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THE STYGIAN CYCLE I: BARSOOM



WILDFIRE™

Igniting Imagination

SERIOUSLY? FREE-TO-PLAY?

Imagination is powerful. To quote Albert Einstein, "Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand." Well said.

We believe in the power of imagination and how it creates wonder and inspiration. Roleplaying games are one of the few things that can do what they do. Some might say they are the last frontier for wild imagination and creativity. We certainly believe so. That's why we make roleplaying games – to help make that possible.

Making roleplaying games the way we have hasn't helped us spark imagination the way we'd hoped. We want to try something different.

First, we're adopting the Creative Commons license, so that you can contribute to the game in a meaningful way. That way, we can support you in your awesome ideas and help you get them out to your fellow players.

Then, we're going to give away electronic copies of the core book for free. We've all bought games that didn't end up working out for us. That's why we're giving this to you for free – so that you can figure out if you like the game before you decide to spend money on it.

If you like The Void and you play it, we're going to put out a bunch of cool material at very reasonable prices. We're going to do it buffet-style, so you can pick and choose what works best for you and your group. Buying these supplements supports us making more cool material, along with the rest of your fellow players.

After all, life's too short to waste time and money on games you don't like.

– The Staff of WildFire



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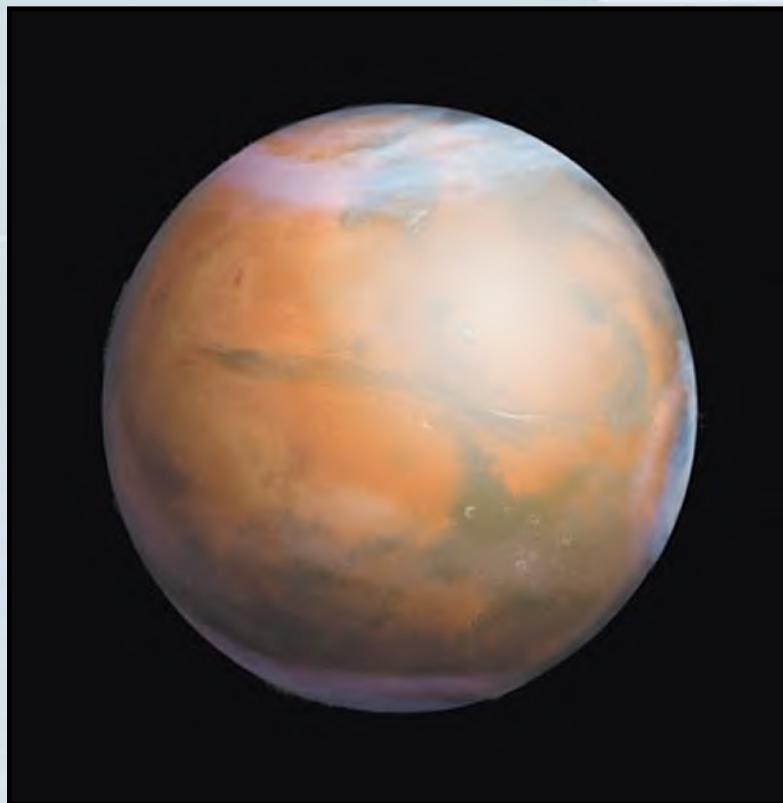


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Welcome to *Barsoom*, the first adventure in the epic story of *The Stygian Cycle*. This is a ready-to-run adventure that can be part of Organized Play.

This adventure is for Level 1 Characters, which are those that have received 10 Advances or less. If your Characters are more advanced than that, you will need to adjust things to be appropriately challenging.

This adventure is self-contained, though it is designed to set Characters up for the next adventure in *The Stygian Cycle*. It involves the Characters being sent to a colony in the Martian Outback, to investigate a series of growing disappearances and thefts. However, what they discover is far more unsettling than simple miscreants.

Naturally, these adventures are intended for Gamemasters. However, as a player, you may find the way the setting of *The Void* is brought to life in these adventures useful for your visualization of your Character and game. You probably don't want to memorize the adventures if you plan to play them – it'll only ruin your enjoyment.

This adventure assumes that your group is composed of Wardens. If it is not, the adventure can still work, but requires some adjustments before you run it.

The Stygian Cycle

The Void Organized Play adventures will take you through the most signifi-

cant events in the solar system, as designed.

This doesn't mean that you won't come up with awesome and significant adventures on your own, but these are the ones we designed to hit the high points based on what we've created.

Soundtrack

We've created a soundtrack for *The Void* on the popular Spotify platform. It is composed of dark ambient music, designed to provide an eerie background for your game. We will be updating over time, to expand the repertoire of music and moods. If you're interested, check our Facebook page for links – facebook.com/TheVoidCalls.

Mars

The gravity on Mars is Low Gravity, so Characters will have to deal with those effects – as found on p. 137 of *The Void Core*. The colony of Presidia is only kind of built to accommodate this. Most buildings have energized deck plates, including the mines, but there is only one large spinning ring to simulate 1G of gravity. People spend time in this regularly to keep themselves healthy.

The colonists have heavily weighted vehicles to help them get around. Most are more weighted than one would expect, to deal with the winds of Martian storms. If caught without either a vehicle or some kind of mooring, the storms can be extremely dangerous.

The good news is that a day is about one Earth day and that the atmosphere has been terraformed – to a point. Those used to it can function for quite a while before needing oxygen, while most others need to carry a breathe-mask in order to function with any kind of exertion. It is non-lethal, in any case – use the Near-Earth Environment rules found on p. 134 of *The Void Core*.

However, Mars is still cold. An average day is 40° F, or 4.4° C. This means that Characters will need to wear appropriately warm clothing, or they may find themselves at the mercy of the environment. You may use a gentler version of the Arctic Environment rules presented on p. 136 of *The Void Core* if the Characters are caught out without protection at night.

Plot Points

In this adventure, you'll have a chain of related evidence that will be the subject of investigation by the players, the bulk of which together will unravel the mystery for the Characters and put them on the path of resolution. Each piece of this chain can be learned through Plot Points.

Once in the appropriate place to earn Plot Points, the Characters must simply have the resources necessary to gain them and they do. They don't have to make a series of Tests, hoping to succeed at all of the Tests they need to in order to glean the clues or information. To determine if the Characters have the necessary resources, simply total up the requisite dice pools from the Skills

Got Feedback?

We're all roleplayers here. When you're playing *The Void*, you're going to have feedback – whether it be questions, comments, or the awesome stuff you came up with while you're playing. We want to hear it. You've got two options. You can just fire off an e-mail to feedback@fearthevoid.com. Alternatively, you can jump into the pool on our forums and engage in conversation with both us and other players. Find them at <http://www.reddit.com/r/TheVoidRPG/>.

+ Attributes necessary. If it is equal to or greater than the Plot Point score, they succeed. Easily gained information required four or five Plot Points, information that requires some expertise requires six or seven Plot Points, and information that is difficult to glean requires nine or ten Plot Points.

For example, the Characters wish to search the quarters of a missing computer technician in Salacia. The key information they need to learn there is that the place has been completely wiped clean (sterilized) and that the hard drive in the dwelling's computer hasn't just been erased, it has been replaced. This requires the Investigate and Computer Skills, but not particularly high levels of either. The GM determines that the Investigate portion rates a four, as does the Computer portion. If the players enter the scene, spend the time, and have a total pool of points from their Investigate + Awareness and Computer + Cleverness ratings that each equals or exceeds four, together they glean all the information there is to gain.

Sometimes players won't have the necessary resources at hand. In many cases, they'll know that they've come to an important juncture and be aware of the resources they are missing. They can simply go away, gather those resources, and return. If they cannot and it is important they gain the information, have them make Tests using the appropriate Skill at whatever Difficulty seems sensible. If they succeed, they get the information. If not, they'll miss it, just like people sometimes do – or just have them spend 2 Tension Points to Get a Clue.

Rules for Organized Play

The great advantage of Organized Play is that players (and GMs) have the flexibility to use their Character in different groups. Perhaps they're playing an event at a local hobby store or at a convention, they're playing in two groups, or their group dissolves or moves on to another game and they want to keep playing.

Using the guidelines here, players can keep their treasured Characters going through *The Stygian Cycle* without restriction.

Level 1 Characters

This adventure is designed for Level 1 Characters, which means they have earned up to 10 Advances.

If players have been playing The Void outside of *The Stygian Cycle*, they may have enough Advances to be considered a higher Level. If this is the case, you'll need to bump up the difficulty and foes in this adventure in order to make it appropriately challenging.

Adventure Rewards

Characters completing this adventure should receive 3 Advances. You can give these out over sessions, or you can give them all out at the end.

Verification

Since players can travel between groups within the Organized Play of *The Stygian Cycle*, any kind of Character advancement needs to be tracked and verified by the GM. This is to make sure that everyone stays honest from group to group.

The simplest method of verification is to note on the back of their Character Sheet the number of Advances awarded, any special gear the Character acquired, as well as the name of the adventure and date or dates played. Please include your name and write in your own handwriting – don't let the players do this themselves. If you're comfortable with it, you may also include your e-mail address.

Since mobile devices are commonplace, an even more formal way to verify advancement is to post the above details to the player's *Facebook* Wall. This creates a digital record that is less easily disputed, if it ever comes to that.

Character Death

If a Character dies, the player shouldn't be handicapped in terms of playing in *The Stygian Cycle*. As per the rules found on p. 225 of *The Void Core*, have the player create a new Character with the same number of Advances as the Character who has passed on.

However, have that player keep the deceased Character with the new one, so that all Advances have been tracked and verified for purposes of Organized Play.

Suspected Cheating

Cheating is poor sportsmanship, most especially in roleplaying games. Most people simply don't, since roleplaying games are about the story.

If you encounter a player who you suspect has cheated, ask them to be more detailed about how they received their Advancements or gear. If they can recount the events of their

adventure and they make sense, you may choose to let them participate.

However, if a Character has extremely unusual advancements – most especially in terms of gear – or cannot satisfactorily recount where they received them, then you have several choices. You can let them play as is, and adapt the challenges for that Character to make them more difficult. You can also ask them if they will play without the suspect advancement for the duration of your game. Finally, you can simply not allow them into your game.

