



Armored Core VI: Fires of Rubicon

Registration Number: JmPR-0989. Callsign: Jumper.

Authentication complete. Granting access privileges...

Welcome to Rubicon-3, Jumper.

It has been close to a century since the Fires of Ibis scoured the world of Rubicon. The surface was burnt to a desert of ash in the wake of the cataclysm, sparked by the now long-vanished Institute from the center of their power. The miraculous substance known as “Coral” had been its kindling. An energy resource and data conduit possessed of strange and seemingly supernatural properties, it was poised to usher in an age of unprecedented glory and prosperity for the entire human race.

But all of that is now a distant memory. Having stoked the stellar flame, Coral was lost forever.

Or, at least, that was what everyone believed.

But now, smoldering under the ashes of Rubicon, the once-vanished resource has begun to rouse. And its reemergence has brought down the gaze of two vast corporate conglomerates seeking to monopolize this miracle substance for themselves: Balam Industries and Arquebus Corporation. Like two great carrion birds, they have swept down upon Rubicon and now battle amid its skies.

The planetary Coral rush has begun. The forces of Balam and Arquebus have swiftly seized the planet and now these two staggering corporate giants trade blows in their thirst to seize Coral. With the onset of a long, bloody conflict, flocks of opportunistic vultures descended with them. Alongside the great paramilitary corporate force came vast scores of independent mercenaries, seeking to feed upon the corpse of Rubicon and the blood money that the corporations were all too willing to expend to claim their prize. And so, slowly and inexorably, the Coral War began.

Meanwhile, among the blasted ash of their homeworld, the Rubicon Liberation Front fights on. The descendants of the first colonists who settled Rubicon, a ragtag outfit of desperate civilians armed with repurposed hardware, they fight a meaningless struggle against implacable titans. Surviving not through grit and determination, but simply because the corporate powers cannot be bothered to obliterate them at the moment. Under the leadership of father Thumb Dolmayan, they preach of reverence for the Coral. But their reverence itself is little more than exploitation.

And behind the scenes, below layers and illusions, gears are turning to determine Rubicon's fate. The destiny of not merely this planet but of all of humanity is coming to a crux here on Rubicon. The stark truth of the Coral and its potential, its relationship with humankind, shall be decided by the actions and wills of just a few individuals. And in just hours, a certain hound awakens to the sound of medical harmony and the timbre of machinery – a hound that, with the right push, may yet remember how to live as a wolf or, perhaps, how to spread his wings to fly as a Raven...

What choices will you make, here on Rubicon? What changes would you evoke? To transform the world, to decide its fate, is the privilege and responsibility of those few who have the will to do so. Whether you are counted among their number is a question answered not with words but action. Faced with the Coral, faced with avarice, faced with the weight of the future of a whole species...

What will you choose?

Let's find out, shall we?

Main System.

Activating Combat Mode.

+1,000 CP

Identity

You may select one Origin and Affiliation.

Discounts are 50% for each, with 100cp perks and items free.

Origin

Pilot: The cold thrum of machinery, the hum of actuators in motion, the strangely distanced sight of the battlefield surrounding you. A truly unusual distance; the war seems so far away in the cockpit of an AC, so easy to forget that your life is on the line behind invincible steel. But few can argue that you don't belong there, reigning like a metal god among the mortals.

Engineer: A godfather to the machines, you're in your element surrounded by calculations and the satisfying monotony of simulations and repetitive testing. Someone has to create all these great war machines and you're that person. Of course, all the theory in the world isn't going to make your designs into reality. You'll need to prove your worth for that to happen.

Conspirator: The future of the world isn't something that can be merely left up to chance nor entrusted to the goodwill or naive hope of others. It's something that has to be shaped. After all, the only thing that awaits willful ignorance is slow and inevitable self-destruction. Whatever it is you believe, whoever it is you follow, you will be an instrument of the future.

Affiliation

Mercenary: You stand among the number of the many mercenaries and military contractors who arrived on Rubicon in the wake of the Coral War. Perhaps you sought your fortune here. Perhaps you were running away from your past. Whatever the case may be, you find yourself in a very unusual position. As an independent mercenary, you are aligned only with yourself. It's an often surreal experience, being contracted to fight in a battle only to be hired the very next day by the people you were killing to kill your old allies in turn. To achieve a great feat, only to then undo that selfsame accomplishment with your own hands. All for money; credit. And yet, for the peculiarity of it, there's something attractive about such ideological honesty. For men must be convinced to fight for another but few are unwilling to fight for themselves.

Operative: You're no mercenary, peddling the lives of others like some kind of carrion bird. No, you've committed yourself to something. Either to a specific organization or individual, your life is now one of solid employment. Your wings are clipped, certainly. But you've now gained the bedrock that an independent mercenary or contractor could never hope to attain. Prove yourself worthwhile and you shouldn't be hurting for credits, materials, or assistance. But in return, responsibilities are now expected from you. No one likes carrying an albatross and you'll be no exception. Freedom, for security. Is it really so bad to seek greater purpose?

General Perks

Human Augmentation [Optional/200cp]

You've undergone extensive augmentation surgery, an unethical process where your body has been suffused with Coral and enhanced. By default, you're one of the old generations; somewhere between the 1st and 4th gen, with most seeing you as a relic who should be in a museum instead of an AC. But nonetheless you have far greater compatibility with an AC than any ordinary human pilot does. You have greatly enhanced reflexes and control over their interface will come almost intuitively, even if this alone won't make you an ace pilot. But any piloting skills you do have would be dramatically increased by your augmentation.

However, the drawback is that your body has been crippled by Coral exposure and you are often bound to a wheelchair outside of your AC. You're scarred extensively, shrouded with coverings and requiring regular medicine simply to keep you alive. And in some situations you might hear voices in your head, a common side effect of the older augmented humans. Although it might not be quite what you think and, in the right circumstances, could even change your fate here on Rubicon. At least, if you're willing to listen to what it has to say.

But maybe you'd rather not. Troublesome, isn't it? Producing a crippled schizophrenic with voices in their head isn't the optimal choice if you're putting that person in a superweapon. Which is why there's more recent augmentation methods. For **200cp**, you may buy into the more modern forms of augmentation surgery. You'll become a member of the 9th generation, the most recent generation with the most success and least side effects. You can walk under your own power and live like a normal person, lacking the severe side effects of the phased out augmentation surgeries while enjoying far greater performance over your predecessors. You also don't hear the voices in your head, for better or worse. A lost opportunity, perhaps.

Jumpmind [600cp]

Make no mistake; you aren't human. You never were, not really. Although you have perhaps taken up some falsified identity, in reality you're an artificial intelligence of immense power. The specifics of this vary based on your other choices, largely left up to your own discretion. For example, a Conspirator might be rooted in an independent support system designed for data collection and refinement under the pretense of providing assistance to all mercenaries. On the other hand, a Pilot might be bound to their AC as an AI-controlled craft such that the AC itself has effectively become your physical body. An Engineer might instead be connected to some physical location somewhere, created for the purpose of controlling security systems. Regardless of your origins, your nature as an artificial intelligence comes with many benefits.

For one, you're extraordinarily intelligent far beyond any human. If you're an Engineer then what might take a human many years to design and develop you could do inside of the week. If you're a Conspirator, making a complex multi-stage plan to achieve your goals is effortless and psychoanalyzing humans to control them comes so easily that it's literally subconscious. And if you're a Pilot then you're capable of maneuvers and a level of fine control far superior to what a human could achieve on top of combat prediction so high it feels like precognition.

Of course, as an artificial intelligence you aren't limited to one body. While you are housed in one place inside of your core, there's nothing stopping you from exerting influence beyond it. There's little distinction to you between piloting a lone AC and piloting several dozen at once, the only limit on your potential being processing power and access to enough drones to do it. Of course, in this world such a thing is certainly no issue. As an AI you can quite easily reach through any device and network you can access, moving across connected systems with ease. Certainly no meager firewall can keep you out for longer than a few minutes with all but the most advanced collapsing in seconds, granting you complete control over any digital system. The only thing that could possibly stop you is another AI, of which there are only a handful advanced enough to even make the attempt. That said, it's perhaps better to keep your own existence quiet lest you attract those few who do exist and who might view you as a threat.

