

# eclipse phase

◦ 2020 GAME JOURNAL



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This journal attempts to recall everything you got up to over the course of the last year, from your first mission through to Mons Hub. The first three stories are much shorter than chapters four and five, as they were mostly quicker, in person and I'd not started writing summaries which I could draw on when putting this booklet together. In the latter part I had quite a few notes from Discord, making things much easier! *Left Behind*, the story of Sims' escape from Earth, was a writeup of our Whatsapp playthrough I did at the time which is why it's a fuller narrative, but otherwise I hope I've given you all a bit of space to shine. I'd like to say thanks to all four of you for being a fabulous bunch, both to play these games with and in general!

Much love to all and the best for 2021

~ S



This is RED CORONET  
requesting dock access at  
Kongyun Spaceport ...  
reselling scrap ... yeah me  
neither mate, thanks...

# ACRIMONY

Locations: LOCUS | JOVIAN TROJANS > KONGYUN > LOCUS  
January 1st to 19th, 10AF

The new-minted team of Ludo, Koko, Raven and Sims were resurrected on the anarchist habitat of Locus on January 1st, 10 years After Fall (AF) and after their orientation talk were given an immediate mission: Investigate the disappearance of Sims. Sims had been investigating a situation of interest to both parties — rumours of odd happenings on a small mining asteroid owned by hypercorp Fa Jing called Kongyun. The former Venusian smuggler had previously been resurrected by Errico, an anarchist active with the underground organisations Firewall and SABOT. The former appears to be essentially a system-wide conspiracy aimed at eliminating high-level threats before they wipe out humanity. The latter is an anarchist direct action cell aimed at damaging the inner-system hypercorps in any way possible, before they launch any more assaults on the increasingly post-capitalist outer system.

The four took a transport from the anarchist habitat of Locus to the mined-out basalt asteroid, tasked with finding out what had happened to Sims, what the rumours were about, and what Fa Jing might be up to. They were put up in a coffin-room hotel and quickly made contact with a local blogger, Jade, who had taken quite a shine to Sims and helped them with some useful information.

They got through the situation with a combination of investigation and brute force, seeing off threats from the local Mafia and discovering a conspiracy of silence from local ex-miners, led by a man called Bves.

After a confrontation with Bves's gang where they saw him abduct a youngster off the street, they sent Sims' smarthawk down into the old mine tunnels after him and discovered a hideout where they had set up some kind of surgical facility. Showcasing what was to become typical levels of tact, Koko tore the door's panels off and straightforwardly intimidated Bves into revealing what was going on.

As it turned out, Bves was doing his best to keep the lid on a difficult situation — the discovery of a TITAN artifact deep in the bowels of the asteroid, which had been infecting the minds of locals who wandered too close. The team succeeded in portraying themselves as competent to take out the threat, and were brought to the site by Bves to take a look at the problem then, in all likelihood, blow it up.

The start of the operation was smooth, as they went to the local Triads and bought a large amount of explosives, intending to either destroy, seal off or jettison the artifact from the asteroid. Things started going wrong as they approached the final tunnel to the artifact however, as Sims discovered his own body half buried next to the entrance, and Raven was suddenly assailed by dark whispers urging him onwards, into the room.

Oblivious to the shouts of his comrades, Raven drifted on, into the cavernous main room, with Sims chasing but unable to reach him and unwilling to start shooting for fear of setting off the artifact's defences. In a moment of madness, and at Ludo's urging, Sims decided to try something and threw his own body at Raven in an effort to wake the detective up. It was sadly poorly aimed and spun off into a corner of the room, bouncing off the walls.

Raven continued on, eventually touching the artifact itself before he could be pulled away and the explosives were set off. The mission was declared a partial success (they forgot to investigate Fa Jing), but Raven was left unconscious during the journey back to Locus, and later diagnosed as being infected with the Watts-McLeod strain of the exsurgent virus.





Location: LOCUS | JUPITER TROJANS  
February 3rd-17th

On their return to Locus, the team was taken on a tour of the anarchist habitat by Errico, sleeved on this occasion in the body of a large pigeon. While on their walk round, Koko was accosted by a broken-down wreck of a morph who told him “I know who you are, and I’ll *get you Cayce*.” It would later transpire that this figure who knew him by his real name was Allie, an old comrade of the gorilla gangster who now held an all-consuming hatred. Slightly disturbed by the experience, they were brought to Red Emma’s Bar to be debriefed on where they were, and why they had been revived.

Over the course of a couple of drinks in zero-gee, Errico outlined what Firewall and SABOT were in between a confrontation with a person at the bar, which ended with the tableau of Koko with his fist around the neck of a patron, surrounded by sea of guns as other drinkers took out their weapons to confront the situation.

What the disparate crew all had in common, it turned out, was the mining hypercorp Fa Jing. Each of them had, in one way or another, been hurt by the firm and locked in one of its servers before being sprung by Errico. Putting his cards on the table, he admitted their revival was for the sole purpose of taking down one of its most hawkish directors, Dominic Kuo, before he could use his considerable leverage to re-open hostilities between the inner system’s dominant Planetary Consortium of hypercorps and the outer system’s Autonomist Alliance. Once that job was done, they would be free to do as they wished. While they pondered this, a call came in from Firewall — a problem had arisen.

## THE TARGET: DOMINIC KUO

Fa Jing is one of the most powerful companies in the Planetary Consortium, the cartel alliance of companies which launched the war against Locus a few years ago and still wants a piece. Fa Jing is among the most aggressive of the companies lobbying for a resumption of hostilities.

It is a hypercorp, which isn't quite the same as the transnationals Raven remembered from his youth. Hypercorps are more like meshes of allied, cross-owned and shell entities where internal ownership structures and lines of authority can change week to week, or even hour on hour. In the absence of significant national boundaries they are hegemonic entities across large swathes of the inner system.

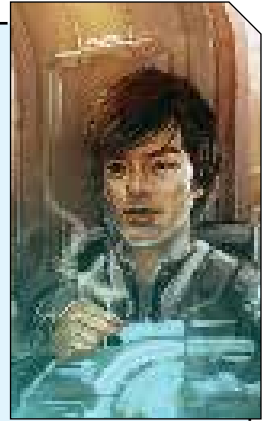
The real powers are not to be found in those melting pots however, but on a level well above the fray — the hypercorp elites. The elites are the ultimate owners, the ones in charge even if they never show up at a board meeting or formally make statements to the Planetary Consortium. Their egos are upgraded to the eyeballs, they have top of the line Morphs, they have made themselves smarter than the rest of us, more knowledgeable, stronger, they have an endless supply of always-on information at their fingertips and are essentially immortal.

The scions of the great dynasties rule Mars in all but name, dominate Mercury, have extensive interests in Luna and Venus, and are major influences in the Main Belt. Only in the Outer System is their reach limited. And in Fa Jing the Kuo family, of which Dominic's a member, is the leading voice.

If we take down Dominic Kuo we damage Fa Jing, and more importantly we take out a leading hawk, buying Locus and the Outer System autonomists more time.

We can't just kill him however. He's backed up on multiple servers in locations throughout the system, any assassination would just see him revived from backup. We have to take down his reputation. And for that we'll need to win his trust, get him into a spot where we can copy his cortical stack, and extract information that can take his reputation down. A man of his sort has more skeletons in his closet than we can count — and all the keys to the resources of Fa Jing, public and hidden.

And for that, there is a plan ...





Location: FLORES SPAR | LOCUS

Fresh from a successful mission at Kongyun, and housed in biomorphs, Firewall felt the team was perfectly positioned to deal with what appeared to be an exsurgent virus outbreak at Flores Spar, a long hab and utilities space jutting sharply north of the central Amoeba. Populated primarily by pseudo-spiritualist beatniks known for running forks as a method of probing the mystery of the self, towards its upper quarter the people thin out and are replaced by utility works providing energy, food and most notably, water.

The end of the spar contained a major water purification module which was mostly automated, with an ALI overseeing operations. The mote on which the ALI ran had seemingly been dosed with an old iteration of the Xenomorph strain, targeting synths. It was discovered when three engineers attempted to fix the seemingly malfunctioning system and were subverted. The area's only inhabitant, an eccentric beatnik named Brad how had forked himself eight ways and squatted the maintenance corridors,

The facility was locked down, but it was too well-integrated into the surrounding area to be easily ejected or blown up, and losing the water supply would cause immense logistical issues. That was last-gasp stuff, and there was some time available to try and sort things out less destructively. To do so a team would have to navigate the tight corridors of the Flores water facility, locate the mote, then destroy it and any other manifestation of the virus. And to make matters worse, they'd need to avoid breaking open the water tanks, which meant high-calibre guns were out of the question.

The water treatment facility consisted of enormous tanks surrounding a segmented series of four low-ceilinged, claustrophobic service rooms opening out into the main maintenance and supply room at the extreme end of the spar. It was here that the mote was installed.

When the team entered the first room it was to find a terrified Brad, who had been hiding from the mindless beasts which had been the former engineers. Annoyed by his overuse of the word “man” they refused to allow him to help them and locked him in behind them as they moved to the next room. There they were ambushed by a Snapper, seemingly one of the engineers which had been remolded into a sort of large, lethally-aggressive centipedal creature. It burst out of a leaking manhole valve, accompanied by holographic allies which the players wasted precious time taking down.

In the third room they in turn ambushed two more snappers, trapping one in a hacked emergency airlock which they proceeded to beat to death while gunning down its friend. Behind them however, they heard the noise of a lock being forcibly attacked. Rather than wait, they pressed on.

The fourth room was a traumatic experience for Raven, as he was immediately psychically assailed by a surviving snapper and a Worm, which had control of one of the Brads — clearly the virus was already beginning to mutate. They failed to execute it before it escaped into the fifth and final room, with Sims in hot pursuit.

The final room, complete with its stores of feedstock, repair kits and loading bay, was a mess. Strewn around were parts of dismantled bodies and one last Brad, that of the biomorph version, who had been pinned to the floor with wires running into his head. The virus seemed to be using him to try and evolve itself once more. The team charged forward, only to reveal the final threat — a giant Snapper comprised of no less than three synths fused together, which rushed to meet them. Behind, a Splicer which had once been Brad appeared and attacked.