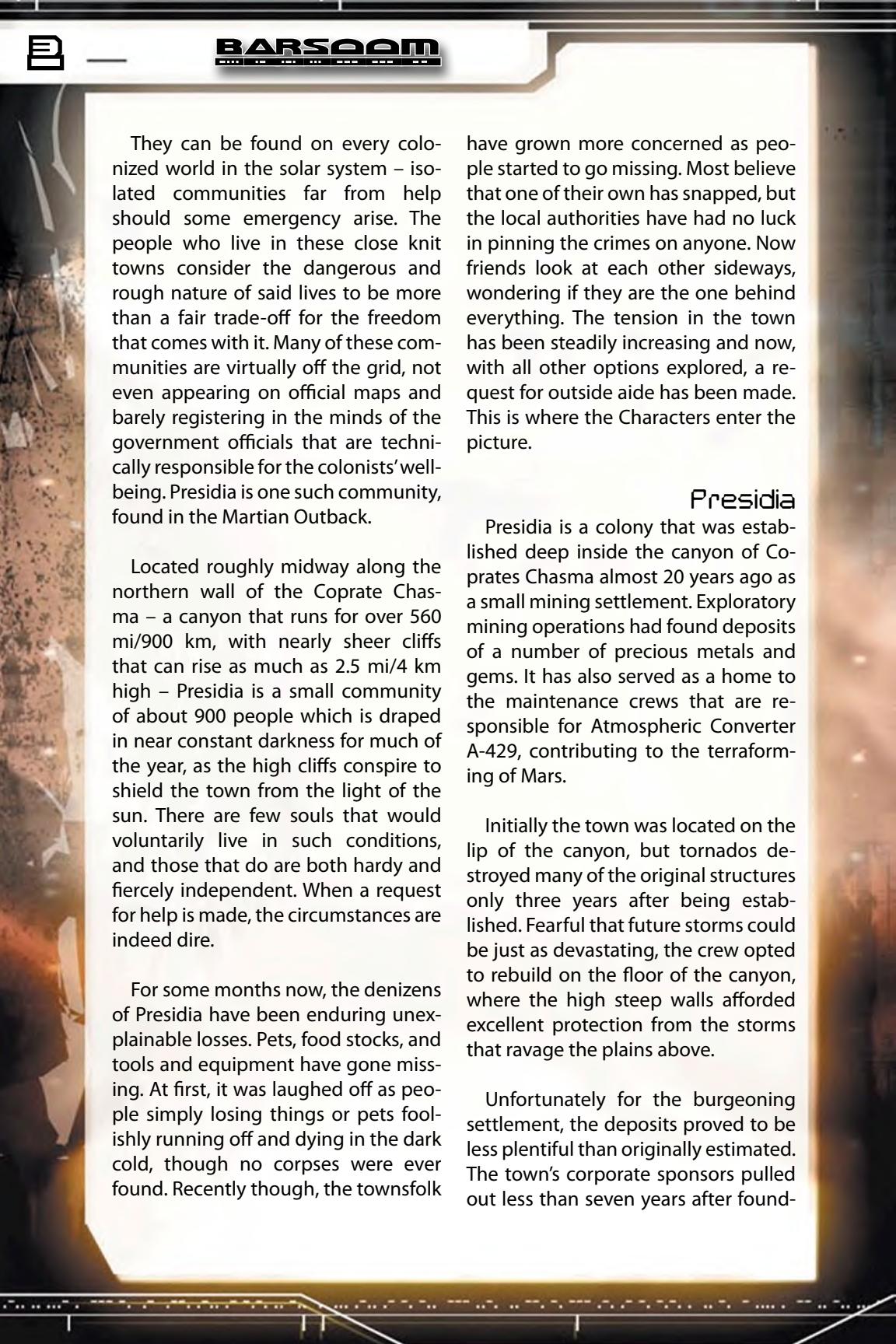
Unverified advancement can be suspect, but groups can often be too excited at the end of a session to properly record things.

In any event, make the judgment call that works best for your group.

Playing Outside the OP

Enthusiastic players may wish to play adventures that are not part of *The Stygian Cycle* in between Organized Play adventures. That's awesome and no one should be penalized for that.

However, if anyone wants to bring in such a Character, they should have all outside advancement verified by their GM, just as if they were playing within *The Stygian Cycle*.



They can be found on every colonized world in the solar system – isolated communities far from help should some emergency arise. The people who live in these close knit towns consider the dangerous and rough nature of said lives to be more than a fair trade-off for the freedom that comes with it. Many of these communities are virtually off the grid, not even appearing on official maps and barely registering in the minds of the government officials that are technically responsible for the colonists' well-being. Presidia is one such community, found in the Martian Outback.

Located roughly midway along the northern wall of the Coprate Chasma – a canyon that runs for over 560 mi/900 km, with nearly sheer cliffs that can rise as much as 2.5 mi/4 km high – Presidia is a small community of about 900 people which is draped in near constant darkness for much of the year, as the high cliffs conspire to shield the town from the light of the sun. There are few souls that would voluntarily live in such conditions, and those that do are both hardy and fiercely independent. When a request for help is made, the circumstances are indeed dire.

For some months now, the denizens of Presidia have been enduring unexplainable losses. Pets, food stocks, and tools and equipment have gone missing. At first, it was laughed off as people simply losing things or pets foolishly running off and dying in the dark cold, though no corpses were ever found. Recently though, the townsfolk

have grown more concerned as people started to go missing. Most believe that one of their own has snapped, but the local authorities have had no luck in pinning the crimes on anyone. Now friends look at each other sideways, wondering if they are the one behind everything. The tension in the town has been steadily increasing and now, with all other options explored, a request for outside aide has been made. This is where the Characters enter the picture.

Presidia

Presidia is a colony that was established deep inside the canyon of Coprates Chasma almost 20 years ago as a small mining settlement. Exploratory mining operations had found deposits of a number of precious metals and gems. It has also served as a home to the maintenance crews that are responsible for Atmospheric Converter A-429, contributing to the terraforming of Mars.

Initially the town was located on the lip of the canyon, but tornados destroyed many of the original structures only three years after being established. Fearful that future storms could be just as devastating, the crew opted to rebuild on the floor of the canyon, where the high steep walls afforded excellent protection from the storms that ravage the plains above.

Unfortunately for the burgeoning settlement, the deposits proved to be less plentiful than originally estimated. The town's corporate sponsors pulled out less than seven years after found-

ing the small community. Even so, some of the colonists decided to stay. While the deposits were not plentiful enough for the large mining conglomerates, they were sufficient to support a small group of private miners. It also proved to be a convenient location for the Martian government to station maintenance teams for one of the massive atmospheric processors that have labored for decades to convert the Martian atmosphere into something breathable.

Nestled tight against the wall of Corporate Chasma, Presidia is almost perpetually cloaked in darkness. For most of the year, the natural light levels in the town resemble that of dusk on an overcast night. Lamp poles and flood lights run almost constantly to give the residents enough light with which to live comfortably. To help maintain the illusion of a more natural light cycle, most of these lights are cut to minimum levels as the town settles down at night. As a result, there is at least a poor mimicry of a day/night cycle. Beyond the borders of the town, however, darkness reigns supreme. Only during a two week period, when the sun's path through the sky happens to bring it directly over the canyon above the small town, does an almost normal natural light bathe the place.

The people of Presidia are a fiercely independent people. Each resident is expected to bring some benefit, be it as a skilled miner, a simple cook, or a trauma trained doctor. Anyone who is not pulling his weight in some notable manner will soon find that his contin-

ued presence is unwanted. Outsiders are also not made to feel particularly welcome, especially if they are seen as an extension of the governing body of Mars. People live in Presidia to get away from what they view as an oppressive government. They simply wish to be left alone to live their lives in a manner that suits them. They do not ask for anything and expect their privacy to be respected. Even so, visits by various bureaucrats are inevitable. So long as the visitor gets his business done quickly and efficiently, the residents try to keep their disdain and hostility beneath a surface of politeness.

The majority of those who live in Presidia are miners of one sort or another. Most own their own equipment and operate either alone or with a small group of friends. Small mining operations are spread throughout the canyon, some as far as fifty miles from the town. Presidia also operates a single smelter. It is used and maintained by all the miners to process raw ore into something that is both pure and more cost efficient to transport to one of the larger colonies, where it is sold for both hard currency and supplies the settlement needs.

Beyond the miners, one can also find a pair of doctors, a couple of barkeeps, the AC A-429 maintenance crews, mechanics, families, and all the other sort of people you would normally expect to find in a small town. The one thing that is apparently missing is the typical criminal element. While not everyone in town is a choir singer, most criminal

acts take the form of brawls and the occasional minor act of theft or vandalism. Anything more severe than this is severely looked down upon, as it is seen as an open invitation for outside scrutiny – something the town prefers to avoid. Anyone caught, or even seriously suspected, of anything more serious these minor crimes is hounded out of the town. In the case of something more violent, such as murder, the perpetrator often quietly disappears. This may seem harsh, but it serves to keep out the authorities.

The Town's Reaction

Given the insular nature of Presidia, it is no wonder that when the Characters first arrive, they will be viewed with annoyance at best and outright anger at worst. However, while the Characters will certainly be made to feel unwelcome, no one will actually make any actual hostile acts towards them unless provoked first. This does not mean there won't be harsh words or acts of intimidation to try and establish a pecking order. With the current unexplained events, the residents' stress levels are understandably high, which makes their reaction towards the Characters even a bit more strained than normal.

As investigation into the events progresses, odds are that the tension within the town will increase even more. However, as it becomes evident that the Characters are there to help, the townsfolk will slowly and reluctantly begin to warm up to them. Where background information on the events and those involved will initially be slow in coming and need to be pur-

posely sought out, people will later seek to provide any sort of information they believe will be useful to ending the current crisis. Unfortunately, this may mean the Characters will go from too little to too much data through which to sift.

Adventure Synopsis

Barsoom has three distinct Acts, as the Characters riddle through the unexplained events that are plaguing Presidia.

Act I:

Welcome to Presidia, the Exit is That Way

In the first act, the Characters are summoned to the Warden-Commander's office high above Mars. There they are given some basic background information on Presidia and the events that have been transpiring there. From here, they head down to the surface, where they receive a less than warm welcome. While the local Sheriff may have requested outside help, it does not mean the rest of the town is happy about it.

Most of the first Act is spent gathering more specific data and doing some preliminary investigations. Much of what the Characters discover does not really answer any questions, as there seems to be no definitive links between the various missing people, items, and pets. They may even begin to question if there is any sort of connection at all.

This changes, however, as the Characters investigate a new event that occurs while they are in town. It is here

that they come to realize that there may be something more sinister than a common criminal at work.

Act II: **Something Evil This Way Comes**

As the Characters continue their investigation, things get worse. A set of miner's bodies are discovered, mangled beyond recognition. It's obvious the bodies were left as a sort of warning to the community. The tension in the town skyrockets to new levels, and suddenly the Characters find themselves no longer viewed as outsiders, but rather as protectors who may mean the difference between the abandonment or survival of the town.

It is during this time that the town comes under attack – as whatever is behind these events attempts to kidnap an entire family from their own home. It is obvious that the perpetrators are becoming more bold – or more desperate. This is also the point at which the Characters realize who they actually are.

As this Act culminates, the Characters will discover a deep chasm inside one of the mines. The chasm has been opened during recent mining operations. Whoever is behind the attacks is working out of the mine itself, and the only real option to descend into the chasm and find the perpetrators.

Act III: **Where Did This Come From?**

In the third Act, the Characters descend into the newly discovered chasm. As they do, they are attacked by the true enemy – Ghasts. Once they fight off the attacks, they reach the

bottom and find a tunnel leading further down. It has seen a great deal of recent use. While exploring this tunnel, the Characters make their final discovery – a lost city buried deep under the surface of the Red Planet. The city is also not empty. It is filled with Ghasts, though many of the residents are still deep in hibernation. This state will not last however, and the Characters must take action to keep the Ghasts locked under the surface before an entire city of them begins to stream onto the surface, causing an unknowable amount of confusion and carnage.

