

LOCUS

Locus is the largest cluster hab ever created, an eleven-kilometer-wide irregular sphere with thousands of habitat modules docked to its skeleton of rings and spars. A conical cutaway with a base about 8.5 kilometers wide (1/4 of the overall circumference of the sphere) runs all the way to its center, forming a 5.5-kilometer-deep central area that is open to space and off limits to large ships. By tradition, the base of the cone is kept pointed toward Proxima Centauri, Sol's nearest interstellar neighbor.

At eleven kilometers in diameter, Locus dwarfs most other habs, all other Nuestro shells, and many nearby asteroids. Its size required some departures from the usual Nuestro shells design. Small Nuestros usually have rigid superstructures, but making a rigid frame of Locus's size capable of withstanding the stresses generated when station keeping rockets fire far exceeded the resources available. So instead, Locus's structure is more like the skeleton of a gigantic animal. Where the spars and rings making up its superstructure meet, they're joined not by metal hinges or self-healing welds, but by a much older technology: lashing. Locus's massive segments act like ligaments in the skeleton, each bone lashed together at its end points by hundreds of cables. The resulting structure always keeps its general shape, yet has enough give that forces are distributed over a wide area when firing rockets to keep station.

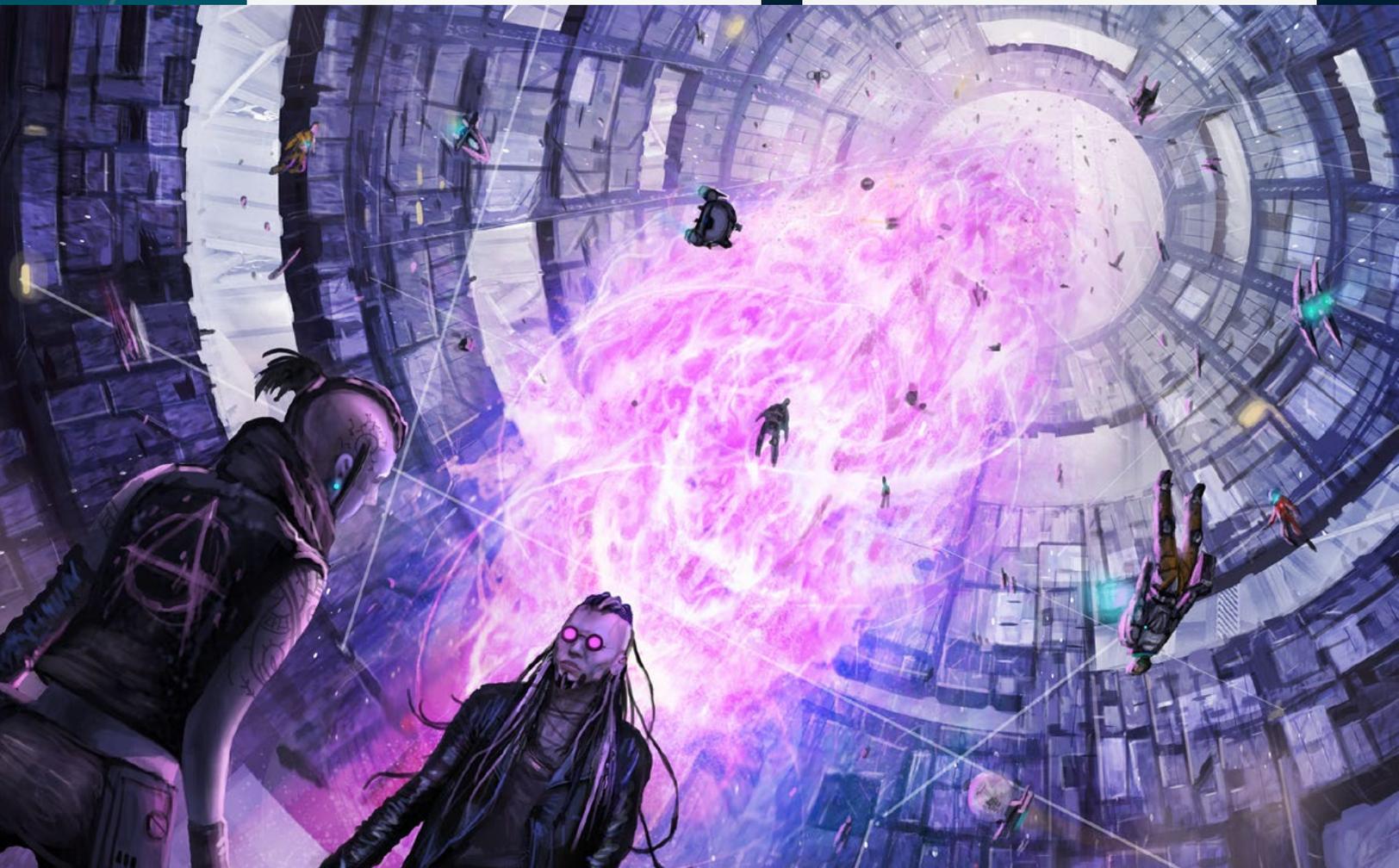
THE AMOEBA

At Locus's heart, at the tip of the cutaway cone, floats the Amoeba, a huge, glowing sculpture that regularly reshapes itself and changes colors across the visual and other spectra. The Amoeba takes many forms, usually that of an animal. A pre-sapient AI controls its transformations, and it has its own fleet of small harvester drones that bring it reaction mass and other consumables.

The Amoeba floats freely, but it always keeps station around an imaginary origin point from which radiate Locus's arterial spars, each 5.5 kilometers long and 10 meters thick for most of their length. The spars radiate from the central origin point in 11.25° increments. Although their imaginary origin point is the Amoeba, the spars actually begin at the Shell, a 500-meter-diameter partial sphere.

THE SHELL

The Shell contains a hollow, ten-meter-thick, spherical bulkhead to which the bases of the spars are lashed. The bulkhead surrounds the Amoeba, but wherever possible the designers cut holes so that from outside, along the spars, there are regular lines of sight to the Amoeba. Enclosing the bulkhead is a geodesic crystal palace of structural rods and thick, self-healing glass. The glass enclosure extends 50 meters from both the outside and inside surfaces of the bulkhead. Aside from the hollow insides of the arterial spars and rings, it's one of the few places in Locus with a publicly supported atmosphere.



