

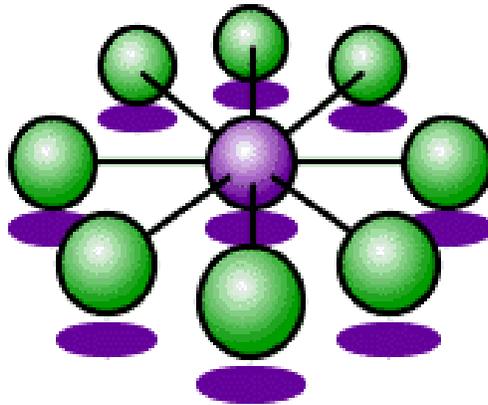
The Top Runners' Quarterly

Newsletter of The Top Runners' Conference, The Official **Netrunner**® Players' Organization
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The Top Runners' Quarterly

AI Advisor

Articles on **Netrunner**® Strategy and Trivia



Special Issue v1.7
commemorating **5 years** of
Netrunner®

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Editorial

It's the second week of March, 2001. Five years ago, in March 1996, a sizable, green-and-purple double starter deck was first seen in game shops, and the history of **Netrunner**® began. Since then, there have been many ups and downs; more downs than ups, some people might say, with the notable exception of the release of the *Classic*™ expansion, which by then, nobody had believed possible. In the meantime, Wizards has abandoned **Netrunner** to its own devices, although the indomitable Jennifer Clarke Wilkes still acts as a faithful liaison and supports the TRC in many ways. Seemingly doomed as a commercial product, **Netrunner** might still see a renaissance if Zvi Mowshowitz' project of acquiring the license from Wizards works out. Still, as long as the TRC remains active and players like the game too much to quit, we won't give up and miss out on the fun.

All in all, a lot has happened in those five years. Remember, for example, the summer of 1996? Well, you probably don't, since it's been quite a while, not to mention that it was in the last millenium. **Netrunner** was a couple of months old, firmly in the embrace of WotC as a main-line product, and everybody was expecting the first print run to sell out any minute. Boy, were they wrong. All that people had was the basic set, a lot of rules questions, and a lot of enthusiasm. *Proteus*™ was only just barely appearing on the horizon, but the very first **Netrunner** tournaments had already been played. State-of-the-art Corp tech was Tag 'n' Bag, Poison Pill (Nakatomi/Vacant Soullkiller), and some nascent fast-advance decks. There was even a "pre-Rio/Siren" deck out there, except that it had, of course, no Sirens!

On the Runner side, Blink stacks were being talked about a lot, but in general, everybody was still coming to grips with how to go about playing the Runner. Still, a few top players were already firing up their *Bodyweight*™/Organ Donor bit engines and had "discovered" the Bartmoss/Joan combo.

In this environment, a bomb suddenly exploded. Somebody asked on the Netrunner-L newsgroup whether it was legal to trash cards with misc.for-sale and then "save" them with Joan of Arc, while still getting the money. After Sparky!!, the then WotC netrep of the list, answered, "This works . . . for now," all hell broke loose. Most people just couldn't believe this ruling, although Sparky!! had in effect

told them that it would eventually be fixed. When people began to press, he asked for more time in which the design team would review the cards in question and think of an official solution to this blatantly abusive card interaction. However, in the meantime, misc.for-sale/Joan stacks were popping up everywhere at tournaments in a matter of days. These decks spit out a huge number of cards, and began selling them to misc.for-sale once the setup was complete. With Joan and Junkyard BBS to repeat it at will, these stacks spent one action to generate 40 or even 70 bits. Of course, they didn't lose a single game back then, when Psycho Tycho was still unheard-of. The players were divided over the issue; some readily jumped at the great potential, while others thought it beneath their dignity to exploit it, feeling that it was against the spirit of the game (and that it didn't make sense to get paid if you didn't deliver). After a short bloom of misc/Joan stacks, however, misc.for-sale got an erratum that said, "successfully trashed", and as quickly as they had come, the misc.for-sale/Joan stacks vanished again.

As this example illustrates, the **Netrunner** environment is changing, if not as fast as in games like **Magic: The Gathering**®, where an expansion comes out every few months. When the articles featured in this special issue of the Top Runners' Quarterly first started appearing, Psycho Tycho and Precision Bribery/Time to Collect ruled the day, which is why they are showcased in a prominent fashion. The Revised Constructed format changed the environment quite a bit (as it was intended to do), and some of the articles must be read with this in mind (I have marked these with a * in the table of contents). Still, in this gallery of famous **Netrunner** decks, they have earned their place as well. So, please pay a little attention to the historical dimension, and, most of all, enjoy these 22 pages of strategy discussion and trivia commemorating five years of great gaming.

Yours,
Jens Kreutzer (TRQ Editor).

Strategy Guide: Corp decks

Psycho Tycho

[from TRQ #4, December 1998]
by Jens Kreutzer

The name “Psycho Tycho” induces fear in all but the most hard-boiled Runners—this Corp concept is aptly named because of its speedy avenue to victory, finishing Runners off like a psychotic killer if they don’t do something about it *fast*. This speed (the deck wins by turn 5 most of the time, but a turn 3 win is possible) puts an enormous psychological pressure on the Runner as he or she sees the game slipping away, which might also be alluded to by the term “Psycho Tycho”.

Originally designed by people such as David Liu, the deck’s potential was quickly realized by players all over the world (such as Brandon Charnesky, who took first place at Origins ‘98). In nothing flat, Psycho Tycho decks became a pest. Most **Netrunner** players frown upon the deck a bit nowadays; while it’s innovative and extremely strong in competition, it isn’t very difficult to play and no fun at all to play *against*. A positive side to the deck is that you can build it without any rare cards, so newcomers to the tourney scene might be forgiven if they try their luck with Psycho Tycho once or twice, just to get the feel for it. But more and more players prefer to design their own strategies rather than being copycats. What’s more, there are several Runner stacks out there specifically designed to beat Psycho Tycho (a bit more on that below). Maybe the deck’s days are numbered—in the German Nationals 1998, not a single player used it.

The strategy of Psycho Tycho decks takes the fast advancing of agendas to the limit, exploiting the combo Tycho Extension, Project Consultants, and ACME Savings and Loan. As soon as the first Tycho Extension is scored (either by slow-advancing it behind cheap ice in the early turns, or by saving bits and scoring it out of hand with Project Consultants), you can win in one turn if one Tycho, one ACME, and one Consultants are in your hand. You install the agenda, then install ACME and rez it—which nets you the 12 bits you need for the Consultants. That ACME also costs you an agenda point is irrelevant, because the two Tychos give you one point more than you need to win. The synergy of these three cards is almost uncanny, which is why time and again players have been tempted to call for bans, restrictions, or “errata”.

This trio forms the core of a Psycho Tycho deck, but apart from that, there are many variants. Most decks use lots of cheap ice like Filter and Data Wall to keep out the Runner in the early game, but some also include more expensive ice cards to fall back on if the game goes longer. Card drawing is important to get the winning combo as soon as possible; that’s why Annual Reviews find their way into Psycho Tycho decks very often as well. You might even play “Euro-style”, using a couple of Euromarket Consortiums to combine card-drawing ability with more room in HQ to hide the agendas. Some devious Corps even go for a sprinkling of →Tag ‘n’ Bag.

This is what a very basic Psycho Tycho deck might look like (50 cards):

5 Tycho Extension
5 ACME Savings and Loan
8 Project Consultants
8 Annual Reviews
4 Efficiency Experts or Accounts Receivable
10 Filter
10 Data Wall

You’d probably like to exchange the Efficiency Experts for even more Project Consultants and ACMEs, if you have the cards, or increase the number of bit-gainers so that you can fast-advance the first Tycho by accumulating 12 bits by turn two. Experiment until you find something that works for you.

A Runner who dares to face Psycho Tycho has to realize and exploit its weaknesses. Usually the Corp is hoping that the Runner will need a couple of turns to get icebreakers installed—afterwards, the cheap ice won’t present much of an obstacle. ACMEs are easily trashed, and without them, the Corp is seriously slowed down. Moreover, Tycho Extension is a danger as well as a boon: Just like the Corp, the Runner only needs to score two of them to win. Thus, if the Runner gets a couple of bits and Corrosion/Codecracker going in the first turn, all it takes to snatch victory from the Corp are some All-Hands and Rush Hours.

“Classic” Tag ‘n’ Bag

[from TRQ #6, June 1999]
by Jens Kreutzer (with input by Scott Dickie)

Disregarding high-powered descendants like Byron Massey’s “Greyhound Demolition Derby,” the “classic” Tag ‘n’ Bag deck doesn’t find its way into tournaments very often anymore. Still, it belongs in a discussion of famous **Netrunner** stacks, since it is a strategy that was there right from the beginning, and one that Runners must always at least take into account while designing their stacks. It took only a couple of days from the release of **Netrunner** v1.0 for players to post the first mention of the strategy to the Netrunner-L newsgroup, and in *The Duelist*® #10 (May 1996), Tom Wylie hinted that such a deck had already been built during WotC playtesting. He also coined the name of the strategy, back then known as “Tag ‘Em and Bag ‘Em,” also dubbed “Tag ‘n’ S(ch)lag” by some players (after a preferred component they were using in their decks).

Universally known and rather obvious, the “Tag ‘n’ Bag” strategy uses card combos that tag the Runner and then deal lethal

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amounts of meat damage during the Corp's turn, so that the Runner has no chance of removing the tag beforehand. Ideally, this is quick and ruthless, the classic combination being Chance Observation followed by Urban Renewal on turn two—which works only if the Runner has four or less cards in hand, of course, and can be baited into running. Another duo with a heavy punch (though costly) is playing Manhunt for six tags, then installing and using Schlaghund for 10 meat damage. Other cards fitting the theme on the tagging side include Audit of Call Records, Trojan Horse, TRAP!, City Surveillance, Blood Cat and—since the advent of *Proteus*TM—Data Sifters and Underworld Mole, as well as Scorched Earth, Punitive Counterstrike and I Got a Rock on the bagging side.

Complementing this core of the deck, the Corp player also needs bit-gainer cards (operations or nodes) and some ice, though less than in most other Corp decks—after all, the Corp wants the Runner to run! Ice that suggests itself is anything that traces and tags the Runner, like Fetch 4.0.1, Hunting Pack, Hunter, Data Raven or Pocket Virtual Reality. Agendas require a difficult decision. On the one hand, cards like On-Call Solo Team, Corporate Headhunters, Marked Accounts, Netwatch Operations Office or even Bioweapons Engineering seem to fit perfectly into a Tag 'n' Bag deck. But you'll need to score them, and with this deck's thin ice, you also need fast-advancement cards like Management Shake-Up to do it. Thus, while using Tag 'n' Bag agendas in such a deck is a viable possibility, all of this takes up a lot of space in the deck: it's difficult to cram everything in, and the fast-advancement operations soak up bits that should power Manhunts instead. Besides, though the agenda abilities are permanent, the corresponding nodes and operations often do a better job.

Another interesting approach (if a risky one) is to focus on the theme of the deck, which wins by actively working to flatline the Runner, not by scoring agenda points. To best minimize the percentage of agenda cards (and the chance of the Runner snatching them) in the deck, include just three Political Overthrows in a 45-card deck; the Runner would have to score two of them to win. This strategy was first formulated by David Mar (May 1996) and Scott Dickie and has been picked up quickly by others. The danger is that the Corp is usually unable to win by scoring agendas, since slow-advancing a Political Overthrow takes four turns; they serve only as bait and hopefully won't show up during the game.

Thus, when you play dedicated Tag 'n' Bag, you'd better keep your fingers crossed that the Runner won't smell the burning fuse and simply refuse to run; if that happens, the Corp will eventually lose through R&D depletion. Bluffing is of the essence here, feigning consternation at not drawing any ice in the first turn—all the while fondling Manhunt, Urban Renewal and Punitive Counterstrike in HQ. All you need to do is get your bit pool up to 11 bits in your first turn.

The following deck is but one example of the Tag 'n' Bag strategy, using David's Political Overthrow philosophy, and is very straightforward in its aims: if it doesn't win by turn two or three, it probably won't win at all. Including four Project Consultants also makes an agenda victory possible as a last resort

(you'd need to scare the Runner into not running for one turn, and have 25 bits available).

3 Political Overthrow
10 Accounts Receivable
9 Urban Renewal
8 Punitive Counterstrike
9 Manhunt
2 Blood Cat
4 Data Sifters

Such a focused deck always has a weak spot, and in the case of Tag 'n' Bag, it is very pronounced. Wise Runners take precautions against tags and meat damage, using cards like Nasuko Cycle, Fall Guy, Armored Fridge or a base link—or all of the above, maybe with hand-size increasers to boot. An assertive Corp can sometimes breach defenses like Full-Body Conversion or Dermatech Bodyplating after a drawn-out battle, but worse news for Tag 'n' Bag decks are Arasaka Owns You, Identity Donor, and Emergency Self-Construct.

Against the first, which is especially devastating to Schlaghund and I Got a Rock, only Urban/Punitive (in that order, when the Runner holds five cards) or a surgically precise, repeatable source of meat damage like On-Call Solo Team stand a chance: If Arasaka Owns You is the last card the Runner has, then 1 more meat damage won't flatline him or her, but does take care of Arasaka, clearing the way for the next (and final) point of damage. Against Emergency Self-Construct, there is no hope whatsoever (apart from including a strategy for trashing programs).

Plus, as soon as the Runner sees an Urban Renewal in HQ or R&D, he or she will be very reluctant to take risks and will probably always keep a full hand, making life even harder for the Corporation. Since the Runner cards mentioned above can utterly thwart a pure Tag 'n' Bag strategy, it isn't employed that often in Constructed tournaments anymore (but can be good for a surprise). This is a pity, because Tag 'n' Bag leaves room for many deck variants (not all as rare-heavy as the example given above), including the use of Dedicated Response Team, Closed Accounts, Omniscience Foundation, or even Crybaby. An alternative is to include just a few select Tag 'n' Bag cards in a Corp stack that's otherwise following a different strategy. This opens up an additional avenue to victory and keeps the Runner honest, while being much more flexible than a "classic" Tag 'n' Bag deck.

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The Rent-to-Own Deck

[from TRQ #8, December 1999]
by Jens Kreutzer

Really heavy ice like Mastiff, Liche, Wall of Ice, or, since the advent of the *Proteus*[™] expansion, Colonel Failure and Toughonium[™] Wall, have always made a Corp player's eyes shine. Be it for psychological intimidation alone, having a rezzed Colonel on the table can surely make the Corp's day. But normally the high-end ice doesn't see action all that frequently, because of its equally high rez cost. Speed is of the essence these days, and if the Corp manages to amass enough bits to rez a Colonel, they are usually better invested in a fast-advancement operation to go for the victory. Ice just slows the Runner down and protects only one fort (disregarding *Classic*'s Glacier), which means that the investment is not likely to be worth it, especially if you take Pile Driver and Big Frackin' Gun into account—or Remote Detonator, for that matter.

Proteus, however, has given us a feasible method to rez ice for free, no matter how high the rez cost might be, namely the operation Rent-to-Own Contract (RTOC), which costs 0 bits to play and reads:

Rez a piece of **ice**, at no cost. Put on that **ice** a number of Term counters equal to its rez cost. At the start of each of your turns, if you have at least 2 bits, lose 2 bits and remove one of these Term counters; otherwise, put a Term counter on that piece of **ice**.

This free rezzing of ice therefore comes with a considerable drawback: A number of Term counters equal to the rez cost has to be paid off by the Corporation, which means that in effect (one counter being priced at 2 bits) we pay double the usual price for the ice. This should even be less advisable financially than rezzing it in the normal way—who has 34 bits to spare for a single Colonel Failure, after all? But a radical strategy takes advantage of the one loophole RTOC offers: A Corporation that is broke (i. e., has no more than 1 bit in its pool at the start of its turns) cannot be made to pay off its contracts. A Corp player who abandons the idea of ever being rich again can thus abuse RTOC with impunity. Term counters will amass to ridiculous numbers during such games, but as long as the Corp never intends to lose them, it couldn't care less. Just rez ice as big and mean as you can imagine in your wildest dreams, without ever wasting a thought on paying off all of those debts.

In a Rent-to-Own deck, we will need about 18 pieces of our heaviest ice, and maybe as many as 12 Rent-to-Own Contracts to rez enough of them. The first couple of turns will be spent icing HQ and R&D (maybe Archives too, if we suspect that the Runner might be using Shredder Uplink Protocol) and at least one subsidiary data fort (SDF). Our initial 5 bits quickly vanish to the

Contracts, but after we are down to 1 or 0 bits, they won't bother us anymore. Unfortunately, this also means that without special measures (like hiring Chester Mix or including Efficiency Experts), four ice is as deep as we will ever get: Starting our turn with 1 bit in pool, we can take 2 bits with our first two actions and then spend all 3 to install a fourth ice layer. But then, this usually suffices—and in any case, the sheer time it takes to do all of this installing and rezzing with RTOC usually limits ice layers to two deep on the central data forts and three deep on the SDF in the average game.

What strategies are there for a Corp that is protected by the toughest ice in the game, but doesn't have any money? First of all, it should use down-to-earth agendas. Since costly fast-advancement operations or nodes are out of the question, agendas will have to be advanced "by hand". That in itself means that scoring one will take at least two turns, but in addition, there are big problems in generating enough bits even to pay for the advancement counters. All that we can manage in two turns is a 3-difficulty agenda. To avoid having to score more than three agendas in this excruciating way, the wise CEO's choice is Corporate War, the only 3-difficulty agenda that is worth 3 agenda points. Its drawback (lose all bits when it is scored with less than 12 bits in pool) is of no importance, because there are never any bits to be lost anyway.

But Corporate Wars are a liability when faced with Terrorist Reprisal; since we don't really need all 9 agenda points, we might consider other 3-difficulty agendas like Marine Arcology (for an improved bit influx), Corporate Downsizing (to relieve an agenda-cramped HQ), or Security Purge (to speed up ice installation) in combination with Corp War. However, these make us include more agenda cards in our deck than necessary, being worth only 2 agenda points each.

The second consideration is that huge ice is the only protection that stands between the Runner and every agenda we want to score. Agendas will always be in danger of being stolen for at least one Runner turn—and if the Runner realizes what's going on, he or she needs only to collect enough bits to breach the SDF and wait.

RTO's greatest weakness is its predictability: Since all of the ice is rezzed beforehand, the Runner knows exactly how many bits will be needed to break through. A common Corp strategy is therefore to double this little equation by installing a Bizarre Encryption Scheme in the SDF, which forces the Runner to run twice (and pay twice the cost) to score the agenda.

If all else fails, the Corp must be prepared to sacrifice an agenda to make the Runner broke, hoping that he or she won't gain enough bits in time to grab the next. Off-Site Backups are often included in Rent-to-Own decks to get back trashed Encryption Schemes and to recycle RTOCs if not enough of them turn up by themselves. The following is a very basic RTO deck without any fancy gimmicks:

6 Corporate War
12 Rent-to-Own Contract

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- 3 **Off-Site Backups**
- 6 **Bizarre Encryption Scheme**
- 10 **Colonel Failure**
- 4 **Toughonium™ Wall**
- 4 **Haunting Inquisition**

ASD/Corp War

[from TRQ #10, June 2000]
by Jens Kreutzer

All of the rare ice cards can be substituted by others you might have, like Liche, Cerberus, Mastiff, or even Mazer and Rock Is Strong if you're really in a pinch. Watch out for cards that specifically target black ice, however: Anonymous Tip or Simulacrum can truly ruin your day if you play with Liche; with Colonels, you don't have this problem. The biggest challenge will likely be to collect 12 RTOCs, which are notoriously hard to find. Put in as many as you have, replace the rest with Off-Site Backups and hope for a good draw.

One or two Rent-to-Own decks are seen in almost every Constructed tourney at the time, and a Runner must surely take this into account when designing a strategy. The basic RTO concept can easily be expanded into more sophisticated strategies; Vapor Ops, for example, is a nice card to complement the theme as a "must-trash" node that lessens the danger to vulnerable agendas. Efficiency Experts raise the bit "ceiling" considerably and might be a nasty surprise for the Runner; Night Shift yields bits and speeds up the deck. Rio de Janeiro City Grid is another card to consider. Experiment until you find a good strategy that is playable and fun.

When faced with the decision whether to play a RTO deck in a tourney, take the "metagame" into account. RTO really is in trouble when it has to face its arch-enemies Pile Driver and Big Frackin' Gun (and Terrorist Reprisal or Corporate Ally), but if you expect heavy use of Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker in the upcoming tourney, RTO is a good idea, since it really shines against Bartmoss stacks. An ice-destruction stack will also have a hard time against RTO if the Corp sees to it that all ice is rezzed the turn it is installed; make sure to detect this Runner strategy early on, though. Runners who don't run SDFs for agenda but instead make only a few multi-access runs on central forts (like →The Big Dig), or those who play a game only against time but not the Corp proper (like Masochism Rules), will also be tough on the rather slow and unwieldy RTO deck. Like already hinted at above, a Shredder Uplink Protocol also presents a danger to RTO decks, since building a double ice layer on the Archives as a countermeasure slows the Corp down considerably. All in all, be aware that RTO gives away its strategy to the Runner only too readily, which means that the Corp loses much of the surprise potential that normally keeps the Runner on his or her toes. The only option tactically is to remain generally passive behind the tremendous ice barriers and hope that the Runner will be stopped short by them. There is not much room for experiment or adaptation during play, but still, a RTO deck can be a formidable opponent.

The three difficulty-reducing agendas Artificial Security Directors (ASD), Executive Extraction and Genetics-Visionary Acquisition have always tickled a Corp player's fancy, since they get around a restriction that is inherent to **Netrunner™**: Normally, an agenda cannot be installed and scored in one turn, since its difficulty is at least 3—barring "fast-advance" approaches like Systematic Layoffs or Chicago Branch. Unlike Washington City Grid and the three corresponding *Proteus™* upgrades, which have a similar effect, the speed granted by these agendas cannot be neutralized by trashing. Once scored, they let the Corp player bang through a 3-difficulty agenda in one turn, without having to fear any Runner interference for the rest of the game. Of course, attention must be given to the keywords Research, Gray Ops, and Black Ops, as appropriate.

Deck designs built around this neat effect abound, but the two that are the most famous are the "Golden Loop" deck and ASD/Corp War. The former has the more consequent philosophy, using six copies of each difficulty-reducing agenda, which can lead to astounding results, since the effects are cumulative. Games with agendas of modified difficulty 0 are not unheard-of (you still need to install them to score them, however).

In contrast, ASD/Corp War shies away from the prospect of including 18 agendas in a 45-card deck (40% agenda ratio), concentrating on an optimized, minimized ratio instead. ASD, Executive Extraction and Genetics-Visionary Acquisition work best with 3-difficulty agendas, though, so the choice is rather limited if we want to cram as many agenda points as possible onto one card. Corporate War is the only 3-difficulty agenda worth 3 agenda points and quickly suggests the ideal combination of ASD/Corp War. With the popular selection of five Corporate War and three ASD in a 45-card deck, we can whittle down the agenda ratio to 17,8%, greatly reducing the Runner's odds of getting hold of our sensitive data.

Ideally, we would like to score an ASD early on, so that two single-turn Corp Wars can then win the game. Unfortunately, with only three copies of it in the deck, the chances of drawing and scoring an ASD early on are not too good. More often than not, ASD will turn up as the second or third agenda, or not at all. Because of this risk, it is advisable to include multiple copies of Systematic Layoffs as a backup. Though rather expensive, they greatly help with scoring the one ASD we need, and also with Corp Wars that have to be waged without the help of Artificial Security Directors.

Ice selection and bit-gaining are more or less standard fare, with an endless number of possible approaches. Note, however, the reduced need for subsidiary data forts due to our strategy of "fast-advancing" agendas, and that the huge bit influx

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generated by a Corporate War that is “won” (scored with at least 12 bits in our pool) can make heavy-caliber ice feasible. With the support of ASD, scoring a Corp War only costs 2 bits, which makes it comparatively easy to “win” it.

The following is my own version of an ASD/Corp War deck, focusing on the main concept without too much fancy stuff. To increase the chance of drawing the first ASD when we need it, additional drawing power (Annual Reviews) and additional R&D control (Planning Consultants, Corporate Shuffle, Strategic Planning Group) could replace some of the ice and bit-gainer cards.

- 3 Artificial Security Directors**
- 5 Corporate War**
- 5 Annual Reviews**
- 5 Systematic Layoffs**
- 10 Accounts Receivable**
- 1 Edgerunner, Inc., Temps**
- 1 Underworld Mole**
- 3 Filter**
- 2 Mazer**
- 1 Haunting Inquisition**
- 4 Data Wall**
- 1 Rock Is Strong**
- 1 Banpei**
- 1 Asp**
- 1 Cinderella**
- 1 Colonel Failure**

Edgerunner, Inc., Temps and Underworld Mole are last resorts against virus stacks and Preying Mantis/Poisoned Water Supply; they can easily be replaced by Annual Reviews and Systematic Layoffs, for example, since including only one of each is unlikely to make a difference anyway. The ice selection is varied (very weak and very strong ice of all three kinds) to present obstacles for the Runner during the beginning as well as the end of the game. Personal preference may well dictate other combinations.

A more streamlined version of ASD/Corp War is the following by Yves Savonet from Liège, Belgium. He designed it specifically for the new Restricted environment and played a modified version (see below) in the French Open 2000 in Paris:

- 3 Artificial Security Directors**
- 5 Corporate War**
- 7 Annual Reviews**
- 6 Systematic Layoffs**
- 10 Efficiency Experts**
- 4 Filter**
- 4 Roadblock**
- 2 Haunting Inquisition**
- 4 Data Wall**

The main differences are Efficiency Experts as bitgainers (more reliable if a Corp War is “lost”) and the lack of stronger ice (just two Hauntings) for any endgame that might ensue. As Yves

points out, the main issue is whether ASD/Corp War will be able to be an effective substitute for →Psycho Tycho in the Restricted environment. ASD/Corp War’s problem is that it must score three agendas to win, and—as fast as it may be in doing this—it usually is not fast enough to baffle tourney-level Runner stacks by speed alone. It takes seven or eight turns more often than not, although a “perfect” game could be won in five turns. That being said, it is almost impossible to outrun a Mantis/Poisoned stack, which finishes in four or five turns. Yves notes that the first two agendas are not difficult to get through; it is the third that poses difficulties.

It would appear that ASD/Corp War is just a tiny bit too slow to win against dedicated no-run, speed Runner decks like Mantis/Poisoned, and that it is quite vulnerable to a number of common Runner strategies: Once set up, multi-access with Rush Hour and the like or R&D control with Microtech AI Interface/R&D Protocol Files will snatch away agendas before we can draw them. Ice destruction can also be quite effective against ASD/Corp War because it gets going right away. Any virus stack with a punch (Scaldan comes to mind) that seriously threatens HQ is also dangerous. Only stacks, like →Big Dig or →Bozomatic, that take a while to set up will usually be outrun by ASD/Corp War. Finally, Corporate War has a disastrous Achilles heel: Terrorist Reprisal, which is becoming ever more popular with Runners these days.

To counter multi-access, or early runs with Rent-I-Con, Yves exchanged four Annual Reviews with four Simon Francisco in the French Open, with moderate success. Holger Janssen has suggested including more copies of ASD than the standard trio (at least 5) to ensure drawing one early on. Although this waters down the agenda ratio, it is a good idea for stressing the speed of ASD/Corp War, which is its main aspect after all. Alternatively, Holger thought about including 4 to 6 anti-Runner cards (like 3 Manhunt and 3 Schlaghund) as a surprise, since most Runners won’t expect this after seeing the first ASD.

Generally, the following hints seem to make the most of ASD/Corp War. First, by all means, be flexible. A lot depends on whether the first agenda you score is ASD (best case), a Corp War that is “won” (good as well, since it allows for decent ice protection), or a Corp War that is “lost” (worst case). If all goes well, minimal ice might be enough to hold off the Runner until victory. If we struggle with bit-gaining and card-drawing a lot, we should prepare for a longer game and set up some defenses. Also consider holding off a Corp War you can score out of hand, gaining bits until it can be “won”.

Try to guess our opponent’s strategy early on. With Top Runners’ Conferences hitting the table, we should not bother with ice but just push through agendas as fast as possible. When facing ice destruction, fortifying HQ and Archives might be advisable, even if it slows us down a lot. With a fair number of ice cards, lots of bits and no need for subforts (which thin out our ice defenses), we might shut the Runner out for good. Against R&D control, put two or at most three pieces of ice in front of R&D and hope for the best, but select the ice wisely for maximum deterrence (Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker just begs for Mazer or Roadblock, for example, whereas Data Wall is not so hot). Creating subforts for

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advancing agenda the “slow way” is usually not in the plan, but in a pinch, it might also be an option—especially if →Precision Bribery rears its ugly head, or no-run stacks make Systematic Layoffs (and its overhead) redundant.

Mind you, ASD/Corp War is anything but a weak deck, and with just 3 essential rare cards, it is above all a good option for new players. However, it apparently is not dominating the Restricted tourney scene as much as some had expected it to— which we should be glad about, since nobody sheds a single tear for the demise of →Psycho Tycho.

The World Would Swing If I Were King

[from TRQ #12, March 2001]

by Jens Kreuzer

Support by Christophe Mambourg and Jennifer Clarke Wilkes

“Hey—if I score this, I win!”

– Player getting a sneak preview of Proteus™ cards while running against one of the **Netrunner** game designers.

With the *Proteus*™ expansion, Political Overthrow was dethroned as the most prestigious agenda in the Corp player’s arsenal, and with it went the tacit law that said: A Corp has to score at least two agendas to win. Along came the mother of all agendas, pinnacle of Corporate ambition—World Domination, possibly the most sought-after card in the game of **Netrunner**.

With a breath-taking difficulty of 12, World Domination takes five turns to be scored “by hand”, but wins the game for the Corp in the selfsame instant with its yield of 7 agenda points. In contrast to this, the Runner would have to steal three World Dominations to win, since he or she only ever gets the 3 agenda points printed on the card.

When *Proteus*™ came out in 1996, World Domination was regarded with awe and eagerness, but initially people thought it impossible to build a viable deck with it, although the 3 agenda points on the card make for an excellent 6-in-45 deckbuilding ratio. More than a few thought that this card was meant to be a joke by the Wizards design team (which might indeed be true). Quite possibly surprising the designers, and most surely surprising the other players, Frisco Del Rosario wrote **Netrunner** history with his deck creation that came to be known as “The World Would Swing If I Were King” (after the song by Tom Petty). He got first place with it at the SiliCon **Netrunner** tournament held at Sunnyvale, California, in 1996.

Frisco won further fame when his deck was published in Wizards’ now-defunct **The Duelist**® magazine. This article is based to a great extent on what was written in **Duelist**® #18 (August 1997), as well as on what Frisco posted to the Netrunner-I mailing list on December 27, 1997. Somebody—probably Frisco himself—is reported to have said, “All I have to do is get 12 advancement counters on this card—what could be easier?” So, how do you do it?

Well, not surprisingly, it comes down to fast-advancement cards that can speed this dreadnought-class agenda along a little bit. With one Overtime Incentives, three Project Consultants, and 40 bits, even World Domination (WD) can be scored out of hand. Accumulating that many bits while maintaining a reasonable defense against the Runner, however, is a daunting proposition.

Therefore, the Corp starts off by aggressively advancing a WD right into the Runner’s face early in the game, in a subfort with just superficial ice. If the agenda survives in the subfort for one turn, the ever-increasing number of advancement counters makes for good bluffing, since ambush nodes tend to accumulate counters in just the same way. If the Runner leaves WD alone long enough for the Corp to score it (either the slow way, or, more likely, with parts of the Overtime Incentives/Project Consultants combination which are affordable at the time), that is an ideal-case scenario.

Frisco’s great achievement was that he found a way of turning the all-too-likely event of losing a partially-advanced WD (normally almost as bad in terms of wasted bits/actions as in terms of losing 3 agenda points to the Runner) into an advantage: Few people had ever given Silver Lining Recovery Protocol a second glance before, since it seems unwise to play with a card that has an effect only if the Corp loses an agenda (normally something the Corp would prevent at all costs), but it really excels when combined with World Domination.

