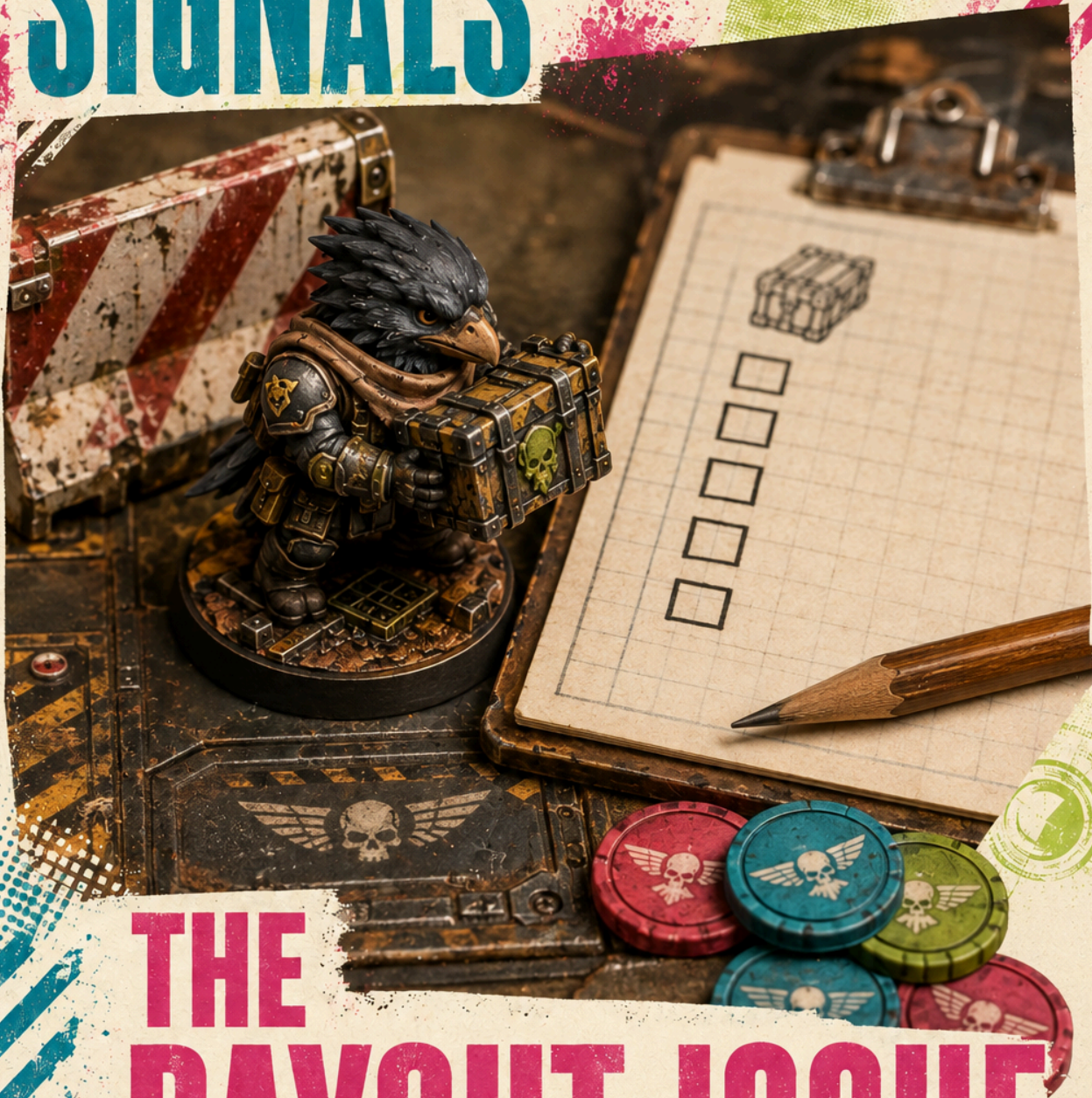


UNSTABLE SIGNALS

No. 06



THE PAYOUT ISSUE

THE TERRA CONFLICTUS HOBBY MAGAZINE

UNSTABLE SIGNALS / No. 06 / THE PAYOUT ISSUE

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WEEKLY ISSUE // 29 AUG 2026

NO. 06 // THE PAYOUT ISSUE

THE HOBBY ZINE

PLAYTEST RECORD // SHOW YOUR WORK

ISSUE: NO. 06

THEME: THE PAYOUT ISSUE

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NO. 06 // THE PAYOUT ISSUE // HOBBY ZINE WHAT THE SHEET

PAYS // SEVENTEEN FILINGS // ONE SCORING GAP // FOUR PROPOSALS

OUT NOW 17 REPORTS COMPILED PATCH NOTES INSIDE SIX WEEKS IN ONE //

BACKLOG CLEARED

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

THE REPORT //

// UNSTABLE SIGNALS // NO. 06 // THE PAYOUT ISSUE

Seventeen filings, six weeks of backlog, and five games that ended with a crew standing over the thing they came for and a scoring sheet with no column for it. The desk stopped complaining in July and started drafting the fix.