From the inside, the Shell looks onto the Amoeba and the space around it; from the outside, it looks out on the vast, glittering extent of Locus, extending away in all directions along the spars. The Shell is host to a variety of free-floating plants tended by smart monkeys and is heavily trafficked at all times of day by transhumans making their way from one spar entrance to another.

GETTING AROUND

Out along the spars are Locus's neighborhoods. The major arterial spars—those at 45-degree increments from the station's poles—are wider and contain fast moving trams. All spars include rungs, tracks for moving large cargo in straight lines without collisions, and people movers consisting of conveyor belts recessed into the hull and covered by hundreds of smart material grab loops. A given conveyor belt will tug a person along in 100-meter stretches before its loops flow back into the belt surface, requiring that the commuter grab a belt on the next loop. Conveyors run in both directions along a spar, usually with several lanes going in each direction.

Locus's analog to a street grid is based on a spherical coordinate system. Every module in the sphere can be thought of as a set of points on the coordinate system. However, addressing modules as three-dimensional coordinates isn't very helpful for actually getting around the city. Residents usually travel along the insides of spars and rings, while the flight paths for outside traffic generally run parallel to them. Therefore (after a lot of acrimonious debate), Locus's designers named all of the arterial spars and rings.

The 0,0,0 point on the coordinate system is the Amoeba. The two spars connecting to the habitat's poles are together called Zenith Spar (or sometimes the Axis), representing 0 degrees inclination from the pole. The spar at the habitat's equator that points toward the Amoeba and is 180 degrees opposite the conical cutaway space at the center of the habitat is Azimuth Spar. Azimuth forms a 90-degree angle with Zenith. The rest of the spars are named based on their angle from Azimuth, according to a complex system using letters from the Japanese katakana alphabet.

Connecting the spars are layers of concentric rings. From the top of Zenith spar to the bottom are 52 layers of concentric rings. The center most, equatorial layer (on the same plane as Azimuth spar) has 25 rings. Like spars, rings are 10 meters in diameter, with 200 meters of clear space above, below, and between each ring. Habitat modules are allowed to extend up to 50 meters from a ring or spar, meaning that even in the most densely packed area of the hab, there's always at least 100 meters of clear space between modules docked to opposite rings. The rings are addressed based on their layer above or below Azimuth Spar.

