

David Liss
Fortune! worldbuilding documents

The world of Fortune! is built around an ongoing mystery/conspiracy narrative into which members of the Discord community are interpolated. Bots who speak in the voice of the principle characters help, confront, or mislead active users. Active users also have a chance to be woven into a story in which the core elements are established but the details have room to grow and evolve.

Fortune backstory:

- The first Fortune Hunt concluded two years ago in the mountains of northern Thailand. It is the subject of massive speculation and wild conspiracy theories.
- The Fortune Hunt was sparked by the world of Professor Daniel Henry Maimon, an anthropologist who specialized in folk beliefs of rural Thailand.
- Maimon began to suspect there might be something to legends about an ancient people who had lived in the mountains millennia ago.
- According to these legends, these Travelers (as he called them) were mysterious and powerful magicians who creates storehouses filled with gold and magical talismans. Maimon called these theoretical storehouses Vaults.
- Though ridiculed by his peers, Maimon pursued his theories, attracting an international following on the internet, which enabled him to crowdfund his first expedition to search for the Travelers.
- During this expedition, Maimon vanished for weeks prompting a search that came up with no evidence he had ever been there at all. Wild rumors of aliens, ghosts, time travelers, government conspiracies, etc. run wild on the internet.
- Maimon then emerged, perfectly healthy – in fact, looking ten years younger than when he went in. Interest in the Travelers and Maimon's theories spread even further.
- Maimon would say little about what he encountered in Thailand. Some of his notes were stolen and leaked. They contained the core details about how to open Traveler Vaults using artefacts he called keys. There was also a reference to a Traveler artefact Maimon called the Alpha Mask, which he several times refers to as "dangerous."
- Other adventurers began making plans for their own expeditions. Maimon would not explain why, but he asked his followers to trust him and stay away from those mountains. Traveler enthusiasts began to turn against Maimon.
- A group of Traveler enthusiasts -- later referred to as the Egbe Expedition, named for its leader, Lolade Egbe -- headed to Thailand, where they quickly revealed they've found not only fascinating artefacts (which they describe in excited but vague terms) but also bars of gold hidden in mysterious vaults. They posted exuberant videos to their social media accounts. Then they vanished. Another search was launched, and, again, nothing is found. The expedition was never heard from again.
- Against Maimon's dire warnings, the first Fortune Hunt began. It garnered huge international interest, sparking media coverage, podcasts, reality shows, etc.
- During the Fortune Hunt, Maimon went into seclusion. Though there are people who claim to have seen or had contact with him, there have been no verified or reliable sightings in over a year. Many believe he was murdered.

- The Fortune Hunt produced many celebrities who came back Traveler gold. Some Fortune Hunters died in mountain climbing accidents. Others died under more mysterious and inexplicable circumstances. Some vanished. Some came back altered, with completely different personalities.
- The Thai government encouraged the Fortune Hunt, but wants to keep track of Traveler artefacts and offered to buy them. They made it illegal to leave the country with artefacts, which inevitably produced a robust black market.
- A shadowy organization calling itself the Researchers emerged, outbidding the Thai government. It soon became the largest holder of Traveler Artefacts in the world.
- The Researchers are led by another American academic, Dr. Rachel Lin.
- Many Fortune Hunters who sought to keep their artefacts claim they were stolen or replaced with counterfeits – either before they left Thailand or after they brought them home. Some claim that the overwhelming majority of Traveler artefacts (other than those possessed by the Researchers) are fakes.
- There are wild rumors that artefacts are "cursed" or convey "abilities." So far, all scientific studies deny that Traveler artefacts are anything other than the ordinary remnants of an admittedly advanced bronze age culture. On the other hand, if those studies are being conducted on counterfeits, they would prove nothing.
- The Researchers believe there are other Traveler settlements out there, and therefore more Fortune Hunting locations. They are not only actively searching for these, but training Fortune Hunters to participate in the next Hunt.

Key questions about the Researchers

- Where do they get their funding?
- Why are they so eager to train Fortune Hunters?
- What secrets have they learned about the Travelers and their artefacts that they are not sharing?

