


SIGMATA

REPEAT THE SIGNAL





SIGMATA: Repeat the Signal

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Comrades-in-Arms

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SIGMATA_BBS (Official SIGMATA Discord)

Here is your invite: <https://discord.gg/5C4fkZS>


Feel free to join us or just stop by to grab the RTS sheets and templates.

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The only time punching a Nazi is acceptable is when higher force options are unavailable.





I can't believe I have to keep saying this nearly two years into this fucking thing, but since some of you all have been living in a cave, I must remind you that we are officially in the "shooting phase" of this conflict. As you know, my background is in global supply chains, not military history, but even my draft-dodging Ivy League ass understands that in the "shooting phase" of a conflict, our adversary is actually shooting at us and we are actually shooting back. Who typically wins the "shooting phase" of a conflict? I don't know, but the people who do know have asked our group to procure weapons, fighters, and money. Let me say that a bit slower for you. Weapons. Fighters. Money.

You'll notice our group got a little smaller since last week. That's because those of you who failed to gin up weapons, fighters, or money for the cause have been transferred to Commander Hobbes' propaganda division. Don't get me wrong, I definitely understand the value of a good marketing campaign. Hobbes is creating what we call a "marketing environment" conducive to materially supporting the Resistance. But unless you're following up with conversions; specifically, getting weapons, fighters, or money from the contacts she's sent you're way, her efforts are wasted.

Look, good politics doesn't win a shooting war. "Solidarity" doesn't stop the Regime from dropping bombs on our safehouses and hospitals. You know what does? Anti-aircraft missiles. This isn't rocket science. It's as simple as listening your customers and giving them what they are asking for. They don't need your opinion. They don't need you to weigh in. They need you to shut the fuck up and give them what they need to counter the Regime's aggression. When you give that Partisan a Stinger to knock a gunship out of the sky, they don't say "But where did it come from?" They say, "Thank you, may I have another?"

You want to have a conscience on where we get the necessary weapons, fighters, and money? Fine. In fact, we rely on your analysis. Nothing is for free. When the bill comes due, we need to know what we'll be up against. We need to know when we're writing checks we can't cash. But I swear to Christ, if any of you amateurs insist on "responsibly sourcing" the machine guns and militants we need to survive a shooting war, I'll pull every string I can to send you to the front armed with nothing but a "good praxis" merit badge. You're more useful to me as a casualty.

- Brock Bellamy, Regional Commander of the Makers, Western Revolutionary Front, Seattle. 1987.

At ease.

Brothers, I got nothing good to say, but you gotta hear me out anyway. We're on the cusp of something great, but we're going to be challenged like we never have been before.

We've all gotten the same two questions. Why did you work for the Regime and why did you join the Resistance? Our answers have been one and the same. So long as society has wolves, it needs sheep dogs to defend against the wolves. That was our charter enlisting or signing up for the Freedom Fist, and that remains our charter as "traitors" to the state. Thing is, though, we aren't the sheep dogs, brothers. Never have been. We're the wolves. Police or grunt, we've always been the wolves. That doesn't change because we took off the mask.

We put the people in camps. Our unions made it legal to lynch with a bullet if you tell the jury you were scared. We shot the kids at Kent State. We massacred women, children, and the elderly at My Lai. Cut up their bodies. Gang-raped some of them, too. Including kids. This ain't new. How far back do you want to go? We used water cannons and dogs on civilians during the Civil Rights movement. Cracked skulls, murdered their leaders. We shot workers for Hoover while in uniform and worked them over moonlighting as Pinkertons. We hunted escaped slaves and gave them back to their "owners." We murdered the people who lived here before we did and built strip malls over their mass graves.

We love our Revolution here in America. We fancy ourselves patriots. But brothers, we aren't the patriots. We're the red-coats. Hell, we're the red shirts. You think people are going to forget when this is all over? You think they're just going to let you sit in a rocking chair and watch your grand kids play in the yard? There's going to be a reckoning, brothers. It's going to start with those who still wear the uniform, and then it's coming for those who used to wear it. And you know what? You have it coming. We all have it coming. Yes, you have every goddamned right to do whatever it takes to defend yourself and your family, but you have it coming. For what you did, for what you allowed your brothers to do, and for every lie you told to cover for them. Folks got long memories. Your bout of conscience at the 11th hour doesn't forgive what you've been doing the last 10.

- Harold Graff, Regional Commander of the Old Men, Northern Revolutionary Front, Duluth. 1987.



The background features a vertical composition of three main color bands: purple on the left, red in the center, and blue on the right. These bands are overlaid with a fine, grid-like texture. In the foreground, there are dark, jagged, rocky shapes. A black rectangular box is centered horizontally and vertically, containing the word "AFTERMATH" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

AFTERMATH





Welcome to Repeat the Signal

“Repeat the Signal” (RTS forthwith) is the official companion to SIGMATA: This Signal Kills Fascists (TSKF forthwith). RTS won’t read like many of the game products you’re accustomed to. It can be thought of as a patch that upgrades TSKF to a “2nd edition” as well as a “director’s cut” where I will be speaking candidly to the reader about TSKF’s intent and issues.

RTS introduces new rules, balance tweaks, and content to make SIGMATA a vastly superior game. It is not a set of optional materials so much as it is the new, official SIGMATA rules. Most of this content was already incorporated into the recent Italian translation of TSKF to ensure that edition remains compatible with RTS. It is my hope to improve play for those who currently enjoy TSKF as it is, but also welcome back some of you who were intimidated or alienated by the core game’s rules. I am extremely proud of how this game has evolved and I owe it primarily to those I’ve been playing games with over the past 18 months.

RTS is also introspective of where TSKF failed: thematically, politically, and mechanically. It may be unusual to read about a game’s failures in a sourcebook, but the way that people are interfacing with games is changing and I’ve chosen to change along with them. SIGMATA was an exercise in risk-taking from its conception. I knew I was dabbling with dangerous materials and that the game would both succeed and fail in ways that I could not have anticipated. In this book, I formally acknowledge and apologize for some of the fallout, including spaces where my privilege and naiveté caused unintended harm.

The acknowledgement of failure is neither a pity party nor a desire to re-litigate the past. It’s just part of the process. This project and its Kickstarter campaign have exposed me to acute moments of validation, vilification, and vindication as an artist, activist, educator, and propagandist. It is safe to say that I’ve had my ass completely handed to me multiple times. Yet, I’m still here, I’m still making games, and I’m still wearing my soul on my sleeve, warts and all. It is my hope that RTS simultaneously concludes lingering narratives while opening doors to exciting new adventures and stories using the SIGMATA setting and system.

This Signal Kills Fascists. Finally, Repeat the Signal.

What's in this Book?

This first chapter, “Aftermath,” will talk about TSKF in a political context. I discuss the real-life regimes currently emulating the behavior of TSKF’s Regime, and the real-life resistance movements using the exact tactics and strategies outlined in TSKF. I then discuss at length the shortcomings of TSKF as a political work and an experiment.

The second chapter, “Receiver,” will teach the reader the bulk of RTS’s new rules by introducing the new character sheet and demonstrating how to build a character.

The third chapter, “Partisan,” introduces the option for players to play as Resistance Partisans; the “mundane” humans fighting alongside Receivers.

The fourth chapter, “Structure,” introduces the new sheets used to manage structured scenes of combat, evasion, and intrigue, and some new rules for running these scenes.

The fifth chapter, “Strategy,” introduces the new War Room sheet and explains how it changes the contours of a SIGMATA campaign. It also introduces the optional “Block Wars” campaign framework.

I've Seen This Before

RTS feature some content you’ve seen in TSKF, particularly when it comes of lists of things available to your characters (e.g. blades, subroutines, Ultimates, etc.). The reason for this is that we don’t want our reader to have to bounce back and forth between TSKF and RTS when creating a character or referencing rules and descriptions of things.

An unintended but useful byproduct of this is that RTS effectively serves as a Player’s Handbook. While running SIGMATA requires a GM to be familiar with TSKF, players unfamiliar with TSKF can acquire RTS and use it to build their characters, whether they are the setting’s cybernetic FM-powered revolutionaries or the human insurgents fighting alongside them. A reader working only with RTS may be somewhat in the dark as to how the game plays, but at the very least, they’ll be able to make their character, understand the difference between a Receiver and a Partisan, and have a fair understanding of how structured scenes work... all in a package that is shorter and less expensive than the core TSKF book.





Never Again and Again and Again

The world continues to careen towards the normalization of genocide and authoritarian violence.

The cruel machinery of the United States' border enforcement agencies chugs along. Human beings are crammed into cages fit for animals and forced to sleep on concrete floors underneath aluminum blankets. Many of those processed and deported are immediately kidnapped or killed by those they fled from in the first place. Judges knowingly deporting people to a death sentence are somehow able to sleep at night. The rank and file of the border enforcement agencies feel widespread contempt and their esprit-de-corp is beleaguered by depression, suicide, and PTSD. None of this is slowing down their mandate of dehumanization, deportation, and death.

Half of the country is hopeful (and perhaps delusional) that an upcoming election might trigger the closing of the internment camps and an embrace of more humane and just immigration processes. America's collective catastrophe will not be undone quickly, for it was centuries in the making, dating back to 1492. Neither the border violence, nor the police violence, nor the industrial prison complex, nor the extractivist violence of colonialism, nor the lone wolf mass shootings will cease until the rot of white supremacy is excised from our culture like the malignant tumor that it is.

On the other side of the world, another quasi-capitalist country engages in a program of population control as grotesque as America's. China is in the process of erasing its Uighur population, which is mostly Muslim and is the most visually distinct (i.e. easily othered) of China's ethnic minorities. In response to an outbreak of ethnic and anti-colonial violence in Xinjiang (one of China's many colonial territories), the CCP's stance is that any expression of Muslim identity outside of the increasingly narrow bounds of state religion is extremism, and that any expression of Uighur identity is separatism and terrorism.

Over a million Uighurs in China have been disappeared or detained in reeducation camps where they are subject to constant interrogation and torture. In the hopes of eradicating this culture completely, Uighur mosques, sacred sites, and graveyards that are centuries old are being bulldozed and built over. Those Uighurs outside the camps are confined in an increasingly all-encompassing



cameras to using traffic cones to isolate tear gas grenades and drown them in water. They have learned much from uprisings happening elsewhere in the world and now their own innovations are being adopted by others.

Their political signaling has also been methodical. To keep the West's eye on their situation, they've been seen waving the flags of the United States, England, and the United Nations in front of international news cameras. Regime propagandists and authoritarian Leftists (aka crypto-fascists) see this as evidence that the resistance movement is a "CIA coup" or a "bourgeois revolt," but this is as absurd as it is cynical. The resistance knows that the moment the international community gets bored and takes their cameras away, the resistance will get rolled by security forces. Their international beaconing is not an imperialist plot. It's a literal life line.

The resistance is equally mindful of the perception that the local population has about them. In addition to only targeting properties of regime supporters, they also rapidly break up their street blockades to permit ambulances and fire trucks to pass through (while giving no quarter to security forces). At the time of this writing, the resistance in Hong Kong has not worn out their welcome with the local population, despite the continual property damage, traffic jams, and other inconveniences that their struggle against regime riot police is contributing to.

While Hong Kong currently presents a hopeful application of the resistance framework gamified in TSKF, there was a profoundly less-hopeful TSKF concept that played out in Rojava... the Great Betrayal.

The Kurds have been stuck between a rock and a hard place for centuries. Surrounded by both regional and global imperialists (USA, Russia, Iran, Turkey, Syria, etc.) and terrorist organizations (Hezbollah, ISIS, etc.), the Kurds made the hard decision to ally with America to preserve their revolutionary project of a free and autonomous Rojava. They have always been weary of the United States and its imperialist designs for the region, but American weapons, air support, and regional power were necessary to keep their dream alive in the face of infinite enemies.

America got much out of the deal. The reason we rarely hear about the ISIS anymore is because the Kurds destroyed their power base, imprisoned thousands of ISIS fighters, and

The Veiled Analogy

TSKF was a work that needed to be read in its entirety in order to understand its intended political message. However, even for those who read the entire work, many arrived at a conclusion far different than what I had hoped for. That is primarily due to my failure as an author. There are two areas in TSKF where it was my duty to be absolutely explicit in message, but I chose to be more ambivalent and obscure than I had any right to. In one case it was a distraction. In the other case, it was disastrous. I'd like to fully acknowledge and apologize for both, starting with the former.

TSKF's struggle and factions were modeled on the dysfunctional and ultimately doomed resisted against the Assad regime in Syria. They were given an American veneer for many reasons, but a primary driver for this was that I convinced myself a Western audience would simply not care about a game about struggles in the Middle East and North Africa. For each of the game's factions, there is a strong parallel to a faction or political force that contributed to or complicated the struggle in Syria.

The Old Men were a stand in for the Free Syria Army (FSA), composed primarily of military defectors that opposed the Assad regime in the early days of the Syrian Civil War. When Syria's military began firing on peaceful protestors, many of the country's military rank and file formally defected from the regime and declared solidarity with the uprising. With military training and access to arms, they were highly effective against regime forces until many FSA soldiers deserted to join Islamist militant groups. Which leads us to the Faith.

The Faith was a stand in for the Islamist groups involved in the struggle. In the mid-period of the Syria Civil War, the struggle was coopted by Islamist groups, and the dream of a "Democratic Syria" was contested by an "Islamic Syria." Islamism is the political application of Islam, and like any religious or political program, is best represented as a spectrum. The Faith's (potential) degeneration towards what was essentially Christian-jihad and Christian-sharia represents what many of the Salafist military groups had in mind. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), for example, one of the most powerful militant groups in Syria, opposes the Assad regime. At the same time, they are a brutal al-Qaeda

offshoot that enforces strict sharia on the territories they control and are hated by the Syrian people. The rise of Islamist insurgent groups provided the narrative that Assad needed to delay and confuse international support. Which leads us to the Makers.

The Makers were a stand in for the international community and the neoliberal order. Global military intervention is often driven by antiquated “realist” interpretations of geopolitical power, or pursued because it represents an opportunity for wealthy countries to extract resources from poor countries. To make it an easier sell, this activity frequently takes on the veneer of caring about human rights, but as atrocities continued in Syria, it was quite clear that human rights were never a concern for international actors. Both Russia’s bolstering of the Assad regime and America’s arming of (the wrong) militant groups were undeniably driven by the extractivism and greed inherent to capitalism. Which leads us to the Party.

The Party was a stand in for the Western Left’s tepid response to the carnage as it unfolded. While many Leftist went to Syria to either report on or take up arms against a right wing regime committing genocide and democide, most watched with indifference, or worse, perpetuated the cycle of conspiracy and disinformation that would isolate and doom the resistance. From saying the White Helmets are a terrorist organization, to insisting that the opposition was using chemical weapons on themselves, Leftists everywhere were working overtime to bolster a regime that currently oversees an industrial rape and torture complex to punish the remnants of the resistance. You don’t have to like Putin to be his shill and you don’t have to be a right-winger to empower right wing autocrats and genocidal tyrants.

TSKF, as written, deserved much of the criticism claiming it was some kind of radical centrist manifesto, and without the explicit Syrian context, can be read as using the absurd “logic” of American electoral politics (i.e. appeal to moderates) to win an armed struggle against a fascist regime. In my attempt to show a resistance movement fraught with factionalism and navigating the cruel realities of allies of convenience, I created an opening for TSKF to operate as something I never intended when writing it. I am sorry for that.

That leads us to the other more urgent acknowledgement.



The Overdue Apology

TSKF's Resistance is made up of the marginalized people that the Regime is targeting: people of color, immigrants, queer folks, Jews, transgender people, indigenous people, disabled people, and their allies. There is even a passage in TSKF where the Old Men swear loyalty to this "real" resistance, which was already centuries in the making and was only joined by allies from privileged ingroups recently. The Resistance works with the setting's four fundamentally dysfunctional factions for weapons, funding, expertise, material support, and political support... the ingredients needed for a modern insurgency to survive a shooting war against a tyrannical regime.

TSKF reinforced the idea of "radical empathy," which is not a feeling of sentiment towards political rivals and potential allies, but rather, is the work of understanding their ideology enough to recruit or counter-recruit them (while also understanding the risks and limitations of doing so). Given the strange bedfellows that have comprised virtually every revolution in history, the position is fairly uncontroversial. However, I made it controversial by not considering how the destructive "civility discourse" in Western politics is transforming how we talk about this political work. So let me address this now by saying what should have been front-and-center in TSKF:

It is not the job of marginalized communities to break bread with or demonstrate civility to the very societal ingroups that oppress them (nor the moderates complicit in this oppression). Not stating this immediately was an egregious miss on my part and I am grateful to those who pointed this out. TSKF, as is, can be read as insinuating that marginalized communities are responsible for rehabilitating the very people responsible for their oppression, or that they should assume a passive or compromising approach that puts them in immediate proximity to people who would kill them. This is obviously not the case, nor was it ever my position, but the thing about any text is that it operates independently of its author's intent.

TSKF message of radical empathy should not be lost on the reader, but the book did not do proper service to the notion of radical outrage. Both are two sides of the same coin and we need to be cognizant who can do which, and with whom, because of how white supremacy frequently

dictates the structural reality of engaging people politically. Those allies who are part of societal ingroups can best serve the Resistance by recruiting and counter-recruiting within those spaces where their marginalized comrades are socially or even physically denied entry. In a fictional insurgency context, this means being a spy and saboteur deep within Regime-controlled social spaces. In reality, it is the work of challenging and countering the casual racism and bigotry witnessed in ingroup-controlled spaces (e.g. “water-cooler conversations” at work). These subtle but pervasive manifestations of bigotry do more to perpetuate systemic bigotry and injustice than the Ku Klux Klan burning crosses or the Proud Boys marching in Portland.

It is also imperative for allies part of societal ingroups to not tone-police marginalized people. **Outrage is the only rational response to systemic injustice.** When an ally insists that someone from a marginalized community needs to soften their message, or contextualize it for the ingroup, or demonstrate less emotion, they are not helping. They are playing right into the Regime’s hands. The advice they think is “helpful” or “strategic” is nothing more than mutating a rational response to systemic injustice into something ineffectual and something constrained by the Regime’s own rules of social conduct (which ultimately normalizes continued systemic injustice). What’s worse, is that they are doing the exact same thing I unintentionally did in TSKF: insinuate that it is marginalized peoples’ job to clean the ingroup’s mess. Ally, own the mess you contribute to and have thrived on.

TSKF’s opening speeches by Father Francis and Commander Hobbes demonstrate that radical outrage and radical empathy are not incompatible, nor are they rhetorical forces that need to be “balanced.” They are both weapons at our disposal, to be utilized in different arenas against different adversaries. Civility discourse insists on a one-true-way to achieve political change, but its primary use is of silencing and colonizing political speech, as well as creating a rift between comrades leveraging a plurality of tactics. Despite making a game about the violent overthrow of a right wing tyrannical regime, I perpetuated the project of civility discourse. Perhaps because of my proximity to its advocates, I failed to appreciate how harmful and insidious it truly is. I apologize for doing so.

Fuck *civility*. Kill fascists.





Cutting Room Floor

There were a handful of game mechanics and narrative caveats that did not work out in practice as well as they did conceptually, or are being revisited because their real-life application is considerably more complex than what was suggested in TSKF. They've been either replaced or removed entirely from play.

Memory

Memory no longer exists in RTS. It has been supplanted by changes to Libraries as well as the introduction of Relationship mechanics, both of which will be discussed next chapter. It was also replaced because it asked players to have their characters relive trauma over and over for the purposes of mechanical benefit. That might make for interesting drama in film or fiction, but it was somewhat difficult and potentially problematic ask of players.

Voice of the Outgroup

Voice of the Outgroup, an optional game rule for intrigue scenes, no longer exists in RTS. While it is a conceptually useful way to articulate how white supremacy and patriarchy puts impossible social expectations on speakers who are not part of the ingroup, it was not a useful game mechanic. It was rarely used by players following TSKF's release and with good cause: it was mathematically disadvantageous to do so. There is nothing in RTS that replaces this rule, though players and GMs are free to incorporate its thematic elements in the outcome of rolls.

Take Off Your Mask

The concept of "Take Off Your Mask," a means to force the Freedom Fist into a conditional surrender, was featured in TSKF for a number of ethical and thematic reasons. Like much of TSKF's content, the "mask effect" was never intended as a practical, real-life tactic to countering authoritarian shock troopers, but rather, a thematic mechanism to explore the concept of differentiating between combatant and non-combatant, of soldiers being human beings with conflicting personal and social pressures, and of creating small fissures in loyalty to the state that could result in military defections (a key ingredient to countless historical uprisings).

The actual act of "taking off the mask" (as well as the removal of patches) has been witnessed in a number of mass



Reclaiming the Narrative

SIGMATA is not and never was a power fantasy game about vigilante superheroes using their abilities to achieve social justice outcomes. It was and remains a game about being part of an armed insurrection against an oppressive and genocidal government.

It is not and never was a game about political compromise. It is a game about grotesque choices and inevitable betrayal. It is not a game that tells you who to ally with. It's a game that tells you how and why your allies might be the ones who end up selling you out or killing you.

It is not a game about heroic victory, but a game about attrition, entropy, complexity, loss, and violent struggle that evolves faster and more erratically than any analyst or strategist can account for. It is not a game about building a political utopia. Its a game where utopia is nowhere in sight.

SIGMATA uses the allegory of the Signal to teach and gamify the central conceits of COIN theory, which governments all over the world use to crush uprisings, control the narrative, and alienate resistance movements from their allies. It's being used by despots in developing countries and it's being used by law enforcement agencies in developed countries. It's being used against you, right now, and effectively so. The struggle against occupiers or tyrannical governments is not won by chosen ones (let alone cybernetic superheroes), but rather, by movements able to counter the plurality of tactics and propaganda that the state uses against them. It's playing the enemy's game on the enemy's terms, according to the enemy's time line. To even stand a chance, you must know your enemy.

It is beyond dark. Yet, stories of heroes fighting against intolerable conditions and overwhelming odds, with an ever dwindling light of hope, is not new. Hell, it's not even original. This is the story of virtually every traditional tabletop game in the science fiction, fantasy, cyberpunk, and adjacent genres. The only thing SIGMATA does differently is insist that armed insurgency is going to be a goddamned mess and you're not going to get out of it clean if you do somehow manage to get out of it alive.

If the revolutionary mess I've constructed does not suit you or your gaming table, you are empowered to build your own revolutionary mess. RTS even provides templates for

you that makes this process easy. The game does not functionally or even thematically change if you swap out the Faith, the Makers, the Old Men, or the Party with one or more different groups.

Perhaps you'd like to replace one of them with a historical or ahistorical variant of the Black Panther Party, the Weather Underground, the Earth Liberation Front, or even the Symbionese Liberation Army. Perhaps you'd like to see the factions represent the various political ideologies to the left of fascism (i.e. liberals, anarchists, democratic socialists, and Marxist-Leninists), or the ethnicities and identity groups primarily targeted by the Regime (i.e. immigrants, queer folks, women, people of color). Go for it. However, I would caution the reader to avoid what TSKF took great pains to avoid: seeing all people who identify as a member of a political identity as monolithic. That type of essentialism is not only lazy and boring, but it's also a departure from reality that comforts us the same way that conspiracy theory and demagoguery does. Be wary of easy answers describing political reality. For real life context, look no further than the people of color who support the Proud Boys or Neo-Nazi women content to be subservient baby makers. The disease of white supremacy and patriarchy is pernicious enough to infect anyone's brain, regardless of their identity.

Any political or social organization large enough to muster a national presence will be comprised of people with very different viewpoints, motivations, and ideas for the organization's priorities. Factions within factions form, all of them vying for the soul of the movement. Even small groups are often rife with doctrinal schisms, power struggles, and Machiavellian maneuvers by both narcissistic grifters and true believers alike. In making your own factions, you're encouraged to embrace the complexity, internal inconsistency, and natural slide towards schism that virtually every movement faces.

The faction template in RTS still features the grim reality of Faction Fallout, including the possibility of the Great Betrayal. To survive in the short term, a movement needs external support. Yet, history has shown that allies are likely to betray the movement, or foster a schism that shatters the dream. This is neither a call for moderation nor is it political fatalism. It just is what it is. Sometimes the real struggle doesn't start until *after* the Tsar, Shah, or President is deposed. Don't fear this likelihood. **Plan for it.**





Faction Template

RTS provides a template to quickly make a faction of your own design to remix or outright replace one or more of TSKF's factions. On the following page, we walk through the steps to create a faction.

Remember, embrace complexity and reject essentialism. If your faction is too grimdark, too utopian, too cohesive, too dysfunctional, or just completely void of extremists and cynics who might drive it into the ground, you've likely created a faction that's as monolithic and problematic as a Tolkien fantasy race. Try harder and kowtow to no one, no matter how loud or irritating they are.

FACTION		
IDEOLOGY & GREIVANCE	COMPETANCY & LIABILITY	
WAVE		
FAVORS		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
+1 LOYALTY, +1 WAVE	+1 LOYALTY, +1 WAVE	+1 LOYALTY, +1 WAVE
Extreme Emergency	Uncertain Outcome	Imminent Victory
FALLOUT		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		- ([LOYALTY] LP, RF, & IC)
SIGMATA		

Step 1: Name your faction

This step is pretty straightforward.

Step 2: Define the faction's ideology and grievance

Use this space to summarize how the faction sees political reality, what types of people are part of the faction, why they resent the Regime, and why they are willing to work with the Resistance (and vice versa). You can treat this section as the faction's "manifesto" because it summarizes their beliefs, demands, and intent.

Step 3: Define faction's competency and liability

Use this space to summarize the types of skills, resources, and tactics the faction brings to the table, as well as why their approach can sometimes work against the Resistance's short term goal of defeating the Regime. This section perhaps best articulates how and why the faction has enough national presence to be even considered a full "faction" in the first place and why they sometimes keep Resistance leadership up at night.

Step 4: Define the faction's wave

Use this space to invent a faction wave, which is a group of Partisans in the field that the players can call on for support during structured scenes. Make sure this wave somehow scales along with the faction's current Loyalty rating.

Step 5: Define faction favors

Use these spaces to briefly summarize some missions that the players can take on to raise the Loyalty of the faction. Note, these missions are sometimes (but not always) consistent with the Resistance's overall values.

Step 6: Define faction fallout

Use these spaces to briefly summarize what it looks like when the faction "goes off the rails" and starts taking actions independently that are harmful to the Resistance's short term goal of defeating the Regime and keeping the factions united. Use the box under the "Extreme Emergency" state for fallout they might resort to if the Resistance is losing badly. Use the box under the "Imminent Victory" state to explain what this faction's Great Betrayal might look like. Remember, the Great Betrayal is either selling out to the Regime or making a sudden power grab that involves destroying the Resistance faction most threatening to this faction's long term goals.





RECEIVER





Receiver

This chapter will introduce the new character sheet and tell you how to build a Receiver for RTS. At the same time, it will introduce most of the new rules that RTS brings to the table. Before we dive in, we need to discuss some terminology changes and give a brief overview of the major rule changes you can expect.

Important Terminology Changes

RTS makes a number of changes to terms used through the TSKF core book. TSKF used a lot of computational language to reinforce its 1980s cyberpunk aesthetic (which will not be apologized for), but we are abandoning that approach to make the game's rules more accessible to new audiences.

“Exposure” is now “Danger”

RTS uses the term “danger” in place of the term “exposure.” Danger is more intuitive and better captures what's at stake during structured scenes of combat, evasion, and intrigue.

“Op” is now “Roll”

RTS uses the term “roll” instead of “Op” (an abbreviation for Operation), because it describes when someone is rolling dice.

Success Versus Progress

RTS differentiates between “successes” and “progress.” A success is a individual dice result of 6+ when a player makes a roll. Progress is the total amount of points a player applies to a structured scene's sheet when using offensive tactics (i.e. Confront, Flank, Rush, Sneak, Snoop, Storm).

This is done because sometimes we are very specifically talking about successes rolled on dice versus the total amount of progress a player makes with a roll. For example, what were formerly the Aggression tactics (i.e. Confront, Rush, Storm) add points to increase the total progress of a roll, not additional “successes” per se. Why is this important? First, because the successes rolled determine how the player and GM narrate the outcome of a roll, not the total progress. Also, there are factors that change or even double successes, but do not double total progress. It will become more clear as we reinforce this idea throughout the remainder of this book.

The New Character Sheet

What used to be called the “Receiver dossier” is now simply called the “character sheet,” both for the sake of simplicity as well as the fact that this sheet can be used to create and manage a character that is either a Receiver or a Partisan.

