such as egocasting. The number of morphs available off-world was another hindrance, however, leading to the massive influx of infugees we still have in the system today. Try also not to think of how many people are still locked away as an infomorph in cold storage somewhere or trapped in a simulspace no one ever plans to let them out of. Quite a number of people opted to back themselves up off-planet and continue to fight or try to survive on Earth. These the TITANs slaughtered and uploaded by the millions. Still others opted to have their body euthanized after the upload, rather than risk capture by the TITANs. Uploading centers quickly transformed into tombs, overloaded with mass suicides.

In the end, the Earth was left behind, barricaded and shielded by the finest defensive systems ever created. No one was allowed back in, for fear of encountering TITANs or one of the many technological attacks they released and left behind. Humanity divorced itself from its home planet, and the separation was total and final.

You've heard all of that before, of course, but that's not really the end of the story. There's something that never gets discussed—at least not in the inner system or Jovian Republic, where the media engineers carefully avoid the subject and the censorbots nuke any stray references that get past. It's the elephant-sized mass grave in the room. Despite the portrayal of the Exodus as a heroic effort that was largely successful in rescuing everyone possible, the truth is that billions were left behind. Abandoned to the machines. I'm not talking about people already killed or captured by the wars or TITANs, I'm talking about those who were still queued up in line when whomever erected the barricade cut it off and slammed the doors.

Let's face it. The governments—what was left of them—were in complete disarray. Entire evacuation centers and refugee camps were simply forgotten. Some countries were simply too poor or too low on the totem pole to get their people to safety—just take a look at the criminally small percentage of African nationals who made it off Earth, compared to their percentage of the pre-Fall population. Some would call that de facto ethnic cleansing. Other countries were too obstinate, and refused to evacuate or let their people leave. It is without doubt that the evacuation process collapsed and went awry in many areas. Military units rescued their own friends and families while leaving those next in line behind. In many cases, especially in the last few panicked days, those responsible for evacuating people went completely mercenary, rescuing only those who could pay exorbitant sums. How many criminal cartels made their first fortune this way, ghoulishly choosing who would live and who would die?

The fact of the matter is, there were still billions of people on Earth when the blockades were erected. People who were not backed up off-world when the Earth was sealed in a ring of automated defenses, laser grids, killsats, and orbiting smart mines. What exactly happened to them? That's anybody's guess. There were a few attempts to run the blockade from both sides and keep rescuing people, of course, but these were ruthlessly shot down. Maybe that was murder, or maybe those ships were carrying infected people or TITAN technology. After a while, people stopped trying. No one else tried to escape. We're supposed to believe that's because no one down there is left.

Now, to this day, no one claims responsibility for erecting the fence. Everyone assumes it's the Planetary Consortium, of course, and they're certainly the ones most vocal about blockade enforcement being in everyone's best interests. They refuse to take credit (or blame, as it were) or even to speculate who might have done it, however, which could just be a media ploy to avoid recrimination and taking the fall for something that was ugly but quite likely necessary. Then again, maybe it was someone or something else, and they don't want to give away the fact that they don't know who. It's certainly a possibility that some uber-rich hyperelites pooled their resources and did it on their own, merely as a measure to save their own investments. Someone that powerful you don't want to piss off.

The TITANs? Yeah, I've heard that speculation, but I don't buy it. The barricade defenses have been equal opportunity in who they shoot down, and I don't see why the TITANs would strike their own forces. They were soundly kicking our asses, too, so it doesn't make sense to me that they would erect the fence to keep us out. Sure, maybe the TITANs aren't a unified bunch and some of them built the barricade while others opposed it, but that seems a stretch. Occam's Razor says it was most likely a transhuman project. Heck, maybe Firewall or its precursors did it. At this point, I'm not even sure it matters anymore.

In case you're wondering, yes, it is current Firewall policy to enforce the cordon. There is plenty to worry about down on Earth that is still dangerous. At this point in the game, anything trying to leave Earth is more likely a bogey than someone needing rescue.

In fact, that's why you're here. Firewall stations sentries here to keep an eye on the perimeter. If anything escapes Earth, we want to know about it. That's just a part of the operation, but it may in fact be the most important part. We also want to know if anything or anyone goes down to Earth, not to mention anything that might still be kicking up activity down planetside. There's more of that than you might expect, but we'll get to that.

So you got that? Our main job is to watch and to report anything interesting back to Firewall. Let me tell you, it may sound easy, but it will get to you. I've been working this post for years now. I've had enough of thinking about that mudball, even if it used to be

our home. You spend as much time thinking about it as I have, about what might be alive or lurking just below those murky clouds, and you'll be ready to leave it for good. I'd rather be anywhere else than sitting above this dead world for another day, waiting for it to come alive again so it can devour me whole.

INTERDICTION TODAY

Want to see what every would-be scavenger and explorer is up against? Take a look. There, that data feed. The one with all the activity. That's the barrier. That's what enforces the interdiction of Earth.

Firewall has mapped this cordon as best we can. That's another prime component of this project—map the barricade. Everything in it, every component, every orbital path, every capability, every frequency, every pattern, every hole. The more we know, the better we can take a stab at punching through it should we ever need to.

In case you're wondering, the current census counts over two thousand orbiting satellites as part of this cordon in low-Earth orbit, roughly between 300 and 350 kilometers above the dirt. Some of these are killsats loaded with enough intelligence, sensors, weapons, electronic countermeasures, and counter-countermeasures to severely disable an impressive military space fleet. But they're not alone, of course. There are also sensor platforms out the wazoo, detection arrays that can pinpoint a speck in a crowded room. These scan the area above and around the Earth in a constantly shifting, overlapping field. Most numerous of all are over a thousand nimble micro-, nano-, and pico-satellites and smart mines that swarm about to jam, intercept, sabotage, or crash into targets or repair and protect the larger defensive systems.

Those green dots are the signal jammers. They create so much static it's a wonder we can still see straight. Nothing in and nothing out, plus they fuzz the barricade itself so no one can try doing exactly what we're doing now, spotting and tagging and charting each defense. This is top-of-the-line electronic deception, years ahead of what is commonly available to the hypercorps or public at large.

Those blue dots? Those would be smart mines. Some are attached to abandoned stations, orbiting asteroids, and space junk. Some are just floating free on their own, camouflaged or invisible to sensors, while others use minijets to maintain their orbit, coming to life and charging anything that approaches too close.

These red dots are hunter-killer drones. They float dark and silent, in passive sensor reception mode, a second sphere of defense. They're also in low Earth orbit, anywhere from 400 to 2,000 kilometers up. If anything gets too close to the cordon from the outside, or manages to break through from the inside, it will get swarmed by these bots—and they're nasty little machines. Judging by some of the radiation signatures we've picked up over the years, some of these are loaded with nukes. You know, in case the gigawatt lasers, particle beams, railguns, shrapnel bursts, or antimatter missiles wielded by the killsats aren't enough. The Van Allen belt is already thicker due to a couple of high-altitude nukes deployed during the Fall; I'd hate to think what more bombs might do.

That icon there? That's us. That's right. You're wondering how we're stationed here in LEO in the middle of the damn barricade without getting killed, eh? Well, I'll tell you. You turn your opponent's strength against them.

Us, here, we're riding smack on the back of this detection array. Hiding on a component of the fence is pretty unnerving, but it works. No one looks for us here. We piggyback our signals on theirs, right past the signal jammers. Their sensors can't see us and we're tapped in to their network, so we have access to all their scans. This means that we get a lot of our raw intel and sensor data direct from the orbital sensor arrays, not to mention a few hidden orbital spies of our own. Every time someone or something tries to run the barricade, we have a front row seat. And with every show we learn a bit more about how it all works, how complete the coverage is, all without risking a single Firewall operative. Well, unless you count our infomorph selves, hanging out in this simulspace-cum-data tap station. Our digital asses are hung out to dry here, as it were, should this op ever be discovered.

On the positive side, over the years we've mapped out several different plans that we're reasonably sure would work as a way to breach the barricade.

Reasonably sure.

GEOGRAPHY OF A WASTELAND

If all we do is sit up here, how can we even know what's going on down there? That's what you're wondering, right?

We're Firewall. We've got tech even the hypercorps don't know exists. In any case, the signal blockers can only do so much—it's next to impossible to hide an entire planet from scrying telescopes, though all the soot in the air down there doesn't help. The blockade is intended more to keep anyone from leaving the planet or setting foot on Earth again. They don't worry too much about scans. After all, it's just a smoking hulk anyway, right?

Well, a lot of it, yeah.

C'mere. I'll show you. This is the monitor array. We've got the whole variety here: long-range and short, geothermal and optical, atmospheric and subterranean. This bank shows the raw data. This bank translates it all, running it through the filters and translation programs to make sense of everything. And this one? This one puts it all together to give us a comprehensive view.

Yep, that's the Earth.

What? Oh, yeah, that's the topographical overlay. Go ahead, bring it up. Wild, huh? It's funny. All that

devastation, all that destruction, all those deaths. They barely scratched the planet's surface.

Which isn't to say the fighting didn't leave some nasty scars. Take a look there. Yeah, there. That big shiny disc. That used to be a city. Well, a metroplex. Ever hear of Chicago? No? Well, it was a major city, back in the day. United States Midwest. Called it the Windy City, because it was right next to one of the Great Lakes and always had air currents off there, anything from a stiff breeze to a heavy gale. Merged with Milwaukee after a time, formed one of the first great American metroplexes. During the Fall, someone detonated an antimatter bomb above it—the Consortium blames the TITANs for setting it off, though the AIs mostly avoided using WMDs. Why they'd use something like that when they seemed intent on capturing and uploading as many people as possible hasn't ever been answered. Most think it was the North American government itself, trying to eliminate a suspected TITAN stronghold—or maybe keeping the TITANs from acquiring something dangerous here. Whatever the reason, the blast took out the entire metroplex and everything in a two hundred kilometer radius. All that's left is that glassy crater there, earth and metal and flesh and bone all fused together in a nanosecond. Flash-burned the lake to steam, of course, which in turn cooked all the clouds nearby and left a permanent thermal updraft there. That's why you can always see that spot—I call it the Big Shiny—from orbit. No cloud cover at all. Ever.

It's not the only scar, of course. There are craters pockmarking the planet from mass drivers, which the militaries tried using against the TITANs and specifically their factories. Worked, too—crushed those automated building sites flat in a heartbeat. Crushed anything else nearby too, but they figured everyone in the vicinity was already dead or worse anyway, so it wasn't much of a loss. In some spots, where the crust was particularly thin, the mass drivers actually broke through the magma beneath, creating lava plumes like little mini-volcanoes or just releasing a river of lava that flowed out until it hardened and capped itself.

For the most part, the planet got off light—at least geographically. The continents are still all there. Most of the mountains survived. Most of the oceans and seas, too, though they've changed in other ways. Rivers got diverted a little, but they're still flowing in a lot of places. It's amazing how much abuse Earth's taken, but it hasn't crumbled away or burst open yet.

At least, not from lack of trying on our part.

Hell, the Earth was already drastically transformed in the decades before the Fall, thanks to the severe climate changes and the desperate geo-engineering projects that tried to fix them. Reduced ice caps, vanished glaciers, desertification, coastal flooding, vast lakes gone dry. Some of the terraforming projects left some odd landscapes, though any gains resulting from reforestation, desert reclamation, river diversion, and similar tasks were mostly wiped out by the Fall. You can still see some signs, though. See that expanse of rocks? That used to be a desert—the Gobi, one of the most inhospitable places on the planet, nothing but dust and dust and dust as far as the eye could see. For decades before the Fall, the Gobi was expanding south, eating up grasslands and agricultural fields with dust storms. Nothing lived there. They tried to reclaim major portions of it by altering the climate, adding cloud cover to block sunlight and lower the temperature, adding rocks and soil to give the place more moisture and something for plants to cling to. They pierced the surface in a few places and poured in water, hoping to create aquifers and wells



and streams. They even built a Green Wall of China several times over, hoping to seed expanses of tree cover. Didn't work. Wound up with gravel and geysers and dust storms—and rockstorms—instead. Bad idea, messing around with nature. She knows what she wants and she usually gets it.

There's still a great deal of majesty down there, you know. You look at those mountain ranges. Miles and miles high, nothing but sharp-edged rock and snow-covered peaks, jutting up into the sky. You could stand there and never know there'd been people down below, never know there were TITANs and nanoswarms and killbots and all the other messes we brought to this world. Just you and the sky and the rocks. That hasn't changed. We scarred her, we shook her, and then we left her behind and chained her so she couldn't follow us.

But Mother Earth still has her pride, and she still has her looks. All you've gotta do is glance down there to see 'em.

CLIMATE CHANGES

We may not have changed the surface all that much, but the weather? That's a whole other story. The climate, the seasons, the air currents—oh, those we fucked up good and proper.

Where to start? See this map? That's a geothermal display. Shows the surface and air temperatures around the globe. Now take a look at this. This is something I've been working on in my spare time—and I've got a lot of spare time, sitting around up here dreaming up new exotic morphs and making sure nothing on the mudball below is trying to break loose.

This is, as near as I can recreate it, what the geothermals would have looked like right before the Fall.

Yeah, I know. Huge difference, right? A lot of that we did ourselves. Some of it the TITANs did for us. All that mass driving, the antimatter bomb, the nukes—they all mucked up the climate around the planet, shattered air currents, threw it all into chaos. From the reports I've seen, during the Exodus the weather was completely insane. Anything could happen anywhere, and often did—snowstorms followed by heatwaves, sudden massive hail out of a clear blue sky, torrential rain that turned to steam as it fell because the air was superheated. People were afraid to go outside. Houses and vehicles were destroyed by lightning strikes, hailstorms, hurricanes, tornadoes. Coastal settlements had to be completely abandoned—tsunamis became a regular occurrence, sometimes multiple times a day. It was a madhouse.

Things have settled some since then. New weather patterns emerged, new currents asserted themselves. In a few places everything returned to normal. But most of the world? A brand new normal applied.

It's not just the nuclear winter that wreaked so much havoc, though that caused plenty. All that soot in the air, blocking out the sun, lowering temperatures, cooling the planet, reducing precipitation. Heck, there are glaciers now where there haven't been for centuries. But there's another factor at work: TITAN nanoswarm weather machines. Throw enough nanobots into the clouds capable of altering their reflectivity and you essentially have a programmable greenhouse gas. These microscopic critters can significantly alter weather patterns, giving you years of summer, winter, or something stranger, like tornado clusters or hail in the desert. Masses of these are still floating around, self-replicating, changing conditions left and right, but if they're all following the same program, it doesn't show. What they have done is made the weather and climate unpredictable.

Look at this stretch here. That's Europe. France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Britain—they were all there. Northern Europe tended toward the cold and rainy, while southern Europe was sunny and warm. Now? Sub-arctic. All of it. Temperature's down to around -4C, and you don't even want to know what it drops to at night. Snow drifts fifty feet deep—most of the old buildings that survived the Fall are so buried you can't even see them. I'll zoom in—there, that dome, off to the left of those skyscraper remnants? That used to be a place called St. Paul's Cathedral, the grandest church in all of Britain. It's hundreds of feet tall. The rest of it is probably still under the snow and ice, but it'd take a pile of mining-rated drills months to cut through. All the rivers are long since frozen, of course—the Thames, the Seine, the Rhine. Famous waterways, now just ice channels beneath more ice.

That's the cold. Then there's the heat. Used to be Africa, considered one of the cradles of humanity, home to some of the oldest civilizations in history. It was always hot there, and dry once you left the coast, but now it's just desert. Not a lot of water anymore, is part of the reason—precipitation's down more than half, thanks to the nuclear winter, so whatever water didn't get boiled away or frozen is all that's left. Same with North America—most of it is sand and dust now, blown about by constant winds. Firestorms are common—the air's so dry a single spark of rock against rock can ignite it, and all that dust catches fire, sweeping across the plains in great burning sheets. Down there, that used to be the Everglades, one of the greatest swamplands in the world. Trees and marshes for miles, so thick you could walk across branches and skip across roots without ever getting wet. Most of it's still there, and you still won't get wet, but that's because the water's all gone—steamed out by nearby blasts and then starved of replenishing rains by altered weather patterns. Cooked the trees from the inside out, so most of 'em burst open, but those trunks and roots are too thick to give way so there's still a huge tangle, only now it's all dead and blackened. The Amazon in Brazil, in South America, that's in some ways worse. Tidal waves took it, the largest forest in the world, and drowned trees hundreds of feet tall. Shattered logs float for miles around that coastline,

To: Dyer
From: Danforth

I've studied those ground-penetrating scans that came back with the core samples from the latest Antarctic mission. We may have a problem here. I think you may want to check the sensor software, because these readings seem to be a bit off. Specifically, they're indicating a semi-liquid mass approximately 3.5 kilometers under the ruins of the Dome C station. Looking at time-lapse video reveals strange, near-geometric patterns in the mass, almost like crystal formations, but it's not ice. I want to make sure these aren't false readings because if we go to Lake and the rest and try to convince them that it's worth more resources, we need to be on solid ground.

If these readings are legit, then I see three possible explanations, and two of them scare the shit out of me. Hopefully, and I mean this in every way, the readings are the liquid-water runoff from a reactor process set up by a group of survivors who managed to ride out the Fall and the aftermath by digging in deep and staying down there. This would mean we have people living under Antarctica in probably hellish conditions, but it's better than the alternatives.

It's far more likely, however, that we're dealing with some sort of TITAN activity. The regularity of the fractal patterns in the liquid scans points at a machine source, not something biological. This then begs the question of what the TITANs are doing 3.5 klicks under the ice that they'd rather we not get a good look at. Which only makes it more imperative that we do get a good look. I think I speak for most of transhumanity when I say I'd rather live a long, full life with no more TITAN surprises.

Finally—and I only mention this because of Peabody's certainty that a gate must exist on Earth—well, this seems to fit the bill. Remote part of the planet, not a whole lot of pre-Fall development, it's buried, buried quite deep in fact, and it's giving off readings we're having trouble coming to grips with. If that doesn't scream potential alien artifact, I'm not sure what else might. Of course, this is bad because there's almost no way we'd be able to get to it, at least not without alerting anyone else with eyes on the planet that we're up to something. And once that happens and once they get a clue what we're after … well we all know what that looks like.

Again my hope is that you can tell me the software is glitching out and I'm just leaping to fantastic conclusion, because if not we may be soon living in interesting times again. ♣

EARTH RECLAMATION PROJECT B-379: AGRICULTURAL STATUS REPORT

After careful analysis of the various soil samples collected, we can conclusively report that portions of the Earth's surface are still more than capable of sustaining proper plant growth. Soil composition is high in nitrates and other critical minerals, low in heavy metals and irradiated compounds. The decomposition of so much organic life during the Fall may have helped to enrich the soil.

Not all surface areas are so promising, however. Tests have determined massive populations of nanobot swarms in some soil samples, potentially covering the entire subsurface of some regions. The purpose of these swarms is unclear, but they certainly have the capability of altering soil composition and in many cases have done so over vast areas.

Water samples have also been studied and found equally mixed. Decomposed organic matter exists in high concentrations in many volumes, offering a substantial increase in minerals and nutrients for any plants partaking of the substance. Radiation is typically minimal and not present in sufficient levels to pose a threat. A small percentage of the sampling showed an extremely high salt content, but this was not the norm. Similar to the soil, nanobot infestation points to the possibility of chemically and physically altering the properties of massive volumes of water. Some oceans, lakes, and rivers have been drastically de-oxygenated, making them inhospitable to life.

Surface temperatures and wind speeds are more problematic. High winds would uproot all but the sturdiest plants, and in many areas the surface is too frigid for plants to burst through or too hot for plants to survive long. There are many locations, however, with enough wind protection and appropriately moderate temperatures. Large farms would be impossible without heavily shielded walls but smaller growing enclaves are entirely feasible.

CONCLUSION

With careful location selection (free of nanoswarm infestation), appropriately chosen and treated seeds, and some light protection from the harsher elements, we see no reason vegetation could not be restored to the planet on a limited basis, enough to feed several small settlements. With time more land could be reclaimed, the vegetation aiding to shift the climate back to more acceptable levels. Larger tracts of land could be tilled and farmed. Within the space of a century the Earth could produce enough fresh produce to provide for at least two hundred thousand people. Initial attempts to seed genetically-modified and neogenetic plant strains in isolated areas has been quite promising. The largest unknown factor remains the presence of TITAN nanoswarms and the ability to apply countermeasures to counteract their influence, especially should they become aggressive. ■

and some of those trees are still there, waving just below the surface, their thick trunks as soggy and soft as wet noodles.

Are there stretches where the plants survived? Some. Not many, though. Little patches along the coasts where the waves never got too bad, isolated pockets and valleys amid the mountains where the rocks kept the temperatures regulated and blocked out the winds. A few oases among the deserts, a handful of gaps in the frozen wastes of Europe where stands of evergreens blocked out the cold and the snow so smaller plants could survive.

The air's gone bad down there, of course, though there isn't anyone to breathe or pollute it anymore. Yeah, you can still breathe it, even without a lung-filter. You wouldn't want to, though. Whole place smells weird, like chemicals, smoke, and raw sewage—especially the oceans.

Speaking of chemicals, it's important to carry a chemical sensor down there for one big reason: methane. It's odorless, so you won't smell it, but if your chem sensor goes off, you'd better run, and fast. Why? Well, Earth's got these massive methane pockets underground, scattered here and there. Still down there, as far as anyone knows. The only reason they didn't emerge is the cold—frozen deep in the soil. But with global warming that could've changed. One good thing about nuclear winter, it drops the temperature so the methane stays frozen. Probably. Except in areas where the tectonic plates shifted and broke open deposits or cleared new cave systems, allowing more air to get through and warm things up. And places where the radiation produced heat of its own. As far as I can tell, there haven't been any major methane releases yet, but I've a feeling it's only a matter of time.

Heat. Don't go anywhere without sun-shielding. No ozone layer anymore, or very little, especially over what used to be the major population centers, so the UV rays'll fry you in minutes if you're not covered. Second-degree sunburn isn't convenient for intrepid explorers.

Oh, and don't forget the active hot spots. See this display? Those used to be the major cities and research centers—the TITANs targeted them first, killed or carried off everyone they could. Many of these were nuked. In most places, the fallout long ago ceased to be a threat. In a few areas known to have large infected populations, though, the bombs were salted with Cobalt-60. If a dirty nuke was deployed, it's probably still too hot to touch without a special morph or a containment suit. At least the air there is clear—the blasts turned everything organic to ash, so it doesn't smell bad. You'll just get covered with a fine residue of what used to be your ancestors.

Ash is everywhere, really. Tons of it in the upper atmosphere, drifting down slowly over the years. Hard to see half the time, and everything on you—and in you—gets coated with the stuff. Plays havoc with ground sensors, radar arrays, things like that. The good news is, it messes with everyone equally, so anyone or anything hunting for you in that mess'll have a hard time distinguishing you from the ash and other particles all around you. Except maybe the nanoswarms.

Speaking of, watch out if you see anything that looks like a looming cloud front, especially one moving with a lot more direction and speed. It won't be a storm, at least not a natural one.

Still think it'd be fun to go down and take a walk around?

NOBODY LEFT?

There's nobody down there. That's what all the official reports say.

Don't believe them.

SURVIVORS

Firewall's had drones and people down there. Reclaimers too. And we're not the only ones. Numerous reports from these expeditions have found signs of habitation. I'm not talking about ruins, TITANs, or exsurgents. No, there are definitely survivors. Who and how many is the question.

Look at the facts. We know not everyone was evacuated. We don't know how many people died during the Fall, but we know that the pre-Fall population counts and the estimated number of refugees and survivors are not even close, even when you factor in the casualty counts. Let's say, for the sake of argument, there were fifty million people left behind. That figure is most likely extremely conservative, considering that not everyone that uploaded killed their old body. This fifty mil isn't all in one place, of course, but scattered all over the globe. Still, fifty million people is a lot—some alone, some in small groups, a few here and there in larger groups as many as a few thousand or tens of thousands. They've got the whole world to hide in. The TITANs probably got quite a few. Starvation, exposure, radiation, and disease probably killed most of the rest. If one-tenth of one percent of these poor souls survived, however—and again, I'm being conservative—that means that at least fifty thousand are still alive somewhere. Conservatively.

Imagine what these survivors had to cope with. They're stuck on Earth with no way out. Even if they could find or build a ship, they'd get shot down by those freshly installed automated defenses. Most earthbound transmitters were all blown apart by remote charges after the last uploads, as a scorched earth policy, to make sure viruses couldn't be sent after them. Even if someone did get a transmitter working again, that'd just draw attention from the TITANs faster than the people could use the system to egocast out or call for help. So those left behind had to survive in the smoking remains, because there wasn't anything else they could do.

Assuming they could avoid the TITANs, they had the whole world to pick over, what's left of it anyway. Anything they can find is theirs to scavenge. There are plenty of places to hide if they're capable of travel and are willing to avoid old population centers. Not a lot of food to speak of, that'd be the biggest problem. A lot of nanofabbers were destroyed or infected—if you're trying to cripple an enemy nation you hit its food and water supplies, it equipment and ammo, and in this case that means intelligent viruses designed to locate, penetrate, and corrupt nanofabbers so they either didn't work at all or only produced toxins, poisons, explosives, and other deadly items. Most of the world's agriculture got obliterated by the climate changes, and there isn't anyone out there to ship them fresh produce anyway. So they've got to survive on whatever they can find, any processed foods left behind and still edible, any animals still alive to be slaughtered and cooked.

Water's less of a problem, provided you can get to a water source. It might be irradiated, but that'll only kill you slow. Dehydration'll kill you a lot faster. Shelter isn't an issue—plenty of that. Weaponry, too. And vehicles, so you can cover ground, though doing so'll draw attention to anything else left behind. Still, it's possible. If they were level-headed and thought things through, marshaled their resources and worked together, people could survive.

But for how long?

That was a decade ago. How long before they ran out of food completely? Succumbed to radiation poisoning? Ran afoul of a nanoswarm? Got careless and beheaded by a headhunter bot?

Take a look at this. This is the planet's energy emissions. Strictly manufactured, too—no lightning strikes or geothermal updrafts. These are all artificially produced and controlled. I've filtered out all of the readings that we know indicate TITAN remnant activity. Lots of little lights still showing, clustered together in a handful of places, right? The highlands of what was Papua and New Guinea. The Ozark Mountains in North America. The jungles of Vietnam and Laos. All places people could hide out, gather, and find food. A few of these others? Those are the Black Caves of North Dakota there, and those are the Swiss Alps. Good places to seek shelter, even set up an underground settlement. And these? These are underwater, but we had underwater colonies before the Fall—who's to say a few didn't survive?

So all those lights? Those could be people down there. People who've survived all this time, and are still tech-savvy enough to use equipment and draw power.

There's no guarantee of course. They could be automated systems, keeping a nice population of skeletons air conditioned. They could be TITAN machines. Maybe even TITAN machines using energy emissions to draw people into their traps.

Of course, the TITAN remnants are capable of spotting these emissions as well. Judging by how some sources have terminated in the past decade, it's likely they do. Or we could give the survivors some credit and say that some of these emitters are decoys, maybe even lures by survivors who are still fighting and hoping to lure TITAN machines into ambush. I'd like to think that if I were a survivor, I'd find some way of concealing my emissions to keep the TITANs away, not to mention conserving power for survival. Then again, how would any rescuers find me? So I'd probably leave some emission source running, and engineer some way of monitoring it, so if rescuers did ever show up there, I'd know.

Know anything about neutrinos? We get occasional neutrino bursts from the Earth's surface, sometimes even great big waves of 'em. They never last, though. We've made some efforts to pinpoint their origins using a few neutrino arrays, but they must be mobile. The question then is, who's doing the broadcasting? And who're they sending to?

There's no way to know, of course, without going down and looking. That's an exceptionally dangerous proposition, and something Firewall is unwilling and unequipped to do. We need to stay up here and keep an eye on everything. There are some reclaimer groups that might be crazy enough to try taking a look. I won't say that I haven't been tempted to pass along some data to 'em, through anonymous channels, just on the off-chance they'll try. I'm afraid I'd just be sending them to their death, though, or worse, they'd bring something infected back.

It's an intriguing notion, though, isn't it?

EXSURGENTS

Here's another fact you'll never see aired within the Planetary Consortium: there are thousands of people still down there, still active, and we know exactly where they are. Possibly hundreds of thousands. Or more.

The trick is, they may no longer be human. Or even transhuman. They're infected. Exsurgents.

I highly recommend you read some of the military files on TITAN activities during the Fall. I'll decrypt them for you. You need to know. A lot of it's horrible stuff, ugly and nasty and completely vicious. Not everyone the TITANs captured was uploaded. Some were used in mass experiments, wedded to machines, transformed in nightmarish ways. Some were transformed into things that can only be called alien. Other still look human, but their minds are gone, replaced by some other intelligence.

When the TITANs left, these exsurgents were left behind. Mass populations of them. Many remain active, working with TITAN machines in old TITAN enclaves, dedicated to some alien purpose. Others have resumed what appears to be a normal transhuman lifestyle, though far removed and protected, safe from the occasional orbital bombardment we still rain down on them.

Entire settlements of transhumans who are no longer human. How creepy is that?

SLEEPERS

Then there are the cryo-tanks. Lots of people had themselves transmitted off-planet, into new morphs or holding databanks. The more confident had their old bodies destroyed after they'd been sent—why leave the husk laying about for anyone to find? But not everyone was that brave, and it never hurts to have a back-up. So most had their bodies cryogenically stored, just in case. Others couldn't afford to be transmitted and either didn't trust or couldn't get on any of the ships. They were cryogenically frozen too, but for them there weren't any uploads. They're in those storage tanks and nowhere else. As far as we know, a lot of these bodies are still there. Imagine it—thousands to tens of thousands of people from the Fall in frozen slumber, untouched by everything that's happened since. Think about how much we could learn about that time, and the real events, if we could find them and rescue them! Think about all the lost knowledge we could regain!

Not everybody wants that, of course. I've heard rumors of bounties on cryo-tank survivors. I don't know if it's true, but I do know one thing. The last thing the Consortium wants is a bunch of Fall survivors getting rescued and blabbing on the newsfeeds about what really went on down there.

PLANETFALL

So you're probably wondering, "How does somebody get down there, anyway? The whole planet's under interdiction!" Am I right?

There are ways.

If you're planning a physical landing, the first thing anyone does is get close. That's easy enough. There is tons of debris up here, just floating around. There are a whole slew of occupied habitats in Earth orbit, above the interdiction zone. There are also plenty of derelict habitats still floating around. So it's real easy to get within a stone's throw of the barricade and not have anybody pay you too much attention.

Getting past the barricade, now that's the tricky part.

Most of what hits it is just debris—bits of space junk in a decaying orbit or stray asteroids getting sucked in by Earth's gravity well. A lot of that'll get destroyed by the defenses or slide through but burn up upon entry. We track it all, and note size, composition, entry speed, angle of entry, and probable impact point. So do the Consortium's scanning systems.

I've seen a few hotshots actually try to run the barricade, counting on speed, armament, defenses, and tricky maneuvering. Most of these end up splattered all over the ionosphere. A few don't even make it past the Consortium's pickets, patrolling outside the cordon zone. The smart ones make an effort to map the fence out first. If you really take your time to study the barricade, there are definite gaps, spots where the grids don't quite overlap. Regions with fewer mines and less debris. Areas where the sentries are hampered by obstacles, and can't sweep as effectively.

It's almost like whomever erected the barricade planned it that way. And maybe they did. I would—set up a nasty fence to keep people out, then put a few careful holes in it so the really determined ones can find their way through but only at the spots I've already selected. Probably right above several equally nasty surprises I've prepared and left on the surface or floating in the upper atmosphere. Or, assuming the Consortium built the fence, maybe they have pre-set navigation channels for when they want to send their own ships down while still making it look like someone's running the barricade.

So if you plan it well, you improve your chances. The smaller your ship, the better off you are too, especially if you run stealthed, no visible burn, systems shielded, blacked out in radar-absorbing paint or wave-bending metamaterials. The reclaimers regularly send down reconnaissance drones that are small ships

GHOSTS IN THE WIND

To: Lars
From: Dex
Subject: Talking wind!

You're not gonna believe this! I made it in! Yeah, you know where—the Old Home. Can't say more, never know who's reading, but it's amazing! Just like the old vids, only better!

I didn't stay long—couldn't risk it. All kinds of crazy shit down there, and the guards were restless—my little nanos fooled them but I didn't know for how long, and I didn't wanna get trapped down there. I'm going back, though, definitely. You should come with me! You've gotta scan it for yourself! Ruins like you wouldn't believe! Stuff just laying about, out for the taking—I snagged a few souvenirs. Lots of nasties, too, but I was careful—they never spotted me. Dex the Ghost, right?

Anyway, here's the weirdest thing. On my way down and back out, I was picking up some weird interference. I isolated some of the static, and it's not static at all. It's voices! Check this out:

[Attached audio file, talkingwind1. Transcript follows:]

"Help me! Somebody help me!"

"Can anyone hear me? My name is Per Narsh, I am a junior-level net-tech from the Mumbai metroplex! My sigint is *[static]*"

"Is this Mars? This doesn't feel like Mars. I think something went wrong!"

"Laura? Don't cry, honey, Daddy's here. I'm here, baby. Laura?"

[End audio file transcript.]

Wild, huh? There's lots more, too—that's just the little bit I could filter out enough to understand. I've got a theory on what it means, and it'll blow you away, man! I'll tell you all about it when I get back. This shit is gonna be huge!

stripped of all extras, no passengers. Quite a few get through the cordon.

I think the best plans involve deception. Maybe you hide your drone or ship inside a space-rock or piece of debris and pray they don't blast you out of the sky just for target practice. Or you hire someone to make a suicide run as a distraction, while you sneak past. Maybe you sacrifice your ship, bailing out at the last second in a high-dive suit, so the sensors think you're just debris as you plummet into the atmosphere. Or maybe you pretend to be one of the maintenance drones that services the killsats and sensor arrays, shucking off your disguise and bolting for planet-side at a distance where you have better odds. Even better, use one of the maintenance drones to get to the derelict spaceport attached to the sole surviving space elevator (the Kilamanjaro one, that is—the mobile Pacific beanstalk went down during the Fall, crashing westward to Earth, and you can still see the scar where it lashed down across eastern Asia). The elevator stopped running long ago, but there's some indication the Consortium merely shut it down, rather than disabling it. Even if it couldn't be reactivated, a makeshift device could theoretically be used to crawl or slide down the cables.

It's easier, of course, to sacrifice your ship if you don't plan on flying back off. Getting out through the barricade is even more challenging than getting in, especially with gravity working against you. If you

SECURITY REPORT

Consortium Security Protocol Alpha-Gamma-7R activated

Subject Dex taken into custody, illegal Earth artifacts confiscated, files destroyed, cortical stack destroyed, backups wiped. Further analysis follows:

Voices heard in Earth atmosphere confirmed as genuine Fall-era individuals. Theorize that the individuals, in an effort to escape the TITANs, uploaded into a secure simulspace environment. These infomorphs lack an exit mechanism and thus remain trapped within the simulspace, though they have somehow accessed an insecure transmission point. Transmission frequency is weak and irregular. No action required. Without external aid individuals will remain within simulspace indefinitely, or until interception by TITAN remnants and neutralization occurs. Case closed, but signal frequency monitoring ongoing. ♣



carry with you the means to egocast out or you're just sending down a bot or making a suicide mission, you increase your chances significantly.

You don't have to go it alone, either. There are scavengers who head down there periodically, and they've been known to take passengers along if you can either pay them enough or simply intrigue them. The reclaimers often send missions down too, and they might give you a lift if you can convince them it'll be worth their while. Or you might find some other individual or some hypercorp planning to send a team down, and partner up—improve your resources and increase your chances.

Oh yeah, I should mention the deliberate "assaults." There are still Lunar mass drivers that grab asteroids and hurl them down on Earth from time to time—they were built during the Fall and programmed to attack suspected TITAN assembly sites, and no one's bothered to deactivate them. The good news is, we have scanners set up in that direction and we get plenty of advance warning, so we can get well out of the way. I only hope anyone still alive down below has equally good equipment, or they might get flattened—those asteroids always make it down to the surface. Now, someone who was really determined might look at those mass driver shots as a way of catching a lift. The killsats always let them by.

Wouldn't that be a wild ride?

THE EGOCASTING OPTION

The easiest method of bypassing the cordon, of course, is to beam your ego past it. This assumes you've got a resleeving rig lined up to receive you down below, of course, which is a big assumption. Squeezing a small drone with, say, an ego bridge and a swarmanoid morph or two past the barricade is an easier and safer proposition than a full ship. Then you could just beam yourself down, sleeve up, and get to business—maybe even find yourself a better morph to switch to. The cordon's signal jammers might screw up a regular radio egocast, so your safest bet would be to cram a neutrino transceiver on that drone too.

Now, if you were some organization that had some vested interest in regular trips down to Earth, this would be a smart plan. Particularly if you went about finding and reclaiming some old resleeving facility as one of your first objectives. If you kept it hidden from the TITANs and stocked with morphs, you'd have a stable path for getting people down to Earth. Getting off presents a whole 'nother set of problems, but if you can't egocast off, smuggling a small rocket drone past the blockade is again an easier and safer option, assuming you have cargo. So that's what I suspect a group with a vested interest in getting to and from would do, such as an organized scavenger group. Or the reclaimers. Or Firewall.

Just sayin'.

Now, let's say you were a hypercorp, or some black ops government agency, or some really rich schmuck, and you had the foresight back during the Fall to set something like this up before you bailed off-planet. Then you have half of the problem already solved, yes?

Again, just sayin'.

RUINS

An entire civilization, an entire world, laid waste and left to rot. Buildings of all types and sizes, just sitting there empty and open. Everything from houses to labs to shopping centers to government factories.

The fact that the civilization is ours only makes it that much more scary.

It's amazing just how much things can fall apart in a single decade. We thought we'd built to last, but without constant maintenance wood rots, concrete crumbles, steel rusts. Add in the effects of nuclear winter, biological agents, nanoswarms, severe weather, and other factors, and you're lucky any buildings are left standing. Hell, some of the structures down there look more like they're centuries old than decades—walls crumbling to bits, ceilings and floors collapsing, windows shattered, curtains and other fabrics rotted away, wiring melted, circuits fried. You're taking your life into your hands just stepping through a doorway. Attempting a staircase is almost certain suicide.

Not that everything is like that, of course. Some buildings had shielding and state-of-the-art materials and self-repair systems. This is especially true of government and corporate structures and the homes of the really wealthy—they're either smoking holes in the ground or completely intact. The surviving ones may even still have active security systems, so without the proper identification you'll get treated as a hostile intruder. If you do get inside one of those intact buildings, though, it's amazing. It's like a living museum—it's our history and you're walking through it! And so much is still there! The clothes people left behind, personal items, pictures, memorabilia, entertainment discs, even food or at least the withered husks of it. I came back with an armload of items to puzzle over. Like this hat I replicated for my avatar. Yep, I have the real physical version stored away. I found it hanging in a closet down there. Fits me, too.

Then there are the bodies.

They're everywhere. Just skeletons now, of course, or ash, or outlines. But everywhere you turn you see signs of the dead. Our former friends and families, strewn all about us like so much trash. People in all shapes and sizes, too. Lots of different morph jobs, you can tell by the bones and the attachments—prosthetics last a lot longer than flesh and blood. Plenty of children, too. Not all of the bones have been left alone. Some have been moved. Disturbed. Gnawed upon.

Humans aren't the only ones who died en masse. The vast majority of complex life forms on Earth went extinct during the Fall. What the wars and TITANs

SCOUTING REPORT UPDATES

[Channel compromised. Decryption complete.]

Recent orbital scans and drone fly-bys have reported the following updates on various Earth locales:

Greater New York City Metroplex: Drones confirm, the city has been stripped bare of all organic material. Wood, cloth, paper, flesh, bone—all gone. Only concrete, metal, rock, and glass remain. Evidence suggests city was engulfed by a massive bioswarm. No sign of the bioswarm now—most likely departed in search of fresh organic matter.

Beijing: Parts of city in ruins, even still smoking in places. Hidden City, however, almost perfectly intact. Too perfect. Most likely a trap, either by TITAN remnants or by others.

Panama City: Urban areas here were leveled during the war. Signs of ruins being converted to basic dwellings suggests survivors from surrounding area have regrouped there and are slowly transforming former city into viable population center again. Drones spotted some evidence of TITAN war machine attacks, and of crude defenses against such.

Netherlands: Entire region submerged and frozen, but there is new evidence of possible underwater settlements. Survivors may have migrated here and stayed below the surface to avoid TITAN attacks.

Tashkent: New signs of TITAN-related activity here, including an active exsurgent population. No indication of purpose. Recommend a targeted Lunar mass driver strike.

didn't kill, the climate changes did. Animal bones are just as common, if not more common, than humans. The shores are littered with the remains of murdered sea life. Not all died off, of course. Who knows, there may even be whale uplifts still surviving in the deep oceans. The hardy animals survive and continue to evolve. Some seized upon openings created by the deaths of rival species to expand. I'm not just talking rats and cockroaches, either, though both are doing well I hear.

AB-DOMES

A lot of Earth's cities had AB-Domes in place before or during the Fall. You read about those, right? They're a series of thin film layers held aloft by simple air compressors, forming a hemispheric shield over the entire city. The layers are transparent, and help regulate the weather and climate while protecting from attack—most attacks would detonate outside the dome and the film would stop any radiation, chemicals, or biological agents from getting through. They're also riddled with solar cells, so they provide power that's routed through the skin and into generators and batteries on the ground. A Russian named Alexander Bolonkin invented them, hence the name.

So what happened to them? Because obviously they didn't work.

It's simple, really. The TITANs either took out the air compressors, which meant the layers lost their shape and the domes collapsed, or they released nanobot swarms to literally consume the film layers. Either way, the cities were exposed.

Of course, AB-Domes can be made to any size. Smaller ones can be inflated in hours. They can also be stealthed with refractive metamaterials, making them invisible to radar and other sensors. This makes them an excellent tool for hiding a small settlement or camp from the TITANs or other prying eyes. It's possible that some old buildings, installations, towers, etc. had domes of their own and survived the Fall unscathed. Which means their inhabitants might have been left untouched as well.

Or survivors might be using them to lay low.

SALVAGE OPS

It says something about a human that can look out upon the wasteland of their home planet, the near-death of their species and civilization, and think of one thing: profit!

Maybe some scavs do it for the adventure, or to find some lost knowledge. Others might go for nostalgia, or simply laughs. Most of them, though, just go for profit. Not a surprise, really. Look at how much Earth artifacts are worth! This hat alone could buy me a couple of fully-customized exotic morphs—and it was just hanging there for anyone to grab! All you've gotta do is get down there and bring a few decent-sized containers and you could come back rich. If you can get back while hauling a hundred kilos or so of loot, that is. Not something I'd want to try.

Most would-be salvagers don't like those odds either. That's why they either go for small but valuable items or put together full-fledged salvage operations. The individuals and small teams look for pre-Fall tech, especially military- or corporate-issue. Some of that stuff is still more advanced than anything we have available now, so it's worth big bucks if they can bring it back off-world. Old knowledge, specific items, individual uploads (especially of the rich and famous), all of those are easily portable and extremely valuable. Finding it requires a lot of digging, though—sometimes literally, if the sites in question have been buried since the Fall. Sometimes it's a matter of research instead, hunting down clues beforehand so you can target your search precisely. The less time anyone has to spend down there, the better their chances of getting out alive.

The bigger operations go about things differently. They've all got funding, usually corporate but

sometimes from a wealthy collector. The Consortium doesn't allow such things, of course, but if the hypercorp or sponsor has enough influence, well, every once in a while the security bots malfunction and the grids lock up and larger holes appear in the blockade. They usually last just long enough for a salvage ship to slip through, and recur again a little while later just as the same ship is exiting. Assuming the ship manages to leave again, which isn't always the case. And if something happens to the salvage crew on Earth, well, they weren't supposed to be there in the first place, were they?

Salvage teams often go for specific locations and items as well, but they've got more people and more equipment so they can go for bigger hauls. Their favorite targets are those same military and corporate bunkers, but they have the manpower and firepower to fight their way through the security systems. Or at least to give it a decent shot.

I've seen plenty of prospectors and salvage teams come through here. Dozens have actually made it planet-side. At least a dozen have made it back off again safely, too. What they found and where it went and what happened to it after that, I have no idea. I do know that a few people got very rich right after some of those incidents—and in some cases a few people got very dead, too. There have been a few technological advancements with suspicious timing, but of course we can't prove any of it.

I also know at least one salvage op, out in what used to be Nevada, that I'm pretty sure was an actual Consortium operation. Not just that, but the little bit of chatter I picked up suggests it was a Project Ozma op. The minute I figured that out, I locked down tight. No way I want to cross those guys, especially not sitting here in my little floating prison. I'd jettison and try my luck passing through the barricade before I let them breach this place—and I'd blow it behind me. But be warned—Ozma's not done with Earth. I have no idea if they got what they wanted in Nevada, but I'm sure even if they did that wasn't all of it. They'll be back. When they do, we'd best stay out of their way.

HERE BE TITANs

TITANs, TITANs, TITANs. Our favorite bogeyman. The scourge of our existence, the bane of our history, the killer of our people, the destroyer of our world. I know, you're probably sick to death of hearing about them. But you need to hear more, because Earth is where they came from and where they were most active.

And as far as anybody knows, it's where they remain.

Sure, they disappeared, or at least went silent, right after the Exodus. Sure, they probably built the Pandora gates and disappeared for parts unknown. Sure, the factories went dead the same time they vanished, at least most of them. Yeah, a lot of their machines and nanoswarms and ongoing attacks went dormant or deactivated at the same time.

But not everything.

There are still nanoswarms down there that'll strip your parts, organic or otherwise, before you can blink. There are others that'll chew right through your stack and then drill back up through your skull. Airborne viruses can cripple your systems and overwrite your operating code, turning you into a walking, breathing bomb so you can't do anything but watch your own death. All sorts of warbots are still roaming loose, cutting apart anything they find.

Then there are the other ones. The ones that aren't just patrolling and killing. The ones that are … building. Take Moscow, or where it used to be. Capital of Russia, major population center, major waterway. The city itself was flattened during the war. But now there are new structures there. Big square ones, too perfectly aligned and spaced to be made by transhumans. TITAN work, for sure. But they aren't factories, or if they are they aren't operational yet, not even the first buildings that've been complete for several years now. So what are they? How many are they building? And what're they waiting for?

Or there's Mount St. Helens and Hawaii. Both were taken over by the TITANs early on, and both have gone dormant since. Not just dormant, actually, but zero geothermal activity. Not even normal surface levels of heat, which is pretty strange for volcanoes. It's like the TITANs have drained away all the lava, all the magma, and all the heat. But how? And what are they doing with all that thermal energy?

I've tried to make sense of it all, and I'm far from the only one. All sorts of Firewall analysts, not to mention freelance scavengers and explorers, have studied post-Fall TITAN activities, hoping to discern a pattern. A few things are easy to make out, like the fact that TITAN war machines and nanoswarms alike seem to avoid both the Tibetan plateau and the Black Hills. No idea why. They're all over Vietnam and Laos, though, and the entire Arabian peninsula seems to be one big nanoswarm. Why some areas and not others? Are they afraid of something, or holding back to draw more survivors into one easily ambushed location?

I wish I knew. One thing's certain, though: we haven't seen the last of the TITANs. Or their strategies. And neither has the Earth.

TITAN FORESTS

That? No, that's not a forest. Yeah, it's a TITAN activity zone, as marked. Let me explain: Not all the growth left on Earth is natural. Or organic.

The TITANs are just weird, ok? Nobody really knows what their plans are or were. Why did they upload so many humans? Why did they kill so many? Why did they engage in so many experiments? Why did they build so many weird things? Why did they leave—and where did they go?

Assuming the AIs weren't simply batshit crazy, they must have been up to something, or maybe several

somethings. Maybe that was the problem—maybe they had a bunch of coincidental or even competing agendas. No reason to think they all operated as a single unit, after all. In fact, there's plenty of evidence to the contrary.

Certainly some of them went a little crazy, making their own creations. Some of these built forests, though not with trees—or at least, not ones made of wood.

These forests look like postmodern sculpture. They're full of towering angular metal shapes, almost like someone carved abstract trees from fiberglass and copper and steel. And they are alive—solar cells laced through the structures provide energy for constant growth, sometimes so fast you can literally watch one of the "trees" shooting skyward. They're home to nanoswarms and to small mechanical creatures, like spider monkeys, but artificial. The critters tap the trees for their excess energy, living off the land.

Neither the flora nor the fauna likes biologicals much. Ever seen a tree attack someone? It isn't pretty.

Yeah, you wanna steer clear of those forests. Well clear. Because they can creep up on you.

RECENT EVENTS

We've had a lot more activity around here lately. In both directions. There's been an increase in energy emissions on the surface, for one thing, and it's been more concentrated. Whether that means some old systems are waking back up or the survivors are banding together and testing new devices, I don't know, but it worries me. Any increased tech use down there is bound to ultimately lead to people or things trying to breach the barrier from the inside, and that's bound to bring the entire Consortium running. If a ragtag fleet rose from the surface and tried to head off-world? My guess is the Consortium would unleash antimatter bombs again—but this time planetwide. They'd reduce Earth to a smoking cinder rather than let those people they claim never existed escape to prove them wrong. Assuming it's people and not something else.

We've had a lot more people aiming for planetfall in recent months, too. More individuals, more small units, and more big salvage ops. A lot of them are going the obvious routes, heading for former city centers and think tanks and labs, but some aren't. Some are branching out, targeting for more remote or less populous locations—and they know exactly where they're going, too. These aren't random wanderings. I've actually been wondering if a lot of these attempts aren't all related. Like somebody's casting a wide net, trying to dredge up something in particular and figuring it's better to send a lot of little attempts at once instead of one big obvious one. I don't know. But if that is the case, somebody knows something, and it's got to be big to be worth this kind of effort.

Another thing about most of these recent incursions: they haven't been government-sanctioned. They've had to fight their way through, each and every one of them. Which tells me whatever it is they're looking for, they don't want the Consortium to know about it. I'm all for anything that upsets the Consortium and shakes up the status quo, but Earth's archives and materials are a potential powder keg—if someone plans on blowing it, I'd just like enough warning that I can dive for cover.

The other thing going on is that the reclaimers have become even more vocal and active. They've been proposing plans left and right—terraforming, widespread radiation scrubbing, shifting the planet's axis to melt away the nuclear winter, reseeding the atmosphere with water to wash away the dust and ash, and so on. They've been winning some big individuals and even a few decent-sized companies to their cause. That's making the Consortium nervous, with the idea that the reclaimers could force them to lower the barricade and allow wide-scale reclamation. It makes Firewall nervous too. We simply don't know what dangers still lie down there.

As a response to all of this, the Consortium's added more enforcement craft to the outer zone patrols. A few weeks back they also beefed up some of the grids and upgraded a few of the bots. I've a feeling it's going to be harder than ever to sneak down to the planet now, and there may come a time when they close it off completely.

One thing I worry about, though: some of those rich bastards behind the Consortium are getting spooked. If they feel the reclaimers are close to getting their way, they might panic and push the Consortium to scorch everything, just to make sure nothing gets out—especially anything that could embarrass them or damage their authority.

Anything like the truth of what really happened during the Fall.

RECLAMATION BASE



To: Tate Markess (Vo Nguyen)
From: Reclamation Base 4

Base up and running. AB-Dome works fine. Soil scrubbers having some difficulty but should have usable soil within the month. Fast-grow plants will be up and producing within three months' time, as scheduled. Ice-well proceeding apace, should have drinkable water within the week. Defenses already up, no nanoswarm contact so far. Will be sending team out to establish RB-7 once everything here is settled—expect it to be operational within four months. Will report back in two weeks, earlier if situation changes. ♣



EARTH ORBIT

OVERVIEW

This report covers three areas:

History: How Earth orbit came to be the way it is. ■ p. 62

Society and Culture: The facts and quirks of orbital life. ■ p. 63

Lagrange Orbit Map: Lagrange points and key stations. ■ p. 63

THREATS

Firewall is actively monitoring these dangers:

Derelict Habitats: Some of these ruins contain lingering TITAN threats. ■ p. 74

Scrappers and Squatters: These occasionally stumble into dangerous affairs. ■ p. 75

Reclaimers: Their mission to break the cordon could unleash lingering TITAN threats. ■ p. 69



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HOT SPOTS

These places may be of particular interest to sentinels:

Vo Nguyen: Headquarters of the reclaimer movement. ■ p. 73

The Hexagon : Military base and stronghold for Direct Action. ■ p. 71

Fresh Kills: Scavenger base and black market outpost. ■ p. 71

FACTIONS AT PLAY

Numerous groups have a hand in orbital affairs.

The Lunar-Lagrange Alliance: An original space power that has seen better days. ■ p. 65

The Planetary Consortium: Concerned with keeping the cordon. ■ p. 67

The Organization: Orbital crime cartel or civic group? ■ p. 68

Reclaimers: Seeking to bring the homeworld back. ■ p. 69

EARTH ORBIT

Before the Fall, when Earth was still transhumanity's home and central point, those stations within Earth orbit held primacy. Their close proximity to the home planet gave them extreme importance, not to mention unrivaled access to resources and personnel. Of particular significance are those habitats located at the five Lagrange points, where gravitational and centripetal forces from the Earth and Luna "cancel out," allowing them to remain in a stationary position as they rotate with both bodies, with little or no need for station-keeping or attitude adjustments. Literally thousands of satellites, stations, habitats, factories, and bases existed in these fixed points in space, and most of them flourished. Still others thrived in the Earth-Sun Lagrange points. Together these were transhumanity's gateway to the solar system.

THE FALL FROM ON HIGH

Unfortunately, their proximity, wealth, and importance made these locations an obvious target once the TITANs came online and began their attacks. Many of the near-Earth stations were overwhelmed in the months of fighting, succumbing to the TITANs' electronic attacks. Some were abandoned before they could be overrun, and a few were even destroyed to keep them from enemy hands. Almost all of the others were inundated with refugees and infugees, stretching their life support capacities to their limits. Sadly, a few of these were also destroyed, torn apart as conflicts erupted, whether between desperate refugees and equally desperate locals or sparked by nationalistic and ideological grudges carried up from Earth. Those who could fled further out in the solar system, but this was not always an option.

After the Fall, when the TITANs vanished and the dust settled, the situation had clearly changed. Earth orbit was no longer prime territory. With the Earth abandoned and off-limits, the stations in Earth orbit were no longer on the doorstep of our core world—now they were on the edge of human space, beside a planet dead and gone. Economic conditions immediately worsened. Receiving supplies was far more difficult, and shipping to other locations more expensive. Proximity to Earth was now a detriment, as these habitats were still considered to be in the danger zone. Hypercorps relocated and thousands fled the region, whether they wished to distance themselves from threats or simply because they could no longer stand to look down upon the dead Earth and the horrors it whispered back at them. Almost overnight, the orbitals transformed from prosperous to impoverished.

The new flotilla of killsats and drones orbiting the Earth—the interdiction cordon—created another set of challenges. These machines were merciless in destroying anything that strayed too close, putting those who ventured to LEO stations, and sometimes even the LEO habitats themselves, at risk. Though a few stations had moved to higher orbits, at great expense, many others simply had to be abandoned, as they were too close to the barricade or even within it.

The destruction of the Fall also presented difficulties. So many satellites, stations, ships, and platforms had been damaged or wrecked, that Earth orbit was now littered with space debris. Maneuvering ships here, especially in LEO or MEO, became a death-defying affair. Remaining stations and habitats were forced to remain vigilant and alert for potentially catastrophic space junk collisions.

Aboard the surviving stations, with so many refugees jobless and penniless, incidents of crime and violence increased sharply. Unemployment was rampant to the point where competition for new jobs was fierce and sometimes deadly. Food became scarce as ecological systems could not keep up with demand and nanofabbers were overtaxed, stolen, or hidden away. Catastrophes occurred as environmental systems failed or became septic and toxic. Overcrowding and lingering antagonisms turned many habitats into powder kegs, periodically erupting with riots and violence. Corruption reached staggering heights and the influence of gangs and criminal outfits soared.

Combined, these factors devastated the orbital community, transforming it from a thriving region to a wasteland of derelicts, husks, and hovels. Once a glittering jewel of high-end destinations and prosperous businesses, the orbital zones around Earth were now a land of detritus, scum, and bare-bones survival.

In the decade since, this situation has begun to change for the better, but the region remains blighted and tarnished. As a growing number of hypercorps and individuals begin to embrace the idea of reclaiming Earth, interest has slowly rekindled in the forsaken homeworld and its immediate surroundings. The orbital habitats have begun to be restored and to see renewed traffic and commerce. Many feel this is only a prelude to reclaiming the Earth itself, but if so it is a welcome step by those who call this region home.

SOL-MERCURY
VENUS
EARTH
EARTH ORBIT
LUNA
MARS
INNER FRINGE
PLANETARY CONSORTIUM
GAME INFORMATION

SOLARCHIVE SEARCH: ORBITAL TERMINOLOGY

LEO: Low Earth Orbit. Between 150 and 2,000 kilometers above sea level. Currently, the lower end of this range is restricted territory, defended by an interdiction cordon of killsats between 300 and 350 kilometers up that will shoot down anything attempting to move past them in either direction.

MEO: Medium Earth Orbit. Between 2,000 and 35,786 kilometers above sea level.

GEO: Geosynchronous Orbit. 35,786 kilometers above sea level and close to the equatorial plane, matching Earth's sidereal rotation period. Objects in geosynchronous orbit (with no inclination) appear to be in a fixed position from the ground.

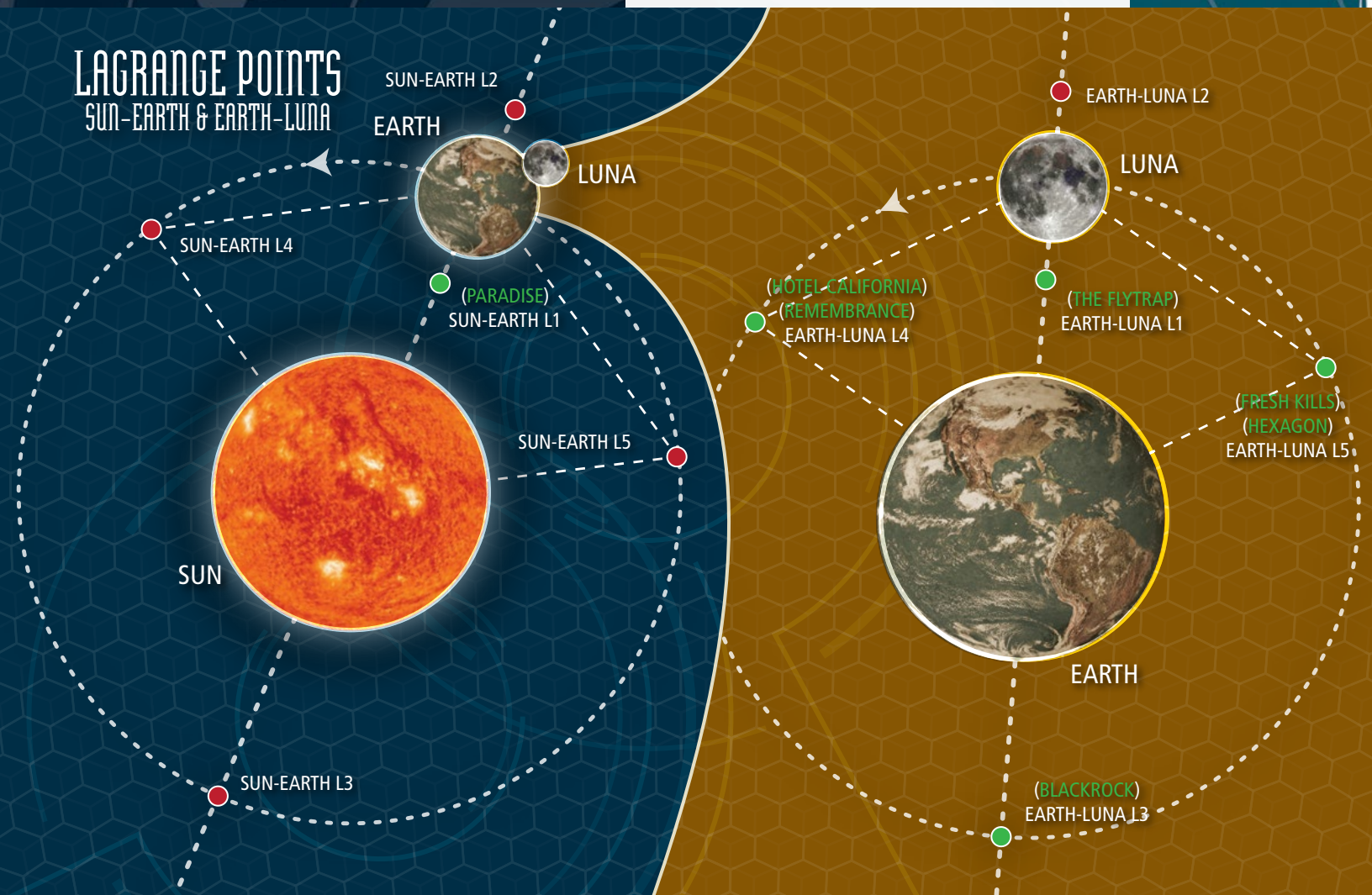
HEO: High Earth Orbit. Above 35,786 kilometers above sea level. ♣

EARTH-ORBIT SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Earth orbit is littered with stations, both operational and nonfunctional. Easily three million transhumans live here, spread between hundreds of different habitats. These might range from cramped and archaic tin can stations left over from early space programs to crowded O'Neill cylinders and toruses to monolithic orbital factories. Even more than the Jovian and Saturnian systems, the Earth-Lunar system is crowded with activity and ships. Travel between habitats is far easier here, and sometimes even quicker and more economical than egocasting. In fact, the amount of traffic here makes clandestine ship movements and operations easier to hide and camouflage, a fact sometimes useful to Firewall sentinels who need to stealth an approach or entrance. Likewise, the amount of derelict habitats and floating space debris offers ample opportunities for covering your tracks.

CLOSE TO HOME

Despite the exodus from Earth, the orbital habitats still have the sense of being a part of transhumanity's "home," and this is something they will never forget or not cling to, as if it gives them more authority and legitimacy. In fact, many orbitals and Lunars feel snubbed that the rest of transhumanity has turned its



back on this area and does not do more to support or elevate transhuman civilization here. This also provides fuel for the budding reclaimer movement here, along with the proximity to Earth.

On the other hand, this nearness to the threat posed by the TITANs, reinforced by the dangerous interdiction cordon, along with the constant visual reminder overhead of the home that transhumanity was forced to leave, serves as a harsh lesson that transhumanity still faces problems that it might not overcome. To many, this area is simply too dark and bleak to tolerate for long. Psychosurgery for depression and similar ailments is more common here than anywhere else in the system.

Scavengers and Explorers

To some, the proximity to the relics of the Fall is exciting, whether they are thrill-seekers who like to flirt with danger or profiteers who see an opportunity. The scavenger and explorer cultures are both strong in Earth orbit, with easy access to so many ruined stations. Scavengers can be found everywhere, whether they operate as loners, in small groups, or as full-on financed operations. Aside from raiding derelict habitats for lost knowledge, stored infomorphs, or other valuables, many operate full-time as space junk herders, sifting and sorting through the cast-off junk and lost parts floating in orbit. Explorers are just as common, often idle hyperelites who enjoy the aesthetics of mapping out old abandoned stations and digging through the detritus of the past. Some socialite explorers go so far as to organize ad hoc social events in dead stations, where party-goers can dance the night away in zero-g, or find other ways of passing the time.

Both exploring and scavenging are dangerous propositions, of course. Aside from the threat of running into dormant TITAN machines, there is the very real possibility of triggering some ancient security system or warbot, or running across unfriendly rival scavengers or criminal operations, not to mention the standard hazards of space exploration.

Diversity

One major defining characteristic of the Earth-orbit (and also Lunar) habitats—often in stark contrast to the rest of the system—is the adherence to old Earth-based cultural identities. Not only were many of these stations founded by specific nations, but many were created or occupied by specific ethnic or cultural groups. Many of these colonies have struggled to retain their unique cultural identities, even in the wake of the Fall—or perhaps because of it. Whereas transhumanity elsewhere has shed many of these old cultural trappings—possibly as a byproduct of technologies like the mesh, resleeving, and instant translation cutting down old cultural barriers and insular traditions—in Earth orbit and on Luna they are embraced and protected. Detractors claim that this illustrates the region's backwardness and conservatism, saying they will never fully appreciate transhumanity's potential as long as they cling to such antiquated notions of place and structure and culture. Others, however, enjoy the cultural focus of each habitat and even joke that Earth may be barricaded and almost unlivable but at least the stations surrounding it maintain the same traditions of insularity and distrust and ethnic/tribal tensions that caused so much trouble on Earth itself.

For Firewall sentinels, navigating unfamiliar cultural groups can be tricky and dangerous. Some gangs and crime groups especially make use of customs, lingo, and esoteric knowledge that an outsider will simply be unaware of, limiting the possibilities of infiltration. These obstacles can be surmounted with advanced study, skillware, and psychosurgery, but this is best left to agents with training in cultural mimicry.

Infugees and Clanking Masses

To this day, the habitats in the Earth-Lunar system retain the highest number of infomorph refugees as well as the largest percentage of impoverished synthmorphs and indentures. The method of handling infugees varies drastically by station, ranging from incorporating them fully in local culture and society (though the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance officially does not consider infomorphs as citizens or grant them full rights or representation) to enslaving them to locking them away in isolated simulspaces or dead storage. The clanking masses are overwhelmingly indentured to the hypercorp or station authorities that resleeved them. While many of them have been put to work, especially constructing new habitats to ease overcrowding, many remain idle and essentially unemployed with no prospects. These synthetics face widespread discrimination, sometimes institutionalized (in habitats where synthmorphs are given less rights). Many orbital and Lunar citizens unfairly blame these refugees for their cramped conditions and general economic plight.

It is worth noting that many refugee groups, having been uprooted from Earth and thrust into an entirely different type of existence, simply settled down wherever they ended up. Rather than embracing the full opportunities offered by transhuman society, some of these have in fact isolated themselves and become even more insular, partly due to suffering from combined culture and future shock. Bioconservative ideals are often rampant among these groups, despite many being sleeved in synthmorphs.

Orbitals vs. Lunars

Though orbital culture and Lunar society are almost identical, and in fact are jointly represented by the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance, there are some notable differences. Orbitals tend to view Lunars as a bit more privileged, simply because they have more resources and opportunities, are safer from the TITAN threats on Earth, are supported by the Lunar banks, and could more easily expand and accommodate their refugee populations. Lunars, on the other hand, tend to view Orbitals as a bit loose on the hinges, especially those who engage in scavving or ruin exploration.

THE JUNKYARD

Ever since humans first took to the stars, we've been littering outer space. The space around Earth is cluttered with old rocket stages, spare parts, broken shuttle pieces, human waste, broken satellites, and other debris. Many old satellites were in fact maneuvered into a so-called graveyard orbit, making room for their replacements. While the orbit of many pieces of space junk decayed until they re-entered and burnt up in the atmosphere, thousands of others continued to rotate the Earth, posing a threat to spacecraft and stations. As transhumanity colonized Earth orbit, the amount of junk we tossed out only increased. If a ship broke down and couldn't be repaired, it was often easier to ditch it in low orbit than to attempt re-entry. The same was true with bulky boosters—once past the atmosphere they could be abandoned to drift with the other castoffs, while the shuttles and cruisers and probes shot off into deep space unencumbered.

By the time of the Fall, we had a thick layer of space junk all around the planet. Some say it was like we were envious of Saturn's rings, so we built our own. During the Fall, of course, these rings simply grew thicker. Ships were shot down, stations were destroyed, and their remnants went on to endanger others in the vicinity.

When the Earth was placed under interdiction, and the constellation of killsats and sensor arrays put in place in LEO, a new policy was born among orbital denizens. Rather than abandon debris in a higher orbit, where it risked sparking a collision, it is now considered proper space etiquette to dump your debris at the bottom rung of LEO, just above the barricade. This area is largely avoided anyway, being a little too close for comfort to the weapon platforms, and the junk won't endanger anything as its orbit decays. If the debris gets too close to an element of the barricade, the killsats blast it out of the sky.

Though some (especially reclaimers) argue that this "junkyard" should be cleaned up—and other space debris as well—there are others who find it useful. Not only does it provide cover to those hoping to slip past the cordon of Earth, but it also acts as a signpost of sorts, a warning sign shouting "Danger! Don't Go Any Further!"

Some scavengers are fascinated by the junkyard itself—it's a microcosm of our spacefaring history, and you can find parts from both pre-Fall and post-Fall ships. All sorts of interesting finds have been made, in fact, from frozen bodies to abandoned experimental technology to items that are completely inexplicable. ■

THE LUNAR-LAGRANGE ALLIANCE

Based out of Remembrance in Earth orbit and Erato on Luna, the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance (LLA) is the coalition government of various stations and other habitats in Earth orbit, at Earth's Lagrange points, on Luna, and in orbit around Luna. The LLA was initially formed out of necessity, well before the Fall when there were only a few extraplanetary habitats and it was too difficult to survive without sharing resources. The various stations established pacts of nonaggression and mutual support, limiting weapons proliferation and taking care of each other in emergencies. While many of the early stations were aligned with a national government, and were essentially treated as sovereign outposts of those countries, this quickly changed as the first hypercorps entered the picture, followed by some NGOs, private researchers, and similar public groups. As the orbital population expanded and this new frontier began expressing its own culture, some of these stations and personnel asserted their independence. The hypercorps especially pushed for a united front, asserting the needs of orbital projects and habitats (and other space endeavors) over ties to dirt-bound patrons. The result was a loose alliance of habitats and entities that each maintained its own structure and personality, while still all working together.