Some major characters

- Zara Burman: She becomes an internet celebrity when her boyfriend convinces her to go to Thailand on vacation and then dumps her on Instagram. Her humiliation becomes an internet sensation, and rather than stew in humiliation, she decides to become a Fortune Hunter. She emerges wealthy and successful, and is now a major Fortune Hunter influencer, but there have always been rumors circulating around her success, including suggestions that her success was manufactured.
- Alfred Mendoza: Another successful Fortune Hunter, Mendoza has clearly been traumatized by things he saw and did in Thailand. Though he returned wealthy, he has dedicated himself to convincing others not to go on any future Fortune Hunts and to exposing whatever it is the Researchers are hiding.
- Douglass Pfeifer: Pfeifer's son, Elliot, was a Fortune Hunter and came back, in Pfeifer's words, "a different person." Not traumatized or preoccupied, but like someone "whose soul was replaced." Pfeifer is the founder of a small operation called the Anti-Hunting Institute dedicated to understanding the truth about the Fortune Hunt, the Travelers, and their artefacts, and he is willing to entertain any possibility and go down any rabbit hole if it will bring him closer to the truth.

Where is all of this going?

With multiple factions (including several yet to be introduced) searching for answers, knowledge becomes power.

The world of Fortune is one driven by hypotheses and conspiracy theories. Understanding the secrets held by the various characters will be key to unlocking the core mysteries:

- Who were the Travelers?
- What do their artefacts do?
- What happened to Daniel Henry Maimon?
- What are the Researchers after?
- There is more at stake here than money, so what is it?

Timeline of the First Hunt

- The backstory begins with the discovery of treasure in Thailand. At first, this seemed like simply ordinary wealth – bars of gold, stashes of jewels, etc. There is nothing to suggest that this treasure is of ancient provenance. Initially, the suspicion is that this is wealth left behind by a drug-running operation. The criminals involved must have been killed, and no one alive knew about the treasure.
- Once the Hunt is underway, evidence begins to emerge that suggests the treasure is of archeological importance. In fact, one group of Hunters deliberately plants false evidence of an ancient civilization in order to try to get the Hunt shut down so they can then sneakily keep searching for treasure. As a result, there are people who will always believe that there are no Travelers, or they are not ancient, and that the whole thing is a hoax. Until the big revelations toward the end of the narrative cycle, this should always feel like a real possibility.
- Even after the revelation that it's possible, even likely, that the region has archeological significance, the Hunt continues. The influx of Hunters has resulted in a boom for the region's economy, and there's no will to shut things down. Instead, the Thai government offers to buy any artifacts without inherent material value – pottery, figurines, etc. They are offering bonuses to anyone who presents their more valuable finds for documentation. This becomes problematic when there emerge claims by Hunters that the treasure they submitted for documentation vanished or was swapped out for something less valuable. It's never quite clear if the government seized these finds, if some corrupt official stole them, or if the whole thing is a lie by unsuccessful Hunters trying to squeeze compensation out of the Thai government or gain notoriety. The end result is that Hunters are reluctant to submit their finds for official review, and that means there's a great deal of treasure that has disappeared into the global market without any official documentation. This leads to rumors and conspiracy theories.
- This is when the Researcher faction first emerges. They are a shadowy organization with their own agenda. They are clearly well funded. They outbid the Thai government for the right to document finds and they provide collateral during the examination period, so the Hunters who submit their finds are never at risk of being ripped off. As a result, the Researchers are thought to be the foremost experts on the hunt and the Travelers, but they are tight lipped about what they know and suspect.
- At about this time, rumors start to circulate about Hunters going insane or dying in freak accidents, though given the decentralized nature of the Hunt, and the fact that there's no official documentation of who's involved, there's no way to know what's true and what's rumor or fabrication. E.g., one person who claims to have seen extraordinary things is exposed as never having left the United States. Nevertheless, the media begins to circulate outlandish stories clearly more designed to generate clicks than get to the bottom of things. The Fortune Hunt is likened to the Curse of Tutankhamen.
- At around the same time, rumors also begin to circulate of Hunters undergoing more positive transformations – becoming stronger or smarter or gaining heightened senses as a result to exposure to artifacts. Many of these claims come from people who are clearly attention-seekers. One group of Hunters having their exploits documented for a television show claim to have undergone transformations, but members of the production crew leak to the press that it's all nonsense.