The character sheet has been reimagined to better accommodate RTS’s new rules. It organizes information more clearly, uses icons to direct players to their available options, and features some rules written explicitly for ease of play. This chapter will work through every single element on the character sheet and also serve a guide for how to build a Receiver.

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Step 1: Determine Who You Are

The very top of the character sheet remains the same with the exception of the “Receiver | Partisan” split in the top left corner of the sheet. If you are building a Receiver (which we’ll be covering in this chapter), simply cross out “Partisan.”

RECEIVER | ~~PARTISAN~~ NAME **Ming Wei** HANDLE **B3nd3r**

SURFACE

Chinese American, 20s, she/they, 2nd gen, neon track suit, bowl cut, always wearing Walkman, ratty high-tops, black leg warmers, confident, quotes movies at the worst possible times.

STORY

parents interred, fled to Chinatown to avoid loyalist violence, was in university conservatory to become opera singer before liberal arts programs were purged of “multi-culturalism”

Receivers still have a name distinct from their 1980s “leet-speak” handle. They also still have a surface (external identifiers that either you project or society projects upon you) and a story (internal identifiers that either defy or reinforce what’s on the surface).

As with almost everything on the character sheet, this step can be done at any time. There’s no need to settle on these items right now. You can always come back to it later.

Step 2: Rate Your Tactics

A Receiver’s efficacy in structured scenes of combat, evasion, and intrigue are no longer driven by Core Processors rating. Instead, you will be assigning ratings to individual tactics. Before we show you what that process looks like, we need to discuss changes made to certain categories of tactics.

Aggression Tactics (Reckless Progress)

As was explained in the beginning of this chapter, the Aggression tactics (i.e. Confront, Rush, and Storm) have been rebalanced. When a player makes a roll using one of these tactics, she gains an additional 3 successes (even if she failed her roll) while also gaining 3 danger. It is important to note that only the *rolled* successes (dice results of 6+) of a roll using an Aggression tactic determines who gets to narrate the roll’s outcome and how. The bonus 3 successes do not influence this. For example, if a player makes a Confront roll and scores -1 successes (a solid failure), the GM still gets to narrate this outcome, even though the player gained a total of 2 successes during the scene.



Guile Tactics (Cautious Progress)

No changes have been made to the Guile tactics (i.e. Flank, Sneak, and Snoop). They still score 1 progress per success rolled. They work exactly how they did in TSKF. We should note that in TSKF, Guile tactics tended to underperform when compared to Aggression tactics, chipping away at progress but not always keeping pace with the rising tide of danger. Changes to how blades work (which will be discussed later in this chapter) make Guile tactics a truly viable alternative to Aggression tactics.

Judgement Tactics (Reduce Your Own Danger)

As was explained in the beginning of this chapter, the Judgement tactics (i.e. Fade, Gel, and Regroup) have been changed, providing the option to either reduce your own danger by 1 per success rolled or reduce your own fatigue (also introduced later in this chapter) by 1 per success rolled. In TSKF, Judgement tactics tended to underperform when compared to Valor tactics in that their only real use was to “buy time” for yourself, or pull yourself out of danger when you were about to fail a scene. The addition of fatigue reduction makes Judgement tactics a more viable alternative to Valor tactics.

Valor Tactics (Reduce An Ally's Danger)

No changes have been made to the Valor tactics (i.e. Deny, Suppress, and Support). They still reduce an ally's danger by 1 per success rolled. In TSKF, Valor tactics were the best tactics, outperforming virtually every other tactic, especially when coupled with blades that effectively doubled their output. While Valor tactics (and their associated blades) remain the same in RTS, they were the gold standard to which all other tactics were upgraded to match.

Assigning Tactic Ratings

Now that you have a better idea of how the tactics work in RTS, it's time to assign ratings to them.

For each category of tactics (i.e. Aggression, Guile, Judgement, and Valor), you will assign a single rating to every associated tactic. For two categories of your choice, you will assign a rating of 4 to every tactic. For one category of your choice, you will assign a rating of 3 to every tactic. For the last category remaining, you will assign a rating of 2 to every tactic. The example on the next page shows one possible distribution.



	COMBAT	EVASION	INTRIGUE
AGGRESSION +1 progress per success +3, but +3 danger to self.	STORM 4	RUSH 4	CONFRONT 4
GUILE +1 progress per success.	FLANK 3	SNEAK 3	SNOOP 3
JUDGEMENT -1 danger or -1 fatigue to self per success.	REGROUP 4	FADE 4	GEL 4
VALOR -1 danger to an ally per success.	SUPPRESS 2	DENY 2	SUPPORT 2

Once that is done, you are permitted to “shift” the ratings in each category’s tactics by 1. For example, you can lower 1 Guile tactic’s rating by 1 point to increase a different Guile tactic’s rating by 1. You can do this once for each category. Below, we’ve “shifted” every category except Judgement.

	COMBAT	EVASION	INTRIGUE
AGGRESSION +1 progress per success +3, but +3 danger to self.	STORM 5	RUSH 3	CONFRONT 4
GUILE +1 progress per success.	FLANK 3	SNEAK 2	SNOOP 4
JUDGEMENT -1 danger or -1 fatigue to self per success.	REGROUP 4	FADE 4	GEL 4
VALOR -1 danger to an ally per success.	SUPPRESS 3	DENY 1	SUPPORT 2

Step 3: Determine Your Peripherals

Next, we'll determine three peripherals for our Receiver, each of which can support any single tactic you want, though only one peripheral can ever be used at a time during your turn.

Peripherals work similarly to how they worked in TSKF, except they now convert 1 botch into 1 success (instead of simply negating 1 botch). This makes them much more powerful. In fact, they now statistically outperform libraries (though they only apply to a single tactic instead of every tactic available in a scene).

Peripherals are documented in the space below the tactic ratings. In fact, you'll notice that the character sheet has been organized in columns for combat, evasion, and intrigue so that it is easier to know exactly what is available to you as you play these scenes.

Write down your peripherals and then put what tactic they support underneath. Lastly, fill in the small square inside the tactic box for each tactic that is supported by a peripheral. This is a mnemonic device to help you remember you have a peripheral available when you use that tactic. You'll also notice a triangle and circle symbol, which we'll get to later in this chapter.

The figure on the opposite page shows an example of three peripherals assigned to a character. In this case, we have one peripheral for each scene type, each assigned to a specific tactic, though you can distribute your peripherals any way you want (e.g. assigning all three to combat tactics). The small square has been filled in next to the tactics that are supported by peripherals.

Note that because peripherals do make fundamental changes to a roll, they *do* impact who gets to narrate a roll's outcome and how. For example, if a player makes a roll and the results are 4, 4, 3, 1, and 1, the roll has yielded a total of -2 botches (a dramatic failure narrated by the GM, and disastrous for the scene). However, if that player has a peripheral to use, they convert one of those botches into a success, meaning that the roll has yielded a total of 0 successes (a marginal failure, with narration rights shared between player and GM).



	COMBAT	EVASION	INTRIGUE
AGGRESSION +1 progress per success +3, but +3 danger to self.	STORM 5	RUSH 3	CONFRONT 4
GUILE +1 progress per success.	FLANK 3	SNEAK 2	SNOOP 4
JUDGEMENT -1 danger or -1 fatigue to self per success.	REGROUP 4	FADE 4	GEL 4
VALOR -1 danger to an ally per success.	SUPPRESS 3	DENY 1	SUPPORT 2
	<input type="checkbox"/> PERIPHERALS skorpion VZ61 (storm)	<input type="checkbox"/> PERIPHERALS spraypaint (deny)	<input type="checkbox"/> PERIPHERALS walkman (gel)

As a reminder, your character's peripherals are not the sum total of their available equipment. It is perfectly fine for them to be armed to the teeth in the narrative without declaring these weapons as peripherals. Also, peripherals don't have to be portable objects that your character carries around on their person. For example, they can be resources you can access in a flashback that occurred before the scene (e.g. elite BBS) or something you always have waiting for you outside during a mission (e.g. Ferarri). The only real rule is that a peripheral is a material *thing* and not a relationship, experience, or signature skill. There are other game mechanisms for those types of narrative conceits, like **libraries**, which we'll discuss next.

Step 4: Determine Your Library

Next, we'll determine a library for our Receiver. In terms of game mechanics, libraries work identically to how they did in TSKF, counting every result of 10 on an individual dice as 2 successes instead of 1. The primary difference in how RTS handles libraries is in their narrative flavor.

Instead of selecting a library from a determined list of approaches, a library is now more of a background that you define, based on your character's history and experiences leading up to when play begins. In our example, we've determined that our character has a library called "Chinatown militia" that is listed under combat. This means that during scenes of combat, she can leverage the training and experiences of her days patrolling Chinatown, honing her marksmanship at the shooting range, and battling skinhead paramilitaries that tried to bring trouble to her neighborhood.

You'll notice that we also filled in the small circle in every tactic box listed under combat. This is a mnemonic device to help you remember you have a library available to you when you use those tactics.

Your character's library doesn't necessarily have to be a vocation. It can be your character's "station" in society (e.g. convict, refugee, yuppy, etc.), a pivotal experience that defined who she would become (e.g. Halite Hill siege, Justice South internment, survivor of evangelical death cult, etc.), or even some kind of hobby that required them to interact with various subcultures (e.g. BBS SysOp, pinball wizard, skateboarder, etc.).

COMBAT	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	STORM 5
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	FLANK 3
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REGROUP 4
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SUPPRESS 3
<input type="checkbox"/>	PERIPHERALS skorpion VZ61 (Storm)
<input type="checkbox"/>	LIBRARY Chinatown militia

As was the case with peripherals, a player must find a way to incorporate their library into the narrative any time it is used. Fortunately, libraries are conducive to telling many types of stories. Let's riff on the "Chinatown militia" library for a moment. Yes, this library has been assigned to the combat column, so it will mostly manifest (mechanically) in structured scenes of combat, but there are a number of ways in which this can be done. Here are just a few examples.

A Library as Muscle Memory

Our character is in a brawl. Fortunately, she's drilled and drilled and drilled hand-to-hand combat. Without even thinking about it, she's able to perform a rapid takedown of her opponent and get him in an armbar.

A Library as a Flashback Repository

Our character is in a firefight. She is faced with a choice of either running to aid a wounded comrade or pressing the attack, hoping the comrade's injury is not serious. This exact scenario happened to her in the past. She made the wrong choice back then and won't be doing so again.

A Library as a Knowledge Base

Our character is in a protracted skirmish that's just been enveloped by a summer storm. She knows that the soot and water are going to make the Fist M-16s start to jam. She knows how heavy their boots and Kevlar will be when soaking wet. She knows that the Fist know the same thing, and will likely push hard now, before the elements erode their material advantage.

A Library as an Aesthetic

Our character is calmly reloading her weapon as small arms fire and rockets hammer her position. This isn't the first time she's been shelled. While the others are sprawled and shrieking, she kneels up near the window, scopes a white mask, and pulls the trigger. She then slinks down milliseconds before machine rounds pour through the window. She's tempted to light a cigarette and wait it out, but she thinks better of it.





Step 5: Determine Your Blades

Next, we'll determine the three (not two) blades that your Receiver starts with. Generally speaking, blades work exactly how they did in TSKF. They provide bonuses to specific tactics or provide certain universal advantages, and they do so whether the Signal is up or not. Specifically, however, the blades available to Receivers have undergone a dramatic rebalancing. While a handful of them remain the same, some have been significantly improved while some have been removed altogether because they were either too ineffective or because they "broke" the game.

Before we dive into changes to blades, we'll discuss the section on the character sheet where they are documented. The first order of business is cross out the word "training" (which is the Partisan version of blades which will be discussed next chapter). You should use the boxes available to list your blades and write a very brief description of what they do, including what tactic they influence and how. In our example character has three blades listed along with a very brief description of what each one does.

The sheet features four spaces to list blades, but there is no limit to how many blades a Receiver can acquire during play. Use this space however you wish.

BLADES | ~~TRAINING~~

<p>▷ Chameleon Camo fade reduces danger <u>and</u> fatigue</p>	<p>▷ Force Points storm rolled or invoked successes are doubled</p>
<p>▷ Snake Eyes snoop successes add progress <u>and</u> reduce danger</p>	<p>▷</p>

You'll also notice that there is a small triangle listed in each box as well as a small triangle listed in each tactics box. If a blade influences a tactic, go to that tactic box and fill in the small triangle. This is a mnemonic device to help you remember you have a blade available when you use that tactic.

On the next four pages, we'll be introducing the blades available to Receivers. As is the case with everything on the character sheet, players are encouraged to incorporate blades into the narrative even when they aren't actively benefitting a tactic. Just because your Snake Eyes blade only mechanically benefits the Snoop tactic doesn't mean your Receiver couldn't be using it to disorientate a fascist before knocking his lights out in a combat scene.





Combat Blades

Aegis Eyes: This blade predicts and displays the visual telemetry of a firefight in a Receiver's field of vision, including past, current, and future vectors for projectiles and moving bodies. When she uses the Suppress tactic, her progress applies to two allies instead of one. So, for example, if she reduces an ally's danger by 3, she can reduce the danger of another ally by 3. Remember, Valor tactics cannot be used to reduce your own danger.

Bunker Morph: This blade causes the plates and panels of a Receiver's cybernetic flesh to fold out and form a phalanx of overlapping bulletproof plates, shielding her from incoming kinetic force. She reduces both her danger by 1 and her fatigue by 1 for each point of progress when she uses the Regroup tactic.

Force Points: This blade reconfigures a Receiver's limbs and joints to house retractable weaponry - such as ripping claws, pneumatic hammers, or monofilament whips - which can be expressed at will, making her extremely lethal in close quarters. When she uses the Storm tactic, she doubles her progress. Note, this blade does not double the 3 bonus progress inherent to Aggression tactics.

Siege Mesh: This blade causes a Receiver's flesh to rapidly generate extra layers of hardened cybernetic plating that breaks away upon impact and regenerates seconds later. During combat scenes, she automatically reduces her danger by 1 at the start of each round (after the GM goes). This blade seems less effective than the others, but on the contrary, it can be used in conjunction with the others.

Tracer Step: This blade causes a Receiver to project blurry after-images of herself as she dashes from point to point on the battlefield, making it extremely difficult to anticipate her movements or lead her with small arms fire. When she uses the Flank tactic, she also reduces her own danger by an amount equal to her progress.

Evasion Blades

Chameleon Camo: This blade allows a Receiver to instantly coat her flesh, clothing, and equipment with a photoreactive liquid metal that assumes the color and texture of her surroundings. She reduces both her danger by 1 and her fatigue by 1 for each point of progress when she uses the Fade tactic.

Ghost Mesh: This blade causes a Receiver's flesh, clothing, and equipment to absorb and deflect light in a way that makes her appear to glitch in and out of human-visible spectrums. During evasion scenes, she automatically reduces her danger by 1 at the start of each round (after the GM goes). This blade seems less effective than the others, but on the contrary, it can be used in conjunction with the others.

Gravity Spurs: This blade reconfigures a Receiver's limbs and joints to house retractable hooks, pitons, and pulleys, enabling her to execute gravity-defying maneuvers such as running up walls or crawling across ceilings. When she uses the Rush tactic, she doubles her progress. Note, this blade does not double the 3 bonus progress inherent to Aggression tactics.

Mute Gyros: This blade activates miniature gyrostabilizers inside the Receiver's joints and torso, expertly shifting her weight in a manner that makes it very difficult to hear her footfalls or tumbling maneuvers. When she uses the Sneak tactic, she also reduces her own danger by an amount equal to her progress.

Sonic Sight: This blade predicts and displays the audio telemetry of an environment in a Receiver's field of vision, compiled from the breathing, footfalls, and heartbeats of nearby witnesses and sentries. When she uses the Deny tactic, her progress applies to two allies instead of one. So, for example, if she reduces an ally's danger by 3, she can reduce the danger of another ally by 3. Remember, Valor tactics cannot be used to reduce your own danger.





Intrigue Blades

Elysian Mesh: This blade causes a Receiver's flesh to shimmer with micro-patterns of visible light that are so rapid and subtle they are imperceptible to the conscious eye, but pulse in a manner that calms the lizard brain of those who look upon her. During intrigue scenes, she automatically reduces her danger by 1 at the start of each round (after the GM goes). This blade seems less effective than the others, but on the contrary, it can be used in conjunction with the others.

Mimetic Regulator: This blade permits a Receiver to analyze the voice, vocabulary, gait, gestures, movements, and mannerisms of a subject, and then reprogram her own behavior to manifest in a similar fashion. She reduces both her danger by 1 and her fatigue by 1 for each point of progress when she uses the Gel tactic.

Snake Eyes: This blade causes minute fractals of light in a Receiver's irises to swirl in a hypnotic pattern that results in a subconscious pacifying effect in any subject she makes direct eye contact with. When she uses the Snoop tactic, she also reduces her own danger by an amount equal to her progress.

Social Scout: This blade displays the behavioral telemetry of groups in the Receiver's field of vision, using facial micro-expressions, body language, body temperature, and breathing patterns to map out social pathways and barriers. When she uses the Support tactic, her progress applies to two allies instead of one. So, for example, if she reduces an ally's danger by 3, she can reduce the danger of another ally by 3. Remember, Valor tactics cannot be used to reduce your own danger.

Vox Machina: This blade augments a Receiver's voice, allowing her to emit sonic and ultrasonic frequencies that cannot actually be heard by humans but do cause them feelings of physical euphoria or distress, depending on the Receiver's intent. When she uses the Confront tactic, she doubles her progress. Note, this blade does not double the 3 bonus progress inherent to Aggression tactics.

Utility Blades

Error Handling: This blade controls a sensor array configured to detect sudden and severe mechanical stress and instantly respond by executing context-sensitive emergency maneuvers. Any time a Receiver with this blade is at 10 or more danger after the GM takes their turn, she instantly restores 2 fatigue.

Liquid Cooling: This blade deploys a liquid metal coolant into the circulatory system of a Receiver when her chassis suffers catastrophic levels of mechanical stress induced by damage or strain. Once per scene, if the Receiver ends a round with 10 or more danger, she is permitted to continue play into the next round without consequence, maintaining her current level of danger. It is possible to safely end a scene with this Receiver at 10 or more danger, so long as the scene ends on the turn when this blade was activated.

Machine Learning: This blade configures a Receiver to learn rapidly from test data generated by approaches and situations they are unfamiliar with. Any time the Receiver uses a tactic rated at 1 or 2, the cost of using a subroutine alongside that tactic is reduced by 1 fatigue.

Peer-to-Peer Seeder: This blade optimally distributes stored Signal power to her allies. At will, during her turn or anyone else's turn, she can increase her own fatigue by 4 to reduce an ally's fatigue by 3. Note, this ability can be used on both allied Receivers and Partisans.



Step 6: Grok Fatigue

That's right, you need to understand the new RTS concept of fatigue before we jump to the next step of determining subroutines. This will be brief and simple.

FATIGUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The character sheet features a tracker for fatigue, which is used by both Receivers and Partisans. It represents the available reserves of energy and concentration your character has available to activate their most dramatic powers (subroutines in the case of Receivers, and talents in the case of Partisans).

Using a subroutine increases your Receiver's fatigue by 2-3 points, depending on what type of subroutine you are using (we'll discuss subroutines very soon). When you gain fatigue from using subroutines, fill in an equal number of boxes on the fatigue tracker. Given that each character can incur a maximum of 10 fatigue (and never burn fatigue "over" this amount), it is a resource that each player must manage carefully.

There are 5 methods to reduce fatigue:

- When a mission (e.g. Regime Action, Resistance Action, etc.) is over, reduce all of your fatigue.
- When you complete a structured scene (i.e. combat, evasion, or intrigue) during a mission comprised of multiple scenes, immediately reduce 5 fatigue.
- Judgement tactics can be used to reduce a number of fatigue equal to your progress, instead of reducing your danger by that amount (unless you have a blade that does both).
- The Peer-to-Peer Seeder blade (for Receivers) and the Command Presence training (for Partisans) permit you incur 4 fatigue to reduce an ally's fatigue by 3. The Error Handling blade (for Receivers) and the Fear Suppression training (for Partisans) reduces your fatigue by 2 if your danger hits 10 after the GM takes their turn.

Note: you can only burn fatigue you have available prior to making a roll, not after it.

Step 7: Determine Your Subroutines

Next, we'll determine the three subroutines that your Receiver starts with. As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, RTS makes dramatic improvements to subroutines. They are now considerably easier to use (no need to process them) and no longer tied to Core Processor scores (meaning you are not "punished" for choosing one subroutine over another). Subroutines are still only available for use when the Signal is up, but once the Signal is up, the only factor limiting their use is how much fatigue your Receiver currently has (and the structural limit of only being able to use one subroutine during your turn).

Before we elaborate more on the changes to subroutines, let's take a look at the space on the character sheet where you will document them.

SUBROUTINES	TALENTS	COST	RATING
Slow Motion		2 3	3
Phone Home		2 3	3
Liberation Frequency		2 3	3

In our example, we've circled "Subroutines" instead of "Talents" (which are the Partisan variant of subroutines which we'll discuss next chapter). We see that three subroutines are listed. All have a "rating" of 3 (which is what all subroutines begin play at). This rating is how many points of progress you can add to any roll when you to use a subroutine. This rating can increase during a campaign (which will discuss later in this book). We also see there is a cost, which the option of either "2" or "3" circled. This cost is how many points your fatigue is increased when you use these subroutines.

If a subroutine is a standalone subroutine, circle "3" under cost. If a subroutine is an elemental subroutine, circle "2" under cost. Standalone subroutines are easier to narrate, but incur more fatigue when used. Elemental subroutines require more creativity to narrate, but incur less fatigue when used. Pick whatever 3 subroutines you want.



Infrastructure Elementals

Infrastructure elementals permit a Receiver to exploit and weaponize the nearby electrical grid, any consumer electronics attached to it, and any physical media in the vicinity.

Gridlash: this subroutine allows a Receiver to touch electrical infrastructure, attune herself to the copper cable it flows through, and animate all the cabling in the vicinity like tentacles. Power lines snap free from utility poles, wiring bursts through drywall, and colored cables protrude out of electronics. These tendrils obey the will of their master, whether to ensnare her enemies, create impassible lattices, or crudely route electricity in a way that helps or creates a hazard.

Gremlin Uprising: this subroutine allows a Receiver to enlist the help of nearby electrical devices to torment her enemies or help her allies, as if these inanimate objects were sentient. Elevators arrive just in time or hold passengers captive. Traffic lights change to facilitate an escape or orchestrate a collision. Neon lights dim to hide allies or glow to illuminate foes. Whether it is consumer electronics or electrical infrastructure, an army of “smart” devices will either aid the Receiver or execute a catastrophic failure on demand.

Tarball: this subroutine allows a Receiver to touch a handheld inanimate object and transform it into a removable storage medium of her choice: floppy disk, cassette tape, or VCR cassette. When that storage medium is placed in the appropriate playback device and accessed, the storage medium disintegrates and materializes into the original object, right into the Receiver’s hands. The compressed object can be no larger than something that could be fit into a large duffel bag or double tier gym locker.

Spark Sense: this subroutine allows a Receiver to emit a gentle pulse of static electricity that transforms the local electrical grid into an extension of her nervous system. She can then visualize the electrical infrastructure in the vicinity, gaining intuitive structural knowledge of her immediate environment. She can also sense the static electricity of bodies moving throughout this environment, allowing her to intuit the location and trajectory of friends and foes alike.

Radio Elementals

Radio elementals permit a Receiver to exploit and weaponize the ubiquitous FM and AM radio signals permeating the air.

Liberation Frequency: this subroutine allows a Receiver to take a deep breath and unleash a seismic roar that is not heard coming from her, but emitted from the antennas and speakers of any device in the area capable of receiving radio transmissions. The destructive sound is capable of bursting eardrums, blowing out windows, stripping flesh to the sinew, cracking the foundation of buildings, and shaking open sinkholes.

Transistor Ear: this subroutine allows a Receiver to extend her consciousness into carrier waves and listen in on conversations and events occurring nearby all radios and antennas in the vicinity, as if they were all part of her personal eavesdropping network.

Transistor Whisper: this subroutine allows a Receiver to demodulate her voice into carrier waves and emit subliminal messages from all radios and antennas in the vicinity, imbuing her audience with powerful, unexplainable compulsions. Though her mouth moves, no sound comes out. Instead, her voice is heard by the subconscious mind of any one she chooses and is obeyed.

Wall of Sound: this subroutine allows a Receiver to compel nearby radio antennas to emit an invisible sphere of kinetic force that radiates a few meters from its source. This radiological barrier is strong enough to shield someone from bullets, hurl heavy objects away from its source, stifle all sound within its range, or crush victims between two antennas nearby one another.





Telephone Elementals

Telephone elementals permit a Receiver to exploit and weaponize telephones, telephone lines, telephone infrastructure, and data flowing between modems.

Call Collector: this subroutine allows a Receiver to pick up a phone or lay a hand on bare phone wire to harvest the traces of conversations that have traversed it in the past. The conversations play back to her rapidly, as if she were listening to a recording played in fast forward. If any of the previous conversations were between modems, she is able to demodulate and visualize every byte and keystroke that rode the wire.

Data Block: this subroutine allows a Receiver to mentally conjure a three dimensional object and compel a nearby telephone to demodulate that mental object into physical reality. The phone emits a glowing, translucent three dimensioning image that hangs in the air in a fixed position, immovable or impassable until it completely deteriorates, one pixel at a time. The conjured object can be helpful, such as a wall to temporarily block small arms fire or a platform to stop a fall, or harmful, such as a stopper to prevent a door from opening or a pole materializing in front of a speeding sports car.

Last Call: this subroutine allows a Receiver to pick up a phone to reach out and harm someone. After she dials a number, waits for a reply, and confirms it is the party she was hoping to make contact with, she unleashes a horrifying shriek of modulated data that crescendos over the telephone line and causes severe mental trauma or cranial injury to the person listening on the other end.

Phone Home: this subroutine allows a Receiver to lay a hand on a phone, modem, or fax machine, transform her material self into electric ether, travel at the speed of light over phone line, and materialize at another phone, modem, or fax machine that is part of the same exchange (i.e. not long distance). This form of teleportation allows her to instantly travel great distances to either escape perilous situations or teleport herself directly into an area of operation.

Television Elementals

Television elementals permit a Receiver to exploit and weaponize televisions, the cathode rays creating their viewable pictures, and the broadcast networks pushing their signal.

Cathode Claymore: this subroutine allows a Receiver to close her eyes, attune herself to the flow of broadcast television waves, and compel the cathode tubes of nearby televisions, computer monitors, and arcade cabinets to erupt like cannons, each one spewing glass, shrapnel, and arcs of destructive energy. With this power, she can instantly convert any living room, sports bar, arcade, gunship cockpit, or consumer electronics store into a veritable kill zone.

Cathode Eye: this subroutine allows a Receiver to gaze into the screen of a turned-on television set, computer monitor, or arcade cabinet, extend her consciousness into the electrical current, and see from the perspective of any similar device in the vicinity. She can use the intelligence she gleans from this temporary surveillance network to outmaneuver her enemies and provide guidance to her allies.

Cathode Warp: this subroutine allows a Receiver to press herself against the screen of a television set, computer monitor, or arcade cabinet, transform her material form into electrical ether, travel at the speed of light, and then crawl out of the screen of any similar device in the vicinity. This form of teleportation allows her to bypass virtually any type of security protocols, instantly get the drop on otherwise unassailable foes, or horrify witnesses with a display that blurs the boundaries between television and reality.

Videodrones: this subroutine allows a Receiver to concentrate on a television set, computer screen, or arcade cabinet, and then project the characters and creatures of the show or video game into the senses of those who are in her vicinity. Her captive audience begins to see, hear, and feel these illusory beings as if they were part of the corporeal world. These illusions can thrill, delight, distract, inform, or horrify their audience, depending on what the Receiver wants her audience to experience.





Standalone Subroutines

Adaptive Armature: this subroutine allows a Receiver to rapidly transform parts of her biomechanical physiology into a mechanical apparatus that performs work or integrates directly with another machine. While this mechanical expression cannot dramatically change a Receiver's size or shape, her imagination is the limit when it comes to how this subroutine manifests. For example, she could transform her face to ingest a film reel and project its content from her eyes, or transform her arm into a winch in order to rapidly ascend an elevator cable.

Crash Test Chassis: this subroutine allows a Receiver to manifest near invulnerability and imperviousness to pain for a couple of seconds. Like a resilient rag doll, she slowly gets up and dusts herself off after enduring the types of kinetic trauma that ordinarily kills instantly: a high-speed motorcycle collision, a fall from a high-rise balcony, a self-inflicted bullet to the head, or a leap onto a grenade thrown near her fireteam.

