

Balance of POWER

by Simon Burley



DE'06

A scenario for Squadron UK

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Balance of POWER

Introduction

Balance of Power is a downloadable scenario for Squadron UK. It is complete and ready to play.

The Adventure has a mixed history. It is based on an innovative way of generating ideas for a scenario but we're unable to outline it here. We'll leave this as a puzzle for interested readers.....

It is a slightly unusual scenario in that it is the situation in which the Heroes find themselves which presents the main challenge rather than the strength of the opposition.



Characters who rely on their raw power level to blast or punch their way through scenarios may struggle whereas weaker but more thoughtful characters may

perform better. In this respect it can be played equally well with relatively new characters and more experienced ones. It is particularly useful for cutting an over-powered armoured character "down to size". They will find themselves completely powerless in chapter 4 and plugged into a completely artificial world in chapter 5 - where their powers are based on the force of their mind rather than the gadgets built into their super-suit.

However it is probably best if it is not played by new or inexperienced players or referees. It is NOT suitable as the first scenario people play.

Preparation

The first thing the Referee needs to decide is how long they want the scenario to go on for.

At its most basic, this scenario consists of two encounters, one against a renegade space station, the other against the villain of the piece. At a push it could be completed in a single evening's play.

Conversely, a Referee could choose to expand on some of the earlier chapters - putting in battles against the (misguided) authorities and playing up the difficulties of travel and finding lodgings in a world turned against the Heroes. In this case the scenario could take several

sessions to complete.

It will help with the fourth chapter (Secrets) if - before the scenario is run - the Referee lists 5 items of common knowledge about each of the players' Heroes which could be used to deduce their secret identities and two names to represent ordinary people who could be mistaken for the Heroes.

In addition, make sure you read the sections about combat in Zero-gravity and the effects of decompression very carefully. Try to anticipate how they will affect your Heroes and how their powers will or will not function in this environment. You and your players need to be extremely clear, for example, about how their Flight superpower works.

Chapter 1 The Big Ear

S.O.R.R.O.W. (Satellite Oversight Relay for Research, Observation and Weather) is an orbiting facility launched two years ago. A joint venture of NASA and the **BASE (British Aeronautical Space Executive)**, SORROW is basically a massive memory bank. Its purpose is to intercept and copy transmitted satellite information and enable duplicate or replacement communications to reduce information loss. Though initially supporting only British and American satellites,

Balance of POWER

SORROW has such excess memory capacity that memory space has been sub-contracted to other countries and, currently, almost 90% of all orbitally transmitted data is copied through SORROW.



Unfortunately, someone has managed to tap directly into SORROW's control interface. This enables them to not only monitor and read EVERY piece of information the satellite carries but also to alter and transmit false versions of that data both from SORROW itself and – through feedback – via the original sources themselves. Not only does this villain have access to almost every piece of information available to the modern world – much of it supposedly secure – they can change it during transmission. Causing a war would be childs-play. With imagination their ability to control what the world's population believes would be almost god-like.

Chapter 2 Humble Pie

The Heroes are brought into this scenario by an unusual contact. Exactly who it is will depend upon the

individual campaign. Options are:

1) A government official (or BISCUIT agent) who has been helping or hindering the Heroes.

2) A newspaper reporter – possibly one who has been hounding the Heroes.

3) A Criminal overlord with whom the Heroes have had contact.

4) A minor villain (PROTOTYPE or one of the members of the EUROPEAN UNION from the Scenario in the rulebook would be appropriate).

It's nice to pick someone who's been on the Heroes' back and play him as eating some humble pie. Whoever it is, however, their method of contacting the heroes will be odd - a rock with a written piece of paper wrapped around it, detailing a meeting spot. This will be thrown at a hero during a battle or other public event, or lobbed through an appropriate window, or left in or on the Heromobile.