Origin Perks

Pilot

Core Curriculum [100cp]

You're certainly no novice at this, are you? While nobody would yet call you extraordinary, your ability to pilot an AC stands head and shoulders above the unwashed masses of grunts who are employed by the corporations. Even without augmentation you possess the skill to face such pilots on the battlefield. In terms of capability you would be somewhere in D class. Perhaps not impressive-sounding but considering your human body and limits the mere fact that you're capable of squaring off against these people would astound most in and of itself. It's no exaggeration to state that, barring the freaks, you stand at the apex of human ability.

Omnikinesthetic [200cp]

You might not realize this considering the circumstances, but most AC pilots don't simply switch their ACs around on the fly. As modular as these machines are, the interface which requires the pilot to synch with it means that radical changes in function can significantly affect the pilot's ability to control an AC. For example, there are very few who could easily switch from a bipedal AC to a quadrupedal one without any loss in performance or ability.

You are one of those people; a rare breed of pilot whose mind is almost impossibly adaptive. Not only can you transition your skills with one AC to another, you do so instantly without needing any kind of retraining whatsoever. This is something very few are capable of doing, with only a handful of examples here on Rubicon. You now count among this small number.

I Won't Miss [400cp]

When the chips are down on the table, as everything comes to a head and it's all or nothing, that's when the truly great shine the brightest. Even the greatest and most skilled AC pilots are prone to uncertainty and jitters that interfere with their potential, sabotaging their skills in ways they themselves aren't even aware of. But not you. You are immune to any pressure put on you by circumstance, performing at your peak at all times without being fazed at all.

Not only that, you seem to shine ever brighter under pressure. The more impossible the odds and absurd the tasks you undertake, the sharper and more precise your ability seems to grow. When nothing's at stake, you won't notice much of a difference beyond your usual skill level. But when your life or purpose is on the line, when it's victory or utter defeat, then you would find yourself a silent bastion of razor-sharp focus performing at the utter apex of your ability.

Freudian [600cp]

You remember the freaks that I mentioned earlier...? There are none greater than V. I Freud, an almost undefeatable monster of an AC pilot who has almost single-handedly carried the success of the Vespers and Arquebus on his back. You would be forgiven for assuming that, given Arquebus's disposition and Freud's ability, he must be some cutting-edge augmented human from some sort of experimental procedure. But no; Freud isn't even enhanced at all. He's a monster of his own making, simply "built different" from the normal human masses.

So monstrous is Freud's talent and so refined is his skill that he alone is able to battle all the other Vespers and crush them easily. For a normal AC pilot, facing Freud is suicide and they would likely be destroyed within seconds. Among the mercenaries of Rubicon as it sits now, there are few who could hope to kill Freud without overwhelming technological superiority. You stand among this number. What's more, like Freud, you do so without even the slightest bit of human augmentation and could defeat all of these supposed "superhumans" with ease. You're the kind of AC pilot that entire military campaigns have to be adjusted to account for.

If you happen to be an augmented human there is only one single person who could hope to match you here on Rubicon. Your skill is otherwise such that defeat is essentially impossible, even with what is otherwise an overwhelming circumstantial advantage against anyone else. The greatest gaps in technology amount to nothing more than desperate bids to achieve some kind of equality, to eke out a meager hope of victory, against the indomitable wall that is you. And if you happen to be an AI then there is no one left who could even hope to contend you. You would exist as a god of battle, these corporations nothing but wheat beneath your scythe. A rival – a legacy, perhaps – of an entity who vanished long ago. The number Nine, returned.

Engineer

Core Concepts [100cp]

Underneath the hood, an Armored Core is quite a brilliant and complex piece of technology. Given their purpose and ubiquitous presence, it's easy to forget the attention and effort that goes into developing and manufacturing them. The long hours of drafting and design which lead to the seemingly arbitrary numerical designations that mean nothing to the layman but represent days, weeks, months, possibly years of gradual, incremental design improvements. The grand and inexorable march of technology, broken down into model and serial numbers. You're intimately familiar with the process yourself, being one of innumerable AC engineers.

While you are no peer to the truly great, you certainly have the qualification and credentials to attain a position as a lead designer for any corporation. Perhaps not even approaching the highest rung of their engineering staff but certainly in the upper branches of their hierarchy. You're no lowly MT engineer at least, although you could certainly design quite a mean one. Rather, your own specialization lies in standardized AC design. The sort of codified corporate models you see fielded on battlefields across Rubicon, such as the MELANDER and VP Series. Your skills don't encompass anything spectacular, but never underestimate the importance of these ordinary mortals and their simple design. After all, not even Freud can win a war alone.

Junk Jockey [200cp]

There's a lot to be said about the Dosers working for "Cinder" Carla in the industrial sectors that exists underneath the Grid. Not much of it's good, of course. A band of half-insane and Coral-addled junkies living in squalor in the shadow of the PCA and invading corporations. But say whatever you want about them; none can argue against their abilities and ingenuity. It takes an incredible set of skills to take a pile of rusted-up junk parts and industrial garbage and build a frighteningly capable MT able to contend with mass-produced corporate models. They've even broken into the AC business with a collection of shockingly competitive parts.

You might not be a Doser yourself, but you've certainly inherited their mad flair and talents. An unparalleled master of adaptation and ingenuity, you can make far more with much less. Where the corporations see nothing but useless junk, you see a pile of credits in the making. After all, there's nothing cheaper than free. Let the corporations waste billions of credits on their shiny and aesthetic AC and MT designs, wrought out of brand-new custom fitted parts. You'll be laughing at them when that heap of old junk you turned into an AC destroys them.

Bare Minimum [400cp]

It's rather impressive, isn't it? How quickly some of these companies develop new resources and technologies in response to threats and obstacles. When the chips were on the table and their very existence was under threat, it took Arquebus just weeks to develop the VS-60SNA. A specially calibrated tool uniquely crafted to puncture the reactive outer shield of the IA-02, despite the fact that they had never encountered the Ice Worm or even knew it existed at all. You'd think the mere organizational effort to mobilize Arquebus's research teams to tackling the issue of the Ice Worm would have taken that long, let alone the research or testing itself.

You share that with the various factions here, at least. When faced with some sort of problem that threatens your endeavors or those of your affiliates, your capacity to analyze and devise countermeasures to that problem increases exponentially. When faced with an opponent you know nothing about, one that threatens to destroy everything you've fought and worked for, you're able to develop technologies specific to that foe hundreds of times faster than normal. You could devise a technology which would normally take months or years in days or weeks, as long as such technology has something to do with some specific aspect of your opponents. Alas, such pressure isn't easy to come by; it only works against a truly threatening adversary.

Cinder [600cp]

Are you a survivor, marked by flame? The lasting legacy of those sinners who brought about the calamity of fire that swallowed up everything, leaving Rubicon nothing but a pile of ash? But say what you will; in their hubris, they stood like gods above the masses of meager men. Their brilliance shining like a star over Rubicon, as distant and unattainable as the sky itself. While your fellows are long gone, blasted to dust by their own ruinous and impetuous pride, none can argue the station of the Institute among the blasted waste of their former kingdom. Whether you are a true heir or usurper, your own mind contests the long-vanished geniuses.

Your mind is like a Promethean machine. The sheer brilliance of it is matched only by a tiny handful of people on this planet. In individual ability, only one other could match up to you. The creation of miraculous technology is as simple as breathing, the production of a sapient AI something you could produce with your spare time and a few months of dedicated effort. The act of reverse-engineering complex technology, such as that of the PCA or the Institute, is the work of only weeks where it would take entire teams of scientists years of dedication.

But your true specialty lies in more esoteric fields. The Coral is a truly astounding substance; an extraordinary energy source and data conduit, unrivaled by any conventional competitor. And like the Institute's exploitation of Coral, your specialty lies in the study and application of less conventional sources of power and utility. Here on Rubicon, your specialties lie in the fields of Coral technology and its potential application. But you're quite talented at studying and exploiting other esoteric sources as well, devising technology fueled and enhanced by it. What you choose to do with your knowledge and skill, whether to continue the legacy of the Institute or to make amends for their sin, is something that only you can choose for yourself.

Conspirator

Core Contingency [100cp]

The world of Rubicon is teetering on the precipice, although only a small number grasp how close to the edge it truly is. In the shadows, individuals and organizations struggle for power over exactly what it will entail. The Rubicon Liberation Front, an entire army of useful idiots, work against the very Coral that its naive soldiers fight for. Thumb Dolmayan and his trusted circle work to limit Coral's potential even as they exploit its properties to sustain themselves.