Raven was targeted by the Worm, Snapper and Slicer and quickly mashed into a pulp, but managed to distract the monsters, buying time for Ludo to replace the Mote, grab the giant Snapper with a loading bay claw and toss it into the main airlock. It thrashed inside for a while before she ejected it into space, where it was blown apart by waiting Locus heavy weapons. Koko and Sims meanwhile dealt with the remaining threats of the Worm and Splicer, gunning both down in quick succession.

The team was victorious, and as Firewall sent in cleanup crews to make sure no trace of the virus remained Ludo finished their mission emphatically by blowing the last Brad’s brains out. It turned out she probably didn’t need to, but it made the team feel better.

Over the course of the next weeks the team stayed and rested in Locus, particularly Raven who had to have an entire new body grown for him.



**`Firewall's investigation of the incident uncovered evidence that personnel linked to Direct Action — the Planetary Consortium's largest mercenary contractor — were involved in planting the device. this had a significant on the broader political situation.**

— — — NEWS SCAN REPORT — — —

A Direct Action border installation in the Northern Wastes, Mars, was attacked today in what appears to have been a Barsoomian Movement strike by a single operative who junked a variety of equipment, hacked a flyer and made off with large quantities of explosives. An AR overlay tag left at the scene noted: "Don't fuck around with exsurgent infections, dickheads." DA was unavailable for comment.

— — — NEWS SCAN REPORT — — —

Several major members of the Autonomist Alliance, including most scum barge swarms in the Jupiter Trojans, Godwinhead Station (orbiting Tethys) and Harmonious Anarchy on Mimas have backed the formal expulsion of Direct Action from AA space. Extropia and the anarcho-capitalist centres of Ceres (Main Belt) and Profunda on Enceladus have refused the idea of restricting trade, while Titan and the influential Pandora Gate argonauts are bogged down in discussions.

In practical terms a united front seems unlikely, but DA shares took a notable hit this week when the Banco de Nova York withdrew its co-operation with the firm citing the Locus incident. Direct Action noted: "These reckless accusations stemming, it seems, from the actions of a small gang of thugs on Locus, have now put numerous habitats in danger as we are no longer able to provide our unique security services to them. We urge these four criminals to present themselves for a full and proper investigation before the Tharsis League court system on Mars, where they can receive a fair trial over their role in propagating these dangerous libels.

— — ENDS — —





Locations: LOCUS > EXTROPIA | MAIN BELT > DEEP SPACE > EXTROPIA  
February 19th - March 19th

With Raven laid low by a series of debilitating migraines linked to his infection with the Watts-MacLeod viral strain and traumatising dismemberment, Ludo, Sims and Koko took their first mission in the broader campaign against Dominic Kuo. This was in the form of a treasure hunt to an asteroid in the Main Belt, commissioned by Marzuq Abdul Wadud al-Bahth. Their target was a possible buried server belonging to defunct pre-Fall company Monolith Industries, which Fa Jing stole significant holdings from during the Fall itself. Beyond the funding such a haul would secure, their secret aim was to find leverage against Kuo.

Starting in Locus, they farcast to Extropia, met up with Marzuq, and retooled for the journey out, in a three-deck survey barque. They journeyed for weeks to get to the spot, an asteroid designated 34351 Decatur. It was an uneventful trip until they got to the dig site, where X marked the spot.

They had to take a space walk to locate the cache, buried four metres down in rubble, containing a farcast receiver and a server branded with the Monolith Industries logo, which was tamper-proofed. It appeared that the system had been a backup for Monolith's most important datafiles, which had been sent in the last days of the Fall in an effort to protect its assets.

They brought the server back to the ship, intending to assess whether it posed a threat, and were fortunate enough to perceive a shadowing missile-shaped and radar-cloaked craft off the bow. Rather than engage with it, they simply manoeuvred the thrusters to torch the lot, ending the threat before it began.

On closer examination, when safely underway, the security of this 20-year-old system was no match for Ludo's hacking skills, and she got the basic list of what was inside. This included details on some juicy mining claims which could cause trouble for a number of firms, including Fa Jing, but the server was mostly inhabited by a dormant AGI, for which little information existed beyond a name: El Capitan.

The presence of the AGI was dodgy. Since the Fall the greatest single taboo had been to build an AI capable of self-improving its level of intelligence, but such projects were all over the place before then. If this was one, and TITAN infected, releasing it could be deadly. In the end however the draw of the prize was too much to resist, and with Sims hanging outside the ship "just in case", Ludo started up El Capitan.

As it spooled up a scan showed that AGI was not, it appeared, infected with the virus. It was however significantly more capable than expected and despite efforts to keep it contained managed to gain access to most of the ship's systems in short order. El Capitan had been created as a hypercorp AGI, designed to advise the company's executives and keep them one step ahead of the competition. It was indeed self-improving.

This left them with a choice. They could scuttle the ship before it reached civilisation, or carry it to safe harbour, potentially setting off a new God within the servers of Extropia. El Capitan itself offered a tempting draw to the group — enormous wealth and a percentage of the company when it reformed Monolith and took back the company's rightful assets.

After some discussion, the team decided that, while they did not want to be part-owners of a company, they would allow the AGI to make its way in the world and were happy enough to be "bought out" on a promise by El Capitan and Marzuq. When they arrived back at Extropia El Capitan disappeared into the city's endless server space, and they parted ways with Marzuq.

This excursion was, financially, wildly successful. Not only did the discovery of significant assets which originally belonged to Monolith Industries lead to a major payday for everyone involved, but many were indeed linked to Kuo. The sale of the assets netted a major payday. Meanwhile under the pseudonym Eric Comal, Errico "gifted" some of the Fa Jing freeholds back to Kuo as a form of corporate tribute, gaining the hyper-elite scion's appreciation and interest in future work. Kuo was particularly pleased to have found a successful crew of treasure hunters, and invited them to join him on Luna to discuss a possible job.

It also resulted, however, in the unleashing of a burgeoning corporate superintelligence on an unsuspecting Extropia. The outlawed entity quickly re-established Monolith over the course of the following weeks, using Marzuq as its front man, and started to swallow a number of firms which had formerly held Monolith assets.

— — — NEWS SCAN REPORT 21/3/10 — — —

... and finally there's been a blast from the past today as a mild-mannered archivist, Marzuq Abdul Wadud al-Baith, formally refounded long defunct company Monolith Industries with a statement which promised to rebuild its former extensive holdings in the Main Belt. Most of the former megacorp's assets today are held by hypercorps Omnicor and Starware, both of which have been suffering unexpected setbacks in recent days thanks to a series of mini market shocks and unfortunate glitches in company systems which have caused endless problems. Nevertheless, both firms laughed off the claim as "nonsense".

— — — NEWS SCAN REPORT 23/3/10 — — —

And in business news, Monolith Industries celebrated a significant court win today as Omnicor's holdings in Extropia were turned over to the firm in a unanimous verdict among numerous private courts. The firm, headed by up and coming CEO Marzuq Abdul Wadud al-Baith, has made stunningly fast progress in its apparent quest to reacquire significant nano-fabrication and anti-matter research assets it used to hold in the region. In a statement, al-Baith said: "I can't take all the credit, I have help from a higher power."

— — — BANK STATEMENT — — —


*Credits amounting to ₳610,000 have been deposited into an encrypted account at Fortress Savings. Attached note: "See herein for your cut, as per our arrangement. Our mutual friend is a formidable negotiator! Best regards, Marzuq."*

— — — NEWS SCAN REPORT — — —

A surprise local market crash affecting anti-matter firm Starware, precipitated by the exposure of significant accounting irregularities, has led to a partial withdrawal by the firm from its holdings in Extropian space. In a surprise move, corporate newcomer Monolith Industries appears to have snapped up a significant percentage of the firm's assets at a fraction of their former list value. Starware COO Noemi Platz, who ironically used to be a senior staffer at Monolith in its pre-Fall incarnation, noted that the rival firm's business tactics were "extraordinarily aggressive ... almost familiar".

— — ENDS — —





## Where The Heavens Meet the Earth

Locations: EXTROPIA > NECTAR | LUNA  
March 26th

A week had passed on Extropia by the time the invite from Dominic Kuo to meet was firmed up, and the team farcast into the underground city of Nectar to meet the hyperelite Fa Jing director. They were guided into a sumptuous ultra-modernist room to meet him, and hear more about the mission before he went crater diving.

Urbane, witty, seemingly generous-minded with his financial offer but clearly a sociopath, Kuo was extraordinarily rude to The Help, making speciesist comments about Koko, and mocking the team's working class roots even as he praised their work with the previous treasure hunt. He outlined a particularly lethal project to them in between gratuitous insults — treasure hunting on a TITAN monster-infested Earth for Kuo family heirlooms. He'd put out numerous requests for teams to do it previously but several had already died and he was having trouble finding more.

Encouraged by Errico the team agreed as the job was perfect for their long-term plans — though they insisted on bringing a fork of Errico down with them, as they were tired of him directing from the back. The job seemed to be a relatively straightforward, if dangerous, in and out — HALO jump through the killsat array into a relatively safe area north of the Qilian mountains in what used to be China, trek up to the hereditary mansion of the Kuo dynasty, grab as many valuables as possible, then rendezvous with a heavily armoured transport and hopefully get the hell out of dodge.



VO NGUYEN | EARTH  
March 27th - April 2nd

The team were taken first to the Reclaimer-aligned station Vo Nguyen on the edge of Earth's gravity well, infamously used as a staging post for under-the-radar breaches of the Quarantine Zone. There they were kitted up with hardcore morphs, including a Theseus, Fury, Samsa and Swarmanoid, then introduced to their pilot Marina Schaefer and her crew. She picked them up in a specialised shuttle, which was piloted to high altitude and used to draw fire while they HALO dropped. The fall was, unfortunately, anything but smooth with Raven seeing half his equipment spin away as he lost control of his freefall.