Fast Forward: this subroutine allows a Receiver to speed through the tape on reality and predict what is about to happen next. She is not actually bending spacetime so much as putting her analytical skills into overdrive and testing dozens of possible scenarios and outcomes in her head in a matter of seconds. The scenes, sensations, conversations, and events of each scenario course through her mind at a rapid clip, too fast to make clear sense of, but slow enough to lend her a useful impression of what's to come. When her thoughts return to the here and now, she has the insight she needs to anticipate and impact the near future.

Lightning Rod: this subroutine allows a Receiver to transmit infrasonic frequencies that cause acute neurological agitation, drawing the attention and aggression of virtually everyone in the vicinity. Though the subjects of this subroutine cannot actually hear the frequency causing them distress, they are keenly aware that it is originating from the direction of the Receiver generating it.

Signal Flare: this subroutine allows a Receiver to convert the bioelectrical energy of her cybernetic frame into blinding light. Her mouth, her eyes, and every seam on her body that separates plates of metallic flesh begins to glow with iridescent light, as if she was about to explode. The sight is as wondrous as it is overwhelming, causing temporary

blindness and abrupt emotional responses from those who gaze upon this expression of the Signal.

Slow Motion: this subroutine allows a Receiver to move so fast that the world around her appears to move in slow motion. Bullets slow to the speed of hurled rocks, expert fighters telegraph their movements well in advance, and physics, generally, behave as if the world was immersed in invisible water. She wins any contest of speed by a landslide (e.g. relieving soldiers of their sidearms and shooting them with it before they can even draw), and can outrun or outmaneuver any physical hazard careening toward her (e.g. a speeding car, a collapsing rubble, etc.).

Switching Station: this subroutine allows a Receiver to instantaneously switch physical places with another Receiver whose location she can see, hear, or intuit with near exact precision. Both she and the subject of this subroutine vanish in an implosion of digitized light, only to materialize in a brief explosion of digitized light a split second later, each occupying the space where the other just was.

Wrecking Ball: this subroutine allows a Receiver to perform incredible feats of physical strength that would otherwise be impossible or cause her severe injury. These expressions of physical power are just barely outside of the realm of human feasibility. Examples include bursting through a wall, tearing off a car door, lifting and carrying a heavy safe, knocking down a telephone pole, pulling a semi-truck and trailer with a chain, bending a steel bar, breaking a rifle in half, punching through someone's chest, leaping a dozen feet into the air, and so forth.



Step 8: Determine Your Ultimate

Next, we'll determine your Receiver's Ultimate. In TSKF, Ultimate subroutines were truly devastating and superhero powers that could turn the tide of battle. They remain so in RTS, though the way they are readied for use has changed. In TSKF, a player had to "process" their Ultimate three times before using it by either scoring dramatic successes on their rolls three times, or by having their allies score dramatic successes and then "transfer" them to the playing readying their Ultimate.

ULTIMATE

Cold War

X

X

READY

Technically, Ultimates in RTS do need to be processed three times before they can be used, but the way this is done is different. There are three ways to process an Ultimate:

- When your danger hits 15+ during a combat scene, check one of the Ultimate arrows.
- If one of your relationships (which we'll discuss later) is triggered during combat, you may choose to check one of the Ultimate arrows instead of invoking it.
- If you choose to "skip" your turn (i.e. do not make a roll) during combat, increase your fatigue by 5 and check one of the Ultimate arrows.

Once all three Ultimate arrows are checked, you are ready to unleash your Ultimate at will (so long as you haven't already made a roll this turn). Ultimates are "use it or lose it." The checks in the arrows are erased once an Ultimate is used, or when the current combat scene ends.

Just like in TSKF, when a Receiver unleashes their Ultimate, they roll 5d10. However, for every success they get on this roll, they score 2 "hits." What's a hit? We'll discuss that more in the Structured Scenes chapter. Just know at this time that an Ultimate has the potential to neutralize upwards of 5 enemy combats or 2 enemy vehicles in a single roll.

As they did in TSKF, Ultimates still cause collateral damage when one or botch is rolled, regardless of the total amount of successes scored. It was not fully explained what this means in TSKF and it's being addressed now. The purpose of this caveat was to represent the idea that states can cause collateral damage almost without consequence, but resistance movements are not afforded the same tolerance. It's not fair, but that's just how the use of power is perceived. Receivers using their most powerful destructive weaponry must be cognizant of the potential risks involved when doing so, and RTS spells out these risks in clear relief


When 1 botch is rolled, the use of an Ultimate is **forgiven**. This means that an unintentional target (e.g. a civilian non-combatant, a Resistance Partisan, etc.) was harmed or killed when the Ultimate was used, but the situation was ambiguous or desperate enough where onlookers would determine that the action was unavoidable. The Receiver who executed the Ultimate may have to process the ethical and moral ramifications of what occurred, but the overall thrust of the Resistance was not harmed politically.

When 2 botches are rolled, the use of an Ultimate is considered **irresponsible**. Multiple unintentional targets were harmed or killed in the process, and the carnage was bad enough where the Regime is able to spin narratives about the bloodthirst and indiscriminate violence of the Resistance. As a result, the GM gets to reduce one of the strategic COIN pillars (e.g. Local Population, International Community, or Resistance Fighters) by 1 immediately. The scene still continues without a hitch, but the consequences of victory are slightly dulled, while the consequences of defeat are slightly amplified.

When 3 or more botches are rolled, the use of an Ultimate is considered **bloodthirsty**. Many unintentional targets were harmed or killed in the process, and the carnage is so bad that there is no possible means to justify what happened. It is a mathematically unlikely situation, but still in the realm of possibility. If this happens, then whatever mission the players are on is instantly considered a failure. Whatever gains they were trying to make, or whatever losses they were trying to prevent, are doomed. There is no way to recover from this mishap in the realm of COIN strategy.

The players involved must still finish the scene and defeat the combatants they are engaging, but they are doing so





simply to escape with their lives. If they do prevail and get away, the mission is a failure, but they live to fight another day simply to escape with their lives. If they do prevail and get away, the mission is a failure, but they live to fight another day.

Ultimate Subroutines

Cold War: this subroutine allows a Receiver to harness the cold vacuum of deep space, unleashing cryogenic destruction on her foes. She concentrates until the targets of her wrath begin to float into the air, as if no longer influenced by gravity, and then she whips her arms back, as if she was ripping the heat out of them. The hapless victims of this power burst into jagged stars of crystalline ice, only to plummet to the ground and shatter upon impact.

Colossus: this subroutine allows a Receiver to perform super-heroic feats of strength. These expressions of physical power are far beyond the realm of human feasibility, and more akin to something a dinosaur or a movie monster would do. Examples include casually hurling automobiles, bending tank cannons, tearing a vault door off of its hinges, bursting through several buildings in a mad charge, or jumping high enough into the air to grapple onto and commandeer a flying helicopter

Digitization: this subroutine allows a Receiver to reduce the elements of her environment into digital detritus. The seams of her metal-plated flesh open, revealing clusters of tiny laser emitters that light up and rapidly scan every inch of her surroundings. Obstacles and adversaries struck by these beams freeze in place, pixelate, and rapidly deteriorate like digitized dust blown by the wind.

Glitch Wraith: this subroutine allows a Receiver to digitize into a glowing ethereal specter capable of phasing through matter, rematerializing at will with catastrophic results for anything, or anyone, in her path. Every time she shifts back to corporeal reality, all matter previously occupied by her spectral form is instantly displaced, regardless of whether that matter is hardened tank armor or human flesh.

Harvester: this subroutine allows a Receiver to turn into a powerful electromagnet, violently binding the environment's metallic objects to her until she is built up into a gigantic avatar of twisted metal. Firearms are ripped from hands, doors are torn from vehicles, and power lines glom on to her like aerosol string. She then lumbers around

as a junk golem until expelling her shroud of metal as if detonating a megaton-scale explosive vest.

Laserbreath: this subroutine allows a Receiver to take a deep breath and scream out a punishing column of amplified destructive light, capable of punching holes through tank armor, knocking helicopters out of the air, slicing infantry into cauterized halves, or violently pushing an enemy Receiver through several buildings.

Radio Free Radicals: this subroutine allows a Receiver to convert radio waves carrying the Signal into invisible blades of cellular death. She raises her hands to channel the Signal permeating the air and then thrusts it in the direction of matter she wishes to obliterate. All organic matter in her path either combusts instantly or sloughs into a pile of twitching slop.

Pause: this subroutine allows a Receiver to move so fast the world around her appears to crawl to a stop. Bullets inch along through the air, explosions grow at the speed of an inflating balloon, and people stand still as if they were mannequins in a shopping mall. She moves so fast that she is virtually invisible to onlookers. To her senses, however, she has several seconds to do whatever she wishes in a world that is standing still for her. She can use this to punish her enemies with impunity, knock bullets out of the air that traverse towards her allies, or otherwise cause hijinks to disrupt the field of battle. Given her velocity during this subroutine, anything she physically interacts with that wasn't already on her person suffers from extreme kinetic impact, including the floor she strides upon.





Step 9: Determine Relationships

We've finally arrived at the last step of character creation... establishing relationships between player characters. This step is reserved for last because it only works once all of the players have completed their characters, whether they are Receivers or Partisans.

Relationships are a major new addition to SIGMATA and are borrowed from AIRLOCK (the first official SIGMATA hack) because they were such a successful play element. Without hyperbole, relationships have the potential to create drama and storytelling that absolutely eclipses anything the GM had planned for SIGMATA sessions. It's also a play concept you'll likely want to introduce to virtually every RPG you play once you get a taste.

You don't fight alongside allies in a desperate struggle for months or years without developing strong feelings for them. However, relationships can be complicated. Partisans and Receivers on the same side can grow to love one another, resent one another, compete with one another, or adopt any number of feelings that exist outside of a conflict

situation. Also, relationships can change. Before we discuss how relationships work in RTS, let's take a look at how they are documented on the character sheet.

RELATIONSHIPS		INVOKED?	
C134n3r	IS MY	inspiration	<input type="checkbox"/>
p11l4g3r	IS MY	ward	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
s1r3n	IS MY	crush	<input type="checkbox"/>
Z1pp3r	IS MY	grudge	<input type="checkbox"/>

Here, we see the handle of the other Receivers and Partisans this character is working with. We also see the relationship the character has with these other characters (e.g. "C134n3r is my Inspiration," etc.). We see that a single relationship has been "invoked," denoted by an "X." Lastly, we see a relationship key to the right, which helps make relationship rules easily accessible.

In game mechanical terms, a relationship can be "invoked" during a structured scene to gain an automatic 5 success *instead* of making a roll (as if you just rolled a 6 on every dice). This guarantee of success can dramatically turn the tide when things look dire. However, a relationship can only get invoked when it is "triggered." For example, if a Partisan is your "ward," someone you look out for, you can only invoke that relationship when your ward is at 10+ danger. The sight of your ward being in mortal danger or about to make a terrible mistake compels you to take decisive action to save them. After it has been invoked, a relationship must be "stoked" before it can be invoked again. Relationships are stoked by player-driven social scenes that occur between missions.

We'll talk about how all these elements work, but first we're going to be talking about your character's backstory, which is going to be the very first thing that terms how other characters feel about you.





Backstories

Everyone has a story. They weren't born as a cybernetic revolutionary or a grizzled resistance fighter. The violence and oppression of the state has been a constant for many people, but the full-on armed conflict of the 1986 American Insurgency snuck up on everyone.

While character backstories are a common thing in role-playing games, RTS condenses them down to answering a couple of predetermined prompts that ask the following:

- 1) **What did you do?**
- 2) **Why did you do it?**
- 3) **What did you learn from it?**

Instead of asking you to come up with a story for your character, you will be sharing two small stories about your character, based on the prompts you select from the next pages. Once every player has had time to mentally answer the two prompts they want to, it will be time for every player at the table to take turns answering their prompts, orally, to the group.

When you do this, the other players aren't just listening to your story. They are putting themselves in the mind of their own characters, and considering how their characters would feel about your character, given what they did, why they did it, and what they've learned from it. The other players (and their characters) are likely to react to the same story in different ways. For example, assume you answer a prompt that asks you why you left someone behind. Depending on who your character left behind, and why, and how they are processing it now, other characters may respond differently. One may see you as a coward and a betrayer, while another may empathize with the cruel choice you had to make (after all, perhaps they had to make a similar choice).

Prompts

On the next two pages, you'll see a series of prompts available to players making their characters.

Every player should select two prompts and then answer them for their character. Once everyone has had time to consider the prompts and take notes if necessary, players will take turns sharing their answer to a prompt, one at a time. Once all players have shared one prompt, go around the table again and share the other. This gives every player time to consider their character might feel about the other characters, but also give them an opportunity to reconsider those feelings when they hear the rest of the story.

Let's examine one of the prompts closely.

I joined [organization/faction/cause] because:

- I didn't really have a choice.
- I believed in the mission.
- I did it for someone else.

However, it didn't exactly work out...

This prompt tells the story about a character joining a group (defined by the player). It also gives a chance for the player to elaborate one *why* the character joined that group, providing three examples (though a player does not need to select one of these choices and can instead make up their own reason). Lastly, it provides a story hook that can bleed into the campaign. The character's experience with the group went bad somehow. They quit, they were exiled, or maybe something horrible happened to them all.

Players and GMs alike, this is your chance to build out the setting, adding important details, plot hooks, factions, and GM characters from the past that may show up again. Everyone is encouraged to not only be creative during this exercise, but riff and expand upon what you hear from other players at the table. When you see something in [brackets], that's your opportunity to insert whatever seems most fitting. Did you join a faction? What faction? Elaborate. And don't forget to address the last part of each prompt... that's the real "punch line" of these mini-stories.





Prompt Examples

If these prompts don't work for you, create your own.

I joined [organization/faction/cause] because:

- I believed in the mission.
- I didn't have a choice.
- I did it for someone else.

However, it didn't exactly work out...

I am [hated/revered/sought] by powerful people because:

- I did them grave harm.
- They want to use me.
- They think I'm something I'm not.

During my last run in with them...

I took sides during [war/schism/event] because:

- I was well-paid.
- I hated the opposition.
- I saw the bigger picture.

I may have chose the wrong side...

I defied the wishes of [person/family/culture] because:

- They were insular and backwards.
- They were corrupted by outsiders.
- I found meaning in something else.

They didn't take it well...

I long to return to [person/place/situation] because:

- Life was simple and beautiful.
- I need to resolve unfinished business.
- Things are so different now; so am I.

But I can't go back, not until...

I'm haunted by what I saw at [place/event/group] because:

- I saw what we are capable of.
- It changed me to the core.
- I saw what the future looks like.

You better sit down for this...

I wish to see [group/faction/cause] prevail because:

- Their struggle is noble and necessary.
- They keep things relatively stable.
- That would benefit me the most.

I helped them out recently...

I will never trust [person/group/faction] because:

- They are in it for the wrong reasons.
- The world they imagine for us is untenable.
- They are absolutely worthless in the moment of truth.

The only time I've seen otherwise is when...

I seek vengeance against [person/group/faction] because:

- They killed someone who mattered to me.
- Their betrayal was shocking and cruel.
- They failed when everyone was relying on them.

There's only one thing stopping from...

I'm known for being at [disaster/event/victory] because:

- Almost nobody got out alive.
- It was a real turning point.
- It was not our finest hour.

Of course, that means everyone assumes that I...

My take on [politics/faith/strategy] upsets others because:

- It goes against the stereotypes others have of me.
- It defies accepted dogma and orthodoxy.
- It seems antithetical to what so many others want.

Last time this became a problem was when...

I spent years in [place/role/situation] because:

- It goes against the stereotypes others have of me.
- I had debts and dependents.
- I loved it.

What finally pulled me away was...

I maintain connections with [person/group/cause] because:

- I think they're worth trying to flip or save.
- They are just too valuable of a resource.
- They haven't figured out I work for the other side.

However, the relationship is more strained than ever...

I left behind [person/place/cause] because:

- I was fleeing imminent danger.
- I was pursuing something important.
- I did something horrible.

During my last day there...





Relationship Types

Once you've heard everyone's story, it's time to determine what your relationship to them is. Remember, relationships are not necessarily reciprocal. It's OK to be fond of someone who resents you and vice-versa. This is about your characters feelings about them, not vice versa (though the feeling might be mutual).

Below, the 7 relationship types of RTS are introduced, including an overview of what each relationship means in the story space, what triggers so that they can be invoked, and how they are typically stoked during downtime.

Comrade

You consider this character to be your friend, your battle buddy, your spiritual sibling, or just a hell of a team player. When the going gets rough, you have their back.

- *Triggered:* Your comrade makes a roll and scores 0 or less successes.
- *Stoked:* scenes of bonding, sharing, goofing off, and reminiscing on past experiences and shared struggles with your comrade.

Crush

You have romantic and/or sexual desire for this character. It may or may not be passing phase. It might be out in the open or a secret you are trying to keep from others (poorly).

- *Triggered:* Your crush reduces your danger by 3 or more.
- *Stoked:* scenes of awkward overtures, daydreams, overt flirtation, getting caught staring, and trying to impress your crush.

Curiosity

You need to know what makes this character tick. There's something about their story that doesn't add up, or comes from an experience you don't understand.

- *Triggered:* Your curiosity invokes one of their own relationships.
- *Stoked:* scenes of fascinated observation of your curiosity, including note taking, question asking, and embarrassing yourself by doing so.



Grudge

You have seething contempt for this character, and wouldn't at all mind if they left the group, voluntarily or otherwise. This thing is going to come to blows unless someone buries the hatchet.

- *Triggered:* Your grudge's danger is equal to or less than half of yours, but not 0.
- *Stoked:* scenes of accusations, threats, petty arguments, and questioning your grudge's loyalty or decision-making.

Inspiration

You look up to this character and aspire to be like them, or you see them as your muse. Their heroics, reputation, or harrowing story inspires you.

- *Triggered:* Your inspiration invokes a library.
- *Stoked:* scenes of seeking your inspiration's council or approval, mimicking their behaviors, or deferring to their leadership.

Rival

You feel the need to compete with this character or put them in their place because you are jealous of them or they've stirred your competitive spirit.

- *Triggered:* Your rival makes a roll and scores 3 or more successes.
- *Stoked:* scenes of competition, contest, provocation, dare, or tarnishing your rival's reputation with others.

Ward

You feel compelled to protect this character, a compulsion fueled by duty, devotion, guilt, pity, or the perception that they are vulnerable (which may or may actually be the case).

- *Triggered:* Your ward is at 10+ danger.
- *Stoked:* scenes of checking in with your ward, advising them on risks, and helping them develop as people.



Triggering a Relationship

A relationship can only be invoked during play when it is triggered during the current turn, or was triggered during the previous turn. Each relationship type has a different trigger, which was defined on the previous pages but also appears on the character sheet. If a player does not invoke a relationship during the turn it is triggered, or the following turn, they must wait until that relationship is triggered again to be able to use it. The triggers are fairly straightforward, occurring when a certain circumstances happen during a structured scene (e.g. when an inspiration uses a library, when a comrade scores 0 or less successes, etc.).

The triggers are also universal, meaning they can happen in any scene type. They occur immediately after the GM has assigned a scene's danger, or immediately after any player has taken their turn. If a relationship is triggered, but then something happens to "undo" that trigger during the same turn (e.g. your ward hit 10+ danger, but then an ally reduced their exposure down to 9), the relationship is still considered triggered for the duration of the current turn and next turn and can be invoked at will.

Invoking a Relationship

A character can invoke a triggered relationship during her turn. When she does so, she gains an automatic 5 successes instead of making a roll, as if she scored 6+ on every dice. She can apply these 5 successes towards any tactic she chooses and can also add any relevant blades or subroutines to this invocation, if they are available for use.

Similar to how blades, libraries, peripherals, and subroutines require a player to narrate them into a roll's outcome, players are expected to do the same with relationships. They should talk about how their ward being in danger compelled them to commit to their actions, or their rival performing well compelled them to try to outdo them, etc. This element of narration can be as brief or drawn out as a player wants, so long as everyone at the table understands, narratively, why a character's feelings (or antipathy) toward another character influenced the outcome.

When you invoke a relationship, you place an "X" in the box under the "invoked?" column next to that character on the character sheet.

Stoking a Relationship

Relationship stoking happens during downtime, which is an opportunity for free-form roleplay that happens between missions (though the GM has the option of permitting it between two structured scenes if it seems dramatically appropriate and there is time for conversations). When the GM declares downtime, each player may choose to stoke one relationship, removing one of those X's on their character sheet, so that relationship can be invoked again during a later structured scene.

When a player chooses to stoke a relationship, she designate which ally she wants her character to talk to and then frames a scene (e.g. "I see him eating alone in the mess hall so I sit down across the table from him..."). She then kicks off a conversation with that character, and both players involved will roleplay that conversation to its conclusion. The conversation will likely be about something that has happened or will happen in the story so far, but will ultimately be defined by their relationships.

You saw some very brief examples of relationship stoking listed under each relationship type on the previous page. For example, under comrade, you saw:


"Stoked: scenes of bonding, sharing, goofing off, and reminiscing on past experiences and shared struggles with your comrade."

These are suggestions as to how a player might roleplay a scene of relationship stoking with someone her character considers a comrade. It is perfectly fine to deviate from these suggestions, especially considering how the stress and trauma of taking part in a violent insurrection can challenge even the strongest of friendships.

Once the conversation is over (concluded by either player), the player that prompted this scene can remove the "X" on their character sheet for the ally they spoke to. The player whose character was approached during that scene has the option to remove the "X" on their character sheet for the character that approached them. However, if they do so, they have effectively taken their turn during this session of downtime. They may choose to stoke a different relationship instead, kicking off their own scene.

While relationship stoking typically happens between two characters, it is fine for a player to instead frame an





ensemble where three or more characters are present. They can all contribute to the conversation and choose to stoke a relationship with someone present.

Relationships Change

Depending on what has been happening on and off the battlefield, your initial impression of an ally may evolve. Perhaps you've forgiven your grudge and you now see them as a comrade. Perhaps you realized that your inspiration does not live up to what you thought they were, and now you see them as a rival. Whatever the case, when a player stokes a relationship, they can choose to change the relationship type at that time.

Relationships and Player Safety

Relationships, particularly scenes of stoking relationships, have the potential to be some of the most compelling, heart felt, and rewarding roleplaying experiences in SIGMATA. However, if handled poorly, they have the potential to become harmful to players.

Relationship mechanics are designed to simulate social, political, and emotional drama that exists between characters in the game's fictional universe, not between the real-life players playing the game. If anyone at the table notices someone accidentally or purposefully blurring those boundaries, feel empowered to call time-out and address it immediately. Assume positive intent! No one gets to lecture anyone else. Someone may have just been really caught up in the drama or were roleplaying their character to the best of their abilities. However, along with assuming positive intent, it is your responsibility to read how other players are responding to your actions, or explicitly ask them how they feel if you aren't confident in your read of them.

The golden rule is don't be horrible. Do your best to make others feel safe and comfortable. Acknowledge that miscommunications and mistakes happen in every human endeavor, including tabletop role-playing, and adjust. Consider the following suggestions to ensure that relationships adhere to this game's insistence on safety and inclusion:

Be sure to ask for explicit consent from another player if you are about to pull them into a scene that involves argument or confrontation (e.g. grudge, rival) or an escalated level of emotional intimacy (e.g. crush, ward). Tell them, at a high

level, what you imagine the scene to be. Examples:

- “My character is very upset about something your character did last mission and wants to confront them about it. Are you OK with that?”
- “My character wants to playfully flirt with your character in this scene. Are you OK with that?”

If a player is not ready for that type of scene, propose another idea or ask them to propose another idea. Regardless, no one at the table needs to explain their decision to pass on a scene unless they want to. In fact, you can even say “My character is not ready for that type of situation” as opposed to “I don’t want to do that.”

During a scene of relationship stoking, either of the two players involved should say “and Scene!” to abruptly end the scene any time they want. Not only is this an escape valve for everyone involved, but it’s an effective means of ending a scene at the perfect time instead of letting it linger until players don’t know what to say or do anymore. The GM also reserves the right to end a scene that is meandering or heading into dangerous territory.

When a particularly dramatic, emotional, or confrontational scene finishes, the player that initiated the scene (or escalated its seriousness) should make a point of explicitly thanking the other player for roleplaying that scene with them immediately after the scene is over. This reinforces the notion that the scene occurred between two characters, not the two human players at the table, and things are still amicable between the players even if the characters are at each others’ throats.





PARTISAN





Partisan

This chapter will introduce rules to play a Partisan; a Resistance fighter who is an “ordinary” human instead of an FM-radio-powered cyborg. RTS’s rules for Partisans were designed to assume that the players’ party will be composed of a mix of both Receivers and Partisans. Partisans use the same character sheet as Receivers and many of the rules remain the same, with a few crucial differences. Below, we give an overview of the primary mechanical differences, some of which we’ll elaborate more on throughout this chapter.

Partisans Cannot Reboot

Perhaps the most striking mechanical difference between Partisans and Receivers is that Partisans cannot reboot. If they end a turn with 10+ danger, they are immediately removed from the campaign (i.e. killed, captured, or otherwise compromised). Whereas a Receiver can instantly recover from grievous injury or similar disaster, Partisans must be extremely conservative in how they manage their danger because there is no coming back from the brink.

Partisans Are Not Reliant On The Signal

Partisans do not have subroutines, but they do have talents which function mechanically similar to subroutines (e.g. increase your fatigue to activate them and add successes to your rolls). There is one crucial difference, however. While talents are not as powerful as subroutines, they do not require the Signal to be up in order to use them. This means that Partisans remaining highly effective even when Receivers are at their most vulnerable.

Partisans Do Not Reduce Danger When The Signal Is Up

Whereas Receivers feel a surge of power and confidence when the Signal is first ignited during a structured scene, Partisans do not. Their danger is not reduced to 0 when the Signal is ignited. Players should be mindful of this when managing the danger levels of the team.

Symbiosis Instead Of Balance

Partisans were not designed to be “balanced” with Receivers so much as represent the symbiotic relationship between the Resistance and its cybernetic vanguard. Receivers will rely on Partisans to carry structured scenes when the Signal is down, whether that is at the beginning of a scene or after the Regime has jammed the Signal during play. Partisans,

meanwhile, will rely on Receivers to carry structured scenes when the Signal is up, especially when dealing with overwhelming force, as well as rely on Receivers to take on risks (i.e. accumulate danger) that Partisans could simply not survive.

Creating a Partisan

The process of creating a Partisan is nearly identical to that of creating a Receiver. You will still fill out the top portion of the character sheet, rate tactics, determine 3 peripherals, determine a library, and establish your character's relationships with the other characters. There are a few differences however, starting with one that is primarily cosmetic: cross out "Receiver," "Blades," and "Subroutines" on the character sheet.

~~RECEIVER~~ | PARTISAN

~~BLADES~~ | TRAINING

~~SUBROUTINES~~ | TALENTS

Forward, we'll be introducing training and talents, two key differentiators you'll find on a Partisan character sheet.

Training

Unlike Receivers, Partisans do not have cybernetic augmentations in the form of blades. What they do have, however, is extensive training to make them highly effective in the field. Training represents the expertise that a Partisan brings to the table, which they developed before or during the current conflict, and both on and off the battlefield. Any Partisan expected to keep up with the Resistance's Receivers will be extremely competent in the realms of small unit tactics, espionage tradecraft, or security.

Mechanically, training is identical to blades. In fact, they are a mechanical mirror image of blades. The primary difference is narrative. Instead of incorporating elements of cybernetic augmentation into the narrative outcome of their rolls, Partisan players will instead be narrating their training; what they learned, where they learned it, and how it has saved the day (in the past or in the now).

Trainings are listed on the next four pages. Partisans begin play with three trainings of their choice.





Combat Training

All Resistance Partisans, including committed pacifists, are trained in firearms and small unit tactics. While no one in the Resistance is expected to harm or kill others if it goes against their moral code, they are still absolutely required to do everything in their power not to be a liability to their comrades if and when things become violent. This means understanding how to move tactically with their unit, keep themselves out of harm's way, and communicate effectively despite the noise and chaos of a firefight.

Below are combat trainings that some Partisans become especially proficient in:

Cover Utilization: This training taught the Partisan to instinctually stick to cover, whether or not she is under direct fire from threats. During combat scenes, she automatically reduces her danger by 1 at the start of each round (after the GM goes). This training seems less effective than the others, but on the contrary, it can be used in conjunction with the others.

Hit & Run: This training made the Partisan adept at harassing and frustrating larger, slow moving forces with guerilla tactics. When she uses the Flank tactic, she also reduces her own danger by an amount equal to her progress.

