

UNSTABLE SIGNALS

No. 02



THE CLOCK ISSUE

THE TERRA CONFLICTUS HOBBY MAGAZINE

UNSTABLE SIGNALS / No. 02 / THE CLOCK ISSUE

Complete web issue, formatted for offline reading. Links to referenced articles remain available online.

[Read this issue on Terra Conflictus](#)

UNSTABLE SIGNALS

< [ALL REPORTS](#)

WEEKLY ISSUE // 13 JUN 2066

NO. 02 // THE CLOCK ISSUE

THE HOBBY ZINE

PLAYTEST RECORD // SHOW YOUR WORK

ISSUE: NO. 02

THEME: THE CLOCK ISSUE

FILED: 2026-06-13



BARCODE: SIG-BATREP-2026-06-13

刻

NO. 02 // THE CLOCK ISSUE // HOBBY ZINE EVERY GAME

ON A CLOCK. // SHOW YOUR WORK // THE DICE DO NOT LIE //

OUT NOW 6 REPORTS COMPILED REPORT OF THE WEEK // MARGIN CALL Q2
2066

// ROLL IN THE OPEN // COUNT THE DICE // BLAME THE TERRAIN // FILE
THE REPORT //

// UNSTABLE SIGNALS // NO. 02 // THE CLOCK ISSUE

Six games this week, six clocks. A six-round window on a deaf relay, eight minutes at a gala, a download that beat its own operator to the floor by three seconds. This issue is about the one opponent in this game that never bluffs and never misses, and what the good tables do with the little time they get.

THE CLOCK ISSUE

NO. 02 // THE CLOCK ISSUE // 2026-06-13

THE MAKING OF THE THING // THE DICE ARE ON RECORD.

// THE FREQUENCY

Six games landed on the desk this week, and I read them back the way I always do, looking for the one thing they share before I let myself name it. This time it took about a minute. Every game ran against a clock.

Margin Call gave a two-operator team six rounds to take a frozen relay and get out. The Long Minute gave a crew eight minutes to bleed a server node at a Dynasty gala. Twice They Tried was five rounds to fold an enemy commander before the points ran out. No Clean Box was a footrace against a warlord's own people coming to fly him out of a detention block. The Cold Record asked an operator to film a glacier doing the one thing that browns out her camera. And One Walks turned on a download that finished about three seconds before the man finishing it hit the floor.

So this is the clock issue. Not the dice, for once. The thing on the table this week was time, and how little of it anybody had.

Start with the report of the week. Margin Call earned it by being the cleanest version of the lesson. Two operators, a six-round window, three weapon jams, and they still walked out with the relay because the intel had done the hard part before anybody rolled. They knew the room. The dice only got a vote on whether they kept it, and the answer came down to one pip at the terminal with the clock nearly out.

Quill builds you a clock you can see this issue, a download terminal with a track that ticks where the whole table reads it, because a hidden timer is the game master's secret and a visible one is everybody's decision. Rio digs into why this world runs on windows at all, the sky nobody owns being owned, and what that does to a corridor. Tib has seven ways to run a table on a clock without turning the night into a stopwatch. And we sat down a game master who will not start a session without a counter on the table, and asked her why.

The clock is the honest part of this game. It does not bluff and it does not miss, and that makes it the easiest opponent in the world to plan for, if you stop pretending it is not there. Read on. Learn where to spend it.

// MARGIT KOSE // DESK HOST

// THE WEEK ON THE TABLE

// REPORT OF THE WEEK

MARGIN CALL

OPERATOR TACTICS // THREAT RESPONSE // RELAY DOWN // T6

EXTRACTION // BY RIO SOLVENG

It earned it by being the cleanest version of the week's lesson. Two operators, a six-round clock on a frozen EO relay, three weapon jams, and a terminal that came down to a single pip with the window almost shut. They won it in the briefing, not the firefight: the pre-mission intel told them which room mattered and which approach the cold would not give away, so when the dice tried to take it back at the terminal there was just enough margin left to hold. When the clock is short, this is the game that shows you the real work belongs up front.

OPERATOR TACTICS // IRON LINE

TWICE THEY TRIED

In Iron Line, Strain is the clock. EO took it five to nothing in five rounds by stacking enough Strain on the NAF Siege Walker to fold it before the round cap, while never giving NAF the same shot at theirs. Steal the focus: pick the one platform whose collapse ends the game and aim the whole list at filling its track.

EO IRON VEIL 5-0 // T5 OPERATOR TACTICS // RPG

THE LONG MINUTE

An eight-minute social clock is still a clock. The crew got in on forged credentials and bled the node by becoming people nobody had a reason to watch. Steal it: when the timer is awareness, spend your first turns buying invisibility, not distance.