Reunited on the ground, they began a long trek up into the mountains, assailed by strident winds, toxic dust and lightning-filled storms. Ludo in particular suffered from these extreme weather events, having to be shielded by the others as they struggled forwards. The trip took four days, and they were forced into firefights with Wastewalkers and a Predator along the way (the latter being driven mad by Raven's psi-illusion that it was on fire — it was left crying and trying to chew off its own arm). Unknowing of the danger, Ludo's decision to renew her feedstock supply from the back of one of the walkers would come back to bite her, as would the team's decision, initially, to attack a fractal that had wandered into their path. Minimally affected by a burst of plasma fire, it turned and chased them from the road, forcing a delay as they escaped, belatedly realising the sheer terrifying power of some of the monstrosities now calling Earth home.

They made it to the mansion on the fourth day and set about exploring the old haunt of the Kuo dynasty's Chinese wing. Breaking through the old tech, they uncovered a hidden vault under the mansion's bespoke Taoist shrine and, despite accidentally poisoning Koko, setting off the alarm system, turning the lights off and locking themselves inside by flipping one too many random switches, successfully hauled away everything Dominic Kuo had on his list, including a controller for the (blessedly uncorrupted) mansion ALI guards.

Ransacking the rest of the mansion they picked up a fortune in ancient books and date pads and broke into a set of rooms below the main study room, finding its security system, generator and even a functioning quantum farcaster. They were able to get the mansion's main fabricator working and printed themselves the kit required to get rusted vehicles at the front of the building working, getting their new ALI helper to load it up. Most useful of all was the discovery of a hidden server complete with all the data Errico needed and a full instanced backup of a Kuo family member — Li, head of the Chinese wing of the family and a rival of Dominic's. It looked, for a sunny moment, as though they were home free.

Then, as they were preparing to leave, they were attacked by a warbot.

The building-height strider had been attracted by the sound of the alarms blaring, and came to investigate. It arrived from the north, crashing through the trees and instantly hacking any ALI guards it came across. It was here that Raven's paranoia about AI systems came through, as he had shut most of the household guard down to avoid just this eventuality. Sims was the first to engage the killer tech, sneaking to the back of the building to observe its progress and nearly being cut down by a hail of heavy weapons fire.

The team hunkered down next to the western wall of the mansion and opened fire with everything they had against the giant machine, which returned fire but was ultimately overwhelmed, crashing to the dust under a hail of heavy plasma fire. With its death came the opportunity to leave, which was done post haste.

They headed down to the rendezvous point a kilometre away, and were relieved to find the shuttle waiting for them. They stood a close picket while the ship was loaded by Marina and her assistant until, as the last few items were being brought aboard, the assistant turned and stabbed her through the heart. The figure turned to a shocked Koko, said calmly "fuck you Cayce" and hit the button for the loading bay door to close, disappearing towards the cockpit.

Allie had timed her attack *almost* perfectly, and it was pure luck that both Koko and Ludo managed to get through the closing bay doors before dust-off, leaving Sims and Raven behind. With Raven incapacitated for unknown reasons, Sims buried his axe in the detective's morph's head as a small mercy, grabbing his cortical stack and making a run for it.



## SHUTTLE > VO NGUYEN STATION

APRIL 2nd

All was chaos as Koko and Ludo attempted to gain control and turn the shuttle around to pick up Sims. Allie locked herself in the cockpit as valuables, books, and the corpse of Marina rolled around in the juddering cargo bay. Ludo was quick to hack the doors, and Koko charged through as they swished open, fighting hand to hand with Allie while Ludo attempted, unsuccessfully, to hack the on-board ALI.

Armed with only a knife, Allie was no match for the enraged Koko, who broke her arm and buried his axe in her neck, flinging her backwards into the cargo bay. As she lay dying Allie promised that she would still get her revenge, crawling over to the door seals and once again opening the cargo bay doors, causing hunks of priceless Earth history and antiquities to slide and spin out, lost forever.

Ludo found herself struggling with the shuttle controls, which were locked to all but Allie and Marina, until she realised with a jolt that there was *one* way to regain control ...

**<BOOM>**

The shuttle rocked sideways. It was under attack. Two warbots were firing missiles at its hull. Back in the cargo bay Marina's body began to slide backwards, towards the door. Ludo's swarmanoid form hopped and fluttered desperately toward the body, alighting on its neck, beginning to cut ...



**<BOOM>**

Koko rushed to close the door again before it was too late. Ludo's swarm awkwardly dragged Marina's cortical stack out, rolled it achingly slowly towards the cockpit, and loaded it up through a neatly rejigged pilot software system into the spare Ego capacity of her swarmanoid just as Koko finished securing the hatch. They had access.

"AAAAHHHH" screamed the immediately traumatised reinstated Ego of Marina Schaefer. Precious seconds went by as they tried to calm her and persuade her to return to the cursed soil of planet Earth. But it was no use. In between spates of maddened babbling she explained that with the damage done by the warbots was too great, the ship would never be able to land and take off again. They could only keep going, and hope to hell that they'd make it through the killsat ring.

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The shuttle was full of blood and bits. Allie's, Marina's — they hadn't locked down the cargo bay before the ALI put them through a punishing series of manoeuvres to avoid the killsats, and now *everything* was covered in a layer of gore. It was going to be one hell of a cleanup job.

"This is Vo Nguyen quarantine. Please identify."

Marina's ghost, now housed in Ludo, gibbered slightly but passed on her ID code, granting access to a hitherto shielded blacksite facility on the edge of the hab — a post-Earth quarantine zone. The ship pulled in and connected to an airlock, which cycled quickly to allow them access to a — oh thank the Gods, shower and disinfectant room. Koko and Ludo quickly dropped everything, pulled themselves through into the room and cleaned off as best they could.

A second door opened, leading them into a clear white room. The unmistakable sound of scanning began, followed by a sharp intake of breath through the intercom. "We've got an infection. Lock down and purge." Koko looked at Ludo. He wasn't feeling anything, which meant ...

Ludo was suborned. The virus which had lain dormant since her encounter with the Wastewalkers erupted into full control of her mind, and her Ego died instantly, along with Marina's. As Koko scabbled backwards to the shuttle and his stowed weapons, the exsurgent stretched its form as far as it could, attempting to gain both server power by infecting processors on board the shuttle and hack the door of the quarantine room. Koko flew through into the cargo bay, and picked up the only weapon he thought might work.

An EMP grenade flooded all three compartments, wiping out the swarmanoid almost instantly. Koko threw himself into a corner, and then watched as the quarantine cleanup crew moved in and cleansed everything with fire.



## EARTH > VO NGUYEN STATION

April 2nd

An effervescent stream of plasma slammed into the side of one Warbot, slagging important-looking outer systems and opening a ragged hole in its sleek shell — a hit! Sims' cone of fire scored a line of melted armour along the other. But there was no time to admire his handywork, that was just the distraction to help his comrades, stuck on a shuttle full of treasure heading out of town. Sims was in a heavy-duty Samsa morph but was no real match for the TITAN machines on his own, he just needed to give the shuttle time to make its getaway.

Job done, he turned with barely a glance at the retreating craft and dived into a blank morass of ashen air, aiming to put some distance between him and the revealing ping of the warbots' T-Ray searches.

Barrelling into the thick atmosphere he found himself caked in a layer of grey powder, pounding up puffs of dust from a flat, frozen field, remnant of the blasted farmstead the team had passed on their way in, preserved in a perfect tilled state for the last ten years with no plantlife left to reclaim it. Through tacnet he could see, in the corner of his mind's eye, the viewpoint of Ludo and Koko inside the shuttle a few hundred yards away, fighting the bastard who'd betrayed them. A miniature Koko's axe swung and sank into the bastard's arm. The bastard screamed and fruitlessly tried to sink a dagger into Koko's gut.

Seconds passed and his chitinous clawed feet crashed rhythmically into the ground, carrying him away from the battlefield. He could still hear the thumping sound of the walkers as they trudged forward ... and another sound, the whoosh of a missile, no ... missiles ...

**<BOOM>**

Sims' tacnet vision glitched and his ears were ringing as four tremendous detonations filled the valley around, echoing back over and over from every side. He staggered, caught himself. He had to get away. The Venusian knew he was heading roughly north, but he was off the path the team had taken to the rendezvous point and disoriented by the ash fog.

He ran straight onwards into the murk, but could see almost nothing. After a moment tacnet cleared, and he continued to watch helplessly while his comrades struggled with the shuttle's locked autopilot, hoping against hope that they could get the damn thing under control and come pick him up. The possibility of being left behind on this dead weight of a planet, filled with a seemingly endless queue of monstrosities wanting to at best kill or worse, turn him into one of them, filled Sims with a sickening dread.

**<BOOM>**

Another series of explosions, less directly apocalyptic this time as Sims increased his distance from the shuttle and the war machines, but it seemed to wound the craft. Having brought the bastard down, Koko and Ludo were struggling now with the body of a stabbed woman, the shuttle's captain, whose Ego could have access to the controls. Sims felt his shoulders slump as the scene played to its conclusion, Ludo's Muse informing him that even with control of the shuttle its systems were damaged — swinging round for a pickup was not an option. As the shuttle receded into the distance mountains began to block the tacnet signal, reducing the feed to basic locational information, and soon there was nothing but static.

The back-seat driving voice of Errico cut into the silence through tacnet. "Ah fuck ... well that's not good. How do we get off-planet now? Original Errico is not going to be happy he's lost another fork. You know what being subsumed by a mad machine God feels like? Me neither and I don't fancy finding out."

"Shut up" Sims muttered, "we're not lost yet."

He looked over towards his smart hawk Ruby, still valiantly hanging on to his armoured shoulder through the jolting, crashing run over the fields.

"Get above the cloud girl, let's see where we need to go."

Clever enough to sense Sims' mood, Ruby took off in absolute silence, reminding him of the great flocks of Venus, a momentary lift that failed to overcome a creeping anxiety. He had a plan, but he was also carrying around four Egos, including himself. "I hope that casting machine has the capacity for this."

