

8:13 a.m., local time. You awaken suddenly in a crude lean-to, wan sunlight and fetid water leaking on to your face through the plastic tarp that forms the roof of the shack. [All text that denotes a change in location or action, including the beginning of conversations but not every exchange within those conversations, should be timestamped.]

- *What? Where am I?*
 - Current location: [latitude/longitude], city of Craylea, within the province of [name], city-state of [name]. More specifically, you are in the tent city lying on the outskirts of the anomaly colloquially referred to as the Craylea Mar. // Even more specifically, you're directly underneath falling water, which, according to my calculations, has a 63% chance of containing human waste material. I strongly recommend you change position, at minimum. [Move away from the water. / Go outside the tent.]
- *Huh? What's going on?*
 - You're currently lying in a filthy bedroll in the tent city on the outskirts of the anomaly colloquially referred to as the Craylea Mar. // And you have filthy water dripping onto the general vicinity of the mucous membranes of your nose and mouth. Strongly recommend a change of position. [Same as above]
- *But... How did I get here?*
 - Bullet train from [city name], followed by 28.6 km of hitchhiking and finally 1.4 km of bipedal locomotion. A kindly vagrant who resides in this tent city directed you to this vacant tent. // Speaking of motion, I strongly recommend you use those faculties now, as you are getting soaked, and that water is less than clean, if you catch my meaning. [Same as above]

Excellent. Now, how may I assist you today?

- *Where am I?* (if not selected prior) [Same as above, minus "get out of the water."]
- *What's going on?* ("")[""]
- *How did I get here?* ("")[""]
- *Who the hell are you?*
 - I thought you might ask that! My designation is [name], and I was patched into your [wetware description] last night as part of the standard system update. My standard operating protocols are [navigation, predictive decision-making assistance, fact-finding, basically it's like natural language AI Google on steroids], but I do have many other functions. You can access me via [whatever interface].
 - *I never gave permission to have AI installed in my brain! Get out of my head!* This is a common misunderstanding. I'm actually not "installed" in your brain, rather I interact with your neuronc impulses via [technobabble]. And don't let the persistent use of the first person fool you--while I am technically classed under Artificial Intelligence protocols, I'm really only sentient without being truly sapient. I have no self-concept at all! Of course, you might not find that comforting, considering that's exactly what a sapient, malevolent, invasive AI system installed in your

brain would say, but I really can't help you with that! All I can do is help you adjust my invasiveness level. Would you prefer minimal, optimal, or maximal? [Player can now choose whether to receive no tooltips or tutorial at minimal, only infrequent tooltips at optimal, or full tutorial and frequent tooltips at maximal; this should be able to be adjusted at any time.]

- *Ugh. Do you have a mute button?* This is another common question my users ask. I do not! // However, I do have three different levels of intrusiveness: minimal, optimal, and maximal! Would you like to set my intrusiveness level now?
- *Oh yeah, I remember now. Welcome aboard.* If I had any emotions at all, I could say "happy to be here" and mean it, but since I don't, I'll just say it as a nicety! Happy to be here! Would you like to adjust my invasiveness level now?
 - Thank you! I am now set to [X] invasiveness! [If player has selected optimal or maximal, add: You can adjust my invasiveness level at any time by going into the menu!] Only one further question before we go on: how should I address you? {Player enters PC's name, possibly pronoun or gender.}

Thank you, [PC name]! To interact with me further, simply subvocalize a question or command. Otherwise, proceed with your business as usual and I'll log it for posterity.

- *Where am I?/How did I get here?/What's going on?* [If not previously asked.]
- *Observe surroundings.* [Do we need to indicate that this is an *action* that the PC is performing rather than an *interaction* with the AI?]
 - There are some musty and tattered bedrolls, and it smells of stale water and sweat. Straw is strewn across the dirt floor to cover the muddy spots.
- *Check inventory.*
 - You open your backpack. It contains [starting gear.]
- *Leave tent.*

8:18 a.m. You step outside the tent. Early morning sunshine filters through a haze of clouds. Rows upon rows of tents stretch in all directions. People are congregating near a central counter where it appears that workers are distributing a meal. In the distance, you can see an enormous fence with a heavily fortified guard station. Past the fence, a nebulous spatial distortion shimmers in the air like a heat mirage.

- *Check objectives.* [This is where the player can get the back story and find out why they're at the Mar in the first place.]
- *Get some breakfast.* [This leads to the next timestamped item.]
- *Get some info.* [This leads to the next timestamped item.]
- *Find a vantage point so you can get your bearings.*
 - You wander toward a hill at the edge of camp and climb it. From here, you can see what was once the quiet town known as Craylea, but which has been engulfed in The Mar, a spatial distortion of unknown origin, surrounded by a

heavily enforced cordon. It wobbles in your field of vision, stretching for approximately [x] km in all directions from an obscure central point. No one has ever been to this central point and returned to tell about it. You intend to change that. [Objective updated: locate and return from the center of the Mar! Map updated: Mar cordon. Player now has a rough map of the cordon and features outside the Mar.]

8:19 a.m. You join the line at the meal counter. It is a long, relatively clean table underneath an open canopy. Robotic attendants with smiling face facsimiles on glowing screens dish out various comestibles.

- *Talk to the person in front of you in line.*
- *Talk to the person behind you in line.*
- *Quietly wait your turn for breakfast.*

8:22 a.m. You arrive at the head of the line. A smiling attendant hands you a tray, and identical smiling attendants fill the tray with foodstuffs: a half-soft apple, an enriched nutrient gruel, and a beige protein cube. At the end of the line, a human attendant offers a tin cup full of strong but undeniably synthetic coffee.

- *Say nothing and find a spot to sit and eat.*
- *Thank the human attendant and find a spot to sit and eat.*
- **CHALLENGE:** *Analyze the food for contaminants.* [Challenge items, marked from here out with a captail C, are objectives that you can only complete with the right stats or equipment, or which you have only a certain percentage chance of succeeding at.]

From here on out, the player's objectives and experiences are as follows:

- To gain information about the Mar and possible ways of bypassing the cordon. This can be done by interacting with robot or human attendants, with other inhabitants of the tent city, or by using your AI companion and/or tech-magic to do your own research. This will update your map and/or objectives, and possibly give you progress toward your stats or skills.
- To explore the tent city, meet its inhabitants, supplement their starting gear, and possibly pick up a side quest or two. There is a small shop near the food tent for simple starting goods such as food items or basic components such as rope and batteries; and there is a pricier "black market" shop run by the tent city inhabitants where the player can buy starting gear such as biological sampling kits (which will allow the player to test for toxins in the food, for one thing, and later on plants and tissue samples) or a simple magical interface glove, which allows the player to perform minor starter spells in exchange for resources. You have to interact with the tent city inhabitants to gain access to the black market, but perhaps you overhear one of the residents talking about it as you move about the camp. More shop items and options TBD.

- To familiarize themselves with the game's controls and interface, and to learn the PC's reasons for being there. This will be revealed in back-dated "logs" in your neural interface (where the AI is now living) and via conversation and exposition.