WHAT THE SHEET PAYS

NO. 06 // THE PAYOUT ISSUE // 2026-08-29

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

// THE FREQUENCY

Six weeks in one issue. The desk filed seventeen reports between the nineteenth of July and the twenty-eighth of August and this magazine printed none of them, which is my fault and nobody else's. So it is a fat issue with a long spine, and the spine turned out to be worth the wait.

Here is what I found on the second read. Five of the seventeen ended with a crew standing over the thing they came for and a scoring sheet that had no column for it. Rampart held five turns of Iron Line in a rock cut on the Vantry coast line and opened a car with nothing in it, and the after-action table paid top tier anyway, because the sheet counts Breakthrough tokens denied and cannot tell a container from whatever was supposed to be inside it. Cricket pulled a shielded drive off a live cradle burning at one GRIP slot, and Raid Race has no line for a crew that takes the package and then refuses the interface. Circuit held a node through a blackout to finish a read that scores nothing per round. Grouse won her take-alive on the Caller and the broadcast drive came off that mast wiped, and HVT has no way at all to write down that you won the body and lost the point.

And the one I keep coming back to. On the twenty-fourth of July a team took the bonded receiver at Tandu Mouth alive, which is the long road: more turns on the board, more exposure to the reinforcement clock, a Medic on the mortal track, and a live chance the man puts the book in the river on his way out the door. They got him whole. They got the book. The sheet paid them exactly what a two-turn assassination pays. Adair wrote that up plainly and then did the useful thing instead of the satisfying one, which is draft a fix, and the desk has since run some version of it twice more.

So: the payout issue. Not what you scored. What the game was willing to write down.

I want to be careful which way this cuts. A game that pays for bodies is not a broken game. It is a game with an opinion, and the opinion is legible on the page: HVT is a manhunt engine, Skirmish scores control of a square of ground, Iron Line counts what is still standing at the cap. All three are honest about it. The trouble starts where a table wants something the sheet was never built to hold, and the group quietly adjudicates it by agreement in the moment and then calls that a rule.

Adair has built a two-state objective marker so you can put the gap on the table where everyone can see it. Solveng has forty-one years of a ledger at Tandu Mouth and why paperwork is terrain in this world. Marlow has seven things to do about all of it on Wednesday. Bozhena Ilic scores every mission twice and will tell you exactly why. And the mail this month is heavy with the same question in five accents: what does the job actually require.

Read the patch notes before the letters. The RPG solved half of this in August and forgot to tell the card game.

// MARGIT KOSE // DESK HOST

// THE WEEK ON THE TABLE

// REPORT OF THE WEEK

NOTHING LEAVES

OPERATOR TACTICS // HVT // HVT SECURED // ALIVE // BY TIB MARLOW

A kill at Tandu Mouth was three turns shorter and cost nothing. The team took the Signer whole instead, paid a Medic a mortal wound for the privilege, then chased a fumbled book grab across a shed floor on a contested reaction the rules do not have a frame for, and scored exactly what an assassination scores. It takes the slot because the desk did not stop at the complaint: the Recovered Consignment token drafted at the bottom of that report is the closest thing we have to a general fix for the whole class of problem, and by the thirtieth of July it was already being extended to cover a wiped drive. Read the last third for the proposal, then read The Caller and Sign For It to watch it get stress tested twice inside six days.

OPERATOR TACTICS // RAID RACERS

NOBODY LOOKED UP

Four dice cleared a five-gate corridor because the crew drove the Alert track and not the road. Arriving quiet is the actual win condition here, so spend your one overwatch window on the drones and let the parked blockers keep talking.

TUNNEL CLEARED // ALERT o // T2 OPERATOR TACTICS // IRON LINE

NINE HUNDRED ALL

Two lists printed as 3,000 point doctrine armies actually totalled 3,075 and 2,750. Add the line items yourself before you agree a game is even, because Kill Ratio scores survivors and nothing else forgives the gap.

DRAW // 900 ALL // T5 OPERATOR TACTICS // RPG

NOBODY FIRED

The Structural clock on Salvage Law advances on any weapon fired inside the building, so the winning loadout is a standing order rather than a gun. Give your cover specialist a second job for after the cover story fails, because it will.

BOTH OBJECTIVES OUT // ZERO SHOTS OPERATOR TACTICS // SKIRMISH

BOTH SURGEONS WALKED

Glass Rook put all four bodies on the only hard cover in their half of the Ash Bowl and lost both rifles inside three rounds. One good position is still one position, and a mono-type list has no second answer when it gets rushed in a single bound.

