



SHADOWRUN[®]

SCREAM YOUR TRUTH

THE VOICES WILL BE HEARD.

The powers of the Sixth World want to control everything, keeping the world pacified through bland entertainment and milquetoast messages. But they can't keep everyone quiet. People have ideas screaming to get out and the tools to record and spread them. Whether they're starting a new band, recording guerrilla trid dramas, or launching a pirate tridcast where someone tells the truth for once, they can grab audiences by the throat and get them to listen. They're out of patience, and everyone else is out of time.

No Future is the *Shadowrun* guide to Sixth World culture, including information on music acts, trid movies and series, media sources, and sports, with a look at some of the voices bubbling up from the underground and demanding attention. With detailed setting information and relevant rules, *No Future* adds new elements and depth to Sixth World role-playing.

No Future is a cyberPUNK sourcebook that details the culture and everyday life of the *Shadowrun* setting and is useful for whatever version of *Shadowrun* you play!



SHADOWRUN[®] NO FUTURE

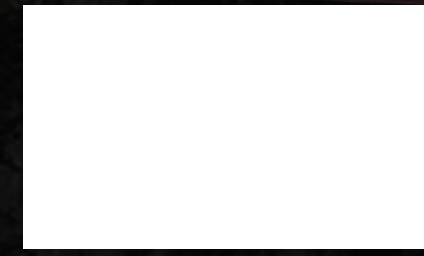


SHADOWRUN[®]

NO FUTURE



A CYBERPUNK SOURCEBOOK



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NO
FUTURE





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////////////////////////////////////
CONNECTING TO JACKPOINT VPN...
...IDENTITY SPOOFED
...ENCRYPTION KEYS GENERATED
...CONNECTED TO ONION ROUTERS
////////////////////////////////////

>LOGIN
>ENTER PASSCODE

...BIOMETRIC SCAN CONFIRMED
CONNECTED TO <ERROR: NODE UNKNOWN>
////////////////////////////////////

“Punk rock is just another word for freedom.”
—Patti Smith
////////////////////////////////////

Welcome back to JackPoint, chummer; your last connection was severed **3 hours, 14 minutes, 19 seconds** ago

TODAY'S HEADS-UP

This whole VPN is DIY. Take a look at some of the others who are operating outside the boundaries—and within them.—Glitch
////////////////////////////////////

INCOMING

>>> It takes the biggest of bads to make the most legendary runners. [TAG: CHICAGO CHAOS]

>>> If we're gonna be honest, you probably should panic. [TAG: THE NEO-ANARCHIST STREETPEDIA]
////////////////////////////////////

TOP NEWS ITEMS

>>> UCAS President “rules out nothing” when it comes to acting against Ares' proposed move to Atlanta

>>> Danielle de la Mar: “I love technomancers! I have one on my security team!”

>>> Asamando officials offer no comment about ongoing low-level seismic disturbances.
////////////////////////////////////

JACKPOINT STATS

74 Users are active on the network.

LATEST NEWS

Johnny Banger calls reports of rioting near his performances “normal concert behavior.”

PERSONAL ALERTS

>>> You have 10 new private messages.

>>> You have 5 new responses to your JackPoint posts.

>>> The resale value of your Maria Mercurial tickets has climbed by an estimated eighteen percent.

There are seven Members online and in your area.

YOUR CURRENT REP SCORE: 717 (66% Positive)

CURRENT TIME: 10 June 2080, 2114 hrs
////////////////////////////////////

INTRODUCTION

There is no future.

Express that thought aloud and you'll get plenty of agreement, but for different reasons. For some people, it will be simple nihilism. After all, the Sixth World staggers from crisis to crisis, disaster to disaster, with whatever balances holding the world together always on the verge of total and final collapse. The people who are in charge of the world seem to have little regard for it beyond what they can extract for their enjoyment, and even less regard for the billions of people who crawl its surface. That form of controlling the world would seem to be unsustainable, but it's lasted for the better part of the century. With each year, though, the inevitable ruin comes closer, and it seems increasingly unlikely that there will be anything left but wreckage.

The other way of looking at the opening sentence does not necessarily contradict the first one. Whether the future is bleak or not, whether total destruction looms or not, isn't relevant. Because the thing about the future is, it stays out of reach. There is always a future in front of us, but we always live in the present. The moment you are in is the one that is real. The past is gone, the future doesn't arrive. There is no future because we all live in the now.

So what are you doing with your now? You can be entertained, if that's what you want. Corp drones of the world don't have a lot of free time, while the SINless of the world don't have a lot of scratch, but there are precious few people in the industrialized nations of the world (which is the vast majority of them) who can't find their way to the Matrix and its wealth of entertainment options. You could catch up on tunes, watch some trid flicks, cheer on your favorite team, or consume news

in whatever fashion works for you. If you want to be pacified and numbed, there are more than enough options for you. Your present can be a rest from the stresses and worries of your other present moments, and with the world the way it is, who can blame you?

But you can make your present something more. You can push beyond the bland, corp-sponsored dreck that fills every mainstream broadcast, download, or whatever, seeking out a little more and finding the jewels hidden in deep caverns. The bands, singers, and MCs who don't have the glittery sheen of corp production on their music and don't want it. The trid dramas and documentaries that set out searing questions about the way the world is and how it can change. And the news that has the courage to commit to the radical act of telling the truth.

This book is your guide to Sixth World entertainment, media, and culture. It starts with **Look Forward in Anger**, an overview of how the media market looks and why it looks that way. **Blitzkrieg Bops** takes on the music scene, including bands and venues, while **Creation Starts with Darkness** looks at how we consume moving pictures and accompanying sensations, namely through trid, simsense, and BTLs. **Leading and Bleeding** looks at Sixth World news, including the rare few who tell it straight, and **Thrills and Agonies** takes on the sporting scene. **We Suck Young Blood** examines how corps co-opt youth movements in the eternal effort to stay fresh, and **Game Information** brings rules, including gear, qualities, and life modules, tied into Sixth World culture.

The book will let you know what's going on in the world, but only you can decide what you'll do with it. Just choose fast, because there's no time like the present.

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SALES PITCH

BY MALIK TOMS

He turns off his eyes the moment the engines start. External sound dampeners engage a moment later, leaving him in a void most people couldn't possibly imagine. In that void there is music; the staccato chatter of beatpace resonating through Yamatetsu-built eardrums, always slashing from one rhythm to the next, an algorithm-driven mixtape that promises to distance him from his flesh and his common sense as the plane lurches upward and he has to kill his vocal cord array in order to stop himself from screaming.

Samuel "Shuggy" Jones cannot fly. Once, before success bought him all these modifications, he tried to take a commuter jet from Seattle to Los Angeles. They had to stop the plane on the runway, because Shuggy had tried to squeeze his dwarf frame under the seat in front of him. When that didn't work, he made a run for it. The stewardess found him trying to claw his way out of the rear door. That was how the BTL use started. Slot a chip into the new hardware, and you weren't on a plane anymore. You were in Paris, or walking across the African battlefields of the fifth

desert war, or sitting in a high chair waiting impatiently for a spoonful of sweet-tasting goop, or perhaps in bed with a busty fomori whose tongue slithered toward you. Problem was, long after the planes landed, the BTLs were still there. It didn't take much for him to reach for them. It didn't take long before that was all he did.

He feels the world around him jostle and wishes he could reach down into his nervous system and find a kill switch for that, too. Instead, he focuses on the music. The algorithm dances into a half-speed offering, abandoning the nostalgia of beatpace maven Zero Interrupt for the slavgrass twang of Chaker Baker. The music, expertly selected, carries his thoughts away from the flight and the fear. In moments, he is asleep.

Then the plane shakes. Then it drops.

Shuggy feels everything. He feels the plane rocking and his lunch creeping up past the pit of his stomach and holding there as if weightless and he is weightless and holding his breath and there is a tremendous shove from below him and he knows he is going to die. He grabs the hand of the person next to him like a baby clutching a parent's hand and squeezes. He keeps squeezing for all he is worth.

The person next to him—Gesher, a toothy ork, wide-eyed and cautious—punches him in the arm. Hard. Shuggy loosens his grip, reactivates his eyes. Gesher is talking,



but there is no sound, just the algorithm overcorrecting to doom arcanometal. Shuggy shuts down the playlist and re-keys external hearing.

“Why’d you hit me?”

“Your nails were cutting through my hand. I thought you were having a bad dream.”

Just a bad landing. “No. I was working. Something in the stream caught my attention, so I tried to get your attention so you could make note of it—for the show.”

Gesher wears a three-piece suit that probably cost more than both their first-class tickets. He has surprisingly small eyes for such a large head, and they dart around nervously. “We should have brought security, he says. “It isn’t safe for you to be put in public like this.”

“You’re damn near two and a half meters tall. All that size ought to be good for something. Besides, corp cops don’t just shoot people in broad daylight here. This isn’t Seattle.” Shuggy shudders, a thrill of discomfort moving through him as he thinks about the Seattle music scene—at least what is left of it. Post CZ Chicago hipstercore churns out more soul than the wreckage of the Seattle sound. That’s why he is here. His show needs something new. Seattle needs something real.

They deplane, collect luggage, and find the rental car waiting for them at the curb. Shuggy climbs into the back,

Gesher the front, still talking. In the artificial silence, Shuggy re-engages his commlink, syncing with local weather and surface traffic feeds. He dives through the music feeds, starting globally, the top of the food chain, then down through regional feeds, chasing likes and links, stumbling through repeated songs like lines on pavement until he finds what passes for a sonic underground in Tennessee. It is a network of four independent feeds, but he can tell by the playlist history that the fourth is a Horizon front-station, feigning independence. Still, the sounds across the spectrum paint a picture of a music scene shifting back toward flatpicked acoustic guitars over a TR-707 bass loop. He hasn’t quite figured out a name for the sound, but it is new—emergent—and he’s starting to feel a twinge of excitement about the artist he’s come to see.

Shuggy has always had a mind for music. His one mainstream hit, “Shake, Shake,” is still blasted from stadium speakers at every sporting event. He doesn’t even like the song—never did. Instead, he understood the proper arrangement of chords and harmony to underpin a hard neo-tribal refrain that people couldn’t help but love. It rocketed up the charts and stayed at number one for twenty-eight weeks. It was around week nine that he met Gesher and learned how much money he was losing on his own song. Fifteen years later, residuals still roll in from that

single monumental hit. Though the body of that wealth stream is picked over by various corporate entities like carrion birds feasting on roadkill, Geshner managed to liberate enough points to make the two of them wealthy men.

Geshner drives as Shuggy feeds the body of the local playlist into the algorithm. Shuggy didn't make the algorithm. That's Geshner's job. He's the hacker, the math guy. The math argues which songs should be played when, but the algorithm is populated by songs Shuggy personally plucks out of the slush of mainstream rejections and indie oversaturation. His instincts determine what continues in the stream. That kind of understanding makes him worth millions. Shuggy knows what makes a successful song. More importantly, he knows why songs hit with specific audiences. He just doesn't feed that info to the corps. He puts it out live on his pirate radio show, *The Crossroads*, and millions of fans stream that feed to hear what Shuggy says is going to be hot next.

This trip is another hunting expedition for that next big artist. Years ago, he found a girl named Zhi Rou Lee. She had no idea of the talent she had. She was wasting it on punkgrass, trying to please her father or something equally inane. Shuggy gave her a nickname, some lyrics, and a new sound. After Zero's first hit, her next three albums did big numbers. She'd changed her name since then and fallen back into the punkgrass scene. The spotlight didn't find her so well anymore. It might've been a blessing.

Shuggy activates his external hearing and asks Geshner, "What time does this kid go on?"

"Ms. Lee said she's going to introduce her during her own set, so I'd guess eleven o'clock?"

A slow sixty kilometers of packed sprawl highway marked by clean, bright corporate enclaves finally yield to black clumps of national forest, the nub of a mountain, and a neon-splashed sign for the Cumberland Caverns. The entrance to the venue itself is little more than a well-lit hole in the ground with a sign that boasts "This way to the Volcano Room—a dwarf's dream location!"

Dwarf's dream. He hated all that Tolkien crap. Shuggy preferred high rises and open-air lofts. Just because one guy a thousand years ago decided he knew what dwarves wanted didn't mean *this* dwarf had to agree.

The Volcano Room lost its connection to the Bluegrass Underground long before the Awakening, and holding a punkgrass show here is clearly meant to make a statement. He likes that. It is the rest he can do without. When he reaches the bottom stair, his headgear tells him he is one hundred meters underneath McMinnville, Tennessee. The place looks like it could hold six hundred seats. Unless his co-processor is wonky again, there are more than 950 jammed in close and sweaty, elation humming on every face. He feels closed in. Perspiration gathers on the walls and floors, causing people to slip and spill into each other, yet there is no anger. People raise their hands and sing along to Zero's off-kilter ballads. It is Woodstock and Burning Man writ small. He starts to sweat and feels his throat tighten. Geshner steadies him with a hand and says, "I'll lead you backstage."

They walk quickly, maneuvering around the outer edge of the cavern as concert-goers dance between them. Sound thunders from the stage, but there is more happening here than his visual and auditory spectrums can capture. Shuggy risks a glance into the AR. Sound and wireless signals bounce off the cavern ceiling, finding open dataports with every ricochet. It is an orgy of information, every collision an invitation to connect.

Zero doesn't see them yet. She's wound up tight, belting out something from her beatpace catalog, but she's changing it. She's making it punk. He hears that now-familiar

flatpicking as the acoustic backdrop, and she's shouting the lyrics. Shuggy stops to watch her. Zero is still beautiful, her Korean features are accented by stripes of red makeup. Blue hair falls wildly across her face. She ends, out of breath, and the crowd screams for more. This is what Shuggy loves most about live music. For a moment he forgets how cramped the space is and how much flesh and sweat is pressing against him deep below the earth. He forgets himself and listens.

Zero takes a bow and says, "I got something special for you tonight!" The crowd reacts instantly, screaming and jumping. She tells a story about meeting a kid on the street singing to herself with a voice so fine it made her stop and listen. It's all stage play, and every bit of it is working. Finally, she screams, "For the first time on stage anywhere, Elektra!" and Zero's voice disappears in the roar of the crowd. She steps aside, and a girl walks out on the stage. She's gangly. Her leather pants and crop top make Shuggy think of a kid playing dress up. In a way, she is. Her hair is the same blue as Zero's and pulled up into a bun that exposes a clean neck. No ink, no jacks. Her makeup is done in the same fashion, with stripes of green instead of red. The guitars wind up, and she lets them go a full sixteen bars before she starts to sing.

The crowd erupts. Her voice has everything Zero had when she started out, but more; a ruggedness that suggests a range beyond this pocket genre. She does three songs, each whipping the crowd up more than the last. By the time Zero joins her to close the show with a duet. Shuggy's music high is wearing off, and Geshner has to push him backstage before the Volcano Room closes in on him.

"Zero!" He shouts as they rush off the stage.

Zhi Ru Lee's smile flickers for an instant before she regains control of herself. She crouches, smothers Shuggy in a hug and whispers. "You're still calling me that."

"You're still pretending you were never a beatpace megastar, so I guess we're even. When do I get to meet this new protégé of yours?"

Zero calls the girl over. On closer look, she can't be more than thirteen. Her features are barely pubescent. He calculates seven different genres that fit those pronounced cheekbones, slender jawline, and ears that could nearly pass for elven. He begins to mold a look for her in his mind. He imagines a persona for each, settling on indie rock.

Zero's is watching him, face set in anger. She glances up at Geshner with a "help me" look before saying, "She's a punkgrass artist, Shuggy."

"Would you agree with that, Ms. Elektra? I think you're too young to know what you are."

"Well, I just wanted you to see what the future looked like. And maybe get you to put her on your show." Zero says. She curls a protective arm around her ward and smiles.

"She was definitely worth the trip down here. Get me some tracks and we can talk tomorrow."

The business side of music has never been his strength, so he leaves those things to Geshner. His partner takes Zero aside to work out schedule and compensation. Shuggy chats up the young artist a bit longer, but his mind has already moved past who she is now to what she can become. This girl is going to be a star. Her style and fanbase will change as she grows into a woman, locking her into a specific sound. There will be a comeback tour with fans of old and new filling venues and falling into this final act alongside her. He's always seen music as that journey, which is why he can't stand the way corporations deal with artists. They expect you to be one thing and stay that thing. You never grow, explore, or change. To the corporation, an

artist is another wageslave—an income stream that they expect to keep feeding them revenue at the same rate from the time they grab you until they dump you on the street.

By the time they're back in the car, Shuggy has Elektra's demo cuts in his algorithm. He's thinking about theming the next episode of *The Crossroads* around her. Specifically, he is thinking about that emergent Tennessee sound and how her voice is indicative of that sound. Gesher speaks up from the front seat as if reading his mind. "They want you to run with her as a punkgrass artist. It's the sound the kid cares about."

"I bet she cares about being famous, too. Elektra can fill bigger halls than what we saw. She has all the tools. She just needs a different sound."

"If she doesn't love the music she's putting out, she isn't going to be able to sell herself to an audience."

Shuggy starts to reply, but he sees something odd through the windshield. The light flashes to yellow, and a motorcycle screams across the intersection ahead of them. The car's automatic safety features take over, engaging the braking system hard enough to slam Shuggy into the seat in front of him. Gesher squawks a warning before the car is violently shoved from the side. Shuggy's head spins. He tries to focus on his feet, the way he was taught to gain his bearings after coming down from a BTL high, but everything is fuzzy. He sees the side door open, and there is the rough shape of a man with a gun. That man grabs Shuggy and yanks him from the car. Shuggy yelps. He can't see Gesher. Instead, he sees a van screeching to a stop, doors open. He is tossed inside, where another two people wait. One of them holds a white cloth to his face, smothering him. Shuggy tries to squirm free, but darkness finds him.

Shuggy jerks awake. He's in a chair in what looks like the foyer to an office. The lights are dim, but his Wuxing-built eyes make out five figures. The nearest is sitting in a chair opposite him, hands folded patiently. He is wearing a suit, and his slicked-back hair shows the nub of a dataport at his temple. The man smiles and says, "Mr. Elias. It is a pleasure to finally make your acquaintance."

A thrill of fear slides down the length of Shuggy's spine. He says, "Horizon."

"No, actually. I am here on behalf of Spinrad Entertainment. Do you know why we asked you in for this meeting?"

Shuggy tries to move. He isn't tied up. He's groggy, but his parts all work. "You want *Crossroads*."

"Technically, your show constitutes an illegal operation. I am professionally obligated to turn you over to the GOD authorities, where you will face charges for pirate broadcasting under section 3547 of—"

"Cut the crap." Shuggy says.

The suit shrugs. "Okay. We want *Crossroads*."

Just over the suit's shoulder, a pair of thugs have Gesher down on his knees, bleeding. Something tells Shuggy if he messes up, Gesher will bleed more.

The suit keeps talking. "What we're proposing is a financial arrangement that is entirely untraceable and jeopardizes neither your social standing nor perceived integrity, as intertwined as they are. This arrangement benefits everyone. While your reputation is built on your unwillingness to sell out to corporate entities, it is just that—a reputation."

He glances at Gesher. The ork's tiny eyes are still for once. Why hadn't Gesher called ahead and made sure there were local runners on the ground to protect him? Why had he been so careless? "Win-win, eh? Until word gets out that we met, and I walked away with a lot more cred in my account."

"No one knows about this meeting. Nobody knows you are here."

"I know I'm here. Isn't that enough?"

The suit shrugs again. "Your fans aren't reading your vocal stress patterns to guess if you're misleading them about a song. They already trust you in a way we cannot cultivate. You are a social influencer. You are a known commodity that, properly motivated, can move our sales figures by as much as two percent."

"You realize you're asking me to sell out. Don't you even know what that means?"

"I recognize that you are trying to be noble, but please explain to me how what we are offering so different than what you're already doing?"

"The people who tune into *Crossroads* don't want to hear what the corps think should be played. They want music that moves them and communicates the anger and passion they feel is whitewashed from every other song they hear. You guys are offering a lie to pacify the people. I'm offering them the comfort of knowing that others out there feel what they're feeling. I'm offering them a voice."

The suit sighs and stands. He says, "That, sir, is an excellent speech. Okay. I suppose we're done here."

Shuggy feels the surprise raise his eyebrows. He hesitates for a moment, like a kid whose parent said sure, go ahead and have that extra cookie. He expected to be punched, worked over, or even shot. Now he's supposed to believe he can go? Shuggy stands up, brushes his hands off on his pants and says, "Come on, Gesher."

But Gesher doesn't move. He's locked in by the corp suit's muscle. The suit says, "Unfortunately, if we cannot come to a suitable arrangement, my superiors will require a justification for the expenditure of funds on this operation. Security, redundancy, not to mention Ms. Lee's own compensation in the matter. So Mr. Gesher and I will be spending some time together unraveling your financial empire."

"Zero? What does she have to do with any of this?"

"Ms. Lee told us where and how to find you in return for promotion of her album."

Shuggy blinks several times, trying to conjure up the words for a response that will undo this moment. He wants to shut off his eyes and ears and slip away into the algorithm. He wants fall into the innocence of sound and let it carry him back through space until he is home again. He glances toward Gesher again, with grief and anger.

The suit continues. "As I said, we will leave you alone to run your broadcast, but your money will be applied to the cost of this endeavor. We are a fair organization. Whatever funds remain, you and your partner are welcome to keep."

Shuggy sat back down.

The Crossroads went back on the air four days later. They themed the show around that new Tennessee sound, and Shuggy dropped in several tracks from Elektra as a connecting point between what had long been the sound of the southern counterculture and what was starting to gestate. The focus of the show was on a band Shuggy discovered in Tennessee. The group surprised him, because he hardly ever liked an artist once a corporation got their hooks into them. The Hillbilly Royals were different, though. Maybe it was just that Spinrad was different. See, Shuggy said, they didn't try to alter what the band said to fit corporate mandate. They just let the Royals play, and the Royals knew how to rip. Shuggy wasn't about to say he liked any corporation, but maybe Spinrad wasn't quite so bad.



LOOK FORWARD IN ANGER

POSTED BY: DR. SPIN

The moment people started relaxing by watching moving pictures, other people started worrying about it. Was the content obscene? Was it corrupting the youth? Look back in time, and you'll see these worries about every form of media or entertainment that enjoyed a rapid rise in popularity—television, radio, rock 'n' roll, role-playing games, comic books, video games, the Matrix, simsense, trideo, you name it—if some people like it, some other people think it's destroying their character.

And here's the real trick of it—they're not entirely wrong. Yeah, a lot of the angles have been overblown or misidentified, but there are certain truths there, too. Some of them are basic, like watching a lot of misinformation leads you to being dumb. Watching propaganda makes you a tool. That sort of thing. But it gets more nuanced from there. Some programming can make you feel anti-social and isolated, while others can make you feel more positive about your fellow sentient beings. Some programming can make you yearn for change, other shows can make you feel complacent.

Maybe you already knew that, maybe you didn't, but I'll tell you this: The corps already knew it, and that plays a huge role in shaping the media landscape in which we exist. The Big Ten are at the root of a ton of the media all of us consume, and they are using tricks and techniques that have been perfected over more than a century.

The very first Academy Award winner for Best Picture was *Wings*, a wartime romance that had production help from the U.S. Army. The Army brought in planes and pilots to help with the movie. Twenty years later, the United States Department of Defense formed an entertainment liaison office so that full-time staff could work with movie and broadcast productions. They played a role in literally thousands of different productions, offering expertise and access to cool-looking weapons and vehicles in exchange for a range of benefits. Sometimes this was about inserting good-looking people in uniform into shows that would show them off to good advantage. Other times it was about tweaking lines and scenarios so that the military would be shown as altruistic heroes. It worked—the old United States spent decades in a condition where its citizens would argue passionately about

everything and anything, but criticism of the military was relegated to the fringes of society. If you wanted a prominent position in the government or business, you saluted the military as heroes and directed any criticism you might have about them elsewhere.

The corps walked right alongside the military in using entertainment to evangelize. Sometimes they were smooth and successful, like *E.T.* and Reese's Pieces. Other times they were clumsy wastes of money, like the *E.T.* rip-off *Mac and Me* and its graceless McDonald's references. When they were bad or just mediocre, they focused on how to move product quickly. When they were good, they focused on how to condition minds, how to tell people the lifestyle they wanted was in reach if they just made the right purchases. Or, on a larger scale, how the freedom to decide what you purchase was the best path to a virtuous society, and how the people who make and sell you these wonderful things are the true heroes of society.

- ▶ There's a reason people keep attempting adaptations of **The Fountainhead**, despite the fact that it's a book about speechifying architects, which is not the most cinematic subject. It fits their narrative, where people with the courage to make a lot of money are the **real** heroes. And don't get me started about adaptations of **Atlas Shrugged**.
- ▶ Cosmo

Now, here's the point where it's tempting to say that the whole point of most of the media you watch is to control you, but that's an unsophisticated way of looking at the world. Back in the twentieth century, fascist and authoritarian rulers usually employed the tactic of ruthlessly controlling the media—centralizing radio, print, and broadcast media, and ruthlessly shutting down unlicensed media. Some of those principles carried over to the twenty-first century, but new wrinkles emerged. As media choices proliferated, audiences Balkanized and drifted into isolated bubbles, where they could hear what they wanted to hear. Media sources developed to serve up what people wanted, and corps learned how to get the behavior they wanted through tribalism. Control can be a lot less heavy-handed when you find the charismatic people of a particular tribe and put them front and center. You don't have to dictate to them—they *want* to share your message. You just have to give them a platform.

Well, and maybe some training, which is where the corps shine these days. There are some time-honored tricks that work whether you're doing the news, making a documentary, or telling a story, and these are the tricks that are passed along from generation to generation. These include:

- **Find an enemy/scapegoat:** Someone, somewhere, is screwing up society, and the good

and decent people of the world need to unite against them. It helps if there are easily identifiable markers of this group (ethnic names, common language, tusks, skin color, that sort of thing) so that people can spot them easily—and build up resentment each time they see them. Whatever you do, make sure people know the enemy is an economic group similar to them—not one far above.

- **Keep people comfortable:** Cop and detective shows have been a staple of video storytelling for about as long as the medium has existed, and there are two critical elements to its appeal. The first is obvious—the lurid appeal of crime and affiliated danger. The second is somewhat subtler—crime dramas are only truly popular when the crime in question is solved. The disorder the crime introduced has to be turned back to order, and importantly, this is usually done by existing institutional forces, such as police. Crime dramas often carry the undercurrent that there are people in authority looking out for you, and they are capable of healing societal wounds.
- **Evil-doers are bad apples:** This is related to the previous point. You tend to have people making mistakes and causing conflict in drama, or else you don't have drama. If you want to preserve the status quo, people have to believe problems are caused by bad decisions, not systems. In this view, criminals are individuals making bad choices, period. They are not symptoms of the system, or people who are only outlaws because of questionable and problematic legal frameworks. These individuals and their choices are the problem—the *only* problem.

- ▶ The trick is that there are, of course, bad apples, and there are also systemic effects on people. Knowing what is a bad choice and what is a societal effect is not always simple to determine, which means knowing how to address it isn't easy.
- ▶ Pistons

If you remember these basic guidelines, you can get away with more subtle propaganda than your detractors might believe. For example, the crude view of corporate propaganda is that they can only show corporations doing good things, or in a good light. But that ignores existing corporate propaganda. Take *DASH: Star Loner*, which recently featured villainous CEO Arden Colosmo of Colosmo Industries. He was truly hissable, with his sexual harassment of underlings, his assorted kickbacks and double-dipping that enhanced his already generous salary, and his occasional murderous rage. He even—and this cannot be ignored—denied life-saving cancer treatment to his executive assis-



tant's daughter. The Matrix was absolutely on *fire* with outrage and anger directed Colosmo's way.

- > And it was overwrought AF. I mean, come on, that line he delivers to his assistant—"I don't invest in failing concerns"? We're supposed to believe anyone thinks or talks that way?
- > /dev/grrl
- > You should attend a DocWagon board meeting some time.
- > Butch

And it wasn't just that he was evil—he marshaled his corporation around him for evil ends. Corporate funds were used to silence witnesses, bribe government officials, and of course fund shadowruns. It was everything bad we know corporations can be, and it was right there on a massively popular trid series.

But here's the important part. Or parts. First, Colosmo clearly was a bad guy. An aberration. That was what was so truly offensive about him, that he was competing with all the other corporations while violating the rules of ethics that they adhered to. He had to be brought to heel, and when <spoiler alert!> he finally was, it was by a combined effort of Lone Star and Colosmo's

plucky competitors at ForTech. No systems were overturned, or even significantly altered in anyway. The corporate structure, with the Corporate Court sitting at the top as a beneficent overseer, remains in place. Not just that, but it was a critical part of bringing the outlier to justice. This is the critical message at the core of it all: The system works.

This is the media world we swim in, one that desperately wants us to believe that the ills we face are bugs, not features. Give us time, the corps ask us, and more importantly, give us information. Tell us what you know. Tell us who are the outliers, the problem children, the troublemakers. Point them out to us, and we will make them better.

There are, of course, other stories out there. They are well told, and with the available technology we all carry in our pockets, they can be filmed in ways that rival most of the trid flicks out there. We can make a searing documentary about the nature of power and how a century's destruction of social and political checks and balances has turned a huge portion of the world's population into nothing more than tools to be exploited. We can tell stories of how greed similar to that displayed by Arden Colosmo is met with pats on the back and "attaboys" rather than outrage and criminal investigations. We can look at who benefits from

a permanent criminal underclass, and how that affects both the structure of laws and the clear emphasis our prisons have on punishment over rehabilitation.

We can make all that. But can we get anyone to see it?

- ▶ The main problems with power are on display here. Those who are best at getting eyes on a trid or news write-up or whatever tend to be able to pick between jobs, and when they pick, they often take the ones that offer prime combinations of pay and benefits, and typically the only employers who can afford the prime packages are part of the status quo, so the best talent inevitably gets co-opted and any rebellious streak they might have had worn out of them.
- ▶ Mr. Bonds
- ▶ We don't get to see the introspective side of Mr. Bonds enough.
- ▶ X-Prime

Let's take a moment to look at those coloring outside the lines. The history of pirate media is long and glorious. Well, semi-glorious. The less-glorious side is the one that simply copies existing media (corporate or otherwise) and sells it cheaply because any and all intermediaries have been cut out. There is a glint of virtue there, in that the bloated money-making machines of corporate entertainment get slightly starved, but sometimes artists lose out, too (though debates rage on and on about whether piracy would actually ever translate into sales, but we don't have time for that). And since this type of piracy tends to be indiscriminate, it may strike bloated corp or scrawny independent with the same force—or with more force on the independent, since they don't have the large cushion of revenue that the big boys enjoy.

And sometimes the quality of these spurious pirated works suffers. This goes back to at least Shakespeare, who had some versions of his plays printed without his permission, and they butchered his work. Familiar with this?

*To be, or not to be. Aye, there's the point
To die, to sleep, is that all? Aye, all*

Did that seem to miss a few crucial points? To lack the mastery of rhythm characteristic of Shakespeare? To sound like something partly remembered and transcribed after the fact? It should, because that's likely what it was. It was an early example of pirate media, but the prouder counterparts of the time were often called underground media, publications that operated without official license and faced potential conflict with official commissions and Star Chambers and whatnot. A wide range of topics could lead to a publication being declared illegal—maybe it was too critical of the government, maybe it was too irreligious in a religious state,

or vice versa, maybe it was pornographic, and so on. Publications came and went, often hindered by the limited availability of the tools needed to print and distribute them. The twentieth century saw tremendous advances in both the number of ways to communicate and the availability of the tools needed to make them, so pirate media spread. In the former Soviet Union, the *Chronicle of Current Events* outlined ongoing human rights abuses over the course of fifteen years, serving as one of many *samizdat*, underground and illegal publications. Pirate radio began at almost the same time as radio broadcasts, the crowded airwaves eventually demanding government regulation. One effect of drawing legal boundaries, of course, is to put some people firmly outside of those lines, so they know how they are viewed. Pirate radio is full of people who will use that to leap into illegal broadcasts. One of the most famous ways of doing this was setting up radio stations on abandoned offshore platforms and ships to avoid radio registration laws, which gave a genuine pirate feel to these unlicensed media. The World Wide Web (the predecessor to the Matrix) and the growth in personal tools to create all kinds of media led to an explosion in both creation and distribution avenues. In the twentieth century, without access to a television network or movie studio, you could not get a wide audience to see what you might have made. In the twenty-first century, an individual with the right combination of filming skill, magnetic personality, marketing cleverness, and chutzpah could make a video, publish it, and eventually get audiences in the tens of millions.

- ▶ Just to reinforce the point about the challenge of mainstreaming subversiveness, it's important to note that the vast majority of these video channels that gained mass popularity were handmade but not truly subversive. They often were commercial in nature—offering gaming tips, beauty tips, baking tips, and whatnot—or various kinds of pranks and comedy skits. Agitprop rarely tops the charts.
- ▶ Fianchetto

Most of you should know how this particular story goes. There was a boom, that boom led to a new power structure, and the existing powers took a deep breath and worked at re-consolidating and co-opting whatever they could. Sometimes the upstarts became powers in their own right, only to find that once they made it to the top, they were willing to make some of the same compromises as their predecessors in order to stay there. One constant in the world is the reluctance of anyone who gets any degree of power to divest it for the benefit of others.

So money structures were built, re-built, and adjusted to make sure cash flowed where it should. The corps couldn't rest easy, though, since they

know popularity isn't always necessary to change the world. Winternight never became huge, but the material they put together recruited enough members that they managed to bring the world to its knees briefly, if not bringing on the full-bore Ragnarok they wanted. They saw that a free and open Matrix provided the chance to make material that would reach the right people and motivate them to action. So that freedom had to go.

The key to the Matrix revision of '75 was Danielle de la Mar helping the corps convince everyone that censorship was good and necessary for the protection of children and society. The corps gained the ability to monitor everything and crack down on content they didn't like. They can't control everything—JackPoint exists to prove that point—but they can tamp down the truth and give legs to the lies. So that's now the world we live in—we'll come back to contemporary piracy at the end of this section.

An examination of the current media environment has to start with the Fourteen Networks—the largest media corporations in the world. They are:

- Ares
- Aztechnology
- Cross
- DeMeKo
- Horizon
- MCT
- Fourth World Studios
- Providence
- Renraku
- Saeder-Krupp
- Shiawase
- Sony
- Spinrad Global
- Wuxing

These fourteen corporations own over ninety percent of the broadcast and Matrix networks through which SINners passively consume radio, trideo, and simsense entertainment and journalism either through dedicated media players or over the Matrix. Those corporations control over sixty-five percent of printed media consumed in hard copy or through the Matrix. Finally, these same fourteen corporations own seventy-nine percent of interactive entertainment and journalism—defined as everything from gambling, gaming, and choose-your-own-adventure stories to media accessible on demand. They are more than capable of the type of message control I talked about earlier. They also have an understanding when it comes to competition—sure, they fight for viewers with each other, but they maintain a certain respect for each other, meaning that they won't question their competitors' legitimacy or the merits of the media in gener-

al. They focus mainly on saying that they perform this noble calling better than their competitors do.

- ▶ Which is quite different from how they treat the pirate media, when they bother to notice them at all. Pirates are scoundrels, liars, deceivers, propagandists, etc., while their fellow corporate networks are honored competitors.
- ▶ Jimmy No

A key underlying belief in all their messaging is that the global hegemony of corporate postcapitalism is sacrosanct and unchanging. While the names may change, the megacorporations rule the world because they control most of the world's resources. Which is how it ever shall be.

The status quo created by these fourteen corporations rests on advancing some striking dichotomies: everything is fine, but everyone around us is a threat; technology provides convenience, but it also increases anxiety; everyone is a distinct individual, but stereotyping is commonplace and appropriate; everyone is equal and has equal opportunity, but the very corporations upon which the status quo rests are inherently hierarchical. These contradictions are built around the twins of terror and desire, both of which are built upon fear and love.

The problem with building empires on fear has been cautioned against for centuries: Too much fear and chaos lead to anger and hate, and those volatile elements can be difficult to control—and, when they go off, may inflict more harm on the wielder than the target. Unfortunately, manipulating people's fears and knowledge isn't quantifiable, no matter what Renraku and Horizon tell the public and themselves, and especially when they are being manipulated in real time with unknown and uncontrollable variables.

Some of those variables include things beyond the control of these (or any other) corporations, including independent producers and distributors who articulate different visions of the world, ideologies, and conditions. Some variables are internal, because the competing visions and the necessity of earning revenue and adjusting to the tastes of audiences (tastes that were created or enhanced upstream by those same corporations) as well as attempting to innovate and be authentic can conflict directly with systemic issues of economics, politics, and society.

The current world economy has had decades to learn how to adjust to events and maintain the status quo. I learned some of these lessons from none other than the late Samantha Villiers, who took in a lot from the various guises she wore in her life. She was a cypherpunk and cyberpunk in her youth, and she was self-aware enough to admit that shaped her becoming the reactionary authoritarian she was later in life, which was critical

to her survival in her final two decades. The first lesson she shared comes right out of Aristotle: the power of catharsis. Built-up emotions need a release, and if you want to maintain the status quo, you need to make sure these releases do not come in the form of a revolution. This is where you get the classic breads-and-circuses approach—not only can creature comforts appease the masses somewhat, but the entertainment can give them an emotional release that helps forestall revolt.

- > I've been inside wageslave apartments, and I don't see how they do anything to keep people appeased. They're tiny and plain.
- > Respec
- > You're missing the larger picture (literally—you'll see what I mean in a minute). First, remember the threat hanging over wageslaves' heads. Without a job, they're out in the barrens. With us. Some of the emphasis on crime in corporate news and entertainment is about constantly reminding wageslaves what waits for them if they're thrust out into the cold, cruel world. That wageslave apartment may be small, but it's temperature-controlled, has running water, and police will come when they're called. When they see how people like us sometimes live, they're glad to have it.
- > And there's another feature they always have—a trid player with a good Matrix stream. The apartment may be small, but there is always a nook especially carved out for some solid trid viewing. This means the worker can come home, full of aggravation and anger about their job, and get transported somewhere else. And, if they get that catharsis, the rage can be diluted.
- > Winterhawk

The release doesn't have to come only through entertainment. Sometimes a spirited political argument can help, or concerted physical activity. Corps look for ways to provide it. For many older sports, like football and basketball, the most common way to watch is with a view that takes in the whole picture, so you can see the entire play unfold. For newer sports, especially urban brawl, viewers love the ride-along cam, the shot that puts you in the middle of the action. Combine it with a simsense feed, and you are part of each shot fired, punch thrown (and received), and goal scored. And when it's over, you're a little wrung out, and some of your buried anger is gone.

Villiers taught me another trick, that of audience segmentation. Hundreds of new episodes of serial shows and new trid flicks are made every year, and the vast majority of previous years' output is out there waiting for you. You can design your own entertainment buffet, and the moment you finish one offering, corporate algorithms are ready and willing to tell you what else you may want to watch. You could be a guns-and-explosion-loving action fan, and you could watch programming for years and years, and never see the

same recommendation as your romantic-comedy-loving friend. Perhaps more perniciously, based on my viewing habits and preferences, I may see news that tells me about a crime wave downtown, the latest spat between organized crime groups, and the inspiring story of a group of barrens residents working to clean up their community; you, by contrast, may see news talking about Knight Errant's new initiative to keep downtown safe, an update on how RICO enforcement is making organized crime leaders panic, and the inspiring story of government officials supporting community improvement programs. Same information, different perspectives. Then you can multiply the perspectives plus the amount of information out there, and then you and all of your neighbors are practically living in different worlds.

This breeds a combination of tribalism and isolation. When you're outside of your tribe, you have a lot of difficulty relating with others; when you're in your tribe, you get a sense of belonging and validation. The trick is to keep the tribes mistrustful of each other but not angry enough to move into open civil war or anything. It's a delicate balance, but the corps have spent years learning how to walk it. The goal is to keep us angry at each other and not them, and also make it feel like we can't change the world—the big institutions are in control, and they'll probably work things out.

THE MEDIUM

Culture can be transmitted many ways. So let's run 'em down.

BROADCAST

Broadcast media was supposed to be dead by now.

A broadcast offers almost none of the advantages people want from their entertainment. It happens on its own schedule, not yours. It has commercial interruptions that you don't have to endure if you wait a little to watch a show, or pay a little extra. Many analysts thought the broadcast model was on its way out sixty years ago, but here it remains, in our Matrix-centric world. How is it surviving?

Analysts underestimated the creativity of network executives in developing revenue streams. For filmed programming, in-show ads have virtually disappeared, except for a brief ad or two before each program. Product placement, however, has shot up, though it only becomes truly lucrative when the show becomes a hit. Your new Generic Cop/Lawyer/Doctor Show isn't going to rack up a lot of nuyen in critical product placement, but once advertisers know you've got millions of eyes watching your breakout character, they'll pay nicely to ensure they're wearing the right threads, using

the right commlinks, and dining at the right establishments. Remember, Chase, Errant Knight, didn't develop his love for his special BMW 400GT until season two.

While product placement is an old tactic, broadcasters made real headway with Matrix-assisted innovations in ad placement. Media mavens have long known that people watch their entertainment with another screen nearby. When someone is watching *The Runners*, they become exponentially more likely to search for, say Ruairidh Torres to see what else he has been in and whether he's ever showed his ass in previous roles. Your PAN knows what the other parts of your PAN are doing, so if you visit Torres' credits or watch his ass videos during or soon after watching *The Runners*, your PAN dutifully informs the sites you visited of this fact, and just like that, some of the revenue for the ads from that site flow back to the networks. If you buy anything you saw on the show, the show gets a cut. If you buy a song you heard on the show, or even listen to it shortly after watching the show, the show gets a cut. Cross-promotion breeds data, and data breeds revenue.

- ▶ You see, people? You are being watched **all the time**. Get serious about privacy.
- ▶ Clockwork

And, of course, network programming makes its way to the various streaming packages, and they get revenue there, too. They make themselves an event for the first-wave cultural adapters, and then streaming services pay for the rights to share their precious programming with you.

With this sort of innovation, broadcast survives. Radio, trideo, and even some limited sim-sense broadcasts are blasted across the face of the Earth through antennas and satellite transmitters.

MATRIX

This is where most of us get our entertainment, because the possibilities never end. Not only are there the aforementioned series and flicks, but there are instructional vids, a trillion songs, and a kajillion videos involving animals of some kind. I don't need to explain this much, because at least once a week, we sit down in front of our Matrix feed and demand that it show us something we like. And damned if it doesn't come through most of the time.

PRINT

The first claim that print was dead happened more than a hundred years ago and has been repeated *ad nauseum* since then. What all the proclamations miss is that the need for the written word never dies—it just shifts. Whether you're reading

on the Matrix or paper, writing carries an elegance, efficiency, and convenience that other forms can not replicate (of course, the medium I'm selecting for this shows my inclination for this form). And as long as words are being written, someone's going to want to read them on a page instead of on a screen or ARO. Print-on-demand publishing means no one has to anticipate the size of print runs for different titles—anyone who wants a book can order it up and have it printed in minutes. Same goes for magazines or, if you're truly old-fashioned, a newspaper. The content exists, you just have to choose how to consume it.

- ▶ And stuff you put on paper can't be searched through the Matrix.
- ▶ 2XL
- ▶ Or you could store stuff in an offline host.
- ▶ Pistons

PERFORMANCE

The heart and soul of it all—the first way that cultural information was implanted in memories and passed along, and still the method cherished by those who want a vital, energizing experience. If you don't think presence matters, watch a recording of a play. Or listen to a recording of a live concert. You'll see and hear some good stuff, but you'll also get a clear sense that you're missing something, and that the people in the witnessing crowd are having a way better time than you. We have plenty of people in this world who make a dedicated effort at never sharing the same physical space with another human being, leaving all their interactions to the Matrix. To them, live performance seems inconvenient, messy, and sometimes redolent of various human odors. And yeah, it is all that. Which is part of its glory. Whether it's dance, live theater, music, stand-up comedy, or anything else someone might do in front of an audience, watching art rise up from the writhing mass of metahuman endeavor.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Is it vanity? Is it a chance to share what you love? To make a statement? Is it empty noise? A chance to connect and keep up with friends? Is it real, or is it shallow posing? You've been online—you know it's all these things. Sometimes, as with P2.0, social media is all about the status, driving your subscriber base numbers up and giving the people what they want, whatever that may be. Other times it's broader, more about lively contact and sharing than about collecting enough pluses or upvotes or smilies or whatever. Evo's Speel puts the focus on sharing and joint creation, where you can muddle with other people's stories, songs, pic-

tures, and so on, seeing what kind of accidental and purposeful collaborations can erupt. Its recent growth has indicated a desire for such a thing—and also started raising calls for greater control of the content shared there, as questionable material becomes more difficult to overlook as the platform on which it's standing elevates.

This is the eternal dilemma social media faces: It needs a significant amount of people participating for it to feel like a wide, vibrant community, but keeping that community functional often requires the sort of control of content that leads to people leaving the platform. If a platform is lucky enough to get into an explosive growth period, they know that a disenchantment backlash is waiting for them after the explosion, and that backlash has claimed more than one social media company. But as long as people still want some software that will facilitate personal connection and communication, someone will keep trying to make tools that meet those needs without also hosting toxic cesspools of metahumanity. We wish them luck.

TRIDEO

This is how we watch the world go by. News is broadcast on trideo. So are sports, talk shows, action flicks, romances, and so on and on. Three dimensions, with alternate camera angles included in almost every package, so you can really get down and dirty in analyzing whatever setting is presented to you. It looks realistic without becoming too real—without building a bridge into the uncanny valley, so that the almost-reality is off-putting. Rather than living with your favorite characters and personalities, it's like having them in your own dollhouse, a loving reproduction where you can set your toys in motion and watch them live, screw, and die in a wonderfully detailed reality that always seems a step or two better than your own.

SIMSENSE

One of the primary goals of art is to make you feel something. Simsense has the same goal, with the shortcut of wiring right into your brain to make those emotion-generating chemicals bubble up. It also gets you more into that dollhouse effect mentioned in the trideo paragraph. Trideo can show you the sights and sounds of Granny Sweetspell baking up a batch of stickernoodle cookies, but only simsense can give you the smell, taste, and warm sense of comfort that comes from home cooking. At its heart, Simsense's greatest value is literally feeding consumers emotional and intellectual stimuli that they desire or need and that they don't get in their daily lives.

MAGIC

If you don't think magic is a medium, talk to a spellcaster about clairaudience and clairvoyance sometime. And then get a load of the people shelling out money for a hit of deepweed so they can experience the wonder of astral perception. Sure, it's of limited use, but communication happens through magic, and as we know, communication shapes perception.

So what shape does magic communication take? For one thing, it's fast, happening at the speed of thought. Awakened people who spend a lot of time in mental communication; either with other Awakened or with spirits, tend to get impatient with slow mouth-to-ear communication. You also might see that they sometimes stumble trying to find the right words to communicate complex concepts—magic communication allows a particular emotional lilt to be part of the communication, with a precision and specificity that oral speech lacks. Trying to recreate that specificity with words is challenging and sometimes frustrating.

- ▶ There are a few Hollywood types who remain convinced that magic-communicated drama is the future of the genre, if they can only figure out how to get in everyone's head. Deepweed gives them hope that it's possible, but it's not practical to ask every viewer to buy deepweed to enjoy entertainment. And deepweed doesn't facilitate the kind of communication that would be needed, anyway. The point is, there's plenty of wealth waiting for whoever cracks this particular nut.
- ▶ Lyran

PLAYERS

As a megacorporation, Spinrad's brand is *Radical*, which naturally pits it directly against Horizon. Aztechnology's brand is *Death*. Horizon's brand is *Consensus*. MCT's brand is *Order*. Shiawase has *Family*. Lofywr and Saeder-Krupp embody raw *Power* as only a great dragon could. Renraku's brand is its name: *Communication*, the value of exchange and interaction. Evo sells *Evolution*, and Wuxing preaches *Balance*. Ares's brand isn't Americana, but rather is a grander articulation of existential *Struggle*. Within those broad paradigms, here are some specifics about some of the communications leaders, with a particular focus on those seemingly poised to make big moves in the near future.

ARES

Ares is the apotheosis of Straussian ideologies and Manichean beliefs espoused by the cold warriors and post-collapse military thinkers who Damien Knight learned from and served under. The corp has a particularly American strain of war and military adventurism running throughout it,

and the Greek god it takes its name from embodies a particularly bloody, brutal form of war (as opposed to the more controlled strategy of Athena). When the U.S. military shrank to virtually nothing and its empire collapsed, Ares became its replacement in the eyes of North Americans and the world. When President Colloton was elected and instituted her military Keynesian, it was a broadside attack on Ares that has persisted for over a decade. Now the UCAS has positioned itself as the world's rent-a-cop, subsidized by corporations and governments that know how valuable the U.S. military's investment had been for global capital during the Cold War. This pattern repeats constantly. Who jumped in to fill Argus's void following the Az-Am War? The UCAS. Who replaced all of those mercenary peacekeepers? The UCAS. The UCAS is directly challenging Ares at its own game.

But I'm supposed to be talking about communications. Ares remains the largest media corporation in the world, fitting given its primacy as the largest and oldest North American AAA megacorporation. While Horizon and others have further filled out that role, Ares is the purest form of a certain strain of North American mass media. It traffics in fear and terror, conflict and division. Everything is a struggle. Conquest of new worlds, ruthless exploitation and protection of resources are fundamental to protect "our way of life," and the vision of the world being sought or protected is orderly, homogenous, and superficial. While Ares Global Entertainment is headquartered in Paris, Ares sells its Americana flavor worldwide to eager Western audiences because it appeals to countless people who have grown up in areas shaped by corporatism, war, and nationalism.

There are gnawing resentments at the heart of Ares, and one of them has to do with Cross. The fact that Ares failed to acquire or has since lost whatever parts of Cross Entertainment it had is infuriating to corporate leaders. If Ares had been successful in 2064 and 2065, it would have been unstoppable, as it would've owned or controlled enough media resources to eventually crush every competitor save for Aztechnology and Mitsuhamma and even threatened the independence of other AAA megacorporations. Its competitors saw this, though, and stopped it from happening, protecting themselves while CATCo fell.

With all the tools and experience at its disposal, Ares is a master propagandist, commanding and controlling the consumers and public spheres it touches. Ares' cachet in security and military ingratiation with authority figures, and it has a strong authoritarian and hierarchical bias toward fictional archetypes who are seen as strong and strong-willed. These depictions are far more common in entertainment than news, since that is what actually shapes most consumers' perceptions of the world, but its non-fiction and news

productions heavily emphasize military and security prowess. It venerates antisocial behavior even in contravention of laws and corporate principles to ensure that the villain is defeated. In the view of Ares execs, creating divisions and encouraging people to love or hate its content is worth far more than producing forgettable content.

It is also important to note that AGE and Knight Errant have an intimate and inextricable relationship. The megacorporations all know this and have made this relationship a cornerstone of their activities. This, of course, is part of why *Chase: Errant Knight* is becoming not just a hit series but a cornerstone entertainment franchise.

AZTECHNOLOGY

It's hard to believe that Aztechnology used to rank below Novatech in the size of its media entertainment assets. Changing tastes, Horizon, and Richard Villiers' hubris took care of much of that, but Aztechnology always sought its own share and eventually acquired it. Aztechnology focused its media on sales and non-entertainment information, which increased significantly during the war, but it invested heavily in entertainment beyond its near-monopoly on Spanish-language media around the world. Exploiting its position in the PPG and other matters, Aztechnology managed to acquire virtually all Yamatetsu/Evo entertainment and media assets save for its Russian properties. Since then, Aztechnology has built up an entertainment line on indigenous fares from Neo-Nahuatl and Mesoamerican languages, along with underserved African, Asian, and Or'zet content. Its cooperation with Wuxing and its growing media presence and focus on Chinese nations have also meant an explosion of material in Cantonese and Mandarin. Thanks to the ease and speed of translation, the language of content isn't as important as the idea of featuring indigenous and underrepresented groups that the corp can exploit as novel and innovative commodities. When Mitsuhamma began to expand into Africa, which Aztechnology wants desperately to control, the Azzies began to emphasize and exploit the deep and inherent connections it has with Africa, further cementing itself as distinct from American, European, and Japanese "colonizers" (Aztechnology remains the master of concealing its own nature) and their cultures and influences.

The hyper-competitive internal structure of Aztechnology makes its media activities particularly interesting, since this means the corp has often produced numerous direct competitors to itself at the regional and local levels. This competition masks the homogeneity of the message when it comes to how invaluable Aztechnology is to media consumers in how they consume everything else in their lives. Before Horizon appeared as the dark-

horse challenger, Aztechnology was the undisputed master of perception management, seamlessly coordinating entertainment and news media with advertising and public relations to benefit the corporation's products and reputation. Its light hand over many of its largest and most popular subsidiaries makes the product placements and tie-ins seem more authentic, but it's also riding the wave of decades of familiarity and the relationships it built up selling and salvaging the reputations of other entities.

As I mentioned, Aztechnology's media message is, broadly, *Death*. Death is ubiquitous and inescapable, and the culture that Aztechnology ostensibly arises from and which it now dominates acknowledges this and presents death and, more importantly, life before death, with respect if not eagerness for it. Their offerings tend to focus not just on violence and death of others as something visceral to enjoy, although there is plenty of that, but it truly is a part of the Aztlaner way of life to respect death and the dead, and not to fear it or them. This is a distinct challenge for Aztechnology given how almost all of its competitors' media assets, most notably in marketing and outreach, exploits the fear of death to sell goods and services. As I noted, terror and desire are two sides of the same coin at the foundation of marketing and outreach: both rest on the fear of losing or having lost something, with the only difference being the response (sacrifice vs. consumption). Aztechnology respects, appreciates, and in a way, loves death because it's universal and inescapable. It sells death as a means of rebirth, creation, and opportunity. Death only exists because life exists and sustains, and so it valorizes sacrifice, change, and the willingness to accept death without fear. Their message is that the real fear is living without value. Stuffer Shack products aren't going to save you from thinking about the inevitability of death; they are going to make life tolerable, if not enjoyable, until death comes, so that consumers face death in all its forms with respect and knowledge that it is the end of their bodily selves but always part of the universe.

This message is part of why Aztechnology is so influential worldwide. It resonates in Asia, Africa, the Middle East (particularly among the Shia in Iran), and elsewhere. There is also an undercurrent of pan-indigenous solidarity in their media given Aztlan's and Aztechnology's ostensible origins. All this, of course, works hard to cover the reality that Aztechnology is as hierarchical and exploitive as any other corp, if not more so.

- ▶ This is critical to help you understand the difference between how the Big A is viewed in society and how they are viewed in the shadows. Thanks to Aztechnology media, many people see the corp as the one who gets it, who shares their values

and works for a better world. The media is what they see, so it shapes their reality. We, of course, see something entirely else.

- ▶ Cosmo

CROSS

Jean-Marie Cross has managed to keep his hold on the A-rated Cross Entertainment and Multimedia, virtually the only CATCo asset left standing from Ares' assault and the subsequent takeovers by competitors, and has turned it into something valuable, something that may even contain the seed for a possible return to greatness. At the time of Lucien Cross's death, CEM was nearly as large as Ares Global Entertainment. While Ares was replacing MCT as the global leader with Aztechnology following closely behind, both through aggressive expansion and acquisition of NeoNET/Novatech and CEM assets, CEM soldiered on. In recent years, the CAS-based corporation has re-taken OTQ, losing them prestige and influence in Québec while consolidating ownership to prevent further losses. Cross's larger dealings have masked the inroads CEM has made on the Francophone world, as well as Russian-language media. CATCo used to be one of the largest corporations in Russia, and while Zeta-ImpChem acquired almost all of CATCo's Eurasian assets, its media assets remained inviolate. More importantly, while Cross lost its Matrix division to Ares, it still knows how to produce and distribute Matrix entertainment and content. It has worked with Horizon and smaller players like Warpdrive, Fourth World, Microdeck, and Mangadyne to earn nuyen and prestige through popular content.

While Cross continues to wage financial and legal warfare against Ares, it is making more friends than enemies by building on the corporation's inherent Catholicism to reach out to the Vatican and regional breakaways, as well as trying to shore up the relationship with the Neo-Soviet in light of potential changes there. Bremen has kept his intelligence on those matters close to his chest, but the country and its neighbors are ripe for exploitation. There is evidence that something is coming, and Cross knows what it is.

Finally, it's noteworthy that Reality Inc. has been investing in Cross to benefit assets like Eagle and Lone Star as well as other assets such as TTK and Peat-Marwick-Thorne-Mabasu, the latter being financial and professional services corporations seeking to increase their visibility in economic and financial news and information.

DEMEKO

This German giant has been fighting to stay out of the clutches of other megas for decades. With their longstanding rivalry with Saeder-Krupp and a history of conflict with Spinrad, Deutsche Medi-

en und Kommunikations AG is never lacking for fights. But they have a hugely loyal following, because they are extremely skilled at developing audience niches and then fulfilling their desires. Where Ares has often looked to fill out tried-and-true shows—they are the world’s home of cop, doctor, and lawyer shows—DeMeKo is able to identify burgeoning niches and sub-niches and craft programming that provides what they are looking for. They aren’t necessarily going to program the next global super hit, but they supply programming to a thousand passionate cults spread across the globe.

HORIZON

Horizon isn’t as large as it seems, but it’s good at convincing people that that is. They make up for their small size (small being relative—they’re still an AAA megacorp, after all) in influence. It produces extremely popular but forgettable entertainment in adherence to its monoculture. Thanks to its acquisition of Affiliated Artists, Hisato-Turner, Disney, and other Novatech assets, Pathfinder Media has woven itself into every segment of mass media. It doesn’t dominate any medium or genre, but it guarantees you a slick entertainment experience, regardless of the kind of entertainment you prefer. Their brand is consensus, so they deliver the type of blandly agreeable fare people watch at family gatherings because they can’t agree on anything else.

MITSUHAMA

Once the undisputed media master, dominating all news and entertainment in the Pacific Rim and the Japanese Empire’s Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere, Mitsuhamas expansion to become the world’s largest corporation came at the cost of its media empire. It lost the CBC network to Renraku and other resources and influence to Ares, Aztechnology, and Wuxing as the latter corporations each exploited their own specialties to draw attention away from Mitsuhamas content. That said, Mitsuhamas is only slightly behind Aztechnology, and it dominates Japanese-language media. Along with Renraku, Shiawase, and Sony, it promotes the Japanese Empire worldwide and the Japanese culture and economic domination over the world. Its position is precarious, though, because of the empire and its own actions. The acquisitions that it made to become the largest AAA incurred massive amounts of debt and placed a burden on MCT Media to integrate support for these new acquisitions in its content and distribution models. The rise to the top also made it a target of corporations like Sony, Providence, and DeMeKo that have redoubled their efforts to chip away at Mitsuhamas because it played a leading role in the Megacorporate Audit. MCT helped make the governance of megacorporations

exclusive to the AAA megacorporations alone, closing the Big Ten’s ranks and making AA status a ruthless zero-sum competition among the three dozen granted or maintaining that rank and its privileges. Mitsuhamas is the corporate embodiment of order and control, and it is wielding hope and hopelessness as weapons against dangerous foes.

This raises the second issue, which is the matter of control. MCT Media is authoritarian and rigid in ways that far surpass AGE fare, but it has also been a powerful force to inspire the people of Japan and cow those under the thumb of the political and economic empire. After the “Ghost Decade” following the Corp War, the Ring of Fire cataclysm, and Crash 2.0, MCT Media (and Renraku) spearheaded a renewed vision beyond Japan’s borders to remind the world who was in command. It has allowed them to maintain dominance, but the reality is that MCT and Japan are dying. With Taiga Mitsuhamas death, this is literal, but it’s a diminishing population that is affecting how MCT and other corporations are run—or aren’t run, if Japanese men (and some women) can’t be found to fill the void. MCT Media could be left further behind, and it is ramping up propaganda imploring a reversal of the empire’s inverted population pyramid. It’s ironic that Korin Yamana has filled the void Taiga leaves since he’s nearly as old as Taiga was, but he was one of the few to really benefit from age rejuvenation before it became effectively useless. Like MCT and Japan, he is waging a war against nature and time, two opponents that always win. That said, he is a ruthless bastard and is capable of making radical changes and wielding MCT Media as a formidable weapon against all comers—though as a board advisor rather than a board member or executive, he’ll have to operate through persuasion rather than force.

- How quickly things can change in the Sixth World. For those living on Mars, welcome back, and guess what: Yamana’s dead. He was eaten by a megalodon during his Hawaiian vacation where he was celebrating his return to the megacorporate rat race. It’s not like megalodon attacks are rare, but the timing and circumstances are incredible. The question now is: Who replaces him, and who gets his estate? Even if he has a will, and even if it accounts for his purchase of MCT stock, it’s still likely to result in a drawn-out conflict. Meanwhile, the shares of the Four Oyabun are still set for sale (it’s unclear if it will be public, which could result in a replay of Novatech’s IPO). With approximately fifty-six percent of MCT’s ownership potentially up for grabs, the Japanese shadows are set to become even more dangerous than they have been.
- Baka Dabora

PROVIDENCE

The Polish-Catholic megacorporation is an important media player in Eastern and Central

Europe, Eurasia, and to every community the Roman Catholic Church touches. It's certainly not as large as the megacorporate giants, but even after all the upheaval the world has seen, the Catholic Church still retains a dedicated following, and the members are eager to watch programming that engages with their worldview.

They have a pretty robust slate of offerings—live music showcases, family dramas, fantastical and science-fiction series, teen drama, comedy, talk shows, unscripted programming, and of course live mass at least twice a week. They don't get the biggest stars in the world, but there is enough talent and technical expertise out there that they can make plenty of quality programming with the same sheen the bigger corps put on.

They exist in a strange spot, though, because while they have a large audience, they remain somewhat adrift from the powers of the world. This has been a long, slow devolution for the church. Back in medieval times, popes held power on par with, or even above, kings. While their political power waned, popes still held a strong voice in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, shaping policy if not deposing rulers like they did in the old days. Now, though, with cash officially installed as the ruling deity of the world and the Church having less of it than they used to, they face challenges in shaping anything beyond their congregations—and they sometimes have trouble moving even that. A sad fact of our world is people often do not feel like they have the time or ability to reflect on deeper matters of spiritual condition. When you're straining to stay alive or working all your waking hours so you're not thrown out on the street, theological concerns seldom get a lot of mental focus. Which in some ways is good for Providence, because people gravitate to trid entertainment with what little downtime they have, and having Providence available makes them feel like they're part of a culture that is still important to them, no matter how little time they have to dedicate to it. On the negative side, Providence is viewed primarily as an entertainment company, when they'd like to be an agent of social change.

RENRAKU

Renraku integrates across several brands better than any other megacorp. You can, of course, watch Renraku entertainment in any trid player, but when you put it on a Renraku player, it looks sharper, cleaner, and more alluring than on any other player. The stars of Renraku teen-oriented dramas invariably have music contracts with Renraku music subsidiaries, and you can get bonus behind-the-scenes footage with your RakItUp network subscription. And you can see the stars wear-

ing clothes and sitting on furniture that of course are featured at all manner of Renraku stores.

The closed-loop nature of Renraku programming might seem stifling if the loop wasn't so damn big. They can throw a thousand styles, looks, and sounds at you to keep you entertained. You can select from a ton of options when you design your own Renraku life, making a strong statement of individuality with programs, songs, furniture, and clothing that are manufactured by the tens of thousands. Their theme is communication, and their messages are everywhere.

SAEDER-KRUPP

Lofwyr only owns a few media assets because he doesn't really need to *own* them. Where Saeder-Krupp is dominant, it influences those in power directly with the sheer force of its power and its indispensable presence in the Matrix and power industries. Los Angeles-based Angelic Entertainment was the holding company Lofwyr formed when he and Saeder-Krupp were barred from doing business in the CFS. After the Pueblo annexation, Saeder-Krupp could've come in from the dark. Instead, it remains the overall enterprise for the corporation in PCC and what remains of California—excepting for Saeder-Krupp Prime, of course. More importantly, it maintains independence to support and enhance the operation of ABS.

Eight networks control over ninety percent of media distributed in the UCAS and CAS (trideo, radio, simsense, print, and social media). ABS is the third or fourth largest and is one of the three oldest and most recognizable networks. By owning ABS, Saeder-Krupp can shape the media and public thought in North America, and the collateral effect extends to the rest of the world. ABS has cachet and influence extending beyond its relative size (although its size is still significant) because it's existed since the birth of radio. It's a brand that generations of people worldwide are familiar with, either through its extensive library of entertainment or its global news reach. World leaders appear on ABS news and information programs. Its media personalities have deep and extensive connections to the press offices of every major corporate and political entity in the world. It can fund or distribute independent journalism and reporting, and above all, it has the veneer of independence because Saeder-Krupp's ownership is concealed well from the general public.

As a result, by having this voice in North American media, ABS has an outsized voice that it can wield directly or indirectly as Lofwyr sees fit, amplifying or destroying messages from opposition through its own actions as well as the influence it has on competitors and political or business "partners." ABS News is especially adept among the broadcast networks at trading access and influence in order to bury or deflect attention to other matters.

SHIAWASE

Shiawase Mediatech used to be small as far as AAA operations go, but it's always excelled at its specialty: Simsense. Korin Yamana's warfare against Novatech/NeoNET (out of spite) and Yamatetsu/Evo (out of honor) left its mark on the media landscape. With NeoNET dismantled and Evo's media presence significantly reduced, Ares and Aztechnology were able to abscond with many Japanese assets. Some people may view this as a loss, but to Shiawase, it's a chance to double down on the thing they do best.

The key to Shiawase's simsense power is attention to detail. Simsense makers know you can't just record all the scents, feels, and emotions that are present at filming and hope that will get you by. Post-production work is as important on simsense as it is on any other form of entertainment, perhaps even more so. At Shiawase, they know when to go for realism, and they know when to amp up the experience. For example, check out *An Instinct for Home*, one in a long tradition of lost-pets-wander-home stories. Look at when Tommy pets Clompton (a big Komondor) at the 5:38 moment in the movie, and then when (spoiler, in case you somehow didn't see this ending coming) Clompton gets his big welcome-home hug at the 92:15 mark. The first moment of contact has the coarse feel of a Komondor's coat combined with the musty smell of a dog that takes a long time to dry off. It's not especially pleasant or off-putting—it mainly just seems real. But at the end, the softness of that coat has been turned up a little, the mustiness is gone, and there is an added sensation of warmth that makes the hug feel incredibly welcoming and reassuring. In fact, Shiawase will sell you an extended version of that hug as its own short simsense recording, and it's proven to be very popular among people who need some reassurance after a long day. Which, of course, is pretty much all of us.

- ▶ They also do fantastic things with alternate emo feeds, which really open up some of their dramas. You can watch a shootout from the point of view of the hero, feeling their effort to fight back fear and their determination to get the job done, then you can switch to the bad guy and get a taste of extreme anger and reckless disregard for life (in case you don't already know how that feels). Then for fun, you can jump into some henchmen and watch their blind trust for their leader turn into fear, then panic, or you can even catch a glimpse of the utter confusion of innocent bystanders. In a more complicated situation, the alternate viewpoints can help you understand how people see the same actions in different ways, and why their memories of the situation become so different.
- ▶ Fianchetto

SONY

Sony lost its Los Angeles assets during the Twins, but it managed to survive thanks to being the best at what it specializes in: interactive media, specifically Matrix games. You've played them. You may be playing one right now, because they have a ton of games that fit in the margins of life. In fact, in their job ads, Sony advertises themselves as "the only workplace that lets you play Sony games!", since the games have been banned in so many other corps.

- ▶ Of course, they neglect to mention that you have to be a manager to get that permission, and you're not going to stay a manager if you keep playing games.
- ▶ Baka Dabora

They have every type of games imaginable. AR games, VR games, shoot-'em-ups, sports sims, puzzle games, you name it. Their business model is simple: Get as many players as possible and give them incentives to keep spending. It's the rare Sony game that doesn't give you multiple options to drop a few nuyen to give you an edge, even if it's a slight one, over the competition.

SPINRAD GLOBAL

If you want to know how the "radical" Spinrad brand shapes and interacts with the culture at large, their habitual "What would Johnny do?" question is a fine guide. Would he make sure members of the Grand Tour wore his fashion lines so he could sell limited editions of those items at ridiculously inflated prices? He would. Would he be a leader in fashion competition programming? He absolutely would. Would he make sure that stars going out clubbing are wearing Spinrad threads and listening to Spinrad artists? You're damn right he would. And would he make sure he supports fast-moving, gossipy entertainment programming to highlight all the things he's trying to push across? You know the answer.

Spinrad does not do a lot of scripted trid or simsense series. Johnny's stated position is that your reality should be so exciting that you don't need to escape from it, and he lives up to it. If only the rest of us were carefree billionaire tycoons, then we could do what we wanted all the time, too. But we can't, so he tries to drag us into his world and tell us it's reality. Which is perhaps the biggest fantasy on the air today.

WUXING

Wuxing is so often overlooked and subtle in its diverse market activities that it's easy to forget that it is a huge source of entertainment and news worldwide because it so thoroughly dominates China, Southeast Asia, and Australia. It also has market

share in Africa, along the western half of the Pacific Rim, and in Aztlan. Sharon Chiang-Wu's management of the megacorporation has been impressive after the internal conflicts and her husband's own "issues" earlier this decade. She still carries the burden of being American-born Chinese, but that has become less of an issue as the Quints reach the age where they will soon participate in management of the corporation, and they don't suffer that burden. They can't. Everyone loves them.

Wuxing and Aztechnology have a growing competition in telling stories from distinctly Asian points of view. Wuxing should, of course, have the advantage in this area, but Aztechnology has been focused on growth in the area for a long time, while Wuxing perhaps became complacent, taking their market dominance for granted. Aztech's growth in the area has woken them up, and the battle is now on to show who can truly reflect the view of the Asian population.

THE PIRATE WAY

Everything discussed so far is part of the mighty array against which media pirates are aligned. The amount of money the corps can spend to make and promote their content is massive. If you want to be a pirate, you have to accept that you cannot compete on the battlefield of money. You will not have the star power, the giant arenas, the national advertising campaigns, and whatnot. So what do you have? Skill, nerve, talent, and raw honesty. And word of mouth driven by relentless self-promotion.

Every medium we discussed earlier can be used by pirates. The Matrix is more tightly controlled than it used to be, but there are still cracks and unofficial hosts. Plenty of makers can rig up transmitters for short-range radio broadcasts or even trid 'casts. There are pirate mages with the same abilities as corp communications mages. Anyone can print screamsheets or full books. And performance—ah, that's what pirate media does best, with the raging warehouse concert or fiery street theater. You can present what you have to say, and you can break away from the official narrative, the sanitized storylines, and the lock-step enforcement of the status quo. You can put your rage into a guitar chord, a ringing monologue, a fiery screed.

Perhaps most importantly, you can show the parts of the world that are overlooked. You can show that the barrens that make the wageslaves quake with fear are full of dedicated, passionate people just trying to get by. You can show the brainy troll, the shy dwarf, the awkward elf, and anyone else who has been told they're worthless because they don't fit others' preconceptions. And you can tell the truth—about the damage the corps do in the hidden parts of the world, about the ruth-

lessness of Lone Star and Knight Errant in pursuit of their warped version of peace, and the devaluing of human life that is an all-too-common part of our world.

When I say "you," I really do mean *you*, whoever you are, reading this. You have the tools. You have a gift and a truth that can be shared. But it won't be heard, it won't spread, unless you *do* something.

The media of the world is aligned against you, but they can't hold you down. See them for what they are, hone what you have to say, and claim your voice. Then rise up.

► Anger isn't a bad thing. Anger means that there's still hope, and hope means that you have something worth fighting for. You haven't given up.

It's easy to give up. That's what these corps want: submission. They don't want us angry. They want us broken and hopeless. There's plenty of awful shit that anger produces, but there's a lot of art that comes from anger. Picasso's *Guernica* is the perfect piece of protest art because it wasn't realistic. It was raw, unabashed horror and anger and terror, not just at the chaos and pain of the bombing, but the real fear that no one wanted to say: more was coming.

There's a reason why musicians, and specifically singers, have always been the dominant social and artistic idols and influencers, with significance far beyond their acts and messages. They are the most direct descendants of the original storytellers who spread knowledge about the world, directions about what is true, how we interact, and how we survive and propagate. The message we spread, combined with the strength of our delivery, makes us matter.

Every group tries to control its story and its message. Everyone and everything has a story, but only some can actually tell us about ourselves and our world, and spread the message that people want and need to hear. Power has always tried to control the message, and most of the time it wins—in the short run. In the long run, the message endures and eventually triumphs because power fades, but the really honest and important messages never die. Punks, rappers, fools, and iconoclasts will always be here.

The people with power control the medium and the message, and with that they control thought. Problem is, they will never make the message. They don't have anything worth saying, and that's what matters. They create the medium, then pirates jack the feed, then counterinsurgency freaks try to co-opt and destroy it. They can shape the world, but they can't make anything. We do. We make the content, and it may be twisted or silenced, but at least it exists. And they will never be able to do that. They destroy.

That's infuriating. That's anger. But if you don't let it turn to hate, you can turn it into hope. Instead of fear and terror, turn it into a message and spread it. They want us to give up on the future, or fear it, but we can't, and we won't. Losing the future is worse than death. Look forward in anger, just so long as you look forward.

► Kat o' Nine Tales



BLITZKRIEG BOPS

POSTED BY: KAT O' NINE TALES (AND FRIENDS)

Back when I was first entering the music scene, my first boyfriend/bandmate told me that “music is the expression of a generation’s soul.” At first I thought he was just trying to impress me in order to score some *ahem* *alone time*. But after I finally got smart and ditched his skeezy ass, I realized he was right, at least on *that* point.

Music is modern poetry, a reflection of the times it is born in and the people who create it. Despite the fact that for decades upon decades, most music has been used as an instrument (no pun intended) of controlling the masses by placation and distraction, music is still very much a means of rebellious and independent expression in the Sixth World despite all lyrical propaganda and barely hidden commercialism. Yeah, there’s tons of drek to wade through in order to get to the good stuff, but it’s still out there if one knows where to look. And don’t worry, my freaky little darlings, your Auntie Kat and her merry band of industry cohorts are here to give you all the necessary paydata on some of the bleeding-edge, nova-hot acts and venues currently making waves—for better or worse—in the Sixth World.

So sit back, optimize your sound filters, crack open a cold one, and crank the volume up to eleven!

THE NEW SOUND

POSTED BY: RED

It’s safe to assume the folks of the 1720s never predicted dubstep or synthwave or rock and roll or any of a thousand new sounds that have been called “music” in the past. Yeah, Mozart probably could have rocked a synthlink and all that, but the fact is, genre is an evolving force. It reflects the pioneering of new sounds and notions, and the societies and psyches that make them up. If you think hymnals or jazz or blues or punk just sprang out of the ether without any prompting from social pressures, you’re kidding yourself.

When I was a kid (admittedly, way before any of you were), there was a lot of new sound coming out. I always came to it late, but at least I had the benefit of seeing it in retrospect to better understand it. Miss the wave, but study the carnage, right? Back then, genres shifted by the year. Now,

we live in an age of unprecedented information sharing. Societies and opinions form and break up, all influenced by countless external factors. Corporate cultures, ethnic backgrounds, violence and peace and transhuman metamorphosis and the infinite possibilities of both the astral and the digital combine in ways that make expression more variable than ever before. A new genre every year? Try every month. Sometimes moment to moment, in the right corners of the 'trix.

