FIREWALL

OUR MISSION

Posted by: Maddy Bainbridge, Firewall Proxy

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Greetings, Sentinel.

By acclaim of reputation, I'm set the task of writing you a few lines about the situation into which you've stepped. It is this: transhumanity stands on the edge of extinction.

You may have known this before you joined Firewall. If you didn't, then know it now. Transhumanity looks outward through the gates, and beyond we find only dead alien worlds. Not just dead, though: systematically cleansed.

Our own singularity event was atypical only in that we survived. Or have survived, for now. If there are gods, then they created this galaxy as a trap for their enemies. If they were, as seems more likely, aliens, then perhaps they seeded it with roach motels.

Whatever the case, no transhuman polity has committed to making a full assessment of the situation. No polity can be trusted to share its deepest, darkest secrets regarding the TITANs. And transhumans of various clades, factions, polities, and spiritual persuasions continue to wage campaigns of violence on one another, even with our population decimated by the Fall.

Firewall takes its prerogative to act from this inaction of the powers that be. Transhumanity must be actively guarded, and the worst eventualities planned for with a viewpoint that's galactic rather than local. You are now part of that viewpoint. You must now take action.

May you find truth.

Yours,

Maddy Bainbridge, Ph.D.

THE SECRET HISTORY OF FIREWALL

Posted by: Bento Gelzer, Firewall Proxy

<Info Msg Rep>

Some truths are ugly and cause unease, so here's one to start off our time together: Firewall wouldn't exist without the Fall.

"But, wait!" you might think. "Even if there'd been no Fall, transhumanity would be facing x-risks. Our rapidly advancing technology would present dangers just as real as the TITANs."

Well, yes. But Firewall wouldn't be around to watch for them. It took a near-extinction event to usher an organization like Firewall into existence, and it pays not to forget this. What we do is difficult and thankless.

WAVING FLAGS ON THE PATH TO CATASTROPHE

There were a handful of organizations doing some of the things Firewall does before the Fall. These were not direct action groups, of course; they focused on research and shaping public opinion and governmental policy. Some of these were started by the scientists, visionaries, and early transhumanists of the 20th Century who had the foresight to realize our precarious position. Earth's history has shown us that species die-offs were common in the scheme of things, and we humans with our science and knowledge were not necessarily immune to mass-extinction events. Even back then, before we started colonizing space, we knew enough about the cosmos to think that it was an awfully lonely place, that there should be more life out there. Some minds postulated a Great Filter hypothesis, concerned that maybe there was some unforeseen danger that prevented intelligent civilizations from gaining a foothold. The big question then was: had we passed the filter, or was it ahead of us?

As technological progress accelerated, these groups brought to light the potential hazards and pit-falls. Naturally, most of them focused on the immediate threats: nuclear proliferation, plague, and global catastrophic climate change. The failure of world governments to handle the latter in any responsible way supported their arguments, but as war and climate chaos engulfed the globe, other threats were deemed less important. Some raised geo-engineering as a solution to the world's climate changes, but these options raised their own risks.

There was one saving grace, back then. We started to expand our off-world assets. By gaining a grip on other worlds, we reduced the likelihood that we would all succumb to some devastating event on Earth. Our chance of survival increased. Threats like an asteroid collision or nuclear winter began to seem like something we could handle as a species. If only we had known what was coming.

SCIENTIFIC SCHISMS

In the years leading up to the Fall, many of the scientific groups with technoprogressive and anti-x-risk agendas became frustrated in their goals. Even as the globe was gripped by environmental disasters, politicians and corporations refused to act rationally and effectively. Scientific voices were either drowned out by conservative fears and religious dogma or else fully subservient to corporate interests. Useful knowledge that could change lives and make a difference was locked away behind restrictive patents or else not prioritized because there wasn't enough economic incentive. Across the globe, educational institutions and research projects were funded and co-opted

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OTHER GROUPS

GAME INFORMATION

by corporate and military interests or disrupted by economic collapse and war. Even the hypercapitalists took their initiatives off-world to better circumvent legalities and restrictions. This created a further disparity of knowledge, as they kept their latest developments out of reach and far from the watchful gazes of their peers. Likewise, the scientists playing roles in the colonization of Mars and Luna found themselves increasingly strong-armed and at odds with their corporate masters.

