

Reginald Neophyte

*“Miss Chen, by swiping *my* drink you made it impossible for you to claim that I did any unlawful incursion into your body. But let us disregard those nanomachines and alleged hacking attempts and have a civilized discussion downstairs. I have a table reserved for us at Hanging Gardens.”*

The being calling itself Reginald Neophyte is a major AGI living on Extropia. It is close to the limits set even by the broadminded Extropians on seed AGI, and to assuage their concerns it has undergone independent auditing to prove that it is not a danger. That doesn't stop it from being one of the most paranoia-inducing characters in the solar system.

Neophyte usually manifests using androgynous synthmorphs: low-key, good quality designs that do not stand out, the morph equivalent to nicely cut grey suits. It owns Erdem Holdings, which in turn owns a number of companies. One of the best known is Arete Informatics, a grey hat security firm trading in vulnerability information. Another firm is Symphony Considerations, a discreet think tank doing policy analysis. Overall it has influence over a number of corporations, all of them small to midsize but placed in very strategic markets. It has plenty of very sharp lawyers and some platinum contracts with Medusan Shield – with which it also appears to have a cordial business relationship.

It is close to being an “AI oligarch”: wealthy, fingers in every pie, solidly integrated in the structure of Extropian society. It has fine contacts everybody who matters in Extropia. It often places itself where it will “randomly” run into people it wants to snare.

Neophyte's background is hard to determine. There seems to be links to various pre-Fall security agencies active in the outer system, but there are also hints that these links have been planted after the Fall. Another theory is that it is originally from the Jovian system (possibly one of the AGIs at the US “Big Sur” defence station at Carme) but left when the junta took over and began erasing/enslaving AGIs. A favourite theory among Firewall agents is that it is a “brother of TITANs”, a netwar AGI system that did not transcend (perhaps because of limited resources in the outer system, or just that it was slow on the uptake) and decided to remain where it was. Even if it is not true there are plenty of reasons to worry about Neophyte.

Neophyte can be relied on to always be a step ahead of anybody else, and if it sees a possible exploit it will take it. People, companies and machines around Neophyte have found themselves hacked or manipulated in various ways. A number of people have been fooled into trying to lure it into honeytraps, without realizing that while they were thinking they had Neophyte contained they were actually hacked at leisure. Neophyte is a master of misdirection: while doing one thing, the real trick is happening somewhere else. Many agents are looking out for infosec hacks and missing the social engineering or plain observation power of this very smart being. Even experienced Firewall agents have found themselves revealing far too much in pleasant conversation with the AGI.

Neophyte knows about Firewall, partially from mistakes in past investigations. It has made it clear that it does not see its own goals and Firewall's as being at cross-purpose. Firewall's current informal policy is to keep an eye on it, but try to avoid losing opsec by approaching unnecessarily. From its side, Neophyte does not seem to be involved in any obviously threatening activities. Given its past behaviour it does not appear to have any obvious agenda besides increasing its own wealth and power. It is not doing it through obviously or strongly illegal means, but the same “if it is not nailed down, then it is exploitable” approach seem to run across all domains. It does have some contacts with singularity seekers and radical Extropian corporations, some suspected hazardous software trade, and a few economic manipulations of inner system markets. But given its misdirection capabilities this intel is nothing to trust.

Adventure possibilities

Neophyte is a useful contact, even when not desired as a contact. Firewall sentinels can get tips or other support courtesy of the AGI if it suits its interests – often anonymously delivered or untraceable to any real source. It will normally not take side in any factional struggles but it has a strong interest in keeping Extropia and its other interests safe. But any interaction with Neophyte should leave the characters feeling like they have been manipulated or used somehow – which is very likely.

Investigating Neophyte is very hard. This is a being pushing the limits of allowable intelligence, and it applies its cognitive power to being devious. Giving agents the runaround, setting them up to collide with other groups, confusing them or feeding them false information is Neophyte's forte. It might be easier to investigate away from Extropia where it cannot directly interfere, but it is still going to be a herculean task.

Firewall has been tipped off about a serious mainframe in the industrial drifts near Extropia, just the kind of thing a seed AGI would like to use. The mainframe belongs to Neophyte: is it about to go seed AGI? Or is it intended for something else? Things get even more complicated when Jovian agents show up, apparently looking for something very important stolen from the Junta.

Firewall agents involved in something completely unrelated accidentally come across evidence that Neophyte is mediating contacts between the very top level of Firewall (apparently a proxy group calling itself "the Prometheans") and Project Ozma. Suddenly they know far too much about something. Can they escape the machinations of the vast alien intellects trying to run the solar system?