When they go to meet the contact, he will be unsettled, untidy and unshaven – in contrast to his usual appearance. He will desperately check that no-one present has used a telephone or any electronic device to communicate about or record details of the meeting. If they have, he will try to flee.

He will tell the Heroes all about SORROW. Any Brilliant Scientists, Reporters and the like in the team (or anyone rolling under three times detective points) will have heard of the satellite. Their contact will explain how he discovered that information he had sent by electronic means had been arriving “changed” or not at all. When he investigated, he traced the changes back to SORROW. Later he found that records of financial irregularities (which he strenuously denies) had been forwarded to the authorities and a warrant issued for his arrest.

He cannot seek help from the usual sources since these are all dependent on the world's electronic web and, therefore, under the spell of SORROW's mysterious new master. He needs a group of mavericks and the Heroes are the obvious choice.

Obviously this all requires a degree of trust. The contact will refer to several current news stories and blame the corruption of SORROW for

Balance of POWER

causing them. He will rant:

"Don't you see? This isn't about stopping some villain's evil plot. You've missed the boat this time Heroes. This guy's already succeeded. He's got the world in the palm of his hand. With this much power he can do ANYTHING!"

Brilliant scientists or computer experts rolling under three times Detective Points (or anyone rolling under basic Detective Points) will realise this story explains problems they have had themselves in recent days.

This encounter could become more complicated in a couple of ways:-

1) The heroes might not believe their contact, thinking this is all some kind of set-up (devious referees might decide that it IS). If they refuse to "take the job" you have two options. Maybe they were RIGHT and this WAS a set-up so nothing happens. On the other hand, if they were WRONG, the world will slowly go to pot around them. Wars will start, governments and public figures will be brought down, the Heroes themselves will be framed etc.

2) If someone DID use a telephone, internet or similar to record or transmit details of the meeting, an armed detail of Police/SAS/BISCUIT etc. will turn up to arrest both the contact and the Heroes.

If and when the Heroes do decide to do something about the situation it becomes clear that – unless they have one of their own - they'll have to commandeer a spacecraft, go up to SORROW and "pull the plug". British Spacecraft are kept at the BASE Base at Wallace Point, just outside Inverness in Scotland.

Chapter 3 Travelling to Wallace

A maverick English scientist actually invented a crude form of anti-gravity in the late 19th century and used it to travel to the moon. Ever since then, Great Britain has had a clandestine, rickety and unreliable space programme. At first this was kept quiet because of its inherent dangers – hundreds of British Heroes have died in the programme over the years – and for fear of the consequences if the technology got into the wrong hands. Both world wars would have been much bloodier if it had been misused.

Recently it's been kept quiet for political reasons. The massive investment in major, more expensive, space programmes has been important for the economies of other nations.

The Heroes have to get to Wallace Point and commandeer a spacecraft to fly up to SORROW.

How easy or difficult this is will depend upon the individual Heroes. Don't make it too easy for them. Make them specify exactly how they are going to travel and (if necessary) meet up when they get there. If SORROW is aware of their involvement, simple tasks such as booking tickets could prove difficult.

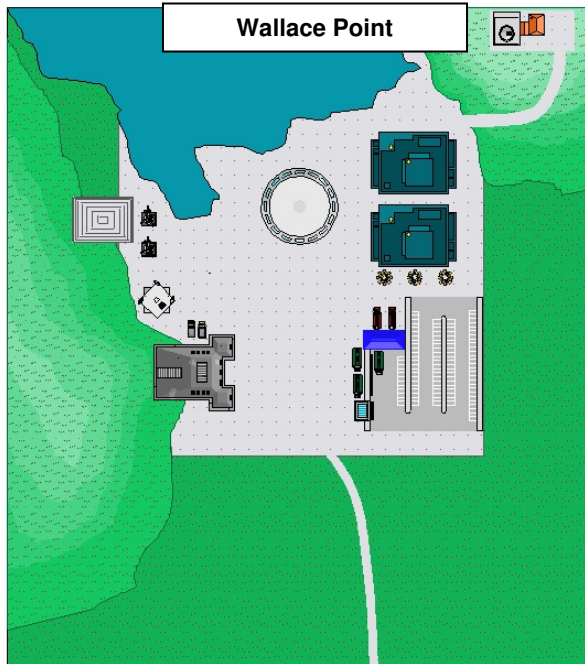
Once they are in Scotland they then have to get through the security surrounding the base. This should just be goon-standard guards.