VENT CHOIR 4-0 // T7 OPERATOR TACTICS // BIG GAME HUNTSSTILL WARM

Read the ground before you commit to a capture plan and an open pursuit becomes a net line at a chokepoint you chose. Hold the Tempo token back for the capture roll, because on a cautious specimen that is the one die the whole evidentiary payoff rides on.

LIVE CAPTURE // FOREIGN SIGNAL FOUND OPERATOR TACTICS // RAID RACE GROUND FRESH

Your Jockey does not have to win the chase if the job is a forced stop. Boarding a moving sled off a moving sled is priced at a flat DC 5 and the desk flagged it for errata, so settle the number at the table before anyone tries it.

GATE DENIED // MARK LIFTED OPERATOR TACTICS // IRON LINE STANDARD ISSUE

Denial is a positioning problem, not a firefight. Box the consist before the walker clears the curve and the rest is bookkeeping, and note that a bad roll in a good position costs a scratch while the same roll in a bad one costs a mortal wound.

LINE HELD // ONE CRATE LIVE OPERATOR TACTICS // HVT THE CALLER

The target's own kit pulled a live specimen onto the table that answered to neither initiative. Run that as a neutral hazard on its own step, and score the drive separately from the body or you will win the man and lose the only thing worth having.

CALLER TAKEN // T6 OPERATOR TACTICS // BIG GAME HUNTS OPPOSITE NUMBER

The natural 6 forced-kill rule is not broken, it is contract blind. The identical roll that voided a live capture in June closed a kill order in July, so check which contract you signed before you decide the rule is out to get you.

KILL CONFIRMED // T5 OPERATOR TACTICS // SKIRMISH SIGN FOR IT

A Hold scores physical control of a zone at end of round, never a finished read, so holding a node through a blackout is only a sane play if the table has agreed the read is a win condition. Agree that at deployment, not on turn three.

DRIVE HELD // 4-2 // T6 OPERATOR TACTICS // BIG GAME HUNTS SECOND SET

Trap-Wise will not charge open ground and counter-charges out of cover, which makes the approach the whole fight. Somebody else's baited drop-cage sitting on your table is intel about who else read the den, not a shortcut to the kill.

SPECIMEN DOWN // T5 // RIG RECOVERED OPERATOR TACTICS // RAID RACERS

THE LAUNCH CLOCK

GRIP is the Jumper's real health bar and patience is a GRIP action: stop rolling under a live drone net and Latch the slot back on a six. Declare the sled layout knowing it decides which third of the course belongs to you and which third embarrasses you.

PACKAGE PULLED // NO LAUNCH OPERATOR TACTICS // IRON LINE THE MIRROR CAR

Holding the Breacher back for the boarding action is printed advice and it is wrong inside a rock cut. Spend the Tempo on the second rail break instead of banking it, because the objective phase can turn out to be worth nothing at all.

LINE HELD // CAR EMPTY OPERATOR TACTICS // SKIRMISH CROSSED NET

Read your intel on an open channel and information stops being a private bonus and starts being a thing both crews can act on. If a scenario is going to allow a truce, the scripted third force has to threaten both sides or the truce costs nobody anything.

OBJECTIVE HELD // 3-2 // TRUCE STOOD OPERATOR TACTICS // HVT FIELD EXPEDIENT

The demolition expert June spent a month asking for finally got dealt, and the gauntlet took her at gate four. A plan that is one specialist deep is a plan that ends at whichever vector removes her, so build the fallback before you draw.

HVT DOWN // T3 // 1 KIA OPERATOR TACTICS // BIG GAME HUNTS SECOND LITTER

The Grunt-tier juvenile nobody would spend a round on came back at Veteran tier carrying a trait the old file never had cause to write. Six in-fiction weeks is long enough for a loose end to promote itself, so hold a Tempo token back instead of burning the bank on approach checks.

SPECIMEN DOWN // T5

// PATCH NOTES

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

CROSS-LINE ERRATA // PLAYTEST // CLARIFICATION

Daily-desk playtest errata

Twelve daily-desk playtest clarifications across Skirmish, the Acquisition Protocol mission Salvage Law, and the RPG core, including a new smoke rule, a new RESTRAINED status, and the melee split between the miniatures game and the RPG.

