INCOMPLETE OUTLINE

1. Part of the team leaves to kill Adrian Vue, part stays behind to work in the Net and prepare supplies for moving.
   1. Troni introduced.
2. Elliot, Rafael, and Habib drive to Vue’s safehouse in Kanto from Lower Kanto.
   1. Discussion of Datism ensues.
   2. Discussion of double-signals ensures.
3. Manoj discusses him and “Apollo” creating Vue’s new Netist team after his costly liquidation of Technica resources. Vue understands Manoj’s plan but doesn’t reveal anything.
4. Manoj asks Adrian to visit him and Apollo in program space for a demonstration. They go to a hill and Manoj showcases one of his personal programs, quick-crypt, by asking Adrian to complete the device with him and Apollo. Adrian’s Netists attempt to break into the quick-crypt room but fail.
   1. A discussion follows about how the Net works.
5. Adrian agrees and asks what payment he expects. Manoj and Elliot give whatever answer.

The server room Elliot Fetterman overlooked was red-hot, the air perturbed by the heat, no light other than the glow of near-molten radiators. The array was sunken down into the ground, slightly, and his view of it is obscured by the reinforced metal framing of a thick acrylic window, tilted overlooking the expanse. Each box flickers and the whole valley of computers fades into the dark fog of the background.

Elliot and his crew have been hunkered down for the past few weeks, preparing for an assignment. Equivalent to one hundred million liters; in fact, it is the biggest gig in the last six months. Manoj Ramanathan and Elliot are in the Net, working on confirming the target’s person one last time. Manoj lays unconscious, elongated by his thin frame, in a cushioned reclining chair. His arm is plugged in from his wrist to a “portable” neural-modem, his favorite one in fact, which in reality weighs three hundred pounds. The tens of unorganized wires protruding from his wrist resemble red muscle fibers.

Elliot, on the other hand, has his wireless ten-pound neural-modem in a backpack, plugged into the back of his head; he’s refused any enhancements beyond the standard neural-interface, so he only has the standard connection available. Unlike Manoj, he relaxes sitting on the edge of the window, one leg on it as he looks over the quiet inferno of the computers. He is scruffy and stubbly, with unkempt hair and round red-tinted glasses, which he actually wears with prescription lenses despite the availability of cheap neural-vision replacements. Manoj on the other hand spares no expense in enhancing his body: neural-vision, synthetic tissue, hardware-based memory failsafes, and everything in between.

Out of the dark, Rafael Bosak reveals himself, his face dominated by thick eyebrows and a messy beard, and begins talking, absentmindedly, “Elliot, get your stuff, let's go; Habib’s your escort, you’ve got the comms with Manoj. He’ll handle the rest on the Net end, don’t keep yourself too deep in now, just enough to be there just in case.”

“Alright, nothing’s changed then? All good?”

“Yes. Say your goodbyes to this spot, it’s great—super fast too, but we’re gonna move right after this.” He, too, looks out the window at the computers, humming in their splendor. A large cable pierces through a hole in the concrete conjoining into a single databus that runs to the core of the data center. Its end split to all the Netists haphazardly, including Elliot’s wireless setup. It’s the best connection to the Net possible.

Elliot gets up from the sill and walks over to Rafael, patting Manoj on the shoulder, before moving towards the door of the maintenance room past Rafael. Provisions litter the place, now long consumed and discarded in the small room. On the stepped concrete floor, two others are busying themselves. Habib Khalil awaits at the door as the two others arrive, his presence alone putting hair on the chest of the rest: muscular, clean-shaven, and with styled hair; he holds his rifle—an ancient design: single-shot and bolt-action with a lensed scope, no computers or electronics anywhere. All three walk into the corporate maintenance hallways of the data center, one of hundreds throughout Kernel handling the bulk of computation for the Net. The hallways are plain gray, concrete, and claustrophobic; dimly lit by faint red LED strips.

As the door closes, Anita Singh wishes good luck to them before she and Jordan Hayes return to the Net, delegated to other, unrelated tasks. The door closes with an airtight squeal and locks remotely as Rafael enters a passcode on his tablet. After a few minutes walking down the twisting hallways, the three arrive at their tunnel, hidden behind a tarp marked “caution”, surrounded by cones and tape. No one wanders these halls, except maybe every fifty-or-so years. The three are quiet with anticipation, crawling out of the small tunnel to the larger tunnel of Kernel’s ventilation system, which resides above most server rooms. Near the tunnel’s exit is a ladder leading out to the alley above.

