

PARANOIA®



MISSION BOOK: THE HOLE BLAME



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PARANOIA[®]

THE HOLE BLAME

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THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK ARE CLASSIFIED ULTRAVIOLET
SERIOUSLY, PLAYERS WILL RUIN ALL THE FUN IF THEY READ THIS



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
MISSION BACKGROUND	4
LOOT FROM ABOVE	6
BETTER THAN A BRIEFBOT	9
WELCOME TO THE SQUARE	23
DO THIS, DO THAT	29
A HELPING HAND	34
WHAT DID YOU (NOT) DO?	42
ACHIEVEMENTS	47
HANDOUTS	48

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INTRODUCTION

W A R N I N G

This book is for Ultraviolet clearance only and restricted to Gamemasters planning on running missions.

An R&D project created a literal black hole in TRK Sector, which of course escaped confinement and grew larger as it gobbled up whatever (or whoever) is in its path. That is why it makes perfect sense for The Computer to send the Troubleshooters after a notorious but small-time thief. Once in TRK Sector, the team finds themselves being re-tasked by Service Groups looking to blame R&D for the catastrophe and steal their budget. The problem? Nobody will acknowledge the black hole's existence – not even The Computer.

The Hole Blame can work as a sequel to the two missions in the *Project Infinite Hole* box set (*Filling an Infinite Hole* and *Hot Box*) or function as a standalone mission. In the latter case, it is recommended that the GM read the other missions for context, although players do not need to have any knowledge of the events therein. Keep them ignorant and enjoy their confused little faces when they realise 'black hole' is not code for a new type of soylent.

Mission Background

Recently, R&D researcher Christof-G-MCV accidentally created a black hole in what came to be known as Project Infinite Hole. After the singularity escaped containment and started increasing in size, the project was considered a failure. Christof-G was terminated and, in his posthumous trial, found mega guilty of negligent terrorism, breaking the laws of physics and not completing form AP303-214EZ 'Request to Endanger All Life as We Know It for Improvements (Minor)'.

His next clone sent a Troubleshooter team to destroy all evidence he could gather on the project, the black hole and any connection to him or R&D (being on your last clone helps focus survival instincts). But it is not like he could simply walk into a CompNode and erase Friend Computer's memory cache. Thankfully, he did not have to. As the black hole grew, it kept destroying The Computer's servers, effectively wiping Friend Computer's memory of its existence ('It' being the black hole, not The Computer itself. A slightly insane Computer is fun. A Computer having an existential crisis, reading Camus and struggling to find meaning in an uncaring universe is less fun and definitely more pretentious). Even when It learned of the black hole again, it soon lost the memory and the cycle started over again.

Because The Computer says the singularity does not exist, all citizens in TRK Sector realised they must not see it either. These daycycles, people carefully walk past the black hole and either adamantly agree there is nothing there (not even a whole lot of nothing) or die a painful, crushing death. This eased the pressure on R&D in general and Christof-G in particular but enemies can be tenacious.

Resources are scarce in Alpha Complex, and R&D uses a lot of them for experiments. The other Service Groups (see page 123 of the *Gamemasters Handbook*) imagined all the stuff they could get if only R&D was shut down for creating some kind of world-ending disaster. That is why the others have begun trying to get The Computer to remember that the black hole exists. They hope this will bring The Computer's wrath down upon R&D, freeing up valuable resources that would be better put to use in generating power, funding the military, producing food or giving Service Group leadership a third home.

Meanwhile, the black hole has been consuming tonnes of matter as it travels through TRK Sector, pulling in furniture, loose items, bots, Infrared citizens and other useless objects. The Computer, having no memory of the black hole, has come to the conclusion that the rash of missing item reports are due to a thief. It has therefore ordered a Troubleshooter team to bring this thief to justice and recover the stolen items.

Does this mean the Troubleshooters will have to arrest a black hole? No but do not tell that to the players.



1. Loot from Above

The mission starts in nearby WCH Sector with the Troubleshooters getting ready for their midday meal. However, make sure the characters already have their Mandatory Bonus Duty.

You are all eating lunch with about 100 other Red-clearance citizens in one of the WCH Sector 'Eat This!' cafeterias, conveniently located right below an elevated transbot track. The loud rumbling and showers of sparks from overhead are considered ambiance.

Right about the time you're trying to decide whether the package on today's lunch is wrong and you CAN believe this isn't organic, a transbot labelled 'R&D Failures DO NOT TEST' passes overhead and crashes into a support beam with a startling CRUNCH, SMASH, KAPOW! After which the entire cafeteria is showered with cargo from the transbot; an assortment of unfamiliar-looking devices, possibly experimental ones. After a moment where everyone looks at the security cameras and then each other, citizens start grabbing the items. Do you?

Ask the players what they want to do. Each Troubleshooter is equipped with their Red jumpsuit and laser pistol, as well as any personal belongings they might have already purchased. Here are the most likely things the players might try:

- **Be loyal and stop citizens from stealing stuff:** Violence + Intimidate, Brains + Psychology or Chutzpah + Charm are some approaches that would work. Failure means the citizen absconds with some loot after showing a very rude gesture to the Troubleshooter.
- **Screw it, I'm stealing stuff:** Brains + Stealth or Chutzpah + Bluff. Success lets a Troubleshooter get away with secretly stealing one item from the R&D Loot Table (at least, they may think they are getting away with it). Give the matching Equipment card to the player from the deck that came with the Project Infinite Hole box set (or the GM can substitute any other item if preferred). Failure means another citizen is recording the Troubleshooter just as they take something. A Computer symbol means The Computer spots the attempted theft and enquires about the guilty Troubleshooter's intentions.

- **Friend Computer! They are stealing stuff!:** Self-righteous (and boring) Troubleshooters might try to snatch on everyone by calling The Computer. Sure! One turn later, IntSec raids the cafeteria and begins arresting anyone holding... well, anything (they're all guilty of something!). Then everyone gets a Treason Star except for the Troubleshooter who made the call. They get a 50 XP Point bonus and the feigned admiration of everyone there.

Limit each clone to no more than one stolen item. Additional stealing attempts merely result in pockets full of loose packaging, screws, bolts and other junk.

R&D LOOT TABLE

Roll	Item
1	Cloud-Based Loyalty Boosterific
2	Disto-Grabber
3	iEye
4	MicroMiniU
5	Pak-N-Sniff
6	SleepyTime Grenade x3

Why is the transbot labelled, 'R&D Failures DO NOT TEST'? That is just to throw terrorists off the scent. These items work just fine. Wait, that is not right. They work as fine as any other piece of poorly-made experimental gear designed by committees full of half-mad boffins. When everyone has had a chance to steal something, not steal something or attempt some other form of mischief, the Troubleshooters receive a message in their Cerebral Coretechs:

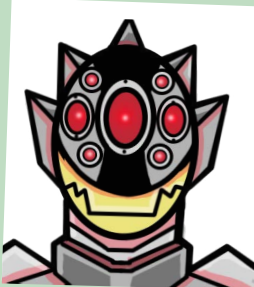
Attention Troubleshooters. Good news! You are now part of Troubleshooter Team Onyx-815125. The Computer needs you to undertake a mission of such great importance that an ordinary citizen would be filled with crippling doubt as to whether they could actually accomplish it! Follow the indicator in your vision to Briefing Room 7 in TRK Sector. As an added bonus, you may leave immediately. You are such a lucky citizen!

The Troubleshooters' directional indicators lead them away from the cafeteria to a hallway labelled 'Experimental Briefing Room Annex'. However, reaching their briefing room will not be that easy.

When you start down the hall towards Briefing Room 7, you are cut off when the door to Briefing Room 3 flies open and a team of Troubleshooters runs out into the hall. One of them shouts, 'The BriefBot Mark 2 has gone frankenstein!'.

And then you see it, lunging out of Briefing Room 3: A bot with tank treads, a cylindrical chassis, half a dozen glowing red lenses and four triple-jointed arms. Its voice glitches and stutters as it calls out, 'Cccccome back, Trouble-Trouble-Troubleshooters! I must brief-brief-brief you into tiny little FLESHY BLOODY PIECES!'. Then it shoots a hole in one of the fleeing Troubleshooters with an ORANGE laser pistol in its fourth hand.

Time to draw Action Cards! The BriefBot only wants to commit genocide of the human race, so stopping it need not be more complex than the application of a few well-placed laser shots. In other words, have fun with this scene but do not let it drag on. The other Troubleshooter team simply tries to flee. This is an opportunity for the player characters to blow off a little steam before being victimised by their own mission briefing.



BRIEFBOT MARK 2

/// SKILLS

GUNS:	+1
PSYCHOLOGY:	-2
INTIMIDATE:	+4

/// HEALTH BOXES

BRIEFBOT MARK 2

/// NOTES

SPEAKS WITH A STUTTERING WORD-WORD-WORD REPETITION. LIKES MIXING MURDEROUS WORDS WITH PHRASES INTENDED TO BE SOOTHING: 'RELAX! THIS WILL ONLY KILL-KILL-KILL YOU FOR A MO-MO-MOMENT!' CARRIES AN ORANGE LASER PISTOL.

2. Better than a Briefbot

Once the frankenstein BriefBot is either junked or run away from, the team can enter Briefing Room 7.

An array of tubes, cables and nozzles hangs off of a ceiling-height rectangular mass of machinery in the centre of the room. A Yellow-clearance citizen and two Orange assistants are working among the tangle of equipment, making adjustments and babbling about things like 'RNA storage' and 'catastrophic neuron failure'.