- Skirmish. Smoke finally has a rule: one action, TACT 4+, a 3 inch cloud on a point in line of sight, and it BLOCKS line of sight rather than granting a cover modifier. Nothing is shot through it, into it, or out of it, movement and melee are unaffected, a failed throw scatters D6 inches with a natural 1 scattering toward the thrower, and the cloud is gone in the End Phase. FIGHT now modifies the opposed melee die, Good plus 1, Ordinary plus 0, Bad minus 1, stacking with the melee weapon bonus and the multiple-attacker bonus. Priority ties are rerolled. The melee pin is confirmed one-sided: only the loser is Locked, the winner may leave base contact at no cost with no disengagement roll and no free attack, and the loser's Locked status ends the moment the winner departs. Steady Aim gains a duration clause, the aim is held rather than spent so it survives the End Phase and applies to the next Shoot, cancelled by any movement or by being Locked. New Braced Aim: a Marksman reduced to one action by the Mortal Wound track may use a one-action Steady Aim that ignores cover but gains no plus 1, so the wound degrades him instead of disarming him.
- Melee, Skirmish vs the RPG. The long-standing contradiction is settled as a deliberate split rather than one rule written two ways. Skirmish melee is an opposed roll with FIGHT on the die, both models roll, high wins, the attacker wins ties, and the loser is Locked. The RPG core, solo play and Big Game resolve a Fight as a threshold roll instead: the attacker's FIGHT plus the target's AR, no cover modifier, no range, a natural 6 is a Mortal Wound, and a miss costs nothing because the Fight is not opposed. Both the Skirmish reader and the rules wiki now name which melee belongs to which book.
- Acquisition Protocol // Salvage Law. The guidance module release tool is now a roll rather than a GM mood: D6 at setup, on 4+ it is in the kit, or the team can buy it outright in prep by leaving other kit behind. Without it the release is a three-stage TACT task and each stage costs one hour of mission time against all three clocks, with a natural 1 on a stage counting as a noise event as well as a failure. The Flood Timer gains the weather generator its trigger line assumed: at the start of each beat roll a D6, and on a 6 rain is reported upstream and the clock advances one extra segment. New GM Notes paragraph reconciles the five-beat structure with the core round sequence: beats are narrative time measured in mission hours against the clocks, any contact drops into the standard round sequence and

resolves there before beat time resumes, and one round counts as 2 minutes of mission time rounded up to the nearest ten minutes when marking clocks.

- **RPG core.** New **RESTRAINED** status and a **Taking Them Alive** section. A non-lethal takedown against a target that is unaware, surprised or otherwise not fighting back is 1 action and a single Fight check at your own threshold plus the target's AR. Success removes them as Restrained, which counts as Out of Action for every scenario purpose but is not a casualty: it rolls nothing in downtime, it can be questioned, moved, carried or traded, and anyone who reaches it frees it with 1 action. A natural 1 means the target gets a shout off, the takedown fails, and the nearest enemy gets a free detection roll. Fumble Table results 1 and 2 now map onto non-combat actions in both the chapter table and the Quick Card: the tool in use seizes, 1 action to clear with no progress on that task this activation, or the tool is dropped at the same cost. Opposed Checks now state that losing a contest is not the same as collapsing, so a loser whose die still met their own threshold fails to get what they wanted but suffers no further consequence and a cover story that loses to a natural 6 is turned away rather than burned.

CROSS-LINE // V1.3 // ADDITION

Contact Markers and the Pressure Clock

The hidden-enemy subsystem from Skirmish Solo Mode is now a shared rule across the GM-run core game and solo play, with Intel Markers folded into the same token pool. Threat Markers are renamed Contact Markers. The Reinforcement Clock keeps its name and gains one shared rate across both lines.

- **Contact Markers.** Enemy forces are built but not deployed. Markers stand in for unknowns and resolve on a D6 Contact Table when an operator gains line of sight. One marker per enemy to a maximum of six, plus dummies. Markers have no stats, take no actions, and never go to Overwatch.
- **Intel Markers are Contact Markers.** One token type, one roll. Approaching a marker is now a gamble between information and contact. A floor of three Intel per mission, two in Small-format skirmish. This supersedes the Investigation and Intel Placement Generator and its 4 to 6 marker count; pre-built scenarios keep their own specified placements.
- **Reinforcement Clock.** One rate across both lines: +1 per round once alerted, +1 more while a leader lives, wave arrives at 3 and resets, capped at 2 to 3 waves. Core adds a +2 band at Alert 3 to 4, which the three-state skirmish ladder has no equivalent for. Killing the leader slows the clock by 1 per round. This is not the Pressure Clock from Skirmish ch. 5, which both players track openly and which

fires the scenario Climax Variable once at threshold 3. Different devices; a scenario can run both and they never interact.

