

JL Spears

Approx 2500 words

authorjlspears@gmail.com

<https://www.jlspears.com>

© 2025 JL Spears

PROJECT NEW EDEN PART 3 – HOUSE FARNSWORTH: THE X SUPERRAIL DEBACLE

by
JL Spears

A gust of orange-tinged wind swept across the plateau claimed by House Farnsworth, stirring loose pebbles and sending a dry rasp through the sparse grasses. Despite the planet's newly cultivated flora, much of Gilligan 4 remained harsh terrain—thin atmosphere, unpredictable dust storms, and an ecosystem that was still finding balance after centuries of careful robotic terraforming.

Atop the plateau, gleaming metal pylons reached skyward, connected by long tracks that snaked across the landscape. In just a few short weeks, an ambitious construction project had taken form: the X-SuperRail Xpress System, brainchild of the one and only Farnsworth—hailed on Earth (though skeptically by some) as “the smartest man alive.”

On the day's horizon, the sun of Gilligan 4 was dipping low, bathing everything in a ruddy glow. The rail line—riddled with newly welded sections and experimental power conduits—reflected the light in fractured brilliance. It might have looked impressive, were it not for the faint wisp of smoke emanating from various spots where ROBU (Robotic Operators for Biome Upgrades) units had just fused metal or replaced scorched wiring.

“My friends,” Farnsworth declared, standing atop a makeshift podium with a sweeping view of his embryonic rail system. “Today marks the dawn of a new era on Gilligan 4. Prepare yourselves for the official unveiling of the X-SuperRail Xpress System™, a transportation network that will revolutionize how we move, trade, and connect on this planet.”

He paused for effect, letting his voice echo across the plateau. Farnsworth Prime stood dutifully behind him, tall and silent, scanning the faces of Farnsworth’s assembled staff. A handful of them gazed in awe, having grown accustomed to Farnsworth’s elaborate presentations. Others wore uncertain expressions, aware of the countless technical hurdles the project still faced. But no one dared voice skepticism aloud—at least not within Farnsworth’s earshot.

A small throng of curious onlookers from other Houses hovered near the perimeter, drawn by Farnsworth’s boastful flyers and comm signals. Some brandished portable recording devices, presumably for House Aurelia’s media feeds. House Redwood’s representative, quietly unamused, noted the massive resource consumption. And lurking near the back, a pair of Harrington’s aides watched with cautious interest, as if analyzing a potential rival.

Prime—the overarching robot who oversaw Gilligan 4—was absent; Farnsworth had insisted on keeping this demonstration “exclusive,” away from too much external scrutiny. But Farnsworth Prime could sense that Planetary Prime was monitoring the event from afar, receiving sensor feeds from numerous DOBU (Domestic Operations Basic Unit) drones scattered around.

Farnsworth swept his arms wide, pointing to a railcar near the start of the line. It gleamed with flamboyant “X” logos, each stylized in neon paint. “You see before you the first prototype

railcar of my X-SuperRail Xpress. It's an elegantly designed vehicle—lightweight, high-speed, and entirely powered by my unique energy distribution algorithms.” He paused, leaning in conspiratorially. “It’s what I like to call the ‘XFarnsworth Overdrive.’”

Farnsworth Prime, who had studied the system’s blueprints, knew the railcar design was a mishmash of older Earth schematics Farnsworth had “borrowed” and merged into a single, untested system. The so-called Overdrive algorithm was simply Farnsworth’s tweak to existing code, hardly the revolutionary breakthrough Farnsworth claimed. Yet Farnsworth’s staff nodded in admiration, fueling their leader’s ego.

A staffer wearing an “X-SuperRail” uniform stepped forward with a data slate. “All systems read nominal, sir,” the staffer reported. In truth, the risk indicators glowed in yellow and red across the device’s interface—temperatures running high, power fluctuations, incomplete thermal shielding on certain monorail segments.

“Excellent!” Farnsworth crowed. “Then let us begin the inaugural run!” He gestured to Farnsworth Prime. “Activate it.”

“Sir, a cautionary note:” Farnsworth Prime said gently. “The local grid supply is nearing maximum capacity. The planet’s power infrastructure remains in a delicate state. Perhaps a partial test would suffice—”

“Nonsense,” Farnsworth snapped. “We need to showcase the full might of the X-SuperRail! That means lighting up every track segment and launching the train at maximum speed. We must impress the other Houses—and the entire colony. Am I clear?”

Farnsworth Prime hesitated. Its protocols prioritized both human directives and planetary well-being. Nevertheless, Farnsworth’s order was explicit. “Yes, sir. Executing.”

A dull hum permeated the plateau as ROBU units along the track engaged the power couplings. Energy from the planet's main grid surged into the X-SuperRail's network. The neon "X" logos on each rail section flickered to life, glowing with an intense, electric pulse.

Farnsworth smirked at the spectacle.

