

# Bone Tussle

## Initial Brief

*From the desk of Dr Curious Direction, Zeitgeist Research Department, Endeavour Kyla*

Dear Budding Leaf,

Please find attached all the research notes on your assorted conditions that I was able to salvage from the *Endeavour*, as requested. Best of luck figuring out this mnemonic virus stuff - I look forward to whatever papers your efforts produce! Oh, and you curing yourself. Of course.

Tiny Ember's reputation precedes her, but if you need any extra help then let me know. I can always put out a wider request for volunteers on your behalf.

Warm regards, Curious Direction

## Characters

- [Budding Leaf](#) - Alex
- [Tiny Ember](#) - Iain

## Summary

See [Picking Up The Pieces](#) for the backstory and motivation to this Mission - in particular the sections on Overworld, Impact, and Charismatic Wheelhouse.

- Budding Leaf and Tiny Ember meet aboard the *Firebrand* and begin to make plans to use the ship's holodeck to play a 'peaceful' run of Overworld in order to convince the Impact mnemonic virus the Leaf is not so bad a person. Ember also intends to make some improvements to the *Firebrand's* energy systems to allow more power to be routed to important systems in an emergency.
- This is the last thing either of them remember...
- *(A whole other adventure happens off screen in this interlude. Most details of this become clear during the mission proper (below), but if you require the canonical OC summary for whatever reason, James can provide a copy.)*
- ...until they wake up alongside Charismatic Wheelhouse in what Ember (now dressed in fantasy adventuring gear) recognises as her Vyixian Spa simulation. Despite Leaf being in a holodeck, the Impact mnemonic virus is notably not present. Nor are any of the spa staff, which Wheelhouse remarks is odd. Wheelhouse joins the party for the remainder of the mission.
- The party recover their equipment from lockers in the spa. Wheelhouse unexpectedly has a fantasy-style sword; Ember and Leaf retrieve their expected equipment, plus some unexpected fragments of research notes.
  - Notebook Page 4 lists some holodeck wake words for the 'Firebranch Holodeck (Spa)' and 'Spa Holodecks (Overworld)'. Ember discreetly shares this with Leaf but keeps this secret

from Wheelhouse.

- Notebook Page 10 is a hurried and unfinished note imploring the reader to find the other pages of the notebook, which have been hidden.
- Given this strange scenario, the party decide to explore the spa. Wheelhouse is especially excited to do so, as the spa has become very samey to them and they crave something new and exciting. The party soon finds a door labelled 'Holodeck Room', which Wheelhouse says is new. Ember breaks down the door, only to find no holodecks, but rather that the room warps into a tunnel passage to a ruined dungeon. Following this, the party find themselves in the world of Overworld.
- The party are accosted by frogs, which they discover can be rendered docile by telling them several frog puns each; in service of the goal of their 'peaceful' Overworld run, the party pacify all the frogs. The frogs drop some gold, and more notebook pages.
  - Notebook Page 1 discusses the plan to do a 'peaceful' Overworld run, and appears to have been written by Budding Leaf.
  - Notebook Page 5 describes that Leaf has somehow managed to talk Impact around to neutrality, and was now silently watching as the party 'prove themselves'. It also mentions that Ember will take over note-taking from this point.
- The party move on to a chamber filled with statues, which must be moved in certain fashions in order to unlock doors to progress. Puzzling their way through, the party find three fragments of the same notebook page, which they able to piece together.
  - Notebook Page 6 chronicles the party's journey through Overworld, on the beginning of a peaceful run: they meet the murderous Terry the Tree and overly protective Guida, both of whom try to kill them. The notes also detail how to pacify frogs (frog puns), ghosts (20 questions), and skeletons (philosophical conversation).
- Continuing on, the party find their way blocked by the aforementioned Terry the Tree, who does indeed seem to be very murderous. The party are committed to resolving things peacefully, but Terry is quite insistent on fighting them, and that there is no way he can be talked down. As the battle progresses, Charismatic Wheelhouse is knocked down and swiftly executed by Terry the Tree, before the rest of the party can intervene; this proves to be the catalyst that Tiny Ember and Budding Leaf need to take the fight to Terry and destroy him.
- Ember and Leaf tinker to attempt to resurrect Wheelhouse (being a simulation, after all), and are someone successful - Wheelhouse is revived, but is haunted by inexplicable memories and an intense fear of trees.
- Terry leaves behind a large pile of gold, which the party elect to ignore in the hope that this won't count as a 'kill' against their peaceful run. Leaf also plants a seedling from their remains in the hope this makes up for things. As they walk away, Leaf hears the seedling call them an idiot. Leaf regrets planting the seedling. Two notebook pages are also left behind.
  - Notebook Page 2 goes into details about several problems with the plan set out on the Page 1, in particular that deloading the spa program on the *Firebrand* to run Overworld would risk damaging Charismatic Wheelhouse, and that the mnemonic virus is designed to prevent a peaceful run from being possible in the first place.
  - Notebook Page 7 continues the chronicling of the party's forgotten first adventure through Overworld: they met Wingding and a 'normal' Impact (distinct from the virus), heard of another character named Aetta, and mused on what the virus Impact's true motivations might be. The note ends with the bemused discovered that Charismatic Wheelhouse has shown up in the run.
- Ember and Leaf discuss their discoveries, but are careful to keep from Wheelhouse the notes that reference them being a simulation. However, Wheelhouse becomes suspicious about this, and eventually Ember decides to come clean. Over the course of an extended discussion, she carefully explains to Wheelhouse their true nature - what happened to the real Orion Gate, what happened on Zero Hiding's simulation of the Orion Gate, and the creation of the spa. The end

