

from *The Overcode*

```
obj3d.txr.active {
  event.mod.kinl $_ >= ++prt io space(330420)
  aud.bot(A3FF68.44).chk
  insert
  -> blb.38.prov("sigma3").exc
  aud.lst.3264325344.sl8.0
  aud.cur.3265322919.sl8.0
  ret
  ID:rez.03.1687.1001034.Z
  ID:href="sail3764D87485FX"

  evt.add
  stat.compl.full
  tex.F3FA99342E0301.PR05
  evt.exc
```

. . . Sail materializes, and her senses kick online in a fraction of a second later.

She hunkers near some ferns and her faux leather skin squeaks. *Nice touch that one—unless one is trying to hide.* She often has the word “lurk” in her mind as she sifts through areas like this. Fix calls her “the lurker” when he is kidding around with her. Lurking gives her more time to sample without being obvious. She really doesn’t want to get caught up in the overt workings of each site; she wants to dart through it and do enough sampling to know it is not harbouring any rogue code caches. This one is a simple beachside landscape gig with a few buildings. A buzzing fly bumps into her forehead.

Only a small fraction of her attention is on the others in the area. They want to kill her; this is another combat area. *Another tiresome combat area.* She has already quietly sampled to see what they are made of, recording their sources, and marking their

locations. Inevitably though, some numb-nut sees her and wants to either shoot her or woo her. *At this point, equally distasteful. thank you very much.*

She is looking for signs of tampering or anomalies, the out-of-the-ordinary. The construction, lighting, and background codes surface and she scans through them in spots that might harbour trouble. It's not errors she is looking for but deliberate and dangerous code segments that have been sunk into the standard algorithms. In a few hours, she will have to get back to her maintenance work; this foray is a sideline, a hunt for a killer, a search for something that seems to be gaining strength. Fix sent her the coordinates; something he had picked up earlier today pointed to this space. They were trying to find out why VW was suddenly creating up dead users.

Sail was just getting tired of the constant media panic. VW messaging was buzzing with fear and speculation: was the vast virtual space disintegrating, was it a bug, was is another crash, another war? The boards were stuffed this morning. The Elites were trying to quell the furor but the instability of virtual life had been a terrifying prospect for decades. Much of VW is still contested; after the Rhapsody Concordance was enacted, it had become a rapidly expanding zone of locations that were haphazardly occupied by users of all types. For the first few years it was a fictional territory with the automatic SURGES, their silver disks scattering like explorers through it. Now it was a bit more orderly, but skilled workers like Sail had to be constantly on the lookout for signs of collapse. The massive maintenance job stretched the ability of even the best and tested the organizational skill of the Elite.

A fireflares against a distant hillside. Sail hardly gives it a glance. Occasionally she dies in areas like this but it doesn't bother her any more. The first time she died, the feed had been knocked off-line, the nanobots unable to respond and compensate for her trauma, and she was landed, breathing heavily, wondering, if just for a moment, whether her apartment was the afterlife. She remembers the absolute disappointment at the prospect of the hereafter so plain and poorly decorated. *And what does that say about my life?* That was when she was a teen and, like all teens, testing the limits of what VW could do. Since then, while still disconcerting, Sail's various grisly eviscerations and immolations have been more routine. Nowadays, she doesn't die much; with Fix's expertise and her explorations, she has become something of a legend, an

elusive and skilled navigator of VW. She doesn't land much either. She could hear Fix scolding her for staying in so long at a time.