

Gatekeeping [DRAFT]

Initial Brief

Incoming Transmission

Source Identifier: Zeitgeist-Aspexx-Botanist Joint Pentagonal Civilisation Research Collaboration Initiative

*# Destination Identifier: TE3-Firebrand#Her Glorious Command#Starlight Ebbing#Muse IX#Unquiet Journey#**

Subject: Asteroid Research Expedition

Message Begins

The ZAB-JPC-RCI has now triangulated the position of the gate-bearing asteroid previously reported in Issue #1 of the Initiative's Journal, and we are preparing a ship-borne expedition to the location. We hope this expedition proves an invaluable augmentation to our existing research efforts, especially as gate-borne expeditions have recently proved intractable (see Issue #3 article "Continued Unexpected Aggression of Asteroid Guardians").

In the spirit of open research and collaboration, capable explorers and researchers are invited to join us on what will no doubt be an exciting and profitable expedition. We are particularly seeking combat-capable individuals to spearhead exploration efforts and keep the still-agitated facility defences at bay.

Prospective participants should contact Curious Direction, Elegant Solution, or Ninth Truth for further details and to register interest.

Message Ends

Characters

- [Budding Leaf](#) - Alex ET
- [Delicate Harmony](#) - Mike
- [Gathering Flow](#) - Phil

Summary

- Following the events of [Five There Were](#), a shaky alliance of Aspexx, Zeitgeist and the Borderland Botanists set out to investigate the 'asteroid' discovered on the previous mission. Two ships - the *Starlight Ebbing* and the *Unquiet Journey* - transport a variety of interested scientists from all factions, including the Party.
- Budding Leaf brings along their small piece of Hive IV
- After arrival, the party take a brief shuttle trip around the asteroid to see what it looks like from all sides, as well as investigating whether there are any alternative routes in apart from the open-to-space damaged rooms discovered by the Pentagonal Gate, since those currently appear to be full of angry rockwork.

- Sadly, there are not.
- The party do however discover that the 'asteroid' is even more clearly a constructed item, easily spaceship-size, made entirely of rock, in a pentagonal prism shape. At the gate chamber end of the prism there is some damage, leading to the broken open rooms. At the other end of the prism there is what appears to be massive blast damage - while there might once have been openings here too, the rock appears to have been melted and reformed in a huge explosion, leaving no way in.
- While flying around having a look, the party are also given various pieces of equipment deemed necessary - space suits, glow sticks and a summary of all research papers to date published about the Pentagonal Civilisation (over half of which have party members as authors...)
- The party, accompanied by Elegant Solution from Aspexx and Dr East Wind from Zeitgeist, enter the asteroid through the room adjacent to the gate chamber, which had the large metal mural in it - fighting off several waves of rockwork to do so. Before setting off, they take a rock sample from the rubble piled in one of the doorways, to compare it to possible sources in system later.
- Heading into the undamaged chambers, they find some Crypt Monitors and a Crypt Cleanser attempting to maintain a large room whose walls are full of doors. The rockwork's programming is clearly a little confused, but they continue to do their jobs, spraying nasty spores into the vacuum of space and scanning ERROR whenever they have a chance. The party knock them down and then mostly ignore them thanks to Gathering Flow's Versatile Barrier. With this respite, they are able to investigate the doors on the walls and work out:
 - This appears to have been some kind of cryo chamber
 - The wall capsules contain organic pentapodal bodies, which are not as decayed as one would expect given the likely age of the facility, but which do not appear to be revivable to the party's understanding.
 - The party stare at these for a while, attempt to interface with the cryo maintenance system to understand its status, and consider various inadvisable options, but eventually decide not to further interface with the dead bodies of another species and leave for the next chamber
- Here, they find a variety of statues, and some other curious things.
 - Against two adjacent walls, statues of 5 pentapodal people
 - These have colour coding: one with a purple halo, one orange, one teal, one royal blue, one pink
 - Against the opposing (single) wall, a slightly larger statue of one pentapodal person
 - This one has a black halo
 - In the middle of the room, a spherical metal orb depicting a planet. One of the landmasses on the planet looks a lot like Kylal's northern continent (give or take a little continental drift), but the other one is in a position where Kylal has no southern continent...
 - Two strange piles of what appears to be dormant fungal growth in different positions on the floor
 - Budding Leaf, with their strong interest in flora and ability to communicate with fungi, investigates these. They are able to deduce:
 - These were the bodies of two pentapodes, sprawled on the floor in positions that do not look intentional. The fungus is related to the spores that the Crypt Cleanser was spraying, and has grown all over the bodies and consumed them until there was no nutrition remaining, since when it has been dormant.
 - On the wall behind the black halo statue, a smear of fungal growth across the wall. Budding Leaf surmises it might have grown on blood, smeared on the wall. Comparing the smear with one of the reference papers containing Pentagonal sigil

'translations' from shipheart interpretations during [Beneath The Surface](#), this is growing in a pattern which roughly matches the shape of the sigil meaning 'No Further Advice'.

