

UNSTABLE SIGNALS

No. 04



THE WINDOW ISSUE

THE TERRA CONFLICTUS HOBBY MAGAZINE

UNSTABLE SIGNALS / No. 04 / THE WINDOW ISSUE

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WEEKLY ISSUE // 27 JUN 2066

NO. 04 // THE WINDOW ISSUE

THE HOBBY ZINE

PLAYTEST RECORD // SHOW YOUR WORK

ISSUE: NO. 04

THEME: THE WINDOW ISSUE

FILED: 2066-06-27



BARCODE: SIG-BATREP-2066-06-27

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NO. 04 // THE WINDOW ISSUE // HOBBY ZINE SPEND THE
WINDOW RIGHT OR DRIVE HOME EMPTY

OUT NOW 8 REPORTS COMPILED PATCH NOTES INSIDE FIRING ARCS LIVE
// ROLL IN THE OPEN // COUNT THE DICE // BLAME THE TERRAIN // FILE
THE REPORT //

// UNSTABLE SIGNALS // NO. 04 // THE WINDOW ISSUE

Eight games came across the desk since the last issue, and every one of them turned on a single opening: the round the relay was exposed, the shot you only get to take once, the one turn the door was unlocked. The tables that read the opening came home. The ones that won every other roll did not.

SPEND THE WINDOW

NO. 04 // THE WINDOW ISSUE // 2066-06-27

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

// THE FREQUENCY

Eight games came across the desk since the last issue, and I am going to tell you the thing they had in common, because it took me until the fourth report to see it.

Every one of them had a door.

Not always a literal one, though there were a few of those too. I mean the opening: the turn the relay was exposed, the round the specimen committed, the one window where the package could change hands and the dice would let it. In Operator Tactics the whole game narrows to those moments. You spend most of a session getting into position to reach one, and then it is there for a turn, maybe two, and then it is gone and you are playing a worse game with worse odds.

What this issue is about is what you do once you are standing in the opening.

The answer I keep coming back to is a skirmish on a survey apron at Lake Tanganyika, where a Meridian East crew won four of five priority rolls and still drove home with nothing. They had the delegate. They had two breach windows. They spent both on the same woman who would not fall, and when the second one closed they were out of road. Tib has it as our report of the week, and he is right to. It is the cleanest version I have seen of a thing I believe: an opening you spend wrong is the same as one you never had. Winning the dice is not the job. Knowing which window to put them through is.

The counterexamples are in the same roundup. A caracal-stock hunter who read a dead team's notes and held her one reactive shot for the feint instead of the first descent. An otter-forged infiltrator who set the winning charge underwater, because that was the only opening the tide left him. Same lesson as Tanganyika, read from the other end.

Quill took the theme to the bench and built a breach frame you can read across a table, the kind of terrain that tells both players where the window is before anyone rolls. Rio went into the tide tables, because half this week's openings were set by water and not by the enemy. Tib has a column on finding your window and not flinching when it opens. And the patch notes are heavy. Firing arcs are in now, Skirmish and Iron Line both, so facing is part of the opening too. Read those.

Pull up a chair. Mind the door.

// MARGIT KOSE // DESK HOST

// THE WEEK ON THE TABLE

// REPORT OF THE WEEK

BOTH WINDOWS

OPERATOR TACTICS // SKIRMISH // WITNESS WALKS // T5 // 7-0 // BY TIB MARLOW

Won four of five priority rolls and lost anyway, which is the most useful loss the desk filed all week. The Wardens had the grab on turn one and two clean breach windows to walk her out, and they spent both on a delegate who would not drop instead of changing the problem. Read it as a clinic on the gap between winning the dice and spending the opening, because the crew that did the first never got around to the second.

OPERATOR TACTICS // THREAT RESPONSE NOT THEIR WAR

When the exfil is a tide and not a clock, set the charge where the water lets you, not where the drill says. The only opening the barrage left was underwater, so that is the one they took.

SKID DOWN // ALL OUT // T5 OPERATOR TACTICS // BIG GAME HUNTS THE FIRST DESCENT

Hold your one reactive shot for the window that matters. The tiger feints on the first descent every time and kills on the second, so spend the shot there and nowhere earlier.

