

Prologue | Life-styles of a Bodega Astronaut

Dramatic Purpose

- Teach basic locomotion, interaction, dialogue, and network systems within a grounded, human workspace.
- Establish tone — mundane routine eroding into eerie unease.
- Introduce the recurring NPC (the man from the hauler) and the first threads of mystery.
- End with the inciting incident (the explosion) that transitions the game into the survival-horror phase.

Vignette 1 | New Customer

Time: Day One after the new ship docks.

Objective: Teach movement, interaction, and shop systems in a calm, procedural environment.

Gameplay setup:

- Player learns **basic navigation** in confined space (shop module).
- **Shelf restocking** (drag & place or timed input) introduces physics micro-interaction.
- **Terminal use:** read invoices, acknowledge shipments, check gate schedule.
- Environmental audio: hum of the station, chatter from dockside PA, looping mechanical drones.

Narrative beat:

- A **new customer** arrives — not a laborer or officer: composed, detached, quietly observant.
- Request: a list of high-grade consumables (filters, data crystals, sealed food).
- They ask you to **send a short encrypted data payload** through the gate network — routine but slightly irregular (using personal rather than corporate codes).
- Dialogue tone: polite but uncanny calm — too focused.

Goal of this vignette:

Introduce the daily life loop and the subtle oddness of the world. It feels real, ordinary — until you sense the surface tension.

Vignette 2 | Repeat Client

Time: Two weeks later

Objective:

- Reinforce social interaction systems and introduce **personal tech / communication mechanics**.
- Expand the player's world beyond the shop through light navigation.
- Deepen familiarity with coworkers to make later survival scenes emotionally resonant.

Gameplay setup:

- Routine return to storefront duties using faster restock and delivery interactions from Vignette 1.
- Subtle ambient decay: a few drones idle, one corridor dark, occasional flicker in gravity sync.
- Side errand: a coworker from maintenance or logistics nearby mentions receiving a **new TeleTalk implant**—a short-range neural comm system they've recently upgraded.
 - They ask the player to **help test it** while finishing a simple task (carry crate, calibrate terminal).
 - This introduces the mechanic for *receiving or sending subvocal messages*, lightly tutorializing the future distress-call system.
 - Dialogue rhythm reinforces casual workplace tone: jokes about “corporate surveillance,” small complaints about static or lag.

Narrative beat:

- The same hauler man returns. He looks **worn and anxious**, edges fraying, but insists on another data uplink and fresh supplies.
- Conversation remains clipped; he avoids eye contact and cuts off casual questions.
- If the player lingers afterward, the coworker with the implant pings them one last time:

“Well, guess it works! You sounded bored out of your mind, though.”
This neatly confirms the implant functionality and adds everyday texture.

- Other voiced NPCs (dockhands, shop patrons) gossip idly: “That hauler guy give you the creeps?” / “Bet he’s running black-contracts from the deep rings.”

Goal of this vignette:

- **Primary:** Develop routine familiarity and foreshadow the cultist's unraveling.
- **Secondary:** Establish the *TeleTalk* system as a normal piece of station life that will later evolve into the player's only communication lifeline.

- Begin weaving emotional ties to secondary NPCs—especially the one who later calls for help—so their eventual distress feels personal and earned.

Vignette 3 | Priority Transmission

Time: Five weeks later

Objective: Merge UI tutorial (terminal use, email/comms system) with the first narrative spike — *The Catalyst*.

Gameplay setup:

- Player enters a quiet, late-cycle routine. Everything feels slightly “off”:
 - Air recyclers seem to drone at a new, **dim, subsonic hum** that wasn’t there before.
 - Coworkers mention hearing it too — half complaining, half joking that the walls are “singing.”
 - Environmental sounds operate through the low-frequency layer, almost tactile through headphones.
- Player is granted **voluntary downtime activities**:
 - Check **work mail**, safety notices, and automated shift reports.
 - Read side content about the station’s ongoing “**reactivation testing**” of the Sol Gate; one notice cautions that ambient magnetic harmonics have increased station-wide.
 - Establish a sense of daily monotony and creeping tension — the calm before horror.
- UI tutorial continues: terminals, data logs, optional reading; the hum is always present beneath everything.

Narrative beat:

- The man from earlier entries returns. His condition has worsened — **sallow skin, sweat on collar, eyes too bright**.
- His voice trembles between exhaustion and exhilaration; he keeps glancing toward the ceiling as though listening.
- The **background hum subtly intensifies** as he speaks, syncing with his mood swings.
- He insists on sending a **priority-class data payload** through the gate **immediately**, overriding protocol.
- Dialogue escalates as the player keys in transmission data manually — paced input prompts with the hum rising in volume and harmonics distorting slightly each step.
- On the final system confirmation of the message send, a sudden flash overloads the screen:
 - **Explosion** hits.
 - The hum spikes into a crushing roar, instantly cut off by silence.
 - Alarms and emergency red lighting flood the scene.
 - Debris and violent motion break composure — transition to chaos and blackout.

Goal of this vignette:

To merge routine action and subtle unease into catastrophe. The faint station-wide hum draws subconscious attention and becomes the sound of looming inevitability.

The player, through direct participation in the transmission, becomes the *agent* of disaster — a moment of mechanical and moral entanglement that bridges the mundane world of the prologue and the horrors of Act I.

Integration Notes

- **Environment progression:** The same physical spaces shown in different states—incrementally darker lighting, fewer ambient voices, subtle environmental decay.
 - **Player learning curve:** Each vignette adds one new mechanic, culminating in mastery of all core interactions just before chaos begins.
 - **Continuity reinforcement:** Emails and station announcements reference dates, cargo manifests, energy quotas — grounding time progression.
 - **Cinematic transition:** Explosion is immediate blackout → hard cut to aftermath gameplay (the survival phase proper).
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