BURNING MOON

You're playing with fire - and it's winning

Outline for an interactive multimedia movie by David Lowe and Jason Wheatley

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They've stolen your soul, but not your will to live. Trapped inside an AI micro organism, you're aboard a space tanker which is about to crash on one of the moons of Neptune. Survival depends on your ability to jump between human hosts - but the crew don't want you messing with their heads. If you want your freedom, you must discover and confront the dark secret of the moon.

The mercenaries are on their way. Oil is leaking. Time is running out. And the Fire is learning. Welcome to *Burning Moon* - the ultimate out of body experience.

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This isn't TV. If you don't interact with this environment it will kill you. Real time. That's a concept you've got to get to grips with if you want to survive *Burning Moon*.[1]

Two minutes to impact...

You're the BOSS. The human part of it anyway. That's the Bio-Electronic Operations and Supervisory System; a microscopic, high-tech electronic insurance policy, designed for crisis management. Only problem is, your body's back on Earth. Right now, home is a three micron thick metal box jacked into someone else's brain.[2]

One minute to impact...

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1. Time in *Burning Moon* will be squeezed and stretched for dramatic effect, but the clock won't stop ticking. The whole game, and each of its stages, will be supported by a strong dramatic structure. When the character you're occupying is killed, it's back to square one for another attempt. If you choose to stay in your cabin then trouble will come to you. You'll also have to attend to the physical needs of your host characters. Understand them. Keep them alive. There's a hundred ways for them to come unstuck, and you with them.

2. You are you in *Burning Moon*, but you're trapped inside the BOSS. You also have to work within the abilities of each of the human hosts you select. That's where the psychology comes in. Remember that as far as ETEC are concerned, your role is to lead and manage the crew in crisis situations - without them knowing it. This isn't *2001*, and there's no HAL-style ship computer. The only thing preventing everything from sliding into chaos is you. Play your cards right, and you might even end up with a body of your own. Just don't let the crew find out who's really in charge...

ORIENT YOURSELF. You've been asleep, just waiting for a disaster to trigger your wake-up call. That thing screaming in your ear is an emergency siren. *FIND THE CAUSE*. The ship's about to crash. Which ship? Nothing too fancy I'm afraid. You're aboard the *Ross Perot* blue oil tanker. One small part of the Extra Terrestrial Energy Corporation's solution to the global energy shortage.[3] Built for work and not much else. Been in space for four years, since 2093. Full up and heading for home. Until five minutes ago anyway.[4]

Thirty seconds to impact...

Now something's definitely gone wrong. Soon the ship's going to crash on Triton, the nastiest moon of Neptune. Putting your head between your knees isn't going to help. Before the crash you've got to choose not just where you want to be, but *who* you want as your next host. And then your problems have barely begun.

SCAN THE CREW. MOVE QUICKLY. CHOOSE QUICKLY.

Fifteen seconds to impact...

ESTABLISH CONTACT. Animated graphs show your host's heart and brain activity. A flashing sign switches from PASSIVE to ACTIVE mode. An audio-visual boot-up procedure begins.

Ten seconds to impact...

TAKE CONTROL. Like a baby growing up at high speed, you take over control of the senses and motor functions of your human host.

IMPACT!

You're alive. Looks like you chose the right host that time, even if he's a little injured right now. Your first host is lying over there, what's left of her. That other guy you might have chosen is crushed under an instrument panel, blowing sparks. Better put out that fire if you don't want to make things worse. If you can manage that, it's time to fix the leak in the life support system. Maybe then you've got time to look out the porthole.

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3. Yep, it's 2097. Oil supplies have been threatened by civil wars all over the place, a bunch of Chernobyl-style disasters have crippled the nuclear industry and solar energy's up the spout since the smog index hit 130. These days all the energy exploration is happening off-world. Blue oil's expensive, but it burns clean and a little goes a long way. The *Ross Perot* is just one of a fleet of space tankers that ETEC are using to bring blue oil to the market from the outer reaches of the solar system.

