
Final Payment

By Zachary Carango

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Something solid knocks you from your dreamy stupor. The cheap venetian blinds reduce the bright daylight to a dull orange glow. You'd left them rolled up. That they've been drawn is the first sign that something is wrong. The boot on your chest is the second.

"Get up." Someone commands.

"Sure thing," You grab the leg above you and twist it halfway around. It's owner screams in pain and stumbles to the side.

You sit up and find yourself staring down several gun barrels.

"I like the spirit, champ," a gravely voice from behind complements, "but save it. You've been reactivated."

"Reactivated? I told you people that I'm finished."

"Sorry kid," the same patronizing growl answers, "but I bought your contract. I don't know what kind of arrangement you had going, but that's over. We need a consultant."

That word strikes an ugly cord in your memory. Consultant. They can call it what they like, but it doesn't change a thing. Your business is murder. You quit years ago, never wanting to come back.

"Find someone else, I'm no good anymore."

"Don't sell yourself short! You look fine to me...but if you really think so we can always take out your hardware and put it in someone else. I can't just leave that expensive technology here."

"I get the picture. What's the job?"

"You've got three actually. We'll send you the memos soon. They're all standard really. I'll advance you the first \$10 million, then send more after each kill. I just figured we'd give you a heads up. Get your gear together and be ready."

An electric jolt surges through your neck. Nothing like a cattle prod to remind you who's boss. As you're convulsing you hear the intruders exit with heavy footsteps. You note one set of irregular thumps and smile despite the pain. Someone will be limping for the next few days.

Rules:

Your account's been reopened. You haven't worked as a consultant in years. That time hangs over you now. You feel ashamed but cannot make yourself regret. You may be rusty, but old habits die slow and come back fast.

This story is divided into numbered **sections**. To play, simply start at 1, read the section, and then pick a choice from the list of options at the end of the section. This choice will lead you to another section, where the process begins again. Over the course of the game you may be asked to note certain words or items. Do so on the Info Sheet several pages ahead. In addition to these basics, you should familiarize yourself with the additional rules below.

All consultants have a similar set of techniques at their disposal. Hand to hand combat, agility, and firearms training, among other assets, are all standard for a consultant. That said each has his or her own specialties. Start by picking two **skills** from the list below. Mark them on the Info Sheet a few pages ahead:

- Athletics—Speed, endurance, and strength beyond even most consultants
- Finesse—Agility and dexterity, to pick a lock or break a neck
- Hacking—Mastery of computers and the links between them
- Persona—Talk, pleasantries, and lies to get what you need
- Stealth—They won't know what hit them

You may use these skills when appropriate to your mission. The text will indicate certain choices that require a specific skill. If you have the necessary skill, you may take that choice, otherwise you may not.

The most important aspect of a consultant's job is combat. Though you may be far more skilled than the average mercenary, you are still a hired gun. Make no mistake; you will dirty your hands.

Combat, regardless of the type, always follows the same system. Any enemy you fight will have a **health** score and an **attack pattern**. You too have health, which begins at 100 and cannot exceed that value. Combat proceeds in alternating **turns**. On your turn you will lower the enemy's health. The enemy will do the same to you on their turn. The first to have their health drop to zero loses the fight. For you this means death, but certain enemies may survive defeat. You will always take the first turn.

To see how much **damage** you inflict on your enemy, you must roll a single six-sided die several times. Keep track of each number you get. Continue rolling until you get a number that has already been rolled. Your damage for this turn is equal to the number of unique rolls squared. If you're allergic to math, just look at the damage table below. Subtract this damage from the enemy's health.

Your Damage Table:

Number of Unique Rolls	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Damage	1	4	9	16	25	36	49

If the enemy still has health left, then it is now their turn. Different enemies will have different attack patterns: something like "1die x 2", which would mean roll 1 six-sided die and multiply it by 2 to find the damage. Subtract the enemy's damage from your health.

Continue trading turns until either you or your enemy falls to or below zero health. If the enemy runs out of health first, you win the fight. If you run out of health at any point, you've been killed and must start over. The use of money adds another dimension to every fight that will be explained in a moment. See the **Combat Summary** below if you're confused.

Combat Summary:

1. Roll die one at a time until you get a number that has already appeared.
2. Add up the number of unique rolls (i.e. results of 1,3,6,3 = 3 unique rolls) then square this number to find your damage. (See Damage Table)
3. Subtract your damage from enemy health.
4. Calculate enemy damage according to their Attack Pattern.
5. Subtract enemy damage from your health.
6. Return to 1 and continue until either you or the enemy drops below 0 health. If enemy runs out of health before you, you win. Otherwise, you die.

A consultant's **account** is their most unique and valuable weapon. Your employers have given you \$10MM (Million) to start, but this number will fluctuate greatly. You can make money for hits, through bonus missions, and through overkill.

Remember that money is serious business and if your account ever goes negative (i.e. you spend more than you have) its game over. Your implanted credit chip will automatically release a deadly but short-lived neurotoxin. This is to ensure your organs can be sold once your body is repossessed.

Hits and bonuses will be explained where relevant in the text. **Overkill** applies to every fight you engage in. When you reduce the enemy to below 0 health, you will be awarded \$100,000 (0.1MM) times any damage you inflict beyond what is necessary to kill the enemy. See the Combat Example below for details.

You may buy a variety of services both in and out of combat with the money in your account. All transactions are carried out electronically and all services are rendered instantly. Whenever you buy something, make sure to note the change in your account before continuing.

Here is a list of services and their respective cost:

Subcontract--\$4MM—Follow a choice that demands a skill even if you do not have that skill. Armies of able experts are standing by to take over your body via the net. These contractors can patch the holes in your skill set for a limited time. The charge covers only one skill use.

Codeine Infusion--\$5MM—Restore your health to its maximum of 100. Side effects include light-headedness and vivid hallucinations. You may not receive an infusion during combat due to these safety issues.

Precognition--\$6MM—Look ahead at the outcome of one choice, then turn back to the previous section and decide on your course of action. Thanks to decades of secret research, computer models are now powerful enough to predict the future. For a fee, the program will assess your situation and deliver a 99.9% accurate simulation of a given choice. The system cannot deal in hypotheticals, so you can only simulate a legal choice: i.e. one for which you have the necessary skill, item, or note.

Adrenaline Infusion--\$1MM—During your turn in combat, you may re-roll once after repeating a number. If the re-roll is successful, you may continue your turn with additional rolls at no charge. This serum boosts both your strength and reaction time. You may use Adrenaline infusions as often as your funds allow.

Mind Hack--\$3MM—During combat, you may take one “free” roll towards your total for the turn. This means that you can conceivably have over 6 unique rolls. This program gives you access your enemies’ minds to temporarily disable them during combat. Again, you may use this power as often as your funds allow.

Now that everything’s been explained, take a look at this **Combat Example** to see how it all fits together:

You are cornered by a Morph Guard (Health: 30 Attack Pattern: 1 die x 3).

*You roll a 2, 4, 5, then 4. This means that you have made 3 unique rolls, so you inflict 9 damage on the guard and lower his health to 21.

*The guard rolls a 4. According to the guard’s Attack Pattern, he inflicts 12 damage on you. Lower your health to 88.

*You roll a 2,3, then another 3. You spend \$1MM for an Adrenaline Infusion, and reroll a 5,6, then a 2. This means that you have made 4 unique rolls for a total of 16 damage. Lower the guard’s health to 5.

*The guard rolls a 2 for 6 damage. Lower your health to 82.

*You roll a 2, 3, 4, 5, 4, then spend \$3MM on a Mind Hack for a total of 5 unique rolls. You inflict 25 damage on the guard, defeating him with an overkill of 20.

*You multiply the overkill by \$100,000 and collect \$2MM as a bonus.

That’s about all there is to being a consultant. Use the Info Sheet on the next page to keep track of everything. It’s time to begin. Turn to section 1 whenever you’re ready.

Info Sheet:

Name:

Price Guide:

Skills:

*

*

Subcontract \$4MM

Codeine Infusion \$5MM

Precognition \$6MM

Adrenaline Infusion \$1MM

Mind Hack \$3MM

Health:

100

Account:

\$10MM

Notes:

1

You take a seat in your favorite dive bar and call for a drink. The few windows in the room are drawn so the place is dim no matter what the hour. The bar smells like a dumpster, but it's cheap and quiet. Ascension may be the city that never sleeps, but here you can at least rest your head.

Most of the time you're the only one in here besides the barkeep. He's not the type to ask questions. After emptying a few more glasses, you're ready to go.

You bring up the information from your employer. The documents project straight into your eye via a discrete implant. Even if someone were watching you, they'd see nothing but a twinkle in your pupil.

Your employer has sent you details about the three targets. Their names are Roman Pilsner, Allan St Froid, and Elaine Rush. Decide whom you want to attack now and mark their name off. You have only one shot at each assignment, so no retrying a target you've already attempted.

[] Roman Pilsner, turn to 37

[] Allan St Froid, turn to 64

[] Elaine Rush, turn to 89

If you have killed all three targets, turn to 22.

