

CIRCULAR FILE

Eduardo Teixeira, a duellist in the violent and wildly popular sport of Aristeia!, has been found dead in his berth. He was travelling between worlds on board a Circular, headed to a tournament. It was not a peaceful death.

With the media itching for a scoop, and a dangerous new recreational drug spreading onboard the starship, can the agents of Bureau Noir find out who is responsible?

OPERATIONAL SUMMARY

The player characters represent Bureau Noir, the secret service arm of the panplanetary O-12 organisation. They are travelling aboard a wormhole-hopping Circular at the time of Eduardo Teixeira's death and are called in to investigate.

Teixeira has died from a brain aneurysm. Early on, the cause is unclear; in reality, he was killed by a dangerous experimental variant of the recreational drug nitrocaine. Evidence in Teixeira's berth points in two directions: to the Drift, a low-g bar in the spine of the Circular, and to Teixeira's girlfriend Gesine Maurer.

As the investigation spins outwards, the drug begins to spread aboard the Circular. Users are suffering vivid hallucinations, connected in some way to the local Maya datasphere. Some of them are turning violent. The player characters come under increasing pressure to figure out the source of the drug.

Teixeira's dealer was a Circular rat known as Noemi de Silva. She's small-time, working out of ship-board bars and dives, including the Drift. She has just started dealing for a new crew called the Bone Spurs, who are holed up onboard the *Sullied Marduk*, a small ship anchored to the Circular.

By the time the player characters reach the *Marduk*, it is in full lockdown. To apprehend the Bone Spurs and bring an end to the spread of the dangerous nitrocaine variant, the player characters will need to breach and storm the ship.

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Wilderness of Mirrors

Teixeira's death unexpectedly activates the player characters' cell, so their handlers do not have their Wilderness of Mirrors assignments ready at the

beginning of the scenario. Instead, their orders will come in as the situation evolves. Sidebars throughout the scenario will provide recommendations on when to introduce each objective. It is assumed that the player characters keep their handlers informed of their progress off-camera.

Ariadna: The player character is ordered to make contact with a friendly agent, in a bar in the Circular's Perpetual Sunset district called the Shentang Sling. The agent is carrying sensitive information, and reports that she is being followed. Take possession of the information packet, and make sure no one knows you are carrying it. A courier will collect it when the player character arrives at their destination.

Haqqislam: The Silk trade is the primary source of Haqqislam's economic and political might. Haqqislamite authorities use biochemical markers on any Silk derivatives to track who is supplying the Silk and ensure that no trade secrets have been stolen. The player character is ordered to obtain a sample of the experimental nitrocaine for testing. Make sure that no one else does the same.

Nomads: Aristeia! is a huge money-spinner, and Teixeira a popular PanOceanian Aristo. Anything that damages his reputation, damages PanOceania. The player character is instructed to leak evidence to the media that Teixeira's death was due to a drug overdose, and that his drug use may have extended to illegal performance enhancers.

PanOceania: Circular security is usually shared between the PanOceanian Knights of Santiago and O-12's Bureau Aegis. The Knights are eager to make it their sole responsibility. The player character is ordered to leak the conclusions of their investigation to Knight-Investigator Brother Antonio Leão ahead of any official announcement, so that he can claim credit.

Yu Jing: The berth that Eduardo Teixeira died in is preferred by PanOceanian and O-12 dignitaries travelling on the Circular. The player character is instructed to plant sophisticated bugs throughout the berth, so any future visitors can be surveilled.

Criminals: Nitrocaine trafficking is a lucrative business, and a new variant of the drug is a new opportunity for profit. The player character's criminal organisation wants a sample. A fresh vial will do, but an uncut sample direct from the source is preferred.

Corporations: The player character's corporate masters are sponsoring Eduardo Teixeira's latest Aristeia! season. The news of his drug addiction could be damaging. Keep the story out of the media. If that proves impossible, plant evidence implying that he was drugged against his will.

Mercenaries: The Bone Spurs have history with the player character's mercenary company. They betrayed your Captain in the past, and left with incriminating evidence on quasi-legal operations. Who knows what secrets they'll offer up under interrogation? Ensure that none of them can ever talk.

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BACKGROUND

Circulars

In the last two centuries humanity has spread to the stars. The Human Sphere now consists of eleven solar systems, divided up amongst the Great Powers. These planets are linked by a system of wormholes. Trade and transport through them is facilitated by the Circulars, vast starships looping endlessly along fixed routes, from one system to the next.

Each Circular is a massive vessel, carrying freight, passengers, and a small city's worth of Circular locals to support them. Smaller starships – from private yachts all the way up to the huge motherships of the Nomad Nation – dock with the Circulars and ride them through the wormholes that connect star systems.