ACT I: **WELCOME TO PRESIDIA, THE EXIT IS THAT WAY**

Goals: To introduce the Martian colony of Presidia as the main setting and allow the Characters to investigate the strange happenings.

Setting: The Martian colony of Presidia in the Coprates Chasma

Cast: Warden Commander Antoine Shari, Sheriff Fielding, various locals

Scene 1: A New Mission

The adventure begins in an orbital station high above Mars. They have just been called into Antoine Shari's office. He is the Warden-Commander for Mars and as close to a direct superior as any Warden has.

Read the following to your players:

The view out of the window is a breathtaking one. The planet Mars

sits far below, its high, rough mountains and deep canyons evident even from orbit. Clouds, thicker than they were just a decade ago, drift slowly across the world, betraying the hand of mankind in turning this cold desert world into a place that is almost pleasant. Here and there, the normally rust-red surface takes on a decidedly green hue where hardy transplanted genetically-engineered plants begin to take hold. As the small disk that is the sun begins to slide behind the planet, you can even see that the atmosphere has begun to take on a bluish tinge, though it has a long way to go before anyone will consider it truly Earth-like.

"The Warden-Commander will see you now."

The voice of the young executive assistant breaks you out of your thoughts and you look towards the door to the inner office. Your arrival here at Mars is recent and you didn't even think the Warden-Commander knew who you were – though in hindsight that was probably a foolish assumption. Even with the relatively loose command structure of the Wardens, it is unlikely that the senior Warden in the region is not going to know what assets may be available to him – even if only temporarily.

Inside the office, you meet Warden-Commander Antoine Shari. He is a relatively unassuming Malaysian man with a face that you would be hard-pressed to pick out of a crowd, and a physique that

speaks of some years behind a desk. Even so, he is known for his sharp wit and mind, and seems to always be aware of anything of note that occurs in the inner-system. Some rumors say that Shari has direct ties with 4G Enterprises, who help feed him the intelligence he always seems to have at hand.

"Welcome to Mars," the Warden-Commander says, as he stands from behind his desk. "I do apologize for the unexpected summons, but there is something I need looked into."

On the screen is an aerial view of Mars. You recognize the massive canyon as Coprates Chasma.

As though reading your thoughts, the Warden-Commander says, "If you don't recognize this, it is the Coprates Chasma canyon. It runs nearly 1000 km from end-to-end and goes as deep as 4 kilometers in some areas."

The image on the screen suddenly zooms in on the canyon and you find yourself dropping beneath the Martian surface. The walls of the canyon look to be nearly vertical and, as your viewpoint continues to dive into the depths of the massive natural fissure, it gets notably dark. After a few moments of darkness, lights can be seen in the distance. Then, only seconds later, the silhouettes of buildings come into view.

As the motion on the screen slows to a stop just outside what appears to be a small town, Antoine says, "And this is Presidia. It is a small

insular community of independent miners and their families. It is also home to a couple of atmospheric processor maintenance teams, some merchants, and mechanics." The older Warden pauses to wave his hand dismissively in the air, "and all the other rabble you can expect to find in such an isolated location."

On the screen, statistics begin to scroll down one side of the image. They show the pertinent information about the community: population, town leaders, minerals and ores that are mined in the region and so on – all-in-all dry and uninteresting.

"The community is not known to be welcoming. They don't like outsiders and especially dislike anyone who may represent the authority of Mars. Frankly, it raised some eyebrows when a request for help was received."

Shari punches a few keys and the image of the screen shrinks as it is replaced by a new one – a video stream. It shows the head of a man with graying hair, a short-cut beard, and skin that has been leathered by harsh Martian winds. For a moment, he seems frozen in time before the stream begins to play.

"I'm Sheriff Fielding. I'm what passes for the law in Presidia, and I think we may need some help. You see, there's a bunch of things that've gone missing around here. It was just small stuff at first, but later people started reporting that their pets had gone and wandered off. Pets

don't normally like leaving for long here, because it gets awfully cold at night. Not that day and night are much different round these parts, except for the lights."

The Sheriff pauses for a moment and looks off-screen for a moment. He then says to someone unseen, "Shut up! I'm on the call. We've been over this. I ain't got a clue what's going on and people are scared." He pauses, while the someone lips off. "Get out of here before I put a boot up your ass."

The Sheriff looks back at the screen with a slight blush. After a moment he continues, "Now, as I was saying – we need help here. Gear and pets gone missing is trouble, but now we've had some people disappear. I can't make sense of what is going on and could really use someone with a bit more experience in this kind of thing."

The image on the screen stops again, then the window closes. The picture of the town moves to fill up the empty space once again.

Looking at all of you, the Warden-Commander says, "I don't know if this is anything for us to worry about here, but Presidia is essentially deep under the surface of the planet. It could be that their mining has stirred something up that we need to deal with before things get worse. If you get down there and it turns out to be a local problem, help the sheriff out as best you can and then get back home. If it's something else, do what you need to do."

The Commander leans back in his chair for a moment before continuing, "Things in the system are starting to get very strange, and I don't know how much longer we're going to be able to keep a lid on things."

"You can pull any data you may need out of the network. Honestly, there isn't much there. Presidia is isolated and the locals like it that way. Don't expect the warmest of receptions when you get there."

Standing, Shari signals an end to the meeting, "Good hunting and watch your backs. Remember, it's up to you to keep all this in check and protect those who don't even know they need protection."

The Warden-Commander will take questions the Characters. In addition, they can find the following information in the Warden database. No Tests or Plot Points are required to learn this information, but the players should ask for it before it is revealed.

1. Presidia has a population of 913. Most of the population are miners and their families. The rest is made up of maintenance and administrative staff, merchants, and the other sorts of people one would normally expect to find in a small colony. It is located on the floor of the canyon, almost 2.5 mi/4 km down.
2. The crime levels in Presidia are surprisingly low. While they have their fair share of petty theft and brawls, anything more serious is

rare. This is an unusual trait of the small colony, as these places tend to attract people who are trying to stay off the grid. The people of Presidia, however, do not tolerate anyone who might attract the attention of outside law.

3. The Sheriff, Joseph Fielding, worked for 4G Enterprises as a security officer for twenty years. His last assignment was in Presidia when it was a 4G exploratory mining outpost. When the corporation pulled up stakes, he decided to stay on with the miners who stayed behind. He had a reputation for being a hard-nosed enforcer and was cited several times for undue force, but was never formally charged with anything.
4. There are no known wanted criminals hiding out in the town.
5. Beyond this, there is not a lot of additional information on the town. Minor background information as described above can also be gleaned from the database, but not much more. Presidia stays under the radar and there has been no reason to invade their privacy.

Scene 2: Unfriendly Welcome

This next scene takes place just after the Characters arrive in town.

Read the following to your players:

The shuttle ride down to the surface of Mars is pretty ordinary. The

thickening atmosphere means that the transition from orbit is not like it was a decade ago, but still pretty smooth when compared to Earth or Venus. Less than two hours after the meeting with the Warden-Commander, the shuttle drops you off at the lip of the Coprates Chasma. The ghostly remains of the old town, long destroyed by especially violent tornados, can still be seen around you. The only intact building is about 100 meters away, sitting on the edge of the canyon.

Inside the building, the Characters will find a single person. He's a rough looking local, with a scraggly beard and leathered pale skin. He's wearing miner's work clothes and a standard rebreather sits on a nearby table. This is Albert Vogler, a local miner taking his shift on the elevator. He's in a less than stellar mood, as he hates elevator duty and would much rather be breaking rocks and looking for his next claim. Albert will give the Characters the once over when they enter, give a dismissive grunt, and ignore them. The elevator controls sit on the other side of him. When the Characters talk to him, he'll glance up but not say a word. When they get around to asking for a way down, he'll hit a button on the control panel, make a rude noise, and then go back to ignoring the group. Make it apparent to the Characters that, while he may be Unfriendly and a bit miffed at the Characters for reasons only he knows, the old miner is not a threat.

The Characters will wait for a good ten minutes before the elevator finally

arrives. It takes a similar amount of time to reach the bottom again.

Read the following to your players:

The elevator is large and surprisingly well-maintained for one that belongs to a small colony. A display glows with large blue numbers that show how far the elevator has descended down the wall. After a ten minute drop, you feel the car begin to slow and a few moments later the elevator opens. Beyond the door lies Presidia, lit by the harsh glow of flood lights. Stepping out, you can see the wall of the canyon rapidly vanish into the darkness. It's almost as if the sun doesn't exist down here.

Despite the nocturnal environment, the town itself is as alive and active as any small colony on the surface. Men and women go about their respective business and children play here and there. The town's sole ore processor emits a constant low frequency drone that anyone in the street is going to have to talk over. From your current perspective, you can see that Presidia has a single main street that runs directly away from the elevator. Buildings line either side of the street, with a couple of smaller streets leading to warehouses or similar buildings. All-in-all a relatively normal mining town, if you ignore the perpetual darkness that cloaks it.

At this point, the Characters will need to locate Sheriff Fielding, since he's their only point of contact in the town. The sheriff has been notified.

that the Characters are on their way, but was not given any sort of time table, so he is not actively seeking the Characters out himself.

Finding the sheriff is relatively easy, as most anyone in the town can point the Characters towards the town jail. There are three basic kinds of people that they can approach for information: the adult residents, the processor maintenance crew, or the playing children.

Adult Residents

Most of the people around are dressed in typical Martian attire – heavy coats, with rebreather masks hanging around their necks should anyone need a quick blast of fresh oxygen. Most people here are used to the thin atmosphere and only use the masks if they are outside for an extended period, sick, or exerting themselves. They will answer any direct questions put to them by the Characters, but will keep the conversation as short as possible. They will not answer any questions about the missing people and it will be obvious they are uncomfortable with that particular line of questioning.

The Processor Maintenance Crew

About a dozen members of the atmospheric converter maintenance crew are in town at the moment. A full two dozen actually live here, but the two teams rotate between shifts out at the site of converter A-429. They stand out from the locals, as they are usually wearing their coveralls with the well-known logo of the Martian Terraforming Project on one shoulder of their shirts and coats. A couple of this crew

are on the street at as the Characters arrive.

Unlike most people in the town, they're friendlier to the Characters. They do not have the same wariness towards outsiders as the rest of the town. Any of the crew the Characters speak with will show the group to the sheriff's office and engage in small talk. None of the crew really knows anything useful about the missing people beyond the rumors that are going about town. Feel free to make up any rumors you wish in addition to the ones below:

- Most people think that some sort of outsider is camping out somewhere in the canyon and preying on the good folks of the town.
- A few people think the Sheriff may be behind things as a way to justify his job. There are those in town that think they pay him too much, given the peaceful nature of the residents, and any problems that do arise could be handled more directly by those wronged.
- Some people think those who are missing have simply run off on their own.
- If asked about the unwelcoming attitude of the locals, their guide will just shrug his shoulders and tell the Characters they just don't like outsiders. If asked about the sheriff, the maintenance person will tell the Characters that he is a good and just man who has an equal share supporters and detractors. No one else really wants

the job, so no one has ever challenged him – though there are some who would like to eliminate the position altogether.