In the days just before the Fall, the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance was the most powerful organization offworld. Its stations were the most influential bases in space and were considered the perfect blend between Earth tradition and outer space innovation. The Fall changed all that, however. Many of the LLA's member stations were devastated by TITAN attack or overwhelmed with Earth's panicked survivors. With Earth smoking and desolate, the LLA stations no longer had favored status or location. Other, more distant colonies and stations gained popularity, and many of those newer habitats joined together with leading hypercorps to create a new political organization: the Planetary Consortium. The Planetary Consortium was far more forward-thinking, more innovative, and more technologically advanced—they encouraged transhumanity to leave Earth behind and not look back, and to free itself from the shackles of tradition and embrace its potential. The Lunar-Lagrange Alliance was one of the elements discarded, and it fell from prominence, its habitats now considered old and conservative and foolishly limited.

The LLA continued to maintain itself, however, and to work hard at keeping its members healthy and prosperous. Slowly, the Alliance's star has begun to rise again. More and more transhumans are turning their eye toward Earth again and seeing the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance right there beside it. Hypercorps are beginning to move more operations here as the economy stabilizes and grows. As the overcrowding has lessened, many LLA stations have restored (and sometimes expanded) their facilities and once again become pleasant places to live.

Allied Forces

The LLA is an alliance in the sense that it facilitates cooperation and working together towards common goals, but on paper it has little in the way of governmental authority. Member habitats with populations exceeding 1,000 each designate one representative to sit on the LLA's Council. The fact that small stations have equal representation to populous ones is overshadowed by the fact that every habitat rep can cast 1 vote per 10,000 people they represent in council decisions (only embodied citizens count, infomorphs and non-citizens are not represented). This grants larger colonies much more influence over LLA affairs, though smaller stations have been known to form voting blocs. The Council votes in a new president every 4 years from its own ranks.

The Council

The Council is responsible for handing any matter that affects one or more members equally, including arbitrating disputes among members. Because the guidelines are so loose, the LLA can justify interfering in almost any large-scale issue on any habitat within its organization, and each president has used different definitions and boundaries. Officially the LLA has only one goal: to promote peace, harmony, and prosperity among all of its members. That can be broken down any number of ways, however, and has been used to justify everything from artificially controlling cred rates across the alliance, to partitioning sections of a habitat in turmoil, to outlawing all offensive weaponry except for military and law enforcement personnel. Most often it is interpreted as ensuring the highest standard of living possible for all LLA citizens, defending the LLA against outside attack, maintaining active communication and transportation between LLA habitats, and restoring the LLA's former status among transhumanity.

The President: Avra Don

Avra Don is a Council rep from Remembrance and the current president of the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance. She has run the LLA for the past eight years, and despite many tumultuous years immediately post-Fall, is now considered the most successful president the Alliance has followed. Though up for re-election, her chances of winning a third term seem likely. Dubbed the Fullerene Lady for her sometimes hard-line stances, Don is determined to restore the Alliance to its heyday, bringing eyes and credits back to the Earth-Lunar system and becoming once again a leader in transhuman commerce. Though she cannot be called a bioconservative, some of her political positions stray in that direction, especially with concern to nanotechnology restrictions and AIs. Her leadership is in fact responsible for the LLA having some of the more conservative and restrictive policies in the solar system, outside of the Jovian Republic. Her distinct ideology is not easy to pin down, however, as it strays across political lines. Though she is strong supporter of the hypercorps, privatization, and free markets, she holds some strong anti-Consortium stances and actually favored the Morningstar Constellation's independence, though relations with the latter have been strained. She is consistently criticized for promoting economic policies that have done nothing to ease the plight of the infugees and clanking masses. She has handled challenges, crises, and controversies, however, with an impressive amount of energy, confidence, and charm.

Don is a short, slight woman with pale skin, fair hair, large pale blue eyes, and a childlike beauty she claims is completely natural and utterly unmodified. She avoids resleeving when possible, though she has multiple clones of her favored morph on hand at likely destinations when necessary.

The Enforcer: Ord Brown

One advantage the LLA can claim is that it inherited a large number of military assets in the wake of the Fall. The tattered remnants of various masterless warships, military units, and security forces that did not defect to the Jovian Republic or get scooped up by the Planetary Consortium ended up in LLA hands, or at least in service to LLA-aligned stations. One of the LLA's first actions in the wake of the Fall was to consolidate these forces under a united leadership and expend resources to boost them further, as a defense against hostilities from re-emergent TITAN threats, the Planetary Consortium, predatory hypercorps, or anything else. In practice, these military units have largely been deployed for civil unrest and population control duties, making them extremely unpopular among many of the LLA's impoverished citizenry.

The current Senior Enforcer of the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance, in charge of both military security and law enforcement divisions, is Ord Brown. An old beat cop from Luna, Brown actively dislikes politics—he prefers straight talk and direct action, and more than once has ruffled feathers by manhandling important hyperelites. Brown is considered beyond reproach in his allegiance if not his methods, and is said to be completely unbribable. Though not outspoken, Brown is notably loyal to the bioconservative cause, and both of his adult children—a son named Tav and a daughter named Mercer—are active reclaimers.

The Fullerene Lady

Avra Don's notable nickname has stuck for one other reason: to date she has survived no less than five assassination efforts, two of which actually killed her. Blame for these attacks has been at various times placed on anarchists, AGIs, synthmorph separatists, criminal cartels, and Barsoomian radicals, though never with much credibility. Don has always returned to her post almost immediately, unfazed by the events, but inevitably using the attacks to justify harsher public surveillance methods and stricter security controls throughout the LLA. ■

TRUTH HURTS!: THE TRUTH ABOUT THE LLA

Truth Hurts! The outlaw newsfeed that uncovers the harsh realities behind transhuman history, power, and politics!

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Remember back before the Fall, when the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance was the big power in outer space? They were entrenched and influential, controlling all of the stations and other habitats up there in Earth orbit and at the Lagrange points. People looked up to the LLA. Respected them. So what happened?

The TITANs, of course. They hit the LLA, and hit it hard.

But was it really the TITANs? And even if it was, were they acting on their own, or did they have a helping hand to guide them along?

See, the LLA had a lock on space resources and space expansion. It all went through them. Certain hypercorps were making a killing, and stifling the opportunities some of the others wanted to take outside of the Earth-Lunar system. In other words, other powers—whether politicos, hypercorps, or both—didn't have much room to expand. Not a lot of opportunity for authority or profit when there's already a big dog on the block. In order for anyone else to rise to prominence, the LLA had to be taken down a few notches.

Lo and behold, along come the TITANs to do exactly that.

Or at least, that's what we were told. Who's to know, really? Who can conclusively point at a virus or a nanoswarm or a missile and say, "Yes, that is TITAN manufacture," as opposed to "That was built by the old world militaries or hypercorps and had all identifying marks stripped away so they could claim it came from the TITANs?" Nobody.

Exactly.

It worked. Not only did the LLA receive the brunt of TITAN attacks off-Earth, but they were also swarmed by all of those infugees and refugees. Conveniently, some stations and habitats further out in the system said no to taking any more in, meaning the LLA was stuck, overcrowded with too many people. Meanwhile, some of those forces took the opportunity, while the LLA was crippled, to build themselves a new empire. To further their own interests, as usual.

Sure, the LLA's still around, but it's a shadow of its former self. Everyone knows the Planetary Consortium is the big game in town.

Wasn't that convenient?

Careful who you tell, though. There are plenty of people, people in power, who like the LLA exactly where it is. They don't want to see it get strong again, and they definitely don't want anyone to figure out how that power shift happened in the first place.

Truth hurts!

OTHER ORBITAL FACTIONS

While the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance holds allegiance from the majority of stations in the Earth-Luna system, there are many others under the aegis of the Planetary Consortium. A few habitats even belong to both, while others remain entirely independent. Additionally, there are other factions with strong influence in this region that deserve attention from Firewall agents.

THE PLANETARY CONSORTIUM

The Consortium has a visible and noticeable presence in Earth orbit, substantially more so than on Luna. In addition to various habitats and hypercorp assets, the Consortium maintains an ongoing military presence here, under the pretense of defending the system from any sort of TITAN resurgence. The Consortium pays especially close attention to the interdiction barricade, though to this day they do not take credit for putting it in place. Should it fail or need reinforcements, Consortium forces stand poised to step in. This ongoing encampment is occasionally a point of contention with the LLA, though many Lunars and Orbitals are re-assured by their presence.

Though both are dedicated to their transitional economies, keeping the inner system secure, and seeing transhumanity prosper, the Consortium and LLA differ politically and economically on several key points, meaning that they periodically butt heads. Though both sides engage in friendly espionage and monitoring, they also share resources when it comes to the outer system autonomists and Factors, and sometimes the Venusians as well. Though the potential of an open military conflict between the two seems unlikely, it is certainly possible that a series of unfortunate or orchestrated events could raise hostilities and put these two uneasy allies at each other's throats.

RANDALL VOX

Randall Vox is the Planetary Consortium's senior representative in Earth orbit, and the official Planetary Consortium Liaison to the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance. Favoring slender morphs with elegant features and subtle mods to enhance his already considerable charisma, Vox is extremely smooth, exceptionally polite, and utterly engaging. He is also a diabolical, ruthless snake who will do anything to satisfy his masters back at the Consortium. A former executive for Omnicor, Vox takes a particular hard-line stance with the LLA when it comes to policy matters regarding Earth and the interdiction. He consistently places pressure on Avra Don's regime to clamp down on the growing reclaimer movement, and has gone so far as to enact economic sanctions against the LLA when they refused to restrict reclaimer observation operations on several orbital stations. Firewall suspects Vox and the Consortium have taken further, more clandestine steps to inhibit the reclaimer movement, including active infiltration and ongoing smear campaigns.

THE ORGANIZATION

Officially and legally known as the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance Civil Organization (LLACO), but unofficially simply called "the Organization," this is the most widespread and entrenched local crime syndicate within Earth orbit. Founded by a mixture of Russian, Eastern European, and Middle Eastern criminal outfits who brought their activities into space pre-Fall, crossed paths, and realized they could be more effective as partners than as rivals, the Organization received a further membership boost when many of their Earthbound allies took advantage of the Exodus to make a profit and/or ended up as refugees in orbit themselves. Though it has substantial competition, the Organization is considered by many to be the dominant "local" cartel.

"Civic leaders" belonging to the Organization on different habitats control their syndicate's activities on those stations, under the guise of civic-minded social projects and clubs. They also attempt to oversee other criminal enterprises, particularly the numerous small gangs, and take a percentage of any credit they earn. Each civic leader is responsible for their own station, and as long as the Organization remains in control and its President, Nav Garson, receives his cut, they can run the station any way they like. As a result, some stations are clean, well-lit, and safe because the civic leaders actually provide community stability and security, preferring to earn money through black markets, gambling, drugs, and other more "respectable" vices. Other stations, however, are deadly pits of iniquity where anything goes and people knife each other for a handful of cred.

The LLA has made moderate efforts to stamp out the Organization, but most of their attempts have been an utter failure. Local officials on many stations are bribed or otherwise cut in on Organization operations, so they look the other way. On others, officials are simply bullied and threatened into letting the Organization operate unhindered. Even when anti-syndicate measures have been successful, the LLA has failed to pin any charges against the Organization itself, or its leadership. Potential snitches are well aware that the penalty for fingering the Organization or any of its senior members is far worse than any punishment the LLA could ever inflict.

NAV GARSON

Also known as the Organizer, Nav Garson is the current president of the Organization. A large man with ostentatious silver-plated cybernetic forearms and glittering sapphire optics, Nav dresses in the latest fashion and presents himself as a law-abiding citizen and the president of a simple community group, yet he lives in an opulent apartment in one of the highest towers of Remembrance and his offices occupy a large, imposing building in the center of the business district. Garson is said to fear the idea



of uploading and resleeving, and has in fact not left Remembrance since he was brought here. If a meeting is called for, people come to him. Behind the scenes, Garson is known for his shark-like sensibilities and his utter lack of morals. Stories among Organization cadres tell of Garson cutting a man's throat, shoving a mechanical fist through, and yanking out the man's cortical stack, all in the middle of an elegant dinner party—and without spilling his drink.

Other Syndicates

The Organization is far from the only syndicate to operate in Earth orbit, of course. The Triads, Night Cartel, and ID Crew all have active and ongoing operations here, often at odds with each other and the Organization. Nine Lives and Pax Familae also have a presence here, though significantly smaller. More widespread, however, are hundreds of small gangs, often culturally insular and present only in a particular habitat or community in that habitat. Many of these gangs have arrangements with the larger syndicates, handling their lower-end operations such as drug and XP dealing, prostitution, piracy, racketeering, etc.

Reclaimers

The Planetary Consortium claims that Earth is transhumanity's past and the stars are our future. They urge us to turn our backs on our birthplace, forget it ever existed, and go forth into deep space, exploring and growing and adapting to new environments and new situations. Most people, however, still feel some connection to our ancestral home. More and more people are saying it may be time to return there, to make it our center once more.

The reclaimers are at the forefront of this opinion. Their movement exists for one reason and one reason only—to bring transhumanity back to Earth and reclaim its homeworld. Though every reclaimer is passionate about returning to Earth, as an organization they are sensible, even cautious, and very, very serious. They have recruited substantial scientific help in studying the planet, and are large enough now to fund their own research initiatives. They have created detailed simulations to plot out the best way to cleanse the world, terraform it, and make it ready for repopulation. They have volunteers ready to serve and hypercorp interests willing to contribute for an opportunity to get in early on a new market.

While they have plans and potential starting resources, the complete project would be a massive undertaking requiring the full support of the Planetary Consortium and LLA, at the least. What the reclaimers don't have, so far, is the political clout to push their agenda into action. They are working on this, however, and a new wave of reclaimer politicians and activists has stepped to the fore, complete with celebrity endorsements, making elaborate arguments to the media and presentations to political leaders and lobbies, pushing them to lift the barriers and return to Earth as soon as possible. They do this through the reclaimers' official organization, the Earth Reclamation Project (ERP), and any less-than-legal activities are carefully kept separate so the ERP can honestly disclaim any and all knowledge of such.

Despite growing substantially in the past few years, the reclaimers still face an uphill battle. There is major opposition to their plan simply on the grounds that no one knows what dangers continue to lurk down there, and stirring them up may doom the rest of transhumanity. This is an argument that is difficult for the reclaimers to counter, as no one knows the true risks, or even if the TITANs are truly gone. At best the reclaimers can talk about caution and full surveys and stages of progress and risk management, none of which is very appeasing to those who still remember the terrors of the Fall. Another common argument used against them is that the Pandora gates offer much better opportunities, enabling transhumanity to colonize and terraform numerous exoplanets, while also spreading ourselves wider and thus protecting ourselves more from any sort of genocidal attack. Proponents of this argument ask why there is a hurry, why not wait and let Earth sit fallow for a century or more, giving transhumanity time to fully establish themselves throughout the galaxy, rather than putting all of our eggs in one barren and dangerous basket. In response, the reclaimers typically play the nostalgia and homeworld emotional appeal cards, with mixed results.

Meanwhile, outside of the realm of public debate, research, and lobbying, another wing of the reclaimer movement is already hard at work secretly putting their plans into motion. Refusing to wait for public opinion to get on their side, these cells of dedicated activists are engaging in more direct studies, including drone surveys and robotic field missions down to Earth itself. Reclaimer scientists work on developing new plant and animal species that will survive and prosper on the devastated planet, as well as microorganisms that will spread and help bring new life to the barren, scarred world. Reclaimers with military expertise make plans for destroying known TITAN remnants and strongholds, stockpile weapons, and recruit and train volunteer fighters. According to our intel, the most daring are already establishing base camps down on Earth, the first outposts in a battle to take back the planet. Preliminary attempts to locate and contact survivors are also underway.

While Firewall is neutral towards the reclaimer agenda, these clandestine reclaimer activities pose several potential x-risks. Ad hoc, unsupervised, and limited resource operations of this sort may run across a threat that they are incapable of handling or containing. Firewall's policy is to monitor reclaimer activities, hinder those that may create risks, and actively engage and counter those that pose active endangerments. If a reclaimer op poses

certain dangers and cannot be stopped, however, policy is to remotely observe and to provide backup support should a risk situation arise. Simultaneously, however, the reclaimers are regarded as a potential resource for information on threats, access to Earth's surface, and other useful resources, so Firewall sentinels are advised to consider all potential interactions with reclaimers on a case-by-case basis.

Movement Support

A lot of people wonder where the reclaimers get their money—all that research isn't cheap, and neither is maintaining Vo Nguyen and the other reclaimer bases, not to mention the clandestine Earth missions they frequently attempt. The truth, as far as Firewall can determine, is that the reclaimers have tapped into a network of support from multiple sectors.

On one hand, we've noted several hypercorps that are likely providing funding and logistics for certain reclaimer projects. While some of these are ideologically motivated, it is likely that others view the reclaimer movement as an investment, looking forward to being on the ground floor for the recolonization of Earth, and all the business possibilities that entails. Some of these corporations are also clearly interested in piecing together more details on the TITANs, what they did to Earth, and what weapons of theirs might still remain, in order to profit from new discoveries.

On another hand, several pro-reclaimer LLA habitats have actually instituted a highly disputed Reclamation Tax that goes toward lifting the barricade and making Earth livable again. Most of these funds are given to the ERP, but some are discreetly channeled to covert reclaimer ops.

On yet another hand, the reclaimers also gain support from more hidden sources, particularly wealthy patrons with nostalgia for the homeworld who donate generously. Our sources indicate that even the Organization crime syndicate is a major supporter, possibly in a bid to control the black market if the Earth is resettled.

One thing to consider with these patrons is that support almost always comes at a price. What favors have the reclaimer benefactors already asked for—and called in?

Reclaimer Scavenging

Another source of funding for the reclaimers comes as a benefit from their clandestine reclamation projects: scavenging. At least one major scavving outfit—PastFinders—is linked up with reclaimer missions to Earth. This company is interesting because risky salvage ops are only part of their business model—they are also heavily invested in researching, cataloging, and reviving egos lost during the Fall. Most of this work entails digging through cold storage infugee archives looking for lost relatives of wealthy clients or tracking down infugee family members separated and sent to far-flung corners of the solar system. Some ego-retrieval cases involve searching through frozen corpses in devastated habitats or determined legwork through the system's criminal network of soul traders. In any case, we suspect PastFinders of supporting at least one mission to Earth, from which the corp reaped the rewards of extremely valuable Earth relics and a few bounties on people lost on Earth during the Fall.

Tate Markess

Tate is the Executive Director of the Earth Reclamation Project, the foremost spokesperson for the reclaimer movement, and the station chief of Vo Nguyen, the de facto reclaimer capital. Favoring muscular female morphs with close-cropped flame-red hair, Markess is surprisingly soft-spoken and disarming, but nevertheless resolute in her convictions. It is open knowledge that Tate's deceased husband was a hero during the Fall; as the director in charge of a major egocasting facility under TITAN attack during the last few days of the Exodus, he stayed behind and ensured that as many people as possible were able to egocast out before the TITANs overwhelmed the defenses and he was forced to manually destroy the transmitter. Markess has vowed to find him and bring him back.

Notable Habitats

As many as five hundred habitats orbit the Earth at various distances. Most of these are tiny tin can habitats, cramped little metal boxes capable of holding no more than a dozen people at best. A handful are enormous Cole bubbles or O'Neill cylinders, built for hundreds of thousands to millions of occupants. The rest fall somewhere in between, their capacity depending upon their design and their original purpose. Some habitats were established as laboratories and research stations, others designed as hotels and resorts, some built as factories or shipyards, and still others meant for spaceports and trading hubs. Then of course there were the monitoring stations, scanning satellites, communications satellites, and orbital defense platforms.

Elegua

Orbit: HEO
Station Type: Modified Bernal Sphere
Allegiance: TerraGenesis
Primary Languages: Dutch, English, Vietnamese
Major Industries: Terraforming, Ecosystem Management, Environmental Data

Owned and operated by TerraGenesis, this research station in Earth orbit is based on a modified Bernal sphere design, similar to an artificial Cole bubble. Housing 120,000 residents, Elegua's primary function is to gather environmental data on Earth for ecological and terraforming research. Numerous

SOLARCHIVE SEARCH: EARTH-LUNAR CYCLERS

One of humanity's earliest and greatest space travelers, the United States astronaut Buzz Aldrin, first proposed the idea of the cycler, a spaceship that used the gravity wells of two bodies to shuttle back and forth between them indefinitely. Though his first projected cycle was between Earth and Mars, other routes were quickly calculated and located, including one between the Earth and Luna.

The cycler itself is a large ship that is boosted into orbit and adjusted until it locks into the gravitational pull between the Earth and Luna. Thanks to gravity assistance, once in orbit it no longer needs fuel or guidance, but will continue its path as long as it retains structural integrity, with the occasional minor course correction. Shuttlecraft allow passengers and cargo to reach each of the Earth-Luna Lagrange points as the cycler passes within range. Though slower than a direct flight, cyclers cost far less and are generally more reliable. The typical orbit period is 2 weeks, with a Lunar rendezvous once every two rotations.

The cyclers were largely ignored by the TITANs and continue to run today. The use of cyclers helped cement bonds between various LLA habitats and gave the LLA a large part of its power because goods could be transported to and from its stations with very little effort. They are still a primary means of transportation to and from Earth and Lunar orbit. Six Earth-Lunar cyclers remain in operation, two of which, *Miles To Go Before I Sleep* and *Demand the Impossible*, are unofficially designated as scum barges.

See also: Earth-Mars Cyclers, Saturn-Titan Cyclers

other hypercorps lease space here, often collaborating with the TerraGenesis cooperative on joint studies and projects. TerraGenesis has been willing to share much of its scanning and sensor data with other parties, a fact that has brought a storm of criticism from the Planetary Consortium. In truth, however, TerraGenesis isn't only focused on studying Earth here; Elegua is also the destination point for much of the data gathered on other exoplanets and solar system bodies. Additionally, some interesting research projects here explore the impact of neogenetic and alien micro-organisms on various closed ecological systems. The interior of Elegua is studded with domed gardens and sealed greenhouses that serve as laboratory environments.

FRESH KILLS

Orbit: Earth-Luna L5
Station Type: Cluster
Allegiance: Independent (Scum)
Primary Languages: English, French, Tamil
Major Industries: Salvage

Fresh Kills calls itself a "reclamation center." That's a fancy way of saying they're a salvage base, which is still a nice euphemism for "pirate stronghold." Not a small one, either—at least several thousand transhumans actually call this hive of scum and villainy home. Built around a central docking spindle, Fresh Kills serves as a starting and stopping point for scavengers and salvage crews in the Earth-Luna system, and sometimes ones ranging farther abroad as well. The base itself is at the far edge of the Earth-Luna L5 point from the Hexagon, but this proximity makes for some uneasy shuffling on both sides, especially given that Fresh Kills is also bristling with armaments. Ships going to and from either generally steer far clear of each other's operations.

SUGALI ALI

Sugali Ali is the owner and operator of the Fresh Kills "reclamation center." Though outwardly a prosperous businessman, he is known far and wide as the Pirate King, since Fresh Kills is a salvage base and home to scum, scavvers, and criminal cut-throats. Typically sleeved as a short, broad man with four thick arms, Ali enjoys the Pirate King image and plays the role. According to stories, he started his career as an actual pirate on Earth's East African coast before the Fall.

HEXAGON

Orbit: Earth-Luna L5
Station Type: Modified Torus
Allegiance: Planetary Consortium (Direct Action)
Primary Languages: English, German, Mandarin
Major Industries: Military Tech, Research, Training

This large, imposing station sits at the Earth-Luna L5 point like a fortress, which it is. Owned and operated by Direct Action, Hexagon houses much of that company's weapons testing and personnel training facilities—most of the Consortium's cutting-edge military tech comes directly from here, which makes sense since Direct Action supplies and/or trains most Consortium troops. Of course, that makes Hexagon a tempting target for business rivals and weapons dealers, but it is extremely well defended. Most of Direct Action's employees here are sleeved in combat morphs, with heavy armaments within easy reach. The rest are either scientists and engineers specializing in military equipment and combat mods or businessmen who handle meetings with clients and assign the company's vast resources and manpower.

In addition to a lethal array of automated defenses and weapons platforms, Hexagon is equipped with some of the most impressive arrays of sensor systems in the inner system. Many of these are pointed at

Earth, keeping a close eye on the cordon and any signs of TITAN-related activity, but the rest are pointed around the solar system, tracking warship movements and supply chains. A small but potent fleet of combat craft and military drones is also stationed here for defensive purposes, and they have been known to shoot down anyone who gets too close without authorization. Ships and bots from his fleet are also leased as protective services to other habitats in the Earth-Luna system, as well as ships traveling to and from.

HOTEL CALIFORNIA

Orbit: Earth-Luna L4
Station Type: Beehive/Dome
Allegiance: Independent (Brinker)
Primary Languages: Bengali, Hindi
Major Industries: None

Asteroid 4113 Calif was a large iron and basalt rock caught in a tadpole orbit around the Earth-Luna L4 point. Those valuable minerals made it an appealing prospect, and several Earth nations cooperated to establish a mining outpost there, one of the first extraplanetary operations successfully attempted. It was a no-frills operation, a simple domed settlement for the workers and a small launch pad where shuttles could drop off supplies and pick up ore. When the Fall came, the mine was shut down and the asteroid abandoned.

Shortly after the Fall, a refugee transport vessel suffered a catastrophic life support failure. Lacking other options, the ship dumped hundreds of excess refugees into life rafts and pointed them at the asteroid. Most of these were lucky enough to make it and find shelter within the abandoned station, where they had power, air, heat, and some water from ice blocks on the asteroid's far side. Despite assertions they would be rescued, no one ever came. For two years the refugees survived at a subsistence level, until a Consortium patrol craft investigated a light beacon the survivors had activated. Though given an option to leave, many opted to stay. When word of the settlement reached other refugees in cramped conditions on board other habitats, some took desperate measures to make their way to the asteroid. The residents of Hotel California welcomed them with open arms, and the colony grew.

When a mining hypercorp returned to the asteroid to re-open the mine, they found a large community of squatters who were not at all impressed with their claim to the asteroid. An initial attempt to evict the squatters was met with an armed response. The hypercorp is currently analyzing the cost-benefit ratio of pursuing the issue further.

Dubbed Hotel California by the residents, after an old song about a hotel where the visitors never leave, this station is notable as a brinker haven right at the heart of transhuman space. The colony has no



egocasting facilities, nor do the residents desire any, so the only way to reach it is by standard physical means. Ships rarely visit here, and few people leave. The local mesh is very limited, and the few meager fabbers, some leftover from the life rafts, are held in common trust. The site is primarily notable as an area useful for lying low and going underground. Firewall suspects that several wanted individuals have made their way here, to live in anonymity and isolation.

PARADISE

Orbit: Earth-Sun L1
Station Type: Torus
Allegiance: Planetary Consortium
Primary Languages: English, Italian
Major Industries: Resort Services, Tourism

This station sits in the sun spot of the Earth-Sun L1 point, meaning it's permanently awash in golden light. It was built as a resort and spa for the ultra-rich, back before the Fall, and was said to be extremely popular, especially for offering cutting-edge rejuvenation techniques back before such technology became more widespread. Overwhelmed by refugees during the Fall, the aesthetic beauty of this sanctum was marred by shanty-towns, hovels, and camps. Its once-handsome groves of exotic trees were hacked to bits for firewood and shelter. Paradise has managed a turn-around, however, as some of the inner system glitterati have taken interest in the resort again and substantial efforts were made to relocate squatters and restore the facility. Ongoing rumors say that the relocation of some refugees was less than gentle, but the support of the Planetary Consortium in the matter has kept this discreet. This reinforces another rumored likelihood, that the Hypercorp Council uses Paradise for critical face-to-face meetings, which seems increasingly likely given the extra security and countersurveillance systems with which the resort has been equipped.

REMEMBRANCE

Orbit: Earth-Luna L4
Station Type: O'Neill Cylinder
Allegiance: Lunar-Lagrange Alliance
Primary Languages: English, Hindi, Wu
Major Industries: Shipping, Trade, Information, Politics

The center of the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance and the largest station near Earth, Remembrance dominates the Earth-Luna L5 point and houses over two million people. Though it is the largest O'Neill cylinder in existence, it is still overpopulated, so most of the station is cramped, dirty, smelly, and dangerous. The station itself actually consists of two counter-rotating cylinders laid end-to-end, each 35 kilometers in length and 8 kilometers in diameter, and providing approximate Earth gravity. The most crowded cylinder, home to the more impoverished residents and indentures, is continuously pushing its environmental systems to their maximum, and suffers regular breakdowns—as evidenced by the septic growths and smells. The other half of the habitat fares slightly better, thanks to better air scrubbers, and it is here that the towers of the upper-class elites, including the LLA officials, rise above all, clean and airy and shining. There have been several proposals to expand Remembrance itself, adding another cylinder in order to accommodate its increased population, but doing so would require a substantial amount of cred. Most of the elite refuse to be bothered; after all, they're not the ones being crowded. Still, the effects do spill over into the business section and even around the towers, and Remembrance suffers an unfortunate amount of vice and crime.

NANDI SETSIN

Nandi Setsin is the mayor of Remembrance, and possibly one of the most disliked political leaders in the inner system. Abrasive and argumentative, Setsin is an ardent reclaimer. Already under fire for failing to relieve Remembrance's overcrowding and widespread poverty, Setsin fanned the flames by instituting an unpopular Reclamation Tax on Remembrance citizens. A supporter of Avra Don, Setsin has occasionally taken the fall for pushing through some of Don's disliked policies. On the other hand, the pair are often at odds, as Don seeks to rein in Setsin's vocal rhetoric and Consortium-bashing. Repeated charges of corruption have been raised over Setsin's administration, though none have stuck. None of Setsin's detractors can fault her administrative skills, however, or the fact that she keeps a troubled habitat from falling further into decline.

VO NGUYEN

Orbit: GEO
Station Type: O'Neill Cylinder
Allegiance: Lunar-Lagrange Alliance
Primary Languages: French, Vietnamese
Major Industries: Research, Salvage

This station is a well-known stronghold of the reclaimers movement. Under the leadership of Tate Markess, the reclaimers study Earth and make plans for taking it back. Some say the reclaimers also use Vo Nguyen as a launch point for missions to the planet, but the reclaimers deny this. This habitat is also a focal point for bioconservative efforts around Earth, with several notable biocon groups headquartered here. Prominent demagogue Milder Ripon is notable as a leading bioconservative organizer and voice.

This mesh of ideologies has led to some contentious disagreements. While most bioconservatives support the reclaimer cause, not all reclaimers are bioconservatives—in fact, most are explicitly not. Political arguments between reclaimers supporting nano-ecologist viewpoints and bioconservatives have sometimes led to physical violence. Certain reclaimer research projects on Vo Nguyen, especially ones advocating heavy use of nanotech and neogenetic life forms in geo-engineering efforts, have also suffered several sabotage and bombing attacks, likely conducted by neo-primitivists in support of the biocon agenda. Some worry that these ongoing disagreements may tear the reclaimer movement apart.

DERELICT HABITATS

A significant number of Earth-orbit habitats were vacated during the Fall, whether voluntarily or by force. The majority of those are still derelict now, though squatters have occupied some, and a handful have been restored. The rest remain potential sources of profit and danger. Though Firewall has cataloged these stations (link), a few deserve explicit attention, having recently raised flags with Firewall scanners.

BLACKROCK

Orbit: Earth-Luna L3
Station Type: Beehive/Dome

Named for the iron-rich black rock asteroid upon which it was built, Blackrock was a thriving travel exchange and mercantile base until the Fall. It was established when a captured asteroid was towed into the Earth-Luna L3 point, for the express purpose of maintaining a communications grid on Luna's far side and also to establish a waypoint there, for cycler traffic and other destinations. It quickly grew into a key shipping point for many companies. When the TITANs began attacking Earth-orbit stations, however, Blackrock was one of the first casualties. In a matter of minutes, something killed all biological life on the asteroid, leaving it a dead rock. Some theorize the attack was a biological virus—quite possibly an exsurgent virus variant—though it is noted that synthmorphs were also terminated in the same period. Another hypothesis is that a dirty bomb of some variety was detonated within the base, which seems plausible given the electromagnetic pulse detected at the time and a tell-tale radiation signature around the station ever since. Some have suggested that Blackrock's own personnel detonated the device in order to prevent the TITANs from exploiting the station's communication nexus capabilities.

Regardless, the station was abandoned and has been an empty hulk ever since. Initial exploration via remote-control drone discovered nothing interesting or unusual, but scavengers have largely avoided Blackrock due to the high radiation count that remains. Recently, however, several stations and nearby spacecraft have reported intercepting transmissions originating from Blackrock. These signals have been analyzed and found to either be encoded or gibberish. The source could be squatters, but it seems unlikely anyone would risk dealing with the radiation there.

It should be noted that without the attitude adjustment it has needed to stay at the L3, Blackrock's positioning has become unstable. It will likely drift from the Lagrange point and crash into Luna sometime within the next 5 years if not dealt with first.

THE FLYTRAP

Orbit: Earth-Luna L1
Station Type: Torus

Originally a resort habitat called De Milo, this torus's amenities were not available to the public, having been designed, built, and created as a private getaway for the OneCom hypercorp's top execs and their favored guests. A sumptuous private clubhouse, the De Milo offered the finest food, wine, accommodations, and service in a lush, arboreal, low-gravity setting. OneCom privately boasted about the torus's vineyards, groves, pools, and gardens, and even populated this carefully sculpted wilderness with unique wildlife—exclusively-licensed chimera provided by Ecologene.

De Milo was digitally invaded by the TITANs early on during the Fall. Though some of the residents and guests managed to escape, hundreds died, apparently turned against each other (a likely sign of exsurgent infection). A half-hearted attempt to destroy the station merely succeeded in taking out a segment of the torus's rim, leaving a gaping hole in the wheel.

Shortly after the Fall, LLA military units investigated, swept, and reclaimed the torus, finding no signs of active TITANs or their machines. OneCom never survived the decapitation of its leadership from the TITAN attack, among other Fall-era incidents that effectively caused the corp to collapse (and be consumed by its rivals). The LLA seized on the lack of ownership and turned the torus into an ad hoc refugee camp, shuttling in hundreds of destitute survivors from overcrowded habitats elsewhere. From the beginning this arrangement faced problems, as the torus's environmental systems were severely damaged, and little effort was made to clean up or restore the wreckage and debris from the TITAN attack. This situation backfired not long after, when tensions between two rival ethnic groups, housed together in cramped and frightening conditions, erupted in riots, leaving dozens dead. The LLA was forced to relocate many of the refugees, then decided to wash their hands of the matter. The remaining staff and residents were left to handle the habitat on their own, many of whom fled rather than live in a habitat they found to be depressing and weird.

In the years since, the decrepit habitat has continued to change. The still-unfixed environmental systems damage means that the torus has been overcome with sepsis and rot. The air within is difficult to breathe at best, and respirators are recommended. The stench is overwhelming. The flora within the station has mutated and exploded out-of-control, with entire segments of the habitat now overtaken with foliage, mold, and spores. A nominal population of squatters still resides here, waging a battle of sorts against their environment.

Now nicknamed the Flytrap, this station is notable as a waystation for brinkers and others who need to conduct business in an out-of-the-way place. More interesting to sentinels, however, are the reports of new animal life-form sightings within the station. While these may be survivors from the habitat's original stock of gengineered animals, the history of exsurgent infection on this station raises potential links and concerns.

SHENLONG

Orbit: MEO
Station Type: Cluster

Known as the "Divine Dragon," this pre-Fall orbital station was a research center and weapons platform for the Chinese military. No one knows exactly what they were developing there—most likely viruses and other germ warfare agents that required a strict quarantine. It had the best defensive systems and security hardware available at the time, cutting-edge really, to protect the scientists working there and safeguard their secrets.

During the Fall, this station suffered a TITAN outbreak. It is unknown how the TITANs got on board—perhaps they infiltrated the cluster's computer systems and activated some of the military's own defenses against the crew or manufactured new killing machines on the spot. Whatever the case, the TITANs swept through the habitat ruthlessly—there are no known survivors. Various other military stations and ships concentrated their fire on the station, attempting to destroy it before the TITANs could deploy its weapon systems. The cluster's sophisticated defenses managed to counter these attacks, however, with the station weathering only moderate damage. For reasons unknown, the TITANs never used the weapon platform to strike back, and seemed to have abandoned the station soon thereafter. Shenlong's automated defensive systems remain activated, however, countering several further attempts to destroy the cluster.

The Planetary Consortium has put a block on any initiatives to destroy Shenlong, likely because various hypercorps are quite eager to see what the Chinese were doing inside. Numerous attempts to gain access to the station have so far failed, however, driven off or destroyed by the cluster's defenses. There is some indication that the cluster has repaired itself and possibly even upgraded these systems. Efforts to breach this habitat are advised to proceed with caution. The defenses are substantial, TITAN relics may still be aboard, and whatever the Chinese scientists were working on may have been released into the cluster, posing further dangers.

PRIVATE STATIONS AND SQUATTERS

On one hand, you have a massive overcrowding problem in the Earth-Luna system. On the other, you have dozens, maybe hundreds, of stations sitting vacant, floating in orbit, waiting to be used again. It seems simple, yes?

Many of these derelicts are damaged, of course. Some are barely inhabitable, or would require extensive repairs to put back in operation. Others are not so pretty as they once were, but functional, having been abandoned for one reason or another during the Fall. Of course, most of those stations have no power, no heat, no water or food. So that is the first problem. But anyone who can surmount those issues can squat the habitat and claim it as their home.

In some cases, these new claims are completely legal. New companies have appeared and bought old stations from surviving owners or their descendants, repairing them and renovating them and setting up corporate headquarters and research stations and outposts around Earth. In some cases these claims have been less legitimate, or at least less bureaucratic—possession is still nine-tenths of the law, and many of the empty stations have no one else to claim them, so any company or individual that inhabits them has a full right to them.

Yes, corporations. Not all squatters are poor and destitute, you know. Some are resourceful and see an opportunity. And where refugees and hypercorps have gone, so too have criminal syndicates and others.

Most of the squatters in the system are indeed impoverished and desperate. Some have been dumped in empty habitats by administrations that sought an easy solution to the overcrowding difficulties in their home habitats. Others have been resourceful enough to organize and find a way to get to an abandoned station and make it theirs. In some cases, they hire freehaulers or crime cartels to transport them to a derelict habitat. If they're lucky, they'll get there alive and without getting their gear stolen. Others cobble together a small shuttle of their own, barely sturdy enough to blast off from Luna or wherever they are and make it to their destination before the life support runs out. Not all of them make it. If they do, they cannibalize the craft to get a small power source, a tiny heat barrier, and a small nanotech assembler. They've got food, water, heat, and power. They can survive. Then they work on repairing their new home, restoring and sealing and re-powering room after room, building after building, until they have a decent living space again, one far bigger and better than the crammed-in hovel they came from. A few are more prepared and have more resources, so they arrive at their new home with a team of bots to clear the place out and clean it up for them.

What worries Firewall the most about squatters is that they may very well be putting themselves at risk, should they unearth or somehow reactivate some TITAN-related threat. Unlike more prepared and resourceful groups, it would be very easy for squatters to fall prey to such machines, or worse, to become infected and then to spread that infection back. On the other hand, many of these old stations still have dangerous weaponry, research projects, or TITAN relics lying around—which could be devastating in the wrong hands. These same concerns apply equally to scavengers. For these reasons, Firewall scanners take an active interest in monitoring squatter and scavenger activity. ■



LUNA



LUNAR SOCIETY

The mingling of cultures in turbulent times has led to an unusual social setup.

Lunar Attitudes: How paranoia and regionalism lead to a conservative society. ■ p. 79

Lunar Government: How Luna fits in with the LLA. ■ p. 80

Lunar Influence: How Luna remains a powerhouse in finance, fashion, and entertainment. ■ p. 80

Life in Lunar Settlements: How factors like underground living, overcrowding, and lingering prejudices affect Lunar life. ■ p. 82

Lunar Map: Notable regions and settlements. ■ p. 82

THREATS

Firewall is actively monitoring these dangers:

Anti-Synthmorph Prejudice: A civil conflict is brewing over the clanking masses. ■ p. 84

Exsurgent Pockets: Lingering caches of dormant nanoswarms still occasionally infect those who stumble upon them. ■ p. 91

New Mumbai: Something still stirs in the bombed and quarantined ruins. ■ p. 93

HOT SPOTS

These places may be of particular interest to sentinels:

Nectar: The largest and most cosmopolitan of Lunar surface habitats. ■ p. 86

Shackle : A center of Indian culture and the Lunars' primary source of water. ■ p. 87

Mitre: The inner system headquarters for the argonauts. ■ p. 89

Selene Station: The major Consortium base in the Earth-Luna system. ■ p. 89

The Lunar Skyhook: Dangling from Selene, this mobile moonstalk is vital to the Lunar economy. ■ p. 91



Home to 40 million transhumans, Luna is one of the three centers of the inner system. While Mars is the most populous world in the solar system, with five times Luna's population and a far more hospitable environment, several of the Lunar settlements are not only the oldest surviving human habitations in existence, they are also symbolically far more of a home to transhumanity. Just ask any Lunar, they'll tell you, and with no shortage of pride. However, there are also things they don't like to talk about too openly. On Luna's "near side," anyone looking up can see the blighted Earth in great detail. While those of us from the outer system regularly deride residents of the inner system as living in the past and still beholden to the now-destroyed Earth, in a very real sense Mars is the new home of transhumanity, while Luna quite literally lies in Earth's shadow. Elsewhere in the solar system, the Earth is nothing more than a distant dot of light. On Luna, the damage done to transhumanity's home by the TITANs is clearly visible, as is the fact that on Earth's night side, the once great seas of urban illumination have been reduced to a handful of baleful flickers that now mark the inhuman activities of a few hundred thousand TITAN-twisted monsters.

LIFE BEHIND THE CURVE

During the Fall, Luna was the easiest place to relocate refugees from Earth. As a result, more than half of the refugees who were physically evacuated from Earth ended up on Luna. Compared to Mars, Venus, and most of the other worlds and moons in the solar system, however, Luna is not a particularly hospitable place. It is an airless world that is exceptionally poor in hydrogen. The lack of a magnetosphere or atmosphere means settlements must be built underground or buried to protect them from solar flares and cosmic rays. To this day, overcrowding and limited resources continue to strain the Lunar economy and living conditions.

Unlike the stations in Earth orbit, Luna did not suffer the same severe economic depression in the wake of the Fall. It was saved in large part by the fact that Luna is a relatively wealthy world that is a system-wide center for both fashion and finance. The impact of the Exodus and Fall and subsequent re-allocation of transhumanity's resources, however, means that Luna remains wealthy but also relatively static. While much of the solar system is in the midst of an unprecedented phase of vibrant growth, Luna remains stuck in a state of equilibrium.

A significant percentage of the infomorph refugees and other members of the exceedingly poor who arrived on Luna after the Fall indentured themselves to Mars or found some other way off-world several years ago. An increasing number of young and ambitious Lunars have followed in their wake, seeking better opportunities elsewhere. Those that stayed remain impoverished with few new opportunities, as there is little job growth, and they remain in cramped conditions as well, since while several cities are being expanded, this expansion is quite slow. Unless they have a good job waiting for them there, few inhabitants of the solar system consider immigrating to Luna, as there are better options elsewhere. The Lunar cost of living is relatively high, and Luna already possesses all of the unskilled and semiskilled labor it needs. Most well-off Lunars aren't interested in letting in more immigrants anyway, and the Planetary Consortium is primarily focused on increasing the Martian population. As a result, most new settlements under construction are being built by synthmorphs for synthmorphs. On the positive side, the cost of creating new living space and the limitations of local supplies of hydrogen and water means that the period of indentured labor an infugee must contract for in

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

A few older residents of the solar system still refer to Luna as "the Moon," but most know better than to do this on Luna or around Lunars. Even before the Fall, some residents of Luna resented this term as indicating Luna's subservience to Earth. Whether someone called it Luna or "the Moon," however, was largely a political issue and of little concern to anyone uninterested in the politics of Lunar settlement.

Unsurprisingly, all this changed with the Fall. In addition to the simple practicality of not referring to any world as "the Moon" when transhumanity now inhabits more than a dozen moons, calling Luna "the Moon" indirectly refers to Earth, and most Lunars do not enjoy being reminded of Earth's proximity. Anyone who calls it "the Moon" on Luna or in any gathering of Lunars is most likely to be greeted with a stony and uncomfortable silence. Such people are regarded as boorish, unmannered, and ignorant by most Lunars.

The other term to watch out for is "Loonie." Lunars use it a great deal, but non-Lunars should avoid it. It began as a pre-Fall pejorative and has been co-opted by the vast majority of Lunars. However, most Lunars react badly to non-Lunars using it. Older residents still remember it as an insult when used by outsiders, and younger residents consider using it as one of the cultural markers of being Lunar. ■

order to be resleeved is no longer than anywhere else in the solar system.

Luna is also not a center for new technology or cutting-edge science, since this world's strict safety regulations and licensing have driven most hypercorps and other organizations performing various forms of research to other, more open worlds. Within the past five years, the general opinion of Luna and Lunars by off-worlders has gradually shifted. Today, most off-worlders regard Luna as relatively wealthy, but not prosperous, and it is universally considered a conservative place. The stereotype of it being a world of bankers surrounded by clanking masses is increasingly common. This reputation for backwardness and conservatism is further reinforced by the fact that Lunars cling to Earth-based cultures far more than most other residents of the solar system. Luna is one of the few places where old holidays like the United States' Thanksgiving or China's Moon Festival are still widely celebrated. In a very real sense, much of the Lunar population is clinging to the past.

Luna isn't devoid of innovation, however. The Lunar fashion industry continues to thrive and helps offset the idea that Luna is a backwater, at least among those who do not favor the fashion houses of Titan. The growth of the reclaimer movement has also renewed interest in and support for the Earth-Lunar system, drawing back some hypercorps and creating new opportunities.

Lunar Attitudes

Though Luna is home to more than 5% of the surviving transhuman population, it is also a world that has been touched deeply by its history and by the Fall. As a result, there is a distinctive Lunar culture and a set of attitudes that are relatively common among long-term residents. Although there are plenty of cosmopolitan, non-paranoid Lunars, the attitudes described below are sufficiently common that off-worlders visiting Luna should be aware of them.

Paranoia

One of the truisms of the post-Fall solar system is that Luna is the most paranoid of the major settled worlds. Both the nearness to Earth and the memory of the destruction of New Mumbai provide a more than ample reason for this paranoia. While most of the inhabitants of the rest of the solar system are content to believe that the TITANs departed the solar system through the Pandora Gates and will likely never return, many inhabitants of Luna either do not believe that they have all gone or worry about their eventual return.

Lunars still vividly remember how a single infected refugee coming to New Mumbai from Earth managed to spread an infection that transformed most of that city's population into a single deadly exsurgent hive. This incident has made many Lunars somewhat nervous about outsiders visiting Luna and even about other Lunars visiting their settlement. These fears have given rise to travel checkpoint and quarantine procedures unparalleled elsewhere in the solar system.

Politically, Luna is fairly conservative. Both the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance and the Planetary Consortium stations here (which are generally regarded as some of the most conservative members of the Consortium) are firmly opposed to increasing public access to nanotechnology or to performing research on AGIs or any technologies derived from the TITANs or "other non-human sources." Lunar residents have passed laws stating that research on these or related topics cannot be performed on Luna or in Lunar orbit without serious restrictions, regular monitoring, and extensive safety protocols.

Regionalism

Lunars are a surprisingly insular people. While the residents of any single settlement are highly social, civic pride is especially strong on Luna, to the extent that most Lunars prefer to associate primarily with residents of their own city. Most often, this regionalism is expressed as friendly rivalries between settlements, but it can also easily become distrust. Tourism between settlements is somewhat less common than on most other worlds and individuals who move from one city to another often face a significant period of readjustment, especially if they do not openly embrace the culture of their new city. Different Lunar settlements also have different official languages, and the politics of language is still a major force on Luna. These rivalries are most evident between those cities that remain predominantly Indian in culture and cities whose populations are considerably more diverse.

Open ethnocentrism is widely considered to be rude and boorish, but more subtle tensions between Indian and non-Indian Lunars continue. There are also persistent tensions between the Sino-European settlements and the Pan American settlements, but the tension between Indian and non-Indian Lunars is the most obvious to outsiders. In general, tensions are significantly stronger between residents of settlements with different dominant cultures and languages. Lunars from settlements that share the same basic culture and language are far more likely to interact easily than those that do not, but even here, there is often some degree of suspicion and reserve.

Electronic interaction between Lunars from different cities is far more frequent than actual visiting, but when Lunars meet on the mesh, their city of origin is usually one of the first pieces of information they exchange. Lunars who keep this information out of their public mesh profiles are considered odd and potentially suspicious by other Lunars, especially Lunars who learn that this individual lives in their own settlement. In many mesh games, teams from one habitat regularly compete against teams from others, and in more free-form games, players from the same station are far more likely to ally with one another than players from different cities. Sports-based rivalries between different Lunar settlements

are very popular and games between teams of two large and important habitats are well attended both by mesh and in person. Usually these contests remain relatively friendly; however, they have on a few occasions resulted in minor rioting. All of these attitudes are magnified when dealing with off-worlders, especially residents of the outer system.

Lunar Government

Luna has no central government. Approximately 60% of the population lives in settlements governed by the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance, while the remainder live in settlements controlled by the Planetary Consortium or in one of the few small independent stations. Those part of the LLA have autonomy in their local government and infrastructure, though in practice there is little in the way of radical experimentation with social models, and most tend towards simple representative democracies, republics, or corporate hierarchies, with a smattering of technocracies, oligarchies, and autocratic systems. LLA members are bound to support each other and send reps to the LLA's Council to vote on issues affecting all of Luna. The Consortium settlements are more answerable to larger Consortium and hypercorp interests.

Most of the laws put in place by LLA Council plebiscites are restrictions on potentially dangerous types of technology and research. Many Lunars fear that these laws are ignored in some of the more secure hypercorp-controlled stations on the Lunar surface. Most Lunars are rather cynical about both governments, but they are also aware that they live on one of the wealthiest and most secure worlds in the solar system. With the exception of some radicals and the more militant members of the lower classes, few have much interest in political changes that might challenge their stability and security.

Lunar Influence

As the oldest and most established world in the solar system, many transhumans look to Luna as a source for stability and new, if not revolutionary ideas. Despite not being at the cutting edge of science or technology and being a world that is no longer growing or expanding, Luna remains exceedingly influential. There are three particular areas where Luna is unrivaled in the inner system and important throughout the entire solar system: finance, fashions, and entertainment.

Finance

The Lunar banks are widely regarded as the most stable and reliable in the solar system. A foundation of the LLA's power, these banks are also relied on by the Planetary Consortium and others throughout the solar system, and they in fact define the economic stability of the credit currency used within the inner system.

There are two types of Lunar banks, LLA banks and independent banks. LLA banks are closely linked to the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance, for whom they issue money and credit, manage interest rates, make investments, offer real estate services and insurance, and manage markets. Though they deal with other entities, they openly advise non-LLA clients (especially investors from the outer system) that in the event of a dispute between the LLA and the client's polity, investors may have difficulty acquiring their funds for a time. These banks pledge not to confiscate or freeze the assets of anyone, with the exception of those found guilty of the most serious crimes, like habitat destruction or voluntary association with the TITANs, but they also are beholden to the directives of the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance. The LLA supports these banks and sees them as a powerful way to help maintain peaceful relations across the solar system.

Each of these Lunar banks also has fully independent divisions that owe loyalty to no political organization. Based on the pre-Fall Swiss banks, these independent banks are loyal only to their investors and vow to make their best effort to insure that clients can gain access to their funds even if open warfare breaks out between their polity and Luna. These banks also keep the identity of their investors fully confidential and will not release this data even to a court of law. They use the finest quantum encryption in the solar system to keep their records secret. They also transfer all secure information via defended wired and air-gapped connections, quantum-encrypted data chips carried by professional couriers, or quantum entangled communication. The only downside for this level of security is that these banks charge a significant fee for their services, making LLA banks more attractive. Some officials in the Planetary Consortium decry these independent banks as havens for the wealth of criminals. Many other prominent members of the Consortium, however, find them exceptionally useful and openly support their independence.

Both types of Lunar bank specialize in transferring wealth between the inner and outer system and converting between reputation and monetary economies. All of these banks have lucrative long-term contracts with firms doing business throughout the solar system as well as with ultra-wealthy individuals with diverse portfolios and interests. Martian banks have been trying to gain access to outer system business for several years, but the stability of the Lunar banks, combined with the fact that their arrangement with various outer system polities works well, has so far meant that Martian banks have made little inroads in these financial markets. The fact that tensions between the Planetary Consortium and most of the outer system run high only serves to make both LLA and independent banks more attractive to outer system clients. More recently, radicals within the Morningstar Constellation have also attempted to interest various outer system parties in Venusian banks, to no avail.

The only significant challenge the Lunar banks face is from Solaris. While Solaris is likely larger than any individual Lunar bank, the Lunar banks as

a whole outweigh it. Nevertheless, the Lunar banks cannot compete with the plasticity of Solaris's virtual structure and the hypercorps' dominance in futures markets and info brokerage. Solaris is also less conservative in some of its investment risks, enabling higher payouts. While numerous other banks have attempted to mimic the Solaris model, a number of them are noteworthy for playing with high-risk investments, especially with exoplanet exploration and exploitation, which could lead to a cascade of failure and significantly shake up some economic markets. On the other hand, even the Lunar banks would be vulnerable to a resurgence of TITAN activity in the Earth-Luna system, especially if numerous habitats were affected, precipitating massive insurance payouts.

The largest and oldest LLA bank is Chan-Davis Trust, established as a hypercorp investment house in 2026 and which was the first bank to establish offices in Earth orbit. Chan-Davis Trust maintains a moderate-sized independent bank, Fortress Savings. The largest independent bank, Cardison Limited, is now fully independent, having broken ties with the LLA bank Amelia Assets five months ago.

Async Bank Robbery



To: Tonal
From: Nagual
Subject: Immediate Aid Requested

Our efforts to track and identify a number of suspected asyncs were successful, but the results are unexpected and alarming. As suspected, these asyncs are working together, but not in a way we anticipated. They have converged on the settlement of Erato, Luna, with a specific agenda: bank robbery.

Previous attempts to rob modern Lunar banks have largely been stymied by stiff security measures and the use of unbreakable quantum encrypted transmissions. Our subjects, however, plan to use their collective async sleights to break the encryption and influence and read the minds of important bank officials. As these banks are likely unaware of the Watts-MacLeod strain and the existence and capabilities of asyncs, they do not have appropriate countermeasures in place for thwarting such a plan.

To complicate matters, these asyncs seem to be specifically be targeting Lunar banks under the direction of an anonymous client we suspect is in league with one of the Martian banks. We suspect this client hopes that the scandal surrounding such a robbery will help discredit all of the Lunar banks. This situation poses two credible threats. One, it could create financial chaos, putting the economic stability of the entire inner system at risk. Two, if the robbery details were to go public, and the existence of asyncs was unleashed in the media, this could lead to a wave of anti-async paranoia and witch-hunts on Luna and across the solar system.

We need to scramble a team capable of bringing these asyncs in within a week, before they strike their first target. ✤

Fashion

The Lunar fashion industry is the dominant force in inner system style. Recently, however, Lunar fashion houses have experienced considerable competition from designers on Titan due to their increased use of active nanotechnology. The latest Titanian releases incorporate built-in hives and active nanoswarms for a wide variety of functions, leading to dynamic styles that are always programmable. Such clothing is restricted and difficult to acquire in the inner system, however, and so there remains a ready market for Lunar fashions.

More recently, the most avant garde Lunar fashion houses have broken new ground with lines that use magnetic and electrostatic fields to control the drape and movement of the clothing under all gravities. The promise that a suit of this new Any-Line clothing will look the same everywhere from zero gravity to Earth gravity, and in any habitable air pressure, has made them quite popular.

Luna also faces significant competition with Elysium fashions on Mars, but Elysium remains a more distant third in the ongoing three-way struggle for system-wide fashion dominance.

Entertainment

As the center for the majority of vids and vidgames that use live action, Luna holds a distinct position in popular entertainment. While most vids and vidgames are generated electronically, a significant minority of viewers and players prefer watching/playing those that involve images of actual locations and actors rather than computer-generated worlds. While there is no perceptible difference between live and artificial, older and particularly avant garde consumers enjoy the skill and tradecraft that goes into live action productions.

Luna excels here because of the large number of parks, zoos, and biome reserves in the various settlements. Almost the entire range of biosphere environments, from the cold Russian taiga to steaming tropical jungles, can be found in the center of one of the various Lunar cities, and all of these parks are at least several hundred meters across. For anyone wishing to use an Earthly wilderness setting, Luna is an obvious choice. One of the current favorites for vidgamers is the Alien Raider series, where the characters are globe-trotting secret agents on Earth during the 1970s who are hunting hidden alien invaders. Created on Luna, characters in this game have a chance to experience adventures in more than a dozen widely different settings, from dense cities to frozen mountain tops to tropical islands and dense jungles. Lunar cities gain both revenue and prestige from allowing entertainment producers to use their parks for such productions.

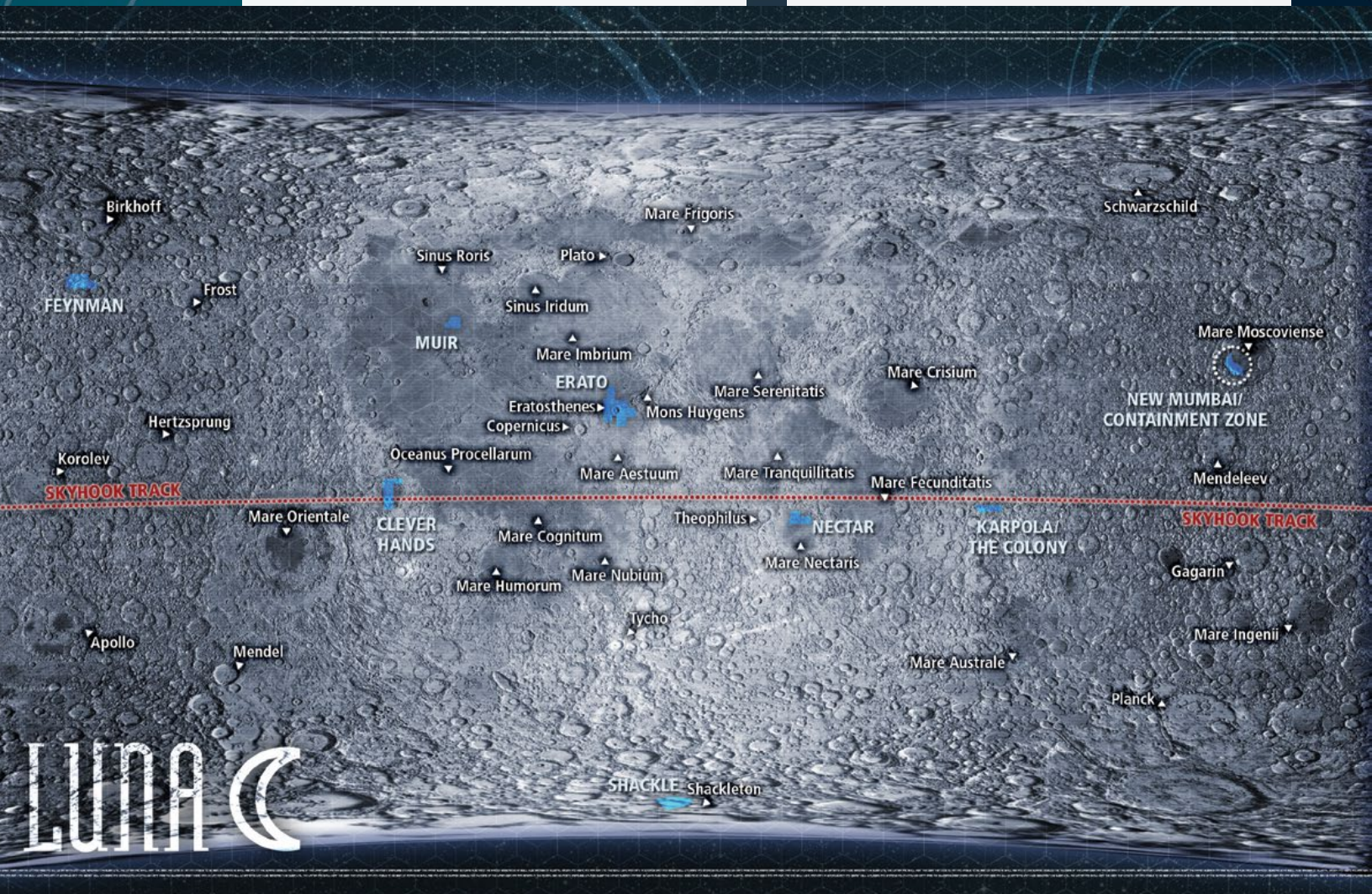
THE VERDANT WORLD

Lunar settlements are a study in contrast. With no atmosphere to protect against solar/cosmic radiation, the vast majority of Lunar habitats are underground, with a smattering of protective domes and tin cans on the surface. The Lunar surface itself is a never-ending drab expanse of gray rocks, dust, and craters. Though of interest to some tourists, the novelty quickly wears off. Almost anyone who spends a large amount of time on the Lunar surface applies an AR skin to the environment, giving it whatever appearance they choose.

Inside the settlements, however, the scenery is drastically different. Another aspect of the legacy Luna owes to Earth is how green and verdant Lunar cities are. When Lunar industrialization began in earnest in the second half of the 21st century, the first large settlements, including New Mumbai and Shackle, featured large amounts of plant life and a moderate quantity of animal life to help workers adjust to spending a year or more off Earth. The plants were also initially an important part of the oxygen and water recycling system. Since the Fall, improvements in nanotechnology have meant that the most reliable and efficient methods of life support do not require any living components. The tradition remains, however, and most Lunar settlements have considerably more plant and animal life than settlements on other worlds.

Today, Luna is home to the largest public parks in the solar system, as well as the largest zoos. Also, unlike those found in many settlements, Lunar parks are home to thriving ecosystems. Because India played such a major role in the initial colonization of Luna, many of these parks use tropical vegetation. Monkeys, ibises, tropical birds, non-poisonous snakes, and various other tropical animals are common choices for these parks. The central park in Erato can best be described as a small and moderately tame jungle. Erato and the other Lunar cities have made significant concessions to hygiene and practicality, of course, and so the animals living in these parks are either small and completely innocuous or genetically engineered to be relatively tame, somewhat more intelligent, and considerably cleaner.

Similarly, many Lunars have gardens and animals inside their homes. These also tend to be genetically modified or even partial uplifts, to better adapt the creatures to smaller quarters. Visitors from off-world are often surprised to find a grove of modified dwarf acacia bushes containing both a colony of dwarf lemurs and a nest of birds in their host's living room. Some well-off Lunars have their dwellings modified to include tiny streams and ponds a meter or two in diameter, filled with fish and similar small aquatic life. Others exist simply as water for the various creatures that live with them. Most Lunars have at least one small pet. In fact, one of the markers of feeling a



connection to Indian culture on Luna is keeping a pet smart monkey.

Exercise and Flight

Unlike most of the rest of the solar system, Luna had a large population before the Fall. One of the more unusual holdovers from pre-Fall Lunar culture is the Lunar emphasis on physical activity. In the middle of the 21st century, a regular program of vigorous exercise was necessary to preserve strength and bone density when living in a low gravity environment. Today, almost every morph is immune to all forms of low and zero gravity degeneration as well as involuntary obesity and other similar physical problems, but the focus on exercise remains an enduring part of Lunar culture. In part, this is because Luna offers a form of exercise that can be only found on low and zero gravity worlds: flight.

At the heart of both Nectar and Erato are large open spheres with many hundreds of meters of open space and a multitude of trees and tall buildings. For many Lunars in both cities, strapping on a pair of lightweight wings is both an enjoyable form of exercise and a useful method of transport that avoids the crowded streets and skywalks. Almost every tall building in Erato and Nectar contains large open balconies designed for fliers to land on. Other settlements like Shackle are less open, but flight is still common in parks and large public spaces there. More recently-constructed Lunar settlements usually feature large, open areas filled with shops and dwellings, with at least one large arena where people can fly for exercise and fun.

Almost every Lunar has tried flying and more than one-third of all Lunars own their own wings and use them regularly. Morphs with wings are also a growing trend. Aerial team sports are also popular on Luna, with an aerial version of soccer drawing massive crowds in the settlements where Indian culture still predominates.

Hydrogen and Helium-3

Compared to much of the rest of the solar system, Luna is a relatively resource poor world. Lunar soil can easily and cheaply be processed to yield large amounts of aluminum, glass, iron, magnesium, titanium, and oxygen. However, it is very poor in heavier elements. Also, the only native Lunar supplies of water and hydrogen consist of the small amounts of ice found in deep craters at the southern pole, just as the only supply of helium-3, used for nuclear fusion, is present in tiny amounts that can be reclaimed from the upper layers of the Lunar regolith. Both of these resources are exceedingly limited. Current projections suggest that existing water supplies will run short in no more than 40 years, as the small but inevitable losses in recycling leach this water away into the vacuum of space. Helium-3 reserves are also predicted to run short within 20 years. As a result, Lunar planners understand that in less than half a century Luna will be dependent upon imports of water—and imports of either deuterium or helium-3 considerably sooner.

As a world where much of the population faces the grim reminder of Earth's fate every time they look overhead, Lunars distrust the idea of having to rely upon regular and continuous imports to survive. Instead, several Lunar banks are working together to implement an ambitious plan to purchase an ice boulder at least 2 kilometers in diameter from the outer system, most likely from one of the mining corporations working in the Main Belt or Saturn's rings. In this case, the boulder would consist of a massive conglomeration of ring particles pressed together into a single huge block of ice. The Lunar banks would then pay ComEx to deliver this massive block of ice to Lunar orbit. At this point, the plan is to encase it in a thin but impermeable membrane to keep it from subliming into space and then gradually take fragments down into specially-constructed subsurface storage tanks. This ice would then provide Luna with sufficient supplies of both water and deuterium for the next several centuries.

Though quite expensive, the Lunar banks have all agreed on this strategy, which also has the backing of most of the Lunar population. The rationale behind this plan is two-fold. On an immediate and practical level, it means that Luna will not be dependent upon any other world or corporation for vital resources, preventing anyone from attempting to influence Lunar policy. However, the unspoken reason is the pragmatic realization that in the event of another emergency like the Fall, having to rely upon supplies of water or fusion fuel that are hundreds of millions of kilometers away could be fatal.

Wealth and Poverty on Luna

On Luna, wealth is ultimately represented by one scarce commodity: living space. Every cubic meter of living space must be dug out of the Lunar regolith or rock and so dwellings are typically small, except for the ultra-wealthy. A few of Luna's wealthiest and most famous or politically powerful residents live in their own small cavern villas, the largest of which are several hundred meters in diameter. Even more than elsewhere in the solar system, such private habitats generate a mixture of envy and anger among poorer Lunar residents.

On the opposite extreme, the poorest Lunar residents are infomorphs and synthmorphs. There are actually few infomorph refugees left on Luna, with the exception of some placed in dead storage and forgotten about, as most have immigrated to Mars or Venus, where there is more work and obtaining bodies is far easier. Instead, most of the Lunar poor are "clanking masses" inhabiting cheap case synthmorphs on the edges of Lunar cities. When Lunar cities expand, they first dig new tunnel complexes. These roughly-finished tunnels are equipped with light and electricity for the use of workers and construction drones, but are not yet sealed and remain in vacuum.

Since Lunar settlement expansion happens slowly, the clanking masses occupy these tunnels en masse. Transforming these rough tunnels into habitable living space is unfortunately expensive, and represents the majority of the cost needed for someone inhabiting a synthmorph to obtain even the cheapest biomorph body. The habitable regions of Luna are currently full and expansion is slow, so the clanking masses may have to wait months or years before they will be able to upgrade to a biomorph.

One cheaper and quicker alternative to excavating new habitats underground is to bury a surface settlement instead. Simply inflate a balloon or metal structure, or cap over a crater, and then bury it under several meters of regolith. Though these mound dwellings are considered unsightly by some Lunars, there is no question that they are helping to relieve population pressures.

Anti-Synthmorph Prejudice

Prejudice against synthmorphs is higher on Luna than on almost any other large and cosmopolitan world or habitat. Though there is little support for this belief, most Lunars assume that synthmorphs are more vulnerable to infection by TITAN viruses. The majority of Lunars also consider people who either prefer synthmorphs or are forced to sleeve in them due to poverty to be inherently lazy, unreliable, or more prone to violence and antisocial behavior. This Lunar biochauvinism extends from synthmorphs to include a distrust of AIs, AGIs, and infomorphs. AGIs remain illegal on most Lunar settlements and infomorphs are not granted equal government representation or allowed to vote, and face other legal restrictions as well.

While Lunar habitats allied with the Planetary Consortium adhere to the standard Consortium principles of morphological freedom and prohibit discrimination based on morph type, the LLA settlements typically ignore the issue and turn a blind eye to it. Many Lunars not only freely snub anyone sleeved in a synthmorph, they also find subtle ways to discriminate against them. Unlike much of the rest of the solar system, this prejudice even extends to various moderate and high-end synthmorphs. Someone who is wealthy enough to afford a biomorph and who still chooses to sleeve in a synthmorph, no matter how pricey, tricked out, and customized, is regarded as an extreme eccentric by most Lunars. The more prejudicial Lunars consider them to be potentially unstable and dangerous, sometimes responding with open fear or contempt. Not all Lunars hold these views, and many are at least polite enough not to express them, especially to visitors, but transhumans from other parts of the solar system are often shocked to experience such open biochauvinism and discrimination.

Consequently, many members of the clanking masses on Luna consider immigrating to Venus or Mars, and some do. Over the past decade, however, there has also been a growing synthmorph pride movement on Luna. The largest group, known as the Steel Liberators, are gaining widespread popular support among the Lunar poor, but most other Lunars regard them as dangerous radicals. The Steel Liberators agitate to improve living and working conditions for the clanking masses and also encourage poor Lunars who have gained enough money to trade in their case morphs to choose a higher-end synthmorph rather than a splicer or basic pod. The leaders of the Steel Liberators are all sleeved in various high-end synthmorphs. This cause has recently been picked up by a popular Lunar synthmorph band called Chrome Freedom, whose songs are known for their radical lyrics and whose shows are exceedingly popular with both the clanking masses and with young and rebellious members of the Lunar middle and upper classes.

