

HELL BANK NOTES

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FADE IN:

EXT. ALMATY CIVIC PALACE - DAY

A futuristic governor's mansion. Behind, the Tian Shan Mountains. Below, the city, pop. 7 million.

SUPER: Almaty, Kazakhstan. 2151.

INT. CIVIC PALACE, BANQUET HALL - DAY

The governor's family is having a throw down with all the finery. Fancy dresses, candelabra, roasted racks of meat. DILNARA (20s), a pretty Asiatic girl, excuses herself from the table, walks out into the darkened hallway.

INT. CIVIC PALACE, MEETING HALL - CONTINUOUS

The Russian ambassador CONTE SENETHIS(40s), a dapper gent, sits at a gilded negotiating table at the center of the marble chamber. Behind him stand a retinue of Russian soldiers.

Across the table are the Kazakhs:

GENERAL CADE TALGAT (40s) lean, with long black hair and a neatly trimmed goatee.

COLONAL AIZAHN NURKADY (late 30s)takes her place behind him. She also long jet black hair and facial tattoos, and looks tough. They have some soldiers too.

TALGAT

The governor apologizes for his absence, he's authorized me to close negotiations in his place. If we observe the formalities quickly, we can join him at the banquet.

GRANT TENNISON (Late 50s) and MICHAEL STEWART (late 20s), in diplomatic dress, burst into the room. Everyone turns.

GRANT

That's unfortunate, as the negotiations are just about to get interesting.

He brandishes a small biochip.

GRANT (CONT'D)
 As these financial records will
 prove, your government has been
 less than honest regarding the
 terms of our lease of the Baykonur
 jump-port. You've heavily inflated
 the value of the land we occupy.

Talgat and Aizahn glare.

CONTE
 A fact we're happy to overlook--

GRANT
 Provided you renew our lease for
 another twenty years at the current
 rate. Unless you think your other
 party will still be interested
 after they see this information.

Conte rounds on Grant.

CONTE
 Shut up, Tennison! We already
 completed negotiations. The
 Governor agreed to lease the land,
 we just have to accept the terms.

Grant looks between them in confusion. Talgat signals a
 subordinate who goes to the door. Conte draws Grant aside.

GRANT
 The contract's going ahead?

CONTE
 And your meddling adds a needless
 complication. I had this. You
 should have trusted me.

The subordinate opens the doors to the banquet hall, and
 ELEINA RHODON (40s) sweeps into the room. Severe haircut,
 severe business ensemble, the model of Hellenic perfection.
 Two soldiers in long robes and mirrored faceplates back her.

ELEINA
 I understand the negotiations were
 concluded successfully. Let me be
 the first to offer my
 congratulations.

Grant retreats to the background as Conte intercepts her.

MICHAEL
 (to Grant)
 The Cypro-corp Ambassador, Eleina
 Rhodon. What's she doing here?

CONTE
 (to Talgat)
 Have we done something to offend you, General Talgat? Surely you haven't taken my associate's little joke seriously.

TALGAT
 I take everything seriously, Ambassador Senethis. It's good business.

CONTE
 These were to be closed negotiations.

TALGAT
 As long as their outcome was all but settled. But to be honest, I expected something like this. I thought it would be expedient to have Cypro-corp here to explore alternative offers.

CONTE
 Let's sit back down. Surely we can resolve this.

Michael and Grant watch from the sidelines. Michael fingers the hilt of his nanocarb steel yatagan sword.

MICHAEL
 I don't like it. The Cypriots usually conduct this sort of thing on the sly. Why are they putting in a public appearance?

Eleina approaches them. She whispers in Grant's ear.

ELEINA
 It appears you've caused quite a problem for your ambassador, Tennison. Haven't you learned by now there are consequences when you wander off the reservation?

Grant grunts. Eleina smiles.

ELEINA (CONT'D)
 I used to be like you, you know. Wild, undisciplined, weight of the world on my shoulders - unable to let go, to delegate, to see the bigger picture.

GRANT

The picture you filter for your self-righteous, agoraphobic mob of shareholders? Answerable only to the board, responsible only for profit? That doesn't sound like a free nation to me.

ELEINA

Nations are outdated. Cypro-corp is unified in vision and purpose, to attain a level of prosperity beyond the means of any mere country. For a man old enough to be my father, I would have thought you'd grown up.

GRANT

What can I say, I've found my niche.

INT. CIVIC PALACE, BANQUET HALL - CONTINUOUS

Just outside, Dilnara reacts to GUNFIRE OS. Past Dilnara, a SOLDIER dressed as Carbonari (we'll meet them later) is firing at unseen pursuers. He runs right at Dilnara, shoves her out of his way. He has a bomb vest on. He dashes into the banquet hall, scatters the revelers.

SOLDIER

Constantia!

INT. CIVIC PALACE, MEETING HALL - CONTINUOUS

Grant and Eleina turn to raised voices from the negotiating table.

TALGAT

Time's up, Ambassador Senethis. I think your offer is - how to put it - hopelessly compromised, and so we are withdrawing ours. Unless you have anything else to add to the proceedings...

Senethis sighs, slides down his chair in defeat.

TALGAT (CONT'D)

Then these negotiations are closed. We will no longer partner with Russia. The Cypriots will gladly engage in honest dealings with my government. In a way, you've done us a favor. I'm sure once I speak to the Governor--

CONTE
This is a mistake, Talgat.

Talgat blinks.

TALGAT
Is that a threat?

EXT. ALMATY CIVIC PALACE

The building ERUPTS in a MASSIVE ENERGY DISCHARGE!

INT. CIVIC PALACE, MEETING HALL

Everyone reacts as the building SHUDDERS. Cracks appear in the walls. The chandelier CRASHES down on the conference table, sends Conte sprawling. Eleina stares right at Grant as her bodyguards rush her out of the building. Talgat looks at them in shock as the plaster settles.

TALGAT
What have you done?

Michael draws his sword, ready to defend Conte and Grant.

CONTE
General, you can't think we had anything to do with--

TALGAT
(to Grant)
You wanted to derail the negotiations? You got your wish.

Conte, Grant and Michael share a worried look. A KAZAKH SOLDIER staggers through the unhinged doors.

KAZAKH SOLDIER
General Talgat, come quickly sir.

EXT. ALMATY CIVIC PALACE - LATER

The building's open wound bleeds black into the sky.

Ambassador Rhodon's Helios Air Platform - a flying aircraft carrier - hovers over the city like a gigantic silver buzzard.

INT. CIVIC PALACE, BANQUET HALL - DAY

Talgat overlooks the city from amid the ruined section of the palace, Aizahn by his side.

He's hunched, almost broken down with grief. Grant, Michael and Conte stand nearby, under guard.

AIZAHN

We're trying to recover usable traces of D.N.A. from the ruling family and military leaders attending the banquet. But it was a genetic device, laced with organic corrosion.

TALGAT

Their Links were destroyed?

AIZAHN

We'll continue to search, but it's almost certain they were.

TALGAT

How's Dilnara?

Aizahn jerks her head across the rubble-strewn ballroom floor to a group of medics intent on a shattered female form, her formalwear torn and blackened.

AIZAHN

Nothing more we can do. We managed to preserve some of her memories, but the corruption was aggressive. We couldn't collect enough synaptic data for a comprehensive AI. I'm sorry. Dilnara - at least, most of what she was - is gone.

Talgat gropes for a seat on the crushed stone of a fallen column.

TALGAT

An entire dynasty, ended in a split second.

MICHAEL

(whispered, to Grant)
They weren't backed up?

GRANT

Didn't believe in it. They were spiritualists. No genetic mods, no quantum backups. They called it the arrow's path - one life, one death.

TALGAT

(to Aziahn)
Show me.

He stares into the air as she LINKS him the memory.

AIZAHN

We found a tissue sample containing pre-existing genetic modifications, so it couldn't have come from the Governor's family. We think it's from the attacker.

TALGAT

What's this the bomber says?

AIZAHN

We can't make it out.

Grant steps forward.

GRANT

May we?

Talgat considers him, then gives him the link.

DILNARA'S POV, CORRUPTED

The soldier brushes past her, bomb vest visible.

AIZAHN (V.O.)

Here's the reconstituted memory.

ON GRANT

GRANT

He says 'Constantia.' Resolve, in the dead tongue.

TALGAT

(venomous)
Carbonari.

AIZAHN

Iye. That would be consistent with the sample's genetic mods.

Talgat turns, his face anguished. Aizahn takes a step back.

TALGAT

How many times did I tell them to avoid gathering in a single location?

CONTE

(puts a hand on his shoulder.)
We all know you did. But they loved life and each other.

TALGAT

What we do for love. I loved the Governor's family. Nurzhan, Duiat, Serik, Aiaulym... all of them.

(looks out over the city)

I could break international law, regenerate them. Claim some had survived. I'd kill all of you if I thought I could save them. But it would be against their superstitions.

CONTE

And they would want Kazakhstan to abide by the National Union mandate more than their own lives.

(to Grant)

You understand these Carbonari - you know their speech.

GRANT

A bit.

TALGAT

What possible motive could the Carbonari have for murdering the Governor's family?

GRANT

To attack the homeland of the Secretary-General of the National Union. To point out the hypocrisy of a secular federal populist global government being run by a religious demagogue from Central Asia, that's their usual line.

Talgat dismisses Grant, gestures to Aizahn. Grant "pushes" - that is, hacks their Links and listens to their conversation.

TALGAT (V.O.)

I want you to use the sample you found.

AIZAHN (V.O.)

(shocked)

Regenerate the attacker?

TALGAT

Do whatever you have to - whatever it takes to find what cell he came from. Keep it quiet.

Aizhan cocks her head to the right, listens to an incoming link. Grant closes his connection.

AIZAHN

(to Talgat)

The Ambassador - our ambassador - requests a meeting to formulate our response before she meets with the Secretary-General. She says the protocol for the catastrophic loss of the last remaining blood relative is the mandate passes to the senior military leader. You're the Governor, now.

TALGAT

(Stares back)

I can't rule in the place of my friends. Not until I've avenged their deaths.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ALMATY CIVIC MASOLEUM - DAY

Kazakh flags drape closed coffins on a dais in the center of the courtyard. Mourners burn bundles of fake money - HELL BANK NOTES. Visitors, including Conte, pay their respects. Grant waits in a shadowed colonnade.

FLASHBACK

The Ambassador's quarters. Conte paces, fumes, Grant watches.

CONTE

I can't have you taking matters into your own hands like this. It brings suspicion on the whole country. I'm going to have to let you go.

GRANT

You'll regret this, son. I was doing this job when you were still a nesting doll.

CONTE

That's probably why your methods are so hopelessly out of date.

GRANT

I didn't bomb the Governor's family. You have to know that.

CONTE

Maybe, but that won't stop me going down with you if I keep you on.

BACK TO SCENE

COMMANDER NOBORU "TANK" TANAKA (50s) approaches Grant from behind. Michael appears, steps to Grant's side and puts Tanaka in a painful wristlock.

GRANT

(a hand on Michael's arm)
It's all right, Michael, this is a friend. You remember Tank - Commander Noboru Tanaka?

MICHAEL

The Carbonari defector?

TANAKA

Reformed, I assure you. The name's a normalization of my old handle.

MICHAEL

The one who killed my father?

TANAKA

Ah.

GRANT

Your father was a hero, Michael. He did his duty, saved lives. You dishonor his memory if you blame another soldier for doing his.

Michael lets Tanaka go.

TANAKA

(rubs his wrist)
Good boy you have there, Grant.

GRANT

A mite overzealous at times.
(to Michael)
Tank's a division commander now. Chameleons, right? No doubt here with the GSTF delegation, although in an unofficial capacity.

TANAKA

And you were at the Russian Jumpport in Baykonur before this... tragedy.

GRANT

The Ambassador was renegotiating the lease of the Kazakh land.

TANAKA

Indeed? And what were you doing?

Grant grins.

GRANT
As little as possible.

Tanaka claps the older man on the back.

TANAKA
I heard about what happened with the Ambassador. I'm sorry. What are you going to do?

GRANT
Not sure. No job, no direction, but no one to answer to, either. I'll find a level.

TANAKA
Your problem is, you hold on too tight. It's what got you kicked out of the GSTF.

GRANT
Pardon me if I don't consider you a paragon of career advice.

TANAKA
I consider you a friend, Grant, odd as it is.

Tanaka puts a hand on his shoulder. Michael tenses.

TANAKA (CONT'D)
I wouldn't be here if I didn't have an offer.

GRANT
I don't want to hear it.
(Thinks)
This have to do with the bombing?

TANAKA
Maybe.

GRANT
I definitely don't want to hear it.

Grant and Tanaka face the square.

TANAKA
Things are harder now. The politicians want to continue the potential of globalization, but the N.U. is besieged. External rebels, trans-nat corporations, treacherous member states... including Russia.
(looks sideways at Grant)
(MORE)

TANAKA (CONT'D)

Does it ever bother you, working for the enemy?

GRANT

There are no more enemies. The world's united. As a former external rebel, I'd have thought you'd notice.

TANAKA

Don't mistake me Grant. I know we're on the same side. But until the GSTF has broader powers, it may be the losing one. I'll come to the point. The Secretary-General is in an uproar over the current debacle.

GRANT

Naturally. He's Kazakh. To the Kazakh people, he's like a reincarnated god.

TANAKA

A belief frowned on by the rest of the National Union, to be sure.

GRANT

Indeed.

EXT. ALMATY STREET - DAY

Grant and Tanaka head down the street, Michael shadowing them.

TANAKA

What do you know about the new head of Kazakhstan?

GRANT

General Talgat? Not much. He's vowed to hunt down those responsible, but that's what he has to say.

TANAKA

Governor Talgat, now. He's serious. He's sworn personal vengeance. He and the Secretary-General are screaming at Benjamin to act.

GRANT

Knowing Benjamin, he won't involve the GSTF directly until he knows who's responsible. You think the Carbonari really did it?

TANAKA

Talgat certainly thinks they did. He claims to have traced the attack to a cell in the Xinjiang province of western China.

GRANT

(grunts)

Mm, the autonomous region, near the Kyrgyzstan border.

TANAKA

But Talgat, the Kazakh Ambassador, and even the Secretary-General want to hold China responsible for harboring the terrorists. The Kazakhs are demanding sanctions, embargoes, revocation of Free World Council privileges, etcetera. And unless they get them, they're likely to hold a vote of no confidence in the GSTF and reform their national military.

GRANT

It would tear the union apart.

TANAKA

The FWC is meeting now. Any moment they could pass a resolution to send GSTF troops into China. We have to act now to prevent greater bloodshed. Take out the Carbonari before it's war between the international community.

GRANT

The threat of force keeps unruly nations in line, but if they start to call our bluff, to be honest, I'm not sure it's a conflict the GSTF can win.

TANAKA

We have to ensure it appears the mere possibility of an intervention makes China back down. It's the only way to maintain a semblance of global order.

GRANT

How does Benjamin want to handle it?

TANAKA

He'd rather deal with the Carbonari quietly, preferably in a non-attributable way. But he needs broader powers.

They walk, Grant reflects.

GRANT

I need a drink.

INT. IRISH PUB, ALMATY - NIGHT

Dimly lit, rustic, and international. Grant joins Tanaka at a back booth they've chosen, carrying a pitcher of watery white fluid and two small bowls. He slides in and pours.

TANAKA

What're we drinking?

Grant holds up a finger, and sets a small black device on the table behind the candle. The device emits a soft blue glow. The two communicate TECHNOPATHICALLY.

GRANT (V.O.)

In Kazakhstan, it must be shubat - fermented camel's milk.

Tanaka sniffs it, scowls.

TANAKA (V.O.)

Disgusting.

GRANT (V.O.)

Appropriate.

TANAKA (V.O.)

What are we drinking to?

GRANT (V.O.)

Let's not rush. So you're going to completely disregard the charter?

TANAKA (V.O.)

The Order of National Enforcement's clear about this sort of operation. Strictly black flag, not even Chameleons are this secret. It's going to be an entirely new unit, no ties to anyone. We have Benjamin's full support, he'll supply personnel and equipment, but he...

GRANT (V.O.)
Benjamin doesn't know you're here,
does he?

TANAKA (V.O.)
No. In truth, he and a lot of the
GSTF top brass think you were
probably involved in the bombing.

GRANT (V.O.)
You're kidding.

TANAKA (V.O.)
I know better. You and I have been
both enemies and allies, and I just
know. Honestly, Grant, the way
you've carried on, can you blame
them?

GRANT (V.O.)
I suppose not.

Grant swirls his shubat.

TANAKA (V.O.)
I want you to run this thing.
You're better than I am, and the
job's too important.

GRANT (V.O.)
How flattering.

TANAKA (V.O.)
It's true.

Grant smirks.

GRANT (V.O.)
Who else's attached?

TANAKA (V.O.)
I've selected some candidates from
my division.

INSERT: holographic of the team's files and photos.

Grant assumes a faraway look as he assimilates them.

TANAKA (V.O.)
They're good kids.

GRANT (V.O.)
Not enough to go broadside with the
Carbonari.

TANAKA (V.O.)
As I recall, the torpedo was your preferred method.

