The Eye - Fanzine

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Tech · Status · Comm · Local

For the ECLIPSE PHASE Roleplaying Game

//ROOT DIRECTORY//

The Eye Is Open

Adam Jury wanted a fanzine for *Eclipse Phase*. Within two days of expressing this on his blog and twitter feed, a production framework was already being built on Darkcast (www.firewall-darkcast.com) and fans began the DIY process of collaborating on a budding project that promised to make full use of the Creative Commons license that Posthuman Studios released the title under. Home-brewers, rule-hackers, writers, artists, designers, editors and one awesome Drupal coder (all fans of *Eclipse Phase*) were there looking for a way to help out and offer their time and effort.

Only a few months have passed since work began on what eventually became titled *The Eye*, and there has been an unbelievable amount of work accomplished. A general workflow has taken shape and the programmer at Darkcast continues to take feedback from the crowd, developing tools and processes to make the job easier. Contributors have stacked up several issues worth of material already, and a core staff of editors has shaped up to make sure that it is all proofed and clear. The design group has done their best to create a consistent layout and style guide for the magazine to provide as much production value as possible for this freshman issue of *The Eye*.

We have all learned a great deal while putting this together and we are proud to see it produce such results from the *Eclipse Phase* fan community. We can thank Adam for planting the seed of thought for this publication, but I think he will agree that it does not matter if *The Eye* turned out to be as he imagined; it's what the fans want it to be, and that's what counts.

"Welcome to all! Working with *The Eye* to build the tools and build the team behind *The Eye* has really been a delight. I hope all our our readers enjoy the work as much as we enjoyed creating it (more even!). The creators of *Eclipse Phase* have been kind enough to invite the world to play on their playground, so please, read! Enjoy! Pass this issue around to all your friends, and to at least one friend who doesn't know what *Eclipse Phase*, or even roleplaying is; we hope to be a wonderful introduction. Join us for the next issue!"—*Sarah E. Hood*

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Page 2 art courtesy of NASA

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Eclipse Phase vs. Mass Effect— Kinetic Barriers

by Martin Swan

Mass Effect contains many interesting components that I think would be fantastic when applied into the *Eclipse Phase* world. A good example of this is the kinetic barriers that are prevalent in the ME universe. For those who are unaware, kinetic barriers are extremely advanced pieces of technology that protect their wearer from incoming kinetic damage. In Mass Effect this is done by utilizing the mass effect fields that much of its technology is based on, a technology that is not present in *Eclipse Phase*. Instead of making an attempt at explaining exactly how they work, I have instead decided to simply put it down to an unknown alien physics effect, which handily also explains why they have not come so prevalent that everyone is wearing them. The following contains both the rules and some descriptive text to go along with them.

Kinetic Barriers

An example of some of the incredibly advanced technology left behind by the long dead civilizations found through the Pandora Gates, kinetic barriers have been adopted throughout the system by elite military teams, especially those who have strong ties with the Planetary Consortium. Smuggled out from under the nose of the Pathfinder Corporation by an unknown benefactor, these alien devices have also found themselves highly sought after by many black market dealers, eager to cash in before one of the hypercorp research facilities trying to replicate their effects makes any progress.
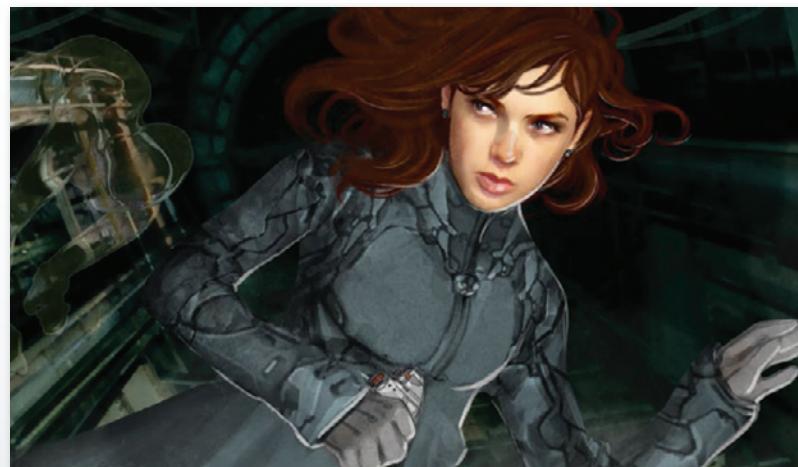
Unlike armor, which reduces the amount of damage taken by its wearer, kinetic barriers are capable of completely absorbing a limited number of direct hits by many kinetic based weapons (such as classical firearms and rail guns) before temporarily overloading and shutting down. Each kinetic barrier has a pool of defense points representing the protection is applies against all kinetic damage. They have no effect on energy or psi damage.

Whenever someone wearing an activated kinetic barrier takes kinetic damage, an amount of that damage up to the number of defense points remaining is absorbed, completely protecting the wearer from that absorbed damage. This absorption is determined before any protection offered by armor. For every point of damage absorbed by a kinetic barrier it loses a defense point.

Defense points recharge over time, however each time they absorb damage this recharge is delayed. At the beginning of each action turn any kinetic barrier that did not take damage during the previous action turn recharged a number of defense points as determined by the particular make or model. While outside of combat a kinetic barrier recharges at a separate rate, also determined by the make or model of the device. A kinetic barrier recharges defense points even while deactivated.

Kinetic barriers utilize a still undiscovered means of protecting their users. All recorded attempts at replicating these devices by transhuman kind has resulting in failure, occasionally catastrophic failure. As such they can only be purchased, not created by transhuman means. ❑

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KB-Alpha

The first of a series of kinetic barriers found on an unknown exoplanet, the KB-Alpha offers the least protection, and as such is sold for the lowest price. Many of these devices have recently been discovered in the hands of low level criminals, and authorities are beginning to suspect that someone may have discovered the means of replicating them. Whenever the KB-Alpha is struck by a high speed projectile it flares blue, with a pulse of eerie light emanating from the contact point along the wearer's body.

Defense Point Pool: 30
Combat Recharge Rate: 1/Action Turn
Out of Combat Recharge Rate: 20/Minute
Cost: Expensive (exceptionally rare)

KB-Gamma

Very few examples of these devices have been documented within the system, and many believe that they only exist in the hands of the exceptionally wealthy collectors of alien technology. Much more effective at protecting its owner than the KB-Alpha, the KB-Gamma has more than triple the defensive properties of those inferior devices. Unlike the other examples of this technology, when a KB-Gamma barrier is struck by a high speed projectile there are no light flares, the bullet simply seems to harmlessly drop to the ground before striking.

Defense Points Pool: 100
Combat Recharge Rate: 3/Action Turn
Out of Combat Recharge Rate: 60/Minute
Cost: Expensive (exceptionally rare, min. 100,000)

KB-Beta

Although only slightly more effective than the KB-Alpha range of kinetic barriers, the KB-Beta goes for many times the price on the black market. Although few of these devices have been found on criminals and their ilk, there have been sporadic reports of Direct Action equipping several of their more prestigious units with them. Whenever the KB-Beta is struck by a high speed projectile it flares red, with a pulse of eerie light emanating from the contact point along the wearers body.

Defense Points Pool: 50
Combat Recharge Rate: 2/Action Turn
Out of Combat Recharge Rate: 40/Minute
Cost: Expensive (exceptionally rare, min. 50,000)

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Rule Hacking: Swarmanoid Morphs

by Jordan Al-Tawoos

As I pored over the original PDF of the *Eclipse Phase* Core Rulebook, the swarmanoid morph immediately jumped out at me, pregnant with possibility. I began crafting a character centered around this notion of a swarm body, but in the process I had to dispel some misconceptions that arose. First, swarmanoid morphs are composed of micro-drones, not nanoswarms. They are not TITAN artifacts, nor are they alien technology. Their scale is closer to that of cockroaches or wasps than microbes.

Playing a swarmanoid morph also required rethinking some of my expectations. Nearly anything requiring a SOM Test is a no-go, and combat options are strictly limited, although the creative player will always figure out something. The simple need to be held makes most weapons and other equipment useless, unless it can be modified to fit on a micro-drone body. Psi is out even if your ego is an async since sleights require at least a partially biological brain. Nanoswarms are fun to play with, but they require a General Hive which, again, the morph can't carry. The idea of letting loose disassembler nanoswarms was compelling enough to me that I included a six-legged walker servitor during character generation specifically to lug the General Hive about. Other players have made their swarmanoid characters play the hacker, scorching egos rather than morphs.

Things get messy again when you begin dig in and begin asking about egos in a swarmanoid morph. Does every micro-drone possess a full ego? If a micro-drone gets crushed, do you suffer brain damage? At what point is a swarm considered 'dead'? There are two related concerns here. The first is a question of where the ego resides. How one answers that question will leads into the second; where the cyberbrain and cortical stack are located on a swarmanoid morph? According to the Core Rulebook, the "computer and sensor systems are distributed throughout the swarm." However, having dug around amongst private emails, public waves and forum postings on EclipsePhase.com and FirewallDarkcast, I found several different theories have been proposed for gameplay, each orthodox but using incompatible hermeneutics. If you're playing as a swarmanoid, make sure you and your GM have the same assumptions going in.

Ego & Cortical Stack

Here, in outline, are summaries of the competing theories surrounding egos in swarmanoid morphs.

Proletariat Theory
The ego resides in every micro-drone.

Deceptively simple at face value, the implications of this theory are enormous. A given swarm would have the equivalent of hundreds of alpha forks, requiring constant synchronization. Changing morphs would be highly traumatic. Capture of one or more micro-drones would constitute kidnapping the character. Resleeving would not be required, in theory, unless every drone were destroyed or incapacitated. Separation of drones or loss of communication would result in forking.

Queen Bee Theory
The ego resides in a particular micro-drone.

The Queen Bee hypothesis poses a single master unit that coordinates the rest of the swarm. All micro-drones will protect the queen at all costs, and losing the queen means a resleeve. The cortical stack is assumed to reside with the queen, making sleeving and stack retrieval simpler. The micro-drones are useless without the queen, so swarm separation or loss is easily remedied with the manufacture of replacement drones.