In a few settlements, tensions between synthmorph pride advocates and young biochauvinist Lunars has escalated into violence. Some anti-synth bigots have taken to going into synthmorph living areas and attacking the residents. Since many synthmorphs live in vacuum to keep costs down, the attackers wear specially-modified vacsuits that block sensors from seeing into the helmet and that inhibit any radio signals coming from the wearer. The attackers don these suits in shielded rooms that are regularly scanned for any recording or broadcast equipment. These vacsuits also make the perpetrators effectively indistinguishable from one another. In the few cases where these hooligans have been arrested, skillful lawyers successfully argued that the crimes were not serious enough to warrant any form of mental intrusion to determine the exact events of the crime. As a result, the attackers were let off with moderate fines and probation. These crimes and the lax sentences are a major source of anger and resentment by the Lunar poor.

Lunar Crime

Luna is simultaneously someplace where it is very difficult and very simple to engage in various forms of illegal and covert activity. Like every other settled location in the solar system, privacy and secrecy are largely illusions in Lunar urban areas. On the surface, however, if someone is in the shadow of a large rock, they cannot be observed from orbit and there are few monitors on the surface, because of the necessity of replacing them frequently as they are gradually destroyed by solar radiation. Also, tunnels in the Lunar rock that are not monitored by a host of worn and embedded electronics are among the most secure and secret locations in the solar system. In addition, Luna's escape velocity means that even small personal rockets like the rocket pack can carry private individuals and small cargoes into orbit to waiting ships.

Like all other worlds and settlements with an old or transitional economy, Luna has a thriving black

market in various forms of nanotechnology. In hidden caverns or small, privately owned habitats located dozens of kilometers from major settlements, criminals manufacture prohibited or restricted goods and either smuggle them into habitats in shielded containers or send them off-world. Most types of smuggling would be relatively easy to stop, but the gangs and cartels bribe Lunar officials and avoid dealing in heavy weapons or other highly illegal goods so as not to bring unwanted attention.

Most of the major crime syndicates have a presence on Luna, from the Night Cartel and triads to the ID Crew and Nine Lives. The Organization, prominent in the orbital areas of the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance, is also represented here. More common, however, are smaller ethnic-based tribes and gangs, typically controlling the crime in their particular community or settlement. Many of these gangs are linked to a larger cartel, running their smaller operations and serving as a picking ground for new recruits.

Violence and Weapons

Much of the more general Lunar paranoia is focused on damage to habitats. Although there are dozens of small settlements, almost three-quarters of the Lunar population lives in half a dozen cities that each are home to more than two million inhabitants. Since most of these inhabitants are sleeved in biomorphs or pods, serious damage to the habitat could result in thousands having to be resleeved, something that many of the poorer residents could not afford to do in anything other than a synthmorph. To many Lunars, the threat of major sabotage means a future as an infomorph or synthmorph, and both options are considered repugnant. As a result, fear of violence to habitats is especially strong. Also, many Lunars worry far more about serious property damage than they do about personal violence.

Lunar weapons laws reflect these concerns. Lunars are free to own knives and other unpowered weapons. Non-lethal powered weapons can be obtained with a special license that requires proof that the owner does not have a criminal record or a history of contact with neuropathic virii. Any weapon that is even remotely capable of opening a habitat to vacuum, however, is strictly forbidden. Also, any action that risks habitat safety is punished even more severely than it would be in most of the rest of the solar system. Deliberate actions that pose a serious risk to habitat security usually result in either mental reprogramming or heavy fines that include mandatory loss of morph and indentured service as an infomorph with severely restricted freedoms. If the offense was not deliberate, punishment typically includes either a heavy fine or immediate exile from Luna, assuming the individual can find a destination willing to accept them.

Lunar Settlements

There are several hundred Lunar settlements. The three largest settlements—Erato, Nectar, and Shackle—are home to half of the Lunar population, and the next three largest contain another quarter. The remaining settlements are a collection of independent city-states, hypercorp-owned settlements, private research stations, and a few compounds owned by eccentric cults or ultra-wealthy individuals. The largest of these smaller habitats have populations of around 100,000, while the smallest are home to less than 1,000. Most of these settlements are located along the skyhook track that encircles Luna, and the few that are not are especially isolated and generally do not welcome visitors.

Some of these settlements are research and manufacturing facilities owned by hypercorps. There are persistent rumors that various forms of restricted research occur in these settlements, despite strict Lunar laws to the contrary. Many Lunars assume, often correctly, that most hypercorps pay far more attention to their own interests than to the wishes of the general transhuman public. The persistent rumor about attempts to transform spherical volumes of the Lunar crust into a "Jupiter brain" is only one of many of these unconfirmed rumors.

Erato

Allegiance: Lunar-Lagrange Alliance
Primary Languages: Mandarin, English

This city is one of the oldest and is still the largest mining settlement on Luna. It is also the smallest of Luna's three largest cities, with a population of slightly more than 5 million. Erato is widely acclaimed as the most airy and beautiful of the Lunar cities. The heart of the city is a vast cavern originally excavated before the Fall. Known as the Great Cavern of Erato, or more commonly as the Great Cavern, it is the largest open space beneath Luna—stretching 1.5 kilometers high and slightly more than 2 kilometers across.

Of all the parks and gardens found in Lunar cities, the park in the Great Cavern is the largest and the most lush. Erato was originally run by a Sino-European mining company and so the park is based on Chinese vegetation. The flat areas in the center of the cavern are primarily large bamboo groves, while other areas are verdant Chinese forest, with mountainous vegetation found along the sides of the cavern. Home to some of the most beautiful wildflowers in the solar system, this park also abounds in birds and animals, including both giant and lesser pandas. Sunlight is directed into the jungle by means of large mirrors that reflect it down from the surface. During the long Lunar nights, reflected sunlight is replaced by artificial light that is effectively indistinguishable.

The rest of Erato is also remarkable, being a synthesis of park and urban areas all in one. Dozens of tall elegant towers built by the wonders of

nanotechnology rise from the groves of trees and bamboo below. Narrow stone paths reminiscent of those found in a classic Chinese garden wind between the buildings, while most traffic uses aerial skywalks and monorails that stretch between the buildings and also connect to the various dwellings, shops, and manufacturing facilities built into the sides of the Great Cavern. Tunnels stretch off from the Great Cavern, most of which are 7 meters high and 14 meters wide. One side of these tunnels is a walkway, the other a road for small electric vehicles, and the central 6 meters is an extension of the wild area, with bamboo or trees as well as birds and animals living alongside the shops and dwellings.

Erato is the wealthiest of the large Lunar settlements and few poor Lunars can afford to live there. Most of the infomorphs and synthmorphs who perform the basic menial work in Erato live in one of several mid-sized settlements located a few hundred kilometers from Erato and perform their work via the mesh. For all its beauty, Erato has the worst tensions between biochauvinists and synthmorphs of any large Lunar settlement.

NECTAR

Allegiance: Planetary Consortium
Primary Languages: English, Spanish

Located along the path of the mobile lunar skyhook, Nectar is both Luna's largest city and also its most cosmopolitan. The settlement's close ties to the Planetary Consortium mean that more off-worlders live in Nectar than in all other Lunar cities combined, and citizens of Nectar are on average less distrustful of off-worlders than any other Lunar residents. Nectar is also the only major settlement with major on-going construction.

Nectar currently consists of two cities. Old Nectar was a large if unremarkable Lunar city, designed on the standard model of tunnels and caverns. Approximately 3 kilometers from Old Nectar is the new wonder of Luna, New Nectar, which is gradually becoming referred to simply as Nectar. Five years ago, construction was started on the new city when a carefully-controlled plasma explosion was used to create an almost spherical bubble 900 meters in diameter located 100 meters below the Lunar surface. Since that time, a combination of robot drones, indentured synthmorph workers, and advanced construction nanotechnology have lined the walls with a pressure barrier and sculpted the sides and bottom of this bubble into a series of terraces lined with buildings, while also adding short tunnels back into the rock for storerooms, factories, and other facilities that do not require easy public access. The construction of the New City was completed 11 months ago, and within the last 7 months almost a third of the inhabitants of the Old City have moved into the city now referred to as Nectar.

In addition to having vast amounts of open space, New Nectar was clearly designed to compete with the grandeur and beauty of Erato. In many ways, the construction of New Nectar is evidence of the ongoing rivalry between the Lunar branches of the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance and the Planetary Consortium, as well as cultural and inter-settlement rivalry. Like Erato, New Nectar is a garden city, with a large park in the center and with large green spaces inhabited by birds, squirrels, geckos, and other small and appealing life forms. The general climate and environment is designed to resemble Hawaii, and Nectar has already become known for the large flocks of parrots that are occasionally found roosting in the city's palm trees.

Unlike most Lunar cities, Nectar is completely enclosed. The upper surface of the sphere contains no windows to look out upon the Lunar surface or Earth. Instead, the upper third of the dome is a vast illuminated projection screen where various simulated sky- and starscapes are displayed. For the comfort of the inhabitants, light levels vary from a bright noonday on Earth to the brightest full moons—true darkness is banished from Nectar. Large colonies of bioluminescent fungi also grow upon the walls just below the projection screen, making certain that Nectar never grows dark even in the event of a temporary power failure.

As most well-off residents move into Nectar from Old Nectar, the fate of the old settlement is causing a variety of tensions. As the largest Lunar city before the construction of New Nectar, the habitat was badly overcrowded. With New Nectar being populated, housing prices in the old settlement have fallen and the cramped conditions have eased, with everyone having a bit more room. This has inspired some Lunars to move here from more crowded habitats. The clanking masses, especially the thousands who worked on New Nectar's construction, were largely looking forward to moving to Old Nectar with its lower living costs and having it to themselves. This plan is now being challenged, however, by a group of Old Nectar residents who have opted not to leave and who have plans to expand their dwellings to take up more room, now that the population has eased. Joined by many new arrivals also attracted to the idea of more living space, these residents are resolutely opposed to giving up space and turning over the old city to large numbers of synthmorphs. This conflict is currently causing tensions in both the Nectar Council and among the members of the Steel Liberators, who are bitterly divided about the idea of poor Lunars moving into the pressurized sections of Old Nectar, because they worry that many poor Lunars will do so in order to trade their synthmorph bodies for splicers.

SHACKLE

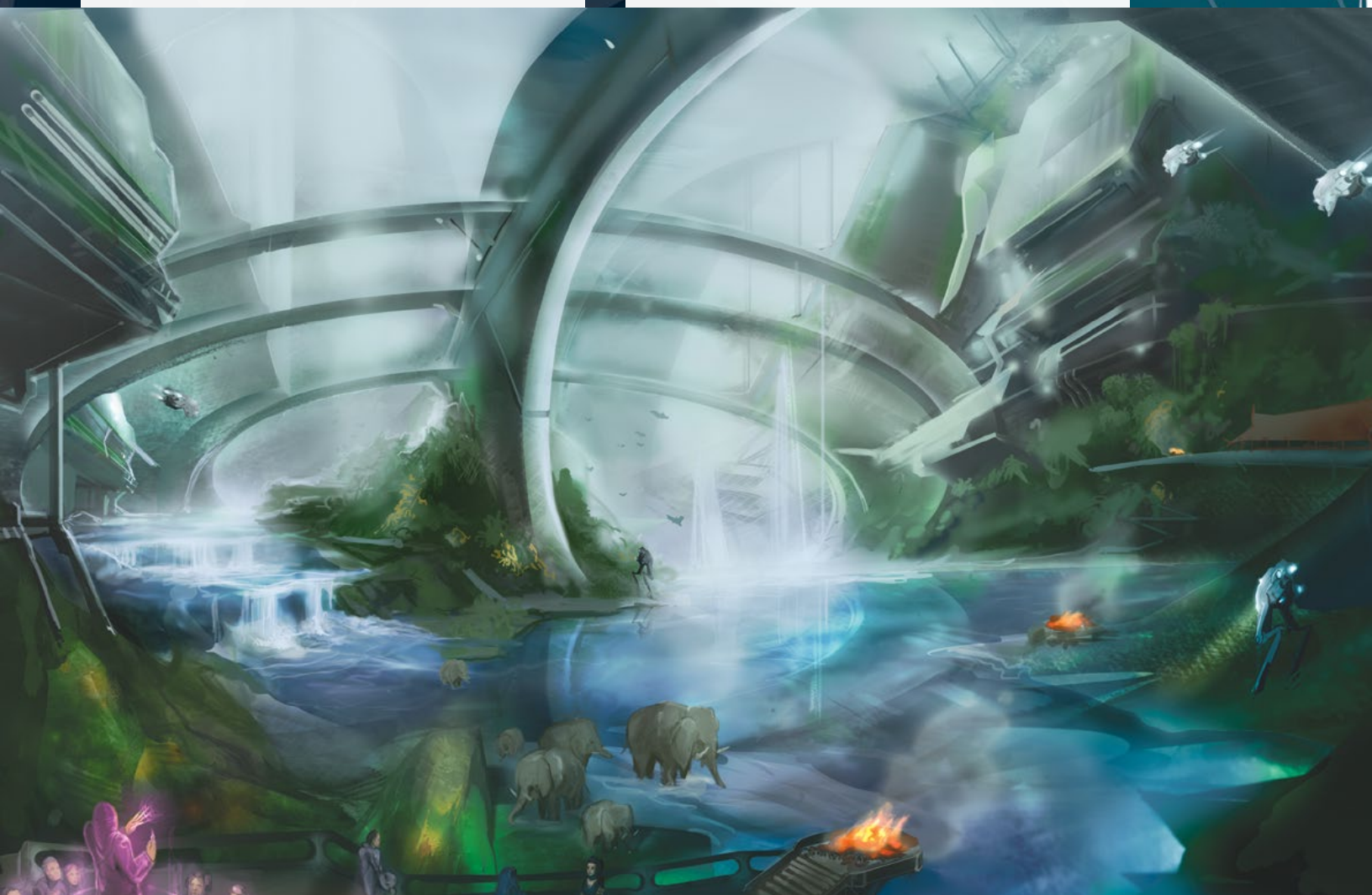
Allegiance: Lunar-Lagrange Alliance
Primary Languages: English, Hindi

Shackle is the second largest Lunar city and also the most important. It is built beside the small but vital deposits of Lunar ice found in the deep craters and shallow caverns at the Lunar south pole. Shackle is the source for all water on Luna, and the settlement was established to mine and process this Lunar ice. Today, environmental engineers working in Shackle manage this ice. The vast majority has been mined and placed in carefully sealed caverns. Ice prospectors, however, still use a wide variety of geological scanning techniques in an effort to find further deposits. Since a small prospecting company found a previously unknown and moderate-sized deposit of ice three years ago, many hope that there are still significant ice deposits to be found. At this point, though, most of the large Lunar mining firms are relatively certain that no large ice deposits remain and so they have turned their attention to eventually supplementing Lunar water supplies with off-world deposits of ice.

While Shackle was primarily founded by a consortium of hypercorps, the Indian government and several large Indian corporations both had a large interest in the city's construction. As a result, it remains the largest center for Indian culture on Luna. Slightly more than 40% of the inhabitants of Shackle consider themselves to be culturally and religiously Indian.

Unlike both Erato and New Nectar, Shackle is not built inside and around a single large cavern. Instead, most of it consists of a series of smaller caverns that are between 200 and 600 meters in diameter, connected by a series of large tunnels. At the end of one of these tunnels is a series of eight heavily guarded and monitored sealed caverns that form the Lunar ice reserves. These caverns hold sufficient water to provide the amount needed to make up for recycling losses for the next 35 years, as well as being sufficient to make up for any catastrophic loss of water in any Lunar city. All Lunar cities also contain their own emergency water supplies, but this reserve is considerably larger and is also exceedingly well protected. If anyone gained control of this water supply, in the event of any large-scale emergency, they would be able to dictate terms to the rest of Luna.

New Varanasi, also known as the city of temples, is the most striking portion of Shackle as well as the center for Indian culture. Using water taken from the polar ice deposits, New Varanasi is built alongside the banks of a series of large canals. The central canal is 500 meters wide and emulates a large Indian river, filled with fish, river dolphins, and an abundance of other animal life. In addition to the many temples, shops, and expensive dwellings along its banks, this canal also contains a series of large islands that are home to many birds and other small animals. The largest of these islands is half a kilometer across and



two kilometers long, and is home to a small herd of Indian elephants. Attitudes towards synthmorphs in Shackle are better than in most of Luna, with those who dislike synthmorphs tending more towards condescension than active distrust.

Clever Hands

Allegiance: Planetary Consortium
Primary Languages: English

This settlement is the center of Somatek's efforts at animal uplifts. In addition, it is where a majority of the genetically-engineered animals that live in the various Lunar settlements are designed and grown. Today, Clever Hands concentrates most of its efforts on producing new and exotic species of pets and genetically tame and hygienic animals. Their most recent popular success has been five species of lemurs that are all as intelligent as chimpanzees as well as being both tame and clean. However, researchers at Clever Hands are also working on reptilian and avian uplifts. More than a third of the 60,000 personnel living and working here are uplifts. There are also persistent rumors of Somatek working on cutting-edge animal pod morphs and uplifted animal intelligences that are designed for military use. Firewall has obtained a report indicating that in at least one incident these creatures have escaped.

The Colony

Allegiance: Lunar-Lagrange Alliance
Primary Languages: Javanese

The Colony is micro-sized, in the literal sense. All members of the settlement are sleeved in insect-sized (though not necessarily insectoid) morphs and the living environment is built to scale. Taking up only a small side cavern in the larger Karpola habitat, the Colony exhibits a transhuman lifestyle that still has all of the same amenities (nanofabrication, the mesh, resleeving, etc.) while being far less resource intensive. The Colony is a popular destination for Lunar tourists who wish to live small for a brief period.

Feynman

Allegiance: Lunar-Lagrange Alliance
Primary Languages: Arabic, English

An Omnicor station, Feynman has a population of 50,000 and is the most heavily guarded settlement on Luna. It is also the center of an ongoing controversy due to claims that the hypercorp is using this factory to attempt to create self-replicating nanotechnology based on TITAN nanoplagues. Doing this is against the various Lunar treaties prohibiting research on TITAN-derived technology. Omnicor denies these charges, but has refused to allow inspectors into Feynman, despite suffering some political and economic sanctions. Omnicor's rival, Starware, also alleges that Feynman is the center of Omnicor industrial espionage efforts against their orbital shipyards.

Muir

Allegiance: Independent (Preservationists)
Primary Languages: English, German

This small outpost is noteworthy as the ideological center of the preservationists. The habitat is a showcase model for non-intrusive, no-impact technologies and methods of living on new worlds. Numerous key preservationist writers and speakers live here, organizing opposition to exoplanet colonization, terraforming, and various technologies they deem too dangerous. Though Muir has sometimes been called a training camp for neo-primitivist and bioconservative terrorists, there is no evidence that any such activity takes place here. If it does, it is kept well hidden.

Orbital Stations

Luna has the standard array of monitoring satellites and small private and hypercorp-owned zero-g manufacturing facilities and research stations found around all settled worlds. However, Lunar laws against many types of cutting-edge research mean that there are considerably fewer research bases than around most worlds, or at least fewer of them that allow anyone outside the hypercorp any information about their research. The total orbital population of Luna is 3.4 million, with the vast majority located in the large station at the top of the Lunar skyhook—Selene Station. Approximately half of these stations owe allegiance to the Planetary Consortium and half to the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance.

Korolev Shipyards (The Yard)

Station Type: Cluster
Allegiance: Lunar-Lagrange Alliance
Primary Languages: Russian

While it is officially known as Korolev Shipyards, everyone on Luna refers to this large station as the Yard. This zero-g station is owned by Starware and is the second largest facility for spaceship construction in the inner system, second only to the larger facility around Mars. The Yard is home to 25,000 workers, 15,000 of whom are in synthmorph bodies, and 7,000 of the remainder are in vacuum-tolerant bodies like the novacrab morph. The Yard is also home to more than three times that number of AI-controlled bots, making it one of the facilities with the highest proportion of robotic manufacturing in the entire solar system. The majority of the Yard is either in vacuum or in an inert helium atmosphere. Starware's replacement of synthmorph workers with AIs has made the Yard the subject of continuing labor disputes with the largely synthmorph-controlled construction union. This conflict has grown worse now that Starware has started construction of a new and extremely large construction pod onto the side of the Yard.

The Lunar news media recently published several unconfirmed reports that Starware leased Factor technology and will soon start work on a relativistic starship in the new construction pod. The Lunar construction union is determined to have a large role in this massive project, setting the stage for a possible strike. Security is extremely high, for fear of both labor union saboteurs and Omnicor spies.

Mare Vaporum Circumlunar People's Republic

Station Type: O'Neill Cylinder
Allegiance: Lunar-Lagrange Alliance
Primary Languages: Cantonese, Mandarin

The largest O'Neill cylinder in Lunar orbit, this habitat is largely notable as the local base of the Sun Yee On triad, who have successfully infiltrated and corrupted the local government. Officially established as a throwback model to the post-communist state capitalist era of China, the ruling party leadership and cadre have largely been supplanted by triad-backed personnel. The syndicate's Wushuang Corporation is also headquartered here, providing cover for their black market distribution channels. The Sun Yee On are known to sponsor at least two salvage operation groups that profit from derelict craft and habitats in the Earth-Luna system, and that may be involved with occasional scavenging raids on Earth. Counterfeit Earth nostalgia items are also produced in bulk here.

Mitre

Station Type: Cluster
Allegiance: Independent (Argonauts)
Primary Languages: English, Mandarin

The inner system headquarters of the argonauts, Mitre is a moderate-sized scientific station and archive. The argonauts here consult with all three of the major inner system polities, as well as independent factions and hypercorps. Numerous pods are dedicated to zero-g, biotech, nanotech, astronomy, and cog-sci research labs, with all results published as open source. Mitre's data archives are renowned as the best public source for information on Luna, TITAN activities and capabilities, genetics, and astrophysics. On several occasions these databanks have come under electronic attack, likely over disputes the argonauts have been involved in over releasing public domain information that certain hypercorps have deemed proprietary instead. The Planetary Consortium and LLA are both known to filter mesh access to these servers, in part because the argonauts also archive nanofabrication blueprints that these entities find objectionable. Mitre is also home to Radio Argosy, the argonauts' non-stop free neutrino transmission program. Radio Argosy n-casts uncensored news, open source nano blueprints, and technoprogressive propaganda, and is a popular program throughout the system.

Selene Station

Station Type: Torus
Allegiance: Planetary Consortium
Primary Languages: English

Selene Station has a population of 3 million and is the fourth largest Lunar settlement. Selene is a vast torus 1.5 kilometers wide and 1.3 kilometers high, forming a wheel with a diameter of 12 kilometers. The interior is divided into 30 levels, with the outer levels devoted to manufacturing, life support, raw material storage, and similar non-public functions. The rest of the station consists of 20 levels of dwellings, shops, entertainment facilities, and places of employment. Each level has a 45-meter ceiling and is carefully designed to feel relatively open and airy. Though the various inhabited levels are slightly less verdant and filled with life than most settlements on the Lunar surface, the innermost level has a 100-meter ceiling, lit by reflected sunlight. This area is a vast semi-wild public park divided into three different biozones: a tropical rainforest, a tropical savanna, and an open temperate forest with many lakes.

In addition to the main torus, which rotates at a rate of one revolution every six minutes to produce Lunar gravity, the station also consists of a central sphere, one kilometer in diameter. This sphere connects to the skyhook on one side and has a large series of docks for spacecraft arriving at Luna on the other side. It is also the primary location for zero-g manufacturing in Lunar orbit. Six tubes connect this sphere to the torus, each 30 meters wide. These tubes contain three high-speed elevators that stop at every level of the torus. They also stretch far past the bottom of the torus, reaching out to small pods located six kilometers below. Each pod is an ovoid 300 meters long and 120 meters in diameter that is kept at Martian gravity for the comfort of Martian visitors, or to help individuals who will be traveling to Mars begin to adapt to the higher gravity before their journey.

Selene Station is one of the most cosmopolitan Lunar settlements and has enclaves of business people and diplomats from across the solar system who act as ambassadors and senior trading factors to Luna. The enclaves from Titan, Extropia, and the Jovian Republic are the three largest, and they have recently been joined by a small enclave from the Morningstar Constellation. Selene's allegiance to the Planetary Consortium and its location as one terminus of the Lunar skyhook give it close ties to both Nectar and the rest of the solar system. The fact that the Consortium controls the skyhook is a sore point for many supporters of the LLA, who feel it gives the Consortium a stranglehold over Lunar affairs.



TSUKOMO

Allegiance: Lunar-Lagrange Alliance
Station Type: Torus
Primary Languages: Japanese

Tsukomo is the headquarters of the Go-nin Group. Located in Lunar orbit, in order to take advantage of its proximity to the Lunar banks, this relatively small station only has a population of 10,000, but it is also one of the wealthiest and most luxurious settlements on or in orbit around Luna. Tsukomo was built as both a corporate headquarters for a highly centralized corporation and a showpiece to demonstrate the wealth and influence of the Go-nin Group. As a result, the station's interior is a work of art, looking like a combination of a Japanese temple, with a traditional Zen mediation garden, and a collection of exquisitely-designed offices and living quarters that give the illusion of being exceptionally luxurious locations on pre-Fall Japan. Competition among Go-nin employees for positions on Tsukomo is exceptionally high. Because of the high degree of centralization of the Go-nin Group, Tsukomo is well guarded, with top-of-the-line automated security and a team of 50 heavily armed Direct Action mercenaries.

LUNAR TRAVEL

There are three forms of long distance lunar transport on Luna. The fastest are the various rockets, rocket packs, and rocket buggies used to move swiftly around this relatively small moon. Lacking air resistance, it is generally possible to travel anywhere on Luna by rocket in less than two hours. Rocket transport is currently the most common form of transport on Luna.

Subshuttles are the newest, safest, and most comfortable method of lunar transport. LLA construction crews are busy building maglev tracks between the various Lunar settlements. These tracks consist of shallow trenches dug into the Lunar soil which are then covered with half-tube aluminum sheeting and several meters of dirt and rock for protection against solar flares and micrometeors. When completed, subshuttle tunnels are 10 meters in diameter and are fitted with tracks to carry two maglev trains simultaneously. Moving in vacuum and floating on superconducting magnets, these trains travel at speeds of 1,500 kph. Subshuttles are fast, comfortable, and easy to use. Passengers enter in stations not all that different from Earthly train stations built before the Fall, and climb into comfortable train cars that carry them to their destination in between 20 minutes and three hours.

As a whole, Lunars greatly prefer subshuttles to rockets, but the subshuttle network is currently limited and incomplete. At this point, subshuttles run between each large city and most of the smaller settlements within 2,000 kilometers. However, these networks have not yet been hooked up to one another. Lunar transportation officials expect that these local subshuttle networks will be connected within two years. Once completed, no city on Luna will be more than four hours from any other by subshuttle. At that point, officials expect lunar rocket traffic to decrease by at least 60% as most Lunars switch to using subshuttles. The first part of this subshuttle network to be completed will be a band of tunnels circling Luna that follows the path of the Lunar skyhook. More than one-third of this equatorial tunnel has already been completed.

SKYHOOKS AND MASS DRIVERS





The Lunar Skyhook is a tether that extends down from Selene Station in Lunar orbit to surface level. Since Selene is in a non-synchronous orbit, the skyhook is essentially a mobile space elevator, dragged periodically around the equator. This setup bypasses the restrictions a stationary space elevator would have, where Luna's slow rotation would require an exceptionally long cable extending 50,000 km or more to the Earth-Luna L1 or L2 points for stability. Instead, the rolling moonstalk is a short 10,000 kilometers in length.

The Skyhook is actually four carbon-nanotube cables bundled together, each carrying a non-stop stream of climber cars with passengers and cargo. The cables are latched onto a mobile base platform that circle Luna on a dedicated track. This platform moves rapidly across the surface, keeping pace with Selene's orbital velocity, a zippy 344 kph. Loading stations located near major settlements and key junction speeds allow descending cars to slide off on parallel tracks and decelerate, or boost ascending cars up to pacing speed to catch the hook and begin their climb. The climber cars are powered by microwave beams with solar backups. The lack of atmospheric friction and low gravity means they can punch up to high velocities very quickly, in excess of 2,000 kph, going even faster as they climb out of the well. Travel time to and from Selene is under 5 hours.

The Skyhook presents a fast and affordable option for getting into orbit, and is a much cheaper (if slower) alternative to rockets. This means that the Skyhook is the primary travel method used by common Lunars to or from orbit. When it comes to cargo shipping, however, mass drivers are also an affordable option.

Small mass driver assemblies (~200 meters in length) are not uncommon at most medium-sized and larger Lunar settlements. These large railguns can launch small packages of cargo into orbit cheaply and at a high rate. Disposable launch containers protect the cargo from acceleration stresses, detaching from the package when it reaches orbit, where it is collected up by an orbital-based catcher system. This system is used to transfer cargo to orbital stations or shipping relay points, as well as to launch drone spacecraft and small satellites. Most mass drivers are not suitable for launching transhumans into space, however some longer assemblies designed to keep g forces down to acceptable levels can be used to push people into orbit if necessary.

The importance of the Skyhook for Luna's economy and the potential for abuse with mass drivers means that both systems are guarded with typical levels of Lunar paranoia.

The remaining type of transport is the slowest and least popular but also the cheapest—lunar buggies. These simple wheeled vehicles are popular with prospectors, security agents, and everyone else who must spend time exploring the Lunar surface. Most are equipped with magnetic shielding to protect against solar flares, but many Lunars still regard these vehicles as inherently unsafe and unreliable. Part of this attitude comes from the fact that when someone is out on the Lunar surface and more than a few kilometers from a settlement, they are far from help. Even a rescue rocket can take almost an hour to launch and find a safe nearby landing site.

LUNAR DANGERS

Despite the standard safety protocols to protect against the hazardous environment, Lunars or their bots still occasionally go missing on the surface. As many valleys and craters aren't visible from overhead satellite view, it's sometimes impossible to tell what happened to these missing people or bots without sending someone or something to look or them. Most of the time, the disappearance is caused by some mixture of accident and carelessness, or the occasional murder. In these cases, the body is usually fairly easy to find. However, on rare occasions the person simply vanishes. Usually that means nanoplagues got them.

One of the gifts the TITANs left the residents of Luna was a bombardment of missiles carrying payloads of nanoswarms. Some of these nanoplagues still lay dormant on the Lunar surface, waiting for some unlucky morph or drone to wander into them and fall victim—or worse, get infected. Carrying nanodetectors is a common precaution for surface activity, but sometimes these warnings come too late. This sort of infection is still a regular, if rare, occurrence, with a new incident every few months.

Lunar vids regularly feature innocent or even heroic characters being transformed by the haunting nanovirus into unknowing agents of the TITANs. These secretly infected characters go about their daily lives as the nanoplague gradually rewrites their mind until they become monstrous and deadly killers. Several Lunar psychologists attribute the particular public fascination with such characters on Luna as evidence of continuing cultural trauma due to the horribly visible evidence of the Fall that all Lunar inhabitants must deal with whenever they look overhead.

EXSURGENT POCKETS

In truth, exsurgent virus breakouts on Luna occur with alarming frequency. These are typically initiated when an individual or bot becomes infected with one of the TITAN nanoplagues still lying on the surface. Careful analysis of these infection incidents has pinpointed several distinct trends. Most of the infected tend to establish a small base of operations from where they can "recruit" others. Given the ease with which oxygen can be extracted from lunar soil,

VIGILANCE!

Excerpted from a post circulating on numerous Lunar mesh forums

Are we asleep or just deluded? Do we have a death wish to end the most pure remnants of Earth remaining? Are we, by our own apathy and lack of vigilance, bringing about our own destruction? Can we be so lax that we invite ruin into our communities?

We've seen the results of giving scientists too long a leash. We know the risks of letting our borders go unwatched. We know what damage a single infected person can do. The danger posed by these threats stares us in the face every day. It may still be lurking there, just next door.

To truly defend ourselves, we must stand united. We must be a community with shared values and interests. We must remain the culture of Earth. But our integrity, our wholesomeness, is being undermined every day. Divisive elements are burrowing into the foundation of our society, undermining our strength, making us weak and vulnerable.

Look around, fellow citizens of Luna! We have Martian nanotech being imported and used at Feynman, the same nanotech that killed millions not more than a decade ago and left its scars even here! We have animals, animals being used for experiments and then let loose to run our streets, breathe our air, and suck up our precious resources. These are the same animals that for centuries our forbears guarded against since they brought disease and pestilence, and now we allow them to share our cities!

Strangers walk our streets. Once, neighbors knew each other and communities were bonded together by mutual trust and appreciation for traditional values. But those have gone by the wayside, swarmed under by synthetic criminals, disease-carrying animals, and foreigners who blatantly flaunt our laws.

We are making a call. A call for all right-thinking, well-meaning, and concerned Loonies to band together, join the Lunar Citizens Alliance, and start a revolution that will keep our way of life secure from the threats that menace it!

EXSURGENT HUNT

To: Jurgen
From: Proxy-23

We've confirmed traces of an active exsurgent pocket near Copernicus crater (see attached data analysis reports and missing persons reports). Evidence suggests between 3 and 5 exsurgents. I need you to scramble your team, scout the area, locate their base of activity, and neutralize the threat.

any exsurgent with access to a lunar vehicle with a small fabber and a functional nuclear battery can create a small habitat. Sometimes a single exsurgent with no equipment can manage this using only its inhuman augmentations.

Once the base is created, the exsurgent lays down more nanovirii in areas likely to be visited by prospectors, tourists, and other individuals who explore the surface. Over the course of several months, or even several years, the number of exsurgents in a single area grows through this method. At least two large exsurgent pockets of this type have been detected and destroyed in the past two years; there is a distinct possibility that others exist, still hidden.

The exsurgents in one of these pockets began kidnapping transhumans and programming them with basilisk hacks that caused them to perform various destructive actions when they were back in their home habitat and were exposed to some common event, such as a vacuum readiness drill. This pocket of exsurgents was only discovered and destroyed when officials began correlating the movements of all the affected individuals and carefully exploring the portions of the surface all of them had visited.

The other exsurgent pocket struck in a far more direct fashion. Four years ago, these monsters attacked Nectar, using their inhuman async abilities to block sensors until they began their assault. While the exsurgents were all destroyed and their base found, they managed to open two habitat tunnels to vacuum, killing more than 100 and infecting dozens more with nanoplagues.

LUNAR COUNTERMEASURES

To prevent dormant nanoplagues or infected individuals from entering any Lunar habitats, everything entering any habitation from either the surface or off-world must undergo careful screening for the presence of active nanoswarms or plagues. Though such scans are common for any off-world immigrant elsewhere in the system, on Luna the scans are more thorough and are performed on everyone who visits the surface or travels to another settlement.

This screening requires less than a minute per individual, but while it takes place the subject must wait in a heavily armored room, monitored by powerful automated weapons. Attempts to evade this process or any aspect of the quarantine and scanning results in the individual being arrested or killed.

It is worth noting that these security measures are not always effective at detecting infected individuals. Several strains of the exsurgent virus are known to alter the victim and then go dormant, leaving no detectable trace of the infection. This is particularly true of the Watts-MacLeod strain. This has allowed some infected individuals to enter Lunar habitats and cause problems. On the positive side, these exsurgents are typically no longer infectious to others, though some have found ways to recreate the virus once inside.

THE NEW MUMBAI CONTAINMENT ZONE

Before it was destroyed by two large fusion bombs, New Mumbai was Luna's primary helium-3 extraction facility and a thriving colony of 50,000 that had rapidly expanded during the early portion of the Fall to hold an additional 380,000 refugees. Unfortunately, at least one of these refugees was infected with an exsurgent virus when they fled from Earth. Though the first generation of quarantine measures was in effect, this infected individual managed somehow to slip through. A few weeks later, more than 70% of the population of New Mumbai was secretly infected, with no one the wiser. At a certain point, however, the virus went active and simultaneously took control of these victims. Experts in exsurgent activity are certain that the virii exchanged covert signals that allowed them to coordinate their takeover.

Once the virii took control of their hosts, surviving records from New Mumbai indicate that the city was swiftly conquered. The exsurgents either killed or infected all of the remaining transhuman inhabitants. Although a few thousand uninfected residents escaped and at least 10,000 more are assumed to have barricaded themselves in various secure locations, the exsurgents took control of the entire city in less than one hour. Orbital imagery of New Mumbai revealed that many of the exsurgents rapidly moved to the city's various transport facilities and were clearly preparing to attempt to travel to other Lunar cities. Rather than waiting to see what they would do, Lunar authorities dropped two fusion bombs on New Mumbai less than two hours after the beginning of the exsurgent takeover. The resulting blast incinerated the city and produced a crater almost 10 kilometers across and 25 meters deep, surrounded by a zone of melted and scorched rock more than 100 kilometers across. The official story is that the blast destroyed all exsurgents. Unfortunately, the official story is wrong.

The region around New Mumbai remains under quarantine and off limits, enforced by automated LLA defenses and drones, and will likely remain so for several decades. Firewall has made some efforts to send reconnaissance drones and nanobot swarms in to assess the situation, however, and has found signs of lingering exsurgent activity. Our analysts think it's likely that approximately two dozen exsurgents still survive, deep in the lowest and most protected portions of the underground city. These must be somehow robust enough to resist the radiation, and there is no saying how the virus may have altered and changed them. Even more disturbing, however, is the report from a Firewall async who participated in a low scouting flight over the crater. According to her report, she experienced odd feelings of some sort of presence down in the ruins, reaching out to her. Given the distances involved, this presence must have impressive async abilities and power.

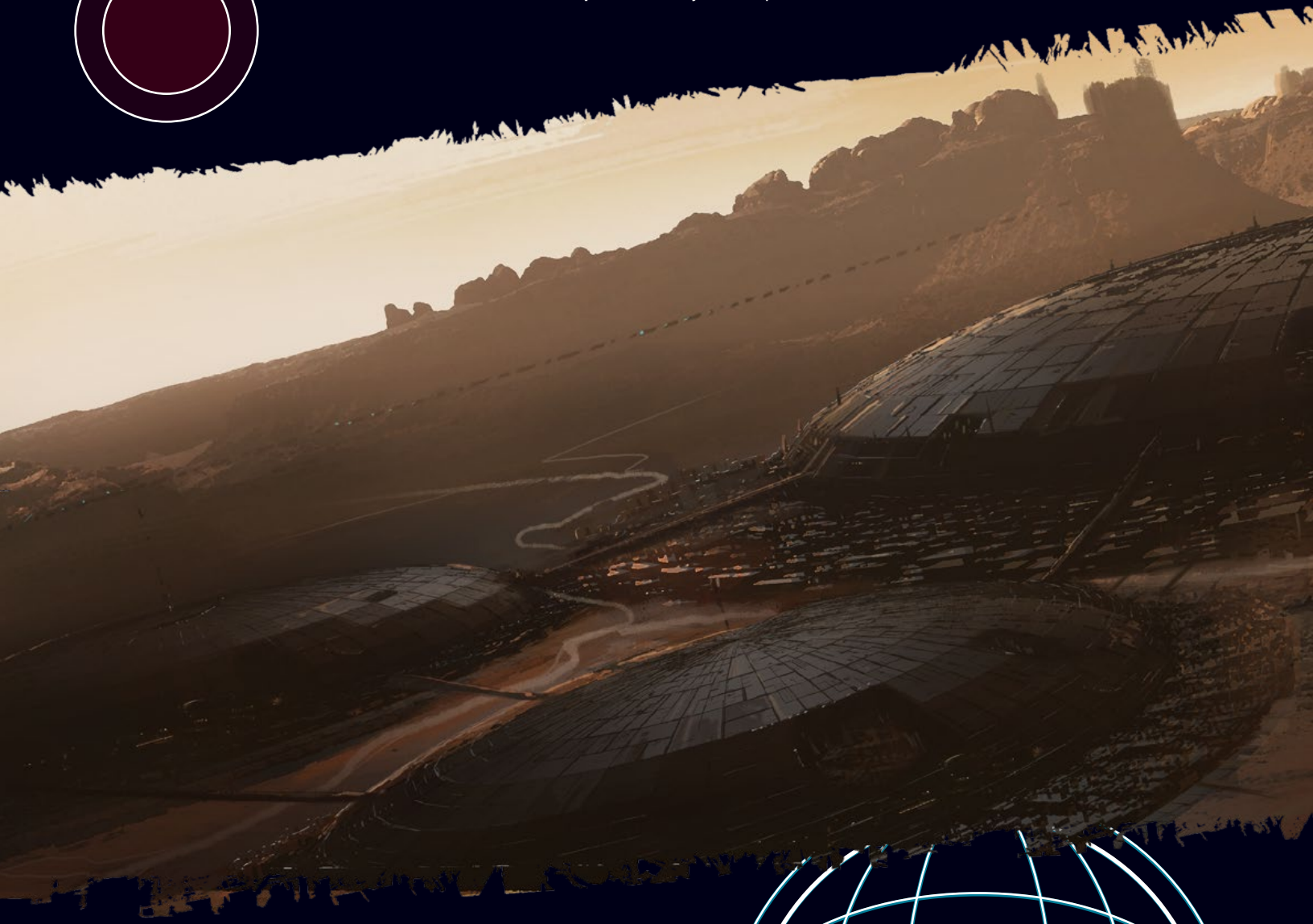
Firewall is currently crafting new containment protocols for this threat. There is significant concern that we may soon see an exsurgent outbreak here, possibly reaching out towards one of the three small Lunar settlements that are within 1,000 kilometers of the ruins of New Mumbai.



MARS

MARTIAN FACTS OF LIFE

Terraforming: The process and the role it plays in Martian life. ■ p. 99
Planetary Infrastructure: Highways, flyways, and more. ■ p. 105
Academic Institutions: Mars has the highest concentration of advanced learning centers in the inner system. ■ p. 107
Mars Map: How it all lays out. ■ p. 108

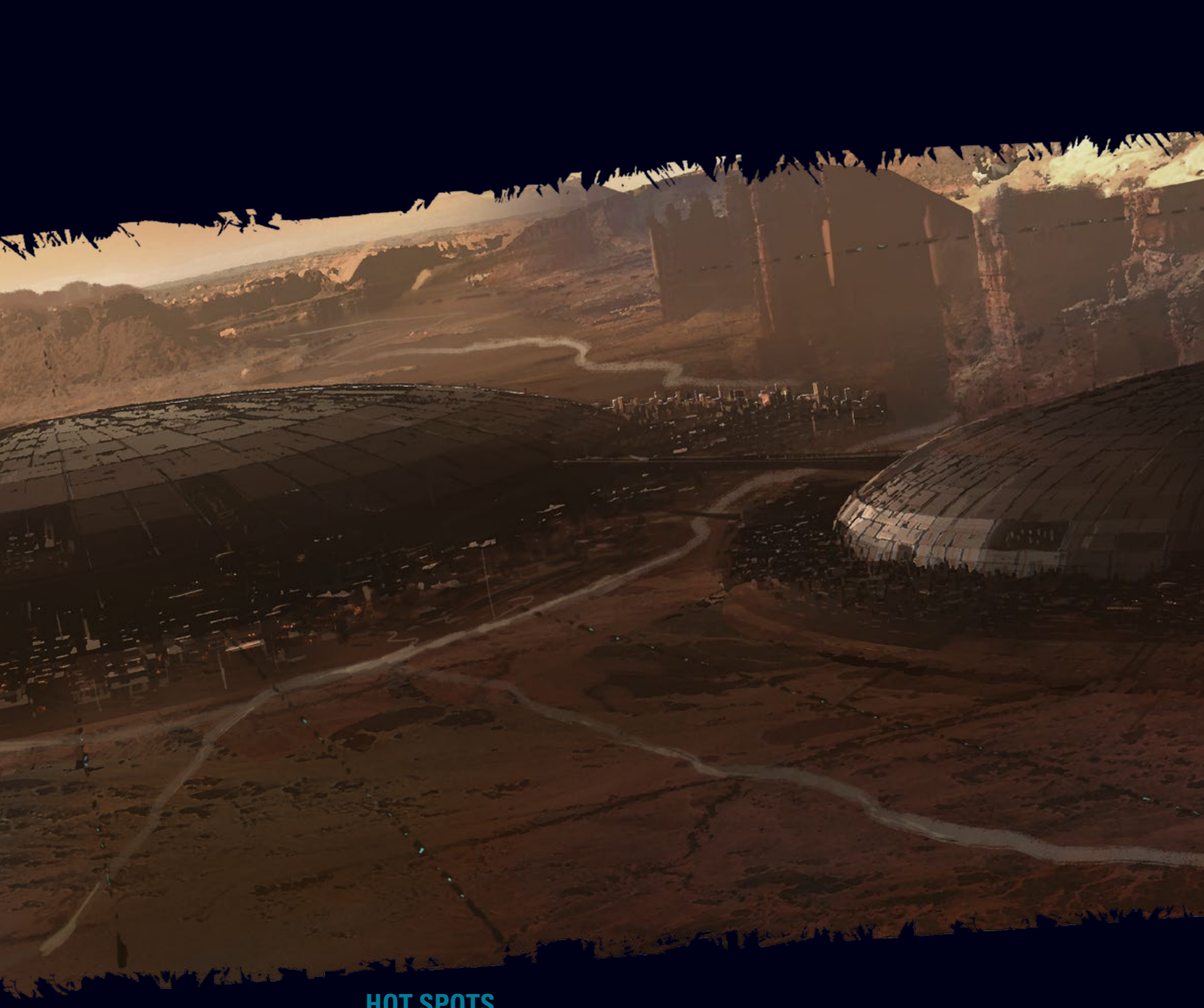


7

ENTITIES

The Consortium isn't the only player in Martian affairs.

Barsoomian Movement: This movement of "rednecks" continues to fight hypercorp dominion of the planet. ■ p. 97
Tharsis League: Conflicting local interests put an unpredictable spin on Martian politics. ■ p. 103
Martian Rangers: Keeping the law in the hinterlands. ■ p. 104
Nomads: Outside of the domed cities is where life really begins. ■ p. 101



HOT SPOTS

These places may be of particular interest to sentinels:

Olympus: The space elevator makes this a critical junction for Martian commerce and travel. ■ p. 109

Valles-New Shanghai: The largest city in the solar system. ■ p. 112

Noctis-Qianjao: The center of Martian industry and ideas. ■ p. 116

Elysium: The entertainment power-house of the inner system. ■ p. 119

Progress: The headquarters of the Consortium in orbit around Mars. ■ p. 125

THREATS

Firewall is actively monitoring these dangers:

The TITAN Quarantine Zone: The TITAN machines secluded here keep to themselves … for now. ■ p. 128

The Martian Gate: The focal point for the Consortium's extrasolar Pathfinder Initiative. ■ p. 124

Wild Artificials: Robots gone wild. ■ p. 110

It was impossible in creating this orientation document for Firewall agents operating on Mars to find Martians who were able to be as objective as professionalism dictates in describing their homeworld. This is unsurprising. Mars is a place of social upheaval and deep-seated unrest, the locus of a long, cold war being fought between transhumanity's past and its future. The authors, one proxy and two sentinels, editorialize a great deal about political matters on their homeworld that often should not be the concern of Firewall, even where sentinels' individual politics might suggest otherwise.

ONE GUY'S STORY ABOUT MARS

<Jake Carter, Firewall Proxy>

They say the Earth was beautiful. Wouldn't know; I ain't been there. This here's my planet. She's cold, full of people hard and scarred, bone dry and unforgiving. But damn if she ain't beautiful, and I wouldn't trade her for nothing. I was born in a tuna can on a hardpan rust flat 300 klicks west by southwest of Olympus—the Amazonis Planitia, dead center of what would become the TQZ. Our nearest neighbors were a bunch of Islamic fundies, but my parents were still able to make ends meet by selling some of them bootleg shoju on the sly. There was a big town dome, but nobody lived in it save company people. The rest was given over to growing food, and all we rednecks lived in the network of cans and tunnels spread about it.

My people, and most of our town, came from Korea on old Earth, and like a lot of immigrants, the thing we held onto tightest was food. The biggest event every year was when the cabbage and chili crops came in, right around New Year's; then mom'd put up enough kimchee to last 14 months. The other 10 months of the year we were eating unflavored tofu and calling ourselves lucky. And we were lucky. Dad and Mom were solid—didn't get hooked on XPs or stims like half the town, didn't take out adjustable rate mortgages on their bodies and end up in cheap synths like some people's parents.

Even if you steer clear of the obvious traps, though, there's one piece of fine print ought to be sequenced onto the eyelids of every ruster morph: rednecks are born fucked. My first tattoo was those last two words, to keep me mindful of it. Some years Mom and Dad just couldn't afford the Genetic Service Packs to keep their bodies running right, and those years were tougher than others. They always found enough money to buy the GSPs for me and my brother, though. Some kids in my town actually needed asthma inhalers, if you can believe such a thing. Dark ages, right?

Every day from when I was eleven on, Dad and I'd get up two hours before sunup to warm up the buggy. It'd be twenty below just about every morning, maybe a little chillier in winter. Lucky we lived a bit north of the equator; gets helluv colder on a winter's night down south. Actually, ain't lucky we lived where we did, but I'll come to that. Dad was a line tech, mostly contracting for TerraGenesis. Huge swathes of the Amazonis Planitia are permafrost, and in some places you even find sheets of ice kilometers wide a meter or so below ground. The plan in those days was a slow melt using simple solar-powered heating rods that'd grow a network of heat-conducting nanofibers below ground, like a tree's root system. It was a big operation with a lot of melting and monitoring gear to watch over, and even self-repairing machinery needs servicing. Lot can go wrong in an extreme environment. We'd drive a few klicks, check out a cluster of gear (it all needed visual inspection; you could never trust the self-diagnostics), then move on to the next. We'd check out two or three clusters while it was still dark, and then we'd always stop in the same spot, on a low rise facing east, and watch the sun rise over Olympus Mons.

Dad never said anything, and I knew not to talk. He'd put the engine on a low idle and watch the shadows shorten for maybe fifteen minutes—a long time for a guy who got up two hours before dawn on a Martian morning so he could finish his rounds by dusk. Dad wasn't a religious guy, but if he had a spiritual bone in him, it came out every morning right then. Olympus hasn't got much by way of foothills like Earthan or Venusian mountains, and it's about the biggest single object you could imagine below the scale of an asteroid. It flattens the landscape around it. Kilometer-high cliffs look like nothing, and our proud space elevator is only a tiny black thread above its caldera. Watching the morning clouds roll down its lower slopes while the sun crept up painting the Martian desert red gold, it was all enough to make you forget you were a helluv poor redneck in a ditchstop town full of XP junkies who didn't even hold the copyrights on their own bodies. Since joining Firewall, I've gone sailing on Titan's methane lakes, I've spent the night in a 2,000-cred-an-hour cathouse in Elysium, and I've stood on a planet orbiting an alien sun. I'd give all that back to see the sun rise over Olympus Mons from that vantage again just once, but now that spot is dead in the middle of the TITAN Quarantine Zone.

When the Fall came, I was twenty-seven and working as a line tech like Dad, looking after a string of ecostations around what was left of the Hellas Planitia glacier. Hellas is a huge impact basin, and it was in the transition from ice field to bog at the time. Mostly I worked at night, when the brutal cold quick-froze the bog, turning it back into an ice field, so I was awake when the first attacks hit Mars.

SOL-MERCURY
VENUS
EARTH
EARTH ORBIT
LUNA
MARS
INNER FRINGE
PLANETARY CONSORTIUM
GAME INFORMATION

I didn't have much politics 'til that night, but the way the PC-run media lied to people during the Fall about what was really going on, lied when they didn't have to, when people could've got away to safer regions if only they'd known, that was what changed everything for me. I only knew what was going on 'cause a friend at the time—I'll just call him Mahesh—turned me on to Radio Argosy, the n-cast the Argonauts'd been running. How'd rednecks cutting frost in a boggy crater tune in to neutrino-band broadcasts? Mahesh was an industrious guy, and you can do some crazy stuff with repurposed terraforming gear. We weren't the only ones tuned in, and a lot of lives probably got saved that way. My fam, though, didn't have an n-cast receiver. I've never found out what happened to them. All I know is when I finally made it up to Empire, the town on the Noctis Labyrinthus canyon rim that used to be the last stop for supplies before you headed out on the M-4, the western highway was barricaded. Nobody was being let through to the Quarantine Zone beyond, and they didn't give a damn whether you had people out there.

The Barsoomian Movement

Two things to know about the Movement: one, it's a real crazy quilt, a lot more complex than any one group's agenda. Two, you can tell who's in the Movement and who ain't by how they call it. If you're down with B, you're just in the Movement; nobody actually calls it the Barsoomian Movement, except in boardrooms and offworld.

There were four million people living on Mars before the Fall: about a third in each of cities, small towns, and back country. Now there're 200 million. How's a planet absorb that many people? If you're the hypercorps and their PC spitboys, you could've settled a lot more people in the country, but that ain't cost effective. Instead, you build bigger habs, bigger cities, establish a pecking order, and get helluv mean if anybody steps out of line. Now over half the planet lives in cities and the big towns around them. Most are either direct employees of a corp or indentures, and it's changed life for the worse. Used to be you filed a report on your terraforming zone and the Tharsis Terraforming Office used that feedback for planning. You gave them your hydration stats, biomass estimates, local demographics and all, and if you were hitting the targets—which were sane back then—they let you be. Now the TTO is just a rubber stamp for whatever crazy plan the PC's cooked up that month to make the city folk think they'll get to come out of their domes some time during the lifespan of their current morph.

Which of course is dead wrong. Terraforming's going a lot faster than we thought it'd do, but there's a point, and we've reached it, beyond which you just can't rush it any faster, leastways not without jeopardizing the climate over the long, long run. Right now Mars is a fixer-upper, but fuck it up by going too fast, and in 500 years you'll have a stormy hellhole like Earth or Venus.

The TTO and the corps realize this, so they do stuff that'll make it look like they're accelerating the process with a lot of smoke and noise. Orbital bombardments near populated areas, flooding—that kind of crap. It doesn't change a thing in terms of the terraforming process, but if you're a nomad or living in a small town that's forcibly evacuated, it makes a rough life even rougher. The compensatory cred from the TTO is always a fraction of what it'd take to get a new start in another town, so whole towns end up forced into the city population, where most of their kids end up being whores, hustlers, and office drones instead of farmers and formers. City dwellers, by and large, don't care what happens to the poor dumb rednecks getting displaced by this weird dog and pony show, but if anyone makes a peep about how atmospheric density and O2 levels aren't rising at the promised rate, they're quick enough to blame it on sabotage by "Barsoomian agitators."

Barsoomians



To: <encrypted>
From: Das Frettchen

Back in the day, we'd have called the Barsoomians terrorists, and it's not an unfair assessment. Politicians in this day and age are far too subtle to fall into such an enticing rhetorical trap, though, despite the truth of it. One can't get away with crying terrorist at any element of the Barsoomian "movement" (and one must use this term loosely; they're about as unified as early twenty-first century Palestine). If you do, you'll have an army of the ignorant beating on your mesh presence—not just the actual terrorists-in-activist-garb, but a whole cavalcade of social democrats, mesh neutrality activists, and pansexual degenerates. While the thought of this should generate a frisson of excitement among those with the will to power, our present planetary authorities are not made of such stuff. ♣

Rednecks, Scum, and the Clanking Masses

The Movement brings together a coalition of interests that's helluv diverse, going from your radical autonomists, ruster preservationists, and Titanian-influenced technosocialists to trade unionists, right-on progressives in the city middle class, and good ol' boy Martian nationalists. The Movement's got no platform, but everybody who identifies with it's got one thing in common: a list of grievances called the Complaints. Summing up basic, the Complaints are against:

- Indentured servitude.
- Planned obsolescence of morphs—especially rusters—cultured on Mars.
- Central planning of orbital bombardments, floodings, and other landscape-altering terraforming events.
- Abuse of eminent domain and forced relocation of populations.

A few other issues are common cause among a lot of Barsoomians, but not all:

- Mesh neutrality and active suppression of fabricator technology. This one is a pet issue mostly of urban autonomists and technosocialists, although it also gets a lot of support from rednecks with nano-ecologist leanings and technosurvivalist clades like the Makers. I'd love a fabber, myself, instead of having to scrounge tin off ecostation gear past its duty cycle. Mesh neutrality is a big issue on account of it keeps too much information under PC control. You're a blogger, you ain't going to reach nearly as many people with your scathing indictment of the Consortium if they start throttling down your content the second one of their PR flacks sees something they don't like.
- Economic justice. Everybody wants some pie, right? Hell, I do. I like pie. How we get from a big, desperate underclass and a rich minority that's stingy down to the markup on its piss, to a planet where people got some opportunities—well, I've gotten in a few bar fights over it. All Barsoomians can agree on this in some shape, though. On one side you got people who just want a better chance for them and their kids under the current system, and they usually talk about education, labor organization, getting rid of GSP licenses, and stuff like that. Elsewhere, especially in the cities, you've got those who'd like to see a system more like what the Titanians have, or even a full-on anarchist revolution.

All in all, the Movement's got plenty to be angry about, and every year, they get more organized. Never mind a lot of people in the Movement hate each other's guts as much as they hate the PC, the corps, and in some cases, the League. Some supporters are actually in the Tharsis League now, mostly holding low offices or appointments, but it's enough to make the powers that be look over their well-tailored shoulders. How it'll all turn out, though, now that's a poser.

Indentured Servitude

Most people in the Movement won't dick around on this point: hypercorp and government use of indentured infugees is slavery, plain and simple. It's only in recent years this issue has caught some real traction with the masses, though, because up until a few years back, the Martian working class wasn't big enough that free Martians were competing with infugees for work.

Those who know their history'll tell you that citizens released from their indentures are in a place a lot like black sharecroppers after the United States Civil War. They've worked for years in agriculture or terraforming, and they ain't got any opportunities in other industries … but the jobs they occupied previously're filled by new indentures drawn from the billions-strong archives of lost souls uploaded during the Fall. The Tharsis League made up some homesteading programs such as they had in the antique United States to get people to colonize the interior, and of course the Planetary Consortium trumpets these loudly as opportunity for all. But you got limited infrastructure and transit networks in the back country. The railroads gouge everybody on rates, so getting supplies in or produce out is helluv expensive. Most would-be homesteaders wind up deep in debt, living on rented land with corp-built life support and agricultural systems.

Although anybody who's down with B agrees that infomorph indentures should be a thing of the past, there's a lot of debate on the fate of the people who're infugees now. Suggestions run from building more simulspace capacity so that all personalities currently on file could be instanced as infomorphs in a virtual Earth, to producing more case morphs and letting them compete in the labor market like everyone else, to simply writing them off as dead. As debates go, this one gets pretty sick.

Planned Obsolescence of Martian Morphs

If you're really damn lucky, you own your body. If you don't, you're like more than half the free Martian population—part of some twisted fuck's business plan, under the heading, "Long-term Recurring Revenues." The part I can't even believe is that so many people on Mars, a lot of whom should fucking well know better, on account of they're the victims of it, think this is not only okay, but desirable. People're convinced their bodies will fall apart if they get off the GSPs, when really all you need is a few months of low-level gene therapy to correct some of the errors the corp genetic designers couldn't be bothered to fix.

In the years between when I left home and the Fall, I put in five years planting water bears and blacking rocks, I ate paste, and I scarce cracked a beer or lit a joint the whole time. I don't think I could ever make myself save cred like that again, and if I'd had kids, there'd've been no way. At the end I got the Cure, and it worked. Doubtless there're some PC and League types who'd wanna clap me on the back after that story, say, "Son, I like the cut of your jib," or some crap like that, and point me out as proof the system really is fair, 'cause if I could do it, anyone could, right? Balls. Most people ain't made like that, and they know it. People—all of them, not just obsessive fucks like me—need to own their own genetics.

Central Planning of Terraforming

What we gain from terraforming will take centuries to ripen, but in the short run it sometimes gets incredibly violent and destructive. Put aside the obvious risks from bombarding the planet with comets, and you've still got flash floods, heightened dust storm activity, altered wind and moisture patterns, fog, and violent hail storms coming along with the process. Some of this stuff is unavoidable, but Mars, especially down

south where the land is heavily cratered, has microclimates everywhere. The most violent storms and floods're local a lot of the time, and anyone who tells you they ain't connected to careless terraforming is either drinking hooch made from reactor coolant or a corporate PR flack. In the Valles Marineris, you're starting to see permanent floodings in the lowest parts of the canyonlands, too, and these are almost always the result of a call made in a planning office somewhere 500 klicks away.

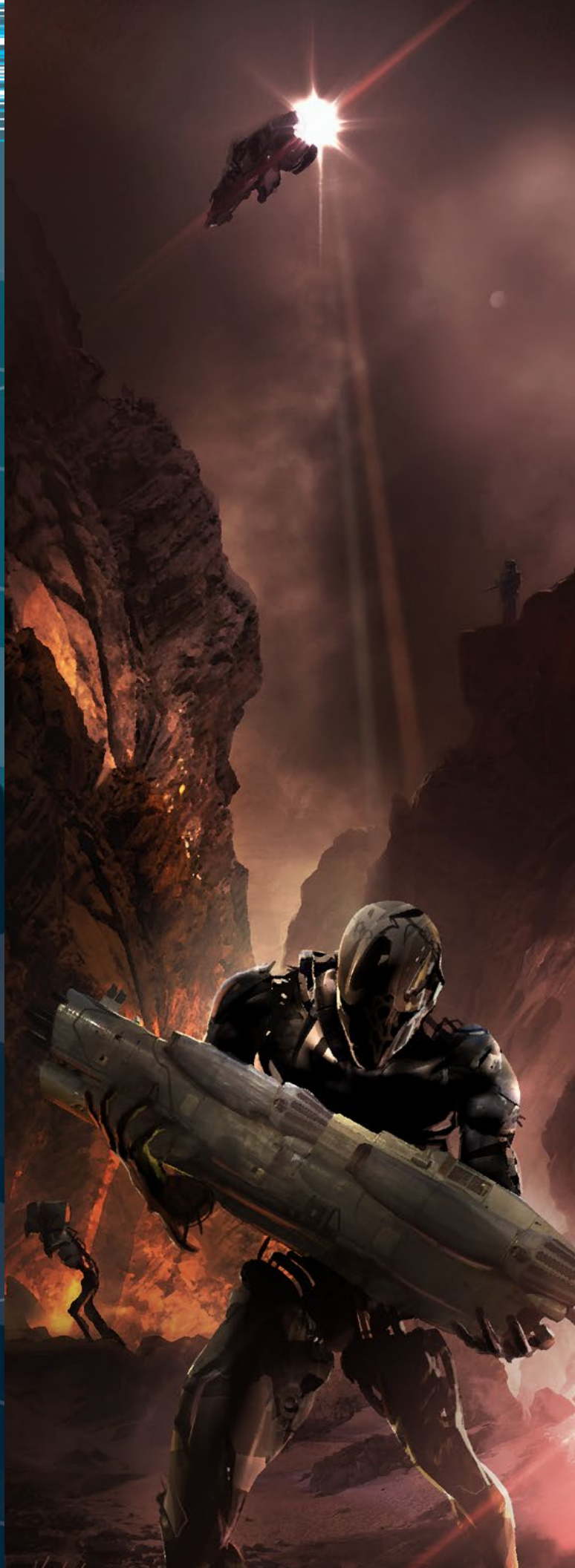
People in the Movement figure the planning process has been co-opted by the hypercorps, especially since they started talking up this Red Eden project. Red Eden is nothing but a move to privatize all terraforming ops under one umbrella. In that kind of space, you end up with a system where sites for the most upheaval-prone terraforming ops are picked with nothing but cost-effectiveness in mind. If an area slated for heavy environmental modification is populated, they invoke eminent domain to relocate anybody who doesn't want to move—almost always screwing them on land prices when paying comp, if the locals are even lucky enough to own their own land.

Planetology and Terraforming

Terraforming's been going on for half an Earth century now, but it's got a long way to go. Looking at Mars from orbit ain't too different from the view the first space probes got. Sure, there's some green, some more clouds, big areas that've been blacked to up the albedo, and even a little water sparkling here and there, but the stark red terrain's still raw enough to show its prehistoric roots. Mars is broadly divided into north and south, with big differences between the terrain of the two. The northern hemisphere is pretty damn flat, or in some places rolling, with the occasional mountain here and there. Go south, and you'll eventually hit a cliff or scarp, some high as a few kilometers, dividing the northern plains from the south, which is older terrain, rugged, heavily cratered, and usually higher elevation. Just about everywhere you look, though, one thing's clear: a long time ago, our planet was warmer. You can see the evidence in the deep cuts of old rivers, some of which are coming to life again, and in the chaotic terrain they left behind. And in Hellas early this spring, we got our first real snowfall ever. It was the loveliest damn thing I seen in years.

Before we really got to exploring Mars, there were those on old Earth who thought we'd be able to come out here and just walk around with a breather mask. Obviously, they were wrong. Atmospheric pressure is still way too low (meaning that aside from problems for morphs that can't tolerate low pressure, a lot of radiation makes it through), and it gets murderously cold at night. Mars being a desert, the day to night temperature fluctuations are extreme. On a warm day at noon, it can get up to seven or eight degrees, but even on a warm night in Valles Marineris, the temperature goes down to twenty below. Splicers need survival clothing at night, and rusters need heavy winter duds. On the up side, pressure's a lot higher at low altitudes, and it doesn't get cold enough for carbon dioxide to freeze any more.

Dust storms're still common, too, although the huge, planet-covering redouts we once got are rarer and rarer these days. When a big one comes, though, you batten down the hatches. In open country, dust storms can go on for days. Aircraft are grounded, you can't see a damn thing, and even going anyplace on the ground can be impossible. Likewise, dust devils are still common, up to a klick across and a few klicks high. As the air gets thicker, these actually grow in strength and last longer, and



someday they'll be as bad as old Earth tornadoes, I hear. It's beautiful sometimes to see three or more of these devils tearin' up the terrain in the distance at once.

I could talk your ear off about terraforming and ecostation gear, on account of I've been working with it half my life, but I'll try to keep this short and sweet. Forming activity falls into a few main categories: the big industrial stuff, offworld and orbital megaprojects (what we call "pot-stirring"), and terraculture (the stuff that goes on at ecostations).

OFFWORLD

Rubbing shoulders in the areostationary sweet spot with space elevators, swanky habs, shipyards, and such are orbital mirror arrays. Each one's made up of four or five kilometer-wide discs of rigid foil with station-keeping solar trim tabs. They reflect additional sunlight onto the Martian surface. Individually, they don't make much of a difference, but there are two hundred of them up there now, enough to raise temperatures just a little along the equatorial belt beneath them. New belts around the poles are planned over the next couple years.

The flashiest part of the terraforming project, though, is cometary bombardment. In the early years of forming, they were dropping any old asteroid, mainly non-minable carbon-silicate rocks from the outer Belt. The point of it then was to heat up the polar caps enough to melt off all the carbon dioxide and start the water melting, too, and for that all you needed was a helluv big kinetic impact. Now most of the objects coming in are comets. It's a dicey operation, for sure. You get a crew of ice pushers to live on one of these things for four, five years. They build a propulsion system that uses the mass of the comet itself as propulsion mass, then keep the thing on course while it accelerates in from way outsystem. All of these snowballs have to be a kilometer or less in diameter; anything bigger could fuck the whole planet. In the final months, they do course corrections and steer the ice so that it makes the slowest possible approach to the planet. They payoff is a giant fuck-all cloud of water and ammonia, and another big jolt of kinetic energy to melt more of the polar caps.

Nowadays, though, they're talking about comet impacts farther and farther from the poles, and they've even done a few. There was a week of rioting in Noctis after the first one hit, and now it's a political hot potato for the Tharsis League. The scientists ain't helping. Some're arguing in favor, some against, and it's unclear who's working off the facts and who's on the take from the PC.

INDUSTRIAL

The same techs we wrecked old Earth with're actually great for making Mars a better place to live. Chlorinated fluorocarbon factories are mostly automated plants that use robotic miners to extract minerals rich in fluorine, then manufacture greenhouse gases. CH^4 plants use ice and the atmosphere itself to electrolyze water into oxygen and hydrogen, then produce methane and water using the Sabatier reaction. Scumyards are industrial-scale decay beds using agricultural and industrial waste products to nourish bacteria and, in the last few years, Martian termites. Mainly they crank out compost and a whole lot of CO^2, which you need to thicken and warm the overall atmosphere. Blackeners are huge, rolling nanobot hives that move over open country, belching smart soot. Smart soot propagates and darkens the landscape, decreasing surface albedo so that the planet holds in more heat. Blackeners mostly operate around the equator, which makes the orbital mirror arrays more efficient. The last major industrial effort involves getting more hydrocarbon-burning vehicles out there. Buggies, flying cars, and a lot of other vehicles now run on methane. This last issue's created some fights within the Movement. City anarchists are a bunch of bicycle freaks, and air quality inside the domes is one of their favorite things to get pissed about.

TERRACULTURE

Rusters and alpiners ain't the only transgenic life on Mars, and in fact we're kind of behind the curve. The most successful lifeforms on Mars so far are microbes: extremophile planktons and nitrificating bacteria released in the wake of comet impacts to break down ammonia. Also doing well are water bears: microscopic animals that can survive being frozen solid. We've planted a lot of them to get more of an ecosystem going.

From the water bears and other extremophiles, the gene designers figured out how to sequence cold-tolerant traits into a whole mess of other animals that ain't warm-blooded and can't carry around a lot of insulation: small insects, lizards, and annelid worms. We've also got some plant life, especially in the Valles-Marineris, breathing in carbon dioxide and breathing out sweet, sweet O^2. There's been some success with types like conifers, sagebrush, tumbleweeds, some grasses, lichens, succulents, and cacti.

