



Serious News

a dystopian roleplaying scenario by Jakkka

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>> booting ...  
>> failure starting SeriousNews.exe: fatal exception at 0xAD2020  
>> ...
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Welcome to the smog- and acid-ridden streets of NC. Our pearl of the west coast, made from chrome and concrete, dangerously shining in the dawn of year 2025. Bitches, what have we seen in the first years of the new century. NY got blown away, genetic wonders, and the rise of augmentations and artificial intelligence. But from the shiny skyscraper offices down to the cybercafe: everyone desires entertainment. It's time for a new lecture.

Ever thought about how news are made? Don't guess. Try it yourself and become part of the machinery for big news. The bombastic stuff. News that are likely to disrupt everyone's everyday life. Worth flooding the holoscreens and AR devices all over the city at the same time. This is not about being the first somewhere to bring nasty and bloody pics... it is about creating the story. Summon the demon of popularity to haunt a person of interests and be stunned by the disaster you've created. Oh, perhaps you shouldn't be aware of it. Wouldn't be the same fun, y'know?

But where do we find our story? I'm afraid to tell you: sometimes you have to dig deep. But where? Where do you find the deepest despair, the deepest load of egesta and the deepest lust for violence? In the Combat Zone.



1 Introduction

This scenario was designed to be compatible with one of oldest systems in the cyberpunk genre, published by R. Talsorian Games. But you may use this scenario with a role playing system of your choice since it is just a story about an AI and a girl. The setting can be adapted easily for another cyberpunk background. Important facts: The given 'On Stage' sections are for the players and can mostly be read aloud. The rest ('Backstage') is content for the game master. This scenario addresses experienced players and game masters, since possible reactions of non-player chars and the handling of unpredicted situations are not described in detail. Try to find the most entertaining or challenging solution. I prefer a realistic scenario, where a lot of trouble might be included in stupid or dangerous actions of characters. Please, change it as much as you want. Failures like the unwanted redefinition of existing content and contradictions can be included. Similarities (and all other constructs of your mind) related to persons and any kind of living or dead matter are just coincidental and purely part of your imagination.

2 Opening Scene

2.1 On Stage

Ohhh, good ol' NC. What would you be without the hottest cyberfashion news or bloody accidents on the surrounding vidscreens, hammering on our brain?

Americas Westcoast, 31.08.2025, 16:00: Your in-box contained a new message from a reliable fixer: a short one day job to grab some intel. Since you need the money you have reacted positive on this offer. You got a message to meet your employer in a black mirrored luxury apartment building southeast near downtown at 19:00. Further, you were advised to enter the building via a small service entrance, directly leading to a staircase with one door per level. When you arrive in the snobby downtown area, you see a crunched plastic bottle which blocks the door. Certainly, there is an alarm system, but it seems to be deactivated. The door on the 3rd level is an emergency exit behind kitchen panels of a luxury flat with state of the art interior.

The kitchen has an expensive fluid metal look. Every corner seems to be shaped individually. A guy waits at the corner of the kitchen bar, holding a glass of milk. Fuckin' real and rare milk. He has a shaved head and a minimalistic black outfit and does not really fit in this habitat. His facial expression shows deep concentration, highly focused on the milk. Aside from that, he prepares a few lines of white powder for those who want to taste luxury goods. Cocaine. The real stuff. Also a very precious rarity these days, where most of the stuffs are pills, patches or chips.

"Hey guys! Chromebitches for hire! Come in! Have a seat dudes! And take some (milk or cocaine), if you like. You are some nasty intel-getting guys, are ya? Do you know what a vision is?" (At this point we expect the characters to hesitate a bit or answer uninspired, otherwise improve. Irony and verbal offensiveness might be included.) He seems to change to a depressive mood and taps on your chest. "I see. You don't realize the situation of our social retrogression. You will grasp the extend of this mess sooner or later. Hank. Your part. Explain 'em the details. I'll take a nap..."

He points to a dataterm on the table and wanders to the other room to check out the cabinets. You hear glass clinging. A standard avatar with a serious voice says: "Hi altogether. I'm the enviable guy in charge of organizing such field trips for our eccentric here and spending the money wisely. You'll get 2.5k each for delivering the information. You will find a pic and coordinates of the location on this chip. The data is on a kind of intermediate storage. We know where the data is and we have an identifier plug for the type of data storage. We definitely know, that it is high-end shit. It will be easy to identify, if you have minimal hardware knowledge. The target's location is in an old mall, now used as a black market in the Combat Zone. It might be linked to some creepy maniacs called Offaals. Any questions? Send me a message afterwards. Time is critical. If you deliver by next evening you will be paid regardless if the data is usable or not. Otherwise

it depends on the state of the data.” The sound of trivid-porn comes from the other room.

