



THE
ARCHITECT

FIELD MANUAL / RULES v3.5

STEAL THE CODE. SURVIVE THE RETURN.



COMPLETE RULEBOOK · V3.5

2–5 Runners · Ages 12+ · 30–60 minutes

1. THE MISSION

The world belongs to the Architect. Its network decides who moves, who profits, and who disappears. Outside it, you barely exist.

You are Runners—freelance infiltrators, code smugglers, and hired ghosts carrying illegal tools into the most protected system on Earth.

BREACH THE NETWORK

Punch through the exposed Mainframe (Red) or disappear into the Undernet (Blue) as you race from Entry toward Root.

Every move leaves a trace. Every shortcut raises your Exposure. Rival Runners can corrupt your route, rewrite the network beneath you, or leave you stranded.

REACH ROOT

Get to the Root Directory and steal the Architect's control code into your portable Payload.

EXFILTRATE TO ENTRY

Turn back toward Entry carrying the Payload. Your route in dictates the route out, and what looked safe before may now force you through danger.

Reach Entry with the Payload and transmit the stolen code before the network—or another Runner—buries you.

CHOOSE YOUR RUNNER COUNT

Runners	Experience
2	Sharper, faster, more calculated. Every move by your single rival matters.
3–4	The intended balance of agency and interference. Plans stay readable while the network remains contested.
5	More interactive, social, and unpredictable. Expect more table talk and more changes between turns.

2. COMPONENTS

Component	Quantity	Purpose
Mainframe Track Cards	14	Red, fast terrain
Undernet Track Cards	14	Blue, cooling terrain
Root Kit cards	42	Your tactical hand
Exposure cards	24	Shared risk supply; each occupies a hand slot
Entry Node	1	Start and finish
Root Directory	1	Payload objective
Runner markers	5	Runner / Payload sides
Route Ledgers	5	Record route Xs
Six-sided dice	2	Determine Movement Points

Match each Runner marker to its Route Ledger: Code Smuggler / Blue · System Saboteur / Red · Hired Ghost / Purple · Breach Courier / Orange · Access Broker / Green.

BOARD LAYOUT

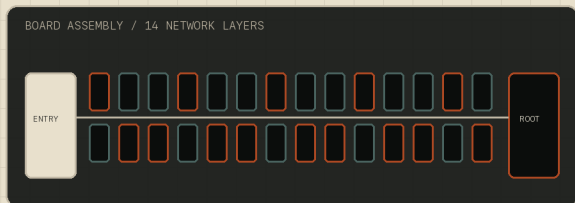
Entry → 14 network layers × 2 rows → Root

Entry and Root are anchors at opposite ends of the board.

The Track Cards between them form the network.

Each card is one Node.

Each column is one network layer containing a top Node and a bottom Node.



3. SET UP THE GAME

1. Put Entry Node at one end of the table and Root Directory at the other.
2. Shuffle all 28 Track Cards together: 14 red Mainframe cards and 14 blue Undernet cards.
3. Deal them face down into 14 network layers and 2 rows, one card in each slot, from Entry toward Root. A network layer is one column containing a top and bottom Network Node.
4. Reveal every Track Card.
5. Each Runner rolls 1 die. Highest roll takes the first turn; reroll ties.
6. The first player applies the two board corrections below and makes all correction choices.
7. In a 2-player game, remove 8 Root Kit cards at random without looking at them. Return them to the box.
8. Shuffle the remaining Root Kit deck. Deal 5 Mod cards to every Runner. Put the rest face down nearby; leave space for a discard pile.
9. Put all 24 Exposure cards face up in one shared supply. Exposure cards never enter the Root Kit deck or discard pile.
10. Each player chooses a Runner, places it on Entry with the Runner side showing, and takes the matching Route Ledger.

BOARD CORRECTION 1: NO BLOCKED NETWORK LAYER

If a network layer contains two Dead Drops, swap either one with any Track Card in an adjacent network layer. Two Dead Drops would provide no legal stopping Node, so correct the network layer before play.

BOARD CORRECTION 2: NO LONG HOT STREAK

A hot network layer has no blue Undernet Node, so neither Node cools a Runner.

If there are three or more consecutive hot network layers, choose a middle network layer in that streak and swap one red card there with any blue card in the network layer immediately before or after the streak. For an even-length streak, either middle network layer is valid. If the streak reaches an end of the board, use the available side.