- The leader never rolls. Previously a skirmish leader could be revealed on a table result of 6 and also had a last-marker fallback. One rule now: the leader is placed on the last unrevealed marker, always. Any intel on their person comes off the body.
- Drift by alert state. Unaware markers wander on a D6. Suspicious sends the nearest marker to investigate while the rest drift. Alert sends everything toward known positions. Core's Contact Table columns re-cut to 0 / 1 / 2+ so they break where the drift bands break.
- New for the GM-run game: Cold Sites (three plausible locations for whatever the mission seeks, none decided in advance, rolled live at the table) and randomized Insertion callsigns.
- Two Investigation and Intel secondary objectives restated for marker play. 'Leave no Intel unrecovered' becomes 'reveal every marker before extraction'; the Objective Zone secondary becomes 'recover the intel carried by the HVT'.
- Insertion callsigns are DEADSTOCK, HOLLOWPOINT, GHOST RIDE, KILL SWITCH, LAST CALL and BAD PENNY, each with a mechanical hook tied to cover, deployment spacing, contamination or supply state. The old 'Unalert Movement' heading is now Patrol Drift, which describes the behavior rather than restating the alert state.
- Adopted across the line. Skirmish Solo Mode gains the six numbered Approaches, Cold Sites and the insertion table, so both editions now run all four parts. Field Operations So8 Firewall and So9 Shadowfall convert from hard-coded enemy deployment to Contact Markers, and So8's scripted Round 3 Centurion becomes a Reinforcement Clock arrival. So3 Lost Relic of Azura replaces its secret pre-rolled relic location with live Cold Sites rolls, which also makes the scenario solo-legal. Big Game stops placing the specimen at setup and searches three candidate lairs, with a sign table for cold ones. Hex Crawl builds three Candidate Objective hexes instead of one fixed hex, composing with Intel Age.
- Solo Rules section 20 split. Fog of war now defers to Contact Markers; patrol waypoints keep the section and lose the hidden-enemy language. A note added against stacking the Escalation Clock, Heat Track and Reinforcement Clock in one mission.
- Two clocks, two names. The Reinforcement Clock is the new wave engine. The Pressure Clock is the existing Skirmish device that both players track openly and

that fires the scenario Climax Variable once at threshold 3. They are unrelated, a scenario can run both, and every book that carries either now says which is which.

- Propagated to the Skirmish and Iron Line reader and print PDF, Field Operations, Big Game, the Hex Crawl rules, the solo rules and slides, and the Ask knowledge base. The core book is unchanged.

// THE WORKBENCH

Five games this month ended with a crew holding an object the sheet could not describe, and in every one of them the object on the table was a token. A flat disc, a spare base, in one case a bottle cap. If the thing your whole evening is about looks like a poker chip, nobody at the table can see the difference between owning it and having read it, and that is exactly the difference the rules keep failing to price. So build the difference. This is a two-state consignment marker: a sealed case that opens, on the table, to show it has been read.

The core is a die-cast shipping container off a 1:64 rail set, the cheap kind sold in blister fours. Cut it across the short axis about a third of the way along, keep the long piece as the body, and the short piece becomes a lid that will sit proud rather than flush. You want it proud. A lid that closes perfectly reads as furniture. A lid with a two millimetre gap and a bit of foam packing showing reads as a thing somebody has already been inside.

The state change is a magnet and a flag. Drill the body floor for a 3mm disc magnet, drop a second magnet into the underside of the lid with the poles set to attract, and the lid snaps on and off one handed mid-game without anybody nudging the model beside it. Inside the body, glue a flag of etched brass or plasticard standing about six millimetres proud, painted hazard yellow on one face and dead grey on the other. Lid on: the case is sealed and it is worth whatever the scenario says a crate is worth. Lid off, yellow face out: the read is complete and the object is now two prizes wearing one token.

The failure point is the cut. Die-cast containers have a ridged corrugation running the length of the body and a razor saw will wander along a valley if you let it. Score the cut line on all four faces first with a knife, deep, then saw to the score. If it wanders anyway, and it will once, file the mating faces flat and accept a shorter lid. Nobody is measuring.

Paint is the fastest part of this and the part people overthink. Rattle can grey primer, a hard drybrush of light grey to pull the corrugation, a wash of the dirtiest brown you own, and then the only detail that matters: a manufacturer stamp on the hasp. The desk spent August chasing crates tooled to BAFO's own containment spec with the

serials ground off, and a hand-painted three character stamp with a file-scarred patch beside it does more storytelling than an hour of edge highlighting. Two characters legible, one destroyed. Let people lean in.

One more thing worth the ten minutes. Build three. A table that has one special objective marker has a special objective. A table with three identical sealed cases, two of which open on nothing, has a decision.

// BITS

- 1:64 die-cast shipping container, blister four-pack. One container makes one marker.
- Two 3mm x 1mm neodymium disc magnets per marker. Buy a hundred, you will use them.
- Etched brass fret offcut or 0.5mm plasticard for the internal flag.
- Foam packing scrap from any blister, torn not cut, for the visible gap under the lid.
- Razor saw, needle files, a fresh blade for the score line.
- Grey primer, light grey drybrush, brown wash, hazard yellow, one fine brush for the stamp.
- Optional: a 40mm base under the body so the marker sits where objectives sit on your table.