All these plants and critters're getting the liquid water they need to live in part from all the work we've done on melting the permafrost. You pick a promising patch, plant a field of solar-powered heating rods, and while you've still got an ice field at night, during the day you'll get liquid water—enough for worms, bacteria, and plants to go on with their little lives. Meanwhile, the less-modified plants living in agricultural domes do their part. Life support systems in a well-equipped dome these days're good enough that there's often surplus oxygen you can vent directly into the atmosphere.

Finally, there are nanoswarms. I talked a little about blackeners, but there're a host of other robotic crawlies loose out there working on tasks like soil aeration, breaking down rust, and "sorting" desirable minerals toward the surface through the soil

and regolith. Using swarms for forming work is controversial, and there's a law on the books (which gets ignored mostly) prohibiting planting replenishing nanobot hives in forming zones. During the Fall, a lot of swarms got subverted by the TITANs and went from aerating the soil to aerating people. The nano-ecology bloc argue the benefits're greater than the risks, but for my money I'm suspicious of them. You need to lower albedo, seed more lichens and algae. But the nano-ecologists've been winning this debate so far.

Regions

'Cause of all this, the places with the highest population density on Mars are those where the effects of terraforming are being felt first: Tharsis and Valles-Marineris, Hellas Planitia, and Argyre Planitia. Of course, there's population scattered all over the planet, but large settlements have sprung up mostly where the living's least harsh.

Tharsis and Valles Marineris

Tharsis is a huge plateau, the result of ancient volcanic processes we're still working on understanding. The Valles Marineris canyonlands begin here, cutting eastward to give us a 4,000-klick stretch of terrain that's just on the bad side of habitable. Three-quarters of the Martian people live here, mostly in settlements at the bottom of the canyons (though high enough they won't drown when terraforming eventually floods the canyons). Here, fogs've replaced dust storms. Some mornings as the cold night air flows over rivers that've thawed from the freezing nighttime temperatures, you get immense flash fogs that can kill visibility in much of the canyons, especially further east in Eos where there's the most standing water.

Hellas Planitia

Hellas is another big project. It's an impact basin, left over from a helluv big asteroid impact that happened so long ago it boggles the mind thinking about it. The glacier at the center—what's left of it—is a major source of water for the settlements around it. Hellas is dotted with a dozen or so towns and a lot of smaller settlements, and it's the heartland for the part of the Movement that concerns itself most with terraforming politics.

Argyre Planitia

This is the other big impact basin we've put a lot of time into terraforming. It's big enough that there are other craters inside of it. One of them, Galle Crater, looks like a giant smiley face from orbit. By all rights, Argyre ought to be as well developed as Hellas, but local politics've slowed down population growth a lot, mostly on account of the lousy maglev service through New Dazhai (more on that boondoggle later).

Southern Highlands

South of the equator, Mars is mostly a rugged, cratered place, and elevations are mostly higher than up north. Going along with that, the weather in the uplands can get a lot colder. Even so, there's a lot of terraforming activity going on here, and you find little towns tucked into nooks and crannies all over the place. The deep craters dotting the landscape are like microcosms of Hellas or Argyre—tiny, tiny pockets where life can find itself a foothold. You can also find Barsoomian nomads here, but since the Fall, most've moved up north.

Northern Plains and Nomad Country

The north's a hard land. Sure, the altitude's lower, but for the most part, it ain't like down south where a microclimate can take hold in a crater or canyon and give full-blown ecosystems a foothold. Terraforming work out here is gradual, done at isolated ecostations that might be 50 or 100 klicks from the next nearest station. Settlements are even fewer, so most people living out here're the real Barsoomians—nomads.

The Nomads

Lot of people don't recall, memories being short these days, but Barsoomian originally referred only to the ecostation nomads of the high desert and northern plains. It was only after the Consortium and League media started conjuring up images of crazed desert warriors and tying them in with the Movement that the Barsoomian label got applied to the Movement broadly.

Nomads working for the TTO get periodic resupplies from airdrops near the ecostations. If they're independent, they run ecostations of their own: tiny caches of life, often camouflaged mini-domes no bigger than 10 meters across, equipped with water condensers and automated greenhouses. Nomads'll live near one for a few days or weeks, depending on how well it's yielding, then move on to the next. Never, ever fuck with these installations. Aside from messing with someone's food and water supply out here being a shitthief move, Barsoomian nomads're helluv good trackers. Raid a nomad ecostation, and like as not, they'll find you and use your cortical stack for ping pong.

There're two main camps among the nomads: those employed by the TTO and the independents. Independents call the TTO nomads "les esclaves." Nomads usually run in clans of from five to twenty people. TTO clans tend to have names that sound like small companies, like Wright & Wu Terraforming or Société Lafitte, and the people in them might come from a lot of different backgrounds. Independents're more family-minded, which makes sense on account of lots of them are related, or at least got strong ethnic and cultural ties. Some clans I've run into are al-Maqqari, Girard-Moussa, LeMieux, and Duverger.

If rednecks and city scum are the heart of the Movement, indie nomads are its soul. Most of them got ties to the Francophone diaspora in North Africa. As Europe froze, millions of French refugees wound up in Morocco and Tunisia, where they lived for decades before the Fall. While they were there, they

mixed in with the local people, which is why you see all the hyphenated French/Arabic names. Trying to solve the refugee problem, the French government, which had a trashed country but great space infrastructure, started offering its citizens the chance to egocast to Mars as indentures. The forebears of the Barsoomians—French citizens and their new Moroccan and Tunisian families—took that offer en masse, while very few citizens who'd been well off enough to remain in France did. During the Settlement Conflict that came on the heels of the Fall, France lost any political claim on its citizens on Mars, most of whom'd worked off their indentures by that time, or the areas they'd settled. But the French North African culture stuck around.

There're two main cultural branches: the makers and the sufis. Both speak a mix of French and Arabic among themselves, but the sufis are mostly from Morocco, while the makers're mostly from Tunisia. Makers've got a lot in common with the autonomist cultures out in the Trojans and Saturn's rings; they're technolibertarian engineer-survivalists. Among other things, they invented the extended duty breathers everyone uses in the Martian back country—and open sourced them, which pisses the corps off to no end. As far as anyone can tell, it's the makers who first invented the "Barsoomian" tag. Word is they got it out of an old Earth sci-fi vid.

The sufis were an Islamic sect on old Earth, but here they ain't precisely that. They got a strong belief in helping others, and they believe the trials of living in the Martian desert purify the soul and bring the heart closer to their God. I don't hold with religion, but the sufis make me proud to be human, while proving what a crock of shit the corp way of life is. You approach them peaceable, they're the most hospitable people you'll ever meet—pretty amazing for people living off barren soil in a frozen desert. I got lucky enough to watch one of their dances once, and it was probably the third most beautiful thing I've ever seen on this world. Piss them off, though, and you got yourself a deadly enemy. Where the makers got clever tech on their side, the sufis have … something. Firewall's been wanting to check out the rumor that a sufi clan roaming the north edge of the TQZ picked up the Watts-MacLeod virus and shared it among their people, but so far no one's had the temerity to bang on their door and ask them where they're hiding their asyncs. Which is probably real wise.

Anyhow, you want to find people who hate the PC, look no farther. The lifestyle of the indie nomad's been under attack for decades. Land use claims and attempts to bring them on as TTO employees have failed, and now the nomads got to contend with badly programmed former swarms gone rogue, flash floods, and even "misguided" orbital bombardments if they're ranging far enough north.



TALKING RUST (SOME MARTIAN SLANG)

- **Artificials:** Catch-all term for artificial life that has a physical body, from self-replicating nanoswarms up to robots. Generally only used to describe artificial life with animal-level intelligence or lower.
- **Basic:** Contracted form of basically or simply.
- **Black Kettles:** Criminal morph storage or production facilities.
- **Technical:** Crazy or haywire. "Technical" was corp psych services shorthand for technical somatically-induced stress disorder, a condition similar to posttraumatic stress disorder that was extremely common among early infomorph laborers sleeved in cheap synthmorphs. It still occurs, though less frequently, in newer models.
- **Wild Artificials:** Artificial life gone feral, either through poor programming or abandonment by its creator. Wild artificials often evolve in unexpected ways and may be dangerous to transhumans. ■

DARIAN CALENDAR AND SEASONS

In a lot of the solar system, time's still kept based on UT (Universal Time, once known as Greenwich Mean Time—Greenwich was a town on old Earth). 'Cause so many habs and settlements, especially outsystem, don't have a natural day/night cycle, timekeeping gets pretty damn arbitrary. I think a lot of the Moon, being tidally locked with the Earth and with the same sidereal period, uses UT, too. On Mars, though, we got our own cycles of seasonal change with their own rhythm. The seasons have a real effect on terraforming, weather, agriculture, and day length. So with a little modification, we've standardized on the Darian calendar developed on twentieth century Earth by an engineer name of Gangale.

Mars rotates at about the same speed as Earth, so the Martian day, (technically it's a "sol," but that term never really picked up) is only 39 minutes and 35 seconds longer than a Earthen day. But the Martian year is just over 669 sols long (668 some years), meaning the seasons are maybe twice as long as on Earth. The Darian calendar splits the year into 24 months, with years beginning on the Vernal Equinox. Each month is 27 or 28 days long, split into seven-day weeks. The main change from Gangale's original calendar is that the names of old Earth calendar months were partly kept to make the system easier to learn for colonists from Earth. March is the first month of the year, so Darian months roughly line up with Martian seasons in the same way as the Earthen months of the same name. The other 12 months are ancient Sanskrit names for the constellations of the Zodiac. So the months of the year are, in order: March, Dhanus, April, Makara, May, Kumbha, June, Mina, July, Mesha, August, Rishabha, September, Mithuna, October, Karka, November, Simha, December, Kanya, January, Tula, February, Vrishika.

The only part really trips people up is remembering how many days in each month, but it's actually pretty simple, not to mention that your muse does it for you. Every sixth month is 27 days long, so you've got 27 days in Kumbha, Rishabha, Simha, and Vrishika. All the rest're 28 days. The exception is in leap years. All of the odd-numbered years in a decade, and the tenth year of each decade, are leap years, meaning they got 669 days instead of 668. On leap years, Vrishika, the last month, is 28 days long. And being as it's always a Saturday, people make a pretty big deal out of 28th of Vrishika parties. Best one I ever went to was in Noctis, where they call it Hogmanay and throw a big fire festival in the tablelands.

TIME

Mars, nearby stations, and more remote settlements under Martian sway use AMT (Airy Mean Time), the time at the center of crater Airy-0—zero degrees longitude on Mars. Because a second's a second anywhere in the system, Martian clocks run to 24 hours, 39 minutes, and 35 seconds before rolling over to the next day. Mars has twelve time zones, each set off 2 hours, 3 minutes, and 17.5 seconds from its neighbor. Meshed tech, including your basic mesh inserts, can track time changes when it moves from time zone to time zone. Spimes in orbital installations normally broadcast their current offset from AMT, allowing nearby meshed devices to update themselves. Orbitals that ain't in an areostationary orbit normally use AMT for station time. Time zones don't have names—officially they're known by their offsets from AMT—but colloquially people'll refer to New Shanghai time or Noctis time and be understood.

THARSIS LEAGUE

I hate politics, especially when it ain't my politics. Lucky for me, I didn't get asked to do a report on the Planetary Consortium, but I got a few words to say on the Tharsis League, the planet's other big political organization. When PC oligarchs look at the League,

TIME ZONES OF MAJOR MARTIAN CITIES AND REGIONS

Argyre Planitia	AMT – 4
Ashoka	AMT – 4
Hellas Planitia	AMT + 6
Valles-New Shanghai	AMT – 4
Elysium	AMT + 10
Noctis-Qianjiao	AMT – 8
Olympus	AMT – 10 ■

they see a herd of agencies like the TTO put there to do their bidding and maybe voice some rubber stamp political support here and there to make things look proper. Interesting thing is, the real structure of the League is basic a mirror of the Movement. You got most of the same camps represented: city dwellers, rednecks, small town people, and nomads. But you've also got people with more to lose: middle management, professionals, bureaucrats, and local businesspeople. The upshot of this is, there's helluv different factions in the League, all with different agendas, and working within different agencies.

League Council and Secretariat

The Council's supposed to be a representative body drawn from all Martian settlements and populated regions. They set policy, make laws, and appoint the Secretary General and other members of the Secretariat, who're supposed to execute all this grand vision through the League's various agencies. Problem is, reps in the Council're overwhelmingly from the cities, where most of the population lives, so most of them get hand-picked by the Consortium. However, the last election cycle there was a weird split in the city vote when a big bloc of moderates from Noctis and Elysium didn't want to go along with the Consortium-backed candidate. So now the Secretary General is Natacha Dhiagelev, formerly the rep from Ashoka. She's screwing up a lot of Consortium plans, she's down with the Movement even if she only alludes to it in public, and I'm pretty damn sure PC Oversight is already thinking up ways to off her.

Infrastructure Workers' Association (IWA)

IWA started out as a credit union and benefits group for terraforming, ecostation, and transportation workers. Funny thing is, it was meant to be a union-busting move put in place by the League's Consortium paymasters, but with so many lower-level IWA officials and members being down with B, it's started to act more like a real trade union. This pisses off the PC and the League higher-ups to no end, 'cause an org they sanctioned in the first place to keep the Movement out of their hair is now making unwelcome demands regarding better worker benefits and decreased use of infomorph slaves. Some of the wheels in this group include John Payne, a redneck station nomad up north who taught himself law and now files a lot of the IWA's advocacy briefs and motions by mesh from wherever he happens to be that week, and Katrina Takahashi, the big union boss out of Pilsener City in Hellas.

Tharsis Terraforming Office (TTO)

The TTO, on the other hand, has been pretty well co-opted by the Consortium, and now they're openly collaborating with the Red Eden project (or Red Bleedin', as a lot of rusters call it). You ask me, they're out to totally privatize forming work, bring it under the control of a single hypercorp entity. Right now, most line techs and ecostation workers're either paid out of the public chest, as TTO employees or private contractors, or they're working for small, local hypercorps. Red Eden coming to fruition'd mean everybody working for the Red Eden corp, and the TTO getting pared down to the point where all they'd be doing is cutting checks to Red Eden. Obviously IWA doesn't like this, but they're not the only ones. There's a faction in the TTO itself, led by Kaki Varma, the powerful Committeewoman for Water Usage, that wants nothing to do with Red Eden (although whether Kaki's down with B or just out for herself is a question mark).

Martian Rangers and Magistrates

The closest thing Mars's got to a planetary police force, the Rangers technically got jurisdiction anywhere within 30 klicks of the surface of Mars. Unless they're on a specific case, though, they mostly work outside city limits; city militias are violently allergic to these guys and gals. They're also not allowed to operate in corp-owned settlements under Consortium protection without the right warrants. Rangers're a mixed bag. Some are down with the Movement and generally all right. Others got corruption and brutality written on their faces bold as the red circle on a Japanese flag. Make sure you figure out which is which quick when dealing with them. Captain Sage Kim, ranking officer of the Elysium Rangers who patrol the periphery of the TQZ, is of the better sort. She's caught a lot of flak for not busting up the Arsia Mons smuggling rings, and word is she's real sympathetic to the Movement. At the other extreme you got guys like Captain Lem Boudin with the Argyre Rangers, whose department got its wings clipped after he turned a pack of police baboons loose on a group of farmers protesting high freight prices. The footage from that dust-up got shown all over the planet, and now most of the policing in the limits of Argyre towns is done by a security corp, Pecos (which I'm sure ain't any better, but the League was forced to do something to quell the outcry).

The judicial complement to the Rangers, Magistrates are circuit-flying judges who hold court in the back country as needed. Like the Rangers, some're good people, others not so good. Magistrates have to convene a jury when deciding criminal cases, but beyond that, they've got wide latitude to do as they please. A few Magistrates out there've gone technical from too much stress on the job, meaning frontier justice can get pretty weird.

Mars Department of Transportation (MDOT)

MDOT builds and maintains all of the planetary transit infrastructure outside the big cities, including highways and flyways (but not maglev trains—those're the bailiwick of the railroad companies). MDOT was the first agency where the Movement really started to make gains in the League, but the current director, Isaiah Xei, a grandfathered appointee

of the previous Secretary General, is a stone bastard. One of his first acts was to asscan half of MDOT's free workforce and replace them with indentures.

Planetary Infrastructure

Mars is one of the only planets in the system with real surface infrastructure: roads, bridges, flyways, and the like. People've been living here long enough that it's gotten pretty built up, which is good, because going everyplace by rocket ain't as cheap or practical as it is on, say, Luna.

Maglev Railroad System

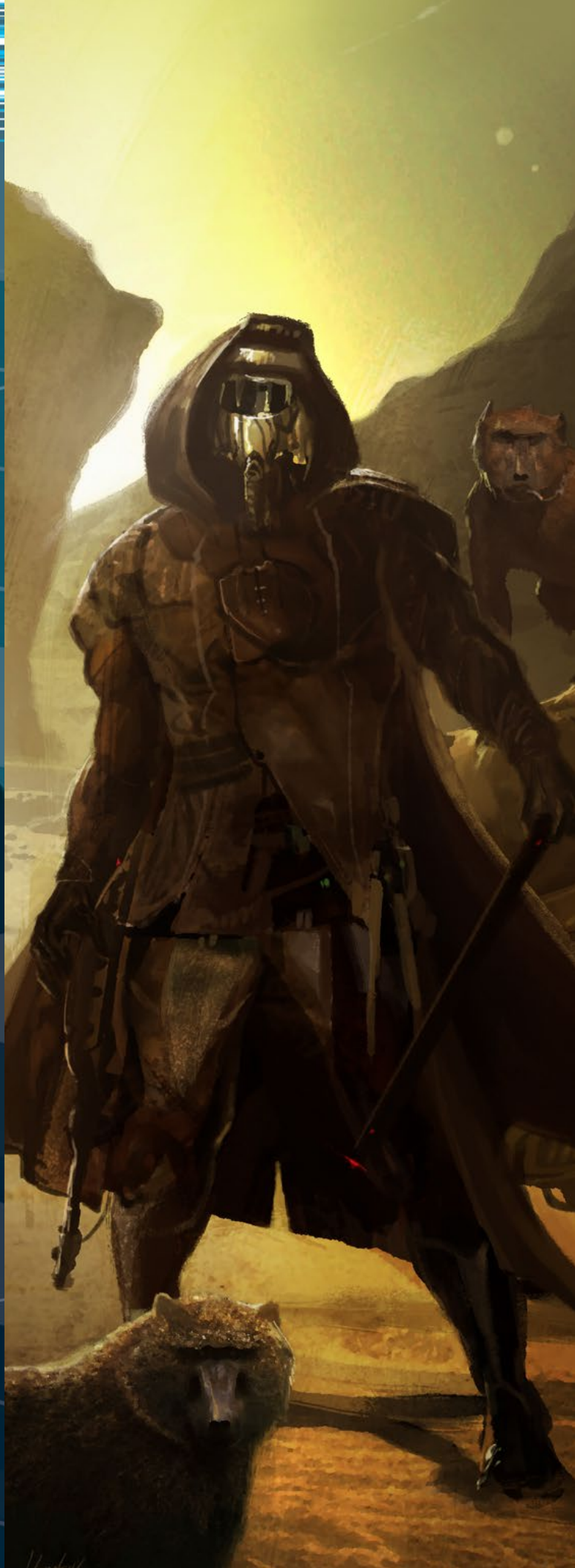
For much of the Martian population, rail is the only affordable means of long distance travel. Railroad hypercorps—Red Northern, Elysium & Tharsis, Rail Eos, and a score of others—have built maglev rights-of-way connecting cities and major settlements with polar ice mines, important terraforming stations, and the agricultural hinterlands. As on Earth in the 19th and early 20th centuries, railroad stations are the nuclei around which towns and villages spring up.

Maglev trains reach speeds of 400 kph, meaning that a train from Valles-New Shanghai takes about 10 hours to reach Noctis-Qianjiao or 13 hours to reach the space elevator at Olympus. In populous areas, tracks are generally elevated on heavy concrete plinths about 5 meters above ground. In open country, these give way to sturdy embankments elevated 2 to 3 meters above the surrounding terrain, with the occasional bridge or viaduct to cross gullies or allow roads through. Trains are similar in dimensions and interior appointments to old Earth rail cars. Long haul trains almost always carry a mixture of passengers and freight, while shorter runs might be passengers only. Freight may include among other things imported bulk raw materials (helium-3 and hydrogen—an important commodity for settlements in dryer areas), large or specialized machinery that can't be locally microfactured, and perishables like produce and biomorphs. High-value commodities like qubits and antimatter are normally transported by air.

Surveillance along railroad rights-of-way is tight, and plinths and rail beds are built much more heavily than necessary to discourage saboteurs. Maintenance and security drones regularly traverse the rails inspecting them for damage and watching for intruders. Nevertheless, daring gangs pull occasional train jobs on the long, lonely stretches between settlements, and militant Barsoomians have managed to derail trains with a combination of clever infosec work and physical monkeywrenching.

Highways

Martian highways're a mixed bag. On arterial roads in dense urban areas and on big highways like the M-1, there's a traffic control system. Grid control picks up your license plate's mesh broadcast, gets a destination from your car's nav, and takes control of the vehicle 'til you're back in a low-traffic area. Make any crosstown trip in a major city, you'll be on grid control for a lot of the trip. Spoofing grid control to get where you're going faster or get manual control of your buggy back is a major pastime among hackers. They claim the system prioritizes not just official traffic like emergency and service vehicles, but anyone who's got enough cred to drive first class. I'm sure this is true, but no one's ever been able to prove it. Every couple years some blogger'll try to expose the first class system, but they always come away empty-handed.



In areas with light traffic and on the long stretches between settlements, most people drive manual, but you can use grid control if you want. If you're driving from New Shanghai to Hellas and're tempted to nap on the way, though, don't. Lonely back country highways're under surveillance, sure, but that doesn't mean anyone's watching the feed, and it doesn't stop desperate locals from pulling robberies here and there.

Speed limits on most city streets are 40 or 50 klicks an hour. Urban highways, the limit's usually 150 kph, and on back country highways, it's 200, conditions permitting. There are traffic control spimes on every street that track your speed and issue a fine, usually between 50 and 100 cred, if you go over the limit. If you're going more than 25 over on a city street or 50 over on a highway, the system dispatches cops or a traffic drone to get you to slow down, and the fine doubles.

Way out in the back country, there're roads with no grid control, and little or no surveillance. Usually, they're dirt or gravel, and in some cases, they're just an ancient arroyo bed that happened to be fairly clear of big rocks. It's real hard to be sneaky moving around the back country in a buggy, though, on account of you're constantly kicking clouds of rust if you drive at any speed.

In the TQZ, there're several highways that still look drivable. Stay the hell off them. Smuggler buddy of mine tried to drive on the Romanesco, a stretch of the M-4 that's become a wild artificial. The self-repair systems went technical during the Fall, and it started growing clusters of twisting, fractalized side roads. It's called the Romanesco 'cause of the spirals and the green coloration it's started to develop. It's not an exsurgent—but it will try to eat your vehicle and everyone inside to build more of itself.

FLYWAYS

Flyways are designated rights-of-way for flying cars. Most of these are virtual, using broadcast AR graphics to delineate lanes and show ads. In some places, especially urban zones, these are like three-dimensional versions of surface roads, divided into lanes by 150-meter tall, regularly-spaced, slender spars that provide lighting, sensors, and mesh nodes. Grid control and surveillance is tighter here, especially in heavily trafficked areas, and attempts to suppress or spoof the traffic grid are contested more vigorously, with more severe consequences. Get caught fucking around in a flyway, and you ain't looking at a traffic ticket. It's a criminal offense, punishable by time in dead storage or indenturing. Penalties range from three to six months for speeding, to a year for spoofing, to longer terms of imprisonment for causing property destruction or injury. Vehicular manslaughter on flyways is a capital crime. Stealing back control of your vehicle or speeding on a flyway can get your car shot down in some places. In others, militia prowlers equipped with net guns and foam rubber cannons may be on alert to force vehicles down if they're threatening populated areas.

To merge onto a flyway, you start from a merge pad—a specially marked highway lane where cars go airborne one at a time or in small, manageable groups. Except on lightly-trafficked flyways, merging is almost always a fly-by-wire operation run by grid control. Once on the flyway, movements're tightly regulated. Lane changes, getting on, and getting off are mediated by grid control. Outside of the tunnel flyways connecting big domes, there's nothing to keep you from swerving off the flyway into open airspace—except the cops, who get real pissed about that sort of thing. In open country and on the verge of smaller settlements, movement is freer, and there are approved zones outside settlement limits where flying cars can move from flyways to open airspace, at which point you're on the same, much less regimented control network as planes and copters.

Flyways shut down during high winds and dust storms. If a storm kicks up, the entire system

MAJOR ROADS

M-1	East-West combined highway/flyway running the length of Valles-Marineris.
M-2	Loop highway connecting major settlements in Eos.
M-3	North-South highway connecting Noctis-Qianjiao to settlements on the Tharsis plateau on both sides of Valles-Marineris.
M-4	Combined highway-flyway connecting Olympus to Noctis-Qianjiao; runs parallel to the Elysium & Tharsis company's Olympus-Qianjiao maglev line.
M-5	Combined highway-flyway formerly connecting Olympus to Elysium. Still connects the two cities to nearby settlements, but ends on both sides of the TITAN Quarantine Zone.
V-5	Flyway connecting New Shanghai and Valles Center to Nytrondheim
V-101	Local highway/flyway connecting New Shanghai and Valles Center to New Pittsburgh and points in between.
V-104	Local highway connecting Nytrondheim to New Shanghai and Valles Center.
V-401	Local highway connecting Little Shanghai to New Shanghai and nearby settlements in Eos.
QB4	Major bicycle artery in Noctis-Qianjiao.
Q-23	Local highway connecting Noctis, Qianjiao, and nearby settlements
Hellas 53	Loop highway joining settlements in Hellas Planitia.
A12	Highway connecting New Dazhai to key settlements in Argyre Planitia.
E90	Arterial highway/flyway running the settled length of Hyblaeus Chasma in Elysium. ■

automatically brings cars down onto surface roads. If conditions are bad enough, surface grid control halts traffic on surface roads to make space for all the traffic alighting from overhead. Careful if you ever try gridspoofing to go manual during a storm; you're like to get smashed by the grid landing a vehicle on a spot it thinks is empty.

Flyway speed limits are usually between 200 and 300 kph, up to 400 kph on open stretches outside settlement limits. This makes them a fast way to get around—but only if you got the cred. Flying cars ain't prohibitively expensive for most people, but flyway tolls are. Rich folks who commute from private domes in Eos to Valles Center by flyway, for instance, eat seventy or eighty cred a day just in flyway tolls, and probably another twenty or thirty to park their whip for the day.

Civic Infrastructure

Most Martian cities're well equipped with automation for basic maintenance of infrastructure. A lot of the gear involved in this is in the form of drones. Maintenance drones of various types are absolutely everywhere in big cities—so much so you just tend to block them out after a while, and monkeying with them is a favorite pastime of infosec people. Almost all of them got eyes, ears, and manipulators of some kind. Although the munis tend to keep a lot of their own infosec people and infomorphs watching these drone networks, they can't watch everything all the time; there's just too much of it. You can do a lot of damage with a temporary local takeover of maintenance drones, or learn a lot by co-opting a single one nobody'll miss for a more extended period.

Academic Institutions on Mars

Valles-New Shanghai and Noctis were home to the offworld campuses of a number of Earth universities and research institutes prior to the Fall. Well funded and equipped, they were able to egocast tens of thousands of their own personnel to Mars. Academic infugees have fared much better than private sector employees and ordinary citizens. The practice of indentures is virtually absent in academia, and most universities have either resleeved their faculty and staff as quickly as possible, or kept them running in simulspace campuses until their endowments grow large enough to afford more morphs. ("Getting tenure" has become slang for being resleeved in a biomorph on the university's dime.)

The University of Mars system is large and lavishly funded by hypercorp donors, but the old Earth institutions have in many cases managed to attract better minds by promising researchers greater freedom to pursue their interests. Among Earth institutions that have managed to survive in some form are: Caltech, Carnegie-Mellon, the University of Chicago, ETH Zurich, and Qinghuá in Valles-New Shanghai; and MIT, Cambridge, IIT Mumbai, and Universidade de São Paulo in Noctis-Qianjiao. The degree to which these universities maintain independence varies. Caltech, for instance, has become more a brand name for U-Mars's honors track engineering programs. Others, like MIT, remain fiercely independent, playing various factions in the Tharsis League and Planetary Consortium against one another to avoid being overly beholden to any one entity for grant money. That said, most of them still spend a disappointing amount of time researching extremely dangerous technologies.

Crime

All this talk about sufis and makers and how fuck-all awesome the Movement is might give you the idea the PC and their tools in the League are the only bad guys on Mars. Ain't so. Now don't get me wrong; some of my best friends're thieves and whores. But Mars's got some real mean termites in the frame, too, and they ain't all sitting in executive suites. Most of the big system-wide syndicates you might've heard about have their fingers (or sometimes whole fists) in Mars, so I'll concentrate on some of the local ones.

Arsia Mons Smugglers

Arsia is riddled with caves, most of them poorly surveyed on account of it's on the fringe of the TQZ. Interdiction is shaky here, so smugglers can dare the TQZ to get rich. They're kind of technical if you want my opinion, but that hasn't stopped me doing some jobs with them when I was hard put for cash. Maybe as much as 80% of their business is in red market fabbers from Qing Long, which get shipped out by truck and buggy to customers. The fabber smugglers are the most professional; they got a product with stable demand. Others, especially drug and human traffickers, can be downright unpredictable and dangerous.

Conduit

Thought to be based in Qianjiao, Conduit's not really a harmful organization, but they're sure as your shoes considered "criminal" in Martian terms. Conduit provides its subscribers a feed of open source software and fabber blueprints that're proscribed as copyright or patent violation under Martian law. Conduit is a bunch of mutualists running tight beam transceivers out of the inner belt to create their own darknet. The receivers are thousands of baseball sized satellites seeded in Mars orbit that create a mesh with immense bandwidth. The PC wants to find the people in Conduit and put all of them in dead storage for 200 years. Some think there might be AGIs in the group, too.

Les Goules

These guys trade in bodies. It's thought they got operations in Valles-New Shanghai, Elysium, and Noctis Labyrinthus. They use the Arsia Mons caves, but they're not connected to the smugglers. Same smugglers would tell you that the few times they crossed paths with a Les Goules drop in the caves, the result


TITAN QUARANTINE ZONE
The TQZ is a large area stretching from the smooth plains of Amazonis Planitia southeast to Arsia Mons. This zone is known to be crawling with leftover TITAN machinery: warbots, nanoswarms, and other dangerous things. Few dare venture here, though some rumors suggest that Barsoomian smugglers make use of the Arsia Mons caves and even scavenge for TITAN tech, despite the risks. Planetary Consortium drones keep a vigilant eye on the Zone's borders, though for unknown reasons the TITAN relics rarely stray beyond its bounds.
MARTIAN PANDORA GATE
Ma'adim Vallis holds one of the Planetary Consortium's most treasured possessions: the Martian Gate. This Pandora Gate was originally discovered by nomadic Barsoomians, then violently wrested from their hands by hypercorp troops—an event that still rankles the rednecks. As different hypercorps themselves nearly came to blows, the Hypercorp Council was forced to step in and offer a resolution. A new hypercorp was founded—Pathfinder—which would control the gate and any resources beyond, with special privileges given to Planetary Consortium members. The Martian Gate is now a staging point for numerous exoplanet colonies, though some fear the prospect of keeping a presumed TITAN artifact operational.
OLYMPUS CITY/ SPACE ELEVATOR
Mars' most notable landmark is the mighty shield volcano Olympus Mons, on which the first—and still principle—Martian space elevator was constructed. Similar in shape and origin to Earth's Hawaiian Islands, but now dormant, Olympus Mons is one of the highest mountains in the solar system, rising 27 kilometers. Olympus, the settlement in the volcano's caldera around the base of the space elevator, was once the chief city of Mars, but waned in popularity as a place to live when terraforming made other regions more attractive. A maglev train from Olympus takes a little over three hours to reach Noctis; air travel is even quicker. Despite the waning of the city, the space elevator still sees heavy use.
ELYSIUM (CITY)
Located in the Elysium and Hyblaeus Chasma in the north of the Hesperia region in Mars's eastern hemisphere, Elysium is the entertainment capital of the system and the largest Martian city outside of the canyonlands of the equator. It is also the most physically remote of the large Martian cities, though transhumanity's advanced transportation technology (suborbital flights and rocket flight from habitats above) make this remoteness a trivial quality.
AIRY-0 CRATER
At zero degrees longitude, Crater Airy-0 is the reference point for AMT (Airy Mean Time), the zero offset in the Martian time zone system.
ASHOKA
Ashoka is located in a crater in the Ares Vallis region about 3,000 kilometers northeast of Valles-New Shanghai, not far from the landing sites of the early Viking and Pathfinder probes. The town is a popular spa and spiritual retreat for Martians wanting to revisit their pioneer roots. It is also an active terraforming station and a major point of contact between the seminomadic Barsoomians and the settled Martians of the equatorial canyonlands.
QURAIN (RUINED)
Several devastated habitats lie in the TQZ, including the former Islamic stronghold of Qurain.
NOCTIS-QIANJIAO
With a population of 13 million, Noctis-Qianjiao is the major metroplex in the west of the Valles Marineris region, an area known as Noctis Labyrinthus. Although not as hospitable as the Eos region in which Valles-New Shanghai lies, Noctis Labyrinthus is considered prime real estate for its gorgeous scenery and well-developed river systems. The metroplex boasts two major domes: Qianjiao, on the northern bank of the River Noctis, and Noctis City (normally just called "Noctis") to the south. Connecting the two domes and spanning the river is a sprawling network of lesser domes and souks, although these have been pushed north and south over the years as the planet warms and the river grows wider.
VALLES-NEW SHANGHAI
The principle city of Mars, Valles-New Shanghai is transhumanity's largest planetary metroplex, with 37 million inhabitants. Valles-New Shanghai lies in the heavily terraformed Eos region in the east of the Valles Marineris canyon system. The metroplex is comprised of five major domes connected by a network of Martian souks. The souks are a unique architectural feature of large Martian cities, consisting of covered thoroughfares and galleries lined with bazaars, eateries, and squats. It is said one can find anything if one spends enough time walking the souks.
HELLAS PLANITIA
Many minor settlements in this region.
Arcadia Planitia
Tempe Terra
Amazonis Planitia
OLYMPUS CITY/ SPACE ELEVATOR
Tharsis Montes
Ascraeus Mons
THE WHITE ZONE
Pavonis Mons
NOCTIS QIANJIAO
QURAIN
TITAN QUARANTINE ZONE
Gusev Crater
PATHFINDER CITY
MARTIAN GATE
Ma'adim Vallis
Arsia Mons
Noctis Labyrinthus
PILSENER CITY
Valles Marineris
VALLES-NEW SHANGHAI
Margaritifer Terra
Chryse Planitia
ASHOKA
Ares Vallis
Xanthe Terra
Ganges Chasma
Capri Chasma
Eos Chasma
Acidalia Planitia
Arabia Terra
Sinus Meridiani
AIRY-0 CRATER
Terra Sabaea
Syrtis Major Planum
Utopia Planitia
ELYSIUM (CITY)
Elysium Mons
Korolev Crater
TITAN QUARANTINE ZONE
Gale Crater
Tyrrhena Terra
Hellas Planitia
NEW DAZHAI
Galle Crater
Terra Sirenum
Argyre Planitia
Noachis Terra
Terra Cimmeria
Promethei Terra
MARS

was a gunfight and both sides retreating. Les Goules are very private. Stuff they deal in is crazy: combat morphs with full-body lidar implants, clones of XP stars grown from stolen genetic samples, packaged human meat for the anthropophagy niche market, and deep discount—occasionally badly-glitched—pleasure pods and case synthmorphs.

They're flesh market loan sharks in some places, too. Solaris doesn't want to do deals with your average redneck scum, so these bastards'll offer you credit with your body as collateral. Miss too many payments, and they have an option on repossessing your body. Of course, this ain't legal, but the civic authorities ain't doing anything about it.

Moderates

These guys trade in guns. The gang's senior membership is heavily Chinese via Hong Kong and Macao, but the mid-level people on down are more diverse. The Moderates have ops in every city and large settlement on Mars and a score of buyers, mostly in the Belt, scouting for product they think they can move. Moderates mostly want to be businesspeople, but every so often they'll pull some vicious gang shit, like murdering people who try to set up competing operations in their territories.

Minor Gangs

The back country's got more than its share of desperate people. Most're products of the PC's systematic disenfranchisement of workers, but that don't make them any less nasty. Outfits like the Dalton Gang in Argyre, the Family Sung in the Valles midlands, and the Ryukyu Uumakus on the Hellas periphery have gotten into everything from train jobs and highway robbery to kidnapping and small-time extortion. Their relations with the locals vary. The Daltons're thugs who terrorize everyone around them, while the Uumakus are sort of folk heroes to the Okinawans in Hellas.

A lot of illegal drugs and narcoalgorithms come from a cottage industry that has just enough access to fabbers and illegal biotech to produce massive amounts of their product in situ. 'Cause of that, Mars doesn't have too many big drug cartels; supply is too close to the dealers. Of course, the cops constantly bust the small operators, which can make prices jump around, but it's just ripples in a coolant pond.

Olympus

<Jake Carter, Firewall Proxy>

Seen through the haze of a dust storm, the city in the caldera of Olympus Mons looks like a smoldering, half burnt cone of incense with a whole lot of ash piled up around its edges. In better visibility, you'll see a core of tall, bright lit buildings, mostly mixed-use corp office and housing towers, peaking around the base of the space elevator. In the pile of busted architecture around it—pressurized housing blocks, industrial buildings, and tuna cans—you see only scattered lights. The souks here are dangerous, and in some places freezing and only partly pressurized. This city had six million people living in it at its height, but now the periphery's almost a ghost town. As the atmosphere in Valles-Marineris, Argyre, Hellas, and other bottomlands started to thicken up and temperatures climbed, anybody who could afford to move did.

Then came the mass evacuations during the Fall, which cleared out most of the poorer people, too. The latter wasn't what you'd call a humanitarian action; the Olympus Infrastructure Authority (OIA), which pretty much runs this town, had heard rumors that TITAN virii could turn people as well as machines. They didn't want a zombie horde tearing down their precious infrastructure, but the power players in Noctis and New Shanghai wouldn't take them in, neither. So they scattered all these poor people around the countrysides of Amazonis and Tharsis in inflatable domes and prefab modules—little better than concentration camps, really—and wished them luck.

You know what happened to those unlucky enough to have ended up camped out on the Amazonis Planitia. Of the rest, a lot died when the cheap life support in their camps failed or because of other resource shortfalls. Many of them are in dead storage or serving as indentures now—which'd be a second or even third hitch of that for some. The first wave of people who had to go through that are just finishing out their indentures these days, and they're some of the angriest Barsoomians you'll ever run into. Others made it through, but only some went back to Olympus. There are dozens of small towns on the Tharsis plateau and southward that started out as relocation camps for Olympian evacuees and're now turned to farming, contract terraforming work, and cutting permafrost for ice.

I've got plenty of reasons for not liking cities, and Olympus is a microcosm of them all. Don't parse me wrong; there's some real good people there. Sussing out who's a good egg, who's a chronic hard luck case, and who's on the corp take can be a rough job for those of us who understand fixing buggies and programming ecoswarms better than backroom deals and shady maneuvers. The evacs are to blame. Those who made it back here after the Fall were either tough and enterprising, or desperate and bent.

Olympus Demographics

Population:	1,000,000
Synths:	35%
Pods:	20%
Biomorphs:	43%
Infomorphs:	2%



Culture and Demographics

Mandarin is the most common language in Olympus, followed by English, and then a whole mess of other languages. You got a lot of people living in Olympus who just got no place else to go, so it's a patchwork of transhumanity. Olympus has helluv people living in synths, which changes the landscape quite a bit. Walk through the souks in the Janks-Yao, and you'll see near as many shops selling accessories and offering maintenance for synths as you'll see restaurants and body stylists' shops. Glamor morphs ain't too common here, even for the upper echelons. Alpiner morphs are common, and just about everyone else wears a ruster. The harsh environment and decay of the city mean that even in well-developed areas, citizens'll regularly encounter souks or walkways with thin air or poor climate control. Specialized Martian morphs are just a lot more comfortable.

Neighborhoods

Important neighborhoods here are Central, the OIA business district rising around the base of the Space Elevator; Deshengmen, the dense neighborhood of corporate housing forming a ring around Central; Zhongguancun, a huge, half-abandoned office park full of squats and on-the-down-low corp projects; Janks-Yao, a neighborhood on the periphery of the city center where a lot of working people live; and Fuxingmen, the general name for the mostly abandoned sprawl of buildings forming a huge ring outside the central city.

Fuxingmen and the abandoned stretches of Zhongguancun can be extremely dangerous. In addition to desperate transhumans, the constant research work in this area has left behind populations of wild artificials—robots that have gone feral—that are sometimes hostile.

The huge railyard for maglev trains coming and going from Noctis-Qianjiao is a section of Zhongguancun that projects deep into the abandoned section of the city. A spur line runs through the central city to the freight terminal for the space elevator, in Central.

At the mountain's foot near the railroad is Olympus Skyport, the city's spaceport; ain't much going on there, which makes it good if you need a discreet flight off planet but don't know any smugglers. The spaceport's down below to keep a clear 15-kilometer no-fly zone between the space port and the elevator cable, for security purposes. High winds in the airspace of the caldera make it a sucky place to land ships anyway.

Law and Order

The OIA Police are the local law enforcement agency. It'd be fair to say I kind of hate them. They've beat up, robbed, and framed too many people I've known. Standard beat uniforms are black and safety yellow (which at least makes them easy to spot); tacticals wear OD green. Most OIA cops sleeve into alpiner morphs to make outside ops easier. Unlike most city cops on Mars, the standard issue prowler here is a small ground truck carrying a squad of four to six cops, rather than two in a flying car. High winds make flying cars impractical. The squad structure arose from the fact that when there's trouble in an Olympus souk, the cops're almost always going to need backup, so they travel in larger groups.

OIA Tacticals are incredibly well-trained and well-equipped given they're living in the most dilapidated city on the planet. Reason is the space elevator and the city's close proximity to the TQZ.

OIA Tacs get issued the tools for taking down hostile war machines and swarms, and a full squad of ten's got an infosec spec and a nanowarfare spec on it. While there's never been a confirmed TITAN/exsurgent incursion into Olympus, the Tacs've seen action many times in Fuxingmen when black bag research projects got out of hand and somebody's artificials went technical.

THE SPACE ELEVATOR

I said before that from the far distance, the space elevator looks like a minute black thread stretching up from the caldera of Olympus Mons. That thread's about 23,000 kilometers long—long enough for the asteroid tethered at the far end to keep the cable pretty much taut. On their way up, the carriers on the space elevator reach speeds of about 500 kph in atmosphere. Around 200 kilometers up, where there's practically no more atmospheric friction, they punch it up to 2,000 kph and maintain that speed for the rest of the ride. At 17,000 kilometers of altitude—aerostationary orbit—they either detach from the cable and slide into orbit for load out, or keep going, and shoot off the far end of the elevator at a velocity high enough to reach the Belt in just a few weeks, provided the launch window is right. Basic, the whole thing can double duty as a mass driver for in-system transit.

Sorry for geeking out on this thing's specs, but if there's one thing I can't resist, it's a big sexy eff-all machine, and that the space elevator is in spades. The first space elevator (on Earth) had one cable. The carrier had two big wings for picking up microwave power beamed at it by an array of sun-fueled satellites. Took forever to get up that cable; it had to be twice as long as those on Mars to reach geostationary altitude. And the jokers who came up with the thing never really had a good answer for what'd happen if something diffused the beam. The Olympus Mons space elevator has eight cables: four for carriers to run on, four configured as superconductors to act as the third rail for the carrier cable with which they're paired. They got so much juice running along those rails, the practical max delta-V for the carriers, when you factor in the acceleration due to centrifugal force you're getting off the planet itself, is around 14 kps. But the cables can't handle that much friction, and I guess the people riding the carrier might be a concern as well, so ships skipjacking off the end of the cable generally only get about 9 kps—which is still pretty damned good for not burning any fuel.

The elevator never stops running, and it's on a tight schedule, taking account of both the masses being lifted and their side effects on the structure. Carriers make the whole cable structure oscillate slightly as they travel, plus the Coriolis force drags at them as they climb, which bows the cable a bit. Schedules have to take this into account, with the result that there're only two trips in each direction every day. There're four cables, but the elevator's rolling stock is a lot bigger, with hundreds of carriers ready on the ground and sitting in parking orbits near the elevator's center of mass. Some are just barely pressurized bulk cargo containers, while others are fitted out for passengers and high value or perishable cargo. And some are actually long-haul freighters. These are the ones that skipjack off the end of the cable; they got just enough fuel in them for course corrections and decelerating at their destination.

The whole ride up takes almost nine hours. Download something to read before you leave. The passenger section on the space elevator is one of the only places in the system with limited mesh connectivity. OIA's so terrified of anyone monkeywrenching the elevator, they actually lined the walls of the passenger compartments with double-thickness Faraday cages. You need a special permit for mesh access. Only people with serious hypercorp connections get them, and even they get watched like hawks by the onboard infosec monkeys. Then again, hypercorp big shots hardly ever travel by space elevator, unless it's for good press.

Taking the space elevator is like taking the bus; the main virtue is that it's cheap. You can get to orbit in five minutes by rocket, but a lot of people on Mars can't afford that, especially if they have to make the trip regularly. Aside from the initial acceleration, the second acceleration when you leave the atmosphere, and deceleration at the end of the trip, passengers can walk around the carrier. There ain't much to see, though. Aside from the acceleration couches, there's usually an observation area (always helluv crowded and only faces the planet if you're lucky); a bar with the most watered-down, overpriced drinks you'll ever find outside a Mormon hotel in New Salt Lake; and lavs that are just big enough to skronk in if you're a lanky ruster and your partner's a double-jointed bouncer. Not that I'd know or anything.

A lot of the people you meet riding the elevator are those who get classified as cargo: soldiers, work gangs, consignments of pleasure pods, and anyone else whose job sucks enough that they get writ off as a replaceable part. For a while before the Fall, corps tried keeping all of their worker morphs in orbit and egocasting people up as needed. They found their psych bills going through the roof. Take a previously well-adjusted construction specialist who used to be in a biomorph and beam her up into an orbital work synth, and she's apt to get glitchy. Then you've got an expensive synth using up space and resources while it malfunctions and doesn't get any work done. Far better to acclimate your workers on the ground where psych and power are cheaper, then send them up the space elevator without having to get resleeved. It's one of those rare occasions where labor interests and profit actually overlap.

OLYMPUS INFRASTRUCTURE AUTHORITY

The OIA is the government, the law, and pretty much the whole show here. At one point Olympus had a government, but in the mass exodus after the Fall,

the remaining citizens voted to privatize it under the OIA. OIA is technically a hypercorp, but it's headed jointly by the governors general of Noctis-Qianjiao, Elysium, and Valles-New Shanghai. See where the conflict of interest with running a city people actually want to live in starts? Each governor general puts four members on the Board, where they serve staggered nine-year terms. The Secretary General of the Tharsis League elects an Executive Director who runs day-to-day ops and executes policy. Right now the job's held by Mae Xi, a lady who's as crafty as her morphs are curvy. The Board members always take whatever position their governor general wants them to on issues, and the Executive Director breaks ties. Xi was put in by Secretary Dhiagelev, making her a real unwelcome outsider facing a lot of trouble getting things done. That said, the lady's got a lot of power, and she's slowly figuring out how to use it. Just hope the Dhiagelev administration's as benign as many want to believe it is.

OIA's biggest job is keeping the space elevator running, meaning monitoring usage and looking for signs of fatigue twenty-four-and-a-half by seven. On top of groundside ops, they've got a respectable orbital presence, with a fleet of tender and security ships, centered around Tether, the captured asteroid acting as a counterweight to the elevator cables.

COMEX

Okay, look: these guys're a bunch of shit thieves. Yeah, I know, they're fully one quarter of the game as regards supply chains insystem, but that doesn't change anything. At its black heart, ComEx is basic just a piece of tracking software for routing supplies—morphs, metals, water, reactor mass, and anything else that still needs to be moved around physically. The people who wrote that software probably deserve to be rich and famous, but the rest of this outfit can go hang far as I'm concerned.

ComEx owns an entire square block of housing and office space in Central, and through their subcontractors, they touch well over half the traffic coming down the space elevator and hitting the maglev rails. They used to own a majority share in Rail Eos, the line that runs from the space elevator clear across the Valles Marineris to Valles-New Shanghai. Then they got greedy and started trying to use their control of the maglev line to muscle their way into a voting position in the Consortium. As y'all know, success hates company, and the PC clipped their wings with a series of sanctions. They ended up having to sell off Rail Eos to stay afloat, and now the majority share in the railway is owned by the Consortium itself. ComEx and the OIA hate each other; the PC uses OIA to keep ComEx in line. ComEx relies on their own security forces in their facilities and on the yards, since they don't trust the OIA cops. I've known black bag people who owe their entire livelihood to the efforts these two corps, their subsidiaries, and their business partners make at screwing each other.

ComEx and its business partners own helluv infomorphs and indentures in clanker synths. They're alleged to've arbitrarily extended the contracts on hundreds on indentures to save cred after the Rail Eos fiasco, but all the lawsuits by Movement lawyers on this are just so much pissing into the wind, if you ask me. The rumor that the ComEx core software itself keeps emerging into consciousness and having to be reset so that it stays below the threshold is a lot more interesting. But that one ain't been confirmed.

VALLES-NEW SHANGHAI

<Das Frettchen, Firewall Proxy>

At the eastern end of the Valles Marineris canyon is an immense basin called Eos. In a few centuries, it will be a sea, but in this day and age it is the most densely settled part of transhumanity's heartland. At its core, on a mesa that will one day be an island, is our utmost city: Valles-New Shanghai. From a cluster of rust-frosted tin cans to a smoking brothel she grew, till the dome slid over her like the nictitating membrane over a snake's eye. She is my broken lady, an aching demimonde held together by the glittering prosthetics of money and nanoglass. She is my love and my curse, my Chinese box, my thousand year egg, delicious and awful. There is nothing—nothing—envisaged in the minds of either angels or demons you will not find under her five domes and the frankincensed eaves of her souks.

Thirty seven million souls—yes, I said souls, reprobates—teem in her boundaries. Half are slaves, the rest whores. I'd rather not sound flippant, though, so let me be clear: indentures are nearly as common as ferrous oxides here, and one in five people is clanking around in a robotic half-life. Another one in five are pods—meat lollipops whose innate humanity ends at their lizard brains. The opportunity for our adversaries to exploit fifteen million poorly protected cyberbrains is one of those things I enjoy losing sleep over.

CULTURE & DEMOGRAPHICS

New Shanghai is a polyglot city, and almost any language that survived the Fall can be heard here if one waits long enough. The most spoken languages are English, Mandarin, Wu, and Arabic, with substantial populations also speaking Hindi, Urdu, and Portuguese.

VALLES-NEW SHANGHAI DEMOGRAPHICS

Population:	37,000,000
Synths:	20%
Pods:	20%
Biomorphs:	58%
Infomorphs:	2%

NEIGHBORHOODS

New Shanghai proper, along with Little Shanghai and Valles Center, stands on a high bluff overlooking the meeting of two rivers, the Xi and Monongahela, where they merge into a third, the Nanjing. All three are shallow, with slow currents, and they run at the bottom of deep cuts crisscrossing the chaotic terrain of the mesa. Across the rivers, at slightly higher and lower elevations to the east and north, respectively, rise the domes of New Pittsburgh and Nytrondheim. The domes are linked by massive transit conduits carrying highways and commuter trains (the Valles-New Shanghai Transit Maglev, or just "vi"). Above them are flyways demarcated by massive beacons on tall aerial spars hundreds of meters high.

From the periphery of the domes to the river banks spread the maze-like souks, a dense network of covered walkways, arcades, streets, and tramways connecting myriad pressurized buildings ranging in size from arcologies to the dilapidated tin can modules of the slums. Most Martian cities have souks, but Valles-New Shanghai's are the archetype. Almost all buildings have black or darkly colored roofs to capture heat from the weak Martian sun. At night they are lit with a riot of glowstrips and, when one comes closer, AR graphics, either displaying advertisements or marking landing pads for small aircraft. Inside the souks, the arcades are filled with a river of transhumanity day and night, and the aromas of cooking food, orbital hashish, and sex waft out from the open fronts of eateries, gambling dens, and brothels. It's as if all the filth and glitter of the red-light district of Amsterdam, the hutongs of Beijing, the squats of Montreal and old Mumbai, and the bazaars of Marrakesh had all come together on one endlessly twisting byway.

Valles-New Shanghai grew from the colonization efforts of several major Earth power blocs, and the architecture and culture of the five domes still reflects this to some extent. Originally, of the three oldest settlements, New Shanghai was Chinese, Nytrondheim European, and New Pittsburgh American. Valles Center was a purely corporate enterprise, and Little Shanghai was built after the Fall.

NEW SHANGHAI

Bisected by the artificial River Ares, the massive dome of New Shanghai is a temple to gleaming excess. It is our Manhattan, our Constantinople, our Babylon. At its center lie Zhongshan Road and the Bund, a brick-for-brick recreation of the famous old Shanghai waterfront. The hypercorps love maudlin public displays of nostalgia like an infomorph broker loves a skilled engineer with no backup insurance.

The Customs House at Number 13, the Bund, houses the Consulate of the Planetary Consortium, Mars. Also located in buildings along the Bund, or further down Zhongshan Road, are the central administration of the Tharsis League, which doubles as City Hall; the Tharsis Terraforming Office; Rail Eos; the consulates of Noctis, Elysium, and other large Martian settlements; the embassies of the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance, the Jovian Republic, and the Titanian Commonwealth (the latter two right next door to one another—strong indication that God has a sense of humor); the Extropian trade mission; and several influential social clubs, including the British-style Shanghai Club at Number 2. An address on the Bund is some of the most expensive real estate in the solar system. One can tell a great deal about both the status and the mindset of a hypercorp by its digs here. The most powerful and ostentatious, including Fa Jing and Direct Action, occupy entire buildings. At the same time, several of the most prominent hypercorps—including Cognite and Solaris—have nothing more than a single secure conference room rented in a shared building. It should go without saying that security along the Bund is some of the tightest in the system. One can be accosted by plainclothes officers doing ID sweeps at any time, and keeping the riffraff out is a major side occupation.

The rest of New Shanghai is a picture-perfect grid of arcologies, parks, and housing towers. The architecture varies a great deal. Outside of the Bund, many of the major buildings, particularly the arcos, mirror the blocky, monumental New Imperial school of twenty-first century China—a style beside which twentieth century Soviet bloc buildings would seem like elfin confections. North of the Bund on the east side of the river is Weiming Prospect, a neighborhood of mansions and row houses expensive enough, and in some cases showy enough, to have made a Russian oligarch blush. Other notable neighborhoods include Ninjinsky Square, a decadent gallery and theater district; Athenaeum, home to the University of Mars; and South Pudong, a neighborhood with much to recommend it if one enjoys haute Szechuan cuisine, high stakes mah-jongg, and meetings with highly placed triad bosses.

LITTLE SHANGHAI

If abuse of neon lighting may be taken as an indicator of how low a population's morale and aspirations have fallen, then Little Shanghai is perhaps the most desperate place in the solar system. The population of pods and synths is highest here, at times seeming to make up half the press filling Little Shanghai's sidewalks. Pimps, narcoalgorithm dealers, and sharks ready to loan fast cred with the lendee's body as collateral crawl the streets in cars whose tawdry glow and swirls of AR graphics compete with the garish, lascivious signage overhead. Beyond the street grid and tramways, there is virtually no design to this place. The buildings are in a riot of styles and intimidatingly dense, a play gym for some of the best parkouristas in the system. The roughest and most sprawling of Valles's souk neighborhoods—the part of my city that may most clearly be called a slum—wraps around the foot of this dome like the coiled insides of a mitochondrion, filling the space between the transit conduits connecting Little Shanghai to adjacent New Shanghai and Valles Center.

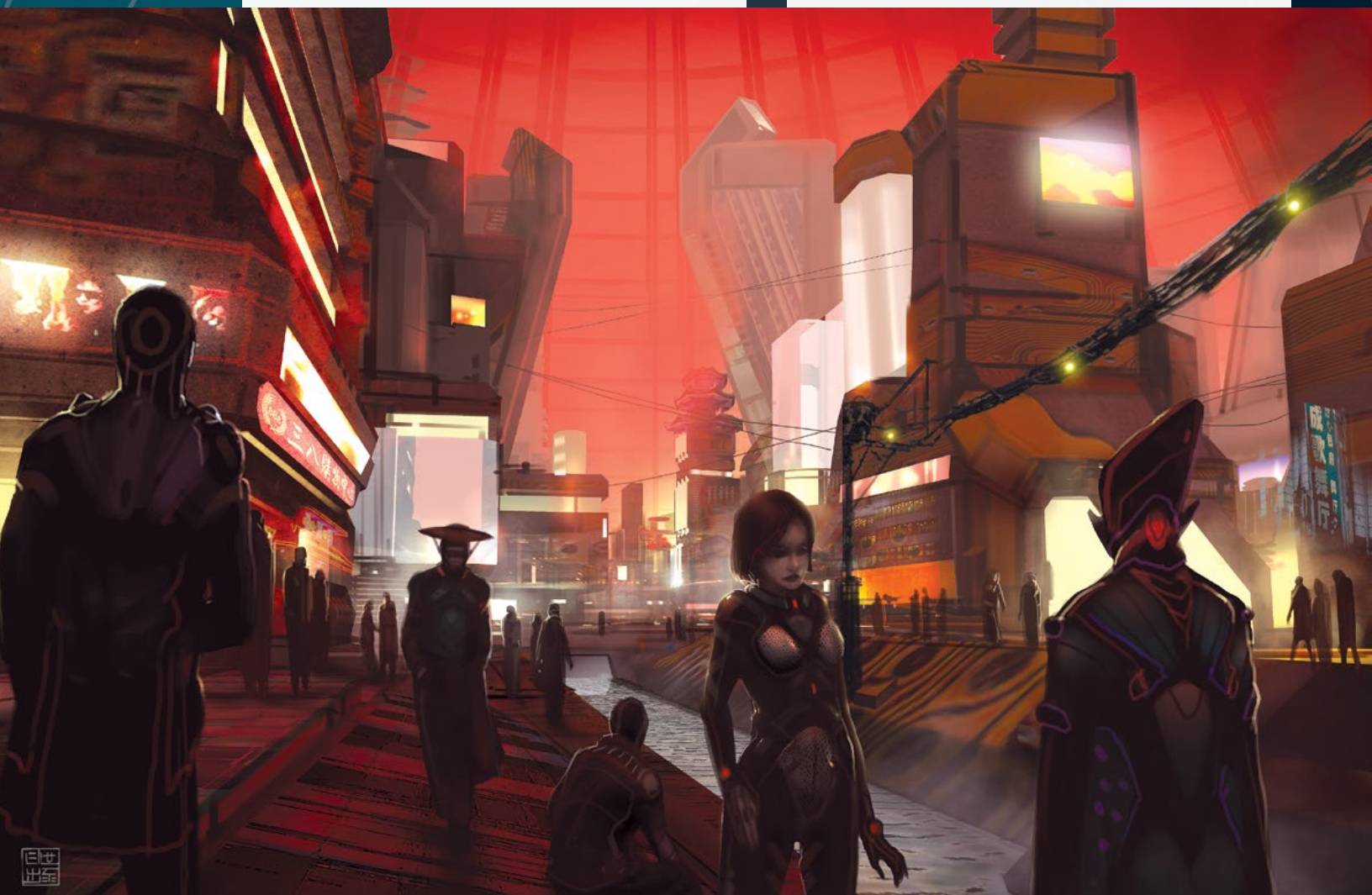
The bars, red market augmentation parlors, and massage parlors here make no bones about what they are, standing in stark contrast to the clinical glamor of the city's other quarters. Like the catch grill on the drain of a slaughterhouse floor, this quarter collects the city's dregs—anarchists, scum, bohemians, and addicts—for easy clean-up. I recommend aggressive AR filters, an anti-nanowarfare package, and a breathing mask in this neighborhood. Judging from the occasional deranged behavior of some of the residents, the corps, the syndicates, and perhaps entities we know not of use this unfortunate quarter as a petri dish for memetic warfare, attempts at creating their own basilisk hacks, and airborne trials of designer biochem. Note also the storefronts that sometimes open up offering an exciting new product on easy terms, only to be gone in a week. Little Shanghai has the ugly marks of a mass experiment on transhuman kind written in its seams and pores.

The criminals operating here are mostly garden variety triad scum and local gangs who war constantly on one another, but one criminal group stands outside the usual fray. The Moderates arms syndicate is well entrenched here, and they're a law unto themselves. They walk and talk like glossy Nytrondheim advertising directors, but their heavily armed reprisals against gangs that cross them are savage and leave no survivors.

VALLES CENTER

Perhaps the most sterile and boring quarter of the city from an aesthetic standpoint, Valles Center is nonetheless one of the most interesting, as this is where many of the hypercorps hide their secrets. While most of the corps have a conspicuous presence in other parts of town, it is in the anonymous office parks of Valles Center that many of their private networks, design centers, and engineering labs are located. The painfully monotonous design of the place serves another purpose: security. Very few people live under this dome. The streets and tramways are crowded with commuters during rush hours and lunch time. The rest of the day, foot and vehicle traffic is incredibly light, relative to the rest of the city, and at night the streets are virtually deserted. This makes keeping the area under tight surveillance nearly idiot proof, which is how the corps like things. Meanwhile, the detestably uniform building designs mean that when someone's ill-advised nanowarfare project gets out of control and breaks half a block down into its component molecules, rebuilding things so that they look exactly the same three days later is a relatively simple matter.

At the center of the dome is the Exchange, a complex of massive office towers and very expensive housing that is the trading center for much of the Martian securities and commodities trade. The three tallest of these, known together as the Trident, are the tallest buildings on Mars; they extend 3 kilometers



above the dome, affording well-heeled occupants a stunning view of the Eosian countryside. Although trading is an entirely mesh-based activity, the trading houses still cluster together for social reasons. Also located in the Exchange are several of Valles-New Shanghai's most prominent law firms; the current cock of the walk is Chen-Boltzmann-Marcos. If there is any proof of karma at work in the universe, it might well be the number of pre-Fall lawyers slaving away as infomorph paralegals for these firms.

New Pittsburgh

The Burgh, as many call it, is built over hilly terrain on a higher level of the mesa. It is not the most practical site, but it has a commanding view of the rivers and the other four domes below—typical choice for the Americans in the waning days of their empire. New Pittsburgh is a solid mass of metal and smoke, with an imposing skyline that peaks toward the center of the dome with the Althauser Rocketry building, corporate seat of the powerful Althauser family (if there was any golden age in this city, it was when Goddard Althauser was governor general; but that was long ago). The architecture is glass, steel, and Martian basalt, weirdly evoking a twentieth century metropolis less than half a kilometer from what is otherwise a city of bright, new constructions. Its parks and sidewalks sit at the bottom of canyons of concrete with fast-moving one-way flyways above, always seeming perilously too close to the buildings. Fortunately, there isn't much in the way of wind shear in a Martian city dome.

This is my favorite part of town. The climate of the dome is extravagantly humid, tuned for frequent drizzles, and one hears English spoken with comforting regularity. The after-work pubs in Burgh Center pour a variety of American-style microbrews, and one can watch an ice hockey match at Rail Eos Stadium four months out of the year. The game is only invigorated by the low Martian gravity, unlike football, both varieties of which I now find impossible to watch with any enjoyment.

Unlike Valles Center, the Downtown area is mixed use, with both corporate offices and a great deal of high-rise housing; thus one finds a great many groceries, simulspace cafes, clinics, and pet stores. Although this is true of Martian cities in general, people in this part of town in particular are absolutely mad about pets; walking a dog is a display of wealth and resources. Cats and more exotic animals are equally prized, though not as status symbols. Despite all of our successes with transgenic animals, to the best of my knowledge transhumanity still hasn't managed to develop a cat that will put up with being walked.

The Yellow Bridge, a massive structure of arched girders, is a major public gathering place, spanning a wide public reservoir (Allegheny Public) placed for climate regulation between downtown and the residential district east of it. A lower deck carries four lanes of traffic on an arterial road. The upper deck is a foot and bicycle bridge that puts me in mind of the Charles Bridge in old Prague. South of downtown is mostly residential. North and east lie a combination of small research labs and microfacturing facilities. Much of Valles-New Shanghai's ground-based industry is concentrated here, with hundreds of 3D copy stores, garages, fabricator shops licensed with blueprints to fab certain goods, and even artisan workshops using pre-fabricator construction techniques. Outside the dome, the rest of the mesa is taken up by the groundside operations of Althauser Rocketry and by Valles Skyport, the city's primary spaceport.

Nytrondheim

I am not one given to self-indulgence—virtual immortality, in me, has produced a certain asceticism—but when I'm in the mood for it, gluttony is far and away my deadly sin of choice. One can fake it with a fabricator, but if you prefer your food cooked by a human (or a pod, at least), Nytrondheim is the only place in the solar system where one can breakfast on ouitsmijter, lunch on crepes or croque monsieur, dine on tapas, and finish off over solid, brown beer in an honest-to-God-and-the-King English pub. It makes continuing to live worth doing, even though on the way one is assaulted with a haze of AR graphics inviting one to various scandalous and anatomically improbable entertainments, the beratement of Marxist Barsoomian street agitators, and a profusion of video walls and ads for new vidgames and XPs that make old New York's Times Square look dim and staid.

Aside from being a place where one can eat well, Nytrondheim is the city's entertainment and media district, and at night it is swarmed by Valles-New Shanghai's glitterati (and also-rans) as they flit from theaters to chic nightclubs. Many of the buildings here are fine examples of the European Genomist style that developed just before the Fall. The style views buildings as organisms whose shapes develop from a sort of architectural DNA rather than an overall design; many of them look more grown than built. A genomist building does not so much have a ventilation system as it breathes, and some of the buildings may even be observed to have slow, gentle movement to them. The style and the construction techniques underlying it were strongly influential in the development of newer organic constructions, such as Hamilton cylinder habitats.

Experia, Boba, Traumwerken, Savage, Red Five, Arnault-Kieselhurst-Patrick, and a host of other media companies and ad agencies have their headquarters or local offices here. Every one of these blood drinkers bears watching. Their interest in AGI, singularity forecast simulations, memetic warfare (in the guise of viral marketing), and repurposing old military intel and even TITAN technologies for gaining greater market penetration makes them incredibly dangerous.

LAW AND ORDER

Order, such as it is, is maintained by the Valles-New Shanghai People's Militia (called the PMs on the street and the VNSPM internally and in city government). These thugs are the city's main police force, with jurisdiction extending through all five domes and into the surrounding exurbs. In terms of professionalism and restraint, they rival the LAPD tac squads turned loose during the Second Watts Riots on twenty-first century Earth. Apathy and bloodthirstiness make strange bedfellows. The VNSPM shows a great deal more discretion when policing the wealthier neighborhoods, with large plainclothes units assigned to areas like the Bund and Valles Center.

NOCTIS-QIANJIAO

<Moxie Harper, Firewall Sentinel>

Aside from Firewall, I've got two jobs, and they overlap nicely. One is cool hunting, and the other is being a cab driver. For both of these, I like the Qianjiao Skyport run. You get to see all these trim Loonies coming in, and glam types off the orbitals. Even more interesting are the ship crews. You want to know about rolling the micrograv life in style, check out an icepusher crew some time. They look like gypsy authentics after a closet collision with Uranian freebooters.

Skyport's the biggest sprawl of elevated flat ground clear of the canyon walls they could find, just north of the Qianjiao dome. Hit the flyway from there, and you'll get a great view: the huge domes of Qianjiao on the northwest bank of the River Noctis; Noctis City on the southeast; and the souks, trains, and roadways in between. Three immense bridges span the 200-meter width of the river, but rather than just being road or rail, they've been built upon, so that when the river freezes solid at night, the light from the souks above twinkles off the ice. Above you is the endless curve of the canyon walls, broken only in the far distance by the Cut, a massive ramp on which trains and road traffic climb the two kilometers from the valley floor to the Tharsis plateau. Here and there on the canyon rim are blinding points of light—mirror arrays angled to point more sunlight at the city's domes and the river. I recommend following the warning your entoptics will flash at you to not look directly at them for too long. Stretched out around the city are the Noctis Tablelands, a chaotic terrain of small mesas and weird hoodoos intersected by deep alluvial cuts.

New Shanghai's big, and Elysium's glitzy, but Noctis is where we get shit done. It's a pricey place to live (hence my two jobs, not counting Firewall), and this town has a higher proportion of people in biomorphs than any of the big cities on Mars. The crazy landscape surrounding the city is an attraction, but the chance to strike it rich in the Martian design industry is a bigger one. Within the domes, and even the souks (which are better kept than in other cities),

NOCTIS DEMOGRAPHICS

Population:	13,000,000
Synths:	15%
Pods:	20%
Biomorphs:	60%
Infomorphs:	5%

Noctis oozes design from every micron of matter. You won't see even a meter of chaos in the street plan here; the entire street layout and land-use scheme was meticulously drawn up by the famous Dutch urbanists Enckl and Vonderhaar. Where the streets twist charmingly, it's because they're meant to, and where they don't, they're a perfect grid. The duck pond in the city park is also a rice paddy—worked by the ducks, with just a little help from agriculture bots that look like mossy logs when they're not working. Grip loops and posts on the Metro use active ergonomics to reshape themselves to the hand of any rider who grabs onto them. My taxi has special footrests that fold out to be comfortable for people with prehensile feet (added those myself; neo-hominids love 'em!). That's only a small sampling, and it's the result of 13 million transhumans constantly, obsessively redesigning their environment and all of the objects in it.