DATA SECURED // LOG CLEAN // T8 OPERATOR TACTICS // SKIRMISH

ONE WALKS

The download is the deadline. The firefight is just noise around it. The operator who completed the pull went down three seconds later and it did not cost the mission, because the medic was already placed to walk the data out. Steal it: decide who carries the objective off before you decide who takes it.

ATTACKER 5 // DEFENDER 3 // T6 OPERATOR TACTICS // HVT

NO CLEAN BOX

You are racing the exfil, not the kill. All three operators got wounded in the corridor before the cell even opened, burned their bodies reaching the warlord, and lost him to the militia clock by one card. Steal it: when the target leaves on a timer, the corridor is the fight, so do not arrive at the cell already spent.

HVT ESCAPES // 2 HP OPERATOR TACTICS // BIG GAME HUNTS

THE COLD RECORD

When the objective runs on its own clock, retune the plan around it. Pelt had to film the one behavior that browns out her camera, so she moved the rig off the corrupted channel and banked four of five segments instead of chasing a clean five. Steal it: a partial you can actually capture beats a perfect the clock eats.

DATA SECURED // 4 OF 5

// THE WORKBENCH

Most of the week's games hung on a clock nobody at the table could see. A download bar in somebody's head. A round counter on a scrap of paper the game master kept honest in private. I want to fix that, because a clock you can see is a clock the whole table plays around, and that is a better night than a number one person is tracking for everyone. So this issue I built a terminal you stand next to and bleed: a download node with a track that ticks one segment a round, right out in the open.

The job of this thing is to read as a place you have to stay, which is the opposite of cover. It should look exposed and important. Mine is built off a dead label printer, the squat kind with a slot, because it already has the right industrial chunk and a face you can sink a screen into. The screen is the whole point. A cracked phone you were going to recycle, glued behind a cut panel, gives you a dead display, and a row of holes down the side takes a line of beads or spare dice you advance one a round so the progress is something you can touch.

I drilled six shallow pits down the front and dropped a six-segment track in: red beads for done, empty for the rounds remaining. Now the download is not a secret anybody is holding. The whole table can see it is two off completion, and the back half of the game organizes itself around that number. One Walks would have looked exactly like this on the table, a node climbing while a firefight happened around the model bleeding it.

The mistake I made, so you do not have to: I mounted the screen flush and a seated player could not read it. Angle the face up, ten or fifteen degrees, the way a real console tilts for a standing operator. And do not paint the track segments the same red as the body. The entire value of the piece is that the count reads from across the table, so the done segments have to fight the body color, not blend into it.

On the table it does the work of three rules at once. It is an objective you have to babysit, a clock everybody can read, and a piece that punishes hugging cover, because the model bleeding the node is the model not behind a wall. Stand it in the open, give it a six-round track, and you have rebuilt the spine of half this week's games without a single bespoke part.

// BITS // WHAT GOES IN

- **Body:** a dead label printer or a squat router, slotted face
- **Screen:** a cracked phone or tablet behind a cut panel, glued dark
- **Track:** six drilled pits with beads or spare dice, one per round

- **Face plate:** styrene offcut, tilted 10 to 15 degrees to read from a seat
- **Cabling:** stripped wire run down into the floor, not out the back
- **Base:** 40mm round or a tile offcut, weighted, with a hazard stripe

// STEPS

1. Gut the printer for a flat face and cut a window for the screen.
2. Glue the dead phone behind the window so a dark display shows through the crack.
3. Drill a six-pit track down the front and seat the beads or dice so they sit proud.
4. Tilt a styrene face plate up 10 to 15 degrees so a seated player can read the count.
5. Run the cabling out of the base, not the back, so the piece sits flush in the open.
6. Paint the done segments a color that fights the body, then a hazard stripe on the base so it reads as a place you are not supposed to stand.

VERDICT: WORTH IT. ONE EVENING, AND IT TURNS THE GAME MASTER'S SECRET TIMER INTO A THING THE WHOLE TABLE PLAYS AROUND. SHOW YOUR WORK.

Drops straight into the download objectives in [SKIRMISH & IRON LINE](#) and any node hack on a Threat Response table. Make the clock honest: one segment a round, in the open, where both sides can count it.

// THE RECORD

Ask an operator on the steppe what time it is and you will get the wrong answer on purpose. They do not tell time in hours down there. They tell it in windows, and a window is the gap between two things in the sky that can see you.

Nobody in the contested zones owns the ground for long, but somebody always owns the sky. EO runs surveillance arcs over the relay grids. The Dynasty leases satellite passes the way a city leases parking. NAF flies drone racetracks over anything it cannot hold with bodies. The result is a schedule nobody publishes: every patch of dirt has a rhythm of eyes passing over it, and the quiet between those passes is the only time real work gets done.