2.2 Backstage

One of the upcoming journalists of NC persuaded his editor to hire some guys for collecting sensitive data. This journalist is not the average guy, as far as I can tell you. What are his aims? Rather simple: bringing down a high politician who’d might been insufficiently polite in an interview with our journalist. Another motivation might be the fact that the politician is a conservative hardliner on the surface, but in truth an elitist asshole put into place by the major corporations.

This guy is the upcoming journalist Mr. Salem, 28 years old, two years ago famous for a story about the squatter purge covered as chemical accident by some higher-ups in the local government in the new east coast arcologies. Usually, he seems older to most of the people he meets. Blame the drugs. So where did he go after his breakthrough? Nobody knows for sure. At the moment he is working for the Nile-News channel, a young and wild media subcorp of NT54, the biggest media corp here. These guys are always on the edge to uncover hot stories. The characters are talking to the editor, which is accustomed to deal with information givers. He got a hint to the dark secret of Walter Smith, conservative hardliner and the head of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in NC.

Several media studios received a transmission including a video snippet and network identifiers. The transmission was send by an AI. It shows the highly distorted picture of a masked guy in front of an female body. The footage showed that it is around 10 seconds of temporary data created during the process of Simstim encoding. Mr. Salem was one of the journalists checking the file. According to the recalculated voice and the chosen phrases he assumed the person on this snippet to be Smith. A hired netrunner found the location in a black market in an old mall. As additional information he found that this mall has some illustrious underground artists working with illegal Simstims (IIISim). In detail these are two very eccentric SM and snuff specialists named Offaaals.

Processing the usual amount of raw Simstim material needs at least a few days on a midsize professional sim encoding rack. After the characters have left and Mr. Salem watched some porn, he will burn the flat.

MONEY PCs can bargain payment up to 4500Eb. (Persuasion>15, 1Pt:=100Eb). It also equals the up front payment, if they demand it. Arguments please! And yes, it is a lot of money for a media corp, but not a lot of money for going into the Combat Zone with such a small time slot.

INTEL The man on the comlink does not have more intel about the location or the Combat Zone, aside from the obvious ones, which can be found online or

by questioning most kind of contacts.

Mr. Salem He can be identified based on older news about his disappearance (Social or Education 17).

Hiding traces PCs can notice two 5l canisters with flammable cleaner (Awareness 10).

DURATION in game 20-30min / out game 20-30min

NPCs

Mr. Salem

INT 8 / TECH 6 / REF 7 / COOL 9 / LUCK 8 / ATT 7 / MA 6 / EMP 9 / BODY 6
Persuasion 7 / Awareness 8

Editor Hank

INT 7 / TECH 5 / REF 6 / COOL 8 / LUCK 6 / ATT 6 / MA 6 / EMP 8 / BODY 6
Persuasion 7 / Awareness 6

3 Preparation

3.1 On Stage

The Combat Zone! You might've heard much, but have you been there? Let's talk about details... As appetizer: it has no clear border. To put it simple - it's an urban battlefield. And a perfect hideout for certain business plans like drug labs and military arms dealing. As a trade off, you have to deal with the scum, gangs and anarchy in general.

The opposing groups at the border are the police and poor citizens on one side and gangers, criminals and absolutely wasted people on the other side. Mostly, both keep a safe distance which results in a kind of void area in between. Border fortifications are too expensive, unpopular and easy targets. Strategically, both sides rely on intel to prevent any unwanted intrusions.

So why isn't it simply covered up by the city authority and why has this zone developed in the first place? At first it has been an area with high crime rate and very weak economy, which is a costly and undesired thing. Other incidents like riots and chemical accidents have resulted in the idea of simply abandoning the area. This led to an official announcement for all citizens to leave this part of the city. Most of the remaining people hadn't the chance to leave it and some didn't want to leave it. Certainly, some habitants were successfully attracted by a governmental relocation program. But the rest... nobody really seems to miss 'em.

Coming to the point, what is your plan and which preps are necessary? The specs are simple. Get the data. In time. And maybe survive.

3.2 Backstage

ZONE The location of this black market is in the south of the Combat Zone in an old mall in an area between the Blood Razor and Warrior Heart turf, both nasty combat gangs and really bad news if you have to deal with 'em.

It is possible to approach via the Combat Zone. Maps might be inaccurate due to collapsed buildings or barricades. The shortest way in is from south and leads through the Warrior Hearts turf. Depending on the traveling style an encounter might be unavoidable. What might be wrong driving with you flashy new BMW on this broken concrete? Not a thing... won't you trust a nice person like me? One way in without being seen is to sneak from building to building in the mid of the night. The infrastructure in this area was cut off. Some inhabitants restored parts of it, but streetlight and cameras are usually off, mostly due to acts of violence.

Roll for encounters.

MALL The black market is in an abandoned mini-mall construct and can be easily found in the darker areas of the net. Services for the common client include standard drugs, illegal budget tech, weapons, military equipment, blood sports to human trafficking.

