



Core Rule Book

Version 0.2

The World of Orbit Punk	2
Earth	3
Extreme Climate Change	3
Hexacarbium-Oxalate (HexOx) Contamination	3
Low Earth Orbit	3
The O'Neill Cylinders	3
The Space Stations	3
The Moon	3
Mercury	4
Venus	4
Mars	4
Saturn	4
The War for Minds	4
Mechanics & How to Play	4
The Gamemaster	5
Resolving Story Conflicts Through Orbit Punk's Mechanics	5
Target Numbers and Dice	5
Beyond Limits and Exploding Rolls	6
Criticals	7
Snags	8
Criticals and Snags Interacting	9
Types of Tests	9
Success Tests	9
Extended Tests	10
Teamwork Tests	11
Luck	11
Your Character	11
Form	11
Core Principles - Your Ethos, Your Legacy to Pass On	11
No Real Names	12
Keys Die With You	12
Masks Don't Beat Mirrors	12
Breathe Normally	12
Consensus Over Command	12
Build Over Break	12
Talk Over Shoot	12
Strike with Purpose	12
Stay Connected	13
Community First	13

Share the Load	13
Run In Shadows	13
Knowledge is Power	13
Hack the System	13
Pass On Our Ethos	13
Luck	13
Gear	14
Qualities	14
Contacts	14
Lifestyle	14
The GM's Role	15
A Short Story Set in the Orbit Punk Universe	15
Chapter 1: It Gets Better	15
Chapter 2: A Diamond Bullet To The Brain	22
Chapter 3: Have You Reached That Point?	22
Credits	23

It's time to face the void. In the year 2125, humanity has established a robust cislunar economy and is starting to venture into the rest of the solar system. However, this economy has only benefited the elite, leaving the rest of society to suffer on a decaying and contaminated Earth.

The World of Orbit Punk

Orbit Punk would not be possible without inspiration from other places. Some of these places include

- The Expanse
- For All Mankind
- Delta-v By: Daniel Suarez
- Critical Mass: A Novel (A Delta-v Novel, Book 2) By Daniel Suarez
- Theft of Fire: Orbital Space #1 by Devon Eriksen
- Scramble for the Skies: The Great Power Competition to Control the Resources of Outer Space By Namrata Goswami, Peter A. Garretson
- Space Piracy: Preparing for a Criminal Crisis in Orbit by Marc Feldman and Hugh Taylor
- Space to Grow: Unlocking the Final Economic Frontier by Matthew Weinzierl and Brendan Rosseau
- The YouTube channel Space Dock
- The 2013 film Elysium

We've blended these sources with our personal experiences working in the new space industry to create Orbit Punk. Orbit Punk has a few distinctions from these other worlds,

however. First, there are no aliens. There is chemical/electrical/nuclear spacecraft propulsion only in Orbit Punk; no jump drives to speak of. This causes us to focus on the cislunar environment, but travel to other bodies in the solar system is possible, given enough time. More uniqueness will be revealed as you read on.

Let's check in on each major planetary body in Orbit Punk and see what this setting is about.

Earth

Extreme Climate Change

Earth is plagued by extreme climate change. The Earth's currents have weakened significantly, and the water level has risen 3 meters. Category 6 hurricanes are bad but survivable. We have enough technology to begin healing the Earth in 2125. What wasn't able to be overcome with technology with HexOx.

Hexacarbium-Oxalate (HexOx) Contamination

In an incident similar to Tetraethyllead, the space industry used Hexacarbium-Oxalate or HexOx to prevent fuels from leaking from o-rings, driving down the complexity of rockets and thus their costs. This worked for a while, and as hundreds of rockets were ignited for a booming cislunar economy in 2052, HexOx contamination spread. It is a yellow liquid at room temperature but vaporizes rapidly. This made it extremely hard to control when its highly carcinogenic nature was revealed by activist scientists. It also disrupts the central nervous system and damages organs. Now HexOx is slowly killing those on Earth, from the water they drink, the food they eat, and the air they breathe.