4. The *Ross Perot* space tanker has been away from Earth for four years; three years travelling, and one year spent mining for blue oil on a large asteroid named K-348. During this period the asteroid's orbit has carried the ship far beyond other mining operations on the moons of Saturn, Jupiter and Uranus. Fully tanked up, the ship is about to leave the orbit of Neptune (using the planet's gravitational field as a slingshot for the long trip home) when a malfunction in the tanker's navigation system sets the ship on a collision course for Triton, Neptune's largest moon. The suspicious death of the captain soon after coincides with the awakening of the BOSS management organism.

It's cold out there. Real cold.[5] The ship's broken into at least three segments; you can see one piece burning on the horizon. Spilled blue oil everywhere. And weird lichen stuff growing around lakes that look like molten glass.

Better look for survivors. The top brass are mostly dead. There's a couple of drillers over there in what used to be the hold. One of the Japanese concubines is in her cabin and won't come out. Altogether there's thirteen of you left alive from a crew of forty.[6] People from all over the world. The consortium of multinational companies that formed ETEC figured that dividing crews along lines of nationality prevented mutiny. Conflicts aplenty here though; long-standing grudges, sexual tension, racism. After a long space voyage, some people have gone crazy. Gambling debts add up to millions of dollars. With the traditional power structure in ruins, some treat the disaster as a licence to descend into anarchy.

Not everyone believes the crash of the *Ross Perot* was an accident. If you're feeling brave, you might like to investigate whether foul play was involved. The shortage of food and oxygen sure isn't going to help.

Check the mirror if you want to see what your current host character looks like. For more information, scan the info on your host's ID data chip. Everything's in there; employment record, criminal record, sexual history... you can even have a look at their school photos.[7]

5. Triton is about the size of Earth's moon, and it's minus 273 in the shade. There's an atmosphere, but most of the elements that could make it breathable are locked up in huge patches of ice. There's also volcanic activity. Occasionally lava rises to the surface and destroys everything in its path. Monstrous dust devils are another problem.

6. They're an interesting bunch all right, drawn from multinational ETEC's parent companies: Tshom Kasavabu (Navigator), a Zairean woman; Harvey Feingold (Cook), an American man; Romana Pilsudski (Head Metallurgist), a Polish woman; Hamilton Ramsay (Captain), an American man; Faisal Yamani (First Mate), a Saudi man; Peter Glazunov (Head Geologist), a Russian man; Computer Engineers - Nagai Kawabata (a Japanese man), Charan Bahadur (an Indian man), Kath French (an Australian woman); Duarte Videla (Chief Medical Officer), an Argentinian woman; Concubines - Scarlett Ward (an Irish woman), Jellybean Jefferson (an American man), Blossom 1 and 2 (Japanese twins), Gina Caputo (an Italian woman), James Barnett (an English man), Marilyn Manos (a Filipino woman); Clairvoyants - these people work with sophisticated technology to find the blue oil - Gwyneth Davies (a Welsh woman), Hu Guofeng (a Chinese man), Henry Carson (an American Indian man); Mechanics/Drillers/Firemen - (Maori, Russian, Greek, Australian, Belgian, Nepalese, South African, German).

7. All ETEC employees carry a tiny ID chip implant (similar to the chips already being planted beneath the skins of pets) which holds the sorts of details usually associated with ID cards, tax file numbers, passports and CIA/ASIO records. Name, date/place of birth, nationality, religion, political associations, employment history, health history, sexual history, marital status, criminal record etc. There will also be voiceprints and pictures: fingerprints, DNA snapshots, eye photographs and photos of the subjects as babies, children, adolescents and adults, together with computer projected images of how the subject might look in middle and old age. Some characters will have blank or stolen chip implants. Others will appear to be okay on the surface, but the more time you spend with that character the more discrepancies arise. One puzzle in the game will involve editing the data on a character's chip implant in order to bypass a security system and gain access to a computer (needed to gain restricted information about the escape probe).

Beyond the fairly clinical information contained on the ID chip, it won't be possible to access characters' memories. Further information about your new host will have to come from found physical evidence (diaries, personal computer files, voice recordings, photo albums, home movies), as well as conversations and dreams experienced while you are aboard. All these sources build a picture of life back on Earth: a place where waves of

Choose an objective. If you're not acquainted with the Stanislavsky Method then don't panic, you don't need to reach for your drama textbook. Just remember, it's all about objectives and actions.