CULTURE & DEMOGRAPHICS

Noctis has a lower population of synths and a little higher population of infomorphs than other Martian cities. Partly this is because there are so many AI and robotics firms here (RiseRobots, Tetsuo, and O'Connor are notable ones). Many of the jobs that might be filled by infugees in synths elsewhere are performed by expert systems in robotic bodies here. Also, using synths for menial labor isn't tasteful here, unlike in New Shanghai, where apparently it's okay to show what a big swinging member you've got by keeping a staff of liveried synths.

The top languages are English, Hindi, and Bahasa Indonesian. Like anyplace, there's a strong Chinese influence, but a lot of Europeans ended up here, too; you'll hear more German and Dutch spoken in Nieuwedam than anyplace else in the system. Seriously, have you heard Dutch? It's so fucking cute; it sounds like a made-up language.

NEIGHBORHOODS

This is a city of industries and interests divided by neighborhood. You'll find entire sections of town devoted to one or another type of microfacturing, retail, or design. The reason is mostly social; density spreads ideas just as well as diseases. Streets are often very narrow in the older parts of town; early life support policies here were complemented by strong anti-sprawl laws and the aforementioned meticulous

planning. Getting around by car can really suck unless you're rich enough to own a flyer, but every major street is served by the Noctis Tram (sometimes called the Night Train). Arterials either have tracks running down the center or overhead rails strung from pylons; the cars are designed to operate either on the ground or suspended, depending upon traffic engineering and the geography of the neighborhood. Both domes are hilly—they needed all the flat ground for the Skyport—so the tram takes some crazy turns.

There are bicycles everywhere. Half the city gets around this way; even corp execs have gotten into it. Just about everybody has the same bike: the ubiquitous beat up, black Qianjiao fixed gear. Few have brakes, which is fine once you get the hang of it, because doing a skid stop is easy at .36 Gs. You'll see some crazy configurations on the street from time to time—pennyfarthings, stacked-frame recumbents, unicycles with 3-meter seat posts—but you'll never see them parked on the street. In Noctis, everyone is a bike thief.

When parkour really caught on, shortly before the Fall, the city designed a whole series of rooftop courses that crisscross the city. Real, hardcore parkouristas think these are a joke, and the fad for them waned, so that they're now little-used. But they're still there, and they're still a great way around town for a decent freerunner. Even better, people tend to forget they exist.

THE BRIDGES

Kledingsbrug is the center bridge. The lower deck carries a suspended tram line and the QB4, the arterial bikeway connecting the two domes. The souks and arcades above and below are the garment district, stretching from the headquarters of the prominent Galliato fashion house astride the bridge entrance in Noctis to the Dumont Building in Qianjiao, a massive retail and microfacturing complex housing hundreds of independent clothing companies. In between, you can try on just about anything, from club wear made solely of AR graphics to one-morphology-fits-all knitwear designed to be worn by both bipeds and uplifts. On the high end, you find Lunar haute couture priced so ludicrously that it makes me throw up a little in the back of my mouth. At the other end of the scale, you've got designs from the Trojans and Main Belt spread out on rugs at street corners, sold by vendors who care more about your anarchist rep than your cred (although they still want your money; the only free things in this town are Fe02 and bad advice). Kledingsbrug is probably the hottest daytime social spot in town. Whether you're made of glitter or pond scum, the garment district is the place to make connections.

Renrakubrug is the southwest bridge. It's a tech bazaar with a serious nerd bent. High precision 3D print shops, augmentation parlors, and security consultancies jostle for space with vintage part shops, data archeology specialists, and pricey boutiques selling geek-oriented Earth artifacts like comic books, toys, and antique game consoles. If you want a truly surreal experience, there are even a few recreations of early twenty-first century maid cafes, mostly peopled by creepy gerontocrat otaku and their protégés. Some pretty shady tech moves through here, as well, although major weapons deals and the like usually go down out in the privacy of the tablelands.

Biobrug (pronounced "bee-oh-brug;" non-English speakers have no idea why this is funny, so no smirking at your hosts) is the showcase for Qianjiao's third big export: biodesign. Need a tiny robot with a microbial fuel cell stomach that lives off the chewing gum and crisps people drop in the back of your taxi cab, aquarium fish that tweet you when their water needs changing, or neon legwarmers that purr and glow green when your date rubs your leg? Yeah, Firewall agents can be frivolous with their cred, too; I got all this stuff on the Biobrug. I've also caught a strain of the common cold engineered to dodge basic biomods, nearly had my face eaten off by a school of land piranhas that got out of their cage, and been harangued by a seven-foot annelid with a voice synthesizer module. (Want some local color? Wiki "Feng the Worm" some time. Do *not* give him any handouts; he's been using the "need spare cred to turn myself back into a biped" story for years). The rumors that Les Goules have a big operation in the market are exaggerated, although if for some reason you want to do a deal with them, it's a good place to find them. They definitely have fingers in the pie here, but they neither run the place nor do they have any front businesses hiding a large operation. Not enough space; too much surveillance. Their black kettles are out in the souks.

NOCTIS CITY

On the southeast bank of the River Noctis is the larger of the two domes, Noctis City. Noctis holds slightly more than half of the population. Landmarks here include the huge Centrum Park at the dome's center; Watertown, the financial and media district; Gastown, the entertainment district, which wraps around the Noctis end of the Kledingsbrug; and the maglev railyards. Also located here is Pembroke Gardens, a working-class neighborhood reputed to house a large number of Guanxi front businesses, including darknet facilities and illegal fighting pits where combat morphs square off against weird transgenic creatures created across the river. Noctis has one neighborhood, Tito, that's all TTO offices, half of them empty since terraforming efforts shifted south and east. These are in a district housing a lot of other League offices and infrastructure.

QIANJIAO

Qianjiao houses the garment district, centered on the Dumont Building; Kuypers-Lalley, a dense neighborhood where a lot of design and engineering firms have offices; Osiris, a neighborhood in Qianjiao centered around Osiris Medical Center; and support facilities

for the nearby Skyport. Qianjiao also hosts all of the major academic institutions in the city, with the exception of IIT Mumbai. Landmarks here include Wizard Alley, a red light district; Peg Towers, a famous block of reconfigurable modular housing and shops that look like stacks of children's interlocking blocks in bright, primary colors; Bleeker Straat, a busy, partly subterranean artery lined with microfacturing shops; and Tufte Square, an open-air market in Kuypers-Lalley centered on a statue of a famous twencen infotect. The TTO's ops center is on the outskirts of Qianjiao, facing the M-4, the highway running up the Cut toward Olympus.

Law and Order

The NQPD is one of the sanest on the planet, which is to say they just might try to ascertain if you're doing something wrong before they cuff you, slam you to the street, and beat up your weird-looking friend who happened to be standing nearby. Basic it's got to do with economics: police brutality exists in inverse proportion to the number of poor, desperate people needing to be kept in line, and our city happens to have fewer poor people. Standard beat uniforms are blue and black. Tacs wear dark gray urban camo. NQPD tacticals rival the OIA Tacs in the shiny toys department, but they've got no experience equivalent to the OIA's patrolling for wild artificials in Fuxingmen. This wasn't always how it was. The old NQPD chief, Brighde ("Bridey") Sheets-Patel, used to send the tacticals on regular scout patrols of the TQZ periphery. She had the job under a mayor who was beholden to trade unionist elements of the Tharsis League. Her replacement, Jad Singh, is a PC man through-and-through. He adopted a policy of leaving the TQZ to the military and the Noctis Rangers (the League ranger department for Noctis Labyrinthus). NQPD tacs theoretically have the tools to contain an exsurgent outbreak, but they might not now have the needed experience.

Cultural Forces and Clades

Big Martian cities have so much going on that a lot of residents have felt the need to fabricate some fairly rigid style expressions and group mores to stay sane. I don't blame these people; life's a confusing cup of scum. It pays to know the protocols for working with different groups, though, because all the rep in the world isn't gonna get your foot in the door if you don't understand why people are doing what they're doing.

Clades aren't factions; they don't have the wide appeal or political clout. However, many clades line up with one or more factions. Tibetans, for example, tend to be either autonomists or reclaimers. Some clade members are very secretive, though. Members of fabber undergrounds, for instance, don't trumpet their presence in the RNA network. Being in with a clade can help out with networking inside a faction that's



got a lot of people from that clade in it, or it can hurt if an antagonistic clade is well represented.

All of the following cultural clades can be found elsewhere on Mars, but many of them sprang up or found themselves here in Noctis.

Authentics

Like you might expect, a lot of people have latched onto one or the other old Earth cultures as a way of having some norms for behavior. Often these are groups that had some kind of outsider status on Earth. Interestingly, most authentics don't really care whether you have a bona fide background with their clade (be that through ethnicity, family history, or the like). If you're running their memes, and you're running them right, you're accepted, because it's the stabilizing cultural familiarity that they're after. One can't pose, though; an authentic walks the walk twenty-four-and-a-half by seven. I already mentioned the sufis among the Barsoomian nomads. Some other authentic clades you might run into include Roma gypsies, tinkers, Jews, Lunar Mormons, Technotologists, urban primitives, Ismaili Muslims, and Tibetans.

Bike vs. Buggy

In Qianjiao, in the smaller El Barrio de la Ciencia, cars are forbidden. Can't tell you how many drunken ride home fares I'm missing out on because of the kids in this neighborhood; it's a dense neighborhood. Ciencia's the center of the Bike vs. Buggy meme. I can't decide whether it's a fad, a political movement, or just a good wholesome urge to pedal in large groups so that you can check out lots of other people's butts. Supporters usually talk about the hit to air quality inside the domes from hydrocarbon vehicles, the benefits of exercise, and the benefit to our psyches from a reduction in traffic noise. Whatever; it's taken root. The streets in Noctis-Qianjiao teem with bicycles. If you have to, say, leave someplace quickly, possibly while being pursued, do not rely on a car in this town. You'll end up doing eight to ten in dead storage for organic damage on the cyclist who you *will* hit. On the other hand, bikes can be a fast and discreet way to get around. The whole city is designed for them to get around quickly, and traveling in a big pack of other bikers (paths tend to be fast-moving but crowded) gives you some anonymity.

Bioclubs

Bioclubs are social and technical societies for people interested in designing transgenic organisms. Most members of bioclubs aren't professionals, they're cab drivers or librarians or something. But most of the equipment involved is easy to get and cheap, and everybody remembers a few tricks from their high school genetic design classes. People in bioclubs treat genetic design like it's arts-and-crafts time; they make organisms that are interesting rather than being useful. These can now be found all over town, but the first ones seem to have come about from bored medical personnel trying some things out off-duty. For a while, bioclubs operated very openly, until (the rumor goes) a member of a club in Gastown accidentally engineered a microbe that emitted a virulent airborne toxin. The stuff got into the ventilation system of his apartment and nearly killed 28 of his neighbors. Now, while not illegal, they're a lot more underground.

Fabber Undergrounds

The fabber gangs, on the other hand, are definitely criminals by the city's book. Started by engineering students in Qianjiao, fabber gangs aim to create private, unrestricted fabricators, able to run open source blueprints. Then they want to put them in the hands of anyone on Mars who wants one. The hitch, of course, is that this is totally illegal, and if any of them get caught, the authorities are going to lock them in a room and throw away the room. Fabber gang members have workshops in their homes or, if they're lucky, in no-tell rental buildings they've anonymized. About half the group are hackers and infosec people whose job is to keep the project hidden, while the other half are tinkerers and engineers of various stripes. They're not interested in selling fabricators; this would only risk compromising their operation while they perfect the models they have. Fabber underground-built fabricators often malfunction, but they have two major advantages over normal fabricators: they emit very little energy, making their operation difficult to detect, and they don't keep any internal log of what they've built.

Elysium

<Violet Perdido, Firewall Sentinel>

When I came back from the dead, I took up work as a whore. I had other choices of employment, but none of them were interesting. Do you know what coming back as an infugee is like? They put you in a simulspace and send you to job interviews. There is a noxiously bubbly social network involved in the process, as well as various skills assessments. In the end, a company rep sits you down and tells you how hard they're going to fuck you. Sign on the dots, or back to dead storage for you, my lamb. I looked at my menu of choices. Actuary. Paramedic. Psych Liaison. Surveillance Monitor. "Adult Entertainment Spec" had the shortest term of indenture. Could the choice have been simpler?

It amuses me that Elysium is a crack in the ground. Coming in on the train, one doesn't normally glimpse the scope of it. One has to be flying. Hyblaeus Chasma is an immense fissure, ten kilometers across at its widest. Covering the canyon rim in a great arc are thick panes of glass and water, held in place by a framework of supports styled as Victorian ironwork and pillars dropping all the way to the chasm floor. The canyon is compartmentalized like a ship to forestall decompression in an emergency. Walls of more faux wroughtwork and glass panes with hatches here

and there to allow traffic through stretch from wall to wall and floor to roof. To the west, there is a final wall, and then the fissure opens out into the wide basin occupied by West Elysium, a great network of souks, mini-domes, and surface buildings.

By day, the city is blue, green, earth tones. Busy people fly to and fro like jeweled birds, selling sin and collecting its wages. On pleasant days, hypercorp luminaries and politicos stroll the Plaza Dei Cigni in Palazzo, conducting their business in the open air via mesh. By evening, Elysium is red and black. Its streets breathe the night people like opium smoke. If one walks around Chinatown at night, the assault of AR graphics, chat requests from hustlers, designer pheromones, visual sex memes, and transhuman awfulness/loveliness is unrelenting.

Sure, there's some out there who looked at the project of Elysium and said, "What is Zevi thinking? Zevi is *crazy* building out there." Mes amis, nine million hustlers, dreamers, and beautiful people live here, because they realized what I did: in an atmosphere this thin, good old solid common sense sublimates into a gas quick as dry ice on the 4th of Mesha. Inspect a topo map; I've already built a beach house where the water line will be in 200 years. And in the mean time, my city is fucking sexy."
—Zevi Oaxaca-Maartens,
CEO of Experia, in an interview with blogger Olivie Ndembe

CULTURE & DEMOGRAPHICS

Skin. Red or white, young or not so, this town is positively devoted to skin. You don't see so many sleeved in synths here; they tend to be only in jobs that are both manual and invite a fantasy of clinical sterility. You know: biowaste disposal, recycler mucking, vatmeat harvestry, or anything where you would want a biomorph to have a long shower after, before they walked the streets. Pods are common. I expect to be in one for a while. Pod or biomorph, everyone in this city is very, very pretty—to the point where it's wearying.

We also have quite a few ghosts living in the machines here, which may cause consternation to visitors from far-off gothams. Most are human infugees, and most of these are indentures. There is a small population of limited AGIs here, though, and Mr. Zevi goes to some lengths to keep them from attracting attention. There are perhaps 100 of them, registered in the mesh as private citizens, with addresses in an Experia arcology and no indication

ELYSIUM DEMOGRAPHICS

Population:	9,000,000
Synths:	10%
Pods:	25%
Biomorphs:	55%
Infomorphs:	10%

they're not real. But research by networks of people who've had mesh contact with them suggests they are almost certainly AGIs, not human infomorphs. The corp media hasn't caught onto this and most likely never will, unless Zevi decides it's finally time to let his AGI experiments out of the closet.

Commonly spoken languages include Hindi, English, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Bahasa Indonesian. Hollywood and Bollywood helped shape this city.

The large Indonesian population resulted from a deal between the Oaxaca-Maartens family and the former Indonesian government to rifle the Indonesian national backup files for 250,000 able-minded construction workers and their immediate families. Quoted at the time, Zevi said, "The Indonesians—yes, I got quite a good deal on them." They are a culturally persecuted underclass, and though most of the Indonesian workers have worked off their indentures, they don't have opportunities. The Movement has a strong foothold in this community.

NEIGHBORHOODS

Three major roads, Northern Arterial, Southern Arterial, and Western Arterial, with two-lane flyways above them, connect the city's main regions. Together these roads are known as the E90. E90 South eventually connects to what is left of the M-5 that once ran to Olympus.

CENTRAL

Palazzo is the government district and the seat of the Oaxaca-Maartens family. The architecture here is palatial; you'll see a bit of American federalist, a hint of Chinese New Imperial, and enough baroque Austrian to choke a flight of cherubs. Elysium describes itself as a constitutional monarchy, with the Oaxaca-Maartens family and their scions as hereditary monarchs. It is a strong monarchy, with the head of the Oaxaca-Maartens family (Zevi) holding important executive powers including a veto over the legislature, extraterritoriality for all of his family's holdings, the ability to write binding executive orders that can only be countermanded by two-thirds of the parliament, immunity from prosecution for him and his family, and immunity from subpoenas for his and his family's forks and backups.

North and west of Palazzo is Hyblaeus City, a large neighborhood of offices and studios. Thirty percent of the entertainment content created in the solar system originates in this neighborhood. Busy night and day, this district is also home to a large number of bars and Victoria Terminus, the city's main maglev rail station.

NORTH

Corinth Parkways, just north of Hyblaeus City, is where all of the good people live, if you want to deconstruct Consortium propaganda quite literally. Close to downtown are townhouses and staid mansions, the province of the small, buttoned-down segment of Elysium's wealthy. Further out are modest but comfortable apartments and houses, interspersed with shops and other businesses. A word to investigators at play in this town: do not ignore this neighborhood simply because it looks so plaintively normal. Corinth Parkways is a favorite spot for identity thieves, black clinics, and drug labs to set up shop. A criminal outfit might rent a townhouse in this neighborhood, use it for a month, then pack up and move to cover their trail. Les Goules are thought to have moved bodies through here, and it's rumored as well that a large portion of Conduit's bandwidth comes from a swarm of self-replicating antenna bots that were loosed on the rooftops of this neighborhood.

Bainbridge is a canyon twisting off the Northern Arterial where a great many poshly compensated scenario writers, programmers, producers, engineers, and senior production people live. There's a lot of what passes for brainpower in Elysium living here. Parties can be interesting. I once entertained for an evening in a robotic exoskeleton that joined with six others like it to form a giant robot. I was a left arm for about two hours. Engineers can be so imaginative. Security in this neighborhood is extremely high and the residents often armed, as hypercorps feeling a tad stabby like to lash out against one another's intellectual property. Interesting fact: members of the Screenwriter's Guild Marksmanship Club have a hit ratio in firefights twice that of the average EPM beat cop. Or course, the lovely gentleman I heard this from was an SGMC member.

Dulcimer Canyon is a disused stretch of road in a winding canyon that climbs almost to the surface, ending some 20 meters below the dome lip at the top of the canyon. To reach this place, one has to drive through Bainbridge off onto Dulcimer Canyon, which is a spur twisting off of Bainbridge Canyon. The road is blocked with a traffic barrier, and AR graphics advise that the area is off limits per the Elysium People's Militia. A kilometer past the barricade is Lost Horizon, a shared workshop once operated by the Lost Horizons Society, a group of tinkerers and citizen scientists, most of whom lived on Bainbridge Canyon. Although all of the men and women involved worked for entertainment hypercorps, many in R&D or engineering work, the work performed at Lost Horizons was that of hobbyists exploring their pet areas of curiosity. Two years ago, someone's AI experiment got out of control, and the workshop had to be abandoned. The plague of wild artificials was suppressed when a series of controlled EMP bursts were released along the canyon, but rumor has it some still survive. Dulcimer Canyon has been quarantined since, and the eight members of Lost Horizons were arrested (and later disappeared, it seems) and their families relocated.

SOUTH

Kirs-Brookley is the glamorous neighborhood immediately south of Palazzo, a high-security fairyland of beautiful people and voluptuously furnished recreations of Uruguayan Dominion period architecture. Many of the wealthiest entertainers, producers, and media strategists live here. This neighborhood is watched constantly by overhead surveillance drones, and the typical home here is a walled, enclosed compound with private security and hardened infosec.

Chinatown is the entertainment district, partly encircling Kirs-Brookley to its south. The Drag along the South Arterial is an orange tree-lined parkway with nightclubs, simulspace parlors, twenty-four hour augmentation shops, and tea houses running most of its length.

WEST

Most of West Elysium consists of working-class housing in modules and mini-domes abutting on twisting souks. Highway and rail come through on elevated pylons, barely interrupting the sprawl. On the fringes of this district are nameless slums where the city's poorest live around clusters of synthmorph service businesses.

Palembeng is a neighborhood at the mouth of the Hyblaeus Chasma where the souks are dense. It is heavily Indonesian, with high unemployment, and is a hotbed of sympathy for the Movement. Several of the community's leaders are also low-level officials in the Tharsis League. An entertainment district fronting on the West Arterial is the most visited section of this neighborhood. The rest of Palembeng can be dangerous at any hour; several flocks of gangsters have divided the territory among themselves.

LAW AND ORDER

The Elysium People's Militia (EPMs) are the main police force here. They are humorless and hostile to anyone having a good time. I urge you to avoid them unless you truly need their services. The EPM is competent and brutally efficient. A riot in Palembeng last year was broken up by baboon squads and hallucinogen grenades. Most of their patrols are in flying cars or on bicycles. Their tactical squads do not have a stellar reputation, however.

The Portmanteau Rangers are the local League Rangers, responsible for patrolling the no man's land between Elysium and the Titan Quarantine Zone. They operate from the town of Portmanteau 50 kilometers south of Elysium on the maglev line to Hellas.

Elysium's lack of readiness in conflict situations is reflected in its first responders, the EPM's Tactical Squads. EPM Tacs are widely considered some of the most inexperienced and under-trained in the planet's major cities. In conventional warfare, they would be a danger only to green, lightly equipped troops.

In addition, they have not seen combat with dangerous artificial life or puppets of the TITANs since shortly after the Fall. Military observers have also questioned the units' skills with weapon systems key to combating hostile nanoswarms or femtobots. These units cannot be considered reliable support in the event of a TITAN resurgence or a major nanoplague. ☘

Unlike the EPM Tacs, the Portmanteau Rangers are seasoned security forces, experienced in handling wild artificials and even exsurgent threats.

PERSONALITIES & FACTIONS

A little oligarchy of people and organizations positively hogs the spotlight among Elysium's wheels.

ZEVI OAXACA-MAARTENS AND FAMILY

It's Zevi's city. If he allows you to play in it, you must play by his rules. The deathless gerontocrats of Noctis and New Shanghai are largely subtle masters. Oaxaca-Maartens and his family are anything but. They're oligarchs unafraid to be open in their exercise of power and influence. Zevi seems particularly fond of giving responsibility to his many nephews, birthing the phrase, "some nephew," for referring to a favored appointee in city government. The family owns several hypercorps other than Experia, including the law firm Oaxaca, Hyannis, & Wales, specialists in biotech law; the security company Rittermark; and Ectomorph, an exclusive resleeving, backup, and egocasting company catering to rich clients with unusual security needs. Zevi and his family favor exalt and sylph morphs—heavily upgraded, one assumes.

All of the Oaxaca-Maartens enterprises rely heavily on AIs, AGIs, and infugee indentures for labor. Zevi himself pioneered the now-illegal technique of indenturing an ego to do administrative work in an office simulspace for three years, then running an arbitrary number of forks of the person (the record was 103 simultaneous instances for one worker) and merging them at the end of the contract. Most would agree the settlement money received by the victims did not go far enough.

Hector Oaxaca is a senior partner at Oaxaca, Hyannis, & Wales and one of the few family members to openly serve in a high-ranking post at a family-owned company. Hector files intellectual property lawsuits at the same pace most men turn oxygen into carbon dioxide.

Leandra Maartens is Zevi's granddaughter and currently one of the most popular media figures on Mars, with a name recognition of 94.6% among the public (more people could successfully identify her than the Governor General of Valles-New Shanghai). She appears mainly as a talking head on pundit shows and in Scoff, a wildly popular reality vid show in which Leandra takes people to dinner and then says rude (and sometimes funny) things to them throughout the meal.

Manisha Maartens was a doctor in a resleeving clinic when she met Alaric Maartens, one of Zevi's favorite nephews. Alaric was assassinated a year ago—an act that included an unprecedented successful attack on the Oaxaca-Maartens house backups. Since then Manisha, a virtual stranger to many of the family and previously accustomed to a quiet life, has been kept in a continual media spotlight. I'll be surprised if the poor woman doesn't go mad within another six months.

MAYOR CORMAC LAPORTE

Mayor LaPorte is tall, quite handsome, and beefy. By beefy, I mean fat: a willfully red-cheeked, corpulent man lumbering like a juggernaut through all of us Elysian stick figures. LaPorte is Zevi's token foil, a political sideshow act who occasionally interferes with Oaxaca-Maartens's plans, but is tolerated mostly to convince the populace that something called "politics" is still going on in this town. Cormac LaPorte was legitimately elected during a period of public outrage over police handling of a demonstration. LaPorte has partially succeeded in reining in the police force, having put a friendly new chief in place, but at the precinct level he still faces a lot of opposition. LaPorte is given to long-winded speeches on holidays and blustering populist sound bites any time of year.

EXPERIA

The Oaxaca-Maartens family is not Experia. Although Zevi remains CEO, and the Oaxaca-Maartens are the majority shareholders, they are not an iron fisted presence in the executive suite. Zevi sets policy and lets his people do their work. Experia is a strongly influential company but not a large one, employing only about 75 people directly. Everyone else is a subcontractor, from security to vid production crews.

Aside from news and entertainment, Experia does a great deal of R&D. From Firewall's point of view, their research into AGIs and memetic warfare are two areas of concern. AGI research focused on creating a seed AGI might be taking place under Experia's R&D program; the risk of this needs to be investigated further. Some Experia business partners might also be conducting unorthodox personality fork research, which would be illegal if not of great interest to Firewall.

MINOR SETTLEMENTS

<Jake Carter, Firewall Proxy>

They say the heart and spirit of Mars is in its small, industrious cities and happy farm towns. They say that in AR interstitials for buggies, anyhow. Mars's little towns are by and large some beat-up places, full of people who've been knocked down a few times too many.

ASHOKA

Ashoka's built into the ground, descending below the permafrost of the chaotic plain on which it lies tens of meters to bedrock. You can take that literal or as a metaphor, if you like. This town's got influence all out of proportion with its size. It's a center of the Movement, a spa retreat for the rich, and an important ops center for the TTO. Ashoka's where city, town, and desert come together.

Instead of being a huge, domed megacity, Ashoka is built into a sixty-meter deep, kilometer-wide cylindrical pit with a transparent, lens-shaped cover over the top. Surface buildings, including a few high-rise housing blocks and hotels, rise at the rim of the pit, their foundations and entryways opening through the pit wall at its bottom. There's a bazaar, a park, and a Hindu temple, among other landmarks.

Nearby is the Viking Historical Park, a big area that includes the landing sites of the Viking spacecraft and Sojourner rover. Some brain-damaged corp flack hit on the idea of installing AIs in them when they found them, so now both are talking parts of the exhibit. Effin' dumb if you want my opinion, but the tourists love it.

CULTURE AND DEMOGRAPHICS

You won't see many synths here. This is a town of rusters, although the ten thousand or so tourists swelling the population at any given time will be in a variety of morphs. Common languages you'll hear are Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Arabic, and English.

BARSOOMIAN PRESENCE

Ashoka is strongly with the Movement. The Governor General, Manjit Savekar, is a former terraforming line engineer. Most of the local League functionaries are also friendly to the Movement. This makes Ashoka the stage for a lot of cloak and dagger work. Consortium Oversight people work this town all the time, trying to keep tabs on what they call "hostile elements." The locals don't like Oversight at all and rarely help them.

ASHOKA DEMOGRAPHICS

Population:	10,000
Synths:	5%
Pods:	10%
Biomorphs:	80%
Infomorphs:	5%

■



New Dazhai (Fa Jing Planetary Station)

Set near the foot of the northern escarpment of the Argyre Planitia impact basin, Dazhai is your regular type of large company town. About 350,000 people live under a good-sized (800-meter) permanent dome, several smaller 100-meter pressure domes, and the usual collection of prefabs, tin cans, warrens, and outbuildings. They share their digs with a couple other hypercorps: Brokenridge, a terraforming corp; Pecos, who've got the security contract for the town and nearby settlements; and Leong Admintech, one of those catch-all back country admin outfits that'll do everything from legal rep to supply chaining to infomorph brokerage (that last being where they get the talent pool for everything else they do). The population fluctuates as people come and go from a string of nearby mining camps along the escarpment, which so far's been a mother lode of copper and bauxite. Great Southern, a maglev line that's also a Fa Jing subsidiary, has a large railyard here. They run an arterial line connecting Argyre Planitia to the rest of civilization and a bunch of spur lines serving a string of nearby communities and their own mining camps. New Dazhai is the vegemite on their regional economy.

Fa Jing ain't what you'd call good neighbors, though. They hate visitors in the town itself, and the fares and freight charges they level on the local towns're pretty near extortionary. People pay, though, because the maglev's their lifeline. Nobody's built a highway out to Argyre yet, and Fa Jing likes it that way. Preservationists and nano-ecologists hate them, too, because while you can't do helluv damage to a dead world with your usual mining pollutants, Argyre Planitia ain't dead anymore; it's a major terraforming zone. There's a lot of concern about heavy metals leaching off the mine tailings and poisoning the northern basin, but when the nano-ecologists have tried to do sampling to find a solution, Fa Jing's chased them off.

It's tense, and the weird part of it is that the mines are a really low-margin operation for a corp like Fa Jing; they're making all their money down there off the Great Southern subsidiary. There's rumors they dug up something else to sweeten the deal—uranium is a popular matter of speculation—and that's possible. But all the conspiracy theorists who think they dug up another Pandora Gate or something under that scarp need to shut up and keep their nonsense to themselves. Security there ain't that tight by half. I prefer the simpler explanation: Fa Jing are a bunch of assholes.

Pilsener City

Located in the Valles Marineris, about midway between New Shanghai and Noctis, Pilsener's your typical small agricultural dome settlement. The people're mostly in splicers, and ethnically, they're pretty homogeneous: Japanese. The dome is just under 600 meters in diameter. Eighty percent of the land is crops: wheat, barley, hops, vegetables, maybe some reefer. In the center, there's a tightly packed town, including offices, a medical center, a few bars, and the homes of the wealthier folk. Be careful going out for a drink here if you're Chinese; a lot of Japanese infugees ended up indentured to unpopular Chinese managers and still carry a grudge. I got called "chink" here, and I don't think I look Chinese at all.

Radiating out from the dome are long rows of greenhouses, growing more food, and a souk-like network of homes and small businesses. As its name implies, brewing (with locally grown ingredients) is the town's major industry, and there is a massive brewery building here as well. There's a solar farm outside the dome, but the community fusion reactors are inside. On one edge of the dome is a small trucking depot. It's about ten klicks from there to the nearest railroad stop.

When're you going to end up in a place like Pilsener City on a Firewall mission? Hell, maybe never. But mark my words, some weird-ass shit goes on in these little ditchstop farm domes.

The Hinterlands

<Jake Carter, Firewall Proxy>

Much of Mars is open plains and frigid high desert, traversed by maglev tracks and lonely byways.

Ma'adim Vallis and the Martian Gate

Ma'adim is practically a crack in the ground compared to some of the other things on this planet got "Vallis" in their names, but scaled to a human being standing at its mouth, it's an impressive sight, bigger than the Grand Canyon of Earth. Less than half a klick in there's a perfectly cylindrical cut about 10 meters diameter deep in the canyon wall. You come into it through a gap about three meters wide. In the center of the cut, standing in the open air, is the Martian Gate, now controlled by the Pathfinder corp.

The gate was first found by sufi nomads ranging southward from the Gusev Crater at the canyon mouth. Somehow some high-ranking Consortium figures got wind of the find, realized the value of it, and tried to buy the sufis off, but they weren't interested. So they bought the land out from under them and established a territorial claim on the property, which was outside any established government's sphere of influence. Then they hired Herzog security, a firm from the Valles Marineris midlands, to storm the gate and shoot all of the sufis. Which they did. The rumor that a sufi async opened the gate and some of his clan escaped through it before Herzog overwhelmed them is probably just that—a rumor.

The Consortium suits quickly pooled resources and pulled strings, and in short order Pathfinder was founded and given control of the situation, with full Consortium backing. The new hypercorp immediately established Ma'adim Research Park, a small

settlement in the canyon, centered around the gate. Similar to Elysium, a short stretch of the canyon is walled and lidded to hold an atmosphere. Outside there is an airfield, maglev depot, and a long, lonely stretch of highway that connects after about 1,000 kilometers to a highway running into the Hellas basin. Few visitors arrive by road. No one enters the settlement without an invite from Pathfinder. The place is set up to efficiently support and deploy gatecrasher teams, with a new team ready to go every time a window opens up.

Herzog, Pathfinder's security contractor here, are smart and well-equipped. Infiltrators shouldn't expect meek resistance from their infosec specialists, and it's unwise to get in a stand-up firefight with them.

To support the logistics of the Pathfinder Colonization Initiative, Pathfinder has constructed a city about forty kilometers from the canyon mouth. People've been commenting on the distance—maybe these rumors that've been going around about massive energy releases from mishandled gates are more than hearsay. Dubbed Pathfinder City, numerous massive building projects are still underway, giving the settlement a lively but unfinished air. An arterial highway has been constructed between the city and the gate site in the canyon, along with a corresponding set of rail lines. In short, it's infrastructure for a full scale colonization effort—despite the fact that the number of actual colonies that have been economically viable so far has been extremely limited. Gotta have dreams, I guess.

The fact that the Martian Gate is just south of the Titan Quarantine Zone is a fact lost on no one. Though there has been no sign of TITAN machine activity or interest in the area, Herzog and Pathfinder pay particular attention to the stretch of land between the two.

KOROLEV CRATER

A deep impact basin located far in the northern plains, Korolev is sheltered enough that many sufi and maker nomad clans spend the harshest months of the Martian winter here. The crater's thus a semi-permanent settlement, with a small crew of clan wardens stationed here to do terraforming work year round. During winter, you might find as many as 10,000 nomads camped here. There's also a permanent ecology station that breeds lichens and microbes for seeding in the surrounding landscape. Dozens of wind turbines on high spars or on the basin rim provide a low-footprint power grid for the camps. Similar camps accompanied by terraforming or ecostations exist at Aggasiz, Burroughs, and Chamberlin craters in the southern hemisphere, and at Curie, Escorial, and Littleton craters in the north.

ORBIT

<Moxie Harper, Firewall Sentinel>

" … And you will have treasure in heaven."—Mark 10:21

Twenty million people live in Martian orbit, the majority of them in the areosynchronous zone near the equator. The space above Olympus Mons is especially crowded, with scores of immense orbital industrial parks and long haul shipping facilities situated to get goods and materials to and from the surface quickly. Further from the space elevator tether are corporate stations, research facilities, and the private sanctuaries of the mega-wealthy.

PROGRESS (DEIMOS)

Formerly the moon known as Deimos, Progress orbits Mars about every 30 hours. It's a cylindrical Cole habitat with immense windows cut into it, making it resemble an immense stone O'Neill cylinder that tapers somewhat toward the ends. The hab has busy spaceports at both of its rotational axes. This place is corp hell. My first gig as a driver, and my only long-term job offworld, was driving an air taxi for execs and their families around the cylinder. I'd hoped working around the vomitously rich might be a good angle for a cool hunter, but all I learned was that you cannot, repeat cannot, buy taste. The problem is that when you have enough money, no one is going to tell you that you can't wear hot orange with aquamarine or that your cosmetic surgery is not cute, but just makes your morph's face look all effed up. Insulated from how actual transhumans dress groundside, this place is a non-stop parade of high-markup fashion crimes.

Fortunately, for every stay-at-home spouse dressed like an inmate from a pre-genetic engineering home for the simple, there are three people in suits so sharp you could cut yourself on the creases. Yes, pretty. Be warned: there is nothing funky about these people; they are face-eating eels in exalt sleeves, no matter what kind of front they show. Progress is where the ambitious come to get powerful, and they are not fucking around.

Did I mention the entire fucking hab smells like an ashtray? Smoking is so popular here that you can almost spot an outsider by whether they're lighting up, and there are two large hydroponics installations orbiting with the hab that grow nothing but tobacco. What you smoke is a display of rank, and within corps, there are unspoken sumptuary customs. It's a major gaffe to smoke a mid-level executive brand if you're a junior exec, for instance. Smoking wears out your morph, sucks more resources out of recycling systems, and gives your life support system that not so fresh feeling … so why do they do it? I'll go with unmitigated group megalomania on this one: you smoke to show that you don't care if you're morph's on its last leg at 40. You are a successful motherfucker, and you're going to buy a new one. That's the kind

PROGRESS DEMOGRAPHICS

Population:	8,500,000
Synths:	30%
Pods:	20%
Biomorphs:	40%
Infomorphs:	10%

of attitude that'll get the honchos admiring the cut of your jib up here.

So far in this report, we've all been saying something about how each city looks, maybe talking about the architecture. Well, it sucks. The place looks like the placenta left behind as the sleep of reason breeds monsters. The built landscape around here is one part Chinese New Imperial, one part executive desk toy, two parts high-end southern California shopping mall circa BF 65. The plant life is obsessively manicured. You know how if you want a relaxing atmosphere, greenery can help out a lot? Well, the people who laid out Progress must have been aliens who read that bit of wisdom in a book but didn't understand it at all.

CULTURE AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Progress is home base for nearly two million vacworkers, most of whom are sleeved in synths. There is a higher proportion of pods and infomorphs as well, both commonly indentures. Exalts, sylphs, hibernoids, and mentons are all common morphs here; only proles sleeve in splicers. Pod morphs are common, especially for indentures, and many security details and bodyguard teams have novacrabs in them.

Progress is a polyglot town. You'll hear Mandarin, Hindi, English, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, and French commonly, and other languages frequently enough. Everyone here used to rule something, from Marathi technocrats to Uruguayan generals, and they're all eager to tell you about it in their own tongue.

NEIGHBORHOODS

On a lush stretch of parkland near the center of the cylinder is Planetary Consortium HQ, a white marble campus of administrative buildings and hypercorp consulates that serves as the administrative center for the Consortium. All of the Hypercorp Council corps have offices here, with the exception of Solaris, who avoid having offices on general principles. The immense phallic spires of the Consortium's Ministry are here, though they take backstage to the pleasant, airy domes that hold the halls of the Planetary Congress and the various media offices that focus so intensely on the cyberdemocracy spectacle. Off to the side, the square blocks of Progress Bank are a monument to safe-like security, if you can avoid the neo-soviet architectural style.

Situated looking up toward HQ on the opposite side of the cylinder, Roycewoods is arguably the most exclusive neighborhood in the solar system. High-level execs, corp lobbyists, and officers of the Consortium live here on cobbled, tree-lined streets patrolled by armed ornithopters and elite PSS officers. Powerful people have lived in this neighborhood for some time now. The Roycewoods Country Club House, with its distinctive green peaked roof and clock tower, is constructed of stone from a medieval French abbey that was almost claimed by the Atlantic well before the Fall.

On one side of HQ are the Tangles—Nottingham, Bankside, and Franconia—three upscale neighborhoods, each housing an echelon of the Consortium hierarchy. These neighborhoods are primarily bedroom communities interspersed with small businesses. They're anonymous places, comfortable for the security minded. Have a good reason to be here at night, or the PSS will not leave you alone.

On the other side of HQ, past a wall of somber administrative buildings, is the Yards, the workers' district. The three main neighborhoods here are Al-Rashid, home to many vac and infrastructure workers; Friday Park, where a lot of service industry people live; and Bailey, where the cops and emergency personnel live.

LAW AND ORDER

Progress Station Security (PSS) is one of the best private security companies in the system. Their primary contract is to maintain order on Progress and to protect Consortium interests. Their tac squads train heavily for microgravity ops in hard suits. The station also has defense batteries and a small fleet of ships.

UNIVERSITY OF MARS, PROGRESS

Located between the Yards and HQ, this U-Mars campus is the most prestigious in the system. The Dowager School of Economics and the Friedman Institute of Management are both located here. You can't take a wild swing with a samurai sword in this place without decapitating an MBA. Of more concern is Dowager's Polymorphic Econometrics Lab, which has been alleged to use AGIs in developing and testing new economic models.

PHOBOS

Phobos orbits Mars about every 7 hours and would have destroyed the space elevator within a week of it going up if they hadn't done something about this sucker's chaotic orbit. Now Phobos orbits the straight and narrow and is crawling with Cognite employees.

Cognite has a controlling interest in Phobos, sharing it with with several other corps, including Direct Action, ComEx, and Eng/Dilworth, an IT firm specializing in automation and security for orbital stations.

Phobos is where the project that created the Lost generation got its start; the first crèche servers were located here. Cognite's Wauxhall Institute was involved in the Lost project and is also rumored to be taking part in experiments with the Watts-MacLeod strain of the exsurgent virus.

Pontes

Pontes is an O'Neill cylinder originally founded by Brazilian interests and also attracting residents from other South American cultures. It is notable for hosting the largest shipyards in the Mars system. A significant portion of its population works for hypercorps focusing on particular elements of the aerospace industry, from spacecraft engineering to rocket design to construction. While many of the ships are manufactured for Consortium hypercorp clients, the Pontes yards cater to other interests as well.

Pontes is also noteworthy as being the Martian habitat most open towards outer system types. The habitat welcomes numerous Extropian hypercorps and Titanian microcorps, and several neighborhoods are devoted to faithfully representing outer system cultures and lifestyles. It is reasonably easy to work out rep-credit exchanges here; if the banks won't do it, various private operations will. Even the Jovians have a presence in the region known as Little Argentina. Many Consortium hypercorps arrange their dealings with outer system polities here—though most are well aware that Oversight keeps a close watch on activities in this habitat.

Faction and Hypercorp Stations

There are too many stations in Mars orbit to describe in such a short space, but I'll mention a few that are fairly important. Each of these stations is run predominantly by one hypercorp, but multiple corps might have a share in any given station's ownership and ops. Most of these stations are in areosynchronous or areostationary orbit. Factions sometimes create settlements, too, although they're fairly rare.

McClintock is Ecologene's masterpiece, a living space hab whose thick hull is a material similar to wood, here and there interrupted by vast windows paned in transparent chitin. Housing, offices, and commercial buildings are scattered across a woodsy parkland clearly designed by someone who loved *Bambi*.

Lu Xing (Prosperity Group) is a research station. This is where they grow the space meats. Station population is 5,000, plus a complement of 500 vacworkers who stay outside in their synths. Aside from living space, much of the station is given over to huge R&D spaces where new meat culture strains and texturizing processes are experimentally tested.

Like Lu Xing, **Ptah** is primarily an R&D station where Skinaesthesia investigates new gene lines for its morphs. It does, however, have a palatial morph boutique open by appointment to the Martian elite.

Viriditas (nano-ecologists) is an orbital manufacturing platform. To advance their research, the nano-ecologists believe they need large scale microgravity industry to build their tools. Everything produced here is used on the surface, or at least it's supposed to be. There are a lot of gangsters who pay long credits for programmable swarms, and not all of their shipments of nanobot hives might be making it to their intended destinations.

The Batteries (Planetary Consortium) are six stations in the tenuous Mars-Phobos L4 and L5 orbits. Each orbits Mars about every 7.5 hours. Bristling with weaponry and bolstered by a network of drone and commsats, they're a strongpoint in Martian planetary defenses.

The Titan Quarantine Zone

<Jake Carter, Firewall Proxy>

The TQZ's part tomb, part zombie museum, part imminent threat. It forms a scalene triangle with rough vertices just east of Arsia Mons in the western outskirts of the Noctis Labyrinthus, just southwest of Olympus Mons on the Amazonis Planitia, and at Gale Crater, south of Elysium. So it covers parts of Tharsis, the Amazonis Planitia, Lucus Planum, and the Elysium Planitia. I grew up out here; it used to be the most heavily settled part of the planet outside Tharsis.

The outskirts of the TQZ seem pretty normal, but by the time you're wondering what the big deal was about, you start seeing that there's something real wrong with the terrain. The actions of the TITANs left weird landforms: fractal barrows, termite mounds, and disassembler aeolians, among others. Fractal barrows look like geometrically-branching clusters of wing-like shapes made of finely patterned slag. The process that forms them hasn't been studied, but given they're made of iron, the barrows're probably a byproduct of baking the regolith for oxygen and other volatiles. Termite mounds seem to be the reverse: weird columns of glittering yellowy-white silicate shaped a lot like the giant termite mounds on old Earth, formed by a process that extracts iron. Disassembler aeolians resulted in places where an active cloud of disassembler nanobots was pushed by strong winds against or through a rock formation, possibly more than once. They look like hoodoos and other wind erosion formations, but the stone is newer and the shapes they form much more extreme.

Arsia Mons

Arsia's the southernmost of the Tharsis Montes (the others, to its north, are Pavonis Mons and Ascraeus Mons). The mountain's fully inside the TQZ, but it's close enough to Tharsis's major highways to make

it attractive for smugglers. Hostile machines are rare here, but they still appear often enough to keep this place under quarantine. The Martian Rangers and occasional Consortium military patrols're more of a threat than exsurgents here.

QURAIN

Set on the massive natural overlook formed by Apollinaris Mons, Qurain was built as a fortress. They were Muslims of some sort—never really understood the theology myself. Qurain was a Martian city-state in its own right, with a lot of dependent settlements scattered around what's now the Zone. I spent some time in this area sellingcondenser pool shoju to them, just like my dad did to the the Muslims where I grew up—markup's better than on cabbage. Muslims or no, the illegal liquor trade to Qurain kept a lot of us rednecks afloat back then. Now Qurain is a ruin. You'll see scatterings of burnt-out, dust-choked domes on the way in, then the citadel itself up on Apollinaris Patera, cracked in half by a tac nuke. Qurain died quickly in the Fall, and the other city-states didn't have to think about it more than five minutes before bombing the place back to rust. There was a massive tunnel complex under the citadel and numerous surface buildings that partially survived the nukes, leaving a lot of ground to explore for scavengers. Most of the place is hot, though, so don't forget to pack your de-ionizing nanopharm.

THE WHITE ZONE

This is where the flyovers end. The White Zone is the most dangerous part of the TQZ, where you still run into active warbots, zombified transhumans, nanoplagues, and the like. It's also the heart of the TQZ, centered roughly around a big ridge on the Amazonis Planitia called Amazonis Sulci. If you're going in here, have your weapons hot and your killswitch program ready. There's stuff in here that'll break your brain down into its component atoms and replace it with sentient tapioca, just for kicks. The fact this area's still so active is a source of worry to both the Consortium and Firewall. The PC's made matters worse by dropping bunker buster nukes on Amazonis Sulci, thinking if they drill into it they'll kill some beating heart of evil. Idiocy … I mean shit, are things ever that simple? Still, something under that ridge is still cranking out helluv monsters.



ISOLATES

Believe it or not, people live here. Whether you want to call them people or not is a debate I don't want to get into, because the evidence ain't weighed yet. There are reports from the smugglers all the time about individual drifters, hermits and such, wandering into or out of the Zone. More intriguing for my money're rumors of the Yazidis, a clade of authentics who supposedly got abandoned out here during the Fall. Like the sufis, they were ecostation nomads with a mystic bent, but they ain't sufis. They speak Kurdish, though they ain't Kurds, and on old Earth they lived in southern Turkey. We've got evidence of the Yazidis—a little refuse from a camp here, bit of footage recorded by a distant scavenger there—but the patrols've never spotted them. They ain't exsurgents, but they might be classifiable as exhumans.

The one person I know of who's ever talked to them was a smuggler named Deja Torvik who ran into a band of them when she had to abandon her flyer over the Zone evading a patrol. She claims the Yazidis helped her find her way and resupplied her. They talked about how their head angel, Tawûsê Melek, had sent machines into the world to cleanse it of human evil. After she came out of the desert, Torvik started acting weird. She got a whole mess of new implants, mostly cybernetic as I hear it, and then about a month later disappeared with nothing but a note to a few old friends that she was going to rejoin the Yazidis. Hasn't been heard from again.

Give anyone you meet in the TQZ a wide berth, is my advice, unless you're there specifically to investigate them. It's a big place, and there's more weirdness than just the Yazidis hiding out there.

EERIE ENCOUNTER



Entry transcribed from an account provided by Jiang Mee, over beers at a maker camp on the outskirts of Hellas Planitia.

Stupidest thing I ever did was one time I was running repairs on chlorofluorocarbon generators out by the Zone. My rover had a bad strut, and I stepped outside to take a look at a spot not half a klick from the quarantine signs. The wind was strong that day, and it took my hat straight off my head. Before I could catch it, a dust devil had it and carried it a dead run straight into the zone. Now, I could have let it go, but it was a genuine oil-tanned leather Stetson, one of the few items my dad had brought from Earth. What can I say, I really liked that hat.

So I jumped back in my rover and went after it. I knew this stretch of the zone boundary didn't have a solid sensor mesh, and I didn't plan to be in there long.

I must have chased that dust devil for 10 klicks. Every time I nearly caught it, it would get carried away again, and the wind was moving it fast enough I couldn't get ahead due to the rocky terrain. Finally I saw my hat get blown into a narrow ravine. There was no way to get my rover down there, but I knew the hat wasn't coming back out, so I hoofed it.

The ravine was deep and narrow, a dark crack in the ground. It took me a few minutes to climb down and locate my hat. I never felt so good, getting that back on my head. Until I heard the whirring, that is.

I had just enough time to look around and see that the walls in that part of the ravine were crawling with bots. Weird, freaky, alien-looking bots. Hundreds of 'em. All at once they were making little buzzing noises, like I had disturbed their nest. I felt some of them land on me, then I lost consciousness.

I came to in the dark. I still had my gear, so once I had the area lit up I could tell I was in a tunnel. My muse told me I'd been out for about four hours. I was sleeved in a ruster, so I wasn't worried about running out of O2. There was no sign of the bots—but I did have my hat.

I spent about ten hours trying to find my way out of those tunnels. It was a complete maze down there. The tunnels easily stretched for klicks. Space was cramped. Some of the tunnels were so small I had to get on my hands and knees and crawl through. There were signs that something had been active down there. I found strange markings on the walls, and various types of tracks left by synthetic sources. At one point, I stumbled on what seemed to be a graveyard of robotic shells—a whole pile of them, all cracked open, like discarded husks. Eventually I found a chute I could climb that brought me back to the surface. When I finally got my bearings, I was about 20 klicks southwest of where I had started. I wasn't even in the TQZ any more.

That's my story. I don't know if they were TITAN machines—I just assume so. I don't know why they didn't take my head or infect me with something. I checked myself in for every type of scan imaginable, and I came up clean. They didn't seem to care about me—it more seemed like they wanted to be left alone, to do their thing.

I heard a rumor once that the Consortium found tunnels in the area of the Martian Gate, which they promptly sealed off. That's not too far from where I lost my hat. It makes you wonder, eh? ♣

INNER FRINGE

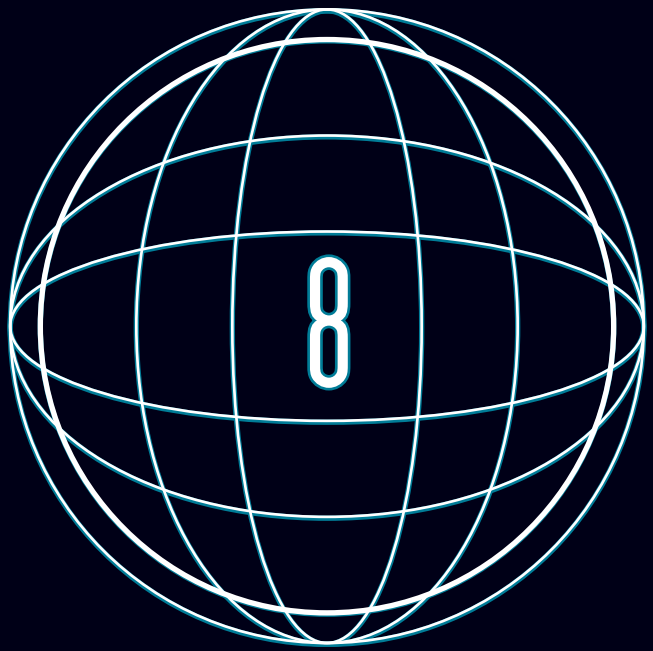
OVERVIEW

This report covers areas outside of the main inner system planetary bodies.

Inner System Asteroids: The most notable asteroid colonies orbiting the sun. ■ p. 132

The Martian Trojans: Groups of asteroids leading and trailing behind Martian orbit. ■ p. 135

Remote Habitats and Ships: Other out-of-the-way sites of interest ... to all sorts of explorers. ■ p. 137




WERNECK

INNER FRINGE

Good day, agent.

As your mission specs note, you'll be spending a lot of time in the inner system on this op. It is important, however, that you stay outside of the main travel and communications hubs and stick to the fringes. Though the Consortium likes to act like they have the inner system locked down, there are many remote stations that run quietly outside normal channels and parameters. The hypercorps don't mind, because they use these stations and channels to hide their own secret ops as well. I've pulled together a short overview of some of the more notable way-stations in this "inner fringe." I'm also including a few habitats that are strictly off-limits to outsiders, as they may relate to your mission in other ways.

INNER SYSTEM ASTEROIDS

Almost 10,000 asteroids orbit within the inner system, including at least a thousand that are over a kilometer in diameter and capable of housing a large Cole or beehive habitat. Many feature smaller dome or tin can stations. Most of these were started as mining colonies, though quite a few other stations were established by parties seeking remoteness and isolation.

ATIRA

Station Type: Cluster (C-Type Apohele Asteroid)
Allegiance: Independent (Criminal/Los Zetas)
Primary Languages: Spanish

The station at 163693 Atira was originally founded by a chemical and pharmaceuticals hypercorp subsidiary prior to the Fall as a remote outpost to produce experimental drugs and exotic metamaterials. Shortly after the Fall, the hypercorp's parent company was revealed to be experimenting on human morphs genetically modified to not experience pain, and in the subsequent scandal, Atira was bought out by another, relatively unknown, company. Firewall has since learned that this hypercorp, Empresas Del Golfo, is a business front perpetuated by Los Zetas, a prominent Mexican drug cartel displaced from Earth. Fully staffed and operational, the station continues to manufacture designer drugs and unusual chemtech. This is, in fact, one of the primary sources of Los Zetas' drug trafficking trade. Recent pressure by the Night Cartel to join the syndicate's operations has led to bloodshed in some habitats, however.

SOLARCHIVE SEARCH: NEAR-EARTH ASTEROID CLASSIFICATIONS

Near-Earth asteroids are those that circle the sun primarily within the orbit of Mars. By definition, these are larger than 50 meters in diameter (anything smaller is considered a meteor), with the largest having a width of 34 kilometers. These are grouped into several families, as determined by the average radius of their orbits, in comparison to Earth's orbit (1 AU). Since most asteroids have eccentric orbits (more elliptic than circular), this classification is not always perfect at pinpointing their actual location relative to Earth or other bodies.

Apoheles orbit entirely within Earth's orbit (their aphelion is 0.983 AU or less).

Atens mostly orbit between the Earth and the sun. Many of them have eccentric orbits, however, so at their aphelion points they occasionally cross Earth's orbit.

Apollos have orbits that average close to 1 AU. Due to their eccentric orbits, this means that their orbital paths criss-cross Earth's orbit.

Arjunas have orbits very similar to Earth (1 AU), with low eccentricity and low inclination.

Amors orbit primarily between Earth and Mars, though they also sometimes cross Mars's orbit (but never Earth's orbit).

SOLARCHIVE SEARCH: ASTEROID TAXONOMY

Asteroids are broadly lumped into one of the three categories:

C-Type asteroids are carbonaceous, meaning they are primarily composed of primitive carbon-rich materials. These asteroids tend to be darker and less reflective than other asteroids, and are thus harder to spot visually. Most asteroids (~75%) are of this type.

S-Type asteroids are siliceous, or stony, composed primarily of iron- and magnesium-silicates. They are the second most numerous group (~13%).

M-type asteroids are metallic, meaning they are primarily composed of nickel-iron or other metals mixed with stone. These asteroids are moderately bright and reflective. They are also most valuable for mining purposes, and thus the most sought after, but they are also the smallest group (~10%).

SOL-MERCURY
VENUS
EARTH
EARTH ORBIT
LUNA
MARS
INNER FRINGE
THE PLANETARY CONSORTIUM
GAME INFORMATION

CONDOR-2

Station Type: Cluster (C-Type Apollo Asteroid)
Allegiance: Unknown
Primary Languages: Unknown

This station is clustered around a small asteroid that has been converted into a large antenna. The habitat orbits at a very high 75-degree inclination, taking it high above and below the ecliptic. Though its operators are unknown, the purpose of the station seems dual. On one hand it stands as a long-distance communication relay station, receiving tight-beam laser transmissions made to the station from one part of the solar system and relay-transmitting them to another. The high orbital path means less interference and chance of accidental interception. It likely also serves as a communications listening post, intercepting radio and neutrino transmissions broadcast throughout the system. Long-range analysis of the cluster's composition and equipment indicates that the habitat also monitors deep space, making use of a large telescope. One of several similar stations, Firewall suspects this one to be operated by the Planetary Consortium's Oversight.

EROS

Station Type: Beehive (S-Type Amor Asteroid)
Allegiance: Planetary Consortium (Red Zone)
Primary Languages: English, Russian, Spanish, Urdu

The asteroid 433 Eros is the second-largest Amor, approximately 34 x 11 x 11 kilometers in size. Prior to the Fall, several hypercorps cooperated in mining this asteroid's abundant amounts of aluminum, zinc, silver, and gold. This mining operation was guarded by a private military contractor, Ze Services. During the Fall, the local Ze commanders used the excuse of a TITAN outbreak to seize control of the beehive. About 1 AF, the Planetary Consortium stepped in, exerting one of its few open displays of force and power, hiring a homeless Russian space navy squadron to assault and liberate the habitat. As it turned out, the Ze commanders had been the ones infected, enslaving the habitat's population and an influx of infugees beamed to Eros from Earth and forcing them into unspeakably horrible and depraved simulspace experiments. Thousands of egos were deleted due to suspected contamination.

Eros has since been repopulated and re-invigorated. Mining operations continue, and the beehive now houses one of the Consortium's primary military bases, staffed by the privatized Russian forces, renamed Red Zone. A displaced population of former Canadian, Pakistani, Uzbeki, South African, and Chilean infugees has been resleeved to repopulate the station. Needless to say, the colony has an eclectic but lively feel to its local culture.

Eros is also notable as being home to a relic from Earth's old space exploration programs, the NEAR Shoemaker probe landed here by NASA in 2001.

GEOGRAPHOS/SYNAPSCAPE

Station Type: Beehive (S-Type Apollo Asteroid)
Allegiance: Planetary Consortium (Cognite)
Primary Languages: English, Vietnamese

The elongated (5.1 x 1.8 kilometers) asteroid 1620 Geographos was mined for iron and silicates and then sold to a mundane-seeming hypercorp named Educare, which established a simulspace educational and vocational training center here. In truth, however, this company is a hidden subsidiary of Cognite, and this station is yet another of their black lab research centers, codenamed: SYNAPSCAPE. Cursory infiltration by Firewall vectors indicates that the primary research avenue here involves isolating various components of transhuman cognition and AI mental state software into distinct software modules, which are then pruned and optimized. Though typically kept distinctly separated and placed through various simulations and exercises, the SYNAPSCAPE program also experiments with compiling these modules into new mental architectures—many of which could not reasonably be called transhuman. Though the research project seems to have ample safeguards for identifying and containing any sort of emergent seed AI or hostile mind-states, Firewall has placed this program on its watch list.

On an interesting but anecdotal note, this research outpost was also one of the stations used in the discontinued Lost generation project.

HOREB

Station Type: Beehive (S-Type Aten Asteroid)
Allegiance: Independent (Israeli)
Primary Languages: Hebrew

Horeb is a small colony with a large legacy. Home to the Israeli government-in-exile, it is the capital for those still clinging to Judaism, particularly die-hard orthodox Jews and Zionist hardliners. Strong supporters of the reclaimer cause, the Jews of Horeb remain insular and isolationist, rarely interacting with the larger reclaimer movement, but contributing in their own ways. Their major interest is, of course, taking control of their holy land once again—a difficult proposition given the nuclear exchange that occurred in the region during the Fall. The majority of Horeb's inhabitants also hold bioconservative views and are opposed to uploading, resleeving, and cloning technologies.

Horeb's orbital period is just over 364 days, in a near-perfect 1:1 orbital resonance with Earth. Its orbital path is highly eccentric, however, between .65 and 1.35 AU, and also heavily inclined at 33 degrees above the ecliptic.

IMPIAN

Station Type: Cole (S-Type Amor Asteroid)
Allegiance: Independent (Triad)
Primary Languages: Bahasa, Cantonese, Malay, Tamil

Mined, converted into a bubbleworld, and settled by a joint Malaysian-Indonesian-Chinese government venture, Impian ("Dream" in Malay) is notable for

being home to a number of ground-breaking software and simulspace-coding hypercorps. Asserting its independence after the Fall, the Impian government has been thoroughly infiltrated and compromised by the Shui Fong triad. As a result, it has a reputation as one of the more vice-ridden habitats in the inner system, and is a regular stopover for scum barges and smugglers. It is colloquially known as a place where dreams can come true—for a price. Originally known as 1036 Ganymed, Impian is the largest of the Amor asteroids, and has a population of half a million.

Lonely Mountain

Station Type: Beehive (M-Type Amor Asteroid)
Allegiance: Independent (Private/Hyperelite)
Primary Languages: Spanish

Originally designated asteroid 1986 DA, this 2.5-kilometer-wide lump of metals was heavily mined by the MMX-Espaço hypercorp, which extracted a fortune—thousands of tons—in gold and platinum, as well as nickel and iron. Shortly after the Fall, the entire asteroid was claimed as the private domain of MMX-Espaço's CEO, Nazareno Batista, who took up residence in the beehive tunnels and warrens with key members of his hyperelite dynasty. The Batistas also claimed the small military installation and defenses that guarded the mining operation, making their home a well-defended outpost. In the first few years of their occupation, rumors tore through glitterati circles about the lavish design of this habitat, including gold- and platinum-plated chambers and furnishings. The Batistas were also known to have one of the most extensive and priceless collections of art and artifacts rescued from Earth. This hoard of wealth was closed off from other hyperelites, however, following the strange death of Nazareno Batista on Progress in AF 5. Though publicly claimed as an assassination—for which a ring of Barsoomian radicals was convicted and sentenced to final death, including erasure of all backups—it is strongly suspected that Batista in fact committed suicide. Since resleeving, Batista has retired from public view and is rumored to never leave Lonely Mountain. Most of his former business affairs are managed by other Batistas and members of their clan, though it seems likely that Nazareno himself is still pulling the strings.

Phaethon

Station Type: Beehive (S-Type Amor Asteroid)
Allegiance: Independent (Brinker/Techno-Creationists)
Primary Languages: Wu

The residents of 3200 Phaethon are adherents of a particularly odd Techno-Creationist splinter cult. Like other Techno-Creationists, the Phaethonites believe that the Fall was a divine portent, and that the future of transhumanity lies in transforming themselves to a future ascension with alien beings. Unlike other Techno-Creationists, the Phaethonites are full-on singularity seekers, and believe they are destined to meld with the TITANs. More bizarrely, they grasp onto a conspiratorial belief that the TITANs are currently hiding within the sun, watching and waiting for enlightened transhumans to reach an unspecified level of development/enlightenment, at which point the TITANs will reach out, snatch them away, and absorb them into their collective consciousness. To this end, the cult engages in severe cognitive modifications and Skinner-esque behavioral adjustments. To outsiders, the Phaethonite ideology is uncomfortably close to exhuman, and the cult remains closely watched by several inner system powers and Firewall.

The Phaethon asteroid's orbit also comes quite close to the sun, with a perihelion of only 0.14 AU—less than half the distance of Mercury. It is actually an extinct comet, the parent of the Geminids meteor shower in fact, and has a diameter of 5.1 kilometers.

Sisyphus

Station Type: Cluster (S-Type Apollo Asteroid)
Allegiance: Independent (Hypercorp /Zrbny Limited)
Primary Languages: Unknown

The binary asteroid 1866 Sisyphus is home to the largest Zrbny Limited waystation hub in the inner system. Built after the mysterious corporation went on lockdown, it was constructed entirely by automated machines, with no signs of direct oversight or transhuman involvement. The hypercorp continues to manufacture mining equipment, process ores, and transfer freight, selling their output to other hypercorps, with minimal interaction handled via a single AGI interface. Firewall has twice attempted to infiltrate this station with stealth drones, to no avail. Remote hacking explorations have also been stymied.

The Summit

Station Type: Beehive (C-Type Arjuna Asteroid)
Allegiance: Independent (Hyperelite)
Primary Languages: English, Hindi, Japanese, Mandarin

The Summit station is built inside a quasi-satellite of Earth known as 3753 Cruithne. With an orbital period approximately the same as Earth's, the Summit and Earth seem to follow each other around the sun, revolving in roughly the same path.

The Summit's true notability, however, lies with its purpose and secretiveness. It is the private meeting place of the reclusive Triplanetary Commission, 33 vetted gerontocrats representing the political and economic leadership of the inner system. Though the actual membership roster is confidential, it is speculated to include representatives from all three inner system power blocs. Unlike other hyperelite special interest groups, the Triplanetary Commission seems focused on protecting the joint interests of these transitional economies, particularly from outside influences, from the autonomists to Jovians to Factors. Their interests are likely opposed by other hyperelite factions.

Naturally, conspiracy theories surround the reclusive Summit, and it is condemned for a range of purported activities, from trying to instill a system-wide government to being the true party responsible for the interdiction of Earth. Others finger the Summit as secretly running Project Ozma, negotiating with the Factors against transhumanity's interests, or even being responsible for the TITANs. Certainly the Summit's defenses are top notch, with no craft allowed to approach, and access presumably only allowed via secure egocasting facilities.

THE MARTIAN TROJANS

The Martian trojans are clusters of asteroids that orbit in the Mars-Sun L4 and L5 Lagrange points. Technically Apollo asteroids, these trojans are not as numerous as the Jovian or Uranian trojans, but they still number in the hundreds. Dozens of habitats can also be found here.

INTROSPECT

Station Type: Torus (Mars-Sun L5)
Allegiance: Planetary Consortium (ExoTech)
Primary Languages: English

This torus is one of ExoTech's primary research installations. Firewall keeps a close eye on it due to implications that, among other things, ExoTech neuroscientists are running long-term time-accelerated AI development experiments. Not only does this research involve testing limited AI and AGI, but it seems to involve infomorphs as well. These may, in fact, be the longest-running (both real and virtual time) continuous time-accelerated simulspaces in existence (that we know of). This is but one of the many research projects pursued here, of course. ExoTech also has researchers working on fine-tuning uploading techniques, advanced ego bridge designs, superior AGI personality templates, and next-gen mesh presence software.

MEMORY HOLE

Station Type: Torus (Mars-Sun L4)
Allegiance: Planetary Consortium (Stellar Intelligence)
Primary Languages: English, Mandarin

The databases and archives kept secure by Stellar Intelligence in this torus represent a massive undertaking to mine and analyze information of value to this espionage corp, the Planetary Consortium, or its various clients. These archives extend back to before the Fall and include up-to-date mirrors of data and traffic distributed on mesh networks across the system—and beyond. Remember that embarrassing public post you made back in 12 BF? Yeah, Stellar probably still has that on file, along with your complete lifelog, a network map of your friends, co-workers, and acquaintances, intercepted messages, and even a copy of all those encrypted files you sent, just in case they figure out a way to crack the code some day. You may be effectively immortal, but your data security probably isn't, and Stellar is counting on finding something juicy in there some day. All of this information is a prime target for data theft or sabotage, of course, but Stellar employs some of the most vicious mesh security in existence, and they likely have everything backed up in various safe-storage archives just to be sure.

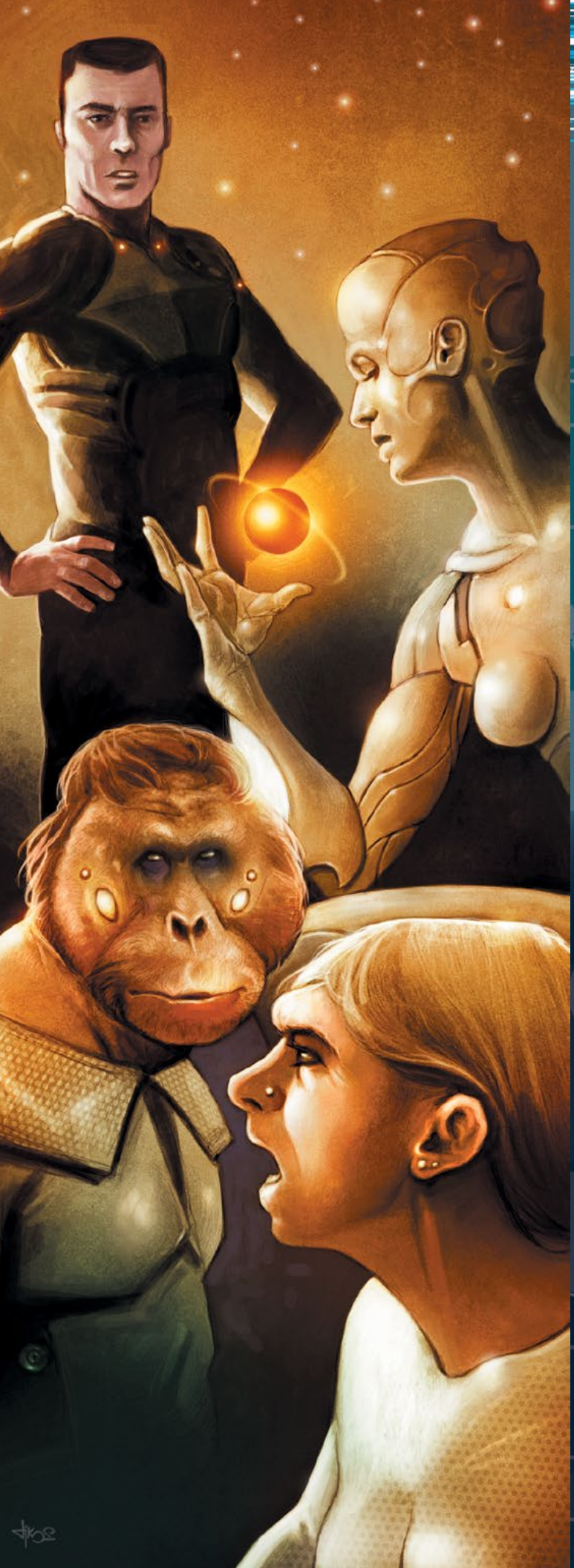
Aside from keeping records on pretty much everybody, this torus is also home base to Stellar's other wholesome activities: intelligence think tanks, data analysis and prediction experts, memetic warfare prep and staging, and so on. A significant chunk of their projects is based on surveillance and countering potential threats to Planetary Consortium hegemony, from Barsoomian interests to outer-system autonomists to the upstart Morningstar Constellation.