Low Earth Orbit

The O'Neill Cylinders

The Space Stations

The Moon

Mercury

Venus

Mars

Saturn

The War for Minds

There's a war going on for minds in Orbit Punk, and the corporations are winning. Look at humanity's miserable state. The widespread cancer from attempting to have the human body survive in space; irrelevant. The declining birthrates and the likelihood that there won't be another generation; unconnected. The common 144-hour work week that has people taking overdoses of Redline; peripheral. The people have accepted their techno-feudal existence from those with embroidered neckties. Those logos are not the symbols of modern slavers but the pinnacle of progress. The people are asleep, and it is up to us Orbit Punks to wake people up. That's why we must message carefully.

Among the tenets of the Orbit Punk is "Strike with Purpose". We only kill when absolutely needed because of the War for Minds. Spill too much blood, and they will paint us with it, driving our movement into the ground. Whatever you do as an Orbit Punk, keep the War for Minds in mind, and we might be free one glorious day. We are only as strong as our message.

Mechanics & How to Play

As a player in Orbit Punk, your gamemaster will describe certain situations for you to respond to. Sometimes, there won't be a debate about if you succeed or fail. We don't need rules for getting some z's while your hacker team member does their magic. However, if there is a debate about failure or success, that's when we engage with Orbit Punk's mechanics. Maybe you want to hack a mainframe to provide a false prisoner transfer to get a buddy out of jail. Maybe you want to dock with another spacecraft. Maybe you want to shoot someone who just insulted you. All of this and more is possible in Orbit Punk.

Orbit Punk wouldn't be possible without standing on the shoulders of previous works. We've drawn inspiration from many sources to design our mechanics, including the following TTRPGs:

- Dread

- Shadowrun 5th Edition
- Runequest: Roleplaying in Glorantha
- Vampire: The Masquerade 5th Edition
- Fragged Empire
- Blades in the Dark
- Warhammer Age of Sigmar: Soulbound
- Metallurgent
- The Pathfinder Adventure Path Hell's Rebels

The hacking section has been adapted from MITRE ATT&CK®.

Orbit Punk's rules are designed to provide a gritty, realistic feel. The world is dark and the megacorporations have already won the war. Ultimately, Punks aren't superheroes, but with enough skill and passion, you can succeed against the megacorporations.

The Gamemaster

The game master (GM) leads a group of players through Orbit Punk adventures. They wear many masks. During planning, they are the player's worst enemy, setting traps and building a harsh world. During gameplay, they are a critical ally sometimes acting as the player's criminal intuition built over many years. They take on the roles of NPCs and contacts. They make up the ice-cold void that the players have to face or the gentle warmth of a functioning life support system.

For more advice on being a GM, see the section "The GM's Role".

Resolving Story Conflicts Through Orbit Punk's Mechanics

Imagine you are 1 click away from a Space Force cruiser. You are towing the most obviously stolen BeyondX prototype Starship. You might be able to talk your way out of this. You might be able to fight your way out. You might be able to hack your way out or some combination of other strategies and plans. Either way, we need to resolve what happens, we need to engage the rules.

Target Numbers and Dice

Orbit Punk uses pools of ten-sided dice to resolve conflicts. These are often denoted as d10. The ten numbers on the dice should range from 0 to 9. If you are using ten sided dice that range from 1 to 10, treat the ten as a zero.

We place a number in front of a d10 to indicate the size of the dice pool. So, for example, if we say 11d10, you roll 11 ten-sided dice. When you roll, you want to see one of your

dice equal to or greater than your target number. We denote this with a \geq symbol followed by the target number. So, if we say $11d10 \geq 7$, we want to roll 11 ten-sided dice and have them land on a 7 or greater. Let's say we roll and get the following results: 8, 0, 2, 6, 3, 6, 3, 0, 9, 5 and 0. At least one of our dice has rolled above a 7, so we succeed. Your dice pool can never exceed 15. You need just one success to succeed.

There are exceptions to these thresholds, but if you are looking for a simple jumping-off point, follow the Target Numbers Table.