Repeat Board Correction 2 until no run of 3 or more consecutive hot network layers remains.

4. KNOW THE BOARD BEFORE YOU MOVE

Each network layer contains two Network Nodes: one top and one bottom. There are no fixed lanes.

Terrain	Color	Entry cost	Usual job
Mainframe	Red	1 MP	Efficient distance; dangerous places to end
Undernet	Blue	2 MP	Costs more; usually cools you when you end there
Switching top/bottom rows	—	+1 MP	Between rows; 0 if switching from anchors

HOW TO READ A TRACK CARD

Printed area	What it tells you
Network / terrain	Mainframe cards are red; Undernet cards are blue.
Card name	The Network Node you are entering.
Flavor line	A thematic description; it has no rules effect.
MP entry cost	The MP required to enter the Node before any row-change cost.
Runner zone	Where to place your Runner when you stop on the card.
LAND	The effect applied when you end movement on the Node.
PASS	The effect applied when you enter and continue beyond the Node.
Reminder text	Limits or exceptions specific to that effect.



FIREWALL / EXAMPLE TRACK CARD

The Firewall example has both LAND and PASS effects. Cards without a printed PASS effect do nothing merely because you pass through them.

From Entry, choose either row. From Root, enter Layer 14 through the row you did not use to enter Root. If both rows in Layer 14 are already complete, choose either legal row. Entry and Root have no row, so this first row change never costs +1 MP. After that, each row change costs +1 MP.

FORWARD ALWAYS MEANS TOWARD YOUR CURRENT OBJECTIVE

While Infiltrating, forward is toward the Root Directory.

While Exfiltrating, forward is toward the Entry Node.

You always move one column at a time and never move away from your current objective during normal movement.

ROUTE LEDGER: HOW TO USE IT

Whenever you enter a Network Node:

1. Find that layer and matching board-slot target on your Route Ledger. The two targets are intentionally unlabeled because either randomized card family may occupy either board slot.
2. If its space is blank, mark it with an X.

While exfiltrating, a layer with one X is incomplete. The blank row is the only normal row you may enter. Mark it with an X after entering it. When both spaces have an X, the layer is complete and either row is legal on any later pass.

Xs belong to network-layer slots, not Track Cards. If REWIRE or SCRAMBLE moves cards later, your Xs stay in their slots.

If you crash and must infiltrate again, keep every X. Mark any blank slot you subsequently enter. You win only after all 28 route spaces have an X.

5. EXPOSURE: CARDS IN YOUR HAND

Exposure measures how visible you are to The Architect. Each point of Exposure is one Exposure card kept visibly in your hand. Each Exposure card occupies one of your five hand slots, leaving fewer slots for Mods.

Exposure	Status
0-4	Active
5+	Crash threshold; check at the timing stated below

Exposure cards are locked status cards. They cannot be played as Mods, discarded by LAY LOW, used to block, or chosen by CORRUPT. Return them to the shared supply only when cooling, VENT, or a crash tells you to reduce Exposure. Exposure cannot go below 0.

Exposure can exceed five during movement. Take every Exposure card you gain, even when this temporarily pushes your hand above five cards. Apply cooling and the landing effect to the full amount. If the 24-card supply is empty, remember any additional temporary Exposure until Manifest; the supply is not a cap.

During Manifest, reconcile your hand first and then crash if you still hold 5 or more Exposure cards.

Node color alone does not change Exposure. Change it only when a rule or printed effect tells you to.

COMMON WAYS TO GAIN EXPOSURE

Source	Exposure
Declare Sprint	+2 immediately
Land on Open Port	+1
Land on Firewall	+2
Pass through Firewall	+1 each, maximum +2 from all Firewall passes in one turn
Land on Honey Pot	+1

COMMON WAYS TO LOSE EXPOSURE

Source	Exposure
Land on Cold Storage	-2
Land on The Hub, Faraday Cage, or Shadow Link	-1
End on blue with every 2 unused MP	-1
Play VENT	Return up to 2 Exposure cards
Pass or land on Accelerator	-1

THE FIREWALL GRAZE CAP

Passing a Firewall gives +1 Exposure, but all Firewall pass penalties together are capped at +2 per turn. A Firewall you land on is different: its +2 landing penalty is not part of that cap.