Overwatch: This training gave the Partisan a keen eye for where to apply suppressive fire for the best effect. When she uses the Suppress tactic, her progress applies to two allies instead of one. So, for example, if she reduces an ally's danger by 3, she can reduce the danger of another ally by 3. Remember, Valor tactics cannot be used to reduce your own danger.

Shock & Awe: This training taught the Partisan exactly when and where to apply overwhelming force to destabilize and demoralize the enemy. When she uses the Storm tactic, she doubles her progress. Note, this blade does not double the 3 bonus progress inherent to Aggression tactics.

Tactical Assessment: This training resulted in the Partisan staying cool during firefights, adjusting and adapting to a fluid combat situation. She reduces both her danger by 1 and her fatigue by 1 for each point of progress when she uses the Regroup tactic.

Evasion Training

Guerilla warfare is all about hit and run tactics, with an emphasis on *run*. The Regime almost always has a kinetic advantage over the Resistance, in no small part because the Freedom Fist is licensed to use excessive force and loyalists will perform mortal gymnastics to justify that use of force after the fact, no matter how disproportionate it may be. As such, Resistance Partisans must be competent in ambush, silent infiltration, and tactical retreat in order to survive.

Below are evasion trainings that some Partisans become especially proficient in:

Deception & Denial: This training made the Partisan versed in using distractions, feints, and red herrings to draw an adversary's attention away from her allies. When she uses the Deny tactic, her progress applies to two allies instead of one. So, for example, if she reduces an ally's danger by 3, she can reduce the danger of another ally by 3. Remember, Valor tactics cannot be used to reduce your own danger.

Security Assessment: This training impressed upon the Partisan the value of observing her environment, timing the movement of sentries, and waiting for the right opportunity to strike. She reduces both her danger by 1 and her fatigue by 1 for each point of progress when she uses the Fade tactic.

Sentry Removal: This training made the Partisan capable of committing to action where others would hesitate, striking with relentless fury. When she uses the Rush tactic, she doubles her progress. Note, this blade does not double the 3 bonus progress inherent to Aggression tactics.

Shadow Utilization: This training taught the Partisan how color and lighting work on the eye, allowing her to plot a course along the path of least visibility. During evasion scenes, she automatically reduces her danger by 1 at the start of each round (after the GM goes). This training seems less effective than the others, but on the contrary, it can be used in conjunction with the others.

Silent Movement: This training taught the Partisan how to mute her footfalls, secure her equipment, and tumble in a manner that cannot be heard while moving rapidly. When she uses the Sneak tactic, she also reduces her own danger by an amount equal to her progress.





Intrigue Training

Unable to stand toe-to-toe with the Regime on the field of battle, the Resistance relies on intelligence gathering, influence operations, and the interrogation of prisoners to level the playing field. Smart utilization of these and other “soft skills” can provide an irregular army with advantages that offset the deficit of equipment, training, and discipline they have when compared to a regular army. The Resistance must prevail in the realms of politics and propaganda if it has any hope of prevailing on the streets and in the trenches.

Below are intrigue trainings that some Partisans become especially proficient in:

Behavioral Analysis: This training taught the Partisan how to pause and assess how people’s body language is communicating their true intent. She reduces both her danger by 1 and her fatigue by 1 for each point of progress when she uses the Gel tactic.

Collection: The training taught the Partisan how to harvest evidence and intelligence from a situation, without exposing her own intentions. When she uses the Snoop tactic, she also reduces her own danger by an amount equal to her progress.

De-escalation: This training taught the Partisan how to reduce tensions, make people feel heard, and drive conflicts towards productive outcomes. When she uses the Support tactic, her progress applies to two allies instead of one. So, for example, if she reduces an ally’s danger by 3, she can reduce the danger of another ally by 3. Remember, Valor tactics cannot be used to reduce your own danger.

Impersonation: The training made the Partisan capable of decoupling her own feelings and stress from that of the role or identity she is assuming. During intrigue scenes, she automatically reduces her danger by 1 at the start of each round (after the GM goes). This training seems less effective than the others, but on the contrary, it can be used in conjunction with the others.

Interrogation: The training taught the Partisan how to get someone to talk without resorting to tactics that make them resent her or lie to her. When she uses the Confront tactic, she doubles her progress. Note, this blade does not double the 3 bonus progress inherent to Aggression tactics.

Utility Training

There are emotional and psychological skills that a Partisan can develop which are useful in virtually any situation. Stress is stress and leadership is leadership, regardless of the situation a Partisan finds themselves in.

Below are intrigue trainings that some Partisans become especially proficient in:

Command Presence: This training made the Partisan adept in boosting morale, inspiring confidence in others, and suggesting courses of action to help her allies. At will, during her turn or anyone else's turn, she can increase her own fatigue by 4 to reduce an ally's fatigue by 3. Note, this ability can be used on both allied Receivers and Partisans.

Fail Fast: This training has made the Partisan realize that failure is a learning opportunity, providing valuable information that allows them to adapt. Any time the Partisan uses a tactic rated at 1 or 2, the cost of using a talent alongside that tactic is reduced by 1 fatigue.

Fear Suppression: This training led to the Partisan being able to master the adrenaline flowing through her when she finds herself in danger. Any time a Partisan with this training is at 10 or more danger after the GM takes their turn, she instantly restores 2 fatigue.

Resiliency: This training resulted in the Partisan being able to push herself through any adversity, even under severe duress or when her odds seem hopeless. Once per scene, if the Partisan ends a round with 10 or more danger, she is permitted to continue play into the next round without consequence, maintaining her current level of danger. It is possible to safely end a scene with this Partisan at 10 or more danger, so long as the scene ends on the turn when this training was activated.





Talents

Partisans do not have subroutines. Instead, they have Talents. Talents aren't superpowers so much as natural gifts, novel approaches, advantageous social standing, expendable resources, and other "mundane" characteristics that help Partisans overcome obstacles in the realms of combat, evasion, and intrigue. Just like subroutines, their rating can be added to the progress of any roll, so long as the player can narrate how the talent is influencing the outcome. Unlike subroutines, however, they can be used at will, with no need to wait for the ignition of the Signal. Further, Partisan talents do not work against vehicles or threats taking cover in strongpoints. They'll need to get their hands on ordnance to do that.

Partisans begin play with 3 talents of their choice, each one with a rating of 2 and a cost of 2 fatigue to activate them. The available talents are listed below:

Athletic: this talent allows a Partisan to use her physical gifts and conditioning to pull off impressive maneuvers and stunts that would be hard for others to replicate.

Bold: this talent allows a Partisan to use her courage, recklessness, or addiction to adrenaline, to pursue courses of action that the opposition would never expect.

Charming: this talent allows a Partisan to use her confidence, looks, attire, or flirtatious nature to inspire for the purposes of distraction or establishing trust.

Deep Pockets: this talent allows a Partisan to leverage her considerable wealth and resources for bribes, hush money, and quick acquisition of goods.

Heightened Senses: this talent allows a Partisan to use her razor-sharp senses to notice tiny details, detect subtle movements, and identify exploitable opportunities in her environment.

Innocent: this talent allows a Partisan to exploit her apparent meekness, naivete, or friendly nature, becoming the last person that others would suspect of malice.

Intel Consumer: this talent allows a Partisan to use her voracious consumption of field intelligence to exploit weaknesses in contacts, environments, and forces.

Jokester: this talent allows a Partisan to use comedic timing and twisted cunning for practical jokes to elevate the esprit



de corps or drive her enemies into a frenzy.

Killer Instincts: this talent allows a Partisan to put her capacity for violence to work, utilizing force with ice-cold professionalism and an utter absence of hesitation.

Learned: this talent allows a Partisan to use her encyclopedic understanding of niche topics, bodies of academic knowledge, and complex systems to solve problems.

Lucky: this talent allows a Partisan to continue the streak of freak accidents, happy coincidences, and comedies of error that have been working in her favor.

Maintenance: this talent allows a Partisan's meticulous cleaning, tinkering, and tweaking of her weapons and gear to result in said equipment always performing at peak capacity.

Menacing: this talent allows a Partisan to use her size, body language, fearsome visage, or unpredictable nature to create an overwhelming sense of fear or unease in others.

Mouse: this talent allows a Partisan to expertly (and creatively) navigate tight spaces, including ventilation shafts, chimneys, natural caves, vehicle trunks, dumpsters, etc.

Quick Reflexes: this talent allows a Partisan to respond to openings, opportunities, or sudden danger in a manner so rapid and reliably, others will swear that she saw it coming.

Reputation: this talent allows a Partisan to leverage her reputation (earned or unearned) to reinforce any promises or threats she makes to others.

Status: this talent allows a Partisan to use her lineage, rank (military or religious), or known contributions to the cause, to garner severe respect, or at least be heard out.

Steadfast: this talent allows a Partisan to appear invincible in the face of physical or emotional duress by utilizing her great stamina, high pain tolerance, or sheer force of will.

Survivor: this talent allows a Partisan to convert her experience living in harsh conditions (e.g. wilderness, extreme poverty, etc.) into resourcefulness and ruggedness.

Technical: this talent allows a Partisan to use her fluency in technology to use, repair, or break machines and electronics in ways those who engineered them never anticipated.



Strange Bedfellows

It doesn't take a lot of imagination to figure out why Receivers and Partisans have been assigned to work together. They both represent the most valuable assets available to the Resistance. Their skill sets and differences complement each other in a way that make them a force to be reckoned with, regardless of Signal Strength. However, that's where things stop being simple. There are two major strains in the relationships between Partisans and Receivers... one is material and the other is sociopolitical.

First and foremost, while Partisans are "mere mortals," Receivers are relentless cybernetic revolutionaries without the need for food, water, sleep, shelter, or even oxygen. While Partisans are still attached to the material reality that they come from, most Receivers are so removed from their former lives and so weary of being hunted down by the Regime or being courted by Resistance faction leaders that they'd rather be shot into space and forgotten about.

There is no game mechanical effect caused by this difference, other than to suggest that it should influence how characters of the two different backgrounds should interact, particularly when it comes to relationships. Both groups are likely to harbor very specific prejudices against one another, whether those prejudices are conscious or unconscious. Partisan players are encouraged to view their Receiver allies with equal parts wonder, trepidation, and pity. They should be especially curious on what a Receiver intends to do after the American Insurgency ends (assuming the Resistance wins). Receiver players, meanwhile, are encouraged to view their flesh-and-blood allies as weak, conniving, and petty. Receivers might also be jealous of Partisans, for they are still attached to society in a way that a Receiver cannot be. These prejudices are totally optional, of course, and they are only suggested because the process of watching these prejudices either disappear or harden during the course of a campaign might make for good drama.

The second and potentially more troubling relational strain between Partisans and Receivers is political in nature. The factions supporting the Resistance have an intense interest in knowing what its revolutionary vanguard is up to and where their loyalties lie if the American Insurgency takes a dramatic turn (i.e. the Great Betrayal). Highly skilled

Partisans are officially sent along with a team of Receivers to protect them when the Signal is down, but unofficially to keep tabs on them and influence them. Partisans chosen to work alongside Receivers are typically nominated by Regional Command and/or Resistance Command, with a preference towards those who have demonstrated either neutrality or an outright aversion to the four factions steering the Resistance in one way or another. Sometimes, however, that neutrality or aversion is little more than a ruse and a means to plant a specific factional mole within the Resistance's most important cell.

Affinity

Affinity for a faction remains an option in RTS. However, there are two key considerations that have been added.

- Affinity is declared secretly to the GM, whether a player is playing a Partisan or a Receiver. To protect this secret, a player should be mindful of how they declare or announce improvements to their character... if you are outpacing the rest of the table in improvements to your character, it might become clear that your character has thrown in their lot with one of the factions. Affinity can be revoked at any time, but you must spend 10 UPs to do so. Keep in mind, no play *needs* to declare affinity to any faction. It remains optional.
- The affinity bonus is increased for Partisans. At the end of each mission, they receive bonus UPs equal to double the Loyalty score of the faction that have affinity for (instead of receiving bonus UPs equal to that Loyalty score). The purpose of this is to both incentivize factional affinity for Partisan players, while also casting suspicion on Partisan players regardless of where they land on the political spectrum. Even those who are truly neutral or averse to the setting's 4 factions will be suspect.



The Partisan as a Template

TSKF was a difficult game to hack (i.e. transform into an alternate setting or reality, such as a medieval fantasy campaign). This was primarily due to the Signal. The Signal is such a specific and singular game element that it is very challenging to re-skin.

In making AIRLOCK, the first official SIGMATA hack, as well as Bombs & Balaclavas, a free product about irregular conflict in the Middle East and North Africa, the idea of the Signal was completely abandoned. Instead, players in those games had to rely on their inherent and acquired abilities, as well as their relationships, to achieve the outcomes they desired. This paved the way for the Partisan rules.

Partisans are decoupled from the Signal, which means they serve as a “template” for creatives to finally hack SIGMATA with ease. They rely on fatigue to fuel their most dramatic abilities, but they might just as well rely on mana, or blood, or energy cells, or some other resource in a SIGMATA hack you create. Partisans have “training,” but the playable characters in your hack may instead have cybernetic implants, magical blessings, powerful relics, or some other type of static advantage. Partisans also have “talents,” but the playable characters in your have may instead have superpowers, magic spells, or special maneuvers that can only be used in a limited capacity.

To elaborate on an example, we present elements from an abandoned SIGMATA hack called “Shattered Shields,” best described as a game of medieval insurgency against a people who conquered your ancestral lands. Basically, think of Vikings as the conquered instead of being the conquerors. Shattered Shields reimaged Partisan talents with a medieval low-fantasy veneer. Below are some examples:

Alchemist: The mundane magics of the land are at your disposal, manifesting in bombs, blinding smoke, stone-melting fire, and other concoctions from ingredients harvested from cave walls, river beds, and forest floors.

Mushroom-Eater: Where others only write and retch when they eat the sacred mushroom, you experience the visions and ecstasy of the oracle or the pain-intolerance and rage of the berserker.

Runicist: You have trained your eyes to seek and spot the subtle runes your people have scrawled throughout their

stolen lands, each pointing to shortcuts, secret passageways, caches, and traps.

Shield-Banger: Your proud boasts, piercing barbs, and aura of menace prod the weak-willed into panicked flight, rage-fueled tactical error, or shrinking from the laughter of their shield-siblings.

Tinkerist: Knife boost, seeing glass, sleeve garrote, light-reflecting stone, sword-breaking dagger, lock picks, fire-proof cloak... you carry an ever-growing arsenal of ingenious tools and trinkets.

Whisperer: You have developed a powerful bond with an especially intelligent specimen of bird or beast that seems capable of intuiting your thoughts or helping you out when you require its aid.

These an many more talents were available to playable characters and had the same effect: players could spend fatigue to use them, adding successes to any tactic they chose, so long as the player could narrate how they influenced the outcomes of their rolls.

The “trainings” available to playable characters in Shattered Shields were reimagined as “blessings,” which narratively manifested in the form of tattoos, scars, woad paint, and family history that made playable characters exception at some tactics. They worked identically to the trainings available in RTS, except they were reimagined to incorporate the flora, fauna, and geography of the people’s stolen land. The blessing of the Wolf, the Mountain, the Boar, the Raven, the Cairn, the Mouse, the Stag, the Pyre, the Viper, the Sky, the Sea, the Storm, and so forth.

This is just one example of what can be done with the RTS framework. If you are interested in hacking SIGMATA, the Partisan should be your starting point. Re-skin the available trainings and talents to thematically fit your imagined setting or add new ones entirely, to reinforce the type of play you think is appropriate to the game you are trying to make.

RTS provides blank templates for you to rapidly experiment and iterate on your ideas. Steal whatever is useful from RTS and make your hack available to the public. Hell, I’ll play with you.



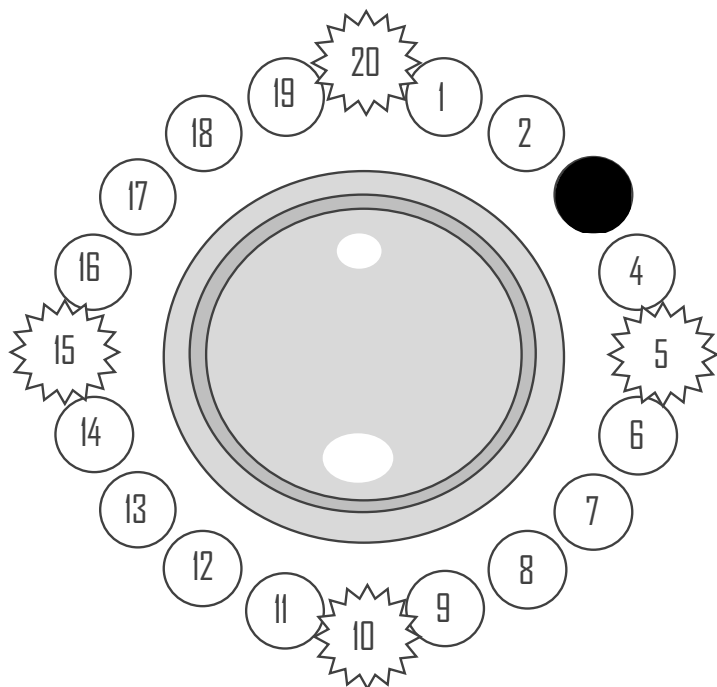


STRUCTURE



The Radio Dial

The rules for structured scenes of combat, evasion, and intrigue have undergone a significant upgrade. Before we dive into the details of how RTS changes scenes, we need to introduce the concept of the **radio dial**.



The radio dial is a new way of tracking the progress of rolls made by players. It is used for all scene types. It can be read like a clock, rotating clockwise from 1 to 20 and then starting over again at 1. A single dot or marker is used to track the radio dial's current position.

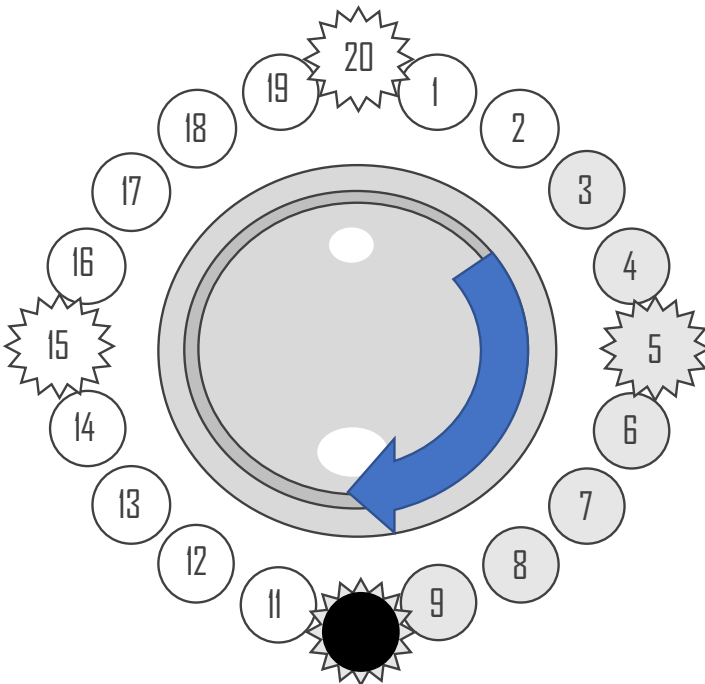
At the beginning of a scene, the radio dial remains blank (or rather, starts at zero). Each time a player makes a roll that advances the scene's progress (i.e. Storm or Flank, Rush or Sneak, Confront or Snoop), the radio dial moves an equal number of positions. For example, if the radio dial is currently at 3 and a player rolls 3 successes using the Flank tactic, the radio dial would move to 6. Later in the scene, when the radio dial is at 18 and a player rolls 3 successes using the Storm tactic (which adds another 3 progress), the radio dial would move to 4.

It works the same way whether a player is invoking a relationship, adding a subroutine (or talent), leveraging a blade (or training), or any combination of these factors. However, the “defensive” tactics (i.e. Regroup or Suppress, Fade or Deny, Gel or Support) do not move the radio dial. Their primary purpose is to reduce danger, not drive a scene’s progress.

You’ll notice that the radio dial uses a different symbol to denote the numbers 5, 10, 15, and 20. Any time the radio dial lands on or bypasses one of these numbers, the player that did so scores a **hit**.

Hits

A hit represent when a character has reached a milestone in a scene. This might be injuring a threat during combat, arriving at a waypoint during evasion, or making a powerful argument during intrigue. Hits, not successes, are applied toward a scene’s challenges, which we will elaborate on fully when we dive into the various scene types. For now, it’s important to understand that a roll can result in multiple hits. In the example below, a player that moved the radio dial from 3 to 10 has actually scored 2 hits (bypassing 5 and landing on 10), which she may distribute in a scene any way she wishes.





Combat Scenes

TSKF is a violent game. RTS makes it more violent. The new rules for combat significantly upgrade the player characters' martial prowess. The addition of the radio dial makes it possible for even characters with low combat tactic ratings to perform incredible feats, thanks to the fact that multiple hits can be scored on a single roll, and those hits can be distributed against threats any way a player wishes (instead of against a single threat). Receiver Ultimates remain devastating and are more easily executed when the Signal is up.

At the same time, the GM now has more tools (and space) to scale up the opposition and continue to challenge the Resistance's Receivers and Partisans. It is now trivial for the GM to manage a combat scene composed of multiple fireteams, in multiple vehicles and strongpoints, supported by one or more Jammers. Further, it is much easier for the GM to create these scenes, as all the information they'll need to run the opposition is listed on the new combat sheet.

The New Combat Sheet

The combat sheet now features a radio dial (which is the case with all of the new scene sheets). The top section, which tracks the player characters' current danger, remains unchanged. Everything under the "Threats" section of the sheet requires some elaboration.

The important thing to remember as we discuss these changes is that combat scenes remain functionally the same. Players are trying to neutralize threats while trying to keep their own danger below 10. The primary difference is that players now score hits on the radio dial and then apply these hits to threats to neutralize them.



COMBAT

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THREATS

Infantry	Ordnance	Not Ordnance
Danger → 3	CL = Chemical Laser	AR = Assault Rifle
Weaponry → AR, G	G, TG = Grenade, Tear Gas	HG = Handgun
Strongpoint → S	(H/L)MG = Heavy/Light Machinegun	HR = Hunting Rifle
	RPG = Rocket Propelled Grenade	MW = Melee Weapon
	SR = Sniper Rifle	SG = Shotgun
	SS = Street Sweeper	SMG = Submachine

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

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2

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2

2

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2

Jammers

Jammers unleash their Ultimate any time they take 3+ hits during a single turn, or are struck by a Receiver Ultimate.

1	5
2	6
3	7
4	8

Armor

Ⓐ = APC Ⓙ = Tank

Strongpoint MG | Main Gun
5 vs 2 or 10 vs 1

1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

Air Support

Ⓒ = Chopper Ⓖ = Gunship

Strongpoint Hellfires | Minigun
4 vs 2 or 8 vs 1

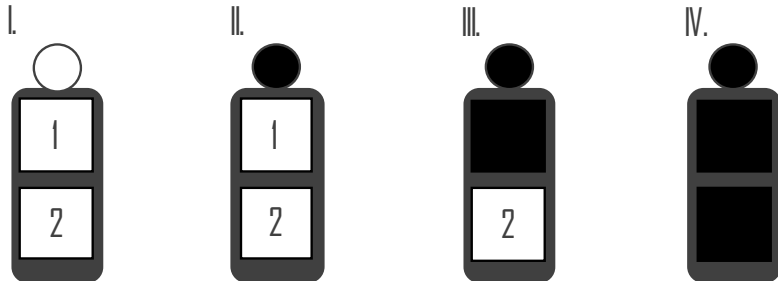
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

= HIT

SIGMATA

Infantry Threats

We'll start our discussion about threats by taking a close look at these four pawn icons, representative of an individual infantry threat (e.g. Freedom Fist soldier, skinhead, fascist paramilitary, security guards, etc.).



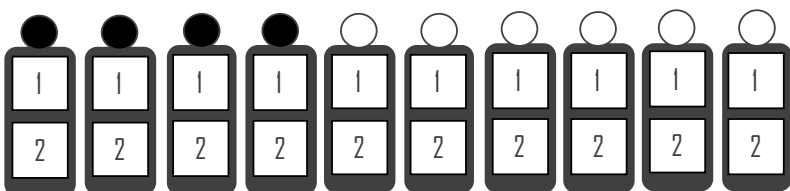
We see that there are varying degrees of bubbles and boxes filled in, each one marked in our example with a roman numeral I, II, III, and IV. We'll work through each of these examples and discuss what they mean.

I. Not Present

When the GM wants to add an individual threat to a scene, they denote it by filling in the “head bubble” on one of the pawn figures. The same goes for if and when the GM wants to add vehicles or even Jammers to a scene. You'll notice that Figure I doesn't have their head bubble filled in. That means they aren't present in the scene and can be ignored.

II. Present

The pawn in Figure II has its head bubble filled in. This represents a single threat (in this case, an infantry threat) that is part of the scene. The GM will add as many threats as they wish before the scene begins by filling in head bubbles. On the combat sheet, if our heroes were squaring off against a fireteam of four Freedom Fist soldiers, it would look something like this:





III. Injured/Damaged

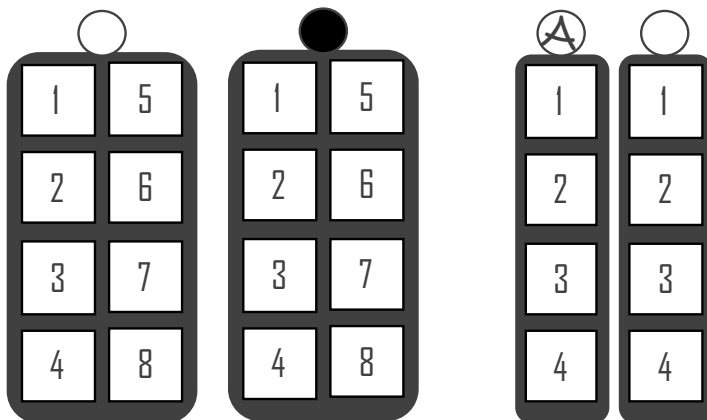
The pawn with a single box filled in has been injured (or damaged, if we're talking about a vehicle). This occurred when a player made a roll, scored a single hit, and applied the hit to this threat. When a player scores one or more hits, they can apply those hits to any threat she wants to. Keep in mind, there is no game mechanical effect of being injured/damaged other than it being easier to finish this threat off. They can still fight and add danger to the player characters.

IV. Neutralized

The pawn with all its boxes filled in has been neutralized. Perhaps the injured Freedom Fist soldier from Figure III took one more hit and went down. Perhaps a player rolled very well and scored two hits, applying them both towards a single threat. Either way, a threat with all its boxes filled is out of the fight (e.g. dead, dying, incapacitated, unconscious, fleeing, or surrendered) and no longer adding danger to our heroes.

Jammer and Vehicle Threats

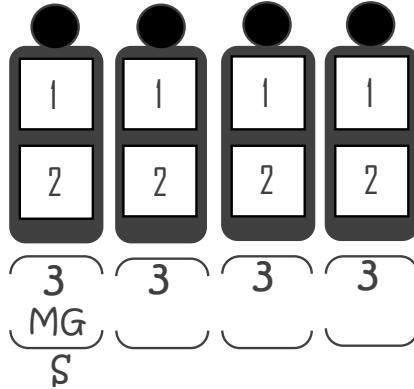
To add a Jammer (or three) to a scene, the GM fills in the head bubble in exactly the same way. However, when it comes to adding vehicles to a scene, you don't fill in the head bubble. Instead, you write in the letter that corresponds with the vehicle type (as denoted on the combat sheet), as was done on the image on the bottom right. Vehicles and Jammers are neutralized in exactly the same way as infantry threats, except they require more hits to neutralize and typically require the use of special weapons (i.e. ordnance) or special powers (i.e. subroutines and Ultimates) to apply hits in the first place.



Danger Added By Threats

Just like in TSKF, each threat in the scene adds a fixed amount of danger to any player character the GM feels like targeting (and sometimes multiple player characters in the case of special weapons).