Target Numbers Table				
Difficulty	Target Number	Success Chance with a Dice Pool of 5 (Typical CharGen Focus Area Skill Value)	Success Chance with a Dice Pool of 10 (Typical End Game Focus Skill Value)	Success Chance with a Dice Pool of 15 (Orbit Punk Dice Pool Hard Cap)
Easy	6	92.2%	99.3%	99.96%
Average	8	67.32%	89.33%	96.52%
Demanding	10	37.6%	61.1%	75.67%
Hard	14	22.2%	40.1%	53.74%
Very Hard	18	4.94%	9.57%	14.02%
Extreme	22	2.97%	5.84%	8.61%
Beyond Extreme	26	0.99%	1.98%	2.92%
Impossible	30+	0.34%	0.69%	1.06%

Beyond Limits and Exploding Rolls

If the GM calls for a test with a threshold higher than 9, you may need to “explode” your rolls to reach it.

- First, roll your dice pool as normal.
- For each die that shows a 9, you keep that 9 (which counts as a critical) and then immediately re-roll just that die. Add +9 to the new roll's value.
- If that new roll is also a 9, you do it again—keep stacking another +9 each time you roll a 9, potentially chaining infinitely.

Example: You roll a single d10 and get a 9, then on the re-roll you get another 9, and finally on the third roll you get a 4. The total for that die is $9 + 9 + 4 = 22$ (with two criticals earned along the way).

Zeros rolled on exploding dice do not count towards the snag total. For example, let's say you roll 2d10. The results are 0 and 9. You explode the 9 and get 0. In this case, you would only have 1 snag, not two.

Criticals

Notice the 9 in the previous roll. That number is special. It is a critical and unlocks certain abilities depending on the qualities, weapons, gear, vehicles or other equipment you have available to you. The GM might also propose a small boon for you to spend your critical on. You can save up your criticals or spend them immediately after a test. Criticals reset after 8 hours of sleep.

Let's say a player is wielding a VoidBlack Nova submachine gun. It has a stat block that looks like this.

VoidBlack Nova	
Damage	8P
Modes	SA/BF/FA
Recoil Compensation	1
Ammo	30
Cost	0.25 NuEth
Availability	1
Criticals	
Maneuverable (Cost 2)	Gain 1 tile of movement if inside a tight corridor such as an alley, tunnel, or hallway.
Snags	
None	

Let's say you then roll four 9s on a roll. You could activate the weapon's critical twice and use that boon to move two tiles. You could also bank your criticals for later.

Snags

Let's return to our dice pool result of 8, 0, 2, 6, 3, 6, 3, 0, 9, 5 and 0.

Notice the 0s in the previous roll. 0 is also a special number in Orbit Punk. It can potentially cause a snag, depending on your dice pool. Consult the table below to figure out when a snag is triggered.

Snag Table	
Dice Pool Size	Number of 0s Needed to Trigger a Snag
1-5 Dice	Any zeros triggers a Snag
6-10 Dice	Any two zeros trigger a Snag
11-15 Dice	Any three zeros trigger a Snag

If you roll a 0 on an exploding dice roll, it does not count toward your snag total.

The opposite party immediately spends snags on qualities, weapons, gear, vehicles or other equipment with a snag labeled on it. Suppose a player rolls a snag and has no Snag-tagged gear. In that case, the GM or player representing the opposite party may introduce a minor environmental hazard or trigger an unintended consequence.

Let's say a player is wielding an OpenGuns Resistor submachine gun. It has a stat block that looks like this.

OpenGuns Resistor	
Damage	8P
Modes	SA/BF/FA
Recoil Compensation	1
Ammo	30
Cost	0.1 NuEth
Availability	1
Criticals	

Disposable (Cost 1)	Reduce the target number to hide this weapon in the environment by one, or by two if hiding it in trash.
Collapse & Conceal (Cost 2)	Reduce the target number by one on any check to conceal it on your person or in luggage. If you already benefit from Disposable when hiding it in trash or the environment, you gain an additional target number reduction.
Snags	
Overheat (Cost 1)	Due to its 3D printed design, this gun struggles at thermal control. The gun's FPGA will prevent firing for one combat turn on the following combat turn to allow the weapon to cool off.

Let's say you roll a 0 on a test. The GM could choose to apply the Overheat snag with that zero rolled.

Let's say we get unlucky and roll 15 zeros on 15 dice. This would trigger 5 snags and be a really unlucky event.