6. TURN OVERVIEW

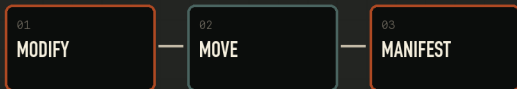
On your turn, complete these steps in order:

1. Modify — Play Mods, or Lay Low.
2. Move — Plan your route, choose your speed, spend MP, and choose where to land.
3. Manifest — Apply cooling, resolve the Node, reconcile your five hand slots, check for a crash, then pass the turn.

The Root Directory changes Move when you are leaving it; see The Root Directory.

7. YOUR TURN, STEP BY STEP

ONE TURN / OPERATING SEQUENCE



7.1 MODIFY

During Modify, you may play any number of Mods, one at a time, or continue to Move.

Every Root Kit card is a Mod. Play Mods only during Modify, before choosing your speed. Exposure cards are not Mods.

LAY LOW

Instead of playing Mods, you may Lay Low.

Keep every Exposure card. Discard every Mod in your hand, then draw Mods until your five total hand slots are filled. End your turn immediately. Example: at 3 Exposure, discard your 2 Mods and draw 2 replacement Mods.

Laying Low still counts as your turn. Any restriction that applies "on your next turn" applies, then expires. Example: if you are LAGGED, you may Lay Low instead of moving. You do not Sprint that turn, and the LAG restriction is gone when your following turn begins.

7.2 MOVE

First, choose one speed:

Choice	Dice	Cost
Safe	1 die	None
Sprint	2 dice	Gain +2 Exposure immediately

You cannot Sprint if you already have 4 or more Exposure, or if LAG/Root trace says you cannot Sprint this turn.

Roll the chosen die or dice. Their total is your Movement Points (MP).

From Entry, choose either row in Network Layer 1. From Root, enter Network Layer 14 through the row you did not use to enter Root. If both rows in Layer 14 are already complete, choose either legal row. Entry and Root have no row, so this first row change never costs +1 MP.

Then enter one network layer at a time. A red Node costs 1 MP, a blue Node costs 2 MP, and switching between the top and bottom rows adds 1 MP.

THE REQUIREMENT TO ADVANCE

If at least one Node in the next network layer is legal and affordable, you must advance at least one network layer before you may choose to stop.

If neither Node is legal or affordable, movement ends where you are. For example, with 1 MP and two blue Nodes ahead, you cannot advance that turn unless an effect changes your options.

After you have advanced at least one column, you may stop early even with MP remaining.

ON THE WAY TO ROOT

Choose either legal Node in the next network layer. Mark its Route Ledger target with an X if it is blank.

ON THE RETURN WITH THE PAYLOAD

If the next network layer has one blank console space, use that row; it is the only normal move for that network layer. Mark it with an X after entering. If both spaces already have an X, choose either legal row. If you cannot afford the required blank row, movement ends.

DEAD DROPS ARE BLOCKED

An unprotected Dead Drop is blocked unless you can immediately continue into a legal Node in the next network layer or into an anchor. You cannot stop on it.

You may stop on a Dead Drop only if:

- GHOST is currently protecting the entry, or

- BLACKOUT is currently disabling that Dead Drop's printed Blocked effect.

If entering an unprotected Dead Drop would use your last MP and strand you, that Dead Drop is blocked.

PASSING AND ENTERING EFFECTS

When you pass through a Node, resolve any printed PASS effect. Accelerator and Backdoor are special: their effects trigger when entered, whether you continue or stop there.

- Accelerator: lose 1 Exposure and gain 2 MP. If you stop on Accelerator or another blue Node, any unused bonus MP can become cooling during Manifest.

- Backdoor: you may take the next column for free, or stop on Backdoor and forfeit that bonus.

You can trigger at most one Accelerator and one Backdoor each turn.

7.3 MANIFEST

Resolve the LAND effect only on the Network Node where you ended movement. Do not resolve LAND effects on Nodes you passed through.

If you ended on a blue card, first convert leftover MP into cooling: every 2 unused MP reduces Exposure by 1. Then apply the card's printed landing effect.

Next, reconcile your hand to five total cards, counting every Exposure card:

Keep every Exposure card.

If you are above five cards, choose Mods to discard until you are at five. Exposure overflow cannot be discarded this way.

If you are below five cards, draw Mods until you reach five or the deck is empty. If the deck is empty, shuffle the Root Kit discard pile to make a new deck.

Finally, check Exposure:

At 0–4, pass the turn to the next Runner.

At 5 or higher, follow the Crash Protocol.