Bureau Hermes, a branch of the panplanetary O-12 organisation, is responsible for operating the Circulars. They remain independent of national squabbles, keeping goods, people and information flowing even during times of conflict. Part city, part cruise liner, part freighter, if you are travelling between systems in the Human Sphere, you are travelling aboard one of the Circulars.

Nitrocaine

The development of Silk by Haqqislamite scholars heralded a medical renaissance throughout the Human Sphere. The threads of this unique technology wind through the human body, granting unparalleled protection against injury and aging, and easy access to cosmetic alterations. Silk even enables perfect real-time digital imaging of a user's brain, allowing personality backups to be stored in a quantronic implant known as a Cube.

Inevitably, an industry has grown around illegal Silk derivatives. In particular, the drug nitrocaine is rapidly gaining popularity, especially amongst the wealthy elite. This drug bonds with the user's synapses, enabling long-term highs that can be controlled using custom hacks installed on the user's Cube. The synaptic-bonding makes the drug highly addictive.

This scenario focuses around a new, experimental nitrocaine variant that allows the high to be controlled directly from the user's comlog – a wearable peripheral carried by virtually every resident of the Human Sphere. This drug was developed by a rogue Haqqislamite doctor named Al-Daran, and distributed by his Bone Spurs gang.

The experimental nitrocaïne suffers from two interconnected flaws. First, it bonds incorrectly with the user's synapses, causing hallucinations, frequently leading to brain damage and death. To complicate matters, the freelance hacker who developed the comlog control software did a shoddy job. Memory errors in the software feed inputs from the nearby datasphere directly into a user's sensorium. This can result in shared hallucinations between users, compounding emotional feedback and dangerously heightening the effects of the drug.

Eduardo Teixeira, Aristo

The first high-profile victim of this experimental nitrocaïne is Eduardo Teixeira (pronounced tay-SHAY-ra), an Aristo from the PanOceanian world of Acontecimento. Aristos are duellists in the popular sport of Aristeia! A hugely violent media spectacle, Aristeia! matches feature bloody combat between Aristos, occasionally even to the death. Aristos are superstars, revered throughout the Human Sphere.

Teixeira grew up poor, the son of farmers. His fluid fighting style, developed from the capoeira brought to Acontecimento by South American colonists, carried him from small displays on market days in his home town all the way to the heights of the Aristeia! circuit. On Acontecimento, Teixeira is a folk hero.

Teixeira was travelling aboard the Circular en route to an Aristeia! tournament. During the voyage, he settled in at the Sorel Sisters' Drift and Tiki Bar, where he met the dealer Noemi de Silva. De Silva was peddling the new nitrocaïne. As the scenario begins, Teixeira's body has been found by the ship's AI, dead due to complications from the illegal drug.

SCENE 1: THE DISTURBING DEAD

An aspect of ALEPH guides the player characters to Eduardo Teixeira's body. The Aspect calls itself Sarama, and appears as an androgynous figure in a sleek business suit. Sarama instructs the player characters to determine what killed Teixeira, identify any threats to the Circular's passengers, and put a stop to them. It emphasizes that Teixeira's death is high profile, but that its main concern is the safety of the Circular and its passengers.

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Aspects of ALEPH

ALEPH is the sole AI in the Human Sphere, watching over and aiding humanity in countless ways. It is present virtually everywhere, including aboard the

Circulars. Occasionally, it chooses to carve off a fragment of itself, a temporary subprogram with its own appearance and personality. Sarama is such an Aspect.

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Eduardo Teixeira's body was found in his berth, an isolated bungalow in one of the Circular's green spaces. Artful landscaping conceals the berth from view despite the small size of the shipboard park. Meandering paths cleverly guide walkers away, granting a surprising degree of privacy. This accommodation is reserved for wealthy travellers.

When the player characters first enter the berth, read or summarize the following:

The small bungalow has been torn apart. Furniture is smashed, the remains of a meal splattered across a wall. Glass crunches underfoot. Teixeira's body lies in the middle of the carnage, bruised and scratched. His face is frozen in an expression of rage, or perhaps fear.

The key pieces of evidence in the scene are described below:

The Body: Sarama was alerted to a medical emergency by automatic monitoring routines, but medics were unable to reach Teixeira in time; they are packing up when the player characters arrive. According to the medics, the cause of death was a brain aneurysm.

A character with the Medicine skill can examine the body. An **Average (D1) Medicine test** confirms the medic's diagnosis, and also reveals that Teixeira was under considerable stress at the time of death. His physical injuries – bruises, cuts – were self inflicted. He has micropuncture track marks on his wrist, near his surgically-embedded comlog.

