

Run on HQ and R&D

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I've just decided to write a few words about HQ and R&D accessing possibilities. I have some major and well-known cards in mind. These are:

- HQ and R&D Interface (Hardware: always access +1 card)
- HQ and R&D Mole (Hidden Resource: trash to access +2 cards)
- All-Hands and Rush Hour (Prep: make a run, access +3 cards)

The preps both have the limitation that no noisy icebreakers can be used during the run. There also exist the similar cards Executive Wiretaps Custodial Position, which don't have this limitation, but only access +2 cards. However, in constructed gameplay, where HQ or R&D access is planned, most players seem to prefer the more powerful versions (mentioned above) and avoid using noisy icebreakers in their decks. I also left out other access strategies like the strong R&D Protocol Files/Microtech AI Interface combo or cards like Synchronized Attack on HQ. Viruses are also not discussed here.

As stated in the rules, each corp deck must have a minimum number of agenda points (dependent on the deck size). Though it is not explicitly said, you can easily deduce that $2/5$ of the deck size is the minimum number of agenda points needed. Since almost everyone plays with this minimum number, we can assume that each single card is worth $2/5=0.4$ agenda points on the average. So, regardless of what agendas are used, a runner always has to access $7/0.4=17.5$ cards on the average to win with 7 agenda points just by stealing them out of HQ or R&D.

For all non-mathematicians: This is only an average number! Please don't blame me if you play against a deck using 3 Political Overthrows, and repeatedly miss an agenda point after having accessed 17-18 cards.

Needless to say that this number can be reduced with cards like Promises Promises and other bonuses agenda point preps.

Ok, on with the analysis. Now that we know we should be able to access 17-18 cards as smart as possible, what runner cards do we use/install to achieve this? Of course, this depends on what deck we play. If we try a Clown or stealth setup, for example, where we have many runs (almost) for free, the Hardware Interfaces seem to be the best choice, because they are the only reusable cards. The Preps and Hidden Resources are one-shots.

But: In my opinion, it is more often seen that you can only afford a single run on HQ or R&D from time to time, and that the corp can react by increasing the protection of the threatened central data forts.

If you want to rely solely on Interfaces, you have to run a lot:

- With 1 Interface installed, you need about 9 runs.
- With 2 Interface installed, you need about 6 runs.
- With 3 Interface installed, you need about 4 to 5 runs.
- With 4 Interface installed, you need about 3 to 4 runs.

Please note that this whole analysis assumes that you do not access cards more than once!

On the other hand, if you only play with Preps, you need to play about 4-5 All-Hands or Rush Hours. This costs you about 13.5 bits in addition to the runs. Now compare: For 13.5 bits you can install no more than 3 Interfaces, and with 3 Interfaces you also need about 4-5 runs. So the plain bit cost seems to be roughly the same, BUT if you use Interfaces, you have to pay the bits for the installation IN ADVANCE, AND you give the corp a big hint to better increase the protection of the specific fort(s). Preps, however, can be played as a surprise.

Talking about payment in advance, we must admit that the play cost of 3 bits for either of the Preps (and also the Prep itself) is simply lost if the run is not successful. Here the third group of cards really shines: the Hidden Resources. The Trash cost of 4 bits may seem to be high at first glance, but you only need to pay it if the run is already successful. This gives you a HUGE advantage. You can install the card(s) for free, and in case that you never succeed in running HQ or R&D, no bits are wasted! Additionally, the Hidden Resources also enable a surprise attack.

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Analysing the cost for these Resources is a bit difficult, because it is not clear how many runs you need to make. You could install 8-9 of them and make a single successful run to access 17-19 cards, paying about 34 bits for the trashing in addition to the one run. Or you could install 6 of them and make 6 runs, trashing always only one Resource, access a total of 18 cards and pay a total of 24 bits in addition to the 6 runs. This would be 10 bits less but 5 runs more than in the other "extreme" case, and since a single run is likely to cost more than 2 bits, it seems optimal to use the first strategy. But waiting until 8-9 Hidden Resources are installed and enough bits are collected might often be not aggressive enough. At least you can see that accessing additional cards with Moles may be the most expensive way, but may also be the most economical way.

The best strategy seems to be a mixture of Preps, Hardware and Moles. It would take long to compare all possible combinations of these cards. Let me just mention one:

You need 3 Moles and 3 Preps (for a total of 21 bits) and finance 3 runs to access $3*6=18$ cards and thus liberate 7.4 agenda points on the average! Running HQ might be slightly less card-effective than running R&D, because with a normal hand size of 5 you cannot access 6 cards on a single run, and you cannot prevent accessing cards more than once. On the other hand, it could be more agenda-effective if the timing is right, because agendas that are not scored pile up in HQ :) I would suggest one HQ and two R&D attacks for a good average success.

Please notice that this combination also has a very good surprise effect. Combining Preps or Moles with Interfaces, however, destroys the surprise effect of the Preps and Moles and makes you spend bits in advance.

Last but not least, I'd like to point out that Hardware is more in danger of getting lost than the other card types. Think of Cinderella, Corprunner's Shattered Remains or Power Grid Overload, for example. Yes, Resources can also be trashed if runner is tagged, but it is not necessarily a good deal for the corp to trash HIDDEN Resources. Preps can only get lost due to net, brain or meat damage, but this is evenly true for all other cards.

Well, that's it for now. Hope it was interesting. What do you think?