- Further consulting this research paper, the party find that the sigil above the door of this room means 'Continuation', but they have no translations available for the sigils on the bases of the various statues.
- During a discussion about things they know, Budding Leaf accidentally lets slip to Elegant Solution and East Wind that they have some kind of connection or communication with Hive IV (heavily implying the ship heart, not the planet). East Wind doesn't seem to pick up on the significance of this, but Elegant Solution very much does and tries to pester Budding Leaf for more information. Budding Leaf clams up.
- In the next chamber (sigil-title 'Renavigation'), the group find a single, central, large chair carved with swirling patterns (similar to the mural's depiction of space). There is also a black metal circlet with a central black gem, apparently abandoned on the floor near the chair.
 - The party are very cautious around these, particularly the circlet, taking it in turns to consider touching and then deciding not to.
 - Budding Leaf (does anything with Hive IV?)
 - Gathering Flow calls Endeavour and asks it whether it can tell them what the circlet is. It takes one look and says, although it's never seen one in person before, that looks a lot like what it believes people generally refer to as 'ship heart relics.'
 - This does not encourage the party to engage with the circlet
 - Delicate Harmony takes his courage in his hands and, surrounded by so much of their ancient workings, opens his mind to the pathways and workings of the Pentagonal Civilisation, becoming aware of their workings and how to copy their work.
 - From the various knowledge he gains, he shares that the pentagonal civilisation did not create technology through science, but through the efforts of 'Bright Ones' and 'Heroes' who created marvels together. He strongly suspects that 'Bright Ones' were, or were similar to, ship hearts.
- Eventually, they decide they have to try picking the circlet up, and do so
 - Immediately, they find themselves pitched into a strange type of vision, where the circlet has become a person huddling on the floor, and figures which look like the black-haloed statue from the previous room start attacking, directing and shouting at both the players and the circlet-being in a fairly overwhelming and confusing fashion. As the players try to talk to the circlet-being, it cries about knowing it wasn't able to do everything, or being asked to do too much, as the vision repeats a few times, narrowing the black-clad figures down to one, who eventually commands "Now Jump!" and the vision ends.
- The party are reluctant to initiate any deeper connection to the ship heart relic in the circlet, but speculate that perhaps ordering a ship heart to attempt some kind of faster-than-light jump of a spaceship - something still impossible with current technology apart from by passing through Aspexx gates - led to the disaster that clearly happened here. Budding Leaf speculates that if the ship split in two when it exploded, the other half of it could be the structure buried on Hive IV.
- Before they can discuss their new knowledge much further, however, a Custodian arrives. It appears vaguely hostile, but with his new knowledge, Delicate Harmony is able to communicate with it directly, and explain that the party is not hostile and is just trying to understand things. This appears to work, until suddenly the Custodian becomes enraged, sharing a vision of the Pentagonal Gate by the entrance hole being bodily winched out of the side of the asteroid by Aspexx staff. Uh-oh.
 - A hasty discussion ensues, with Elegant Solution attempting to defend Aspexx's actions for science, before Gathering Flow calls down an Intervention from Endeavour to move