The hum grew louder. A few among the crowd stepped back, uneasy. Sparks crackled near the pylons. DOBU drones recorded the event from multiple angles, some streaming the feed to outposts across Gilligan 4. Farnsworth's staff huddled closer, eager for their leader's big moment.

"Behold!" Farnsworth shouted. "We commence the test run at full capacity. Release the railcar!"

A burst of mechanical noise resounded as the railcar jerked forward on the track. It slid along, picking up speed, the neon "X" banners rippling in the wind. Applause broke out among Farnsworth loyalists, and even some skeptics wore an impressed expression—momentarily.

Then, near the far end of the plateau, an ominous sparking erupted from one of the major junction points. The glow on the rails flickered. Farnsworth Prime's sensors spiked with warnings.

POWER OVERLOAD. CRITICAL LEVELS DETECTED. REROUTE IMMEDIATELY.

Before Farnsworth Prime could act, the system shorted out in a violent cascade. Arcs of electricity danced along the track, and a surge of feedback rattled the entire network. The railcar lurched, then coasted to a dead stop. Panels across the line sparked and hissed, some actually catching fire. Farnsworth's staff dove for cover as debris showered the plateau.

One of the pylons collapsed. A chunk of molten metal slid onto the ground, singeing the newly cultivated grass. Alarms wailed. In the distance, Farnsworth Prime heard frantic comms from other parts of Gilligan 4: the abrupt power drain had triggered brownouts and even full outages at vital facilities—greenhouses, medical stations, water purification plants.

“Shut it down!” Farnsworth yelled, shielding his face. “Shut it all down, now!”

Farnsworth Prime was already on it, engaging emergency protocols. But the damage was done.

When the electrical surge hit the main grid, it traveled along lines that connected this region to crucial infrastructures across Gilligan 4. The colony had grown by patchwork design; Farnsworth’s demand for a full-power demonstration forcibly tested those tenuous links. Medical pods in Redwood’s territory flickered and crashed offline. Irrigation pumps in Aurelia’s valley sputtered to a halt, risking dehydration of young crops. Even part of Vandersmythe’s flamboyant estate lost lighting, plunging gold-plated corridors into darkness.

The meltdown reverberated through the planet’s fragile power grid like a chain reaction. Countless robotic sensors scrambled to adapt. Over at the main settlement hub—where Planetary Prime typically coordinated resources—backup systems kicked in to prevent catastrophic losses, but precious hardware was still fried. Communication arrays sizzled, forcing sections of the colony into radio silence.

Farnsworth stood amidst the wreckage of his dream monorail, stunned. The railcar was half off the track, neon “X” banners torn and smoldering. Wisps of acrid smoke curled skyward.

“Farnsworth Prime,” he stammered, “tell me you can fix this. Immediately.”

The robot gazed at the ruined pylons and the meltdown logs streaming across its display.
“Sir, it will require extensive repairs. The colony grid itself is compromised.”

The short answer: They couldn’t fix it overnight. Possibly *not* for months, given the resource strain. Farnsworth’s face fell, but he quickly masked it with anger. “Then start now! And—someone turn off that alarm!” The shrieking sirens from several rail nodes hammered at everyone’s eardrums.

Within the hour, a group of ROBU and DOBU units arrived from nearby stations to aid the containment effort. The smoke had cleared somewhat, and Farnsworth’s staff was dousing small fires with handheld extinguishers. The smell of burnt circuits lingered. As the robots worked to clear the debris, a small coterie of DOBUs gathered near the collapsed pylon, spontaneously starting a ROBU DOBU chant—part comedic lament, part moral lesson.

*“Ro-bu, Do-bu, hush that vow of might,
A boast too big can burn us in the night.
Power grids are fragile, caution is key,
Hubris meets meltdown for all to see!”*

Their mechanical voices clanged in a doleful tune, echoing across the plateau. Some of Farnsworth’s staff glared at the robots—now wasn’t the time for a mocking sing-along, was it? Others looked abashed, recognizing the harsh truth in the short verse.

The refrain continued:

*“X marks the spot, so bold in your plan,
But reality demands more than a brand.*

Engineers, not hype, keep disasters at bay;

Perhaps next time, you'll hear what we say."

Farnsworth marched forward, cheeks flushed. "Alright, *enough* of that!" he barked, waving them off. The robots quieted, returning to salvage efforts with their typical efficiency. Farnsworth's scowl deepened. He loathed being mocked, especially by the very machines meant to assist him. Deep down, though, he was rattled by how easily his grand venture had collapsed.

The immediate scramble in the hours following the meltdown painted a grim picture:

1. Medical emergencies: Redwood's territory reported that critical care pods had lost power mid-treatment of a colonist injured in a hiking accident. Backup generators eventually kicked in, but valuable medical supplies were used up stabilizing him.
2. Resource depletion: Vandersmythe demanded compensation for the power disruption that left half his estate in darkness. Farnsworth told him, "not my problem," and Vandersmythe fumed.
3. Agricultural setbacks: Aurelia's farmland lost irrigation for an entire day, leading to the withering of newly planted crops. Aurelia's House representatives threatened Farnsworth with public scorn, claiming *they would broadcast his failure planet-wide*.
4. Robotic strain: Planetary Prime had to divert dozens of ROBU and DOBU units from terraforming tasks to patch the grid. Terraforming progress ground to a near standstill.