Every time you jack into a new host, you've got to work within the capabilities of that person. It's no use trying to lift a 40 gallon drum full of oil if your current host has spent her life hunched over a computer screen, and you won't be able to sweet-talk the navigator into letting you look at her charts if you can't talk the same language. Don't judge a book by its cover. A macho driller might fold up in his first firefight, but have secret codebreaking talents. The concubines have got insights into character that don't show up in ID chips. The head geologist is blind in one eye but he's got a killer sense of humour. To survive you're going to have to get into the mindset of a whole bunch of different people; men and women, crew-members from just about every culture on Earth. Each of these people have particular skills and failings, both physical and psychological. The trick is working out which host to jump to when.

Choose from a selection of long term objectives, and then choose an action to achieve that objective. Every action's got a percentage probability rating. If you try to get your character to do something they wouldn't normally do, the results might be unexpected (or downright dangerous). Each time you get in a new environment, or a new situation, you've got to choose a new objective and a new action to achieve that objective. Think fast and choose well if you want to stay alive.[8]

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refugees flood back and forth across the planet's surface, stone and post-space ages collide, and the gap between rich and poor has never been wider.

8. Instead of getting the player bogged down with endless, mechanical decision-making about individual pieces of dialogue, the storytelling in *Burning Moon* will be grounded in the principles of action and objective, putting the player in a position more like a director than a puppeteer. Obstacles - the vital third dramatic ingredient - will be taken care of by the game. This is how it will work: having jumped into a new character, and established links with the cerebral cortex, optic nerve and so on, the player is faced with a choice of possible long term objectives for that character. These will grow from the character's own history and psychological make-up, and may range from the grand (saving the world) to the selfish (saving yourself). The player must choose a single objective from three to five options. Each of these will be graded with a probability percentage (based on what that character would most likely choose if forced to consciously decide).

The computer "processes" your decision and then comes up with a series of possible, practical actions to achieve that objective, such as "find the components of the escape probe", "convince character X to risk her life and come with you", or "ensure the air and energy supply is properly rationed out". Again, these actions are each matched with a probability percentage number. If you choose an action that is wildly at odds with your character's personality then you may have a mutiny on your hands later on.

Having decided on a major long term objective and action, you will then be prompted for a series of short term objectives and actions for each key "scene" or "encounter", (ie a new personal interaction or a new environment). An objective for one character might be to "steal" something (objective), by "seducing" another character (action).

Having made these decisions under pressure of time, often with another character waiting for your response, you'll sit back and watch the scene unfold. Character emotions, timing, dialogue and use of props will all stem from the decisions you made regarding objective and action. There will be a loss of moment to moment

Whatever you do, don't let the crew know who's really in charge (last time someone found an active BOSS the host was lynched and the union dispute lasted fifteen years).

If necessary, you can override your host, but be careful. Keep an eye on their brain and heart rates and only override when it's safe. Otherwise they'll end up dead, and you with them.[9]

It might be a good idea first of all to start the Mayday signal. You've got to fix it first. Jack into someone who knows what they're doing and get to work. Then you might want to find the escape probe. If you choose that option then you've got to find a pressurized suit, get outside the ship, and trek through a ravine to find the other sections of the ship containing the components of the probe. If you need anyone's help, find a host character with good leadership skills and talk the others into coming with you.[10]

Think of the BOSS like a virus; it can be transmitted via a cough, a wound, a kiss - use your imagination! These moments are called "jump windows". When a window's about to open, the BOSS will sense this and let you know. Hit a button and you will automatically disconnect from the hypothalamus of your host, travel down the blood stream and out via the appropriate route. Having arrived in your new host, you will connect to their optic and auditory nerves, select objectives and actions, and hopefully stay alive.[11]

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interaction, but a gain in drama, emotional intensity and realism. If things go badly off the rails, then you will have the option of overriding the character - but there is a cost.