Grant smiles.

GRANT (V.O.)
Point is, you can make these kids disappear. You can set them loose in China. But that won't solve the problem.

TANAKA (V.O.)
Your never-say-die attitude's what I always liked about you.

GRANT (V.O.)
Sure I say die. I say it until someone pays attention. That's why you're a division commander, and I'm out of work.

TANAKA (V.O.)
We know China's a smokescreen. Their culpability is just the surface problem. But not everyone's complicit. We need to cut through the chatter, put the politicians back on track.

GRANT (V.O.)
So Ben thinks he can solve China's Carbonari problem and get Kazakhstan back to the table without the controversy of appearing to publicly involve the GSTF in an internal Chinese matter.

Grant shakes his head.

EXT. IRISH PUB, ALMATY - NIGHT

CHRISTINA TENNISON'S (30s) incoming link startles Michael as he stands guard outside.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)
How is he, Michael?

MICHAEL (V.O.)
Taking it hard, I think. It's hard to tell.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)
I hope he doesn't do anything we'll all regret.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
He's talking to Commander Tanaka
now.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)
The former Carbonari? That's not a
good sign.

Several black cars pull up to the bar, disgorge Colonel
Aizhan and several Kazakh security.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
Speaking of which, this isn't a
great time. I gotta go.

He draws his sword.

INT. IRISH PUB, ALMATY - NIGHT

Tanaka leans forward, his eyes eager.

TANAKA (V.O.)
This is what you wanted, remember?
A blank check to do something
constructive; to make a difference.

GRANT (V.O.)
And now I just want out of the
game. You're going to need more
than GSTF cannon fodder to make
this work.

Tanaka waves him off.

TANAKA (V.O.)
Be that as it may, this is still an
opportunity not to let the rules
get in the way of what's right.
I'll send these kids to die for
that, and more.

GRANT (V.O.)
Count me out.

TANAKA (V.O.)
Had to try.

Tanaka downs his shubat, grimaces. Grant allows himself a
half smile and raises his bowl. Tanaka inclines his head.

THE BAR WINDOW

Michael's limp body crashes through. Bloodied and dazed, he
slides on his back towards their feet as Grant and Tanaka
jump up in alarm.

GRANT

Michael?

Kazakh soldiers surround their table, Colonel Aizahn at their head. They carry rifles, Aizahn a plasma crop.

AIZAHN

Everybody stay calm. Get up slowly, hands where we can see them.

Grant and Tanaka stand, hands on their heads.

AIZAHN (CONT'D)

Grant Tennison, you're under arrest for espionage and treason against the people of Kazakhstan, for conducting an act of terrorism on Kazakh soil, destruction of property, and murder.

GRANT

Murder?

AIZAHN

The man you're meeting with is an ex-Carbonari, I shouldn't have to spell it out. We have a warrant to freeze your Link and search it for evidence of Carbonari involvement.

GRANT

Me, a Carbonari? Don't be ridiculous, do you have any idea what I've suffered on their account?

AIZAHN

Did you want to derail the negotiations so badly you had to kill the Kazakh Governor's Family? Surely there was another way.

GRANT

I thought you were talking about the jump-port. I wanted to save the negotiations, not derail them.

AIZAHN

Is that an admission of guilt?

Grant looks at Tanaka.

GRANT

I thought the new Governor liked China for the bombing.

TANAKA

I told you, he needs to buy time. He must think if he points the finger at you, he can implicate Russia and drive the process in circles while he pursues China on his own.

AIZAHN

The Ambassador's cut you loose, no diplomatic immunity anymore.

Grant nods, understanding.

GRANT

Then this is about the jump-port, in a way.

AIZAHN

Shut up, turn around!

Grant doesn't turn.

GRANT

You couldn't let it go. You had to push.

AIZAHN

Hardly. We've just come to put a sick old horse out to pasture. Ex-GSTF turning tricks for Russia. You're a disgrace.

Grant's eye narrow. He grabs the D.M.Z. off the table and whips it at Aizahn. It sputters and gives off a big energy surge. Aizahn and the soldiers all react in pain. Guns go off. Tanaka dives for cover, yanks his gun from beneath his jacket. Grant charges ahead.

TANAKA

Dammit, Grant, what're you doing?

GRANT

You got a better idea? I'm not sleeping in a Kazakh jail.

Grant goes hand-to hand with Aizahn. She blocks his first assault. Tanaka fires into the soldier's heavily armored uniforms, knocks them back through the air. Aizahn, off balance, lands one on Grant with the plasma crop. He goes down. On the ground, face bloody, hair singed, Grant sweeps Aizahn's feet from under her.

Grant returns to a crouch, cold cocks Aizahn while she's down. Tanaka stands from cover, surveys the destruction. All the soldiers are down, the bar patrons stare in horror. Grant helps Michael, still dazed, to his feet.

GRANT (CONT'D)
Better clear out before they get
up. Come on, Michael.

They stagger through the door into the street.

EXT. ALMATY STREET - NIGHT

Grant and Tanaka grin at each other, escape down the shadowed street, Michael supported between them.

TANAKA
I never get tired of this kind of
thing.

GRANT
Good to know, seeing we're in this
together now.

TANAKA
I hope you have an escape route.

GRANT
Are you kidding?
(off Tanaka's look)
There's no clearing my name, I've
been down that road. There's no
coming back from this.

TANAKA
You can't just keep running away,
Grant. You have to do something
about this.

GRANT
You know me, Tank. I do both.
That's my style, run and fire.

Grant keeps moving, his breath ragged gasps.

GRANT (CONT'D)
If I'm going to be a scapegoat, all
I can do is make my martyrdom
meaningful. So we're going to do it
my way, with my people.

TANAKA
I'm sure Benjamin will be pleased.

GRANT
He damn well better be.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MALTA - DAY

The sun glares off the flagstones of a villa nestled amid the shipyards of a slightly industrial Mediterranean town.

SUPER: Marsa, Malta.

INT. VILLA - DAY

Grant sits at small table in the villa's courtyard. It's covered with a white tablecloth. Near him sits DOVE (30s), a stoic Native American cyberpunk computer whiz. MARQUIS STEFEN DE PIRO (40s) elegant, rakish - hands Grant a glass.

STEFEN

Wine?

GRANT

(takes it)

Naturally.

(to Dove)

When you're at the villa of the Marquis de Piro, a Spanish red from the Ribera del Duero, probably a Viña Sastre or Vega Sicilia.

(to Stefen)

Funny a maverick Spanish marquis should prefer the same Spanish wine as the crown of England.

Stefen tilts his glass to examine the wine's color.

STEFEN

Nonsense. It only means they have better taste in wine than titles.

(raises his glass)

But first we toast to old friends who continue to surprise us.

Grant and Stefen sip. Dove watches impassively.

GRANT

(swirls his glass)

Viña Sastre. Very nice.

STEFEN

And who have we here?

GRANT

Stefen, this is Cero Duvv - Dove, for short. Formerly of the American Resistance Movement.

Stefen doffs an imaginary hat.

STEFEN

A bona fide 'skin, eh? Splendid. I welcome you sir, as one oppressed minority to another.

Dove stares back at him, expressionless.

GRANT

The Maltese nobility hardly qualify for victim status, my friend. Dove's one of our operations specialists.

STEFEN

Ah yes, a neurohacker.

DOVE

People throw that word around. Doesn't mean what it used to.

STEFEN

Indeed? And what does it mean?

Dove looks at him, appraising. A bemused smile plays across Stefen's face.

DOVE

You cellar wines?

STEFEN

(including Grant)
Naturally.

Dove leans forward, holds Stefen's eyes intently.

DOVE

You know the finest wine in your collection? Can you picture it?

STEFEN

Of course.

Dove sits back, negligent, having seen everything.

DOVE

Seventh rack in the cellar vault. It's worth half your villa.

STEFEN

How clever. Should I have my sommelier move it?

DOVE

I don't drink.

STEFEN

No, you clearly have other vices to
intoxicate you.

DOVE

Not as much as you'd think.
Principled neurohackers never
misuse their skills. Our community
takes a dim view of--

GRANT

Boys.

(to Dove)

Stefen de Piro may be a number of
things, but most notably he's a
talented doctor. And I suggest you
befriend him, I have a feeling
we'll need his services.

STEFEN

And how were you planning to
procure them?

GRANT

He owes me a rather large favor.

STEFEN

Which you never tire of reminding
me.

GRANT

I know you're comfortable here.
Even if I could still order you, I
wouldn't. But I have to ask.

STEFEN

Ah. You're throwing a party.

GRANT

Big party. Sea, air and land.

STEFEN

And you want to use the estate.

GRANT

Title and privileges.

STEFEN

Now that does sound like fun.
(looks into his wineglass)
You'll want your boat, then.

INT. UNDERGROUND JETTY - DAY

Stefen leads the way down a long stairway cut into the rock of a dim, musty cavern. LEDs line the pier. A vast water-filled chamber extends into darkness.

STEFEN

This quay goes back to the Knights of Malta.

GRANT

Any relation?

STEFEN

Not that I'd admit to, religious sentiment being what it is.

(looks around)

It travels almost a mile underground all the way to the Grand Harbor.

DOVE

It's a slaver's wharf.

STEFEN

And still useful to those who wish to conceal their activities. Profit by any means.

GRANT

(to Stefen)

Don't mind him. He doesn't want to be here.

STEFEN

I wondered about that. The question is, what enables you to hold a neurohacker against his will?

GRANT

I don't know, is it?

They walk out along the jetty.

STEFEN

We can continue this conversation another time, yes? For now...

He stares at the water, his Link CHIRPS as he sends a serial key. The light chop lapping at the pier begins to roil and steam, and the shadow of something massive emerges.

GRANT

Been nearly twenty years. Hope she's still operable.

A futuristic submarine surfaces in a cloud of steam. It's wide and flat, its conning tower nestled into the hull.

DOVE

You have a submarine.

GRANT

My retirement plan.

Steam disperses as the sub extends a gangplank onto the dock.

INT. SUBMARINE - CONTINUOUS

They climb through the hatch into the companionway of the darkened vessel. Their retinas shine, amplify the light. Grant moves aft towards the control room, runs his fingers along the railing.

GRANT

Takes you right back, doesn't it?
You can feel the ocean in a ship
like this. Shame naval officers
don't train in them anymore.

DOVE

Interesting mods. Was she
Carbonari?

GRANT

Once upon a time. She was the
Naumachia. She's lightly armed for
offshore combat with thirteen
decks, a payload of eighty
conventional cruise missiles, six
torpedo tubes, and usually about
five fighter planes in her hangar
bay. We'll have to do without
those.

They come into the control room.

GRANT (CONT'D)

Dove, you'll need to update her
cells. Build me a möbius strip of
supplemental fire-walls and
isolated nodes. I know her system's
ten years old, but I do expect
miracles.

DOVE

Don't we need a... crew or
something?

GRANT

That's the beauty of this class of
ship. Practically run themselves.

(MORE)

GRANT (CONT'D)

Just point her where you want to go, and the sea is yours.

Grant leans on the steering stand, gazes out the view port.

GRANT (CONT'D)

She needs a new name.

INT. PETROLEUM CLUB, ALMATY - DAY

A freight dog bar. Every head turns as Governor Talgat and Colonel Nurkady barge in, along with a retinue of armed soldiers.

AIZAHN

We're looking for a pilot.

Many patrons quickly vacate their seats. All except the hard crew around the center table: pilot GLENN TARVIS - (40s, Australian), flight engineer GEIL RAIKAN - (40s, Aleutian), gunners TANITH DARIEL (30s, Hawaiian) and SARINA SHIRE (30s, New Mauritian). All except Sarina wear flight jackets. Sarina wears small cargo shorts, a tank top, and mirrored contacts.

GLENN

Glenn Tarvis, captain of the Flywheel. What brings you down here to bulk rate, Governor?

Talgat sits, a server brings a round of shubat.

TALGAT

I need a crew with combat experience, as the places I intend to land are liable to be inclement. Am I in the right bar?

GLENN

Depends on what you want to spend. Hazard pays extra.

TALGAT

Good, right to business. I'm for globalization, but one built on real socio-economic ties, not the false unity, big government, and gentrification of the National Union. We have to break China's hold on the world, and stabilize it for the new order of the corporate state.

GLENN

I don't care about corporate states unless they link Yuen to my offshore account.

TALGAT

I understand. It can't be easy for you, with the collapse of the world economy after the murder of a major global dynasty with ties to the Secretary-General of the National Union. Jobs must be scarce.

GLENN

I wouldn't know anything about that, Governor. Life moves on. Great thing about being a pilot - you don't like rain, you can fly somewhere nicer.

TUNNEL TO:

INT. SUBMARINE - DAY

Grant sits back, having seen all this on his Link, scowls.

EXT. SILHOUETTE ISLAND - DAY

Mt. Dauban lurks in a tropical haze.

SUPER: Silhouette, Seychelles.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Tanaka runs through the thick vegetation, out of breath, sweating. He wears techno-cam fatigues that make him almost invisible. He rounds a corner, sees two Carbonari soldiers with guns trained on him - TORBEN (30s) and CARVER (30s), super-soldier types. He gives them a savage look, as a third soldier, RUSTY (30s) creeps in behind him. Tanaka whirls, punches him, grabs his vest, swings him into a tree.

Tanaka kicks the gun out of Carver's hand, spin kicks Torben backwards. Torben does a backward somersault, comes up with a small pistol from an ankle holster. Carver forces Tanaka against the tree. Tanaka grapples, tries to knee him but hits the rifle butt, winces. Torben's gun is in his face. Tanaka resigns.

TANAKA

Good run.

Torben lowers his gun, removes his hat and goggles, grins at Tanaka.

TANAKA (CONT'D)

(recognizes him)

Torben! That you?

They embrace. They stand in the forest clearing for a beat. Rusty recovers from his run-in with the tree. Torben introduces them.

TORBEN

Tank, this is Rusty. Rusty, our man in the GSTF.

RUSTY

(shakes hands)
A living legend.

TANAKA

Well, living, at least.

TORBEN

When I heard the Oread had picked you up, I wanted to see for myself. You're still sharp, even if you are dangerously close to decommission.

TANAKA

(scowls)
I think you should take me to Sepp'ca now.

They enter a camouflaged hatch.

INSERT: Grant sits up, he's lost his connection.

INT. CARBONARI BRIEFING ROOM - DAY

Tanaka sits in a large, dark briefing room cavern, carved into the granite rock of the mountain. SEPP'CA (late 40s), grizzled soldier, bushy black beard grills him. BLUE (late 40s) weathered woman, still tough and energetic. Both look like Roman centurions forced to live in the wild - superior but feral.

SEPP'CA

(looks at the ceiling)
We've frozen your Link, your location can't be traced. Mt. Dauban protects us from orbital eyes.

(right in Tanaka's face)
Your scan shows no serious genetic degradation. But it's been almost twenty years. What's to convince me you're still Carbonari?

TANAKA

You've received my reports. I performed your tests.

(MORE)

TANAKA (CONT'D)

All that's left is to have faith that the bonds of genetics - of brotherhood - are stronger than indoctrination.

BLUE

We believe in both here.

TANAKA

I remember. But you know why I've come. Do you believe Carbonari could have committed the attack on the Kazakhs?

SEPP'CA

Impossible! If you were still one of us, you wouldn't ask.

BLUE

You know we have no contact with other cells. We have no intelligence on who may be involved, but Carbonari don't target civilians.

SEPP'CA

Our enemy is the fiction of the National Union. No one respects a terrorist, even if his cause is just.

BLUE

The plan of action you've proposed would be a huge commitment for Silhouette, possibly a fatal one. Torben'll take you to the kitchen cavern while we deliberate.

She puts a hand on his shoulder.

BLUE (CONT'D)

Get something to eat. You've had a long day.

INT. CARBONARI BASE - DAY

Torben leads Tanaka through the rock-cut hallways. Warter channels and planters overflow with tropical plants. It's as posh as a secret military cavern can be.

TORBEN

I was a boy when you left. But I remember when you led the Naumachia against an entire GSTF fleet in the Sea of Okhotsk.

They enter the kitchen cavern, a large but homey room with a fire pit grill and long, rough-hewn tables, empty now save for one other Carbonari, Rusty. They sit at the table, Tanaka on the far side the fire. Torben across from him. Rusty pours coffee into tin mugs.

TANAKA

It was an unusual time. I'd just lost my partner, Tige. Probably wasn't entirely in my right mind.

Rusty plates small portions of bread and meat on the table.

TORBEN

Misiricord. Rusty and I just lost our partners in an action against New Mauritius.

TANAKA

Misiricord.

TORBEN

But you don't see us mounting major offensives. We've been rotated off duty.

Rusty sits next to Torben.

RUSTY

We haven't seen much progress in the movement. Not since your day.

Torben picks at his food.

TANAKA

(sips his coffee)

The younger generations are restless. Do you think the Chinese...?

TORBEN

If there is a cell in China, they might have acted out of turn.

RUSTY

And if they've broken faith, if you're going find and punish the Carbonari responsible...

TORBEN

We want in.