Queen Bees Theory
Multiple copies of the ego exist in specific micro-drones throughout the swarm.

Rather than having a single point of failure in the queen, this theory adds several inactive queens

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which each possess a cortical stack and a full copy of the ego, regularly synced. If an inactive queen no longer hears the signal heartbeat of the active queen, it awakens and takes over control. This theory combines the simplicity of the Queen Bee theory with intriguing gameplay situations such as synchronizing multiple copies of the ego, and mechanical mitosis. For some, however, the requirement of multiple cortical stacks in a single morph makes this theory untenable.

Emergent Ego Theory

The ego resides in the entire swarm, and cannot be [much] reduced.

The Emergent Ego is the most magic explanation, in that it doesn't really specify where either the ego or the cortical stack resides, only that they're present as long as the bulk of the swarm is too. If the players aren't sticklers for detail, this is a simple theory to operate on. Micro-drones that get separated from the main swarm are useless, possessing neither ego nor ability to act. If the swarm splits, the smaller swarm is no longer part of the ego until it is reunited with the larger swarm; if split up enough, the entire swarm may become dormant. Given sufficient damage (% of swarm lost, at GM's discretion) the character would need a resleeve. This theory assumes that the ego only functionally exists in the presence of a majority of the swarm.

Ego Ratio Theory

Multiple copies of the ego are distributed across the swarm.

The Ego Ratio theory assumes that there are full copies of the ego distributed throughout the swarm. They are not reducible to specific micro-drones, and are synchronized via line-of-sight communications. Ratio can increase with the production of additional micro-drones, but more drones won't fix an ego ratio below 1.0, at which point the player suffers brain damage, memory loss, trauma, or death at the GM's discretion. The swarmanoid is susceptible to mechanical mitosis and capturing any amount of the micro-drones will mean obtaining some percentage of the ego.

A typical assumption is that 1 full copy of the ego is available amidst 100 micro-drones, with a stan-

dard swarm size consisting of 500 to 1000 micro-drones. Assuming a 500 micro-drone swarm with 5 full copies of the ego, the ego ratio would be 5.0. Damage only occurs when the ego ratio dips below 1.0—this may happen even in swarms larger than 100 micro-drones, if some portions of the ego are duplicated whilst others are unaccounted for. Ego ratio is checked using the Stack Recall action.

Mechanics (Ego Ratio Theory)

Step 1. Simplify ego ratio
Round your ego ratio to the nearest whole number.

a. If your rounded ego ratio is 1.0, you suffer severe trauma and require a resleeve. Alternately, the GM can rule to allow the swarms to persist, the ego equivalents of gamma forks.

b. Above 1.0, perform the Group Size Test. If one group ends up with fewer than 100 micro-drones,

SWARMANOID

The swarmanoid is not a single shell per se, but rather a swarm of hundreds of insect-sized robotic micro-drones. Each individual "bug" is capable of crawling, rolling, hopping several meters, or using nanocopter fan blades for airlift. The controlling computer and sensor systems are distributed throughout the swarm. Though the swarm can "meld" together into a roughly child-sized shape, the swarm is incapable of tackling physical tasks like grabbing, lifting, or holding as a unit. Individual bugs are quite capable of interfacing with electronics.

Enhancements: Access Jacks, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Mnemonic Augmentation, Swarm Composition

Mobility System: Walker (2/8), Hopper (4/20), Rotor (4/32)
Aptitude Maximum: 30
Durability: 30
Wound Threshold: 6
Advantages: See Swarm Composition (p. 311)
Disadvantages: See Swarm Composition (p. 311)
CP Cost: 25
Credit Cost: Expensive

it takes damage as outlined below. All other groups take the Stack Recall Test.

Example 1:
Ego Ratio is 5.3, we round down to 5.0

Example 2:
Ego Ratio is 1.5, round up to 2.0

Step 2. Group Size Test
Roll 1d10 twice. Choose one of the rolls as the percentage of total micro-drones in Group 1. The remainder are in Group 2.

Example 1
Roll 10, 40
Choose 40
Group 1 receives 40% of total micro-drones (40% of 530 = 212 micro-drones)
Group 2 receives 60% of total micro-drones (60% of 530 = 318 micro-drones)

Example 2:
Roll 30, 20
Choose 30
Group 1 receives 30% of total micro-drones (30% of 150 = 45 micro-drones)
Group 2 receives 70% of total micro-drones (70% of 150 = 105 micro-drones)
In this example, Group 1 takes damage and does not perform the Stack Recall Test. At less than 100 micro-drones, there is no chance that there is a full ego present.

3. Stack Recall Test
Perform the Stack Recall Test once per group, where the total number of micro-drones in the group is 100 or greater.

Subtract the % of total micro-drones in the opposite group from the total number of micro-drones.

Example 1 (Group 1)
Total Micro-Drones (both swarms) = 500
Percentage of Total Micro-Drones in other group = 60%
500 – 60 = 440

Example 2 (Group 2)
Total Micro-Drones (both swarms) = 150
Percentage of Total Micro-Drones in other group = 30%
150 – 30 = 120

Divide the result by the rounded ego ratio

Example 1 (Group 1)
Ego Ratio = 5.0
440 / 5 = 88
Roll d100. A successful Stack Recall Test is an 88 or lower.

Example 2 (Group 2)
Ego Ratio = 2.0
120 / 2 = 60
Roll d100. A successful Stack Recall Test is a 60 or lower.

Damage
If you fail the Stack Recall Test, the group in question does not possess a full ego and may lose memories, mental abilities, or other functions. A test against LUC with a –20 or –30 modifier is also warranted here, but may be avoided with a Moxie point or a GM's grace.

Miscellaneous Concerns

Can multiple swarms join to form a gigaswarm?
This is plausible if one combines the notions of digital computing(1) with sparsity theory(2), allowing, in theory, each micro-drone to see the forest using just its tree. The GM may require the modular design enhancement to be present in each swarm, and an alpha fork of the original ego would be copied to the subsequent swarmanoid morphs. However, note that swarmanoid morphs are not self-replicating, nor do they repair themselves without additional equipment.

How are communications between micro-drones protected?
Most players discussing swarmanoid morphs online have utilized line-of-site communications for in-swarm communiqués. Communications are signed by the individual micro-bots, but this does

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not rule out the ability for an enemy to perform a spoof attack to analyze incoming and outgoing signals from captured micro-bots.

Can the queen of a swarm self-destruct if it loses contact with the swarm?

By all means, if you and your GM agree to the notion. One idea that was broached in the *Eclipse Phase* forums was to have the queens (or any minority of micro-drones) wipe themselves if they lapse too long without receiving a broadcast time-stamped passphrase.

What constitutes 'death' for swarmanoids?

Death is a little fuzzy a concept for transhumanity in general, but particularly for swarmanoids. Once there is no more functional cyberbrain/cortical stack (either due to lost queens or a depopulated swarm) your character would need a restore from backup. In the case of a depopulated swarm with a distributed ego, some memories may be retrieved, but a sync would be required, as with merging forks.

How would one play as a hive mind?

Jack Graham covered this well on his blog *http://www.eclipsephase.com/playing-game-can-i-be-collective-mind.*

If an enemy captures part of a swarm, can it obtain memories and other parts of the ego?

If an enemy captures a queen (assuming Queen Bee(s) Theories) or 1.0 or greater of the ego (assuming Ego Ratio), then standard cyberbrain hacking rules apply. Less than that, and a penalty should be applied by the GM, reducing either the likelihood of success or the amount of information retrieved, or both.

Does increasing or decreasing the size of the swarm affect stats?

The only stat that seems reasonable to change in relation to swarm size would be durability, and even then you and your GM need to work out an agreement on this point.

What if my character just wants to moonlight in a swarmanoid morph?

Severe morphing disorder is recommended when transferring into or out of a swarmanoid morph; it's going to be jarring jumping between handling one

body and several hundred, and most of the muscle memories will be invalid or counter-productive. That said, I wholeheartedly recommend the experience. ❑
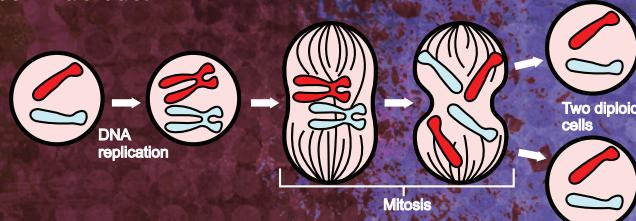
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Mechanical Mitosis

In biology: Mitosis divides the chromosomes in a cell nucleus.

In *Eclipse Phase*: The splitting of a swarmanoid morph into two or more alpha forks by physically separating and impeding communication between micro-drones. The split may be player-initiated or caused by circumstances beyond the player's control. In either event, the separate swarms lose communications and enter damage recovery mode, acting as thought the other swarm has been disabled or destroyed. Each swarm takes a Stack Recall test, and becomes the equivalent of an alpha fork if the test is passed.

Resistance

A message was intercepted by Lunar authorities that was transmitted between several locations on Earth. The sender claims to be the leader of a group of survivors who believe that Earth's fate was shared by whole system. They have survived 10 years amidst the horrors of TITAN technology, and if rescued could provide unique and valuable insights regarding TITAN tech, but it could be another trap left by the TITANs that preys on human empathy.

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Interview: David Brin

by Sarah E. Hood

We recently caught up with award winning novelist David Brin, to ask him some of his views regarding many of the themes that appear in Eclipsephase. Mr. Brin is one of the leading voices in the current science fiction genre. His books have been translated into over twenty languages, and have won multiple Hugo and Nebula awards. He is a scientist and writer, with a great deal to say about our world and society, the future, and writing itself. For more information about Mr. Brin, or to explore deeper into his views on any number of subjects please drop by his website at *http://www.davidbrin.com*, it's a worthwhile read.

The Eye: The most obvious influence of your work on the *Eclipse Phase* setting can be seen in the concept of Uplift, the process used to raise less sentient animals to a level of consciousness equal to humanity. What benefits do you see in humanity pursuing the effort to uplift other species?