9. Overriding will only be possible if your host character's heart rate is strong (EEC graph), and their brain activity within certain limits (EEG graph). There will be a limited number of overrides for each character, and a limited amount of time to stay in that mode. Overriding characters risks epileptic fits, psychotic episodes, breakdowns and blackouts, as well as detection of the BOSS by other characters, which can be equally dangerous.

In practice, hitting override will present you with a number of quick choices - dialogue: (go away, leave me alone, come here and say that, shut up etc) and physical actions: (pull out your knife and stab him, run away, hide under the table etc). Normally, overriding will be a solution of last resort. In other situations, such as combat and exploration of a new environment, you will assume full motor control of the character, directing all physical activity. Links to every part of the body will remind you when the character needs to eat, sleep, go to the vac-toilet etc, as well as specialised needs such as religious rituals and drug addictions. Clicking on any warning of distress will provide a deeper level of information about the problem.

10. The objectives of the player in *Burning Moon* are straight-forward: survival and freedom. Survival means overcoming the physical threats to your host characters. Freedom means escaping from the ship, the moon, the human host character and ultimately the BOSS itself - back into your own body.

11. The process of leaping from one character to another will work like this: a superimposed graphic in the main window will inform you that a "jump window" is imminent, and ask whether you want to take advantage of it. There will be a strictly limited time to respond, perhaps three to five seconds. If you click the button that says you do want to jump, the BOSS will begin disconnecting from the human host; life signs, optic nerve, cerebral cortex etc. Finally you disconnect from the hypothalamus gland and commence the trip along the blood stream to the relevant jump-off point. Human eye visuals are replaced by pictures from a tiny grainy camera attached to the BOSS, providing *Inner Space/Incredible Journey*-style imagery. An outside perspective on all this, including the leap itself (sneeze/wound/orgasm), will be provided by the Eye.

The journey is completed as you travel to the brain of the new host and connect to his or her hypothalamus gland. It will take a couple of minutes to gain control over your new character as links to the senses are established and brain wave patterns are scanned and matched. Pre-recorded movie sequences will run in the

For some characters, being occupied by the BOSS will be like being possessed, or schizophrenic. Others will be unaware of your presence. Those with psychic abilities may be completely aware of what's going on, and will fight with you for control. Certainly there are many on the crew who suspect, and resent, ETEC's use of BOSS-type artificial intelligence parasites. Don't let these people suspect you or the results could be disastrous.

Organise the crew, try to control the limited food and energy resources of the crippled ship, but keep your presence hidden. Soon a new enemy emerges; an intelligent, malevolent fire, apparently born from a union of the ship's blue oil cargo and volcanic activity within the moon.

Although there aren't any mutants on the *Ross Perot*, you aren't restricted to a single pair of eyes in *Burning Moon*. ETEC have supplied you with something to help you in your crisis management role. It's called the Eye, and works a bit like a mobile security camera. Imbued with an artificial intelligence of its own, the baseball-sized Eye follows your host character around and supplies another visual perspective at all times. Say you're having a conversation with someone; the Eye might lurk in the opposite corner of the room and show you how your host character is standing up to the stress. Then it might zoom in and show you something the other person is hiding in their hand, under the desk.[12]

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background during this period (continuing the conversation or whatever is going on outside). Immediate information about the new host will be provided via the character's ID chip implant in the form of text and picture files. You will then be presented with long and short term Objective and Action choices for that character. Having made these decisions, you take active control.

12. There are two principal points of view through which you will experience the visual environment of *Burning Moon*:

   i.) A first person, 3D, *Doom*-type perspective; through the eyes of your host. Continuously available for action and conversation sequences. Able to look left, right, up and down.

   ii.) The POV of the Eye; a floating, mobile security camera, imbued with the spirit of the greatest cinema-verite and news camera people in history. The Eye will eliminate the need for cut, cinematic scenes which pull the player out of the drama. During conversations the Eye will automatically fly and zoom about to show whatever the player needs to see in order to satisfy the needs of drama and strategy at that moment. Its second perspective also comes in handy during action sequences.

The two points of view are represented by two windows; one large, favouring the top left, and one smaller, favouring the bottom right and overlapping the large window. The player will be able to toggle between these two so as to display whichever perspective is most useful at that moment in the large window, while keeping track of the other perspective via the small window.