EXT. SAFE HOUSE, MOSCOW - NIGHT

A Car pulls up outside, Michael and CASSANDRA ROLLINS (Late 20s, blonde Amazon ice queen) get out.

SUPER: Moscow

INT. SAFE HOUSE, MOSCOW - NIGHT

Guards let Michael and Cassandra in. They climb the stairs, hear CHRISTINA'S VOICE coming from the open door.

CHRISTINA (O.S.)
What kind of choice is that, dad?

INT. SAFE HOUSE, MOSCOW - GRANT'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Grant sits at his desk with his hands on his temples. Christina angrily paces the space between the desk and the door. Michael slips in quietly, Cassandra behind him.

GRANT
I don't expect... I tried to teach
you not to be afraid to make
sacrifices for--

CHRISTINA
All you taught me is you're willing
to sacrifice me.

She plants her palms on the desk.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)
Since you've worked for the
Ambassador I've lost friends that
never existed.
(glares at him)
So I know what kind of life it is.
That why it's not really a choice.

She looks up, sees Michael, runs to him and embraces him.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)
Michael - thank God you're okay!

GRANT
(clears throat)
Michael. How was Antarctica?

Michael approaches the desk, avoiding her gaze as Christina stalks past him.

MICHAEL
It's winter there. This can wait,
you're dealing with family.

GRANT
Nonsense. Come in.

MICHAEL
(to Christina)
You knew I wasn't hurt bad.

CHRISTINA
I know, but I expected--

MICHAEL
Christina, please.

CHRISTINA
Fine, be a soldier.

Christina retreats to the back of the room, glowers at him.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)
(indicates Cassandra)
Who's this?

CASSANDRA
Cassandra Rollins, late of the
Iceberg Troops.

GRANT
Cassandra and I had a little
adventure in the Russian sector of
South Pole Station a while back.
Had my eye on her career since.

CASSANDRA
Waiting for a good chance to bring
it to an end, apparently.

GRANT
Now, now.

CASSANDRA
It's okay, old man. Someone saves
your life at great personal risk,
you expect to make allowances. I
hear you have this thing called a
world up here. Be nice to see a
part of it isn't white.

GRANT
Good.

Grant leans back in his chair, his face blank.

GRANT (CONT'D)
No job for Ambassador Senethis ever
had this kind of finality. I've
called in almost every favor I
could ask.

MICHAEL

But not all.

GRANT

We're not to that point yet, but we may soon be. Which brings me to you, my friend. You and I have reached a crossroads in our journey together. As I'm soon to be dead, I will no longer require your services as bodyguard.

MICHAEL

(confused)

If this is because of the fight with the Kazakhs, sir, I--

GRANT

No, of course not. But the team needs a squad leader, and I can't think of a better candidate... If you're willing to stay the course.

Michael's silent for a moment.

MICHAEL

I've been running since the day I left Cyprus - to the GSTF, then here. Where else would I go?

He looks at Christina. She looks back in reserved approval.

CHRISTINA

So, how will we be dying?

Grant eyes the two of them with suspicion.

INT. AIR BASE OBSERVATION LOUNGE - NIGHT

It's deserted except for ANTOINE BURKE (38), KENDLE (14) asleep on his shoulder, and another rangy young man, ALEISTER CROSS (30s) - sitting across the row of plush benches. Behind Antoine, through the trans fiber windows, a GSTF transport descends on its inverse gravitational field.

ANTOINE

(to Aleister)

What did you have to do?

ALEISTER

(watches the transport)

Rented a boat. Took my girlfriend cloud climbing. Nice dinner. Took her to bed, told her I loved her. The usual.

ANTOINE

Let her hope you're coming back.

ALEISTER

I know. Just couldn't bring myself to do the other thing.

ANTOINE

Hard not to think of it as a normal tour yet.

ALEISTER

Mm. You ever been?

In the BG, the service technicians crawl over the waiting transport.

ANTOINE

Cloud climbing? No, heights overstress me.

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

(filtered, over intercom)
Flight five seven four is now boarding on pad eight one nine.

They heft regulation GSTF duffels, file onto the gantry. Kendle shuffles behind Antoine, half asleep, her hand in his left. Aleister extends his right toward Antoine.

ALEISTER

Aleister Cross.

EXT. AIR BASE - NIGHT

The transport blasts off. It makes a wide sweeping turn, the towers of a massive, futuristic city in the background. It rockets out over the water.

INT. TRANSPORT - CONTINUOUS

Antoine and Aleister find their seats beside ADRIAN RHODES (20s) swarthy greek, and ALLISON UMBRIEL (20s), soft-set but tough.

ALEISTER

(to Adrian)
Hear this plane is going to crash.

ADRIAN

Damn things're completely unreliable.

CUT TO:

INT. NEWSROOM

DERN MAGNAN faces the camera, charming and informal. Info-graphics layer the screen.

DERN

"Hushed Voices" is an alternative news source from the MediaWeb corporation. I'm Dern Magnan. This week in convenient accidents -

INSERT: Stefen stalks away from his villa.

DERN (V.O.)

A Maltese Marquis disappeared, his estate tied up in legal matters.

INSERT: Michael drives a limousine with Grant and Christina in the back. Angle on them through the windshield.

DERN (V.O.)

The advisor to the Russian Ambassador, his daughter and bodyguard were killed in a car accident outside Moscow this evening.

INSERT: Several skiers speed down a massive snow drift and disappear into a storm on the ice shelf.

DERN (V.O.)

Late yesterday, Iceberg troops in Antarctica reported a team member lost on the Axel Heiberg Glacier.

Dern leans his elbows on his desk.

DERN

The reason these seemingly unconnected accidents are convenient are the relationship of all the victims to this man:

(graphic of Tanaka)

Commander Noboru Tanaka, a GSTF division head who also this week mysteriously died.

(waves graphic away)

So either the world recently lost a number of highly qualified citizens with military backgrounds, or - well, I'll let you fill in the blanks.

The newscast changes angles.

DERN (CONT'D)
 Meanwhile, still lobbying for a
 corporate reorganization of
 Kazakhstan's government, new
 Governor Talgat had this to say:

The window expands to show Talgat addressing the FWC.

TALGAT

At this trying time in our history,
 we have to eschew the backwards
 beliefs of the terrorists, and
 partner with our strong, forward-
 thinking neighbors. Together we
 will rise above this tragedy and
 achieve a unity we never thought
 possible.

Back to Dern, intercut with shots of troop movement.

DERN

But even as Governor Talgat talks
 of unity, GSTF Troops are massing
 on the China-Kazakhstan border,
 largely at his behest. What they'll
 do in days to come is anybody's
 guess.

EXT. THE BLACK HAND - NIGHT

The submarine cruises along, its topside hangar bay doors
 open to accept the transport in the FG blasting towards it.

SUPER: The Eastern Mediterranean

INT. BLACK HAND, CHART ROOM - NIGHT

Long, low-ceilinged, with a holographic table. Seated around
 and just approaching the table are Adrian, Allison, Aleister,
 Antoine, Torben, Rusty, Stefen de Piro, Cero Duvv and Michael
 Stewart.

TANAKA

Welcome to the Black Hand, ladies
 and Gentlemen. I hope everyone got
 something to eat.

Grant clears his throat everyone turns to look at him.

GRANT

There are moments when history
 turns on the lynch-pin of the
 actions of a few men and women. You
 may not recognize them. They may be
 - to you - just another mission.
 (MORE)

GRANT (CONT'D)

But I believe this is one of those moments. I believe we have the chance to prevent a great injustice, and speed the world on the way to enlightenment. It will be trying. For all its challenge, there will be little glory or recognition. But I believe it is the right thing, a thing that needs doing. And I believe all of you are equal to it.

Grant stands in the back, turns the meeting over to Tanaka.

INSERT: A hologram of The Black Hand travels through canals. The camera flies ahead to the large body of water beyond.

TANAKA (V.O.)

We have three days till insertion, so we've got to be slick. This is where we're headed: The Caspian Sea, by way of the Volga-Don canal. So we have to pass for smugglers before we get to the Bosphorus. A few bribes should get us through without any questions.

Tanaka deals out files to the assembled team.

TANAKA

Here are your identities. You get hard copies because I want you to get used to committing them to memory without Links. You don't have to eat them when you're finished, but disintegrate them, please. Adrian, you're going to backstop these. Our cover stories need to withstand a level four counterintelligence investigation.

INSERT: Stefen and Dove look into a microscope.

TANAKA (V.O.)

Dove, I want you to get with Stefen on developing a system to back up and remove our Links. Our past lives are history. The smugglers we're impersonating wouldn't have that kind of wetware. This'll be a tourist mission, so we want nothing to tie us to any agency, legitimate or otherwise. We'll back up your info and store it as fully viable AIs in the Cypro-corp data haven. If we survive this, you can have it back.

The team reacts to this news. Concern, confirmed suspicions.

DOVE

How do I handle operations without
an uplink?

Tanaka dusts off an old deck and monacle.

TANAKA

You get in touch with your roots,
Kimosabe. It may look old, but it's
been converted to use Link
technology.

(surveys the room)

That goes for the rest of you. If
we're going to get along without
our Links, we're going to have to
train hard.

INSERT: Michael and Cassandra lead the group in Tai Chi.

TANAKA (V.O.)

Michael and Cassandra, I want you
to develop a reflexive training
regimen for the rest of the crew.
They'll report to you in the hangar
bay every morning for calisthenics.

Tanaka wraps up the briefing.

TANAKA

That covers the preamble. The rest
of you: demolitions,
communications, intelligence, you
know your jobs. Team leaders, I
want reports every four hours.
Dismissed.

Everyone gets to their feet.

GRANT

Dove.

Grant waves him over as the others file out.

GRANT (CONT'D)

Walk with me.

Dove follows him into...

INT. BLACK HAND, COMPANIONWAY - CONTINUOUS

Grant activates one of his personal DMZs.

GRANT
You wanted top secret. This is it,
blacker'n black.

DOVE
Good, the light hurts my eyes.

The two men chuckle.

GRANT
I have one more favor to ask of
you, my friend. Another security
measure. You know a commander's
greatest need is up-to-the-minute
information about what's happening
on the ground.

Dove looks at him, waits.

GRANT (CONT'D)
I've been pushing links like you
showed me.

DOVE
Grant...

GRANT
I know you said only in
emergencies, but surely this
qualifies. If not now, when is it?

DOVE
If now, when is it not?
Justification, Grant.

GRANT
This isn't the time to quibble
about ethics. This is the big game;
it's time to make our strongest
play. So far, I've been able to
push links I've already established
prior to the attempt. I can even
crack new ones, sometimes.

DOVE
And what do you propose?

GRANT
When you kill the team's Links,
don't kill them all the way. Leave
me a back door. I need to be able
to monitor situations as they
develop.

DOVE
You want me to channel them?

GRANT

Think of it as a backup plan,
another pair of boots in the mud.
My experience applied to your
combat scenario, comes to that.

DOVE

I don't doubt it will. And I doubt
it would be popular with the crew.
Since we're meeting here, buffered
by that DMZ, I gather I'm not
supposed to tell them.

GRANT

You surmise correctly.

DOVE

It'll be difficult to hide it from
Stefen if we collaborate on the
procedure.

GRANT

Keep it a strict division of labor.
He's the medical specialist. You're
the programmer. Just get me
eyeballs.

DOVE

Promise you won't use it to ensure
security in the women's shower?

GRANT

I'm an old man, Dove. Have some
faith in me.

DOVE

That's the problem, isn't it?

EXT. BLACK HAND - DAWN

The Black Hand cruises among merchant vessels through the
straits.

SUPER: The Bosphorus

INT. BLACK HAND, TANAKA'S STATEROOM - DAY

A cubby-sized bunk and office space. Tanaka looks up at a
knock on the door.

TANAKA

Come in.

Michael enters and sits on the palette, unbidden.

TANAKA (CONT'D)
Something I can do for you, son?

Michael glares at him.

MICHAEL
You probably knew my father, Master Chief Cameron Stewart, was GSTF. I was being transferred to Kamchatka to serve in the same regiment as him. I was going to meet him for the first time, until... until the Battle of Okhotsk.

Tanaka sits forward at his desk.

TANAKA
Are we going to have a problem?

MICHAEL
No, sir. You're my commanding officer, and I respect that. But I thought you should know something about the man you killed.

TANAKA
You should understand something.
(stands up)
I killed a lot of people as a Carbonari. Not because they were bad people, or because they deserved it, but because they were the enemy, and life is the only price high enough to make your enemy pay attention. You see a lot of that in war.

Michael stands too, eye to eye with Tanaka.

MICHAEL
I disagree, sir.

TANAKA
Oh? And what is your learned opinion on the subject?

MICHAEL
I may not have lived through any war worth speaking of, but it's my observation human life is a cheap and endless resource. Wars start when leaders put profit before people, and the only thing that checks them is economic collapse.
(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

That's what happened to the Carbonari - you alienated your financial backers, and became too isolated to present a serious threat. Then you got desperate, and did Kazakhstan.

TANAKA

They did Kazakhstan, son. I work for the GSTF now.

MICHAEL

Yes, sir. Us and them.

A hard stare. Both nearly jump when the alarm sounds.

INT. BLACK HAND, CONTROL ROOM - DAY

An alarm blares. Tanaka looks over Allison's shoulder at the console.

ALLISON

I'm receiving a call, bearing two nineteen range forty-seven kilometers. It's the T.A.F. Flywheel. They're requesting permission to land.

INSERT: missile pods extend from the Black Hand's deck, tilt up and locked on.

Grant enters the control room, looking dour.

GRANT

Who's on that freighter?

ALLISON

(into the comm.)
Flywheel, this is a merchant ship. Who on that plane needs to see us?
(listens)
It's Governor Talgat, sir.

TANAKA

(sotto, to Grant)
The new prince.

GRANT

(thinks)
Allow them to land, but maintain missile lock.

ALLISON

Roger sir, opening hangar bay.
(into comm.)
(MORE)

ALLISON (CONT'D)
Flywheel you are cleared to land.
Maintain speed and course.

EXT. BLACK HAND - DAY

The T.A.F. FLYWHEEL - a rocket-powered freighter based loosely on a helicopter - comes in for a landing as doors open in the Black Hand's Midsection, and a landing platform elevates into view.

INT. BLACK HAND, HANGAR BAY - DAY

The landing platform lowers into the room with the Flywheel perched atop it. An armed detail, containing members of the team led by Tanaka, takes up positions in a line covering the T.A.F.'s hatches.

The hatch opens and Governor Talgat exits followed by ERIK DENIN, DELGADO RODRIGUEZ and GREGORY POPE, mercenaries, and the Flywheel crew: Tanith and Sarina, gunners, Glenn and Geil - pilot and engineer.

TALGAT
What kind of reception is this,
Tennison?

GRANT
You'll have to forgive us Governor
Talgat, we weren't expecting you.
I'm curious to know how you learned
our location.

TALGAT
The Secretary-General told me, of
course.

GRANT
Unlikely. The Secretary-General
doesn't know about us, and no one
that does know would have told him.

TALGAT
Of course he doesn't know. He can't
know, politically. But when I
learned about your mission to deal
with the Chinese Carbonari, you'll
understand why I had to be a part
of it.

GRANT
Bullshit. It's out of the question.

TALGAT

It is in the question, or the Secretary-General will learn about you in a very public and criminal charge-incurring way.

GRANT

You're not among Kazakhstan's finest here, Governor. It won't do to make threats.

TALGAT

I don't need to threaten you, Commander Tennison. Your crew's made up of GSTF Milquetoasts, ex-Carbonari meatheads and a Maltese fruit. It's a cornucopia of incompetence. Not a real soldier among them. The privateers I've engaged--

GRANT

Mercenaries.

TALGAT

--have been on the front lines of one engagement or another for the last quarter century. And there's your lack of air transport.

(gestures to Flywheel)

Which I have thoughtfully provided. You need me, Commander. I may be the only one here with the will to carry out this mission. And I will carry it out.

GRANT

(thinks)

Michael.

TORBEN

(steps to Grant's side)

Sir!

GRANT

Find them a place to bunk.

The group mutters in surprise, consternation.

GRANT (CONT'D)

(to Talgat)

Mess is in twenty.

He strides from the room. The team slings their rifles and follows.

INT. BLACK HAND, GRANT'S OFFICE - DAY

Tanaka follows Grant into a small version of Admiral Nelson's quarters and shuts the hatch. Its bay window rides the waterline.

TANAKA

You sure it's a good idea, in the interests of security--

GRANT

Of course it's not a good idea. You know what else isn't a good idea? You told him where to find us.

TANAKA

Grant--

GRANT

My First damn Officer! You're setting me up, aren't you? If the mission backfires, I'm the scapegoat - the rogue element everyone already suspects.

TANAKA

Talgat was going to find out anyway. He had the Secretary-General lean on me. The leader of the Free World Council, Grant. Do you know what that's like?

GRANT

As a matter of fact, I do! It happened right after I hauled your sorry ass off the sea floor.

TANAKA

Things would have been very different if the Carbonari had arrived first.

Grant paces the room.

GRANT

I thought I knew you better. I thought you didn't care about political pressure.