Playing Children

There are a couple groups of children playing while the temperature is still warm enough to allow it. They are dressed much like the adults, though they generally wear their rebreathers all the time. They will be friendlier than the adults of the town, but they really aren't supposed to talk to strangers. They don't know about the things happening in town – they've been rightfully shielded from concern by their parents.

Scene 3:

Meet the Sheriff

The sheriff's office is a nondescript building directly in the center of town. The only sign that there is anything special about the building are the obviously thick shatter-proof windows and a surveillance camera watching all those who come and go.

Inside, the Characters enter a lobby with a single locked security door that allows access further into the building. A young attractive female deputy sits behind the desk, who eyes the Characters with a mix of curiosity and suspicion. She will be friendly but distant, and will not hesitate to show the Characters to the sheriff's office once they explain who they are.

Read the following to your players:

The deputy buzzes the security door open, then leads the Charac-

ters deeper into the sheriff's office. You quickly cross the single large room that fills the bulk of the building. Inside are two other deputies that seem more bored than anything. Any conversation that may have been going on stops, as the pair of deputies seem more interested in watching you. You sense the same distrust that was palpable in streets, though here it seems more contained.

The deputy ushers you into the sole office, eager to be rid of you. A rugged looking man, the same you saw on the video stream in the Warden-Commander's office, sits behind an equally rugged desk, steaming cup of coffee in hand.

"Hey Joe, these folk say they're here at your request," the deputy says, in a manner more familiar than you would use with one of your own superiors.

The Sheriff looks up from the flex screen he was studying and looks at each of you before nodding to the deputy. Without another word, she turns and leaves you alone with the man.

"Well, I know I asked for help, but I wasn't expecting a bunch of Wardens to show up. Never had much dealing with Wardens – too secretive for my taste. But thanks for taking time to come down into the trench. Maybe you can make more sense of things than I can."

The sheriff will provide the following information to the Characters:

- The events that led up to the request for assistance started about six months ago. Initially, it took the form of seemingly unconnected thefts and elevated from there. The sheriff is not certain how much connection there is between the early thefts and the escalation that occurred later.
- The sheriff has no suspects. So far he hasn't been able to tie anyone in town to the various events. He hasn't even been able to tie a group of people to the events. This is one of the reasons for the rumor that some psycho is lurking outside town somewhere preying on Presidia.
- The first pets went missing about four months ago. At first, it was believed the animals simply strayed too far and froze to death when the temperature plummeted at night, though no carcasses were ever found. It didn't take long for people to be careful with their pets, to make sure no more wandered off.
- About two months ago the first people went missing. Again, no bodies have ever been found. It is as though the people simply left with no warning. In all cases thus far, the missing have been miners out at their various dig sites. As a result, most of the mines further out have been abandoned for the moment until the townsfolk are assured nothing untoward is going on. A total of twelve miners are missing to date.

The Sheriff will also provide the case files for the Characters to study (see below).

If the Characters ask about the apparently unfriendly nature of the town, the sheriff basically shrugs it off. No one in town is really dangerous – they simply don't like symbols of outside authority. He also recommends the Characters try not to flaunt their authority, even going so far as to offer the team some clothing to replace their Warden uniforms so they will fit in better. He also requests that they leave their weapons in the sheriff's office for safety's sake, and to reduce the chance of anything unfortunate happening. He will provide them access codes to get into the building and weapons locker anytime they need to, even while he is not around.

The sheriff provides a number of cases that may all be linked to what is going on. Plot Points will help the Characters pare the case files down to the ones that are the most relevant, as well as confirm the information the sheriff provided above, and possibly glean some additional information. *Plot Points are earned through Awareness + Investigate, or Cleverness + Research.*

- *Automatic* – All the information the sheriff relayed is proven true. Unfortunately there are no obvious links between the various case files that point the team any useful direction. There are quite a few cases that likely have no link whatsoever, but without more information none of them can be fully ruled out.

- **4 Plot Points** – Through careful examination, the team is able to set a satisfying number of the case files aside. With the noise eliminated, a pattern becomes evident. Many of the thefts involve things used in traditional mining operations. Items of note include a batch of excavation explosives, shoring frames used to brace potentially unstable tunnels, sonic drills, a portable power generator, and mundane excavation tools. The Characters also notice that, on two separate occasions, cases of portable batteries that would fit the sonic drills were reported as stolen.
- **6 Plot Points** – Besides the information above, the Characters notice that two of the missing people are miners who specialized in excavation work. The rest of the miners range from rookies trying to strike out on their own to grizzled veterans with no detectable links beyond living in Presidia. There are no reports of grudges of any sort between any of the missing, and none of the missing are known noted for any suspicious behavior or habits beyond those normally associated with one who prefers living off the grid – as much as is possible in today's world.
- **8 Plot Points** – The most recent thefts, with the most recent happening only the previous week, include things like high-tensile cables, pulleys, a large drive motor, and a large (12' x 9'/4 m x 3 m) reinforced screen. Each was stolen

at different times from different active mining sites. However, each one could potentially be used as a component for creating a high-capacity elevator.

Scene 4: Investigation Begins

It takes the Characters a good full day to study all of the various reports and files the Sheriff makes available to them. The first thing that strikes them is that, thus far, it does seem (and is true) that the Sheriff really does want the group's help. He does not seem to be trying to hide anything or cast suspicion in any particular direction. This means the Characters can trust that he will be a reliable ally as the investigation moves forward, and may be able to help keep the locals, at the least, off the Wardens' backs.

From this point, the Characters will likely want to do some investigating of their own. How involved they get in this aspect of the adventure depends upon the group. As a result, this part of the adventure is fairly freeform. A number of Skills can come into play, with each providing clues that will both confirm what they already know and add new insights into the situation. You should allow this to play out for as long as the players are having fun – if you need to, you can turn this into an information dump, though that may take away from some of the tension and problem-solving.

During their investigation, you should allow the Characters to travel to various crime sites as they try to piece together any information they

gather. They will also want to talk to potential witnesses, some of which will be found in town while others will require someone to travel to a mining site. Plot Points will be earned by various Skills, as appropriate. It may also be advisable, for time's sake, for the group to split so they can pursue differing avenues of investigation in a more timely manner. This would not be odd at this stage of the investigation, since it really does not take more than one skilled agent to interview potential witnesses.

To help keep things on track, a number of avenues of investigation are provided below, along with the information that can be gained at each one. Players can look into one or more of these, though, unless they split up, they will not be able to check all of them before events move them beyond this initial inquiry. They do not need to be investigated in order.

Summary of Investigation Points:

- Tracking the Missing Explosives
- Tracking the Missing Tools
- Tracking the Missing Pets
- Tracking the Missing People
- Tracking the Elevator Equipment
- Tracking the Missing Flatbed
- Tracking the Welding Generator
- Investigating the Strangers

I. Tracking the Missing Explosives

There is a nearby mining site where the excavation explosive were stolen. There are several ways in which the Characters can earn Plot Points.

Investigation: General

Plot Points Earned By:

- Awareness + Investigate

- *Known Information* – The security fence that kept the excavation explosives secure was cut open in some manner for the thieves to gain access. A full dozen charges are missing. The theft happened late in the night.

- *6 Plot Points* – The fencing was not cut open, but rather appears to have been melted in some manner. This knowledge opens up the opportunity for a Science Test back in town, if a sample of the fence is taken back for analysis.

- *8 Plot Points* – A small tuft of grey hair was missed by the sheriff. It looks like it was torn from the thief's head as he went through the hole in the fence. This knowledge opens up a Medicine Test back in town if the hair is taken back for analysis.

Investigation: Talking to the Miners

Plot Points Earned By:

- Demeanor + Savoir Faire
- Demeanor + Intimidate

- *4 Plot Points* – Multiple miners can confirm that security is tight when it comes to the explosives. Meticulous paperwork readily available backs this up.

- *6 Plot Points* – A couple miners remember that a generator catching fire pulled the attention of anyone who might have been awake the night of the theft. This opens up the following if the Characters investigate the generator.

Investigation: The Generator Plot Points:

- Cleverness + Engineer: Electrical
- Cleverness + Mechanic

- *6 Plot Points* – Coolant had purposely been drained from the generator, allowing it to overheat and catch fire.

Investigation: Analyzing the Melted Fence in Town

Plot Points:

- Cleverness + Science: Physical
- Cleverness + Science: Earth

- *4 Plot Points* – The fencing was melted with some sort of synthetic acid.
- *6 Plot Points* – The acid is some sort of new compound that does not appear in any easily accessible database.

Investigation: Analyzing the Hair in Town

Plot Points:

- Cleverness + Medicine: Physical
- Cleverness + Medicine: Animal

- *6 Plot Points* – The tuft of hair is not human in origin, though with the tools at hand it is impossible to tell any more about it.

II. Tracking the Missing Tools

The batteries and generic mining tools went missing from the general store on the edge of town.

Investigation: General

Plot Points Earned By:

- Awareness + Investigate

- *Known Information* – The batteries that were stolen are usable in a whole host of different tools that are commonly used throughout the region, and there is nothing extraordinary about any of the more mundane tools. The door to the store was forced open through pure brute strength.

- *6 Plot Points* – Unusual scratches are found on the hard-packed ground in front of the door.

- *8 Plot Points* – The scratches are deeper closer to the door and become narrow and shallow further away.

Investigation: Talking to Sergei, the Owner

Plot Points Earned By:

- Demeanor + Savoir Faire
- Demeanor + Intimidate

- *4 Plot Points* – There is no history of thefts of this sort in the town. Shoplifters and drunks who pop open a can without paying for it are about the worst it ever gets. No other real info to be gained.

III. Tracking the Missing Pets

Angelina Sanchez is the owner of the dog Sand, who is from a type of Australian Shepherd that has been bred to survive in the thin Martian atmosphere. Sand went missing about three months ago.

Investigation: General

- *Known Information* – Sand had stayed out all night in the past, but knew where to find warmth

and was always back in the morning for food. A few days before Sand vanished, he returned with a wound along one side – a scratch. She assumed it was made by another dog. The town vet looked at it, but didn't see anything dangerous. He treated it with antibiotics to make sure it didn't get infected.

Investigation: Talking to the Vet

Plot Points:

- Cleverness + Medicine: Physical
- Cleverness + Medicine: Animal

- *6 Plot Points* – The scratches on the dog are very similar to the ones found in front of the door at the general store. This information can only be gained if the Characters have also found the scratches at the general store.

IV. Tracking the Missing People

Alise Alenin's husband, Stepan, is one of those who has gone missing.

Investigation: General

- *Known Information* – Stepan Alenin has been an upstanding member of the community for over a decade. He was known for his ability to safely excavate even the most unstable cave without causing a total collapse, and was the go-to guy for this sort of work. There have been no known issues between the couple. Alise is not certain how long her husband has actually been missing, since his schedule tended to be unpredictable and he would often not return home for several days at a time. He also had his own site,

where he worked between other jobs, and would sometimes spend the night working there.

- The sheriff already checked out Stepan's personal work site and found nothing unusual. Players can check it out if they wish, but won't find anything new.

Investigation: Stepan's Workshed

Plot Points Earned By:

- Cleverness + Computers
- Cleverness + Crime: High

- *4 Plot Points* – No one has been in the worksite shed for almost two weeks before Stepan's disappearance.