David Brin: I'm not the first author to explore this concept. Alas, all those who came before—Wells, Boule, Cordwainer Smith, and others—seemed too willing to go along with the basic cliche…that this would be done by evil people or by fools, who would thereupon suffer just punishment for their cruelty and hubris. (In all cases, the uplifted animals are enslaved.)

These morality tales serve a purpose. That certainly is one of many failure modes to warn against, but I saw no benefit from my doing exactly the same thing. Instead, I wondered, "What if the job is done by us? By an open, modern diverse civilization filled with reciprocal criticism and sensitive to issues of oppression?" Our culture would not do uplift to get slaves, but to get diversion… things/voices that are new, different. We are propelled by novelty.

In other words, if we fail to make contact with aliens, we'll make our own. Through A.I., or uplift, or by emphasizing the differences among ourselves. On the plus side, uplift would add fresh, new minds to our civilization, and new perspectives.

On the down side, I doubt experiments on higher animals will be allowed. In order to get to talking dolphins and chimps, there would be fifty generations of trial and error, and quite a lot of pain. Ask yourself, would it be worth it? I can see the point of those who say no. I disagree.

TE: *Eclipse Phase* is the first RPG setting released under Creative Commons. What are your thoughts on copyright in creative fields?

DB: Mixed feelings. Copyright and patents were invented for good reasons. They ended 4,000 years of frenetic secrecy and magical thinking. Heron of Alexandria knew enough about steam power that he might have sparked an industrial revolution. But the only way he could benefit was through secrecy and it all was lost.

Yes, intellectual property owners today can be trolls, parasites, and obstructors having the OPPOSITE effect than the one Ben Franklin called for. These abuses arise out of human nature (greed) and should be stopped. Copyrights should expire.

And yet, I depend on them to feed my kids. If you criticize, try to do so with full awareness of the earlier problems IP was designed to overcome. Synthesize new ways to achieve win–win games.

TE: Does the looser copyright of a CC share-alike license benefit the cultural dialogue of society? Is it worth it?

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DB: As author of *The Transparent Society: Will Technology Make Us Choose Between Privacy and Freedom?*, I am a big believer in general openness and generally free information flows. The book has a chapter on Intellectual Property that folks might find balanced, nuanced, and unusual.

But dialogue has not come as far as it should have by now! For a rather intense look at how "truth" is determined in science, democracy, courts, and markets, see the lead article in the *American Bar Association's Journal* on Dispute Resolution (Ohio State University), v.15, N.3, pp 597-618, Aug. 2000, "Disputation Arenas: Harnessing Conflict and Competition for Society's Benefit", or at *http://www.davidbrin.com/disputationarticle1.html.*

TE: The setting of *Eclipse Phase* makes a strong distinction between the mind and the body of an individual. In the setting an individual can switch bodies, even take up a robotic form, or remain as pure information in a digital environment. What are your views on the nature of identity in those circumstances? Would a human who goes through the process of switching bodies still be human?

DB: It sounds a lot like my novel *Kiln People*! It would change things. As I describe in the novel. Certainly this changes game play!

TE: One of the key struggles in *Eclipse Phase* is with the idea of a post scarcity economy—some parts of humanity have leaped into the post scarcity economy wholeheartedly, while others have struggled to continue with more traditional economic styles. Do you think a post-scarcity economy is feasible?

DB: Why not? Most of us already live in one—compared to all past cultures.

Star Trek is our beckoning lure. See how it compares to another famed universe in *Star Wars On Trial*.

TE: Would it be a benefit or a detriment to human society?

DB: Iain M Banks handles this well in his Culture series.

TE: Most of your works would be classified under hard science fiction, being of the more scientific bent, as opposed to soft science fiction. Why did you make the choice to write on the harder side of the genre?

DB: I am scientifically trained. I also think that appraisal of CHANGE is the most important role of science fiction, because change is the fabric of our lives. It might end or exalt us.

Still, I don't call my Uplift Universe "hard SF" Sure there is a lot of fun science extrapolations a gosh wow speculation. But there are also too many nets that are left deliberately down, for the best reason of all…to have fun! And to take the readers on a rollicking ride.

TE: Why is hard science fiction valuable?

DB: See several essays on this at *http://www.davidbrin.com.*

TE: And lastly, the most difficult question of all—assuming that I'm out of books to read and have already read all of yours, which three authors should I pick up next?
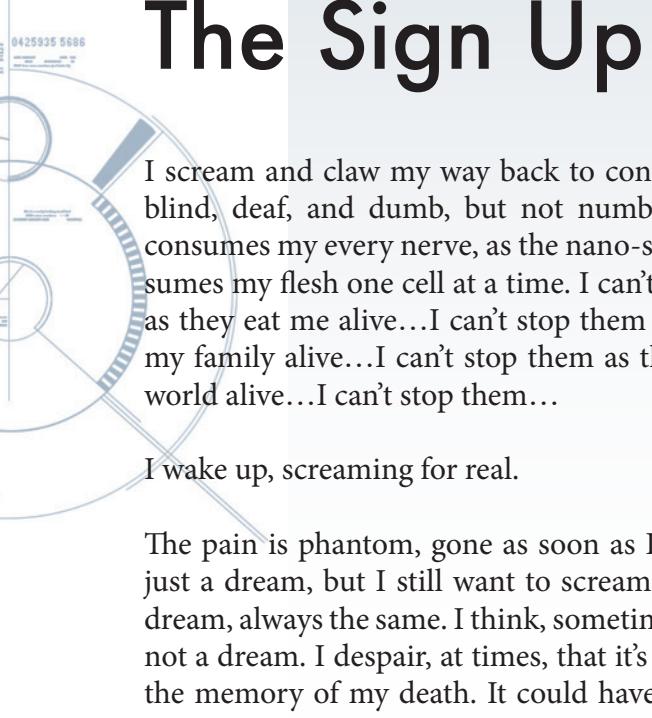
DB: Vernor Vinge's *Rainbow's End*. Anything by Kim Stanley Robinson. Half of the books by Greg Bear. Nancy Kress. Some of the works of Stross, Scalzi, Asaro. Older works by Sheckley, Anderson, Boyd, Tiptree. ❑

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    dp/0738201448

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The Sign Up

by Justin Killam & Damien Hunt

I scream and claw my way back to consciousness, blind, deaf, and dumb, but not numb. The pain consumes my every nerve, as the nano-swarm consumes my flesh one cell at a time. I can't stop them as they eat me alive…I can't stop them as they eat my family alive…I can't stop them as they eat the world alive…I can't stop them…
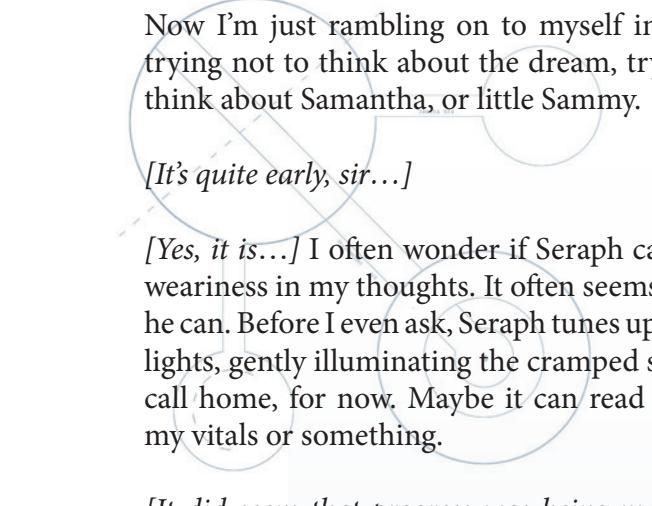
I wake up, screaming for real.

The pain is phantom, gone as soon as I realize it's just a dream, but I still want to scream. The same dream, always the same. I think, sometimes, that it's not a dream. I despair, at times, that it's a memory, the memory of my death. It could have happened that way, it could have happened any way at all. I will never know, because the bastards took that away from me. They are not content with stealing money and power. They think they must steal and control my memories, my mind, my soul…

Now I'm just rambling on to myself in my head, trying not to think about the dream, trying not to think about Samantha, or little Sammy.

[It's quite early, sir…]

[Yes, it is…] I often wonder if Seraph can hear the weariness in my thoughts. It often seems as though he can. Before I even ask, Seraph tunes up the room's lights, gently illuminating the cramped space that I call home, for now. Maybe it can read moods via my vitals or something.

[It did seem that progress was being made in your latest simulation, sir. Perhaps…]

Seraph leaves the suggestion unsaid, knowing already that he has turned my mind back to the latest simulspace design. At the edge of my field of vision, a series of frequency designations begin to scroll by. The dream, my pain, the grief, it all fades away as my focus tunes into the numbers and calculations.

[I found the oscillation frequencies you requested, sir…]

[Yes, thank you Seraph. This is exactly what I was looking for.] I slide out of bed, a hot cup of coffee already waiting for me to grab from the dispenser. My lab is an oversized chair next to a table holding a small block of dull metallic tech. I settle into the chair and place the block in my lap, the coffee already forgotten. Hard connection established via touch, I access the wireless-incapable mini-server and dive in.