When giving a module's location, most residents will give the closest ring-spar intersection. Of course, you can always have your mesh implants guide you wherever you need to go, but for Lokies—as Locus

residents are called—knowing and using spar and ring names is a matter of civic pride. Rattling off a series of polar coordinates to anything other than a ship navigation system is a newcomer's move.

LOCATIONS AND NEIGHBORHOODS

There are a lot of interesting sights, places, and people in Locus—almost too much to cover. Here are a few places every sentinel should visit.

BLUE POD

This unassuming boxy, blue, converted ore-freighter module is operated by Blue Pod, an art collective devoted to exploring the use of AI in artistic creation. Members include Mason Wang, a former Martian software entrepreneur turned programming artist; Brancusi, an AGI that creates art morphs inhabited by gamma forks of itself; and Letitia Barrow, Locus's most prominent suicide artist. Blue Pod is famous for the parties they throw and infamous for turning out some artwork that is disturbingly alien and creepy. Wang also keeps a private hab, Wang Industries, in the cloud around Locus.

BOISTER'S ARMORY

The Armory is a huge (750-meters long), heavily reinforced module that has been at the end of Azimuth Spar since Locus was founded, slowly moving outward each time more length has been built onto the spar. If it shoots projectiles with deadly force, explodes, eats people's faces, or destroys spaceships and small asteroids with malice, the Armory has a blueprint for it, and probably a few in stock, as well.

The Armory's main purpose, though, is research, with a focus on anti-ship drone swarms, artillery, and anti-TITAN war machine weaponry. You heard that last right; Boister himself—a rough-mannered character with a thick Boston accent and a burly crasher morph that compliments his manner—is a Firewall asset. He has proxy-level access to the Eye's communications channels, but his focus is on arming agents up, not coordinating missions. Boister has access to all of the Eye's data from the field on capabilities of TITAN war machines, and his job—at which he excels—is inventing things that can kill them.

KANIGAWA FARMS

Kanigawa Farms sprawls over an entire layer of spars, spilling over into the intersecting rings as well. Over half of the modules in Locus are given over to gardening in one form or another, be it combined algae/aquaculture vats or more conventional hydroponic farms. Plants remain the best recyclers at transhumanity's disposal, so they're everywhere. Kanigawa, run by a co-op called Verdant, just happens to be the largest concentration of agricultural modules in Locus.

Lighting for greenhouses accounts for a sizable percentage of Locus's power consumption, and this slice of the habitat consumes more power than any other. The result: sweet, sweet atmosphere and high

nutrition foods. You can still find crops like maize and potatoes cultivated in small quantities, but the old heirloom strains are extremely rare. Crops like quinoa and yams account for most of the hectareage under cultivation. (Don't ask how one calculates hectareage in a hydroponic garden; the subject is best left to agronomists).

THE PILL BOX

This 100-meter-long, lozenge-shaped module moored along Shingo Spar glows softly white from the outside. Inside, it's a massive drug lab operated by Freeq Collective (eponymous inventors of the hallucinogen freeq). Part chill space, part drug factory, part research lab, the Pill Box isn't a place to go score your fix of alpha or hither. It's where you go to experience substances you've never even heard of before, because they were invented this morning.

The core of Freeq Collective is ten transhumans of all types, ranging from narcoalgorithm-coding infomorphs to neo-primate chemists. The notorious petal artist, Rarely Neemonic, is a founding member. A rotating cast of partygoers, one-nights stands, and passed-out people clutter the module at any time, day or night cycle.

ROOKTOWN

Rooktown is a neighborhood along Nürnberg spar, home to several hundred neo-corvids and a handful of parrots. The largest module in the neighborhood, the Parliament (never mind that neo-corvids descend from ravens, not rooks), is one of the largest modules in Locus. The Parliament is nearly 250-meters long and 400 meters in diameter, filling an entire "block" along the spar. The Parliament is built around Nürnberg spar and spun for gravity, actually using the spar itself as an axle. Locus has very few modules built in this way; the ravens had to call in a lot of favors to get their neighbors behind the idea. It doesn't hurt that the Parliament is open to the public several days each week. The biosphere inside is lush temperate rain forest such as was once found on the Pacific coast of North America.