- The emergence of the Anti-Hunter faction, which begins sabotaging Hunters and excavation sites. They also begin to plant false artifacts, muddying the waters about what's real and what isn't. The arrest of an Anti-Hunter leads to a report that this person is also affiliated with the Researchers. Both groups vehemently deny this, and there are rumors of a false confession extracted under duress. It is entirely possible that someone, with their own agenda, wants the world to believe that the Anti-Hunters and the Researchers are allied, possibly to discredit both groups. If this is the case, it suggests there is a third faction operating in the shadows.

- As the Hunt winds down, the Researchers begin to post their findings on the web. They believe the treasure and the artifacts were left by a group not indigenous to the region who were in Thailand only briefly. Major questions like what they were doing there and why they left so many items of value remain unanswered. The findings suggest, however, that there must be other Traveler settlements elsewhere in the world.

- The search for the location of the next Fortune Hunt begins.

- Rumor circulate that the Researchers are in possession of an artifact that reveals where the Travelers went next. In other words, they know the location of the next Hunt. They are waiting for a time of their choosing to reveal what they know.

- The emergence of the Conspiracy Theory faction, which begins to tie the Hunt to various governments and political movements.

The secret history of the Travelers and the factions

The Travelers are, of course, aliens. In late 20th century popular mythos (e.g., *Chariots of the Gods*), ancient aliens are often supposed to be benevolent visitors, gently guiding and shaping human culture. That seems uninteresting to me, since the existence of aliens doesn't then lead to further compelling story opportunities. However, we need a plausible explanation for what they were doing on Earth and why they left their treasure and artifacts behind.

One kooky explanation for what aliens were doing on earth was searching for gold, which has been speculated could be an important component in space travel technology. Aliens were not on earth to uplift us. They were here because Earth has an unusually high concentration of gold. Aliens on earth weren't benevolent guides. They were more like the British in India, establishing their outposts among the natives in order to go about their business. They learned that it was easier for them to blend in rather than make themselves conspicuous, which is why they presented themselves as humans and concealed any obviously advanced technology.

Travelers are neither especially wise nor inherently benevolent – just more advanced. Their civilization has gone through various stages of rise and collapse. In a very ancient iteration of their expansion, they uplifted our more animal-like ancestors – explaining why there was an explosion of human creativity around 50,000 years ago. Humans, in other words, are the product of Traveler genetic engineering in an effort to make us more useful. At the time, humans existed only in small, fairly-isolated bands, so they had no reason to fear losing control of the planet to their creation. They just wanted useful servants, and so they tinkered with our genetic code to make us more like them. Our desire to accumulate wealth is programmed into us by the Travelers. The Travelers, in turn, suspect their desire for wealth was encoded into their DNA by some previous and unknown precursor species.

Several centuries after humans were uplifted, Traveler culture experienced one of its cyclical collapses. Humans were left on their own for tens of thousands of years, during which they spread out over the globe with a rapidity that the Travelers never anticipated. Then, during the bronze age, a new iteration of an advanced Traveler culture rediscovered their ancestors' work on earth. As the Travelers expanded out through the galaxy, they returned to earth to acquire the gold they coveted. Even after all these years, Earth remains one of the best places they know to mine gold. In their culture, our world is the prize of a galactic treasure hunt. (*Love how this becomes a very meta discussion*)

Then, during this period, came a second cultural collapse. The Travelers will have many fine qualities, but they are far more avaricious than we are, which leads to inevitable conflicts. In fact, the notion that their civilization will collapse into a primitive stone-age culture seems perfectly natural to them. It's perceived almost like the cycle of the seasons. In any case, the collapse during our Bronze Age happened unusually quickly. Consequently, many Travelers were stranded on Earth. Knowing that they had no chance of rescue, they adjusted their own genetic code to make them capable of interbreeding with humans.

Researchers are people who know this, and who frequently (though not exclusively) tend to have a below-average percentage of Traveler DNA. They believe that by learning more about Traveler

technology, we can avoid the kind of civilization collapse that plagued the Travelers. They believe, perhaps naively, that the greatest possible spread of Traveler tech among the largest possible people will advance human civilization, helping us to avoid the kind of collapses that plagued the Travelers.

Traveler artifacts affect people with a high percentage of Traveler DNA more powerfully. One side effect of this artifact alteration is eye-darkening. Rachel Lin's eyes are so dark because she has been so overexposed -- deliberately on her part. There should be some question raised about whether or not she is the same person she was when she began investigating artifacts or if she has been turned into someone/something else entirely.