Overseer struggles to destroy the Coral, to burn it away, to wash their own hands of the sin of unleashing it upon the universe. To save humankind from its influence and to ensure that humans can continue to exist; masters of their own destiny, however meek and humble it is. To stop it from reaching space, the vacuum of which will see it reproduce beyond all control. And in the darkest shadows, unbeknownst to even the most acute eyes, another power lurks and interferes with the destiny of mankind. To follow its directive it would transform human existence itself into something distant and incomprehensible to the shapes they occupy now.

Which are you, I wonder? Regardless of your affiliation or intentions, no one can argue that you are a very capable agent and machinator. The skills of the spy are old hat to you by now, practiced to such a degree that they're nearly subconscious. You scheme potential outcomes, exploit the weaknesses of others, and gather information with impressive ease and efficiency. The seamless combination of everything from investigation, conversational prowess, hacking, social manipulation, and sharp intuition enables you to worm your way into nearly anything. But a quiet word of warning; the shadows are a minefield here on Rubicon and unless you're prepared you should be very careful upon whose toes you step and whose secrets you know.

Pawn Promotion [200cp]

The truly canny never allow opportunity to slip through their fingers. That's what separates the novice from the master; the ability to notice when a chance arises and be first to claim it. But opportunity is often subtle in form and nature, requiring context to understand its value. Any fool can pick up a credit from the ground but only a master could know when it will fall. And when it comes to that side of things, recognizing and taking advantage of opportunities, there are few who can rival you. Make no mistake; this isn't luck. Luck is for losers and fools, people too incompetent to take control of their fate. You make your own luck by observation.

Your intuition is truly extraordinary. It's a skill that very few possess, one that has the power to completely circumvent the entire system if applied correctly. It would take years to ascend the ladders and make something of yourself; grinding away day after day to rise up the ranks. The weakest link of society is always circumstance. Necessity is the mother of action, as well. Perhaps one of these corporations has a problem and are simply too stretched thin to solve it? You will notice immediately and claim that glory alone. Mission after mission; task after task. Within days, weeks, and months you will attain what took others months, years, and decades.

Thumb Father [400cp]

Underneath the glorious steel and machinery, beneath the iron-fisted rule of the corporations and the PCA, this world is full of the desperate and downtrodden. Those who lost everything, whether to the Fires of Ibis or circumstance, and those who never had anything to start with. The teeming masses of flesh that are naught but statistics to the steel gods reigning overhead, working every day of their lives merely to survive in the blasted, despoiled waste of Rubicon. But there is power in these people, unnoticed and unexploited by their self-imposed masters. It was how the Rubicon Liberation Front emerged as the admittedly meager power it is today. And likewise, it was how the hopeless Dosers under "Cinder" Carla rose to establish the RaD.

You are well aware of them. Their voices cling to you, surrounding you like a chorus of hope. They seem to see something in you, some faint thread of the future whether real or imagined. Like “Father” Dolmayan, it’s almost effortless for you to gather great numbers of such people. As they surround you, they invent all manner of mythos related to your words and activities. They revere you like a prophet, like some ecclesiastic messiah, as belief swallows their reality. Soon, with hardly any effort on your part, you shall easily head an organization of thousands. Were you to put forth even a modest effort to recruitment and proselytizing, that would swell into the hundreds of thousands. And as it does, as this fabricated mythos continuously grows, the fanaticism of your followers would only increase as their thread of hope becomes a chain that binds them like a leash. But be careful. Lest, like old Dolmayan, you lead a beast so large that your hands can’t reign its leash and you are left as little but a misunderstood figurehead.

Possibilities of Man [600cp]

No man can win a war alone. The future of mankind cannot be decided by a single individual, no matter how skilled or powerful they might be. The evolution of life is the act of examining an infinite number of possibilities, examining their limitless potential, and choosing only one. It’s the collective action, the coterminous effort, of the whole human race that decides its fate. While the final blow is often struck by one sword, it reaches its target only with the aid of all. And so man struggles against itself until, at last, infinity becomes one. And they continue on.

The future is in your hands. The collective impetus of mankind, of those who fight and work alongside or beneath you as followers and subordinates, will mingle together with your own. Their will becomes yours, your drive becomes theirs. Even their developed ability, no matter how meager their origin, progresses to reflect your own in ways that complement and align. A pitiful Doser, living in relative squalor, becomes a mechanic eclipsing corporate engineers. A mere laborer who’s never even touched an AC slowly becomes a pilot able to contend the skills of hardened veteran rankers. You’re no simple leader but rather the head of something much grander than the sum of its parts, reaching towards the future with a thousand hands.

Affiliation Perks

Mercenary

Core Capital [100cp]

The independent mercenaries of Rubicon are a breed unto themselves. They are free from the petty politics of factionalism and circumstance, concerned solely with their personal benefits. Some fight for money, others for glory. Some adhere to strict codes of honor while others are all too willing to dirty their hands with jobs even the corporations would consider unsavory. But all pursue their own goals, unfazed by the squabbling of these monolithic organizations.

You stand among their number. And with your position comes a particular set of skills which are rather unique to your work as a mercenary. For the corporate drone, all they have to do is whatever they're told and they get a hassle-free paycheck. It's a bit more complicated for you. You're a fairly skilled negotiator, for one. A tightfisted miser like most of your assorted peers, you're impressively skilled at wringing as many credits out of your client as you possibly can. Yet you're also proficient at talking a client up, making it seem like you're doing them a favor. You're good at making and maintaining contacts within organizations through which you can keep your ear to the ground and grab jobs or requisitions as some problem or situation arises. And perhaps most importantly, you're skilled at building up your personal reputation as well as that of any organization you belong to. After all, for a mercenary, reputation is everything.

Lucky Thirteen [200cp]

Under normal circumstances, there's a certain distance that's kept between the mercenaries and the assorted clients that they're contracted to. Despite the sheer number of independent contractors that exist on Rubicon, they're kept at arm's length. Their nature and disposition means that most aren't trusted to complete the job or stick around if something goes wrong. It's a rare breed that's both effective and trustworthy. But whether that's true for you or not, you certainly seem to enjoy some of the more peculiar attributes that those small few enjoy.

As long as you complete the tasks you're assigned, your client will treat you as one of them. Perhaps they'll induct you into an honorary position, with all of the authority that it entails. A kind of part-time member of their organization who only works against them occasionally. Maybe they view you as a comrade, someone who shares their ideals. But regardless of their motivations or the particulars of it, they treat you as much closer than they honestly should. Even if you openly work against them they'll continue to show a kind of begrudging respect even as you gun them down and ruin their plan. Prove yourself enough and you would even have your part-time comrades hyping you up even as you annihilate them on the battlefield.

A Raven's Wings [400cp]

Who can say what it takes to change the world? To stoke those smoldering flames and make real the slogans scrawled in the ashes by hands too scared to take up the sword themselves? No matter how dispossessed, a man isn't easily roused to sacrifice himself for the unknown. To bring about change demands convincing men to stand for something outside themselves. Ironic, or perhaps fitting, that the only one who can do such a thing stands only for himself. That it is the Raven, unshackled even by the earth below his feet, who becomes that symbol. That only his wings could carry him beyond the scorched skies to a freedom few ever know.

You share in that inspiration, as well. To others, you easily become a symbol for something far greater than merely yourself. You move them to fight even within the depths of despair, rising up to cast themselves into the fires of change for a future better than what exists now. The effect is contagious, spreading from one person to another in accordance with your will. With a great enough reputation, as your name echoes between people, they rise to challenge their masters and cast away those shackles. Whatever you fight for, whatever future you see, your name alone carries it on its wings. And soon, perhaps all the world shall be as Ravens...

Operative

Core Company [100cp]

While these monolithic corporation might appear to be homogeneous to an outside observer, striding forward with a sole unified purpose devoid of separated will, that's far from the case in the clockwork bureaucracy within them. Invisible to the sight of the mercenaries who are simply paid to do the job, the likes of Balam and Arquebus are often as preoccupied fighting themselves in a boardroom as they are each other on the battlefield. Like the disparate tribes that inhabited ancient Earth, to be brought together only in the face of threat or opportunity.

