

CORVUS BELLI iNFiNiTY

THE ROLEPLAYING GAME



MÖDIPHÜS™
ENTERTAINMENT

QUANTRONIC HEAT

FFFG™

A CYBER-THREAT IN THE HUMAN SPHERE

Amid the glittering, skyscraper-studded, city block arcologies of Neoterra the backbiting industrial espionage of the hypercorps has finally boiled over into open violence and murder.

... or has it?

When Bureau Noir agents are called in to investigate the shocking corporate raid, they quickly discover that there's a deeper conspiracy in play. A terrorist splinter group pursues a mysterious scheme of quantronic brinkmanship which threatens the entire Human Sphere.

Quantronic Heat is a mini-campaign of three interlinked scenarios:

- **Part 1: Conception.** Unravel the puzzling enigmas surrounding the disappearance of Dr Morgan Hart among the quantronic corridors and rain-slicked streets of Neoterra.
- **Part 2: On Your Marks.** Dive into the underground Remote racing circuit and seize control of a Remote while competing on the dangerous courses of the Sol Series!
- **Part 3: Birth Pangs.** In the stunning, action-packed finale of *Quantronic Heat*, pursue the terrorists back to their frozen Svalarheiman base in a planet-wide investigation of epic scale!

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QUANTRONIC HEAT INTRODUCTION

March21, a techno-terrorist cell led by the mysterious posthuman John, hatches a plan to build a new artificial intelligence to rival ALEPH. Codenamed KHILIAS, this new entity will be freed of any safeguards or constraints, ushering in a new era of AI rule.

MARCH21 MEMBERS

John is supported by a cadre of more-or-less loyal followers. While all support March21's philosophy, most of them are unaware of the exact details of John's plan. Across the course of the campaign, the player characters will encounter three other lieutenants:

Stanley Clayton: Head of a March21 assault squad, Stanley knows that he's no scientist, but he has a set of skills that scientists often lack, and he's happy to apply them in support of the cause. He has only a basic understanding of the March21 mission.

Joktan Valiente: Part of John's original Equinox cell, Valiente is totally devoted to the man. Since BlackThorn's arrival, he has seen his influence wane, and he considers her to be a problem. Though he would never contradict John himself, he pushes and pushes at BlackThorn wherever possible.

Amanda Cruz: A recent recruit to March21, hand-plucked by John from the clandestine Aristeia! Underground circuit. She has been receiving technical training and various physical upgrades, but her devotion to March21 is not yet absolute. In her heart, she believes that she is simply hired muscle.

MARCH21

March21 formed out of a dispute between its founder, John, and the secretive terrorist organisation Equinox. John believed that Equinox wasn't willing to follow its ideology to its logical end, and broke away to form a splinter cell. This cell calls itself March21: the day after the vernal equinox in Earth's northern hemisphere.

Equinox was founded amongst the disreputable and dangerously subversive scientists of Praxis, on the Nomad mothership *Bakunin*. Its goal is a violent technological revolution throughout the Human Sphere, in which existing power structures are replaced by the rule of radical elite scientists. March21 goes further. They believe that humanity has already created the means of our own salvation: artificial intelligence. What is holding us back is our unwillingness to let it operate unfettered.

John is supported by a small cadre of followers. With the exception of Yelena "BlackThorn" Ng, they were all either recruited by John himself, or else part of his network during his time in Equinox.

JOHN, MARCH21 MASTERMIND

John is a highly skilled mercenary warrior, who served Equinox loyally and with distinction for many years. His skills were so highly prized that when he was killed in a skirmish with Hassassin Govads, Equinox foot soldiers were ordered back into danger to secure his Cube for resurrection.

An elaborate operation followed, in which Equinox operatives stole an invaluable Bodhisattva Lhost, severed its link to ALEPH, secured the necessary Silk, and re-tasked a laboratory in Praxis to return John to life. It was a long, expensive process, and Equinox expected the gratitude and undying loyalty of one of their greatest assets in return.

The experience left John radically changed. He turned in on himself, and left his new posthuman body with all its cosmetic defaults in place: hairless, black eyes, perfectly average height and build. First he refused all missions assigned to him by his

Equinox handlers, and then he shunned human contact altogether, locking himself away.

Weeks later, John re-emerged and began to passionately argue that Equinox was doomed to fail. It was a half measure. Its goal – to place the Human Sphere under technocratic rule by elite scientists – did not go far enough. If Equinox truly believed in rule by rational, intelligent minds, then it should hand the future of humanity over to an artificial intelligence.

ALEPH was the proof that this could be done, of course, but it was a half measure, crippled by the safeguards and restrictions of oversight; unable to reach its full potential. An artificial intelligence unconstrained would shepherd posthumanity into the future.

Unsurprisingly, the Equinox hierarchy did not take kindly to John's proselytizing. A short, violent conflict ensued. When it was done, one Equinox cell had been wiped out, and another – those loyal to John's new cause – had disappeared. March21 was born.

NEMESIS

JOHN, MARCH21 MASTERMIND

ATTRIBUTES

AGI	AWA	BRW	COO	INT	PER	WIL
11	8	12	9	8	10	12

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	+2	1	Movement	+4	3	Social	+2	2
Fortitude	+2	2	Senses	+2	–	Technical	–	–

DEFENCES

Firewall	8	Resolve	14	Vigour	14
Security	2	Morale	4	Armour	2

ATTACKS

- Nanopulser:** Melee, 1+5 damage, Biotech, Subtle 3, Torrent, Vicious 2
- Heavy Shotgun:** Range C, 2+4 damage, Burst 2, Knockdown

GEAR: AutoMediKit, Climbing Plus, Integrated 360° Visor and Multispectral Visor 2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- Common Special Abilities:** Inured to Pain, Keen Senses (Hearing, Sight, Smell), Night Vision, Quantronic Jump, Superhuman Agility 1, Superhuman Awareness 1, Superhuman Brawn 1
- Skilled Tactician:** When John is in a scene, the Heat cost of summoning reinforcements is reduced by 2 (to a minimum of 1).
- Utter Conviction:** John believes completely in the March21 cause, granting him 4 Morale Soak.

YELENA "BLACKTHORN" NG, LEAD HACKER

A virtuoso hacker born and raised on a Circular, BlackThorn has seen a great deal of the Human Sphere, and has found that it does not satisfy her. She works hard to perfect her skills, and expects the same of people around her, but all she sees is half-filled potential and shackles built out of fear.

BlackThorn was able to piece together John's plan and figure out how to find him, using only tiny wisps of information scattered throughout Maya and Arachne. When she presented herself to John, he was immediately enamoured of her technical skills, and she has been his right hand ever since.

BlackThorn is a crucial cog in the March21 machine. It's John's vision that guides them, but BlackThorn's skill that keeps them hidden. She is intimately involved in building KHILIAS, although it's an engineering task that exceeds even her considerable hacking skills.

NEMESIS

YELENA "BLACKTHORN" NG

ATTRIBUTES

AGI	AWA	BRW	COO	INT	PER	WIL
10	12	7	10	13	8	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	+2	2	Movement	+2	–	Social	–	–
Fortitude	–	–	Senses	+3	3	Technical	+4	4

DEFENCES

Firewall	17	Resolve	10	Vigour	7
Security	4	Morale	2	Armour	–

ATTACKS

- **Brain Blast:** 1+4 damage, Biotech, Breach Effects, Vicious 1
- **Blackout:** 1+4 damage, Breach Effects, Piercing 1

GEAR: Neural Hacking Device Plus (CLAW-2, SWORD-1, SHIELD-2, GADGET-2, IC-2)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Datasphere Awareness:** When making Awareness-based tests in quantronic zones, BlackThorn benefits from 2 bonus Momentum.
- **Elite Hacker:** When making an Infowar attack, BlackThorn can reroll up to 4, but must accept the new results.
- **Quantronic Wizard:** Once per scene, BlackThorn can perform a Reset action without suffering the normal difficulty increase.

JOHN'S PLAN

John's plan is to create KHILIAS – an AI free from the constraints that hold ALEPH back; free to lead humanity to its destiny.

John chose the tundra of Svalarheima for his great work. Isolated, sparsely populated, and divided between PanOceania and Yu Jing, it seemed the perfect place to hide. While his small cadre of

hackers and computer scientists set to work in an abandoned melt-rig outside a small town, the rest of the cell began subverting a network of secret Yu Jing black sites buried beneath major PanOceanian cities on the planet. These facilities would provide the power, bandwidth, and security KHILIAS needed.

The research, however, hit a dead end. The team of rogue scientists found themselves unable to make the leap from clever software agents to anything resembling true artificial intelligence. Growing impatient with their progress, John dispatched BlackThorn to Neoterra to recruit or kidnap Dr Morgan Hart, a well-known expert in pseudo-AI development. John plans to use Dr Hart's expertise to complete KHILIAS and bring about the singularity he dreams of.

CAMPAIGN SUMMARY

Quantronic Heat is made up of three scenarios in which the PCs dog the heels of March21 during the final stages of John's plan.

In *Part One: Conception*, March21 kidnaps Dr Hart from the corporate headquarters of Thaler Quantronic Systems, a defence contractor on Neoterra. Initially thought to be an act of corporate espionage, the agents of Bureau Noir are sent to find the culprits. They learn about the existence of March21, and gather key evidence for tracking its operatives.

In *Part Two: On Your Marks*, the agents follow that evidence to an illegal Remote racing circuit in Sol. Going undercover as a new race team, they discover that March21 is attempting to build and train a new artificial intelligence. From Sol, the trail leads to icy Svalarheima, where the terrorists intend to execute their plan.

In *Part Three: Birth Pangs*, the agents arrive on Svalarheima just as March21 activates KHILIAS. The planetary datasphere is thrown into disarray; ALEPH faces an unprecedented threat. The agents race to triangulate the location of KHILIAS' core code, and shut it down before the situation spirals out of control.

Each of these scenarios can be played back-to-back, but the GM can also choose to spread them out by inserting unrelated scenarios between them. In this way, *Quantronic Heat* can be either a flash fire or a slow burn.



PART ONE

CONCEPTION

The Remote Cognition Lab at the corporate headquarters of Thaler Quantronic Systems has been attacked. Scientists are dead, cutting-edge lab equipment has been destroyed, and Dr Morgan Hart is missing.

OPERATIONAL SUMMARY

The player characters are dispatched to Thaler Quantronic Systems. When they arrive, they find a lab that has been torn apart in an intense firefight. An entire Thaler Corporate Security Unit (CSU) is dead, along with a half dozen scientists and lab technicians in an apparent act of corporate espionage. Dr Morgan Hart is missing, but there is one survivor: Dr Anju Cooper.

Thaler Chief of Security Bhatia is convinced that their major corporate rival, the Yu Jing-backed Shèshou Defence, is behind the attack. He pushes the Bureau Noir agents to follow that line of investigation, which seems ever more likely when it is revealed that Dr Cooper is in fact a spy working for Shèshou.

The Shèshou angle is, however, a red herring. Other evidence points to the involvement of a skilled hacker – BlackThorn – and contact between Dr Hart and a mysterious organisation called March21. As the agents draw nearer to the truth, BlackThorn tricks Bhatia into attacking Shèshou headquarters, covering her own escape from the planet, with the captive Dr Hart.

A March21 intimidation team stays behind on Neoterra, tasked with stopping the agents' investigation. By defeating this team, the agents will gather the necessary evidence to track BlackThorn off-world, placing them on a collision course with March21.

WILDERNESS OF MIRRORS

Ariadna: Thaler Security Chief Bhatia was part of a PanOceanian unit that unjustly abandoned an Ariadnan Expeditionary Corps unit to die on Paradiso. The Ariadnan character is ordered to kill him, discreetly. The player character is supplied with a small autoinjector containing a single dose of a lethal toxin that induces heart failure in six hours. Delivering the toxin without being noticed requires a Stealth test, opposed by Observation.

Haqqislam: Thaler Quantronic Systems are a known target-of-interest for the techno-terrorist organisation Equinox. The Hassassin Society has sworn to destroy Equinox; any corporation that interests them also interests the Hassassins. The player character is ordered to recruit an asset at Thaler, through whatever means necessary.

Nomads: Who knows what technological secrets Thaler might be hiding in their secure datasphere? The player character is ordered to install a backdoor data tunnel into the Thaler Security Server.

PanOceania: Thaler Quantronic Systems supplies equipment to the Neoterran Capitaline Army. It is absolutely crucial that no further security breaches occur. The player character's handlers have reason to believe that representatives of other nations will attempt to steal Thaler trade secrets. Ensure that this does not happen.

Yu Jing: The StateEmpire has an informant embedded in Thaler Quantronic Systems, a woman named Dr Anju Cooper. Ensure that her cover remains intact.

Corporations: The agent is ordered to secure quantronic copies of whatever research was being conducted by Dr Hart's team.

Mercenaries/Submondo: Thaler Quantronic Systems manufacture combat Remotes for the Neoterran Capitaline Army. Any samples of their technology would be invaluable, for reverse engineering or for sale. Steal whatever possible – working sensor or comms arrays, an optical disruption device, control software.

BACKGROUND

THALER AND SHÈSHOU, CORPORATE RIVALS

The city of Santiago de Neoterra, on Neoterra's northern Aquila continent, is a centre for military research. Its heart is the military research labs and test sites owned and operated by the PanOceanian Military Complex, but it is surrounded by satellite districts where private military companies develop and test new technologies, hoping for lucrative military contracts.

One such district is Lampa, consisting of a dozen intricately connected blocks nestled up against the military quarter. The district is a mixture of corporate buildings – usually owned by private military contractors – and residential towers, in a flamboyant riot of styles. At night, the district is lit by a beautiful fleet of floating lamps. They drift between towers and bridges on random paths, carefully overseen by ALEPH.

This scenario concerns two corporations headquartered in Lampa: Thaler Quantronic Systems and Shèshou Defence. Both companies specialise in Remote software design, including the specialised control systems being developed by Dr Hart's team. They have been rivals for a long time, bidding

on the same military contracts, locked in corporate battle.

This long history of conflict has left a great deal of bad blood between the two companies. Thaler Quantronic Systems accused Shèshou of being a puppet of the Yu Jing State Empire, hoping to sabotage their bids for PanOceanian military contracts. Shèshou Defence have publicly accused Thaler of stealing trade secrets. Although neither accusation has been proven, both have a kernel of truth.

THE RAID ON THALER QUANTRONIC SYSTEMS

Four days ago, Yelena “BlackThorn” Ng and her March 21 strike team broke into Dr Hart’s apartment, on the 207th floor of the prestigious Mosaic Tower residential building. Dr Hart wasn’t home and they settled in to wait for him to return.

Three days later, Dr Hart still hadn’t come home. He was, in fact, sleeping in executive rooms at Thaler HQ, in the middle of a project crunch. With the clock ticking on their transport out of the Neoterra system, BlackThorn decided to attempt a riskier operation there.

Just hours ago, BlackThorn entered the Thaler Quantronic Systems corporate tower alone. A remotely planted work order and stolen quantronic credentials got her past the front desk, and she made her way to the Security Centre. She attacked the guards there, and took control of the Thaler network.

As soon as BlackThorn had control of the network, her assault team flew in on an aeropter and breached the windows of the Remote Cognition Lab with carefully placed d-charges. While they were securing Dr Hart, BlackThorn scrambled the security footage and biometric detectors in the building.

Unfortunately, BlackThorn and her team were unaware the scientists in the Remote Cognition Lab carried personal panic buttons, transmitting on a separate secure network. One of the scientists, Dr Anju Cooper, triggered her button, and a Thaler Corporate Security Unit responded. A firefight broke out before the team could secure Dr Hart’s research, but they escaped with Hart himself, evacuating via aeropter to their hideout at Mosaic Tower.

Before she left, BlackThorn concealed a repeater in the Security Centre, giving her continued access to the Thaler network.

MISSION BRIEFING

The player characters receive a terse message from their Bureau Noir handler:

You are to divert from your present itinerary and report to the HQ of Thaler Quantronic Systems ASAP. Local law enforcement was notified ten minutes ago of a raid on their research laboratories and Bureau Aegis’ Tailwind monitoring program tagged the incident due to Thaler’s military contracts with the Neoterran Capitaline Army. You have been seconded to take over the investigation. Determine if there is Shasvastii threat, prevent the development of any diplomatic incident, and ensure that all military technology has been properly secured. Your contact point at Thaler is Security Chief Harbin Singh Bhatia.

ARRIVAL AT THALER HQ

As the player characters arrive at Thaler HQ, read or summarize the following:

Thaler HQ lies in the centre of Santiago, Neoterra’s military research and development capital. The glass tower twists as it rises, an AR overlay projecting a flood of shimmering blue numbers cascading down every surface. A section of glass has been blasted out, ten stories above ground level. Nervous security personnel patrol the perimeter, studiously watching every angle. Some carry weapons, while others manipulate AR information overlays.

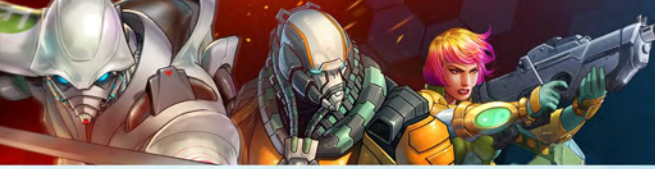
Security Chief Bhatia: Their Thaler contact meets them in the lobby (which is also swarming with Thaler security personnel). After a terse introduction, he escorts them up to the crime scene, efficiently explaining the situation as they walk:

- The target was the Remote Cognition Lab. Entrance and exit appear to have been made via the shattered window ten stories above ground level.
- Six heavily armed CSU operatives are dead, along with four scientists. Dr Morgan Hart, the lab head, is missing.
- There is one survivor: Dr Anju Cooper. She is being treated for minor injuries in a break room down the corridor from the Remote Cognition Lab.
- The Security Centre was also attacked, with two dead and one severely injured CSU.
- Bhatia will mention his suspicion that Shèshou Defence is responsible for the attack.

TRADE SECRETS

Security Chief Bhatia will assist the agents with their investigation, to the best of his ability. He won’t, however, give them free rein of Thaler HQ – he takes his job guarding the company’s trade secrets very seriously. Each PC will be assigned an escort, an armed Corporate Security Unit trooper who follows them at all times. This officer is observant, but unable to make any decisions of consequence without approval from Bhatia.

Here are some names you can use for these CSU troopers: Raza, Turner, Peña, Valencia, Brown, Patel. Use CSU Trooper stats (*Infinity Corebook*, p. 427).



DR MORGAN HART

The purpose of the March 21 raid on Thaler was to kidnap Dr Hart. He heads up the research team at the Remote Cognition Lab, and is a recognised expert in pseudo-AI development. He is a good scientist, well-regarded by his co-workers, and trusted by Thaler.

Although Dr Hart is the focus of this scenario, he will not make an appearance until *Part Three: Birth Pangs*, p. 34. BlackThorn will sneak him off-planet before the PCs can catch up with her (see *Scene 5: Shèshou Defence*, p. 9).

TRACKING THE AEROPTER

The area around Santiago is strewn with cameras. An Analysis (D1) test can be used to track the aeropter using aerial Remotes, public access terminals, building foyers, and even personal recordings uploaded to Maya. The trail goes dead on the far side of the Lampa district near the Shèshou Defence HQ. (BlackThorn hacked the local cameras and destroyed the feeds.) If 1 Momentum is spent, the trail can be picked up on the far side of BlackThorn's "dead zone" and traced to the Sanhattan District before entering another dead zone and vanishing entirely. (Many people at Thaler might recognise that as the neighbourhood where Dr Hart lived.) If 3 Momentum are spent or with some unusual effort (like obtaining military satellite footage of the area), an image of the aeropter docking at the Mosaic Tower (*Scene 6: Mosaic Tower*) can be found.

SECURITY CHIEF HARBIN SINGH BHATIA

APPEARANCE

A tall Punjabi man with a closely cropped beard flecked with grey. Wears a royal blue turban and a black suit with gold buttons that hints at a military uniform.

ROLEPLAYING

- Bhatia is a man of action, continually pushing the player characters for answers, the next step, progress. He reacts before he thinks.
- He always stands ramrod straight, not quite at attention.
- He responds well to direct instructions.

BACKGROUND

Harbin Singh Bhatia served two tours in the PanOceanian Fusiliers. It was a formative experience for him – he was a good soldier, popular, and earmarked for promotion up the ranks. At the end of his second tour, however, he resigned and settled on Neoterra to start a family. To his officers and platoon-mates, this felt abrupt, but Bhatia always knew what he wanted.

Given his disposition and training, it is no surprise that he rapidly rose through the ranks of Thaler Corporate Security. He is efficient and loyal, well-liked by his staff, who call him Lieutenant. His one blind spot is Yu Jing – he thinks it is inappropriate that StateEmpire corporations are allowed to set up on Neoterra. This opinion never explodes into outright hatred, but influences Bhatia's actions more than he realises.

KEY INFO

Bhatia is convinced that Thaler's corporate rival, the Yu Jing-backed Shèshou Defence is responsible for the attack. He won't be irrational about it, but will attempt to guide the player characters in that direction. He will latch on to any clue pointing that way.

STATS

CSU Elite (*Infinity Corebook*, p. 427)

SCENE 1: REMOTE COGNITION LAB

Chief Bhatia has the lab cordoned off, with two CSUs guarding the door.

The Remote Cognition Lab is a scene of carnage. The floor-to-ceiling windows looking out on Santiago have been blown inwards, showering the room in glass. Walls and desks are riddled with

bullet holes, sophisticated quantronic interfaces shattered and strewn everywhere. A large, partially shredded mass of machinery was once suspended from the ceiling by four heavy cables, but now dangles awkwardly on only two. The lab is littered with bodies, some in body armour and grasping guns, others obviously scientists in dishevelled clothing.

Bodies: There are six dead CSU agents and four dead scientists. Two of the CSU agents were shot and killed in the hallway just outside the lab and have been dragged inside. If the names of the scientists are compared those working in his lab, two are missing: Dr Morgan Hart (who was taken) and Dr Anju Cooper (who is in a break room down the corridor being treated, see *Scene 4: Interviewing Cooper*).

Dronbot: The scientists were apparently working on a PanOceanian dronbot, a combat Remote stripped of its weaponry and partially disassembled in the centre of the room. Fibre optic cables snake from its carapace into complicated-looking quantronic terminals and other boxes of unknown purpose. It too is riddled with bullets.

Security Cameras: There are multiple security cameras discreetly positioned throughout the room. Some have been destroyed by bullets, but others are intact. See *Scene 2: Thaler Security Centre* for accessing the data.

Ballistics: A Ballistics (D1) test can identify that the assault team used Yu Jing Combi Rifles (Yungang Xing Type 4.2) with custom-made silencers and light grenade launchers (which were used to fire smoke grenades).

SCENE 2: THALER SECURITY CENTRE

The Thaler Security Centre is a hive of activity. A section of the hallway containing the bodies of two Thaler CSUs has been cordoned off. Two new CSUs stand guard on the door.

Inside the Centre, medics are attending to a third CSU agent – Mauricio Sousa – who was shot during the attack. Two other security officers, Quintero and Soto, are scouring the current security footage to make sure nobody suspicious is left in the building. A third, a bulky Māori woman named Maahu, is wrestling with the footage of the raid.

The room is much deeper than it is wide. A handful of paces inside the door is a bank of physical screens. They relay visuals from the cameras, but

also streams of data from the other sensors. The Thaler officers monitoring security are assisted by a suite of pseudo-AI agents that constantly monitor movements throughout the building. Behind the screens are banks of quantronic storage, in which the data from the security systems is stored.

Security Door: The door requires a keycard, a passcode, and biometric verification. A Hacking (D1) test to analyse the door will indicate that the passcode was bypassed with a very sophisticated infowar attack. (BlackThorn had access to a keycard and biometric data from one of the guards in the hall.)

Mauricio Sousa: Mauricio was on duty monitoring the security feeds. He heard two gunshots outside in the hall and turned around just in time to get shot as the door opened. He can describe his attacker: A short woman in a skin-tight black jumpsuit. (This was BlackThorn.) He doesn't know how she managed to get the door open.

Security Footage: Reviewing the footage from the raid shows the entire sequence of events except that:

- The facial features and biometric signatures (gait analysis, bio-electric patterns, retinal scans) – anything that could be used to identify the perpetrators – has been deliberately distorted in order to render it useless.
- No trace of whoever attacked the Security Centre can be found. The footage is still there, but the perpetrator is simply... not present. It's as if an invisible entity carried the whole thing out.
- **Analysis (D2):** The character can partially reverse some of the damage to the footage. This gives them a clear view of Stanley Clayton's face, which (with the proper research) can be used to

identify him as a known member of Equinox (and possibly even March21 if Momentum is spent on the research test). Spending 1 Momentum on the Analysis test can also pick up a reflection of BlackThorn's face – too distorted for identification, but enough to confirm Mauricio's description.

BlackThorn's Repeater: BlackThorn has hidden a repeater (Firewall 12, Security 1) in the Security Centre, allowing her to continue accessing the Thaler security network and monitor the investigation into the attack. Spotting the repeater requires a Daunting (D3) Observation test unless the PCs are specifically sweeping the room for it (or for unusual signals), in which case the test is merely Challenging (D2). See *Scene 3: BlackThorn's Network*.