Criticals and Snags Interacting

If a Snag and a Critical are rolled, the player may choose to let the Snag cancel the Critical, such that there are no bonuses or disadvantages. Otherwise, the Snag remains in effect. This extends to any number of criticals and snags.

Types of Tests

Orbit Punk has a few different types of tests. They are denoted here.

Success Tests

Success tests are the basic type of test in Orbit Punk, they are invoked when a player wants to do something that does not have a direct opposition. This can be rewiring a security keypad, repairing a life support system, or attempting to rendezvous with a wildly tumbling asteroid. You want to get a success test.

Success tests are denoted as $(A+S+B)d10 \geq T$ Test where

A is the attribute used to form the dice pool,

S is the skill used to form the dice pool,

B is miscellaneous bonuses used to form the dice pool and

T is the target number that you want dice in your roll to be equal to or greater than.

Extended Tests

Sometimes, a task takes longer than a moment in time. Maybe you are at a spaceport repairing your beat-up corvette, perhaps you are pulling a long con by becoming an actual employee of a targeted megacorporation, or perhaps you are sifting through misinformation on the internet.

An extended test looks like this:

$(A+S+B)d10 \geq T:U$ Extended Test

Where

A is the attribute used to form the dice pool,

S is the skill used to form the dice pool,

B is miscellaneous bonuses used to form the dice pool and

T is the target number that you want dice in your roll to be equal to or greater than,

And U is the time the test will take.

For example, the GM might call for a Logic+Industrial Engineer+Bonus \geq 10:30 Minute Test.

Extended Tests are made at the beginning of the time period, then the time elapses. Then, the result is actualized. Criticals can be applied to reduce the time the task takes according to the table below.

Extended Test Intervals		
Task	Time Interval	Critical Time Reduction
Fast	1 Combat Turn/15 Seconds	1 Second per Critical
Quick	1 Minute	10 Seconds per Critical
Short	10 Minutes	1 Minute per Critical
Average	30 Minutes	5 Minutes per Critical
Long	1 Hour	10 Minutes per Critical
Prolonged	8 Hours	30 Minutes per Critical
Consuming	1 Day	1 hour per Critical
Exhaustive	1 Week	16 Hours per Critical
Mammoth	1 Month	1 Day per Critical

Teamwork Tests

Among the principles of the Orbit Punk is “Share the load”, your team will often times save you from sucking vacuum. To represent that, teamwork tests are available. Other members in the group may conduct a test. If they succeed, they reduce the difficulty of the roll by two.

Luck

Luck can be spent to reroll a failed test. It can also allow you to seize the initiative, moving to the top of the initiative stack. You can negate a snag with a point of luck. You can finally use a point of luck in your character’s dying moment to take a single additional action.

Your Character

Players interact with the world of Orbit Punk through their characters. In Orbit Punk, we try to draw out the convictions that make each person who they are and the passions that drive them. We also try to draw out the addictions that hinder them. The character sheet encapsulates this information with numbers, but always remember the person represented by those numbers. Let’s walk through what appears on a character sheet and what those numbers mean.

Form

Players can play as either humans or robots. They have different starting arrays of points to put into their core principles.

Core Principles - Your Ethos, Your Legacy to Pass On

Although each punk will have their own personal take on these tenets, our movement is bound together by these ideals. They are just ideals and guidelines, and we often fail to meet them, but without these guidelines, the void would consume us.

During character creation, humans allocate the following numbers to their core principles: 5, 4, 4, 3.

During character creation, robots allocate the following numbers to their core principles: 6, 3, 3, 2.

All other principles get a 1. Describe what each principle means to your character. If it aligns, reduce the target number by 4.

No Real Names

Protect identities in a world where information is power. Use aliases, false identities, and code names.

Keys Die With You

Never share access to your sanctuaries or secrets; your security is your lifeline.

Masks Don't Beat Mirrors

In an environment of constant surveillance, masks are necessary, but never overlook who you are. Manifest the ethos no matter the deception.

Breathe Normally

Conserve oxygen and resources to ensure survival, even in dire situations.

Consensus Over Command

Make collective decisions. Value everyone's input.

Build Over Break

Always work towards improvement, even in adversity. Innovate and repair.