2

"Let me call my supervisor," you dial a singles hotline from a battered cellphone. Props like this really improve the disguise. While you converse out loud with the confused operator, your mind races elsewhere. Thanks to the chip in your head, you can cruise the Internet with nothing but thought.

Once you've reached his server, Roman's calendar proves an easy target. You add an entry reading "electrician" for later today. Once this task is complete, you hang up the phone.

"You may want to check again, 'cause my boss has Mr. Pilsner marked down for today."

"I'm telling you—" the majordomo pulls out an infopad and swipes her hand across the surface, "oh wait. How could I miss that? My mistake. Let me show you to the electrical room."

Once the two of you are out of sight down a side hallway, the majordomo's tone changes. In a flat, serious tone, she demands, "What's your game?"

"Excuse me?" you answer in character.

"I'm not crazy and I know there was no 'electrician' on that calendar. What exactly are you here for?"

You're beginning to lose control of the situation. Will you kill the majordomo now to avoid any trouble, turn to 31? Or will you offer the employee a \$10MM bribe to walk away immediately, turn to 60.

3

The battle may seem hopeless, but consultants have pulled off miracles before. As the hallway erupts with gunfire you fight with everything you've got.

Marduk Enforcers(Health: 100 Attack Pattern: 1die x 4)

If you are the only one left alive, you move on to face your employer. Turn to 68.

4

Though the tri-copter shows little outward signs of damage, one of its engines has begun to smoke. The entire aircraft wobbles and gyrates. The pilot, or whatever automated system runs the vehicle, lands the tri-copter back on the pad with a messy crunch.

As the functioning rotors power down, Elaine emerges followed by a handful of the same, oddly dressed security you saw earlier. Elaine's black hair is short enough that she wouldn't have to tie it back in the lab. Her face looks deceptively young. The only hints that she's ten years your senior are the creases around her eyes.

The lead guard, his face obscured by a Kevlar ski mask, lifts his gun. Elaine raises a hand before he can fire.

"Look," Elaine addresses you, "and I know how consultants work. If you give me the chance I can double whatever you're being paid."

If you have a Phosphate Rock and wish to toss it to Elaine, turn to 30. Otherwise, turn to 18.

5

Something has been bothering you these past few days. Throughout your preparations you've found signs of someone else watching your moves. If Marduk were the ones responsible you're sure they would have canceled the meeting by now. Besides, this work looks too subtle to anything but another consultant.

When your preparations are almost complete, a plain brown envelope arrives at your door. Inside is a single sheet of paper with a few lines of text.

"I know what you're planning and I want in. I'll meet you there. Don't worry, you'll recognize me when you see me.

A Friend"

The message makes you smile. It looks like your investment hasn't gone to waste. Turn to 33.

6

You take a running start from the platform and fling yourself onto the side of the metal car. The roof is slick but offers a few good handholds. With one free arm, you draw your sub-machinegun, smash the window, and climb in.

A handful of men--Allan and his guards--stands at the other end of the car. Your brash action has taken them off guard. They are at a loss for words. Not that you were going to hear them out anyway. You raise your gun.

"No, wait," Allan yells, "I know what this is about. If you want to sell I'll sell! Anything but--"

You silence him with a single round. The guards draw their side arms with new bravery. You may have killed their charge, but these guys aren't about to let you walk out.

Allan's Guards(Health: 100 Attack Pattern: 1die x 5)

If you manage to survive three turns against the guards, turn to 17.

7

After what must be a mile the passage opens out onto the salt flat. The enormous mining robots look much bigger up close. Each of their six hydraulic legs stands as tall as a telephone poll. Their rotary excavator could slice through your hatchback in seconds. You look across the barren expanse until someone calls out from behind.

"Game over punk," Roman stands over the tunnel exit, pointing a shotgun in your direction.

"You think I'm just some rich kid you can push around? Well tough luck 'cause you're the one who's dying today!"

Roman Pilsner(Health: 40 Attack Pattern: 1die x 3)

If you win, turn to 63.

8

The dark brown wall extends all the way around Roman's compound. The rough basalt is set with enough precision to make climbing difficult. The door is made of solid wood, but does have a key slot. If you have *athletics* as a skill and wish to climb the wall, turn to 95. If you have *finesse* as a skill and wish to pick the lock to the side door, turn to 35. Otherwise you may kick in the door, turn to 51, or drive your car through the main gate, turn to 97.

9

Acting on instinct rather than thought, you pull yourself up just above the door. The frame offers a half-inch foothold: Just enough for you to crouch while a dozen guards storm into Elaine's office. You hold your breath and watch the freakishly tall, masked soldiers pass under you. Their skin-tight uniforms squeak a little with every move they make. You try hard not to laugh. When they're all inside, you drop soundlessly and make for the elevator, turn to 43.

10

Something catches your eye from outside the enormous window. It could just be a trick of the mind, but it's the only hope you've got. Before Marduk's enforcers can shoot you dead, you drop to the floor.

You press yourself as flat as possible. The hallway explodes with laughter. Your show seems entertaining enough to stave off your execution for the moment. Before the men can catch their breath the hallway explodes with a deafening roar. Huge sections of the glass wall fall away as a stream of hot lead sweeps up and down the passage.

The machinegun fire passes over you, but spares none of the guards. Once the shooting stops you stand. An armed helicopter hovers outside the now shattered window, admiring its work. The machine has no pilot, but fixes you with a single tinted lens. The helicopter dips, as if to give a salute, and then disappears as quickly as it arrived. Your pleas for help didn't fall on deaf ears.

Powdered glass covers the hallway like a dusting of fresh snow. The wall opposite the window has a new coat of red. None of the slumped figures lining the long passage shows any sign of motion. You proceed down the silent hallway, turn to 68.

11

An enormous maze of pipes and catwalks towers overhead. These gasworks give off a noxious, grey fog that covers the entire fourteenth district. To your left gapes a grim, trapezoidal concrete channel called the Ascension River. Right now it carries only a miserable smear of slimy green effluence, but in the stormy season the river can become a raging torrent.

You'd be worried about drawing too much attention, but the streets are nearly empty. Several plans of attack come to mind as you drive. You can hack into St Froid's personal data to find his current location and intercept him there. If you have *hacking* as a skill and would like to attempt this, turn to 73. If you'd rather simply head for the Transpacific Building, where he should be working today, turn to 55.

12

You sit at a windowsill and catch your breath. The consultant fought as hard as you'd expected. One slip and you would be the one lying motionless and mangled on the granite floor. You won this fight, but you can't win them all.

Rather than interrupt your mission with a voice call, your employer sends you a congratulatory message, "Glad to see you went for the bonus! I hoped you would, wanted to make sure I picked the better consultant. It's a matter of pride, like having a horse in the races. Money's on the way."

Note that \$10MM has been added to your account, then turn to 70.

13

Humiliated and exhausted, but ready for a fight, you emerge on the roof. The face of Paradyne pyramid breaks here into a flat platform just big enough to land a helicopter. You spot Elaine Rush for a second as she boards her idling vehicle. Your suspicions were correct. Dr. Rush is smarter than your typical mark; she knows when to run.

Once Elaine is inside, the machine's three rotors extend out on hydraulic arms. In its main configuration the vehicle resembles an equilateral triangle with a set of blades at each vertex. Elaine must be rich, or at least have rich friends to be able to afford a tri-copter. Though it's high enough to use its machine guns, the tri-copter is still vulnerable at this altitude. Now is the time to bring it down.

Tri-Copter(Health: 100 Attack Pattern: 1die x 6)

If you manage to reduce the tri-copter to less than 80 health in two turns, turn to 4. Otherwise, turn to 57 after the second turn.

14

A handful of guards draw near as you approach the entrance.

"Excuse me," An enormous man with a shaved head blocks your path, "This area's been rented for a private occasion. You're going to have to leave."

"Oh, I'm sorry," you give a dopey smile, "I guess I should have worn this on the outside."

You show the enforcer your id card. He scrutinizes your face, then hands you back the tag.

"Sorry to keep you. You should keep that where we can see it."

You move through a pair of sliding glass doors into a yawning atrium. Your pass only gives you access to this bottom floor. The main conference room lies on the upmost level. An enormous escalator runs all the way up. You step on the moving staircase and begin rising towards your final goal.

As you near the top a distant siren reaches your ears. They're on to you. Turn to 44.

15

You step out of the elevator and into total anarchy. The laboratory level seems to consist of one large, open room. Bizarre contraptions made of copper tubing and gold foil vie for space with overflowing file cabinets and coffee makers. An eclectic crowd of longhaired techies and tight collared regulators mill around, engrossed by the work.

No one questions your presence. To them you're just another new face. Assuming you have *persona* as a skill, you may ask where Rush's newest project is located, turn to 87. Otherwise you may make a systematic sweep of the area, turn to 59.

16

One, two, almost three full seconds after you hit the floor a bomb goes off. The heat of the explosion scorches your clothing and burns on your back. You can feel blood dripping from inside your ears. The blast's concussive force pushes you so hard against the floor that the broken glass and loose nails cut into your skin. Subtract 1die x 8 from your health.