If a WD with five counters on it (i. e., it just has to “survive” one Runner turn) gets stolen, playing three Silver Linings in the following Corp turn yields an astonishing 45 bits. If there are seven counters, just two Silver Linings grant 42 bits, enough to pay for all four of the winning fast-advancement cards!

The following is a version of The World Would Swing that slightly differs from the one printed in **The Duelist**®; it reflects two revisions Frisco made afterwards.

- 6 **World Domination**
- 3 **Project Consultants**
- 1 **Overtime Incentives**
- 3 **Silver Lining Recovery Protocol**
- 2 **Efficiency Experts**
- 6 **Accounts Receivable**
- 1 **Edgerunner, Inc., Temps**
- 1 **Euromarket Consortium**
- 1 **BBS Whispering Campaign**

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- 1 **Virus Test Site**
- 2 **Red Herrings**
- 1 **Bizarre Encryption Scheme**
- 1 **Chester Mix**
- 1 **New Galveston City Grid**
- 1 **Rio de Janeiro City Grid**
- 2 **Quandary**
- 3 **Scramble**
- 3 **Crystal Wall**
- 2 **Data Wall 2.0**
- 4 **Shock.r**

The earlier version had an additional Edgerunner, Inc., Temps and one Credit Consolidation, which got dumped for the sixth Accounts Receivable and the second Efficiency Experts, making bit-gaining somewhat more reliable. Since Silver Lining is intended for the endgame, bit-gainer operations and a BBS Whispering Campaign as a backup are included to pay for ice, advancement counters, and eventually fast-advancement operations. Having only three each of Project Consultants and Silver Lining (and only one Overtime Incentives!) seems a bit tight, but since the other cards are all very important, too, there is not much room for redundancy. Plus, too many Silver Linings tend to end up as dead weight. The Corp had better expect a long game or on-the-spot improvisations of the fast-advancement scheme, though.

Euromarket Consortium helps when HQ gets crammed and vital cards don't turn up fast enough; with its high trash cost, it can be installed in the open. The job of most of the rest of the cards is to defend the one agenda subfort. The ice is very cheap and saves on bits but was chosen to be comparatively hard on Codecracker, Skeleton Passkeys, and Jackhammer, icebreakers that were often encountered in tournaments at that time. Frisco mused about using Too Many Doors instead of Shock.r; the ice selection doesn't really matter that much as long as it is cheap but cost-efficient. It seems like one could fare better with fewer walls in the mix, for example. Bizarre Encryption Scheme and Red Herrings, along with New Galveston, make things harder for the Runner and buy time for further advancement counters, whereas Chester Mix and Edgerunner help with installing deeper ice layers on the subfort as the game progresses (or, in the latter case, also quelling virus counters). Incidentally, the main data forts should normally get no more than one or two pieces of ice.

Rio de Janeiro could be nice in the late game (earlier, New Galveston is preferable), but Frisco himself remarked, "[V]ery few games are running long enough for Rio to be effective. For that reason, I'm considering swapping Rio out for another piece of ice or another Herrings." The BBS Whispering Campaign was intended to ease the way back to the 5-bit ceiling of Accounts Receivable—though the 2 bits per action are nice, it can use up a lot of actions better spent in other ways. There is nothing wrong with installing Whispering Campaign in the open, but Frisco said in his email that it best functions as a decoy installed in the iced subfort, although it then might end up blocking the space that should be used by World Dominations being advanced as fast as possible.

A final touch of devilish elegance completes the picture: Virus Test Site. The Corp wants the Runner to access this card from HQ or R&D to make him or her believe that its World Domination is an ambush, hopefully giving the subfort a wide berth afterwards. The one Net damage it does is perhaps trifling, but sometimes might nick a vital card, slowing down the Runner. If push comes to shove, the Corp might change its plans and actually install and advance Virus Test Site—if the Runner has no detection cards handy, this could be its only chance to win in some hopeless situations.

As far as tactics go in playing The World Would Swing, so much can be said: Never digress much from the primary goal of advancing WD. Everything else is secondary. A lot depends on bluffing the Runner: On the one hand, the Corp would like the Runner to hesitate out of fear of a Virus Test Site; on the other hand, it must keep the Runner in the dark about how many more turns are needed to score. To this end, all fast-advancement cards must be held back until they can win the game; there is no point in giving our intentions away early. Frisco advises: "The fun in this deck is learning all the bit/card combinations for Project Consultants and Overtime Incentives. For example, 8 bits plus Overtime puts the Corp in range when the agenda is advanced eight times (while the Runners sometimes don't fret until the ninth advancement counter is placed). Nineteen bits plus Overtime and Project Consultants wins when the agenda is advanced just five times (Overtime, three advancements, Consult)."

It must be admitted, however, that The World Would Swing might encounter some problems in top-level tournaments. First, it is always an all-or-nothing game, since the Corp either scores 7 agenda points or none, which doesn't sit well with the score sheet. Further, the deck doesn't have any strong defenses—most tournament-level Runner stacks have bit engines that let their breakers steamroll over ice like Crystal Wall. Even if the opponent shuns the subfort for fear of a Virus Test Site, a quickly-set-up R&D-attack strategy might outrun the Corp. Plus, considering the weak ice, the Corp is very vulnerable to virus stacks (though Edgerunner might come in handy), ice-destruction and bit-denial. In any case, a smart Runner will harass HQ and R&D, stealing agenda and trashing upgrades, and run the subfort at the last possible moment.

But Frisco points out the strong points of the strategy as follows: "The deck is *exceptionally* fast. When fast advancement operations are not used to win the game—that is, when the first World Domination goes down and the Corporation merely advances it twelve times—the deck wins in seven or eight turns. Rob King once called it 'the ultimate speed deck'. One of the deck's points, after all, is that the Corporation only needs to draw, install, and advance one agenda—no need to draw, install, and advance two or three or four." This is a best-case scenario though, and when we assume that the Runner steals the first WD and that the second has to be fast-advanced, the speed level drops somewhat. The downside to the deck's legendary status is that Runners get suspicious much earlier nowadays when they see a card being advanced like crazy.

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Therefore, if you manage the impossible and collect six World Dominations (Silver Lining Recovery Protocol is *much* easier to trade for), maybe you should still not risk getting beaten to a pulp at the next Constructed. But definitely try out this legend of a **Netrunner** deck at home (where you can use proxies, too)! Once more in the words of Frisco: “This deck is just full of big moments—22 Net damage here, 81-bit Silver Lining Recoveries there, going from 0 agenda points to 7 in one turn.”

That is not the end of the story, however. Recently, other decks have made themselves shown that are also based on six World Dominations. Frank Gerolstein has designed a deck that dispenses with ice altogether and uses TRAP! as a deterrent; it exploits Chicago Branch and Pacifica Regional AI for advancement and also features meat-damage cards. This makes for a diverse, promising cocktail. The other way of getting away with WD is using a Rio de Janeiro City Grid/Siren approach, in which agendas can be advanced in the open while the Runner has to deal with the Siren fort. Richard Cripe posted a deck of this kind to Netrunner-1 on January 26, 2001. These strategies might be discussed in future installments of Famous **Netrunner** Stacks.

The Nasty Code Gate Deck

[from TRQ #14, September 2001]
by Jens Kreutzer
using material by Jim McCoy, with permission

*“Once you get experienced with how this deck plays,
you will find it a useful addition to your collection.”*
—Jim McCoy

Choosing a certain kind of ice as a “theme” has always been a fun way for the Corp player to go about building a deck. After all, there are Skölderviken SA Beta Test Site and Black Ice Quality Assurance for Black Ice; we have Data Masons and Superior Net Barriers for walls, while Encoder, Inc. and Encryption Breakthrough support code gates. However, after years of trying, it has become apparent that only one of the three approaches really has any promise in the unforgiving realm of tournament play—the code gate deck. And, using Encoder, Inc. as the essential part of his strategy, famous Runner Jim “McCode Gate” McCoy has proven that it can get downright nasty.

The trick is that unlike Skölderviken and Data Masons, Encoder, Inc. doesn’t just give a strength bonus or reduces rez cost—most importantly, it adds an “End the run” subroutine to all code gates. This wouldn’t be such a big deal, since nearly all code gates have an “End the Run” subroutine already, and against

breakers like Skeleton Passkeys or Codecracker, it wouldn’t make any difference anyway. However, two specific code gates benefit tremendously from Encoder, Inc., namely Misleading Access Menus and Ball and Chain. The former, a “payback” ice at strength 1, suddenly becomes a “real” piece of ice that is not only better than Sleeper, but also gives the Corp player 3 bits. Ball and Chain suddenly becomes stronger than Mazer, at a dead-cheap rez cost of just 1 bit. With two Encoders in play, it rezzes for free.

It is this synergy that makes Jim’s code gate deck so very nasty: Because a pretty strong ice defence is put up almost for free, there is enough money left for advancing agendas and further mischief like Crystal Palace Station Grid, which makes sure that Runners using Skeleton Passkeys won’t go scot-free. Crucially, there is no superweapon against code gates along the lines of Big Frackin’ Gun or Pile Driver, so that it just gets more and more expensive for the Runner. Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker and Rent-I-Con also pay dearly for multi-subroutine Ball and Chains.

The following is the deck list sent by Jim McCoy to the Netrunner-1 on January 21, 1997.

- 4 **Encryption Breakthrough**
- 3 **Tycho Extension**
- 1 **AI Chief Financial Officer**
- 4 **Encoder, Inc.**
- 1 **Virus Test Site**
- 1 **BBS Whispering Campaign**
- 3 **Antiquated Interface Routines**
- 2 **Crystal Palace Station Grid**
- 1 **Chester Mix**
- 8 **Misleading Access Menus**
- 10 **Ball and Chain**
- 3 **Mazer**
- 2 **Haunting Inquisition**
- 1 **Rock Is Strong**
- 1 **Minotaur**
- 1 **Code Corpse**
- 3 **Accounts Receivable**
- 3 **Off-site Backups**
- 1 **New Blood**

Jim already did a great job himself explaining the strategy behind his deck, and the following remarks are to a great extent a paraphrase of what he posted to the Netrunner-1.

The core of the Nasty Code Gate deck are its four Encoder, Inc. Next to the main subfort that is heavily iced and later used to score agendas, the Corp will therefore also create one or two other subforts to hold Encoders. While the main subfort ideally has Minotaur and Haunting Inquisition as its innermost ice, the second subfort for the first Encoder should be reasonably but not too heavily protected. If the opportunity for creating a third subfort presents itself later in the game, ice that consists mainly of Misleading Access Menus will be sufficient for protecting it. HQ and R&D are iced as needed; most of the time, a light protection

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will be enough, but when facing a dedicated HQ- or R&D-attack stack, they can be fortified similarly to the main subfort.

Hopefully, the first Encoder, Inc. turns up quickly. As soon as it is drawn, it should be installed in the second subfort. Now, Ball and Chain and Misleading Access Menus mutate to quite expensive “must-break” ice. Moreover, when raising the strength of the icebreaker to be able to break the “End the run” subroutine anyway, it is usually cheaper for the Runner to break the “Pay two bits ...” subroutine of Ball and Chain as well than to suffer its effect. A second Encoder makes everything even more expensive for the Runner. Haunting Inquisition as an occasional surprise might allow the Corp to score an agenda “in the open” while the Runner sweats of his no-run actions.

Other ice tech includes Minotaur, a natural choice for a code gate deck, alongside Code Corpse and Rock Is Strong, so that each type of ice is present, which forces the Runner to install a full breaker suite. New Blood optimizes the ice configuration, putting early Ball and Chains into outermost positions and switching Minotaur and the other heavies to innermost positions. All of the upgrades likewise function as support for the ice. Chester Mix helps with building the main subfort (often six ice deep); Antiquated Interface Routines are neat because they catapult Mazer’s and Ball and Chain’s strength over the second Skeleton Passkeys threshold (it pays 6 instead of 3 bits against strength 6); Crystal Palace Station Grid combines well with the ever-increasing subroutines and is a potent weapon against icebreakers that pay 0 bits to break a subroutine. There are a lot of possibilities within the Nasty Code Gate deck to make the Runner’s life expensive, and Jim accurately described this synergy as “death by a thousand paper cuts”.

Another notable characteristic of this deck is its total lack of fast-advancement cards, in spite of its agendas being of a rather high difficulty (4 or 5). This means that it relies completely on its strong ice defences to keep the agendas safe for at least one Runner turn while they are being advanced “by hand”. The one Virus Test Site, however, could be used as a further deterrent not to run cards with advancement counters. Further, the deck doesn’t include a lot of bitgainer nodes or operations: just one BBS Whispering Campaign and three Accounts Receivable. The eight Misleading Access Menus are the main source of bits, later helped along by huge influxes from Encryption Breakthrough. There lies a danger in the fact that Misleading bits won’t flow if the Runner doesn’t run. But then, Nasty Code Gate is a very slow deck anyway (and on purpose), so that it doesn’t stand much of a chance against no-run Runner stacks like →Masochism Rules in the first place.

Versatile Off-site Backups is a card to consider for every Corp deck; in this case, the three copies are indispensable for recycling trashed Encoders. However, they might also fetch back trashed upgrades, or even agendas that were hidden away in the Archives. As far as Jim’s agenda choice is concerned, Encryption Breakthrough of course fits right in with the deck theme, boosting code gate strength (e. g., against Skeleton Passkeys) and giving a sizable bit influx of perhaps ten or twelve bits at a time. AI Chief Financial Officer (AI CFO) is an insurance against getting decked, and also is a potent draw engine for getting used operations or

trashed nodes/upgrades back into HQ. Since the Nasty Code Gate deck is intentionally slow, getting decked is a possibility that must be addressed. However, just one AI CFO is not much, as Jim has remarked himself: “I learned the hard way in a tournament that a single AI CFO is not enough; if the runner gets lucky and manages to score the AI CFO, then you need to hope that your agendas are not clustered at the bottom of the deck, or else you will not have enough time to advance and score them.”

Another consideration that must be made with today’s tournament environment in mind is agenda choice number three, the three Tycho Extensions, which—like in so many card-intensive theme decks—conveniently provide the remainder of the needed agenda points without taking up a lot of deck space. Tycho Extension, however, is banned in the Revised Constructed format, and therefore, an alternative would have to be found if Nasty Code Gate were to be used in such a tournament. Jim has suggested Political Overthrow; this could even make additional AI CFOs feasible and accordingly has promise. Also possible is substituting four Corp Wars for the Tychos and one Accounts Receivable; cards that might be removed from the deck in order to make room for agendas would have to be bitgainers, or maybe the sentry ice (most Runners will install a sentry breaker anyway, just in case). If Corp War seems too dangerous (beware Terrorist Reprisal!) or inconvenient, other options include Security Net Optimization since it fits the theme, alongside the usual suspects Employee Empowerment and Main-Office Relocation. Jim also mentioned Genetics-Visionary Acquisition, but with its single agenda point, it probably takes up too much deck space.

Let’s take a closer look at how this deck plays (and just how tough code gates can get). Again, Jim has already done an excellent job explaining all of this, and the following remains close to his remarks. Nasty Code Gate sets up slowly, but hopes to keep ahead of the Runner in the bit race, making it more and more expensive to breach the most important data forts. In time, the cost will become overwhelming (barring Runner interference): Jim gives the example of a mid-game subfort with Minotaur (innermost), four Ball and Chain, and a Misleading Access Menus (outermost), augmented by Crystal Palace Station Grid, Antiquated Interface Routines, one Encoder, Inc. and one scored Encryption Breakthrough. This makes Ball and Chain strength 7, with two subroutines. Minotaur has strength 5 and also five subroutines. Misleading Access Menus has strength 3 and two subroutines.

In this combination, Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker pays 65 bits to get through, which is much more than even three Loan from Chiba will give the Runner. With a Skeleton Passkeys/Big Frackin’ Gun combination, it still costs 57 bits. Even *Classic*’s new powerhouse Rent-I-Con guzzles up 53 bits to breach this fort. Counting all upgrades, rezzing this whole datafort with just one Encoder in play costs only 14 bits (the three bits gained for rezzing Misleading are already deducted). Installation costs can be reduced to a mere 6 bits with Chester Mix, for a total of 20 bits. And a second Encoder reduces costs further and bumps up the bit costs for the Runner even more.

The Nasty Code Gate deck is very defensive in its approach, as Jim has also pointed out. It neither aggressively

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pushes its agendas through, nor does it try to actively damage or flatline the Runner (apart from Virus Test Site). Not quite as predictable as a →Rent-to-Own deck, it is a solid possibility for tournament play, being able to adapt to Runner strategies to a certain degree. To drain Runner bits, the Corp will sometimes have to “sacrifice” an agenda, installing a second one right after the first has been stolen, when the Runner is (presumably) broke and cannot get through to it. Usually, the game will be decided by the Runner’s choice of code gate (or generic) breaker, and woe to the Runner who somehow loses this all-important program. Apart from no-run Bad Publicity stacks, it is perhaps the “big finale”-type stacks like →Big Dig or The Short Stack that can become the most dangerous for Nasty Code Gate. Ice destruction that gets going fast is also a threat. On the other hand, R&D control with Technician Lover, or TagMe stacks of various kinds might see themselves in serious trouble. →HYHADIARS, using Bartmoss and Loan from Chiba, also will probably have to struggle hard to implement its plans. Against Clown, Crystal Palace gives the Corp a fighting chance.

Some comments on individual Runner cards: Death from Above is an annoyance, while cards like Remote Detonator always hurt severely if the Corp builds a huge datafort—in this case, at least, it will likely cost the Runner more than the Corp, since the ice is so cheap to rez. Against Security Code WORM Chip and Core Command: Jettison Ice, icing HQ and Archives becomes top priority.

Thinking about possible variations of Nasty Code Gate, the following comes to mind: Virus Test Site and Code Corpse do not really fit the theme of the deck; rather than damage, trashing the Runner’s code gate breaker is probably more devastating. Putting in Experimental AI (also Jim’s suggestion) and Colonel Failure or Data Naga instead therefore seems like a good idea (Jim revealed that he picked Code Corpse when metagaming against a Joan-of-Arc-heavy environment). Other cards a Corp player might consider are Rio de Janeiro City Grid, Sterdroid or Rasmin Bridger for extra nastiness, or Syd Meyer Superstores for bits in a pinch (the latter appeared in an earlier version of Jim’s deck). To thwart Demolition Run or protect agendas, using Data Fort Remapping as an agenda choice also has promise—getting remapped and then having to run that huge fort *again* will surely be tough on the Runner. Theorem Proof would fit in with the trashing approach. *Classic*’s new code gate Puzzle (and perhaps Vortex) might also be worth a try.

Once more in Jim’s words: “A code gate deck is the antithesis of a speed advancement deck, it builds slowly and just keeps getting stronger as the game wears on.” Well, he has given us a classic in his Nasty Code Gate deck, and, rarest of all things, a strong deck that is also fun.

Greyhound Demolition Derby

[from TRQ #16, June 2002]

by Jens Kreutzer

using material by Byron “Neal” Massey, with permission
with input by Richard Cripe and Lukas Kautzsch

*“Children should not attempt to build or play this
without adult supervision.”*

—Neal

In this article, we’re going to take a look at one of the most famous heavy-caliber Tag’n’Bag-decks out there. It’s also one of the most straightforward.

As you can read in the article on “Basic Tag ‘n’ Bag”, the basic premise of that strategy is to tag Runners and then hit them with enough meat damage to flatline them. This is best done fast in order to catch opponents by surprise, and one card combination that was notorious in the infant days of **Netrunner**[™] was playing Chance Observation/Urban Renewal in the second Corp turn.

But this approach depends on the Runner running during turn one, plus having no linkage, no tag or meat damage protection and not more than four cards in hand during the Corp’s second turn—which is a lot of uncertainty to base a deck around. Since there are only four actions for the Runner to set up, this wouldn’t be so bad, if it weren’t for the fact that modern Constructed Runner stacks tend to draw lots and lots of cards. Bodyweight[™] Synthetic Blood and Militech MRAM Chips are standard. Later in the game, circumspect Runners often install Emergency-Self Construct, which then spoils the party for any meat-damage strategy. Consequently, the “basic” Tag’n’Bag approach was seen less and less in tournaments up till 1998.

Into this Tag’n’Bag-lean metagame environment stepped Byron Massey (a.k.a. Neal). At the time, some really strong deck archetypes like Psycho Tycho and ASD/Corp War had already emerged, and—decklists being spread via the Internet—everybody and their friends were playing them. The same was true for the Runner side, with Precision Bribery/Time to Collect as the deck to beat, and bit engines like Bodyweight[™] Synthetic Blood/Organ Donor/MIT West Tier or TagMe ruling the day. Neal was fed up with everybody just copying decks in his local Constructed tournaments, and one day, he made a conscious metagame decision to counter the ubiquitous TagMe and Bodyweight/Organ Donor stacks by bringing back the long-shunned Tag’n’Bag strategy. Only this time, it was Tag’n’Bag’s elder brother: Greyhound Demolition Derby, published August 3, 1998.

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Greyhound Demolition Derby

- 5 Tycho Extension**
- 10 City Surveillance**
- 8 Schlaghund**
- 12 Accounts Receivable**
- 8 Manhunt**
- 2 Project Consultants**

The main element is, and quite prominently so, Schlaghund. Eight copies ensure that one shows up in turn 1 or 2, and ten meat damage should take care of most Runners at that stage, eliminating Urban Renewal's shortcoming. Also, unlike I Got A Rock, which packs an even harder punch, Schlaghund doesn't need any agenda points to "work", which is good, since having to score agendas and turn-2 surprise kills don't really fit together. The concept is, literally, striking: Neal's deck features the most potent tag strategies available that punish card drawing (City Surveillance) and running (Manhunt), respectively, both capable of giving multiple tags at one go, which are very much needed by Schlaghund (ideally six). Then, he uses the tags to set off a Schlaghund as early as possible for the win, ideally before the Runners know what's hitting them, and before they can set up any defenses.

This is what Neal has to say about his approach:

"If you're wondering how to make this work (no ice!), here is the very brief explanation:

[First turn:]

1. Install a City Surveillance.
2. Play an Accounts Receivable.
3. We have some options. We can play another Accounts Receivable if we have one. We can also draw another card, or even take a single bit ('working in the mail room'). Installing a second City Surveillance is another great idea. We can even install a Schlaghund in anticipation of the kill, but it might get trashed.

"If the Runner makes a run on any fort, we can play Manhunt on the next turn and kill him with a Schlaghund. If the Runner doesn't run, they will almost certainly need to draw cards, and we should rez up the City Surveillance(s) when this happens. Typically, the Runner will run to trash the unprotected City Surveillance after paying a bit for each card drawn.

"On our second turn, we should:

1. Play a Manhunt with all but two of our bits.
2. Install (if we haven't already) and rez a Schlaghund.
3. Use it.

"There are all kinds of variations on how this works, but the effect is the same."

This deck takes its chances with being able to pull off what it attempts to do, and it might very well not be able to, but

unlike with Chance Observation/Urban Renewal, it *does* have a real chance of working even (or especially so, because of the abundance of Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood) in the Constructed environment.

Once again in Neal's words: "Is this deck unbeatable? No. The Runner will often die on the second turn, however, which leaves little time for a solution. The inspiration was to kill TagMe Runners with meat damage. The unfortunate side-effect was killing nearly everyone, nearly instantly."

There are three ways in which Demolition Derby may fail to operate as planned (apart from a really bad draw for the starting hand):

1. Not enough tags to set off Schlaghund reliably (and then having bad luck with the dice rolls).
2. Not being able to deliver the meat damage because of fast Runner defenses.
3. Failing to function because of early Runner disruption.

Let's address each of them in turn. First, tags. Of course, Neal designed Demolition Derby as a weapon against TagMe stacks, and if the Runner really happens to play one of those, this first point won't be much of a problem, though it isn't guaranteed that TagMe-Runners start off with Drone for a Day right in the first turn. However, if the Runner doesn't play TagMe, it might be a little expensive to rez City Surveillance (1) plus Schlaghund (2) and still be able to play a Manhunt for six tags (10)—which would probably be necessary, since most Runners will pay for City Surveillance rather than gain tags. This is no problem if the Corp played two Accounts Receivable in the first turn, but with just one (and taking a bit for the last action), 10 bits might not be enough to pull it off reliably in the second turn (and the third might be too late: Although the Runner will have a tough time removing the tags quickly, trashing Schlaghund or installing protection might be more feasible). Another danger is a Runner who neither runs nor draws cards during the first turn, though this should be a pretty rare occurrence.

Second, fast Runner defenses. While Demolition Derby has a good chance to outrun Emergency Self-Construct, the bane of all meat-damage strategies, another danger is Identity Donor, which finds its way into many a Runner stack. Especially in a Bad Publicity stack, Runners will have as many as four or even more copies, and unlike Emergency-Self Construct (which usually isn't included in great numbers), one might very well be in the starting hand or be drawn with the first Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood. In comparison to other meat-damage approaches (such as Corporate Headhunters) that break down their deadly damage load into smaller units, an all-or-nothing heavy hitter like Schlaghund is especially vulnerable to Identity Donor. Other Runner defenses exist, such as Full-Body Conversion, an untrashed Wilson or a good link, but the two discussed above seem to be the most problematic ones.

Third, early Runner disruption. Neal mentioned some Runner strategies that might be disruptive to Demolition Derby:

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“Precision Bribery/Time to Collect could be difficult to beat, depending on the steel nerves of the Runner, who must decide how much he believes in Time to Collect as a way to protect his many resources (assuming he takes the City Surveillance tags). A first-turn Credit Subversion or Weather-to-Finance Pipe would also stop the second-turn kill (assuming the Corp hadn’t played two Accounts Receivable on its first turn).”

While Precision Bribery/Time to Collect has fortunately lost its sting since then, attacking the Corp’s bit supply is still a very viable Runner strategy. In the case of Demolition Derby, this is aggravated by the iceless nature of the deck: HQ is wide open for any kind of disruption.

As was shown above, the deck is indeed beatable, but quite a lot of Runners will find it difficult to survive longer than one or two turns against it. Neal sums it up: “It’s scary to see how many [Runner] options this rare-laden monstrosity takes away”. That brings us to another aspect of Greyhound Demolition Derby: 18 out of its 45 cards are rares that are very hard to get, since every **Netrunner** player wants them in multiples. Unfortunately, there are no real substitutes for City Surveillance and Schlaghund, and that means that only a few players will be able to build the deck at all—but on the other hand, even “card lords” with ten copies of each card might balk at the gamble that lies at the heart of this deck strategy. Consequently, it won’t be seen that often at tournaments, and therefore it can still surprise opponents (even if they know all about Demolition Derby)—which in turn will often lead to their messy demises. If you can build it, I’d like to encourage you to try it out at tournaments now and then. Tag’n’Bag is an integral part of **Netrunner**, and Runners must be prepared to deal with it—to keep them on their toes, we could do with some more tagging and bagging in tournaments. Though it’s hard to win with Demolition Derby once the Runner knows what the Corp is up to, the Corp will likely never lose with this strategy because of a game being called for time.

Neal picked Tycho Extension as his agenda of choice, which allowed him a lean card-agenda ratio in his deck and opened up (in combination with Project Consultants) an alternative way of winning by fast-advance. It’s good to have this backup plan, but since Tycho Extension is banned in the Revised Constructed format, the original Greyhound Demolition Derby needs some modifications. Being a frequent choice of Tag’n’Bag players, Political Overthrow offers itself as a substitute. Winning by fast-advancing two Overthrows won’t be feasible anyway, and so we might as well drop the Project Consultants. This in turn leaves room for four other cards. These slots can be filled by additional Accounts Receivable, Schlaghund, City Surveillance or Manhunt, but *Classic*’s Shock Treatment, which wasn’t around when Demolition Derby was created, is another consideration. With Shock Treatment, the Corp can trash an installed Emergency Self-Construct and clear the way for the hounds.

Greyhound Shocker Derby

3 Political Overthrow
10 City Surveillance
8 Schlaghund

13 Accounts Receivable
9 Manhunt
2 Shock Treatment

Another card that might have the same effect is Badtimes—Lukas Kautzsch has experimented with this, but since just one Badtimes won’t do the job, Shock Treatment is arguably the better choice, even though it is trashable. Of course, playing the deck without either of the two is just as fine: Another strategy, also suggested by Lukas, is putting in four Blood Cats as a nice surprise for Runners who don’t run at all (Faked Hit) or only in their final action (Big Dig)—they tend to just pay for City Surveillance and dodge the tags.

Richard Cripe has suggested another way of adapting Demolition Derby to Revised Constructed rules:

GreyOps Demolition Derby

6 Employee Empowerment
9 City Surveillance
8 Schlaghund
11 Accounts Receivable
8 Manhunt
3 Project Consultants

Just like Psycho Tycho substituted Employee Empowerment when Tycho Extension was banned in Revised, Richard recommends keeping the fast-advance strategy, albeit in a lesser incarnation (since you must now score three agendas to win). Here are his comments: “The main focus is still to kill the Runner. If you can’t, then it’s a race to see who can score the agendas faster. The only way to win that race is to out-draw the Runner. Employee Empowerment is the easiest way to attain this. It’s not as good as the Tycho version, but it’s a solution. The main vulnerability to this deck is a Runner who has Emergency Self-Construct and a virus setup, particularly Highlighter, Viral Pipeline, or Taxman. It’s probably not worth it to put in cards to prepare for this strategy; just hope to win before this gets set up.”

Concluding, Greyhound Demolition Derby is a classic that is going to stay, even after **Netrunner Classic**—but because of the many rares needed for building it and its risky strategy, it will only ever be a threat that looms in the (metagame) background of Constructed tournaments, to strike at unexpected moments (unless you’re playing Neal, Lukas, or Richard, of course). At such times, a wise Runner had better be prepared for the Schlag-hounds.

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Rio/Siren

[from TRQ #18, December 2002]

by Jens Kreutzer

using material by Felix Borchers, Frederic Garnier,
and Erwin Wagner

with input by Daniel Schneider

with support by Gilles Delcourt, Derek Evans and Patrice Gross

“Also, does anyone else find the Rio de Janeiro City Grid upgrade fantastic?”

—Russell Mirabelli, May 17, 1996

“Kein Verlaß auf Rio!” (“You can’t depend on Rio!”)

—Jens Kreutzer, at various occasions

Rio de Janeiro City Grid, I think it is safe to say, has been a favorite with Corp players since Day One—if the above remark by Russell Mirabelli just one month after the release of **Netrunner** is any indication of the mood back then. Rio’s ability is random, of course, and it normally won’t actually come into play all that often, but ending a run without giving the Runner any chance of averting this fate is a very powerful effect. Even the vague chance of Rio rolling a one will put the Runner’s calculations off and disrupt his or her plans considerably. Cheap to install but almost prohibitively expensive to trash, Rio doesn’t need much in the line of protection, fits into almost any Corp deck (save iceless ones) and is almost sure to annoy the Runner quite a bit.

That said, the following statement I like to quote whenever I face Rio in a game of **Netrunner** is also true: “You cannot depend on Rio to stop the Runner on that one game-deciding run.” Due to its random nature, the Corp can never be sure that Rio will really kick the Runner out if push comes to shove, and therefore, in a normal Corp deck, it is best seen as a way of occasionally draining the Runner’s bit pool (preferably by rolling a one after the innermost piece of ice and thereby forcing another run). However, in order to turn Rio into a veritable weapon, players have been building dedicated Rio decks for a long time.

Obviously, the deeper the ice on a datafort is, the greater is the chance of Rio rolling a one. The way to do this is to concentrate on one big datafort and leave the others lightly protected or unprotected. Though the gut feeling that six pieces of ice should guarantee an end-the-run effect by Rio is proven wrong by statistics (the chance is approximately 66.5%), two-thirds of the time is nonetheless where it starts to get interesting. Now, in the days before *Proteus*TM was released, players had to take the risk of leaving their other forts unprotected and just build one big Rio fort. This could either be an SDF to score their agendas in, or (more often) R&D, to protect upcoming agendas (and then fast-advancing them directly from HQ). The latter strategy, rather potent in its day, was first formulated by Glenn Elliott (May 29, 1996), who later wrote an article on the Rio/Siren strategy in the **Duelist** (Feb 1997 issue, p. 75).