A **Challenging (D2) Medicine check**, with time and access to appropriate facilities, reveals that the brain damage was caused by a drug that looks similar, but not identical, to nitroaine. It is still in Teixeira's bloodstream, along with drastically elevated levels of stress hormones.

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Playtest Tip: Why Us?

Security on board Circulars is managed jointly by Bureau Aegis, the judicial and tactical branch of O-12, and the PanOceanian Knights of Santiago. The relationship between Bureau Aegis and the Knights of Santiago is fraught. In a high-profile case such as this one, the likelihood of inter-agency conflict is high. O-12 wishes to avoid any such complications, and so they assign a deniable Bureau Noir team instead.

Sarama is provided as a supporting asset, but has no authority on board the Circular. For this reason, the player characters can't just call on Circular resources whenever they wish. If they try, they can turn a Medicine or Hacking test into a Command test, but emphasize that there are risks associated with involving other agencies.

These risks are personified by the cold and calculating Bureau Aegis Chief Edward Hasegawa, or the belligerent Knight-Investigator Brother Antonio Leão.

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The Room: If the player characters take their time, they will be able to thoroughly sweep Teixeira's berth. Otherwise, call for an **Observation test**:

- **Simple (D0):** There is a damaged Tiki mask lying next to Teixeira's body. He was wearing it when he died; the medics removed it when they attempted to revive him. It is a tacky souvenir, carved into a snarling face. An inscription indicates it came from The Drift and Tiki Garden, a bar aboard the Circular.
- **Average (D1):** There is a single dress in Teixeira's wardrobe, and a few scattered cosmetics in his bathroom. (The owner of these items, Gesine Maurer, moved out in a rush two days previously.)
- **Challenging (D2):** A thorough forensic sweep confirms that only two people have been in Teixeira's berth: Gesine Maurer, and Teixeira himself. This implies that either Maurer inflicted Teixeira's injuries and destroyed his quarters, or Teixeira did both himself, in some sort of frenzy. (The latter conclusion is correct.)

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Playtest Tip: PanOceania and Yu Jing

When the player characters have had a little bit of time to investigate Teixeira's berth, but before they are done, ping any PanOceanian or Yu Jingese agents with their Wilderness of Mirrors objectives (see p. XXX).

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The Quantronic Trail: Accessing Teixeira's comlog and other quantronic data will require a **Simple (D0) Hacking test**. Ask the players what they wish to search for – each point of Momentum generated on the roll reveals one of the following:

- **Berth registration:** Teixeira's berth is reserved under two names: Teixeira, and Gesine Maurer.
- **Personal messages:** Teixeira's messages include frequent contact with Gesine Maurer, who is clearly his girlfriend. Their communication abruptly stopped two days ago.
- **Teixeira's AR:** The player character can reconstruct Teixeira's augmented reality (AR) environment at the time of his death. The room suddenly fills with screaming and noise. Teixeira's old Aristeia! duels are layered on top of each other, opponents coming from all directions, shooting and kicking and slashing. It is intense and panic-inducing, a sensory overload.
- **Unusual code:** There is a small piece of code buried on Teixeira's comlog, which was used to control a nitrocaine high. Normally, this control requires complex Cube hacks. If this new nitrocaine can be controlled using comlog software instead, it is likely to be both cheaper and much more dangerous.

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Playtest Tip: Nomads and Corporations

As soon as any Nomad or Corporate players have plausibly had time to alert their handlers to Teixeira's drug use, issue them their Wilderness of Mirrors objectives (see p. XXX).

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SCENE 2: THE SOREL SISTERS' DRIFT AND TIKI GARDEN

The Drift and Tiki Garden is a low-gravity bar, located at the central axis of the Circular. Here, rotation provides only minimal gravity. Dropped objects drift slowly to the floor on curving trajectories, and some patrons are disoriented by

the difference in gravitational force between their heads and their feet. This feeling is referred to as “having the spins”.

This scene is an opportunity for social characters to shine. Clues point to the drug dealer Noemi de Silva, and a screaming match between Teixeira and his girlfriend Gesine Maurer. There is also an opportunity for the player characters to sample the experimental nitrocaïne, and a small piece of evidence connecting the drug to the *Sullied Marduk*.

As the player characters approach one of The Drift’s two entrances, read or summarize the following:

You pass through the maw of a huge, leering Tiki mask and into The Drift. It’s like being on the inside of a lazily spinning rum barrel. Polynesian by way of 20th century American kitsch, patrons drift at deck chairs scattered around the circumference of the barrel, drinking fluorescent cocktails under stunted palm trees. The air is humid, and the default AR projects the sounds and smells of the ocean. Portraits of the Sorel Sisters, Cécile and Émeline, hang above the bar.