TANAKA

Look on the bright side. This way Governor Talgat moves at our pace. We don't have to worry about him running wild, or bumping into him at the wrong--

GRANT

Don't try to spin this, Tank.
You're not a politician.

TANAKA

No. I'm a soldier, and a soldier
knows how to use his assets. He
doesn't drop a weapon just because
it's dangerous.

GRANT

Alright, we'll give him every
appearance of freedom, but I can't
let Governor Talgat or his hired
guns out of our custody until the
mission's complete. The operation's
secrecy is more important than its
success.

The two share a look.

TANAKA

Question is, what do we do with him
once the mission is over?

GRANT

You ask yourself that.

INT. BLACK HAND, MESS HALL - DAY

The crews sit at different tables. Glenn sits with Michael,
Delgado and Erik.

DELGADO

(to Michael)

Tattoo on your arm - you Muslim?

MICHAEL

No, long story.

(off their looks)

Father was Basmachi - Turkic
guerilla; fell in with a bad crowd.

ERIK

Sword came with that?

MICHAEL

It's good to have alternatives.

DELGADO

Why not have the tattoo removed, if
it makes you so uncomfortable?

MICHAEL

Can't. It's genetic.

Sarina carries her tray over to where Aleister, Antoine and Kendle are sitting.

SARINA
(off their looks)
Sarina. This seat taken?

Aleister smirks at the mostly empty mess hall, designed for more people than they have.

ALEISTER
Help yourself.
(she does)
I'm Aleister. This is Antoine.

ANTOINE
Hi.

ALEISTER
You're on Flywheel's crew?

SARINA
Gunner.

ALEISTER
I crewed a boxcar as a gunner. A
190, back in my GSTF days.

SARINA
When were those, last week?

Antoine laughs aloud. Sarina smiles apologetically.

ALEISTER
It's in the past now.

SARINA
This's just a job. There'll be
another one after it, or there
won't. They're all jobs. Nobody
does what they were bred for.

As Aleister digests this, raised voices from the next table draw their attention.

DELGADO
...I'm just saying what we're all
thinking. Governor Talgat's the
senior military officer on board,
and he should command the mission.

ALLISON
But he's Kazakh Guard. Commander
Tennison is former GSTF, and this
is a GSTF mission.

CASSANDRA

Have you looked at your GSTF file lately? It says deceased. There's no flag on this ship.

ERIK

It's a question of experience--

ADRIAN

And Commander Tennison is unquestionably the more experienced officer. If he hadn't left the service he be a Commodore by now, or something.

ALLISON

(to Delgado)

What do you care? You're just trolling for a bigger cut.

POPE

The long and the short of it is it's his ship, and he's not going to give it up unless somebody forces him too.

DELGADO

I'm just--

Stefen approaches the table.

STEFEN

(interrupting)

My friends, I don't mean to interrupt, but are any of you familiar with the concept of Domi Militaque?

RUSTY

It means 'at home and in the field.'

STEFEN

(Sets down glasses)

And in Roman society, the two concepts were strictly divided. The army wasn't even allowed in the city. So the question is, are we at home, or are we at war? We're, what, a scant fifty between crew and teams? This is our home now, and the one thing our commanders have in common is that they will not be joining us in the field.

(opens wine bottle, pours)

It is our duty therefore to band together in making our home a refuge.

(MORE)

STEFEN (CONT'D)

In that pursuit, I am dedicating a case of a very old Vega Sicilia from my private collection in the hopes we can reach an accord.

That hangs in the air. No one speaks for a beat.

GEIL

I don't know what he just said, but I like booze.

General agreement. Everyone takes up a glass.

STEFEN

To our new home. The Black Hand, ladies and gentlemen.

ALL

The Black Hand!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BLACK HAND, MED BAY - DAY

Dove and Stefen monitor their equipment.

STEFEN

Source masking complete - AIs are imaged and backed up to the Cypro-corp data haven.

Dove addresses the assembled team, as Stefen and Allison stand by to assist.

DOVE

Nothing we've been asked to do so far is brain surgery, but the next thing we have to contend with is. My colleague and I-
(nods at Stefen)
Have developed an injection that will kill our Links. We go in through the skull. We've already performed it on each other, so it should be relatively safe.

He gestures to a medical chair - grumbles from the crew, except the mercenaries.

CASSANDRA

Should've waited so the Link could assist you when you perform the procedure on us.

TALGAT

Agreed.

STEFEN

Glad to see you appreciate the Catch-22. Technology is only a tool, my friends. We have others. Your brain will adapt.

Dove picks up a set of goggles, gestured to the medical chair.

DOVE

And these visors will perform many of the same functions. Inelegant, perhaps, but--

TANAKA

Everyone has to do this. Remember, we're no longer alive. If we're caught or killed we have to be untraceable to the GSTF. Means no downloads, links, enhanced memory, or immersion.

Cassandra sits in the chair, clenches the arms.

STEFEN

If my lovely assistant will be so kind...?

Stefen gestures to Allison, who smiles and blushes a little too much as she provides the first of several long needle attachments to his med glove. Cassandra rolls her eyes, and leans back. Dove and Allison monitor their visors, Stefen carefully inserts the needle into Cassandra's skull as the rest of the crew waits nearby.

While Stefen concentrates on the more anatomical aspects of the task, and Allison concentrates on Stefen, Dove copies certain subroutines into a hidden sector of the Link. The crew grudgingly lines up for the procedure.

ALEISTER

(whispers to Sarina)

You alright? You didn't sign up for this. Decision was made before you landed.

SARINA

May be a relief, actually. I've often felt a bit overwhelmed by the Link. Be nice to have a more natural head.

ALEISTER

How will you see?

SARINA

Same way I see you now. New
Mauritius engineered my people to
see and mine the ocean floor
without the aid of lights.
Genetically modified synesthesia.

ALEISTER

That's when you take one of the
more interesting drugs and hear
colors, right? Mixes up the senses?

SARINA

My skin perceives heat as light and
form.

ALEISTER

So you don't use your Link for
visual input?

SARINA

Why would I do that?

ALEISTER

Amazing. And you're Flywheel's
gunner?

SARINA

Does it bother you?

She gives him a withering look. Antoine turns to Pope.

ANTOINE

And you?

POPE

Never afforded one. I'm just here
for moral support.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BLACK HAND DECK - DAY

The team (excepting the commanders) prepares to play soccer
on the deck of the Black Hand. They line up for the kickoff.

POPE

Okay, this is a civilized game,
remember. No spitting, cussing, or
inappropriate touching.

Cassandra takes the ball, pins it beneath her foot.

CASSANDRA
 Special Forces versus mercenaries,
 I think. Now we find out what life
 without Links is really like.

As the game begins, Torben approaches Talgat on the
 sidelines.

TORBEN
 They're integrating better than I
 would have thought.

TALGAT
 GSTF, hired men, Carbonari. You're
 Carbonari, aren't you?

TORBEN
 Former. We're all here for the same
 reason, Governor.

Sarina sits on the deck, watches Aleister miss his kick, and
 chase after the ball.

ALEISTER
 In all fairness, I was terrible at
 this game before the procedure.

TALGAT
 Anyone in your cell ever show signs
 of going rogue?

TORBEN
 Signs of stagnation, I'd say. And
 some of my genesis group were
 restless-- including me, obviously.
 But we never attacked civilians.

Talgat watches the ball trade sides.

TALGAT
 Odds're stacked pretty high against
 us. All the precautions we're
 taking are simply to survive until
 the crucial moment. Even if we're
 successful, we'll make enemies in
 the highest places. We'll be hunted
 down and nothing will save us.

TORBEN
 All due respect, Governor, I knew
 this was a suicide mission when I
 signed on. I think all of us did.
 But we hope for the best, just like
 Tank before us.

TALGAT
 Still keeping the faith, Carbonari?

TORBEN

I'm just keeping it somewhere else.

Delgado misses his save, the ball goes over the side into the water. They look down at it.

INT. BLACK HAND, CHART ROOM - DAWN

People file in, take seats and stand around the chart table. The team falls silent as Tanaka reaches the head.

TANAKA

Good morning, everyone. We may have had a break. Late last night, agents from the Chinese Information Education and Defense Agency in Easy City intercepted a group of dissidents they think was planning to join the Carbonari.

INSERT: Scruffy-looking characters in handcuffs await the attention of CIEDA. Agents FU RENSHU (50s, spooky) and RHEE JIANJUN (late 30s, Bond-ish.) examine their holographic files before going in to talk to one of them.

TANAKA (V.O.)

There's been a resurgence of interest in freedom fighters after the attack. We think the China cell is trying to benefit from it, gather new recruits.

Everyone gives Tanaka their sober attention.

TANAKA

This is a rash move for the Carbonari, who don't usually accept outsiders. Further evidence the group's acting out of turn.

DELGADO

(interrupting)

We're not ready. The crew needs more time to adjust to working without Links.

TALGAT

Time however, is our enemy. China's fueled its rapid development with recklessness and negligence, and my country paid the price.

(slaps the table)

(MORE)

TALGAT (CONT'D)

If we fail to undertake this mission, we miss an opportunity not only to lay this crime at the doorstep of those responsible, but to undermine them utterly and completely.

(to Delgado)

Also, I'm paying you.

The crew looks at each other. Offense, consternation, grudging agreement.

GRANT

Benjamin agrees.

POPE

(impressed)

Benjamin Tate, the GSTF commander?

GRANT

Unofficially, of course. He's under pressure from the Secretary-General.

TANAKA

(resumes control)

The plan's a bait-and-switch. Fire Team Alpha's going to pose as arms dealers and potential recruits to track - and if possible infiltrate - the Chinese cell. You'll be dressed to look like the kind of ragtag paramilitaries the Carbonari will expect.

TALGAT

It's not much of a stretch.

Tanaka glares at him.

TANAKA

As a further deviation from the norm - and to sweeten the pot - you'll carry these.

He lays a stumpy black semi-automatic rifle on the table.

TANAKA (CONT'D)

PD-ARC plasma-foil repeaters - a compact personal defense weapon with a bullpup configuration very different from the standard issue GSTF MV-7. Electrically fired stacked projectiles, vacuum-sealed ceramic bore. You'll have a whole case to donate to the cause.

As the meeting breaks up, Grant pulls General Talgat and Aizahn aside.

GRANT

I'm allowing you to accompany the team in an advisory capacity against my better judgment, to secure the loyalty of your specialists, and to provide what expertise you can. But let me be perfectly explicit on this point - Michael is in charge. In the event you're cut off from command, he speaks for me. Is that plain?

TALGAT

Do you miss being a commander, Tennison? Do you want us to call you sir?

GRANT

You don't have to say it, but this is my boat. So if you expect to make it back to Almaty with air in your lungs, by god you'll think it.

He ducks out of the room, and into the corridor, where he sees Christina follow Michael above decks. Irritated, he listens in.

TUNNEL TO:

EXT. BLACK HAND, CONNING TOWER - DAY

Christina comes out of a hatchway to find Michael staring out over the water.

CHRISTINA

Antoine's looking for Kendle. It's almost time to go, and she's hiding.

MICHAEL

Sorry, haven't seen her.

CHRISTINA

Don't be sorry...

MICHAEL

I'm not, really, just being polite.

She joins him at the rail. They share the silence.

CHRISTINA

Michael, you know how I feel about you.

(MORE)

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

Are you going to kiss me at least once before you go and get yourself killed?

Michael blinks.

MICHAEL

I don't think that would be appropriate, Christina.

CHRISTINA

Appropriate?

MICHAEL

Because of your father.

CHRISTINA

Damn my father, this is about you and me!

MICHAEL

You say that now, but you know what happened to my parents. I don't want to make the same mistakes my father made.

CHRISTINA

What mistakes?

MICHAEL

Falling in love above his station. Nothing good can come of this, Christina.

CHRISTINA

Not until you grow a backbone it can't.

She turns to leave. Michael leans on the rail.

MICHAEL

Just came up here for some air. Plenty for everyone out here.

CHRISTINA

(turns back)

On the Solon I had a flower patch, a little place off the hydroponic gardens where no one went. I'll have to do something like that again here.

MICHAEL

(laughing)

Maybe in one of the spare bunks.

CHRISTINA
 (laughing too)
 Yeah. Or maybe an occupied one. Can
 you imagine Stefen opening it up...
 (imitates Stefen)
 Whatever is this dirt doing here?

They chuckle. Michael turns back to the water, smiles.

INT. BLACK HAND, HANGAR DECK - DAY

The blast doors open and the team heads out to the landing pad where Flywheel waits. Geil and Kendle emerge from around it, Kendle wiping greasy hands on her coveralls.

Antoine drops his gear and picks her up.

ANTOINE
 Where have you been? I looked all over!

KENDLE
 Keeping you safe.

Antoine looks from her to Geil dubiously.

GEIL
 I don't know about that, but she was a big help.

ANTOINE
 (to Geil)
 Do I want to get on this plane?

The rest of the team clambers aboard.

DELGADO
 Hell, I don't want to get on this plane.

RUSTY
 Oh, I don't know. We're only trying to pull one over on eight to twelve highly trained, desperate killers. I give us even odds against.

POPE
 I dunno, laying odds on our survival is crass, even for mercenaries. I should know.

ALLISON
 How do you expect to get paid if we all die?

RUSTY
Being right is its own reward.

The team hunkers down in the cargo hold. The pilots and gunners climb into the ship's blister canopies. Geil looks at the crew in the new flight seating.

GEIL
This is fun. I'm usually in here with the cargo by myself.

EXT. BLACK HAND - DAY

The ship surfaces, bay doors open and the launch pad rises into position. Flywheel's rotors spin up. Glenn puts his headset on.

GLENN
(into comm.)
This is Snipe One to tower,
requesting permission to take off.

INT. BLACK HAND, BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Grant leans on the railing in the command position.

GRANT
Roger, Snipe one, you're clear for trans-atmospheric insertion. I'd say good hunting, but it'd be a mixed metaphor.

EXT. BLACK HAND

Flywheel's engines power up to a HIGH WHINE. Glenn grips the controls.

GLENN
(into comm.)
Roger that, tower. And thanks.

Flywheel winds up and BLASTS OFF into the stratosphere.

EXT. EASY CITY - NIGHT

Mile-high skyscrapers crowd the horizon.

INT. EASY CITY, OBSERVATION BOOTH - NIGHT

Torben, Rusty, Dove and Adrian inspect the interface overlooking a landing pad high in the city.

Fu Renshu introduces Rhee Jianjun to Michael. The CIEDA agents wear slightly bulky black dress suits.

FU RENSHU
Officer Torben, this is Agent Rhee.

MICHAEL
(bows)
Pleasure. You'll monitor from here with Adrian. Thank you again, Director Fu, for your assistance in this investigation.

FU RENSHU
It's Deputy Director. And we're happy to be of assistance to the GSTF in any way possible.
(strokes his moustache)
You know, I'm not sure I've ever met GSTF officers without Links.

MICHAEL
Part of the sting operation. The Carbonari believe we want to join up, so we have to be Luddites too. You can't fool an unwired brain with high-tech tricks. Have to do this the old-fashioned way.
(smiles)
Lie.

He pats a slightly offended Fu Renshu on the shoulder.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Don't worry, we're backed up.

EXT. EASY CITY, LANDING PAD - NIGHT

The fire team waits out on the landing pad. A thunderstorm below, blasts of lighting, GUSTS blow rain upwards.

The Carbonari appear between flashes of lightning. SIAN (30s) steps forward, followed by QUIN (30s).

SIAN
You don't look like your picture.

TORBEN
(nods)
A necessary precaution. You understand.

SIAN
I'm Sian, this is my partner Quin.

TORBEN

I'm Cavoto. We've been in touch on the IC.

SIAN

You refused to be directed to a local cell group.

TORBEN

We heard what you did in Kazakhstan. We want to join the cell responsible.

QUIN

We had nothing to do with that! We would never--

Sian squeezes her arm, she relents.

SIAN

Point is, we can't be sure of each other. You can't simply join up.

TORBEN

We have recommendations!

SIAN

All the more reason for you to make yourselves useful locally. We've drawn exclusively from our own ranks for three generations.

TORBEN

It's an example of your stagnation. You need fresh blood - new ideas - to accomplish your purpose.

SIAN

You're not wrong. I'll go one step further. Our movement is dying. That's why we're here. Since the incident, our patrols have encountered Kazakh troops.

(Torben's eyes flick to the observation booth.)

They're closing in on our position. We've lost the balance of our actionable partners.

TORBEN

(distractedly)

Misiricord.

QUIN

What did you say?

The Carbonari tense. Our heroes look at each other, confused.

TORBEN
I, uh, I said--

Sian backs up behind the line of his crew, who raise their guns. The team tenses, unsure what to do.

SIAN
How do you know that word?

TORBEN
I read it, I--

SIAN
You're from another cell! I told you we had nothing to do with Kazakhstan. We haven't broken faith!

TORBEN
I promise--

It begins to HAIL.

SIAN
If you aren't one of us, you don't know what breaking faith means. It's our blood!

He takes out a sampling device, holds it accusingly at Torben.

SIAN (CONT'D)
Take it - prove you're not Carbonari.