There are some tricks in the Basic Set (v1.0) for enhancing such a Rio fort: First of all, mainly cheap ice should be

used, because ice installation costs will be steep enough on their own, and the ice must be rezzed in order for Rio to have any effect. Candidates that come to mind are Filter, Data Wall, Shock.r, Ball and Chain, and many others. However, some cards are particularly suited for Rio forts: Vacuum Link can loop the Runner back if unbroken, letting the Corp roll some more for Rio (combo posted on May 3, 1996). Chester Mix is a staple whenever big forts are constructed. Edgerunner, Inc., Temps speeds up installation considerably. Tesseract Fort Construction might be worth a thought as well.

These kinds of Rio decks were around even before *Proteus* arrived on the scene. But when it did in September 1996, the Rio strategy was supercharged. For one, payback ice made building ridiculously large forts much easier. For example, if you use only Snowbanks, the bits generated by rezzing them will pay for Rio plus a six-piece deep ice defense! But most importantly, Siren saw the light of day, and it became fast friends with Rio. Because of Siren’s ability to redirect runs from other dataforts to a big Rio SDF, where the Runner is hopefully kicked out of Netspace by Rio before Siren can be trashed, all other forts are suddenly safe, even without any ice. In fact, a successful Rio/Siren deck won’t flinch at advancing heavy-caliber agendas like Political Overthrow or even World Domination out in the open, which is the ultimate taunt for the Runner. (To be on the safe side, using Vapor Ops is also an option, but it takes up a valuable card slot.)

So, how can the Corp guarantee that the Siren fort won’t be breached? The answer is that there is no guarantee because of the random nature of Rio, but with a fort that is big enough, the Runner won’t be able to get through very often in the course of one game. When this happens, another Siren must be installed (perhaps with Off-site Backups). The Corp might very well lose an agenda in such a situation, which cannot be helped. But if the next Siren is installed right away, chances for winning the game are still high. Of course, in an ideal game, the Runner will never get through to the Siren, but don’t depend on that, since Runners are a persistent bunch.

As we have seen from the Snowbank example above, Rio forts tend to get really big in post-*Proteus* Rio decks, with twelve pieces of ice being a reasonable aim and even more not unheard of. Rather than taking their chances on such a monstrosity, Runners might try another way of getting around Siren. One weakness of Siren is that redirecting runs costs one bit. In the likely case that the Corp’s bit pool is strained from installing and rezzing ice, the Runner might just make three or four runs on another fort in a row (or even more with the help of, say, Wilson, Weeflerunner Apprentice), costing the Corp one bit for activating Siren each time. The Runner won’t break the outermost piece of ice of the Rio fort if it’s harmless or else will just jack out right after it, waiting till the Corp cannot afford activating Siren anymore, and then running with impunity.

To thwart this Runner tactic, the Corp has to find a way of gaining bits for each run on the Rio/Siren fort. Tokyo-Chiba Infighting comes to mind, and it might actually work in combination with Siren, but since it is also a Region, it cannot be installed in the same fort as Rio de Janeiro City Grid. A much

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better solution is combining payback ice with Olivia Salazar. If a piece of ice like Misleading Access Menus is rezzed with Olivia, it will still rez for zero bits (one half of zero is still zero), but crucially, it will derez at the end of the run. As long as the outermost piece of ice is payback ice, it can be rezzed anew with each run the Runner makes, and will yield its three bits again each time. Richard Cripe posted this combo on October 21, 1996.

Proteus offers some interesting ways of making big forts tougher for a relatively small investment. Cards like Minotaur, Dogpile, Bug Zapper or Mastermind seem ideally suited as the innermost piece of ice on a Rio/Siren fort. Herman Revista (or New Blood) ensures the right ice configuration. For the late game, Obfuscated Fortress is a real killer card, since the Runner must announce enough bits for breaking all ice on the Siren fort if he or she wants to get in, but if Rio rolls a one, all announced bits are lost anyway. Rasmin Bridger gets meaner and meaner as the ice gets deeper, since this upgrade costs the Runner one additional bit to get past each piece of ice—even when the ice isn't rezzed yet, and Rasmin works in multiples, too.

Some attempts have been made at finding a last-ditch defense for those times when Rio is out of luck. Felix Borchers has experimented with Dr. Dreff and Jenny Jett as the last line of defense, which combines with Obfuscated Fortress in a fiendish way. Here is his version of a Rio/Siren deck, originally posted at the *Netrunner Weekly* site as a Deck of the Week (www.darkpact.de/netrunner/decks/corporation003.html):

Rio Reiser

4	Misleading Access Menus
3	Quandary
1	Roadblock
2	Haunting Inquisition
2	Snowbank
1	Wall of Ice
1	Vacuum Link
1	Coyote
1	Washed-Up Solo Construct
1	Fatal Attractor
2	Colonel Failure
1	Marine Arcology
2	Tycho Extension
2	Corporate War
2	Viral Breeding Ground
4	Siren
4	Dr. Dreff
3	Rio de Janeiro City Grid
4	Olivia Salazar
1	Chester Mix
1	Jenny Jett
1	Obfuscated Fortress
1	Off-site Backups
3	Day Shift
2	Edgerunner, Inc. Temps

Rio Reiser is the name of a famous German rockerboy, who died in 1996. Felix's original decklist mistakenly had 51 cards with just 20 AP, which results in an illegal deck, and so I took the liberty to remove one of his three Edgerunners. Felix stresses that Rio/Siren takes a long time to set up, and including 50 cards provides something of a margin for long games: Running out of cards before finding the time to score the agendas isn't fun.

In order to make good use out of Dr. Dreff, Felix has included some heavy ice as well (Wall of Ice, Colonel Failure, Haunting Inquisition). Note that Rio rolls for ice installed by Jenny Jett and passed by the Runner, but not for Dr. Dreff ice, since that isn't really installed, just encountered. As Felix remarks in his deck description, the beginning of the game is the most difficult phase for a Rio/Siren deck. The aim is of course to quickly build a large subfort to eventually house the Siren, but in the meantime, HQ and R&D will be wide open to attacks. Taking into account the Runner's strategy, the Corp must decide whether both HQ and R&D should be iced initially (ideally with Quandaries), and when the focus should shift to the SDF. If the Corp draws an Edgerunner early, it might be a good idea to start building the SDF right away. Felix warns us not to waste too many pieces of ice on other forts, since there are only 19 of them in his 50-cards deck. Alternatively, a lone Dr. Dreff might serve as a deterrent against attacks on HQ or R&D.

The Siren should normally be installed only when the subfort is already pretty big and secure, and when the Corp has the spare bits for a couple of activations. On the other hand, if the Runner aggressively targets a lightly protected HQ, it might be unwise to keep Siren there for long and risk its being trashed. Likewise, if HQ is brimming with agendas early in the game, using the SDF to score an agenda or two before installing Siren is a sensible option. Thereafter, agendas can be advanced in the open. Felix has another trick up his sleeve with the inclusion of Viral Breeding Ground: With two advancement counters, this agenda can spell doom for a program-dependent Runner, while the drawback of trashing the whole SDF on scoring it is negated if Breeding Ground was the only card in it in the first place. Felix gives us one further hint: In a pinch, discarding an agenda from HQ into the Archives is also a possibility (as Off-site Backups can get it back later).

In the German Nationals 1999, Felix played a variant of this deck that experimented with Virus Test Site and Fetal AI as little surprises for times when the Siren gets trashed. The Test Site disguises as an agenda installed in the open and might well flatline an unsuspecting Runner. Fetal AI also deals Net damage, but more importantly, the Runner might not have the bits left to pay for stealing it after an exhausting run to trash Siren.

As Felix's Rio Reiser deck includes Tycho Extension, it cannot be played in Revised Constructed tournaments without some switches in agenda choice. One suggestion for the bold would be to try two Political Overthrow, two World Domination, and a Viral Breeding Ground (20 AP); the Edgerunner could then go back in, as well as another supporting card of choice (like a second Chester Mix).

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Also as a Deck of the Week, Erwin Wagner created the following variation of the Rio/Siren theme:
(www.darkpact.de/netrunner/decks/corporation001.html)

B-Veil, Inc.

- 3 **Misleading Access Menus**
- 3 **Quandary**
- 1 **Haunting Inquisition**
- 3 **Data Wall 2.0**
- 3 **Coyote**
- 3 **Dog Pile**
- 1 **Colonel Failure**
- 4 **Ice Transmutation**
- 2 **AI Chief Financial Officer**
- 1 **Viral Breeding Ground**
- 2 **Siren**
- 2 **BBS Whispering Campaign**
- 2 **Corporate Negotiating Center**
- 4 **Rasmin Bridger**
- 2 **Rio de Janeiro City Grid**
- 1 **Olivia Salazar**
- 2 **Chester Mix**
- 2 **Herman Revista**
- 2 **Obfuscated Fortress**
- 2 **Off-site Backups**

While Ice Transmutation is amusing in combination with Colonel Failure or Haunting Inquisition, and AI Chief Financial Officer has perhaps the most useful ability of all agendas (addressing the problem of a drawn-out game), the most interesting bit are the Corporate Negotiating Centers. Erwin realized that with an installed Siren, Runners cannot get at agendas stored in HQ, even if they know perfectly well that they are there.

One final trick that wasn't featured in either of the two decks discussed so far involves Roving Submarine. As has been discussed on the Netrunner-L back in the day, with a Siren on the table, Roving Sub plus a juicy content can be installed in the open and likely survive the next turn untrashed. Once a node like Chicago Branch has been positioned like this, fast-advancement can speed the Corp to victory. There is a danger of losing focus, however: Rio/Siren requires a lot of cards as is, and adding some Roving Subs plus worthwhile nodes to put into them might stretch the deck structure too thin, so that the right cards never show up at the right time. Political Overthrow helps a lot in this respect, since it cuts down on the card slots needed for agendas, making room for other gimmicks. But in the end, Rio/Siren (in contrast to just Rio) isn't really about fast-advancing, as being able to advance agendas in the open is the whole point of it, and therefore I don't think that the strategy matches too well with Roving Submarine.

In the meantime, the *Classic* expansion has become available, and we should not overlook the new twists it can give to Rio/Siren tech. One smart option is including Datafort Remapping as the agenda of choice, being a non-random super-Rio that can

help the normal Rio out in a pinch, which definitely has potential. A Glacier on a Rio/Siren fort offers the option of moving it over to unprotected forts as an emergency deterrent when the Runner has just trashed a Siren—when the next Siren is installed, it can return to its former position (ideally with the help of Herman Revista). Frederic Garnier played the following deck in the 2000 Corporate Shuffle tournament in Höchst, Germany, which includes these new tricks from *Classic* (24 AP, 58 cards):

Post-Classic Rio/Siren

- 10 **Misleading Access Menus**
- 3 **Filter**
- 2 **Glacier**
- 4 **Data Wall**
- 2 **Dog Pile**
- 5 **Data Fort Remapping**
- 4 **AI Chief Financial Officer**
- 1 **Political Overthrow**
- 5 **Siren**
- 5 **Rio de Janeiro City Grid**
- 3 **Olivia Salazar**
- 5 **Chester Mix**
- 1 **Herman Revista**
- 2 **Obfuscated Fortress**
- 2 **Tesseract Fort Construction**
- 6 **Edgerunner, Inc. Temps**

Also, a Self-Destruct tucked away in the Rio/Siren fort might make Runners regret it when they finally manage to get through to the Siren... This is a nice insurance for those times when Rio's luck runs out, but it can easily be countered by Skullcap.

You can have lots of fun with Rio/Siren, and since the two key cards are uncommons, they shouldn't be that difficult to get ahold of (multiple copies of Siren perhaps being a minor problem). Also, the deckbuilding possibilities are endless, and the definite Rio/Siren deck has yet to be built. Even for the Runner, it can be fun (as well as frustrating, of course) to take on those giant subforts again and again—therefore, I recommend trying out this strategy (and experimenting with it) to every **Netrunner** player.

However, be aware of Rio/Siren's weaknesses as well. As has been said above, the deck can be very strong in the endgame, but is very weak in the first couple of turns, and also slow to win. These two points account for the fact that Rio/Siren is not seen that often at tournaments: Tourney-level Runner stacks tend to be aggressive from the very start and may well eat a Rio/Siren deck alive before it has any chance to set up. Also, because of time limits for each match, Corp players tend to be reluctant to play a strategy that takes lots of time to win. But at least for casual play, Rio/Siren forts are one of the things that can make a game of **Netrunner** memorable.

Specifically, the following Runner strategies might cause a Rio/Siren Corp a headache, so watch out for these. A dedicated

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ice-destruction strategy (that targets HQ) might nip Rio/Siren in the bud, but once a Siren is installed behind two- or three-piece deep ice, it gets problematic for the Runner. Rarely seen in tourney-level ice destruction stacks, a Startup Immolator that is recycled with Microtech Backup Drive still can seriously cut down on a Rio fort, as the Corp will eventually run out of ice cards (barring AI Chief Financial Officer). Also, Immolator doesn't end the run, which is a definite plus. Clown decks such as Bozomatic eventually run for free and can then just run in each action until they luck out on Rio rolls and can trash the Siren. Rasmin Bridger is a strong countermeasure against Clown decks, since they cannot get around that cost and usually don't have a way of gaining bits fast.

The destructive approach (Death from Above and Remote Detonator, but not Demolition Run, which is too risky versus Rio) can spell doom for the Corp, should the Runner ever get through to the Siren. Restrictive Net Zoning on the SDF can seriously hinder the Corp, but should not be installed too early, as the Corp might then just build another fort. Virus stacks are a problem at first if they target HQ or R&D, but if the Corp can afford to ignore the accumulating virus counters until the Siren fort is ready, it can then forgo actions once and be safe for the rest of the game. Rio/Siren is absolutely devastating versus stacks that plan to make one big winning move late in the game, like The Big Dig or the Short Stack.

Finally, for the statisticians, here is the formula for the probability of Rio ending a run on a given datafort. This formula was originally posted by Glenn Elliott (also thanks to Patrice Gross, who confirmed once more that it is indeed correct):

$$\text{probability} = 1 - (5/6)^n$$

$$\text{probability in \%} = (1 - (5/6)^n) \times 100\%$$

where n = number of rezzed pieces of ice on the datafort

The probability will of course never reach 100%, but can be made to approach it infinitely close (99.999% is reached at 63 pieces of ice). A long time before the probability even reaches 99.0% though, it doesn't make too much sense to keep adding ice to the fort, since the installation cost is just too high for such a small increase in probability, as installation costs rise exponentially: $n(n-1)/2$, where n = total number of ice after installation.

Number of installed and rezzed pieces of ice on the datafort	Chance of the run being ended by Rio de Janeiro City Grid	Total installation cost in bits for that many pieces of ice
1	16.667%	0
2	30.556%	1
3	42.123%	3
4	51.775%	6
5	59.812%	10
6	66.510%	15
7	72.092%	21
8	76.743%	28
9	80.619%	36
10	83.849%	45

11	86.541%	55
12	88.784%	66
13	90.653%	78
14	92.211%	91
15	93.509%	105
16	94.591%	120
17	95.493%	136
18	96.244%	153
19	96.870%	171
20	97.392%	190
21	97.826%	210
22	98.189%	231
23	98.491%	253
24	98.742%	276
25	98.952%	300
26	99.126%	325
27	99.272%	351
28	99.393%	378
29	99.496%	406
30	99.579%	435

You'll definitely want to include some Chester Mixes if you look at the installation cost column! Besides, the number of ice cards in the deck and various other pragmatical reasons limit datafort size anyway. Still, Corp players can use this table to decide for themselves just how many pieces of ice deep is best for them.

Poison Pill

[from TRQ #20, December 2003]

by Jens Kreutzer

with Richard Cripe

input by Daniel Schneider and Nils Kreutzer

"Why I've stopped playing Netrunner? Well, haven't you heard? It's been solved! There's this card that lets you install an ambush node and an agenda in one fort at the same time ..."

—Unidentified shop owner in a TCG shop in Hanover, Germany, 1998(?), who hadn't heard of *Proteus*.

"Worthless."

—Byron "Neal" Massey on Poison Pill.

Bluffing has always been one of the fun aspects of **Netrunner**, and it is perhaps at its most exciting when the Runner is wondering whether that juicy card with six advancement counters on it is an agenda or an ambush node. Your basic advanceable ambush nodes are Corprunner's Shattered Remains, Experimental AI, Vacant Soullkiller and Virus Test Site, which respectively trash hardware, trash programs, do brain damage, or do Net damage. Of the four, Virus Test Site sees the most action because of its low rez cost and high damage yield, but in a normal Constructed game of **Netrunner**, these nodes would merely

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inconvenience the Runner if run early, and few Corps are willing to dedicate card slots, bits and actions for something that doesn't directly help them win. Shattered Remains, Experimental AI and Vacant Soullkiller seem to be somewhat overpriced for their effects anyway, since the Corp needs to pay both for the advancement counters and the rez cost of 2. Plus, if the Runner sees through the bluff or uses detection, all of the Corp's ambush preparations go to waste.

However, soon after **Netrunner** was published in 1996, players tried to think up a strategy that used ambush nodes as its centerpiece. There are actually several approaches, but all of them have this in common: An ambush node is advanced to a deadly level, and then Runners are forced to either helplessly watch the Corp win or to swallow this "poison pill", which will kill or cripple them. The term was first coined by Len Blado on the Netrunner-L.

The archetypical incarnation of the Poison Pill strategy builds up an ambush node (usually Virus Test Site) to a destructive payload and then uses Namatoki Plaza to install (and score) agendas in the selfsame subfort. These agendas can be advanced at a leisurely pace, since accessing them would also mean accessing the Test Site and thus, game over. That is the theory, anyway.

While the concept seems to be attractive (and fun) enough, there are also several problems here. First, it is true that the Runner can't get at the agendas while they are tucked away in the subfort, but HQ and R&D will be vulnerable. Second, setting up the ambush node and Namatoki takes a lot of time and bits, and until that's done, the Runner can do all sorts of mischief (trashing ambush nodes and Plazas from the central data forts being a favorite). Third, the Runner can easily mess up the Corp's calculations by drawing cards with e. g. Bodyweight Synthetic Blood (BSB) right before the run and unexpectedly surviving the encounter with the node, trashing it in the process. Fourth, and this is the decisive point, a single Runner card like Enterprise, Inc., Shields, Weefle Initiation or Skullcap (or Joan of Arc in the case of Experimental AI) can totally neutralize the threat being posed by the ambush node. The ban on Enterprise, Inc., Shields in the Revised Constructed format addresses this problem only partially.

It is because of these various problems that Poison Pill just isn't viable in the Constructed environment at the time, for which *Proteus* is to blame in part. The conspicuous absence of a decklist for an archetypical Poison Pill might very well mean that it never really worked at all (even in casual play) and that the strategy was only ever speculated on. Here is a deck I put together, using the basic premise:

Basic Namatoki Poison Pill

4	Fetal AI
1	AI Chief Financial Officer
2	Priority Requisition
5	Virus Test Site
7	BBS Whispering Campaign
2	Information Laundering
5	Namatoki Plaza

1	Dieter Esslin
1	Lesley Major
4	Team Restructuring
4	Quandary
2	Glacier
2	Laser Wire
1	Banpei
1	Brain Wash
3	Neural Blade
3	Bolter Cluster
2	Liche

Fetal AI, Dieter Esslin and the ice selection complement the theme of doing lethal Net damage with Virus Test Site. Unfortunately, this deck tends to lose all the time, for the reasons noted above. Richard Cripe elaborates on them:

"The first problem is creating a SDF that will kill the Runner. Now, how much Net damage does it take to do that reliably? Five? Six? Ten? The answer depends on how fast the Runner can draw cards. A determined Runner could just draw cards as his first three actions, then run and soak up the damage in order to get the agenda. So that would be 5 (starting hand) +3 (draws) +1 (to kill him) = 9 damage. But if he has one Jack'n'Joe or BSB, then it goes to ten or twelve damage. If he has multiple Jack'n'Joes or BSB, the number can be as high as 18 (5 starting +12 BSB draws +1 to kill). So you have to be ready and willing to put nine counters on a Virus Test Site. In casual play, you can probably assume that the Runner could use two Jack'n'Joes, so that is eleven damage required, or six counters to be 'safe'. You can't use Team Restructuring for this setup, since it advances the poison pill too slowly. Overall, this means spending six actions and six bits doing nothing but setup. That's at least three turns of actions doing nothing but preparation, while the Runner is doing what Runners do best: disrupting your plans and stealing agenda.

"An alternate option for this is to use Vacant Soullkiller. This way the damage is permanent, and even if they can soak the damage on that run, they will still lose at the end of the turn because of negative hand size. I can't guarantee that this is a 'better' solution, but it definitely discourages the Runner from going there unless it's the last agenda they need to win. It still suffers from Enterprise, Inc., Shields, Emergency Self-Construct, Weefle Initiation, and Skullcap. Both of the above issues can still be modified due to hand-size increasers and/or the various Shield programs etc.

"On a deeper level, there is a problem with making an SDF untouchable: It forces the Runner to run R&D or HQ. If you're spending all this time/money making an SDF invulnerable, you're likely leaving your CDFs open to attack. When this happens, you lose all the upgrades/nodes/agendas you need before you even draw them. Take the sample decklist we just looked at, for example. In that deck, 28 out of 50 cards could be stolen/trashed by the Runner. If R&D is easy to break through, the Runner will just keep running as he trashes or steals cards until he wins. Or he'll rifle through HQ, trashing all the Plazas and stealing all the agendas before they get into the protected fort.

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Theoretically you could score the AICFO and shuffle your hand back in until you have a 'safe' hand, but then the Runner just plunders R&D while you are wasting actions trying to protect HQ.

“The other inherent problem with this deck (besides being slow and having weakly protected CDFs) is that there is no surprise value. Typically, the Runner quickly catches on and starts preparing what he needs to counteract it. Part of that problem comes from him seeing cards in R&D/HQ and part comes from seeing a card advanced with little to no protection. Overall, the deck concept is too slow and unprotected to even be viable in casual play.”

Sadly, it seems that the original Poison Pill idea needs a serious shot in the arm in order to fry some Runners. Without drifting too far away from Poison Pill into the realm of pure ambush decks, the most promising idea seems to be the inclusion of Siren. If there is a Siren in the poison pill SDF, the Runner will have to deal with it before HQ and R&D can be plundered. Obviously, herein lies a connection to the Rio/Siren strategy, but Poison Pill with Siren is still a distinct deck type, as the goal is not to create an un-runnable fort (as is the case with most Siren decks), but rather a fort with Namatoki and the poison pill that must be run before the Runner is able to go anywhere else. It just so happens that the only method of forcing the Runner to actually swallow the poison pill is Siren, so its inclusion is only logical.

Richard Cripe has created three variants of Poison Pill/Siren, which I'd like to present here:

Basic Siren-Namatoki Poison Pill

- 6 Corporate Retreat**
- 5 Virus Test Site**
- 8 Rockerboy Promotion**
- 3 Siren**
- 3 Namatoki Plaza**
- 2 Off-site Backups**
- 3 Quandary**
- 2 Keeper**
- 1 Haunting Inquisition**
- 2 Data Wall**
- 2 Laser Wire**
- 2 Firewall**
- 2 Rex**
- 2 Banpei**
- 2 Homewrecker™**

This first one is the tamest, using Rockerboy as its bit-gaining method (occasionally, Corporate Retreat might join in, but you'll do a lot of installing and rezzing). If the Siren/Namatoki/Poison Pill-SDF gets set up, there is still one problem: Even though Rockerboy does provide some bits, they might run dry if the Runner repeatedly runs another fort, forcing Siren activations, and then jacks out or has the run end. If bits run out in such a situation, Siren can't protect the CDFs or the agenda SDF anymore. The solution is to install expensive "must-break" ice as the outermost

ice on the Siren fort, like Homewrecker or Haunting Inquisition. Smacking into that ice four times a turn will either hurt the Runner or be very costly, i. e. impossible to keep up for long. Off-site Backups fetch back parts of the poison pill ensemble that might have been trashed earlier. Of course, the Corp can always fall back on the classic poison pill strategy in a pinch, installing agendas next to a loaded Virus Test Site if Siren doesn't show up. This deck can be fun in a casual environment and doesn't always lose.

Siren-Namatoki Poison Pill with Olivia/Misleading Combo

- 6 Main-office Relocation**
- 5 Virus Test Site**
- 3 Siren**
- 3 Namatoki Plaza**
- 2 Olivia Salazar**
- 2 Off-site Backups**
- 10 Misleading Access Menus**
- 2 Keeper**
- 1 Haunting Inquisition**
- 2 Data Wall**
- 2 Laser Wire**
- 2 Firewall**
- 2 Rex**
- 2 Banpei**
- 1 Homewrecker™**

One step up the evolutionary ladder, this variant tries to solve the problem of bit-crippled Sirens by using a proactive bit engine. Olivia Salazar can repeatedly rez (and derez) Misleading Access Menus (which needs to be the outermost ice on the Siren fort), giving the Corp bits for each run the Runner makes. The problem is that this further complicates the combo, which now consists of an advanced Virus Test Site, Namatoki Plaza, Siren, Misleading Access Menus and Olivia Salazar—good luck with setting everything up. Apart from that, this might actually work.

However, a sleeker way to go is using Tokyo-Chiba Infighting instead. It is another sure method of avoiding being drained of bits by repeated activations of Siren, and easier to set up than the Olivia/Misleading combo, but nets one bit less per iteration. I came up with the following decklist (see next page), with some bit-gainer operations to help pay the installation and rez costs of the first pieces of ice, as well as advancing the ambush node. Night Shift is probably the operation of choice here rather than Accounts Receivable, because it helps speeding through the deck and assembling the combo pieces Virus Test Site, Namatoki Plaza, Siren and Tokyo-Chiba Infighting. Adjust to taste.

Siren-Namatoki Poison Pill with Tokyo-Chiba Infighting

- 6 Main-office Relocation**
- 5 Virus Test Site**
- 3 Siren**

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- 3 **Namatoki Plaza**
- 3 **Tokyo-Chiba Infighting**
- 2 **Off-site Backups**
- 5 **Accounts Receivable and/or Night Shift**
- 2 **Quandary**
- 2 **Keeper**
- 2 **Haunting Inquisition**
- 2 **Data Wall**
- 2 **Laser Wire**
- 2 **Firewall**
- 2 **Rex**
- 2 **Banpei**
- 2 **Homewrecker™**

The third stage suggested by Richard is only for the gutsy Corp:

Siren-Namatoki Poison Pill with CorpNegoCenter

- 9 **Marine Arcology**
- 5 **Virus Test Site**
- 3 **Siren**
- 4 **Corporate Negotiating Center**
- 3 **Namatoki Plaza**
- 3 **Off-site Backups**
- 3 **Quandary**
- 2 **Keeper**
- 1 **Haunting Inquisition**
- 2 **Data Wall**
- 2 **Laser Wire**
- 2 **Firewall**
- 2 **Rex**
- 2 **Banpei**
- 2 **Homewrecker™**

This variant works like the first, but uses Corporate Negotiating Centers as its bit-gainers. Since these are seldom trashed by Runners (they tend to be deluded into seeing them as an asset for showing them juicy agendas in HQ), they usually provide a reliable bit influx each turn, powering the Siren. An early Marine Arcology can also boost the bit pool along. This deck can hold its ground in casual and might just be viable in Constructed, too. Hint: If Homewrecker damages a Runner, go for the MRAM Chips.

Richard puts these decks into the right perspective: “In fairness, all of these still have problems against Emergency Self-Construct, Enterprise, Inc., Shields etc. But by forcing the Runner to deal with the Siren, you thereby protect the CDFs. None of the decks are terribly efficient. None will stand up to real tournament decks. But they do try to force the poison pill down the Runner’s throat.” It also helps if the Poison Pill Corp faces a Runner who doesn’t know what’s coming. This is true for any strategy, of course.

Daniel Schneider also gave his ideas on Poison Pill variants, which enterprising Corp players might want to experiment with:

- Play with three Political Overthrows to make the deck more solid and to focus more on killing the Runner than on scoring agenda.
- Play with some cheap deflector ice on the central data forts. Try to use them as surprise. Note, however, that the run flow chart seems to allow the Runner to jack out before accessing the contents of a fort even if there is no ice installed on it. Maybe Jack Attack can help with that?
- Play with World Domination, Falsified Transactions Expert and Overtime Incentives to advance the poison pill node and World Domination simultaneously.

- Play with Namatoki and Chicago Branch or Remote Facility to be on the safe side. This could well mean playing it *too* safe, though.

- Play with additional nodes like Corprunner’s Shattered Remains or Experimental AI in the Namatoki fort or with upgrades like Dieter Esslin to get rid of Emergency Self-Construct, Skullcap and similar cards before letting the Runner access Virus Test Site.

- Play with Lesley Major, or Raymond Ellison (and some useful cards).

In any case, the Poison Pill strategy is fun to play and can make for some very interesting games. I’d definitely recommend trying it out in casual games, and who knows: Maybe a variant that shines in Constructed too is possible after all? Nobody has seriously tried to find that variant since *Classic* came out.

Strategy Guide: Runner stacks

Precision Bribery/Time to Collect

[from TRQ #5, March 1999]

by Jens Kreutzer (with contributions by Daniel “Beats” Schneider
and Holger “The AI” Janssen)

Note: Now that the erratum on Time to Collect is in effect (trashing by the Corp by paying the cost written on the card cannot be prevented), this article is mainly of historical interest.

Chided as one of the most “broken” Runner stacks, Precision Bribery/Time to Collect (PB/TTC) is a staple to be found at most constructed **Netrunner** tournaments since the advent of *Proteus*TM, conceived of by players like Nat Johnson and others. Because it tries to create a “lock” situation for the Corp, attempting to reach a point at which the Corp player cannot do much apart from taking bits and watching its R&D dwindle away, playing against PB/TTC can be very frustrating.

For all the deserved criticism people have thrown at PB/TTC and the way it takes away the Corp player’s fun, this much can still be said: It is a strategy against the most powerful Corp ace-up-the-sleeve (namely fast-advancing operations) that really works. It has been suggested that the *Proteus* design team created the card Precision Bribery specifically to neutralize → Psycho Tycho decks. But Runners beware: your opponents in a tournament might become grumpy if they see that they’re up for another hackneyed ‘Bribery game—many players consider it beneath their dignity to utilize this well-known, unoriginal strategy.

What can be called the “inner core” of each PB/TTC deck is the combination of three cards: Precision Bribery to stop the Corp dead in its tracks, preventing the installation of nodes or agendas in new subforts and therefore taking away the main avenue of a Corp victory; Time to Collect to make the Corp spend the 4 bits to get rid of PB not once, but multiple times; and finally, Junkyard BBS to recycle and reinstall the cards the Corp just trashed.

It takes only simple arithmetic to calculate who will win this bit race: If the Runner has a PB, two TTCs and a Junkyard installed, all the Corp can do in its three actions is pay 12 bits to trash the PB/TTC combo. In the next turn, the runner pays 2 bits to Junkyard the PB and one TTC and reinstalls them. The Corp has made just one card headway for 12 bits. Can it afford another 8 bits to cram in the one card it wants to install next turn? Most of the time, it cannot; in any case, it’s a 20-bits-versus-2-bits scenario we’re looking at—you can figure out by yourself who will come out victorious about 90% of the time (at a guess).

It is because of this gross difference in the install–trash cost relationship that people have called either PB or TTC “broken.” But still, it is not all-powerful, since getting the combo into play in the first place isn’t that easy. An experienced Corp player who finds out that he or she is facing PB/TTC will create one or more subforts immediately; a Corp that has already created all the subforts it needs by the time PB hits the table can simply ignore the card. That is why almost all PB/TTC stacks contain some kind of an ice-destruction kit (and possibly node/upgrade destruction as well) to get rid of early subforts—if the Runner can destroy all but the central data forts, the Corp is on its knees. Part of this “outer core” of PB/TTC decks therefore are cards like Remote Detonator, Security Code WORM Chip, Death from Above, Inside Job, and maybe Core Command: Jettison Ice, though normally the Runner just runs HQ so that the subfort ice is never rezzed anyway.