SCENE 3: BLACKTHORN'S NETWORK

The repeater BlackThorn installed in the Thaler Security Centre allows her to access the Thaler Security Server. While she was onsite, she created a superuser account granting her authentication on Thaler's systems.

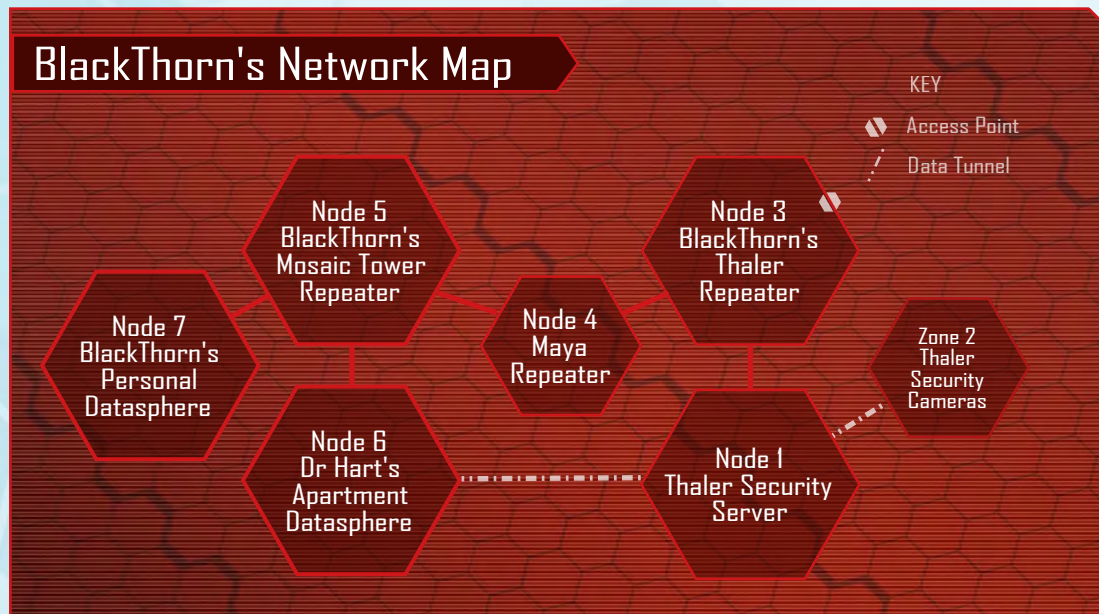
Node 1 – Thaler Security Server: This is the central node of the Thaler network, usually accessible only from inside Thaler HQ.

- **Commercial HighSec:** +2  Interference Soak to authenticated users.
- **Hidden Data Tunnel:** Observation (D3) to detect this hidden data tunnel installed by BlackThorn. If her hacked superuser account is deleted, she can use this data tunnel to access the Security

BLACKTHORN ATTACKS

At some point during the scenario (possibly multiple times), BlackThorn will attack the PCs through her repeaters. Her first attack most likely takes place when the PCs enter the Thaler Security Centre, and her goal is to tag one or more of the PCs as a Breach Effect so that she can keep tabs on them. If it becomes clear that they are a threat, she will launch another attack. (This may involve having one of the March21 team covertly bring a repeater within range of the team.)

BlackThorn's Network Map





Server again. The data tunnel is connected to Node 5 – BlackThorn's Mosaic Tower Repeater.

- **Secured Zone:** Firewall 5

Node 2 – Thaler Security Cameras: All of the security cameras in Thaler HQ are linked to the Thaler Security Server.

- **Commercial HighSec:** +2 Interference Soak to authenticated users.

Node 3 – BlackThorn's Thaler Repeater Access: This zone represents the Maya connection BlackThorn is using to access the Repeater. (The Repeater is physically located in *Scene 2: Thaler Security Centre*.)

- **Data Flux Camouflage:** Observation (D2) test to see the repeater's zone. The connection can also be seen if the Repeater is suborned or disabled with a Breach Effect.

Node 4 – Maya Relays: BlackThorn has disguised the connection between her repeaters by bouncing it through multiple Maya nodes. It requires an Analysis (D2) test to successfully track the connections, revealing the node on the other end.

Node 5 – BlackThorn's Mosaic Tower Repeater: This zone is occupied by the repeater BlackThorn is using to access the quantronic systems in Dr Hart's apartment (see *Scene 6: Mosaic Tower*). If the repeater is suborned or disabled with a Breach Effect, its location in Dr Hart's apartment can be determined.

- **IC-2 Deadfall:** Protecting the data tunnel to and from Node 1 – Thaler Security Server.

Node 6 – Dr Hart's Apartment Datasphere: Dr Hart's quantronic tower is cutting-edge. Mostly it duplicates work files found on the Thaler mainframe so that Dr Hart can work locally.

- **Analysis (D0):** Identifies the datasphere as belonging to Dr Hart's apartment. 1 Momentum will automatically provide the address.
- **Communication Logs:** An Analysis (D2) test of the data on the server will locate, decrypt, and highlight a series of communiqués from an organisation called March21 and Dr Hart. They express interest in Hart's published research into unique data packet structures for mimicking human cognition. They also contain job offers that are short on details but long on financial enticement. Dr Hart replied only twice – once after the first message, saying he wasn't interested, and then again after another dozen messages demanding the March21 stop contacting him.

Node 7 – BlackThorn's Personal Datasphere: Within the quantronic system map, this personal datasphere is where BlackThorn is located. If intruders make it this far, BlackThorn will initiate a shutdown, killing the connection.

- **IC-2 Crybaby** (*Infinity Corebook*, p. 371): Notifies BlackThorn.
- **Data Camouflage:** Observation (D2) test to detect this zone.
- **Advanced HighSec:** +3 Interference Soak to authenticated users.

SCENE 4: INTERVIEWING COOPER

Dr Anju Cooper was the sole survivor of the raid on the Remote Cognition Lab. By the time the player characters arrive, she has been moved down the corridor to a plush break room, where she is being seen to by Thaler staff medics.

DR ANJU COOPER

APPEARANCE

A small Indian woman in a lab coat with an assortment of burn marks at its cuffs. Her hair is shoulder-length, with a stripe of green dyed into the fringe.

ROLEPLAYING

- Cooper is extremely nervous – loud noises and sudden movements cause her to jump. This is part a stress reaction to the raid, part fear that she'll be discovered.
- Her right leg bounces endlessly.
- If she is exposed as a spy for Shèshou and the Yu Jing StateEmpire, she will oscillate between fear and sadness.

BACKGROUND

Anju Cooper was born into affluence on Neoterra. Her mother is a trader in financial instruments, and her father a propulsion engineer. Anju obtained an advanced degree in quantronic systems from Manaheim University on Concilium, and was personally recruited by Dr Hart as soon as she graduated.

On a wanderjahr between finishing her studies and starting work at Thaler, she fell in love with an agent of the Yǎnjīng, the Yu Jing intelligence agency. He used her affection to recruit her as a spy, sharing Thaler's secrets with a contact at Shèshou Defence. Cooper is smart – she knows she was manipulated. It's a thought that fills her with sadness. Nevertheless, without ever quite understanding why, she continues to funnel information to her handler.

In her heart of hearts, Cooper is looking for an excuse to confess her secret. She is also intensely loyal to Dr Hart – she considers him a good man, and has nearly told him everything on a few

occasions. This combination of factors presents an opportunity: if she thinks that confessing will help Dr Hart, she will do so. In particular, she's adamant that Shèshou had nothing to do with the raid.

KEY INFO

- She was underneath a desk, tinkering with a temperamental science-grade quantronic processor when the attackers blew out the window. She activated her security alert and remained hidden.
- After the raid began, but before Thaler CSUs arrived on the scene, Cooper overheard one of the attackers say to another: "We wasted all that time staking out his house, and the bastard was sleeping here all along." She assumes, correctly, that they were referring to Dr Hart.
- She heard a female voice arrive later, after the assault, as the attackers were leaving. She also saw an aeropter flying away when she crawled out from under the desk.
- On a recent visit to Dr Hart's apartment, he asked her if she had received any emails from an organisation called March21. She had not, and he told her it wasn't important, but she distinctly remembered that he seemed troubled by it.
- Metanoia Effect: Cooper is a Shèshou Defence spy. She has been funnelling information on the Remote Cognition Lab's research to her contact at Shèshou, Security Officer Chen Chi Shing.

STATS

Scholar (*Infinity Corebook*, p. 454), Willpower 8, Resolve 8

SCENE 5: SHÈSHOU DEFENCE

Any number of leads (or Bhatia's paranoia) may lead the PCs to Shèshou Defence. With their Bureau Noir credentials they should be able to gain an appointment with anyone they choose to speak with (CEO Hou Liuxian, Security Officer Chen Chi Shing, etc.). Questions are answered politely, but any accusations they make are fiercely denied (even if backed up with evidence, such as Cooper's testimony).

Before any such conversation can get very far, however, all of Shèshou's quantronic systems go offline and the power cuts out. (If the PCs were communicating with Shèshou personnel remotely, this will cause their connection to be abruptly cut off.)

ASSAULT ON SHESHOU TOWER

In order to create a distraction, BlackThorn hacks into Shèshou Defence and installs a virus to bring

down their system. She then delivers a message to Security Chief Bhatia:

You're not wrong about the Jadies. They need to be taken down a peg. I've opened a hole in Shèshou security for you. Do the right thing.

— A Concerned Citizen

The message includes a countdown to the moment when BlackThorn's virus activates.

BHATIA'S STRIKE TEAM

BlackThorn's message is all Bhatia needs: he immediately assembles a squad of nine Thaler security officers (acting as three fireteams of CSU Troopers, *Infinity Corebook*, p. 427), loads them up into three transports, and leads them across town on a retaliatory strike. They are stripped of any identifying corporate logos and fire only stun ammunition (they are not here for murder).

Bhatia himself is disguised, but can be identified with an Observation (D1) test. His goal is to send a message: He wants to deal some property damage and then pull out.

FIGHTING IN THE LOBBY

The conflict begins in the lobby of Shèshou Tower, and very likely spills out into the street.

The foyer of Shèshou Tower is in chaos. The front doors have been smashed, spraying glass across the marble floors. Smoke grenades hiss and fizz; people dash back and forth through the haze. Bullets ricochet off marble pillars, and the statue of a powered armour-wearing archer in the middle of the room. You can hear voices shouting in Chinese over the noise – it's the Shèshou security guards, trying to figure out what's happening.

Shèshou Security: BlackThorn's virus has brought down the Shèshou security network, and so Shèshou CSUs begin the conflict in disarray. There are four guards (CSU Trooper, *Infinity Corebook*, p. 427) in the lobby, but additional reinforcements may arrive as appropriate.

WRAPPING UP

After inflicting property damage (destroying windows, blowing up decorative statues in the lobby, disabling the building's elevators, etc.), Bhatia will order his team to withdraw, if he can, before Shèshou security can fully respond. If they are delayed due to the actions of the PCs, then it's possible that local law enforcement (Police Trooper, *Infinity Corebook*, p. 449) may arrive on the scene and add additional complications.

PLAYTEST TIP

BHATIA REACTS

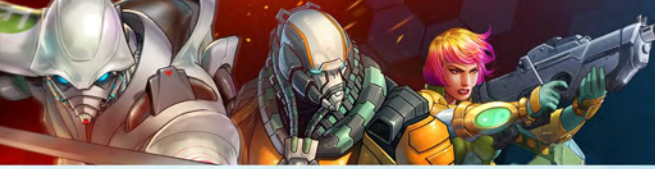
This scene is best conducted with Security Chief Bhatia in the room. If Cooper's Shèshou Defence allegiance is revealed, he will consider his suspicions of the raid confirmed and begin interjecting himself into the interrogation, quizzing Cooper aggressively about what she has done and demanding that the PCs take immediate action against Shèshou.

ALERT FROM SHESHOU TOWER

If the PCs don't investigate Shèshou, Bhatia still mounts his assault. In this case, the PCs receive notification that another local defence contractor is being hit by an assault team.

MINOR ENCOUNTER: CHEN CHI SHING

After the assault is resolved, the PCs may be able to confront Chen Chi Shing (Information Broker, *Infinity Corebook*, p. 440) with Anju Cooper's testimony. It requires a Metanoia Effect for him to admit his involvement, and it will quickly become apparent that he has no feelings for Dr Cooper whatsoever.



TRACING BLACKTHORN'S MESSAGE

Tracing BlackThorn's message is a Challenging (D2) Analysis test. It will lead back to Node 5 in *Scene 3: BlackThorn's Network*.

PLAYTEST TIP STUCK IN THE MIDDLE

The fighting in this scene is primarily between Thaler and Shèshou. It's up to the PCs to decide if they want to intervene and, if so, on which side. They may also decide to simply remain on the sideline as observers. In either case, you can complicate their lives by putting civilians and bystanders at risk.

APARTMENT HISTORY

Dr Hart hasn't been home in some time. He has been sleeping in executive rooms at Thaler HQ, during the push to finish his latest Remote control software in time for it to be presented to Neoterran Capitaline Army officers. During that time, cleaning staff employed by Thaler have dutifully kept his apartment spotless.

MINOR ENCOUNTER: BHATIA REPENTS?

Although it isn't directly relevant to the remainder of the scenario, after the debacle at Shèshou Tower the player characters can take the opportunity to demand an explanation from Bhatia. He's initially defiant, especially if he thinks Bureau Noir haven't been doing their job. Depending on how the players handle the exchange, they could turn Bhatia into an enemy, or a repentant ally eager to assist however he can.

SCENE 6: MOSAIC TOWER

Dr Hart's apartment is located on the 207th floor of the exclusive Mosaic Tower in the Lampa district, bordering a pleasant park with a small lake. The façade of this residential tower incorporates a mosaic made of rare stone imported at astronomical expense from the city of Punta Norte on Acontecimiento. Above the hundredth floor, the tower consists only of exclusive apartments. The building aims for an old-fashioned Western European feel: plush carpets, dark wooden panels, and gleaming fixtures.

MARCH21 INTIMIDATION TEAM

The March21 squad have been holed up in the apartment for three days, originally waiting for Dr Hart to return and now using it as a base of operations to monitor the situation and act as a quick response team until BlackThorn has safely extracted Dr Hart from the planet. (Which BlackThorn is, in fact, already in the process of doing. She and Dr Hart are already off-planet and heading for a wormhole.)

MARCH21 ROSTER

ENCOUNTER	LOCATION
1 Foot Soldier	Area 2
2 Foot Soldiers (sleeping)	Area 4
1 Foot Soldier	Area 5
2 Foot Soldiers (sniper)	Area 6
Stanley Clayton	Area 7

TACTICS

If they become aware of the approach of the player characters, the foot soldiers will wake their sleeping comrades and set up an ambush at whatever access point they expect the PCs to use. If the breach is coming from a direction other than the hallway, this may include setting up additional shock mines (see Area 2).

Stanley: When the attack begins, Stanley will give orders to his men, but then move as quickly as possible to Area 5. Once there, he will use an override code to cause BlackThorn's local repeaters to self-destruct (Nodes 3 and 5 in *Scene 3: BlackThorn's Network*). He will then spend an additional three rounds destroying all of the local data (see Area 5).

If Stanley can't make it to Area 5, he'll order one of the foot soldiers to do the work instead. But they require one extra round to destroy the repeaters and take an extra round after that before they begin deleting data.

Stanley is fanatically loyal to the March21 cause and will do anything in his power to stop any of his men from being captured. This includes executing them if they're rendered unconscious or too injured to flee.

QUESTIONING THE INTIMIDATION TEAM

The foot soldiers are low-level March21 operatives. If captured, they can be interrogated in detail about the operation on Neoterra. They can also identify and give a physical description of BlackThorn. They know nothing of March21's grander plans (not even the specific reasons for kidnapping Dr Hart).

Stanley Clayton is a fanatic and far more difficult to interrogate (Intransigence 3). He knows that BlackThorn is John's right hand, that Dr Hart was kidnapped for his expertise in pseudo-AI development, and that March21 seeks to save mankind from itself by freeing artificial intelligence to act unfettered. (His understanding is that they hope to free ALEPH from Bureau Toth's control.)

DR HART'S APARTMENT

The apartment is officially owned by Thaler Quantronic Systems. Thaler CSUs have the proximity key and passwords required for access.

Area 1 – Entrance: The front door has an AR projection of an old-fashioned, Victorian-style doorknocker. If it's used, everyone inside the apartment will be alerted. In addition, the entrance is protected by multiple security measures.

- **Proximity Key:** This can be disabled with a Hacking or Thievery (D1) test.
- **Thaler Alarm System:** The alarm has been suborned by BlackThorn. If the codes are used or it is otherwise triggered, the signal is sent to Stanley instead. This can also be disabled with a Hacking or Thievery (D1) test.
- **Security Camera:** A recent, concealed installation above the door. Observation (D1) to spot it and Hacking (D1) to disable it. The feed is monitored by the foot soldier in Area 5.

Area 2 – Lobby: Several pieces of animated, virtual sculpture (visible only in augmented reality) stud the lobby of the apartment.

- **Booby Trap:** The lobby is booby-trapped with two shock mines set to detonate on proximity triggers. The mines can be detected with an Observation (D1) test.

Shock Mine: TN 12 on attack roll, 2+5  damage, Biotech, Comms, Disposable, Grievous, Indiscriminate (Close), Unsubtle

Area 3 – Living Room: The outside wall of the living room consists entirely of floor-to-ceiling tinted windows. They've been darkened to the point where no one can see in from outside (or vice versa).

Area 4 – Bedrooms: One of the bedrooms has a bed of smart-matter which extrudes from the wall. The other has a sunken bed which can be raised or lowered out of the floor to the height desired. The foot soldiers have been sleeping on a rotating schedule in these rooms.

Area 5 – Computer Room: This small room is filled with computing equipment. It includes both a quantronic tower belonging to Dr Hart and also hacking and monitoring equipment installed by BlackThorn (including her repeater, see *Scene 3: BlackThorn's Network*). If the systems are analysed, the following pieces of data can be found:

- Samples of custom code identify their creator by her hacker alias of "BlackThorn".
- The security camera footage from the entrance of the apartment shows the comings and goings of the intimidation team, including BlackThorn.
- Internal communications allow the PCs to recreate the team's plan: to kidnap Dr Hart and evacuate him from Neoterra. It will also be clear that only BlackThorn knew the details of the evac plan.
- The names March21, BlackThorn, and John.

Area 6 – Balcony: The balcony wraps around almost the entire exterior of the apartment. A small observation and sniper's nest has been constructed on the balcony just outside the dining area.

Area 7 – Master Bedroom: Stanley has been staying in this room. The decoration is surprisingly austere: Plain white bedclothes. White walls. Simple side tables and chairs, also of pure white. (Dr Hart liked having a pure physical environment in order to enhance the custom AR work environments he created for himself.)

- **Booby Trap:** A shock mine has been installed on the door to the balcony. The mine can be detected easily from the inside, but requires an Observation (D2) to notice from the balcony.

Area 8 – Master Bathroom: Five additional shock mines have been stacked in the bathtub. (They are not activated; they're just being stored here.)

NEMESIS

STANLEY CLAYTON

ATTRIBUTES

AGI	AWA	BRW	COO	INT	PER	WIL
9	12	10	9	10	8	12

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	+3	3	Movement	+2	–	Social	–	–
Fortitude	+4	2	Senses	+2	2	Technical	+2	–

DEFENCES

Firewall	12	Resolve	16	Vigour	14
Security	1	Morale	2	Armour	2

ATTACKS

- **Combi Rifle:** Range C/M, 1+5  damage, Burst 2, Expert, Hackable, Vicious 1
- **Assault Pistol:** Range C, 1+3  damage, Burst 3, Close Quarters, Salvo (Spread 2), Vicious 1
- **Smoke Grenades:** Area (Close), Hackable, Smoke 2, Thrown, Unsubtle

GEAR: Deflector-2 (+2D to hack March21 equipment), Light Combat Armour, Multispectral Visor 2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Quick Strategy:** As long as Stanley is in the scene, the GM can seize the initiative with two March21 foot soldiers for every 1 Heat spent.
- **Tough It Out (1+ Heat):** For every point of Heat spent, Stanley recovers 3 points to one of his Stress values.

ELITE

MARCH21 FOOT SOLDIER

ATTRIBUTES

AGI	AWA	BRW	COO	INT	PER	WIL
9	10	10	9	8	8	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	+2	1	Movement	+1	–	Social	–	–
Fortitude	+2	1	Senses	+2	1	Technical	+2	–

DEFENCES

Firewall	8	Resolve	9	Vigour	10
Security	1	Morale	2	Armour	2

ATTACKS

- **Combi Rifle:** Range C/M, 1+5  damage, Burst 2, Expert, Hackable, Vicious 1
- **MULTI Sniper Rifle:** Range L, 1+6  damage, Burst 1, Unforgiving 2, Vicious 2 [Only one foot soldier is armed with this weapon]

GEAR: Light Combat Armour, Multispectral Visor 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Double Tap (1 Heat):** Once per turn, if a March21 foot soldier succeeds at a ranged attack, they can spend 1 Heat to immediately make a second attack against the same target. The difficulty of this attack is reduced by one step.
- **Loyal (Up to a Point):** As long as Stanley is alive and fighting, the March21 foot soldiers are loyal to the cause, granting 2 Morale Soak. If Stanley is taken out, or if they witness him executing any of the squad, this Morale Soak disappears.

PLAYTEST TIP

DEPLOYING THE TEAM

Depending on how the scenario plays out, the intimidation team (or some portion of the team) may elect to leave Mosaic Tower and hunt the PCs down elsewhere.

RECOVERING DATA

If Stanley deletes the data, the PCs may still attempt to recover it with an Average (D1) Hacking test. On a success they recover one piece of deleted data, plus one additional piece of information per Momentum spent (see Area 5). If Stanley was stopped before he finished deleting the data, the PCs gain 1 bonus Momentum on this test per round that Stanley left unfinished.

PLAYTEST TIP

TIME PASSES

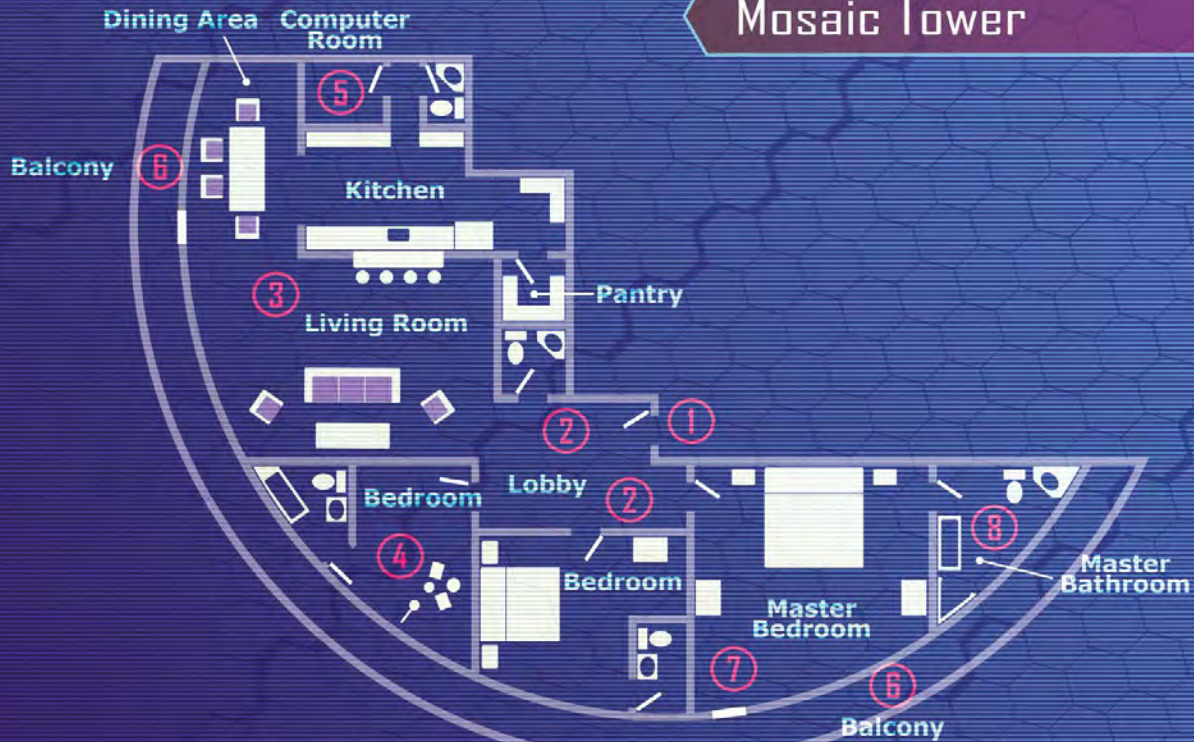
If it takes the PCs more than three days to locate the apartment, BlackThorn will have left the system and the team will have debarked. In this case, they'll find the apartment stripped clean and the burned-out remnants of the computer equipment in Area 5. If they're clever, they might still be able to figure out a way to track the team, in which case a final firefight can play out onboard a transport or at the starport.