If you survive, you continue down the passageway despite your injuries, turn to 7.

17

You cannot jump off while the train is passing above the river. The guards do their best to finish you off, but you are too much for these budget-bin soldiers. Once the car has gone over the river you bolt for the shattered window and jump clear of the tracks. The guards can only watch as the train carries them away. They're not paid enough to jump from a moving train.

On your way back to the car you receive a call from your employer.

“Great job kid! St Froid never knew what hit him. That was some pretty fantastic gymnastics you pulled back there too. If I could still move like that...”

“If you’ve got something to say, say it. Otherwise just shut up. I may work for you but that doesn’t mean I have to put up with this every time you call.”

“Congrats kid. You just shut down a lonely old man. I’ll send the money this time, only because you do such good work. If you talk like that again though, I’ll wear your teeth as lapel pins.”

Note that \$10MM has been added to your account, then turn to 1 and pick another target.

18

Even if Elaine could deliver on her promise, which you’re sure she can’t, your employer would kill you for such a betrayal. That he was even able to find you shows that he is not only rich but also powerful enough to circumvent the law. No, siding with Elaine would mean death.

“Money’s not the problem,” you shout over the wind, “Sorry, but I don’t accept.”

Elaine steps behind her guards and you draw your weapon.

Rush’s Entourage: (Health: 60 Attack Pattern: 1die x 4)

If you win, turn to 46.

19

Before Marduk’s enforcers can gun you down, you turn and fire a few rounds through the window. The glass fractures, but does not fall away completely. You now run through the damaged pane at full speed. A few shots ring out from the guards, but none meet their mark.

The window shatters and for a brief moment you sail out over nothing. The pulverized glass falls around you like snow.

A few guards peep their heads out the window to make sure you’re dead. Thick trees cover the ground directly below. It could take hours to find your body. Of course they never will.

You hang by one hand from a piece of metal coping. Dangling below floor level, you remain just out of sight. Once it seems like things have settled down, you swing hand over hand. Once you’ve moved far enough, you pull yourself back up through the broken window. Only a few guards remain in the hallway. None notice as you slip into the conference room, turn to 68.

20

You climb to the top level of the stairs. A forgettable, beige hallway lies beyond the door. A handful of office workers mill through the passage. You’ll step out once the place is empty.

While you wait, a distinct, pneumatic hiss reaches your ears. You dive backwards down the stairs just before something large and metallic drops from the ceiling. The device recovers from its fall, stands on four spindly, razor-sharp legs, and fixes you with a single, red lens. It would have taken your head clean off.

The machine clacks and hisses as it dances towards you. You’ve seen razor bots before, but never this small or quiet. The courts have tried to ban these things for years because they make it’s near impossible to identify their victims.

If you have and would like to use a Securis Chip, turn to 52.

Razor Bot(Health: 40 Attack Pattern: 1die + 6)

If the bot rolls a 1, it may take another turn due to its ruthless speed.

If you manage to destroy the robot, turn to 81.

21

You sift through Marduk's servers with the utmost care. If they find out you've broken in, the entire plan will be ruined. Good thing you have enough time to be delicate.

The meeting will take place at the Onyx Center, an elegant high-rise built on an artificial island. Corporations rent the center out if they need to impress but don't have the cash for a permanent headquarters. You suspect Marduk's motivations are somewhat different.

Whoever planned the event had security in mind. A private army will guard the center the entire time. Aside from them, only a handful of other employees will be present. After days of searching you find an open position as an assistant gaffer. A quick change to the employment forms and you have the job under a false identity. You print a security clearance card immediately.

Note the word *orange*. If you have the word *green* turn to 5, otherwise turn to 33.

22

You stand over a bathroom sink cleaning your weapons. The mission is finished...well this mission is anyway. Something tells you that your new employer will not let you go so easily. This thought weighs heavily on your mind. Will you be a slave? Or is there something you can do to break free.

If you have noted the words *red*, *blue*, and *yellow*, turn to 99. Otherwise, turn to 100.

23

Most of the guards are dead by the time the train pulls away, but Allan St Froid has managed to escape. Another attempt is impossible now. St. Froid will go so deep underground that even you won't be able to find him.

Though you wait for a call from your employer, no word comes. The only indication you get is a frozen account. As the hours pass you grow more and more paranoid. You are an expert at lying low, but without money there's only so much you can do.

Not that you really have anything to fear. When the bullet, your severance package, does arrive you won't see it coming.

24

You take a running start and leap off the helipad just as an elevator full of masked guards empties behind you. You land hard on the side of the pyramid, but the transparent panes hold your weight easily. The steep face keeps you from standing, so you slide with knees bent.

As the parking level nears, you steer yourself towards the ramp. It is an easy jump down to the roadway and an even easier drive out of the pyramid and away from the hectic scene. Turn to 1 and pick another target.

25

The Pilsner mansion looks far older than it actually is. High, vaulted hallways of ruddy stone lend the place a sense of weight. The flat screen televisions and other modern appliances remind you that it's just a fantasy. Roman himself commissioned this place only twenty years ago. Your motel is more of an antique.

The house seems uninhabited. Roman must keep his staff to a bare minimum. When someone in a dark suit appears ahead you almost jump.

"The security didn't seem to give you too much trouble," the tall, light haired woman speaks, "Too casual to be military...Too much hardware for a thief...I guess that makes you a consultant."

"Takes one to know one I guess."

"Very good. Why don't you tell me what you want, one consultant to another?"

If you answer honestly, turn to 36. If you instead offer this consultant a bribe of \$10MM, turn to 93.

26

By the time you're finished in Allan's office, the building has cleared out. No one wants to get caught in the crossfire of a fight they don't have a stake in. You look out the window into the parking lot. A horde of "security", really more of a private army equipped with the latest rifles and carbide body armor, has filled the lot.

Despite their equipment, the group is disorganized. They've focused their attention on only the exits, leaving the more creative routes unguarded. If you have *stealth* as a skill, you may sneak past the blockade, turn to 72. Otherwise, your only choice is to fight your way out, turn to 98.

27

A familiar blonde woman wearing sunglasses and a dark suit strides up beside you.

"You look well," you speak without shifting your pace.

"No thanks to you," the consultant responds in a similar flat tone, "but I guess that's old news. We've got bigger problems."

"Marduk Corp after you too?"

"More or less. So what's the plan?"

If you have *stealth* as a skill and would like to sneak into building, turn to 49. Otherwise your only choice is move in and hope for the best, turn to 38.

28

You step out onto the station platform just as another train departs. The squat, cylindrical cars move like electric caterpillars. With this departure, you find yourself on the open-air platform alone except for a few bums lounging in the shade. You couldn't have asked for better conditions.

St Froid's car will be passing the station soon. Though the train is not set to stop here, it should be easy enough to access the itinerary and slow the vehicle down as it passes. Or you could speed things up instead. The elevated track makes a sharp turn across the Ascension River just past the station. If the car is going fast enough it should fly right off the rails. If you'd like to slow Allan's train, turn to 83. If you'd rather speed the train up, turn to 58.

29

"Looks like this is as far as we go," your ally adjusts her collar in preparation for the fight.

"Don't count us out just yet."

You and your fellow consultant draw your weapons in unison. The hallway explodes with gunfire.

Marduk Enforcers(Health: 50 Attack Pattern: 1die x 3)

If you win, turn to 96.

30

Elaine picks up the rock at her feet and inspects it closely. For a minute, she seems confused, and then her features go slack with realization.

"So that's it then," Elaine's voice sounds sad rather than afraid, "I guess you won't be reasoned with. Tell your boss he can go to hell."

With this, Elaine and her entourage prepare for a shootout.

Rush's Entourage: (Health: 40 Attack Pattern: 1die x 4)

If you win, turn to 46.

31

Two suppressed rounds to the head and the majordomo's questions are over. You search her and find a shocking array of concealed weapons. She must have been the consultant. You lucked out, but only because your enemy was too merciful. Something tells you that the majordomo was very close to killing you outright.

A message from your employer congratulates you, "No honor amongst consultants eh? Honor is overrated. Take the money instead."

Note that \$10MM has been added to your account. You move on towards Roman's personal suite, turn to 70.

32

You fall in with a bunch of people entering the building and strike up a conversation, "Man that traffic was a nightmare today. I'm lucky to even be here!"

"Tell me about it," A young woman in an unflattering, lumpy outfit speaks up, "I'm honestly thinking of transferring somewhere closer to home."

"Oh c'mon," A round, older man with a crooked tie interjects, "the roads aren't bad if you know 'em like I do. Just get off before the interchange and take Ruta de Silencio instead."

The chatter goes on like this until you're all inside. No one questions you. They're either too embarrassed to ask or too jaded to notice that you've never been here before.

As everyone filters into their own offices, you pretend to be headed somewhere. When you're alone, you turn around and find a faux wooden door labeled "Allan St Froid, CMO".

You walk in on Allan sitting at his desk, scribbling circles on a piece of paper.

"Mr. St Froid?"

"Yea what?" Allan snaps back, "I don't remember calling for an intern."

