

Eric M Hunter  
<http://ericmhunter.net>  
[hello@ericmhunter.net](mailto:hello@ericmhunter.net)

about 1,600 words

Jazzpunk: an introduction

By Eric M Hunter

Based on the game

By Necrophone Games

Japanada International Airport.

Probably one of the nicest airports I've ever flown into. A nice simple flight from Manchester. The baggage hold was roomy with minimal bumping with other bags. The air had a scent of jasmine and black tea.

The conveyor belts were smooth moving baggage from the plane compartment to the claim area lined with shortly grown flora. Large ears of leaves sprouted up here and there. Yellow columns held the ceiling up from the floor.

Glossy plaques hung from above by tiny wires with white printed letters displaying the direction to your gate or where the bathroom was. Chairs lined together for two or three people huddled up against the wall. They looked comfortable to sit on. In the spaces between, lonely potted plants did their best to grow in the artificial light.

It was a cozy, welcoming scene. One of which I didn't have the chance to experience this trip due to mailing being cheaper than an actual seat on the airplane. Times were tough at the Operation. Travel expenses had to be cut, headquarters moved to lower rent costs, but there was always a need for espionage even on a budget.

Finally, me and my case made it along the conveyor belt with the rest of the luggage. The others filled with just clothes and trinkets, no doubt. All over my suitcase were stickers from every customs department I had to go through to make it to Japanada International. And with these layovers, there were quite a few of them marking my journey.

While I shuffled along silently on the belt, I could hear the murmurs of the other passengers. I peeked out the slit in my luggage and it occurred to me that there was no one here to claim their baggage. The entire place was empty. Well, empty except for me. I made a note.

It was no troublesome task to get me here. A handful of system scans of similar man-shaped suitcases until the computer came across the one not made of circuits and diodes. A claw picked me up and dropped me down a series of connecting tubes. A signal is sent from high atop a radio tower that reaches down below ground underneath a bustling jam of traffic, then a series of connecting flights. Once onboard, a secret phone call made from one party to another all the while said conversation is being recorded on a reel to reel by the Operation for security which then moved to a building's floor that houses a sea of data mainframes announcing my arrival to:

Darlington Station: the new home of the Operation.

See, simple enough.

My blurry vision passed after a few moments. Behind me laid my traveling suitcase lined with flush red fur. Very comfortable. A sign on the wall pointed an arrow up, notifying an exit to the street level.

Darlington Station was an abandoned subway train platform. Went under years ago. Taken over by mole people for a short time (or so they say) until it by an anonymous buyer purchased it and turned into office space for companies like Reginald Aubrey & Fessenden Turing Fiances, Lorenz & Koch Quantitative Accounting, Carter Fairfax Import Export Limited, and the Operation.

Tall wooden walls separated each business with a single door with pane glass and black lettering announcing their names. Overhead were red metal fans with blades as long as a highway billboard. Their dull whisper cut through the air, giving the empty subway station a sense of filling. If that makes sense. I don't think it does.

The left side wall remained unaltered from the glory days of the subway platform. Empty green benches lined the wall except for a grumpy box wanting to be alone.

High on the walls were speakers once announcing train arrivals and safety messages now collected dust and cobwebs. They used to announce when the next train was to arrive or typical safety messages.

The place was drab. A far stretch from the highrise buildings the Operation had once come from. I checked my wrist

for the time but had a gruelling task finding my arms. No matter. It was late. That I knew.

The only light on in the entire place was my destination, although I may have been interested in turing fiances. Another time, I'd promised myself.

I made quick steps and was present at the front door of the new headquarters of the Operation.

Inside, the sounds of typewriter keys hitting their respective places on a page echoed through the subway station. One of the large overhead fans hung in the center of the room and gave light to the far corners. The dust floated about, giving a sense of stars amongst the night sky. A deep red carpet with green diamonds laid on the floor. The wooden walls sat on three sides with a subway car to the back.