TORBEN
No, I--

Quin whips out a plasma-foil and LANCES Torben. He goes down, winged. The team raise their guns to cover him, and the Carbonari CUT LOOSE. It's a bloodbath. Delgado goes down, dead. Other team members receive wounds of varying severity.

Cassandra leaps to cover Torben. She BLASTS two Carbonari, her expression cold. Antoine knocks another senseless with the butt of his gun. The Carbonari back away, maintain COVER FIRE as individual members leap from the platform, and deploy gliders.

TALGAT
Bring them down! We need at least one!

INT. EASY CITY, OBSERVATION BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

Adrian sees one of the Carbonari gliders circle towards his position, gun trained on the exposed team below.

ADRIAN

No!

EXT. EASY CITY, OBSERVATION BOOTH DECK - CONTINUOUS

Talgat, Michael, Adrian and Jianjun run out of the observation booth and OPEN FIRE on the Carbonari glider, Jianjun from a forearm-mounted gun concealed in his suit. They miss as the glider STRAFES their position. Jianjun dives out of the way, the glider turns towards the team on the pad. Adrian vaults the railing, lands atop the glider. It crumples, plummets out of control.

ALLISON

(sees him)

Adrian!

CRUNCH! Adrian lands on a ledge below the landing pad. The glider pilot glances off the ledge and falls SCREAMING into the abyss. Torben HEARS the SHIP'S ENGINES before he sees it.

TORBEN

Get cover!

He rolls as a Carbonari drop ship ROARS by overhead, STRAFES their position. It doesn't stop or circle, but ROCKETS away into the night. The team gathers themselves. Aleister turns Delgado's body, looks at Antoine, closes the eyes. Michael exits the stairwell onto the landing pad.

MICHAEL

(into comm.)

Glenn, you tracking that ship?

Stefen looks over the ledge to where Adrian lies far below. Michael follows him as they try to climb down to where he is.

GLENN'S VOICE

(over comm., filtered)

Roger. What's your situation?

MICHAEL

(into comm.)

Screwed. We need to evac immediately, tail her.

GLENN'S VOICE

Spinning her up now.

They arrive at the ledge where Adrian lies broken, bleeding, his right knee at a wrong angle. Stefen examines him.

ADRIAN
 (weak)
 That was pretty stupid, huh?

MICHAEL
 You reacted, that's all.

The hail CLATTERS down around them. Allison joins them and assists, shields Adrian from the hail with her body. Stefen looks up at Torben, shakes his head.

STEFEN
 His spine's shattered, compound femoral fracture, head trauma. I'm not prepared to handle injuries like this. Even if I had him on the ship right now, I can't--

Michael looks at Stefen. Adrian's eyes track them both.

ADRIAN
 I know you can't help without taking me to a hospital.
 (looks over ledge)
 Push me off.

ALLISON
 No!

ADRIAN
 I'll be a liability, compromise the mission.

STEFEN
 Not going to happen.

ADRIAN
 Even if I survive, I'll be burned. I can't go back to the GSTF. Dammit, I gave up everything for this. My mom--

Adrian collapses in agony. Michael puts a hand on Adrian's chest as Flywheel HOVERS overhead. Allison's hand covers her mouth.

MICHAEL
 I'm sorry, kid. Really sorry.

EXT. EASY CITY HOSPITAL LANDING PAD - NIGHT

A gurney is rushed from a HART ship, accompanied by EMTs and two black-suited CIEDA agents, Fu Renshu and Rhee Jianjun.

INT. EASY CITY HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Fu Renshu argues with a doctor, LIQIN (30s)

FU RENSHU
Only enough to save his life.

LIQIN
I can't do that, director Fu, the
Hippocratic--

FU RENSHU
I'm from the Information, Education
and Defense agency, my dear.

LIQIN
What's that supposed to mean?

FU RENSHU
It means the only reason you've
ever heard of Hippocrates is
because I allowed it. So if you
want anyone to hear of you ever
again, you'll do as I say.

INT. BLACK HAND / FLYWHEEL - INTERCUT

Grant Links Dove over the back-door connection.

GRANT (V.O.)
Dove, I need access to Fu Renshu,
fast. I have to know what he's
thinking.

Dove looks around the transport. No one else is watching.
Grant's on a private channel.

DOVE (V.O.)
Are you serious? He's the deputy
director of Chinese Intelligence!

GRANT (V.O.)
You saying you're not good enough?

DOVE (V.O.)
No, but I can't do it fast and
dirty without raising a red flag
somewhere. I can get you the junior
agent, maybe. Sure you're not
taking this too far, old man?

GRANT (V.O.)
Don't lecture me about obsession,
you hack like other 'skins drink.

DOVE (V.O.)
Take it easy, Grant. No need to
thank me.

GRANT (V.O.)
I thought you knew what boat you
boarded.

TUNNEL TO:

INT. EASY CITY HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Grant makes the connection. Jianjun and Fu Renshu stand back as Adrian is wheeled into an operating room. Fu Renshu pulls Jianjun aside.

FU RENSHU
Hold on.

JIANJUN
(straightens his suit)
So that's what Carbonari look like.

FU RENSHU
Didn't they meet your expectations?

JIANJUN
I'm not sure.

FU RENSHU
Clearly this agency is at an
informational disadvantage
concerning the Carbonari.
(strokes his moustache)
I'm authorizing a pursuit of the
terrorists, effective immediately.

Jianjun turns to walk down the hall. Fu Renshu watches him go, then turns towards the operating room.

EXT. EASY CITY, LANDING PAD - NIGHT

Rhee Jianjun, in flight gear, walks out to a waiting CIEDA Zephyr. Fu Renshu links him instructions as he climbs into the canopy.

FU RENSHU (V.O.)
Bring me back one or two to
interrogate, or any information
regarding their operation that
could help offset this deficiency.
And Jianjun - just between us, for
the GSTF to engage in clandestine
operations is strictly against the
Order of National Enforcement.

(MORE)

FU RENSHU (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I'd hate to think there was
 anything unconscionable going on.

JIANJUN
 Yes, sir.

Jinajun closes the canopy and runs down his preflight. A holographic display encircles him, and the fighter's interior beams a 360-degree view directly to his Link. Jianjun slides his arms into the control panel gloves, lifts them free of the console, and FIRES the boosters.

EXT. UPPER STRATOSPHERE - NIGHT

Flywheel leapfrogs the globe at 120,000 feet.

INT. FLYWHEEL - CONTINUOUS

The fire-team, now in flex armor, don one-piece techno-cam jumpsuits. Tagged portions of the Techno Cam suit are visible to their visors, to avoid friendly fire.

MICHAEL
 (to Dove)
 We're down two operations
 specialists, so don't get killed.

Torben and Cassandra assemble heavy particle-beam splinter guns that fracture everything they touch into sawdust. Antoine rests with his broad head in his hands.

INSERT: Rhee Jianjun's Zephyr blows by them at high speed.

The freighter shakes with a clap. The crew jumps. Antoine looks up.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 The hell was that?

GLENN
 Looked like an interceptor.
 (into comm.)
 Sack, you see unfriendlies up here?

TANAKA (V.O.)
 Roger Snipe One, it's a CIEDA
 fighter, not engaging. He's
 traveling on your same vector,
 likely after the Carbonari ship.

GLENN
 Sure left us in his wake.

INSERT: Grant tracks the ships, one passing the other, on his interface.

GRANT
 (sotto)
 You'll arrive in time for it.

EXT. CHINESE FOREST - NIGHT

SUPER: Xinjiang Province, China.

Flywheel cruises in low above an area aglow with radioactive fire.

MICHAEL
 Jesus.

As soon as it stops to hover, Flywheel draws SMALL-ARMS EXCHANGE from the wreckage. Flywheel's belly guns swivel and lay down COVERING FIRE. The team zip-lines down and takes up positions. Blazing light flies back and forth. Flywheel peels off. The FIRING dies down. SIAN'S VOICE calls across the battlefield.

SIAN
 We didn't murder those Kazakhs!

TALGAT
 We know you--

Michael waves Talgat off, signals his team to encircle them.

MICHAEL
 Prove it to us! Take us to your sanctuary.
 (to Talgat)
 We need to keep them talking, not provoke them!

QUIN
 The other cells have already turned against us or you wouldn't be on this action.

TORBEN
 You outnumber us! Take us--

SIAN
 You know we don't! It's a trick, you know I can't bring you in without the authorization of my progenitors.

RUSTY
 You sound like a sniveling N.U. culture slave. Where's your initiative?

QUIN
Initiative is clearly something you
don't support.

MICHAEL
Only if it's heretical. Let us
help--

SIAN
If you want to help your Chinese
collaborator, you'll hold your
position.

MICHAEL
(confused)
What?

SIAN
The plane that tracked us from
China ahead of you. We brought it
down. If the pilot's still alive,
exchanging fire with us will only
endanger him further.

MICHAEL
(shouts)
Pilot, are you alive?

JIANJUN
(faintly)
Sorry to say.

An All-terrain troop carrier rolls over the crest of the
hill, and the team swivels to cover it. Its floodlights blast
the area.

SIAN
Our ride's here. We have him
covered 'till we're all on. If your
plane comes back, we'll bring it
down too!

Several of them keep their guns trained on Jianjun and the
team as the others get on the troop carrier.

MICHAEL
It's not too late to let us help
you. There are greater forces at
work than you're prepared to
withstand.

Sian climbs on the ATV.

SIAN
Just stay out of our way. Go back
to your cells - China doesn't need
your help.

He pulls the door closed, and the ATV tears off. The team emerges from their positions and watch it, frustrated.

EXT. CHINA JUNGLE - LATER

They pull Jianjun out of the wreck. He's pretty busted up, a little burned. Stefen and Allison check him.

TALGAT

We're following them, right?

ALEISTER

They've got to be close - didn't take them long to drive here.

RUSTY

Carbonari mount constant wide-ranging patrols. It could just be that one was in the area.

STEFEN

He's stable, we can move him, but not far.

POPE

We're going to need help if we're going to track them on foot.

MICHAEL

Let's move.

Jianjun blacks out.

INT. EASY CITY, HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Adrian's eyes flutter open, find Fu Renshu by his bedside.

ADRIAN

Am I dead?

FU RENSHU

Interesting you should put it that way. Your GSTF file says you are.

ADRIAN

Right, but, ow.

FRIAZER

I know you weren't part of a proper O.N.E. sanctioned unit. You want to tell me about that?

ADRIAN

I'm not one to make big speeches.
 (looks down at his
 extensive injuries)
 So let's just say that's not going
 to happen.

FRAIZER

No one's questioning your loyalty.
 Or your resolve. I'm trying to help
 you. They're thankful now, they let
 us take you to the hospital.
 Nevertheless, you're a security
 risk. You think a rogue
 operation'll be willing to bear
 that risk indefinitely? I can offer
 you protection.

Adrian stares him down. Fu Renshu waits, gauging him.

FU RENSHU

It comes to this. We can regenerate
 the knee, but your injuries were
 severe. The longer we wait, the
 less perfect the operation will be.
 Think about that.

They stare at each other.

INT. CHURCH CAVERN, CELL - NIGHT

Jianjun wakes up in a small room on a modest wood-frame bed.
 His injuries are patched. Michael, Dove and Pope watch him.

MICHAEL

(off Jianjun's look)
 You're in a cell at the Liberation
 Church of Uygur Zizhiqu - a cave
 near Urumqi, on the edge of the
 Taklamaklan Desert.

POPE

Not a jail cell, that's just what
 they call them. It's a monastery.

JIANJUN

Convenient.

POPE

Not really, that's why Governor
 Talgat hired me. Contacts in the
 Chinese Occult. I know all the best
 places to hide from an aggressively
 secular humanist society.

MICHAEL

Stefen was able to knit your arm.
You'll be fine in a few hours, but
you should take it easy.

JIANJUN

So where are the Carbonari now?

POPE

Probably deep in the mountains
already. We'll need the church's
help if we're going to track them
down. They have trucks on the way.
We'll head out soon as they arrive.

MICHAEL

Which brings us to the question of
what to do with you.

JIANJUN

No room for me in the helicopter?

MICHAEL

If we want to find the Carbonari's
base without them seeing us coming,
we have to travel by land.

POPE

You can stay with the church. It's
not a bad life, but probably not
the one you had in mind. They can
take you to town once we're gone.

JIANJUN

You're not in the ferry business.

MICHAEL

Not counting heavily on there being
an after to this expedition.

POPE

Local legend is, 'Taklamakan' means
'Go in and you'll never come out.'
(off their looks)
It's not true, but it's colorful.

JIANJUN

What were the Carbonari talking
about? They're not responsible for
the murders in Kazakhstan?

MICHAEL

Could be deception. Hard to say.
Governor Talgat's convinced of
their guilt. We have to play this
out.

JIANJUN
How'd you draw the duty?

MICHAEL
Not telling you that is my way of hoping there is an after.

JIANJUN
(holding Michael's eyes)
Fu Renshu sent me to spy on you as much as them. He knows you're not regular GSTF or a Chameleon team.

Michael starts to speak, Jianjun interrupts him.

JIANJUN (CONT'D)
You lied. Everybody lies. But I think the case of the China cell is more important at the moment.

MICHAEL
That's your call?

JIANJUN
I'm the agent on the ground.

MICHAEL
That you are.

DOVE
Which only leaves us with what to do when it's closed.

JIANJUN
(to Dove)
That's your specialty?

DOVE
I can introduce a mirror virus, ghost us from your memory. It's not without side effects. In order to hide it from the operators at CIEDA, it will be quite invasive.

JIANJUN
But it'll protect you from any interrogation performed on me?

Dove nods.

MICHAEL
One more thing. I've talked to my commanding officer. If there is an after, we want you to provide for the man we left behind in Easy City. Get him into witness protection, something.

JIANJUN
How will I remember?

DOVE
I'll write it into the program.
You'll know and trust him. He's
trained to throw you at our
backstop and you'll accept it.

JIANJUN
Fu Renshu won't.

MICHAEL
Let us worry about that. You know
the whole story now, what we're
here to do. It's about saving China
from the Carbonari threat before
the world goes to war. GSTF can't
do it.

JIANJUN
But you can, and I can help.

MICHAEL
If you agree to our terms. So,
what's it going to be?

JIANJUN
Cost of doing business.

EXT. CHURCH CAVERN - DAY

With the help of the Liberation congregation, the crew load their packs into the TUMBLERS - futuristic six-wheeled land rovers and prepare to move out. Their drivers - XU BEKRI (65), a terra cotta warrior, and NUR AMAT (19), her hair tied back in a leather strap - kiss their loved ones goodbye, sling outdated MX-3 railshot rifles over their shoulders, and climb into the Tumblers' pilot pods. Michael sits, stares out at the valley, brooding. He considers a small white flower.

POPE
Saussurea involucrata.

MICHAEL
(looking up)
What?

POPE
Xinjiang Snow Lotus. It's a kind of
flowering herb. Supposed to have
some medicinal properties, but it's
quite rare. Only grows wild in the
high alpine.

MICHAEL

So the question becomes: do you pick it, or leave it alone? You may destroy a rare thing, but you may never find another.

POPE

Boss's daughter, right? We're all on borrowed time, my friend. Should've enjoyed it while you could.

MICHAEL

(to the group)
Pack up, people, let's do this.

Michael snags a sample of the saussurea, stows it in a belt pouch. The GREY CARDINAL (80s)- a distinguished old man in monk's robes, watches them board, and, to everyone's surprise, climbs into the lead Tumbler beside Nur Amat. His followers look as if they want to rush forward and stop him, but no one dares.

EXT. TAKLIMAKAN DESERT - DAY

The team takes shifts standing at the rail gun emplacements in the tops of the Tumblers, PD-ARCs trained on the horizonas they ride down the sand-blasted highway between the world's tallest mega-dunes.

INT. TUMBLER - CONTINUOUS

Michael, Pope, Stefen, Allison, Torben, Governor Talgat, and Rhee Jianjun ride in the lead truck with Nur Amat and the Gray Cardinal.

ALLISON

(to Stefen)

So, are the Carbonari our only lead? 'Cause if we do have some doubt whether they were really involved, seems like it might be easier to follow up a different one.

STEFEN

We have to clear our primary suspect before we can move on to another.

ALLISON

But time is a factor here, or this team wouldn't have formed in the first place.

(MORE)

ALLISON (CONT'D)

So since the Carbonari are potentially being framed for the murder, and China blamed for allowing them to proliferate, the question we should be asking ourselves is, who'd want to destroy China?

STEFEN

I think you mean who wouldn't want to destroy China. It would be a shorter list.

ALLISON

But why?

STEFEN

Please. China owns half the world, and nobody's happy about it. Especially the corporate states. China buys up all the debt, including that of trans-nationals like Cypro-corp, putting their state-run trans-nats at a certain advantage in the marketplace.

TALGAT

It's nothing new. China's cultivated its global financial positioning for years while racking up a string of human rights abuses that would make the old-world KGB blush. But don't take my word for it. Ask Rhee Jianjun.

JIANJUN

It's true. Anti-Chinese sentiment is often rooted in socio-economics.

The team tries not to laugh at his overly sincere response. The Cardinal folds his hands in a gesture of contemplation.