"Oh you didn't. And I'm not an intern."

"Then why are you wasting my time?"

"Believe it or not, I'm a consultant. I think you know what that means."

"Wait, what?" he looks up, surprised.

With this you draw a length of piano wire and attack.

Allan St Froid(Health: 30 Attack Pattern: 1die x 2)

If you manage to kill Allan in two turns, turn to 45. If he lives three turns or more, Allan presses a button to summon his security. They shoot you dead.

33

You drive to the Onyx Center, a sleek building on an artificial island just off shore. Marduk has rented out the entire place for its meeting. A hundreds strong private security force guards the island. Hopefully you can avoid the majority of these pseudo-soldiers.

You park the Omega and walk across a two-lane pier to the gleaming island. The landscaping here is beautiful, but conspicuously artificial. A shining, mirrored glass structure melds with perfect, rolling lawns. Guards in dark suits dot the idyllic scene like flakes of pepper.

If you have the word *orange* turn to 14. If not, but you have the word *green* turn to 27. If you have neither, turn to 66.

34

The elevator doors open and you step out onto the top floor to the Paradyne Building. The glass tip of the pyramid lofts high above your head. Soft light filters in from outside, illuminating a garden of bonsai trees that decorates the atrium.

Elaine, along with Paradyne's upper management, has a large office up here. The doors stand in a sort of ring around the miniature garden. You find Elaine's and try the knob. Locked.

If you have *finesse* as a skill, you may pick the lock, turn to 50. Otherwise, you may listen at the door, turn to 67

35

Despite its rustic appearance, the wooden door is equipped with an advanced lock. The device uses a standard mechanical key along side an optical system that detects lock picks. You've never actually seen one of these, only heard of them.

You find the countermeasure frustrating at first, but devise a workaround soon enough. Rather than use the keyhole, you work your picks in through the side of the door. You find it strange to work from this new angle, but adapt quickly. Once you've loosened the lock, you push until it falls at your feet. You pick up the little brass assembly and find a microchip imbedded in its side. This Securis Chip could prove useful, note it if you wish to take it.

The gate opens onto a lush garden. It must cost a fortune to keep this place watered. You move across the lawn toward Roman's mansion. Something enormous lumbers into view before you can make it inside. A claw-bot, same as the ones mining outside except for its mounted machine guns, stares you down from across the yard. You are close enough to escape the behemoth, but not its first burst of gunfire. The fire strafes across you. Lose 1die x 6 Health.

Were it not for your bullet resistant shirt you'd gone. If you survive, you enter the Pilsner mansion through a low window, turn to 25.

36

"I'm here for Roman and you too."

For a second the consultant looks shocked. Her face remains inscrutable, but you can see it in her brown eyes. Then she understands, "So it's a hit. And I must be a secondary target. That's a shame."

"Sure is."

Consultant(Health: 60 Attack Pattern: 1die x 5)

If you win, turn to 12.

37

Roman Pilsner is the sole owner of Pilsner Phosphate. The mines have been in his family for three generations. They lie outside Ascension and have fed the farms that ring the city for many years. From the information you have, Roman seems eccentric.

Legacy has gone to Roman's head. He rarely leaves his estate, an anomalous mansion built adjacent to the mines. Perhaps he fears meeting someone like you. According to your memo, Roman's hired another consultant. Your employer guarantees a bonus if you kill this rival agent too.

You settle in for a long ride behind the wheel of your rusted but reliable Omega hatchback. The drive to Roman's mansion leads you past the edge of nowhere. Beyond the chalky mountains that encircle Ascension the super slab sheds lanes until only a modest, two-lane road remains. You roll through dingy trailer towns at increasingly longer intervals until civilization drops away completely. For about three hundred miles you pass nothing but dry brush and some distant high-tension power lines. The last sign of humanity you see before reaching the mines is an abandoned cabin with the windows smashed and the roof caved in.

The mines offer a startling change from the stillness of the desert. Huge, automated excavators lumber across a pure white expanse of salt. These hundred foot tall, six-legged robots tear up the top layer of an ancient lakebed to reach the precious phosphate underneath. Not a single human is needed to manage the process. Nonetheless, Roman has chosen to make his home out in this no man's land.

You pull over to the side of the highway. The sun shines so bright here that you have wear sunglasses to see past the glare. Good thing you thought to grab a pair at the drug store. A tall basalt

wall surrounds Roman's mansion. The heavy main gate and a recessed side door seem to be the only ways in. If you have *persona* as a skill, you may ring at the gate, turn to 91. Otherwise, you may try the side door, turn to 8, or smash through the gate with your car, turn to 97.

38

The closer you get to the building the more stares you get from the guards. Soon a mob has gathered around you. A broad-shouldered goon tries to stop the two of you at the door. You duck past and step onto a long escalator leading up.

"Stop them now." one of the guards yells, "Kill them before they make it off."

The consultant shoots you a glance through her shades, "Looks like this is it."

You and your friend turn so that you can fight back to back. A hail of bullets from below shatters the glass sides of the escalator and you return fire.

Marduk Enforcers(Health: 50 Attack Pattern: 1die x 4)

If you survive, the horde begins to recede. Against all odds, you and your friend have nearly won the fight. You yell above the gunfire, "Looks like we might win this."

"Ha ha—" something cuts her off mid laugh. Your friend falls to the moving steps. Blood flows down grooves cut into the metal steps and drains through the cracks. You check her pupils as the two of you continue to slide slowly upwards. They show no sign of life. Your friend has left as quickly as she arrived. Erase the word *green* then turn to 44.

39

You step into the elevator and give it the command to descend to the parking level as fast as possible. The elevator slows, and then creaks to a stop on the 75th level, far above your trusty Omega. You press yourself against a wall as the doors slide open. Immediately, a handful of Paradyne security guards dressed in dark green jumpsuits storm in.

You jam the "close door" button with your elbow, and then dive at the intruders. The platoon of guards outside can only watch as the doors close and you continue to descend, albeit with some unwanted company.

Paradyne Security: (Health: 80 Attack Pattern: 1die x 4)

Assuming you survive, you duck out of the trashed elevator once it arrives at the parking floor. Your Omega groans to life and you steer it out of the building. Though security has yet to arrive here, a metal grate has dropped into place to block the exit. You put your pedal to the floor and smash right through the lattice. Though your hood is bent and your windshield shattered, you escape in one piece. Turn to 1 and pick a new target.

40

"I'm in."

Your former employer follows through on the deal, knowing that if he reneged you would find him. Once you've got your title and your office the money flows in and never stops. For a while you entertain yourself watching the numbers in your account climb higher and higher. That gets boring fast.

Despite your new wealth, you find yourself hanging out in the same old bars. The crowd at the fancier places just rubs you the wrong way. Looks like old habits die-hard.

41

As the train rolls past the platform you see a handful of figures silhouetted through the tinted glass. They seem unaware of the unplanned delay. You draw your sub-machinegun and rouse them.

You sweep your fire along the length of the car, shattering all its windows. Those still living return fire while taking cover as best they can.

Allan's Entourage(Health: 30 Attack Pattern: 1die x 5)

If you manage to finish everyone in the car off in three turns or less, turn to 69. If you are still fighting after three turns, turn to 23.

42

The tunnel curves to the right for a ways, and then continues into a long straightaway. You are moving at a swift jog when something brushes against your leg. You've snapped a nylon wire that spanned the walls.

Whatever the tripwire was connected to is probably deadly. You don't want to be anywhere near it. If you have *athletics* as a skill and wish to sprint ahead, turn to 85. Otherwise, you may drop to the floor, protect your head, and hope for the best, turn to 16.

43

You breathe a sigh of relief once the elevator doors close. You've escaped from tighter spots in your day, but close calls like these never lose their effect. There's no time to savor the endorphins now though. From what you can see, the elevator does stop at the roof but this final floor can only be accessed when the system is in emergency mode. Assuming you have *hacking* as a skill, you may put the elevator in emergency mode, turn to 65. Otherwise, your only choice is to open the ceiling hatch and climb up the shaft, turn to 78.

44

The escalator rises until you are eye level with a gallery of armed men, no doubt Marduk's best agents. They form a human fence that blocks the hall before you. A glass wall to your left offers a great view of Ascension. You see no doors to your right.

They've all drawn their guns. Even if you wanted to surrender, they wouldn't take you alive. An alert from your bank pops into your vision. Your employer is draining your account. If you have the word *purple* noted, your money remains safe. Otherwise note that you now have \$0.

"That's far enough," one of the enforcers speaks, "this is where it ends."

"I guess you're right."

If you have noted the word *grey*, turn to 10. If you have *finesse* as a skill and would like to jump out the window, turn to 19. Otherwise your only choice is to fight, turn to 29 if you have noted the word *green*, or turn to 3 if you have not.

45

Allan lies dead on the floor. His office is a mess. The security will show up any second and you don't want to be here when they do. Before you can act you get a call from your employer.

"Just got the news kid. Great job! Killing a man is one thing, but in his own office. That's cold."

"You'll be lucky you don't end up all over your office when I'm finished with you."