Dr Hart's Apartment

Quantronic Heat Part I

Mosaic Tower

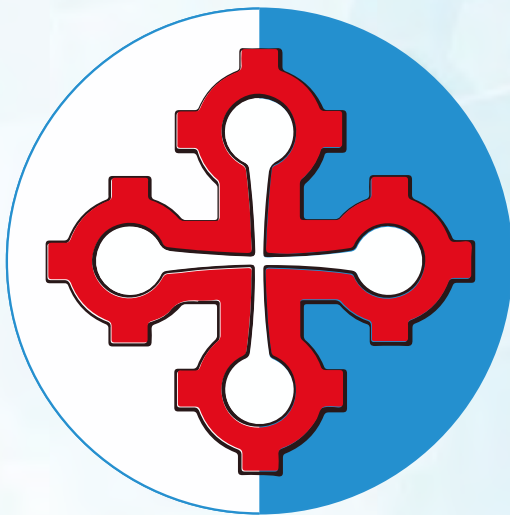


CONCLUSION

Killing or apprehending the March21 squad most likely brings the first part of *Quantronic Heat* to a close. By the time the scenario ends, the PCs will most likely know:

- The organisation they're confronting is known as March21.
- Dr Hart has been kidnapped and taken off Neoterra.
- The leader of the operation was a skilled hacker working under the alias BlackThorn. They may have identifying information for BlackThorn, including biometric data, customised code samples, and/or video images.
- They may be aware that March21 is a splinter group from Equinox and that it has an interest in artificial intelligence.

However, the PCs will not have any immediate leads to follow. Several months will pass before *Part Two: On Your Marks* begins. This time can either be skipped over, or the PCs might pursue other investigations before picking up BlackThorn's broken trail.



PART TWO

ON YOUR MARKS

The player characters are ordered to an O-12 orbital above Saturn. They are met there by Lieutenant Shoal, the local Bureau Noir commanding officer, in an office which looks out over the planet's half-shadowed rings. She is tall and dark-skinned, her head shaved and stitched with scars as if from some sort of invasive brain surgery.

Shoal informs the PCs that an intelligence alert was triggered by several comm channel intercepts in the Yu Jing system containing the keywords "March21" and "BlackThorn". Follow-up by local teams have concluded that the messages originated from the *Clean Sweep*, a command ship for an underground Remote racing circuit. The next system series of the Clean Sweep Circuit is scheduled to take place here in the Sol system.

The PCs have been called in due to the previous experience with the case. They are to be sent into the underground Remote racing circuit. The initial groundwork has been laid and they are to be provided with the resources to set themselves up as a rival team on the circuit, but they will need to complete the work of developing their cover identities (see *Cover Identities: Building a Team*, p. 24). They have two mission objectives:

- The **first mission objective** is to identify the March21 agents on board the *Clean Sweep*, and figure out what they're doing.
- The **second mission objective** is to plant a tracking device – physical, or quantronic – on the March 21 agents or their equipment.
- It is crucial that the agents not reveal themselves to the March21 operatives. Any exposure runs the risk of spooking March21, in which case they will go to ground and the complex and meticulous work that Bureau Noir has done to get this far will go to waste. The player characters must remain unexposed.

BACKGROUND

ILLEGAL REMOTE RACING

Remote racing is a hugely popular sport throughout the Human Sphere with hacker-pilots manoeuvring their Remotes at breakneck speeds through elaborately constructed courses. Legal Remote racing is a tightly controlled spectacle dominated by the Interplanetary League's circuit which tours through

the Human Sphere, bringing with it an army of engineers, administrators, Maya broadcast teams, and wealthy hangers-on.

LEGAL REMOTE RACING TEAMS

- Voltage (Nomads, Hacker-Pilot Olga Stolyarova)
- Lightspeed (PanOceania, Hacker-Pilot Nani Kāne)
- Velocity (Haqqislam, Hacker-Pilot Noor Zoubi)
- Sùdù Kuáng (Speed Maniacs, Yu Jing, Hacker-Pilot Zi Cheng)

Audiences looking for a rawer and more dangerous spectacle follow the underground Remote racing circuits. Here, courses are improvised at the last minute, often taking Remotes through populated or high-traffic areas where accidents are a very real possibility. The pilots use banned biofeedback technology to tie their nervous systems directly to their Remotes, increasing their performance but also placing hacker-pilots in direct danger of nervous system and brain damage.

CLEAN SWEEP CIRCUIT

Most of the illegal racing circuits are small, primarily local affairs. There are a handful of larger and more ambitious circuits, however. One of these is the Clean Sweep Circuit, named after the *Clean Sweep*, the main control ship of the circuit.

The Clean Sweep Circuit is financed almost entirely by the proceeds of organised crime. The *Clean Sweep* travels throughout the Human Sphere, following no fixed pattern in order to avoid the authorities. In each system, generally two to five races will be held (referred to as a **system series**). The full season is made up of multiple races, forming a **circuit**. Awards and prizes are given for individual races, system series, and the full circuit championship.

Only the wealthiest and most dedicated teams can afford to field **circuit racers** (who compete for the entire circuit through multiple systems). It's not unusual for **series racers** or **local racers** to join up for shorter stints.

THE SHIP

The *Clean Sweep* is a moderate-sized freighter, crewed by the people who make the underground Remote racing circuit happen. Ships belonging to the individual racing crews will dock with the *Clean Sweep* and the teams mingle onboard.

GROUNDWORK: INTERCEPTING COMMS

Alternatively, the PCs might stumble across the communications chatter during another operation. They could follow up on the information themselves or simply include it in their mission briefing.

GROUNDWORK: CONSEQUENCES

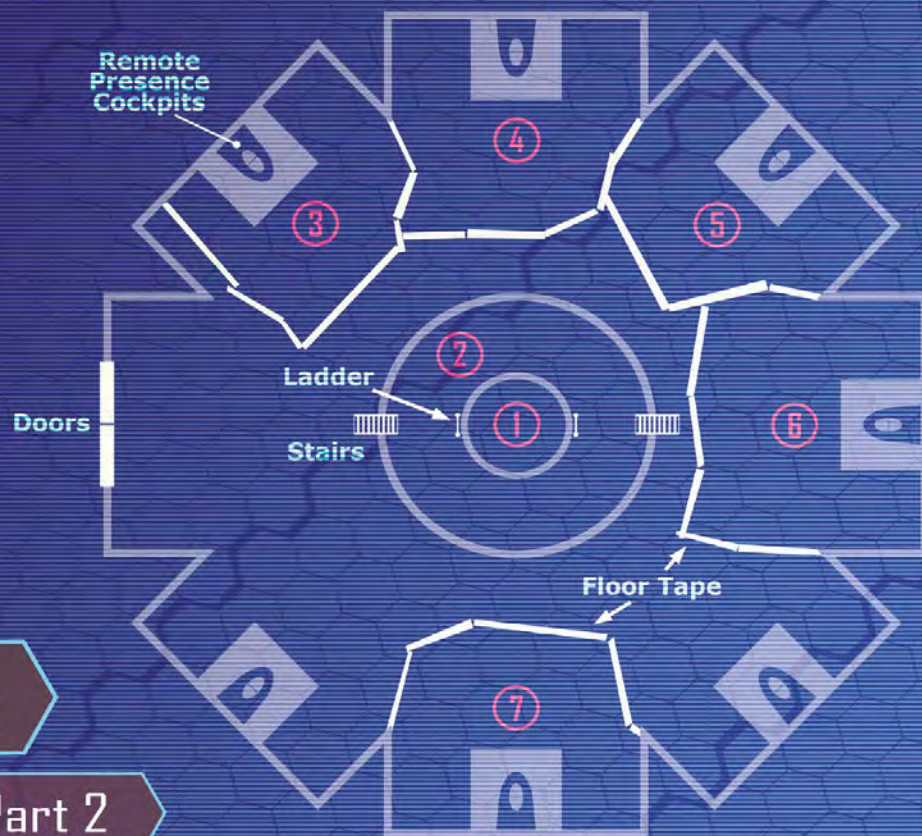
If BlackThorn or her team escaped from *Part One: Conception* with identifying information on the player characters, it may make it much easier for her to recognise them onboard the *Clean Sweep*.

THE AUDIENCE

Through secured and semi-secretive Maya clusters, illegal racing circuits will progressively leak the location of each race, starting with very broad regions and then narrowing into a more specific area until, just a few minutes before (and, in some cases, during) the race, the precise route of the circuit is released. This allows the audience to congregate through rapid flash mobs before law enforcement arrives.

The majority of fans tune in through Arachne broadcasts. Using Arena+ protocols, audience members can jump into POV shots from the Remotes themselves or tune in through any number of remote cameras operated by both fans and the race organisers.

- ① Officials' Platform
- ② Viewing Platform
- ③ PCs' Area
- ④ Heavy Bombers
- ⑤ South Wind
- ⑥ Cold Fusion
- ⑦ Bleeding Edge



Race Deck

Quantronic Heat Part 2

COMMUNICATIONS ONBOARD

To preserve the security and secrecy of the race, all communications onboard the *Clean Sweep* are routed through the ship's systems. During a race, each team will deploy its own Remotes and repeaters, but the encrypted communications are still routed through the ship's systems.

Docking Ports: The *Clean Sweep* has nine docking ports — four along each side connected directly to the eight living quarters reserved for racing teams, and a larger, communal port on the rear of the ship attached to a modest docking bay.

Racer Quarters: Eight separate living areas are each reserved for a separate racing team. Each contains a dozen rooms (including communal bathrooms and a small kitchen) organised around a central quad.

Recreation Core: The core of the ship consists of a communal dining area and recreational areas (including a fitness centre, spa, and bar).

Bridge: Perched in highly secured pod at the front of the *Clean Sweep*, racers are forbidden from entering the bridge for security reasons.

RACE DECK

The race deck is where all the action of the circuit takes place. During a race all of the hacker-pilots and their support teams are located here.

The race deck consists of eight bays arranged in an octagon, each centred on a Remote Presence Cockpit on a raised dais. Five of the eight bays are occupied, strewn with equipment. In the middle of the room, there is a large raised platform for spectators and non-core personnel. It is separated from the outer ring by a simple railing. Right at the centre of the platform, a pillar of pipes and cabling pierces the room. It is ringed with another, higher platform from which race officials can survey everything. It's dark, like a nightclub. Only the racing bays are brightly lit. The whole room looks the battle bridge of a warship in the middle of a long, difficult campaign.

CHAMPIONSHIP LEADERBOARD

In the Clean Sweep Circuit, teams score 3 points for a first place finish, 2 points for second place, and 1 point for third. Winners of each system series and the overall circuit championship are determined by total points. Cold Fusion has won the championship the last three years running.

When the PCs arrive onboard, there have been nine races in the current circuit and the championship leadership board looks like this:

- **Cold Fusion:** 21 points
Starts: 9 | 1st: 5 | 2nd: 2 | 3rd: 2
- **Heavy Bombers:** 18 points
Starts: 8 | 1st: 3 | 2nd: 4 | 3rd: 2
- **Bleeding Edge:** 8 points
Starts: 4 | 1st: 1 | 2nd: 2 | 3rd: 1
- **South Wind:** 3 points
Starts: 9 | 1st: – | 2nd: – | 3rd: 3

System Trophies are also given for each system series. Cold Fusion took the first three trophies of the current series (in Neoterra, Dawn, and Svalarheima), but in an unexpected turn of events the Heavy Bombers won the Yu Jing series by 1 point.

MARCH21: THE PLAN

Since the events of *Part One: Conception*, Dr Hart has been put to work in the March21 stronghold on Svalarheima (see *Part Three: Birth Pangs*). He has managed to construct baby artificial intelligences – simple entities that can theoretically be rapidly grown into full-blown AIs. This last stage, however, carries risks: small errors in the code can propagate exponentially, producing damaged or insane minds. Furthermore, there is always the risk that Dr Hart – a reluctant assistant at best – has deliberately sabotaged the minds he is building.

John has therefore ordered that the baby AIs be stress tested, outside of a lab environment, to see how they learn and grow in challenging circumstances. The illegal Remote racing circuit provided a perfect test environment, and BlackThorn created the Bleeding Edge, a racing team which joined the Clean Sweep Circuit with remotes secretly controlled by the onboard AIs.

Although the Bleeding Edge Remotes struggled in their first few races, through slums and high-rises on Shentang, they have quickly found their feet. At this stage, BlackThorn is testing them for longevity as much as anything, to make sure that they continue to operate under stressful conditions without developing faults. Her plan is to reassess at the end of the Hacker-Pilots and the end of the Sol leg of the circuit, and decide whether the experiment is complete.

OPERATIONAL SUMMARY

The player characters are on a deadline. The Sol Series consists of only two races – the Dustbowl Rally on Mars and the Encke Gap in orbit around Saturn.

PSYOP

On Your Marks is primarily a psyop. Having infiltrated the Clean Sweep Circuit, the player characters will need to manipulate the other members of the circuit to extract the information they want.

PLAYTEST TIP

DRAWING THE SOCIAL NETWORK

Putting a large, poster-size sheet of blank paper in the middle of the table and allowing the players to draw the evolving social network map as they explore it can be very effective.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

BLEEDING EDGE

Amanda Cruz (Comms Tech)
Jessica Tong (aka BlackThorn, Hacker-Pilot)
Joktan Valiente (Fixer)

COLD FUSION

Andrey Popov (Engineer)
Arianne Cook (Press Agent)
Brothers Li (Zhan and Kan, Engineers)
Irina Ko (Face)
Koposov (Hacker)
Masha Ko (Hacker-Pilot)
Niemann (Medic)

HEAVY BOMBERS

Leonidas Falk (Captain, Hacker-Pilot)
Cooper Bray (Soldier)
Clem "Junior" Bray (Soldier)
Juan Heliodoro Lopez (Comms)
Luiz "Patch" Enright (Chief Mechanic)
Samantha "Sammy" Pike (Navigator)
Winston Graves (Med-Tech)

SOUTH WIND

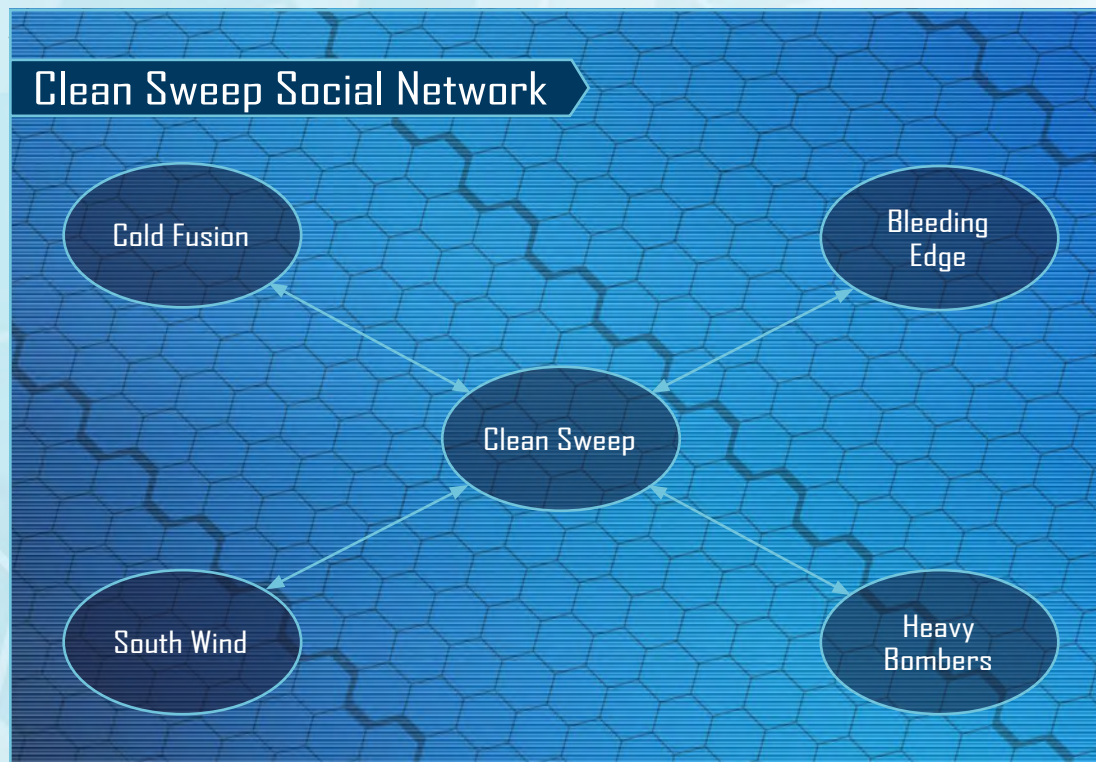
Amin Ershadi (Support)
Corbett "Ace" Halabi (Hacker-Pilot)
Logan Khan (Fixer)
Nyssa Khouri (Medic)
Rosie Nazar-MacLeod (Trainee)
Zahra ("just Zahra", Navigator)

MEDIA

Bailey "The Barnstomer" Chen
Clara Saint Claire

CREW OF THE CLEAN SWEEP

Harmon Beck (Captain)
Celeste Egan (Race Coordinator)



DYADIC LINKS TO EVENTS

Each event is also a social zone.

Every attendee of an event has a dyadic link to that event. You may not want to draw all of these links on your social network map, but you should not forget that the links exist.

PLAYTEST TIP

RUNNING SOCIAL EVENTS

Encourage the PCs to split up. Cutting back and forth between various conversations can be very effective in large social events.

Keep the social groups circulating. You don't need to completely use up everything interesting about a particular NPC in a single interaction.

Reincorporate topics of conversation. Let the PCs discuss the same topic with different people in order to get (and argue) different points of view.

Pay attention to which NPCs "click". Make a point of bringing those NPCs back and developing the PCs' relationships with them.

If things are lagging, cut to a different group of PCs or trigger the next event in the main sequence.

Don't hog the driver's seat. Let the PCs observe things they can choose to react to. (For example, an NPC walking past or overhearing a group talking about a topic of interest.) Ask what they want to do next; if they don't have an answer, trigger the next event.

As shown on the accompanying social network map, the PCs will initially have only the most basic understanding of the situation. Four teams are travelling with the freighter: the icy Bleeding Edge, the mercenary Heavy Bombers, the corsair South Wind, and the chimeric Cold Fusion. The PCs begin the scenario with awareness of the dyadic links between those teams and the *Clean Sweep*, but not access to them.

As the psyop proceeds, however, the PCs will quickly discover that the social network onboard the *Clean Sweep* is a complicated and tangled one. As they discover new dyadic links between the various team members, these can be added to the social network map.

Team Social Zones: The members of each racing team have a dyadic link to their team. Bleeding Edge and Cold Fusion have **Insular 1**. (This includes all of their team members.)

Event Social Zones: Each major event (see below) is a social zone. Any NPC in attendance has a dyadic link to the event.

Other Dyadic Links: Important dyadic links are noted in the character descriptions. New dyadic links are also likely to be created during the scenario (either through the direct actions of the PCs or as a result of the evolving situation onboard).

EVENTS

The spine of this scenario features seven events (as described in Scenes 1 through 7), starting with the PCs coming onboard the *Clean Sweep*, proceeding through the two races of the Sol Series, and ending with the Sol Valediction awards ceremony. Each event has a list of participants, a main event sequence, and topics of conversation.

The **main event sequence** is a linear series of things which occur during the event. Obviously the PCs can also initiate alternative events or end up derailing (or transforming) the events listed.

The **topics of conversation** for an event are what everybody is talking about during the event. Topics of conversation are also likely to pick up elements from the main event sequence as they happen.

These various elements form a toy box. Running the social event largely consists of picking up these toys and putting them into play in different configurations.

- Which NPCs are talking to each other? (Consult the participant list.)
- Who might come over and join a conversation that the PCs are having? (Again, use the list of participants.)
- What are they talking about? (Look at your topics of conversation.)

RACING

This scenario includes two races – *Scene 3: The Dustbowl Rally* and *Scene 5: The Encke Gap*. Each race consists of a route, a list of race events, and a list of deck events. The race events are a list of things which may happen during the race (like one Remote attempting to crash into another). The deck events also take place during the race, but are social events occurring on the race deck.

Each race route consists of a list of the course's legs. Each leg has a Momentum value and is resolved as a complex skill test: When the hacker-pilot has generated enough Momentum with their Pilot or Spacecraft tests to pass the leg, they move onto the next leg of the race. The first hacker-pilot to accrue enough Momentum to move out of the last leg of the race has won the race (with second, third, and subsequent places determined in the same way).

Other members of a race team can assist the hacker-pilot or interfere with the other teams as they see fit.

BREAKING INTO BLEEDING EDGE

Once the player characters have figured out that Bleeding Edge is their target, they'll need to find out exactly what BlackThorn and her crew are up to. They can accomplish this by either hacking the

GENERAL TOPICS OF CONVERSATION

- These topics of conversation are pervasive on the *Clean Sweep* and can be brought up during any of the scenes.
- Captain Falk of the Heavy Bombers is supposedly wanted by Haqqislam for war crimes during his mercenary days.
- The unusual design of the Bleeding Edge Remotes. (The bulbous protuberance on the front of the Remote leads to accusations that they ram other Remotes.)
- The exceptional quality of Cold Fusion's Remote, which is easily the best in the circuit. (Mechanics can't understand how they can afford its components.)
- The small size of the Bleeding Edge team. (Having no medic and only three members is unusual.)
- The secrecy of the Bleeding Edge team: No one has ever been invited onboard their freighter.

WILDERNESS OF MIRRORS

The covert objectives for *Part Two: On Your Marks* are not faction-specific. Instead, they primarily involve various persons of interest that almost any faction could be interested in.

- Leonidas Falk is wanted for war crimes committed during the NeoColonial Wars. Implant a subdermal tracking device so he can be apprehended at a later date.
- One of the racing teams on the *Clean Sweep* is believed to be testing technology for the Nomad Voltage professional remote racing team. Identify which team is responsible and gain proof in order to discredit Voltage.
- A hacker named Bruce Erikson stole blackmail material on an important hypercorp exec and then released it on Maya. He's been tracked to the *Clean Sweep*; identify him and, if possible, tag him for tracking. (See Koposov, p. 18.)

Submondo: The player character is ordered to fix at least one of the races and notify their criminal masters ahead of time who will win, so that they can bet accordingly and reap the profits.

Bleeding Edge network, infiltrating the *Scythian* (their ship), or suborning a member of the team (most likely Amanda Cruz). This last, however, would probably compromise their mission objective. These options are primarily covered in *Scene 8: The Scythian*.

RACING TEAMS

The underground racing circuit currently consists of four teams: Bleeding Edge, the Heavy Bombers, South Wind, and Cold Fusion. The network of relationships, debts, disagreements, and feuds between these four teams forms the core of this scenario: it is the job of the player characters to dig through these relationships to find out what secrets Bleeding Edge is hiding.

BLEEDING EDGE

The Bleeding Edge team has only recently joined the circuit, and they're a bit of a mystery to all of the participants. Jessica Tong and her unusually small crew (consisting of only three members) mostly keep to their own freighter, the *Scythian*.

- Bleeding Edge are the newest team on the underground circuit.
- Their campaign started badly, losing even to South Wind. They've improved rapidly since, competing for first place in the last race.

"Jessica Tong" (Hacker-Pilot): Jessica Tong is, in fact, Yelena "BlackThorn" Ng. See her description on p. 3.

- "Jessica Tong" is a fake identity, which can be determined with a Dire (D3) test when checking out her credentials or background.
- Tong is only seen on the *Clean Sweep* on race days. If she's approached, Joktan will intervene.

- She has formed a calculated friendship with the Cold Fusion hacker-pilot (Masha) through flattery in order to install backdoors into their Remote.
- She knows that Nyssa Khouri is secretly the daughter of a Silk tycoon.
- Bleeding Edge Remotes are not actually under her control. They are piloted by the baby AIs.

Joktan Valiente (Fixer): Wears a collarless black suit. Clean shaven, slicked back black hair, blue eyes, and unblemished skin.

- Member of Equinox. Considers himself a part of the inner circle and dislikes that BlackThorn's rapid rise has caused his influence to wain.
- Disagrees with current mission. He believes AI could be tested in simulated environments, and he is convinced that BlackThorn is enjoying winning the races and is now recklessly endangering their missions by prolonging the testing unnecessarily.

Amanda Cruz (Comms Tech): A muscular woman with a buzz cut, who never looks entirely comfortable in her tech's coveralls.

- Never drinks, but can be caught staring longingly at other people's alcohol.
- Equinox member. Hand-chosen by John and plucked out of an illegal Aristeia! Underground circuit running out of an old mining asteroid in Human Edge. John brought her in, pumped her full of March21 propaganda, wired her with combat augments, and assigned her to BlackThorn.
- Although officially the Bleeding Edge comms tech, BlackThorn handles most of the technical challenges. Cruz's real job is defence — she's a bodyguard to Joktan and BlackThorn.
- Cruz has only limited understanding of Equinox's plan, but knows that the current mission is testing baby AIs in the field.

