

SHADOWRUN

STORM FRONT



ALL-SHAKING THUNDER

It's been a tense couple of years (or couple of decades, if we're being accurate) in the Sixth World. Aztlan and Amazonia have been slugging it out. Great dragons have turned on each other, testing old alliances and forging new ones. Governor Kenneth Brackhaven of Seattle is facing pressure unlike ever he's ever seen, and scandals seem on the verge of overwhelming him. In Denver, a powerful dragon and an angry elf are set to butt heads in ways that will shake the whole city—and provide new opportunities for an old enemy. And on top of that, a new plague is spreading through the world, and the denizens of JackPoint aren't immune to its effects.

All this tension has been building up, and in *Storm Front*, it breaks. *Storm Front* provides background and updates on these and other plotlines changing the shape of the Sixth World. The shadows are shifting, and runners need to move fast if they want to earn a paycheck—or if they want to keep from being crushed as the powers of the world slug it out. The world is changing, but some things remain the same. Power will corrupt. Money will flow to those who already have it. And shadowrunners will scramble to make a living without selling their soul.

Storm Front provides plot information as well as adventure hooks that are compatible with *Shadowrun, Fourth Edition* while also laying the groundwork for the upcoming *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition*. As a bridge between the two editions, this book is useful to all Shadowrun players, setting the stage for explosive stories and memorable campaigns.



SHADOWRUN

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Posted by: FastJack

Given all of the things that I'm going to share with you in this posting, what I'm about to say might sound odd, but I'm saying it anyway: All in all, we're getting off easy. We've seen the world go nuts before. The Great Ghost Dance (yeah, yeah, none of you are old enough to remember it. Shut up), VITAS, the two Crashes, and more—several times this century, the world has completely upheaved itself, erased and rewritten large parts of the map, turned powerful people into peons and peons into kings, and so on and so forth. What's happening now is plenty dramatic, and lots of people are going to lose their lives due to what's going on, but at least it doesn't feel like the world is going to end for all of us. The world economy is not going to collapse. Megacorporations are not going away. The players are changing, but the shadows are remaining in place. Work is flooding our way. Some of us will drown in that flood—a few of us have already gone down—but the rest of us will get calls from Mr. Johnson throwing money our way as long as we put our lives on the line. Just like always.

I'm not saying that nothing has changed, though. We've got a war that's tumbled to a conclusion, with a clear winner and an angry loser; a shakeup among the great dragons; including a death; a clash of powers in Denver raining chaos on the city; and political pressure mounting in Seattle. And then we have—well, we have something else.

Fortunately for most of us but unfortunately for a select few, JackPointers have been out there, seeing what's happening first hand and doing their best to come back and report to the rest of us. Most of them made it back in pretty much one piece, and I have hopes that a few others will re-appear sooner or later. For now, we have a lot of solid information that will help you navigate the changing world.

First, we take a look at the resolution of the Aztlan-Amazonia war. I can't say I'm surprised by the eventual outcome, but the war took some interesting twists and turns to reach its final endpoint, and the rubble left down Bogotá way promises to cast some interesting shadows for a good long time.

Next up is a brief recounting of the Great Dragon Civil War that sets up the epic clash that happened in GeMiTo recently,

leaving a great dragon dead. A good number of shadowrunners didn't make it back from that fight, but I know a few who made it through and came back with heavily padded bank accounts—and some incredible stories to tell.

Then we take another look at the shadowrunning capital of the world, Seattle, where the Brackhaven administration has hit a level of disarray I've never seen it accomplish before. It's to the point where I can't be sure Brackhaven will survive, and judging by the amount of money pouring into the shadows, a lot of other people feel the same way and are anxious to help grease the skids for their beloved governor.

After that we move to Denver for a look at how Ghostwalker's been operating ever since his mysterious return. It's not entirely clear what's happening in that town, but someone seems to have a serious grudge against the White Wyrn—and the balls to attempt to take him on. The city keeps exploding in chaos, and there are plenty of parties there who know how to take advantage of a good crisis.

The next area of focus is Ares. The release of their horribly malfunctioning gun, the Excalibur, was bad enough for them, but they seem to be having trouble recovering from it. It's like there are some forces actively holding them down, and Sticks has some ideas about what that might be.

Then we have some quick hits, a look at some of the people and places undergoing some interesting evolutions, including the Tir Tairngire Council of Princes, vampire hunter Martin de Vries, the big three Japanacorps, and a check in with our old friend Dodger.

The last chapter is—well, it's rather personal. I put everything I wanted to say in that chapter, so I don't need to say anything more about it right here.

This is the part where I tell you to read on and use what you learn to make some money. This time, though, I want to say this: Stay alive. We've lost some, we're going to lose more, and we need everyone we can get. We need what you know and what you're going to learn. So stay alive. For me, if you can't figure out a reason to do it for yourself.



Connecting JackPoint VPN ...
... Matrix Access ID Spoofed.
... Encryption Keys Generated.
... Connected to Onion Routers.
> Login

> Enter Passcode

... Biometric Scan Confirmed.
Connected to <ERROR: NODE UNKNOWN>

*"Hard pounding, gentlemen. Let's see who pounds the longest."
-The Duke of Wellington*

JackPoint Stats

140 users currently active
in the network

Latest News

* <011875> It's all done. The maintenance is complete. Just got some emergency security measures to put in place, but ... well, more about that later. -FastJack

Personal Alerts

* You have 7 new [private messages](#).
* You have 4 [messages](#) queued for anonymous re-routing.
* You have received 3 new [Metalink Friends](#) add requests.
* 4 individuals have dropped you as [Metalink Friends](#)
* You have 27 [new responses](#) to your JackPoint posts.
* PDA: Your fixer says his headache has gotten worse, and he says everyone should stay away from him for a while.

First Degree

You are hidden from all contacts.

Your **Current Rep Score**: 73
(61% positive)

Current Time: January 18, 2075, 11:35

PREFERENCES

FEEDS

TASKS

LINKS

HISTORY

Welcome back to JackPoint, omae;
your last connection was severed: 16
hours, 12 minutes, 45 seconds ago.

Today's Heads Up

- * If Brackhaven goes down, don't you want to grease the chute? [Tag: [Dirty Tricks](#)]
- * There are many ways to be a samurai. Most of them hurt. [Tag: [The Way of the Samurai](#)]

Incoming

- * History is important, especially when there are people who might shoot history in your face [Tag: [Euro Wars Antiques](#)]
- * We finally had enough operatives return from the wild alive to put together a report on critters [Tag: [Parazoology 2](#)]

Top News Items

- * Media blackout from Asamando continues; Matrix interference is happening on "a level not seen since the Crash," GOD investigators say. [Link](#)
- * Celedyr announces relocation of critical NeoNET research projects from Albuquerque to Boston. [Link](#)
- * Aztechnology mages call reports of manmade structure allegedly discovered in Antarctica "nothing more than pure fantasy." [Link](#)



CHAT

MESSAGES

FILES

POSTS

NEXUS

SEARCH

STORM FRONT

Posts/Files tagged with
"Storm Front"

Eye of the Hurricane
The Triumph of Aztlan
Fall of a Dragon
Seattle Shakes

[More]

CONTINUE

ADVANCED
SEARCH

SAVE

Active



ComStar
Firewall

Active



Jack-in-the-Box
Antivirus

Active



SpamWitch
Filter

On/Receiving



Commcode

Excellent



Signal

Active



Hidden
Mode



Local
Map

... EYE OF THE HURRICANE ...

All the runners I've ever known—the ones still *living*, anyway—say to never go on a bender the night before a big job. You do too much boozing, chipping, whoring, whatever, and your brain's gonna be duller for the whole rest of the day after you wake up. Synapses don't fire as quickly. Slower reaction time. A nanosecond's hesitation can get even the best runner in his prime killed.

So, why in the hell do I have this Turing-cursed hangover?

First thing I notice on waking up—besides the buzzing in the back of my head and the throbbing at my temples and the base of my neck—is my left arm, just a few centimeters from my face. It's depilated, to better show off my nanotattoos, except I can't even make out the design from this close. I slide my arm away from my face to bring the rest of the world into focus. Everything sharpens except for the tattoo. The programmable nanite design is something unrecognizable. Rubbing my eyes of sleep and refocusing them doesn't help; it only accentuates the wrongness of what used to be a painstakingly crafted gold-and-red *draco occidentalis* coiling around my forearm. Now it looks like blocks of garbage code, like the 256th-level glitch from that ancient 2D game with the yellow ball that eats ghosts. The mirrored nanotattoo on my other arm is likewise wrong. Placing both arms side by side, the patterns—seemingly random at first—match each other perfectly, as though this was intentional.

Must've had too much to drink to have done something like that, because I sure as hell don't remember reconfiguring it. I close my eyes—not because I have to, but because it helps to shut out the light right now—and access the tattoo nanites' programmable function. Buffer recall easily restores the twin dragons in seconds. Should be faster, but this hangover is slowing everything down.

I don't understand this. Don't remember having *anything* to drink last night. Okay, *maybe* I had *one* drink, but that wouldn't dull me like this. In fact, I don't even remember quite what I did last night.

Think, Ragno. What did you do last night?

I sit up, wander into the shower. Water always seems to help jog the memory. Last night was ... the meet at Sulla Vite with Signora Rossi. Had one glass of *vino rosso* with dinner and a chocolate gelato while we reviewed the plans for tonight. Nothing that would make me feel like this.

Showers usually wash away all remnants of the night—the *vino*, the women, the entertainment—but not today. That buzzing in the back of my head is still there, but it's not the buzz I'm used to. For those of us in constant contact with the Matrix, the continuous flow of data in and out of our brains is a comforting presence. The input/output stream passes through my consciousness like a raging river when I need it, or a gentle brook when I don't. I can speed up or slow down the information as much as I want, but it's always there, even if it's just a trickle. Now, though, the brook feels ... polluted somehow. Like someone put a filter on incoming data. Or the signal-to-noise ratio is drowning out important data with random garbage.

This is not good.

As I'm getting ready for today's job, the background noise isn't getting any better. A breakfast of soykaf, a *cornetto*, and some methamphetamines pills doesn't help calm it. A quick run on the treadmill does wonders for my stiff muscles, but my brain still feels like it's lodged sideways in my cranium.

Something's wrong with my wetware. I'm sure of it. Problem is, I don't know of any street docs that would have any clue on how to treat a virtuakinet, and, besides, I *really* don't want anyone rooting around in my brainpan unless it's necessary. One wrong move and I could end up lobotomized or lose my connection to the Matrix for good. Or the *medico* could sell me out and my brain would end up in a jar in some Mitsuhama lab somewhere.

Whatever's wrong with me, it feels like my skull's home to a hundred lightning bugs all fighting to get out of a jar that's just too damn small.

Maybe it's the Dissonance creeping up on me.

Maybe I'm just getting old.

I spend most of the morning going over the plan in my head. The more familiar with it I am, the better I'll be in case this noise doesn't go away. So far, the noise is mucking with my concentration whenever I try to do anything more complicated with the Matrix than access a public node with very little security. I try to thread a complex form to take root access from the soykaf shop across the street, just to see if I can do it; it works, but almost trips an alarm. From the streams of Matrix code, I try compiling a low-rating sprite. I call it Zero-Uno. It coalesces in my AR view as this lopsided, geometric monster that again makes me think of the 256th-level glitch.

Zero-Uno works, but just barely, and the attempt nearly knocks me out. I keep the sprite cached just in case; no need to let that effort go to waste.

After another soykaf, I'm heading out the door of my flat with my Beretta 97 tucked into a shoulder holster, my dummy commlink shoved into the pocket of my jacket, and a swirl of Matrix noise rattling around in my head. I've got my jacket sleeves rolled up to my elbows, so both dragon tattoos are visible.

No one hassles me on my way down the street. The uninitiated take one look at the tats and assume I work for the great dragon Alamaï, who seems to be dropping by every once in a while to remind us small folk that he's *capo* at the top of the food chain. These people think if they look at me wrong, I can summon the golden *bastardo* right on the spot and he'll eat them all. If people want to think that, fine; I don't do anything to discourage them, but the tattoos are for something else entirely.

A large shadow covers the street for a moment, and I flinch. A dragon—a *real* dragon—just passed in front of the sun, flying on its way to wherever. Can't tell if it's a great or a normal dragon. All I know is, from its coloring, it's not Alamaï, and I can breathe a sigh of relief. How long ago was it that the average man on the street



never saw a dragon? Nowadays, dragon sightings are so common that the occurrence is becoming customary. Give it another few weeks, and I'm sure I won't even notice how many dragons are in the sky anymore.

Though I've already had more than enough caffeine, I stop in a soykaf house on Via Gaudenzio Ferrari. My game face is on; it's easier to maintain today because of my hangover, bad dream, Dissonance, or whatever is going on with me. Sitting in the back corner is part one of my job. A pert, young businesswoman in a snappy Italian pantsuit sips a cappuccino along with the rest of the mid-morning crowd, while perusing something in an AR.

"Buon giorno, Signora," I say. "How are the markets looking today?"

Capricia Fuselli, granddaughter of N'drangheta Dona Allegra Fuselli, glances up at me through the AR overlay for only a single moment. "Sit."

I slide into the booth across from her. The waitress stops by and I order a double espresso. Two soykafs already today, and I still feel like I haven't slept in weeks, so I'll take all the help I can get. "Signora Fuselli," I say, but she cuts me off with a glare I believed could drive off a crazed free spirit, were she so inclined.

"You've got a lot of nerve showing your face in this sprawl again, Ragno, after what you did last night."

I recoil from her accusation. I've done many things, some I'm not proud of, but this ...? Last night I was at Sulla Vite, having *vino* and gelato. "I don't—" I quiet down as the waitress drops off my steaming mug and wait for her to leave. "I don't know what you're—"

"Stow it," Capricia snaps. "I will get the info from you one way or another."

"I'm sure you will," I say. I try to play coy, but it's difficult to do while sipping scalding-hot espresso, sending Zero-Uno to search for any recent news items that might be connected to me, and trying to press through the swarm of lightning bugs bouncing around in my skull. "But I honestly don't know what you're talking about."

Capricia frowns. "You think we wouldn't find out? —out? —out?"

A wave of vertigo and nausea hits me. Everything sounds hollow and distant. Capricia turns into a blend of psychedelic colors that waves back and forth, and darkness edges in on my vision.



An explosion of pain brings the world back into focus. I'm not in the booth anymore, but from the heady tang of soykaf vapors I can still smell, I haven't gone far; probably to the apartment above the café. A quick check with a GPS service over the Matrix confirms my suspicion.

I'm sitting in a chair, and sunlight streams into my eyes through the windows. My Beretta and 'link are resting on a nearby table, far

out of arm's reach. Two armed, cybered goons—also in expensive Italian suits—flank Capricia and will likely shoot me dead if I try to make a move for my sidearm.

"Let's try this again," she says. "Tell me who you're working for." "Some small-time outfit," I lie. "You wouldn't know 'em."

She backhands me across the jaw. Takes me a moment to refocus my eyes. I taste blood in my mouth.

"You're working for *il drago*, aren't you?" she says. "Alamais sent you here to kill me, didn't he? He wants to destabilize my grandmother's hold on this part of GeMiTo and crush us for defying him, doesn't he?"

I immediately send Zero-Uno on a quest for any pertinent and current data on the Calabrian N'drangheta. "I already told you, I don't know what you're talking about."

"Then how do you explain this?" Capricia turns her AR window so I can see it.

In some security camera footage, I watch myself, wearing the clothes I wore yesterday, attempting to hack a maglock on the outside of a building.

My throat goes dry. My pulse quickens. I do not remember myself doing that last night.

"What is this?"

"You tell me," she said. "You tried to break into one of our data havens. And you've apparently been a very busy little spider of late, Signore Ragno." She changes the image. "This is from three days ago, when you hit another of our data farms." Another snapshot. "This is from a week ago."

I don't know if I want to laugh or cry. I never did any of those things, but the clips all look real. And in each one I'm wearing outfits I normally wear. Have I been ... sleepwalking? *Sleephacking*?

My throat constricts in on itself and my blood goes cold. Last night's hangover, the reprogrammed nanotats, the reason I feel like I haven't been sleeping, and the lightning bugs all bottled up in my braincase ... What in Turing's name is going on here?

"I ... you've got everything all wrong," I say. "I was ... I don't work for Alamais. The dragon tattoos ... they're just a code. A way of communicating nonverbally to contacts or potential clients. Dragon means I'm working a job. Violin spider means I'm available."

"And the data stores?"

I know she's never going to believe me, no matter how truthful I am. She has evidence of things I don't remember doing and would have no motive for. I feel something break on the inside. All of my hardened runner instincts are gone. "You want to know who I'm working for? Your grandmother the *dona*," I admit. "She wanted an outsider to keep tabs on you. Make sure you weren't trying to create your own power base to push her out of the organization. But this?" I wave at the accusatory AR footage hovering less than a meter in front of me. "There's nothing I can say to convince you that's not me, because, frankly, I can't be sure it's *not* me. But I tell you, I have no conscious memory of any of these incidents. Someone must've done this to me."

A sensation in the back of my thoughts alerts me to Zero-Uno's return.

Did you mean to upload this database to your bio-storage late last night? the sprite said in my AR view. *The data trail marks the files as originating from a series of local nexi operated by the Calabrian N'drangheta Mafia.*



In the space of about five seconds, I scan the database I didn't even realize I already had downloaded to my wetware, and a huge red flag pops up.

By Turing ... it *was* me who had hacked all those mob nodes.

Capricia's eyes narrow into monoblade daggers. "My *nonna* would never have *me* supervised."

"She would if you were *guilty*," I say.

Now she's pointing the pistol right in my face. "Do you know what happens to people who tell lies about me?"

"*Si*," I say as calmly as I can muster. "You sell them out to Alamais. You betray members of your own race to that scaly pile of *merda*."

Capricia winds up to pistol-whip me, but the blow never lands. The sunlight disappears, just like when I was out walking, only this time it doesn't come back. There are—there are *dragon* wings headed straight for the window in front of me. Time slows. A blur of dragon scales sends a thousand barbs of shattered glass sailing through the room. Capricia screams and throws herself to the ground. One of her bodyguards takes a broken piece of windowpane right through the jugular. All of the air seems to have been sucked out of the room. And then, the adult Western dragon falls away from the hole it made in the building, bathing the room in sunlight once again.

Out the window, I see another dragon—a much *bigger* dragon—rearing up to strike at the first dragon.

For five seconds I cannot breathe. When I do, I smell only burning. I dive for the table, grab my Beretta—the commlink is worthless—and run for the door.

"After him!" Capricia shouts.

The surviving goon fires. Splinters from the doorframe pelt my arm as I bolt into the hallway. I blind-fire a few shots of my own, and then I'm down the stairs, into a soykaf house filled with shrieking, fleeing patrons. The ground shakes several times and I nearly fall face-first into broken saucers and mugs. Flames from the upper story lick at my heels.

I don't know if Capricia is still alive or not, and I don't care.

I'm out on the street, which smells like hellfire and brimstone. I look up, and my bravado vanishes with a whimper. The two adult dragons are trading magic and fire in the sky, diving and nipping at each other. Nearby buildings fared far worse than the burning chanel house behind me. Whole sections of pavement have been uprooted. Storefronts were reduced to burning rubble. Smoke and magic paint the morning into a scene of Hell itself.

And then I look past the two wrestling dragons. In the sky above them are *dozens* of other dragons, both young and adult, maybe even a few great dragons for all I know. Scintillating pockets of magical energy created by great form spirits fill the air. Drakes and countless other creatures I cannot even begin to name take to the skies like all the fireflies banging about in my head.

Somehow I've walked right into a scene straight from a war trid.

To get away from dragons, fire, and magic, I run down Via Gaudenzio Ferrari—or what's left of it. At Via Montebello, I turn down a stretch of unbroken road. And for some reason, I can't stop looking behind me at all of the destruction.

Are you getting all this? Zero-Uno asks in my AR overlay.

My wetware's been storing every image my ocular nerves have captured since Capricia woke me. *Start uploading this feed to every news service on the Matrix that you can reach*, I instruct the sprite. *I have a feeling we just walked into a fight we want no part of.*

Ahead, I catch sight of the Mole Antonelliana's upper spire. Tallest brick building in the Sixth World, home of Museo Nazionale del Trideo. Right now it's probably one of the safest places in all of Torino. If I can just get there and find my way out of the sprawl, maybe I can figure out what's gone wrong with my head.

The sky darkens as I'm almost to the base of the *mole*. Two more dragons blot out the sun. Amid a haze of fireballs and ear-scraping dragon shrieks, both reptilian beasts collide into the Mole Antonelliana's squarish, conical crown—and burst through the other side in a spray of brick, glass, and fury. The massive, broken spire leans toward me in slow motion as gravity wins. I keep running, regardless. Grit and debris rains on my face. The sun darkens again, but not from dragons this time. It is inevitability.

I glance down at my arms. The twin tattoos are no longer dragons, but the 256th-level glitch again, changing with each fraction of a second.

Someone is reprogramming them, but it's not me.



... THE TRIUMPH OF AZTLAN ...

Forward Air Base, Task Force Two

Location: Classified

1415 ZULU

Long ago, Major Hector Mendoza's first flight instructor told him that the hardest part of battle was waiting for it to happen. In his youth, that was especially true; Mendoza was always driven, determined to accomplish whatever was required to get whatever he desired. This drive had carried him well through his military career, fast-tracking him to major five years ahead of his peers. Combined with his natural skills and instincts (his superiors called him a "hot stick"), Mendoza was confident bordering on arrogant and aggressive in the sky. In short, he was a perfect combat pilot. He relished the time he spent in his plane; merging his mind with a powerful craft was intoxicating, to say the least. And yet, despite the awesome destructive forces at his command, when he was gliding among the clouds, he never felt more at peace. With over fifty combat missions completed without so much as a scratch on his craft, Major Mendoza felt completely invincible.

At least, until the demons visited his home city of Cali.

Mendoza clenched the small sun coin in his hand once again, focusing his will to keep his mind clear and focused. Since command started the operation, Mendoza and his squadron had been placed on high alert. His squadron's twelve-hour rotation was almost complete, and soon another would take their place as the alert-ready aircraft. But until he was relieved, he had to be ready for the call. So he sat in the cockpit of his fighter with his rigger cocoon open, the day's heat washing over him despite the thermal insulation of his aircraft's shelter. The rest of his squadron was in the pilots' ready room; making good use of the air conditioning. Mendoza preferred to wait in his craft for the order to launch. He was a native Aztlaner, and all his life he'd embraced the heat of the beloved sun.

