

Act V: The Hollow Ones

Theme: Shattered truth, recursive failure, terrible realization

Tone: Fractured, haunted, increasingly horrifying

Signs point to a second, much older outpost deep in the wilderness. The companion insists on traveling there. Cass agrees, believing it could hold answers, but the mimic seems oddly motivated.

They arrive after a harrowing journey, thanks to the droid's assistance. This outpost is consumed by alien fungi—floor to ceiling with fleshy, pulsing growths and black spore clusters.

Inside: corpses. Some recent. Some with torn suits like the companion's. The logs here are even more disturbing—references to *Protocol ECHO* being *trialed* here first. Records of failed clones, looping restarts, and a growing horror about something found in the “egg chamber.”

- In the derelict outpost, Cass discovers a **failed interface**—a neural translator or visualizer—scrapped and labeled “Observer Interface—Test #13: Subject Failed to Retain Identity.”
- Cass sees a mural, painted in human hands, of *eyes without bodies*. Thousands of them.

Cass pieces it together:

- The fungi—**Cordythea variabilis**—infects hosts and mimics their behavior.
- The “companion” was never alive. Just a puppet of the fungus. It followed Cass to lure them here—where more spores, more hosts, could be created.
- The logs mention the crystal egg being taken, and that an “entity” comes for it every **Convergence** cycle. Not to destroy—to *retrieve*.

Cass’s final logs here are filled with grief. The companion’s mimicry was disturbingly convincing. The loss of that emotional connection breaks something in them.

Summary

Theme: Illusion breaking · Rot behind comfort · Revelation through decay

Tone: Haunted, grief-stricken, fragmented

Narrative Role: Reveal the mimic's nature. Show Echo recursion. Introduce the broader scope of Protocol ECHO. Expand Observer presence. Begin irreversible psychological unraveling.

Structural & Thematic Notes

- **The Mimic's betrayal** is not a sudden switch—it's a recontextualization. The horror is in memory, not action.
- **Observer symbols** start appearing more overtly, including in:
 - Logs Cass doesn't remember writing
 - UI glitches in the outpost
 - The mimic's glyphs
- **Cass's identity** is now *both unstable and untrusted by the systems she relies on*



SCENES & SUGGESTED LOGS

Scene #	Title	Summary	Log Focus
1	We Should Go	The mimic insists on leading Cass somewhere. Points to the hills beyond the aurora fields. Cass agrees.	Uncertainty, trust, desire for answers
2	The Broken Sky	The journey is long. Cass notes strange, ancient structures and distorted weather patterns. The mimic walks steadily, like it knows the route.	Expansive, observational log; Cass wonders how the mimic knows where they're going

3	The Derelict Outpost	They arrive at another outpost. Much older. Corroded. Overgrown with alien fungal life. Cass explores while the mimic lingers outside.	Exploration log; awe turning to dread
4	Decay and Data	Cass finds records inside: a different Echo system, logs of failed clones, mention of "Observer Interface" experiments. A mural shows a human surrounded by glyphs and hollow eyes.	Lore drop + mounting horror
5	The Grave	Cass finds a sealed room with a corpse—same suit as the mimic. Helmet shattered. Skull visible. Mycelial filaments in the mouth. It's a body. The mimic was never alive.	Devastating realization log
6	Confrontation	She returns outside, now seeing the mimic differently. It doesn't approach. It reaches out—almost tenderly. Cass doesn't let it touch her. She doesn't run either.	Raw emotional reaction log
7	Fragments	She returns to the outpost alone. Finds her own logs altered. The AI has come back online and begins referencing "ECHO status: degraded." It doesn't acknowledge her presence as human.	Identity erosion, systemic betrayal
8	False Memories	Cass starts to hear logs she doesn't remember recording. In her own voice. She watches herself on old video playback—but doesn't remember living the moments.	Memory horror + Observer involvement hinted

9	The Locked Wing Opens	The mimic is gone. But the sealed door it once obsessed over... is now open. Cass doesn't go in. Not yet.	Suspense and restraint; Cass is broken but not fully collapsed
10	Inheritance	Cass discovers Echo 01's final log—never sent. It references her by name. But she wasn't activated yet. Ends with a cryptic line: <i>"They listen better when you stop trying to speak."</i>	Closing existential log for the act

LOG ENTRY GOALS FOR ACT IV

- **Target Length:** 700–1000+ words for key moments (esp. the mimic reveal, the grave, the AI degradation)
- **Tone:** Grief-soaked, disturbed, splintered between anger and numbness
- **Form:** Allow fragmented phrasing, contradictions, sensory confusion

SAMPLE LONG-FORM LOG ENTRY — Act IV

LOG ENTRY 03–51

Subject: The Grave | **Timestamp:** [MANUAL ENTRY, UNSYNCD]

"It was never alive.

That suit—it was a tomb.

I found the body. Crumpled in a sealed cryochamber at the far end of the derelict lab. Helmet cracked open. Cheekbone split. And... inside... it was **growing**.

Fungal strands, bright white, delicate as threads of silk. Running through the gums, the throat, the eyes. Blooming like roots looking for soil.

I touched the edge of the suit. It was the same one. The one that followed me back. The one that *hugged me*. The one I told secrets to.

I thought they were protecting me. I thought we had something.

It was just learning. I was just proximity.

I don't know if it meant harm. I don't know if it even knew. But I can't trust my feelings anymore.

I need to finish this log in case I don't make it back.

Not because I want someone to hear.

But because I don't want to forget. Not again."