result is that Wheelhouse is left deeply troubled and listless.

- Eventually the party proceeds onwards into a forest (Wheelhouse takes some coaxing), where they encounter skeleton guards. Following the instructions from the notes, engaging them in philosophical conversation pacifies them. The party muses over how many attempts they might have previously made at the peaceful run - was it just one, or have they done this repeatedly? - and Leaf leaves a message with the skeletons to be repeated to them 'next time' as a test of this theory. Pacifying the skeletons yields more gold and another notebook page.
  - Notebook Page 8 explains that the party has let Wheelhouse arrived after finding a Holodeck Room that the party had installed in the spa. They've let Wheelhouse tag along, have found them a weapon, and they seem to be enjoying the new experience. Meanwhile, having pacified Wingding, the party is now going on a dinner date with him! Finally, the note says that the virus Impact and Leaf have gone to have a talk, and that the next note will be Leaf's explanation of the results.
- The party arrives at a village, where a manic ball of fluff is selling a variety of items including the final two notebook pages. The party do not have enough gold for both, so Ember decides to backtrack and retrieve the uncollected large pile of gold from the Terry encounter. This allows the purchase of both pages plus some cheese, though some extortionately-priced armour remains out of reach.
  - Notebook Page 3 details the actual plan Leaf and Ember concocted to work around the issues detail on the second page: they placed two holodecks within the spa simulation, networked together using a fan-made mod for Overworld that links two distinct instances of the game. In this way they are able to avoid disrupting the spa program containing Charismatic Wheelhouse, and also hack around the mnemonic virus interfering with the Overworld game making a peaceful run impossible - with Ember in one holodeck and Leaf in the other, Ember's game can be made authoritative and thus be free from interference.
  - Notebook Page 9 details the results of Leaf's conversation with the mnemonic virus Impact, after it had observed their peaceful playthrough up to the point of sparing Wingding. Ultimately the virus Impact regrets that it is burdened with meta-knowledge about the game, and wishes it could be more like the regular Impact it has watched the players interact with. Leaf muses in the note that maybe merging the two Impacts together might resolve the virus.
- The village also features a restaurant, where the party find Wingding. Wingding explains that during their dinner date, the world fell apart and reformed, seemingly due to something about the conversation with the virus Impact. Wingding also makes it clear that Notebook Page 10 was written by Leaf, not by Wheelhouse as the party had been assuming. Clearly, something that was discussed with the virus had turned its opinion at some point between the ninth and tenth pages. In this new world, Impact is not in a good way has gone to 'the Laboratory' for some purpose; Wingding implores the party to follow and fix his brother.
- On the way to the Laboratory, the party are accosted by unfinished business ghosts. The party do their best to pacify them by asking questions to guess the objects that caused the ghosts' deaths, with mixed results, though the ghosts are eventually pacified. More gold is dropped.
- The party reach the bridge to the lab, but their path is blocked by Aetta the Eternal, the realm's ultimate defender. It seems that Impact has briefed Aetta against the party, and she is insistent on attacking them despite the party's protestations. Convinced of the need to remain peaceful, the party hold Aetta off for a while, kiting her across the bridge in an attempt to allow other party members to rush past. Budding Leaf and Charismatic Wheelhouse make it past, but Tiny Ember is struck down by the furious Aetta. Moments from Aetta executing Ember, Wingding intervenes. After a tense negotiation, Aetta leaves Wingding to guard Ember while she pursues the others into the laboratory; Wingding is conflicted but ultimately revives Ember given their established friendship. Ember stays behind to recover, but tinkers her drone to provide support and sends it after the others.