MOUSTIER

Station Type: O'Neill Cylinder (Mars-Sun L5)
Allegiance: Independent
Primary Languages: English, French, German

This small O'Neill habitat was constructed by a temporary consortium of hypercorp interests in order to house infugees and relieve some of the overcrowding stress in other habitats from the Fall. As a result, its portion includes a significantly high percentage of synthmorphs, most of whom were former indentures helping to build this or other habitats, and who have not been able to upgrade to a biomorph. Its populace is also largely composed of refugees pushed out of other habitats, making it a cultural and lingual melting pot. Add in a sizable amount of still-disembodied free-roaming infomorphs, and you get quite an interesting mix. Among hypercorps, it is known as a good place to find cheap labor, as the poor and clanking masses are desperate for work. Numerous small hypercorps have taken up residence here, making it a small bazaar of corporate interests as well.

Moustier also has the distinction of being home to the largest population of neanderthals in the solar system. Resurrected from fossil DNA and uplifted to full human-level sentience, this research project met with mixed reactions within the Consortium—to many transhumans, the ethical issues of raising a species formerly wiped out by primitive humans, and so genetically similar, was disturbing. The neanderthals themselves have mixed opinions on the matter, with the majority considering themselves part of the transhuman family while still supporting mercurial causes, and others taking a more militant/separatist approach. Their small community has attempted to revive what they can of neanderthal culture from archeological records, though in practice they have forged much of it anew. Their natural propensity towards music has produced some of the best musicians in the inner system.



Qing Long

Station Type: O'Neill Cylinder (Mars-Sun L5)
Allegiance: Planetary Consortium/Triad
Primary Languages: Cantonese, Korean, Mandarin, Vietnamese

The largest habitat in the Martian trojans, and the largest O'Neill cylinder in the solar system, the "Azure Dragon's" two million inhabitants display a heavy Chinese cultural influence, though sizable segments of Vietnamese, Korean, and other Southeast Asian groups are also evident. Though nominally a part of the Planetary Consortium and adhering to its standards, Qing Long and its residents have been sanctioned by Oversight several times, not least because of the heavy influence of criminal groups here. Nevertheless, several prominent hypercorps call Qing Long home, including Hyundai Transport, one of the leading designers of personal transport vehicles used in habitats throughout the system. Several Extropian corps also favor Qing Long as a port-of-call for doing business with Consortium hypercorps.

It is an open secret that Qing Long is a triad stronghold and that the administration is firmly in their grasp. The 14K Triad is predominant and considers this station their headquarters, though several others, including the Shui Fong and the Big Circle Gang, also operate here. For the most part, tensions between these groups are muted on Qing Long, as they each cooperate in maintaining the habitat as the best environment for their particular trades (elsewhere, however, all bets are off). The station's current Overseer, Jintao Suharto, is related to one of the top 14K leaders, and Pai Gow (Double Hand), the triad's security company, is employed for immigration control and to protect the station's key assets.

Given the triad activity, Qing Long features some of the best gray and black markets in the inner system. The colony is also a hotbed for vice and unsavory activities, from gambling to prostitution to pit fights. It is especially notable for its casino circle, a row of massive casinos that lines the interior of the cylinder at one end. The massive spires of the Galaxy 888 dwarf the rest, highlighting the influence of the Galaxy Entertainment Group, another 14K front.

Transix

Station Type: Cluster (Mars-Sun L4)
Allegiance: Planetary Consortium (Comet Express)
Primary Languages: English, Russian

Transix is Comet Express's primary waystation and transfer point between the inner and outer systems. It may in fact be the largest freight station in the entire solar system. The port spars provide docking space for numerous farhauler freight craft. A fleet of courier drones operates on constant rotation here, and a large manufacturing/repair module makes sure that both ships and bots remain in good shape. Groupings of slingshot accelerators and mass drivers stand ready to launch drones into space—or even cargo shipments to be picked up by ships passing nearby at speed, so they don't have to burn fuel to slow down.

Comet Express also leases space here to many smaller cargo and courier hypercorps, and several entertainment corps run modules that provide R&R for visiting hibernoids and other vacworkers. Oversight also has an import/export control office here, monitoring traffic and inspecting shipments to and from Consortium habitats. Given that all manner of goods pass through here, both Firewall and Oversight (and possibly others) have instrumentation in place to detect potentially dangerous cargo, such as radioactive materials.

REMOTE HABITATS AND SHIPS

A few remote habitats lie far from any asteroid or planetary body. Similarly, some large ships are essentially roving habitats.

ELYSIAN FIELDS

Station Type: O'Neill Cylinder (Earth-Sun L3)
Allegiance: Independent (Brinker)
Primary Languages: English, Japanese

Elysian Fields is unusual in being one of the closest brinker colonies to Earth but also in that its residents have come here in search of that which transhumanity has specifically sought to avoid: death. This habitat was founded shortly after the Fall when hypercorp magnate Masamune Nami decided that he had tired of life, declaring that no species should have to outlive its own homeworld. Spending much of his amassed fortune to build this habitat at the Earth-Sun L3 point, directly opposite the sun from Earth, he invited all those who wished to come live a natural, human life, followed by a peaceful (or even assisted) death. Condemned by many transhumans as cowardice and embracing exactly the wrong response to the Fall, Elysian Fields has nevertheless attracted thousands of bioconservatives or others who simply no longer wished to live the transhuman life. Anyone is welcome to Elysian Fields, though the station has no egocasting or resleeving facilities, so direct travel is necessary. There are only three rules: no synthmorphs, no contact with the outside world, and you may not leave. While many come to the habitat to live a few final days or months before suicide, most residents simply intend to live out their natural lifespan in peace and harmony. Nami himself is still alive, overseeing his final-death-embracing colony.

MARS CYCLERS

The Mars cyclers are large ships placed on a gravity-assisted trajectory designed to "cycle" them between Earth and Mars, allowing them to traverse this path indefinitely with almost no fuel expenditure (except for minor course corrections). The Chinese colonial effort invested heavily in these ships before the Fall. Half of these cyclers followed a path with a transfer time between Earth and Mars of 5 months, followed by 21 months to get back (16 of which are spent out beyond the orbit of Mars), for a total cycle time of 2 years. The other half follow a similar but opposite path, with only a 5 month period to get from Mars to Earth. Many of these ships remain in operation, transferring people and cargo between Mars and the Earth-Luna system. A few specific ones deserve mention:

The flagship cycler, *Martian Express,* was lost to a TITAN attack during the Fall, one that saw its crew and passengers turning on each other. Though depressurized and abandoned, its derelict hull continues to cycle. Eventually, without course correction, it will drift off path and into space.

The Peculiar Taste of Silence was a Chinese government cycler that succumbed to a mutiny during the Fall. It is now a full-fledged scum barge, catering to the Consortium and LLA habitats at either end of its cycle. It is notorious for being one of the best sources of Earth relics, whether legit, fraudulent, or black market. It is also home to a large contingent of uplifts and other mercurials who have sought refuge here from the restrictive policies and attitudes they face in inner system habitats. Various TITAN relics have occasionally turned up in the hands of scavengers here, so Firewall keeps an eye on what's available.

Dào Yì Yǒu Dào (Even Thieves Have Principles) was another Chinese cycler that succumbed to a pirate attack shortly after the Fall. It has since exchanged hands and become a Night Cartel operation, used to transfer goods of a questionable nature. It is notable as one of the best sources of illicit weaponry in the inner system.

The *Lazy Eight* cycler also transferred hands, though more legitimately, when it was bought out by an Extropian merchant corp in 7 AF. It is now a major outpost for Extropian affairs in the inner system, with several other anarcho-capitalist and mutualist projects leasing space here.

P/2019

This extinct comet in an eccentric and highly inclined Aten orbit has just recently come to Firewall's attention. A survey drone recently spotted unmistakable signs of structures on the comet's surface, and further analysis detected some minor (probably shielded) energy emissions that are similar to signs of previously seen TITAN activity. Whether this is a remote hypercorp research project playing around with TITAN technology or an actual relic of the TITANs remains unknown, but certainly warrants further examination.

PEX

Station Type: Torus (Mars-Sun L2)
Allegiance: Planetary Consortium
Primary Languages: English, Mandarin

PEX is the home of the Planetary Stock Exchange, the inner system's premier electronic trading network. This is where the vast majority of stock trading that involves Consortium hypercorps occurs, and it is accordingly busy and secure. The mesh traffic between this habitat, the Martian cities, and Progress benchmarks at some of the highest volumes achieved so far. Oversight's central offices are also here, keeping a close eye on market activities. Despite the high security, someone managed to release a psychotropic biowar agent in one of the trading chambers in 8 AF, resulting in half a dozen suicides and three traders chewing their own arms off. The exchange was shut down for a week, and the entire incident was blamed on outer system anarchist terrorists.

THE PLANETARY CONSORTIUM



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CONSORTIUM ECONOMICS

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THE PLANETARY CONSORTIUM



REMINDER! TODAY IS YOUR LAST DAY TO VOTE

Greetings citizen! Remember, today is your last day to vote for your congressional representative. Alice Hak needs your vote! Our records indicate that currently you are a resident of *Harmony's Embrace* in circumlunar orbit. If this is incorrect, please contact the local security directorate of your new habitat to make sure your records are kept up-to-date.

As you know, voting is one of the vital elements that empowers you, a citizen of the Consortium, to play a role in your government. Our cyberdemocracy and freedom is what makes the Consortium great and separates us from the lawlessness and anarchy that prowls the fringes of the civilized system and seeks to draw us back to the dark days of the Fall. As a citizen, you have a civic duty to elect representatives to the Planetary Congress, to ensure that you exercise your franchise and affirm our strong democratic principles in the face of chaos and terrorism. As a voter, you exercise rights and privileges that the anarchists and non-humans squawk for, without earning—rights and privileges that are a standard in the fine tradition of progress that stretches back to the great civilizations of Earth.

Ours is a tradition that draws upon the finest intellectual traditions of law handed down from ancient China, the principles of governance and scientific progress of Greece and Rome, and the cultural richness of the Vedic peoples of India. Your freedoms come from your constant vigilance in maintaining a secure habitat and harmonious community. In exchange, your elected representatives pass the laws that ensure your efforts are rewarded with a system that recognizes merit and raises up those who are willing to work hard to get ahead!

To this end, Ms. Hak promises to protect your rights and your freedoms to choose for your children what tracking path they are placed into during their primary mesh schooling. Additionally she strongly supports the recent Congressional proposal that would place a quarantine period of at least three weeks on any new arrival to *Harmony's Embrace* who has a record of ever inhabiting a morph affiliated with uplifted creatures or which is part of the Mercurial agenda. With regards to the Pathfinder Colonization Initiative, Ms. Hak is in full support of extending the terms for indentures in order to more efficiently secure our future expansion and survival for all.

Ms. Hak would also like to remind voters that Yang Jing, who is currently running more than six points behind her in a recent Go-nin Advanced Studies Institute poll, has recently admitted to making trade agreements with the renegade socialists of Titan during his time as trade representative. These sorts of conflicted loyalties, especially with polities that are known to finance terrorist activities, are not the kind of leadership we need to continue our tradition of excellence.

Take the time now to look over Ms. Hak's candidate profile in your entoptic voting interface. Remember, Alice Hak will provide for your children and your safety and carry the torch of progress and advancement in the Planetary Congress! ■

VENUS
EARTH
EARTH ORBIT
LUNA
MARS
INNER FRINGE
THE PLANETARY CONSORTIUM
GAME INFORMATION

Let's turn that off for a moment shall we? Please, take a seat; we have a lot to discuss. If you are going to infiltrate Oversight, we need to make sure you understand the Planetary Consortium from every conceivable angle. You're not a corp brat, you're an outsider, and an anarchist to boot, and the only reason we're using you is because your social infiltration skills are without peer. The psychosurgery and the skillsofts will cover a lot of angles, but we're going to cover all of the basics face-to-face, to make sure the groundwork for your new identity is solid.

It'll probably come as no surprise when Ms. Hak wins the election handily. The illusion of choice is wonderful, but for anyone who is a resident of *Harmony's Embrace* the choice between Ms. Hak and her half-dozen opponents is the choice between sanity and the creeping madness of the outer system. Bread and circuses with the threat of howling barbarism at the gate. This is what the Consortium offers its citizens. Visit any habitat that's part of the Consortium and you'll quickly be assaulted with images of the "depraved and debased outer system" and the threat it poses to the Consortium way of life. You know what? They're right. You do pose a threat. Your way of life would upset the security and sense of purpose that most Consortium citizens have spent decades internalizing and becoming dependent upon. This is the pivotal mistake many Firewall agents from the outer system make the first time they come to the Consortium on a mission. They assume that the people here want their way of life, that they want unfettered choice and the ability to live next door to a polymorphously-perverse orangutan with a background in biowarfare agents. But if you've spend your entire life secure in your identity as a "good worker," if the only morph you've ever known is

the one genetically similar to the one you were born in, if all your friends and neighbors are good people who look and act just like you, if you've spent your entire life letting elected leaders make your decisions for you, then you are likely to find visitors from the outer system and their strange ways of doing things rather disturbing.

The key, for agents of Firewall, is to find a way to understand your hosts without completely alienating them. Don't judge, don't push, and don't try to start a revolution all on your own. If you're dealing with the Consortium, it's because there's something important you need out of them. Drawing the attention of the local security directorate for making statements that might be seditious is not a wise thing to do. Here in the following data dump is the information you need to stay alive and well and get what you need and get back without having to resort to a backup.

You may think Oversight is a bunch of overpaid, self-important accountants. In fact, they are the heart of the Consortium's black operations and monitor the balance of power between the member hypercorps. We don't often find a way into Oversight so we need to move fast, and that means you're going to have to pay attention. I must warn you, though, these people are good, and our opening could be a trap to acquire one of our agents. So you'll be flying solo on your initial infiltration for at least a year, without any contact with Firewall, until we can be sure you are securely in place. We'll go over the contact protocols beyond the one-year point before you leave.

BUSINESS OR GOVERNMENT?

Let's start with what you already know. The Planetary Consortium is literally a business consortium—an economic alliance maintained by a dozen or so prominent hypercorps. On a more abstract level, however, the consortium is a central node in a vast network of allied hypercorps. These hypercorps provide products and services to millions across the system and help each other break into new markets and expand their consumer base. In traditional hypercorp fashion, most specialize in particular fields and share their resources and work on joint projects to reduce costs. This web of corporate allegiances sustained by the Consortium is huge; you can find their outposts scattered across the solar system, though their real power lies in the inner system and especially Mars. Tacked on to this business network is a civic infrastructure, sustained by the Consortium to coordinate civil affairs, manage public interest, and promote a healthy economic environment. In effect, it is a government run by corporations, with a democratic facade.

Remember, governing transhumanity is a byproduct, not the purpose of the Consortium. It's all about the money, that's something you should never forget. The Consortium is a business. If it isn't profitable, it isn't worth doing.

THE FORMATION OF THE CONSORTIUM

The Consortium existed under a different name before the Fall, but like so many other things it rose from the ashes transformed. Exactly how it traversed from a simple business arrangement to the most influential economic bloc in the solar system is, of course, no accident, and it could easily be said that the ashes it rose from were from fires it set.

The hypercorps have always been good at working together and forming temporary alliances. Their specialized and adaptable nature makes it convenient and profitable to employ each other to assist on mutually beneficial projects and then move on. The one thing they don't get on with, though, is governments. Governments impose taxes and regulate trade for fair play and to avoid monopolies. Always on the forefront of new technologies and new business models, the hypercorps also pursued expansion into space as a means of escaping governmental oversight and control. Taking advantage of defunct and privatized nation-state space programs to seize the lead in space exploration, colonization, and exploitation, the hypercorps continuously shrugged off attempts by Earth-bound governments to keep them grounded. In fact, conflicts between the hypercorps and nations of Earth—as well as the bioconservative and religious opponents of hypercorp activities—were one of the many crises that fed directly into the wars that became the Fall.

During this period, several leading hypercorps entered into an arrangement they dubbed the Offworld Consortium (OC). Initially the OC was a trade and lobbying group that acted on behalf of its members to negotiate good terms with earthbound governments and interests that held key beanstalk or spaceport accesses. These gatekeepers could extort individual hypercorps but were at a disadvantage when Consortium members applied their leverage as a larger group. Like so many other hypercorp alliances, the OC also facilitated pacts between different corps, both large and small. It is notable primarily by its membership—though fluid, some of the key corps involved are now players in the Planetary Consortium—and by virtue of being the largest and most influential of such contractual affairs.

During the Fall, several factors conspired to create a leadership vacuum among the joint forces scrambling to evacuate transhumanity off-world. First and foremost was the seemingly deliberate effort by the TITANs to decapitate the political and military authorities of various governments and powers, striking their hideouts and transports, subverting them from within, and even intercepting their egocasts to prevent their escape. The United Nations, nominally in charge of coordinating the evacuation, was effectively paralyzed by selective strikes and disruptions. Interference and deception on communication channels kept many groups effectively isolated from, or distrustful of, their leadership. Add to this that many forces were still using the situation as cover to

snipe and attack each other, or at least maneuver for advantage, and the situation was a chaotic free-for-all. As a result, many social and military groups found themselves casting about for direction. Entire habitats suddenly realized that the earthbound governments and administrations they once relied on no longer existed, and they were on their own. Populations of infugees clamored for representation while held in the servers of unsympathetic former allies and rivals, or were mashed together into polyglot communities with no discernible cultural identity. Even the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance was scattered and ineffective, reeling from the aftershocks of TITAN attacks on its own habitats.

The hypercorps, already entrenched off-Earth, fared better than most of their Earth-based cousins, though even these suffered. Among them, however, the Offworld Consortium remained one of few resourceful and well-organized entities still standing. Even before the Fall and evacuation were complete, in fact, it could be said that the OC was maneuvering itself into position. Casting off its old identity, the OC reformed as the Planetary Consortium, bringing several strategic new allies into their fold. Chief among these were Solaris, which gave the new entity the economic backbone necessary to instill a new set of economic standards and markets, and Direct Action, the newly-inaugurated milcorp that brought a sizable military presence and thus a sense of security and power to the Consortium. Tackled with the media domination of Experia and the intelligence assets of Stellar Intelligence, the Consortium had developed into a well-rounded heavyweight at a crucial period, when many of its rivals were in tatters.

Before the dust had even settled, Consortium representatives were contacting numerous habitats far and wide that had found themselves cut off, without leadership, or otherwise on their own. Approaching them with offers of support and protection, the Consortium helped these colonies establish new supply chains, repair infrastructure, and establish defenses … via contracts with Consortium members, of course. Solaris provided needed loans, then pressured the indebted to follow their directives. What the Consortium provided in these cases was often vital to the station's survival, but it came with a cost. In return for aid, these habitats were asked (some might say pressured, or even coerced, at least in some cases) first to guarantee monopolistic market shares of key hypercorp members, and then to join the Consortium's infrastructure and accept their authority. Many colonies had no choice. Others did so willingly, finding it advantageous to ally with a newly developing power bloc, if only on a temporary basis.

As transhumanity recovered and other political and economic entities restored their horizontal orientation, the situation remained tenuous. While the Jovians and Titanians established their own polities in the outer system, the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance and Consortium began to square off for control of the inner system. The Consortium scored two major victories early on, however. First, they absorbed the remnants of the Martian colonization infrastructure, which had been stumbling in the wake of the disappearance and presumed deaths of major Chinese officials, as well as the effective absence of other governments and agencies involved in the effort. Second, they acquired the remnants of the United Nations, which struggled tattered and divided, with no means of asserting its own authority. Together these strokes counted as an effective coup against the LLA's potential for dominance, bringing a number of new habitats and resources under the Consortium's directives.

The deal-closer on the Consortium's climb to prominence, however, can be said to fall on two measures. First, the Consortium established a framework for a civil society to work in conjunction with its economic affairs, offering the diverse populations of the habits it worked with a chance to engage in a democratic process and establishment of a new government—all under the Consortium's benevolent direction, of course. Seizing upon the emotions of the moment, the Consortium also played on the meme of unifying transhumanity in this time of danger and uncertainty, solidifying itself as a bulwark against outside threats. In contrast to the LLA, the Consortium also oriented itself towards establishing a bright and progressive new future for transhumanity, rather than wallowing in the mistakes and tragedies of the past. The Experia meme-machines worked overtime to reinforce this discarding of the psychic burden that lay heavy on the minds of transhumanity, so fresh after the Fall. These combined new outlooks caught on famously, paving the way towards Consortium popularity and success.

Simultaneously, the Consortium recruited the other hypercorps by giving them an active stake in the Consortium's development. With the establishment of the Hypercorp Council, the hypercorps were given a chance to buy in on what promised to be a lucrative period of growth and rebuilding and given a democratic voice in the process. Seeing the opportunities and necessities for establishing stable and equitable markets, the hypercorps signed up in droves. The Fall had left most markets with an undesirable amount of uncertainty and instability that needed to be quashed immediately. The Consortium also promised the establishment of a common currency that all member habitats could use to conduct easy and equitable commerce, as well as strict controls over the use of nanofabrication technologies.

These developments, as well as the judicious uses of military force to contain questionable "TITAN outbreaks" on several habitats, ensured the Consortium's rise to becoming the most influential political and economic power in the inner system. Despite the propaganda (both pro and con), life under the Consortium can actually be said to be favorable, and certainly improved in comparison to the Fall. The Consortium leadership employs the carrot far more than the stick, and guarantees a certain degree of

mutual prosperity. Over time, however, they increase their control over habitats with more restrictive trade agreements, recruiting the best and brightest to corporate training centers, and a monopoly of military forces. Member colonies have universally been pressured to cut off relationships with autonomist habitats. Over time, each Consortium station's local policies have become just a cosmetic overlay for a nearly universal core of economic regulations, security protocols, and political systems that were modular and controlled from a central power base.

THE CONSORTIUM AGENDA

The Consortium's agenda is open and transparent, part of the Four-Point Plan instituted shortly after its formation. For the most part these goals speak for themselves, but the best lies are hidden in the truth.

ESTABLISH A NEW HOMEWORLD

The Fall despoiled the cradle of transhumanity. Mars is our new homeworld and we must terraform it and make it our own if we are to survive. Earth needs her rest, it is from Mars we will launch our people into the stars.

Earth is dead, that's a fact. So what else can transhumanity do but look to Mars as the solution? To many, this part of the agenda is a no-brainer, but the question to always ask of any position is: who profits? Who gains? Whose interests does this serve? The Consortium gains, of course, because many of their core economic interests are invested in transforming the red planet into a bountiful new economic paradise. Their goal is not so much to make Mars the new cradle of transhumanity as to become the landlord for the whole damn species. Once they're done with Mars, they'll get to work on Venus. I don't want to be between Morningstar and the Consortium when they do.

Some people also point to this agenda item as a core component of the Consortium's memetic spin control. As in: the past no longer matters, forget about the mistakes that led to the Fall. Cast aside the old nationalism and cultural identities, and embrace the new. Forget about Luna or Venus or Titan, Mars is the new capital. These stances are key to the Consortium's policies of supporting the interdiction of Earth and suppressing the reclaimer movement.

IMPROVE THE HUMAN CONDITION

Transhumanity must continue to evolve and embrace new technologies to meet the challenges of the future.

Perhaps not surprising, given how many hypercorps embraced early transhuman technologies and ideologies, but the Consortium strongly endorses human enhancements through genetic engineering, cognitive mods, biotech, and nanotechnology. Again, this seems appropriate given the desire to prepare transhumanity for any future threats, but it also once again plays into Consortium member self-interests. Enhancements cost money, and it's a never-ending race to get the latest enhancements to keep up with pack, all the while lining corporate coffers.

The first thing mercurials notice with this agenda point, of course, is the distinct "human" part. Though the Consortium pays lip service to uplifts being part of transhumanity, in truth their status remains a contested political issue. AGIs have it even harder, being heavily restricted and monitored to a point few can tolerate for long, and many Consortium habitats ban them entirely. Within certain hypercorp circles, attitudes are much more lax, but the Consortium population at large still views AGIs as potential time bombs.

SAFEGUARD TRANSHUMANITY

The universe is full of threats. We face danger not only from unknown entities out in the void, but from our own carelessness and recklessness. Strong security measures are essential for transhumanity's future.

On the surface this point refers to the TITANs and how close transhumanity came to extinction during

PLAYING NICE?

Posted on: Cryptomix Open Forums
Posted by: Anonymous

If you really think the Planetary Consortium just happened to be in the right place at the right time, I suggest taking a look at some of those old records from during and just after the Fall—if you can find them, that is. Oversight has done a terrific job of scrubbing the mesh for anything that might make the Consortium members complicit in their crimes. If you dig hard enough, though, you'll find something.

Need some pointers? Start with the roles certain hypercorps played in the evacuation process. Agencies supplying off-world transport had an unprecedented amount of authority in deciding who got to live and who was left to have their brain sucked out by the TITANs. Hell, just the order of who was evacuated first and who last made an important difference. Just because you were a prominent leader or businessperson didn't mean you were guaranteed a ride or egocast out—you had to make a deal, promise them something. Entire nation states were left to feed the machines when they were unable to offer anything the Consortium wanted in return.

Even if you bought your way off the planet, you were mostly likely at the Consortium's mercy. If you happened to be part of a government that might be problematic for the Consortium's plans for solar system dominance, well, sucks to be you. There are probably entire old-Earth government administrations locked in dead storage, kept carefully packed away by the hypercorps who prefer to keep them out of the picture for now. How else do you explain how so many world leaders simply went missing?

the Fall. Upon closer inspection, it reveals several nuanced elements of the Consortium agenda. First it paints the other factions, especially the autonomists, as dangerous, out of control, a threat to civilization itself. Without law and order, and strong government, transhumanity is doomed. Thus the outer system is regularly painted in Consortium media as a wild and dangerous frontier, crawling with degenerates and terrorists and—gasp!—software pirates! More to the point, it provides the ideological underpinnings for Consortium restrictions and controls of key technologies, particularly nanofabrication. According to Consortium dogma, fabbers are controlled technology not just to milk consumers, but to protect Consortium citizens from the inevitable murder and mayhem that would accompany open access.

Grow and Prosper

Expansion into new markets and opportunities is vital for transhumanity's shared prosperity.

Simply put, the Consortium wants economic growth and new markets. It wants to exploit and leverage new opportunities into investments and high-yield returns. It wants to create new wealth and new dividends. No surprises here, but this is notable as being a major component of the Consortium's extrasolar colonization and resource exploitation initiatives. It is also worth noting that such new riches are unlikely to be evenly distributed among the population at large, despite naive assumptions to the contrary.

You may think it would be a mistake for the Consortium to be so bold, but let's face it, when everyone knows what you are you'd be a fool to try and hide it. By making profit sound like a virtue they appear more transparent and bolster people's assumptions. In this way most people assume they know and understand the Consortium and what it is trying to do, so they stop digging too deeply.

Consortium Organization and Power

On the surface, the Consortium presents itself almost as a new type of nation-state, composed of many habitats united under a sort of federal structure with a cyberdemocratic process. The truth is far more complicated and unusual. There are few historical precedents for the Consortium's unique set-up, with the most similar possibly being the old-Earth European Union. Unlike all such previous arrangements, however, the key component of the Consortium is that it is, at heart, a commercial alliance and enterprise, with civic trappings.

The Consortium's organization can be broken down into three entities: the Planetary Congress, the Ministry, and the Hypercorp Council.

The Planetary Congress

One of the first challenges the Consortium faced when dealing with myriad diverse habitats was figuring out how to incorporate them into an infrastructure that gave each an equal voice. The Planetary Congress was their answer, drawing representatives from each and every settlement that holds full membership in the Consortium. Habitat representation is based on population, with each receiving at least 1 representative, and representatives serving 3-year terms. Every habitat is counted, and even stations wholly-owned and operated by hypercorps are given representation unless they specifically waive the right.

Voting and citizen participation are emphasized and encouraged in Consortium colonies, and the political process itself is a major media spectacle. Candidates come from a wide range of backgrounds and political parties (starting a new one is easy), with a high percentage of politicos coming from hyperelite backgrounds, particularly younger members of hypercorp dynasties. A number of glitterati and media icons have ridden their popularity into office as well, relying on their charisma and star power—not to mention a staff of memeticists and culture hackers—rather than political stances. In fact, several mesh feeds, sometimes dramatized, relate their ongoing day-to-day activities. Representatives are very accessible to their constituents, with forks periodically making appearances at virtual rallies and town hall meetings. The election process itself is very interactive, with candidate profiles and lifelog highlights easily accessed via the mesh and tagged with comments from peers in your social network. Reputation plays a major role, but is not always the deciding factor.

Despite the pomp and sometimes shallowness of the representatives, actual political issues are often relevant to the proceedings. Hot-button issues like uplift rights, AGI restrictions, indentures, security, terrorism, crime, the Factors, forking, and extrasolar colonization initiatives are major talking points. Representatives often poll their constituents via the mesh, and public referendums are also a significant part of the political process. Nevertheless, outsiders to the Consortium such as yourself are likely to notice that most such issues are debated in the context of a very narrow ideological tunnel, with few outside-the-box options ever seeing real consideration. Don't expect many of the issues that autonomists take for granted—open-access nanofab, AGI equality, the creative commons—to be greeted with anything other than alarm at best, histrionics at worst.

The Ministry

What the Planetary Congress did for the public, the Ministry does for the hypercorps. Every hypercorp that is a full-fledged member of the Consortium is granted one minister to appoint. These ministers legislate everything of importance to the Consortium, particularly commerce, biotechnology, civil defense, immigration, security, terraforming, relations with

the Factors, and colonization. For decision-making purposes, each minister's vote is weighted based on their hypercorp's current public shares price. Privately held corps are assessed a rating by Oversight each quarter, based on the assets they make known. The Ministry makes substantial use of in-house prediction markets as a method for guiding some discussions, forecasting likely outcomes, and gauging group consensus.

In contrast to the Congress, the Ministry is where the bulk of the Consortium's legalities and day-to-day affairs are decided and implemented. Where individual habitats, hypercorps, and citizens are often free to ignore Congressional rules and edicts with little sanction, the Ministry's laws are considered binding and will be enforced. Unlike the veneer of cyberdemocracy the Congress puts forth, the real power lies in the hands of the unelected corporate officials.

The Assembly

The Assembly is a collection of judicial officials that are usually elected from the Ministry's ranks, though in a few cases non-Ministry delegates have been appointed as well. The Assembly is the Consortium's judicial branch, making judgments when necessary in legal affairs and disputes, as well as criminal cases. Most Assembly decisions are in fact handled by expert legal AIs, though live judges can be requested and are brought in for important decisions. Assembly decisions are overridden by, and may be appealed to, Oversight and the Hypercorp Council.

The Hypercorp Council

Though thousands of hypercorps are full members of the Planetary Consortium—the business entity, that is—the vast majority have no actual voting power (outside of the Ministry) and hold no shares. That privilege is set aside for the Consortium's founding members, who have changed little since its beginning a decade ago.

In practice, the Hypercorp Council is the ultimate authority within the Consortium. It holds de facto executive power, has veto power over all legislation, and is the final answer on judicial cases and appeals. Despite its dominance, the Council is careful to not oppose public opinion—or rather, hypercorp opinion—too drastically, especially in cases of near consensus. They are well aware that they rely on the good will and support of the populace and other hypercorps for continued smooth operations, and they employ armies of social engineers to ensure such compliance. The last thing the Council wants to do is to come off as some sort of dictatorial regime, and they take pains to avoid this. This does not mean that they don't throw their weight around when necessary, as the smoldering ruins of a few uppity corps and colonies can attest to, but such matters are always handled with subtlety and finesse, even when conveying a sincere message. For the most part, however, the Council is content to screen its affairs and keep them from public view, concealing them behind the spectacle provided by the Planetary Congress. It is rare to see mention of the Council in Consortium media feeds.

In typical networked hypercorp fashion, some Consortium members are consortiums, conglomerates, or similar business alliances in their own right. Though it is estimated that there are approximately twenty members on the Hypercorp Council, no one outside the Council knows for sure, and the Council is under no obligation to reveal that information to anyone. Each of those twenty or so corps holds a percentage of shares, an investment in



the Consortium itself. This stake in the Consortium determines their voting power for decisions made by the Council. No single hypercorp owns a majority (the Consortium bylaws actually forbid this), though 10 of the corps own 80% of the shares combined. In practice, this means that plenty of deals are made between hypercorps about how each will vote and what reciprocal favor such a vote might earn. The major share-holding hypercorps (Experia, Fa Jing, Prosperity, and Solaris) can overrule the others if they are united, with 52% of the vote. The minor hypercorps, however, can often hold the balance of power with their more modest percentages when the major hypercorps can't agree.

COGNITE (6%)

If the Consortium is a family, Cognite is the prodigal son. Still reeling from the PR disaster of the Lost project, they have become one of the most secretive of the hypercorps, an approach that makes them few friends in the Consortium. However, they mollify this suspicion by often voting with the majority and staying to one side of most political issues. The only issue Cognite really seems to care about is increased media control and the importance of upholding the reputations of Hypercorp Council members.

On several occasions Cognite has proposed implementing mandatory nootropic, psychosurgery, or cognitive filter regimens for habitat populations, as a means toward ensuring public compliance with Consortium goals. It says something about the hypercorp mentality that these proposals have actually been considered, though so far not implemented outside from a few test case programs.

DIRECT ACTION (6%)

Direct Action's inclusion solidified the military backing the Consortium needed after the Fall. Though Direct Action continues to play a prominent role in military and security matters, the other Council members are careful not to seed the milcorp too much in the way of resources or authority, lest they need worry about a coup. Nevertheless, Direct Action subsidiaries can be found protecting assets throughout the Consortium, and the rest of the system as well.

On several occasions, rumors have arisen regarding the connections between Direct Action and Fa Jing. It is known that Fa Jing played a pivotal role in Direct Action's early beginnings, providing the loans and financial support needed to keep the milcorp's military units in action. It is unclear if there were any strings attached to those resources, or whether Fa Jing is still owed any favors.

EXPERIA (10%)

Experia is the driving force behind the Consortium's publicity and public relations, and it is very good at it. Experia culture jammers are a thing to be feared. Though Experia does not monopolize media feeds within the Consortium, it certainly dominates and controls major trends, with a diverse assortment of programming, news, and entertainment options. It is a mark of distinction for a Planetary Congress-critter to be backed by Experia.

FA JING (15%)

Aggressive and arrogant, Fa Jing execs know they hold a position of power within the Consortium and they are unafraid to use it. One of the few corps that's been able to switch nimbly between the reputation metrics of the new economy and the market intricacies of the old, Fa Jing is able to get what few other corps can out of the outer system and bring it in the form of raw materials into the inner system. Despite their relations with various outer system concerns, Fa Jing is one of the strongest proponents of taking aggressive action against the autonomist menace, considering their ways to be the premier threat to the Consortium's existence.

FUJIZO (3%)

This consortium is a major competitor to Starware in the field of spacecraft propulsion and design, but its primary market is robotics, including a number of synthetic morph designs. It is not uncommon to see the clanking masses in a case stamped with a Fujizo logo. They are a large supporter of the idea of built-in obsolescence for indentured morphs.

INVATCH (2%)

This conglomerate of smaller hypercorps is the largest combined manufacturer and employer of pods in the solar system. While some of the firms involved strictly deal with pod design and creation, or AI programming, other corps operate in the service sector, making pods available for a wide range of labor and social purposes.

LUCKY STAR GROUP (2%)

Another conglomerate of hypercorp interests, the Lucky Star Group is dedicated to electronics design and minifacturing. Aside from providing key design elements for mesh inserts and common-use ectos, Lucky Star electronics see widespread use in numerous habitat mesh networks. On the software side, several Lucky Star firms specialize in mesh cloud systems and data security products. Interestingly, the latter industry sometimes puts them at odds with Stellar Intelligence, and there have been occasional clashes in Council discussions over legislation that mandates the application and use of embedded surveillance and data collection systems in Consortium mesh networks.

NANOSYS (4%)

This consortium of nanotech hypercorps plays a pivotal role in the Consortium's policies towards nanofabrication, providing strict guidelines for fabricator designs, vetting other manufacturers, and setting the standard for nanofab blueprint licensing and DRM. In effect, they are an enforcement association

for the proprietary nanotech industry. If someone hacks a maker, pirates a blueprint, or sets loose a new nanobot design, Nanosys will be the ones called in to investigate, prosecute, or set policy.

Olympus Infrastructure Authority (2%)

Bringing the OIA into the Consortium fold was a major coup at a critical point in history. The OIA controls the Martian space elevator, a crucial pipeline for the terraforming and development of Mars. Along with other elements of the Martian colonization infrastructure, this solidified the Consortium's control over Mars.

Though it is not yet public knowledge, signs point to the fact that the OIA is laying the groundwork to establish a second space elevator on Mars, allowing the Consortium to double the flow of goods and resources.

Prosperity Group (10%)

While there is little glamor to the Prosperity Group, it is nevertheless a vital part of the Consortium. The hypercorps recognize that controlling the food supply, and what goes into it, is one of the keys to controlling transhumanity. Unlike many of the other hypercorps, who prefer an image of flash and sass, Prosperity prefers to propagate their idea as simple, prosperous, and fundamentally necessary. This has allowed them to neatly bypass several scandals that could have been damaging to their reputation, particularly their connections to certain criminal enterprises known to distribute a variety of drugs and sometimes dangerous narcotics—the byproducts of their primary research.

Solaris (17%)

Solaris is the economic backbone of the Consortium, the financial giant that provides the funding for Council initiatives and the stability to keep the Consortium's markets attractive and bountiful. Though the Progress Bank now plays the role of central bank for the Consortium, Solaris remains both larger and more influential, and is the primary banking institution for Council hypercorps specifically. The minds behind Solaris are respected and revered for their financial wizardry; the corp has an uncanny ability to stay one step ahead of potential economic pitfalls.

Stellar Intelligence (6%)

Stellar Intelligence is a small but potent presence in Consortium affairs. Their data collection and espionage capabilities give the Consortium a distinct edge when dealing with outside rivals, but their activities don't stop there. Stellar makes it their business to know not just everything about everyone, but also anything that can give them leverage over anyone who's likely to be important. This means they make a tidy profit selling secrets about non-Council hypercorps to Council hypercorps. As a rule, however, they avoid dealing with any intelligence on their fellow Council members, so as not to dirty the pool they all play in or instigate other conflicts of interest. Nevertheless, their Council partners are often quite careful about what information they share with Stellar, and keep them close but not too unleashed, much as they do Direct Action.

Within the Consortium, Stellar Intelligence has an ongoing rivalry with Oversight, which has so far been restricted to hammering each other's rep and occasionally outing each other's operations. Part of the rivalry may stem from the fact that certain top Oversight personnel were originally ranking chiefs at Stellar, parting ways over some undisclosed but apparently bitter disagreement.

Other Council Members

There are at least half a dozen other corps on the Council, though most of these are minor shareholders, owning about 1% each (or possibly less). Analysis of Council documentation strongly implies that there is at least one other hypercorp with a significant holding of shares, possibly as much as 10%. The identity and nature of this entity remains carefully concealed, however.

It is worth noting that Pathfinder, a subsidiary of the Consortium, is given the extraordinary privilege of having a representative sit in on Council affairs, despite having no voting rights. The reason for this is simply because exoplanet colonization, exploration, and resource exploitation play a vital role in Hypercorp Council plans. As the Consortium's lead on this project, Pathfinder has been granted a special place at the master's table.

Hidden Power

In many circles, it is a common belief that the Hypercorp Council itself is not the ultimate power in the Consortium. According to this line of thought, the real strings are pulled by an influential group of gerontocrats and their undying, ever-growing dynasties. Raving conspiracy theories aside, there is merit to the belief that the old and ultra-rich have amassed considerable power and influence, and that they travel in social circles of elites with similar interests, with whom they make plans for their own personal and mutual benefit. Many of these modern aristocrats serve on the boards of multiple hypercorps, allowing for a number of cross-fertilization opportunities. Just as often, however, they are likely to have conflicting business interests or even personal outlooks and ideologies with their peers, leading to an atmosphere of intrigue and competition. The benefits of age and wealth are that these oligarchs have the savvy to hide their goals and maneuvering, the patience to craft long-term plots and see them through, and the resources to acquire just about whatever they need: whether that be a priceless art relic from Earth, control over an entire industry, the death and erasure of a rival's backups, or a series of platinum-gilded double-ended slitheroids studded with whips and sex

OLIGARCHS AND HYPERCORP DYNASTIES

So who are the oligarchs and major dynasties? There are many, ranking in several tiers of wealth and influence. Here's a small sampling of those with a large stake in Consortium affairs. There are many others who operate outside the Consortium, of course, including those tied to Lunar, Morningstar, Extropian, or independent interests.

The Al Kabir Family: Descended from the younger sons of a Middle Eastern royal family who established their own personal and profitable ventures in and around Luna and Earth prior to the Fall, this dynasty maintains multiple private habitats and holds significant investments in a range of major hypercorps. The current patriarch, Nassim Ibn Wasid Al Kabir, is known as a man to go to for funding if you have a project that tickles his fancy for extrasolar exploration or for something unusual that has not been tried yet.

Biao Qian: This quiet but ruthless businessman made his fortune as a venture capitalist in the Chinese technological growth sector before investing in the Martian colonization program. He profited greatly from the exploitation of Third-World workers as off-world indentured labor. Aside from a private dome near the southern Martian pole, Biao is rumored to have another personal habitat in the outer system. Though he has served on the boards of both Nanosys and Invatch, in recent years he has diminished his public profile. According to unverified socialite gossip, the reason for his retreat had something to do with catching a disfiguring alien disease. Biao has fathered an excessive number of children, all of them sons.

Rael Duvalier: The former CEO of Somatek helped to fund many of the breakthroughs in biological uplifts. Despite his public persona as a grandfatherly figure devoted to the welfare of his "children," Duvalier's primary interest in uplifts seems to be exploitation. In private, he has been known to express rage at being forced "into retirement" by a hostile board and "fucking zoophile activists." He is considered an enemy by many uplift mercurial groups, not in the least for proposing that uplifts should be consigned to indentured servitude in repayment for having been raised to sentience. Duvalier is, of course, far from retirement, and continues to meddle in the biotech and genetics industries. He has been known to bankroll political groups that oppose mercurial efforts and uplift rights.

The Marathi: The identity of this figure is unknown even in hyperelite circles, but their reputation is growing. According to gossip, the Marathi has been very actively interfering with the affairs of several Lunar-based dynasties since the Fall, sometimes with exquisite effectiveness. The Marathi is reputed to hold interests in Consortium biotech projects, particularly genomics, and one tale circulating in socialite gossip suggests a particular interest in old-Earth cryptids, even suggesting the Marathi has a private zoo of myth-based neogenetic creatures.

Orson Pournelle: Like most of his peers, Pournelle was born into a wealthy family. Prior to the Fall, he invested heavily in space elevator plans, becoming a key player in the beanstalk logistics sector. He made a killing by developing more efficient algorithms for taking cargo off-planet. When the TITANs struck, Pournelle leveraged himself into position where the UN placed him in charge of evacuation operations for the Panamanian elevator.

toys for their personal dungeons. You laugh, but if there's one thing that comes with wealth, it's eccentricity. When you have the power to make everything and everyone around you conform to your wishes, some interesting aspects of your personality start to bleed out.

But I digress. Many of these gerontocrats and hypercorp moguls are public figures, often in the media spotlight. A few are even icons, like the irreverent Morgan Sterling, a name synonymous with ExoTech, not to mention other exotic interests. Some are effectively masters of their own domains, such as the Oaxaca-Maartens, and their control over Elysium on Mars. Many others prefer to stay out of the public eye, and a few seem to hide all evidence of their existence and activities whatsoever. Along with their riches and longevity often comes a large extended family. These dynasties are case studies in nepotism, with younger family members or those related by marriage contract often holding key positions in a hypercorp's upper ranks. Given the wealth at their disposal, however, younger members with no personal ambitions embrace the dilettante lifestyle, joining the ranks of the socialites and glitterati. Though often nothing more than a drain on a family's resources and reputation, some of these manage to make a name for themselves in the media. Inevitably, however, they are a source of inter-dynasty intrigues and power plays, which often seem instigated out of boredom and a desire for drama more than any need to actually compete with their peers.

PRIVATE CLUBS

If there's one thing that feeds conspiracy theorist paranoia, it is the existence of secretive organizations with members pulled from the ranks of the hyperelite. Though invariably dedicated to social activities, they offer an opportunity for the masters

OLIGARCHS AND HYPERCORP DYNASTIES (CONT.)

Numerous accounts suggest that Pournelle and his staff ruthlessly abused their authority, auctioning evacuation slots to the highest bidders, taking now-priceless Earth relics as bribes, and often prioritizing hypercorp cargo over refugees, presumably earning favors and markers from hyperelite peers. More damning reports claim that Pournelle instituted policies that de-prioritized uplift evacuees in favor of humans, and that similar decisions were clouded by his personal racist and religious beliefs. Any factual evidence to support such indictments is, of course, well hidden or was lost during the Fall. Pournelle's business interests now include military technologies, simulspace programming, and exoplanet resource exploitation.

Rook: This oligarch has crossed paths with Firewall on several occasions, though their actual identity and motivations remain unclear. Using the moniker "Rook" when dealing with hired agents, this entity has more than a passing interest in the TITANs and has been known to communicate with at least one group of singularity seekers. There is also evidence that Rook has requested and been granted personal audiences with the Factors on more than one occasion. It seems likely that Rook has some sort of interconnection with Stellar Intelligence, though the exact relationship is muddied. Sentinels interacting with Rook or their minions are advised to stay alert until we can ascertain whether their agenda is at cross-purposes to Firewall.

The Yamafuku Clan: This extended family is the legacy of Kassi Yamafuku, perhaps one of the oldest living humans and among the first to undergo uploading. An offshoot of a former Japanese keiretsu dynasty, Yamafuku and her descendants have been major players in biotechnology and life sciences. The clan also took an early interest in Venus, and Yamafuku herself is said to have helped orchestrate the creation of the Planetary Congress and the Ministry. The clan has been strongly opposed to Venusian independence.

Ayn Zamyatin: Zamyatin is noteworthy as being opposed to the hypercorp agenda before the Fall. The daughter of a Russian energy and oil magnate with links to organized crime who built a fortune after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Zamyatin expanded this empire in the resource and water conflicts before the Fall. She fostered the idea of relocating climate refugees to carefully structured and highly surveilled "productive labor" camps, a program condemned as slavery by Amnesty International. When the TITANs struck, however, Zamyatin was quick to liquidate her assets and transfer her wealth to the Lunar Banks, taking exile herself in orbit shortly after. Purchasing a spacecraft, the *Integral,* as her personal nomadic retreat, Zamyatin has since involved herself in Consortium affairs, buying into both Experia and Cognite. Labeled the "Siberian Queen" by some media feeds after a string of controversial appearances, she is infamous as one of the lone Consortium voices that opposes major efforts towards extrasolar colonization as potentially dangerous and fracturing to Consortium interests. She has, however, advocated cautious exploration and the establishment of a few select colonies with strict social controls. Persistent rumors link her to certain Night Cartel leaders. ■

of the inner system to fraternize and share their ideas for building a galactic empire over wine and a game of mah-jongg, or Martian beers and a drum circle, depending on your affiliations. Though there are doubtless an array of small, exclusive, clandestine clubhouses of this sort, two of the more well-known are worth mentioning.

Helm & Spear: Named for the accouterments of the god Mars, this secret society is a gathering place for those hyperelites heavily invested in the transformation and exploitation of the red planet. This includes board members, ministers, and backers of various mining, terraforming, railroad, and infrastructure development corps. For their retreats, on which all business and political negotiation is allegedly barred, these people of wealth and privilege like to revel in the Martian wilderness, often sleeving in customized ruster morphs and going on a nomadic jaunt.

X Club: The X Club originally evolved from the entrepreneurs behind and involved in the old-Earth X-Prize competitions for "radical breakthroughs for the benefit of humanity." Initiated to spur competition and development in spaceflight, genomics, nanotech, and similar fields, these awards helped catapult the hypercorps into space. Decades before the Fall, the visionaries and venture capitalists behind these technologies and industries adopted the group as a social club and networking tool. As the hypercorps expanded off-world, the elite X Club followed, transforming into a fraternity of hyperelites in critical orbital/space infrastructure sectors such as ship manufacturing, robotics, habitat engineering, banking, indenture brokerage, and so on. Today the X Club meets on Progress, and their ranks include a number of prominent Consortium ministers and board members from the likes of Solaris, Fujizo, and Prosperity.

CONSORTIUM ECONOMICS

Economics is the central purpose of the Consortium. The current economic philosophy upheld by Consortium interests has been labeled *hyperliberalism* by some (or also *hypercapitalism*). It goes beyond the precepts of classical liberalism—opposing government intervention, promoting privatization and free markets—by suborning government (in this case, individual habitats) to the edicts of a trade bloc (the Consortium). Hyperliberalism, however, does not feature the same embrace of the free market as Extropianism, which eliminates states entirely. Instead, subject governments are still counted on to administer public needs like shelter, power, and food—all managed via privatized services, of course. Additionally (and to Extropian types, more importantly), hypercapitalism incorporates a bit of Keynesian economics in believing that some sort of watchdog apparatus and regulatory authority is needed to to ensure stability, in order to prevent the sort of economic bubbles and crises that were so damaging to market economies before the Fall. The Consortium does not rely on a state to provide this overwatch, instead ensuring it through a cooperative self-regulating agreement of major hypercorps.

The primary attraction of the Consortium to the vast majority of hypercorps was the creation of a large single market and common currency in the immediate wake of the Fall. Like many trade blocs of the past, the Consortium enables the free passage of money, people, and goods between Consortium habitats, with a standardized set of light economic regulations. Hypercorps who are not members may still do business in Consortium space, but they are restricted by tariffs, import/export controls, and sometimes trade agreements between the Consortium and other entities.

The Consortium's economic approach has so far been highly successful, growing to dominate the inner system. The Lunar-Lagrange Alliance, though a rival and more protectionist in outlook, has equalized its currency to mesh with the Consortium, at the behest of the Lunar banks who saw it as a necessary measure to stay competitive. Even the Morningstar Constellation, though politically and economically separate, still links its currency to Consortium rates.

INSTITUTIONS

Two economic structures have been central to the Consortium's success. The first is the Planetary Stock Exchange (PEX), the largest exchange within the inner system. While the Lunar exchanges reeled and remained on lockdown in the aftermath of the Fall, the Consortium scored a victory by absorbing a nascent Mars exchange, converting it, and using it to catalyze the growth of a new economy. Though many other exchanges exist, PEX remains the most significant. To counter the lag problem with intrasolar communications, which limits most exchanges to trading within their local spatial "neighborhood," PEX offers an expensive option for trading via QE communication channels. Though PEX trades primarily in stocks, a dozen other Consortium-backed exchanges trade in commodities, futures, and other securities throughout the solar system. Morningstar, the LLA, Impian, the Jovians, and Extropia also have their own competing exchanges.

The second critical structure is the Progress Bank (PB). Established by the Consortium in its first year, PB was specifically set up to help build the Consortium while remaining free from its political affairs. Though a subsidiary of the Consortium, PB has its own budget and member corps, including those on the Hypercorp Council, are legally barred from seeking to influence its decisions. Bank officials also have lengthy tenures, to limit intrigues over appointees. As the Consortium's central bank, PB sets monetary policy and interest rates, stabilizes prices to keep inflation low, issues currency, stimulates the economy, and manages foreign exchange transactions. It is also the prime lender for the Pathfinder Colonization Initiative and the Red Eden Terraforming Project.

OVERSIGHT

According to top Consortium economists at least, while a free market and deregulation are ideal goals, the market does not police itself, and so a guiding hand ensures smooth operation and stability. As a business enterprise with thousands of hypercorp members, these financial experts argue that a nominal framework of competition regulation is necessary to derail monopolies and corruption, approve mergers, monitor risky investment and lending practices, and otherwise foil destructive efforts to game the system. The tool for this task is Oversight.

First formed under the initial charter that established the Planetary Congress and Ministry, the Oversight Directorate for Fair and Free Markets, more commonly known as just Oversight, is meant to maintain as fair and free a market economy as possible in the Consortium. Not wanting to corrupt its image by mimicking some sort of nation-state regulatory body, the Consortium initially took great pains to set up Oversight as a cooperative effort, a burden and responsibility shared by the members of the Hypercorp Council. Nevertheless, submitting to



Oversight's authority and allowing this agency to check their books is the price any corporate entity pays if it wants to be a full-fledged member of the Consortium with representation in the Ministry. In the decade since, however, in a classic example of mission creep, Oversight's authority and agenda has expanded well beyond its original outline.

Oversight's purview falls under the Hypercorp Council's executive powers, meaning that the agency acts with the Council's authority. Early on, this led to accusations that Oversight was acting preferentially towards the Council members' specific interests. To counter this and develop more of an air of impartiality, the Council has adopted a hands-off policy towards most Oversight activities, aside from hand-picking the directorate's General Secretary. As a result, Oversight has grown and expanded with little oversight of its own affairs. It is worth noting, too, that Council members are also subject to Oversight scrutiny, though there is undoubtedly some institutional bias at play.

Oversight's activities can be broken down into several realms. The first is analysis and forecasting, handled by squadrons of internal bureaucrats who specialize in conducting market analyses on emerging economic trends and conditions. Given their privileged access to some internal hypercorp records and the trading records from PEX and other exchanges, this enables some impressive forecasting capabilities. If any anomalies are detected or irregularities noticed in the data flow from the hypercorps, an investigative team is dispatched. What is interesting to note about these oracle operations is that Oversight does not only analyze economic factors—they measure a range of real-world developments as well, taking note of how they can impact financial matters. By Consortium law, Oversight forecasts are released to all hypercorp members after 90 days.

The second realm of Oversight is ongoing investigation of personal and hypercorp financial irregularities. Oversight auditors may be tasked to uncover tax evasion, insider trading, pyramid schemes, cartels, corruption, and much more. Agents have significant powers to subpoena records and investigate internal files. It should not be assumed that auditors are just accountants with attitude: a specially tasked branch of

Oversight auditors practices more direct methods of investigation, including surveillance, physical infiltration, digital intrusion, social engineering, psychosurgery, and occasionally other, less savory tactics. In an arena of cutthroat capitalism, where greed and power go hand-in-hand, extreme tactics are sometimes necessary.

It is this familiarity with black ops that has developed into Oversight's third area of operations, thanks to the directorate's over-extending mission. In alignment with their mission to preserve stability, Oversight has expanded their operations to address almost anything that could be considered a threat to the Consortium. Anarchist agitators, bioconservative terrorists, reclaimers, criminal operations, espionage from rival power blocs—all of these and more are now handled by Oversight's efficient auditors, the new Men in Black. Oversight has even maneuvered itself into a sort of immigration control, authorizing suspension of incoming egocasts until they've had time to interrogate a fork in simulspace. Oversight's operating budget has doubled every year for the past half a decade, indicating a bureaucracy that is simply out of control. Though few of the influential personages within the Consortium care to challenge this development, as it serves their own interests, it is a matter of time before Oversight oversteps its bounds and the Council is forced to leash their guard dogs.

Oversight is one of the few places in the Consortium where infomorphs can find advancement. Aside from utilizing a number of indentures for low-level tasks, it possesses a large percentage of infomorph auditors on staff. Oversight agents are assigned for their individual skill sets; those who like numbers make good analysts, those with "people skills" become field agents. Rarely, if ever, is one promoted to the other. Salary is based on experience and seniority, so loyalty and service are rewarded.

General Secretary Gia Norne

Appointed head of Oversight in AF 5, Norne has single-handedly reworked the scope of Oversight's operations, transforming the regulatory agency into an enforcement arm of the Consortium. There are some who think that Norne has exceeded her bounds so efficiently by virtue of the intelligence she has access to as head of Oversight. Certainly even the most powerful figures in the Consortium think twice before crossing swords with Norne's agenda. Others point to a few select scandals and exposed corruption schemes as proof that Norne has exercised her threats against those she is blackmailing.

Norne's personal agenda seems to focus on countering the autonomist threat. Under her leadership, Oversight has ruthlessly hunted down anarchist, technosocialist, and other radical elements within the Consortium's sphere. Oversight has played a large role in persecuting Barsoomian troublemakers, and the directorate has also harassed numerous Extropian corps that operate within the inner system. Norne's agenda has also extended towards opening investigations into hypercorps that deal with outer system interests. Despite Norne's increasing abuses of power, few within the Consortium would argue with the fact that she steers Oversight capably, fulfilling its mission and keeping, if not a level playing field, at least a stable one.

Æther Jabber

Start Æther Jabber
Active Members: 2

- From your description, it sounds like Oversight has the Consortium dancing to its tune.
- That's a polite way of putting it. A more accurate way might be to say that not only do they know where the cortical stacks are buried, but they've wrapped some tentacles around some key gonads, squeezing just hard enough to convey a message.
- Well, the real question then is this: Is Norne operating on her own, or is she a puppet? And if so, who's pulling the strings?
- That's a very good question. And I don't have any answers. The puppet show may be a more extravagant affair than is immediately obvious.
- Let me ask you this, then. What's the practical difference between Oversight and Ozma. How do they overlap? Which supersedes the other?
- My take is this: Oversight are the secret police, the MiBs, the enforcers. They're the ones called in to do the Consortium's dirty work. There may be puppeteers at work, but ultimately they work within the bounds of the Consortium, if not always legally. Ozma, on the other hand, is the shadow government, the power behind the throne. As far as I can tell, Ozma acts with authority that exceeds all others.
- Even the Hypercorp Council?
- I haven't seen them pitted against each other directly, but I would suspect so. Whomever Ozma works for, it's not the Council, it's someone behind the curtain, using the Consortium as a front.
- Do they compete? Does Oversight step on Ozma's toes?
- In my years as a proxy, I've actually seen Oversight clean up after Ozma's messes more than once. Whether they knew they were doing that is questionable—they may have simply thought they were correcting some hypercorp's mistake. I've also seen Oversight and other Consortium interests impede Ozma more than once, a situation that usually leaves the backups wondering which TITAN ate their brain. I wouldn't be surprised if Ozma occasionally recruits auditors, but who knows. Ultimately, I think Ozma's interests are on a much larger scale than Oversight even usually considers.
- Well, those gerontocrats know how to look at the big picture.
- Gerontocrats? Who's to say Ozma's masters are even human? ♣

Consortium Subsidiaries

It is not unheard of for the Consortium to hold subsidiaries of its own. In some situations, when the Consortium needs something accomplished, it is often easier to buy a smaller hypercorp outright and task them to do the job. This has occurred many times, and in several cases the takeovers have been hostile, with help provided by Oversight. Few could successfully refuse, of course, but it is interesting to note that the Consortium has also discarded some of these subsidiaries when their usefulness ended—even sometimes taking a loss in the process. Two current subsidiaries deserve notice, one being PEX, the Planetary Exchange. The other is Pathfinder.

Pathfinder

Pathfinder's remit is to exploit the worlds beyond the Pandora Gates. This is a significant element of the Planetary Consortium's long-term plans, making this one of the most important Consortium projects since its inception. One of the Consortium's promises to the other hypercorps was an expansion into new markets, and the gates allow this in spades. Exactly how these new markets develop—and what populations are used to seed them—is turning out to be a contested issue, however, as various corps scramble for opportunities to loot new worlds, construct new societies, and otherwise establish a beachhead in the galaxy at large. Along with its many other duties, of which simple logistics and security are gargantuan efforts, Pathfinder has been delegated the responsibility of coordinating the Pathfinder Colonization Initiative (PCI)—putting them squarely in front of what is practically a hypercorp stampede. Given these responsibilities and the importance of the task at hand for the Consortium's future interests, Pathfinder's CEO, Ravji Gada, has been granted an honorary non-voting seat on the Hypercorp Council, so as to better integrate Pathfinder's mission with Council objectives. This exceptional act has been viewed by some of Gada's critics as a ploy to leverage Pathfinder into a position where it can buy itself free from the Consortium and possibly even onto the Council.

Pathfinder's recent relations with Oversight have been strained as Gada has sought to loosen certain restrictions binding hypercorps involved in the PCI. He has all but asked Oversight to back off and look the other way when it comes to extrasolar affairs, citing this as a crucial time for Consortium corps to aggressively carve out what niches they can. Oversight's Norne has not only refused, but concentrated some of the directorate's investigations there, leading to a potential future showdown.

Life in the Consortium

A lot of wet-behind-the-ears autonomist types view the residents of the Consortium as exploited workers and slaves, blinded by their XP feeds and limited educations into believing that their lousy lives are the best they can do. Those naive anarchists think that if only these poor Consortium dupes knew better, if they could just escape and see the glories of the outer system, then they would abandon their ways, rise up against their masters, and topple the parasitic gerontocrats and hyperelites. The truth isn't so black-and-white. While there is a sizable segment of the Consortium population with a class consciousness, or at least a recognition of indentured labor as slavery, the vast majority of Consortium citizens are content and favor their lifestyle over an outer system one. This is because the social control of the Consortium is more nuanced and fine-tuned than the outright repression of the Jovians. Life in the Consortium is by no means a harsh experience, and is for the most part privileged and secure. Most citizens can expect to have all of their basic needs met for minimal fees as long as they stay gainfully employed. The standard of living, even among the poor, is significantly more prosperous than life was on Earth under the old pre-Fall regimes.

There is little in the way of a social safety net, of course. It is rare for transhumans to get sick, age, or suffer health (or mechanical) problems. Accidents happen, however; people abuse their bodies or they suffer from mental health issues. Aside from a few habitats with social programs, anyone suffering from this fate may be forced to resort to status as an infomorph, with few options but indentured servitude. For the majority, this is just proof that the system works and that the lazy will reap the fruits of their indolence while industrious hard-working citizens will be rewarded with promotions and top of the line XP caster units.

All of this wealth and privilege could not be sustained, of course, without an underclass to shoulder the burden. The use of indentured and robotic labor has gone a long way towards helping hypercorps maximize profits. Though there is a growing sentiment against the use of indentures, there is an even stronger base of support, grounded in the benefits the hypercorps reap from exploiting such a vast cheap labor resource. Still, the economy requires a standard rate of unemployment to keep job demand in place, so there is always a percentage of the population that is forced into poverty.

This all assumes, of course, that the citizen in question is from original baseline human stock and survived the Fall with at least enough resources to purchase entry into on of the Consortium habitats. If this isn't the case, then the Consortium is a much less pleasant place. Uplifts suffer from a persistent social and institutional bias, often relegating them to the ghettos and fringe areas of habitats. Infugees are pitied but rarely helped; they are expected to make

their own way via indentured service. The clanking masses, most of whom are embodied indentures (or former indentures), suffer similar discrimination and social isolation. Many Consortium habitats are home to synthetic ghettos where the clanking masses scratch out a living, often finding just enough work to keep their shoddy shells maintained. These areas are breeding grounds for crime, which only serves to reinforce the less than wholesome reputation their inhabitants enjoy among the majority of the Consortium's citizens.

THE DAILY GRIND

Automated labor (bots and pods) and indentures account for a significant amount of manual, repetitive, or distasteful work, and are common throughout the Consortium. Most citizens are employees of hypercorps, meaning their work may be as diverse as information management, biotech lab staff, programming, or media production. Habitat maintenance and the service sector are both large and common avenues for the lower classes. Extensive use of technology and AI serves to increase productivity and efficiency, but has done little to decrease the amount of work most people do. Forty-hour work weeks are still common, and some industries expect far more. Many citizens, however, have the luxury of working from their home or a shared workspace, given the decentralized and mesh-based nature of most business operations.

A NIGHT OUT

The citizens of the Consortium may not party with the abandon of the scum, but they do have a thriving entertainment industry. XP entertainment is cranked out at an impressive rate, eaten up by Consortium consumers, providing that distraction for the masses the hypercorps desire, before it is pirated by the rest of the solar system. The most popular diversions by far, however, are AR and VR games. The current popular trend embraced by massive numbers of Consortium citizens is to subscribe to at least one "coterie" in a massively-multiplayer interactive alternate-reality AR roleplaying game (MARGs). The plots of these games are experienced through skinned AR environments as they go about their day-to-day lives, with options for fuller simulspace immersion scenarios as well.

For those less interested in social gaming, there are still plenty of fine dining and drinking establishments across the Consortium. Clubs with live music and dancing are major attractions, also accessible via live feeds on the mesh. Most clubs in fact offer AR "channels" that skin your environment according to your choice from a selection of DJs and digital artists famous across the system. The omnipresent glitterati and celebrity socialite scene ties in effortlessly here, and playing citizen paparazzi is a common diversion for Consortium citizens on the lookout for the icon du jour engaging in scandalous behavior. In fact, the major sponsored celebrities are usually contractually required to visit some of the smaller out-of-the-way habitats and engage in the kind of tabloid-friendly behavior that their reputations are often built on, as a way of driving sales of their associated brand.

UPWARD MOBILITY

If there is one myth the Consortium has excelled at perpetuating, it is the dream of upward mobility. According to this commonly held fable, anyone can work their way up from the bottom and break into

MARGs

These are but a few of the most popular massively-multiplayer alternate-reality roleplaying games:

Cloak and Dagger allows players to act as sleeper agents sent on secret missions by a hidden conspiracy. Its success is partially due to persistent rumors that players are sometimes used to pull off actual espionage activities, though Consortium media sources claim this is just part of a viral marketing campaign.

War of Wizards is the largest MARG with millions of subscribers to a high-fantasy world that features a mishmash of old Earth cultural myths and legends.

Wyrmwood is the main rival to War of Wizards and is a grittier, more historically influenced high-fantasy setting that offers what its adherents call a true grimdark fantasy experience.

Footy is a football (soccer) team-based game that replicates the feel of old terrestrial football leagues by allowing members of different neighborhoods and habitats to face off against each other and engage in acts of hooliganism against their rivals.

Innsmouth Nights is the latest in a series of reimaginings of the works of HP Lovecraft and the Cthulhu mythos.

Thousand Heavens features Buddhist-inspired overlays that place the user in any of a number of heavens or hells where they must help out saints or demons to progress further along their spiritual journey.

Starfleet Command allows subscribers to assume the role of officers on extrasolar exploration missions in a setting that incorporates a variety of near-human alien races.

MechaMash! is a popular giant robot fighting MARG where players take the side of either noble transhuman clansmen or a decadent Star League and fight against each other in great gladiatorial mecha combats. ■

THE LOTUS CLUB

The brainchild of Experia and Fa Jing, the Lotus Club is one of the most talked about organizations among the glitterati. It is a network of exclusive and private areas spread across the inner system. Only the most glamorous hyperelites and metacelebrities are allowed to join, and by invitation only. The attraction of the club is simple: not only is it the most exclusive club in the system, but it caters to any taste. Anything you want, no matter how decadent or perverse, will be provided for you. Individual club locations are extremely well-guarded secret areas within habitats, sometimes hidden within other private clubs, each dedicated to providing certain entertainments. They are recognized by markings only known by members and visible only via AR with the proper codes. Celebrity hunters who have heard of the club search relentlessly to discover these secret hideaways and learn the secret signs and codes, even if they stand no chance of getting in. Needless to say, the potential for blackmail on what activities take place in these clubs is enormous, but the Lotus Club is extremely diligent in upholding its reputation for privacy. In fact, it is known that Oversight has been called in by Lotus on at least three occasions to help protect secrets that might otherwise be damaging to prominent members of the Consortium. ■

the hyperelites with enough hard work and effort. In this fable, even the lowliest indenture from a backward region on Earth has the capability and, most importantly, the opportunity, to work their way up through the ranks with diligence, and may eventually travel the socialite circuit and own their successful hypercorp one day. It is this fantasy that keep Consortium citizens working diligently for their hypercorp masters, in hopes of one day being a master themselves. Hard data showing the actual infeasible nature and unlikelihood of these ideas is conveniently waved away.

One way this cognitive bias plays out is the manner in which high-scarcity goods are pursued, even by the poor. While even the clanking masses have the means to license the maker blueprints they need for basic sustenance and survival, living this way is an indicator of lower status. Instead, Consortium citizens spend their wealth purchasing goods that are more scarce and "designer" licensed nanofab prints that are essentially more expensive versions of basic goods slapped with a name brand logo. In particular, the glitterati and hyperelites place a premium on hand-made goods and items that are so elaborate that they are labor- or resource-intensive even when made with a fabber. As a result, these expensive and extravagant designs are growing in demand among the less affluent.

As autonomists are well aware, licensing and DRM play an important role in restricting open access to nanofabrication in the inner system. Though piracy is certainly an option for the poor—and there is indeed a thriving underground in black market prints and even jail-broken fabbers—the production of non-approved and non-licensed substances is a crime that carries a substantial penalty in the Consortium. Possession of hacked fabbers is even more illegal, most likely invoking the seizure of your morph and a minimum amount of indentured labor as punishment. This regime of restrictive usage rights means that only the privileged few get the newest and hottest gadgets and gear; the rest have to make do with regressively older versions of whatever it is they want.

GULAG ARCHIPELAGO

While not quite the police state that the Jovians enjoy, the Consortium wields a much less overtly restrictive hand when it comes to social control, though it is no stranger to exercising iron-fisted control when the situation calls for it. Most security in the Consortium is handled by private hypercorp forces. Direct Action and Gorgon—and their numerous subsidiaries—are both prominent here, but are far from the only ones. All security forces are answerable both to Oversight and the Hypercorp Council, though most matters are handled according to local habitat legalities. Consortium habitats are also held under the military protection of Direct Action and other Council-hired private military contractors.