With a mental command, he accessed the chrono in his comlink; less than twenty minutes before the alert shift was over. Mendoza squeezed his coin again, hard enough to leave an indentation despite his heavy flight glove. He wanted the scramble order to come so that he could be one of the first to respond, the first to enact righteous vengeance. Mendoza opened his palm and stared at the dull yellow coin.

It wasn't worth anything, except to Mendoza. His son Roberto

purchased the once-bright coin with the gaudy cartoonish sun when their family visited Tenochtitlán four years ago. It was a cheap trinket meant for tourists, but Roberto knew how devoted his father was to the path of the sun and wanted Mendoza to have it. The coin remained forgotten in a pocket for years until he found it again after Cali. It was the only thing he had to remind him of his family. Mendoza squeezed the coin yet again, trying to focus, but his will failed him, that fateful day coming back in excruciating detail.

His squadron was one of the first to arrive in the skies over Cali, and nothing had prepared him for what he witnessed. Demons on leathery wings soared in the sky, raining death onto his city below. On the ground, monsters advanced like a rising tide, slow and unstoppable. Like any good solider he charged in, the afterburners of his Zeta-Bravo fighter spitting trails of hellfire behind him as he desperately tried to defend his people from the advancing threat.

But all his training, all of his experience, and all of his raw determination meant nothing. His weapons refused to lock onto the dragons, and when he overrode the launch protocols to dummy-fire his missiles, his adversaries simply dodged out of the way. Still he fired and fired, letting everything loose until his weapon bays were dry. This must have amused the beasts, who swooped past and looped around him and his wing mates, toying with the Aztlan fighters. Before long the dragons grew bored and started tearing the wings off the fighters. Mendoza lasted longer than most, and managed to kill one who ventured too close to his fighter's rear. The flames from Mendoza's afterburner removed the creature's face and head like a blowtorch on butter. He had tried to engage another after that, but the recall order was given. Enraged, Mendoza refused to retreat and aimed his craft at the biggest demon of all. But before he could complete his suicide run, Mendoza's commander overrode the fighter's controls.

Mendoza watched through the rear sensors as his city, his home, his family, was destroyed in one final blue flash.

When he had arrived back at his base hours later, Mendoza was promptly escorted to a holding cell, where he languished for two days. Convinced that he was to be court-martialed for refusing to obey orders, perhaps executed for failing at Cali, Mendoza wasn't surprised when he was taken to an interrogation room. There, a man



in an Aztlan uniform bearing a Military Intelligence insignia and a man in a well-cut business suit were waiting. Mendoza's fears were almost confirmed when the Intelligence officer told Mendoza that he was now officially a dead man. The man in the suit passed a commlink with a data packet on it, which Mendoza took, thinking they meant for him to sign a confession. Instead, the packet contained a new identity, a benefits package for a new employee of Aztechnology, and new orders.

That was over two years ago. Since then, Mendoza and many more began training for a special mission: this mission. They were given the most bleeding-edge equipment Aztlan and Aztechnology had to offer. Mendoza's own craft came straight from the R and D labs and had no real designation other than Bloodwing. Sleek, black, and deadly, with its unique variable-geometric wing surfaces and unique vectored thrusters, it could outperform anything he had flown before, including his old Zeta-Bravo. There were also other aircraft, ones that could control an entire squadron of drones by themselves. The drones they controlled were also unlike anything Mendoza had ever seen. There were other craft stationed at other forward bases, strange ones that were the same design as his but somehow integrated magic into their systems. Mendoza wasn't sure what to think of that, but it wasn't his place to think. He had his orders, had his weapon. One thing all of these craft had in common: every single one of them was armed with weapons designed to achieve the revenge he—and everyone around him—wanted.

Coming back to the present, Mendoza let out a huff of satisfaction as he thought of the special ordnance in his weapon bays. He gave his coin a soft kiss before pocketing it. He checked his chrono again; only four minutes before his shift was up. Frustration started to creep into his mind, but he resigned himself. If the gods willed it, he would be at the tip of the spear. If not, he would just have to trust that he would be part of some other master plan.

With three minutes and fifty seconds to go in his rotation, AR tags lit up Mendoza's field of vision as alarms blared all over the base. The order was given: all pilots SCRAMBLE. Pilots and aircrews rushed to their respective craft as techs moved into position. Mendoza gave silent thanks to the gods as he slid down into his cockpit and closed his eyes. The VR immersion systems came online instantly as his rigger cocoon sealed. In less than a heartbeat, he was one with his craft. Its sensors were now his eyes and ears; the power of its engines was his heartbeat. Already craft status indicators were filling his VR heads-up display indicating all systems were green. With a mental command, Mendoza checked all control surfaces. In his virtual vision, he could see the ground crew visually verifying the test. With a thumbs-up from the crew chief, Mendoza blinked the running lights three times to indicate his own thumbs up.

"Avenger Two-Zero-Zero, ready for taxi," Mendoza signaled to the control tower.

With an acknowledgement, Mendoza watched as an unnecessary AR overlay indicated which runway to proceed toward; he knew the base by heart for just this moment. As the engines powered up,

Mendoza felt a rush of adrenaline as his craft made its way down the runway. By the time Mendoza reached takeoff position, his wingman, Lieutenant Perez, was also pulling into position to his right. With both craft properly positioned, they heard the order to take off.

Mendoza took a deep breath as he mentally applied throttle and brought his engines to full military power. With Perez on his wing, both craft roared down the runway and into the sky. Once airborne, Mendoza checked his tacnet. Coordinates filled his eyes, indicating course, speed, direction, and time to target. With practiced ease, Mendoza and his Avengers formed up at their predetermined rendezvous, turned toward their target, and applied full afterburners. According to information from the combat flight controllers, their target had finally decided to make good on his promise to destroy Tenochtitlán. Mendoza smiled; they would intercept him long before then. Fifty kilometers from Acapulco if his estimates were correct.

"Avenger Two-Zero-Zero to group, come to ten thousand feet and maintain current speed. On my order, initiate attack plan Alpha. Leads go for good shots only and wings watch their backs, especially for more bandits. Everyone watch your exit vectors; don't let those idiot drone-jockeys box you in. Let them absorb the damage!" A chorus of acknowledgements came over his comm, but Mendoza was already thinking ahead. At present course and speed, they would intercept the target in approximately fifty-one seconds.

As the seconds and the kilometers ticked away; Mendoza watched as his long-range radar and sensors synched up with orbital assets and painted his target. Mendoza came in on the target's three-o'clock side, high, and for a moment it seemed the enemy was unaware of their presence. Mendoza held his breath as his weapons systems worked to gain a solid lock, but just before they could, the target stopped suddenly and turned ninety degrees—directly toward them.

Cursing to himself, Mendoza shouted out orders: "All Avengers; break and engage at will, repeat: engage at will!"

The Aztlan flyers broke neatly into pairs, trying to scatter and force the target to choose a direction so the rest could turn and engage. But before the maneuver was completed, the target was among them. Screams and pleas from the doomed pilots echoed across the tacnet as the target tore into them with tooth and claw, or blasted them with magic.

Mendoza continued his bank and saw through the tacnet that two-thirds of his squadron were already gone. Twenty seconds in and the engagement had already degraded into a chaotic dogfight. Kicking his engines to full, Mendoza went vertical and inverted into a dive back towards the engagement zone. With his nose pointed directly at the target as he dove, Mendoza held his breath as his sensors tried to lock on to the target. Just as the Bloodwing's targeting system registered a weapons lock, the target looked directly above, right into Mendoza's eyes. Mendoza snarled as Sirurg arched his back and surged upwards towards him, his mouth full of dagger teeth opened wide.

"That's right! Come on! Come ON! COME ON!" Mendoza belted as his missile fired.





- Before we get this thing going, I have to say that 2074 has been a clusterfuck of world events (no shit, huh?). But we have to start somewhere, and this section deals specifically with the end of the Amazonian-Aztlan War. Although I don't think I should say "end," because while it's been officially over for about three months, battles still continue in some form or another. There are even whispers that the real war is just beginning, as if the last three years weren't enough. Still, we're going to do our best to throw out everything we know so far, which may not be much. After all the shit that Aztlan and Aztechnology pulled, who the hell knows what the flying frag is really going on down there anymore?

Fianchetto is going to take point on this and give a brief rundown on the war's first few years. Then we'll turn things over to several guest posters—some you all may know, some you may not, but all of them were actually there when things went down. Now before anyone freaks, anyone who posts has been vetted, so no messages about it, scan? I got my own problems to deal with right now. And before anyone asks why certain familiar faces aren't posting, it's because they're either recovering or missing. Picador is quite fucked up, but alive, after eating more than her daily requirement of lead. She's now post-third surgery in Lisbon and her unit's chief NCO Sergeant Major Martinez is filling in for her here. We've confirmed that Hard Exit survived the Battle of Bogotá, but she's gone to ground and that's all I know. We've also confirmed that Lyran is alive, but she got caught up in some serious shit down there and is taking time to deal with it. When I asked if she would post, her reply was simply "maybe." Aufheben, Black Mamba, and Marcos are all currently MIA. So, yeah, if you have any data on them, please let us know.

- FastJack
- Has anyone been able to verify any of the information in Black Mamba's last message?
- Sticks
- Not yet, but the whole thing will show up later in the file.
- Glitch

HAVOC CRIED AND DOGS OF WAR SLIPPED

Posted by: Fianchetto

First of all, I want to say I wasn't in South America during the war, but I have numerous associates who were. As such, I am not claiming to know everything that went on there; rather I am trying to honor the memories of past and future friends by doing a small part in all of this.

A long time ago, I was a soldier. I know what war, real war, is like. That's why I volunteered to do this posting.

As most of us already know, the war in South America is one of the worst in recent history and in some ways surpassed even the carnage and destruction of the Euro Wars (which I witnessed firsthand). Much is written on why and how this war started, and I won't rehash every detail and waste bandwidth talking about every small independent group or bit player(s) involved. Check JackPoint for that.

The main focus of my contribution will be simply a very brief history of the war as it pertains to Aztlan and Amazonia, and what I

believe are the key points of the war. Specifically, I'll attempt to illustrate the events that lead the war's end. In a nutshell, I believe it ended because Aztlan got enough public opinion behind it to spend some of their capital by putting their boot to Amazonia's ass. But, that is my opinion and I will try and stick to the facts as I know them.

OPENING SALVOS

Aztlan officially declared war against Amazonia in early 2072 when Amazonian agents were caught infiltrating an Aztlan research facility. There has been much contention and speculation as to why the Amazonians were there; they claim they were trying to end an Aztlan weapons program that was specifically targeting their country. Aztlan claimed the infiltration was an unprovoked attack and act of blatant espionage. There is evidence indicating that Amazonia was set up and that Aztlan engineered the whole affair just to start the war for expansion. Regardless of why, the war was officially on and both sides came out swinging.

While their respective militaries had vastly different organizations, tactics, and doctrines, both sides were evenly matched in the early months of the war. Amazonia repeatedly frustrated the more conventional Aztlan military with its guerilla-style approach to warfare and magic that was backed up by the rainforest itself, especially when the Aztlan dared venture into the jungle. Conversely, when Aztlan managed to draw out or pin down the elusive Amazonians, it was in urban areas, where the Amazonians were destroyed. Because of its location and strategic (and political) importance, Bogotá became the de facto center of the conflict, as both sides fought in and around it for months, trying to force their opponents into a fatal mistake.

- Hey, there's no mention of runners, mercs, or other types who flocked to the area like vultures to a carcass. And what about the corps in all this?
- Slamm-0!
- I did say I was going to stick to key points. I had hoped to avoid the usual complaints and "get to the good stuff."
- Fianchetto
- Don't take it personally; a lot of us are still keyed up over this and want answers.
- Glasswalker
- While Fianchetto wisely stays on topic, I think it would also behoove anyone to study the Vietnam War of the late twentieth century, specifically the tactics of the USA and the North Vietnamese/Viet Cong if they wish to better understand the tactics employed in this war. There are several parallels in strategic goals, methodologies, and ideologies that can grant a greater understanding of how and why the current conflict played out as it did.
- Thorn

With the opponents evenly matched, the first year of the war quickly devolved into the bloody stalemate that would become a regular theme. Early in 2073, an event occurred that drastically affected how the war would be fought and set the stage for its ultimate outcome.

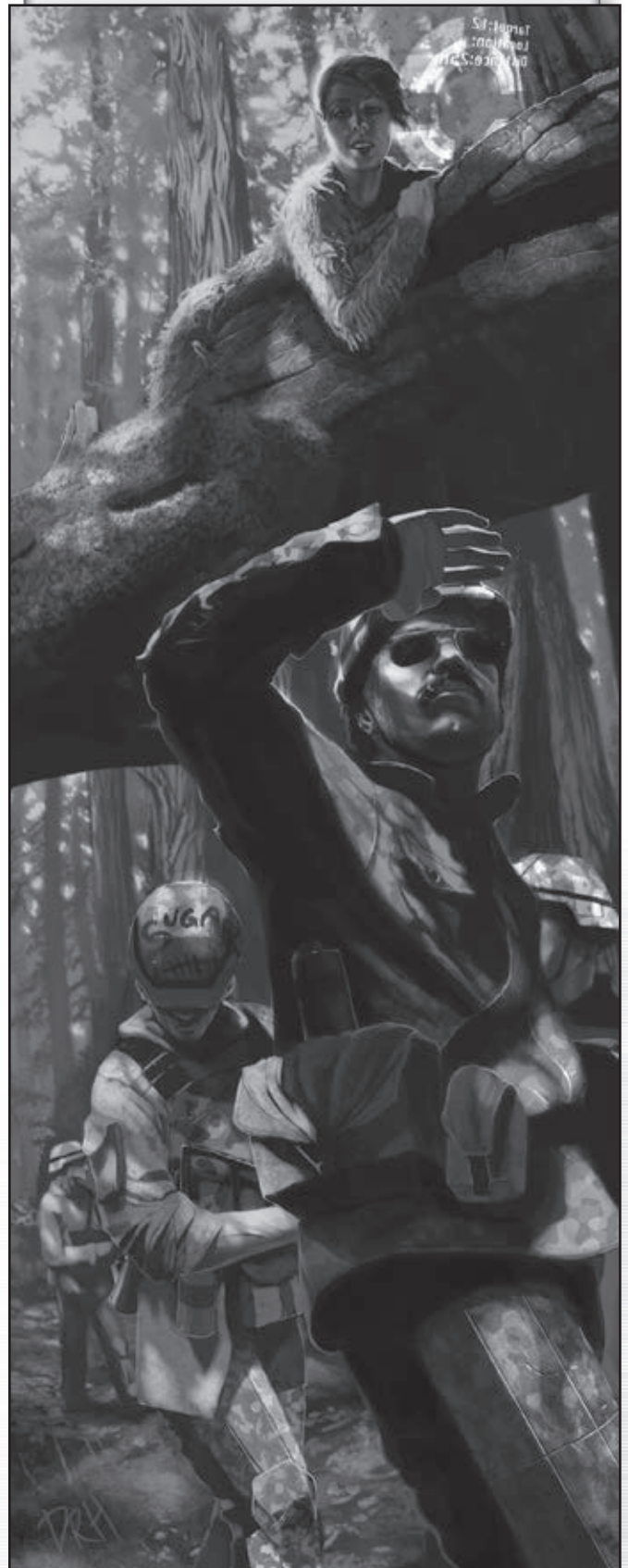


On January 18, 2073, the great Amazonian dragon Sirurg led his forces into the Aztlan base at Cali. By now we should all know about the merciless, brutal slaughter of Aztlan soldiers and the killing of thousands more civilians though Sirurg's entropy power. This one attack forced Aztlan military planners to completely change their operational doctrine. No longer would they mass large numbers of conventional forces for fear another dragon attack would devastate whole military units in a single stroke. From that point on, Aztlan adopted a more unconventional methodology, deploying their troops in smaller numbers that operated more like Special Forces units rather than conventional military. Amazonia, with their decentralized military command and units operating in small groups or cells, had the advantage of experience in unconventional/guerrilla warfare and took out Aztlan units piecemeal.

As the months dragged on, the body counts on both sides rose steadily. Aztlan and Amazonia bolstered their respective forces with mercenaries, shadowrunners, and other irregular assets who were better equipped and experienced for the war's more unconventional style of combat. Mercenaries in particular became valued assets for both militaries, especially as both sides continued to take heavy losses and needed ready, experienced troops to fill their ranks. Several mercenary companies, including the top-tier Big Four (MET2000, Tsunami, Combat, Inc., and 10,000 Daggers), took contracts in the war. By the war's end, there were almost as many hired assets as there were regular troops.

It was this influx of troops that caused the first real shift in the war. Using mercenaries to garrison key strategic locations, the regular Aztlan military was free to engage targets. Aztlan surged into the jungles of Amazonia using orbital observation satellites as spotters, prosecuting several key positions. The attack was sudden and unexpected; Amazonia was caught completely by surprise and their border was pushed back approximately fifty kilometers.

- I know he doesn't mean to, but Fianchetto makes it sound like mercs and runners didn't come into the scene until well into the war. The reality was, we were there from day one, and even before then. Just like every other job, we did all the lovely dirty work that makes us oh-so-famous. The only difference was that we had to factor an active warzone into our plans. South America, especially Bogotá, is still a shadow bonanza even after the war.
- Beaker
- Hell, the only conventional troops Amazonia had were mercs.
- Stone
- I've also gotten more than a few bounties from the overflow in South America, including one rogue blood mage. Not my cup of 'caf, but cred is cred, and he was right there. Although I think I'll stick to bugs from now on.
- Sticks
- One of my favorite jobs was creating back doors for the CAS in several spy satellites. Seems they got a little nervous when their favorite enemies started moving troops around. Too bad all that good work went to waste.
- Orbital DK



- And I think it goes without saying that Aztlan and Aztechnology were joined at the hip during all of this. For all their claims of separation from Aztlan, mostly to keep the Corporate Court off their backs, I know that most of the shadow and merc talent for Aztlan was hired and paid for by Aztechnology on their behalf. There were also many joint-security operations (wink-wink) conducted together in Bogotá.
- Pyramid Watcher
- Oh, I'm sorry, I wasn't paying attention. I was too busy counting all the cred I've made from smuggling shit there over the past few years.
- Kane

A DIFFERENT KIND OF WEAPON

Desperate to halt the Aztlan advance, Amazonia approached their friends at Horizon in fall of 2073 with an idea, one specifically suited to their assets and talents. Shortly after the war began, Horizon aided Amazonia in the nation's efforts to attack Aztlan in the realm of public opinion, undermine Aztlan's entire war effort. Horizon also helped provide intelligence gathering and subterfuge for Amazonia.

The plan itself was relatively simple, yet held a challenge: create or exaggerate a series of events that would not only halt the Aztlan advance and give Amazonia a chance to recover and re-group, but also badly damage Aztlan as well. Horizon, specifically their Dawkins Group, was more than willing to help Amazonia in this endeavor. Horizon saw it as a chance to put their most valued theories on social engineering to the test while making a considerable profit. As soon as the virtual ink was dry, the Dawkins Group set their plan into motion. Initiating several plans and contingencies they already had in place (imagine that), they identified several opportunities and targets that, if successfully taken out or sufficiently compromised, would cause the Aztlan military to falter, perhaps crumble entirely, and leave the nation sufficiently crippled as well.

The first target on the Dawkins Group hit list was a POW camp located near Medellín. A shadowrunner team obtained vital intelligence on the camp and uncovered evidence of Aztlan war crimes against POWs. The run was a success; approximately seventy Amazonian prisoners, both wounded and not, were liberated and turned over to a Dawkins Group agent for care. The team also obtained footage showing "brutal" Aztlan interrogation techniques. Their next target was an Aztlan communications center responsible for coordinating all air strikes along the new border. The same team of runners infiltrated the base and not only managed to compromise the military networks, but they also killed several double agents funneling information to Aztlan on Amazonian troop movements and other intelligence.

The next run was also successful. The compromised systems started to feed inaccurate firing coordinates during air strikes; the result was several friendly fire incidents that damaged Aztlan forward positions as severely as their previous attacks on Amazonia. After the strikes, Amazonian units finally counter-attacked and started to push the Aztlan military back. Less than three weeks after expanding their border, Aztlan lost almost half of what they gained.

Things went from bad to worse for Aztlan shortly thereafter as Horizon let loose with their own magic. New footage of abuses

in Aztlan prisoner of war camps became lead stories in all Horizon news outlets. Footage showing gratuitous torture techniques and inhumane treatment of prisoners led to worldwide cries of outrage. Horizon then aired "evidence" showing the location of a mass grave of POWs near Tenochtitlán, and it was enough to start a UN investigation. When investigators arrived, they found the grave, plus three more. The UN held an emergency session and placed official sanctions on Aztlan while the Corporate Court investigated to see if Aztechnology was involved. Both protested, claiming that the footage was doctored and the graves were a set-up, but their pleas were ignored.

- I later met one of the runners on that team. After their job was finally over, they saw the footage on the trid and knew it was fake. It was a good fake, and had the runners not been there, they never would have known. Not only was their original footage used, but several other segments were added in or edited to exaggerate the conditions. Worse yet, this runner also found out that all of the POWs he and his team rescued ended up in that mass grave. When I asked him if he was going to do anything about it, he just paid his bar tab and walked out. Never saw him again.
- Sunshine

With Aztlan severely bloodied and on the defensive, Amazonia pressed the advantage. Demoralized, the Aztlan forces crumbled and war degraded into one of attrition with Amazonia coming out ahead in the numbers.

The free city of Bogotá, desperate to maintain their independence from both sides, was caught in the middle. As Aztlan and Amazonian forces slugged it out in the rainforests around the city; the war was also fought inside of Bogotá itself. Insurgents, radicals, terrorists, and just about anyone with a weapon or a cause took up arms for one side or another, sometimes for neither or both sides. As the battles outside razed the rainforest, Bogotá became a macrocosm of pain, suffering, and death. Those who profit from such things did very well during the war, if they survived.

Still, neither side gained any real momentum. Aztlan continued to hammer away at any Amazonian forces it could find, but Amazonia was able to largely blunt those gains thanks to their previous help from Horizon. And while Horizon's propaganda machine was slowly but surely undermining the entire war effort in Amazonia's favor, Horizon was forced to scale back their South American operations in the end of '73. During that time, Horizon was dealing with their own problems, issues, and events that threatened the corporation itself. Horizon did not completely abandon Amazonia, as several Dawkins Group operatives remained in the area to take on a more advisory role. By 2074, however, the damage to Aztlan was done.