The bottom and right of the screen will contain key life sign information relating to the current host character: animated graphs of heart (EEC) and brain activity (EEG). Buttons will bring up further, optional windows which will only come to the forefront automatically when they indicate a crisis situation; exhaustion, hunger, dehydration, olfactory information (smells described in text) eg "something is burning", lung strain, intoxication, sexual arousal. Psychological crises, such as profound depression, panic, and false sense of security will be similarly treated. Objective and Action buttons (text) will appear superimposed over the main window, selected via mouse.

Although lots of information will be available if and when it is needed, occupying a human being in *Burning Moon* won't be like driving some kind of walking tank. Most of the interaction will be on a psychological, rather than a nuts and bolts, mechanical level. When a physical problem does emerge, such as "blood sugar level low", the solution will be found in the world outside the character, rather than in a buried sub-menu within the interface.

People don't like the Eye, but can't do much about it, and are unaware of its true purpose (having been told it's just a security camera beaming random images back to ETEC). It's also almost indestructible; crew members throw it around and hit it with baseball bats with no apparent effect.

Through the course of the game the Eye develops a personality of sorts: it's a bit like a loyal pet which follows you round. Normally its movement is automatically controlled, but when your host character is asleep, or unconscious, you can take control of the Eye and steer it around to look at things. The Eye can only travel a limited distance from you before its signal breaks up.[13]

When you're asleep, you share your host character's dreams.

Sometimes other discordant images crash through the static; snowflakes falling in a big city, sleeping outside next to a fire burning in a barrel, a man in a helicopter giving you his business card, a bundle of cash, a signature in triplicate, strapped into a sarcophagus, laser beams at your head. "Soul transfer initiated... Soul transfer activated."[14]

While you've been wandering around Triton you've found some strange things. Ruins of buildings made of glass blocks, strange dams and channels connected to some of the molten lakes, old pictures and bits of video with people messing about with fire in laboratories. It seems ETEC's intelligence was wrong. There's definitely been someone here before you, apart from mineral exploration crews. If you've got an interest in archaeology (or getting back to Earth for that matter) you might like to explore this one a bit further.[15]

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13. It will be possible to slow down the frame rate and number of colours for the Eye's output to whatever the player's computer can cope with. The Eye's pictures will play a useful dramatic and narrative role even if they are reduced to a series of B&W stills with movement blurs in between. It can be set to see in different spectra: infra red, x-ray, ultra-violet. The Eye can also smell (results represented via text), and hear (sent to listen at keyholes). These functions have been damaged, and are only available erratically.

14. The BOSS artificial intelligence technology was originally developed for military ends, but subsequently sold to the corporate world. The promise of spectacular productivity gains, however, only became a reality when the AI element of the micro-organism was supplemented with an indefinable human component best described as a "soul". Unfortunately, this required the participation of a human donor. With few volunteers forthcoming, ETEC instituted a policy of paying homeless people to participate in their scheme. Perhaps your dreams are flashbacks to your own origins as an ETEC employee?

15. The story which eventually emerges is a complex one. It is not until the end of the game that all the pieces fall into place, and some players will never see the full picture. It turns out that it was no accident that the *Ross Perot* crashed on Triton.

Forty years ago, in 2057, a group of scientists and their followers left Earth to found a Utopian colony elsewhere in the solar system. Known as the Prometheans (after the mythic character who stole fire from the gods and was punished), they were led by an immensely rich and charismatic Nobel Prize winner for physics, named Koetzveld, who had been exiled from the scientific community some years earlier for stepping over the boundary from science into mysticism and the occult.

Acknowledged universally as a genius, Koetzveld had made his fortune not in the field of physics, but in artificial intelligence. Having worked on early prototypes of the BOSS organism, he went on to believe that the future for artificial intelligence was grounded not in silicon or carbon-based life forms but in elemental forces, particularly fire. A semi-mystical, fire-worshipping cult grew up around Koetzveld after a series of spectacular

That weird lichen you saw earlier is everywhere now. If you're getting hungry, you might like to try eating some.[16] It's not too bad. Just don't try cooking it. Since the intelligent fire infected the ship even a cigarette lighter isn't safe. If you don't figure this puzzle out then you've got a one way ticket back to the stone age.