Now, it would take far, far more time than you're willing to give me to even begin to explain all the new trends in music, and I'm hardly a professional. It would take even longer to get into the sociological influences that brought them about. And if you really want that info, there's data screeds out there that dwarf JackPoint to research and debate it. For now, here's a little sampler of some of the stuff that has ended up on playlists lately.

FEATHERCORE

In the age of constant noise and info-overload, it's not surprising to see the rising popularity of calm, cool music. While some turn toward such perennial standbys as jazz or ambient tracks, the kids have to innovate—and so they have, with a mesh of quiet rock and ambient electronics with lyrics that range from whispers to the dreamy. They call this sleepy trend feathercore, and it's not hard to understand why. Some tracks are reminiscent of the indie trends of the early twenty-first century, like those produced by Gizmo's Wish, while bands like Sluice use subliminals and binaural beat structures to get the listener to relax, whether they want to or not.

- ▶ Corp drone burnout is a very real thing, and with workers with sleep regulators pulling eighteen-hour shifts, there's a whole bunch who are dropping from sheer psychological and emotional exhaustion. Some turn to drugs, but more corps are finding that just leads to larger problems down the line or makes some assets susceptible to turning. Enter the Decompression Chamber. You sit in a color-neutral room with noise dampeners on, plush chairs, and this kind of music playing. Usually it's laced with the hypnotic stuff that keeps you loyal, but it does show a lot of success in keeping worker burnout and suicide down. It's cheaper than the alternatives, keeps productivity high, and takes about as much time as a smoke break.
- ▶ Dr. Spin
- ▶ With the right subliminals, you might be able to convince the wageslave to do other things for you. Nothing too complicated, but they may be more willing to take a bribe or feel more paranoid.
- ▶ DangerSensei
- ▶ Or just lull them into sleep. You might not even need to; most of these guys are in a trance while they're in there, so if you're

going to extract someone and want to take them by surprise, this isn't the worst place to do it.

- ▶ Rigger X

BEATPACE

The rogue brainchild of corporate calculation, beatpace was originally designed to be a corpyouth sound, the kind of thing that would synchronize young listeners and make them coordinate subconsciously. This was based on the psychological models developed by Dr. Yoriko Utetsu at Renraku, describing how to contribute to a light hive-mind mentality to better form cooperative relationships in enclosed environments and improve teamwork and productivity. Leave it to the artists to take it, break it, and remake it for their own purposes, resulting in a rhythm-based style of music designed around biological models. Beatpace has a steady, somehow uplifting sound, putting a spring in your step and some swagger to go with it.

- ▶ The original models are still used in some Horizon and Renraku offices, especially with coders. It's got a great rhythm, but I gotta admit, it's weird when you and the folks you're working with start moving with the same starts and stops, like being part of a machine. Still, it does seem to help with teamwork, at least for me.
- ▶ Beaker

BUGSTOMP

This Chicago-born style is pure street tribe. Imagine the sounds of industry and bucket drummers mixed with inhuman chitters and the screech of tearing metal, and you're approaching the sheer chaos of bugstomp. Originating among the shell-shocked youth of the survivors of Bug City, bugstomp might be seen as a coping mechanism for their PTSD. The music is primal and chaotic, always active, a mixture of tribal influences and the sound of war. While this is still more street than mainstream, some DJs looking for a fresh new sound have begun to incorporate elements into their sets, while others are just recording it and spinning it. I'm told it's the kind of thing you'd need K-10 to really get into. Personally, I don't like remembering bugs when I'm trying to have a good time.

- ▶ I like to blast it as an enhanced interrogation technique.
- ▶ Stone
- ▶ You should see this stuff live in the Zone. You want to see a real mosh pit? It's like a post-apocalyptic rave.
- ▶ Chainmaker

FRACTAL

Originally an experiment in SK programming, this



Horizon breakout genre is the fruit of one question: What kind of music would an AI want to listen to? The rumor mill of the shadows says data stolen from Transys servers and Renraku archives helped round out this complicated, complex sound that *WHAM Music* called “an audio tiramisu, layer after layer of seemingly chaotic phonics that are like a magic-eye picture: Only when you let yourself let go from the individual elements clashing can you begin to appreciate the way the whole acts in such startling harmony.” *Pogo* was more critical, calling it, “vaguely melodic feedback static. You’d have to be pretty damn high to find any kind of meaning or reason in this mess. Like, ‘thinking the lights of geodesics are Dunklezahn’s ghost communicating with you in Morse code’ high.” Still, it’s gained some popularity with technomancers, hipsters, and wannabes, who sometimes say they can hear the message behind the music.

- > What message?
- > Netcat

- > That’s not music.
- > Plan 10

- > I kinda like it.
- > Plan 9

- > That doesn’t make it music.
- > Plan 10

- > Are you saying it’s something more?
- > Snopes

- > No, I’m saying it’s crap.
- > Plan 10

- > Everyone’s a critic.
- > Plan 9

PLEX

Harkening back to the big beat sounds from almost a century ago, plex is all about progressive energy and solid beats. A lot of sampling from the early ’60s shows up here, even some perennial favorites like Mercurial or the Elementals, but the style’s big claim to fame is that the “instruments” used are exclusively found outside of physical reality. That is to say, you won’t hear a single sound that occurs in meatspace. It’s all Matrix sounds from here on in, kids. Basically, it’s what you’d get if you could somehow make bitrock sound like it’s coming from a UV server, then put old music samples in it. Clubs are spinning it, but it’s losing

its street cool fast as corporations attach themselves to the tracks for commercial use. While I've heard it has to do with blackmailing the artists for using sounds the corps have patented, most just see their chosen band selling out early. What a time to be alive.

- > I don't know if it pisses me off that they're bastardizing music and trids from my youth with beeps and quacks, or if I like the nostalgia it induces.
- > Bull
- > You don't have to get it, Dad. Just let it be what it is.
- > Tauren

MODERN MUSES: MUSICAL ACTS AND ARTISTS

JOHNNY BANGER

Oh, Johnny, you magnificent bastard. In the music biz, where an average recording "star" has an army of producers, writers, and usually corporate backing to help them churn out tepid music-like products, there are still a few people who can actually back up the bravado, that have lived the things they sing or write about. Case in point: the legendary Johnny Banger.

- > You know, there's always someone who makes fun of the super-produced stuff. Can't music just be good for some folks, no matter how many or few people it takes to make it?
- > Kia

Often called the heir apparent of classic and Neo-British punk rock by critics and fans alike, Johnny's music often revolves around the darker, neon-shaded aspects of a life chock full of frustration, pain, and a certain defiant disdain of willful ignorance and authority in general. His famous catchphrase "I do what I want!" is not only the name of one of his biggest hits, but serves as his personal rallying cry for life. What sets his music apart from all the other punk-wannabes out there is the fact that there's a certain gritty realism in his songs—which, by the way, he both writes and composes. Each one has a brutal ring of truth to them that can only be conveyed by someone who has literally been there and done that.

And there's a reason for that.

You see, it's a bit of an open secret that Johnny isn't just an arrogant, self-important punk rocker; he's also one of the best runners in the biz. Where else would he get his inspiration? For years, even decades, Johnny has used his shadow-work not only for inspiration, but to directly fund his mu-

sical ambitions without becoming beholden to a music label and ultimately to some corp.

- > As much of a pain in the ass Johnny is on a personal level, I can vouch for his professionalism during a run. Few years back, I was leading a team on a kidnapping recovery job that led us to the Lambeth Containment Zone in the UK. Our normal muscle had gotten a terminal case of dead in Madrid, so we needed some local talent. My contacts suggested a local tough and Johnny as replacements. At first, I was wary having of a prima donna punk rocker on my team, but the job needed to be done yesterday. After the tough tried to sell us out, Johnny not only sorted that "wanker" out but single-handedly held back a squad of armored goons with his Ingram SMG that ultimately let us get the principal out, all while humming the Sex Pistols. Who hums the Sex Pistols, let alone during a firefight?
- > Danger Sensei
- > What, you got something against classical music?
- > Glitch
- > This coming from a guy who probably thinks Rachmaninoff is a Vory kingpin.
- > The Smiling Bandit

About three years ago, Johnny eventually scored enough 'yen in the shadows to invest in and partner up with Bletchley Park Records, which was—at the time—one of the few remaining indie labels still operating in the UK. With a nice nest-egg and a new partnership, Johnny finally had the means to devote himself to the music he wanted to create full-time and on his terms.

Of course, it all came crashing down when a corporate shark with ties to Horizon swooped in and forcibly took Bletchley over through some obscure British asset forfeiture laws. No one's sure exactly what happened after that, but local legend has it that during the first business meeting, Johnny was told in no certain terms that the new label "owns him and all of his music, lock, stock, and barrel," and that if he ever wanted to play another note again, he'd better toe the company line. That went over about as well as one would expect. After dropping the exec's bodyguards and smashing the exec's face in, he left, saying only "We'll just have to see about that."

Johnny got a bounty of 85K nuyen on his head, and all of his songs are now effectively barred from being legally (key word there) played under corporate copyright laws. This doesn't mean that Johnny has stopped playing; quite the contrary. He's just gone deep underground, playing the seediest and toughest dive bars for nothing more than the sheer love of music. Today, Johnny exists as sort of a cross between a musical Robin Hood and shadowy patron saint/guardian angel of musicians. When not belting out his old and new material, he's in the shadows protecting new musicians from

predatory labels and managers or striking back at corporations with any ties to the music industry.

- > Two months ago, Johnny released his latest album, **Bullet Brain Kiss**, for free on multiple pirate Matrix sites, much to the supreme annoyance to his would-be corporate masters. The first self-titled single off that album is already a hit, with over two million reported downloads. It's also now number one on my pre-run playlist. I love his style.
- > Chainmaker
- > Actually love, it's more like five million, but who's counting? Cheers on the warm-up music, though. Oh, and Kat my darling, I hate to point out inaccuracies to a fellow professional, but my last words after that meeting were, "We'll just see about that, **you bloody tosser.**" Sorry, but I **hate** incomplete data. Cheers!
- > Johnny B
- > You want a cool story? Word is a few other artists like to collab with him on the downlow. Johnny is pretty pure about his sound, but it's too sweet to pass up a chance to give copyright the middle finger, so he does uncredited contributions to other artists, especially if they belong to a label owned by a Horizon rival. If you think the guitar on Pariah Soul's "Obligarchy" sounds familiar, now you know why.
- > Red
- > You can bet your ass he's starting all kinds of shit in the shadows with that. I should buy him a beer.
- > Rigger X
- > I used to have a guitar signed by Johnny. It went up in flames with my old doss. Fraggin' NeoNET ... *grumble, grumble*
- > Old Crow

SAMPLE LYRICS FROM JOHNNY BANGER'S LATEST RELEASE: 'BULLET BRAIN KISS'

Unwanted visitors at a quarter till four!
Another corp team kicking in my front door!
Tryin' to catch me with my chica in bed,
Poison my body with full-auto lead!

Thought they had me locked,
Thought they couldn't miss.
But then those cocky fraggers got my bullet brain kiss!

Bullet Brain Kiss!
Bullet Brain Kiss!
With my trusty Ingram, I never fragging miss!

Bullet Brain Kiss!
Bullet Brain Kiss!
Try to frag with Johnny and you'll get more of this!

MORRIS KNIGHT AND THE SPACE

Here's a good example of an act who'd love to make it big with corp backing but just has a street following so far. There's a lot of talent that gets signed, and once they do, they lose that certain something—hunger, maybe—that they had on the streets. So I guess I kinda hope Morris never gets signed, cuz I dig this slag's style and sound. Back in high school, Morris Knight was in a troll-based fusion pop-funk band with Barry Mana (yes, *that* Barry Mana) and Andreas Clinton, with the trio being managed by Knight's mother. The band, Shamploo (later renamed Uptown Monk) was a big hit on Chicago's Southside, at least among the orks and trolls there. Never gaining commercial success, Barry Mana moved to Seattle, where he was discovered and has since become a star. Andreas and Morris, trying to follow Mana's example, created an ensemble group, focused on old school R&B with 2070's funk flair. Dubbed "the Space," Knight's group immediately suffered when Clinton fell victim to metaracially motivated murder after the Space's first big gig.

Unable to get the Space off the ground financially, Morris has engaged in more than a few unsavory activities just to pay the bills for his ensemble, hoping to keep the Space alive. Find him in Chicago, working bars and clubs on the weekends while he sells his charm and mojo to the highest bidder on weekdays, all for the love of the music. He's even gone as far as to reach out to his old friend Barry Mana, offering to tour or have the Space provide backup. Mana's lack of response indicates that Barry's concerns don't include Morris.

The Space haven't released any albums as such, but their most popular hits include "Toxic Love," "Dance the Two-Freak," "Hit Me Harder," and "Slam Those Horns."

- > Damien Knight has not commented on whether there's any relation. ;)
- > Slamm-0!

FRAGGING UNICORNS

The Fragging Unicorns are the musical wrench in the gears of the Sixth World. Late in 2076, this street-punk ensemble began popping up at all manner of venues worldwide. Wherever there was rabble to be roused or a crowd waiting to be whipped up, they seemed to be right there in the midst, creating chaos. These cats seem to exist solely to harmonically frag the system wherever they go. No corporation officially owns them, but somehow, they are getting gigs in all the major venues, even corp-sponsored events. Most recently, they are finishing up their Rainbows of the Abyss World Tour, following up their underground hit album, *Lone Star Supernova*.

- > FU isn't just a band; it's a revolution, a way of life.
- > Red
- > Preach.
- > Old Crow

FU band members are hard to get info on. That is, their stage names are commonly known, but their faces are always obscured by masks, tech, or extreme makeup. They remain as mysterious as they are popular. Their Mascot, Fragg, has emerged in the last few years as a frequent resistance icon at anti-authoritarian rallies.

- > They do this because the FU aren't a real band. The whole gig is a front. The whole band is made up of shadowrunners.
- > Dr. Spin
- > Hahaha! They're the most musically inclined runners I've ever met, then. Why run at all when you can wail like them?!
- > Slamm-O!
- > They aren't wailing. They just dress up and pretend to play, whipping crowds up so they can use the chaos to pull off heists.
- > Dr. Spin
- > Sure, man. Whatever, we get it. You don't like non-corp bands. But honestly, let people like what they like. **Bug City Sushi** and **Neon Grifter** were amazing albums. You just don't have time to put out that level of sauce if you're splitting your time running shadows.
- > Borderline

The number of band members seems to fluctuate from venue to venue, but at least a few of the theatrical players have changed over the years. Originally, the band consisted of Rust-bucket, MBT, Dark 'n' Stuff, Abilene, and Rev. Blackfeather. After their first few shows, band members Wig-gid³Wack, Sprocket, and Mr. Trix were added. Lately, however, new members Steel Eyes, Prism Shard, and Wryder X have joined, while Abilene and Mr. Trix haven't been seen in months.

- > Wonder what happened to Abilene and Mr. Trix? They were favorites of mine. Remember how they used to argue on stage all the time?
- > Slamm-O!
- > I heard they got into a fight at a show, and they both spontaneously combusted in a flash of green light.
- > Borderline
- > Nah, nothing like that. Abilene perished in a bizarre gardening accident, and Mr. Trix drowned in vomit.
- > Bifrost
- > The vomit wasn't his, though.
- > Plan 9

- > No one is going to address that?
- > Snopes
- > No one? Ugh. This place.
- > Snopes

- > Some of us know a reference when we see it, and we just let it pass.
- > X-Prime

REESE FRENZY

Let's keep the theme of street music and rockers-turned-runners going. Most shadowrunners find themselves rebelling against the system because it's the only thing they are good at. Well, that, or the nuyen is good, but this fragger Reese is different. He was raised in a good home (whatever that means), did all the right drek growing up, and got his degree in medicine from some corp university. The whole time, he was also the front man for a Denver-based sprawlpunk band, Undead Robot. When the band broke up, Reese got a job at a hospital as a nurse, using his degree for something useful; and in the time he ain't doin' actual good at a hospital, he runs the shadows, hooding for the people.

Frenzy has a mad-on about injustice, and it comes out in his music. Somewhere deep inside him, there's a voice telling him everything that this world says is good—isn't. No matter what the corp news says, the corruption and oppression that started in North America with the Native people, continued with slavery, and extended to women continues today against orks, trolls, and other metahumans. Education freed this fragger's mind, and now his guts rage to free others. He's immune to double-talk, intolerant of passivity, and angry enough to do something.

His music, still sprawlpunk at its core, aims to change the world, take down the corps, and give people a fair chance at a free life. And when you grok his jams, it just makes the rage resonate even more to know this chumbatta is smoking what he's selling.

- > Legitimately my favorite artist. I liked Undead Robot better, but Reese is too legit to quit.
- > Old Crow
- > Any truth to the rumor about Undead Robot getting back together?
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > Kay? You surprise me! I didn't know you were a fan. And to answer the question, I've heard the rumors, too, but I hate to get my hopes up.
- > Old Crow

GREEN RIVER BURNING

Another Chicago band that's found some surprising success, GRB was born in the Corridor, combining a pseudo-classical folk sound allegedly passed down from band leader Kenny Lovett's family with a scrapyard aesthetic from their homemade instruments. Their popularity stems from lyrical form, somehow speaking to romance and longing for a better life while still sticking it to the corporate folks attending their concerts for being soulless cogs in the machine. The irony, of course, is that they have started taking corporate gigs, and you might have heard their song "Wolfpack" in the latest Ares Wolf commercial. Their original fanbase has been split solidly down the middle, with some calling them hypocrites, and the others saying their sound and message are what really matters. Only time will tell if they survive the transition to mainstream without losing what got them there in the first place.

- > I'm not holding my breath. The latest corpyouth flavor of the month gets discarded like a can of Dragon Piss before you know it.
- > Sounder
- > Dragon Piss™, the tasty alternative to draggin' ass! *perfect smile* This commercial was brought to you by the corporation for marketing literal poison to wageslaves to keep them productive.
- > Slamm-0!

PARIAH SOUL

Electronica is hardly anything new, but every now and again someone manages to tap into the sound and the spirit to transcend the machine and make an instant classic. Pariah Soul, an Asamando expat of ghoulish persuasion, burst onto the scene a few years back with brutal lyrics based on observations of the dark side of the country's livelihood and an eclectic mix of cultural influences for which Asamando art is coming to be known. Inspiration is taken from all over the world, and a combination of styles from every continent and seemingly incompatible elements finds harmony in Pariah's beats. If you ever wanted to know what Benedictine chants, Tír na nÓg lyrical innuendo, taiko drums, and Lakota beat structures sound like together, you've found the right guy. His latest album, *Seekers Beneath*, has eschewed his own vocals in favor of more instrumental work, but the sound remains as haunting and breakneck relentless as ever.

- > PS is considered a very hot commodity right now. On one hand, you've got corps falling all over themselves to get him to sign. On the other, he's become a rallying point for the GLA and other Infected-rights groups. To them, he is a symbol of the positive

role of Infected everywhere. The fact that he's remaining strictly independent is only adding to his legend.

- > Hannibelle
- > He's made a few enemies along the way, as well. Word is, Queen L considers him a traitor, and Horizon is still sore about him slipping out of the contract that got him free from Asamando. There's a pretty hefty bounty on his head (alive only), and a lot of that money from Horizon paid for the best protection Proteus could offer. By all accounts, it's a very comfortable spot he's got, and extracting a celebrity ghoul from an aquacology with an AAA security rating means it'll take the best to get to him, let alone get him out unscathed.
- > Red Anya
- > Man, Johnny B could have snatched him up and made a bundle. Good thing for him they both have a healthy hate-on for Horizon.
- > Red

LIQUIDSKINS

Some acts defy the traditional notion of how sound is made. LiquidSkins is one such duo. Each is clad in a form-fitting suit that covers every inch of their body in mirrored nanofibers. Their instruments are a combination of movement with samplers and mechanisms triggered by infrared beams projected onto the stage. The nature of the suits, with different patterns and textures in spots only they truly understand, means that depending on which laser they trip, and with which part of the body they do it, a different sound emerges. It's like a really roundabout analog synthlink mixed with a Goldberg machine. Their movements always seem to match the nature of the sound, so that a sensual twist can generate a slow and sexy crescendo, while a violent spasm can rage out the sounds of nightmares.

Part performance art, part musical performance, the Twins, as they identify themselves, maintain an air of mystique that has thus far driven their fans wild. Never seen in public outside of a show, nothing is known about either of them, including their gender or relationship. Their body type would seem to indicate human or elf, but even that is up for debate with body sculpting. They might even be spirits or drones; all of their shows are expertly warded and scrambled.

- > The 'Skins don't drum up a lot of controversy, since they don't have lyrics or even any obvious message. Some might read that as being apolitical, but just as many folks like to interpret their own statements into the music and the performance itself, which are basically inextricable. Maybe the suits symbolize that we are all the same, or the mirrors mean we're making the music, or that identity is whatever you make of it. Who knows? They sure ain't telling.
- > Baka Dabora

- > You won't find any contracts for extracting them corpside. While they're independent, they happily (?) take gigs from all kinds of venues through their agent, Abel Konstantopolis, who has done a good job keeping them independent while still making them available. So far, everyone is happy with the results, and they're honestly a little too weird to warrant a full-time contract.
- > Kia
- > That, and their sound isn't very sellable. I thought their first album was okay, but it wasn't until I saw the sim of a show that I got it. It's definitely better live.
- > Traveler Jones
- > The hardcore fans weird me out a bit, which is why I think they are the best source of work if you're going to try to squeeze some business out of them. Fan screeds have put together a rolling bounty for information on who they really are, payable upon reliable verification. Last I saw, the payday was in the six-digit range.
- > Pistons
- > How has no one claimed that yet?!
- > Clockwork
- > Because no one can seem to lay hands on them. And let's face it: you kidnap a celebrity, and you attract all the heat. Just ain't worth it. The fans might pay you, or they might skin you alive if you hurt them.
- > Lyran

EREBUS & CERBERUS

A New York success story, this elf-and-troll duo formed the rap supergroup Erebus & Cerberus after meeting at a pirate trid cartoon studio, of all things. Both had long been involved in socially progressive work shining a light on government and corporate corruption and societal decay before meeting, and their sounds meshed perfectly. While the corps aren't happy about them, they sell packed shows everywhere from small secret shows in smoky clubs to a sold-out Madison Square Garden concert last year. Erebus's production skills are tight as hell, and Cerberus, a CAS expat, is a stone-cold performer. The best part? All of their music is free. You have to pay to see them at the stadiums, but every track they make is free to download.

- > These guys are chill as frag. I'm not sure I've ever seen them without deepweed in hand, and they make some of the coolest music videos I've ever seen. They are, unfortunately, both taken, but I've rarely met such charming and gentlemanly flirts in my life. And seriously, the best sense of humor in the biz.
- > Kat o' Nine Tales
- > There are a lot of rumors that they both have a history in the shadows. Erebus was allegedly a pretty hot Brooklyn decker back in the day when he wasn't breakdancing on street corners, and Cerberus supposedly did a whole lot of hooding in Atlanta. Of

course, after a Crash and all the speculation that follows media heroes, it's hard to tell what's true and what isn't, but they do carry themselves like folks who have done some street work.

- > Glitch

TERRA INFERNO

Tabby Kimitetsu and Angel Kurosawa of former babymetal band Swallowtail Fall weren't ready to give up the limelight in their adulthood. These darlings of the Chiba designer bodyshop scene are back, with a new, somehow even more thrash sound than their old band. Tabby's combination bass and body synth continues to dance about the stage with rage, while Angel remains serene even as she produces sounds that could only come from Hell itself. Rumors say they're battling implant addiction, but their agent says all is well.

- > I call bullshit. Chiba Johnsons are more than willing to pay out good nuyen for delaware connections, and a little legwork shows the money flows back to TaikoDevil Productions.
- > Icarus
- > "Their agent says all is well" is about as meaningless a phrase as exists everywhere. As long as the nuyen is flowing, agents always say all is well.
- > Jimmy No
- > I hope they're doing all right. I loved Swallowtail, and they've only gotten better with age.
- > Bull

GLOCK .50

Pure Detroit rap, Glock .50 is a neo-anarchist's dream. Brutal subject matter and a smooth lyrical flow lend themselves to what many of their fans refer to as street gospel. The eight members of the group represent a mix of metaraces and genders, but they all come from the gutters and have something to say about what they saw there. It's the music corpkids have to buy on the down-low, lest their parents take away their Matrix privileges for a month. It's funny to think something so laced with ultra-profanity could be so damned poetic, but they've managed to weaponize their message, and it's not unusual for a live show to result in an angry mob smashing shit for several city blocks afterward.

- > Their last album, Fendertaste, got attention from Humanis fronts and neighborhood watch groups. You really want to piss them off or make a distraction? Blast this from a passing car.
- > Chainmaker
- > It may have something to do with Shakal and Bromide's on-stage, uh, romance. Nothing pisses off the white hoods like a troll and a human happy together.
- > Goat Foot

YES OR NO? NOVA

Yes-Know-Nova: You know who it is?! We're novahot! Comin' at you live, gonna see what they brought. I'm kickin' it backstage, look who's here on hand: it's the opening gig, rockin' out with Orxanne!

Johnny Danger: Hey, uh, yeah. It's really great to be here with that righteous legend, rocking out with Orxanne and all her fans. Who are you again?

Yes-Know-Nova: It's Yes-Know-Nova, in the place to be, 'cause I'm doing a live gig, with my boy Johnny Dee!

Johnny Danger: Are you doing that rhyming thing on purpose? Is that—is that your thing?

Yes-Know-Nova: I drop rhymes all the time, chummer, what's on your mind? You wanna talk rhymes, or you wanna talk crime? I think you know the time, you're ready for my line, let's hit play Danger-boy, stop hittin' rewind!

Johnny Danger: I'm sorry, who are you?

Yes-Know-Nova: Opening for Orxanne, J-O-H-N-N-Y, did you really run the shadow-streets, or was that a lie?

Johnny Danger: Listen, uh, Yes-Know-Nova? Yeah. If you want to do an interview, you've got to stop that. The rhyming thing.

Yes-Know-Nova: But this is who I am, see, it's how the streets can find me. It's only when I'm spittin' rhymes that the stage lights don't blind me!

Johnny Danger: Yeah, uh, okay. I'm gonna just go.

Yes-Know-Nova: All right, all right! [laughter] You got me, man, you got me. It's cool. You're a righteous tusker, so if you want me to drop it, I'll drop it. I made it like eight minutes one time, interviewing Taffy and Taffy, you know them?

Johnny Danger: I saw them backstage at White Stone, yeah.

Yes-Know-Nova: Eight minutes, I made it, before I slipped up. No joke, bro! No joke! They were high as kites, tusker, I don't know if they just didn't notice I was doing the rhyming thing, or what, but they just went along with it. But anyways, it'cha boy Yes-Know-Nova, legit, I got a press pass and all, bro, and yeah, we talked to your people.

Johnny Danger: [off camera] Mina? Mina! This is chill? You signed off on this? [muffled response] Okay, then. Yes-Know-Nova, you said? How's this work?

Yes-Know-Nova: It's just like it sounds. I ask questions, you answer with yes, you answer with no, or you, just once, get to answer with "nova," which is like pleadin' the Fifth in UCAS territory, you dig? You get that one pass, letting novahot rumors slide right off your back and ignoring one question.

Johnny Danger: And this gets broadcast, uh, where, exactly? I'm not looking to plead guilty to some shit, since you talkin' UCAS courts and all ...

Yes-Know-Nova: Ah-hah, you were paying attention before, huh? You think we're gonna talk about running some shadows, huh? It's chill, bro, it's chill. It's novachill! We're an underground gig, we ain't about that rat money. We've got no corporate sponsors pulling strings, we want the truth for the streets. And you're about that street life, right?

Johnny Danger: I've seen my share of trouble, sure. But what tusker ain't?

Yes-Know-Nova: All right, then, you seen some trouble, but you've seen some good stuff, too, am I right?

Johnny Danger: [laughter] For sure.

Yes-Know-Nova: Buzz on the Matrix had you going with Josie Pink last spring. Yes, no, or nova, that legit?

Johnny Danger: It was.

Yes-Know-Nova: Yes, no, or nova, she break your heart?

Johnny Danger: [laughter] Nova! Nova, nova, nova.

Yes-Know-Nova: [laughter] Rules is rules, chummer, rules is rules. Fine. What about that rebound, though, Johnny? Everyone re-

ported you and Sally Sang together. True love, the headlines said! Yes, no, or nova?

Johnny Danger: No. No, she's just a friend.

Yes-Know-Nova: That's one cute friend. You and Billy Twitch got spotted at a few venues, lookin' chill, and then them papa-rot-sees saw y'all move in. Yes, no, or nova, that love as legit as it looked?

Johnny Danger: Yeah. It was real.

Yes-Know-Nova: You already used up your nova, but I'm not gonna do you raw, tusker, and ask you who broke that one off. But what up with your single that hit, "Brake Up," that repped gold in the street-racer market. Yes, no, or nova, that about you and Twitch?

Johnny Danger: Damn, y'all cruel with this game. [laughter] But yeah, it was about Twitch, mostly.

Yes-Know-Nova: All right, Danger, all right. You're being honest, and we dig that. What about that follow-up track, that mellow piece, though? "Life Saber" made it sound like you were in a better place after that rough break-up. Yes, no, or nova, you really get that close to, y'know, pulling the plug?

Johnny Danger: Yeah, I did. Yes. I'm not scared. You gotta be sharp to keep your wits in this world, and you gotta keep your wits to keep your heart, you know? I own it. I made mistakes, but I'm stronger since then. If me rhyming about that kind of hurt can help someone else, then, damn, why not?

Yes-Know-Nova: Indeed, chummer. So. You and those shadows, though, what's the word? You dropped that single, "Hot Predator," earlier this year. Yes, no, or nova, it was based on real life?

Johnny Danger: Yes.

Yes-Know-Nova: Yes, no, or nova, two bodies dropped?

Johnny Danger: You know it, bro.

Yes-Know-Nova: I scan, I scan. Yes, no, or nova, one of them was an ork?

Johnny Danger: Nova.

Yes-Know-Nova: Ah, ah, tryin' to cheat, bro? C'mon, you already tried that nova-slick move once, remember? Yes or no, you had to pop a fellow tusker?

Johnny Danger: Man, that's how it is in the game. You've heard "Hot Predator." You've heard "Tusks Out." You've heard "Alley Fat." You do what you've got to do out there. You blast who you've got to blast.

Yes-Know-Nova: Was it really a girl, chummer?

Johnny Danger: Equal opportunity for equal pay, bro.

Yes-Know-Nova: One to the dome, for reals?

Johnny Danger: I put someone down, they stay down.

Yes-Know-Nova: Was her name Janine?

Johnny Danger: Drek, bro, I don't know.

Yes-Know-Nova: It was. Her name was Janine.

Johnny Danger: Whatever. Sure, I guess.

Yes-Know-Nova: Say it.

Johnny Danger: What? Yo, wha—

Yes-Know-Nova: Her name was Janine! Say her name! Say my sister's name, you—[gunshots, screams, gunshots]

- > Well. At least I know why Johnny Danger didn't finish the tour.
- > Slam-0!

- > He pulled through, I hear. Shooter was frantic, sloppy, only got in body shots. Orks can take a lot of those.
- > Thorn

SCHTICK MYSTIQUE

The constant shift and twist of politics and policy in Tír Tairngire can give any outsider a headache. You can only imagine the Machiavellian migraine the locals have come up with. Maybe it's no surprise they have a thriving underground punk scene. The most common assumption about "elvis" music is that it's all like the government-approved New Age chimes and poetry they promote. That falls to pieces the moment you hear a band like Schtick Mystique, who utilize the multi-tiered innuendo forms of Sperethiel to mock mainstream culture and corporate oppression from every angle.

The band—four elves and an ork—use names based on the five Paths of the Wheel. Perhaps most insultingly to adherents of the Path, the ork is Rígh, and he is secondary vocals and drums. Rígh's scorched vocal cords provide a death-metal rasp to Bard's power singing, while Warrior, Steward, and Druid play the bass, guitar, and second guitar respectively.

Schtick Mystique hasn't caught any corporate ears by way of the mainstream, as some of the conservative powers of the Tír are rumored to be working to contain them and hunt them down. A few interesting twists of legalese have led to them being accused of copyright infringement, despite a total lack of evidence, and there is a soft warrant for their arrest. Still, bootlegs of their work have made their way past the Tír Tairngire border, and it's only a matter of time before the old blood of Tír na nÓg hear the songs that directly challenge them. What happens next is anyone's guess.

- > The extra insult? Sperethiel is a very melodic language with complicated rhyme structures. It's considered very crass to drop from them. The lyrics to their songs only rhyme (in a way) when translated into English, and even then they drop the last verse's structure. I can imagine that going over with Tír cultural patriots like hand razors across a chalkboard.
- > Thorn
- > I hear the Ancients are going crazy for this sound. No word yet on whether S&M has any relationship to them, but you can bet the Seattle heavies would pull serious strings for a live show.
- > Frosty
- > S AND M! Holy crap, they've got layers to everything!
- > Chainmaker
- > I gotta admit, even I like this.
- > 2XL

FLATVID WESTERN

Samples of classic movies and television lace this pseudo-plex band of remixers, who dig on classical hip- and trip-hop beats and layer them

SWITCHBLADE SMILE

My ears can cut/ The sound is my boot/ The story my knife

Consuming the flowers/ Choke on my youth/ This is my life

All Paths lead to Rome/ Your Towers are burning/ You profit on strife

Can you spell the end?/ See your stars tumbling/ We breathe ashes together

Your clothing is sheer/ Emerald Isles decaying/ Is this a Soldier's Song?

Did you plan to be old?/ This is a corpse wedding/ You've been here too long

You can't fit in my skin/ Flavored metal or blood?/ You couldn't recognize wrong

Smile at me, Father/ You can hear them laughing/ Tongue the edge

with pop culture deep cuts. Considered a band for cinephiles, Flatvid Western doesn't take itself too seriously, constructing "lyrics" that they find amusing in a gonzo way. At the same time, they're vinyl purists, insisting on using the antique medium to spin at live shows and produce sounds for their recordings. This has led to a very mixed fanbase, from hipsters seeking something classic or original, to others who love the bridge they build between the old and the new.

- > For a lot of the fans seeing a live show, this is their first time witnessing actual classic DJing done by hand. Seems like a lot of work to me, but the results speak for themselves.
- > Kat o' Nine Tales
- > They show up at a lot of antiques auctions to buy century-old vinyl. It says a lot that other bidders often back down out of respect when they enter the fray.
- > Red Anya
- > Word is they got an audience with Rhonabwy to borrow some of his collection. Now **there** is a fandom.
- > Silk
- > Meanwhile, some news we can actually use: Flatvid Western is rumored to finance the odd shadow op to procure some material from collectors who don't want to share. High-security targets, and they always insist on zero body count and pay bonuses if there's no residual trace left of the B&E.
- > Miko

COMPLECTOGRAM

The brainchild of Carrie Highland, Kimama Edmo, and Eddie Brighton, this band walks the lines between a few different genres, changing

track to track from haunting ballads to dancehall floorbreakers. While their performance is entirely mundane, it is informed by their individual worldviews and experiences as mages, with each hailing from a different tradition (Highland is a Kabbalist, Edmo is a Shoshone shaman of Dog, and Brighton is a follower of Dragon, and is notably a grandson of Holly Brighton, the reporter who first interviewed Dunklezahn). Any attending mage can perceive that they do not utilize any magic in their shows, but many enjoy the inspirations they use.

- > I'm a fan.
- > Man-of-Many-Names
- > 0.0
- > dev/grrl
- > A few students at Universitas Carolina Pragensis like to use Complectogram in their thesis papers in Schwartzkopf's classes. Seems he likes how it lends itself to Universal Magic Theory, even though the band has never made any mention of it in interviews.
- > Lyrn

GIZMO'S WISH

This little band of Wuxing corpyouth rebels got their start in a rehab facility. Each had their own breakdown, whether it came from psychological pressure or trouble from friends, family, or school. Banding together through shared pain, they decided to try to come up with their own cure for their anxieties. Their first album, *Panacea*, caught the attention of a talent scout who thought that trauma was a good place to find art, and it sat at number three on Wushu Records' digital downloads chart for eight months. The band still attends treatment, and they donate the majority of their profits and concert income to charitable research and facilities for psychological care. This has made them something of a *cause celebre* of late, as well as media darlings that Wuxing points to as proof of the virtue of their corporate culture, completely ignoring that it was that very culture that caused the band's problems in the first place.

- > Oh, the hypocrisy goes deeper than that. The kids seem to have their hearts in the right place, but the word is that their handlers who take care of the donations like to funnel it to Wuxing psycho-think tanks whose data output is primarily used for marketing research.
- > Dr Spin
- > I wonder if they would be open to switching contracts if they found out ...
- > Kat o' Nine Tales

SLUICE

You ever been in a spa? That droning, New Age, not-quite-multicultural sound you heard was probably Sluice. Self-described as a "one-and-a-half-man band," Sluice (real name Tommy Ehrgarten) splices samples and soundscapes, then has an agent program re-modulate it into binaural templates to pretty much force the listener to relax. It's about as cheap a trick as can be, and Sluice isn't even trying to pretend it's anything else. Re-contextualized music that's been stretched past casual recognition and into psycho-aural rematting means his piracy is almost untraceable. It's a cheap candy coating over medicine that makes you calmer. The worst part is that it works, and the massage you were getting is that much better for it.

- > This guy has **no** fans, but his music gets bought all over the world for its effects, so he won't be running out of work any time soon.
- > Kat o' Nine Tales
- > Looks like someone's account needs a little bleeding ...
- > Pistons
- > On the other hand, those binaural patterns are worth something, right?
- > /dev/grrl
- > Store-bought.
- > Pistons
- > Son of a bitch.
- > /dev/grrl

THE CLASSICS

POSTED BY: RED

We've been talking about the new stuff, but it's only right we at least mention a little "Where Are They Now?" of some of the best bands of the past thirty years.

ANDREA FROST

The sole remaining performer from the classic band Concrete Dreams, Andrea continues to pioneer synthlink performance even in her old age. Freed from the drama of her previous partners, she's become something of a wanderer, joining up with other acts to lend her prodigious talents on the road and learning from their different styles and sounds. A musical polymath and living legend, she often takes other musicians under her wing. This has resulted in a few of the new generation getting their start, notably Pariah Soul and Terra Inferno, the latter of which has referred to her as their "Oneesan."

- > So what happened to the rest of Concrete Dreams?
- > Glitch
- > Andrea won her little shadow war against Warren when word got out that he had started using wires to generate what he claimed were authentic performances. These days he's trying to get some credit back, but he's gotta start back at square one. Nyanze had a stroke last year and hasn't been able to perform since. Moira is still working in synthlink design, notably the Dreamthorn 3.0 that dropped this year. After all that's happened, they're never getting back together again.
- > Pistons

DARKVINE

Still happily teaching at his classical music school, the legendary elven harpist has been seen on the Grand Tour of late, most notably getting into good-natured musical duels with other musicians of note. While he has declined to comment, the improvisational compositions he and his "opponents" come up with have become viral sensations, and it's considered a special treat for the aristocracy who manage to be there to see these utterly unique events.

DIGIT

The remaining member of the changeling band DNA has only improved his diverse skillset since then, becoming a one-man instrumental band with compositions for his extra fingers. These days he has been doing soundtrack work for a few major motion pictures and books regular gigs for trid shows. He recently managed to convince his old partner Noticia Nightcord to lend some supporting vocals for his work. Evidently, working behind the scenes instead of on the stage has helped her regain some confidence that her talent is in her voice, and not due to her feline SURGE characteristics. In a recent interview, they made it clear that while they are happy to be working together again, they have not reformed DNA and are quite content with the work they have now.

GRIM AURORA

Our very own Kat's band of merry musical miscreants continues their steady work in the Seattle scene, with tours all over the UCAS. While their style remains consistently punk/industrial, they keep it fresh with guest members and cross-overs. There was some controversy with a copyright issue for their latest album, *Grinder*, came under dispute between MTCA and Nashville Notes in the wake of NeoNET's breakup, but their relationship with their fanbase has carried them through. While they don't book as many stadium shows they used to, their club appearances remain sold out and packed solid.

- > Oh, Ghost, we're considered classic, now?
- > Kat o' Nine Tales
- > Hey, you're still performing, right?
- > Red

LORELEI ANGEL

Still a stunner, the Phoenix shaman continues to do shows independently at her own pace. She doesn't maintain a very busy schedule anymore, mostly holding secret shows or single appearances whenever and wherever she likes. Her mastery of illusion magic has only improved over the years, and her live show is still considered one of the best in the biz.

- > I honestly don't care if those looks are part of the illusion. She's gorgeous.
- > Traveler Jones

MARIA MERCURIAL

The Silver Maiden has taken a step back from music these past few years. The mixture of scandal and allure of her checkered past (BTL abuse, multiple personalities, and no shortage of shadow rumors), as well the success of her work promoting BTL awareness, has shifted her focus more on production than songwriting. She does put out the odd single now and again, always shifting to new musical styles and influences interwoven with her signature rock sound, but you're more likely to hear her playing with other Horizon artists, particularly her daughter Isabelle, who has continued to gain popularity on her own merits. Maria has been known to occasionally show up for a surprise duet with her in concert, though to Isabelle's credit, most of her fans consider this a bonus instead of a feature.

- > There was a rumor that Maria had an early form of CFD, but nothing ever showed from that.
- > Miko
- > Oh, it was tried. But from what I hear, something about her was just ... untouchable. I don't know if it was the state of her mind or her legendary chrome or just respect for the mind they found, but the AI in question left her alone.
- > Plan 10
- > After all she's been through? Thank goodness.
- > Mihoshi Oni
- > Insiders say her therapy is finally bearing some real fruit, and she's much more in control these days. Maybe we'll start seeing some more work from her.
- > Kat o' Nine Tales

MUSIC SAMPLER SET: RANDOM

Down for Stevie—"Why'd It Have To Be Like This?"
The Hoplights—"Justice Jackson"
PharmaDon—"The Sweet Roll"
Project ANTHEM—"Tyrannosaurus Hex"
Electric Stigma—"Rumble and Moan"

Play Now?

SHIELD WALL

A perennial favorite, Shield Wall recently made headlines when Sheena M and Jay Keith announced their latest reunion tour starting in Asamando with the nigh-mythological return of Frumious. Evidently infected back at the infamous Underworld 93 show in '51, he had confessed his condition to the band and left, insisting he was too dangerous to remain. Eventually, he made his way to Asamando, where he learned to control his urges and has been performing ever since. The rest of the band is said to be eager to reunite with their old crew, and previews of new tracks, including "Absentee," "Doris," and "Sicker Snack" are already whipping fans into a frenzy.

- ▶ How the hell did a bandersnatch muster up the intelligence to communicate with them?
- ▶ Baka Dabora
- ▶ He was turned by a vampire. He's a jabberwock.
- ▶ Hanibelle
- ▶ Well, there goes the symmetry of his moniker.
- ▶ Mihoshi Oni
- ▶ I've made my feelings about Asamando clear in the past, but I'll deal with it to be at that show. I've been waiting for this.
- ▶ Red

MUSIC OF THE SEELIE COURT

POSTED BY: BIFROST

Having spent no insignificant time among the Seelie, I grew up either reveling in, recoiling against, or recovering from what passes as popular music in the Court. The Seelie use music in much the same way Earthlings do, but just ... deeper, if more pretentious. Musical modes known as Crannfolan and Amhrándeora are most prevalent in traditional Seelie music, while what we'd refer to as Mixolydian is not unheard of. Crannfolan and Amhrándeora use similar sets of notes to Hypodorian or Mixolydian, but flirt with microtonal variations, often breaking an octave into forty-eight or more distinct micro-tones, bleeding out (sometimes literally) every bit of somberness a centuries-old elf can perceive. They experience this music as if they were drinking a fine wine of

pure nostalgia, more potent than anything an entire mortal life could muster; or so they believe. Songs often last for hours, or even days, while it isn't uncommon for an audience to be overcome with spontaneous emotion, weeping or laughing for hours at a time; indeed, it seems almost pleasurable for them to do so, as if addicted to the emotion the music incites.

More particularly, different factions of the Court prefer alternative microtonal approaches, each containing bizarre scales of dozens of different notes. Some use forty-eight tones per octave, and others thirty-six. Since the Awakening, there have been songs composed in the twelve-note octave approach, specifically to impress dumb-down Sixth World audiences. Invariably, their musicians can't help embellishing with occasional quarter-tone accidentals.

FÁILTHE FALLAIN

That isn't all there is to say about music in the Fae realm, however. While the Seelie Court appears to condescend to mortal ears with their interpretation of what Sixth World audiences prefer, culture is moving in both directions. Time moves differently in the fae realm, so no one knows when or how it happened, but sometime after the Awakening, rock music, specifically punk (in attitude if not aesthetic) began to take root among some Court outliers. And as mentioned above, since time moves differently, the punk music movement among the Seelie has been developing underground (literally) for hundreds of years. Developed parallel to punk on Earth, Seelie punk is dismissively referred to as Fáilthe Falain, meaning a sort of naive welcoming of joy; something the punks have run with. The concerts where Fáilthe Falain is played are incredibly joyful events, and all fae, even those boggles, bogies, orks, fomorians, sith, and other traditionally Unseelie fae are welcome. This has spawned the unquenchable rumor that Fáilthe Falain is an Unseelie plot to steal young and vulnerable Seelie away from their rightful allegiance. But as is their fashion, the Seelie are more concerned with intrigue and gossip, even when wrong. Fáilthe Falain is a reaction, 20,000 years in the making, against what these punks consider a false, pretentious, and harmful system of oppression clothed in smiles and beauty. Fáilthe Falain is about being happy and content, something the Seelie seem unable to abide, which is why those caught attending Fáilthe Falain shows are sent to "correction classes." Shame, really. It's great fun.

- ▶ Seelie kids live in a place so full of fake emotion and fake relationships that they rebel by getting together and listening to simple, happy jams and enjoying each other's company? Punk as frag. Where do I sign up?
- ▶ Old Crow



GRAYCE UNDER PRESSURE

Also worth mentioning is a bright star who recently flared up in Tír Tairngire. Sadly, she's already novaed out, but the music she left behind is wiz. Maria Young came on the music scene in the Tír only a little over a year ago, making a name for herself with haunting Celtic-inspired rock-orchestral music, fused with synthpop. Two of her singles rose to top the charts in Tír Tairngire, CalFree, PCC, UCAS, and Salish-Shidhe Council: "(Soulless) Metal World" and "Free Spirit." Her live shows were spectacular, as she would regularly summon spirits and have them join in as back-up singers. And she didn't just summon and dismiss them, either. She'd call them up, introduce them to the crowd, they'd sing a couple songs, then she'd thank them like they were people, and send them off with a curtsy!

No one's sure just what happened to Young, other than she dropped off the radar a day or two after a sold-out show in downtown Cara'Sir. Her body hasn't turned up, so she's presumed to still be alive somewhere. Her parents, James and Emma Young, both mid-level executives in Telestrian Industries' magical research division, have issued press releases pleading for Maria to come home, and promising a reward for anyone who can help them locate her and bring her home.

- ▶ There's plenty of rumors about Maria's disappearance. The kidnapping rumor is pure drek, and her body wasn't found floating in the Columbia River, either. From what I can tell, she probably had a falling out with her parents on account of being an aspected mage who could only summon spirits, while they and her older brother, William, are all full mages. Gotta love it—they have a beautiful, talented daughter, and they couldn't see past one thing they considered a flaw. Some people, man.
- ▶ Old Crow
- ▶ Oh yeah, her tunes are nova hot! Funny thing is, I could-a sworn I saw an elf chick who looked just like her walking down the street in Touristville a couple days ago. Couldn't be her, though. I mean, this slitch had cyberware and drek, and magic-types don't "pollute" their body like that, right?
- ▶ Borderline
- ▶ I was at the Sultry Siren last week, a new nightclub in Downtown Seattle with a classic noir motif, and the singer on stage that night sounded a lot like Maria Young. What caught my attention was that the singer turned out to be the shadowrunner I was there to meet about a run. I guess she vaguely resembled Maria, being an elf and all. She had chrome, though, and her figure had been augmented. Anyway, she calls herself Grayce, and she's got a talent for infiltration and social engineering, if anyone's interested.
- ▶ Bull

- > Bull, are you saying all elves look alike?
- > Netcat
- > *coughs*
- > Slamm-O!
- > Don't you dare.
- > Netcat
- > Sultry Siren ... yeah, that's a wiz spot. Giordano Turturro owns it. He recently came out from Manhattan under questionable circumstances. He denies any connection, but some known associates of the O'Malley syndicate have been seen there.
- > Traveler Jones
- > How did I miss this? All the spirits she summoned are fae—every single one. Her music has more than a little fae influence, too. Curious.
- > Frosty

VANGUARD VENUES: TIPS OF THE MUSICAL SPEARS

POSTED BY: KAT O' NINE TAILS (AND FRIENDS)

Art, no matter the medium, is nothing without a place to show it off. For music, venues are just as important as the acts they host. I'm not talking about the mega-stadium where the masses pack together to have the latest corporate-approved tunes shoved into our brains; I'm talking about places that have as much history and impact on the music scene as the artists themselves. These are the kinds of places and events that, for lack of a better term, have hosted so much mojo that they've almost developed their own kind of, well, soul.

THE BRICKHOUSE

POSTED BY: WENDY STORMS

The Brickhouse was once described to me as a stubborn prize fighter. No matter how many times you knock it down, chances are it's going to get back up again. Located in the heart of Ares Town (a.k.a. Detroit), the Brickhouse has always stood out as a glaring eyesore in contrast to the projected corporate utopianism. From its chipped and rough brick exterior that was first erected in 2022, The Brickhouse started out as just another local dive bar. But as the Ares renovation began to take hold within the city, the little dive bar became a small beacon of non-conformity when the owner, Ben "Bix" Bixby, backed up by several local "associations," fended off attempts to buy the place out. Several years and six owners later, the Brickhouse became *the* place to go if you wanted to get away

from the stifling corporate omnipresence. In 2053, Bix's son Jackson brought the Brickhouse back into the family and added a small stage in the back. That small decision forever altered the bar's destiny. Soon, the Brickhouse became known as one of those small hole-in-the-wall venues where people could see up-and-coming as well as local staple acts. The place itself is physically unremarkable, just another three-story brick building, but people come here to partake in the feeling of defiant action the place inspires.

- > Their locally produced craft beer is also the stuff of legends. I highly suggest the Camshaft Stout and the Eight-Mile Red Lager.
- > Traveler Jones
- > Come for the drinks and music, stay for the corporate defiance. I need to visit this place.
- > Old Crow

But that's not what made the Brickhouse a legend. As already stated, the place stood out like a handful of sore thumbs, which went against the image Ares wanted to project for "their" city. So like any good corporation, they tried to take it over. From 2055 to 2063, the Brickhouse survived not only hostile takeovers, but a score of direct attacks designed to literally destroy the place—and with each failure, there would be a massive blow-out party that drew names like Jetblack and even Maria M herself. Eventually, the cost of trying to take the place out outweighed the rewards, and "the House" was left alone. Though it would end up battered, the Brickhouse still stood strong and independent, and you know what? It's still there, thumbing its nose at the corporate establishment, kicking out tunes and brew.

- > Trolling Thunder headlined the last rebuild party. Fun fact, they came right from a run to the party and performed for three hours in full body armor.
- > Rifleman
- > Okay, so how does a dive bar get enough juice to hold out against Ares for almost a bloody decade?
- > Treadle
- > It became too much of a hassle, and the costs outweighed reward as gangs and shadowrunners on both sides got involved. Currently, local business owner (and semi-retired shadowrunner) Marvin Castle owns the Brickhouse—and all of the other buildings on the block.
- > Mr. Bonds
- > Wait, doesn't Castle also own Platinum Trollgirls?
- > Stone
- > **Si.** That particular establishment also happens to be located directly opposite the Brickhouse on the other side of said block.

It also doesn't hurt that Castle's patronage comes with the added benefit of having several allies of the, how one would say, **mercenary persuasion** at his beck and call for when things start to get out of hand.

- > Picador
- > In the last five years, Platinum, the Brickhouse, and several other shops on that block have become one of the major biz hubs within the city. I'd estimate that at least fifty to sixty percent of all shadow deals that go on in Detroit happen on that block under Castle and crew's protection. I've even heard rumblings that some old service tunnels were discovered and now connect every damn building there. Add in Castle's allies, associates, and connections, and that block is pretty much an armored fortress. It's no wonder Ares decided to let their little war cool off.
- > Turbo Bunny

COUNTRY SCENE

POSTED BY: TWANG

All right, I'd say this is a local focus piece, but I've seen way too many Japanacorp execs out on their free time rocking a Stetson and singing "Momma's Gonna Kill Me" by Orkcountry into a karaoke microphone. Whether that's about homage, fandom, or pure mocking entertainment doesn't matter. What matters is music written on a napkin in some seedy bar while wallowing over the loss of your dog, wife, truck, best friend, etc. can be heard all over the world. It's huge in the CAS and most of the UCAS, but it carries over to just about every nation touched by the former USA. Whether part of their anti-establishment underground or a genuine part of their history, the influence of the U.S. of A. lives on in country hearts.

"But this is JackPoint," you say. "What does it have to do with my next run?" Could be nothing, could be everything, because while I joke about that seedy bar and napkin, most of today's biggest hits are written on a tour bus, by someone already making millions of nuyen (not much for themselves, but I'm not touching that part of this industry), in an office highrise by the genius without a pretty face, or on some daydreamer's home system or commlink—and that's all paydata! Runners get jobs to snag the latest and greatest musical creations from the brightest stars, new and old. They even get hired to snag those stars sometimes, and as long as you can avoid doing something stupid because you're star-struck, you're golden. It's those personalities at the top of the country world I want to talk about!

- > In parts of Eastern Europe, country and bluegrass is incredibly popular. So much so that they just call it their own folk music. Maybe the chord progressions are similar enough by coincidence, but they're adamant on the topic. Regardless,

drive ten miles outside of Prague or go to a regional fair, and I can guarantee you'll come across a few gents with a banjo, guitar, and washboard who're passing an unmarked bottle between them and belting sweet twangs into the night. Could be a useful cover.

- > Dez

ORKCOUNTRY

I'm a huge fan of acts that buck the norm, and orkcountry certainly throws an interesting spin into the country music scene. They're a brother-and-sister duet that mixes Or'zet with Cityspeak and regular old American English into their lyrics. They rock to the familiar beat of most country rock and sing with a twang that could only have been picked up in the backwoods of the CAS. Their work is a bit ork-centric, but that's not chasing fans away; it's exposing real ork life to a whole new crowd. The pair are seen as sellouts by a healthy percentage of orks, but they're loved by other fans, including me, for their willingness to branch out from the "live fast, die young" lyrical stylings of current ork artists and into a "love, relax, and live a good life" feel.

- > Their latest hit, "Love Ain't a Limit," has gotten them some strange looks. It's a two-part love song sung by a brother and sister. Some of the themes hint at a bit more going on there.
- > 2XL
- > There's a lot going on there, because they aren't brother and sister. It was a solid, wholesome theme from the label, and they started out as just friends, but life on the road makes strange romances. Now they're bucking because they're tired of living a hidden life.
- > Pistons

CONFEDERATE SUMMER

The CAS is the biggest breeding ground for country acts. Not all of them hit it big, but most of them can at least get themselves a little exposure thanks to the pervasiveness of social media. Confederate Summer started out playing small venues but boosting their signal with a paid P2.0 stream. Their efforts paid off when Ellis Turner heard his daughter singing along to their first hit, "Tell It to Them Straight." It wasn't a hit at the time, but Turner reached out and offered them a deal with Pathfinder Media. They jumped on and jumped up the charts. Now those P2.0 concerts get dedicated bandwidth, and Confederate Summer combines six-figure stadium seat sellouts with seven-figure P2.0 attendance.

The band is led by Jason Pour, a classic country heartthrob with abs of steel. Pour's the face the world loves, but the fans all know that the heart and soul of Confederate Summer is their bassist,

Brian Pyle. He's got some unique styling with those four strings, but it's the lyrics and music he writes for the band that make the world swoon over Pour. His latest piece, "Red Rover," is a sad homage piece to his brother, Adam, who worked on Mars for Evo before the whole Monad debacle.

- > Pyle is a prime extraction target. He's not the frontman, so most people don't know his face, and the value is in his lyrics.
- > Fianchetto
- > Seeing as he was, in the not-so-distant past, a citizen of Evo and now he flies the Horizon colors, something went down.
- > Stone
- > Internally, the band isn't stable. Pour doesn't like the attention Pyle gets. It's a tale as old as time and likely to play out the same way, with egos destroying great music.
- > Kat o' Nine Tales

WHEREVER WE ROAM

POSTED BY: GYPSY STRIKER

Salutari, my friends ...

First, let me say I am honored that the famous Kat o' Nine Tales asked this humble Roma *barzii* to shed some, but not too much, light on the wondrous festival known to a select few as Wherever We Roam. May it always bring joy, happiness, and enlightenment to those who have the heart and will to find it, and confusion and frustration to those who wish to destroy it.

- > Humble bard? Yeah fragging right. Is that Roma for **terrorist** and **assassin**? Because I've seen your Interpol files, chummer.
- > OrkCEO
- > And your point is? We all carry labels; some we give ourselves, others we choose to reclaim, while ... others are **forced** onto us. But, I simply sing different songs. Would you like to hear one? *grin*
- > Gypsy Striker
- > Why do I need to keep reminding people to quit antagonizing each other and stay on topic?
- > Glitch
- > My apologies.
- > Gypsy Striker

Wherever We Roam's humble beginnings go back to the first Euro Wars, when various Roma families were ravaged by warfare as they attempted to survive the decimated lands of Europe. In the rare times they were able to find some sanctuary with those who did *not* buy into the centuries of

lies and bad blood, the hosts and their families shared Roma dance and songs—some of the few things those families had left to share.

As the wars raged on, these simple gatherings became small festivals where surviving Roma and their friends, allies, or those who also sought refuge from persecution gathered to celebrate and trade. The only cost was that each person or family had to contribute *something*, even something as simple as a campfire story.

Unfortunately it was common for forces on both sides of the war to target the Romani and ... vent their frustrations upon them. But because of the good will the unfortunately-named (*ugh*) "Gypsy Tours" generated among some of the locals, many Romani were spared and hidden. After the wars, the festivals continued, albeit with a less negative connotation to the word "gypsy." My ancestors at the time instead owned the term, and worked to change it as much as they could.

- > I attended one of these tours; it was after my time ... fighting, and I happened upon one by accident. I thought for sure I was going to end up in some shallow grave somewhere. It was there I learned that some wounds could be healed. I never found another one, but I'm glad I found that one.
- > Fianchetto

These early tours became full-fledged festivals and even sanctioned events in some places. For a time, it was a place where the Romani and others of like spirit came together in fellowship and celebration. And for many years, it was good. Of course, something like that could never last.

In 2061, the last Gypsy Tour was killed. The direct cause was wrath born of ignorance. The twin children of the French Finance Minister, Jean-Pierre Morin, went through class-III SURGE as Halley's Comet was seen overhead. Convinced that his children were the victims of a "Gypsy Curse," he used his influence to go after the Romani families at that particular festival with government agents, mercenaries, and shadowrunners. In fear for our safety, we once again disappeared into the shadows. But this time, we had something we didn't have enough of before: true allies. Those Roma families survived because of the bonds of friendship formed over many years and festivals, where previously cold hearts had put aside old prejudices and helped their newly adopted brethren.

- > While others sold the Romani out. Needless to say, they did not live long enough to enjoy their metaphorical thirty pieces.
- > Red Anya
- > Indeed. And Minister Morin did not live very long to continue dispersing said silver, either.
- > Gypsy Striker

Almost a decade after the last Gypsy Tour concluded, rumors began to surface about a new underground music and arts festival making its way across Europe. These festivals were by invitation only, and those honored to get one were treated to music and festivities the likes of which had not been seen in almost a decade. It became *the* place to see all kinds of musicians and artists from across Europe. Everything from traditional Romani folk tunes to the bleeding edge in metal and electronica were represented in a glorious fusion of sight, sound, and simsense. As in the past, chosen artisans and performers of all stripes are present. And to continue past tradition, everyone is expected to contribute something.

But as the saying goes, “this is why we cannot have nice things.” Eventually the new festival was discovered, or more accurately betrayed by a spectator (who was later dealt with accordingly), and the local authorities tried to shut it down. But the Romani have learned hard lessons about evasion. These new festivals became mobile, popping up in places and then disappearing into the night as quickly as they came.

Officially, this festival has no name and never will. But it is unofficially (and lovingly) called *Wherever We Roam*; a slight play on words and history, most definitely. To ensure that locations and times remain secret, access is still *mostly* by invitation only. However, clues to when and where the next event will be are often seeded in various locations on many realms. Yes, that statement is accurate. It is said that only those of sharp mind and loving heart can find and decipher the clues that tell the where and when. And to date, not a single event has been successfully attacked or canceled.

- > And it's not uncommon for select professionals to contribute intelligence, location scouting, and security. Small price to pay, in my opinion. I was there in '70 with my guitar (among other things). For me, the highlight was a Romani singer whose voice I can only describe as “pure beauty.”
- > Rifleman
- > WWR is no longer just a European thing. It's rumored to have crossed into Central Asia, Scandinavia, Russia, and even North and Central America in the last five years. Consider the logistics on **that!**
- > Traveler Jones
- > They want to keep it safe, yet put out clues? Kinda counterproductive, isn't it?
- > Slamm-0!
- > And yet, only the right people seem to find it.
- > Old Crow
- > So what are these clues, and how do I find them?
- > Treadle

- > Without and within, everywhere and nowhere, hidden and in plain sight. It's not a question of knowing where and when, but how and **why**.
- > Man-of-Many-Names
- > Well said, my friend.
- > Gypsy Striker

SLITCH & WESTIN

Yep, she knows what it means, and Caitlyn Slitch will gladly tell you it's just a little front end warning before you get in close. Angelique Westin plays the sweet to her stage partner's salty, and the pair have been tearing up the country charts since their break out hit in '76: “Freedom and a Gun.”

While most still call them country, the pair have used their last two albums to feature a new sound. Influenced by their tour in Africa, they've pulled dozens of local African musicians and their traditional African instruments into the studio to create a unique new breed of music. While their diehard country root fans aren't keen on the warble of a kora or the replacement of their rock piano with a mbira, Slitch and Westin have a whole separate following just for those songs. It's a big enough fanbase to feed the rumors of a split tour with some shows featuring their country roots and others offering what they call Tribal Country.

- > Slitch has a price on her head over on The Hidden Blades. It's got a three-figure, value so it's not the top or the bottom, but it's there—and as usual, it doesn't offer a reason, just money for a contract.
- > Ire
- > I'm not jumping over to tell them, but you know better than to share THB contracts.
- > Balladeer
- > I'd guess Ire wants more people to know so his payout from the contract on The Unwavering Shield is bigger. Not that many here are jumping on network contracts for country divas.
- > Thorn

NORTHERN LIGHTS

Currently the biggest show in the UCAS, the power behind Northern Lights, Ares Global Entertainment, is trying to expand their influence into the CAS. James “Scuffles” Tugworth and Summer Winters share the lead, while Trent Williams, Ashton Kennedy, and Scott Brooks round out the musical talent. Scuffles delivers the twang while Winters belts it out like a rock-opera diva. The pair rarely harmonize, usually playing duets or swapping the lead on their various hits. Ashton is the pretty face on the bass and supposedly a rising star in his own right, releasing several underground solo tracks

under the name AK-57. Brooks and Williams, both country legacies with Garth Brooks and Hank Williams back up their family trees, are happy to just hang out in the background, but their pedigree is raised often enough to create internal rumblings. They're at the top right now, but some think the band is perpetually on the verge of collapse with the internal strife being kept together by the wranglers at AGE.

- > Ares could be looking at the internal extraction option to split up the band and rebrand Scuffles and Trent south of the border. As Kentucky boys, born and bred, they've got the best chance of making it despite their former connection to a "Yankee Country" band.
- > Stone
- > Winters and Scuffles have a friendly internal wager that slides our way on occasion. They swap penthouse rights based on which one sang lead on their current hit. They're both constantly trying to grab the next big one and occasionally use some shady methods to get material.
- > Pistons

FREE RANGE

Another UCAS-based group, but these guys are from the UCAS Sector of Denver, so that doesn't really count—especially now that it doesn't really exist. They're on their third album, but they're just starting to get popular thanks to the hit, "Southern Nights." They've been independent from the start, but their recent success has brought attention from some of the big boys. The accompanying interest in their earlier work is the real success here. Those first albums had at least a dozen potential hits between them but lacked the kind of exposure mass-media marketing could bring.

Thanks to their Denver roots, they've still managed wide success. They've also gained a ton of positive press with recent charity concerts. The proceeds are going to help those displaced during the recent violence in Denver. Their music is the real draw, with a brooding tone and touching lyrics that hit on real-world topics without feeling preachy. Several of their less-known tracks definitely offer a country look at life in the shadows.

- > They may appear independent, but most of their money traces to the Draco Foundation. It's not widely known, and the only outward signs are a few DF logos smattered around their concert venues during shows. The connection isn't a problem now, but it probably will be once other megas see the nuyen signs tied to a contract with Free Range.
- > Mile Highlighter
- > Dig a little deeper, youngster. Let me clear something up: They aren't funded by the Draco Foundation. The money they use

is held in trust by the DF. Tucker Willis and Bethany West are shadow-babies. Their moms—a.k.a. Pebbles and Siren, a couple of Denver legends—worked heavily for the DF and left behind a cut of their cash for their kids. The money may look like it's coming from the DF, but it's really just cleaned-up cash from their moms.

- > Dr. Spin

KYLEY ANN DANES, A.K.A. TWO MINDS

Gimmick acts don't normally make my list, but when Kiley Ann came out that she was a host for a Monad intelligence in the middle of last year, I started following the tragedy, only to be shocked by the first new thing I've seen in country music in a while. Kiley and her Monad guest (her description), Tracer, swap control during shows and performances. Others have tried this as an act or gimmick, but the shift between Kiley and Tracer is so dramatic that facial and vocal analysis software identify them as distinct entities. During interviews, the pair swap to answer, and networks use camera swaps triggered by Tracer. Even though they are wearing the same clothes, you can most certainly tell who's talking.

As for their music, it's a renaissance of synth-country melded with acoustic six-string. The message is one of universal love and understanding, along with heartbreak, loss, and regret. Tracer has talked extensively about his Monad life, and Kiley has come out to admit fighting depression and loneliness all her life. Her ailments have been a thing of the past since Tracer came along.

- > Stockholm Syndrome, anyone?
- > Chainmaker
- > Um ... fuck you!
- > Plan 9
- > What ze said!
- > Plan 10
- > It's one positive example in a sea of bad ones. Tracer's positive influence doesn't balance the threat of global annihilation and the massive loss of life from the recent issues in Boston or the DSECI launch.
- > Icarus

COEUR SAUVAGE

No talk about country stars would be complete without these stereotype-shatterers! I don't trust any number or claim tossed at me by a corp, but I do accept firsthand testimony, and my own experiences to tell me that this group is the *most* famous country act in the world! They're French in origin but have a global appeal. I've experienced

sold-out stadiums in Pretoria, Sydney, Atlanta, Tenochtitlán, and Paris, while hearing word from fans across the globe that “Wild Heart” packs the house everywhere they go.

Combining heartfelt lyrics, classic country rhythms, and a Kentucky twang across eight different languages, Coeur Sauvage brings tears, laughs, and raucous parties everywhere they go.

- > French and country music aren't even close to synonymous, but it works here. I love them!
- > /dev/grrl
- > Anyone know if they're runners? And if they are, why do they continue in the shadows when they've gotta be making millions?
- > Riot
- > Runners: Yes. Making millions: Yes. Held hostage by their corporate masters by keeping their families “secure” within their Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur facility: Yes. They're the epitome of hooders and run almost exclusively for favors. I'm guessing at some point they'll try to call in all their markers to get their families out safe, but all told the band has at least twenty-three loved ones at a facility in southern France. One hell of a coordinated run, and they aren't the type to be looking at acceptable losses.
- > Glitch
- > Hardest part will be trusting the runners doing the jobs to not sell them out. They make SpinStorm millions of nuyen per show. Plenty to pay a runner to roll over on the plan.
- > Rigger X

ARCOLOGY MEDIA

Ever wonder what it's like to live your entire life inside a corporate community? Ever consider how many fewer choices you have by virtue of having only one corp offer those choices? Welcome to life inside an arcology (or aquacology, as the case may be). I could spend volumes describing the so-called life that is lived inside these manufactured monuments to post-capitalist idolatry, but since we're talking media, I'll limit myself to what the wageslaves see and hear, believing it's because they chose to like it, rather than being force-fed.

- > Who'd have thought that being conditioned by single-source propaganda your whole life would lead to mysterious and bizarre side-effects like enjoying tacky media? I mean, sure, having your freedom stripped from you is bad, but not knowing who **Neil the Ork Barbarian** is? That's just evil.
- > Slamm-O!

Outside arcologies, most wageslaves, salarymen (or salarywomen, salaryfolk, salarycritters, etc.), and other consumers get to choose from media from all corporate varieties. Sure, the megas pro-

UCAS STRONG

BY NORTHERN LIGHTS

Under a starred striped leaf
Can you feel that beat
America's on the rise

Some said we're done
Under the corporate thumb
Comin' to test us just ain't wise

Ain't afraid to fight
Stand up and rock your night
Unwilling to compromise

Callin' out to everyone
A call to have some fun
So go and wipe those big dark eyes

- > It's huge south of that Mason-Dixon line, but the C part of UCAS ain't happy they didn't get a mention.
- > Stone
- > First line ... “leaf” ... pretty sure that's a reference. Guess if it doesn't say “Oh Canada,” it don't count. And, for accuracy, the Mason-Dixon line is completely within the UCAS. It doesn't separate the UCAS from the CAS.
- > Slamm-O!
- > Slamm-O! offers a history-related correction ... end of days!
- > /dev/grrl

SPIT THE TRUTH

BY NO SWEET GEORGIA PEACH

I'm gonna spit the truth

You see a chump
Livin' in a dump
Hoods fallin' left and right
They got no game
Going down in flame
Soon be out of sight

See a straight killer
Next steps a thriller
Bringin' mega moves with that big A
Don't need no dragon
We got that D-wagon
Ain't nothin' more for us to say

- > AGE offers this one as a free download to anyone using a city grid in the UCAS.
- > Stone
- > The UCAS government cracks down on as many of those downloads as possible. Rumors as to why range from subliminal signals for inciting violence to dangerous code. No matter what they say, it's all about keeping the messages in this band's lyrics away from UCAS citizens.
- > Glitch

duce the bulk of all media that's out there, but the AAs, As, and even some local stuff manage to slip in. If they're particularly worldly, they may even manage to imbibe some non-corp music or trid media. So while it may be polished and corporately on-message, most folks have some measure of choice as to what they spend their ever-dwindling free time taking in.

Not so in the arcologies.

Inside the controlled-down-to-the-second mechanics of arcology life, not only are other corporations' media not allowed, even the media from the arcology's patron corporation is throttled. So if you live on Horizon's Arcology Mile in LA, you'd shouldn't expect to see Ares' new action trid or hear Shiawase J-pop. But what may not seem intuitive is that Horizon also keeps you from checking out the latest Horizon trids and music singles as well. Why? Because outside, Horizon has to compete with the other corps for every dollar spent on entertainment. Inside, Horizon knows that you don't have a choice, and so you will listen to whatever they give you. So the corps have discovered that by keeping the best music away from arc-dwellers, they can use the populace as test-beds for the media they will release worldwide. The things that end up being the most popular inside the arcologies will be massively overproduced, dressed to fit world trends, and then released in an almost unrecognizable form to compete on the world stage. An additional benefit to this is that once something proves itself on the world market to be a hit, the corp always has the option of releasing it to the arcology, knowing that the culture-starved mass inside will be so blown away by what they are seeing or hearing that production, loyalty, and crime will go way down, reflecting the populace's thankfulness to their father/mother corp.

And yet. There are odd things that happen inside these cloistered corporate shells. A sort of divergent evolution of culture happens the longer the arc-dwellers are kept apart from the balance of the world. Certain trid shows and music genres and artists flourish inside certain arcologies that seem bizarre and frankly stupid to the rest of the world, but inside the insular community, they are beloved—sacred, even. Here are a few examples of arcology-only media:

- *Bull le Pirate Ork* (Renraku Arcology, Paris, France)
- *Don't Do That, Bobby!* (Ares Trident Aquacology, Guiana Basin)
- *Martin Steves and the Redgrass Four* (Shiawase Arcology, Manhattan, UCAS)
- *The Neo-Gnats* (Fuchi arcology, Neo-Tokyo)
- *Rodeo Free America* (Cord Mutual Insurance Building, Atlanta, CAS)

- *Sounds Good to Me* (Proteus AG arkoblock, North Sea)
- *Tales from the Stuffer Shack* (Homeless Floors of A.C.H.E. in Seattle)
- *Wyrms Talk*, featuring Dunklezahn (Horizon Arcology, Arcology Mile, Los Angeles, California Free State)
- *You Have It Better* (Evo Saotome Aquadomes, Sea of Japan)
- *Zoom Kitty* (Sugamo Retirement Arcology, Neo-Tokyo)
- And, I drek you not, *Danke, Lofwyr* (Saeder-Krupp Arcology, Rhein-Ruhr-Megaplex, AGS)

▸ Could you elaborate on "sacred"?

▸ /dev/grrl

▸ I mean literally living and dying for the stuff. When a rogue wave messed with a live transmission of **Don't Do That, Bobby!**, production in the Ares Trident slumped sixty-six percent. I bet you think I'm being hyperbolic, but I'm not. There were even a few incidents of salarymen attacking Ares corpsec (which ended badly). It was the closest thing to a strike Ares has ever seen. Thankfully, the techs fixed it before Ares' "encouragement" specialists showed up, but I think Ares learned a valuable if difficult lesson about getting workers addicted to Arcology media that day: What you catch 'em with is what you keep 'em with.

▸ Dr. Spin

WORLD MUSIC

POSTED BY: DEZ

To many people, music is much more than a simple form of passive entertainment. For millennia, music has been used as a medium to share a people's history and fables, to idolize their values and warn against their vices, and to express their deepest and most volatile emotions. We can tell a great deal about a population through their music, both past and present, not simply by asking "how beautiful is this symphony?" and "how angry is this rap group?", but by delving deeper to ask "what inspired this beauty?", "why are they angry?", "what has historically brought them to this point, for better or worse?", and "what genre have they chosen to use, and with what instruments, and why?"

While all of these observations would be true in the western world, it goes without saying that music is just as valuable, if not even more so, to cultures unfamiliar to many of us. From the shamen wielding poets of old Japan and the Tuvan throat singers of Tibet to the psychedelic log drum and bass chants of the modern Mystic Council of Vanuatu and Bedouin Moto-Gang Trance, world

music is one of the more accessible and richly valuable sources for understanding a far-flung culture.

... and most of it sounds better than that shitty deathcore band that you own six T-shirts for.

SHARA MIDOUN, ALGERIA

There's a saying in Greece that the only value refugees have is the anger they produce. For such a noble cause as taking in, clothing, and feeding the downtrodden masses, it seems like there are few other topics that will so instantly and divisively create a vortex of rage—rage at the resources being spent on them or the lack of attention being paid to them, rage at their despair or at their very existence.

It is within this vortex of hate and Molotov cocktails that Shara Midoun exists. Born Algerian, Midoun experienced the life of a refugee as far back as her first memories. Her father was a member of the revolutionary group, and the family spent years constantly on the move. Shara first took up an AK as a six-year-old girl and has sworn never to do so again. Shortly after, the family was smuggled out of Algeria to France. There, she became enamored with the fast-paced, dirty-production rap records that were being produced by French and foreign nationals alike.