Anti-Hunters also know the secret history and have a comparatively high percentage of Traveler DNA. They, on the other hand, believe that the dissemination of Traveler tech will hasten the collapse of human civilization. They pursue the ostensibly benevolent goal of attempting to save the world, but they are inevitably elitist, and many of their people at the highest levels are also motivated by acquiring Traveler artifacts and knowledge for themselves in order to accrue power.

Whether or not you react badly to Traveler artifacts is determined by your percentage of Traveler DNA. This explains why Researchers "burn out" after too much exposure to Traveler tech. It also explains why Anti-Hunter operatives working undercover have a huge advantage over others.

Some questions that remain unaddressed – and may not have to be addressed – are:

(1) Where are the Travelers now? Their cultural cycles happen over tens of thousands of years. They could be on their own world working with primitive tools right now. Or they could be poised to descend on Earth within a matter of years.

(2) Who uplifted the Travelers? In other words, there's another advanced alien species out there. We can also discuss whether there's anything to do be done with them or what they might want.

Major characters

Daniel Henry Maimon

Role: The sage/source of information

A mysterious, central figure who functions as the repository of otherwise inaccessible knowledge. Maimon knows more than anyone else about the Travelers and the Fortune Hunt. Maimon is an elderly academic – an anthropologist who has spent most of his career writing about folk culture and the belief in the supernatural among contemporary rural Thai communities. Ten years before the first Fortune Hunt, he began to suspect the existence of a lost ancient settlement in the Thanon Thong Chai mountain range, based on local legends and an admittedly small amount of physical evidence. He published on this theory, but his work was widely dismissed by his peers. Maimon continued to pursue this line of research, however, and increasingly became convinced that the settlement existed, built by people not native to the region, who moved on after a generation or so. Nevertheless, they appeared to have exerted a huge influence on the locals, shaping their folklore and culture. Maimon called these people the Travelers, and he proposes there may be evidence of their presence elsewhere in Asia – and perhaps even further away.

Maimon became increasingly alienated from the academic community. Unable to find reputable journals willing to publish work, and with other experts mock his theories, he began to publish his work on a blog and launched a podcast that gained a surprisingly large audience. Two years before the first Fortune Hunt, Maimon leveraged his growing popular appeal to crowdfund an expedition to Thailand, where he vanished into the mountains for weeks. This became a major news story and an obsession on the internet, as people speculated he was assassinated by one of a handful of countries, whose governments seem particularly interested in discrediting his research. Other wacky theories emerged – Maimon has been abducted by aliens, wandered into another realm of existence, held prisoner by an ancient cult, etc. A search was launched, but no evidence was found that he had ever been in Thailand at all. Then, a few weeks later, he wandered out, not only alive, but looking great – ten years younger than when he went in. He claimed to be enlivened only by the exciting discoveries he made, but inevitably more rumors circulated among his followers and the general public.

Maimon had always lived modestly on his professor's salary, but now he appeared to have new sources of income. He retired from his job and bought a large, isolated house where he intended to continue his research privately. How would he afford all of this? Sure, there are the ads on his blog and podcast, but they can't be generating that much revenue. His followers began to suggest that in addition to ancient artefacts, he found something else in Thailand – something of monetary value.

Maimon remained aloof, rarely engaging with his fans, but when a group of amateurs began to crowdfund its own expedition, Maimon warned them off. He said they could destroy valuable artefacts and historical evidence of the Travelers. Moreover, those mountains are dangerous. His messages made clear that there were things he discovered that he was not yet ready to present to the world. Maimon issued a plea for his believers to trust him and to stay away from those mountains. Maimon releases no information, but some of his notes are stolen and circulated, and these contain the core details about how to open Traveler Vaults using artefacts Maimon calls keys. This is also the source of information about the artefact Maimon calls the Alpha Mask, which he describes as "dangerous."

For the first time, Maimon's followers began to turn against him, accusing him of being greedy, wanting to hoard the truth about the Travelers – and whatever it is they've left behind – for himself.