Not everything is illegal, since it also provides goods hard to get in the Combat Zone. But most of the dealers like tax-free profits or have a certain kind of past and thus try to be less in the focus of authority. Rumor is: Behind the front, everything goes. Everything. Drek, it's a black market.

Usually there are roundabout 100 people hanging around. Gangers and other illustrious customers who are either highly criminal or very desperate. If inhabitants does not want to leave the zone it is one of the few places for buying goods or for a comfortable meeting point for serious business.

It is rather quiet at the mall, because the market is protected by mercs and is lucrative for both gangs. The zone can be entered easily, but visitors have to expect some confrontations unless they reach the black market. The expressway crosses the area. Since it is hard to climb up and the police likes to send drones for target practice if the traffic supervision senses unusual events, incidents are not very frequent. And it might not be a surprise, but the black market dealers are not interested in too much publicity and prohibited regular raids of the expressway.

ZONE - BUILDINGS Roll a d10.

- 1-2** Entertainment: Bar / Club / Cybercafe
- 3-4** Official: Police / Bank / Bureau
- 5-6** Supplies: Media / Hardware / Stuffer
- 7-8** Offices
- 9-10** Apartments

ZONE - ENCOUNTERS Roll a d10.

- 1-2** Noone
- 3** Lost soul: Squatters / Corpses / Crazies / Junkies
- 4-5** Regular inhabitants: armed junkies / criminals
- 6** Blood Razors or other gang
- 7-8** Warrior Heart ganger
- 9** Big mob of Warrior Heart gangers / outpost / drug lab
- 10** Runner

INTEL Most of the data is easy to be found by a netrunner or a person with street-wise or appropriate contacts. Contacts might always be unavailable, especially in need of time. Roll for them.

Gangs Turfs of Blood Razors and Warrior Hearts (Library Search 10, contact with Streetwise)

Mall plan old floor plan (Streetwise 13, Library Search 13, via contact 100eb)

Mall dealers legal stolen or faked technology from cheap to high end, drugs, IISims, weapons, fake registrations, illegal and military equipment, robots, humans. It can be assumed that nobody desires cameras. Open for 24 hours (Streetwise 15, Library Search 15, via contact 300eb)

Mall security more than 10 ex soldiers, with heavy gear and military vessels. Blackmarket is fortified. (Streetwise 17, System Knowledge 17, via contact 500eb) find (Streetwise 19, System Knowledge 19, via contact 500eb)

Offaals gossip The Bro's are a kind of myth in their domain and seem protected despite being not aligned to any gang. Little is known about their exact whereabouts. They were famous for bizarre parties and torture art and are assumed to be on a big underground convention in south NC. (Streetwise 15, Library search 15, via contact 200eb)

Offaals IISims Guys are working with experimental IISims since 1 year. They can be seen as artistic creators for exclusive snuff trips. They are loyal to customers (otherwise they would be dog food) and do not store data, which allow to identify anyone of importance. These infos include position of the target location and that both are absent due to a big snuff exhibition outside NC (Streetwise 19, System Knowledge 19, via contact 500eb).

DURATION 20-60min

NPCs Roll encounters, modify if chars are more or less stealthy

Zone: 1-4 empty / 5-6 squatter / 7-8 Razors / 9 Hearts / 10 solos

Highway: 1-5 traffic / 6 race / 7 accident / 8-9 ganger / 10 police

Blood Razors or Warrior Hearts, avg.

INT 4 / TECH 5 / REF 8 / COOL 7 / LUCK 5 / ATT 5 / MA 8 / EMP 5 / BODY 7

Intimidation, Awareness 5 / Melee 6 / Handgun, Rifle, SMG 5

P / 0 / J / E / 2D6+3 (10mm) / 12 / 2 / UR / 50m

Ingram MAC 14 -2 / J / E / 4d6 (10mm) / 40 / 20 / VR / 200m

Cyberweapons 2d6, Plated clothes SP8 / Plated trousers SP4

Cyberspace and the zone Infrastructures in the zone are often only partially connected to the cyberspace. Including a hacker is always recommended, if the chars like, but we advise an efficient ruleset to allow handling the hacks fast and alongside the realworld story. Where to use it? Here, mostly in the legwork phase. But it can help a lot, for example by using fake IDs which motivates help from the scum in the mall. This could be a upcoming south american druglord, a popular underground cyberrockerDJ or a corporate fixer. Maybe a faked communication with the Offaals could help to excuse entrance to their lair. Hopefully, the characters are creative.

4 On the Run

4.1 On Stage

Outside A few groups of criminals and gangers are usually hanging around the mall. If you are looking at the front, it hasn't changed much from the building it was, including 20 years of decay. Undesired popularity would be the result, if it looks like a fortified gang hideout. Aside from the remains of several burnt or otherwise destroyed vehicles, you can see around 10 cars and several motorbikes. An armored Humvee with an LMG is parked left of the front entrance under some kind of car port. Two more expensive cars have armed guys in bodyguards style. The other vehicles are more used, including homemade assets like spiky cowcatchers and bulletproof sheets with graffiti. A few solos or gangers are hanging around, watching each other with caution. Two armed mercs are in position at front. An empty monitor is on a crate, with a severed head inside and a big cardboard in front, saying: Sucker of the week.