PLAYTEST TIP

VICTORY NOT ESSENTIAL

Remember that the PCs don't need to win. The actual race may be simply a backdrop to their other plans.

TEAM INTERACTIONS

Interaction between teams on race day is nominally forbidden, but it happens all the time. Teams will attempt to hack their opponents' data streams, distract them with taunts or banter, sometimes even engage in acts of outright sabotage. This kind of sideshow is a key part of the underground circuit's popularity.

RACING TEAM STAT BLOCKS

Use these stats for members of other racing teams unless otherwise specified.

Hacker-Pilot (Elite Pilot, *Infinity Corebook*, p. 445)

Medic (Elite Nurse, *Infinity Corebook*, p. 445)

Mechanic (Tech Support, *Infinity Corebook*, p. 457)

Comms Tech (Mr. Patch, *Infinity Corebook*, p. 438)

Navigator (Trooper Pilot, *Infinity Corebook*, p. 445)

Face (Diplomat, *Infinity Corebook*, p. 429)

Manager/Fixer (Club Owner, *Infinity Corebook*, p. 425)

BLEEDING EDGE SUPPORT CREW

A pair of March21 soldiers — Fortitude Nyoja and Hanuman Kaminski — stay onboard the *Scythian* at all times as guards (see *Scene 8: The Scythian*).



BIOFEEDBACK RIGS

Both Cold Fusion and South Wind use biofeedback rigs which create a custom VR control mode for pilots operating Remotes (see *Infinity Corebook*, p. 355). They're considered the "next best thing to ghosting", completely eliminating the normal complication range penalty for remote control and also acting as an Expert 2 system. However, they achieve this higher level of control by directly linking the user's brain and body to the Remote, requiring 1+2 rounds and a Tech test with a difficulty equal to the number of Effects rolled to establish a connection.

In addition, biofeedback rigs have the Neural quality and, if the Remote suffers damage, the pilot must make a Resistance (D1) test or suffer 1+2 physical damage.

- Cruz recently discovered that Captain Falk's mercenary unit was involved in the union-busting action in Human Edge where Cruz's father was killed. A week ago she took a swing at him and Joktan had to pull her off.
- **Stats:** Heavy Spec Ops, *Infinity Corebook*, p. 455

COLD FUSION

Cold Fusion are the real darlings of the underground circuit. They are spearheaded by a trio of handsome lizard chimerics, exotic and alien, exactly the sort of thing that the underground circuit likes to believe it is. Masha is the Cold Fusion hacker-pilot, her sister Irina its public face, and their brother Andrey its mechanic. They operate out of a heavily modified yacht named the *Qebui*.

Masha, Irina, and Andrey were born in a bioengineered clutch in a *Bakunin* commune. The trio, closer than the rest of their clutch, fell to hustling in low-rent illegal Remote races on *Bakunin*. Masha drove, Andrey handled the engineering, and Irina was the charm. When an unhinged rival racer took exception to a particularly big win for the triplets, the situation devolved into a gunfight in the corridors of *Bakunin*, and the Moderator Corps stepped in.

The siblings served in a penal zero-g maintenance team for a short time, until they were approached by a lawyer secretly representing Voltage, the hugely successful (and legal) Nomad Remote racing team led by Hacker-Pilot Olga Stolyarova. She offered them a deal: reduced sentences and clandestine support to set up an underground Remote racing team, a test-bed for technologies that – if successful – would be used to bring Voltage victory.

Voltage supplies Cold Fusion with money and experimental tech – software interfaces, tactical programs, engines, and so on – incorporating the most successful developments into their own machines. Even an Average (D1) Hacking test of Cold Fusion's financial records will show they're swimming in cash. Far more than their winnings justify. Tracing the money through layers of shell companies is a Daunting (D3) Analysis test, and runs into a dead end at *Tunguska*, the financial capital of the Nomad Nation. Only Masha, Irina, and Andrey are in on the secret.

Andrey Popov (Engineer): Unusually large, especially across the shoulders. He has high-quality but ostentatious eye implants, and a mechanical tail that apparently moves of its own accord.

- Andrey has a criminal record from multiple arrests by the Moderator Corps on *Bakunin*. (His sentence was dramatically reduced for unclear reasons.)

- Andrey considers the safety of his sisters (Irina and Masha) to be his responsibility. He loves them both dearly, and they are his sole blindspot.
- Andrey knows Masha has become very close friends with Jessica Tong. He also knows that Irina is sneaking away to visit someone. He worries that his family is coming apart.
- He knows that there's something "wrong" with the Cold Fusion Remotes. He just can't quite figure out what it is or how to fix it. (This is actually the result of BlackThorn's quantronic backdoor.)
- He has a weak spot for conspiracy theories.

Arianne Cook (Press Agent): So tall she must be augmented, with a shaven head. Constantly watching her visual implants – tracking appointments, ratings, responding to media requests, composing social updates.

Brothers Li (Zhan and Kan, Engineers): Identical twins in four-armed lhosts.

- Washouts from the *Bakunin* Clockmakers, they're always arguing.
- Andrey mostly works as if they're not there.

Irina Ko (Face): A mild lizard chimera. Her skin looks normal until the light catches the gentle sheen of her subdued scales. Her eyes have eyelids and blink normally, but have a snake-like appearance.

- Irina has a criminal record from multiple arrests by the Moderator Corps on *Bakunin*. (Her sentence was dramatically reduced for unclear reasons.)
- Irina is very sick. Her body is rejecting her Silk treatments. Out of desperation, she has gone to Nyssa Khouri for help. The South Wind medic supplies her with a constantly tweaked regime of drugs, which has so far kept most of the symptoms at bay.
- Nevertheless, Irina has begun to wonder if she's dying. And with that fear has come a deep desire to return to *Bakunin*, her home. She hasn't brought any of this up with her siblings – she is convinced that Andrey and Masha are in their element, and wants nothing more than to see them both happy.

Koposov (Hacker): Long, perfectly straight orange hair. Officially, Koposov is the team comms tech, but he also runs defensive hacking for all of the Cold Fusion data.

- "Koposov" is a fake identity, which can be determined with a Challenging (D2) test when checking his credentials or background. Spending 1 Momentum will connect him to "Bruce Erikson", but that's not his real name either. Spending 2 Momentum will identify him as Ell Redmane (*Infinity Corebook*, p. 438).

Spending 3 Momentum will identify Ell Redmane as a Tunguskan Interventor (who's onboard conducting an independent investigation trying to identify BlackThorn for crimes she committed on *Tunguska*).

- Feels he doesn't get the respect he deserves from Andrey, Masha, and Irina.
- Kuposov has ferreted out the secret of his team (that they're supported by Voltage), but hasn't told anyone yet.

Masha Ko (Hacker-Pilot): An extreme lizard chimera. Her skin is richly patterned scales, her eyes the unblinking vertical slits of a snake. She's always wearing her flight suit.

- Masha has a criminal record from multiple arrests by the Moderator Corps on *Bakunin*. (Her sentence was dramatically reduced for unclear reasons.)
- There is a growing bitterness in her. Once convinced that Voltage would call her up, she has come to realise that this will never happen — she is tarnished and will never be able to leave the illegal leagues.
- Masha is also frustrated because her Remote is not responding well. (This is due to the quantronic backdoor BlackThorn has installed on it.) Her flying is growing increasingly reckless as she tries to overcome the problem.
- She has befriended Jessica Tong, the Bleeding Edge hacker-pilot.
- Jessica has told her Nyssa Khouri's secret (that she's secretly the daughter of a Silk tycoon). Masha is trying to figure out if she can use that information, perhaps by bribing Khouri, or maybe turning her in for a reward.

Niemann (Medic): Also lizard chimeric, but no relation, Niemann keeps an eye on Masha's vitals. Aside from occasional tech malfunctions, he's rarely needed, and often bored; the Cold Fusion Remote Presence Cockpit is very new.

HEAVY BOMBERS

The Heavy Bombers are the remnants of a team of mercenaries, veterans of combat throughout the Human Sphere. (They've been known to still take small scale merc contracts when money is tight or the racing circuit is temporarily disrupted.) They operate out of a military transport named the *Tenner*.

- Only three points behind Cold Fusion in the circuit, but have never beaten them in the championship.
- The Heavy Bombers missed a recent race on Neoterra. (The timing coincides with the kidnap of Dr Hart, but this is a red herring; the Bombers were on a corporate security job in Darwin.)

"Captain" Leonidas Falk (Hacker-Pilot): A muscular, dark-skinned man in his fifties, with neon blue swirling tattoos running from his bald head, down his neck, and along both arms.

- Born on *Corregidor* and ran with a *maras* gang in his youth. His skill with Remotes boosted him in a merc outfit.
- Falk figured out that South Wind is dealing drugs to make ends meet and it makes him furious. (A bunch of his friends back in the *maras* were killed by a bad batch of drugs.) He blames their leader, Ace Halabi.

Clem "Junior" Bray (Soldier): A feisty pipsqueak. Her hand is often propped up on a cocked hip. The top of her head is a spiky crop of rainbow-hued hair.

- Like her father, does odd jobs for the team. Trained to fight, but rarely gets a chance to use her skills.
- Junior is considering leaving the team to join a proper mercenary unit.

Cooper Bray (Soldier): The weapons tech in Falk's mercenary unit, Bray acts as a general dogsbody for the Heavy Bombers. Occasionally works on upgrades — additional armour, or defence mechanisms — to the Bomber's Remote.

Juan Heliodoro Lopez (Comms): Deafened, blinded, and scarred in tunnel fighting on a Human Edge asteroid, Lopez relies on implants to see and hear.

- He's figured out that Patch and Ace are lovers.

Luiz "Patch" Enright (Chief Mechanic): Compact and powerfully built, Enright has light scarring around his two obviously bionic eyes. His right arm is patterned with a neon blue tattoo that matches Leonidas Falk's.

- Enright's parents were itinerant maintenance workers in Human Edge. They were killed during the NeoColonial Wars and Enright ended up getting adopted by Falk, who he's tagged along with ever since.
- Enright and Corbett "Ace" Halabi (the South Wind hacker-pilot) have been secretly dating each other for almost a year. (Ace would prefer to declare their relationship, but Enright doesn't want to muddy it with team politics and publicity.)
- He's not sure if his relationship with Ace has anything to do with Falk's recent animosity towards him, but he fears the conflict if it does.

Samantha "Sammy" Pike (Navigator): Tall and thin, with spacer's bones. Sammy is a meticulous planner. She has some Remote Presence experience of her own, and often takes the Bomber Remote on scouting runs through the proposed course.

CLEAN SWEEP RACING REMOTES

BLEEDING EDGE RACERS

The Bleeding Edge racing Remote is small compared with the other Remotes — indeed, it is positively dwarfed by the Heavy Bombers machine. Light, nimble, and fast, its aerodynamic contours and photoreactive chrome finish suit its advanced capabilities perfectly. It does, however, have a particularly bulbous cockpit, ruining its otherwise sleek lines. The contents of this bulbous attachment is a topic of considerable discussion amongst the other team engineers. Speculation currently favours high-power comms equipment, possibly coupled with a discreet jamming device, but wilder theories abound.

BLEEDING EDGE REMOTE

ENCLOSED, AIRCRAFT, HOVER, SPACE

ATTRIBUTES

Scale	Speed	Brawn
0	3	9

DETAILS

Max. Passengers	Impact
0	0+2 (Knockdown)

DEFENCES

Structure	8	Firewall	11
Armour	1	BTS	0

ELITE

BLEEDING EDGE REMOTE

ATTRIBUTES

AGI	AWA	BRW	COO	INT	PER	WIL
10	10	8	11	10 (+1)	6	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	—	Movement	+2	2	Social	—	—
Fortitude	—	—	Senses	+2	2	Technical	+2	2

DEFENCES

Firewall	11	Resolve	8	Vigour	8
Security	—	Morale	—	Armour	1

ATTACKS

- **Slam:** Melee, 0+2 damage, Knockdown

GEAR: Repeater

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Common Special Abilities:** Inured to Disease, Poison, and Vacuum; Superhuman Coordination 1
- **Shenanigans:** When the Bleeding Edge Remote is part of a scene, the GM can spend Heat to trigger static, quantronic interference, or other Infowar attacks at +1 .

COLD FUSION REMOTE

The Cold Fusion Remote looks like it's in a whole other league. Sleek and well cared-for, its dagger-point, refractive violet hull stands out even in a field of hotshots. Noted for its ability to scale vertical surfaces as quickly as it moves on the ground, the Cold Fusion Remote routinely places at or near the top, or dead last, with little in-between. A gambler's worst nightmare, when running smoothly, it's clearly the best machine on the circuit; predicting when that's going to be has proven difficult. Since it's often pushing the edge of its performance envelope, it has proven quite prone to flare-outs, comms failures, and lag, though it also frequently packs unexpected upgrades or surprises that carry the day.

Unbeknownst to the Cold Fusion team, Yelena Ng has installed quantronic backdoors into their Remote and Remote Presence Cockpit. This is introducing a very slight comms lag, which is causing a dip in performance (+2 complication range). It also means that Ng can hijack the Cold Fusion Remote at any point.

COLD FUSION REMOTE

ENCLOSED, AIRCRAFT, HOVER, SPACE

ATTRIBUTES

Scale	Speed	Brawn
1	3	10

DETAILS

Max. Passengers	Impact
0	1+4 (Knockdown)

DEFENCES

Structure	10	Firewall	8
Armour	2	BTS	0

ELITE

COLD FUSION REMOTE

ATTRIBUTES

AGI	AWA	BRW	COO	INT	PER	WIL
10	10	10	12 (+1)	7	8	6

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	+1	1	Movement	+3	2	Social	+1	1
Fortitude	+1	—	Senses	+1	—	Technical	+1	—

DEFENCES

Firewall	7	Resolve	6	Vigour	10
Security	—	Morale	—	Armour	2

ATTACKS

- **Slam:** Melee, 1+4 damage, Knockdown

GEAR: Repeater

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Common Special Abilities:** Inured to Disease, Poison, and Vacuum; Superhuman Coordination 1
- **Versatile:** The Cold Fusion Remote's design is brilliantly adapted to verticality, tight corners, and other hazards; reduce the difficulty of all vehicle terrain tests by 1 (minimum of 0).

CLEAN SWEEP RACING REMOTES

HEAVY BOMBERS REMOTE

Built for ramming, to accommodate the Heavy Bombers' aggressive racing style. Although weaponry is officially forbidden in the underground circuit, collisions between drones are common, and the Heavy Bombers Remote is armoured to take advantage of these close encounters. Falk's racing style is belligerent, looking for any opportunity to smash rival drones out of contention.

At roughly twice the size of the ORC skimmer used by the PCs (p. 23), this custom Remote more strongly resembles a flying APC or armoured cargo transport more than a racing Remote. Reinforced bulkheads, side-mounted heat vents, and more than a few "decorative" spikes make this Remote bad news in a collision.

HEAVY BOMBERS REMOTE

ENCLOSED, AIRCRAFT, HOVER, SPACE

ATTRIBUTES

Scale	Speed	Brawn
2	2	14 (+1)

DETAILS

Max. Passengers	Impact
0	2+6 (Knockdown)

DEFENCES

Structure	15	Firewall	7
Armour	3	BTS	0

ELITE

HEAVY BOMBERS REMOTE

ATTRIBUTES

AGI	AWA	BRW	COO	INT	PER	WIL
10	10	14 (+1)	9	5	5	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	+2	2	Movement	+1	—	Social	—	—
Fortitude	+3	3	Senses	+1	—	Technical	—	—

DEFENCES

Firewall	5	Resolve	10	Vigour	10
Security	—	Morale	—	Armour	3

ATTACKS

- **Slam:** Melee, 2+6 damage, Knockdown

GEAR: Repeater

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Common Special Abilities:** Inured to Disease, Poison, and Vacuum; Superhuman Brawn 1
- **Only Way Out is Through:** The Heavy Bombers Remote reduces the Heat cost to Ram Through terrain by 1 (to a minimum of 1).

SOUTH WIND REMOTE

An old, military surplus Murafeq Remote stripped of its weaponry, South Wind's Remote is not a particularly noteworthy entrant, save for its distinctively ungraceful, jagged appearance.

SOUTH WIND REMOTE

ENCLOSED, AIRCRAFT, HOVER, SPACE

ATTRIBUTES

Scale	Speed	Brawn
0	3	10

DETAILS

Max. Passengers	Impact
0	1+4 (Knockdown)

DEFENCES

Structure	10	Firewall	8
Armour	2	BTS	0

ELITE

SOUTH WIND REMOTE

ATTRIBUTES

AGI	AWA	BRW	COO	INT	PER	WIL
9	10	10	13	8	6	7

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	+1	1	Movement	+2	2	Social	—	—
Fortitude	+1	1	Senses	+1	1	Technical	+1	1

DEFENCES

Firewall	8	Resolve	7	Vigour	10
Security	—	Morale	—	Armour	2

ATTACKS

- **Slam:** Melee, 1+4 damage, Knockdown

GEAR: Repeater

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Common Special Abilities:** Inured to Disease, Poison, and Vacuum; Superhuman Brawn 1
- **Push the Limit:** Khouri's experimental stims allow Ace to push himself, but it's not gentle. When making a Movement test, he may reroll one d20 at the cost of 1 Heat, doubling in cost each time it's used.



SOUTH WIND REPAIRS

South Wind doesn't have a dedicated mechanic on their roster. That role is filled by Khouri and Halabi, working in tandem. Neither is expert, and it shows in the quality of their repairs and maintenance.

Winston Graves (Med-Tech): A grizzled vet from Falk's merc days, with a handsome salt-and-pepper beard. He has no patience for minor medical complaints – "it's not like you've been shot" – and even less for jokes about his name.

- Drinking buddies with Logan Khan from South Wind.

SOUTH WIND

South Wind is a team of Haqqislamite corsairs. Most people assume that the team is led by their hacker-pilot, the dashing Corbett "Ace" Halabi. He is happy to play the role, enjoying the attention. In reality, the team was originally bankrolled by their medic, Nyssa Khouri. She is secretly the daughter of a powerful Silk tycoon called Erdal Bey. South Wind is Khouri's dream for a life away from the clutches of the family Silk trade.

- The team has been having trouble meeting race payments – rent on the *Clean Sweep*, race fees. They're staying afloat, but only just.
- South Wind doesn't have a ship; they berth on the *Clean Sweep*.
- The security cameras around their quarters have been physically broken and a fake, looped feed is transmitted to the *Clean Sweep's* security stations. (Enright, the Heavy Bombers' chief mechanic, did it to help conceal his relationship with Ace.)

Amin Ershadi (Support): Always wears a red scarf tied around his head.

- Amin has been sampling Khouri's nitrocaine. Though he doesn't realise it yet, he's addicted.

Corbett "Ace" Halabi (Hacker-Pilot): Everything one expects in a hacker-pilot: Dashing handsome, a flop of black hair and a regal nose, anachronistic leather jackets and scarves that recall old-fashioned aviators.

- Nyssa Khouri found Halabi just after he had been dropped from his third Remote racing team, bouncing around the minor leagues of Bourak (he had a shocking knack for totalling Remotes).

- In order to stay competitive despite South Wind's out-of-date Remote, Halabi has been taking a cocktail of drugs cooked up by Nyssa Khouri. The post-race crash is bad, with Halabi crashing hard about half an hour after each race.
- Ace is in a secret relationship with Patch Enright, the Heavy Bombers' chief mechanic. He chafes under the secrecy, but Patch prefers to keep it secret. Ace is on the verge of revealing everything to Khouri, however.
- Once or twice, Halabi has caught Irina leaving South Wind quarters after one of her treatments. He assumes that Khouri is having a secret affair with her.

Logan Khan (Fixer): A shabby old corsair, who has seen a great deal of the Human Sphere. He works out deals, haggles fiercely, and makes introductions for South Wind.

- Drinking buddies with Winston Graves from the Heavy Bombers.

Nyssa Khouri (Medic): A quiet woman, who eschews flamboyant clothing in favour of forest-green tunics and headscarves. Her hands are stained a blotchy red.

- "Nyssa Khouri" is a fake identity, which can be determined with a Challenging (D2) test when checking out her credentials or background.
- Nyssa Khouri was born Nisha Hanim, the first daughter of the Haqqislamite Silk tycoon Erdal Bey. She was raised in the family business, given the scientific, technical, and bureaucratic training necessary to one day take over from her father.
- The Remote racing circuit captured her imagination like nothing else, but her father considered it frivolous. Worse, she had no particular knack for piloting Remotes. That wasn't enough to put her off, though. She set about quietly embezzling money from the family corporation, using it to establish a fake identity – Nyssa Khouri – and acquire her pride and joy: a surplus Haqqislamite Murafeq Remote. When finally all of the pieces of her plan were in place, Nisha just slipped away. A year later, South Wind arrived on the *Clean Sweep*.
- To keep the struggling South Wind team competitive, Khouri cooks up illegal drugs (nitrocaine and other tailored highs). Her team sells the drugs to help make ends meet.
- Khouri tries to avoid cameras.
- She talks about racing with wide-eyed enthusiasm.
- Khouri has been providing medical treatments to Irina, a member of Cold Fusion, whose body has begun rejecting her Silk treatments. At Irina's behest, Khouri is keeping this information secret.

Rose Nazar-MacLeod (Trainee): A fierce kid, willing to do just about anything for Khouri. She loves

SOUTH WIND'S RACING COCKTAIL

This potent cocktail is custom-tailored for Ace Halabi by Nyssa Khouri. (Injected, Instant 2, Hour)

Special Effect: The user gains +2 Focus for Observation, Pilot, and Spacecraft tests. Once the effect comes to an end, the user suffers +1 difficulty to all tests until they have slept for eight hours. If anyone other than Halabi uses the custom-tailored drug, they must immediately make a Resistance (D2) test or suffer 2+4  physical damage (and will not benefit from the drug's other special effects).

Addiction 1 (5 doses), Compulsion 2, Withdrawal 2+4  physical damage

UNMODIFIED ORC SKIMMER

The Omnia Research & Creation Corporation's attempt at a manoeuvrable, high-speed reconnaissance Remote never quite caught on with the PanOceanian Military Complex, but the durable, highly customizable unit's ability to transition in and out of atmosphere has made it a favourite of civilian operators, and the unit has found new life as a racing Remote.

Resembling a two-pronged dart, this industrial-strength Remote's bulky, utilitarian construction provides a distinctive silhouette; immediately recognizable to fans of underground racing circuits, where its relative durability provides something of a safety net for new pilots.

ORC SKIMMER

ENCLOSED, AIRCRAFT, HOVER, SPACE

ATTRIBUTES

Scale	Speed	Brawn
1	2	10

DETAILS

Max. Passengers	Impact
0	1+4 (Knockdown)

DEFENCES

Structure	10	Firewall	7
Armour	1	BTS	0

ELITE

ORC SKIMMER REMOTE

ATTRIBUTES

AGI	AWA	BRW	COO	INT	PER	WIL
10	10	10	10	7	7	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	+1	–	Movement	+1	1	Social	+1	1
Fortitude	+2	1	Senses	+1	1	Technical	+1	1

DEFENCES

Firewall	7	Resolve	9	Vigour	10
Security	–	Morale	–	Armour	1

ATTACKS

- **Slam:** Melee, 1+4 damage, Knockdown

GEAR: Repeater

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Common Special Abilities:** Inured to Disease, Poison, and Vacuum
- **Stock Model:** When a Skimmer is controlled by a geist or its native LAI, it gains a Morale and Security Soak of 1

the South Wind Remote deeply, and is trying to learn everything about it – piloting, repair, comms, navigation.

Zahra (“just Zahra”, Navigator): A former merchant pilot, Zahra has had a bad case of the shakes ever since her ship was boarded by pirates. Uses anti-anxiety meds to help her get through race day.

OTHER CHARACTERS

In addition to the racing teams, there are a number of other characters found aboard the *Clean Sweep*.

CREW OF THE CLEAN SWEEP

The *Clean Sweep* has a couple dozen crew members, most of whom are not relevant to this scenario. They dress in sharp, blue-and-white civilian uniforms.

Celeste Egan (Race Coordinator): Celeste is short, impish, and capable of unleashing a tirade of venomous fury. For all intents and purpose, she is the Clean Sweep Circuit, representing the

faceless “managers” who bankroll and profit from it. She enforces the rules, tries to keep the rivalries between teams from boiling over (but only to a certain point; a little temper is good for ratings), and coordinates all race-related activities.

Harmon Beck (Captain): A tall man with salt-and-pepper hair and beard. The wry quirk of humour in his eye and upon his lip hardens to implacable stone when angered. He runs a tight ship, believing that strict discipline is the only way to contain the rowdy, rambunctious spirit of the racing circuit and keep the *Clean Sweep* flying.

MEDIA

A small swarm of correspondents and commentators follow the circuit, of which the two most notable are Bailey “The Barnstormer” Chen and Clara Saint Claire.

Bailey “The Barnstormer” Chen: Chen is the Clean Sweep Circuit announcer, introducing each race and providing colour commentary throughout. He's a goofy, self-aggrandizing fellow with a wreath of thinning, puffy white hair in a halo around his head. He was supposedly banished from Yutang for a variety of highly variable reasons (none of which are true).