For years, Midoun has made nearly constant illegal trips to record in refugee camps across the globe. The stories of refugees' histories, pain, and hopes are all part of the message. Using little more than handheld recording equipment, she cycles through a constantly rotating cast of guest musicians collectively called "the '62," a nod to the year Algeria was established as a sovereign nation. Some of them you may have heard of: 3DEEP, Jailyard, Al-Kalimat, and Sir Jorges Paidi have all lent their voices. Some are simply refugees hoping to make it big enough to escape the shantytowns and camps, or orators who share their stories with their neighbors. Some are just children playing by the river.

At twenty-three years of age, Midoun is already matronly, overly concerned with her collaborators' lives, their well-being, and most importantly, their message, as she broadcasts it to as wide an audience as possible. Her songs alternate between children's lullabies and blazing condemnations of the institutions that forced people into camps to be forgotten. The '62 are as wide and varied as their points of origin, lending a broad wingspan to Midoun's solid core.

"Rocket Twilight," one of their songs, illustrates the fear and desperation of trying to cross the Mediterranean in a plastic boat, packed to the gills and with few supplies, while munitions go off in a staccato lightshow on the shore. One questions whether staying on shore might have been better than being adrift at sea. Rapper Mozam-

beek lends a verse centered on the hustle of a hard-working man in the tent cities, selling both bread and drugs at an equal value just to keep his family fed. A loose drum melody cuts through the entire song, playing the dual role of munitions in the distance and the refugees knocking their traditional songs on the side of the boat. An overbearing and anxiety-inducing synth rhythm emulates the fear of those onboard and serves as a reminder of the alarms that ring out at their very presence—no matter where they are.

A later track, titled "Crush," features Jordanian Gospel singer Maria Shatik and Ghanaian rapper Pizza Box, who, with little interruption from Midoun, fuse the catchy beats and melodies of Hip-life's synths and horns and the power of Shatik's passionate, raspy crooning in a dual condemnation of wars and of nations that close their borders to the victims.

Meanwhile, "Harry" is lyrically a heartbreaking song about a war correspondent that Midoun fell in love with, and who died only three months into their romance. However, it is set to samples from Mari Amanpul's "Ustav," a Bollywood song that Midoun's mother would make her dance to as a young girl for money to feed the family.

EL CANTO, AZTLAN

I first ran into El Canto in a tiny expat bar in Antigua City. Through a haze of red light cast through a room of smoke and spilled Mezcal, a tiny guitar melody peeked its head out above the din. Soon, it had been picked up, doubled, and played off. Then another coupling joined in, distorted and playing a countermelody. A voice whispered above it all, raspy and powerful. Together, they grew, and multiplied, and became a twisting beast of sound—surely too many people for this small bar to hold.

What I found was a small woman, maybe a meter and a half tall, made almost entirely of lean muscle. Half of her long black hair was shaved completely off, the other half bore beads and feathers that draped over her leather vest, nearly to the tattooed guitar she was strapped to. She seemed to be in a trance, completely lost in the music, dancing and bouncing on bare feet, wrestling with the guitar, as if the chaos of this forty-part counter-counter-counter melody would overpower her at any moment if she took one wrong step.

This was El Canto (translating simultaneously to "The Word" and "The Crow"). Born Mayan, raised with Mexican traditions, she struggles to find a place for either identity in the Aztlan world of mecacorps and drones. Her lyrics, mostly spoken in Yucatec, share both the Mayan mythology of her childhood and more modern concerns of a lost soul [see sidebar]. Her guitar work draws on influences from Spanish colonization, to 1960s

American rock, to modern distortions and looping—with a heavy emphasis on the latter. Through this, she is able to weave layer atop layer of sounds, music, motifs, and voices. All of this is being juggled by a switchboard with hundreds of buttons at her feet, which she dances spastically around.

That one person can embody such a long history and such a rich volume of sound is a marvel. I'm not ashamed to say that I had more than a few too many glasses of cheap Mezcal that night, just to watch El Canto's show to the end.

UMSAKAZO, AZANIA

Azania has always been a land of clashing cultures. Seventeen tribes laid claim to the land before the British drew borders and the Dutch sucked it dry. Indian migrants somehow found promise in cheap labor, and German investment worked its way into the cracks of society and eroded them to valleys. This was all before the Awakening. When dragons fell from skies, races transcended from social constructs based on skin color to physiological definitions based on genetic mutation, alien bugs swarmed, and magic clashed with technology, the rickety post-apartheid state nearly collapsed under the weight of its own schizophrenic insecurities.

This is where Umsakazo was born. This is

where they grew up; in the slums by the river, blocks away from Cheese Boys, in rubbish heaps, and serving blonde, beautiful Tirna in pressed whites. A batch of tribal elves and third-generation expats led by Wakymbi vocalist Xavier Thomas and pan-instrumentalist Jack Redwood, they were, to say the least, at a disadvantage. Despite this, they were determined to break away from their past—and the past of the entire country—from the very beginning. Their stated goal is to create a new sound, a new culture from the disparate ashes of the dozens that came before them.

They relentlessly take to this task by employing the instruments around them in broken, unconventional ways. A Mog and Doncomatic Keyboard, a crackling Speak-n-Spell, a bodged-together 808, all decrepit and found in a trash heap, come together to form a driving, bass-heavy melody, punctuated by android voices singing Xhosa and Zulu war chants. Car bonnets and empty beer bottles become a drum set, Grandfather's tired voice rasps over the sounds of Jo-burg outside the window. By the next track, we're tossed back in to an eerie acoustic lullaby that could be sung in the middle of nowhere under the stars, or in the blown-out theater down the street, then out-of-tune horns and a broken piano blare over Xavier's crooning paranoia [see sidebar].

EL CANTO, FLORES VERDES (TRANSLATED)

I watch the way you move, you stretch,
Be here by my side, white blossom,
Now I see the tears in your eyes,
I can turn them to gold,
Or we can run faster than the flood,
Your love is worth more than gold to me
Let the sun cast through me,
See my intention, look closely,
But throw me in the river of destiny,
They'll call Ullil against me,
Put your faith in me, we'll be just fine
Meet me near the green flowers,
Where we'll run careless and free,
Meet me near the green flowers,
Wipe your eyes and see,
Take my hand,
Take my hand

Black snake in a suit and tie,
You weave within me,
You may have the biggest heart I've ever seen,
How can this be?
Take your scepter and take your chair,
Now tell me, what do you feel?
Fire and flames, our houses will burn,
And I will rise to the sky beside you,
The embers will fly,
All I see is your eyes
Meet me near the green flowers,
Where we'll run careless and free,
Meet me near the green flowers,
I need your eyes to see,
Take my hand,
Take my hand

UMSAKAZO, KLEIN SEUNTJIE (TRANSLATED)

Wipe the sweat from my brow,
I ducked out
We've got dead messengers,
You've got puppets,
We've got dead messengers,
And you've got puppets
Specters in the corner,

Specters in the room,
Specters in the corner,
Specters are hiding in my room,
Follow my tune from the city,
Follow my pipe far away,
Let's go far away

There are few enough bands in the world that can take so little and create so much, but Umsakazo seems to exist solely to fill this role. From the trash hills of their country and the remnants of their ancestry, they are forging a new patchwork future.

THE LAST DAWAYU, NIGERIA

In Old Cameroon, now Nigeria, there was once a tribe called the Dawayu. Their days consisted of farming, drinking, and most importantly, making music. These days were deceptively simple, as all of this was done under the knowing gaze of their ancestors—quite literally. After a Dawayu passed away, their body was buried for a time, and left to decompose. When the tissue had mostly rotted away or more often been eaten, the corpse's skull was removed with a long staff and set upon a shelf outside of the family home. There they could watch the fields and the daily comings and goings of the family.

Westerners would naturally balk at this grave tradition and call it nonsense, but in fact, the Dawayu have a strong lineage of shamans who speak to the spirits of the ancestors, the animals and trees, and even the forces that control the weather—all through song. These traditions were first documented by Rigel Wheat in the early 1980s but have long been overlooked as hoodoo and nonsense. In time, the Dawayu died out like so many other rural tribes in southern hemispheres. With no one to remember them, their name vanished, and all traces of their existence seemed to turn to dust. Then, The Last Dawayu spoke up.

Clad in a hand-crafted wooden mask, and possessed of the shamanic talents of his ancestors, The Last Dawayu channels the restless spirits of his tribe to once again make music and dance among us. Ancient melodies from beyond the physical realm call out over synth and drum machines, reviving the Dawayu histories for a new age. While the musical style derives from the ancient rhythms, they are fed through a new-world synth and bass styling.

The historical content and uniquely necromantic nature of The Last Dawayu's work has made him a curiosity in numerous eclectic circles. I've heard that he was in a London bunker club, but I saw him near Liberia, in the middle of the desert with mystics and pilgrims. I've heard that academics and even military representatives have begun taking an active interest in him as well.

LUMIERE, JAPAN

Shoegaze has a long and fabled history of flying under the radar until very recently. For decades, heavy distortion, muted vocals, and eight-minute instrumentals punctuated by explosions of sound

and distant cries have come from all corners of the world. While the elves of Tír na nÓg have rightly cornered this market with fae whimsy and over-the-top visuals, Japan has been playing this game longer than just about anyone. From the days of Citrus and Meryl, bands have been rebelling against the salaryman preset and whining into neon-pink-and-purple basement clubs into the wee hours of the morning.

Lumiere continues that tradition. Armed with two vocalists—Shinzo Yakamaya and Arita Oko—and an ensemble of instrumentalists so deep that some have to play offstage at smaller venues, Lumiere has been subtly, quietly keeping the fire of rebellion burning. Their lyrics shamelessly explore sexuality, drugs, the adventures of youth, and flights of fancy—the antithesis, perhaps even the enemy, of the strictly regulated Japanese way of life.

One absolutely cannot help but get swept up in the moment when Yakamaya and Oko call out to each other over the minute-long gulf of silence, the only sound being the delicate dance of shrine bells in the background, emulating the night sky's twinkling stars. The thirty-piece explosion of sound that erupts from that silence is undeniably a force of nature. It is a scream in the face of overbearing tradition, social constraints, and self-imposed guilt.

That is what Lumiere is: a brilliant, shattering light disrupting an empty, otherwise featureless void.

OO GHYAP, TIBET

The Maya Cloud is waning. The misty veil that blocked all travel into or out of Tibet has been slowly weakening for over fifteen years. For two generations, the people have lived in absolute isolation, their lives run by doctrine and tradition, and that is slowly coming to an end. Various corps have lined the exterior of the magic wall, waiting in the wings to supply the rare traveler with whatever new and amazing experiences they may need.

Enter Oo Ghyap, a twenty-something, heavily tattooed, ex-Buddhist monk who's redefining what it means to find Nirvana. Taking a name that roughly translates to "breathe," he is intent on breaking down conventions and barriers while exploring the essence of what it means to be part of the bigger picture.

He makes his music with smuggled-in equipment. We don't know if he's recording in a basement, at a mountain hideaway, or in town square with his middle finger raised high. Wherever it is he plays, he just smuggles the sound back out on data sticks and sends it out into the world.

To call what he makes "punk" would be an absolute disservice. His external influences are the pre-Awakening compact discs that were hidden

from the religious authorities almost a hundred years ago (clearly including some Riot and DangerSEX). The few tunes that he hears outside of the bubble seem like mere curiosities, and whatever someone has put on the media player that he was given only roughly translate in broad strokes. These form a crooked backbone to his work, but the flair is all Tibetan. An Erhu guitar and a half-dozen Tuvan throat-singers drone a chorus of melodies over a New York-worthy drum-thrashing, and Oo Ghyap pierces through it all with an unruly, angry racket, all faded band t-shirts and whiskey breath [see sidebar].

This, you must understand, is his freedom. To break free from the monastic, the regulated, the controlled; to escape the prison that he, and his father, and his father's father were born into; to transcend beyond the finite and corporeal, and to ascend—through uprising and unrepentant expression—to a greater plane and become one with the big picture, to breathe deep, that first desperate gasp of air after suffocating for his entire life.

- ▶ Oo Ghyap might be based out of Tibet, but Tuvan throat singing is originally from Mongolia—where the number-three monk in the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy, the Bogd Khan, basically runs the place. There have been rumors that he's had a way to communicate through the Maya Cloud for years, which would explain how Oo Ghyap was able to get instruments into Tibet.
- ▶ Traveler Jones

KAIHOE (NEW ZEALAND)

To the Maori people, the ocean is everything. Land is just a bunk bed for the night, a terrestrial spot on the vast expanse of waves that they consider the Maori Nation. The water brings them food, allows them to travel, trade, and form connections. While some of the younger Auckland generation would prefer a stable life in a biz firm, wearing a suit every day and flying to corp meetings in Dubai and Tokyo, there are some who still remember the waves.

Kaihoe is a young woman, barely on the other side of her teen years. Born on a rural island off

the coast of New Zealand, she has a fanatical dedication to the dying traditions of her people. Forbidden from performing the Haka, playing sport, and piloting a boat, she has turned to the one thing she has—music. Her instruments, more often than not, come from the ocean. Driftwood chimes and a drum kit made from washed up bottles and trash, an old acoustic guitar that her father had before donning a suit, and the waves themselves.

With these humble tools, she tells the tales of the Maori, myths that she's memorized from the crib about gods fishing the islands up from the sea, heroes who sailed for distant lands, and the stars they navigate by. She sings the chants that her ancestors called out from the shore to welcome visitors, and openly weeps on one track as they leave. She tells stories about love, home, and family—the simple, critical elements of Maori life.

It's easy to lie in a hammock with a fruity drink and listen to Kaihoe; in fact, it's encouraged. While you do, however, remember that you're listening to possibly the last person who knows these stories. You're listening to an audio-museum, the last vestiges of a culture before it sets out to sea.

VENUES

Let's talk locations. Sure, there are plenty of arenas to see your favorite acts. Big glitzy megadomes, packed with frenzied fans and merch vendors selling the hottest new holo-weave Ts for the low, low price of nana's replacement liver. That's not what we're all here for. We're here to discuss those cubbyholes of character, places the cops and the cops either don't recognize or don't bother, and where a man might be able to put his feet up or rage the night away with relative comfort.

I've been around a bit, and I've found that the best method of finding the real heart and soul of a city is to ask your favorite bartender where he goes when the shift ends. What place does he knock back a few in during the wee hours? You'll need to work up a rapport with them first, but it's a question that's gotten me into a number of hidden gems, sitting beside some incredible folks, planning some

OO GHYAP, GYUR TOG (TRANSLATED)

I can't reach you
I've tried so often,
There's been a few times,
I've been at the edge of your vision,
Today won't ever start,
Not until ...
I know you're not open to me,
It's been a while,
You weren't there to see me try
It won't start,
It's far away,

You won't reach it,
It's far away, and I'll still be here
I know you don't trust me,
I don't understand why,
Why you can't put me out of your mind,
Today won't ever start,
Not until ...
Strip down, stand up,
Strip down, stand up,
It's far away



escapade, sharing a laugh and some great tunes. A few times, it's landed me on the wrong end of a broken bottle, but that's the odd case.

I'll try to save you the footwork, but read the crowd as best you can.

TAINARON (THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF HELLAS)

The Greeks have a long, long history of cult activity. Way back in the day, many gods' services were kept secret because they were seen as blasphemous, heretical, or obscene. Worshipers would hide in basements or make pilgrimages into the mountains and far plains to conduct their unsavory mass away from prying eyes. It might be an understatement to say that sex, drugs, and rock & roll were frequently on the menu. Orgies were a given. Braziers of intoxicants were burned to give the area a vision-inducing haze, and wine flowed freely. Music and dancing set the pace—which was often a frenzy.

These practices obviously fell out of habit over the millennia, and the arenas and glades were forgotten. Then in '61, Halley's Comet passed. While the masses marveled at shedim, orichalcum, Ghostwalker, and Athens, smaller miracles were happening all around.

Like all of these things, there's a dozen stories, each as likely as the next. The one I've heard most often is that a farmer saw strange lights emanating from a cave mouth in the hills. When he approached it, he heard music and hundreds of voices. Inside, he saw the ghosts of his ancestors in the middle of a cult spectacle. Apparently taking inspiration from the swaying, seizing bodies, he began inviting certain discreet individuals in modern day Bacchanals. Of course, who knows how much of that is true?

What I can tell you is, the cave called Tainaron does exist. Its primary function is to be a stage for hypnotic, riotous, and profane talents. All around them, a throng of revelers indulge in every sensation imaginable, moving as a mass, either erotically, violently, or both. You'll catch a contact high as soon as you step down into the dimly lit chambers, but a more substantial buzz is easy to find.

Possibly the most appealing aspect of the whole bundle is that secrecy is paramount. It's invite-only. Everyone wears a mask. Musicians are inspired to write new music for the gig, or to play "covers" of their own jams to maintain anonymity. If you're the type who wants to have a near-death experience of hedonistic glory, but you don't want your chummers to know, see if you can get an invite into Tainaron.

MINDARIE WATER TOWER (PERTH, AUSTRALIA)

I was only passing through Perth. It was a long layover that'd left me anxious for every minute wasted, terrified that the story might slip away before I even arrived on scene. I decided that I desperately needed a glass of gin, if only to distract myself. I did what I normally do: I got to know the bartender at the first decent-looking bar I found, and I asked where he'd go after hours. What I didn't know at the time was that he was the head of the Perth Bartenders' Association. As you may imagine, I was not directed to Nevin's Pub around the corner.

On the far north side of the city, right along the coast, there's a small neighborhood named Mindarie. It may have been quaint forty years ago, but now it lies abandoned, an entire suburb left to rot. And it is here, between the crumbling houses and the rusted cars, that the bartenders, the cooks, the hotel workers, and late-night locals come to meet, drink, and party. And when the service industry parties, they bring the best. That night, I spent ten nuyen on a gin and tonic, and spent the rest of the night drinking top-shelf wine out of the bottle and eating gourmet marinated beef and roasted vegetables out of a lunch box for nothing but a smile and a story.

While the entire neighborhood is fair game, most of the activity happens beneath the water tower. The locals have built a stage between its legs—just a simple wooden floor with string lights and colorful rags strung between the struts. The effect isn't far from the stage that a group of children might build in their backyard to present their own play—which is to say, it's charming.

On the particular night that I was there, Karen Gillette, a French cellist and folk singer, was on the stage, looping and crooning to a field of campfires in the early morning. I'd been told that local acts, underground and content to stay there, often take this stage. It was Perth's little secret, like a neighborhood-wide block party at 3 a.m. No record execs would come steal their entertainment away, just like no corp suit would drink their wine. Like one great family, they had agreed that this place was sacred and just for friends.

I ended up walking back along Perth harbor as the sun came up the next morning, my anxieties temporarily eased.

MAINGAY NA ISLA (PHILIPPINES)

There really is no lead-in to this one, I'm sorry to say. There's no historical background, no cultural significance. This place does not offer you a lens through which to view humanity. It's just freaking cool.

The Philippines are a group of over seven thousand islands whose exact number changes based on the tide and the current ice cap status. A couple thousand of them are inhabited, but a lot of them get ignored as either too small, too short on resources, or too isolated. Luckily, if you're only looking to get down for about twelve hours with a hundred or so like-minded individuals, none of that shit matters.

That's the case with Maingay na Isla. Here's the deal: Passenger boats in Manila are always looking to turn a quick buck, so if you ask them at the end of their shift, they'll take you to an island an hour or so to the west of the city. They'll charge a steep price, but it's worth it. Grab a few friends and split it. On any given night, the island is full of foreigners looking to keep the party going. A half-dozen bands will inevitably play, although they're rarely scheduled in advance and almost never publicized widely. You can drink, relax by the ocean, listen to some jams, or rage right in front of the stage. Whatever your preferred flavor of desert island is, there will be plenty like you. Right before the sun comes up in the morning, when you're either coming down or at peak frenzy, a fleet of passenger boats will arrive to take the crowd back to the city before their first round of carting tourists around.

It should be pointed out that this is not a tourist destination. You won't find posters on the streets or boatmen trying to scam in you into taking a ride. Maybe they all know there'll be business without the extra effort. Maybe it's out of a need to keep the island under the radar, safe from real estate developers and sleazy agents. Whatever the reason, nobody really advertises it. Besides, it's not really the kind of place you'd like if you're wearing a Hawaiian shirt and sipping a piña colada. I found out about it from an Aztláner bartender who liked my accent. She'd been in the city for six months and only just found out about it a few weeks before I came along.

No one knows how it started; I asked a dozen people and got a dozen different answers. You hear tales of this sagely bar owner or that passing corp suit looking to make an extra buck out of scraps, but ultimately it seems to have manifested from the sea, from a need of the locals and those passing through to have a bit of freedom and isolation to cut loose for a while.

CAFÉ PERCUMA (JAKARTA, JAVANESE REPUBLIC)

In every war zone, there will be an expat bar. It's a place for mercs, journalists, contractors, and interested parties to go and let down their guard. A middle ground. Switzerland. And through the fall of Indonesia and the subsequent sundering, in-fighting, martial law, and fruitless dreams of

expansionism, Café Percuma was Jakarta's. Established in 2012 in the Jalan Jaska area—what used to be the foreigner district—this tiny venue was immediately swarmed by anyone from out of town who wanted a piece of the nation's carcass. When the military pushed outward toward Malaysia, most mercs spent at least one night within its cramped walls. As times have calmed more recently, Café Percuma has laid low, acting as a place for outsiders to meet up, make a deal, buy cheap liquor, and see a show.

If you follow Jalan Jaska to its eastern end, you'll find a neon "X" in the window. To the left of that is a small, unmarked black door. This is the way in. Beyond that is, essentially, a pirate bar. It is small. That must be noted. Even the gentlest troll carries the potential of disaster in these tight walls. The entire thing is made of decades-old wood, except for the corrugated metal ceiling. It is lit only by candles, the largest of which creates a massive wax mountain about halfway down the right wall. Sitting like a Buddha shrine in a wannabe mage's dorm room, this pillar has been continually built on, candle by candle, throughout the bar's six decades of operation. There are a half-dozen tables along the other wall, a small bar in back, and an empty space near the door which has perpetually been used as a "stage."

That's it.

What, you no doubt ask, makes Café Percuma so vitally important to the music scene of Jakarta?

In the same way that it serves as a middle ground for runners, mercs, militaries, and buyers, Café Percuma is a safe haven for musicians and artists of every persuasion. With eighty percent of the country being Indonesian Muslim, a ban on any music seen as sensual, vicious, or otherwise sinful was easily passed into law. That ban extends to the furthest borders of the Javanese Republic and ends at Jalan Jaska, due in large part to Café Percuma. By 2 a.m. most nights, the party spills out into the street rather than pack into the tiny hole. Whether they're writhing beneath the string lights to Gending Gelam or thrashing to Gor Sapura Punk, with sight of Café Percuma, they are safe.

It's a bit of a mystery how this works. The current owner, a small, round man who calls himself Robbie, said that the bartender leaves a warm case of soda on the corner for the police every night. The innuendo then continues with the cops taking the warm drinks to a distant snack shack to "trade for cold bottles." Whatever that entails, the officers seem content for the night and don't show up until the following day.

THE ENCLAVE (BEIRUT)

Beirut is home for me most of the time. It's a weird hybrid of European trends and Middle Eastern traditions. Lebanon has no official state reli-

gion, and a cardboard cut-out of a government. It houses major investments from all of the Big Ten, acts as a backdoor to and from the Middle East as well as a smuggling port in and out of Israel. It is technically an independent state, but it's occupied by the New Islamic Jihad and hosts hundreds of Syrian peacekeepers. It may be the only place in the world where German soldiers can twirl drunkenly down the boardwalk while hardline fundamentalists with AKs stand guard a dozen meters away. Everything here is a circus act. Beirut is a worn-out clown, riding a unicycle across a tight-rope while juggling cats, and he's not particularly good at any of those things.

There was a time when Beirut had a thriving nightlife. Sure, there were clubs, but there were also cafés that hosted rappers and slam poets and bars where the best local rockers could play with the volume maxed out. I guess the short skirts, mohawks and piercings are still welcome on the Corniche, they're just tightly regulated and specifically sold to investors and soldiers. Any locals found partaking in those places are swiftly punished.

The Enclave is the answer to this culture shift. It is hidden well inside of the city, in a bombed-out neighborhood where more buildings are lying across the road than still standing. Just getting into it is a bit of a journey. Graffiti artists like to paint massive murals on the side of the three-story building—last time I was there, it was of a scarfed elven resistance fighter firing an AK around the corner. Just down the way, over a pile of wreckage sprawled out from the deli across the street, there's a place where vines and overgrown trees obscure a door leading to an alley. The alley turns into stairs that actually lead you into the second level of the building. There, hidden and obscured by the completely overgrown park behind it, is a terrace and a bar, littered with graffiti and lit by flickering neon lights.

That's just the entrance, though. Within the Enclave, all three stories above ground and the two levels below have been divided into a maze of small auditoriums. The halls branch and turn unexpectedly, opening into an intimate space with each decorated and suited to its own style of performance. It's tight. The stairs are an afterthought in most cases, wedged into a corner or spiraling through a bar in one instance. The halls are claustrophobic, and even I have to turn sideways to slip through some places.

The Enclave's unique architecture offers two generous benefits. For one, on your way to your intended destination, you'll likely get lost and stumble into a few other rooms with artists you never would have known about. I'd guess forty percent of my current Primary playlist was filled up this way. The second, maybe more obvious advantage to some of the more violence-oriented individuals is that the place is an absolute safe house. I can't

say if it was intentional, but between the winding, semi-hidden, high-ground entrance, the tight, winding halls, and the awkward stairs between levels, the Enclave proficiently bottlenecks any and all potential peacekeepers or morality police.

THE BAR (LIMA, PERU)

Run by expats, backpackers, and runners who need a place to lie low, The Bar in Lima is not a taste of home, wherever that may be—it's a taste of *everyone's* home, wherever that may be. It's a seventy-thirty ratio of light-to-dark blended beer because "it tastes better that way, and fuck pretensions." It's the Korean grad student from LA telling you about the mummies that were found on the far north side of the city at 2 a.m. over a bowl of "Cajun" chicken wings that may as well be straight Sriracha with a heavy hand of Mrs. Dash. It's BBQ chips on your sauerkraut quesadilla while shit-talking the rowdy Brits on the other side of the wall with a troll from Toronto. It's a gritty elf playing classic blues rock in the corner with a Bollywood trid projected behind him. It's a Renraku salaryman who comes in just to pass out at the end of the bar every night. It's Czech lessons from a Russian contractor, and an Argentinian professor who's just stopping over on the way to the Urban Brawl World Cup.

The Bar is not a melting pot. It is not fusion, and it is not pretty. It is a stupid, wonderful, chaotic, desperate mess, and it is one of my favorite places on the planet.

Started by a Wisconsin troll and Peruvian elf couple as a way to simultaneously escape and fuse their different interests, the music scene at the Bar is accordingly schizophrenic. Sure, you'll see plenty of local talent, from the buskers to start-up Hueyno-Tondero grunge kids. You'll also see just about anyone worth seeing who's passing through Lima. Truth be told, I don't know how the proprietors make contact and convince busy talents to fit a two

or three-hour gig into their already crammed schedules. Maybe they have connections with bigger fish. Maybe they have deep pockets. Maybe it's magic. At this point, it may just be that word of mouth has spread in just the right circles and the bands seek out the Bar. Whatever the method, over the years, I've seen UK punk, Chicago-style witch house, Japanese neo-shamisen, German folk, and Angolan club tracks performed within this tiny dive.

PLAY THAT FRAGGIN' MUSIC, BREEDER

Running the streets is wiz and all, but sometimes you want a little something different from the Sixth World. Whether you're a rocker looking for inspiration in crime, or you run a cover as a band, or just want to make some cash on the side, here are the rules you need to start jamming for cred. Just make sure the spotlight doesn't ruin your shadows.

SYNTHLINKS

Synthlinks allow musicians an unprecedented amount of control over their craft. Operated through DNI, the musician has direct neural control over what comes out of their instrument, provided it is equipped with a music rig.

While in the past, some posers just plugged in and made others watch their slovenly bodies drool as the music dribbled out a speaker, no one puts up with that crap nowadays. There's plenty of wailers out there dying to get noticed and putting on a better show. The real showstoppers are the performers who give the audience a good physical show to go with the sounds. Not everyone can do both at the same time, which separates the drek from the dareos. Of course, not everyone is a Teiko or Maria Mercurial, so you take what you can get if you're at a live show.

WAX

The Wax is slang for the music industry itself. There are, of course, similar industries for trids and other media, but they don't have cool slang names, scan? When a rocker shoots out a new track and it fails hard, the kiddies call it "drek wax." The Wax itself is made up of popular bands, one-hit wonders, and the writers, techs, producers, and managers at the corp level who make it all happen. This means that even though a fraggin' novahot band busts wiz wax out their wonder holes weekly, they aren't getting most of the nuyen it sells. Downloads over the Matrix only cost a nuyen or two, and the Wax takes the lion's share off the top. To keep paying the bills, rockers need to keep rocking—and when they stop, they're replaced yesterday. Thank-

MUSIC AND SKILLS

Singing, playing an instrument, and dancing all fall under the Performance aspect of the Con skill. This section is focused on music, but the principles can be easily adapted to any other form of artistic endeavor, such as painting or writing. In order for a character to lead a double life as a shadowrunner and artist, they must specialize in Performance (it wouldn't help to have expertise in Performance and a specialization in their chosen branch, but it's not a requirement).

Unlike other Skill tests, using the Con skill for a gig doesn't always use Charisma (but Charisma is still important). When using an instrument or performing a dance at a show, Agility may be substituted for Charisma, at the gamemaster's discretion.

fully, there are other ways for those with the talent to make some cash.

GO LIVE OR GO DIE

One of the strangest ironies of the Sixth World is that the more technological and “perfect” art and music gets, the more people want to connect with something real. Sure, the music technically sounds better, nearly flawless, due to the way music can be piped directly into your brain-meat, manipulating your mind into being addicted to it, but it still doesn’t compete with a live concert. Throngs of sweaty, grindin’, singin’ kids still fill clubs and concert halls every day of the week, despite working eighty hours that same week (or maybe because of it).

The Wax uses live shows to test new material, to scout new talent, and to charge astro prices to parade out well-known commodities. Of course, the Wax isn’t the only horse in this town, chummer. Local shows pop up all the time. This is where you hear the good stuff. Not the “wiz wax,” but the solid shit that hasn’t been beat down, shut up, or sold out. Solid gold youth, omae.

So the good news is, if you can make an impact, you can make some nuyen. If you make a solid impact, you can make a name for yourself. And in the rare event that you make a crater with your impact, you can make a difference. So if you think you got what it takes, chummer, go do some musical murder and kill it for me, willya?

IMPACT

When making a performance in-game, the Impact of the performance is judged by a number of factors. The first is the rating of the performance

REHEARSAL TIME

Performance	Rehearsal Time
Club Date	10 days
Recording a Single	15 days
Recording an Album	60 days
Major Concert	90 days
Concert Tour	180 days

(whatever single artistic endeavor is performed, like a single concert, an entire tour, a painting, a dance, etc.). An individual piece’s rating is gained by making a Performance test, which is Con + (Agility or Charisma) test, as determined by the gamemaster (Agility would be used for the more physical performance disciplines, such as dance). The number of hits scored on this test is the rating of the piece. If a group is performing, take the average result of all members’ Performance tests (divide the number of hits by the number of people in the group, rounding up).

Performance tests can’t be made whenever the character wants. In order to make a Performance test, the artist(s) need to practice.

If the artist(s) has a manager (or band leader), they may make a Leadership test (Influence + Charisma) against a threshold of 5 hits to encourage (or intimidate) the band to practice harder. Divide the base time by the number of net hits. A failed test means the group needs the entire rehearsal period.

CREATING A PIECE OF ART

Creating a piece (a song, a painting, etc.) is different than performing live. Characters can spe-

IMPACT MODIFIERS

Group Test

Divide total number of hits by number of players

Dice Pool Modifiers to Characters’ Individual Tests

Venue is Matrix-only (or has a dedicated Matrix presence) and character is a technomancer	+2
Artist is using magic to enhance performance	+2
Artist is a sasquatch, vampire, pixie, or naga	+3

Training/Rehearsal

Character is not rehearsed or under-rehearsed	-4
Character is not specialized in Performance	-4
Character is defaulting on test (isn’t trained in Con)	-8

Instrument/Gear Quality (based on lifestyle, unless gamemaster allows otherwise)

No gear or drek gear (Street Lifestyle)	-4
Worn or poor gear (Squatter Lifestyle)	-2
Average gear (Low Lifestyle)	0
High quality gear (Middle Lifestyle)	+1
Custom or Masterwork gear (High Lifestyle)	+2
State-of-the-art gear (Luxury Lifestyle)	+3

cialize in Composing with the Con skill to focus on creating wiz wax. The base time to create a piece is 10 days per minute of the song or dance, or per square or cubic decimeter of canvas or other medium, while other forms of art may take even longer, at the gamemaster's discretion. Make a Performance test with a threshold of 6, or 4 if the character has the Composing specialization, and divide the base time by the number of net hits. A failed test means the piece automatically has an Impact of 1 (see below).

In order to promote and sell the piece, the character (or their agent) makes an Etiquette test (Influence + Charisma) against a threshold of (7 –the rating of the piece). The piece then sells for a base price of (500 x net hits) nuyen; the gamemaster may allow the artist(s) an Influence + Charisma test to affect the final sale price. Normal Wax contracts take three months to pay out for a wiz wax song.

PLAYING A GIG

After creating the piece, the next step is performing or displaying it. Performances can be live shows, recorded albums, or any kind of exhibition. Of course, any artist can use an existing song to woo a crowd, but in order to have Impact, it must be an original; an original song, album, concert, dance, etc. First, determine the rating of the piece, as described above. Then, the artist makes a Performance test; if a group is performing, average the net hits on their individual Performance tests. Multiply the result by the rating of the piece. This number is the Performance rating.

If the performance only contains a single piece, add the piece's rating to the Performance

rating. If it's an album, concert, portfolio, or other collection, the gamemaster should determine the average quality of the included pieces and assign it a value from 1 (wet drek) to 10 (sonic supernova), then add that number to the Performance rating.

A glitch cuts the rating of the piece being performed in half, rounded down. A critical glitch on a Performance test here means an automatic 1 Impact (tough soy, chumbatta).

Example: The Fragging Unicorns are playing a single gig at Dante's Inferno. The band has five members tonight; with hits on the Performance tests as follows: Rust-bucket: 5, MBT: 4, Dark 'n' Stuff: 6, Abilene: 4, and Rev. Blackfeather: 6, for an average of 5. They are performing songs from an older album, Bug City Sushi, which had a rating of 6. Multiplying their average Performance tests (5) by the rating of the album (6) gives a Performance rating of 30, making it an average performance.

DREK WAX OR WIZ WAX?

To check the impact a performance makes, check the Performance rating on the Impact Chart. Gamemasters should use narrative and common sense when using this table. A group with few Performance specializations and low Charisma can theoretically use Edge, get lucky, and have a novahot impact, but if that's the case, treat it like an exploitable one-hit wonder, not the start of a career. Likewise, if an extremely talented group with average Charisma 6 and Performance expertise makes a crap roll and has a drek wax performance, treat it as a hiccup; fans are disappointed and critics slag the artists, but not much else happens.

IMPACT CHART

Performance Rating

9 or less:

10 to 21:

22 to 36:

31 to 60:

61 to 96:

97 or more:

Impact

Drekstained. A failed performance. No one buys it. Artists' status is reduced. If they're already a Newb, increase the difficulty in getting a new gig by 4 until they pull off an Excellent or better performance.

Crap performance. Poor talent, no authenticity, and/or lack of passion was on display. This performance makes critics and promoters wonder if the artist is on the decline or never had anything to begin with. Add 2 to difficulty in getting a new gig until an Excellent or better performance happens.

Average performance. Artist pulled off what was expected. No more, no less.

Excellent performance. Decrease difficulty in getting a new gig by 1.

Neon Swag performance. Getting a new gig is automatic.

Novahot sureshot. Critics, promoters, and talent scouts are scrambling to grab 'em. Gigs, contracts, and contacts are offered generously. Ten, and possibly fifteen, minutes of fame are here! Next booking is automatic. Artist's status is Increased.

ARTIST STATUS

Whether you're in this for the money or not, money is always part of the wax biz. During character creation, artists may purchase Status with their starting gear nuyen. Costs for each Status is listed under **Cost at Character Creation**. If no status is bought, the artist is considered a Newb. Provided the artist makes at least one performance per month, lifestyle costs associated with each Status are considered paid.

BOOKING

Each Status has a booking difficulty associated. This is the target for booking tests that the band leader (or manager, promoter, etc.) must make an Etiquette test (Influence + Charisma) in order to get the artist a new gig.

ARTIST'S CUT

This is the amount of money an artist at this Status level gets paid for a single performance. A single performance is equal to a single night's work. Note that a group performance does not increase the payout. It must be split between members.

ROYALTIES

Royalties is the amount an artist of this Status gets paid after Matrix distribution happens. It is paid three months after the performance ends. Payment is based on roughly an album's worth (one hour) of music. Multiply or divide accordingly, based on length of performance. As above, a group performance does not increase payout. Pay is split between group members.

RECOGNITION

This is the chance someone on the street will recognize the artist—not very handy when running the shadows. This number represents the threshold the average person on the street must hit in order to recognize the artist. If the artist is recognized while on a shadowrun, decrease Reputation by 1 and increase Heat by 1.

STATUS

There are six types of Status an artist can achieve.

NEWB

Cost at Character Creation: Free (Nowhere to go but up, sleazeball)
Lifestyle Included: Street
Booking: 6
Artist's Cut: 50¥ x Performance Rating

Royalties: 50¥ x 1D6 x Performance Rating
Recognition: None (No one care about you, not even your mamma, newb)

OPENER

Cost at Character Creation: 500¥ (Almost as good as free!)
Lifestyle Included: Squatter
Booking: 5
Artist's Cut: 100¥ x Performance Rating
Royalties: 100¥ x 1D6 x Performance Rating
Recognition: 14 (You'll be more excited than they are)

SIDELINER

Cost at Character Creation: 1,000¥ (You gotta spend it to make it)
Lifestyle Included: Low
Booking: 5
Artist's Cut: 200¥ x Performance Rating
Royalties: 150¥ x 1D6 x Performance Rating
Recognition: 10 (the most famous person in ... where are you from, again?)

STEADY ROCKER

Cost at Character Creation: 10,000¥ (Costs a lot to look trashy all the time)
Lifestyle Included: Middle
Booking: 4
Artist's Cut: 300¥ x Performance Rating
Royalties: 100¥ x 2D6 x Performance Rating
Recognition: 8 (Don't I know you? Yeah, yeah, you dated my sister once!)

SIXTH WORLD STAR

Cost at Character Creation: 100,000¥ (Are you a runner who rocks or a rocker who runs?)
Lifestyle Included: High
Booking: 3
Artist's Cut: 500¥ x Performance Rating
Royalties: 200¥ x 2D6 x Performance Rating
Recognition: 6 (Holy drek! I can't believe I drank a soykaf from the same Soybucks as ... *you!*)

NOVASTAR

Cost at Character Creation: N/A (Sorry, chummer. You can't get everything you want right away)
Lifestyle Included: Luxury
Booking: 2
Artist's Cut: 1,000¥ x Performance Rating
Royalties: 300¥ x 2D6 x Performance Rating
Recognition: 4 (Oh. My. Ghost. I ... Can I have your autograph? Right here ... above my Jet-black tattoo!)

DANCING FOR THE MAN OR SHOUTING FOR THE PEOPLE?

When determining payouts (Artist's Cut and Royalties), an artist may choose to Shout for the People. This means that not only do they strive to perform well, but also are looking to make a social difference with their music. Social commentary, rabble-rousing, controversy, pushing boundaries, calls for aid, or any other cause that is not making money is considered Shouting for the People. When an artist sings for the people, they can take any of their Performance Rating and, after determining Impact, convert it to Expression Points. Points converted in this way do not count toward Artist's Cut or Distribution payouts (it doesn't play well with the sponsors).

Example: Reese Frenzy pumps out a Neon Swag performance at 65 Performance Rating. Since Reese doesn't care about money, he converts 60 of that Rating into Expression Points, leaving only 5 Performance Rating to get paid through Artist's Cut and Distribution.

EXPRESSION POINT EXCHANGE

Expression Points aren't worthless. They can get an audience to change in a meaningful way, like only art can. They can get an audience (not an individual) to:

- Adopt an attitude
- Agree with a point of view
- Support a cause

- Give money
- Make the audience feel something
- Make a target more open to negotiation
- Collect various pieces of clothing
- Praise or criticize a local establishment
- Get a mob started, or aim them somewhere
- Any other action the gamemaster thinks is it is reasonable.

EXPRESSION POINTS MAY BE EXCHANGED AS FOLLOWS:

- 30 Expression Points: Nothing changes, but the audience is willing to listen intently to what the artist says.
- 60 Expression Points: The artist is able, mostly, to motivate the audience to the desired result.
- 90 Expression Points: The artist is able, completely, to motivate the audience to the desired result.
- 120 Expression Points: The artist achieves their desired results with additional boons described by the gamemaster.

At gamemaster discretion, if the artist doesn't use Expression points for any benefit, they may instead gain Karma at a rate of 1 Karma for every 10 Expression Points left unused (generally rounded up, but characters must spend at least 5 Expression Points to get any Karma bonus).





CREATION STARTS WITH DARKNESS

POSTED BY: SUNSHINE AND TURBO BUNNY

Sometimes we forget to take a look at the world the other people live in. We focus on what's making us nuyen and ignore why ninety-nine percent of the world lives under the bootheel of the megas.

Mindless entertainment. That's why!

Seriously, when was the last time any of you in the shadows actually went and sat in a theater, let yourself get zoned out on a simsense, or even watched something on your trid player? I know it's not the norm. Theaters are dark, and most of us are fragging paranoid. Same thing with simsense—it leaves us too vulnerable. And as for the trid, well, don't get me started on the cost of services, the addictive-by-design nature of the shows, and the complete and utter bulldrek they're selling. There's stuff in action trids that could get a runner pinched or killed if they even half-believe it will work, and then there's the garbage they call funny, dramatic, or tragic—ugh, it's all tragic to me. All of it is designed to keep the masses entertained and ignorant of the oppressive nature of their parent megacorp, while—in grand old Hollywood tradition—portrating every other megacorp as enemies. You can tell which megas have the biggest rivalries

at any given moment by who's getting depicted as the villain in their latest features.

With this in mind, let's take a closer look at some of the current entertainment keeping the masses tuned in to their programs and tuned out of reality.

TRID FOR THE TIRED MASSES

Shadowrunners are romanticized by almost every studio in existence, but every corp does them in a slightly different way. From the Horizon-made *Max Wild* series, which features a street-savvy fast-talker who handles more problems with his silver tongue than his chrome pistol, all the way across the spectrum to the DeMeKo-backed *Berlin Nights*, which features a team of rowdy anarchists constantly doing everything in the noisiest way possible. Every megacorp finds a way to shape their citizens' views of shadowrunners. For some, it's a way to misinform and make the shadows a terrifying place, while others are simply trying to sell the people on shadowrunners always falling just a hair shy of succeeding against the mighty "Home Corp" while tearing up the security or

making fools of their “Rival Corp.” And last but not least, runners play roles in tragic tales of corporate betrayal, where their own mistakes cost them their safe place with the corp.

- > What? **Berlin Nights** is made by Weisser Engel Studios. That’s an independent production company.
- > Stone
- > Most folks track it back to DeMeKo, though it is convoluted. Better than that, though, if you do a fund trace for payments to Marksman? You’ll find an S-K connection. The question is, why?
- > Icarus
- > That money going to Marksman is a corp payoff for him to keep his yap shut about his transition between corps. No one wants the publicity for the way the media and public could spin his life.
- > 2XL

BATTLERUN (HTO)

In the thirty-second century, war is the new normal for humanity. The megas have teamed up with the Intergalactic Royal Houses and are out to come out on top, no matter who they have to kill, bribe, or seduce. Based on the acclaimed eighteen-book series by Jonas Mars, the Successor States break out in three dimensions on HTO. While the crash of L.B.I. was expected to restore order to the Inner Sphere, no one expected Mulva Hansen and her Turkish invasion of the Terran Meritocracy. Can Lofwyr, Alaric Lupis, and Gertrude Steiner co-exist enough to survive and thwart Mulva’s ambitions? Will the return of Darren Lime change the Meritocracy’s outlook? And what of the grudge match between Albert Davos and Wuxing CEO Gloria Chao? Will it go beyond minor raids and assassinations of their love interests? Like a lance of Rampages from the Periphery, *BattleRun* will surprise you when you don’t expect it and play it straight when you do.

- > Well, the writing is all right, but at least my nuyen isn’t going to some mega. I only support independent creations.
- > Tauren
- > Seattle may be a hotbed of independent trid, but follow the ownership of Puyallup Productions down the rabbit hole and you’ll find ... Horizon!
- > Slamm-0!
- > Oh, come on! Puyallup just put out that documentary on Horizon, the one that basically says they don’t deserve to be one of the Big 10.
- > Tauren
- > There’s no such thing as bad publicity!
- > Slamm-0!



- > Really? Tell that to Renraku when you're within sight of the ACHE.
- > Sounder

BERLIN NIGHTS (WBN)

Set across the Berlin sprawl, this series features action that is frequent and frequently real. The film crew does all of their shots on site. This means a need to maintain some level of control in a very uncontrolled environment, or they have to just go with the flow. Director Brig Koch mixes and matches both elements in the series, which features Stephan Marksman as Wolfgang Richter, a former Sonntag-Krieg executive who was pressured into selling corporate secrets to rival MTC, leading to a massive shift in corporate power. Now Richter works with members of Berlin's robust anarchist community in order to correct his misdeed by running in the shadows for Sonntag-Krieg.

- > Several teams in Berlin claim to have worked with Marksman. They all have similar tales of being hired with a caveat that Herr Schmidt sends a pair of guys along with them. One is Marksman, the other is his bodyguard. Helps Marksman make his character more real, I'm sure.
- > Icarus
- > It also lets DeMeKo have a man on the streets that other runners think is some kind of poser. They completely ignore Ritter (his bodyguard), who had a decade in the shadows of Europe before he took the gig shielding Marksman.
- > Stone
- > I'll give DeMeKo credit for throwing off the scent with all their S-K (Sonntag-Krieg) propaganda in this series. Certainly keeps people thinking this studio is S-K owned and not a child of DeMeKo.
- > Glitch

BLOOD RUNNERS (CBC)

Renewed for a second season! Private investigator Jack Yeats and his friends, former corp mage Diane Oliver and self-taught decker Greg McAdams, face off against blood mages, gangs, paranormal critters, and a plethora of other dangers as they solve crimes, stop corruption, and help the downtrodden. But Jack has his own dark secret—he's a vampire, forced to feed on human blood! Will Yeats succumb to his thirst, or will he hold true to his promise to help those in need?

- > Despite its lackluster name, this show is surprisingly good. It's not award-winning good, but the acting and writing are entertaining enough that it got renewed. The writers at least make a token effort at keeping the blood motif from just being about Yeats. Every few episodes, they're going after a rogue Infected, or a blood mage, or some other critter that has something to do with blood.
- > Sunshine

- > Are you kidding me? Yeah, okay, the actors are decent enough, but every Infected in the show other than Yeats has been portrayed as either a bloodthirsty fiend or a self-hating emo who's happy to meet their end. Hollywood dreck at its worst.

- > Red
- > A little sensitive, Red?
- > Clockwork
- > I'd tell you to bite me, but that's too much irony for my liking.
- > Red
- > Rumors are flying around the Infected community that they don't appreciate that Grant isn't a vampire. There's word in the shadows that he's got a fang-shaped bulls-eye on him. Money and favors are being traded to get hold of him and offer him some lessons in method acting.
- > Hannibelle
- > I haven't heard those rumors.
- > Red
- > The shadowy side of Infected life may not open up to you that much. You've got a bit of a rep.
- > Hannibelle

THE COFFEE CLUTCH (NABS)

The staff of the East Street Soybucks in Denver have a secret, and it's not the menu. Torn between a world of their choosing and one that has been thrust upon them, they work to keep their secret safe while also making great lattes. Between the drama of a regular life and the troubles of a double life, Sasha, Kiley, Camino, Sahara, Jake, and Jordan spend their days maneuvering through the politeness of the corporate barista life and their evenings maneuvering through the politics of life under a dragon's reign.

The coffee scene of Denver is heating up this season as Dr. Blake Hunter has become a regular, and everyone knows his last name isn't just a coincidental moniker. Staying off his radar while dealing with the recent turmoil in the city is going to keep our brave baristas snout-deep in a latte trouble!

- > Cheesy stuff like this is standard fare for Horizon. The use of Denver as a backdrop is bold, though. They're making some statements in this show that could very well get them as welcome in the Mile-High City as Aztechnology.
- > Pyramid Watcher
- > The cast aren't just playing drakes—they **are** drakes. (I suppose I should have tagged that as a spoiler alert.) The behind-the-scenes shenanigans that go on with this show are ridiculous. There's the serious stuff, like constantly dealing with a few dragons who think these drakes need a real clutch. And then there's

the stupid things six bored drakes with a Hollywood-party mentality get into. For image reasons, the sextet is regularly seen together out in the world, but the internal squabbling is intense. Intense enough to occasionally involve runners and efforts to damage the image and careers of their fellow actors and actresses. They never want actual harm done, but a few missed calls or a delay before a shoot are enough to damage their internal reputations and do the trick. The pay is usually pretty low, but these are genuine milk runs.

- > Fianchetto
- > Kiley, played by Rebecca Richards, and Jordan, played by Janelle Sheen, have a particularly heated rivalry, both on and off screen. The drama of Kiley and Jordan competing for Jake's affections is playing out on-screen, with Jordan clearly holding a commanding lead in the stolen-moments department. Behind the scenes, the successes seem reversed, with Rebecca holding the heart of Darik Hall, who plays Jake.
- > /dev/grrl
- > You need more detail in your data. Janelle doesn't want Darik; she's in love with Rebecca. They've been a quiet thing since their paired casting in **Dragon Falls**, a cautionary tale of love across corporate lines set to the backdrop of Dunkelzahn's campaign, election, and assassination. They've got a big roadblock to being a couple, though—the pair are cousins in the Sheen (Estevez)-Richards Hollywood dynasty.
- > Sunshine

DASH: STAR LONER! (LSTV)

Never seen such a spot-on rip-off do so well, but this one is still going strong for some reason. This Lone-Star-sales-contract-driving drivel is on season nine, only a half-season behind its muse, *CHASE: Errant Knight!*. This season's big surprise is a relocation of primary operations for Dash to Atlanta, where he'll likely put a lot of effort into going after criminals with connections to the UCAS, and in particular Detroit, in order to smear Ares and their attempts to gain KE contracts in the CAS. A few pre-released clips seem to hint at some serious political targets for the cop/bounty hunter, a change from his primarily street-level hunts for petty crooks that slipped away from Knight Errant or Minuteman. You can probably expect them to ramp up the Lone Star love with their new venue, and the amount of "Go CAS!" crap we'll see could easily be a drinking game.

- > It won't be playing a large part in the series, but the office address for Dash's services in Atlanta is actually out in the Sweetwater Creek area. He's an elf, but the storyline that brought him down south was a call for help from an old buddy—Jake Roth! Roth was a runner plant on the show, put in for his ork heritage, but it didn't fly. Problem was he just looked like a thick-jawed bulky human rather than a true tusker. He was a smoothie fan favorite, but the ork and troll fans didn't see him as demograph-

ically representative. He hung on for the '74 and '75 seasons but left abruptly after he got a little too famous for the shadows.

- > 2XL
- > And now? What's a smoothskin ork doing in Sweetwater?
- > Clockwork
- > Apparently operating a successful bounty-hunting operation in need of more talent. Episodes one and two of the arc had Roth sidelined with an injury, but he's back on a regular basis.
- > Bull
- > You watch this, Bull?
- > Glitch
- > I actually know Roth personally. He did quite a bit of work for me back in the day. He's a good chummer, despite the lack of bulky tusks.
- > Bull

DEBONAIR DAVE (NBS)

Have you ever wondered what would happen if you pulled a squatter off the streets and gave them a cool ten million nuyen? Well, on NBS this spring, you'll find out! You'll meet Dave Gilbrowski, a nineteen-year-old ork from Redmond who collects scrap metal and does odd jobs to make ends meet. After secretly watching him for a few weeks, he'll be presented with ten million nuyen and a posh apartment for a year in the heart of downtown Seattle. Viewers will watch as he splurges on some of the strangest things and attempts to hobnob with elite society. Will they embrace Dave as they often claim they would any metahuman from the streets who's made it big? Will Dave learn to adapt to his new social standing? Or will he waste all his newfound wealth? Find out Wednesdays 0300 GMT on NBS!

- > Poor ork makes it big. Sure, no orksploitation here <rolls eyes>.
- > Bull
- > I think you'll see some rich folks exploited as well. They are so isolated by their wealth, they don't realize how warped their values are.
- > Winterhawk
- > Oh please, they'll go on living with all their money. Dave is going to get used and go right back to the streets.
- > 2XL
- > I'm not saying he won't, but this is the corp way—exploit everyone you possibly can.
- > Winterhawk
- > C'mon, he's no different than athletes who get their first big contract.
- > Slamm-0!

- > No, Dave doesn't have a shot at using his athletic talent to get a second contract. And he's going to be pushed into spending that money like it's nothing. For a guy like him, one thousand nuyen and ten thousand nuyen aren't noticeably different; it's all a huge amount he can spend but not really comprehend.
- > 2XL

DESERT WARS (PREMIER: ALL MAJORS; RERUNS: THE BATTLE CHANNEL)

Desert Wars has been making war a sport for decades now. Already bigger than the Olympics or the World Cup, *Desert Wars: Sahara* is set to begin its biggest season ever with the introduction of its newest AAA team: SpinGlobal. Originally a televised conflict of two corps squaring off in Libya over some lost tech, the media spectacle it became was sufficient not only to make the conflict its own series (*DW: Sahara*), but to spawn three additional spinoffs: *DW: Mohave*, *DW: Gobi*, and *Rad Wars* in the SOX.

Tasks involve classic military objectives like search-and-destroy, force recon, objective seizures, penetrating encampments, asset exfiltration, and base defense. The scale varies from squad-level combat to battalions being mobilized in the final conflict. The battle rages in the air, on the ground, in the Matrix, and in the astral. It is a full theatre of war with magic, Matrix, and muscle well-balanced among all teams. Early rumors suggested that this was the year that technomancers would be allowed on the field, but the pan-corporate Desert Wars Commission that supervises the event felt their inclusion would “only further the notion that technomancers are simply agents of chaos, terror, and a threat to world peace.”

- > They ... actually may have a point.
- > Dynamam
- > Bulldrek. Technos are superb force-multipliers. Smart corps are saving them as aces-in-the-hole should they need them.
- > Aspire
- > Or maybe they just don't want to show the public how ill-prepared they are to combat technomancers when all their T-birds start falling out of the sky.
- > Kenji the Kid

Each version of *Desert Wars* is divided into three championships, each then divided into four-month seasons. The “Mercenary Challenge” pits mercenary companies against each other, while the “Open Challenge” involves corp, merc, or nation-state forces. The big draw each year is the “Mega Challenge” where AA+ corps go into all-out simulated war on each other—at least until the final challenge. That's when the gloves come off and the body bags come out.

Pre-season hype usually involves trial games, the MVS (Most Valuable Soldier) award ceremonies, soldier trades from mercenary to corporate teams, and previews of what's to come. Broadcast rights to *Desert Wars* topped 650 million nuyen in 2078, and thirty-second commercials for the finals are expected to top twenty-five million nuyen this year for the four-hour final battle. The Mercenary Championship grand prize of one million nuyen seems a pittance in comparison.

Fans can get into the action as deep as their pockets will allow. Typical coverage gives users both media drone, battlefield overview, and select soldier camera feeds, complete with a running commentary from former MVSs. Premium users can slot their credsticks and jump into the live simsense feed of the frontline soldiers as they kick hoop and take names. And while soldier feed is still the number-one premium buy, the fastest growing market is viewership of Matrix combat.

SpinGlobal is rolling out its latest Techwarrior battlesuit for both its corporate and Caliphate teams. They are serious about beating Saeder-Krupp into the ground this season in the Mega Challenge.

- > You know the Caliphate is playing this up for propaganda, right?
- > Sunshine
- > Of course, and they've got Major Al Hawsa leading their team. He's solid. He'll hold them together. The only way you rise up through the ranks is either through skill or connections. He's not from a major family like Yaz-man.
- > Moharik
- > You mean Lieutenant Yazeed Al Sheik, that pandering pretty-boy?
- > Sunshine
- > Yeah, there's a game within a game going on. So Yaz is totally courting that whole smooth-killer/playboy image at the parties. But on the other hand, it's hurting his family name, which is traditionally associated with ultraconservatism.
- > Moharik
- > They are also big stakeholders within SG.
- > Sunshine
- > Yup. So his star is rising, and he's doing it at the cost of his family's rep. But what does he care? He's the seventh son in the family, so he doesn't really stand to benefit from the family name that much.
- > Moharik
- > Who do you think that is helping?
- > Glitch

- > Who else?
- > Moharik
- > Ah ...
- > Sunshine
- > SG, a house divided?
- > Old Crow
- > Well, consider it a house loosely aligned, held together by threats, blackmail, marriage, and gecko grip.
- > Moharik
- > ... and Spinrad. Funny enough, he and Gabrielle are one of the strongest unifying elements in SG. Gives all the families someone to hate.
- > Old Crow
- > Yup, and Spinrad. For now.
- > Moharik

DESSERT WARS (CBC)

A fun little show that somehow fails to be ruined by the relentless corporate affiliations being blasted in your face, *Dessert Wars* is Ares' playful entry into competitive cooking, as well as a kind of olive branch extended to other megas to foster good will. Just like *Desert Wars*, different corporations send in teams of their best. Unlike the war games, however, the teams compete in a battle royale of culinary daring. Celebrity guests judge each competition, spanning the megacorporate and political spectrum. While there's a cash prize for the winning team, the real coup is that their corp gets some prime advertising spots to go with it. But everyone knows we're the real winners.

- > Not gonna lie, seeing Aunt Sally come out of retirement to judge was awesome, but I got pretty misty when she helped show the Evo kid how to gut an incubus. I wish I had someone like her growing up.
- > Slamm-O!
- > After the last show's plans were almost lifted by a shadow op aimed at gaining an advantage in coming up with recipes for the secret ingredient, Ares Sports has been considering making a tie-in where the corps get to contract runners to extract the plans on purpose. It's been bouncing around the boardroom, but **Dessert Wars** isn't quite pulling in the ratings to warrant a spin-off, and they're worried it'll upset the balance of the show if it's more about who can steal the plans better than who greases the pans.
- > Kia

DIS IS UZ (KFOX)

The series, built on the foundation of an older show, follows the lives, loves, and tragedies of three siblings from a mixed metahuman family in the ev-

er-changing Sixth World. Alex and Vivian Rapos, a mixed-race couple from Chicago, were bystanders in the Night of Rage. A female dwarf running from a mob hurled her own baby into the hands of these newly minted parents before getting torn apart on their front lawn. The young dwarf foundling (Hope) now has to grow up with two siblings (Jackie and Joy) while their parents live with the guilt of Hope's mother's death and hide this fact from their adopted daughter as they raise her alongside their twins in the ashes of the Night of Rage. Episodes jump between 2039 and 2065, bouncing between the early lives and struggles of Alex and Vivian and how the siblings' lives are evolving in a world that is slowly growing more tolerant.

- > OMG I did not see the twist coming when they flashed back and Alex was beating Hope's mom to death on the front lawn in order to convince the mob and save Hope.
- > Slamm-O!
- > You know, I'm torn. I mean, I know this is media drek for the masses, but I can't help but see that this is actually changing people's attitudes.
- > Calorie
- > Well, it sure is generating a lot of controversy. And that translates into ratings. And that translates into nuyen.
- > Sunshine
- > Yeah, but they're doing the right thing for the wrong reasons. Does that make it okay?
- > Calorie
- > Does the end justify the means? Social change with a tidy profit? Sounds a lot like what we do.
- > 2XL
- > Yeah, but you know what Humanis and Alamos 20K are willing to pay for runs against the cast, right?
- > Calorie
- > Spoilers alert! I bet Jackie is going to come out as a technomancer.
- > Netcat
- > Oh, Jackie is going to be coming out all right, but not as a technomancer.
- > /dev/grrl

GRANNY SWEETSPELL'S MAGICAL KITCHEN (KPOW)

"Hello, children, welcome to my kitchen. Please, stay for a spell or two ..."

And thus began every episode of Granny Sweetspell's Magical Kitchen, a lovely little show

about an old magician (“Oh, I’m not a witch, dearie, but I know many nice ones”) who tries to teach young children that magic isn’t as bad and scary as people want to believe and how they can be more accepting of everyone because everyone is special in their own way.

The original *Granny’s Kitchen* aired in the early 2050s as a syndicated children’s show from Grimoire Studios, a now-defunct production company. For exactly 264 episodes, *Granny* and her colorful cast of costars, including the shaman Mr. Fox, the hermetic mage Dana Flame-Dancer, and the free spirit Whisper on the Wind, discussed various topics related to magic in a way that children could understand and digest. Additionally, the show tried to dispel (pun intended) many of the negative stereotypes permeating society at large in regard to magic. For the mundane members of the audience, it told tales of how to simply be a better person in general by giving lessons on life that didn’t revolve around corporate consumerism. Of course, this drew the ire of several anti-magic parent groups, who predictably tried to say that the show was secretly subversive to children, which is rich when comparing society back then to now.

Eventually, the show was canceled and quietly forgotten about. An MCT holding company acquired the rights to the show and promptly blocked any attempt at further distribution or rebroadcast of any form. Interestingly enough, it was the proliferation of episodes on the Matrix that saved this show about an old lady and her simple magic, as bootleg copies were readily available, which led to the show gaining an underground cult following.

- Really? **This** is the kind of stuff we’re wasting megapulses of data on?
- Rigger X
- Despite the targeted age demographic, *Granny* was a source of inspiration for many magicians back in the day, mainly because for the first time there was someone who said—nay, proclaimed loudly—that we were not freaks of nature and that our gifts were not evil. And for many a neophyte magician on the streets who had nowhere or no one to turn to, *Granny* was a godsend for our sanity. So you may want to keep that in mind.
- Winterhawk
- Don’t piss off the wizworms, got it. Whatever ...
- Rigger X

The property languished for more than twenty years until some MIT&T students on an MCT scholarship came across some old hard copies of the show. Using it as the basis for a project involving practical magical effects, the group of students created a thirty minute “new” episode that was a

dead ringer for the old show, despite the fact that the lead actress, Helen Westfall (along with most of the original cast), had passed in the interim. What made this new episode different than before was the utilization of illusion spells to re-create the characters and set exactly, while manipulation spells are used to operate various puppet characters. It was a concept that had often been theorized but never really implemented before.

- The lead student on the project, Cassandra Knox, a follower of the Goddess, sought out and was able to find Whispers on the Wind, who agreed to assist with the show. The free spirit is credited as a technical advisor.
- Elijah

Eventually, word of the project reached the CEO of Sakura Studios (an MCT subsidiary, for those not paying attention). A full pilot episode was ordered and in 2077, *Granny Sweetspell* was back! Teaching children lessons about magic from her humble little kitchen and telling tales of morality to a new generation, albeit with a bit more product placement than before.

- So like everything else, it’s been co-opted by the corporations. Why am I not surprised that they’ve once again corrupted something else I used to cherish.
- Old Crow
- Hold on to your feathers there, Crow—you’ll love this. It seems that Knox and her MIT&T cronies were also hired onto the show as producers, writers, and of course effects artists. A year after it started airing, threads on various Matrix nodes and sites began talking of hidden messages and Easter eggs hidden in the show that actually subverted and in some cases mocked their corporate masters. Gutsy move, but neither Sakura nor MCT have apparently found out because they’re still there. Usually it’s nothing more than flashing jokes, but sometimes a Matrix address pops up that leads to other sites where interesting information on magical theory can be found.
- Bull
- Like the original series before it, this new **Granny’s Kitchen** is providing assistance to magicians who don’t have anywhere else to go or leads them to places or people that can possibly help. All of this right under MCT’s nose. Love it!
- Old Crow
- Not only that, but there have also been links specifically designed for technomancers to find. Like the magicians, these links lead to information that can help new technomancers find assistance and allies.
- Netcat
- And who’s to say that MCT isn’t using this show as a double-blind to subvert people into their service? Think about it, what better way to sucker in new assets than by pretending to be the exact

opposite of what you are? What's the saying, "if it seems too good to be true ..."

- ▶ Plan 9
- ▶ There's also something to be said about looking gift horses in the mouth. It's a fair warning, but unless MCT is playing some kind of long game, and it's not out of the question, this seems genuine. But, this is MCT we're talking about here, at the very least we need to keep our heads on a swivel about all this until we know for sure.
- ▶ Glitch

KARL KOMBATMAGE RELOADED (WBN)

I don't know what it is that keeps *KKM* alive. Is it the wacky fictionalized German setting? The at best mediocre acting (especially in the original series)? Or maybe it's the soap opera-esque plots? From the outside it all looks really cringy, but when you start to watch, it's downright addictive. But whatever it is, the Karl Kombatmage phenomenon now has lasted for more than twenty years now. You can see cosplayers at every big convention. This show has shaped the public view on shadowrunners, even "inspiring" many people to try their hand at shadow work.

- ▶ Many of them were shocked after they discovered the life of a shadowrunner is not like in the trids. Naive, dead bastards.
- ▶ Glitch

Karl Kombatmage started as a tridseries in 2058 portraying the life of Karl Kombatmage (Joe Venski), a shadowrunner, and his crew. They all rock cheesy names—Danny Decker (Silvio Patrone), Ritschie Rigger (Peter Herbst), Sally Schamanin (Eliza May), Sammy Samurai (Mahmud Belugi), and Tobi Troll (Kevin Winzacker)—that were too on the nose but still somehow okay with the masses that ate the show up. There were various other characters and recurring cast members, but this was the core team that ultimately made ten seasons, five feature-length *KKM* trids, and various spin-offs. While mostly popular in Germany, the series soon gained worldwide recognition, thanks to DeMeKo's worldwide distribution network. Unfortunately, after the tenth season in 2064, just before *Crash 2.0*, the series was canceled. It faded out with the with a few low-budget trids and some lackluster spin-offs, but the huge success of the early years was gone. The actors hadn't aged well, and every one of them had survived a variety of scandals.

- ▶ Poor Silvio Patrone became a chiphead and did everything from humiliating reality-trid shows to porn. He recently made his third trip to rehab and now lives in a Westphalian monastery.
- ▶ Peter Herbst completely vanished from the public and allegedly

became a real shadowrunner. He's rumored to be a fixer in the German shadows, now. Eliza May became a second-tier celebrity in the Munich schickeria, still a yellow press favorite. Kevin Winzacker opened a bar in Munich but died some years ago.

- ▶ Only Mahmud Belugi still works as a "serious" actor.
- ▶ Dr. Spin

Move forward almost a decade, and Bavaria listened to its fans. In 2071, they rebooted the franchise with *Karl Kombatmage Reloaded*. The wacky tone of the old episodes was gone, though. The show addressed modern issues, became darker, more nuanced, and kind of more realistic—kind of. The old roles were recast and rewritten. The primary cast over the last nine seasons is younger and more international. You now have the former model Kamil Pjekow as the new Karl Kombatmage and the Dutch actress Madeleine Terboven as Annie Assassin (who went from the main antagonist to one of his allies due to the huge popularity of the character). French actor Pierre Rodin is Claude Chamäleon, Frank Maria Grimm is Harry Hacker, and Dana Kalenjo is a new, yet familiar, Samantha "Sammy" Samurai. Only the venerable Joe Venski has a recurring role in the new series, as the mysterious, smoking mentor of Karl, along with his own subplot.

- ▶ Alexandre Plumioën, the original actor for the role of Harry Hacker, died in a car accident just after the second season. He was drunk after a party and walked into the street, where a car hit him. The press made the masses believe it was an accident, but it was common knowledge that Plumioën was a vegan and Buddhist who wouldn't touch alcohol with a three-meter rod.
- ▶ The Smiling Bandit

After nine seasons, *KKMR* has parented several spin-offs, with occasional crossovers. You have *Holly Striker: Street Warrior* (co-produced by Bavaria and Hollywood Simsense Entertainment), which is set in Seattle and centered around the adept Holly Striker. There are also plenty of cheap knockoffs, like *Carlos Guerra* from Aztechnology, which centers around a local hero who fights off evil foreign corporations trying to secretly infiltrate Aztlan.

THE MASTER WIZARD (KFOX)

Eight mages will enter the tower, but only one will emerge as *The Master Wizard!* Each week the contestants will have to meet a different challenge (or two!) and use their magical prowess to survive to the next week. Not only will the talents of each individual mage be put to the test, but also their traditions and schools! Who will be the last wizard standing? Find out this fall!

Here are the contestants:

Murray Pittman: A summoning expert from Brooklyn, Pitman has spent years training for this

contest. He regularly competes in street magic contests and has yet to be defeated.

Charlease Newman: The youngest contestant and a prodigy from Boston, Charlease will have to show that talent is more important than experience. Just because she can't drink doesn't mean this dwarf can't brew a mean potion!

Hu'ntar Bonner: Practicing the mysterious art of Bard Magic from Tír na nÓg, this elven mage will show the world what Irish magic can do! Bonner may not have fiery red hair, but he has the fire of magic in his heart!

Lucy Curry: Hailing from Dallas, Lucy is a southern belle who can freeze your mint julep with the snap of her fingers. Don't underestimate her because of her accent, or you'll find out how gracious a winner she can be!

Dr. Moses Vang: Dr. Vang is a researcher and professor at Georgetown. He might look like a mid-level account manager, but his knowledge of magic will surprise even the most seasoned wizard.

Sandra Moreno: This Chicago native has spent years working to tame the city's bug problem. Can she exterminate the competition to become the Master Wizard?

Sumaiyah Holding: A nature-loving shaman from outside of Vancouver, Sumaiyah is an excellent horse rider and grows her own herbs. She is the medicine woman for her tribe and the only one who treats their bumps, bruises, and wounds.

Kiana Laing: Casting spells is what we all know wizards do, but some magic practitioners channel their powers to enhance their physical abilities. Martial arts expert and part-time stuntwoman Kiana will bring her San Francisco savvy to *The Master Wizard!*

- > Ahhh, marketing. They leave out that Dr. Holding went to medical school at UC Davis and lives in the suburbs.
- > Winterhawk
- > Oh, this is true Corp Broadcasting 101. Make sure everyone is from different regions and has different appearances. Toss in at least one clear outsider and a few outliers (a shaman and adept) to spice things up a bit (and make sure they make it midway through the season), and you're set.
- > Sunshine

MAX WILD (H-CHANNEL)

I'm not sure how a show that just strings a series of tough-guy one-liners together can manage to be so successful, but *Max Wild* is a winner. The show is even pirated to other corps on a regular basis, though most people know that the pirating is totally controlled and funded by Horizon, the show's producers. Wild is a smooth-talking former Horizon negotiator who lost his wife to a group of psychotic shadowrunners and volun-

teered to leave the corp and enter the shadows on a quest for revenge. The series has caught up with two of the six runners responsible for his wife's death, but the plots are beginning to shift the blame up the chain to whoever hired the runners, which hadn't been spoken of or considered before this season (fiction, indeed). Horizon is obviously trying to talk about the evils of another mega. Especially considering evidence is building up to point at MayaCorp as the main culprit. Horizon gladly plastered their own logo all over the show but has chosen to avoid legal issues by poorly veiling rival Aztechnology as MayaCorp, even going so far as to use a logo that is awfully close to the Aztechnology totem.

- > The show got bored with its native LA setting relatively quickly. The fourth season will be headed south of the border into MayaCorp's home territory. Most of the filming will be done in the PCC, but Mr. Johnsons connected to Horizon are looking for teams of runners to take on a few cheesy milk runs in and around Tenochtitlan with the stipulation of taking a handsome face and a gaggle of video drones along.
- > Dr. Spin
- > And on the other side of the border, they're gearing up to make those milk runs cost you dearly. It's a dumb show, but Aztechnology wants none of the bad press Horizon is trying to throw their way on the sly.
- > Marcos
- > It's all playing out as Horizon planned. Those milk runs are going to turn bloody, but they're screening their teams. With a little backend editing magic every Jaguar that gets smoked is just an unpaid extra.
- > Hard Exit
- > Expect some Corp Court work coming from this silliness. These two are starting to act like dumbass punks on the playground. They're not even trying to hide their attacks.
- > Kat St. Irregular
- > Makes you wonder what they're covering up with this smoke-screen.
- > Picador

A MURDER TO KILL FOR (OTQ)

Rising Hollywood star Jayce Steyr and Bollywood favorite Alavandan Bhatt make for one smokin' hot couple in this neo-noir trid, set in the dieselpunk retrofuture universe of *Spitfire Resurrection* (which is, ironically, getting resurrected with this movie). Steyr is a former redcop turned private eye in Nova Argyre, with Bhatt playing the husband of an ace pilot of an Etherhawk squadron who is murdered after he tells Bhatt about some shady government dealings.

Fate throws them together and the sparks (and bullets) start flying almost immediately as a plot to destroy the fragile peace between Terra and Mars draws ever closer. Critics already love it, but some of the hardcore fans of the classic aren't impressed.

> I miss when they used more CGI, but I am loving Bheyr on-screen, and the writers are doing an awesome job picking up where

Armistice Stars left off!

> /dev/grrl

> "Bheyr"? ... OH! I get it! Cute.

> Pistons

> Wanna catch the next one together, dev?

> Red

> Hell yeah! My place or yours?

> /dev/grrl

> Yours.

> Red

> You're couch surfing again, aren't you?

> /dev/grrl

> Maybe.

> Red

NINGYO: THE DIGITAL GEISHA DIARIES (NIPPON)

Ningyo, or *Atashi Wa Dare* at home, is a trid series about Shizuna, a poor Japanese elf girl, played by human actress Natsume Soeskei, who sold herself to a bunraku parlor. However, due to bad surgery for the bunraku chipset, Shizuna forgets who she was. Every day, she wakes up with a different personality in her body, no memories of the previous day, and a diary. Ultimately, it's a quest for her to find who she really was and answer the question if she would be happier as that person.

> Natsumi-chan is killing this role. I thought the casting was a bit racist in having a human play an elf, but she's showing real chops.

> Kai

> It may not be racist, but it is most definitely racially insensitive! There are plenty of skilled elven actresses who could have played the part.

> Plan 9

> But she is doing such a good job, it's hard to imagine anyone else in the role.

> /dev/grrl

> Neo-Tokyo is eating this up, but the local Yakuza are finding it a little harder to swallow.

> Danger Sensei

> Yeah. There's a growing movement among the populace to outlaw bunraku parlors.

> /dev/grrl

> Oh, they'll find a way to squash that movement, one way or another

> Clockwork

ON POINT (LSTV)

Back for its eighth season, Shauna Battle returns as Detective Tessa Rogers, who keeps the streets of Nashville clean from criminal scum on her trusty unicorn Platinum! Also starring Sung Rodriguez as Captain Steven Bolton, Evylyn Sunleaf as magician-for-hire Sara Silverstar, and Gunthar Paulson as the mysterious Mr. Johnson. Season eight picks up where season seven left off. Tessa was suspended for violating the civil rights of Gar Hornface when she beat the criminal troll to extract the location of a bomb containing a mutagen that would have forced the population of Nashville to goblinize. Will she be able to repair her relationship with Captain Bolton, who approved of her actions but had to satisfy his superiors? What will Platinum do without the only rider he has ever known? And what is Mr. Johnson up to, now that his attempt to cause utter chaos in Nashville failed? Find out, starting September 8 on LSTV.