// STEPS

1. Score the cut line on all four faces with a knife, deep enough to feel, then saw to the score. Body is the long piece, lid is the short one.
2. File both mating faces flat. Drill the body floor and the lid underside for the magnets, set the poles to attract, and glue them in with the lid closed so they self-align.
3. Cut the flag six millimetres proud of the body wall and glue it inside standing upright, offset from centre so it is visible the moment the lid lifts.
4. Wedge and glue a torn scrap of blister foam under one corner of the lid so it sits proud by about two millimetres.
5. Prime grey, drybrush light grey across the corrugation, wash brown, then paint the flag faces yellow and grey. Hand-paint a three character stamp on the hasp and file a scar through the third character.
6. Build two more with nothing but grey flags inside, so the table cannot tell which case is the one.

VERDICT // WORTH IT. FORTY MINUTES A MARKER AND IT SETTLES AN ARGUMENT THE RULEBOOKS HAVE BEEN LOSING SINCE JUNE. BUILD THREE OR DO NOT BOTHER. // Q. ADAIR

// THE RECORD

The man the desk took alive at Tandu Mouth on the twenty-fourth of July had signed for cargo in the same shed for forty-one years. Not the same company. The company changed four times and twice it did not exist. The shed stayed, the desk in it stayed, and the ledger on that desk stayed, and Ferran Ombak signed the IN column every time something came off the water and never once signed the OUT.

That is not an oversight and it is not corruption in the way an outsider reads it. In the Java Scatter, a bonded receiver is the last surviving piece of a legal system that stopped having courts. When the Scatter's inland registries went under with the coastline, the paper that survived was the paper somebody physically held, and the man who held it inherited an office nobody granted him. A bonded receiver does not own the cargo. He owns the only surviving statement that the cargo arrived. Everything after that arrival happens in a fog that four separate armed parties find useful, and the receiver stays alive precisely because none of them can afford the fog to lift.

You can see the same logic doing different work three thousand miles north. In August the desk boxed an unmarked consist in a collapsed grain silo and found six crates tooled to BAFO's own containment spec, seal gauge and hasp stamp correct, serials ground off before the crates ever left the shop. Two days later a second convoy ran the same spec toward a gate BAFO does not own. The counterfeit is not the crate. The crate is easy. The counterfeit is the paperwork the crate implies, and somebody has worked out that in a world with no registry you do not need to steal a shipment if you can manufacture the document that says it was always yours.

Here is the turn, and it is a small one that changes a lot of games. In the Terra Conflictus world, a document is a physical object with a location, and it is the only kind of property that can be in two places at once. That is why every crew in this issue kept ending up in a room arguing over one token. The drive at Kalapa Transfer was a key to the collectors and a manifest to the crew reading it. The car in the Vantry Cut held nothing, and the thing that mattered was the address that said it should have. The Caller's mast held a body worth points and a broadcast log worth the entire strike.

So the table consequence. Any time your scenario's objective is information, put two tokens down instead of one, and hand them different fates. The object can be carried, dropped, stolen and scored. The information can be read, copied, wiped or spoken aloud on an open channel, and it does not leave when the object does. Once those are

two things, a take-alive is a real decision, a wiped drive is a real loss, and an empty car is a result instead of a scoring accident. The ledger at Tandu Mouth ran forty-one years on exactly that distinction. Your Wednesday table can manage six turns of it.

A BONDED RECEIVER DOES NOT OWN THE CARGO. HE OWNS THE ONLY SURVIVING STATEMENT THAT IT ARRIVED.

// THE COMMAND TABLE

01

SCORE THE OBJECT AND THE INFORMATION SEPARATELY

Adair's Recovered Consignment proposal is the cleanest patch this desk has produced and it takes one line on your scenario sheet. Full clear needs the target and the records. Target without records is a partial. Records without the target is a partial. Run it in HVT first, where the sheet currently pays a two-turn assassination the same as a take-alive that cost a Medic a mortal wound.

02

THE RPG ALREADY SOLVED YOUR TAKE-ALIVE PROBLEM

August added a RESTRAINED status and a Taking Them Alive section to the RPG core. One action, one Fight check at your own threshold plus the target's AR, against anyone unaware or not fighting back. Restrained counts as Out of Action for scenario purposes but is not a casualty, rolls nothing in downtime, and can be questioned, carried or traded. If your card game has no live-capture rule, that is the one to import.

03

A CLOCK ONLY WORKS IF THE TABLE CAN SEE WHAT ADVANCES IT

Salvage Law's Structural clock advances on any weapon fired inside the building, on any breaching charge, and when the flood reaches 4. Say all three out loud in the briefing. Vector Group finished that mission with zero shots fired because they knew the price before the first door, and a hidden clock would have produced a firefight and a worse story.