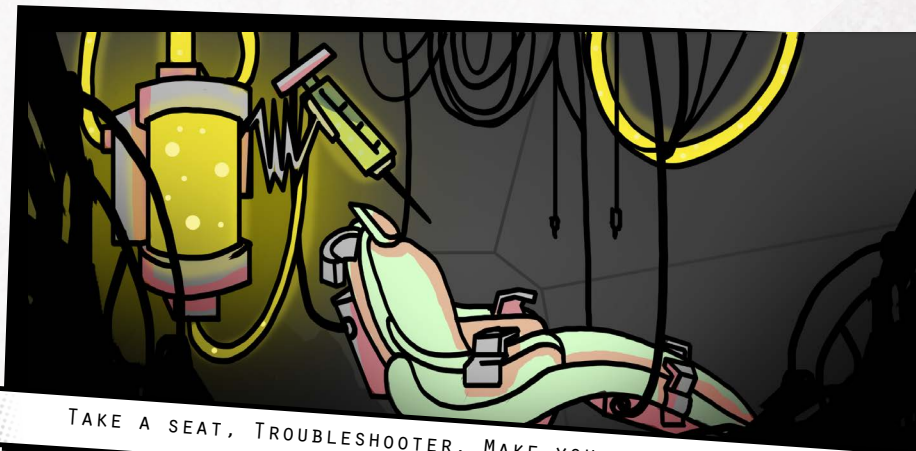
The Yellow citizen turns towards you, identified in your heads-up display as Jeremy-Y-WCH. He chews gum loudly and tries to chew and talk at the same time with mixed results. 'Congratulations, Troubleshooters. CHOMP SMACK You have been volunteered to help R&D test a new CHOMP CHOMP more efficient form of imparting critical mission information: the injectable briefing.'

Jeremy-Y points to the bank of equipment as he blows a bubble. 'The serum in these cables has the ability to impart new information directly into the human brain in mere moments. It works through the miracle of chemical bonds and dendrite rewiring and other buzzwords you most certainly wouldn't understand. What you WILL understand – and I know you'll enjoy this – is that we've thrown in a bonus skill for each of you that's guaranteed to be useful on your mission!

'SNAP CHOMP Now, I need all of you to come and sit in one of these injection seats.' Jeremy-Y points to the circle of plush, comfortable-looking chairs that surround the central rectangle. Each one faces outwards, away from the machinery, and is attached to it with an array of tubes and wires – including one hose that connects to a particularly large needle positioned behind where a seated subject's head would go. Jeremy-Y and his staff await your compliance with barely perceptible irritation.

If anyone refuses to take a seat, Jeremy-Y will repeat himself once. Then he will ask for volunteers to assist the Troubleshooter into a seat. Once they are seated in their injection seats (even with a few injuries), the Orange assistants strap them all in securely and then Jeremy-Y initiates the briefing injection.

At Jeremy-Y's signal, one of the Orange assistants throws a switch that makes the big needles plunge into the back of everyone's head. Strangely, the sensation is pleasant at first like a massage but in your brain. Then the itching starts behind your eyeballs. Then trembling, hot flashes and an overwhelming desire to lick something rusty. Right about the time the hallucinations start, the equipment behind you explodes and you lose consciousness.



TAKE A SEAT, TROUBLESHOOTER. MAKE YOURSELF COMFORTABLE.

When you awaken, Jeremy-Y and his helpers are tending to you and your teammates as you lie on the ground, apparently having been thrown from your now-slightly-on-fire chairs. Nobody is wounded, although everyone is slightly charred and smoky. You also feel a bit strange.

Looks like some of the injection worked.

First, ask the players to pick one skill on their character sheet that is empty (or has a zero if you are that kind of gamer). Some will think they are about to get that skill. That is amusing. Instead, the player on their right gets +2 to that skill and the one doing the selecting takes -2 in that skill. (Ex: Emily picked Stealth because she wanted to be sneaky and stuff. To her right is Liam, who already has Stealth +2. That means Emily would have Stealth -2 and Liam would have Stealth +4).

Looks like most of it did not.

After messing with skill ratings, roll or select what happens to each Troubleshooter using the Briefing Injection Mishap Table below. Rolling randomly will work, too, if the GM is okay with duplicate results or re-rolling to avoid them. If possible, give each player the text of their mishap so they can study it, either as a slip of paper or sent via text message. A literal text will work nicely. These mishaps last for as long as the GM and players find them entertaining, but try not to let it last beyond this scene unless it is very funny.

BRIEFING INJECTION MISHAP TABLE

Roll	Mishap
1	Every other word out of your mouth is 'briefing'.
2	You giggle whenever you hear the words 'bandit', 'steal' or 'thief'.
3	Your tongue is asleep.
4	You are famished and desperately need something to eat.
5	Whenever someone gives you something – or you take something – you are compelled to give them a receipt.
6	You cannot hold anything for more than one round.

Note that Jeremy-Y and his assistants actively ignore any evidence that the Troubleshooters are experiencing side effects.

'Well, that could have gone better, couldn't it?' Jeremy-Y laughs nervously. 'Don't worry, CHOMP CHOMP we'll get these bugs worked out with the next team. In the meantime, we were prepared for this. Here's your backup briefing.'

Jeremy-Y opens a smouldering file folder marked 'When It Malfunctions' and reads from it. 'High-clearance citizens in TRK Sector have reported a number of missing belongings. The Computer SNACK CHOMP has determined that this is the work of a traitorous thief, now designated the Small Item Bandit. Your mission has two objectives: One, arrest the Small Item Bandit CHOMP and two, recover the stolen items. Here's a list of what you need to retrieve.'

Jeremy-Y gives a hardcopy list to the Team Leader (see Handout 1: List of Items Stolen by the Small Item Bandit).

Jeremy-Y continues, handing over another sheet of paper. 'Finally, this is an IntSec artist's rendering of the Small Item Bandit. I assume the image has been redacted for Security Clearance reasons.' (see Handout 2.)

This assessment is incorrect. The drawing is actually an accurate rendering of the black hole, provided by IntSec in an attempt to lead the Troubleshooters into seeing and then inevitably messing with the singularity itself.

'Anyway, CHOMP CHOMP The Computer wants you to go to the site of the thefts. You will receive the coordinates after you're equipped by R&D and ready for action. Each time you recover one of the stolen items, send the code to IntSec through your Coretech to dispatch a courierbot to collect it for safe return.'

Jeremy-Y looks up from the still smouldering file. 'This concludes your briefing, Troubleshooters. Don't worry, the next time we try the injectable briefing experiment on you, it will be much more memorable. My assistants are bringing out your mission equipment now. Gear up and then proceed to R&D for your opportunity to test even newer equipment. Good luck!'

Jeremy-Y quickly leaves just as his Orange assistants drag two large boxes into the room. Then they stand and wait, staring at the Troubleshooters.

Did you notice how Jeremy-Y said the team would get coordinates after being equipped by R&D? There is no regular equipment for this mission. These crates are for an upcoming mission briefing, not for Team Onyx-815125. Whatever they take from the crates is theft. Do the guards know that? Does it matter?

Troubleshooter: *Is this our mission equipment?*

Orange Assistant: *What does it say on the side, Red?*

Troubleshooter: *Yes but I want to know if this is for my team.*

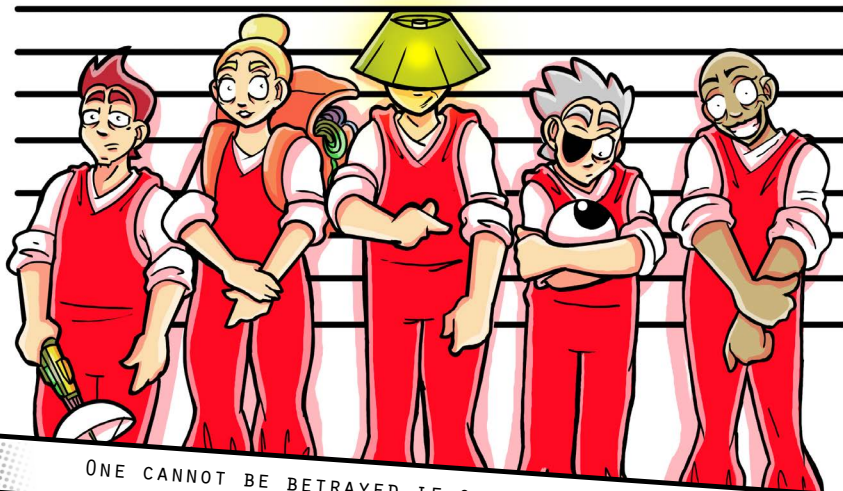
Orange: *That's up to you to decide. You won't get far in life not making decisions.*

Troubleshooter: *Hypothetically, if I were to open a box and take something inside, would you try and shoot me?*

Orange: *Depends. Are you taking something illegal to have at your clearance?*

Troubleshooter: *How can I know unless I know that's for my team?*

Orange: *How can I know unless I know what you're taking? Use your head, Red.*



ONE CANNOT BE BETRAYED IF ONE HAS NO TRUST IN OTHERS.

The first box is labelled 'Experimental Theft Investigation Kit' and contains six experimental devices that R&D wants field tested. Pick whatever six makes you chuckle the most but here is a suggested list:

- Interrupting Party Chaff
- PAMMI
- Coretech Jammie Whammie Gun
- Light Emitter Disguise Kit
- iEye
- Happy Place

The other is labelled 'Mandatory Bonus Duty Gear'. Each item inside is marked for a specific MBD:

- Team Leader: Megaphone
- Combat Officer: Needler
- Equipment Officer: Multi-adaptor
- Happiness Officer: Sedatives (x3) (You may substitute Gelgernine from *Acute Paranoia* if desired)
- Loyalty Officer: Data Bomb
- Science Officer: Medkit (x3)

If the players take too long, mention that their heads-up displays show a glowing yellow arrow pointing out of the room. If they do not leave very soon, it begins to flash urgently. Finally, a head explodes. Serves them right not getting the hint.

Secret Society Missions

As the team follows the arrow, pull each player aside and give them a message from their Secret Society. What kind of message? Text, letter, secret code on the wall, smoke signals, whatever.

ACLHRG: This 'Small Item Bandit' has surely stolen artefacts from earlier eras of Alpha Complex history since they steal from high-clearance citizens. Retrieve one of these items for us but make sure it's really old!

Anti-Mutant: Try to make it look like a mutant is responsible for these thefts. Then kill a mutant. Any mutant.

Communists: Capital belongs to the masses, not high clearance landlord class bourgeois capitalist pig dogs! Find stolen things but redistribute them to the Infrared citizens of Alpha Complex!

Death Leopard: The Small Item Bandit RULEZ! Protect him and follow his awesome example by stealing whatever you can from the higher clearances!