"Well isn't that something to look forward to. In the mean time I'd get moving if I were you. I've sent you the money."

Note that \$10MM has been added to your account.

Allan's false tooth appears to be intact. You stoop over and pop the device from his jaw. After wiping the blood from its root you find a microlink port imbedded in the side. Using a matching cord implanted in your wrist, you connect to the drive.

The database encoded in the tooth-drive has gone into lockout mode. It probably detected that St Froid's pulse has stopped. In its current state, you can either wipe the information, or attempt to read it. If you read the contents, turn to 86. If you destroy the information, turn to 74. If you skip this entirely and flee now, turn back to 1 and pick your next target.

46

Though shredded by gunfire, the tri-copter continues to idle even after the shooting stops. You give the guards credit for trying, but they were no match for you. Rush lies slumped against the side of her aircraft. It looks as if a round went clear through the tri-copter's thin skin and hit her on the other side. You check for a pulse and confirm what you already know.

You leave red tracks behind as you walk away from the scene. Before you can get very far, your employer calls.

"I thought you might have a hard time with this one kid," he speaks with mock awe, "but I guess I underestimated you. You're as cold as they said you were."

"Maybe so, but you're playing with fire."

"And you're a quick wit too! I am impressed. Don't think that'll help at an arraignment though. The judges work for me. Keep up the good work and stay out of trouble. I'm sending the cash. And oh by the way, I'd get moving if I were you."

Note that \$10MM has been added to your account.

Your loathsome employer is right. Paradyne's vast security force will find you within minutes if you don't move. If they get their hands on you a trial will be the least of your problems. If you'd like to take the elevator down, turn to 39. If you'd rather slide down the face of the pyramid, turn to 24.

47

You leave the conference room alone. Needless to say, you rejected your employer's offer with extreme prejudice. Without his leadership Marduk's scheme will fall apart. The world may well be a better place because of it. This thought gives you a little comfort, but it does not change all that you've done.

But that's almost over now. Freedom feels strange. Perhaps now you can make something of it.

48

You pull the Omega across the double red line and into the fast lane. A chip in your car registers the merge and instantly charges your account the \$100,000. Your chip is, of course, encoded with a false name, but it works all the same.

Far away from the bumper-to-bumper back up, you punch the gas and watch the speedometer climb. You reach the Ascension 14 exit in less than twenty minutes, turn to 11.

49

You stay low as you circle around the building. Rather than walking through the front entrance, you slide under a fence around back. The service entrance is locked, so you wait in a dumpster until someone walks out. While they fumble with their cigarettes you slip through the door unnoticed.

An escalator at the front of the building leads up several floors to the big conference room. You are halfway up the long, mechanical stairway when the atrium below begins to fill with guards. They give you no warning before opening fire.

Marduk Guards(Health: 50 Attack Pattern: 1die x 4)

If you win, you step off at the top of the escalator. Turn to 44.

50

Despite the many electronic locks on the market, nothing can replace a simple deadbolt. Good thing you can handle a screwdriver and hairpin. The entire lock falls apart in your hands after a few minutes of work.

Elaine's office gleams with pseudo-oriental décor. The minimalist design makes easy to see that Dr. Rush is not here. As the emptiness of the room sets in, two sounds catch your attention. One is the noise of heavy boots out in the atrium, the other a dull thump of rotor blades above you. You look up and realize that there is a helipad on the roof just above Elaine's office. It doesn't take a genius to guess who's taking off now. You need to reach the roof before she escapes.

If you'd like to head straight for the elevator in the atrium, turn to 71. If you have *stealth* as a skill and would like to take a more discrete approach, turn to 9.

51

You kick the edge of the wooden door so that it comes loose on its hinges. It falls off after a second blow. Beyond, you find a lush lawn. It must take an entire aqueduct to keep this gardens fed. Besides this lush scene, something huge greets you inside.

A claw-bot, the same type as the ones mining outside, stands guard. Your sloppy entrance must have tripped a silent alarm. Instead of a rotary scooper, the robot carries a battery of machine guns. You will have to destroy this machine.

Claw-Bot(Health: 100 Attack Pattern: 1die x 4)

*If you have a Securis Chip, you use it to scramble the machine's targeting systems. Take two turns before each of the claw-bot's turns.

If you win, turn to 82

52

You override the razor-bot before it can harm you. Now that you're on its no-kill list the robot is as friendly as a puppy. The spidery quadruped clacks back up to its position on the ceiling and clamps itself to a hanging pipe with a hiss.

A quick search of the upper floor shows no sign of Allan St Froid. Walking past your mechanical friend, you head down to the ground floor, turn to 76.

53

There are only a few inches of space between the ladder and the wall. You manage to squeeze most of your body here before the ascending elevator passes. As the metal box screams by you feel something slam into your back and hear the distant pings of your gear falling down the shaft.

Once the cart passes, you loose yourself and check your back. As you guessed, the elevator knocked off some of your equipment. Though pricy, technology can be replaced. As you continue your climb to the roof you receive a message indicating that you've been charged \$4MM for the damage. Note the change in your funds (if you do not have \$4MM, you are dead), and then turn to 13 if you're still alive.

54

You prepare several envelopes full of information you've collected and a letter asking for help against Marduk Corporation. You drop off each by hand so as to ensure the packets are not intercepted. The prospective allies each stand to lose from Marduk's schemes and the support of any one could mean the difference between victory and death.

As the marked day approaches no word comes back from them. You can only hope that the information has reached someone smart enough and powerful enough to do something with it. Note the word *grey*. If you have the word *green* noted turn to 5, otherwise turn to 33.

55

You pull over across the street from the Transpacific Building and roll onto the curb with a screech. Some people smoking in the parking lot turn and stare. Transpacific headquarters doesn't impress you. It's little more than a boxy steel office building nestled at one end of a train depot. Can't fault them for efficiency.

Biometric locks secure the building, not that this has ever been a problem for you. If you'd like to break in, turn to 61. Assuming you have *persona* as a skill, you may instead pretend to be a new intern and enter with the staff, turn to 32.

56

"Let me check my papers," you stoop and unlatch your toolbox. Instead of a clipboard, you remove set of pistols. You turn and aim the weapons at your hosts.

The butler raises his hands above his head. His unprofessional look of terror tells you that he's not the consultant. You turn just in time to block a kick from the suited woman.

You step back and she draws her own weapons. Looks like Roman's majordomo moonlights as a consultant.

Consultant(Health: 60 Attack Pattern: 1die x 5)

If you win, 12.

57

The tri-copter rises higher and higher until you can no longer be sure of your aim. Once it has reached the right altitude, the aircraft tilts and glides away from the Paradyne pyramid. You watch as it hums over the grey cityscape far below.

You check your funds to find that the account's been emptied. Apparently your employer has decided to sever your engagement. The boss will not, however, let you fall into the hands of Paradyne security. A single shot fired from some anonymous rooftop miles away shatters your skull and all the secrets it contains.

58

Once the necessary changes have been made to the train car's digital itinerary, all you have to do is wait for it to arrive. In the mean time, you leave the platform and take a position at the edge of the river. From your vantage, you can see the bridge and the concrete plain where the car should fall.

As the train approaches the bridge begins to rumble. The car is moving much too fast. It curves onto the bridge, wobbles, and tips up on one side. For just a moment, the train rolls along a single rail, then it flips over the edge. The car lands with a loud, long crunch.

You watch a man dressed in a black suit—probably a guard—drag Allan from the wreckage. All that's left to do is finish the job gravity started.

Allan's Guard(Health: 40 Damage: 1die x 2)

If you win, turn to 94.

59

Most of the projects are not marked by name but by an arbitrary number system, making your search tedious. You inspect each project before moving to the next. Eventually, you come to a sealed, metal chamber built right on the lab floor.

You find no markings on the outside of the box, so when no one is looking you step inside. You immediately regret the decision. A sharp hissing confronts you. You stumble back and something

toothy snaps down on your arm. Your light reveals a glimpse of iridescent purple skin before the creature disappears. The monstrosity avoids your light, but strikes from the shadows at every opportunity.

Mystery Aberration(Health: 60 Attack Pattern: 1die + 6)

If you kill the beast, turn to 84.

60

“You’re perceptive. It would be a shame to waste such talent,” you drop the electrician act and address the majordomo directly, “I’ll pay you \$10MM to walk away now. I think that’s more than fair.”

The woman bites her lip and furrows her brow. You know her answer before she does. The more you consider a temptation the harder it is to resist.

“I’ll go,” the majordomo nods. You begin the transfer once you’re sure she’s left. You can’t be sure, but something tells you that Roman’s majordomo was also his consultant. And a consultant never passes up a good deal. Note that \$10MM has been removed from your account and note the word *green*. You move on to Roman’s personal suite, turn to 70.

61

Transpacific spared no expense on their biometric security system. Unfortunately these scanners do not stop you from scaling a pipe on the outside of the building and kicking in a first story window.

A security camera turns lazily as you slip inside. You manage to avoid its sweep. Odds are no one’s watching on the other end anyway. You land in the middle of metal stairwell. A thick layer of dust covers everything. This passage must not see much traffic.