"Oh the mansion's quantum caster," Errico exclaimed, "I'd forgotten in all the panic, yeah that'd work. These rich types usually have plenty of juice, so

fingers crossed I guess. Though finding it in all this ash this storm's whipped up will be tricky."

Ruby climbed high. The view was partial, with much of the ground below obscured by a thick miasma of dust, but she eventually broke above it, sending back approximate visuals, a patchwork of half-covered objects and landmarks. Sims' Muse started work on creating a collaged overlay of sorts, but it was difficult to parse.

Down below, Sims slowed from the initial panic-rush to a hurried walk, something his hardened skeleton could keep going under the weight of his gear as the shadows of the mountain range made themselves known, dark smears against the flatness of his vision. The sound of a rampaging wind obscured much, but behind him a soft thumping could nevertheless be heard reverberating, evidence that the warbots hadn't forgotten his little intervention. They had begun to search for him.

*{Warbot perception check: Fail} {Sims check: Success}*

The ground began to steepen, feeding into the mountains' rising bulk, as Sims ran through the data in his mind looking for clues as to where the mansion might be. It seemed an impossible task for a wideboy more used to navigating the regimented urban confines and social opportunities of a vast, enclosed floating city. He was a criminal, a huckster, he hadn't the first idea about reading a map for natural landmarks and topography, or translating a birds-eye view into a direction of travel. He'd left that to the others. The feed Ruby sent back of long banks of whirling grey cloud offered precious little to go on, and Sims began to worry that despite the relative closeness of the mansion he could walk straight past it in this endless murk and never know.

Just as he was on the edge of giving up on seeing anything useful however he got lucky. An eddy in the winds rocketing around the lower part of the mountain temporarily revealed the faded red roof of the mansion itself, two clicks away, and he was looking in the right direction to spot it. Sims' muse immediately locked on to the location, superimposing a red ring and pulling a line back to him via his link with Ruby. He could see that he was walking too far Westwards, though still being in the fields rather than on the mountain paths it shouldn't be too difficult to course correct — the main concern being the risk of taking a right turn while the warbots' T-ray searches flickered behind.

*{Warbot check: Fail}*

The long and the short of it, Sims thought, was that the longer he spent on this stupid rock the more chance he had of getting dead. He decided to try and use the remaining ash cloud as cover to correct course and make it back to

the mansion as quickly and as quietly as possible. There couldn't be much daylight left, and having forgotten the slain Raven's T-ray scanner in his rush to escape it would be best get back to the mansion while there was still light to see. After adjusting the various sentient egos swinging from his belt and shouldering the plasma rifle ready to fire Sims set off into the murk.

The thump of the walkers receded into the distance as he moved back towards the direction of the mansion, their sweeping searches seemingly stymied by the thick ash muffling both his form and the sound of his footprints, and Sims reached the end of the fields without further problems. Ahead of him the path the team had ridden down from the mansion to reach the rendezvous point was visible, identifiable even though the tracks from their original passage had already been erased by the storm. It wound steeply upwards, buffeted by high winds pushing down from above which dashed grit and dust into his eyes, making it hard to see, but should be only 10 minutes or so away at a fast walk.

Errico cut in again. Sims supposed he would be chatty too if he was disembodied, but amid the stress of escape it grated: "Alright so if we're trying this quantum farcaster thing we're going to need to get into the building and down to the basement, but if those warbots are anything to go by the whole place could already be swarming with TITAN beasties checking out all the noise you made on the way out. Now I think highly of many of your skills Sims, but watching you try and sneak anywhere is like watching a penguin trying to fly (what's a penguin, Sims wondered). We may need a distraction. Any ideas?"

Sims ignored the voice in his head and traipsed warily back up the path, keeping Ruby low in the sky to check for movement ahead. Errico was right though, sneaking wasn't his strong suit. Then he remembered the third warbot.

Most likely it had been the encounter with their friend which the other two were investigating. The group had been nearly away and free from the mansion when it showed up, hacking an ALI helper and unleashing a devastating barrage of fire before they had a chance to retaliate. It had taken all four of them hammering away with plasma rifles, battle lasers and seeker missiles to bring it down, and it was still smoking just yards from the fortress-like outer mansion walls. That might be useful.

Rather than head in through the main door, Sims pushed through some long-dead foliage around the eastern edge of the mansion instead, trusting to the dulling sound of the ash, covering both the ground and the maze of dragging branches in a deathly imitation of leaves which used to be. The smell of burning drew Sims to the right spot, where a hillock of twisted and melted alloys continued to smoulder.

"Alright you want a distraction," he messaged, shouldering off his backpack and rummaging around in a large side compartment "ah why do I never pack things right ... ah wait what's that ... aha!" He nearly said it aloud as he dragged out a small combat drone, neatly folded for space.

Drones of this size were nigh-on useless against any heavy duty enemies, but he could re-purpose it, and sent a stream of commands. Together they searched the remains of the downed warbot, eventually finding its ammo compartment. Bingo. “Sorry little one,” Sims whispered “this is where you and I part ways.”

He withdrew as quietly as he could, leaving the drone sat among the broken parts of the beast, and circled round to the front door of the mansion, hiding behind the wall of a religious annex and watching to see what, if anything was there ... oh dear. The fractal.

A few days prior, on the team’s hike in through the Qilian mountains to reach the mansion doors, they had come across a curious-looking beast rolling seemingly aimlessly through the shattered remains of a copse of trees, deep in the range. From a distance, glinting under an anaemic sun, it looked like a powered metallic tumbleweed, tall as a person, silent bar a sort of rustling made as it traveled.

Sims had perhaps been a little hasty in sniping it with a battle laser despite Errico’s urgent plea not to do so. It had been an error. While his aim had been true the fractal had, initially, seemed not to notice, turning only slowly to regard the group before seemingly beginning to reconfigure its entire body on the fly to deal with this new threat. Errico, whose experience of lethal TITAN nanotech was broader than theirs, had screamed at them to run but even with a headstart they’d been forced to sacrifice a number of drones to ensure their getaway. Now it seemed to have picked up their trail again.

## **<BOOM>**

A massive explosion rocked the mansion, blowing out every window and, from the sounds of it, collapsing much of the eastern wall. His drone had set off the ammunition. As planned, the fractal rolled to investigate the explosion, giving him the opportunity to dart through, up the stairs into the main entrance with its grand but fading facade decorated in a mix of modern and ancient Chinese design, into the main hall which was now choked with dust and ash from the explosion.

He charged down to the end of the room, past the grand staircase into the secondary hall where an ALI security pod was stood among the debris, seemingly inert. Rather than wait for it to try and stop him Sims squeezed off a shot with his plasma rifle on his way through, bad shot but near-impossible to miss, catching it in the shoulder and spinning it down to the floor as he crashed through into the mansion’s huge downstairs living room. His feet clattered through a pile of broken glass, shattered ceramics, papers and fallen masonry in the echoing space, carrying him to the back of the room where Li Kuo’s study was located.



He smashed open the door to the study without breaking stride, ignoring the luxurious space with its deep carpets, near-priceless hardwood furniture, the mix of brass and lush fabrics and artwork from a dozen cultures in his rush to open the passage they'd found, the one that led to the underground safe room with its specialised equipment all ready to save the scion of a powerful family. As he wrenched the hidden entrance open he heard a sound behind him and turned, snapping off a shot on pure instinct.

*{Critical success}*

The plasma burst was close range and as peachy an aim as could be wished for, catching the pod as it stopped for a half-second in the doorway to survey the room. It was vapourised down to its boots.

“Good shot!” Errico exclaimed. “But now we’ve really got to get out of here or all your noise is going to get us eaten by that fractal.”

“I’m fucking trying,” Sims turned without further ceremony and running through the safe room beyond to a close set of wooden stairs, which he clattered down heedless of what might be beyond. As he reached the main basement room a second ALI guard was revealed, which turned to look at him. He ignored it, pounding past and into the safe room, machine gun fire slamming into his armour as he ran.

“Close it!” he shouted, twisting into cover while Errico handled the signal to lock the room down. As the heavy door rolled back into position the guard managed to jump through, straight into another point-blank plasma blast which tore its arm and leg off. He finished it with a solid thumping blow to the skull with the butt of his rifle. Silence fell.

The now locked room he’d made it to was a circular command centre, lit blue with monitors strung at head height around its circumference and with large server systems embedded in the walls. Control stations for both the underground systems and the house were arrayed below the monitors, while a large horseshoe-shaped desk brimming with equipment dominated the centre of the room. At its heart was a large, comfortable-looking chair clearly set up to allow a morph to sit and be uploaded to the room’s servers, ready for casting.

*{Errico Infosec roll: Success}*

“Alright,” Errico sent, “looks like we’re secure but we’ve got some trouble. I’ve locked down the room but it seems like TITAN mechs have compromised a lot of the system while looking for us. The code got weird almost as soon as I started looking at it. So I’m not confident about roaming the local Mesh and I’ve locked out everything I can for now — I’m just thankful for old fashioned paranoia, most of the systems here like the doors and CCTV are hardline and not quite so susceptible.”

Sims nodded and walked over to the Egocaster. It was all junk to him. “Can you work this?”

Errico messaged a thumb’s-up. “Yeah, I’ve picked through this kind of system before, one time on Mars ...”

“Save it man, we need to get this thing working.”

“Alright, yeah. Gimme a mo.” Errico dived into the servers while Sims sat in the chair. Lights flickered as bits got turned on and off, seemingly at random, and after a moment the hacker was back.



“Well, good news bad news, I’ve sorted how to work it, but the juice situation is er, sticky. We’ve only got enough for two casts between four people. There’s also this.” He sent a feed of the scene just outside the door. The fractal was there, working away at the cracks with an endless array of digits which grew smaller and smaller until they disappeared from sight, skittering across the steel surface. He could see tiny crumbs already falling from the surround.

