

A Tune From The Deep

Initial Brief

Across the Keter System, a handful of Particularly Capable individuals receive the following communication:

the myteneans have dug 2 deep. whatever they found, aSpExX are scrambling to get their

but its not just any old aspexx lackey - its »melodious solution« (and her "mobility" division) that are paniking about this. we don't no y yet, but we r watching them. solution is bad news - did you hear she stole an entire asterode???!?

anyway point is this goes really deep and also all the way 2 the very top, but with your help we can blow this hole thing wiiiide open. GOTO 'the adventurers guild' in civilia on mytene (*not* the one on aceworld! y r there 2 of these...) and meet our agent there, codeword 'undrw0rld'. theyll fill u in

Characters

- [Gathering Flow](#) - Phil
- [Stellar Glory](#) - Tamsin
- [Lost Finder](#) - Stuart

Summary

- The party head to the recently-created Adventurers' Guild building in Civilia, where they eventually identify their contact from the briefing message after getting several other bystanders interested in whatever they're off to do, since all the currently available quests to hunt Magma Wyrms are apparently getting rather repetitive.
- The party find out that Aspexx, and specifically the team reporting to Melodious Solution, seem to be very interested in something that was discovered recently by a Guild adventuring party – an area of decay suppression out beyond Civilia's ship heart range, but where the nearest ship heart still appeared to be Civilia. An Aspexx team has apparently gone down to investigate, so the Card Table hacker collective wants to send the party in to disrupt/prevent whatever nefarious thing Aspexx are presumably up to.
- Heading down into the mine, the party encounter several hazards they might have expected – cave slugs, burrowing mites, Decayed drilling equipment – and a few they might not have, such as heavily drugged and angry raktors (introduced by someone to fight Decay, it seems).
- Eventually, they find the area described – protection from Decay, but when Gathering Flow attempts to discern the direction of the nearest ship heart, sure enough this is unchanged and is Civilia. Heading deeper, they find what appears to be a deep chasm, with one Aspexx elite soldier standing guard at the top. They manage to deal with them without alerting the rest of the Aspexx party below, but as they begin to rappel down the rope into the chasm, lying about being Aspexx staff, they are rumbled. Since the staff at the bottom of the chasm are only two non-combat scientists and one more elite guard, however, this only causes a small hiccup in

proceedings until the guard is dealt with and the scientists have been variously threatened/knocked unconscious/threatened some more.

- The scientists were in the process of tethering a box to the bottom of the rope when the party arrived. This box is a complex creation, with many buttons and controls on the outside, clamped around what is clearly a ship heart inside it. The scientists get very very agitated when the party try to open the box and/or talk to the ship heart.
- Questioning of the scientists eventually gets them to break their Aspexx NDAs in preference to being murdered. The party learn the following things:
 - The box is a SCION unit, which may be more or less familiar to characters as interfaces that e.g. spaceship-bound ship hearts exist in.
 - SCION units have various setting options, and this one is currently set to prevent the ship heart within receiving any input (e.g. communication, people talking to it, etc) from the world around it.
 - This is because this ship heart is an 'unattuned' ship heart, which has not yet made contact with any people or other outside influences. The party recognise this as similar to things that Endeavour has previously mentioned about e.g. ship hearts forming personalities based on interactions – this would appear to be a ship heart which has not started that process.
 - The scientists are very clear that this ship heart needs to remain unattuned for the purposes of Aspexx Mobility Division, led by Melodious Solution – which is to recreate an Interstellar Gate to replace the Orion Gate.
 - Also, the ship heart (and its SCION) cannot be moved through the power of another ship heart (e.g. Intervention) – this is another type of grey area in ship heart interactions where the ship heart would need to consent to (or contest) being moved and, since it is kind of unaware of the existence of existence, cannot/will not do either.
- The party develops a bit of a split about what to do with all this information, with Lost Finder favouring immediately opening the box to rescue the ship heart from solitary confinement, while Gathering Flow and Stellar Glory prefer to keep it in its un-contacted state until they learn more about the purpose which Aspexx want it for – after it develops a personality, after all, they know of no way to undo that and return it to this state.
- Eventually, they agree to bring the box back to the surface, along with the Aspexx scientists and their unconscious guards. On the way back they do not meet any Decay, since the ship heart they carry appears to be repelling it. They do, however, meet a Magma Wyrms, which poses a considerable fiery problem until Gathering Flow uses Intervention with Endeavour to forcibly relocate it to a field a few miles outside Civilia which she saw while flying in. The Magma Wyrms cease to be a problem (for the party).
- Heading back towards the surface, the party encounter another adventuring party heading down - apparently hunting the same ship heart. This turns out to be the Hole Gang, a longstanding group of ship heart enthusiasts who had stopped hunting for relics after the events of [Treasure Hunt](#) but had been sucked back in for One Last Job by the hackers' hints of how amazing this thing down here was. Oh yes, the hackers had reached out to them too. Somewhat indiscriminate party hiring, it seems.
 - The party attempt to argue the Hole Gang down from attempting to steal the ship heart, but it's too big a prize - however, with a combination of reason, threats and Gathering Flow's deployable Barrier preventing anyone getting too close, they manage to get past and leave the Hole Gang to follow them back out of the mine.
- At the exit to the mine, however, they meet an Aspexx welcoming party headed by Melodious Solution herself (with three more elite guards for backup). The party return the unconscious guards to her, and they are taken off to heal quietly in a corner. Meanwhile, the party try to