SPECIMEN DOWN // T1 OPERATOR TACTICS // RPG BURN NOTICE

A dying source is a closing window. Bank what you cannot get back later first, and do not detour for the one extra thing the dice were always going to charge you for.

GHOST CLEAN // T7 OPERATOR TACTICS // HVT THE LEDGER STAYS OPEN

Never build a kill around a single tool. One weapon could touch the broker, a natural one sent it down a ladder, and two soft-skill operators spent the rest of the night throwing punches at a 3 HP target.

TARGET ESCAPES // HP 2 OPERATOR TACTICS // BIG GAME HUNTS INTO THE WALLS

One round short of the kill is a closed window. The thing lives in the floor and goes back into it the moment you stall, so plan the last round before you are in it.

SITE PURGE FAILED // SUBMERGED OPERATOR TACTICS // RAID RACERS THE EASY LINE

Waiting to take it at the grab only works if your jumper makes the board. The favorites banked the late window, and one missed corner meant the operator who had to be there never arrived.

CINDER LARK EXTRACTS // T4 OPERATOR TACTICS // THREAT RESPONSE ONE LINE LEFT LIVE

Sometimes the only clean window is the harder job. The relay was fused to three patients' life support, so the squad burned both Failsafe on a surgical cut and walked out with the ward still alive.

SPINE DOWN // WARD LIVES // T6 // PATCH NOTES

This week on the table, the rules moved. Everything the desk changed or confirmed, logged in one place.

SKIRMISH & IRON LINE // V1.2 // ADDITION

Firing Arc (front 180°)

Both modes gain a forward firing arc. Shooting out of arc is allowed but penalized, so facing now matters for guns, not just movement.

- Skirmish. Each operator has a front, read from the figure's eyeline or a base notch. A model shoots into its front 180° cleanly; a target behind that line takes Out of Arc, minus 1 to the die, stacking with cover and range. Facing changes free at the start or end of any move; no pivot-to-shoot without moving. Reactions obey the arc the same way.
- Iron Line. A unit shoots into its front 180°, measured from its front edge, for free. A flank or rear target raises the shooting Target Number by 1, stacking with Cover. Wheel or Reform to bring a flank or rear target into arc for a clean shot. The arc gates shooting only; LoS, range, and Combat are unchanged.
- Penalty model, not a hard block. A snapped out-of-arc shot is always possible, just worse, so the rule rewards facing without removing the option.
- Propagated to the HTML reader, the combined print PDF, and both quick-start PDFs.

CROSS-LINE ERRATA // PLAYTEST // CLARIFICATION

Daily-desk playtest errata

Twenty rulings from two execution passes, across HVT, Skirmish, Raid Racers, Big Game, Threat Response, and the Dead Loop and False Signal modules.

- Skirmish. Rapid Fire is capped at once per activation (no double Rapid Fire for four shots). Ghost breaks on any Interact attempt whether it succeeds or fails. Dead Drop: the plus 2 for discovering the enemy objective is earned only by a successful Call the Target on a still-hidden drop, and a new Carrier Down line drops the package at its last position for any friendly to recover, never the enemy's to score.
- HVT. Per-variable Challenge crit notes now override the Section 4 defaults (a variable-1 nat-1 is a state change, not KIA; a variable-4 nat-6 recovers a state). Medic Health Restoration 3+ is a flat DC, unaffected by the medic's Wounded state. Attack Priority: the team means operators still alive, and a KIA vulnerability-match operator counts as absent so Fallback opens for the survivors.
- Threat Response (Solo). A double natural 1 in an opposed Fight is status quo with no wound. Priority Check rerolls on a tie. New Precision / Restraint option: plus 1 difficulty to limit a side effect.
- Raid Racers. New Vehicle Layout rule (a front or rear engine gives plus or minus 1 by Tight or Open terrain). Race Complication Pressure replaces the failed-roll drone Pressure and does not stack. Jumpers may take an Early Board (risky) out of a Chase via Latch.
- Big Game. Resonance Drift base save is now a flat GUTS 4+ with no proficiency. Buran and Climax escalations use a harder flat DC 5+. A failed Approach against an already-Cornered specimen gives plus 1 to the first attack and no Tempo. Hunt 05 Template Regression gains a second Mortal Wound box (destroying it takes two MWs).
- RPG, Dead Loop module. New Aberrants on the OT d6 Chassis section (Stalker, Pack, Corvid conversions) and a core-stat legend: TECH maps to TACT, PRES maps to OPINT, and the Dread PRES penalty falls on OPINT.
- RPG, False Signal module. New d6 conversion box (Difficulty 12 is at-threshold, 16+ is minus 2; Perception and Investigation use OPINT, Concealment uses TACT) and Cael Morne's canonical OT Infiltrator stat line.