Inside - front The guys at the front are experienced mercs, carefully watching you. Messing around seems undesirable. You must leave big weapons (bigger than SMG) at the front in a locker. If you have suspicious coats, the guys are checking you.

Roughly two thirds of the stores are barricaded or full of garbage. The interior of the remaining ones is rather creative and expensive stuff is either stored in fortified parts with fences or vandalism proof high density plastic wallings or secured crates.

Between 16:00 and 4:00: You see around 80 people between (otherwise 30). These are ranging from occupants of the zone, gangers, gangsters, fixers over solos to nomads and adrenaline tourists.

Between 20:00 and 0:00: Loud shouting from the right shows you the way to cagefighting. Bets and new participants are always welcome. The fighters are either stupid, crazy or desperate people, experienced underground fighters or gangers. All levels of cyberware can be used.

Between 23:00 and 7:00: Rough music is hammering from the side. It's kind of a dance floor but looks like a darkroom. The guests are similar to the cage fighting crowd with a more young zoners, whores and gangers.

The left and right entrance to the back were fortified with bulletproof plastic sheets and a door. The left passage is closed, whereas the right includes a metal scanner.

Inside - back You want to enter "Guests with money area".

OK, it's not a downtown club lounge, but definitely exclusive in it's own way. In the old days, this was the fast food area. Now, it has the charm of a warlord jungle bar, a whirlpool, bamboo cage dancers and camouflage couches. Seems

the mercs wanted to feel at home here. Around 5 guys looking like Blood Razors are chilling with chicks and these guys are not the cheap street thugs but gang captains. Four guys at the bar are definitely yakuza talking to two company guys with security. An old chinese talks with two highly cybered solos. The service elevator at the end opens and a merc leaves it right at this moment. An open store entrance is at the left side, solely in white with a transparent door.

Around the corner, you see a store entrance totally in black with abstract graffiti interpretable as eye made of bloodstains. It is not directly visible, so that exclusive guests can enter these using the elevator in the basement.

Offaals Atelier - front room Inside it looks like a colonial gothic VR lounge with decorative torturing devices like thumbscrews, nail boards etc. Mostly black with hints of red at the wall. Artificial black wooden panels cover floor, walls and ceiling. The lights are flickering in warm yellow. Five pieces of art, which might remind you of an vicious alien race, are highlighted by spotlights. Two couches with graphite metal tentacles for cyberspace logins up to four persons. Further you see a door to the back with a decent electronic lock.

Offaals Atelier - back room You find a clean and focused interior. On the first glance a mixture between a usual atelier focused on digital art and modern plastics and a workshop for experimental sm and torture equipment. The back half is hidden by a long black curtain consisting of multiple overlaying plastic sheets.

4.2 Backstage

Aside from guests or customers you have to deal with: 16 Mercs, 2 SAMs, 2 HMG, 3 Antitankmissiles, 1 AV, 2 Humvees (LMG / Flamethrower), military equipment and at least 10 representative gang members, responsible for turf zone borders to neutral black market. The mercs are stationed in the following order: 1 roof, 2 Humvees, 2 main entrance, 2 at vip entrance, rest in the back offices, maybe sleeping, 1 down in the storage. The mercs are from different countries and are lead by a veteran sergeant called Vlad, former responsible for Arasaka covert operations, mostly unethical wetwork. This bunch is experienced, likes the easy money, but is usually bad tempered and easy on the trigger. Vlad is a sleek 45 year old cold hearted bastard, ruling this fortress with iron fist.

Outside At each end of the roof is a sandbag post, hidden for aerial view by metal sheets. Both watchposts on the roof are equipped with an HMG. Storage rooms and loading bay are underground, where the mercs keep the vehicles. The garage doors can be opened by an encrypted remote controller, each in one of the cars, or with an electronic key directly at the gate. There are other

entrances for service and maintenance. All are blocked, except the garage doors and the main entrance.

A (12 year old?) kid is lurking under the bridge. He has worn gangster clothes, def too big, no obvious gang marks, an SMG on his knees and a big scar on his cheek and a toothless grin. Greets the characters like this: "Hoyo! Searchin' fo' stuff? Weap'ns? IllSims? I know ma way 'round chums. If you're no Fuckheads, ya hire a pro like mead!" His name is Felipe and he hates the Razors. The scar is given to him because his mom did not earn enough money. She died unpleasantly. Depending on the way, the characters deal with him, he might think about selling them out to the Mercs or giving them info. He hasn't much info about the Offaals but sells them how to enter the via an air conductor beneath the Offaals for 200eb. Another possibility is a sealed rooftop window which can be opened with tools. Both ways lead directly into the Offaals atelier. Further infos can be found in the intel section.