The Drift only ever seems moderately busy – something about the beach-side affect encourages a relaxed mood. It is owned by Dr Emília dos Anjos Drummond, a retired particle physicist from the PanOceanian world of Acontecimento.

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The Sorel Sisters

Cécile and Émeline Sorel were crucial figures in humanity’s ascent to the stars. Their research into quantum gravity provided the theoretical framework for stabilising wormholes, a decade after the first viable wormhole was discovered orbiting Saturn. Crucially, they were able to develop so-called *Sorel field manipulators*, which allowed ships to traverse these wormholes safely. They were awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics for their great gift to humanity, and are particularly revered by people who live and work aboard the Circulars.

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Working the scene: The player characters might ask the staff and patrons at The Drift about Teixeira, or about the nitrocaïne. Each requires a **Persuade test**:

- **Teixeira (Simple (D0) Persuade):** Virtually all of the patrons have seen Teixeira at The Drift. A few nights ago, he had a screaming fight in the bar

with his girlfriend, Gesine Maurer. Glasses were thrown, Teixeira's table overturned. Station security were called to remove Maurer.

- **Nitrocaine (Average (D1) Persuade):** The Drift has a regular drug dealer, a Circular rat called Noemi de Silva. She has been peddling a new batch of nitrocaine, which is proving very popular with the customers. Cheaper than the usual stuff, and easier to use. If the player characters set up surveillance (an **Average (D1) Observation test**, over a few nights) they will spot Noemi de Silva dealing nitrocaine themselves.

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Momentum Spend: Joining the Dots

If the players spend one Momentum on either Persuade test while working the scene, one of the patrons will join the dots for them. They'll mention that Teixeira bought drugs from de Silva, and bring up the fight between Teixeira and Maurer.

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Fancy a Hit?

While the player characters are in The Drift, they will have an opportunity to sample the experimental nitrocaine. The peddler — either a high customer, or Noemi de Silva herself — will try to persuade the player characters to try the drug on the spot. If you think it's appropriate, call for Discipline tests to resist. The dose consists of a micropuncture for injecting the drug, and a software packet to be loaded into the user's comlog. Once the drug has bonded with the synapses, the software can be used to control the high.

Unless the software packet is studied in detail (a **Daunting (D3) Hacking test**), anyone taking the drug will be unaware of a crucial glitch. The software is interfacing with the local datasphere, tweaking the user's emotional response based on nearby inputs. As the errors in the code cascade, the emotional feedback compounds, and the user begins to hallucinate.

If one or more of the player characters samples the drug, this is your opportunity to heighten the weirdness. Mysterious figures — perhaps even Teixeira himself — appear fleetingly in the distance, noises that other characters don't hear, sudden compulsions (requiring Discipline tests to resist) to do strange things.

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Teixeira's Table: The bar's owner, Emília Drummond, is keeping Teixeira's preferred table for him. It is in the perfect position to see and be seen by the entire bar. Teixeira didn't go to The Drift to hide, he went there to be on display.

Although Drummond has kept the area clean, the player characters might still conduct a search. With an **Average (D1) Observation test**, they will turn up a partially-damaged, used micropuncture. It contains traces of the nitrocaïne.

The micropuncture bears a maker's mark, a tiny AR data packet with a MesoMed corporate logo. An **Analysis test** will provide additional information:

- **Simple (D0):** MesoMed is a small pharmaceuticals company focussing on Silk-derived therapies.
- **Average (D1):** A MesoMed transport ship, the *Sullied Marduk*, is currently docked with the Circular.
- **Challenging (D2):** Irregularities in MesoMed's credentials imply that the company is fake.

Gesine Maurer

Appearance: Dark skin and worry lines on a broad face. Dreadlocks, dyed green and piled up on her head, held roughly in place with a pale scarf.

Roleplaying:

- Abrasive, impatient. She assumes everyone will treat her as a handsome, mindless extension to Teixeira, and doesn't like it.
- Her hands are always in motion as she talks.
- When she hears about Teixeira's death, all the energy goes out of her. She struggles to focus.

Background: Maurer the artist, creator of graceful murals in motile paint and AR overlay. Teixeira the Aristo, a hedonistic fighter. The match was unexpected, the media never sure how to handle Maurer. It was also rocky – the two often fought, and weren't reluctant to do so in public. But something about it worked.

Two nights ago, Maurer and Teixeira fought in The Drift. Following that, she took her things from their shared berth and moved to a hotel room in the Circular's Perpetual Sunset hold. This district – tall, narrow, about the length of a city block – is piled high with restaurants and clubs, theatres and bars. It's a never-ending nightlife, heavily influenced by bustling Yu Jing cities. The player characters will find her there.