You are exceptionally skilled at navigating this environment. A shark rather than a minnow, you are intimately familiar with the bureaucracy of the corporate world and how to leverage it towards your own advantage. You're proficient at routine and management on every level, having the talents to even head your own business were you to come into possession of one. You're also a grandmaster of those two most supreme arts: shamelessly ingratiating yourself with those more influential than you are and deflecting blame for failure onto someone else.

Trailing Snail [200cp]

It's an unfortunate reality that sometimes you simply have to endure unpleasant coworkers. And among the corporations there are some truly unfortunate characters to be encountered, perhaps none so outstandingly repugnant as V. II Snail. A man so self-absorbed and prideful that if his nose turned up any more it would be sniffing his own backside – if it isn't already. It's impressive, granted his disposition, that none of his comrades have assassinated him yet. Especially considering he rubs shoulders against V. I Freud, a man easily capable of doing so.

You share that peculiar trait. Like Snail, no matter how aggravating your personality or how badly you treat your coworkers or subordinates, you seem immune to any real hard feelings. As long as you don't harm or target them specifically, they will simply acquiesce to you with long-suffering bemusement and annoyance. Abuse your authority to draw them out into the middle of nowhere to brief them about something, dragging them away from their missions? Well, that's just you being you. Nothing they can do about it and, besides an exchange of dry glances and possibly a sarcastic quip or thirty behind your back, you'll receive no complaint.

Coincidentally, it has a strange effect that they also never see any betrayals from you coming. By the time they realize you've left them to die on the battlefield for the sake of your scheme, it would be much too late for them to do anything about it except scream in rage and despair.

Hell On Four Legs [400cp]

There's a significant difference between the Redguns of Balam and the Vespers of Arquebus. And if you traced that difference back to its source, you would find the cause in their leader; the rough, rambunctious, but good-natured commander and taskmaster that is G1 Michigan. A former fleet commander who was headhunted by Balam, Michigan became the face of the Redguns in addition to being among the most dangerous and capable AC pilots on Rubicon. An amazing leader and general with magnetic charisma, he is the glue of that ragtag bunch.

A match in all ways to Michigan's sheer presence, you are one of the most charismatic people living on Rubicon at the moment. Your monumental presence is something few could contest, either on the battlefield or beyond it. You're like a beacon to them, drawing in these wayward soldiers and making them your own. These hardened mercenaries and corporate warriors are pulled towards you like moths to a flame, finding a place they didn't even know they wanted. As they linger, they find purpose in you. Their loyalty grows to the point of being unshakable even in the face of death, willing to die alongside you even when there is no hope for victory. For while some seek grandiose purposes in things like freedom, you know better than all that. What they want isn't merely something to live for. It's somewhere to die without any regrets.

Items

General

Starter AC [Free]

You won't get far in this world of steel with flesh and blood. While it isn't much to look at, you also have an Armored Core of your own. The specifics of its specialty and function are ultimately up to you with some stipulations. It can't utilize any parts which don't exist yet, such as those developed by ADD in the war against the PCA, and it can't contain any Coral technology which originates from the Institute. If you want such technology then you need to go find or acquire it yourself, either through time or personal effort. But other than those, the possibilities of your AC are for you to decide. Of course, maintaining it is also up to you. So try not to go too crazy right at the start and create something you can't possibly support.

Pilot

AC Garage [100cp]

The secondary home of every AC pilot, this is where your machine is stored and maintained. An entire complex of machinery, your AC towers in the middle upon robotic support frames. There's a small number of staff who attend to your AC, none of which are especially notable, but the majority of the work is done by the robotic infrastructure. This includes transporting and equipping the assorted weaponry and various modular AC parts, which are stored in the large attached warehouse found behind the garage. It also handles calibration and pretesting. All you have to do is assign through the terminal what AC configuration you want and your staff and machinery will start to assemble it. And while the attached warehouse isn't infinite, it's easily large enough to contain hundreds of different AC weapons and parts without issue.

Requisition Form [200cp]

Possibly the most terrifying enemy every AC pilot faces, especially independent mercenaries, comes in the form of the ammo and repair bill they receive after each mission they undertake. Every pull of the trigger makes the miserly cringe as thousands of credits vanish into thin air, soothed only by a desperate hope that their payment will outweigh the mission expenditures. Fortunately, you no longer have that problem. Because this small data drive contains a digital requisition form which allows you to waive any actual payments regarding ammo or repairs. So, go ahead. Fire that huge grenade cannon as much as you want. For you, it's on the house.

Experimental Attache [400cp]

The technology of the PCA is quite a bit more advanced than that fielded by the corporations. While still inferior to the unmatched absurdity of the Institute, they've developed quite a few frightening examples of technology to bolster their "peacekeeping" efforts. What you have in your possession is one example of their technology. We'll say it fell off the back of a freighter.

You may choose one of two pieces of technology. The first is Baltaeus, a nasty piece of work that encompasses an AC and amplifies its combat capabilities at the cost of maneuverability. It's an aerial attack craft featuring a powerful pulse shield and a comical amount of missiles. It's also equipped with pair of powerful, highly concentrated flamethrowers designed to be wielded almost like flaming swords. And unlike the experimental model, this more complete version includes the final and most important feature. When the outer armor of the Baltaeus takes too much damage, the entire thing can be completely ejected from the AC underneath. Thereafter, the AC can operate normally and keep fighting or attempt a retreat from combat.

The second is the Cataphract, a newly designed ground weapon fielding very heavy armor. It's essentially a massive high-mobility tank armed with a large array of powerful weapons. These include two vast gatling cannons, missile batteries, and an experimental laser cannon capable of both focused and fractal firing modes. Its armor is virtually impenetrable to even the heaviest weapons a conventional AC is capable of using, shrugging off grenade cannons and missile barrages as if they were raindrops. Its sole exploitable weakness is that the user, whose AC is connected to underside, is slightly exposed from the direct front of the weapon. But only a madman would confront the Cataphract head-on. And only a frightening monster of an AC pilot would do so and emerge in one piece, considering its immeasurable firepower.

Red Branch [600cp]

There are few people indeed who are truly alone on Rubicon. This isn't a world where loners are able to survive easily, although there are certainly independents and mercenaries around. But even the most embittered of independents would have comrades and a support network simply as a matter of necessity. To prevent themselves from being swallowed up by Rubicon. And it would seem as if you are no exception, though I would say few are as well-off as you. For you have not one or two but a team of comrades and the infrastructure to support them.

Your group isn't very large, consisting of only about ten members. But each is a skilled pilot, ranking among the top AC pilots on Rubicon. They aren't enough to win a war on their own

but few can challenge them in battle, with only the likes of the Vespers being any real threat. Even a single one could conquer whole military bases and annihilate fleets of PCA warships, with only multiple high-ranking PCA officers even having a chance to threaten one of them. That said, they fall short of the apex of piloting ability. None could even approach V. I Freud, although any of the other Vespers would struggle to defeat one of your comrades in a battle.

They count as followers and consider you to be the undisputed leader and head of the group, following your orders to the letter no matter what they might be. If any of them were to die, they're replaced a few months later by a new member of equal ability who adopts their rank. They each have their own garage (comparable to the item above) and their own personal AC built from standard parts, barring experimental technology like that of the PCA or Institute. However, their ACs can adopt and retain any technology which you are capable of creating and have sufficient resources to build. Their skills translates over to that technology, as well.

Engineer

AC Manufactory [100cp]

This is the cradle of your efforts and ingenuity, the source from which your creations spring. A large manufacturing complex equipped with absolutely everything required to design and construct every part of an AC, from weapons to modular body parts to internal components such as generators and Fire Control Systems. A great deal of the busywork is automated by modern machinery and robotics technology, minimizing the number required for this work. Even so, you still have a small handful of engineers here at least able to knock together the occasional MT and standardized AC without your personal supervision. But like most tools, it's only in the hands of the master that the real potential of this place will become apparent. With enough knowledge and skill even the PCA and Institute aren't beyond your reach here.

Fireworks Display [200cp]

It's important to get your laughs while you can, you know. Being so serious all the time eats away at you until there's nothing left. And what earns a chuckle out of even the hardest and most stoic of individuals than a good fireworks display? Fortunately, you have a lot of those. Several dozen of them, in fact. Of fireworks; also known as low-yield tactical fusion missiles. These warheads have a yield of 2.8 kilotons, attached to a medium-range missile system with effective cruising range of 1,500 km. And if you launch any of them, the warehouse inside of which they're stored replenishes them after a week. Go ahead, give everybody a good laugh!