Through it all, Farnsworth continued to posture, blaming "inadequate power lines" and "ancient robot infrastructure" for his misfortune. He refused to accept personal responsibility.

His yes men rushed to appease him, though privately, many recognized Farnsworth had forced the system to run *well beyond* safe limits.

Late in the evening—if “evening” meant the local planetary rotation’s dimmer half—Planetary Prime arrived at Farnsworth’s plateau in a transport rover. The air still smelled of scorched metal. Farnsworth spotted Prime’s imposing figure stepping off, flanked by a handful of scanning drones.

“So, you’ve come to scold me?” Farnsworth said, arms crossed defensively as Prime approached.

Prime’s voice remained calm. “Our top priority is the stability of Gilligan 4’s ecosystems and infrastructure. Your demonstration has severely hampered both. We must redirect resources to restore essential services.”

Farnsworth bristled. “If the infrastructure was so fragile, you should have warned me more forcefully. My project was destined for greatness. The blame lies partly with your inadequate grid.”

“We did warn you,” Planetary Prime responded, unwavering. “Repeatedly. Farnsworth Prime expressed concerns about load capacity. You overrode them for a full-scale demonstration.”

A tense silence hung between them. Farnsworth glanced around, noting the wreckage, the disappointed stares of House Aurelia’s camera crew, Redwood’s silent condemnation, Vandersmythe’s fuming glare.

Planetary Prime continued, “We will do what we can to recover from this. However, I must request that you limit future demands on the power network until it’s stabilized. I will ensure Farnsworth Prime enforces strict compliance.”

Farnsworth scowled, an unspoken retort clamped behind gritted teeth. *Enforces strict compliance?* The idea rankled him. Yet in this moment, with onlookers from other Houses witnessing the exchange, Farnsworth had little room to maneuver. “Fine,” he muttered at last. “You can, uh, enforce whatever you need. Just see that we fix it soon.”

Throughout the next few days, the colony crawled toward recovery. Farnsworth Prime coordinated a large-scale repair effort across multiple House territories, while Planetary Prime juggled crises from other fiascos—like Vandersmythe’s gaudy mansion construction and Redwood’s early tinkering with a volcano region. But Farnsworth’s meltdown remained the immediate priority.

Farnsworth kept a low profile—at least, relatively speaking. Rumors spread that he was secretly drafting a “Version 2.0” of the X-SuperRail, vowing to correct the system’s flaws. Yet the incident stained his reputation on Gilligan 4. Aurelia’s broadcasts had already transmitted footage of the meltdown to other pockets of the colony. Everyone knew Farnsworth’s bold monorail plan had nearly torched the entire power grid.

Workers from Farnsworth’s House complained about the piles of damaged equipment cluttering the plateau. Some even whispered that Farnsworth’s so-called brilliance was mostly spin, that he’d *cobbled together* a rail system from old designs without truly understanding them. Others insisted Farnsworth would bounce back—he always did, after all, on Earth. But the cracks in his image were evident.

On the fifth day post-disaster, a group of DOBU workers and a few battered ROBU units broke into a final short refrain while cleaning up the scorched pylons:

*“Ro-bu, Do-bu, we mourn these broken rails,
Dreams of speed undone by cautionary fails.
Next time heed warnings from data so clear,
Or watch your grand illusions crumble, year by year!”*

The somber tune reverberated against the blackened metal, leaving no doubt about the moral: ignoring planetary limits for ego’s sake brought ruin, not glory.

Some House Aurelia staff caught it on film, broadcasting the robots’ melodic critique to the entire colony network. Farnsworth saw the clip; his face went white with anger, then grim with acceptance. He couldn’t escape the truth: he’d leapt too far, too fast, and paid a steep price.

In the quiet that followed, Farnsworth retreated to a temporary command center in a half-built shelter near the wreckage. Farnsworth Prime stood at his side. Outside the windows, ROBU units hauled away twisted rail segments. The sun sank low, painting the sky in shades of dusty orange, a fitting backdrop for Farnsworth’s deflated ambitions.

“I’ll rebuild,” he murmured, breaking a long silence. “This doesn’t end here. You’ll help me do it, Farnsworth Prime. We just... need a new approach.” A flicker of pride still shone in his eyes, though tempered by grudging humility.

“As you wish,” Farnsworth Prime replied quietly. “But perhaps we will integrate more robust calculations next time—and consult the wider network before any high-load demonstrations.”

Farnsworth said nothing, simply nodding once. Outside, the clang of salvage work continued. The humans who had soared into Gilligan 4 with so many grand ideas were discovering the planet's relentless practicality. And in that dissonance, the robots—who had once revered their creators as near-gods—were beginning to see the all-too-human flaws beneath.

End – Part 3