> A Lone Star officer on a unicorn? Are they from a different universe?

> Balladeer

> Yeah, it's called the corporate world. Reality doesn't sell as well as fantasy.

> Slamm-0!

> I can't stand all the fluffy drek that Nashville churns out. I have to wonder if Humanis helps fund their trid production.

> Bull

ORK AND MINDY (ABS)

Mindy needed a citizenship endorsement to keep her job in San Francisco and not have to return to Tír Tairngire. Grumsh was looking for a wife who could show him the finer things in life. An agency put them together, sight unseen. Now Mindy must try to maintain her old life and learn to live with her new ork family. Grumsh continues his life as a trash collector and tries to get his parents and eight siblings to get along with his new elven bride. Can they find true love? Can Grumsh learn the manners of high society? Can Mindy

learn to love her ork-in-laws? Find out, Tuesdays this fall!

- > Ahhh, orksploitation at its best.
- > Bull
- > At least they are getting some orks on trid.
- > Clockwork
- > Ugh, at what cost? Do we have to put up with this for another few decades before the corp folks finally open their hearts and minds a little?
- > Ms. Myth
- > Hey, if you think the show is bad, imagine what the dubs of this for the Japanese megas will be like.
- > Slamm-O!
- > Non-existent.
- > Bull

POLAR WARS (ATTACK CHANNEL)

Polar Wars is the newest franchise attempting to compete with *Desert Wars*. Broadcast on the Attack Channel, which is in no way a rip-off of the BattleChannel, wink-wink, it's looking to be the new hit on the battlefield.

Following the hit format of *Desert Wars*, *Polar Wars* debuts on the Kamchatka Peninsula, one of many polar climate locations available should the series be renewed for a second season. The first few episodes focus on the different teams and their preparations. These have been heavily edited, to provide a heroic team, a thuggish team, a bumbling team, and so on. A special episode then follows where an overview of Kamchatka is done. This covers not only the terrain, but the flora and fauna as well as the few native metahumans living in the region. This episode really stands out from the rest, having some beautiful trid pictures that show the beauty of the region—places that will likely be ripped apart when the fighting starts.

The three episodes of battle coverage that have been provided show a second-rate production. There are far fewer camera angles than *Desert Wars*, the locations of the different teams appear to be staged (pitting one group with a strong trid personality against teams that came across flat), and no cohesive view of how the entire battlefield is playing out. Most of the fighting is squad-based with minimal drone support. Those expecting the massive tank battle from the initial preview will be disappointed to find out that only existed in a training simulation that the Argentinian team used. Excessive coverage of gruesome injuries and death spoil the thrill of the teams executing combat skillfully, and the editors are prone to jump-cuts between scenes. There is also little to no downtime

footage aside from the eye-rolling love triangle within the Swiss Team. Given the coverage so far, the final conflict will likely come down to known arctic colossuses Aztechnology and the CAS.

In the end, *Polar Wars* is a poor man's *Desert Wars* and makes little attempt to argue otherwise. Taken for what it is, it's a passable way to watch some mayhem, but those with limited time should spend it with higher quality trid.

- > C'mon, that drek is wizzer! Watching that French chick scream for like two minutes while her leg was pinned and the Swiss were advancing on her? Worth every cred I spent to pirate this.
- > Clockwork
- > About half those teams are criminals, even a few shadowrunners. If anyone knows Two Fists Bleeding, he's on the Athabaskan team.
- > Ma'Fan
- > I knew I recognized that mug!
- > Bull

PORKY'S LANDING (NETWORK 666)

Pirate sensation Network 666 airs this indie comedy bi-weekly, always on a different hacked channel. It's become a bit of juicy vogue to know when and where it will show, and those in the know (or claiming to know) can make a little cred with its more rabid fans. Funny thing is, I've never heard two people describe the same show when I asked them about it. There're all kinds of message boards describing what they saw, but no one has been able to capture it. You can only see it on a trid, and it scrambles third-party recording and data bombs itself if it's loaded into storage. Trippy stuff.

- > I swear I saw the one with the weird mask and the spatula.
- > Slamm-O!
- > Honey, that had to be a dream.
- > Netcat

RED SAMURAI RUN (KFOX)

This series is based on the classic video game franchise. Takeshi is the best of the best, but when the Renraku Arcology shutdown traps his family inside, he goes rogue and delves into the shadows to find a way inside. Tetsuo Kage makes for a fantastic Takeshi, but the decision by Renraku Media to try to make this a puff piece about the Arcology Incident and paint themselves in a better light is still in poor taste even after all this time. Several groups have protested the use of actual footage from the incident, and bereaved families have filed several lawsuits for showing the deaths of family



members for the sake of entertainment. It's a coin toss as to whether the show can survive it, but most folks don't think it's going to make it past the first season.

- > You better believe Renraku fired someone over this. Their spin division is working overtime, turning over all profits to charities to try to save face after the wave of bad publicity they stirred up.
- > Dr. Spin
- > Real shame. **Red Samurai Run** was a great game. They just can't seem to do adaptations right.
- > Bull
- > Internally, someone probably got fired, but externally, they've been mopping up the mess from the shadows. None of the lawsuits are coming from current Renraku citizens. Only those who have left the corp since the Arcology have been willing to sue them. Several attempts to contact internal parties have been met with unpleasant results.
- > Danger Sensei

THE RUNNERS (ABS)

New on ABS this fall, *The Runners* follows a team of shadowrunners as they work for Saed-

er-Krupp to fend off intrusions by outdated governments while providing the megacorp deniability for their actions. *The Runners* team is made up of leader and weapons expert Jackson Witt, combat specialist Jed Keller, mystical shaman Rebekah Good, electronic wiz-kid Zi Kline, and Lori Couch, who is both the driver and procurement guru.

Jackson Witt, played by Ruairidh Torres, is a veteran of the UCAS armed forces, unfairly discharged for refusing an order to slaughter innocent civilians. He not only knows his way around a gun, he has the contacts and guile to find help when the team needs it. The combat specialist, Jed Keller, played by Waqas Rangel of *Neil the Ork Barbarian and Son* fame, served with Jackson Witt in the UCAS. He followed his old CO to Boston, where his trollish toughness allows him to buy time while the rest of the team does their jobs.

Rebekah Good is a Raccoon shaman from Quebec. Her accent can cause some trouble, but her magical powers often get the team out of tight jams or give them the insight they need to complete a job. Good is portrayed by Shyla Harmon, infamous for her early career start in adult trids. Newcomer Haaris Young makes his debut as the hacker and electronics expert Zi Kline. A MIT&T dropout, Kline doesn't carry personal weaponry

but has drones at his disposal that will protect him and the team. Rounding out the team is Lori Couch, who serves both as a rigger and the woman with the connections to find whatever they need whenever they need it. Aliesha Branch was cast in the role after her success on *My Mother-in-Law the Wendigo*. While Couch can whip out her charm when need be, she isn't afraid to pull out a Predator if the drek hits the fan. *The Runners* also stars Karam Griffiths and Marianne Munoz, who work for Saeder-Krupp and the UCAS Anti-Corp Squad, respectively.

- > This is nothing like real shadowrunning.
- > Matt Wrath
- > Tell us something we don't know.
- > Bull
- > Well, I wore some simsense gear on a few runs for one of the producers of the show. I made some good coin, but they didn't use a lot of what we did. Probably too boring for trid.
- > Stone
- > Yeah, I wish I had the snappy dialog they show in the previews in my life. Usually it's just "Wizzer, got the iron? Yup, sling me some cred."
- > Red Anya

SEAS OF DEATH: THE TALE OF KANE (THE BATTLE CHANNEL)

One that hits close to home, *Seas of Death* is the long-overdue and much-anticipated biopic about everyone's favorite oceanic anarchist, Kane. It was only a matter of time before the corps tried to recoup some of the losses they have taken to the Most Wanted Man in ... hell, pick a place. They should have known better. Stuck in development backlog for years due to the efforts of Kane himself, the movie has become a documentary using footage of his own sabotage of the film. Far over-budget, the movie's lack of advertising might have doomed it to obscurity. In an extraordinarily ironic twist, Kane kidnapped Keith Napier, the director of the film, at its premier, boosting its profile and giving it the publicity it needed to make national headlines.

- > And there's a sizable reward for his return, too. Not that it's enough to entice anyone to chase after a famed pirate lord.
- > Kia
- > It's just the insurance companies doing their due diligence. No one expects Napier to survive this, which, of course, only boosts the interest in the movie. Standard operating bullshit.
- > Sunshine

- > Hey, now, I'm not gonna kill him! Someone has to tell the true story of my life, and little Keith here has already done the homework. Now I just have to decide what genre I want it in ...
- > Kane

SPACE FLEET (NBS)

Reviving a classic television series from the last century, *Space Fleet* follows the elite crew of the U.E.S. Endeavor as they explore uncharted regions of the galaxy and defend the United Space Confederation from hostile alien empires. Join Captain Tobias Kyle, Commander Balok, Doctor McLeod, and the rest of the Endeavor crew as they boldly engage the unknown!

- > Really? They couldn't think of anything else to bring back? This utopian space science crap should've been left in the trash heap.
- > /dev/grrl
- > Kids these days don't appreciate the classics.
- > Bull
- > It might help if the show was worth appreciating. Don't get me wrong; I love the reruns of the original series on NostalgiaVid, and I'm glad they were found and restored. The new one ... sorry, Bull, but it's drek. The fact that they kept the Awakening out of the timeline and then cast most metahumans as various alien species just makes it worse.
- > Dr. Spin
- > *sighs*
- > Bull
- > Whether you like the show or not, Shanks is pulling cash into the shadows with his issues. He got pegged for sexually inappropriate behavior by several women within the studio, but he denies the charges. No surprise there, but the story gets weirder. The cops got video on him that's been confirmed as authentic, but on the other side, Shanks has passed every poly test, including magic, to prove his innocence. Either he's a pro at faking, or a pro faked the footage, or there is something more going on. Money's flowing our way to check it all on both sides.
- > Glitch
- > Did they check to make sure he's not a Monad? Swapping personalities to cover its/his activities?
- > Plan 10
- > According to the police reports, yes. But that could be faked too.
- > Bull
- > Magic can alter all known realities, and some that are unknown.
- > Man-of-Many-Names

STREET BY STREET (H-CHANNEL)

The most recent brainchild of famous (or infamous, depending on your point of view) action director Gunner Delta and his new Renegade Productions, *Street by Street* is billed as “an intimate and unflinching look into the world of the Sixth World’s most infamous gangs, in their own words.”

Or at least that’s what the marketing says.

But in a slightly refreshing change of pace, there is actually some truth in the advertising.

Street by Street (or *SBS*, as the fans like to call it) is one part documentary, one part reenactment (heavy on the effects, no shocker there), and one part investigative reporting, with Delta acting as MC and narrator. Yeah, that’s an interesting mix, but Delta and company have figured out a way to make it happen. The show’s basic premise is for a small production crew to embed themselves with a street gang in order to “tell their story.” Cheesy, but that’s what the promotional materials say, so sue me. Of course, any outright illegal activity isn’t shown, but it *is* heavily alluded to or implied. The crew follows the gang in question on their day-to-day lives, but inevitably, some kind of *thing* happens that becomes the focus of the entire season. While the main focus is on how the gang reacts, there’s plenty of expert witnesses on the law side to get just enough of a police procedural flavor thrown in.

Season one focused on the Skraacha of the Ork Underground in Seattle. It began with the all-ork gang still dealing with the effects of Proposition 23 (which, for those of you who don’t know your recent history, made the Underground a legit district) and then having to deal with a KE crackdown for which multiple Skraacha members, including their leader Ca’Kal, were arrested for murdering a pair of surveyors from the Seattle Government. The rest of the season chronicled the upheaval in the Underground and subsequent trial, which was a media circus of epic proportions. I won’t spoil the ending, but there were more twists than a pretzel factory.

- > Pretzel factory? That the best you can come up with? Anyway, it was a circus. Mothers of Metahumans and a whole lot of other groups got involved, protesting outside the Seattle Metroplex Supreme Courthouse, almost as if they were on standby, to make sure the SINless gangers got a fair trial.
- > Plan 9
- > What, a reality show may actually be scripted beforehand? Shocked! I am shocked!
- > Mika
- > It was a royal mess. I give props to defense attorney Kim Hightower for her handling of the case, especially preventing KE from using **SBS** footage as evidence. I also loved her rousing

closing arguments during the season finale. Watching her spar with DA Dana Oaks was fine entertainment. Glad there’s no love lost between the former colleagues. Still, the whole thing seemed a bit too convenient at times with how things shook out.

> Bull

Season two, which as of this posting is about at its mid-season, headed to the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex where the *SBS* crew spent some time with a relatively unknown go-gang (outside of DFW) known as the Range Rovers. The main thrust of season two so far has been the Rovers butting heads with local mafia boss Miguel “Caesar” Chavez over a weapons deal gone bad that ended with the death of six Rovers.

- > It goes beyond that. The Rovers have been known to take jobs for pro-Aztlan individuals and groups. Rumor has it that the Rovers diverted product meant for Chavez and company to several underground Aztlan cells working in and around DFW. This, of course, slotted Chavez off royally on many levels. Little wonder why he made examples of the Rovers, who are now looking to find some kind of payback and threatening to touch off a local gang war.
- > Marcos
- > GOD FRAG IT, SPOILER ALERT MUCH! That was the twist for the midseason finale!
- > Kane

Because of high ratings, it was recently announced that *Street by Street* will be renewed for season three. Teasers and leaked bits of data indicate the crew could be heading somewhere in Central Asia.

EXCERPT FROM: STREET BY STREET, SEASON TWO PROMO AD

They thought they ruled the streets ...
On their chrome horses they rode through the heart
of Texas, heirs to the outlaw spirit ...

<Sound of roaring motorcycle engines>

They ride for personal honor, for glory, for their very
survival!

**<Images of several chromed motorcycles flash by,
sounds of engines whining amid several gunshots>**

This season, ride beside the Range Rovers as they
bring their special brand of justice to the Dallas-Fort
Worth Metroplex. Watch as the Rovers expose the gritty,
sun-scorched neighborhoods and back alleys, chasing
their destiny down the dangerous Texas highways, where
death is always just down the road or the next street over.
It’s a fight for survival as they move Street by Street ...

TEMPLE TERROR (CHANNEL 12)

Don't miss the last few episodes of the season! The field has been whittled down from 130 contestants to just eight! Last week, former combat badminton star Jason Sjardin couldn't swing his way across the river of muck and was washed out of the competition. Pooja Hodge, a Stuffer Shack cashier, used his Instant Win Idol to skip the challenge and was surprised when he got to man the water cannon. It might have been fun to spray Safiyya Gonzales, but the construction worker will try and get her revenge in the next contest.

Brought to you by Taco Temple—"Sacrifice your taste buds on the altar of flavor!"

- > The challenge is less about overcoming the obstacles and more about surviving on nothing but Taco Temple and Dragon Piss energy drink. Dehydration and indigestion are why the uber-athletes don't do as well as you'd expect.
- > Butch
- > I'll stick out an inferno hoop for some of that sweet prize money. I'd only need to make the top twenty.
- > Matt Wrath
- > Not if you wanted to spend it.
- > Marcos
- > Huh?
- > Matt Wrath
- > Ever see anyone who wasn't in the top three after the show ends?
- > Marcos
- > Now that you mention it ... no. Strange.
- > Matt Wrath
- > Between the poor diet and the strenuous exercise, it's easy to have them lie down afterward. Only when they see the knife do they realize they're on a blood-stained altar.
- > Marcos
- > Bulldrek!
- > Matt Wrath

THE WRONG SHIFT (KPOW)

Let's talk for a moment about the glory of farce. Piling on misunderstandings and building comical

exaggeration has been a go-to device for pretty much as long as people have been telling stories, and it's a device that can stay fresh as long as there are awkward situations to put people in and social mores to violate.

This is the niche *The Wrong Shift* is trying to fill. It centers on a married couple, Masako and Lalla Oshima, and their two children. At the beginning, Masako is an advertising copywriter for the fictional Mega Industries in Neo-Tokyo, while Lalla is a steak chef at a high-end restaurant. In episode one, Masako gets an irresistible promotion to Mumbai with a huge pay raise. She takes it, moving her entire family, only to find out that, through a data-entry error, she has been made head of security at a Mega Industries research site. Using classic sitcom logic, Masako decides to keep the job and considerable raise rather than tell anyone about it, so many episodes focus on her trying to learn her complicated job on the fly, with plenty of mistakes. More complications come from Lalla, who is trying to adjust her techniques to a mass-market, soy-based restaurant, and the children, who experience all sorts of fish-out-of-water complications.

While the family can be fun, most of the focus is on Masako. Whether she is trying to figure out how to stop shadowrunners from breaking in to the facility or figuring out how to handle a new shipment of security critters, her disasters and attempts to cover them up with her skills from advertising are typically good for a laugh.

- > I'll be surprised if this makes it a season.
- > Slamm-O!
- > You'd think so, but remember **The Jack and the Knave** managed ten seasons with the same sitcom, bumbling, and pratfall mix.
- > Netcat
- > Just when I'd forgotten about that drek. You owe me a bottle of brain bleach.
- > Slamm-O!
- > This is actually produced in Mumbai. They've had a huge film industry forever, and they're trying to make inroads beyond their usual markets.
- > Ma'fan

THIS SEASON, ON CHASE: ERRANT KNIGHT! BROUGHT TO YOU BY NBS.

Episode 1: Kill Teams

Join Chase as he does what Lone Star can't: Clean up the Azzie border! The season opens with a boom when Chase and a hand-picked squad of Bigger Triggers™ head toward Old Mexico to clean up Austin's streets and thumb their nose at Lone Star from the Lonies' own back yard. It's our own Errant Knight against a whole posse of lawless banditos, and we continue our multi-season tradition of our first episode being live ammo, guaranteed! Real blood! Real action! Real lives on the line!

Episode 2: Crush Hour Traffic

Watch as Chase follows up on a triple-dipper, a three-nation bounty on the Long Riders, a border-hopping go-gang. Chase will run them down on the long, lonely, highways of the Old American Southwest, test-driving his brand-new Special CAS Edition Ford Phalanx™ in an on-road, off-road, no-road adventure you'll have to see to believe!

Episode 3: Sun? Burnt

Follow Chase and the Derby Diva Devils (sponsored by City of Angels Derby Girls) as they run and gun for some fun in the sun! Will Chase's down-home manners stand out in the flash and glitz of Los Angeles, or will this Real American Cowboy™ remind these beach bunnies and muscle men what true Ares grit can do? Special gel-round episode, as Chase struggles to collect bounties with less-lethal ammo while also wearing Derby Diva Devils (sponsored by City of Angels Derby Girls) roller skates!

Episode 4: Not So CalFree Now

Watch as Chase brings his own brand of two-gun, two-fisted, red-blooded Old West justice to the West Coast! BTL-heads and sprawl gangers alike will find themselves under the gun, and Chase brings back a fan-favorite ammunition option, Wild Card™, where the only guarantee is that his straight-shooting Ares Carnivore tactical revolvers will feature mixed ammunition. Chase won't know what he's shooting until he pulls the trigger!

Episode 5: Not That Kind Of Elf

Watch Chase interact with the nose-in-the-air Tír Tairngire crowd as our favorite cowboy shows them that his ears might be pointed, but his heart is pure American. Chase might struggle with that fancy Sperethiel,* but his guns are fast and his aim is true, and that's sure to be more than enough as he clashes with an assortment of paracritters that'll make your head spin.

* (Closed captioning provided; linguasoft access available)

Episode 6: Cara-No-Sir

Catch up to Chase as the conclusion to his thrilling two-episode Tír Tairngire special takes him out of the woods and into the heart of Cara'Sir, the old American city of Portland! Will the Sperethiel-spewing* elves honor the bounties Chase is looking to collect on pelts and teslas from last episode's successful hunt, or will it be sprawl gangers who step up and get gunned down?

* (Closed captioning provided; linguasoft access available.)

Episode 7: Em City

Marvel as Chase returns to the rain-slick streets of Seattle. Remember his madcap adventure working alongside fan favorites Skip and Trace, helping out that down-on-his-luck amateur ghoul hunter, last time he was in town? Well, all the claws and sewage of Ghouls Gone Wild is nothing compared to what Seattle throws at Chase and the girls this time ... or compared to what Chase throws back, thanks to his new Ares Apex Predator semi-autos! Six shots won't be enough—so will a double-stacked magazine of caseless do the trick?! Live ammo, guaranteed, like every Seattle special to date!

Episode 8: Wild and Woolly

Follow Chase away from the urban jungle and into the primitive wild country of the Salish-Shidhe. Will he test out the new Ares Aggressor carbine on wild hogs? Paracritters? Salish orks up to no good? Find out if less-lethal ammo can cut it against a horned bear, chummers, in this gel-round-guaranteed episode!

Episode 9: The Big Chill

Stalk Chase through the knee-deep snows of Old Canada as he tests his Ford Hopscotch™ ATV against everything the Athabaskan Council can throw at it! Chase hires on as a wolf hunter for the Trans-Athabaskan Pipeline and spends a month keeping the hard-working people of our oil industry safe from paracritter harm and unpatriotic meddling, alike. Wish him luck, chummers—it's cold up there!

Episode 10: So Sioux Me

Enjoy the hilarity and the high-octane action as Chase returns home to the Sioux Nation. But with his Apex Predators, his usual Ares Carnivores, and his rugged new Ford Phalanx™ helping him out, there's no way they'll try to put him back on an Anglo Reservation! It's not revenge that's on his mind, but frontier justice, as Chase tracks bounties through his old stomping grounds, and stomps skulls along the way. The drama intensifies as this reunion episode highlights our WildCard™ ammunition option once again. Gel rounds or APDS? Nobody knows until the hammer falls!

THIS SEASON, ON CHASE: ERRANT KNIGHT! BROUGHT TO YOU BY NBS.

Episode 11: Sin Pretty

Get razzle-dazzled as Chase hits Las Vegas for the first time in show history! When he's in town for Ares' own Hoplite™ Gun Show,* Chase will have to find the time to help dancing girls in distress, chase down a skip trace, collect local debts ... and play cards just like a real cowboy!

* (Tickets on sale now through Ares and Ares Pro; Ares Pro members gain access to the "Meet Chase!" special VIP package.)

Episode 12: Peaches and Crime

Sit a spell and relax as Chase wraps before the mid-season break in Atlanta, the very heart of the CAS. As sprawl gangers and bail jumpers of all stripes keep Chase and his Harley Davidson Night Glide™ motorcycle busy, the show will explore the rich socio-economic history of this bastion of the American South, and, between the gunshots, ask an important question: Is Atlanta the city of the past, or secretly the city of the future?

- > The worst part of this jingoistic, corporate-shill crap? Chase isn't even a bad guy, honestly. He's just a guy who got in over his head when Ares somehow got him to sign the dotted line, those many moons ago. They've dedicated eight seasons, now, to turning him into an Ares commercial, and fans are still eating it up.
- > Hard Exit
- > His gun handling's unreal. Literally. If the prick wasn't an adept, he'd never make a single shot, I swear. He's got no proper stance, no follow-through, no trigger discipline, no nothing. He doesn't aim so much as strike a pose every time he pulls the trigger.
- > Kincaid
- > Aww, you're just sour because he pulls off elven ruggedness better than you, Jimmy.
- > Hard Exit
- > Anyone else make it a habit of catching the premieres at the local Golden Archers? Cheap food and corporate-sponsored hoop-kicking, what a combo!
- > Morlok

NEW FROM TOON HORIZON

Tune into the latest animated shows debuting this season, only on Toon Horizon!

Bizarre Bazaar: Ralph and Kenny juggle high school, teenage awkwardness, and being nerds as they investigate strange events at a creepy carnival on the edge of town.

Pirates of the Seven Seas: Join Captain Whalebone and his zany crew as they sail the seas in search of treasure, magic, and adventure! Cartoon fantasy action suitable for children of all ages.

TransMorphers: Ultimas Alpha and the Metacars defend Earth against the evil Magnacron and the Vilatrons in this highly anticipated reboot of a classic cartoon series.

- > What is this, the '30s all over again?
- > Kane
- > Don't you mean the '80s?
- > Red
- > Huh? It is the '80s.
- > Kane
- > Exactly.
- > Red
- > ... what?
- > Kane
- > K-Tribe over on LAXnet claimed to have evidence that the Toon Horizon programming block has been laced with subliminal advertising, mostly creating a compulsion to buy Horizon goods and trust Horizon. Tried to get a copy for us, but come to find out, she's MIA.
- > Glitch
- > That's the lighter side of the story. Reports are hitting the shadows of Hell-A about kids watching adverts during a TransMorphers show and going nuts, attacking and killing their families. The kills are supposedly super clean, like the kids were pros. Any operators working around LA using killer kids as cover?
- > Thorn
- > All the reports on those deaths are getting wiped fast. Horizon is trying to clean up something.
- > Slamm-O!

HORIZON DOES THE ACADEMY AWARDS

One of the major media changes in 2079 was a decision by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to officially contract Horizon Media Group to run the Academy Awards. Previous award ceremonies had judges displaying thinly veiled corp favoritism in their choices. With the populace quickly losing faith in the media institution, Horizon saw an opportunity. Approaching the Academy, they proposed to let the Consensus run the Oscars, citing that from 2063 to 2077, Consensus results had accurately chosen films that lined up with popular opinion 92.6 percent of the time, a considerably higher figure than Academy voting was able to produce. A one-year trial brought a ratings boost, so the trial was extended to five years.

- > Horizon scored big-time with this deal.
- > Snopes
- > Yeah, but probably not for the reasons you think. I'm sure they're gonna pretend to be impartial. Their choices will

- probably be honest ones. But the data on public opinion and reactions to films will make them that much more powerful as they use consumer data to refine their films in the future. This is a long play for Horizon and a great stepping stone.
- > Sunshine
- > Señor Johnson from "South of the Border" has already offered a few runs on the Oscar server. Anyone else want in?
- > /dev/grrl
- > Maybe. What are you going to do?
- > Slamm-0!
- > Make sure that Johnny Spinrad gets nominated for Best Male Lead in a Comedy.
- > /dev/grrl
- > I can't even tell if that's a joke.
- > Chainmaker

SIMSENSE STIMULATION

Flatvid lacked immersion with only two dimensions. Trideo tried to make you feel like you were there with three. But only simsense makes you feel like you are truly part of the action, covering every spatial dimension and adding the intricacies of emotion and sensory data to the mix. Often truly difficult to record and full of boring regular life, simsense packages benefit greatly from the editing process, with top-notch simsnippers earning paydays that match the actors and actresses themselves. The process is different, but the entertainment is just as real.

DUTCH BARRACUDA: CYBERNETIC BOUNTY HUNTER

Based on the true exploits of famous street sam Dutch Barracuda, *Dutch Barracuda* stars Javier Flores, who combines machismo, grit, and a classic 2050 Harley Scorpion to bring this character to life. Each episode brings Dutch closer to the man who killed his wife and ruined his career as a cop. The plot is basically trash, but it's worth watching for the cinematography, as well as Flores' over-the-top performance. Sultry camera angles are expertly designed by director Carter Helstrom, who finds ways to utilize polyPOV to make every shot worth a rewatch. Of particular note are the post-gunfight smoke effects coming from his Ingram Smartguns and his cigar. The lighting and shadow work got the show a nod at the last EIB awards show. It looks like style over substance might keep this show chugging along.

- > Dutch really was a bounty hunter in the '50s. Today he's an info-broker and runs a cozy little skip-trace business outside Fresno. He got screwed out of the royalties to his original life story, but that movie adaptation was totally fucked by Mars Studios, so he used their infamy to sell a round of (somewhat) fictionalized accounts of his adventures. Prometheus Pictures bought the rights to those.
- > Red
- > Fun fact: Both Mars Studios and Prometheus Pictures are subsidiaries of Ares but are in direct competition for box office receipts. Gotta love corporate cannibalism.
- > Sunshine
- > See the big picture. Entertainment from Ares can usually be bought with Ares scrip, so more options means more employees turning a portion of their salary right back over to the parent corp. They'll make all sorts of shows if it means keeping their cheap labor pacified.
- > Cosmo

FALCON DIRECT!

Ever since she walked out of that tank vs. dragon incident back during the '75 finals, Evangeline "Falcon" Falcone has been a *Desert Wars* starlet. Her feed alone has been raining nuyen down on the White Lions. During the last off-season, she went in for elective surgery. Instead of coming out with some new, top-of-the-line Hermes reflex system, she went the bioware route through Evo and got one of those synaptic overlay systems so she'd have biostability remaining for the REELLife simrig and SpeedFreak control rig she added to make this season that much more entertaining.

Along with watching the White Lions lay waste to their opponents, you can get the straight sim feed from Falcon and watch her kick hoop and take tags. This new program also has her broadcasting from a custom-fitted cockpit inside her modded Megalodon for those who can't handle the straight sim high of this high-energy hottie. Sorry if I sound a little like a salesman, but I am a true fan of Falcon. I love her style and precision. The Megalodon isn't the most graceful of beasts—hard to be graceful at 65 tons—but Falcon makes hers dance like a dolphin in the deeps.

- > That's funny. "Custom cockpit." You mean rigger cocoon inside the command zep floating over the match where she's been since the first time she climbed back into a Megalodon and ended up sobbing and curled up in a ball on the deck plates. Girl's got serious PTSD, but the White Lions saw the nuyen signs when she walked away from that scrap with Kolarius.
- > Rigger X
- > I thought it was a variation in the broadcast speed that had her reactions slightly off from the action. Makes sense now.
- > /dev/grrl
- > Wait, if it's a sim feed, how do people not sense her PTSD?
- > Stone
- > Tweaks to the feed can cover the PTSD. If Rigger X is right, she also may not be suffering any acute issues while operating from above the action. Drivers and riggers feel things in very different ways.
- > Butch
- > Damn! That's why my fantasy scores always seem off. We drafted her as a driver, but she's actually scoring as a rigger in official fields. Damn it! Gotta talk to the fantasy guys and get a mod in place or something.
- > Slamm-O!

HIGH OCTANE

Everyone who runs this feed loves it. No matter how little time you've spent working on your understanding of the mechanics of the various vehicles driven on the show, feeling them is a whole different story. The show's host, Skyler Tempest, offers a riveting rundown on the specs of various vehicles before jumping in, full VR. She uses her recording systems in conjunction with her control rig to offer an adrenaline-boosting ride in everything from modified street racers all the way to military fighter jets and drones.

- > Fun fact: Half the rides that Tempest gets her hands on are boosted. In order to not make the show just seem like a massive advertisement, Skyler uses a chunk of the development budget to hire those skilled at acquiring rare and exotic vehicles for her

use. Sometimes after the show is done, she drops it back into the thief's hot little hands, but that's mostly to avoid possession-of-stolen-goods charges.

- > Rigger X
- > Skyler doesn't always just contract the jobs. She's an A+ rigger and gladly supplements a team in need of transit assistance for a slightly smaller overall bill.
- > Sounder
- > I just found out her episode featuring a T-97 Thunderwave was all footage from a running battle to get out of Yakut. It was one of her highest-rated shows to date, and her producers are pushing for more of that kind of action to keep the masses happy.
- > Slamm-O!

Skyler's feed, which she overlays with commentary post production, offers plenty of insight into her personal life and the tragedy that sparked her need for speed. This last season, she talked about her brother's racing career and her parents shutting down her efforts to follow in his footsteps. She doesn't use names, but the fan theories and speculation on her brother's identity and her real identity are almost as popular as the loco-locomotive adrenaline rush from the show.

Almost!

SINLESS LIFE/LIFE OF CRIME

Can't decide whether this show is a lesson about keeping your job so you don't end up like them or just the classic, "look, life could be worse" type of shlock they toss out to make the wageslaves feel better about themselves and their miserable lives. Either way, it's fragging golden entertainment!

Reality Studios, a way-down-the-totem-pole subsidiary of Ares (if my digging is correct), randomly selects individuals who live on the streets to get fitted with simrigs. They walk around in their regular life, and people all over the world can tune in and ride along on their feed. Each "Lifer" (the show's term for the participants) earns points for viewers who subscribe. The points add up, and it ends with a payday at the end of their contract, including a cash payout and a SIN from the participating nation of their choosing. Contracts are for five years and the show is only in its third season, so no one has gotten to the payout point to date.

Several of the Lifers have managed to rack up several million in their payout pools by getting into shadowwork or street fighting. A few have gone the prostitution route, but the clientele they're hooking isn't particularly appealing to a broad audience. Small street scuffles, random acts of violence and mischief, and a list of crimes a mile long are getting committed by these hobos every day to draw a crowd. It's catching Reality Studios a ton

of flack, but they have a healthy army of lawyers fending off the attacks against them.

- > This show has been a goldmine for organleggers. They not only get a line on meat but know that it's filled with valuable wares. Secondhand simrigs still pull a pretty penny on the black market.
- > Hannibelle
- > Food source?
- > Arcadian
- > Don't be a drekstain.
- > Bull
- > Legit question!
- > Arcadian
- > No more, Arcadian. Lesson to the new kids. When we speak, don't talk back. Just heed the advice. Stone, that black mark is going on your record.
- > Bull
- > Sorry, Bull, this is not a defense, but a lesson for others. Arcadian was drunk as a stinkstoat when she posted that. Don't drink and post.
- > Stone
- > You know those big payouts aren't going to happen. It's a lot easier to pay a small runner team a pittance of the overall debt. Hell, they could offer a rookie hitman the contract and pay a fraction of the nuyen they owe the hobo.
- > /dev/grrl
- > Or the hobo can set up a contract with a small runner team to keep him safe for a percentage of their earnings.
- > Stone
- > The window is too wide for a hit. Every one of those high earners already has a bullseye on them. It's going to cost them a big chunk of their payout, and they need to find runners willing to work with a promise of money, knowing that failing means zero payday.
- > Picador
- > Subscribe to Romeo of Remington Station. His older feeds featured a bunch of romantic encounters with other resident of Remington Station, a decommissioned underground train station in New York, but his later work is genius. He found a runner team to cover his ass by offering a chunk of the payout in exchange for being on their team. They even gave him a Remington Roomsweeper to add to the branding! They're getting a profile boost, his payout is about to roll into eight figures, and if Reality comes a-gunning for him, they have to go through Captain Crunch, the team's troll gunbunny.
- > Slamm-0!

- > The bigger the payout, the more money they'll throw against them to keep from paying it. Captain Crunch is a beast, but I'll drop him with a thought while Sapphire runs interference on Admiral Ames. Being on the defensive is a rough spot when there's cash getting tossed out to every hitter on the market.
- > Ire
- > I've got Sergeant Slaughter and Lieutenant Dan dialed in if you want to split the payout.
- > Balladeer
- > Connect direct. Been awhile since I took on a challenge. And after the way they handled that job in Soho, they deserve anything they get. Professional courtesy only gets you so much.
- > Ire

If a Lifer gets pinched, they get moved over to a new show, *Life of Crime*, or *LoC* to the fans, with a premium subscriber list and a glimpse inside the prison systems of the world. The feeds are often blocked by the prisons, but skilled Lifers know how to get their feeds out to their fans and keep racking up that payout pool. For *Life of Crime*, the Lifers have the option of a payout upon release, which could be quite the nest egg, or a yearly payout to their prison account to ease the pain of living inside. As one might expect, Ares-run prisons tend to have more feeds slip through. That was one of my first clues on a direction I could take to trace the corp behind Reality Studios.

- > Same contract issues are going to come calling inside these places, especially if anyone gets wind of someone being a Lifer. Make a Lifer your prison slitch, and you've got a cash cow you can milk.
- > 2XL

WHO YOU KNOW IS WHO YOU ARE

We aren't just interested in the "art" that keeps the masses in line. We of the shadows must also look behind the curtain, because that is where we'll find those who seek out our services, or who our services are to seek out. From gathering (or planting) dirt on celebs and industry icons to sabotaging sets and creating other production-delaying operations, we get work in droves from those who, on the surface, appear to be all about entertaining the masses, rather than undermining the livelihoods of their opposition.

A. K. ASHWORTH (A.K.A. A.K.A.)

Yep, we all see it, but to most, it's just a creative quirk by an eccentric artist. They don't know what she does when the cameras aren't on her, and as a primarily behind-the-scenes operator, that's a lot of crazy time.

DOWN IN THE DIRTY

POSTED BY: TURBO BUNNY

Don't even pretend you don't do it. It's the Matrix, where anything is possible and everything is permissible. So let's all just admit it together: "I watch porn."

Except it's not really just watching, is it? The wonders of simsense mean it can feel like you're really there. If you're willing to trade some brain cells, it can be even better. You don't have to call the next day, don't have to worry about catching anything, no guilt about cheating or indulging your kinks, no hooks or hangups, and you can relive that orgasm the same way again and again and again.

But wait, there's more! Cabana boys, hulking trolls, coquettish maids, college-age school girls and harsh nuns are vanilla, these days. The world is full of monsters and AIs and metaplanes and more. The room for sexual fascination has never been greater, and the associated danger isn't something everyone wants to chase in real life. Porn is a gateway into worlds of carnality, for better or worse.

Where you find the worse is where the fun and games end. Appetites are more jaded than ever, and there's no end of scum to supply any kind of demand. More often than not, there's all kinds of staged stuff, from demonic hentai lovingly rendered in full POV wonder to "force play" with all participants in on the fantasy, safe and sound. Still, though, some soulless bastards need the real thing. Snuff, BiteBytes, torture, and far worse pollute the darker corners of the 'trix, and whether you're the one dying to get someone else off or the asshole who paid for the brainmelter of it happening, everyone loses. The upshot? It's one of those industries that creates a lot of work for us. Crime syndicates, slave rings, and sicko production houses tend to generate a lot of missing persons and bounty work, and it's the kind of job where putting a bullet in the brain of every piece of shit who made it happen isn't just a moral imperative but a real pleasure.

Goldie Hollywood

Goldie is considered the queen of p2p porn. Effectively a digital prostitute, she dodges the label by making her performances with fans public, creating what her agent calls "The World's Biggest Peepshow." She prefers to think of it as performance art, and she remains a media darling both in the adult industry as well as mainstream trids due to her charita-

To be clear, no one knows what the A.K. stands for. It's probably nothing, since it's all a well-built fake, but the best fakes have some sweet subtle details of truth. I wouldn't doubt that A.K. were her initials in her previous life, or some other such bit of incidental and unsearchable trivia. Ashworth, though obviously at least forty years old, didn't exist before 2062. Sure, Crash 2.0 may have erased every bit of information on this person, but come on, seriously, if it did, there's obviously more going on anyway. But I digress on the personal precariousness of this brilliant woman's nom de plume.

ble foundations, professional gaming career, and sex-positive workshops promoting safety and communication between partners.

Marty Leeward

King of Vanilla, Marty brings vintage charm to the trid with paper-thin plots, unbelievable set-ups, and laugh-worthy dialogue. The secret to his success? He's fantastic in bed, or at least feels that way in polyPOV. Empathetic, a team player, and by all accounts a pleasure to work with, Marty won the Gentleman's Award at the Luscious Films Award Show last year, boosting subscriptions to his original series Deliveryman Diaries. He's the Ork Next Door you always dreamed about.

Phillip Dynamite

At the forefront of "Action Erotica," Phillip Dynamite is part B-trid action star, part skinsim sensation. While it's considered a somewhat niche market, Dynamite's use of an adrenal pump makes for some thrilling POV scenes, whether he's diving from a post-apocalyptic scrap car to save his girlfriend from raiders, or "celebrating" with her afterward.

Ted Delicious

Everyone needs a schtick. Teddy uses his tongue on everything from food to ... well, whatever else you care to imagine (or not). Delicious has brought a whole new world to porn epicureans everywhere. His latest, Teddy Has Taste 3, has become something of a cult controversy, and everyone is worried what he's going to put his lips on next.

Wynona Onyx

Mage porn is nothing new, but Onyx is special in that she follows a possession tradition. Calling upon spirits to possess her during the act is something which has, surprisingly, never happened before in media, and while the output is often disorienting, it's proven all the rage with the curious.

- ▶ Just gonna stop any comments here. This is a little too dark to have a conversation about and honestly, I don't want to hear anything remotely resembling a debate about it. I'm with Bunny.
- ▶ Bull

A.K.A. is a regular invite signature for runners across North America. While the traditional Mr. Johnson would work just fine, she prefers her more distinctive pseudonym as a touch of flair for jobs touching the world of entertainment. She acts as a major entertainment industry fixer for jobs spanning the globe. She never seems to leave central North America, basically the strip that was once southern Canada and the U.S. For those without a clue about history, that's pretty much the UCAS, CAS, NAN, and CalFree. She has, according to official records, never left this wide swath of land. I know I said her work is global, but all of her

business meetings occur in these regions, while the work touches everywhere.

- > There's got to be a reason she doesn't leave. Anyone got rumors?
- > Slamm-0!
- > Only rumors, and they're quite vague. Her former life occurred somewhere in Europe and she didn't leave on the best terms. Whoever has a grudge against her must have less influence across that region.
- > Balladeer
- > I heard it's a handshake agreement to keep her personal access to assets in other areas limited. Thanks to runners that's a moot point, but she still can't go in person to use her ample and quirky charms face to face.
- > Snopes

Ashworth is apparently independent. She doesn't have obvious connections or affiliations to any single corp, working as a talent scout, contract negotiator, director, and producer for several of the larger production companies—even ones under different megacorporate umbrellas. According to official records, her SIN belongs to the PCC, but her work appears to happen via freelancing and subcontracting. She has worked for PCC-affiliated companies, but it's never exclusive or permanently binding. She doesn't do any contracts for multiple films to avoid appearing bound to a single corp, but she has returned on a few sequels. It's a rare position in the entertainment industry to be so fluid, but her work speaks for itself, and no corp has offered her enough to lock her in to one place.

As for A.K.A., she has been contracting jobs regularly against a wealth of entertainment industry heavies and crushing up-and-comers on a regular basis. Her official name's neutral status makes her ideal for Johnsoning internal conflicts as well as brokering arrangements to cease adverse operations between internal projects.

- > Any chance of truth to the free spirit rumor? I've heard that she never flies and instead drives everywhere. Maybe she doesn't leave the region she's in because of some kind of domain restriction.
- > /dev/grrl
- > Similar rumors connect to a cortex bomb that limits travel. Both seem flimsy but might make for a great trid.
- > Netcat
- > It's interesting to see all the effort here on JackPoint examining who really hires us, while out on the street, so many runners just see the nuyen.
- > Glitch

- > So many dead runners.
- > Bull

- > I don't dig, and I'm still kicking.
- > BioKnight

- > Luck only lasts so long. You have access, learn from it.
- > Bull

GUNNER DELTA

If you've watched an action trid or sim in the last twenty or so years, chances are you'll know the name Gunner Delta.

A self-proclaimed man of action, Delta burst onto the action scene in 2051 with his breakout hit *Blood in the Desert*, a docudrama about Ares' mercenaries fighting in the *Desert Wars*. Shot almost entirely by Delta himself while embedded with the mercs, the sim was praised by many for its unflinching look at the gritty realities of warfare (at least, as real as *Desert Wars* is), while also being lambasted for the over-dramatic and somewhat cliché portrayal of the characters. But the criticisms didn't matter, as it brought in almost 500 million nuyen worldwide on a budget of only 400K. This cemented Delta's position as the hot up-and-comer (and cash cow) for Ares Global Entertainment.

By 2075, Delta would go on to direct or produce more than 100 different action-related sims and trid shows, each of them following the same basic formula of big explosions, intense action sequences, extremely attractive leads, and slow panning shots for dramatic effect. And despite harsh criticisms by critics and fans, his movies kept making stupid money, which is why AGE kept giving him the funds for his projects, no matter how insane they seemed.

- > Another trick Delta liked to use in his works, especially his early sims, is adding something called "amp code." While I won't bore you with the technical aspects, the overall effect of this tiny bit of glitch coding caused an enhanced neurological response, usually only about 0.05 percent overall. It was small enough that the FCC and other governing bodies let it slide. But during those intense battle, chase, or whatever scenes, it was just the kind of extra punch sim-fans came to expect of Delta's early work. Too bad they didn't know exactly why.
- > Butch
- > Until Delta's sim **Run Fast, Love Faster** was released in 2058. Some Humanis drekhead fragged with the shock code, and it engaged during the love scenes between leads Liam Burke (male ork) and Sarah Blackthorn (a human female). Having audiences get sick during their first kiss played right into their hands and made for some great propaganda. Delta himself was forced by AGE to come clean about the practice and discontinue its use.
- > Bull

Considering himself somewhat of a “maverick visionary” (his words, not mine), Delta is something of a method director/producer. He’s the kind of nut job that has to be in the middle of the action, recording it up-close and personal with intense attention to detail. While this has garnered a great deal of respect from those he works with, it’s not quite as endearing to others. It’s an open secret that the AGE board of directors get very nervous when Delta begins a new project.

When he isn’t giving the board of directors, corporate accountants, or attorneys heart attacks with his antics, Delta was (and still is) known to be a bit of an activist. During the Az-Am War, he joined a small cadre of celebs to help show “the plight of the local people caught up in a horrendous war.” His epic biopic about that war, *Crimson Jungles*, was dedicated to the people of Central and South America, although in reality nothing he or any of the others did amounted to squat. It played extremely well on the press releases, and everyone felt good about helping the poor, poor people <gagging noises>.

- ▶ AGE was also known to hire additional security on the sly to keep Delta out of trouble. Case in point: when filming **Crimson Jungles** during the Az-Am War, Delta liked to gear up in full tac-armor and loaded with weapons to “get the real feel of the fighter.” All he did was almost kill himself from heat stroke and nearly get his head blown off. Twice.
- ▶ Hard Exit
- ▶ Still, **Crimson Jungles** earned 460 million on its initial release.
- ▶ Marcos

But aside from his interesting production methods, Delta is also famous for his outlandish marketing strategies and antics. At the 2065 premiere of his retro-space dramedy *Rocket Rangers*, Delta arrived on the red carpet utilizing an honest-to-ghost rocket pack. Never mind that he also set said red carpet (and several close-by items and structures) literally on fire when he veered off course. Two years later in 2067 while promoting *Neon Ninjas*, he had several actors posing as ninjas stage showdowns throughout downtown LA. Several actors were seriously injured and three were killed when some locals mistook the staged fights as real and dealt with the problem.

- ▶ Back then, AGE had an army of attorneys on standby for damage control. During a datasteal five years ago, I came across some bonus data that said fifteen percent of all Delta’s gross sales went into an emergency fund for just such occurrences.
- ▶ /dev/grrl

For years, Delta could do no wrong and was happy riding the wave of his own success, so it was a big shock when in 2076 AGE suddenly dropped



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Wynona Flying-Horse

After her sex tape scandal following SURGE during the passing of Haley's Comet, Wynona spiraled into tabloid antics for a few years, from rumored BTL use to shoplifting. She wisely chose to fade from public view for a while before she started popping up in cameos with old friends in the industry. Nostalgia and talent proved bigger than scandal, and Wynona's star seems to be on the rise again, especially after her fantastic turn as Alice Haeffner in *A Prophet of No Consequence*.

him without warning, cutting off all support and leaving Delta with only his personal accounts, which weren't as flush as they could have been thanks to his extravagant lifestyle choices.

- > Choices like Delta's gold-plated 2065 Saab Dynamit with a freakin' jet engine attached to it. What insane fragger does that?
- > Stone
- > Uh, how many riggers do you know?
- > Turbo Bunny

Rumors ran rampant about Delta's parting with AGE, everything from Delta sleeping with an AGE exec's wife to wanting to film his next production in deep space with the help of AIs. Ultimately, though, it was Delta's excesses and diminishing returns on his projects that caught up with him, coupled with the split of Truman Distribution Network from AGE.

But you can't keep a good artist—or whatever Delta is—down for long. In 2078, after liquidating all of his remaining assets, he founded Renegade Productions and Delta Company Studios and returned to his roots as an in-your-face documentarian and indie sim-maker. Or at least he hired enough people to do the heavy lifting for him so he could just slap his name on whatever they produced. Now at the helm of this new company, Delta is slated to be releasing three new docu-sims, and his hit trid show *Street by Street* is gearing up for its third season.

- > For those of you who may be wondering, Renegade and Delta Company aren't exactly independent. After his departure from AGE, Gunner had nowhere near enough capital to create both companies at the same time. But if one follows the money down just the right paths, they'll find that Delta has a bright future on the horizon.
- > Mr. Bonds
- > Oh, that's cryptic. Whatever do you mean? *rolls eyes*
- > Hard Exit

Gary Cline

While Gary hasn't been in a Pathfinder flick in years, the Horizon boy-hunk remains a central figure for social media (people still boast about how many degrees they are from him on the Persona network), as well as a corporate powerhouse of popularity and trendsetting. While rumors continue on about his actual efficacy as CEO of Horizon, his presence in pop culture remains as fresh and vibrant as ever.

PAOLO ESCOBAR

Best known for his claims of being related to world-renowned drug kingpin Pablo Escobar, this producer has been known to loudly state, "They will forget my ancestor to remember me!"

Paolo is hungry for success and willing to use whatever means necessary. He doesn't have the charms of some of his fellow industry counterparts, but he has the guile, wiles, and complete lack of moral fiber. That all adds up to a willingness to go to any length to solve any problem. His efforts are slowly gaining notice as his projects are making millions for the studios that take him on. None have offered him a lucrative contract to stick with them, likely due to the reputation he tends to leave behind. Paolo is having a lot of success working his way up in the entertainment world, but he is stepping on vast quantities of toes along the way. And by stepping, I mean stomping the drek out of. The bullseyes and baggage building up around him just aren't worth the risk to the bottom line if trouble follows. The corps will make the money they can with his efforts but leave him to collect his own just rewards without backslash on them.

- > Reminds me of a lot of runners I know. Making good money, getting a lot of ticks in the win column, but leaving scores of enemies in their wake.
- > Slamm-O!
- > He'll keep money flowing into the shadows, not just for his industry jobs, but also for the protection gigs. If they aren't there already, contracts on him have to be coming out soon.
- > Stone
- > He's got a spot, but the pay is low. Unless he starts hurting someone's bottom line while helping his own, he won't earn a big enough contract to collect until he gets himself a rich nemesis.
- > Balladeer

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

There are plenty of places around the world making nuyen hand over fist for this industry. I meant for, not from, because the industry still wants to profit, and if costs are too high to record a trid set in Atlanta in actual Atlanta, there are plenty of other cities that can get a little CGI editing in post production, or sets that can be built in a barrens warehouse to keep costs down. There's always the famous spots that get business for the prestige or because the backroom deals made around them help out the right people, but alongside those, there are plenty of less-typical spots that have been getting some attention lately as filming locations where we might be summoned for work.

CHICAGO

Two "independent" studios have begun extensive operations in Chicago, and not in the nice part of town. Both Bug City Pictures and Shattergrave Productions have been selling off completed features to the larger studios. Connections between the two are rumored, based on some similarities in their unconventional business model, but my analysis didn't dig that far up the money trail. That business model funds films up front, completes them, sells them to big studios around the world, and then distributes a percentage of profit to all those involved in the film. For two separate companies to pop up in Chicago at the same time doing the same thing seems awfully odd, though weirder things have happened in business.

- ▶ Chicago is an odd bird right now. There's a lot of variety in the Chi-town shadows. If you want to keep it interesting, check out one of our latest updates, and then get in on the action. The city changes fast, and old news will get you killed in Bug City.
- ▶ Icarus

Bug City Pictures is headed up by Vaida Sepkus. She's a no-nonsense negotiator with the smarts to leave the filmmaking to her creative employees. Her bio on their host is vague, but based on her scars, she probably weathered the reality of the fictions that Bug City Pictures creates. She has connections all over the former CZ, including Spire, Inc., Hoodville, and Little Earth, as well as dozens of the local warlords.

Bug City focuses on telling stories of the hardships, struggles, and action during the three-year quarantine of the Chicago Containment Zone. There are endless stories from locals as well as outsiders who found themselves working behind the wall to save lives, steal secrets, and slay monsters. Every genre is covered, all with connections to one of the darkest periods of Chicago history. In fact, one of the studio's earliest films, *No Rest*, is

rumored to be Vaida's actual story from the events of late 2055.

Many of their films get limited release due to the lessons they offer about the bugs. Rather than presenting them as simply monsters, Bug City's top storytellers often delve into the tales of the people who walked a path straight to the Universal Brotherhood—many of whom were former corporate wageslaves who felt lost within the masses of their megacorps. Then, once the story progresses, they truly show how horrifying the bugs can be. Happy endings are not their storytelling specialty.

- ▶ Got that right. I've come to expect those kinds of endings out of anything from BCP, but man do they make you want something different. Even though you know it's coming, they hit home every time.
- ▶ Bull
- ▶ Whenever I meet a CZ survivor, I totally understand their cold detachment from those around them. Lose enough friends and you're bound to lose yourself.
- ▶ Ire

Shattergrave Productions is the brainchild of Garrett Prior. A simple barista at Soybucks in the late '30s, he was living a pleasant and relatively normal life until Alamos 20k brought the Sears Tower, and the Soybucks where he was working, down around his head. By some miracle, he survived the initial explosions and collapse, only to be trapped below the rubble. But he wasn't trapped alone. A small group of ghouls had already found a nice living space in the subfloors of the skyscraper. While the collapse laid waste to surrounding areas, much of the substructure, including the sewers and tunnels beneath that section of the city, fared well. Garrett chose to be Infected in order to survive. Now, he's chosen to bridge the society he once served and the one that saved him.

Shattergrave Productions doesn't seem like the kind of little studio the big operations would want footage from, but they have something special. Prior has tapped a niche no others have managed: ghouls. Thanks to some tweaks on a standard simfeed, Prior can offer the ghoul experience and viewpoint for the works they produce. Stories cover a wide assortment of topics, though the plight and reality of Infected life is a common subplot across virtually every tale.

- ▶ Those tweaks he's talking about are nothing small. Several megas are after Prior and his techs to try to get access to his protocols. Between the simfeeds from full rigs (something ghouls usually lose connectivity to) to the coding to make their natural magical nature accessible to the feed, Prior has something the big boys want.
- ▶ Red

- > I started a dig on that awhile back. Prior got the tech from a Truman studio in the CZ. They were working on it before the bugs and abandoned it, or lost it, after the walls went up. I didn't get much further than research because Prior has a lot of protection that will ruin your future if they scratch you, and the Truman site where rumors suggest he got it seems to draw a larger-than-average number of feral ghouls.
- > J.J. Versluis
- > If this is the place I think you're talking about, the area is set aside as a safe haven for our less-fortunate brothers and sisters.
- > Hannibelle
- > Damn if I don't trace the trail for setting that patch aside back to Barry Stah. Claims to be an early activist for ghouls' rights but hasn't got a single photo or bit of record on him prior to '57, and even that's sketchy CZ data. Prior must think he's pretty funny.
- > J.J. Versluis

All over the CZ, these two studios are spreading the wealth with construction efforts on the front end, promoting art and post-production efforts from real Zoners during the process, and leaving behind the sets and construction as gentrification and beautification in the aftermath. Even though it's easy to shoot war-torn areas, post-apocalyptic settings, and even disaster films within the confines of the CZ, every production they put together includes at least one scene that requires some newer-looking structures. This provides new growth and fresh developments for all of those who have suffered so greatly. The construction efforts are generally easy, as bulldozing and building fresh is just a matter of pushing the detritus out of the way. Doesn't leave the prettiest neighborhood around the place, but small steps still complete a journey.

- > I like what they're doing, but the construction isn't durable. There was at least one collapse last winter, and most of the buildings have had to have several refits for insulation and real electrical and plumbing systems.
- > HoodKid

Their efforts are filled with nobility and altruism, but as one would always suspect in such a case, the haters are everywhere. Several groups are constantly trying to get their production schedules to know when and where to interfere with their efforts. Local warlords and area gangs feel the most at risk from the success of these studios, as a hopeful populace is more willing to fight back. Luckily, they don't have the funds or the information network to do much in a large way. They occasionally get in a quick hit, cause a bit of a security issue, or come after a reconstructed neighborhood after the fact in order to put a damper on that hope, but the people of the CZ are resilient.

- > The possibility for the gangs or warlords (not that there's a difference) to cause more problems is there, but they'd need to muster enough cash to buy the info or talent to cause any real problems.
- > HoodKid
- > Way to offer up the answer to those hoopickers.
- > /dev/grll
- > As if they didn't know that already. They aren't FauxSox fans ... oh , wait.
- > HoodKid
- > Ballsy, Kid. I like your chops.
- > Kane
- > The studios aren't just protected by their own security. The local mob has a vested interest in making small firms like this successful. If the CZ can come back with mostly small corp support, then maybe the local mafia has a chance of holding onto some control.
- > Fianchetto
- > It's a long shot. The megas and the Illinois government are both already heavily invested in the resurrection of Chicago. I don't think the little guys have a chance at this point. Not that the little guys are really the little guys anymore. Someone owns them somewhere up the line.
- > Glitch
- > Chicago isn't dead. The CZ is dead, and all those involved are using it as a PR stunt to show they care. The rest of Chicago has long kept on surviving and thriving even with that blight marring the third coast.
- > Comiskey
- > The studios have some underworld support outside of the mafia. A group known as the City Council, led by the Mayor and his Aldermen, has been promoting the studio's efforts as a way to build civility through their artistic efforts.
- > Stone

ST. LOUIS

The Gateway City has been serving as a backdrop of visual entertainment material for going on half a century. Ever since downtown Chicago got trashed by Alamos 20k, companies have been using St. Louis to depict the dark urban sprawl in their epic tales in a place that doesn't risk the crew being eaten by ghouls or kidnapped by bug spirits. Well, there's less risk of it. Whether they realize it or not, most runners are doing a ton of work around this patch of the Mississippi connecting back to the various production companies.

The shadows have been especially hot of late, with a huge volume of the films sliding out of St. Louis being used to promote local agendas into a

broader market. All while those same agendas are being pushed heavily on set and within the production crew. You can't swing a stick without hitting a Mr. Johnson looking for a team to hinder the efforts of a rival who wants to promote their side of the story. With the four major agendas (pro-UCAS, pro-CAS, pro-megas, pro-Free City) being pushed so heavily over the past eighteen months and ramping the industry up, production groups and film companies have been branching out their money-making machine and pandering to groups looking to build a film around other issues. The small-time stuff might not pay as well, but it also tends to avoid getting you shot at.

The pro-UCAS faction desires a stronger and greater connection with the nation across the river. Their films depict a far stronger UCAS than the real one, or depict the entire situation indirectly (or incorrectly, depending on who you ask). *Southern Pride* came out earlier this year and has been raking in positive reviews. It's a modern retelling of *Pride and Prejudice* set in St. Louis, veering vastly from the original in order to get the right messages across. Especially prominent, and way off from the original, is the message that St. Louis is at the heart of the UCAS in the south, allowing the tale to give off a more classic American south vibe, despite originally being set in England even before the first time there was a north and south in the United States.

- > The film is getting a bunch of positive press, and several big names are calling for Academy Award nods. Which, as discussed earlier, means work for us.
- > Glitch
- > We're also going to be hired on the sly by Horizon to correct those changes and ease the pressure other teams put on the voters. Horizon doesn't want it to look like they're interfering with the awards, so they have to keep it in the shadows, but they need these next few years to go smoothly for their new contract.
- > /dev/grrl

Working the opposing message this year was *Fallen Arches*, a tale of runners working against the development of the ARCHology. With a definite anti-mega, anti-UCAS, pro-Free City feel, the story itself feels like it got bulldozed to the side as the political agendas leap out at every turn. Main character Cavilan Ross, a.k.a. Cross, leads his runners all over the sprawl, including across the river to a hellscape UCAS, to deal with the low-life corporate scum looking to steal the land to build their newest tower of greed. It's not a spoiler, don't worry. This film telegraphs every move, but that isn't hurting its bottom line. *Fallen Arches* has the fourth spot on the list of highest grossing films of the year, with less than a handful that look like they may be able to take it out of the top five before year's end.

- > Cross is played by Anthony Sherman, son of Senator Nathaniel Sherman, a known member of the Black Lodge. I'm not sure if the apple fell far from the tree, or if it is just taking a different course, but keep that in mind if you have any dealings with Sherman or anything related to him.
- > Icarus
- > A sequel is already in the works. **Risen City** supposedly pushes the Free City agenda straight down the watcher's throat with very little veil on the message.
- > /dev/grrl

War movies usually do well as long as they have some compelling tale to go along with all the cool scenes of stuff blowing up. *Bloody Ol' Muddy* wants that story to make you hate the UCAS and think the CAS is the only hope for a city that is confused about where it belongs and gets itself caught in the middle of a war. The movie depicts the aftereffects of a war between the UCAS and CAS played out with St. Louis as a major warzone. A unit of Confederate soldiers is sent into the warzone to recover a missing doctor. The doctor, played by Dyna Grayson, turns out to be more than they expected. With UCAS soldiers hot on their heels, they need to get out of St. Louis fast.

- > It's basic fare for a movie, but the depiction of soldiers on each side couldn't be any more biased if they tried. Aston Gates is a bright-eyed fresh lieutenant, looking to be the noble, young hero for the CAS. Meanwhile, Sergeant Frank Springfield is the hyper-violent, grizzled veteran on the UCAS side, willing to stop at nothing, including killing women and children, to prevent the doctor from escaping. The stereotypes run deep in this one.
- > Sunshine

Utopian futures are a fixture of sci-fi, and *Gateway to Infinity* is the most recent entry in this tradition. This epic megacorporate hoop-licking flick is centered on a bustling urban sprawl, filled with shiny structures peppered with just enough green to look eco-friendly. The backdrop for this extra-dimensional exploration film is obviously St. Louis (retagged Archangel City) with the arch as a focus for this unique form of travel. The city's corporate council, which looks an awful lot like a rebranded Big Ten corp, is at the heart of the explorational efforts. Those efforts are by a collection of rebellious rabble dubbed the Shadow Force. The release date has been pushed back several times over the past year as the production has been hindered by setback after setback. I'm certain no one here has heard anything about any of that!

- > The story looks like a post-fall knock of NeoNET, with one of the traitorous members of the council coming from NovaNET.
- > /dev/grrl

- ▶ Based on the original release date, that would have been more like well-timed propaganda as NeoNET was pinned and shredded for Boston. The work that slowed the picture could very well have come from them at that time, given the amount of bad press they were trying to dodge in order to sell off what they could before the fire sale by the Corporate Court.
- ▶ Icarus

SWEETWATER CREEK

We offered a glimpse at Sweetwater Creek in our *Complete Trog* download, but it couldn't cover everything. Now that we're talking about the entertainment industry, in particular trideo and sim, we can talk a little more about this quaint not-so-little trog haven and some happenings we could all take an interest in.

With the oversized structures and wide variety of architectural styles, the community here has been used as a location for everything from high-fantasy trids to local sim documentaries about a day in the life. Filming for a smaller crowd is quite friendly here as well, as the oversized rooms allow for cameras and equipment to fit within the spaces without the need for building a set on a soundstage. That's not to say they don't have them. Hangar 21 Studios, named for the main hangar at a small (now defunct) airstrip within the boundaries of Sweetwater, has six hangars that are all used for soundstage creation. The old equipment lot out behind building four is a menagerie of pieces from various eras and settings. One of the best parts about film projects in Sweetwater is the easy access to construction crews and the speed at which large projects can be built thanks to the primarily troll-and-ork workforce.

- ▶ The airstrip, and the land it's on, aren't part of Sweetwater. They're trying, and using a lot of dirty tricks in the process, to get it all cleared. Hangar 21 Studios uses an address in Sweetwater proper, but that land is still part of Lithia Springs.
- ▶ OrkCEO
- ▶ The issues with Lithia Springs weren't mentioned much when they wrote about Sweetwater. The town was not happy losing the nearby federal land and a healthy chunk of city property to become a trog refuge. It's simmered down, but old feuds burn long down here, and you never know when they'll spark back up.
- ▶ 2XL

The local government is also enforcing construction ordinances for the building of any structure within Sweetwater Creek. After completion, costs are reported to the city and local property management companies for purchase options. It's been great for growing the area and attracting more residents with inexpensive, creatively designed homes. As a reinvestment in the community, several stars have been buying iconic locations

from their films as homes or taking them as a portion of their pay. Danika Sterling created Sterling B&Bs and rents out the seven sets that she owns (so far) to her fans.

- ▶ Construction costs are getting more and more inflated with each project as the film companies try to cash in on Sweetwater's desire to keep its homey, small-town feel. It's blowing up in their faces as no one buys the property and it stays abandoned, attracting very large squatters. Removal has proven to be difficult.
- ▶ 2XL
- ▶ It's not just Danika's fans that stay at her B&Bs. Several stalkers have left her unpleasant messages for not being onsite for their visit, including several threats. She's not a passive individual. To stem the tide, she's hired several teams of runners to "apologize" for her.
- ▶ Butch

The trolls and orks of Sweetwater also love the entertainment attention and opportunities they've gotten to get on set. Extras are abundant, but stars are hidden among the masses. Tarrek Argon, best known for playing Viktor Krush in the *Krimson Krush* series, was working set construction when Alan Knight (no relation) spotted him. Janit White, girl next door starlet from *Old Red Kansas*, was doing the classic waitress gig when she was discovered.

Sweetwater has also become the home base for this season of *DASH: Star Loner!*. Some critics have said the bounty hunter series has been upping its ratings at the expense of those trying to make a better life despite problematic former circumstances that led them down some errant paths. Showrunners point out that they only go after legally issued bounties, and every potential target is vetted. Other complaints include unnecessary violence being brought to town along with riling elements that were trying to settle into a quiet life. As it stands, Picket Dunton, outrider for the Tacoma Timber Wolves, is at the top of their target list. He was accused of murdering his girlfriend and manager when he found out they were hooking up behind his back, and most people think his apprehension will be the season finale.

- ▶ Dunton's not going to be an easy snag like the rest of this show's marks. He's running with a shadowteam, and if my info is correct, they're killers. Someone will die trying to apprehend Picket Dunton if they make it part of the show.
- ▶ Stone
- ▶ That's funny you think they'll play it so straight. This will go one of two ways. A real Lone Star team will actually grab Dunton, then release him to the showrunners to stage a grab.
or...
The showrunners will reach into the shadows, offer Dunton

a deal to stage a capture, and he'll get a new life with some plastics work. Not my favorite option, as that means he'll be back on the block and not playing for my beloved T-Wolves!

- ▶ Slamm-O!

TRID NETWORKS

Broadcast trid still exists, focused primarily in major sprawls. While Seattle can claim dozens of channels being shown on "Free 3V," once you get out into the boonies, you're lucky to find half that variety. Each broadcast channel comes with three to five sub-channels showing extra content or primary content at differing times to take into account work schedules versus primetime viewing. Yes, imagine, there are still people who work simple banker hours from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday. Can you imagine that? Currently, broadcast channels usually show eighteen minutes of content for every twelve minutes of commercials. The big media corps would like to move this even more toward commercials, but you risk losing viewers.

- ▶ Or having them move toward paid non-commercial services, which is a fine outcome. Still, you often need that first-night buzz to build an audience, so the networks can't bring themselves to totally alienate their live audiences.
- ▶ Cosmo

Premium channels are accessed via a decryption box delivered to your home (one box per trideo, each with a separate charge, natch), and the trid corps take illegal decryption very seriously. The metroplex government has been hammered by complaints about the Ork Underground on this front for decades, and now, with the renaissance down there, the telecoms have been ripping out illegal exchanges and going after pirates with a vengeance. Premium channels are commercial-reduced, often showing as few as five minutes of ads per hour, mostly for related corporate content. As you might imagine, advertising for people to buy premium access is heavily promoted on the free channels.

THE ITCC

Everybody knows the ITCC (Internetwork Transmission Control Council) runs the broadcast world. The ITCC is a regulatory body formed by the major broadcasters, a.k.a. their parent megacorps, watching over one another and their content to ensure quality and fair play. Ha! What a lot of you scraggs don't know is that the ITCC has only existed since 2022. Before then, the U.S. government had a regulatory body called the Federal Communications Committee, or FCC, where they bossed the corporations around. Can

you even imagine them trying that today? At any rate, the ITCC has expanded across all of North America, working in concert with the NANs and in full control of the rest. Keep in mind, only the major networks get a seat on the council—the smaller guys just do what they're told from above. This keeps a tight control over what you can see or hear. If a small fish gets too uppity and starts trying to give out legit information, they're shut down hard. Oligarchy! It's what's for breakfast.

THE MAJORS

With the addition of NABS and OTQ to the council, every major has a seat at the table. In fact, in direct reflection of the Corporate Court, you can now define a major network as one that's on the ITCC, much like AAAs make up the Corporate Court. With control over consumer broadcast frequencies, cable access, satellite transmission, and Matrix content, they decide who gets what feed, at least legally. "But what about the indies? Don't they push rebellious content?" Yeah, corporate-approved rebellion, like buying records from that renegade band that Renraku execs have hyped for months on their college radio stations, then fed into major broadcasts, stuck on MtD, and who have a major clothing line now available at "off-beat" online retailers. Pass the salts, you cutter, I'm woozy from the edge.

ABS (AMERICAN BROADCASTING SYSTEM, UCAS)

The largest shareholder exists in a conundrum most do not see. Through several layers of distraction, including Transnational Communications, Saeder-Krupp holds a sixty percent interest but exerts little direct control due to the spread of investment assets. The dragon corp seems content to just play a long game and let ABS do what they do, only raising a claw to kill negative coverage of ol' Golden Scales. Otherwise, the network is bland sitcoms, corp-friendly news, and soaps. In addition to the regular programming, ABS also owns the World Sports Broadcasting family. WSB is the primary sports source in North America. Their content ranges from live events for urban brawl on WSB 1 to American football on WSB 2 to baseball on WSB 5 to competitive paper football and the World Marbles Championship on WSB 8. If it has to do with sports, it's going to be on some version of WSB.

CBC (CONFEDERATE BROADCASTING COMPANY, CAS)

When MCT passed their twenty-five percent of stock over to Renraku (who had previously inherited Fuchi's stock in the channel) everyone watch-

ing was a bit shocked. The CBC's been a useful mouthpiece for decades, but the cash infusion went into establishing today's Matrix. This meant that in the end, it was a good deal for Mitsuhamma. The CBC pushes CAS nationalism fairly hard, with an undercurrent of just how damn awesome the old US of A was until they let those dirty Canadians join. Once Nakatomi became chairman of the board at Renraku, CBC started going after NeoNET pretty hard. They had a 24/7 news feed dedicated to Boston during the lockdown and absolutely hammered Villiers when it came out that NeoNET was responsible for that whole mess. Beyond that, the CBC has a reputation for "country backwater content," hosting the *Country Music Awards* every year and aiming for an older, more rural target audience. Interestingly, they still run *60 Minutes*, the longest-running show on the trid, an hour-long news magazine where actual journalism gets out.

HEN (HISPANIC ENTERTAINMENT NETWORK, PCC)

The Hispanic Entertainment Network is the successor of Univision Network and various other Spanish-language channels of the old U.S. of A. They operate various stations all around North America, mainly showing sitcoms, tridnovelas, and Latin American soccer games. They also run some politainment shows about the life, rights, and situations of Hispanic people in the various NorthAm countries. HEN is owned by an A-corp known as Pyramid Operations—a more-than-obvious attempt by Aztechnology to bypass the operation bans they have in the CFS and PCC. So it shouldn't surprise you HEN channels are pro-Aztlán and pro-Aztechnology. Unsurprisingly, HEN and Aztlán's Televisa network share a lot of content.

HTB (HISATO-TURNER BROADCASTING CORPORATION, CAS)

Ted Turner once created this major network, which later merged with a Japanese network. HTB is now one of the biggest networks in NA as well as Asia. The range of channels belonging to HTB is countless. Their portfolio includes names like Ancient Wisdom (documentaries), H-T Sports, H-TNT (main trid series channel), HTB Channel 22 (world business news), HTB Mega-Station (main program), NostalgiaVids (old flat vids), Toon Horizon, and of course the infamous NewsNet (NN). Since the takeover and integration into Pathfinder in '72, HTB has become part of the greater Horizon family. While NN once had a history of independent reporting, journalistic integrity was long ago set aside for ratings. The race to be first in all the news is constant, with BREAK-

ING NEWS! alerts constantly popping up, hyped up, and promised to be talked about ... right after this commercial break. They're generally based in actual facts, but they sensationalize everything and force-feed it to you while screaming that this is the most important news fact in the history of everything right until another new story drops to take the trophy. Horizon has promised to improve the network, but what that means, exactly, is still unknown. Ah, Billionaire Ted, how far your baby has fallen.

- Horizon's various other trid stations, like H-Channel or the Hard Ball Sports Network, are considered "independents."
- Sunshine

NABS (NATIVE AMERICAN BROADCAST SYSTEM, SIOUX)

Less of a single broadcaster than an umbrella organization of NAN broadcasters, NABS is headquartered in the Sioux Nation but has regional branches in each NAN member—NABS/SSC in Bellingham, NABS/PCC in El Paso, and so on—who all share the majority of their content. Most of the content is boring, with public-access drek like weather reports, agricultural reports, nature programs, and so on, but things spice up on the weekend, when the entertainment side takes over. Historical docu-dramas, in-depth breakdowns of wars, and soap operas that feature brave warriors and fierce leaders as far as the eye can see. The budgets are low and the acting hammy, but the costumes are amazing and reflect modern NAN fashion. The most notable aspect of NABS, however, is the journalistic integrity. NABS is never first to break a story but, when they get there, it's with evidence, documentation, and crystal-clear honesty laid out for the viewer to digest, rather than feeding into a narrative. Needless to say, every politician winces when a NABS reporter gets called on to ask a question. They're doggedly determined and better than many at getting to the truth.

NBS (NORTH AMERICAN BROADCASTING SYSTEM, UCAS)

A wholly owned subsidiary of Ares Global Entertainment, NBS toes the corporate line, praises the great UCAS, and spoon-feeds bland entertainment and unthreatening information to the UCAS populace. They pound fear into the head of the middle class, talking constantly about how the NAN want to go to war, that the CAS is hungry for territory, and that "sprawl gangers" (read trolls and orks) are after your women. Generally speaking, they have the least-educated and most-fearful people locked in to their network. Trust the corps, trust the state, fear the unknown

and different. Oh, and only we tell the truth that the others are afraid of.

NTN (NATIONAL TRIDEO NETWORK, UCAS)

NTN is what was left of the old Fox network after the first Crash (which wasn't that much). The network is owned by Adams-Westlake-Media-works, which is a Renraku subsidiary, which makes NTN the second major network owned by the "communication" mega. After Renraku acquired the majority of CBC, it started some debate in the ITCC. The balance shift on the board, because one mega owned two majors was a hot debate—that Joe Normal probably never heard about. In the end, the ITCC did nothing, as their rules did not forbid what Renraku had done. Nonetheless, the other ITCC members kept a close eye on NTN's and CBC's actions. NTN's programming is in line with Renraku's values of blending into the local culture, so you don't find outright pro-Renraku propaganda. Still, it considers itself a network for the status quo, which means their news sections are tendentious, biased, metaracist, anti-NAN, and xenophobic, while still pro-UCAS. It is basically CBC's Yankee brother—with, of course, exemplary integration with other Renraku media divisions.