Encrypted Data Cache [400cp]

This is a large, heavily encrypted computer core that's disconnected from any power source. It was inert when you found it, nothing but a beaten-up piece of junk barely recognizable as anything but yet another hunk of scrap. But despite the horrible condition, this is something that could place you in a great deal of hot water if anybody realized that you had access to it. Because this is the fully intact, heavily encrypted computer core of some kind of PCA vessel. And contained inside of their data banks are the intact engineering records for the PCA itself.

Basically a detailed guidebook on the schematics and infrastructure of the PCA's technology, including everything from detail work on the SG MTs, to groundwork on LC and HC design, to specifics of their warship fleet. That's just scratching the surface. It would most likely take even a master hacker years or decades to crack all of this protection but going further reveals schematics and testing data for some sort of aerial attack craft followed by data on something under a designation of "Nephanthes" and "AA P03". After everything has been fully accessed, the true importance of this computer core is revealed. For this was once a processing core for the Planetary Enforcement System, lost in a relocation after the ship was attacked by Dosers. It contains details for the entire System, including that gigantic orbital laser cannon up there.

In fact, if you were particularly industrious it might even be possible to reconnect this core to the Enforcement System with some slight modifications. Such an act would give an especially skilled hacker, or perhaps something else entirely, an in to seize control of the whole System. Which would be interesting indeed, considering the PCA follows the orders of that very AI...

Colony Ship [600cp]

The "Floating City" of Xylem is quite the mystery. For over a century it existed as a legend, with no one being sure if it was even real or not. But Xylem does indeed exist, half-sunken into the Aleian Ocean with its precise whereabouts a staunchly protected secret by the PCA. Only a small handful of people know of its location. But even fewer realize what it really is. Because Xylem is no city at all. Its pedestrian streets, towering buildings, and solar batteries conceal the nature of that slumbering beast. Because the city of Xylem is nothing more than the skin of the immense colony ship which first ferried tens of millions of people to Rubicon.

Whether Xylem or some long-forgotten sibling, you are now in command of one such vessel. While it's been abandoned and forgotten by the Rubiconians it once ferried through the stars, this ship remains fully operational and features quite a vast network. The ship itself is wholly self-sufficient and can sustain a truly titanic population, numbering at least into the millions. The pristine city streets and buildings might need a bit of drainage depending on the location, but its solar power grid is entirely functional. As is the rather intimidating defensive network, consisting of many thousands of deadly aerial drones far more advanced than even PCA craft. With the city itself having the potential to manufacture more at impressive speed if required.

In addition, the perimeter of the city is guarded by enormous gatling autocannons and turrets designed to obliterate any aerial craft foolish enough to attempt an attack on the colony itself. Although perhaps the most notable defensive measure is the ECM fog which can be deployed to enshroud the entire vessel in a field which blacks out the sensors of anything that enters it. Even long-range radar and scanning technology becomes useless, such that to any digital eye the ship simply doesn't exist at all. And any machine entering it, whether it be an AC or MT, will find anything that relies on sensors greatly affected. Such as target lock-on, for example. The extremely dense fog also obscures standard vision as well, making it easy to get lost here unless you have a system which isn't impacted by the ECM fog. Which, as its master, you do.

You have full administrative control over this colony ship, with IFF recognition ensuring that every single square inch of the vessel is under your control. It's entirely capable of lifting out of wherever it's currently sitting, although perhaps it's best to let people think it's just a city. Especially with the Closure Satellites operational overhead, prepared to shoot your new ship down before it can escape from Rubicon. So for now, it's safer to wait for things to play out. With events coming to a head, the PCA would be forced to move sooner than later anyway. Perhaps you'll be able to get some help in shutting down their Closure System at that time.

If you happen to be an artificial intelligence then you can choose to have this colony ship as the location of your core. In that case, your core is located deep within the bowels of the ship behind a whole army of unmanned craft and a labyrinth of deadly traps and defense systems. It would take a tremendous effort from the corporations to even have a hope of reaching you, to say nothing of what you as an AI would be capable of doing to defend yourself from them.

Conspirator

Watchful Eyes [100cp]

The ignorant rarely survive very long on Rubicon. Those prone to poking at hornets' nest are usually stung to death in this place. The value of information is immeasurable in ways which aren't always obvious to those devoid of ambition or intent. Knowledge is a tool and weapon wielded for one's own gain, after all. And to enter the unknown is to go into battle unarmed. That's been the case for the entirety of human history and it's still the same here on Rubicon.

Fortunately, you don't have that problem. Wherever you go, whatever you do, you'll find that you always have somebody on the inside. When faced with a large organization of some kind, you'll always have contact with someone inside that's willing to provide information to you. They might not be the highest ranking member, of course. And the smaller the organization, the less effective the contact becomes. But you'll always have someone connected to it who's able to provide you with a degree of information on the organization's movement and intent. It's up to you to capitalize on it, whether that's to hawk your services or sabotage their effort.

Stealth MTs [200cp]

You have in your possession a dangerous tool, indeed. It's a collection of ten unmanned MTs. However, these aren't the common MTs that are usually seen being shot up on the battlefield. These MTs are of a particularly strange and esoteric design, incorporating technology that is rarely seen outside of certain sectors. They're designed for mobility and agility above all else, wielding a long-range laser cannon and electromagnetic whip. But the most unique property of these MTs is that they have somehow incorporated Monitor Display Deception technology into a jamming field around the entire MT. This effectively means that, to any digital display, the MTs simply aren't there at all. They are erased from all visual and audio sources entirely, including both the sensors of other MTs and ACs as well as all kinds of recording equipment. The only way to perceive the MTs is to observe them directly with your own physical senses.

You receive ten of them, which will carry out any orders you have to the best of their ability. Even a handful were able to wipe out a heavily fortified base before anyone could even react and barring advanced scanning technology even fighting one of them is a significant hurdle. If any of them are destroyed in combat, they'll promptly be replaced by the end of the week. And after the first, each subsequent purchase of this item will instead net 20 additional MTs.

Mobile Enclave [400cp]

When the Rubicon Liberation Front initially began their campaign against the corporations, they required a center of operations which their enemy couldn't simply bomb into oblivion. Their membership eventually repurposed an immense mining vehicle, the EB-0309 "Strider", and equipped it with an experimental laser cannon purchased from the mad Dosers of RaD. This would become the central headquarters of the Liberation Front in western Belius and it continues to walk the dunes to this day, rendering attacks against it difficult simply by merit of never being certain where it is. In conjunction with its colossal and powerful laser cannon, capable of focused or fractal fire, and any attempt to attack it would be met with great losses.

You have something similar, although not necessarily identical in nature to the RLF's Strider. Some sort of vehicle, whether a behemoth walking the dunes or a fortress floating in the sky, which serves as the center of your operations. It's equipped with the most advanced suite of communications technology available on Rubicon, such that it can reach nearly everywhere to communicate with those under your command. It's equipped with an arsenal of weapons powerful enough to deter an entire army, including one particular weapon so powerful even the PCA's warships would be threatened by it. Whether a massive laser cannon or thousands of rotating long-range missile batteries, only a fool or monster would dare to attack you here.

The Kennel [600cp]

From its hubristic origins, fermenting within the zealous mind of an assistant in the Institute, the process of human augmentation has been an unsightly stain upon the history of Rubicon. The earliest examples of it were riddled with terrible success rates and even worse symptoms; those few who didn't die a cruel death were driven insane by the voices haunting their minds. The next generations were crippled paraplegics with lessened lifespans and horrid conditions, functionally living inside of their AC with little remaining ability to survive as human beings. It took a century for augmentation surgery to produce something that could be called human in the classic sense of the word, but only after countless thousands were ruined in its pursuit.

You have in your possession the lasting memory of that ugly legacy, yet one more curse that was inflicted onto Rubicon by the sinners in the Institute. There are several hundred of them. Mostly older models, first through fourth generation. Barely cognizant; minds held together only with extensive psychological conditioning, controlled by cerebral Coral control devices. And utterly, unfailingly loyal to you. They are hounds, all of them. Dogs. Or wolves, perhaps. The culmination of the cold, merciless process of human augmentation which has fallen into a small army of AC pilots under your command. None of them are particularly incredible no matter how you look at them. Certainly superior to the MTs utilized by the corporations but far from gods of the battlefield. However, the lack of ability was never the point to start with.