If all goes well for the Runner, however, the Corp never gets time to adjust to a PB/TTC-using opponent. A normal opening for a typical Corp deck is one ice card each in front of both HQ and R&D and maybe a bit-gainer operation like Accounts Receivable. With an Inside Job and WORM Chips at his or her disposal, the Runner can immediately begin to trash ice with impunity. Almost no Corp will put two ice cards in front of HQ on the first turn and be able to rez them both. That is why PB/TTC stacks are so dreaded.

Apart from these “inner” and “outer” cores of a PB/TTC stack, there are many variants. Some concentrate on the lock and use lots of PBs and TTCs, simply waiting until the Corp cannot draw any more cards and so loses. Others include another component to deliver the killing blow, often a virus-based strategy such as a Scaldan–Bad Publicity scheme. There are even PB/TTC stacks that use the combo solely as support material to strengthen another strategy altogether; in such stacks, the “core” will constitute less than 50% of the whole stack. Still another question is whether to include icebreakers at all, since an ice-destruction theme usually gets by without them just fine. And of course, the questions of card-draw engine, bit generation, and tag protection must also be addressed. Therefore, there is no single “ultimate” PB/TTC deck.

The following PB/TTC deck was played by Bernard-Pierre Panet in a Paris **Netrunner** tournament in April 1997 (and has been plagiarized ever since). It is a rather down-to-earth stack without any extra virus kits—it just tries to run the Corp out of cards. His bit-gaining engine is Organ Donor/BodyweightTM/MIT, and it includes an icebreaker as well as some tag protection to fall back on.

- 4 **Precision Bribery**
- 5 **Time to Collect**
- 3 **Junkyard BBS**
- 4 **Inside Job**
- 4 **Security Code WORM Chip**

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- 1 **Remote Detonator**
- 1 **Death from Above**
- 1 **Shredder Uplink Protocol**
- 1 **Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker**
- 1 **Joan of Arc**
- 5 **Organ Donor**
- 7 **Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood**
- 2 **MIT West Tier**
- 2 **Militech MRAM Chip**
- 2 **Total Genetic Retrofit**
- 2 **Fall Guy**

So, what can you do against a PB/TTC stack? Not too much, really, apart from trying to trash any PBs and TTCs at all costs before a Junkyard BBS can recycle them. If all else fails, you must gather bits until you can afford the unfavorable 20-bits-versus-2-bits equation for several turns in succession. Bit-gainer operations can help tremendously here. Since trashing takes one action whereas Junkyarding and reinstalling takes two, you can get ahead of the Runner eventually, even though he or she has one more action per turn than the Corp does.

Also remember that trashing resources costs only two bits if the Runner is tagged. But then, you might just pack Chance Observation and Urban Renewal to bring the PB/TTC-Runner a deserved fate on turn two. Good luck!

Bozomatic

[from TRQ #7, September 1999]
by Jens Kreutzer (using material by Dennis Duncan)

When people start playing **Netrunner**, often the very first Runner strategy they try out is the “Clown stack”. The essential and archetypal thing a Runner must do in a game of **Netrunner** is run—people have pointed out jokingly but accurately that the name of the game is **Netrunner**, not “Net-sit-on-your-but”. But running can become prohibitively expensive quickly when the Corp starts building up deep ice layers.

An obvious solution to the problem is a suite of icebreakers that pay 0 bits to break an ice subroutine, classics being Wild Card, Codecracker, and Jackhammer, among others. Richard Garfield has done an excellent job of balancing cards against one another, however, and therefore each of these ‘breakers comes with a drawback: Their strength is 0, or in cases apart from the three mentioned above, at least not very high. Forward’s Legacy from the *Proteus*™ expansion is potentially a big exception but it is priced accordingly, with a 9-bits installation cost, and not very reliable if push comes to shove. And Wild Card may truly be a killer card against weak sentries like Banpei, but paying 3 bits for each point

of strength is simply unfeasible in the long run (Cinderella costs Wild Card 18 bits to break!).

Enter a card that combines ideally with these icebreakers: Clown. Since multiple Clowns generate a cumulative effect, having six or more installed makes running for free a breeze: Installed agendas are just an action away, and woe to the Corp that faces a Clown-powered virus delivery stack. Clown decks, by the way, combine excellently with cards that provide extra actions for running, such as Bodyweight™ Data Crèche or Wilson, Weeflerunner Apprentice. But for all the temptation of limitless free runs this strategy offers, it has one considerable drawback: It is slow.

A standard Clown setup requires three icebreakers, up to six Clowns, depending on the initial strength of the ‘breakers, and additional memory to accommodate all of them. Often, daemon programs are used, but memory chips may take their place. The Runner also needs to get all of these cards into his or her hands and have the bits to pay for them—one Clown, at four bits, being not exactly cheap to install. Pulling all of this off within an acceptable time frame has been called “the circus act”. Before all of the clowns have entered the ring for the show, however, the Corp can advance and score agendas at its leisure, once it has established some basic protection for the important forts. Chances are that the Runner won’t have the bits to spend to get past substantial ice on short notice. Thus, although a standard Clown deck that does things the slow way is a viable strategy, a Corp that realizes what is happening can cruise to victory before the Runner can do anything about it.

Here, consummate deck designer Dennis Duncan enters the fray. In a consequent style unknown before his time, he maximized the speed of the “circus act”, constructing a stack that throws out cards like a relentless machine. Originally, Dennis called his stack “Hyper Clown”, but other players gave it the now well-known name “Bozomatic”, after Bozo the Clown (a character well known in America), and “automatic”. Here’s how Dennis managed to cut down on time needed for the complete “circus act”:

- maximize installing speed with Valu-Pak Software Bundle,
- maximize drawing speed with Jack ‘n’ Joe,
- dispense with bitgaining entirely by relying exclusively on Zetatech Software Installers.

Thus, his 50-card stack is almost all programs:

- 1 **Wizard’s Book**
- 1 **Wrecking Ball**
- 1 **Forward’s Legacy**
- 5 **Clown**
- 8 **Zetatech Software Installers**
- 2 **Joan of Arc**
- 1 **Emergency Self-Construct**
- 1 **Imp**
- 5 **Afreet**
- 2 **Succubus**
- 3 **Viral Pipeline**

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- 12 **Jack ‘n’ Joe**
- 7 **Valu-Pak Software Bundle**
- 1 **MIT West Tier**

Dennis left the other players at the 1997 EUCON **Netrunner** tourney flabbergasted when he hit them hard with his newest creation, finishing in first place in the Constructed-deck event. When asked to make the details available to the public afterwards, he did so and offered some advice for playing Bozomatic as well: “Ideally, you Jack ‘n’ Joe or draw in the first three actions, and use Valu-Pak to install five cards on the fourth action. If things go well, the eight Zetatech Software Installers provide enough bits to get everything installed without using the five bits you start the game with. The only bits you need to spend are for the MIT and the things the Corp can make you do.”

MIT is used for refilling the hand as a damage buffer when everything is set up to run. Depending on the luck of the draw, the whole “circus act” takes between four and nine turns. Once everything is in place, the stack delivers three Pipe counters every turn to paralyze the Corporation, which can only watch its R&D dwindle away—running is free for Bozomatic, after all, and the Viral Pipelines take care of the rest. You can substitute any Virus you like; Dennis experimented with Armageddon, but Cascade or Scaldan work as well.

Despite the awesome power of a fully unleashed Bozomatic stack, however, it is seen only occasionally in Constructed-deck play nowadays. There are several reasons for this. Although relatively fast in comparison to conventional Clown stacks, Bozomatic still loses against speed Corp decks such as →Psycho Tycho. Bozomatic is passive in the early game—it’s too dangerous to do much running—but the only way for a Runner to beat Psycho Tycho is to be super-aggressive from the very start. When Bozomatic is ready at last on turn eight, Psycho Tycho has already won.

As well, Bozomatic is very vulnerable against damage, meat damage in particular. Its only protection is the one Emergency Self-Construct. The vital icebreakers are present in just a single copy, and if they and the MIT end up in the trash somehow, the Clowns can go packing.

Furthermore, there are some “counter” cards for the Corp that create real problems for a Bozomatic stack: Pattel Antibody and Antiquated Interface Routines effectively negate Clown’s benefit, and Crystal Palace Station Grid, as well as Rasmin Bridger, circumvent free icebreaking. With no bitgainers whatsoever in the stack, the Runner has to waste actions taking bits from the bank one at a time to finance a run on a fort in the Crystal Palace. Even a single Homing Missile with strength 8 might save the Corp: Normally, the Runner expects ice with a maximum strength of 6. Last not least: Rio de Janeiro City Grid in a huge fort can frustrate a Clown stack, as might one of the rarely-seen Newsgroup Taunting decks. Playing with Bozomatic can bring overwhelming success, but it’s always a long shot.

Note: Having more than one Viral Pipeline installed is illegal under the new Revised Constructed rules. For Revised tournaments, this stack would have to be adjusted accordingly. Further, *Classic’s* Sterdroid is a huge thorn in the side of any Bozomatic player nowadays.

HYHADIARS (Hope You Have A Disinfectant In A Roving Sub)

[from TRQ #9, March 2000]

by Jens Kreutzer (using material by David Liu, with permission)
Thanks to Holger Janssen and Daniel Schneider for their helpful comments.

Just like →Bozomatic, HYHADIARS (or HYHAD for short) uses the devastating Viral Pipeline from *Proteus*TM as its winning strategy. The main goal is to deliver three Pipe counters and thereby strip away the Corp’s single most important asset: actions. Combined with at least two Code Viral Caches, a vicious lock situation for the Corp ensues: A Corp with three Pipe counters has 0 actions per turn and must forgo its next 3 actions to remove the Pipe counters. Normally this would work, but the Caches prevent precisely this option—and since it costs an action (which the Corp doesn’t have) plus 5 bits to get rid of a Code Viral Cache, the Corp won’t ever get back any actions during the remainder of the game, losing eventually through R&D depletion.

When David Liu created his HYHAD stack in October 1996, he unleashed a steamroller that would flatten many a Corp during its notorious career—for unlike →Bozomatic, it is downright brutal. Jim McCoy, for instance, used it at EuCon and was undefeated. On June 16, 1997, David posted a deck listing of his HYHAD deck to the Netrunner-L discussion list and also gave a very detailed and elaborate account of its strategy and tactics. This article is based on David’s email to a large part, and if you’re interested in the topic, you should definitely have a look at it. Just order the appropriate digest (#9706C) from the Oracle list server.

The following is David Liu’s original deck list (45 cards):

- 11 **Loan from Chiba**
- 7 **BodyweightTM Synthetic Blood**
- 4 **Militech MRAM Chip**
- 1 **Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker**
- 1 **Joan of Arc**
- 1 **Viral Pipeline**
- 4 **Code Viral Cache**
- 2 **Pirate Broadcast**

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- 2 **Inside Job**
- 2 **Junkyard BBS**
- 3 **Time to Collect**
- 3 **Airport Locker**
- 2 **The Deck**
- 2 **Fall Guy**

Like all virus stacks, HYHAD intends to do a lot of running during its games. Viral Pipeline demands a successful run on HQ, R&D, and Archives before it yields a Pipe counter. To cut down on actions, David uses Pirate Broadcast, which conveniently accomplishes these three runs in one action—the extra agenda point is just icing on the cake.

Not wasting time with the installation of a full ‘breaker suite, David chooses the ubiquitous Bartmoss/Joan of Arc combination to deal with any kind of ice that might be encountered. It is well known that Bartmoss is efficient as far as speed, MU cost, and versatility are concerned, but also that it gets expensive fast if used often (and can fail the Runner during Pirate Broadcast runs on two unlucky rolls of the dice).

Therefore, 11 Loan from Chiba are needed to fuel Bartmoss with ludicrous amounts of bits. As a safeguard against premature death by a trashed Loan, David relies on The Deck, Fall Guy, Junkyard BBS, and Time to Collect, the latter of which also protects the Code Viral Caches.

To add still more speed, Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood, in combination with Militech MRAM Chips, quickly gets all essential cards into the Runner’s hands. The one Bartmoss is swiftly found with the Airport Lockers, as is Joan of Arc or Viral Pipeline. This kind of card access power, combined with Inside Job (mainly targeted at HQ for an early Code Viral Cache or two), means that the Runner can start doing business almost right from the start.

A Corp will have a very hard time building a quick defence against a bit-gaining strategy relying on Loan from Chiba. If it starts off by icing a subfort right away and going for a quickly scored agenda, HYHAD can easily postpone its ultimate plans and go for the agenda, using Inside Job or Airport Locker/Bartmoss in combination with Loan from Chiba.

To paraphrase David’s email to the list, HYHAD has three ways of winning:

- The lock: Three Pipe counters plus two Code Viral Caches mean slow, agonizing death by R&D depletion.
- Frequent runs: Taking into account the large number of runs made during HYHAD games, the Runner has a good chance of serendipitous agenda finds—which might yield the 7 points for the victory.
- Pirate Broadcasts: Even if the Runner finds fewer than 7 agenda points while accessing cards, these can eventually make up the difference.

Often, HYHAD can win in fewer than 9 turns.

Incidentally, even a Disinfectant in a Roving Submarine, seemingly a safe protection against Pipe counters, won’t do the Corp much good against this stack, despite its name. HYHAD can easily run and trash any Roving Sub with a Disinfectant on a moment’s notice a couple of turns into the game. What’s more, a Corp player who puts lots of Roving Subs and Disinfectants into his or her deck will have a hard time winning in any case, since those cards don’t really help scoring agenda. All in all, the name HYHADIARS is more of a joke than the fear of a possible nemesis.

To quote David Liu again, his stack has a very clear-cut schedule of goals to accomplish. First, get the Code Viral Caches and Time to Collects into play (probably using Inside Job), while being on the lookout for signs of impending →Tag ‘n’ Bag hazards. If the Corp seems likely to use this strategy, first install protection cards like The Deck and Fall Guy to guard the Loans. Against brain and Net damage, big hand size usually constitutes enough of a buffer to prevent a flatline; vital cards lost in this way can be retrieved using Junkyard BBS.

The biggest danger to HYHAD is a City Surveillance rezzed when the Runner is just playing a Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood; therefore, all suspicious nodes should be trashed or investigated right away. As soon as this preliminary phase is over, the Runner can install the program suite (if he or she hasn’t done so already) and start to deliver Pipe counters, either using Pirate Broadcasts or making single runs on the relevant forts.

One interesting sidenote concerning Pipe counters: As David also pointed out, the timing rules really favor the Runner here. The moment there is one Socket counter each on R&D, Archives, and HQ, they immediately convert into a Pipe counter. As long as there is at least one Code Viral Cache installed, the Corp cannot do much about that first Pipe counter. Just before the last Socket counter is delivered, the Corp cannot forgo actions to lose the other two counters—because of the Cache. Since the Runner always gets priority when both players want to perform an action at the same time, he or she can shortcut the Corp by invoking this priority rule when the Corp wants to forgo actions, pressing through with the conversion of the counters instead. Once the Pipe counter is in place, it is protected by the Code Viral Cache(s) once more. Usually, the tide has turned against the Corp by this time; with only two actions a turn it is seriously crippled, and later in the game, with three Pipe counters in place, the Runner can usually deliver counters faster than the Corp can forgo actions.

If HYHAD has a structural weakness, it is, quite surprisingly, a problem with supplying bits in the long term. Although Loan from Chiba is the most efficient Runner bit engine in the whole of **Netrunner**, it *still* might not be enough for the demands of HYHAD. Airport Locker is a fast way to get at programs, but it is extravagantly expensive to use. Likewise, the frequent Bartmoss runs are very taxing for the Runner’s bit pool. Eleven Loans provide 132 bits, less about 50 bits for installation and Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood, leaving maybe 80 bits for running—enough to break through 10 Hellhounds, no more, no less. If these bits are used up in a longer game, HYHAD burns out. It just can’t gain any more quick bits after all of the Loans from

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Chiba are installed. Luckily for HYHAD, it usually wins before this happens—but if the Corp can sit out the initial onslaught, it is likely to win.

What are survival strategies for a Corporation that faces a HYHAD stack, then? Really heavy ice, as might be found in a →Rent-to-Own deck, could eventually stop the Loan-powered Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker. On the other hand, a Rent-to-Own Corp will never have enough bits to trash a Code Viral Cache: Once it has a Pipe counter, it cannot get rid of it.

A trap-heavy deck that deals lots of Net or brain damage might slow down or even cripple HYHAD, if vital cards end up in the trash to be retrieved with Junkyard BBS. If both Junkyards themselves go, it might be “game over” for the Runner.

→Tag ‘n’ Bag might work too, but with defenses like The Deck and Fall Guy available, meat damage must hit fast and heavily. Another possibility is Underworld Mole to go for the Loans. City Surveillance is possibly the most dangerous card for the Runner, as has been mentioned above. Edgerunner, Inc., Temps is always good for providing actions that can be forgone to remove virus counters. *Classic*’s Superserum agenda might also be worth a thought, since it circumvents the Code Viral Caches.

All in all, it’s a race against time—a superfast Corp strategy might outrun HYHAD, but it will be very hard pressed. Advice: Ice HQ as heavily as possible and trash all Code Viral Caches on sight, which is more feasible in a Revised Constructed environment (see the following paragraph).

The power of HYHAD has not gone unnoticed, of course, and that is why the new Revised Constructed format addresses this “problem”, among others. In a Revised Constructed tournament, the trashing of Code Viral Caches cannot be prevented by Time to Collect, which gives the Corp a better chance of breaking through the lock. This erratum to Code Viral Cache is a general one, applying to all formats, which really is a relief for all Corp players. Incidentally, Revised’s making Viral Pipeline unique doesn’t affect HYHAD at all, since it just uses one copy of it anyway. Still, only time will tell whether HYHAD will continue its success story in Revised tourneys, too.

Big Dig

[from TRQ #11, December 2000]
by Jens Kreutzer (with support by Holger Janssen)

Normally, it is always worth an action to run R&D and check the top for an agenda that’s ripe for plucking. R&D comprises those cards that are least controllable by the Corp, barring card effects like Strategic Planning Group or Planning Consultants. If the Corp gets nervous each time the Runner looks at

an R&D card, it gets downright paranoid about heavy-caliber Runner tech like Rush Hour.

The Runner strategy taking this approach to its limits is called, appropriately enough, “Big Dig”—after a somewhat slow buildup, it simply accesses everything that’s left in R&D in one fell swoop, which normally yields enough agenda points for the win.

The *Proteus*[™] expansion supplied the last of the three tools needed for an effective Big Dig approach: a ‘breaker suite sure to breach R&D ice at the critical moment, a powerful tool for multiple card access (*Proteus*’ R&D Mole, possibly in combination with Rush Hour), and vast amounts of bits to power the first two. And so, as early as November 17, 1996, the following stack by Chris Patterson was posted to the Netrunner-L newsgroup:

7 **Top Runners’ Conference**
4 **Loan from Chiba**
1 **misc.for-sale**
8 **Bodyweight[™] Synthetic Blood**
2 **MIT West Tier**
3 **Militech MRAM Chip**
1 **Codecracker**
1 **Pile Driver**
1 **AI Boon**
1 **Enterprise, Inc., Shields**
1 **Mouse**
10 **R&D Mole**
1 **Mercenary Subcontract**
1 **The Deck**
2 **Time to Collect**
3 **Fall Guy**

The stack’s first goal is to install as many Top Runners’ Conferences as possible, and fast. They quickly reach the Runner’s hands with the powerful draw engine of Bodyweight[™] Synthetic Blood and Militech MRAM Chips, yielding bits every turn once they have been installed. Since this deck makes only one run, the Conferences’ restriction (trash upon making a run) is of no importance. Loan from Chiba can be used as a fast bit influx for installing expensive cards like AI Boon or The Deck, but it is better to save Loans for the last turn, since they interact with Top Runners’ Conference in a counterproductive way. The card best played immediately before the final run is misc.for-sale, cashing in the Conferences. Chris revealed that he created bit amounts in the realm of three digits with this engine.

Just as important is getting the setup (‘breakers, some defense if deemed necessary, and, most importantly, all the R&D Moles alongside a Mercenary Subcontract) on the table as fast as possible. Although the draw engine helps, installing three ‘breakers, ten R&D Moles, and a Mercenary Subcontract still takes 14 actions—being a bit on the slow side is the weak spot of Big Dig. After all of this preparation is complete, however, its big moment comes—unless the Corporation has won by then, of course.

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After three more actions of preparing or bit-gaining (Loan from Chiba and/or misc.for-sale), the Runner assaults R&D. The ice should not seriously impede a breach by now, and once inside, the Runner spends all leftover bits on R&D Moles. Assuming a starting Corp deck of 45 cards, minus five cards drawn at the start of the game, minus perhaps eight or ten more drawn during the elapsed turns, that leaves 30 to 35 cards in R&D. Ten R&D Moles accesses 21 cards, which falls little short of rifling through what is left, but the Moles can be used one at a time while accessing cards, saving bits for a possible use of Mercenary Subcontract if not enough agenda points for winning turn up. In that event, the Mercenaries put everything accessed into the Archives, severely pushing the Corp to the point of losing through R&D depletion. Also very important are Enterprise, Inc., Shields to guard against an R&D bristling with Setup! or TRAP!

As Chris pointed out, a Corporation that is caught unawares by this strategy will be very unhappy and surprised indeed, as it watches the Runner's agenda score go from 0 to 7 in a single action. His other assertion, that the Corp cannot do much about it even if it sees it coming, might have been true in 1996, but times have changed. Nowadays, a Corp player need only see one Top Runners' Conference played in the Runner's first turn to know exactly what kind of general approach is to be expected and adjust to it.

With only minimal ice (or even in the open), the Corp does nothing but draw cards, create bits, and advance agendas, speeding towards victory on overdrive. If this taunts the Runner into running, that's just fine with the Corp, since it neatly disposes of all installed Top Runners' Conferences, crippling the Runner's bit pool. If not, the Corp will usually outrace the Runner to 7 agenda points. In any case, it becomes an exciting race between the two players, albeit with little in terms of interaction.

Chris Patterson identified several natural enemies of Big Dig: speed advance, in which the Corp has no trouble outracing the Runner with time to spare, and the much-played City Surveillance, which presents a dire threat to a draw engine relying on Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood. Chris's deck includes Mouse to identify speed decks early on (presumably agendas like Tycho or fast-advancement nodes), but in today's tournament environment, this seems to be a waste of actions. Speed decks use powerful bit-gainers and fast-advancement operations in most cases, which cannot be detected by Mouse. It could be used to spot City Surveillances, however. Chris joked in his mail, "To fight City Surveillance, I just concede." Not far from the bitter truth, because the Runner can do nothing but take bits until he or she has enough to pay off City Surveillance before starting to use Bodyweight™. Otherwise, the Runner will be a sitting duck for incoming meat damage, or the trashing of vital resources. The only other tag danger would be from Underworld Mole, against which the Fall Guys and Time to Collect give the Runner a fighting chance.

Much has changed since Chris posted his deck to the list, most notably the additional cards offered by *Classic*™ spicing up the environment. With these and the experience of years of playing Constructed tournaments added to the bill, the Big Dig has much more potential, in terms of both speed and impact. On the other

hand, the new Restricted environment has ousted Enterprise, Inc., Shields, so Runners should try to make do without them.

The first likely idea for improvement is substituting *Classic*'s Rent-I-Con for Chris's original 'breaker suite (he would have done well in choosing Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker/Umbrella Policy in the first place). It saves actions otherwise used for installation, is not too expensive in light of the powerful bit engine, and really shines since the Runner can ignore its major drawback: If only one run is ever made during the game, Rent-I-Con's self-trashing only adds to the show.

The greatest forte of the Big Dig is its finality: If the whole of R&D is trashed with Mercenary Subcontract, the Corp loses at the start of its next turn, no matter how many agenda points the Runner has liberated by then. As shown by the calculation above, Chris's stack did not consistently access all that remains of R&D, sometimes leaving a number of cards behind. Assuming a standard 45-card Corp deck, the Big Dig has to make sure that if the Corp allows the Runner to make that one big run, it loses. Therefore, it needs more accessing power, which is provided by more R&D Moles and one Rush Hour. An improved, modernized Big Dig might look as follows:

10 Top Runners' Conference
2 Loan from Chiba
1 misc.for-sale
10 Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood
5 Militech MRAM Chip
2 Rent-I-Con
1 Rush Hour
13 R&D Mole
1 Mercenary Subcontract

This deck assumes a game that lasts no longer than ten turns. At that point, there are at most 30 cards left in R&D, assuming a 45-card deck and one mandatory draw per turn only. The Rush Hour and R&D Moles allow the Runner to access exactly 30 cards, guaranteeing that he or she will see the remainder of R&D.

Installing all the Top Runners' Conferences (TRCs), two Loans from Chiba, two Militech MRAM Chips, one Rent-I-Con, 13 R&D Moles and the Mercenary Subcontract, plus playing eight Bodyweights, misc.for-sale and Rush Hour, takes exactly 39 actions, or ten turns with one action to spare, should you have to draw a single card when no Bodyweight turns up. It is crucial that the Bodyweights and MRAM Chips show up in time, but since there are a lot of them in the stack, you have a good chance of never wasting actions to draw single cards or having to throw away cards vital to the strategy.

At first, install as many TRCs as possible, since the earlier they are installed, the more bits will they yield on the whole. Next priority is getting one or two MRAM Chips into play. Then you can start installing whatever turns up, preferring TRCs over Moles and the Subcontract. Save Rent-I-Con for the penultimate turn, lest the Corp realize what ice would make you pay the most.

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You will probably have to discard the odd card, so look at the game situation: If the Corp draws lots of cards, you don't need so many R&D Moles (though this leaves no doubt about your intentions); if you drew and installed many TRCs at the start of the game, you can discard later ones easily. The default choice for discard would be the three superfluous MRAM Chips, or Bodyweights, if you have a handful of them. Discarding one of the Rent-I-Cons gives away much to the Corp, although less so than the R&D Moles.

When everything is in place, the final turn should look like this: Play misc.for-sale, selling off all TRCs and MRAM Chips, then two Loans, and finally Rush Hour. After breaching R&D ice (and hopefully surviving any nasty upgrades), pop the R&D Moles one at a time. As long as you don't hit any ambushes and your bits don't run out, keep doing this until R&D is looted. Then, if necessary, send in the Mercenaries for the *coup de grace*. This should work, unless you hit Net and brain damage cards, in which case all you can do is pray.

Ten turns is a lot of time for the Corp to glide to victory, of course. If you see that impending danger, take the risk of a hip-shot run over not running at all. It's not that hard to make the big run during turn nine, dispensing with say, two TRCs and two Moles, as well as one Bodyweight, since the Corp is likely to draw lots of cards seeking agenda anyway. Depending on what you draw, runs by turn six or seven are not a bad choice, either—even though you probably won't access R&D completely, you might get enough AP for the win. The two Rent-I-Cons increase the chances of having one in the event an early run is necessary.

This streamlined version of the Big Dig comes with a steep cost: even greater vulnerability to →Tag 'n' Bag and ambushes. Though you might survive an Underworld Mole, City Surveillance is still the card you'd rather not see on the table.

Without Enterprise, Inc., Shields, ambushes have become very dangerous. The cards you have in your hand when making that final run won't be much of a damage buffer, so beware. Skullcap or Emergency Self-Construct might not be worth the effort, but Holger Janssen advises using Weefle Initiation instead of Rush Hour to be on the safe side.

If you don't have enough TRCs, substitute Score! or the like, though this is hard on your bit supply. On the other hand, if you're not shy of a little brain damage, Holger names Do the 'Drine as an effective alternative for bit-gaining. He also points to the possibilities of Promises, Promises in the Big Dig context (especially cool if you're up against a Corp that just uses three Political Overthrows). Try it out and play with whatever works best for you.

Since it does not involve much interaction, Big Dig is perhaps not that much fun to play in the long run (pun intended), but everybody should try it out once for the sheer pleasure of digging away!

Masochism Rules

[from TRQ #13, June 2001]

by Jens Kreutzer (with input by Derek Evans)

"The sacrifices one must sometimes make for the common good!

"—and, one might add, a few thousand eurobucks"
Stephen Holodinsky

The biggest impact of the release of the *Proteus*TM expansion in September 1996 was arguably the introduction of Bad Publicity as a game mechanic: Virtually overnight, there was a new avenue of winning for the Runner that did not depend on agenda points. While many Bad Publicity (BP) cards require interaction with the Corp (among the most powerful ones are Scaldan and Identity Donor), there are also some that don't. More on those below.

At first glance, giving the Corporation 7 BP points looks the same as scoring 7 agenda points. After all, it's still the number 7, and (in the case of BP, most of the time) the Runner has to run to get to 7 points and victory. However, in a tournament, a BP strategy has a slight disadvantage in comparison to the standard agenda-liberating approach: Most tournament scoring systems take into account the number of matches a player has won, and sometimes even the total number of scored agenda points is of importance. If a Runner goes for BP instead of agenda points and loses a game, it doesn't matter whether he or she has given the Corp 0 or 6 BP—0 agenda points is entered on the scoresheet in both cases, which means that the entire match will almost certainly be lost as well. Some players have argued for altering the status quo, suggesting that BP points should be counted as "victory points" in the same way as agenda points.

This disadvantage, next to many BP cards' depending on certain Corp cards like black ice, is the main reason that an "interactive" BP approach (apart from Scaldan and perhaps Frame-Up) is deemed unfeasible by most players and therefore not used in Constructed tournaments. However, two BP cards do not require any interaction with the Corp: Faked Hit and Poisoned Water Supply. Each comes with a price (brain damage and having to trash certain resources, respectively), but they avoid Corp interference almost entirely. Thus, they lend themselves to becoming the core of a well-oiled, no-run BP engine that pays this price in the fastest and most effective way.

A deck that uses →Poisoned Water Supply to best effect is one of the most powerful and dreaded Runner stacks at the time, but this article focuses on its predecessor, the Faked Hit strategy. Its most famous incarnation is the "Masochism Rules" stack by Stephen Holodinsky, with which he completely surprised his opponents at a tournament in Berlin, shortly after the *Proteus* release, and finished in first place. Although players like Steve Bauer, Len Blado, William C. Brandt, Stephane Bura, Stephen

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Lake, Eric Rodriguez and Chris Wagner (a.k.a. Foolkiller) pointed out the potential of Faked Hit right away on the Netrunner-I mailing list, no-interaction BP decks had not yet been canonized as a deck archetype by the time of the Berlin tournament, and when Stephen installed neither icebreakers nor anything else that would help with accessing cards, his opponents at first believed themselves completely safe. Since then, however, players have learned to be wary whenever Top Runners' Conference shows up in numbers.

The decklist shown below was originally published as a “deck of the week” on Matthias Nagy’s “The Netrunner Weekly” website (www.darkpact.de/decks/runner007.html), and this article is largely based on Stephen’s own comments that came with the list.

- 9 Faked Hit**
- 9 Top Runners' Conference**
- 9 Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood**
- 6 Militech MRAM Chip**
- 3 Preying Mantis**
- 2 Junkyard BBS**
- 2 MIT West Tier**
- 3 Total Genetic Retrofit**
- 2 Nasuko Cycle**

Perhaps the most characteristic attribute of Masochism Rules is that it, as a no-run stack, does not include any programs. Of the nine Faked Hits, the Runner intends to play seven to give the Corp 7 BP points and win. Ideally, this is done in one quick stroke, over just one turn (or at most two), to keep the Corp in the dark about the Runner’s intentions until it is too late. Three Preying Mantises make a seven-actions turn possible.