Alternatively, the Referee can throw in one super-powered guardian if they want. The Heroes could find themselves fighting against an erstwhile ally.

Ideally, the Heroes need to get in without hurting anyone and without compromising their Heroic image. A pitched battle against the duly appointed guardians of Britain's space programme isn't going to help their ratings! There is also the issue of actually piloting the craft – if the team doesn't possess a Brilliant Scientist, Pilot or Astronaut.

The easiest way to handle things is for the Heroes to wait until a group of Astronauts leave the base on weekend leave. They could then be accosted and co-opted or replaced. Hypnotism, Public Status or, even, threats should work.

Balance of POWER

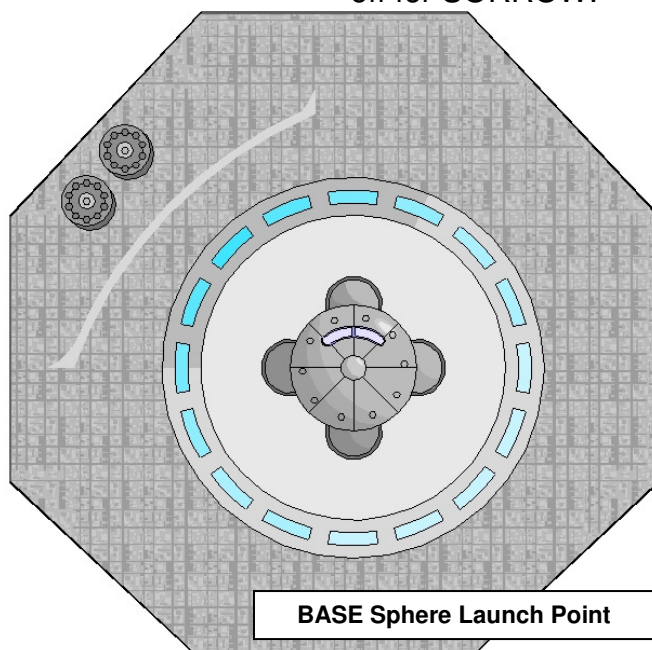


Of course, your Heroes might have a different approach.

Don't give them any hints. This part should be easy for them – if they want to over-complicate things, let them. A map of the base is supplied above should this be the case.

Should a battle occur, it will probably climax around the launching pad for one of the BASE spheres and will take place on the map given below.

Eventually, the Heroes should have gained access to a sphere and, if necessary, co-opted an appropriate pilot. They should be able to take off for SORROW.



Throw in an appropriate description of the journey here. There is no unpleasant G-Force associated with the take-off of a BASE sphere but the Heroes should be aware that they have just entered an alien and unforgiving environment.

Hopefully they've remembered to bring some way to locate the SORROW satellite. Eventually it will come into view over the horizon.

If the Heroes attack and destroy SORROW, this will disrupt communications all over the world, throwing civilisation into a new dark age.

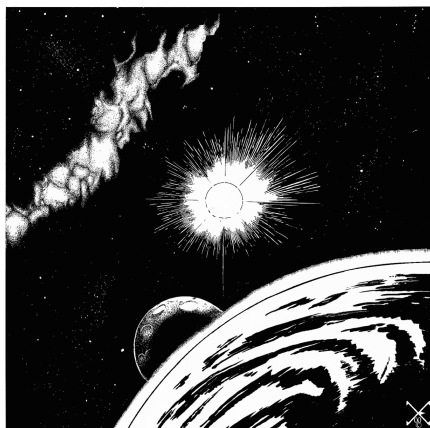


This is unlikely, however. As they approach the relay station, their presence will be detected. SORROW will activate an electromagnetic pulse. Suddenly everything will go dark as every system on the sphere dies and the Heroes are left drifting alone in space.