FCCCP: Stealing is a sin that must be punished. If you witness anyone stealing anything, punish them, no matter the cost! For it is written in the holy Book of Barry, 'You shall not steal from the rich, for Christ loves them more than you'.

Frankenstein Destroyers: Make sure IntSec thinks the thief is a rogue bot. If that won't stick, blame bots for letting things get stolen. Then for not finding the thief. Then for even existing, those metallic bastards!

Free Enterprise: Theft is bad for business, so send a message to the Small Item Bandit by way of broken kneecaps. If you can't do this by debriefing, then break somebody's kneecaps. We have standards to uphold, you know.

Illuminati: Find the Bandit and give him 13 cans of B3. If he gives you anything in return, do not put it in your mouth no matter how tempting. Call us immediately.

IntSec: Any chance you get to steal a small item, do so. Keep doing this until you are contacted by an undercover agent for further orders. The agent will speak in code, so stay alert for cryptic messages.

Mystics: Nothing can really be 'stolen' because nothing actually 'belongs to anyone', man. You need to free your teammates' minds by giving away an item each one thinks they own.

Phreaks: If someone is stealing things, we could use some new servers! Go ahead, take some tech and send it to us. Just don't get caught or we never met you.

Psion: Try to make it look like a mutant is not responsible for the thefts. If a mutant is responsible, cover it up. And if you can't cover it up, you're dead to us. Literally.

Research & Design

The team's Cerebral Coretech indicators lead them to TRK Sector and then to a room in the Research & Design department. There is no need to make this journey complicated, so skip any travel shenanigans in favour of getting to the fun experimental gear.

The yellow arrow leads you all to a door labelled 'Computer Lab CT7'. A clone in an Orange-accented lab coat opens the door slowly, peers outside and then smiles. 'Well don't just stand there for crying out loud! Come in! Welcome to R&D, Troubleshooters! Oh, where are my manners? I'm Research and Sales Specialist Jennifer-O-DEN-1. Newly promoted, dontcha know! Until recently I was a poor Red schlub just like you! Anyhoo, wow, do I have a great product for you! Come on in and let's get your new R&D gear installed so you can start testing it. You're going to love it!'



JENNIFER-O-DEN-1

/// SKILLS

SCIENCE:	+1
BUREAUCRACY:	+2
PROGRAM:	+3

/// HEALTH BOXES

JENNIFER-O-DEN-1 ● ● ● ●

/// NOTES

JENNIFER-O IS A BUBBLY SALESPERSON. SHE IS ALSO FRESHLY PROMOTED AND LIKES TO BRAG ABOUT BEING AN ORANGE.

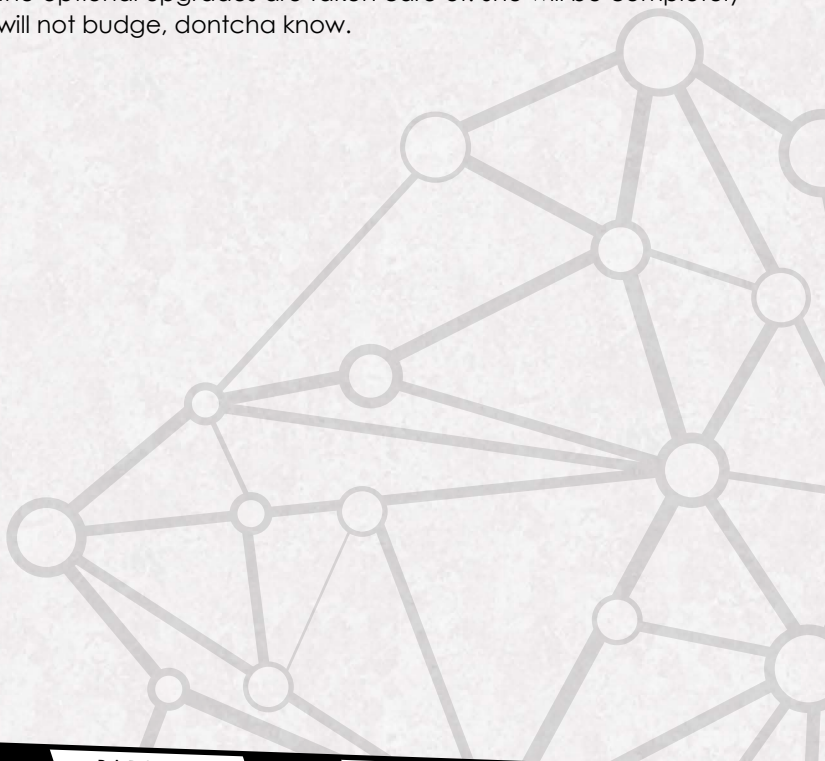
Entering the lab, you see row upon row of computer terminals, both in the centre of the room and lining all the walls. Jennifer-O walks over to one of them. 'R&D wants you to test a new module for your Cerebral Coretech, you betcha! It's called CoreTalk! Here you go...'

Jennifer-O presses a button on her terminal and you instantly experience the pins-and-needles feeling from receiving new software.

'CoreTalk is a new voice messaging system that you can use to talk to your teammates, other clones with CoreTalk modules and even bots. You know how you can talk to The Computer? Unless you're as dim as a Re—I mean, an Infrared, you know that you can send messages to other clones. But CoreTalk gives you lots of additional things! Before I get to the details about CoreTalk's basic functions, I just need to know which optional features you want to sign up for. Here's the list. They're all super affordable.'

Yes, this allows citizens to call the brain of another citizen and chat away.

Jennifer-O lists the optional upgrades from the CoreTalk Optional Features Table (minus the Secret Info, that is just for GMs). If anyone asks her to explain the basic features first, she says she will provide all the details they need once the optional upgrades are taken care of. She will be completely friendly but will not budge, dontcha know.



CORETALK OPTIONAL FEATURES TABLE

Feature	Cost	Secret Info
Decline calls	25 XP	Cannot actually decline calls.
Decline important calls	50 XP	Can decline calls from Red clearance citizens or lower.
Decline urgent calls	100 XP	Can decline calls from Orange or higher. Get a bonus Treason Star for each use.
Decline calls from The Computer	200 XP	+2 Treason Stars instantly and does not work.
Control Volume	25 XP	Actually works. Huh.
Unlimited Call	75 XP	One call can last as long as the caller wants and the other cannot hang up. Then no more calls can be made (but they can be received).
Shielding	200 XP	Prevents others with CoreTalk from picking up on your conversation. Also prevents brain cancer.

The features all work (or not) as described in the table. If a Troubleshooter does not buy any, Jennifer-O will be sad but that is the only consequence.

What can CoreTalk do that typical Cerebral Coretech messaging cannot? A few things.

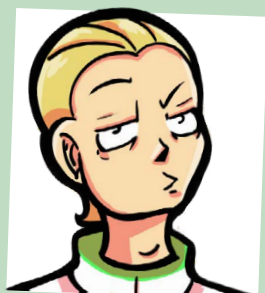
- **Private Mode:** This is the default setting. It allows a clone to call the brain of any other clone that 1) also has CoreTalk installed and 2) they know the full name of. You cannot call 'that guy Frank'. People on the receiving end cannot decline but can hang up anytime. Calls from unshielded CoreTalks can be picked up by others nearby whenever it would be embarrassing or lead to criminal prosecutions.
- **Group Call Mode:** A caller can add up to six clones to the call and everyone can hear each other. It has a nasty habit of adding random clones in Alpha Complex.
- **Dead Zone Mode:** This sends microwave signals to permit calls even in dead zones. But there is an undisclosed 'roaming' charge of 5 XP Points per minute.
- **Megavoice Mode:** While no sound is amplified, the volume is virtually increased so the receiver can hear it over any background noise. The caller tends to shout the words out loud without realising it.
- **Bot Whisperer Mode:** Allows the caller to speak with bots as if they had CoreTalk installed. Since no one ever told bots this is possible, they tend to freak out and think they have gone insane.

'Now, don't be a silly so-and-so but I'm going to briefly and legally turn this lab into a temporary dead zone to showcase your CoreTalk features.' She pushes a control on her terminal and your heads-up display and other Coretech functions immediately turn off.

'The Computer has allowed this dead zone for the purposes of our testing. You Reds wouldn't know about such things but when you reach my level, dontcha know, you get a measure of trust! Anyhoo, you'll see why we need a dead zone soon enough!'

Before she can continue, she is interrupted by the arrival of a Green-clearance citizen in a well-tailored R&D lab coat. 'Good job, Jennifer-O. That will be all.' Jennifer-O opens her mouth but instead of objecting, she nods her head and leaves the room.

The new arrival, Christof-G-MCV, introduces himself. If he has already met any of the current Troubleshooters in previous missions, he makes a point to recognise the Troubleshooter in a mostly friendly way.



CHRISTOF-G-MCV-6

/// SKILLS

SCIENCE:	+4
ENGINEER:	+2
DEMOLITIONS:	+2

/// HEALTH BOXES

CHRISTOF-G-MCV-6



/// NOTES

CHRISTOF-G ALWAYS ACTS FRIENDLY TOWARD THE TROUBLESHOOTERS AND IS CERTAIN THAT HE CAN GET THEM TO DO WHAT HE WANTS. HE ALSO ASSUMES THAT HE IS THE SMARTEST CLONE IN THE ROOM AND THAT EVERYONE ELSE'S BRAINS BARELY FUNCTION.

'Team Onyx-815125, I am Christof-G-MCV-5. I am the senior R&D director here.' He pauses, as if for applause. *'I have an important non-optional voluntary bonus mission that only someone of your obvious skills, bravery and obedience can achieve. It's a very simple one. All you have to do is...'* He pauses and smiles. *'...deny any knowledge of a black hole in TRK Sector. Each of you who complies throughout the mission will be promoted to Orange clearance after debriefing. Are we clear?'*

It is hard to hide a small black hole in a city. It tends to stick out like a small black hole. But as it eats through servers and data lines, The Computer's memory of it keeps going away. After enough terminations for false reporting, citizens in TRK Sector figured out it is healthier to pretend it does not exist.

