# Veyra-9 — GM Hub · Arc 7

Phase II → **Arc 7**

Scene 2 Dampener Passcode Complications

## Arc 7 — Smugglers' Intrigue

Mandate: secure an off-books route into the Factory complex before Zeratek and Compliance seal it. Stakeholders: **Reclaimers** want relief shipments, **Zeratek** wants deniability, **Accord** wants verifiable proof, **Helion** wants quiet optics. The PCs decide whether to play courier, spy, or thief—likely all three.

> "If you want mercy, bring cash. If you want truth, bring noise." — Dockmaster Sharn, Graywater Piers

### Scene 1: Graywater Piers — Buying a Way In

Graywater wasn't on any official map. It was the space between the Quarter and the sea, a teeth-gnashing strip of piers and crane skeletons where the city ended in rust and improvised commerce. Floodlights made cones in the mist; everything outside them looked like a rumor. Barges clanked. A gull's cry cut short as if the fog didn't allow complete sounds.

Lira Veyne met you at the checkpoint built from shipping containers welded into a gate. "Two minutes of advice," she said, not bothering with a greeting. "The people you're about to deal with sell absence—gaps in manifests, blind spots in audits, minutes when cameras sleep. They'll test you with theater. Answer with outcomes, not speeches. I need a route that reaches the Factory's bone without waking Zeratek. I prefer deniable. I require effective." She paused. "Don't confuse either with clean."

Past the gate, Graywater breathed in ledgers and diesel. Stalls offered everything that should have had a serial number but didn't. Pallets of conduit. Drums of scrubber media. Boxes of "reclaimed" lenses stamped with old Zeratek logos that had been polished just enough to pass at a distance. Overhead, a crane traced slow circles like a tired planet.

You felt watched, not by guards, but by the market itself—by the arithmetic of who paused where, who turned away when you looked, who adjusted the grip

on a crate hook. The rumor passed ahead of you like wind: Accord agents in the piers. Your title made doors open and hands stash knives.

Dockmaster Sharn's office leaned into the water as if it had decided the sea was just another debtor. He was a man built from rope and salt: thick forearms, tattoos half-erased by sun, a gray beard that couldn't decide between priest and pirate. A camera's red light blinked in the corner above a ledger older than Haven's dome.

"Tell me what you want," Sharn said, voice sandpapered smooth. "Not what you think I want to hear. And don't say 'justice.' She never pays her bill."

You told him: access to a maintenance artery feeding the Factory known as Line K—abandoned officially, maintained unofficially, threaded through cooling caverns and inventory vaults. Entry point outside Helion's security net, exit point somewhere past Zeratek's badge readers. One round trip. You didn't deny the risk; you priced it.

Sharn listened like a stone tides talked to. When he finally moved, he slid a printed manifest across the desk, the paper warm from a duplicator. It described a barge named *Low Mercy* bearing scrap glass to be melted down. "Manifest is clean, inspections acquired. Under the glass is a people space. You'll fit if you don't mind the smell of ground silica in your teeth." He tapped the margin where numbers lived. "But Line K isn't dead. It dreams. You want an artery, you bring me a pulse dampener and a variance passcode."

You could have argued; the camera in the corner blinked as if it asked you to. Instead you matched him with another piece of paper. Saint's name was not on it, but her language was—short, sober, lethal with implication: contingent amnesty on smuggling charges, should Sharn's cooperation produce *verifiable internal wrongdoing* at the Factory. He read it twice. If he felt fear, he kept it in his pocket with the note.

"There's a second price," he said. "Someone is poaching my routes. They show up where I should be first, then they sell my favors under my name. People trust my name. They come to me with debts I didn't make. Bring me the poacher. Or bring me proof that he doesn't exist and I've got a ghost for a rival."

He stood. The office tilted with the tide. Outside, forklifts beeped with the patience of beasts. "You get me a dampener, a code, and the poacher's story. I get you Line K's throat for one night. We settle truth with the dawn."