- A man known as Agent was one of Dawkins' best operatives. I met him briefly while in Acapulco. This guy was as smooth a talker as I've ever met. Had I not already known all the tricks he used, I may have signed on with him. The write-up he had in the Street Legends file doesn't do him justice. Any man that can turn an entire Aztlan unit against their own people is a special kind of scary.
- Traveler Jones



OF PAIN AND BLOOD

As 2074 began, the war was still mostly a bloody stalemate and both sides were now hurting. Amazonia and Horizon landed a decisive blow with their propaganda war against Aztlan and the UN sanctions were taking their toll. But Aztlan proved stubborn and was holding on, and of course they had their own formidable PR machine. With the costs of the war reaching critical levels, both sides were eager to find a way to end the war, preferably with a total, decisive victory. The stalemate made that look impossible, though. Unknown to the public, leaders on both sides were privately considering plans to end the war, even if it meant giving concessions. It wasn't until February 2074 that those plans were put into motion, setting the stage for the inevitable showdown between the two nations.

SECOND BREAKTHROUGH, ADVANTAGE: AZTLAN

In early 2074, Aztlan intelligence received a few desperately needed breaks. The first occurred in February of 2074 when former Leopard Guardsman and Aztlan traitor Alejandro Tepeyollotl was captured. The second occurred a month later, when runners working for Aztechnology apprehended two Dawkins Group members operating around Bogotá. The information extracted from Tepeyollotl and the Dawkins operatives identified several Amazonian and Horizon intelligence assets and other targets. This information gave Aztlan planners information that led to the successful prosecution of several Amazonian strike-cells and set up future targets that would prove vital later in the war.

- So why didn't Aztlan just take those assets out right away?
- /dev/ grrl
- Simply because they were more valuable alive. Dead agents/assets can cripple an intelligence apparatus in the short term as they try and rebuild from scratch. But when playing the long game, live agents are much more useful for things like planting false information with the enemy. Living agents are also potential sources of information or allies, if one can find a way to turn them. At this point, Aztlan was playing the long game because Horizon was doing the same with its propaganda tactics.
- Fianchetto

From there it was a domino effect, and Aztlan reclaimed the advantage. In a series of strikes a few weeks later, Aztlan forces punched through Amazonian lines and almost re-established the border they created the previous year. For the second time since the beginning of the war, Aztlan was on the offensive, and Amazonia was reeling. But it was far from enough to secure victory because the Aztlan military held back. Taking a page from their Horizon associates, Amazonia played the one card that stopped Aztlan dead in its tracks: Sirurg.

- The Aztlan push into Amazonia was no joke. Major Cabrera and I were leading a patrol along the border when they hit and we were spared. It was not some random search-and-destroy mission; they came in hard, fast, and knew exactly where to strike. Several

camp, including ours, were decimated by airstrikes before ground forces swept in to finish the job. The only way they could have pulled it off with that level of coordination was if they knew about the targets ahead of time. Thankfully, we lost mostly materiel and very few lives. Others were not so lucky.

- Sgt. Bandito
- Hey Bandito, how's Picador?
- FastJack
- Resting. She doesn't feel so good when she wakes, but at least she can wake up. I'll tell her you asked about her.
- Sgt. Bandito

NEEDING A BIGGER GUN

Despite their gains, the Aztlan military leadership was still strategically hampered. Its leaders felt that a Sirurg attack was still an imminent and significant threat, especially now that they had pushed far into Amazonia. Two days into the second Aztlan offensive, shadowrunners working for Amazonia planted information that Sirurg was there and was planning to lead the counter-offensive personally. Additionally, they said that he had obtained the information of all Aztlan positions on the front. Rather than press their advantage, Amazonia hesitated and held their ground. This was a ruse, and Aztlan leaders realized it, but there was little they could do at that point. The incident proved that there was still one significant threat left to deal with.

Hestaby's words from her 2073 address to the UN were still very much in the Aztlan leadership's minds when she claimed that Sirurg's next target would be Tenochtitlán. Aztlan leaders also remembered their promise to use "whatever means possible to defend its citizens from this deadly, chaotic threat." They were clear that they wouldn't be pulling any punches but would go straight for the throat when, not if, Sirurg attacked. If Aztlan couldn't deliver on that promise, they would lose much. Not only would their capital city be destroyed, they would lose any international political power they had left.

Ultimately, Aztlan knew that if they were ever to mount a successful, final campaign against Amazonia and save their country, eliminating Sirurg had to become their top priority for its strategic, political, and morale value. The problem they faced was how to accomplish this. Because of the raw power and exceptional (to put it mildly) magical abilities of dragons, it was considered practically impossible for even modern conventional military weaponry to defeat a dragon. Even Aztechnology, Aztlan's supposedly silent partner in the war, was daunted by the task.

It was no secret that Aztlan and by extension Aztechnology had been studying Dzitbalchén's corpse after the dragon was executed for his (supposed) part in the 2064 Yucatan Peace Talks bombings. But part of that study was to complete so-called "anti-dragon" weapons and countermeasures. In their reply to Hestaby's address, the Aztlan representative alluded his country had the means to defend itself against Sirurg. In truth, Aztlan/Aztechnology were developing such weapons, but by 2073, they were far from viable. Nevertheless, the entire world wanted those secrets.

The question remained: Was this admission a blunder or part of a plan?

- One thing's for sure: the shadows went nuts over the whole anti-dragon tech thing. Just about everyone and their mother wanted paydata on what Aztlan and Aztechnology were playing with. Eventually, several files made their way to the shadows. Several of those were included as part of the Clutch of Dragons file a few months back.
- Glitch
- You know, I personally think that Aztlan completely overestimated Sirurg's reaction. Could he take out military units wholesale? Of course. But in a great dragon's mind, doing so would be beneath him. Why waste your effort on something as petty as an armor column when an entire city, such as Cali, was a much more tempting target?
- Mika
- Could the USA and USSR have lobbed nukes at each other? Yes, but did they? No. Still the Cold War raged on for how many years? Sometimes the mere threat is enough, and do you really want to take that risk? But that was the whole point. It's Psych Warfare 101.
- Kernel

Regardless of how or why Aztlan revealed what they did, Aztlan military commanders ran with it. I've recently learned through various sources that Aztlan began a massive disinformation campaign and planted a lot of red herrings about some projects to protect others. Information about particular projects was deliberately doctored to sabotage anyone attempting to use the data. Anyone with decent hacking skills could retrieve the information while other intel was quietly reclassified or transferred to other research divisions to hide its true nature.

- WHAT?! I lost two of my best agents while three of my best attack utilities were corrupted getting paydata on some of that shit! Now you're telling me some of it may be bogus?
- /dev/ grrl
- If you got paid and you're still breathing, don't worry about it. That's not our job.
- Clockwork
- Don't feel bad. Remember back in Clutch when I said my team and I were hired to secure a sample of some kind of nano/mana weapon? Then got hosed from a team member who I think was a CAS plant? Well, got an update. Seems I was right; the CAS eventually got the fruits of our labor, but it didn't turn out the way they planned. Check this out. And by the way, this story lasted on the boards for maybe two hours before being pulled.
- Beaker

Incoming Message

INDEPEDENT NEW SERVICE SPECIAL BULLETIN!

Posted 13:45:01/05-10-74

TERRORISTS ATTEMPT TO COMPROMISE RESEARCH FACILITY! CAS Army and Lone Star Security foil plot to create weapons of mass destruction.

Baton Rouge, CAS—Representatives from the Confederate Government announced today that a contingent of CAS Army Special Forces foiled an Aztlan terrorist plot late last night.

Yesterday at approximately 2045 hours local time, Aztlan terrorists seized control of the ChemTech storage and weapons research facility located just outside of Baton Rouge. Local Lone Star Security (LSS) forces received the call and quickly secured the perimeter, evacuating the local populace. LSS then called the Army Haz-Mat Response team.

After negotiations with the terrorists failed, the Army and HRT teams attempted to secure the building, unaware that the terrorists had already completed their weapon. At the first sign of Army and HRT teams in the building, the terrorists killed all civilians in the building. Facing imminent danger of local contamination, Army commanders initiated an air strike that completely destroyed the facility and any chance of contamination.

At this time, Army representatives are unsure when the evacuated populace may return to their homes, but are optimistic for early as next week. To read more: [link].

- Long story short, in the trid footage I saw my former teammate among the Army haz-mat specialists. Also found out that before the "terrorist attack," ChemTech suffered a breach in one of their containers and sent out a mayday. Air strike on a chemical facility? Come on! I know cover-up when I smell it. I wonder if the sample they got from me was tainted and it blew up in their face, or if it was valuable enough that someone else wanted it destroyed. Who knows; who cares. Like Glitch said, I got paid. Just thought I would share.
- Beaker
- With the CAS so keyed up at the time, they could have used it as justification to hit Aztlan, but they didn't. I agree and go with cover-up on this one.
- Snopes

- Wait, information re-classified. Be back in a bit folks, I have to go find something.
- Butch

And while the intelligence types were busy playing shell games with classified data, another part of Aztlan's strategy came into play. The government and military leadership, for whatever reason, decided that their various weapons programs were ready to start secretly developing and deploying special Anti-Dragon



Task Forces. We now know that these task forces were the best of the best that Aztlan and Aztechnology (more on that later) had to offer and were given the most cutting edge, state-of-the-art weaponry available. At least, that was their story. There will be more on them later.

- I saw the newsfeeds, but has anyone been able to dig up any exact specs on these Task Forces? Even a name would be good. I can't believe they called themselves simply Task Force One, Two, etc., etc. You would think that they would have gotten more creative.
- Sunshine
- Guess they had more important things to worry about.
- Bull
- Indeed, because they sure as hell didn't worry about the dangerous research they were conducting. Trying to create tech that would integrate with magic in months rather than years, or even decades. We're all damn lucky it didn't cause more damage than it did.
- Frosty
- And from what I heard, wasn't it your former mentor who gave them the last push they needed to get some of these systems online?
- Winterhawk
- We'll talk about this later. Maybe.
- Frosty
- Anyone else notice that while Aztlan was losing troops, Aztechnology was gaining employees at about the same rate? I also saw that a lot of the casualty numbers weren't adding up, and I realized that Aztlan was exaggerating their losses. Not much but enough. If they suffered, say, thirteen percent casualties, they would report up to fifteen. And lo and behold, even in the middle of a war, Aztechnology employment numbers kept increasing by the exact amount as the discrepancy.
- Kernel
- How else do you think they created those Sirurg Task Forces? For an operation like that, one cannot simply hire out; the Aztlan leadership would not risk operational security on mercenaries. No, they wanted homegrown, loyal troopers. It also looks better on the trids.
- Sgt. Bandito
- They weren't just assigned to the task forces.
- Rifleman
- After the Clutch posting, I kept researching these weapons and weapon systems. In particular, I found some data about a new fighter-bomber being developed by Aztechnology codenamed Bloodwing. From what I can determine, it was the craft on which the CAS based their new Skyknight fighter. The general design, specifically the vectored thrust systems, is pretty much the same. I know there are at least two versions of the Bloodwing in development: one for regular mundane pilots and one for spirit-integrated

systems. But I haven't gotten anything solid about that yet. Right after PCC moved into Texas, a lot of my data sources suddenly disappeared. Funny that.

- Clockwork
- This sounds like something my friend Eight-Ball ran into last year. He flies with a merc air-unit, the Ghost Hawks, currently contracted with the CAS. According to his story, he and his wing were flying combat air patrol along the CAS/Aztlan border when he saw something about six clicks out on the Confederate side of the border. Neither sensor had squat, but they vectored in for an intercept. Before they could make an ID, the bogey pulled a complete 180 and darted off faster than anything they've ever seen. They tried to chase, but the bogey was out of visual in less than two seconds. Without a visual, they figured it had bugged out but they almost shit themselves when that thing was suddenly on their six (his words not mine) and had weapons lock on both of them. They split evasive, but nothing. Eight-Ball said he tried every trick he knew of to break lock, but it never lost contact, and his countermeasures were worthless. Then it was just suddenly gone. I think it was playing with him, because otherwise, I never would have heard the story. Eight-Ball is one of the best flyers I know, and he drives an Eagle-C—not a bird to take lightly. He's also not one for bullshit, so I believe what he said. So could that have been the bird Aztlan used?
- Turbo Bunny
- After doing my own research, I would say yes with eighty percent certainty. Too bad Aztlan is keeping this close to the vest. You'd think they'd love to bask in the PR of the thing.
- Clockwork
- Interesting you mention that and the Ghost Hawks. For the past few years they worked with Federated Boeing on a new drone control system for aircraft. It's discussed in a JackPoint file that's in the hopper called Ten Mercenaries. Glitch mentioned the theft of several modules from FB in the file. I guess we know where it went. This would be an ideal weapon for engaging a dragon because it allows for larger numbers of drones, and the tacnet they create further enhances the drones' performance. I need to get a few for myself. For anyone who's interested, here's an excerpt from that post.
- Rigger X

Incoming Message

Falconer TAC-C Command System Module, Mark I

The TAC-C, or Total Airborne Command-Control system (pronounced "taxi"), is a strategy in which medium and small-sized aircraft to act as aerial drone command stations and the traditional Airborne Warning and Control mission. With this protocol, aircraft have the option of either controlling unmanned aircraft in a more traditional method, from a distance, or to directly participate in a strike. What makes the Falconer Mark I more than just a collection of various common components is the specially designed software and rigger cocoon, enabling its operator to endure high-g maneuvers. The software and rigger cocoon also create an aerial tacnet to enhance manned and unmanned craft performance. It allows strike commanders greater flexibility and accuracy through enhanced situational awareness when the on-site/direct strike participation option is used.

AMAZONIAN COUNTERMOVES

When Aztlan initiated their second breakthrough in a blitzkrieg-like attack, they destroyed several Amazonian bases and depots. Communication and supply lines were cut, and hundreds of troops were lost. Those who survived the attacks were mercilessly hunted down in the jungle before Aztlan gave the order to halt. Confused but grateful for the reprieve, Amazonian forces fell back and regrouped while Aztlan forces began to dig in, determined not to surrender any ground.

- Aztlan didn't stop dead cold just because they heard a rumor about Sirurg attack. They stopped because they lost the ability to track him. One of the biggest advantages Aztlan had in the war was their spy...er, orbital observation satellites, and a control center located on Spindle space station. Soon after the second breakthrough, a team of runners penetrated Spindle and planted codes that ultimately destroyed six of these satellites. Aztlan was blind; they lost their ability to coordinate their troops in real time, but more importantly they had no way of knowing if Sirurg was suddenly going to pounce on them.
- Orbital DK
- Wait, how the hell can satellites track a dragon? Sorry, DK, but I have to call you out on this one.
- Cosmo
- If you have enough eyes open, then you will see. The predator always reveals himself before the kill.
- Man-of-Many-Names
- WOW! That was almost straightforward.
- Slamm-0!
- I have my moments.
- Man-of-Many-Names

But determination was not enough to hold the lines. Just before May, several Aztlan forward bases began to experience severe supply shortages. Aztlan theater commanders had underestimated the enemy strength and used far too many supplies that projected during the assault. While Amazonia was still regrouping, its own commanders decided to turn the tables on the Aztlan troops and began specifically targeting *their* supply lines. Within two weeks, Amazonia choked off several vital supply routes on land while the UN enforced sanctions on the sea.

- The CAS was more than happy to help enforce UN sanctions against Aztlan. Several CAS Navy ships, including the CSS Kitty Hawk and her battle group, were sent into and around the Gulf to conduct interdiction operations. The mercenary Free Marine Corps' naval detachments were also hired to supplement these operations but mainly patrolled the waters around the Carib League. Any ship attempting to enter Aztlan waters was either turned away or promptly boarded for "inspections." Those who refused to comply were promptly prosecuted (read: blown out of the water) per rules of engagement.
- Kane

- The CAS and FMC may have kept things quiet on the other side of Aztlan, but things in the Pacific were a bit spottier. There were several clashes between UN forces and Aztlan navy vessels out of San Diego when Aztlan ships tried to muscle their way past UN patrols. Ultimately Aztlan was forced to stand down. Aztechnology ships were followed closely, but there was little the UN could do without sanctions. Most of what made its way into Aztlan came through either Aztechnology or by smugglers—those who managed to get through.
- Sounder
- In the jungle, Amazonian shamans also took full advantage of their particular talents. More than one road simply disappeared or was reclaimed by the jungle. Sometimes with convoys still on them.
- Arête
- That wasn't as common as many believe. More often than not, Amazonian raiding parties simply did their jobs.
- Rifleman

Short on everything, the Aztlan units were ordered to pull back and consolidate their lines, leaving them back behind their original 2071 border. But Aztlan was still unwilling to give up their positions in and around Bogotá. Like the city of Bastogne in World War II, Bogotá became a bulge in the battle lines. After the Aztlan troops were sufficiently bled, Amazonian forces eventually attacked to try and push them away from Bogotá, but the Aztlaners held firm a mere two kilometers from the city. The Aztlan military became extremely overextended as part of the plan to hide the Sirurg Task Forces, and were forced to depend even more on hired runners and mercenaries to hold their lines. With the Corporate Court keeping an eye on them, even Aztechnology was forced to withhold obvious support.

- To add insult to injury, fewer and fewer merc units were renewing their contracts with Aztlan, fearing default of payment. Aztechnology footed a lot of the bills to keep the bigger units happy, offering incentives in advanced hardware as bonuses. But a lot of the smaller units saw the writing on the wall and didn't want to end up chewed up in the Amazonian grinder.
- Cosmo
- About this time one would think that Aztlan President Silva and Aztech CEO de la Rosa would be in a bit of panic, at each other's throats, or both. But they weren't. Things were definitely tense in the president's office and the boardroom, but there was nothing to indicate the situation was anything more than a minor inconvenience. Their country was under sanctions, their military was faltering on all fronts, and they had taken severe PR hits. At the time I thought the lot of them had lost their minds.
- Pyramid Watcher
- Sounds like triage to me. Cut off a hand to save the arm, give comfort to the slag about to die so you can concentrate on the one that may live.
- Butch
- You ever find what you were looking for?
- Glitch





INCOMING FEED.....

- Not yet, dammit.
- Butch

MAIN TARGET SIGHTED

By mid-May, with their backs securely against the wall, Aztlan got either their dearest wish, or their worst nightmare. Accompanied by his legion of dragon and dracoform followers, SIRRURG began a series of attacks on the Aztlan cities of Tucson, Roswell, El Paso, Las Cruces, and Corpus Christi. The damage was extensive, and the casualty count was high, but SIRRURG was not content to attack only his hated enemies' soil. He and his followers also attacked several cities in the CAS and PCC, hoping to start a northern front in the war and draw the other countries in. Thankfully for Aztlan, the plan didn't work and both countries stayed within their borders. The PCC and CAS did deploy forces along the border to defend against any more hostile aggression.

- Why didn't those SIRRURG Task Forces try and engage him then? Isn't that what they were created for?
- Slamm-0!
- Like we discussed in Clutch (we have referenced that a lot, haven't we?), dragons are far too mobile. Unless you already have forces staged to intercept, there's little to no chance to engage. No, you'd have to lure your target to you.
- Rigger X

- It's not like they didn't try. Remember, Aztlan had already spotted SIRRURG near Roswell and sent several teams of Special Forces augmented by mercenaries and runners to try to track him down. While their mission was to simply locate him, these teams more often than not ended up forced to engage SIRRURG or his followers. And we know how that turned out.

- Sticks

- Ugly ... and messy. I heard at least eighty percent casualty rates, and these weren't doctored.
- Stone

While the PCC was willing to cut Aztlan some slack and didn't hold them completely accountable for SIRRURG's attacks, the CAS wasn't nearly so forgiving. They placed responsibility for the attacks directly on Aztlan's shoulders, though most suspected it was merely a ploy to send troops in and reclaim parts of Texas. In an utterly surprising move, Aztlan then sold large portions of Texas to the PCC.

- I would've laid good cred that Silva would have been the morning's next sacrifice after he sold Texas off. Apparently, he didn't bother to consult his partners on the Aztechnology board. But dammit, he lived! AND was still president! I guess there still are surprises left in this world.
- Sunshine

In a strategic sense, it was a bold move. By giving away parts of Texas, Aztlan managed to accomplish several objectives in one swoop. First, they avoided expanding the war and also created a buffer between them and a hostile foreign nation. With the CAS now fixated on the PCC, Aztlan was free to continue their hunt for Surrurg. Second, by using the chaotic withdrawal from Texas as a cover, Aztlan further disseminated false information and intelligence. Specific locations were used for this purpose. While not every abandoned Aztlan facility contained valuable paydata, the sheer amount of disinformation put out made it difficult to determine what was valid and what wasn't. The chaos was also a perfect cover for Aztlan troop movements. At least two divisions of troops slipped back into Aztlan unnoticed, although some gear and material was left behind as strategic sacrifices. Despite the relocation, Aztlan forces remained in Texas to continue the search covertly, using the chaos of the relocation as cover for their operations. In late July, Surrurg's attacks ceased but the Aztlan hunters were still unable to locate him.

- Some troops also got in position for future Denver-related actions, but we'll cover that later.
- Kat o' Nine Tales
- If anyone's acquired any abandoned Aztlan gear or vehicles from Texas, double- and triple-check them before use. They may have been left behind, but they weren't sacrificed. Every single flipping piece of equipment was booby-trapped. I've seen and heard about everything from simple RFID tracer tags to multiple self-destruct systems. Almost got a nasty hole in my hull before my tech-head found the triple-redundant GPS detonator on a couple of Aztechnology drones. I wasn't happy with the slag who sold them to me. He assured they were clean.
- Kane
- Do I even want to ask? Who am I kidding? Of course I do.
- Red Anya
- Strapped him to one and made him take a ride.
- Kane

While the drama in Texas played out, Aztlan was continuously plagued with problems, and Amazonia continued their operations in the south. By now the Aztlan border was pushed back even further, and several more Aztlan forward bases were destroyed with heavy casualties. Bogotá was now in real danger of being surrounded and cut off from Aztlan completely. Repeatedly President Silva was pressured to recall the Special Forces up north to shore up Bogotá, but he refused, ordering the units in the north to continue their mission.