Rooktown is culturally important to neo-corvids as a meeting place. Many of those living here are pilots and biodesigners, but product designers and artists live here too. The designers specialize in creating equipment and everyday items for neo-avian bodies. The artists have decorated the Parliament and other areas with both human art (Native American, Bhutanese, Norse) celebrating ravens and art of their own.

LOCUS: SOURCES IN THE CROWD

Habitats that allow government run on bureaucracy and departments. Locus runs on individual citizens that cooperate to do needed work. Very few of these people make great claims about their own importance. Self-promotion doesn't play well here and, with their reputations, they don't need to.

ANA DURRUTI, MILITIA CROWDSOURCER

Durruti, a hero of the resistance to the two Planetary Consortium incursions, is Locus's most respected militia organizer. Since then, she's fought in several actions against criminal factions whose operations got out of hand in the Patroclus asteroids and has been heavily involved in training neighborhood watches in armed response tactics. Durruti can be found almost daily leading preparedness drills and zero-g combat exercises in and around the habitat. Her favored body is a Lunar steel morph heavily modified for microgravity.

Unfortunately, Durruti is no friend to Firewall. She views our org as a group of dangerous, heavy-handed vigilantes operating without the consent of those affected by our actions. (If it strikes one as odd that an anarchist militia leader would view other militants as vigilantes, keep in mind that Durruti has a mandate of sorts based on consensus of the Lokie population).

ATSUKO VAN VOGT, EGOCASTING OPERATOR

Van Vogt is a prominent argonaut and a habitual bodyhopper. These days, she favors heavily customized bouncer morphs, although she began life as a neo-dolphin uplift. If one has the @-rep to get a place on her busy schedule, hers is the most trusted egocasting facility on Locus. Van Vogt's renown as a physician and psychosurgeon was cemented by *The Seven Chakras: Metaphor & Holistic Practice in the Treatment of Integration and Continuity Disorders*, her treatise on resleeving medicine. Sounds like mumbo jumbo, but under the garnish of poetry, the book is full of good science. I can tell you, waking up in a candlelit room to a steaming cup of herbal infusion is a lot nicer than the cold metal slab and glaring lights treatment common to most decanting facilities.

BENEDETTA KATZENELLENBOGEN, CITY PLANNER

Benedetta moderates Architect, the public mesh forum where Lokies propose and plan structural enhancements to the habitat and its infrastructure. Locus doesn't have building permits. Anyone can extend one of the spars as long as they follow a few ground rules. Anyone can add modules to empty space along a spar as long as they don't block rights of way. Building is regulated by custom and public debate. Benedetta, though she has no title or position, acts as facilitator for much of this running debate. She has an encyclopedic knowledge of current and past projects and a knack for getting the right people talking (or sometimes arguing) when a project is proposed.

Benedetta lives in a collective with a group of other planners and architects near where Azimuth Spar meets the Sphere. She's a well known anarcho-syndicalist. Her most recent known morph is a thirty-ish bouncer. Although she doesn't know of Firewall, Katzenellenbogen's obsessive tracking of module and infrastructure projects aboard Locus has supplied vital information during several Firewall investigations.

MAIN BELT

JUPITER

JOVIAN TROJANS

SATURN

TITAN

URANUS

NEPTUNE

OUTER FRINGE

AGRONOMIST ALLIANCE

NAME INFORMATION

EIDOLON, ART INSTALLATION AND FIREWALL CROW

Someone once made the mistake of showing Eidolon this old Earth movie where a little old man poses as a god-like presence by operating machinery from behind a curtain. (This was before AR; people were *naïve*). Eidolon thought this was the funniest thing they'd ever seen and adopted a similar persona. Since then, Eidolon's physical embodiment has been a micro-gravity interpretation of an ancient Greek temple (think the Acropolis built out in all directions from a center point, with station-keeping thrusters). The entire inside of the temple is an immense cornucopia machine that also teems with disassembler swarms. Usually the temple can be found floating free in the Cone, its dim purple lighting visible from the Shell. Occasionally Eidolon docks on a spar, particularly if they're working on a project that requires their full attention.