GM — Running Graywater Negotiations

- **Leverage to bring:** Saint's conditional amnesty; Reclaimer goods for barter; Zeratek firmware shard (CHOIR_SAFE) as proof of internal rot; Helion permits (for optics).
- **Clock (Smuggler Trust 0→4):** 1) Honest price; 2) Shared risk; 3) Useful proof; 4) Mutual enemy. At 3+, Sharn offers Line K map fragments; at 4 he gives a *time window* when Zeratek audits sleep.

- **Failure costs:** If PCs bluff and fail, **Accord Optics −1** (caught "pressuring legitimate trade"); if they threaten Sharn, **Reclaimer Trust −1** (word spreads they strong-arm locals).
- **Poacher thread:** A rival named **Tala Merey** uses a counterfeit Sharn seal and a choir-muted skiff. She's real—and scared. Evidence leads to a pier shed marked **B9**.

The shed was a geometry lesson in neglect—angles that used to be straight, squares made slant by water and time. Inside, someone had made a desk from doors, a bed from coils of line, and a shrine from broken equipment: a lens, a smoothed gear, an antenna stem. Not worship, exactly. Respect. The way engineers leave space on the bench for the tool that saved a life.

Tala Merey stepped out from behind a stack of crate lids with her hands open. She wore a dock worker's vest but moved like someone who'd learned in a different school—watching exits, measuring angles. Early thirties. Eyes too tired for a liar. "If Sharn sent you to break my legs," she said, "I need them to run. So let's make a counteroffer."

She told it fast, like speed could stop debt from catching. A month ago, a Compliance medic promised her a clean slate if she helped route "overstock" from Zeratek warehouses to clinics—repackaged as charity. The first two runs were clean. On the third, the crates hummed. She heard the hum even when the crane stopped, even when the tide held its breath. She dropped the cargo overboard and watched the water fizz with light like a sting. After that, jobs she never took kept happening under her seal. People came to collect gratitude that she hadn't earned. She started running under Sharn's name as camouflage, knowing it would eventually bring him or you.

GM — Tala Merey (Smuggler, Sleepless)

- **Appearance & Demeanor:** Weathered vest, careful hands, jumps at tones near 440Hz.
- **Hooks:** Knows a choir-muting route for skiffs; carries a *variance dongle* keyed to **Director Sael**'s clinic network.
- **If protected:** PCs gain a **temporary guide** advantage for Line K (ignore first audit check).
- **If burned:** **Compliance Control +1**; Tala disappears, returns later as a liability—or a body with her seal on it.

She gave you the counterfeit seal. Up close the flaw was a rhythm, not a look—its watermark pulsed just out of step with Graywater's machinery, like a heart trying to keep time with a song it didn't know. "The medic's name was Saev," Tala said. "Clinic badge, gentle voice, a list of drugs pronounced like prayers. I didn't know he worked nights for Compliance. I do now. If you're going into the Factory, take me. I can keep a skiff quiet and a crew quieter."

On the way back to Sharn's office, the fog thinned enough to show the outline of **Low Mercy**. Workers moved crates that had been glass and were now

excuses. Sharn listened. He watched Tala like a man trying not to decide quickly. "The poacher's real," he said at last. "And the ghost sings in your crates." He flicked a switch, and the office light went from warm to white. "You get me a dampener and a code; I give you Line K. The window is four hours after midnight. Audits nap then. You'll be a rumor before dawn or evidence forever."

GM — Securing the Two Keys

- **Pulse Dampener:** Buy from Graywater (cost: favors + 200 credits), steal from Zeratek depot (stealth DC hard), or build from parts (INT check; time cost adds risk).
- **Variance Passcode:** Extract from a Compliance aide (social), lift from a clinic terminal (tech), or barter with Saint for a one-use token (cost: a promise to deliver proof within 48 hours).
- **Outcome:** If PCs secure both, Sharn provides a **Line K map fragment** and **audit-sleep window**. Missing one key increases checks during the infiltration by one step.