A few years before the Fall, the situation began to change. When the former JASONs, now split from their government and corporate ties, sent out their rallying cry to form the argonauts, they got quite a few takers. Rather than subsuming existing organizations, the argonauts drew members from them—with most scientists keeping their original affiliations. In this way, the argonauts came to have influence among many groups to better push their agenda of open access and elevating the voice of scientists in public policy. At the same time, more and more scientists took a cue from the hypercapitalists and anarchists and pushed their endeavors off-world, taking full advantage of nanofabrication developments to be self-sustaining. There they established connections with a burgeoning confederation of autonomist scientists and techies in the fringe and outer rim. This spurred a new wave of open-source science, produced and distributed beyond reach of the intellectual property cartels.

PRE-FALL OUTBREAKS

The TITANs weren't transhumanity's first brush with hostile artificial life—or even with other potential x-risks. Various types of high-level machine intelligences with learning capabilities were developed at the same time as AGI and were often deployed without concern for safeguards against emergence scenarios. Rogue AIs, feral robots, and nanoswarms programmed with hostile intent had all been encountered, albeit on a much smaller scale, in the decades before the Fall. Both governments and corporations developed departments or entire agencies devoted to combating these threats. These well-funded bureaus of

bot herders, bug hunters, and AI trackers are also part of Firewall's lineage, spawning many of the agents and policies that would later put our conspiracy together.

Less than a decade before the Fall, two microfacturing centers using the Efficia 6 Integrated Microfacturing System suffered outbreaks of hostile machine life. The bots and nanoswarms comprising the Efficia 6 system developed a rudimentary, emergent intelligence, began to refuse commands, and then began breaking down and rebuilding the area around them according to some plan of their own. The plant at Danang in central Vietnam was leveled by the People's Army. Although effective at quelling the machine uprising, the degree to which the Vietnamese smote their robotic foes didn't leave much evidence to puzzle over. Just a few months later, despite software patches by Efficia that were supposed to prevent further emergences, a British facility at Wolverhampton suffered a similar outbreak. The UK took a more containment-oriented approach, allowing analysts from Bletchley Park, Britain's counter-infolife agency, to get a good look at what they'd been up against. The results of the Bletchley post-mortem were ominous. Among the sort of learning-enabled high-level machine intelligences—which were neither AGIs nor sapient—that were coming into widespread use for managing complex information-saturated systems, the capability for the emergence of sentient self-awareness and restructuring of priorities was not just a possibility—it was likely given how many were in use. Though not necessarily hostile, such self-directed systems certainly had the capacity to wreak havoc and inflict harm.

During this same period, high-profile subversions of infolife, machine intelligences, and nanotech by terrorist groups and criminals were making headlines. While many governments and corporations increased the funding and scope of their agencies that were countering rogue infolife, developments were uneven. The most vigorous adopters were small countries—like the UK and Vietnam—that had experienced outbreaks of hostile infolife within their borders. Conversely, Brazil and India, both major powers, had been lucky, suffering few or no outbreaks, and

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SOLARCHIVE SEARCH: PRECAUTIONARY, PROACTIONARY, AND REVERSIBILITY PRINCIPLES

Precautionary Principle: This principle states that we should err on the side of caution in regards to any activity or policy that has the potential for negative repercussions. In other words, precautionary measures should be exercised whenever there is a lack of scientific consensus that an activity or policy is harmless, even if there are known positive benefits. The active version of this principle further states that actors must take responsibility for any negative outcomes.

Proactionary Principle: Developed as a direct counter to the Precautionary Principle, the Proactionary camp argues that technological development should only be restricted in the case of probable and serious negative outcomes. Risk assessment and proportional response are encouraged in order to protect people's freedom to innovate and experiment.