Since playing Faked Hit means suffering 2 points of unpreventable brain damage, and activating Preying Mantis’ ability also results in unpreventable brain damage at the end of the turn, this deck is built to withstand cruel amounts of brain damage. It has six Militech MRAM Chips and should install at least five of them, for a whopping total hand size of 20 (or ideally, all six for hand size 23). Even reduced by the 12 brain damage points dealt by seven Faked Hits, the resulting hand size of 8 is still enough for a couple of Preying Mantis shots with room to spare. However, seven Faked Hits plus the twelve cards that are discarded due to brain damage means losing 19 cards in all, and these must all be in the Runner’s hand at the start of the final turn. Note that the seventh Faked Hit doesn’t do any damage to the Runner, because the Corp immediately loses on the 7th BP point, ending the game before the final 2 brain damage is dealt.

Nine Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood (BSB) constitute the workhorse that shovels the whole stack into the Runner’s hand as quickly as possible. Conveniently, never making a run totally negates the weakness of Top Runners' Conference, so it is the ideal bit engine for this stack.

When playing Masochism Rules, keep the following in mind: If at all possible, make sure no cards get discarded due to hand size restrictions, because they are ultimately needed to fill out the fully set-up, 20- or 23-card hand. Therefore, carefully consider when to play a BSB—when in doubt, drawing single cards might be preferable, for in the end, it’s cheaper to lose a couple of actions here than pick up filler material with Junkyard BBS if the stack is exhausted. When a discard cannot be avoided, make sure never to dump a Faked Hit, since this would give away everything. At the start of the game, installing Top Runners' Conferences for bits and MRAM Chips for hand size is the first priority in order to get the BSB draw engine running smoothly.

Another serious consideration is tag protection, but since almost all of the Corp’s tagging cards rely on some sort of interaction—which Masochism Rules won’t provide—, threats like Manhunt or Schlaghund Pointers can’t touch the Runner. That leaves Underworld Mole, City Surveillance, and “unconditional” tracers/taggers like Blood Cat. All of these can be a nuisance, but with Nasuko Cycle, Total Genetic Retrofit and a hand size that laughs in the face of Schlaghund, this stack should be able to survive a →Tag ‘n’ Bag Corp opponent. After all, bits are plentiful after the first two or three turns, and using Nasuko Cycle or simply paying off a City Surveillance should keep the Runner tag-free. A Preying Mantis or Junkyard lost to Underworld Mole would probably hurt the most, so a careful Runner should make a point of installing Nasuko Cycle early on.

While the Cycle can be omitted to save time if the Corp obviously doesn’t play dedicated Tag ‘n’ Bag (in the case of a →Rent-to-Own deck, for example), one Junkyard BBS is an indispensable part of the setup. As soon as this Junkyard, all Militech MRAM Chips and Preying Mantises are installed, the Runner can draw the whole stack, and preparations for the final phase are complete. Playing eight BSB, six Top Runners' Conferences, six MRAM Chips, three Preying Mantises, one Junkyard (and probably one Cycle) takes 24 or 25 actions. Not playing the Cycle can theoretically save a whole turn, setting the minimum setup time to six turns. Most of the time, however, everything does not work out perfectly, and it is typical to be ready only at the end of turn eight. On the plus side, having 35 bits in the pool by that time is usually not much of a problem (barring Corp nastiness like City Surveillance).

In the next turn (typically turn nine), the first four actions are used for playing Faked Hits, while hoping not to lose any of the remaining Faked Hits to brain damage. If there are still any Faked Hits left in the Runner’s hand after this, Preying Mantis actions are used *one at a time* for playing them. In a really lucky scenario, no more than two of the nine Faked Hits are lost, letting the Runner play seven in a row and win. But don’t count on it: Most of the time, one or two too many will be lost in the carnage. When the last available Hit has been played, it’s usually best to end the turn—additional Mantis actions to play MIT West Tier, for example, won’t do much good in most cases, since the accumulated Mantis damage might nick a freshly-drawn Faked Hit again. It’s better to wait for the next turn, which will very probably be the last. Junkyard BBS has a very good chance of letting the Runner dig up and play the remainder of the seven Faked Hits within the seven

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available actions. If an MIT is handy, and a Faked Hit is not the top card of the trash, playing the MIT is preferable: With nearly all non-prep cards gone from the stack, the chances of drawing enough Faked Hits (or BSB to get at them quickly) are pretty high. Then, typically by turn ten, the Corp will be finished—if it hasn't won in the meantime.

Stephen described how a perfect starting hand for Masochism Rules might look: “Bodyweight Synthetic Blood, Militech MRAM Chip, two Top Runners Conference, Nasuko Cycle. First action BSB, then MMC followed by both TRCs. Install the Cycle on the first action of your next turn.”

An interesting historic sidenote is what the discussion on the Netrunner-1 came up with around September 3, 1996, which was the official release date of the *Proteus* expansion. Actually, some players had astounding insights even *before* the actual release, having read the spoiler. Ideas revolved around using Loan from Chiba as a bit engine, as well as repeated self-inflicted flatlines with Faked Hit, followed by Arasaka Owns You. Though all the players mentioned above realized the potential of Faked Hit as the basis for a no-run strategy, nobody thought of using Top Runners' Conference as a bit engine at first.

Since then, *Classic*TM hasn't really done much in terms of influencing the Faked Hit strategy. With regard to Masochism Rules, one could substitute Vintage Camaro for Nasuko Cycle—but with this deck, bits are plentiful while time is of the essence, so that the Cycle is still the better choice. However, back in October 1998, a variant of the Faked Hit approach was designed by Sean Eric Ponce, which he called The Big Hurt (50 cards):

10 Faked Hit
17 Score!
10 BodyweightTM Synthetic Blood
10 Militech MRAM Chip
3 Junkyard BBS

The point of this stack is that no rare cards are needed to build it, which makes it attractive for players who don't have a big card collection (though amassing ten BSB or Faked Hits may be a quest in itself). Instead of Top Runners' Conference, Sean Eric uses Score! as a bit engine, which does the job almost as well. Tag protection is dispensed with altogether, an extremely risky move that admittedly speeds up things. The additional card slots are filled with extra copies of Faked Hit, BSB and Militech MRAM Chips. These are very much needed, since without Preying Mantis, this deck doesn't attempt Masochism Rules' plan of playing all Faked Hits in one turn. Here, the endgame invariably takes at the very least two turns (but usually three to five), with heavy use of Junkyard BBS. If bits run low, Junkyard can also recycle a couple of Score! preps, though Runners should be aware of the fact that this nets only 1.5 bits per action in effect.

When one compares Stephen's rare-heavy stack with Big Hurt, the former is probably the more elegant version. More important than aesthetic considerations, however, is the question of speed. Big Hurt has 50 cards instead of 45 but makes up for it by

not having to draw the whole stack, unlike Masochism Rules. Moreover, it neither has to deal with Preying Mantis brain damage, nor does it have to hold 19 cards at a time for a one-turn win. This reduces the need for hand size a little bit, and also makes Hurt much more flexible when timing the start of the endgame. Further, not playing Nasuko Cycle and Preying Mantis saves actions. Generally speaking, Big Hurt can start the endgame even earlier than Masochism Rules, though it invariably takes longer to execute it: Hand size 17 or 20, together with 45 or possibly as few as 40 bits, plus seven Faked Hits (or maybe six in a pinch) are enough for Big Hurt to start hitting. Masochism Rules typically finishes in an average of ten turns, while Big Hurt usually pulls it off in eleven—though it sometimes takes considerably longer, especially if not enough BSB are drawn. Therefore, quite surprisingly, Stephen's 17 rare cards net only a single turn in terms of speed; Sean Eric's stack is very much an accomplishment in this respect. But in competition, the points described above make all the difference (especially if the Corp is to be taken by surprise)—and so, less surprisingly, Masochism Rules beats Big Hurt on the tournament floor, too.

From the present perspective, Masochism Rules could be called a “poor man's →Preying Mantis/Poisoned Water Supply”, while The Big Hurt caters to even “poorer” players. While nine Top Runners' Conferences admittedly is harsh, Faked Hit as an uncommon card is not so hard to get in multiples, and three Preying Mantis is maybe just about doable these days—whereas Poisoned Water Supply is expected to be hard to come by, now that *Proteus* supplies have all but dried up.

After all of this lengthy discussion, it is almost a pity to tell players that they should not use no-run stacks in tournaments, if it can be avoided at all. Though Faked Hit is a cool card to finish off a BP strategy that requires running at least initially, a no-run stack has by definition no interaction whatsoever with its opponents, and is therefore quite boring for everybody involved. Let's face it: In this way, players miss out on a whole lot of fun that a game of **Netrunner** should provide (yes, even in tournaments), and what is worse, do the same to others. Incidentally, the WotC design team revealed that there were more cards like Faked Hit and Poisoned Water Supply in the original *Proteus* design, but that they were dropped during playtesting. Maybe **Netrunner** would have been better off if Faked Hit and Poisoned Water Supply had also been scrapped.

That said, there is one point in support of no-run decks: They are ideal for those moments when no other player is around and you are itching for a game of solitaire **Netrunner**. Imagine an evil Corp that deserves taking down, and count the turns it takes you to daub it with Bad Publicity, maybe enlisting your grandmother or little brother to deal the brain damage. This can get really exciting, so always keep a stack handy at home (and please keep it there!).

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TagMe

[from TRQ #15, December 2001]

by Jens Kreutzer

with support by Mark Applin and Byron “Neal” Massey
using material by Mark Applin and Wyatt Cheng

“Some cards in Netrunner will give you extra power at a cost. This cost is often the Corp giving you tags. By combining these cards, you can reap all the benefits, but the cost stays the same: tags.”

—Wyatt Cheng

The label “TagMe” doesn’t really stand for a specific Runner stack; it rather stands for a general framework that is characteristic enough for qualifying as a **Netrunner** deck archetype, but still accomodates quite a lot of strategy variations. The main idea behind and the defining element of TagMe stacks is the following: Though Runners would normally do everything they can to avoid receiving tags, the TagMe approach consciously accumulates lots of tags (mainly as a result of using certain powerful cards) without the intent of getting rid of them—this of course means that watertight precautions must be made in order to avoid a devastating Corporate retaliation. It is as if the Runner was actively taunting the Corp, along the lines of, “Here I am, now what are you going to do about it?”

Wyatt Cheng is probably the progenitor of the TagMe approach, and we will, in the course of this article, listen to some of his insights first posted to the Netrunner-L newsgroup on January 29, 1997. This is one of his comments on TagMe in general:

“TagMe decks are the antithesis of the Loan-from-Chiba decks. Whereas the Loan-from-Chiba bit engine used the massive surges of bits to set up massive tag defense and then power fast, powerful runs, the TagMe decks use cards which are otherwise unuseful because they give tags and set up defenses against Corp measures *against* tags.

Loan from Chiba: Get a tag and you’re dead.

TagMe: Give yourself tags and stay alive.”

TagMe stacks usually have the following points in common:

- Most importantly, they use Drone for a Day as their main bit engine. As a tradeoff for yielding one more bit than Score!, multiple Drones eventually let the number of tags rise into double digits. Since this card hails from the *Proteus*TM expansion, TagMe stacks have been around roughly as long *Proteus*.

- Since resources would get trashed anyway, TagMe stacks never use any.

- A heavy protection against incoming meat damage is a must in TagMe stacks. Cards that see frequent use in this respect include Armored Fridge, Full-Body Conversion, DermatechTM

Bodyplating, Emergency Self-Construct, Identity Donor, or most of the time, a combination thereof.

- Since tags are going to be amassed in ridiculous numbers because of the Drones anyway, other preps like Edited Shipping Manifests, Demolition Run or Remote Detonator can be used without restraint. They frequently make an appearance in TagMe stacks.

- For the same reason, MS-todon is an icebreaker choice that might be considered.

So, the strong points of TagMe are a solid sentry icebreaker choice, supported by the ample bit supply, next to some heavy artillery like Remote Detonator in the arsenal. Such a prep-heavy bitgaining scheme needs a powerful draw engine, which will most likely feature BodyweightTM Synthetic Blood and some MIT West Tiers. A few Zetatech Portastations can be a worthwhile addition.

This, plus the various card slots usually needed for a watertight meat damage prevention, take up a lot of deck space, and therefore, the problem area of TagMe stacks is probably their lean “winning kit”: Often, there simply isn’t much space left for sophisticated schemes. Since resources cannot be used for obvious reasons, that leaves programs (like a virus or two), hardware (perhaps an R&D Interface), and preps (Custodial Position, for example), as well as combinations thereof—the possibilities are manifold, if limited in scope.

Back in 1997, long before the release of *Classic*, Wyatt Cheng posted what was perhaps the first TagMe incarnation to the Netrunner-L. Though a bit unfocused, it has a strong theme for its winning strategy:

Proto-TagMe (HQ attack, 46 cards)

8	Drone for a Day
4	Edited Shipping Manifests
9	BodyweightTM Synthetic Blood
2	MIT West Tier
1	Militech MRAM Chip
1	Skeleton Passkeys
1	Jackhammer
1	Big Frackin’ Gun
1	Succubus
1	Emergency Self-Construct
1	Taxman
1	Crumble
1	Enterprise, Inc., Shields
2	Self-Modifying Code
1	BodyweightTM Data Crèche
3	Armored Fridge
1	Full-Body Conversion
1	Gideon’s Pawnshop
3	Organ Donor
3	Remote Detonator

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It's the Organ Donors that don't really seem to fit the TagMe theme, but then, with nine Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood, the Runner will draw quite a lot of cards. Wyatt's attack strategy is an HQ-virus strategy—he pointed out the synergy between HQ viri and Edited Shipping Manifests (which let the Runner drop a virus counter even if no cards from HQ are actually accessed): “One of my favourite tactics is to have an HQ virus in play, and use Edited Shipping Manifests. Use the 10 bits gained to Remote-Detonator, and then run normally.” This still holds true today if you plan on including some Manifests in your stack. However, as we will see, focusing exclusively on Drone for a Day is mostly how it is done nowadays.

Let's leave the history books behind and look at a rather generic example of a “modern”, “pure” TagMe stack (i. e., no non-TagMe way of bitgaining). The following stack is by myself, but it unfortunately tends to lose a lot—it's listed here mainly for the sake of the argument. We will subsequently look at ways of improving on “modern” TagMe strategy.

Generic TagMe (mainly HQ attack)

13	Drone for a Day
1	Edited Shipping Manifests
8	Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood
1	MIT West Tier
1	Militech MRAM Chip
1	Raffles
1	Pile Driver
1	MS-todon
1	Emergency Self-Construct
1	Shredder Uplink Protocol
1	Vienna 22
1	Enterprise, Inc., Shields
2	Zetatech Mem Chip
1	R&D Interface
1	Zetatech Portastation
3	Armored Fridge
2	Full-Body Conversion
1	Dermatech™ Bodyplating
3	Temple Microcode Outlet
1	Remote Detonator

What possibilities are there for Runners trying to make the best of the TagMe strategy in a post-Classic environment? Basically, TagMe means needing a clumsy apparatus of draw power, bit-generating preps and meat damage protection as a tradeoff for having lots of bits to spend freely. This is illustrated by my stack above. In order to tweak this approach for creating a tournament-worthy stack, players have tried to cut down on the number of cards that crowd the slots needed for a winning strategy, as well as costing lots of actions to implement. There are two main ways of doing this:

- While MS-todon is cool, it means you also will have to use two other breakers for code gates and walls (e. g., Raffles and

Pile Driver). Swallowing up three card slots and 3 MU for a breaker suite is not so cool when Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker and Joan of Arc only need two of each. Bartmoss' drawback of being really expensive against certain kinds of ice is partially balanced by TagMe's bit abundance. Therefore, though sadly lacking in variety, lots of TagMe stacks sport the ubiquitous Joan/Bartmoss combo.

- Another area that lends itself to “downsizing” is the protection against meat damage. Though it's cool to lay down one Full-Body Conversion and Dermatech™ Bodyplating after the other (and for zero installation cost), you need a lot of them to really make this work. There is one (perhaps overpowered) card in the game that shuts down all meat damage just by itself: Emergency Self-Construct. To use this program as the sole protection rather than as a last-ditch fallback surely is a possibility. Losing an action per turn is harsh, but many Runners gladly take the risk of encountering a →Tag'n'Bag deck for whittling down their anti-meat damage card slots to just one!

Here is a TagMe stack built and utilized in various tournaments by UK Runner Mark Applin. Its winning strategy is, obviously, multi-access preps.

TagMe/Rush-Hour

14	Drone for a Day
8	Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood
2	MIT West Tier
1	Militech MRAM Chip
2	Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker
2	Joan of Arc
1	Emergency Self-Construct
1	Enterprise, Inc., Shields
5	Self-Modifying Code
6	Rush Hour
2	All-Hands
1	Remote Detonator

This deck simply relies on Emergency Self-Construct for meat-damage protection. In Mark's words: “Even if the Corp does manage to ‘kill’ you, the deck is still fast enough to win most games. Otherwise, just Rush-Hour R&D until you win.” Here, instead of the three slots in my stack, there are eight slots for the “winning kit”. Plus, Mark's stack sets up much more quickly, since with just one Bartmoss or Self-Modifying Code, the Runner can start running with relative confidence. At this point, only Joan of Arc and Emergency Self-Construct are missing to complete the whole setup. Note, however, that the Enterprise, Inc., Shields make both stacks illegal for Revised Constructed tournaments. They should best be replaced with Force Shield or Skullcap.

Next to multi-access and virus disruption (Vienna 22, Crumble, etc.), TagMe also lends itself to a Bad Publicity approach. Though not as foolproof as Emergency Self-Construct, Identity Donor can also hold its ground as a sole insurance against meat damage, while contributing tremendously to the Bad Publicity strategy. The following stack is also by Mark Applin.

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TagMe/Bad Publicity

15	Drone for a Day
8	Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood
3	MIT West Tier
1	Militech MRAM Chip
3	Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker
3	Joan of Arc
2	Self-Modifying Code
2	Scaldan
1	Shredder Uplink Protocol
5	Identity Donor
1	Remote Detonator
1	Bodyweight™ Data Crèche

In Mark's own words again: "Just run HQ and dump Scaldan counters. If it gets expensive, you can drop Shredder and detonate the HQ ice."

While TagMe stacks can be reasonably strong in the Constructed tournament environment, there are some cards that severely disrupt them or even shut them down. For once, it is not City Surveillance that is the most dangerous threat for a strategy depending on Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood—quite the contrary: the more tags, the merrier. No, the most dangerous card is Closed Accounts, since there is absolutely no defense against it, and the bit engine only works as long as the "bottom line" of the 4 bits in pool needed to play a Drone is not crossed. With *Classic*™ adding Street Enforcer and Shock Treatment to the anti-TagMe arsenal, Mark went as far as to retire his two decks (which are both pre-*Classic*). Sure enough, at least Closed Accounts has shown up in Corp players' decks as a metagame reaction to TagMe stacks.

Still, all is not lost. Some considerations on post-*Classic* TagMe tech come to mind: First, it is not unknown for TagMe stacks to include one or more copies of Total Genetic Retrofit to get rid of all tags in a pinch. This might be a way of circumventing (and hopefully trashing) Street Enforcers and Shock Treatment.

Second, *Classic* has not only hurt TagMe, but also helped it along by adding Zetatech Portastation to the mix. While Closed Accounts will always be a painful experience, having four Portastations installed negates the long rebuilding phase needed to get back up to the "bottom line" for Drone for a Day. Plus, since a lot of bits are invested in the `Stations, there might be less left in the pool to be lost to Closed Accounts. Also, if the Runner bases his or her winning strategy on preps like Rush Hour and Remote Detonator (not to mention Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood), the Portastations will probably be worth the investment. Of course, another card to look out for would then be Power Grid Overload...

Good luck with your TagMe experiments—I'm sure that the last word has not yet been spoken on this solid, manifold and fun Runner strategy, though Wyatt sure gave it a shot:

"So what can the Corp do to you when you have tags?"

- Give you more tags: *Ha!*
 - Meat damage: *Armoured Fridges, Emergency Self-Construct, Full-Body Conversion, MRAM Chips.*
 - Powergrid Overload: *Cybernetics in the form of MRAM Chips and Full-Body Conversion.*
 - Trash resources: *Don't play with resources.*
 - Closed Accounts: *Cry. And draw 4 bits."*
 —Wyatt Cheng, January 29, 1997

Preying Mantis/ Poisoned Water Supply

[from TRQ #17, September 2002]

by Jens Kreutzer

using material by Byron 'Neal' Massey

with support by Richard Cripe

"Playing Mantis ... ain't easy."

—Scott Dickie, February 15, 2001.

"I still think it's the most boring deck on this planet (and probably on most others too)."

—Erwin Wagner, later that day.

A little while after the self-mutilating Faked-Hit stack surfaced on the **Netrunner**™ strategy map, the other type of deck that could win by Bad Publicity counters and without any interaction with the Corp started to rear its ominous head on the Netrunner-L newsgroup. This time, the idea was not to play seven Faked Hits and somehow avoid a premature death by brain damage, but to use Poisoned Water Supply as the main theme instead. This *Proteus*™ rare reads:

Poisoned Water Supply - Cost: 4

Prep-Bad Publicity

Play only if you have at least two connections in play. Trash two connections. Give the Corp 1 Bad Publicity point. If the Corp has 7 or more Bad Publicity points, it loses the game, even if it fulfills victory conditions at the same time.

The question about which kind of connections should best be used was quickly decided. While any 0-cost connection (like Databroker or Smith's Pawnshop) offers a cheap solution, and while generally useful connections like Broker or Crash Everett might help with the preparation before being trashed, it became clear by 1997 at the latest that Preying Mantis seemed to be custom-made for the job at hand (i. e., getting poisoned). It's non-unique, installs for free, and speeds things up by offering extra actions. Since speed is of the essence in this no-interaction plan, Poisoned/Mantis has the potential for an uncanny synergy that

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comes very close to the horror that is →Psycho Tycho, as would gradually become apparent over the course of the next couple of years. The race was on.

An early concept by Leonard Blado (September 8, 1996) tried to win in an average of 6-8 turns by combining Arasaka Owns You, Faked Hit, Loan from Chiba, Militech MRAM Chip, N.E.T.O., Poisoned Water Supply and Preying Mantis. The idea to use Arasaka Owns You as the main draw/bit engine was nice, but since it cannot be played when the Runner suffers unpreventable damage (Faked Hit, Preying Mantis), the concept was flawed—back to the drawing board.

On June 1, 1997, Byron ‘Neal’ Massey made the first serious attempt, relying exclusively on the Poisoned/Mantis combo. The deck he suggested would contain nothing but Preying Mantis, Poisoned Water Supply, Loan from Chiba and Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood, winning in about 8-11 turns (a variant with Top Runners’ Conference is also feasible). This is really the deck concept in its purest incarnation, albeit much too slow for being competitive. But since this approach didn’t get much mileage out of its Preying Mantes (probably using them only in the last turn), there was still a lot of room for improvement and speeding-up.

On the next day (June 2), Leonard Blado showed us a way of dealing with the brain damage that results from no-holds-barred Mantis abuse: Emergency Self-Construct (ESC).

Here is how it works: Each round, the Runner installs and uses as many Mantes as possible, while keeping one less card in hand than the number of times a Mantis was activated. The last point of brain damage would normally flatline the Runner, but ESC then kicks in, preventing the flatline and conveniently removing all brain damage as well. The Runner starts the next turn with zero cards in hand and one less action, but with an armada of Mantes installed, this is a very minor annoyance. Since it was ruled that multiple uses of ESC do not reduce the action count further (instead re-setting it to 3 each time), using it each round is no problem at all. The hand size does keep decreasing, though, but that is irrelevant since there are never any cards left in the Runner’s hand at the end of the turn anyway. This is Leonard’s idea of a 3-turn win with this strategy:

Turn 1, Actions 1-3: Install Preying Mantis
 Turn 1, Action 4: Install Loan from Chiba
 Turn 1, Action 5-6: Play Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood
 Turn 1, Action 7-9: Install Preying Mantis
 Turn 1, Action 10: Install Emergency Self-Construct

Turn 2, Action 1: Draw
 Turn 2, Action 2-6: Play Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood
 Turn 2, Action 7-14: Install Preying Mantis
 Turn 2, Action 15: Install Loan from Chiba
 Turn 2, Action 16: Install Emergency Self-Construct

Turn 3, Action 1: Draw
 Turn 3, Action 2-4: Play Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood
 Turn 3, Action 5-7: Install Loan from Chiba
 Turn 3, Action 8-14: Play Poisoned Water Supply

The problem with this is that there is about a 1-in-10,000 chance of drawing the right cards at the right time. Especially the seven Poisoned Water Supplies at the very bottom of the deck (you are in trouble if you draw them before the last turn) are just improbable. Thus, the theory was formulated—a 3-turn win is possible!—, but what kind of deck should you build in order to pull this stunt off reliably? That was a tough question.

Time passed, until Neal (with the help of Erwin Wagner) tried in earnest to solve the puzzle, hoping to play his newly developed strategy in the 1998 U. S. Northwest Championships. As a quirk of fate, he got the days for the Sealed and Constructed tournaments confused and couldn’t play his new innovation after all, because there wasn’t enough time to tweak it, but he really got the ball rolling with his post to the Netrunner-L on 12 November, 1998. Part of this effort was to disprove the claim that there were no new deck types to be found in **Netrunner** anymore, which was heard time and again during those pre-*Classic* days. It seems that Byron Bailey had also been working on the Preying Mantis/Poisoned Water Supply deck, with a similar approach, but hadn’t taken it quite as far as Neal and Erwin.

Was the three-turn win possible after all? Let’s hear it from Neal himself: “The third turn is where I want to stop, applying the winning lock with my sixteen Preying Mantis actions. In practice, I haven’t been able to engineer it. You start each turn with no cards, and usually no bits. My brother convinced me that you should spend the third turn just like the first two, installing Preying Mantis until you have the magic number (twenty-two) on the table.” And so, in practice, four turns would become the realistic target.

Here are Neal’s ideas in a nutshell: “Draw cards and install as many Preying Mantes as possible each turn. Since each Mantis immediately grants another action, they can be installed at no real action cost, greatly speeding up the process. Each turn, you must install an ESC and have exactly one less card in hand than the number of Mantis actions that were used. The accumulated brain damage will flatline you at the end of turn, but ESC lets you go virtual and immediately remove all brain damage. You start each turn with no cards in hand, so you must begin anew with drawing. The number of available actions increases rapidly each turn since more and more Mantes are being installed. Do this for three turns, and in the fourth, play misc.for-sale on all the Mantes. You now have an incredible amount of bits and actions and should be able to win in various creative ways, one of them being to instead sell all Mantes but twelve and play six Poisoned Water Supply, followed by one Faked Hit.”

However, the problem was *still* to get the ‘winning cards’, a. k. a. winning kit, at the right time. Also, the question of an affordable draw engine needed addressing. Neal put a lot of thought into these issues and suggested many interesting avenues that might be taken. In the end, it appears that two archetypes of the stack evolved with time. Neal never really made his final results public, because he wanted to put his work to good use in Constructed tournaments, but based on the comments that he let slip, several other players tried to emulate his strategy, notably

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during the Finals of World Domination 1999. Up till the present, an aura of mystery still surrounds this stack that nobody but Neal and Erwin has ever seen (with the exception of Douglas Kaufman, who judged the famous IRC match challenge between Neal and Sean Harvey in January 2000).

Apparently, the question of draw engine/bit engine proved too difficult for Neal's original plan. In one, the most successful archetype, he settled for Loan from Chiba as bit engine and N.E.T.O. as draw engine (this deck list was created by Richard Cripe, based on conjecture):

Preying Mantis/Poisoned Water Supply (Loan-from-Chiba Archetype)

- 15 Preying Mantis**
- 7 Poisoned Water Supply**
- 9 Loan from Chiba**
- 1 Emergency Self-Construct**
- 3 Sneak Preview**
- 8 N.E.T.O.**
- 2 MIT West Tier**

Sneak Preview cleverly combines with N.E.T.O. and Emergency Self-Construct, fetching the latter from the trash or the stack as needed. Incidentally, to illustrate the guesswork that was involved in approximating Neal's deck, his complaints on the NR-L about the ruling which states that Sneak Preview doesn't bring back ESC from the trash at the end of turn served as a hint that Sneak Preview was part of the Poisoned/Mantis stack. Richard Cripe wrote a detailed comment about this reconstruction:

"This deck is based off what I know of Byron 'Neal' Massey's PWS deck. He may have more to say about it, having more experience and knowledge of the deck. You could probably play with one less MIT, but if you draw it in your opening hand, you're screwed. You could probably play with one less Sneak Preview, but trying to scramble to get the ESC down is a real pain and often leads to flatlining. The goal here is to install every LFC and PM you get your hands on while not flatlining yourself.

"Best first turn:

- a1: N.E.T.O.
 - a2: Preying Mantis
 - a3: Preying Mantis
 - a4: Draw 4 cards with N.E.T.O.
 - a5: Preying Mantis
 - a6: Loan from Chiba
 - a7: Loan from Chiba
- Leaving you with 0 cards and 25 bits.

"Approximate turn two (12 actions in total):

- Draw 16 cards (Don't draw the second MIT West Tier or the third Sneak Preview!)
- Play Sneak Preview to get Emergency Self-Construct
- Play 5 Preying Mantises and 2 Loan from Chiba

- Cards discarded to brain damage should be N.E.T.O. or Poisoned Water Supply, maybe a Sneak Preview or a Loan from Chiba.

"Approximate turn three (15 actions in total):

- Draw 24 cards (but not the last MIT)
- Play the rest of the Preying Mantises, as many Loans as you can safely, and a Sneak Preview. You may need to let a Loan or two go for damage here.

"Turn four:

- Draw and play MIT
- Draw the seven Poisoned Water Supply, and any Loans you may need to pay for them.
- Win by playing the seven Poisoned Water Supply."

So—why N.E.T.O. instead of Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood? For once, it solves the problem of getting the right cards at the right time, because you can simply choose not to take that MIT into your hand when you see it early on. Also, since it doesn't count as drawing, N.E.T.O. evades City Surveillance, which would have been a serious danger otherwise. As it is, but two dangers remain, namely Blood Cat and Underworld Mole, which spell quick doom if aimed at the Loans. As Richard Cripe remarks, one Sneak Preview and one Preying Mantis might be switched for two Access through Alpha as a countermeasure, but since this slows down things a lot, it's perhaps best to take one's chances, hoping that even if the Corp packs Cats and Moles, they won't show up right away. Backdoor to Netwatch is also worth consideration, but it is only of use against Underworld Moles. The Deck has also been discussed in this context.

Let's now take a look at one of the other conjectured archetypes of Poisoned/Mantis (a. k. a. Poisoned Dealer Supply), which has misc.for-sale as its main feature. The idea is to install more Preying Mantises than needed for the Poisoned Water Supplies, and sell the rest off to misc.for-sale during the last turn. In order to make do without bits until the final turn, Jack 'n' Joe is used as draw engine. This is Scott Dickie's version, which he played (without much success) in World Domination 1999—as a variation on the seven Poisoned Water Supplies, one Faked Hit reduces the number of Preying Mantises that need to be left after misc.for-sale to twelve:

Preying Mantis/Poisoned Water Supply (misc.for-sale/Jack 'n' Joe Archetype)

- 22 Preying Mantis**
- 4 Emergency Self-Construct**
- 6 Poisoned Water Supply**
- 1 Faked Hit**
- 15 Jack 'n' Joe**
- 2 MIT West Tier**
- 1 misc.for-sale**
- 4 Crash Everett**

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With 55 cards, Scott's deck seems rather big, and though Crash Everett can be used to 'float' crucial cards on top of the draw stack, N.E.T.O. might still be the better choice. In fact, there are still more possible permutations of the theme. Richard Cripe reports that "an entirely alternate method of playing the deck revolves around using a Jack 'n' Joe engine, not using any Loans until the turn it is ready to win. It is less vulnerable to Blood Cat or the Mole, but it is more vulnerable to City Surveillance. The Corp can then start trashing your Preying Mantises, but the ESC pretty much stops meat damage. I believe this deck is a turn or two slower than the N.E.T.O. version as well as it just doesn't draw cards as fast and has less throw-away cards to soak damage."