Key Info:

- Maurer knows that Noemi de Silva was supplying Teixeira with his nitrocaïne. She can provide a remarkably clear description of the dealer.

- She also knows that Teixeira has been spending all his nights in The Drift. This is what they fought about. Maurer wanted to experience everything the Circular had to offer, and found The Drift tacky. Teixeira was happy where he was. The fight was part genuine anger, part performance, but it wasn't serious. They would have patched it up in a few days.

Noemi de Silva

Appearance: Extremely pale, perhaps due to a lifetime aboard the Circular, perhaps a deliberate gene tweak. Her clothes are a clash of cultures, a different mix every time you see her.

Roleplaying:

- Early on in the nitrocaïne outbreak, de Silva projects a personality much larger than her size. She's loud, and aggressively friendly.
- As the situation worsens, de Silva gets more and more jumpy.
- Never holds anyone's gaze for long. She is constantly consulting her comlog, surveying the room for customers.

Background: De Silva is a Circular rat. Unlike other Circular locals, her relationship with the ship is parasitic. She knows its layout and shifting underground power structures intimately. Plenty of people aboard the Circular know her, but few would call her a friend; she is extremely self-reliant. Although she has dabbled in a wide variety of minor criminal enterprises, her major source of income has always been drug dealing.

She was proud of her professional relationship with Teixeira. It makes her normally tawdry business seem glamorous. She'll begin to learn that something is wrong with the nitrocaïne ahead of the general populace, and will grow progressively more terrified. When she goes to ground, the player characters will need to generate at least two Momentum on D0 or D1 tests (see *Playtest Tip: Finding Noemi*) to find her.

Key Info:

- De Silva regularly dealt nitrocaïne to Teixeira.
- She saw Maurer and Teixeira fighting in The Drift. If she thinks she can get away with it, she will suggest that the fight was serious, that Maurer had a temper and sometimes got violent.
- De Silva's new nitrocaïne came from the crew of the *Sullied Marduk*. She has never worked with them before — they came to her, and she was happy to help out. She finds the Bone Spurs' cosmetic alterations freaky, but doesn't judge.

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Playtest Tip: Finding Noemi

To find Noemi, the player characters need to generate two Momentum on any appropriate D0 or D1 tests. These might be Hacking tests, to access security footage, Persuade tests to ask around, perhaps even Stealth tests to lay an

ambush. This technique allows players the freedom to drive play in whichever direction they choose.

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SCENE 3: DANGEROUS HIGH

As the investigation proceeds, the experimental nitrocaine spreads through the Circular. It's cheaper than older nitrocaine variants, and the high is easier to manipulate via comlog. It is also very dangerous, causing hallucinations, freak outs, and ultimately brain damage.

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Sympathetic Reaction

The experimental nitrocaine interacts with the surrounding datasphere in unexpected ways. Users will often hallucinate episodes from their recent Maya viewing history – emotionally-charged dramas or Aristeia! fights in particular. These can bleed into other nearby users via the faulty comlog software.

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Playtest Tip: Haqqislam and Criminals

Once the player characters have established that a new variant of nitrocaine is circulating, supply Haqqislam and Criminal characters with their Wilderness of Mirrors objectives (see p. XXX). If you're looking for a dramatic moment, in the middle of dealing with an addict may be appropriate.

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Give the players a sense for this growing crisis by planting nitrocaine users in the background of early scenes. Here are a few suggested examples:

- A man in The Drift quietly strips off all of his clothes, and then curls up on his chair, hugging his knees.
- A woman screams at a pedal-powered passenger cart in the streets of Perpetual Sunset. She is re-enacting, word for word, a scene from a recent episode of the Maya drama *The Sun Always Shines*.
- A customer at a noodle restaurant starts attacking a wall, pounding his fists bloody and screaming Eduardo Teixeira's name.

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Nitrocaine Users

Here is a list of names that you can use for nitrocaine users, innocent bystanders, or accidental victims:

Rien Ng, Magnar Einarsson, Jens Leeworth, Nasheen Tran, Sol Arias, Soto van der Garde, Wu Jia, Aitor Carreño, Beca Chiaki-Jones, Frog Berninger.

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As the situation escalates, Sarama alerts the player characters directly to unfolding incidents. It is clear that the drug is becoming a risk to the Circular, not just to a few isolated junkies. Use any or all of these scenes to provide additional clues, add tension, or improve pacing.