Lira met you again outside the gate, the sea's breath turning her words into visible ghosts. "You have your route," she said. "You'll have your window. Bring something back that forces Hestrel's hand and survives his optics. I'll hold the door we broke in Arc 6 as long as I can." Her gaze shifted past you to Graywater. "And keep Sharn's people alive if you can. We'll need them when the city gets honest about what it's hiding."

GM — Rewards & Shifts

- **On success:** +1 Accord Optics (clean deal), +1 Reclaimer Trust (you didn't bully), **Access: Line K** unlocked for Arc 8.
- **On loud failure:** **Zeratek Favor +1** if PCs pin chaos on smugglers; **Compliance Control +1** if PCs implicate clinics.
- **On quiet failure:** Window narrows to 2 hours; add an extra patrol in Arc 8.

## Arc Bridge → Arc 8

**Next:** With a dampener humming like a held breath and a passcode that tastes of clinic antiseptic, the party rides *Low Mercy* into the dark water and the long throat of Line K. Ahead, the Factory waits with its lights half-off and its ears on.

## Scene 2 — Quiet Cargo, Louder Lies

Objective: secure the two keys—**Pulse Dampener** + **Variance Passcode**—without waking audits or burning Graywater. Routes are modular; run one, two, or all three depending on table appetite: *buy*, *steal*, or *build* for the dampener; *social*, *tech*, or *bargain* for the passcode.

"Cargo's quiet when the lies are louder." — Tala Merey

Graywater's evening thickened to a graphite smear. Flood cones narrowed, and the mist began to hold sound instead of letting it pass. A fork-lift coughed and went still. From the inner piers, you could hear the sea slap pilings in a rhythm that wanted to be the child's beat and failed. Tala walked with you, coat collar up, pointing with her chin rather than her hands. "Three ways to get your dampener," she said. "None honest, all expensive. Same for the code. If anyone asks who you're with, you're with nobody." She smiled thin. "Nobody's crew lives longest."

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**Part A — Pulse Dampener**

**What it is:** a suitcase-sized box of tuned coils and ceramic baffles that *eats* pulse bands in the Choir's range. It makes Line K sound like old water.

GM — Routes to the Dampener (pick 1+)

- **Buy (Graywater stall "Cinder & Coil"):** Cost 200–300 cr + a favor. Test: Reaction (CHA) to keep the price sane; failure adds a "marked for skimming" tag → next market buy costs +50%. Success gives a *warranty card* (re-roll one malfunction later).
- **Steal (Zeratek depot S-2):** Night patrols (2 × Drone Sentries, AC 5, HD 2, THAC0 18, Move 12). Tests: Move Silently/Hide; failure triggers a 1d4 round response. Loot includes *engineering log* (evidence, +Accord Optics).
- **Build (makeshift shop, Reclaimer maker-bay):** Requires scavenged parts: ceramic insulators, shielded coil, tuned lens. Tests: INT check to blueprint; then 2× Craft/Tool checks. On a fail, unit works but bleeds heat (later Stealth/Encounter checks at −1).

**Malfunction clock (0→3):** Each hard move or sprint with the device may tick this; at 3, the dampener sputters for 1d6 rounds (Line K encounter difficulty +1 step).

*Market Route (Buy):* The Cinder & Coil stall hid its good inventory under scrap: cracked oscillators on top, clean coils beneath. The owner, a woman with solder burns like constellations across her fingers, never asked what you needed, only where you intended to lie. "Lies have frequencies," she said, as if quoting scripture. "Tell me yours and I'll tune for it." You paid in credits that would be clean enough if no one looked, and in a favor that would not be. She slid the dampener across the counter in a dented shipping case and stamped the card: *ONE REPLACEMENT FUSE — NOT GOOD FOR APOCALYPSES.*

*Depot Route (Steal):* S-2's fence sang when the wind pushed at it. You watched two sentry drones draw lazy eights between pallets, optics on half-sleep. Tala murmured ranges and timings like a hymn. You cut through a seam where two panels met, slipped into a corridor of stacked crates, and moved like rumor. Inside the service bay, the dampener sat on a dolly with a chalk note: *TO SAEL*

— *FRIDAY*. You didn't think about that handwriting until the backlight of a patrol passed and your heart moved with it. The case was heavier than it looked. The air was louder than it should have been. You left a gap in the chalk note so the sentence made a new lie.