This would imply a combination of Jack 'n' Joe and Loan from Chiba, but no misc.for-sale. Richard once more: "The misc.for-sale is not essential at all; it just boosts the already sick amount of bits from the Loans." Unfortunately, there is no decklist for this variant, so you have to figure it out yourself. Actually, Neal himself hinted at still another version on January 13, 2000—one that combines N.E.T.O. with misc.for-sale: "As far as playing the stack, the secret is to get to a spot where you have 14 Preying Mantises installed, then end your turn with an MIT waiting to be drawn. You N.E.T.O. for the MIT (with good planning it should happen on the first action of your fourth turn). Then you play it, use N.E.T.O. to draw four cards per action until you get all the Poisoned Water Supplies in your hand, play your misc.for-sale, and then all seven Poisoned Water Supplies." As you might have been expecting by now, no decklist here either.

So there you have it: Though it is easily the most notorious Runner stack since →Precision Bribery/Time to Collect, Poisoned/Mantis remains shrouded in mystery. Neal (and others) claim that a rather reliable win in the fourth or fifth turn is possible with this strategy, but to come up with the optimal card combination is left to the individual player. I find this to be a very desirable situation, since it makes players think for themselves and get creative. Moreover, coming up with a clever decklist alone doesn't do the trick, since actually playing Poisoned/Mantis is reportedly no easy task: "Unlike →Psycho Tycho, this deck does not play itself but rather requires concentration and memory to achieve success," Richard Cripe tells us. Accordingly, many Runners are said to have inadvertently flatlined themselves with this strategy.

Before I give you a list of ingredients for cloning your own Poisoned/Mantis, let's hear Richard once again with his theory on the evolution of this strategy: "My guess would be that it started as a BSB/Loan engine that evolved into two separate methods of dealing with City Surveillance." He is referring to the N.E.T.O./Loan variant and the Jack 'n' Joe/play-Loans-only-in-the-final-turn variant: The former avoids City Surveillance altogether, while the latter avoids playing the vulnerable Loans until the last turn, daring the Corp to start trashing resources (as ESC protects against meat damage). And here's the toolbox for Do-It-Yourself Poisoned/Mantis stacks (combine at your leisure):

- Bit engine: Loan from Chiba, misc.for-sale, Do the 'Drine (suggested as a way to avoid playing with the dangerous Loans).

- Draw engine: N.E.T.O., Jack 'n' Joe, Crash Everett, Sneak Preview, MIT West Tier, Mantis, Fixer-at-Large.
- Core: Poisoned Water Supply, Faked Hit, Preying Mantis, Emergency Self-Construct.
- Protection: Access through Alpha, Backdoor to Netwatch, The Deck.

With Preying Mantis/Poisoned Water Supply (PM/PWS) winning in four or five (or maybe even as few as three) turns, it is easily the fastest Runner deck out there. A question that has been asked repeatedly is how it measures up to the hallmark of fast Corp decks, →Psycho Tycho. Richard Cripe said (on February 16, 2001) that he believed that PM/PWS was "generally faster" than Psycho Tycho, though he'd never really done a full study. We have to consider here that the Corp starts the game, and that it is therefore enough if it can win by turn four, which should perhaps be doable with Psycho Tycho. In any case, like Richard concluded, it's a close call. But with Tycho Extension banned in the Revised Constructed Format, there is a real danger of PM/PWS becoming dominant, and there have been appeals to do something about it, maybe making Preying Mantis unique or banning Poisoned Water Supply in that format, or issuing an erratum on Emergency Self-Construct to the effect that it may only be used once per game.

Since PM/PWS is one of the no-run/no-interaction Runner stacks (like →Masochism Rules), we'd rather see it go, since it tends to spoil the fun out of Constructed play—this of course isn't supposed to discredit Neal's genius in any way, but the stack does play much like Solitaire. In order to have any chance of even slowing down PM/PWS, the Corp needs to include some very specific cards, like Blood Cat or Underworld Mole, and must draw them in time.

That nothing has happened yet to curb PM/PWS has four reasons. First, it uses a mind-boggling number of rare cards, many of them from the *Proteus* expansion, which are notoriously hard to find nowadays. In fact, apart from Loan from Chiba, Neal's version of the stack is *all* rares! And Loan from Chiba is a valuable uncommon to boot. This means that only a very small number of players will be able to actually build PM/PWS and play it in a meatspace tournament (online play, like on IRC, is a different story). But a deck that only shows up once in a blue moon perhaps needn't be banned. Second, since almost nobody has ever seen the actual decklist created by Neal, PM/PWS is basically a phantom. Neal hasn't had the chance yet to really show off the merits of his stack, and to ban it outright even before it has shown its full potential seems a bit hasty, and very unfair to Neal as well. Third, much unlike →Psycho Tycho, PM/PWS is quite difficult to play. There is a lot of juggling with actions and bits, and the correct way of drawing cards. This means that winning with PM/PWS is a measure of skill in the end, and that cannot really be such a bad thing. Fourth, being a direct consequence of points two and three above, players trying their luck with PM/PWS in tournaments mostly got a very bad performance out of it. Most notably, the PM/PWS clones played in the WD 1999 Finals didn't do well at all. It remains to be seen how it fares in WD 2002, however.

As if it wasn't enough already, though, PM/PWS has recently got another boost by a clarification that concerns the way

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Emergency Self-Construct functions. It used to be a worry of PM/PWS players that they had to have exactly one less card in hand at the end of turn than the total number of Preying Mantis brain damage that would be suffered, so that the last point of brain damage would trigger ESC and remove them all in the process. It is clear that, should there be any more incoming damage, the Runner would flatline again and lose if there was no other Emergency Self-Construct installed for each additional point of brain damage past the limit—and this gets deadly real soon.

But there was also a perceived danger at the other end of the spectrum, which was, strangely enough, not enough brain damage. If the Runner has, say, twelve cards in hand at the end of turn and suffers eleven points of brain damage, he or she would ‘survive’ this, but would then end up with a handsize of -6 , which means a lost game. But this effect of having to discard ‘more than you have’ is counted as flatlining as well according to the clarification. This means that when the Runner attempts to ‘discard’ to -6 , ESC triggers and removes all brain damage, and the handsize is then reduced by just one, which should bring the Runner out of the danger zone. This makes playing PM/PWS much easier, since any number of brain damage \leq (cards in hand + 1) at the end of turn will do. This aspect of playing PM/PWS was pointed out by Douglas Kaufman and others in January 2000. As noted above, the current understanding seems to be that the handsize reduction incurred by multiple uses of Emergency Self-Construct is cumulative, as opposed to the one lost action, but this doesn’t really hurt PM/PWS, since it wins before ESC-induced handsize reductions can result in a negative handsize that is not due to brain damage.

Another issue that saw discussion in the context of PM/PWS is the interpretation of N.E.T.O. Here’s a reminder of N.E.T.O.’s game text:

N.E.T.O. – Cost: 0

Resource-BBS

Action: Look at the top four cards of your stack. You may bring any prep or resource cards among them into your hand. Pay one bit for each card taken in this way, and show those cards to the Corp. Shuffle the rest back into your stack.

The question about this wording is the “pay one bit” part. Since it doesn’t appear in front of the colon like the action cost, it isn’t written in compliance with the usual cost:effect syntax. But this seems to imply that paying a bit for each card taken into hand is a penalty, not a cost, and according to the rules, penalties can be ignored if they cannot be fulfilled. This in turn would mean that even if there are no bits in his or her pool, the Runner could still get four cards per action for free! With a supercharged draw engine like this, Neal estimated that he could win in three turns with PM/PWS. Tom Wylie ruled on November 12, 1999, that paying a bit is to be considered a cost and therefore must be paid in order to get the effect, but this issue is still controversial, since it contradicts the card text.

In January 2000, Neal gave us a hint on how to play PM/PWS with style: “When I am playing the Poisoned Dealer Supply stack, I turn each Preying Mantis sideways when I declare that I am using his action (a.k.a. ‘tapping’ in **Magic**TM). On my fourth turn, I only discard copies of Preying Mantis that are already turned sideways when I play a copy of Poisoned Water Supply. Because my base actions are down to three, it has never been even a minor inconvenience to play with this convention. Fifteen or sixteen of the eighteen or nineteen actions taken on the fourth turn require the use of Preying Mantis. Only seven of those actions are used to play Poisoned Water Supply. As it turns out, there are always two Preying Mantas available for destruction. If your version of the stack runs in to trouble (I can’t imagine how, but ...) you can always play with a single Faked Hit and six Poisoned Water Supply. Then you only need to kill off twelve dope dealers, an easy thing when you are running a drug empire.”

As is fitting, Neal gets the final word on the metagame implications of his creation: “If played properly, Poisoned Dealer Supply should win on turn four. That means the Corp gets twelve actions to tag and kill a Loan. That might be possible in some fraction of games. But when you add in the fact that the Corp must also prepare itself for Runners with no resources, and non-Loan bit engines, plus TagMe plans, it’s not realistic. Blood Cat, though” I guess we can expect Blood Cat to show up in quite a few Corp decks in the future, should Preying Mantis/Poisoned Water Supply become really popular with players—which fortunately hasn’t happened yet.

“Oops, looks like I broke the game, sorry.”

—Neal

“Oops, guess we have to add Neal to the banned list then.”

—Benjamin Ford

The Short Stack

[from TRQ #19, June 2003]

by Jens Kreutzer

using material by Byron “Neal” Massey and Paul Grogan

“I hope this stack gives you the same success I have enjoyed.”

—Byron “Neal” Massey, *Neal’s Last Words*.

Apart from The Big Dig, there is one other famous Runner strategy that gorges itself on R&D for the win: The Short Stack by Byron “Neal” Massey, posted to the Netrunner-L on February 17, 1997. The name was chosen because in the rather short time of eight turns or less, the Runner draws his or her whole stack and then (hopefully) wins with a flourish. Unlike Big Dig, which intends to make one huge run, The Short Stack makes many runs that become ever more effective. At its heart lie Highlighter and Microtech AI Interface, a deadly combination for explosive access power: Accumulating Highlighter counters let the Runner

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access more and more cards from R&D, while cutting cards that have already been accessed to the bottom of R&D with Microtech AI Interface ensures that no card is accessed twice. Let's have a look at Neal's original decklist:

The Short Stack (46 cards)

10	Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood
6	Militech MRAM Chip
9	Loan from Chiba
4	Access through Alpha
3	Nasuko Cycle
1	Krash
2	Highlighter
1	Microtech AI Interface
1	False Echo
1	Enterprise, Inc., Shields
2	All-Nighter
1	Rush Hour
1	Remote Detonator
1	Private LDL Access
1	Valu-Pak Software Bundle
1	Bodyweight™ Data Crèche
1	WuTech Mem Chip

Neal himself has written an article that plays with the metaphor of stuffing oneself with R&D cards, and that does an excellent job of describing how The Short Stack works. I take the liberty of quoting Neal's article with some minor editing:

Flipping the Pancakes

"The first strategy is to use Bodyweight Synthetic Blood to draw through the entire stack as quickly as possible. I don't discard anything except excess Bodyweight Synthetic Blood, Access through Alpha, Militech MRAM Chips, and Nasuko Cycles. Occasionally I discard a Loan or two if my hand is too crowded. The Access through Alpha should be installed with the first Loan from Chiba, if possible, but sometimes I have to risk it. The Nasuko Cycle can be left out unless the Corp is playing an R&D that forces me to run before turn 8 (sometimes turn 7). It has to be installed before any early run, since a tag during the Corp's turn is instant death with an installed Loan from Chiba.

"It seems to take four Militech MRAM Chips to get past the hump, which usually comes around turn 3 or 4. Sometimes I only need three Chips. I try to hold the Loans back as long as possible to avoid paying the Chiba goons until absolutely necessary, and all those extra Loans require MRAM to keep my head from exploding.

"Somewhere along the way I install the Bodyweight Data Crèche, WuTech Mem Chip, and Enterprise, Inc., Shields. This has to be done before running starts, but none of these cards gives away the strategy, so there is no special timing needed to put them into play.

Setting the Table

"At this point, about six turns should have gone by. I have been furiously racing through my stack, installing Loans and MRAM and collecting cards. The installed cards should be:

- some Loans from Chiba
- some Militech MRAM Chips
- Access through Alpha
- Bodyweight Data Crèche
- WuTech Mem Chip
- Enterprise, Inc., Shields
- and possibly a Nasuko Cycle

"I hopefully have all eleven of the cards needed for the finale (the 'kit') in my hand. I try to follow this sequence in the last two turns of the game (hopefully no later than turn 7):

Turn 7:

- Loan from Chiba
- Loan from Chiba
- Loan from Chiba
- Valu-Pak Software Bundle, installing:
 - Krash
 - False Echo
 - Microtech AI Interface
 - Highlighter
 - Highlighter

Going Back for a Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Helping

Turn 8:

"First action. If HQ has a lot less ice installed than R&D, I play Private LDL Access, otherwise, Rush Hour. Private LDL Access is especially nice if the Corp ices R&D heavily after seeing the programs on turn 7. If I use Rush Hour, I access four cards, if not, just one. Either way, I give the Corp two Highlighter counters.

"Immediately after this run, I use the False Echo program to force the Corp to rez all the ice on R&D that they can afford. This sets up action 2.

"Second action. If I won't have enough cash to keep Krashing the R&D ice for five more runs, I play the Remote Detonator. Otherwise, I just run R&D. I almost always have to play the Remote Detonator, and I will use that assumption for the rest of my description. I ignore the tags from the Remote Detonator since this is the last turn of the game. The Corp will not get a chance to send the Chiba goons after me (famous last words, but it usually works).

"Third action. I play All-Nighter and make two runs on R&D. I access two cards on the first run and four on the second, cutting off the ones I have already seen with the Microtech AI Interface before accessing. At the end of the action, I have seen ten

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cards (counting the Rush Hour from the first action) in R&D and the Corp has six Highlighter counters.

“Fourth Action. I play another All-Nighter. At the end of this action, I have seen 24 cards in R&D, and the Corp has ten Highlighter counters.

“Bodyweight Data Crèche. I run R&D again with the Crèche. After this run, I have seen 34 cards from R&D. Since this is turn 8, and the Corp has to draw at least one card each turn, I have seen every card in R&D.

Doing the Dishes

“A quick-setup Siren can really be a bummer. Hopefully the Nasuko Cycle provides enough protection to run on the Siren as soon as it is rezzed. The same is true of City Surveillance.

“Super-Speed Tycho can sometimes outrace me to victory. I have experimented with Precision Bribery, but it seems that most CEOs these days put ice on a subsidiary data fort before I can even grease the frying pan.

“There isn’t much strategy or suspense when I play this stack, and it is currently retired. It does provide a sort of benchmark for speed Corp CEOs. I imagine there are stacks with Taxman, Viral Pipeline, or Scaldan that can win faster, but this stack is very predictable. If I can make it to turn 8, I nearly always win.”

This was Neal’s original article, and it pretty much says everything there is to say about his creation, except perhaps that it doesn’t really do the Corp much good to start forgoing actions in the middle of the Highlighter R&D carnage, as the Runner can just start to run again next turn. However, since 1997, the tournament scene has changed, and *Classic* has been released. So, let’s look at The Short Stack from a current point of view.

First, of course, the Revised Constructed Format has banned Enterprise, Inc., Shields, so this card should be removed from the deck list. This makes The Short Stack very vulnerable against R&Ds that pack multiple Net damage ambushes like Setup!. On the other hand, the format gave The Short Stack a new chance to shine, since Tycho Extension is also banned. Neal had always been worried about this: “I have to be fair and say that [The Short Stack] was too slow in the days of Psycho Tycho”.

Second, thinking about an alternative icebreaker choice might prove worthwhile. Neal had already considered taking Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker (and some Umbrella Policies as insurance) over reliable but expensive Krash. This takes up more deck space and still could let the Runner down in the critical last turn. *Classic* has introduced Rent-I-Con, and this is a really viable option, since it doesn’t depend on any support cards, but is much cheaper to use than Krash. The single drawback is that playing Remote Detonator (in combination with False Echo) is a must after the run with Rent-I-Con.

Ironically, *Classic* has also provided a defense against Rent-I-Con: Glacier. If the Corp suspects that a Detonator is about

to be played, a Glacier on R&D can be moved *away* at the start of the run to escape being detonated, only to return when the Runner next tries to assault R&D. This will be very expensive for Krash, but impenetrable for a Runner whose Rent-I-Con has just trashed itself.

Paul Grogan has built a post-*Classic* Short Stack and written some comments about it:

The Short Stack Mark 2 (45 cards)

10 Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood
6 Militech MRAM Chip
12 Score!
3 Loan from Chiba
1 Rent-I-Con
1 Microtech Backup Drive
2 Highlighter
1 Microtech AI Interface
1 False Echo
2 All-Nighter
1 Rush Hour
1 Remote Detonator
1 Private LDL Access
1 Valu-Pak Software Bundle
1 Bodyweight™ Data Crèche
1 WuTech Mem Chip

Here is what Paul has to say about his creation: “I was tempted to play The Short Stack for the Y2K UK Championships as I’d been practising it and wanted to see how it would fare against any decks with new cards in it. I was a bit worried about Data Fort Remapping which people might play. A Theorem Proof deck might also cause me problems but nobody seems to be playing that at the moment.

“24 hours before the event, I thought to myself that I really should change it a little bit. I looked at Rent-I-Con over Krash and I was worried about using Loan from Chiba as I’d overheard a few people saying they will be playing anti-Loan Corp decks. So, I thought that if I play Rent-I-Con, I need less money, so I dropped all the Loans for Score!s. I also dropped the Enterprise, Inc., Shields since the card is currently banned. A short while later I had the finished deck. I added the Microtech Backup Drive as a safety measure, just in case.

“On the day of the championships I never needed the Backup Drive or the Private LDL Access. The deck didn’t lose a game all day, not even against Barry, who got two Data Fort Remappings out against me.”

All in all, this classic Runner stack has seen a renaissance, and still seems to be a viable option nowadays. It doesn’t have many rares, and never more than one copy, which should make it comparatively easy to build. Besides, it doesn’t take a genius to

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play it, as the *modus operandi* is almost the same each time. Advice for newer players: Try this out a couple of times and see how you fare. When it becomes boring for you, move on to something else, like others have done before.

Hints for Corporations that play versus The Short Stack (in its newer incarnation): If you know (or suspect) beforehand that you will have to face a Short Stack Runner, you have quite a number of metagame choices, some of which have already been mentioned:

- Play with Glacier, as almost every Corp does anyway these days. If you can ice R&D again after the big Detonation, Runners using Rent-I-Con will face a big problem. Other Runners will at least face big expenses and might not be able to pay up.
- Play a Rent-to-Own deck. Some Colonel Failures in front of R&D and HQ might prove too much for Krash, but they probably won't be enough to really stop Rent-I-Con.
- Play virus defense versus Highlighter. While Disinfectant, Inc. is a flash in the pan, two Superserums scored beforehand might make the difference, as the first four virus counters will be prevented. This reduces the number of accessed cards from 34 to 18. Three Superserums whittle this figure down to a puny 13.

Another way to threaten the Runner is having a way to increase the number of available actions per turn, like with Remote Facility, for example. If the Corp can forgo actions to remove the Highlighter counters right before the second All-Nighter, only 17 cards will be accessed. With the remaining one action, the Corp can then trash a Loan from Chiba for the win in the following turn.

- End some of the Highlighter runs: Though Paul Grogan's experiences are different, Data Fort Remapping might still thwart the Runner's plans. A well-placed Rio de Janeiro City Grid could do likewise.
- Kill the Runner with Net damage. Since Enterprise, Inc., Shields is ousted, this is a major weakness of The Short Stack. Skullcap isn't worth it, since it only prevents one source of damage, and Weefle Initiation doesn't combine with either All-Nighter or the Crèche. Therefore, the choice of weapons is up to the Corp: Setup! is standard, of course, and TRAP! works well as long as the bits are there to pay for it, but perhaps the strongest and most versatile choice is Fetal AI.
- Use Theorem Proof as the agenda of choice. This delays the Runner enough for the Corp to trash some Loans from Chiba the next turn (thanks to Remote Detonator tags)—the Runner needs three extra actions (and two extra MU) to score three Theorem Proofs, which are not accounted for in the plan.
- Dazzle Microtech AI Interface with Bel-Digmo Antibody. Perhaps only a minor annoyance, reshuffling R&D by rezzing an installed Bel-Digmo might reduce the percentage of accessed cards considerably. Perhaps most efficient at the point when the Runner just needs one other agenda for the win.

- Divert the runs with Siren. A strong Siren fort and some defense on R&D and HQ is likely to spell doom for a Runner using Rent-I-Con.

- Incidentally, a Newsgroup Taunting deck is very strong versus The Short Stack, since these nodes are immune against Remote Detonator. If the thing that makes running expensive cannot be removed after the first run, further runs will be very difficult to make.

- Trying a tagging approach to go right after the Loans is also an option. The Runner might be forced to try and find another bit engine if tagging (and bagging) proves too much of a danger.

On the other hand, if the Corp has no chance to actively metagame against The Short Stack, possibilities for reactive countermeasures are limited. Trying to win before The Short Stack can kick into action is best, of course, but not easy. Drawing enough cards from R&D to get the agendas into HQ, a subfort or perhaps the Archives might be a worthwhile tactic, best done if there is some way to increase hand size. Essential for this second tactic is an early identification of The Short Stack.

Of the two "big finish" R&D stacks, The Short Stack seems to be the more vulnerable one, while The Big Dig is probably a little bit slower. Nevertheless, both are solid and very focused strategies—if perhaps a little boring in the long run.

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Anagrams in Netrunner

[from TRQ #15, December 2001]
by Jens Kreutzer

Looking at the title of this article, you might ask: So what's an anagram? The word comes from New Latin *anagramma*, that in turn coming from Greek *anagrammatismos*; *ana-* meaning "up, again, back, new", and *-gram* meaning "letter". An anagram is a rearrangement of the letters of one word or phrase to form another word or phrase. Sometimes, you can find amusing results in this way. A simple example is to rearrange the letters of *evil* to get *vile*, a more complicated one, changing *Clint Eastwood* to *Old West action*. Or, *Proteus* to *top user* (or *our pest*)!

The easiest way of forming an anagram is simply reversing a word, but most often, you only get gibberish. This is what happened to Larry Niven, a famous science-fiction novelist, who is also Richard Garfield's favorite author. Niven is probably best known for his book "Ringworld". If you spell Niven's name backwards, you get "Nevinyrral". This not only appears on the **Netrunner** Corporation card of the same name, but also on the card Nevinyrral's Disk in **Magic: The Gathering**TM.

On to more complex anagrams, of which there are quite a few in **Netrunner** (maybe there are still more to discover!). Scaldan rearranges to form "scandal", which seems fitting for the bad-publicity nature of this virus.

Ever wondered what "MIT West Tier" is supposed to mean? Well, MIT is short for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and *tier* (which rhymes with *beer*, for non-native speakers of English) means roughly, "level". But you might have heard that MIT West Tier is an anagram of "Timetwister", a card from **Magic: The Gathering** with a very similar game effect.

The two masterminds behind **Netrunner** also hid their names in anagrams within the game. "Omni Kismet, Ph. D." is an anagram of Mike Pondsmith, designer of **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.**, the roleplaying game that lent **Netrunner** its background story. The painting on the card is (quite recognizably) a portrait of Mike. And finally, "Filched Radar Rig" (found on page 9 of the **Netrunner** Rulebook) is an anagram of Richard Garfield himself.

It appears that the *Wizards of the Coast* design team is very fond of anagrams, and indeed you can have lots of fun with them. At

www.wordsmith.org/anagram/index.html,

you can find a collection of famous anagrams ("Internet access" gives "ancient secrets") as well as an anagram generator to check out whether your name or any other phrase you might choose

contains any hidden messages. In honor of the "third pillar" of **Netrunner**, Jennifer Clarke Wilkes, I tried to find an interesting anagram for her name, but "A jewel fencer: link risk", "A new ice rink: jerks fell", and "A Finn's jeweller: kicker!" is about all the generator came up with. Sorry, Jennifer! But do note the *Neuromancer* reference involving Finns and jewels.

Next question: What's a palindrome? A palindrome is a word or phrase that can be read from front to back as well as from back to front. Some easy examples:

Racecar.

Evil olive.

Some longer examples:

Cigar? Toss it in a can, it is so tragic.

A man, a plan, a canal—Panama!

Unfortunately, there are no known palindromes in **Netrunner**, but perhaps we can hope for further expansions to see to that. ☺

Banpei

[from TRQ #12, March 2001]
by Jens Kreutzer

with support by Nils Kreutzer and Daniel Schneider

Banpei is perhaps the most basic and typical of all sentry ice cards in the Corp's arsenal. Because of its two "must-break" subroutines and its very reasonable rez cost, it is sometimes seen in Constructed play, and most players would use it in Sealed. Still, most sentry (and generic) icebreakers don't pay a lot to break through Banpei, although it seems to be the perfect foil for Big Frackin' Gun or Black Dahlia. Wild Card, of course, is a different story altogether.

The illustration on Banpei depicts a computerized, futuristic samurai in what seems to be a virtual hallway, standing guard. The warrior carries a sword strapped across his back, and his helmet has a shape typical of the Japanese *kabuto*. Incidentally, the original picture created by Douglas Shuler is only reproduced in part: On the cover of the **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.** supplement *Bartmoss' Brainware Blowout*, the whole illustration is depicted, showing *another*, similar samurai standing to the left of the one seen on the card. **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.**, published by R. Talsorian Games, is the roleplaying game from which the background of the **Netrunner** world was adapted. In the section on Netrunning in the **Cyberpunk** second edition basic rulebook (p. 139), an offensive program named "Killer" is mentioned, which is used to destroy other programs. Employed as a defense for dataforts as well as by Netrunners themselves, it comes in several strengths, just called

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“Killer II”, “Killer IV”, and so on, up to “Killer VI”. Without doubt, this category of programs (which all do the same but have six different levels of strength in game terms) served as the model for Banpei, Ice Pick Willie, D’Arc Knight, Triggerman, Sentinels Prime, and Data Naga. In the description of the icon (Netspace representation) that is characteristic of the “Killer” series, we find a “large manlike robot, dressed as a metallic samurai. His eyes glow red from behind his mask, and he carries a glowing katana”—*et voilà* the Banpei illustration.

In the background as well as on the samurai’s chest armor, one can see a stylized trefoil symbol, which is the corporate logo of Arasaka Corporation, based in Japan. This leaves no doubt about the Killer’s affiliation. The red circle symbol divided into two drop-like halves with a white dot in them (seen right next to the samurai’s elbow, and, by the way, on Loan From Chiba) is an ancient Asian symbol for Yin and Yang, two opposing forces representing the cosmos in Eastern philosophy, which are ideally in an equilibrium.

It is not too far-fetched to associate Yin and Yang with Bushido, the Way of the Warrior, which has its roots in Zen Buddhism and is mentioned in the card’s flavor text. Bushido was a set of principles (theoretically) to be obeyed by the ideal warrior, among them absolute loyalty to one’s lord, readiness to accept death in battle (or indeed at any given moment in life), and purity of mind. The quote, “The survival of Bushido into cyberspace has spiritual significance to many execs”, finds its sequel in the flavor text of Wild Card, forming a nice connection between Banpei and its nemesis, thereby contrasting the Corporate philosophy of Bushido (yeah, right) with the Runner’s more anarchistic approach.

Considering all of the above, the name “Banpei” couldn’t be more fitting. As you might have guessed, *banpei* (pronounced [bahm-peh]) is Japanese. Written with the Chinese characters for “guard” (*ban*) and “soldier” (*hei*, which becomes *pei* in this phonetic environment), Banpei means just—“sentry”.

In the sourcebook *Rockerboy*TM (p. 62), the concept is explained: “The braindance is similar in nature to the netrunner’s interface, in that it allows, via neural transmission, a person to fully and realistically experience an alternate reality. Unlike the interface a netrunner uses, the perceptions are not created from the user’s brain, but rather from the recorded thoughts, memories and physical sensations of another person. Originally developed as a method of aversion programming for convicted criminals, and later as a military simulator, the braindance is fast becoming the most popular form of entertainment in today’s media-oriented society. Several companies, including DMS [...], have many employees whose sole purpose is to go out and get involved in situations that normal people only dream of.”

Incidentally, if you want an excellent demonstration of the braindance, look no further than to the SF/cyberpunk movie *Strange Days* (directed by Kathryn Bigelow). Braindance—and its possible dangers—is really what this film is all about (even though they don’t call it that). Don’t miss out on it.

What hasn’t been addressed so far, however, is the card’s flavor text. The evil idea to infiltrate braindance with subliminal messages also comes from *Rockerboy* (p. 65): “Another common fear associated with the braindance was that of subliminal suggestion. When [it] became available to the public, there was a rumor spread that people’s personalities were being altered, or even overridden by the braindance. It was soon discovered that there were several black market chips that were doing just that. The person would jack into the program and find themselves as a netrunner, just as his personality gets overwritten by a Liche program. The Liche programming was strong enough to actually overwrite the person, even though they were receiving the programming from a source other than the Net.”

The flavor text seems to imply that corporate methods of subliminal influence are much more subtle nowadays. Therefore, Runners, watch out when you hit a Braindance Campaign the next time. A Liche may not be too far away.

Braindance Campaign

[from TRQ #6, June 1999]
by Jens Kreutzer

A staple and well-liked bit-gainer node, at least in Sealed play, Braindance Campaign also features stunning artwork by Heather Hudson, which creatively captures the concept behind the card. But though it metaphorically portrays the effects of prolonged braindance exposure on the brain in a tongue-in-cheek fashion, it doesn’t exactly tell you what braindance is supposed to *refer to*. To find out, you must turn to R. Talsorian’s **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0**TM roleplaying game, which provided the background story for **Netrunner**.

Crystal Palace Station Grid

[from TRQ #9, March 2000]
by Jens Kreutzer

It all began in 1851. On Mayday that year, the Great Exhibition of the Industry of all Nations was opened in London’s Hyde Park—and it was housed in the largest building the Victorian world had ever seen before. Designed by the architect Joseph Paxton and built in about nine months’ time, mainly of iron and glass, the Crystal Palace looked like a giant hothouse styled in “Moorish” fashion, quite the rage at the time.

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Covering an area of 18 acres, the Crystal Palace was 1,848 feet long and 456 feet wide. It is claimed that the entire glass-production capacity of England was employed on the edifice, which was to receive more than 6,000,000 visitors from all over the world during the year that the exhibition lasted.

In June 1852, the Crystal Palace was dismantled and moved to the outskirts of London, to Sydenham in Kent. The reconstruction was completed in 1854, the redesigned building being smaller now but taller, and with a glass surface that doubled the original one in size. Situated in a huge area of parkland, the Crystal Palace became the world's first theme park for mass entertainment, featuring exhibitions, concerts, sports, and other activities. The year 1853 saw another Crystal Palace erected in New York for its exhibition.

Unfortunately, the original Crystal Palace was destroyed by fire in 1936 and hasn't been rebuilt since. The area where it once stood is still known as "Crystal Palace" today, and local residents are now fighting against a government plan to construct a multiplex cinema complex on the site.

Crystal Palace is also the code name for Cheyenne Mountain in the USA, under which is the command bunker for US Defense command SAC and NORAD. It was designed to survive a direct nuclear strike: The whole place is on springs and is buried deep inside the mountain. A location called Crystal Palace Station also exists in the novel *Teklab* by William Shatner.

Here, we leave fact and move over to fiction. As can be seen on the illustration of Crystal Palace Station Grid, the Crystal Palace in the **Netrunner** world is a huge orbital space station, named after its Victorian predecessor.

Like almost everything in **Netrunner**, the Crystal Palace space station is taken from R. Talsorian's **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0**™ roleplaying game. In the supplement *Rache Bartmoss' Guide to the Net*, we read that the Crystal Palace is situated at a stationary point (Lagrange-1) halfway between the Earth and Luna. Built and controlled by ESA, the space station is part of the Orbitville Region.