- Public transport throughout the Circular is via vacuum transport tube. In one tube station, a nitrocaine user has somehow forced the airlock doors, been sucked into the tube, and suffocated. The resulting decompression has strewn debris around the terminal station, injured other travellers, and stalled the transport network. A villain with a small oxygen re-breather used the exact same method to escape arrest in the blockbuster *Circular Blues*.
- A drone controller, responsible for repairs on the surface of the Circular, has lost her mind and begun racing remotes across the ship's outer hull. She is convinced that she is the famous Nomad hacker-pilot Olga Stolyarova. A half dozen remotes have already been lost – flung off into space, or smashed into the Circular's heat sinks and sensor arrays.
- A party at the Shentang Sling, a bar in the Perpetual Sunset district, ends in tragedy. Bartenders initially thought some sort of flash mob had formed when a half dozen patrons started a synchronised dance reminiscent of

Eduardo Teixeira's fighting style. This drove a second group of patrons into an inexplicable rage and a genuine fight erupted.

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Heat Spend: Bad Timing

Spend 1 Heat to have a nitrocaïne incident happen while the player characters are in the middle of something important, such as a conversation with a witness, or a complex datasphere hack.

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Playtest Tip: Ariadna

The Ariadnan Wilderness of Mirrors objective can be revealed to Ariadnan player characters at any time (see p. XXX). If you wish to complicate the task of meeting up with the contact, have it happen during the nitrocaïne incident in the Shentang Sling.

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Evidence: If the player characters chase up on any of the victims, they'll find the following clues:

- Some of the victims have recently been in or around The Drift. This information can be found by asking around (**Average (D1) Persuade**), or by accessing security camera footage at the bar (**Average (D1) Hacking**).
- In a few cases, financial transactions can be traced to Noemi de Silva. This will happen in the middle phase of the nitrocaïne epidemic, when de Silva is struggling to keep up with demand, but hasn't yet realised the dangers. A victim's credit history can be obtained by hacking their comlog, a **Challenging (D2) Hacking test**.
- Two customers have been caught on surveillance camera — a roving security microdrone — purchasing nitrocaïne directly from one of the Bone Spurs. Tracking down this information is a **Challenging (D2) Observation test**. Once the deal has been observed, an **Average (D1)**

Analysis test is required to link the Bone Spur thug to his ship, the *Sullied Marduk*.

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Playtest Tip: Demonic Dealers

The Bone Spurs go out of their way to look terrifying, like demons. Play this up when viewing surveillance footage. Any experimental nitrocaine users in the group should be particularly susceptible.

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SCENE 4: SIEGE ON THE *SULLIED MARDUK*

Records show that the *Sullied Marduk* belongs to a pharmaceuticals company known as MesoMed. In reality, the ship is crewed by a gang of violent mercenaries and drug runners called the Bone Spurs. They are led by Al-Daran, a rogue medical scientist.

Al-Daran and the Bone Spurs have been monitoring the situation aboard the Circular, preferring to stay aboard the *Sullied Marduk* and distribute the drug through intermediaries. By the time the player characters arrive, the Spurs will most likely know the situation is spinning out of control, and will be hunkered down and prepared for a siege.

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Playtest Tip: Mercenaries

Once it is clear that the Bone Spurs are aboard the Circular, choose a dramatic moment to reveal Wilderness of Mirrors objectives to Mercenary player characters (see p. XXX). Two good choices are just before breaching the *Sullied Marduk*, or in the middle of a firefight.

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The Transport Bay

The *Sullied Marduk* is berthed in one of the Circular's vast transport bays. These rectangular bays house dozens of ships, nestled in a lattice of gantries. The gantries act as anchor points for fuel and coolant lines, as well as remotes and cranes. The hangar is kept in zero-g vacuum to allow for the safe transport of ships never designed for gravity wells.

Articulated cranes shuffle ships throughout the transport bay without the need for firing thrusters. Sarama manages this process with optimal efficiency. The player characters may be able to convince it to move the *Sullied Marduk*, but there's no way to do so in secrecy. The crew of the ship will know the instant they are moved.

The Ship

The *Sullied Marduk* is a classic small freighter design. A small cockpit sits atop two circular decks, followed by a long spine running the length of the ship. Modular cargo containers are attached to this spine, and can be accessed from the central tunnel. The reactor, engineering, and main engines are located at the end of the spine. Decks are connected by ladders.

INSERT MAP

The two living levels and Al-Daran's lab have artificial gravity, but the spine and the cargo pods are zero-g environments. There is atmosphere throughout the ship. In an emergency, each of the crew quarters can be sealed and ejected separately, acting like an escape pod. Their beds double as acceleration couches. Both the cockpit and engineering are too cramped for any serious fighting.