The three men push the man-hole cover aside and climb out into the zig-zagging alleyways of Lower Kans, a few hundred feet from a small arterial road. Rafael’s car is about a mile away from the tunnel, parked next to a small Kernelese restaurant which serves only local, hydroponically grown produce at a steep premium. The car is tan colored, small, and mostly cheap plastic. Most people in Lower Kans and the nearby districts travel by metro or hydrogen scooters.

“1021 West Morley, Kans,” Rafael says, “it’s a forty-five minute drive from here.” He reaches into his pocket to grab his tablet again, unlocking his car and vanguarding the route.

“From all we’ve gathered, he has no enhancements beyond the standard neural-interface, right? An old air-powered shot will do the trick, silent too,” Habib states rhetorically, now in the car’s dusty interior, cleaning his rifle excessively and loading an air-cartridge bullet. The car moves silently, powered by hydrogen, but it vibrates and shows its age nevertheless. It’s make, disintegrated during the Great Data War; it’s model, out of production for at least one-hundred years.

“You only get one shot, Habib, make it count. Manoj and Elliot have been working on this for four weeks now,” Rafael says, while waving his hand to the back seat where Habib sits. He drives through the narrow streets of Lower Kans, where he and the others have been for some weeks.

“Yes yes,” Habib continues cleaning his rifle.

The streets are dusty like the car, and near the outskirts of Kans, the buildings are short, no more than five stories, all plain, concrete, and sandy in color. Ancient cellular spires litter the rooftops, and small hydrogen-powered scooters litter shop fronts and residences. The streets are likewise packed with honking scooters. Wires criss-cross between buildings, some running underground towards the Net’s infrastructure. Out of all the districts in the city of Kernel, Kans is the most populous, mostly because of the district’s center where the heart of the city lies. West Morley resides in this core, affluent and glittery.

“You guys should visit Herresh! Lower Kans basically looks like it nowadays, although we are on the outskirts of the district,” Rafael jokes. He was born in Herresh—a seemingly permanent refugee camp formed after the Great Data War—and was never given a neural-interface before birth. Because of this, he resents his parents, becoming a devout Dataist, even after the actions and against the final wishes of his grandfather, Aleks Bosak.

“Don’t go on about your whole spiel about Dataism, Rafael,” Elliot looks out his window to his right and sees some people playing with a ball, seemingly un-interfaced, “Europe was glassed a hundred years ago, and the Dataists caused it as far as I’m concerned,” Elliot says this to annoy the ideologue, not actually caring initially.

“Your capacity for nuance amazes me, Elliot,” Rafael says, gripping the wheel tighter, “now, our corporate target you can agree must go, correct?”

“Of course, the rich bozo just acquired half the Net infrastructure in Kans; and we’re being paid handsomely by Technica anyways. We get to keep the datakeys too, per the contract. Weird, but I guess they see taking out Vue as more important than getting back the stuff he took, which wasn’t more than a few small load-bearing data centers, I’m pretty sure.” The car pulls around a corner, lit by the dim red glow of the street lights just awakening as the sun sets. “We can of course just keep the datakeys for ourselves. I’d prefer to actually keep them (and I bet everyone else too), but I know you wouldn’t allow that, mister righteous one.”

From the backseat, Habib retorts, “And what would you have us do with them, Elliot? Just turn the servers into our personal fief? Of course you would—the consequences of not holding yourself accountable.” Habib shares many views with Rafael, despite not being a Netist like Elliot and Manoj; and Anita, although she is still new to the crew. Rafael and Habib both consider themselves Dataists.

“I’d be a benevolent dictator.” Elliot says half joking.

“Oh really,” Habib laughs at this, “so what about the other guy, would he not be considered such?”

Elliot continues with conviction this time, ironically, “No, and we would be able to accomplish a significant amount with complete control: first, with control over the infrastructure exclusively, we could organize expansion projects easily. Just think about where we were, that corporate load-bearing data center. Could someone have built that without exclusive control over its datakeys? Most certainly not. Second, who would we even give the datakeys to? Just random people on the Net, over itself; or would we distribute them ourselves in reality. Third, the money we could make with the datakeys could be used to build up the Net, and it would be a lot more than if we just gave them away to random people without the capacity to make that much money.