- the party, Elegant Solution, East Wind and the Custodian all back to the gate chamber
- In the gate chamber, chaos ensues. The party arrives to find the gate, attached with heavy-duty metal cables to an Aspexx shuttle, being towed out into space. Two Aspexx commandos standing in the room seem surprised by the party's arrival, but ready to fight to rescue Elegant Solution from any untoward expressions of annoyance. The Custodian ends up half-blocking the exit to space, but still angry and willing to fight all bipedal annoyances.
 - To try not to lose the gate, Gathering Flow deploys her Between Heartbeats ability to cause time outside the encounter to move incredibly slowly (or time inside to move incredibly fast: who can tell?). This quickly turns into a practical physics & philosophy problem when one of the Aspexx guards is PUSHed out into space past the Custodian and continues to move at speed towards the edge of the encounter.
 - One by one, the party and the Aspexx employees (Elegant Solution and her remaining guard-commando) also all somehow decide that throwing themselves into space - in the direction of the gate on its tow-cable - is the smartest thing they can do right now. They end up either clinging onto either the (currently inactive) gate or the cable, depending on their self-yeeting skills. The fight continues, except now in zero-G and all in a line.
 - Notably, Dr East Wind does *not* throw himself into space and is left in the gate chamber with the Custodian.
 - Meanwhile, it is observed that the Aspexx commando now reaching the edge of the Between Heartbeats bubble is, at least, not ripped to shreds as they start to rejoin normal-speed time. They don't look like they're *enjoying* it, though.
 - Also meanwhile, shuttle engines are rather unpleasant to be hanging onto a cable behind. Everybody takes some quantity of upsetting BURN.
 - With no way to easily cut the cable, Gathering Flow attempts another Intervention to move the party and the gate back onto the asteroid.
 - This... is a choice.
 - The party hear Endeavour asking them to fight on its behalf, and no other request.
 - They enter the normal, white, empty space where shipheart quarrels get resolved, and there is no-one else there to fight.
 - This means they can't resolve the quarrel the way one usually would - if there even is a quarrel? But something odd is definitely going on.
 - Following his insights about Bright Ones and ship hearts earlier, Delicate Harmony realises that the gate must in some way be a ship heart, or something similar, that would usually get a chance to agree or disagree with another ship heart messing with its stuff. The chance exists, in the form of the empty psychic space, but the agreement or lack of it seems to be what's missing.
 - There appears to be no easy way to resolve this situation. Gathering Flow asks Endeavour's advice and is told that maybe she should think carefully about what she's doing when calling down powerful things like Interventions.
 - Delicate Harmony, meanwhile, attempts to suggest to the gate (if that's what the entity on the other side of this empty space is) that it should rejoin its ship. Something changes, but the empty plane stays the same. Budding Leaf comments that Hive IV says 'there's two of them now'. Delicate Harmony sighs.
 - Eventually, Gathering Flow asks if Endeavour can drop them out of the Intervention challenge-space, and Endeavour does so.
 - They are back in space, bodies still holding on to either the gate or the cable. However, the gate has now switched on. In so doing, it has sliced the cable in half where it was encircling the gate arch, and the gate is no longer connected to the Aspexx shuttle. Those holding the cable (Delicate Harmony and the remaining Aspexx employees) are being pulled away (and still occasionally BURNed) by the Aspexx shuttle. Everything moves very quickly as the party realise their best chance of survival, let alone salvaging the mission,

is to jump through the gate and hope for the best.

- They do this, and emerge in the gate chamber of the pentagonal structure on Hive IV.

Aftermath

- Moving as quickly as possible - and finding this even easier than before now he is more attuned to the Pentagonal civilisation's 'technology' - Delicate Harmony realigns the Hive IV gate to connect to the Botanists gate at Kyholt, brings everyone through, tells people to talk to each other about stuff, connects a communicator to Budding Leaf's and then realigns the Kyholt gate through to the one currently floating in space next to the asteroid. After sticking his head through to judge orientations, he propels himself as hard as he can towards the asteroid, and succeeds mostly because Aspexx have been far too busy sorting out the mess of Aspexx employees floating in space while a) shot, b) tormented by space-time distortion or c) horribly burned by shuttle engines, so the gate is still pretty much where it was.
- Delicate Harmony manages to grab onto one of the rough edges of the broken chambers and pulls himself into the gate chamber, where he finds Dr East Wind has been beaten unconscious by the Custodian, apparently as the only bipedal representative around to take responsibility for stealing the gate. He's not dead, though, and Delicate Harmony is able to communicate to Budding Leaf and call in *Unquiet Journey* to pick him up.
- Delicate Harmony starts attempting determined cultural exchange with the Custodian, though it takes a little while to calm it down by explaining the mess of Keter System politics enough that it understands not all bipedal people are working together.
 - Trying to understand the question of whether this civilisation came from Kylal is initially hindered by trying to work out how to translate 'Kylal' - not a name the Custodian recognises - but eventually, after describing the appearance of the planet (with reference to the globe on the ship) and its position in the solar system, Delicate Harmony is able to extract a little information
 - The Custodian does indeed think of a planet that matches the globe on the ship as 'home', although its concept of 'home' is a little odd. 'Place of the people it guards' is perhaps the best translation. It seems confused, however, by the description of Kylal as that globe without a southern continent.
 - The ship was taking them away from that home planet to a new home. That, the Custodian is clear on.
 - The description of the position of Kylal within the solar system seems to cause it some confusion as well. It seems to both know that that is the correct position for the planet it thinks of as home, but not the 'correct' position. True position? Old position?
 - After a few hours of discussion, however [OC: the refs will give you answers to one or two more questions you can have asked in that time, building on the above], a problem arises. Aspexx have spent this time rounding up their floating employees, and getting an additional shuttle out so that two shuttles together can gently nudge the gate (still connected to Kylal) where they want it. As the shuttles manage to resume moving the gate away from the ship, and it starts to disappear into the distance towards *Starlight Ebbing*, things get a little strange on the asteroid.
 - The Custodian starts to become uncoordinated, in motion as well as in speech/thought, until it eventually ceases to move or speak. Its last action, as it seems to realise what is happening, is to push the circler back into Delicate Harmony's hands.
 - Gravity weakens and then goes away. The situation on the asteroid becomes zero-G, and everything has to be tethered down to stop it floating away into space with

the least movement. The circlet, thankfully, fits in a pocket.