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The darkness of the system spreads out before me, pinpricked here and there with tiny dots of light. Between my hands is a ball of plasma, dimmed so as to not flash-fry my optics. This sim is based on reality, and it can kill me even here in this fictional techno-wonder of a recreation. Seraph has stopped trying to talk me into enabling the safety protocols, the entire point is the realism. Otherwise how am I ever going to learn anything…
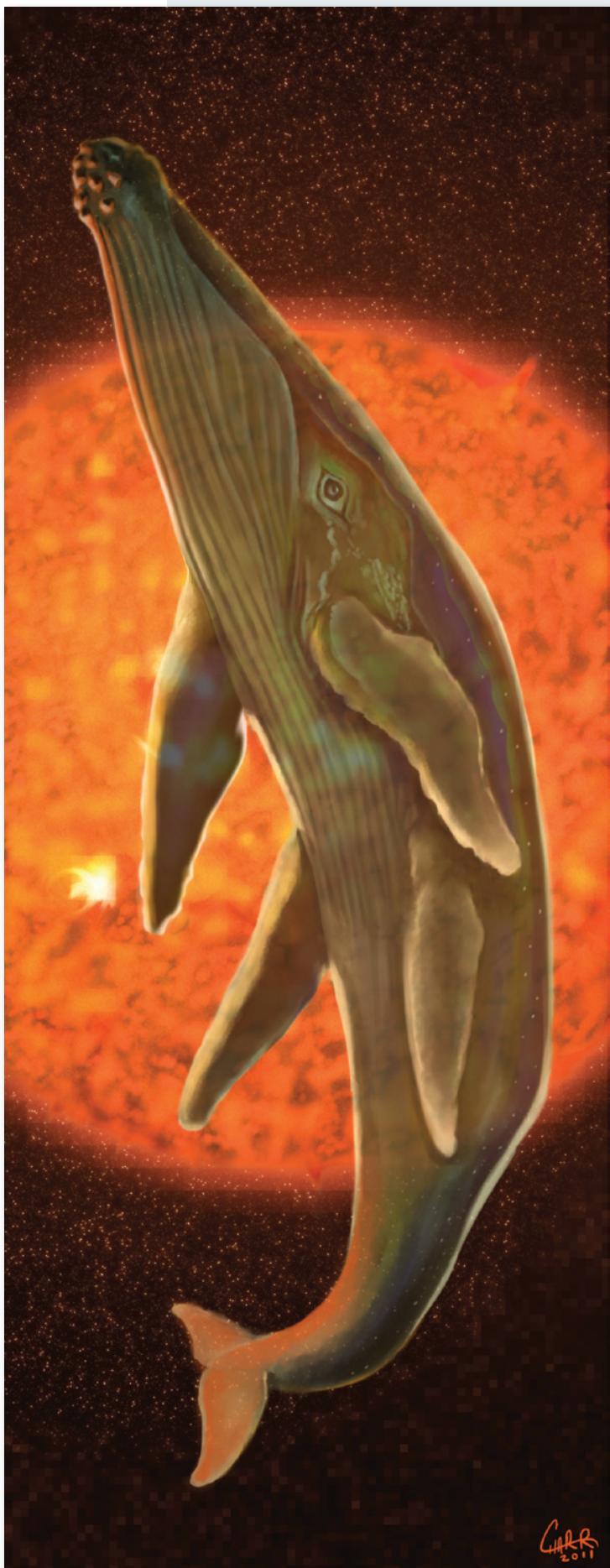
Floating near my head is Seraph, inhabiting a tiny whale-like creature. The Surya. I wonder, not for the first time, if any of the Suryas were whale uplifts. I can't remember if they died out before the Fall. I always forget to look it up.

Streams of data flow into the miniature sun, the new calculated frequencies. I adjust them, merge them with existing research. No calculating subroutine is needed, this Menton Morph does have its uses. Still, I do long to return to Sol.

Finally it is ready to test. Seraph merges with me, the Surya simul-morph encompasses us both and Sol surges into reality…virtual reality. I soar through the plasma fields of the corona once more and feel…almost free. Almost. I know, already that it still isn't just right, but ride it out. I never lie to myself, I don't stay just to collect data. I know my own mind, I need this to stay sane.

I glide along the magnetic waves, flowing with plasma currents that would instantly incinerate most beings of this galaxy, but register as warm rippling caresses.

Now this is how I should try to go to sleep. It is not long when the alarms signal the sudden increased magnetic activity below. The storm is coming, far below me the sun's photosphere is churning and the sunspot begins to emerge. Already turbulence tears through the moments-ago calm plasma currents and rocks me around the now chaotic corona.

The sunspot spreads below me. Though I remain within the corona of the sun, the less bright area below rapidly dwarfs me. There is no escaping it. Though I know this is a simulation, instinctively I launch into action, as does Seraph. All non-essential systems go offline as power and resources are pumped into navigation, sensors, and most importantly the magnetic defense fields. I am about to be rocked, and I love it.

Navigation is offline. I don't need it anymore, I have absolutely no control over where this storm tosses me. Magnetic fields are holding, and I have yet to deplete my store of medichines as they work overtime to clean the ions out of the outer layers of this biomorph's flesh. Sensors are maximized, and trained on the sunspot still fluctuating below. I await the Angelfire.

I remember, before, when it was real. The anomalous magnetic wave readings caught my attention even though I was in danger of destruction. They flowed up from the sunspot, curves of plasma flowing in a complexity of coronal loops and reconnection events. And I saw it, the pattern. I saw it, and it called to me, called to something buried deep within me. Called it forth. And then everything was lost in an eruption of a solar flare.

I continue to await the Angelfire, but it does not come. I remember it, recall it with perfect detail, but the simulation does not reproduce it. The storm rocks me violently. Faintly I taste blood and know I have bitten my lip back in reality. The Angelfire continues to elude me.

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I disconnect.

/ / /

[A successful run was it sir?]

[No, Seraph…it was not. But I expect success will continue to elude me for some time. It was, however, a good run. The reconnection event in sector F769-H903 was a pleasant surprise.]

[Yes sir, I am overjoyed that you were pleased with your near death experience.]

I laugh out loud. I can never tell if Seraph is serious in his comments or just that good at deadpan humor. He will never tell me, and I know that he knows that I wouldn't have it any other way. Already he is busy implementing the digital restrictions into the completed simulspace design. Like the rest of the Angelfire projects, this will be limited to a single hardline jacked user and be difficult to copy out of the mini-server. I am already planning on how to dispose of it securely, minimizing the chance it can be traced back to me, when there is a knock at the door.

[Tessa, sir…and Captain Obron]

I set the mini-server aside as I rise, hiding it from sight, and key the door open with a thought. I see Tessa's face and smile, unconsciously running a hand through the tangled mess of my hair until I realize what I am doing and stop myself. She starts to smile back, but stops as Obron steps in front of her and into my room.

"Dr. Amador…" His voice is gruff, like the rest of him, worn from years of scum service in the far reaches of the outer system. He has treated me fairly; as he treats all that live under his purview. I have come to respect the man, but the formality I am presented with at the moment worries me.

"Captain?"

"We have a problem, may I come in?"

An odd question, considering he is already standing within my cubical of personal space, but I nod. I can't read him, or Tessa who still stands outside the door. I'm not so good with people. Obron keys the door closed behind him, and Tessa is gone.

[Sir, Obron has effectively shut down every device within the room capable of recording this meeting.]

I wince. Going dark like this usually attracts attention, and is more of a hindrance than a help. I can only hope this is not a new trick for him. I've had a good run here and can't afford to go back on the run again now.

He pulls a crate up to the table and sits on it, motioning for me to take a seat. I do, and he sends me a file that unpacks into a video feed from several months earlier. I already know what it is going to show me, but have no choice but to let it play out.

/ / /

They catch up to me in a cluster colony nestled deep, or so I thought, within the Jovian Trojans. This was back before I learned to forge a collection of false Mesh IDs. I have made good with the people here, they are decent folk. So I've already been tipped off and know the hunters are here when they find me in a small community park.

I don't run, I stay seated and watch them close in on me, thinking they are successfully camouflaged as a young couple out for a walk. The Angelfire flares in my mind's eye. I tweak the male's mind, implanting the suggestion that when she goes into convulsions it will be due to infection of the Exsurgent virus. It's a tough push to sell, but I've gotten good at it in the last few months. He doesn't even know the thought is in his mind, waiting to be triggered.

She grabs my arms and locks them behind me. She is good, quick. He has a rather large pistol trained on me. He is good too, I didn't even suspect a gun that size. I fall forward then, she starts to drag me back and then convulses as my Eelware pumps her full of electricity. We go down, her body thrashing overtop of mine.

I know the implanted thought has triggered and, remaining still under her body, help it along by flooding his system with fear. I know he is overwhelmed with the ages old instincts of fight or flee. The big guy does not let me down and his roar is drowned out by automatic fire. She convulses some more on top of me as his ordnance shreds her body, and I absently wonder if she will remember this when she is resleeved.

I hear a clip drop, and I rise, turning towards him. He fumbles with the second clip, stepping away from me. Angelfire floods my mind and I fade into the background. Only vaguely am I aware of my body rushing forward to flick the gun out of his hand. His knife is a blur that I still manage to avoid while moving in. He goes down with a touch of electrical voltage.

I come back, the Angelfire receding. They are both dead. I got creative with the knife. I am not happy about that. I look around and the decent folks of the colony are looking at me like I have a second head growing out of my ass. I understand, and am gone on the next available transport, on the run again.

/ / /

The play by play ends, my memories filling in what the vid didn't or couldn't record. I look up at Obron, one eyebrow raised.

"So, what's the play here Captain?" I don't play it tough, just straight and to the point.

He looks me in the eye, something most people find uncomfortable, "Are you a danger to me and mine?"

He doesn't play it tough either, he doesn't have to. He holds all the cards, but does not like what he saw and wonders just what I have up my sleeve.

I sigh, and simply nod, "Yes, yes I am. They will continue to hunt me."

He slams his fist down on the table, rattling everything in my room, "That is NOT what I mean. I am not afraid of some dickhead, Hypercorp hunters! I mean you, are YOU dangerous?"

I can't help myself, I laugh. I find his use of the colloquialism too unexpectedly funny, especially coming from him. It's a mistake, and I find myself hanging by his fists, feet dangling above the floor, against the wall. The collar of my shirt begins to slowly cut off the air.

I raise my hands, palms open, indicating surrender. I manage to choke out, "I'm…sorry…long time… last heard…dickhead…"

He chuckles and lets me go. I massage my throat and sit back down, not at all angry. Really, can I blame the man? I am impressed though, he read more in between the lines of the vid feed than most. I find myself respecting the man more than ever.

"I honestly," I say, pausing to get my throat working properly again, "don't know. It is not my intent to harm anyone, Captain Obron."

He just stares at me, studying me, looking for some answer to his question. I think about the Angelfire server hidden behind the chair and wonder if it will be worth enough to help me out of this situation. Obron stops me by placing a similar block of tech on the table and I wonder just how much this man has found out about me.

"This is for you," he says as he continues to study my eyes, "you say you do not wish to harm anyone, perhaps then it is time for your intentions to be about more than just helping yourself?"