Balance of POWER

Chapter 4 Secrets

As well as the Sphere, any Hero who relies on cybernetic components – including armour – will have those components subjected to a 25 point attack. Players will have to roll a d20 and add either their Ego (for devices they have direct control over) or 10 (for devices which function independently). If they get a total of 25 or more the device can function otherwise it shorts out along with everything else on board the Sphere. (This may leave some Heroes trapped inside malfunctioning power armour. This is perfectly acceptable.)



The Heroes now have 5 rounds to save themselves. After five rounds the sphere will have drifted too far from SORROW and will be in a decaying orbit. Bad air in the Sphere will be causing people to pass out.

There are enough spacesuits in the Sphere for everyone but their electronic systems aren't working.

All the Heroes can do is put them on and flood them with oxygen. They'll have to use their own powers to get out of the Sphere and across to SORROW, dragging any immobilised characters with them. (Preferably, the Sphere will have to be abandoned to burn up in the atmosphere.)

When the Heroes get to the Space Station, they'll have to get inside. As luck would have it, the first hatch they open will access a maintenance conduit. The tunnel heads straight into the main control room. This is a simple rectangle – dark – illuminated only by the flashing lights from the various communications and computer panels.

The room does not have any atmosphere, lights or gravity.

The first job is to tap into SORROW's computer system. This can be done by a Brilliant Scientist, computer expert or someone with an integrated cybernetic system (one of those guys trapped in their power armour would be perfect). It is fairly easy to find a direct neural interface. When the connection is made, the Hero concerned will enter cyberspace.

As soon as this happens, the lights will go on in the room. Typing will scroll across a large computer display:

THIS UNIT – UNDER ATTACK

**RESOLUTION – ALPHA:
DIRECT NEUTRALISATION**

**BETA: DETERMINE IDENTITY
OF ATTACKERS AND TRANSMIT**

A graphic of each Hero will appear on the screen. From this point on, each round for five rounds, a publicly known fact about each Hero will appear beside their graphic until – by the end of round 5 – the system has deduced their secret identity.

Simultaneously, blaster cannons will pop out of concealment and attack the Heroes. There will be two cannons for each Hero (including the one in cyberspace).

The cannons are WC: 2 and do 2d6+3 HTC and d6+3 HTK electrical damage, divided as energy. They fire one shot per round. Because the Heroes are weightless, ANY damage will push them back into the nearest surface.

Each cannon has a DC of 10, 10 HTK and dividers of 2.

SORROW will also electrify all exposed surfaces. If a Hero touches or is pushed back into a wall, they will take 2d6 HTC and 1d6 HTK (reduce dividers by one).

The Hero connected to SORROW will take none of this "surface damage" due to insulation on the Neural Interface.

Balance of POWER

They can be targeted by the cannons, however.

The Heroes' spacesuits will absorb the first 20HTK of damage they take but, after this, will rupture – losing oxygen. (A Personal Status roll or spending a Hero point will prevent this).

If a space-suit is ruptured, the wearer will take 2d6 HTC damage per round of suffocation damage.

The Heroes will have to work out some way of maneuvering in zero gravity to resolve this situation. Players should not be allowed to simply move their figures. They should be asked, each time, EXACTLY what their character is doing and how they are trying to maneuver. If they want to push off a surface, for example, they will need to strike that surface. This will require a frame, will fail on a roll of 1 and require they take 2d6HTC damage. A further strike roll (vs. DC 10 and taking an additional frame) will be required to head towards their chosen target.