If you’d like to head up the stairs to the upper floor, turn to 20. If you’d rather go the ground floor, turn to 76.

62

At the last possible moment you leap up into the air above the ascending elevator. You time the jump perfectly, but the elevator still hits hard. The shaft echoes with a tinny boom. You fall to your knees and struggle to recover.

The jump has injured your legs, lose 1die x 6 health. If you survive, the elevator continues up, turn to 13.

63

Roman bleeds from wounds to his shoulder, chest, and legs, but refuses to give up.

“You won’t kill me!” he screams as he limps into the desert, “Not now, not ever!”

He’s frothing at the mouth now. Roman shows no fear, only anger. You admire his fighting spirit, but the only wise thing he can do is resign.

“Hear me? I don’t care how much they pay you, you’re still just a wh—”

At this moment Roman’s speech breaks into a long, tapering squeal as one of his own mining robots crushes him. You’d seen the behemoth approaching, but Roman was too distracted to notice. Once the insectoid machine strides past, you walk over to the spot where Roman stood.

His broken body lies at the bottom of a deep depression left by the machine. You are heading back to the car when your employer calls, “Bet you Roman never expected to go like that. Bwa, ha, ha!”

You remain silent.

“Oh come on, that was funny. All right, I guess you just want to talk money then. Don’t worry, the cash is on the way.”

“Money’s not really what I’m interested in.”

“Don’t start asking me to let you go just yet. If you quit then I’ll have to find some other way to

entertain myself. Breaking your thumbs is only going to be fun once after all.”

With this he hangs up. Note that \$10MM has been added to your account. You climb back to your car. It’s a long drive home. Turn to 1 and pick another target.

64

Allan St Froid, Chief Martial Officer, Transpacific Holdings. Your employer sends you mountains of information, but you understand St Froid after the first two pages.

He’s someone who gets things done without questioning policy, an executive and an executioner. The two of you are alike in this small way.

His company owns the tunnels that run underwater across the Pacific. It’s easy to forget now, but for a long time people said trans-oceanic rail was impossible. Turns out almost anything can be accomplished with a worker mortality rate of 25%.

St Froid works out of a modest building in Ascension 14, a subdivision of the city devoted to heavy industry. Apparently he has a false tooth that doubles as a secure database for his company correspondence. Your employer guarantees a bonus payment if you destroy the contents of this tooth.

Seems straightforward enough. Ascension 14 lies well out of the way, but your Omega hatchback makes the drive easy. The boxy car wears its rust like a badge of honor. Despite its age, the Omega still handles well even on the super slab.

The slab through Ascension has two levels, one for northbound and the other for southbound traffic. You’re glad to be on top right now. The Omega feels like an airplane as you race above the rooftops.

You make decent time for a few miles, but hit congestion at a towering, six level interchange. The express lane is clear, but the fee for merging is a steep \$100,000. If you’d like to pay \$100,000 (\$0.1MM) to enter the express lane, turn to 48. If you’d rather sit out the jam, turn to 79.

65

Once you’ve cracked the building’s security systems, you trigger a false fire alarm. The elevator automatically switches to emergency mode. The lights above flicker off to be replaced by dim, red strips along the floor. A sprinkler opens in the ceiling and soaks you. The elevator moves at double its normal pace in response to your fictitious fire. You speed to the roof as water pools around your ankles, turn to 13.

66

You decide on a plan as you near the island. Dozens of guards watch the building. If you have *stealth* as a skill and would like to sneak in, turn to 49. Otherwise, your only choice is to keep moving and hope for the best, turn to 80.

67

Even before implants your hearing was above average. Years of upgrades have turned you into walking studio. You press your ear to the door. Within seconds you realize that there’s no one in Elaine’s office. You do notice a pair of different sounds though: the airy thump of rotors of above your head and the crunch of heavy boots behind you. Elaine is escaping by helicopter, and she’s sent her guards after you.

You turn and head back for the elevator, turn to 71.

68

You push open a pair of heavy wooden doors and step into the conference room. A circular table sits below a ring of bulbs recessed in the ceiling. It takes your eyes a moment to adjust to the dim lighting. You don’t have to see to know that something is wrong.

Instead of the clamor you expected, the only sound you hear is a slow, steady clap. A dozen or so figures lie strewn across the floor, slumped in swivel chairs, and spilled over the table. Someone’s

gotten to the company's leadership before you could. You have a good guess who.

"Bold move kid," that familiar voice greets you, "but I'm one step ahead."

Your employer steps into the light. He looks much as you'd imagined: thick but not fat, face like an old wallet, hair thinning but still lovingly kempt.

"That was quite a show," he produces a handkerchief and mops his brow, "as you can see, I've been busy too."

"Winded already?" you revel at the chance to speak face to face, "It's not over yet."

"He he. Well I don't blame you for wanting to kill me. Didn't count on you getting this far. But before that how about a deal? I'll make you the senior partner of my little racket. Of course to do that...I'll need to be alive."

If you accept your employer's offer, turn to 40. If you refuse, turn to 47.

69

By the time Allan's car leaves the station there is no motion inside or out. The bums have fled. They know better than anyone else how this sort of thing works. You don't need to see his body to know that Allen's dead, but you connect to the pulse monitor imbedded in his neck to make sure.

You are halfway back to your car when your employer calls.

"You really are an artist kid! I've never heard of a reverse drive by."

"I'll have to invent something even better when I find you."

"I like the spirit but I'd watch my mouth if I were you. The kind of work you do doesn't require a tongue and I could always have yours taken out. I've sent the money to your account. I'll let you get back to work."

Note that \$10MM has been added to your account, then turn to 1 and pick another target.

70

You press your ear to Roman's door and hear nothing. You try the knob. It's unlocked. The office is as lifeless as it is tasteless. A taxidermy bear shows its teeth on one side of a mahogany desk while a life-sized portrait of Roman's father watches from behind.

The desk faces a similar portrait of Roman himself dressed in elegant riding gear. A chunk of Phosphate Rock, perhaps a reminder of what brought him wealth, sits on Roman's desk. You may take this memento if you wish.

There's no way Roman escaped through the front door, yet you see no sign of another way out of the office. You are admiring the painting of Pilsner Sr. when something strikes you. The portrait is skewed, just slightly, to one side. You slice through the canvass to reveal a deep cavity beyond.

A dark tunnel stretches beyond the ruined artwork: Roman's escape route. Roman must be smarter than you thought, or more paranoid. The tunnel leads on a little ways before branching in two. In the blue light of your LED torch, the two passages look nearly identical. If you take the left route, turn to 77. If you take the right, turn to 42.

71

You step out into the atrium. A dozen soldiers have trampled the rock garden, wrecking the space's ambiance. Rather than the usual uniform, these mercenaries wear skintight kevlar, complete with facemasks. This isn't the only thing off about them. The shortest of the bunch stands a full foot taller than you. It's amazing what tweaking a few chromosomes can do.

"Break his legs," one of the crew mutters. They draw nightsticks and encircle you. The helicopter continues to chop overhead.

Giant Crew (Health: 60 Attack Pattern: 1die x 3)

If you manage to beat down these oversized enemies, you head for the elevator, turn to 43.

72

Compared to you, the men who surround the Transpacific Building look like amateurs. You climb out of a first floor window and land behind a parked van. The packed parking lot offers you enough cover to leave the premises undetected. Turn to 1 and pick another target.

73

Volumes of information about Mr. St Froid clutter your vision. The vast majority of it is inconsequential: personal messages to his ex-wife, money transfers to his far-flung children, receipts for cartons of cigarettes and cases of scotch.

Then you find it. All the nonsense disappears as you access the tracking chip in his drivers' license. He's on the metro rail-line but is going right past the normal stations. Transpacific operates the city's rail, so Allan's probably on a private train.

You follow the tracks to a lonely station by the Ascension River. If you'd like to intercept St. Froid here, turn to 28. If you'd rather just wait at the Transpacific building, turn to 55.

74

Allan's secrets don't interest you enough to pass up a bonus payment. You wipe the contents of the tooth then crush under your heel it for good measure. Though your employer doesn't call again, you notice that he has delivered an additional \$10MM. Note this increase, and then turn to 26.

75

The sun climbs over Mt Diablo. You press on despite the heat. From the top you can see clear across Ascension, all the way to the ocean. The Paradyne Pyramid gleams far away, small against the surrounding landscape.

76

The high level offices seem to be located on the ground floor. Avoiding the stairs must be one of the perks of upper management. All the business takes place behind closed doors here. You see no one else as you slink down the hallways.

A brass nameplate marks each faux-wooden door you pass. Eventually, you find one labeled "St Froid, Allan, CMO". You take a moment to compose yourself before stepping inside.

"What are you doing here?" Allan turns from behind his desk and shouts at you. There's another man standing across from Allan. The sweat on their faces, coupled with the general tension in the room tells you that they were just fighting about something.

"Well, spit it out!" Allan demands impatiently.

"I'm here to fix the coffee machine," you ad lib, spotting a fancy espresso maker in the corner, "No one told you about the appointment?"