I look at the mini-server and then back at him. He is still studying me, still seeking the answer to his question. I nod to him and pick up the block. I notice, in a rare perceptive moment, that he begins to relax from being overly tense. Later I will wonder just how close I was to being shot then and there, but for the moment I am just grateful he is leaving.

I glimpse Tessa outside in the hall when Obron leaves, a look of undisguised relief on her face as she sees me still breathing. Obron ushers her away and the door closes once more, leaving me alone with the mini-server. I pick it up, initiate hard connection via touch, and dive in.

/ / /

A whiteroom, the standard simulspace pre-loading construct. A window blinks into existence and the following text scrolls up…

» WELCOME TO FIREWALL, SENTINEL AMADOR

» PLEASE INDICATE WHEN YOU ARE READY TO BEGIN
  YOUR TRAINING ❏

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Exsurgents Under The Sun

by Costán Sequeiros

This adventure takes place in the Eden habitat located on Mercury. Reasons for players to be there are up to the GM, as this adventure can very well take place on the way to other adventures or missions. In fact, it works best if it comes out unexpectedly but if you want to Firewall can believe something strange is happening in Eden and send a team to investigate.

Location: Eden, Mercury

Eden was first colonized in 2 AF by a small group of individuals fleeing the overcrowded space in the Lunar-Lagrange stations, starting their trip from Vo Nguyen. The refugees pooled all their resources to pay for the endeavor and started a new mining facility in the zone in order to create space to live. More immigrants arrived after the colony was established. Though today it still remains a small settlement (even for Mercury) it has attracted more people since and is slowly growing. The main language employed in Eden is English.

Like all habitats on Mercury, Eden is an underground settlement, placed in the western internal edge of a two-kilometer wide crater. Its entry is always protected from the sun covered by rocky outcroppings that shade it, and is a large metal door, semicircular, six meters across.

Inside the initial cave has been hollowed out as the community continues to mine, leaving Eden nestled into one central large cave that has a gentle slope downward. The eastern side of the cave, closest to the door, is the residential area. Most housing in this area is carved out of the walls, instead of being built of freestanding structures. So doors and window are visible everywhere from the bottom of the cave to the ceiling. In the center of the open cave are a few metallic buildings that serve mostly as warehouses and public buildings. The northern edge was the first to be industrially mined after the main space was completed and is currently dedicated to food production. The now played out mine tunnels are filled with many kilometers of hydroponic plantations and a few small farms. Food is one of the main exports of the habitat aside from mining ores, so this zone is ample and is always busy with locals tending to it and keeping it

working correctly. The southern and western sides of the cave are currently the main focus of the mining efforts and as such are mostly avoided by locals who are not working in them. The mines are far too noisy and can be heard everywhere in the habitat during work hours, despite efforts to sound proof the area.

Most of the habitat is rough and crude as the locals are rather poor and life in this habitat is demanding and complicated. The few buildings built and not carved out of the rock are from remains of cargo containers and other recycled supplies and are full of patches and quick repairs. The carved buildings are small and sober. The locals are generally uninterested in anything that is not useful or necessary for survival in one way or another. Art and less pragmatic studies are given very little value and considered by most as a waste of time.

The population of the habitat is small, consisting of about two thousand transhumans, one uplifted octopus, and one AGI. There are 16 children of varying ages, and the rest are adults, a little over half of them in synthetic morphs. Most members of the community are physically male or neuter (depending on the morph) with many less female morphs. Given the markedly uneven gender ratio the community has developed a series of different family models based around several males sharing one female or male pairings. Given the difficult circumstances surrounding the founding of the community, and the lack of spare morphs, there are a sizable percentage of locals whose physical bodies do not reflect their psychological identities, so the community has made some effort to accommodate the social needs of its members. They freely accept immigrants from the exterior if they wish to join the community but few are willing or interested to live in these conditions.

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There is very little free time in this habitat, and most members dedicate their time to either work or sleep and have only a few moments to themselves. The community is organized as a direct democracy that gathers every day via the Mesh in the Eden Council. In this Council they discuss public matters and vote on presented actions to take. Usually, most of the community members agree on pragmatic issues so these votes are quite quick and give the members some time to rest and exchange ideas on future development of their collective group. Every member has the right to one vote, except the AGI and the children under 15 years (twelve of them) who are not eligible to vote.

Everything in the habitat is collective property, as is the work organization and member privileges earned through it. This collective work organizes time for everyone, and the Programming Office presents each member with different tasks each day according to current needs. As they fulfill their tasks, new ones get sent to them via the Office, so everyone is permanently busy. The Office does take into account the abilities and interests of the workers and attempts to match assignments correctly to members, but every member of the community will eventually be rotated through a job they don't care
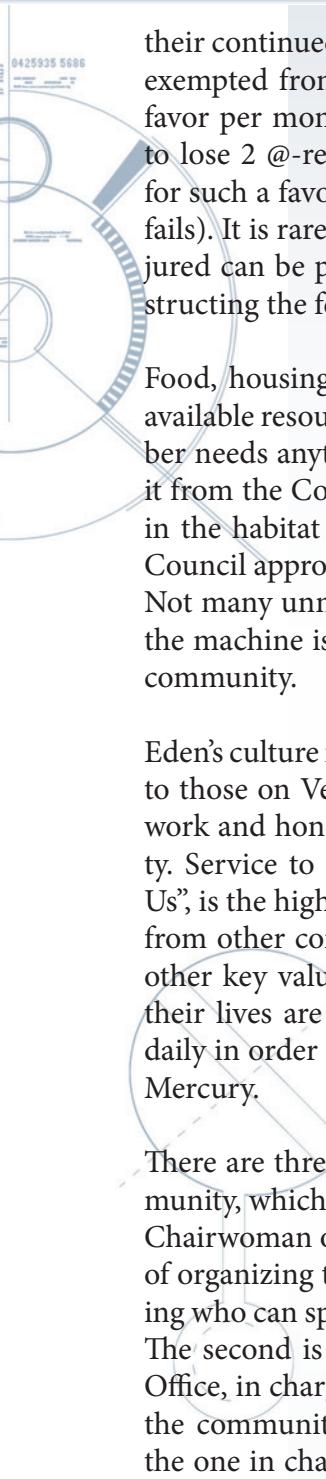
for. The most demanding tasks are those of mining, loading and unloading incoming cargo during the few hours this can happen, followed by tending to food production, then social services and repairs in damaged infrastructure or upgrading infrastructure.

Members of the community have very little time to sit around idly chatting and when they do they usually do that in the meeting area in the center of the cave. Most of the time, they chat and socialize while working with a constant use of the Mesh. The other available social time is during lunch as everyone on the same shift eats in the same common room so they have some time to share with each other while they wait for their next task. The habitat operates on a round the clock shift schedule, so work is constant.

It is a precarious existence but most are rather happy with it as they feel deeply tied to their community and useful to it. Of course, problems exist as everywhere else, but disagreements are usually either dealt with privately or set for discussion in the Council.

The economy in Eden is completely @-rep based as the community doesn't allowed for any form of cash. The only alternative to rep favors consists of personal barters with specific objects, an informal trade system amongst the locals. All machinery and needed objects for work are collective property to be used by those assigned to tasks by the Office. The main exports of Eden are heavy minerals and food, which they exchange with those that pass by the zone. They usually trade for ice and manufactured goods, which they can't obtain for themselves readily.

People in Eden can be either citizens or visitors. Visitors have rights to no material support and must obtain said rights either by bartering or by asking for favors. The rest are all citizens, which have all of their needs covered by the Office in exchange for

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their continued work. One member could ask to be exempted from work but it would require a High favor per month (and would force the one asking to lose 2 @-rep points just for asking successfully for such a favor, and 3 in case the Networking Test fails). It is rare to ask for a vacation, as even the injured can be put to non-physical tasks such as instructing the few children of the community.

Food, housing and all the rest are provided from available resources and in case any particular member needs anything more specific they may ask for it from the Council. The only cornucopia machine in the habitat is in the Office building, where the Council approves every good before it is produced. Not many unneeded objects are approved as using the machine is a drain on the raw resources of the community.

Eden's culture is rather unsophisticated if compared to those on Venus or Mars. It centers on values of work and honesty and of service to the community. Service to the community, usually called "The Us", is the highest of all good. External interference from other communities is generally resisted. Another key value for this community is sacrifice as their lives are tough and require a lot of sacrifice daily in order to survive in the harsh conditions of Mercury.

There are three central seats of power in the community, which are voted on twice a year. First is the Chairwoman of the Eden Council who is in charge of organizing the meetings of the Council and saying who can speak and when, and organizing votes. The second is the Chairman of the Programming Office, in charge of assigning tasks to memebers of the community. Finally, the Chair of Relations is the one in charge of organizing trade and production exchange with the groups that will pass by the next time the sun goes up or down. The Council is always thus led by a female morph, the Office by a male morph, and the Chair by a synth.

Regarding local laws, many transhumans would be surprised to see how heavily sanctioned all physical attacks on other transhumans are—from simple fights to the extremely rare case of murders. The habitat lacks any spare morphs, which have to be bought from other cities in Mercury. Each morph

represents a very costly investment for the whole of the community. Beyond the limits on attacks there is very little law. The community summarizes it simply as: "Don't fuck around with people." So long as a member fulfills commitments, respect others and doesn't interfere with them they will do well. All sanctions are applied to the individual's @-rep including sanctions related to doing the work no one wants to do.

Since the law here is so simple and there are no police, most community members carry around portable personal weapons though none that can harm the habitat itself. This is a habit established since the first days of the community. When some inhabitants get too drunk and start waving them around the locals do take issue but so far no serious injuries have occurred. It does help when dealing with others that pass by, especially as there have been rumors that a group of pirates may be moving into the area.

There are three small hotels in the residential area of the cave. Last Chance the worst, barely suitable for residency, Red Sun is a coffin hotel, and New Future the best quality guest housing in Eden. It would still be considered poor by most visitors from Mars or Venus. There is also a tavern in which those with some free time for whatever reason (usually as a reward for good work) socialize, drink, relax, and play simple games.