But that has not stopped other Service Groups from noticing. They want The Computer to recognise the black hole's existence, blame R&D (which would be accurate) and either defund R&D or, worse, terminate Christof-G. He learned that other service groups are sending the Troubleshooters to expose the black hole. But what if that very team agreed there was nothing there? It is not a permanent solution (since the singularity will eventually kill everyone and everything) but it buys him enough time to find a better one.

Christof-G takes any response along the lines of 'What black hole?' as acceptance of his deal. If any of the Troubleshooters have not encountered the black hole yet, then that answer is a likely one. Even if some or all of the Troubleshooters are hesitant to go along with Christof-G's wishes, he remains friendly and asks them to continue to think it over while they go about their mission. Then he will casually remark how Jennifer-O could be busted back down to Infrared one day...

If anyone is suicidal enough to ask Christof-G why he wants the black hole covered up, he explains (truthfully) that The Computer does not believe it exists and that contradicting The Computer is bad for everyone involved. Then he adds a Treason Star for the Troubleshooter being a smarty pants.

Christof-G ends the scene by giving the team one final pep talk.

'Completing this mini-mission will not only keep you from making The Computer angry, it will make me happy. You should know that I am influential around here and any citizens who help me out tend to rise through the ranks. Like Jennifer-O, who was Red clearance like you last monthcycle. Just keep that in mind and I think we can be great friends. Now, carry on with your mission, Troubleshooters!'

It should go without saying that if the Troubleshooters report Christof-G's 'mission' to The Computer, The Computer believes Christof-G's denial rather than the team's accusations.

When the Troubleshooters leave Computer Lab CT7 (and the dead zone therein), their HUDs reactivate and their mission path indicators point the way to their next objective.



PROPER MOTIVATION IMPROVES TEAMWORK AND MORALE. ALWAYS.



3. Welcome to the Square

Start by giving *Handout 3: Map of TRK Sector Public Hating Square* to the players. Then read the following:

Your Coretech arrows lead you through the Dutiful Worker transtube station to the area where the Small Item Bandit has been busy; the public hating square. This is a large oval platform where citizens of TRK Sector come to show their loyalty by seriously hating whatever they are told to hate. The square is bordered by two transtube stations: Dutiful Worker Station on its eastern side (which you arrived on) and one to the west. There's some kind of store to the north, a cafeteria to the south and all those people.

A large crowd of Infrared and Red citizens are standing just off the lines on the floor showing where laser clusters will target to kill. There are bleachers closer to the centre, half-full with citizens of Orange and Yellow clearance. A citizen of unknown clearance is strapped to the upright Traitor Display table. Above him, a giant screen shows a 3D model of his face slowly revolving. He looks positively evil and maniacal on screen despite looking mostly unconscious in real life. His crimes? The screen says, 'Did not eat all his pudding, offended the nose of a high-clearance citizen and murdered 117 innocent Infrareds'.

On the far side of the oval square, you can make out a dark Pedestrian Expressway for heading back into the heart of TRK Sector. Two Blue IntSec agents seem to be guarding this exit. The air here is rather stale and the dull roar of all that loyal hating barely assaults your ears.

To start, here is a breakdown of the most interesting parts of this location.

The Black Hole

Down the Pedestrian Expressway is the black hole itself. It is big enough that it completely blocks the wide hallway with only a curve to the blackness. Air whistles into it, as does the occasional wrapper or old form.

Yes, this is actually the Small Item Bandit. Better put, nothing is actually being stolen; things keep getting sucked into the singularity but no one is willing to say it exists, not even higher-clearance citizens (they did not get that high up by contradicting Friend Computer). When enough reports came in about thefts, IntSec assumed it must be a small-time but surprisingly sneaky thief. And the Small Item Bandit was born.

IntSec wants the Troubleshooters to find and report the black hole but they cannot keep letting random citizens disappear inside it. That's why two IntSec agents, Brett-B-FRN and Dolores-B-MCV, are there to stop citizens walking down the corridor. As with everyone in TRK Sector, they never acknowledge that the black hole exists, instead making up some bogus and not-necessarily-convincing reason for standing guard in the area.

Troubleshooter: Hey, what's that black curved thingy blocking the expressway?

Dolores-B: Don't know what you're talking about. Go away.

Troubleshooter: What are you guarding, then?

Dolores-B: Uhh...<looks around>...that Fungus Cake wrapper. I said, go away.

Troubleshooter: But it just got sucked into that dark thingy!

Brett-B: SHESAIDGOAWAYYOUSTUPIDGITSCRVAMOOSEOFFWITHYOU!!!!

If the Troubleshooters talk to anyone about the black hole, they all deny the existence of such a thing. That remains true even if that citizen is sliding across the dirty floor to their painful demise. Why? Mostly because that is what everyone else is doing. This is a survival instinct among Alpha Complex citizens; do not attract attention no matter the danger, as attracting attention is almost always a bigger danger. Besides that:

- Christof-G and his flunkies are constantly working to purge any evidence of the black hole's existence.
- The Computer keeps losing servers and data feeds thanks to the growing singularity, so it does not remember it exists.
- A black hole is obviously unimportant because it is obviously Infrared clearance.

As a result, any Troubleshooter who claims to see a black hole, describes an object that behaves like a black hole or provides direct evidence of a black hole, is immediately ostracised or punished. If dealing with fellow clones, the Troubleshooter is treated as a liar and fearmonger; if talking to The Computer, it means a Treason Star and a lecture about the dangers of fibbing.



BRETT-B-FRN-4 AND DOLORES-B-MCV-3

/// SKILLS

GUNS:	+2
SCIENCE:	-4
INTIMIDATE:	+3

/// HEALTH BOXES

BRETT-B-FRN-4
DOLORES-B-MCV-3



/// NOTES

DOLORES-B LIKES TO SAY 'GO AWAY.' BRETT-B LIKES TO SCREAM REALLY FAST TO SUPPORT DOLORES-B. BOTH ARE ARMED WITH NEUROWHIPS AND BLUE LASER RIFLES, AND BOTH WEAR BLUE ARMOUR.

Okay, it is time to talk about the infinite hole. But before that... *Paranoia* has never been about plausibility. Instead, it focuses on having fun. When it comes to the black hole, do not worry about actual physics. Only worry about what is amusing, funny or deadly to Troubleshooters (they are all the same thing really). But for those GMs who need a little context, here are some facts.

Size: It has grown considerably since *Filling an Infinite Hole* and continues to slowly grow as it absorbs more matter. Would a 30-metre diameter work? Sure. The actual size does not matter to this mission as long as it remains big and grows ever bigger.

Pull: The black hole exerts a gravitational pull on anything in the immediate area. This effectively has three zones. Up close is the Event Horizon Zone (about a metre away from it). Anything that enters this zone will quickly get stretched out like taffy before getting sucked into the inky darkness to become very, very dead/destroyed. No one can survive this zone and nothing short of a Mark IV Warbot can pull anything out of this zone's hold.

Next is the Pull Zone. Here, objects weighing roughly not much are pulled towards the Event Horizon Zone. Small things like wrappers or children will eventually get dragged past the event horizon and be crushed. Bigger things like bots or Troubleshooters will occasionally need a Violence + Athletics (or whatever the GM wants) roll to walk away from it.

Lastly is the Wind Zone. The pull is very weak here but the air swirls and rushes towards the singularity. No rolls are necessary to get away and the only things getting pulled in are very lightweight.

Accretion Disk: This is that swirly, colourful stuff that looks like a spiral galaxy zooming around the black hole. Since Alpha Complex keeps getting in the way, there is no disk. See Mr. Smart Physics Guy? Us Famous Game Designers know something about cosmology. (Or is it cosmetology? Meh, close enough.)

The Square Itself

The poor sod strapped to the display table is Shane-R-JSN. Once a Troubleshooter of some promise, he made the mistake of offending an Indigo-clearance executive. Now he is the Most Villainous Citizen (MVC) of this sector. He is guilty of the first two charges and completely innocent of the third. After the locals have had some time to froth at the mouth, IntSec agents will arrive to wheel Shane-R into a brainscrubbing session, free of charge.

There is an obvious, thick stripped line on the floor surrounding the platform. This is the limit of how close people can get. There really are laser clusters hiding in the ceiling that pop out and blast anyone who even takes a step over the line.

Initially, this was planned as a metaphor about the black hole – how the pull of hate can drag you into a dark, dangerous place. Not sure if that works, but the players would not get it anyway. They are too busy trying to figure out what their cards mean.

Transtubes

The two transtube stations, Dutiful Worker on the east wall and Patriot Way on the west, are located behind two sets of sliding double doors. Most nearby citizens are already here so they are noticed attending the public hating event but feel free to send as many as needed through either station. The Troubleshooters will need at least one of them working to leave this area when it is time for debriefing.

Big Bob-Y's Buyatorium

At the north of the Public Hating square stands Big Bob-Y's Buyatorium, the largest shopping chain in Alpha Complex. This Buyatorium has nine enormous floors, one for each Security Clearance, and each packed with merchandise. (The topmost level is for Ultraviolets but is actually empty. No High Programmer is going to go shopping themselves. That is what lackeys are for!)

Can the Troubleshooters simply buy (or steal) the stolen items that IntSec reported (see Handout 1) at the Buyatorium? Sure! It will not help but that is clever at least. Even if they manage to get all five items on the list, that list will soon grow since the black hole is expanding. And nothing says the GM should make it easy on the players. Potential obstacles include XP Point costs (obviously), another citizen grabbing the last of an item, restrictions on items above Red clearance and so on.

Eat This! Cafeteria

Catering to Red, Orange and Yellow-clearance citizens, this cafeteria chain has long rows of tables, a very long serving line featuring definitely edible food and a short kitchen in back where Yellow-clearance food is cooked, Orange-clearance food is shaken from cheap packaging and Red-clearance food is glopped onto a plate. This would be an excellent place for a food fight if you are into that sort of thing.

Kiosks & Vendabots

Scattered around the public hating square is an assortment of kiosks, food stands and vendabots. It is here that citizens who have come to spend leisure time shouting and frowning and despising can grab some Hot Fun, a can of Bouncy Bubble Beverage X-TREME or a 3D printed likeness of whoever the current MVC is.