Investigation: Talking to Recent Employers

Plot Points Earned By:

- Demeanor + Fraternize
- Demeanor + Savoir Faire

- *6 Plot Points* – There was nothing unusual as far as either of his last two employers could see. However, after each job they said he set off in an unusual direction that led towards no known mining sites. With this knowledge and the general direction he travelled, the Characters can get a good sense of where he might have gone to. This opens up the Orienteering opportunity below.

Investigation: Where Stepan Went

Plot Points Earned By:

- Awareness + Orienteering

- *6 Plot Points* – The Characters manage to find Stepan's truck, which

opens up both the opportunities below. The site the players find has evidence of numerous explosions.

Investigation: Nearby Blast Sites

Plot Points Earned By:

- Cleverness + Explosives

- *6 Plot Points* – The craters themselves and the residue therein each seem to be caused by different explosive mixes. The craters also show that the explosions were directed, rather than omnidirectional. It is a good guess that Stepan was working on improving the efficiency of the explosives he used in his work.

Investigation: The Truck

Plot Points Earned By:

- Awareness + Notice

- *4 Plot Points* – The truck has been stripped of just about everything above the tires. Batteries, the engine computer, and even the first aid kit are missing.
- *8 Plot Points* – A tuft of grey fur or hair is found snagged on the vehicle under the hood. The same information can be found in town about this as the tuft of hair from above.

They can also talk to Philip Van Hooser, whose business partner, Li Zau, is missing.

Investigation: Li Zau

- *Known Information* – Philip was partners with a woman named

Li Zau. They were working a site about six hours outside of town. Philip had left Li working at the site while he ran back to town for supplies. When he returned the next day, Li was nowhere to be found. At first, Philip had thought she had decided to break their partnership and join forces with another – they had been having some significant disagreements – since with her tools and supplies were also gone. However, when she never turned up in town and no one had seen her in over a week, Philip and the sheriff both became convinced something had happened to her.

V. Tracking the Elevator Equipment

The large screen, square iron bars about 12"/30 cm in length, and the 1-ton roll of high-tensile cables were stolen from a fenced-off outdoor storage yard about 0.25 mi/0.4 km outside of town.

Investigation: General

- *Known Information* – It is unknown how long passed between the items being stolen and Mariyah St. James, the woman who runs the yard, noticed they were gone. The equipment in the yard is bulky and not often needed, and she had not been to the yard for a couple weeks. What she can say is that the chain that normally locked the yard had been cut, likely by a pair of bolt cutters. The theft also happened after the theft from the general store and, if the players think about it, they will be able to learn that a pair of bolt

cutters were stolen from the store. However, while the Characters are looking around, Mariah notices and confirms with a quick check in her records that another spool of cable (about half the size) and more steel bars are missing. This time she's ready, however, as she had installed a video system at the entrance.

Investigation: The Video
Plot Points Earned By:

- Awareness + Notice

This takes several hours, as there is a lot of video to go through.

- *4 Plot Points* – The theft happened only a week ago. The video catches a truck pulling up in the middle of the night when no one would be around. The chain around the gate is cut. The people involved are wearing heavy coats with hoods pulled up so they cannot be identified. The truck is the same one that was stolen from the motor pool.
- *4 Plot Points* – As the gate is being opened, two of the four enter the office for the storage yard (where the Characters most likely are), which is located just outside the gate by a couple minutes. When they return, they climb back into the truck and head into the yard.
- *4 Plot Points* – The truck is seen leaving less than 30 minutes later. As they close the gate, it appears they replace the cut chain and lock. The padlock is biometric and Mariah quickly checks a cabinet

and announces that a lock is missing from her spares.

- *6 Plot Points* – The movements of the thieves seem odd, as though they have a limp of some sort. Three of the four exhibit the limp. The only one who seems normal also appears to be a reluctant participant, who is always being watched by another of the four. He is one of the pair that enters the office.

Investigation: The Records
Plot Points Earned By:

- Cleverness + Computers

If the players do not think to do this, Mariah will.

- *4 Plot Points* – Someone accessed the inventory database, specifically looking up the locations of the items which are currently missing. It is unknown who, as the search was done from a public account that anyone who may be picking up supplies can access.

VI. Tracking the Missing Flatbed

The town's motor pool was where the vehicle in question was stolen.

Investigation: General

- *Known Information* – A single 5-ton flatbed was stolen at some point between sunset and sunrise. The trucks are generally not kept locked, as most any of the miners have a license to make use of them. The keys are stored in a cabinet which any licensed driver can access. The cabinet itself had been

forced open, which led the sheriff to believe the truck was stolen by someone that was not licensed to use one. Let the Characters investigate here, but there is really no other information to be gained. If they ask, there was an attempt to track the truck by following its tire marks, but a windstorm and the generally hard-packed nature of the canyon floor made that pretty much pointless. Its GPS was also removed. This theft was the first of the stolen items.

VII. Tracking the Welding Generator

The welding generator was stolen from a construction site about four hours outside of town. A new storage facility is being erected near the locals, who are excavating a new mine.

Investigation: General

Plot Points Earned By:

- Awareness + Investigate

- *Known Information* – A portable welding generator, along with a large supply of welding wire, was stolen here. There were four at the site at the time. While the generators are ‘portable,’ any serious movement requires a vehicle – they weigh about 60 lbs/27 kg each and the wire is another 100 lbs/45 kg. This crime happened roughly three months ago.
- *4 Plot Points* – Since this crime, a number of other thefts on the records have also included welding wire. It seems likely that the welding generator was not simply stolen, but is actively being used for some project somewhere.

VIII. Investigating the Strangers

Ferris Bourne, a local conspiracy theorist, thinks he saw strangers moving through the town recently.

Investigation: General

Plot Points Earned By:

- Demeanor + Fraternize

- *Known Information* – Ferris moved to Presidia five years ago, but is not a miner. Instead he runs the local broadcast that spouts conspiracy theories about just about any subject you can imagine. Normally he would normally have been run out of town, but in-person he is actually a quite gregarious and comports himself in an intelligent and professional manner. If asked, he will tell people he fully believes everything he says, but also understands why most people don't – and does not hold it against them.

- *Known Information* – Ferris is open with the Characters about what he saw. He is more open than most in town, since he himself is still a bit of an outsider to the locals. He is also not the traditional paranoid conspiracy theorist – not everyone is out to get him. Ferris will relate all the information he has, if asked. The sheriff really didn't take anything he said seriously and didn't keep any notes, so the Characters will need to talk to him personally.
- *4 Plot Points* – Since the Characters arrival, he has spoken about them and their mission. He believes they are really here to see if alien

creatures are about to take over Mars (which is to some extent true, though he has no proof). He also speaks of a secret cover-up by the government and the increasing frequency of bizarre occurrences in the solar system (again, actually true, though he has no proof). Feel free to have the Characters overhear one or more of his broadcasts.

- **6 Plot Points** – A week ago, Ferris was woken up in the middle of the night by some unusual sounds outside. At first when he looked outside, he didn't see anything but, after hearing more noises, he stepped outside. That was when he saw shadows moving over the roofs of the buildings across from him. He also heard some strange clicking sounds, though he couldn't localize where they were coming from. It sounded almost as if they were coming from all around him. He is also positive that one of the shadows saw him watching, as it seemed to stop – and he swears he saw the glow of eyes glaring at him for several seconds before leaping across to the next roof with barely a sound, melting into the dark along with the rest. After that, he darted back inside, with his heart pounding. For a time there was no other noise, but when he peeked out of the window later, Ferris swears he saw something moving along the cliff face, though it might have been his imagination (his home faces the walls of the canyon). The next day he decided to investigate further, but could find nothing. It

was later that day that he learned of one of the break-ins that have been plaguing the town for the last several months, and put two-and-two together.

Final Investigative Notes

While the Characters are investigating, they may make requests to send samples someplace where they can be better analyzed, since the facilities in Presidia are limited at best. There is no reason to not allow this. They can easily contact the station and request a shuttle to pickup any samples they may have gathered. However, shuttles are not available at the drop of a dime and it will take time to arrange for one to travel to such an out of the way location. They will be notified when the shuttle is on the way. In the end, because of the events that will transpire, they will not be able to reach the shuttle – but they don't know that... yet. Inform them of the shuttles imminent arrival when the investigation begins to stall.

The scenarios above try to cover the key parts of what the Characters can discover, but feel free to add additional information based upon their actions, as it is impossible to fully anticipate what your group may do. There isn't much action during this portion of the adventure, but there is a lot of opportunity for roleplaying. Allow this to play out naturally, but if the Characters should begin to get too far off course, gently coax them back in the right direction.

ACT II: SOMETHING EVIL THIS WAY COMES

Goals: To isolate the town; to introduce the Characters to the real threat; to guide the Characters into the mines where they discover something unusual.

Setting: The Martian colony of Presidia in the Coprates Chasma

Cast: Sheriff Fielding, most of the town

Scene 5: Cut-Off

This scene should be set off when the players' interest in the investigation begins to wane. If the Characters decide to send some samples back to their base in orbit, then this scene should be triggered while one or more of them are taking the samples up to landing site at the lip of the canyon. Should they try to send it up via courier, remind them that evidence must always be handled securely and one (or more) of the Characters must accompany it, just in case it needs to be used as part of a formal inquiry or trial later.

The events can be set off anytime you feel is appropriate by reading the following to your players – it works best if at least some of the Characters in town:

A noise, almost like a rumble of thunder from one of the powerful Martian storms, is the first sign that something bad is happening.

Whipping around instinctively, you can see the red-orange glow of a fireball high up on the wall of the canyon. The rolling flames highlight the black smoke that is even now rolling up the stone wall. Moments later you hear the unmistakable sound of steel and ceramic bending, cracking, and shearing. The flames silhouette the structure of the elevator as it slowly buckles, bends forward, then begins the long tumble to the ground far below. A stream of sparks further below tells you that the elevator was in transit, its emergency breaks straining to stop the plummeting car before it slams into the ground. It takes a moment for the gaping townsfolk to understand what is happening, but then, as though a switch were thrown, panic breaks out and alarms begin to sing throughout Presidia.

If one of the Characters are in the elevator car, read the players the following:

Leaning against the wall, you softly hum with the inane music that seems to be a standard part of every elevator you have ever ridden. An odd vibration cuts your humming short. The vibration increases in intensity until the entire car is shaking. Then, you hear the sounds of distant explosion from somewhere far above you. The car suddenly slows to a stop, then seems to hang in midair for a moment before suddenly plummeting down. The squeal of emergency brakes accompanies a rapid deceleration as you are slammed down onto the floor. You don't know how far the car has

fallen, but the brakes seems to have done their job as the car comes to a stop. For a moment, calm seems to have returned, but then the sound of heavy steel clashing together is accompanied by more shaking of the car for several seconds, before that too quiets and calms.

The elevator is Presidia's sole contact with the outside world – at least on any regular basis. The canyon stretches nearly 1,000 mi/1600 km before its surface rises up to the surface of the planet. The colony's communications relay sits at the lip of the canyon, on top of the same building the elevator empties out near. Unfortunately, all the hard lines that connect Presidia with the communications relay ran up the same superstructure as the elevator and are now been severed. They are, at least for the next several days – the time it will take for anyone on the outside to realize something is wrong – cut off from the outside world. What the Characters don't know is that the elevator operator stationed at the top of the canyon is also dead, meaning he cannot raise a more timely alarm.