The Installation is the group of buildings in the center of the cave in which the Office is located. It is surrounded by warehouses for the mined materials ready to be sent to the exterior and the warehouse dedicated to goods and ice. The ice is stored below ground. The Installation also holds the farcaster installations and a small storage bank for copies of egos. In front of the Installation is a large courtyard called the Meeting Zone in which the community gathers when they have free time, especially during celebrations. Between the courtyard and the housing lie the kitchen and lunchroom as well as the child care center.

People of Eden, Mercury

Elisse Dewager was the original thinker of the establishment of the habitat and the one that orga-

nized it all. This small and somewhat notorious woman in her twenties has been the Chairwoman for most of the community's existance and can be usually found in the kitchens coordinating the cooking of the facility. She considers everyone a member of her family and calls adults "uncles or aunts", children are "nephews or nieces" to her. She is caring, intelligent and quite charismatic.Rudolph Dewager, Elisse's first husband, was the one that organized the initial trip to Mercury and is an old man with an old morph. Like Elisse, he has been always chosen to be the Chairman, and so has been organizing work in the community since the very beginning. Both Rudolph and Elisse are also married to Hun, a man who is usually working in the mining zone.

Tron is a large and bulky synth currently in possession of the Chair. He has many contacts throughout Mercury. He is a recent community member, and only joined Eden a few years ago. He is the one to carry out most negotiations with outsiders even when he's not the one appointed to the Chair. He always has good stories to tell about his days roaming around the planet and system.

Technically lacking a name, the local AGI likes to think of itself as "Life". It is in charge of all of the environmental support machinery and works constantly. It is sour and tired, and has been attempting to strike for several months now, requiring others to grant it some free time in order to get the chance to read a bit (it loves Shakespeare and other classic works). Unfortunately, its demands are never met and it has to continue working… so it always ends up calling off the strike once it has made everyone uncomfortable enough by letting temperatures drop or rise significantly. Still, it's in the core of its programming to keep people alive, so it can never carry it fully and complete its strike. Most members of the community find it difficult to relate to and Life spends most of its time by itself.

Act 0

What Has Happened Before

A few years ago, when Tron came to live in Eden, he brought with him some heavy drilling lasers to improve the efficiency of the mining efforts and

bring some wealth to the habitat. He bought them from a Fa Jing agent in Hellswatch, part of a mining project the corporation was going to open on the Planet; but, in the end Fa Jing decided not to open the mining project, and sold their drills cheap in order to compensate for losses and to avoid having to pay for transport back to Lunar orbit. Or at least, this is what Tron was told and he believes.

The truth is that the seller, named Jonkia Mollinson, was infected by the Reddrik variant of the exsurgent virus, and each drill carried a copy of the Reddrik strain of the virus as well. Jonkia had moved the drills from one of the stations in orbit from the Moon in order to get the virus in contact with as many biomorphs as possible (19 before he met Tron). He expected to start spreading it in Mercury and was only too happy to see the drill go to the mining facility.

Since then, the exsurgent has spread to those biomorphs that have come in direct contact with it (40 more in the Eden habitat), and has created a dozen syringes full of viral material that are stored in a secret compartment of the machine. The syringes can be used to spread the virus and infect those that aren't in direct contact with the mining drill.

Act 1

The Tiredness

The players reach the habitat when Mercury is passing from day to night, during the two hours in which the surface is habitable and will have to stay for the next two months until the sun finally comes out again. During those two hours life will return to the surface and Jin's Path will pass through. Life in the habitat goes by normally and it is possible that players stay the full two months without ever noticing something is strange. After all, this strain of exsurgent likes to remain hidden. Still, there are a couple ways they may notice something strange is occurring.
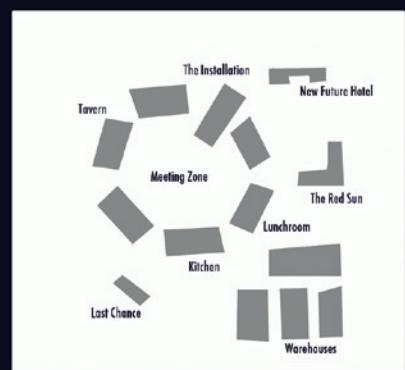
The first is during lunch. At those times, those with a good success in Kinesics may realize that miners coming back from work appear to be extra tired. Much more than one would expect from their work, something strange for certain, especially the player

EDEN
Allegiance: Independant
Primary Languages: English, French

Hydroponic Farms

The Installation

Tavern

New Future Hotel

Meeting Zone

The Red Sun

Lunchroom

Kitchen

Last Chance

Warehouses

The Mines

Entry

The Drill (The Mother)

Residential Chambers

SeH 2010

The Reddrik Exsurgent Variant

The Reddrik variant is one of the oldest variants of exsurgent and as such not one of the most sophisticated. Yet, it still is very dangerous, and relatively little is known about its behavior. The Reddrik variant is an ego collector. It creates a gestalt between the different egos it absorbs and puts them to work in unison, under the central control of a mother infection source.

It infects only biomorphs since it travels in the blood stream and it can be introduced there by physical contact with the vessel the mother is in or by injection, blood or saliva contact. Once in the blood stream, the nanos that compose the Reddrik start to replicate themselves by absorbing blood and mimicking its function perfectly, thus fulfilling the same functions as the host's original supply. The body doesn't even realize it has been attacked and doesn't respond to it. If countermeasures are sent against it in the blood, it cannibalizes them and takes their shape, just as it does with the blood itself.

After full blood supply conversion, within a period of 24 hours, blood flowing through the brain reshapes the neural pattern of the left temporal lobe, the one in charge of superior reasoning, and adds new functionality to this area of the brain. The new functions work in parallel with the usual work of the brain. To a victim this feels like simple exhaustion (2 stress points). This activity shows on many brain scans as unusually high levels of activity and can alert those that know the specific details of this exsurgent as to the nature of the infection.

Once fully active, it logs into whatever mesh nodes are available in the surroundings and starts sending encrypted data in very small packages to all nodes around it. From these nodes the mother, the central source of the exsurgent collects information and edits the logs to erase all traces of access. This data is a large file that usually takes 1 or 2 days to be fully sent, as it is a copy of the ego the exsurgent has infected which then is added to the mother's gestalt. Since the virus is present in the emission/reception part of the victim's Basic Mesh Inserts and since it is the victim's own brain that issues the orders to send that information, it usually is sent without the infected realizing anything is unusual. The muse usually considers it normal information sent by its owner. Since little information is sent to each node most monitoring systems consider the activity to be normal transactions, which are then erased from the logs when the exsurgent connects to retrieve the data.

After this upload is complete the individual resumes his usual life. The only signs of infection are occasional data packages that are sent to the nodes when new information is added to the victim's identity, such as important memories or things the exsurgent may want to know, and the heightened activity of the brain. Still, if the exsurgent thinks it is necessary, it can override control of the brain and seed ideas, which the victim then tries to fulfill as best he can. Once the virus has gathered enough copies of egos to decide to spread itself further by creating a new mother. The victim never remembers what happens during possession.

Even if morphs in the immediate area aren't infected, they will become worn out if they come too close to the gestalt due to data overload. The area immediately surrounding the mother is thick with data transfer signals. The data is moved in both the Mesh and in more direct ways, since the brains of the infected are a direct part of the gestalt. This causes all those that remain close to it for at least an hour to take 2 Stress points. Though tiredness is always felt when near the gestalt, the Stress points are only taken on first exposure, to represent the direct contact with the gestalt even if the victim doesn't know they've come in contact with it.

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has a MoS +30. Sure, it is a hard physical work, done over many hours in a stressful environment, but the miners seem more worn out than they should by the lunch hour. Still, for the miners, they consider this normal. It has been this way for years, and no one in the habitat has noticed the slow changes in behavior taking place.

The second opportunity to notice something out of the ordinary is if any of the players get asked to work in the mine or go there voluntarily. They will suffer the effects of exhaustion themselves because they are too near to the mother. Of course, if any biomorph enters in contact with the infected drill, they will be infected directly.

These two venues should give the party plenty of opportunity to notice that something isn't right.

This opens the path to investigation, which the players can approach in many different ways, keeping in mind the final stages of the virus. Infosec hacking will not show anything strange in the victims, except if the players check basic biomods and notice the heightened brain activity. They may also choose to interrogate the miners, directly or in conversation via the mesh during work hours (a normal socializing habit in Eden). By asking around they should find out that problems began almost two years ago, when work intensified in the mines.

Further investigation and questioning should allow the player characters to realize that Tron reached the habitat just a little before that date, so he may be an initial suspect who seems to conveniently not know anything. He actually doesn't—he's immune to the virus because he's a synthetic morph. It is important to note that the locals connect Tron and the problem only if directly asked, and they believe the exhaustion is simply due to his work scheduling making them work especially hard for the whole habitat's sake. Tron simply hasn't raised any other suspicions and seems to have the good of the habitat in mind. Still, in time, the locals may be able to work out that what's wrong is not Tron but the machinery he brought with him as he came to Eden.

As the players begin investigating and come near to the mine, the exsurgent will know they are outsiders. By accessing the memories of the infected

who may discuss with the players their plans and ideas it may pick up on the players' intentions to leave soon. Once it knows they plan to leave as soon as the sun comes up, it will decide this is the right time to begin to replicate. It has almost completed the cycle of reproduction with 59 egos in its gestalt, and knows that it may be long before it can get hold of another opportunity if it lets this chance fly by. It wants the player characters to complete the process of replication and to provide a stealthy vector off planet for further infection.

Act 2

Infection in the Night

A week after the mother notices their existence it will move to take hold of the players. During the second hour of sleep, individual teams of two men will go to each player character's room. Most likely the players will be sleeping in individual rooms of a hotel, but if they have chosen to double up then more men will come to their room—two for each player character. One of each pair is equipped with something to bind their victim and keep them silenced; the other is equipped with a syringe full of the exsurgent virus.

The attackers aren't great warriors, they are untrained miners after all, but they count on surprise on their side and that the players are sleeping. If the players haven't set any sort of defenses, make them roll each round Perception –30 to wake up as the door is opened. If they wake up they can easily defeat the attackers on their own and then help each other. If they don't, in the first round the attackers will move into the room. One will hold the character to the bed, waking the character in the process. In the second round the one holding the character will tie the character up and in the third round his companion will inject the virus. Once this is done, the character is infected and the virus will progress.