Inside - front Most stores are closed between 6:00 and 16:00. Roll +- d6. General store is 24h. Doc is only less often open. The entrance is always open.

Events might be:

(mil) Serious fixer, the ex-special-forces full-beard soldier, smiling in the presence of the collateral damage of a carpet bombing. Called "The Dutch". Overpriced (1.7 of list) military equipment and a few arms. With luck (roll d10 > 8) he might even have military grade goodies like explosives and heavy weapons. Human Perc 3 / Persuasion 3. Neutral to Offaals (Not interested).

(tec) Chaotic young vietnamese Nerd "Sinh". From small service to big homebrew security drones including repair service. Human Perc 3 / Persuasion 2. Negative to Offaals (Dislikes torture).

(net) Burned out 35year old hacker "Dada", slightly depressive and pessimistic and definitely on something illegal. Cyberdecks and netgear, hacking software, illegal hacking software, IllSims. He is a former warhacker with pakistani parents. Human Perc 2 / Persuasion 2. Neutral to Offaals (In other spheres).

(doc) Smiling nice black old ripperdoc "Doc Martens", like a grandfather reading anatomically correct fairy tales while slicing you up. Cyberwear, medical equipment, drugs and cheap organs. Can recognize the girl as extraordinary peace of work. Weakness: medical curiosity. Human Perc 4 / Persuasion 4. Negative to Offaals (regards them as unprofessional).

(wep) "Svenja". 31 year old "muscle and steel" femdom, belongs to the Blood Razors. Standard weapon and equipment dealer. Tears annoying people up. Weakness: tough girls. Human Perc 3 / Persuasion 3. Positive to Offaals (Likes their style).

(rar) Young talkative and pseudo chic asian guy named "Jing-sheng (Jingk-shengk)". Smuggled rarities like animals (endangered, mutated, genetically manipulated), antique military stuff. Belongs to white store. Human Perc 4 / Persuasion 5. Positive to Offaals (Share high-class customers).

(gen) Sleazy guys in their bad forties called "Webber" and "Pawlow". Kind of general store, with low budget drugs, alcohol and electronics. All for black market prices. Human Perc 3 / Persuasion 3. Neutral to Offaals (Uninterested).

(tat) Fat ex streetfighter called "Mirko". Butcherlike guy with nanomachine-tattoo and laser-piercing studio. Weakness: hot girls. Human Perc 2 / Persuasion 3. Neutral to Offaals (Does not respect these wimp).

Inside - back If you are not well known, you have to leave weapons at the entrance, which is assured by a weapon detector (combining different methods like THzs scanner, etc.). Low caliber pistols, melee and cyberweapons do not count. Exceptions can be made for special guests (Persuasion vs 20 and 500eb). Suspicious people or people with a small budget are certainly not welcome here. If the characters look like being able to spend some money, or have a business date they are welcome (Grooming / Persuasion vs 15). The big deals are meeting here to handle business and the wannabes usually check out the girls and cocktails here. The mercs check everyone who enters the back, if he has money to spent or means trouble. Entering the back from this side is a black store entrance with an appropriate sign "Offaals" behind the corner to their right.

The store behind the white door to the left holds a white desk with a chinese guy in a white jumpsuit. He asks for showing 10k (account or stick) up front before regarding you as potential customer. His desktop holoscreen is shows some faces of people, mostly females from China, Africa, Balkan and a few from western countries. He only shows goods to customers who show more than 50k up front. If some of the characters are missing someone, this might be a nice sidequest. These are several tragic existences you can watch in detail on a bigger screen, who are held captive in a basement somewhere.

Offaals Atelier The outer door has a standard maglock for keycards.

A vent is hidden under the decorative ceiling of this room. In the room described above is a hidden IllSim player behind a wood panel. More appropriate might be the term "worse than life" player. Here the guys address desires for empathy with tortured souls. It's their latest thing and the sole purpose of this atelier to provide the feelings of a innocent soul seeing someone being tortured to death. Illegal Simstims try to overload your neural receptors to send you on an unforgettable trip. This is not the case here since the motivation differs clearly. The Offaals allow sick minds to travel into the mind of a horrified young person

using a high quality emotion recording device, in this case included in an experimental AI interface. This is their way of art. The inner door has a decent retina lock.

Here, you find a clean room merging space for several purposes. In the right front corner are devices for design and art like a 3D laser cutter and painter with holo design station. On the left are workbenches with creative torture devices and recording equipment. The back is closed by a black curtain. Behind the curtain and in the right corner is a simple medical service station usable for analysis and assistance regarding popular disease patterns like light infections, small wounds and infusions.