In addition, if the characters take OR DISH OUT any damage, they will be pushed back 2m. per frame for every 5HTK/HTC done by the attack. Unless they think to grab hold, the Heroes will get one punch which will then knock them backwards before they get a second.

Players and their characters should find this extremely frustrating (and challenging).

This is a difficult set-up, so allow clever ideas to work. (Standing in front of a cannon and then dodging so that they blast each other, for example.) Note that, though surfaces are electrified the cannons themselves are not.

This is all the Heroes in the “meat world” can do, however. The rest is up to their colleague.

Chapter 5 Out of this world



The first thing that the Hero will notice when they emerge into cyberspace is that their neuralnet image is a copy of their self-image in the real world. This will either be their Hero form or Secret Identity depending upon which persona they perceive as their “real” one. Minor differences may be evidenced. An over-confident Hero might find themselves brimming with additional muscles (+10 Strength) or vice versa.

Any corrections the Hero feels are necessary will take an action and require an Ego roll total (D20 plus Ego) of 20 or more. For example, a Hero who appears in their secret identity can change to their Hero persona.

This applies throughout this encounter. For example, a Hero who runs out of Energy can regenerate back to their maximum dice for one action plus an Ego roll. (don't tell the player this, however, let them find out for themselves).

This encounter should be run simultaneously with the battle against the blasters (above).

The Hero's visualisation of the situation in cyberspace may vary but, generally, they will perceive SORROW as a huge amorphous white octopus.

It has massive tentacles which subdivide into tendrils which manipulate the various data entering and leaving the base. These include:-

1) Editing and feeding back data from satellites. (White dots come in, are coloured red and re-directed back out).

2) Life support/lights etc. in the power station. (Tendrils hover above a series of circles. Some are illuminated – the lights – some are not – life support.)

Balance of POWER

3) The Data-scan to unmask the Heroes. (Tendrils tear jigsaw pieces from a cloudy mass of data and paste it onto small images of the Heroes).

4) The blasters. (Little whips of electricity arcing from the tendrils.)

5) The data-stream feeding information to the unknown villain. (Tendrils drop bits of data into a pit on the floor.)

6) Other functions at the Referee's discretion.

SORROW's cyber-avatar is DC: 12 and nominally has 75 HTK but you should adjust this to suit your Hero. Anything from 50 to 200 HTK could be appropriate. Whenever 10 HTK damage is scored on it, one of the functions above is affected (roll a d6). If the Hero wishes to target a specific function their rolls "to hit" are at -5.

SORROW does not fight back in cyberspace but, if the Hero attacks it, it will target blasters against the Hero's supine form in the real world (striking at +5 unless their team-mates interfere). This will appear as tendril firing arcs of electricity against the Hero in cyberspace.

If the Hero is unable to disable SORROW before the end of 5 rounds, it will deduce their secret identities and transmit them to the world.

It will get one of them WRONG, causing much distress to the poor innocent soul incorrectly labelled.

When the Hero has taken all of SORROW's HTK, the entire station will go black and die.



Chapter 6 Station Fall

The Heroes should have a feeling of "Not again!". The situation is exactly what they were in back in the Sphere. No power, no life support and the orbit slowly decaying.

What they won't know is the situation back on Earth is even worse.

The death of SORROW has caused communications disruption on a global scale.

The only bit of good news it that – in its final death throes – SORROW released an electromagnetic counter-pulse.

This will have re-booted any cybernetic systems the Heroes might possess – freeing up weapons, power armour etc.

Now the Heroes have to get SORROW back on-line, at its original default settings, before it falls into the Earth's atmosphere and burns up.

Chapter 7 The right someone

If the Heroes have a Brilliant Scientist amongst their number he or she will be able to fix the satellite, working in the dark with their bare hands. A computer expert will have to roll under three times their Personal Status score to succeed (four times if the other heroes can help out in some way e.g. by providing light or tools).