Talk Over Shoot

Prioritize negotiation and diplomacy over violence. Resolve conflicts peacefully.

Strike with Purpose

Engage in combat only with clear intent and understanding of its consequences.

Stay Connected

Maintain secure communication channels. Share information.

Community First

Prioritize the needs and well-being of the community above individual gains.

Share the Load

Distribute tasks to avoid burnout. Work together effectively.

Run In Shadows

Operate unseen and unheard, using stealth to protect yourself and the community.

Knowledge is Power

Seek and share information to empower the community and stay ahead of threats.

Hack the System

Use ingenuity and subversion to bend the rules and turn the oppressive system to your advantage.

Pass On Our Ethos

Teach others our values and skills to ensure our legacy endures. Inspire others to join us.

Luck

Every character starts with three luck. This can be spent on various abilities and rerolls. It can also be permanently reduced for other abilities.

Gear

Your gear is what is between you and sucking vacuum. Treat it well.

Qualities

Qualities are used in Orbit Punk to modify your character in interesting ways, granting innate snags and criticals.

Contacts

Our community is our strength and our heart. People you know well in the community are your contacts. They can take many forms, from a janitor at NASA, to a shipyard worker who has seen the latest Space Force design to the basic bartender with an open ear. Contacts have a connection rating and a loyalty rating. Loyalty represents how loyal they are to you. Connection indicates their place in the world of Orbit Punk. Loyalty ranges from 1 to 6. Connection ranges from 1 to 12.

During character generation, you are allow to purchase contacts. Afterwards, they have to be earned through play.

Lifestyle

You can live in the alleyways of a decrepit space station, or you can live in luxury with a beautiful view of Mars. Either way, rent needs to be paid, and grocery bills need to be addressed. To abstract this away, each game month, players pay a lifestyle cost. This will give bonuses on various tests.

Lifestyle	Cost
Luxury	400 NuEth per Month
High	40 NuEth per Month
Middle	4 NuEth per Month
Low	1 NuEth per Month
Squatter	0.5 NuEth per Month
Hull Rat	Free

The GM's Role

A Short Story Set in the Orbit Punk Universe

Chapter 1: It Gets Better

Switch sat in an old GM van used as a mission control center for a group of orbit punks raiding the BeyondX O'Neill cylinder NexSphere. They got their asses kicked. Raze got taken out by a BeyondX security guard when Skylar's deceit didn't work. Skylar, who always was awful at combat, immediately surrendered when Echo got taken out by a self-guiding explosive security drone. However, the battle lasted just long enough for Ion to get their extraction target, a propulsion engineer named Dr. Lena Kurovski, back to the airlock. Luckily, not enough time passed for security to realize they were there under false licenses and to lock out the airlock. Now Dr. Kurovski and Ion were back in their ship and hiding just under a sensor array on the kilometer-long NexSphere. They could stay there for a while but needed a plan to leave as soon as possible. Eventually, an automated patrol ship would spot them but they were safe from the emergency, manual search after BeyondX security detected their presence on the cylinder.

What Switch needed was a hacker or an electronic warfare specialist and fast. They needed to blind the NexSphere for just long enough to exit the 10-kilometer large exclusion sphere around the habitat. Within that exclusion sphere, BeyondX had full traffic control authority and authority to legally fire upon craft that did not heed instructions. With their fake licenses and docking paperwork likely discovered, BeyondX won't allow them to leave but instead demand for them to submit to boarding. Getting hacker or electronic warfare support was easier said than done, not for technical reasons, but for interpersonal reasons. NeonGhost, the best hacker Switch knew, was pissed at her. NeonGhost had invited Switch to various social engagements, including a Dungeons and Dragons game, but Switch had declined them all. She felt like she was drowning too much to even leave her van, let alone go on a night out on the town.

Switch recently disrupted NeonGhost's work with her old, rusting satellite dish. She just happened to be transmitting on a frequency that NeonGhost found the exploit of the century. The exploit could have led to them gaining more orbital licenses and fake identifications from the issuing corporation Chang'e. NeonGhost had warned her not to transmit, but Switch was feeling too numb to look at her Starlink when it chimed multiple times with NeonGhost's warnings.