Instead, all of Aztlan's forward bases and positions were abandoned and the troops staged near Bogotá. Sanctions were also taking their toll, and food shortages were projected if they were not lifted within six months. With scores of troops deployed north to look for Surrurg or as part of the Surrurg Task Forces, the regular Aztlan military was stretched dangerously thin. For a month, the only thing keeping Amazonia at bay was the Aztechnology Security Forces. But Amazonia knew of their precarious position with the Corporate Court and determined that they might squeak by as long

as Aztechnology property was left alone. The rest of the city was fair game. Smelling blood, Amazonia started to move forces into position.

- Amazonia was sure they had Aztlan on the ropes, Aztechnology contained, and the backing of public opinion and the UN if they decided to move against Bogotá. And they still had the specter of Surrurg to plague Aztechnology. It was the first time they saw a true path to victory. Suckers.
- Sticks
- Silvia was walking a very fine line at this time. De la Rosa was becoming nervous and the priesthood from the Path of the Sun priesthood was also very displeased with him. Several times they threatened Silva directly if he continued to "fail in his duty to properly protect them." I've even heard they were going to refuse to perform magical rites.
- Pyramid Watcher
- Not surprising. Since the beginning of the war, the priesthood was one of the biggest targets of enemy forces. Take away Aztlan's ability to perform magic and you've left them very vulnerable. High-ranking officials and initiates were of especially high value, and Amazonia paid handsomely for eliminated magicians. Several specialty bounty hunters and mercenary groups popped up during the war. The priesthood feared one unit in particular—Bravo Company—because of its high body count.
- Thorn
- It took a while to find who we were looking for.
- Rifleman
- Indeed. You definitely made an impression.
- Frosty

Incoming Message

21-Aug-74

To: Major Rafael Guzman
From: Captain Silvia Zepeda

Sir,

I have completed my investigation into the recent assault on the teocalli in Medellin. My findings were the same as they were in Panama, except this time only three priests were killed. Still no witnesses or forensic evidence to speak of. As in Panama, several slugs were recovered from the bodies, and I would hazard that the ballistics here, too, will prove unidentifiable. I would also surmise that the responsibility for the attack belongs to the same individuals behind the assassination of other priests all over the country (current total: fifteen).

I once again ask the Major for permission to hunt down these murderers, if for nothing else to cease the constant mewling of these so-called "chosen ones of the Sun." As you know, my team is ready and only needs your command to proceed. Should you decide to give this order, I will take personal pleasure in performing this task.

Yours in service,
 CZ



LOADING THE GUN...

As events unfolded in the south, Hurricane Donald was a disaster and a blessing for Aztlan. SIRRURG used the hurricane to cover his presence and power his magic, allowing him to level most of Borinquen (Puerto Rico, for the old-timers). This included destroying the NatVat processing facilities that were responsible for eighty percent of Aztlan's food supply. But the payoff was that Aztlan started to garner sympathy from the public.

- Of course, having a dragon destroy most of your food supply tends to do that. Despite displaying apathy 99.99 percent of the time, such complete destruction draws people in when they realize it could have been them. It wasn't the only factor, though. With Amazonia and Horizon whacking away down south and Ghostwalker's continued anti-Aztlan agenda, people thought Aztlan was being bullied. The fourth-largest megacorporation in the world was suddenly an underdog—and people love underdogs.
- Dr. Spin
- More pressure was off Aztlan when the CAS diverted the Kitty Hawk and her battle group to conduct relief efforts. But on the flip side, the Free Marines were now royally torqued at both ends. See, their base is located at the old Roosevelt Roads Naval Base on the east side of Borinquen. When SIRRURG and company hit the island, they hit the Roads as well. By the time the attack reached the base, SIRRURG decided to call it a day and let some of his underlings have some fun. They trashed the FMC barracks and supply depot, but the jarheads fought back (supported by several local houngans), taking out at least three wyverns, several spirits, and a couple of drakes. Just don't ask how many marines were lost. Thankfully, the FMC's fleet was out on patrol for the UN contract and were spared.
- /dev/ grrl
- How do you know so much about the FMC?
- Bull
- That's my business. *grin*
- /dev/ grrl

Aztlan's second break came when it finally located SIRRURG's base of operations: only fifteen kilometers outside of Roswell. Armed with this information, President Silva initiated Operation: Marauder, which put all SIRRURG Task Forces on alert. The Huey Tiatoni Carrier Task Force set sail from San Diego and made its way into the Pacific. To preserve operational security, the rest of the Aztlan military was also alerted but was told that the Amazonians were preparing for an assault on Bogotá. To help sell the story, several armor companies staging in Panama also began making their way toward the city. Several teocalli also became active as the beleaguered priests were sequestered and began their own preparations for Marauder. Before the operation could begin, SIRRURG left his base of operations and headed toward Amazonia. Reports say that Hualpa had summoned him and other dragons for an impromptu meeting, the purpose of which is still unknown, but it forced Aztlan to change their plans slightly.

- I have it on good authority that Hualpa and the rest of the dragon community were finally concerned over SIRRURG's actions and wanted to discuss things before they got out of hand.
- Frosty
- BEFORE?! What the hell did they think the war was, a picnic?
- Ecotrope
- It was already too late. Amazonia military leaders were monitoring activities and troop movements in Aztlan. Apparently, they weren't as dumb as Aztlan hoped and started to piece together that an operation was already in motion. Though the teocalli all going active at once was a big fucking clue.
- Ethernaut
- Amazonia, through Horizon contacts, got wind of bits and pieces of Aztlan's plans. They knew: 1) That Aztlan was embellishing their casualty figures, 2) that Aztlan was building up to a big operation, and 3) that for said operation, the teocalli were going to play a big role. Even their agents in Bogotá didn't know more than that, but it turns out most of those agents were compromised. They just didn't know it yet. But I'm getting ahead of myself. When Amazonia got word that Aztlan had gone on alert, they initiated their own contingency plans and activated several assets with orders to hit predetermined targets.
- Thorn

As far as the rest of the world was concerned, it was business as usual in South America. Of course, as we all know business tends to change in a heartbeat.

... AND PULLING THE TRIGGER

Posted by: Sunshine

I'm going to start with a flashback here, because I think this transcript is the best way to get a feel for the chaos that erupted when things went down. I have permission from all the involved parties, so let's look at what happened when Aztechnology put its plans in motion.

Incoming Message

/Private chat <IN PROGRESS>/

/User registered: Pistons

/User registered: Netcat

- I still couldn't believe the look on his face. His favorite Seadog jersey ruined! I warned him not to feed the little guy Big Rhino hot wings again. He's never gonna get the puke stain out.
- Netcat
- I wish I could've seen it. So how pissed is Fred right now?
- Pistons

Incoming Message

- He's mourning in private over it. I hope he won't make the same mistake again, but I doubt it. Honestly, after everything that's happened this year, I'm just glad to be home.
- Netcat
- Yeah. It's been a mess. I just hope things finally calm ... wait, I got a message ping. Make that multiple pings.
- Pistons
- Me too. Oh damn, I just got a message about ...
- Netcat
- Hold that thought. I'm expanding our chat parameters and sending out multiple invites. I think the drek just hit the fan. Again. Drek, I really need to keep my mouth shut. Hold on, it's going to get crowded here in a hurry.
- Pistons

/User entered: Orbital DK

/User entered: Slamm-O!

/User entered: FastJack

/User entered: Glitch

- People, we have a bit of a problem. Tell them what you told me, DK.
- FastJack
- Approximately ten minutes ago, someone hacked and took control of multiple observation, communication, and weapon satellites. Both the Grid Overwatch Division and Space Rescue Service just went into full counter-attack mode and are locking down anyone they suspect was part of the attack. Several networks, including the Asgard Data Haven, just got their lights punched out. I can't get a hold of several contacts up here, and those I could indicate this is a coordinated attack. For what purpose, I don't know.
- Orbital DK
- Do we have confirmation on which sats have been disabled?
- Glitch
- No, and right now I'm running through several backdoors just to be able to talk here. I'm practically blind!
- Orbital DK
- I'm checking with someone I know right now who may know something.
- FastJack
- DK, you said "weapons" satellites. Do we know if someone now has the ability to, oh, I don't know, start dropping fucking Thor shots on our heads?
- Slamm-O!

Incoming Message

- I don't know about that, but the SRS has initiated Alert Status: Alpha. That means orbital weapons are compromised.
- Orbital DK
- Fucking lovely.
- Slamm-O!
- OK, we need to start rallying the troops and getting people online. We need information and fast. DK, you know what I want you to do. The rest of you, start digging, and for ghost's sake make sure you got your best security up. We don't know what kind of attack we're looking at.
- FastJack

/User entered: Winterhawk

/User entered: Black Mamba

/User entered: Traveler Jones

- Just got the message, but I think there's more to this than satellites. Several teocallis in Aztlan warming up for the past few months have just become full-blown active and the energy around them is growing exponentially. Someone's cooking up some major mojo and fast! Be back shortly—I'm going to do some astral recon.
- Winterhawk
- All major traffic in Aztlan is shut down, and they've blacked out as many communication sources as they can, especially near Acapulco. I just got back on literally thirty seconds ago.
- Traveler Jones
- I'm in Bogotá right now and something's definitely going on. Someone's been following me for the last two days and they're starting to get serious. I lost them at

<transmission interrupted-SIGNAL LOST/User: Black Mamba logged out>

- Damn! Can we get her back?
- Netcat
- No, transmission lost at the source.
- Pistons
- Here's another bit of bad news. I can't raise Mamba, Marcos, Picador, Hard Exit, or Aufheben. And come to think of it, I haven't heard or seen any activity from them in days.
- FastJack
- And when was the last time someone heard from Lyran? I know she was still down there too.
- Traveler Jones



- Everyone! I just used a back door to get into the Eagle-Eye II Observatory; someone's already here accessing the orbital telescopes and is using them to <SIGNAL JAMMED>. Damn, got made. Hold on, you all need to see this! I'll try and get some of the feed before this gets ug<transmission interrupted-SIGNAL LOST/User: Orbital DK logged out>

<WARNING! UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS ATTEMPT! INITIATING COUNTERMEASURES!>

<WARNING! COUNTERMEASURES INEFFECTIVE! BREACH IN FIVE SECONDS!>

- Oh hel's NO! Eat JACKHAMMER YOU FUCKERS!!!!!!
- FastJack
- Got the other one, 'Jack!
- Slamm-O!

<INTRUDER PURGED, SWITCHING TO BACKUP SERVERS>

- Initiating emergency measures. How the hell did they get in so fast? OK, we're good!
- Glitch

/User entered: Sunshine

- Sorry for the delay, things are getting busy to say the least.
- Sunshine
- Oh ... my ... ghost. Everyone, I got a hold of the feed DK tried to send. I got an image...
- Netcat
- Oh, shit. This is gonna get ugly.
- Slamm-O!
- Are we SURE this is legit? IS IT CLEAN?
- Glitch
- I'm back and it is ... it's ugly there. Things are warping. I'm not feeling well.
- Winterhawk
- Yeah Glitch, it's clean. I scrubbed it and checked for any tattle-tales.
- Netcat
- Damn, it finally happened. Is anyone else thinking WWIII has just started?
- Pistons
- I just got a message from my sources down south. Yeah, it's true. I can confirm that approximately ten minutes ago, previously unknown units from the Aztlan military engaged SIRRURG.
- Sunshine
- OK, focus everyone. We need to get the word out and make contact with the other JackPointers; find out what's going on out there...and how bad it REALLY is.
- FastJack

- That conversation happened on October 3, 2074 at approximately 1500 Zulu. At the time, none of us here at JackPoint had any idea what was coming. The first few years of the war were nothing but a build-up for what eventually came. Bogotá and the surrounding area was literally a powder keg and it's one hell of an understatement to say that things went downhill fast from that point. When Aztlan finally engaged SIRRURG, it was exactly what everyone thought it was going to be: a knock-down, drag-it-out, extremely destructive melee. What happened that day changed the entire course of the war and brought about its conclusion, for better or worse. It took a while, but we finally got the real paydata on what happened, not Aztlan's ultra-patriotic version. Sunshine will lay it out for all of us.
- Glitch
- Thanks, but I have to give special thanks to Orbital DK (who's fine, headaches notwithstanding) for all of her help with this. Recently General Ricardo Vega, head of the Aztlan Air Force, briefed a joint emergency session (closed of course) of the Corporate Court Crisis Coordination Committee (C5) and the UN Security Council on Zurich Orbital (yeah, in person). He told them what the hell happened over Acapulco in a mostly accurate account. He didn't outright lie, but he got somewhat vague over certain details in the name of "national security." The media at large still doesn't have the all the facts, but I've learned that Samantha Roth has special access to the briefing transcripts and other related files on the attack. She's working on a special for Televista's The Sphere, but a certain reporter may just decide to scoop her <evil grin>. Here's what I've got so far based mostly on those transcripts and some other sources.
- Sunshine

HIGHEST PRIORITY TARGET

After several months of searching for his base of operations near Roswell, the Aztlan military finally struck gold and located SIRRURG's base just outside of Roswell. The Aztlan High Command initiated Operation: Marauder, the Aztlan military's plan to eliminate the great dragon SIRRURG.

Operation: Marauder

Marauder became an obsession to the Aztlan leadership, specifically President Enrico Silva. After the complete destruction of their military base and the loss of several thousand more civilians at Cali, President Silva felt personally responsible for not protecting his people better. Even with the support of Aztechnology, President Silva knew that the Aztlan military was incapable of victory as long as the threat of the great dragon and his followers remained.

President Silva wasn't the only one who felt this way; fear of SIRRURG clouded the judgment the Aztlan military as well. Even spectacular victories lost their luster, and several times opportunities to advance were ordered to hold. While not openly discussed, this fear started to poison the morale of the military as the leadership lost faith in its troops, and vice versa. This is one of the main reasons why Horizon's PR campaigns were initially effective against Aztlan, as the average soldier had stopped believing in his country.

Since President Silva was a former soldier, the situation was not lost on him. He knew that by eliminating SIRRURG, he would remove the biggest threat his country faced while restoring hope

and pride in his people and military. When it was finally approved, Operation: Marauder became the highest military priority and took precedence over everything else. To Silva, the horrendous losses incurred during the multiple Amazonian counter-assaults were considered acceptable and even necessary to maintain Marauder's integrity. For a time, many wondered if this obsessive drive was a sign of madness in the president.

Before the success of finding Sirurg's base, some of Aztlan's leaders started to doubt whether preparations for Marauder were sustainable. Adding to the frustration: Several of the anti-dragon weapon programs were faltering. While a few were promising, the projections still showed they could not provide the knockout capability Aztlan needed.

Several times, Silva's advisors, the military high command, and even the priesthood of the Path of the Sun tried to convince him to scale back Marauder and focus on the situation at hand. When he refused, a small vocal minority wondered if it was time to replace their president. It wasn't until early 2074 when Aztechnology CEO Flavia de la Rosa met with President Silva, informing the president that one of the weapons projects, Blue-227, was viable. Aztlan finally had the weapon Marauder needed. Now all they had to do was find Sirurg.

- Ah ha! I knew that sounded familiar! I just found what I was looking for thanks to that little bit. OK, here is the download: Blue-227 is the project code name applied to weapons developed for the Sirurg Task Force. I first saw a reference for it when an associate of mine snagged some extra paydata during a run in Panama. It was the first program to show some actual promise. To prevent data on it from leaking out, the entire project was transferred out of weapons R&D and given a medical research designation. It was labeled as a new battlefield trauma treatment. Think of it as an instant battle dressing in salve form. I admit this is some heavy stuff because even I'm having a hard time understanding it. Trying to read the formula that explains the biochemical reaction on the base RNA sequences still gives me a headache. Dammit, I'm a street doc not a biochemist!
- Butch
- I think I can help. I've also seen information on Blue-227, but I've been holding on to it for my own reasons. But basically, Blue-227 is a biochemical weapon (no nanotech, sorry everyone) that targets the proteins found in dragon blood. Depending on the specific chemical mixture and how much oxygen is present, it will either act as a coagulant or anticoagulant.
- KAM
- In other words, this stuff will either cause a dragon to bleed out or turn their blood to cement. And Butch, don't worry about not understanding the formula. I had to ask another associate of mine and he explained that a large part of it was magically based. But that part's a mystery, as it's not necessary to the overall formula. Oh, and you're welcome by the way, doctor.
- The Smiling Bandit

TARGET ACQUIRED

But just before the planned assault, sources on the ground discovered that the great dragon was not present. The original plan

AZTLAN FORCES, ASSAULT ON ROSWELL STRONGHOLD

Comprising several different types of Guerrero warriors, Ground Task Force One (GTF-1) spent months fighting and dying trying to locate Sirurg's base of operations near Roswell. Several times during the war the great dragon or his followers engaged them; each encounter left heavy casualties including the original command officers from the Caucahtin (The Eagles) Order. The only one left in the task force is the current commander, Major Roberto Estrada. As the operation continued and several more Guerreros fell in combat, Aztlan and Aztechnology commanders were forced to augment GTF-1 with members of the mercenary company Task Force: Magus and several irregular specialists who were organized under the temporary designation of the 155th Irregular Detachment. Though Guerrero field commander Major Estrada initially objected to the presence of the "outsiders and unworthy," he ultimately followed his orders and worked to integrate them into the task force. Task Force: Magus was specifically selected for their experience in combat magic and magical threat suppression—something that would be needed when the eventual assault on Sirurg's stronghold was ordered.

Ground Task Force One, Aztlan Theater Commanding Officer: Major Roberto Estrada

Composition:

- 23rd Aztlan Ocelomeh (Jaguar) Detachment
- 14th Aztlan Otontin (The Brave Ones) Detachment
- 9th Aztlan Cuachicqueh (The Shorn Ones) Detachment
- Task Force: Magus (mercenary company)
- 155th Irregular Detachment (shadowrunners)

- Before being assigned to the hunt for Sirurg, all of the Aztlan units listed here had some of the highest kill ratios in the war. Major Estrada, a high-level initiate mystic adept, served under President Silva and was handpicked by the president to lead the task force. Among Aztlan military commanders, he's known as the President's Red Hand.
- Pyramid Watcher

TASK FORCE: MAGUS

Task Force: Magus is a mercenary company of combat magicians who sell their specialized services to units that need magical support. Former UCAS Army Thaumaturgic Corps Lt. Colonel Rita Furlann formed Task Force: Magus in 2058, and it quickly gained a reputation in the mercenary community as one of the most competent in their field. They're also infamous for their arrogance, and rumors persist of magical subversion of other units' commanders or clients. Still, they are the only unit of their type and continue to receive highly lucrative contracts. In early 2061, General Furlann retired to take a position with MCT, although she still maintains regular contact with Magus. Her successor, General Simon Greenspirit, is rumored to be a former Tír Paladin who supposedly betrayed his lord by murdering him and his wife.

- The rumors about subversion are true. If you take a contract that forces you to work for or with Task Force: Magus, be very careful. While they know much about the arts, they are somewhat lacking in knowledge of traditional military tactics and will use their talents to subvert command authority for their benefit at their earliest convenience. They also like to avoid action whenever possible and use other units as meat shields when they eventually engage in combat.
- Thorn

had called for special air and ground task forces to ambush SIRRURG while still at his base, but this was no longer possible and the entire operation was now in jeopardy. Refusing to waste an opportunity or lose the initiative, the high command decided to move on to an alternate part of the plan: to try to draw SIRRURG out instead.

On October 3, 2074 at approximately 1350 Zulu, after several other units all over Aztlan were put on alert and mobilized, Aztlan Special Forces augmented by several specialist units (that's military jargon for shadowrunners and mercenaries) began phase one of the plan and assaulted SIRRURG's base head-on.

The base itself wasn't SIRRURG's base of operations in North America; it was one of his "mini-hordes." Once the security illusions and wards were breached, the entrance to the stronghold just looked like a large hole. Heavy assault troops from the 23rd, 9th, and 155th stormed the entrance, attacking with heavy weapons fire backed with support from the magicians of the task force. The tactics employed were similar to what police/security HRT teams use when entering an unknown building.

Reports say that after the initial breach, the troops only took minor casualties, mostly from the magicians suffering from severe drain. Initial contact occurred three minutes and six seconds after the breach when a squad from the 9th engaged a group of drakes and dracoforms in an antechamber just off the main hallway. According to the Aztlan squad leader (translated from Aztlan Spanish), "we engaged the targets with automatic weapons fire until they no longer moved. We then removed their heads just to make sure." The next fifteen minutes were relatively uneventful, and the Task Force began a thorough sweep of the base.

Around minute sixteen, all hell broke loose.

This is where the details get a bit vague. In his briefing, General Vega said the Task Force engaged a security force including the usual dracoforms, drakes, a *lot* of spirits (mostly air elementals ... his words, not mine), and at least two adult dragons. After a brief but intense engagement, the entire base was cleared.

Before people start rapid-firing questions and ask "how the hell did they do it," I think General Vega answered it in response to a question from Jean-Claude Priault of S-K: "After confronting the adult dragons in the southwest corridor, various members of the 9th Detachment, with support from elements of the 14th, employed their main weapons and began a holding action while the weapons took effect. Once the targets were down, they were finished off and the task force moved on."

- Oh shit. He said that with a straight face? I'll ask the obvious question: Does anyone else think that these guys did a test run with Blue-227 to see if it worked before the big show? Show of hands if you think "oh fuck yeah!"
- Slamm-0!

At this point, Vega doesn't say much more about the raid other than the Task Force initiated the next part of the operation. The troops removed the wounded and dead, and placed mining charges at strategic points inside the base, which detonated after all personnel were evacuated from the area. According to Vega, the Task Force immediately extracted themselves from the area.

- I think there's quite a bit the good general left out. On one of my marathon Seattle-to-LA-and-back-again runs, a group who needed a lift back north hired me. When I dropped them off, one of them flipped me an old coin as a tip. Old as in, ancient Roman old. Seriously, it had a picture of Augustus Caesar on it; I verified that it was the real deal and checked out those slags, too. Come to find out they hired on with the Azzies during the war. How much does anyone here want to bet those troops in Roswell made off like bandits with some of SIRRURG's loot?
- Sounder
- That's pretty thin, Sounder.
- Snopes
- Well, doesn't matter if they got it themselves, or got it off someone else. And I got rid of it as soon as I could. Sold it to the University of Washington for enough to buy a new ship. If that thing came from where I think it did, I want to be as far away from it as I can get. And if anyone comes asking about it in the future, I'll have no problems telling them where I got it and where I took it.
- Sounder
- I wonder what else from that horde could be floating around out there.
- Elijah

With GTF-1's mission complete, the only thing to do now was to wait and see if SIRRURG took the bait. The idea to blow up his Roswell horde was a gamble. There was no guarantee that SIRRURG would attack, at least not on their timetable. Operation: Marauder's success now rested on the slim chance that the destruction of part of his horde could piss SIRRURG off enough that he would come screaming into Aztlan for revenge. SIRRURG was no fool and there was no guarantee that he would dance to Aztlan's tune.