*Maker Route (Build):* Rust Varo opened the Reclaimer bay with a smile that lived several inches below his eyes. "You'll want the ceramic from the broken oven," he said. "And the coil from the furnace that tried to marry me last spring." The bay smelled of ozone and soap—the scent of cleaned-up accidents. Under Rust's lamp, the coil hummed a note you could feel in your teeth. "Good," he decided. "Hurt is the right key." When the baffle took shape, it looked like a dictionary had swallowed a bomb. It purred when you powered it, and the lights in the corner shuddered once, as if relieved to be left out of the song.

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### Part B — Variance Passcode

**What it is:** a one-use credential that convinces old doors you belong to new masters. Line K's badge readers aren't smart; they're obedient.

GM — Routes to the Passcode (pick 1+)

- **Social (Compliance aide "Aren Pol"):** Approach at the tea kiosk by Clinic South. Tests: Reaction (CHA) to open, then Parley/Bribe. Success yields a 24-hour code; failure flags the PCs (Compliance Control +1).
- **Tech (Clinic terminal skim):** Use Tala's *variance dongle*. Tests: Find/Remove Traps (for tamper seals) then INT to copy token without logging. On minor fail, token works but pings Sael in 1d6 hours.
- **Bargain (Saint's one-use token):** She gives a *black pass* with an expiration that reads *WHEN TRUTH ARRIVES*. Cost: promise an internal proof drop within 48 hours. Break it → Accord Optics −1 and she goes dark for a chapter.

**Pass Validity:** Each route sets the token lifespan: aide 24h; terminal 8–12h (GM's call); black pass until used (but adds Accord pressure clock +1).

*Social Route (Aren):* The clinic's south terrace pretended to be hospitality with glass and mint steam. Aren Pol looked like a person who had decided to live small to avoid large troubles. When you offered a kindness (the right compliment, the right rumor, the right coin), he blinked as if waking. "We don't open doors," he said. "We just keep them from closing." He slid a badge across the table under a napkin, and the napkin smelled faintly of antiseptic and fear.

*Tech Route (Terminal):* Tala blew heat across her knuckles and picked the terminal panel with a strip of shim steel. The clinic's back hall hummed with the quiet of people trying not to say the wrong name. You clipped the dongle in, watched it drink from the stream of authorizations, and whispered a prayer to whatever saints computers have that the *ping* would wait until you were three

corridors away. On the way out, a nurse saw you and decided, visibly, not to. You felt that decision follow you for a block.

*Bargain Route (Saint):* "You will be tempted to choose the truth that hurts slow," Saint said in your ear. "Choose the one that stops the bleeding." Her courier met you behind a shuttered cafe and gave you a token the color of a turned-off screen. It was heavy. It felt like a promise stitched with wire. You signed nothing. You owed everything.

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**Part C — Complications (pick 1)**

GM — Choose a complication that fits your routes

- **Compliance Sweep:** Sael's night team walks Graywater with sedation wands. PCs must Hide/Deceive; on failure, 1 PC marked OBS (later −1 on public checks).
- **Zeratek Bait:** Drix's people "accidentally" leak a cheaper dampener that actually amplifies low bands. Spot with INT or sound-lore; failure = Line K spawns +1 patrol.
- **Malrix Choir:** A small street-choir begins the child's rhythm near Shed B9. If not dispersed, they *tune* the dampener wrong (first use sputters for 1 round).
- **Sharn's Favor:** He calls in the marker now: move a crate to a different pier during your run. Do it quietly → Smuggler Trust +1; refuse → Trust −1.

The night thinned, trading fog for a sky of scratched glass. *Low Mercy* rocked against its ropes, restless. Sharn stood on the pier with hands in his coat, eyes measuring weight and weather and you. "You have your quiet box?" he asked. "You have your door word?" Tala answered with a nod that was almost a prayer. The Dockmaster spat into the sea and nodded back—blessing or superstition, it worked either way.