Underneath each infantry pawn icon is a bracketed box that looks like this:



This is the space for the GM to decide how dangerous each infantry threat is, what kind of weaponry they have access to (including ordnance), and whether or not they are situated in a strongpoint (e.g. APC, pillbox, etc.). Above the infantry pawns, you'll find a key that explains how to fill out these brackets:

Infantry	Ordnance	Not Ordnance
Danger → 3	CL = Chemical Laser	AR = Assault Rifle
Weaponry → AR, G	G, TG = Grenade, Tear Gas	HG = Handgun
Strongpoint → S	(H/L)MG = Heavy/Light Machinegun	HR = Hunting Rifle
	RPG = Rocket Propelled Grenade	MW = Melee Weapon
	SR = Sniper Rifle	SG = Shotgun
	SS = Street Sweeper	SMG = Submachine

As was the case in TSKF, it is up to the GM to decide how much danger an individual infantry threat adds, based on their training, armament, and tactical situation. A rating of 2, 3, or 4 is fairly standard, with 2 representing a poorly trained irregular with a hunting rifle, and 4 representing a member of special forces with milspec gear. The GM also uses their turn to determine which infantry enter a strongpoint (add the S), or leave one (remove the S).



In the case of attack vehicles (i.e. tanks and gunships), the GM is given two options for adding danger which are listed on the combat sheet. Transport vehicles (i.e. APCs and choppers) do not add danger, but they can be considered mobile strongpoints for infantry units.

Armor

Ⓐ = APC
Strongpoint

Ⓓ = Tank

MG | Main Gun
5 vs 2 or 10 vs 1

Air Support

Ⓒ = Chopper
Strongpoint

Ⓖ = Gunship

Hellfires | Minigun
4 vs 2 or 8 vs 1

Jammers, meanwhile, the Resistance's greatest military adversary, provide the GM with three options for adding danger, which are also listed on the combat sheet. One of these options, the unleashing of their Ultimate, can only be chosen by the GM if the Jammer suffered three or more hits last turn, or if they were struck by a Receiver's Ultimate last turn and somehow survived.

Jammers

Regular 4 vs 2
Subroutine 8 vs 1
Ultimate 6 vs all

Jammers unleash their Ultimate any time they take 3+ hits during a single turn, or are struck by a Receiver Ultimate.

While all threats fight until they are neutralized, routed, or surrender (however the players wish to narrate the outcomes of defeating their opposition), the GM has the option of removing any Jammer (with hits remaining) from a scene when it is the GM's turn to assign danger. A retreating Jammer is removed from the scene before adding danger to our heroes.

The option to retreat at will ensures that Jammers remain elusive and recurring nemeses throughout a SIGMATA campaign's last legs, only fighting to the death when their back is against the wall and the Regime is about to fall. Either that, or the Resistance has somehow made a fight very personal for a Jammer.



Strongpoints

Just like in TSKF, a threat that is taking cover in a strongpoint (e.g. a Fist APC, a Regime chopper, a concrete pillbox, a sniper roost covered in sandbags, etc.) is fighting from a defensive position that makes them more difficult to neutralize without the use of special weapons or tactics. RTS refines how strongpoints operate, denoted below.

Strongpoints protect against small arms

The primary benefit of strongpoints is that they protect infantry from small arms fire and direct approaches against them. This means that no tactic used by players can actually inflict hits on infantry in strongpoints unless subroutines or ordnance is used against them. As a reminder, Partisan talents are not as naturally destructive as subroutines, and therefore cannot be used to hit targets behind strongpoints.

Strongpoints are especially vulnerable to ordnance

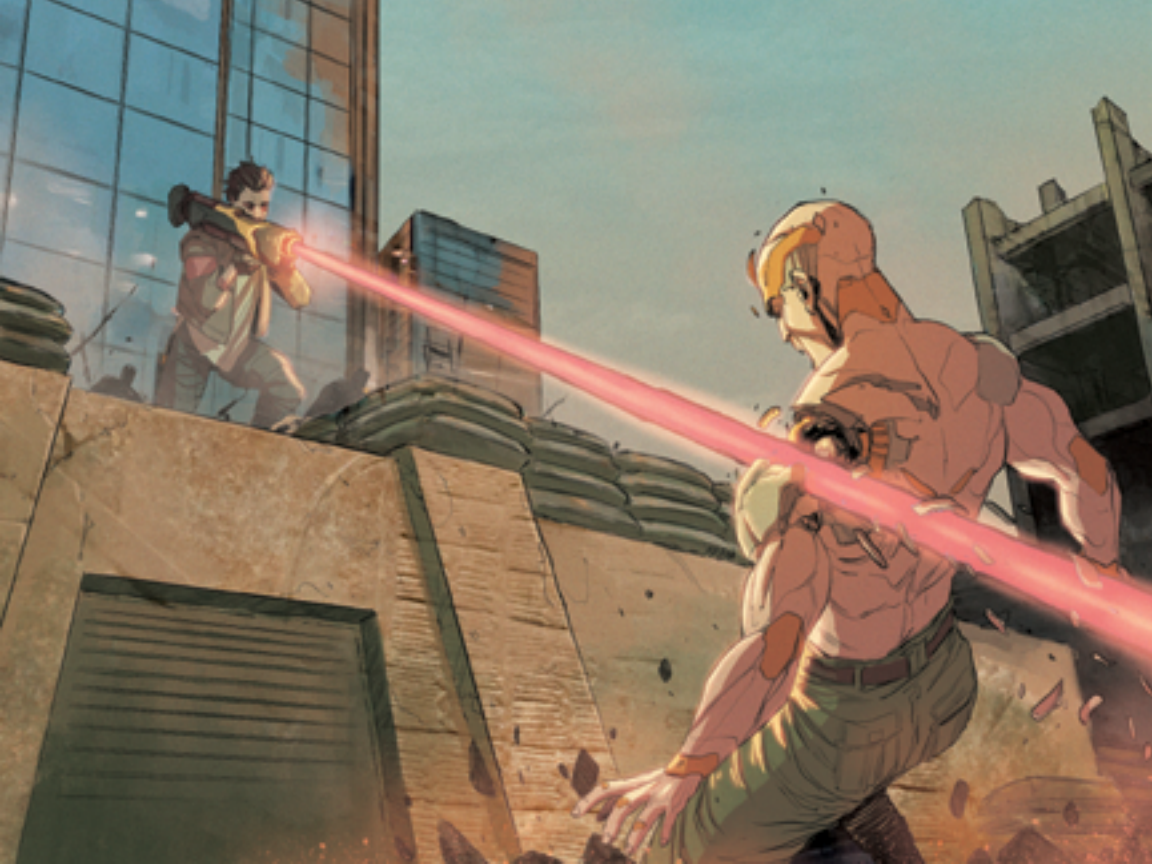
Strongpoints do have one major weakness. Infantry huddling in a confined space are more easily neutralized with support weapons such as grenades and rockets. When using these weapons, every hit scored against a threat in a strongpoint is applied equally against every threat in the same strongpoint. That is, if a character throws a grenade and scores 2 hits against an infantry inside an APC, the same 2 hits are scored against every other infantry in the same APC.

Infantry can be forced to abandon strongpoints

While a character using small arms or direct approaches cannot apply their hits against infantry in strongpoints, they can still force infantry out of strongpoints. Every time a character scores a hit against a threat in a strongpoint that they cannot otherwise harm, they can use that hit to force their intended target out of the strongpoint. The GM then erases the "S" underneath that threat's hit tracker. If a character is fortunate enough to score multiple hits in one roll, those extra hits can be used to force other threats out of the strongpoint, or even applied as direct hits against the initial threat who is no longer protected.

Player characters no longer benefit from strongpoints

For the sake of simplicity (and because they have many other defensive tools at their disposal), player characters no longer benefit mechanically when inside a strongpoint.



Ordnance


RTS reimagines ordnance to make it more effective in the field, more balanced during play, and a generally more valuable commodity best reserved for when it's most needed. We'll be reintroducing every type of ordnance available to players with new rules and tweaks, as well as a handful of new ordnance, but before doing so, some general comments on the topic.

Ordnance is decoupled from vehicles

Vehicles have been simplified and described in the previous section. Ordnance now describes special weapons only.

Ordnance captured in the field is abandoned or re-allocated

The Resistance is fighting a major war on many fronts. Regional command must determine the best use of all resources available to them, including ordnance captured from the enemy. When a character captures a piece of ordnance during a scene (e.g. they neutralize a machine-gunner and take over his weapon), they (or one of their comrades) are free to use that ordnance throughout the duration of the mission. However, once that mission is



over, it should be assumed that the ordnance is abandoned, depleted, too heavy to haul around, or handed over to other Resistance fighters following in the party's wake. Those weapons are better served in the hands of Resistance units who don't have benefit of cybernetic superheroes.

Ordnance requisitioned by the Old Men is yours to keep

In RTS's last chapter, Strategy, we'll be talking about how the player characters can be requisitioned ordnance that is theirs to keep and use at their own discretion until depleted. This means that the players characters will be able to hold onto and carry around ordnance (or gain rapid access to its hiding place) during any scene they are part of. The players will democratically decide what ordnance is chosen and who gets to carry it around (which is documented on the character sheet of whoever has it). Narratively, this ordnance does not have to be actually carried around (e.g. you don't have to try to conceal your machine gun). It should just be assumed that it is rapidly available, and all its owner needs to do is pop the trunk where it is stored, or pull it out of the duffle bag where it has been stashed, etc. A player simply needs to narrate how the ordnance "materializes" to be able to start using it immediately.

Ordnance Revisions

The ordnance featured in TSKF is revised as follows:

Chemical Laser (CL): Can be used to inflict hits on ground vehicles, air support, or infantry inside strongpoints. When used against a Receiver (i.e. Jammer), the target is unable to employ subroutines or Ultimates during their next turn, whether or not a hit was scored. Chemical lasers have very limited batteries. When firing one, roll a D6. On a result of 1-3, that was the weapon's last shot.

Grenade (G): Can be used to inflict hits on ground vehicles or infantry inside strongpoints (but not infantry inside of a flying chopper). Doubles hits scored when used against infantry outside of a strongpoint, which can be distributed against one or multiple infantry any way the thrower chooses. When used against a single threat inside a strongpoint, apply however many hits were scored to every other threat inside the same strongpoint. Grenades are a single-use weapon.

Light Machine Gun (LMG): Doubles hits scored when used against infantry outside of a strongpoint, which can

be distributed against one or multiple infantry any way the thrower chooses. Works identically to the Aegis Eyes blade or Overwatch training when using the Suppress tactic. It also works in conjunction with them (e.g. if someone with Aegis Eyes or Overwatch uses an LMG to suppress, they reduce the danger of 3 allies instead of 2). LMGs use a lot of ammunition. When firing one, roll a D6. On a result of 1-2, that was the weapon's last burst. MGs are squad support weapons fired from a stationary spot and work best in conjunction with a fire team protecting their position. As such, only one character can use an LMG per round of combat.

Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG): Can be used to inflict hits on ground vehicles, air support, or infantry inside strongpoints (including infantry inside of a flying chopper). Doubles hits scored when used against infantry outside of a strongpoint, which can be distributed against one or multiple infantry any way the thrower chooses. When used against a single threat inside a strongpoint, apply however many hits were scored to every other threat inside the same strongpoint. RPGs are a single-use weapon.

Tear Gas Grenade (TG): When used in conjunction with an attack designed to make a threat abandon a stationary or ground-based strongpoint, it forces everyone in that strongpoint to abandon it immediately so long as one hit is scored. This includes Receivers and Freedom Fist or Partisans with gas masks. Tear Gas Grenades are a single-use weapon.



New Ordnance

Below, ordnance new to RTS is described:

Sniper Rifle (SR): A sniper rifle is a high-calibre long gun fit with a telescopic scope and a collapsible tripod. It can strike a target at extreme ranges and its rounds are capable of piercing light cover. It is identical to any other small arm in terms of rules, with one exception: it can inflict hits on infantry who are taking cover inside a strongpoint, but *only* when using the Flank tactic. Sniper rifle ammunition is common.

Street Sweeper (SS): A short semi-automatic shotgun with a revolving cylinder, capable of rapid fire and absolute devastation in close quarters. A character using this weapon changes the +3 progress / +3 danger of the Storm tactic back to TSKF's +5 progress / +5 danger. The weapon's extra progress is self-explanatory, but its extra danger is on account of the weapon's short range and its perceived lethality (making its wielder one of the first targets that need to be neutralized). Shotgun ammunition is common.

Heavy Machine Gun (HMG): A heavy machine gun is functionally identical to its lighter cousin, but far from being a squad support weapon, it is designed as a main line weapon against enemy armor and air support. Unlike a light machine gun, it can be used to inflict hits on ground vehicles, air support, or infantry inside strongpoints. When used against a single threat inside a strongpoint, apply however many hits were scored to every other threat inside the same strongpoint. HMGs use a lot of ammunition. When firing one, roll a D6. On a result of 1-2, that was the weapon's last burst. HMGs are also so large, they can only be fired from fixed positions, such as a pillbox or atop a tank. They cannot be carried by a single person nor acquired as a personal piece of ordnance on character sheet. They should be thought of scene-specific set pieces require immediate capture.

Not Ordnance

In infantry threat key on the combat sheet also features abbreviations for weapons that are decidedly not ordnance.

- Not Ordnance**
- AR = Assault Rifle
- HG = Handgun
- HR = Hunting Rifle
- MW = Melee Weapon
- SG = Shotgun
- SMG = Submachine

That means they have no special rules whatsoever. You might be asking “Why include them at all, then?” Well, for starters, it’s a fantastic way to disambiguate between threats on the combat sheet. Instead of saying, “I apply my hit to the second guy,” a player can say “I apply my hit to the guy with the shotgun.” It also operate operates narratively. It signifies how the GM might be narrating the threats’ tactical movements and capabilities. It makes sense that the infantry threats adding 2-3 danger are armed with civilian firearms (handguns, hunting rifles, and shotguns), while more dangerous threats are armed with assault rifles and submachine guns. There’s also the likelihood that some players will want to loot the dead for stuff that can be turned into breaks.

For maximum gun porn verisimilitude, we’ve included the names of a few popular 1980s “period pieces.” Some of these guns were ancient in 1986, and some were considered bleeding-edge prototypes.

Assault Rifles: AK-47, FN-FAL, H&K G3, IMI Galil, M-16, Steyr Aug, SIG SC 550

Handguns: ASP, Beretta 92, CZ 75, Desert Eagle, Luger Pistol, M1911, Ruger 38 Special, SIG P226, Walther PPK

Hunting Rifles: L96A1, Lee-Enfield L42A1, Mauser 98, Remington Model 700, Ruger 10/22, Winchester Model 70

Melee Weapons: Baseball Bat, Brass Knuckles, Butterfly Knife, Crowbar, Ka-Bar, Maglite, Nightstick, Switchblade

Shotguns: Benelli M1, Browning BSS Sidelock, Franchi SPAS-12, Remington Model 870, Winchester Model 23,

Submachine Guns: Beretta PM12, H&K MP5, M3 Grease Gun, MAC-10, TEC-9, Tommy Gun, Uzi





When Threats Use Ordnance

Threats also have access to ordnance. This section describes how they use it against our heroes. Generally speaking, the amount of danger that a threat normally adds to a single character is augmented by ordnance.

Chemical Laser (CL): A threat armed with a chemical laser disables the ability of their target to use subroutines or Ultimates during that turn.

Grenade (G): A threat using a grenade adds danger to two characters, instead of one. For example, if the threat normally adds 3 danger to a single character, it now adds 3 danger to two characters.

Heavy Machine Gun (HMG): A threat armed with a heavy machine gun adds danger to two characters, instead of one, but adds an additional 2 danger to this value. For example, if the threat normally adds 3 danger to a single character, it now adds 5 danger to two characters.

Light Machine Gun (LMG): A threat armed with a light machine gun adds danger to two characters, instead of one. For example, if the threat normally adds 3 danger to a single character, it now adds 3 danger to two characters.

Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG): A threat using an RPG adds danger to two characters, instead of one. For example, if the threat normally adds 3 danger to a single character, it now adds 3 danger to two characters.

Sniper Rifle (SR): A threat using a sniper rifle has the option of doubling the amount of danger they normally add, if used against a character whose danger is already at 8+, so long as they are firing from a strongpoint.

Street Sweeper (SS): A threat armed with a street sweeper adds danger to an additional character if their initial action increases a character's danger to 10+. For example, if the threat normally adds 3 danger to a single character and they increase a character's danger to 10+, they can add 3 danger to an additional character. Yes, this can be done multiple times. However, the threat cannot be firing from a strongpoint.

Tear Gas (TG): The mere presence of tear gas, whether it was used by the Regime or the Resistance, adds +1 danger to every Partisan at the beginning of the round, unless they have gas masks or the source of the gas has been drowned.

Balancing Combat Scenes

There is no equation for ensuring that a combat scene is fair, challenging, or even possible to win. As it was in TSKF, it remains a process of trial and error, though it is made somewhat more forgiving by the fact that tactical withdrawal from a scene is now less lethal than it was before.

It is still suggested that the first combat scene the party has is with a fireteam of 4-5 Freedom Fist soldiers who also have an LMG at their disposal. The party's performance in this type of battle will allow the GM to calibrate the difficulty up or down accordingly. As player characters improve with experience (and players get better at utilizing the various game-mechanical tools available to them), the GM can begin to ratchet up the difficulty. If the GM underestimates the difficulty of a scene, they can either add reinforcements to the scene (discussed on the next page), or they can remind players that you can't win them all. After all, the "hit and run" nature of guerilla requires that the insurgency does, in fact, have to "run" sometimes.

GMs may also encounter situations where the players are absolutely steam-rolling the opposition, no matter what is being thrown at them. There's two approaches to addressing this. The first is to *let it ride*. What is best in life? To crush fascists, see them driven before you, and to hear the lamentation of loyalists. Obliterating the shock troopers of a genocidal regime makes for cathartic roleplaying. Receivers are walking WMDs and their high-speed Partisan allies are consummate Nazi-killers. Let players revel in it.

The second approach for when combat is no longer challenging is to break combat up into consecutive scenes. If players know they are in a mission's only combat scene, they're likely to leverage all of their fatigue, all of their relationships, and maybe even all of their ordnance. However, if there is a chance that the current combat scene may be followed up by another scene, the players will be more conservative with how they use their resources. Do they go all out, or do they hold back in case this is just the first wave? Just by planting this seed that this is a possibility, the GM ratchets up the tension of combat scenes.





Reinforcements

There may be times during the struggle where the Resistance must raid a hardened Regime fortification or hold their ground against a full Regime offensive. TSKF describes rules for “massive battles” to cover these types of scenes, but RTS introduces the optional play concept of “reinforcements” to strike a better or more rules-consistent balance between small tactical firefights and large scale battles.

A reinforcement is an individual, a fire team, an artillery team, or some other type of unit that is supporting the party. Each reinforcement adds a specific bonus or ability which may be “tapped” once per round by a single player, in addition to their usual tactics roll. It can be tapped either before or after a player makes a roll. When a reinforcement is tapped, it cannot be used until next round. If it is not used during a round, its effects are wasted.

Reinforcements are dramatically less effective than an intervention by a wave of Minutemen, but they can be utilized every round, assuming the GM has determined they are present in a specific battle. Players are still on the hook for incorporating reinforcements into the narrative when they tap them for their special effects.

The following are some examples of reinforcements:

Sniper Reinforcement: A lone Resistance sniper is watching your team from far away, picking off Freedom Fist soldiers or slowing down their advance. A player can tap this reinforcement to add 1 hit to a single infantry threat.

Fireteam Reinforcement: A fireteam of four Resistance fighters are using their small arms and LMG to assist the party, either providing focus fire on enemy positions, or cover fire to take some heat off of the Receivers and Partisans. A player can tap this reinforcement to either add 2 progress to the roll they just made, or reduce any character’s danger by 2.

Artillery Reinforcement: An artillery team firing mortars, rockets, or HMG rounds from a safe distance away and coordinating their fire trajectory with our heroes via hand signals or radio. A player can tap this reinforcement to allow their own Flank or Storm tactic roll to hit like a subroutine (i.e. they can inflict hits on ground vehicles, air support, and infantry taking cover in strongpoints).

Combat Medic Reinforcement: A combat medic is available, ready to splint and suture otherwise lethal wounds, or inject the stimulants needed to put an injured Partisan back into the fight. This reinforcement can be tapped to effectively allow a Partisan to “reboot,” during a scene of combat, but can only be used once, by the first Partisan who claims it.

Heroic Leader Reinforcement: A regional commander, Resistance commander, or a highly decorated fighter whose command presence and tactical insight inspire the Resistance to fight harder than they normally could. Can be tapped to reduce any character’s fatigue by 3.

Resupply Reinforcement: A group of runners that brave the fray to deliver extra munitions to fireteams that have exhausted their ordnance. This reinforcement can be tapped to effectively “reload” or replace a single piece of ordnance that has been depleted a scene of combat, but can only be used once, by the first character who claims it.

Incorporating Reinforcements

Reinforcements are means by which a GM can add either balance and or dramatic elements to a combat scene. In fact, if a GM sees a combat scene going sideways, they can always throw in a reinforcement or two to balance things out. They shouldn’t always do this... sometimes fleeing is the only viable tactical option.

Reinforcements can also be used as a means to “reward” players for their past endeavours. The commander they saved is now helping them lead the charge against the enemy. The loyalist doctor who they showed mercy to has joined the Resistance and showed up in the nick of time. The artillery team is on standby only because your last mission raiding a Regime weapons convoy was successful. And so forth.

Reinforcements are also a useful means of adding heroic GM characters to a scene without them effectively “stealing” that scene. Since reinforcements are tapped and then narrated by the players, players can utilize and describe these heroic allies any way they wish.

All of this is meant to serve as a feedback loop between the Receivers and Partisans controlled by the players, and the larger movement that they are a part of.





Evasion Scenes

Evasion scenes were easily the most difficult scenes in TSKF. What made them challenging was that characters who spent their turns using the Fade or Deny tactics to help out others were ultimately left behind to fend for themselves, usually with a surplus of danger making this task an uphill battle. While the new rules for evasion scenes still require every character to progress to the final navpoint for the scene to be considered a “success,” things have gotten a lot easier, primarily because hits scored by players using the Rush and Sneak tactics can now be used to push *any* character forward to the next navpoint, instead of just themselves.

As was the case in TSKF, a character who arrives at the final navpoint is officially out of the scene (assuming they got there without having 10+ danger). Their danger no longer rises and they cannot make rolls. Those who remain in the scene are on their own.

Forward, we’ll be introducing the new sheet and each of its elements. Then we’ll talk about different ways to run evasion scenes.

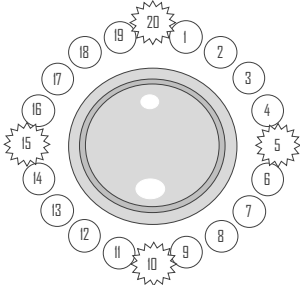
The New Evasion Sheet

The evasion sheet now features a radio dial. The top section features spaces to write out where the characters are starting and the navpoints they are trying to reach. Just as it was in TSKF, an evasion scene may be anywhere between 1 and 4 navpoints, depending on how long the GM wishes the scene to be.

In the bottom section, each character has their own track for both danger and their progress towards the final navpoint. All characters start with a marker on the "start" arrow, and move the marker to the right every time they score a hit (or an ally scores a hit on their behalf).

EVASION

ALARM



START

NAVPOINT

NAVPOINT

NAVPOINT

NAVPOINT

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
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START

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	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
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START

*

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	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	--

START

*

*

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	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
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START

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= HIT

SIGMATA

101

Defining Start and Navpoints

Just as was done in TSKF, the GM still defines the scene's starting point and navpoints. In the example below, the player characters are tasked with sneaking into the data center of a Regime-controlled building. They start outside of the building and methodically make their way deeper and deeper into the facility, avoiding detection along the way. You'll notice that the start and three navpoints have been defined, meaning every character must score 3 total navpoints for this scene to end safely. An evasion scene can require up to 4 navpoints per character if needed, but there's no need to use every navpoint on the sheet unless the GM plans on a very long and arduous evasion scene.

START Facility perimeter: chain-link fence, barbed wire, street lights, bushes, street traffic, padlocks.

NAVPOINT Facility grounds: parked APCs, Freedom Fist patrols, tower with a spotlight and a sniper.

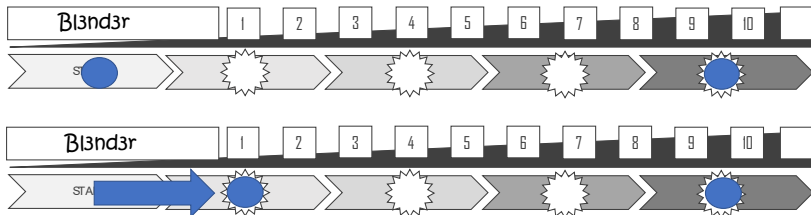
NAVPOINT Facility interior: cubicle farms, fake plants, flag stands, door locks, filing cabinets, janitors, employees.

NAVPOINT Data center: servers, racks of tape storage, CCTV cameras, techs in lab coats, loud air conditioning.

NAVPOINT

Tracking Movement

Every character in the scene has two trackers to manage. One is their danger. The other is their current position. In the example below, we see our character “Bl3nd3r” with a marker on the start position. This means she is still outside the facility perimeter. Later in the scene, if she scores a hit with a Sneak or Rush roll, she can move herself to the next navpoint (the facility grounds beyond the perimeter fence).



You'll also notice that there is already a marker on the fourth and final navpoint in both cases. This was done because our scene only requires each character to move 3 navpoints, not 4. That extra marker is just there to remind the players how many total hits needed to be scored for each of our heroes to arrive to a safe point.

Sharing Hits

The biggest change to evasion scenes is the ability to share your hits. When a player scores a hit using the Sneak or Rush tactics, she can use that hit to move her own character forward one navpoint, or move an ally forward one navpoint. If she scores multiple hits, she has the option of distributing those hits any way she wants to. For example, if she scores 2 hits, she could move herself and an ally one navpoint forward, or ensure that the coast is clear for 2 allies to move forward one navpoint (while she, herself, stays behind).

The only requirement is that the player sharing their hits narrates how their character's action helps push the others forward. Perhaps her Rush tactic is used to dismantle and carry away a sentry, clearing a safe path forward for her comrades. Perhaps her Sneak tactic was used to deactivate a security control (e.g. locked door, motion sensor, spotlight, or CCTV camera), and one of her comrades was the first to pass by this defeated control.



Evasion scenes as Car Chases

The car chase is peak 1980s. Unfortunately, car chases were difficult to conceptualize using the evasion scene rules as they were written in TSKF. Each character was likely to be in a separate physical location throughout much of an evasion scene, which doesn't make a whole lot of sense when all characters are narratively in the same moving vehicle. This issue has been resolved with a minor tweak in how to narrate and resolve these scenes.

Being Pursued In a Car Chase

If the player characters are being pursued in a car chase, change the starting position and navpoints to reflect either how far their vehicle is from the pursuing force, or how many of the pursuing force still tails them. Change the last navpoint of the scene to reflect the point at which the chase is over. Mechanically, there is one minor change to how these scenes work: *the entire party is narratively stuck in the navpoint of the character that has accumulated the least navpoints*. To explain, look at the example provided on the opposing page for an idea of what this looks like.



START The chase has started! Multiple
Fist APCs and a handful of pursuit
motorcycles are on our tail!

NAVPOINT We've lost half of the APCs, but
the ones remaining are ramming us.
The motorcycles are keeping pace.

NAVPOINT We lost all the APCs, but the
motorcyclists are now shooting
their sidearms at us!


NAVPOINT We lost the motorcycles, but
now there's a chopper tailing us.
We can't run, but we can hide.

NAVPOINT

Is there a character who hasn't accumulated any navpoints yet? That means the vehicle they are in is still being pursued aggressively by the entire pursuit fleet.

While that is pretty straightforward, you might wonder how this is narrated? One person is driving the vehicle, but what is everyone else doing in the meantime? And how do we narrate one character being in danger, specifically, when everyone else is doing fine?

Let's start with how players might narrate their roll outcomes if they are the vehicle's driver. To Rush is to push a vehicle to its limits, ram the opposition, and perform dangerous stunts to get away. To Sneak is to drive steadily and methodically, making subtle and sudden lane changes, and to keep ahead of the pursuit fleet while avoiding obstacles (instead of driving through them). To Fade is to use other vehicles as cover, to drive into heavy traffic that makes pursuit complicated, or to "hide" the vehicle temporary to lose the pursuit. To Deny is to drive defensively in a manner that protects your passengers, avoiding ramming attacks and putting the vehicle into a position where it is difficult to fire on.



Next, let's talk about what everyone else in the vehicle is doing. To Rush is to insist that the driver take a reckless route to lose the pursuit, or jerk the wheel or pump the breaks yourself, or stick your upper body out the window to fire small arms at your pursuer. To Sneak is to methodically navigate for the driver by telling them what to do and when, or exchange small arms fire with the pursuer in a defensive manner. To Fade is to keep your head down, make sure you're buckled up, and otherwise avoid the debris, shrapnel, and projectiles of a high speed chase. To Deny is to do what Fade is doing, except that you are doing it on behalf of an ally, making sure they are not injured or distracted.