Rache Bartmoss himself has the following to say about this topic (p. 130f.): "Getting into Orbitville is a little different than it is for the other regions. You must first go to one of the equatorial belt LDLs [Long-Distance Links] like Bogota or Nairobi. From there, you can jump to LEO [Low-Earth Orbit] ..., shift up in the LDL to the Orbital level, and run the region. ... [T]he delays are quite noticeable, and rather disorienting to grav-grounded weeflerunners. You just have to get used to getting visual and tactile feedback a second or two after you do things." This delay is reflected in the higher bit cost to break ice subroutines in the Palace.

What the actual space station looks like can be gleaned from the card artwork by R. Talsorian; its layout is also reflected in Netspace, as Rache Bartmoss tells us (p. 133): "The grid, like the Crystal Palace, is built with five ribbons encircling a central data

trunk which runs along the station's axis like a spinal cord. In addition, the rings have microwave transmitters along their rims to facilitate intercommunications between the rings without having first to go through the center pole."

As in **Netrunner** gameplay, the Crystal Palace is also a favorite of Corporations in **Cyberpunk**: "Every government of note and every important corporation has an embassy or office here, and therefore a data fort to be run. The city grid itself is small and tight, and different from Earth-bound city grids in that it curves back in upon itself."

So, the next time you run a juicy target up in orbit and curse about your Clowns having trouble with the delay, remember that you are far out—halfway to the moon in fact.

HQ Interface and R&D Interface

[from TRQ #16, June 2002]

by Jens Kreutzer

Perhaps the two most basic multi-access cards for the Runner, R&D Interface and HQ Interface share a lot of features: Both are of course "Interfaces" and Hardware, have a similar ability and the same installation cost, but the most interesting bit about them is perhaps their card-spanning flavor text, which starts on R&D Interface and is continued on HQ Interface:

"I have a friend in Oaxaca who sells to Ops in Cuernavaca who supply a tech at Arasaka ... from Arasaka to Cuernavaca to Oaxaca—to me the gear does come."

Now, Oaxaca and Cuernavaca are cities in Mexico, while Arasaka is a ruthless corporation in the **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0**™ world (which was used as the background for **Netrunner**). But to understand the joke, you must know that this flavor text is a reference to a song by Tom Lehrer (born 1928), an American singer-songwriter who is famous for his satirical and humorous compositions. Mainly active during the 1950s and 60s, his songs have always been somewhat controversial. The following are the lyrics of the song *Lobachevsky* (from the album *Tom Lehrer Revisited*, 1959):

Lobachevsky

*Who made me the genius I am today,
The mathematician that others all quote?
Who's the professor that made me that way,
The greatest that ever got chalk on his coat?*

One man deserves the credit,

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One man deserves the blame,
and Nicolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky is his name. Oy!
Nicolai Ivanovich Lobache...

*I am never forget the day I first meet the great Lobachevsky.
In one word he told me secret of success in mathematics:
Plagiarize!*

Plagiarize,
Let no one else's work evade your eyes,
Remember why the good Lord made your eyes,
So don't shade your eyes,
But plagiarize, plagiarize, plagiarize...
Only be sure always to call it please, "research".

And ever since I meet this man my life is not the same,
And Nicolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky is his name. Oy!
Nicolai Ivanovich Lobache...

*I am never forget the day I am given first original paper to write.
It was on Analytic and Algebraic Topology of Locally Euclidean
Metriization of Infinitely Differentiable Riemannian Manifold.
Bozhe moi! This I know from nothing.
But I think of great Lobachevsky and I get idea—haha!*

I have a friend in Minsk,
Who has a friend in Pinsk,
Whose friend in Omsk
Has friend in Tomsk
With friend in Akmolinsk.
His friend in Alexandrovsk
Has friend in Petropavlovsk,
Whose friend somehow
Is solving now
The problem in Dnepropetrovsk.

And when his work is done—
Haha!—begins the fun.
From Dnepropetrovsk
To Petropavlovsk,
By way of Iliysk,
And Novorossiysk,
To Alexandrovsk to Akmolinsk
To Tomsk to Omsk
To Pinsk to Minsk
To me the news will run,
Yes, to me the news will run!

And then I write
By morning, night,
And afternoon,
And pretty soon
My name in Dnepropetrovsk is cursed,
When he finds out I published first!

And who made me a big success
And brought me wealth and fame?
Nicolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky is his name. Oy!
Nicolai Ivanovich Lobache...

*I am never forget the day my first book is published.
Every chapter I stole from somewhere else.
Index I copy from old Vladivostok telephone directory.
This book, this book was sensational!
Pravda—ah, Pravda—Pravda said:
"Jeel beel kara ogoday blyum blocha jeli," ("It stinks").
But Izvestia! Izvestia said:
"Jai, do gudoo sun sai pere shcum," ("It stinks").
Metro-Goldwyn-Moskva bought the movie rights for six million
rubles,
Changing title to "The Eternal Triangle",
With Brigitte Bardot playing part of hypotenuse.*

And who deserves the credit?
And who deserves the blame?
Nicolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky is his name. Oy!

This song is a humorous take on plagiarism in the world of science, and the reference fits really well, since plagiarism (i. e., theft of data in a broad sense) is just what the Runner does for a living (and he or she does it even better with an R&D Interface installed). Note also the parallelism of *research* in the song and *R&D* (short for Research & Development) on the card. Incidentally, Nicolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky (1793-1856) was a real Russian mathematician, mainly famous for his achievements in the field of geometry. As the album *Tom Lehrer Revisited* has since been republished on CD, why not listen to some Tom Lehrer while making that HQ run next time?

Investment Firm

[from TRQ #19, June 2003]

by Jens Kreutzer

using material by Skip Pickle, with permission

Investment Firm is one of those bitgainer nodes that almost never see play. In the first place, it is perhaps a bit difficult to understand how it works, and second, once you have figured it out, its performance just isn't very impressive when compared to stars of the limelight like BBS Whispering Campaign. Let's look at the card text:

Take 1* from Investment Firm, if it has any bits, at the start of each of your turns. Whenever 1* or more bits are added to your pool, you may put 2* from the bank on Investment Firm for each 1* you choose not to add to your pool. Effects that give you bits at the start of your turn cannot be used this way.

This means that, for example, when you use an action to take a bit, you can put two bits on Investment Firm instead of adding it to your pool. This deal of two-for-one actually isn't that bad (rather similar to BBS Whispering Campaign, in fact), but you

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have to wait for two turns to reap the benefits. Unfortunately, the average game of **Netrunner** doesn't last long enough for long-time schemes such as this to be worthwhile, all the more since you have to install, rez and load a Firm before it has any effect (BBS rezzes for free and can be used as soon as it's installed). Besides, at its trash cost of 2, it is quite easy for the Runner to trash a fully-loaded Firm.

There is one trick with Investment Firm that comes close to redeeming it. It has been ruled that if you have multiple rezzed Investment Firms, and you choose to "invest" a bit that would otherwise be added to your bit pool, you may instead put two bits on *each* of the Investment Firms. With two Firms, this means four-for-one, with three, six-for-one, and so on. Anthony Petrarca perhaps wanted to express this explosive cumulativity when he included the upward-soaring ray of light in his artwork—the sky's the limit.

It is too bad that despite this amazing potential for profit, it still takes two turns for it to arrive in the Corp's bit pool. I have yet to see a tournament-worthy deck that uses Investment Firms as its bitgaining method. But I'm sure that it would be fun to try and make it work in a casual game.

Be that as it may, the really interesting stuff about Investment Firm has a lot to do with the French edition of **Netrunner**. The thing is that nobody has ever seen a French version of Investment Firm. Since there is nothing so very special about the card itself, at first people thought that it must be a coincidence that they never drew one. But when it became clear that *nobody* ever drew one, the card gained a somewhat mythical aura: Some French players started looking for it as if they were on a quest for the holy grail—understandably, as they wanted a complete set of **Netrunner** cards for their collections.

Back in the day, *Wizards of the Coast* sometimes gave away complete **Netrunner** card sets to tournament winners. In the case of French players getting French sets, there still was no sign of a French Investment Firm: an English version of the card was slipped in with the French cards instead. So, if even *Wizards* didn't have any French Investment Firms, suspicion grew that this card had in fact never been printed. But it should have, since it appears on the official spoiler list as "Cabinet d'investissement". And, sure enough, there were always (second- and thirdhand) rumors that the elusive card had been seen somewhere.

We had to wait until Nov 21, 2002, to finally bring the matter to a close. Skip Pickle started a resourceful investigation and posted the following to the Netrunner-L (all material by Skip in this article is slightly edited by me):

Subject: The fabled card known as "Cabinet d'investissement"

"This was a new one for me. Maybe it will be for you too.

"Lately, I've been noodling around over on the forums at www.ccg-workshop.com. A question popped up on CCG Workshop's **Netrunner** forum this week, about the omission of Investment Firm from the French version of **Netrunner**. [...]

"I volunteered to go through my cards. I have a complete collection of v2.0 French; my brother participated in the v2.0 French localization and had received a full set because of this. Later, he very kindly gave it to me (mostly, I suppose, so that I would quit coveting it so loudly).

"This set should contain one of each card printed. The cards have never been separated from each other (they are cut, of course—I'm just saying that neither I nor my brother ever played with them or split up the cards in any way). I have now gone through these cards pretty carefully. There is no French equivalent of Investment Firm in the set. Some of you already knew this (or strongly suspected it).

"Now, I don't know how much you know about the card production process, but one of the things that should have been pretty obvious to the set producers is a hole in the card sheet. They should have noticed right off, for instance, if there weren't the same number of Corp cards as of Runner cards.

"That suggested to me that either there is also a missing Runner card in the print run (which the French Netrunner players should have noticed long before this), or that there is a duplicate Corp card (which they probably wouldn't have).

"So I did some counting, and discovered that the latter seems to be the case—I do indeed have two copies of a particular Corp card in my set. (It might also have been the case that a "new" card was introduced to the French set, but I think that would have been noticed before now.)

"Therefore, here's a trivia question for you collectors out there to chew over: Which card is it?"

To this challenge, somebody with the handle Simon Darkangel replied:

"I thought that if there was card duplication, that it would be either the card immediately before or immediately after the one that was missing. Since Investment Firm was uncommon, I found out which uncommon was immediately before (Information Laundering) and immediately after (Jack Attack)."

And Skip revealed the following:

"Nice call. It was Deconnexion Impossible (Jack Attack). [...] Just to be clear: You assumed that the English cards were divided by rarity, then printed in alphabetical order, and that the French cards were kept in the same order as the English ones? Sounds about right."

And so, there is no French Investment Firm, since they all were printed as Jack Attacks instead. But how could this mistake happen? Skip asked his brother, who was—as Skip mentioned—involved in the production process, but he said that he didn't remember, and he was in fact mildly irate that Skip would expect him to remember that far back. The one thing he did comment on was the fact that they kept the proofing area dark, much to his irritation. It made proofing difficult, but someone with

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too much influence apparently liked the ambience of low lighting and wouldn't let them turn up the lights.

A proofing area that is kept dark on purpose? Seems like an act of sabotage to me. Maybe someone with too much influence didn't like **Netrunner** in general? ☺

Joan of Arc

[from TRQ #18, December 2002]
by Eric Platel, with Jens Kreutzer

Most famous for its interaction with Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker, Joan of Arc is one of the most sought-after rare cards in the basic set of **Netrunner**. In comparison to Umbrella Policy, which is also an insurance against programs getting trashed, Joan of Arc's strengths are reusability and the ability to save many programs at the same time (as might be useful when accessing an Experimental AI node). The only way around Joan is having two separate trash effects one after the other, like with Colonel Failure. Especially Demon-dependent Runner stacks, and of course users of the trash-prone Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker, cannot go amiss packing one or more Joans while on the run.

With game effects out of the way, we can look at the story behind the card. The evocative artwork by John Casebeer features two knights on a chessboard, or perhaps the same knight being resurrected (*re-rezzed?*) at a different location. In the sky behind the two, the floating face of a woman, presumably the icon of the Joan program, observes the scene. Both the artwork and the name of the card are an obvious reference to the famous 15th century French military leader and martyr, Joan of Arc, also known as the Maid of Orléans. Frenchman Eric Platel has provided us with a detailed account of the history of Jeanne d'Arc, as she is called in French:

Jeanne d'Arc (La Pucelle) – 1412-1431

Early years

The story begins in 1412 with Edward III, King of England, and his ambitions to become King of France as well. Since 1337, France had been engulfed in blood and fire, and now, the Hundred Years' War takes a new turn: The French army led by Charles VII takes back the lost territories, but will soon (1415) be dramatically defeated at the battle of Ajincourt. The situation is worse than ever. France has three masters: The English troops, who occupy Normandy, Brittany, Aquitaine and Paris, the Burgundians, who rule in the east, and the Armagnacs, the faction of Charles VII, 'true' King of France, who controls the rest of France.

In January 1412, Jeanne is born in Domrémy as the youngest daughter of a family of five. Domrémy lies in the heartland of the Burgundian fief, but the village and its environs have always remained faithful to Charles. Jeanne's father Jacques is a peasant farmer. She doesn't know how to read or write, but is skillful in sewing and spinning. She is a singularly pious child,

often to be seen kneeling in the church absorbed in prayer. Later, she would be called "The Maid of Orléans".

At the age of 13, in the summer of 1425, Jeanne becomes conscious of weird manifestations for the first time, which she calls 'voices'. At first simply hearing a voice, she later discerns the appearance of those who speak to her, recognizing them as St. Michael, St. Margaret and St. Catherine, accompanied by angels. She is gradually told that God has chosen to side with the French people, and that she will participate in freeing the country under the leadership of the True King.

Glory days

Meanwhile, the military situation is growing more desperate for Charles, and on 12 October 1428, Orléans (the gate to the Armagnacs' territories) comes under siege. Jeanne's voices become urgent and even threatening in reiterating that she should go and act, as "it is God who commands it". She finally leaves Domrémy in January 1429, dressed in male attire, and heads to Vaucouleurs, where she meets Robert Baudricourt, a rude and sceptical soldier who had mocked her during her first visit some months earlier.

This time, however, she is allowed to stay, and her cause gains ground when a few days after her announcing that a great defeat will fall upon the French army, an official statement confirms her prophecy. Now convinced of her sincerity, Baudricourt sends her on to seek out the King in Chinon. Since the King knows of the Maid's coming, he decides to test her and disguises himself, but she picks him out without hesitation amidst a group of attendants and salutes him.

The court is divided on the matter and opposes her as a mad visionary, but a secret sign she gives to the King (probably telling him about the legitimacy of his birth) leads him to believe in her mission. She receives a suit of full plate armor, an escort, and a banner with the words "Jesus Maria". Declining the sword Charles has offered to her, she searches for an ancient sword buried behind the altar of a neighbouring church and finds it at the very spot that her voices indicated.

In a letter written by a counselor of the King, it is reported that Jeanne prophesied that she would save Orléans, repelling the English to lift the siege, that she herself would be wounded but would not die of it, and that the King would be crowned in Reims. She writes a letter to the English King (can be seen at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/joanofarc.html>), asking him to leave Orléans and the rest of France. Of course, he refuses.

With the help of experienced officers and noblemen she has met at the court (Gilles de Rays, and Jeanne's famous brother-in-arms La Hire), she enters Orléans on April 29 and gives back hope to its inhabitants and the remaining garrison, though the city still remains under siege. On May 8, after a series of victorious battles, the English siege is lifted, but Jeanne is wounded by an arrow. Her first prophecy has been fulfilled.

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After many more victories, the warlike spirit of Jeanne dramatically defeats the English in Patay, opening up the way to Reims. In just a few weeks, the best English officers are either killed or taken prisoner, and as the morale of the English army is hitting rock bottom, desertions are more than frequent.

The solemn coronation of Charles is celebrated in Reims on Sunday, 17 July 1429.

The fall

An assault on Paris is attempted on September 8, but as it is not supported in earnest by the King, it is aborted when Jeanne is shot in the thigh with a crossbow quarrel. She has to be removed from the battlefield by force.

It follows a period of inactivity, in which a peace treaty is signed with the Burgundians – and the war deescalates to mere skirmishes. In Melun, Jeanne’s voices make it known to her that she will be taken prisoner before Midsummer Day. While defending the garrison in Compiègne against a Burgundian attack, she is then indeed pulled down from her horse and becomes the prisoner of Jean de Luxembourg, who sends her to the English.

No words can describe the terrible apathy and ingratitude of Charles and his counselor, who could have bargained for the release of Jeanne in exchange for an English prisoner like the Earl of Suffolk. Abandoning her to a dark fate is probably a diplomatic tactic, Charles being most in favor of a long-lasting peace with Burgundy. Jeanne is sacrificed on the reconciliation altar.

The trial

The purpose of the now ensuing trial is to sentence Jeanne to death for being a heretic and a witch. It might seem strange at first glance to see important dignitaries of Jeanne’s own Church condemning her, but the following must be remembered: Because she always claimed that her orders were given to her by God Himself and wouldn’t listen to anybody else, she undermined the authority of those very people. Nevertheless, the hypocrisy of calling her a witch in consequence is quite obvious.

The trial begins on 21 February 1431 and is conducted by the bishop of Beauvais, Pierre Cauchon (his name translates as “Peter Pig”), an unscrupulous and ambitious man belonging to the Burgundian faction. His 231 assessors are, for the most part, theologians and doctors of the University of Paris. Historians relate that her trial was “fair”, without omitting to say that she was kept in a secular prison instead of a clerical one. The difference is not that slight, since she is at times kept in an iron cage, chained at neck, hands and feet. Because her jailers are men, she prefers to keep her male attire.

The questioning of Jeanne ends on March 15, and a document of twelve accusations is submitted to the University of Paris for debating. Meanwhile, on many occasions her judges put terrible pressure on her, in order to make her retract her statements. This practice is called “admonitions”. But even when threatened with torture, Jeanne remains unshaken.

The University’s response comes on May 23, denouncing the Maid in no uncertain terms: Superstitious, heretical, idolatrous and schismatic. The verdict is, as expected, death by burning at the stake. On the day before her execution, Jeanne’s courage fails her at the St. Ouen cemetery. She consents to sign a retraction document and gives up her men’s clothes. By virtue of this concession she is not to be burnt, but condemned to perpetual imprisonment.

The English and Cauchon are furious. But Jeanne recovers her courage once more, and two grave mistakes seal her fate: She revokes her abjuration and puts her male attire back on (some say it was because her women’s clothes were stolen from her). Considered now a relapsed heretic, she is burnt at the stake in Rouen on 31 May 1431, and her ashes are thrown into the Seine river. It is recorded that up to her last moments, she keeps declaring that her voices had come from God and had not deceived her.

Rehabilitation

Weirdly enough at first glance, the rehabilitation process starting in 1450 is initiated by Charles VII. But things have changed a lot since Jeanne’s death. First of all, she is now considered a national heroine who gave hope back to the French people. Since 1431, Charles has been leading assaults on Normandy, and plots to destabilize Paris were hatched. The city became quite insecure, and its inhabitants put the blame on the English occupation troops. In 1434, a peasant revolt flared up in Normandy. The King of England needed the help of the Burgundians, but they had irreversibly sided with Charles.

In this year of 1450, Paris has been liberated and is back in French hands, taken by an Armagnac-Burgundian coalition, and so is the University of Paris. The Pope, who had not participated in the first trial, is now part of this reassessment of the case. Charles has to prove that his legitimacy as the King of France is not based on the mad visions of a witch. Again, it is a political stratagem.

Jeanne is rehabilitated in 1456, six years after the second trial began. The judges use a formal mistake made by Cauchon to justify their verdict: On the morning of her execution, Jeanne was allowed by Cauchon himself to confess and to receive the holy communion, which was strictly forbidden since she was considered an excommunicated heretic.

It takes a very long time, but Jeanne’s beatification is confirmed by Pope Pius X in April 1909, and she is canonized in 1920.

This brings Eric’s account to a close, but there is one more bit of trivia about the Joan of Arc program. One of the staunchest supporters of the game of **Netrunner** is Jennifer Clarke Wilkes of *Wizards of the Coast*, and her much-appreciated efforts have earned her the nickname “Jen of Arc”, both in reference to the pugnacious and virtuous French heroine and the one program that can save other programs.

Finally, the designers of **Netrunner** saw to it that Joan of Arc has a nemesis in the ice card D’Arc Knight: As a killer sentry, the Knight’s job is trashing programs, just what Joan sets out to

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prevent. “D’Arc Knight” is of course a humorous version of the ubiquitous dark knight of fantasy movies or novels, or perhaps even of the **Magic: The Gathering** card Black Knight. In the artwork by Douglas Shuler, the knight’s icon sure looks dark *and* black. Just good to know that Joan of Arc will usually prevail against the trasher subroutine and come back to fight another day—as long as the Runner has a bit to spare, that is.

Sources:

Robert Fossier, *Le Moyen age*, Book 3. Paris 1983: Armand Colin.
Alain Demurger, *Temps de crises, Temps d’espoirs*. 1990: Seuil.
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html>

Liche

[from TRQ #14, September 2001]
by Jens Kreutzer
with support by Nils Kreutzer

Liche is arguably the scariest piece of ice in the whole of **Netrunner**. Though with the advent of *Proteus*TM, it was relegated to second place in terms of sheer rez cost by Colonel Failure, the Colonel attacks only programs—while Liche still represents the most brutal attack on the Runner’s frontal lobe there is. But admittedly, this toughest variety of Black Ice has lost somewhat of its glamour since the days when 14 bits in the Corp player’s pool was considered something of a “magic number”. Today’s streamlined tournament play doesn’t leave much room for Black Ice-heavy strategies, rather investing such large sums of bits in fast advancement. Moreover, Liche is at its best when sprung as a surprise, but the single widespread strategy that uses big ice these days, Rent-to-Own, rezzes its ice beforehand, negating any surprise. And so, it is usually Colonel Failure with its five must-break subroutines that ends up getting used in Rent-to-Own, with declassified Liche often serving as a substitute if not enough Colonels are available. After all, brain damage isn’t so bad when you see it coming, while getting a program trashed usually means “End the run” if it wasn’t the innermost piece of ice.

Where Liche hails from is rather obvious: There is a program of the selfsame name in R. Talsorian’s **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0**TM, the roleplaying game that lent its background to **Netrunner**. In the basic rulebook of **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0** (page 139), it says: “An advanced form of Zombie, Liche also rips away the forebrain [...], but selectively. Most memory is eradicated, leaving enough to implant an easily controlled (by the Referee) pseudo personality into the empty brain. Icon: A metallic skeleton dressed in black robes and wearing a blackend crown. It grabs the Netrunner in its freezing grasp and drags him back under the floor.” This description is accurately reflected in the straightforward but very fitting artwork by Mark Poole. However, there’s more trivia to it, as Rick Cripe has revealed: “Mark Poole did the illustration for both Liche and the original Counterspell in **Magic: The**

GatheringTM. If you hold them next to each other, you clearly see that it’s the same guy from Counterspell in the Liche illustration.”

Now that the card’s origin is clear, there remains one perhaps not-so-obvious question: What, precisely, *is* a “Liche”? We conveniently have, of course, the supposed picture of one right on the card, but let’s take a look at where this word comes from (It’s hard to find it in the dictionary; plus, you’ll never find this “undead” meaning). It’s probably safe to say that this skeletal undead fiend made its first appearance in fantasy role-playing games like **Dungeons&Dragons**[®], where it is usually portrayed as a former human (often with magical powers) who somehow manages to prolong his (or her) life even beyond death. It resembles a zombie or a vampire in some respects, and is usually a terrible opponent with devastating powers. Somehow one gets the impression that the **D&D** authors were looking for another scary sort of “living dead” to add to their bestiary, and just made up the name, written initially as “Lich”, but also as “Liche” in various other roleplaying games thereafter.

Normally not found in non-dialectal modern English all on its own, the word does appear in compounds like *lich-gate* (also written as *lych-gate*) “a church-yard gate with a porch under which a bier may be rested”, or *lich-house* “mortuary”. It is therefore only natural to associate *lich* with death, graveyards and other unpleasant things. These compounds that incorporate *lich-* are relics from the time of Old English when there still was a word *līc* (or *līcaman*) meaning “body”, pronounced like *leech* back then. Old English was spoken in England more than 1000 years ago, at which time the related languages English and German were still much closer to each other than they are today. Taking a look at the other side of the English Channel, the ancient Old Saxon language probably comes close to being their common ancestor (Old Saxon also had a word *līc*). The later Old High German term *līhnamo* is closely related to *līc*, *līcaman* (and therefore, *lich*) and modern German *Leiche*, *Leichnam*, “corpse”. Old High German *līh* and Old English *līc* originally meant almost exclusively “body” in a general sense, while *namo* meant “shell, husk, cover, wrap”. A corpse (*līhnamo*, literally “bodily shell”) was apparently understood as the discarded shell that the soul left behind when it went on into the afterlife. At some later point, the meaning of *līc* and its various descendants was narrowed down from referring to “body” in general to meaning only “dead body”. By the medieval times of Middle English, when there already were *lich* and a variant *liche* (pronounced in two syllables back then) around, they were understood as meaning “corpse” most of the time. Hence, like its lesser cousin Code Corpse, Liche is etymologically just that—a corpse. But one that seems pretty much alive and shambles around, throwing fireballs with abandon. So, Runners, beware!

Of course, if you insisted on going back to ancient times, *lich(e)* would just mean “body”, but then, since *corpse* comes—via Old French—ultimately from the Latin *corpus* (also meaning “body”), old buddies Liche and Code Corpse would gang up once again on the poor Runner, etymologically speaking. But before you start asking about the etymology of the word *boring*, and to finally get away from this somewhat morbid, doom-and-gloomy discussion: A *lychee* is a kind of fruit grown in southeast Asia, not half as scary as a *lich(e)*, so please don’t confuse the two. :-)

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Livewire's Contacts & The Short Circuit

[from TRQ #8, December 1999]
by Jens Kreutzer

Two staple cards for the Runner, Livewire's Contacts as the most basic bitgainer and The Short Circuit as a widely-used program fetcher, hail directly from the roleplaying game **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.**, which is the background to the **Netrunner** world. The character Livewire is described in the **Cyberpunk** rulebook, version 2.01, pg. 222:

"Livewire is a [n]etrunner who used to be associated with a solo team known as the *Devil's Horde*, until the team disbanded in 2011 due to a mishap in an operation that killed off everyone except Livewire and one other member.

These days Livewire can usually be found in a small shop that he runs out of the back of The Short Circuit, a local bar. It is said that he has access to any program for the right price; and if he doesn't have it, he will make it."

So, as can also be gleaned from the artwork on the card, The Short Circuit is a bar, and the scene depicted on Livewire's Contacts and described in its flavor text might well be right inside it. Livewire is also referred to in the cyberpunk novel *Bad Voltage* by Jonathon Littell.

Situated next to Night City's Trauma Team™ Tower, the Barbican Building houses The Short Circuit, as the **Cyberpunk** Night City Sourcebook, p. 117, informs us:

"This black edifice [i. e., the Barbican Building] contains the main offices of Argus Inc., a company specializing in netrunner software. Argus, which is owned by Livewire, has been focusing lately on developing applications for the many local medical facilities. Well regarded among the netrunner community, Argus programs are considered to be some of the most reliable commercial products on the market.

The Short Circuit is a bar set on top of the Argus offices. Favoured by many of the city's netrunners and techies, it is highly useful for people looking for help in those areas. The bar's other interesting feature is its rotating floor, which allows patrons to see a panoramic view of the [Night] City below.

Although there has been a lot of Corporate interest in the bar, Livewire has forbidden recruiting there because he's had problems with corporations and no longer trusts them (or the people who associate with them). Rough, street-hired bouncers

make sure no one exceeds the dress code. In addition to normal booths, there are booths with interface jacks which allow netrunners access to an area in netspace where the bar is represented. Whether online or not, many netrunners use the bar as a gathering place to exchange news and services."

The French version of this card contains flavour text, translating to: "Enter, enter! Here, you will find everything you're looking for. Illegal programs, authentic proofs, and also virtual parties."

π in the 'Face

[from TRQ #17, September 2002]
by Eric Platel, with Jens Kreutzer
using material by Scott Dickie
with support by Nils Kreutzer

Though it is the only card with the keyword "DecKrash" in the base set (v1.0) of **Netrunner**, π in the 'Face is somewhat of a staple among sentry ice: If all you want is an end-the-run subroutine on a sentry ice to complement your mix of code gates and walls, π in the 'Face is the natural candidate. It's a simple but effective little piece of code, and always a good choice in Sealed-deck tournaments.

First of all, the name of this card is a pun between *pie* (as in 'cake') and the Greek letter π (*pi*), which is of course the symbol for and the name of a mathematical constant. Further, '*face*' is a pun between *face* and *interface*. Like so many concepts of **Netrunner**, this card's design can be traced back to R. Talsorian's **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0** Roleplaying Game. Interestingly, in **Cyberpunk**, π in the 'Face is not a defense program for data forts, but an attack program used by Runners to fry a data fort's CPU. Here is the description that can be found in **Cyberpunk's** *Chromebook 3* supplement, on page 73:

"An improved Krash. If the program makes a successful attack, the CPU will be trapped calculating Pi. This paralyzes the CPU for 1D10+1 net turns. ICON: A LARGE cartoon pie, for throwing."

Bartmoss' Brainware Blowout (BBB, p. 47) has basically the same information, but adds the following reference to clowns: "Guess which buncha bozos loves this one?" These two quotes explain the inspiration for the artwork by Robert McLees (though BBB was released after **Netrunner** v1.0). Also, we learn that the keyword DecKrash is indeed an indication of the fact that the Corporation ice card π in the 'Face and the Runner icebreaker Krash use similar attack strategies!

The beginning of the decimal expansion of the mathematical constant π (3.141592654...) is shown in the card artwork background—look at the space directly above the pie in the clown's hand to spot the "3.1" that starts it off. Incidentally, if you

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look closely at the artwork on the card Test Spin, you might be in for a surprise.

Scott Dickie has made some additional remarks to elucidate the flavor text of this card: “Nyuk, nyuk, nyuk...”. This is what Curly of the Three Stooges says when something amuses him, such as throwing pies at other people’s faces. The French version of this card is called “PiGnon” and has the flavor text, “Heu, le code c’est 3.14159 et ... vous voulez vraiment toutes les decimales? Je peux pas vous le faire au PI-fomètre? Non pas dans la tête!” The word *pignon* in French means either a house gable, or a pinion gear. The word *gnon* is slang for a strong blow or impact—so the title could be translated as “Pi Hit”. *Pif* also is French slang and means ‘nose’. Therefore, *pifomètre* could be translated into English as ‘nosometer’. The term *au pifomètre* means guesstimating, or following intuition (i. e., your nose, as it were). The full translation of the flavor text could read: “Uh, the code is 3.14159 and ... do you really want all the decimal-places? Can’t I just take a wild guess (to do it for you)? No! Not the head!”

Weirdly enough, the computation of π summarizes 4000 years of the story of humanity, covering different fields of fundamental research in mathematics like geometry, algebra and analysis.

The definition of π is really simple: It’s a constant that is equal to the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter.

The hunt for ever more precise definitions (meaning more decimals after the point) started around 2000 BC: On a old parchment in cuneiform writing, the Babylonians gave the very first approximation of $\pi = 3 + 1/8$, which is 3.125.

Archimede of Syracuse developed his own method (using inscribed 96-gons) and stated that π was bounded by $3 + 10/71$ and $3 + 1/7$, giving the second correct decimal: 3.142857143...

Using Archimede’s works, Ptolemy of Alexandria (Egypt, 150 AD) gave the value as 377/120 (3.14166667...), and Tsu Ch’ung Chi of China (500 AD) set it to 355/133, which is 3.14159292. They respectively defined 3 and 6 correct decimal places.

Around 1450 AD, Al’Kashi managed to compute 14 decimals. In 1609, van Ceulen was the last mathematician to base his research on Archimede’s works, and after having dedicated a part of his life to the computation of π , the 34 decimal places he discovered were engraved on his tombstone.

