



# Up Against It

*M.J. Locke*

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Geoff and his friends live in Phocaea, a distant asteroid colony on the Solar System's frontier. They're your basic high-spirited young adults, enjoying such pastimes as hacking matter compilers to produce dancing skeletons that prance through the low-gee communal areas, using their rocket-bikes to salvage methane ice shrapnel that flies away when the colony brings in a big (and vital) rock of the stuff, and figuring out how to avoid the ubiquitous surveillance motes that are the million eyes of *'Stroiders*, a reality-TV show whose Earthside producers have paid handsomely for the privilege of spying on every detail of the Phocaeans' lives.

Life isn't as good as it seems, though. A mysterious act of sabotage kills Geoff's brother, Carl, and puts the entire colony at risk. And in short order, we discover that the whole thing may have been cooked up by the Martian mafia, as a means of executing a coup and turning Phocaea into a client-state. As if that wasn't bad enough, there's a rogue AI that was spawned during the industrial emergency and slipped through the distracted safeguards, and a giant X-factor in the form of the Viridians, a transhumanist cult that lives in Phocaea's bowels.

In addition to Geoff, our story revolves around Jane, the colony's resource manager—a bureaucrat engineer in charge of keeping the plumbing running on an artificial island of humanity poised on the knife-edge of hard vacuum and unforgiving space. She's more than a century old, and good at her job, but she is torn between the technical demands of the colony and the political realities of her situation, in which the fishbowl effect of *'Stroiders* is compounded by a reputation economy that turns every person into a beauty-contest competitor. Her maneuverings to keep politics and engineering in harmony are the heart of the book.

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