Strange technical malfunctions have been occurring in various locations throughout a large metropolis. Traffic systems freeze up, safety systems fail to engage, and communication systems falter. After every event, the same message appears at the scene. Display systems flash the message, printers spit out pages upon pages of the words, and audio systems squeal with the barely audible phrase, “Who am I?”

The PCs could be city employees such as police or firefighters, journalists investigating the story, or computer programmers and technicians troubleshooting the failures. They first encounter a malfunction when multiple vehicles are given the right of way and several accidents occur. The crew and ship are subjected to incredible stresses, and everyone aboard is tossed around like rag dolls. A sensor ejected in the explosion monitors the test and then activates a homing beacon. The contractor collects the bomb, surveys the damage, and then tries again with a more powerful device.

The bomb can be forced or cut open, though if care isn’t exercised it will go off. Once opened, it can be shut down, and can also be easily tracked back to the contractor through part numbers and software entries.

If the PCs follow a courier instead of taking the delivery themselves, they may be caught in the gravity flux, but it won’t be nearly as devastating to them as it is to the ship carrying the bomb.

After uncovering the truth about the contractor’s unethical testing methods, the PCs can choose to blackmail the director of the project (whose name appears in the software credits), or expose the project in the media.

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Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) bearers, betrayal, difficult choice, innocent, interplanetary, investigative, politics, shady, travel, villain

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The real story: A military contractor has developed a gravity bomb and is testing it on smugglers. When a predetermined trigger event occurs (such as switching to zero-g), the bomb goes off, violently disrupting gravity around it. The crew and ship are subjected to incredible stresses, and everyone aboard is tossed around like rag dolls. A sensor ejected in the explosion monitors the test and then activates a homing beacon. The contractor collects the bomb, surveys the damage, and then tries again with a more powerful device.

Then the crime prevention systems go haywire. Stun guns, gun turrets with rubber bullets, and tear gas launchers begin attacking innocent civilians. Investigation of these strange occurrences will reveal that the systems were all hacked. The point of origin can be traced to the city’s central mainframe, which controls both trivial and mission-critical systems.

You can have the hacker be anyone or anything that’s appropriate to your game world: a new type of AI, an imprisoned person sedated and held against their will that “fuels” the system via latent psychic abilities, or a disgruntled employee who feels that credit for his work is long overdue. The PCs should be able to quickly move to a climactic encounter once the identity of the hacker is known.

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Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) artificial life form, city, combat-heavy, epic challenge, innocent, investigative, mass combat, siege, tactical planning, villain

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The PCs are offered a substantial payment to quietly deliver a simple cargo: a heavy, tightly sealed metal box. The tiny company making the offer is unknown to them, and by the time the PCs reply, a group of smugglers has taken the contract.

A day or so later, the PCs find the smugglers’ ship adrift with the cargo missing. There are no signs of boarding and no log entries past launch. The entire crew is dead of massive blunt force trauma, and everything aboard the ship is tossed about as if it the ship had been violently searched.

The company shuts down, but another company makes a nearly identical offer that involves transporting a similar box to a completely different location. This series of events will happen a few times (with the occasional involvement of the PCs), and each time the crew is found dead, the cargo is missing, and the ship is trashed.

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The Puzzle

A n ancient device appears and threatens to destroy a world, which could be ours or another planet. The PCs can prevent this from happening only by interfacing with the heart of the device, and the only way to get inside is by solving a series of logic puzzles while avoiding the device’s defenses.

For a creepier version, make the ancient device an organic machine. While an enormous space cannon is certainly threatening, a large fleshy orb with a single burning eye, doors that fold back in a lid-like fashion, and a spongy, vein-riddled floor is much more unsettling.

The opening scene involves the PCs doing “the thing no one should do” and activating the machine. For example, human colonists come across some ancient ruins and, with the help of the PCs, an archaeologist gets into the old control center and removes an artifact. This triggers the ancient device, which the makers programmed to destroy the world if their enemies ever got this far. There is a coded message in the old control center that explains what is happening.

The ancient device may try some nonlethal tactics first in the hopes of having the invaders flee. Unfortunately, the old invaders were a bit heartier than humans and had more advanced technology, so these “nonlethal” methods wreak havoc: an electromagnetic pulse wipes out the entire colony’s machinery, or a fierce lightning storm pummels the people.

The PCs have to travel to the device, make their way inside, solve a series of logic puzzles while battling the device’s defenses, and finally get to the heart of the device, at which point they can interact with a hologram of the builder. They must then convince the hologram (which has limited artificial intelligence) to make the device stand down, a diplomatic effort aided by the fact that they’re obviously not the invaders of old.

Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (WC) artificial life forms, deadline, epic impact, investigative, planet-based, spirit

Buzz about the New Cell Tower

A t a remote cell tower construction site, swarms of bees start attacking the workers. One worker dies and the rest are hospitalized for severe poisoning. It’s a common occurrence for workers to disturb bee hives, but company exterminators sent to the site find no evidence of hives or bee colonies. This is actually the second bee attack on this specific project; in the first, the workers ran off and escaped serious injury, then resumed their work the next day. The PCs are recruited by the phone company.

Perplexed by the unusual nature of the bees’ biology, a college professor offers the phone company her assistance. The bees she examines have larger-than-average stingers and more potent venom than normally found in this species. The professor also explains the recent phenomenon of “colony collapse disorder,” which some attribute to the powerful disturbances cell towers cause to colony structure.

The cell phone company representative then lists the history of recent problems with this project. A property owner who objected to the construction adjacent to his home cut the wires of one tower construction site. Another troublemaker is a local bee keeper who formed picket lines, tried to get the local government to stop the lease, accused the company of “bee genocide,” and vowed to use any means possible to stop them.

The property owner and the beekeeper are not the culprits, though both exhibit suspicious behavior when questioned. The owner is sorry for the worker’s death, but the bee keeper calls it “nature’s justice.” If the professor tests the keeper’s hive, none of his bees exhibit the mutant qualities of the bees at the tower. Later, a swarm of bees attacks the keeper, sending him to the hospital for severe poisoning. “Not my bees. Not my bees,” he says.

Investigating the surrounding area, the PCs encounter mutant bees that are larger than the ones that attacked the workers. Eventually, the investigators come upon a large farmhouse in the middle of its slow transformation into a monstrous hive. At the center of the hive is the true instigator: a human/bee hybrid queen, a mutant who’s gathering a super colony with her mutated bee minions.

One possible twist: Mutant bee venom slowly transforms its victims into bee-folk, a transformation that is undergone by the tower workers and the bee keeper who were stung.

Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (TT) exploration, innocent, investigative, monster, planet-based, sandbox, villain
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