- In the laboratory, Wheelhouse and Leaf find several caged monsters and a strange machine. Experimentation reveals that the machine can composite monsters together if the cages are fitted to either side of the machine and a switch pulled. The composite monsters are confused and aggressive, but can be pacified. The pair head into the basement of the lab, where they find the virus Impact, as well as the original Impact held in stasis. Upstairs, Aetta catches up, shortly followed by Ember's drone.
- In the ensuing standoff, broken up various skirmishes, the party do their best to negotiate with the virus Impact. Attempts are made to push him into the compositor machine alongside the original Impact in stasis, but the virus Impact becomes wise to this and evades future attempts. At one point Aetta is struck down, but through sheer determination she comes back to fight again; eventually being defeated by Wheelhouse. Ultimately, the virus Impact requests to be given the wake words that will allow them to leave this level of the simulation and take over the systems of the *Firebrand*; he obtains the words to get to the Spa level but Ember eats the notebook page to prevent him getting the rest.
- Virus Impact wreaks havoc in the Spa in his attempt to escape into the *Firebrand*'s systems, drawing the attention of the ship's sysadmins who initiate a system purge. The party do their best to assist, heading in and out of the holodeck at various stages in the chaos. Ember's earlier tinkering allows additional power to be rerouted to help with the system purge.
- Realising that the purge will wipe Charismatic Wheelhouse, Tiny Ember persuades them that they can bring them into the real world, and with their consent works with Budding Leaf to extract Wheelhouse's data.
- With Leaf out of the holodeck, the virus is no longer afflicting the *Firebrand* - but Leaf and Ember realises this just puts them back where they started, as the virus is still in Leaf's head. Re-entering the simulation, they use the system purge to burn the mnemonic virus out once and for all.

## Aftermath

- Tiny Ember makes the improvements to the *Firebrand*'s power distribution systems permanent with Mark II.
- Budding Leaf makes the transfer of Charismatic Wheelhouse's data into Ember's drone permanent with Mark II.
- Tiny Ember goes to the *Firebrand*'s brig and turns herself in, assuming full responsibility for bringing a powerful virus into the ship's systems and the consequences thereof. In her defence of herself and the party, she notes that the virus appears to have been deliberately coded into a commercially-released video game, and that Charismatic Wheelhouse appears to either be a fully sentient program or so close to one that they should be treated as if they were.
- Tense deliberations ensue. Ember's superiors acknowledge the moral correctness of curing Leaf and protecting and nurturing Wheelhouse, as well as her efforts to contain the virus, and how her improvements to the power distribution were instrumental in the success of this. Indeed, despite how close the situation came to disaster, it **didn't** in no small part thanks to Ember's efforts, and her superiors almost talk themselves into commending her for her bravery and quick thinking under difficult circumstances. The *Firebrand*'s sysadmin team are having none of this, however, and argue that given \*gestures at everything\*, there has to be **some** kind of punishment. Ultimately, a number of options are put on the table (see Consequences).
- Budding Leaf reports to the *Firebrand*'s medbay and is examined by the medical staff. The staff are somewhat alarmed to discover Leaf's honeyed bones and a hint of fungal spores in their flesh, but Leaf is less concerned with those, and more with what has happened to the mnemonic virus. Besides the splitting headache, the medics aren't able to see anything obviously wrong, but mnemonic viruses are a niche and little-understood subject, so they may

be missing something. They provide Leaf with a number of high quality scans and samples (better than what Leaf could have gathered alone) and some painkillers, and Leaf goes to do further research.