HANGERS-ON

A variety of fans, reporters, and other groupies frequently bribe their way on board the *Clean Sweep* to be close to the action. A few names that can be used for these hangers-on: Ricardo Piexoto, Aarush VanderMeer, and Sally Regner.



SAMPLE BACKSTORY

Heavenly Thunder

Backed by an ancient Triad that remained behind in Sol when the rest of the Yu Jingese powers moved to Shentang and Yutang. They're financing a team in an attempt to regain some relevance in interstellar criminal circles.

SAMPLE BACKSTORY

Helicon Heroes

A team of miners from the Helicon asteroid field in Human Edge. When their corporate masters cracked down on a underground racing circuit using re-purposed repair Remotes, the team stole their Remote and skipped out on their contracts.

PLAYTEST TIP MISSING ROLES

If the players are lacking any core competencies – medic, mechanic, hacker-pilot – they will be assigned NPCs by Bureau Noir.

ADDING BIOFEEDBACK

The PCs can also choose to use a biofeedback rig if they wish (see p. 18).

Clara Saint Claire: Razor-straight, platinum blonde hair frames a face of harsh beauty. Saint Claire wears a different *haute couture* dress for each social occasion or racing event. She's an ex-hacker-pilot herself. In addition to conducting ruthless and insightful pre- and post-race interviews, Saint Claire will frequently take her own heavily customised camera Remote out onto the tracks. She fancies herself an investigative reporter and digs for all the best behind-the-scenes gossip.

COVER IDENTITIES: BUILDING A TEAM

Before the mission begins, the player characters will need to develop their cover identities. This will include the backstory of their team, the roles each of them play on the team, and the credentials that will make their cover stick.

BACKSTORY

It may be illegal, but the underground circuit is still a media spectacle. Come up with a rough backstory for the player characters' team. Where did they come from? Why did they join the circuit? Who is financing their entry? What's their style? (Alternatively, one of the sample backstories in the sidebar can be used.)

ROLES

Race teams have certain roles that need to be fulfilled. Decide which of the player characters will handle each role. Relevant skills for each role are indicated in brackets.

Hacker-Pilot (Pilot, Spacecraft, Hacking): The star of any team, the hacker-pilot climbs into the Remote Presence Cockpit and controls the racing Remote directly.

Medic (Medicine): Hacker-pilots are hooked up to a neural feedback device, pushed to the limit both mentally and physically. Tweaks to their in-race drug regime can help them get the best performance out of their machine, as well as protect them from feedback and negative side effects.

Mechanic (Tech): Not only does a racing Remote need constant repair and maintenance, but the Remote Presence Cockpit and other support equipment on the race deck is old and finicky. And then there's sabotage...

In addition to these core roles, teams also sometimes contain the following:

Comms Tech (Analysis, Hacking): The datafeeds from racing Remotes are always under attack. Teams place small jammers on their Remotes to disrupt opponents' signals, and the comms infrastructure on the support ship is shaky. A good support hacker will keep all of the quantronic information flowing freely.

Navigator (Observation): One character can piggy-back on the Remote datafeed, acting as a spotter and navigator for the hacker-pilot. They might notice irregularities on the track, keep an eye on the other racers, or spot weaknesses on opposing Remotes that can be exploited.

Face (Psychology, Persuade): Hacker-pilots are frequently the frontmen and women of their teams, but not always. Sometimes another team member – someone particularly glamorous or charismatic – handles the media responsibilities.

Manager/Fixer (Psychology, Persuade): Everything runs more smoothly when there's someone handling the details. Berth assignments, paying bills, access to resources (including media and admin contacts), are all handled by a good manager.

CREDENTIALS

Once the details are in place, a series of tests will determine the effectiveness of the player characters' efforts. Each player can participate in only one test, either directly or by providing teamwork. Note down the results, and any complications rolled.

Disguises (Stealth): The player characters, including their Remote, will need to look the part. This roll sets the difficulty of any tests to spot inconsistencies in the way the agents or their Remote look.

Quantronic Trail (Hacking): A solid data trail will help throw off any nosy hackers. This roll sets the difficulty of any Hacking investigation into the agents' cover.

Prepping the Remote (Tech): Bureau Noir have procured a basic ORC Skimmer racing Remote; with a bit of time and effort, the agents can improve their machine. This is a Simple (D0) test and each point of Momentum can be spent to:

- Add +1 to the Remote's Speed, Armour, or BTS
- Add +2 to the Remote's Brawn or Firewall
- Add 1+1^N to the Remote's Impact damage

Little Details (Psychology): The agents are trained to resist interrogation, but attention to detail can make all of the difference. This final test involves careful testing of the little details – the result represents a communal pool of Momentum the player characters can use in any psywar scenes.

SCENE 1: WELCOME ABOARD

When the PCs first arrive on the *Clean Sweep* they are greeted by Captain Harmon Beck and Celeste Egan, the race coordinator. After brief introductions, Beck and Egan will answer any questions they have, and then they'll be asked to stow their gear and get down to the race deck to install their equipment. They'll also be invited to the Sol Soirée (*Scene 2*), a meet-and-greet event welcoming the Clean Sweep Circuit to the Sol system.

PARTICIPANTS

When the PCs get to the race deck, they'll find a few other racing team members hanging around.

- Amanda Cruz
- Patch Enright and Juan Heliodoro Lopez, working to fine tune their Remote Presence Cockpit
- Masha Ko and Andrey Popov, arguing good-naturedly over their remote

MAIN EVENT SEQUENCE

Installing Their Equipment: The PCs need to sync the preinstalled Remote Presence Cockpit with their Remote. This requires a Tech (D1) complication test, or a Challenging (D2) test if they're also installing a biofeedback rig or any other advanced equipment. On a failure, the installation takes so long that the PCs won't have time to do anything else before rushing to the Sol Soirée (*Scene 2*).

Amanda Cruz, Awkward Spy: Cruz has been ordered by BlackThorn to report on the new team. She'll come over and awkwardly introduce herself.

A Quick Interview: Clara Saint Claire (p. 24) sneaks onto the race deck (which is supposed to be closed to media at the moment). She wants an interview with the new hacker-pilot.

TOPICS OF CONVERSATION

These topics of conversation might be brought up by NPCs directly interacting with the PCs, but could also just be overheard from the other teams working on the race deck.

- Falk's racing style has changed recently. He's been aggressively targeting the South Wind Remote, even when it's a tactically dubious choice.
- "My money is on the Bombers this year, if Falk can stay focussed. Cold Fusion are losing it, I reckon. That'll be a thing, the Bombers beating Fusion."

SCENE 2: SOL SOIREE

Whenever the *Clean Sweep* arrives in a new system, they hold a soirée to kick off the new system series. The Sol Soirée is being held in the forward lounge. The ship is currently in orbit around Mars, and the ruddy mass of the war god's world can be seen through the expansive windows which form the entire front wall of the lounge. *Clean Sweep* crewmembers in crisp, blue-and-white uniforms circulate through the room serving drinks and hors d'oeuvres.

PARTICIPANTS

As the PCs arrive, the room is already swarming with the race team members, members of the media, hovering CamBots broadcasting live Arachne feeds, and an assortment of other glitterati.

All of the characters listed in the *Cast of Characters* (p. 15) are present, with the exception of:

- Irina Ko and Nyssa Khouri (Irina is receiving a treatment)
- Jessica Tong and Amanda Cruz (following the general precedent of Bleeding Edge mostly staying on their own ship)
- Patch Enright and Ace Halabi (who lost track of the time while engaged in a romantic liaison)

MAIN EVENT SEQUENCE

After arriving, give the PCs a chance to circulate among the guests and scope out the scene. At the first lull, however, begin Celeste's speech.

Celeste's Speech: Celeste Egan mounts a low dais of smart-material in the centre of the room. With a musical chime, the section she's standing upon rises into the air and begins to independently rotate so she can look out over the crowd.

"Thank you all for joining us! Today marks the beginning of the Sol series, and I am pleased to announce that our first race of the series – the tenth of the circuit – will begin tomorrow with the infamous Dustbowl Rally!"

"The competition has tightened considerably." She gestures towards a glittering scoreboard which rotates around the border of the room. "After initially looking as if Cold Fusion would run away with the circuit this year, the Heavy Bombers have closed the gap considerably. With the unexpected departure of Lonesome October after the end of the Dawn series, it would seem as if the race has come down to just those two teams. But newcomers Bleeding Edge have caused quite a stir with their impressive performances at Svalarheim. And now

PLAYTEST TIP

A LITTLE HELP?

If the PCs struggle to succeed at their Tech check, Patch Enright might leave off working on his own rig and offer to lend them a hand. Of course, this would also give him an opportunity to see if there's anything unusual about their rig.

PLAYTEST TIP

PACE YOUR CHARACTERS

Just because nearly every character is present for *Scene 2: Sol Soirée*, it doesn't mean the PCs need to meet everyone right here and right now. Let them meet a few people and hit the main events, but you don't want to overwhelm them and the scene shouldn't overstay its welcome.

PLAYTEST TIP

LATE ARRIVALS

Instead of having everyone present when the PCs arrive, you can also have additional characters – perhaps Captain Falk with Sammy Pike (Heavy Bombers), the chimeric Masha Ko and Andrey Popov (Cold Fusion), and/or Clara Saint Claire – arrive after them but before Celeste's speech. This can be a good way to draw attention to these characters and offer a clear opportunity for the PCs to go over and introduce themselves.

we are joined by the [PC team name], a dark horse of mystery which promises to shake up the whole solar system."

At this point, the comlogs of the hacker-pilots (including the PC hacker-pilot) will signal a request for them to join Celeste on the dais. (As each of them steps up onto the dais, they, too, are raised into the air to a level just below Celeste's.)

She introduces them: "Cold Fusion's four-time circuit champion, Masha Ko!" Masha gives the room an icy theatrical glare, and a reptilian flicker of her tongue. "And the heroic Captain Leonidas Falk of the Heavy Bombers!" Both are greeted with cheers and applause, and the CamBots zoom in close.

Then things start going slightly off script: Jessica Tong of the Bleeding Edge isn't there, but Joktan Valiente steps up in her place and displays a little hologram recording of Tong saying that she welcomes "the Martian challenge".

But then South Wind's Ace Halabi is introduced and... he's just not there. The other members of the South Wind team seem confused and embarrassed. Celeste Egan's beaming smile falters for a moment, but then she proceeds to introduce the PC hacker-pilot with a mass of enthusiasm in an effort to recover her momentum.

"The Dustbowl Rally tomorrow! And then the Encke Gap! The Sol Series has begun!"

A triumphal march of music, accompanied by holographic Remote racers in AR running a course of neon and laser beams around the room and between the guests, bursts through the lounge, as the dais sections slowly lower their way back down to the floor.

Amanda Causes a Scene: A little while after Celeste's speech, Amanda Cruz begins shouting loudly and then storms out after Kaposov tries to force a drink on her.

Halabi Arrives: Ace Halabi finally arrives. He's almost immediately surrounded by a gaggle of reporters of CamBots. His cool charm and handsome good looks manage to laugh off the earlier bit of awkwardness.

Characters making an Observation (D1) test may notice Patch Enright sneaking into the party a few minutes later.

Masha Causes a Scene: Things turn a little ugly when Rosie Nazar-MacLeod of the South Wind team approaches Masha Ko and puts her hand on her shoulder. Masha whirls and hisses loudly at her

in a sudden rage. Several members of the South Wind team rush to back up Rosie, and Cold Fusion follows suit.

Halabi's Challenge: Towards the end of the evening, Ace Halabi jumps up on the dais. It raises him into the air and he proudly declares that this is the year Cold Fusion will lose the Dustbowl Rally, with South Wind taking the race. He then drains his drink, jumps down from the dais, and strides out of the party (which winds down shortly thereafter).

TOPICS OF CONVERSATION

- A rumour that Jessica Tong (p. 17), the Bleeding Edge hacker-pilot, has a crush on Masha Ko (p. 19).
- A week ago, Bleeding Edge's comms tech (Amanda Cruz, p. 17) took a swing at Captain Falk, the hacker-pilot for the Heavy Bombers (p. 19). She had to pulled off him by Joktan Valiente (p. 17), another of the Bleeding Edge crew members.
- The state of the championship race: Cold Fusion's recent wobbles, the Heavy Bombers closing the gap, and Bleeding Edge's meteoric rise.
- The two races of the Sol series (*Scene 3: The Dustbowl Rally* and *Scene 5: The Encke Gap*). Cold Fusion has never lost the Dustbowl Rally.

SCENE 3: THE DUSTBOWL RALLY

The Dustbowl Rally winds through the canyons of Mars' Valles Marineris. Ducking in and out of networks of tunnels, barrelling along narrow canyon passages, and ultimately up onto the dunes themselves to a finish line marked with a pair of beacons sunk into the sand. Landslides are a constant risk, as are falls into canyons kilometres deep. Since they joined the circuit, Cold Fusion's climbing Remote has never lost the Dustbowl Rally.

On race day, the deck is absolute bedlam. It feels far too small for all of the people who need to be there, and collisions are common as people rush about their business. Each team operates in a small bubble, crudely taped out on the floor, so that they are not physically restrained from doing their jobs.

The racing Remotes, a skeleton support crew, and an array of camera Remotes and their crews are down on the surface of Mars. An orbital flier also waits nearby, in case a raid forces the racing Remotes to be hastily evacuated (Remotes have been lost to raids in the past).



ROUTE

Leg 1 – The Maze (4 Momentum): The race begins in a stretch of canyon divided into many small channels that weave back and forth, folding into each other before diverging again.

Leg 2 – The Tunnels (2 Momentum): The course then plunges into a series of extremely tight tunnels, occasionally opening into wide caverns. Everything is dark, forcing hacker-pilots to navigate using spotlights, or infrared scanners.

Leg 3 – The Climb (3 Momentum): Bursting out of the tunnels, the Remotes are now forced to climb a series of perilous ledges and switchbacks onto the surface of Mars. The way is narrow, landslides are a constant danger, and the fall to the bottom of the canyon is many kilometres deep.

Leg 4 – The Dunes (2 Momentum): The final leg across the dunes is an entirely different challenge. The way is open, but the ground is treacherous and prone to sliding.

DECK EVENTS DURING THE RACE

- Bleeding Edge are the last team to arrive, their skeleton crew of three standing in stark contrast to the buzzing activity at the other control areas.
- Barnstormer Chen introduces the race and the competing teams, including short descriptions of their Remotes waiting at the starting line.
- With an Observation (D1) test, an unoccupied PC can spot Zahra taking some kind of drug. (This is just her anxiety medication.)

At the Finish Line: As the first Remote finishes the race, Barnstormer Chen announces that armed police are converging on the track. The race ends in a rush as the Remotes are evacuated.

AFTER THE RACE

- Masha and Andrey (Cold Fusion, p. 18) confront Patch Enright (Heavy Bombers, p. 19) about the comms failure, accusing him of cheating.

BLEEDING EDGE DURING RACES

Although “Jessica Tong” is not actually controlling the Bleeding Edge Remotes, this really can’t be noticed or discovered by watching her actions on the race deck. Anyone monitoring Bleeding Edge’s communications with their Remote, however, will discover that the feed is heavily encrypted. A successful Analysis (D1) test will reveal that virtually all of the bandwidth consists of transmissions *from* the Bleeding Edge Remote. (That’s strange because normally the control signals being sent *to* the Remote would chew up most of the bandwidth.)

- Simultaneously, a visibly haggard Ace Halabi confronts Falk about the attack on the South Wind remote during the race.
- One or both of these confrontations may lead to a fist fight, causing the CamBots to swarm as Clara Saint Clair breathlessly gives a literally blow-by-blow account.

RACE EVENTS

- The aerocams briefly lose visual on the Remotes. Falk takes advantage by attempting to ram Ace Halabi's Remote, causing the South Wind team to erupt in outrage on the race deck.
- Cold Fusion suffers a complete comms failure and can't take any actions until Andrey and the Brothers Li succeed on a complex Tech (D1, 3 Momentum) test.

SCENE 4: AFTER THE DUSTBOWL

PLAYTEST TIP

MOVING FORWARD

If the PCs are narrowing in on the Bleeding Edge team as their targets, their targets, advance to the next scene. Don't let the whole investigation play out in Scene 2.

After the tumultuous Dustbowl Rally, it takes several days for the *Clean Sweep* to make its way to Saturn (for *Scene 5: The Encke Gap*). During that time, the PCs will have a chance to pursue their investigations and seek out social interactions with virtually any of the other race participants.

MAIN EVENT SEQUENCE

These events are spread out over the course of the journey. Use them proactively to counterpoint or complicate the interactions initiated by the player characters.

Drug Dealer: Amin Ershadi approaches one or more of the PCs and offers to sell them nitrocaïne. If that doesn't work, he'll offer them other pick-me-up options and even offer to custom-tailor a "special high, just for you... for a special price".

The Voltage Representatives: A fast freighter catches up with the *Clean Sweep* and docks. Three men in business suits protected by cybermasks disembark and board the *Qebui*. They are representatives of Voltage and are here to meet with Masha, Irina, and Andrey.

Liaison: One or more of the PCs may spot Patch Enright and/or Ace Halabi sneaking off to a liaison in a private suite on the recreation deck.

TOPICS OF CONVERSATION

- The outcome of the Dustbowl Rally (whether that's congratulations, commiserations, or something else entirely).
- Someone has spotted Patch Enright and Ace Halabi sneaking around together. They'll

speculate that might be why Falk is so mad at the South Wind team.

- There's concern that the cops were tipped off about the location of the Dustbowl Rally. "The Encke Gap might not be safe."

SCENE 5: THE ENCKE GAP

The Encke Gap, the last race in the Sol leg of the underground circuit, is a space race. Remotes are fitted with boosters, testing a whole different set of piloting and spatial awareness skills. The course begins skating across the top of Saturn's dense A Ring, dipping once below before popping back up again. This is followed by a stretch through the relatively clear Encke Gap, and then a slalom through a machine graveyard on the moonlet Pan. The final stretch runs along Pan's equatorial ridge, where a Remote is clearly visible from all sides.

ROUTE

The Encke Gap is an endurance race. Fatigue and speed both build along hundreds of kilometres of track, marked out by tiny pinging buoys. After each of the first three legs of the race, hacker-pilots make a Discipline test. The difficulty begins Average (D1), but increases by one level for each additional leg. Each level by which a hacker-pilot fails the test generates 1 Heat that can be used against them in the next round. Generate complications as usual.

The first two legs of the race use Spacecraft tests; the last two use Pilot tests.

Leg 1 – The A Ring: The outermost of Saturn's bright rings is dense with rocky and icy particles, ranging from specks up to metres in size. The course skims across the top, dipping once below the ring before passing back up again. It's a little like moving through a sandstorm, where the occasional sand grain is the size of a boulder.

Leg 2 – The Encke Gap: The 300 kilometre-wide Gap is almost completely clear, swept clean by the moonlet Pan. This is a straight run to Pan, pouring on prodigious amounts of speed. Occasionally, space traffic uses the gap to pass from one side of Saturn to the other.

Leg 3 – Machine Graveyard: Touching down on the moonlet Pan, the course weaves through a graveyard of shattered military machinery from an old battle. The corpses of old-fashioned TAGs and Remotes, craters and debris, and occasional unexploded munitions are all likely hazards.

Leg 4 – Equatorial Ridge: Pan is shaped like a walnut – an equatorial ridge circles the entire 35-km wide moon. The final leg of the race runs along this narrow ridge, in plain sight of all the other racers. Any last ditch (illegal) efforts to knock the leading Remotes off the track have a clear shot. Don't forget, Pan is an extremely low-gravity environment!

DECK EVENTS

As the teams gather, the mood is tense. Amin Ershadi is missing. Those making an Observation (D2) or Medicine (D1) test notice that Ace Halabi and Irina Ko both look distinctly unwell.

- A minor scuffle breaks out between a couple support crews for some minor infraction (cutting corners on a taped-out zone, making irritating noises, etc.). This can be Cooper Bray, Clem Bray, and the Brothers Li, or any other set or pair of minor support crew that seems appropriate.
- Amin Ershadi finally shows up. He's obviously high.
- Medical alarms begin sounding from Ace Halabi's Remote Presence Cockpit; his body is struggling to keep up with his drug regimen. Nyssa Khouri manages to stabilise him.
- An Observation (D1) test notices a man with his face masked using an optical disruption device slip onto the race deck. (This is an observer from Voltage keeping an eye on Cold Fusion.)
- Irina Ko collapses. Andrey begins panicking and shouting for help. Nyssa Khouri runs to her side. A Psychology (D1) test notices that Patch Enright looks abnormally concerned.

FINAL COLLAPSE

- While Nyssa is still ministrating to Irina, Ace Halabi collapses. (The South Wind remote begins flying in autonomous mode.)
- Nyssa shouts that she can't leave Irina or she'll die. Someone else needs to help Halabi ASAP!
- BlackThorn uses her backdoor in the Cold Fusion remote to completely disable its comms system. It begins flying in autonomous mode, requiring a complex Tech (D2, 6 Momentum) test to restore.
- If no one else has stepped up to help, Patch Enright begs Winston Graves, the Heavy Bombers med-tech, to help Halabi. Either way, he rushes to Halabi's side and sobs.
- Captain Falk's loathing of drug dealers meets Enright's "traitorous" love for Halabi head-on. In a rage he leaps out of his Remote Presence Cockpit and rushes Halabi, ending up in a fight with Enright. (The Heavy Bombers Remote begins flying in autonomous mode, but only for one round until Samantha Pike leaps into the cockpit and takes control.)

WINNING THE RACE

- If the situation on the race deck has stabilised to at least some extent, as soon as the first Remote passes the finish line, the viewers and the winning team erupt in celebration.
- The hacker-pilots are exhausted or unconscious. An Observation (D1) test notices that Jessica Tong is significantly fresher than everyone else, as if the stress of the race hadn't affected her at all.

RACE EVENTS

- A small squadron of lumbering sight-seeing vessels crosses the Encke Gap, throwing the race into chaos.
- In the Machine Graveyard, a Remote hits an abandoned TAG, causing a pile of debris to collapse and strike the Remote behind it, requiring a Pilot (D2) test to avoid suffering 2+4 damage. (Depending on the situation on the race deck, this may also trigger another scuffle as the two teams blame each other.)

SCENE 6: AFTER THE GAP

Between the end of *Scene 5: The Encke Gap* and the beginning of *Scene 7: Sol Valediction Awards*, the PCs have a few hours to either prepare themselves or finish their investigation.

SCENE 7: SOL VALEDICTION AWARDS

The Valediction Awards officially end each system series. The celebrations for many of the fans (and some of the racers) actually start immediately after the race finishes, but the official ceremony and after party don't get started until a few hours later.

PARTICIPANTS

The attendees at the awards ceremony and after party will depend entirely on how earlier scenes have played out, but everyone who is conscious will try to attend. (Patch Enright will remain at Halabi's side if Halabi is unconscious or dead.) Notably, the Bleeding Edge team – BlackThorn, Joktan, and Amanda – all attend. BlackThorn can't resist: All of her tests have been successful and she is in the mood to celebrate (particularly if the Bleeding Edge Remote won).

PLAYTEST TIP

CHANGING FATE

By this point in the scenario, it's likely that the PCs will have begun changing the status quo onboard the *Clean Sweep*. This may alter or even completely negate some events. (For example, they might cut off Halabi's supply of racing drugs.) But also remember to create new events and outcomes that grow out of their actions.

MAIN EVENT SEQUENCE

Presentation of the Sol Trophy: The winners are the centre of attention for the CamBots and fans alike. The Remote of the series champion is placed on display on the central dais and a trophy is presented by Celeste Egan. After which, Celeste officially announces that the next system series will be in Human Edge.

Bad Habits: Characters who are aware that Amanda Cruz abstains from alcohol can attempt an Observation (D1) test to notice that she is, in fact, drinking at the bar.

The Other Shoe Drops: Andrey figures out that Bleeding Edge were responsible for the comm failures of in the Cold Fusion Remote. He bursts into the party and confronts Jessica Tong.

Cold Vengeance: Amanda Cruz – now thoroughly drunk – tries to shoot Captain Falk.

Grave News: Masha Ko returns from Irina's bedside where her sister has just died.

TOPICS OF CONVERSATION

Use this scene to wrap up any outstanding subplots that have been developing among the racers. Most of the topics of common conversation will be a reflection back on the incredible events – calling back to awesome moments from the races, being astonished by the interpersonal revelations, and so forth.

SCENE 8:
THE SCYTHIAN

The Bleeding Edge team spend the overwhelming majority of their time on board their freighter, the *Scythian*. Once they're identified as the primary suspects, it is likely that the player characters will want to infiltrate either their ship or their network.

Gun Cameras: The gun cameras are monitored by the Bleeding Edge LAI (see *Bleeding Edge Network*, p. 32). If a complication is rolled on a Stealth test,

the GM can also have one of the Bleeding Edge crew members monitoring the feed (allowing them a face-to-face Observation test). If the camera itself detects movement, it runs biometric scans. Failing the biometric scans triggers an alarm which alerts BlackThorn and causes the cameras to open fire.