OTQ (ORGANISATION TRIVIDEO DE QUEBEC, QUEBEC)

Few broadcasters have gone through what the OTQ has. Originally formed out of a dozen or so nationalized networks when the Republic of Quebec was created, they wound up being sold off to Cross Applied Technologies, then were largely dismantled after Crash 2.0. Ares bought up most of them, sold off the bones of the rest, then largely forgot about it, having little use for a second major network. Former Cross employees were allowed to run it with a bored administrator making certain that content stayed pro-Ares and otherwise not caring, until it was sold off a few years back in one of Ares' frequent power struggles. The new owners? CatCo Entertainment in the CAS. In short order, the OTQ flipped back to powerfully pro-Quebec and, interestingly, patriotic Canadian content, giving air time to assorted Canadian revival movements, and freedom-fighters in former-Canadian nations. It also tends toward a pro-environmental agenda. The OTQ has been censured several times by the larger ITCC but has shown little remorse. The current push to highlight the Tsimshian environmental disaster and heap scorn on MCT for creating it has garnered awards for the hard-hitting coverage and gut-wrenching footage. Which means, of course, that the corps are looking for ways to put the reporters responsible out of work.

PBN (PUBLIC BROADCASTING NETWORK, UCAS)

A replacement for the PBS of old, PBN was formed back in 2017 as a pro-American channel, combining government airwaves with corporate money, being little more than a government propaganda mouthpiece and shilling shows mainly to talk about their corporate sponsors. It outlived the old US of A as the UCAS found it useful and has continued on its merry way ever since, holding telethons to raise money for public shows, dribbling out information for farmers in rural areas that don't get "real" trid channels, as well as having some actual artistic content due, largely, to corporations that want a new generation of artists to be raised for writing corporate jingles and putting together visuals for advertising.

WBN (WORLD BROADCASTING NETWORK, UCAS)

Up until recently, DeMeKo kept to the production side of things to save themselves the headaches of dealing with the ITCC. With their recent absorption of several broadcasting assets across the globe thanks to the fear of the Megacorp Revision, they've taken their rightful place on the ITCC and making a name for themselves as a mover and shaker. Using their already considerable entertainment pool to boost their initial offerings, they've been on a creation binge for going on a year with even more of their final products due out in the next two months than have come out in the past twelve. The rest of the year looks just as promising, though efforts to slow their production rate down abound.

WUX (WUXING, CFS)

The newest player in the game, Wuxing's obviously named media network operates out of San Francisco in the CFS. They have little original content yet, focused mostly on rebroadcasting shows from Hong Kong or working with assorted SimStudios in California that have slipped out of Horizon's control. Their home improvement shows, featuring gardening, landscaping, and, of course, *Feng Shui* are hugely popular, while "Find Your Center," the early morning tai chi workout, is a breath of fresh air in a world filled with young, corp-perfect bodies doing intense athletics everywhere else.

THE INDIES

Largely a misnomer at this point, over two-thirds of the "independents" are corp-networks and channels that have no seat on the ITCC board and thus are not part of the majors. This



include European media giant DeMeKo, as well as Aztechnology's North American Televisa channels, the rest of Ares Entertainment North America, the Christian media juggernaut United Christian Broadcasting System and the Catholic network Providence, Horizon's Truman Distribution Network or Hard Ball Sports Network. Also it includes all the small sub-subsidiaries of corporate media arms that focuses on small genres. Here you can find channels on carpentry, cooking, NASCAR, interactive lucha-romances, whatever. If there are people who're willing to pay, they'll find a way to feed you a channel tailored to your passion. A few true indies exist, usually in small media markets or in areas, like the NAN, that are strongly opposed to the Business Rights Accords, but economic pressures being what they are, they're an endangered species.

- ▶ And some aren't even as free as they look. The Simmons Group operates out of Oklahoma and has bought dozens of small conservative channels across the CAS, PCC, Sioux, and UCAS. These are super-local broadcasters that reach maybe ten thousand people each but are also the only over-the-air broadcasts in the area. Simmons gets to be the only voice that they hear, and these small rural areas get outsized representation in elections, giving them influence. Thus far, Simmons has focused

more on the gathering than the use, but no one knows when that'll change.

- ▶ Sunshine

THE PIRATES

Most pirates are news-focused, and you can read about them in that section. Pirate entertainers are something else entirely, focused largely around bloggers. Small-time entertainers who record skits, social commentary, or "reality" shows they then upload and allow to be passed around, becoming "Matrix Famous" without corporate backing. Due to an old law signed by President Dukakis, broadcasts of up to 10 km are unregulated, allowing anyone who can assemble the transmission gear to create their own pirate channel. Getting enough content for a 24/7 station is beyond them, but an hour a week? Ten minutes a day? Easy enough. You can see some walking around, broadcasting from a mobile uplink backpack while their CU3 drones whirl around them, getting good angles as they carry on their day. Others rig up a car or van, advertise the channel on the vehicle, and when you're stuck in traffic you can tune in and enjoy what they have to offer. True pirates also exist, hijacking corporate transmissions to send their own

message out, but they tend to get caught quickly and are never seen or heard from again.

PRIVATEERS

A subset of pirates are privateers, or pirates who have corporate backing. Usually it's a small deal—some blogger gets a good-sized fan following, earns a corporate sponsor, then shills their products for a minute or two before going on with the show. Another angle is to find some crusading band of rebel journalists who have an axe to grind against Corporation A, where Corporation B finds out about it and slides the rebels extra resources as “a concerned fan who wants to see the Truth spread.” This lets the rebels take shots at a corporate rival, but should they ever go after the second corp, they can be “outed” and left to the tender mercies of the “betrayed” populace. There's also a small number of “pirate entertainers” who were corp-created from the start. Abbie16, a girl in Los Angeles who was blogging about her life,

troubles in school, racism, and so on? Turned out that she was a Horizon feed from the get-go, an actress hired to take on the role. People were suspicious about the great lighting and gear that was being used for what was ostensibly “just a blog,” and how the story seemed to be unfolding like, well, a story, but the debate about it being real or “reality” was hot for months. When the truth finally came out (thanks to a hack done by a runner hired by Aztechnology), the show's credibility was shot, and viewership vanished overnight. It was rebranded and made into an actual trideo show later but, too late.

These privateers are only a problem when they hide their loyalty. The knowledge that they exist in stealth mode undercuts the trust in other pirate broadcasts and, now, when something breaks, you can hear people flock to chatrooms to talk about Privateers, False-Faces, and Crash Actors. Where does entertainment end and truth begin? We may never agree. But then, we haven't for ages.

SEATTLE TRIDEO CHANNEL GUIDE

BROADCAST CHANNELS

Seattle Public Trideo is pleased to unveil the latest channel options. Please note that your favorite channel might have a new location on the dial. Press [MENU] at any time to call up the master list of Seattle's most popular entertainment options.

- [2] KOMA (ABS)
- [3] KPUB (Seattle Metroplex Affairs)
- [4] KONG (NBS)
- [5] KORO (CBC)
- [6] NABS/SSC (Salish-Shidhe affiliate)
- [7] KSPS (PBN)
- [8] KATE (ESPN 8 - The Ocho)
- [9] KNEO (NeoNET) (OFF AIR)
- [10] KPOW (MCT)
- [11] KSTS (Independent)
- [12] NSSL (Salish-Shidhe)
- [13] KFOX (Renraku)
- [14] KCFS (Independent)
- [15] KBBC (BBC)
- [20] KTXN (Independent)
- [21] KAKE (Seattle ACHE Affairs)
- [30] KSAF (Seattle's Real News)
- [34] KNUS (NN)
- [38] KRMA (WUX)
- [44] KHMC (Home Megastore Channel)
- [50] PA1 (Public Access 1)
- [77] KUCB (United Christian Broadcasting System)
- [98] OTQ/Seattle
- [99] KEEL (Pirate)

- > Ugh. And they do it again. Another twenty-five stations gone! That's over one hundred gone in the past decade. Trimming

stations to show us who's boss. I'm not crying, I still have global access to whatever I please, but I hate when they move channels around. It takes forever to reprogram Sprout-P's system to record properly.

- > Slamm-0!
- > It's happening all over. Since the de la Mar Matrix “adjustment,” trid options are dropping. The general populace isn't noticing because, well, they're sheep and getting fed doped entertainment. Everything they watch, cast, or sim, is designed to be addictive or actually contains addictive code.
- > Plan 9
- > I'm just glad that they finally moved KPUB to channel 3 instead of KUCB. Every time the power went out, my trideo'd come on with some preacher telling me I was gonna go to Hell. I don't need that negativity, y'know?
- > Riot
- > NABS has been confused the past three months. Every morning, they wish that Shiawase's bid to buy the ACHE would be taken up to flush the nuclear reactors out that the UCAS uses as an excuse to keep troops in Seattle. Every evening, a Gaeatronics suit is talking about how there's no need for Shiawase Atomics when their own power production is excellent.
- > Netcat
- > Yeah? Then tell me why most of my clinics only get between six and sixteen hours of power a day?
- > Butch

- > KEEL's a special brand of fun. There're a dozen pirate broadcasters that operate in and around Seattle and all have agreed to use channel 99 for their broadcasts. Nothing is ever advertised in advance of course, so you mostly get static, but sometimes you flip over to see something good.
- > Dr. Spin
- > How do they keep from crossing their own broadcasts?
- > Ma'Fan
- > They put out around six hours of content a week. Not much of an issue with those odds.
- > Sunshine
- > NeoNET got shredded like two years ago. Why is KNEO still listed?
- > Morlok
- > Honestly, I think it's a lesson from the Corp Court. The channel comes through with beeping sound and scrolling text about being off the air. A not-so-subtle reminder of NeoNET's fate.
- > OrkCEO
- > Aw man, you guys get CRY? They took it off here a year ago. I'm way behind on General Discord.
- > Kia
- > A year ag - YOU MISSED THE WEDDING OF SPIKE AND CODY!
- > 2XL
- > What?! I mean, the way those two were always fighting, you knew that there was something there but ...
- > Kia
- > Ugh! Spoilers you fraggers!
- > Kane
- > Wow, MtD's still going? Remember when they showed music trideos? These days, it's just liveblogs and "unscripted" dramas.
- > Bull
- > Wait. MtD used to play music?
- > /dev/grrl
- > While I'm here, how come GON no longer puts out anything about the First Church of the Squishy Ball?
- > Bull
- > I guess GON's really dropped the ball on that one.
- > Slamm-O!
- > PA3 used to have Ollie's Under Advisement, a great little show from the Ork Underground. He went offline last year and his spot's now filled with trendy Elves discovering underground hotspots (and ruining them.)
- > Sounder
- > On a related note, PA4 now has Flip This Hovel, where Tock and Tolly Bennett discover Seattle Underground shacks and turn them into proper homes for a massive upsell. Best show on the trid right now.
- > OrkCEO

BASIC SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

Available to Seattleites with a Silver Subscription or better. Contact your trideo provider today for more!

- [AW] Ancient Wisdom
- [BOB] The channel for all things Bob!
- [CRY] The Crying Channel
- [NOVD] Nostalgic Flatvids brought to you by Hisato-Turner
- [GON] God's Own Network
- [KIDVID] Kidvids
- [MtD] Music triDeo
- [NOODL] Heavenly Noodle Delivery livestreams your dro-nelivory order
- [NUATL] Neo-Nuatl programming ((real-time translation available.))
- [PA2] Public Access 2
- [PA3] Public Access 3
- [PA4] Public Access 4
- [SEX] Sports EXtreme Channel ((Surging EXTasy Channel has moved to Premium services))
- [SPORT1] WSB 5
- [SPORT2] WSB 6
- [SPORT3] WSB 7
- > Horizon's been trying to move down to the basic service package for years, but Seattle won't take the CalHot broadcast strength at this level. With a new administration in charge, Horizon's going to go full-court press.
- > Sunshine
- > Why are there sports on ... fraggin' drekheads! You moved it!
- > SeaTac Sweetie
- > Hey Fred! Found kiddo's animated stuff.
- > Netcat

PREMIUM SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

Available to Seattleites with a Gold package or better. Contact your Trideo provider today for more!

- [\$M\$] Moneyline
- [APPRENTICE] Renraku's skillssoft basic access
- [THE BATTLE CHANNEL] Desert Wars and so much more!
- [HOOAH] Ares "You're There" warsims, "It feels like you're really here!"™
- [HOT] Horizon's Calhot Broadcasting
- [HTO] Premium trids and epic shows
- [LOVE] Period Romance Sims
- [NEOSENSE] NeoNET Realsense Theatre (Offline)
- [NIPPON] Japanese-language broadcast direct from Japan
- [SEXC] Surging EXTasy Channel
- [SPORT] WSB1

[TELE] Sperethiel-language broadcasting
 [TOD] Truman On Demand
 [WFBL] World Football Broadcasting
 [META] WyrnTalk

- > Be careful on LOVE. They've started trying to compete with HOT and pushed up the simsignal as far as UCAS law allows. It gets ... intense.
- > Turbo Bunny
- > Do tell!
- > Slamm-O!
- > Rumor has it that Spinrad is going to move in on the NeoNET channels. Still a lot of paperwork to sign and a few execs might get other ownership "suggested" to them. Contracts in the hiring hall if you're interested.
- > Am-mut
- > Wyrmtalk's an interesting mix. There weren't that many interviews with Dunkelzahn, so it has branched out to all things dragon. Fan conventions, sightings and rumors, documentaries, tours, and so on. It used to be funded by Hestaby, but her funding obviously fell out. Masaru is the other dragon-backer, but his finances got hammered as well. I'm not sure who's footing (or clawing) the bills these days.
- > Glitch
- > TELE is fully owned by the Telestrians. I think it's just fluff pieces and propaganda.
- > Turbo Bunny
- > What, you don't watch it?
- > Kat o' Nine Tales
- > I would, but I don't speak the language.
- > Turbo Bunny
- > Wait, I thought you were an elf?
- > Riot
- > Less than five percent of the worldwide elven population speaks Sperethial, kid.
- > Butch
- > The World Football Channel carries the rest of this package. Everyone watches footie!
- > Hard Exit
- > Go Marchers!
- > Feinan Fan

PLATINUM SUBSCRIPTION CHANNELS

Available to Platinum subscribers ONLY! Your trideo provider will contact you if you qualify.

[ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT] Cultural programming including opera, museum tours, and plays
 [BLOODSPORT] Only the most violent content found worldwide. Now with AZZIESPORT finals, LIVE!
 [HIGH LIFE] Lifestyles of the rich and influential
 [PLATINUM SHOPPING] Only the best. Only for you.
 [SHIAWASE] Japanese-language broadcast
 [STARLET] All-access sims of the novahots of tomorrow!

- > Tune in to A&E at 2300 for their Calligraphy program. It teaches cursive at a primary school level.
- > 2XL
- > Pfft. Reading's overrated.
- > Riot
- > Shiwase's channel isn't that different than the gold NIPPON channel. Why pay more for the same thing?
- > Lyran
- > Because Shiwase is worth it.
- > Baka Dabora
- > When STARLET says "All-access," they mean it. Renraku stars are all set up with simrigs so that those who wash out can fall into a secondary career with the corp. Yesterday's future star is tomorrow's adult actor. Well, after midnight anyway.
- > SeaTac Sweetie
- > Hey Kia, don't you have a sim on there?
- > /dev/grrl
- > I was young! I needed the money!
- > Kia
- > For the record, the truly wealthy have personal shoppers and so forth. The Platinum Shopping channel is for the upper twenty percent who want to be the top twenty percent and think flashy things are the way to buy-in. Don't waste your time.
- > Icarus
- > But those watches look so wiz!
- > Slamm-O!
- > You still don't have a headware chronometer, Fred? No wonder you've slowed down. Sheesh.
- > Glitch
- > Aztechnology's gotten into trouble in some nations with Bloodsport. It's not available in most of the CAS or UCAS, but since Seattle's surrounded by the NAN, it goes there. Several people make some money on the side by recording shows to chip and getting them out to pirate broadcasters. The FBI keeps a task force in Seattle just to track them down.
- > The Smiling Bandit

EXTENDED TRIDEO NETWORK AND CHANNEL GUIDE

Global station subscriptions are highly regulated, but we aren't the types to follow local regulatory policies. We have hacker pals that help us tune in to stations and programs from around the world. Some are available as close as the nearest international border, while others are only available in places very few of us will ever venture to. Here's an expanded list of some stations available outside the Seattle Metroplex.

- [ALJZ] Al-Jazeera News (Spinrad-Global)
- [ATTK] Attack Channel (Evo)
- [CH12] Channel 12 (Aztechnology, Sol Media)
- [CHSS] Chessvid (Ares Global Entertainment)
- [CRRP] Crime Report (Ares Global Entertainment)
- [DISC] Discovery Trid (Ares Global Entertainment)
- [EEXX] EEX (Amalgamated Studios)
- [EROK] EuRock (DeMeKo)
- [EUNW] EuroNews (Ares Global Entertainment)
- [EUSP] Eurosports (Ares Global Entertainment)
- [HRZN] H-Channel (Horizon)
- [HSPT] Hotspot Simcast (Horizon)

- [CH22] HTB Channel 22 (Horizon)
- [KKRU] KKRU (Independent)
- [KZHN] KZHN (Horizon)
- [LSTV] Lone Star Channel (Lone Star)
- [N666] Network 666 (Independent)
- [NADL] NewsNet ADL (Horizon)
- [NNNP] NewsNet Japan (Horizon)
- [RAKU] Renraku Broadcasting (Renraku)
- [RKNT] RockNet (Horizon)
- [SPAD] Sport 24/7 (DeMeKo)
- [BLST] SportsBlast (Spinrad Global)
- [SPNT] SportsNet (Renraku)
- [TVMC] Trideo Monte Carlo (Spinrad Global)
- [TVQE] Tridéovision Quatre Élémentals (Cross Entertainment)
- [TGNW] Truman Global News (Horizon)
- [TNNW] Truman Network News (Horizon)
- [UDKC] Uncle Don's Kidvid Channel (Ares Global Entertainment)

CHANNEL GUIDE: MAY 19, 2080

A look at some of the most important trideo broadcasts of Seattle as we reach season-finale time. Tune in before it's too late!

1800 PST

- 2 - My Two Wizards
- 4 - Texas Lawmen
- 5 - Sixty Minutes
- 6 - Medicine Hour with John Pochel
- 8 - UCAS fidget spinner championship (final round)
- 10 - Corporate Samurai Stories
- 13 - The Simpsons

SHOUT OUT!

It's The Simpsons season finale! Sure, Milhouse's date with Nelson has gone sideways, and everyone loves Honorable Burns-Sama, but the big question that'll haunt you all summer is this: Who shot Maggie Simpson?!

- 38 - Shaw Brothers Return: Seven Fisted Tiger!
- 77 - Theology Roundtable: Do AIs have souls?

- AW - Healing Drum
- BOB - Yoyo with Ross Roberts
- KIDVID - Sensational Sentai Seven
- MtD - MtD Safehouses
- SEX - Urban Hoverskating

- \$M\$ - Investing in Spin?
- HOOAH - Bloody 'ol Muddy (2064)
- SEXC - Naked Interviews LIVE
- TELE - Telestrian Tagalong

- BLOODSPORT - Chainsaw divorce
- SHIAWASE - Tokugawa (Part 1)

1900 PST

- 2 - No More Bio
- 4 - Knight Errant: Cleveland
- 5 - Brand New Opry (Guest Host: Granny Cyrus)
- 6 - Fishing with Peter Salmon-Dancer
- 10 - Ai Love You 2

SHOUT OUT!

Ai Love You 2 continues the love story between Sasuke Imahara and Ai, the AI who loves him. In the season finale, Sasuke and Ai finally confront the technomancer that's been glitching her all season. Now, it's time to take her down!

- 13 - KFOX News Hour with John "Danger" Steele
- 15 - How Commlinks Are Constructed
- 34 - Boston Lockdown: The Reconstruction (with Kari Yamaha-Schwartz)
- 50 - Seattle Treats and Eats (feat. The Seattle Underground)
- 98 - UCAS: How It Came to Be

- CRY - Passion of the Luchadores (dubbed)
- KIDVID - Charlie's Galaxy
- SPORT3 - Field hockey

- HOT - Beachwatch!
- MtD - Squaredance Rap Party

- HIGHLIFE - Johnny Spinrad
- STARLET - Meet Keiko Asamura

2000 PST

- 3 - This week's planned power outages
- 4 - Baseball (Detroit Tigers vs Atlanta Braves)
- 6 - Let's Learn Lakota

BOB - Bob Your Head! (music videos)
FLAT - Breakfast at Tiffany's

\$M\$ - Market Watch
HOT - Terror Night!
LOVE - Romance in the Three Kingdoms
SPORT - In the Pits

SHOUT OUT!

In the Pits sees special guest Rory MacTavish talk mechanics with Mike and Keiko. Get a sneak peek at next year's best bikes!

SHIAWASE - Tokugawa (Part 2)
ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT - Burr: The Musical

2100 PST

- 2 - Heartbeat Hospital
- 6 - Salish-Language Programming
- 8 - Dodgeball: Sumo Trolls vs Ninja Dwarves - LIVE!
- 11 - Miles of Dirt: Matt's Return
- 15 - Enchanted Scotland
- 77 - Pastor Ryan Takes Your Calls
- 99 - Pirate Broadcast

SHOUT OUT!

We don't know who'll have the dish tonight, but 99 at 9 remains the most reliable port for unpredictable pirates. Yarr!

SEXC - The Bishiboi Hour
HIGHLIFE - Caribbean Islands Getaways

2200 PST

- 3 - The Seattle Underground

SHOUT OUT!

The Seattle Underground, a tour filmed with the help of Renraku (Renraku: How May We Serve You?) showcases the Seattle Underground's sights, sounds, and oh-so yummy flavors. Watch Jeremy try Genuine Rat-on-a-Stick™!

- 5 - Kids These Days! (Ted takes on the growing scourge of marbles)

- 10 - Ninja Panty Flash: Rebirth Saga!
- 13 - The Pulaski Hour
- 21 - Warden Report
- 38 - An Orderly House
- 50 - Cooking with Aunt Sally
- 98 - Bounty Hunters

SHOUT OUT!

This week's Bounty Hunters features advice on tagging shapeshifters. With special guest Dave Tetch.

KIDVID - The Grown-ups Are Playing
NUATL - Sojourner: The Scourge

HOOAH - Hottest SWAT Action
WYRM - Dunkelzahn (third interview)

2300 PST

- 2, 4, 5, 6, 13, TELE - News
- 50 - Arise Humanity! The Humanis Policlub weekly show
- 77 - If I Die Before I Wake

NIPPON - Tokyo News

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT - Calligraphy
PLATINUM SHOPPING - Spotlight on Personal Aircraft
STARLET - Meet Silas Clark



// CREATION STARTS WITH DARKNESS



JUST KEEP DIGGING

BY DYLAN BIRTOLO

“What’s this?”

Nathaniel pulled up Kalyn’s article on the AR display over her desk when he stormed into her office, overriding the story she was working on. She sighed, looking up at him from above the rim of her glasses as she dropped her head. She knew what had him flustered, but she was in no mood to dance their normal dance.

“It’s a piece you need to run, if you want to keep the viewers entertained.”

Two more strides, and Nathaniel stood on the other side of her desk. He slammed his open palm down hard enough on the surface that she felt the impact through her chair. She leaned back at the uncharacteristic display of aggression. Over the years, she had become a master at pushing Nathaniel’s boundaries, but this overt display was new.

“You don’t get to decide what keeps our viewers entertained and interested. That’s not your job. Your job is to handle the stories I give you.”

Kalyn waited, not wanting to prod him until he had a moment to recover. She saw the change come over him as he closed his eyes and took a deep breath in through his nose. He reached up and smoothed his hair back, then reached down and straightened his collared shirt and tie. In a moment, he looked like the model of charisma elves were supposed to be.

“What’s different this time? We’ve gone after the corps before,” Kalyn leaned forward as she spoke, folding her fingers together and resting her hands on her desk. She looked up at her boss, trying to read his face.

“This story got the wrong kind of attention,” Nathaniel said, looking over his shoulder at the door to her office. “If we run this ...”

He left the thought unfinished. Kalyn stood up and put both her hands on the desk. She didn’t even come up to her boss’s chest, but she still managed to carry herself tall for her dwarven stature. She stepped around and crowded him, gesturing to the Manhattan skyline visible out her window.

“You have to run that story. You know what’s at



stake. When I signed on with you, you promised me the truth would come first, no matter the cost.”

“We’re not some independent rag that can say whatever it wants and just be forgotten about when they put out a snuff piece. We’re the Independent Information Network!”

Kalyn stepped in closer until she almost ran into her boss. To his credit, he refused to back down from her advance. The much shorter dwarf had to crane her neck to look her superior in the eye.

“And that’s exactly why we need to do it. We have credibility, and people will believe it. We’re too big to be ignored, and the corps won’t touch us. There would be too many questions. That keeps us safe.”

Something she said made Nathaniel sigh and lift his hand to his forehead so he could massage his temples. He shook his head and turned back to the door, leaving a confused Kalyn in his wake. She tilted her head to the side and reached up to tug on the short dark hair at the nape of her neck. When it got long enough for that, she knew it was time to get it shaved again.

“I’ll put this piece out there, but you need to slow down. I’m putting you on the Feylines piece.” He spoke without turning around, pausing in the open doorway.

Kalyn’s shoulders sagged, and her hands slapped against her legs they went limp. Her mouth hung open—it took the space of several heartbeats before she found the ability to form words.

“A music gig? You’re demoting me to a fragging entertainment review?” She didn’t attempt to keep her volume civil or hide her disbelief.

“I never said demotion. You’ll be paid your full fee.”

“You can’t be serious.”

Nathaniel’s sigh deflated his entire body. “Just do this for me. And if that’s not good enough, it’s an order.”

Kalyn watched Nathaniel leave while staring into his back, willing him to come back and change his mind. But it was to no avail. He walked far enough down the hall to be out of her view. With a growl, she stomped back over to her desk, dropping into her chair and getting back to work.

Kalyn walked around the set of the Feylines’ recording studio with their PR agent. The amount of technology in the large room was almost as impressive as the multiple layers of security she had to be escorted through in order to get to this point. Even now, a large troll walked behind her, taking one step for every two of

hers. He spoke as little as possible, leaving that for the representative.

Multiple people milled about, adjusting devices that—well, Kalyn couldn't even venture a guess as to their purpose. Whenever she tried to stop and get a closer look, the representative ushered her forward, refusing to let her stay in one place too long.

"The Feylines are going to grow this year to be one of the largest entertainment groups in the entire world. Our reach has grown by three hundred percent over the last three months. Their fans are drawn to the authenticity mixed with just a bit of magical flair that provides a unique flavor."

Kalyn nodded along and offered a noncommittal noise of agreement. There were much better uses for her talents than touring a recording studio like a groupie while being fed lines the public had heard hundreds of times over. Besides, she had doubts as to just how authentic the Feylines' performance was.

"If you come this way, you can see where all of the post-recording editing is handled," the representative offered, leading their entourage through a small door into a private soundproof room.

The chamber had four large terminals where people could sit and work without risk of bumping into each other. Each of the workstations had its own dedicated trid projector, further reinforcing Kalyn's doubts about the group's genuine magical talent.

"If the acts are authentic, why is there any need for post-recording processing at all?" Kalyn prodded.

The representative waved her hand in the air in a practiced motion as she responded. "We find it necessary to have a minimal amount of processing in order to filter out background noise or other artifacts that creep in during recording, as well as providing the best cuts to showcase the performers' talents."

The words had a slow and metered pace that let Kalyn know they had been rehearsed and said multiple times, maybe so often that the PR agent started to believe them herself. Kalyn could always tell when people gave answers that had been committed to memory. Once again, she thought how this was a waste of her skills.

But as long as she had to be here on this task, she might as well do it right.

"I'd like to sit in on one of the recordings, if you don't mind."

The representative started at that, unsure of how to respond. Kalyn followed it up before the rep had a chance to reject her request.

"It would give me the opportunity to see the live performance and then I could lend the support of the IIN behind the authenticity of the act. I would of course be more than willing to show you our piece before it was released to the public."

Kalyn would share it, but that didn't mean she was going to change what she created or released. She had faced down international corps before. A small entertainment group was not going to intimidate her.

"Of course that would be permissible. I'll arrange it for tomorrow's recording."

"That would be wonderful. I believe that's all I need for now."

Kalyn watched the performance with a plummeting amount of interest. She expected the performance to be poor, but it still managed to limbo under the mental bar

she had set. She knew the music was not to her liking, but she never expected it to be so off-key and have a complete and total lack of actual magic.

She had been around enough charlatans to recognize the tricks for what they were. Smoke and mirrors that anyone with a smattering of skill at sleight-of-hand tricks could perform. It took her all of two minutes to realize the entire thing was a sham.

It was so bad, it felt like a genuine insult.

The only mystery remaining was how this collection of elves got a gig with all the technical support they had. The sheer amount of money being dropped into making these kids successful—or at least notable—was astronomical.

Kalyn's nose twitched, and she smiled for the first time since being assigned to this task. Perhaps there was more to the story than appeared on the surface. Her palms itched, and she rubbed them against her pantlegs. She needed the recording session to end so she could begin her real work.

When it ended, she gave her pleasantries and excused herself as soon as she could without arousing too much suspicion. She went to her car and used her commlink to call one of her associates.

"Tamsynn, I need a favor," Kalyn said without preamble as soon as the other woman picked up the line. The connection was audio only, but she didn't need to see Tamsynn to imagine the tired look that came across her face at Kalyn's greeting.

"Give me one reason I shouldn't hang up right now. The last time we talked and I told you something in confidence, I found it plastered all over IIN's coverage."

Kalyn winced at the accusation. In her defense, she hadn't planned to share the details of a run that Tamsynn and her team had undertaken, but her original edit lacked enough facts to be considered publishable. She figured a few details wouldn't be too horrible as long as people's names and faces were kept out of it. Tamsynn disagreed.

"This isn't anything about what you're into. I need an address."

There was a pause. "An address? That's it?"

"Yes, promise. I don't suppose you could get that for me, for old time's sake?" When Tamsynn didn't respond, Kalyn pressed. "Who hooked you up with the metahuman rights group out there on Mercer Island?"

Tamsynn sighed over the line, but Kalyn knew she had her. Guilt was a powerful motivator, and if she had to pay that price, she had no qualms about flipping it around and using it to her advantage.

"How long you going to hold that over my head? All right, fine. I'll do it. Just let me know whose address you need."

"The lead singer for the Feylines, goes by Maz. If he's got more than one place, his New York address."

Just over an hour later, Kalyn found herself parking in front Maz's house. She got out of her car and walked around the building, taking a look at it from all angles. It was a simple two-story building, the most notable feature being a small fenced-in yard. Real estate with land in New York was a display of wealth almost as rare and flagrant as non-soy-based food.

To her surprise, it seemed like Maz hadn't bothered to install any security systems. The extent of his protection was a remote camera system mounted in plain view.

The rear of the house, however, had no such cameras. Kalyn crawled over the short fence, grunting with the effort, and dropped into the back yard.

There might be an absence of security, but at least the backdoor to the house was locked. It was an old-fashioned manual lock, something she knew how to handle. Glancing around to make sure no one was within sight, Kalyn took a knee and removed a set of lockpicks from her pocket. With practiced motions, she felt around in the keyhole, adjusting the small picks until she heard a satisfying click. She slid inside, pushing the door shut behind her.

The inside of the house was a mess, with items stacked on every available flat surface until they threatened to topple over. Dishes were intermixed with take-out containers and empty boxes for entertainment systems. As best as she could tell, she currently stood in a dining room. She guessed that by the large table and six chairs seated around it, but it was all buried underneath a collection of random junk. The stench let her know that the occupants had not been diligent about removing leftover food. Crouching down, she looked at the underside of the table. It was new and still had a tag attached to it. According to the label, someone had purchased it a couple of months ago.

Touring the house, the theme of random junk combined with new furniture and luxuries continued. She guessed Maz came into a sudden influx of wealth and felt the need to spend it all. Nothing in the house seemed to be more than a year old.

Until she got to the office on the second floor.

Where the rest of the detritus had been more or less random, something about a pile of clothes against one of the walls felt too staged. The room was clean by the standards of the house except for the laundry. Stepping over, she slid it to the side with her foot, revealing the hardwood floor underneath. Squatting down for a better view, she noticed scratches in the varnish near one of the seams.

Kalyn reached out, sliding one of her nails into the seam, pulling back on it and lifting up. The board lifted, just enough to grab with her fingertips and pull it free. A small cavity sat underneath, holding a physical drive.

Snatching the drive, Kalyn copied it to her commlink without bothering to see what was on it first. As soon as the transfer finished, she put the drive back and slid the wooden plank into place. Using her foot, she nudged the clothes back over the area, trying to make it look like it had never been disturbed.

Having found her prize, she hustled out of the house, not wanting to stay too long. There was no way to know how long Maz would be at the recording studio, and she didn't want to be there when he came home.

Kalyn's fingers flew across her desk as she typed up her story. The drive held more than she hoped. It contained recordings of the Orion's Belt Studios CEO bartering for and using BTLs. At least now she knew who bankrolled the Feylines.

While she had no intention of releasing those recordings, it still gave her the edge to write a piece that IIN viewers would be interested in hearing about. Much more so than a simple entertainment review.

The hours drifted by as she worked, engrossed in weaving the tale in just the right way while she did her due diligence—calling more sources, double-checking info, and the like. Some movement caught her attention in the hallway, pulling her out of her work. She saw a human and two orks, glancing around and peering at office doors. When they got to hers, they stopped, the human walking in while his bodyguards stayed in the hallway. They had obvious pistols tucked under their jackets.

So it was a deliberate show of force. Kalyn pulled down her display so she could stare unhindered at the newcomer.

"Who are you and what do you want?" Kalyn demanded.

"Who I am is irrelevant. What I want, on the other hand, is very relevant."

He paused, taking a moment to pull at the cuffs of his shirt and dropping his gaze. Kalyn wrinkled her nose, but it wasn't only because of his display. A breeze kicked up, carrying his heavy cologne with it, something that seemed like it belonged in a machinist's shop more than an office.

"And what do you want?" she asked.

"You acquired a copy of something very private, something that you should've never seen." He raised his gaze and glared at her, as if daring her to contradict him. When she didn't, he continued. "You will not release any hint of this information to the public in your story."

"Let me guess—you also want me to destroy what I found and tell you where you can find the original?"

The man shook his head. "That is irrelevant. Just don't release the story. We don't need it."

Kalyn snorted and gestured at the bodyguards with her chin. "You think they're enough to scare me? I've dealt with thugs before. Maybe if your boss didn't want to have his dirty laundry released, he should've been more careful."

It was the emissary's turn to chuckle. The reaction made Kalyn lean back in her chair. That was something she wasn't expecting.

"Miss Davis, I promise you, I do not work for Orion's Belt Studios." When he continued, the mirth faded from his face and his eyes narrowed to dangerous slits. "Our interests are much more far-reaching and encompass far more than a simple media studio. I will give you one final warning."

"Is that a threat?"

"Indeed."

The man walked out of her office without another glance in her direction, his ork bodyguards close behind as they marched down the hall. Kalyn felt a shiver travel down her spine as soon as they left her view. She barely had time to absorb what had happened before Nathaniel walked into her office.

"Are you okay? Did they do anything?"

Kalyn shook her head. "I'm fine. But it looks like this story goes deeper than I thought if a megacorp cares what happens to the Feylines and Orion's Belt Studios."

"What are you going to do?"

Kalyn stood up and looked at him over her desk. "We are going to run the story as I wrote it. We're the IIN."



LEADING & BLEEDING

POSTED BY: LATE BREAKING

- > News. While we in the shadows have our own sources of information that we know and trust, the majority of the unwashed masses of wageslaves rely on corporate-controlled media in order to find out what the hell is going on in the world around them. To say that the corps don't really tell them the truth is a **massive** understatement. Any of us who peek our heads out of the shadows can instantly see how incredibly deluded the average person on the street is these days. How do the corps manage to lie so convincingly to John and Jane public? Who are the corps crafting the lies? And isn't anyone fighting back? Well, I have a treat for you my fellow shadow-questioners! I have brought you my friend and mass media expert, Late Breaking, for a rundown on the state of the media in the Sixth World. Take it away, LB!
- > Snopes

BATTLE FOR THE TRUTH

I'm not going to sugar-coat things for you—the state of the news today is an absolute shitfest. Peo-

ple are fed a gigantic truckload of lies and misinformation, all designed to keep them docile and compliant—good little corporate worker drones. Unless we do something about it, the corps will continue to control the thoughts and lives of everyone they can reach. But it wasn't always like this. How did we get here, and how can we fight back? Well, let me walk you through it from the beginning.

HISTORY OF LIES

Things started to go wrong with the passing of the Journalist Protection Agreement in 2037. By its name, indeed at the time, this seemed to be a *good* thing—something that would secure the protection of those who report the news. I'd like to believe that the original intention of this international agreement was pure, but as with everything (it seems) in this world, it inevitably turned to shit. Since this was an international agreement, there was a separate board that oversaw the administration and licensing of the people that the Agreement deemed a “journalist.” At first, one didn't *have* to be board-certified to report and have their work be

respected and published. However, the board put pressure on nations all over the globe to adopt JPA certification as a requirement for being considered a legitimate journalist. They did this using all the tried and tested techniques for pushing a message that the evil overlords want to get across. I'll go into more depth on this later. Well, the heckling, honeypotting, and hacking worked, with most of the world and corporate nations agreeing that only a JPA-certified journalist could conduct "legitimate" journalism. Anyone who didn't have a license was effectively blackballed and banned from getting a job in any of the mainstream media.

- > I remember the adoption of this in my country. At the time it was universally praised as a huge positive. The days of propaganda news and regional bias was going to come to an end. This international organization was going to ensure that news was held to the highest standards, and a bright future of truth awaited everyone. Even then, I thought they were laying it on kind of thick.
- > 2XL
- > I definitely just choked on that dragon turd sized hunk of bullshit and irony. All rolled into one shit ball.
- > Snopes

The smart among you have already figured out where this whole situation was heading. Major corporations that own the news media outlets maneuvered to take absolute control over the JPA council through all the usual means: bribery, blackmail, extortion, or just plain old making unwanted people disappear. When the dust had settled, they had the power and freedom to filter who would be reporting the news all around the world. If a certain reporter or network started to push a message that wasn't in line with the bullshit narrative that the corps wanted to push, then they would revoke their JPA certification. Just like that, a veteran, respected, career journalist would lose their means of living. Just for telling the truth. Sometimes just the threat of having certification revoked was enough to have stories spiked, or get a troublesome writer banished to covering cat shows for the community feel-good feed.

- > I don't know why I keep being surprised by the pure, unfiltered evil of those goddamn corporations.
- > Sunshine

Of course, once they had control, corruption spread throughout the system. Since JPA certification was the *only* way to be a journalist now, schools offering journalism programs restructured their material to align with JPA-approved methods. Hell, JPA council members came to "consult" for the bigger universities so that they could brag about the "certification success rate" of their grad-

uates. They *advertised* about the success of their corporate brainwashing program. JPA consultants charged the schools top rates for the services, because of course they did.

What we are left with now is an entire system that is designed to speak the corporate message, push their narrative, and tell the news that they want the people to know and believe. Your average Joe Q. Citizen has no idea that the news they consume every day, every moment, is a fiction that has been carefully crafted and handed to them. All of it designed to keep them docile, believing in the corporate agenda, and being part of the machine.

CRAFTING THE LIE

So how do they do it, you ask? How do the media corporations consistently get the public at large to believe what they want them to believe? How do they push the lies, twist the truth, on all those people—many of whom are legitimately intelligent and discerning? Well, let me break down how the lie is crafted.

- > I wasn't asking any of those questions.
- > Gravedigger
- > Shut up and go activate a learning module on the word "rhetorical."
- > Bull

NAME CALLING

Everyone who was once a child can probably remember calling another child "butthead" or "poopy face" or something like that. We like to think that name-calling is strictly juvenile and that we all grow out of it, or that we are too mature to respond to that sort of thing anymore. Well, it may surprise you (or it may not, if you're that jaded) that your average person does *not* grow out of it—the practice just evolves and becomes more insidious.

- > Old tricks are the best tricks. Sometimes you find something that works so well there's no reason to stop. I have no problem calling someone a drekhead if they are being a drekhead.
- > Glitch

In the twisted modern media, this tactic is practiced by simply slipping in words, usually adjectives, that have an instant negative association with your average person. A political rival may be assigned words like anarchist, rebel, or terrorist sympathizer. Ideas that are contrary to the desired status quo will be described as radical, cowardly, socialist, or weak. Words like these are tied to deep-rooted psychological associations for people. Even if someone has legitimate reasons for believing something or supporting a person, they

will have difficulty committing or keeping with that support because of how that person or idea is being described. “I’m no rebel or anarchist,” they think to themselves, so the associated idea clearly can’t be right.

- ▶ Unless those words mean something different to you. If some corp wageslave calls someone else an anarchist with radical ideas, that just gets my attention!
- ▶ Tolstoi

This also works when the tone of the words is reversed. Just as negative words generate a negative association, positive words generate a feel-good reaction. A person in a story can be introduced as wholesome, approachable, or down-to-earth. Ideas become reasonable, sensible, or forward-thinking. It’s as old as using a carrot and stick when training an animal, and people respond in similar ways. They instinctively move away from the stick and chase after the carrot.

In isolation, strong language like this would be easy to pick up and filter out, but when it is repeated often enough and spread widely, the effect is powerful.

REPETITION

Repetition is another old but powerful technique that has only gotten easier and more powerful in our age of easy information repetition. Believe it or not, you can get a lot of people to believe a lie—even a big one—if you repeat it often enough. Blast the same “fact” in enough places, saturated throughout all the daily experiences of a person, and people will eventually internalize it. It becomes part of their world, turning into a fact as solid as the color of the sky (scraper) above their head. If you do this across an entire population group, then the intelligence of the herd takes over. It doesn’t even matter if the sources are credible—quantity has a quality all its own. Once the lie has reached saturation point, the masses accept it,

ENVIRONMENTAL THEORIST CONTINUES TIRADES

LYON, FRANCE

Environmental alarmist Esa Ame, most well known for her unverified articles on alleged environmental damage from the magical tesma industry, held another overly dramatic rally near Lyon, France this Wednesday. In a rambling speech, Ame made wild and dire predictions about the state of the magical environment if magical tesma operations continue in the French countryside. A small rabble of adherents were present, as well as several dozen riot police who were fortunately on hand to keep the mob contained. Ame was later detained by authorities for inciting a riot. She was subsequently released on bail.

and questioning it becomes rare. The lie becomes something that everyone simply “knows.” Well everyone knows that, it’s common sense. Right?

- ▶ No way this is that easy. People will believe any made-up thing if they are just told it enough?
- ▶ Cosmo
- ▶ It absolutely is that easy. Here’s an example for you: orks are menial workers and criminals. Everyone **knows** that right? Hell, even other orks will admit to that. But where did that “fact” come from? How was it verified? More importantly, who first started spreading it?
- ▶ Mihoshi Oni

Reinforcing the lie also means spreading it to other channels. Since the media channels are owned by giant corporations that own other corporations, this has gotten much easier. A message that the corporation wants to get across doesn’t just appear in news stories: it also appears in advertising, entertainment, and education. Want to reinforce that all metahumans are vile? Then have ugly metahumans representing the dust bunnies that your new drone vacuum sucks up. Show the “flaws” or “abnormalities” in metahuman physiology in the textbooks at school. Have metahumans always be the villain in all the entertainment trids and sims that you produce. Before you know it, that message simply becomes a fact that everyone accepts. If the machine is *really* working, then that fact becomes part of a person’s very identity that they will fight and argue to protect.

- ▶ That’s when the lie reaches critical mass, isn’t it? Once a part of a person’s self-identity depends on the lie being true, they will do whatever it takes to reinforce that truth. They simply can’t accept that the thing they believe to be true might not be. To that end, they become part of the lying machine, searching for whatever evidence can be found to reinforce the truth they believe in. They’ll argue with anyone who tries to deny it. They amplify and reinforce the lie without the corp ever having to do anything else.
- ▶ Dr. Spin

STACKING AND OMISSION

Just because a corp may *want* something to be true doesn’t make it so. Inevitably, contradictory opinions, facts, and events emerge. Does this ruin the myth the corporation has constructed? Not in the least—they’re ready for that! Tearing down an inconvenient contradiction is done through presenting an argument that is rigged from the start. The media piece will *appear* to consider a dissenting point of view, but the entire thing is just a setup to utterly destroy the opposing fact or point of view. All of the facts and research will be shown to be on the side of the lie, or preferred narrative.



People presenting or defending the preferred message will always be the type that is found to be the most palatable to the target audience. That could mean a middle-aged white male in the UCAS, or an elderly Chinese female in Hong Kong. Trust me, the media divisions of these places know *exactly* the right kind of face to put to the message to make sure it is best received.

- Aren't these stereotypes a thing of the past now? Do people still cling so tightly to these outdated ideas based on race and gender?
- Cosmo
- Yes, because people are still people. They keep their tendency to separate into tribes, and superficial differences are one of the easiest ways to divide.
- Mihoshi Oni

By far the most common tactic in stacking the argument is simple omission. Is there a fact or event that is really too real for the falsehood you are trying to push? Just don't report it. Don't talk about those protests, or the people dying from that product, or the person who just got arrested who was so trusted just the day before. The world is a big, busy, and complicated place. People just don't have the time or energy to find out what's going on in the world for themselves. They rely on what the news outlets tell them is going on in the world, and if those media channels don't tell them that something happened, then it might as well not have happened in the minds of the thousands of average wagslaves out there.

SUBLIMINAL

Another classic that has seen some fresh use is subliminal messages. These are messages, usually visual, that affect recipients without them even realizing the messages are there. Modern Matrix-based communications, with their heavy use of imagery and iconography, have increased the use and penetration of this technique. Anything the corps want to reinforce gets icons and video with positive colors and images, while anything they want people to not look at gets a negative distortion. Now, thanks to the fact that we are beaming messages *directly into our brains*, this has opened up new avenues. Hidden emotive tracks in full simsense messages have become a hot new favorite. These are low-level and subtle enough that most consumers don't even notice they are there, slipping below the sensitivity levels of the most common filters. When a corp wants to reinforce a particular message, they will slip a happy, feel-good emotive track along with it. When they start reporting on whatever they want people to not like, they slide in a fear, anger, or disgust emotive track. Just like repeating the lie, this sort of thing

doesn't do much in a single experience, but if done consistently and over time, a consumer's brain will be trained to feel what the emote tracks are telling them to feel in association with that imagery, or topic, or whatever.

- ▶ Always make sure your emote filter is up to date, especially if you run hot sim! Those hidden emote tracks might be low-grade for your average cold sim user, but running hot sim on a bleeding-edge deck might give you an ear-bleed when one of them comes ramming into your brain. Not trusting anyone else with the care of my brain, I coded my deck's emote filter myself.
- ▶ Slamm-0!

FEAR

As powerful and effective as all the techniques I've listed before are, there is one that beats them all: fear. For all the advances in metahumanity and all the changes that have happened in the world, people are still driven by fear. If anything, all the changes in the world have made things worse. There are so many things that people can be afraid of: orks, trolls, magic, spirits, crime, terrorism, famine, war, loss of virility—people are afraid of all this and more. Without being consciously aware of it, people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors change dramatically in the face of fear. Fear drives people with a power that is almost limitless, and the corporate spin doctors know it. With an injection of fear, a person's actions can change dramatically, and they will even work to rationalize those actions afterward based on the fear they felt.

To use fear as a weapon, the corps first determine the fears of their target audience. This can come from all kinds of sources that the monolithic megacorporations have no trouble finding. Once they've identified the fears, they can start injecting them into their messages. Are metahumans going to ruin the country and destroy everything you know and love? Well then, metahumans are the source of all that crime, or the reason that food is

getting too expensive, or the carrier of that virus, or anything else that the corp wants to cover up or redirect blame toward. Similarly, if some opposing group or thought or fact emerges, they simply find a way to attach the fear to that. That new political party or rival corporation is full of metahumans, or secretly backed by a worldwide conspiracy of metahumans, or some other such bullshit. The attachment of the fear can be overt, or it can be subtle. Either way, the effect is the same. People instinctively, without fully realizing, move away from the source of their fear.

- ▶ This was my life for so many years. When the existence of technomancers broke to the public, the media whipped people into such a frenzy that there were literal lynchings in the streets, attacking anyone who appeared to have TM "powers." Some of those poor slots weren't even technos—just people in the wrong place at the wrong time.
- ▶ Netcat

ATTACKING THE OPPOSITION

While all the measures that the corporate shit-spewers that call themselves the "news" employ work to a significant degree, they are not one hundred percent effective. Dissenting voices can and do appear on a regular basis to challenge the view and narrative put forth by the media giants. This is inevitable, as some of those narratives are almost completely detached from reality—I would lose all faith in metahumanity if *nobody* noticed.

- ▶ It might be that somebody noticed but didn't think there was any purpose in trying to point it out. The ability of corporate drones to block out anything that defies the holy corporate message is legendary.
- ▶ Baka Dabora
- ▶ If we don't try to wake people up, the problem will only get worse.
- ▶ Sunshine

When those dissenting voices appear and start to gain any sort of traction for their countermanding ideas, the media monsters turn to a few other time-tested techniques for destroying the opposition. These methods are employed whether they're attacking governments, multinational corporations, or even individuals—it's all the same script. These are the three Hs: Heckle, Honeypot, and Hack.

HECKLE

The first step in tearing down someone with an opposing viewpoint, someone who points out the lies and hypocrisy, is to heckle them. When the corporate "public image" departments get the sense

GHOUL MENACE STRIKES AGAIN

KARACHI, PAKISTAN

Although investigating officials have still refused to make any official comment on the recent murder of a family of four, confidential sources have confirmed that the savage, unprovoked attack was the work of ghouls. Ghouls are voracious, unthinking creatures that desire nothing but to feed on human flesh, which has led community safety groups to ask government officials to address the growing threat of ghouls to public safety. Zhian Yazdani, speaking on behalf of Sandstorm Security, reinforced the concerns, saying, "We are deeply concerned by the threat that ghouls pose to public safety. We stand ready to step in and resolve this situation so that people can feel safe in their own homes."

that some person or organization is gaining an audience, they will start to seed that audience with hecklers. These contrarians start the undermining process by harassing whoever is pushing the message in a steady barrage. They will point out opposing stories (from their own sources, of course), pick out logical flaws or holes (if there are any), or just call them a liar, traitor, or fucktard. They will digitally vandalize objects that the source puts on the Matrix or places that they frequent. They will alter or add their own AROs and tags wherever they find them. Whatever works to begin to erode general confidence in the source, they will use. The key to this technique is not what is being done but the volume and persistence of it. They will use whatever resources they have to ensure that nothing the source posts goes unmarred.

- › I'm sure this operation can get quite sophisticated. I once saw a small army of sprites swarming their way across a host engaged in an assortment of targeted digital vandalism. Compiling disposable sprites would be an easy way to spread a message.
- › Respec
- › Except technos working in corporate offices are a rare resource. I imagine they only get pulled out for something like this if times are getting desperate. I know dozens of Matrix gangs that would engage in that kind of digital mischief for peanuts and pocket change in comparison.
- › Slamm-0!

HONEYPOT

Dirty tactic number two for taking down an opposing viewpoint is the honeypot. This is when the corporate hellspawn turn from direct attack to subterfuge, hoping to gain some advantage or weapon through a trap.

- › The term is also used in hacking circles for a vulnerable-looking system loaded with juicy data, which is of course a trap. Seems like the same idea here.
- › Clockwork

The honeypot can take many forms. For organizations, it can be a particularly lucrative business deal, or a super-wealthy sponsor or investor who suddenly appears and wants to throw money at the organization that “aligns with their ideals.” If the “problem” is an individual, then the honeypot could take the form of a representative offering to increase the reach of their stories, an adoring fan who praises their tenacity and intelligence, or the one that never gets old: someone of the race and gender that the target finds sexually attractive. While the form is different, the intention is always the same: to gain the confidence of the target in order to subvert it.

- › It never changes, does it? From the Russian red sparrows seducing western spies in the old Cold War to Matrix systems loaded with impossible-to-resist paydata, it's all the same. Just the names are different.
- › Bull

If the honeypot is successful, then the corporate asshats can start working the inside angle to discredit or take down the source. The easiest thing is to start feeding them false information. If the source trusts the honeypot enough, then they will start to repeat the bullshit they are being fed and silently become another drone spouting the corporate lie. If the target is too smart for that, they will be fed information that sounds like something they *want* to believe but can be proven false. This allows the hecklers to point out that the source is wrong and cast doubt onto everything else that they will say or have said. Other times they will try to lure the target into some sort of scandal so they can use it to publicly shame or blackmail them. This could be getting them to accept dirty money, bribes, or “donations” that can be traced back to a dubious source. The compromised source could end up divulging a secret of a personal nature that can be used against them. An organization could be drawn into coughing up secret information about questionable or illegal business practices. Finally, there is the never-gets-old sex scandal—the more salacious, the better. This depends on the prudishness of the audience, but there is always *something* of a sexual nature that people will find abhorrent, and there always seems to be a person secretly doing it. Oftentimes just getting the likeness of the target to use in a faked image, video, or (gross) sim recording is enough.

- › I suppose everyone has **something** in their life or past that could be used against them. What if it has nothing to do with what they are saying? Aren't they still telling the truth about what's going on in the world?
- › Kane
- › You'd be surprised at how quickly opinions can be swayed by such things. If the person was already saying things that ran against social norms or the approved message of the corporations, they're already sticking their ass out in the wind. Corp drones are already calling them a deviant or terrorist. Then something comes out that seems to validate those criticisms, and all the followers and supporters jump the grid before it converges on them too.
- › Sunshine

In the end, the target has divulged a secret that gets used to smear their reputation. Every time they try to get their message out from then on, the smear is thrown out for all the Matrix to see.

HACK

If the heckling isn't slowing the target down, and they're too smart for the honeypot, the last recourse of the media maniacs is the hack. This could be of the Matrix kind targeting their gizmos, or the physical kind—like a hack to the neck with a sharp blade. As I've said before, I'm no decker, but I've known colleagues who have been hacked when they become too much of an inconvenience for the news corps. The results can range from getting all their research destroyed, to their equipment being burned out, to having some embarrassing private secret thrown on the Matrix, to having their brain fried next time they jack in. When you piss them off and threaten their carefully crafted reality, the corps do not fuck around. Fortunately, I have the right friends who have taught me how to keep my shit safe.

- > But that's just being an idiot. If you know someone is gunning for your deck, then you lay the fuck low for a while. Go find a safehouse and get off the grid for a while rather than sticking your neck out!
- > Clockwork
- > If every dissenting voice ran and hid when the corporations threatened violence, then there wouldn't be anyone left to oppose them. Plus, we're not talking about experienced shadow operatives here—many of these are just regular people with a brain and conscience.
- > Sunshine
- > Spiders track people by trying to establish patterns, so inconsistency is the key to staying ahead. Jack in and post from different places, at different times. This doesn't mean just doing a crawl of your favorite hacker hangouts, either. Sometimes hack a legit entry point, and other times come in from a shadow grid. Hell, befriend a techno and have them compile a sprite to deliver your paydata. If you can keep them guessing, you can keep hidden.
- > Netcat
- > Turning the attack back on them can also give you some space. I've never liked to stay on the defensive. Plant your own honeypots with stories that look like yours but laced with a data bomb or virus. Spoof signatures of a rival corp in your messages to lead them on the wrong trail. Keep them chasing their tail.
- > Puck
- > I'd hack their own news feed server and stick the stories right in there. They'll be more confused if the source leads back to them right?
- > /dev/grrl

MEGA-NETWORKS

Now we come to it: I've gone over what the drek is and how it's spewed; now I'll cover who does the spewing. If you are going to join in on this

war—hell, if you just want to know that the war is going on—then you should know who is on the opposing side of things. These are the mega-networks, the ones trying to shape reality by shaping the perceptions—the very thoughts—of the entire public. Unless, of course, someone stops them, but I'll go into that more later. All of them claim to be the biggest, or have the most views, or have the most hours of content, or some other metric, so here they are in no particular order.

ARES GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT

Ares is one of the premier old-guard media giants of the western hemisphere. They have always tried to completely dominate the media market outside of Europe and its descendant nations, but there always seems to be another major competitor rising to challenge them. Back in the day it was CATCo, but Ares took them apart and swept up most of their European media assets. These days, Horizon is giving them a significant run; more about them later.

- > AGE has taken more than a few hits over the years. It's impossible to take down a giant of this size quickly, but unless they can turn things around in the next decade, I see the whole branch as terminal.
- > Mr. Bonds
- > There's no way that Knight will let the entire division wither and die. If it really does get that bad, then we will see major changes in some key leadership positions first. Some of those long-time executives will not want to go willingly.
- > Cosmo

When I said that AGE was the old guard, I really meant it. All of the stuck-up, rich, milquetoast, pervy men who have worked in the news business for a million years are the executives who run AGE. While the acquisition of media companies from CATCo brought it some youth and vitality, those executives mostly stayed with the European companies. North American assets were far too entrenched to do anything as radical as change what they've been doing for a hundred years or whatever. So, if you take what media did and how it was run from back in the day when there was television and physical newspapers and shit and drag that kicking and screaming into the modern Sixth World, you've got how AGE runs today.

- > Our presenter here is exaggerating a bit. While someone can certainly call the business practices of AGE “conservative” or “traditional,” they are based on tried and tested practices for building and running a stable company. No, they may not be flashy or conducive to rapid growth, but they also keep the company from dramatic losses.
- > Mr. Bonds

Due to its long history of providing a ton of content, AGE has managed to craft the tastes of their audience to the style and substance that they want to produce. It doesn't take a genius to spot their style. They like to make things as flashy and dramatic as possible, blurring the lines between news and entertainment. Their stations and programs have names like *Action News!* and *Insider Investigations*. All of it has the overall narrative theme that they are showing how mainstream society, and by association you the news consumer, are part of this bastion of civilization that is constantly being assaulted on all sides. Terrorists, criminals, insurgents, and corrupt and incompetent officials are all trying to tear down everything that was so carefully built. The headspace message they are trying to inject is this "us against them" bullshit. They get the media consumer to believe they are part of some fight against these external forces, and then they just point them at whatever target they want this society to tear down. Metahuman rights starting to hurt corporate profits? Make metahumans the source of problems. Some uppity government official trying to actually enforce laws that protect the people from corporate greed? Just expose them as corrupt. Want people to shut themselves away while some corporate mess gets cleaned up? Create some crisis that gets everyone so scared they lock themselves in their homes.

- > But sometimes it isn't a lie or exaggeration, like with the bug spirits. If anything they **downplayed** the danger to the public with that one.
- > Kia
- > Yeah, but they only told anyone about it once it was impossible to keep it quiet! Sure they were trying to clean things up, but first they made a bigger clusterfuck out of the whole thing.
- > Thorn

How they transmit their message is, as I've said, through all the traditional channels that spring to mind. Regular trid broadcasts of good old-fashioned news shows with an anchor, audio-only streams, and gigapulses of text pumped out every day. It may not be glitzy, but they sure do put out a load of it, and their reach is almost total outside of the NAN and CFS.

ARTHUR BAILEY

Of course, no mention of Ares Global Entertainment can be complete without mentioning Arthur Bailey, the "Most Trusted Man on the Matrix." Can you hear me throwing up in my mouth? Arthur Bailey is one of those suit-wearing, wrinkly, old humans that I mentioned before. Despite the fact that he's a century-old tired cliché, he is the anchor of the most watched (or should I say "experienced," since it is a sim) news show that

AGE produces. Over the long years of his career, Arthur Bailey has built a reputation and trust with the very traditional and conservative news market that AGE caters to. As such, any sort that appears on his show, or any opinion or analysis he expresses, carries tremendous weight. If he tells you that a company is going out of business, then hundreds can lose their jobs the next day without a shred of evidence to back that claim up. If he says that an explosion was the result of dissidents and terrorists, then all the evidence of corporate malfeasance will be ignored. Though he disgusts me right down to my boots, I have to admit that his words carry power.

- > If any message spouted by this slot is that powerful, then there must be a whole shitload of people trying to get an angle on him to get him to spout their message instead. He's even got a wife and kids! How has no one put the screws to this guy yet?
- > Hard Exit
- > Because he's an incredibly valuable asset, and Ares isn't going to let him be manipulated. Remember that even though their media and entertainment division isn't top dog, Ares has some pretty drek-hot security resources. From what I have seen, Arthur Bailey has as many or more assets assigned to his (and his family's) protection as any upper-level Ares executive.
- > DangerSensei
- > That just means the price for getting to him is going to be high, for those willing to go for it.
- > Hard Exit

AZTECHNOLOGY

Among the AAA megacorporations, Aztechnology has always enjoyed an enviable position—the total dominance of the region where it resides. While there are some downsides to having a corporation so intertwined with a government, there are more than enough upsides, including total control of the state's media outlets. For Aztechnology, this comes in the form of the massive station Televisa, which serves as the primary, and in many households the only, source of news. Far from being dull and single-track, Televisa offers an enormous variety of programming for the wide range of audience ages and tastes that exist throughout their reach. After all, they can't let people get bored and start seeking their information or entertainment elsewhere.

- > Try as hard as they do, the Azzies haven't managed to completely wipe out the desire for non-Televisa sources. By law (drafted and passed with the help of AZT), media from outside the country has to be inspected and approved by the government before it is legal to import. This process, when it approves something at all, takes years to finish. This

automatically means that trying to import news stories is a waste of time, and entertainment pieces are generally perceived as outdated by the time they legally arrive. Consequently, smuggling bootleg news and sims and such is a huge business. Smuggler and pirate activity on the coasts, as well as illegal border crossings over land or by high-pret t-bird pilots, keep feeding the demand. AZT corporate forces have been trying to train and equip the government border patrols, but so far, the smugglers have been able to keep a step ahead of them.

> 2XL

Despite the uniform nature of most AZT corporate branches and offices, Televisa is broken down into several regional branches so as to create local branding and promote loyalty to the network. Though it may not seem that way to outsiders, there is still a great deal of fierce independence and national pride in Central and South America, so pushing all the news from a single central office would not land well with the latent patriotic sentiments.

- > That doesn't make any sense. The people may be patriotic, but they aren't fucking stupid. Can't they see that this "local affiliate" is just a thin vatjob skin over an ugly-ass AZT core?
- > Kat o' Nine Tales
- > Not quite as thin a vatjob as you might think. Remember, AZT have been masters in the marketing and PR fields for decades. It might be that the people just don't want to believe that their local station is just a puppet of the larger whole, but don't discount the Azzies' ability to pull one over on people. How long was it before anyone even **heard** of blood magic?
- > Dr. Spin

As might be expected, Televisa delivers a perspective on the news and current events with a distinctive slant to the Latin-America viewpoint. Blunders and embarrassing moments for AZT that happen abroad are never mentioned, the Yucatan is full of rebels and anarchists, and anything bad that happens in the country is traced back to corrupt foreign influences. Aztechnology's hold on the minds and attitudes of the people is as strong as ever. I have several colleagues who work in the area, trying to show the people the truth of what is going on, but the list of former colleagues who worked in the area is even longer. Azzie government and corporate forces show no mercy to the "pirates" who infiltrate their borders. Areas controlled by Televisa continue to be the most dangerous places for pirate media evangelists to operate.

- > Sounds like they just need some competent protection. Have someone drop me a line and I'll keep them as safe and secure as their mama's womb. If they can meet my fee.
- > Balladeer

- > Careful now. You almost showed you had a human heart. Until that last sentence.
- > Kane
- > Hey, a merc has to make a living. I'm not going to apologize for that.
- > Balladeer

THE BATTLE CHANNEL

In my mind, undoubtedly the most notable—and heinous—piece of media that Aztechnology operates is the Battle Channel. The existence and popularity of this entity just shows that we are nowhere near as *evolved* a species as many people like to think. Quite simply, the Battle Channel exclusively shows programs where individuals get injured or killed during the programming. Sometimes this is as mundane as a brutal combat biker match between some bitter rivals, but that is on the mild end of the spectrum. What they also show is a great deal of real combat footage, from any of the numerous skirmishes and border wars that are going on around the world. If some self-styled warlord wants to inflate their own delusions of grandeur, they will film the "conquests" of their "army" and sell the footage to the Battle Channel. Sometimes a merc wants to make a little extra cash on the side or promote themselves and their business, so they will sell the cybereye-captured footage of their latest raid. The whole thing sickens me, but it's been going on for years and shows no sign of slowing down.

- > Just when you thought metahumanity couldn't sink any lower ...
- > Old Crow
- > As bad as it may be, there are some good uses for it. A little while ago I was hired to take care of a Chinese warlord who had become problematic because he was no longer following the instructions of his benefactors. Being the egotistical asshole that he was, he posted a video of his troops fighting off an attack on his main headquarters, along with a lengthy sermon/speech at the end on his victory. I went through all the footage and was able to identify the location, along with a good idea of the makeup of the security forces on-site. Three days later I slipped in, took care of the asshole, and slipped out without anyone laying an eye on me.
- > Thorn

DEMEKO

Deutsche Medien und Kommunikations AG—it's quite a mouthful for Germans, so it's no surprise everyone knows it as DeMeKo. If the name didn't give it away, this company started in Germany and still dominates the market there. It has also spread out all over Europe and into parts of Asia. Being a German corporation, the immediate question that springs to mind is: Are they part of the monolithic

evil corporate empire that is Saeder-Krupp? I'll let the accountants figure that one out, as from my perspective, it doesn't really matter.

- ▶ S-K does not have direct ownership of any significant portion of DeMeKo. Whether they have influence on some owners is beyond my ability to say, but DeMeKo's general dislike for S-K would indicate that any influence S-K has is not widely felt.
- ▶ Mr. Bonds

DeMeKo has been a top company for most of its life, staying at the top by gobbling up one German media outlet after another. They don't seem particularly picky, either, buying out everything from good old-fashioned print and text media to trideo and bleeding-edge simsense. If it's media in Europe, they want to own it. I once saw a compiled list of all the various stations and publishing houses that they own, and I stopped counting once it got past one thousand. To understand DeMeKo's weight and significance as a media opponent, you need to know about two of their most significant holdings. First, they control the entire Hamburg Matrix grid, which is no small asset. Second, they have a contract to do nearly all of the PR and media work for the draconic corporate empire of Saeder-Krupp. That contract started around the time the wireless Matrix was getting going, and while it's an uneasy relationship, it's also profitable for both parties, so they warily stumble along together in this area.

- ▶ This isn't just about making money—this is about gaining information from rivals. Friedrich Xaver Mooshuber didn't get this far in the corporate world by being particularly nice. My sources told me that he has stashed away no small amount of information ranging from embarrassing to damning regarding some of S-K's nastier actions that they needed to smooth over with their media spin doctors. Word has it he tries to use it as leverage in any ongoing business deals.
- ▶ DangerSensei
- ▶ And S-K is no doubt gathering intel of their own. In general, rivalries are great for our business.
- ▶ Hard Exit

The growth and success of DeMeKo as a media conglomerate can be attributed in large part to their incredible astute knowledge of their target audience. There are subtle but significant differences in how Europeans like to consume their media and how they prefer the messages to be presented, and no one knows that better than these guys. They tailor their messages to every audience, wielding some of the best algorithms in the business to tell people what they want to hear and present the options they want to see. When they develop new programming, they know exactly which audiences it will appeal to, and they're wickedly efficient

about getting it in front of them—whether it's political commentary, sports, action flicks, comedy, porn, or whatever. They get more renewals for their new programming than just about any media mega in the books because of their audience cultivation and segmentation efforts.

- ▶ The cleverness of their use of language should also be noted. Europe is a patchwork of all kinds of languages packed into a small area, and DeMeKo media produces a deluge of content in all of those languages. I'm not talking about just running the same text or audio through some shitty linguasoft either. They use word plays and double meanings and make use of subtle aspects of the language in order to reinforce their message.
- ▶ Tolstoi

Despite having so much historical success, DeMeKo has been embattled on multiple fronts for the last several years. An absolute turd-nado of insider reports, exclusive exposés, and damning accusations flew back and forth for several months as they launched a campaign to cripple their principle rival to the west: Sol Media Group. Despite having the backing of Aztechnology funds, DeMeKo wouldn't be denied their home turf and managed to cripple Sol's largest subsidiary Endemol Entertainment with a whole series of reports on massive corruption and sexual abuse of the talent by high-level executives. Some of it may even have been true. The result was Sol Media retreating back to their primary market of Spain.

- ▶ While not directly involved, I did watch the buildup for that corporate assassination from the sidelines. Jobs and scrip were flowing fast as runs put all of the pieces in place. Sol shadow assets caught word of things too late, with many of them getting their brains evacuated through the back of their heads for their failure.
- ▶ Fianchetto

Taking down Sol Media was just the beginning of the fight for DeMeKo. After the CFD disaster saw the death of NeoNET, longtime rival corporation Spinrad Industries merged with Global Sandstorm and gained the much-vaunted AAA status. Although allied with ostensibly the most powerful megacorporation, DeMeKo finds itself now surrounded by the hostile opposition of the newest AAA. The battle to control the minds and attitudes of the people of Europe is just heating up.

HORIZON

Horizon is still the new kid on the block as far as megacorporations go, but it has a very distinct personality in how it operates, especially in the media realm. While most of the other major media conglomerates were well-established corporations with long histories and traditions, Horizon was born of and in the new age of media. While the

others had to adapt their views and practices for media in the Sixth World as one learns a new language, Horizon grew up in this world and speaks it as its native language. Don't grok me wrong, though—while their drek may smell like roses to some (most), if you take a closer look you will see that they are still dropping the same giant turds into the brains of the world. Maybe even bigger.

Controlling the minds of the populace in the modern age is all about the subtle arts of crafting an image, constructing a perception, and creating a brand. Horizon is a corporation that specializes in such activities—they have made their fortune doing just that, and they do it very well. The image they have constructed sets themselves apart from all the others, portraying themselves as the “good guys” of the world. They are the place the intelligent, discerning, and creative turn to for their information, products, and services. People who get their information from Horizon sources consider themselves smart, discerning—in short, better than those who consume the mass media of their competitors. This image, and the fact that people have bought into it so completely, is what makes Horizon so deviously effective.

- › I've never thought about it as far as the media goes, but you can certainly see their marketing genius working with their products. Every time Horizon releases a new version of some doodad, people buy it—even though they paid way too much for the last one a couple of years ago—and they're proud of it. All of the various vanity feeds fill up with people taking pictures of themselves with the new widget, proudly announcing that they have made the amazing life accomplishment of **purchasing something**. They seem completely blind to how completely hooked they are.
- › Dr. Spin

The evil genius behind what Horizon has done is get people to make the source(s) of information part of their identity as people. By carefully and specially crafting the presentation of themselves and their media sources, they create allure. People who want to have a certain identity for themselves—intelligent, discerning—see the image of the Horizon media and then decide for themselves to begin to consume and believe what they are being told. Worst part is, now that they perceive that they have made this intentional, intelligent choice for themselves, they will defend and promote the validity of anything the media source says, because they have now attached a piece of their personal identity to it.

- › This reads too much like the plot of a sim that was low on nuyen. What is she saying here, that Horizon has somehow crafted some sort of mind control? This belongs with theories of drugs in the California water, or secret wavelengths in sim tracks, or freaking hypno-toad.
- › /dev/grrl

- › While our host might be on a bit of the dramatic side, the information given is essentially correct. No, it is not mind control on the level of some cheap horror or sci-fi sim, but it is social manipulation, and it is happening on a grand level. Think about it. Horizon gathers and tracks history and patterns of Matrix and physical activity on a scale unmatched by any another corporation. If they are tracking you, then they know your tendencies, habits, preferences, and aversions—probably better than you do. Don't you think a massive corporation with billions of nuyen in resources can't put all of that data to use in crafting the perfect kind of message that you want to hear?
- › Dr. Spin

IDEA EXCHANGE NETWORK

The best example I can show for how Horizon crafts a manipulating message comes from one of their newer ventures in media: Idea Exchange Network (IEN). On the surface, the IEN is a champion of the people. They tell everyone that they exist to promote the free exchange of information and ideas of all the “undiscovered intelligents” that exist in the world. Unlike the traditional media channels, they advertise that they are not controlled by some stuffy board or tyrannical CEO, but by a council or some shit of educated professionals just wanting to make the world smarter. All of this is a steaming pile of shit.

- › You know, when this came out I wanted it to be true. But I suppose it was just wishful thinking. Still, it stings to have the bubble popped like this. Dammit, look at that! They got me to **like** the fucking station.
- › Butch

In a recent bit of investigative reporting, I was able to acquire documents from a major Horizon office that detail how and why the IEN was created. The information is chilling.

- › That must have been one hell of a run. You must have had a crack team to get that kind of score.
- › Pistons
- › Your self-congratulating drek makes me want to vomit.
- › Clockwork

Horizon had identified a demographic of people who considered themselves discerning and intelligent, making a specific choice to avoid the traditional media outlets. They were seeking out alternate sources of information that they identified with on a deeper level. Seeing and profiling the target audience—as Horizon does so well—they crafted a media product to perfectly target the audience: well-educated deep thinkers who distrust traditional authority figures. IEN was born to dump a whole load of Horizon-approved messages down the ear hole of this audience. Carefully craft-

ed and disguised, they deliver product advertisements as “reviews” and “recommendations,” they create alternate narratives for events as “new academic analysis,” and twist the facts of events with their “reports from the streets.” While initially given a modest budget to test the idea, IEN has likely outgrown even Horizon’s optimistic expectations as contributions and subscriptions to the network continue to grow, with articles and shows in new languages being posted each new day.

MITSUHAMA COMPUTER TECHNOLOGIES

Despite what the corporate name may suggest, MCT has had and continues to have the largest media empire in east Asia and the Pacific. In the general public consciousness, MCT is known for technology innovations, such as simsense and drones—but remember that simsense made just as big a splash (if not bigger) in revolutionizing the media and entertainment industry. They had a formidable amount of “traditional” media outlets prior to the invention of these technologies, and they only rode the wave higher when trideo and simsense dominated the markets. For a time their ascension seemed unstoppable as they dominated the Asian market and spread into western North America, gaining significant assets in the California Free State. Like many organizations that achieve huge dominance for so long, they got complacent. In their midst, Horizon rose up and almost completely ousted them from the CFS and delivered crippling losses to the once-dependable division of Mitsuhamama Media.

- ▶ This pissed off not just the corporate suits, but the Yakuza oyabun who were using MCT territory to spread their influence. CFS was a major market for their BTL chips, and they were displeased (to say the least) to lose such a cash cow.
- ▶ Baka Dabora

Despite the losses, Mitsuhamama Media is far too large to count out. The previous head of the division was replaced (no one has seen him since), and new division head Uchima Masahide pledged an oath to turn the division around.

- ▶ Pledged an oath? Are we just throwing around tired Japanese clichés now?
- ▶ Jimmy No
- ▶ It’s not an exaggeration, actually. Masahide made his oath in front of Toshiro Mitsuhamama and several witnesses.
- ▶ Kia

Over the years, the volume of Mitsuhamama Media offerings has never waned, but its quality certainly has. Although it may be profitable, creating

bargain-basement programming doesn’t give you the best reputation or create a lot of loyalty. That’s why Horizon—with smart, high-quality programming—was able to rise up and grab so much of the market so quickly. To address this, Masahide made investments to shore up the weakness in the quality of MM programming. On the media front, this resulted in the cancellation of several longstanding programs and outlets that were replaced by a revamped product line. Production values went up; younger, more contemporary hosts were tapped to deliver news and social commentary; and new programming was designed to target younger audiences. True to their roots, they still offer old-fashioned news programming, but also special-interest content focusing on culture and technology. Specifically, they are going after Horizon in a very targeted way, trying to win back the audiences—and the market share—they lost.