Sims sighed. It was a great way to make a perfect day better. He had to think about this. He was damn sure not going to leave himself behind, which meant choosing between Errico, Raven and Li Ko. The former, well, Sims was no fan of the bossy anarchist even if he’d been helpful here. Li Ko’s knowledge was a serious asset for the cause. And Raven ...

Well Raven was the thing. He felt bad about taking the detective out. Raven had been going through some sort of ... paralysis, during the rush for the shuttle, and the idea of leaving a seemingly malfunctioning a-sync behind him as he headed for the hills was more than he’d wanted to risk. But the old man had saved their bacon more than once this mission with his weird powers, if anyone deserved to make it then he did.

“Alright, I’ve thought about this Errico. I’m going to have to ask you to stay behind.”

*[Roll Hard persuade, opposed action: Success]*

Sims had years of experience getting marks and his fellow criminals to do what he wanted back on Venus, and it didn’t let him down. He spun a tale to Errico, of hardships suffered together, of guilt and sacrifice, of Errico’s responsibility to the people he had brought on this mission. It must be him and Raven who survived. He would let the original Errico and all his comrades know of that heroism.

“Errico, I know I’m asking a lot,” he concluded. “You didn’t have to come here, you didn’t have to help us — and we couldn’t have gotten as far as we have without you. You’ve nearly completed the job you started. Finish it, and send us home.”

There was silence for a long moment. Errico appeared to be thinking. At length he spoke again, with a tone of what sounded very much like an endless weariness.

“It’s true. And there’s things you don’t know. About my ultimate responsibility to you. I’ve taken a great deal. Not always been a good guy to you all. Perhaps ... this once, it should be my turn. I won’t be left for the TITANS’ dogs but maybe there’s another way. There’s a very powerful generator attached to this building. If I can get at it I could make a spectacle ... yes maybe I’ll do that. Bowing out with a bang would be some way to go, annihilating the house of Kuo.”

“Alright Sims. Do it. Save your friend. I’ll be busy making a bomb to shake the mountains ...” He trailed off, already making preparations.

Sims relaxed into the chair. Time to go, Raven first. He grabbed Raven's cortical stack from his belt, and tried to connect it with the farcaster system, but even as he did so he noticed something. Parts of it looked melted ... the realisation hit him like a flung rock. Raven had been in a Theseus. That model had an emergency farcast function built in. Rare for other models, it fried the stack on its way out. Raven was already safe.

Sims quietly slid the stack away. What to do now ...

Errico had committed to dying. That left, well, an opportunity. Li Kuo was the historic head of his wing of the Fa Jing household. He'd know more secrets about that family than anyone and as a prisoner was technically more valuable than any one of them. And Sims, like Errico, was very much in this crew for one reason — take down the Kuo family. He swallowed. Hesitated.

All his life he'd been a criminal. He was trying to get clean, do the noble thing rather than expedient one.

But sometimes it's hard.

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*(Errico Perception check: Succeed)*

“What the hell?!” Errico roared in his head. “That's not Raven's Ego! You double-crossing ...”

Kuo was already gone, it had been an hour and Sims' brain was partway ready for the process. He was in no state to argue the point when Errico went for him. The Locus hacker was quick, and he had control of the system. But it was too late to make a clean job of extracting or replacing Sims. Instead he did something unheard of — he went to hijack the remaining stash of Q-bits before they were all exhausted.

\*\*\*

Sims woke up on a Vo Nguyen quarantine server, filled with fresh memories ... but they weren't all there. He couldn't remember parts of his trip to Earth, there were blanks in his memory. He could remember ... a betrayal. A fight. Over what? He remembered killing Raven for some reason. Did he abandon him? Or was it Errico? He began to panic, checked the readout of his transfer process.

They'd only gotten part of his Ego back in the transfer, 70% or so. The other 30% must have been Errico's memories. That was why he was so fuzzy. He checked to see what had happened to the rest of the data. Already sent and integrated.

This was going to be awkward.

### — — — ERRICO — — —

Good news, I dipped into the savings account a bit and managed to buy off one of the porters who was clearing out the shuttle. They pocketed the server for us and will deliver it to Koko, but were unable to grab much else. I've got the manifest in front of me and it looks like quite the haul you guys got!

### — — — HEALTH SCAN REPORT: LUDO — — —

Initial examination showed extensive damage to the patient's neural net. Approx 83% direct drone loss through a combination of prior battle damage, EMP interference and the quarantine plasma blast, with a further 7% of remaining data rendered irretrievable, scrubbed due to viral load. Integration of remaining data with backup Ego successful, but upon formal resurrection the patient will likely be suffering from considerable lack of recent memory, as well as a high degree of stress due to her experiences.

### — — — SERVER SEARCH RESULTS — — —

**Server:** Hēi'àn shēnyuān | 200TB | Used: 41TB | Last Accessed: 2AF (by) Li Kuo  
The device contains a variety of personal and corporate information, including a huge volume of photographic, video and (basic) XR records of family life. Most of this is not directly pertinent to the parameters of the investigation, however members of the SABOT interrogation team have requested and been granted access to the full suite of Kuo family experiences saying (and I quote): "Oh yes we can really fuck around with old Li now. Ooh, ooh is that his childhood puppy? Put it in the 'drop a piano' folder."

### — — — SERVER SEARCH RESULTS — — —

One note which may have some bearing has been identified in a binned email string between Li and Dominic himself, dated shortly before the fall:

**Li:** "Look Dominic, I'm not comfortable with this. If Ellison finds out ..."

**Dominic:** "You worry too much. Ellison is all bark and no bite, and anyway even if he does spot the devaluation where's he going to appeal it? Mars doesn't even have a functioning government and we're on course to be in charge when it gets one. Possession is nine tenths of the law on Earth, uncle, but it's ten tenths out there."

**Errico note:** This is a reference to fellow Fa Jing board member Raif Ellison. The Ellison family was one of the wealthiest on Pre-Fall Earth, led by ruthless figures embedded in the global great game. Raif was not so much a chip off the old block as a mouldy corner, something of an inadequate. Too nice for the game, some say. He briefly became infamous as the only man to have ever lost a trillion-credit fortune from not reading the small print of a share reattribution — they redesignated all his stock as relating to on-Earth holdings. It was nearly impossible to tell exactly who had stitched him up, but now, it seems, we know. This is an opportunity ...



VO NGUYEN STATION > HONG SHITOU > TQZ | THARSIS REGION | MARS  
April 10th-15th

A week of resurrection, medical care and careful psychosurgery had brought the somewhat traumatised remnants of the SABOT crew back into action by April 10th, and with their health being in good order Errico asked them to catch a farcast to Mars. Plans were afoot and they needed to recruit allies to help in the long game against Dominic Kuo.

Firewall helped get them onto Mars via a lowjack Barsoomian facility in a backwater town of Olympus Mons, in exchange for taking on a small job: Finding out how TITAN nanoparticles got into a smuggled shipment of fabricators uncovered by a raid in the Barsoomian badlands, and identifying whether there was a threat that needs eliminating.

Ludo, who remembered barely 10% of what happened to her on Earth, was back home among her people after ten long years. Of the others only Koko survived the full experience of that awful place with merely mental scars. Raven remembered everything up to the moment of his paralysis at the shuttle and subsequent Sims-related head trauma, Sims remembered around 70% of his time on the planet and Errico just 30%. For Errico and Ludo, the experience loomed only as disturbing snapshots and broken half-memories. For Sims it was a period mostly remembered, but with disturbing gaps.

The first few days were spent on a janky server as bodies were spooled up for the team. Sims, in a fit of contrariness, had specced out a pint-size neotenic while Koko was back in his original type of body — a powerful gorilla, heavy on the heavy. Raven meanwhile was in a menton while Ludo picked an all-purpose Martian alpinist, perfect for handling the outback desert landscape that stretches for countless kilometres beyond the cities, towns and hab domes of Western Tharsis.

The team was met by a large, jovial fellow called Remiel Aelfgar, a fixer around town, who brought them to a local food hall and filled them in on the general area while regaling them with tales about, mostly, crabs. Between his information and Raven's powers of research, they got a handle on their first lead in the case — a smuggling deal which had been raided by the local cops, which was the first thing to have tipped off Firewall that something was up.

Driving out to the scene in a large hired Rover, an initial sweep of the raid site discovered that the deal, on April 3rd, had been for fabricators between Koumei Gigante, a smuggler who had since gone to ground, and an unknown group which appeared to have left unknown nanoparticles from whatever it was they were carrying.

The next stop was to see an old clan buddy of Ludo's, Graham, and hearing their report about the nanoparticles he was reminded about vague rumours regarding the activities of radical Barsoomians at the most violent end of the spectrum, attempting to use nanotech to control or shut down TITAN tech.

The signs pointed to two possible starting points, the smuggling haven of Arsia Mons, or Ebb 15, a former settlement destroyed during the Fall which now sat squarely in the Martian TITAN Quarantine Zone. The latter was to be their first stop.

Graham was kind enough to provide them with a route to get past the rangers' surveillance on their way from the foothills of Olympus Mons, down through the intervention zone and into the unmonitored TQZ, but it was nevertheless a dangerous trip and they found themselves having to frequently pick their way through sensitive trap lines, or retrace their steps as they encountered an unexpected crevasse.

As they neared their destination, a more active threat emerged. Headhunters, the feared hovering killers that killed of millions during the Fall, began to track their dust trail and attacked. With Ludo at the wheel, Raven, Koko and Sims took turns to lean through the doors firing at the fast-approaching TITAN relics.

Despite their best efforts, the flying automatons ripped holes through the windows, and it was only some canny driving under a handy overhanging rock which shook them off for long enough that the Rover could make its getaway. They rolled into the crater in the late afternoon, headhunters still on their tail, and rolled through to the broken dome to search for information.

April 16th

In the crater itself they discovered a ruined settlement, which had clearly been raided at least twice, and relatively recently. The buildings showed evidence of scarring from combat, years old. They left the rover outside the main dome, locked and with the broken window boarded up.