But in this case, the long shot paid off. Approximately two hours after the initial Aztlan attack, observation satellites spotted SIRRURG making his way along Aztlan's west coast at high speed before veering out to sea, presumably to gather strength for his magic. As part of Marauder, Aztlan had three separate task forces ready to deal with SIRRURG once he appeared. Air Task Force Two, secretly based out of Guadalajara, was the first to intercept the great dragon roughly forty kilometers west of Acapulco. Air Task Forces One and Three were also scrambled with Three ordered to move in immediately to support Task Force Two. Task Force One held station. The Aztlan carrier *Huey Tlatoani* and her battle group, having set sail days earlier, also made their way towards the engagement zone.

- In orbit, a handful of Aztechnology hackers co-opted several observation satellites in an effort to keep the rest of the world, especially Horizon and Amazonia, in the dark. Earlier in the year, Aztechnology lost several of their own sats to sabotage, so this time they decided to call in a little favor from Evo and used their satellites to conduct operations. One of the Aztlan's main targets was Horizon's Eagle-Eye II space observation platform. When it wasn't taking nice pictures of faraway galaxies, it had its optics turned Earth-side and did a lot of spying for Horizon and Amazonia. Using "borrowed" codes from the Space Rescue Service (you know, the ones that in



times of emergency can be used to take control of any satellite in orbit), Aztechnology used Eagle-Eye II to help coordinate the attack against SIRRURG. And to add insult to injury, they also made it look like "terrorists" had taken control of the platform and were going to dump the sat into the atmosphere. An SRS cutter eventually responded and secured the platform, pending a full investigation. Seems the SRS and GOD don't like it when someone uses their own codes against them. They went batshit crazy and blacked out the rest of the sat-network, then slammed several other "suspected" terrorist networks as a precaution, which also benefitted Aztlán. I'm still pissed that the Asgard Data Haven got smacked in the crossfire, and I'm still pissed that someone smacked me out of Eagle-Eye II like a redheaded stepchild. Whoever did it better hope I never find them.

- Orbital DK
- Damn! I knew it would be nice to get a hold of one of those codes! I bet they'll change all the security protocols now. Some days I just can't get a break.
- Pistons

The first wave of fighters and attack craft from Task Force Two barely slowed SIRRURG. The attack started off as planned but quickly devolved into clusterfuck of a dogfight. Only one pilot managed to get a shot off before SIRRURG's fangs and claws destroyed him. The second wave of craft from Task Force Two, composed mostly of drones and their TAC-C control craft, had better luck and used the chaos of the battle to score several hits with their main weapons.

- Bozhe Moi! Can we just call it for what it is? We all know by now that the Aztlán Task Forces used the Blue-227 weapon. I've seen the specs. And I am also willing to pay top nuyen for anyone able to deliver an intact sample of the weapon or its delivery system. Will pay triple for both.
- Red Anya

By this time, air units from Task Force Three arrived on station and joined the battle. New waves of previously unseen aircraft engaged SIRRURG. Quickly adapting to the situation, battle commanders spread out and attacked the great dragon from multiple vectors in an attempt to keep him off balance. By now the sheer volume of the attackers was difficult to control and coordinate, and the troops pulled back to regroup. SIRRURG took advantage of the brief chaos to send some of his spirits into battle and dive into the waves of drones still hounding him, easily destroying them before he moved on to some of the manned aircraft. SIRRURG's spirits destroyed several of the regrouping aircraft, but Task Force magicians turned most of the spirits back.

Soon after the initial engagement, SIRRURG decided to get a better position and headed for land. As the aircraft task force regrouped for another wave of assaults, naval vessels moving in from the Pacific hounded SIRRURG with missile and gunfire. Accounts claim that a lucky railgun shot from the destroyer *Chupacabra* scored a direct hit on SIRRURG's left shoulder near the wing joint, which was the first time that Aztlán was able to draw blood from the great dragon. This caused him to crash into the earth approximately thirty miles north of Acapulco. The remnants

of Task Forces Two and Three renewed their attacks and launched several salvos of their main weapons.

- Not to interrupt Sunshine's fine documentation of the event, but there are a few pertinent missing details. I have orbital footage of the attack. In the footage I noticed several dark swept-wing shapes that were part of the attack. Several of them went toe-to-toe with SIRRURG and almost outmaneuvered him. Are these those Bloodwing fighters Rigger X mentioned awhile back? Anyone else who wants to see the footage here's the [\[link\]](#).
- Orbital DK
- Visually, they match the craft specs I have, but if this is them, then I've seriously underestimated their performance capabilities. In that footage, several of these craft dodged melee attacks from SIRRURG and were taken out at distance. This could be a game-changer in the weapons business.
- Rigger-X
- Is it because the pilots are that good, or could this Blue-227 have something to do with it?
- Turbo Bunny
- Hard to say. We don't have enough data on Blue-227 to know how long it would need to take effect. But I doubt that lucky shot helped SIRRURG's cause.
- Butch
- Has anyone else noticed that throughout the battle, some of the drones were even older than Bull and Fastjack. It's like Aztlán emptied their warehouses to throw everything they had at the big wyrm. I've seen the specs on the Falconer TAC-C system (cred's already in the account. X), and badass as it is (I'm so getting one), there is no way they could have successfully coordinated as many drones as they fielded. It's like they were ordered to fly right into SIRRURG's face.
- Clockwork

Now on the ground, SIRRURG was squarely on the defensive. As the battle resumed, SIRRURG let loose and attacked with his magic. Several more spirits, specifically air, attempted to create storms in the area to thwart the air attacks. Heavy-lift aircraft created instant firebases and several mobile artillery pieces came to the fight. Naval assets also contributed to the artillery barrage from offshore. Several times SIRRURG took to the sky and obliterated any Aztláns who crossed him, but he was unable to leave the engagement zone. Airborne controllers had several waves of craft stacked at different altitudes and at various positions around the engagement. As soon as SIRRURG attempted a breakthrough, the controllers simply vectored in other craft to cut him off; all the while SIRRURG was under constant barrage and bombardment. On his fifth failed attempt to take wing, Aztlán pilots and spotters confirmed that SIRRURG was wounded, even bleeding profusely, and his wings were completely torn to shreds. One pilot even reported that the great dragon's right eye was gone.

SIRRURG was hurt, but Task Forces Two and Three were mauled. Over half of their drones and nearly as many aircraft were either destroyed or forced to disengage after sustaining significant





INCOMING FEED.....

damage. At least thirty pilots were forced to punch out over the Pacific and two command and control aircraft were also downed thanks to enemy spirits. Still, both sides pressed on, neither one offering any quarter. Sirurg leapt several times into the air to attack passing craft, but already he was starting to slow down.

Approximately ninety-eight minutes after the land engagement began, reinforcements from Task Force One and Sirurg's followers arrived. Coming in from the north, both groups made contact twenty kilometers from the engagement zone and ferociously tore at each other as they arrived. One group from Sirurg's reinforcements also broke off and destroyed the temporary firebases while another forced the Aztlan naval elements to withdraw. The tide of the battle appeared to be shifting and the on-scene air commander requested permission to withdraw, but he was ordered to continue to the last man.

As Sirurg and his followers continued to tear into the Aztlan forces, unexpected reinforcements from local Aztlan regular military, local militia, or anyone with an air vehicle, heavy weapons, and a grudge against the great dragon joined the fray. Despite receiving no orders to engage and the secret nature of the entire operation, these groups threw themselves into the battle. All semblance of coordination disappeared as they sky filled with dragons, dracoforms, spirits, state-of-the art aircraft, T-birds, drones, and aircraft that hadn't flown in decades. Ground troops also poured into the area, shooting at anything that wasn't metahuman.

With so much weapons fire and magic use, a blue fog formed in the engagement zone. Wind kicked up from all the air spirits in play and for a few minutes the jet stream was even temporarily altered, scattering the blue mist into the clouds above. All over the battlefield, aircraft of both kinds crashed as they did as much damage to themselves as they did to the enemy. Several locals

attempted suicide attacks on Sirurg, but none were successful.

Bloody and battered, Sirurg attempted to end the conflict with his entropy powers, just as he did at Cali. He ordered his followers away and all spirits to take him into the clouds. The remnants of all three Task Forces attempted to pursue, but they were either too damaged or were out of ammunition to continue. A few kilometers up, Sirurg began his rite. Reports state that the dragon began to glow bright blue and there was a flash of light—an energy discharge half a kilometer wide that blinded anyone looking in that direction. The shockwave snapped back in on itself, killing anyone within the radius.

The dragon fell to the earth when his spirits were destroyed, and he did not move. Those outside of the blast were ordered to move in and investigate, but before they could, a large storm formed over the battle site. Strong winds kicked up and prevented any aircraft from getting into the area. Witnesses say at least two gigantic, mist-obscured figures were seen rushing effortlessly through the storm toward the engagement area. Then just as suddenly as it began, the storm was over. By the time Aztlan forces were able to investigate, all they found were several dead bodies, broken hardware, and an indentation with burn mark in the ground where Sirurg had crashed.

- Holy shit, where do we begin?
- Slamm-0!
- I'd like to know why in the hell Sirurg responded like that. I mean, his past few operations were calculated, well planned, and generally solid. This seems totally out of character. He practically walked right into Aztlan's trap, wings wide open.
- Stone



- You want to know how dragons think? You and everyone else! Just a shot in the dark here, but I'd say that when the Azzies blew up part of his horde, it was a giant frag-you and a direct challenge to SIRRURG. Up until then he was invulnerable, but the attack showed even he had his weaknesses. And for whatever reason he felt he needed to take care of it himself. Either that or he was so fragg'd off he didn't care about making a plan.
- Pistons
- Looks like Blue-227 was successful. Pardon me for sounding naïve, but if it works against a dragon's blood, how did they introduce it?
- /dev/ grrl
- I'd say a combination of specialized ordinance and Trojan-horse drones. To get an initial dose into him, they probably let him smash a few and breathe it in. Then pounded him as much as they could with both regular and modified ordnance to see if they could at least wound him.
- Glasswalker
- Given what we now know about their tactics, it makes sense. You can't really sneak up on dragons, so what you need is a concentrated and overwhelming force. Trick is, you still have to overwhelm a dragon. I can understand why Aztlan did everything to put SIRRURG in the position they did, but what about his magic? I would have guessed that would have been the greatest concern: how do you shut down a dragon's magic?
- Am-mut
- I ... I honestly don't know. The amount of power necessary would be astronomical, not to mention it requires extreme precision. Is Aztlan even capable of such a thing?
- Frosty
- It is if they combine the power of the Sextant of Worlds, a locus, and then power the whole damn thing with the sacrifice of about a thousand. Yes, it was possible.
- Rifleman
- What?! When did the Sextant come into play? I knew every asshole and his uncle were looking for it and it was rumored to be in Aztlan hands, but now you're telling me that they had it all the time? How the hell do they hide something like that? And no offense, but how much do you actually know about it?
- Snopes
- I don't know, yes, I don't know, and quite a lot actually.
- Rifleman
- Oh no, you're not getting off the hook that easy, mister. You can't just come in here and drop a bombshell like that and then get all mysterious on us. You better spill what you know or by gods I'll
<1.9 MP deleted by SYSOP>
- Frosty
- Down, girl. Take the threats elsewhere.
- Bull
- Frosty, I'm sorry but I've already said too much. I'm only saying anything now because I know people will follow up and find the truth for themselves.
- Rifleman
- You're not related to Man-Of-Many-Names are you?
- Slamm-O!
- What we really need to worry about isn't how this ritual was conducted, but just what the full effects of the attempted rite are going to be. In the short run, I think it's safe to say that it was designed to stop SIRRURG from using his entropy power by reflecting it back at him. I wonder what would've happened if the rite went off as planned.
- Arête
- Hey guys, am I the only one who remembered that magical component of Blue-227? How do you think that would affect things? A lot of it was thrown around, and after reviewing my files it seems that it was considered safe with no dangers when exposed to metahumans. But if the ritual it was attached to got corrupted.
- Butch
- And a large cloud of it was spread all over the area. Oh great.
- Glitch
- Several other teocallis were hit during Marauder, most likely to disrupt the rite. Only the assaults at Panama, Guadalajara, and Tijuana were successful. The assaults at the others, I don't have any details yet but what my sources have uncovered include words like bloodbath, rout, and decimation to describe what happened to the attackers.
- Pyramid Watcher
- Still, the priesthood of the Path of the Sun was almost shattered. The assaults took out a lot of the priests, but nothing's come out about what happened at the other teocallis when the spell backfired. The mana backlash during the rite was astronomical. I know of at least ten high-level initiates who died because of it, and several of their blood spirits were freed. I'd also keep an eye on those temples and what happens when magic is performed there again. Something about them makes me even more nervous than before.
- Elijah
- Give me a PM; I have some related data to show you.
- Winterhawk.
- I have the best question of all: did Aztlan kill SIRRURG or not?
- Plan 9

After the battle, all surviving troops were ordered back to their bases. The action near Acapulco would later be called the Battle at Dragon Beach. The battle was over, but Aztlan's plans were just unfolding. Twenty minutes into their victory, Aztlan gave Operation: Huntress the "go" order. The Battle of Bogotá began.



THE BATTLE OF BOGOTÁ

Posted by: Sunshine, et al

- OK, before I get going, we're going to break from our traditional format for this section just a bit. Normally whoever's posting will just collect the data from our sources and then feed it back to everyone here. This time, I think it would be better to let the sources speak for themselves. We know the broad strokes of what Aztlan did in Bogotá after Sirurg was defeated. But we don't know much beyond that because Aztlan was controlling the information flow. I think in this case, the best way to learn what really happened is to read the words of those who were actually there. I'll help cover the high points, but most of the nitty-gritty stuff will be coming from a variety of sources.
- Sunshine.

October 3, 2074

Less than two hours after Aztlan defeated Sirurg outside of Acapulco, Aztlan launched Operation: Huntress, their plan to secure the city of Bogotá. The first phase of Huntress was twofold: to eliminate all known Amazonian, Horizon, and anti-Aztlan agents still within the city, and to feed Amazonia false intelligence. Once the operation began, agents of Aztlan and Aztechnology began their assignments. Less than twenty-four hours later, eighty percent of the assignments were completed. Some of these assignments implied that Amazonian agents attacked Aztechnology holdings, thereby allowing the Aztechnology forces to legally engage in the fight. Based on planted intelligence, Amazonian commanders thought the bulk of Aztlan forces were engaged against Sirurg in the north. Amazonia launched an offensive against the city to completely cut it off from Aztlan. Aztlan responded, deploying several previously unknown airborne and air cavalry units that dropped in behind advancing Amazonian forces. Meanwhile, Aztechnology forces attacked from within the city, effectively surrounding the Amazonians. The Battle of Bogotá had officially begun.

- Guess Rifleman was right; all those shuffled units didn't just go into the Sirurg Task Forces. Damn, they pulled off one hell of a logistical sleight of hand.
- Stone

Incoming Message

<From the personal journal of
Sergeant-Major H. Martinez,
77th Independent Ranger Company "El Cuadrilla">

October 8, 2074

Location: 45 kilometers northeast of Bogotá

I hoped to get my first full night's sleep in months, but the Major called an emergency meeting to inform us the orders were in. We were to make way towards Bogotá to reinforce and cover the northern flank of an Amazonian push into the city. My guts told me that this whole thing was a giant mistake, and from the look on the Major's face, she thought it too. But, like good soldiers we had our orders and made ready to move out. Just before we departed, we saw the first wave of Aztlan's "counterassault" hit. A flight of Halcon fighter-bombers struck our position first, taking out most of our large transports and forcing us to scatter. I saw at least six t-birds of various types fly overhead past our position. Judging by their configuration, they were troop carriers. The Major then yelled orders to take up defensive positions and for the rocket crews to get ready, but two Paynal gunships broke off from the t-bird group to begin attacking our positions with heavy machine gun and rocket fire. A few of our squads opened up with small-arms fire, but those gunships had heavier armor than usual. Still, it got their attention and gave Corporal Jones and his crew a chance to deploy their Ballistas. The gunship's countermeasures defeated two rockets, but one connected squarely with one of the Paynal's right engines. With one now crippled, the two gunships retreated while letting loose with their remaining rockets to cover their egress. We were battered, bloody, and no longer combat-effective. We lost most of our transports in the attack and our TacNet crew signaled multiple contacts coming in on our position, ETA ten minutes. It was time to move. The Major ordered all available equipment and the wounded gathered up. Anything left behind should be destroyed or booby-trapped. Taking only what we could to survive, we began the long trek through the jungle to the last known friendly position in Amazonia. I just hope it will still be there if we arrive.

October 12, 2074

Aztlan and Amazonian forces clashed in open warfare both in and outside of Bogotá. Amazonian forces were divided; some penetrated the city to attack from within while others fought in the surrounding wilderness. Aztlan airborne troops continued to attack Amazonian forces from the rear while Aztlan and Aztechnology troops inside the city continued with brutal street fighting. In the Gulf of Aztlan and the Pacific Ocean, Aztlan naval forces stationed themselves just off the Aztlan coast and provided artillery support in the form of cruise missiles. Several units from the north, including remnants of the Sirurg Task Force's

THE TRIUMPH OF AZTLAN

Incoming Message

<Posted to ShadowSea, Aztlan-War Thread. Oct. 4, 2074. Poster: Rabid Fire>

- Fuck! I still can't believe they took out that fucking dragon! Now the whole thing's starting to come apart here in Bogotá. Sometime last night, gunfire started erupting all over the city. I know it's Bogotá and those things just happen whenever they happen, but this is different. Two of my local contacts were wasted no more than three hours ago. Double-taps to the head. Definitely a professional job. Apparently all sorts of people with some kind of tie to Amazonia are being killed all over the city; it's like a massive network run!

And fuck me sideways; I just got a message from Barney that he just found Tabby, butchered in our secondary safehouse. I can't get a hold of the rest of the team. Fuck this shit; I should never've let Two-Tone talk me into coming down here, no matter how good the money was. Fuck him and his Azzie hatred for getting me into this shit. What the fuck? Now I'm hearing aircraft overhead, lots of them! There haven't been any real flights over the city in years ... okay, that's it, I'm outta here. Anyone who's working biz in Bogotá, get the FUCK out now!

- Rabid Fire

<Note: This was Rabid Fire's last known post to ShadowSea>

Storm Front

ground units, also arrived in Bogotá and deployed around the city's perimeter. Just north of the city along the disputed border, famed mercenary units MET2000 and Tsunami clashed as the Amazonian-contracted MET2000 attempted to engage Aztlan armor forces on the way to the city.

- By this time, no one seemed to care about collateral damage, just killing the enemy. I haven't seen such blatant disregard for civilians in my life. At least the Russians bothered to attack military targets, this ... it just makes me sick.
- Fianchetto
- I've done a lot of research into some of the magical aspects of this battle and frankly, it scares the hell out of me. It's one thing to let loose with conventional weapons like this, but to do so with magic is almost suicide. I'd advise everyone to keep an eye on this place for even more magical problems in the future.
- Winterhawk
- Judging by the soldier's reactions, I wonder if one of those rogue spirits, Maelstrom or Oblivion, were involved?
- Glasswalker
- You a betting man?
- Kane
- Actually, my information placed them in Denver at the time.
- Elijah
- On a personal note, Chuck Pesina was a good friend of mine. They found his body two days later, cut almost in half and several of his organs missing. He was a good reporter, one of the few honest ones out there.
- Sunshine

October 15, 2074

The Aztlan military established a no-fly zone extending in a fifty-kilometer radius around of Bogotá. This comes two days after Aztlan/Aztechnology forces cordoned off the city, cutting off all access to the outside world. This didn't stop Amazonian forces and civilians from attempting to leave or enter the city. Current Aztlan rules of engagement gave their forces standing orders to shoot on sight any craft or vehicle attempting to enter or leave the city. Strict curfews were enacted as Aztechnology security forces cracked down on anyone suspected of working for or affiliation with Amazonia.

Amazonia and several other countries protested this in a current UN meeting, citing the inability to get humanitarian relief into the city for trapped civilians. The Aztlan ambassador to the UN replied: "If you're so concerned with civilians, then why did you enact sanctions in the first place! We are fighting for our very survival, and yet you all have turned it into a game of politics and punished us because of lies. No, we have defeated our greatest enemy and now we shall end the war our way!"

Inside the city, conditions were barbaric. Leaked reports indicate widespread conflict over basic supplies and rampant disease. Orbital satellites showed that thirty percent of buildings in Bogotá are now destroyed or uninhabitable. Even the Aztechnology Business complex took significant damage. Fighting

Incoming Message

Excerpt: Independent News Services, Carlos "Chuck" Pesina, broadcast October 13, 2074, 1457 GMT

<Close in shot, Carlos Pesina, crouched down next to wrecked APC>

This is Chuck Pesina, INS coming to you from the current Amazonia-Aztlan border, embedded with the famed mercenary company MET2000! Six hours ago, forces from rival mercenary company Tsunami intercepted MET units moving along the border towards Bogotá. The fighting since then has been fierce because as far as I can tell, all armor and vehicles on both sides are either crippled or completely destroyed! *<Audio: sounds of mortar rounds and machine gun fire in background>* Infantry units are now slugging it out among the burning vehicles and the terrain trying to gain some kind of advantage, but things have gotten so confused that the various units are mixed in between each other, no one seems to know who is friend and who is foe! *<Audio cutout: excessive noise, explosion>*...nition is running short and the battle is devolving into hand-to-hand combat. From what I can tell, mercenaries on both sides are throwing themselves into combat with reckless abandon, ignoring incoming fire to charge enemy positions with empty weapon.! *<Audio: sound of rocket flying overhead>* I don't know if this is some sort of grudge match, but there ... wait, hold on!

<Wide angle shot, battlefield, three Tsunami troops in the foreground fighting with five wounded MET troops. Tsunami troops repeatedly bash Tsunami troops with rifle butts and attack them with combat knives or swords. Tsunami trooper looks into camera and begins screaming in Japanese>

<translation engaged>

Tsunami trooper: YOU! DON'T LOOK AT ME! STOP LOOKING AT ME! I'LL KILL YOU!