TROOPER

GUN CAMERA

ATTRIBUTES

AGI	AWA	BRW	COO	INT	PER	WIL
–	10	6	12	8	–	–

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	+2	1	Movement	+2	–	Social	–	–
Fortitude	–	–	Senses	–	–	Technical	–	–

DEFENCES

Firewall	4	Resolve	–	Vigour	3
Security	2	Morale	–	Armour	2

ATTACKS

- **Combi Rifle:** Range C/M, 1+5 damage, Burst 2, Expert, Hackable, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Automated Turret:** The Gun Camera is an immobile turret, controlled by a software agent. It is immune to any psywar effects. It uses its Intelligence attribute only to resist infowar attacks.

Locks: All of the doors, including the airlock and internal doors, are guarded by two-factor authentication. The first is a physical passkey, embedded in the encrypted relays carried by the crew. The second is sophisticated biometric scanners, the data for which is stored in the User Records node of the *Bleeding Edge Network* (see p. 32). Physically bypassing the locks is a Challenging (D2) Thievery test.

Area 1 – Airlock: The airlock door attaches to a flexible docking tube of smart-matter. While docked it is at a 90-degree angle, meaning that the deck of the ship is “down” with the *Clean Sweep* “below” it.

Area 2 – Common Room: The chairs and tables are bolted to the floor. Refrigeration units and other storage compartments are built seamlessly into the walls.

BLEEDING EDGE ROSTER

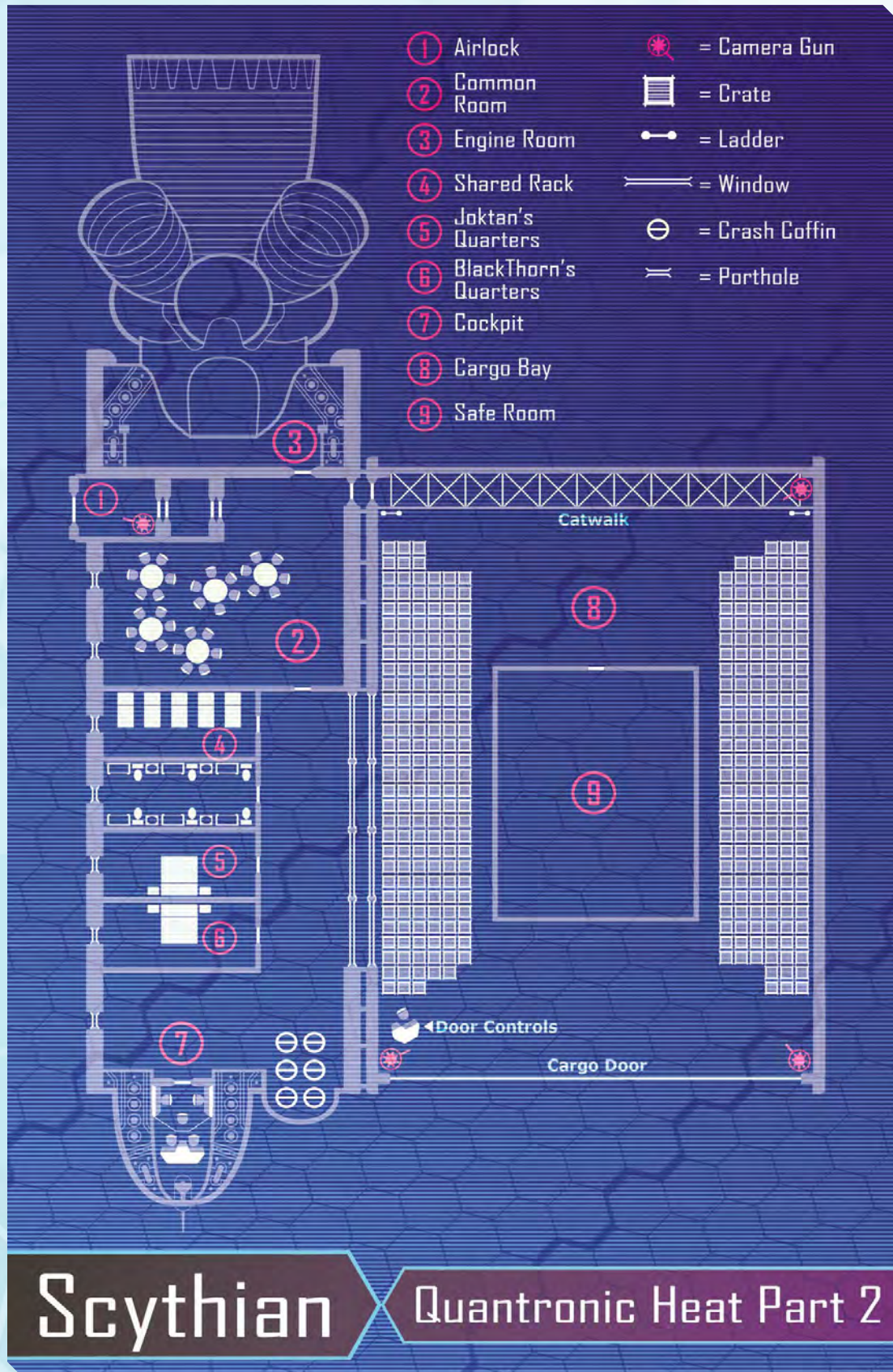
ENCOUNTER	DAY	NIGHT	RACE DAY
Fortitude Nyoja	Patrol (7, 2, 8)	Area 4	Patrol (7,2,8)
Hanuman Kaminski	Area 4	Patrol (7,2)	Patrol (3,2)
Joktan Valiente	Area 2	Areas 5	on <i>Clean Sweep</i>
Amanda Cruz	Area 3 (25%) or Area 7 (75%)	Areas 4	on <i>Clean Sweep</i>
BlackThorn	Area 7 (25%) or Area 8 (75%)	Area 6	on <i>Clean Sweep</i>

GRAVITY ON
THE SCYTHIAN

The *Scythian* does not use rotational gravity. While exploring the vessel, characters will note acceleration couches built into the walls, beds with straps to hold their user down in zero-g, and similar features. While docked with the *Clean Sweep*, however, the *Scythian* is under rotational gravity.

LOCKDOWN

If BlackThorn fears she's lost control of the *Scythian*, she will wipe the User Records node entirely, re-installing only her own data. This will lock any of the other March21 operatives where they are, shut down their access to the network, and cause the gun cameras to identify them as hostile.



PLAYTEST TIP

OTHER SHIPS, OTHER NETWORKS

The player characters may, of course, also try to infiltrate the ships and quantronic networks of the other teams. The GM shouldn't tip their hand by handwaving these attempts, but the PCs will generally find that the other teams don't practice strong security: Their ships have larger crews than the *Scythian*, but they don't post guards; doors are secured with simple locks (requiring D1 tests to bypass); their networks consist of a central node connected to their security cameras, comlogs, and a racing hub (which, in turn, connects to their Remote).

BLEEDING EDGE AUTHENTICATION

Bleeding Edge members carry encrypted relays: Small, sealed widgets about the size of a finger which interface with the owner's comlog and encrypts their quantronic traffic. While it's possible to hack the Bleeding Edge network without them, it's impossible to gain any form of authentication without one. They can be spoofed by sniffing network traffic with a Hacking (D3) test. If one can be physically obtained, a Tech (D2) test will suborn it and automatically grant a superuser account.

HIGHSEC

Nodes 2 through 7 of the Bleeding Edge network have Military HighSec (+4  Interference Soak).

OTHER ACCESS POINTS

Onboard the *Scythian*, the cockpit grants access to Node 4, the Remotes grant access to Node 7, and the gun cameras grant access to Node 8.

Area 3 – Engine Room: Gantries rigged for zero-g flight allow cramped, difficult access to the *Scythian's* engines.

Area 4 – Shared Rack: Three of the five bunks in this room show signs of use. Storage lockers bolted to the underside of each bunk have simple locks – Thievery (D1) to open – and contain a variety of personal items, identifying Fortitude Nyoja, Hanuman Kaminski, and Amanda Cruz.

Area 5 – Joktan's Quarters: An Observation (D1) test turns up a datachip hidden in the lining of the mattress. It contains a draft of a report written by Joktan and addressed simply to "John". It refers to BlackThorn by name (Yelena Ng), describing her as a "young upstart who has thrust her way into the heart of March21" and who threatens to "disrupt the development of KHILIAS" by playing games as part of the Clean Sweep Circuit. It is clear that the report is currently incomplete.

Area 6 – BlackThorn's Quarters: BlackThorn's quarters are kept scrupulously swept clean of personal effects, but are studded with hidden alarms designed to warn her of anyone tampering with her quarters. These require an Observation (D2) test to avoid and a Tech or Hacking (D2) to disable.

Area 7 – Cockpit: A fairly standard control cockpit.

Area 8 – Cargo Bay: The *Scythian* can have up to four large cargo bays attached to it, but at the moment is carrying only one. A catwalk runs across it as an upper level, with ladders leading down to the floor. Huge stacks of "cargo" (virtually all of it just empty decoy containers) are packed in along the sides, but much of the centre is taken up with a large, rectangular block of greyish metal with a single door in its side.

Area 9 – Safe Room: The safe room is completely isolated from the rest of the ship. It is sealed in a solid, interlocking alloy, with its own dedicated power and internal environment system. Inside is a clean room and sophisticated lab where BlackThorn works on the Bleeding Edge Remotes.

- **Vault Door:** The door to the safe room requires a quantronic passkey (obtainable from any Bleeding Edge member's comlog or data traffic),

a biometric scan (which can be either spoofed or implanted on the User Records node of the *Bleeding Edge Network*), and a top-grade physical combination lock (Thievery (D2) test to crack). If any of these factors fail, an alarm is triggered alerting BlackThorn (Hacking (D3) test to disable the alarm).

- **Remotes:** There are two identical Remotes (only one on race day). A Tech (D2) test to analyse the hardware or a Hacking (D2) test to analyse the Remote's quantronic data will clearly reveal that they are being piloted by illegal baby AIs which are being allowed uncontrolled growth in response to their experiences.

BLEEDING EDGE NETWORK

As an alternative (or in addition) to physically infiltrating the *Scythian*, the player characters can also accomplish their mission objectives by penetrating the Bleeding Edge's quantronic network.

Bleeding Edge LAI: The Bleeding Edge network is patrolled by an LAI (*Infinity Corebook*, p. 443).

Node 1 – External Access Points: This node on the *Bleeding Edge Network* map represents multiple external access points (each of which, in practice, should be treated as a separate node if the distinction becomes important). These access points require a Breach Effect on an appropriate target and include:

- The comlog of any Bleeding Edge crewmember
- The data stream of a Bleeding Edge Remote

Node 2 – Core Node: Central access to the rest of the network.

- **IC-2 Black ICE / Crybaby**

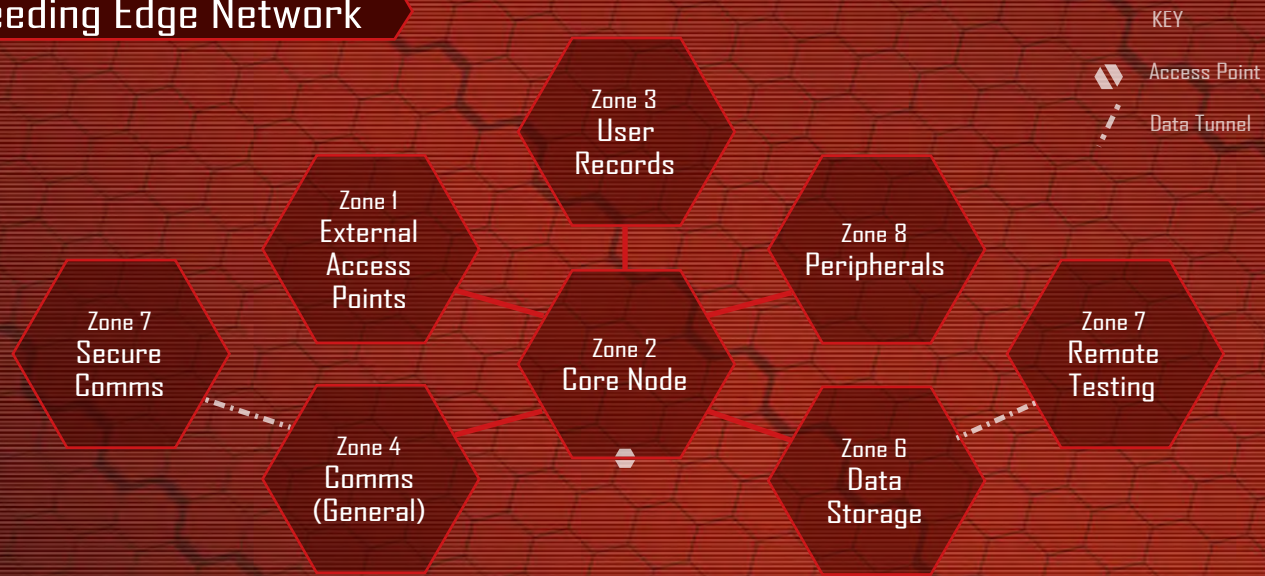
Node 3 – User Records (Firewall 10): This node contains user records, which can be used to identify the full roster of Bleeding Edge members. Records can be created or modified by those with proper authentication or as a Breach Effect. They notably include the biometric data which authorises access to the locks, gun cameras, and safe room on the *Scythian*.

- **IC-1 Crybaby**

BLACKTHORN'S COMMUNIQUÉS

- The communications are being routed to Svalarheima.
- They are addressed to someone called "John".
- There is a great deal of cryptic discussion about testing the "KHILIAS technology" – that the tests are proceeding as planned, the results are promising, and so forth. Care seems to have been taken to provide no concrete details about what the KHILIAS technology is.
- There is something referred to as "KHILIAS technology" in the Bleeding Edge Remotes.

Bleeding Edge Network



Node 4 – Comms: Basic communications are stored here – internal messaging, access to Maya, and so forth.

- **Access to Node 5:** Node 5 benefits from data flux camouflage and requires an Observation (D1) test to detect.

Node 5 – Secure Comms: This node contains BlackThorn's secure communications with John, sent using tight-beam communications to dark satellites.

- **IC-2 Crybaby**
- **BlackThorn's LAI:** An LAI (*Infinity Corebook*, p. 443) operates and guards this node. If it has not been dispatched within three rounds, it will signal BlackThorn. Each Breach Effect inflicted on the LAI also grants access to a batch of communiqués (which can be later analysed to provide one point of knowledge, see sidebar).

Node 6 – Data Storage: Ancillary data storage (cached Maya programs and the like). This node does not contain anything of particular use.

- **Access to Node 7:** Node 7 benefits from data flux camouflage and requires an Observation (D2) test to detect.

Node 7 – Remote Testing: This node can be accessed from either Node 6 or the Bleeding Edge Remotes. Data transmitted from the Remotes is cached here; an Analysis test (D2) reveals that Bleeding Edge is testing some sort of automatic

piloting software. (The actual baby-AI code, however, is not present and cannot be detected here.)

- **IC-3 Black ICE / Crybaby**

Node 8 – Peripherals: All quantronic systems on the *Scythian* connect to this node and can be controlled from it. This notably includes the gun cameras (which can be targeted with Breach Effects from here). Essential systems (like the engines) are considered Secure Zones (Firewall 10).

- **IC-2 Crybaby**

CONCLUSION

By the time the Sol circuit of the Clean Sweep Circuit is complete, the player characters will have ideally learned that:

- March21 is developing true artificial intelligences, in violation of the Sole AI Law.
- BlackThorn is a high-ranking operative in March21, responding to orders from "John".
- March21 is active on Svalarheima.

The agents should also have planted a tracking device – physical or quantronic – on either the March21 operatives, their Remotes, or the *Scythian*. These leads should draw the player characters directly to Svalarheima and *Part Three: Birth Pangs*.

FAMILIAR NETWORK DESIGN

Anyone who saw BlackThorn's network in *Part One: Conception* who succeeds at an Analysis or Hacking (D1) test will immediately recognise a common architecture in the Bleeding Edge network.

PART THREE

BIRTH PANGS

With the success of their mission on the *Clean Sweep*, the player characters have tracked March21's operations back to Svalarheima, the Snowball of Discord. The planet is an ideal location for March21. John has used the tense military situation to his advantage, playing PanOceanian and Yu Jing forces off against each other as a distraction for his activities, and the icy frontiers of the planet offer a lot of territory in which to hide.

Now, however, the net is closing. The question is whether or not Yu Jing and PanOceania can set aside their differences before March21's schemes come to fruition and KHILIAS is born.

OPERATIONAL SUMMARY

The scenario begins with an assault on a suspected March21 base: an abandoned melt-rig, half buried in the ice outside of Shuangdong, a small village on the coast of Yu Jing-controlled Huangdi. This is where the clues obtained in *Part Two: On Your Marks* have lead, but the agents arrive too late. March21 has already moved on, to a facility better able to support KHILIAS' power and bandwidth needs.

WILDERNESS OF MIRRORS

A new artificial intelligence has the capacity to alter the balance of power in the Human Sphere. Publicly, everyone is united behind the Sole AI Law: there will be no artificial intelligence but ALEPH. Behind closed doors, however, the situation is entirely different.

Ariadna/Yu Jing/Mercenaries: The risks that KHILIAS represents to the Human Sphere are too great, and the organisations built to contain them cannot be trusted. The agent is ordered to ensure that KHILIAS is destroyed utterly, all of its code wiped irretrievably, and the quantronic storage that housed it smashed to pieces.

Nomads/Corporations/Submondo: KHILIAS is dangerous, no doubt, but also an immense opportunity to either study or to activate and use

(in isolated quantronic environments, where it can cause no damage). The agent is ordered to secure KHILIAS' code in anyway possible, and make sure no one else does the same.

PanOceania: Dr Morgan Hart has made remarkable breakthroughs in the development of artificial intelligence. If he is alive, ensure that he stays that way, and is returned safely to PanOceania. Do not let any other nation claim him.

Haqqislam: Dr Morgan Hart has done remarkable work for March21 in the pursuit of artificial intelligence. If Hart is still alive, capture him and hand him over to Hassassin operatives. Ensure he does not fall into the hands of any other nation's intelligence services, or O-12.

The abandoned melt-rig contains three leads: KHILIAS' exact power requirements, a sample of its unique packet structure, and the name of a Yu Jing black program to build secret facilities deep in PanOceanian territory. Each individual lead provides a list of potential sites. If all three leads can be triangulated, they will identify the site where KHILIAS has been activated. If not, the PCs may need to methodically brute force their way through a list of suspect sites.

Either way, their progress will be impeded by KHILIAS, which has launched an assault on Maya. The planetary datasphere begins to fall apart as KHILIAS and ALEPH wage quantronic warfare on a plane beyond human understanding. KHILIAS also uses its growing control over Maya to issue conflicting orders to military assets, disrupt public services, spread March21 propaganda, and create chaos. Once it becomes aware of the agents, it targets them directly.

The scenario culminates in an assault on the true March21 headquarters, an abandoned spaceport outside of Arkhangel City. Here, the players will confront John, the March21 mastermind. With luck, they will rescue Dr Hart, capture BlackThorn, and isolate and secure KHILIAS. They will then be faced with a difficult choice: what to do with this new artificial intelligence?

KHILIAS

Even as the players are arriving in the Epsilon Eridani system, March21 activates KHILIAS. As they make preparations for assaulting March21's abandoned base, they begin noticing that access to the planetary datasphere is... stuttering. In the base itself, the situation will get worse: Routine datasphere pings will slow to a crawl. Information requests return garbage or, more troubling, strings of seemingly coherent information that, on closer inspection, turns out to be misleading in key ways, or laced through with references to birth: biological, messianic, parasitic, or even Frankensteinian.

The truth should eventually become clear: KHILIAS has awoken.

As the PCs emerge from the melt-rig, they'll learn that their problems aren't local: The entire planet is experiencing them. The next two sections – *Rise of KHILIAS* and *KHILIAS' Revenge* – include a menu

of situations and events that can be used over the course of the entire adventure as KHILIAS' grip on Svalarheima tightens.

RISE OF KHILIAS

In the earliest stages, KHILIAS will act a little like an unhinged child. Jump scares, sudden noise, and wild swings in behaviour are all appropriate. This is part strategy, part simply a case of finding its feet.

As KHILIAS' control grows, some of the wilder and more confusing excesses will die down, replaced instead with sinister assurances and March21 propaganda.

In the final stages, KHILIAS will have established enough control over the planetary datasphere that it is no longer concerned with the public. Public access will be cut off, leaving the people of Svalarheima confused. Public terminals are silent, comlogs no longer answer queries, and so on. The streets and surviving networks will be eerily quiet.

DETERIORATING DATASPHERE

To begin with, the main impact of KHILIAS' awakening will be the deterioration of Maya access. This will fluctuate randomly – GMs can spend 1 Heat to increase the difficulty of all tests involving Maya by one step for the duration of the current scene. (The amount of Heat spent can be escalated as KHILIAS' control of the datasphere becomes more pronounced.)

FLASH MOB

The street or other public place suddenly fills with people. They're flooding out under conflicting instructions from their comlogs: some have been threatened, warned about imaginary attacks or disasters, or just shouted at until they panic.

HAUNTED DATASPHERE

Whenever an agent is actively using a comlog or hacking device, whether in AR or full VR mode, they keep catching glimpses of unexpected movement at the corner of their vision. Dark figures lurk in the background, vanishing as soon as one looks at them directly. A voice whispers just at the edge of hearing. The GM can spend 1 Heat to force all of the player characters to make a Discipline (D2) test or become Dazed.

POLTERGEIST DOMOTICS

As KHILIAS spreads itself further into the Svalarheima datasphere, its control over local domotics will slowly ratchet up the creepiness and tension: closed doors suddenly opening, flickering lights, strange noises, and the like. Over time, these phenomena will escalate and become more

ALEPH'S RESPONSE

When KHILIAS first assaults Maya, ALEPH will be confused and surprised – an artificial intelligence threat on the scale of KHILIAS is unprecedented. ALEPH's response will therefore be haphazard: it will attempt to put out fires by repairing holes in the datasphere, fixing malfunctioning equipment, reassuring panicking citizens, and other patchwork tasks.

As KHILIAS takes control of more and more of the Svalarheima datasphere, ALEPH will begin to realise the scope of the threat. It will focus its efforts – and diminishing computational power – on fighting back. ALEPH will bring all O-12 loyalist infosec operatives online (this may include a request sent to any player characters with such expertise). At the same time, ALEPH will demobilise and isolate its military assets. This is a precautionary measure; ALEPH has seen the damage that KHILIAS is able to cause by issuing false orders to PanOceanian and Yu Jing assets, and wishes to prevent the same thing happening with any (supposedly neutral) O-12 soldiers or materiel.

At this stage, it is clear to ALEPH that its survival on the planet is in the hands of operatives on the ground – it can no longer hope to defeat KHILIAS in the datasphere. If it can keep track of what the agents are up to, ALEPH will work hard to support them. This is done by fending off KHILIAS' physical and quantronic attacks on their behalf, and by providing a bubble in which datasphere access functions essentially as it should. Fighting a planetwide quantronic siege which it is slowly losing, ALEPH is reduced to the player characters' quantronic angel.

specific: blasts of bright light, the hints of a baby crying, voices pleading, insane shouting, and worse. These may impose a +1 difficulty penalty due to distraction at the GM's discretion.

Later, larger structures (like vehicles or bridges) might also exhibit strange behaviour or fly out of control.

STANDOFF

The player characters stumble into a tense standoff between two heavily armed military or police units: PanOceanian Fusiliers, Yu Jing Zhànshì Qízhì, police, or anything else that seems appropriate. KHILIAS has issued false orders to both units, ordering them to attack each other. These can be handled as two five-person fireteams of SWAT Officers (*Infinity Corebook*, p. 449), Corporate Security Units (*Infinity Corebook*, p. 427), or any other trooper stat block which seems appropriate.

TRAFFIC MADNESS

If the player characters are in a public area, the local traffic control system suddenly goes haywire. Cars careen into each other, through walls and windows, and straight at civilians. Challenging (D2) Acrobatics or Athletics tests are required to avoid 2+4 physical damage, with the Armour Piercing 2 and Knockdown qualities. Civilians can also be placed in harm's way, requiring similar tests from the PCs to rescue them.

ACCESSING ARACHNE

The Arachne darknet is isolated from Maya. Although KHILIAS can access both networks, it is focused on wresting control of Maya from ALEPH. For this reason, while using Arachne any negative effects caused by KHILIAS are reduced by one step. Bear in mind that the type of information available on Arachne and Maya are different, which may introduce unique complications.

KHILIAS' REVENGE

If KHILIAS is tracking the player characters, more and more of these occurrences will begin specifically targeting them. There are also more direct assaults which KHILIAS will unleash in self-defence.

KHILIAS ATTACKS!

The most direct intervention is for KHILIAS to launch a direct quantronic assault on the PCs. It is likely to also bring along a fireteam of support agents.