- ▶ Work in the shadows has shown this rivalry as well. Security around the few offices of Mitsuhamama Media that are left in California has increased from already-impressive MCT levels, along with teams of highly skilled black-ops agents. Money has been flowing into the shadows as they employ a host of runners hitting Horizon anywhere that they see weakness.
- ▶ Cosmo
- ▶ Just in case anyone was worried that this focus on improving quality would threaten MCT’s production of shitty BTLs—you have nothing to fear. Whole shipments of low-quality chips still manage to get “lost” from MCT warehouses or in transit, only to show up on the street in the hands of Yakuza pushers.
- ▶ Rigger X

AURORA EXPERIENCE

Even if they lost their quality edge in the media department, MCT has never lost its bleeding edge in the hardware department. Their devices continue to vie for the top market spot among people looking for the next fastest commlink or sharpest simsense experience. Mitsuhamama Media’s latest flagship product in that category was called (at least in California) the Aurora Experience. The marketing campaign leading up to the launch of this was unprecedented in its scope and hype level. They used the revamped quality of their media programming to its full extent to prime the demand. Despite Horizon trying to downplay it and counter with their own offering, in the end they couldn’t contend with the clearly superior MCT hardware. But then, after the successful launch of the product—lineups went for blocks, and drone deliveries were backlogged for weeks—a new controversy emerged. Horizon is now claiming that the device has embedded code that adds an “addictive emotional track” to any media consumed from the MCT grid. Mitsuhamama Media—of course—denies

the claims and has demanded proof. So far they have not produced anything conclusive, but the litigation is ongoing.

- > This has been a hot one for the California shadows as well. Horizon is paying big money for any runner who can get them the smoking gun they need to put down the resurgent Mitsuhamu Media. On the other side, MCT has been throwing every trick they can think of to stall, influence, or derail the case.
- > Sunshine
- > Shouldn't a competent decker be able to crack one of those open and find the code?
- > /dev/grrl
- > No one has found it yet, or we would have heard about it by now for sure. That means MCT must have used some drek-hot coding scheme that no one has been able to crack yet. If that's the case, that's some wiz coding.
- > Slamm-O!
- > What if no decker has been able to find it because it isn't code? At least, not in the way that you can recognize?
- > Netcat

- > What, like some kind of crazy technomancer shit? In every device they sell? Is that even possible? I thought MCT hated technos.
- > X (decker)
- > Many things have changed with Mitsuhamu Media lately. There are people and entities with abilities that previously they would not have considered dealing with, but desperation and greed are powerful motivators.
- > Puck

SPINGLOBAL

SpinGlobal is the newest AAA corporation on the block, and it is one of stark contrasts and big personalities. Born of the merger between Lisbon-based Spinrad Industries and Middle-East-based Global Sandstorm, on the surface it would appear to be an unsteady entity of clashing cultures. At least, that's what all the opposition that underestimated them thought. In the time since the merger and the acquisition of a seat on the Corporate Court, SpinGlobal has shown that they deserve their position. Following the style of their flamboyant leader, Johnny Spinrad, the media branch of the corporation seems to have adopted a "go big or go home" attitude. For better or worse,

they have picked an outlandish in-your-face style and are sticking to it (though part of this means different branches rebel against any directives from HQ and put their own stamp on things, so Spinrad offerings vary from place to place). They have major studios operating out of Portugal, the Arabian peninsula, and Mumbai, India, with the venerable Regency MegaMedia. All of which are producing content at a prolific rate.

- > That's for sure! Regency just released the **fifth** sequel in the **Married in Mumbai** series. People don't seem to care how predictable and formulaic it is, they still buy the sim just to see what crazy costumes and choreography are going to be in this one. There's an entire trid channel dedicated to the adventures and exploits of Johnny Spinrad himself. I can't believe all the crazy shit that guy does while managing to run an AAA corp.
- > Kat o' Nine Tales
- > That's because it isn't all him! Most of the time you are watching a stunt double with some remarkable plastic surgery done to look like Johnny. Plus, they're not stupid enough to announce the upcoming location and dangerous exploits of a person so many people would pay to see a fatal accident happen to. Ever wonder why he recovers from injuries so fast? Because they just pull another double out of the stable to take his place.
- > Snopes
- > And yet, the show and its exploits provide a distraction that SpinGlobal's opponents cannot ignore, even if they suspect that it's not real. If that's not the real Johnny, then where is he and what's he really doing? Or to make things more complicated, what if that really **is** him, hidden in plain sight, since everyone assumes he's a fake?
- > Pistons

No other source blurs the lines between entertainment and news like the media owned by SpinGlobal. In visual form, they have no straight-up traditional "this is the news" kind of show. The style that they seem to have hit on is the variety "news magazine" style, where every piece of news that they want to deliver is wrapped up in some other sort of general-interest story. This means that they are masters at telling and yet burying any bad news or messages that they don't want the people to hear. They'll start by telling you that a whole neighborhood full of poor SINless people burned down (in a fire they probably started), but then pivot to talking about how brave those fire responders are! Here's an interview with one of them, his wife, and cute little girl. Oh, she has a tooth missing and talks really cute, that's adorable. What was this story about again?

- > I've been following that series about the orphan ork girl that they gave a scholarship to with money to live on and stuff. It seemed all right to me.
- > /dev/grrl

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTEST TURNS VIOLENT

THOOTHUKUDI, INDIA

At least twelve people are confirmed dead after an unfortunate confrontation between an angry mob and Viventi Resources security forces. Since the Indian government approved Viventi Resources' expansion of the mine outside Thoothukudi, corporate representatives and construction workers have been harassed by enraged intruders. Fearing for the safety of their workers, Viventi deployed additional security forces to the site when expansion of the mine was set to begin. Shortly after 9 a.m., an enraged mob marched up to the site and began to hurl rocks and heavy objects at the arrayed security forces. Despite the onslaught, Viventi security held their ground against the rabble. Things reached a critical point when the crowd rushed the security cordon en masse wielding a variety of improvised weapons. Viventi security attempted to hold their ground, but when multiple personnel were dragged down by the mob, they opened fire into the crowd. Paramedics were immediately called, but twelve people were pronounced dead on the scene, with dozens more injured. Viventi officials have already filed an official statement indicating that they were only defending corporate lives and property. Investigation into the incident is ongoing.

- > You must have missed the beginning of that series. That girl is an orphan because her family, and everyone else in that oil corporation's building, died in a "terrorist bombing." My sources say it was a Sandstorm-sponsored job.
- > Pistons

FIGUREHEADS

The other major aspect of SpinGlobal's media strategy that I have observed is the development of, for lack of a better term, "personality cults." Within a particular region, demographic, or audience group, they create and elevate/venerate a single individual who will be used to push the brand and message that they want communicated. This individual becomes the "face" that people connect with, identify with, and want to emulate. Products they endorse are the new hot item to get, and where they go and what they do becomes the place to be and the thing to do. More to the point for us media types, they spout the messages and information that the corporation wants people to believe. This has been incredibly effective for them, since through the marketing and promotion, people develop a self-identity of admiring or emulating the personality, so when they say that this new SpinGlobal facility is good for the people and economy (just ignore the natives we violently displaced to get the land), or that story about unsafe and harmful products is bullshit (just ignore the horrif-

ic injury reports), people want to believe them. So desperately, in fact, that they will argue and ignore plain facts even when they are staring them in the face. Mahava Singh, Abbaad al-Dar, and ol' Johnny Spinrad himself are all examples of figureheads SpinGlobal uses to push their message.

- ▶ I can see how that strategy works. But doesn't that make them highly vulnerable? A single prominent figure that a corp relies on is just asking to be extorted, extracted, or exterminated.
- ▶ Jimmy No
- ▶ You've never had a tangle with Sandstorm Security, have you? I was doing a passive observation job when I saw an extraction attempt on Abbaad al-Dar last month. Some runners, who probably thought they were pretty hot, tried to grab him as he was moving from a building to get in a limo. Four of them grabbed him, but before they could take three steps, these hitters with black fabric covering their faces jumped out of fucking nowhere. Without a sound they shot and cut them up with fucking scimitars. Scariest shit I ever saw.
- ▶ Mika

TRUTH SEEKERS

Whether people know about it or want it to be true or not, the lines have been drawn in the war over the truth. On one side are the cyclopean giants of the corporations with their lie peddlers and truth twisters. On the other side are the ones they call "pirates." We are the crusaders for truth, and we are getting more numerous and more organized. Together, we are standing stronger and fighting harder than ever before, punching above our weight and giving those bastards a black eye.

WANDERVOGEL

The largest group of those dedicated to the truth, of which I am a proud member, is *Wandervogel*. I don't know who came up with the name, but roughly it means "wandering bird." The moniker is apt, as we are a loosely affiliated group of independents who rove about, gathering our own stories, but sharing information and resources when we need it. Although now bearing a German name, the origin of the group goes all the way back to the west coast of North America, in the megaplex of Seattle.

HISTORY

Old-timers will remember the legendary KSAF news network. For many years, they beat the odds and achieved the impossible. In a world of giant news networks with millions of nuyen (or whatever currency) to throw around, they as a small independent news studio were able to beat the giants to the story. Their ability to be in the right place at the

right time to capture a critical event as it happened was nothing short of prescient. To this day, no one really knows how they did it.

- ▶ I thought that was a pretty open-and-shut case. They were being fed information from the Big D himself, the great dragon Dunkelzahn. That's why their information dried up pretty quickly after he died. He left them a nice chunk of change in his will, though.
- ▶ Kay St. Irregular

Over the years, the network had their high points and low points, driven forward by the singular vision of their CEO, Helena Rossum. Even after their physical offices were destroyed, Rossum endured by shifting the network to exist primarily in the Matrix. Perhaps their enemies thought they could silence the work that Rossum and KSAF were doing, but in the end, they simply caused them to spread, casting the network's eyes and ears farther over North America and beyond. Rossum worked tirelessly to find other people like her who were interested—more than that, passionate—about finding and reporting the truth. About fighting against what the news was becoming, and seeing instead what it could be.

- ▶ She was also ultra-paranoid—constantly moving around, changing contact information, and keeping a cadre of bodyguards around her. She knew the kind of enemies she had made.
- ▶ Thorn

When the second crash hit and the corps clamped down on everything with their grid system, KSAF was nearly squeezed out. Fortunately, Rossum had people on KSAF with skill and determination who managed to move things to a location that the corps couldn't crush. Somehow (I'm not a Matrix expert), Rossum and the KSAF team were able to get their data, contact lists, and communication off the corp-controlled grids and on to a place where they could continue to operate in freedom.

- ▶ I'd like to know how they pulled that one off.
- ▶ /dev/grrl
- ▶ KSAF had made friends with some of the early otaku, and even more among the newly awakened technomancers. When the time came, they reached out for help. A vast Resonance ritual was performed, severing their Matrix hosts from the other grids and isolating them in their own trans-Resonance space. The minds of many of the participants were lost forever in the process, but it was worth it.
- ▶ Puck
- ▶ Why does everything have to be mysterious technomancer bullshit with you? There was no Matrix magic performed here. They simply hooked into the shadow network that runners like

us have been working on for decades. It's a separate set of parallel hardware, so the signals are never going through the corps' grids, therefore they can't stop them.

> Clockwork

The last task that Rossum undertook before she vanished permanently was to set up *Wandervogel*. She created a way for independent reporters from around the world to communicate, share information, and pool resources. Now connected and coordinating, we are fighting back in a way the shit-peddling corporations feared we would.

ORGANIZATION

Like our namesake, we are transient in nature. There is no centralized authority or single leader—we are a group of people united in our purpose of seeking and reporting the truth. Each individual can decide how much or how little to utilize the organization. There are some who have formed smaller sub-groups specific to a geographic location or topic of interest, working as a group almost continually. Others will band together for a limited period of time for a specific purpose: researching a specific story, finding a missing person, or focusing on a particularly vile person or organization. Most of the members are like me, lone roving reporters who simply seek to report the truth we see around us.

> Sounds like an anarchist utopia.

> Clarion

Thanks to the benevolence of Helena Rossum, *Wandervogel* has a sophisticated Matrix system allowing members to communicate with each other, sending messages, and sharing information all over the world. Different members use the tools available on the system to whatever degree they are comfortable with. Some reach out to the network only when they are looking for help, information, or just when they post something. Others are online almost constantly, participating in all kinds of conversations, posting whatever scrap of news they dig up in the hope that it will be useful to someone, somewhere. They exchange advice and provide feedback on early drafts of stories that other users post. The level of engagement with the network is really up to the individual. For the most part, there are no rules for usage, except this one: You must, on at least a semi-regular basis, post some sort of news.

> Here we go with the rules! Just when I was starting to like the sound of these guys!

> Clarion

> “No rules” might sound great as a slogan or fucking marketing buzzword or whatever, but it doesn't actually make for an

effective group. In order for a group of people to work together, there has to be some sort of structure to guide what happens and how people are supposed to behave. Otherwise you have a rabble, a mob, and we've all seen the kinds of things those groups can do. And the “what have I done” hangover is worse than any all-night drinking binge.

> Kia

Wandervogel was founded with the purpose that the truth, the real un-shit-on truth, needs to be found and told to the world. We need to wake people up to the giant pile of bullshit that they're being fed every day. Anyone who wants to be part of the group needs to buy into that and help make it happen. If you want to stay in the group, you need to help fulfill this mission—you need to do some actual reporting. Now, this can take a variety of different forms. There are those who produce pieces that are small and easy to understand in this age of increasingly short attention spans: a single powerful image, maybe with a short caption, a brief trideo clip, or audio file. Some pull out all the stops in production values and make a full simsense news show to rival those of the major networks, blending in all the accompanying sights, smells, feels, and emotion tracks that you would expect in a top-level simsense recording. Most of us are like me, producing something in between. Personally, I'm a fan of the old ways, so I write text articles with a few still images put in to support the facts. For me, it's all about getting the content out in the clearest way possible, without all the flash and e-pop.

> My favorite has to be **Edu-tainment with Edgar**. That guy (or girl or digital consciousness, whatever) makes an absolutely perfect parody of those sickening and sad corp-sponsored kid shows, except he tells the news, and not to kids. The way he says stuff makes me bust a gut and shoot soy out my nose sometimes. Like that time he explained how a hostile corporate takeover worked to that sim puppet called Mr. Celery-man. Hilarious.

> Butch

> That would be right at your intelligence level, wouldn't it? I guess if you aim something at the lowest level, you're going to pick up a wider audience.

> Clockwork

> It's actually much smarter than you're giving it credit for. Many times adults are too proud to admit that they don't understand something, or they have a complete misunderstanding because the concept was never fully explained to them in the first place. By explaining things as if he were explaining to a child, Edgar can get an important message through to more people in a way they can understand where they might not have paid attention to before.

> Kat o' Nine Tales

Once a member has posted a completed piece, the network helps them distribute it. As with pretty much all the news today, this is done through the Matrix. Since I'm a reporter and not any sort of deck-head, I can't really explain to you how this all works. All I know is that some very talented people who are part of the network are able to take the story and get it out where people can find and read it. All I know for sure is that all parts of this job can be risky.

- ▶ You've grokked that, for sure. The small packs of data wouldn't be hard to smuggle onto a grid and drop all over the place like a dog with a bladder problem. Big stuff like trideo and sim recordings don't jump grids in an instant, though, even in areas with a juiced connection. Dumping that many pulses onto a grumpy grid would take some sleazing for sure. If the ice or the spiders lock on too fast, then you'll never finish getting those pulses onto the grid, and you could get your deck slagged in the process.
- ▶ Slamm-O!
- ▶ Not to mention that while they are sending data from whatever shadow grid that **Wandervogel** runs on, they are opening the door to attack. That door can swing both ways, and the corp spiders could jump down their throat.
- ▶ /dev/grrl
- ▶ They wouldn't be thick enough to tie the two grids together, even temporarily! That's just asking for an ass-whupping.
- ▶ Slamm-O!
- ▶ You never know. This is a group of various skill levels that are all being truth crusaders. Someone may get sloppy.
- ▶ Pistons
- ▶ There are other possible means. I was once drawn to the site of a massive Resonance disturbance, where two groups of technomancers were fighting over what appeared to be a large Resonance portal of some kind. It connected the grid to somewhere **else**. Forms and sprites were being fired back and forth, and the fabric of digital reality itself was being shredded. I was just trying to move closer to get a better look at this mysterious Resonance tunnel when it abruptly vanished, along with most of the participants in the combat.
- ▶ Netcat

When it seems a member hasn't been posting content to fulfill the rule, a public warning is posted. If there is still no content after the warning, a trial is organized. The member in question has thirty days to appear and explain their activity. Members in good standing are organized to review the case. This council hears what they have to say and reviews their previous work to decide if they are still acting in good faith to the purpose of the group. If the person doesn't show, then convincing is harder, but a no-show doesn't automatical-

ly mean guilty. If the council decides the member isn't acting in the group's best interest, then their access is revoked. Passwords and access locations are changed frequently, so without being on the approved membership list it is impossible to continue to access the network.

- ▶ That all sounds too much like school or some shit.
- ▶ /dev/grrl
- ▶ I get that every group needs a way to police its members and enforce its rules, but in the end these systems are still just people. The same flawed, manipulable people who are the failing of so many systems. If I was going to try to bring this group down, I'd do it by infiltrating and then manipulating these kind of systems. People can be bribed, coerced, or extorted in so many different ways to direct their actions.
- ▶ Kay St. Irregular

New members are brought in exclusively by the recommendation of existing members—a sponsor. When this happens, a committee is formed and the sponsor makes the case for the new member. Their work is reviewed, their activities are watched for a period of time, they might be interviewed. If they pass all of that, then they are given access to the network.

ACTIVITIES

So I've dumped the info on how *Wandervogel* came to be, how it's organized, and how people get in and out. But what do people in the network actually *do*? Well, in short: We find and report the truth. The real news. We don't believe in secondary sources, because the shit creek of distorted information goes all the way up to the top, or back to the beginning, or however the hell you want to look at it. The point is, if you want to know what's *really* going on, you have to go find out for yourself. That means being where the action happens, gathering the proof, and talking to the people. We are good, old-fashioned beat reporters, with our feet on the concrete and our recording devices in people's faces.

- ▶ You are also putting your asses in a very vulnerable position.
- ▶ Jimmy No

Some of us are mostly passive information miners. Good researchers able to dig through primary sources and pull together a cohesive picture from it. They are good members, and often act as an excellent resource for others. I, and quite a few like me, prefer a much more active approach. We go to where the stories are and find the heart of the matter—the part that the bullshit-spewers of the news corps don't want you to know, or the angle they don't want shown. We go, we find the

truth, and bring it to light. The people need to know the truth of what is going on around them and why.

Now, active as reporting on events is, it's still only *reactive* to what's going on. I, and a few other brave members, take a much more *proactive* approach to the news. Rather than waiting for something to happen to break a story, we go and find it before it breaks. We are the ones who steal the secret memos titled **CONFIDENTIAL: EMPLOYEES ONLY**, or infiltrate the offices of the corrupt politician to catch him taking a bribe, or plant a bug in the perfect spot to catch that damning conversation. Make no mistake, the corps have all the resources in this war, enough to crush the truth into whatever shape they want it. They have time on their side. So if we are going to start turning the tide, we are going to have to strike back. Be bold, take the initiative, and hit them where it hurts. It's a risk and we know it, but what's at stake are the very minds of metahumanity.

- > And they are often looking for runners to help them do it. I've taken calls from **Wandervogel** members before, looking for someone to help work a job for them. The cred isn't great, because they don't have a lot of it, but they always try to sell you on how fucking noble it is to do whatever shit they are up to. I don't get many takers, but if some of you are hooders at heart, the jobs are out there.
- > Am-mut
- > I will take any job that hurts the corps.
- > Old Crow
- > And that's why you'll always be poor. But I guess you'll die with a clear conscience, right?
- > Clockwork

RECONSTRUCTION

From almost the moment after an event happens, the facts of it start to become distorted. Every person witnessing it has their own perspective and perception, while the news sources immediately begin to alter the truth. They might simply emphasize the portions that will get them better ratings, cater to a specific audience, or send whatever message the powers-that-be want told. The truth of an event, the pure fact, is irrecoverably lost, and all we have left are the various twisted, unreliable versions. Or is it irrecoverable? This is the question that the hacker group that calls itself Reconstruction asked. In a modern city in the Sixth World there are an almost unbelievable number of Matrix-capable devices in every cubic meter, all of which have cameras or microphones or antennas or some other way to take in information. In this kind of world, is any event really going unrecorded and unnoticed by all these devices?

Reconstruction seeks to rebuild the pure, undiluted facts about critical, newsworthy events by hacking every device that was in range and taking those recordings. Video from every available angle, audio recordings, sensor scans, Matrix traffic—they take everything they can find that has even a shred of a possibility of being useful. They compile all of the fragments of the recordings that they recover and piece them together. Once they're done, you have something that wouldn't have been possible otherwise: the actual truth about what happened at a critical event.

- > But is it really the "whole truth?" That seems to be reaching.
- > Cosmo
- > Of course it's not the whole truth! You can't be sure this is the whole truth if some people are deciding what to include and what not to include. Lies can be told through omission in these Frankenstein recordings. And all of that is aside from them just editing or completely fabricating something and putting that in.
- > Kay St. Irregular

Once Reconstruction has compiled one of their composite information packages, they post it for anyone—pirates and mainstream media alike—to use as a reference when reporting on the incident. Most mainstream media ignores them, of course, considering the recordings to be a biased and unreliable source at best and a complete fabrication at worst. Even among my pirate media colleagues, there are various opinions on the usefulness of what Reconstruction provides. Some reporters reference the material as the complete and unfiltered truth, whereas others are much more guarded (or jaded) about the information provided.

- > Well of course, why wouldn't you trust a bunch of random hackers when they say "this is what really happened." Do you hear my sarcasm?
- > Glitch

For their part, Reconstruction has stated that its only goal is to provide the truth. The unbiased, unfiltered truth about what really happened. They don't provide any sort of commentary or editorializing on the event; they simply gather and provide the information. In any of the messages they post, they have been very consistent about their motivations: truth must be made available, to whoever wants to face it. There are certainly people who remain skeptical, saying that Reconstruction's motivations can't be that pure, that they must have some sort of angle. But those of us who have trusted the information they provide and used it to further our investigations have never been led astray.

Being thoroughly dedicated individuals, the members of Reconstruction will work for days, weeks, or even months after a significant event to

improve the data available. I don't pretend to know anything about how they do it, but I have seen the recordings and data available for an incident get better and more numerous as time goes on.

- > That makes sense. It would be easy to identify and hack into obvious sources that are close to ground zero of an event: security cameras, traffic sensors, and shit like that. That would be the first place I would go to grab data, and it's easy to find because most of those devices are geographically fixed—they don't move around. From there, you can scour the sensor logs to try to find the IDs of other mobile devices that were nearby at the time. Then you can raid their recordings and take the data from them. The whole process needs to be repeated on multiple grids to find all the possible things that could have caught a piece of the action.
- > Netcat

Reconstruction provides recordings for many major newsworthy events on their own, and they can be commissioned to gather data on a specific event. If you have a good relationship with them and can provide a reasonable fee, they will do their best to gather what data can be found for a requested location and time.

- > See, if these guys are taking nuyen for this, that just kills any righteous credibility they were claiming. What a pile of drek.
- > Dr. Spin

Who the members of the group are and how they are organized is completely unknown—they keep a very low profile. They have certain esoteric and temporary ways of communicating with people outside the organization, but for the most part they are a pretty closed group, as they have made more than a few enemies. Bottom line is, they are wizards in the Matrix, able to dig up and provide information in ways I don't understand.

- > Surely some of our Matrix experts can add something here?
- > Haze
- > It wouldn't be that different from any other hacker gang or technomancer clan that exists. They're just super-focused on what they do—gathering information on real-life events. Physically, these people or AIs or whatever could be anywhere; they just need a secure way to send messages to each other. It's not an impossible thing to do, but they have done a good job of staying undetected and covering their tracks, so they've got to have some skills.
- > Glitch
- > I did a job for them once. I got an offer from a contact to go and hack this host to pull a bunch of sensor logs from the drones of this consumer research corp. They were a Mitsuhamma baby, so the host was tougher than usual to crack, but I got the payday and got out, like I always do. After I dumped the data at the

return address, this rezy persona shows up and starts talking to me. Said he was with Reconstruction—they were really jazzed about my work, and he asked if I wanted to join. I'm not into throwing in with groups promising to save the world anymore, so I gave it a pass, but I didn't charge them for my work.

- > Puck
- > You didn't take their money? My dear Puck, that's positively righteous of you.
- > Netcat
- > Hey, a guy can change, can't he? Even a little.
- > Puck

ANNOTATED

I don't think any other group embodies the spirit and attitude of this war for the truth more than Annotated. They're another purely virtual group, but beyond that they couldn't be more different from Reconstruction. Where Reconstruction seeks to present a pure and unfiltered truth without any editorial or opinion, Annotated is almost completely editorial and attitude. The way I see it, they are the perfect voice for the kind of pluck that it will take to wake up all the info-sleepers to what is really going on in this world. To show them how much of a bag of lies we're being fed each and every day. Annotated is the new free voice.

- > Preach it, sister!
- > Slamm-0?

What Annotated does is take the news and *correct* it, alter it, and just generally shovel the drek off of it. How exactly they do this depends on the medium in which the news is delivered. For purely text stories, Annotated simply alters or edits the text. They will stroke out incorrect "facts," they will expand quotes to show how they are being twisted, and add footnotes that give additional information or link to corrective sources. In video and VR, the corrections take on much more hilarious forms. Sometimes, I guess if they're feeling bored or don't have a lot of time, they will just insert windows, speech bubbles, or other elements that correct whatever is being said or shown in real time. Even in this form, they use garish colors and styles to intentionally differ from the bland and sterilized form that the corporate-sponsored news-casts take.

- > This format is also used when the corrections are more subtle or need to be more specific to the story at hand. It can be really difficult to correct some of the more deep and insidious pieces of misinformation in a comical way. To their credit, Annotated still manages to get the information across.
- > Kay St. Irregular

Their more outlandish corrections have made Annotated a legend on the Matrix. Their VR and video editing is absolutely top-notch, without a doubt, and creativity always keeps people amused. Often they will pick some sort of stylistic theme for the images used in their corrections to the video. There was the video where a little girl in pigtails skipped into the scene, blowing bubbles with corrected text or images on them, and then pulled out a crayon to start coloring over the charts and figures that were being displayed. Another time they had a whole gang of cartoonish punk gangers crash into the VR news studio and smash all of the news elements that were in error with bats or chains and such, then pull out cans of AR paint to write corrective information, in addition to making some lewd gestures at the news casters. My favorite, though, probably because of its charming simplicity, was the time the dragon flew down and ate pompous newscaster Vance Tanner, then proceeded to put on a pair of tiny reading glasses and deliver the corrected story instead.

- > How can you not mention the VR broadcast where they made an insect spirit rip its way out of that dude's body! Right as he was saying "the cause isn't known." I mean, it scared the shit out of me at the time, but they sure got their point across. "It was bugs."
- > Pistons

- > You would like the graphic and obvious one wouldn't you? Personally, I think the "meta-racist rant" annotation was far more brilliant. As that stuck-up talking head kept going on about how all the problems were to be blamed on the "races without a long cultural lineage" (read: orks and trolls), he started to look more and more like an ork. By the time the asshole was done with his thinly disguised racist tirade, he was the ugliest ork I've ever seen.
- > Mihoshi Oni
- > Why don't the corp spiders just upload a fresh copy of the thing?
- > /dev/grrl
- > Keep reading.
- > Bull

Despite the best efforts of security specialists to lock down their news content or to correct Annotated's "vandalism," the hackers have managed to stay one step, if not two or three, ahead of them. Content is "re-corrected" almost as fast as the new stations can bring in a fresh copy. News agencies have tried cross-posting, distributing content, encrypting, and a whole bunch of other hacker shit that I don't understand, but nothing seems to slow

these punks down. If anything, every bit of resistance put up by the corps just drives them harder.

- > You're damn right. It's pure entertainment watching these guys run circles around the muddle-headed spiders the news agencies use. One time, the corps knew they were going to try to alter this big news headline so they put out an early bait story to try to draw the hackers into a trap. Of course, they saw it three grids away and turned the trap back on them. Annotated hackers altered the bait file all right, but they knew that the spiders were going to counter by uploading the **real** story from this protected archive. So they waited until the spiders hooked up the archive to the grid and before the slugs could even finish loading the file, Annotated had altered the copy in the archive even **worse** than the original. The spiders blasted out the "fixed" copy all over the grids, and it was too late to take back. Fucking brilliant.
- > Glitch
- > I know for a fact that they—some of them anyways—use sprites to alter some of the stories. I've seen them zipping about the news grids making file alterations.
- > Netcat
- > That does explain some things. I've noticed a unique Resonance signature on many of the files that they alter. There must be some very talented technomancers in that group.
- > Puck

I would be extremely negligent, though, if I didn't mention the most famous intrusion of Annotated to date: the time they interrupted a live broadcast and altered it *in real time*. As I've said before, I don't know a whole lot about the hacker shit, but I do know that Confederate Studios was doing live coverage of the confrontation between security troops for Falcon Development Corp in Atlanta and some protesters that they were about to evict. The story from *their* side was that the "lowlifes" in the tenement were way behind on their rent, along with serious issues with the building that they couldn't fix because maintenance personnel had been "harassed" when they came to work. Well, just as the broadcast was about to show how saintly Falcon Development Corp had behaved, this *other* signal jumped in and took over. This tech throwback kind of avatar came on and gave the protesters' side of the story. It showed how Falcon corp employees were harassing and beating people, and secret camera footage showed them purposefully damaging equipment and making it look like vandalism. All of it plain as the shit under your nose. Well, Falcon was seriously pissed off at Confederate Studios, who worked their hoops off trying to do damage control, but public opinion was too far against them by that point. The normally dickless government stepped in and pulled the license from Falcon, handing management of the residences over to a non-profit.

- > Fragging amazing. They were able to nab that satellite signal right at the source and change it on the fly. These guys deserve a fucking medal.
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > Yeah, it was trippy glitchy, but couldn't they have used a more high-tech avatar? That guy looked so low tech, he kept glitching and st-st-stuttering on his words. If they are such hot hackers, couldn't they have used better software?
- > /dev/grrl
- > Kids these days! That wasn't bad software, that was a brilliant throwback. Go do some searching on the very first "virtual TV host" created in the 1980s. His name was Max Headroom.
- > Bull
- > Gotta respect those who respect the classics.
- > /dev/grl

ORUNMILA

Whenever I go to write about something, I make sure I take the time to research and understand it properly. In order to report the news accurately, you need more than a half-assed impression of your subject. The last thing I want is to spout off about something I know nothing about like the dumbass talking-heads who vomit the news at us these days. For this reason, I haven't written much of anything about magic and the astral world. Fortunately, I don't have to worry that the topic is going uncovered by an honest source. For that, we have Orunmila.

- > My translation soft must be broken—what is that word?
- > /dev/grrl
- > Orunmila is the name of the spiritual manifestation of wisdom and knowledge in many African faiths.
- > Am-mut

Orunmila is a group of magically active beings—mostly metahuman magicians, but some free spirits and such—who make it their business to inform the general public about magical goings-on. The kind of reporting they do comes in three main categories.

The first kind are general-interest pieces on what is going on in the world from a magical perspective. These can be interesting "natural" (if you can call magical things natural) events such as mana storms, spontaneous spiritual convergences, or unexplained phenomena. They report on the work of the Astral Space Preservation Society in protecting areas of unique magical beauty, along with the work of independent researchers and "astral environmentalists." They even explain findings of recent magical research in a way that all of us can understand.

The second kind of article they write is pieces that raise awareness and acceptance of sentient non-metahumans. There have been editorials on Sasquatch culture, free spirits who have become popular artists, and a young naga's first day at school. They tell the stories of their lives, hopes, and dreams in a way that everyone can relate to. They really are heart-warming, and I always look forward to reading them and feeling like maybe, just for a moment, the whole world isn't going to hell.

- > Oh slot, I read one of those once and it was boring with a capital B and a capital ORING. When I see something about centaurs I don't want to hear about his fragging fruit orchard! I want to read about all the weird and crazy shit that they do.
- > Chainmaker
- > But that's just the point, though. What Orunmila is trying to do with those articles is make those creatures seem **less** weird, not more. They are trying to emphasize the similarities between them and metahumanity, not the differences. By showing all the relateable aspects of their lives, they reduce that fear in people about things that they don't understand. At least, that's what they're trying to do.
- > Glasswalker

The third, and most common, kind of article they write, however, is about the depressing state of the magical world today. The modern Sixth World has not been kind to its magical neighbor.

- > That might be the understatement of the century.
- > Winterhawk

This is the kind of story that Orunmila seems to tell best: the struggle to preserve the purity of the astral world in the face of the constant damage that the modern world is doing to it. They show beautiful and enigmatic magical creatures, displaced, dead, or diseased from the damage done to their mystical habitats. They show spirits that were once peaceful avatars of their environment turned twisted, bitter, and hateful from the pollutants dumped in their habitats. They show the native people with a long history and connection to the land they live in, fighting to save it from the encroaching predators of the corporations.

- > Starting to lay it on a little thick, isn't she?
- > Clockwork
- > You have no idea. I was on a trip to gather magical components in Brazil and fell in with an isolated tribe living in the jungle there. They had a sense and connection to the mana around them like no other people I have encountered. They helped me gather the materials I needed over a couple of weeks. Manadyne has always had their greedy eyes on that land, wanting to get in there and harvest telesma for themselves, but local laws

prevented them from displacing the native people. Well, once I made it back to the local sprawl to start arranging my trip home, I caught word that the corp finally found their solution—they hired a hit squad to remove the local population. I couldn't believe they would get that much blood on their hands, but I should have known better. Three weeks later, I saw a news feed saying that all the natives were found dead from a "mysterious viral sickness." With no more natives, there was nothing to prevent Manadyne from moving in, those heartless bastards.

> Lyran

How can I say all this like the magic world is so near and dear to me, you say? Well, that's what Orunmila does best. With only a small fraction of the population being magically active, they know that they need to make mundanes care about the magical world if they are going to have a chance at changing anything. As a result, their stories do a fantastic job at making the mana world understandable to us mundanes. Their writers are among the very best at describing magical phenomena in a way that everyone can grok. Equally talented artists render visions of the astral realm in colors and visuals that are vibrant and compelling. Possibly most surprising of all are the occasional VR simulations that they produce, allowing regular people to experience what it is like to be in the astral realm—and to be revolted at what is being done to it.

- > Their simulations are impressive, but they still pale in comparison to the real experience. I applaud their efforts all the same.
- > Winterhawk

◀◀CHAT SESSION OPEN▶▶

- > Those goddamn heartless corporate dog-fuckers! They finally did it!
- > Sunshine
- > Did what? What's got you all glitched?
- > 2XL
- > Let me just show you:
- > Sunshine

ACTION NEWS REPORT 2080-05-18

SEATTLE CARJACKING LEADS TO GRISLY DEATHS

Knight Errant has confirmed that three people are dead after a car-jacking went wrong in the early morning hours on Highway 405 in Seattle. The infamous biker gang, the 405 Hellhounds allegedly approached a vehicle, attempting to force it to a



stop in order to steal it and rob the inhabitants. A chase ensued, with the pursued vehicle eventually crashing into a median strip at a high speed several kilometers later. KE officers are not releasing the names of any victims at this time.

- > That van was carrying my friend Late Breaking and her team.
- > Sunshine
- > So what? Sounds like bad luck with the Hellhounds catching them out on the road.
- > Clockwork
- > How can you be so fucking stupid? Of course it wasn't the Hellhounds—they're just a bunch of joy-riding punks! Late Breaking and her team knew how to take care of themselves, so there's no way a bunch of biker punks took them out.
- > Sunshine
- > I just read the **Wandervogel** report on this attack. The van looked like it was a fucking shooting gallery target for high-caliber weapons. The rear passenger side of the vehicle looked like it was ripped open by some sort of high explosive. Does that sound like go-ganger firepower to you?
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > I think the smart ones here can put together the pieces. Late Breaking has been pissing off the news corps for too long now. Somehow they got wind of her location and decided to remove the annoyance. It's not like they haven't done shit like this before.
- > Kane

- > Sure, but this one hits a little closer to home.
- > Sunshine
- > How many times have I told you not to believe anything you read from those shit-spewers?
- > Late Breaking
- > Holy shit, you're alive! How did you make it away from that corp death squad?
- > Sunshine
- > I'm a slippery one, and way too angry and stubborn to die. Especially if those asshats are doing the shooting.
- > Late Breaking
- > But you're on borrowed time. Those teams are professionals, and they've got to know that there wasn't enough of you in that wreck to confirm your death. They'll be looking for any sign that you're still alive and come to finish the job.
- > Mihoshi Oni
- > Let them. I'm not cowering in some shitty safe house for the rest of my life, living off of soykaf and krill bars. Those fuckers killed my team and tried to make me bleed out, too. I'm not going to let them walk away from that. I'm going to go back at them—grab their balls and squeeze as hard as I can. I am going to broadcast every dirty fucking secret they have until the people riot and bring those corporate shit-towers burning to the ground. Who's with me?
- > Late Breaking



THRILLS & AGONIES

POSTED BY: SLAMM-O!

Sure, shadowrunning is great, but if you want *real* excitement, drama, violence, and nuyen in equal measure, have you tried professional sports?

- > Have you?
- > /dev/grrl
- > I've dabbled. Getting back in shape's not easy, but it's not impossible. Jerk.
- > Slamm-0!

Sports are magical (some of them literally). They bring communities together, they turn communities against outsiders, they turn local pride into nuyen, into joy, into disappointment, into rage. They light up whole cities in team colors, they get cop cars flipped and burned, they lead to parades, riots, brawls in the streets, joyous celebrations, and births and deaths and everything in between.

- > But most of all, that part about the nuyen. Legit corp nuyen, back-alley bookie nuyen, shining, bright, e-gambling nuyen, regional political bribe nuyen, you name it. Nuyen.
- > Mr. Bonds

Today, I'll be introducing—or re-introducing—you sad lot to today's top sports. Some of them got picked for raw popularity (read: opportunity), for the rabidity of their fanbase (especially online, as Matrix spats are easy to stir up), some for the nuyen they drag in (some through sales, some through gambling, most through both), some for their cultural importance (regional sports tend to draw really crazy crowds in their limited spheres), and—as a special bonus!—for how likely they are to be affected by, and as such affect, our beloved shadows. Whenever there's a lot of nuyen moving around and strong emotions at play to complicate issues, we've got an opportunity.

- > Look at him talking about it like work is why he follows sports.
- > Netcat

THE MAGIC: SPORTS AND MOJO

A recurring theme throughout this section will be the disagreement between the rules of various professional sports and the people who can bend

or break the rules of physics through sheer force of will. Magic is a wildcard, and we know how angry the corps get when they can't control it. That shows up in sports as clearly as it does anywhere else.

One school of thought is that certain sports are penalizing people for being born with magical talent, and as such these sort of rules are discriminatory. This is especially true when the brand of "magic" being discussed is actually something that doesn't come with dedication and hard work, but simply through an accident of birth (like being a changeling, troll, or multi-limbed metavariant).

The counter-arguments tend to come down to fairness when they don't come down to plain old bigotry. Sports like boxing have weight classes for reasons tied to player safety, so how do you integrate a troll while trying to pretend that a human can stand a chance against them? If a grown man wanted to play Little League, you'd say no, so why let a sasquatch play basketball? Where would the line be drawn—would you let a dragon slap on a jersey and play football?

Which, uh, I'm just saying, would be amazing.

Anyway, it's worth pointing out that sometimes the rules aren't there purely for (meta)racism or player safety's sake. Quite a few sports measure degrees of success or failure based on the measurements of the players involved; the baseball strike zone on a troll is massive compared to that on a human, for instance, and unless they're swinging log-sized bats at passing soccer balls, they're just not going to have much of a chance.

- > Och, but just imagine one of 'em charging the mound if a pitcher hit him with a wild fastball. That'd be worth it.
- > Thorn

And bigotry, of course, is certainly an issue. Sometimes it's wrapped up in "tradition" instead of racism, but if you ask me, the end result is the same. Your sacred sport might have always been a human affair, and maybe all your technique and spirituality and mumbo-jumbo go out the window when an ork uses his strength against you, or when a dwarf's low center-of-gravity flips the script. To me, that just means your sport needs to change with the times and keep up. It doesn't mean they shouldn't be allowed to play by the same rules—it means the rules need to change so they *work*.

Now, all that said, sometimes there *is* general agreement where disallowing spellcasters and spirits are concerned. You can't very well call it a footrace if someone is casting Levitate, right? You can't just whip up a Physical Barrier spell and keep a runner from reaching first base in baseball, can you? Flinging an ally spirit with Movement at someone who's carrying a football would hardly be fair, would it?

- > Those do all sound awesome, though.
- > /dev/grrl

The primary point of contention, then, remains metahumanity's wondrous variety (trolls and changelings, especially), and that magical wildcard, adepts.

- > Ironically, it was the CAS Supreme Court that did their damndest to settle the metatype issue, way back in 2056. They said it was illegal for pro leagues to keep anybody from playing based on the shape of their ears, just like it had long been illegal to do so for the color of their skin. For the CAS, back in the '50s, that was a pretty big deal.
- > Bull
- > It was brought to the forefront again during the first wave of changelings trying to play. Elongated limbs, digitigrade legs, all-natural (rather than implanted) horns, fangs, and claws? It opened up a real can of worms.
- > Hannibelle

The sticking point is that some of an adept's abilities can largely be mimicked by 'ware (so the playing field can be nominally level), but clearly not all of them (and that's without getting into all the, uh, what're they called, ways and stuff, and mystic adepts, and all the rest). The arguments tend to swirl around, as usual, fairness and player safety. How do you fairly judge a rock-climbing competition if one of the competitors can literally run straight up the course? If a sport has "throttled" cyberlimbs allowed (those that remain within certain parameters), how can you be sure an adept player is similarly limiting their augmented strength (mechanical tests for the capacity of cyberlimbs are routine, but what's to stop an adept from sandbagging during a strength test)?

- > All of this was far more reasonable to clutch your pearls about twenty, thirty, or forty years ago. The more everyone's learned about adepts and our capabilities, the less all this hand-wringing makes sense.
- > Ma'Fan
- > Then again, it seems like the more we adepts learn about ourselves, the more tricks we can pull out of our arseholes. Good luck keeping up.
- > Thorn

Now, the flip side of the magician coin is also true, though. Plenty of different sports (even, or especially, those that have rules against mojo) also use magicians of various stripes in order to enforce the rules, oversee events, and check for cheating. Magicians in the astral can handily keep up with any sort of race (and watch out for spirit interference), astral perception is as solid as a scanner



at picking up banned cyberware, and, push comes to shove, a talented magician has plenty of tricks to shut down an out-of-control athlete or keep a crashing car from endangering a crowd.

- ▶ One of the biggest black marks on the reputation of Gladio, the adept-promoting athlete union, came when Beatrice “Big Dawg” Delverson, a dwarven physical adept of no small ability, got hopped up on combat drugs during a mixed-martial-arts bout. A trainer applied a slap patch between rounds to give her an edge, and she just went straight loco the next time her opponent tagged her. Big Dawg was working pretty hard on wrenching her opponent’s arm off—not out of the socket, but **off**—and she’d shrugged off the referee’s taser. Finally, a nearby Awakened league official locked her in place with a Control Actions spell, and put a stop to it.
- ▶ Thorn
- ▶ I remember that match. She tore up “Pole Axe” Patrowski, in ‘65 or ‘66, right? Patrowski ended up on the Predators, Ares’ urban brawl team, for a season. Her new arm was pretty wiz.
- ▶ Hard Exit
- ▶ I can vouch for magicians and their dumb spells stopping crashing cars from hitting live studio audiences, for sure.
- ▶ Kane

- ▶ There was some heart-stopping footage of a near-tragedy at the Circuito Urbano Bilbao, a few years ago. A racer had a blow-out, rolled, and almost went right over the barriers and into the—wait, did you say “live **studio** audiences”?
- ▶ Turbo Bunny

THE MACHINE: SPORTS AND AUGMENTATIONS

A hundred years ago, athletes pushed the boundaries of what was physically possible through a whole host of bizarre diets, training regimens, high-altitude workouts, sleeping in pressurized chambers, wrapping their bodies in weird tape, or dabbling in every imaginable flavor of performance enhancer. These days, that’s all pretty quaint compared to what most leagues sanction, encourage, or even require players to do.

Professional athletes these days are often hotbeds of mundane augmentations, cybered up at corporate clinics, pushing the boundaries of what a body can handle by stacking ’ware atop ’ware, or riding the cutting edge with nanite and gene-

tech treatments. Athletes are uniquely situated to get crammed full of everything an R&D team can throw at them. The corporation wants them to succeed, since they're walking, talking avatars of corporate prowess and pride. The corporation wants them to show off company products while they do so, since they're walking, talking billboards. And lastly, of course, the corporation tends to have every legal right to implant whatever they want, regardless of risk to the subject, because athletes are walking, talking skills who hardly ever pay enough attention to the contracts they sign.

- > Professional athletes tend to come in two styles: those painstakingly groomed for their position after years of corporate or corp-financed education (and therefore feel an obligation toward their sponsors, alongside maybe a decade or so of being told not to read the fine print), and those rarer, wildcard talents who scouts find struggling somewhere (and who are thus aware of the once-a-lifetime opportunity they're being given and will eagerly sign their rights away for the chance for a better life). Corporate sponsors know what they're doing. League officials know what they're doing. Team administrators know what they're doing. These kids sign up to train, study, work, play, and often fight and die for a team, and the team pays them a fraction of what that should be worth.
- > Marcos
- > On the other hand, it's a living wage and often quite a bit more, it's access to augmentation and training, it's a roof over your head, and it's the chance to be somebody. Plenty of athletes know the risks full well when they sign up. It's like somebody going all-in in poker; they know they're risking it all, but they think the risk is worth it.
- > Mr. Bonds

At their best, a top-end urban brawler, football player, or combat biker (not to mention some of the personal combat fighters) can hold their own against any street sammie, military, or corporate-security goon you want to name. Corporate facilities have access to plenty of vat-grown muscles and wired reflexes, cybereyes dripping in tactical goodies *do* kind of grow on trees, and package deals mean their clinics have tons of practice at installing this sort of thing well and efficiently.

- > In fact, plenty of combat-capable cybersuits are marketed as sporting goods, not tactical 'ware, in certain jurisdictions. With the right paperwork behind you, you can get licensed for most anything if you try.
- > Traveler Jones

There's plenty of cerebral chrome to be found, too. *Miracle Shooter* aside, drone racing and e-sports have mental demands instead of physical, and you're not likely to see many slabs of mus-

cle being implanted in a video gamer. Gleaming rows of datajacks and chipjacks are the order of the day, with plenty of headware snuggled out of sight just below them. Anything a high-end decker might like, an e-sports rock star will like too, and the same goes for their external tech.

- > The same goes for fans and stuff. Some will bring their cobbled-together decks and Frankenstein commlinks to get signed or ogled by their favorite players, given half a chance. A string of young fans got robbed around a series of big **Atlantis Clash** meet-and-greets earlier this year, and when I caught up to 'em, the skills had almost a cool million in tech they'd snatched up.
- > Kincaid
- > **Atlantis Clash?** Pfft. **Dawn of Atlantis** is still where it's at. **Clash** is for folks without the dedication and farsight to enjoy a rich, immersive, setting. It's pure quick-twitch reaction garbage. There's no story, no drama, no emotional investment.
- > Frosty

It's not all research-and-development wet dreams, though. In even the most heavily augmented sports, not everybody gets the superstar chrome treatment. On minor league teams, or even just players in secondary positions on otherwise superstar teams, used chrome is often the order of the day. Recruits will get muscles, eyes, or reaction enhancements essentially loaned to them for the duration of their contract, and then have them removed when they're no longer working for the team. The worst is when the bioware for minimizing pain gets removed, too.

- > Hah! And you thought cleaning up the locker room was messy work before!
- > Kane

Leagues, teams, and contracts vary on how well they compensate players for that sort of treatment. Nobody's—quite—dumping players, eyeless or limbless, anywhere, but plenty of teams give players crude prosthetics or low-grade replacements that leave them essentially crippled for life. The top-end, holistically reasonable, vat-grown stuff is only available if they pay additional fees for it, and for these desperate young athletes coming off a time in their life when they likely weren't spending their money very wisely, they can really get screwed.

- > Or they can bounce ahead of time, though team security's certainly onto that trick. More than one young stud's decided to jump the fence and hoof it with a body full of combat chrome, RFIDs be damned, and teams respond accordingly. It's not uncommon for some teams to double or triple security at the start of a season (when rosters are still being finalized) or at the end of a season (when player going absent would also

hurt the team the most), and they love to blame those extra “bodyguards” on hysterical fans and external security risks.

► Hard Exit

THE MAN: SPORTS AND CULTURE

At the end of the day, even the most die-hard sports fans have to take a step back and recognize that, essentially, we’re just consumers like everybody else. Sports exist not to bring communities together for a shared, uplifting experience, nor to celebrate the hard work and dedication of the young women and men who train, prepare, and study to do the best they can in their chosen fields. Sports exist, fundamentally, as a means of taking away our hard-earned nuyen through a meticulously fostered system of lifelong fanaticism and brand loyalty.

The bottom line isn’t a celebration of meta-human excellence or talent, it’s the harvesting of nuyen from us loyal schmucks. That’s important to keep in mind as we discuss individual sports later on, it’s important to keep in mind when we talk about the money that these sponsors pour into their teams (just remember—they’re clearly getting even more money out of it), it’s important to keep in mind when we talk about incarcerated people being press-ganged into playing these games for little or no compensation, and it’s important to keep in mind when we talk about player injuries and deaths. At the end of the day, the corps are ... the corps. They exist to take nuyen from you and me, period.

I mean, this particular method of nuyen-taking is awesome. I love it. I’m sticking with it, just like a BTL addict, sugar addict, or novacoke addict sticks with it. But I’m doing so with my eyes wide open, and I, at least, have earned my “hard-earned” nuyen in a little cooler way than most sports fans, and I won’t deny that me and Netcat have a bit more nuyen to spare on this sort of thing than your average corp drone. I don’t feel bad for spending some of it on cool stuff that makes me happy, but I sometimes do feel bad for the seventy-hour-workweek schmuck who sinks his savings into corporate-branded gear and spends his weekend cheering on his corporate-branded team.

► This is pretty shockingly self-aware of you, kid. You feeling okay?
► Bull

I mention all that just to clear the air before we dive in. It explains why these sponsors make the decisions they do. Even the non-corporate ones—the local governments that try to put second-tier teams together, that sort of thing—they’re ultimately in it to make money. That colors every single thought,

that *is* the bottom line for them. They care about player safety (in the sports that even still use that fig leaf) only because they need players for the games to make them money. They care about fan involvement and the community only because it’s fans that give them money. They care about the sanctity of the game only because pretending to do so means fans will pay them money. They care about the rules of the game, about winning the game, about *playing* the game, only because it is through doing so that they can continue to profit.

Never forget that soulless animatronic monsters staff the upper echelons of every sport I’m about to wax geek-etic about. For all that I love an awful lot of my home teams, I never really feel like it’s the idea of the team I’m hurting, if I take a gig against ’em.

Now, there are plenty of people with tons of heart in the lower rungs, don’t get me wrong. Casters and athletes, managers and coaches, trainers and team psychiatrists, dieticians and medical staff, the folks who clean the towels and uniforms, sweep the floors, tend the fields, maintain the equipment ... lots of them are doing what they do for love of the game and the community built around that game. Respect those folks. Just like the salaryman sitting plugged into a cubicle somewhere, there’s no reason to rough ’em up if you come across a normal work-a-day schlub during a run.

Back to those decisions, though, and how they’re all about the nuyen, huh?

Plenty of the conversations to be had about metaracism fit more into metahuman culture (and how to profit from it) than anything else. Heck, the executives making these top-level decisions that happen to promote metaracism might not even be metaracists themselves, they’re just okay with pandering to metaracists because that’s what market analysis suggests will keep them rolling in hookers and blow.

For instance? Sex sells, elves sell, and elven sex sells.

► Ahem?
► Netcat

So what do we see? Hunky elven faces to franchises, gorgeous elven women on center-stage, more elven cheerleaders (in leagues that still have cheerleaders) than any other metatype, juicy gossip-columnist and paparazzi pieces about illicit affairs between players, staff, said cheerleaders, pop stars, supermodels, etc. ... and very little mention of *the game*. They’re all about the juicy docu-drama, the chiseled jawline that’ll look good for team advertisements, and the male power fantasy of being a good-looking superstar athlete.

► There’s probably no better poster-children for this than Jon Winger and Tamara Ny, riding for the Los Angeles Sabers combat

biker team, back in the early '50s. Tamara died mid-game, and half of the media buzz about it was focused on their supposed romance, instead of Dougan Rose's hit that took her out.

- > Hard Exit

For a prime example of this sort of elven favoritism at play, even/especially in non-Tír sports, let's talk about football for a minute (the American kind, not soccer). Football has long been divided into "skill positions" and, well, others. The skill position players are the ones who handle the ball, score points, and earn glory (or the defensive linemen who directly oppose them). They get the camera time. They get their faces on everything. They get the jersey sales, the highlight reels, the cushy commentator jobs when their careers are over.

Couple that with the specific physicality required by, say, quarterbacks (game sense, intangible social skills and leadership abilities, perception, enough height to see past linemen, quickness to avoid tackles, hand-eye coordination for accurate throws) or their primary targets, wide receivers (long, lean, builds and good reach to make jump-catches, top-end running speeds to dart downfield, lean builds to dodge tacklers) and what do you think ends up filling those roles more than any other metatype?

- > I bet he's about to say orks.
- > Bull

Elves, that's right.

Furthermore, look at how other players are treated compared to those skill position players. Look at the stereotypes about most football players—not quarterbacks, but most other positions—as big, strong dummies. Look at the prioritization of brawn over brains in popular culture, when they're discussed. Look at how they're told, from peewee ages on up through college and into the big leagues, how disposable they are; they're told to take a hit for their quarterback, to protect their quarterback, to throw themselves between oncoming Mack-truck-looking rushers and their quarterback.

There's no question where the most salary goes, along with the most camera time, the most league-sanctioned awards, the most hall of fame slots. Teams clearly prioritize the welfare of skill position players over everyone else, and, hell, they're open about it.

Now, take that team's natural inclination to favor one player over another, add in the elven superiority complex, and couple it with elven longevity that doubles or triples or quadruples how strongly teams feel the way they already feel.

- > Man, imagine if Tom Brady'd been a spike baby.
- > Pistons

- > "If?"
- > Thorn

So imagine everything I just said, and make yourself a nuyen-obsessed, penny-pinching sociopath in charge of funding a team, prioritizing marketing and advertisements, and arranging team housing, medical care, and equipment allocation.

On the one hand, you've got yourself a superstar elven face who's a natural-born team leader with a thick head of hair, just the right amount of stubble, and an arm like a cannon. If you play your cards right, he'll stay in his physical prime *functionally forever*, until your grandkids' grandkids are through with college. Dudes and ladies want him and want to be him. Coaches and managers love the idea of having a player they can build a franchise around for decades to come. Marketing and sales analysts are drooling at the notion of literally generations of fans all growing up wanting this superstar's jersey, autograph, and digital trading card.

On the other hand, you've got ... what? You've got a bunch of disposable parts, that's what. You've got a bunch of fast-breeding, fast-aging, fast-burning-out orks who are innately tough and strong and great for throwing between your franchise superstud and oncoming danger. You've got "litters" of them being born every day, you know they'll be in their physical prime faster than humans will be, and you know that, statistically, they'll be out of that physical prime faster than a human would be, even *if* you chose to take good care of them.

So why take good care of them?

Orks and trolls turn into seasonal ablative armor for elven (and the occasional dwarven) superstars, while those superstars can outlive most of your fans if you do everything in your power to keep them healthy and happy. Toss in some metaracial minimization cosmetic operation as team-standard augmentation (or just tint the faceplates enough nobody cares), and voila. You've got yourself a football team.

- > All of which is exacerbated by the financial situation orks and trolls are more likely to be in, compared to elf, dwarf, and human recruits. Statistically, the "goblinoid" races are far more likely to see the patronage of a professional team as their only way out of bad financial situations; they're more likely to need that patronage to get into and through college, and orks in particular are likely to have large family groups who could also use their support. It's hard to say no to a mediocre contract when that mediocre contract could improve both your future and that of your family.
- > Baka Dabora

It's an ugly situation, it's just one situation out of many (the same sort of thing happens plenty in tons of other sports, I'm just picking on football because

I'm watching a Seahawks game while I write this up), and it's not getting better any time soon. There were problematic overtones to this sort of stuff back in the twencen when it was all humans, all the time, and we were just talking about skin color. Now that there's even more meaningful physical differences and lifespan discrepancies to go along with that pigmentation stuff? Man, people can suck.

On the bright side, fans have started to notice it, and stage their own little protests from time to time. A hacking attack during a pre-season game last season left multiple pro teams with their jerseys and digital overlays tampered with. Orkish and trollish linemen had their last names removed from their jerseys and the on-screen datafiles, so that they were literally only numbers, pieces on the field being maneuvered to protect the players with faces and names.

- > "A hacking attack," he says. Vaguely. Coily.
- > Netcat
- > Innocently.
- > Slamm-O!

Turns out, it caught on. Players started to physically alter their jerseys to match (tearing the letters off and leaving just their numbers), fans modified their jerseys at home to do the same thing, and even a few franchise-contracted, skill-position, fancy-pants, superstar types played along and started to refer to themselves by number or position instead of by name. A dialogue got started. It hasn't led anywhere yet, and all the usual jerks were piling in to say all the usual things and try to shut it down, but a dialogue got started. If it leads to me loving the Seahawks guilt-free, great. Passion counts. Passion can change things.

People get passionate about their sports, and leagues get passionate about that passion. It's the interest of the public that makes a professional team a license to print money, but it's a fine tight-rope that league commissioners and other officials have to walk. Too little interest from fans, and the money dries up. Too much interest from fans, and you get assassination attempts, riots, hacking attacks, or litigation. Folks in the Sixth World care hard about the things they care about, and we can be fickle beasts.

- > It's nothing new, really. In 390 AD, a Greek charioteer flirted with the wrong Roman general, and got himself locked up for homosexuality. The locals were outraged at their chariot-driving hero being taken from them, so they rioted, overran the Roman encampment, freed their champion, lynched the general and torched downtown Thessalonica. The Emperor Theodosius sent in the troops and massacres ensued to restore order. Thousands of people died.
- > Thorn

- > You always did favor part-time lecturing assignments as cover identities.
- > Fianchetto
- > What can I say? History's fun. It teaches us valuable lessons about what generals to flirt with.
- > Thorn

Plenty of cities bear scars—physical and mental—from when fans have gotten too invested in the successes of their team. Sometimes these riots have started as celebrations and gotten out of hand, other times they've been indignant marches in the face of disgust over an official's call or a player's injury.

- > And other times, of course, they've been sparked on by provocateurs who needed some chaos as cover for a gig, or who were planted by enemies of the franchise in question, or the whole thing's just been blown out of proportion by the media and was just a dozen excited kids who happened to be wearing team colors. Lame.
- > /dev/grrl

Now, before I leave you all thinking I'm no longer supporting my beloved Seattle franchises, I do want to say a few positive words about sports. For all that it might just be a side effect of corporate bloodsuckers taking our money, sports *do* bring communities together. Plenty of athletes do a lot of good work for their hometowns and franchise-linked communities alike, and it's not just for the mid-evening feel-good tridshow clips, either. Lots of these pros came up on harder streets than I did, that's for sure, and they do their best to leverage their newfound wealth into improving where they came from.

Sometimes, there'll even be a job offer in it for you, if you know the right people and have the right rep.

Other times, though, sports actually do what they pretend—they provide neighbors with a shared point of pride, a common ground for friendly discussions, or a bonding experience that can bring friends and families together. There's something almost—excuse the phrase—almost magical about sitting in Bosco's or The Sports Bar here in Downtown, looking out over a sea of blue and green jerseys and AR spam, and feeling the *roar* that fills the place when the puck hits the ice to begin another Squall hockey season (or the blue and green of the Seahawks before kick-off, the blue and green of Mariners fans right before opening pitch, the blue and green of the Sounders before a soccer match, or...or...man, we like blue and green, huh?).

Yeah, the beer helps, don't get me wrong. But there's a sense of community in a moment like that; there's a sense of drama as everyone in the

bar cheers at the same moment, curses at the same moment, or winces at a hard hit up on the trid-screens at the same moment. Parents and kids spending some time together is a big deal, and family traditions could be built around worse stuff than a shared love of your hometown's teams. Sportsmanship isn't all dead, and neither is civic pride. There can be an ugly belly to modern sports, but there's some good to be found in it, too.

STICKING IT TO THE MAN: SPORTS AND CRIME

So, aside from golden-hearted athletes giving back to their communities, the occasional bloody riots, and some good-natured, handsome, debonair scoundrel hacking a football team's equipment in order to thumb their nose at societal injustice, how do sports and crime overlap? Lots of ways!

First and foremost, the barrier between the shadows and the sporting world is pretty thin and malleable. There are plenty of shadowrunners who dabble in sports when they're given the chance, and more than a few athletes who've brought their skills to the shadows when circumstances demanded it.

- ▶ One of those chances shadowrunners get to "dabble" is if you get locked up.
- ▶ Hard Exit
- ▶ More on that later, I promise.
- ▶ Slamm-0!

Depending on what a crew (or a league) needs, there are all sorts of transferable skills that can be brought to and from our line of work into various pro circuits. General athleticism and physicality, of course, but also plenty of melee combat skills (armed and unarmed alike), shooting skills, throwing ability (if you can land a goal with a handball, you can probably whip a grenade pretty well, and vice versa), a tolerance for pain and punishment, and teamwork, to name a few. More niche sports can also train you in, or benefit from, hand-eye coordination, high-end headware, familiarity with electronics, and skill behind the wheel (or the control rig).

And I don't just mean the athletes, either! The support staff of some big-league franchises have people with incredible technical skills, whether organic, mechanical, or electronic. If you can customize and maintain a combat biker team's worth of wheels, you can probably handle the mechanical side of a chop-shop or street racing

outfit, too, and vice versa. Likewise, overseeing the hardware for an e-sports team. More than one disgraced and discredited sports doc, rocked by scandal, has found himself running a shadow clinic in short order.

- ▶ Slammy's talking mostly about shadowrunning here, but the same holds true for other lines of work, too. You could do a lot worse for a getaway driver than someone already accustomed to racing, and a canal-riding smuggler could learn a lot from watching how hoverball players handle their sleds.
- ▶ Red Anya

One simple (but miserable) way for a professional criminal to find himself pivoting his career model and turning into an athlete is to, well, get caught. Urban brawl, combat biker, hoverball, courtball, and some of the darker martial arts "leagues" out there are all known to allow and encourage qualified players to work off their sentences by putting their lives on the line to play a sport.

- ▶ Racing, too, but they keep it hush-hush. I know a guy who placed in a NASCAR rally, filling in as something of a ghost rider (the injured driver he was replacing got all the credit), who was **supposed** to be riding out the last eighteen months of a smuggling sentence. He got out early instead.
- ▶ Turbo Bunny

There's a definite second-tier (or worse) vibe to players on this sort of work-release program. Most leagues and legal systems alike require an implanted control measure of some kind (read "cortex bomb"), and in one weirdly overlapping case, one criminal had *two* such bombs: one from the facility and one from his team. If they get paid at all, it's nowhere near a living wage. Oh, and everyone keeps a wary eye on these players anywhere near the armory; league security makes sure stadiums and play areas are locked down tight before any motorcycles or other getaway vehicles come on-line, and the gear these players get is never the best of the lot (and might feature additional security measures, like friendly-fire smartlink limiters). Their presence on teams is also totally downplayed or, in fact, unacknowledged; team highlight reels and intro vids will always show the familiar superstars, and meticulously don't mention the handful of facemask-tinted schlubs working their lives away in some unglamorous position elsewhere on the field.

- ▶ Unless their hand gets forced by a work-release prisoner just really acing his big shot, and making a splash. I remember an urban brawling ork, a real skell who made into onto the Mountain Dragons roster, maybe six or eight years back. When he grabbed the spotlight and never let it go, they couldn't keep the cameras off'a him. They had to work his prisoner schtick into his in-game persona instead, with a big, obvious shock collar, a

modified prison jumpsuit he wore under his armor, all kinds of silly shit.

› Kincaid

Such players are often treated pretty poorly by their teams when their “contract” is at an end. Some might have team-owned augmentations removed at a stadium clinic instead of a proper facility, others might be left with augmentations locked down or throttled to safe levels indefinitely, and some have faced heavy bills levied at the end of their work-release period, to boot (fees for their food, housing, and transportation while on the road with a team).

The lucky ones find themselves unceremoniously dumped wherever the team happened to be at the end of their period of indentured servitude. Some of you know a hacker named Gentry, who’s joined us here in Seattle these last few years? He had a tiger by the tail and was working off a Tir imprisonment via the urban brawl circuit, and after he helped them win the last game they needed him to, they just roughed him up, dosed him with laés for fun, and left him in the stadium parking lot, right here in Seattle. Landing on your feet after something like that can’t be easy, and just remember, he got off *light*.

› Imagine surviving six or eight games of urban brawl or combat biker—live action, live ammo!—only to get kicked to the curb like that. We like to kvetch about shadowrunning being high-risk, but at least it’s theoretically high-reward, too.

› Pistons

› Hey, compared to prison time, though?

› Turbo Bunny

I’d be slacking if I had a chapter all about crime and sports and didn’t touch on a way those two venn diagrams already overlap; organized crime. Mafia and Yakuza-style outfits around the globe have long, bloody histories of tampering in organizing sporting events, along with dominating the bookmaking rackets for (even the otherwise legal) gambling that inevitably follows these contests. Sporting commissions all over the world have long been rumored (or confirmed) to be heavily influenced by blood money and/or criminal threats, and more than one would-be franchise has leaned on the local community (with leverage and muscle provided by organized crime) to manipulate property values and that sort of boring bookkeeping stuff.

And then, of course, there’s the game-fixing.

Whether you’re talking about Arnold Rothstein and the “Chicago Black Sox” 1919 World Series scandal (say it ain’t so, Joe!) or Seattle’s own Choson Ring *Underwatch* championship scandal from just last year, organized crime and

cheating go hand-in-hand. Players have long been threatened, blackmailed, beaten, maimed, or even killed by representatives of organized criminal outfits, and in recent years lots of that work has been outsourced to we, the lucky few, the deniable shadow assets. By offering mobsters another layer of deniability and anonymity between themselves and this sort of crime, though, we also become one more moving part in a complex machine that can break down. Most modern-day Mafioso are well aware of the scandal and attention this sort of fix can bring, so they’ll be extra careful with their shadow talent.

› Up to and including trying to get rid of us once the work’s done.

› Pistons

› Same old, same old.

› Turbo Bunny

Organized criminals aren’t the only ones who’ll hire shadowrunners to mess with their games, though. There have been plenty of instances where league officials, team owners, and even community-funded groups of fans have offered nuyen to our dashing brethren to tamper with their favorite game.

Heck, I know of a crew of ’runners who claim they played in a Super Brawl a couple of years back, cleaning up a mess caused by some second-tier gun-bunnies who’d been hired by a Seattle super-conglomeration of toxic fans. A bunch of locals pooled their money to throw a monkey-wrench into the sacred Super Brawl, and team officials threw nuyen at the problem until shadowrunners made it go away (rescuing kidnap victims and filling uniforms on-field at the last minute!). My hat’s off to those dudes and dudettes for trying to even a playing field and, at the very least, making sure the match still got to happen and all the other *not-drekhead* fans got to watch the big game.

If that’s not the craziness and heart of pro sports in a nutshell, I don’t know what is.

CARE & FEEDING OF PRO ATHLETES TURNED SHADOWRUNNERS

Now, just because the transition from court-baller or urban brawler to shadowrunner might be *simple*, that doesn’t mean it’s going to be *easy*. There are combat skills and, if you’re lucky and well-connected, augmentations aplenty that can transfer over, but that doesn’t mean just any Joe off the court is ready to be a street samurai as easy as that.

- > Yeah, there's this little thing called "professionalism" that these pretty boy sportsballers just don't bring to the table.
- > Kane
- > I almost had a stroke just now.
- > Cosmo
- > Bwahahahah!
- > Kane

One of the most glaring differences between being the starting Banger for an urban brawl team and being the heavy hitter for a shadowrunner outfit—and one of the differences that's going to show itself well before you go on a single job—is the sudden and clear lack of a support crew. You don't have franchise armorers keeping everything locked, loaded, and ready to roll, any more than you have sideline supplementary medics or a locker room masseuse standing by. You'll need a fixer (a *good* one), a street doc, a proper arms dealer, and the nuyen to back up each request, to get anywhere near that level of support again. Building that sort of network takes time, and requires some connections, itself. If you've got some new muscle wanting to transition to the shadows, and you're the one that hooks them up with access to that network, you'll help your would-be teammate get up and running that much more quickly, and they'll owe you one before any drek hits any fans.

Then, of course, there's the simple matter of the skills that *aren't* easily transferable from the court to the back-alleys. Knowing how to talk to people (and who not to talk to) could easily be a shadow-primer all by itself, but there are practical, physical, skills, too, that even the most top-notch shooter might be lacking. Urban brawlers and combat bikers make a living off of big, flashy, plays, and earn plenty of nuyen for wiping out the enemy team. If they decide to go in guns blazing instead of tip-toeing their way through an infiltration, your team can get hosed, and quick. Speaking of infiltrating, most of them don't have any idea how to pop a lock or bypass security, either. Those are pretty necessary on any shadow crew, as we've all learned one way or the other.

Even combat skills don't always swap over as neatly as they might like. A mano-a-mano or Ultimate Fighting contender might be rightfully fearless in a one-on-one fight, and a stickballer or hurler could be hell on wheels with a baton ... but chummers, how often do we get in fair fights, in our line of work? Even the most ruthless courtballer out there could be a real demon with a knife in his hands in a three-on-three skirmish, but once you start tossing spirits, spells, and automatic weapons into the mix, or up-scaling to a standard six-man security response team, they could find themselves in over their heads.

I'd be remiss if I didn't also mention the SIN and fame issues that might haunt an athletic phenom

trying to keep a low profile on a shadow-squad. Hackers, make sure her drek is slaved to yours, security-wipe it for her, and hook her up with a proper fake SIN. Fixers and street docs, try to talk your buddy into some cosmetic work (at least a hair and eye color swap) to help avoid being recognized (and for pete's sake, remind them to avoid any standard pro-athlete celebrations after a big fight; corp-sec won't even *need* gait recognition software to find a match, if your teammate's sloppy enough).

Last but not least, we've got the intangibles. Watching your back. Never trusting an elf. Never dealing with a dragon.

- > Hey!
- > Netcat
- > Heh.
- > Bull

There's running the shadows for a night, and then there's *being a shadowrunner*. Even some of us right here on JackPoint still struggle with being the right mix of stick-it-to-the-man and I-watch-my-own-back, right? And we've all been in the shadowrunning biz for a while, to be posting here.

- > Speak for yourself. I'm no shadowrunner.
- > Kincaid

Some hotshot combat biker might just be the spitfire you need to watch your back during a get-away, but if they get sloppy drunk and brag about it like they just made a big play, you could get blown away well after the fact. Don't expect them to be cold-eyed professionals overnight, any more than all of us were. Remind them, early, loudly, and often, that they're in a new line of work, now, and that here, *they're* the rookies.

But if you show them the ropes and help them out, they can be a ready-packaged ass-kicker for any shadowteam that signs them up. With just a little guidance and a helping hand, any fixer I know could turn a high-end biker or brawler into a shadow asset in just a few months. If they keep their eyes and ears open and try to learn, you'll have some solid street muscle in no time.

BASEBALL

The Bonuses: Extensive bioware, cyberware, chipware (see below). Magic forbidden.

The Basics: Baseball, still moderately popular in CAS, UCAS, and Japanese territories, is all about a dude with a stick trying to hit a ball that's being pitched past him. If the ball gets hit, he runs in a circle and scores a point. There's nine other dudes trying to stop him, either by throwing the ball re-

ally hard, defending “plates” that he has to touch as he runs in a circle, or by catching the ball and/or throwing it toward one of those bases. After one dude gets a go, and either gets called out or makes it to one of the three bases, another dude from his team gets to go up to the plate, bringing his own stick, and taking a swing.

- > It’s amazing how he can make one of his very favorite things in the world sound so lame.
- > Netcat
- > It’s called professionalism. I’m trying to stay neutral throughout this doc.
- > Slamm-O!
- > The gendered language isn’t a mistake, by the way. Baseball’s still hardcore conservative in a lot of ways (though they prefer the term “traditional,” natch), and gender-segregated at best. Women’s leagues have basically withered on the vines.
- > Pistons

The big draw for baseball is, at this point, baseball itself. Attempts have been made over the years to change the public’s perception of the sport, some more successful than others, but it’s recently decided to lean into it and make a game of statistics and legends *into* a game of statistics and legends.

It’s turned from a game of physicality into a game of tactics and strategies nearly entirely; players get extensively modded and persona-chipped to the point they mimic exactly a famous, or infamous, player from prior years. Instead of having geeky “what if” fights about what top lineups would win—best pitcher from this season, best batter from this season, a real speedster on the bases from this season—the sport’s become a way to play out those exact scenarios.

The most dedicated players turn themselves into specific superstars from specific seasons; coaches, managers, and owners adjust their lineups and fill slots while managing league-sanctioned salary caps (so that the brightest superstars are paid for with points, essentially), which means the game’s basically turned into a game of chess and playing the numbers. The biggest games feature sim-rig-saddled players body-modded to let fans slot in and go along for the ride, *actually feeling like* Babe Ruth as he steps up to the plate against Nolan Ryan, while Ty Cobb runs the bases (or being Cobb, or Ryan, or any other player on the field, jumping on-the-fly).

The Buzz: The biggest changes going on in baseball in recent years have been various teams and leagues steering right into this “traditional play” initiative, augmenting and skill-chipping players to mimic the stats of legendary stars from bygone days.

- > Which makes it one of the few sports to actively take a backward step when it comes to metahuman inclusivity. Even the Japanese teams were allowing metas for a while, but with this new initiative, there’s no way to really work metas in. None of the players being mimicked had an elf’s reach or an ork’s bulk, so there’s no way to keep metahuman players involved. It’s bulldrek.
- > Butch

The backlash has resulted in a handful of new leagues trying to spring up, featuring unaugmented players, women, and metahumans. The fan base—long struggling—has splintered, but the most dedicated fans have pivoted and just started snatching up memorabilia and tickets for every local team that’s popped up.

- > “Dedicated,” he calls it. Not “fanatical” or “spoiled.”
- > Netcat

This has led to some in-city rivalries, too, though. When one major metroplex hosts five, six, or more teams, all nominally playing the same sport, lots of fans will turn ugly toward one another, resent people for jumping ship to a new team, or that sort of thing. League ownership mostly only cares about ticket and jersey sales, though, and so far none of these scuffles have turned into anything newsworthy, so the trend keeps happening.

- > It’s worth pointing out that some of the most die hard traditional teams have attracted all the worst types of fans. They’ll make noise about how followers of new meta-friendly teams are race traitors, and all that sort of garbage. In a few neighborhoods, it’s gotten to the point that wearing the wrong team jersey or ballcap might get you lumped in with Humanis and their ilk. They’ve almost become gang colors.
- > Traveler Jones

BASKETBALL

The Bonuses: Adept abilities allowed, augmentations allowed (reach/height mods banned).