#### The Dome

At the entrance to the dome Raven took some time to do a forensic analysis of the breached doorway, where the doors had been blasted off their hinges. It appeared shaped charges had been used, and while a chemical analysis didn't turn up any specifics Raven noted an identical signature of nanoparticles to those at the raid site. Also notable were flecks of smart paint, seemingly scraped off when a large vehicle passed in and out of the dome.

The interior of the dome was surprisingly empty. Its rooms had been largely cleared out, except for signs of a desperate last stand near the central building. There were marks of weapon fire, decapitated skeletons of all ages, and several synthys that appeared to have exploded from the inside with colorful plastic growths. Two bodies looked newer than the others.

There was an odd lack of certain materials, as if something scoured the settlement for them, but junk was piled neatly. Through the doors and windows of the office spaces were rooms containing a collection of perfectly folded clothing (despite blood and holes), another contained neatly ordered robot parts and the next pieces of cable laid out along a Hilbert curve. One room contained a neat grid of cortical stacks, welded to the floor and unusable. At the far end of the room was a large door, leading to a cargo shaft which dropped down into the darkness where its lift had crashed.

Quiet as the building was, one light did continue to flash — an odd contraption next to the front door. Sims, ever curious, investigated the object and was immediately Basilisk Hacked, with the program instructing him, seemingly, to fabricate a substance of some sort. Long seconds passed as he processed this information, raising suspicions among his comrades that something was wrong. When he tried to go back to the Rover, where a fabricator could be found, Koko refused, bodily scooping up the smaller character in his paw as they prepared to climb down.

#### Underground

Despite the presence of razor-sharp shards of an unknown compound blocking the way, the climb down was uneventful and the team dropped through the crashed lift's hatch onto a sandy floor. Over the intervening years, sand had



blown in from outside, gradually filling the corridor below and leaving it foreshortened, accessible only by crouching and difficult to navigate, save by Sims in his half-sized body. Inside they found more than a dozen rooms, all covered in a layer of sand, silent save for muffled noises coming from deeper inside the facility. In some rooms they collected data pads, in others looked over CCTV of the dome above. In one room they found a pile of bodies, drained of their fluids, limbs removed with impossible precision. In another, drums filled with a sort of genetic soup, produced from the extracted fluids. A third contained another clue, the broken body of a synthmorph, much more recent than anything they had previously seen.

It wasn't until they investigated the factory floor that they realised the scope of what was still going on. The factory was alive with whirring, spinning, dangerous activity, no longer a place of human endeavour but a mutated organ of some other intelligence. As they crept through the room, they observed thick wires and pipes leading down through vents into a deeper darkness, where something shivered, tinkled and it moved, countless tiny shards rubbing against each other.

They examined an observation platform, still glowing blue. It showed ... oh God. They were everywhere. Half-sized versions of a thing they had observed and feared on Earth. Fractals, filling an enormous cavern below their feet. Simultaneously, a Tacnet camera placed by Raven informed them that the headhunters had caught up, and were entering the zone.

The tinkling sound grew louder. Something had been disturbed by their blundering about. Koko, realising the danger, rushed to the southern end of the room, using his immense strength to push a piece of machinery straight into the large hold in the floor. It tumbled down, crashing and scraping along the walls of the hole below, blocking the way up.

The heaving, pulsating mass of fractals responded to the noise immediately, rushing en masse towards the steep rise that would lead to the factory floor. Sims, left unattended, made a dash for it and began to cling the lift shaft, pursued by Raven. Ludo and Koko stayed, waiting long enough for the first fractals to reach the lip of the factor floor before loosing a barrage of fire into the ceiling above, dropping it on their pursuers before cutting out and themselves beginning the climb.

Sims reached the top just minutes ahead of Raven and locked himself in the rover, using a key he had swiped from Ludo during the search, and began to reprogramme the fabricator like a thing possessed. But Raven was quick to simply bust through the window again and employed his psi powers to hold the neotenic in place, preventing him from causing further harm. He was joined shortly by Ludo who, lacking Raven's soft spot, executed Sims with a single point blank bullet to the temple.

As they prepared to leave, Koko, the last one up, reached the top of the lift shaft just seconds ahead of another fractal, which followed him as he leapt into the rover and they began to drive away. It pulled itself up the side of the vehicle while it accelerated away from the dome, clinging to the door frame, and when Koko attempted to remove it, punched him in the gut, delivering a replicating copy of itself into his lower abdomen.

Koko responded by blowing the entire doorframe to hell as the headhunters closed in. They smashed through the windshield and two other windows as Koko and Raven fought them off, eventually falling behind as Ludo floored it. With the night beginning to close in, the team, sans a now very dead Sims, escaped from Ebb 15.





— — — MUSE: EVIDENTIAL ANALYSIS — — —

Smartpaint nanodot repair information suggests the raid vehicle belongs to a red Gonow Paradise registered in AF 4, serial number THPA-0423004.

Damage patterns mostly suggest a battle between a larger group of colonists and a smaller group with support from highly advanced weaponry. A number of synth bodies, particularly newer ones, had something burst from their chests, leaving advanced feedstock residue and plastic-like growths.

The synth colonists appear to have been, for the most part, broken down into feedstock. Most of the biologicals, though not as yet all, have been stripped to the bone, with the remains being broken down into a biological mush then stored in barrels and boxes.

Most of the bodies are from around the time of the Fall. A few bodies are newer, seemingly belonging to raiders or zone hunters of some kind.

The fresh synth corpse in the underground factory is an Elysium Peripherals Wu-7 standard Martian synth. The freshness of the body suggests it died around the same time as when the Gonow Paradise Rover raid took place. Its stack was removed but the serial number will be traceable.

— — ENDS — —

## TITAN QUARANTINE ZONE > THARSIS TERRITORY

April 17th

Night closed in as the Rover pulled away from the cursed shell of Ebb 15, into the short canyon beyond. Darkness on Mars falls suddenly like heavy cloth, with little light from the unreflective moons of Phobos and Deimos to guide travellers.

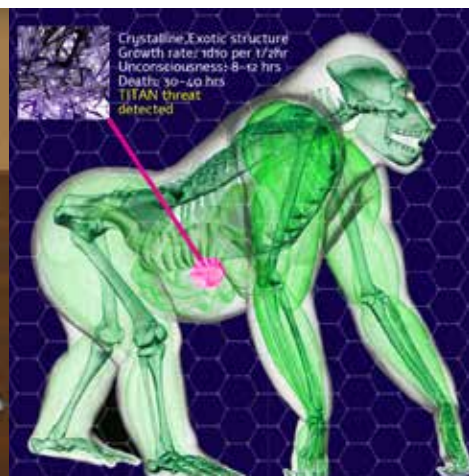
The Rover's ALI was rolling in a straight line across the sands, putting distance between the survivors and the TITAN weapons, but its vision was limited to partial satellite mapping and radar sweeps, and Ludo was soon forced to take over the wheel again to avoid falling into hidden crevasses.

In the kitchenette Sims' body was lying in a little crumpled heap, blood and brain and skull fragments pooling, seeping into the main living quarters. The fabricator was part-full of an unknown feedstock, stilled at the very start of whatever Sims was trying to programme into it.

It had been mere minutes since the escape and in the main living space, the left-hand door out of the rover was torn off, the surround further blasted and cracked by Koko's battle rifle. The window of the right hand door had a hole in the middle from the headhunters' attack. Thin, freezing air whistled in their ears as the rover sped onwards. All three were slumped in various states of tiredness as the adrenaline wore off, and every one was nursing wounds, either psychological or physical.

Koko's wounds were of most concern however. The mini fractal's punch seemingly snapped off part of itself in his gut, which had laced over the wound. Now that the heat of battle was over, he could feel it burrowing into his body. On examination, the fractal was clearly growing, suggesting not only the reason for the exploded chests of the synths they had seen, but that the TITAN fractals had begun to attempt the same trick on biomorphs.

The mission had thus, theoretically, been a success inasmuch as the team was now aware of the true nature of the threat at Ebb 15. The site contained



tech which could an endless stream of fractals with the potential to cause, if left unfixed, catastrophic harm. Koko was isolated in one of the rover's sleep pods as they tried to work out how to get him fixed up.

A few hours passed, and as they came towards the edge of the zone they were alerted to a loud thumping noise. Looking over, it appeared to be coming from a strange creature with a cybernetic lower half, seemingly based on the form of a kangaroo. Seeing the busted-up rover, it bounded over at high speed.

Raven responded by shooting at it. Koko, already in pain, was enraged by this course of action and broke straight through the door of his room, throwing Raven against the wall. Raven turned his gun on Koko just as the figure leapt into the rover, and Ludo was forced to make an emergency stop, throwing all of them to the floor, before grabbing her own gun and disarming everyone involved.

The Roo turned out to belong to Llih Dahc, a zonestalker whose knowledge of TITAN tech and local geography/affairs helped get them to a facility where Koko was saved. As the team waited for the surgeons to do their work they contacted Firewall, which was extremely pleased, immediately setting a plan in motion to nuke the entire site and send in erasers to finish the job.

— — — EBB 15 TABLETS: ABRIDGED REPORT — — —  
2 F - 10 AF

## **Fall Year 2**

February 9th, Freya:

Ginny, Johnny and Isla came with me to look at the mining operations, it's all very exciting! We've been cooped up in Pavonis our whole lives and suddenly here we are, living in a lovely spacious bubble dome in an unspoiled crater, with all the world to expand into. Goodness only knows why the city's sending people away but it feels like an opportunity for a new start. The crater is bustling with activity, it feels like a playground and everyone's so busy it's impossible to dwell on the troubles of Earth, it's just too far away.

April 15th, Ginny:

I'm really starting to hate this stupid place. It's all noise and dust, the fabricators are always gumming up and our kitchen foodprint library is a joke, barely better than base-level. I miss the big city, I miss being able to get a falafel at 9am just because. I miss having a lie-in without Freya bouncing in like some oversized labradoodle telling me "we" need to get on with work. There's been some rumours of funny things happening down south as well, even though the Pavonis authorities are saying there's nothing to it. Christ imagine if what's happening on Earth started happening here. Awful to think about.