"No. And it doesn't need fixing. The thing works fine."

"It works fine because I've been doing my job."

Allan sighs and then waves you off, "just do what you need to do and keep quiet."

You stand by the coffee counter and face away from the other two. They keep their voices muted, but you catch a little of their conversation: "...not selling...", "...ridiculous...", "...over my dead body..."

You assemble your weapons without a sound. Every so often you fiddle with the coffee maker just in case they're watching. Finally, you're ready.

You turn and level your gun at Allan and his co-worker. Both men have already drawn enormous revolvers. Staring down the barrels, you notice that both are silver plated, but that Allan's has a more ornate, etched on design.

"Lets waste this spy," Allan mutters and for the first time his guest agrees.

Allan St Froid and Friend (Health: 50 Attack Pattern: 1die x 3)

If you win, turn to 45.

77

The left fork curls around on itself until it piddles out under a dripping mess of pipes. Amongst the broken light bulbs, fasteners, and lost tools that litter the floor you find some burnt fragments of paper. It would take a few minutes, but odds are you could piece together at least part of this letter. If you'd like to piece together these scraps, turn to 90. If you'd rather not waste the time, turn to 42.

78

You pull yourself out of the plush elevator and into the cavernous, bare shaft. The cables holding the elevator up hang against one wall, but a rusty ladder on the other side offers a much safer way up. You grip the rungs as securely as the damp bars will allow and climb.

Something whirrs at your back when you are halfway up. The cables have begun moving. You turn just in time to see the counterweight drop past you. You look down at the elevator. The square roof of the chamber seems to be growing larger as it climbs towards you. Unless you act, you will be crushed. If you jump and attempt to land on the roof, turn to 62. If you instead press yourself flat against the wall of the shaft, turn to 53.

79

An hour of screeching tires and near collisions leaves you on your last nerve. Somehow traffic makes you bored and stressed at the same time.

You listen to the radio to take your mind off the mess "Welcome back to the show! I'm your host Radical Bob and I've got all the answers here on 88—" The sound cuts out as you pass under a sweeping bridge. There's nothing good on anyway.

The road clears up some time later. It feels amazing to be moving again. Once you've passed the jam, it takes just forty minutes to reach the Ascension 14 exit, turn to 11.

80

As you near the front entrance more and more guards tail you. By the time you walk in, you are trailing a veritable parade. A huge escalator leads up to the top floor of the building, where the biggest conference room is located. One of the guards yells, "Just hold up. Show us some ID or get out of here."

Though slow to action, these enforcers are not fools. Most already have their guns drawn. You dive onto the escalator and the room explodes with gunfire. You shoot back from your moving vantage.

Marduk Guards(Health: 100 Attack Pattern: 1die x 5)

If you win, turn to 44.

81

Though the robot managed to land some deep gashes, it now lies in several pieces on the floor. Amongst the debris you find a small microchip bearing the logo of Securis Corporation. Note this Securis Chip if you wish to take it. You hide the still-twitching garbage under the stairs. Using cloth from your shirt, you patch your wounds as best you can. After fixing your sleeves and straightening your tie you're ready to move on.

A search of the upper floor shows no trace of St. Froid. Looks like your fight was for nothing. You head back down the stairs to the first floor, turn to 76.

82

With a final shudder the colossal robot collapses to the ground. Its six hydraulic limbs splay out. Oil from severed tubes pools beneath the behemoth. Even after the act, you can hardly believe you managed to bring down something this large. You leave the shuddering pile of debris and enter Roman's manor, turn to 25.

83

Once the necessary data has been altered you sit on a bench and wait. A murder of crows watches you from the tracks. The birds seem all knowing but aloof, content to preen their oily black feathers while you take the safeties off your guns.

You stand once the birds takes flight. A few seconds later the train rolls into view at an achingly slow crawl. Assuming you have *athletics* as a skill, you may leap onto the train, turn to 6. If you'd rather shoot the train from the platform, turn to 41.

84

Once the creature stops moving, you shine your light on it out of curiosity. The thing is an indescribably ugly combination of insect, primate and fish. Its big compound eyes explain its fear of light. It's iridescent has begun to wither already. This must belong to Paradyne's genetic research division. You leave the chamber unnoticed and continue your search.

Soon enough, you locate Elaine Rush's section of the lab. After your long search, the results are a bit underwhelming: just a set of sealed beakers, coils and metal boxes connected by plastic tubing. A nearby note bearing Rush's name identifies the project as hers.

You switch the labels on a few of the beakers before leaving. The change may seem small, but this will almost certainly ruin the whole experiment. Sure enough, once you send pictures of the sabotage to your employer, he credits \$10MM to your account. Along with the money, he sends a message: "Progress isn't all it's cracked up to be ;)". You leave the lab and take the elevator up to Elaine's office. Note the change to your funds, then turn to 34.

85

The jagged metal fixtures and broken glass now matter little as you sprint down the tunnel. One, two, almost three full seconds pass before the explosive goes off. The blast chars the clothes on your back and temporarily deafens you. Most of your important parts are unscathed. You continue down the passage with a little more caution, turn to 7.

86

The correspondence stored on Allan's tooth offers some insight into the seamy aspects of his business. Among the data are unreported gifts to some prominent judges, the number of an escort service, and locations of the mass graves where a large fraction of Transpacific's laborers are buried. Nothing you hadn't expected to see.

Out of the thousands of files, one short correspondence catches your eye.

"To: Allan St Froid, CMO
Re: Urgent

My offers will not get any more generous Mr. St Froid. Though you have veto power, do not overestimate the leverage this gives you.

To: m*=l7d5?ah9iy#ukg+
Re: Bite Me

Your threats are as cheap as your "offer". Watch your back.

Allan St Froid"

Note the password *red* then turn to 26.

87

You ask one of the younger looking researchers where you can find Dr. Rush's current project. The bearded young man seems taken aback, as if you'd just asked what year it was. When he notices your outfit, he seems to relax, assuming you're just some suit from out of town.

"This place can be a little overwhelming. Let me show you."

The techie leads you to an unremarkable set of tables with a cheap looking apparatus on top. Instead of fancy circuitry or precision lasers, Dr. Rush's latest project consists of beakers, coils, and grey boxes connected by plastic tubes.

"Yup, it really is impressive," the techie looks on with genuine awe, "To think that something so small could change so much."

"What do you mean?"

"You haven't heard? I guess it must not have gone public yet. Dr. Rush has developed a technique to isolate phosphate from sea water!"

Your vacant stare draws more chatter from the technician, "Phosphate? For fertilizer? Once Dr. Rush goes public this technology should guarantee an indefinite supply." Note the word *blue*.

You nod and thank the researcher, promising to mention his helpfulness to the higher ups. Once he's gone, you switch the labels on a few beakers. This should be enough to ruin the experiment. You send pictures of the sabotage to your employer and he wires you the bonus, along with a message: "Now that's what I call peer review!"

Note that \$10MM has been added to your account. Your business in the lab done, you take the elevator up to Dr. Rush's office, turn to 34.

88

".5 FM, Ascension's number one home for talk radio. And we've got a caller on the line. Welcome to the show Dennis!"

"Hi Bob!"

"So Dennis, what did you want to talk about?"

"Well...I saw something last weekend that's been bugging me ever since. Someone, he was dressed in all black, was climbing up the side of a building near my place. I tried to get a picture, but they were gone too fast."

"Dennis, are you sure you didn't just have one too many?"

"Ha ha, that's what I thought until next morning. I walked outside and they've got police tape around a building down the block, the same one that guy was climbing on last night. Apparently someone turned up dead in their room that morning, murdered."

"Heavy stuff."

"I know. It's really bugging me. I tried talking to the police but they just brush me off."

"Wow. Well there's some food for thought. Better hope the mystery assassin isn't listening! Alright, time for another caller."

89

Elaine Rush, Head Scientist, Paradyne Laboratories, Research Division. Your employer lists of research papers and patents Rush has produced over the years. Though most of the jargon flies over your head, you can glean enough from the technical papers to tell that Rush is a savant when it comes to chemical engineering.

Elaine's writing explains theory well, but leaves out necessary details about practical application. The patents you look over seem to fill in some of these gaps, but the copies you find are heavily censored. Someone has carefully redacted enough to prevent someone from copying the processes on a large scale.

You guess that your employer wants one of these patents. There are so many that is impossible to tell what exactly he's after. Your employer offers a bonus if you can sabotage Rush's latest experiment, but no information exists to explain the nature of this project.

You gear up the next morning and take your rusty Omega hatchback out onto the super slab before the sun rises. There's almost no traffic this early and you soon see the hundred-story Paradyne Pyramid looming in the distance. The structure rises like a modern tower of babel from the grimy, disjointed sprawl all around it. Few other structures in Ascension, or the world, can even come close to its sheer size.

An extension of the highway branches off and rises to a parking garage on the fiftieth level. Climbing up this monumental ramp, you watch the streets below shrink until they look like something in a petri dish. For a full minute, you soar over the massive, mirrored face of the structure until the road finally connects with the building and you pull inside.