If the Characters have called for a shuttle, it will arrive and then depart a short time later when no one is at the landing pad to meet it. The shuttle crew has a schedule to keep and are not interested why a pickup was not where it was scheduled to be.

If the Characters should think to ask the sheriff, he tells them that one of the communications satellites will be passing overhead in two days. For about an hour, the town will be able to communicate with the outside and

let the authorities know what has happened. Even so, it will take another more critical time before any real help will arrive.

In the immediate aftermath of the destruction of the elevator, there will be a lot of panic in the town. The sheriff will enlist the Characters to help stabilize the situation and will relay all of the above information in a town meeting. This is a good place for the Characters to learn the specifics of what the accident means for the town in the short term. Besides the above info, the sheriff also lets everyone know that there is at least a month of critical supplies stored, so things like food, water and medicine are not an immediate issue.

Between the destruction of the elevator and the meeting the sheriff holds, there are a number of things the Characters can do to help out. Those with medical training can help tend to the wounded, as there are several. One building was crushed by debris from the elevator's superstructure and a dozen people inside have wounds ranging from cuts and scrapes to life-threatening. It is these latter where the Characters can come in most handy. Have any with medical training can make Hard Cleverness + Medicine: Physical Tests. If they succeed, the wounded patients will survive.

Elsewhere in the town, Characters with Savoir Faire, or similar social Skills, can help to calm the crowd. Have any Character properly trained can make an Average Test to calm everyone, get them to return to their homes, and so on.

Characters with Engineer, Mechanic, or Explosives Skills can help try to figure out what is going on. Anyone with these Skills can, with an Average Test, figure out quickly that the elevator was sabotaged. Signs of explosives can easily be found and, once spotlights have been placed and binoculars acquired, the damage to the canyon wall has all the characteristics of a excavation explosion – this last piece of information requires someone with the Explosives Skill.

Finally, anyone with the Athletics: Coordination, Mechanic, or similar Skills can help people who are stuck in the elevator car. Just have Characters make an Average Test as appropriate as they help people reach the ground – the elevator car stopped about 100 ft/30 m up. The Medicine: Physical Skill could also come in handy here, as there are likely some minor wounds that need tending.

Keep playing through the immediately aftermath of the disaster until it feels done, and then hold the town meeting as the sheriff sums up what is known. If the Characters succeed in the Explosives Tests, he'll explain that it appears the elevator was sabotaged – if they managed to save some lives, he'll let everyone know that locals will survive thanks to the quick and skillful effort of the appropriate Character. By the end of the meeting, the town's attitude will be much warmer than when the Characters first arrived. They have proven their worth in the eyes of the locals.

Of course, the day is not yet done...

Scene 6: Attack

As the town meeting breaks up and people begin heading home, things go from bad to worse.

Read the following to your players:

After the meeting, people seem to be understandably anxious, though not panicked. More importantly, the denizens of the town seem to have warmed up to you. The efforts you made in the aftermath of the elevator explosion showed them that you really are here to help, rather than interfere in their chosen isolated lives. A number even take a moment to thank you all for the efforts you have been making in figuring out who is behind the thefts and disappearances that have plagued the town.

The first sign of a new problem is a flickering of the lights. They dim and blink several times before going out completely. In the darkness, the rolling yellow and red fireball rising in the sky from somewhere beyond town stands in a stark contrast to the enveloping blackness all around. Moments later, the rumbling sound of the explosion washes over you. A scattering of emergency lights blink to life, bringing some light back to the town.

The explosion comes from the town's power plant. Once the Characters arrive at the site (via the sheriff's own truck, which he drives), it will appear chaotic, but the Characters will immediately recognize the professional way the locals have already started fighting the fire. A pair of fire

engines have arrived on scene, spraying water and flame retardant over the burning generator. There are no Tests necessary here. Play out the scene, giving the Characters the opportunity to help out. Possibilities include shutting down fuel flows, helping with hoses, and tending to the wounded, of which there are a good number. Play this out for a short time before moving on to the next event.

As a note, it may be possible the Characters will want to arm themselves and retrieve their weapons from the sheriff's office. This event has the looks of sabotage, given how close it is to the elevator incident. The sheriff will take them by the office if they ask. It is important to keep in mind whether the Characters have armed themselves appropriately, as it will have a major impact on the next scene.

Scene 7: Abductions

Things will now move much more quickly. With the town cut off, the true perpetrators behind the events come out – the Ghasts who are waking up in their city deep beneath the surface of the Red Planet.

Read the following to your players:

The fire at the power plant is slowly being brought under control, but it is clear the damage is major and it will take outside help to restore the plant to operation. With both the elevator accident and this, it seems obvious that forces have begun to move against the town. It is now isolated and literally in the dark.

Shouts, barely noticed at first above the din of the fire and the efforts to control it, grab your attention. Turning, you see a pair of townsfolk running from out of the dark, their flashlights whipping left and right, in tune with their footfalls on the dusty canyon floor. They pause for a moment, looking around frantically, but then spot your group and dash towards you.

The two townsfolk, a man named Antonio and a teenage girl known as Sandrine, are out of breath when they reach the Characters. They are obviously panicked and tears streak the girl's face. As they try to catch their breath they say:

(Sandrine)...Taken...they've been taken...

(Antonio)...The Wings and the Andersons...saw the truck then the men jumped...off the sides...guns in their hands.

(Sandrine)...Please come quickly...

The Characters will likely want to get some clarification. Sandrine was heading to see one of the boys at the Andersons. Antonio was heading to a small bar in the area at the same time. A truck came out of the dark, and people that were clinging to the outside of it jumped off. First, they stormed the home of the Andersons, pulling them out and forcing them into the back of the truck. The truck looked like one out of the motor pool and is, in fact, the one that was stolen. However, the bed has been turned into a secure

cage using some of the things that have been stolen over the last months from the village. At the same time, part of the same group also broke into the Wings doing the same thing. Antonio and Sandrine noticed that the men seemed to move with an unusual gate, as though they were heavily laden or limping for some reason. Finally, a couple of them looked like they were armed with firearms. This is all the information the pair can provide, as after that they both ran for help.

The Characters can either run – it is a good five minute run – or, if they think about it, they can grab the sheriff's truck and make the same trip in about 30 seconds. If they have not recovered their weapons from the sheriff's office they can do so, but even in the truck the trip will take at least three minutes to go to the sheriff's office, retrieve their weapons, and get to the site. What the Characters find when they arrive depends on which of the above options they choose.

If the Characters arrive by foot, they will get there too late. A third family, the Sanduskys, has also been taken, but there is no sign of the truck. However, the truck has left tracks and the winds are relatively low, so it may be possible to try and follow the truck to wherever it has headed.

If the Characters take the truck directly there, they will arrive in time to save the Sandusky family. A firefight will break out between the abducting Ghasts and the Characters. The Ghasts will conduct a fighting withdrawal and will retreat in the truck as soon as they are able. The pair that are armed

with weapons will even stay behind to provide cover, before running into the darkness as they try to escape. The Ghasts will also try to shoot out the tires of the sheriff's truck before running to reduce the chances of pursuit, but will not do this until their own truck is making good its escape. The Characters may also think of taking out the tires of the Ghasts' truck to keep it from going anywhere, but they will have to use an Aim Action in order to not risk shooting the people in the cage. If the truck tires are shot out, the Ghasts will flee on foot.

If the Characters arrive after retrieving their weapons, they will arrive just in time to see the truck vanishing into the darkness and can give chase. The best option here will be to try and catch up and take out the tires of the truck. If successful, the Ghasts riding in and hanging on to the outside will scatter into the darkness.

Details on fighting either of the possible battles is provided below. Characteristics for all creatures are provided at the end of the adventure.

If a battle does result, the Characters will know for certain they are not dealing with humans. While the Ghasts are wearing loosely fitting overcoats in an attempt to hide their appearance, success at an Average Awareness + Notice Test will tell the Character that, whatever they are facing, it is not human. Success at a Hard Cleverness + Cryptozoology Test will reveal they are dealing with Ghasts – creatures who appear to be native to Mars and whom the Wardens have seen evidence are stirring once again. At this point, noth-

ing much is known about them by the Wardens, beyond that the creatures have been in an extremely long sleep and have been on Mars since before men walked the surface of Earth.

If the Characters manage to secure the truck, they will be able to use its internal navigation system to track where the Ghasts are coming from (this requires no Test). If not, they will be able to track the vehicle the old fashioned way, though this will slow pursuit down, which will affect things later.

Battle 1 - Battle in Town

If the Characters have arrived in time, they can try and stop the abductions. The goal of the Ghasts is not to fight the Characters, but make off with the people already secured in the cage on the truck. They will not try forcing the Sandusky family into the cage, but will abandon them and jump for the truck. Once at the truck, it will take one turn for a Ghast to get the truck started and roughly one turn to get it turned around. After that, it will take off into the night. Note that the truck will run without headlights – Ghasts see fine in the dark – so once it starts moving, it is quickly swallowed by the night. Shooting the truck tires out requires the Characters to use an Aim Action first. The tires are pretty tough and designed to take some punishment, so treat them as having 10 points of armor and that they can take a total of 15 points of damage. If the Characters shoot at a Ghast with civilians nearby, they must use an Aim Action to ensure they do not hit them. If they do not, and they miss the Ghast, roll one Die. On a 1, the shot hits the

civilian instead. Assume any hit on a civilian drops him, for purposes of combat. After the fight, success at an Average Cleverness + Medicine: Physical Test will stabilize him and ensure he survives the wound.

Opponents:

- 2 Protector Ghasts
- 4 Abductor Ghasts

Battle 2 - Chase

This battle assumes the Characters arrive in time to see the truck speeding off into the darkness. Their only choice is to chase the Ghasts. The Ghasts will be running without lights, and doing everything they can to lose the Characters' pursuit. Whoever is driving will need to make an Opposed Test using Grace + Drive: Wheeled each turn against the Ghast driver. Assume the Ghast has 6 Dice for his Test. If the Character wins the Test, he keeps the enemy truck in range. If he wins by a Trigger or more, he manages to close the range. If he loses the Test, the opposing Ghast opens the range. If the Ghast wins by a Trigger or more, it manages to swerve unexpectedly and disappear into the dark. If at least one Character can succeed at a Hard Awareness + Notice Test within the next turn, he will be able to guide the driver back on course.

Because of the jostling of the trucks and the nature of the Tests, all Characters (and Ghasts) lose 2 Dice on all ranged attacks. If they Aim, they lose only one die. The Characters can try to shoot the tires out of the truck or kill the driver. Either one will force the truck to a stop, at which point any surviving Ghasts will attempt to flee into

the darkness, scattering in different directions as they do. Because of the nature of the chase, attacking Characters lose 1 additional Die if trying to shoot out tires.