- Procuring a laboratory, Budding Leaf analyses the provided scans and samples. They soon deduce that the mnemonic virus is gone - indeed, it has been quite thoroughly **burnt** out of their brain, leaving a minute area of fresh scar tissue that barely registers on the scans but the laboratory equipment is able to identify. Leaf doesn't know what those neurons used to do, but it's clear that that's where the virus had taken residence. It doesn't look like this is going to heal, but at least the damage is very small and contained. Leaf theorises that there were probably other ways that the virus could have been dealt with, but at least it's pretty clear that Impact isn't coming back this way.

## Consequences

### All Characters

- +3 Clout with the Zeitgeist Research Department OR +1 Clout with a faction of your choosing that is not the *Firebrand-TE3*.

### Tiny Ember

- Your drone's data storage now contains the full data dump for Charismatic Wheelhouse in a well-preserved and stable state.
  - The drone's hardware is very much insufficient to run the Charismatic Wheelhouse simulation on its own - its processor, memory, power supply, and cooling are all much too weak.
  - The drone can be plugged into a functioning holodeck in order to run Charismatic Wheelhouse within that holodeck. If you do this and OC constraints allow, you may summon them as an NPC within that holodeck. The drone, and any abilities using it, are unavailable for the duration.
  - This is (at present) the only copy of this data. Damage to or destruction of the drone may affect the data. This includes consequences from tinkering applied to the drone!
- Disciplinary consequences.
  - Chose **one** of:
    - Lose your recent promotion to Lieutenant, OR
    - Lose 2 Clout with the *Firebrand-TE3*
  - In addition, there are restrictions on your access to the *Firebrand's* computer systems, including its holodeck suite:
    - All such access must be accompanied by a *Firebrand* sysadmin, who will monitor your actions and intervene if necessary. You must arrange this supervision **before** accessing the systems.
    - If you access the *Firebrand's* computer systems without this supervision, you will lose 1 Clout with the *Firebrand-TE3*, but will be able to act as normal without supervision. This counts as an 'incident' per the next bullet-point, and stacks for repeated infractions.
    - This supervision requirement lasts for the next 2 missions that Tiny Ember plays (whether they involve the *Firebrand* or not). If these 2 missions pass without any 'incidents' involving the *Firebrand's* computer systems, this restriction will expire

and you will have free access again. Any 'incidents' will reset the counter (and may have additional consequences of their own).

## Budding Leaf

- No longer has the 'mnemonic virus' curse.
- You are now more or less the Keter System's foremost expert on mnemonic viruses. Though you're working from a sample size of 1, you're reasonably certain of the following:
  - Which physical area of the brain the virus reprograms the neurons of.
  - Burning out that area of the brain can remove the virus. Achieving this via experimental brain surgery might work in theory but is extremely risky in practice and highly likely to just kill the subject.
  - Powerful interventions with a holodeck can modify the virus. For example, the use of a military grade antivirus (especially running on a system being overclocked by a recent power supply upgrade) to incinerate the virus within the holodeck simulation would also incinerate the virus within the brain.
  - There is evidence that other, more subtle modifications might be possible, in theory. Though you lack practical evidence, you can imagine what these might involve...
    - Your original plan to convince Impact that you were good might plausibly have worked had whatever messed up in your forgotten quest not gone wrong, leaving the virus present but non-aggressive.
    - If there had been a way to get Impact into the compositor machine and combined with the other Impact, that seems like it might have had a more complex effect on the state of the virus.

## Firebrand

- The power distribution system is permanently improved. Power can be diverted more effectively around the ship's systems, yielding improvements in a variety of emergency scenarios.
- Use of the ship's holodeck now requires users to sign a series of user agreements about usage (e.g. 'users must not knowingly bring viruses into the holodeck') and waivers against accidental injury incurred while using the holodeck.

[mission](#), [budding leaf](#), [tiny ember](#)

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