A group of Traveler enthusiasts -- later referred to as the **Egbe Expedition**, named for its leader, Lolade Egbe -- headed to Thailand, where they quickly revealed they've found not only fascinating artefacts (which they describe in excited but vague terms) but also bars of gold hidden in mysterious, ancient vaults built by the Travelers. They posted exuberant videos to their social media accounts. Then they vanished. Another search was launched, and, again, nothing is found. The expedition was gone for good. And yet, it was clear they discovered something. There's a fortune to be found in those mountains, and it seems impossible to keep others from heading out to search for it. More expeditions are launched, and the first Fortune Hunt was underway.

During the first Fortune Hunt, Maimon vanished from the public eye. Was he murdered? Detractors say he's gone into hiding because he knows these expeditions will prove he's a fraud. Yet, when people start discovering more Traveler artefacts and more Traveler vaults filled with gold, it's clear that's not the case. Maimon is not seen again (by any reputable source), and his articles, blog posts, podcast, interviews, and social media utterances are scoured for hints and clues.

There are those who claim to have seen Maimon – in Thailand and elsewhere – but these claims are largely dismissed. Players will initially have to speculate on whether he is alive or dead. There will be communications from people who claim to be Maimon, and some of these will be useful, others useless or outright deceiving. Others will claim to have communicated with his ghost. Those who believe he's alive claim that when he appears, it is always in disguise, boosting the potential significance of encounters with random NPCs.

The truth: Maimon is alive, but has been so transformed by Traveler artifacts, that he can move through the world unrecognized. Maybe it's a bit too on the nose, but exposure to Traveler artefacts has given Maimon the ability to... travel. He can walk in public unobserved. He can pass through virtually any security system undetected. He is not invisible and cannot change shape, he can just go unnoticed. It's like he has the ability to create an apathy field.

What does Maimon want? He has come to believe that the human will to avarice is the result of Traveler DNA. The excesses of capitalism, a refusal to respond to climate change, the rise of nationalism – all of our worst impulses are not human but Traveler. Exposure to artefacts may cause some improvements in some people, but while the Researchers believe that humanity will achieve its full potential by embracing and expanding its Traveler side, Maimon believes the exact opposite. We must excise all Traveler elements from our cultural, behavioral, and genetic code. Again, it's worth emphasizing that neither the Researchers or their detractors are "right." These are two viable and rational positions: Maimon is a humanity purist, who believes our best selves derive from our original genetic code; Researchers are futurists, who believe in the best of what the Travelers have to offer and see the possibility of humanity being more than it is.

The Alpha Mask

The first Traveler artefact Maimon discovered was a ceremonial mask that has become known as the Alpha Mask. It is the subject of much rumor and speculation, believed by many to have conferred great powers on Maimon. Others say it's just a gold mask, certainly worth a great deal, but nothing more than that.

Escanaba Jones
Role: The Conspirator

This won't ever be explained, but the name is a play on Indiana Jones. Escanaba is located in norther Michigan so above – that is, better than, Indiana.

An anonymous poster on the dark corners of the internet, EJ – as this person's adherents refer to them – claims to be an expert on the Fortune Hunt and someone who knows the real story, unlike Maimon, who is vilified in EJ's posts. EJ develops a massive following, sparking blogs, memes, slogans, YouTube channels, etc. These followers call themselves Jonesers. Posting about the Fortune Hunt is called Jonesing.

Escanaba Jones maintains that the Fortune Hunt is unleashing something terrible upon the world. Posts will variously reference a variety of different evils: satanic cults, the illuminati, communism, the JFK assassination, extraterrestrials, time travel, out-of-control theoretical physics, etc., etc. The sprawling, nonsensical nature of these many, and often contradictory claims, does not seem to bother EJ's followers, who happily devote their time to deciphering and interpreting his cryptic messages.

In the first few posts, EJ will seem to be a crank and Jonesers will come across as wackos. But some of the EJ's posts, or at least their interpretations, will turn out to be useful. In other words, it would be a mistake to ignore the EJ movement entirely, but players will have to approach these posts with extreme caution.

One thing will be absolutely certain is that Jonesers are bonkers, which will set up a nice twist later on when some of their most insane conspiracy theories turn out to be correct. Addendum: I'm leaning toward making EJ a rogue Researcher who doubts the Researcher agenda and wants to undermine the organization from the inside. To protect their identity and cover their tracks, this person would have to deliver more misinformation or red herrings than actual facts. So right now, think smart but deliberately deceptive, intentionally burying the real content with false leads. In other words, I want EJ posts to not only be content that needs to be deciphered, but once their deciphered, people will then have to figure out what's real info and what's intended to throw off the uninformed.