The following key describes the map locations:

1. **Central Spine**
2. **Al-Daran's Ready Room**
3. **Al-Daran's Sleeping Quarters**
4. **Crew Quarters**
5. **Head**
6. **Airlocks**
7. **Rec Room**
8. **Mess**
9. **Kitchens**
10. **Storage, including weapons locker**
11. **Storage**
12. **Cargo Pods**
13. **Al-Daran's Lab**

There are ten Bone Spurs, plus Al-Daran, aboard the *Sullied Marduk*. If they are caught unawares, they will be scattered throughout the ship and carrying only sidearms. If they have had time to prepare, then all of the Spurs will be armed, and defending the following locations:

- **2:** Two Spurs in Al-Daran's ready room, one disguised as the doctor (**Average (D1) Observation test** to notice the subterfuge).
- **10:** Two Spurs guarding the weapons locker, using storage crates as cover.
- **12A:** One Spur hiding in the first cargo pod.
- **12B:** Three Spurs in the second cargo pod, two standing guard and one hacker opposing any attacks on the shipboard network.
- **13:** Al-Daran and two Spurs are defending the lab.

They have prepared the following defences:

- **Shipboard Network:** The Spurs have fortified their shipboard network, and cut off external access. A **Challenging (D2) Hacking test** is required to access internal cameras or comms.
- **Bulkhead Doors:** All of the shipboard doors are locked down. Internal doors require an **Average (D1) Hacking or Tech tests** to open. The blast doors leading to the cockpit, spine, and engineering are reinforced, requiring **Daunting (D3) tests** instead.
- **Airlocks:** Breaching airlocks requires **Challenging (D2) Hacking or Tech tests**. A point of Momentum is required to open them without tripping alarms.
- **Sentry Guns:** In the corridors beyond the airlocks, the Bone Spurs have hastily set up autonomous sentry guns (see p. XXX).
- **Nitrocaine Aerosols:** Al-Daran has ordered his men to jury-rig nitrocaine aerosols into the air circulation system. Each of the Bone Spurs carries a small oxygen re-breather. At Al-Daran's order, the system can be activated, filling the air with the drug (see *Heat Spends: Nitrocaine in the Air* on p. XXX).
- **Cargo Pods:** The Bone Spurs have loosened the straps and shoved the cargo around, creating a dangerous maze. Extraplanetary tests are required to fight in these pods, and there are opportunities for both Heat and Momentum spends.
- **Al-Daran's Lab:** The lab is filled with sophisticated medical equipment and dangerous chemicals. As a last-ditch defence, Al-Daran has rigged this room with explosives on a three-round timer. He can arm them remotely (**Challenging (D2) Hacking test** to jam the signal), or via a dead man's switch that triggers if he is killed. The explosives are sufficient to destroy the lab, and may damage the ship's reactor.

[[[Begin Sidebar Here]]]

Heat Spends: Nitrocaine in the Air

Spend 2 Heat to activate the nitrocaine dispensers aboard the *Sullied Marduk*. The air will fill with smoke, carrying the aerosolized drug. Anyone breathing the drug will begin to suffer low-grade hallucinations, which escalate the longer they are exposed. In particular, the Bone Spurs will look more and more like hulking demons, looming out of the smoke.

Discipline tests will be required to keep calm; if the character fails, they become Dazed. These tests begin at Simple (D0), or Average (D1) for existing nitrocaine users. Spend 1 additional Heat at any time to raise the test difficulty by 1, to a maximum of Daunting (D3).

[[[End Sidebar Here]]]

The Bone Spurs, Crew of the *Sullied Marduk*

The Bone Spurs are a gang of thugs and mercenaries. Their leader, Al-Daran, trained as a doctor on the Haqqislamite planet of Bourak, but found his temperament better suited to experimentation. The Bone Spurs make their money pedalling nitrocaine and other Silk-derived drugs, operating as a mercenary company when the drug trade grows thin.

The experimental nitrocaine is Al-Daran's first attempt to carve himself a unique niche. Unfortunately, he has overestimated his own skill, and the freelance hacker who built the comlog software for managing the drug was sloppy. This combination has proved deadly.

The Bone Spurs have a love for dramatic cosmetic modifications: they grow spurs of bone from their bodies and faces. In some cases, they allow the bone to pierce the skin, forming exposed horns or shards. Otherwise, the bone contorts their features into unnatural shapes — sharp-edged cheekbones, ridged foreheads, plated forearms or chests. They often tattoo themselves to emphasise these features.

In combat situations, Al-Daran keeps his men supplied with adrenaline enhancers, lactic-acid regulators, and a suite of other drugs. In combination with their cosmetic alterations, this makes them frightening opponents in close quarters.