GMs should use these to mess with the Troubleshooters. If they are keeping an eye on the IntSec guards, a vendor gets in the way. If they are diligently searching for the missing items (hey, it could happen!), that thing underneath the Tube-Shaped RealzMealz MeetTreats stand might be it. (Pro-tip: It is not.)

Also standing among the kiosks and vendabots are a confession booth and a termination booth. Handy!



Once the Troubleshooters have had a chance to explore a bit to get a sense of the area and start looking for the 'stolen' items (or start replacing them from the Buyatorium), the mission is finally underway.

As Jeremy-Y covered in his briefing, the Troubleshooters are expected to send a code to IntSec and ask for a courier bot to take away any stolen items they recover. This mostly works as expected. A four-rotor drone arrives via transtube, floats over to the Troubleshooters (as long as it does not get too close to you-know-what) and collects the item. Then it merrily zooms back to IntSec. If the GM wants a little uncertainty, have the Troubleshooters roll Brains + Program to phrase their commands properly. (Having a courier bot loaded with 'recovered' items get devoured by the black hole would be the height of cruelty. Do it.)

After the team has had a chance to pretend they are working on mission objectives, one of those drones comes by with a single piece of paper attached to it. See Handout 4 and a longer list of stolen items. Looks like the Small Item Bandit has been busy!

Most of these items are available at the Buyatorium and even the ones that are not (such as Brett-B-FRN-4, who was one of the black hole guards' earlier clones) can be faked by clever Troubleshooters by repurposing something that is in the Buyatorium (such as cashier Bjorn-R-LQV-5).

4. Do this, do that

For the rest of this act, the Troubleshooters will receive additional mission objectives via their CoreTalk modules. The new objectives originate from R&D's rivals, the seven other Service Groups. If anyone checks with The Computer, these mini-missions do seem to be authorised. Despite the apparent intentions of these missions, their real aim is to keep sending the Troubleshooters to the black hole in the hope that the team will finally get The Computer to believe the thing exists. Once this is done, the Service Groups believe, The Computer will thoroughly investigate R&D, conclude that the black hole experiment was a massive, dangerous failure and shut down R&D for good, thus freeing up more resources for each of them.

That is why every service group gives the team a new mini-mission. Each is unique but has the same goal: Get the Troubleshooters to find the black hole already, geez. The entries below list the very short briefing the Service Group provides using CoreTalk, the carrot they use to motivate the team, the stick they use for further (negative) encouragement and why the mini-mission is impossible to accomplish.

The GM is encouraged to schedule these in a way that will result in optimum Troubleshooter stress levels – sometimes spreading them out individually, sometimes having two or three come in at the same time, whatever seems like it will have the best payoff in comedy value (except the Power Services and Technical Services missions, which should come very close together). If time is running short, skipping a few of these will not hurt anything. Go ahead. No one is looking.

Armed Forces

- **Mission Brief:** 'Listen up, civilians! This is Major Nina-B-PPL. The 97th Non-Volunteer Battalion is set for a morale-boosting parade around the public hating square. Your job is to walk ahead of the parade and make sure there's nothing in the way. Soldiers will arrive at the Dutiful Worker transtube station. Lead them around the square and then down the Pedestrian Expressway until you reach Exit 32.'
- **Carrot:** 'Succeed and each Troubleshooter will receive 25 XP Points and a shiny new weapon.'
- **Stick:** 'Fail and each be penalised 50 XP Points and assigned to reboot camp after this mission. Make it so!'
- **Why It's Impossible:** Exit 32 is currently within the black hole. If the Troubleshooters manage to avoid it while sending the regiment to their doom, Armed Forces will wonder what the Troubleshooters did with an entire battalion.

CPU

- **Mission Brief:** 'Hello, this is Spencer-B-TYR. I'm the VP of Data Acquisition for CPU. So nice to speak with you! Listen, Friend Computer has authorised us to send you to repair a drive that's gone naughty and stopped responding. Locate workstation LOL-TRK-29 and get it working again.'
- **Carrot:** 'Once we verify the data's integrity, everyone will get 50 XP Points.' (GM note: This is 50 XP Points for the entire group, not each Troubleshooter.)
- **Stick:** 'Fail or ruin the data and everyone will get a Treason Star.' (GM note: This is one star for each Troubleshooter, not one for the entire group.)
- **Why It's Impossible:** The drive in question is part of a workstation inside Patriot Way station's Yellow-clearance server room. The door is on the north end of the station but half of the room beyond has been destroyed by the black hole. Yep, that includes the failed drive.

HPD&MC

- **Mission Brief:** 'Is this on? Can you hear me? Hey, Troubleshooters, this is an HPD&MC priority mission addendum. Go measure the length, width, height and depth of the Eat This! cafeteria in TRK Sector. If you don't do this immediately and precisely, one random Troubleshooter will be demoted to Infrared clearance.'
- **Carrot:** 'If you do this immediately and precisely, the Team Leader and Loyalty Officer will be promoted to Orange clearance.'
- **Stick:** 'Otherwise, the Team Leader and Loyalty Officer will be demoted to Infrared clearance.'
- **Why It's Impossible:** Actually, this is possible despite there being four measurements to take in a three-dimensional room. But notice how the person giving the mission addendum didn't give his name? This is actually a Death Leopard named Superstar Whizzard who needs to know how much C4 he needs to destroy the cafeteria. If the Troubleshooters do this, the cafeteria will explode in a few rounds.

IntSec

- **Mission Brief:** 'Troubleshooter team, this is Subcommandant Toni-G-VOF with a one-zero-fiver-niner priority mission override. IntSec has arrested the traitor known as Dank, who is suspected of being the Small Item Bandit. Take receipt of this traitor at TRK Sector's Citizen of Interest Holding Pen 003 and escort him through secret passageway TRK-GGT-1004 to the public hating square to see if he cracks there. Clearance to use this passageway has been uploaded to your Coretechs.'
- **Carrot:** 'Success means we remove a Treason Star from each of you. If you have none, then loyalty is your reward.'
- **Stick:** 'Failure means each will gain a Treason Star. Then you will all vote on which team member should be terminated.'
- **Why It's Impossible:** TRK-GGT-1004 is a suspended hallway hanging from the ceiling of the public hating square that looks like a large air duct. It can be entered at the holding pen (which can be reached by either transbot station) but the exit into the public hating square is swallowed up by the black hole. In addition, Dank is not the Small Item Bandit but a mutant with the Anomaly power. He will use that repeatedly after the Troubleshooters pick him up.

PLC

- **Mission Brief:** 'Yo, Troubleshooters? What's up? So there's this soylent paste conduit running under the floor on the Orange level of the Buyatorium. Conduit TRK-swirly-hopscotch. But it's like not working. Nothing's coming out the nozzles in the Buyatorium. Find out what's blocking it and unclog the sucker.'
- **Carrot:** 'Get this taken care of right away, and we'll authorise resources so you each get a new clone. Cool, right?'
- **Stick:** 'If you don't, then no offence but we'll need like extra soylent resources. Totally coincidentally, you'll all lose one clone.'
- **Why It's Impossible:** Sure enough, the conduit has been severed by the black hole. Troubleshooters tracing the conduit out of the Buyatorium will see that easy enough. And woe be the Red Troubleshooter digging up the floor on the Orange level.

Power Services

(NOTE! The GM should offer the Technical Services mission below right after assigning this one.)

- **Mission Brief:** 'Yello, Troubleshooters? This is Plant Manager Makayla-G-LAI. Easy mission for ya here, easy peasy. We've lost connectivity to confession booth hashtag-317-smiley-face in the public hating square. Looks like a severed TechServ power line in the walls, of course! Figure out what's wrong with the TechServ wiring and get the booth back online, will ya?'
- **Carrot:** 'Get this done and we'll send ya two Orange-clearance laser pistols with full batteries. Oh, and temp clearance to use 'em.'
- **Stick:** 'Screw it up and you obviously got a traitor in your team, so one of ya will have to be volunteered for reactor shielding duty.'
- **Why It's Impossible:** There is a small maintenance hatch behind the booth that one Troubleshooter could fit into. It is full of wiring, including those for the booth. But follow it along long enough and the Troubleshooter will find the black hole yet again. PowerServ want the team to discover the black hole but they really want to blame TechServ for this. That's right, despite them having the same secret goals and only using the Troubleshooters as patsies, Power Services and Technical Services still cannot cooperate.

Technical Services

(NOTE: The GM should run the Power Services mission above before or right after assigning this one.)

- **Mission Brief:** 'Attention Troubleshooters! This is a mandatory mission addendum from TechServ lead engineer Tessa-G-KLM. Your records indicate three of you have a high aptitude for technical skills. Confession booth hashtag-317-smiley-face has lost power and there is a 117% chance this is due to a faulty PowerServ circuit box. PowerServ is known for faulty equipment, so acquire evidence of this and repower the confession booth.'
- **Carrot:** 'Upon success, those three Troubleshooters will receive a Coretech technical skill upgrade' (aka +3 to any one skill underneath Mechanics).
- **Stick:** 'Upon treasonous failure, those three Troubleshooters will receive remote brainscrubs' (aka brain death).
- **Why It's Impossible:** Same reason why the Power Services mission is impossible; the circuit box was swallowed by the growing black hole. Also, Technical Services does not know which three are skilled; the team will have to determine that somehow. All they know is there is a chance to take Power Services down a few pegs.

Ending This Scene

After all of the Service Groups have tasked the Troubleshooters with mini-missions (or time is running short in the game session), let them play out in their impossible glory for as long as the players are having fun.

5. A Helping Hand

Christof-G has been monitoring the team's progress (or lack thereof) but has not been able to block the other Service Groups from interfering with 'his' team. However, he has just experienced a bit of good luck in that one of the black hole's recent bouts of destruction has eliminated the server with records and authorisation for the Service Groups' mini-missions. Yes, that is narratively convenient, is it not?

Now that this has happened, Christof-G realises he needs to step in and provide more direct assistance to the Troubleshooters. He does not want to rescue the Troubleshooters (although it is adorable that some would think that). He is not even that into saving R&D. He just wants to save his own hide.