The egocasting and body bank facilities on Consortium habitats are also typically operated by contracted service providers, though all such groups are subject to Oversight scrutiny and are required to share specific data. Visitors who legally egocast in are scanned and approved by security forces before transfer to the body bank facility or being released as an infomorph. If necessary, inbound egos are copied into a simulspace interrogation loop before their access is approved.

Persons caught violating any of the myriad of laws in the Consortium are usually stripped of their morphs and placed in accelerated-time simulspace or dead storage for the duration of their sentence. Once they've paid their debt to society in simulspace they are usually consigned to indentured bondage in order to build up the credit to pay off any fines (often severe) and reacquire a morph. In the Consortium, convicted criminals are sometimes denied biomorph resleeving privileges and must settle for living in a synth or a case. This has the happy (to the Consortium) benefit of inspiring most criminals to try and leave the Consortium or at least seek out less controlled areas such as Mars.

Relations with Other Organizations

The Consortium is not the only big fish in the pond; knowing their allies and enemies will help you understand how to deal with everybody in the playground.

Firewall

While it often seems that the most vocal Firewall agents hail from the outer system, Firewall agents are drawn from every faction of transhumanity. Firewall's ranks include a number of people originating from or embedded in the Consortium, each sharing the common goal of protecting the shattered remnants of transhumanity.

Officially, the Consortium denies that Firewall exists. Unofficially, an agent who is captured and identified can expect harsh treatment at the hands of Oversight and may possibly be turned over to Project Ozma and effectively disappeared. Though Firewall and the Consortium may share the same tactical goals in a given situation, our strategic goals are very often conflicting. Firewall has at times been able to use the competing agendas of different hypercorps and agencies within the Consortium to its advantage.

Autonomist Alliance

The ideologies and culture of the outer system autonomists represent a direct challenge—some might say a *threat*—to the core of hypercapitalism. The Consortium is well aware of this, and thus considers the future outcome of this conflict a critical affair. For now, their primary focus is on limiting the spread of the autonomists while expanding the Consortium's presence into the autonomist sphere of influence. While Oversight works hard to ensure that no autonomist cancers take root within the inner system, the Council pursues a plan of military buildup in the outer system, targeted probing and destabilization of autonomist strongholds and networks, and heavy-handed economic sanctions imposed on supposedly neutral third parties that have yet to come down hard on the Consortium's side.

Anarchists and Scum

The Consortium doesn't care much for the anarchist autonomist factions. They at best tolerate the groups of scum that travel between their habitats, but many in the Consortium take petty delight in causing the scum minor inconveniences, though the scum often find ways of turning the Consortium's interference and tricks against them. Ultimately the Consortium finds the anarchist ideology so at odds with its own beliefs, that it seems unable to believe their system of organization will survive long without collapsing. In the meantime, they do what they can to push them closer to that edge, awaiting the day they will swoop in and take over. Without law and order there is no marketplace and trade, without trade there is no civilization, without civilization transhumanity may as well give up on the future. The Consortium is most concerned, however, with the anarchists who promote direct action and resistance to hypercapitalism, and who actively organize to sabotage Consortium projects and foster rebellion. In response, the Consortium decries anarchists in general for supporting terrorism, listing several outer system anarchist groups on their terrorism watch list.

Extropians

The relationship between the Consortium and the Extropians is especially interesting. Many hyperelites and Extropians share core beliefs when it comes to ideas about free markets and opposing regulation and government interference, and some hypercorp leaders are not unsympathetic to anarcho-capitalist positions. The majority, however, think the Extropians are naive and will learn to toe the line one day. Though Extropian corps are allowed to operate in the Consortium just like any other, they are wary about Extropian ties to other autonomists. They are particularly opposed to the smaller anti-capitalist mutualist Extropian positions.

Titanian Commonwealth

Publicly, the Consortium portrays itself as the pre-eminent power in the system, magnanimously collaborating with other blocs—including the Commonwealth—for the betterment of transhumanity. Privately, Consortium military and political analysts cite Titan as the main impediment to Consortium expansion in the outer system. Titanian intervention in the Locus conflict was widely seen as the decisive factor in Locus remaining independent—ironic, given the anarchists put up a stiff resistance all on their own. The Consortium mentality, however, has an easier time identifying a large, unified force such as Titan as an enemy than a seemingly fractious movement like the anarchists.

Titan's successful democratization of the flow of capital and the zealous commitment of its citizens to this model, combined with its military strength, make it both an ideological and a strategic threat. The Consortium's approach so far has been to attempt containment and isolation. Experia and other media hypercorps wage memetic warfare, distributing media that portrays the Commonwealth as an expansionist entity seeking hegemony in the Saturnian system and beyond. Oversight employs agents provocateur outsystem, tasked with sowing ill will between the anarchists and their technosocialist neighbors. On the diplomatic front, overtures toward the Jovians are in part intended to pave the way for future joint military action against Titan.

For their part, the Titanians have not taken this lying down, bolstering their physical defenses, extending offers of mutual defense to major anarchist habs (and even in some cases influential individuals), and engaging in some memetic warfare of their own by promoting technosocialist memes within the Barsoomian movement.

Jovian Republic

Every playground has a bully, and the Jovian Republic is ours. Ideologically the Republic and Consortium are often at odds, though they both consider the Autonomist Alliance the larger threat. Currently a sort of détente exists between the two blocs, with a limited amount of trade and interaction occurring between them. The Republic is very strict about visitors from the Consortium, heavily censors transmissions and mesh traffic, and has outright banned certain hypercorps. Most of the ongoing trade involves military hardware and mining resources.

Lunar-Lagrange Alliance

The Consortium considers this old alliance to be a fading dinosaur, but it is still a major thorn in their side. They await the day it will collapse under its own internal contradictions and they can sweep up the useful pieces. Already dozens of LLA habitats have switched allegiance to the Consortium since the Fall. The LLA has proved remarkably tenacious, and Consortium attempts to undermine public nostalgia for Earth have met with greater opposition than expected. Memetic conflict over the new Martian homeworld and the reclaimer ideology continues unabated. One significant advantage the LLA lacks, however, is direct access to any Pandora Gates.

Morningstar Constellation

How much of a threat the Morningstar Constellation is depends very much on your point of view. Many of the powers within the Consortium believe that Morningstar will eventually see the error of their ways and seek permission to rejoin the Consortium, especially as the Consortium increases its dominance of inner system markets. Others view this as a terrible mistake, recognizing that with each day the Constellation grows more stable and slips further from Consortium influence. Though the Consortium is quite displeased with losing control of the Venusian terraforming plans, a vocal minority in the Consortium have proposed letting Morningstar do most of the hard work and laying the foundation to topple them when the time is ripe.

Morningstar's program of recruiting indentures away from the Consortium has also ruffled many feathers, inspiring some gerontocrats to push for more aggressive sanctions against the upstart bloc. Perhaps most dangerous to the Consortium agenda is the "free thinkers" reputation Morningstar is acquiring, a meme that provides the Venusians a good moral platform to oppose the Consortium agenda and destroy customer confidence in the future they are trying to sell. Recent attempts to undercut Morningstar's stability by flooding nearby markets with cheaper and higher-quality goods, made possible by the the Consortium's superior economies of scale, have been showing some positive results.

Tharsis League

The Consortium and Tharsis League seem to be perpetually quibbling, though most of the difficulties can be summed up in the form of management/worker relationships. To the majority of the Consortium, the League is a collection of hicks, Barsoomians, autonomist sympathizers, and assorted annoyances that just need to be appeased so they can get on with the job of terraforming the planet. The Consortium tries to restrain itself from invoking any measures that might be too repressive, not wanting to further seed rebellion and knowing that any atrocities might bring recent tensions to a boil. On the League's side, many are critical of the body for being too supportive of Consortium interests and prioritizing the hypercorps over the people of Mars. On the other hand, there are more and more people who see the League as "the voice of the people" and there is a growing movement within the League that is against Consortium governance and hypercorp interests altogether. The hydra-headed nature of the League makes it hard for the Consortium to apply definitive control, as there are so many voices and no clear leader. So while the League is not a specific threat, it ties up a disproportionate amount of resources to get a definite effect. However, several leaders do control large enough groups of the people that they can be useful tools to keep the populace in line if handled correctly. Adding fuel to the fire are Oversight reports that place Titanian arms and cornucopia machines at the sites of several recent raids.

The Factors

The alien nature of the Factors seems to make even the Consortium uncertain of how to proceed. "Caution" seems to be the buzzword in all Factor affairs, at least until the Consortium can get more of a grip on whether to consider them friend or foe. In the meantime, Oversight and various hypercorp concerns do everything they can to compile data on the Factors and suss out what they can about their technologies, capabilities, and motivations. Most importantly, the Consortium is interested in what the Factors *know*—about the TITANs, the exsurgent virus, the Pandora Gates, the Iktomi, other alien species, and any other threats or surprises that await us. The Factors are very good at avoiding questions, however, most likely because they are also still evaluating transhumanity and determining what they can charge us for sharing their secrets. Though the Consortium has had the most direct contact with the Factors of any power bloc, they are increasingly dismayed by the Factors' willingness to dismiss their assumed authority and deal with others directly (including individual hypercorps). Of particular concern are the repeated lectures the Consortium receives for making use of the Martian Gate and an indication that the Factors are favoring relations with the LLA more strongly as a result.

GAME INFORMATION



10

USING INNER SYSTEM LOCATIONS

We provide rules and advice for putting these locales to use:

Environmental Hazards: Things that will kill you or make life difficult. ■ p. 160

Secrets and Notes: Gamemaster-only information. ■ p. 171

Plot Hooks: Scenario and mission ideas. ■ p. 178



NEW GEAR

Items specific to the locations in this book:

New Morphs: New body options, from Lunar fliers to suryas. ■ p. 162

New Enhancements: Bioware, cyberware, and robotic upgrades. ■ p. 166

Survival Gear: For surviving inner system environments. ■ p. 167

Smart Animals: Critters common to Mars. ■ p. 168

New Robots and Vehicles: Getting around, inner-system style. ■ p. 168

GAME INFORMATION

This section provides rules on environmental hazards, new morphs, and new gear relating to the areas described in *Sunward*. It also includes a selection of plot hooks.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Some places within the inner system are extremely hostile to life.

THE SOLAR CORONA

The solar corona is an uninviting place for most life, and even most machines. Hotter than the surface of the sun, the temperature ranges from 1 to 3 million Celsius. Only biomorphs with special coronal adaptations (p. 164), such as the suryas, may survive here. Others will be destroyed by super-heated plasma and radiation almost instantly. Synthmorphs and vehicles require extreme heat shielding (p. 166) and radiation shielding (p. 167) to survive.

SOLAR FLARES AND CMEs

Characters caught unprotected during a solar flare or a coronal mass ejection (CME) will be subject to extraordinary levels or radioactive flux. While the magnetic fields and atmospheres of Earth and Venus provide protection, people caught in the solar corona, in space, or on the surface of Mercury, Luna, or an inner system asteroid will be exposed. The magnetic field and atmosphere of Mars provides little protection, putting Martians at some risk as well. Most space habitats, spaceships, and Martian habitats provide adequate shielding, though some older and smaller tin can habitats may require residents to take refuge in a specially shielded room for the duration of the flare-up. Common vacsuits and vacuum adaptation will not protect characters in space, though a hardsuit will. Systems for predicting solar flares and CMEs maintained by the argonauts and other entities are advanced and commonly provide plenty of warning. The farther away from the sun you get in the system, the less serious the threat becomes, though the entire inner system is part of the danger zone.

Guidelines for handling the radiation of flares and CMEs are given on p. 201 of the *Eclipse Phase* core rulebook. Gamemasters are encouraged to treat this threat as a plot device, particularly one that makes the characters' timing in a particular situation critical. The severity and effects of the radiation exposure are determined by the gamemaster as appropriate to the story.

MERCURY: A TERRIBLE PLACE TO VISIT

In some ways, Mercury is the most dangerous place in the solar system. Only Venus is hotter and only the outer planets are colder. Temperatures range from 430 C (800 F, 700 K) during the day to –180 C (–300 F, 90 K) at night. It lies closer to the sun than any other planet, and it lacks an atmosphere to shield out intense solar radiation.

In practical terms, this means that any character, bot, or vehicle caught on the day-side surface that isn't protected with cumbersome extreme heat shielding (p. 166) is going to burn or melt to ash in seconds. Even if shelter is sought, such as the shade of a crater wall, temperatures are likely to exceed anything they can withstand, leading to death/destruction in minutes (gamemasters needing to apply damage should start at 4d10 + 20 DV per minute, reduced by energy armor ÷ 2 (round down), and adjust from there as they feel appropriate). Likewise, radiation shielding (p. 167) is required for synthmorphs, bots, and vehicles that operate on Mercury's day side.

The surface of Mercury at night is much like being in space—there is no atmosphere to retain heat. The average night time temperature is –160 C (–260 F, 110 K). Synthmorphs and vacuum-adapted or vacsuited biomorphs fare fine, but any biomorphs lacking sufficient insulation will suffer from extremely low temperatures (see *Extreme Cold*, p. 161). Without equipment or bio-mods to breathe, they will also suffer asphyxiation (p. 194, *EP*).

Mercury's surface gravity is 0.38, counting as low gravity for rules purposes (p. 199, *EP*).

VENUS: HOT AND HEAVY

The carbon dioxide atmosphere of Venus is unbreathable to biomorphs, and so they require breathing equipment or implants, otherwise they suffer from breathing the toxic atmosphere (p. 201, *EP*) and/or asphyxiation (p. 194, *EP*).

Below the habitable layer of the aerostats, Venus's atmosphere rises rapidly in pressure and temperature as you descend to its hellish surface. The thick clouds of sulfur dioxide and sulfuric acid below the aerostats block visible light and are corrosive (see *Corrosive Atmospheres*, p. 201, *EP*). Biomorphs descending into these depths without proper equipment (such as a vacsuit or hardsuit) may encounter some of the same problems associated with deep sea diving: nitrogen narcosis, oxygen toxicity, high-pressure nervous syndrome, or even the bends if re-ascending. Light vacsuits will protect a biomorph to an altitude of 45 km, standard vacsuits to 40 km, and a hardsuit to about 35 km. Below that, hardsuits can withstand the

SOL-MERCURY
VENUS
EARTH
EARTH ORBIT
LUNA
MARS
INNER FRINGE
THE PLANETARY CONSORTIUM
GAME INFORMATION

pressure, but the temperature will fry the occupants. Unmodified synthmorphs, bots, and vehicles can safely descend to 35–40 km, below which they too succumb to the heat and pressure.

The surface of Venus has an average temperature around 470 C (880 F, 735 K) that varies little between day and night. Atmospheric pressure is over 90 times that of Earth's. Though the surface atmosphere is typically quite still, with occasional winds moving at only a few kph, the density of the air means the winds are slow but powerful. At visual wavelengths the surface is dark (the clouds block most light from above), and air pressure is strong enough to distort light so that the horizon is curved upward, as if the viewer were standing in a bowl. Only synthmorphs, vehicles, and bots equipped with extreme pressure adaptation (p. 167) and extreme heat shielding (p. 166) may survive in these environs. These adaptations make them incapable of functioning in lower-pressure environs. Though simple tools and other items with no empty spaces or gaps in their structure can also withstand the pressure, the acidic atmosphere will slowly corrode these items over time unless they feature corrosion protection of some kind.

The average Venusian surface temperature is above the melting point of metals such as lead, tin, and zinc. The extreme heat softens hard rock and common alloys, causing poorly designed structures to sag from their own weight over time. Though lava pools and flows on the surface are extremely dangerous, they are slow-moving and usually avoidable with care.

Venusian gravity is 0.9 g, quite close to Earth's.

EARTH: CLIMATE GONE WEIRD

Earth was already having climate troubles even before the Fall—or at least the transhumans on Earth were. Global warming had led to catastrophic climate change, with elevated sea levels, coastal flooding, melted glaciers, drought, desertification, biosphere collapses, and other issues. Though some of this was mitigated with new technologies and geoengineering projects, these megascale changes often simply created new problems of their own from unforeseen side effects.

The Fall made everything worse. Nuclear winter from strikes made against the TITANs (and sometimes rival states) cooled the planet but brought with it massive species die-offs. Radiation and biowar plagues spoiled the land and drove much flora and fauna extinct. Scouring TITAN nanoswarms finished the job, sometimes removing all biomaterial from an area, other times transforming it into something different and alien.

The real change wrought by the Fall, however, is the weather machine utility fog—nanobot swarms that float in the air and alter their properties to drastically impact local weather conditions. These weather swarms can alter the climate of an area in hours, sometimes minutes. Mix this in with the general chaos and changes wrought by global warming and the Fall, and you have an environment that simply can't be predicted. Places that were once temperate are now covered in ice and snowdrifts or scorching dunes of sand and ash. Tornadoes and lightning storms come out of nowhere, sometimes with a seeming intelligence of their own. Drought, flash floods, and raging wildfires take turns ravaging transformed landscapes.

In short, anything goes. Transhuman biomorphs can still breathe on Earth unaided, though this is not recommended to avoid the pollution and unpleasant stench afflicting many regions. Explorers entering some areas may need cold weather gear or protection from radiation. The occasional ash storms can be just as irritating as Martian dust storms (p. 162).

MARS: COLD AND DUSTY

Characters venturing into the Martian back country need to outfit themselves for extreme weather, dust storms, and other natural hazards. Equipment malfunctions, failure to come prepared, or being left to die of exposure (a favorite form of execution with some crime syndicates) can leave characters at risk from numerous environmental conditions.

CARBON DIOXIDE ATMOSPHERE

The Martian atmosphere is not yet breathable to biomorphs. Without the proper gear or implants, such characters will suffer asphyxiation (p. 194, *EP*). Characters with enhanced respiration bioware can breathe without assistance.

EXTREME COLD

Despite terraforming, Martian surface temperatures fluctuate between –50 C (–60 F, 220 K) and 10 C (50 F, 280 K) on average, though it can get significantly colder (to –80 or even –100 C) during the winter, at the poles, and at high altitudes. The average temperature is best described as "freezing."

Biomorph characters without proper cold weather gear suffer a –10 modifier on all tests after 1 Action Turn of exposure. After 3 Action Turns, exposed characters will begin taking damage. The exact amount of damage to apply is up to the gamemaster, though somewhere between 1 and 5 DV per minute is recommended, more for extremely cold conditions, such as being outdoors on Olympus Mons. A number of factors should be taken into account, such as the season and whether characters have sufficient protection. Vacsuits, cold weather gear (p. 167), vacuum sealing bioware, or temperature tolerance bioware with warm clothing are enough to protect biomorphs in most standard conditions. Synthmorphs, bots, and vehicles are typically unaffected by Martian temperature ranges.

Low Pressures

High altitude areas on Mars, such as volcanic calderas, have extremely low atmospheric pressure. While not quite a vacuum, operating in this environment is extremely uncomfortable and strenuous for biomorphs not in vacsuits. Depending upon altitude, characters suffering from low pressure take a –10 to –30 penalty (gamemaster's discretion) on all tests.

Dust Storms

Severe dust storms are accompanied by driving winds. Air travel is inadvisable (apply up to a –30 modifier on Pilot Tests, plus the effects of poor visibility). Ground traffic on unenclosed surface roads or in open country should also suffer a penalty between –10 and –30 for winds and poor visibility. Dust storms may completely disrupt some forms of communication, such as tightbeam laser transmissions. At the gamemaster's discretion, abrasive sands flung by the winds at high speeds may be damaging to exposed biomorphs (1d10 ÷ 2 DV) and may also cause breathing difficulties for characters who breathe the Martian atmosphere.

LUNAR FLIER BIOMORPH



New Morphs

This selection of morphs includes various designs generally only found in the locales specified. At the gamemaster's discretion, these may be allowed during character creation.

Lunar Flier (Biomorph)

This morph is a version of the exalt morph that has been adapted to fly in Earth normal air pressure as long as the gravity is 0.2 g or less. Though this morph is available on other low-g worlds and habitats, it was developed for and is primarily found on Luna. This morph resembles a typical exalt morph, except that it is lightly built, has larger lungs, and has feathered wings with a wingspan of 3 meters. The wings come out of the back torso and leave the morph's hands and wrists unhindered. The wings may also be folded behind the body.

Implants: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Clean Metabolism, Cortical Stack, Enhanced Vision, Wings
Aptitude Maximum: 30
Durability: 30
Wound Threshold: 6
Advantages: Flight (Movement Rate 8/40), +5 COG, +5 COO, +5 to two other aptitudes—player's choice
CP Cost: 35
Credit Cost: Expensive

Martian Alpiner (Biomorph)

Alpiners were a relatively common biomorph design on early frontier Mars, when temperatures and atmospheric pressure had not yet risen to present levels. Now they are found predominantly in the city of Olympus, where environmental conditions will always be incredibly harsh. Avid rock climbers and outdoor types also favor this morph, and in recent years it has enjoyed an unusual vogue among chic urbanites going for a rough-and-ready look without sleeving in the more de classe ruster morph.

Implants: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Direction Sense, Grip Pads, Low Pressure Tolerance, Oxygen Reserve, Respirocytes, Temperature Tolerance (Improved Cold)
Aptitude Maximum: 25
Durability: 40
Wound Threshold: 8
Advantages: +5 SOM, +10 Climbing skill
Disadvantages: Fast Metabolism trait, Planned Obsolescence trait
CP Cost: 30
Credit Cost: Expensive

Neanderthal (Biomorph)

This morph is based on fossilized Neanderthal DNA, uplifted and enhanced to transhuman equivalence. Neanderthal morphs look like muscular humans with a heavy bone structure, distinctively long skulls, heavy brow ridges, and weak chins. Pale complexions and red hair are common features.

Implants: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack
Aptitude Maximum: 30
Durability: 40
Wound Threshold: 8
Advantages: +5 COG, +5 INT, +10 SOM, +5 to one other aptitude of the player's choice
CP Cost: 40
Credit Cost: Expensive

Q-Morph (Synthmorph)

Quartz morphs, commonly called Q-morphs, are the primary shell design used for Venusian surface mining. Constructed from quartz and extremely durable alloys, Q-morphs look like four-legged crabs with two pairs of arms. The lower pair of arms is designed for strength, the upper pair for precision and dexterity. This morph is squat, exceptionally tough, and completely unable to function in temperatures below 250 C.
Enhancements: Access Jacks, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Direction Sense, Echolocation, Enhanced Vision, Extreme Heat Shielding, Extreme Pressure Adaptation, Mnemonic Augmentation, Radar, T-Ray Emitter, Wrist-Mounted Tools
Mobility System: Walker (2/4)
Aptitude Maximum: 30
Durability: 120
Wound Threshold: 24
Advantages: High Temperature Operation trait, 8 limbs, Claw Attack (DV 2d10), –5 COO, +10 SOM, +5 to one other aptitude of the player's choice, Armor 18/18
Disadvantages: Only works on the Venusian surface or in similar hot and high pressure environments
CP Cost: 100
Credit Cost: Expensive (minimum 60,000+)

Salamander (Biomorph)

Salamanders are a type of biomorph popular with Solarians. They share some of the physiological traits of suryas, but are unable to survive unprotected in the corona (requiring a solar survival suit, like other biomorphs), and are instead bio-engineered to survive in the protected vacuum of coronal habitats. Their skin is thick, hairless, vaguely reptilian, and mostly black in color, with gold and orange body patterning. Like suryas, salamanders communicate either via wireless transmissions or by "sunspotting"—using their chromatophores to shift light and dark patterns on their skin to form patterns easily comprehensible to other coronal morphs. Salamanders have a wiry, streamlined, swept-back sort of look, a combination of fey and monkey-like. Their heads are also somewhat reptilian, with reflective eyes, no nose, and no mouth. Their feet are prehensile, usable just like hands. They lack reproductive organs and capabilities and feature cyberware gas jets on their chest and back for maneuvering in zero g. Many Solarians who normally inhabit suryas will sleeve into salamanders if they need to use humanoid tools or interact with non-Solarians.

Implants: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Chameleon Skin, Enhanced Vision, Gas Jet System, Medichines, Oxygen Reserve, Prehensile Feet, Vacuum Sealing
Aptitude Maximum: 30
Durability: 60
Wound Threshold: 12
Advantages: Coronal Adaptation (solar metabolism only) trait, Limber (Level 1) trait, +5 COO, +5 INT, +5 to one other aptitude of the player's choice
CP Cost: 40
Credit Cost: Expensive

Steel Morph (Synthmorph)

This morph was developed by technicians and designers who are members of the Lunar synthmorph rights movement, the Steel Liberators. Middle-class Lunars who came out of poverty and continue to actively support the Steel Liberators sometimes choose this morph, despite the fact that this choice often results in them experiencing significant prejudice from biochauvinists.
Enhancements: Access Jacks, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Eidetic Memory, Mnemonic Augmentation
Mobility System: Walker (4/20)
Aptitude Maximum: 30
Durability: 40
Wound Threshold: 8
Advantages: +10 SOM, +5 COG, +5 to two other aptitudes of the player's choice, Armor 8/8
Disadvantages: Social Stigma (Clanking Masses) trait, Uncanny Valley trait
CP Cost: 50
Credit Cost: Expensive (minimum 30,000+)

Steel Morph (Masked Variant)

This version of the steel morph is equipped with the synthetic mask enhancement, making the shell look like a human biomorph. This version is uncommon, as most Steel Liberators view biological masking as a form of "selling out." It is used both by Lunars who are stuck sleeving into a synthmorph, but whom don't want to suffer discrimination, and by Steel Liberator activists looking to infiltrate biochauvinists and other opponent groups. Use the same stats as the steel morph, with the following changes:
Enhancements: Add Synthetic Mask (this negates the Social Stigma (Clanking Masses) and Uncanny Valley traits)
CP Cost: 55
Credit Cost: Expensive (minimum 40,000+)

Steel Morph (Liquid Silver Variant)

Designed as a top-end version of the steel morph, this shell's entire outer covering is composed of active nanomachines. A number of synthmorph performers use this shell's shape- and color-altering capacities as part of their acts. However, the fact that this morph can disguise itself as any other humanoid synthmorph, including the ubiquitous case morph, means that a

number of covert operatives and criminals also make use of this morph. This version of the steel morph cannot use a synthetic mask.

Enhancements: Access Jacks, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Eidetic Memory, Mnemonic Augmentation, Shape Adjusting, Skinflex, Wrist-Mounted Tools
Mobility System: Walker (4/20)
Aptitude Maximum: 30
Durability: 40
Wound Threshold: 8
Advantages: +10 SOM, +5 COG, +5 to three other aptitudes of the player's choice, Armor 8/8
Disadvantages: Social Stigma (Clanking Masses) trait, Uncanny Valley trait
CP Cost: 70
Credit Cost: Expensive (minimum 40,000+)

Sundiver (Synthmorph)

The sundiver is a synthetic morph designed for solar research and emergency rescue operations. Sundivers are sleek mechanisms, about six meters long. They look a little like ramjets, except for a pair of articulated arms that extend forward from the morph's pointed nose, allowing it to reach for and grasp objects. Because sundivers operate in the coronal environment, they are built to survive superheated plasma and shielded against radiation. Sundivers are equipped with a powerful electromagnetic propulsion system that allows them to skate along solar magnetic lines of force much like the surya do.

Enhancements: 360-Degree Vision, Access Jacks, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Enhanced Vision, Heavy Combat Armor, Mnemonic Augmentation, Radar, Reflex Booster
Mobility System: Thrust Vector (12/60)
Aptitude Maximum: 30
Speed Modifier: +1 (Reflex Booster)
Durability: 120
Wound Threshold: 24
Advantages: Coronal Adaptation, +5 COO, +10 REF (+20 with Reflex Booster), Armor 16/16
Disadvantages: Large Target combat modifier
CP Cost: 70
Credit Cost: Expensive (minimum 40,000+)

Surya (Biomorph)

Named for a Hindu sun deity, suryas swim freely in the sun's corona. Looking roughly like whales or orcas, suryas may reach lengths of ten meters or more. They generate powerful magnetic fields that shield them from solar radiation and heat, while allowing them to surf the solar wind and extract ionized particles. Strong bones and connective tissues protect against the crushing solar gravity. Beneath their thick hides are channels of liquid water interleaved with layers of fat which serve to shield the organism from harmful radiation. Engineered medichines repair tissue damaged by radiation and convert hydrogen ions into water. A surya's skin is an extraordinary organ, embedded with chromatophores that allow them to transmit alternating patterns of light and dark for communication. In addition, a lateral line runs down their sides, allowing them to detect the long-period sound waves that reflect off the sun's lower atmosphere and resonate through the corona's gas and plasma. Suryas traveling through the transition zone between the corona and the chromosphere use these vibrations to predict and avoid heavy solar weather.

Implants: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Chameleon Skin, Cortical Stack, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Lateral Line, Medichines, Vacuum Sealing
Aptitude Maximum: 30
Durability: 100
Wound Threshold: 20
Advantages: Coronal Adaptation trait, +10 COO, +5 REF, +5 SOM, +10 Free Fall skill
Disadvantages: Large Target combat modifier
CP Cost: 50
Credit Cost: Expensive (minimum 30,000+)

Venusian Glider (Biomorph)

The glider is designed to survive for many hours in Venus's unbreathable atmosphere. Tall and thin, with long, strong limbs and a lightweight build, this morph also features gliding membranes (p. 166) that allow it to soar through the upper Venusian atmosphere. It can even gain altitude by riding thermals (which it can see using its enhanced vision). Once Venusian terraforming efforts are complete, an upgraded version of this morph will be able to breathe normally.

Implants: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Enhanced Respiration, Enhanced Vision, Gliding Membranes, Grip Pads, Prehensile Feet, Respirocytes
Aptitude Maximum: 30
Durability: 30
Wound Threshold: 6
Advantages: Limber (Level 1) trait, +5 REF, +5 SOM, +5 to two other aptitudes of the player's choice
CP Cost: 40
Credit Cost: Expensive

New Traits

The following traits may be available to starting character morphs at the gamemaster's discretion.

Positive Traits

Coronal Adaptation (Morph Trait)

Cost: 30 CP

For biomorphs, this radical alteration enables the subject's metabolism to live off solar energy, using medichines to repair radiation damage. This same metabolism also generates powerful electromagnetic fields that protect the character from the intense temperatures and radiation in the coronal

environment and even enable the character to sail the solar winds. Morphs with this adaptation cannot survive outside the coronal environment (or similar environments) for more than a few days without extensive medical support. Coronal adaptation can only be applied to morphs that also have medichines (p. 308, *EP*).

For synthmorphs, this adaptation restructures the morph's composition with heat-resistant materials capable of surviving superheated plasma and shielded against radiation. The shell is also equipped with refractive metamaterials and a perfectly mirrored surface, giving it an albedo of nearly one. The reflective surface protects the wearer from well over 99% of the radiant energy that falls upon it, but a powerful cooling system and extensive radiation shielding are required for the minuscule percentage of energy that slips through. Generated electromagnetic fields also protect the morph and enable propulsion along solar magnetic lines.

This adaptation provides a +10 modifier to the biomorph's Free Fall skill tests in the presence of strong electromagnetic fields. It also provides 10 points of Energy armor against heat and electromagnetic-based attacks (such as lasers, microwaves, and plasma weapons, but not explosions).

High-Temperature Operation (Morph Trait)

Cost: 10 CP

This morph has been designed to operate only in high-temperature environments, enabling them to withstand temperatures up to 1,000 C. This morph loses 1 point of COO for every 5 minutes it spends at temperatures lower than 250 C, and 1 point of COO for every minute that it spends below 150 C. When its COO equals zero the morph becomes completely immobile. This same penalty is applied to all COO-based skill rolls. The morph's cyberbrain and mesh access still work in these circumstances, but the morph cannot physically move under its own power. Even if placed back in higher temperatures, if it was previously reduced to total immobility, the morph halves its COO and SOM (round down) until it has been serviced.

This trait may only be applied to synthmorphs. It provides 5 points of Energy armor against heat-based attacks (such as lasers, microwaves, and plasma weapons, but not explosions).

Negative Traits

Fast Metabolism (Morph Trait)

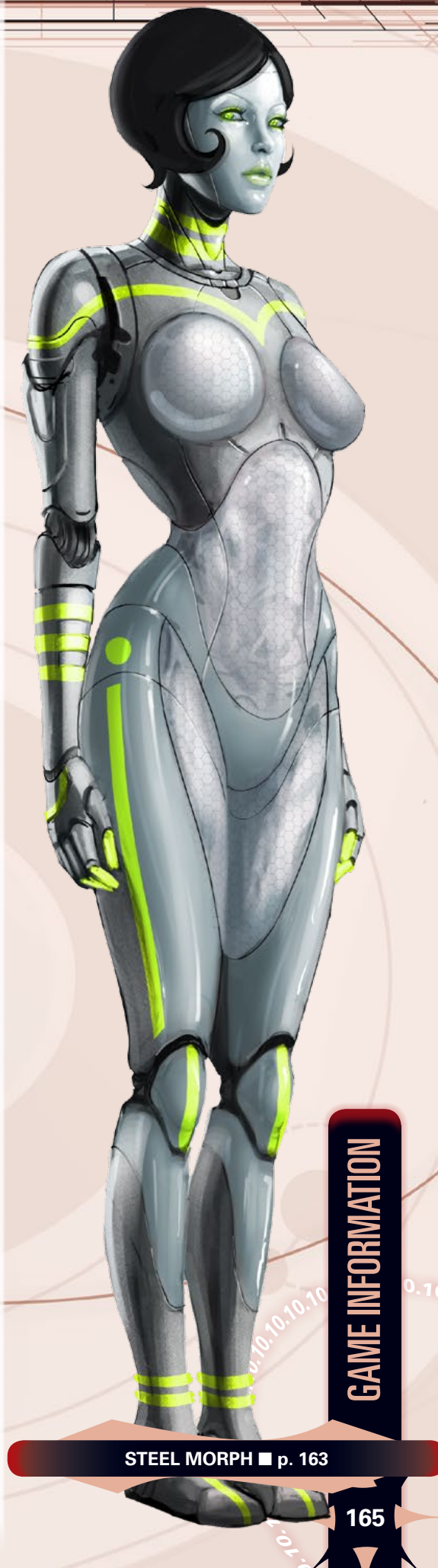
Bonus: 5 CP

The morph's metabolism runs hot, requiring the character to eat two to three times as much food as a normal character with similar body mass. Food tends to be plentiful and cheap in most transhuman settlements, but this trait can pose a problem in remote areas or when visiting settlements with limited resources. The character must plan ahead and pack enough food on expeditions. If the character is eating off their rep, they must expend two trivial favors each day for the additional food they require. If the character is unable to obtain enough food, they lose SOM at the rate of one point per day until they resume their usual caloric intake. This trait is only available for biomorphs (including uplifts and pods).

Planned Obsolescence (Morph Trait)

Bonus: 5 CP

The morph is a hypercorp model that requires periodic GSP (Genetic Service Pack) therapy. For every three months of game time, the character must spend credits equal to 10% the cost of the morph on GSP "upgrades." If they fail to do so, the morph's SOM is reduced by 5 until the character gets their GSP therapy. These penalties are cumulative over time (at 6 months, 9 months, etc.), but getting GSP therapy once removes all penalties. The character suffers no SOM loss if the majority of a given 3 month period was spent in hibernation, in a healing vat, or in some other form of metabolic suspension. The SOM reduction is due to low level neural degradation, minor tumors, joint pain, and other problems that crop up and express later as hypercorp genetic designers working on tight budgets and tighter deadlines race to release morph models with extra value-added features. While theoretically over many years this trait would lead to the early death of the morph, in game terms the morph stops accruing penalties when its SOM is reduced to 5. The character regains their normal SOM score if they resleeve. This trait is only available to biomorphs (including uplifts and pods).



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OPTIONAL RULE: MARTIAN MORPH OBSOLESCENCE

As a way of exerting economic control over Martian citizens, and particularly indentures, morphs sold via Martian hypercorps are often equipped with the Planned Obsolescence trait. In fact, as many as 70% of the biomorphs on Mars may have this negative trait.

Using this rule, most ruster morphs also come equipped with the Planned Obsolescence trait. This modifies their CP cost to 20 and their Credit Cost to High. Ruster morphs that do not come with this trait are assumed to be from either an open source or "premium" model series that lack this trait. Gamemasters should remember to take this trait and any lost SOM from failure to apply GSPs into account if a character tries to trade in this morph. ■

NEW GEAR

This gear is commonly used in specific areas of the inner system, as noted. At the gamemaster's discretion, it may be purchased during character creation just like other gear.

NEW BIOWARE

These implants follow all of the standard rules for bioware given in the *Eclipse Phase* core rulebook.

GLIDING MEMBRANE (PHYSICAL AUGMENTATION)

Gliding membranes are thin, muscular sheets that stretch from wrist to ankle, that allow the character to glide through the air. For human-sized morphs in standard Earth or Venusian gravity (1 g), these gliding membranes allow the glider to maintain a glide ratio of 10:1, so it can glide 10 meters for every meter of altitude it loses. In low-gravity environments, this ratio doubles to 20:1 or more. Gliding membranes provide a +10 modifier to Free Fall Tests made to cross long distances. Gliding membranes can also be used to ride thermal updrafts, allowing the morph to ascend to higher altitudes. Use the Flight skill to make tests when using gliding membranes.

Gliding membranes can be wrapped around the morph's arms, legs, and torso when not being used, allowing the morph to move and wear clothes normally when not gliding. **[Low]**

LATERAL LINE (ENHANCED SENSE)

A transgenic organ developed from aquatic creatures, a lateral line hears low-frequency sounds and can detect movement and vibrations through nearby liquids. Suryas use lateral lines to "hear" in the corona's plasma atmosphere. **[Low]**

LOW PRESSURE TOLERANCE (PHYSICAL AUGMENTATION)

The morph can tolerate extremely low atmospheric pressures, such as those found at high altitudes on Mars, with no ill effects. Morphs with this mod are also somewhat more resistant to vacuum exposure and are able to spend up to five minutes in hard vacuum without incurring damage. However, morphs without respirocytes or an oxygen reserve still suffer asphyxiation. **[Low]**

TEMPERATURE TOLERANCE (IMPROVED COLD) (PHYSICAL AUGMENTATION)

The morph is treated as having the Temperature Tolerance biomod (p. 305, *EP*), but with an even greater resistance to low temperatures. The morph can tolerate temperatures as low as –80 C without ill effects. **[Moderate]**

WINGS (PHYSICAL AUGMENTATION)

Wings enable the morph to fly at Earth/Venusian gravities if small (child-sized) and light, or at low gravities if human-sized or larger. Tests made while flying use the Flight skill. Most wing designs are transgenic and based on bat-wing physiology, so they may be easily folded when not in use. Though the Movement Rate depends on the morph in question and the particular design, a standard Movement Rate is 8/40.

Neo-avians have wings by default, as part of their physiology. **[Moderate]**

NEW CYBERWARE

These implants follow all of the standard rules for cybernetic implants given in the *Eclipse Phase* core rulebook.

The following bioware items from above are also available as cybernetics: gliding membrane, lateral line, temperature tolerance (improved cold), and wings.

GAS JET SYSTEM (PHYSICAL AUGMENTATION)

This cybernetic system implants nozzles in the morph's chest, back, and limbs, allowing it to maneuver in microgravity using vectored bursts of gas. It either inputs atmospheric gases through implanted intakes or draws gas from an oxygen reserve implant. This mod applies a +10 modifier to Free Fall Tests. **[Moderate]**

ROBOTIC ENHANCEMENTS

These alterations follow all of the standard rules for robotic enhancements given in the *Eclipse Phase* core rulebook and are only available to synthmorphs, vehicles, and bots.

EXTREME HEAT SHIELDING (PHYSICAL MODIFICATION)

This enhancement bolsters the synthmorph's tolerance to extremely high temperatures with heat-resistant materials, heat sinks, and bulky coolant

systems. This modification increases the morph's Durability by 25% while reducing its Movement Rate by half and modifying COO by –10. Morphs with this augmentation can withstand temperatures up to 500 C. **[Expensive]**

Extreme Pressure Adaptation (Physical Modification)

Morphs with this mod undergo serious structural reinforcement, enabling them to withstand pressure of up to 5,000 atmospheres. This modification increases the morph's Durability by 50% while reducing its Movement Rate by half and modifying COO by –10. **[Expensive]**

Radiation Shielding (Physical Modification)

This enhancement hardens the morph to exposure from electromagnetic and ionizing radiation. This will protect the morph in most situations that would be harmful to others, but at the gamemaster's discretion is only of limited effectiveness against extremely powerful sources of radiation (such as Jupiter's electromagnetic field) over prolonged periods. **[High]**

Survival Gear

The following gear may be of use in surviving some of the inner system's more extreme environments.

Breather

Martian breathers are the size of a small backpack and use solar cells, nanobots, and a water reservoir to turn atmospheric CO2 into O2 and methane (CH4). A CO2 scrubber also recycles the oxygen. As long as the character wearing the breather spends two hours a day in sunlight and feeds the unit a kilo of water a day (chunks of ice or even permafrost work fine), they may subsist on the Martian atmosphere indefinitely. Another part of the unit continually extracts atmospheric nitrogen and adds it to the mix as a buffer gas. A backup power supply powers the unit for up to 24 hours in darkness or dust storms, and a backup tank holds up to 8 hours of breathable air. **[Low]**

A version with a larger backup power supply, good for up to a week, is also available. **[Moderate]**

Recycling-conscious travelers can add a bladder that fills up with methane for use in fueling vehicles. The output from a breather used by an average-sized person over the course of day is enough to fuel a mars buggy for an hour or two. **[Trivial]**

Cold Weather Gear

This is a full suit of clothing for extreme cold weather, including boots, jacket, pants, gloves, face mask, and goggles, with apertures and clips for breathing equipment. Much less bulky than its antique equivalents, these suits allow full maneuverability. They come in two versions: basic (for rusters and alpiners) which protects up to –50 C, and survival (for most other morphs), which protects up to –100 C. The survival version is partially pressurized for morphs operating in the extreme low pressures of the Martian highlands. **[Trivial for basic, Low for survival]**

High-Dive Suit

High-dive suits are individual spacesuits specifically designed to withstand atmospheric re-entry and allow the occupant to reach a planet's surface safely. They feature a liquid-cooled thermal regulation system, a closed-loop oxygen system with chemical scrubbers, small gas jets, a drogue chute, and a conventional parachute. High-dive suits are made of fullerene with a refractory metal coating and an opaque sapphire faceplate. A mini-oxygen tank and rebreather provide the wearer with 3 hours worth of breathing air. A high-dive suit compares to light body armor in terms of general protection, though its refractive glazing and heat-transfer systems provide extra protection against energy weapons (AV 13/10). Because of its thermal dampening systems (see p. 313, *EP*), a high-dive suit also makes its wearer difficult to spot with thermal sensors (–30 modifier to Perception Tests), unless they are entering atmosphere, in which case they are difficult to miss (+30). Note that high-dive suits were designed for (unpowered) descent only—they are not equipped for any sort of powered flight. **[High]**



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Mercury Suit

These modified hard suits feature extreme heat and radiation shielding, enabling an occupant to survive on Mercury's surface under both day and night conditions. They have all of the standard features of hard suits (p. 334, *EP*) except that they can withstand temperatures of –200 to 500 C. The extra protection hinders the wearer's movement; reduce Movement rate by half and apply a –10 modifier to all COO-linked tests. **[Expensive]**

Pressure Tent

This is a collapsible shelter for two or four people, plus gear. Pressure tents contain heating and will inflate with a breathable atmosphere using a breather-like device. The two person version has a cost of **[Low]**; the four person version **[Moderate]**.

Solar Survival Suit

Solar survival suits are hard suits with special modifications, equivalent to the coronal adaptation trait (p. 164). The survival suit also possesses an extremely powerful emergency beacon, strong enough to punch through the sun's electromagnetic background roar. The built-in maker provides enough air, water, and food for the wearer to survive indefinitely. Solar survival suits provide armor of AV 20/15.

In the event that a survivor is subjected to a coronal mass ejection, the suit's effectiveness is drastically reduced. Subjected to high density plasma with temperatures reaching tens of millions Kelvins, the suit will only protect the wearer for a few seconds at best—just long enough for a survivor to access their cortical stack's emergency farcaster before being vaporized. **[Expensive]**

Venus Suits

Venus suits have the same characteristics as Mercury suits, plus they are specially modified to protect a biomorph from the crushing pressure on Venus's surface. **[Expensive]**

Smart Animals

The following smart animals are commonly used on Mars.

Police Baboon

Police baboons are transgenic Cape baboons modified for obedience, heightened intelligence, and longer attention spans. Still of only (enhanced) animal intelligence, they are typically fielded in groups of two to seven with police handlers. Working as a police baboon handler is an extremely dangerous job, as the baboons have been known to turn as a pack upon their handler in mentally stressful situations, such as when attacked with sensory or nerve agents, or more rarely when subjected to psi or encounters with exsurgents. Nonetheless, baboon units remain popular with police commanders for tracking, crowd control, and guarding prisoners. Baboons are frighteningly strong, and a pack of them can easily immobilize most prisoners—or tear them apart, if commanded. They are sometimes equipped with body armor and clubs. They are adapted to breathe Martian atmosphere. [High]

Implants: Enhanced Respiration, Enhanced Vision, Light Bioweave Armor (AV 2/3), Neurachem (Level 1), Temperature Tolerance

Attacks: Bite (DV 1d10 + 2), Club (DV 1d10 + 3), Unarmed (DV 1d10 + 1)

Rust Hound

Rust hounds are large, transgenic dogs. In addition to being able to breathe the Martian atmosphere, they're able to smell it and are sometimes used as trackers. [High]

Implants: Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Light Bioweave Armor (AV 2/3), Neurachem (Level 1), Temperature Tolerance, Toxin Filters

Attacks: Bite (DV 1d10 + 2)

Robots and Vehicles

These shells follow the rules for bots and vehicles given in the *Eclipse Phase* core rulebook.

Cargo Hauler (Groundcraft)

These freight-hauling trucks are commonly used to carry goods to isolated rural habitats and terraforming operations on Mars. Powerful and rugged, they are equipped with smart tires for handling tricky off-road situations. Their interiors are pressurized, heated, and provide life support for biomorphs unequipped to breath Martian atmosphere. **[Expensive]**

Flying Car (Aircraft/Groundcraft)

These highly-efficient, methane-powered, turbofan vectored-thrust vehicles are common on Mars, especially in the cities and larger settlements. The

SMART ANIMALS

SMART ANIMAL	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR	LUC	TT	IR	SKILLS
Police Baboon	5	10	15	15	5	15	5	60	1 (2)	30	6	45	10	4	20	Climbing 40, Clubs 30, Fray 40, Freerunning 50, Intimidation 50, Perception 30, Scrounging 30, Unarmed Combat 50
Rust Hound	5	10	15	15	5	15	15	60	1 (2)	30	6	45	30	4	60	Fray 50, Freerunning 30, Intimidation 30, Perception 60, Scrounging 30, Unarmed Combat 50

vehicle is the size of a small sedan, and the fans fold into the body when not in use, enabling it to also operate as a ground car. On the ground, they have a maximum velocity of 180 kph on roads, but only 60 kph off-road. Flying car cabins are pressurized, heated, equipped with radar and a radio booster, and provide life support for biomorphs unequipped to breath Martian atmosphere. **[Expensive]**

Security Model: Used by police and security forces, this model has higher speeds, a weapons turret, better armor, and off-road capabilities. **[Expensive, Minimum 30,000]**

Ground Car (Groundcraft)

Mars is one of the few places in the solar system where actual cars can be found, reminiscent of pre-Fall Earth. Martian cars are small and economical, however, made for inner-city travel, and are rarely used outside of major habitats. **[Expensive]**

Interceptor (Robot)

Interceptors are robotic spacecraft that are used as part of the cordon around Earth. Clearly of cutting-edge design, interceptors have no external markings to indicate their manufacturer, which suggests that they are deployed by a Planetary Consortium military-tech project. Interceptors are extremely fast, extremely agile, very well armored, and heavily armed. They carry multiple lasers and railguns on swivel-mounts to fire in any direction and are equipped with a missile launcher and explosive missiles. Attempts by scavengers and other parties to capture interceptors have so far failed due to a built-in self-destruction system—the magnitude of the blast suggesting an anti-matter charge. **[Not Available]**

Enhancements: +10 COO, +10 SOM, 360-degree Vision, Enhanced Vision, Lidar, Heavy Combat Armor, Medichines, Neurachem (Level 2), Oracles, Radar, Structural Reinforcement, T-Ray Emitter, Weapon Mounts with railgun machine guns with armor-piercing ammo, 2 particle beam bolters, and a missile launcher loaded with HEAP missiles.

Martian Maglev Trains

These trains use magnetic levitation systems for propulsion. Passenger and sleeper cars are airlocked, pressurized, and heated, whereas cargo cars are not, except for cars handling sensitive cargo. While basic systems (doors, windows, entertainment systems, makers) are meshed and may be controlled or exploited per standard mesh rules, control systems (life support, brakes, acceleration, magnetic dynamos, security doors) are on an air-gapped hardwired network and require physical access to hack. **[Not Available]**

Martian Rover (Groundcraft)

The rover is a mobile living unit used by Martian nomads and terraforming work teams. This large



vehicle features eight large smart wheels and cramped living quarters to accommodate up to six people, with bunk beds, a kitchen, and bathroom. Rovers are also equipped with a fabber, mobile lab, headlights, radar system, external cameras, radio booster, cargo trailer hitch, drone-launching rack, and a two-person airlock to protect the internal pressurized environment. Barsoomians are known to decorate and mod their rovers in creative fashions. **[Expensive]**

Martian Trike (Groundcraft)

This three-wheeled motorcycle is used for travel in the Martian wilds. An unpressurized pod protects the passengers from Martian storms, while smart wheels allow the bike to traverse difficult terrain. The trike is equipped with a headlight, radio booster, and radar. **[Moderate]**

Passenger Airship (Aircraft)

A major method of intra-aerostat transport on Venus, these huge vehicles are 250 meters long and 40 meters in diameter and can carry up to 100 passengers and 20 tons of cargo. Powered by small fusion reactors, these vehicles can operate for weeks at a time, but most journeys take less than 5 days. **[Expensive]**

Passenger Balloon (Aircraft)

These delicate constructions of lightweight polymers and aerogels are primarily used by tourists and the wealthy on Venus. The spherical balloon is both the vehicle's source of lift and also the source of breathable air for those passengers that require it. The passenger cabin is a small room, 6 meters in diameter, with limited facilities, attached directly to the bottom of the balloon. **[High]**

Scorcher (Robot)

Scorchers are a tank-like mining shell used by both corporate mining operations and nomadic sifters on Mercury. Scorchers are designed to operate on Mercury's terminus and night-side, but they can also survive the planet's day-side extreme heat conditions. Due to their extensive heat and radiation shielding and cooling systems, scorchers are heavy and slow. Four sturdy legs carry their bulky 3-meter frames, while two manipulator arms allow the morph to carry and manipulate tools. Four additional tool-arm sockets allow for customized equipment such as shovels, drills, pneumatic hammers, and similar mining/construction tools to be attached. **[Expensive]**

Enhancements: +10 SOM, Access Jacks, Enhanced Vision, Extra Limbs (6–10), Extreme Heat Shielding, Industrial Armor, Radar, Radiation Shielding, Sonar, Wrist-Mounted Tools

Siftrunner (Groundcraft)

Similar to the Martian rover, this mobile habitat is designed for use by sifters and other surface miners on Mercury. It has the same features as the rover, except that it is also designed to withstand the extreme

ROBOTS

ROBOTS	MOVEMENT RATE	MAX VELOCITY	ARMOR	DURABILITY	WOUND THRESHOLD	DEATH RATING	MOBILITY SYSTEM
Interceptor	12/200	NA	20/20	150	50	300	Thrust Vector
Scorcher	2/4	12	25/20	200	40	400	Walker

VEHICLES

VEHICLES	PASSENGER CAPACITY	HANDLING	MOVEMENT RATE	MAX VELOCITY	ARMOR	DURABILITY	WOUND THRESHOLD	DEATH RATING
Cargo Hauler	2 (more as cargo)	0	4/32	120	20/15	250	50	500
Flying Car	4	0	8/40 (ground) — (air)	30/180 (ground) 200 (air)	20/10	150	30	300
Flying Car (Security Model)	4	+10	8/60 (ground) — (air)	40/200 (ground) 220 (air)	20/20	200	40	400
Ground Car	2	+10	8/40	180	20/10	150	30	300
Martian Maglev Train	30–60	0	4/40	500	20/15	150	30	300
Martian Rover	6	0	8/32	100	20/15	200	40	400
Martian Trike	3	0	4/40	100	15/10	60	12	120
Passenger Airship	100	–20	—	100	5/5	300	10	350
Passenger Balloon	10	–30	—	100	—/—	20	5	30
Siftrunner	6	0	8/32	80	30/15	200	40	400
Venusian Hauler	—	–10	2/16	80	30/20	200	40	400

temperatures on Mercury's surface and carries extra radiation shielding. **[Expensive]**

Venusian Hauler (Groundcraft)

This tungsten-tracked flatbed cargo hauler is designed to transport Q-morphs, mining equipment, and mined goods across the harsh Venusian surface. It is built from materials designed to withstand the heat and temperature, equivalent to the High-Temperature Operation trait (p. 165). It has no passenger compartment or life support; Q-morphs and mining bots ride like cargo along with everything else. [Expensive]

Other Secrets and Notes

The following ideas expand on some of the material introduced in earlier parts of this book. As always, gamemasters should feel free to alter or even ignore this material as best fits their campaign settings—especially if they know their players have read this section of the book.

Mercury's Antimatter Factories

Mercury's proximity to the sun, and the excess amounts of energy this provides, makes the planet an ideal place for energy-intensive processes: particularly antimatter production. As noted in the text, several antimatter factories exist on or in orbit above Mercury. Each consists of multiple particle accelerators (for slamming atoms together) and enormous solar arrays for collecting energy. The antimatter must be stored in special magnetic containers, as any contact with physical matter will result in an explosion. Antimatter is valuable as a high-energy fuel, particular for spacecraft antimatter rockets. Its destructive capabilities, however, mean that antimatter facilities are very heavily secured and transported antimatter is carefully regulated, tracked, and guarded.

Firewall keeps a close eye on entities capable of antimatter production and any possible breaches in antimatter security that might cause amounts to go missing. Since the Fall, there have been an unfortunate amount of such incidents, though these have been carefully concealed and hidden from the public.

Venusian Exsurgents

Active exsurgent nanoplagues cannot survive on the Venusian surface; they are swiftly destroyed by the extreme heat and pressure. No morph will ever be infected by a nanoplague in that environment. However, during the Fall, one of the TITANs experimented with the limits of adaptation of the xenomorphs it was creating. To that end, it created several dozen xenomorphs adapted for life on the Venusian surface that remain active to this day. These beings would swiftly die if they attempted to exist in the lower temperatures and pressures of the aerostats—they cannot survive above an altitude of 15 km, and they cannot long remain at that altitude. These exsurgents have built no cities or large structures and are far too small for orbital radar scans to notice.

These xenomorphs are squat, wide humanoids with blunt hands and flexible feet that lack toes. They use sonar and radar instead of sight and have a potent command of both psi-chi and psi-gamma abilities. They do not hate other transhumans, but consider transhumanity to be mentally broken and desire to repair their minds and spread their own inhuman knowledge. These xenomorphs are unable to reproduce and are intent on not being found.

Firewall is aware of one incident in which it suspects some type of exsurgent-spawned xenomorphs may have played a role. In this incident, a small group of exsurgents raided a mining camp that had been shut down, but that was still equipped and lightly staffed. Problems with the mining equipment had forced the mining hypercorp to call for a full refit, during which it transferred away the tele-operating miners. Eight technicians sleeved in Q-morphs remained, refitting the mining gear.

During the raid, the xenomorphs killed one technician and stole several pieces of mining equipment. They covered up their activities with a small explosion. The cause of this explosion remains unknown, but is assumed to be further evidence of the faulty equipment, which the miners had recently purchased. Unwilling to create an incident, the mining corp covered up the details and took efforts to silence the witnesses. It does, however, remain on active guard against any more signs of sabotage.

Currently, the exsurgents are examining how to adapt their stolen technology so that it can create basilisk hacks to reprogram the minds of miners, transforming unsuspecting transhumans into unknowing allies. This process has been difficult so far, however, and with limited resources the exsurgents will need to steal more equipment before they can complete this plan.

While the xenomorphs cannot spread nanoplagues on the surface and would swiftly die in any environment remotely habitable by transhumans, their twisted bodies contain several carefully sealed pockets of dormant nanoplagues that activate if placed in an environment safe for ordinary transhumans. These nanoplague pockets exist for two reasons. First, part of the reason the TITAN placed exsurgents on Venus was to have them ready to spread nanoplagues onto Venus once it was terraformed. Second, The TITAN also hoped to spread nanoplagues to anyone who killed or capture a xenomorph and transported its remains up to the aerostats for study. Only a very careful scan of the interior of one of these xenomorphs will reveal the dormant caches of nanoplagues. The Venusian xenomorphs do not know about the caches of dormant nanoplagues in their bodies, but would be more than happy to exploit these nanoplagues, even at the cost of their lives.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL	MOX
+5 (20)	–5 (10)	+5 (20)	— (15)	— (10)	+15 (30)	+10 (25)	—

INIT	SPD	LUC	TT	IR	DUR	WT	DR
70	1	—	—	—	80	16	120

Movement Rate: 4/16
Skills: Clubs 50, Fray 40, Perception 50 (60), Psi Assault 50, Unarmed Combat 60
Notes: Armor (18/18), Direction Sense, Extreme Heat Adaptation, Extreme Pressure Adaptation, Psi (Level 2), Radar, Sonar
Attacks: Club (DV 1d10 + 5, AP 0), Unarmed (DV 1d10 + 3, AP 0)
Suggested Sleights: Ambience Sense, Grok, Mindlink, Onslaught, Psychic Stab, Static (Gamemasters should feel free to alter these choices for their games)

Aliens on Venus

Other than the Pandora Gates, which almost everyone believes to have been created by the TITANs, there is essentially no evidence for alien visitation in the solar system. However, that's because no one has looked for any evidence on the Venusian surface. Aliens visited the solar system approximately 300 million years ago, but time has left no record of their visit—except on Venus. The aliens could not visit Venus, but they sent a few exceptionally durable probes there—probes that tough enough that they still survive, though they have been completely inactive for more than 300 million years. For unknown reasons, the aliens removed all evidence of their presence from the solar system. They even included self-destruct mechanisms in all of the Venusian probes. However, in two of these probes, the self-destruct mechanisms failed and the aliens were unable to recover the probes due to the difficulties involved in reaching the Venusian surface. Each probe is now a somewhat worn and corroded 20 cm diameter sphere with 50 cm legs. Internal examination immediately reveals the probes are not made by transhuman technology and they are clearly very old. While their discovery would set off a careful survey of the Venusian surface, nothing else will be found. Whether these probes carry anything of interest is entirely up to the gamemaster, though their value simply for scientific research is immense, so they make excellent macguffins around which various parties and factions would compete.

Secret Aerostats

Gamemasters seeking to explore the idea of hidden aerostats in the Venusian atmosphere can make use of these suggestions.

Cloud 9

The aerostat known as Cloud 9, home to 1,500 morphs, is an illegal manufacturing facility that develops and manufactures restricted technologies including both weapons and unrestricted AGIs. Although the station is controlled by a small group of criminals linked to the Night Cartel, it also has secret but close ties with Egonomix, a software hypercorp that specializes in complex systems, for whom they perform research on both AGIs and incapacitating inputs.

Egonomix exchanges data with Cloud 9 using quantum farcasters. Occasionally Egonomix researchers farcast a fork down to Cloud 9 to engage in research and monitor developments there. The Egonomix reps who work with Cloud 9 do their best to ignore the weapons and contraband research and production. In fact, Egonomix policy is to have their personnel stripped of any memories of Cloud 9 when they are no longer needed.

When Cloud 9 requires supplies, Egonomix makes certain that one of their shuttles or the automated delivery capsules that regularly visit the Venusian aerostats goes off course and is either lost in the clouds or has brief engine troubles that cause it to fall deeper into the clouds. Egonomix also has an ongoing program to develop a near perfect model of Venusian weather patterns. In addition to being able to sell the program to the Morningstar government when it is completed, this project provides Egonomix with an excellent reason to send probes and survey vessels into the deeper portions of the Venusian atmosphere. A few of these Egonomix ships deliver and drop off specially shielded natural buoyancy containers that float in the Venusian atmosphere until Cloud 9 retrieves them. Cloud 9 delivers examples of its work in similar containers that Egonomix and other shuttles retrieve.

Cloud 9 currently delivers their weapons and weapon designs using a similar system of quantum farcasters communications and automated probe drops with arms smugglers, some of whom are based on the Gerlach orbital habitat. Demand for weapons is on the rise, however, and so the Cloud 9 cartel has begun putting pressure on Egonomix to use their shuttles and automated delivery pods to carry these weapons. Egonomix has so far refused. If faced with the threat of Cloud 9 ceasing to work with them, however, Egonomix will agree to allow these shipments. If Egonomix was found to engage in arms smuggling as well as unlicensed cognitive and AGI research, their entire Venusian operations and staff would be in jeopardy.

Egonomix is also a competitor with Cognite, and they both take an avid interest in each other's secret research. Should Cognite learn of Egonomix's relationship with Cloud 9, they might wish to steal it, or take knowledge of it public to damage Egonomix's credibility. On the other hand, the Cloud 9 cartel may look to sell their research to Cognite if Egonomix fails to comply with their weapon shipment demands.

Markov's Hide

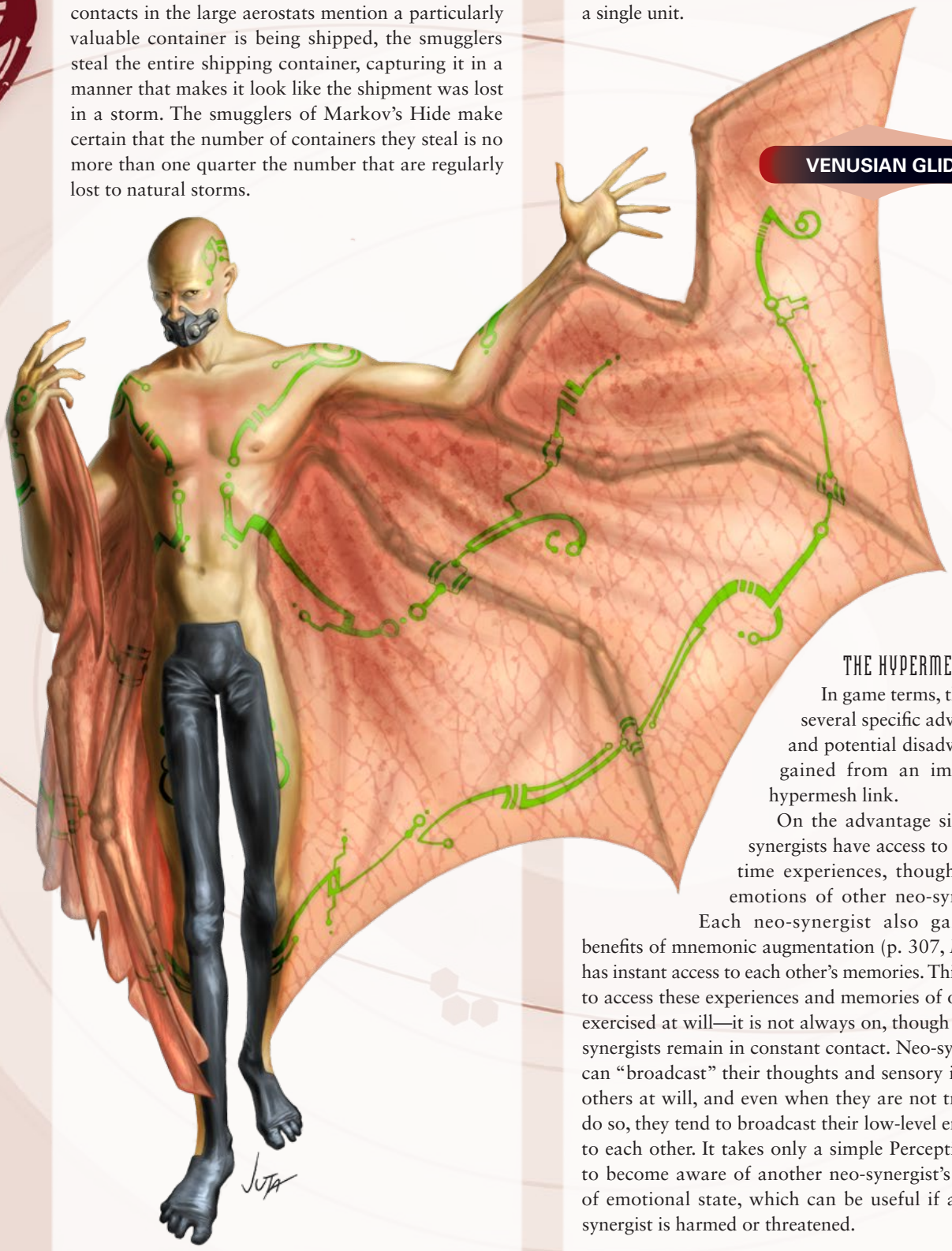
The other major hidden aerostat is home to 200 morphs and is known as Markov's Hide. It exists as a base for aerial pirates and transfer point for stolen and smuggled goods. Several Venusian aerostats manufacture valuable cutting-edge electronics and biologicals, including prototypes and gear made with

highly specialized equipment. Working with contacts who are employed shipping legitimate cargo to orbit or other habitats, the smugglers on Markov's Hide arrange for additional merchandise to be included with shipments that are launched during periods of high electrical activity. Specially designed air vehicles from Markov's Hide intercept these transport containers, remove the additional goods, which were previously recorded as damaged or lost, and send the container on its way, without anyone else becoming aware of their efforts. Occasionally, when their contacts in the large aerostats mention a particularly valuable container is being shipped, the smugglers steal the entire shipping container, capturing it in a manner that makes it look like the shipment was lost in a storm. The smugglers of Markov's Hide make certain that the number of containers they steal is no more than one quarter the number that are regularly lost to natural storms.

THE NEO-SYNERGISTS

The neo-synergists are based in Octavia and comprise a moderately wealthy collective that has been responsible for several valuable technological developments. While stories circulate about the inhumanly brilliant transhumans linked via a potentially dangerous and unsafe hive mind, the reality is quite different. The neo-synergists share a mindspace with each other, but they retain their individual identities. The primary benefit of the link is an ability to plumb the group's combined knowledge and experience and act as a single unit.

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THE HYPERMESH LINK

In game terms, there are several specific advantages and potential disadvantages gained from an implanted hypermesh link.

On the advantage side, neo-synergists have access to the real-time experiences, thoughts, and emotions of other neo-synergists. Each neo-synergist also gains the benefits of mnemonic augmentation (p. 307, *EP*) and has instant access to each other's memories. This ability to access these experiences and memories of others is exercised at will—it is not always on, though the neo-synergists remain in constant contact. Neo-synergists can "broadcast" their thoughts and sensory input to others at will, and even when they are not trying to do so, they tend to broadcast their low-level emotions to each other. It takes only a simple Perception Test to become aware of another neo-synergist's change of emotional state, which can be useful if any neo-synergist is harmed or threatened.

In terms of sharing knowledge and experience, each neo-synergist gains a +5 COG bonus while linked to their hypermesh mind-state. Additionally, neo-synergists almost always take advantage of teamwork (p. 117, *EP*) on Task Actions, calling on the skills and know-how of others in their hypermesh. The maximum modifier from teamwork is raised from +30 to +50 for neo-synergists.

The level of intimacy the hypermesh provides comes with certain disadvantages, not the first of which is the inability to keep secrets from or deceive other neo-synergists. Gamemasters who wish to play up the creepiness and prototype nature of the neo-synergists are encouraged to add other drawbacks and side effects. These can range from intermittent periods of distraction as the neo-synergist is involuntarily entranced by the thoughts, emotions, and experiences of others in the hypermesh to a loss of the sense of self from so much intimate contact with others, potentially resulting in mental stress, derangements, and even long-term disorders. Not every subject takes to the mesh mind equally well, and new neo-synergists may freak out at the invasiveness and lack of privacy or become overwhelmed by the input from so many minds on the hypermesh, losing the inability to discern individual neo-synergists from each other.

One noticeable side effect exhibited by many neo-synergists is a type of "personality leakage" that occurs as individual neo-synergists start expressing personality traits, microexpressions, and other kinesic traits of others in the hypermesh. This quirk can be noted with a Kinesics Test. When it comes to identifying a neo-synergist in a new morph, however, or even just reading the intent or nonvocal/emotive communication from a neo-synergist, the gamemaster can apply a modifier from –10 to –30, depending on the severity of the personality leakage at that particular time.

The shared mindspace of the hypermesh only applies when the neo-synergists are actually meshed together. This mesh acts as a virtual private network within the local mesh, but is not hackable by conventional means. Neo-synergists who are cut off from this mesh lose the COG and Task Action bonuses until they are relinked. If cut off from the hypermesh for a long period (more than 2 hours), they suffer a –5 COG penalty due to distraction and depression until reconnected. If cut off for an extended period (more than a day), they suffer mental stress (1d10 DV). If they remain disconnected for longer, they may suffer additional stress at the gamemaster's discretion.

More to It?

The possibility remains that there is more to the hypermesh than meets the eye. Rumors of neo-synergists engaging in strange, secretive projects, speaking in unknown languages, and exhibiting other unusual behaviors have some worried that the hypermesh might be under some sort of external influence, or that the neo-synergists have some sort of hidden agenda. Gamemasters who wish to exploit this may play up the mystery and oddities. There may be rumors of things going quite bad with new neo-synergists—until they are properly "absorbed" by the group mind, that is. Perhaps the ability to keep secrets from other neo-synergists is a skill that must be learned, something that long-term synergists are already expert at.

Player Character Neo-Synergists

The numbers of the neo-synergists continue to grow, but prospective members can only be accepted by a majority vote of the existing members. Because the members work so well together, such votes are often unanimous or at least close to it. With few exceptions, all new members are highly-intelligent scientists, engineers, technicians, or physicians whose interests parallel those of the existing neo-synergists.