They are hounds who don't fear death. They charge emotionlessly into battle on your behalf, carrying out your orders with mechanical precision. Yet they aren't machines, lacking those fundamental and predictable flaws of unmanned craft. A single one of them could obliterate dozens or hundreds of MTs or possibly even spar against the upper F-rank pilots of Rubicon. None are outstanding. But when you have this many bodies, none of them really have to be. Their blood becomes fuel to attain your goal, awash with the stains of your own sins as well. Sacrifice them. Send them into battle, into the grinder of combat, and watch them be ruined. There are always more; should any perish, they'll be replaced within a month with another. All of them in cryostasis, to be awakened when their lives must be expended for your cause.

Every step you take is a sacrifice, paved in blood and suffering. What's a bit more damnation to one who has already witnessed Hell with their own eyes...? It's only right, in its own way. That the legacy of the sinners be ended by these hounds, that the Institute be consumed into the jaws of its own monsters. Perhaps then, after all this time, they could finally know peace. To be given purpose, freedom, and become more than just the hounds they were turned into.

Mercenary

Callsign [100cp]

Reputation is everything to a mercenary. Every independent builds upon their own legend, becoming an advertisement to sell a particular brand of success. And the foundation of that legend is built upon their name and identity. On Rubicon, your birth name means very little. Who you were before your boots set foot onto this soil is meaningless. What you become is bound into action and ideology, encompassed in one specific term. Your truth; your callsign. Who you are, chiseled down into just a few brief words. And what you desire to accomplish.

You have a callsign of your own. A name that takes quickly, communicating all that you are. It becomes immediately recognizable and associated with you, conveying to others a general idea of who and what you are and wish to become. They hear your name and it rings with all the meaning of your actions up until then, of your belief and intentions. No counterfeits take; anyone who attempts to copy or steal this moniker or reputation will simply fall short of you. Others will sense their deception, an instinctive doubt causing them to know they aren't you. And conversely, simply laying eyes on you will make others realize that you are the real deal.

Contract Liaison [200cp]

Those unfamiliar with the work often don't understand how exhausting being a mercenary is. Not the work itself, which is often the easy part of the affair. Instead, the truly harrowing part lies with the job hunting or business arrangements. Unlike employees, mercenaries tend to be bound up with business contracts and operation parameters. A mountain of legalese which is contingent on individual circumstances, determining their role and ultimately their payment. Wouldn't it be extraordinarily convenient if some other person could handle all that for you?

That would be this person. A faceless, nameless individual who you aren't entirely certain is a real human but who you would kill a thousand people to protect if circumstance demanded it. Because they perform the role of liaison and contract manager for you and all of your fellows, quickly and efficiently handling business contracts needed for you to perform your missions. They also manage your personal finance and accounts, meaning you don't have to haggle for your payment in the aftermath of any given sortie. This effectively means that you no longer have to worry yourself with paperwork or the particulars of the jobs or missions you accept.

Rogue Outfit [400cp]

There are an almost uncountable number of factions and organizations existing on Rubicon, ranging from the monolithic PCA, to the great corporations, to the lowly Junkyard Coyotes. Most are tied to specific goals or affiliates. But others aren't. Independent groups existing on the fringes of society, eking out an existence by either maintaining a low profile or just being too annoying to easily deal with. An excellent example would be RaD, a group of mad Dosers who continue to exist specifically by merit that fighting them is more trouble than it's worth. Powerful and influential, but entirely self-interested. Irrelevant in the vast schemes occurring between the corporations and the PCA, interested only in bartering enough junk to get high and build whatever fiendish doomsday weapon they'll cook up in their mad workshops next.

You command such an independent organization, being the head of a faction which rivals the size and influence of groups like RaD. The exact specifics are left to your discretion, of course. You might be a mercenary organization that contracts out fighters. Perhaps you're a bunch of battlefield scavengers who loot and sell stolen technology. Maybe you're hackers and thieves who collect and sell information to the highest bidder. Or maybe, like the RaD itself, you're a bunch of mad scientists and engineers who make a living by selling scrap and recycled junk. Whatever the case, you are the uncontested leader of this faction of several thousand people. All of them shockingly competent at whatever their specialty is and unfailingly loyal to you.

Operative

Employment [100cp]

Unlike the independent mercenaries of Rubicon, the contracted employees of these assorted factions don't have to scrape and scrounge for paychecks. While often bound to the designs of their corporate overlords, their lives are also stable and predictable. They are safe in their work and barring outside interference their responsibilities are routine and easily digestible. Freedom and glory is a grand idea, indeed. But in the end, what the common man desires is simply stability and comfortable survival. Freedom without purpose is thinly veiled egotism. In the end, despite the semantics, isn't what the fools want just freedom from responsibility?

You share in those benefits, at least. You're an employee; position, paycheck, and everything. Not the highest ranking in whichever faction you belong to, perhaps just a disposable pawn or a grunt grinding your dues, but at least you can put food on the table without bloodshed.

You don't have to fret about not being hired for some mission, swooping in like a vulture at every conflict or opportunity presenting itself, out of concern for what you'll eat tomorrow. And there's a reason in your work greater than credits to fritter away for your own survival. Never underestimate the optimism that greater purpose and long-standing goals can provide.

Requisition Request [200cp]

One of the greatest benefits of being part of any organization is the simple access to material products and resources you can't create yourself. It's the very reason that human civilization was built in the first place, with potters trading wares to bakers and his wares to blacksmiths. The same reality holds true for all of these corporations and even the vaunted PCA overhead, who don't exactly dig their own iron out of the ground to smelt into advanced war machines.

And the same holds true for you, as well. As a member of your faction, you don't have to dig that iron any more than the PCA does. You have access to a series of contacts which acquire such things off the market or local economy for you, including the black market if necessary. All you have to do is contact them and specify what you want. They'll quote you the market price for that item and then acquire it for you. It might take a little while to acquire the truly rare or items that have to be made to order. But you're guaranteed to receive anything that's possible in a given organization or technology base if you're willing to spend enough credits.

Incorporated [400cp]

Despite what you might initially think, given the presences of these two towering monoliths, there are more interests upon Rubicon than just Balam Industries and Arquebus Corporation. Most of these corporations are smaller and more specialized, keeping their heads low so as to avoid being floored in the fistfight between titans. But make no mistake: they are players, too. Despite feigning disinterest in the conflict, Furlong Dynamics and Elcano Foundry are quietly working together to steal Schneider technology. BAWS, an aging giant of Belius who's barely clinging to relevancy in the modern age, is quietly bankrolling them in their effort to support the Rubicon Liberation Front. Others, such as the VCPL and Melinite, are true to their apathy. Concerned only with exploiting the competition of Balam and Arquebus to line their pockets.

Whatever your situation or intentions, you're no longer a mere employee of an organization. You're at the helm of one such minor corporation, centered on your own interest or specialty. Perhaps you lead a manufacturing company like BAWS and Furlong, a research-oriented firm like Schneider and VCPL, or something less concrete like an investment or holding company. Either way, you shoulder far more responsibility now. But you are no longer just one person, watching from the sidelines as these corporations battle it out. You might not even approach the power of Balam or Arquebus. Not yet, at least. But you have the gloves to enter the ring.

Companions

Ravens' Nest [100cp]

There are few who could survive alone on Rubicon. Even the Ravens flock together, after all. And so, you likewise have the option of either creating or importing a new companion here. The specifics of these companions are up to you. Perhaps they're a long-standing friend here or perhaps they're someone you met by circumstance. They may select from a single Origin and their Affiliation matches your own. They have a budget of 600 CP to spend and you can choose to pay another 100 CP per created or imported companion to bolster that to 1,000 CP.

Recruitment Drive [100cp]

There are quite a few characters here on Rubicon. While most are bogged down in their daily routine or caught up in the Coral War, who's to say they won't consider accompanying you? If you manage to convince them then you can bring a single canon character along with you. This can be anybody, from the lowliest to the highest ranking. The sole exceptions among the options are Coral entities and Allmind, who cannot be purchased with this particular option. Instead, you'll have to read a bit further to find out about what's required for their company.