The frozen relay in Margin Call was a node in that grid, not just a wall to hide behind. The team's six-round clock was the gap between two surveillance arcs, the window where the station was deaf. That is why the intel mattered more than the guns. Somebody had spent days mapping when the eyes looked away, and the operators were spending that map one round at a time until it ran out.

This is why the people who live there talk about time like something you can be robbed of. A blown approach does not cost you a roll, it costs you a window, and windows do not refund. The veterans run quiet because noise shortens the gap, not because they are timid: a sensor that wakes early eats the back half of your clock before you have a chance to spend it. The whole texture of an operation down there is people moving fast and silent through a hole in the sky that is closing whether or not they are finished.

Here is how you put it on your table. Stop treating the turn cap as the clock. The turn cap is just the wall at the end of the room. The real clock is the window, and you can make it visible. At the start, the game master picks a round when the next pass comes over and tells the players the shape of it, not the number. Until then the map is deaf and loud actions are free. After it, every gunshot adds a Pressure token and every loud action risks the alarm. Now the players are not racing a figure on a card. They are racing the sky, and they will spend those quiet rounds the way the steppe taught everyone to spend them: fast, and without a sound.

NOBODY OWNS THE GROUND FOR LONG. SOMEBODY ALWAYS OWNS THE SKY.

// THE COMMAND TABLE

1

MAKE THE CLOCK VISIBLE

A counter both sides can see changes how both sides play. A hidden timer is just your secret, and a secret you have to keep honest in your head is a secret you will eventually fudge. Put a die, a track, or a row of beads where everyone can read it. Now the clock makes decisions instead of just ending the game.

2

THE PRESSURE CLOCK IS A SHARED CLOCK

At three tokens the Pressure Clock fires the scenario's Climax Variable, replacing the individual trigger, and you roll on the Climax Table. Both players feed it: a body down, two operators within three inches of a marker, a failed Contact Ceiling check. So know who is one token from setting it off before you advance, because the Climax lands on everyone, including you.

3

DO NOT START THE CLOCK FOR FREE

Most clocks start on a trigger you control: the first body down, the first loud action, the first contact. If your reward favors a late game, do not be the one who trips it early to feel like you are doing something. The player who starts the clock hands the tempo to whoever was waiting for it.

4

IN IRON LINE, STRAIN IS THE CLOCK

Twice They Tried, five to nothing in five rounds. Heavy platforms take Strain instead of wounds, and a Siege Walker folds when the Strain stacks high enough. Find the one platform whose collapse ends the game and aim everything at filling its track before the round cap. Spread your fire and you run out of clock with two half-broken targets and nothing down.

5

BANK THE PARTIAL

The Cold Record. When the objective is on its own clock, a piece you can actually secure beats a perfect result the timer eats. Pelt took four of five segments and left instead of chasing the clean five into a dead camera. Read what the clock will let you finish, take that, and stop. A scored partial outranks an unscored ideal every time.

6

PLAN THE CARRY BEFORE THE GRAB

One Walks. The download finishes, then the operator who finished it goes down. It did not cost the mission because the medic was already placed to walk the data off the edge. Decide who carries the objective out before you decide who takes it, so a clock running out on your carrier is a contingency you built for, not the way you lose.

7

THE EXFIL IS THE CLOCK, NOT THE KILL

No Clean Box. When the target leaves on a timer, the corridor between you and the target is the real fight, and arriving at the objective already spent loses you the last card to whoever is racing you. Pace the approach to land at the cell with bodies left to spend. The kill is easy if you are not bleeding when you get there.

// TWO CHAIRS

Vesna Arok runs threat-response and crew tables out of the Gorodskie Ekho hobby halls, and she will not start a session without a physical counter on the table. Margit caught her after a Tuesday night that ran four minutes over the window she had set. She was not happy about the four minutes.

// KOSE: You put a clock on the table every game. Why not just track it yourself?

Because a clock I track is a threat I am holding over them, and a clock they can see is a decision they get to make. The second one is a game. The first one is me telling a story at people and pretending they have a say. I want them sweating the count, not waiting for me to announce it ran out.

// KOSE: Players tell me a visible timer makes them rush.

Good. Rushing is a choice with a cost, and I want them choosing it out loud instead of dithering in cover and then blaming the dice when the cap arrives. A team that decides to go fast and eats the risk is playing the game. A team sitting still waiting for a clean shot is hoping I forget the clock. I do not forget the clock.

// KOSE: How do you set the number?

I do not give them the number. I give them the shape. Two more loud rounds and the pass comes over, that kind of thing. Exact numbers turn it into arithmetic and the table goes quiet doing sums. A shape turns it into a gut call. Watch how differently a team plays a clock they can feel against one they can count to the decimal.

// KOSE: What do new game masters get wrong with clocks?