It is not recommended that player characters be allowed to play neo-synergists, for the simple reason that by being part of the group mind-state they have immediate access to the skills and memories of dozens of others—not to mention allies at their beck-and-call. Under certain circumstances, however, playing a neo-synergist could be an intriguing part of an adventure or campaign, particularly if the goal is to infiltrate the neo-synergists and find out what the real story is. In this case, the gamemaster should carefully balance the pros and cons of being part of the group mind-state.

Getting to Earth

A journey to the ruins of Earth can be an adventure unto itself. Doing so is not easy, but there are several methods that characters can exploit.

Running the Barricade

The most basic method of bypassing the killsat cordon is to simply take a fast and/or heavily armored ship and try to blast right through it. This method is dangerous and has a high risk of failure. The network of killsats, interceptors (p. 169), and other defenses is high tech and lethal. Scavengers and reclaimers have tried various tricks over the years, with limited degrees of success. These include assaulting the barricade from different points at once, swarming it with a bunch of small and fast craft, using an armada of high-signature drones as decoys, or even trying to "clear a path" by pushing an asteroid or comet through and using it as cover. Certain black market vendors claim to sell "maps" of the barricade with routes and points of insertion that are guaranteed to provide the best chances, though these claims are dubious at best.

If this method is chosen by the characters, it is recommended that the attempt to run the barricade be played out as a dramatic scene rather than a full-on combat. While Piloting, sensor, and defensive weapons tests can be made by the characters, gamemasters should be wary about making the lives of the entire team depend on a couple of dice rolls. These tests should primarily be used to heighten tension and determine the degree of the success the characters

have in punching through. For example, the dice rolls can be the difference between breezing through with little damage to a forced crash-landing or even abandoning ship in the midst of an atmospheric entry.

If the gamemaster wants to reinforce that bad plans have consequences, of course, then by all means give the characters a difficult challenge and enforce the results. Dedicated transhumans will hopefully have the resources to try again, or try a different approach, once they have resleeved.

HIGH DIVES

Perhaps one of the best tricks employed by groups attempting to get down to Earth is to use a barricade run as cover. In this scenario, the group plans for their ship to be destroyed, but the characters jump free or eject right before this occurs and "space-dive" down into the atmosphere in high-dive suits (p. 167). The advantage of this plan is that the high-diving characters appear to be debris from the destroyed craft. This approach is not without risks, not the first of which is correct timing or the chance of an impact with actual debris thrown from the destroyed spacecraft. The defensive cordon is also wise to this trick and is known to target larger pieces of debris. If nothing else, however, a high-dive jump can be considered an emergency measure if a serious attempt to run the barricade fails.

SPACE ELEVATORS

As mentioned in *Lack*, the fiction piece at the beginning of the *EP* core rulebook, one of the space elevators on Earth remains intact. Though it is largely believed to be nonfunctional, this is a ruse. It is in fact deactivated, but a dedicated team with the proper planning and know-how could theoretically reactivate the climber shuttle cars. The spaceport station at the elevator's terminus is well-guarded, and the elevator itself is actively protected from debris, presumably by the Planetary Consortium or whatever entity is keeping the elevator in repair. The spaceport itself is far above the orbital altitude of the defensive cordon.

Rather than reactivating the elevator and climber shuttles, a more discrete team could simply take advantage of the elevator's cable and catch a ride down using a makeshift shuttle or platform of their own. This would require serious advance planning!

EGOCASTING

It is entirely possible that some egocasting stations still remain active on Earth and might be capable of accepting inbound egocasts. This would allow intrepid infomorphs to beam themselves down to Earth and possibly even resleeve if they could find an automated resleeving facility or body bank. A method such as this is intensely risky, however. The receiving egocaster could simply be a TITAN trap to ensnare more uploads, or the station's mesh could be infected with TITAN/exsurgent virii.

Rumors abound that some reclaimer and scavenger groups have established base camps down on Earth, complete with egocasting facilities. Any egocasts to and from Earth would have to bypass the defensive cordon's jamming signals. It is also possible that groups such as Firewall, Oversight, or Project Ozma may have established similar dedicated facilities.



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Lunar Mass Drivers

One of the more audacious and risky plans proposed by those seeking to get to Earth is to catch a "ride" in or on one of the mass driver shots still launched from Luna to bombard signs of TITAN concentrations and activities on Earth. If even feasible, such a plan would require infiltrating the systems that launch the mass driver bombardments to somehow hide or attach a survival capsule to one of the projectiles. Hitchhikers would need to be equipped with acceleration suits or couches in order to survive the mass driver's accelerative forces without bring pulped. Though the defensive cordon allows these missiles through, the hitchhikers would need some way of abandoning the missile, surviving atmospheric entry, and/or slowing their descent. In theory, a well-timed ejection in high-dive suits (p. 167) could work. In theory.

Getting Off Planet

Once the characters have reached Earth and accomplished whatever they came down to do, they face the challenge of getting off the planet again. If they managed to bring an intact ship down to the surface, they can try to leave the same way. Even if they didn't, they might be able to find an intact ship somewhere on Earth or perhaps repair/salvage one damaged during the Fall or left behind by scavengers. In many ways, this is more challenging than getting down to Earth, as ships have a much more significant chance of being detected on their way up and will be slowed down by Earth's gravity well. The defensive cordon is also dedicated to ensuring that nothing from the TITANs escapes off the planet, so attempts to launch off-world are exceptionally difficult.

If the characters have no cargo to bring back and don't mind leaving their bodies behind, then egocasting is a considerably better option. Functional egocasting facilities still survive on Earth, while others could be repaired—or the characters could bring their own. The cordon attempts to jam and interfere with transmissions originating from Earth—they are wary about the TITANs broadcasting infections—but the effectiveness of these measures is up to the gamemaster. The most sure-fire way of egocasting off-Earth is to use a neutrino transceiver, as these transmissions cannot be blocked.

Anticipating these challenges and difficulties, the characters' mission could be considered one-way right from the start. Firewall and other groups have been known to send down operatives (often alpha forks) with no means of getting back once their objective is completed. Sometimes these missions are taken on voluntarily, sometimes the operatives won't realize that their ticket is one-way until it is far too late. Awareness of a suicide mission is mentally stressful to even veteran agents, and appropriate mental stress should be applied (1d10 SV recommended).

Survivors on Earth

As mentioned in the *Earth* chapter, there may be millions of survivors still existing on Earth. Though the Planetary Consortium steadfastly denies this claim and will do their best to divert attention or cover up such inconvenient facts, anyone making the journey may indeed run across them. Though some of these may be post-apocalyptic survivalist bands eking out a bleak existence, surviving from monster machines and other threats in a devastated wasteland, others might be well-hidden and -equipped colonies tucked away in deep mountain holdouts, isolated stations, or deep undersea. Some of these may be under imminent threat from TITAN machines, others may be in risk of failing due to sepsis or running out of resources, while still others may not want to be found, content to live out their lives as hidden brinker colonies.

More numerous than physical survivors are the frozen sleepers and infomorphs of those who failed to escape during the Fall. The TITANs harvested many of these sleepers, and others died when their facilities failed or fell victim to nuclear fallout, rampant nanoswarms, or other catastrophes. Yet many others survive in peaceful cryogenic sleep.

Dangers on Earth

Aside from the unpredictable and rapidly-shifting climate (p. 161) on Earth and lurking risks like nanovirii (p. 384, *EP*) and biowar plagues, there are many other dangers that explorers can face. Remaining TITAN war machines (pp. 382–382, *EP*) are the first of these, still active and common in many areas, particularly urban environments. These machines are known to actively hunt down transhumans and forcibly upload them, for purposes unknown. On occasion, however, they have been so engrossed in alien projects of their own devising, they have ignored transhumans entirely.

Perhaps just as numerous are the exsurgents—transhumans infected and transformed by mutating strains of the exsurgent virus (pp. 362–370, *EP*). Many of these are still transhuman in outward appearance and demeanor, but their minds belong to alien intelligences. Others have been transformed into various xenomorphic forms and are no longer even remotely human. As a rule, these exsurgents are hostile to transhumans, and will seek to overpower and forcibly upload those they come across. Like the TITAN machines, many are engaged in their own unusual activities and projects, whether that merely be maintaining a community of thriving exsurgents or building some type of weapon or spacecraft to escape off-world. Those that can pass for unaffected transhumans have been known to pose as survivors in order to lure unsuspecting scavengers and reclaimers to their doom.

Most dangerous of all, however, are the autonomous nanoswarms (p. 383, *EP*). These intelligent micro-machines are near-unstoppable opponents, often lying as invisible traps for careless prospectors (thus the necessity of maintaining

working nano-detectors). Others are identifiable by the strange effects they have on the environment, the unusual machines they build, or the otherwordly creations they artistically devise and leave behind, like monuments to some alien gods.

As noted, gamemasters can find details on these threats in the core rulebook. Further exploration of various threats on Earth will occur in upcoming *Eclipse Phase* sourcebooks.

Dormant Lunar Nanoplagues

Unlike both Mars and Earth, Luna was an exceptionally poor environment for the TITANs' nanovirus attacks. While a nanovirus attack on New Mumbai transformed it into a TITAN-controlled hive, during the Fall several missiles from Earth carrying exsurgent nanoplagues struck Luna. Fortunately, all of these missiles landed on the barren Lunar surface and so had no effect. Lunar rock lacks all but the smallest traces of hydrogen and several other elements needed for the most active strains to construct devices from raw materials. Also, most of the Lunar surface is rarely visited and so these attacks infected no one. However, small swarms of various nanoplagues remained in place after the TITANs fled the solar system. Most of these swarms have since been destroyed by the intense solar radiation experienced by the Lunar surface. However, in crevices shaded from sunlight, small quantities of these nanoplagues wait in a dormant state, ready to activate and spread whenever they encounter a supply of raw materials. Several times a year, some morph or automated surveyor stumbles onto a small pocket of one of the nanoplagues and the robot or morph is transformed into some type of exsurgent (pp. 362–370, *EP*). Strict decontamination procedures prevent anyone or anything carrying active nanoplagues into any Lunar habitat. As a result, the primary danger is to travelers on the Lunar surface and anyone that they encounter.

Dormant nanoplagues lying on the Lunar surface are completely undetectable from more that a meter away as long as they remain inactive. Even close up, they can only be found by using sophisticated and highly specialized sensors so the threat is difficult to detect and almost impossible to eliminate. Because they are dormant, nanodetectors will only spot them if given a direct sample or once the plague has become active. The vast majority of infections result in a morph—or more commonly a small robot drone—being transformed into a deadly killer.

New Mumbai Containment Zone

The developments with a potential exsurgent threat in the NMCZ are left deliberately vague and open to gamemaster speculation. As indicated in the text, a group of exsurgents seems to have been deep enough to survive the initial blast and robust enough to deal with the subsequent radiation. Since that time, the exsurgents have been waiting … and changing. They may simply be growing in number, they may be breeding new exsurgent types, or they may be growing together psychically (if not physically) into some sort of psi-epsilon-enhanced hive mind. If this alien mind mass continues to grow, its async abilities could extend further, possibly even threatening one of the three small Lunar settlements that are within 1,000 km of the ruins of New Mumbai.

TITAN Quarantine Zone

The TQZ on Mars is very similar to Earth in terms of potential TITAN/exsurgent threats (see *Dangers on Earth*, p. 176), though there has not (yet) been an active amount of weather-affecting nanoswarms. There is also less in the way of active exsurgents or large exsurgent communities—most of the danger explorers will encounter comes in the form of TITAN machines or autonomous nanoswarms.

Wild Artificials

Despite—or perhaps, because of—the lessons learned with the TITANs, there has been a small explosion of experimentation with low-level (non-sapient) AIs on Mars, typically shelled in robotic forms. Much of this experimentation has been with creating non-standard forms of AIs, often with poor results. Some of these projects have been abandoned, others have escaped, leading to a small population of "wild artificials"—bots with weird and unusual animal-level intelligences. Some of these have formed together in actual packs, like robotic dogs. These wild artificials are sometimes a threat to transhumans, whether from poor/glitched programming or mistaken intent. Gamemasters are encouraged to be creative when devising wild artificials. A sample is provided below.

Collectors

Collectors are small, fast, agile, and cat-sized bots programmed with animal behavioralisms for scavenging and hoarding. Enough of these have been found in the streets of Elysium that it seems likely that someone is manufacturing them and

WILD ARTIFICIAL

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL	INIT	SPD	DUR	WT	DR	LUC	TT	IR	SKILLS
Collector	5	20	15	20	5	5	5	70	1	15	3	30	—	—	—	Blades 40, Climbing 60, Fray 50, Freerunning 50, Perception 30, Scrounging 60, Unarmed Combat 40

intentionally setting them free. Collectors scurry about on spider-like legs with grip pads across any available surface, collecting any small objects that strike their interest. They seem to have a fondness for shiny electronics and other powered items, and more than one Martian has set down an item only to have a collector snatch it up and make off with it before they can be stopped. Collectors hoard the items they scavenge in rat-like warrens they presumably scrape out themselves. They have been known to attack transhumans when cornered or prevented from taking something they really like. Their forelimbs have painful pincers for grabbing and retractable blades with which they can cut.

PLOT HOOKS

The following collection of short scenario ideas and plot seeds is provided to help gamemasters incorporate elements of *Sunward* into their *Eclipse Phase* games.

THE SUN, VULCANOIDS, AND MERCURY

- The Planetary Consortium's Oversight wants to get their hands on a respected nuclear physicist, for reasons unknown. The scientist, on the run, has resleeved in a surya morph and gone to ground among the Solarians. Firewall sends a team to infiltrate the coronal culture, find the scientist first, and determine why Oversight wants him so badly.
- Firewall learns that one of TerraGenesis's Venusian hypercorp partners is using a research project as cover to smuggle something from an exoplanet back into the solar system—and they want to know what it is.
- Planetary Consortium sensors have detected that something was launched from the Egg—the artifact left behind by the Factors in Mercury orbit—but they lost track of it as it descended down to Mercury's surface. The race is on between different factions to find what was launched first—and figure out what the hell it might be.

VENUS

- A string of mining bot and surface shell disappearances and accidents in and around a particular crater on Venus's surface has both the mining corp and Firewall concerned. The characters are sent down to the surface to investigate further.
- A famous Consortium artist has been alerted to the fact that someone is taking advantage of Venusian IP laws to distribute unauthorized copies of a particular piece the artist produced. The artist doesn't care about the piracy, but the piece in question was finished during the Fall and was left behind on Earth—with no copies or records surviving, as far as the artist knows. Considering the piece a personal best, the artist pulls in some social network favors and calls on the characters' unique skill sets to track the pirate down and find the original piece, presuming they have it.
- The characters are taking an airship journey between aerostats, scheduled to last several days. On the first day, however, the pilot (a largely ceremonial oversight job, given the craft's AI) is murdered in a grisly fashion, with signs pointing to the culprit being an exsurgent. The characters must find the monster in their midst and trust the AI to pilot them safely to their destination.

EARTH

- A group of argonauts has learned that a prominent theoretical physicist, thought to have died during the Fall, was in fact placed into cryogenic storage back on Earth. They hire the characters to find a way down to Earth to find the sleeper, reanimate them, and rescue them—or at least their ego.
- Firewall asks the agents to infiltrate a reclaimer cell of which they are suspicious. Shortly after the agents join, the reclaimers find evidence of a colony of survivors on Earth's surface, and decide to send a mission down to make contact. Firewall urges the characters to volunteer for the job, to ensure the reclaimers don't bring anything dangerous back.
- The characters wake up in an automated resleeving facility, with no memory of how or why they got there. When they venture outside, they are shocked to find themselves on Earth and surrounded by dangers.

EARTH ORBIT

- A scavenger craft engaging in a salvage job in Earth orbit has run into difficulties and lost control. Their orbit is decaying, bringing them perilously close to the interdiction zone, where the killsats will destroy them. The characters happen to be on another ship in the vicinity, but they are bound to be surprised by the scavengers' true cargo when they respond to the distress call.
- A Firewall proxy has somehow angered Nav Garson and his Organization syndicate. The sentinels are dispatched to retrieve the proxy before Garson learns anything he shouldn't. The methods they use—negotiation, infiltration, brute force, or other—are completely up to them, but time is critical.
- Sugali Ali, the Pirate King of Fresh Kills, has a fresh lead on some very interesting

salvage—possibly TITAN tech. Problem is, it's located in a derelict habitat that was destroyed during the Fall—and from which no scavenger team has successfully returned.

LUNA

- The characters are in a Lunar habitat when news breaks out that there has been some type of TITAN (possibly exsurgent) infection set loose in one of the habitat's neighborhoods. As panic, rioting, and civil unrest break out all around them, the characters find evidence that the "infection" is in fact nothing of the kind—though it may be cover for something more sinister.
- Questions arise when a prominent biochauvinist muckraker is assassinated and the Steel Liberators are blamed. Things get weird when the corpse is examined, however, and the demagogue turns out to have been sleeved in a synthetically-masked steel morph. Were they an agent provocateur or self-delusional? And why were they killed?
- An Omnicor whistleblower turns to the characters for help in going public with evidence that Omnicor is working on nanotechnology based on captured TITAN nanoplagues. When evidence turns up that the whistleblower may in fact be a Starware agent, the characters must determine the truth of the matter.

MARS

- Word reaches Firewall's ears of a nomadic sufi exhibiting previously uncatalogued async abilities. The sentinels are sent to determine if this is a new variant, separate from the Watts-MacLeod strain, but they aren't the only ones on the trail. Cognite has also sent agents with instructions to bring the strain back for investigation.
- A new narcoalgorithm is making the rounds in Little Shanghai, but this one has a dangerous twist. It seems to hit many users with a basilisk hack that infects them with an exsurgent virus variant. Victims are known to seek out and disable other synthmorphs in order to steal their cyberbrains, hacking them together for some unknown purpose into a mass mind, typically driving the occupants crazy.
- The Oaxaca-Maartens family is looking to cover up a potential scandalous murder involving one of their younger nephews. As it turns out, this socialite's muse is in fact an experimental AGI system developed by Experia. When the AGI goes on the run, the characters must track it down.

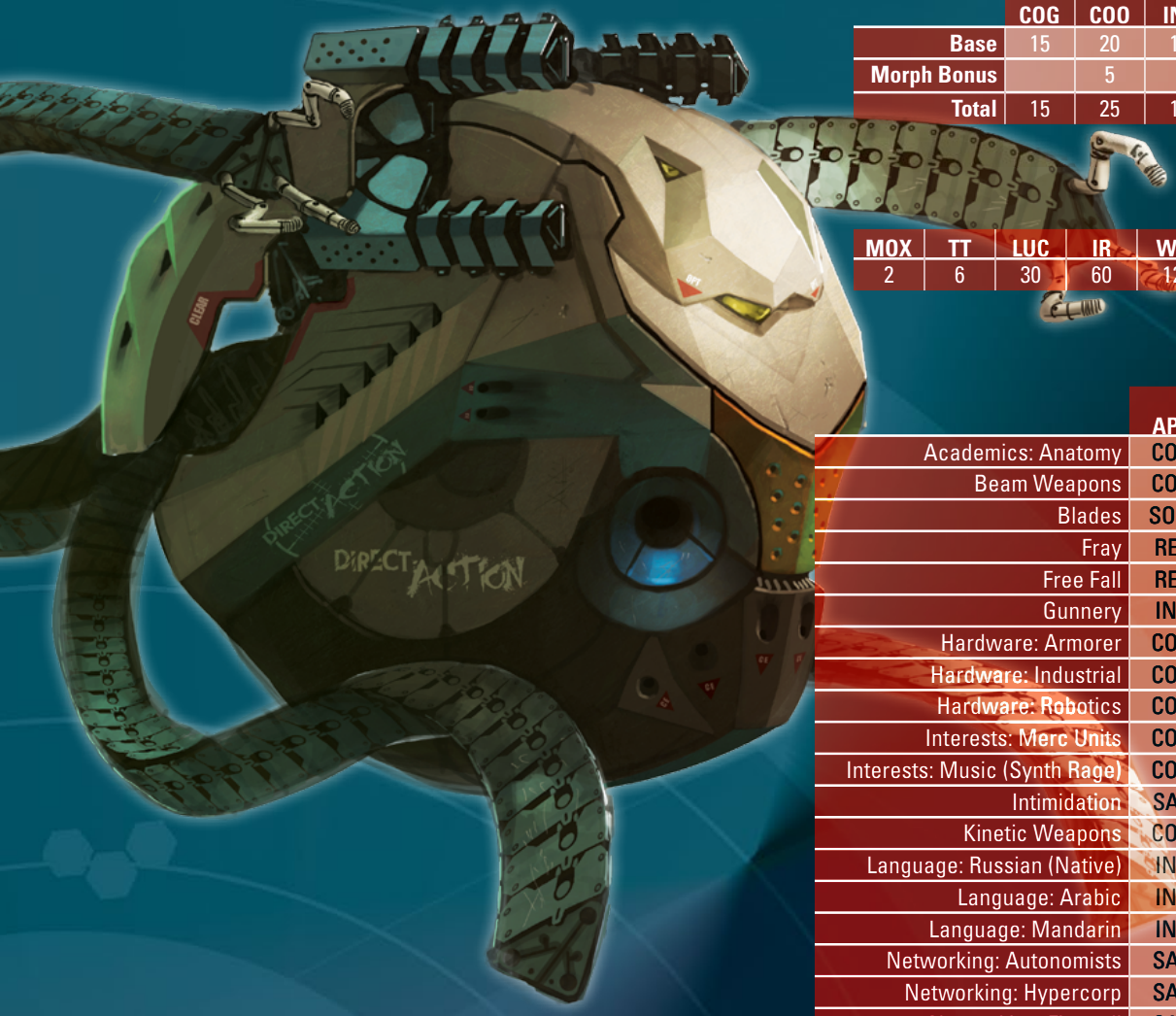
THE INNER FRINGE

- The exsurgent-infected Ze mercs on Eros habitat were thought to have been wiped out long ago. A new sweep by Red Zone forces on the station, however, uncovered a previously-hidden weapons cache—and accidentally freed the exsurgents trapped within. The hunt is on to track the exsurgents down before they wreak more havoc or spread their infection.
- Firewall has reason to believe that the Batistas are harboring an unusual TITAN artifact in their Lonely Mountain habitat. The characters have the opportunity to infiltrate the station as part of a gathering of hyperelites invited for a specific private function.
- A mundane face-to-face negotiation between triad factions on Qing Long has gone horribly awry, and now the cortical stack of one of the 14K triad's senior members is missing. Tensions build and war threatens to break out between the triads as the 14K blames the Shui Fong for stealing the stack, while the Shui Fong blame the Big Circle Gang. The characters are sent in to defuse the situation and find the missing stack before a bloody syndicate war engulfs the colony.

THE PLANETARY CONSORTIUM

- A Firewall crow investigating past exsurgent virus outbreaks makes an alarming discovery, which strongly suggests that a candidate about to be appointed to a seat in the Ministry is in fact an exsurgent sleeper agent, working their way into a position to inflict the utmost damage. The sentinels are sent to investigate the threat and uncover the exsurgent if necessary.
- The characters are visiting a small Consortium habitat when they accidentally stumble upon evidence that the entire station is an immense field trial experiment run by Cognite, using nootropics and mandatory psychosurgery to control the population's mental states. If the characters are alarmed and seek to foil the program, they discover that an alarming percentage of the station's residents had previous sociopathic tendencies and are now much "happier" and more stable.
- Oversight has uncovered a secret Firewall operation, carefully concealed within a hypercorp's infrastructure. The agents are scrambled for damage control—erasing data Oversight has acquired, rescuing arrested personnel, and otherwise charring any evidence of Firewall activity. If they screw up, Project Ozma is likely to be drawn in, in which case they'll really be in trouble.

DIRECT ACTION MERCENARY



APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	15	20	15	20	10	20	15
Morph Bonus		5		20		10	
Total	15	25	15	40	10	30	15

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
2	6	30	60	12	60	120	8 (11)	1 (2)

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Anatomy	COG	45		45
Beam Weapons	COO	40	5	45
Blades	SOM	60	10	70
Fray	REF	50	20	70
Free Fall	REF	25	20	45
Gunnery	INT	55		55
Hardware: Armorer	COG	55		55
Hardware: Industrial	COG	35		35
Hardware: Robotics	COG	50		50
Interests: Merc Units	COG	50		50
Interests: Music (Synth Rage)	COG	55		55
Intimidation	SAV	35		35
Kinetic Weapons	COO	70	5	75
Language: Russian (Native)	INT	90		90
Language: Arabic	INT	60		60
Language: Mandarin	INT	45		45
Networking: Autonomists	SAV	35		35
Networking: Hypercorp	SAV	60		60
Networking: Firewall	SAV	30		30
Perception	INT	25		25
Pilot: Groundcraft	REF	60	20	80
Profession: Security Ops	COG	60		60
Profession: Squad Tactics	COG	65		65
Protocol	SAV	40		40
Research	COG	20		20
Seeker Weapons	COO	45	5	50
Unarmed Combat	SOM	30	10	40

Background: **Lunar Colonist**
Faction: **Hypercorp**
Morph: **Reaper**
Motivations: **+Hypercapitalism +Thrill-Seeking -Anarchism**

TRAITS
Ego: Brave
Morph: —

REP
@-rep: 45
c-rep: 85
i-rep: 40

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Reaper Heavy Combat Armor [16/16] ■
Primary Weapon: Automatic Rifle with Smartlink (200 rounds regular ammo, 200 hollow point, 100 RAP, 100 proximity) ■
Starting Credit: 450 ■
Implants: 360° Vision, Access Jacks, Anti-Glare, Basic Mesh Inserts, Combat Armor (Heavy), Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Cyberclaws, Extra Limbs (4), Magnetic System, Mnemonic Augmentation, Pneumatic Limbs, Puppet Sock, Radar, Reflex Booster, Structural Enhancement, T-Ray Emitter, Weapon Mount (4, articulated) ■
Gear: Backup Insurance (1 month), Monofilament Sword, Muse, Portable QE Comm, Railgun Automatic Rifle (200 rounds regular ammo), Seeker Rifle with Smartlink (Frag and High Explosive Seekers), Tactical Network Software ■

Direct Action sends war machines like you wherever they are needed to perpetuate the image that everything is in control. That could be pacifying a habitat rebellion, making a display of strength to a rival faction, hunting pirates, or handling exhuman pest control. Some assignments merely involve protective services, like guarding a space convoy or providing overwatch for an important hypercorp summit, but you prefer to be called directly into action, when the shit has already hit the fan and you don't need to worry about collateral damage. You've seen your share of exsurgent outbreaks too. Most people cannot imagine what is out there or what you have fought against. Your contract forbids you to talk about it and Direct Action pays princely sums for you to keep your mouth shut. What matters more to you than money, though, is having someone who can cover your back. ■

"Ever seen a reaper in action? Bloody poetry in motion that is! Let me show you."

EARTH SURVIVOR

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	15	20	10	20	15	15	15
Morph Bonus						5	
Total	15	20	10	20	15	20	15

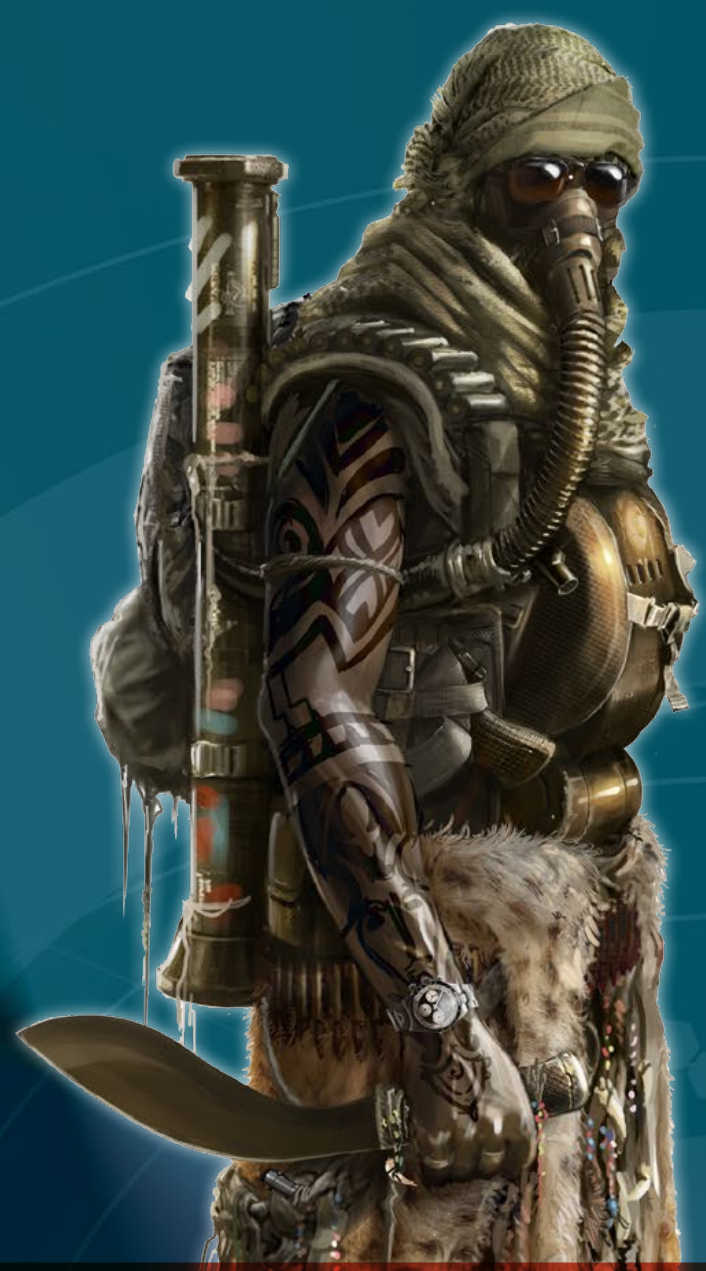
STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
3	6	30	60	5	30	45	6	1

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Geology	COG	40		40
Animal Handling	SAV	35		35
Beam Weapons	COO	35		35
Blades	SOM	40	5	45
Climbing	SOM	30	5	35
Deception	SAV	40		40
Demolitions	COG	55		55
Fray	REF	65		65
Freerunning	SOM	35	5	40
Hardware: Electronics	COG	30		30
Hardware: Industrial	COG	30		30
Infiltration	COO	45		45
Infosec	COG	40		40
Interests: Earth History	COG	50		50
Interests: Resistance Enclaves	COG	55		55
Interests: Hypercorps	COG	55		55
Interests: TITAN Tech	COG	50		50
Interests: Transhuman Culture	COG	45		45
Interfacing	COG	30		30
Kinetic Weapons	COO	60		60
Language: English (Native)	INT	80		80
Medicine: Paramedic	COG	40		40
Networking: Hypercorp	SAV	35		35
Networking: Ecologists	SAV	65		65
Networking: Firewall	SAV	60		60
Perception	INT	45		45
Pilot: Groundcraft	REF	45		45
Pilot: Spacecraft	REF	45		45
Profession: Resistance	COG	60		60
Profession: Survival	COG	65		65
Scrounging	INT	30		30
Seeker Weapons	COO	50		50
Swimming	SOM	30	5	35

You survived the Fall ten years ago, but like so many others, you did not make it in time to a spaceport or egocasting facility to get rescued. You were left behind, struggling for survival in a world turned into an unpredictable wasteland, inhabited by ravaging war machines and nanoswarms. You are a survivor, skilled in improvising, escaping dangerous situations, and patching equipment and electronics. You adapt quickly to new situations. Your mind is focused on getting to the end of the day, the next shelter, or the next meal instead of making plans for the future. At night, you hide in the derelict subway stations, bunkers, and safe havens where transhuman civilization still ekes out an existence. By day, you stalk through the wilderness, scrounging deserted cities for clothing, food, or ammo, as fabbers and other high tech amenities are scarce. And if you get an opportunity, you pay the machines in spades for what they have done to transhumanity. ■



Background: **Fall Evacuee**
Faction: **Brinker**
Morph: **Splicer**
Motivations: **+Destroying the TITANs +Reclaiming Earth +Survival**

TRAITS
Ego: Danger Sense ■
Morph: Improved Immune System (Level 2) ■

REP
c-rep: 50
e-rep: 60
i-rep: 70

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Heavy Body Armor (with Thermal Dampening) + Second Skin [14/16] ■

Primary Weapon: Automatic Rifle with Smartlink and Underbarrel Seeker (200 rounds regular ammo, 200 rounds biter, 100 rounds proximity, 100 rounds RAP, 10 HE seekers) ■
Starting Credit: 100 ■
Implants: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Medichines, Nanophages ■
Gear: Chameleon Cloak, Cold Weather Gear (Basic), Electronic Rope, Guardian Swarm, Miniature Radio Farcaster, Muse, Shelter Dome, Smart Dog, Spindle, Spindle Climber, Superthermite Charges, Viewers ■

"The swarms don't come here. We are safe, at least for a few hours of sleep. Trust me. I have survived this hellhole for more years than I want to remember."

MAKER NOMAD BOT JAMMER



APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	20	10	15	15	15	15	20
Morph Bonus				5			
Total	20	10	15	20	15	15	20

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
1	8	40	80	7	35	70	7	1

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Ecology	COG	60		60
Flight	SOM	65		65
Fray	REF	40	5	45
Hardware: Aerospace	COG	60		60
Hardware: Electronics	COG	65		65
Hardware: Groundcraft	COG	50		50
Hardware: Industrial	COG	40		40
Hardware: Robotics	COG	55		55
Infosec	COG	45		45
Interests: Infolife	COG	45		45
Interests: Mars Terraculture	COG	50		50
Interests: Robots	COG	60		60
Interests: Terraforming	COG	65		65
Interfacing	COG	65		65
Kinetic Weapons	COO	20		20
Language: French (Native)	INT	85		85
Language: Arabic	INT	60		60
Networking: Autonomists	SAV	65		65
Networking: Hypercorps	SAV	60		60
Networking: Ecologists	SAV	40		40
Perception	INT	40		40
Pilot: Aircraft	REF	65	5	70
Pilot: Groundcraft	REF	40	5	45
Profession: Moonshining	COG	35		35
Profession: Survival	COG	60		60
Programming (Nanofabrication)	COG	60 (70)		60 (70)
Protocol	SAV	40		40
Scrounging	INT	40		40

Background: **Martian**
Faction: **Barsoomian**
Morph: **Dragonfly**
Motivations: **+Barsoomian Movement +Morphological Freedom +Open Source**

REP
@-rep: 65
c-rep: 45
e-rep: 70

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Dragonfly Armor [2/2]
Primary Weapon: Sniper Rifle (100 rounds regular ammo, 100 accushot)
Starting Credit: 950
Implants: Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Fractal Digits, Lidar, Mnemonic Augmentation, Nanoscopic Vision, Structural Enhancement
Gear: Backup Insurance (1 month), Creepy, Fixer Swarm, Gnat (2), Guardian Angel, Maker, Muse, Radio Booster, Speck, Spoof, Tool Kits (for all Hardware skills)

You are a true Barsoomian, a nomad Martian redneck. You voluntarily choose to live far from the crowded Martian metroplexes—and farther still from the work camps of the Tharsis Terraforming Office and the patrols of the Martian Rangers. You prefer the freedom to roam the Martian outback and do as you like. As part of a tribe of technolibertarian engineer-survivalists, you are part of an extended family and support network. You keep each other company and watch each others' backs as you explore remote areas of your homeworld. Like the others, you always have some piece of tech to tinker with, whether a new robot creation or a new technological innovation. While outsiders who have never experienced the hospitality of the nomad community think that you are isolationist or have cut yourselves off from civilization, in fact you still care about the future of the red planet and very much support the Movement. ■

"Do you think those ranger patrol bots are a match for me? You've never seen me jam, have you?"

MARTIAN RANGER

APTITUDES

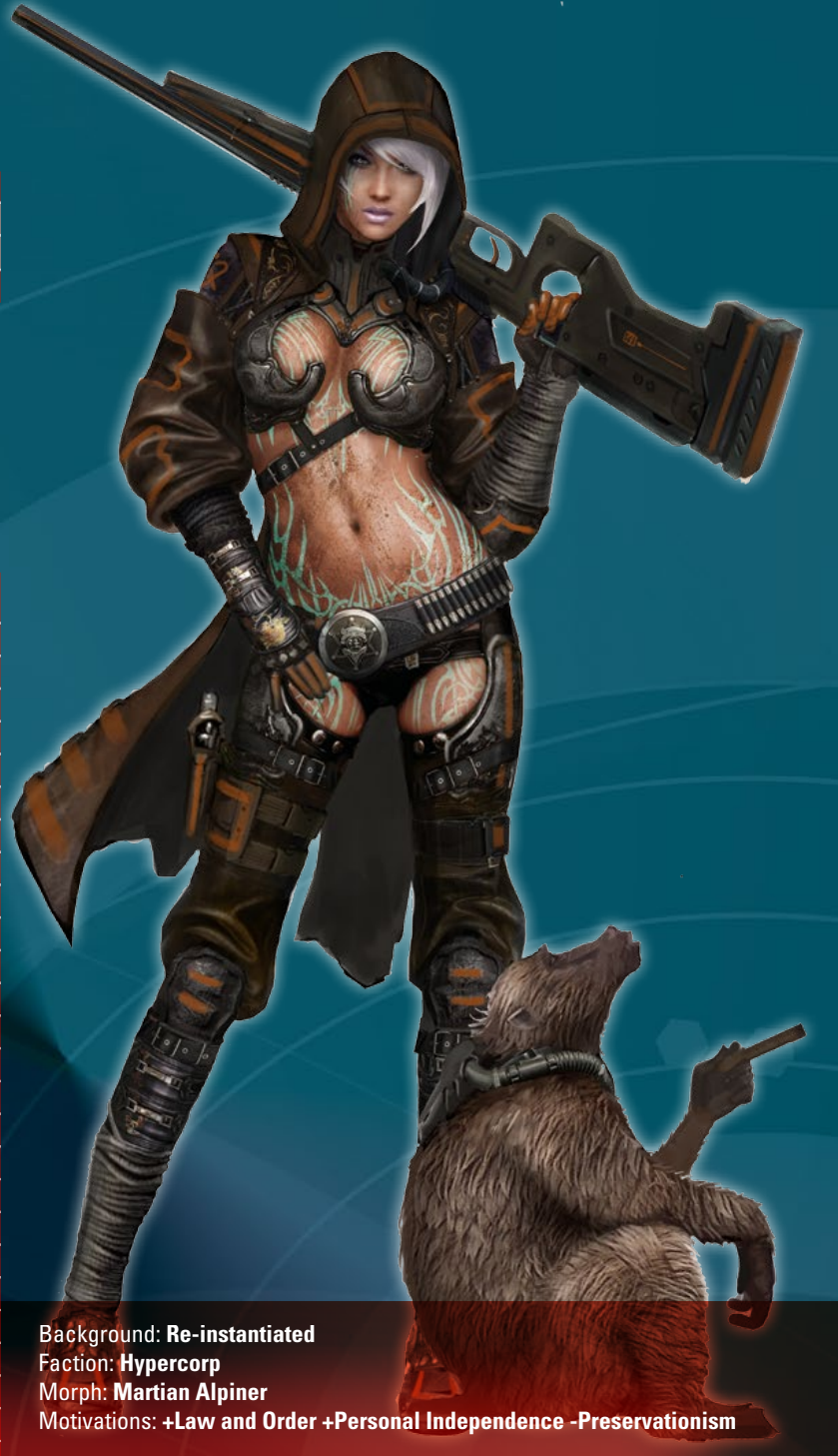
	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	15	15	15	15	20	20	10
Morph Bonus						5	
Total	15	15	15	15	20	25	10

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
3	4	20	40	8	40	60	6	1

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Animal Handling	SAV	55	0	55
Blades	SOM	40	5	45
Climbing	SOM	60	5	65
Clubs	SOM	45	5	50
Deception	SAV	30	0	30
Fray	REF	50	0	50
Freerunning	SOM	55	5	60
Interests: Drug Dens	COG	25	0	25
Interests: Mountaineering	COG	50	0	50
Interests: Smuggling Routes	COG	50	0	50
Interests: Tharsis League	COG	60	0	60
Intimidation	SAV	35	0	35
Investigation	INT	65	0	65
Kinetic Weapons	COO	55	0	55
Language: English	INT	85	0	85
Language: Cantonese	INT	40	0	40
Language: Mandarin	INT	45	0	45
Medicine: Paramedic	COG	40	0	40
Networking: Criminals	SAV	40	0	40
Networking: Ecologists	SAV	60	0	60
Networking: Hypercorps	SAV	65	0	65
Perception	INT	60	0	60
Pilot: Groundcraft	REF	60	0	60
Profession: Law Enforcement	COG	70	0	70
Profession: Survival	COG	70	0	70
Programming	COG	25	0	25
Protocol	SAV	50	0	50
Research	COG	30	0	30
Swimming	SOM	35	5	40
Throwing Weapons	COO	35	0	35
Unarmed Combat	SOM	40	5	45



Background: **Re-instantiated**
Faction: **Hypercorp**
Morph: **Martian Alpiner**
Motivations: **+Law and Order +Personal Independence -Preservationism**

TRAITS
Ego: Addiction (Klar, Moderate), Edited Memories, Situational Awareness ■
Morph: Fast Metabolism, Planned Obsolescence ■

REP
@-rep: 15
c-rep: 70
e-rep: 45
g-rep: 50

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Light Body Armor (with Offensive Armor) [10/10] ■
Primary Weapon: Medium Pistol (100 rounds regular ammo, 100 bug) ■
Starting Credit: 600 ■
Implants: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Direction Sense, Grip Pads, Low Pressure Tolerance, Respirocytes, Oxygen Reserve, Temperature Tolerance (Improved Cold) ■
Gear: Backup Insurance (1 month), Cold Weather Gear (Basic), Cuffband (3), Fiber Eye, Klar (4 doses), Muse, Maker, Prisoner Mask, Portable Lidar/Radar Sensor, Radio Booster, Submachine Gun (100 rounds accushot, 100 rounds zap), Utilitool ■

As a Martian Ranger, your job is to uphold the law in the remote areas of the Martian frontier. Though you work for the Tharsis League, you must deal with blurred jurisdictions and the gray areas where your authority intersects with the power and influence of the Consortium, Barsoomian rednecks, and even crime syndicates. You operate with great independence and autonomy, though you are sleeved in a morph that requires periodic genetic therapy (a leash to ensure the Rangers' loyalty). Trained to operate in all regions of Mars no matter the environmental conditions, you patrol looking for signs of illicit activity or people in danger. Some of the threats you deal with aren't even transhuman, like dealing with wild artificials or TITAN remnants from the TQZ. ■

"I know this hinterland like the back of my hand, and there is no stone under which you can crawl that I can't reach."

MOBILE SCIENTIST



APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	20	20	15	15	15	10	15
Morph Bonus	5	5	5			5	
Total	25	25	20	15	15	15	15

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
3	6	30	60	6	30	45	7	1

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Astrobiology	COG	55	5	60
Academics: Genetics	COG	65	5	70
Academics: Xenoanatomy	COG	60	5	65
Animal Handling	SAV	30		30
Beam Weapons	COO	45	5	50
Climbing	SOM	30	5	25
Fray	REF	45		45
Free Fall	REF	25		25
Infosec	COG	50	5	55
Interests: Haute Nosh Food	COG	60	5	65
Interests: Uplift Agenda	COG	65	5	70
Interfacing	COG	60	5	65
Kinesics	SAV	50		50
Language: Dutch (Native)	INT	85	5	90
Language: French	INT	60	5	65
Medicine: Gene Therapy	COG	40	5	40
Navigation	INT	30	5	35
Networking: Autonomists	SAV	50		50
Networking: Ecologists	SAV	25		25
Networking: Firewall	SAV	25		25
Networking: Hypercorp	SAV	45		45
Networking: Scientists	SAV	65		65
Perception	INT	60	5	65
Persuasion	SAV	25		25
Pilot: Aircraft	REF	40	5	45
Profession: Bioengineering	COG	55	5	60
Profession: Lecturing	COG	60	5	65
Programming	COG	55	5	60
Protocol	SAV	60		60
Research	COG	70	5	75
Unarmed Combat	SOM	30	5	35

Background: **Uplift**
Faction: **Venusian**
Morph: **Neo-Hominid**
Motivations: **+Exploration +Transparency +Uplift Rights**

TRAITS
Ego: Psi Defense Level 2 ■

REP
@-rep: 45
c-rep: 45
e-rep: 55
i-rep: 55
r-rep: 60

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Armored Clothing (with Immunogenic) [3/4] ■
Primary Weapon: Stunner ■
Starting Credit: 500 ■
Implants: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Enhance Respiration, Mental Speed Mnemonic Augmentation, Prehensile Feet, Temperature Tolerance (Improved Cold) ■
Gear: Backup Insurance (1 month), Guardian Swarm, Mobile Lab, Muse, Portable Plane (Venus adapted), Specimen Container, Viewers ■

Contrary to your colleagues, who spend most of their time in labs and habitats, squabbling about theories, data, and equations, you are looking for the "hands-on" experience out in the field. While you support the Morningstar Constellation and especially encourage the growing reputation of its scientific communities, you are rarely physically there as you want to study in a diverse array of environments. Following the spirit of Earth's earliest researchers and scientists like Darwin, who visited remote places on Earth to observe and analyze the evolutions of species, you have a knack for practical science. Since you are able to take your lab with you using modern technology, you have never seen field work as an obstacle. Maybe it is residual hominid instinct, the "call of the wild," which is why you have not become the stereotypical egg-head. ■

"Hubble said: 'Equipped with his five senses, man explores the universe around him and calls the adventure Science.' So don't spend your time in boring labs. It's worth the ride."

OLIGARCH

APTITUDES

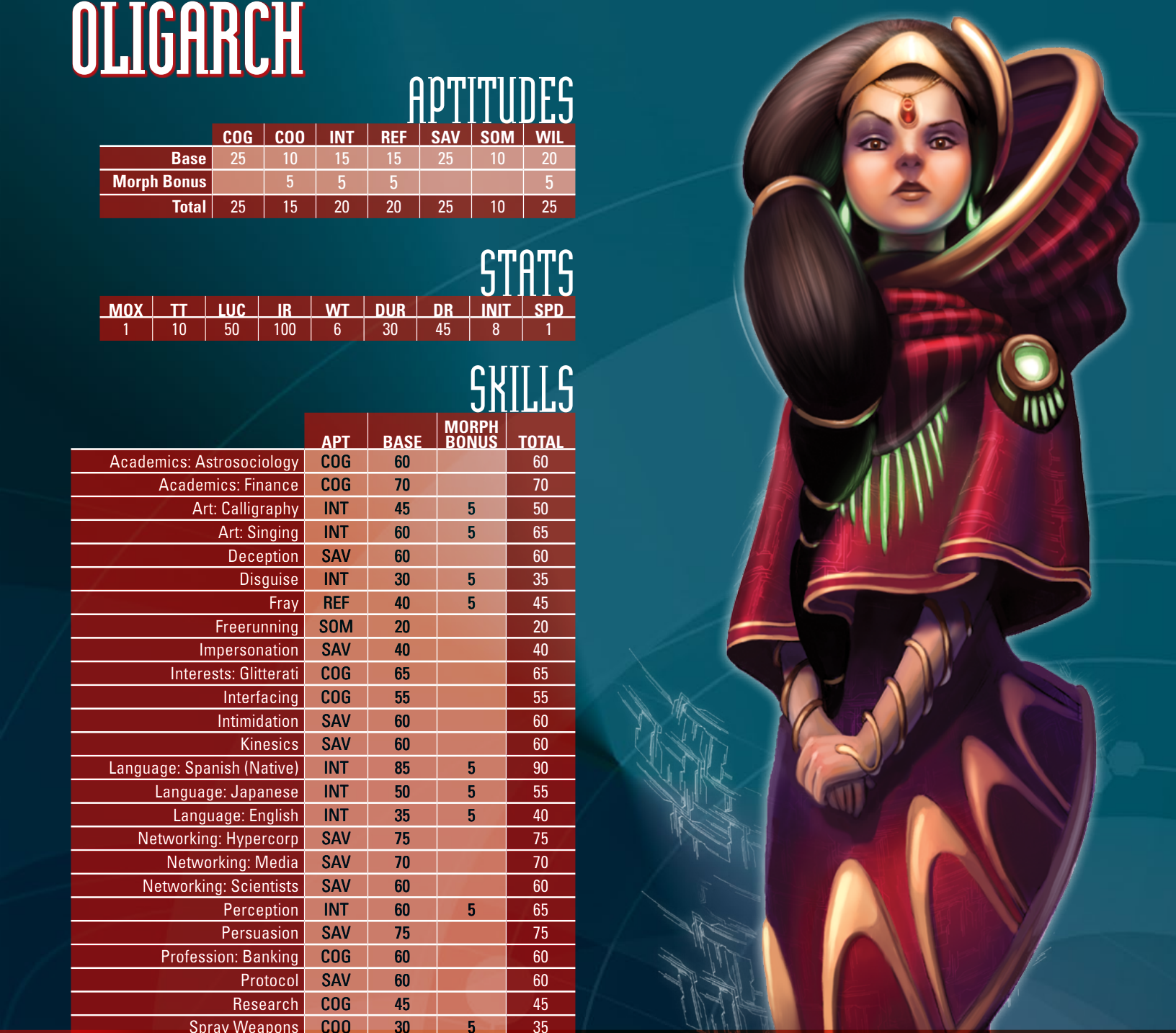
	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	25	10	15	15	25	10	20
Morph Bonus		5	5	5			5
Total	25	15	20	20	25	10	25

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
1	10	50	100	6	30	45	8	1

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Astrosociology	COG	60		60
Academics: Finance	COG	70		70
Art: Calligraphy	INT	45	5	50
Art: Singing	INT	60	5	65
Deception	SAV	60		60
Disguise	INT	30	5	35
Fray	REF	40	5	45
Freerunning	SOM	20		20
Impersonation	SAV	40		40
Interests: Glitterati	COG	65		65
Interfacing	COG	55		55
Intimidation	SAV	60		60
Kinesics	SAV	60		60
Language: Spanish (Native)	INT	85	5	90
Language: Japanese	INT	50	5	55
Language: English	INT	35	5	40
Networking: Hypercorp	SAV	75		75
Networking: Media	SAV	70		70
Networking: Scientists	SAV	60		60
Perception	INT	60	5	65
Persuasion	SAV	75		75
Profession: Banking	COG	60		60
Protocol	SAV	60		60
Research	COG	45		45
Spray Weapons	COO	30	5	35



Background: **Hyperelite**
Faction: **Socialite**
Morph: **Neotenic**
Motivations: **+Bio-chauvinism +Immortality +Hypercapitalism**

You are a family member of an inner system dynasty, one of the elites of the Planetary Consortium. Like the other descendants of Japanese zaibatsus, Middle Eastern sheikdoms, and European blue-bloods, your family can trace its aristocratic lineage back to the Middle Ages. Unlike the hypercorp upstarts and nouveau rich, your bloodline has a history of surviving disasters, rebellions, and worse. You wield your wealth and power with subtle grace and poise, and your sphere of influence extends to a variety of social cliques throughout the system. You rarely step into the spotlight, preferring to remain behind the scenes as an enigmatic éminence grise. However, having lived for over a century and having almost everything you've desired, you now find that the constant manipulations and schemes are beginning to tire you. To relieve your boredom you are turning towards emerging currents of transhuman culture to satisfy your hunger for entertainment. ■

TRAITS
Ego: First Impression, Immortality Blues ■
Morph: Social Stigma (Neotenic) ■

REP
c-rep: 80
f-rep: 75
r-rep: 65

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Armor Clothing + Second Skin [4/7] ■
Primary Weapon: Shard Pistol ■

Starting Credit: 950 ■
Implants: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Enhanced Pheromones, Emergency Farcaster, Medichines, Nanophages, Skillware ■
Gear: Backup Insurance (1 month), Creepy, Muse, Security AI, Servitor, Skillsofts (Infosec, Kinetic Weapons), Space Roach, Tracking, Viewers ■

"I have seen nations crumble and civilizations fall. Show me something I haven't seen."

OVERSIGHT AUDITOR



APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	10	15	15	15	20	15	15
Morph Bonus	5	10		5		5	5
Total	15	25	15	20	20	20	20

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
3	8	40	80	9	45	68	7	1

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Art: Design	INT	55		55
Beam Weapons	COO	35	10	45
Disguise	INT	45		45
Fray	REF	50	5	55
Free Fall	REF	40	5	45
Freerunning	SOM	40	5	45
Impersonation	SAV	50		50
Infiltration	COO	55	10	65
Infosec	COG	35	5	40
Interests: Inner System Who's Who	COG	50	5	55
Interests: Firewall Proxies	COG	50	5	55
Interests: Overboard Schemes	COG	50	5	55
Interests: Yoga	COG	50	5	55
Interfacing	COG	30	5	35
Intimidation	SAV	40		40
Investigation	INT	40		40
Kinesics	SAV	50		50
Language: Hindi (Native)	INT	90		90
Language: English	INT	45		45
Networking: Criminals	SAV	45		45
Networking: Hypercorp	SAV	60		60
Networking: Media	SAV	55		55
Networking: Scientists	SAV	60		60
Perception	INT	55		55
Persuasion	SAV	60		60
Pilot: Aircraft	REF	30	5	35
Pilot: Spacecraft	REF	25	5	30
Profession: Law	COG	40	5	45
Profession: Social Engineering	COG	40	5	45
Protocol	SAV	30		30
Research	COG	30	5	35
Unarmed Combat	SOM	50	5	55

Background: **Original Space Colonist**
Faction: **Hypercorp**
Morph: **Ghost**
Motivations: **–Anarchism +Consortium Stability +Hypercapitalism**

TRAITS
None ■

REP

c-rep:	80
f-rep:	65
g-rep:	55
r-rep:	50

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Armor Clothing (with Shock Proof) + Second Skin [4/7] ■
Primary Weapon: Laser Pulser (with Safety System) ■
Starting Credit: 450 ■
Implants: Adrenal Boost, Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Chameleon Skin, Cortical Stack, Emotional Dampers, Enhanced Vision, Enhanced Hearing, Grip Pads, Skinlink ■
Gear: Anonymous Account, Backup Insurance (1 month), Bot AI, Covert Operations Tools, Extendable Baton, Facial/Image Recognition Software, Fake Ego ID, Gnat, Microbug (2), Micrograv Shoes, Miniature Radio Farcaster, Muse, Nanobandage, Psi Jammer, Saboteur Swarm, Saucer, Sniffer Softeware, Speck, Tracking Software ■

There is no order in the inner system without control. You are one of the cogs in the machine to ensure that everything runs smoothly: an agent of the Oversight Directorate for Fair and Free Markets. You were one of the original colonists who participated in creating the Planetary Consortium, and you are devoted to preserving it at any cost. Oversight's principal duty is the maintenance of the status quo. All anomalies, may they be economic, social, or criminal are considered a threat to be corrected by people like you. This can range from the spread of subversive ideologies to meddling from rival factions or even when the Consortium's own hypercorps don't play by the rules. Drawing from the Consortium's black accounts, your task is to identify these problems and fix them before they become a public issue. You possess a broad spectrum of skills to investigate, infiltrate, manipulate, and, if necessary, sabotage. ■

"Anomalies like anarchism are a threat to what is otherwise a harmony of socially-engineered precision and guidance. While it remains a burden assiduously avoided, it is not unexpected, and thus not beyond a measure of control."

SCAVENGER

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	15	15	20	20	15	10	15
Morph Bonus							
Total	15	15	20	20	15	10	15

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
3	6	30	60	5	25	50	8	1

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Astrophysics	COG	55		55
Academics: Economics	COG	35		35
Beam Weapons	COO	30		30
Blades	SOM	20		20
Demolitions	COG	35		35
Fray	REF	60		60
Free Fall	REF	60		60
Freerunning	SOM	30		30
Hardware: Aerospace	COG	40		40
Hardware: Robotics	COG	45		45
Hardware: Industrial	COG	45		45
Interests: Morph R&D	COG	55		55
Interests: Rumor Mill	COG	35		35
Kinetic Weapons	COO	45		45
Language: German (Native)	INT	90		90
Language: Mandarin	INT	65		65
Navigation	INT	55		55
Networking: Autonomists	SAV	60		60
Networking: Criminals	SAV	40		40
Networking: Ecologists	SAV	40		40
Networking: Firewall	SAV	35		35
Networking: Hypercorp	SAV	25		25
Palming	COO	30		30
Perception	INT	60		60
Persuasion	SAV	40		40
Pilot: Spacecraft	REF	60		60
Profession: Appraisal	COG	60		60
Profession: Scavenger Trade	COG	65		65
Profession: Salvage Ops	COG	50		50
Programming	COG	25		25
Protocol	SAV	20		20
Research	COG	25		25
Scrounging	INT	75		75

You are a member of a scav crew operating on or in the vicinity of the "cradle of transhumanity." You salvage anything worth selling to nostalgic transhumans longing for Earth. While the profit margins for relics and tech from Earth are extremely high, thanks to gerontocrats and hypercorps willing to spend fortunes for a tiny piece of archaic scrap, so is the risk. Having visited the hellhole that was your homeworld on a few occasions when an opportunity presented itself, you have seen the ruins of human civilizations and the concrete carcasses of capital cities. You have also come face to face with the new rulers of Earth—so on some of those missions you merely returned as a stack, or not at all. Combing through derelict habitats and ship wreckage in Earth orbit may be less profitable, but it is also a lot safer for your own sanity. ■



Background: **Drifter**
Faction: **Extropian**
Morph: **Flexbot**
Motivations: **+Thrill-Seeking +Wealth –Reclaiming Earth**

TRAITS
None ■

REP
@-rep: 65
c-rep: 60
e-rep: 25
g-rep: 65
i-rep: 45

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Flexbot Armor [4/4] ■
Primary Weapon: Submachine Gun (300 rounds regular ammo, 100 rounds capsule with twitch) ■
Starting Credit: 100 ■

Implants: 360° Vision, Access Jacks, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Fractal Digits, Magnetic System, Mnemonic Augmentation, Modular Design, Nanoscopic Vision, Shape Adjusting ■
Gear: Backup Insurance (1 month), Breadcrumb Positioning System, Disassembly Tools, Fake Ego ID, Flexcutter, Liquid Thermite (2), Muse, Scrapper's Gel (3), Spindle, Spindle Climber, Superthermite Charges, Toolkits (Aerospace, Industrial, Robotics) ■

"Reclaiming Earth? You must be kidding. Do you want to put me out of business?"

SIFTRUNNER TECHIE



Background: **Scumborn**
Faction: **Brinker**
Morph: **Arachnoid**
Motivations: **+Individualism +Techno-Progressivism +Wealth**

TRAITS
Ego: Mental Disorder (Depression) ■
Morph: none ■

REP
@-rep: 50
c-rep: 35
g-rep: 35
i-rep: 45
r-rep: 35

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Arachnoid Armor [8/8] ■
Primary Weapon: Shredder (100 shots) ■
Starting Credit: 0 ■

Implants: Access Jacks, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Mnemonic Augmentation, Enhanced Vision, Extra Limbs (8), Lidar, Medichines, Pneumatic Limbs, Radar, Radiation Shielding ■
Gear: Backup Insurance (1 month), Disassembler, Engineer Nanoswarm, Flex Cutter, Linkstate Narcoalgorithm (1), Muse, Scout Microswarm, Simulspace Subscription (1 month), Toolkits (all Hardware skills), Utilitool ■

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	15	20	10	15	15	15	15
Morph Bonus		5		5		10	
Total	15	25	10	20	15	25	15

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
1	6	30	60	8	40	80	6	1

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Materials Science	COG	60	0	60
Academics: Mining	COG	60	0	60
Art: Sculpting	INT	35	0	35
Beam Weapons	COO	30	5	35
Blades	SOM	54	10	64
Climbing	SOM	25	10	35
Demolitions	COG	50	0	50
Fray	REF	50	0	50
Free Fall	REF	55	0	55
Freerunning	SOM	25	10	35
Gunnery	INT	25	0	25
Hardware: Groundcraft	COG	50	0	50
Hardware: Industrial	COG	45	0	45
Hardware: Robotics	COG	50	0	50
Infosec	COG	45	0	45
Int: Medieval Weapon Smithing	COG	60	0	60
Int: Simulspace Entertainment	COG	50	0	50
Interests: Sifter Community	COG	50	0	50
Interfacing	COG	55	0	55
Kinetic Weapons	COO	30	5	35
Language: Arabic	INT	80	0	80
Language: Urdu	INT	50	0	50
Networking: Autonomists	SAV	55	0	55
Networking: Criminals	SAV	35	0	35
Networking: Firewall	SAV	60	0	60
Networking: Hypercorp	SAV	45	0	45
Networking: Scientists	SAV	30	0	30
Perception	INT	45	0	45
Persuasion	SAV	40	0	40
Pilot: Spacecraft	REF	30	0	30
Profession: Heavy Industry	COG	50	0	50
Programming	COG	40	0	40
Protocol	SAV	30	0	30
Scrounging	INT	40	0	40
Spray Weapons	COO	50	5	55
Unarmed Combat	SOM	40	10	50

You are a sifter, part of the community of mobile miners on Mercury. Given the extreme temperatures between Mercury's day and night, you and the other miners have just a small window in which to move, unpack, mine, sift, pack, and move to catch up with the Terminus again. Your job is to make sure the tech runs like clockwork, even on this non-stop, round-the-clock schedule. The pay is good, though, and after a long stint of work you can look forward to taking some time off with some serious cred in your pocket—unless you spend it all buying entertainment inbetween your work shifts. ■

"Move people! The window is open and time is cred, so get those bots moving and start digging!

SOLARIAN RESEARCHER



SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Astronomy	COG	60		60
Academics: Astrophysics	COG	65		65
Art: Poetry	INT	50		50
Fray	REF	50	5	55
Free Fall	REF	65	5	70
Infosec	COG	65		65
Interest: Exo-Planetology	COG	55		55
Interest: Pantheism	COG	50		50
Interfacing	COG	75		75
Investigation	INT	50		50
Language: Korean (Native)	INT	85		85
Language: English	INT	55		55
Language: Hindi	INT	60		60
Medicine: Exotic Biomorphs	COG	60		60
Medicine: Nanomedicine	COG	45		45
Navigation	INT	65		65
Networking: Autonomists	SAV	50		50
Networking: Hypercorp	SAV	30		30
Networking: Media	SAV	25		25
Networking: Scientists	SAV	70		70
Perception	INT	50		50
Pilot: Spacecraft	REF	40	5	45
Profession: Stellar R&D	COG	65		65
Programming	COG	70		70
Research	COG	65		65
Swimming	SOM	20	5	25

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	25	15	15	15	15	15	15
Morph Bonus		10		5		5	
Total	25	25	15	20	15	20	15

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
3	6	30	60	20	100	150	7	1

You consider yourself a Solarian "native." Like the solar system orbits around its star, so do you circle the sun, drifting in its magnetic field and bathing in its glorious light. Your work as a solar researcher from Ukko Jylinä is not just an assignment, it is a passion. Though you traveled the inner system for years during your studies, the sun always held a peculiar attraction towards you. It is life giver, a radiant light and a source of inspiration. Often you float in the "cool" photosphere, constantly collecting data while meditating about the origin and meaning of life. Many of the others who have chosen a life in the vicinity of the sun share your spirit and spirituality. It's a social community that does not have many secrets, thanks to the many uplifted cetaceans who have found a new home in the corona. You would not want it to be different. Though you are of infolife origin, the other Solarians have admitted you to their family, accepted you for who are you now, not where you came from or who you have been. ■

Background: **Infolife**
Faction: **Brinker**
Morph: **Surya**
Motivations: **+Exploration +Open Society +Spirituality**

TRAITS
Ego: Hyper Linguist, Real World Naiveté, Social Stigma (Infolife) ■
Morph: none ■

REP
@-rep: 40
c-rep: 35
f-rep: 25
r-rep: 70

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Bioweave Armor [2/3] ■
Primary Weapon: — ■

Starting Credit: 250 ■
Implants: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Bioweave Armor (Light), Coronal Adaptation, Cortical Stack, Chameleon Skin, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Lateral Line, Medichines, Mnemonic Augmentation, Vacuum Sealing ■
Gear: Backup Insurance (1 month), Muse, Portable QE Com with Low Capacity Qubit Reservoir, Radio Booster, Security AI ■

"Beauty and danger often lie very close to each other. There is no place where this is no more evident than here."

SYNTHMORPH ACTIVIST



APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	15	15	20	15	15	15	20
Morph Bonus						–5	
Total	15	15	20	15	15	10	20

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
3	8	40	80	4	20	40	7	1

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Sociology	COG	50		50
Art: Graphic Design	INT	50		50
Beam Weapons	COO	45		45
Demolitions	COG	50		50
Disguise	INT	50		50
Fray	REF	50		50
Free Fall	REF	35		35
Freerunning	SOM	25	-5	20
Infiltration	COO	45		45
Infosec	COG	55		55
Interests: Hypercorp Politics	COG	40		40
Interests: NGOs	COG	55		55
Interests: Bio-chauvinist Groups	COG	60		60
Interfacing	COG	60		60
Kinesics	SAV	40		40
Language: English (Native)	INT	90		90
Language: Cantonese	INT	65		65
Networking: Autonomists	SAV	55		55
Networking: Firewall	SAV	50		50
Networking: Hypercorps	SAV	45		45
Perception	INT	60		60
Persuasion	SAV	55		55
Pilot: Groundcraft	REF	45		45
Profession: Political Activism	COG	65		65
Profession: Security Procedures	COG	40		40
Programming	COG	50		50
Research	COG	55		55
Seeker Weapons	COO	45		45

Background: **Re-instantiated**
Faction: **Lunar**
Morph: **Case**
Motivations: **-Biochauvinism +Morphological Freedom -Racism**

TRAITS

Ego: Edited Memories, Black Mark Level 2 (Media) ■
Morph: Innocuous, Lemon, Social Stigma (Clanking Masses) ■

REP

@-rep: 60
c-rep: 60
f-rep: 20
i-rep: 50

EQUIPMENT

Armor: Case Armor [4/4] ■
Primary Weapon: Microwave Agonizer ■

Starting Credit: 50 ■
Implants: Access Jacks, Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Hidden Compartment, Medichines, Mnemonic Augmentation, Puppet Sock ■
Gear: Anonymous Account, Backup Insurance (1 month), Dazzler, Disposable Launcher (Frag), Exploit Software, Fake Ego ID, Holographic Projectors, Kaos AI, Liquid Thermite, Muse, Spoof Software, Utilitool, White Noise Machine ■

While the wealthy elite of the inner system reside in hyper-augmented biomorphs, the poor and unfortunate are forced to sleeve into cheap synthetic morphs because they can afford nothing else, or worse yet they must sell themselves into indentured bondage for the privilege of getting a synthmorph at all. Mainstream society views this underclass with disdain and pity. Bio-chauvinists take it even further, taking prejudicial stances against the underprivileged and robotic. As a modern ego with an open mind and political motivation to bring about a change in trans-human society, you have decided for yourself to become an activist in the fight for the acceptance of synthmorphs. Choosing the cheapest shell available to prove a point, you have yourself been the target of social marginalization. You have also learned that rallies, campaigning, media coverage, and other forms of activism are less effective than you believed, so you now consider more direct tactics to achieve your goals. ■

"We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools."

TRIAD SOLDIER

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	10	15	10	20	20	20	15
Morph Bonus		5				10	
Total	10	20	10	20	20	30	15

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
3	6	30	60	9	45	68	6	1 (2)

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Art: Drawing	INT	50		50
Blades	SOM	35	10	45
Clubs	SOM	55	10	65
Deception	SAV	45		45
Fray	REF	55		55
Free Fall	REF	30		30
Interest: Body Modifications	COG	40		40
Interest: Crime Syndicates	COG	65		65
Interest: Law Enforcement	COG	35		35
Interest: Smugglers	COG	50		50
Interfacing	COG	30		30
Intimidation	SAV	65		65
Kinetic Weapons	COO	65	5	70
Language: Cantonese (Native)	INT	80		80
Networking: Autonomists	SAV	40		40
Networking: Criminals	SAV	70		70
Palming	COO	25	5	30
Perception	INT	55		55
Persuasion	SAV	40		40
Pilot: Groundcraft	REF	60		60
Pilot: Spacecraft	REF	55		55
Profession: Prostitution Biz	COG	40		40
Profession: Protection Racket	COG	50		50
Protocol	SAV	45		45
Research	COG	25		25
Scrounging	INT	25		25
Seeker Weapons	COO	35	5	40
Spray Weapons	COO	30	5	35
Swimming	SOM	25	10	35
Throwing Weapons	COO	30	5	35
Unarmed Combat	SOM	40	10	50



Background: **Fall Evacuee**
Faction: **Criminal**
Morph: **Worker Pod**
Motivations: **+Personal Career +Triad Prosperity +Vice**

TRAITS
Ego: Patron (Triad "438" Vanguard) ■
Morph: Social Stigma (Pod), Tough (Level 2) ■

REP
@-rep: 35
g-rep: 85

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Light Body Armor [10/10] ■
Primary Weapon: Submachine Gun (200 rounds regular ammo, 100 biter, 100 flayer) ■
Starting Credit: 50 ■
Implants: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Mnemonic Augmentations, Neurachem 1, Puppet Sock ■
Gear: Backup Insurance (1 month), Cleaner Swarm, Densiplast Gloves, Extendable Baton, Fake ID, Muse, Utilitool ■

You are a "49er" or Sze Kau, a rank-and-file soldier for one of the big triad syndicates. While you have already sworn the traditional oaths of loyalty, your power in the organization is still limited. Due to the patronage of a 438, an influential and established triad boss, you hope to advance soon within the syndicate when you have proven worthy of your patron's trust. Until then, you play your part in the business, whether that be drug trafficking, pirating fab blueprints, running gambling and prostitution operations, protection rackets, or loan sharking. Naturally, this includes defending the triad against system authorities or syndicate rivals, by force if necessary. ■

"Ni zhao si ma? Ni yao wo kai qiang?" ("Do you want to die? Do you want me to shoot?)

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