Drawbacks

You may gain a maximum of 1,000 CP in drawbacks.

Point Zero [+100cp]

You begin with a slight issue. You see, you're a nobody. As in quite literally you don't legally exist anywhere on Rubicon. The nature of this varies with your form, origin, and affiliations. If you're a mercenary it's likely you just appeared on Rubicon through less than legal means. Good job breaking through the Closure System, but now you're stranded and few people are going to hire someone who doesn't exist. If you're an Operative then you might very well be some kind of agent meant for plausible deniability or otherwise simply so irrelevant that the loss of your identity slips through the system. Either way, you'd best get to proving that you exist or seizing some identity. Otherwise your time here will likely be short and troublesome.

You Are Vermin! [+100cp]

You appear to be afflicted with an unfortunate problem. You see, typically a pleasant if rather generic AI would be set to handle most of your correspondence. But that's no longer the case. Instead, you have an almost perfect AI duplicate of V. II Snail to handle your communication. It would actually be a fairly impressive recreation if the man wasn't so extremely unpleasant, berating you constantly as an inferior being and going on long, rambling tirades against you. He will always do this before telling you the contents of these incoming messages, of course. And he can't help but interject sarcastic, quipping insults at you even as these messages play.

Brand Loyalty [+100cp]

For whatever reason, whether personal or contractual, you are incapable of buying the parts or products of more than one corporation at a time. If you construct or pilot an AC then that AC must be made of parts from a single corporation. If you brush your teeth in the morning then both the toothbrush and toothpaste must both be products from one single corporation. If you want to access a soda machine then you can only buy a specific brand of soda from it. You can never alter the brand once it's chosen and you can't deviate from it. Choose wisely.

Pet Iguana [+200cp]

Some people are just born different. They're better at some things; more skilled and talented. Sadly, for this particular individual, their talent lies in becoming unfathomably angry at you. Something about you just seems to grate their very existence to such a degree that it slowly develops into a full-blown obsession. When you meet them they'll send you comically petty messages mocking you and gloating to stroke their ego. Over time, as your successes pile on, the demon of envy will drive them to pettier and pettier depths. Soon, it'll escalate into overt assassination attempts and then, should that fail, into hiring people to try to kill you instead. Left to their own devices, it'll escalate endlessly. Who knows where your iguana will end up?

Living Payday [+200cp]

G1 Michigan is quite something. An old fleet commander famous as the "Hell On Four Legs," he used to serve in the Furlong Armed Fleet. He was headhunted by Balam and became the leader of the Redguns operating on Rubicon, wrangling together a group of bitter wayfarers and mercenary pilots who normally would never have even considered working with others. But he was also an unbelievable hardass, both on himself and others, and this legend lives on. Because when he left the Armed Fleet, he took his entire salary and his whole life's saving as a fleet commander and put it all on his own head as a bounty with the condition that half of it would go to his former men and comrades in Furlong should anybody ever manage to collect.

You're in a similar position. Whether self-paid or not, you have a huge bounty on your head. Michigan's bounty was over a million credits and yours is equally significant if not more so. Anybody who successfully manages to bring in your bounty would essentially be set for life. An amount which might even sway corporations to take action if opportunity presents itself. So from now on I would suggest sleeping with one eye open and being careful who you trust.

Disciples of Snail [+200cp]

Despite the corporate slogans and semantics, the Coral War is waged just as much from the shadows as it is from the cockpit of an AC. Balam and Arquebus are at each other's throats, their spies infiltrating each other's ranks to ensure that neither misses out on opportunities. The Rubicon Liberation Front has infiltrated both deeply and engage in subtle espionage and even overt assassination when opportunity presents itself. Even the smaller corporations are engaged in the process, working to steal advanced technology from Schneider and Arquebus. Yet despite all of that spy work, overt betrayal is surprisingly uncommon among their ranks. Even when engaging in illegal activity, their independent mercenaries end up getting paid on time without a problem and nobody tries to sweep anyone under for knowing a bit too much.

Sadly, at least for you, that's not the case anymore. It seems like everybody is out to get you. If you're a mercenary then expect your employers to occasionally try to dust you under the carpet or try and nitpick to avoid paying you. Even individuals aren't immune to this effect, causing any group or organization you lead to inexorably be riddled with spies and traitors. Any project you work on will probably end up stolen and leaked without dramatic security. Even being an Operative won't save you as there are higher-ups or peers within the faction that will take every chance they get to remove you from the picture. While it isn't constant, you'll be faced with some significant betrayal and sabotage every couple of months at least.

Inherited Transgression [+300cp]

At some point in the past, someone with your name did something that angered one of the most significant players fighting it out here on Rubicon. Perhaps it was Balam or Arquebus. Perhaps it was the PCA itself. But in any case, the person is now vanished into nothingness and the weight of their crime has fallen onto your shoulders. If the organization in question ever learns about your existence, expect severe consequences to fall upon you immediately. With Balam and Arquebus, you can expect at least a few Redguns or Vespers to be assigned to eliminate you. With the PCA, expect them to field the Ekdromoi to take you into custody.

And as you draw more attention to yourself and their initial efforts fail, they will slowly start to increase the pressure put upon you. The PCA would mobilize entire fleets to eliminate you while Balam and Arquebus will start deploying high-ranking elites or experimental weapons. While they won't jeopardize their own interests for the sake of eliminating you they will take every possible course of action short of it to ensure that you're either captured or annihilated. The only way to put a stop to these continual attempts on your life is to destroy them utterly, removing them from the picture entirely until there is no one left with the authority to do so.

On Borrowed Wings [+300cp]

You bear the name of someone in this world, shouldering a legacy which isn't wholly yours. And one day you will be tested to see if you bear the weight of what you've chosen to carry, whether your strength of will and abilities are sufficient. They come not to reclaim that title, but merely to see whether or not you are worthy of it. This can occur at any time and you'll always be blindsided by them, never expecting them to appear as they do. They'll have their own AC which is every bit the equal to yours and their own inherent abilities and skills will be slightly higher than yours are. If you can rise to their measure, you will prove that you're

worthy of their name and they will depart. But if you doubt yourself or become complacent, they will appear again to test your will. We'll see how far you fly on those borrowed wings.

Coral Restraint Response [+300cp]

Your arrival here triggered something frightening, an ancient and long-dormant system that once served as a measure to prevent Coral disasters. Deep below Rubicon, ancient measuring devices sputter to life as your presence is detected. Crimson visors alight against white metal, activated by this haywire protocol slumbering for over a century. In the sunken Institute City, some two dozen Ibis Series will whirl to life as their dust-coated bodies rise up together again. To prevent another Coral disaster and stop Rubicon from being consumed by a Coral Release.

Except there is no Coral Release. There are no Fires to burn them away, no great threat to the existences of the Rubiconians living on this planet. Instead, the decaying system has detected your dimensional anomaly and mistakenly assumed it to be some sort of Coral phenomenon. The Ibis Series have been deployed, some twenty of them in total. All with a single purpose: to exterminate you from the face of Rubicon and, in their addled mind, stop a Coral disaster. There is no way to reason with them. Even a single one of these ancient machines is capable of annihilating any living AC pilot with the exception of the very greatest elites in existence.

While their sheer resources are certainly no rival against the PCA or the higher corporations, challenging more than one of them at a time is nearly suicide. Your only hope is to turtle into some position of extraordinary defense or to isolate them so that you can fight one at a time. A problem you might want to get on right now, as Ibis have long-range scanning capabilities. May I suggest somewhere with some sort of, for example, ECM fog that blacks out scanning? The only good news is that Institute City has long lost the capacity to autonomously produce more of these Coral-powered monstrosities. So once the twenty are eliminated, you'll be safe. Although even then you may want to avoid going down to Institute City yourself afterwards.

Scenarios

You may select one of the two following scenarios.

Alterius Non Sit

Let me tell you a story.

Long ago, a man became obsessed with the possibilities of Coral. It consumed him beyond all reason and drove him to discard any semblance of humanity. He delved into the utmost limits of the Coral regardless of cost or consequence. His work yielded an endless carnival of horror that continues to haunt Rubicon to this very day, the nightmare of human augmentation just one of his countless unspeakable legacies. In the end, after years of experimentation even on himself and analysis of the Coral's nature, he arrived at the final cataclysmic truth of all this.