Zara Burman
Role: Successful Hunter

Never a true Maimon believer, Zara Burman went to Thailand with her boyfriend, who was also not a true believer, but he was the one who wanted to go, and he had to talk Zara into spending money on the trip. He is an aspiring social media influencer, and he's convinced the trip will be a great opportunity for him to build his brand. While they're still staying at their hotel, and before they even secure their equipment, the boyfriend dumps her (on Instagram!) for someone he met in the hotel bar. The boyfriend proceeds to post pictures of himself with his new girlfriend as they leave the country and head off to Paris – where Zara wanted to go in the first place! Zara is humiliated and furious, suddenly left alone in a strange country, having signed on to an adventure that never held much interest for her. Meanwhile the story of the public dumping trends briefly, making her public mortification even more painful.

While all this is going on, she is contacted directly by a person claiming to be Maimon, who says he's taken an interest in her story. He knows a thing or two about public humiliation. He urges her to carry on without her boyfriend, and provides her with a few choice hints. "Why me?" she asks. He tells her that she's not the only one. He has taken an interest in a few of the Fortune Hunters and provides some of them with guidance here and there.

[NB: This is a reveal for down the line, but the person who contacts Zara is NOT Maimon. At this point, he's already having doubts about exposing other people to Traveler artefacts. It is actually Rachel Lin, who has been looking for someone to guide through the process who can later be a role model for future Fortune Hunters. (I may even decide that Lin is responsible for disappearing Zara's boyfriend and staging the whole fake jilting business, but I'm still chewing this over). Lin not only manipulates Zara into becoming a Fortune Hunter, she arranges for Zara to find the key to a gold-filled vault. Zara's success is entirely engineered.]

But, again, Zara doesn't know any of this. She thinks she's talking to Maimon. Rather than going home in humiliation, Zara decides to follow Maimon's advice. Success will be the best revenge, after all. She sets out on her own, following Maimon's tips and curating her experience on her own expanding social media accounts. Maimon's advice proves solid, and Zara emerges hugely successful. Now, with a massive following, she has become the public face of everything positive about the Fortune Hunt. She learns to be an effective self-promoter, and someone who clearly enjoys basking in the limelight. She has crafted her brand as *the* Fortune Hunting expert. And that's when Rachel Lin makes herself known to Zara, helping Zara promote her brand and land followers. Zara doesn't think of herself as working for the Researchers, but at first she will be a Researcher mouth piece. That may change over time.

Also, because she's about burnishing her brand not everything Zara says is reliable. It's also unclear why, if she had such a great experience, she seems to have no interest in joining in the next Fortune Hunt. The truth is, despite Lin helping Zara behind the scenes, she had some very frightening experiences in the field. She was in constant danger, and she saw things she cannot explain and things she would rather forget. She has not exactly repressed her memories, but she refuses to engage with them.

Potential plot twist: The ex-boyfriend publicizes his new romance for a few weeks, and then disappears from social media. Zara has moved on, so she doesn't much think about it. Years later, his body is discovered in Thailand. Further investigation reveals the social media posts were all deep fakes. It's starting to look like Zara has been manipulated – but by Maimon or someone else?

Alfred Mendoza

Role: Traumatized Hunter.

Mendoza participated in the Thailand Fortune hunt and came back severely damaged. Much like Zara Burman, Mendoza discovered treasure – enough to be considered successful, though not as much as Burman. Nevertheless, it's hard to dismiss his concerns as mere sour grapes. Mendoza is haunted by his experiences in Thailand. Previously happily married, he leaves his wife and children, wanting nothing to do with them. His public posts suggest this is for their own protection. He no longer trusts himself around people he cares about.

Mendoza won't say what happened to him, claiming that people won't believe him. Instead, he posts frequently about how the Fortune Hunt is not what other people suppose. He is deeply suspicious of the Researchers and suspects they are manipulating people for their own ends, though he has no idea what those ends are. As people begin to get excited about the prospect of finding a second Fortune Hunt location, Mendoza begins to warn people off. His warnings are often outlandish and inconsistent. He talks about evil sorcerers, monsters, aliens, ghosts, time travel. It's easy to dismiss him, and yet he also provides survival tips for Fortune Hunters, and many of these prove to be extremely useful. Some, however, are nonsense.