The Basics: Two teams of five players share one ball on a rectangular field with a hoop on each end, 3.048 meters off the ground. They try to get the ball through the other team’s hoop, scoring two points most of the time, three if they wing it through the hoop from far enough away. Notably, they’re not allowed to tackle or strike one another meaningfully or pick up the ball and carry it—it’s got to be bounced everywhere they try to take it.

Since there’s no straight-up brawling over the ball, and the ball spends an awful lot of time in the air, reach and height are critically important. Let’s just say you don’t see many dwarves playing it, compared to, say, elves and trolls, wakyambi, and the occasional changeling.

Low-level physical augmentations are largely unlimited, so players can be as fast and fit as possible. Smartball technology and other sensory augmentations have been increasingly popular, but reach-affecting modifications (extending cyber-arms, for instance) remain strictly banned.

Of particular note are that these rules are largely the same for college leagues, as well. There's a long tradition of student athletes in lots of the sports I'm talking about today, but none moreso than hoops. Letting one student's tuition money fund the augmentation of another student has been the norm, not the exception, for a long time on campuses throughout CAS and UCAS turf.

- > University of Kentucky broke the ice with student-athlete augmentation decades ago. It was a major point of contention in their rivalry with University of Louisville, who called them cheaters and blamed early smartball tech on a division championship they lost to the boys in blue.
- > Winterhawk
- > Wait, a quick search says UK's top rivals are University of North Carolina.
- > /dev/grrl
- > Wait, now it says University of Indiana.
- > /dev/grrl
- > Wait, now it says Duke.
- > /dev/grrl
- > Man, nobody likes these Kentucky guys.
- > /dev/grrl
- > Welcome to college sports.
- > Winterhawk

The Buzz: The dynamism that began with allowing the whole range of metahumanity continued with the recent inclusion of adepts. In '78, the Asian Pacific league lifted a longstanding limit on magical enhancement, and several other leagues followed suit when they saw what happened to ratings—namely, they leapt almost as high as the wave of adepts who got lucrative contracts.

- > It's not rocket science, here. Fans like action, and basketball's long been a game whose popularity hinged on that fact. They want feats of athleticism, they want fast-paced gameplay, and they want momentum. Letting adepts in increases all of that.
- > Icarus
- > There's a little more at work, but yeah, all of that, too. Basketball's also a game that's blossomed in urban centers in UCAS and CAS territories for generations, a sport of oppressed minorities and communities coming together around a ball and a pair of hoops. Letting all sorts of metas in, changelings, and



now adepts? It makes the game more welcoming and lets it keep its street cred.

- Kay St. Irregular

COMBAT BIKER

The Bonuses: Unlimited augmentation. Limited magic (adepts only, spellcasting and spirits forbidden).

The Basics: Throw two go-gangs into an arena field 150 meters long and fifty meters wide, carved into lanes and with a skyway right across the top-center of it. Put a two-meter goal on either end, and reward each team with points for putting a drone-mounted flag into the other side's goal. Give 'em a ton of not-quite-totally-lethal weapons, all the combat-specced motorcycles corporate money can buy, and get out of their way. Voila.

- Those motorcycles can run the gamut, too. You'll see some stripped-down machines that look like the lovechild of a café racer and a stunt bike, that linebikers practically **dance** on, and you'll see some up-armored Scorpions and Blitzens that could make a Citymaster blush.
- Turbo Bunny

Four linebikers per side get maces and riot guns full of gel rounds, along with their pick of supplementary melee weapons (like a whip or a net). Four lancebikers get maces, riot guns, and two-meter-long lances (which they'll use to clothesline a chummer if they want to, or spearing them like a chromed-up knight; neither is pleasant). One thunderbiker gets a cycle-mounted launcher and all the concussion grenades he wants (and a mace, but frag, who needs it?). The goalie doesn't get a bike, but he gets a full-auto riot gun, a mace, and a big fraggin' stick instead.

All of them get to be whatever meta they want, get to be cybered to the gills, or get to be an adept. It's a glorious mess, chummers.

- The adept bit has made for some great watching. While plenty of teams have fielded various modifications on vehicle control rigs over the years, there's just a different look and feel to someone

making a bike do the impossible thanks to *mojo*. The Korean-born linebiker, Hannah "Seoulo" Kim, is a real spectacle out there. She does things with a Suzuki Mirage you have to see to believe. Won me a pretty penny, she did.

- Thorn

The Buzz: The biggest controversy to rock CB lately has been the league shake-ups, as more and more corporations are opting for their own teams instead of behind-the-scenes sponsoring of existing regional affairs. The Horizon Prodigies, MCT Ronin, Evo Sorcerers, and NeoNET Edge (RIP) have all made big splashes in recent years, and Saeder-Krupp and Wuxing are set to join the World Combat Cyclists League next season (Shiawase is rumored to be replacing the now-defunct Edge, who were themselves replacements of the old Novatech Hogs, but no team information's been released yet).

- S-K and Wuxing fans are already brawling and sniping at one another in the Matrix, with a rivalry brewing before a single match has been played. S-K's fielding a team called the Drakes, and Wuxing's Hong Kong team, the Dragons, has a startlingly similar logo and color scheme. Fans of both are incensed, and it's turned into a real Eastern (dragon) vs. Western (dragon) feud.
- Traveler Jones
- What better way to make sure ratings are high?
- Winterhawk

COURTBALL

The Bonuses: Unlimited augmentation. Limited magic (adepts only, spellcasting and spirits forbidden).

The Basics: Take a sunken rectangular stone court, wrap it in high walls, and put a single ring (about the size of a basketball hoop) on just one wall. Toss in two teams of three players each. Give 'em absolutely no armor (and, in fact, barely any clothes), give them one ball to fight over, and give them access to any single-handed melee weapon they want (implants included). Take away any other rules except "shoot the ball through the ring."

So, yeah. That's basically it. A half-dozen dudes with swords get dropped in a hole, nominally to fight over a ball and a hoop, but mostly just to fight.

Oh, but wait, it's worse/better (depending on your perspective), because there's also piles of regional and even ethnic pride on the line to constantly egg athletes on to greater highs and deeper lows. Courtball's always been Aztlan's turf, but they've let in just enough northern teams to drum up interest all across the continent and maintain rivalries and bloodlust. The media's been eating it up, and casualty rates have been climbing, no

WORLD COMBAT CYCLISTS LEAGUE

Atlanta Rebels
Baton Rouge Red Devils
Chicago Lightning
Cleveland Commandos
DeeCee Shuriken
Evo Sorcerers
Houston Mustangs
Horizon Prodigies
Los Angeles Sabers

Mitsuhaman Ronin
New Orleans Buzzsaws
New York Marauders
Saeder-Krupp Drakes
Seattle Timberwolves
Shiawase [TBD]
Texas Rattlers
Wuxing Dragons

doubt due to encouragement from on high and this feud mentality.

- > Courtball players are basically all crazy, forced to play, or both. The game's a blight, and it's spreading.
- > Mika
- > When push comes to shove, plenty of sports are just as bloody. Courtball's just honest about it.
- > Marcos
- > Yeah, and if nothing else, at least the numbers are pretty low. Urban brawl fields larger teams, with fully automatic weapons. Squads of three with knives is pretty tame by comparison.
- > Slamm-O!
- > It's the lack of protection and the personal nature of a blade that causes it, I think. There's something impersonally clean about shooting someone wearing body armor, with a gun, at a polite distance. In urban brawl, maybe there's a splash of blood or the like, but mostly the drones show a downed brawler's armor flashing surrender-yellow, a medico running up, and then gameplay continues as the cam-drones follow the ball down the street. Hell, we just call it "gunplay" and move on, aye? In courtball, you see six fellas in just loincloths go at it with knives and axes, up close and personal. Not many tridshows glorify that level of hands-on bloodshed, and there's no way to make it look clean or civilized.
- > Thorn
- > Or maybe the reason I'm not a fan of courtball's neither your business nor your affair. Don't play amateur analyst with me, Irish.
- > Mika
- > Aye, maybe that, too. Sorry.
- > Thorn

The Buzz: Following the early 2070s' addition of the New York Warriors, Denver Warpaths, and cringe-inducing Sioux Scalpers, more UCAS, CAS, and NAN teams got in on the action in recent years. Trid subscribers with the right passcodes for this level of violence can now marvel at fast turnover rate of the LA Scalpels, New Orleans Guard, Salish-Sidhe Sea Lions, and the Sioux Scouts (yeah, they doubled down) (yeah, they're just that good at this).

- > Rather than settle any feuds between Aztlanners and NANites, these games have only inflamed both sides. Some of the worst game-related violence of the last few years has come thanks to these increasingly bloody matches. The on-court bloodshed's bad enough; the off-court nastiness has come close to lynchings and spree killings a few times.
- > Mika

DRONE RACING

The Bonuses: Unlimited cyberware/bioware. Magic forbidden.

The Basics: The name kind of covers it, I think? You take drones, and then you race 'em. Duh.

- > Don't be a jerk.
- > Pistons

I'm being kind of a jerk, though, so okay. The basics are there—drones, race—but the details change as you go from league to league or circuit to circuit (and many of the top players, and the support teams built around them, do just that, since nobody in the industry's decided to limit fan support by demanding exclusivity clauses).

These swooping, flying, splashing, and drifting knights-errant pilot a whole variety of vehicles remotely, through whatever terrain and course their chosen league's specialized in. Or, in the case of the Triathlon League, the triumvirate (flying drones, wheeled drones, and underwater drones) all at once. Most of the race formats spice things up with prominent augmented-reality displays, and/or by letting viewers sim-jump right into their favorite drone and go along for the ride.

- > Fans can "go along for the ride" by also buying some ready-made drone kits that mimic popular models. These specialized machines are built for speed and agility, and some of the pricier ones (the Triathlon models) are easily customizable with modular parts that let you use the same basic chassis for flight, underwater, and ground-based racing.
- > Pistons

The Unmanned Unlimited Combat League does most of the same, but the drones are armed. This has led to straight-up security and military machines being used, not the store-friendly stuff most of the other leagues go for. This attracts a whole different demographic, and they're really only barely racing at this point. Being in front is *bad* when everyone behind you is packing forward-mounted guns.

- > The limited ammo is what makes this tense and exciting to watch. There's a randomizer before each race that determines how many shots you get to pack (modified for your season placement, further modified by a fan vote/donation program). You can cash in two regular rounds for an APDS, but once you're loaded out for a race, you're loaded out for a race. Period. You've got to know when to shoot and who to shoot at—you can't just blast away.
- > Pistons
- > Sounds familiar.
- > Hard Exit

- › Limited ammo? Sounds boring.
- › Kane

The amateur circuit and street racing are plenty popular, too, not just the legit big-league stuff. You find a rigger or wannabe who doesn't like to go fast, and I'll find you someone who's not cut out for this line of work, y'know? Unsurprisingly, plenty of shadowrunners rise from the ranks of these amateur racers (or dabble in the game on the side, like for nuyen laundering), and the occasional pro racer will drop out of the circuit for a while and "find themselves" by getting back to the back-alley action.

- › So far, Knight Errant and Lone Star don't pay nearly as much attention to illegal drone races as they do other types of street racing. Hoverdrones whipping by three stories off the ground don't have nearly the same odds of splattering good corporate citizens as street racers do.
- › Orbital DK
- › That depends entirely on the racers involved, though. And, uh, word on the street is that Knight Errant interest can really spike if those drones are armed and playing sky-tag while they're racing. I hear. Just a rumor, though.
- › Turbo Bunny
- › Damn it, Bunny, that was you? Again, with my fuckin' window ...
- › Kincaid

The Buzz: The perpetual risk with drone racing is signal interference, and it's also where most of the sport-specific controversies arise. The Urban Exploratory League suffers this problem the most, since they famously host their races in the middle of straight-up cities, featuring the drones racing through crowded city streets (no, they're not the armed ones). There's plenty of potential for outside interference, and it's almost become an accepted part of the sport at this point (there's a thriving collector's market for hacked drones that've been snatched up and resold, similar to the way folks have auctioned off caught baseballs).

DUELLO MAGICAE

The Bonuses: Limited cyberware/bioware. Magic forbidden (just kidding, magic totally allowed).

The Basics: Two mages enter, one mage leaves! WHO RUNS MAGICTOWN?!

- › Hah! I get that one!
- › Respec

The fancy-pantsy Duello Magicae series of wizard wars started, perhaps unsurprisingly, in Tír Tairngire. They'd long since had all sorts of fancy-pantsy rules in place for all sorts of fancy-pantsy

formal challenges. I dunno, that's not my flavor of elf-stuff. Anyways, after a while, those formal challenges would get trid-clipped and spread after the fact, or even make it onto the news after appropriately flashy and impressive-looking displays. Horizon latched onto that during their 2070s clean-up programs, and the sport commenced to blossom and grow like, uh, gloriously living ivy crawling up out of cracks in the pavement, or something? I dunno, elf poetry's not my flavor of elf-stuff, either.

- › You're no Chrome Bard, honey, no.
- › Netcat
- › "Duello Magicae" makes me wince every time I hear the name. Someday we'll all stop eating up this sort of faux-Latin garbage, constantly associating it with spellcasting and arcane mysteries. But not today, apparently.
- › Winterhawk
- › The incident that first got sponsors and the media involved was a six-elf duel, by the way. It was fought in a dressage arena after some riding competitors were being hurried out by a gaggle of Tír-traditional medieval enthusiasts who'd scheduled that field for a joust. Several members of both groups were qualified combat hermetics (thanks to that mandatory Peace Force time they're so proud of), and were also of high enough social rank that they could declare legally binding duels, on the spot, and nobody tried to stop 'em. The circle size that's become DM standard came from that, as have the uniforms/costumes—these weird mixtures of formal dressage attire and fantasy-traditional ren-faire garb.
- › Thorn
- › Sounds like there must have been quite a story there.
- › Pistols
- › It looked like folkd's had a few drinks, aye.
- › Thorn
- › That's putting it mildly, Rory.
- › Freya

The basics are pretty simple and have stayed simple as the sport's caught on internationally. Twenty-meter circle, two magicians—they fight until one submits or is incapacitated. Spells are allowed, of course (the flashier the better), spirit assistance is allowed (the number, but not type or power, of spirits is agreed upon beforehand), adept powers are allowed (mystic adepts tend to work like scrambling quarterbacks or other dual-threat athletes from older games), and that's about where the rules stop and the creativity begins.

Mages who want to take a hit to their mojo are allowed whatever mundane augmentations they want (so far nobody's tried packing a cybergun or other ranged weapon), but those augmentations are

rare and tend to be pretty subtle. Healing magic is available after a submission in a nominal effort to keep fatalities to a minimum, and the circles are plenty warded to minimize outside interference (or crowd injuries from spells that go astray) ... so aside from that bare handful of rules, anything goes.

- > Experts in the Apotropaic techniques reign supreme here (to compare it to mixed-martial artist's nomenclature, I believe, it's comparable to a sort of Brazilian jiu-jitsu, in that it's a high-mandatory tool for every fighter and excellent for using an opponent's power against them). That said, not all duels are simple spell vs. counterspell back-and-forths, either. Some bouts can engage in far more direct contests of wills, challengers can go astral and engage in combat there (so long as the contestants maintain visibility for the crowd's entertainment), actual literal physical dueling is both allowed and encouraged (reproduction "mageblade" weapon foci are available from licensed retailers). If magic is directly involved, it's an option.
- > Winterhawk
- > You sound like quite a fan, professor.
- > Pistons
- > Except for that damned name, indeed.
- > Winterhawk

The Buzz: The sport's still going through growing pains and settling into just what it wants to be. Team duels have happened sporadically, as have more specialized bouts (particularly when an aspected mage is involved, you'll see spirits only, one type of spell only, or one *color* of spell only—that kind of thing), but so far the league rules are basically "whatever the duelists agree to," which has led to the magical talent having all the power. There's no way the corps are going to let that stay the status quo for long.

- > This ability to customize a match has maintained a very formal, personal feel, that I think moving away from would damage. I know of at least three different DM bouts that have been used as an Initiatory Group's rite of entry, even! Taking that away from the players and sanitizing the whole mess would be a real shame.
- > Winterhawk
- > If no one else is gonna say it, I will: This is basically professional wrestling for elves. The spectacle, the feuds, the heels, faces, and heel-face turns, the melodrama, the entrance music, all of it? It's totally twentieth-century pro-wrestling, just done mostly by skinny, pointed-eared vegans instead of oiled-up, steroid-addled bodybuilders.
- > Bull
- > ... drek.
- > Winterhawk

E-SPORTS

The Bonuses: Unlimited cyberware/bioware. Magic generally forbidden.

The Basics: This one runs the gamut, in part because what sports aren't electronic these days, but in part because I'm using it as a lazy-ass umbrella term for just about any sort of professional video gaming you can find (some of which are plenty physical, but still rely on augmented reality for the "gaming" part).

This runs a broad range from virtual-reality dueling (deck-jockeys going at it almost like the mage duels I just wrote about, *Full Tilt* being the prime league) to team-based first-person-shooter video games fought in pure VR (there are dozens of options there, ranging from the nominally realistic and gritty *Firewatch* end of the spectrum to the anime-stylized over-the-top unreality of *Underscan*), and even covering classics like *Miracle Shooter* (real-life people making real-life movements, but using AR overlays to fight gun battles, up to and including on real-life city streets, especially college campuses). It's ... a lot to take in, honestly, and I think I'm only doing it this way to keep me from geeking out about each one individually. I could. I so could.

- > He's doing us all a favor, trust me.
- > Netcat

There are a lot of players who jump from league to league, and a lot of teams (coaches, managers, owners, and support staff) that span multiple games. There are plenty of video games that don't quite overlap but still have transferrable skills from one game to the other, and if you've got a well-oiled machine that knows how to work together in one VR first-person shooter, the odds are good that same squad of nerds can do well working together in some other VR first-person shooter.

- > The Fairlight Fireknights are totally the kick-assiest example of this sort of thing. They've dominated in three different leagues since '78, bringing home eight trophies and consistently placing well. One of their players, Highball, even jumped out of the full-VR scene and hard-carried in **Miracle Shooter** for a clutch playoff run last season.
- > /dev/grrl
- > No foolin'? Unless hackers aren't picky about who uses their handles, I know that kid. He's a combat decker who worked his way out of the Cereal Killers and into freelance work for the Gianellis. Lemme guess—that sort of longshot stunt he pulled, it really fucked up the Vegas numbers for that game, huh?
- > Kincaid

The Buzz: Because this is kind of a bulldrek, potpourri, catch-all way to label so many different

games the same way, there're plenty of different games' worth of controversy to be had. E-sports routinely allow (and encourage, and as such demand) plenty of headware, but some leagues, for some games, still allow adepts and technomancers (making them functionally illegal, or at least risky, in several prominent territories).

- ▶ One thing Slamm-0! doesn't mention (in this blessedly brief read) is how often corporations use e-sports as a recruitment and light training tool for corporate spiders and the like. Many a garage-kit hacker's gotten steered down the white-hat path by getting seduced by sponsorships and scholarships, sent off to a good school as a student-athlete this way, and ended up signing their lives away to corporate security contracts.
- ▶ Pistons
- ▶ Especially metas.
- ▶ Bull
- ▶ And other disenfranchised folks.
- ▶ Hannibelle

FOOTBALL

The Bonuses: Unlimited cyberware/bioware. Magic forbidden. Sasquatches permitted.

The Basics: This "real American" tradition is all about two teams of eleven burly players trying to move a weirdly oblong ball 100 meters at a go, through an hour of regulation play that routinely takes about four times that to broadcast. You can run with the ball in your hands or you can pass it to another player, and the other team can stop whoever's got the ball by tackling them to the ground. If you can't move the ball ten yards after several tries, you have to kick the ball to the other team and they get to start going.

You score points by moving it ten yards at a time, then ten more, then ten more, until you make it to one end of your 100-meter field. If you kick the ball for the last push of that 100 meters (through a giant tuning fork) you get three points. If you carry it (or throw it and catch it) the last little bit of that 100 meters, you get six points, and then the option to kick it through the giant tuning fork (for one bonus point) or carry it across the line again (for two bonus points).

There. Did I take the majesty and glory and make it vague and bland enough for everyone's liking?

Football allows essentially unlimited mundane augmentation and a wondrously diverse spread of metahumanity. You can use dwarves and their low center of balance to run the ball a few yards reliably or to make textbook tackles, you can use elves and their height and reach to catch and throw the ball, you can use orks and their power to run downfield, or you can use trolls to smear the holy

drek out of any/all of the above. From 2073 on, sasquatches have been allowed, too, thanks to our very own Seattle Seahawks pushing that boundary.

- ▶ Ahote lasted four seasons and did pretty damned well for himself. Considering how long he had to play in the minors before the NFL'd give him a shot, four years wasn't a bad run. He was a hell of a tight end.
- ▶ Kincaid

What's more, you can bulk up, chrome up, muscle up, chip up, and just generally cyber up as much as you want; man, woman, or somewhere in between, you bring whatever brawn you want to the field, as long as it's not clearly and overtly a weapon (bone lacing is allowed, cyberspurs aren't).

The Buzz: Back in my grandpappy's day, folks were worried about the long-term effects of brain damage caused by tackle after tackle after tackle. These days, ain't nobody got time to worry about decades down the road, it's straight-up on-the-field fatalities that stir up controversy. The league nominally bans implanted weaponry, but everybody who's anybody in *our* line of work knows that a chipped-up killer with a body full of titanium bone lacing can kill you just as surely as someone with hand razors or spurs. Helmets and pads be damned, it gets messy.

You take two trolls with wired reflexes, vat-grown muscle, and a metal-laced skeleton, have them run at each other as fast and hard as they can with a good thirty or forty yards head-start, and imagine that impact, and it's not surprising that player deaths are still a problem.

- ▶ There's no collision like a head-on collision.
- ▶ Turbo Bunny
- ▶ Several of these fan-titled "bonerboys" who've been ejected from the league as punishment for excessive violence have gone on to bloody careers in urban brawl or personal combat, instead, and sparked rivalries with the "razorboys" more popular in those sports.
- ▶ Hard Exit

HOCKEY

The Bonuses: Nigh-unlimited cyberware/bioware. Magic forbidden. Metatype restrictions (trolls only allowed in ice hockey).

The Basics: Hockey's two popular varieties both feature five skaters and one goalie per team, each of them with a flat stick they use to swat a puck towards the opposing team's net (where the opposing team's goalie hangs out, ready, willing, and able to bodily chuck themselves between the oncoming puck and their goal).

The difference is that ice hockey happens on ice (and ice skates), while speed hockey happens in the

love-child of a skate park and a courtball court (with inline skates or, sometimes, skimmer feet). Do you want to get your ass kicked in the cold or in a hole in the ground? Do you want a straight-up wall to shoulder check the other team into, or do you want sloped walls and half-pipes to skate past them and stunt on?

Universal between both varieties are heavy helmets, pads, and fists. There are nominal penalties for crashing, bashing, and fist-fighting, but realistically the penalty box is an absolutely normal part of the game, and some top teams openly employ players known for their ability to take a shot with their fist much better than they could ever take a shot with a puck.

- ▶ Hockey matches aren't nearly the bloodsports some of these other games get, though. There's a gentleman's agreement to keep the sport from getting downright lethal, with old rules about not lashing out with skates, not using sticks as weapons, etc. A knuckle sandwich is one thing; anything more lethal than that is still frowned upon on the ice.
- ▶ Kay St. Irregular
- ▶ Yeah. :(
- ▶ Kane

The Buzz: There was an effort about five years ago to shuffle together the three-dimensional sporting of speed hockey with the more traditional accoutrements of ice hockey, but after two failed leagues from two different corporate-conglomerate sponsors, they gave it up for dead. Rumors persist that a “really cold parkour-puck awesomeness” league will get going, but so far fans just haven't shown interest. There's a firm core of hockey fans who are invested in the way the game's “always” been played, and so far it looks like assorted leagues would rather keep catering to them than risk a baseball-esque rift (or series of rifts).

Metahuman rights groups occasionally grouch at hockey leagues, mostly after the troll ban in speed hockey. Carlos “Cwik Shot” Cruz, a free-runner turned ice-hockey phenom, recently shared a few trid-clips of him stunting around on inline skates, sparking a fresh wave of protests and petitions, but time will tell if the league ever lifts the ban.

HOVERBALL

The Bonuses: No magic, essentially unlimited cyber/bio. Trolls banned.

The Basics: Imagine a game of water polo, only instead of swimming everywhere with their own stupid arms and legs, everyone rides the coolest jet skis money can buy. Then, pretend you stole mallets from horse polo (not water polo), only they're souped up with powerful electromagnets, because your ball is metalloplastic now, too. Make it clear

to the lightly-armored-by-nautical-necessity players that running into one another with your jet skis isn't just allowed, but encouraged, because fans dig it. Lastly, do the whole thing in pollution-thick water, like, half the time, just to spice it up.

The World Hoverball League is the leading authority, and the sport's still more popular overseas than here in North America (it started in Europe, and splish-splashed around from there), but there's a thriving scene here in UCAS turf, too.

- ▶ Or, rather, CAS and UCAS turf, who love to square off (and, according to more than a few rumors, let their hoverball players cross-train with their respective navies). The “Great Muddy” tournament every year, making its way down the mighty Mississippi, has turned into a floating, gambling, drinking, swearing, brawling, cussing hell of a good time. Or so I hear.
- ▶ Hard Exit

The Buzz: The longest-running fights in hoverball are about water quality. Scenic and traditional locations (some of them used for three or four decades now) play a big role in the fan base and in league decisions, but many of those same sports have become, or always were, toxic as all get-out. Long-term health concerns tend to elicit a little more compassion than the dramatic violence of the game would imply. (Brain damage in football players over decades evokes sympathy, but the same fans will cheer and clap at a bone-rattling tackle, right? Same thing here.) While fans are all for the excitement and short-term violence of jet skis slamming into one another and the super-slow-motion simrig ride of feeling a player send someone crashing into the surf, it's a whole different ball game (so to speak) when fans have to witness lost hair and teeth, bleached skin, or cancer in their favorite hoverball superstars.

So far, the league's settled mostly for distracting fans with yet-more excitement on the waves, relaxing a few restrictions that some of the top-end jet skis once had so that they can get even more speed. Nobody knows how long that will last before petitions and talks start up again, with the players' representatives spurred on by fan sympathy.

- ▶ Or how long it takes for the whole purity issue to be handily brushed aside by rigged water-quality samples and the usual shenanigans. They'll deny any sort of problem long before they'll pay a dime to dying players.
- ▶ Pistons

HURLING

The Bonuses: Nominally meta-friendly, but elven-dominated. Adepts allowed. No mundane augmentations allowed.

The Basics: In short, a bunch of elves run

around a lot and wack each other, and sometimes a ball called a slitter, with sticks.

- > That's crude, but fair.
- > Thorn

The longer form? It's a beloved Tír Tairngire sport, with two teams composed of six defensive players (plus a goalkeeper), two mid-fielders, and six offensive players. Technically the sticks (your "hurley") are mostly for hitting the ball. Players can hold the slitter with their hand but aren't allowed to run with it or throw it from there—you've got to use your stick for that (and you've got to use your hurley to pick the ball up from the grass, too, never your hand). You score points by winging the ball (with your hurley, mind) through your opponent's net, or for slinging it above the net between some uprights. The accuracy required to do that, while a bunch of opposing players with elf-long reach and elf-quick reactions are all trying to stop you? These guys are *unreal* with their hurleys.

Nominally, those hurleys are for the slitter, not your opponents. In reality, though, according to the official league rules, it is "a very physical game" and "reasonable contact is to be expected, so long as it occurs while trying to gain or maintain control of the slitter." What that means is basically that it's fair game to punch, kick, tackle, or stick-fight anyone who's got the ball, might get the ball soon, or had the ball in recent memory and seems to be smug about it.

- > That's pretty accurate, aye.
- > Thorn

Adepts run amok, as you might imagine, given nobody's allowed any sort of cyberware or bio-ware to challenge their dominance. Elves, meanwhile, similarly dominate; not for any practical reason (do *you* want to fight a troll with a big stick?), but because it's just that sort of game, and just that sort of society.

With the recent inclusion of adepts a few years ago, mundanes are struggling to keep up. The national sport of Tír Tairngire is pretty heavily slanted toward the magical, as one might expect, but the biggest problem has been player fatalities. When someone who's adept-quick and adept-strong and adept-good with a stick gets to swinging it, normal folks can really get laid out. The '78 season had six fatalities and nine players who required extensive augmentic replacement (i.e., needed so much reconstruction and repair that they're no longer eligible to play). It's a dangerous sport, and the crowds don't seem to mind.

- > That's because the crowds are in on the violence. Soccer hooligans don't have drek on hurling fanatics. It's not at all

uncommon for attendees to be allowed to bring their own hurley sticks from home, nominally to have their home team sign them, bless them, or whatever. It's also not at all uncommon for every full citizen of the country to have Peace Force training in submission and pain compliance techniques with a whole line of tactical batons that are, at the end of the day, not terribly dissimilar to said hurleys (to say nothing of the fans who've been playing hurley half their bloody lives, or those who've dabbled in some of the Tír-trendy martial arts out there, like bartitsu). The violence on the field is **nothing** compared to the violence in the stands, on a bad day.

- > Thorn
- > Don't act like you've never been a part of it, or encouraged it as cover, Thorn. I was in uniform in '68, at the Lords/Wanderers game, when that "riot" broke out.
- > Freya
- > Big boy games, big boy rules. We owed you.
- > Thorn

The Buzz: There have been a few social movements that attempt to challenge the elven superiority clearly on display in this game, but they tend to fizzle. There have been several dwarves who've made big splashes over the years, and the occasional human player, but so far not a single ork, troll, or metavariant of any kind has been welcomed onto the field.

There's a secondary league in the works, sponsored by a multi-Prince effort (Demarco, Jaeger, Joubert, Foster, and Taylor, all with the vocal blessing of High Prince Telestrian), as part of a national program intended to improve race relations and promote fitness and health. There have already been threats posted, but with so many Princes directly involved in funding and figureheading the program, the increased Peace Force security might do the trick and keep things peaceful.

- > Go Marchers!
- > Freya
- > Feeling better?
- > Thorn
- > A little, yes.
- > Freya

MARTIAL ARTS

The Bonuses: These vary wildly from sport to sport and league to league. A ban on spellcasting and spirits is universal, though.

The Basics: To save space and cut down on minutiae, this is another broad umbrella that I've got a *ton* of different sports huddling under in a pile. You've got underground black market anything-goes fights (often to the death), you've got

the manly art of fisticuffs as boiled down to punching-only boxing matches, you've got a slew of kickboxing variants, you've got sumo or Greek wrestling, the spectacle of professional wrestling, sport fencing, mixed martial arts, you name it. Some of them are formal affairs with rituals and traditions, some are purposefully gaudy and brutal, and many are somewhere in between.

Metahumanity's a mess, and we've got lots of different ways to pummel one another, with plenty of nuyen, leagues, titles, and belts to go around, is where I'm going with this.

- > He barely mentions it, but I guess armed combat is covered by this, too. There's a whole host of sports out there, all bloodier than the last, that would fall under this umbrella. They range from stick-fighting contests (with regular, or even lightly padded, batons like **Kali Basics**) to some downright brutal edged-weapon stuff (**Kali Extreme** or **Fury Forge**, the latter where contestants blacksmith their own blades). Some of these straddle the line between sport and tridshow, but the ratings are there, some rules are in place, and they call the contestants athletes, so take your pick.
- > Mihoshi Oni

Some of these leagues allow and encourage extensive combat cyberware and bioware, others (mostly Ultimate Fighting League) allow adepts. Most of them allow a wide variety of metatypes but practically limit who can fight who based on weight class (for the ironic-sounding "fighter safety").

At the more brutal edge of things, with stuff like freestyle fighting, basically anything goes. You'll see straight-up razorboys just going at it, all-out, until one submits (and hopefully the on-site medics can keep them from bleeding out right there). Even if there are rules in place to theoretically cut down on the outright fatalities, like limiting blade length, you'll see biting, scratching, and targeting tender areas as routine strategies. There's far more blood than sport at the wrong end of the spectrum.

- > You risk your life your way, they risk their lives theirs. You both get paid if you do a good job, right?
- > Red Anya

The Buzz: The more old-school sport leagues of martial arts, often limited to a single style, are often steeped in racism as much as tradition. Some of this has, thankfully, softened with Imperial Japan's new social movements, but old habits and hatreds die hard (and it's not like the problem was unique to Japan). Ancient sports like *iajutsu* and sumo have, all-too-often, been sullied by refusing to let metahumans participate, but there's been plenty of bigotry to be found in foil/epée fencing, boxing, and other combat sports

- > The most stark example of this was when the eldest of the famous Watanabe brothers refused to face an orkish sumo wrestler. He instead committed **yubitsume**, sending his severed portion of his finger to the sporting commissioner via burglary-delivery-service, as both formal apology for the cancellation of a bout and implicit threat.
- > Mihoshi Oni

We would be doing soccer hooligans and hurling fans a disservice if I didn't mention that, even though these various martial arts competitions tend to be one-on-one instead of team sports, rivalries and loyalties and feuds run deep, often spilling over into the fans. When grappling phenom Lindsay Tucker submitted Mike Brepkis in Vegas last year, brawls seemed to magically break out all across the globe, just like when New York's home-grown hero Mickey Demopolous ate an after-the-bell dirty punch from Dimitri Petrov in '78 and half of Manhattan was subsequently rocked by furious rioting.

The ugliness of sports isn't limited to team games, is all I'm saying.

- > Or to one gender. Tucker tying Brepkis in a knot led to female grappling enthusiasts around the world simultaneously finishing their drinks and talking shit (and then plenty of them, being grappling enthusiasts, winning the ensuing fights that broke out). Fans are fans, regardless of gender, and muscle augmentation's available with generous payment plans. Sports make people crazy.
- > Hard Exit

PILOTED RACING

The Bonuses: Unlimited cyberware/bioware. Magic forbidden.

The Basics: This one covers a lot of ground again, but my flippant description is "whatever drone racing does, only with people attached." You've got lots of driving in circles, flying in circles, piloting boats in circles, or what-have-you (sometimes with a figure-eight or something thrown in, just for funsies), only you've got actual metahumans doing the driving—there, on-site—instead of remotely.

NASCAR, the old National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (a CAS and UCAS hit, but which never spread very far otherwise) is probably the most traditional of these, wholly encouraging unaugmented drivers and comparatively straight-forward cars (while their racing machines are hardly "stock" any more, they *are* generally on par with one another, for a fairly even racing field).

- > It's still wildly popular, in all the regions you'd expect. The sport's bootlegging history actually made it even more of a fan favorite when the old US of A broke into a bunch of parts that all hate each other. How better to keep the romantic smuggler

myth alive than by having borders to cross and cargo to haul again? Never mind that most of that work's done with t-birds, not stock cars, these days ...

- > 2XL
- > So what I'm hearing is we should introduce stock t-bird racing.
- > Kane
- > That's not what I meant, but it's just not in me to argue against it.
- > 2XL

Formula One style racing is a direct counterpoint to that, with corporations and Europe's social (and financial) elite backing and meticulously designing the finest drivers and cars in the world (or in outer space, after a recent Johnny Spinrad promotional stunt). There's where you'll find a drive-by-wire car piloted by an integrated pilot sporting a skull full of headware, augmented lungs and heart to resist the stresses of driving, cyber-optics with better sharpness than any human eye, chipped-up reaction times and vehicle control cyberware, the whole nine meters.

The Buzz: Neither of the world's biggest auto racing programs allow spellcasters or adepts, and neither do any of the other second- or third-tier racing venues (jet skis, underwater craft, airplanes, helicopters, off-road trucks and buggies, you name it). The engineers, pit crews, racers, and financiers all seem determined to keep their sport focused on tech and talent, rather than magic.

- > Or maybe they've realized that as soon as somebody whips up a spirit capable of using the Movement power, even accidentally, their whole game goes tits up.
- > Thorn

SOCCER/FOOTBALL

The Bonuses: Corrective/replacement implants only, limitations on metavariants (no trolls, for instance), no magic.

The Basics: Two teams of eleven players match off again, with one player on each side sticking by a big net/goal on opposite ends of a rectangular field that's about 110 meters long and like seventy-ish meters wide. Players score points by getting the (one) ball into the other player's goal, and have two forty-five-minute halves in which to attempt to do so. Sometimes they tie at zero-zero, and that's totally okay with everybody watching from home. Also, players are subtly encouraged to flop and writhe on the ground like a fish out of water to try to draw penalties on opposing players for fouling them.

But the best part? The whole time, nobody but goalies are allowed to use their hands. They've gotta kick and headbutt the ball only. Whee!

- > Can you tell this was written by a fan of other, lesser, sports?
- > Red Anya
- > Oh, yes. Yes I can.
- > Ecotope

Soccer is renowned for two things: being made fun of in North America (zing!) and remaining something of a purist's game. While the recent capitulation of the United Middle Eastern League means metahumans (aside from trolls) are now allowed to play in every reputable soccer league in the world, magic remains strictly forbidden, and so do augmentations of any kind; implants must be corrective, not enhancing.

- > Let's never forget the "Severe dislocation? Get enhanced articulation!" wars of the 2060s, lads.
- > Thorn
- > I had to look that up to see if that was actually something you shot people over.
- > Slamm-0!

This traditionalist, essentially neo-Luddite, attitude is mostly noteworthy because *oh man this game is wildly popular anyways*, and it feels like it's always gonna be. Somehow.

The Buzz: There's still some push-back against the anti-troll policy. There was a real stink last year when a trollish striker almost tore an opposing player's foot off in a minor league game in Spain, just days before Europe's biggest league had scheduled a vote to reconsider the troll ban.

- > There's no way Julio wasn't a set-up. Too many cameras caught the injury, too clearly, from too many angles. The whole thing was rigged and timed.
- > Lyran

Pro-metahuman policlubs continue to protest from time to time, but generally the authorities don't even have to get involved. Soccer hooligans take care of those things for them; drunken bands of violent superfans hate one another (there's a whole sub-culture dedicated to team-on-team brawling, with associated clubs having reps wholly independent of their actual soccer team) ... but they band together against a common foe, and that common foe is, all too often, anyone who's even remotely critical of their favorite kicky-footsy sportsball game.

- > You're a family man, now, lad, I'd be a bit more careful how you talk.
- > Thorn
- > This **is** the sort of commentary that can cause some real problems across the Atlantic, yes.
- > Traveler Jones

- > Are you guys **trying** to prove his point?
- > Sounder

STICKBALL

The Bonuses: Implants allowed, magic allowed, free spirits and sasquatches allowed. Everything is legal in stickball!

The Basics: First, you take two teams of twenty aggressive athletes each, and you give them *all* sticks (some of them get two each, if they want 'em). You throw 'em all together in a rectangular field with a pole on each end, representing a goal. You encourage those dozens of athletes to fight over a single small ball by giving them seven points for slinging the ball from their stick to hit the pole, or two points for running up and hitting the pole while they've got the ball.

Then, you back the heck outta the way and wait for the dust and blood to settle, because, chummer, it gets messy, fast. Why? Because you take everything I've said about a bunch of similar games to date—lots of prime athletes, lots of sticks, lots of ground to cover and a single ball to fight over—and then you just say “Sure, whatever,” and you let them use whatever magic they want, you let some of 'em be fraggin' *sasquatches* if they want, you throw *free spirits as players* into the mix, you have a shaman-coach on each sideline enchanting whoever he wants to with kick-hoop augmentation spells, and you encourage the mundanes to get just as chromed up as they want to, to keep up.

This sport used to be used as a straight-up replacement to a war, chummer, and with some of these hardcore teams, it feels like it still is. No helmets, no pads, hell, some of these guys play it barefoot! It's rough. It's not a straight-up bloodsport like courtball, but it's not as focused on the actual *game* as soccer, and it lacks any of the protective equipment of football.

- > It's something, all right.
- > Mika
- > It's more than it lets on.
- > Man-of-Many-Names

The Buzz: Stickball's already so damned inclusive that there's not much fuss to be found surrounding it on that front. It lets in men, women, adepts, spellcasters, trolls, sasquatches, even spirits. Who's left out to be mad about that?

- > Maybe we can talk Humanis into trying to field a team. I bet they feel plenty left out.
- > Mika

What controversy there is—and as such, what opportunity for stirring up shit—mostly comes from the violence inherent in the game. Old grudge-

es die hard, and folks get upset when a promising young athlete (especially of the Awakened variety) takes what could be a career-ending injury. Given the cutthroat nature of the game and the strong local pride it drums up, “accidents” on the field can turn into “accidents” in the shadows, real quick.

- > Shadows, my ass. There were three hospitalizations during a friendly training exercise between Sioux and Salish Sidhe forces last year. Of the three that got choppered out mid-training, one had been involved in an in-game altercation that led to Daniel Two-Bear's losing an eye, and the other two had siblings that had played in that game (and waded into that brawl). It doesn't take the shadows for this violence to escalate.
- > Hard Exit

URBAN BRAWL

The Bonuses: Effectively unlimited cyberware/bioware, limited magic (see below), adepts still banned (see below).

The Basics: Urban brawl is everyone's favorite game of “thirteen heavily-armed-and-augmented lunatics try to kill thirteen other heavily-armed-and-augmented lunatics nominally over a ball,” and has been for almost as long as Bull's been alive.

Teams have four scouts (light armor, sidearms), four bangers (medium armor, sidearm), heavies (medium armor, sidearm, and either an SMG, combat shottie, or assault rifle), and one blaster (just light armor, but a proper machine gun) all dedicated to moving the ball through the brawl zone, or murdering the other team for trying to do the same.

On top of that, they get an outrider (a heavy load-out, only their big gun's mounted on a combat bike) and a medico (heaviest armor on the team, but no weapons at all, just a bad-ass medkit). Outriders are never allowed to move the ball, medicos are never allowed to fight (or be attacked).

The real draw isn't the teams, though, or even the nigh-unlimited corporate budgets for arms and upgrades. It's the playing field. The brawl zone is a four-city-block by three-city-block area carved out of an actual urban hellscape; it's the only game that's really played in the streets.

- > “Urban hellscape,” kid? Really? How many times've brawl games been played right here in Seattle, the 'burg you claim to love?
- > Kincaid

Brawl zones are selected by the league well before any given season, but only “activated” twenty-four hours before any given match. League officials and security rush in, relocate residents (and reimburse them well enough so that nobody complains), set up cameras and secure relay transmitters (the ones that aren't drone mounted, at least), and otherwise prep this living, breathing, chunk



of city to be broadcast live on trids all across the globe.

- ▶ That twenty-four hour window is also the prime time for shadowrunners and wannabes to try to influence a game. Map out a zone, flash your knowledge of the city to try and get a reserve roster spot, set up spy cams, you name it. Urban brawl's got a lot of nuyen riding on the ins and outs of a given neighborhood—players are free to go inside buildings, down into basements, that sort of thing—and insider information goes for a premium.
- ▶ Pistons

The Buzz: Urban brawl's only remaining real controversy is the inclusion of adepts (or, rather, the continued ban on them). Every metatype under

the sun is welcome, and the rules against spirits are clearly laid out and generally respected (meaningfully threatening them with just a mage or two per enemy team is too difficult, and for once a “purity of the game” argument kind of makes sense). With the inclusion of wiz-bang combat mages and the necessity of on-the-field wireless hackers shaking up roster expectations (mages and deckers can fill any role on the field, from Scout to Medico!), the one barrier left is adepts.

So far, the North American Urban Brawl League has stuck fast on this one and continued to back up its call with regular astral overwatch to look out for cheaters. The European Urban Brawl League, though, has opened the door for limited adept play—no more than one per team, and a strict “no mystic adept” rule that leaves mages as

glass cannons—and started to poach some real talent across the Atlantic with it.

- ▶ Most recently, Seattle's own Screamers got bit in the ass by this “no adept” crap, when some hotshot kid named Redlock got caught slinging adept mojo during what would've otherwise been an upset win over the Cincinnati Lasers. The kid got kicked down to the rookie leagues with the poor schmucks stuck using gel rounds instead of the real deal, and the Screamers had to pay a hefty fine.
- ▶ Kincaid

With the European league changing the game and starting to draw some high-profile talent (several prominent Tír sportsmen took the plunge, including a prodigal Telestrian son!), it feels like it's only a matter of time before adepts are allowed to sling lead in the big leagues here at home, too.

NORTH AMERICAN URBAN BRAWL LEAGUE, 2080 SEASON

Ares Predators (Ares Macrotechnology)
Atlanta Butchers (CAS)
Boston Massacre (UCAS)
Chicago Sensations (Truman Technologies)
Charleston Duelists (CAS)
Cincinnati Lasers (UCAS)
Cleveland Chaos (UCAS)
Dallas Outlaws (CAS)
Denver Thunderheads (UCAS)
Detroit Nightmares (UCAS)
Havana Guerrillas (CL)
Horizon Coordinators (Horizon)
Lakota Arrows (Sioux)
Miami Spears (CL)
Montreal Assassins (Quebec)
Mountain Dragons (Draco Foundation)
New Orleans Tombstones (CAS)
New York Slashers (UCAS)
Norfolk Battlers (CAS)
Oakland Terminators (CFS)
Portland Paladins (Tír Tairngire)
Renraku Invincibles (Renraku)
Seattle Screamers (UCAS)
Spin Dervishes (SpinGlobal)
St. Louis Slaughter (UCAS)
Tacoma Wings (Federated Boeing)
Tenochtitlán Volcanoes (Aztlán)
Tsimshian Warriors (Tsimshian)

- ▶ With the dissolution of NeoNET, Boston lost a team, and a CAS contender was quick to snatch up the open spot, bringing South Carolina to the world stage. The other noteworthy addition to the big leagues this year came with SpinGlobal's entry, and with the budget they're likely to get, the Spin Dervishes should be a force to be reckoned with.
- ▶ Slamm-0!



WE SUCK YOUNG BLOOD

POSTED BY: DR. SPIN

Media isn't built simply to control the present, but also the future. That latter part is tricky, as the boardrooms of global megacorporations are not known for their creativity and insight into bleeding-edge trends and changing cultural norms. What they can do, though, is hire people who know how to market, which means that for more than a century, megacorporations have been wringing adolescents and their spending money dry through appeals to sex, death, and corporate-approved "rebellion." These days, they can wring kids for more money by guaranteeing ready credit with a return on investment in the form of permanent wage slavery, but those discretionary dollars are still out there, and they still add up to billions if not trillions. Which means the corps still want them.

The nature and identity of youth is undergoing a shift in our world. Elves and dwarfs who are at the age humans historically had started to retire realize that they don't need to stop working and are seeking a second adolescence, while their grandchildren can continue being adolescent for a few more decades. This is a topic for a deeper discussion, but the point is that adolescence and youth

are more desirable than ever. Additionally, the pools of creativity and culture that the megacorporations can draw from are growing broader but shallower because they've claimed as much of the streets' and minority cultures' pasts as is possible. The streets will never be controlled by the megas, both because they can't really be controlled and because the megas don't really want to control them. But they are being bled. The youth, the streets, and minority/marginalized communities have always been divided over co-option and appropriation, between pride and resentment, between seeing it as a way out versus another means of control and oppression. Most young people don't know or care, to be honest, and the conflict is often visceral and aimless. In some aspects, even the way youth and the streets react are shaped by how the megas taught them.

The corporations are in the difficult position of always needing something new but knowing nothing truly is. Having something new to sell is critical to continued corporate revenue. People must always feel the need for something bigger and better, or else they'll reduce their consumption, and corporatism has never been comfortable with that

prospect. People need to feel an urgency for the next new thing, and in order for that drive to exist, there needs to be something that plausibly can be called new. Which isn't always easy, given the deep back catalog that exists in the world. Mass media has existed in one form or another for about six hundred years. Reproductions of music have been spread for two hundred years, with motion pictures being only slightly younger. There are twelve notes (counting sharps and flats) in an octave and seven basic plots in stories (though, somewhat tellingly, there are varying lists of what those plots are). Thousands of songs, stories, books, and trids are made each year, as has been the case for well over a century. With this limited pool of tools and this profusion of output, how can there be anything new? Instead, all we have is revival and remix. Pachelbel's Canon has been recorded hundreds of times, and its chord progression and other characteristics have been used in dozens of pop songs. *The Three Musketeers* have appeared in nearly fifty flavids and trids, both live-action and animated. And for this entire century, the default position when describing a band or music genre has been to say "it sounds like X crossed with Y." Nothing is new; it is just retooled, remixed, and re-packaged.

But here's the dirty secret of culture: It was always this way. Shakespeare took plots from history and Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Then Shakespeare, in turn, was borrowed by everyone. Mozart borrowed most of a symphony from Haydn and, like many opera composers, took his plots from existing dramas. Rock and roll was not created out of whole cloth—it needed rhythm and blues, boogie, and the electric guitar that first found heavy demand in the big-band era. And hip hop explicitly turned the remix into an art form, sampling and recombining existing music in innovative ways while layering on searing rhymes. When it comes to culture, complete novelty is highly overrated.

What you need is the *feel* of novelty, and nothing helps you find that like youth. Young people, with their energy and thirst for novelty, naturally look for things that are different—partly to break away from the older generation, and partly because it's just fun. Along with their thirst for the new, they are incredibly social, talking about the things they like so frequently and rapidly that trends can spike quickly. And fade just as quickly.

There is a lot of nuyen waiting for the people who ride the wave of an emerging trend. Did you expect the feywear trend of the early '70s? Few did, but then a boutique fashion line of clothing designed by free spirits morphed into a line that was simply "enhanced" by spellcasters in the assembly line (in ways that were never clearly specified), and then in turn morphed into clothing that looked like what you'd wear to a faerie ball, should you ever be invited. It was impractical and

a bit ludicrous, but it was also *everywhere*, including a million high-school dances with fairy kingdom themes in '74. Then, as soon as it started, it was done. The companies ready to capitalize on the trend made a bundle; the ones that were too slow found themselves sitting on warehouses full of silvery gowns in '75 that wouldn't move.

The corps, naturally, want a piece of this large pie, but their ability to capitalize on youth trends has been mixed at best. Here are some of the ways they try to turn youth into a commodity, how they sometimes succeed, and a few ways they've screwed up.

COOL HUNTERS

"Cool" is like jazz—if you have to ask what it is, you ain't never gonna know. What was cool yesterday is old drek today, and if you think you can follow a clear pattern in the shifts of cool, you're dreaming.

Still, it's not an entirely random phenomenon. Some people have it, whatever "it" may be. They either know what trends are bubbling up or start them themselves. If they started wearing dried deepweed leaves on their left shoulder on Monday, everyone in school would be wearing them on Friday. Finding these kids is a marketer's dream.

This is the role of the cool hunter. They go where youth go, either in reality or on the Matrix, and try to sniff out what they're going to be into just before they get into it. It's not easy work, because you have to be able to tell the difference between a local fad and a real trend. You have to get youth to talk about things that are often instinctual and may be the type of thing they're not all that eager to talk to an adult about. If you hit it, you'll catch a wave like the Wu quint's MeFeed and the bonanza of product placement dollars it collects. If you miss it, you'll be like that former Horizon employee who spent three months trying to convince his bosses that all the kids would soon be into top hats because a few schools he was watching were doing *Greatest Showman* revivals. Long story short, if you need a top hat, I know a landfill where there are plenty of them.

Cool hunters can be valuable to corporations in at least two ways: identifying trends and speeding up the trend cycle. I already talked about the first one; the second is especially interesting. A cool hunter who is doing their job right will have a network of kids who are trendsetters, the kids who will start the things the others adopt. One of the defining factors of this group is their individuality—they are ahead of the fashion curve, and they don't do the things that everyone else is doing or has done. This means that once they have started a trend and that trend has grown popular, they're going to move on to the next thing. Which might



become a new trend, so people will move away from the previous trend. The faster marketers can identify trends and push them forward, the faster they'll die. So cool hunters really are hunters—what they find, they kill.

- ▶ One of the important things that differentiate the good cool hunters from the bad ones is that they remember to adopt trends if they want them to grow. They want to interpret the initial trend in a way that people can latch onto. That's what happened with feywear—the original model was too impractical to see mass adoption, so marketers found versions that could sell in larger numbers. The initial trend setters can do things just because they want to, but everybody else needs to be able to fit it into their lifestyle.
- ▶ Kay St. Irregular

INFLUENCERS

Trends are not long-lasting by their nature, but there are occasional exceptions. Take the Kane jacket (though it's never officially called that), a long jacket loosely modeled after nineteenth century frock coats with extended horizontal trim by each button and button hole. Kane possibly only wore his once, but he had it on when he was caught

on tape taking oil from an in-motion freighter, and the footage became so popular that it became an indelible part of his overall image. It also subsequently appeared on a lot of his wanted posters, which didn't hurt from an image point of view. As the coat became equated with the public's image of Kane, demand for it grew. We're at a point where there are multiple versions of the coat out there, along with several forums where people discuss the merits of each model. All because they hope the garment will help them capture a piece of the Kane magic.

- ▶ It won't, but I damn sure respect their intent.
- ▶ Kane

Kane, as it turns out, is one of those influencers cool hunters are desperate to find. And it's not easy to find and use them. If the magic that these people carry could be bottled, it would have happened decades ago. They have to be found, because they often won't seek out the corps. They're usually not after anything other than getting the chance to be themselves, but they do it in a way that onlookers cannot help but imitate.

The reasons people imitate them are beyond the scope of this download—we'll just accept that it

happens, and it gives those influencers power. It's a tricky and fragile power, though. The moment it takes on a whiff of desperation, corporate marketing, or, heaven help use all, *age*, it's done. Gone. The influencer will influence no more.

From a cool hunter's perspective, this means you want the influencer on your side without telling them what to do. Marching orders are impossible—youth who are close to influencers have a well-tuned radar for inauthenticity, and the moment they smell it, they'll turn on the person they used to listen to. Also, don't assume that everything they do will become a trend, since sometimes a quirk is just a quirk. You may not even be able to let the influencer know what you're trying to do when you get to know them, because they won't want you co-opting what they do. This means the main goal in identifying influencers is to watch and learn.

One more thing: Don't think that you and your corporate buddies can become influencers, introducing trends on your own. Kids spot messages that don't sound like one of their own even faster than they spot inauthenticity, and they have enough idiosyncrasies in their communications to ensure that adults trying to mimic them will fail. Pathetic attempts to sound young and trendy have cost more than one corp millions of nuyen.

THE JOB

If you have some cool watchers watching a solid network of influencers, what do you do next? Basically, you should have a strategy going in two directions. If you spot a trend that looks like it's about to break, you have two ways to jump on it: start manufacturing what they want or buy someone who already does. The Big Ten have this information at their fingertips—they know who makes what and who they can snatch up when the time is right. Careful information watchers can see what trends the corps intend to capitalize on by watching all their acquisitions, which is why the corps made sure they didn't have to make much information about what and who they buy public. There is, though, one part of the public that they are more willing to disclose information to: their shareholders. You're likely not going to get a good connection among any of the significant shareholders, since part of their wealth is specifically deployed to keep people like us away from them. But making a connection to someone lower down the food chain can get you information that governments and the rest of the public never sees.

- > For clarity, what he's talking about here are people like me. Which means that I somewhat resent the term "lower down the food chain."
- > Mr. Bonds

This is part of what the entire field of corporate espionage is all about: getting information on what your competitors are doing so you have an insight into their plans. Corporate espionage is not just about learning what tech a company is playing with—you can also learn what parts of the youth movement a corp intends to co-opt. Among other things.

If a corp decides acquisitions are not the right way to jump on an emerging trend, it has to spin up its own capacity to make the item in question, whether it be a new clothing line, a bunch of music artists, a new snack, or whatever. This is far trickier than it might at first sound. Setting aside the complications of making something functional, you have to hit the trend in a way that people see as authentic and useful. Kids love WhompSnappers, and lip balm can be useful, but that doesn't mean WhompSnappers-flavored lip balm is going to be a hit with the kids. No. Some flavors just shouldn't be worn in wax on your lips, you know?

So while the job description is simple—find trends and capitalize on them—the work is not. A lot of it hinges on good information and the ability to produce goods, and those are two things the shadows get involved in often.

- > I had a blast once planting a false trend to mess up some cool hunters. We had some plants in a few schools, deckers messing with focus group results, fake videos planted online and seeded with what looked like an audience of tens of thousands but really was a bunch of bots, and so on. The targeted corp bit, investing millions in drones specifically built to carry a kid's school supplies around. The kids, of course, don't use hard copy books and don't really need a drone to carry what little they have. The line crashed, hard. At least a dozen people lost their jobs. No shots fired, no punches thrown.

> Pistons

FOR YOUR OWN GOOD

Now we get to the really hard part. It's one thing to identify trends and attempt to jump on them. Shaping them is a whole other level of difficulty. But if you can pull it off, the rewards are great. You don't have to rush to jump on a trend before it wanes; instead, you have time to prepare, developing products and marketing strategies that will emerge at just the right time. You can even preemptively lock down possible competition, giving yourself several months as the only player at the table. You shape one single trend, and you've made your career. You can spend the rest of your professional life making presentations and mentoring others who want a small morsel of your wisdom.

But before you get there, you have to avoid the pitfalls. This is hazardous territory in more ways than one. There are a million ways to go wrong, from tone-deaf messaging strategies that youth reject to burgeoning trends that shape some behavior but never result in actual purchases of products with any sort of profit margin. And then there is the prospect of unintended consequences.

One of the classic examples of animal conditioning involve securing baby elephants with a rope connected to a stake in the ground. When they are young, they cannot get the stake out. They spend some significant time pulling at it, but eventually their failure sets in. It sets in so deep, in fact, that it becomes a critical fact in the elephant's life. They know water is wet, plants taste good, and stakes don't move. So when they become large, powerful animals who are more than capable of pulling a stake out of the ground, it still can be used to secure them, because they don't try to uproot it. They know that stakes don't move.

- > Except that elephants are pretty smart and could figure this all out. The more likely reason they stay is that they see the stake as a polite request, and as long as they are fed and watered, they don't see a reason to reject the request. Which, come to think of it, is really not all that different of a lesson.
- > Ecotope

This seems like a great solution, right up until you need the elephant to move and no one is there to move the stake. Try as you might, you will not be able to convince the elephant to fight against the stake. It has learned the lesson, and it won't forget it just because you have decided you want it to.

Whatever social conditioning the corp try to build into youth will, if it sticks, stick completely. They won't be able to just turn it on or off at their whim. It'll be in place when they want it to, and also when they don't want it to. You can condition docility and obedience into youth all you want, and maybe they'll become more susceptible to your manipulations than previous generations were, but then you'll get to a moment where you'll find innovation has lagged and unhelpful patterns are just repeating over and over, and you'll look for an emerging leader who can think in new ways and shatter your existing expectations, and you'll find out you're fresh out of them. Rebellion and revolutionary thought are annoying nuisances right up until the moment they're not. And let's not even think about what will happen if someone of truly evil intent gets control of your easily manipulated army.

- > We don't have to use our imaginations there. History has provided many examples.
- > Fianchetto

The risks are great, but these are the megacorps we're talking about. They always think they can handle any risk as long as the prospective reward is big enough. And the possible rewards here are tremendous. So here's some info on a couple groups trying to shape youth trends, and some other groups who are quite willing to interfere with their attempts to claim rewards.

DAWKINS GROUP

We already know what happens when the Dawkins Group goes awry—spirits are tortured, technomancers die, that sort of thing. Maybe some people would be humbled by these experiences, but not the Dawkins Group. Sure, they have looked at the Vegas Massacre to see what they can learn from it and how they can be better, but they didn't for a second think about stopping. Social manipulation is their goal, and it's not one they're prepared to sacrifice.

Now, the Dawkins Group is smart enough to understand what I said before about the possible hazards of social control. They're not out to make a bunch of malleable sheep—that's too crude for them. Instead, they want to recognize how people consume, and then encourage them to consume in a certain way. It's a social scalpel as opposed to a social axe.

When it comes to youth, it means recognizing certain key truths: 1) Youth are not monolithic, both as a whole and within individual nations. You are never marketing to all youth. 2) Youth look to distinguish themselves both from adults and from each other. 3) Youth have good but not perfect bullshit detectors.

They're all critical, but Dawkins excels in its focus on the last one. They know that if you're not a youth, it's foolish to pretend you are one. That's the kind of bullshit kids pick up easily. Trying to sound young when you're not is hard. Trying to sound young when you're not and you're also trying to push a product is insanely difficult. There are thousands of marketers trying to do this right now, and maybe half a dozen doing it passably well.

Dawkins Group partners know, though, that youth are not actually all that anxious to be reminded they're young. They are already quite aware. What they want is the power and perceived freedom that comes with being an adult, where you go where you want, eat what and when you choose, and so on. Of course, this is still bullshit. It's a fantasy version of adulthood, so while we're at it, we'll just throw in the ability to be attractive to those whom you desire and to be able to engage in sex according to your desires (the fact that youth often overlook the *other* person's desires when it comes to sex helps explain why they're often so bad at it).

This is what the Dawkins Group attempts to push, this vision of a life that only a few people lead. A life of freedom of choice and freedom from responsibility. The beauty of it is, it doesn't require much conditioning to get people to want that. Most people have some sense of yearning for such a life, even if they know how selfish and unsustainable it is. Dawkins works with that desire and attempts to tell people how they can get it.

Which is the critical part. Because, of course, the corps don't want people to be free from responsibility. They want them bound. What they need is for them to feel that freedom is obtainable, in small steps, through select purchases.

Here's one example of how the multiple prongs of their effort work together. Pathfinder Media produces *Band Jam*, which has continued to draw youth audiences in its eighth season. It follows a tried-and-true reality show premise—eight bands are selected from a wide-ranging audition process, then brought to Jamaica where they write new songs, compete with each other, and of course fall in love, because that's how these things go.

So far, so standard. Here's what Pathfinder—with Dawkins support, of course—does especially well. First, the show leans on the fantasy of it all. Start a band, get swept up to live in Jamaica for a few months, then sign a contract to become hit musicians. It's a perfect dream. The living conditions are incredibly appealing, and the kids are usually attractive and charming. Pathfinder recruits the whole package, making sure the selected bands have musical chops, but also that they're charismatic personalities who can carry a show. Their trend analysis is on point—if there's a hot new music style climbing the charts, someone on *Band Jam* is playing it, without sounding like they just jumped onto it because it was trendy.

So the show is solid, but it's the stuff outside the show where Pathfinder and Dawkins really shine. Yeah, they have the expected tie-in activities, like branded instruments and music lessons from past stars and the like, but they cover the whole gamut. If you hit a gathering of any group of kids slugging off on the show, there's a good chance one of them has a Dawkins contact spurring them on. Dawkins wants both sides of the coin, kids who love *Band Jam* and those building their identities hating it. They'll watch carefully for the groups those kids identify as *real* musicians, and then work to bring them into the fold or rip them off.

Horizon clothing lines also take huge cues from the show. When the kids first arrive in Jamaica, they're taken to a warehouse where they can pick new clothes for the duration of their stay. Dawkins people carefully watch what they pick, what they don't, and even the order of what they look at to see how considering and rejecting one item might lead to acceptance of another. All that data then filters down through any clothing stores Horizon

either owns or sells data to, affecting both what they display and how they display it. And since the show airs a few months after it's taped (except for the live finale, of course), Horizon designers have time to see what the kids select, find color or design connections between them, then amp up fashion lines with their choices so the kids look like they're right in the leading edge. Which, in a way, they are.

This is just one example, but it gives you a chance to see how Dawkins works through nudges. It isn't about mass brainwashing or anything; it's about pushing us to act to get what we already want in a way that benefits them.

- ▶ Which really isn't nefarious, so that Dawkins doesn't seem like they deserve their sometimes-dark reputation. But things get worse, because this is the Sixth World, and that's how things go. Dr. Spin said all this nice stuff about wanting freedom and identity, but he left out a crucial aspect of turning those desires into consumer action: dissatisfaction with your current circumstances. Content people want less stuff, because they're content. Unhappy people spend more, because they are attempting to find **something** to relieve that unhappiness. Dawkins knows this, which means they try to nudge people toward unhappiness. Make people believe that they don't have enough, that they are at risk of ridicule, that they are not as attractive as their peers. Youth are full of these insecurities, so there are plenty of opportunities for the Dawkins Group and others like them to amp them up. This can be successful, but it's often cruel, because there are a fair number of youth who, if their life becomes any more miserable, decide it's not worth living. Dawkins has their blood on their hands.
- ▶ Butch

MARKET FORECASTING AND FORECAST DEPARTMENT

If Dawkins decided to be a scalpel instead of an axe, part of the reason for this may be that the axe role was taken. Shiawase's MFID has long been feared for the simple reasons that they are brutal and ruthless. Many people in the world, including me, think that NeoNET's head is another trophy on the MFID wall. After all, MFID is known for their deep AI contacts, so who would be in a better place to find out NeoNET's connection to cognitive fragmentation disorder? And in characteristic MFID fashion, once they had the information, they made sure their victim paid an incredibly dear price.

But I'm supposed to be talking about youth culture here. This is not generally thought of as one of MFID's strengths, but their typical techniques can certainly be applied youth marketing. Whether they're blackmailing stars to move to one of their production companies or labels, conducting corporate counter-espionage to find out who is trying



to steal their secrets, or preventing critical mergers and acquisitions from happening, MFID keeps themselves busy. They do not shape the culture the way Dawkins does, but they still make their parent corp plenty of money, and that, of course, is literally the bottom line.

SPECIAL INFORMATION SERVICES

SIS is not the largest espionage/marketing group, and they don't have the resources of one of the Big Ten backing them up, but if you're in the shadows and want to be involved in this area of work, SIS is an excellent contact to make. They know the shadows, they work in the shadows, and perhaps most importantly, they hire for the shadows. Sure, so do the other two organizations here, but SIS always has a high volume of shadow work to do, especially if you're not especially worried about ethics.

SIS is even less directly involved in youth marketing than MFID. Most of their operatives know less than nothing about what young people watch, listen to, or wear. They don't get in too many battles over sabotaging contract negotiations for the latest starlet.

So why are they here? Because while they might not deal much with the youth market, they sure as hell deal with the Dawkins Group and MFID. When other corps want to interfere with Dawkins and MFID work, SIS is one of the prime places they go to. When you want to retrieve stolen information, punish those who hurt you, or expose someone else's networks, SIS can do it. With significant organized crime connections, especially the Yakuza, they have access to information others can't get, and a ruthlessness others might lack. So if you want to shape youth, go to Dawkins. If you want to mess Dawkins up, go to SIS.



GAME INFORMATION

Below are some tools, qualities, life modules, and other info to use some of the ideas and areas of work from this book in your game.

NEW GEAR

They say it's a poor craftsman who blames his tools. That might be true, but I've yet to see an album go platinum with a toy xylophone, a plastic drum set, and two broomstick guitars. The simple truth is that it takes money to make money, and in the world of entertainment and media, that's as true as it is any place else. There are plenty of garage bands full of big-name talent out there, but without a sound system, no concert will take your manager seriously. And if you don't have a manager? You have work to do.

INSTRUMENTS

Instruments are the difference maker for musicians, comparable to the kits that most other craftsmen use. These instruments can add or subtract to your dice pool when making a Con + Charisma test for a performance (see p. XX). At the entry level are **Simple** instruments, the kind

that you can pick up at a Wu-Mart or a pawn shop. They're enough to entertain the family for the holidays or woo a teenager, but you'll never cut a deal with one. Instead, you need a true **Professional**-grade instrument. The bar for entry keeps many a young dreamer on the wrong side of success, but for those who truly want to dive in, this is where the work begins. In truth, the main difference between a **Professional** and a **Rising Star** is the speaker system; the latter has enough amps to take up the whole trunk, or for a whole band, a dedicated van. This is when you should have a roadie on staff, as these things start getting heavy. Lastly are the **Big Time** sets, with stadium-worthy speakers bigger than an ork, and each one sounds just how you like it. For those who enjoy smashing up the gear on the way out, a replacement instrument costs one thousand nuyen.

SYNTHSTRUMENTS

The introduction of the mind-machine interface allowed a whole new style of music to be played, allowing those with poor fingers but a good head to make the music that was always in their head

but which they could never play. Forty years ago, it was cutting edge, but over time we found that it's just as hard to play a synthstrument as it is to play a normal one. You still gotta practice. Any instrument can be modified into a synth with an hour's work and the right parts, creating an **External Synth** link. These work equally well through a basic DNI, like trodes, or a more powerful datajack—the external synth is the choke point. The best of the best instead use an **Internal Synth** link, built into the instrument itself when it's created, which is no better than an External Synth link when using trodes but can reach a whole new level when paired with a datajack.

INSTRUMENTS

INSTRUMENT	DICE POOL EFFECT	AVAIL	COST
Simple	-1	—	50¥
Professional	—	—	500¥
Rising Star	*	8	5,000¥
Big Time	1	12	50,000¥
External Synth	2	4	2,000¥
Internal Synth	1 or 2**	+4	x2

*You can ignore one 1 rolled for the purposes of determining a glitch or critical glitch.

**If you decide to add 2 dice when using this instrument, one of them must be the wild die.

Note that the costs are the same for guitars, keyboards, a singer's mic, a tuba, etc. It's the quality of the instrument, not what the piece is, that determines the cost.

INSTRUMENTS OF DEATH

Shadowrunners being who they are, it didn't take long before someone had the bright idea of installing a weapon into their instrument in order to sneak it past security. These modifications are somewhat complex and always have a negative impact on the instrument's quality. Each reduces the effective level of the instrument by one row on the Instruments table, so that a Big Time instrument becomes a Rising Star, a Rising Star becomes Professional, and so on. Treat each weapon as the SR5 equivalent (p. 442-45) but with -1 Attack

Rating at all ranges (to a minimum of 0) due to the awkward design. An Instrument of Death cannot be concealed, but noticing the weapon function is treated as if it were a hold-out pistol (-4 Concealability Modifier)

An Instrument of Death has a cost equal to the instrument plus double the weapon's cost, and an availability of the weapon +2. Weapons that may be used are: **knife, club, stun baton, monofilament whip, any taser, or any hold-out pistol**. A **combat axe, katana, staff, or sword** may be used but are far easier to spot (no Concealability Modifier).

MELEE WEAPONS

YO-YO

Laugh all you want, but the yo-yo was originally designed as a weapon for hunting, and while we think of them as toys for children, they can still be used for their original purpose as well as performing. A **hardened yo-yo** is simply constructed out of a tougher material, such as hardwood or metal. A **bladed yo-yo** is exactly what you think, while a **monofilament yo-yo** is safer to use than a monofilament whip but not by much. Each counts as a **Professional Grade** instrument for performing tricks.

ROLLING BLADES

Skates have been connected to shadowrunners ever since the dawn of the Sixth World. Making combat-worthy skates came about a day later. Skateboards can be found in both **hardened** and **bladed** versions, while roller skates only come in bladed. As with other instruments, the hidden weapons degrade the performance somewhat, while the awkward design makes the weapon somewhat inferior, but the hidden feature allows them to be snuck past security. Trying to discover that someone's skates are, in fact, rolling blades are treated as if they were a hold-out pistol (-4 Concealability Modifier).

Wearing rolling blades increases your Sprint dice pool by 2, and you can add the wild die if you decide to (this does not stack with other movement mods).

TORCH

One of man's first weapons, a torch is simply a piece of wood set on fire. A well-made one will be

YO-YOS

EXOTIC WEAPON	DV	CLOSE	NEAR	MEDIUM	FAR	EXTREME	AVAIL	COST	NOTES
Hardened	2S	8	—	—	—	—	8	600¥	
Bladed	2P	8	—	—	—	—	12R	625¥	
Monofilament	5P	14	—	—	—	—	12F	12,000¥	Monofilament glitches

ROLLING BLADES

EXOTIC WEAPON	DV	CLOSE	NEAR	MEDIUM	FAR	EXTREME	AVAIL	COST
Hardened	2S	8	—	—	—	—	8	600¥
Bladed	2P	8	—	—	—	—	12R	625¥

TORCH

CLUB	DV	CLOSE	NEAR	MEDIUM	FAR	EXTREME	AVAIL	COST	NOTES
Torch	3S	11	—	—	—	—	—	10¥	Fire damage

PITCHFORK

BLADES	DV	CLOSE	NEAR	MEDIUM	FAR	EXTREME	AVAIL	COST
Pitchfork	3P	10	4	—	—	—	4	25¥

MOLOTOV COCKTAIL

GRENADES	IMPACT	2M	5M	10M	AVAIL	COST	NOTES
Molotov	10P	4P	2P	—	6F	15¥	Fire damage

wrapped in an oil-soaked cloth to ensure a good burn, but in a pinch, a chair leg'll do just fine. Not the fanciest of weapons, but it keeps most critters at bay.

PITCHFORK

Where you have torches, you gotta have pitchforks. The items are easy to find out on the farm, but sprawl-dwellers have to build their own out of meter sticks, cast-off fence parts, and so on. But it's worth it—nothing gets the blood pumping like a good ol' mob!

GRENADES

MOLOTOV COCKTAIL

A classic first seen in Finland nearly a hundred and fifty years ago, the Molotov is simple enough to make: Take a glass bottle, fill it with gasoline, stuff a rag in the top, done. Light the "fuse," hurl it at something you want to burn, then sit back and enjoy a crackling good time. They were absolute terrors against Russian tanks, with burning fuel slipping through joints and setting people, uniforms, and ammunition aflame. These days, there are some problems. Glass bottles have been generally replaced by bio-plastic, gas costs a ton, and modern armored vehicles are sealed against liquids. Still, they're seen at any good riot, ruining many a Knight Errant enforcement officer's day. Molotovs don't come in wireless versions. Funny, that!

LITER OF MILK

DEVICE	AVAIL	COST
Milk (1 liter)	—	3¥

BIOTECH

LITER OF MILK

The two most common crowd-control weapons you see deployed are Pepper Punch spray and CS/Tear Gas. These are both quite effective at disruption, leaving targets nauseated and blind, easy prey for the follow-up arrests. One of the best responses to this is good ol' milk. A full liter of milk poured onto one's eyes will wash away and neutralize the burning sensation and clear out the mucus membranes as an effective, if messy, counter-measure. If you ever wondered why riot professionals always have a jug of milk on their belt, now you know.

One liter of milk removes the Nausea status from CS/Tear Gas or Pepper Punch and the Dazed status from CS/Tear Gas with a full action's application. It has no effect on any suffered Stun damage.

CLOTHING

TRENCHCOAT

The unarmored version is a timeless classic that's making a comeback. Available in any color, they're found most often in a dark grey or black, for the goths, samurai, and vampire-wannabes, or tan for the reporters and gumshoes. They don't provide any armor, but they do provide an addi-

tional -2 Concealability modifier to items hidden underneath. Plus, they're stylish!

FEDORA

The king of hats, the fedora's been a staple of menswear for almost two hundred years despite starting life as a ladies' hat. Nowadays, it's for anyone. A fedora is made of felt, with a soft brim, creased crown, and a pinched front, often, but not always, having a cloth or leather hatband. They come in many colors, but dark grey and brown are the most common by far.

TRILBY

Often mistaken for a fedora, a trilby has a narrower brim, turned down in the front and angled up in the rear.

HOMBURG

While a homburg bears a passing resemblance to a fedora, it's made of a hard, stiff felt, with the brim turning up on the sides while dipping down at the front and rear. It has a dented crown and only comes in a dark grey or black. Popular with gangsters in the 1930s, it has a reputation as a criminal's hat and picked up the nickname of "The Godfather." It remains popular with today's mob. A homburg is usually decorated with a silk or satin hatband.