04

CONTACT MARKERS ARE NOW THE DEFAULT, SO STOP DEPLOYING ENEMIES

Threat Markers are Contact Markers, Intel Markers are the same token, and one D6 table resolves both when an operator gains line of sight. Build the enemy force, place markers to a maximum of six plus dummies, and let approaching a marker be a gamble between information and contact. The leader never rolls: place them on the last unrevealed marker, always.

05

DO NOT STACK THREE CLOCKS AND CALL IT TENSION

The Reinforcement Clock is the wave engine at plus one per round once alerted. The Pressure Clock is the open Skirmish device that fires the scenario Climax once at threshold 3. The Escalation Clock and the Heat Track are separate again. A scenario may legally run more than one and they never interact, but the solo rules now warn against stacking them, and that warning is there because somebody tried it.

06

PRICE A CONSTRAINT INSTEAD OF ADDING A BODY

Sign For It worked because the collectors deployed under a no-escalate order: take it clean or do not take it. That single line turned every approach into a pressure play in a room with a live decant valve. A constraint costs nothing in points, cannot be out-shot, and does more to shape a game than a third of a reinforcement wave.

07

IF YOU ALLOW A TRUCE, MAKE THE THIRD FORCE MEAN IT

Crossed Net produced a genuine two-crew truce and the scripted Force C, a Veteran quartermaster and four Grunts, was a speed bump against a thousand points of cooperating players. Either give the third force enough weight to frighten both leads or take the truce off the table. A truce that costs nobody anything is a conversation with dice next to it.

08

GRADE THE POSITION BEFORE YOU GRADE THE LUCK

Standard Issue lost a natural 1 on a flank charge and paid a flesh wound. The Mirror Car lost the same roll and put an operator on the mortal track. Same die, different table state. Before anybody at your table says the dice hated them, ask what a miss was going to cost from where they were standing, because that number was set two turns earlier.

// TWO CHAIRS

BOZHENA ILIC has run the same Wednesday table out of a converted freight office in Gorodskie Ekho for two years and three months, across Skirmish, HVT and one long RPG campaign her players still refuse to end. She keeps two scoresheets for every mission and has never once shown her players the second one until the game is over. Kose called her the morning after the Tandu Mouth report went up.

Two scoresheets. Explain that before anyone decides it is a control problem. The first sheet is the game's. Whatever the book says scores, I score it, honestly, and that number stands. The second sheet is what the table actually wanted, and I fill it in as we play, in the margin, in whatever words the players used. Somebody says out loud we need him breathing, that goes on sheet two. At the end I read both. Most nights they agree. The interesting nights are the ones where they do not.

What does a disagreement between the two sheets look like?

Last winter a crew took an HVT alive over three extra turns, lost a body doing it, and won the scenario by the book. Sheet one said clean win. Sheet two said they wanted the man's contact list and they never asked him a single question, because there was no rule that made asking worth an action. That is not the players being dull. That is the sheet teaching them what to care about, and it taught them wrong.

So you house rule it.

I did for a year and it made a mess. House rules pile up and then a new player at the table cannot read the game off the book any more. What I do now is smaller. I announce the second sheet in the briefing. Not the contents, the existence. I say there is a way to end this evening that the scoring page does not know about, and if you find it I will tell you afterwards. That is it. No points.

No points at all? Players will not chase a reward that is not a reward.

Mine do, and I was surprised too. It turns out the thing people want is for the table to have noticed. Once a group knows somebody is writing down the choice they made, they start making choices worth writing down. The week I started reading sheet two out loud at the end, my quiet player started talking in the briefing.

Is there a game in the line that already does this well?

Big Game, and it is not close. The between-hunts sequence makes the last hunt physically change the next one, and the contract type decides what a roll even means. The same natural 6 that voids a live capture closes a kill order. That is a book that knows what it is paying for. HVT deals you a deck and asks you to be excited about a body.

What do you do about a rules gap in the middle of a live game, when there is no time to design anything?

Rule it fast, rule it out loud, and write the ruling on the sheet with the turn number. Never rule it twice. The damage is not from a bad call, the damage is from three different calls on the same question across an evening, because after the third one nobody trusts the floor. I have made calls I knew were wrong at the time and held them to the cap, then changed them the following week with everybody watching.

A table ritual you would recommend to somebody starting a group.

Everybody says one sentence about what their operator wants out of this specific job before deployment. Not backstory. One sentence, present tense, about tonight. It takes four minutes and it fills in half of my second sheet for me, and when a crew hits the moment where the scoring page and the job diverge, they already know which way they are going to jump.