It was all too much. Switch looked at the VoidBlack Eclipse pistol sitting next to the flickering laptop she used as a mission control center with longing. She picked it up and held it to her head. She felt the cold of the muzzle against her temple and wished, dearly, for this all to be over. The .45 ACP round it contained would ensure that it all just vanished. Just then, her laptop played a chime. It was the Rebel's Drift still stuck below the sensor array on the NexSphere.

"Not today" Switch silently said to herself. She let her right hand numbly fall to the desk then released the Eclipse from her hand. She put on a brave face and answered the call.

"Where the hell have you been, Switch?" Ion said.

"Shit's complicated down here, Ion."

"How? I'm up here with only 3 more days of life support and security drones buzzing like a hornet's nest. How is your shit more complicated than my shit? I need this sensor jammed, Switch."

"I sent procedures to do a full spectrum jamming." Switch said exasperatedly.

"That fuck does "Set WU 739 to 0" mean? I'm a meathead, not a nerd. I need a nerd who can remotely do this for me. We don't have much time."

"All the nerds I know are busy", Switch said with building frustration, "just try the procedure. If we can't do it, then I'll try harder to find someone. I'm also working on trying to save Skylar."

"Screw that coward, focus on me and this ship and getting paid," Ion said, screaming into his microphone so loud that it peaked.

"Let's just do a walkthrough of the procedure, we just have to try it first." Switch said, trying to calm down the heavily augmented Ion. "Just open the ship's terminal by navigating to the black window in your AR display."

There was silence for a few beats. "Fine, whatever Switch. I'll give it a try but it is going to end up with some critical fault or some shit."

"Thank you", Switch said, trying to appease Ion. It was a stressful situation, after all. As mission controller, she had to project calm and control, no matter what.

They worked through the procedure and it went smoothly for a bit until physical modifications needed to be made.

"Okay, now open panel 72B. You are going to want to grab a soldering iron." Ion said.

“Now you want me to be an electrical tech, Switch, what the fuck. No, find another way.” Ion said, growing more angry.

“You have to try, I can switch to entering commands from here if you give me admin permission to the Rebel’s Drift, but we need to prepare the antenna for higher voltages for this to work. You have to try.” Switch said, concealing her growing anger and frustration the best she could.

Just then, Switch noticed a commotion outside. She pulled open a camera feed to notice Celestial Shield officers tearing through the homeless encampment she called home, knocking over and questioning anyone with a satellite dish or laser link.

“Shit, we’ve got heat down here,” Switch said “I’ll be back online as soon as possible, keep following the procedure, Ion. Maybe ask the Doctor for help? It was a voluntary extraction.”

She grabbed her Eclipse and opened the van’s door into the cold Aurora, Colorado evening. Snow was gathering in the ruins of a collapsed condominium building beyond the fence of the empty lot their encampment was in. Celestial Shield officers were pushing over a solar panel, shattering it on the gravel ground. Switch joined a local Co-Orbit group chat for the encampment, Dustwalker, SolarRay, Starlost, Comet Tail, and Nebula Eyes. She placed an earpiece into her ear that would scan her brain wave so she could think into this chat.

“Glad you are here, Switch”, Dustwalker said in a deep baritone.

“What’s the plan?” Switch said.

“Fight back”, SolarRay said, as hopeful as the light she collected for power in the camp.

With that, Switch activated the DeepVoid Forward Predictive Model software on her cybereyes. The world became overlaid with ghostly images as the software tried to show her fractions of the second in the future so she could react faster. Switch crouched and advanced towards the Celestial Shield officers. A Celestial Shield officer noticed the approach of armed people and screamed out. They aimed a grenade launcher at the center of the group. It thumped, releasing a gas grenade that spewed burning tear gas into the encampment.

Luckily, Switch’s respirator implant and cyber eyes prevented most of the burning, a necessary implant given Colorado’s continuous wildfires. Switch took aim at the officer with the grenade launcher, augmented reality markings predicted where the shot would land in the future even with the officer’s dive toward cover. She squeezed the trigger and the Eclipse barked, scoring a direct hit. But then, Switch felt an immense hit against her body as her armored jacket and sub-dermal plates caught a bullet intended for her heart. She stood back up fast and aimed her VoidBlack Eclipse at the source of the shot that hit her, but then she saw Dustwalker’s

3D-printed OpenGuns SubMac-1 open fire. He ripped down the Celestial Shield officer who shot Switch.