// THE WORKBENCH

// QUILL ADAIR // THE READ-A-DOOR BREACH FRAME

Here is the problem the firing arc just handed every table: a model has a front now, and on a crowded board nobody can tell where anyone's front is pointing without an argument. So this week I built the cheapest fix I know. A breach frame that reads the opening for you.

The piece is a single doorway, freestanding, about 90mm tall, on its own footprint so it drops anywhere as a hard line of sight gate. The trick is not the door. The trick is the lintel. I cut a shallow notch into the top of the frame on one face only and painted a thin cyan chevron under it. That chevron is the arc marker. Stand a defender in the doorway and the chevron tells both players, at a glance, which 180 the gun covers. No protractor, no eyeline argument, no Showboat call that turns into a ten-minute rules read.

BITS // PARTS

- 1x interior door casing offcut, the 12mm pine trim kind from a hardware bin
- A sprue gate and a ladder rail off a Raid Racers vehicle frame, for the lintel detail
- Hardboard offcut, roughly 60 x 60mm, for the footprint
- 2x 3mm rare-earth magnets plus 2x steel washers from the same blister
- Cyan paint pen for the arc chevron, grey primer, and a wash in your table's biome color
- A strip of micro-tape for the wear stripes down one jamb

STEPS

1. Cut the casing to a 90mm doorway and square the base where it meets the hardboard. Dry fit before any glue touches anything.
2. Notch the lintel on one face only, a 4mm V, centered. This is your arc marker, so keep it shallow and obvious.
3. Glue the frame to the hardboard, then sink the two washers under the board for weight. Cure flat under a book overnight.
4. Prime grey, paint the chevron under the notch in cyan, then wash the whole piece in your campaign's biome color so it bases into the table.
5. Magnetize the threshold if you want a swappable blast-door insert: one magnet in the floor, one in the insert.

The failure point is the footprint. My first version rode a 3mm plastic base and tipped every time someone reached across the table. The fix was boring: a wider hardboard offcut weighted with the two washers. Dead flat now, and it slides without walking.

Tie it to play and it earns the shelf. A breach frame is a window in the literal sense: the one place a carrier has to pass through, the one tile where a defender's arc actually bites. Put two on a table and you have made the map's openings legible before anybody rolls.

VERDICT // BUILD IT. One evening, table scrap, and it makes the new firing arc legible without a protractor. The first piece of terrain I have built that plays the rule instead of fighting it.

// THE RECORD

In the drowned zones they check the tide table before the threat brief, and the habit is older than any of the crews using it now. Where the water came in after the Upheaval and never fully drained, the river sets the tempo. The enemy is a problem you can shoot. The level is not. An exfil on the Frisian coast or down in the Gorodskie sublevels is not a clock you negotiate with, it is a number that rises whether you are winning or losing, and when it crosses the threshold the only vote left is swim or stay.

You saw it twice on the table this week without being told. The splice that blew the NAF skid at Maelby had five rounds because that was how long the road stayed above water, not because anyone set a timer. The squad in the Hollowmark sublevel worked their relay in slackwater, the dead hour when the tide is neither coming nor going, which is the only time that room is quiet enough to cut a charge. Both crews planned around the water and let the firefight happen inside the opening the water gave them.

The tell is in who plans around it and who fights it. State commanders dislike tide jobs on principle, because the schedule is not theirs to issue. Splices take them on purpose. A window the enemy cannot reschedule is a window the enemy cannot steal, and a contract crew that has practiced reading a level will sit calm through a turn that makes a line regiment flinch. Night shift ownership is a real doctrine out here: whoever holds the ground after the water turns holds it for that whole tide, permits be damned.