8. NETWORK NODE REFERENCE

MAINFRAME: RED CARDS, 1 MP TO ENTER

Card	Copies	When you land	When you pass
Open Port	8	+1 Exposure	Nothing
Firewall	4	+2 Exposure	+1 Exposure, within the graze cap
Honey Pot	2	Draw 2 Mods, then +1 Exposure	Nothing

UNDERNET: BLUE CARDS, 2 MP TO ENTER

Card	Copies	Effect
Cold Storage	4	Land: -2 Exposure
The Hub	4	Land: -1 Exposure and draw 1 Root Kit card
Faraday Cage	1	Land: -1 Exposure; Pressure Mods cannot target you until the start of your next turn
Shadow Link	1	Land: -1 Exposure; your next row change costs 0 MP
Accelerator	1	Pass or land: -1 Exposure, then +2 MP, once per turn
Backdoor	1	Pass or land: optionally enter the next column for free; once per turn
Dead Drop	2	Blocked: pass through only; cannot stop without GHOST or BLACKOUT

If a crash occurs before you use Shadow Link's free row change, that benefit is lost.

9. CRASH PROTOCOL

Reaching 5 or more Exposure while moving does not crash you immediately. Complete movement, apply blue unused-MP cooling, resolve your landing, and reconcile your hand. If you still hold 5 or more Exposure cards, crash.

ROOT EXCEPTION

The Root Directory is not a Network Node landing and provides no cooling. If you enter Root at 5 or higher Exposure, finish downloading the control code into your Payload, reconcile your hand, then perform the normal Manifest crash check.

RESOLVE A CRASH IN THIS ORDER

1. Drop the Payload. If you are carrying the Payload, return to Root and drop it. Flip your Runner back to its normal side. You must download the control code again.
2. Wipe your hand. Discard every Mod and return every Exposure card to the shared supply. Do not refill; you remain empty until your next Manifest.
3. Retreat 3 columns toward Entry.

If you dropped the Payload, retreat from Root through Columns 14, 13, and 12.

Otherwise, retreat 3 columns from where you crashed.

4. Fall back to a blue checkpoint. From your new position, continue toward Entry until you reach the first column with a legal blue Node. Move there.

A Dead Drop cannot be a checkpoint.

If both blue Nodes are legal, choose either.

If you reach Entry without finding one, return to Entry.

Crash does not erase console Xs. If you have to make another run at Root, keep every mark and continue filling blank spaces.

10. THE ROOT DIRECTORY

ENTERING ROOT

You may enter Root only while infiltrating and standing in Column 14.

1. You need at least 1 MP remaining.
2. Spend 1 MP to enter Root. Cancel any additional unused MP.
3. End movement immediately; Root has no Network Node landing effect.
4. Download the Architect's control code into your Payload. Flip your Runner marker to its Payload side. Your objective becomes Exfiltrate: return to Entry and transmit it.
5. Complete Manifest normally. Root has no Network Node landing effect, but any applicable crash check still occurs.

You cannot enter Root with 0 MP. If you are passing through a Dead Drop in Column 14, you must have enough MP to pay the Dead Drop's entry cost and Root's 1 MP cost.

If you enter Root at 5 or higher Exposure, finish the download, reconcile your hand, then perform the normal Manifest crash check. Drop the Payload at Root if you crash.

EXITING ROOT ON YOUR NEXT TURN

Take Modify normally. Then do not choose Safe or Sprint.

1. Roll 1 die. Its result is your MP for moving out of Root toward Entry.
2. Compare that roll to your current Exposure.
3. If the roll is lower than your Exposure, gain +1 Exposure and mark yourself unable to Sprint on your next turn.
4. You still move with the die result. A low roll never keeps you inside Root.

A trace that raises you to 5 or higher does not interrupt your exit. Complete movement, cooling, and landing Resolve normally before checking for a crash. The no-Sprint restriction applies on your next turn whether you crash or survive.

Exposure before exit roll	Roll	Result
3	2	Gain +1 Exposure, move with 2 MP, cannot Sprint next turn
4	4	No trace; move with 4 MP
4	3	Gain +1 to 5, move with 3 MP, then crash only if final cooling and landing do not bring you below 5

RETURNING TO ENTRY WITH THE PAYLOAD

While carrying the Payload, use the blank row in every incomplete next network layer. Completed network layers allow either legal row. Firewall penalties remain their normal printed values.