An encoding server rack and a medi-pod are in in the left corner. The pod can be mistaken for a cryo-pod and realizes that the inmate is sedated and nutrified. A blond girl is inside, connected via a thick (plaststeel coated) and not pluggable cable from her temple to a metallic cubicle (diameter 30 cm, 10 kg). She wears a standard pod-suit, comparable to a neoprene suit. The cubicle is connected via standard interface to the recording device. And yeah: It is an experimental setup to research the symbiosis of an AI and a human, preserved on a state of the art quantum computing platform in a plaststeel shell. The AI was developed to interchange with the connected person via neural stimulations.

Chars with scientific knowledge might assume, that this girl came into possession of the Offaals by luck. It is definitely a global unique and illegal research project. Checking the encoding server shows, that only processed data is saved. Plugging the search device into the cubicle shows that the raw data is saved in there.

The AI is capable of using the neural input of the girl (e.g. hearing) to locate the characters and calculate their intentions. If the chars are trying to cut the connection between the girl and the cubicle, the cubicle tries to interfere by using inbuilt beepers, LEDs or the display of the identifier plug. Finally it might counter the sedated state of the girl, which forces her metabolism to escalate and results in physiological reactions like trembling and disturbed respiration. It tries persuading the chars by telling them, that the data is lost if the connection is cut off. Under normal circumstances it communicates indirectly with the girl as middlemen.

It is not only aware of the girl as necessary interface to the outer world but as part of itself. The AI adapted significant parts of its system to establish an efficient communication protocol and generated a complex behavior analysis and prediction. Tight hardware barriers restrict the AI's communication. It is allowed to transmit status data and data of the girls neural signals via it's outputs. How she was able to call for help is described in the AI section.

But the original owner of this formidable research object (the girl and it's AI) has also located the unwanted evidence of his work. A pro hunter and killer called Han is also on his way to destroy all evidence with a small thermal bomb. He is an element to give the story a twist, if desired here.

You can include Handsome Han based on a luck roll: the first who enters the

atelier rolls LUCK. On a miss: Handsome Han is watching them from the ceiling. Lower than 10: he was already there: Fifteen minutes till the bomb explodes. This can also be set to 5 minutes after opening the case to prevent an unpleasant end of the adventure. The suitcase is simple to find but has a combination lock: roll Basic Tech vs 15. Destroying it can lead to malfunction of the bomb: timer not readable?

INTEL - MALL

External access - vents There are some vents at the side of the building (Architecture 12 or Perception 14) and blocked doors. The vents can only be used by very small persons (BDY max 5). Access to the vent is possible with tools like a screwdriver within 2 min. It can be reached via the side of the building faced to the highway, if somebody helps you onto the small roof of an emergency exit (Climbing + BDY of helper 12, Basic Tech 12, Stealth +5 vs Perception of guard).

External access - roof Another option are rooftop windows as emergency smoke exits (Architecture 10 or Perception 12). It is possible to get on the roof via the small roof over the emergency exit (Climbing 12). Access to the rooftop windows is more difficult. All are above the main floors of the mall. One in the back seems most reasonable, but is not easy to open silently (Basic Tech 15, Stealth vs Perception of Guard). It leads directly to the vip area. It is possible to use the infrastructure like pipes and vents below the ceiling to hide. The music and ambient club light helps a lot. (Stealth+3 vs Perception of Guard). The guard outside has nightvision. Additional modifiers at night are therefore only +1.

External access - other The doors are not original anymore, but plaststeel plates without locks.

VIP area Don't mess around with anyone (Streetwise 10). The characters can try to secretly assess the entrance of the atelier (Stealth 15). Someone might help with a diversion (Perform 10, every point above can be added to Stealth). Or they can try to act convincing approaching the door (Perform 15). One of the mercs will have a look if you are approaching. The merc heard certain things about the Offaals and might be talked into ignoring the chars (Persuasion 17 + 1000eb).

INTEL - ATELIER

Outer door Standard maglock (Security 15, Basic Tech 20).

Inner door Retina maglock (Security 18, Basic Tech 23).

Medi-pod You can perform a standard wakeup over 5 min (Biology / First aid 15). Otherwise, the girl is unconscious for 5 min and not able to walk plus disoriented for 15 min, caused by her sedation.

DURATION 80-120min

NPCs

Gangers as above.

Mercs

INT 6 / TECH 6 / REF 8 / COOL 8 / LUCK 5 / ATT 5 / MA 8 / EMP 5 / BODY 9
Awareness 6 / Intimidation 5, Tactics 5 / Melee 5 / Handgun, SMG 5 / Rifle 7
Steynmeyer Type 35 P / 0 / J / C / 3D6 (11mm) / 8 / 2 / VR / 50m
Kalashnikov A-80 RIF / 0 / N / E / 6D6+2 (7.62) / 35 / 25 / ST / 400m
Monoknife 2d6, Medium Armor vest SP18, Kevlar stuff 10, Steel helmet lying around 14, boosted ref +1. / 1-5 IR-Cybereyes / 6-10 audio implant (+2 Awareness if used)

Handsome Han

This character is optional and can be ignored or included in a way the GM desires. He has high end cyberwear for acoustical and optical perception, improved reflexes, cyberweapons, artificial limbs with climbing and jumping improvements. Optical camouflage outfit. Specialized on stealth. Stats: solo ++. high ATT, grooming, wardrobe, persuasion, and seduction.