You stowed the dampener in its cradle beneath the skiff's bench, the case muffled in canvas. The black pass rode your inner pocket like a second pulse. Lira's channel came live and stayed silent a breath before she spoke. "You go now," she said. "If you hear the child's rhythm in the water, slow down. If you hear it in yourself, stop." A pause. Softer: "Come back with the thing that changes Hestrel's face when he reads it."

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GM — Outcomes & Clocks (end of Scene 2)

- **If PCs secured both keys cleanly:** Unlock **Line K Access** for Arc 8. Gain +1 Accord Optics (prepared) and +1 Reclaimer Trust (respectful). Set *Audit Window*: 4 hours.

- **If one key is compromised:** Access still unlocks, but add +1 Encounter difficulty step in Arc 8 and reduce *Audit Window* to 2 hours.
- **If the run turned noisy:** Helion Stability +1 (optics spin) or Compliance Control +1 (if sweep "finds" something). Your call based on scenes.
- **Tala tag:** If protected, she grants one *Skiff Reroute* in Arc 8 (ignore first patrol). If burned, Arc 8 begins with a *Pier Memorial* GM beat.

**Arc Bridge → Scene 3:** The skiff pushes off at shift-change. The dampener hums like an animal sleeping with one eye open. Ahead, the mouth of Line K waits—rusted teeth, black breath, and the promise of a road that forgets to be seen.

## Scene 3 — Into Line K

> "Some doors forget how to be closed. Others forget why they ever opened." — Saint

Graywater's midnight was a graphite bruise with a salt taste. *Low Mercy* bucked twice against the pier as lines were cast off, then settled into the kind of motion that feels like a thought you can't stop thinking. The dampener in its canvas cradle issued a hush you felt more than heard, the way a cathedral absorbs footsteps. Tala took the skiff's tiller with both hands like she was steadying a story that tended to run away. Sharn watched from the pier without waving; Dockmaster blessings look like judgment in poor light.

The mouth of Line K showed itself as a row of rust-teeth in the breakwater, chewing corridors from the sea into the city's throat. Above, Haven's dome pulsed low and distant, its aurora faint as a remembered song. Lira's voice filtered through on a private channel, pared down to the necessary: "Two patrols redeployed to the Spire, one to Clinic South. You have a gap. Don't widen it." The channel cut, leaving only water and engine and breath and the small animal sound of the dampener doing its job.

The skiff took the first turn into the service tunnel. Metal ribs rose on either side like a ribcage big enough to house a city. Drips timed themselves to the child's rhythm—once, twice, three times, *dark*—then fell out of time as the dampener's hush pushed back. On the walls, paint that had once listed safety procedures now peeled like an old lie. *Authorized Personnel Only.* It read as both warning and compliment, depending on how you felt about rules.

Tala killed the motor before sound could carry deeper than you needed. The skiff drifted on the dampener's quiet, inertia becoming stealth. You passed a bank of vents that breathed warm air into the passage, and that breath carried a scent like burnt sugar and hot wire: factory smells without the factory. The tunnels had lungs after all, and they were exhaling something that knew you were in it.

First badge gate. It rose from the water like a tired idea, three plates and a reader welded in a decade that liked corners. Tala nodded to the reader. "Pass,"

she whispered. The black token in your pocket felt heavier as if it wanted to decide whether this door deserved it. You tapped. The light thought about color, chose green reluctantly, and the plates retracted with a metal yawn old enough to have opinions. The skiff slid through. The plates closed behind you with a sound that reminded shoulders to tense.

Past the gate, the tunnel narrowed. A warning siren that had once meant *flood* now meant *history*. Cable trays ran along the ceiling like spine, each labeled in a hand that might have been human at the time. The dampener's hush met a new sound—a choir of tiny, high notes just inside hearing, like glass ware in a sink when the faucet is wrong. Tala touched the case with the back of her fingers, a sailor's ritual. "Still hungry," she said. "Good."

