

SYSTEM REFERENCE MANUAL

The Lobachevsky Initiative //

Subserial Blues

Playtest Edition

INTRODUCTION

You are the SYSTEM. You control the world of the adventure. This is a cyberpunk hacking themed game with rules (Subserial Blues) and a scenario (The Lobachevsky Initiative), which this booklet will help you run. You'll need to improvise, but the information here and in the handouts should give you a good head start. Good luck, have fun.

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MECHANIC REFERENCE

Standard Resolution

1. Player describes **Intention**.
2. Negotiate their **Position** (their current status i.e. Desperate, Normal, also the consequence for failure) and **Effect** (What a success might give them). Confirm they want to proceed.
3. If yes, choose a relevant skill from **CALDAF** (Communications, Athletics, Literacy, Dexterity, Authority, Friendliness). Rough correlation with Charisma, Strength, Intelligence, Dexterity, Wisdom, Empathy.
4. Remember: **Dice pool = number of *s in that skill**. Add 1 dice if you have ample time. Add 1 dice if they expose themselves (worsen position) or lower their aims (worsen effect).
5. Roll all dice, count the highest. **6 = Success, 4-5 = Success with partial consequence, 1-3 = Consequence**
6. They can force a reroll by **burning** that skill (cannot use skill for the rest of the scene).

Combat

1. Same as *Standard Resolution*. However, on failure make them **fold over** one or more corners of their **Skill Record** based on severity of incoming damage. If all corners are folded over, **tear off corners**. If all corners are torn off, character is dead.
2. Unfold corners by resting for 10 minutes to catch their breath in a secure location.

Hacking

1. Ask for their **Payload** (goal). If it's impossible, reject it.
2. Ask for their selectors (**Target, Entry Point, Exploit**). Assign 0-3 dice to each. If they are perfect i.e. corresponding to realistic vulnerabilities the hack works automatically. If they are completely ridiculous i.e. more than one 0 automatically reject it.
3. Set **Difficulty Rating**. 2 for trivial, 3 for normal, 4 for hard.
4. Set **Mistake Rating**. 5 for basically free reign, 3 for tense, 2-1 for patrolled by an active Netsuke.
5. Set **Consequences**. If system is static, possibly nothing or a log that will be reviewed in a few hours or a day. If the system is Netsuke-powered, possibly an alarm will be raised.
6. Ask the hackers to **Confirm**.
7. Run the hacking minigame (**Subserial Interface**). Default Difficulty is 3.

Social Engineering

- Ask for **Leverage** (compromising info or appeal, 1 piece for small favour, 2 for major favour, 3 for rule-breaking or compromising security). Succeed if they have enough, otherwise ask for appropriate **Communications / Authority / Friendliness** roll.

HANDOUTS

- ExploitDB - Gives information on ways to attack Netsukes
- Company Manhunt - Gives information about death of Haskell + Company all-hands
- Neuralyft - Gives information about Neuralyft's operations
- System Map - Gives possible targets for attacking
- ISET/Subserial Interface - Gives rules for social engineering/hacking
- Red Team Handbook - Gives basic hacking/social engineering principles

CHARACTER GENERATION

For one shots, just get a name and rough occupation/background down. Have them allocate points and decide their unique assets on the fly. Otherwise, use these steps in a session 0:

Session 0

1. Choose name, pronouns, current occupation (before you became a hacker).
2. Divide 10 points between the five skills. 1 point = 1 *. No skill can have more than 3 *s at game start.
3. Write down 2-3 previous occupations. Each one is a backup skill.
4. Write down a unique asset or specialty. This gives limited narrative fiat: If you're good at singing, no roll needed to sing.

USING HACKING

This game, by its conception, requires a lot of familiarity with hacking that not all SYSTEMs or players will have. There are two ways to handle this: Handwaving and Rough-sketching.

Handwaving

Use this option if cybersecurity experience is limited. So long as they present some intent of hacking ("I want to get into the employee database"), let them use the hacking minigame. Allocate dice based on assets and prior experience.

Rough-sketching

Use this option if the SYSTEM and the players both have some cybersecurity experience. Instead of asking for a ton of technical details, ask players to walk you through their exploit plan. If it gets too bogged down in implementation detail, remember this is a) the year 2000 and b) features grey-matter brainboxes and cyberpunk megacorps. Cut short any tangled confusion by making a decision on how many dice to allocate based on your experience.

STARTING INFORMATION

Mission Briefing

- Goal is somewhere in Silicon Valley HQ
- They need 1) Access to the HQ; 2) Access to the project; 3) A way to get it out
- You have one week. It is 15th January, 2000.

Manhunt page

- All-hands later that week -> New access passes being minted
- John Haskell dead -> Probable leaker

MAIN LOCATION

Silicon Valley HQ

Description

Resembling a futuristic spaceship, the dome-shaped HQ of NEURALYFT seems to hover above the Silicon Valley landscape, even as it is surrounded by other rival companies. There is a sense of austere grandeur, but also of threat.