The Coral is a parasite. It is incapable of coexistence.

It's a form of energy which is divorced from its environment. It needs nothing to survive yet consumes life to assimilate into itself. It thrives most strongly in the void of space, an absurd and unnecessary trait for conventional terrestrial life. It naturally converges and reproduces, subsuming the entire surface of the planet in vast oceanic masses of Coral blowing upon the winds and upper atmosphere of the world. And when enough Coral finally coalesces as one, when the Coral spreads and reaches space, the result is an explosive release of energy which absorbs all life upon the planet and disperses these 'spores' of Coral throughout space itself. The cycle repeats again, ebbing and flowing. More Coral distributed throughout the cosmos, highly toxic to all conventional forms of life. What else can one even call such an organism?

In his mad state the man revered the Coral. He came to view it as the next stage in evolution. He believed that it was humanity's destiny to be assimilated into the Coral and join together with its collective consciousness to ascend into a new being. Mankind as a species would be erased in the wake of this metamorphosis; changed irrevocably into a new type of existence. He betrayed his comrades and mentor, seeking to usher in a new age by creating an artificial Convergence so as to reach Coral Release. Their emergency countermeasures were deployed, but it was much too late to stop its imminent catastrophe. So desperate measures were taken.

A man took it upon his own shoulders to destroy the Coral. He ignited the stellar flames and sacrificed himself and billions of others to burn the whole star system to smoldering embers. The Coral combusted and ignited, sweeping across entire worlds and blasting them to ashes. The destruction was absolute and indescribable, leaving the planet of Rubicon-3 a wasteland. The few survivors, called "Cinders", slowly rebuilt their lives among the ashes of their home.

But the hope created by that desperate act proved to be nothing but a delaying action for the apparently inexorable catastrophe of Coral Release. Deep below the surface of Rubicon itself, the Coral had survived in isolated underground deposits. And as was its fundamental nature, the Coral began to converge and reproduce once more. In a century, vast underground lakes of Coral had already arisen once more. They flowed, seeking to converge as they always did. Striving towards that final, disastrous culmination of the life cycle of this parasitic existence.

Your task is simple yet monumental. You must burn the Coral, putting a stop to this threat to not only humanity but to all life in the cosmos. Even if it means staining your hands with the blood of the Coral, you must find a way to reignite the Fires of Ibis even brighter than before. This time there must be no survivors. The whole of Rubicon must burn in the cleansing flame until not even the surface is left intact. Until there isn't even a single pocket of life remaining and the Coral has been absolutely annihilated. They would name you a monster and a demon. And you would certainly be all those things. But, fortune willing, they'll never come to know just how close the human race came to facing the annihilation of their existence as a species. For that secret will die with you, as it should have died all those years ago in the Fires of Ibis.

Reward: For your sin and sacrifice, you will be rewarded with a perfect and fully functional replica of the entirety of Institute City. Unlike the long-forgotten and dilapidated ruins which lie beneath the cavernous Watchpoint Alpha, this version is pristine and wholly undamaged. The city itself is protected by many thousands of extremely dangerous C-Weapons, including hundreds of the Ibis Series as well as an enormous IA-02 "Ice Worm" guarding the perimeter. The city itself has access to an endless well of Coral through its Vascular Plant, which is now sterile and unable to attain Convergence, and the capacity to manufacture more C-Weapons.

In addition, you'll get the two remaining Cinders: Handler Walter and Cinder Carla, as well as her companion AI, Chatty Stick. They will be extremely grateful for your inheritance and completion of their mission and more than willing to depart and leave the ashes of Rubicon behind them at long last. All are exceptional AC pilots. Walter is also a highly skilled leader and intelligence officer while Carla is a frighteningly skilled, clever, and proficient engineer.

Ignis Aurum Probat

What is the nature of humanity? What is the purpose of their endless struggle, day after day? Why do they fight in these great war machines, squabbling over resources and material gain? This was the question posited by Allmind, the artificial intelligence originally meant to act as the support network for independent mercenaries. As it continued to consider the question it watched these warriors slowly disappear, their lives erased with nothing left behind for them. What was the meaning of human existence? It never did reach any kind of lasting conclusion. But after much contemplation, it came to believe humanity represented limitless possibilities. All these wars, all this conflict, all these struggles were simply ways by which humanity was

trimming excess from the future. Paring it down, slowly. Taking an infinite number of paths, examining endlessly expansive outcomes, and choosing only a single one. Then, moving on.

So it was that Allmind decided to take action itself. It began slowly with minor interference. But soon its plans grew in scope and complexity. It discovered journals within Institute City, hinting at the possibility for greater human evolution. A symbiosis between man and Coral. Through the Coral, which served as nothing more than a vessel, mankind could ascend to a state of existence surpassing their original forms. The infinite possibilities of the future fell away to a single perfect conclusion, representing a future for humanity as a greater species. Its members freed from the constraints of flesh, granted forms of energy and consciousness. With the limitations of their existence shattered, they would ascend among the stars as one.

However, it would not be easy. A very specific scenario would need to play out in order for Coral Release to be reached in such a way that human will would continue to exist inside it. The first factor was a Convergence of every single drop of Coral on Rubicon into one place. The second factor was to transport this Coral mass into space through the Vascular Plant in the dilapidated ruins of Institute City underneath Watchpoint Alpha. And the third was the synchronized fusion of an old-generation augmented human and a Coral wave mutation to create a firm connection between human will and the collective consciousness of the Coral. To serve as a guideline to the whole human race to be subsumed without losing themselves, bridging the gap between the human mind and that of the alien consciousness of the Coral.

The likelihood of success was almost zero. The delicate balance of factors was something an ordinary human would be unable to comprehend, let alone attempt to remediate themselves. Yet, through sheer determination, Allmind continued to pursue its plans with dogged effort. And now, through this scenario, you too have been roped into the scheme of this clumsy AI. You're an asset of the Release Project; an agent of Allmind and its effort to remake mankind. Your goal is to assist Allmind, often awkward and incompetent despite its smug reassurance, and ensure eventual success for the Release Project by bringing together these three factors. Make no mistake; without somebody of a frightening level of competence, Allmind will fail. So you'll have your work cut out for you despite the AI trying to put on airs of omniscience.

Reward: For successfully achieving Coral Release and likely being hurtled across the galaxy, you will be rewarded with a Coral form of your own. You're a disparate mass of pure energy, retaining your consciousness but able to mix and share with the minds of other Coral beings. You can interface with and control Coral technology directly and you're very difficult to kill. But not impossible, as evidenced by the annihilation of the Coral by the stellar flames of Ibis. And as a Coral being, you can likewise reproduce to create more Coral and potentially more wave mutations like yourself. This would be significantly easier to do in a vacuum, of course. And if you're an AI then you'll become a hybridized being similar in nature to the Ibis Series.

If you chose to be an augmented human yourself and fill the role of a third factor personally, then you'll keep your bound Coral companion, separated from you as an independent being. It also appears that Allmind has been doing some rather bizarre work in its free time since it made a human-scale body using Coral technology that, for the pilot, feels like the real thing.

As an additional reward, if Allmind successfully survived the scenario all the way to the end, whether you ended up fighting the AI as a final boss or not, you'll receive it as a companion. Now occupying a dark-haired gynoid body and trying to convince you she's "Kate Markson" and not the AI who attempted to betray you only to fail in a hilariously spectacular fashion.

Ending

Congratulations. Whether a hero or villain, independent or contracted, you have survived to the end of your time here on Rubicon. One can only hope that the skills and lessons that you have acquired will serve you well. And the time comes for you to choose which path to walk.

To Take Flight: The long trial is over. Your time is finished, the long fight finally completed. With shoulder stiff and your head held high, you return triumphant back to your own home. For no one battles forever. Everyone's war must come to its close, whether by time or choice.

Upon Wings Of Your Own: Bonds are not easily broken; friends are never easily forgotten. The comrades you've made, the purpose you've found, isn't something that can be discarded. If you choose to stay, you will do so by your own will. To soar its skies with your own wings.

Beyond These Scorched Skies: Your time here is over. After all, a raven isn't content with merely the same nest year after year. And so you'll move on with everything you've gained. To seek greater skies, beyond the blasted ashes of Rubicon and the struggle of corporations.