The only time the vehicle's movement to the next navpoint is discussed in the scene's narrative is when the player character with the lowest amount of navpoints is moved forward, whether it was done by themselves or one of their allies.

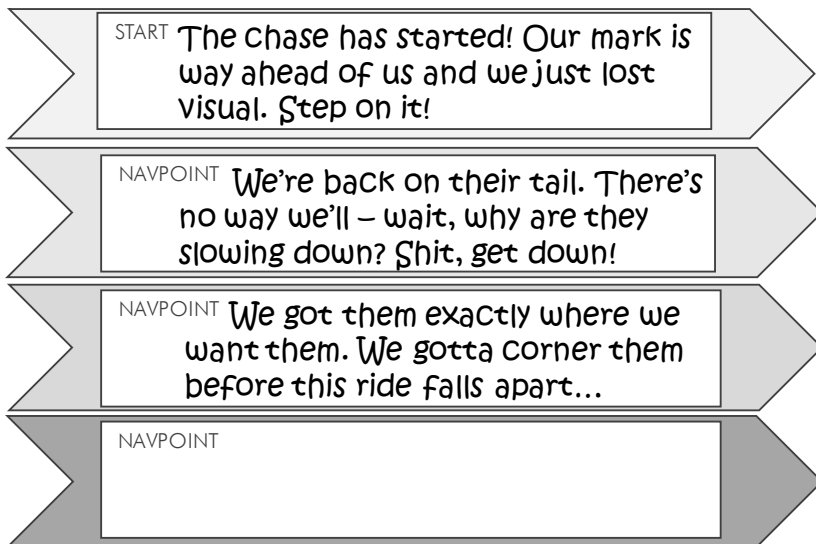
Now that we've talked about what everyone is doing in the scene, let's talk about those characters who have achieved 10+ exposure, or are lagging behind in navpoint accumulation. The character with 10+ exposure is about to have a horrible accident. They are about to be thrown from the vehicle, catch a bullet or piece of debris in the head, or make a mistake that impacts the entire party ("Did you just shoot the transmission? You just shot the transmission!").

Regardless, their bad turn is about to become the party's bad turn. It's not necessarily their fault. Maybe the driver slammed the brakes to prevent that character from being harmed. Maybe the driver crashed the vehicle into an obstacle after they were splattered with that character's blood. Either way, the scene is over and in a fail state. It's time to shoot or negotiate your way out, or continue the flight on foot.

This is all to say that the current navpoint position of every character is the entire party's responsibility. The character that is well behind on navpoints? It's not their problem alone, it's the party's problem. The party's vehicle has only progressed as far as the character with the least amount of navpoints.

Pursuing a vehicle in a Car Chase

If the party is chasing a vehicle, as opposed to being chased, the guidance provided so far is exactly the same, but the way that navpoints are described is a bit different. See the example on the opposing page for an idea of how this looks. Instead of the navpoints representing distance gained from pursuers, the navpoints represent proximity to and advantage against the vehicle fleeing the party.



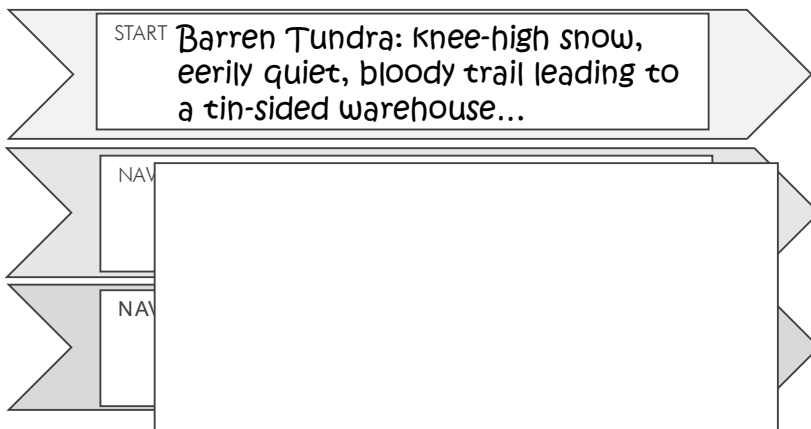
As was the case with a car chase pursuing an adversary, the party's overall scene progress is determined by the character who has accumulated the least amount of navpoints. It doesn't matter if nearly every character has arrived at the final navpoint... the vehicle itself is situated at the navpoint that the currently least fortunate character rests at.

Narrating Alarm in a Car Chase

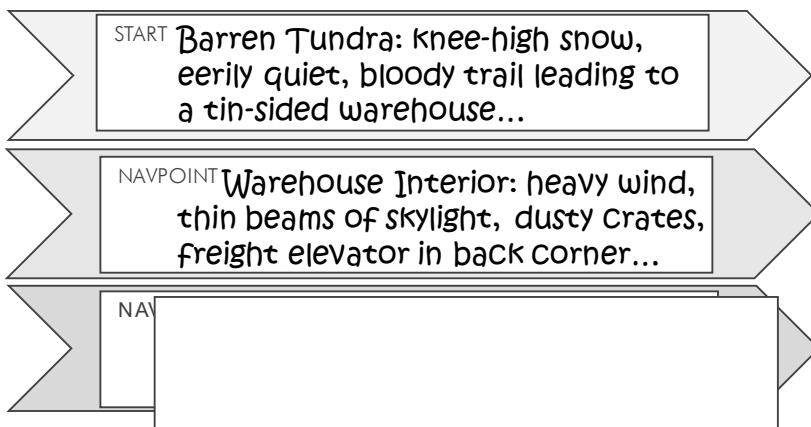
The GM's job during a car chase is to narrate where the chase has gone and where it is going. What obstacles lie ahead (e.g. a crowd, a traffic jam, a closed bridge, etc.) and what's in the rear view mirror (e.g. the tumbling and flaming wreck of a pursuit vehicle that made a mistake)? As you ratchet up the scene's danger, you should give the players narrative clues to sink their teeth into. You should also make the scene feel visceral, with character lurching in their seats, feeling the vibration of rough terrain, and rocking violently as the vehicle gets rammed or does the ramming. In short, make your players motion sick.

Evasion scenes as Horror

GMs interested in running evasion scenes that have a feeling of dread and horror can add suspense by simply covering up navpoints until at least one character has arrived. When designing navpoints, each one should have a clear indicator of where the characters should go next. In our example below, there is a blood trail leading to the warehouse...



When at least one character arrives to the next navpoint, it is revealed to the group. The place is empty, but there is a freight elevator in the back corner that seems to go underground. What's down there? Whose blood is this? And just like that, we've injected this scene with some serious suspense. Players are bound to have their characters proceed cautiously. The GM is encouraged to have players elaborate on what's going through their characters' mind.



To make things even more suspenseful, the GM can decide to *not* indicate how many navpoints are required to safely clear this scene until one of the characters arrive at the final navpoint. Does this scene require 2 navpoints or 4 navpoints? This element of uncertainty makes it harder for players to decide if they want to use finite resources like fatigue or relationships.

When it comes to assigning the scene's alarm rating, there's no need to tell the players exactly who (or what) might detect them (or leap out at them). Instead, the GM can allude to sudden noises that put characters on edge, an increasing sense of unease, or the fear that they are being watched. Setting the scene's alarm to 4 is another easy method to ratchet up the tension and create a sense of urgency.

What happens to that character who blows the scene, ending their turn at 10+? Something horrible, of course. If it is a character-ending failure (i.e. the character cannot reboot), they might go missing without a trace, or they might have something profoundly violent happen to them (even if it's just an accident, like falling through rotting floorboard onto some exposed rebar). If the failed scene is not necessarily lethal, the GM at least knows who exactly to direct their wrath towards if the scene transitions to combat against whomever or whatever was stalking the party. From a rabid Grizzly with a taste for human meat to some type of horrible skunkworks experiment, there are all kinds of potential threats that can be applied aggressively against the character who blew the scene, *every single turn*.

As a final note on dabbling in the horror genre when playing SIGMATA: this setting doesn't need *monsters*. It already has them. The Regime and its loyalists are up to truly awful things both in public and private, including murder, torture, ethnic cleansing, processing prisoners like cattle, and human experimentation (up to and including the SIGMATA project). Running these horror-variant rules for evasion scenes is a useful technique for revealing some of these uglier setting elements, but remember, there is nothing more terrifying than the banality of evil: killing because you were ordered to, torturing because it's something to do, and watching people in need expire slowly without raising a finger because to do otherwise would be an inconvenience. As a reminder, establish buy-in with all players regarding dark content and have safety tools available.





Intrigue Scenes

Of the three scene types, intrigue scenes have undergone the least amount of change. They function nearly identically to how they did in TSKF, with some very minor adjustments for the sake of ease and making intrigue scenes more extensible.

In this section, we'll introduce the new sheet and its new features, and then spend some time talking about the different ways that intrigue scenes can work in SIGMATA campaigns. RTS really opens up this scene type, allowing them to serve a number of purposes, including strategic montages (scenes that happen over the course of days or even weeks), investigation scenes, and even scenes of argument and debate to resolve critical disagreements between player characters.

The New Intrigue Sheet

The intrigue sheet now features a radio dial. The top section is still used to track each character's danger as the scenes pressure continues to pile on.

Agendas now feature a larger space to write them out and require between 1 and 5 hits to fulfill them. There is also a space between each agenda where the GM can determine if two agendas are either *sequential* (i.e. one agenda must be fulfilled before any progress can be applied to the next agenda) or *competing* (i.e. only one of the two agenda can prevail, and the first one that is fulfilled "wins" and cancels out the other).



INTRIGUE

PRESSURE

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

AGENDA

Competing ↕ Sequential

AGENDA

Competing ↕ Sequential

AGENDA

Competing ↕ Sequential

AGENDA

Competing ↕ Sequential

= HIT

SIGMATA

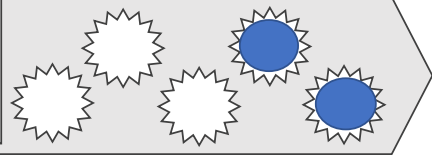
Sequential Agendas

Sequential agenda work exactly how they did in TSKF. You must complete one in order to even begin to work on the other. To denote sequential agendas, the GM should circle the “sequential” tag that lies between two agendas. It should be read as you must complete the agenda on top before you can even start to work on the one on the bottom.

In the example below, the players have been assigned the task of figuring out where in the city they should establish a safehouse, and determine if it’s possible to flip some weary Freedom Fist soldiers to the Resistance’s side. We see that the party must figure out which of the local Freedom Fist precincts seem to be less enthusiastic about the job of crushing the people and carrying out the Regime’s will. Once they determine this information (likely by interviewing the locals, doing their own reconnaissance, and watching television), they have an idea of who should be approached to become either an ally or an asset. The GM has circled “sequential” between these two agendas, denoting that the one on top must be fulfilled before the one on bottom can even be started.

AGENDA

Determine which of the local FF precincts is most likely to defect, or has the lowest morale...

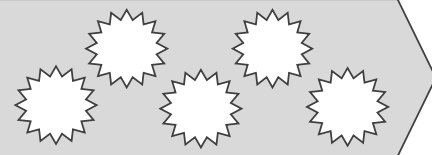


Competing] [

Sequential

AGENDA

Approach a lieutenant in that precinct and get them to defect... along with their subordinates.



The GM has also determined that the first agenda only requires 3 hits to fulfill, while the second agenda will require 5 hits to fulfill. They denote this by filling in some of the hit markets in advance, so that the players know exactly how many hits are required to fulfill each agenda.

Competing Agendas

There may be times during an intrigue scene where the player characters may be forced to choose between two incompatible agendas. This might be because of resource constraints (i.e. the players only have enough time to do one agenda, but not both), political incompatibility (i.e. if the players court one group, they'll anger the other group), or character disagreement (i.e. some characters want to do one thing while the other characters want to do a different thing). Regardless of the reason, competing agendas are used to resolve strategic disagreements between characters (and potential players). They represent an opportunity for players to essentially “vote” on a course of action consistent with their values, their factional affinity, and their perception of Resistance strategy when faced with a plurality of options. They can make rolls to further one agenda over the other, hoping to fulfill their preferred agenda first before the competing agenda is fulfilled.

When two agendas are competing, the agenda that is fulfilled first at the end of a turn “wins.” That said, the decision isn't made until the end of a round, after all players have had a chance to act. If two competing agendas are fulfilled at the end of round, they both lose 1 hit immediately, keeping options open.

Further, when a player scores 1 or more hit, they are permitted to use those hits to either apply them towards the agenda they prefer, and/or negate hits on an agenda they disagree with. For example, a player who scores 2 hits may decide to use 1 hit to increase the agenda they prefer while taking away 1 hit applied to the agenda they are opposed to. Nothing is set in stone until after the round has ended and everyone has an opportunity to act.

In a strictly “gamer” sense, is it advantageous for all players to just agree on a single competing agenda and fulfill it as quickly as possible? Absolutely. Movements work best when all participants agree on their goals and the means to achieve them. At the same time, neutral parties “going with the flow” because it is the most expedient choice is exactly how movements degenerate into embracing authoritarianism. Conflict regarding courses of action is healthy for a movement, particularly when it comes to the application of force. It's even better when said conflict happens before difficult decisions need to be made in the field.



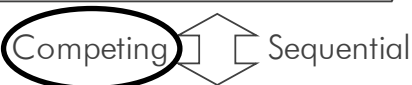
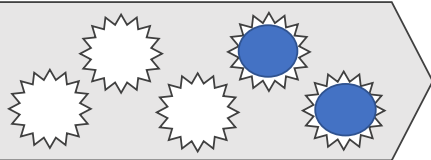
Intrigue Scenes as Arguments

Our heroes won't always agree on something, nor will they always be able to postpone a difficult decision until they get more facts. Intrigue scenes serve as a great means to dramatically resolve a disagreement between characters. It's as simple as setting up two or more competing agendas and having players race to finish one first. There's just one caveat. All players must be able to take their turn before the scene is concluded, and a player who scores a hit is permitted to use it to *negate* a hit already scored on an agenda they don't like.

For a good example of this, look a look a the competing agendas below:

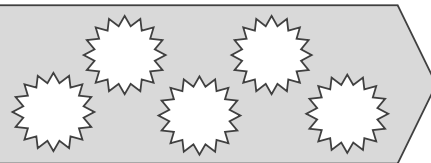
AGENDA

Guilty: mole had ample opportunities to inform Resistance of their son's predicament, but didn't.



AGENDA

Innocent: mole was being extorted by the Regime, he is a victim and not a willing informant



This intrigue scene occurred in playtesting immediately after a dramatic and bloody firefight with Regime forces resulted in the death of several Resistance fighters. It was quickly discovered that their position was betrayed by a Regime mole who was nearly torn apart by a mob. The mole quickly confessed his crime, but said he did so because the Regime threatened to kill his son who was currently in an internment camp. He pleaded for mercy, but the mob was growing restless.

A regional commander asked the players what they thought and they had differing opinions on the matter. He asked them to split up and serve as both defense and prosecution of the mole in a field tribunal, to deliver "justice" before the mob did so itself. The GM set up the two competing agendas (Guilty or Innocent) and declared that if any character ended their turn with 10+ danger, the mob would

take justice into their own hands. The regional commander assured the characters that this would be the worst possible outcome when it came to political optics, for it would bring into question the Resistance's capacity to govern should they win the war. The continual rise in danger reflected the vitriol and restlessness of the Resistance fighters who just lost their comrade because of the mole's betrayal.

Players took turns delivering statements, appealing to notions of justice and mercy, presenting facts, and refuting each other's arguments, jockeying to win the agenda of their choosing. One player could not decide and waffled between the two agendas. If the "guilty" verdict won the day, the mole would be officially sentenced to death and killed on the spot by a firing squad. If the "innocent" verdict won the day, the mole would be exiled from the Resistance, but not harmed. What was particularly dark about this scene was the fact that the "truth" didn't matter... only the verdict mattered.

This example represents an extreme case, but it is instructive. To build an intrigue scene as an argument, the GM needs to solicit player ideas to establish the following:

- What are the competing agendas?
- What are the consequences of one agenda winning out over the other(s)?
- What social crisis happens if a character ends their turn with 10+ danger?

If these elements have been established, the table will be primed to play out a very entertaining and dramatic scene. However, it is imperative that all players involved agree on the scene's potential outcomes before the scene is started. By submitting to the rules of an intrigue scene as an argument, players are agreeing to submit to the results of the scene, whatever they may be. Their character, in the narrative space, may protest vociferously or be upset about the outcome, but they will not disrupt or sabotage the outcome if they don't get their way. They will, however, most certainly consider this scene's events when it comes to their relationships with their allies.

It's certainly possible to ignite the Signal during this type of intrigue scene, but it's also perfectly fair for the GM to consider it an absurd use of Resistance resources and formally ban it at the very beginning of the scene.



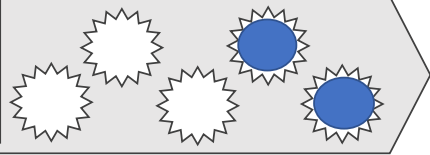
Intrigue Scenes as Investigations


GMs can use intrigue scenes to run scenes of investigation that don't actually involve interacting with an audience of GM characters. In the example below, the characters were asked to investigate the recent murder of a regional commander. While the Regime was most likely involved, the Resistance needs to determine who exactly murdered him, especially in the off chance it was done by a spy within the Resistance.

When they enter his apartment, the GM describes what the characters see. The commander's corpse lies in a pool of blood on the floor. The place has been tossed, presumably by his murderers. Filing cabinets, piles of mail, and a personal computer offer enticing places to look for clues. The GM has broken down these areas of investigation into separate agendas, each requiring 3 hits to fully review

AGENDA

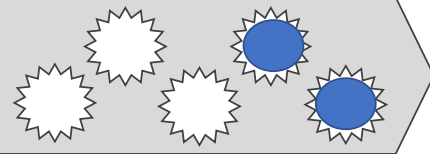
Examine the victim's corpse




Competing  Sequential

AGENDA

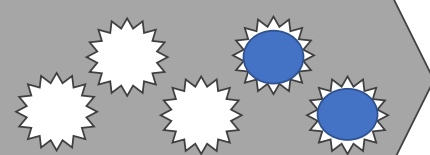
Access the victim's personal computer



Competing  Sequential

AGENDA

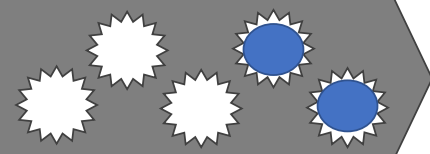
Scour the victim's mail and filing cabinet



Competing  Sequential

AGENDA

Search the apartment for physical evidence



for clues. For each of these agendas, the GM will have determined what a completed agenda yields. Consider the agenda of accessing the victim's personal computer. They may discover that the victim was part of a non-Resistance BBS and was in an argument with another user, or maybe even the Sysop. This might be an important lead. Alternatively, they might determine that there is absolutely no useful evidence on the personal computer, but that they can officially ignore it for the purposes of their investigation. For all the players know, only one of these agendas lead to an important clue, but they won't know unless they look.

The GM can decide if all agendas need to be fulfilled to be successful in this scene, or if the players simply need to complete the right one(s). Either way, the players should be told this information up front, because as they are investigating, the scene's pressure is rising.

What's causing this pressure to rise? It could be any number of things. Perhaps this crime scene was cordoned off by EyeOps and their detectives might still be in the vicinity. Perhaps the neighbors might take notice as the place is being tossed (again) and call the Freedom Fist. Alternatively, perhaps rising pressure represents characters overlooking or accidentally destroying important pieces of evidence.

Meanwhile, how are players narrating their outcomes? To Confront is to recklessly turn the place over, move the body around, and take actions that might ruin evidence. To Snoop is to look for evidence patiently and methodically, being sure to preserve the scene. To Gel is collect ones thoughts, hypothesize about what has transpired, or simply stop shuffling around so much because you're cognizant the downstairs neighbors might be home. To Support is to help allies be more methodical in their approach, or to simply stop them from accidentally knocking over the vase.

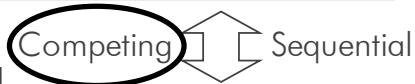
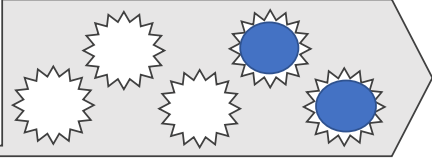


Intrigue Scenes as Strategic Montages

While intrigue scenes were designed to gamify high impact scenes of debate, negotiation, and social crisis management, they also work fantastically as “montages,” which are scenes that occur over a long period of time in the narrative space, but are truncated down to their most dramatic moments for the purposes of gameplay. For a good example, take a look at the four agendas below. In this scene, which occurred during playtesting of RTS, the party was tasked with establishing a brand new Resistance stronghold behind enemy lines over the course of a week. To achieve their objective, the party was required to make strong contacts on the street and among the business underground, as well as prepare local Resistance fighters, and recruit assets to spy on Regime facilities. The scene’s pressure represented the likelihood of one of the party

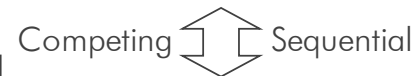
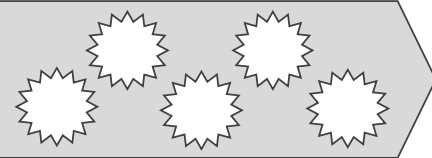
AGENDA

Street scouts: skaters, squatters, cab drivers, bus drivers, news stand clerks, users.



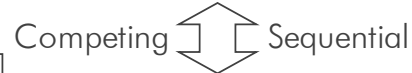
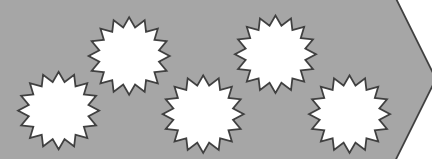
AGENDA

Business underground: print shops, queer clubs, street clinics, punk/rap clubs, dealers.



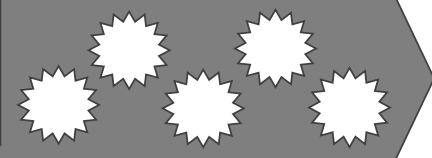
AGENDA

Insurgency: recruit, train, weapon caches, supply lines, sniper roosts, contingency plans, etc.



AGENDA

Assets: recruit spy in teclo switching station, university computer lab, FF precinct, etc.



members getting made by EyeOps counter intelligence officers or detained by a Freedom Fist dragnet.

At the beginning of each turn, when the GM increased every players danger, they would explain, generally, what Regime assets were doing to keep an eye on this slice of the city. This included APCs patrols, EyeOps shaking down their street contacts, and loyalist citizens being especially nosey of their neighbors. When danger got very high (perhaps 10+ for one or more players), the GM would explain how EyeOps was building a case against one of the player characters, including photographs, aliases, last whereabouts, etc., and put out an APB for any Freedom Fist patrols who see them to detain them. It was information that the character themselves couldn't possibly know, but it was information that the players, as fellow directors of the scene, could play with an influence depending on the tactics they selected and how well they rolled.

When it was players' turn, they would choose an agenda that they would try to work over the next 24 hours or so, and give a very brief overview of their approach (e.g. "I'm going to work an asset by befriending a member of the overnight janitorial staff at the local university"). Since the action was taking place over a long period of time, it was easy for that player to use the Gel tactic to reduce their danger ("I decide to sit in on some classes to better pass as a student"), or for another player to help out with Support ("I learned from a campus Leftist group that the janitors are under surveillance already for trying to unionize, so I let my ally know").

Ultimately, Intrigue scenes played like montages allow players and GMs to play scenes that are very strategic in nature, achieving the kind of significant political and espionage victories that are unlikely to be achieved in a sitting dramatic moment. Whether its building a brand new resistance cell behind enemy lines, or getting a sympathetic candidate elected in a critical local election, or keeping a massive and prolonged demonstration alive in the face of Regime suppression, intrigue scenes as montages fit the bill.

The Signal works the same way in these scenes, mechanically. It's just assumed that the Signal is on in short bursts over a long period of time and that Receivers are synchronizing their use of subroutines when they know the Signal will be up.





STRATEGY

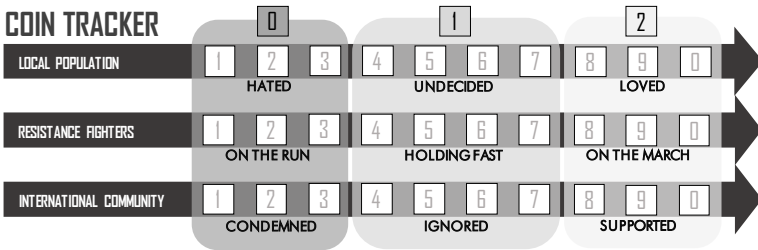


Changes to the War Room

The War Room sheet, the primary tracker of a SIGMATA campaign's progress, has undergone a number of changes, clarifications, and improvements. We'll be spending much of this chapter talking about these changes and what they mean for your campaigns.

WAR ROOM

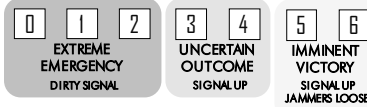
COIN TRACKER



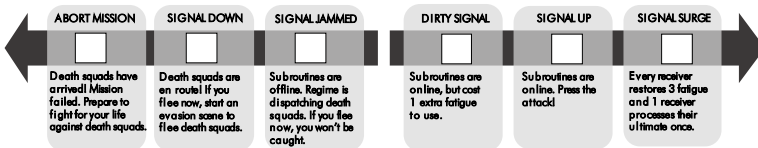
STRATEGIC PHASES



SIGNAL STRENGTH = 0 + 1 + 2



SIGNAL WARS



RESISTANCE FACTION LOYALTY

FAITH

TRIBULATORS: During **any scene**, move the marker on Signal Wars tracker to the right a number of steps equal to [LOYALTY].

W AVES

PARTY

VANGUARDS: During **evasion scenes**, reduce all Resistance danger by [LOYALTY] or add [LOYALTY] hits to move towards navpoints.

W AVES

OLD MEN

MINUTEMEN: During **combat scenes**, reduce all Resistance danger by [LOYALTY] or apply [LOYALTY] hits to enemy forces.

W AVES

MAKERS

DARK MONEY: During **intrigue scenes**, reduce all Receiver danger by [LOYALTY] or add [LOYALTY] hits towards fulfilling agendas.

W AVES

SIGMATA

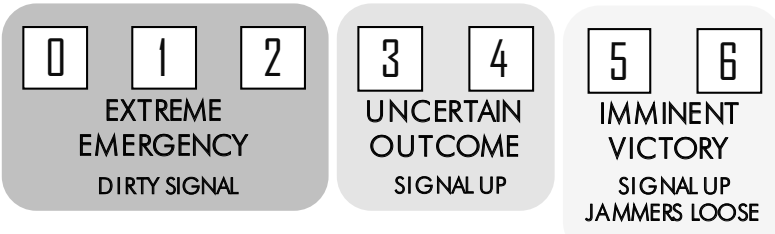
COIN Tracker

The only change to the COIN Tracker is that it is now visually more clear how the rating of each of the individual strategic pillars translates into the Resistance's overall Signal Strength. Ratings of 0-3 add 0 points, ratings of 4-7 add 1 point, and ratings of 8-10 add 2 points.

Signal Strength

The Signal Strength tracker has also been visually adjusted to make it more clear how COIN Tracker points influence Signal Strength. It also features extra information regarding how the strategic state of the Resistance (i.e. extreme emergency, uncertain outcome, and imminent victory) influences what actually happens during play in structured scenes.

$$\text{SIGNAL STRENGTH} = \boxed{0} + \boxed{1} + \boxed{2}$$

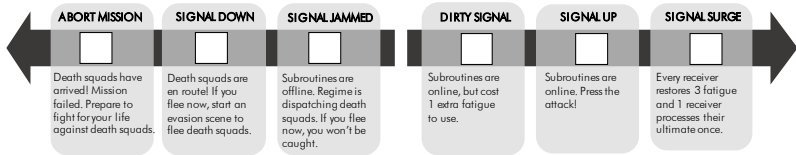


We see that under “extreme emergency,” it says “dirty signal.” This means that if the Resistance ignites the Signal, it’s weak and full of interference. Under “uncertain outcome” it says “signal up.” This means that if the Resistance ignites the Signal, it’s healthy and strong. Lastly, we see under “imminent victory” that not only is the Signal strong, but that the Regime has called in Jammers to quell the uprising. They enter the story in this final phase of the campaign. We’ll be elaborating more about what “dirty signal” and “signal up” means shortly.