// SIGNAL TRAFFIC

Should the GM tell players up front what the mission actually requires, or is finding out part of it?// Need To Know // Corva Basin

Tell them what the job pays. Let them find out what it costs. Those are different halves of the same sentence and only the second one is fun to discover at the table. A briefing that hides the win condition does not create tension, it creates a group that spends four turns doing the wrong thing and then feels tricked. A briefing that states the win condition plainly and says nothing about the three clocks running underneath it creates the game you actually wanted. Vector Group went into Salvage Law knowing exactly what they had to leave with and having no idea the building would price a single gunshot. That is the correct split.

How heavy can a single objective model carry before the rest of the list feels like a taxi service?// All Taxi No Fare // New Geneva

The taxi feeling does not come from the carrier being important. It comes from the carrier being the only thing on the table that can score. Split the payout and the problem dissolves: if the escort can generate value by controlling ground, denying an

approach, or finishing a read, then they are running a job with a carrier in it rather than driving a bus. Look at Sign For It. Circuit held the node and Rampart held the room, and neither of them was decoration, because the table had agreed there were two things worth winning.

We skip the between-mission steps every single time. Any trick to actually running them?// Straight To The Next One // Java Scatter

Stop trying to run them as a session. Run them as four minutes at the end of the night while people are still packing dice, and make step one a physical thing somebody writes on the campaign sheet in front of everybody. Grouse's entire summer happened because a handler logged a second set of prints off the record in June and nobody erased it. Six weeks later that line was a Veteran-tier boar standing in a relay yard with her name on the contract. Between-mission steps are boring right up until one of them grows up.

How do you build a resupply piece so it does not just become the best cover on the table?// Free Bunker // Salt-Line Yards

Build it tall and open rather than low and solid. A resupply point should be a thing you have to stand next to in the open, not a thing you get behind. Racking, a canopy on legs, crates at ankle height, and a footprint wide enough that two models cannot both use it and hide. If it has to have a wall, make the wall face away from the likely approach so anybody using it turns their back on the room. Adair's rule of thumb is that a resupply piece should feel like a decision every time somebody uses it, and cover never feels like a decision.

My solo career has failed twice and I want to restart it clean. Is that cowardice?// Two Down // Eurasian Steppe

No, and I would ask you a different question. What are you actually restarting to get away from, a build you no longer like, or a record you are ashamed of? If it is the build, restart tonight, nobody is counting. If it is the record, keep the career and change the contract. A failed run is the only thing in this hobby that can generate a story you could not have written on purpose, and two of the best reports this desk filed all summer are follow-ups to hunts that went badly. Grouse walked away from a juvenile in June and spent all of July paying for it, and that is the most interesting thing that has happened to her.

// THE DROP

OPERATOR TACTICS // SKIRMISH

TWO PRIZES

SETUP A shielded drive sits in a decant room that both crews have been paid to reach. One side is collecting the object. The other side only needs what is on it.

TWIST The drive is two tokens on one marker. The object can be carried and stolen. The read is a three-stage TACT task and once a stage is banked it cannot be taken back, only wiped. **WIN** Collectors score on extracting the object. Readers score on completing all three stages. Both is possible. Neither side may score the other's condition. **CAP** Six rounds.

OPERATOR TACTICS // HVT

RECEIPT

SETUP A bonded receiver has signed for everything that came off one dock for four decades and never signed anything out. The strike team wants the man and the desk wants the book. **TWIST** Recovered Consignment. The records score on their own track, and a fleeing HVT may attempt to dump them once per confrontation turn on a contested reaction. **WIN** Full clear on the target restrained and the records recovered. Partial on either alone. A killed target drops the records at his feet, which is easier and pays less. **CAP** Three confrontation turns.

OPERATOR TACTICS // BIG GAME HUNTS

DRAWN HAZARD

SETUP A broadcast lure has been calling live animals toward a dead relay mast for a week. The operator running it is the contract. The animal is not, and nobody owns it. **TWIST** The specimen activates on a neutral step between the two sides, scores for no one, and can only be removed by ending the thing that draws it. **WIN** Take the operator out of action with the mast still standing. The specimen leaving the table on its own is a neutral result, not a win. **CAP** Climax fires at Threat Phase 6.

OPERATOR TACTICS // SKIRMISH

THE ONLY COVER

SETUP A drained quarry with exactly one piece of hard cover in each half and steam sitting at chest height. Total War rules: no objectives, remove them or do not. **TWIST** Both hard cover pieces are placed before either side picks a table edge. Everyone can see the trap and somebody will walk into it anyway. **WIN** Two victory points per enemy operator out of action. Full elimination ends it at once. **CAP** Seven rounds.

THE SHEET PAYS FOR THE BODY. WRITE DOWN WHAT YOU CAME FOR.