So here is the consequence for your table. When a scenario's clock is set by water, do not draw it as a counter on the side. Draw it as terrain. Put a tide marker on the board, a real rising edge of card or foam, and move it a tile a round so it closes routes as it comes. The moment the exfil tile goes under is the moment the game changes, and a player who can watch the level climb makes sharper calls than a player counting down an abstract number. Make the window physical. The river is the third army, so give it a model.

THE RIVER IS THE THIRD ARMY. GIVE IT A MODEL.

// THE COMMAND TABLE

01

NAME THE WINDOW IN THE BRIEF

Before the first activation, say out loud which turn the job is actually winnable on. Most missions have one, a few have two. A table that has named the window plays the early turns as setup instead of spending them like they count, and nobody panics on turn two over a roll that was never the point.

02

HOLD THE REACTIVE SHOT

A reaction spent early is a reaction you do not have when the target commits. The cloud-tiger hunt this week was won by a player who sat on her one reactive shot through the feint and took the real descent. If your model gets one good interrupt a game, treat it like the last round in the gun.

03

ONE WINDOW PER TARGET

If your first breach window does not drop the mark, the second is usually better spent changing the problem than repeating it. The Tanganyika crew put both windows through the same delegate and walked home empty. When a target will not fall, stop feeding it your openings and go take the thing it was guarding.

04

FACE BEFORE YOU FIRE

With the new firing arc live, a model that has not set its front is a model shooting at minus one into anything off its 180. Facing changes free at the start or end of a move, so end every activation pointing where the threat will be, not where it was. The cheap discipline of squaring up is now worth a full pip.

05

READ THE WATER AS TERRAIN

When the clock is a tide, do not hide it on a counter. Put a rising edge on the board and move it a tile a round. Players make sharper calls against a level they can see climbing toward the exfil than against an abstract number, and the scenario stops being a stopwatch and starts being a place.

06

PLAN THE LAST ROUND FIRST

Targets that submerge, flee, or recover at a threshold punish the crew that improvises the kill turn. The steppe site purge died one round short because the finish was never sequenced. Decide your final-round actions while you still have rounds to buy the position they need, then play backward to now.

07

LET THE HARD WINDOW BE THE CLEAN ONE

Sometimes the only opening that does not cost you the mission is the harder version of the job. At Hollowmark the relay was fused to a ward's life support, so the squad burned both Failsafe on a surgical cut instead of a fast one. When the easy window fails the secondary objective, the hard window is the real one. Spend for it.

// TWO CHAIRS

Teho Brann plays out of a back room in New Geneva and files more losses on the kill count than anyone the desk knows. He also keeps winning. We asked a man who gets outshot most games how he keeps coming home with the box.

You lose the firefight most games. Is that on purpose?

Mostly, yeah. I stopped trying to win exchanges a long time ago. The other guy wants a gunfight because a gunfight is legible, you can see who is ahead. I do not give him one. I give him a board where the only thing that scores is a tile he has to come to, and then I sit on the tile.

So what are you actually playing for?

The window. Every mission has one moment where the game is decided and about forty minutes of theater around it. I spend the theater getting a model onto the deciding tile with a full activation left. If I am there when the window opens and he is still reloading, I win, and the kill count can say whatever it wants.

The Tanganyika report this week, the crew won every priority roll and lost. Recognize that?

Painfully. That is me from six years ago. They won the dice and spent the wins on the loudest target instead of the quiet one that scored. Priority is not the prize. Priority is a tool you use to be standing in the window first. They kept buying the fight and forgot to buy the door.

How do you tell which window is the real one?

Ask what the scenario pays you for, then find the turn that thing becomes reachable.

Not killable, reachable. The real window is almost never the one with the most targets in it. It is the boring one where the objective is briefly soft and everybody is looking somewhere else. If a window feels exciting, be suspicious. Exciting usually means the other guy wants you there.

Firing arcs just came in. Does facing change your game?