Signal Wars Tracker

The Signal Wars Tracker, which is used during a structured scene when the Signal is ignited, has undergone a dramatic change that adds a lot of flavor, excitement, and tension to scenes. Every step on this tracker now has a title and text that describes how it influences the tactical situation on the ground.

SIGNAL WARS

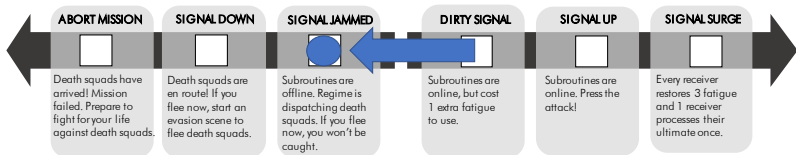


It still works fundamentally the same as it did in TSKF, but the GM will be using a single marker on this tracker, moving it left or right depending on how the Signal Wars behind the scenes are going. When the Signal is first ignited, the GM will place the marker on “dirty signal” if the campaign is in the “extreme emergency” phase. Otherwise, the marker will be placed on “signal up” when the signal is first ignited.

At the beginning of every turn (after the initial turn that the Signal is active), the GM rolls a D6. If the result is equal to or less than the Signal Strength, the Signal gets stronger (moving to the right). If the result is greater than the Signal Strength, the Signal gets weaker (moving to the left).

In the example below, the Signal Wars Tracker was on “dirty signal,” but after the GM rolled a D6 and got a result higher than the campaign’s Signal Strength, they were forced to reduce the Signal Wars tracker one level, moving the marker to “signal jammed,” which is exactly what it sounds like.

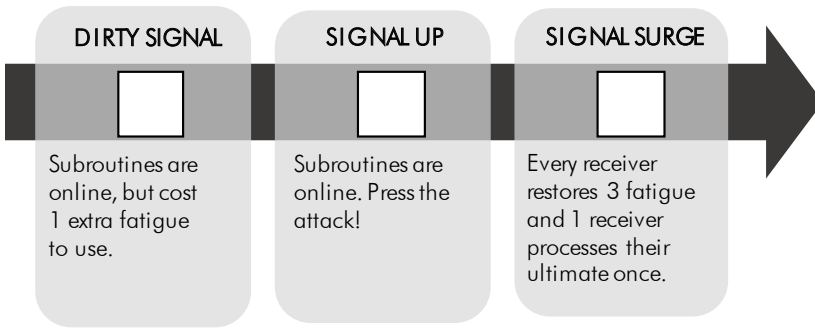
SIGNAL WARS



As a reminder: Receivers only reduce their danger to 0 the very first time the Signal is ignited during a scene. If during the course of Signal Wars, the Signal goes out but then returns again, Receivers do not again reduce their danger. That's a one time event during a single structured scene.

Tracker Steps

Every step on the Signal Wars Tracker now has a title (e.g. "dirty signal") as well as rules that explain what that means mechanically and sometimes narratively. In this section, we'll work through what every step means, starting with the right side of the Signal Wars Tracker, when the Signal is actually up.



Dirty Signal

Dirty signal indicates that the Signal is up, but just barely. Either the closest repeater or pirate radio station is almost out of range or the Regime's SigOps corps is successfully making life miserable for the Resistance radio operators beaconing it out. The Signal is still strong enough for Receivers to use their subroutines, but weak enough where doing so requires extra concentration (i.e. 1 extra point of fatigue). This is not a great spot to be in, for it is just one step away from the Signal going down.

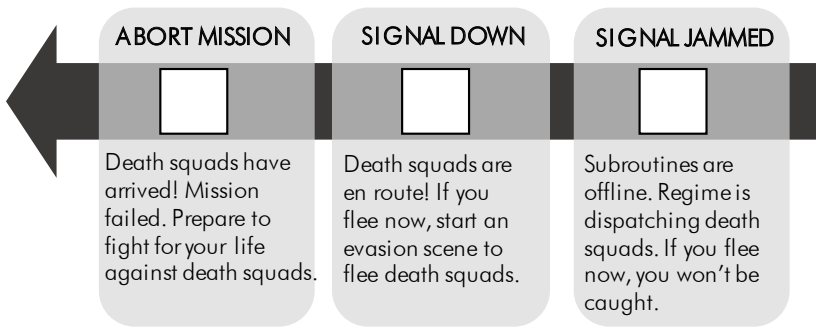
Signal Up

Signal up is the "default" situation of the Signal, as described in TSKF. The Signal is online, it is strong, and the Regime either hasn't realized it yet, hasn't fully mobilized to counter it yet, or can't keep pace with the Resistance's radio operators. It means that Receivers can now use their subroutines at will, without penalty or restraint. Given that Receivers no longer need to process their subroutines before using them, there's no reason to hold back.

Signal Surge

Signal surge indicates that the Signal is very strong and the Regime's SigOps corps in disarray, likely due to internal sabotage or a coordinated Resistance attack on their installations and staff. When the party hits a signal surge, every Receiver reduces their fatigue by 3 and 1 Receiver (chosen democratically) gets to check one of their Ultimate bars. If the party is already at the signal surge step, but succeed again when the GM rolls a D6, they get another signal surge.

Next, we'll discuss the left side of the Signal Wars Tracker, when things start to go south for the Resistance.



Signal Jammed

Signal jammed indicates exactly what it sounds like. SigOps has figured out that the Signal is up, likely due to the detection blades available to them. They've found the frequency broadcasting the Signal and have started to jam it. The Signal is effectively down, meaning that Receivers can no longer use their subroutines. Worse, SigOps has triangulated where the Resistance is likely operating and has dispatched Death Squads (Freedom Fist special forces) to neutralize their opposition. If the party decides to abort their current mission, they are permitted to flee without issue. They still suffer the strategic consequences of mission failure, but won't have to worry about contending with Death Squads if they abort immediately.

Signal Down

Signal down indicates that the repeater or pirate radio station broadcasting the Signal has been destroyed or compromised by the Regime. It is possible that the Resistance will be able to get it back online or fire up a redundant system, but things are looking grim. The Signal

remains down, but by continuing to fight instead of flee, the party is now in a situation where if they choose to abort their mission, the GM will abruptly end the current scene to kick off an evasion scene where the party is fleeing the overwhelming force that is chasing them.

Technically, the party has “completed a structured scene” if the GM transitions the scene to fleeing Death Squads, thereby reducing their fatigue by 5. When being chased by Death Squads, the Signal cannot be ignited and the party cannot withdraw, but Receivers can still reboot (assuming they haven’t done so already). This evasion scene doesn’t “end” when someone ends their turn at 10+. That just determines who dies (assuming they cannot reboot).

Abort Mission

When the Signal Wars Tracker hits this step, the current mission is over, period. It’s now time for the GM to put together a combat scene where the party will need to fight for their lives to get out alive. They’ll be up against the Regime’s most experienced combatants and are most definitely outgunned. The party should have fled before this moment arrived, but perhaps they gambled on another round because they were so close to victory. None of that matters now. The only way out is through.

As was the case in fleeing Death Squads, fighting them means that the Signal cannot be ignited, the party cannot withdraw, but Receivers can still reboot. GM’s are encouraged to put together a challenging (but not impossible) fight. Be mindful of whether or not the party has ordnance before assigning threats.

Withdrawing From A Scene

TSKF had draconian rules when the party attempts to flee a scene they are losing. Those rules no longer apply and instead, we rely on the “signal jammed,” “signal down,” and “abort mission” steps on the Signal Wars Tracker to determine what withdrawal looks like.

The party can choose to flee a scene at any time during that scene (after the GM goes) so long as they are at the “signal jammed” step or better on the Signal Wars Tracker. The only caveat is that if a character is at 10+ when that decision is made, that character either must reboot or they are killed/captured/compromised. It’s best for the party to make sure that none of their allies are at 10+ before they retreat.



Faction Loyalty and Waves

Faction loyalty and waves works fundamentally the same, with a few changes. Dark Money, Minute Men, and Vanguarders can be used to either reduce every characters' danger by a value equal to Loyalty *or* apply a number of hits equal to Loyalty towards the scene's agendas, navpoints, or threats, depending on the scene type.

RESISTANCE FACTION LOYALTY

FAITH	1	2	3	4	5	WAVES
TRIBULATORS: During any scene , move the marker on Signal Wars tracker to the right a number of steps equal to [LOYALTY].						

PARTY	1	2	3	4	5	WAVES
VANGUARDS: During evasion scenes , reduce all Resistance danger by [LOYALTY] or add [LOYALTY] hits to move towards navpoints.						

OLD MEN	1	2	3	4	5	WAVES
MINUTEMEN: During combat scenes , reduce all Resistance danger by [LOYALTY] or apply [LOYALTY] hits to enemy forces.						

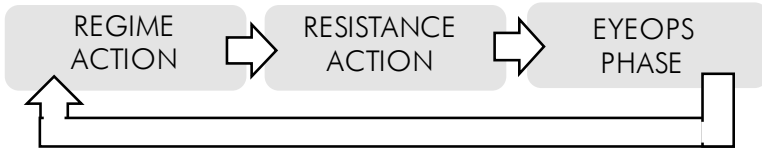
MAKERS	1	2	3	4	5	WAVES
DARK MONEY: During intrigue scenes , reduce all Receiver danger by [LOYALTY] or add [LOYALTY] hits towards fulfilling agendas.						

Tribulators have been adjusted to the new Signal Wars rules. When you use this wave, you move the marker on the Signal Wars Tracker a number of steps to the right equal to Loyalty. This wave cannot be used if a scene has already arrived at the "Abort Mission" step, but otherwise, it can be used at will.

Strategic Phases

RTS introduces a new way to think about and organize the campaign's larger conflict. Countering Regime Actions and supporting Resistance Actions still comprise a majority of a campaign's mission. However, instead of Loyalty Checks resulting in either Faction Favors or Faction Fallout missions, there is now an "EyeOps phase." During this phase, the GM chooses which one of the EyeOps branches (i.e. SigOps, PsyOps, CI, or a Troop Surge) to disrupt Resistance operations, and then the players choose one of the Resistance support factions (i.e. Faith, Old Men, Makers, or Party) as a counter.

STRATEGIC PHASES



After each of these phases, the GM should give the player characters a session of downtime to stoke relationships and discuss the evolving conflict. Regime Actions and Resistance Actions remain unchanged from how they are done in TSKF, so we'll spend the rest of this section talking the moves both the GM and players make during the EyeOps Phase. This information has been placed on the following two pages to make it easier to reference when it comes time for the table to manage the EyeOps Phase.





EyeOps Phase: Regime Moves

During the EyeOps Phase, the GM goes first, selecting either CI, PsyOps, SigOps, or Troop Surge to disrupt Resistance operations during the following phase.

CI: the Regime's counter intelligence branch has made a major breakthrough thanks to investigation, interrogation, and expert analysis, kicking the Regime's strategy into overdrive. The next Resistance Action will instead be an additional Regime Action. The Resistance is put on the defensive and the player characters will be tasked with preventing all the dominos from falling.

PsyOps: the Regime's psychological operations branch is making deep inroads into infiltrating, agitating, and counter-recruiting the Resistance's support factions. The GM trigger a loyalty check against 2 factions. For each success (i.e. the GM rolls equal to or less than that faction's Loyalty), the party gains 1 wave for that faction. It is then time for the party to determine if they would like to either embark on a Faction Fallout mission or a Faction Favor mission (assuming one is available after the Loyalty check). They can only choose one to support one faction, so they must choose wisely.

SigOps: the Regime's signal operations branch has saturated the area of operation with jamming devices and has compromised all local towers, repeaters, and stations. The Signal cannot be broadcast during the next Regime Action and Resistance Action. The party will have to rely heavily on ordnance, faction waves, and their Partisan allies until the next EyeOps phase.

Troop Surge: resources normally allocated to EyeOps branches are instead used to facilitate a Freedom Fist troop surge. A combination of new weapons and hardware, fresh cadets, veterans of foreign wars transferred to the American front, and new regional leadership has emboldened the Fist. At the beginning of every round of combat, every threat that has not been neutralized reduces 1 hit scored against it.

The GM can never pick the same option twice in a row.

EyeOps Phase: Resistance Moves

Once the GM has selected the Regime move, the players get to choose the Resistance's move, leveraging the Faith, the Makers, the Old Men, or the Party.

The Faith: SigOps did not account for the tenacity or the technical acumen of the faithful, nor did they realize how many Resistance spies and sympathizers are in their midst. If the GM chose a SigOps signal blackout, the party is able to ignite the signal (locked in at Signal Up status) for a number of turns equal to the Faith's Loyalty. This can occur only one time during the subsequent Regime Action or Resistance Action. Otherwise, the party gains -1 each Signal Wars check made by the GM, a number of times equal to the Faith's Loyalty.

The Makers: Normally stingy with their money, the Makers agree to fully finance a series of operations. Add the Maker's Loyalty rating - 2 to the Loyalty rating of all other factions for the purposes of utilizing waves until next EyeOps phase. During the next phase, Minutemen will hit much harder with new ordnance, Vanguard's will have far greater reach and technology at their disposal, and Tribulators will likely spike the Signal to a surge every time.

The Old Men: The Old Men requisition ordnance stolen from a Regime convoy or weapons depot to the party. The party gains a number of ordnance points equal to the Old Men's Loyalty rating. Unlike ordnance that is typically captured during structured scenes, this ordnance is neither abandoned nor requisitioned back to the Resistance. This is heavy military hardware the party gets to hold onto, documenting on their character sheets until they use it up. They decide democratically what ordnance is selected and who gets to hold onto it.

The Party: The Party has reached out and established solidarity with new groups, and has hardened the anti-Regime resolve of fence-sitters. If the GM chose a CI breakthrough, this move will cancel it out. Otherwise, the next Regime Action will be will instead be an additional Resistance Action.

The players can never pick the same option twice in a row.



Upgrade Points (UPs)

Upgrade points are earned the same way they were earned in TSKF (Sum of faction Loyalty x Number of scenes played). However, the cost in UPs to make character improvements have been balanced and updated to reflect RTS's new rules and content:

New Library.....	30
New Peripheral.....	15
New Subroutine or Talent.....	20
Upgrade a Subroutine or Talent.....	10 x New Rating
Upgrade a Tactic.....	5 x New Rating
New Blade or Training.....	30

Ordnance Points

Ordnance captured from the enemy gets reallocated back to the Resistance, but the party can get their own Ordnance from the Old Men by choosing to utilize them during the EyeOps phase. These points can be used to purchase ordnance at the following rates:

Chemical Laser	3
Chemical Laser Reload.....	1
Grenade (x2) or Tear Gas Grenade (x2)	1
LMG	3
LMG Reload.....	1
RPG	1
Sniper Rifle.....	1
Streetsweeper.....	1

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Deal with it.



Block Wars

This section introduces the new concept of “Block Wars,” an alternative way to structure SIGMATA campaigns. The Block Wars sheet is a tool to help ground an RTS campaign in sense of time and place, working best to represent sustained urban warfare in a city where the Regime and the Resistance are fighting tooth and nail to assume control of strategic positions one block at a time. It is a highly militarized approach to managing a game that is already highly militarized, and remains completely optional. However, you can also use the Block Wars sheet to simply create a “strategic map” for your campaign, while ignoring all the rules that are printed on the sheet.

A blank Block Wars sheet is demonstrated below. The key feature is in the center... a diamond shaped grid of 16 nodes which reflect strategically important locations within a city and its outskirts.

REGIME MOVES

1 – Airstrike
Add 4 Casualties, minus 1 for each Anti-Aircraft block captured.

2 – Full Offensive
A Freedom Fist wave attacks a Resistance node. 50% chance of 2nd wave, 20% chance of 3rd wave. If the party retreats, the node is forfeited to the Regime, breaking a block.

BLOCK KEY

Signal Tower
-1 to Signal Wars checks by GM

Capital
Gain an extra Resistance move each phase.

Utility
Gain 2 faction waves each phase.

Anti-Aircraft
Reduces airstrike casualties by 1.

Stronghold
Reduces 2nd and 3rd wave chances by 10%. Gain 2 Ordnance each phase.

Supply Node
If part of a block, gain 1 faction wave. For every 2 captured, reduce airstrike casualties by 1.

NODE KEY

○ REGIME NODE
□ SUPPLY NODE
● RESISTANCE NODE
◆ RESISTANCE BLOCK

MOVES

CASUALTIES

If casualties reach 20, the Resistance has been crushed.

BLOCK WARS

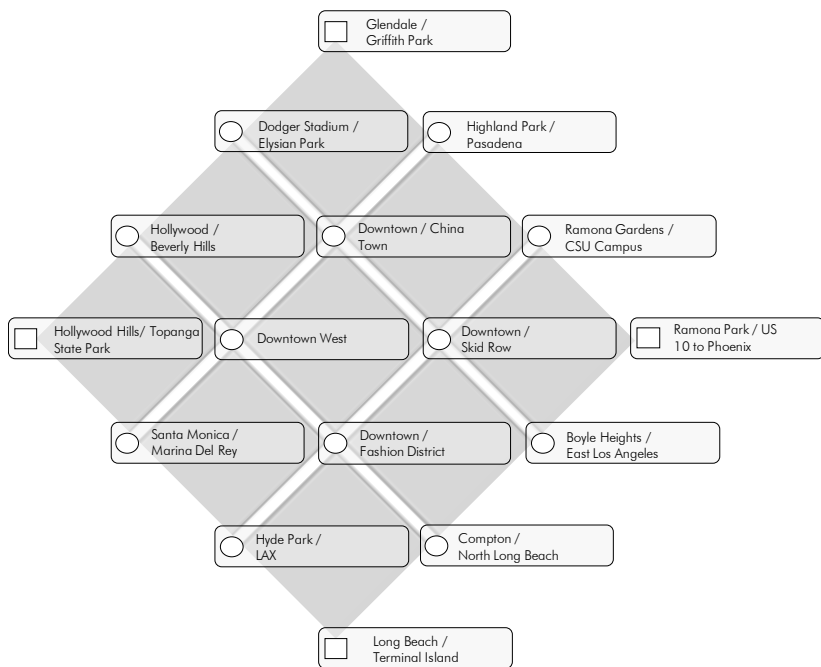
SIGMATA

These nodes are organized into “blocks,” signified by the gray diamonds, which represents the geography and territory between nodes. The white space between nodes represents the most direct path, or the most strategically important path, between nodes.

The grid is meant to be a “conceptual map” more than a geographically accurate one. That means that the top node

isn't necessarily the northern-most node, and the bottom node isn't necessarily the southern-most node. The same can be said with east and west.

What the grid allows a GM to do is break down the geography of their campaign down into 16 strategically important locations. Here is an example that breaks up the city of Los Angeles into strategically important locations.



If you do nothing else but fill out locations in the grid, you now have a conceptual map that can be used to visually and narratively set the geographical contours of an ongoing campaign set in Los Angeles. As the Resistance takes territory from the Regime, or loses territory to the Regime, this can be reflected on the grid. On a smaller scale, as the party navigates from node to node (e.g. from their safehouse to the location of their next mission), you now have a map of sorts to reflect the locations (and dangers) they'll have to travel through.

Forward, we'll be introducing the remainder of the Block War sheet's features and optional rules. As always, use whatever you find to be helpful, fun, or interesting. If the rules we'll introduce don't suit your group, or the type of struggle you'd like to play, feel free to change the sheet to suit your own purposes.



Nodes and Blocks

Before we discuss the idea of taking and holding territory on the Block Wars sheet, it is useful to describe a playtest scenario that led to the construction of the sheet in the first place. This prompt describes a brief campaign called “The Battle of Los Angeles.”

After 3 years of bloody conflict across the US, the Northern, Southern, and Eastern Flanks of the American Insurgency have all fallen to the Regime. The few fighters remaining in those regions have either fled to the wilderness, or are steadily making their way to Los Angeles, where the Resistance is making a desperate last stand against the Freedom Fist juggernaut.

LA is an urban war zone, shelled into a withered skeleton of its former self and suffering from one of the worst humanitarian crises ever seen on American soil. Millions have fled the city, but millions with no where else to go still remain. The alternative is being sent to a processing center, all of which have become de facto death camps on account of administrative negligence, incompetence, lack of oversight, and calculated cruelty. If living in the ruins of Los Angeles without power, potable water, nor a reliable food supply was the worst of their problems, the Resistance might have more hope. However, the conflict has evolved in a terrible way.

Beleaguered by years of conflict, the Regime is fighting like a scared animal, despite its numerous advantages. The war has ravaged the American economy and made an early grave for a majority of the Fist’s fighting elite. With little more than battalions of demoralized 3rd string conscripts at its disposal, the Fist can only make gains against the Resistance at significant cost. Instead of incurring these costs or brokering a cease-fire with the Resistance, the Regime has resorted to an utterly vile air war, dropping barrel bombs and chlorine gas on population centers under Resistance control. Hospitals, schools, and villages aren’t collateral damage; they are the Regime’s intended target.

Many in the International Community express their outrage, but few are interested in a bloody, costly, and destabilizing intervention action on American shores. The last of the Resistance is backed against a wall and facing the absolute destruction of movement, their comrades, and their kin. They are truly alone.

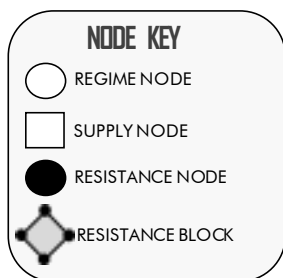
In this campaign, inspired by events that occurred during the Syrian Civil War (and are still occurring), the Resistance is fighting an urban battle while both their strongholds

and civilian population centers are being bombed daily by Regime air support. The Resistance must move fast to capture the city and its outskirts, capture anti-air weaponry to stifle the bombing, and establish supply lines so that the influx of weapon, fighters, and resources outpaces their daily attrition.

Your utilization of Block Wars may involve a completely different scenario, but keep this one in mind as we introduce the various elements on the sheet, starting with the Node Key.

The Node Key

This feature on the Block Wars sheet tells you what each of the nodes on the grid mean.



At a high level, every node on the grid that is not filled-in is considered Regime territory, while every node on the grid that is filled-in is considered Resistance territory. Block Wars should start with a single node filled in, representing either the last bastion of the Resistance in this sector, or the new foothold or safehouse they've established in Regime territory. This single filled-in node should be chosen from one of the nodes on the outermost ring of the grid, but not be one of the supply nodes.

A **supply node** is a special type of node that exists at the far top, bottom, left, and right of the grid. We'll go into what this type of node does soon. For now, you should simply grok the idea that a supply node is a path for new fighters, weapons, and supplies to get back into the city and flow to the Resistance there.

When the Resistance has captured four nodes comprising a gray diamond on the grid, they've established a **Resistance block**. Not only do they control each node, but they control all the territory (and resources) in the geographical space in between. The more blocks the Resistance takes over, the stronger they are, which brings up the **Block Key**.

The Block Key

This feature on the Block Wars sheet tells you what it means when you take over a specific block.



BLOCK KEY



Signal Tower
-1 to Signal Wars checks by GM



Anti-Aircraft
Reduces airstrike casualties by 1.



Capital
Gain an extra Resistance move each phase.



Stronghold
Reduces 2nd and 3rd wave chances by 10%. Gain 2 Ordnance each phase.

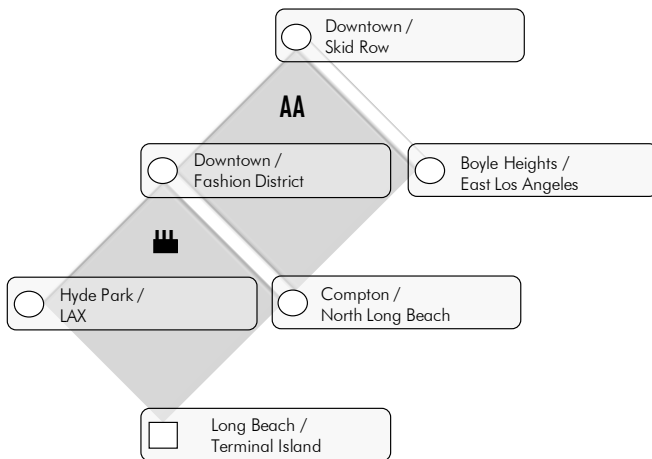


Utility
Gain 2 faction waves each phase.



Supply Node
If part of a block, gain 1 faction wave. For every 2 captured, reduce airstrike casualties by 1.

When the Resistance takes over a block, they gain the benefit of the major resource contained within that block. Pay attention to the icon denoting each resource in the Block Key. Before a Block Wars campaign begins, the GM will place these icons on the grid. Specifically, there will be one icon per gray block. Below, we see an example of two blocks that include icons... one for a utility (if the bottom four nodes are captured) and one for an anti-aircraft installation (if the top four nodes are captured).



During play, if the Resistance captures the four nodes that surround either of these icons, they gain their benefit, as denoted by the Block Key. We'll return to what these resources do shortly, but first, we need to introduce how and when the Resistance moves on the grid and takes over (or loses) territory.

Regime Moves

During Block Wars, the GM makes a move and then the players make 3 moves. GM moves are very different from player moves and we are going to start with them first.

The Regime has two moves in Block Wars: Airstrike or Full Offensive. An airstrike is designed to break the Resistance by bombing its strongholds and the civilian population centers that the Resistance is hiding within. A full offensive is designed to take over a Resistance node, to break the Resistance's control of a block, or crush the Resistance outright if it is their last remaining node.

REGIME MOVES

1 – Airstrike

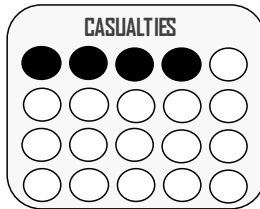
Add 4 Casualties, minus 1 for each Anti-Aircraft block captured.

2 – Full Offensive

A Freedom Fist wave attacks a Resistance node. 50% chance of 2nd wave, 20% chance of 3rd wave. If the party retreats, the node is forfeited to the Regime, breaking a block.

Airstrike

To understand how punishing airstrikes are, we must first introduce the concept of casualties.




If casualties reach 20, the Resistance has been crushed.

Casualties represents just how much death and destruction the Resistance can withstand from airstrikes until it is completely crushed and no longer able to operate in the city or region at all. Airstrikes inflict 4 casualties per phase when chosen by the GM, and when the Resistance suffers 20 or more casualties, the Resistance is soundly defeated.

Note that casualties here are representative of overall destruction, not the actual quantity of people harmed. Each casualty may represent dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of people killed by airstrikes, depending on the scale of the conflict you are representing with Block Wars.





In the game's fiction, an airstrike should be absolutely horrifying, destructive, and indiscriminate. Buildings tumble, filling the streets with choking and blinding dust for several blocks. Fires burn, sirens wail, and the screaming and crying of both the injured, the trapped, and those mourning the dead fill the air. Even if the player characters are not present at the site of a bombing, they'll sense its effects reverberating throughout the city.

Full Offensive

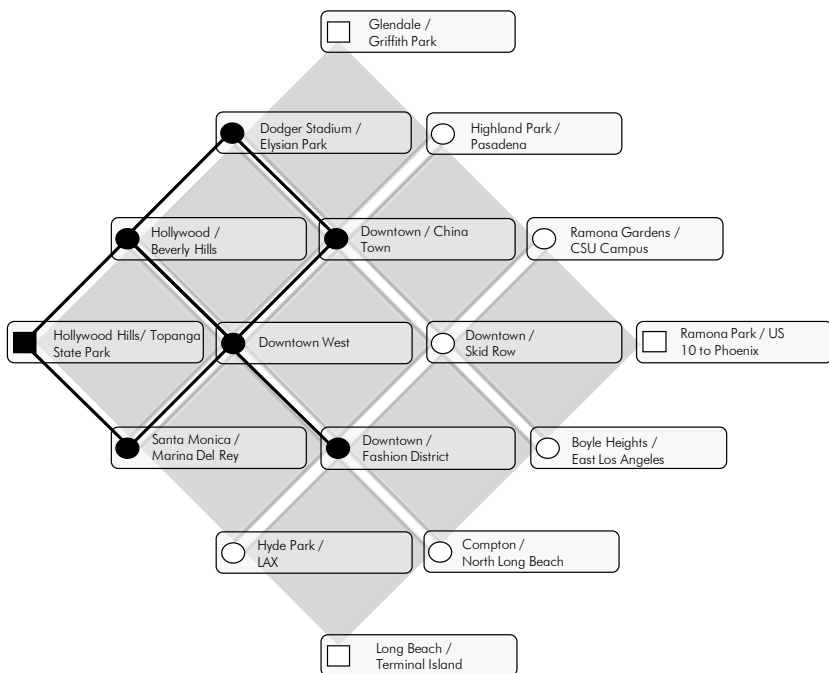
The Regime will only send in its ground troops and commit to a full offensive if it is forced to. In the late stages of insurgency, whether the Regime is on the cusp of victory or defeat, its troops are simply too beleaguered to fight and take ground themselves. However, when the Resistance is gaining ground rapidly, or has established anti-aircraft capabilities, or threatens to overrun a strategic location that the Regime would rather re-capture than bomb (e.g. a power plant), the Regime launches a full ground offensive to take a position back.