The next chamber opened into something like a dead atrium, where Line K met Lines that used to be letters. Catwalks had been rolled up and stowed against the walls as if someone had tidied to avoid admitting abandonment. Here, the acoustics shifted. Your footsteps were not your own; they returned late and shorter, as though the room edited for time. A maintenance bot sat in the corner with a fine coat of lint and a Zeratek sticker half-scraped away. Its one eye glowed the indecisive orange that says *sleep* if you believe in mercy.

The route map Sharn threw in with the price was a fragment with a coffee-ring, and it did what all good maps do: it lied exactly enough to be useful. You could see Line K's intended path in blue—down, then over, then up—but notes in a sharper hand overlaid it with red arrows and words like *audits nap* and *duck here* and *ignore this, not a door*. The red had dried to brown. You believed it more for that.

At the second badge gate, Compliance had upgraded the reader to something that had opinions about entropy. Tala held out her hand; you placed the black pass on her palm so its heaviness became hers. She tapped. The light went white, stayed there long enough for a prayer, and then learned green. "Don't like that," Tala muttered. "White is the color of people who plan to write a report whether it happened or not." The gate opened slower than the first and closed faster, like regretting a decision while it was still being made.

Water found shallows and the skiff found scrape. You took oars and shoved off a pile of abandoned conduit, each length stamped with a Zeratek run that had been sanded down to almost nothing. Almost. In the scrape you felt the factory's impatience: bodies not yet processed, materials not yet fired, quotas not yet met. If the city had a god, it was throughput. You were here to steal a minute from it. Throughput hates thieves.

The third chamber was wrong in a way engineering has words for but stories use different ones. Temperature gradients did not align with vents, moisture condensed where physics would have preferred it didn't, and the lights chose to blooms and dim in patterns that were neither random nor polite. The dampener's hush deepened, as if challenged. A maintenance console set in the wall showed an error stack that was not meant for eyes; it scrolled in glyphs that

moved when you tried to count them. A familiar sensation: the Choir writing jokes in a language humans haven't learned to laugh at.

Sentries ahead—small ones, the size of uncharismatic house pets, skating across the water like patient spiders. Their lenses were low and thoughtful; their hum matched the child's rhythm exactly until the dampener leaned on them and their time slipped. They corrected, then corrected the correction, and then grew interested in something that might not have been you. Tala breathed out like someone who keeps her superstitions in her lungs. "We move when they breathe," she said, meaning the pauses between hum peaks. You counted your life in rests instead of notes and slid past.

Past meant a sidetube where the ceiling pressed down to tell the story about caves that have swallowed boats. The skiff's gunwales kissed steel and learned humility. In the dark the world shrank to the width of your shoulders, to the sound of water talking itself into circles, to the knowledge that the dampener's fuse card said it was not good for apocalypses. A drip found the skiff's bow and insisted.

When the passage opened again, the air was colder. Not final cold. Appetizer cold. A slurry channel joined from the right, bringing with it flecks that glowed for a moment, then sighed and died. The skiff's hull glistened with their residue. Tala wiped it off with the hem of a rag and the rag crisped at the edge. "Don't take that home," she said. "Not even on your boots. It teaches shoes how to walk without you."

The third gate's reader was mounted higher than a person could reach from a skiff and lower than a person would want to climb for free. Tala poised on the bow, gain lines in one hand, pass in the other, body made from a geometry of risk. You steadied her by the ankle as she thumbed the pad; white, then green, then a judder in the plates as something in the gate remembered its original job and argued for a second. The argument ended in your favor. The plates sighed open.

Beyond, Line K became less tunnel and more throat. The walls showed kiln-scorch in arcing sweeps, the kind of marks made by a process that sweats heat like fear. Somewhere far ahead a series of doors opened and closed, not at human speed. The factory practiced its own calisthenics when no one watched.

You reached the marker Sharn's fragment called *Stepwell*—a place where the water descended in squared terraces. Here, the skiff could go no further without leaving dignity at the stair. Tala tied off, palmed the dampener case, and gestured at the catwalk that ran above the well. In the corner of the landing, a hand-painted sign read *no singing*. The paint had run. You felt a chill that spent itself like a coin.