<Tsunami trooper charges camera, katana in hand>

<SIGNAL LOST>

inside the city began to slow as Amazonian forces surrendered, but several groups continued to fight and the entire city remained under lockdown. Fighting outside of the city showed no sign of slowing as Amazonian forces continued to frustrate Aztlan soldiers in the rainforest. As a result, Aztlan began carpet-bombing several stretches of the rainforest to flush out Amazonian forces. Discipline problems were also on the rise among Aztlan troops; their commanders attributed it to stress and fatigue.

- This definitely got some attention in Amazonia, specifically that of Hualpa. Up until now, he was content to let his underlings handle things, but when this happened, he started to take a more personal interest in the war and didn't like what he saw.
- Frosty





Aztlan began a PR campaign to showcase their new “relief centers” that offered aid to Bogotá’s beleaguered citizens, but these centers became the target of theft and attacks. The ad campaigns play this up, citing that “Aztlan is giving what little it has to the needy in Bogotá. Where is the UN?” This campaign had a positive effect for Aztlan as petitions came in, urging the UN to lift sanctions. The UN stubbornly refused, citing that Aztlan was still guilty of metahuman rights violations and possible war crimes. Horizon tried to counter with its own PR campaign, but several files leaked that indicate Horizon may have altered some of the footage to implicate and ultimately enact sanctions against Aztlan. The PR campaign backfired, and global support for Aztlan grew.

- Dawkins Group Operatives: not just for military secrets anymore!
- Slamm-0!

Incoming Message

<Excerpt from Aztlan PR ad, Oct 10, 2074>

It began with an attack on a peaceful Aztlan medical research facility; technology-hating Amazonian terrorists tried to destroy decades of research intended to cure countless diseases. Why? Because the leaders of Amazonia want to take metahumanity back to the Stone Age and tell us what is the “right” way to live. They claimed Aztlan was developing weapons of mass destruction. Are vaccines weapons? And when Aztlan was forced to defend themselves, the entire world turned against them. First, they did nothing when the war criminal Sirurg slaughtered thousands of innocent civilians at Cali. Then, when Aztlan was prevailing, they enacted sanctions based on lies and treachery. And now, when Aztlan defeats the war criminal and tries to share what little it still has to help the people of Bogotá, what does the UN do? They continue to make Aztlan and now the innocent people of Bogotá suffer as well. Contact your leaders and tell them that you feel it’s time to let Aztlan take care of its people. Tell them to urge the UN to lift sanctions on Aztlan and force Amazonia to end their destructive war. Because if we let one country tell another how to live, how long will it be before they tell *you* how to live?

October 18–28, 2074

Amazonian forces, now desperate to end the war because of the carpet-bombing campaign, began planning a new offensive. From a staging base at Cali, members of MET2000 and Combat, Inc. planned to spearhead the attack against Aztlan forces outside of Bogotá. Members of Black Star, desperate and trapped inside of Bogotá, were ready to lead an attack against Aztlan and Aztechnology forces inside the city if they could get resupplied. Several shadowrunner teams were hired to complete the operation. Using the offensive as a diversion, some of these teams were successful, but most were killed or captured by Aztlan and

Aztechnology forces. It was still enough to adequately re-supply Black Star and their allies, who launched their part of the offensive.

- From what I’ve learned, Aufheben was the one who planned Black Star’s part in the offensive and personally led it. I don’t suppose we found anything new on him or Marcos, have we?
- Traveler Jones
- Absolutely zip at this point.
- Glitch

The offensive over the next week was exceptionally brutal, even by current war standards. In the city, Black Star led forces attacking Aztlan patrols, hoping to draw out a significant number into the mazes of rubble throughout the city. Black Star kept the patrols occupied while the MET and Combat, Inc. led forces engage the Aztlan outside of the city. Both sides went at each other in a rage. Black Star and their forces successfully drew Aztlan and Aztechnology troops into a series of running gun battles throughout the city. Civilians also joined the fighting, but elected to attack both sides equally. What began as isolated pockets of conflict degraded into a citywide melee. Heavy artillery and armor were deployed and aircraft of all kinds strafed all positions, sometimes their own. Spirits of all kinds, both free and bound, were turned loose and entered the fray. Magicians used spells until they collapsed from drain. Those not actively in the fight tried to flee, but were forced to defend themselves and join in on the carnage. Fires and explosions rocked the city as the fighting continues. Military commanders on both sides lost control, and secured themselves and whomever they could in bunkers to let the battle play out.

- Wow, Sunshine, way to gloss things over. What happened to that “epic” piece you were going to write about the battle?
- Slamm-0!
- When you only have so much time, bandwidth, and information to work with, see how “epic” you can make it.
- Sunshine
- I watched from up here after securing my own little feed, and I can tell you it’s not for the faint of heart. One group would move, another would counter, only to get blown apart by some artillery shell or air strike that came from off-screen. And then there were the spirits. Oh ghost, I’ve never been so glad I’m up here in all my life. Of all the things I have to worry about, at least spirits aren’t one of them. I never realized how destructive they can be. I watched people literally tear each other apart when a mage mixed several fire spirits and air spirits and ... well, I have the footage. Anyone want it? I’m not sure I want to keep it.
- Orbital DK
- I ran into a survivor last week; used to be a cabdriver in Bogotá. Now he’s trying to commit suicide by whiskey. He summed it up in one word: hell.
- Traveler Jones





INCOMING FEED.....



Incoming Message



- This one was hard to read, and I know a lot of you have already seen it, but many still haven't. I don't care what you may have thought about Black Mamba, but for better or worse, she was one of us and in the end she did the right thing.
- FastJack

<Received at JackPoint, general message. October 19, 2074, 00:45:23. Sender: Black Mamba>

/dictation enabled, begin message:

I can't believe I fucked up so bad. I let my greed get the best of me. It was more than enough to set me up for life. You know that one score all runners dream about? Well, I'll tell you what: my dream has just become a fucking nightmare. I'm sitting here now in the basement of some blown-out ... hell, I don't even know what this building was. Like most everything else around here, it's just gone, just like I'm going to be. I never should have taken the job, knowing what I knew. But that was the problem; I knew I was better than them, better than any damn Azzie out there. I knew that I could get past them, get the target out and then go retire on what Johnson was going to pay me. It seemed so simple. I thought I had all my legwork done, nice and solid, but I didn't count on the shit hitting the fan. Granted, I don't think anyone could've seen Amazonia making the stupid play they did ... OK, I need to focus, that's not the reason I'm sending this message. I don't have much time. Either this scavenged commlink will give out or I will; the human body is just not meant to take a twelve-gauge slug in the gut and keep going. All my medkits are done and the bleeding's still going. Bleeding, yeah, that's what I'm trying to tell you all about. I'm going to die, I know this, but for once in my life I'm going to do something right. The blood, you see, that's the problem. That what he showed me. He tried to tell them that Blue-22826 or whatever is not safe for metahumans, but they wouldn't listen. They just wanted their ... damn weapon. But now that he's dead, I failed to get him out so he could warn everyone about it, warn about the blood fury ... how exposure messes with the mind and body, turns people to rage. It starts slow but it gets worse. The magic messed with it, made the norepen...norepherine...norepineph...oh FUCK me, what's it called?! I can't remember it all. Just, remember that the weapon is not safe. I know you all, JackPoint, will find the truth. That's what we do, right? Wish I still had paydata. Lost it with the target. Still, remember, find it out, stop it, let everyone know.

<Time limit exceeded, message/connection automatically terminated>



- KAM, The Smiling Bandit, and I are forming a little project to look into this. Anyone who wants in, let me know.
- Butch
- Not to be an alarmist, but when Blue-227 was deployed around Acapulco, the altered jetstream sent a large cloud of this stuff in all sorts of directions, but some of it made its way down the coast.
- Orbital DK

Outside of the city, the battle continued. MET200K and Tsunami actively hunted each other and continued their grudge match from earlier in the month. Units from Combat, Inc. were caught out in the open several times and become easy fodder for Aztlan aircraft and gunships, but still managed to down seven Aztlan aircraft. Similar air strikes continued throughout the engagement zone, destroying more swaths of rainforest. Several smaller mercenary units and irregular individuals from both sides engaged each other throughout the battle, which turned into a vicious melee once ammunition was depleted. Various feeds of the action in Bogotá leaked, and the UN finally decided it was time to take action.

On October 28, at approximately 1634 local time, a UN Peacekeeping force consisting of the mercenary Free Marine Corps Amphibious Readiness Group landed on the Aztlan coast near Cali. The CAS' *Kitty Hawk* Battle Group is also stationed nearby to "render aid as needed." The Peacekeeping force was under orders to end hostilities by force if necessary. The FMC quickly dispatched any hostiles encountered.

- How the hell did they get there so quickly?
- Cosmo
- Well, if a dragon smashes your base and you suddenly had a chance for payback, you'd be motivated too. That, and did I mention they have an amphibious assault force ready to go pretty much all the time? It's kind of their thing.
- /dev/ grrl

Before the FMC arrived, the fighting at Bogotá suddenly stopped. Participants and witnesses would later describe having a "switch" thrown inside of their minds, and they no longer wished to fight. All capable Amazonian units fled the area and made their way to the staging base at Cali, but FMC troops intercepted them and "took them into custody."

Aztlan forces secured in the bunkers beneath the business complex came out approximately one hour later to survey the damage and take control of the area. Members of Combat, Inc. and Black Star were specifically identified and taken into custody. While most members of these units were accounted for, several were still missing but presumed killed in the fighting. Those mercenaries operating under the articles of the Mercenary Guild were turned over to UN authorities.

The remaining forces received orders to organize into a pursuit squad and head to Cali to eliminate any remaining Amazonian forces. The UN countermanded those orders and instead told the Aztlans to stand down and hold position. The FMC arrived two hours later to ensure compliance with the order. Supplemental forces arrived twelve hours later to augment FMC peacekeepers.

- The UN wasn't the only one watching. Soon after the Battle of Bogotá began, Hualpa finally got interested. He was in contact with the UN Secretary General before they fired the first shot. They had this planned for a while; once the ball started rolling downhill, Amazonia needed a way out of this war while being able to save a little face.
- Plan 9

Incoming Message

<Posted at the Outpost, Current Events: Aztlan/ Bogotá, October 30, 2074. Poster: Liberator >

- I give a toast to all my fallen brothers, the ones who tried to bring freedom and honor to South American soil. The one who tried to help a people retain their freedom and independence despite the two demons at their doors. This is also for those who did make it back, who fought the good fight and slipped through the demon's fingers. Oh, wait. I'm the only one. That's right. Black Star is no more. The one shining fucking light in the whole putrid mercenary trade is gone.
And if anyone wants to come and collect the bounty on my sorry ass, feel free. I still got plenty of ammo and grenades left. But right now, I'm going to have another tall, cold one.
- Liberator

THE SMOKE CLEARS

Posted by: Sunshine

TO THE VICTOR GO THE SPOILS

After almost four years of fighting, the two sides declared a cease-fire on October 28, 2074. Through the UN, the Amazonian great dragon and leader Hualpa announced that he was willing to end all hostilities to prevent any more destruction to the rainforest. Aztlan President Silva accepted the cease-fire and ordered all Aztlan forces to stand down. The official signing in Geneva on October 29 made the cease-fire official. Hualpa made a rare public appearance to sign the agreement personally as a show of good faith, although he refused to say anything.

As per terms of the new agreement, Aztlan claimed the city of Bogotá and re-claimed the city of Cali. Aztlan, Amazonia, and the UN acknowledged a new border between the two nations, which extended a full sixty kilometers past the 2071 border and allowed for a three kilometer "buffer zone" between the two nations. Amazonia and Aztlan also agreed to allow UN peacekeepers to remain to help facilitate the transfer of power in local villages and to ensure that humanitarian aid was properly distributed. The Aztlan no-fly zone over Bogotá was lifted and the city's borders were opened up as all sanctions against Aztlan were lifted.

ALL HAIL THE CONQUERING HEROES

November 3, 2074. Aztlan President Enrico Silva addresses the People of Aztlan, broadcast on all Aztlan Stations

<President Silva stands in front of the podium in the Presidential Chamber after fifteen minutes of applause>

My fellow citizens, WE ARE VICTORIOUS!

<Excessive applause for another ten minutes>

This is not a victory one person can claim. This is a victory for and by the Aztlan people. For almost four years we struggled through a war of many adversaries on many fronts. On the battlefield, our brave and loyal soldiers fought and died defending us against our enemies. They fought in the deepest recesses of the rainforests, at the summit of the tallest mountains, in the skies among the clouds, and at times on the waves of the sea. Our brave soldiers fought everywhere for us because they knew that our way of life and our very lives were at stake. When the time came, and the call to duty sounded, they answered it without question, without hesitation, knowing full well that they may never return. Time and time again they stood up to look death in the eye. Time and time again they stood up against the legions of our enemies and held their ground, despite whatever horror was placed in their path. They stood their ground when the accursed Sirurg destroyed Cali. And though our enemies that day sought to break our will, to send us running in fear, to surrender, it was the inspiration of the valiant men and women of our armed forces who gave us the resolve to defeat the evil that threatened our existence! Their sacrifice calls out: Avenge us! Bring us justice! Remember us ... and remember them we shall. The Cali War Memorial is already in planning.

And as it will be a fitting tribute to our brave soldiers, it will also stand as a monument, a testament, to the great people of Aztlan. For you are just as responsible for our victory as they were. For you not only provided them with the courage to fight, you provided them the reason. For if a person does not have something to fight for, why fight at all? But that is not the only reason. You, the Aztlan people, suffered and fought as much as they did. When the world turned its back on you, you did not bow. When they spit in your face for no other reason that you were of Aztlan, you stood tall. You toiled for your country, made the sacrifices necessary to provide our soldiers what they needed to fight, to win. And most importantly, when all was darkest, you all kept hope alive. So always remember that this victory is also yours.

<EXCESSIVE APPLAUSE>

My people, my friends, my family. We did not ask for this war, we did not even want this war, but if someone comes to us again and wishes to make war against us, by the gods, we will make such a war, that no other nation will ever dare think of making war against the Aztlan people ever again!

<EXCESSIVE APPLAUSE>

- Anyone else feel ill reading this?
- Slamm-0!

PICKING UP THE PIECES

Despite the last few years of being crucified in the court of public opinion, Aztlan and Aztechnology came out of the war looking like absolute heroes. Aztlan and Aztechnology's PR department went into overdrive in the last weeks of the war, painting Aztlan as victims who, despite pressures surrounding them, overcame all odds and defeated their opponents. And when you defeat a great dragon, the world takes notice.

And even though Aztlan looked good after the war, that was about all it had going for it. The war took its toll on the country in several ways. With their military and economy in shambles to bring about the end of Sirurg, it will take a while to recover and they'll need to rely more and more on Aztechnology. While the Path of the Sun priesthood is still struggling, they are recovering. Aztlan's victory caused a resurgence of interest in priesthood, and now the Path of the Sun has gone global.

As of this writing, things are still pretty foggy about what's happening in Amazonia. Right after the signing of the cease-fire, Hualpa disappeared along with the other dragons (more on that in another file). But he left Amazonia in a lot of turmoil when he relieved Marcela Ruiz, the chief Amazonian diplomat, and his own translator, Maria Locasin of their respective duties. Of course, no one's seen them since.

Bogotá is currently in the process of rebuilding, and Aztechnology has de facto control. The Free Marine Corps and other UN peacekeepers are still there to handle the minor insurgent incident, but they're scheduled to demobilize by March of 2075. I'd still keep an eye on Bogotá. Even though Aztechnology claims that most of the criminal element is "under control," don't bet on it. Aztlan and Aztechnology may think they're in charge, but there are a lot of people out there who plan on making trouble in the near future. The insurgency in Bogotá hasn't gone anywhere; it's just getting ready for the next round. I've also heard rumors that the Catholic Church survived in Bogotá and is reaching out to all the displaced criminal types to see what mayhem they can plan in the future. And let's not forget some of the other odd stuff from Bogotá. The Toxic Shamans' Final Judgment and Absolute Equilibrium somehow managed to survive and not get blown away during the Battle of Bogotá, same with the free spirits Maelstrom and Oblivion. But in the shadows, who knows.

The Battle of Bogotá has also changed the mercenary world as well. Both MET2000 and Tsunami fucked each other up something fierce in the war's final days, so don't expect them to be world players for a while. Combat, Inc. was also royally fucked, and now has the added bonus of Aztlan bounties on their heads. Good luck with that. And as we all know, Black Star is completely gone. Right now, the biggest player on the block is 10,000 Daggers, which managed to stay out of most of the heavy fighting. So they're sitting pretty at the moment. The next big unit to



watch out for was a latecomer to the war party: the Free Marine Corps. Not only have they impressed the UN with their ability to keep peace in Bogotá, but how many other merc units have their own navy?

Then we have the corps. Two months after the end of the war and things are still moving on that front. Aztechnology is still going strong, despite actions during the war that royally pissed off the Corporate Court. But, apparently that's old news. Aztechnology didn't get so much as a stern word from the CC, thanks in large part to some rather revealing and damaging files they happen to have about Horizon. But it's the corps, so don't count on them playing nice for long.

- So now Aztechnology has both Horizon and Evo in their back pocket. Nice.
- Mr. Bonds.
- What do you mean, Evo?
- Beaker
- After the Hino affair, Evo owes Aztechnology for doing their part to prevent the Corporate Court from crushing them. The two companies are (somewhat uncomfortably) allied.
- Cosmo
- So what about the other corps?
- Snopes
- They pretty much stayed out, a few like Ares did some behind the scenes stuff, but they had their own problems to deal with. Same as S-K. The rest, well expect some horse-trading and some attempts to knock Aztechnology down a few and get some contracts in Aztlan. Good luck, though.
- Mr. Bonds.
- Also, look for Aztlan and Aztechnology to start working on some "other" problems like the Yucatan and Denver.
- Pyramid Watcher

- Hey, better late than never, but I found Hard Exit! She's back home in Atlanta and well, she's alive. It took a while but I found out what happened to her. She and her crew were hired to pull some VIPs out of Bogotá after it was closed off. Long story short, their ride out was compromised (read: blown to hell) and they had to take shelter to reassess their options. A stray artillery round hit the building they're in, killing the rest but burying Hard Exit alive. She was down there, in a two-meter space for over a week before a UN rescue team found her. I went to see her, and I could tell she was shaken. She won't admit it, but she's hurting. Something is wrong.
- Stone
- The only thing that's fucking wrong is that people need to leave me the fuck alone for a while. I don't need any damn pity and I sure as hell don't need any coddling here. I can still handle my shit.
- Hard Exit
- OK, well since we're on the subject of good news: I think I found Marcos. Problem is, he was in the company of some ghost cartel types and went back with them to one of their compounds. I know his last run was trying to get supplies into Bogotá before he went off the grid but at least he's alive.
- Sticks
- And I bet he'll have one hell of a story to tell.
- Glitch

South America has been through the wringer in the past few years. And for all the destruction, changing players, and changing rules, it is still a place where the shadows run deep. Because now that the militaries have receded, that's where the war will continue to be fought.



... FALL OF A DRAGON ...

GeMiTo, October 28, 2074

Larnala flew swiftly into Alamaï's fortified compound nearly six hours earlier than expected. The eastern dragon had spent the last three hours outside of the compound hunting, searching the streets of GeMiTo for her prey—metahumans. Thanks to Alamaï and all the dragons he had brought together, GeMiTo had become an open feeding ground for dragons, where they were rarely challenged by the scattered and disorganized metahuman population who had no strong military or government to protect them. Whenever metahumans found the courage to fight back in small packs, the dragons descended on the metahuman population en masse and taught those troublemakers a painful lesson. Larnala delighted in feeding on metahumans in broad daylight, instilling in their population a primal terror of what dragons are physically capable of doing to a metahuman body. Larnala loved tasting their fear and savoring her ability to break their spirits. In her final outing, she fed upon eight metahumans she found wandering the streets of the large sprawl before ending her excursion prematurely. She knew she could have—and usually did—consumed much more, but political circumstances over the last few weeks had shifted dramatically and forced her to abandon her routine. For the sake of her survival, she knew it was time for her to leave what had become a dragon's paradise.

Her abrupt change of heart was not due to any loss of faith in Alamaï's teachings. For her, the great dragon's philosophies were the absolute truth; dragons were indeed the superior beings on the planet. They had the right to feed without restraint and do as they pleased. To enable metahumanity to protest and interfere in the predator-prey dynamic was inherently wrong. It went against the natural order. Metahumanity might have numbers over dragons, but that fact made them no more significant than any other prey. Sheep and zebras did not tell wolves and lions how to survive; metahumans should be treated no differently for the dragons. But her recent meetings with her

mate, Talidyr, convinced her that it would be unwise to remain in Alamaï's service much longer. From what Talidyr had told her, Lofwyr was coming for Alamaï, with an all-consuming fury that would only be quenched by Alamaï's death. And Lofwyr was determined to make Alamaï and anyone still associated with him an example of what happens when you defy the will of the Loremaster. To be an effective example of Lofwyr's power, Larnala knew the example had to be bloody and decisive. Lofwyr would be coming with an overwhelming force, a force equivalent to an unstoppable act of nature. Any dragon still left in the compound on that day would be brutally slaughtered. No mercy would be shown. Larnala did not want to be a part of that bloodbath no matter how righteous their cause. She felt it would only be prudent to accept Lofwyr's gesture of leniency to the younger dragons and to abandon Alamaï's cause (if only for show). Later, when things have calmed down and she had grown stronger, she could rebuild and continue Alamaï's crusade, even if Alamaï himself was dead. She would be more than willing to use him as a martyr for the cause. Discretion would once again be the better part of valor.

As Larnala had expected, the compound was virtually empty except for two of her fellow dragons, Ilathorn and Gorgax. They had already gorged themselves and had returned from the feeding grounds, and now they were fast asleep in their underground lairs. She also glimpsed guardian spirits patrolling the compound perimeter. But she knew they kept vigil only for metahumans trying to break into the compound and trying to instigate violent retaliation against her kind. They did not monitor the dragons themselves. Larnala knew she had nothing to fear from either the sleeping dragons or the spirits. What she needed most was for Alamaï to be out of the compound. And because of her timing, he was. She knew Alamaï had left on a recruitment drive into the Congo Tribal Lands within the last two hours, while she was conveniently

out hunting. She also knew that he was not expected be back for another eighteen hours. That time would prove more than sufficient for her to recoup her eggs and flee to safety.