When you reach Network Layer 1 with the Payload and all 28 Route Ledger targets marked, you need at least 2 MP remaining to return to Entry. Spend 2 MP, transmit the control code, and win immediately. You may have additional MP; an exact roll is not required.

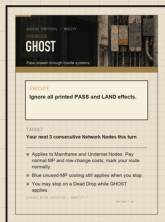
11. THE ROOT KIT

Your Root Kit is a cache of stolen exploits, improvised patches, and hostile code gathered for this run. During Modify, deploy these Mods to improve your route, alter the network, or disrupt another Runner's plan.

You always have five hand slots shared by Mods and Exposure cards. Every Root Kit card is a Mod; play Mods only during Modify, before choosing your speed. Discard a Mod after use unless its text says otherwise. Exposure cards occupy slots but are never Mods.

HOW TO READ A ROOT KIT CARD

Printed area	What it tells you
Family / Root Kit	Identifies the exploit family; it does not change timing.
Card name	The Root Kit card being played.
Phase tag	MOD / MODIFY: play voluntary Mods during Modify.
Flavor line and icon	Theme and visual identification; neither changes the rules.
EXECUTE	What happens when the card is played.
WHEN	The timing condition for playing it.
COST	What must be paid or discarded to play it.
TARGET	The Runner, card, Node, or sequence affected.
Protocol notes	Limits, block eligibility, and reminders that apply to the effect.



GHOST / EXAMPLE ROOT KIT CARD

Read the effect first, then use its target and protocol notes to track the Mod.

BLOCKING A MOD

The following Mods can be blocked: REWIRE, SCRAMBLE, BLACKOUT, LAG, CORRUPT, and SHUNT. OVERCLOCK, GHOST, and VENT cannot be blocked.

If a Mod directly targets one Runner, only that Runner may block it.

If a Mod changes Track Cards, a Runner may block it only if at least one affected Track Card is within 3 columns of that Runner. Entry counts as immediately before Column 1; Root counts as immediately after Column 14.

To block, discard any 2 Mod cards from your hand. Exposure cards cannot pay for a block. The Mod is cancelled, but its player has already paid any cost.

If several Runners may block a Network Mod, offer the choice clockwise from the Runner who used it. The first Runner to block cancels the Mod. If everyone declines, resolve it normally.

NETWORK MODS

REWIRE ×5

Choose two unoccupied Track Cards within 3 columns of one another. The cards may be in the same row, different rows, or diagonal positions. Swap them. Moving a card does not trigger its effect.

SCRAMBLE ×4

Choose 3 unoccupied Track Cards that form one connected group. Each chosen card must share an edge with at least one other chosen card. Diagonal contact does not count. Shuffle them, then randomly deal one face up into each vacated slot. Moving a card does not trigger its effect.

BLACKOUT ×4

Choose one Track Card and place BLACKOUT on it. Until the start of your next turn, that card's printed effects are disabled for every Runner. Its MP cost does not change. At the start of your next turn, discard BLACKOUT.

This turns off printed pass effects, landing effects, bonuses, penalties, and the Blocked instruction. A blacked-out Dead Drop may be stopped on.

RUN MODS

OVERCLOCK ×7

During Modify, gain +3 MP this turn. You may play only one OVERCLOCK per turn.

GHOST ×7

During Modify, you may VOID the printed pass and land effects on your next 3 consecutive Network Nodes this turn, whether red Mainframe or blue Undernet.

Pay normal MP and row-change costs.

Mark your Route Ledger normally.

Blue unused-MP cooling still applies when you stop.

A voided Dead Drop is not Blocked.

Count every Network Node entered. Any unused entries expire when the turn ends.

VENT ×4

During Modify, return up to 2 Exposure cards to the shared supply. The freed slots refill during Manifest.

PRESSURE MODS

Pressure Mods target a Runner ahead of you. A Runner carrying the Payload is ahead of a Runner who is infiltrating. Among Runners with the same objective, the Runner farther toward that objective is ahead. Runners in the same position are tied. A Runner who crashes and loses the Payload returns to Infiltrate and ranks with the other infiltrating Runners.

Playing a Pressure Mod does not change your Exposure.

You cannot play a Pressure Mod if you are the sole leader. Faraday Cage prevents Pressure Mods from targeting its protected Runner until the protected Runner's next turn begins.