“Tell me what good have the Dataists done in the quest for the liberation of the Net? The Great Data War? A glassed Europe? Rafael would know, and the ‘data’ is already free now, and wasn’t that the primary mission of the Dataists? I can go to any library server and find any text, film, photo, schematic, die, or whatever instantly, and with no restrictions, per international law, itself formed from your compromise with the Anti-Dataist corporations and so on: to let them keep control over the infrastructure in exchange for them giving up their mass cold-storage projects. What’ve we done concerning the Net to hold ourselves with such high regard—so morally righteous?”

Habib continues before Rafael can interject. “The Dataists have always believed in both data freedom and non-corporate control over the Net. You’ve failed to explain how your control would differ at all from his. What stops him from being so benevolent like you? If we can so easily be as such, then why not try to convince him to act as such? No, the idea of a ‘benevolent dictator’ means putting the Net in the hands of someone you must trust, and I’d prefer to have it so no one person has the capacity to control everything.”

“You guys are gonna end up glassing the rest of the world ignoring compromise like this. Our small actions, of course, don’t add up to much; and they're at the behest of clients, and not our personal convictions. But if you Dataists keep this up, ignoring international treaties, it’s gonna go that way.” As Elliot says this, in the back of his mind, like a morning dream, Manoj tells him to shut up. Manoj does not consider himself a devout Dataist, similar to Elliot and the rest of the crew. “Alright, enough talk, Manoj’s harassing me. Back to the job then; damn corporate Cipherists. Just a big waste of time really, but that’s the consequence of a peacetime Cipher.”

“I’d rather have a low fry rate than open warfare.” Rafael says, Habib nodding in agreement.

“Of course, but it’s still a pain when all these corporate types take it as an opportunity to flaunt themselves on the Net, risk free. Nowadays, it’s easier to employ Habib’s skills than to get a Netist to unmask a Cipher user and fry them.”

“Yeah,” Habib says, shifting himself to the middle seat while straining against his seat-belt, “—unfortunate, really. My grandparents always talked about how when they were growing up, the Netists who created the Cipher forced millions of civilians to use it during the war to increase the chance of any one random fry killing a civilian. Their whole town was basically forced to connect to the Net by Cipher, kept there by a few armed guards—those of course being Anti-Dataist scum, although I will admit the Dataists definitely aren’t perfect in that regard. It wasn’t important what they did on the Net, just that they were part of the Cipher’s pool. But now the civilians using the Cipher are using it voluntarily, seemingly—which of course results in the super low termination rate we see today.” Habib leans forward between the two front car seats, his arms relaxed on the backs of each chair.

“It’s like 0.1 percent yearly right now, I’m pretty sure. Manoj?” Elliot says over the Net and outloud, preparing to echo the response to Rafael and Habib.

“Something like that,” Manoj says while talking with Adrian Vue, the target. Elliot isn’t deep in, so he isn’t really part of the conversation with either of them in the Net. “Adrian? I bet you check often, being that you’re corporate yourself. You’ve gotta make sure it's actually worth it, valuing your life as much as you. On the other hand, me and Apollo are more concerned with anonymity of course, and it’s probably safer than connecting without the Cipher anyways.”

“Yeah, I checked this morning and it was something like 0.102 percent. My Netists all tell me that my chances of getting fried would be higher if I connected without it. Anyways, I will say it’s quite rare to find someone who even knows what chess is, let-alone how to play. Honestly, you’re quite terrible at it. It amazes me that you subject yourself to losing against me over and over. I’m fairly certain you have some kind of offer you’d like to make with me, we’ve been meeting over the Net every-once-in-awhile for the past few weeks. You can stop buttering me up now, what’s the offer?”

Elliot, Manoj, and Adrian all use the Cipher, which makes frying someone over the Net impossible, as the Cipher scrambles its users amongst themselves. Basically, each user connects to the Net through another user’s host—their neural-interface basically, and vice versa, giving up their own host to another random user. So, terminating someone’s host over the Net, whose signal is using the Cipher, will result in the death of a random user, and not the intended target.