Eidolon has a reputation as one of the best hacker/trackers on Locus, although their weird sense of humor has led them to take the oracular temple schtick a bit far for some tastes. To get Eidolon to work for you, you need to physically visit their temple installation and make a sacrifice. The sacrifice must generally be in the form of an item with a novel or unique design, which Eidolon will then reverse engineer into its library of blueprints and break down using the temple's disassembler swarms.

The exception to this rule is Firewall agents, who can call on Eidolon from anywhere in the system if they have sufficient rep with the Eye. Eidolon has sent forks to work Firewall runs from Mercury out to the Kuiper Belt using its temple's private egocasting capability.

KUIPER STRAHND, SABATÉ SWARM LEADER

If Durruti is representative of Locus's infantry and Teilhard Liu of its artillery, Kuiper Strahnd is the cavalry. A protégé of Liu, Strahnd captains the *Exquisite Corpse*, an Althausen Huitzilopochtli-class destroyer that was disabled and captured in a boarding action during the first Planetary Consortium incursion. Strahnd's commentary on Liu's *Doctrines* expands on the idea of an open source command and control structure.

Strahnd was an officer in the South African Air Force and fought in the long series of battles to protect the African space elevator from destruction. He's half Zulu, half Afrikaaner, and escaped Earth in his original body, an olympian. Firewall has debated making overtures to Strahnd on several occasions, but it's far from clear how he'd respond to an invitation to join.

MIYOKO BATONGBACAL, HARVESTER

Batongbacal bailed on an indenture aboard an icepusher by pointing a hacked laser comm array at Locus, attaching her engineering resume to her uploaded persona, and hoping for good luck. Guess she really wanted out. Her specialty is

whaling—organizing mobs of transhuman-piloted and autonomous vehicles to opportunistically mine passing asteroids. Batongbacal usually lives as infolife. Her morph on whaling missions is a harvester drone kitted out with bigger engines, a bot bay specialized for prospecting, and a wider array of sensors. However, she also owns a pleasure pod that she sometimes uses to socialize, teleoperating via its puppet sock.

Batongbacal has a well-known knack for spotting asteroids that will yield well, but her rep has been marred by one incident that drew Firewall's interest. She nuked an entire whaling party during a mining op. Ten people and twenty-some harvester drones—vaporized. It was the worst mining “accident” in Locus's history, and if anyone else had been leading the mob, they'd probably never lead one again. Using nukes in a mining op might seem extreme, but it's occasionally called for on a big asteroid.

After much investigation, complicated by the fact that the asteroid calved into multiple fragments that couldn't be caught, public consensus came to the uneasy conclusion that a catastrophic coding error led to premature detonation of the nuke, before the whaling party was clear. There were disputes. Some suspected criminal or Planetary Consortium sabotage.

Firewall has its own theory. We think Miyoko Batongbacal stumbled on something inside the asteroid. TITAN wargear, something planted there by the Factors—possibly even a Bracewell probe or other alien artifact. We don't know. But the fragments of the asteroid might not be beyond recovery.

PINPIN, HABITAT ECOLOGIST

Pinpin is an infomorph ecodesigner whose consciousness is distributed over a mob of smart monkeys. They can often be found in the vicinity of Kanagawa Farms, tending plant beds, or in newly built-out areas of the habitat, helping to install new algae vats and green spaces. Pinpin is a prominent voice in the long-view preservationist movement.

TEILHARD LIU, PROGRAMMER-ARMSMAN

A newcomer once asked me why Locus, the stronghold of autonomist anarchism, has a mutual defense pact with a statist government entity like the Titanian Commonwealth. I answered that it's a practical matter. Until revolutionary change reaches Mars and Jupiter, we need allies. But the questioner also got a detail wrong: Locus doesn't have an alliance with Titan. Teilhard Liu does.

For a planetary government to sign a major treaty with an individual isn't exactly the done thing. But then, Liu is a walking legend. He was a veteran Air Marshal in the Indonesian TNI (air force) when the Fall came. As groundside governments and their accompanying command and control structures collapsed, Liu persuaded, cajoled, and in a few cases coerced commanders from other aerospace forces into forming a unified defense in a broad swath of