JIANJUN (CONT'D)

Is it really so bad?

The Gray Cardinal just looks at him.

I/E. TAKLIMAKAN DESERT - CONTINUOUS

Then without warning, Nur Amat swerves off the main track and engages the Tumbler's active camouflage. The team dismounts from the Tumbler, fans out and takes up covering positions in the tall grass. The desert stretches into a haze of dust in every direction. A long column of People's Armed Police trucks trundle into view. They THUNDER by in a cloud of dust and black exhaust.

NUR AMAT

The armed police's patrols never miss a chance to persecute our church, so we've learned to stay hidden.

MICHAEL

Great, just what we need. What're they doing here?

POPE

Must've got wind of something big going down, that's practically a whole battalion.

TALGAT

You see? Autonomous region... what a joke. The Uyghurs can't breathe without PAP interference. Even on a local level, within their own country, China is the enemy.

The column passes without incident.

MICHAEL

What are the chances the PAP's presence in the same area we tracked the Carbonari to is coincidental?

RUSTY

Not good.

JIANJUN

Could be Uyghur unrest. We see that often.

TALGAT

Not often enough.

CARDINAL

So you see, the conflict between the Han and the ethnic Uyghurs is continual.

NUR AMAT

The problem is, the Han see all Uyghur as terrorists. It's no wonder the Uyghur don't mind hiding Carbonari.

TALGAT

Chinese oppression of its ethnic minorities has gone on too long. They Uyghurs are Turks, just like the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks. If only they could unite under one banner-

MICHAEL
 And let us guess, that banner
 should be Kazakh blue and gold?

EXT. REMOTE MOUNTAIN TRACK - DAY

The team turns off the main road for an even less traveled mountain track. The steep grade and crabbed switchbacks give the Church's trucks trouble.

MICHAEL
 Jesus, what a trip. They have to do
 this every time they re-supply? No
 wonder they're desperate.

XU BEKRI
 Can't be made except in summer.

The truck grinds to a halt, spins giant tires on the loose rock.

TORBEN
 What's the problem?

The passengers pile out so Bekri and Nur Amat can negotiate a particularly narrow portion without unbalancing.

I/E. WALL OF ROCK - DAY

The Tumblers roll to a stop. The track continues at an improbable angle. An older footpath winds into the wasteland beyond.

XU BEKRI
 From here you walk.

The soldiers hop out and shoulder their gear.

Michael extends a hand to the Gray Cardinal.

MICHAEL
 Thanks for your help.

CARDINAL
 You haven't really seen the dragon,
 only his tail. Don't be concerned
 whether you live or die, my son.
 (looks to the mountains)
 The dragon already knows your fate.
 Ask him.

Michael's gaze drifts up to the icy slopes.

MICHAEL
 I will.

He walks back to the team.

RUSTY

(sotto)

Ask them why you don't have better trucks. You can bet the Carbonari didn't walk this part.

POPE

The congregation has to live underground. They're hated, but not as much as the Carbonari. No one else has to go this far into the wilderness to survive.

MICHAEL

Besides, that truck just saved your life. Try to show a little gratitude.

RUSTY

I'm betting on being dead, remember?

The Gray Cardinal climbs into the other Tumbler to drive it home. The team waves in parting to he and Bekri, then continues on foot up the faint track into the mountains.

INT. BLACK HAND, BRIDGE - DAY

Kendle walks quietly onto the bridge. A seascape, overlaid with info-graphics is visible out the main port. Tanaka, Christina and the rest of the bridge crew sit quietly at their stations. Grant stands in the center of the bridge, lost in thought.

KENDLE

Does anybody know if they're okay?

GRANT

Get her out of here.

Christina and Tanaka move to intercept Kendle and the same time. Tanaka takes her arm, tries to guide her out of the door, but she yanks it away.

KENDLE

My father's out there fighting for you! I have a right to know if he's okay.

GRANT

We'd all like to know, Kendle. They don't call us to chat. They might need our help at any point and we can't afford to be distracted.

Christina intercepts Tanaka.

CHRISTINA
 (to Grant)
 Let me handle this.
 (to Kendle)
 Come on, honey.

She ushers Kendle over to one of the stations near the rear of the bridge.

KENDLE
 It was open.

CHRISTINA
 I know, it's okay. They checked in about four hours ago. Everything's fine.

EXT. CHINESE DESERT - DAY

Michael's fire-team passes through harsh high-altitude shadows as they trudge up the mountain. The wind SCOURS the blasted landscape clean. The group emerges onto a wide plain. An abandoned village huddles on the far side of a small lake. Sun-bleached mud brick buildings in a teetering heap, half covered in earth.

The team hunkers down in the ghost town on a slope of rotting grain piled in the lee of a broken wall. They sip water, catch their breath. Past the ruins, the wind heaps an array of sand dunes hundreds of feet high, peaked and imposing. Rusty and Aleister scan the dunes with their visors while Michael looks on.

VISOR POV: Nothing but barren desolation.

Jianjun comes up to them.

JIANJUN
 Still no sign of the base?

RUSTY
 Nothing. Lost the tracks a ways back, too sandy. We should've spotted their flyers by now.

Jianjun takes the visor Rusty offers, looks for himself.

ALEISTER
 It's almost like they're hiding in the sand itself.

JIANJUN
 (lowers the visor)
 That's exactly what they're doing!

He gets up, walks back down to the rest of the team.

RUSTY
 (following him)
 But the sands are constantly
 shifting, blown in here across the
 desert.

JIANJUN
 Dove, where the hell are we?

Dove looks at Michael, who nods. He adjusts his monocle and thinks into his machine. He hands the display to Jianjun.

DOVE
 Link says it's the Gez Defile.

INSERT: An overhead view of where the undulating desert meets the serrated molars of the Tian Shan.

Jianjun takes it in.

JIANJUN
 This a live image?

DOVE
 'Course.

JIANJUN
 Can you wind it back a couple of
 months?

DOVE
 Just a minute.

INSERT: The same view, but this time the dunes crawl back towards the desert in rapid reverse time-lapse. All but one.

JIANJUN
 (points to the display)
 There. That's where they are.

ALLISON
 Inside the dune.

TALGAT
 That's ridiculous.

JIANJUN
 Satellites don't lie.

DOVE
Not strictly true, but I believe
this one.

The group looks across the rooftops of the ruined town.

VISOR POV: the mega-dune in question, magnified. It lies across a broad field of equally massive cousins, and at the far end of a constricting canyon - a natural fortress.

The fire-team moves out in response to Michael's hand signal, and ranges from the town across a bare stretch of pasture - littered with burned-out vehicles and scrap. Without warning, the sand EXPLODES! Vast plumes of dust crater out before the booming MUZZLE REPORT of the canyon's defenses ever reach them.

MICHAEL
Find cover!

They dig into the leeward side of a berm at the desert's edge. The team sneaks views over the top. Flares from the canyon's guns precede the shells that strafe the dune in front and rain sand down on them.

POPE
Have to move 'fore they dial us in.

TALGAT
The approach's too exposed. Half a dozen dunes between us and the canyon. We'll never cover the ground.

Cassandra looks at scraps of corrugated sheet metal littering the canyon.

CASSANDRA
I have an idea.

She runs down the berm, dodges the occasional SHELL EXPLOSION and hauls a six-foot piece of sheet metal back to where the team hunkers down. She bends the leading edge into a blunt ramp. Michael smiles as he realizes what she's about to do.

CASSANDRA (CONT'D)
(winks at him)
Wish me luck.

She dives over the top, bodysurfs down the broad side of the dune, white-blond hair flying behind her before she disappears in a cloud of dust below.

TALGAT
Crazy bitch.

MICHAEL

I like it.

He nods, and the rest of them races to collect their own makeshift toboggans.

EXT. CHINESE DESERT - DUSK

The group crosses the treacherous approach to the Gez Defile, alter their timing, slide down the gun-ward faces of the titanic dunes and trudge up the protected slopes, platforms of scrap metal held above their heads.

To the ADWS targeting system, they're specks lost in small wakes of dust, too fast to track. The automated guns swivel, impotent, as the team reaches the canyon mouth, inside their arc of fire. The team looks at each other, intoxicated by their cleverness, ready for anything.

EXT. GEZ DEFILE - DUSK

The dunes mask the approach to a highly defensible canyon. It's deathly quiet. Carrion birds scatter at their approach.

RUSTY

This isn't right. We should have met some resistance by now.

They come upon the entrance to the dune base. Its bay doors blasted open. Michael scans the entrance with his visor.

MICHAEL

Snipe Two to Sack, are you seeing this?

He waits, looks at the others.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Sack?

TUNNEL TO:

INT. BLACK HAND, CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Grant reacts.

GRANT

We hear you Michael, go ahead.

Tanaka looks up from his instruments.

TANAKA

Sir, I'm not hearing anything on my equipment. Are you getting something I'm not?

Grant realizes what it must be. His back door connection is still getting through, but someone's jammed their visor uplink.

MICHAEL (O.S.)

(in Grant's ear)

Snipe Two to Sack, please respond.

Grant grips the railing, glares out the view-port.

TANAKA

Sir? Are you okay?

GRANT

Sorry. I heard a ghost, just wishful thinking.

EXT. GEZ DEFILE - DUSK

Michael shoots Dove an impatient look.

MICHAEL

What's going on?

Dove's eyes flash over the stream of information from his deck.

DOVE

I don't know. We lost the uplink.

MICHAEL

Damn. Okay, we go back and re-establish communications.

TALGAT

No, we go in!

MICHAEL

That's not your call, Governor. Grant told us to--

Governor Talgat strides towards the door.

TALGAT

I didn't come all this way to read from the GSTF playbook. I'm going in.

Aizahn follows him and charges her plasma crop, her tattooed face set. The mercs look from the Governor to Michael, unsure whom to follow.

MICHAEL

Damn it!

CASSANDRA

(whispered, to Erik)

Told you.

Michael waves them on.

INT. GEZ SANCTUARY - DAY

Inside, it's dark. The only light comes from fused sand skylights in the high ceilings. Curtains are torn, planters uprooted, walls charred and pitted. Bodies with red arm bands litter the floor, hang impaled on wreckage, float face down in water gardens.

VISOR POV: the grim carnage cast in a grainy green glow.

ALLISON

Who... what could have done this?

ALEISTER

Some kind of massive assault. They were defending the place.

The team advances through cast sand corridors, step over shredded and exploded corpses. Rusty wipes a smear of blood from the glasslike wall with his finger.

RUSTY

Made from molecularly altered sand, thick and strong enough to withstand bombardment from space.

TORBEN

We should try to find the training cavern. That's where they would have made their stand.

He and Rusty share a look.

INT. BLACK HAND, CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The crew share tense looks as they watch the sub's stealthed non-emissive displays.

TANAKA

Twenty minutes overdue for check in.

GRANT

They'd call if they drew fire.

Grant paces the room.

HIS POV: he watches the team step over the slashed and mutilated corpses of the Carbonari cell.

TANAKA

Maybe it happened too fast.

CHRISTINA

Maybe they're inside. The base's shielding could prevent--

GRANT

Dove's deck can punch through any shield the Carbonari have.

Tanaka looked at his interface.

TANAKA

Sir! I'm reading a massive energy surge from inside the base.

GRANT

(startled)

What? When?

TANAKA

Just now. Something's powering up in there.

KENDLE

(to Christina)

What does that mean?

She looks to Grant, who grips the rail again.

GRANT

Nothing good.

INT. TRAINING CAVERN - DAY

The team works their way down the aisles of a large amphitheatre. More carnage. Two ROBED SOLDIERS stand at the center of the room, mirrored faceplates bowed over pole arms with wicked-looking, multi-sided blades. Forearm and shin greaves bristle with gadgetry. Shining laurel wreaths surround the mirrored domes.

They flank a towering device erected in the center of the cavern - an inverted black cone over 3 meters high and covered in blinking lights. The team freezes as a third figure emerges from the shadows: Eleina Rhodon - severe hair, severe business ensemble.

ELEINA

It must be Halloween, the ghosts are out.

(MORE)

ELEINA (CONT'D)

I have to ask you Michael, if you're already dead, will anyone mourn you? Or should I address that solely to the representatives of the GSTF who sacrificed their careers to be here with us today? After all, nobody mourns a Carbonari.

MICHAEL

I'm addressing the Ambassador to--

ELEINA

A loyal member of the National Union, who would never be mixed up in such a sordid affair.

CASSANDRA

Cypro-corp.

MICHAEL

I know who she is.
(to Eleina)
They'll find this place. You won't be able to cover up all the evidence.

ELEINA

Oh, I think we will.
(indicates device)
This geothermal magnetic injector is poised to punch a hole in the earth's crust, turn all this sand to glass. Nothing will be left to cover up. One of the wonderful technologies we developed and sold to the Chinese government.

Michael grips his weapon, ready for the coming fight.

ELEINA (CONT'D)

In the end, it won't matter whether the world thinks the Chinese or the Carbonari are responsible. The world will see China as the powerless, flailing dictatorship it is, and fall on them like a plague of frogs. Inspiring global reinvestment...

(indicates soldiers)

...in private security. It's amazing what you can do with magnets.

MICHAEL

Why haven't you set it off yet?

ELEINA
It's charging.

Erik watches the soldiers, and looks at Pope, confused.

ERIK
Who's he talking to?

POPE
I'm not sure, I don't see anyone.

CASSANDRA
You don't see her?

MICHAEL
You're a long way from Nicosia,
Ambassador Rhodon.

ELEINA
So are you.

The robed soldiers look up at them.

ELEINA (CONT'D)
And call me Eleina, please. No need
to stand on formality - I know you,
too. Or the AIs stored in our IC.
Allison, Cassandra, Michael. Your
death certificates are already
filed; along with obituaries that
quantify the sum total of your
contributions to society. So and
so, beloved relative, died. They
are survived by, blah blah blah.
Which is to say, not much.

MICHAEL'S POV: His synapses fire, he sees Eleina and Grant,
inside out and upside down, looking back at him.

Michael turns to Torben, his eyes hollow, hypnotized. He
draws his sword and speaks in a combination of his voice, and
Eleina's.

MICHAEL / ELEINA
Now we just have to trim the fat.
(to the robed soldiers)
Prosochi!

The soldiers leap into the air, robes fluttering, propelled
by JUMP BOOTS. A devastating opening salvo of ENERGY BLASTS
from their gauntlets toss weapons and bodies, SHRED potted
palms and tear curtain hangings. Michael-Eleina falls in with
them, swinging his fractal blade.

MICHAEL / ELEINA (CONT'D)
 N.U. Member countries aren't
 allowed standing armies, as you
 know, but ambassadors are allowed a
 personal guard.

Our heroes scatter and RETURN FIRE, but their weapon hits are ineffective.

MICHAEL / ELEINA (CONT'D)
 These are two of mine. We call them
 Kantara after the castle in
 northern Cyprus. They're not quite
 an army, but you'd be hard pressed
 to see the difference.

ANGLE: Jianjun RAILS with his forearm gun, but a BLAST knocks him roughly aside.

ANGLE: it BLASTS Erik against a wall, he falls facedown in an aisle.

MICHAEL / ELEINA (CONT'D)
 Everything has a resonance, a
 vibration. The right frequencies
 can shred cell walls, boil brains.

The Kantara shift positions, their halberds ready. One extends two ornate blades from his gauntlet. The Kantara wade in, shrug off PLASMA CHARGES and deliver crippling hand-to-hand blows in rapid succession. The team tries to defend themselves, but the Kantara easily outmaneuver them with vicious cuts and inhumanly graceful dance-like attacks.

They're not invincible, but they completely outclass our heroes. Cassandra CARPETS one Kantara with her splinter gun, but the beam SHOWERS off his electronegative shielding in dangerous, brittle nanoparticles.

CASSANDRA
 Forget the splinter guns, they're
 useless!

ANOTINE
 Don't let them get between you!

He lands a powerful blow, makes the Kantara in front drop his halberd. Allison fires furiously as a Kantara leaps towards her, SLICES her gun in half in a SHOWER OF PLASMA, and jabs her in the gut with the blunt end of his halberd. She's down.

INSERT: Grant staggers in the control room as the feed goes dead. Christina moves towards him, arm outstretched, but Grant pushes her away.

ANGLE: Rusty parries a sword thrust from Michael with his suit-armored forearm, but Michael quickly counter-thrusts and jabs him in the neck. Rusty falls to his knees, clutches the wound. A fountain of blood sprays between his fingers.

TORBEN

Rusty!

ANGLE: Torben lunges at the nearest Kantara, who spins and delivers a CRUSHING BACK-KICK, cuts Torben's face with a gauntlet blade. Torben staggers back, wipes the blood from his eyes.

ALEISTER

Split up and draw them off!

The team breaks, scatters into the caves.

INT. CAVERN ATRIUM - CONTINUOUS

A thunderous CRACK shakes the foundation. Dust flies. Pope draws a Kantara into the open with CONTINUOUS FIRE as Antoine circles around a cracked pillar.

POPE

(hoses Kantara with
gunfire)

This way, worker bee!