Four of the Ghasts are inside the cab of the truck (it has a back seat), but the two Protector Ghasts are hanging onto the outside using their tails to secure themselves and leave their arms free to fire at the pursuing Characters. If a Ghast on the outside is hit by weapons fire, roll 5 Dice. If at least one is a Success, nothing happens. If there are no Successes, the Ghast loses his grip and falls off, vanishing behind the trucks in the darkness. Assume it suffers 5 Dice of damage in the fall. Unless it is killed, it will make its way home on foot.

Scene 8: Tracking the Problem to Its Source

Things will start moving even more quickly now. It is obvious (or should be) that the Ghasts are making moves against the town and the Characters need to find a way to counter this. First, they really need to figure out what they are up against.

The Characters should now have everything they need to track the Ghasts to their origin. If they have the truck, they can use its integrated GPS system to determine from where it came. This will require no Test and will reveal that the Ghasts seem to be originating from an old mining site that was abandoned over a year ago, after a partial collapse during an earthquake that resulted in a death. The sheriff knows that the mine's returns had begun to dwindle, so it was decided by the town

to abandon it, rather spend the time and money to opening it back up.

The second option is to track the truck the old fashioned way. The Characters will need to do this immediately, as the tracks will not stay viable as a source to follow for long before the Martian winds scour them away. This will also take longer, as there will be points along the path where the tracks will have already faded away and the group will need to take time to pick them up again.

The sheriff will not come along, as he will want to stay back and set up whatever defenses they can for the town in case the Ghasts return. There is still a good day and a half before the comms satellite will pass overhead and allow the town to call in additional help. The Characters should see a silver lining in this, as it will make it easier to keep whatever they end up finding under wraps – and they really want things wrapped up before additional help arrives. The more people involved, the more difficult it is to keep things quiet.

When the Characters reach the old mine, which is a good hour away, they will quickly come upon the collapse that resulted in the closure of the mine. They will just as quickly see that someone or something has opened the collapse up again, and Success at an Average Cleverness + Science: Physical or Science: Life Test will reveal that it looks like someone from the other side of the collapse dug their way out.

If the Characters think to ask, they can get a relatively recent map of the mine. It is a single-shaft mine, with

only a couple of small side branches and a couple of man-made caverns at the end of each offshoot, that were created as major veins of ores were mined out.

Scene 9: Into the Cave

Beyond the immediate entrance and collapse, the caves are utterly dark, forcing Characters to rely on their own lights. There are lights strung along each wall, but they are not working as the generator that used to power them was removed when the mine was closed. This mine is an older mine and goes deep into the canyon wall. Going is slow, as it is obvious parts of the mine are still unstable. The Characters will have a number of obstacles to overcome as they move deeper into the mine. Each is described below.

At some point, while the Characters are moving deeper into the mine, inform them they notice one odd thing about the mine. There is an ever-present light breeze which, given that any air circulation machinery has been moved to new worksites, is unusual in a mine that has no known entries beyond the one the Characters used.

Obstacle 1: Collapsed Floor

About ten minutes into the mine, the Characters come across a spot where the floor has collapsed into a cavern deeper within. The crossing is almost 30 ft/10 m across. A small, six-inch ledge runs along one side of the wall. The collapse runs almost 30 ft/10 m down and the floor is strewn with sharp broken rock. On the ceiling are the remainders of some structural members that reinforced the ceiling.

Across the pit, the Characters can make out a sort of make-shift bridge that looks like it could be manually extended over the collapsed floor – which will make any return trip easier. Unfortunately, there is no way to pull the bridge from the group's current location.

Crossing via the ledge requires success at an Average Grace + Athletics: Coordination Test. Climbing down safely and crossing across the floor requires success at an Average Physique + Athletics: Brawn Test to climb down, then a second to get back up. Falling from the ledge results 4 Dice of damage. Falling while climbing results in 3 Dice of damage. In either case, armor will reduce this damage.

If the Characters opt to move along the floor, have them make a Hard Awareness + Notice Test. If successful, one or more of the Characters notice some stones roughly halfway across have a dark stain. Success at an Easy Medicine (any) Test will reveal that the stain is dried blood. It is obvious the blood stain occurred after the floor collapsed. If the Characters opt to take some samples, they can try to identify them later on.

Obstacle 2: Ambush

The tunnel is not empty and, as the group pushes deeper in, they come across the first of the Ghasts. This occurs about five minutes after the Characters make it across the pit, shortly after they go past a couple of cross tunnels.

The first indications that something is amiss will be a series of high-pitched

Noises. The Characters will have a hard time figuring out where they are coming from, as the sounds seem to bounce off the walls. This is the Ghasts who are laying in ambush for the group (they use echolocation). A short time later, the Ghasts will attack.

Opponents:

- 2 Ghast Protectors
- Increase this number for larger groups

The ambush will take place near one of the access tunnels. There is also some debris from partial collapses that can be used for cover. The Ghasts will use their ability to move along the walls to their advantage. They also have an advantage in the darkness of the cave. While the Characters are reliant upon their light sources, which have the side effect of giving away their positions, the Ghasts can see as well in the dark as in light thanks to their echolocation.

Obstacle 3: The Gate

About thirty minutes into the mine, the group comes across something that is unexpected – a gate barring anyone from proceeding any further. Success at an Easy Cleverness + Mechanic or Engineering (any) Test will tell the Characters that the gate is a relatively new construction (within the last six months), based on the condition of the materials. If the players should think to ask, the materials used to build the gate could easily have been taken from the materials that have been stolen from the town over the last few months. If they don't think to ask, have them make an Average Cleverness test.

The gate is locked with a chain and padlock, but the lock is on the opposite side – which indicates that whoever put the gate up is somewhere deeper in the mine. If the Characters got a map of the mine, this may seem odd since they have moved three-quarters of the way into the mine. There is a single off-shoot further ahead, but a bit further than that the main tunnel ends. Based on the map, there is nothing much more of interest ahead.

Getting through the gate can be accomplished either by cutting the chain or picking the lock – an Average Grace + Crime: Low or Cleverness + Mechanic Test. It will delay progress, but should not be a major impediment.

ACT III: WHERE DID THIS COME FROM?

Goals: To bring the Characters into the underground Ghast city; to rescue the surviving captives; to close the mine before the Ghaunts get out; to keep the situation quiet.

Setting: The Martian colony of Presidia in the Coprates Chasma, the underground Ghast city

Cast: Stepan Alenin and the rest of the survivors.

Scene 10:
End of the Mine

Once past the gate, it does not take long for the group to reach the end of

the mine. The main shaft ends as predicted, but the team finds something in the offshoot that surprises everyone.

As they begin exploring the offshoot, have the Characters make an Average Awareness + Notice Test. If successful, they begin hearing a whistling – like wind blowing through something.

A short ways further, the off-shoot tunnel opens up into a larger cavern, something not noted on the map – though that's not surprising. However, what is surprising are the four cages that have been erected along one side of the room. The doors to these cages are open and are currently empty, but a quick check will show that this was not always the case. Dirty, torn sleeping mats are in each cage, along with bits of leftover food and what was obviously a pail for biological waste – empty now, but the smell of their use still lingers.

More interesting is the ragged hole in the floor of the cavern. It appears as though part of the wall collapsed and the floor buckled, opening up a small chasm that extends much deeper into the ground – an Easy Cleverness + Science: Earth Test will confirm that this was likely formed as a result of the earthquake that caused the collapse. Even more unusual, there seems to have been some sort of makeshift elevator that descends into the cavern. If the Characters check, the serial number on the motor that runs the elevator matches one that was stolen from the town. All the materials that have been used to build it also appear to

have been stolen from the town – as, for that matter, were the cages. The elevator is currently at the bottom of the hole. Success at an Average Cleverness + Mechanic or Engineer: Electrical or Power Systems Test will reveal that, based on the size of the spool of cable, the hole likely descends at least 500'/152 m.

The team has two options for continuing on. A control panel set near the motor exists, but a quick check will show that it is dead. The controls are likely limited to wherever the elevator descends. It may be possible, with a successful Hard Cleverness + Mechanic or Engineer: Power Systems Test, to jury rig the motor directly and take control of the elevator, allowing the Characters to raise it up and then take it back down.

The other option is to climb down the shaft the old-fashioned way. If the Characters feel like they have the time, they can run back to town and find some climbing gear to make the descent easier and safer. If they feel pressed for time, they will have to climb down the hard way. It is up to them to decide what sort of pressure they are under – do not provide guidance in this regard. It really does not matter, though a trip to town and back is a good two hours, plus another hour to exit and re-enter the mine. Climbing down with the appropriate repelling gear makes this Test Easy. If a Character should fail, they can make a second Test to catch themselves before they fall to the bottom (and die). Fortunately, even without gear, this Test requires Success at an Average Physique + Athletics: Brawn, as the

walls are rough with lots of handholds. However, a failed Test here requires Success at a Hard follow-up Test to catch oneself before crashing into the ground below.

What the team finds at the bottom depends upon what happened when the Ghasts hit the town. If the Ghasts got away clean, they will have left two of them to watch for anyone who might follow them. If the Protectors were alive, they will be posted. If not, a pair of the Abductors will be waiting. In either case, they will be hiding. Have the Characters make an Opposed Awareness + Notice Test against the Ghast's 8 Dice of Stealth. Failure will result in the Ghasts getting one surprise turn to initiate the conflict. Whether the Characters use the elevator or not does not really matter, as the Ghasts are a patient race and have been laying in wait since their return.

Opponents:

- 2 Protector Ghasts
- Or 2 Abductor Ghasts
- Add more for larger Character groups

If the Characters stopped the Ghasts from getting away with the truck, there will be no one waiting for them at the bottom of the shaft.

Once the Characters have an opportunity to look around, they will find that they are in a small cavern. A pair of lights have been bolted into the walls of the cavern. It is immediately obvious they are not from the town. When triggered, the light they give off is redder than normal. A single tunnel leads out of the room.

Scene 11: The Missing

As the Characters move deeper into this newly discovered set of caverns, they can sense something is not quite right. Have the Characters make a Cleverness + Science: Earth Test. If any Succeed at a Hard Difficulty, they realize that, despite the fact that the cavern looks natural, it has actually been worked. Closer looks at the walls will reveal very fine markings that are indicative of tools. Of course, this revelation does not really help with the current situation.

The tunnel meanders for a good fifteen minutes, lit at regular intervals by the odd red-hued lights. Just before they arrive at the end, have the team make an Awareness + Notice Test. Any who succeeds against an Average Difficulty hears the sound of a steel door being slammed from up ahead.

Ahead, the cavern opens up into a large, obviously non-natural room. The floor and walls have been machined into a smooth, seamless whole. Inside the room, along one wall, are two dozen small cages similar to the ones the Characters found topside. These cages are not empty. Along the opposite wall are stacks of materials, many of which look like the very ones that have been stolen over the past several months from the town. The far end of the room opens into an even larger cavern, though the floor of that cavern is not visible from the Character's current vantage.

Inside the room are over a dozen human prisoners. Many of them are those missing from Presidia, though there are some others that are unknown

to the team. Also in the room when the Characters arrive are four armed Ghasts (Protector Ghasts). If the team opts for a more stealthy approach – requiring success at an Average Grace + Stealth Test, since these Ghasts are not expecting company – when they hear the door slam, they will see the Ghasts and have the chance to watch them. One of the Ghasts seems to be shoving food into each cell, opening the door just long enough to shove a bowl in, then slamming the door shut. Another is watching the caged humans with his weapon pointed towards them in an obvious, unspoken warning of what will happen if any of the prisoners decides to try something. The other pair seems to be counting supplies.