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and destructive public demonstrations of his ideas. Having encircled Chicago with flames in one demonstration, and made the ring dance to his baton, Koetzveld was dismissed as a circus performer by some and attacked as a threat to the state by others. Soon after came the shock announcement that he and his followers would be leaving the planet to set up a Utopian colony founded on fire worship and study. Many saw the plan as evidence of Koetzveld's encroaching madness, but further wealthy benefactors appeared, engineers were contracted, and the plan set in motion. The day of departure was overshadowed by China's invasion of Japan, and Koetzveld and his followers were never seen or heard of again.

In fact, whether by accident or design, the Prometheans ended up on Triton, one of the most geologically active places in the solar system. The moon had been dismissed by exploratory geologists years before as being worthless, and scarcely visited since. With no building materials to hand, Koetzveld and his followers built channels from crater lakes of molten glass to drain the substance into brick-shaped molds. They built transparent temples and laboratories, ate genetically engineered foods designed to thrive on the thin soils, and lived like high-tech monks under the guidance of the genius who had brought them there. Breathable elements locked up in the ice were released as a result of their activities, creating a livable atmosphere, and huge lakes of water were released from the ice caps.

As time went on, Koetzveld's experiments with fire got out of hand. Many people died to achieve his greatest ambition: an intelligent, sentient fire. Soon after, fuel supplies began to dwindle. Koetzveld discovered that the lichen which had been developed to feed the colony was an ideal renewable fuel source for the fire. Many people starved to death. Eventually only Koetzveld remained alive.

Starved of fuel, the intelligent fire retreated to the core of the moon and to the candles of Koetzveld. The moon began to cool. The atmosphere turned back into lakes and the lakes into icecaps. From a glass castle on the dark side of the moon, Koetzveld conceived a plan to enable he and his creation to escape from Triton.

Koetzveld designed an elaborate computer code and converted it into a radio signal designed to be picked up by a radio telescope. Using his radio transmitter for the first time, he sent the code back to Earth disguised as a random radio signal. The broadcast was weak enough to be lost among the radio noise of the universe, and contained an imbedded computer virus. Having slipped through the defences of a telescope computer back on Earth, the virus escaped and lodged itself into another computer, where it established a false corporate identity and linked up with an old (and now huge) bank account belonging to Koetzveld.

The virus posed as a blue oil black marketeer hoping to steal the cargo of one of ETEC's ships. Using the lure of enormous amounts of money, the virus found a weak link among ETEC's staff; someone prepared to cause one of ETEC's ships to be crashed on Triton. This person was told that scavenger pirates in the employ of the black marketeer would steal the undefended and extremely valuable cargo of blue oil before rescue craft could arrive.

Of course Koetzveld's actual motive was to provide a fuel source for his beloved intelligent fire, as well as an escape route from Triton via the rescue craft which he believed would surely come to save the crew of the tanker.

16. Genetically modified lichen was originally grown as a food supply for the Prometheans (after being genetically altered to grow in the Triton environment), but then Koetzveld discovered it was an ideal, fast-regenerating fuel for the fire. Because of his obsession, the other Prometheans starved to death. Lichen growth is fed by spilled hydroponic solution from the crippled ship. On board, the hydroponic gardens stop working after the crash. Remaining fresh food rapidly runs out, with limited dried and emergency food to sustain the survivors.

Subterranean volcanic activity, fuelled by leaking blue oil, is warming things up outside. The atmosphere is changing too.

Finally someone answers the Mayday call. They say they're from the Extraterrestrial Energy Corporation, your esteemed employers, but they take their time about getting you off Triton. All they do is ask questions. Has anyone been acting strangely? Out of character at all? When they don't find out what they want they start shooting people. Looks like the psychiatrist-rescuers are actually mercenaries.