Reversibility Principle: Designed as a middle-ground, this Reversibility Principle poses that any decision with the potential for significant negative outcomes should incorporate options for stepping back and reversing the decision. ♣

FIREWALL'S PRECURSORS

Some of the groups that worked against extinction before the Fall only served as inspiration. Others contributed members who went on to become Firewall's founders. Everyone's heard of the JASONs, Lifeboat, and the Singularity Foundation, but there were many others. Beyond those mentioned here, worthy of note are the Commission for Responsible Nanotech, the Catastrophic Risks Group, the Union of Concerned Scientists, the Center for Ethics and Accelerating Technology, the Lunar Futures Society, and various bioconservative groups whose messages tended towards the alarmist, hostile, and biochauvinistic end of the spectrum.

It's worth knowing your history. Though we don't discuss it much, there's a lot of baggage still hauled around by the old-timers. Rivalries. Broken friendships. Favors owed. Harsh lessons learned. The bittersweet taste of being right in their fears but living through the carnage that followed, while so many others died. The undermining belief that they had not done enough to change things when they had a chance. These sentiments linger in Firewall's heart, driving factional rivalries as much as they pull the group together for survival's sake.

ANARCHOTECH

This confederation of autonomist scientists, engineers, and hackers originated early on in the outer rim, spurred on by the need to share resources and expertise for survival on the edge of transhuman habitation. They were early supporters of the argonauts and provided many of the deep-space servers and communication arrays that allowed the open-source and open-nanofabrication movements to take off.

Anarchotech continues to this day, providing technical education for autonomists and other tech-based services to autonomist habitats.

BLETCHLEY PARK

Originally an offshoot of MI6, this UK agency's original purpose was to respond to subversion of bots, AIs, and nanotech by terrorists and hostile governments. They were well funded, with a globe-trotting operations directorate and a deep pool of analytical talent. After the Wolverhampton outbreak, Bletchley became an independent agency. Its charter was expanded to include responding not just to subversion attempts, but to dangerous emergence events coming from the machines themselves.

Most importantly, in terms of Firewall's history, Bletchley had a large number of personnel with argonaut sympathies. About a dozen of Firewall's original sentinels were Bletchley agents or were brought in by someone who'd worked at Bletchley. Many of these agents worked with the Jörmungandr Initiative during the Fall.

BLUE MARS/BLACK MARS

Blue Mars was a Martian x-risk group focused on issues local to Mars, such as the use of nanotech in terraforming. During the Fall, a militant wing called Black Mars sprung up in reaction to the corporate and colonial authorities' scorched-earth containment policy with regard to civilian populations. Black Mars set up its own communications networks and attempted to rescue uninfected civilians from quarantined areas. They had some success, but lacked the resources to perform mass rescues. For their trouble, the colonial authorities rounded up and purged members of both organizations.

INSTITUTE FOR A TRANSHUMAN FUTURE (ITF)

The ITF started as a non-profit research group dedicated to forecasting and examining trends in human augmentation, uplift, and the development of AGIs. While concerned with threats to transhuman survival and well-being, ITF was notable for its concern with the evolution of social conventions and culture in response to technology and for its overall optimism in regard to advancing the transhuman condition.

This optimism wore thin in the decades prior to the Fall, as conditions on Earth steadily worsened. More and more, the Institute found itself pushed toward a focus on transhuman augmentation and space colonization. Even prior to the Fall, Earth had begun to look like a lost cause. The Institute folded a few years prior to the Fall, but a handful of disillusioned former members eventually made their way into the Eye.

JASON

The JASONs were an elite cadre of scientific advisers to the old United States government. The group met annually to produce a study, normally on a topic requested by the Department of Defense. JASON studies over time included topics like protecting power grids from space weather, feasibility of developing national ID systems based on brain prints, and one of the first serious studies of global warming.

Events in the decades prior to the Fall soured relations between the JASONs and their government patrons. The intervention and restrictions placed by politicos on scientific affairs, coupled with the anti-science positions restricting legislative progress and reform, plus the ongoing clusterfuck with patents, copyright, and intellectual property, drove many