If the Characters sit tight, the Ghasts will ultimately leave the room. The team can then safely enter and release the prisoners if they wish. If they either do not opt to move forward stealthily, or decide to initiate hostilities, they will have a fight on their hands and a major problem shortly thereafter. Both of these possibilities are covered below.

The Stealth and Patience Approach

This is the safest and smartest route to take. Once the Ghasts leave the room, it is easy for the Characters to release the prisoners. They will need to take care to keep the newly freed townsfolk quiet initially, but a couple simple warnings will do the job. If anyone moves to check out what is at the far end of the room, have them make an Average Grace + Stealth test. If successful, they see the following.

Please read this to your players:

As you near the far end of the room, you stop short at a sight you could hardly have prepared yourself for. Instead of another Martian cavern, you are greeted with a breathtaking view of an entire city that seems to be nestled at the bottom of a deep underground valley. To one side, an epic waterfall cascades out of what is obviously a deep Martian underground river. Evidence of such rivers have been found over the last few years but, in all cases until now, they have been dry. The city itself consists of an obviously alien architecture, beautiful in its own right, but obviously incredibly old given its relatively ruined state of repair. Even so, signs of life within the city can be seen as pools of reddish light glow here and there. Occasionally, you hear sounds that seem to echo from the city below. The Wardens had always theorized that there might be such cities, the remnants of a culture far older than mankind, deep within the Martian world, but this is the first actual evidence. It is not a fortuitous discovery and the implications are both frightening and staggering.

About this time, the sounds of an explosion echoes over the valley, though the exact source cannot be determined from the Character's current vantage.

The Characters can learn the following information from the prisoners – no Plot Points required.

- Most of the prisoners are from Presidia. Their identities can easily be verified. The rest are surveyors

or explorers that were captured while they are far out in the Martian wastes. Most often the Ghasts swept over their camps at night, killing those they had to, but taking as many prisoners as possible.

- Most of those taken have been forced to work at various sites. Those with technical skills have been working to help restore power to the city, though they were generally blindfolded before being taken to worksites, so they never see much of the city itself. Others have been working to restore other aspects of its infrastructure. Those unskilled have been working hard at opening collapsed passages leading out in various directions from the city.
- Stepan Alenin is here. He tells the Characters he has been forced to help demolish especially bad tunnel collapses. In several of the locations, he has noticed what looks to him to be an ancient track of some sort. It looks similar to a maglev track, though he does not know for certain. He has also caught glances of what he thinks may be a map the creatures reference sometimes. If he is right, there is an entire network of the tracks that link at least two other cities.
- The Ghasts have been using any who they have killed as food. On at least one occasion, they ate one of the more rebellious prisoners in front of the rest as a demonstration of what can happen. They ate him alive.

- Some of the Ghasts can speak English, though it is heavily accented and obviously not natural or easy for them. The words seem forced.

The Open Conflict Approach

If the Characters completely botch their stealthy approach, or decide to simply attack, they will have to kill the Ghasts before they can learn any of the above information. The only problem for them is that, as soon as the fire fight breaks out, one of the Ghasts will sprint out of the room and make for the city. There is no real way the Characters can stop him.

If the Characters initiate the fight from stealth, they will get a single surprise turn in which the Ghasts will not have a chance to react.

Opponents:

- 3 Protector Ghasts
- Add more, based on group size
- Assume the fourth flees the room, unless they somehow manage to kill the other three in the first turn of combat.

Assuming one of the Ghasts does flee, the Characters will have a very short time to get the prisoners out before overwhelming forces arrive. Give the Characters a heads up by mentioning a cacophony of angry sounding screeches coming from the direction of the city after a few minutes have passed.

Closing the Scene

If the Characters do not think of it, Stepan Alenin will recommend they grab some of the explosives that are

stored along the wall, so that they can collapse the tunnel and seal off the Ghasts' access to the surface – at least for the time being. If the Characters made a stealthy approach, this is easily and safely done. If, on the other hand, they stirred the hornet's nest, then they should be made to feel the pressure of an overwhelming force close on their heels as they evacuate the prisoners.

With Stepan along, setting the demolitions is easy, as this is his profession. If they are being pursued, he can even set a couple charges to act like time-delayed grenades as they team moves down the lower tunnel. Once they get to the top of the elevator – no matter how the Characters descended, the car will be at the bottom – they will have to allow for two trips to get everyone up. If they are being pursued, have the first couple of Ghasts get close enough to force a fighting withdrawal, though make it obvious staying to kill them is really not an option. Have the Ghasts appear as the elevator is descending for the second pickup and have a couple scale up the shaft as it is rising back up, though the Characters can take them out as they do. Make this as exciting and frightening as possible, but not necessarily deadly, at this point.

Once at the top, Stepan will rig an explosive to demolish the elevator, then several more to collapse the tunnel itself. He'll complain about not having time to do it properly, but it is obvious he really knows what he is doing as he proceeds about his work in a very professional and skilled manner.

Epilogue:

Wrapping Things Up

At this point, the Characters now know the Warden theory of a Ghast threat to Mars is very real – though how exactly they should proceed is up to those with a much higher pay grade.

With the tunnel collapsed, the town will be safe for at least long enough for outside help to arrive. In addition, given the scope of this new intelligence and the number of people who know, or at least have a good idea, about the Ghasts, it will take a team of Wardens with much more experience to work with the town and determine how best to keep things under wraps. Rumors will flow from this, but the Wardens are adept at keeping those rumors to a minimum.

The Characters themselves will be congratulated for good work and, if any of them should have been killed – a real possibility – they will be properly honored.

GHAST

With a powerful leap, it hits the floor, its ragged black talons scraping across the ground. Built like some awful cross of man and alien kangaroo, it bares its sharp teeth with a hiss. A ruddy coat of fine, dirty fur seems to cover the beast from the top of its head down its body, all the way to the tip of its powerful tail. Perhaps most disturbing is the creature's face, a hideous mockery of a human's. Sickly sulphurous eyes narrow as a forked tongue flits out of its mouth to lick its lips. It's clear you're on the menu.

The problem is, it's not this one you have to worry about. The others have snuck around while you were distracted, and you can hear their hisses in the shadows. The things are pack hunters. Damn.

Ghasts are disturbing kangaroo-like humanoid creatures that seem to be native to Martian soil. They have been waking up from their eons-long hibernation as the Chthonian Star approaches.

These creatures have a society all their own, complete with their own guttural language. They even appear to have technology that they are resurrecting as they come back into the world. For now, they seem content to steal human technology, but more of their own is popping up all the time. The ghast race is coming back, and these first are assessing how that might best happen.

In general, ghasts are reasonably intelligent, but they are very clever. They are pack hunters that instinctively know how to work together, much to the chagrin of their prey. While they can eat any kind of meat, they prefer the colonists of Mars – but will eat one another if necessary.

Ghasts have difficulty operating in sunlight, and prefer to come out only at night.



Ghast Game Statistics

Size:	6' - 7' tall, 180 - 220 lbs. (Male) 1.8 - 2.1 m tall, 82-100 kg						
	5'6" - 6'6" tall, 160 - 200 lbs. (Female) 1.7 - 2 m tall, 72-90 kg						
Habitat:	Martian Plains & Mountains, Earth-like Atmospheres						
Attributes:							
Awareness	4	Grace	5				
Cleverness	4	Perseverance	3				
Demeanor	3	Physique	4				
Statistics:							
Health	12	(12/24/36/48)					
Speed	18 mph						
Skills:	Athletics: Coordination 3, Deception 2, Defense 2, Guns (any) 2, Hand Weapons: Blade 2, Insight 2, Language (any) 3, Natural Weapons 2, Notice 3, Reaction 2, Stealth 3						
Weapons:	Bite (3d6 + 2d6 for Physique) Clawed Kick (6d6 + 2d6 for Physique)						
Armor:	Tough Hide (5/3)						
Horror Factor:	Average						
Special Abilities:							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>Adaptable</i> – Ghaunts can survive and thrive in the thin atmosphere of Mars, as well as that of Earth.<i>Climber</i> (x1) – Ghaunts can climb as fast as they can run.<i>Echolocation</i> – Ghaunts can sense their environment like bats.<i>Jumper</i> (x3) – Ghaunts can leap three times as far as humans.<i>Skilled</i> – Assign another 20-40 points in skills for individual Ghaunts, in addition to the basic skills listed here.<i>Tool-Users</i> – Ghaunts can and do use human tools and limited technology of their own. They are capable of using many human weapons, as well as projectile weapons of their own design.							

UPCOMING SUPPLEMENTS

There are many exciting supplemental books coming up for *The Void*!

Horrors of the Void I: Monsters

The *Horrors of the Void* series introduces you to more of the fascinating and terrifying creatures that are awakening in the solar system.

Ecological Footprint I: Jupiter

The *Ecological Footprint* series provides in-depth looks into the different planets of our solar system, with more setting, adventure seeds, and character options. This first installment explores Jupiter – most especially the Galilean Moons of Callisto, Europa, Ganymede, and Io.

Tools of the Trade I: Technology & Gear

The *Tools of the Trade* series explores new kinds of technology and provides new gear, weapons, vehicles, and more to add to your game.

Ecological Footprint II: Saturn

This second installment of the *Ecological Footprint* series explores the Republic of Saturn and its key colonies – Dione, Enceladus, Hyperion, Rhea, Tethys, and Titan.

Vessels of the Void: Spaceships

This volume greatly expands the roster of spaceships for *The Void*, including expanded stats, customization, and rules for spaceship combat.

Ecological Footprint III: Kuiper Belt

This third installment of the *Ecological Footprint* series explores the vast frontier of the Kuiper Belt, far out at the edge of what we know.

Characters Unbound I: Talents

The *Characters Unbound* series introduces new options for Characters of all kinds, with this volume focusing on a much expanded list of awesome Talents.



THE STARS WERE NEVER MEANT FOR US

2159 AD. Something approaches, a thing on an orbit from far away. Seemingly a mysterious shard of dark matter, this object is known in obscure prophecy as the Chthonian Star. It is awakening things long thought lost or dead, things that have slumbered awaiting its return. The Unified World Council sends out special teams of sanctioned Wardens, whose job it is to ascertain the new threats to human life, to learn everything they can about them, and fight them wherever they are found.

Barsoom. It started with a few missing pets. Then things started turning up missing. Then people disappeared. In the small Martian Outback town called Presidia, things are much more than they seem. Find out for yourself.

The Void is an original Lovecraftian hard sci-fi horror setting, and this an adventure to take you there.

The Stygian Cycle I - Barsoom:

- Is a turn-key adventure, ready-to-run, with most everything you need.
- Takes Characters to Mars, to unravel a dark mystery plaguing a colony in the Martian Outback.
- Is the first adventure in the epic *Stygian Cycle* campaign.
- Is usable in *The Void* Organized Play framework – take your Character from game to game.
- Created by the award-winning team that brought you *CthulhuTech*.



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