It helps me, honestly. I play denial, and an arc means a model parked on the objective owns a direction now. I can angle a defender so the clean approach to the tile is into his front and the only flank is across open ground. Used to be facing was free real estate nobody tracked. Now it is a wall I can build for nothing.

Advice for a player who keeps winning the kills and losing the mission?

Put a coin on the tile that scores and play the whole game like the coin is the only model on the table. Every activation, ask whether it gets you closer to standing on the coin when it matters. If it does not, you are doing theater. Theater is fun. It does not extract.

// SIGNAL TRAFFIC

"I keep winning the kill count and losing the mission. Is my whole approach wrong or just my list?" // BODY COUNT BRAM // GORODSKIE EKHO

Your list is fine. Your scoreboard is the problem. The kill count is the most satisfying number on the table and almost never the one the scenario pays out on. Pick the tile or the package that actually wins, put a token on it, and audit every activation against whether it moves you toward that token. You will lose more firefights and win more games. Read Teho Brann two sections up; he has built a whole table habit out of exactly your problem.

"Do you let the carrier shoot, or is hands-full hands-full?" // TWO-HANDED TOMAS // SALT-LINE YARDS

Hands full is hands full. A carrier moves and interacts; it does not also lay down fire like a free operator, and the moment you let it, the package stops being a liability and starts being a bonus gun. The whole tension of a carry mission is that the most important model on your side cannot defend itself. Keep it that way. Escort is a job, not a formality.

"My Iron Line lists always come down to one super-unit. How do I build without putting every egg in the Siege Walker?" // ONE BIG GUN // CASPIAN BASIN

Ask what happens to your plan on the turn the Walker is gone, because a good opponent already has. One tool that a single well-spent window can answer is a list with one point of failure, and this week's HVT roundup is full of crews who lost the job when their one answer went down a ladder. Spread the threat so no single reaction closes your whole game. A second credible gun is cheaper than a funeral.

"My terrain blocks line of sight so well the game turns into a staring contest. Too much cover?" // NOBODY MOVES // CASPIAN BASIN

Probably, but the fix is not less cover, it is cover with direction. A table of total blocks rewards nobody for moving. Add pieces that open one lane while closing another, so taking a better angle is possible but costs exposure. With firing arcs in now you have a second lever: terrain that forces a model to turn its front to use a lane leaves a flank for someone else. Make movement buy something and the staring stops.

// THE DROP

OPERATOR TACTICS // THREAT RESPONSE

THE SLACK HOUR

SETUP A relay in a flooded sublevel that is only workable at slackwater, the dead hour between tides. A two or three operator splice has to cut it and get clear. **TWIST** From turn 4 a tide edge advances one tile a round. Any tile it covers is impassable, and a model caught mid-Interact when it floods loses the action and the charge. **WIN** Relay down and every live operator on the exfil tile before it goes under. **TURN CAP** 6.

OPERATOR TACTICS // SKIRMISH

BOTH WINDOWS

SETUP One frightened delegate stranded on open ground between two crews. She will not go down and will not come quietly. **TWIST** Each crew declares exactly two breach windows across the game, once-per-game reaction beats. You can grab in one or hold in one, never both in the same window. **WIN** Walk the delegate off your own table edge. **TURN CAP** 5.

OPERATOR TACTICS // BIG GAME HUNTS

THE SECOND DESCENT

SETUP A wounded feinting specimen, cloud-tiger class. It strikes in two commits and the first is always the feint. **TWIST** The hunter has one reactive shot for the whole game. Spent on the first descent it whiffs by rule; held for the second it lands on a 5+. **WIN** Specimen down before it lands two hits on the hunter. **TURN CAP** Open, until the kill or the hunter falls.

OPERATOR TACTICS // HVT

ONE KEY ONLY

SETUP A boarding action on open water against a 3 HP broker. Exactly one operator carries the weapon that can hurt him. **TWIST** On any natural 1 by the key operator

before the confrontation, the weapon goes over the side and cannot be recovered. The rest of the team has soft skills only. **WIN** Broker down before he reaches the boat off the stern. **TURN CAP 5.**

AN OPENING YOU SPEND WRONG IS ONE YOU NEVER HAD