The Kantara follows, shrugs off PLASMA BOLTS, halberd ready. With a grunt, Antoine shoves the cracked pillar over onto him, WHAM! He and Pope watch, breathing heavily, unsure if they've done the trick. But, with a massive ENERGY DISCHARGE, the Kantara re-emerges sending large boulders flying. Antoine and Pope go down.

INT. CAVERN CORIDOOR - CONTINUOUS

Michael-Elieina - now carrying a Kantara halberd in one hand and his sword in the other - presses the attack. Aleister backs down a side passage, draws his attention.

ALEISTER

Eleina!

They circle, size each other up.

MICHAEL / ELEINA

Magnets, incidentally, take their name from an ancient Greek province, once ruled by Magnes, a son of Zeus.

They fall to it, Aleister landing some solid blows, and making a valiant effort, but Michael clearly has the upper hand. Fractal sword and halberd whirl, each move perfectly suited to the small ways Aleister leaves himself open.

MICHAEL / ELEINA (CONT'D)
 Magnesia specifically was the
 homeland of heroes - Jason, Peleus,
 Achilles. Early magnets were called
 "magnítis líthos," or Magnesian
 stones - an appellation
 attributable to only one thing...

Aleister staggers against the wall, unable to defend against her any longer. Blood runs freely from wounds on his face.

MICHAEL / ELEINA (CONT'D)
 ...their power.

Michael-Eleina lunges forward, ready to take Aleister's head off with the halberd. Torben and Cassandra dive from the shadows, tackle Michael. The halberd spins across the floor. Michael-Eleina jumps to his feet, gripping his sword. The three square off.

TORBEN
 What'd they do, make you eat
 Wikipedia?

INT. CAVERN ANTECHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

Talgat and Aizahn are among the fiercest fighters. One of the Kantara comes at them, slices their guns and blinds them with a light pulse. Azain retaliates with her plasma crop. The Kantara wings Talgat with his halberd, knocks Aizahn against a wall with a MAGNETIC PUSH. She crumples to the ground. A trickle of blood slips from her mouth, traces the line of her tattoo.

TALGAT
 Aizahn!

Talgat dives in front of Aizahn, shields her with his body.

TALGAT (CONT'D)
 (to the air)
 Ambassador Rhodon, my people were
 not to be hurt! We had a deal!

INSERT: Michael, fighting with Aleister, Torben and Cassandra, looks distant.

MICHAEL / ELEINA
 I'm restructuring it.

ALEISTER

What do you mean you had a deal?

The Kantara jams Talgat in the face, knocks him out.

INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

The fight between Aleister, Cassandra and Michael ranges across the Carbonari Truck bays.

MICHAEL / ELEINA

Ochi skono nisteia. Echo anag praktika!

CASSANDRA

What's he saying?

TORBEN

She said not to kill us too fast. It's Cypro-corp Battle Code.

CASSANDRA

Can I ask how you know it?

TORBEN

You can ask.

MICHAEL / ELEINA

This one could have been a Kantara. He enrolled in the program. It's good to see we still command a certain amount of loyalty.

ALEISTER

(taps his visor)
Dove, we've got to figure out what they did to him.

INTERCUT: Dove crouches in a dark corner of the warren, focused on his deck.

DOVE

I'm trying, but they own the information flow into this place. I'm not sure how they mirrored it from me, but I can't break through.

Aleister chases the fight down a dirt-choked corridor.

ALEISTER

Keep trying!

DOVE

(sotto)
I don't know what to do. His Link should be completely nonfunctional.

(MORE)

DOVE (CONT'D)
 (his fingers hover over
 the deck)
 Stefen, any suggestions you may
 have would be helpful.

INT. CARBONARI LIVING QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Stefen drags Rusty into a small, shattered apartment - its spring-fed reflecting pools tainted with gore. He leans Rusty, who still clutches his own bleeding neck, up against the wall. Stefen sponges away caked blood with a nanotech sponge, activates his visor's x-ray scope, gently lifts Rusty's flex armor away from the wound.

STEFEN
 I'd hypothesize a magnetic carrier
 wave resonating occult RNA
 subroutines, but I grasp at straws.

INTERCUT: Dove's fingers fly across his deck.

DOVE
 If that's true, there's nothing for
 me to code around. They're
 channeling the dead. It's a direct
 manipulation of the Link. But their
 AI node has to be too far away for
 that kind of fine work. And the
 network in this base is a burned-
 out wreck. So where's the signal
 coming from?

Rusty's lips move, but no sounds come out.

STEFEN
 Don't try to talk.

Stefen gives Rusty a shot.

STEFEN (CONT'D)
 I'd anesthetize you completely, but
 we need you mobile. This should
 numb it a bit.

Rusty nods his thanks and winces.

STEFEN (CONT'D)
 I have to clamp the external
 carotid before I can see how bad
 the damage is.

He does so, and frowns.

STEFEN (CONT'D)

The cartilage in your neck is fractured. Hold still while I clean it up.

Stefen switches to his visor's bronchoscope, and his med glove extends a sensor and manipulators as he removes shreds of flesh from Rusty's trachea. Stefen attempts to close the deeper structures around a drainage tube when he HEARS the SCRAPE OF A BOOT outside the room.

INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Aleister and Cassandra are close fighting with Michael. Aleister narrowly avoids the sword, but takes a BRUTAL KICK. Cassandra BELTS Michael, he staggers back towards a wrecked MPV. Michael recovers, lunges for Cassandra, fractal sword flashing.

At the last second, Michael summons all his willpower, and is able to check the blow. It's a fraction of a second slower than it should have been, but that's all Cassandra needs. She sidesteps his attack and throws him off balance towards a large tank of compressed air. The force of Michael's BLOW jams his sword into the tank, which RUPTURES, takes a chunk of flesh with it.

The tank flies into the nearby maintenance bay. The equipment and fuel cells there SPARK and EXPLODE, shower the area with metal fragments and globs of battery acid.

The BLAST hurls Michael high in the air and painfully doubles him around an exposed ceiling girder. He lands hard on his back. It takes all the wind - and the fight - out of him. Eleina releases him. Cassandra picks up the fallen sword. Torben looks at her, impressed.

TORBEN

You're kind of a pain in the ass,
but you're good in a fight.

CASSANDRA

It's part of my charm.

Michael lies at Cassandra's feet, clutches his belt pouch where a mutilated flower is tucked. She holds the sword to his neck, dares him to move.

MICHAEL

(faintly)
Re...

Cassandra bends close.

CASSANDRA

What?

MICHAEL
...Repeater.

Aleister, also up as far as his knee, looks at Cassandra.

ALEISTER
What does that mean?

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Dove stops short.

DOVE
They must have an amplifier. A
phantom power receiver that's
juicing them, and jamming us.

INTERCUT: in the amphitheatre, Rhee Jianjun gets dazedly to his feet.

JIANJUN
(over link)
Where would you put something like
that?

INTERCUT: Torben finds a Kantara dragging Talgat and Aizahn from the antechamber. He braces to fight for his life.

TORBEN
It'll be in the cell core, to tap
into the whole system. On the
bottom level, the most shielded
area.

Jianjun turns, runs down the corridor in the opposite direction.

JIANJUN
I'm on it.

INT. CARBONARI LIVING QUARTERS - DAY

A Kantara enters, sees Rusty lying crumpled against the wall through his cracked faceplate. Stefen comes from behind, wraps a curtain around the Kantara's head and swings him head first into a carved stone water table.

Stefen's arms tighten, trying to hold his enemy under the water. He grits his teeth, but the Kantara jerks back, SMASHES him in the face with his helmet. Stefen staggers, his nose bloodied. The Kantara rights himself, SHREDS the curtain.

INT. CELL CORE - CONTINUOUS

Jianjun runs into the room, sees the shielded compartment, and heads towards it, but a Kantara steps out to block his path. Jianjun rushes him, twists by, BLASTING with his railstorm. The Kantara lashes out and breaks Jianjun's injured arm.

JIANJUN
(screams in pain)

Jianjun falls, but struggles to his feet and keeps running, the Kantara stalks behind him. He enters the shielded room, and sees the repeater, attached to the cell core. The core's suspended in an electron plasma field, above a precipitous geothermal tunnel.

JIANJUN (CONT'D)
Oh, come on!

Jianjun leaps over the railing and launches himself over the chasm. His body passes through the field, but the rail-storm strapped to his broken forearm CATCHES in the energy barrier. He swings, agonizingly suspended by his broken arm.

JIANJUN (CONT'D)
(screams in more pain)

Sweat pours down his face. The Kantara activates his jump boots and leaps after Jianjun, COLLIDES with him in midair. With a sickening RIP, Rhee Jianjun's arm tears loose just below the elbow.

They pass through the field, and CRUNCH into the core, which showers them with SPARKS. Jianjun grabs blindly for the repeater with his good hand, and to his surprise, it TEARS AWAY in his grip. He looks at it in shock as he and the Kantara fall.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Dove BELTS down it at top speed, eyes glazed over, staring at something only he sees.

DOVE
That's it! I'm in. Snipe Two to Sack, we're under heavy assault. It's the Cypriots, Eleina Rhodon is here. Please confirm the presence of a geothermal injector in the base.

HIS POV: Info-graphics confirm a link with the Black Hand.

TANAKA (V.O.)
 (over visor)
 Copy, Snipe Two. We're reading--

Dove turns to see, behind the layers of info-graphics, a Kantara right on top of him, already striking.

CUT TO STATIC.

INT. TRAINING CAVERN - DAY

A Kantara drags Jianjun - limp and clutching his mutilated arm - and drops him, broken and bleeding, with the others. They lie where they've been dropped - in a heap on the floor, held in place by some unseen force. A countdown TICKS away on the magnetic injector's interface. Aleister watches Eleina survey her conquest.

ELEINA
 That was exhilarating. My guards
 need field testing, time to time.
 (to her guards, indicates
 Talgat and Aizahn)
 Ton ypo kratisi. Aftin episis. I
 have an experiment in mind.

Michael opens his eyes. One of the Kantara drags Talgat to his feet.

TALGAT
 (weakly)
 Get away from me!

He struggles against the force holding him rooted to the floor, without success.

ELEINA
 But none of us would be here if not
 for you, general. You sold out two
 countries for a chance at power,
 Killed the Kazakh Governor's family
 and blamed China. Honestly, how
 could the Carbonari have pulled
 that off without a senior military
 official's help? Kazakhstan was a
 military coup, nothing more.

Michael moans. Invisible bonds hold him flat.

TALGAT
 That's not true! China held the
 world's purse-strings. Even you
 were powerless against their
 controlling interest. But now... I
 helped you crush them, for the good
 of your company, and my country!

MICHAEL

(to Eleina)

What does he mean? He said you had a deal?

ELEINA

(in Talgat's ear)

You've done well for your people, inspired them to form their own corporation. I do think you're on the right track, but you're unpredictable. Despite your ideals, military men know only one kind of order. And in light of your role in the murder of the former governor's family, the new board of directors has asked that you remain our guest for the time being.

The Kantara bind Talgat, Aizahn with malleable metal shackles.

TALGAT

I'll not stand for this treatment. We're allies. We want the same thing.

ELEINA

You've served your purpose, and you can continue to inspire your people as a figurehead; the hero who struck a blow for them and freed them from the shadow of the Sino-Russian pact. But they need time to realize their newfound liberty.

INTERCUT: Grant listens in over the link.

ELEINA (CONT'D)

These military minds, they think they're so pure, so much more capable of handling things if only the bureaucracy wouldn't interfere. But they're the relics, the unevolved stuff of unbridled competition, of a blind lust for domination that poisons our ability to co-habitate this planet. You were useful, general, but you're part of the problem. The military, the government, religion - these things aren't the answer to humanity's needs. Control requires a soft touch. People want the future to be a product they can buy into, which is what we - the corporations - offer them.

She crouches by Michael.

ELEINA (CONT'D)

Talgat wasn't alone, of course. We have collaborators in the highest positions in Japan, New Mauritius.

(to Jianjun)

Even China itself. When you have collusion on that scale, can you even call it corruption, or is it merely policy?

She gets up, looks at Talgat.

ELEINA (CONT'D)

But you showed special initiative and creativity, general. You knew to get behind the investigation in order to derail it. Reeducated, you might make a fine Kantara.

She moves her hand as if to caress his face, not quite touching it.

ELEINA (CONT'D)

The rest of you helped chase the scapegoat into the desert. In thanks, I give you front-row seats to witness the wrath of god.

She strides away and the Kantara follow, drag Talgat and Aizahn with them. Michael shouts after her, still splayed out on the cavern floor.

MICHAEL

The Carbonari were innocent! China was innocent. What gives you the right?

Eleina stops, turns.

ELEINA

Please. No one's innocent. You said it yourself, China deserves this. And our shareholders deserve a healthy financial future.

MICHAEL

You'll never get away with it. The GSTF will know what you did here.

Eleina's body shimmers as her voice cross-fades into a resonant echo.

ELEINA

My dear, poor, deluded friend, what makes you think I was ever here at all?

She winks out. The Kantara, along with Talgat and Aizahn, continue up the aisle and out the door.

POPE

There goes any chance of us getting paid.

He nurses a bruise as best his range of motion will allow. Michael looks sideways along the floor to where Dove lies bound like the rest of them.

MICHAEL

(to Dove)

I thought you were supposed to protect us from stuff like that.

DOVE

Must've missed something. Clearly there's some residual functionality in our Links. Cypro-corp has neurohackers on their side, too.

MICHAEL

I thought true neurohackers weren't supposed to take sides.

DOVE

It's complicated.

EXT. GEZ DEFILE - DAY

A Cypriot Tellus Dropship LIFTS OFF, blowing sand, and ROCKETS away.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

The Flywheel crew watches the Tellus blast unto the stratosphere.

INT. BLACK HAND, BRIDGE - DAY

Grant throws his headphones down in frustration.

GRANT

Shit! Shit.
(picks them back up)
Glenn?

GLENN
(filtered, over comm.)
Roger.

GRANT
Wind it up. We're pulling out.

CHRISTINA
What?

KENDLE
You can't!

GRANT
That's it. The injector's powered up now. We're registering it from here. They're gone, honey. They're gone.

CHRISTINA
Dad, no! There's still time. The injector emits an E.M.P. before it detonates. Dove said Eleina Rhodon was there. She'll have to get clear - well beyond the blast radius.

GRANT
I know that. How do you?

CHRISTINA
I read your mission reports.

Grant stares at her.

GRANT
But her ship's almost clear now.

CHRISTINA
It's a drop ship. She's not on it, Talgat and Nurkady are.

INSERT: The Tellus approaches the landing bay of a massive airplane, a flying aircraft carrier. The same one from above Almaty.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)
They require a massive power transmitter in the area. She'll have a stealth air carrier here. It's shielded, just like Flywheel, but she won't take the chance. It's big and slow, and it'll take time to land the drop ship on board and get underway.

GRANT (V.O.)
How do you know?

INSERT: The guards disembark the parked Tellus, and approach a waiting Eleina.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)

I remember Ambassador Rhodon from embassy functions. She attends via uplink; she doesn't go herself. It's beneath her. She needs that carrier - it's here. Trust me, dad.

BACK TO SCENE

GRANT

It doesn't matter, though. Until the injector goes off, the canyon's area denial weapons systems are still active. That's too small a window--

CHRISTINA

Dammit, dad, you can't just abandon them!

Christina advances on him.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

You love to do this - you get your hands dirty and then you bail. And you tell yourself you're being strong for accepting their deaths. You took everything from these people, always knowing they would fail, and now you're refusing to go all in.

INSERT: Tanks and soldiers line the DMZ.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)

There're GSTF soldiers massed on the border. What will they do when that thing goes off and no one knows what happened?

Christina drags Kendle in front of him by the wrist.

CHRISTINA

Well, you may be willing to sacrifice Michael and this girl's father, but I'm not.

Her eyes hold his. He doesn't say anything.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)
 (into comm.)
 The Flywheel can go stick and
 rudder, right?

GLENN
 Yeah, but--

CHRISTINA
 Then fire her up. We're going to
 get them out of there.

INTERCUT - FLYWHEEL

GLENN
 But the ADWS--

CHRISTINA
 Will be knocked out by the device.

GLENN
 And if our shielding doesn't work,
 we'll be flying blind. If we're
 flying at all.

ON SARINA

SARINA
 So?

GLENN
 (awaits a consensus)
 Sir?

BACK TO SCENE

Grant looks at his daughter.

GRANT
 (into comm.)
 You heard her, soldier.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Flywheel warms up and LIFTS OFF.

INT. GEZ SANCTUARY - DAY

Dove's deck CRACKLES to life.

CHRISTINA
Dove, can you hear me?

DOVE
(fumbles for the monocle)
Barely. How--

Michael stirs, adjusts his visor.

CHRISTINA
Flywheel's coming in hot. Whatever restraints Eleina has on you will cut out when the device activates. You have to get the others up and moving.

EXT. GEZ DEFILE - DAY

Flywheel enters the mountain pass. Suddenly, a blaze of ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE surrounds them.

INT. FLYWHEEL - CONTINUOUS

Glenn jams the controls and pitches the ship sideways.

GLENN
The canyon's defenses are active!
Guns!