Note: Mendoza provides help for surviving, not for acquiring wealth. He wants to save lives, but he won't give any advice that might keep people Fortune Hunting longer than they would be otherwise.

Possible developments:

- It would be interesting if Maimon contacted Mendoza and wanted to feed him information and collaborate with him. Maimon would be tight-lipped about what he knows, but he would want to lend credibility to Mendoza's efforts to keep people out of the Fortune Hunt.
- Mendoza could become a huge EJ enthusiast. This could be functional, giving players clues to EJ puzzles, though they should sometimes be wrong. For the most part, however, he would point them in the right direction.
- Connection/collaboration between Mendoza and Pfeiffer? It would be more interesting if there was some bad blood between them. Maybe Mendoza could try to collaborate with Pfeiffer, but then it turns out that Mendoza and Pfeiffer's son were part of the same Fortune Hunting crew. The son, in a moment of lucidity, blames Mendoza for what happened to him.
- This could tie into my general notion that Mendoza did terrible things on the Fortune Hunt. He should acknowledge that but claim that he was "not himself." That is, he was under the influence of Traveler artefacts, though he may not fully understand that.

Rachel Lin

Role: High-profile Researcher

Chief Archivist of the Researchers. The charming, public face of the Researcher faction.

Lin began as one of the few public followers of Maimon within academia. Since the early days of Maimon's theorizing about the Travelers, she has quietly amassed a cadre of followers, some working secretly within academia, others in the private sector. They have come to believe core elements of the secret history, particularly that the Travelers were aliens and that humans contain Traveler DNA. Lin directs the Researcher project of amassing evidence and studying the physical and cultural influence of Travelers on human culture. She believes that embracing our Traveler genes, and by unlocking Traveler abilities by uncovering artefacts, humanity can evolve to a new, more powerful state. However, she and her team believe that the public is not yet ready for these truths. She encourages people to learn all of this themselves by participating in the Fortune Hunt. This is why the Researchers actively publicize the Fortune Hunt and train Fortune Hunters

Though she may later begin to address some of the truths about the Travelers and their artefacts, she will initially present herself as someone who wants to help people search for treasure that will make them rich. Accordingly, Lin, as the face of the Researchers, will offer clues, bonuses, and aid. Like all NPCs, she is fallible, and sometimes her advice will be wrong, but when that happens, she will always admit it. Nevertheless, her demeanor, however charming, will be a little sly, and it will be easy to see she is holding things back and pursuing her own agenda. She can have a role in delivering hints and clues for challenges. E.g., she could say something about the Researchers having an interest in a particular geographical location, and that location is a clue (not the answer) to a challenge. Embedding useful tidbits into lore is a way of getting players to engage.

Lin is an egoist and elitist. She believes she knows what is best for all of humanity, and she wants to make those decisions for everyone.

Lin has villainous qualities, but she is definitely not a villain in her own mind. She believes she is doing the right thing to help humanity and solve our global problems. Once we embrace our Traveler DNA, we will be able to deal with hunger, climate change, concentrated wealth, injustice, etc. In other words, she is just like Maimon, trying to save humanity from its own foibles.

Why is she like this? Lin's parents were political refugees who escaped from government oppression in China. Her parents were so horrified by the heavy hand of the Chinese government, that they gave their children a lot -- too much -- leeway in making their own decisions in growing up. This led Lin to make a lot of bad mistakes when she was a teenager, almost ruining her life. She only managed to save herself through meeting a mentor who taught her discipline. Thus she has come to believe that people left to their own devices will make destructive mistakes. They need smarter, wiser people to guide them. She is willing to be that smarter, wiser person.

She is also surprisingly insecure. She desperately wants Maimon's approval.