BOWLER

Another hat made of stiff felt, the bowler's rounded top leaves no doubt as to its form. Like the homburg, it tends to dip at fore and aft while rising on the sides, but unlike the other hats detailed here, the bowler is often an informal hat thanks to having roots in the low-born British and Irish immigrants of the nineteenth century.

HATIQUETTE

Hats are only starting to make a return in 2080, and many have no idea of how they're supposed to be worn. The short form is that all save the bowler are formal, or semi-formal, hats that should only be worn with suits—never casual clothing. It's expected that they'll be removed indoors unless the

venue is particularly large (a theatre means removal, while a sports stadium allows them to be worn). Tipping your hat, or at least touching the brim, when passing others is a form of courtesy. In older days, it was usually gentlemen tipping their hat at ladies, but anyone can wear any hat and tip it at whomever they please. Hats typically are placed over the heart for a national anthem, funeral, or other honorable presentation.

TOOLS

GRAFFITI KIT

While anyone can grab a can of spray paint and tag a wall, a Graffiti Kit has a selection of colors, several stencils, and quick-cleaning solvents, letting a young artisan quickly assemble an impressive display, remove the evidence from their own hands, then store the lot for a rapid escape. Protective goggles and a rebreather are highly recommended.

GRAFFITI KIT

TYPE	AVAIL	COST
Graffiti Kit	4F	100¥

VEHICLES

FORD BROADCAST

The primary news van of the Sixth World, the Ford Broadcast (and similar models) is the newsteam transport of choice. A driver (who usually doubles as a sound man) and reporter sit up front, with room for two more (usually a cameraman and a technician) in the rear, plus storage space for ample gear (boom mics, cameras, etc.) all topped off with a powerful satellite transmitter and a built-in Compuforce TaskMaster drone controller to operate three CU^3 drones (drones not included in the van's price), allowing for both a mobile uplink unit and an on-the-spot command and control response vehicle for breaking news updates. The Broadcast isn't a particularly agile or well-armored machine, but can safely roll into the average bad neighborhood without fear of small-arms fire. Barrens with rocket launchers are another matter, of course.

Similar models: Nissan NV-1800 (newscast variant), S-K Sprinter NCV6 (special)

SKIORSKY-BELL CONDOR

While many channels have moved on to drone-cam reports, there's still something about "Chopper Dave" reporting live from the sky, flitting over

CLOTHING

CLOTHING	ARMOR	AVAIL	COST
Trenchcoat	-	-	100¥
Fedora	-	-	30¥
Trilby	-	-	20¥
Homburg	-	-	40¥
Bowler	-	-	10¥

VEHICLES

GROUND CRAFT	HANDL	ACCEL	SPD INT	TOP SPD	BODY	ARMOR	PILOT	SENSOR	SEATS	AVAIL	COST
Ford Broadcast	3/3	12	20	180	16	10	3	3	4	8R	50,000¥
AIRCRAFT	HANDL	ACCEL	SPD INT	TOP SPD	BODY	ARMOR	PILOT	SENSOR	SEATS	AVAIL	COST
S-B Condor	4	14	25	200	12	9	2	6	2	12R	120,000¥

traffic, talking about car chases, or dipping low to get a good view of a gang war before slipping just out of the line of fire from a cheap RPG. The Condor is a simple two-man helicopter with openable windows and an upgraded sensor suite to allow all manner of camera updates. Ordinarily, it's crewed by one pilot, while the co-pilot's job is simply to keep an eye on what's going on while shouting into a mic on live TV. Not a combat-worthy machine by any stretch, most corporate facilities tolerate the buzzing gnats in their airspace for a few minutes before waving them off. Those that don't take the hint are usually met with "persuasion."

Similar models: Robinson Raven IV, Airbus Eurocopter EC 215, Cicare CH-12X

MEDIA GEAR

PRESS PASS

There are some press credentials that are free, such as those given out to an event photographer, but legitimate cred costs nuyen. A press pass (which is registered to your SIN, of course) can be purchased from any media organization that's willing to have you, giving some special access to areas. The press can enter a crime scene (but will always have an officer at their side to make sure they don't disrupt anything), get into government functions, attend high-class parties (as long as they're working), and gain some bonus legal protections. Note that many corporations don't have a "freedom of the press" law in their corporate charter, so this is by no means a "get out of testimony free" card, but every real reporter carries one.

PROCAMS AND SMARTCAMS

ProCams are larger, higher-end cameras than most shadowrunners use, ideal for professional camera work. These are larger, shoulder-mounted or built into drones, quite impossible to hide but able to be absolutely stuffed with high-end optics. They can be found at any major event but are typically attached to a cameraman in the wake of a roving on-scene reporter.

SmartCams are spun out of smartgun technology, focused on allowing the user to get a better shot of a scene, not a target. There are external add-on SmartCam attachments, but they're getting harder to find as cameras with an internal SmartCam system have continued to grow in market share. With

less computation needed than the ballistics needs of a smartlink, a SmartCam can be used with any DNI but work best with a datajack.

An external SmartCam adapter grants a point Edge to any test made using the device, but only if it is used immediately on the test. An internal SmartCam does the same also grants a +1 dice pool bonus to Perception tests using the camera when it is connected to a datajack.

REPORTER GEAR

ID AND CREDIT	AVAIL	COST
Press Pass	6	50¥
OPTICAL DEVICES	AVAIL	COST
ProCam (1-12)	4	Capacity x 250¥
SmartCam External	6	200¥
SmartCam Internal	8	(Camera) x 2

PRINTING PRESSES

Most of us stick with digital dispersal, but some still insist on physical copies for media, such as printed fliers to advertise a local band (instead of just using AR blasts like rational people). Those who want to print more, shall we say, *disruptive* content quickly find that standard printers secretly code tracking information in every page, allowing law enforcement to track down would-be rebels and cut them off early. This led to a throwback in analog printing. Enter the humble printing press! Little changed since the days of the Gutenberg Bible, the most basic press is strikingly similar to an olive press, using pressure to drop a carving painted with ink onto a piece of paper, making a copy of the engraving, then allowing you to repeat the process with occasional re-inking. For a bit more money, you can get a professional **small press** with metal type instead of wood and a faster method of ink application and actual pressing, letting you churn out ten times as many copies in the same length of time. This professional press also comes with a wide array of letters in several fonts (with the larger letters being stored in a top drawer or the storage cabinet that comes with it while the smaller are stored in the bottom drawer, giving rise to the terms "upper case" and "lower case," which is not especially relevant here but is

still a fun thing to know). Lastly, a true **industrial press** is beyond what most people ever use, but allows for a small citywide newspaper to be printed on the daily. The big papers use even larger facilities that cost millions, but we're going to focus on the small press here.

PRINTING PRESSES

EQUIPMENT	AVAIL	COST
Basic Press	4	500¥
Small Press	6	5,000¥
Industrial Press	8	50,000¥
Paper (per 500)	–	1¥
Black Ink (per 500)	–	5¥
Color Ink (per 500)	–	20¥

EXPANDED CYBERSENSES

While many corporations have moved away from R&D in cybernetics, a few continue to expand the possibilities. Recently, some expanded cyberoptics and cybERAUDIALS have hit the market. Unlike standard eyeware and earware, these expanded systems are unmistakably artificial, requiring a large build up outside the bone to house the extra options. In return, you get a higher grade of implant with an expanded capacity.

AUTOVOICE

The concept of a cyber-augmented throat has been around for decades and is present in some highly illegal hardware that allowed for voice modulators to be used to duplicate other people's voiceprints. A more musical-aligned (and legal) version has been around since the early '70s. Known as "AutoVoice," it led to a brief flurry of cybernetic-voiced artists who, before the addition, couldn't carry a tune. Used at a normal setting,

the AutoVoice controls airflow through the voice box, and the voice box's own vibrations, to hit and hold notes as needed. With some software tweaks, this can be turned into a more mechanical sound (creating that distinct AutoVoiced sound of a few years back) or used to pitch the user's voice up or down but still recognizable only as their own. Software hacks to allow more illegal operation now circle the Shadownet.

AutoVoice replaces the user's own limit for singing performances with its rating.

Wireless: The AutoVoice allows the user to broadcast to a local audio network without a mic.

VOCAL EXPANSION

A terrifying upgrade usually undertaken only by those who've suffered throat damage but sometimes gambled on by those who need the extra edge to break in, vocal expansion is a series of minor bioware improvements to the throat and lungs, controlling the flow of air through the voice box, strengthening the user's natural abilities to create longer, clearer notes, a more powerful sound, and a throat more resistant to hoarseness and strain. If it goes wrong, it can ruin someone's career forever or, in a worst-case scenario, render them mute. Currently the upgrade is reserved to beta or delta clinics, but once perfected, it should filter down to standard clinics in a few years.

A vocal expansion raises the user's natural limit for Leadership tests using Influence and Performance (singing) tests using Con by its rating.

BIOWARE

BASIC BIOWARE	ESSENCE	AVAIL	COST
Vocal Expansion (1-3)	0.1	(Rating x 6)	Rating x 8,000¥

CYBERWARE

CYBEREYES	ESSENCE	CAPACITY	AVAIL	COST
Rating 5	0.6	20	15	18,000¥
Rating 6	0.7	24	18	22,000¥
Vision Enhancement (4-6)	0.2	[Rating x 2]	Rating x 3	Rating x 5,000¥

CYBEREARS	ESSENCE	CAPACITY	AVAIL	COST
Rating 5	0.6	20	15	15,500¥
Rating 6	0.7	24	18	21,000¥
Audio Enhancement (4-6)	0.2	[Rating x 2]	Rating x 3	Rating x 5,000¥

HEADWARE	ESSENCE	CAPACITY	AVAIL	COST
AudioTune (1-6)	0.2	–	Rating	Rating x 1,000¥
Hacked (as above)	–	–	Rating x3F	Rating x 4,000¥



NEW QUALITIES

CANDLE IN THE DARKNESS

(POSITIVE QUALITY)

**COST: 5 KARMA (MUST HAVE
A CODE OF HONOR NEGATIVE QUALITY)**

In a world of “I got mine, Jack,” the rare person with an actual code of honor stands out like a candle in the darkness. Showing that it’s an actual code that defines their life, that they’re willing to make sacrifices to do the right thing even if it hurts themselves? Yeah, some people will dismiss them as a sucker, but those who see the truth find themselves believing. Turns out that when people see a light in the darkness, they’re drawn to it.

As long as the character doesn’t break their Code of Honor, all contacts are treated as having a Loyalty 2 higher than their actual rating. If the character breaks their Code of Honor, the contacts are treated as having 1 Loyalty less than their rating until the mistake can be corrected.

MASSIVE NETWORK

(POSITIVE QUALITY)

COST: 20 KARMA

The character spends an obscene amount of time socializing, gathering friends from all rugs of society. This quality is often seen in fixers, newspaper editors, schoolteachers with two decades of graduates, and world-famous musicians—the type of people who seem to know everybody. The cost of all contacts is reduced by 2, to a minimum cost of 2. This does not stack with Networker.

NETWORKER

(POSITIVE QUALITY)

COST: 5 KARMA

This character has an extensive social network of loose friends and casual contacts. This quality is often found in reporters, business managers, and small-time musicians who may cast a wide but shallow social net. The cost of all contacts is reduced by 1, to a minimum cost of 1.

STOLEN GEAR (NEGATIVE QUALITY)

BONUS: 1 TO 20 KARMA

A mentor of yours once said, “You are a shadowrunner. Why buy what you can steal?” Taking their words to heart, you went out and took what you wanted, and damn the consequences. Might not have been the best of ideas, chummer, because someone wants their stuff back.

The player and gamemaster must decide on the exact details, but the benefit is that for each point of Karma (up to 20) spent on Stolen Gear, the character gets 10,000 nuyen (see below) to spend on gear, cyberware, and/or bioware during character creation. These points are spent instead of the normal Karma for extra cash (not in addition to), and extend the possible additional funds to 150,000¥.

This nuyen must be spent on gear, cyberware, or bioware. Any nuyen left over does not convert into nuyen that the character can keep.

Congratulations! You’ve got a ton of wiz gear!

Unfortunately, you lifted it from someone with the means to hunt you down and get it back. I mean, what did you expect after stealing from someone who could afford to leave such nice gear lying around? Not only will these folks be hunting you themselves, but they’ll be putting a large bounty on your head (worth at least 25,000 nuyen) and sending other runners after you. The more you stole, the more they’ll want you found. See the table below for guidelines on how often someone comes hunting for you. And once they catch you, odds are you’ll be a smoking pile of meat after they’ve reclaimed their goods. Maybe if you’re lucky, you can convince them to let you live if you work for them to pay off what you stole. Hope you’re a smooth talker, chummer. You start with a Heat rating of 2 if you took this at character creation, or increase your Heat rating by 2 if you acquire this quality later.

The character can buy this quality down in increments to represent that the people/organization/corp hunting them are starting to give up, as they begin to spend more hunting the character than the gear that was stolen from them is worth. Once the character buys off the quality entirely, the hunters have given up. If the character is captured by the people hunting them, the gamemaster may allow the character to live if they agree to work for their

unwilling benefactor. Good role-playing and high Influence rolls are recommended.

LIFE MODULES

These life modules will be usable with a future Life Module character creation system for *Shadowrun, Sixth World*.

FURTHER EDUCATION

STUDENT ATHLETE (55)

Adding two years to your character’s age, this Life Module reflects years spent at a university, but focusing all-too-often on athletics over education (it may be combined with other Further Education modules to represent someone more genuinely dedicated to mind *and* body). Scholarships are the norm for high-skilled students like yours was, and these years could present a fast-track to steady corporate work, or even the life of a pro working your sport’s big leagues, if you play your cards right.

Attributes: Body +1, Logic +1

Qualities: Fame (4)

General Studies: Electronics +1, Influence +1, Knowledge skill [any two academic subjects]

E-Sports: Cracking +1, Electronics +1 w/ Hardware specialization

Vehicle/Drone Sports: Engineering +1, Piloting +1

Physical Sports: Athletics +1, Quality: Natural Athlete

REAL LIFE

PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE

Hard work, talent, drive, connections: pick at least two, and you can make it as a player in a big show, somewhere. Whether you were a clever tactician who dukes it out with other chromed-up quick-twitch video gamers, a born jockey with gasoline in their bloodstream, or a contracted pro in sports that get a little more physical—maybe even a corporate-trained spellslinger, in the right league!—you had what it takes, and the game took you under its wing and remade you in its image. You signed on the dotted line in exchange for making a living *and* a name for yourself, and did your damndest to rewrite the game while you were at it.

Attributes Reaction +1, Intuition +1

Qualities Fame (8), Limited Corporate SIN (15)

Part of the Gig (all sports) Influence +2, Language [Any; either choose a new language or advance a language 1 level], Knowledge skill [Chosen Sport]

Sports

Awakened Athlete: Body +1, Willpower +1, Sorcery +2, Knowledge skill: Magical Theory,

STOLEN GEAR TABLE

KARMA SPENT	TYPICAL BOUNTY	HUNTED FREQUENCY
1-5	25,000	once per 4 game sessions
6-10	50,000	once per 3 game sessions
11-15	100,000	once per 2 game sessions
16-20	200,000	once per game session



Knowledge skill: Magical Law, Quality: Focused Concentration

Combat Biker/Urban Brawl Outrider: Body +1, Reaction +1, Engineering +1, Piloting +1, Choose One: [Close Combat +2, Firearms +2], Quality: Steely Eyed Wheelman

Courtballer: Body +1, Strength +1, Athletics +1, Close Combat +2, Influence +1, Language: Spanish +1 level, Quality: Toughness

Drone Racer: Reaction +1, Cracking +1, Engineering +1, Piloting +1 w/ two specializations: [Pilot Aircraft, Pilot Exotic Vehicle, Pilot Ground Craft, Pilot Walker, Pilot Watercraft], Knowledge skill: Drone Manufacturers, Quality: Gearhead

Freestyle Fighter: Body +1, Strength +1, Biotech +1, Close Combat +2, Influence +1, Knowledge skill: Martial Arts

Hurler/Stickballer: Agility +1, Strength +1, Athletics +1 w/ Running and Throwing specializations, Clubs specialization for Close Combat, Language [Sperethiel or any NAN] +2 levels, Quality: Natural Athlete

Miracle Shooter: Agility +1, Athletics +2, Electronics +1 w/ Software specialization, Firearms +1

Professional Gamer: Logic +1, Cracking +1 w/ Cybercombat specialization, Electronics +2 w/ Software specialization, Influence +1, Knowledge skill: Video Games, Quality: Overclocker

TEEN DIVA

You've practiced music, singing, and dancing since you were old enough to crawl, and it paid off. You got noticed by the right people, and now you're a teenage rock star! Thousands upon thousands of fans want your autograph, your attention, your body, and whatever other piece of you they can get. I just hope the dream is really all it's cracked up to be. You can trust your manager and the corporation that holds your contract—right?

Attributes: Agility +1, Charisma +1

Qualities: Fame

Skills: Athletics +1 w/ Performance specialization, Knowledge skill: Dance, Knowledge skill: High Fashion, Knowledge skill: Music, Knowledge skill: Entertainment Industry, Knowledge skill: [Corporate Sponsor]

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SHADOWRUN

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The *Neo-Anarchist Streetpedia* is your definitive guide to the Shadowrun universe. With hundreds of entries, it covers corporations, shadowrunners, politicians, nations, cities, criminal organizations, and more. Even better, it gets to the point and tells you what you need to know now, so you get hit the streets a little smarter than you were when you woke up this morning.

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SHADOWRUN: THE JOHNSON RUN

BY KAI O'CONNAL

**Sneak
Preview of
Upcoming
Shadowrun
Fiction!**

AGE IS MORE THAN JUST A NUMBER...

Keandra's been around for a long time, outliving most shadowrunners twice over. With a legacy of runs under her belt, she has the solid reputation and wisdom that comes with surviving the shadows longer than most.

Looking for a way to cash in on her street cred, Keandra comes up with a novel idea: why not set herself up as a Johnson? With her rep, she could take on high paying jobs and farm them out to other capable teams, minus a small cut as a finder's fee. Everyone wins and no one's the wiser...unless someone makes the wrong call.

And when a run goes south, Keandra and her team must scramble to salvage more than just their reputations. They are thrust into a situation that could start a new world war, and have to figure out who to trust, and fast...but trust is always hard to come by in the shadows...

CHAPTER 1

"I told you this would be easy."

It was practically a law that those words were guaranteed to be a curse, bringing down all the misfortune possible, and then some. Keandra regretted them the moment they passed her lips.

As if reading her mind, E-jekt snapped his attention to her rather than the AR display in the air between them. She shrugged in response. He returned to hacking the alarm system for the next room with an exaggerated sigh and mumbling, no doubt directed at her. If not for their current activities, he looked like a stereotypical old ork sitting on his porch, scratching at his frizzy white beard, and complaining about the kids. She could almost hear him screaming for her to get off his lawn and claiming to have clothes older than she was. Judging by the state of his tattered jacket, that might have been a true statement.

Keandra looked down the hall, trying to catch any sign of the rest of their team. The white-tiled floor and brightly painted walls reflected the little light available to let her see all the way to the elevators. The hall was empty, which was both a good and a bad sign.

The good news was the guard on patrol was nowhere in sight. If he did come around the corner, at least Keandra would be able to see him anywhere in the hall. All she had to use on him was the Beretta tucked under her arm. If she turned out to be the muscle for the group, it meant something had gone horribly wrong.

The bad news was that Lance and Paz hadn't finished their rounds and were possibly in trouble. This floor of the tower was small, and shouldn't take more than ten minutes to do a sweep. Keandra glanced down at the display mounted on the inside of her wrist and winced. They'd been gone for almost twelve.

Closing her eyes, she strained to listen for any sound of the other runners. She heard the steady



rattling hum of the HVAC system in the background and E-jekt's ever-present wheeze; the ork really was getting on in years. But she couldn't hear anything to indicate her teammates were nearby.

When she opened her eyes, Keandra jumped and put a hand against the wall behind her as her breath caught. Lance stood at the intersection only a few meters away, flashing a smile that would be menacing if she didn't know him better. He looked like a shadow, sleek and covered in black except for his shaved head. With his dark skin, he looked like he could be part of the shadows themselves if he closed his lips. Not

for the first time, Keandra was glad he was on their side.

His sword was tucked into its scabbard under his long coat, so he hadn't found any trouble. Keandra knew that if he'd run into any, he'd still be armed. Despite their history, he continued to impress her with his stealth. Even watching him strut toward her, she couldn't hear his footfalls.

Paz was another story altogether. Keandra heard the sturdy dwarf long before she turned the corner. Then again, when you were a walking tank with short metal legs and one unskinned cyberarm, that was to be expected. She looked to be more machine than dwarf. Even the tight braids of her short hair added to her android impersonation, looking like thick, dark wires coming out of her head.

Unlike Lance, she had her assault rifle out and ready, moving with military precision as she swung into view, her gun barrel leading the turn. When she saw the rest of the team at the end of the hall, she pointed her gun at the ceiling and marched toward them.

"All's clear on the east side of the tower. Looks like everyone cleared out for the day. How's the west side, Meat-sack?"

"Dark and empty, like your soul." Lance said the words with a grin that reached his eyes as he gave Paz a deferential nod.

"Somebody must've messed with his brain. We both know I don't got a soul."

Lance was quick to continue the verbal sparring. "I thought it was a heart you didn't have. Didn't you have that replaced with a mechanical pump last year?"

E-jekt let out a low growl, a cue to Keandra that the banter was distracting. He wasn't dropping into the Matrix completely, so he was still aware of his surroundings. She hushed the other two and they immediately quieted. Paz spun around to watch the elevators, her gun lowered and ready to react at the slightest movement. Lance slid across the floor, moving like a whisper as he took up a position behind E-jekt, ready to burst through the door if need be.

Several seconds of tense silence followed that strained against Keandra's optimism. The security here should not be taking this long for E-jekt to dismantle. Perhaps he was getting slow in his old age; it wouldn't be surprising. But there was no one she would rather run with. They'd been together since her first run, over twenty years ago. She glanced at him and opened her mouth to say something, but shut it before any words passed her lips. Anything she said would just

add stress and make him take even longer. Besides, when it came down to it, E-jekt was one of the best hackers she'd ever met.

E-jekt closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. He waved at the door with one hand, gesturing that they should go through. Lance opened the door, his leather jacket creaking as he slid past the narrow gap. Keandra waited, counting in her head until she reached twenty. Then she opened the door all the way and stepped into the room beyond. E-jekt crept in behind her, closing the door and leaving only a small crack visible to the hallway beyond. Paz kept a lookout for them and make sure their exit route was clear. Everything was going exactly as planned.

The room was a private office, with various fine art pieces decorating its walls and corners. Just one of those statues or portraits could likely fetch over twenty thousand nuyen to the right buyer. Keandra couldn't tell for sure, but she'd bet the glass decanters on the small table next to the desk were filled with real alcohol – and top-shelf stuff at that. She was tempted to open one, wafting the top to get a subtle taste of the rare beverage, but she tore her attention away. That was not their target, and above all else she was a professional. Besides, she had a bottle of her own at home. With what this job was paying them, she'd be able to afford another two or three.

Lance walked around the edge of the room, lifting the corners of the portraits away from the wall with a gloved hand to peer behind them. Three quarters of the way around, he stopped and waved the other two over. As they reached him, he lifted the nearest painting from its hook to reveal a safe embedded in the wall.

"I'll never understand the obsession with being old-fashioned and hiding your valuables behind pieces of art," he said. "It's such a trite custom, usually observed by those with far more wealth than sense. Still, at least it makes our jobs that much easier."

Keandra pressed her lips into a thin line and glared at her verbose companion. Now was not the time for foolish witticisms. When he saw her stare, Lance offered a slight bow before moving out of the way, carrying the painting with him. He rested it against the wall, tilting his head to study the abstract shapes from a different perspective. It made the tattoo on the back of his head look comical as the angry dragon's gaze tilted to the side.

E-jekt fiddled with the keypad of the safe, al-

ternating between it and his AR interface before giving her the thumbs-up to let her know he had it under control. Keandra turned away from him and investigated the rest of the room while she waited. The desk had a full holographic display, but she didn't dare turn it on. She kept her distance just in case it was motion-activated. There was no telling what kind of security measures might be layered on top of it. Just turning it on could alert the corporate executive who worked here.

She wandered over to the one wall completely bare of any hangings. As she got closer, she noticed it wasn't a normal wall at all, but a large projection screen, probably meant to display an outdoor scene. Having a large window would be a liability, but you couldn't deny the successful businessman his window office. That had been a symbol of power ever since offices existed, and Keandra knew that these white-collars valued their displays of power more than any tangible success. She'd certainly seen enough of them in her time, and knew how to use them to her advantage.

"Problem."

Paz's voice snapped Lance and Keandra to attention, both of them turning toward the door to the hallway. Lance sprinted across the carpeted floor, but the sound of heavy gunfire erupted before he was even halfway across the room. Keandra saw staccato flashes of light through the small crack in the doorway. Above the noise she heard a distinct deep thrum followed by a brief clatter.

Paz burst through the door and slammed it shut behind her just as an explosion shook Keandra's knees.

"We've got company."

Several people shouted in the hallway, too jumbled and distorted for Keandra to make out what they were saying, but it was clear they didn't have much time. Lance took up a position behind the door as Paz stood near the edge, gun pointed at the opening. She gave a nod and Lance slid the door open enough for Paz to fire a burst down the hall. She and Lance moved in unison: she stopped firing and pinned her back to the wall as Lance slammed the door shut with his foot. The return fire ripped into the metal door and echoed in the office like heavy rain on a tin roof.

Keandra rushed over to E-jekt, trying to see how he was coming with the safe. Sweat streamed down his face, following the heavy wrinkles etched into his skin. His hands shook

as he worked with his sprites. There was no way for her to tell how far along he was.

"E-jekt, we need it open ten minutes ago."

For a moment, she wondered if he heard her, or more accurately, if it registered. He paused to take a deep breath, and then his entire body went slack. Now, more than ever, he needed to be protected. Keandra crouched in front of him, shielding him with her body. There was nothing else she could use as portable cover. The desk was the only thing that looked like it might stop a bullet, and it was far too heavy for her to move.

Across the room, Paz and Lance continued to work together to fill the hall outside with a deadly rain of bullets and explosives. A few of the return shots made it through and bit into Paz's armor. More than once, a bullet sparked off her arm or leg before ricocheting and embedding itself in one of the walls. If it affected Paz at all, she didn't show it.

Time was critical. Reinforcements would be on their way soon, if they weren't already. And those would be the heavy troops, maybe even Knight Errant. They needed to get out, even if it meant abandoning the mission. Keandra whipped around, grabbing E-jekt's shoulder and getting ready to force him back to the physical world if need be. Just then the safe whirred as gears turned inside and the door swung open. Keandra stood and flung the door open the rest of the way, reaching inside and dumping most of the contents on the floor. At this point, secrecy was pointless.

In the back of the safe was their objective, some type of BTL chip in a glass case. She snatched it up and held it to the light from her commlink, verifying the part number etched into the main processing chip. Their intel had proven valuable—this was the one they were looking for.

Shoving it into one of the pockets of her coat, Keandra grabbed E-jekt by the arm and dragged him up. "Target acquired. We need an exit route, now."

Paz dumped the magazine from her assault rifle and slammed a fresh one into place. She also loaded a couple of grenades. "Next burst, Lance take point. I'll keep 'em pinned down. My hallway, second office on the right. Taking the express."

E-jekt's arm tensed in Keandra's grip before he jerked it away. Keandra knew he wouldn't be happy with the plan, but it was better than trying to fight their way through the entire security team and their reinforcements. Besides, it

was Paz's call. When things went south, she was the one who got them out in one piece.

When there was a brief lull in the clatter of bullets against the door, Lance jerked it open and Paz fired into the smoky hallway. This time, instead of slamming the door shut, Lance ducked low and slipped through the opening, skirting to the far wall as he drew his blades and tapped into his supernatural speed.

He shifted one shoulder, dodging a bullet that would have gone through his chest, and then he was in the middle of three security guards. His blade slashed the throat of the first man within reach and then he spun, driving the tip deep into the chest of the second. He dropped to the ground, yanking his blade free with the motion and taking cover as Paz burst into the hall and sprayed rounds with a beastly roar. The final guard in the advance group fell, her body ripped to shreds by the hail of bullets. The rest of the security team ducked behind the far corners and didn't dare peek around and expose themselves.

Paz held the trigger down until the magazine was empty and she was forced to reload once again. Keandra sprinted into the hallway, steering around her dwarf companion and following Lance as he turned and made for their exit point. Her feet slipped in the blood and she stumbled forward. Rather than try to catch herself, she went with the momentum, turning her shoulder to slam it into the wall and bounce back toward the office that would get them out. Once she was out of the line of fire, she turned around to take stock of her team while Lance broke the window. A sudden rush of air breezed past her as the wind howled through the makeshift opening.

Just as he was about to turn the corner, E-jekt lurched to the side and his eyes went wide. He stretched a hand toward Keandra as he collapsed, his other hand clutched to his bleeding side. Time seemed to slow as he hit the ground, and Keandra found that she couldn't move and her breath wouldn't come. Then everything snapped back to normal speed so quickly it made her head spin.

Paz's weapon roared to life once again, covering all the other noise as she laid down suppressive fire. She came into view, holding her gun in one hand as she reached down with the other to grab E-jekt's belt. Walking backward, she half-dragged, half-carried him to the office before kicking the door shut. Keandra's muscles listened to her brain once again and she rushed to one of the tables, sliding it across the floor in an attempt to bar the door.

"Come take the old man, Beanpole. Don't get squished on the way down."

Lance didn't respond except to bend and pick up E-jekt's limp body. The old hacker groaned and his eyes fluttered. He was alive, but how long he stayed that way was heavily dependent on them getting off corporate property in a hurry. Lance cinched a strap around his and E-jekt's waists, connecting the two of them. He hobbled over to the window, looking like some strange bi-meta conjoined twin, while the two women braced the table against the solid thudding of a portable battering ram. Lance fell out of the window, and Keandra hoped he'd been able to get enough distance from the tower.

"You next. I got this." Paz's legs and arms let out soft *whirrs* as they locked into place.

The wood door splintered, making Keandra flinch as she stood up, ready to follow Paz's order. She sprinted to the hole in the window and dove through, spreading her arms out to slow her fall as much as possible so she could get her bearings. Below her and almost half a block away was Lance; he had already deployed his chute and looked to be close to touching down. Keandra angled herself in that direction and pressed her arms against her body, plummeting through the sky and gaining speed and distance. If she knew Paz, there would be a significant surprise left behind for those who finally broke down the door.

Sure enough, a loud explosion went off behind her, followed by the sound of splintering glass. She was far enough away that she didn't feel the heat or shockwave of the blast, so she pulled the cord to deploy her chute. She came down hard, rolling as soon as she hit the pavement to keep from breaking an ankle or a leg.

A few people on the street ran away as Keandra and her team dropped into their midst. The explosion had gathered a bit of a crowd, but none of them would want to be around when the authorities showed up. Or else they didn't want to be caught in the crossfire. Either way, the street was soon deserted except for her and Lance cutting himself free from the tangled mess of his chute. Already she heard DocWagon's sirens; E-jekt would be in good hands soon. It cost a fortune, but it was well worth it.

With the *thud* behind her that she felt as much as heard, Keandra knew that Paz landed safely. The pavement cracked from the force of the dwarf's impact, but she didn't seem to care. She sprinted to the van, already using her connection to bring it online and get the engine started. Ke-

andra hurried to the other two members of her team.

She took E-jekt from Lance and laid him gently at the edge of the street while Lance collected and coiled up their chutes. They were generic, but any proof left behind could lead back to them in ways they never even considered. They left nothing to chance.

E-jekt's breathing was steady, but his eyes were still unfocused. One hand was still pressed tight to the wound in his side. It looked like the bleeding had slowed, but Keandra could still see a small trickle and smell the copper odor hanging heavily in the air.

E-jekt squeezed Keandra's shoulder with his other hand; its lack of strength concerned her. "Easy, huh? We're getting too old for this."

"I know, friend. Take it easy. DocWagon's almost here."

The lights of the emergency vehicle reflected off the buildings across the street. Tires squealed as the medivac took a sharp corner. Keandra gave E-jekt's hand a final tight squeeze before resting it against his chest.

"We'll meet you at the safehouse. They'll have you patched up in no time."

He smiled and Keandra turned away, rushing to the van. Lance had already collected their gear and loaded it into the back. He stood in the large opening on the side, ready to slam the door shut as soon as she was inside. Keandra vaulted the small step and rolled in the tangle of chutes as Paz took off. Lance closed the door, and for a few moments, Keandra allowed herself to rest in the darkness, her eyes closed, taking deep breaths. When she felt her heart slow its erratic rate, she crawled out of the fabric and up to the passenger's seat.

By now, Paz drove through the streets of Seattle with deliberation. They were far enough away from the towers that normal traffic had resumed and they could blend in with the regular Friday night commuters. Keandra pulled down the visor and began cleaning her face and fixing her appearance. They weren't scheduled to meet with the Johnson for hours, but it was still best that she was prepared. They had a reputation to maintain, and even a casual glance from a passing vehicle could ruin that for them. If anyone might be able to recognize her, she needed to look presentable and professional.

Once she was satisfied, Keandra checked on E-jekt's commlink. It was turned on and pinging from Group Health Central Hospital. She let out another deep sigh and collapsed into her seat,

sinking in as much as the stiff leather would allow. "He's at the hospital, still in one piece."

"You know, I bitch whenever that bill comes up, but I gotta hand it to those DocWagon suits. They got some damn good drivers and are worth every nuyen. Glad the old man's gonna be fine. Sticking with the original plan?" Paz glanced at Keandra out of the side of her periphery without turning her head.

"Yes. I can't meet our Johnson smelling like gunpowder and blood, so I need a change of clothes. There's only so much I can do from here."

"He's gonna be pissed that every suit and his brother's gonna hear about what we did tonight. Didn't he say he wanted it quiet?"

"You let me handle that."

From the back of the van, Lance chuckled just loud enough to be heard.

CHAPTER 2

The clock read 8:20 pm as Keandra pulled into the parking lot of Elliot's. The meeting wasn't scheduled to start until eight forty-five, but Keandra wanted to arrive early to set the scene to her advantage. She was thankful that at this point in her career, she had her beautification routine down to a science. It was her specialty, no different than Paz going to the gun range. Tonight she was cleaned up, her pale skin scrubbed clean and any wrinkles smoothed over. She had pulled her wavy black hair into a tight braid that rested over one shoulder. Her dress was modest and modern, an indirect sign of one who could afford to pay attention to fashion for those who were knowledgeable about such things. She had doctored her appearance to showcase her professionalism and class with even a glance. Thankfully, she had aged more gracefully than E-jekt.

She took a moment to do a final review of her image while waiting for the valet to reach her car door. When he opened it, she extended a hand and slid out with the grace of a dancer. On the passenger's side, Lance exited the vehicle and walked around the rear to meet her. She took the lead, with him following just half a step behind, the human socialite and her elf bodyguard. It was a role that they played well, and served them better.

As she climbed the half set of stairs, she took a quick glance around to survey her surround-

ings. Granted, she wouldn't pick up as much intel as she was used to, since E-jekt was still out of commission. Paz should be with him by now, making sure everything was okay. Keandra blinked and fought the urge to shake her head as she forced herself to focus on the surroundings and not be distracted. Everything was taken care of to the best of their abilities.

The crowd waiting in front of the maître d' was the standard selection of the population she'd anticipated: mid-level corporate workers, a state judge with an escort, and a young elf couple who reeked of excess. The corporate group managed to occupy the entire center of the hallway leading up to the maître d's stand, and Keandra stopped just before reaching their group. She wouldn't maneuver her way through them. She had time to spare. One of the human men turned to her and offered a smile that would have made her skin crawl if she bothered to notice it. Instead, she kept her gaze focused through the group, looking past them.

Her presence made the man shift his weight from one foot to the other, and the smile faded from his face. He looked back to his friends and they chuckled behind upraised hands. Clenching his jaw, he quickly turned back to her and opened his mouth to say something. Before he got a word out, the well-dressed ork maître d' appeared behind him and forced him out of the way with a shove that knocked him into a few of his companions. The small tangle collided with the wall next to the elven couple.

"I apologize for making you wait, Miss Tierney. If you'll come this way, your table has been prepared. It is a pleasure to see you again."

Keandra took the ork's offered hand, giving a small dip of her head as she did so. The smile on her face was genuine.

"Think nothing of it, Francis. I only just arrived. Your service is, as always, impeccable."

He smiled and seemed to blush a little at her compliment, but with orks it was always difficult to tell. The limited lighting didn't make it any easier. As soon he opened the doors to the restaurant proper, a wave of heat and sound washed over Keandra; she felt herself flush and her body threatened to start sweating.

As her gaze meandered around the tables, a flood of information about the other diners assaulted Keandra's cybereyes. Her programs still ran, collecting data about every person she could see. Without E-jekt's sprites filtering the data and collecting it in a database, though, it was too much for her brain to process. She forced

herself to ignore the information, and focused only on what was physically around her. She also made a mental note that she would need to turn off the information scrubbers before the Johnson arrived. It wasn't as if they'd be able to detect anything new or of note from him.

Francis led them to the far side of the restaurant and opened one of the glass doors to a patio that overlooked the Sound. The gust of cool air felt great on her skin even as it raised goosebumps on her exposed arms. They both stepped outside and Keandra saw that only one table was set on the patio. Even without her special reservation, it looked like the patio was no longer a popular choice among regular diners. The dropping temperatures certainly did make certain aspects of her job easier.

"The waiter will be along presently. If you need anything, please don't hesitate to ping the front desk. We are at your service."

"Of course. Thank you, Francis."

He gave a final smile and a bow, closing the door behind him as he returned to the heated room. Once the door was shut, all the noise was abruptly cut off. The only sounds were the wind and the lapping of water as it splashed against the hulls of a few boats moored nearby. Keandra walked to the railing and took a deep breath, appreciating the salt smell heavy on the air. She stared at the lights of several ships in the Sound, each one reflected in the dark water below.

After a few moments enjoying the view, she returned to the table and took her seat. She made sure to choose the chair that put her back to the only door leading to the patio. Mr. Johnson would want to keep the entrance and exit in view at all times. If he had his back to it, he would be uncomfortable and suspicious, which would make him harder to negotiate with. He was already bound to be disappointed with their performance. In order to smooth out the situation, Keandra needed him to be as comfortable as possible.

Lance took up a position on the far side of the door, standing straight and crossing his arms but deliberately not leaning against the wall. Keandra knew he would stand like that all night if he wasn't needed. His body control was so thorough he could remain as still as a statue for hours at a time. Again, his position was deliberate. Far enough away that Mr. Johnson would know Keandra was protected, but not so close that their employer felt threatened.

A waiter came out on the patio carrying a standing bucket filled with ice and a bottle

tucked under his arm. He placed the stand next to Keandra's table and presented the bottle so she could read the label. A natural Chardonnay with no synthetic modifications or additions. It was pricey, but it was also Mr. Johnson's favorite. She nodded and the waiter slipped the bottle back into the bucket, twisting it so it was partially submerged under the ice and would start to chill. The staff at Elliot's knew better than to open the bottle until her guest arrived. He would want to inspect it and make a show of it, even if the only thing he was checking was that it had not been tampered with.

"Is there anything else you need?"

Keandra smiled and shook her head. "That's all for now. Thank you."

The waiter bowed and left, closing the door behind him and once more shutting out all the restaurant noise. For a few seconds, Keandra enjoyed the peaceful night and forced herself to relax. She could still feel the tension from their earlier run creeping through her entire body. All she had to do was handle one small negotiation and then it would be time to move on.

But move on to what was the question. Another job? Another run where they dodged gunfire and barely managed to get out by jumping out of a window? While it was true that they were an accomplished runner team, sooner or later everyone's card came up. Security was always improving while their bodies were degrading, except perhaps for Paz—her body might technically be improving. Nonetheless, Keandra was starting to feel the weight of her forty-four years heavily, and she felt an exhaustion that was related to more than their recent adventure.

While she waited, she accessed her commlink and connected to the private network shared by her team. She needed an update from Paz.

<How is he?> she texted.

<He's doing fine. Tough old bastard. It'll take more than just a random bullet to take him out. Doc's already removed the bullet and got him patched up. He's just sleeping it off. They'll be kicking him out soon. I'll take him back to primary. How you holding up? Suit show up yet?>

<Not yet. But the meeting doesn't start for another five minutes. He never shows up early; always lets me set the stage.>

<Meat-sack keeping an eye on you?>

<At least I have the wherewithal to know how to dress appropriately for the occasion.> Lance replied. <There's a reason you never get to attend these dinners. I believe it is called class? It's a shame really, since the alcohol is to die for.>

<Real alcohol? Not synthahol? Bring some back!>

Keandra's commlink pinged an alert that her guest was being escorted to her table. She silently thanked Francis for his diligence. It was one of the many reasons she loved using the venue.

<Enough, you two. Our employer has just arrived.>

Keandra put her commlink away and folded her hands on the table in front of her, forming the perfect picture of etiquette and form. She heard the door open behind her, but did not turn around at the sound. She waited until Mr. Johnson came into her field of view before she acknowledged him. He was an older human, easily in his fifties, but possessed a strength and vitality of someone still in his early twenties. Working for a AAA company certainly came with its benefits.

She stood up and extended her hand. He took it in both of his and offered a small bow while his bodyguard maneuvered around them to pull out his chair. Keandra didn't know his name, but she did know it was the same bodyguard who always accompanied Mr. Johnson on these transactions. She detected the slight bulge of a firearm underneath the human's jacket, which was also no different than she expected.

"A pleasure to see you again, Miss Tiernay. It is always enjoyable to have these chats with you."

Keandra scanned his face as he spoke, searching for any sign of how he really felt. There was a slight twitch to his cheek that made the skin around his eyes tighten when he said the word 'pleasure,' but other than that, he gave her nothing to go on. He was good at this game, as she both expected and knew from personal experience. Otherwise, he never would have reached the status he currently held.

"The pleasure is all mine, Mr. Johnson. I've ordered your favorite."

She gestured toward the bottle chilling in the ice bucket. As he picked it up to examine it, she took her seat. Out of the corner of her eye, Keandra saw a faint shimmer on the other side of the glass separating them from the rest of the diners. The AR screen was up and would shield their conversation from any prying eyes. For the moment, they had their privacy.

Mr. Johnson finished his inspection of the wine bottle and handed it behind him without looking at his bodyguard. Then he sat down, folding his hands on the table in front of him and staring at Keandra. She felt the scrutiny of that stare as he

attempted to ferret out her secrets just as she had done moments before. She simply smiled and held out her glass once the bodyguard had opened the bottle. He served her first, and then his employer. Keandra raised her glass.

“To good business.”

She took a sip, noticing that Mr. Johnson waited until she had swallowed it and put her glass back on the table before lifting his own glass to his lips. It was nice to know she had earned so much of his trust over their years of working together. Then again, it wasn't a surprise. If he had behaved any differently, it would have made her nervous.

“Speaking of business, I heard there were some difficulties.”

Keandra kept her smile consistent and easy without forcing it. She wouldn't give him any indications of just how ugly things had gotten.

“Nothing we couldn't handle. After all, you specifically requested our services because of our ability to handle difficulties.”

“The report I read indicated that there was a violent response, and some trespassers were dealt with. Nothing was stolen and there was only a minimal amount of collateral damage.”

“Since when have you ever known a security company to confess to an utter failure on their part?”

Keandra deepened her smile and cocked an eyebrow before picking up her glass and taking another sip. It was cool and smooth, with just a hint of fruity acidity as it slid down her throat.

Mr. Johnson leaned forward in his chair. The motion was subtle, and Keandra was only aware of it by noticing the tightening of his suit coat around his elbows.

“You were able to complete your objective?”

For a few seconds, Keandra stalled by savoring the wine. It wasn't completely an act—it really was an excellent vintage. But she wanted to enjoy the moment a bit longer as well. She couldn't let the bait hang out for too long, but even the brief second of holding the upper hand was satisfying. She let her glass hang from her fingertips and swirled it in front of her, dropping her gaze to focus on the liquid climbing its walls. With this viewpoint she could still make out every detail of Mr. Johnson, but it gave the appearance of inferiority. He was not a man who dealt well with being in a weaker position.

“Of course,” she said at last. “I would not have handled our meeting with the original arrangements if it was only going to lead to disappointment.”

Now that the moment had passed, Mr. Johnson eased back and picked up his own glass, once again resuming the aloof air that fed into his sense of superiority. It was his turn to sample the wine while buying time and forcing Keandra to wait for his response. This was the game they played, and one that Keandra greatly enjoyed. She looked up to match his gaze and refused to speak before him.

The silence stretched on long enough that the waiter came out carrying a couple of plates of steaming food. They had come here often enough that the waitstaff no longer bothered to take their orders. Mr. Johnson never touched the dish, but he always seemed to enjoy the aroma of the spices. Keandra refused to let the food go to waste, so she'd gotten used to her fish growing cold. She wouldn't eat in front of her employer if he was not going to partake. It was still good, even if it had to sit for several minutes.

Mr. Johnson waited until the waiter departed before he spoke again. “I do believe that my instructions specified that no one was to know of your presence. It seems as if you have done quite the opposite.”

He tilted his head just slightly to the side. Again, it was almost imperceptible and would have been completely so if not for the level of Keandra's scrutiny.

“Sometimes such encounters are inevitable. Even the best of plans can run into unexpected obstacles.”

“Were any of your resources damaged?”

His words cut her off before she had a chance to justify the encounter with security, and caught her off balance. Did he know about E-jekt? Or at the least, did he know that one of them had been injured? Keandra tried to make sure most of her team was hidden and never known about. Being too well-known could be a hazard. The only faces and false identities they ever shared publicly were hers and Lance's.

Too late, Keandra realized she had given him information. This time the smile crept around his face and reached up to his eyes with a brief sparkle that let her know he was only plying her for information. Even if he did know about her team, he clearly didn't have the facts relating to E-jekt's injury. But now he knew that someone was hurt. She cursed herself for slipping up with so easy a trap.

“Nothing you need to worry about. After all, the resources at our disposal are not what you're really interested in, are they? You are more interested in our results.”

Lance stepped forward as if summoned, pulling the BTL chip out of his pocket and resting it on the table before resuming his sentry position. With two fingers, Keandra slid it across the tablecloth, leaving it halfway between the two of them. He reached out and picked up the chip, handing it over his shoulder without glancing back. The bodyguard removed it from its case and plugged it into a scanner on his watch. Both negotiators waited until the bodyguard performed his analysis.

“It checks out. The chip is valid and undamaged.”

The bodyguard placed the chip back on the table in front of his employer before resuming his station behind the older man’s chair. Mr. Johnson drummed his fingers on the table next to the chip. The motion was light, and Keandra could barely hear the impact with the hard surface.

“Your team performed adequately, and I am glad to see that you have in fact recovered your objective. However, I still maintain issue with your methods.”

“Clearly you don’t have that much of a problem with our methods, or you wouldn’t keep us in your employ. This is the tenth time we’ve been of service to you in the last six months, I believe. If you had a problem with our methods, surely there would be others who would take your money.”

“True enough, which is why it is such a disappointment that you did not rise to the usual level of excellence I have come to expect. Perhaps your reputation is catching up with you and you have hit the limits of what you can accomplish. All things start to fade with time.”

“Even corporations?”

Mr. Johnson chuckled, something that Keandra had never seen before.

“Especially corporations.”

Mr. Johnson pushed his chair back and stood up from the table, scooping up the BTL chip and dropping it into his jacket pocket. He extended a hand palm-up to Keandra. She placed her hand on top of his and he nodded.

“You will find your usual fee deposited into your accounts. I’m sorry to say that your performance means there will be no additional bonus. However, I do hope this is not the last time I will be able to count on your services.”

Keandra smiled and returned the nod. “Of course. I understand completely, Mr. Johnson. Have a wonderful evening. I look forward to our next endeavor.”

“I’ll be in touch.”

With those words, he took his leave, the bodyguard close on his heels as he left the patio. Keandra waited until she received the notification that his vehicle had left the parking lot before picking up her fork and digging in to her food. She was glad to have the opportunity, since her mouth wouldn’t stop watering at the scent of poached sturgeon with lemon. Lance took that as his cue and sat down in Mr. Johnson’s chair, helping himself to the food left behind.

“That seemed to go smoothly, all things considered,” he said between bites.

“Something he said has me uneasy. Did you see how he reacted when I made that crack about corporations? Something big is going on.” Keandra shrugged and devoured another bite of fish. “At least we’ll have more work ahead of us. I suppose that’s the most we can hope for. That and not catching any bullets on our next run. Speaking of, let’s finish up and get back to the primary. I want to check on E-jekt.”

“Paz will be less than pleased if we come back empty-handed.”

“Then take the bottle. We’ve already paid for the whole thing.”

CHAPTER 3

Their primary safehouse was a secured apartment on the twelfth floor in downtown Seattle. Keandra owned the place, purchasing it using certified credsticks years ago when they started to hit their successful stride as shadowrunners. It wasn’t perfect, but it had everything they needed to plan their excursions. Keandra was proud of it, and thankful to have it considering how many times they’d needed to lie low over the years. The building owner made a point not to determine his tenant’s identities, and even removed all cameras in the building. Plus, the location was convenient since it was right in the middle of downtown with restaurants, clubs, and corporate sectors all within easy walking distance. Keandra wondered if they were an anomaly, or if the location was popular with shadowrunners. She’d seen several members of high society in the hallways, so it was clear the apartments catered to the wealthy with a desire for anonymity.

By the time she and Lance arrived at the apartment, E-jekt and Paz were already there. The older ork was on the couch, splayed out with his head propped up on the arm. He had the distant

stare of someone fully in the Matrix. Paz sat on the floor, cleaning a small collection of her armaments that she kept at the safe house. When the door opened, she snatched an Uzi and had it leveled at the opening before Keandra even saw her. She put it back down and clicked the safety on when she recognized the new arrivals.

“You better have brought me back some of that good stuff.”

Lance hurled the bottle at her as soon as Keandra was out of the way, and Paz snapped her arm up to catch it before it could smash against her shoulder. She grinned, pulling out the cork and taking a long swig before putting it down next to her, now smudged with black grease. Keandra went to the kitchen and turned on the air filters. Hopefully they'd help clear out the gun-oil smell pervading the air. When she returned, she dropped on the couch next to E-jekt and looked him over. His body was limp as she lifted his arm and examined the wounds on his side. They were patched up, and only a little bit of redness had bled through the bandage, so he looked like he'd be fine. Probably hurt like hell, though.

She let his arm go and sent him a quick message.

<Care to join us? It's time to debrief.>

E-jekt blinked a few times as he came back to reality and shifted on the couch, wincing in response to the motion. Keandra patted his leg before standing up so he could have the entire space to himself and moving to the center of the room where everyone could see her. The rest of the team gave her their undivided attention, Paz even putting down the gun she was working on.

“I met with Mr. Johnson and he transferred our fee into our team account. On the way back from the restaurant I verified that it's all there. There was no bonus, so after taking out expenses and overhead, we'll each get about five thousand nuyen. Nothing weird there, and the scrubbers are already siphoning the money through to our accounts. It should all be there in about two days.”

“What did the suit have to say? Was he pissed that things got loud and messy?” Paz asked.

“He was less than pleased. That's why there was no bonus. But at least he didn't try to cut our fee. He also said he'd be willing to work with us again, so we didn't burn that bridge.”

“That's a good thing, right? I mean, of all the suits we've worked for over the years, this one pays the best. Usually gives us a bonus too, when things don't get all messed up. Still wish you'd let me go try the fancy food for once.”

E-jekt pushed himself to a sitting position, swinging his legs around so he wasn't taking up the entire couch. He put his hand on his side and pulled it away, checking the palm.

“So I guess it's on to the next job, right, boss?”

“How do you feel?”

“Dead tired and like my skin's just hanging loose around me. I might need to be out for a bit and running remote support. I don't think I'm up for pushing that limit.”

Keandra began to pace, a nervous habit she made sure not to demonstrate when meeting with clients. It was one of the reasons why she preferred a sit-down meeting when engaging in business. However, in front of her team, she didn't bother to hide her habits. She paused, an idea coming to mind. It was crazy, but it could work.

“She's getting that look again. I don't like when she gets that look. At least let me stock up on ammo first.” To accentuate her point, Paz picked up one of her handguns and slammed a magazine into place.

Keandra snapped her attention back to her team.

“I've got an idea. Look, we have a reputation, right? We always get the job done, no matter the risks. We've earned that reputation, and more than one Johnson out there knows we can handle ourselves. Hell, we get more offers for work than we could take on even if we cloned ourselves. I only tell you about the best offers we get. I literally turn down at least ten every week. But you know who doesn't know us? Or at least doesn't know our faces?”

“Knight Errant?”

“Anyone, hopefully.”

“Corporate security?”

“UCAS?”

Keandra shook her head and waved a hand to stop the stream of guesses.

“Other runners. Hell, we don't even know the faces of most other runners. All we know are their aliases and their reputations. Granted, there's a few who like to showboat, but most runners know that getting too popular just paints a big target on your back.”

Keandra paused, waiting to see if anyone else would jump to the same conclusion she had. She glanced from one team member to the next, but they were all silent and waiting for her to finish. Just before she gave up and continued, she saw the light of an idea on E-jekt's face as his eyes went wide and he shook his head.

“You can't be serious.”

“Yes I am! Think about it. It could totally work!”

Paz frowned. “Someone mind filling in the rest of us who aren’t as quick? Your nice loveable enforcers are kinda in the dark here. No offense, skinny.”

Lance just waved a hand, brushing aside Paz’s comment.

E-jekt spoke up. “Well, our illustrious leader wants us to hire other runners to do the work while we get paid.”

The room became so quiet that Keandra could hear faint snatches of music from the club across the street through their soundproofed windows. Paz stared at E-jekt and turned slowly toward Keandra, her eyebrows raised all the way up. Lance tilted his head and scrunched up his face.

“It isn’t as crazy as it sounds,” Keandra said. “If other runners don’t know who we are, we just claim to be a Johnson. I’ll handle the negotiations. It won’t be anything different than what I’m currently doing, I’ll just be sitting on the other side of the table.”

“But you don’t work for a corp!” Paz slammed her gun down on the floor.

“But *they* don’t know that, do they? We take a job and then farm it out to a team we know can get the job done, at a reduced rate. We take the payscale that our reputation earns, and subcontract the work to someone else, letting us collect a small portion of it. Think of it like a finder’s fee. The job still gets done, the Johnson still gets what he wants, the runners still get paid, and so do we. Everyone wins. The best part is, no risk for us. We don’t go into the hot zones.”

“This is absolutely fucking insane—” Paz began.

Lucas’s eyebrows lifted. “In a rare show of solidarity, I find that I have to agree with our mechanized infantry.”

“—and I love it!” the dwarf finished.

Lucas rolled his head back until he struck the wall and spoke to the ceiling. “So much for that feeling of harmony.”

Keandra turned to face E-jekt directly. His opinion would be more than enough to sway Lance to her way of thinking. “What do you think, E-jekt? We’re all getting a little long in the tooth. Maybe it would be best to leave the grunt work to someone else and ride on that reputation we’ve earned. We’ll start small, something easy, and see how it goes.”

All eyes in the room turned to the ork as he deliberated. He took a deep breath and winced, bringing his hand once again to his side. After a

few more gentle breaths, he opened his eyes and looked at Keandra.

“You do have a point.”

Keandra turned to Lance, but she already knew the battle was won. He appeared to know it too, as he held up both hands in supplication. “If everyone wants to go down this crazy road, I am more than willing to participate and learn what trouble I need to save you from.”

She nodded. “All right, it’s decided, then. The first thing we need to do is to find a good job, and then start looking for runners who could take it on. E-jekt, I want you to start compiling a list of runner teams in the area that are looking for work. Try to find someone who has a decent track record, but is either new to the scene or at least hasn’t taken on any big jobs. I’ll start filtering through our backlog and see what we can try that wouldn’t be too large of a task: probably something that would normally be beneath our paygrade. I’ll come up with an excuse for why we’re taking the job. Lance, you’ll need to take on the most dangerous part of this.”

“What would that be?”

“You need to help Paz look presentable as a bodyguard for a Johnson.”

For what may have been the first time Keandra had ever seen, Lance was speechless. No pithy comeback rolled off his tongue, and he could only stare at Paz. She offered him a toothy smile that promised a future filled with difficulty.

“But that’s tomorrow. For tonight, let’s get some rest. We’ve certainly earned it.”

With those words, the meeting ended. Lance and Paz gathered their belongings and prepared to leave. When E-jekt started to stand up from the couch, Keandra put a hand on his shoulder. “Crash here. I’ll get you a blanket and a pillow.”

“I can make it back to my place just fine.”

Keandra didn’t bother responding. She knew the more she argued, the more he would dig in his heels. Instead, she went to the linen closet and pulled out some extra bedding. By the time she came back into the living room, the other two had left. Keandra tossed the bedding on the couch next to E-jekt. She turned around and walked down the hall to her bedroom. Behind her, she heard him grumbling, but also making himself comfortable. Yes, he could handle the trip back, but she felt better this way.

As she crawled into her own bed and arranged the bedding around her to form a nest, her mind wandered over the proposed plan. Doubts started to creep in past the false confidence she’d displayed to her team. She mentally

worked through the potential problems multiple times, convincing herself as much as she had the others. It took over an hour, but she eventually managed to fall into a restless sleep.

She woke at five in the morning, sweat covering her body, and jerked to a sitting position. Keandra rubbed her face, shaking off any last vestiges of sleep. Out of habit, she checked the proximity sensors and everything was safe. As she started her morning routine, she called up a list of the possible jobs archived on her commlink.

By the time the sun was up and she didn't feel quite so guilty about disturbing her guest, she'd identified the job they would use for their trial run. She'd even sent a message to the Johnson, requesting more details and negotiating the fee. The initial communication with his secretary had gone well, and everything appeared to be going according to plan. He was grateful that they could find time to take on his task. It was a straightforward wetwork gig for a target with a very predictable schedule. Discretion was not required, which made Keandra feel more comfortable handing it off to runners who might possess less finesse. It wasn't her favorite type of job, but they had taken a few over the years and this was the best option to try her idea.

When Keandra entered the living room, E-jekt was awake and already plugged into the Matrix, given the distant look in his eyes. She sent him a message. *<Any luck finding us a team?>*

<Going through the potentials right now, actually. Do you know what kind of job it is?>

<Wetwork, so make sure they've got a track record for that.>

<I've got a team that'll work. Not too famous, but they have some prime jobs under their belt. They've got a rep for being hotheads, though.>

<Set it up.>

Keandra closed the display and went back to her room to pick out an outfit. She probably wouldn't need to meet with Mr. Johnson to finalize the arrangements. They had worked together before, and this job was simple enough that they already had enough details to go on. So she needed to make sure she looked the part of a corporate employer. Something strong and commanding, intimidating without being over the top or trying too hard.

She was perusing her options when her commlink pinged with a message from E-jekt.

<Lance and Paz are on their way. Our meeting is scheduled for three hours from now. I don't like this plan.>

<Starting to have doubts, my old friend?>

<Barely older than you.>

Keandra paused, waiting for his next message. She knew he was trying to decide on his exact words.

<I'll still go along with it. Let's just be careful.>

<We always are.>

<And yet I still got shot.>

<Maybe you should wear some armor. We'll pick you up some on the way to the restaurant. Besides, you need to look your part as well. As for your worries, what's the worst that could happen? They realize I'm not a Johnson and decide to open fire in the middle of a public venue? This'll be easy.>

<I hate when you say that.>

CHAPTER 4

Keandra looked around the small room of the restaurant they were using for the meet. She didn't want to use Elliot's, because she didn't want to risk being recognized. While she trusted the staff there, that trust only went so far. She was taking on a completely different persona, so it made sense to use a completely different location. They had decided on an upscale sushi restaurant only a few blocks from Pike's Place market. It was close enough that the scent of saltwater and fish was strong every time the door opened.

The room was dimly lit, which suited Keandra's purposes. If it was harder for anyone to see her face clearly, she could use that to her advantage. They had decided that E-jekt and Lance would stay with her in the room, while Paz took on the role of external guard, limiting who was allowed entrance. Just in case things did go poorly, Keandra wanted the entire team around for an easier escape.

She set up the chairs so she faced the only entrance. It would make a quick getaway more difficult, but it was also the power seat. And even if she was nervous about the meeting, she wanted to project the appearance of complete control and confidence. After all, it was the seat she would have given to a Johnson if she were the one seeking a job. Lance stood just behind her

right shoulder, while E-jekt took the chair to her left and immediately pulled up his AR interface. He shifted in his seat, grunting and shrugging his shoulders as he tried to get used to the new armored vest. As far as Keandra knew, this was the first time he had ever worn anything protective enough to be restricting.

“It would be trivial to code up a simple sprite to hide your face and alter your voice.”

Keandra’s jaw clenched and she resisted the urge to sigh, instead taking a slow measured breath. “Stop and think for a second about what you’re suggesting. Have you ever known a Johnson to be afraid to show her face or hide her voice? They’d know we were faking it in a second.”

“Not if I made your voice sound like someone else.”

“And not be in complete control and work my magic? No. We’ve been over this. It’s a bad plan. No disguises and no filters. We’ll play it out and it will work.”

<We got company. All five of them showed up. Just pointed in our direction.>

The message from Paz made Keandra sit up straighter and lift her chin so she was looking down her nose when she stared at the doorway. She fired off a quick message before tucking her commlink away.

<Only let two of them enter. I want them outnumbered for the negotiation.>

<Roger.>

The three in the room waited in silence as the other group confronted Paz. The room’s soundproofing made it impossible to make out the words, but they could hear voices increasing in volume. Apparently the team’s reputation for being a bit hotheaded was well earned. Through it all, the door handle didn’t budge until the voices died down and it was clear some type of agreement had been reached.

The door slid open, and a human walked in with a large, angry female troll just behind him. The troll sneered as she walked into the room and pulled her shoulders back, letting her jacket part a little to display the arsenal she carried. Keandra was not impressed and also not surprised. The human took a seat at the table directly across from Keandra. The troll in turn glared at Lance, who kept his face impassive, not even making eye contact.

“You must be our Johnson. Name’s Graham. I heard you got a job for me and my team.”

Graham extended a hand, but Keandra kept hers folded in front of her. After a brief moment

of tension, he withdrew it and hid it under the table. At least he was being professional, even if he didn’t have quite the level of sophistication she was used to. She offered a brief nod as greeting before she spoke.

“Indeed, we do have work that may appeal to those of your talents. You received the dossier?”

Graham nodded, sliding forward in his seat so he could lean back more easily. The leather of his coat creaked as he made himself comfortable. He looked up, staring into the space above Keandra’s head for a moment. His gaze flicked over to the troll before returning to her. Keandra’s legs tensed. Clearly he was reading or sending a message. She kept her arms still, willing her nervous energy not to creep up past her waist.

“Although I do have a bit of a problem with the fee. I think that for what you’re asking, we should be looking at fifteen thousand. Ten seems too low a bid when you’re buying services of our caliber.”

Keandra relaxed and let the corner of her mouth creep up into a smile. Price negotiation was something she could handle. It was also something she should have expected, especially for a first contact. They’d want to see how much they could squeeze out of their new Johnson, and how much of a stickler she would be for the proposed arrangement.

“I do not think that your reputation precedes you as much, or as favorably, as you expect. If you’d like, my associate here would be more than willing to provide some recordings that clearly demonstrate your caliber. Three weeks ago, a convoy heist, I believe?”

E-jekt pulled up a video feed for everyone in the room. It was a recording from a series of traffic cams that managed to catch the entire heist from start to finish. There was no sound, but the resolution was high enough that E-jekt ran a facial recognition program at the same time, clearly identifying three of the members of the team. As the video progressed, Graham’s mouth tightened and he looked away, glancing toward an empty corner. Keandra nudged E-jekt under the table with her boot, and he cut the display.

“As you see, we do our due diligence when looking for the services that your kind provides.”

Keandra watched Graham as she pressed her superiority. His eyes flashed and his gaze shot back to her, so she decided to ease off for the moment. Right now he was still willing to do the job. If she pushed too far, she would lose him.

“However, I do appreciate your candor and dedication to making sure the job gets done.

Your team has shown a persistence and determination that are worth paying a premium. I'll raise your fee to twelve thousand, with an additional three thousand as a bonus if you handle the matter discreetly."

Keandra sat back, letting her posture ease. She could see him recognize the gesture, and some tension seeped out of his neck. That was just the effect she wanted, and at just the right time. She waited as he debated her offer. Most likely, he was conferring with his team and making sure they agreed to the terms. She was tempted to ask E-jekt to poke into their conversations and see if he could relay the messages to her, but it wasn't worth the risk. A corporate Johnson wouldn't bother with such tactics because the Johnson would have all the power. She needed to be the Johnson and think like one.

"Well, Ms. Johnson, it looks like you have yourself a team," Graham said. "We'll take care of your problem within the next twenty-four hours, and report in when it's done."

This time when he stuck his hand forward, Keandra grasped it. His grip was strong, and he offered a single solid shake before letting go and turning his back to her to leave the room. His companion backed out, facing forward until the door was shut. Keandra and her crew waited in silence, the entire group staring at the door until Paz messaged them.

<They're gone. Got in a car and turned the corner.>

The dwarf walked into the room so they could have some privacy without needing to resort to messaging. She dropped into the chair vacated by Graham and the simple wooden structure groaned in response to her sudden weight. E-jekt let out a sigh that matched the furniture's complaint.

"It actually worked." His tone indicated his surprise.

Keandra nodded and smiled. "Of course it worked. I told you this would be simple enough. I've certainly met with enough Johnsons over the years that impersonating one wouldn't be a problem. I'm just glad you were able to add the facial recognition program to the recording. I think that bit tipped him over the edge. Now we just need to make sure they actually do the job.

"Lance, go keep an eye on them. I want you in position in case they fail to take out the target. If they handle it on their own, don't be seen. They've seen our faces and I don't want them to think we're keeping tabs on them. But for this to work, they need to succeed. Otherwise, we'll need to pick up the slack."

Paz smacked the table with a bark of laughter. "Looks like I get to be stuffing my face this time while you're doing the heavy lifting."

"Sorry, Paz. We won't be staying," Keandra said. "We'll be in the van a few blocks away in case he needs backup. I don't want to take any chances."

Despite some heavy grumbling, Paz agreed and left to go get the limo they'd rented in case anyone was watching their movements too closely. It was a bit much, even for a Johnson, but Keandra figured it would be better to go over the top than too subtle. They didn't want anyone looking too hard into their past, and would rather have an aura that radiated wealth and influence. A little bit of wealth made you a target. A lot of wealth made you a force to avoid.

As they passed back through the restaurant, Keandra paid close attention to the people who looked at their group. She made mental notes of anyone who showed more than a passing interest. Most of the diners paid attention to their food, ignoring them as much as they did the waitstaff.

One elf sitting at a table by himself caught her attention. She recognized him from when they'd first entered. He still didn't have any food in front of him, and the only beverage on the table was water. Their meeting hadn't taken that long, but his presence still seemed odd. He looked at her, but as soon as he recognized her scrutiny, his gaze snapped back to the space in front of him. Keandra didn't know if she was being paranoid, but the interaction made the hairs on her neck stand on end. She'd need to ask E-jekt to investigate this person later. For now, they had a job to do and an image to maintain.

Within minutes, they'd left the restaurant, dropped off the car, and retrieved their van. Lance was in pursuit of the runner team they hired, close by but staying out of sight. Apparently the team wasn't too careful about making sure they weren't tracked. They had settled into a building, possibly one of their safehouses. Keandra and her team likewise got settled, ready to wait all day and night if need be. They slept in shifts, getting rest while they could in case they'd need to be up all night. Lance had the unfortunate reality of needing to stay awake the entire time, but with his abilities, one night wouldn't be a problem.

The sun had long since set when Paz shook Keandra's shoulder to wake her. They were still

parked on the edge of the same side street in downtown Ballard, but now the continuous roar and rumble of passing cars had faded to the occasional hum. Few people were out on the street at this time. The display on the windshield said it was 2:20 in the morning.

“They’re on the move. Meat-sack has a feed,” the dwarf said.

While Paz navigated through the streets, Keandra watched the feed playing on the interior wall of the van. It showed an empty intersection, dark with a flickering light overhead. The view panned around the corner until they saw a single car on the road, brake lights coming on before it took a corner. Lance drove out of the side street to the next corner, and then continued to watch. He drove without lights and crept up to each intersection, taking all the precautions he could to not be detected. Keandra was amazed that he didn’t lose the other team, but he knew how to do his job.

Eventually the car came to a stop and the team climbed out of the vehicle. Lance parked his bike against a wall, then scaled the wall so fast that the feed was a shaky blur. Keandra closed her eyes briefly to keep from getting motion sickness. When she opened them, Lance was at the front corner of the building, looking down at the runners across the street and just over a block away.

Another car met them at the location and a couple of other people joined the small group. They gathered in a knot and began to talk as they unloaded and prepped their weapons. All told, there were five people in the group. That was their entire team.

<It appears our employees are ready to hit the target.> Lance sent a message over their network.

<Maintain watch, but keep out of sight.> Keandra wanted to see if this would work, and the only way to test that was to pretend as if they weren’t there.

Two of the team members stayed near the vehicles, leaning against them and passing a bottle back and forth. The other three crossed the street and walked up to the front door of an apartment building. Two kept watch while the third took a knee and manipulated the lock. After a few moments, the area was suddenly bathed in light, making all the runners jump.

The liquor bottle smashed against the ground and shattered. The troll grabbed the guy working on the door and yanked him back so hard he fell on his ass in the street. Then she charged the door, breaking it down with her sheer size and strength.

<Guess they won’t be able to claim that bonus you proposed.>

Keandra didn’t bother to respond; she was transfixed by the feed. Secrecy was never part of their arrangement, but she needed to make sure the team at least pulled off the job. If they failed now, the target would be aware and any future attempts would be much more difficult, if not impossible. She turned to E-jekt, crouched up against the van’s back doors.

“Can you see if that building has any security cameras? If we can get eyes inside, we need them.”

The area in front of the building was still bathed in light, but at least the three runners were inside the building now. The other two ducked behind the vehicles, taking cover and holding up their weapons. A few seconds later, a couple of Knight Errant vehicles skidded around the corner, lights flashing.

“They have cameras, but I’d need a local bug. There should be access on the roof.”

<Our local, incorruptible law enforcement has arrived. If I need to intervene to finish the contract, I should enter now.>

Paz revved the van’s engine and glanced at Keandra. “Time for some backup action?”



FIN



COMBAT BIKER SEASON PREVIEW

From SportStream's Anka Rolle

All the talk and hype are finally ready to die down and be replaced by action as the combat biker season is about to jump out of the starting gates! Before the first engine revs, we're here to give you are bold predictions! Check back with us as the season goes along to see how we did!

PREDICTION 1

The revamped Suzuki Mirage will draw a lot of complaints for more sluggish acceleration, leading to at least one high-profile biker switching rides.

PREDICTION 2

Surging phenom Hannah "Seoulo" Kim is due for a comedown. She'll still be a good player, but the dominant streak some have been predicting won't happen.

PREDICTION 3

The World Combat Cyclists League has teased a mid-season announcement of a forthcoming expansion team. My bold prediction: Shiawase gets a team.

PREDICTION 4

The Horizon Prodigies will be the surprise team of the year—by the middle of the season, people will have to start seriously considering them as championship contenders.

GRANNY SWEETSPELL'S SNICKERDOODLES

These sweet and sticky cookies are so delightful that you should share them with everyone. Even your worst enemy will become a dear friend when you gather around these wonderful treats—enhanced, as always, by a touch of Granny Sweetspell magic.

INGREDIENTS

- 2½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 teaspoons cream of tartar
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- 1 cup unsalted butter, sliced
- 1¼ cup dark brown sugar
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon plain Greek yogurt
- 1 cup caramel squares, cut into quarters
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- Coarse sea salt for sprinkling



1 Granny and her coven use these as preparations for Influence spells. They always pack an extra punch.

2 This is Granny abandoning subtlety about how she uses things like this.

3 The sea you get the salt from very much makes a difference. Check background counts! Toxic waters = more anger in the devourer.

4 Consider reducing the sugar amount and substituting honey collecting from Awakened bees for a potency boost.

5 Obviously, chimera chicken eggs are ideal. Only use double-yoked eggs when you need to convert the Pope or something!

6 The crew you get together to make this is important, but don't neglect your tools! If your mixing bowl isn't already enchanted, what are you waiting for?
AND USE A GAS OVEN,
FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE!



PEACEFUL Violent protest thwarted

**—AND
TURNED
VIOLENT
BY CORPS!**

APRIL 29, 2075, THAILAND

An embattled commercial development project near the Thai city of Chiang Mai faced another protest that unfortunately turned **INTO A SHOOTING GALLERY** **ORDINARY CITIZENS** violent. Officials on the scene have confirmed that twelve are dead, with an unknown number wounded after the ~~terrorists~~ fled into the mountains. **TO AVOID BEING SHOT!**

This is just the latest incident in a long string of protests and complications for the development project being undertaken by Sansiri **A WHOLLY OWNED SUBSIDIARY OF SHIAWASE...** PCL Group. The project, which ~~received the go-ahead~~ from the Thai government eighteen months ago, aims to develop 283 acres of **WAS FUELED BY BRIBES AND BLACKMAIL TO** **CORPORATE ULTRA-WEALTHY.** ~~unused forest~~ land into a thriving subdivision of commercial areas and modern housing for the ~~thriving Thai economy.~~ **THE HOMES OF SENTIENT AND MAGIC BEINGS**

“It is certainly unfortunate, I ~~wish it hadn't happened.~~ This isn't the first obstacle we have faced with this project, but I hope it will **PASSIVELY ALLOWED THIS TO** be the last. We are going forward with the project as planned,” stated Areva Prachuab ~~spokesperson~~ **PUBLIC SPIN DOCTOR** for Sansiri PCL. **BY BULLDOZING ACRES OF TREES**

Protests started early in the morning of the 29th as Sansiri crews were set to begin work for the day. Security forces were called in when protesters approached the corporate equipment with ~~improvised weapons~~ and ~~made threats~~ against the ~~un~~armed workers. **GREEN ARM BANDS CHANTED SLOGANS**

Things took a turn for the worse when several naga—a species known for ~~their violent tendencies~~—attacked Sansiri security **BEING SCARY TO THE SMALL-MINDED** personnel **WHO FEARED** **MAGICAL DEFENSE AND SHITTING THEIR PANTS ABOUT IT,** with their innate magical abilities. Not having any ~~other way~~ to counter the ~~mystical onslaught~~, Sansiri security—after **NO**

issuing ~~several~~ warnings—opened fire after the protesters refused to disengage. By the end of the incident, twelve protesters were dead, while the rest fled back into the mountain forest surrounding the development site.

WHAT A JOKE

URBAN BRAWL



AERIN "FLYNN" SKOBHAN
PORTLAND PALADINS

URBAN BRAWL



TORAN SKELLY

CHICAGO SENSATIONS

URBAN BRAWL



BENGISKHAN

TACOMA WINGS

URBAN BRAWL



CARVER

BOSTON MASSACRE

URBAN BRAWL



CONRAD RUNCITER
NEW YORK SLASHERS

URBAN BRAWL



BARRAT RICHARDS
SEATTLE SCREAMERS



**ONCE IN
A LIFETIME
SHOW!**

**ONE
NIGHT
ONLY!**

MARIA MERCURIAL IN CONCERT!
FAREWELL TOUR!

You only have one chance to catch the concert experience of the year—don't miss it! You will want to be among the lucky few to see what this living legend can do live!

A Wilmore (Gavilan) Entertainment Production



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