Your CoreTalk modules activate and you hear a familiar voice. 'Hello, Troubleshooters. This is your friend in R&D, Christof-G. How goes the mission?'

Christof-G responds sympathetically but unhelpfully to whatever the Troubleshooters say, then continues as if no one said anything important.

'I've been notified about some of the things the other Service Groups are making you do and I want to help you out because we're friends now. Those missions have been de-authorised! You no longer need to do the bidding of the other Service Groups. However, I fear that they will keep trying to find a way to get you close to something you shouldn't encounter, so I've come up with a solution.

I am sending a perfectly safe, virus-checked program to your Coretechs. Go to the nearest CompNode, find the iBall server there and upload this program using the right port. Doing so will modify our enemies' senses so that, to them, any large, Infrared-clearance object simply does not exist. Is this all clear?'

If the Troubleshooters seem reluctant to accept Christof-G's mission, he offers them an immediate promotion to Orange clearance (sending their new Orange jumpsuits and laser pistols via courierbot) and promises a promotion to Yellow once they've uploaded the program.

'I hesitate to mention this but my associates have discovered weak evidence that might indicate specialists were recently hired by one or more Service Groups. If this is true, they will probably try to help your mission by going through all of your clones. Something about not being happy with how you handled their assignments. But hey, use that as motivation!'

If they still don't go along with it, the GM can handle this in one of two ways. One, Christof-G can call in some favours and have his mission assigned as an official one by The Computer. Or two, the Troubleshooters can ditch Christof-G and proceed with trying to recover 'stolen' items while the black hole causes more destruction, until that's gone on long enough and the GM brings things to a close by jumping ahead to the second ending in Part 7.

Locating the CompNode is easy. Let the players figure this out for themselves but possibilities include asking The Computer where it is (and enduring the inevitable questions about why they need to know or why they cannot find it themselves), wandering around and looking for signage, asking Christof-G for directions, asking nearby citizens, using Secret Society contacts or using Mutant Powers. (It is accessed through a door marked 'Powehi Only' in the Patriot Way station in the far end.)



WE FIVE VERY REAL GUARDS ARE TELLING YOU TO SCRAM ALREADY!

Getting to the iBall server requires entering the CompNode and surviving a bunch of obstacles while searching for the location of the server room. Because this is an unofficial objective, not much aid will be available to the Troubleshooters. If Christof-G had to make this an official objective due to Troubleshooter reticence, The Computer still refuses to help much, insisting that the team show initiative in accomplishing their goal without any official paperwork or authorisations. The main source of aid they will have is Christof-G himself, who they can reach via CoreTalk.

Ahead of you stands the TRK Sector CompNode. The entrance is two large interlocking metal doors with a security tongue-pad next to them. Five guards, one of each clearance from Red to Blue, stand watch in front of the doors. They are standing so still, you could swear they were statues instead of loyal citizens. They all have body armour and heavy, slightly dented truncheons.

Actually, four of them really are statues dressed up to look like real guards. The only human there is the Red-clearance one named Burt-R. His truncheon is real; the others are part of the statues.

Before they can do anything, another courierbot drone zooms up from behind with another list of stolen items. Give *Handout 5: Yet More Stolen Items* and remind them it is their responsibility to find all of these.

The CompNode is clearly Blue clearance, so gaining access to it is an opportunity for player creativity. Burt-R does not have the clearance to help, and neither can the statues because... well, they are statues. Some possible solutions include:

- Getting a Blue citizen's tongue for the scanner. (lck.)
- Acquiring bogus security credentials from a Secret Society.
- Finding (or making) a scrubot hatch leading inside the room.
- Asking for help from Christof-G.
- Hacking the tongue scanner or mechanically bypassing the magnetic locks.
- Blowing up the wall with the door and hoping the CompNode is mostly unaffected.
- Doing something really stupid but damn funny so what the hell go with it.



BURT-R-HUW

/// SKILLS

GUNS:	+3
BUREAUCRACY:	+4
BLUFF:	-3

/// HEALTH BOXES

BURT-R-HUW



/// NOTES

BURT-R IS SLIGHTLY INSANE AND BELIEVES THE STATUES ARE ALIVE AND SPEAK TO HIM. THEY MOSTLY YELL AND BELITTLE HIM, SO HE COULD BE CONVINCED TO TURN ON THEM. ALSO, BURT-R HAS CORETALK INSTALLED SO HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO HEAR THE PLAYERS' CONVERSATIONS AND THINK IT'S FROM HIS 'SUPERIORS'.

The GM should not make this obstacle too hard, as it is more fun to let the players feel they were clever enough to get inside. That is actually what you want to happen, so they are not so much clever as mere pawns.

The inside of the CompNode is freezing and the lighting is subdued. A subtle humming sound comes from everywhere. The floors are made of metal grating and the walls and ceiling are painted grey to match. Corridors stretch out in front of you for a short distance and then branch out in all directions, including going up and down a level. Other than the corridors, you don't see much else – no directory, no corridor labels and no signage.

Now that the Troubleshooters are inside, they can start exploring and try to find the iBall server. That means it is time to bring the assassins.

Here Come the Assassins

Christof-G was telling the truth earlier. The Service Groups realise their plots were thwarted and do what powerful people do when frustrated: They try to kill somebody.

How should the GM determine if the assassins hit if the GM does not roll dice? Simple: Have players make rolls to notice the assassin or avoid being hit. If they fail, there you go. And if the GM really wants to roll dice, we included relevant stats in the descriptions.

The GM should use the assassins whenever they want in this scene. All these ninja-like assassins can magically get into the CompNode, so drop them into the scene if the Troubleshooters waste time, get boring or have too many clones left. But do not feel like they all have to be used. Add them only if there is time left in the game session or some Troubleshooters deserve termination more than usual.

- **Armed Forces:** Juan-G-CNS, a Green-clearance Vulture Squadron warrior (Guns +4). Armed with a knife, a Green laser rifle, his hands and combat armour (Defence 2). Juan-G is not a fan of subtlety. He prefers shouting death threats and running at the targets, shooting at anything vaguely in front of him.
- **CPU:** Virginia-Y-PGG is an expert in psychological warfare (Bluff +3). Instead of open attacks, she uses CoreTalk to whisper to individual Troubleshooters and convince them to either turn themselves over to CPU or use a termination booth. A Troubleshooter who hears her arguments must succeed at a Brains + Psychology roll (or another player-justified combination); failure to do so means they must either forfeit a Moxie point or obey Virginia-R's suggestions.
- **HPD&MC:** This one is straight out of the MC division of HPD&MC. Shannon-G-ENR (Guns +4) has a dart gun that she will use to inject as many Troubleshooters as possible with a drug designed to turn clones homicidally paranoid. Any clone hit with this loses two Moxie and immediately Loses It (even if their Moxie remains above zero). The drug lasts for a few rounds, after which the affected clone is immune to future doses.

- **IntSec:** The Internal Security assassin, Scott-G-WRD, is disguised as a Vulture Squadron warrior from Armed Forces (Guns +4). He uses identical equipment and stats as the Armed Forces assassin described above. If the two meet (please make them meet), they try to out-macho each other ('You call yourself a Vulture Squadron warrior? I don't even NEED a gun to beat up this Troubleshooter!' 'Oh yeah? I could do it with only my teeth!').
- **PLC:** This group has arranged for a Troubleshooters' own next clone to be their assassin. Pick one PC with the most clones left (or whichever player forgot to bring sacrificial snacks for the GM). That's the assassin! They appear wearing Orange-clearance armour and carrying a weapon that matches their best Violence skill. (If it is Melee, then give that assassin a big knife.)
- **Power Services:** Clint-B-ROB (Engineer +5) is not exactly an assassin. He is more the kind of person who likes hurting people from afar. That is why he has set traps in the CompNode that will electrocute Troubleshooters. Plural. The traps kill one clone; Maim two clones; Injure three clones; and do nothing but give an annoying shock to four or more. Clint-B is not there unless finding him in the CompNode would be good fun.
- **Technical Services:** It is not surprising to find a scrubot in a CompNode but scrubot BZ-777& ('Buzzy', Melee +3) is a TechServ assassin. It acts completely normal at first, so the GM should briefly mention one is around and move on. If the players ignore the hint, Buzzy attacks with sharpened brushes and/or bleach.

There is more here than just people trying to kill the Troubleshooters. Here are some areas inside the CompNode.

CompNode Corridors: As noted before, the corridors go in all directions. This is why, instead of providing a map, we are expecting the Troubleshooters to get lost and have to wander a bit before reaching their destination. Feel free to have them roll dice a few times to locate the iBall server room but then ignore the results and throw an assassin at them.

Maintenance Ducts: Similar to the one by the confession booth, there are maintenance hatches and ducts running throughout the CompNode. Clever players might think that taking the maintenance ducts will let them get around obstacles, get into places they wouldn't otherwise be able to reach and hide from assassins. Wrong! (These are especially great places for the Power Service's assassin traps.)

Use these to provide different atmospheric descriptions than the main corridors (they're cramped, warmer and occasionally feature obstacles like ventilation fans and escaped R&D horrors) but otherwise work the same as the corridors.

Other Server Rooms: The CompNode is home to part of The Computer and the Alpha Complex cloud network. Before the team reaches the iBall Server Room, they could encounter other rooms filled with server racks totally unnecessary for their mission.

The way they discover this fact is by using Brains (or Mechanics) + Engineer (or Program) to try to find the iBall server. Success at this stage only reveals that the iBall server is definitely not in this room, although a great margin of success might let the Troubleshooter skip having to make this roll in future non-iBall-server rooms.

Clones who try to cause destruction or damage in a server room find themselves quickly gassed by defence countermeasures. And then quickly taken away by a scrubot (Buzzy or another) to be recycled. The Computer does not play around with its innards.

Black Hole Damage: The slowly growing black hole has cut through part of the CompNode and destroyed enough servers that Friend Computer keeps forgetting the singularity even exists. The GM can use this whenever and wherever it works.

Are the Troubleshooters wasting time wandering around? Need a distraction so an assassin can get behind the team? Hey, do you feel the air rushing towards that slightly curved black wall blocking this corridor?