SENTRY GUN

(Trooper)																							
ATTRIBUTES		FIELDS OF EXPERTISE																					
Agility	0	<table><tr><td>Combat</td><td>+2</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td>Fortitude</td><td>+2</td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>Movement</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>Senses</td><td>+1</td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>Social</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>Technical</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr></table>				Combat	+2	1	Fortitude	+2	-	Movement	-	-	Senses	+1	-	Social	-	-	Technical	-	-
Combat	+2					1																	
Fortitude	+2					-																	
Movement	-					-																	
Senses	+1					-																	
Social	-					-																	
Technical	-					-																	
Awareness	6																						
Brawn	10																						
Coordination	12																						
Intelligence	8																						
Personality	0																						
Willpower	0																						
DEFENCES																							
Firewall	4	Resolve	-	Vigour	5																		
Security	2	Morale	-	Armour	3																		

ATTACKS: Mk12

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Automated turret:** The Sentry Gun is an immobile turret, controlled by a low grade software agent. It is immune to any Psywar effects. It uses its Intelligence Attribute only to resist Infowar attacks.

NOTES: One Sentry Gun has been placed facing each airlock on board the *Sullied Marduk* (map locations 6).

Mk12: Medium Range, 2+5[CD] damage, Burst 3, Mounted, Salvo (Knockdown)

BONE SPUR					
(Elite)					
ATTRIBUTES		FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Agility	8	Combat	+2	2	
Awareness	8				
Brawn	12				
Coordination	10				
Intelligence	8				
Personality	7				
Willpower	10				
DEFENCES					
Firewall	8	Resolve	10	Vigour	12
Security	0	Morale	1	Armour	2

ATTACKS: Light Shotgun or Submachine Gun, Pistol and Spiked Knuckles

GEAR: Subdermal Grafts

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Fear:** Cosmetic modifications turn a Bone Spur into a fearsome sight. Whenever a Bone Spur attempts a Psywar attack based on fear, he gains 1 bonus Momentum.

NOTES: Bone Spurs are scattered throughout the *Sullied Marduk*. One, located in the second cargo pod (map location 12B), carries a hacking device. This is loaded with no useful software, but can be used to oppose any player character attempts at Infowar.

Light Shotgun: Close Range, 1+4[CD] damage, Burst 1, Burst (Close), Spread 1, Knockdown

Submachine Gun: Close Range, 1+4[CD] damage, Burst 2, AP Ammunition, Spread 1

Pistol: Close Range, 1+3[CD] damage, Burst 1, Close Quarters, Vicious 1

Spiked Knuckles: 1+4[CD] damage, Armour Piercing 1, Vicious 1

AL-DARAN, LEADER OF THE BONE SPURS (Nemesis)					
ATTRIBUTES			FIELDS OF EXPERTISE		
Agility	8		Combat	+2	-
Awareness	10		Fortitude	-	-
Brawn	7		Movement	+2	1
Coordination	11		Senses	+4	2
Intelligence	10		Social	+3	2
Personality	12		Technical	+2	2
Willpower	12				
DEFENCES					
Firewall	10	Resolve	12	Vigour	7
Security	2	Morale	2	Armour	2

ATTACKS: Wetspike, Viral Pistol

GEAR: Light Combat Armour

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Fast Recovery (Vigour 2):** Thanks to custom engineered Silk treatments, Al-Daran regains two points of Vigour at the start of each turn. He can spend Heat to remove Wound impairments at a cost of one per impairment currently being suffered.
- **Nitrocaine Aerosols:** See *Heat Spends: Nitrocaine in the Air* on p. XXX.
- **Bone Spurs Leader:** if Al-Daran is targeted by an attack, he may spend a point of Heat to redirect the attack to a Bone Spur within Reach.

NOTES: Al-Daran can be found in his laboratory, a converted cargo pod (map location 13). He is initially defended by two Bone Spurs. Other Spurs will fall back to his location if pressed.

Wetspike: 1+3[CD] damage, Armour Piercing 1, Biotech, Toxic 1, Subtle 3

Viral Pistol: Close Range, 1+3[CD], Burst 1, Biotech, Close Quarters, Vicious 1

Al-Daran

Appearance: A thick beard and artificially blue eyes. His armour is clearly Haqqislamite in origin.

Roleplaying:

- Though he appears slight in comparison to the Bone Spurs, Al-Daran exudes an air of fierce control that marks him out as a leader.
- Tracks the flow of conflict via his comlog, even if fighting erupts in his vicinity.
- Communicates tersely with his Bone Spurs – issuing orders, demanding reports – but doesn't speak to the player characters at all.