Moving through the underground caverns, Larnala admired how Alamaï crafted his compound to cater to dragons in their natural form. She had no problem slithering gracefully through the labyrinth of underground corridors and massive, carved-out caves. She was sad that she had to give all this up to merely survive. While inside the compound, Larnala headed to a specific cavern reserved only for Alamaï. Once there, she headed to the rear of the cave, where she looked for signs of the entrance to the rookery. She had heard that Alamaï kept the entrance hidden behind at least a hundred meters of solid rock, which he would shape using his magic if necessary. After scrutinizing the wall, Larnala discovered astral markings in the rock face written in the draconic language. The markings simply read, "The future." Larnala took several deep breaths. Shaping the one hundred meters of rock to get to the rookery was a relatively easy feat for a dragon as powerful as Alamaï, but Larnala would need a lot of effort and time. Extending her claws and channeling mana through them, Larnala moved the rocks at her command, slowly shaping them into a rudimentary corridor. It took her several minutes of breaking down and reshaping the rock into a passageway leading to the rookery. By the time she reached the chamber door, Larnala was exhausted. Only then did she discover her next challenge: Alamaï had placed warding over the door. Upon careful examination, it was clear that Alamaï had invested a lot of energy in crafting this warding, putting as much care into it as he did shaping the rest of the compound. Having lived with Alamaï for nearly a year, Larnala had learned he always used charged wards to protect his assets. This warding would be difficult to break through.

Larnala had to resist the urge to begin tearing at the warding out of desperation and a primal need to get to her eggs as quickly as possible. Up to this point, Larnala knew she had done nothing to arouse any suspicion or set off any alarms that would bring Alamaï back to the compound. She had time to be methodical, and she knew that attacking the warding would not only be grueling, but could be potentially life threatening. So despite her screaming instincts, Larnala laid herself down at the foot of the chamber door and rested for a couple of hours. Once she started taking down the warding, she would have to hurry, as Alamaï's spirits would likely start appearing and impeding her escape.

After resting for as long as she dared, Larnala arose, feeling stronger. She started slashing at the warding with her claws. The warding fought her, striking back with a telekinetic force that felt like blasts from a rocket-propelled grenade. Despite the pain, she kept tearing at the translucent warding, with each strike making it weaker. After a couple of minutes, the magical

barrier finally collapsed. Despite blood dripping from her snout and jaw, Larnala did not allow her wounds to slow her down, as she forged ahead into the rookery, all the while keeping an eye out for hostile spirits.

Inside the rookery, the eastern dragon found what appeared to be dozens of dragon eggs. She knew most were decoys created by Alamaï to keep potential intruders from easily finding the true eggs. Even the decoys themselves were imprinted with astral signatures from the real eggs. The only sure way to identify the true eggs from the decoys was through a dragon's natural telepathic ability. She was ready for this, though, and she called upon one of her spirits. It appeared with a chest that she had painstakingly constructed over the last several weeks to safely transport the eggs. She cautiously loaded each of her four eggs into the chest; doing so triggered the anchored spells on the chest to both protect the eggs during transit and keep them warm. After collecting her four eggs, Larnala grabbed the chest from her spirit and departed, fast. She made sure to collapse the tunnel to ensure the rookery was protected. Having already moved anything of value out of her lair over the course of several weeks, Larnala took off and headed straight for the mouth of the compound. Straight for what she thought would be her freedom.

Just moments before reaching the mouth of the compound, Larnala's eyes grew wide. Her senses picked up the scents of all the other dragons that resided in the compound, coming from the courtyard. Those scents were always present, but they were only this strong when the others were present.

Something is wrong.

At that precise moment, she detected Alamaï's scent. He had not traveled to the Congo Tribal Lands after all. It had been a ruse. *Fuck.* Larnala didn't know how her planning failed. All she knew was that she only had one chance left—running, and fast. She hit the open air at maximum speed, fleeing from someone she knew could outrun her. She did not get far.

A telekinetic force grabbed hold of the chest containing her eggs. She tried desperately to keep it within her grasp, with her claws digging deep into the wood, but the force was too great. The chest was ripped from her claws and flew toward Alamaï. Just as Larnala roared in horror, a second telekinetic wave washed over her, slamming her to the ground.

It took Larnala a few seconds to shake off the disorientation and the shock she felt before she could pick herself up out of the dirt. She looked up to find herself overshadowed by the massive form of Alamaï, standing over her in his majestic gold-and-scarlet draconic form.

"Traitor," Alamaï hissed in her mind. The word weighed heavy with contempt and rage.

"I am no traitor, Lord Alamaï," gasped Larnala. "I was trying to do what is right for myself and my offspring. There's

a storm coming, and I wanted to make sure we are all safe. I believe in everything you teach, but I've realized there is no way for us to survive this impending storm. I would never betray your plans to anyone, let alone the Loremaster. Let me go, I will not do anything to harm you or the cause. I will remain loyal!"

"You needn't bother with this charade. Everyone here knows that my brother is coming within the next few days. I have known this for months now. I have been prepared for decades. I did not tell you any of this because I knew you were weak; that in your heart, you were never truly committed to our cause. Someone tells you to run, and that's exactly what you do. If he were to track you down, I have no doubt that you would spill your guts to him if you thought it would save yourself. And I also know that you have passed important intelligence to the Loremaster. Because of you, he is aware of the eggs in our compound. So when you tell me you can hold your tongue, I say, 'Liar!' You are nothing but a liability.

"Unlike you, the rest of your kind assembled here are true believers. We are not afraid of fighting for what we believe in. They are not afraid of fighting for the world that we deserve, the world to which I am leading them to. Sometimes, bloodshed is the only way we can get what we are owed. They know we can win, and they will gladly put their lives on the line to make that happen. But you—you are a coward who would rather live in slavery to our prey and to their whims. You should have joined up with Hestaby's army. But I can and I will defeat the Loremaster and prove how truly weak and pathetic he is. I will show everyone that he should not be leading us. In your actions here today, you show you are not deserving of your draconic heritage. Your cowardice is your greatest sin!"

"You need to face reality like I did, Lord Alamaï," spat Larnala. "The sitting Loremaster has a number of great dragons still loyal to him that he can call upon to aid him in this battle. You are but one. Even if he does not call on the others to join him in this fight, he has any number of other vassals and drakes that he can conscript as his own personal army to simply overwhelm us and our defenses. With everything he has at his command, including nearly limitless financial resources, we would simply be waiting here to die. I came to that conclusion of my own free accord; not from anything in particular that Talidyr said to me. Right now, it is for the best for all of us to flee, to scatter to the ends of the earth for any of us to have a chance to survive his rage and to continue spreading your message of dragon superiority. If he loses that support, the Loremaster will have no choice but to acknowledge the value and the validity of our cause. He will be forced to acknowledge that you are right."

"No!" Alamaï screamed. "I have been playing his games for far too long, and it has gotten me nowhere. I have played things too carefully in the past and denied our kind of what we truly deserve. Doing what you suggest will only keep us

repressed with no end in sight. Now, I have taken actions that have ensured there can only be one outcome of my conflict with the Loremaster—his death or mine. And you forget I am not without my own resources. Where your feeble mind is locked on my destruction and our group's obliteration, I see so much more. I see nearly two hundred and fifty metahuman mercenaries that I have hidden up to the north, twenty minutes away. They will be commanded by drakes loyal to myself, and I can use them to catch his forces in a crossfire. I am confident he doesn't know anything about them. He likely believes I would never lower myself to using metahuman mercenaries as my minions. But even our prey can be used as effective cannon fodder from time to time, especially when you know how to manipulate them using their own greed and avarice. He thinks I only have up to fifteen dragons following me; in truth, that number is twenty-five. The ones he doesn't know about are hidden from sight, nearly eighty kilometers to the south. They will be brought in when the time is right to attack his flank. If he dares bring in metahumans to storm our compound, they will encounter dozens of anchored spells just outside the compound walls. And even more if they persist in attacking us. They will suffer great losses in their numbers for their brazen arrogance. All this in addition to over a hundred spirits we have called to fight alongside us. No matter what you think, I am ready for this great battle, little one. You should never have doubted me. Now you will pay the price."

"I suppose that's how you got that scar of yours, huh? By being so clever?" Larnala let the jibe fly as she gave up trying to win over Alamaï on logic. She bolted away from the western dragon as fast as she could. Before she could escape his reach, however, Alamaï's right claw lashed out with lightning-fast speed and tore into Larnala's back. The claws pierced deeply into her flesh as he viciously drove her back. Pinned beneath Alamaï's grasp, Larnala roared in agony as she tried to free herself, but her efforts were in vain. Alamaï's words burned into her brain as he tore at her flesh.

"How very disappointing. I give you a location where you could feed to your heart's content; where you didn't have to starve yourself in order to befriend metahumanity. Since coming here, I have watched you more than double in your size. You are much larger and more formidable than any that follow him that are of your age. Everyone that I have gathered here are all bigger and more formidable for feeding as the grand predators that they are. I have watched you grow in power; more so than what you would have been able to do under his rules. And this is how you thank me—by cowering and running away. I will suffer no cowards in my ranks. You brought this on yourself." Alamaï lurched forward, grabbing Larnala by the neck with his massive jaws, and with one quick and vicious bite, ended her life. Her body dropped lifelessly to the ground before the grand and bloodied figure of Alamaï.



Posted by: Frosty

It's been a couple of months now since the major events of the Great Dragon Civil War have taken place. A lot has changed for the dragons and their culture in that time, rapid changes that many of us helped along by playing the role of their foot soldiers in campaigns that likely filled bank accounts with plenty of extra nuyen. It would seem as though the Great Dragon Civil War has finally reached a climax and a resolution. Some of this has taken place in the public eye, but much of it has been out of sight. It has taken me months of digging to collect enough information from my contacts to be able to present everyone here on JackPoint with a relatively accurate snapshot of what has transpired with the dragons over these last few months, and to answer many of your questions about what it all means, especially in regards to the events that did not show up on the nightly newfeeds. I want to give credit to our regular guest, Wyrms Watcher, and the Draconic Information Virtual Exchange (DIVE) for graciously helping me with my research and sharing their findings. As a courtesy, DIVE will also be receiving a copy of my research notes.

A HISTORY LESSON OF THE GREAT DRAGON CIVIL WAR (AUGUST 2074)

Many academics believe that the execution of Dzitbalchéen in 2064 was the official starting point of the Great Dragon Civil War. They point to acts of violence that immediately followed the execution, actions that many at the time chalked up either as isolated incidents or wrongfully attributed to extremist Yucatan rebels not satisfied by the peace agreement. In truth, the great dragons were responsible for the violence. It also did not help that Aztlan and Aztechnology carefully "handled" the media coverage of the incidents and prevented them from becoming widely known to the outside world. As researchers have now discovered, Aztlan and Aztechnology incurred attacks in Tenochtitlán (nearly twenty-six of them) that targeted institutions such as the University of Azatlán-Quetzacoatl Institute (where Dzitbalchéen's autopsy took place), Genetique (where tissue samples of Dzitbalchéen's remains were sent for research), and Pyramid Arcane Supplies (an Aztechnology subsidiary that handles most of the megacorporation's magical reagents).

Following the flare-up of violence in Aztlan, there had been dozens of break-ins at the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research, MIT&T, the Draco Foundation, Apep Consortium, and the Atlantean Foundation, all targeting antiquities that various dragons may have had a claim to in the very distant past. Unfortunately, the organizations do not share information or communicate well, so no one seems to have been able to piece together the puzzle until now, using a measure of hindsight. Many even believe that the Artifacts Rush that occurred during 2072 and 2073 may have had connections to the Great Dragon Civil War that we may not have been aware of at the time. As such, these researchers believe that the dragons were at war with us as far back as 2064 and we didn't even realize it, due to the insular nature of their culture and their tendency to operate in secret.

Although I agree that this significant event was one of the major flashpoints that led to open violence erupting between dragons and metahumanity, the motivations that fueled the Great

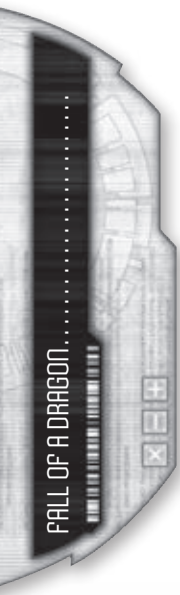
Dragon Civil War likely started years before that, perhaps even as long as several millennia ago.

We know from what Hestaby has said in her United Nations speech that at one time, dragons and metahumans were at war with each other, at a time when "steel met scale." It is only logical to assume the raw emotions and passions produced from such a tumultuous time may have been harbored and carried over by the dragons into this present day. It is very likely the dragons may have been actively looking for opportunities to settle old scores and to seek retribution for past crimes committed against their blood and against their draconic honor. And when the execution of Dzitbalchéen occurred, the dragons seized upon that egregious act and violence began to evolve into what we have been experiencing over these past couple of years. And as violence persisted between dragons and metahumans, factions began forming within the dragon ranks, centering on the scope and focus of that violence and the ramifications it would have for future relations with metahumanity, leading to tensions between their kind.

And just as there has been much speculation over exactly when the Great Dragon Civil War started, there has been as much speculation on the Matrix and in academic circles over the specific reasons for the dragons' rage against metahumanity. Leading theories revolve around the possibility that the dragons are seeking revenge for all the members of their kind that metahumanity was directly responsible for slaying as they slumbered within their lairs over the previous age, when the earth was mostly devoid of magic. In the past two decades, the Atlantean Foundation and the Draco Foundation have both discovered lairs where dragons at one time slumbered. Those dragons not only failed to awaken in the twenty-first century, but their skeletal remains have revealed that violent trauma had been inflicted on their bodies prior to their deaths. These sites seem to confirm that such violence did in fact take place against the dragons as they have claimed.

Other theories include the idea that dragons may desire revenge for the extensive looting of their lairs, for the vast riches contained within each of their hoards, or for the intentional destruction of dragon eggs within their nests that has threatened their population. Many also believe the widespread and massive destruction of the earth's once-pristine ecosystem by metahumanity over the course of centuries is another driving factor in the dragons' undying rage against metahumanity. This destruction has placed additional strain on the dragons' survivability in the twenty-first century and beyond, and it has pushed them ever closer to the brink of extinction. As a race, metahumanity has proven to be a poor caretaker of the Earth while the dragons slumbered. As Hestaby mentioned in her now-famous speech, these were all likely contributing factors that provoked Sirrurg, one of the world's most volatile dragons, into taking his deadly actions in the city of Cali, in January of 2073. That attack earned him the title of "war criminal" in addition to his existing sobriquet of "the Destroyer" and helped spark this ongoing global crisis between dragons and metahumanity.

- Interesting. If they have in fact found lairs like that, I wonder if their hoards were still intact. And if so, I wonder how much of those hoards are now sitting in the vaults of the Draco and the Atlantean Foundation, wealth that neither one desires to speak about. Wealth that undoubtedly is worth stealing.
- Mika



Sirrurg became one of the first visible participants in the Great Dragon Civil War. In January 18, 2073, Sirrurg attacked the (then) Aztlan city of Cali. In his attack, not only did Sirrurg viciously tear apart and destroy the main Aztlan base filled with thousands of Aztlan troops, he went a step further and deliberately cast a spell over the city of Cali itself that killed thousands more indiscriminately, from the very young to the very old. Sirrurg would then go on a campaign of bloodshed that would kill thousands more, almost all of whom belonged to Aztlan or Aztechnology. A vast majority of these metahumans were neither soldiers nor combatants but rather blue-collar workers only interested in making a living. Sirrurg's rampage accomplished a couple of different things. First, it garnered support and approval for Sirrurg from other dragons who believed their kind had been too lenient with metahumans and that the time for dragon retribution had come. Other dragons decided to either join up with Sirrurg in his attacks against Aztlan and against metahumanity or to provide financial and logistical support for his cause. Evidence has surfaced suggesting Sirrurg and GreenWar were able to accomplish much more than what they could have done on their own mainly because many other dragons viewed Sirrurg as their champion, and they did whatever they could to support him and to further his war on Aztlan. There were even reports that a few dragons once fiercely loyal to Aztechnology and Aztlan switched sides and turned to Sirrurg to rebel against their former masters.

The second event Sirrurg provoked was a ferocious global backlash against dragons from metahumanity. This backlash generally took the form of protests in the streets against dragon holdings, particularly Saeder-Krupp and NeoNET, and to a lesser extent, the Draco Foundation and the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research. These protests occasionally led to riots, boycotts, vandalism, and even sabotage. Saeder-Krupp bore the brunt of the attacks because of who their CEO is, but NeoNET also saw its share of reprisals for its affiliation with Celedyr (albeit a far less well-known great dragon). Between 2073 and today, Saeder-Krupp has seen a twenty-two percent drop in its profits, while NeoNET's drop has only been around eight percent. This disparity and the unrelenting efforts of NeoNET to try to take advantage of Saeder-Krupp's woes have led many to suspect that NeoNET has still been able to close the gap between itself and Saeder-Krupp in terms of corporate profits and products produced, putting it in a position to rival Saeder-Krupp as the world's largest megacorporation. It is still very much contested which of the two megacorporations currently holds this prestigious title. Only time will tell which megacorporation will come out on top as both look to recover from the Great Dragon Civil War.

- I have to admit: all the anti-dragon sentiment has provided excellent cover for runs that have been carried out against either NeoNET or Saeder-Krupp. I was personally involved in three runs, two against S-K, one against NeoNET. Each time, all we had to do was drop hints here and there that the break-ins involved these anti-dragon radicals, and their corp sec never bothered to look for us again. I would suspect these protests and incidents of vandalism have masked a far bigger shadow war between those two megas than even we are aware of. I'm going to be sad to see this conflict settle down. Not having such a convenient scapegoat will certainly make our jobs a little bit harder from here on out.
- Hard Exit

- First of all, I hate the idea of using people like that, especially in this instance. You likely got more than a few innocent people killed when the corporations kicked in their doors looking for answers. And secondly, this type of anger just does not die down on its own because the dragons called a truce. People were killed during this spat, rightfully or not. They were killed for reasons that may not have had anything to do with them, things that might be connected to some part of their family lines. From a long time ago. Sins of the father and all that crap. They were used as cannon fodder. We metahumans can have long memories too. It's going to take a couple of decades at least before peoples' rage calms the fuck down over everything that has happened in the last couple of years and returns to something that begins to resemble "normal" when it comes to dealing with the dragons. In the meantime, expect these radicals to continue pushing things with the dragons, seeking their own revenge. We'll see if things stay calm (or not). If I know these kinds of people and how they think (and I think I do), it will not stay calm for long.
- Slamm-O!
- Wait, is that the sound of a spoiled and immature hacker growing the fuck up? I thought I would never see the day.
- Clockwork
- Sirrurg gets a lot of blame for stirring up this anti-dragon sentiment and prompting violence by metahumans against the dragons, but Ghostwalker deserves just as much blame. Ghostwalker has always been anti-metahuman. Ghostwalker doesn't govern Denver with the blessing of his people so much as he rules it unilaterally, setting laws that subjugate his metahuman citizens and their freedoms. And when they disagree, he imposes his will on the public using brute force. And then there is the incident with the Dunkelzahn Rift. In July 2073, he was the one that arranged for four incredibly powerful magical artifacts to be in DeeCee at the same time so they could be used in performing a ritual. As a consequence, he ended up destabilizing the rift and caused extensive collateral damage to the sprawl, which led to hundreds of deaths, with even more people missing. All that just for him to allegedly bring back the Sprit of Denver, Zebulon. Such callous disregard for metahuman life has made many to wonder if the world would not be better off if all the dragons were extinct and their remains displayed in museums.
- Wyrms Watcher
- Another thing we can blame Sirrurg for: the development and possible future proliferation of anti-dragon counter measures designed to stop dragons like him. Even if this current conflict gets settled, the dragons will not be too happy that metahumans were looking at weapons specifically designed to kill them. In fact, I'd bet that may become an issue in the future.
- The Smiling Bandit

As a part of this backlash against the dragons, drakes were targeted by these anti-dragon forces for their draconic heritage, looking to send a message back to the dragons even if the drakes themselves were not aligned with any particular dragon. Between 2073 and the present day, approximately sixty-three drakes have been killed worldwide as a result of this violence. These numbers



are only the ones that I have been able to confirm; there are a number of rumors suggesting that there are many more dead drakes that have yet to be found. Many other drakes were forced to seek sanctuary at the Draco Foundation under the vigilant watch of Ryan Mercury. Many of these drakes are still in hiding, afraid of reprisals from the anti-dragon movement.

Around this same time, stories also began to appear on ShadowSea of runners being hired to find and destroy dragon eggs. Some of these stories were bogus, obviously spread by braggarts looking to garner unearned street cred for themselves or by chipheads who were confusing their BTL experiences with real life. Unfortunately, there were other stories being shared by those not afraid to talk about their activities that proved to be true. Best estimates place the number of actual dragon eggs that were destroyed by runner teams to be nearly two dozen by August 2074. Publicly known groups like Alamos 20K and Humanis are believed to have been involved in hiring these shadowrunners, but other, lesser-known groups from Human Nation to the Black Lodge have also been linked to these raids. At the same time, ancient secret societies of dragon slayers have re-emerged from legend and have actively started recruiting new members. Membership for these anti-dragon groups has since skyrocketed. Even today, their recruiting efforts continue to see record success. Because of this Great Dragon Civil War, these extremist factions seem to have shrugged off their identities as secret societies and have essentially gone mainstream, which for the moment seems to be helping them be sustainable. It could also, of course, contribute to increased hostilities with dragons.