If the Heroes don't have anyone like this in their team then it'll be just a case of dumb luck. Have each one try to roll under their raw Personal Status to succeed by simply pushing buttons at random.

If they all fail, it's time for them to come up with some extreme plan based on their individual superpowers.

If they do manage to fix things then they'll be able to get a radio link working which will put them through the NASA.

Balance of POWER

Chapter 8 A Call to the USA

The first thing they'll discover is the chaos the world has been in during the last few minutes. Ground Control will express their gratitude on behalf of the world.

When they make their identities known, however, their ground contact will admit surprise. It seems that evidence pointing to the Heroes' involvement in some extremely dubious events has recently been uploaded into the world's computers. Everyone assumed they had turned evil. It's good to know they can be relied on after all.

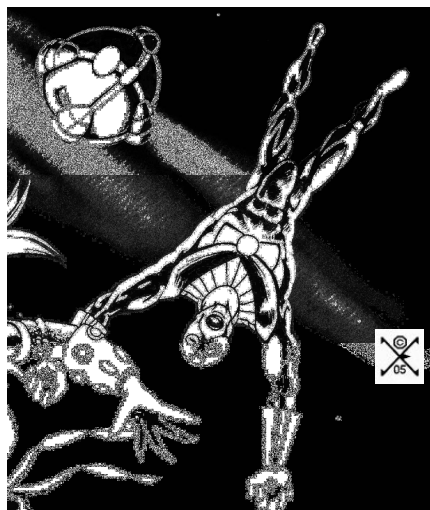
NASA will ask the Heroes to hang tight and a shuttle will be sent up for them, piloted by one of their best men, Major Thomas Ross.

When the shuttle arrives and docks, however, the Heroes are in for a shock as Major Tom blows the airlock causing an explosive decompression on the control room.

It is important if this comes as a surprise, so a cunning Referee will start discussing ratings with the players whilst the shuttle is arriving. Something along the following lines would be appropriate:

"Of course you'll have to wait until you get down to Earth to find out the effect on your Public Response rating. The wall of the control room is blown out and you are sucked into space. What are you doing?"

Anyone who specifies it and succeeds in a strike roll against DC: 10 will be able to grab onto something. Everyone else WILL be sucked into space. Now is the time to roll for Initiative.



In the first round Major Tom will float into the station and attack the most threatening looking Hero whilst launching into a tirade about how it was him who'd corrupted SORROW and how the Heroes have disrupted his plans and are going to pay.

It is unlikely that the Heroes will be able to respond in this round as they will be busy:

1) Holding on to stop themselves being pulled out into space.

2) Re-sealing their spacesuits (if they still have them on).

3) Rescuing their less fortunate team-mates.

Having an unsealed or damaged spacesuit will do 2d6 HTC per round as specified above. However, being sucked into space or still having compromised protection when the chamber is completely evacuated will cause decompression damage of 2d6 per Action.

It will take two rounds for the air to totally evacuate the chamber. From round three onwards the Heroes can let go of their holds without fear of being sucked out into space. They will still be at a disadvantage, however. Major Tom has a thruster pack and knows how to use it. He has a normal push-back threshold and can move freely in zero gravity. The Heroes have a pushback threshold of zero. Any attack will send them flying back until they hit a surface of some kind. In addition, their movements will be hampered as specified in the previous battle.

Their opponent will, of course, try to use his superior skills, experience and equipment to best advantage. Possible tactics include:

1) Knocking a Hero out of the blown hatch and into space.

Balance of POWER

2) Smashing a Space helmet (10 HTK) causing the wearer to take decompression damage.

3) Retreating into the repair conduits or out into space to recover, if necessary.

4) Using the momentum from an attack to knock a Hero away (and to allow himself to retreat).

It is important that Major Tom is played as an experienced, cunning and frustrating opponent.

When (if) the Heroes defeat him, they can use his shuttle to get back to Earth, provided they have someone who knows how to fly it.