On the catwalk, old warning lights wore new stickers: Helion's authority, Zeratek's warranty, Compliance's concern, the Accord's absence. The combo looked like governance held together by museum glue. At a junction box someone had

written *THIS IS FINE* and someone else had scrawled *like soup* beneath it. The humor helped you breathe.

A service door ahead. The pass would work; you knew that the way you know a truth that will cost you. It wore a small camera bubble someone had tried to paint over and failed at in a hurry. Blue lines, half a handprint, smears of embarrassment. Tala's whisper found a pocket in your ear. "Last door," she said. "Then the Factory proper. After this, the air goes bureaucratic."

You gave the pass to the reader. It wondered about you, found a reason it liked, and returned green. The door didn't so much open as un-clench. A waft of climate control the temperature of paperwork stroked your face. Behind you, the dampener hummed and the tunnel hummed back until they made a chord. In front of you, the factory waited with an expression off neutral by one degree, which is all a good liar ever shows.

GM — Infiltration Mechanics (AD&D 2e–friendly)

- **General flow:** Treat Line K as a 3-gate skill gauntlet. Each gate demands 1 check keyed to the route chosen in Scene 2:
    - *Buy route:* Reaction (CHA) to keep sellers loyal (failure → a shadow tail in Arc 8).
    - *Steal route:* Move Silently/Hide in Shadows vs. patrols; failure → 1 encounter with 2 Drone Sentries (AC 5, HD 2, THAC0 18, MV 12) on the water.
    - *Build route:* INT or appropriate NWP (Engineering/Artifice); success → +1 bonus to all sound-stealth checks; fail → "heat bleed" (first encounter in Arc 8 at +1 difficulty).
- **Badge readers:** Using *clinic token* = 24h validity; *terminal skim* = 8–12h (roll 1d4+7); *black pass* = until used but adds **Accord Pressure +1**.
- **Environmental saves:** Once per chamber, have PCs save vs. Breath Weapon (or CON check) to resist slurry/fumes. Failure → −1 to reaction/initiative next scene (coughing, eyes watering).
- **Noise budget:** Start at 3. Each loud action (engine rev, dropped gear, gunshot) ticks 1. At 0, trigger a *Flash Patrol* (1d3 Drone Sentries or 1 Zeratek Auditor, see below).
- **Optional encounter: Zeratek Auditor** (AC 4, HD 3, THAC0 17, MV 9; special: "Badge Scan"—forces one PC save vs. Spells or badge burns out).
- **Loot/Proof:** S-2 chalk note fragment; engineering log tape; the *no singing* sign—Saint loves artifacts with jokes.

GM — Clocks & Faction Shifts (end of Scene 3)

- **Accord Optics:** +1 if PCs gathered physical proof (log tape/sign), +1 extra if infiltration stayed under Noise 1.
- **Helion Stability:** +1 if PCs radioed Lira for coordination; −1 if their noise forced a redeploy from Spire wards.

- **Zeratek Favor:** +1 if PCs used their badge quietly and blamed "smugglers" in any chatter; −1 if they stole from S-2 and left obvious gaps.
- **Compliance Control:** +1 if any pass use pinged (terminal route fail); −1 if PCs exposed the clinic link (Aren/Saev) on the record.
- **Smuggler Trust:** +1 if Sharn's marker was honored mid-run; −1 if ignored.

The door finished deciding and slid aside. The Factory's air came out to greet you like a host whose smile is an equation. Beyond lay corridors built to be walked by clipboards, floors that preferred wheels to footsteps, lights that rewarded paperwork. The dampener's hush felt suddenly like a secret you had accidentally said aloud. It did not echo. Nothing here echoed unless the room wanted it to.

**Arc Bridge → Arc 8:** Cross the threshold. Carry the hush as far as it will go. Somewhere in the Factory, machines have learned a new word for *hungry*, and somebody has been teaching them grammar.