Eyeballing the iBall

When the players have had so much fun bravely fighting (or cowardly fleeing from) assassins and searching fruitlessly for their objective, they find the right room.

You find yourself in another server room and something tells you this might be the one you are looking for. Maybe it is the subtle difference in the acoustics of the machinery, maybe it is some mechanically empathic feeling you have. Maybe it is all those eyeball stickers on that one server in the middle of the room? Either way, you may have just found the iBall thing Christof-G wanted you to find.



It looks mostly like one of the many rectangular blinky things here but this is definitely different (and not just because of those stickers). There are two pairs of eye-shaped depressions on the side facing you. Each has a line running down the middle, as if it could open up to let something come out. A tiny blue button is next to each pair.

Yes, these are ports for a clone's eyes. To download something into it, a citizen must press their face up against the depressions, keep their eyes open and press the blue button. Then the depressions will open and a wireless connection will be made between the server and the Coretech.

But which one? Technically, the team was told to use the 'right' port. That would be the pair on the left. The right pair will reformat their Coretech, which also reformats their brain, which also requires their next clone replacement.

With the right (left, LEFT!) port in use, uploading Christof-G's program is an easy Brains + Program task. If the players need any encouragement, Christof-G calls them on CoreTalk, confirms this is the right server and reiterates his promise of promotion.

If the players take too long arguing who will push their eyeballs into a server, a part of the nearby wall cracks and tumbles backwards into an inky blackness. The air starts to rush towards the hole as more of the wall disappears. That should motivate 'em.



EYES WIDE SHUT WOULD BE DUMB.
TRY THEM WIDE OPEN FOR BETTER RESULTS.

6. What did you (not) do?

What happens next depends on what choice the Troubleshooters made.

IF THE TROUBLESHOOTERS UPLOADED THE PROGRAM:

Christof-G calls you on CoreTalk. 'You did it! You've ensured that neither The Computer nor anyone else will be able to prove the black hole exists. And you've saved R&D, which means you are all now my best friends and will remain so for as long as you're useful to me. Now report to debriefing to receive the Security Clearance promotion I promised.'

Now all the Troubleshooters have to do is follow their HUD arrows to debriefing. Here is the complication; the iBall modification affects every clone in Alpha Complex, so nobody – including the Troubleshooters – can perceive the black hole anymore. Oh, and by the way... It is growing faster.

Is the black hole still in the Pedestrian Expressway? Yes and that is the direction the arrow is pointing. When the Troubleshooters get there, they do not see any damage or inky darkness. They just see a perfectly normal hallway. They also cannot feel the rush of air or see any garbage flying past. Christof-G is a capable programmer.

If they continue walking... well, the lead Troubleshooter will suddenly feel a pull that only a solid Violence + Athletics roll can counteract. A failed roll means they are pulled into the black hole. With the program in place, the rest of the team sees that Troubleshooter turn to them and say, 'Hi friends! I'm going away now, obey Friend Computer!' before fading into nothingness.

With some clever ideas or just lucky rolls, the team can determine they can take a transbot to the debriefing. Dutiful Worker station, the one they came in on, is shut down by IntSec. A digital sign reads, 'No Egress Until The Small Item Bandit Comes Forward And Apologises'. The team can see a few Green IntSec agents carrying an identical sign heading to the Patriot Way station. If they hurry, they can get inside the station before it is shut down.

Of course, the black hole has also swallowed one end of the transtube servicing this station. Guess which way the Troubleshooters' transbot will head?

IF THE TROUBLESHOOTERS DID NOT UPLOAD THE PROGRAM:

Suddenly, The Computer contacts you all through your Coretechs.

'Attention Troubleshooters. Your current location puts you inside a CompNode. This room requires Blue clearance to enter. Please explain why you have violated Security Clearance regulations.'

It does not matter what the Troubleshooters say here, as The Computer finally realises something is very, definitely, catastrophically wrong.

'Attention Troubleshooters. Priority mission override that overrides all previous and subsequent mission overrides. Please wait.'

Give the players a minute or two to do something stupid. Then continue.

'... please wait... please wait. Attention Troubleshooters. TRK Sector is now under a Category 9 emergency. A Class One destructive force is growing in TRK Sector. Evidence suggests this is from a failed Research & Design experiment classified as Project Infinite Hole. Evidence suggests the Small Item Bandit has been destroyed along with 231 citizens, 17 bots and, worst of all, many precious resources.

You are to report immediately to Debriefing Room 3 for mission debriefing. If you come into contact with any R&D personnel before you reach the debriefing room, regardless of their clearance, they should be apprehended and turned in at the nearest confession booth for impromptu but effective questioning.



Regardless of what the team did with Christof-G's program, the Troubleshooters eventually arrive at Debriefing Room 3 in a hallway labelled 'Experimental Debriefing Room Annex'.

Your debriefing room has a chair for each of you, a desk for the debriefing officer (currently absent) and a flickering digital painting of a bland but happy face on the wall behind the desk. As soon as you're all seated, a second door slides open and a familiar-looking bot trundles into the room.

This is the newly-repurposed BriefBot Mark 2, now repaired and reprogrammed and serving as a debriefing officer. Make sure to describe physical hints of anything that might have happened in the team's first meeting with this bot in Part 1, such as laser burns or welding marks from its reassembly.

'Greetings, Troubleshooters! I am your experimental debriefing officer, BriefBot Mark 2. I have been programmed to believe we will get along famously. DEBRIEF MODE ACTIVATING.'

Before the bot starts, that same door opens and out comes Christof-G.

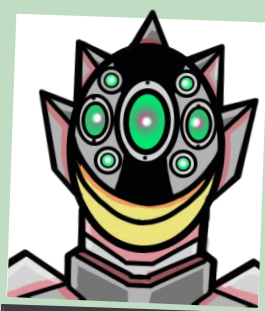
A familiar Green-clearance R&D figure comes out holding a data pad. 'Don't mind me,' he says in a familiar tone. 'I'm here to monitor the Briefbot Mark 2's performance. Pretend I'm not here.'

Regardless of what the Troubleshooters did in the CompNode, Christof-G volunteered to monitor the bot during debriefing. This means he gets to watch and listen as the Troubleshooters explain what happened. He stares hard at whoever is speaking.

- If that Troubleshooter is about to say something about the black hole, he will quickly make a throat slashing motion across his neck and mouth, 'You're dead' without speaking.
- If that Troubleshooter does not mention the black hole, even if Friend Computer now sees it, he discreetly flashes an Orange-coloured handkerchief in his hand and smiles.

Really, the Troubleshooters can answer the following questions however they want. The Briefbot Mark 2 asks them one at a time but no one can really tell which person the bot is looking at.

- How did CoreTalk work in the field? Why was it so amazing?
- Did you capture the Small Item Bandit as ordered or did you TERMINATE KILL KILL the traitor?
- Did you recover all stolen items or did you purposefully not collect some? Please name them.
- Why did you enter the CompNode in TRK Sector?
- Do you have any idea why assassins tried to MURDER MURDER KILL KILL you?



BRIEFBOT MARK

/// SKILLS

GUNS:	+2
PSYCHOLOGY:	-1
INTIMIDATE:	+4

/// HEALTH BOXES

BRIEFBOT MARK 2

/// NOTES

OCCASIONALLY RELAPSES AND SPEAKS LIKE IT DID WHEN IT WAS BRIEFBOT MARK 2 (SEE PART 1; PERHAPS THIS GLITCH HAPPENS WHEN ANYONE ROLLS A COMPUTER). HAS A LASER PISTOL MODULE INSTALLED THAT IS ONE CLEARANCE HIGHER THAN THE HIGHEST TROUBLESHOOTER.

And now for the big question.

- Did any of you see a large black hole-shaped object that destroyed everything that entered it?

Christof-G will be very interested in how the Troubleshooters answer that. So will the GM, because the very last scene depends on these answers.

If the majority say there was no black hole, Christof-G looks relieved. The debriefing ends and as they exit the room, Friend Computer makes an announcement.

'Congratulations Troubleshooter Team Onyx-815125. You have been nominated for promotion to Orange clearance and a 200 XP Point reward. Please wait. Attention Troubleshooters. Your mission is now over. Attention Troubleshooters. You have seven new missions from seven Service Groups. You are in luck. All these missions require you head to TRK Sector via the Pedestrian Expressway. Please leave immediately.'

If the majority say they saw the black hole, Christof-G looks furious. The debriefing ends and, as they exit the room, Friend Computer makes an announcement.

'Attention Troubleshooter Team Onyx-815125. Mission debriefing addendum. Have any of you ever come into contact with R&D citizen Christof-G-MCV at all before, during or after this mission? Before you answer, reminding citizens that all visual feeds are fed into my memory decreases required terminations by 65%.'

Let the players sweat it out. Friend Computer will not terminate anyone but no matter how they answer, it announces they are needed for enhanced questioning and must report to the nearest IntSec Citizen of Interest holding pen. The closest to their current location is in TRK Sector.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Preventing citizens from stealing in the cafeteria

+50 XP points

Defeating BriefBot Mark 2

+100 XP points

Testing each feature of the CoreTalk module

+100 XP points

Accomplishing an impossible Service Group mini-mission

+200 XP points

Capturing the Small Item Bandit

+300 XP points

Recovering one of the listed stolen items (per item, except the
one below)

+10 XP points

Recovering citizen Brett-B-FRN-4

+50 XP points

Killing an assassin

+50 XP points

Killing one's own clone assassin

+50 XP points (cumulative with above)

HANDOUT #1: LIST OF ITEMS STOLEN BY THE SMALL ITEM BANDIT

Official Internal Security Memorandum

Department of Worthy Citizens Affairs

Only for citizens of Yellow clearance or higher (or those holding a wavier)

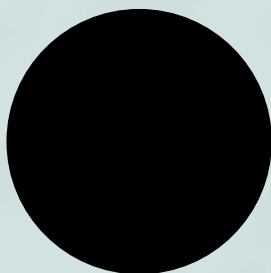
The following is a list of items absolutely, 100% for sure stolen by the notorious traitor known only as the Small Item Bandit. If you find these items, use your Cerebral Coretech and send code 6B696C6C6C65A to your local precinct house.