convince Melodious to let them go with the ship heart. Melodious tries to convince them to hand the ship heart over, for the good of the Keter System. Neither succeeds.

- Eventually, the party are so insistent that they want to stay with the ship heart, understand what will be done with it to create a gate and ensure its best interests are protected, that Melodious Solution offers a compromise: she will employ them as Aspexx contractors (with an NDA and contract) on this specific project to recreate an interstellar gate. They will assist in the project and thus will get to be involved in the fate of the ship heart. Gathering Flow and Stellar Glory accept this as the best offer they're likely to get from Aspexx: however, Lost Finder refuses to part with the ship heart for even the time it would take to transfer everyone to the *Starlight Ebbing* and get contracts etc signed. Instead, he uses a combination of his Ziline and Specialist abilities to hide - holding the SCION - and attempts to flee. This is eventually foiled by everyone else, and he is knocked unconscious and dragged back to the *Starlight Ebbing* for Aspexx to deal with later.

Aftermath

- Before leaving Civilia, Gathering Flow takes a moment in the Adventurers' Guild to mention the relocated Magma Wyrms. This results in a new Quest being added to the list, which a number of adventurers seem moderately interested in following up (on the one hand it's another darn Magma Wyrms, on the other hand no getting trapped in caves turning to lava around you?)
- The whole party are then taken to the *Starlight Ebbing* escorted by Melodious Solution and her heavily armed retinue. For Gathering Flow and Stellar Glory, following their agreement with Melodious Solution, they are presented with contracts to sign. The key points, presented in watertight legalese, are as follows:
 - By signing, you agree to become a contractor working on behalf of Aspexx. This does not make you (nor entitle you to the benefits of) an Aspexx employee.
 - Specifically, you will be working for the Mobility Division on a Special Project, and will be under the direct supervision and command of Melodious Solution (and/or her appointed delegates).
 - The contract does not go into details about the exact nature of the Special Project, but you know that its intention is to reconnect the Keter System to the rest of the galaxy - ideally by constructing a replacement Gate linking to the Fjenix system though these specifics are not set in stone.
 - This contract lasts until the completion of the Special Project, at which point your involvement with Aspexx will end.
 - The contract stipulates that:
 - you will carry out all work assigned to you in a timely fashion to the best of your ability
 - you will respect Aspexx's management hierarchy and obey their orders and instructions to their fullest extent
 - you will not engage in any activity to the detriment of Aspexx, its facilities, equipment, or staff, nor any activity which would bring Aspexx into disrepute
 - A condition of signing this contract is that you also sign a Non Disclosure Agreement that prohibits you from revealing any aspect of your work on the Special Project to anyone not also working on the project or otherwise specifically approved by Melodious Solution. This includes Aspexx employees and contractors not assigned to the project. Unlike the main contract, the NDA lasts indefinitely, even after the Special Project has completed.
 - Any breach of the contract or the NDA will be dealt with via Aspexx's disciplinary process. Disciplinary actions vary based on the nature and severity of the infraction, but without limitation include:

- verbal warning
 - reassignment of duties
 - imprisonment
 - forwarding relevant evidence to the Elegy for their consideration
 - termination of contract
- Gathering Flow and Stellar Glory sign these documents, after some attempts on Stellar Glory's part to add clauses around moral objection to orders she finds ethically unacceptable. After receiving repeated reassurances that obviously all Aspexx projects conform to the highest moral and ethical standards, she does not manage to get any wording changes agreed. However, she does learn that Aspexx are okay with contractors leaving Aspexx projects if they are unable to deliver the deliverables, so long as a) they don't expect payment thereafter and b) they continue to abide by the NDA. So in a situation where she is faced with a task she finds morally unconscionable, she can just quit the whole project and relinquish any ability to learn what happens after that point (and be speedily escorted off Aspexx premises minus any equipment/documentation/etc pertaining to the project).
 - Lost Finder is imprisoned upon the Starlight Ebbing until he signs an NDA, which he is happy to do. With the NDA signed, Aspexx soon decides to transfer Lost Finder off the Starlight Ebbing to a facility on Ace's World. One might suspect that despite Finder signing the agreement Aspexx does not trust him aboard their research vessel, and relocating him somewhere more anonymous is their way of reducing risk, even if it is a lower security base. After a couple of days further detention at the facility on Ace's World, one night the cell door just... pops open, on its own. An Aspexx security robot ambles into view, and in a somewhat broken voice beckons Lost Finder to follow it. The robot leads him out of the facility, where some familiar faces are waiting for him: the same Card Table hackers who resuscitated Lost Finder from his extended hibernation and sent him on this mission in the first place.
 - Once free, Lost Finder shares info with the hackers as follows: "I can't tell you. It was big, bigger than anything since the gate died, and I tried to stop a tragedy. But I failed, and I should have died. And my life was spared by Aspexx on the condition I don't tell anyone what happened. Here is are the maps I made of our trip; I'm giving them to you because I'm sure that everything has been cleared out by now. And there were witnesses to the final fight and to my last words. In the adventurers' guildhouse. Either they are free to talk, in which case the secret is partially out, or they aren't, in which case the secret isn't. There's nothing wrong in telling you this, because I'm not revealing the secret to you, just making sure that, if the secret is out, that you can be among those who know it. I can't do more, now. I'm sorry." The maps are the ones he made of the mine using his explorer's ability. He will make extra copies for his companions, and one copy for Aspexx.
 - Gathering Flow reaches out to Endeavour, sneaking around the NDA by telling someone that Aspexx probably won't be able to interrogate about this. She gives Endeavour a packet of knowledge, basically what she now knows about gate creation, ship heart creation (?) and the nature of unattuned shiphearts, and requests that Endeavour release this information to the system's startouched if Gathering Flow ever asks, or if Gathering Flow dies.

Consequences

- Members of the Civilia Adventurers' Guild, and the Card Table hacker collective, are aware that Aspexx retrieved some kind of special ship heart in a box from the Civilia mines and took it back to Starlight Ebbing, against the vocal criticisms of one speedy Ziline.
- Aspexx employees will be aware that Aspexx is now finally able to start work towards 'restoring'

interstellar gate functionality.

All Characters

Gathering Flow

- +3 Clout with Aspexx while she remains contracted to Aspexx
- -1 Clout with the Card Table hackers for becoming an Aspexx st00ge
- Star Pact Gift: following this up with Endeavour, you find out the following:
 - Endeavour no longer wishes to learn more about the causes of the Orion Gate disaster
 - Endeavour no longer desires the reconnection of an interstellar gate as a priority
 - Endeavour's priority now is much more focused: it values its own self-determination, and the self-determination of Hive IV. Actions taken to guard or promote that ability for Endeavour and Hive IV to make their own choices will be valued by Endeavour.

Stellar Glory

- +3 Clout with Aspexx while she remains contracted to Aspexx
- -1 Clout with the Card Table hackers for becoming an Aspexx st00ge

Lost Finder

- +3 Clout with the Card Table hackers for exposing the Truth
- -1 Clout with Aspexx for being an inconvenience

[mission](#), [gathering flow](#), [stellar glory](#), [lost finder](#)

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