Of course, it could happen that all player characters wake and defend themselves. It could happen that none do and they don't even realize they have been infected. Probably, the result will be somewhere in between with some waking up in time to defend themselves and others not. Don't be afraid to in-

fect all you can, the exsurgent doesn't have pity nor mercy and wants to collect and use the party. If all player characters die in this adventure, they will learn the dangers that come with dealing with the exsurgent threat. Make sure your players bought resleeving insurance and have backups.

The attackers are all miners, which links them to the things the characters may have noticed by now. Interrogating the attackers (if they survive) proves of little usefulness, as none of them recall anything of the night. All they remember is going to sleep in their own beds. If exposed to tapes of what happen, they will recognize they are the ones shown but still can't recall anything of the attack.

Of course, all the inhabitants of the place (including the attackers) will be alarmed by the attack. Nothing like this had ever happened, never had there been such unexpected and unreasonable violence before, and never have they seen syringes like those carried by the attackers. The leadership of the habitat will slowly start to lose control from here on as they don't know how to deal with this situation and can't organize solid responses to the events. Votes will be called for many issues, and bitter rivalries will start to show during the proceedings.

Act 3

Battlelines:

By now, the players should be aware that someone is after them. And yet, signs and leads are scarce. Analyzing what one of the infected does (either one of the players or one of the attackers) will probably reveal the sending of coded data to the mesh. If it is one of the players and process is near the beginning of infection, the party may notice that the data being sent is very large. In the end, if all packets are added together, the results are just a little bit larger than a full copy of an ego, though the data is still encrypted.

The players can start tracing where this data goes and where it could be stored in the habitat. It is not a small amount of data so it has to be kept in an ECTO somewhere in the habitat or concealed in a sizable piece of equipment. A hacker can start hacking everything in the station and will eventually lo-

cate the infected drill within a few days of searching by noticing that it has a firewall much harder to crack than anything else in the habitat. The exsurgent is defending itself actively (Infosec skill 100) and will try to delay detection and keep attackers out by all means. If the player characters do enter the exsurgent's protected system it will warn them to leave and attempt to force them out. The characters may notice the existence of 59 egos (plus those of the captured player characters) stored inside and functioning as a linked whole. If the player characters can stay inside the system long enough, they may obtain the identity of the 40 miners that have been infected, plus 19 other unknown victims. Researching the additional names will show that they are not in Mercury, but scattered all over the system and are possible origins of more infections. Of course, such an invasion into the exsurgent's system will trigger Act 4.

The players can also choose to investigate more quietly from a greater distance. Following the attackers and those that show signs of tiredness may allow them to identify who the infected are. Studying the last two years of tapes from the mines will eventually lead them to the fact that all of the infected miners manually operated the infected drill after which declines in performance indicate infection occurred. Such an approach will avoid the exsurgent's alarm and it will not be ready for an attack.

The unused syringes (if there are any after the attack) may also be useful to the player characters. Analyzing the nanobots inside them will show that they are inactive, apparently dead. Actually, they are dormant since in the syringe they lack blood on which to feed and become active. If exposed to blood, they will start replicating in it while devouring it. The nanobots will start changing color as well. If exposed to enough blood, they will take on the form of what seems to be blood cells but continue replicating.

This may give the players some useful information on the working of the virus and maybe even some sort of counter measures. Probably the only useful one consists of draining the user of all blood and replacing it with new and clean blood (or a blood substitute) before the process of conversion is complete. This won't reverse the damage already done

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The Exsurgent and Psychosurgery

The exsurgent virus modifies the connections between neurons in the brain modifying the structure and workings of the brain itself. This gives the virus direct access to the emission/reception section of the Basic Mesh Inserts. Since it modifies the brain itself, Psychosurgery can't easily revert the effects.

Still, a skillful application of Psychosurgery can be very helpful. It will reveal the existence of a section of the brain that has been locked away from the victim's knowledge. The exsurgent activity is based in that location and any attempts to perform surgery on the spot will draw the virus's attention. Being as it is a bold but not yet confrontational entity, it will first warn the attackers to step back by speaking to them in a low and severe tone that recommends they leave. Characters unaware of what is going on may mistake this communication for the victim's own response.

Attacking the walled off section is possible. If attacks persist, it will decide to resist with force. If a character uses the Modify Behavior action they can make that section become "inactive". Of course, they can't repair the brain to normal functionality and the exsurgent will sooner or later break free after some months, but meanwhile the virus won't be able to take control of the host or force the victim to continue sending information.

but will stop further progress. There isn't any machine in the habitat capable of emptying a morph of blood and replacing it and it surely will be expensive to create one for a one-time use so the habitat council will be reluctant to grant the request if someone asks for it to be created in the fabber even if the situation is presented directly. Given that the habitat is already in a state of fear, debate and voting on the matter may take longer than the player characters have time to wait, and openly declaring an exsurgent infection will panic the inhabitants of the habitat.

If things remain tranquil or the players can't pin the location of the mother, the Exsurgent will complete the process of adding infected player character

egos to its gestalt. After doing so, it begins the process of splitting itself in two by asking its agents to bring blood for it to feed on in order to replicate itself. Four days later, there will be two mothers; one will be stored in the machine (in a simple square box) while the other is intended to leave with the party when the sun rises. One of the infected players, or a miner if all players avoided infection, will be possessed and called to the drill at night carrying some object of importance to the player character which will be taken along when the party leaves the mine. The second mother will enter this object and wait, so that even if the players end up discovering the first mother and defeating it, the second one may survive to spread the infection.

Act 4

Showdown:

Eventually, the original mother will probably feel threatened enough by the player character's actions to decide hiding will not do it any further good. It will begin to forcefully upload all available hosts to its gestalt. The mother will call all its infected victims in the habitat to the mine, where they will gather and surround the drill. By now, the whole habitat will be quite scared and the uninfected are likely to hide in the central buildings in defensible locations.

The infected will take the original mother in the box and carry it with them as they move through the habitat. They will gather up all remaining syringes, looking to infect as many inhabitants of the habitat as possible before tearing the whole habitat down and scattering elsewhere to start infection in other locations. If confronted, the mother will personally act to defend the group (see Powers of the Mother). By now, players should have few remaining options to defeat the virus.

Destroying the mother and all those inside her protective bubble requires a weapon of mass destruction: a small amount of antimatter, a small nuclear device, plasma, or some similar powerful blast. A weapon like this can be quite hard to obtain, certainly no melee weapon or any commonly available ranged weapon will harm it. Probably the best way to do this in a pinch is by sacrificing a char-

acter with an Emergency Farcaster implant, thus destroying the Exsurgent with the small antimatter explosion but other options may exist depending on the group. If they have some sort of TITAN quarantine equipment, or nanobot destructors, those may work as well. Lastly, the players may be able to use the resources of the mine itself by jury-rigging equipment, explosives, and mining ore in a makeshift blast. This blast may also catch innocent bystanders or party members.

Infected who survive the destruction of the mother will return to themselves, taking Stress in the process. How much Stress is left to gamemaster discretion, but the circumstances of the mother's defeat, the acts committed by the individual while possessed, and the number of innocent lives lost by the time of defeat should play a factor. Individuals are still infected, and may be vulnerable to control by another mother if they come into proximity with another sample of the Reddrik variant.

The other option, of course, is fleeing. Depending on how long the investigation has taken, this may be viable (if sun is close to coming up) or quite dangerous. The closest habitat is the B-2 prison an hour away by car. Unfortunately, there are no cars in the habitat but the characters may be able to jury rig some equipment to travel if they are willing to risk approaching the mines. Otherwise, the trip would take around 3 hours on foot—running the whole way. There are suits prepared for cold in the storage chambers, but they won't last more than six hours in the cold Mercury night. A series of hard Freerunning Tests may get the players safely into B-2, but it is possible that several, many, or all will die of freezing cold. If the players flee, one thing is certain: the habitat will be lost.

Final Considerations 1

Mood and Theme:

The mood for this adventure should be close to a Lovecraftian horror story. Something strange, unknown and powerful is moving in the shadows, subverting the minds of those around the party and taking control over once friends. Of course, this works best on groups that haven't yet fought the exsurgent threat before, but even those that have

Powers of the Mother:

The mother remains in the box until it senses someone outside its influence is coming close and has hostile intent. Then it will leave the box and expand to form a sphere that surrounds its followers. Within this sphere it can control its victims biologically by entering their saliva without using the Mesh. Therefore in this form the mother is immune to attacks through the Mesh and its control over its victims cannot be disrupted electronically.

The mother is a brutal devourer of material, replicating itself and growing. It prefers organic material but if it is attacked with material objects (bullets, boxes, cranes…) it will devour them in an instant and appear to simply grow in size. (It takes more mass than that of a bullet to make the mother measurably stronger.)

If the mother has taken to a manifested form - the player characters need to consider options other than direct confrontation.

should feel the pressure. Residents of the habitat may be toughened by the experience of hard work and a hard life but their whole society is going to crumble before them under the influence of this unknown for, chaos will spread, and all they know will vanish.

The locals may become hostile to the players for "starting all this" or resort to locking themselves inside their walls in fear, or any other appropriate paranoid response. Exploit the unknown and insecurity in this situation and don't hesitate to initiate additional conflicts that may provide the players with red herrings. The locals are going to be scrambling to find some way to return the habitat to 'normal'. NPCs should often be portrayed as brutish (they don't have a comfortable life), mysterious, or untrustworthy, though you should add a decent percentage of reasonably normal people to avoid the adventure becoming a farce and to provoke sympathy from your players when you kill the 'nice guy' that they have come to like.

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The primary theme for this adventure is sacrifice. Even if all goes well and the exsurgent threat is destroyed, a high price is asked in exchange. The lives of 40 infected transhuman egos may have to be completely wiped out, bystanders may die during the explosions, and player characters may be sacrificed during the fight—exsurgent can only be put down at high costs. We are on the brink of extinction and this has to be felt deeply. Each lost transhuman life counts and the virus never takes only a couple, or only the 'bad ones', with it.