“I’m probably the best chess player you’ll ever find nowadays, unfortunately; but yes, we have been buttering you up. I was about to tell you the offer too, so here it is I guess: Before Technica fled the load-bearing data centers, I’m guessing they DRMed most of the good non-server based defensive programs still leftover on—”

“Wow,” Adrian interrupts, looking over at a relaxing figure on a virtual leather couch: Elliot’s current pseudonymous signal, Apollo, “you’re double-signal friend here is basically just dozing off here, what’s he up to in reality?” All three are hanging out on a classy server owned by the Kans municipal government, with swirling whisky, cigars, and pretentious novels. The ceilings of the virtual environment seem to pierce through clouds, and plenty of tables cover the red woolen carpet. Behind Adrian is an ornate bar, normally empty on weekdays, which seems to extend miles.

Since the server is owned by the municipality, user’s hosts are well protected from any malicious actors. In comparison to some of the underground servers—where connecting via the Cipher is basically a must—most users on the municipal servers connect with their actual hosts. The municipal servers are used mostly for data storage and simple interactions of the Net, nothing like the awesome experiences facilitated elsewhere, often on less cautious servers. Most school, business, or other servers fall under corporate control, with municipal ownership amounting to very little of the Net. However, compared to the rest of the Net, despite their lack of functionality, they are generally the most reliable for simple person-to-person communication.

“Oh, right now he’s just doing some household chores and stuff I bet. Double-signals really can’t keep themselves invested in anything.”

“I heard that!” Elliot says to Manoj, annoyed. “Just remember that I’m a pretty lossy double-signal to begin with, there’re plenty of good ones out there. You have no experience of keeping yourself in the Net and reality at the same time, so trust me, it’s hard.”

“I remember you had the funniest way of describing the feeling, what was it? Ah, yes! You said it was like drunk driving as you daydream about drunk driving.” Adrian laughs at Manoj’s comment, putting a virtual cigar between his lips. His signal looks identical to him, as he only uses the Cipher for protection and not anonymity.

“*Return to convo. on DRMed programs somehow*

Too much information is dumped here. Spread it out more with dialogue, including descriptions of inner Kans as our crew arrives at Adrian Vue's safe house (move some of the reveal about the target to an early part). Maybe move the explanation of the Cipher to later, when needed to explain why Adrian Vue wasn't just taken out over the Net:

Elliot and Manoj have never connected to the Net without using the Cipher—both referring to themselves as Cipherists, but Anita is a bit disturbed by it, not so much to call herself a Anti-Cipherist however. Giving up your host to another is, to some, equivalent to putting your life into the hands of the Cipher. Many are disturbed to almost a reverent degree by this selling of the soul, often referred to as Anti-Cipherists, many simply because of its hand in the escalation of the Great Data War. Currently connected to the Net, the corporate client uses the Cipher as well to protect himself from host termination. Given that the Cipher’s termination rate is only around 0.1 percent per year at the moment, a relatively low rate in comparison to the past few years, its use has exploded to non-criminals and the like, simply wanting to ensure their connections to the Net are better protected.

Despite weeks of effort surveilling the target in the Net, his actual host—used by some other random signal—has not been found. Reluctantly, Habib’s skills have become necessary. Not being able to unmask his actual host on the Net, it was easier to simply get him to spill the location of his safe house, where he has resided since his acquisition of Technica’s largest Kans datacenter. This acquisition took place a few months ago during a small skirmish above the datacenter between a few hundred armed corporate forces of Technica and the personal mercenaries of the current target, Adrian Vue. Cobalt Saber was contracted to kill Adrian Vue by Technica, making the Dataist’s of the group hypocritics, really.

Going through lower Kans, as it’s called, Rafael navigates the erratic unmarked streets towards central Kans, where the target lives. As the car approaches, buildings grow taller and more metallic, chrome and glossy. The silver buildings turn on dim, expansive flood lights for the night. The cacophony of the city grows with the thousands of pedestrians in the city growing nearer. Edges are smoothed and modern, fitting with the uniform silver. Streets expand to multi-lane roads, and they begin to stack themselves, no more than three or four layers though.

“Our target’s little ‘incident’ ”

NOTE Squad is amateur, taken in by paramilitary group

NOTE Adrian Vue hired Jordan Hayes—manipulated everything from start?

TODO Fix intro of Anita and Jordan

IDEA Magnets used as weapon against Netists—triggerable magnets next to Netist which can kill them on command by someone else

IDEA MRI type magnet, where both participants in meeting have metal in them, and bystanders have capacity to turn magnet on

Adrian’s crew gets route from their hidden base from the car’s guidance computer