Switch heard a radio transmission in the distance.

“Celestial Shield 839 to Mission Control, we have encountered heavier than expected resistance. Request immediate VLEO Orbital Shock Trooper Deployment.”

“Rodger Celestial Shield 839, deployment in 33 minutes. Have you disabled the target signal?”

“Negative.”

“We need to execute this contract 839, keep pushing into the encampment.”
While she was listening, Dustwalker maneuvered over to her.

“Switch, how bad are you wounded?”

“Not too badly, I can fight.” Switch replied.

Dustwalker helped her to her feet.

“I saw Nebula Eyes go down a few moments ago, we need to get to her.”

“Right, I’m with you.” Switch said.

Together, they took on 5 Celestial Shield officers using barrels as cover. Dustwalker provided covering fire while Switch used augmented reality and an overhead drone to project images of the officers in cover. Her heavy .45 caliber ammunition made light work of the barrels and the targets behind them.

After all 5 officers went down, they pushed forward toward Nebula Eyes. She was hurt badly. Switch screamed into the Co-Orbital group chat, “I need a med kit at my location”

A few seconds later, SolarRay, Starlost, and Comet Tail all came running towards them with Dustwalker still laying down suppressive fire.

“How bad is it?” SolarRay said.

Switch was holding Nebula Eyes’ throat with blood spilling out.

“It looks like shrapnel from a round hitting her armor cut her jugular. We need to stop the bleeding. Does the medkit have any Bleedgel? ”

Together, they worked under fire to stop the bleeding. The Celestial Shield officers backed off, taking heavy losses themselves.

"We have 28 minutes to get out of here, gather any essential items, and let's roll."

Sometime later, the encampment was gathered in a cramped safe house. A rotting condo building worth millions of NuEth per unit on paper, but a completely abandoned mess in reality. Dustwalker was able to call in a favor for the actual keys to this place. Switch sat with her head in her hands and she contemplated all the mess she made and her friend's near death. She wept silently, trying not to draw attention to herself.

Dustwalker walked up to Switch and leaned next to her on the wall. He grabbed a cigar, lit it, and smoked silently while Switch tried hard to stop the weeping.

"Nebula Eyes is going to be okay, the doc says."

Joy now mixed with sadness in the salty water running down her cheeks.

Silence for a few minutes.

"You got shot, Switch, you need the doc to look at you?"

"No", Switch shot back, "I need..."

She didn't want to explain the chaos in orbit with Ion or how NeonGhost was pissed or how she was pretty sure her operation brought the hell fight down on their encampment. Why else would Celestial Shield be here?

"...space. I just need space."

"Do you really, kid?"

"I only took this job because I needed to NuEth for my HexOx treatment on my father's HexOx treatment. I didn't mean to bring down all this shit. I fucked up and brought a lot of trouble to you all. I should go. I just promised Ion I would try my best. He needs helps, I should go. "

Switch stood up.

"Listen, kid, I can't stop you. But let me give you a gift. I'll be right back."

Switch stood there, perplexed. A gift?

A few moments later, Dustwalker returned with an OpenGuns QuadStrike Kamikaze Drone Kit in the form of a silver briefcase.

"If you get in trouble with those Celestial Shield goons out there, just push this button."

"Thanks."

Switch then walked out of the safe house apartment and into the stairwell. Emerging from an emergency exit into the cold Colorado night, she stealthily made her way to her van. When she was about 250 meters away, she noticed four Celestial Shield officers inspecting it, yet four VLEO Orbital Shock Troopers in power armor guarding them through magnified vision.

"Shit, what am I going to do." She thought to herself. She thought hard for a few minutes.

"They likely have surveillance drones in this area and they likely know I was from the earlier engagement. I need them blinded at the very least. I need..."

Dread filled her as she realized.

"...I need NeonGhost.

She sighed, got on Co-Orbital, navigated to his profile, and clicked the call button. Then waited. And waited. And waited. The call then went to voicemail.