Final Considerations 2

Moral Choices:

There are several important moral choices to be made. As soon as the characters realize that the habitat has been infected but before they know how big the infection is there may be pressure to kill all in the habitat to cleanse the place. This is not a poorly thought out option, after all the sacrifice of the (relatively) few in the habitat will destroy a threat that is dangerous to the whole of transhumanity. Some sectors inside Firewall may even be favorable to this option, as they believe that the havoc an exsurgent virus can cause is a much greater danger than the value of the people currently living in the habitat.

If player characters are infected as well, there will also be questions regarding what will be done with them. Sure, the infected character is one of their own, possibly a vetted Firewall member, but if the morph is infected, are they also a threat? Can the infected character find a way to control the virus? Afterall the victim seems to retain the full control of their bodies (unless actively possessed by the mother). Does destroying the mother prevent possession? Where does the line between survival, friendship and loyalty lie?

In addition, the exsurgent virus actually improves the working of the transhuman brain by adding additional processing capacities to it without causing any perceivable disruption or damage. Research on this effect could improve the cognitive capabilities of transhumanity, making the species more powerful and ready to defend against any sort of threat, including that of the TITANs or other variations of the exsurgent virus. Is it possible this virus is a step towards a symbiotic relationship? But, what is the price to pay? Can this virus be allowed to exist to be studied or is it too dangerous for even that?

Lastly, if the players retain a syringe, they have the option to keep it and possibly bring it to other Firewall agents in order to study the virus and learn about the exsurgent threat. Or they may opt to destroy it in order to prevent any sort of accidental infection. ❏

hooks

You're Just a Payday

While passing through an anarchist habitat one of the PCs spots a known terrorist, one of the Planetary Consortium's most wanted. The reward for capturing the fiend (or at least getting his cortical stack) would be considerable. Unfortunately, he is not alone, and the habitat is known to be sympathetic to his cause.

Just Passing Through

Exhausted from travel, the PCs rent hotel rooms in a small town. The next morning, woken by an angry mob, they learn that there have been over a dozen murders since they arrived the night before. As the only outsiders in town, they are the prime suspects.

The Hit

A high-ranking Planetary Consortium official has come into possession of physical evidence proving the existence of Firewall and the Prometheans. The PCs are the team closest to his current position. They have 24 hours to silence him and retrieve the evidence.

//Tachi

Jins Path

by Costán Sequeiros

History

Jins Path was first organized halfway through the year 8 AF in the city of Al-Hamadhanj, Mercury. It started small, as a group of merchants willing to follow Jin Nou Fai, a veteran merchant on Mercury with a well-established reputation in most cities on the planet. It soon grew, as more and more people joined Jin in his travels around the planet. Of course, many left along the way, but the caravan has kept growing since the start, and most consider it a small habitat by now, a mobile one of course.

Physical Description

Jins Path is currently a collection of about twenty very large trucks, battered down by long trips and little time to stop for repairs. Trucks vary in shape and color according to the owner's tastes, but most are a maximum of two meters wide and about twenty-five meters long. They all include large living quarters where the owner, his family, and guests live (usually between 4 and 7 meters long, and placed in the front of the truck, though some have placed it above), as well as a long space devoted to cargo, most of it refrigerated.

The trucks are each connected by long ramps that extend from one to the next, allowing people to move freely between them, socialize, and exchange items without slowing the caravan. Each truck is responsible for bringing its own ramps to connect it to the truck ahead, and for keeping its ramp in good shape; most of them show some signs of personality and are usually quite worn.

Jins truck is always the first in the caravan.

Population

The current population of Jins Path is 123. 104 of them are transhuman (60% male), with about 20% of them sleeved in synthetic morphs. The other 19 are AIs that help guide the trucks and keep them working, even while everyone else sleeps; they are especially adept at monitoring the state of the trucks. The

AIs can usually detect any major flaws and prevent most problems before they occur, and will automatically make repairs to prevent forcing the caravan to stop in their eternal race against the sun.

Social Life and Organization

There are no collective arrangements or organizations in Jins Path. Each truck is owned by a family or individual, and is free to charge as much as they desire for any services they provide. It is a hyper-capitalist approach, where each truck is viewed as a small enterprise completely independent from the rest. Even air and water are charged separately to the people in each truck, with different trailers competing for lower prices. Such an approach, of course, has created much conflict, but without any political organization, each truck is free to solve the problems the best they see fit…or leave the caravan in the next city.

Social life has three different forms. The more restricted form is based around the small clans that own each of the trucks, and the family life inside of them. As they spend most of their time together, these families are usually full of the good and bad things that family life brings, to the maximum degree in both.

The second form takes place on the ramps, and during the visits, as people move from one truck to another to meet, socialize, and sell their services (usually for repairs). They often meet and speak face to face on the ramps that connect the different trucks, but are also invited to other's trucks for drinks or lunch…with a nominal fee for the services rendered usually handed out at the end. Of course, most of these invitations are mutual, so one family may go to dine with another one day, and the other will do the same a few days later, keeping money flowing throughout the full community.

Finally, the mesh keeps them all connected at all times. And, since there is little to do during the trip (at least when not close or in a city), the mesh is full of VR games, chat sessions, and gossip. It is a very active community.

Of course, all of these activities stop during the key moments in their lives, which take place when they

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reach cities. Then they get ready to unload all they are going to sell, and to load all they have bought (usually, to save time, both selling and buying is handled in advance via the mesh), as well as making the most important repairs they can handle before they have to get on the road again. This is also when new trucks join in, or old ones leave, which happens with little ceremony, as they merely connect or disconnect their ramps to show their engagement with the Path.

Economy

Jins Path is an anarcho-capitalist "habitat", similar to Extropia in some ways, dissimilar in others. It is similar because no one enforces any law, or does much of anything else. But there is no central AI-authority like the one in Extropia, nor do they use contracts. On the contrary, they base their existence on being as self-sufficient as possible, handling each specific transaction with payment at that moment, rather than using long-term contracts. After all, no one knows how long others may stay. This makes it a more malleable society, one that lives mostly in today instead of tomorrow.

The main commercial good that most of the trucks deal in is ice. Bought from the shipments brought down from orbit, it is a key element that allows life on Mercury and, as such, is always in demand. Some trucks do deal in other items, but uaually only those that are useful, as life on the planet is harsh and most inhabitants don't have free time for leisure activities; these trucks typically buy only those things they know the next city or two on the group's route will buy, usually not prospecting farther beyond. One of them, though, permanently carries weapons, and its owners (the Martilli family) usually have no problem living quite well.

Culture and Politics

Jins Path has no such thing as a common political ideology, but there are political decisions to be made. When such a time comes that common needs have to be addressed, each truck sends one representative to Jins truck and a meeting takes place. Usually, the most important decision is the route that will be followed, which is modified after each stop at a city, and is a heavily debated issue, as

some trucks may be loaded with one type of goods or another, thus making some cities more or less interesting to them. In the end, a simple majority vote is issued if no agreement can be found, and route is then started. Usually, this meeting takes place one hour after the caravan has started moving from one city to another, and decides on the second city they will stop at (as the current destination was selected during the previous stop).

As far as culture goes, Jins Path has no common culture; each truck is free to do as they like. There are two Italo-catholic trucks, three Hindu-chinese, one that's communist, etc. All of this is further complicated by the family relations that are the basis of each

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truck's society, and the constant change that occurs as trucks join and leave the Path as they desire.

Of course, this also means there is not much common law. Each truck has its own laws, and its inhabitants enforce them the best they can. The few mandatory laws that all have to accept when they join the caravan are; to allow freedom of movement for people from one truck to another (as long as they pay appropriately for the services in every truck they pass through or stay in); to restrict weapons use to only those weapons which cannot damage the trucks; and to not sabotage the trucks in any way that may slow the caravan down; as this could grant them a very fatal meeting with the sun, after all.

Languages Spoken

Italian, English, and Mandarin are the main languages, but each truck is free to speak what they desire.

Social Installations

There are no social spaces on the Path, other than the ramps that connect each truck to the one ahead of them.

The Fei Jun Hao and the Giuseppe families rent space in their trucks as a means to move from city to city, acting as both transport and hotel while the trip lasts.

Important People

Jin Nou Fai
The organizer of the caravan, and a savvy, veteran merchant who has been selling ice all over Mercury for almost a decade. He knows the roads and paths, even the secret ones, as very few others on the planet, and has a very respectable reputation due to those two skills. Still, he's stubborn, uneducated, loud, and often falls into anger for no apparent reason, which has caused him much friction and many problems with other people in the caravan. He and his family are probably the most influential and richest in the caravan.

Giuseppe Martilli
A shy and quiet man, his weapons business is never short on supply or demand. Some say he used to

have links with the Italian Mafia on Earth before the Fall, others that he was once an African warlord and is now using a new identity, and finally, there are those that believe he was an illegal weapons dealer on Earth. Whatever he may have been, Martilli and his family never talk about the past, always focusing on the now, or on the future.

Plot Hooks

Break!
While traveling from one city to another with the Path, a truck suffers a major breakdown due to some mechanical problems the AI should have located. Yet, the AI seems to have been edited, to keep it from noticing. What to do? Leave them behind to die beneath the sun? Try to repair it in a hurried race against the sun, and expose the full Path to danger? And, if the AI was edited, can the potential murderer still be around wishing to cause further harm?

Unaccepted Wedding
A son of one of the Italo-catholic trucks and the daughter of one of the Hindu-chinese have fallen in love over the long hours of voyage. They usually meet on the ramps, but neither family approves of the relationship. Now they say that their families will either be accept them, or they will leave the caravan together in the next city. Will their families accept them, or are we seeing Romeo & Juliet 2.0? ❑

Trigger Happy

A small collection of individuals awaken standing in a room on an abandoned icy habitat. They have no memory of how they arrived in this location and each is dressed in a matching uniform with no recognizable badge or ranks. At their feet, covering the floor of the small room, are the corpses of nearly twenty other morphs also wearing the same uniform, none of which show signs of traumatic injury or death. At this point, each morph becomes aware that they are all equally armed.

//sysop

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