Plot twists:

- She manipulated Zara into becoming a Fortune Hunter and becoming a Fortune Hunter influencer.
- She might have some role in what happened to Mendoza and Pfeiffer's son.
- Some manipulative role in recruiting Freyja TBD
- Possibly introduce a lovable character as a bot who then dies in a training accident. Solving the mystery of the murder could be a group activity. Various non-bot characters could be introduced, interrogated, etc. In the end, the murderer will be one of them, for a seemingly rational reason, but then we'll learn that Lin was behind it. The victim had discovered something they should not have.
- Traveler artifacts affect people with a high percentage of Traveler DNA more powerfully. One side effect of this artifact alteration is eye-darkening. Rachel Lin's eyes are so dark because she has been so overexposed -- deliberately on her part. There should be some question raised about whether or not she is the same person she was when she began investigating artifacts or if she has been turned into someone/something else entirely.

Douglass Pfeifer
Role: High-profile Anti-Hunter

Founder, director, and sole full-time employee of the Anti-Hunting Institute.

We want to make sure the Anti-Hunters are not confused with the Escanaba Jones movement. They are not conspiracy theorists. They are people, like the Researchers, who have discovered some elements of the secret history, and they believe that exposure to Traveler artifacts are bad for humanity. They are, in other words, trying to tell other people what to do. Accordingly, Pfeifer is self-righteous, condescending, even belittling to those with whom he disagrees. Even so, there is a kind of gruff charm.

People who identify as Anti-Hunters will mostly be those who lost friends or loved ones to the first Fortune Hunt. Some will be those whose friends or loved ones have gone to the Researcher campus to do the training (possible tie-in with Freyja's father?). Anti-Hunters are people who post on Pfeiffer's forums or boost his message online, not actual members of his organization.

Background: Pfeiffer's son, Elliot, participated in the Thailand Fortune Hunt, and he came back... altered. Before he was intelligent and ambitious, full of creative energy. Now he is sullen and depressed, refusing to talk about what happened to him. After extensive testing it appears as though Pfeiffer's son is not depressed or traumatized by things he did and saw in Thailand. Rather, it seems like his brain chemistry has been altered. This provides the passion behind Pfeiffer's antagonism to the Fortune Hunt.

The Anti-Hunting Institute, which Pfeifer runs, is a pitiful counterpart to what the Researchers are doing. It's a makeshift operation running out of Pfeifer's basement.

Much like Mendoza, with whom Pfeifer will eventually ally, Pfeifer is not malicious. He will try to discourage anyone from participating in the Fortune Hunt, but he will offer helpful advice and aid to those who ignore his advice and participate anyhow. Also like Pfeifer, he will only help people survive or escape. He will not help in the discovery or removal or treasure.

Possible developments and uses:

- Introduce a bot who can later turn out to be a spy working for Pfeiffer. This could tie into the murder mystery concept (see notes for Rachel Lin).
- Pfeiffer could offer a small \$FP reward now and again for anyone who reposts his talking points.
- Pfeiffer is the throw everything against the wall guy to see what sticks. He will be the one who is constantly talking about various theories of who or what the Travelers are, though not endorsing any of them.
- Could his son, Elliot, emerge as a character?

Freyja Jónsdóttir,

Role: International voice, general enthusiast.

An over the top Icelandic Fortune Hunter/podcaster. She wanted to participate in the Thailand Hunt, but she was too young, and her parents wouldn't let her. Now it's her turn. She's an enthusiastic Hunter who actively pursues making Fortune Hunting a cooperative and communal affair. "Let's get rich together," is her motto.

She is, in all ways, the opposite of Mendoza and Pfeiffer. She will happily repeat anything boosters like Lin and Zara have to say.

Contrary to Pfeiffer, she could offer \$FP for repeating Researcher propaganda.

Her arc, however, should be toward increasing fear and doubt. She will never back out of her desire to be a Fortune Hunter, but she should grow increasingly nervous over time.

Cranston Banks
Role: Financial voice

A television investment guru who's quit his job to create a Fortune Hunt funding operations – a purely mercenary counterpart to the Researchers. Crass, loud, and always certain he's right. Think Jim Cramer times a thousand. He is only interested in the financial aspects of the Fortune Hunt. Ghosts? Magicians? Aliens? His opinion: Who cares? There's gold to be found, and he wants to help YOU find it – for a cut, of course.

Development: Cranston gets roped in by the Researchers as a financial advisor. They give him access, but they are manipulating him to get him to promote their agenda. Their larger goal is to create a crash in the cost of black market artefacts so they can buy them easily and inexpensively (though the price is a secondary consideration).