You park your hatchback in a reserved space next to the elevator. The fake permit on your dashboard should give you more than enough time. The building directory shows Elaine's office on the top floor and her dedicated lab space much farther down. If you'd like to head for the top floor, turn to 34. If you'd rather go to the lab, turn to 15.

90

Though the sheet has been torn up, it is only partially burnt. You can piece together some of the document:

"Roman Pilsner:

Pardon me for being so archaic, but I think we better keep this conversation offline. Someone from the Marduk Corporation has been—

--calls himself Mr. Brown, but I think this is an alias. His offers have recently become a lot more threatening—

--same thing has happened to you. I'm not one to overact but considering their history—

--yourself a consultant. I'm finding one myself. They aren't the only ones that—

--hope you take me seriously. Reply by mail only.

Allan St Froid"

Note the word *yellow*, then turn to 42.

91

You don a blue jumpsuit, one of several costumes in your trunk, and ring the buzzer at the front gate. A hawk-nosed old butler comes and asks your business.

"Repair call for Mr. Pilsner...about some electrical issues I believe." You smile and hold up your toolbox.

The butler answers, "I've heard nothing of this. You must have something wrong."

You look both directions down the barren highway, and then make a show of mopping your sweaty brow, "I guess I'll try the neighbors then. It is quite a drive though."

"Alright, come in. Hopefully we can clear this up and, uh, compensate you for your trouble."

The butler leads you across a lush lawn, a huge extravagance considering the desert heat, and into the entryway of Roman's ruddy stone mansion. You take a seat while the butler goes to find someone inside. The ceiling vaults high, but lacks the wear of true age. Roman's castle is a good imitation of the past, but still just an imitation.

Within minutes the butler returns with a tall, light haired woman in a dark suit. You can tell by the severe look on her face that she's in charge of the estate.

"I'm sorry to turn you away sir, but I have no record of your appointment."

If you have *hacking* as a skill and would like to alter Roman's calendar to show your appointment, turn to 2. If you'd rather reveal yourself now and pull a weapon, turn to 56.

92

Your employer has until now been keeping tabs on your account. This allows for easy deposits and withdrawals. When you cross Marduk your employer's first move will likely be to empty your funds. With some work, you can protect your money.

Bit by bit, over a period of days you move your funds into a handful of overseas accounts. You have to make only small transactions so as not to draw your employer's attention. Even if Marduk reaches some of these banks, most of your money will remain safe. Note the word *purple*. If you have the word *green* noted turn to 5, otherwise turn to 33.

93

"I think you know what I came for," you address Roman's consultant, "I'll give you \$10MM to walk away now. Trust me, it's better than the alternative."

"So you're after Roman. He must have some enemies in high places. Whatever, he can fight his own battles. See ya."

Once the consultant disappears you begin the money transfer. It will take at least an hour to complete and can be stopped at any time. Not that you're expecting her to come back. Consultants tend to be honest, at least when money's concerned.

Note the word *green*, make sure you've marked off the money, then turn to 70.

94

You make short work of the guard and head over to Allan. He bleeds from a puncture wound to the chest and wheezes up bloody phlegm with each breath. It doesn't take much to see that he is on the verge of death.

"Said he'd make me a deal," St Froid rambles without paying you any attention, "go figure... Never thought I'd be on the other end of this sort of thing."

Allan now looks straight at you, "I guess that's just the way it's... gotta be..."

With this thought he expires. You take a look at his modified tooth before leaving. It seems that the fall has already crushed the delicate device. You get a call on the way back to your car.

"I always thought that river was an eyesore, but I really like what you've done with the place!"

"Lets meet in person. I'd be happy to redecorate your face."

"Always got something snappy to say eh kid? Talk all you like but remember I'm the one who decides whether or not your head goes in a vice. I'll send you the money. Oh and congrats on the bonus."

Note that \$20MM has been added to your account, then turn to 1 and choose another target.

95

You rub a handful of the dusty soil between your palms before approaching the wall. The rocks are tightly packed, but your deft fingers still manage to find a grip. You pull yourself up and on top of the wall.

A lush garden spreads out before you in defiance of the desert heat. Roman must pay quite a bit to keep this little paradise watered. There doesn't seem to be any movement in the yard. You see no sign of a guard even after waiting a full minute. You are about to drop down when something huge rounds the corner.

A modified claw-bot, the same type mining just outside, patrols the estate. It walks on modified footpads so as to not damage the lawn. Instead of the usual rotary shovel, the machine carries a battery of machine guns. You wait for the robot to pass before dropping down the other side of the wall and crossing to Roman's manor. Turn to 25.

96

Against all odds, you stand alive and the dozens of trained killers before you lie dead. You may hate to admit it, but your employer was right about one thing: he picked the best. Not that you didn't have help... Only now do you realize that your ally is missing.

It doesn't take you long to find her limp figure slouched against a wall. The fist-sized wound in her side would be enough for most to write her off, but you check your ally's pupils anyway. They show no sign of life. You leave this friend behind with more than a little sorrow. You move on to meet your employer. Turn to 68.

97

You position your car so that it faces the wrought iron main gate from across the road. Beyond the bars, you can see a gravel driveway surrounded by lush gardens. Roman must pay a fortune in water bills.

It pains you to so abuse your beautiful Omega, but every mission requires some sacrifice. You punch the accelerator and slam into the gate. Your bumper crumples from the impact, but the chassis holds strong despite its rust. A second ram knocks the gate off its hinges and you roll the battered car inside.

You expected some sort of response, but what confronts you on Roman's driveway takes you by surprise. A modified claw-bot, the same type mining outside the walls, blocks your path. Instead of an excavator, the six-legged colossus carries a battery of machine guns. You hold a gun with your left hand and grip the steering wheel with your right. The car will offer at least a little protection from this autonomous killing machine.

Claw-Bot (Health: 100 Attack Pattern: 1die x 3)

*If you have a Securis Chip, you may scramble the machine's targeting systems. Take two turns for each of the claw-bot's turn.

If you manage to defeat the behemoth, turn to 82.

98

You climb to the second floor and leap through a window facing your car. Glass falls around you and a few of the larger pieces cut your arms. The inexperienced mercenaries stare in disbelief. You make a break for it. Only a handful of zealous fighters stand in your way.

Paramilitary(Health: 50 Attack Pattern: 1die x 4)

If you win the fight, you manage to reach your car. You have no trouble outpacing the guards' lumbering personnel carriers and soon lose them in the tangle of surface streets. Turn to 1 and pick another target.

99

The information you've found paints a clear enough picture. All you need are a few days to fill in the gaps with your own research. By the time he calls to tell you you're on retainer, you know without a doubt what your employer is up to.

In recent years the world's supply of phosphate, a key component of high-yield fertilizers, has begun to run out. Though the chemical can be found almost everywhere, there are only a few sites with enough for practical extraction. At present, only a handful of mines keep the world fed.

Roman Pilsner owned one such mine. You find that a group called "Marduk Corporation" bought up Roman's competitors. You were sent to deal with Roman because he refused to sell.

Now that Marduk controls the world's phosphate, it can sell at a premium. Or so you think at first. Then you find reports on the mines that have come out since Marduk took over: equipment rusting

and unmanned, masses of workers driven from the area, toxic runoff pools allowed to overflow. Marduk is driving the mines into the ground.

For a long time you cannot figure out why they would buy the mines only to destroy them. Then you find a research paper, put out by a scientist who now works for Marduk, outlining a process for mining phosphate from the ocean floor. Allan St Froid was in charge of Transpacific's underwater tunnels. Considering the huge capital necessary for such a project it is unlikely another tunnel will ever be built. Thanks to you, Marduk now has a monopoly on undersea phosphate.

Elaine Rush seems like an afterthought. Her project was far from economical, but it could have threatened Marduk's racket years down the line. If this brutality is any indicator, then Marduk Corporation is far from finished with you.

You will have to strike back against Marduk if you ever want to be free. Marduk is just a cover, a financial instrument for people working behind the scenes. But even a fake corporation has to meet sometime.

Marduk Corporation's board of directors has rented out a convention center and plan to convene there in a few weeks. Your employer will be there. It's your only opportunity. You'll make the most of it. Before then, you need to prepare. If you want to secure the money in your account, turn to 92. If you want to search for an ally, turn to 54. If you want to break into Marduk's own servers and see if you can do anything useful, turn to 21.

100

It takes several days, but soon enough the call comes. That same awful, rusty voice comes over the line.

"You do good work kid. I can't remember the last time I've been truly impressed. There's a reason I picked you for this job. You've got the gall to do what nobody else will. It takes real strength, real fiber to do what you do and not come out a loon. Hell you're practically an artist! I like someone who can put some passion into their work."

You don't say a single word but he knows you're still listening.

"That's why I'm putting you on retainer. Congrats kid! You're in the big leagues. Enjoy yourself. Take a day or two off. I'll pass on the next assignment soon."

With that the line goes dead. You sigh and pack up your gear. Out the doorway and past a dented cigarette machine you head for the bar.

"I'll take the usual."