The Receptionist's desk sat just to the left of the subway car's doors.

"Sit down, honey. The Director will be right with you." The Receptionist's glasses shook as she spoke, but her hair stayed in a tight bun on top of her head. Her pink polka-dotted dress displayed the summer's highest fashion. Bet they took it right off the mannequin for her. I smiled and made my way around the waiting room.

It had all the amenities you'd expect out of a high-class covert op espionage agency on a budget: a basket of growing plants that had outgrown their pots, bulletin boards advertising saxophone lessons either acoustic or piezoelectric and even the sale of a 1949.b Chaebol Fortram, reactor fully serviced. Call Blake.

On two walls were red overstuffed airplane chairs that could have come from the flight I'd just taken, although I wouldn't know what the cabin had looked like.

I sat down on one captain's chair and perused the table beside me which was full of today's most popular reading material: VR Guide, BlackHat, January's Reader's Digestive Organs, Soak: the Wetware Enthusiast Magazine, and, if you can believe it, an issue of Playbot. I quickly put the Playbot face down and looked up to see if the Receptionist was watching me. She was. I smiled faintly and absently reached for one another.

"The Director is ready for you," she said through a smile, never breaking her gaze. I moved from my seat and towards the back of the office. The door to the subway car opened as I approached. The Receptionist went back to typing whatever important document she was working on before I had interrupted.

The Director sat behind his desk staring at his Vid-O-Screen, a purple Martini and scattered papers covered his desk. Overflowing filing cabinets blocked off the rear exit of the subway car. Advertisements for Magnetic Valves and Placebex pills looked down on us from the car's ceiling.

"Please, sit down. We have much business to discuss," his mustache murmured. His cowboy hat covered his bald head and his circular sunglasses hid bloodshot eyes. It was from the late hours working espionage or from the cigar smoke and cheap booze he had scattered about. The stench suggested the latter.

There were bench seats that sat across from the Director's desk. A certified whoopie cushion sat innocently alone where he wanted me to sit. I looked back at him, but he sat staring at the whoopie cushion, never wavering. I sat down, shifting my weight to push all the air out. If I'm forced in a position of ridicule, I would do it to the best of my ability. The Director waited until the farting had finished.

"Basically, we need you to infiltrate the Soviet consulate," the Director turned in his chair and his dotted line of vision tiptoed to the blackboard that was standing on the right side of the car. His voice was deep and sluggish, like his tongue was thicker than his mouth could handle.

They laded the chalkboard with drawings of a building showcasing some of the finest architecture the Soviets could muster and a complicated looking cassette tape with the words "obtain the data cartridge" written beside it. An arrow pointed to it to drive the point home.

"They've taken some of our important technology and it's imperative we get it back in the right hands." My vision shifted to a small pill bottle that appeared on the corner of the Director's desk.

"As pure usual, here's your Missionoyl prescription." *You'll need this,* I read. "Don't take too many," he said. I remembered this warning from last time. He slipped off his chair.

"If you need me, I'll be in the wine cellar." The Director turned and walked down the staircase that was apparently behind his chair. The quiet typing of keys accompanied each hollow step down behind me.

And there I was: sitting on a subway bench of the Westbound, staring down a bottle of pills, and a mission of espionage in front of me.

I turned the bottle over.



*Take one capsule every mission, or until reality is sufficiently augmented.* They made the subscription out to a John Doe administered by Dr. Homer Dudley. The Operation had many doctors on the payroll. You never knew when you'd need one in a pinch.

I peered over the desk to find the Director lying on his back asleep, bubbles rising from his lips. He'd be out for a while, I reasoned.

I looked over to the mission board. The plan was simple: infiltrate the Soviet Consulate, then obtain the data cartridge. Easy like Sunday Breakfast tea.

I opened the pill bottle, ruffled one into my hand, and threw it back. A moment passed and nothing. Maybe they weren't--

And then it appeared in front of me: starting a mission in  
5... 4... 3... 2... 1...