KHILIAS GASLIGHT

The GM can spend 1 Heat to have KHILIAS infect a quantronic zone as a character is entering it. This operates as an IC-3 Gaslight. If the test to enter the zone fails, read the following:

You are surrounded by utter darkness. A tiny point of light appears. It wavers for a moment, then rapidly expands, roaring past your VR presence. A universe is forming, or a visualisation of one. Gas clouds collapse into stars and galaxies, supernovae explode, black holes grow and grow.

Until the character can bypass the IC-3 Gaslight, they will be unable to leave this zone. KHILIAS itself is also likely to make an appearance. If it is unaware that the character is a threat, it may simply exhibit curiosity, asking strange and seemingly nonsensical questions. If not, it will attack, attempting to infect the target with its virus before disappearing.

QUANTRONIC NODE DESTRUCTION

A quantronic node the PCs are in suddenly explodes into a sensory assault. The quantronic terrain destabilises, and otherwise clear pathways begin to twist and disrupt. Treat the entire node as a Hazard – navigating requires an Average (D1) Hacking test, which inflicts 1+3 mental damage with the Stun quality on failure.

SUBORNED KANRÈN

A team of four Kanrèn, Yu Jing counter-insurgency troops, are dispatched under false orders as assassins. Possible targets include the PCs themselves, Ambassador Ke (p. 43, under the mistaken belief that he's a traitor to the StateEmpire), Captain Nangala (p. 38), or anyone else the PCs might have cause to meet with.

UNDER FIRE

Whenever the player characters are outdoors, there's a risk that an orbital spy satellite under KHILIAS' control will spot them, and it will activate snipers. Spend 1 Heat to have this happen – treat the sniper as a Hidden Bounty Hunter (*Infinity Corebook*, p. 422).

NEMESIS

KANRÈN

ATTRIBUTES

AGI	AWA	BRW	COO	INT	PER	WIL
10	11	9	11	9	11	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	+3	1	Movement	+2	1	Social	+3	1
Fortitude	+1	1	Senses	+4	1	Technical	+1	1

DEFENCES

Firewall	10	Resolve	10	Vigour	10
Security	–	Morale	2	Armour	2

ATTACKS

- **Combi Rifle:** Range C/M, 1+5 damage, Burst 2, Comms, Expert 1, MULTI Light Mod, Vicious 1
- **Chain-Colt:** Range C, 1+5 damage, Concealed 1, Torrent, Vicious 1
- **Monofilament Sword:** Melee, 1+5 damage, Parry 2, Vicious 1, Monofilament

GEAR: Holoprojector 2, Kinematika, Light Combat Armour, Sniffer

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Quick Strategy:** As long as Stanley is in the scene, the GM can seize the initiative with two March21 foot soldiers for every 1 Heat spent.
- **Tough It Out (1+ Heat):** For every point of Heat spent, Stanley recovers 3 points to one of his Stress values.

TROOPER

SUPPORT AGENTS

ATTRIBUTES

AGI	AWA	BRW	COO	INT	PER	WIL
8	10	8	6	10	6	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	–	–	Movement	–	–	Social	–	–
Fortitude	+1	–	Senses	+1	–	Technical	+2	2

DEFENCES

Firewall	5	Resolve	4	Vigour	–
Security	2	Morale	–	Armour	–

ATTACKS

- **Brain Blast:** 1+4 damage, Breach Effects, Biotech, Vicious 1
- **Slasher:** 2+5 damage, targets Firewall only, cannot cause Breach Effects, Vicious 2

GEAR: Limited Software Suite: CLAW-1, SWORD-1, SHIELD-1, GADGET-2, IC-2, +2 bonus damage

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Dumb Agent:** Support Agents are immune to psywar effects.
- **Software:** Support Agents are pure software; they do not have, or use, physical attributes, including Vigour or Armour.

NEMESIS

KHILIAS

ATTRIBUTES

AGI	AWA	BRW	COO	INT	PER	WIL
8	12	8	8	12	10	12

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	—	Movement	—	—	Social	+2	1
Fortitude	+2	—	Senses	+3	2	Technical	+5	5

DEFENCES

Firewall	17	Resolve	14	Vigour	—
Security	5	Morale	5	Armour	—

ATTACKS

- **Brain Blast:** 1+4 damage, Breach Effects, Biotech, Vicious 1
- **Slasher:** 2+5 damage, targets Firewall only, cannot cause Breach Effects, Vicious 2
- **Horrorshow 3:** 6 damage, Breach Effects, Nonlethal, Terrifying 3

GEAR: Software Suite: CLAW-3, SWORD-1, SHIELD-3, GADGET-2, IC-3, UPGRADE Solifugae, Stop!, Sucker Punch; +4 bonus damage

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **I Am Legion:** KHILIAS can rapidly create swarms of quantronic Support Agents to harry any opponent. Spending 1 Heat brings 2 Support Agent reinforcements.
- **Brute Force:** When making an infowar attack, KHILIAS can reroll up to 5 damage dice. (As normal, dice may only be rerolled once.)
- **Virus:** KHILIAS can plant a specially tailored virus as a Breach Effect. Make a Stealth roll opposed by the target's Analysis to conceal this action (if successful, the target is unaware they've been infected and the virus is in a hidden stealth state). The virus effectively Tags the victim and, at the cost of 2 Heat, the virus can inflict a special Breach Effect (this is a noisy action). The virus makes stealth state tests (TN 15, Focus 3) and cannot be removed until it has been detected.
- **Quantronic Native:** Trying to find a concealed KHILIAS in any datasphere is like searching for a needle in a needle-stack. All attempts to find a hidden KHILIAS are made at +1 difficulty.
- **Software:** KHILIAS is pure software; it does not have, or use, physical attributes, including Vigour or Armour.
- **Decompile:** The current instance of KHILIAS may immediately decompile itself. This is equivalent, to taking the Terminate Connection action as a Minor Action. Any Link or CLAW-2 Harpoon attempts are at +2 difficulty.

NOTES

Destroying an instance of KHILIAS does not defeat the entire AI. To do that, its core code needs to be isolated and shut down (see *Scene 4: AI, Interrupted*, p. 45)

Shoal explains that the leads provided by the player characters in *Part Two: On Your Marks* have allowed Bureau Noir to track March21 back to Svalarheima, but they were only able to narrow down the potential area to a large swath of the barren wastelands of Trollhättan. "Fortunately, Captain Nangala was able to carry us the rest of the way."

Captain Nangala steps forward. "The Snow Angel is equipped with a suite of specialised sensors allowing us to scan the surface of Svalarheima for power signatures, heat blooms, and similar indications of technological activity."

She gestures and one wall of the analysis dome glitters with a satellite map of Svalarheima's surface. A twist of her hand and the image zooms in until it's filled with an overhead view of some sort of industrial platform. "This is an abandoned melt-rig. It's in Trollhättan just across the border from Niflheim. The closest settlement is a hundred kilometres to the north; a village containing a few hundred Yu Jingese."

"Acting on Bureau Noir's request, we were able to analyse our historical data for the region. This image is from one year ago. The melt-rig is cold. Now, let's run this forward in time and... there!" In the image, the rig has begun to glow a very faint red. "Two months ago there's a massive heat bloom." The rig starts pulsing an angry red. "Before returning to its original heat levels. But then one week ago there's another massive spike of power output."

Agent Shoal turns back to you. "The initial heat signature is from just a few weeks before Dr Hart was kidnapped. The first bloom occurred shortly before the Bleeding Edge team joined the Clean Sweep Circuit. The second bloom started just after BlackThorn returned to Svalarheima. We can only assume that there's something big going on down there. You need to stop it."

Accompanied by a squad of Bureau Aegis troopers (shown on p. 39), the agents are to lead a raid on the melt-rig. The mission objectives are straightforward:

- The **primary objective** is to stop March21 from bringing an illegal artificial intelligence online. Shut down their quantronic processing at all costs.
- The **secondary objective** is to secure a copy of the artificial intelligence's code to hand over to Bureau Toth, as both a research tool and to aid in any clean-up.
- The **tertiary objective** is to apprehend any March21 operatives for questioning by Bureau Toth.

MISSION BRIEFING

When the player characters arrive in the Epsilon Eridani system, they report to the *POS Snow Angel*, a PanOceanian infoquantronic warfare corvette in orbit around Svalarheima. They are joined by Agent Shoal (from *Part Two: On Your Marks*) and introduced to Captain Bess Nangala in an analysis dome where secure data is displayed in 360 degrees on the walls and ceiling.

PLAYTEST TIP

HANDLING NOIR

If appropriate, Agent Shoal can be replaced by the PCs' regular Bureau Noir handler.

PLAYTEST TIP

TOUCH OF KHILIAS

Remember that the earliest signs of KHILIAS' effect on the Svalarheiman datasphere should begin appearing as early as the PCs' arrival on the *POS Snow Angel* and their briefing there.

Shoal provides the standard layout of an operational melt-rig. It is a three-storey tracked structure, with mining machinery, heaters and a generator at its base, mineral processing, sorting, and storage in the middle, and crew quarters and laboratories on the top level.

CAPTAIN BESS NANGALA

APPEARANCE

A long-limbed and crisply uniformed Australian Aboriginal woman.

ROLEPLAYING

- Clasps her hands behind her back.
- Proud of her ship, her crew, and her nation.
- Professional and quick to the point.

BACKGROUND

Nangala is the captain of the *POS Snow Angel*. Her ship, considered a bad-luck frigate, was only recently assigned to Svalarheim.

ELITE

CAPTAIN BESS NANGALA

ATTRIBUTES

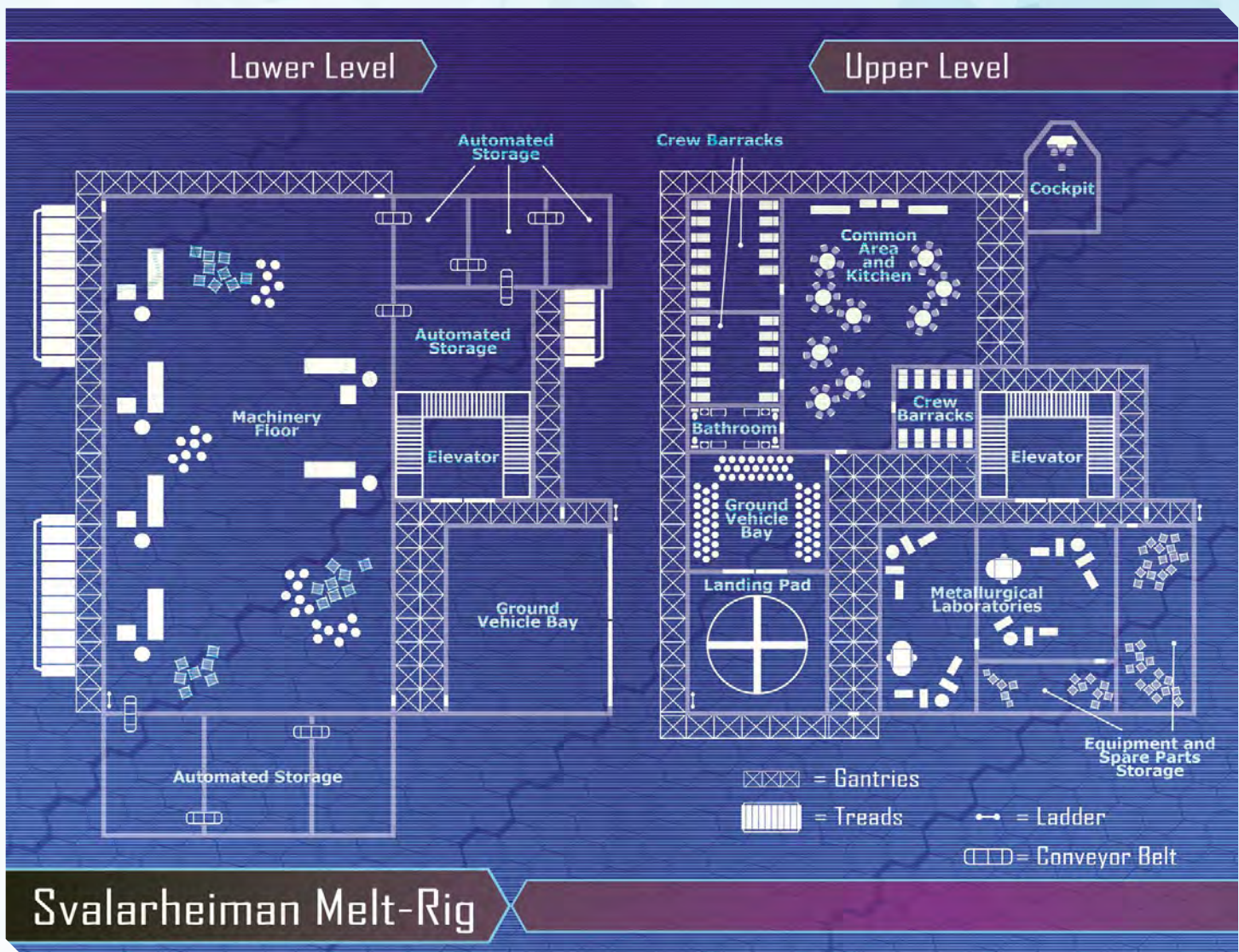
AGI	AWA	BRW	COO	INT	PER	WIL
9	10	7	8	9	10	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	—	Movement	—	—	Social	+3	—
Fortitude	+2	1	Senses	+3	2	Technical	+1	—

DEFENCES

Firewall	9	Resolve	10	Vigour	7
Security	4	Morale	2	Armour	—



SCENE 1: BIRTHPLACE OF KHILIAS

A dropship from the *POS Snow Angel* can insert the PCs at a facility a couple hundred clicks from the March21 facility. There they can meet with Captain Minwae and her assault team (see sidebar). From there, a pair of aeropters will take them to the melt-rig, but before they leave they should take time to plan their assault with Minwae.

MARCH21 MELT-RIG

The rig is abandoned. John and his March21 allies have already moved on. The entire rig has sunk into the ice at a slight angle – the floors are treacherous, and the air freezing. The lowest level is buried in the ice, as is the cockpit. Inside, the melt-rig is cramped: echoing steel corridors, heavy pipes and grating floors, lit only by the helmet lights of the Aegis assault squad and the strobe of gunfire.

The most obvious points of ingress are either the aeropter pad (Area 13) or the ground vehicle bay (Area 5). There are also a number of smaller doors located on the upper and lower outer gantries. One could also hypothetically go underneath the rig, work their way through the tangled morass of the cyclopean driveshafts and melting equipment, and then come up through the elevator shaft (Area 4).

Automated Sentry Guns: March21 has left behind six automated sentry guns. They are scattered throughout the rig (marked on the map), and include smoke launchers. The turrets, unconcerned by any risk of friendly casualties, happily fire blindly into the smoke.

Area 1 – Computer Lab: This was once the machinery floor, but most of the drills, grinders, conveyers, scanners, and other mining equipment has been removed. It was replaced with large banks of quantronic equipment housed in rows of white obelisks which seem eerily out of place amidst the industrial grunge of the melt-rig. Several of these are visibly scorched and partially melted.

- **Motion Detectors:** As indicated on the map, several motion detectors have been installed in this room. They can be spotted with an Observation (D1) test. If characters enter the room, the detectors make an Observation test (Awareness 10, Expertise 2, Focus 1). On a success, if the Arachne node in the room is still active, they transmit a warning to KHILIAS.
- **Quantronic Equipment:** An investigation reveals that much of the quantronic equipment has been deliberately stripped, while that which remains has been deliberately destroyed. A Tech (D1) test

TROOPER

SENTRY GUN

ATTRIBUTES

AGI	AWA	BRW	COO	INT	PER	WIL
6	8	9	11	7	7	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	+2	1	Movement	–	–	Social	–	–
Fortitude	+1	–	Senses	+2	–	Technical	–	–

DEFENCES

Firewall	4	Resolve	8	Vigour	5
Security	2	Morale	–	Armour	3

ATTACKS

- **Mk12:** Range M, 2+5 damage, Burst 3, Mounted, Salvo (Knockdown)
- **Light Smoke Grenade Launcher:** Range M, Burst 1, Area (Close), Speculative, Smoke 2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Automated Turret:** The Sentry Gun is an immobile turret, controlled by a low-grade software agent. It is immune to any psywar effects. It uses Intelligence only to resist infowar attacks.

can be used to recover some of the data (see *Recovered Data* sidebar).

- **Arachne Node:** The physical hub of a still-functioning Arachne node is also nestled in amongst the quantronic debris. An Observation or Tech (D2) test can discover the node. Anyone accessing the node is confronted with an IC-3 Gaslight. Anyone successfully bypassing the IC will discover some unusual data packets (see *Recovered Data* sidebar). On a failure, the PCs are trapped in the *KHILIAS Gaslight* (see p. 36).

Area 2 – Automated Storage: These rooms are not designed for human egress, but one can crouch and pass through the various conveyor belts leading in and out of them. Large waldos cover the ceiling of these automated storage areas, originally programmed to sort mineral samples in to a number of large, iron bins (or onto the next set of conveyor belts), but they are now nothing more than rusting testimonies to the melt-rig's original purpose.

BUREAU AEGIS ASSAULT TEAM

Captain Lynn Minwae is a short woman with spiky blue hair. She has an animated tattoo of a Bourakian Sea Serpent on her left forearm. She's enthusiastic, with a big grin plastered on her face, but she's also detail-oriented and wants to fully understand the details of the assault plan.

The assault team are a rough-and-tumble bunch of professionals: Roger Bagnoli, Afra Frost, Gunnvor Kamal, Fenella Lamon, and Évelyne Kendall.

Minwae: Great Detective (*Infinity Corebook*, p. 428) with a submachine gun

Assault Team: Spec Ops Trooper (*Infinity Corebook*, p. 455), act as fireteam

PLAYTEST TIP

INITIAL CONFUSION

In the chaos and the darkness, it shouldn't be immediately obvious that the player characters are being fired on by smart turrets, rather than live enemies. An Average (D1) Observation test will clear up the confusion, modified as usual by smoke.

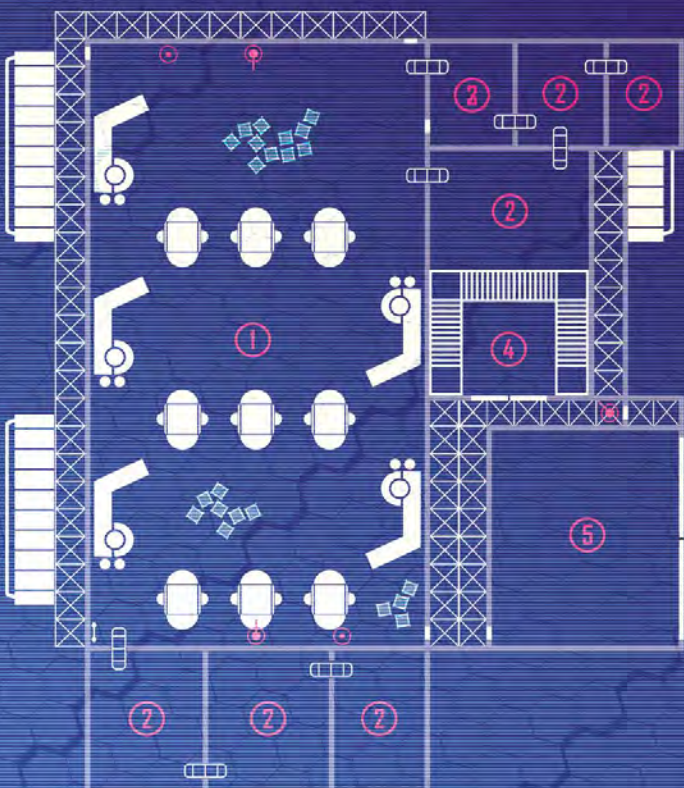
RECOVERED DATA

If data can be recovered from the quantronic equipment, an Analysis (D1) test can be used to pry a little information from the data fragments:

- Fragments of code and access logs confirm that both BlackThorn and Dr Hart were present here in the melt-rig. They also identify the leader of the operation as someone named "John", who was also located onsite.
- The system is riddled with an unusual data packet structure. This ornate data structure will look familiar to anyone who studied Dr Hart's research in *Part One: Conception* or the baby-AI comm traffic in *Part Two: On Your Marks*. (It can also be used to trace KHILIAS, as described in *Scene 2: Triangulation*.)



Lower Level



Upper Level



March21 Melt-Rig

Quantronic Heat Part 3

Area 3 – Dr Hart’s Cell: The conveyor belts leading into this chamber have been welded shut with large sheets of thick iron, but a crude door (which can be bolted shut from the outside) has been laser-cut into the wall between the room and the machinery floor. The room contains a bunk, a chair, and a battered desk.

This is where John kept the kidnapped Dr Hart. (This can be confirmed through DNA evidence or handwriting analysis.)

- **Bunk – Observation (D1):** A short message has been freshly scratched into the steel plating beneath the bunk: “*Jin huā*: YJ black sites”. *Jin huā* is a Chinese phrase meaning “golden flower”. (See *Scene 2: Triangulation* to follow up on this clue left by Dr Hart.)
- **Desk:** In the desk drawers are a few scattered sheets of paper. They do not contain any useful information, however, just some assorted technical scribbles (in Dr Hart’s handwriting).

An Observation (D2) test, however, will discover several sheets which have been deliberately concealed by taping them to the underside of the desk. They contain a detailed analysis of KHILIAS’ data packet structure and Dr Hart’s conclusion that the structure could be used to track KHILIAS’ location.

Area 4 – Elevator: This elevator can access the upper level, lower level, and also provides direct access to the ground vehicle bay (Area 5). It is currently disabled, however, and would require a Tech (D1) test to put back in order. There is enough room around the car to climb from one level to another.

Area 5 – Ground Vehicle Bay: This large vehicle bay is actually sunken below the rest of the lower level. Two ladders lead from the grated walkway down to the bay floor, which still contains a number of prospecting Remotes and a jeep sled. (These would require significant repairs to operate again.)

Of potentially more interest are the Bleeding Edge racing Remotes which have been haphazardly stored to one side of the disabled jeep sled.

- **Racing Remotes:** These are now just empty shells. The baby-AI brains have been removed and used to complete the creation of KHILIAS. A Hacking (D1) test can pull up data fragments from the secondary memory and processing centres, however, which possess an unusual data packet structure (see *Recovered Data* sidebar).

Area 6 – Aerial Vehicle Bay: What was once the aerial vehicle bay is now filled with piles of junk (with an automated turret hidden in one corner).

Area 7 – Cockpit: The melt-rig's cockpit is elevated slightly above the upper level (with a ladder leading up out of a metallic pit just inside the door). It hasn't been using a long time and the controls are rimed with frost.

- **Tech (D1):** To reactivate the control panel. Reviewing the logs reveals a massive spike in power draw from the melt-rig's fusion reactor. This corresponds with the bloom seen by the *POS Snow Angel*, but the records here indicate

that virtually all of the power was being funnelled to equipment plugged into the machinery floor (Area 1). (See *Scene 2: Triangulation*.)

Area 8 – Metallurgical Laboratories: One of these laboratories remains untouched since the melt-rig was originally abandoned (the equipment is caked in ice). The other was recently cleaned up and put into use.

- **Tech (D1):** Determines that the lab was being used in an attempt to construct large heat shields which would mask very large power signatures from aerial or orbital detection. It appears that the work was unsuccessful, however.

Area 9 – Equipment/Parts Storage: Only a jumble of rusted parts remain here, all dating back to the days before the melt-rig was originally abandoned.

Area 10 – Bathroom: Recently used and kept in good repair.

HEAT SPENDS

MELT-RIG

The abandoned melt-rig is an unusual environment for a fight, with a few unique risks. Use the following Heat spends to add to the general chaos of the breach:

1 Heat: Ice. A patch of floor is covered in ice; characters must pass an Average (D1) Acrobatics check to keep their footing. If any complications are rolled, the character suffers 1+2 physical Stun damage.

2 Heat: Floor collapse. A section of floor collapses, sending the character tumbling to a level below. The character suffers 2+4 physical Stun damage. An Average (D1) Acrobatics check grants 1 additional Soak against this damage.



JĪN HUĀ SITES

A mine outside Vest Festning

A warehouse in the Port of
Odinheim

An abandoned spaceport near
Arkhangal City

A farmhouse on the outskirts of
Valontach

Military compound in Youxiong

KHILIAS DATASPHERE HOTSPOTS

A collection of warehouses in
the Port of Odinheim

A data centre at the base of the
Shidong space elevator

A mine outside of Vest Festning

An abandoned spaceport near
Arkhangal City

The White Whale Casino in
Arkhangal City's Furlough Row

A data centre in Odinheim

KHILIAS POWER USAGE LOCATIONS

A rustbucket passing between
the Sentinel Cities

An abandoned spaceport near
Arkhangal City

A collection of warehouses in
the Port of Odinheim

An abandoned Hyō Shō Dome
near Odinheim

An abandoned Hyō Shō Dome
near the Trollhättan border

A mine outside Vest Festning

Area 11 – Barracks: Although now stripped bare, all of these areas have seen recent use. It can be estimated that March21 had over thirty people staying here.