You steal a satellite TV from a mercenary and get a couple more clues:

Back on Earth the BOSS technology was banned after a president fitted with a BOSS almost started World War Four. Then an ETEC ship crashed into the moon and threw it off course, playing havoc with the tides. ETEC have denied using the technology on any of their ships, but with huge corporate fines now in place for anyone using BOSS devices, it's not surprising that the mercenaries want to find you before anyone else does.

After further investigations you discover that worldwide ethical and human rights groups successfully campaigned for the banning of BOSS devices in 2081, but ETEC was unwilling to abandon its high-tech insurance policy, and continued developing and using the technology in secret. Although the company's public policy was that there were no BOSS organisms on any of its ships, until recently there were BOSS devices installed in each ETEC space tanker, lying dormant in executive crew until problems developed.

Unfortunately for you (and for Koetzveld as it turns out), BOSS devices are no longer in vogue. Severe new corporate penalties have been imposed for the use of AI management organisms, with the threat of lifelong jail sentences for company directors and automatic removal of licences to mine or sell blue oil. BOSS devices have been covertly removed from all of ETEC ships except for the *Ross Perot*, which was scheduled to have its BOSS organism removed upon return to Earth. Now that the *Ross Perot* has crashed, ETEC cannot risk crash investigators discovering your existence aboard the ship. With Koetzveld little more than an historical footnote back on Earth, no one suspects the involvement of a third party in the crash.

There is some hope on the horizon though. Human rights groups have uncovered rooms full of unconscious zombie people with their souls trapped inside BOSS devices - the final ingredient in an otherwise artificial intelligence. Maybe if you can get off this moon then you can get back to your body as well...[17]

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17. Acknowledging that every human/AI combination is unique (earlier versions of the BOSS technology were blamed for the destruction of New Zealand and the collision with Earth's moon) the BOSS now has a fail-safe mechanism built into it, which requires the organism to prove itself capable of responsible leadership before becoming fully self-aware. What this means in practice is that the player must solve a particular puzzle or get past a particular obstacle before the BOSS is granted a higher security clearance and given a little more information. This information is delivered via video clips, providing story punctuation and a sense of reward for the player.

Right now, though, you've got other problems to deal with. As well as the mercenaries, you're at risk of attack from the intelligent, malevolent fire everywhere you go. The fire launches guerilla raids along tendrils of lichen and then retreats and seems to watch you.[18] Harness your fire fighting supplies carefully. If you track the fire to its source without getting burned then you'll have found Koetzveld. The mad genius lives in a glass castle on the dark side of the moon. A powerful enemy... or ally.

To avoid the problem of getting stuck completely, there are a limited supply of psychoactives stashed on various characters and locations in the game. If you get completely stuck, you can always blame the character you're inhabiting at the time for your difficulties. By taking psychoactives (and risking the side effects) the neuron pathways of your host character will be sped up, making solutions more apparent. Psychoactives appear in various forms, including clear cylinders which can be broken and sniffed, providing an instant adrenaline rush. No matter how hard you try though, you can't cheat your way home.

Burning Moon is all about summing people up, deciding whether it's better to fight someone or join them, deciding who has the best leadership potential and who has the best chance to survive. As in a game of chess, success depends on your understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each of your pieces, or in this case, characters. Your survival aboard the BOSS AI organism depends on their abilities to get you where you want to go.

Can you face the challenge of *Burning Moon*? Contact us for more information.[19]

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18. Despite its special abilities, the fire is subject to the rules of physics and chemistry. It cannot burn without fuel, for example. Like a human army, it must marshall its strength. One positive by-product of the intelligent fire's activities is a terra forming process, in which the ice melts and is slowly transformed into a breathable atmosphere. The moon of Triton begins looking like the North Pole and ends up more like the Sahara.

19. *Burning Moon* is a game about resources, about how over-reliance on certain substances makes those substances, and those who control them, our masters, and potentially our destroyers. The intelligent fire can be seen as as expression of the dark side of human nature, or as an exploration of the idea that progress and intelligence are inherently wedded to destruction.

On an escapist level, *Burning Moon* will have the strengths of a good traditional puzzle game as well as realistic human interaction. The player will become so enmeshed in the crises of the game that the problems of the real world will seem insignificant by comparison. Multiple story paths, and endings, will keep the player coming back for more.