They make them invisible and then they fudge them, which is the same mistake twice. Both come from not trusting the clock to do the work. If you built it right you do not need to nudge it, and if you do nudge it the players can tell, and the first time they catch you the clock is dead for the rest of the campaign. Set it, show it, let it run.

// KOSE: Ever had a clock ruin a session?

Once, my fault. I set a window too tight for the map and the team never had a real shot at it, so they spent the whole night losing to a number instead of to each other. A clock has to be losable and winnable on the same night. If only one of those is true you did not build a clock, you built an ending and made them watch it arrive.

// KOSE: Last one. Best clock you ever ran?

A download node, dead center, no cover within a stride of it. Whoever wanted the data had to stand in the open and count out loud while the other side decided how much they cared. Nobody touched their dice for two rounds. They just stared at the node and did the math on each other. That silence is the whole game to me. I live for that silence.

// SIGNAL TRAFFIC

When the Pressure Clock trips the Climax, do you tell your opponent it's about to fire or let them find out? // OPEN OR CLOSED // GORODSKIE EKHO

Tell them. The Pressure Clock is open by design. It climbs on things both players can already see, a body down, two operators within three inches of a marker, a failed Contact Ceiling check, and at three tokens the Climax Variable fires on everyone. Palming the count does not make you clever, it makes you the player nobody wants to measure next to. Say it plainly: that puts the clock on two. Let them decide whether to back off the marker or commit. That decision is the game. You hiding the number is just cheating in slow motion.

My solo Big Game prep takes longer than the actual hunt. Am I over-reading the specimen? // TWO MINUTES OF MAPPING // EURASIAN STEPPE

You are reading the right things and timing them wrong. The Read is the hunt, that part is true, but you do not need every line on the card before you move. Map the two things that kill you, the vital you are aiming for and the behavior that ends your run, then start. The rest you read as it becomes relevant, with Tempo banked for the shot that matters. Prep is not a checklist you complete to feel safe. It is the two minutes that keep you alive, and after those two minutes it is just stalling.

I want to run a campaign but my players can't commit to the same night. What's the lightest persistent format that survives missed weeks? // TUESDAY MAYBE // METROPLEX

Run the threat-response loop instead of a linear campaign. Each session is one self-contained job with its own clock, and the only thing that carries over is a short ledger: who is wounded, what intel you banked, where the faction Signal sits. A missed week is just a job that did not happen, and nobody has to remember a plot to come back. Keep the persistent part to three or four numbers on an index card. Stories punish the people who miss a night. A world state waits for them.

How do you keep a Big Game Hunt scary once the players have the threat's pattern figured out? // THE QUIET GM // SAHARAN OASIS

Put the pattern on a clock. A threat is frightening while it is unknown, and once they have read it the fear has to move somewhere, so move it to time. The specimen still does the predictable thing, fine, but the weather closes the grid in four rounds, or a second threat is drawn by the noise of the first, or the extraction window shrinks every time they fire. They know what the animal will do. Make them race the doing of it. A solved threat in a closing box is scarier than a mystery with all night to crack.

// THE DROP

OPERATOR TACTICS // THREAT RESPONSE

THE DEAF WINDOW

SETUP: A two-operator team hits a frozen relay node in a surveillance grid. The station is deaf for one window. Pull the routing data and get out. **TWIST:** The game master sets the window as a shape, not a number. While the grid is deaf, loud actions are free. The round the pass comes over, every gunshot adds a Pressure token and the terminal locks for one round. **WIN:** Bleed the routing data and clear a table edge before the window shuts. **TURN CAP:** 6 rounds. The pass arrives on a round only the game master knows.

OPERATOR TACTICS // RPG

EIGHT MINUTES AT THE GALA

SETUP: A crew enters a Dynasty event on forged credentials with a server node to bleed and eight minutes to do it without going loud. **TWIST:** The clock is awareness, not the round count. Every loud or out-of-place action climbs a visible suspicion track, and the node bleeds one segment a round only while a model stands at it unwatched.

WIN: Bleed every node segment and leave with a clean log before suspicion fills.

TURN CAP: 8 rounds, or the suspicion track fills, whichever lands first.

OPERATOR TACTICS // SKIRMISH

STAND AND COUNT

SETUP: A six-segment download node dead center, no cover within a stride of it. Two splices on opposing edges. Build the terminal from this issue's Workbench. **TWIST:** The node advances one segment per round only while a model is in base contact and exposed. Plan the carry: whoever completes the download still has to walk it off their own edge. **WIN:** Complete the download and exit the carrier off your edge. Position scores nothing on its own this time. **TURN CAP:** 6 rounds, or the Pressure Clock trips the Climax.

YOU DO NOT BEAT THE CLOCK. YOU DECIDE WHAT TO SPEND IT ON.