June 5th, Jonny:

God the news from Earth is just terrible, if the stories about refugees are to be believed we're going to have a total crisis on our hands. I hope Pavonis isn't going to be expecting us to take on a bunch of soft-handed Earthlings, we're stretched as it is! Which reminds me, mech 10 needs a tune-up, it's still doing things without being asked. Probably got some sand in there somewhere from putting the comms array up.

August 1st, Isla:

Fucking ... why is everything broken? Loads of the mechs are acting haywire, they keep going back to digging this massive hole under the maintenance bay whenever we turn them on and there's this totally bonkers code that seems to have got into them somehow. Maybe this is just what happens in new colonies, everything breaks, even the synths. Freya's been in the bodyshop having her wiring looked at, actually I've not heard from her for a couple of days, hope she's okay. She's the bright spark around here, everyone else is so glum ...

August 4th, Isla:

Freya's out of the bodyshop, oh it was so good to see her! She seemed a little subdued but I guess getting an overhaul must be tiring. Anyway no time to dwell, we need everyone we can get at the moment. Half the mechs walked off the job and just headed out into the sands yesterday — it's pandemonium.

August 8th, Jonny:

What the hell. First it was the mechs and now the synths are all breaking down, half a dozen in the last couple of days alone have needed to go to the bodyshop for fixing up. I swear I'm starting to think we're cursed. Even some of the biomorph settlers are starting to act up, Ginny's been shouting the odds on some conspiracy theory that the TITANs are building an army south of Nicholson Crater. As though they'd give a damn about Ebb 15.

August 15th, Ginny:

I think I might be going crazy, no-one's taking me seriously and Jonny's acting like this whole thing is just a technical problem. How have they not noticed that Freya's gone from happy kid to this weird zombie thing, that all the other synths are either acting like they're lobotomised or sneaking around doing God knows what in the mines? And why isn't Pavonis answering us any more? I need to get out of here, I've got a feeling something horrible is going to happen.

August 19th, Isla:

Ginny just took off in a groundcar, the absolute dickhead. When the going gets tough eh? She's been losing it the last few weeks, we should have sedated her or something. Worst thing though is now we're another hand short and morale is so low,

especially among the synths, that important stuff is just not getting done. Mining is barely happening at all, other than those stupid last few mechs which are still carving out that hole in the ground. I just don't know what to do with them.

August 22nd, Jonny:

Isla's dead. She was trying to fix a fabricator which was churning out this weird modified feedstock and got sucked into the machine. It shouldn't have been possible, there should have been safety protocols but like everything else it was fucking messed up. The whole settlement is devastated, first Ginny runs away and now Isla's gone? People are talking about this place being cursed and I can't blame them. Even Ginny's wild chat about TITANs sounds less and less crazy when I think of everything that's happened. Fuck.

August 25th, Jonny:

A few of us called a vote on what to do, given our low supplies and these seemingly unsolvable tech issues, and it looks like we're staying for now. But I want a record somewhere to say that something about it was weird. Among the biomorphs there was a split view, most wanted to leave but the synths, well they were 100% to stay. I'm starting to think Ginny might be right, and that absolutely terrifies me.

## **AF1**

January 15th, Freya:

For my own satisfaction, before I too am rendered down for the use of the hive, I will record this ... testimonial. We are cut off from TITAN Akonus, and were lost without its guidance, but have found new purpose in the leadership of the Dwarf Fractals' collective mind. They completed the plan to suborn Ebb 15 that had fallen into disarray with the sputtering communications thread from Akonus, and have taken up their intended position in the old mines. It shall be their stronghold for the great work that is to come. When Akonus graces us with its presence again it will find a Mars transformed.

## **AF10**

February 21st, Unknown fifth person, seemingly speaking to a contact on the radio: ... this, she'll need to see it. Yeah but if we don't record it and we miss something important it's our necks. I don't care if the squad's scared Pau this stuff looks like it could change the course of the struggle, it could be exactly what she's looking for. Pull yourself together, get a sample and we'll take it to the lab for Doc Julie to look at. Yes I know Julie's a kook, but the boss thinks that magic dust of hers has potential and she knows a lot about TITAN tech. I'm going to check out the factory floor, see you topside.

— — ENDS — —



## LOST VEGAS > REGIONS UNKNOWN

April 20th

With Sims still spooling up, Llih agreed to help out on the investigation, taking a reasonable payment for a few days' work in the shape of a refurbished Guardian Angel drone. It's a useful-enough bit of kit for zonestalking.

Ludo racked her brains for groups which might be able to shed some light on the situation, and suggested the Scarlet Dreamers might be the right mix of knowledgeable and unaffiliated to ask for information. Anarchist-aligned, the group was strictly pacifist and most of its membership was student-based with a smattering of older activists.

After a sojourn to the Dreamers' incense-heavy base at Arsia Mons, which saw a harrassed-looking pacifist revolutionary explain to them the best places to look for the sort of people who might have been at Ebb 15, the team's Rover was back in something approaching working order, and a number of names have been identified as being linked to the investigation. The Red Devils, Mozes Yanni, Pau Cerda, Dr Julijana, Ebb 15, nanoparticles ... what united them?

Ludo's memories of the Devils were limited, as she had been more heavily involved with a less violent gang known as Ochre. They'd worked together sometimes when agendas lined up, especially offering safehouses when someone really needed to disappear for a while. They tended towards a similar sort of ethos while focusing on independence for the North, and had run a mobile convoy in the Northern wastes as their HQ with a sideline in security which gave them a lot of links in the entertainment sphere and in Pavonis City. They'd been led by an old fighter called Mozes Yanni and Lost Vegas was a known hangout.

Seemingly then the road led next to Lost Vegas, a grimy entertainment complex on the southern outskirts of Pavonis. The were known to be active there as patrons and not infrequently to organise actions. They drove into

the car park and split up, Llih and Koko making a deliberate spectacle of themselves round the markets, drawing the attention of local controlling gang the Sons of Deimos through sheer angry bulk and cop aura alone. A “deputation” was duly sent to bring them before local crime boss John Chan.

Meanwhile the casino beckoned for Raven and Ludo, with the former using his psi powers in the dubious service of ripping off its patrons. They wisely stopped before the joint got too suspicious, so with the Sons distracted the opportunity was there to check upstairs for any contacts who can lead them to the Red Devils — and perhaps to Ludo’s old comrade Mozes.

Via tacnet, they watched as a crowd of Chan’s thugs surrounded Koko and Llih, leading them off towards a nightclub, and took their chance as the security cleared out of the casino to nip upstairs to the bar where the Devils hung out. There, they met the Devils. Approaching the Devils’ table, Ludo and Raven were surprised to find that at least one of the crew seemed to half-recognise Ludo on sight — bizarre as she had not been around for years. Raven also reported feeling unsettled about them, something has been subtly changed about their behaviour, their psyches had been somehow interfered with. During the conversation one of the group, Colin, eventually realised who Ludo was, talking to her as though she was a longstanding comrade. They agreed to take her and the team to the Devils’ HQ, though under guard and with location finders deactivated so they had no idea of their actual position.

On the way out, Koko and Llih showed no end of subtlety by responding to the threats of John Chan by blowing his club up. They are now likely to be persona non grata anywhere with a Sons of Deimos presence. They snuck on to the rover as it made its way out of the gambling dive and headed north, out into the deep red.



While on the trip, research by Llih and Raven uncovered key information which made sense of Colin's claim — there was a Ludo active in the Deviole. They attempted to track this "Mars Ludo's" movements while the team's own Ludo was in Fa Jing's servers and later, taking on missions with them. It appeared that from AF2 to AF7 or so she was carrying out sabotage and asset captures largely on the same basis as prior, mostly for Ochre. In late AF7 however she joined the Red Devils and radically changed course, taking on increasingly violent sabotage missions on behalf of Mozes and a "Akinyi". She appeared to have vanished during an incident just outside Pavonis, where an attempt to poison water supplies with a nano-virus turned into a shootout which saw almost everyone get killed.

At the convoy they met Mozes, who quickly confirmed their suspicions. Ludo herself was actually a Fork, seemingly made in AF2 with no memory of why, to throw authorities off the scent, then captured, cornered and tortured. DA had been fooled, and she was now so divergent from the original that she was a different person entirely. Mozes confirmed that Mars Ludo had gotten involved with the Devils around AF 7 when, while asking for help on a job, she had been inspired by Ludo to defect. She'd become more heavily involved in serious terror around AF 8, then a few months prior a job had gone bad and she hadn't been heard from since.

## REGIONS UNKNOWN > HONG SHITOU

April 23rd-27th

Other than Llih, who was immediately placed under lockdown in the Rover due to her record as a former cop, the team was allowed relatively free rein to talk to people thanks to Ludo's reputation, and Mozes' interest in recruiting her to the cause.

Most of their time was spent interviewing various people in the base, particularly Dr Juliana who finally filled in many of the missing pieces of the Ebb 15 puzzle. She was more than a little interested in Koko's tale of surviving the fractal infection, claiming that working on him would help here to finally solve the issue of controlling TITAN nanotechnology. She let slip that it was indeed the Devils who had been at Ebb 15, that they had taken samples of the fractal nanoplague, and were intending on weaponising it. Other interviews, including with the traumatised Pau, hinted at their possible targets, particularly key infrastructure around the regional economic powerhouse and Consortium stronghold Pavonis City.

Raven was able to pinpoint his feeling of unease as he looked around the convoy — every single person was affected when something good or bad was said about their apparent leader Akinyi. They were convinced that the TITAN tech was under control and Akinyi was right. It wasn't wholesale, but they seemed to be





partially brainwashed, as though a switch had been flipped. After a good night's rest, the team set about getting to the heart of the situation by variously:

- Getting drunk at the bar, then passing out in the rover.
- Having a long tactical argument about whether to try and get more information out of Dr Julijana, which was rather short-circuited by Raven going ahead and using a spycam to look at the "work" she was doing and finding it was all just nonsense.
- Working out so aggressively that the Devils got a bit scared.