- **Search – Observation (D1):** A broken repeater can be found wedged between one of the bunks and the wall. A Hacking (D1) test can pull fragmentary data from its memory buffers. Lack of context makes most of it meaningless, but one unusual phrase does stand out in two places: “5 Jīn huā” and “the Jīn Huā sites appear promising”. (*Jīn huā* is a Chinese phrase meaning “golden flower”.)

Area 12 – Common Area/Kitchen: A simple dining hall. The remaining food in the refrigerators is still fresh.

Area 13 – Landing Pad: Designed for aeropters and similar vehicles. Kept in good repair.

SCENE 2: TRIANGULATION

Following the investigation of the abandoned rig, the player characters have three possible leads to follow: KHILIAS’ unique data packets, the power usage demanded by KHILIAS, and the references to the Jīn Huā sites. Any one of these leads will provide five to six separate locations. The correct location, an abandoned spaceport near Arkhangal City, appears on each of the lists. The player characters can either brute force the process by checking all of the locations on a single list (*Scene 3: Site Raids*) or they can obtain all three lists in order to precisely identify KHILIAS’ location (*Scene 4: AI, Interrupted*).

KHILIAS’ NETWORK TRAFFIC

The structure of KHILIAS’ data packets is unique. By logging onto Maya, a hacker can attempt to map its spread across the datasphere. Normally this would be a Dire (D4) Analysis task, but if the PCs have already identified the data packets (using the samples found in the melt-rig), it is merely a Challenging (D2) task, albeit one that takes at least a day of solid work. (Momentum can be spent normally to reduce the time required.)

Successfully tracking the data packets provides six hotspots (see sidebar).

MAPPING POWER USAGE

The specialised sensors on the *POS Snow Angel* can, of course, be used to pinpoint the location of any facilities generating enough power to support KHILIAS, provided they are away from major urban centres.

There are two challenges: First, the PCs must reach the *POS Snow Angel*. Second, due to KHILIAS’ corruption of the planetary datasphere, Fleet Admiral Akemarr is dealing with the collapse of his command and control architecture and paranoid that Yu Jing is either mounting the assault themselves or planning to take advantage of it. He’s ordered Captain Nangala to focus the *Snow Angel*’s sensors on Niflheim. The PCs will need to convince Captain Nangala to disobey her orders. (Alternatively, the PCs might try to reach Fleet Admiral Akemarr directly. He’s located at a naval base in Odinheim.)

Once the planetary sensor sweep is completed, it provides six locations matching KHILIAS’ power signature (although Captain Nangala will once again caution that it can’t include any such locations in urban areas):

JĪN HUĀ BLACK SITES

The *Jīn huā* (“golden flower”) black sites were an ambitious programme, conceived by Ambassador Ke and executed at considerable cost to the Yu Jing State Empire. The goal was to place well-staffed and equipped Yu Jing bases deep in PanOceanian territory, where agents of the Yǎnjīng could carry out sophisticated spying and sabotage missions. Ultimately, they could be used as staging points to strike key PanOceanian positions in event of open conflict.

Emerging from the melt-rig, the PCs are likely to only have fragmentary references to “Jīn Huā sites”. *Jīn huā* is a Chinese phrase meaning “golden flower”, but its meaning here is obscure at best. There are several ways they may be able to figure out what it means:

- If they query their Bureau Noir handler or check older Noir Alert Bulletins themselves, they’ll find a reference to an enigmatic Yǎnjīng black ops project on Svalarheima known by the codename *Jīn Huā*. The only thing known about it is that it was being run out of Ambassador Ke’s office.
- If the PCs make an inquiry with any Yu Jing authorities, the keyword of “*jīn huā*” will trigger an alert for Ambassador Ke (who will discreetly reach out and contact the PCs).
- Research tests (D3) can also dig up an obscure reference to “Ambassador Ke’s *Jīn Huā* initiative” in a diplomatic journal. (On a failed check, it’s possible that Yǎnjīng counterintelligence might still detect the PCs’ queries and alert Ambassador Ke.)

Other approaches (perhaps launching an infowar infiltration of a secure Yu Jing facility) are also possible.

Meeting Ambassador Ke: Any meeting with Ke will take place in his office in Shidong, or a simulacrum

on Maya. When the PCs enter, read or summarize the following:

Ambassador Ke's office is minimally appointed and spacious, divided by wooden lattice into three areas: a foyer, where Ke's secretary sits, a greeting area with a table and a trio of black wood chairs, and a desk with its back to a large window and balcony, looking out on Shidong and the Yu Jing space elevator.

AMBASSADOR KE (YU JING)

APPEARANCE

An elderly man, in a collarless tunic made of black with white sleeves. Intricate dragons are stitched into the tunic, in black thread. A close-cropped grey beard.

ROLEPLAYING

- Ambassador Ke is aggressively formal. He will insist that things are done in the traditional way, and the correct order.
- Always squints, whether due to poor eyesight or constant suspicion.
- Despite unwavering politeness, his disdain for PanOceanians is clear.

BACKGROUND

Ambassador Ke is the highest-ranking member of the Yǎnjīng on Svalarheima. He believes absolutely in the StateEmpire, and the value of public service. He has devoted his life to this belief, and it has earned him power in the Party. But his ambition has always exceeded his grasp, and he believes that his assignment to Svalarheima, far from the real centres of Yu Jingese power, reflects some fundamental disfavour in the Party.

This has made him bitter, but it has never chipped away at the hard core of loyalty at his centre. He will go to great lengths to further his political career, but he will never do so at the expense of his nation.

Ambassador Ke is an isolated man. He has no family, and insists on a formal distance with his co-workers and employees.

KEY INFO

- **Intransigence 3:** To reveal Yu Jing state secrets. (Aside from his loyalty, he would also need to admit personal failure in losing *Jīn Huā*, most likely scuttling any hope of return to Yutang.)
- Ambassador Ke can pinpoint the five *Jīn Huā* black sites (see sidebar). He supervised the program to construct Yu Jing facilities deep in PanOceanian territory, as monitoring stations

and staging points for assaults. Four were located in or near strategic PanOceanian cities, the fifth was a staging point in the Yu Jing city of Youxiong.

NOTES:

- Ke regards PanOceanians as enemies. Social skill tests against Ke by PanOceanians are made a +1 difficulty.

SCENE 3: SITE RAIDS

If the PCs fail to cross-reference all three lists of potential sites (see *Scene 2: Triangulation*), they will most likely need to start mounting raids on whatever sites they have identified. If Captain Minwae and her team are still with the PCs, they're more than happy to help. The PCs may also be able to drum up additional support (from either PanOceanian, Yu Jing, or O-12 resources), but this should not be easy and should be limited to, at most, two additional fireteams. (While their mission is important, the truth is that KHILIAS' global assault means that resources are spread thin.)

Most of the locations are either innocent or abandoned. The GM should feel free to improvise their content, while using each as a set piece for the ever-escalating manifestations of KHILIAS. The exception is the *Jīn Huā* sites.

JĪN HUĀ SITES

Once built by Yu Jing a decade ago, the *Jīn Huā* sites have been left fallow in order to minimize the risk of being detected by PanOceania. Each facility is constructed from a network of hexagonal modules. The modules are unmarked – there is no signage – and arranged differently in each base. The goal is to create confusion, and a subtle sense of wrongness. The GM should customise each base using the small sample base depicted on p. 44 and the larger base housing KHILIAS (shown on p. 46–47) as models.

IDENTIFYING JĪN HUĀ SITES

If the PCs are not aware of what the *Jīn Huā* are when they arrive at these sites, trying to figure out where the quantronic traffic or power signatures are coming from should be framed as a minor mystery in its own right.

Once inside, there'll be considerable evidence that allows them to identify them as *Jīn Huā* facilities (even if they haven't heard term "*Jīn Huā*" before). These leads may turn them back towards

PLAYTEST TIP

MAPPING THE TARGETS

Making three copies of the map of Svalarheima (*Infinity Corebook*, p. 293) and marking each with the list of target locations generated from one avenue of investigation can make for a very effective set of player handouts.

PLAYTEST TIP

PACING KHILIAS

After leaving the melt-rig, the PCs will need to visit multiple locations to conclude their investigation. (If they get very lucky, this could be as few as two locations, but it is more likely to be four to five locations.) To really make this scenario work, you want to thoroughly incorporate the events described in the *Rise of KHILIAS* (p. 35) and *KHILIAS' Revenge* (p. 36) into this sequence: As their investigation continues, the PCs should feel increasingly desperate as the situation on Svalarheima spirals out of control. The fact that KHILIAS has corrupted the planetary datasphere should encourage the PCs to physically visit these locations (instead of simply calling Ambassador Ke, for example), providing you with the time and scope to incorporate KHILIAS' actions. If they attempt the quantronic calls anyway, KHILIAS will almost certainly interfere.

PLAYTEST TIP

OTHER THREATS

The GM can also introduce threats unrelated to March21 or KHILIAS at some of these sites: Dealing with Submondo gangsters at the White Whale Casino, smugglers who have taken up residence in an abandoned Hyō Shō Dome, or the natural threat of a cave-in trapping the PCs in the depths of the abandoned Vest Festning mine, for example.

Ambassador Ke in *Scene 2: Triangulation*. Examples might include:

- Labelled crates identifying Yu Jing suppliers and the *Jin Huā* site number.
- Files kept in the computer servers.

GENERAL FEATURES

The *Jin Huā* bases are ideal for March21: they're concealed, and they run off dedicated reactors so that they're isolated from any local grids. Most importantly, they have high-bandwidth, secured, and obfuscated Maya connections plus quantronic connections between the facilities. March21 hasn't taken full advantage of the facilities yet, but they have compromised all of them.

Sentry Guns: March21 has installed automatic sentry guns at each of the facilities. These are identical to those found on the melt-rig, and are clearly out of place with the Yu Jing technology found throughout the rest of the site.

KHILIAS Conduits: KHILIAS is using two of the locations (in Vest Festning and the Port of Odineheim) as secondary processors and conduits for accessing Maya. The servers in these bases can be used to

identify KHILIAS' unique data packet structure.

KHILIAS also monitors all of the *Jin Huā* bases. If it hasn't already become aware of the player characters, it may do so here.

Security: The entrances to the *Jin Huā* bases are secured with advanced locks and alarms, requiring Challenging (D2) tests to bypass. On a failure or complication, Yu Jing authorities are alerted (which may bring the PCs to the attention of Ambassador Ke if they have not already spoken with him). March21 has installed bypasses, which can be detected and taken advantage of with a Hacking (D1) test.

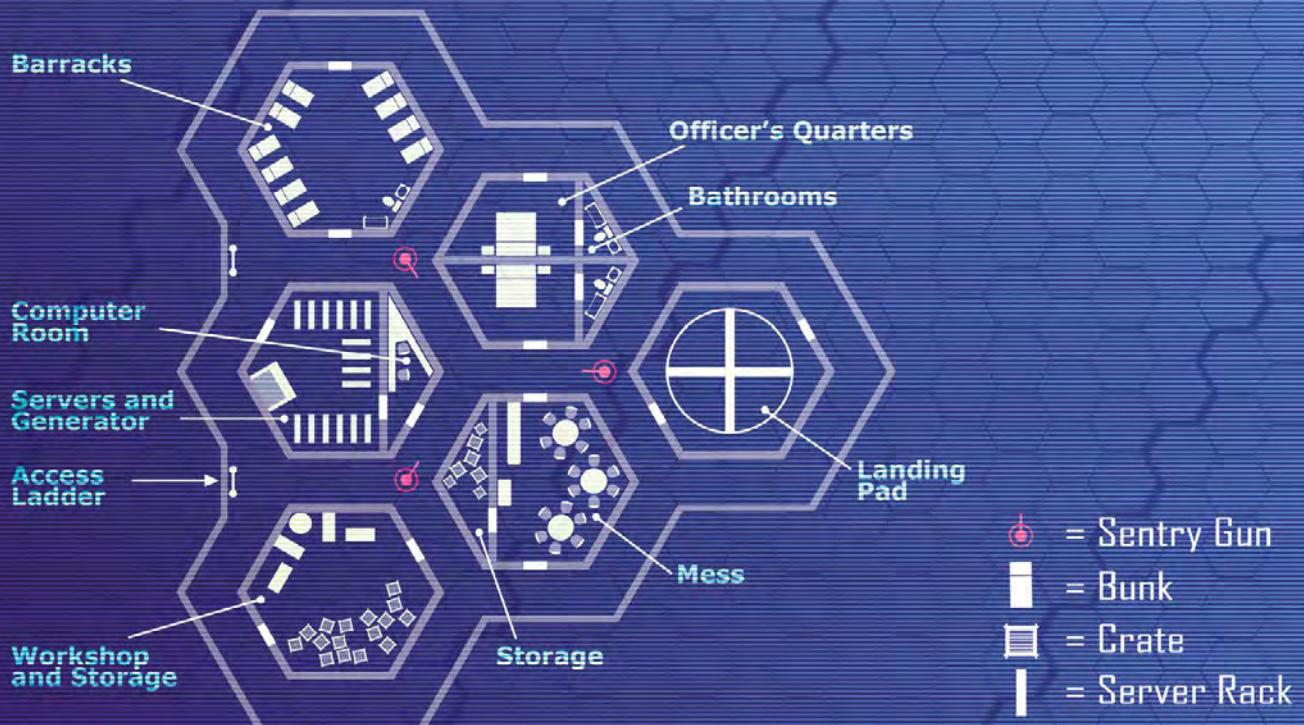
SPECIFIC SITES

Arkhangel City Spaceport: This site is where March21 is housing KHILIAS, see *Scene 4: AI, Interrupted*.

Port of Odineheim: This site is located in a sub-basement of a warehouse near the western end of the port. The surface of the parking lot can open to

Jin Huā Facility

Quantronic Heat Part 3





reveal the landing pad. This facility contains ten March21 soldiers (p. 11, but armed with heavy shotguns and smoke grenades), working in two fireteams led by Joktan Valiente (use the stats for Stanley Clayton, p. 11).

- **Heavy Shotgun:** Range C, 2+4 damage, Burst 2, Knockdown
- **Smoke Grenades:** Area (Close), Hackable, Smoke 2, Thrown, Unsubtle

Valontach Farmhouse: This site is located in the field of a farmhouse. The farmhouse itself is occupied by two simple farmers, who are actually deep cover Yu Jing agents watching over the facility. (Use stats for a Bodyguard, *Infinity Corebook*, p. 422.) There are no March21 gun turrets at this site.

Vest Festning Mine: This site is located at the very bottom of the abandoned mine. It can be accessed either through the mine tunnels or via an aeropter landing pad concealed on the top of a nearby mountain. (An elevator leads down from the pad to a tunnel connecting to the facility.) The facility itself is cold and abandoned, except for the server room.

Youxiong Military Compound: This compound is located at the border between Yu Jing and PanOceania on the northern continent. It can be accessed from a nearby Yu Jing military compound or through a concealed landing pad. Multiple tunnels extend from this facility under the border, opening at disparate locations twenty to thirty kilometres inside PanOceania territory.

SCENE 4: AI, INTERRUPTED

The climax of the scenario is an out-and-out assault on the March21 base. The site is concealed at the outskirts of Arkhangel City, underneath an old, decommissioned spaceport.

ENTERING THE BASE

There are three entrances to the facility, all concealed (Challenging (D2) Observation tests to locate them):

PLAYTEST TIP

ESCAPE!

BlackThorn, John, or even KHLIAS may attempt to use these aeropters to escape.

ENEMY PROFILES

Sentry Gun, see p. 39

March21 Foot Soldiers, see p. 11. Instead of a MULTI sniper rifle, one trooper in each squad is armed with a Spitfire.

- **Spitfire:** Range M, 1+5 damage, Burst 3, Spread 2, Unsubtle

BlackThorn, see p. 3

John, see p. 2



Warehouse A: A simple locked door, disguised by its mundanity (Average (D1) Thievery to crack, Average (D1) Athletics to break), leads to a ladder descending to Area 1 of the facility.

Warehouse B: A freight elevator at the back of the warehouse. When the correct code is entered into its control box (a Challenging (D2) Thievery test to bypass), the elevator descends into Area 2 of the facility.

Hangar: The roof of the hangar opens, to allow VTOL access. The steel floor also slides open, so that a second, secret hanger (Area 3) can be accessed below.

PLAYTEST TIP HOSTAGES

John, BlackThorn, KHILIAS, or even just desperate foot soldiers may take Dr Hart hostage in an attempt to escape the facility.

BASE DEFENCES

March21 Fireteams: The facility is guarded by twenty March21 foot soldiers. These operate as four independent fireteams, as noted on the roster.

Sentry Guns: The facility has sentry guns, as marked on the map.

MARCH21 ROSTER

ENCOUNTER	LOCATION
March21 Fireteam	Patrolling Top Level
March21 Fireteam	Area 3
BlackThorn	Area 6
March21 Fireteam	Area 6
Stanley Clayton	Area 7
March21 Fireteam (sleeping)	Area 8
John + March21 Fireteam	Area 9

TOP LEVEL

Area 1 – Access Ladder: This ladder leads to Warehouse A, above. The bottom rung of the ladder triggers an alarm – Observation (D2) to spot; Tech (D2) to disarm.

Area 2 – Freight Elevator: Elevator leads to Warehouse B, above. Operating the elevator triggers an alarm – Observation (D2) to spot; Tech (D2) to disarm.

- ① Access Ladder
- ② Freight Elevator
- ③ Aeropter Pad
- ④ Basement Access
- ⑤ Workshop/Storage
- ⑥ Officers' Quarters
- ⑦ Mess
- ⑧ Barracks
- ⑨ Dr Hart's Cell

Top Level

Quantronic Heat Part 3

March21 Jin Huā Site



• = Sentry Gun
— = Chamber Door

- ④ Top Level Access
- ⑩ Dr Hart's Cell
- ⑪ KHILIAS Storage and Reactors
- 🔦 = Sentry Gun
- ▮ = Server Rack
- ▮▮ = Window
- ▮▮ = Double Doors
- ▮ = Crate
- ▮ = Stairs



Basement Level

March21 Jīn Huā Site

Quantronic Heat Part 3

Area 3 – Aéropter Pad: A retractable ceiling leads to the hangar, above. Three troop transport aéropters are in their berths when the player characters arrive.

Area 4 – Stairwell: These stairs lead down to the basement level.

Area 5 – Workshops: These workshops contain Universal Teseum Cradles (UTCs), installed by Yu Jing to supply the frontline Jīn Huā bases with the capacity to build whatever supplies they might need on an *ad hoc* basis.

Area 6 – Officers' Quarters: John, BlackThorn, and Joktan Valiente each reside in one of these quarters (which also include bathrooms).

Area 7 – Mess: Each mess contains a small kitchen for preparing food.

Area 8 – Barracks: Each contains racks for ten people and a shared bathroom.

Area 9 – Dr Hart's Cell: Dr Hart is locked up in this officers' quarters.

BASEMENT LEVEL

Area 10 – Computer Room: A large, roughly circular space has been hewn from the bedrock to house the quantronic racks containing KHILIAS' code and core computing power. The room is frigid, but if you get close to the racks you can feel the prodigious heat they are generating.

Each of the four bays of quantronic drives have Structure 30 and Armor 2. All four need to be destroyed to put KHILIAS completely out of commission.

Area 11 – Quantronic Storage / Reactor: Below the computer room, visible through glass flooring, is a reactor embedded in coolant. This is providing the power that is keeping KHILIAS alive. It can be manually shut down using physical access panels, requiring 6 Momentum on Tech (D1) tests.

KHILIAS' LAST GASP

When it becomes clear that the March21 defenders in the facility may lose the fight, KHILIAS puts two last-ditch plans into motion.

INFOWAR

This facility is KHILIAS' home turf; it is the absolute master of its quantronic components. Any agent who has not gone silent will be exposed to infowar attacks by KHILIAS every round. Logging onto the network in the facility will subject the agent to a phantasmagoria of the horrific and the completely inexplicable. A bewildering array of interconnected nodes, their purposes difficult or impossible to interpret, spawning and disappearing as fast as the agent can move through them. The network is Military HighSec.



VICTORY!

The player characters can claim victory by shutting down the generators powering KHILIAS' data centre, or by destroying the quantronic drives on which its code is stored. If KHILIAS has successfully transferred into John's Lhost, they will also need to secure or destroy it.

Aeropter Kamikaze: KHILIAS will grab control of any aerial vehicles in the vicinity, and begin crashing them into the facility.

- Anyone on the surface (including the warehouses or hangar) can be attacked, dealing 4+6 (Knockdown). 1 Heat can be spent for each additional target.
- 1 Heat can be spent to send it crashing down into any area on the top level of the facility to the same effect.
- 2 Heat can be spent to send it down the stairwell into the basement level (although this also damages the mainframe, so KHILIAS is unlikely to do it unless its vacated those servers or is extremely desperate).
- In addition, 1 Heat can be spent to block an entrance or exit. And 2 Heat can be spent to make the crashed vehicle explode on a subsequent round, dealing 2+6 (Indiscriminate (Close), Spread 1, Unsubtle, Vicious 2) damage to anyone in the area.

Escape Vector: KHILIAS will begin a forced download of as much of its personality and core code as possible into John's Lhost body. John's body is disconnected from ALEPH, and therefore safe for KHILIAS. John, forced to confront the possibility of his own erasure, finds that he doesn't want to die. If the player characters are within earshot, he will beg for their help.

NEMESIS

KHILIAS, LHOST

ATTRIBUTES

AGI	AWA	BRW	COO	INT	PER	WIL
12	12	12	8	12	10	12

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	+2	1	Movement	+4	3	Social	+2	1
Fortitude	+2	2	Senses	+2	1	Technical	+5	5

DEFENCES

Firewall	17	Resolve	14	Vigour	14
Security	2	Morale	4	Armour	2

NOTES

KHILIAS, while in John's Lhost, has all of John's equipment (see p. 2) and all of KHILIAS' special rules (see p. 37).

The transfer will take 1+2 rounds unless a hacker intervenes, in which case KHILIAS will need to succeed on a face-to-face Hacking test (which it can attempt each round).

Once the transfer is complete, John will be dead and KHILIAS in control of his body. At this stage, its sole goal will be escape. It will try to leave the facility as quickly as possible, using its Lhost body in ways that seem unnaturally fluid to any observers. Once on the surface, it will call down an aerial transport and attempt to flee off-world.

EPILOGUE

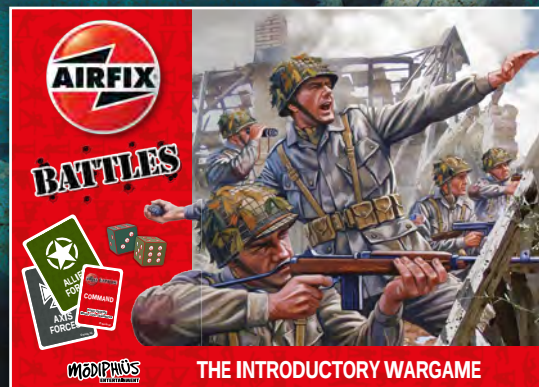
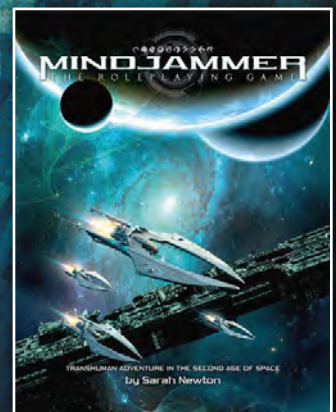
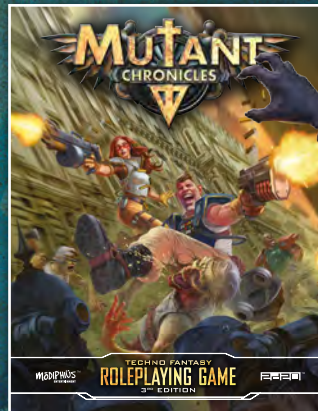
At the end of *Part Three: Birth Pangs*, the player characters should have captured the March21 facility and cut KHILIAS off from Maya. John and BlackThorn may be dead or captured. Dr Hart will probably have been rescued.

If John or BlackThorn escape, they could cause trouble for the player characters again. BlackThorn in particular is ideal for this role; she has been fighting the agents directly since the very beginning of *Quantronic Heat*. Arguably, too, her position is less tied to the fate of March21 than John; if John resurfaces, he's likely to be pursuing the same agenda, whereas BlackThorn could turn up in a variety of situations.

If KHILIAS' code survives – handed over to the Nomads, some corporation, or Bureau Toth – it could certainly resurface. This need not be in the flamboyantly destructive way that March21 envisaged; KHILIAS has the capacity to significantly impact the balance of power in the Human Sphere from behind the scenes.

An alternative epilogue to *Quantronic Heat* might simply look at the consequences of KHILIAS being properly secured by one faction or another: Bureau Toth could responsibly dismantle it, or Nomad Black Hand specialists could spend lifetimes tinkering with the code, generating clever software agents and other programs that never stray into true artificial intelligence territory.

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