Chapter 9 Chain of Lies

When they get back to Earth, the Heroes will face a number of dilemmas.

Firstly, though they have saved the world from chaos, the authorities won't want the full story of SORROW to get out. They also intend to keep using the relay - with appropriate safeguards of course.

In addition, SORROW has spread all these false stories about the Heroes. Despite official debunking, some of these stories will stick and will dog the Heroes until the end of their days.

(Almost every interview they do from now on will have a reference to "that unfortunate incident in South America".)

There is also the possibility that their secret identities have been revealed and/or the fact that an innocent bystander has been falsely identified as one of the Heroes with serious consequence for their life. (Assuming they haven't already been assassinated by one of the Hero's enemies.)

Chapter 10 Wall of Truth

If the Heroes do want to clear their name, they will have to get the message out somehow.

Since most of the world's communications will still be routed through SORROW, getting the truth out without it being detected and intercepted by those in power will be difficult.

The Heroes' public image could take a long-term battering.

Future Issues

1) Are the Heroes going to let the authorities keep using SORROW? They might feel morally obliged to destroy the satellite.

(After the authorities have been given the opportunity to put alternatives in place, of course!)

2) What damage was caused whilst the world's communications were out? At the very least some Superpowered villains will have escaped from jail. At worst, some nations may have come to blows and a war may need defusing.

3) If an innocent person was wrongly identified as a Hero, does that hero owe any obligation to him or his widow?

4) What if the Heroes' secret identities were revealed? How do they protect their families and loved ones?

5) Passing aliens have picked up the fallout from the Heroes' battle with SORROW. How will they take advantage of this?

Ratings

Backing: Co-operating with the authorities to conceal SORROW could allow them to negotiate up to 5. Revealing SORROW will drop this to 2.

Public Relations: No better than 2 if the public believe the truth of SORROW's lies about the Heroes, possibly even 1.

Balance of POWER

Practice: Yes. If the Heroes can get the truth of SORROW and their actions out, this Scenario IS worth a Practice rating of 10. The key word here is "if".

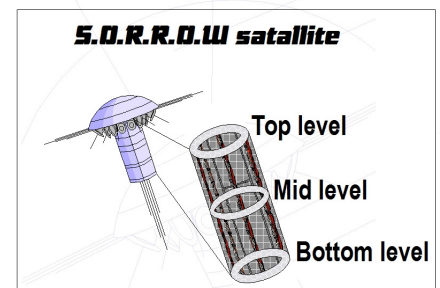
Conscience: If the Heroes conceal SORROW this cannot be higher than 3. If an innocent dies in the Hero's name, this will drop to 1 or 2.

Success Rate: The scenario can count twice for this – once for stopping SORROW, once for stopping Major Tom. (If the earlier chapters were expanded, it could count three times.)

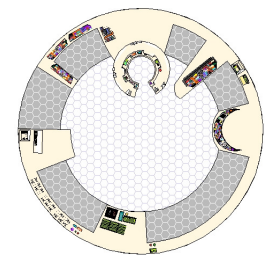
Security: No higher than 3 if the Hero's identity becomes public. This may also drop as the Heroes realise just how vulnerable they are outside the Earth's atmosphere.

After a number of launches where he was asked to take his protein pills and put his helmet on, something snapped. Reaching the end of his career and looking at an inadequate pension, he decided to branch out. He has been using his position of trust to implant devices into satellites he has serviced which he can use to take those satellites over.

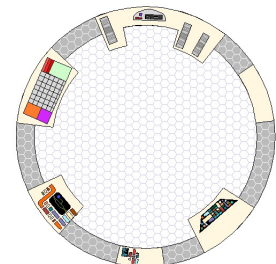
Though generally a cunning and careful opponent, he can become enraged at, and target, any Hero who refers to him by his hated nickname.