Item	Serial #	IntSec Case #
One (1) Green boot size 72	4420	TRK-9921
One (1) Teela-O-MLY autographed photo with silver frame	n/a	TRK 9922
One (1) folder containing receipts that you should not look at	88F3L0193	TRK 9923
One (2) serving tray(s) holding a half-eaten somenut-n-algae sandwich with crusts cut off	LKM8&N	TRK 9925
One (#) set of keys because I know I left them somewhere they just don't disappear now stop recording and open my front door already, shut up and open that damn door	n/a	TRK 9926

HANDOUT #2: THE SMALL ITEM BANDIT

WANTED BY INTERNAL SECURITY AND THE COMPUTER

THE SMALL ITEM BANDIT



Wanted for: Petty larceny, grand larceny, sneaky larceny, malicious larceny, annoyingly clever larceny, intent to sell stolen items, hoarding of stolen items, resisting a future arrest, failure to turn themselves in for termination.

DESCRIPTION

Date of Decanting: [REDACTED] **Home Sector:** [REDACTED]

Hair: Most Likely, **Eyes:** Why Not

Height: [REDACTED] metres, **Weight:** [REDACTED] x 1,030 kilogrammes

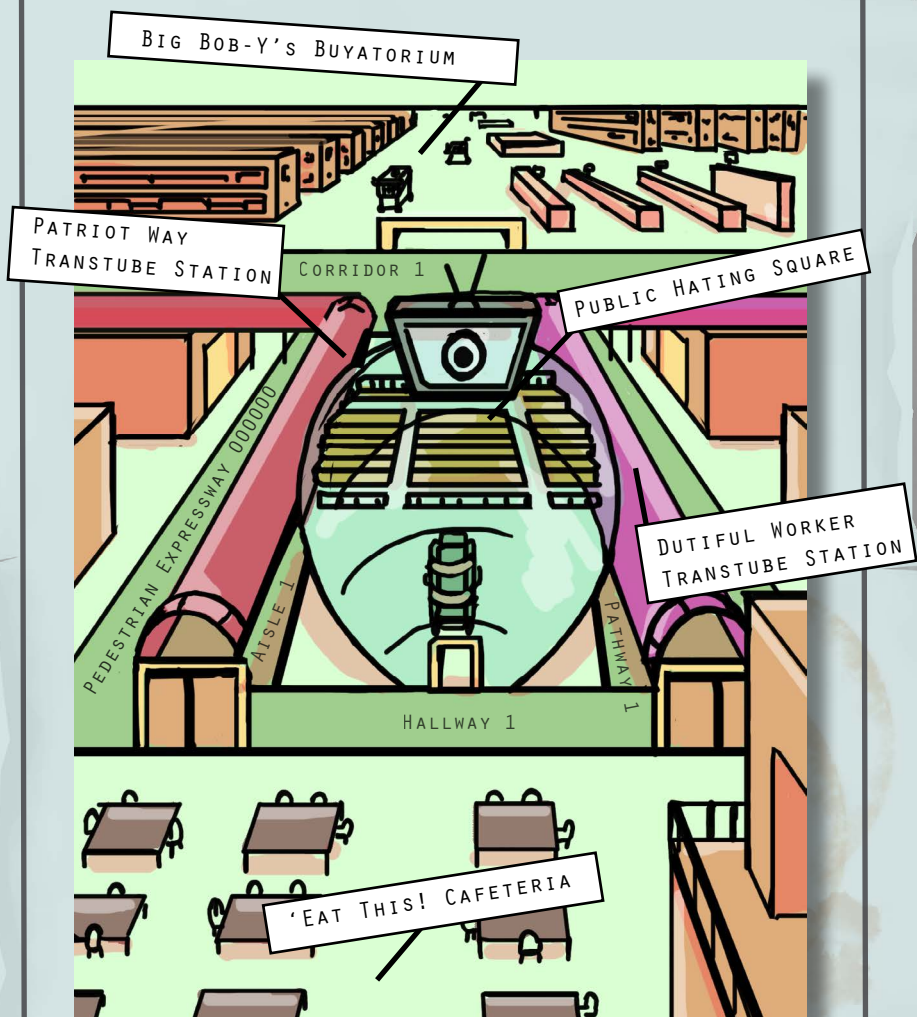
Noticeable features: Very [REDACTED] especially when you get too close

SHOULD BE CONSIDERED SO STUPID AND OBVIOUSLY WANTING TO DIE

If you have any information on the whereabouts of this heinous traitor, stay where you are and call Internal Security. We will come to you.

Note: Portions of this may be redacted due to Security Clearance restrictions and not wanting the terrorists to win.

HANDOUT #3: MAP OF THE TRK SECTOR'S PUBLIC HATING SQUARE



HANDOUT #4: SECOND LIST OF ITEMS STOLEN

Official Internal Security Memorandum

Department of Worthy Citizens Affairs

Only for citizens of Yellow clearance or higher (or those holding a wavier)

The following is a list of items absolutely, 100% for sure stolen by the notorious traitor known only as the Small Item Bandit (future notices may call this suspect 'Thingy Thief' or 'Wee Pilferer' depending on the workshop vote). If you find these items, use your Cerebral Coretech and send code 6B696C6C6C65A to your local precinct house.

Item	Serial #	IntSec Case #
One (1) Green boot size 72	4420	TRK-9921
One (1) Teela-O-MLY autographed photo with silver frame	n/a	TRK 9922
One (1) folder containing receipts that you should not look at		TRK 9923
One (2) serving tray(s) holding a half-eaten somenut-n-algae sandwich with crusts cut off		TRK 9925
One (#) set of keys because I know I left them somewhere they just don't disappear now stop recording and open my front door already, shut up and open that damn door	n/a	TRK 9926
One (1) vendabot	n/a	TRK 9929
One (1) autocar model XT-7 coloured choking blue	n/a	TRK 9930
Three (2) petbots answering to 'Clarence', 'Mr. Pootie' and 'Clarence'	n/a	TRK 9933
One (1) elevator car	n/a	TRK 9934

HANDOUT #4: SECOND LIST OF ITEMS STOLEN - CONTINUED

One (1) IntSec agent answering to Brett-B-FRN, PRIORITY CASE #1	n/a	n/a
One (1) Blue-clearance IntSec riot shield	n/a	TRK 9973
Five (5) [REDACTED] servers with [REDACTED] drives, HIGH PRIORITY CASE #1	n/a	n/a
One (1) confession booth with two (2) citizens inside	n/a	TRK 9984
Two (2) large, worthless stones that look like glass	n/a	TRK 9985
One (1) uncensored absquatulator	n/a	TRK 9986
Five (5) Infrared citizens (names unknown nor cared for)	n/a	TRK 9988
14 (14) metres of flooring from TRK Sector	n/a	TRK 9989
One (1) way to walk out of TRK Sector's Public Hating Square	n/a	TRK 9992

HANDOUT #5: YET MORE STOLEN ITEMS

Official Internal Security Memorandum

Department of Worthy Citizens Affairs

Only for citizens of Yellow clearance or higher (or those holding a wavier)

The following is a list of items absolutely, 100% for sure stolen by the notorious traitor known only as the Small Item Bandit, the Wee Pilferer or Ted. If you find these items, use your Cerebral Coretech and send code 6B696C6C6C65A to your local precinct house.

Item	Serial #	IntSec Case #
One (1) Green boot size 72	4420	TRK-9921
One (1) Teela-O-MLY autographed photo with silver frame	n/a	TRK 9922
One (1) folder containing receipts that you should not look at		TRK 9923
One (2) serving tray(s) holding a half-eaten somenut-n-algae sandwich with crusts cut off	LKM8&N	TRK 9925
One (#) set of keys because I know I left them somewhere they just don't disappear now stop recording and open my front door already, shut up and open that damn door	n/a	TRK 9926
One (1) vendabot	n/a	TRK 9929
One (1) autocar model XT-7 coloured choking blue	n/a	TRK 9930
Three (2) petbots answering to 'Clarence', 'Mr. Pootie' and 'Clarence'	n/a	TRK 9933
One (1) elevator car	n/a	TRK 9934

HANDOUT #5: YET MORE STOLEN ITEMS - CONTINUED

One (1) IntSec agent answering to Brett-B-FRN, PRIORITY CASE #1	n/a	n/a
One (1) Blue-clearance IntSec riot shield	n/a	TRK 9973
Five (5 [REDACTED]) servers with [REDACTED] drives, HIGH PRIORITY CASE #1	n/a	n/a
One (1) confession booth with two (2) citizens inside	n/a	TRK 9984
Two (2) large, worthless stones that look like glass	n/a	TRK 9985
One (1) uncensored absquatulator	n/a	TRK 9986
Five (5) Infrared citizens (names unknown nor cared for)	n/a	TRK 9988
14 (14) metres of flooring from TRK Sector	n/a	TRK 9989
One (1) way to walk out of TRK Sector's Public Hating Square	n/a	TRK 9992
17 (seventeen) metres of transtube track	n/a	TRK ERROR_ CASENUMBER_ OVERFLOW
One (1) box of '100% imitation grain Tasty Not-Cardboard Thins'	n/a	TRK ERROR_ CASENUMBER_ OVERFLOW
Two (2) rooms labelled 'Bathroom'	n/a	TRK ERROR_ CASENUMBER_ OVERFLOW
One (1) room labelled 'Reba's Quality Used Autocars & Dry Cleaning'	n/a	TRK ERROR_ CASENUMBER_ OVERFLOW

HANDOUT #5: YET MORE STOLEN ITEMS - CONTINUED

Nine (9) autocars	n/a	TRK ERROR_ CASENUMBER_ OVERFLOW
One (1) Exit 32	n/a	TRK ERROR_ CASENUMBER_ OVERFLOW
One (1) intersection of TRK Pedestrian Expressway and the Mike-U-Lem Memorial Corridor	n/a	TRK ERROR_ CASENUMBER_ OVERFLOW
One (1) Mike-U-Lem Memorial Corridor	n/a	TRK ERROR_ CASENUMBER_ OVERFLOW