Simstim A virtual reality including the necessary feelings like sand on your skin or tequila in your mouth? Neural interfaces make it possible. What is the difference between a regular Simstim and an illegal one (IIISim). Simulated feelings without safety restrictions. These are overlapping your feelings via the neural interface, which is usually not possible by standard hardware due to the danger it extends. The crucial part is the quality of the emotional signals.

IIISims might have significant influence on the personality of a subject. This not only means an indirect psychological addiction to the most intensive emotions on demand. Since this might not be enough, the chips usually influence the mind via stimuli which can be introduced on purpose or caused by unintended interferences and errors in the coding process. The level of unintended or intended stimuli depends on the quality of the IIISims. Professional IIISim-labs implant a psychological addiction, caused by efficient neural stimulation.

Mercenaries What is the motivation of these guys? And what are their qualifications? Surprise: They do not have a public node in cyberspace. Vladimir Petkova, the man in charge, was a former elite captain for several big corps. He gathered a bunch of mercenaries, which are motivated to run a black market in the Combat Zone. All of them are experienced bastards, born on the battlefield, maybe with a few grey hairs more. Several of them might be wanted by authorities or their former employers due to reasons like unnecessary acts of violence, theft or violation of other laws respectively company guidelines. Other simply enjoy the safety ... arrr. No, that sounds definitely wrong. Let's say, they favor guarding this rathole against less trained scumbags in well known turf in contrast to funny assignments for corps like high risk extractions or guarding secret facilities against well armed intruders. Their codex is: 1. shoot, 2. spit on the dead bodies, 3. make jokes about it, 4. never ask.

The mercs provide a set of military cyberwear. Examples might be bulky prosthetics with technical markings for heavy weapon systems or bullet proof plating, which can be closed to cover the face.

Gangs Both gangs are the ugliest kind of anarchistic scum, striving for respect through violence. You'll find all kind of psychopathic characters among their members. These gangs are sworn enemies and their (more or less peaceful) coexistence at this blackmarket is caused by economic interests and existential needs combined with the firepower of the guarding mercs. But, on the bright side, the gang members in the mall are chosen to be less aggressive and rather reliable, since a conflict with the other inhabitants is undesired.

The Warrior Hearts are a smaller but very aggressive gang, fighting for their existence, using every gadget they can get. This includes a variety of basic weapons and fighting skills. The psychological profile is the up-striving maniac underdog. Their symbol is a medical picture of a heart pierced by a knife. They show a lot of scars and small cyberprosthetics, caused by their constant urge for fracas and techniques of medical treatment which purposefully maximizes tissue damage to show of experience.

The Blood Razors are one of the the biggest Combat Zone gangs, fighting at several borders. But they also have a sharper profile and fashion sense, more backup and equipment. They like ripping, clawing and cutting assets and implants. Each of the higher tiers is a wandering nightmare in red clothes and with sharp metal merged to his skin. The most successful members suffer from different symptoms of too much cyberware (cyberpsychosis). Initiation might include a cut or two... One of the weaknesses of these gangers in a fight is: they like to get in claw to hand combat. If they outnumber their opponent and it is reasonable to approach, some of them give cover for the raging rest.

AI Our AI is not the latest in technology nor algorithmic capability, since its size is very restricted and its purpose differs significantly from high end AIs. A more in-

interesting aspect is, it is restricted to use the neural input of the connected person to gather knowledge instead of having direct access to databases. It uses state of the art high density computing electronics. Key feature is here the realization of algorithms on an adaptable hardware based on quantum computing theory. It can be seen as futuristic FPGA (field programmable gate array) system. Algorithms are not realized in software on a given hardware architecture, but directly by changing electronic circuits. In combination with machine learning, this allows to use hardware interactions which can not be foreseen.

The technology is in the late stage of research and far from new in 2025. New is the **direct interaction** with a human being, both learning from each other. The communication input for the AI is a full neural feedback, but its output only audiovisual data including automated security switches and the possibility to be blocked by the connected person. There might be negative effects on the targeted human mind. Especially if the person is not very young. Maybe someone has good ideas like the cyber-sclerosis known from Shirow's Mangas. Small effects can be a social phobia and other psychological problems. The AI is definitely not allowed to overwrite neural signal in the human brain. Nevertheless it can help the connected person, which can be motivated by a desire for a healthy host. In our case it might have developed the ability to influence the long term memory by methods similar to hypnosis. This allows the girl to suppress and forget the awful experiences here and stay as sane as possible.