LAG ×4

Choose a Runner ahead of you who is not in the Root Directory. If LAG is not blocked, that Runner rolls only 1 die and cannot Sprint on their next turn.

CORRUPT ×4

Choose a Runner ahead of you who has at least 1 Mod. If CORRUPT is not blocked, that Runner reveals their Mods and you choose 1 Mod for them to discard. Exposure cards cannot be chosen.

The target chooses whether to block before revealing their hand. If they decline or cannot pay for a block, reveal the hand and resolve CORRUPT.

SHUNT ×3

Choose a Runner ahead of you who is on a Network Node. Entry and Root are anchors, not Network Nodes, so Runners there cannot be targeted. If SHUNT is not blocked, move the target to any orthogonally adjacent Network Node: one column in either direction in the same row, or the other row in the same column. Never move diagonally.

Entry, Root, and Dead Drop are not legal destinations. A destination that would make the target crash is not legal. The target immediately resolves only the destination's LAND effect; do not resolve PASS effects, spend or gain MP, take free movement, or mark the target's Route Ledger. Accelerator removes 1 Exposure but grants no MP, and Backdoor grants no free movement. Persistent LAND benefits from Faraday Cage and Shadow Link apply normally. If the Node draws Mods, keep any temporary overflow until that Runner's next Manifest.

12. TIMING AND EDGE CASES

Use these answers when a situation is not obvious.

CAN I MOVE ZERO COLUMNS?

Only when no move into the next network layer is both legal and affordable. If even one next Node is available, you must advance at least one network layer before stopping.

CAN TWO RUNNERS OCCUPY THE SAME NETWORK NODE?

Yes. Network Nodes have unlimited capacity.

DOES PASSING A CARD RESOLVE ITS EFFECT?

No, except Accelerator and Backdoor. Firewall pass penalties still apply when you pass through a Firewall.

WHEN IS A DEAD DROP LEGAL?

An unprotected Dead Drop is legal only when you can continue beyond it. GHOST lets you stop on it for that protected entry; BLACKOUT blanks its Blocked instruction while the Blackout lasts.

DOES MOVING A TRACK CARD MOVE A ROUTE X?

No. Xs belong to layer-and-row slots, not the physical cards occupying them.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN DRAWS OR EXPOSURE PUT ME ABOVE FIVE CARDS?

Temporary overflow is allowed until Manifest. After cooling and LAND resolve, keep every Exposure card and discard Mods until your hand is at five. If Exposure alone is 5 or higher, reconcile any Mods first and then crash.

WHO CAN BLOCK A MOD?

The direct target alone can block a Mod that directly targets one Runner. For a Network Mod, only Runners within 3 columns of an affected Track Card can block. See Blocking a Mod.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER A BLOCK?

The blocking Runner discards any 2 Mod cards. Exposure cards cannot block. The Mod is cancelled, but the player who used it still discards that Mod.

WHEN DOES CORRUPT REVEAL MY HAND?

Only after you decline to block or cannot pay for a block.

WHAT DOES ORTHOGONALLY ADJACENT MEAN FOR SHUNT?

It means one Node directly up, down, left, or right: the other row in the same column, or the same row one column away. Never diagonal. Entry, Root, Dead Drop, and any Node whose LAND effect would crash the target are illegal destinations.

WHAT DOES A FAILED ROOT EXIT ROLL MEAN?

It does not mean you remain at Root. You still leave with the rolled MP; it means the roll was below Exposure, so you gain +1 Exposure and cannot Sprint on your next turn.

WHAT HAPPENS TO A PLAYER WHO CRASHES WITH THE PAYLOAD?

The crash corrupts their local copy. They return to Root, drop the Payload, flip back to Infiltrate, then retreat 3 columns toward Entry and reboot at the first legal Undernet checkpoint. They must reach Root to download the control code again. Every console X remains. A completed layer permits either row on later passes.

13. FIRST-GAME REMINDERS

Before your first few turns, remember:

1. Read ahead before you roll. Notice blue landing cards, Firewalls, Dead Drops, and hot columns.
2. Red buys distance; blue cools you. A common strong line is to cross several red cards and stop on blue.
3. Unused MP is coolant only on blue. Stopping short can be safer than moving farther.
4. Your outbound route writes your return problem. Look at the opposite card before you commit.
5. Exposure 5+ is not immediate. Finish movement and Manifest first. Root provides no cooling, but hand reconciliation still occurs before its crash check.

Good luck, Runner.