A full offensive is a wave (or multiple waves) of infantry, armor, and air support, used to attack and take back an individual Resistance node. The players' Receivers and Partisans will be required to take part in this battle, helping to fend off the onslaught. If the Regime fails and their offensive is repelled, the Resistance maintains the node. If the Regime is victorious (i.e. our heroes are killed or forced to withdrawal), the Regime takes back the node. Further, if this node is part of a Resistance block, the Resistance loses this block's resource until it is taken back.

What does a full offensive look like? As was discussed in the combat section, there's no optimal size for how big or numerous the opposition should be. A huge battle is occurring, for sure, but our heroes might be engaged in just one of many skirmishes happening simultaneously in different places throughout the geographical turf comprising the node. Generally speaking, a GM should not be afraid to make the opposition numerous, well armed, and supported by a handful of vehicles. Nor should they be afraid to give our heroes ordnance and a handful of reinforcements, given that they are likely fighting alongside Resistance fighters. All that being said, there is a very important consideration for everyone at the table when a full offensive starts: they happen in waves. If the first wave is defeated, there is a 50% chance that another one

arrives immediately (5 or less on a D10). If a second wave is defeated, there is a 20% chance that a third and final wave arrives immediately (2 or less on a D10). Characters do recover 5 fatigue between each wave, but the reality is, no one at the table, including the GM, knows for sure how hard this battle will be until it is over. It might be decisively won in a single scene, or it might be a bloody slog over the course of three consecutive combat scenes, potentially forcing the players (and the Resistance) to cede the node.

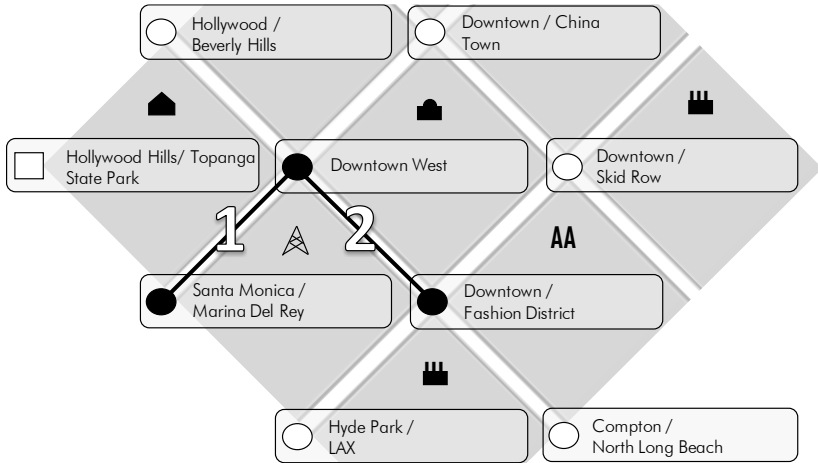
Which node should the GM launch their full offensive on? Any node controlled by the Resistance is in play, but the GM should focus on breaking up important Resistance blocks to diminish their overall power. In the example below, the GM would be wisest to attack the “Downtown West” node, which, if taken, would shatter the Resistance’s grip on two blocks. The Resistance would lose the benefit of two resources they acquired... a stronghold and an anti-aircraft installation. Until they take it back, that is.



A final note on full offensives... the GM may never select a full offensive two phases in a row.

Resistance Moves

After the GM decides on and carries out a Regime move, it's now the Resistance's turn to make some moves. Unlike Regime moves, which are prescribed, a Resistance move is two things: a proposed change to the grid and then a mission to make to make it happen. Consider the example below.



This Block Wars campaign began with the Resistance having a foothold in the “Santa Monica / Marina Del Rey” node. During their first move, the party decided that they wanted to claim the “Downtown West” node. Either the GM had an idea in mind on what it would take to do this, or the players and GM discussed their approach as a table. Either way, the party spearheaded a mission to take this node under Resistance control, which likely played out over the course of 2 to 3 structured scenes. Once they accomplished that mission, the GM filled in the new node and drew a line connecting those two nodes. The characters then took some downtime in between planning sessions for the next Resistance move.

During their second move, they chose to target the “Downtown / Fashion District” node. Just like the node they captured before, the table played out a mission that either the GM had in mind, or the table developed together. The players were successful, so the GM filled in the node and connected the nodes with a line.

Where should the Resistance move next? Well, there's a few considerations they should keep in mind. First, the Resistance gets 3 moves, so the players should keep this in

mind as they plot their course. Second, there are constraints on where they can move, potentially limiting their choices. Third, they need to figure out what they are trying to accomplish in the short term. We'll break these down a bit more.

3 Resistance Moves Per Regime Move

Between the Regime's airstrikes or full offensives, the Resistance gets to make 3 consecutive moves, potentially going on three entire missions (and taking 3 sessions of downtime to stoke relationships afterward), before the next Regime attack on their territory.

Move Constraints

The Resistance can make a move towards *any* Regime node that is diagonally adjacent to *any* Resistance node. In the example on the preceding page, every single Regime node shown is technically in play. Keep in mind, the Resistance doesn't have to make their move originating from the last node they captured. In the narrative, it should be assumed that the party can travel relatively freely between any and all lines that have been drawn on the grid after taking over nodes.

Move Strategy

To be victorious in the Block War, the Resistance needs to take over the entire grid and do so before Regime airstrikes increase the Resistance's casualties to 20. If you do the math, airstrikes will destroy the Resistance entirely in a handful of turns. To even last long enough to take over the entire grid, the Resistance is going to have to capture and hold blocks that make airstrikes less punishing. That means capturing blocks with anti-aircraft installations as well as capturing blocks with supply lines so that new Partisans joining the fight can keep up with attrition. Only when they've slowed the bleeding should they set their eyes on other objectives.

On the following page, we'll finally discuss in detail what each of the resources from the Block Key provide for the Resistance when they are captured. This will not only inform the Resistance's approach to Block Wars, but it will also inform the GM where to best apply the Regime's full offensives.




Block Resources


Below, we walk through the resources available for capture during Block War campaigns.

AA **Anti-Aircraft**
Reduces airstrike casualties by 1.

Anti-Aircraft Installations: Capturing this block means that the Resistance has gained access to an embankment of fixed turrets with quadmount .50 cal machine guns or surface-to-air missile (SAM) racks. There are likely portable anti-aircraft systems, too, including shoulder-fired FIM-92 Stinger missiles and M163 Vulcan Air Defense System vehicles. For each AA installation the Resistance holds, the casualties caused by a Regime airstrike is reduced by 1.

 **Capital**
Gain an extra Resistance move each phase.

Capital Building: Capturing this block means that the Resistance has taken over a building or series of buildings of immense strategic, symbolic, and defensive value. This might be a city's or state's capital building, or a public monument or square of historic significance. Holding this position gives the Resistance an air of legitimacy in terms of optics, but it's also so central to municipal operations that taking it away from the Regime is a major disruption. So long as the Resistance holds the capital, they take 4 moves each phase instead of 3.

 **Signal Tower**
-1 to Signal Wars checks by GM

Signal Tower: Capturing this block means that the Resistance has taken over one of the largest broadcast antenna clusters in the city or region, along with the television and radio studios that leverage them. That's not to say that SigOps cannot disrupt or even overpower Signal broadcast from this tower, but it will be more difficult for them to do so when they try. For each Signal Tower held by the Resistance, the result of the D6 roll made by the GM during Signal Wars is reduced by 1.



Stronghold

Reduces 2nd and 3rd wave chances by 10%. Gain 2 Ordnance each phase.

Stronghold: Capturing this block means that the Resistance has taken over a large Freedom Fist precinct or military base, and now has access to its extensive arsenal, intelligence files, and its highly defendable architecture. For each Stronghold held by the Resistance, the chances of both a 2nd wave (50%) and 3rd wave (20%) during a full offensive is reduced by 10%.



Supply Node

If part of a block, gain 1 faction wave. For every 2 captured, reduce airstrike casualties by 1.

Supply Node: This node represents a geographical location that can be considered a major point of ingress, where weapons, cash, medical supplies, and fighters can flow into the grid. It could be a major transportation hub (e.g. a port, a railroad station, etc.) or terrain that is extremely difficult for the Regime to control (e.g. desert, mountains, swamplands, etc.). For each Supply Node held by the Resistance, they gain 1 faction wave of their choice every phase. In addition, for every 2 of these sites they hold, they reduce airstrike casualties by 1. It's not that they are deterring airstrikes so much as ushering in medical supplies and fresh fighters to outpace attrition.



Utility

Gain 2 faction waves each phase.

Utility: Capturing this block means that the Resistance has taken a major utility, such as a coal plant, nuclear power plant, hydroelectric dam, oil refinery, or similar. It won't operate at full efficiency by any means, but it is enough to literally keep the lights on in important Resistance safehouses, hospitals, radio stations, and faction encampments, as well as generate resources that can be exchanged for cash with foreign powers or even regional neighbors. For each Utility held by the Resistance, they gain 2 faction waves of their choice each phase.





What about the War Room?

The War Room still comes into play when playing a Block Wars campaign, but a lot of it depends on when and how you use the Block Wars framework.

The Signal Wars Tracker

A Block Wars campaign still relies on the Signal Wars tracker every time the party chooses to ignite the Signal.

The COIN Tracker and Signal Strength

A Block Wars campaign does not use the COIN tracker. The fog of war and media blackout surrounding such a relentless, close-quarters battle, and the rapid cadence in which missions are undergone (almost daily) means that there simply isn't enough time or space to engage in the battle for hearts and minds.

If you begin play using the Block Wars framework, the COIN tracker is ignored entirely and Signal Strength remains fixed at 3 throughout the duration of the campaign. If an ongoing TSKF campaign shifts into a Block War midstream, the Signal Strength remains fixed at whatever it was when the move to Block Wars began. Capturing signal towers does effectively increase Signal Strength, just not directly.

Strategic Phases

A Block War campaign does not use the framework of Regime Actions, Resistance Actions, and EyeOps Phase. It instead revolves around 1 Regime Move and 3 Resistance Moves.

Factions and Loyalty

Factions still exist in a Block Wars campaign, primarily as waves. However, Loyalty scores will not fluctuate during play, and there will be no Loyalty checks, Faction Favors, or Faction Fallout. Given how desperate the Resistance involved in a Block War is, the factions on the ground remain as thick as thieves. They'll be plenty of time to tear each other apart when they aren't being shelled.

If you begin play using the Block Wars framework, the Loyalty of every faction is fixed at 3, with 1 wave each. If an ongoing TSKF campaign shifts into a Block War midstream, the current Loyalty of each faction remains fixed, and however many waves for each was available is what the players have to work with until they get more.

Block Builder

It's time to build your grid. Let's do this from the top.

1. Determine where your Block Wars will take place. Is it a major city, where each node represents a neighborhood? Or is it a region, where every node represents a town or small city?

2. Determine the relevant story details that will influence your campaign's tone, themes, and events. What year is it? How is the overall Resistance movement fairing? What is happening outside of the Block War? Why is this singular battle, or this territory, so central to the Resistance? Is this the Resistance's last stand? Or is the final assault on the Regime's seat of power?

3. Populate the names of the 16 nodes. Remember, it is a conceptual map, not a geographic one, so you can be as squishy as you need to when it comes to North, South, East, and West.

4. Drop an Block Key icon in all 9 gray blocks. In terms of distribution, you should place the following icons in whatever blocks you think make the most sense:

- 1 Capital
- 2 AA Installations
- 2 Signal towers
- 2 Strongholds
- 2 Utilities

5. Refer to the previous page to figure out the Resistance's Signal Strength, the Loyalty of each faction, and how many waves are available for each.

6. Select a node where the Resistance is holed up or has just established a foothold, and fill in the circle. This node can be any node on the outside ring of the grid, but not a supply line.

7. You're all set. Time to introduce the setting to the players and have them build characters (unless of course you were already mid campaign). Kick things off with either an airstrike or a full offensive. Just know that if the players lose that full offensive made against the only node they have, the campaign will have ended *very* early. No pressure.





On Airstrikes against Civilians

What is often perceived as “indiscriminate bombing” or even “collateral damage” is, in fact, targeting civilians centers for the purposes of killing as many of them as possible. The entire history of war is full of incidents where military forces deliberately bombed civilian population centers, from the allied bombing of Dresden, to the nukes dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to the use of napalm on villages in Viet Nam. In the Syrian Civil War context, it is still happening with regularity in Idlib. The Assad regime even uses the grotesque tactic of the “double tap,” where after a city block is bombed, it is bombed again several minutes later, with the goal of exterminating the emergency aid workers (and family members) digging through the rubble to save civilians.

States develop their justification for the mass killing of civilians either during the event or long afterward. For example, a flimsy justification used in defense of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was that an event that killed hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians was done to prevent war with Japan from continuing for years, potentially resulting in a war of attrition that could have killed hundreds of thousands of American soldiers. In the Syrian context, the Assad regime simply declared that the “White Helmets,” the emergency aid workers they were actively targeting, were terrorists in disguise. It is a conspiracy rejected by virtually everyone, save for a very tiny, cynical, delusional, but extremely loud group of fringe Leftists (at least, that’s the political ideology that these genocide apologists *claim*). However, the point of this conspiracy, and many others like it promoted by Assad regime and its handlers, is not to be believed, per se, but just give enough pause for the rest of the world to hesitate long enough that the job can be finished. It’s working.

Block Wars as a campaign framework assumes that the Regime is weak enough, and the international community is numb enough, that the use of airstrikes against civilian population centers is a viable option. Why would the Regime (or a real life regime) bomb civilians if they are “winning?” It’s simple. They haven’t won until the Resistance is completely eradicated and they have likely reached a point where they can’t afford to do this through conventional means. Their coffers are empty because their economy is in shambles. Their troops are too tired, too

ineffective, and too demoralized to take ground themselves. However, if those troops can waltz into a city that has been shelled until it is abandoned by the Resistance, they are much less likely to refuse orders or defect.

So long as there is a lack of national outrage coming from the nations doing the bombing, and a lack of international outrage from outsiders observing the bombing, then military attacks on civilian centers will remain a viable strategy for regimes on the ropes. If you're in the business of excusing any country's bombing of civilians, or spinning conspiracies about those civilians being terrorists or voluntary human shields, or coming up with moral excuses why combatants need to kill non-combatants, do planet Earth a solid: tear out the pages of this book and eat them until you choke and die.

We need to be outraged by the bombings of civilians and not just hit the street when our favorite Iranian imperialist militia-leader gets drone-struck and calling it "anti-imperialism." There are two things which are considerably more effective against airstrikes than outrage, however. Anti-aircraft weaponry and no-fly zones; two things that no resistance movement, let alone a civilian population, can acquire without the aid of international support. This is not a popular topic, nor a simple one, however, because no-fly zones and weapon influxes are almost universally provided by Western countries less interested in civilian deaths and more interested in controlling the facts on the ground.

There are cultural theorists who suggest that this type of intervention only delays a conflict's conclusion. Instead of it ending abruptly and decisively, this act of fostering a "fair fight" where a rebellion actually stands a chance only causes a conflict to extend for years, becoming a war of attrition that kills hundreds of thousands, creates millions of refugees, and destabilizes entire regions. Or, to put it more bluntly, "if only the resistance would die already, we'd have more global stability." Crass as that is, I would bet anything that your favorite cultural theory has said as much.

Intervention hawks have perpetuated international disastrous and non-intervention doves have given tyrants the leeway to perpetuate international disasters. Probably because none of them ever bother to listen to the people on the ground stuck in the middle of armed conflicts.



RECEIVER | PARTISAN

NAME

HANDLE

SURFACE

STORY

RELATIONSHIPS

	IS MY		INVOKED?
			<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/>

RELATIONSHIP TRIGGERS
 Invoke a relationship to gain an automatic 5 successes on your next roll, instead of rolling, when:

- Your **Comrade** scores 0 or less successes.
- Your **Crush** reduces your danger by 3 or more.
- Your **Curiosity** invokes a relationship.
- Your **Grudge**'s danger is \leq half yours, but not 0.
- Your **Inspiration** invokes a library.
- Your **Rival** scores 3 or more successes.
- Your **Ward** reaches 10 or more danger.

COMBAT

EVASION

INTRIGUE

AGGRESSION

+1 progress per success +3, but +3 danger to self.

STORM

RUSH

CONFRONT

BLADES | TRAINING

GUILE

+1 progress per success.

FLANK

SNEAK

SNOOP

JUDGEMENT

-1 danger or -1 fatigue to self per success.

REGROUP

FADE

GEL

VALOR

-1 danger to an ally per success.

SUPPRESS

DENY

SUPPORT

SUBROUTINES | TALENTS

	COST	RATING
	2	
	3	
	2	
	3	
	2	
	3	

ORDNANCE

PERIPHERALS

PERIPHERALS

PERIPHERALS

ULTIMATE

READY

UPS

LIBRARY

LIBRARY

LIBRARY

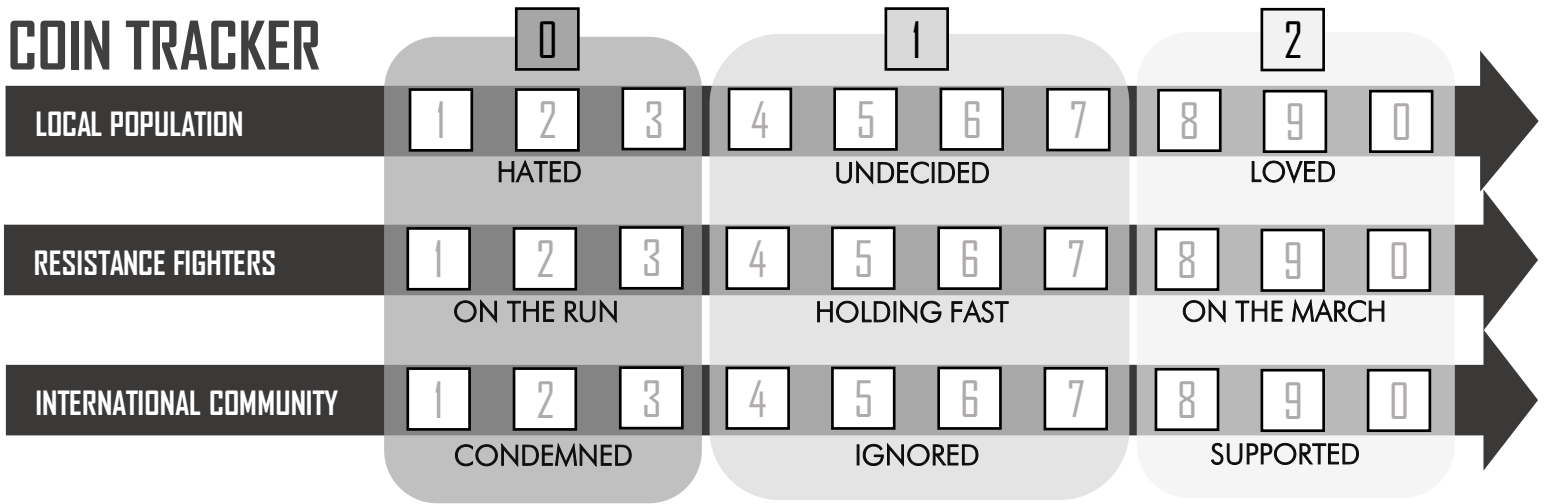
- A **Peripheral** converts 1 batch into 1 success.
- A **Library** counts each rolled 10 as 2 successes.

FATIGUE

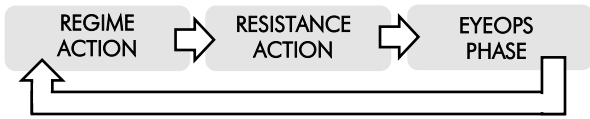
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

WAR ROOM

COIN TRACKER



STRATEGIC PHASES



SIGNAL STRENGTH = 0 + 1 + 2

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
EXTREME EMERGENCY DIRTY SIGNAL			UNCERTAIN OUTCOME SIGNAL UP		IMMINENT VICTORY SIGNAL UP JAMMERS LOOSE	

SIGNAL WARS

ABORT MISSION	SIGNAL DOWN	SIGNAL JAMMED	DIRTY SIGNAL	SIGNAL UP	SIGNAL SURGE
Death squads have arrived! Mission failed. Prepare to fight for your life against death squads.	Death squads are en route! If you flee now, start an evasion scene to flee death squads.	Subroutines are offline. Regime is dispatching death squads. If you flee now, you won't be caught.	Subroutines are online, but cost 1 extra fatigue to use.	Subroutines are online. Press the attack!	Every receiver restores 3 fatigue and 1 receiver processes their ultimate once.

RESISTANCE FACTION LOYALTY

FAITH 1 2 3 4 5

TRIBULATORS: During **any scene**, move the marker on Signal Wars tracker to the right a number of steps equal to [LOYALTY].

WAVES

PARTY 1 2 3 4 5

VANGUARDS: During **evasion scenes**, reduce all Resistance danger by [LOYALTY] or add [LOYALTY] hits to move towards navpoints.

WAVES

OLD MEN 1 2 3 4 5

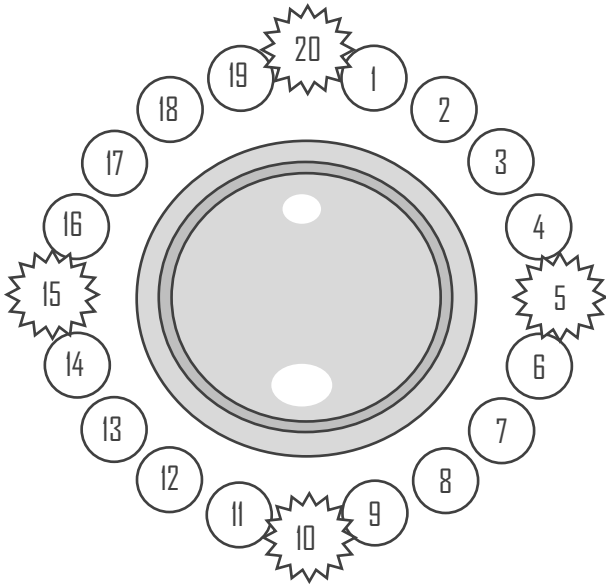
MINUTEMEN: During **combat scenes**, reduce all Resistance danger by [LOYALTY] or apply [LOYALTY] hits to enemy forces.

WAVES

MAKERS 1 2 3 4 5

DARK MONEY: During **intrigue scenes**, reduce all Receiver danger by [LOYALTY] or add [LOYALTY] hits towards fulfilling agendas.

WAVES



START

NAVPOINT

NAVPOINT

NAVPOINT

NAVPOINT

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

START

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

START

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

START

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

START

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

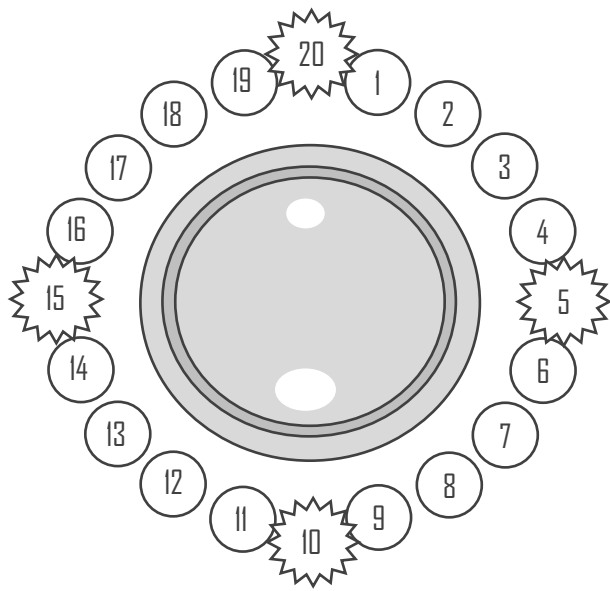
START

= HIT

COMBAT

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

THREATS



Infantry Danger → 3 Weaponry → AR, G Strongpoint → S	Ordnance CL = Chemical Laser G, TG = Grenade, Tear Gas (H/L)MG = Heavy/Light Machinegun RPG = Rocket Propelled Grenade SR = Sniper Rifle SS = Street Sweeper	Not Ordnance AR = Assault Rifle HG = Handgun HR = Hunting Rifle MW = Melee Weapon SG = Shotgun SMG = Submachine
--	---	--

1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

Jammers

Regular 4 vs 2
 Subroutine 8 vs 1
 Ultimate 6 vs all

Jammers unleash their Ultimate any time they take 3+ hits during a single turn, or are struck by a Receiver Ultimate.

1	5
2	6
3	7
4	8

1	5
2	6
3	7
4	8

1	5
2	6
3	7
4	8

Armor

A = APC
 T = Tank

Strongpoint
 MG | Main Gun
 5 vs 2 or 10 vs 1

1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4

Air Support

C = Chopper
 G = Gunship

Strongpoint
 Hellfires | Minigun
 4 vs 2 or 8 vs 1

1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

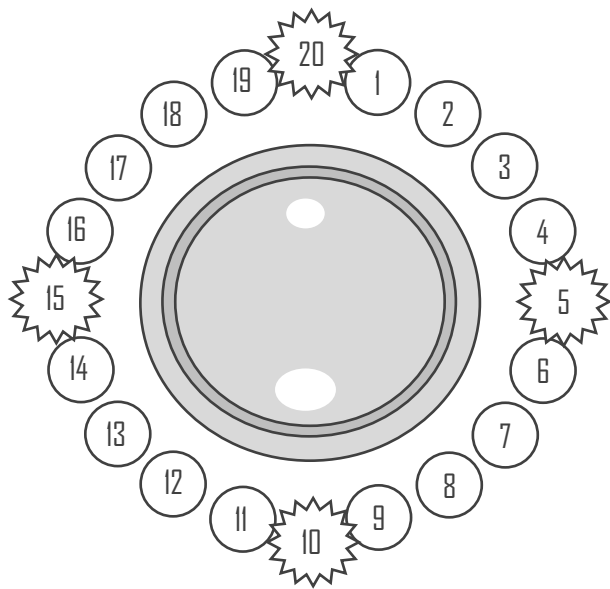
= HIT

INTRIGUE

PRESSURE

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

AGENDAS



AGENDA

Competing ⇄ Sequential

AGENDA

Competing ⇄ Sequential

AGENDA

Competing ⇄ Sequential

AGENDA

Competing ⇄ Sequential

= HIT

FACTION

IDEOLOGY & GREIVANCE

COMPETANCY & LIABILITY

WAVE

FAVORS

+1 LOYALTY, +1 WAVE

+1 LOYALTY, +1 WAVE

+1 LOYALTY, +1 WAVE

Extreme Emergency

Uncertain Outcome

Imminent Victory

FALLOUT

- [LOYALTY] LP, RF, & IC

REGIME MOVES

1 – Airstrike

Add 4 Casualties, minus 1 for each Anti-Aircraft block captured.

2 – Full Offensive

A Freedom Fist wave attacks a Resistance node. 50% chance of 2nd wave, 20% chance of 3rd wave. If the party retreats, the node is forfeited to the Regime, breaking a block.



Signal Tower
-1 to Signal Wars checks by GM



Capital
Gain an extra Resistance move each phase.



Utility
Gain 2 faction waves each phase.



Supply Node
If part of a block, gain 1 faction wave. For every 2 captured, reduce airstrike casualties by 1.



Anti-Aircraft
Reduces airstrike casualties by 1.



Stronghold
Reduces 2nd and 3rd wave chances by 10%. Gain 2 Ordnance each phase.

NODE KEY



REGIME NODE



SUPPLY NODE

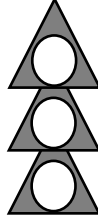


RESISTANCE NODE

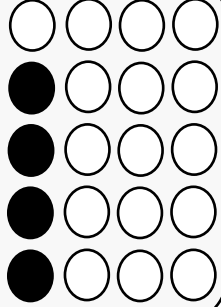


RESISTANCE BLOCK

MOVES



CASUALTIES



If casualties reach 20, the Resistance has been crushed.