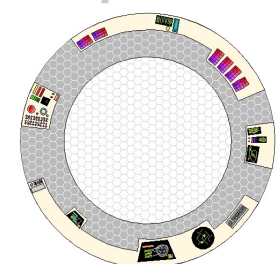
Bottom level



Mid Level



Top level



The Opposition

Background:

Major Thomas Ross was a respected American Astronaut. He joined the service looking for adventure on "the Final Frontier" but found himself repairing satellites and working as nothing more than a glorified engineer. This was bad enough, when he was a Lieutenant and Captain. When he reached the rank of Major, however, people started calling him "Major Tom".

Major Tom			
Alias: Major Thomas Ross			
EGO	STRENGTH	DEXTERITY	VIGOUR
12	12 (27)	12	12
HTK	Divider	Recover	Hospitalised
44	4	1d6/hr	4
HTC	Divider	Recover	Stag./Stun
42	3	1d6/rnd	8 / 4
Move	DC	Dodge	Damage
6m/ 15m	4	0	+12
Frame	Strike	P.back	Energy
4	-	20	15
Superpowers:			
Armour 1			
Energy Attack 1 (Heat – Laser Torch, 15 dice, Quick Blast)			
Flight 1 (In space)			
Health 1 (Environment Survival – Space, Immunity to Radiation)			
Skills 1 (Pilot and Computer Knowledge)			
Strength 1			
Equipment:			
Spacesuit			
Laser torch			
Radio			
Attack	Laser Torch	Fist/Foot	
WC	3	2	
HTK	0-6xd6	1d6-6	
HTC	0-6xd6	+12	
Mod.	-	-	
Time	Action	Frame	
Notes	15d6		

Author's note: I'd like to dedicate this scenario to my collaborator and artist, Dave Eadie, who took this scenario from its original format to a whole new level.

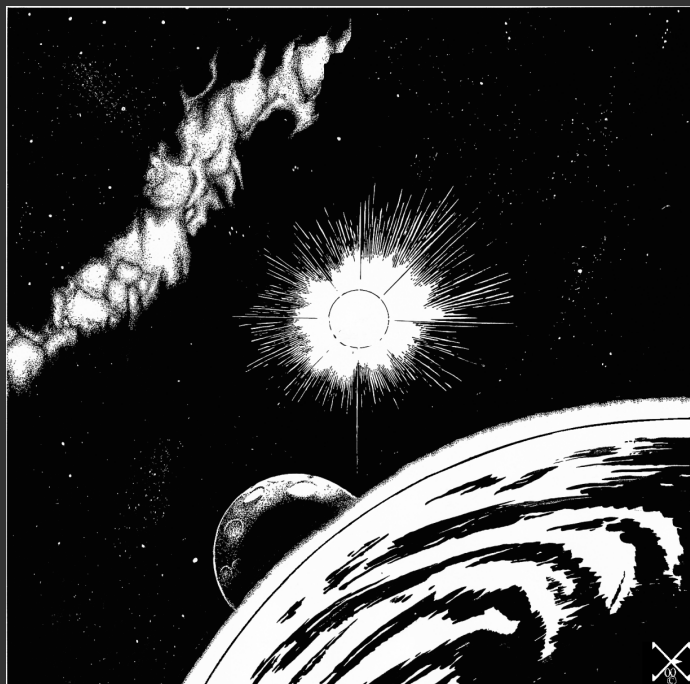
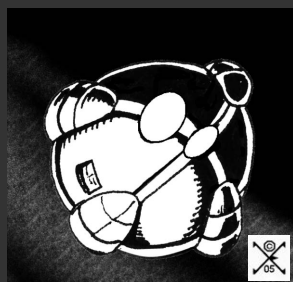
Cheers Dave!



A meeting with a shadowy figure.....

Leads to adventure on the Final Frontier.....

And an encounter with the most unexpected villain of all.....



When the

Balance of POWER

shifts, life for the Squadron UK never be the same again.....