ANGLE: In the forward turret, Sarina closes her eyes and homes in, feeling the heat of her targets through a specially designed thermal targeting interface.

ANGLE: Tanith steadies her sights and squeezes her triggers.

The women cling to their guns like runaway jackhammers, loosing ROUND after ROUND, arm muscles tense. Flywheel CAREENS into the canyon, EXCHANGING FIRE with the automated turrets, EXPLODING some, weaving desperately.

GLENN (CONT'D)
Geil, better bring the reactor offline so we don't have a meltdown.

Geil complies from his station in the cargo hold below the rotor - he activates the rate limiters and lets the tokamak's superheated plasma SPIN DOWN.

INT. BLACK HAND - DAY

Grant, Tanaka, and Christina look on in horror.

CHRISTINA
 (sotto)
 Keep going. It'll stop.

INT. GEZ SANCTUARY - DAY

A FOLLOW SOUND rings through the amphitheater. The towering black injector device is active - lights blinking, its highly focused geodetic beam magnetically PROJECTING into the earth's crust, building a chain reaction.

MICHAEL
 E.M.P.

Dove wiggles his fingers, gets up. The ground heaves.

DOVE
 Come on people, the shackles are
 off. Let's move!

Jianjun cradles his stump. Michael carries an unconscious Rusty in a fireman's lift. Aleister and Cassandra help Allison and Torben. Stefen, Antoine, Pope and Dove bring up the rear. They stagger down the dark and twisting corridors, step over the dead. The whole cavern SHUDDERS, dust cascades from the ceiling. They stumble on.

I/E. FLYWHEEL / GEZ DEFILE - DAY

Flywheel dodges its way down the canyon racing an electromagnetic SHOCKWAVE. The anit-aircraft guns stop as the E.M.P. HITS them. In Flywheel's cockpit, lights SPUTTER out.

GLENN
 There go the avionics. Continuing
 on rotor power. Shielded batteries
 and motors still alive. Good old
 girl, bless your redundant control
 systems.

With a deafening ROAR, the canyon floor ERUPTS in a volcanic mushroom cloud. Lava SPEWS, rock SHATTERS. Flywheel falters, but stays in the air, clears the column of fire as the ground melts below them. In the cockpit, Glenn does his best to steer around airborne chunks of white-hot stone and magma.

GLENN (CONT'D)
 Geil, she's sluggish. Looks like
 the electric motors have stopped
 working. You'll have to winch open
 the cargo door. And wind that
 reactor back up, we're gonna need
 it.

Dove, Michael, and the others stare in horror as they emerge atop the farthest mega-dune from the base they can reach. The electrified ash plume's now a dozen miles high, lightning SHOOTs out of the shredded ground as the Gez Defile COLLAPSES into a fiery caldera.

DOVE
(in awe)
It's the end of the world.

Flywheel appears out of the heat haze, KICKS UP a torrent of dust, hovers low between them and the fire. Geil reaches a hand, and helps them one by one into the cargo hold.

INT. FLYWHEEL - CONTINUOUS

Tanith and Sarina BLAST the larger volcanic rocks that fly at them. The smaller ones SEAR pinholes in Flywheel's composite armor. One hits Cassandra in the thigh. She winces and pulls it out, burning her fingers. It lands on the deck and catches fire. A rock the size of a small car gets close enough for them to smell before Sarina BLASTS it in a shower of embers.

SARINA
(into comm.)
Not bad for a blind woman, huh
Cross?

ALEISTER
You don't hear me complaining. Keep
shooting, lady.

The team helps the last few climb aboard. They collapse in a heap on the troop deck while Geil HOSES out the fire with the onboard extinguisher.

DOVE
We're on, Tarvis. Please go!

Glenn yanks back on the control stick, nearly telescoping their spines. Flywheel CAREENS upwards. The ground recedes beneath as it COLLAPSES into fiery oblivion.

INT. FLYWHEEL - DAY

Allison cleans Rhee Jianjun's arm, gives him a shot for pain.

ALLISON
Don't worry, I'm sure your Easy
City doctors can regenerate it.

Stefen examines Michael, his med-glove explores sensory pathways and nerve clusters as he repairs the damage to Michael's face and hands.

ALEISTER

How is he?

STEFEN

I'm at a loss. It shouldn't have been possible without a Link, but hypnosis or suggestion doesn't explain it either. There must be something we missed.

ALEISTER

You misunderstand me. Is he safe?

STEFEN

Oh I think so. I'd theorize the trigger, like much of Cypro-corp's other technology, requires proximity to their transmitter. Their information was gathered not from Michael, but from our stored data.

(shrugs)

Safe as ever. Except around Cypriots.

CASSANDRA

I can't believe we lost, in spite of everything.

RUSTY

I can't believe we're not dead.

Aleister picks the dried blood out of his hair.

ALEISTER

Yeah, pay up on that, by the way.

RUSTY

You'll get your money.

STEFEN

I told you not to talk. If you talk before I get you back to the med bay for some proper regeneration, you could force a blood clot into your brain.

ALLISON

I can't believe Governor Talgat. He killed the Governor's family.

POPE

Cypro-corp was on the rise, and he wanted in.

ANTOINE

Played us and the Carbonari and all of China for patsies.

CASSANDRA

Well, not all of us. I always said he was rotten.

ALEISTER

Power and prominence. I guess we really are that simple, sometimes.

Geil Raikan cleans and racks their weapons, looks at the spot where Michael sits in his acceleration couch.

GEIL

It's like Michael said, war is about economy, never ideology. Poor countries go to war to get rich. Rich countries go to war to stay rich. Everything else is sanctification.

POPE

I'd be disillusioned, but I'm already a mercenary.

ANTOINE

And we had him right there the whole time. We could've ended this.

STEFEN

(to Dove)

Why couldn't you have discovered he was a traitor? Read his mind, the same way you did--

Dove barely looks up - he's engrossed in his deck.

DOVE

Because it's something on principle we don't do. You said it yourself, too much information is dangerous. Neurohackers can walk through almost any door, but the ones you choose say something about you. Besides, wasn't it more interesting this way?

STEFEN

I'm not sure Delgado and Erik would agree.

ALEISTER

It doesn't matter. This would have gone down the same if we hadn't come. At least we tried.

CASSANDRA
We still lost.

DOVE
Maybe not.

They all turn to look at him. He strokes the air with his deck interface.

DOVE (CONT'D)
This thing is only partly the new biotech. It must be seriously shielded, but...

He presses a button. A static-strewn but recognizable Eleina Rhodon appears before them.

ELEINA
(filtered, heavily corrupted)
We have collaborators in the highest positions in Japan, New Mauritius, even China itself...

They look at each other, taking a moment to realize what the recording means. It's proof. They won!

MICHAEL
We have to get this to the authorities in Beijing right away. If we can get them to see this, we may still have a chance. Glenn, take us back to the Black Hand. Dove, get Grant. Jianjun - we can't just show up in the capitol. We need to set up a meeting through channels.

DOVE
(to Jianjun)
I never could've hacked in if you hadn't pulled that amplifier. Or talked to our ship.

JIANJUN
Still, that's a pretty good deck, there.

DOVE
(turns the deck over)
They really don't make them like they used to.

EXT. FLYWHEEL - DAY

The team looks out the windows as Flywheel banks away from the field of fire below and races on.

EXT. CASPIAN SEA - DUSK

The Black Hand cruises along the surface. Flywheel comes in for a landing on the deck.

INT. BLACK HAND, HANGAR DECK - DAY

Flywheel lowers into frame on the aircraft elevator, and the troops disembark to a rush of general greeting. Sarina and Aleister hug each other, in spite of themselves. Jianjun stands awkwardly by. Kendle runs to her father. Grant and Tanaka look on as Christina rushes into Michael's arms.

CHRISTINA

Thank god you're okay!

(Michael pulls away)

I heard what happened. It's not your fault. The old man doesn't blame you; neither do I.

Michael looked at his benefactor, as if for the first time.

MICHAEL

How the hell would he know?

Michael stalks over to Grant and Tanaka.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I need to talk to you, sir.

GRANT

Of course, son. In just a--

MICHAEL

Right now.

Tanaka stands aside as Grant and Michael move off together. Christina follows at a distance.

GRANT

What's on your mind, Michael?

MICHAEL

I'm not sure. I could see it - like I was hovering, helpless above my own brain when Ambassador Rhodon and her Cypro-corp crypto-monkeys hacked my Link. It should have been dead. You know what I saw? You, looking back at me.

Christina steps forward, looking from one to the other.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Everything Cypro-corp did to me...
but I never felt used until now.
I've got nothing to hide, you
should know that. Instead you
almost got us all killed.

CHRISTINA

Is this true, Dad? Me, too?

GRANT

I don't know what you're--

MICHAEL

Of course not. Killing the Links
was the plan, why would you
hamstring it out of some crazy need
to spy on us? I won't tell anyone
else what you don't know, but I'll
tell you this:

(indicates Christina)

You're going to give us your
blessing.

GRANT

Or what? I'll not be dictated to--

He sees the way Christina looks at Michael, and fumes.

GRANT (CONT'D)

I knew this would happen when I let
you join the mission.

CHRISTINA

Why d'you think I wanted to join
it? And you let me. So I think you
know this is how it has to be.

GRANT

Christina--

CHRISTINA

Let it go, Dad. You already know
you can trust us, there's no reason
to object. There's no going back.
This is our world now; let us make
the best of it. No more secrets.

GRANT

Fine, but what I don't know also
saved you. If we hadn't been able
to reconnect--

MICHAEL

Don't fool yourself, sir. Christina saved our lives. Glenn, Geil, Sarina, and Tanith saved us. You... you just got in the way.

Michael and Christina turn and walk away together, hand in hand. A look passes between them as they stop in a shadowed alcove of the hangar bay.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Talk about falling in love above my station.

Christina shakes her head.

CHRISTINA

We played his game before, but now... I don't care what my father says. We earned this.

She kisses him for a long moment.

MICHAEL

I brought you something.

Michael gives her the crushed remains of the snow lotus from his belt pouch.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

For the garden you're going to plant in Stefen's bunk.

CHRISTINA

(laughs)
It's a pulp.

MICHAEL

It's been through a lot, but you can't get one of these just anywhere. I think it's salvageable.

She looks into his eyes, touches his face.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

(pulls away)
You're smushing it.

CHRISTINA

(shushes him)
We can regenerate the herb.

She kisses him again. Grant looks darkly at Michael and Christina as he and Tanaka approach Rhee Jianjun.

TANAKA

You ready to make good on your
promise?

Rhee Jianjun still cradles his bandaged arm.

JIANJUN

I'll regret not remembering this.
Seems like someone should.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SARGASSO SEA - DUSK

Another kind of island on an active sea. A massive city-ship,
surrounded by a fleet of arsenal ships, cruisers and
frigates. A fast attack transport ROCKETS by in the FG.

SUPER: "G.S.S. Praesidium Carrier Group, Sargasso Sea."

The fleet PLOWS through the waves. Under the water, the
windows of Praesidium's bulbous bow.

INT. G.S.S. PRAESIDIUM, ADMIRAL'S DINING HALL - NIGHT

An undersea panorama outside the curved windows. BENJAMIN
TATE (50s) heads the table, flanked by Grant, Tanaka. White
linen, candles, champagne.

INSERT, GRANT'S POV: Michael and Christina watch the newsfeed
aftermath together in Michael's quarters. Christina's head
rests on Michael's shoulder.

GRANT

(brooding)

Where did I go wrong? My daughter
is seeing my bodyguard. That can
only end badly.

TATE

Let them be, Grant. I know for a
fact you love that boy like a son.
In this upside-down world, that
someone can find the optimism to
love is a small miracle. Eat your
steak.

TANAKA

So where do we stand, sir?

TATE

Well, the super-national tango is
in full effect.

(MORE)

TATE (CONT'D)

We explained things to Beijing, but they refused to accept the evidence on the advice of Russian Ambassador Conte Senethis. We released the data wherever we could, but it won't fuel a change in public opinion unless China runs with it.

INSERT: Tanks and troops pull out of DMZ

TATE (V.O.)

Nevertheless, it gave us the leverage to pull our troops from the Chinese border. The GSTF no longer considers them an active threat, whatever the Secretary-General says.

INSERT: The N.U. Council chamber - much arguing and shoe-thumping.

TATE (V.O.)

Even so, the N.U. has literally buried China in sanctions and embargoes -

Widen to reveal we're in an...

INT. NEWSROOM

...Looking at a graphic window on "Hushed Voices with Dern Magnan." A graphic of the Geothermal Injector detonation replaces the council chamber.

DERN

- over the detonation of a Geothermal Injector, purportedly by Chinese dissidents. But a deteriorated video has surfaced that seems to throw suspicion on Cyprus and a vast conspiracy on N.U. members. I love a good conspiracy, but the Cypriots are denying any involvement.

INSERT: Eleina Rhodon receives a resounding welcome at a Lecture Hall in the Academie Nicosia - Cyprus' premier international university.

DERN (CONT'D)

Ambassador Eleina Rhodon has been declared a national hero for her role in exposing Chinese corruption and complicity with Carbonari.

(MORE)

DERN (CONT'D)

But look at what "Hushed Voices"
has found on closer examination of
this footage.

We close in on the graphic, and an indicator encircles a very blurry Talgat and Aizahn, standing behind Eleina Rhodon. We see a file photo comparison.

DERN (V.O.)

Cade Talgat, the newly promoted Governor of Kazakstahn, is still reported as missing in action. But is this Governor Talgat, captured in the images of Rhodon's acceptance speech? And another missing Kazakh officer, Colonel Aizahn Nurkady?

Dern leans into the camera.

DERN

Have they, too, been mysteriously reincarnated in a convenient new job post? Or are they the product of illegal regeneration, as Governor Talgat was rumored to have used? I'll let you fill in the blanks.

INT. G.S.S. PRAESIDIUM, ADMIRAL'S DINING HALL - CONTINUOUS

TATE

It's a regular incident. What happened with that CIEDA agent? Jianjun, was it?

TANAKA

That's right.

INSERT: A Military tribunal in a futuristic courtroom. Jianjun, in dress uniform, stands for the judge's sentence.

TANAKA (V.O.)

The Deputy Director, Fu Renshu, condemned his actions and demoted him. You have to wonder at his motivation. Was he in on the Cypriot plot, or was he just mad that Jianjun didn't help to expose us?

The gavel comes down with a BANG.

BACK TO SCENE

GRANT

We're going to maintain him as a contact. His memory of us is ghosted, but can be reactivated at the time of our choosing.

TATE

And the man you left behind?

Grant grimaces.

INSERT: Adrian stands, looking a little lost, in a seedy apartment in the Downgate borough of Easy City.

GRANT (V.O.)

Also thanks to Jianjun and Dove's ghost virus, settling into the CIEDA witness protection program. He's a good man, he won't talk.

BACK TO SCENE

TANAKA

We are sorry about that.

TATE

It's your problem, not mine.

GRANT

There's still a lot to do, Benjamin. A lot left undone.

TATE

I want you to understand something, Tennison. I'm indebted to you, both for my appointment and for this recent service. So I'll support you and your crew, and deny all knowledge. But if the existence of your operation is ever proved...

(spears a piece of food)

I'll have to hunt you down.

GRANT

That's fair.

INT. G.S.S. PRAESIDIUM, TORBEN'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

Stefen tilts his wineglass above the white tablecloth and examines it critically. A large meal is laid out. The group gathers around, awaits Stefen's verdict. All except Michael, who prepares the next course is in the kitchenette.

STEFEN

(sips)

A challenging grape. Thick skinned,
mellow. Quite old. And of a quite
excellent quality if I may say so.

(nods at Pope who raises
his glass)

Complex, fruity, but structured.
Cool climate. I'd say South
African. Vergelegen Cabernet,
pressing of 2178.

An uproar of general amazement as Pope reveals the label.
He's right on all counts.

ALEISTER

Unbelievable.

ALLISON

Do another.

POPE

Please, I didn't bring that many on
board.

GLENN

I think one of our first mission
priorities will be to liberate some
fine French reds.

Kendle watches her father sip.

KENDLE

Can I have a sip of your wine?

ANTOINE

Over my dead body.

KENDLE

Dad!

MICHAEL

I've spoken with Commander
Tennison.

Everyone quiets down and looks into the kitchenette where
Michael chops vegetables.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

(continuing)

There was talk of disbanding the
team, as our primary mission
objectives are complete.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

But it was felt some in the company might have unfinished business with Cyprus, and with the idea that we could conscientiously address some of the stickier points of GSTF policy. So we have Benjamin's countenance if we decide to continue as a unit.

ANTOINE

Some of us have given up a lot to be here.

ALEISTER

Sounds like good work.

SARINA

And like most good work, I'm sure we'll find an unending supply of it to be done.

The others nod in general agreement. Michael looks at his team for a beat.

MICHAEL

Good enough for me.

TUNNEL TO:

INT. G.S.S. PRAESIDIUM, ADMIRAL'S DINING HALL - NIGHT

Grant listens in, smiles.

EXT. G.S.S. PRAESIDIUM CARRIER GROUP - DUSK

The fleet sails into the sunset.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END