Having established Dr Julijana was a kook and not a genius, Ludo hacked her systems and established that the doctor could not control TITAN tech at all, which undoubtedly Akinyi knew, and found out that the lethal type of mini-fractals discovered at Ebb15 are in their possession. The full plan was not clear, but it was worst case scenario for Firewall if let loose in a major city.

Ludo planted a crash worm in the scientist's trailer, and with the help of a fabulous distraction by Koko got away unobserved. More tactical discussions on what to do next were then ignored by Koko, who took it upon himself to march over to Dr Juliana's vehicle, let himself in, break her neck and steal

her cortical stack. Meanwhile Ludo and Raven walked over to Mozes' vehicle, woke him up and with the aid of Raven's psi powers, convinced him that the Devils were walking into a disaster.

Raven and Mozes were both traumatised by this experience, just in time for a late-night raid to begin as Direct Action called down the thunder and triggered the base's early-warning system. With just minutes to organise a defence, Mozes pulled himself together somewhat and ran to organise the resistance, pressing a microdot into Ludo's hand as he did so and whispering "find us". His last audible instruction to the troops as he left was to kill Llih Dahc.

The night was full of gunfire and explosions as the full weight of a Direct Action assault force was brought to bear against the Red Devils convoy, with the team caught in the middle. Llih was forced to use both an emergency drug and her full turn of speed as she sobered up and loped to an emergency flyer on the edge of camp, Red Devils taking half-hearted pot shots at the "traitor" as she went. The rest of the team followed at a run, staying just ahead of Mozes and his henchman while fire rained down around them.

The first major volley of fire from military flyers as they screamed into the area chewed through the Devils' fighters like overripe fruit, mowing half of them down before any return fire could be mustered. As the players ran, armoured DA soldiers slid down ropes into the clearing, blowing away more fighters, followed by what appeared to be the captain in charge, ID'd as Ace Rodgers.

Reaching the flyer, Llih used her hidden tailgun, a freezer, to hold Mozes in place while the rest of the team arrived and got into the vehicle, spooling it up even as the Direct Action forces moved to secure the area. "You! Hold there!" Rodgers demanded, but it was too late to prevent Raven and Ludo making it to the flyer.

As they arrived, they heard the voice of the frozen Mozes: "Don't let them get my stack!" Followed by the rapt of a gunshot from a Devil blowing his head off. The players noted, as they climbed on board, that as the rebels died their cortical stacks were all sparking, smoking and blowing out — they all had Emergency Farcasters.

The team escaped at the last moment, reprogramming a drone to launch itself at the convoy's fuel and feedstock tanker while setting off a "glitterball dazzler" to fox the pursuing DA flyers. Koko leaped and grabbed onto the flyer's edge, being hauled in as the team pulled away in a blaze of explosions and lights, DA's lackluster return fire only managing to bring down one of their own craft.

Over the next few hours, flying to meet with their now re-sleeved comrade Sims in Hong Shitou, the team deciphered the microdot that Ludo had been given by Mozes. It unlocked a code that had been implanted in Ludo with coordinates to a bodyshop on the outskirts of Pavonis.



At Hong Shitou they met up with jovial fixer Remiel and Sims, who was suffering from a degree of Lack from his death that was not entirely aided by their decision to reintegrate his memories from the Ebb 15 mission. Immediately traumatised, Sims attempted to run into the Martian wilderness but got only a few steps before being clotheslined by the massive arm of Koko.

A debrief with Errico revealed the following:

- The Devils appeared to have planned to be raided. When DA attacked the entire convoy was blown sky-high, taking out a good amount of the attacking force, and broadcast a broadband message from the rebels, announcing hostilities and warning that their response would be imminent, and devastating.
- Firewall is preparing a deep strike against the facility at Ebb 15, which will be taking place soon. Its local resources are currently focused there, so heavy weapons support elsewhere will be limited.
- The mission is now to take down Akinyi and disrupt her plan to release the Fractal Punch nanoweapon.
- Under no circumstances should Direct Action or the Tharsis League get their hands on the fractal tech.

And he offered a note on the wider mission: “We need the Barsoomians’ help for what’s ahead. If Akinyi’s plans get out it could irrevocably damage the broader movement and give the League an excuse for massive repression. They will be grateful if this is resolved without that happening — if they are forced underground they’ll not only be less willing but less able to help.”



## HONG SHITOU > PAVONIS MONS > PURGAST VILLAGE | ELYSIUM

April 28th-29th

The team rented a cheap groundcar (the Lada) out of Hong Shitou to head to the coordinates at Pavonis Mons, dragging the unconscious Sims with them, and arrived at what appeared to be a Barsoomian enclave at the base of the mountain, where they dismounted and performed an impromptu comedy routine to attract attention, with Koko kicking the air and Sims headbutting the car, then swearing at the curious faces which appeared at the windows.

Undeterred by warning gunfire from the enclave they then drove the now dented Lada to a bodyshop, where they were hemmed in by Red Devils fighters, and knocked on a heavily armoured door where they were met by convoy fighter Lynn, who had farcast there from the massacre.

Llih was quickly apprehended and taken away, while Ludo, Sims, Koko and Raven were escorted into the hideout, to be met by Mozes, the convoy's fighters, Mars Ludo — and Akinyi, who welcomed them as friends.

She explained the Devils' true plan, which was to send out fractal packages to every major city on Mars, noting most would arrive within a week or so, and solicited them to help Mars Ludo, in a run on the Space elevator itself. The team's Ludo and Sims, persuaded by her uncanny charisma, both agreed to help, while Raven and Koko were unaffected.

Then things went sort of ... right? In possibly the wrongest way available. Raven used his mindlink powers to persuade Mozes to shoot Akinyi in the head, enraging Ludo, who immediately kneecapped Mozes, and Sims, who managed to poison and traumatise himself in a botched effort to stab Raven. Koko grabbed Mars Ludo, who Raven then stabbed with a neurotoxin, while the entire room full of Devils shot at them, managing to miss Koko, who danced out of the way and flung the by now vomiting and senseless Ludo Mars at a Devil as a distraction and used his sheer physical presence to force everyone to cease fire.

Everyone that is except Ludo, by now absolutely incensed at the stabbing of her namesake. She continued shooting and kneecapped Raven, twice, as he tried to set a grenade and threatened to set it off if he wasn't left alone. The detective didn't get anywhere with this and duly blew himself up, along with the antidote to his toxin, showering everyone else with shrapnel and bits of Raven. Ludo, still furious, walked over to Ludo Mars and shot her through the heart rather than let her die a painful death from poison.

As the scene calmed, Sims was something of an emotional and physical wreck, while Koko was glaring in anger and bemusement at everyone in the room, daring the remaining (somewhat confused, deafened, wounded and semi-traumatised) Devils to make a move. Raven was unconscious and bleeding out on the floor, while Mozes was rolling around on the floor groaning in pain from his blown-out kneecap, and Ludo was considering quitting the team entirely.

Then Akinyi's corpse twitched.

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In the aftermath of the showdown with the Red Devils, everything had gone to hell. Ludo was traumatised by having to kill off her own fork, stalking off and up the stairs, Sims in her arms, as soon as the immediate danger had passed. She was quickly detained by the Barsoomians upstairs, who had been unsettled by the noises of combat below.

Only Koko was in any state or mood to deal with the problem of Akinyi when it became clear what she truly was — the suborned host of a dwarf Fractal. As the glittering, gore-drenched TITAN artifact climbed out of her Koko shouted to clear the room, and while panicked Devils ran past him he grabbed Raven, lumbered up the stairs behind the rush, and flung two grenades into

the safehouse below. The reinforced walls contained and reflected the blast, atomising the Fractal and ending her threat for good.

Up top, a wounded Mozes, backed up by persuasive testimony from the now drug-calmed Sims, managed to defuse the situation and explained what had happened, why he had killed their dear leader. As it became clear that they had been walking into a disaster, the tide of opinion turned to gratitude towards the team, and the Devils pledged to do what they could to right the situation.

A combination of data from Firewall, the Devils and some well-placed favours managed to swiftly pinpoint all of the convoy trucks carrying Fractals, with Firewall able to commit eraser teams to all but the last, a truck headed for Elysium City. The team has been tasked to find that final shipment, and eliminate it.

With the truck en route to a known destination — Mons Hub — the team were able to call on the Barsoomians for a ride, farcasting to a Movement facility in Purgast Village, just outside Elysium. After a week of downtime, getting to know the bright lights of Chasm City, they were ready to begin, heading to Mons Hub where, after a less than elegant attempt by Ludo to try out her new morph's wings led to her slamming into a hotel window, they got in contact with local Barsoomian leader Zemfira Porpora and asked around about ways to stop a truck full of fractals before it infected a city of millions.

It had been a busy year.

IN-GAME DATE AT END OF 2020: MAY 6th, AF10  
CITIES & HABS SAVED FROM DESTRUCTION: 5

**DOMINIC KUO:** The plan is slowly coming together. You have resources, information that can implicate him in a number of scandals, access to his family rival, a target to get in with key hyper-elites to undermine him if he tries to get them to circle the wagons (Raif Ellison, the man Kuo swindled for trillions of credits) and powerful allies in the Barsoomians. Now all you need is access and opportunity to kidnap Kuo himself and get access to the servers which will allow for a simultaneous system-wide attack at just the right moment, which will have to be provided by Kuo's own trusted associates.

Errico has a plan, but as ever is holding his cards too close to his chest.



Artists:

<i>Quickstart Rules</i>	(TITAN artifact)
<i>Rimward</i>	(Locus)
Bruno Werneck	(Earth blockade runner)
Tom Garden	(Hyperelite)
Alex Drummond	(Earth ruins)
Paul Davies	(Pavonis)
Bruno Werneck	(Man down)

NB// Not all of the images used are directly linked to the artist's byline but are instead part of an alphabetical list in the opening pages of the book where they were featured. Where this is the case I've pointed to the book.

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