The 17th century brought renewed efforts to study π and its properties, not using geometry anymore, but analysis. Leibniz (1646-1716) and Euler (1707-1783) used Gregory’s work to devise some formulae that were based on the following serial computation:

$$\pi = 8 * \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{(2n+1)(4n+3)}$$

It’s obvious that the more iterations you have, the more exact the value of π you get will be. Unfortunately, you don’t get a whole lot of new decimals after each iteration (slow convergence), meaning you have to do a lot of calculating.

In 1706, John Machin discovered another formula, which for the first time in history allowed the manual computation of 100 decimal places, a formula that is still used nowadays:

$$\pi = 4 * \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{(-1)^n}{(2n+1)} \left(4 * \left(\frac{1}{5}\right)^{2n+1} - \left(\frac{1}{239}\right)^{2n+1} \right)$$

Euler defined the symbol for Pi (π) in 1737.

In 1761, Johann Heinrich Lambert proved that π was irrational, i. e. it cannot be the exact ratio of two integer values.

William Shanks achieved immortality in a very curious way: In 1864, he computed 707 decimal places, but in 1945, Ferguson discovered (due to a suspicious shortage of sevens) that Shanks made a tremendous error starting at the 528th place!

The German mathematician Lindemann proved in 1881 that π was transcendent, i. e. that it cannot be the solution of a polynomial with an integral coefficient. This result proved that it was impossible to ‘square a circle’, i. e. that it is impossible to draw a square whose area is equal to the area of a given circle. This problem was posed by the Greeks 2000 years ago, but had never been solved up till then.

Buffon proposed a curious experiment: Suppose a needle of length k is thrown at random on a plane marked by parallel lines of distance k apart. He estimated that the probability of the needle landing between two lines (i. e., not crossing any line) is $2k/\pi$. Based on this idea, Lazerini threw 34,080 needles in 1901 and got the value of 3.1415929 as the result, which was the value calculated by Tsu Ch’ung Chi.

During most of the 20th century, no real progress was made regarding the study of π . Nevertheless, the massive use of computers caused an explosion of the number of known decimal places, and the amazing number of 1 million was reached in 1973—still using Machin’s formula.

Fortunately, the 1980’s saw the birth of many new formulae. The most important step was the discovery of formulae that were able to double the number of correct decimals after each iteration. This new generation of formulae was based on the work of the Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramajujan, who came to fame only well after his death (1920) because he wrote all of his theories in Indian, i. e. it took a lot of time to decipher it.

On September 19, 1995, Canadian Simon Plouffe (with the help of mathematicians David Bayley and Peter Borwein) found this one:

$$\pi = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{16^n} \left(\frac{4}{8n+1} - \frac{2}{8n+4} - \frac{1}{8n+5} - \frac{1}{8i+6} \right)$$

It allows the computation of any digit of π either in binary or in hexadecimal code. Moreover, it proves that it is possible to compute a given decimal place without knowing the previous ones.

Using Plouffe's formula, the French student Fabrice Bellard managed to calculate the 1000 billionth decimal place in September 1997, and Colin Percival calculated the 40,000 billionth digit in February 1999, with the help of the Internet community.

It should have become obvious by now that π is infinite—there is no last decimal place to be found, and attempting to calculate it in its entirety is a hopeless effort that would last into all eternity. And that is precisely why π in the 'Face is so nasty: Sooner or later, any CPU will be brought to its virtual knees by this.

Proteus

[from TRQ #7, September 1999]
by Jens Kreutzer

From September 1996 to 2000, **Netrunner** had just the one *Proteus*TM expansion, with which all of us had to be content for such a long time. But why is it called "Proteus" of all things? Sounds like Latin to me; so what has it got to do with the 'Net?

The text on the back of a *Proteus*TM booster pack gives us a hint with the statement, "Flexible new ice and icebreakers". Apparently, it weren't so much the Bad Publicity and hidden resource cards the designers considered paramount about this expansion, but the "morphing" ice and icebreaker cards, although players might have a different opinion.

In this light, the name "Proteus" is very fitting, because in ancient Roman mythology, Proteus was a god famous for his astounding shape-shifting abilities. To get a taste of it, here's a quote taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (translated from the Latin by Mary M. Innes, Penguin Classics edition, 1955):

"There are some [...] whose shape has been changed just once, and has then remained permanently altered. Others again have power to change into several forms. Take, for instance, Proteus, the god who dwells in the sea that encircles the earth. People have seen him at one time in the shape of a young man, at another transformed into a lion; sometimes he used to appear to them as a raging wild boar, or again as a snake, which they shrank from touching; or else horns transformed him into a bull. Often he could be seen as a stone, or a tree, sometimes he presented the

appearance of running water, and became a river, sometimes he was the very opposite, when he turned into fire."

It seems that Proteus has found a new abode in netspace, then. And what do you know: Recently, he has been seen morphing into sentries, code gates, and walls as well.

☺

Raffles

[from TRQ #20, December 2003]
by Jens Kreutzer

A staple icebreaker from the earliest days of **Netrunner**, stately Raffles is still the "biggest" code-gate breaker in the game. Though players usually shun the installation cost of seven bits and go for favorites like Skeleton Passkeys, Raffles still sees enough play in Sealed games and in stacks where installation costs don't matter that much (using Zetatech Software Installers or Mystery Box, for example). Apart from that, the card is more bread-and-butter **Netrunner**, not fancy stuff.

It is, however, a program that was directly adopted from the **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0** roleplaying game, which lent its background to the **Netrunner** universe. In the second-edition basic rulebook on page 137, we can find the following description: "Raffles is designed specifically to deal with complex code gates and file locks which have a specific word as the key. It asks the code gate a series of innocuous and leading questions ('Is is bigger than a breadbox?' 'Is it hot or cold?'), designed to tell Raffles the nature of the code gate and its key."

Raffles and Tinweasel share similar card artworks by Mark Collen, showing a question mark-shaped creature holding up a flat image of a person in front of the same stylised padlock. Obviously, the padlock represents the code gate to be broken, but the question mark might either be the icon of a Runner using the icebreaker, or it might be some sort of guardian icon posing the question that must be answered with the correct answer (password) in order to enter the code gate. Instead of an image of the password, the guardian icon gets handed an image of Tinweasel or Raffles, respectively. On Raffles, the icon description from **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0** (page 138) is represented faithfully: "A dapper young man wearing evening clothes of the early 1900's. It speaks briefly to the door, then vanishes as soon as it opens."

But what does the name *Raffles* mean? As always, the Oxford English Dictionary is the authority to turn to. If written with a small r, *raffles* means "lottery", hence the French translation of the card, "Loterie". But here, I think, the French translator got it wrong, since *Raffles* (with a capital R) also means "a man of good birth who engages in crime, especially burglary". This goes back to A. J. Raffles, the protagonist of *Raffles, The Amateur Cracksman*

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(1899) and other books by E. W. Hornung (1866-1921). Raffles was a gentleman thief in Victorian England, which explains the artwork on the card.

The following is a quote from the 1994 Wordsworth Classics edition of *Raffles, The Amateur Cracksman* (p. 15-18) to give you an impression of his modus operandi. This book is an enjoyable read, by the way, which I'd like to recommend. The story is told from the perspective of Bunny Manders, Raffles' partner in crime. We join them as they are burgling a jeweller's.

"Next moment I saw the door wide open, and Raffles standing within and beckoning me with a jemy.

'Door number one,' he whispered. 'Deuce knows how many more there'll be, but I know of two at least. We won't have to make much noise over them, either; down here there's less risk.'

We were now at the bottom of the exact fellow to the narrow stone stair which we had just descended; the yard, or well, being the one part common to both the private and the business premises. But this flight led to no open passage; instead, a singularly solid mahogany door confronted us at the top. 'I thought so,' muttered Raffles, handing me the lantern, and pocketing a bunch of skeleton keys, after tampering for a few times with the lock. 'It'll be an hour's work to get through that!'

'Can't you pick it?'

'No. I know these locks. It's no use trying. We must cut it out, and it'll take us an hour.' It took us forty-seven minutes by my watch; or rather it took Raffles, and never in my life have I seen anything more deliberately done. My part was simply to stand by with the dark lantern in one hand and a small bottle of rock-oil in the other. Raffles had produced a pretty, embroidered case, intended obviously for his razors, but filled instead with the tools of his secret trade, including the rock-oil. From this case he selected a 'bit,' capable of drilling a hole an inch in diameter, and fitted it to a small but very strong steel 'brace.' Then he took off his covert-coat and his blazer, spread them neatly on the top step – knelt on them – turned up his shirt-cuffs – and went to work with brace-and-bit near the keyhole. But first he oiled the bit to minimise the noise, and this he did invariably before beginning a fresh hole, and often in the middle of one. It took thirty-two separate borings to cut round that lock. I noticed that through the first circular orifice Raffles thrust a forefinger; then, as the circle became an even lengthening oval, he got his hand through up to the thumb, and I heard him swear softly to himself. 'I was afraid so!'

'What is it?'

'An iron gate on the other side!'

'How on earth are we to get through that?' I asked in dismay. 'Pick the lock. But there may be two. In that case they'll be top and bottom, and we shall have two fresh holes to make, as the door opens inwards. It won't open two inches as it is.' I confess I did not feel sanguine about the lock-picking, seeing that one lock had baffled us already; and my disappointment and impatience must have been a revelation to me had I stopped to think. The truth is that I was entering into our nefarious undertaking with an involuntary zeal of which I was myself quite unconscious at the time. The romance and the peril of the whole proceeding held me spellbound and entranced. My moral sense and my sense of fear were stricken by a common paralysis. And there I stood, shining my light and holding my phial with a keener interest than I ever brought to any honest avocation. And there knelt A. J. Raffles, with

his black hair tumbled, and the same watchful, quiet, determined half-smile with which I have seen him send down over after over in a country match [...]. At last the chain of holes was complete, the lock wrenched out bodily, and a splendid bare arm plunged up to the shoulder through the aperture, and through the bars of the iron gate beyond.

'Now,' whispered Raffles, 'if there's only one lock it'll be in the middle. Joy! Here it is! Only let me pick it, and we're through at last.'

He withdrew his arm, a skeleton key was selected from the bunch, and then back went his arm to the shoulder. It was a breathless moment. I heard the heart throbbing in my body, the very watch ticking in my pocket, and ever and anon the tinkle-tinkle of the skeleton key. Then – at last – there came a single unmistakable click. In another minute the mahogany door and the iron gate yawned behind us, and Raffles was sitting on an office table, wiping his face, with the lantern throwing a steady beam by his side.

We were now in a bare and roomy lobby behind the shop, but separated therefrom by an iron curtain, the very sight of which filled me with despair. Raffles, however, did not appear in the least depressed, but hung up his coat and hat on some pegs in the lobby before examining this curtain with his lantern. 'That's nothing,' said [h]e, after a minute's inspection; 'we'll be through that in no time, but there's a door on the other side which may give us trouble.'

'Another door!' I groaned. 'And how do you mean to tackle this thing?'

'Prise it up with the jointed jemy. The weak point of these iron curtains is the leverage you can get from below. But it makes a noise, and this is where you're coming in, Bunny; this is where I couldn't do without you. I must have you overhead to knock through when the street's clear. I'll come with you and show a light.' Well, you may imagine how little I liked the prospect of this lonely vigil; and yet there was something very stimulating in the vital responsibility which it involved. Hitherto I had been a mere spectator. Now I was to take part in the game. And the fresh excitement made me more than ever insensible to those considerations of conscience and of safety which were already as dead nerves in my breast. So I took my post without a murmur in the front room above the shop. The fixtures had been left for the refusal of the incoming tenant, and fortunately for us they included Venetian blinds which were already down. It was the simplest matter in the world to stand peeping through the laths into the street, to beat twice with my foot when anybody was approaching, and once when all was clear again. The noises that even I could hear below, with the exception of one metallic crash at the beginning, were indeed incredibly slight; but they ceased altogether at each double rap from my toe, and a policeman passed quite half a dozen times beneath my eyes, and the man whom I took to be the jeweller's watchman oftener still, during the better part of an hour that I spent at the window. Once, indeed, my heart was in my mouth, but only once. It was when the watchman stopped and peered through the peep-hole into the lighted shop. I waited for his whistle – I waited for the gallows or the gaol! But my signals had been studiously obeyed, and the man passed on in undisturbed serenity. In the end I had a signal in my turn, and retraced my steps with lighted matches down the broad stairs, down the narrow ones,

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across the area, and up into the lobby where Raffles awaited me with an outstretched hand.

‘Well done, my boy!’ said he. ‘You’re the same good man in a pinch, and you shall have your reward. I’ve got a thousand pounds’ worth if I’ve got a penn’oth. It’s all in my pockets. And here’s something else I found in this locker; very decent port and some cigars, meant for poor dear Danby’s business friends. Take a pull, and you shall light up presently. I’ve found a lavatory, too, and we must have a wash-and-brush-up before we go, for I’m as black as your boot.’”

It doesn’t take much imagination to view a Netrun before one’s inner eye when reading these lines. Doors and iron gates are dealt with one after the other, just like pieces of ice are rezzed and encountered. The stealth connection is also there. If you’ll forgive the pun, I found it hilarious that Raffles “selected a bit” in order to crack the lock.

A film starring David Niven was made about the life of the gentleman-crook Raffles in 1939. It was re-published on VHS video in 1996, so you have a chance of getting hold of it if you prefer films over books.

By the way: The famous Raffles Hotel in Singapore (www.raffleshotel.com) is named after another Raffles, namely Sir T. Stamford Raffles (1781-1826), the founder of Singapore. Also named after him is the Rafflesia plant, or stinking-corpse lily, a south-east Asian rainforest parasite which produces the largest flower in the world. Anyway, now you know the background of the largest codegate breaker in the world of **Netrunner**.

Schlaghund

[from TRQ #4, December 1998]
by Jens Kreutzer

One of the heavy-hitter cards in **Netrunner**, Schlaghund has always been a favourite of Corp players who seek a drastic approach when preventing felons from trespassing in their data forts. But what does this strange word mean, anyway? “Schlaghund” [SHLAHK-hoont] is a German compound, although there’s no such term in German currently (that might change in 2020, though). It basically means “hit-dog”, from *schlagen*, “to hit, to strike” and *Hund*, “dog”. The sick concept behind it is: A dog is fitted with cybernetic enhancements (and possibly some sort of “remote control”) and then packed full with explosives. The Black Ops department of your Corp then sics it on the hapless Runner as soon as the dog has tracked the offender down, it simply ... explodes. It is very likely that this idea originally hails from one of William Gibson’s novels, *Count Zero*. Gibson, a Canadian, is the most famous cyberpunk author the whole idea of a virtual-reality interface for the Net that’s directly hooked up to the brain comes from his book *Neuromancer*. The following is a quote from *Count Zero* (New York 1987: Ace Books; start of the first chapter):

“They set a slamhound on Turner’s trail in New Delhi, slotted it to his pheromones and the color of his hair. It caught up with him on a street called Chandni Chauk and came scrambling for his rented BMW through a forest of bare brown legs and pedicab tires. Its core was a kilogram of recrystallized hexogene and flaked TNT. He didn’t see it coming. The last he saw of India was the pink stucco façade of a place called the Khush-Oil Hotel.”

Why people translated “slamhound” into the German is anybody’s guess... (You can read more about *Schlaghund* [SHLAHK-hoon-duh, the grammatically correct plural] in R. Talsorian’s supplement *Rache Bartmoss’ Brainware Blowout*, p. 98.)

Shakespeare in the 'Net

[from TRQ #11, December 2000]
by Jens Kreutzer

Act the First

Assumed to be the greatest playwright of all times by quite a few people, the Bard, the Swan of Avon, better known as William Shakespeare, has sustained his fame for some 400 years now, and it is unlikely that he will pass into oblivion anytime soon. That said, it is not too big a surprise to discover that he has found his way into the not-too-distant future world of **Netrunner** as well. With the Renaissance-like figures pictured on the artwork of Riddler as a backdrop, we can set the stage for Shakespeare’s cameo appearance. Dressed in the Elizabethan attire of Shakespeare’s times, the “Riddlers” seem as if they might pull a skull out of their pockets at any time and start off reciting the *Hamlet* soliloquy.

Act the Second

We go *in medias res* with the flavor text of Asp, taken from Shakespeare’s *King Lear* with a few modifications. On the card, it says, “Oh how sharper than a serpent’s tooth is one of these suckers clamped onto the boot sector of a drive!” Having Asp make the Runner pay a bit and miss an action to get rid of the “serpent’s tooth” might be harsh, but *King Lear* has sorrows of his own. In Act I, Scene 4, he laments the thankless behavior of one of his daughters, invoking Nature to curse her, so that she may experience the same insults he had to suffer from her:

Hear, nature, hear; dear goddess, hear!
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful!
Into her womb convey sterility!
Dry up in her the organs of increase;
And from her derogate body never spring
A babe to honour her! If she must teem,

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Create her child of spleen; that it may live,
And be a thwart disnatured torment to her!
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth;
With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks;
Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
To laughter and contempt; that she may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child!

We all know that Lear turns mad in the end, of course.

Act the Third

On we go, traversing “this wooden O”, the round stagehouse of Elizabethan London (or rather, “this criss-cross'd matrix”?), only to find us in the middle of historical Verona, where tempers run high as two houses, the Capulets and the Montagues, fight it out over *Romeo and Juliet*. Filled with a deep hatred for each other, the families only realize their folly when the two young lovers have died. Earlier, when a fight in the street is about to claim him as a first victim, the wounded Mercutio curses in Act III, Scene 1:

Help me into some house, Benvolio,
Or I shall faint. A plague o' both your houses!
They have made worms' meat of me: I have it,
And soundly too:—your houses!

Much evil could have been prevented if the families' hot-blooded swashbucklers had been glued to the spot instead: “Epoxy both your houses!”, it says in the flavor text of *Classic's* Superglue, epoxy being a key component of modern industrial glues. The handle “Bard” of the Runner quoted on the card only makes the reference (and reverence for Shakespeare in the cyber age) more obvious.

Act the Fourth and Act the Fifth

As in any classic Shakespeare play, there should be five acts to this article; unfortunately, they must be put off until future expansions (as you have guessed, this is not a comedy, nor a history, but a tragedy) are released to pay the Bard his due.

Short-Term Contract

[from TRQ #5, March 1999]
by Jens Kreutzer

A staple bit-gainer card for the Runner, Short-Term Contract is especially liked in **Netrunner** Sealed-Deck play,

coming a close second to cards like *Newsgroup Filter* and *Broker*. The “mouse-slinging,” temporary Runner employee is humorously portrayed in the artwork by James A. Higgins.

In the flavor text, we find a reference to the roleplaying game **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0**, by R. Talsorian Games, which features the character Spider Murphy in some of its supplements. She is a hacking companion of the notorious Rache Bartmoss in the **CP2020** background story.

What's somewhat mysterious about the card artwork is the Japanese writing in the background, however, which also contains the English letters “JM” and “SF,” and the number “2021.” The Japanese characters translate as the fragments “Keanu Reeves,” “JM,” “the year 2021...” and “three movie stars from the U.S. and Japan.” These are references to the cyberpunk science fiction film *Johnny Mnemonic*, starring Ice-T, Keanu Reeves, and Takeshi, an actor quite famous in Japan.

Another fragment of Japanese, beginning in parentheses, spells out “U-i-ri-a-mu” (William)—possibly a reference to cyberpunk author William Gibson, who wrote the script for this movie, which is based on his short story of the same name.

The whole fragment of text might have been taken from the cover sleeve of the movie's soundtrack CD, which was manufactured in Japan.

The Shell Traders & Access to Kiribati

[from TRQ #10, June 2000]
by Jens Kreutzer

One of the more sought-after Runner rares, *The Shell Traders* is known as a nice alternative to standard-fare bit-gainers like *Score!* or *Newsgroup Filter*, although it only works for hardware and programs. It gets really nice when you soak up *Lucidrine™* *Booster Drug* bits with it during a run!

But what strange artwork (both the original and the Promo version)—and why shells? *The Shell Traders* is once again a direct reference to the roleplaying game **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0™** by R. Talsorian Games, which was used as a background for **Netrunner**. As can be seen in the supplement *Rache Bartmoss' Guide to the 'Net* (pp. 35-36), the *Shell Traders* are “a fast-growing group of independent netrunners operating in Kiribati”, which is an island country in the Pacific formerly known as the Gilbert Islands (Kiribati is the indigenous way of spelling “Gilbert”—it's pronounced “Kiri-bahs” by the way). Today, Kiribati as a state

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consists of the Gilbert Islands, the Phoenix Islands, and the Line Islands.

The *Guide* goes on: “With the failure of the Kiribati government to regulate traffic and commerce through their national LDLs, some independent runners have set up their own shop to take advantage of the idea.” This sentence, it seems, inspired the flavor text of Access to Kiribati. The name Shell Traders hints at the past of the Pacific archipelagos, when, on certain islands, seashells were used as a kind of money or ritualized gift. This tradition has to be seen as a backdrop when the *Guide* elaborates further:

“These guys are the master sellers of the ‘Net. The security and openness that they provide bring people from all over the world to trade in their market. ... [They] run open markets on both the Gilbert Islands and the Kiritimati LDLs. They will trade for anything, but are most interested in stolen data and code. When they make a purchase (or trade... these guys are well-equipped for code-swapping), they download the contents of the files to their terminals and copy them onto disk or needle, erasing the version in the ‘Net.”

Kiritimati is an island belonging to the Line Islands; the name is the indigenous version of “Christmas”. Because the Shell Traders send their data on disks through the mail (no, not email) or by courier, they don’t have to worry about ‘Net security. The card ability in **Netrunner** reflects the fact that the ‘Traders are cheap (“install that card, at no cost”), but that you have to wait for the program in the mail—an AI Boon takes 12 turns to “reach” you if you don’t help it along a bit.

The artwork of the v1.0 Shell Traders isn’t much of a mystery anymore when one compares it to the black-and-white illustration on page 35 of the *Guide* (also in *Rache Bartmoss’ Brainware Blowout*, p. 109). This picture shows a roughly-rendered, humanoid figure sitting in a hilly landscape of fractals, and it is subtitled “Shell Trader Sysop (with primitivist icon) awaiting a client near the Kiritimati [sic] LDL”.

Although the humanoid is not a lay figure or mannequin used by artists like the one on the card illustration, it resembles one closely. The background designed by Mike Kimble evokes visions of Pacific islands in the ocean, whereas the original black-and-white background is rather nondescript.

Also prominent in the card illustration are the icons that seem to be floating around. The bar code in the lay figure’s left hand might be representing an identity card or some sort of credit being transferred as payment, whereas the simplistic icons are once more directly taken from a **Cyberpunk** supplement, this time the *Chromebook* (vol. 1). On pages 91-92, it can be seen that the icons correspond to programs to be used by netrunners in the roleplaying game. Most of these, interestingly, don’t appear in the card game, however.

These programs are (left to right, as displayed in the card artwork): Bunnies (though it sounds like Rabbit, Bunnies is a special defense program designed to thwart Vampyre II below),

Fatal Attractor, Wolf (a Killer disguised as a Watchdog), Vampyre II (a D[a]emon that absorbs other programs it encounters and adds their abilities to its own), and, half obscured by the bit cost of the card, Termite (a very cheap and simple wallbreaker), of which only the lower legs are clearly discernible. Why the artist didn’t include the Smarteye icon (an eyeball “wearing” a mortarboard cap) is anybody’s guess.

Finally, a few words about the Promo Shell Traders artwork by David Ho: The currency symbols (dollar, yen, and cent) grouped around the futuristic polyp-like entity in the center suggest trade; the globule at the entity’s lower end contains “an eye on top of a pyramid”—maybe a reference to the Data Masons flavor text.

But that’s stuff for another installment of Did You Know?.

Top Runners’ Conference

[from TRQ #13, June 2001]
by Jens Kreutzer

Top Runners’ Conference represents one of the most powerful bit-gaining schemes in **Netrunner**. For an investment of 0 bits and an action, the Runner gains 2 bits each turn for the rest of the game—as long as no run is made, that is. Obviously, this is not a good idea in a stack that does a lot of running early on, but if this resource survives just two Corp turns, it is already on par with Score! Another elegant trick is to combine it with Smith’s Pawnshop: If the Runner only runs every second turn and installs a Conference right after running, it is possible to gain 6 bits per action out of it.

In the long term, Top Runners’ Conference in multiples beats even Loan from Chiba for a huge bit buildup that is then used up in one fell winning swoop (like The Big Dig or Masochism Rules), often helped along by a misc.for-sale for even more bits. Top Runners’ Conference ranks among the most sought-after cards in the game, not only because it is such a powerful and useful rare, but also because players don’t want three (like Political Overthrow) or six (like World Domination), but as many as they can get—for this prestige card only shows its true potential if you have a *lot* of copies in your stack.

The card Top Runners’ Conference also lent its name to The Top Runners’ Conference (TRC), the official **Netrunner** Players’ Organization, and a stylized version of the cool artwork by James Allen Higgins has been turned into the logo of this newsletter: A sphere connected with and surrounded by a circle of eight other spheres (though on the card, there are actually ten shapes in the circle). The picture apparently shows a conference in

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Netspace, where ten Runners have gathered around a central spherical object that is either another Runner or perhaps some matter of importance being discussed. The Runners are not depicted as in real life, but as the icons they use when they roam the Net—the virtual form in which they appear to everybody else they encounter there. Among various geometrical and abstract shapes, a rattlesnake and a sphere with the letter M (for Militech?) stand out. One icon in the background is a sphere that seems to have several balls floating around it—maybe an atom or a solar system, or perhaps a Beholder, a monster that is featured in the **D&D**® roleplaying game (the sphere seems to have a single eye and a gaping, grinning mouth, which would fit).

As enjoyable as the card's ability and artwork is its flavor text, which reads: "I have discovered a truly elegant codebreaking routine. Unfortunately, this chip is not large enough to contain it." Jennifer Clarke Wilkes has revealed that she was the author of this text, and that its reference to a certain, very famous mathematical problem was intentional. Apparently, Richard Garfield, who holds a Ph.D. in mathematics, was impressed and amused by this. The problem referred to is known as Fermat's Last Theorem. Pierre de Fermat (1601–1665) was a French mathematician who wrote an annotation into the margin of his copy (now lost) of Bachet's translation of Diophantus' *Arithmetika*. Translated into modern English and modern terminology from the Latin, his comment amounts to:

" $a^n + b^n = c^n$ has no positive integer solutions for a , b and c when $n > 2$. I have discovered a truly remarkable proof which this margin is too small to contain."

(In the original: "Cubum autem in duos cubos, aut quadratoquadratum in duos quadratoquadratos, et generaliter nullam in infinitum ultra quadratum potestatem in duos ejusdem nominis fas est dividere: cujus rei demonstrationem mirabilem sane detexi. Hanc marginis exiguitas non caperet.")

The following is an excerpt from the Microsoft Encarta (<http://encarta.msn.com>), "Fermat's Last Theorem," Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2001:

"While studying the work of the ancient Greek mathematician Diophantus, Fermat became interested in the chapter on Pythagorean numbers—that is, the sets of three numbers, a , b , and c , such as 3, 4, and 5, for which the equation

$$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$$

is true. He wrote in pencil in the margin, 'I have discovered a truly remarkable proof which this margin is too small to contain.' Fermat added that when the Pythagorean theorem is altered to read

$$a^n + b^n = c^n,$$

the new equation cannot be solved in integers for any value of n greater than 2. That is, no set of positive integers a , b , and c can be found to satisfy, for example, the equation

$$a^3 + b^3 = c^3$$

or

$$a^4 + b^4 = c^4.$$

Fermat's simple theorem turned out to be surprisingly difficult to prove. For more than 350 years, many mathematicians tried to prove Fermat's statement or to disprove it by finding an exception."

Quoted from *A Short Account of the History of Mathematics* (4th edition, 1908) by W. W. Rouse Ball:

"Except a few isolated papers, Fermat published nothing in his lifetime, and gave no systematic exposition of his methods. Some of the most striking of his results were found after his death on loose sheets of paper or written in the margins of works which he had read and annotated, and are unaccompanied by any proof. It is thus somewhat difficult to estimate the dates and originality of his work. He was constitutionally modest and retiring, and does not seem to have intended his papers to be published. "

Quoted from an article by J. J. O'Connor and E. F. Robertson:

(http://www-groups.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/~history/HistTopics/Fermat's_last_theorem.htm)

"Despite large prizes being offered for a solution, Fermat's Last Theorem remained unsolved [for a long time]. It has the dubious distinction of being the theorem with the largest number of published false proofs. For example, over 1,000 false proofs were published between 1908 and 1912. The only positive progress seemed to be computing results which merely showed that any counter-example would be very large. Using techniques based on Kummer's work, Fermat's Last Theorem was proved true, with the help of computers, for n up to 4,000,000 by 1993. [...]

"The final chapter in the story began in 1955, although at this stage the work was not thought of as connected with Fermat's Last Theorem. Yutaka Taniyama asked some questions about elliptic curves, i. e. curves of the form

$$y^2 = x^3 + ax + b$$

for constants a and b . Further work by Weil and Shimura produced a conjecture, now known as the Shimura-Taniyama-Weil Conjecture. In 1986, the connection was made between the Shimura-Taniyama-Weil Conjecture and Fermat's Last Theorem by Frey at Saarbrücken, showing that Fermat's Last Theorem was far from being some unimportant curiosity in number theory but was in fact related to fundamental properties of space.

"Further work by other mathematicians showed that a counter-example to Fermat's Last Theorem would provide a counter-example to the Shimura-Taniyama-Weil Conjecture. The proof of Fermat's Last Theorem was completed in 1993 by Andrew Wiles, a British mathematician working at Princeton in the USA. Wiles gave a series of three lectures at the Isaac Newton Institute in Cambridge, England, the first on Monday 21 June, the second on Tuesday 22 June. In the final lecture on Wednesday 23 June 1993 at around 10.30 in the morning, Wiles announced his proof of Fermat's Last Theorem as a corollary to his main results. Having written the theorem on the blackboard, he said, 'I will stop here', and sat down. In fact, Wiles had proved the Shimura-Taniyama-Weil Conjecture for a class of examples, including those necessary to prove Fermat's Last Theorem.

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“This, however, is not the end of the story. On 4 December 1993, Andrew Wiles made a statement in view of the speculation. He said that during the reviewing process a number of problems had emerged, most of which had been resolved. However, one problem remained, and Wiles essentially withdrew his claim to have a proof. [...]

“In March 1994, Faltings, writing in *Scientific American*, said: ‘If it were easy, he would have solved it by now. Strictly speaking, it was not a proof when it was announced.’ Weil, also in *Scientific American*, wrote: ‘I believe he has had some good ideas in trying to construct the proof, but the proof is not there. To some extent, proving Fermat’s Theorem is like climbing Everest. If a man wants to climb Everest and falls short of it by 100 yards, he has not climbed Everest.’

“In fact, from the beginning of 1994, Wiles began to collaborate with Richard Taylor in an attempt to fill the holes in the proof. However, they decided that one of the key steps in the proof, using methods due to Flach, could not be made to work. They tried a new approach with a similar lack of success. In August 1994, Wiles addressed the International Congress of Mathematicians but was no nearer to solving the difficulties. Taylor suggested a last attempt to extend Flach’s method in the way necessary and Wiles, although convinced it would not work, agreed mainly to enable him to convince Taylor that it could never work. Wiles worked on it for about two weeks, then suddenly inspiration struck: ‘In a flash I saw that the thing that stopped it [the extension of Flach’s method] working was something that would make another method I had tried previously work.’ On 6 October, Wiles sent the new proof to three colleagues including Faltings. All liked the new proof which was essentially simpler than the earlier one.”

So, using modern mathematical methods and more than a hundred pages in the process, Fermat’s Theorem has finally been proved to be correct (though people without an academic mathematical background probably would have a hard time understanding this proof). However, Fermat couldn’t have known all of these modern methods back in around 1630, and it remains a mystery how he could know (or why he thought he knew) that his theorem was true.

(By the way, *Classic*’s agenda Theorem Proof is almost certainly a jab at the voluminous book that had to be written in order to prove Fermat’s Last Theorem.)

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