- While Delicate Harmony is using his communicator to tell Budding Leaf about all of this, it gently Decays in his hand into a small swarm of Stingers. Delicate Harmony can deal with the Stingers adequately, but is left with no communicator and a concern that bringing any more technology onto the asteroid would go poorly at this point.
- Meanwhile, back on Kylal, Gathering Flow runs spectroscopy and other characterization techniques on the chunk of rock taken from the mural chamber, and ends up 99% certain that this rock matches the rock on Kylal which pentagonal tunnels have been found in. Reports coming back from *Unquiet Journey's* other shuttles suggest that the other asteroids in the belt are a mixture - most appear to be different types of rock, but there are also other small fragments of what looks to be the same black rock - possible ejecta from the asteroid ship's explosion.
- Budding Leaf is busy reporting everything that was seen on the mission (minus anything that requires mentioning Hive IV), plus communicating this to *Unquiet Journey* so it knows what is happening on the asteroid right now. Both the Botanists and Zeitgeist are shocked by Aspexx's actions, but after some discussion decide that it shouldn't have been a surprise Aspexx were interested the pentagonal gate specifically - after all, they'd shown no interest in the Pentagonal civilisation as a historical curiosity until after the first gates were discovered, and Aspexx do own the proprietary technology (and knowledge) for creating modern-style system-to-system gates. Everyone is annoyed, but no-one wants to attempt to fight Aspexx for possession of the gate right now. There's even a few people who cautiously hope that maybe Aspexx will learn something here which will help them rebuild the Orion Gate.
- Forewarned with the knowledge of what's going on (before Delicate Harmony's communicator decays), *Unquiet Journey* sends a shuttle back to the asteroid once the *Starlight Ebbing* is clearly moving off. They collect East Wind's unconscious body and rush him to the medical facilities on board (which are sort of part of the Various Forge. It's probably fine). They are reluctant to leave Delicate Harmony on the asteroid with no gate and no communicator, but Delicate Harmony argues for a little more time to explore and is granted a week - *Unquiet Journey* also give him a large white sheet to tether to the broken walls to signal if he wants to be picked up before that.
- Unfortunately, without the Custodian talking, all Delicate Harmony can do is wander the ship and look hard at things, poking the new well of information in his head to understand as best he can. He ends up with a pretty good understanding of how everything on the asteroid/ship itself probably worked [OC: ask refs if there are any parts you're particularly interested in], but no more knowledge of the history before the ship launched. Delicate Harmony is eventually picked up by the *Unquiet Journey*, leaving the gate-less asteroid somehow emptier and quieter than it was when the party arrived.

Consequences

- The news spreads in system that Aspexx took the pentagonal gate from the asteroid, risking scientists' lives in so doing. While most people shrug and accept this is how Aspexx does business, there's definitely a small swell of public resentment for the way Aspexx sometimes just waltz in and take over something someone else is doing. No actions are yet taken by any other group to attempt to retrieve the gate, though.
- Budding Leaf also publishes a well-received paper outlining their hypothesis that the pentagonal ship is split in two, and the other part is on Hive IV.

All Characters

- -5 Clout with Aspexx
- +3 Clout with either Zeitgeist or the Borderlands Botanists (or a mix of the two)

Gathering Flow

- No additional consequences

Budding Leaf

- Budding Leaf is now on Aspexx's list of 'people who might have knowledge or things we want.'

Delicate Harmony

- Now in possession of the circlet from the asteroid. It is your choice whether you try to communicate with the relic gem properly and ask it any questions [OC: if yes, let refs know by next Delicate Harmony adventure]
- Pulling the trigger on Total Perspective Vortex opens a character retirement option with a Pentagonal flavour [OC: due to where we are in Planetfall as a system, this will not be a retirement linear as specified in the skill tree, however it will be an available character decision at some point during the final two missions. We will do our best to flag the option when it arises, and note that you do not have to choose to take it.]

[mission](#), [budding leaf](#), [delicate harmony](#), [gathering flow](#)

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