Security

- HQ requires gated access passes at every door, security checks you on the way in, high level of cameras
- In the basement underground, surrounded by a Faraday cage, is the airgapped S3 (Sensitive Storage Solution)
- Here there is the netsuke for the world's first General Intelligence (GI)
- You must sneak in past the guard who will compare your name and info on your pass to the access database
- You must then convince the GI not to trip the alarm and allow you to disconnect it, and then sneak it out

Ways in to HQ

- All hands meeting
- Posing as delivery workers
- Posing as maintenance workers
- Getting/making an access pass
- Befriending R&D workers
- Break in (high risk)
- Hack building (high difficulty)

SIDE LOCATIONS

NOTE: Location format is name, location, description, interactions/possible exploits

U.S. Delivery Depot

Austin, Texas

- A brutalist, concrete box with workers and delivery trucks streaming in and out. Cameras valiantly sweep the warehouse floor and there are a few security gates, but sneaking in by mingling with the throngs of workers may be possible.
- **Get hired as a low level delivery/warehouse worker** (Partial access to shipping manifest and a few shipping crates [mostly raw materials or electronics], you know where boxes are going not what's in the boxes, but also monitored on the floor and entered into employee database)
 - **Sneak in by dressing in uniform** (Low likelihood of getting caught but tampering with shipping will cause suspicion, employee card will need to be forged to get around swiping in requirement)
 - **Befriend low-level workers** (Some are undocumented, some want to unionise, most are friendly and willing to help you on your quest, managers are hostile)
 - **Pretend to be chasing up order** (Will get you access to manager and possibly shipping manifest, medium risk as you may be asked to prove identity if you don't succeed on Authority roll)
 - **Hack shipping manifest** (target is a *database*, exploit ought to be *SQL injection* or equivalent, entry points include *help site* or *employee access* [low level employee access required])

REWARDS: Knowledge that Lobachevsky is a Netsuke project due to material requisition, ability to sneak into other branch offices by posing as delivery drivers

Hopper House R&D

Houston, Texas

- A beautiful, geometric building with smooth curves and a roof with plentiful skylights for natural lighting, located in the new Houston Development District littered with high end restaurants, virtual arcades, as well as bars. Everyone coming in and out of the building appears to be young, casually dressed, and highly stressed. There are many smiles but few laughs.

Note: this is where the theoretical work for the Lobachevsky project is being developed. You can't get the actual goal, but you can figure out more about what the project actually is and how it's protected.

- **Befriend the scientists** (Many of them drink at bars after work together, they can't get you an access pass but might be able to give a short tour with a security escort, public areas only, can tell you details about target)

- **Sneak in** (Quite difficult, will require some level of preparation or a suitable distraction, exterior is gated with wire fencing, interiors are mazelike and watched by security, possible routes: fire or blackout)
- **Hack into the intranet** (Entry point is staff login on Web portal, requires social engineering or password snooping, staff directory uses unsanitised database queries so SQL injection can work to retrieve staff IDs, Web portal is managed by contractor with outdated software [KeyKeeper v0.5.7 from 1997] which you can exploit if you look it up on Exploit.DB)
- **Steal keycard** (Requires Cobol Information Engineering breakin or compromising first, no menial jobs are available, tailgating is hard)

REWARDS: Knowledge that Lobachevsky is a Netsuke project aimed at developing the world's first General Intelligence, the fact that the airgapped workshop is underground, warning that it will be done soon, access pass for HQ if you get scientist's keycards

Cobol Information Engineering

San Francisco, California

A tall, New International style office building with four walls of glass gleams under the midday sun, the COBOL INFORMATION ENGINEERING logo plastered prominently on a faux-marble archway. Serious looking consultants in suits stream in and out.

- **Tailgating** (You need a suit but its easy otherwise due to the volume of people working in the building)
- **Pulling fire alarm** (Will evac entire building, giving you time to search the R&D floor or the access pass minting floor)
- **Pose as secure courier** (New access passes are being generated for the Annual Meeting, will require ID and passing a background check)
- **Befriend security engineers** (Will reveal that minted access cards are not secure due to cost-saving measures, they use Mifare encryption that is easy to break if you have access to computing resources, there is an added secret that requires physical access to fake cards however)

REWARDS: IDs for the HQ or any other location if they have compromised the physical card minting machines, ability to duplicate cards otherwise.

Anaheim Recovery Facility

Anaheim, California

A conservative, squat, brick-and-masonry building with a sand-yellow shell and thin dark slits for windows, the Anaheim Recovery Facility seems innocuous but you can only see one way in, with two guards posted immediately inside.

NOTE: No info about Lobachevsky is here but you can access old employee IDs and information, as well as the blueprints for the Silicon Valley HQ.

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- **Forge Requisition Order** (Gets you access to tape stacks under supervision, if you can distract the guard you can access any info you want)
- **Break In** (Physically quite difficult, can pose as maintenance however)

REWARDS: Old employee info for employees you could masquerade as, the design and security features of the S3.

Branch Offices

You see a futuristic looking building sticking out of the landscape, important looking people lining up to access the store and employees milling around the open campus.

- **Pose as customers** (Suit or expensive clothes required, allows you to find out more information about Netsukes in general as well as "new exciting developments in the pipeline")
- **Get hired/Pose as interns** (Suit required, low level interns constantly in need, if you mill around long enough someone will walk up to you and say "get me two coffees on floor 2", if you hold two coffees people will open doors for you)
- **Break in** (Stay behind in a washroom until after hours, gets you free reign of the non-keycarded areas, employees may be staying late)
- **Pose as medical volunteers** (Seattle only, gets you in and gives you temp access pass to facilities but requires you to take brain scans, can slip out by asking for bathroom or causing distraction)

REWARDS: Access pass for company All-hands, rumours about Lobachevsky

FINAL TIPS

- **Run with the players' plans** - The players are your allies. Often they'll think of things you didn't.
- **Get interested players** - They should have, at least, watched Mr. Robot. They should also be interested in reading handouts/manuals!
- **Fail Forward** - Always show some kind of vulnerability or flaw that allows them to continue after failing. Unless, of course, they screw themselves over.
- **Guide the conversation** - Don't get bogged down in technical details. The hacking minigame is here to help you when discussions get out of hand.