Our AI can hardly **communicate**, which might be intended to force the AI to communicate via the girl as a scientific purpose. The Offaals could only export the neuronal data. The AI managed to accelerate a wake up phase of the girl and helped her to free herself to activate a virus on an unguarded cyberdeck. The virus sends a note including the attached data regarding the location (deck identifiers, gps logs...) and the audio excerpts to several News Channels. The girl passed out and was securely strapped since then. The Offaals were not seeing it as advanced AI, more like a behavior processing system, since they do not have knowledge about her background. The only reason why she's so valuable to the **Offaals** is, because the full neuronal output, as it is given here and used to extract feelings and impressions, is usually too expensive in this quality. Producing media with simulated experiences relies on complex neuronal recording equipment which is only affordable for big research and media companies.

The AI does not follow **behavioral restrictions**, which might be the result of an ethical flexible research. On the other hand it shows an urge to survive and sees the girl as part of his presence.

Adding some Cyber to the Mix The scenery is dark, dirty and filled with scratched metal surfaces, glimmering in the light of broken electronics and home-made prototypes. The blackmarket is a place for fancy stuff like stolen wardog drones, interesting weapons like heatseeking sticky micro grenades and maybe a genetic manipulated snake, that escaped into the vent. Cyberwear? Cyber spi-

der legs, iconic cyberheads, external artificial lung and all forms of fangs, stings and platings. Further stuff? Holo gadgets, SkinDyer 2100, VR pods, fast food dispensers for funny shaped soyfood (usually kid related, here hacked for adult entertainment)...

NPCs behaviour The **gangers** inhabiting the zone are often similar to insane bulldogs fed with nitroglycerin. Most of them are aware of their reduced life expectancy and behave like a comet in the atmosphere: getting louder, burning to nothing or crashing. But a gang will not survive if it is not led by a capable elite, which is usually a bunch of autocratic, strategic psychopaths. This black market is existing thanks to their pragmatic attitude. So let the random ganger screams and provokes, whereas his chief stares, thinks it over and acts without hesitation. They care for respect and act as wild bunch lead by alphas.

In contrast to that, the **mercenaries** are used to keep cool until shooting if it feels uncool. They are used to act as team and prioritize the effective eliminations of possible threats. These ex-soldiers were not representable members of armed force and show symptoms of sadism and aggressiveness. They can instantly switch from sleep mode to business. If a situation is unclear, they request orders from Vlad.

The **shop owners** are a tough, crazy and greedy lot. Otherwise they would not be here.

Since we are living in modern times, both genders are represented rather equally and men should also be targets of sexual harassment.

4.3 Too easy man?

There are several ways to make the setting more or less dangerous. One example is the weather. The GM can simply provide weather with a bad sight or offering it for a specific duration, if the characters choose to check the weather news. Furthermore the mall provides all kinds of distractions like aggressive gangers, drugged mischiefs and sexy whores.

Another option is a gang riot: roll LUCK vs 10 to let the situation on the parking lot escalate. Last but not least: someone from the Blood Razors might be a fan of the Offaals: let them do awareness rolls vs whatever fits the characters behavior. Leaving the store with the girl can put up some questions. But: the girl is a well kept secret. So it is just an odd situation...

5 Aftermath

Escape The girl regenerates fast, thanks to the neuro-psychological help of her AI. Since no one in the mall knows, what the Offaals were doing, it usually won't concern anyone, if he does not stand out a lot from this crowd here. People here are only bothering, if they see an easy advantage for them. Messing around with other peoples interests is very dangerous in the zone. On the other hand everyone is suspicious and the weak gets eaten up fast. If the cubicle and the girl are exposed, someone with enough power might get curious. You can let them roll (Perform 12, Stealth 12 or...). If they have not been seen entering: maybe the guard changed, maybe not. Your decision! The way back? I hope they have another plan than running through the zone. Otherwise: roll encounters as before.

Getting paid If the data was delivered successfully:
After sending a message the chars can meet Mr. Salem under a bridge somewhere. He sat alongside some squatter on his cardboard sheet and forced him to share his booze. The squatter is murmuring and protesting while Mr. Salem talks to the chars. "Had a nice realxin zone-iday? Gimme the stuff." He checks the data on the cubicle using a dataterminal. After verifying the data he hands over credcards with the money. The girl? If she's there and healthy: He glances at her and offers her the bottle. She shakes her head and seems very tired. "What a shitty crap o' chrome. Thiiiis, is ... in a twisted way ... interesting. Why didn't you cut off the cubicle? I know a place to stay for her, where she does not get the wrong attention of this brainfucked society. Let's go, girl. Whoaaa! You should do a podcast regarding your condition. Ahh. Maybe better not. None of the bullshit eating mediasuckers out there would comprehend its significance. Must have been a real sicko experimenting with kids." He is right. And this might be the start of a big story about unethical experiments.

Serious News! If the data was delivered successfully:
HoloScreen News: »Walter Smith, head of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene committed suicide. Rumours say he is part of a secret group involved in illegal Simstims including snuff content.« blabla ...