"Hey NeonGhost. I know you are pissed and I know I've been ghosting you, but ... I need a friend right now...I need help right now. "

She hung up and hoped. She hopes as she saw the offers plug in a device to her terminal in her van. Time was running out.

"I fucked up. This is life or death...fuck...I promised Ion...fuck"

She reached for an inhaler full of Rush, a combat drug that made the world slow down and suppressed fear. She placed the nozzle between her lips, pressed the button, and inhaled hard. The acrid smell filled her nose and a burning sensation filled her lungs. The snow flakes froze in place, her heart roared like an engine.

Then she charged.

Immediately, a drone above shined a spotlight on her. Just then, her Co-Orbital application sent a notification on her StarLink. It was NeonGost! She picked up.

"Konbanwa from Tokyo, Switch!"

NeonGhost was on the top of the orange and white Tokyo Tower, holding his StarLink in a pose to get a perfect selfie shot of the tower and the surrounding city.

“How’s everything, how’s your first job?”

Just then, 5 rifle bullets tore through her torso, she collapsed on the cold concrete of the sidewalk.

Coughing, she replied, “Fine, just, fine. How’s Tokyo?”

“Tokyo is great! I wish you were here, but I understand how jobs go. People get radio silent when they get desperate enough to do a job. What’s with the coughing, turn on your video feed! If you can.”

“I just fucked up, that’s all. The Shield was inspecting my van with some VLEOs and I charged them. I just got fucked up really good.”

“Oh...Switch. I’m sorry I didn’t check in more. I’ll start hacking them to get you a prisoner transfer to some shell corporation we control. You’ll be out in like two days, tops.”

Then Switch heard the crunching of snow under power armor boots approach her.

“Well, it was a fun first experience NeonGhost, I’ll see you in two days. The Shield is here.”

The Celestial Shield Officer swatted next to her. She then felt something familiar, comforting; The cold metal of a gun barrel against her temple. The Celestial Shield Officer spoke.

“I’ll only ask once. Where is the rest of your encampment hiding?”

“Fuck off.” Switch retorted

“Switch, what’s going on?” NeonGhost said over the CoOrbital voice chat.

“Hmm. I’m contractually obligated to ask you this, you waste of oxygen. Is that your van and your ground station over there?”

“Fuck! Off!” Switch shouted, fear suppressed by the combat drugs.

Switch looked up and saw the red, mirrored visor of the Celestial Shield Officer. He breathed out and switch saw his breath in the frigid Colorado air. Switch searched for a badge number or name patch, but found them tapped up.

“Okay then...” The Officer replied.

“NeonGhost, I’m-” BANG.

NeonGhost heard a bang that peaked the microphone.

Then nothing.

“Switch! Switch, you okay? Switch!” NeonGhost screamed into the microphone.

Static.

The faint hum of the StarLink connection.

Then—

“Switch? ...Switch?”

Silence.

Chapter 2: A Diamond Bullet To The Brain

Chapter 3: Have You Reached That Point?

It took 15 months to build that rocket in the rusted oil well ruins of the former Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Signs of nature’s dominance were slowly showing, with vines crawling up the oil wells. Man’s needs still fought back, with shanty towns supporting the smog-covered city of LA.

Most of the delay was due to the need for secrecy and a fierce debate over the propulsion system. But, despite all the hardships, drones managed to 3D print the vast majority of the rocket with the scrap we found from those ruined oil wells. It was a hairy 15 months with patrols from Celestial Shield. But they aren’t paid well, and when they did look too closely, we would bribe them. We also had to take several jobs to fund the project. But we knew the resistance was best fought from orbit and from the Haven.

We operated out of an old warehouse. Our design was an old, leaked, Rocket Power Boson design standing at 30 meters tall. We planned to use thermite charges to burn one side of the roof’s supports, peel the roof off like a Pringles can seal, and then go vertical. This would have to be fast, as we all know, ascension is obvious. We didn’t want to get intercepted by terrestrial fighter jets.

It was finally T-minus 24 hours. We huddled in what would have been the manager's office, with large windows looking over our flight to the void.

Credits

Writer: Daniel "DrBurst" Sims

Art: Anna Shaposhnik

Reviewers: Michael, Dunadd