- When it comes to stories about the destruction of dragon eggs, it isn't the runners who are usually bragging about their exploits, it's their Johnsons. They are the ones spreading the word for them, claiming responsibility for the acts they sanctioned. If I were the runners for those jobs, I would be pissed. Having a Johnson or his group claim responsibility for such a violent and provocative act can be just as dangerous for a runner team and their long-term health as if they had boasted about it themselves. It's yet another way Mr. Johnson can screw over a runner team. So my advice: if anyone comes to you wanting to hire you to destroy a dragon egg, just don't. It's not worth it.
- Cosmo

Obviously, this violence being perpetrated by metahumans against the dragons has not gone unanswered. Magic groups known to possess dragon reagents were heavily targeted by the dragons. Sometimes they used metahuman runners, while other times they used their own kind, including drakes, young dragons, wyverns, lindworms, and other dracoforms and dracomorphs. And sometimes, they used a mixture of both. But no matter who or what was used, the attacks were always vicious and demonstrated a distinct disregard for metahuman life. There were always metahumans that died in their runs targeting the magic groups, even when non-violence would have made their jobs easier. Some metahumans were left appearing as though they had been partially eaten, while others were left dissected, almost like how a talismonger would dissect a dracoform looking to harvest exotic reagents. It has been difficult to obtain the exact numbers of metahumans killed in these ways. Many security corporations

(such as Lone Star and Knight Errant), governments, and at least one megacorporation that we know of (Horizon) went to extraordinary lengths to cover up these crimes and to prevent the truth about these deaths from ever getting out, hoping to prevent a terrible panic from engulfing the general population and making a bad situation even worse. So far, those efforts seem to have been relatively successful, limiting these stories to places like ShadowSea.

Outside of the magic groups, talismongers became the next obvious group for reprisals, particularly those known for dealing in dragon reagents. Roughly three thousand talismongers from around the world died in retaliatory strikes from 2073 until the present day. Sometimes the violence spearheaded by the dragons spread beyond talismongers to magicians who were either known for or suspected of using dragon reagents in their rituals. This violence hit particularly close to home when two JackPointers, Lyran and Ethernaut, reported being harassed by such groups. In addition to her being constantly chased, harassed, and hunted by these groups, Lyran saw a good friend of hers die at the hands of these dragon groups, while Ethernaut proclaimed his innocence of ever using such materials. To my understanding, Lyran is still on the run from her very persistent pursuers. The harassment of Ethernaut, though, seems to have ended. Many who are facing these hunting groups and this unique persecution would consider Ethernaut lucky that whoever sent out the dracoforms to hunt him haven't sent out any more.

- For everyone's information, I too was also wrongfully assaulted by one of these groups a few months back as well. I survived. Not sure how many here give a damn about that though.
- Haze
- I'm sorry to hear that—sorry that they didn't succeed in putting you in the ground. If anyone here deserves that fate, it's you.
- Pistons
- You know, the more you talk, the harder it is for me to believe that you and Netcat are actual omaes. Seems to me the prejudice and hatred you have for me, for something I didn't even do, is the equivalent of Clockwork's rants against technomancers. You're just as bad as Clockwork, and Netcat doesn't even realize it.
- Haze
- I may have been lucky to have only been attacked once by these thugs, but that's where my luck ends. I've known several other good magicians and talismongers who were assaulted repeatedly and who eventually ended up losing their lives because of it. Over the last couple of years, I personally lost close to a dozen friends and acquaintances that might still be alive today if it were not for this Great Dragon Civil War. This loss of talent is just heartbreaking, especially when I'm in the position of knowing they were innocent of the crimes they were accused of committing. It's also been depressing to think of just how many more innocent magicians and talismongers have suffered this same fate due to these overzealous creatures, who were more interested in their self-righteous fury than they were in being right with either their facts or their targets. Very shameful indeed.
- Ethernaut



Since the time of Lyran's and Ethernaut's experiences, this violence has spread well beyond just talismongers and magicians to those who had been retired and out of the business for years. It has also spread to poachers, talisleggers and smugglers, as well as to anyone who ever had a hand in killing dragonkind, selling dragon body parts as reagents, or even transporting them. Again, it is difficult to tell how many metahumans were actually killed during those strikes. The attacks were scattered across the world, having been organized and paid for by different dragons. And to make it even more complicated to collect accurate numbers, the individuals responsible for the smuggling routes and poaching expeditions do not, of course, announce how their members are killed during the highly illegal operations that could net them decades' worth of jail time. Given the veil of secrecy under which they are forced to work, it has been difficult to tell whether the violence was carried out by the dragons or simply initiated by rival groups in a very competitive and bloody market. It has been almost as difficult to discover just how many smugglers and talisleggers have been killed by the dragons as it has been to learn just how many shadowrunners have been killed working both sides of the fence in this civil war. From what I have learned, there have been far too many deaths for anyone's liking.

From months of asking around in the shadows and relying on individuals willing to talk, I have assembled a reasonable list of poachers, smugglers, and talisleggers who I believe have either disappeared entirely as a result of this violence, or who have suffered so much extensive damage to their operations that they were left with no other choice but to get out of their business entirely. This list reaches into the hundreds (three hundred and twenty at my last count). If anyone wishes to view my list in its entirety, here is the [link](#). There are more than a few names that should catch your attention. I personally know a few people on this list who I wish weren't there. Many of these operations were independently owned and operated as small-time outfits, but about a third of them were run by various criminal syndicates, particularly those from the Vory, the Mafia, the Koshari, and the Ghost Cartels. The dragon's actions may have inadvertently spawned a ripple effect within the politics of these organized crime syndicates. As some of these operations have either been crippled or have outright collapsed, the Yakuza, the Triads, and others have been pushing hard (particularly in Asia and South America) to move their people into these territories vacated by their rivals and establishing these smuggling routes and the poaching grounds as their own. And of course, the Vory, the Ghost Cartels, the Koshari, and the Mafia are not willing to simply give up their lucrative smuggling routes and their resources (resources that easily bring in hundreds of millions of nuyen each year for the syndicates) despite these setbacks. As a result, they are pledging a war of their own. In the last six months of 2074, violence has jumped between the crime syndicates by at least twenty percent thanks to these operations. Many in law enforcement are concerned that the violence between the dragons will continue to spawn new rounds of violence between the organized crime syndicates, each vying for control over the talislegging and smuggling trades.

- Fuck me. Damien, Domino, Chameleon, Mouse, Houdini, Eraser, Night Demon, Fade all killed? Damn it! I'd lost contact with them over the last six months or so, but I didn't know they had gotten

themselves caught up in this shit storm. They were all exceptional connections who made my life much easier. This is going to cost me a small fortune to rebuild and replace them in my network. Fuck the dragons for trying to put me out of business.

- 2XL
- I feel your pain. Three of my favorite contacts are on that damned list too.
- Kane
- As are four of my own.
- Red Anya
- Fortunately there doesn't appear to be any JackPointers on that list. And hopefully it stays that way.
- Bull

No one seems to have been spared the dragons' wrath, rich or poor. Between 2073 and August 2074, there have been very successful executives, entrepreneurs, and white-collar types who have all disappeared. No one knows exactly what happened to them, even the megacorporations that worked with many of them. Many of these megacorporations have led prolonged investigations into these individuals' fate, but their investigations have yielded little more than unsubstantiated conspiracy theories, and none of the missing have ever been successfully recovered. But what is generally known is that all the wealth that they had amassed over the years—generally in the millions or, in a few rare cases, billions—has disappeared without a trace. Many very capable hackers have attempted to trace those funds, but to no avail. All their properties and physical assets were sold virtually overnight through the use of dummy corporations, fake SINs, forged documents and Zurich Orbital accounts, utilizing enough fronts that would have given our very own FastJack, in his prime, a headache.

- I'm still in my prime, and I intend to stay there for many more years.
- FastJack

Not only did these individuals disappear but so did everyone in their family lines. Brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, wives, husbands and children. All gone. Some had extensive family lines scattered halfway across the globe, but even they ended up being methodically wiped out, as if their family lines had never existed at all. Although very little trace of who was responsible for these disappearances has been uncovered, many believe that shadowrunners across the globe had to be utilized in operations of this magnitude. Unfortunately, like the good runners that they are, those that were involved are not talking, fearing the horrific reprisals and repercussions that would follow if they ever chose to break their silence. In the early parts of 2073, these unusual disappearances happened very rarely. As things escalated in the Great Dragon Civil War, more mysterious disappearances occurred and at a greater frequency. As I mentioned in the *Clutch of the Dragons* datafile, by the midpoint of 2074, nearly six hundred metahumans from around the world had vanished, along with fortunes totaling nearly six billion nuyen in currency and assets. Between the time of that report and the end of August 2074, three hundred and



ninety-five more metahumans disappeared, and with them, nearly five billion more nuyen in wealth. All of which is likely being divided amongst the dragons and being added to their hoards as recompense.

While SIRRURG's actions in January 2073 helped prompt the violence between dragons and metahumans, Hestaby's actions later on in 2073 contributed to the divisions we have witnessed between the dragons themselves. As most people here on JackPoint are aware, on July 23, 2073, Hestaby addressed the United Nations. In her landmark speech, she spoke about the rage and animosity that was building within dragon ranks directed at metahumanity. She broached issues that many of her fellow dragons saw as a betrayal of their customs and traditions. She condemned SIRRURG for his actions and gave her support to the United Nations' desire to have SIRRURG indicted on war crimes. SIRRURG was indeed indicted on war crimes a month later; an act that many experts believe would not have happened without Hestaby's support. No one seems to remember what else she requested in her speech, including: asking metahumanity to take SIRRURG alive; having a war crimes tribunal called that would have integrated both metahumans and at least one great dragon sitting in judgment of SIRRURG; requesting good-faith gestures from both sides to help repair relations; seeking the return of Dzitbalché's remains from Aztlan; and removing the Dzitbalché autopsy trid footage from the Matrix, as its existence violated the dragons' deeply held senses of decorum and dignity for the handling of the remains of one of their own. Hestaby appeared to desire to find ways of quenching this dragon rage without it consuming the entire world in bloodshed. She made a good-faith gesture of her own during her speech by giving the world the next target of SIRRURG's wrath, which likely contributed to Teotihuacan not being hit by SIRRURG. But instead of being seen as trying to mend dragon and metahuman relations and acting as a neutral mediator between all parties, all Hestaby seems to be remembered for in her speech now is turning on SIRRURG, and potentially sentencing him, a fellow great dragon, to death. These are crimes that her fellow great dragons likely treated with contempt, and they took actions against her to make certain she paid dearly for her perceived treachery.

Immediately following Hestaby's speech, the head of her Shasta Shamans was assassinated by a sniper. Many took this as an act of retaliation by the other dragons. Some immediately blamed Lofwyr for this assassination while others blamed his brother, Alamais. Still others blamed the assassination on a collusion between Hestaby and Lofwyr, aimed at achieving objectives that only they understood. Still other conspiracy theories have placed the blame for Elliot Eyes-of-Wyrm's death squarely on Hestaby herself. Followers of this theory believe Hestaby may have had the head of her own magic lodge assassinated to give herself an excuse to attack Lofwyr. Hestaby, being a very eco-conscious dragon (almost to the point of being militant), might have sought to bring down Lofwyr without jeopardizing her perceived status as heir to Dunkelzahn's legacy. By making herself look like a victim and raising the possibility that Lofwyr was involved with the attack, she knew she would garner a lot of sympathy, which could serve as justification for attacking Lofwyr. A lot of people don't buy that explanation, but it's out there. If we want to get even wilder, we can look at alternative theories out there that it wasn't actually the dragons that had Elliot Eyes-of-Wyrm killed, but rather, a former

Tír prince. Some suspect Jenna Ni'Fairra as being responsible, utilizing her paladin, Talondel, as her instrument of revenge. According to this theory, she used the assassination to manipulate the tense situation between the dragons to her own ends, which may have included finding a way to remove Hestaby from the Tír Tairngire Council of Princes. No matter what reasons were behind the assassination, Hestaby responded in force a week later by sending her assets against Saeder-Krupp and its subsidiaries. These attacks reached a climax on July 30, 2073, when Hestaby appeared in the Middle Eastern city of Dubai. She called spirits to her there and used her powerful magic to carve up Saeder-Krupp's Middle East division headquarters, a feat made even more spectacular when Hestaby kept metahuman casualties to a minimum. There were no fatalities during her attack on the forty-seven story high rise that turned the high-tech, visually impressive skyscraper into mounds of shattered and crushed rubble.

- There is also a provocative theory out there that dragons did in fact sanction the assassination of Elliot Eyes-of-Wyrm, but it wasn't arranged by any of the dragons mentioned above. Just because Lofwyr is Loremaster doesn't mean he actually sanctioned the attack or had any knowledge that it may have been coming. The act could have been arranged by one or more of the great dragons behind Lofwyr's back, which might suggest even further fracturing of the dragon hierarchy. It may not have even been the handiwork of a great dragon. It could very well have been arranged by an upstart adult dragon. And Lofwyr may not have actually wanted to discuss the matter publicly, because if dragons acted on their own accord in this assassination, he would appear weak and vulnerable. That's something he would want to avoid.
- Sunshine
- So have there been any updates on the investigation into Eyes-of-Wyrm's death? Have any of the alleged assassins been caught and/or ruled out as suspects? And if they've been caught, have they spilled any secrets?
- Doctor Spin
- Kind of. I have been following law enforcement reports on the three main suspects; two of them are already dead. Ilari "Scopes" Gurevich was found dead following his assassination of the head engineer of Aztechnology's Marine Technologies subsidiary in San Diego about five months ago. Gurevich's cause of death was listed only as "suspicious circumstances," because apparently the coroner down there is allowed to get away with vague bullshit like that. An undetectable poison is the leading theory of cause of death. The other dead assassin, Jack "the End" Daemon, tried to kill Conall Taylor, a sitting member of the Council of Princes in Tír Tairngire, about two weeks ago. Apparently, the Tír authorities had been tipped off about the plot ahead of time and took precautions. Daemon took out the wrong target, and the Tír forces then took him out. It would seem as though someone is trying to tie up loose ends and make sure the details about what happened in '73 never get out. So if either one was involved in the assassination, they have taken their secrets to their grave. If Felicitas Nacht heard what happened to her colleagues on that list, you can bet she's already gone to ground before the same fate





INCOMING FEED.....



happens to her. But as far as getting answers, there really hasn't been any progress made.

- Snopes

There is little doubt that the world experienced a fundamental change following Hestaby's rampage. It became obvious even to metahuman observers that divisions were forming amongst the dragons, based on how they viewed their relations with metahumanity and whether they placed those relations in high regard above their individual needs for vengeance. Hestaby, Rhonabwy, and Masaru banded together quickly based on their mutual goals and philosophies. Word spread fast that Lofwyr, a notorious lone wolf among the dragons, was looking into building alliances with both Lung and Ghostwalker. Lofwyr was also seen on different occasions courting support from the Sea Dragon, Arleesh, and Aden. On the other hand, Hestaby was very public in trying to court the support of Schwartzkopf, Celedyr, and Mujaji for her cause, though her efforts met with only moderate success.

As the lines between the dragons were drawn, attacks on dragon interests rose dramatically. These attacks were more focused and more intense than what the anti-dragon protestors could do on their own. There were vigorous Matrix attacks on the dragons' financial assets, wealth the general public knew nothing about. Billions of nuyen were either illegally transferred to other accounts or lost thanks to altered or corrupted records. Even accounts the Zurich-Orbital Gemeinschaft Bank claimed to be impenetrable to hackers were compromised during these campaigns (though ZO-G will not admit to any of that publicly, for obvious reasons). There has been speculation that the datafiles

contained in the datastore Dunkelzahn left for Hestaby on Zurich-Orbital were also compromised by hackers. Dragons' physical corporate holdings and investments have also been assaulted in the course of this war, and many have been deliberately wiped out as a means to weaken the resources of the opposing sides. Starfield Botanical Engineering, Biologic Technologies, BCMU, Johns Hopkins Institute of Health, Inc., Olgitechnologies, AET Ergonomic Systems, Alvis PLC, and Bowman Metal Works have all been forced into insolvency over the last two years, leading to thousands of metahumans losing their jobs. Since the *Clutch of the Dragons* file was posted, a few more companies with dragon investments have been added to this unfortunate list: Aksakal Tek, Baihu Corporation, Harburgh Detox Labs, and Hermetic Services Inc. Saeder-Krupp has seen many of its subsidiaries pushed to the breaking point due to this civil war, but their subsidiaries are managing to survive in spite of many devastating financial blows. The ten hardest hit S-K subsidiaries during this war have included Awakened World Research, Commerzbank, Deutsche Erdölgesellschaft, Fatima Petrochemicals, GIAT Industries, Heavy Metal, Iraq Oil, Kinesys Heavy Industries, Konglomerat Przemysowo-Wydobywczy, and Saurer-Rieter.

While this dragon in-fighting has revolved heavily around financial assets and corporate investments, the conflict has manifested in other sectors. In 2074, multiple runner teams were used to try to secure power sites around the world for the individual dragons, including such mystical places such as Stonehenge and the dragon lines surrounding the Ring of Fire. The violence around those power sites has been bloody at times and has increased steadily since the beginning of 2074. I have confirmed that many

runners lost their lives in the battles that many governments have taken extreme measures to cover up. Runner teams have also been used to repeatedly strike at the various lairs of the dragons involved in this conflict. Runner teams have tried (and failed) on at least four occasions to raid Mount Shasta and destroy the Shasta dam. There are other stories of runs being carried out against Lofwyr's primary lair in the Rhine-Ruhr megaplex (S-K Prime), but from what I have heard, none of the runners that accepted those jobs have returned from them.

Other lairs and nests, though, have been successfully raided. Perhaps the most well known and talked about of these raids has been Alama's primary lair on the island of Spitsbergen. A few treasures from that lair have ended up on public display at S-K Prime. It is also believed Rhonabwy has had one of his secondary lairs raided in Wales. Several shields, swords, daggers, rare artwork, and tapestries from a previous age went missing, as did the Silver Songbird bequeathed to him by Dunkelzahn. And if chatter in the shadows is to be believed, it has ended up in Lung's possession. In retaliation, it is said that Rhonabwy during this time went after the three Coins of Luck that were in Lung's possession. There has been no reliable information on whether Rhonabwy was successful in his endeavors. In recent months, the fighting among the dragons has led to some of the younger dragons serving as vassals to the great dragons becoming entangled in physical confrontations with each other. Horizon was aware that Yat Guan, a vassal to Lung, was engaged in a physical battle against an unidentified dragon in February 2074, an incident that they covered up. Since that time, Masaru's vassal, Marcupo, was attacked by a couple of adult dragons believed to have been loyal to Alama's. Marcupo was seriously wounded in the attack. Reports suggest Marcupo may have lost a limb during the battle, but such rumors have yet to be confirmed. While one of Lung's other vassals, Choi Mu was attacked in Denver in late August by a dragon believed to have been a vassal for Rhonabwy. Choi Mu is believed to have been killed in that encounter. In total, it is believed that nearly six adult dragons who were aligned to one of the great dragons as vassals have been killed as this conflict has escalated.

- You know, I find it pretty hypocritical of the dragons to be so mad at us for raiding their lairs, and calling it an atrocity. But when they do it or when they have us do it for them, it's fine. Such bull-drek.
- Bull

As Hestaby and Lofwyr waged war against each other and Sirurg burned his path of destruction throughout Aztlan, there would be one more dragon that would play a major role in the Great Dragon Civil War: Alama's. A few months after Hestaby's UN speech, Alama's established a stronghold near GeMiTo. While Lofwyr fought to balance dragon interests with metahumanity and its needs, Alama's was intent on advancing his beliefs in dragon superiority at any cost. Alama's recruited a number of adult dragons to follow him and to further his cause of dragon superiority. Alama's and his dragons turned GeMiTo, a feral city before they arrived, into their own feeding grounds. Every day, a dozen or so dragons preyed upon the inhabitants of the sprawl. According to reports from the inhabitants of the area, approximately three hundred metahumans a day were attacked, many out in the open for all to witness. This feeding frenzy by

Alama's and his followers led to an astounding ninety thousand metahumans being killed over the course of the war in that mega sprawl. Lofwyr, in his capacity as Loremaster, attempted to meet with Alama's and to correct the situation. It is fairly widely known that Alama's rebuffed Lofwyr's efforts to diffuse the situation diplomatically, forcing Lofwyr's hand in the final conflict that would shake the foundations of the dragon culture.

- Frosty says Lofwyr balanced the needs of the dragons he governs (I guess that's the right term, I don't know) with the needs of metahumanity, but I don't see it. I mean, where was he when this violence against innocent metahumans was taking place? Couldn't he have stopped it? It seems to me we have suffered a lot because of the dragons and their war, and he did nothing to stop it or redress those injuries against us.
- Ethernaut
- I would hazard a guess if Lofwyr wasn't actively restraining his side and holding the other dragons back, we would have seen a far different war. With a more militant Loremaster, we may have seen a half-dozen greats showing up in Manhattan, Tenochtitlán, Seattle, or Atlanta looking for vengeance. I think Lofwyr has been pragmatic, allowing the dragons to claim a certain measure of blood to settle their claims for vengeance, but not allowing it to get so out of hand where entire sprawls are laid to waste. Basically, he elected to allow violence to happen that was used more as a surgical tool as opposed to a blunt weapon (like Sirurg or Ghostwalker) that would have caused massive collateral damage and would have led to full-on war with metahumans. After all, he has major investments in metahumanity, and he doesn't want to lose all of that. What Lofwyr did probably wasn't everything the dragons wanted, but at least it was something of a compromise. And with that, Lofwyr was likely successful in reining in those who were still loyal to the Loremaster. In hindsight, I would say it was a good thing that Lofwyr was the Loremaster at this time instead of anyone else.
- Wyrm Watcher
- I certainly don't feel very fortunate because of it. And you don't think Hestaby would have been able to do a better job as Loremaster?
- Ethernaut
- If her motives are true, and she is seeking improved relations with metahumanity, Hestaby would have likely pursued peaceful and diplomatic means to resolve the conflict, as she tried to do with her speech. The trouble is that's not what the majority of dragons would have wanted. I have studied dragons and their history for a long time now, and I can tell you if Hestaby was Loremaster, many other dragons would have rebelled against her. The fracturing of the dragon culture and its hierarchy could have been much worse than what we saw under Lofwyr. The dragons were in a mood for war, and Lofwyr gave it to them, even if it may have come with certain restrictions. I doubt Hestaby would have been able to do the same.
- Wyrm Watcher
- Hestaby troubles me. She has seen all the destruction that Alama's wrought on GeMiTo, but over the last year and a half she has done nothing to stop him. With Rhonabwy and Masaru at her



side, she should have stepped up and ended the Alamaï's problem instead of waiting around for Lofwyr to take care of it. Seems pretty hypocritical of her, especially when she is the one who has been espousing how important maintaining and improving relations with metahumanity is for her.

- Dr. Spin
- From what I have heard, Hestaby has already sent large sums of nuyen and resources from her lairs to the metahumans in GeMiTo to help them defend themselves against the onslaught of Alamaï's dragons. She hasn't publicly disclosed those activities because they seem to be in direct conflict with the interests of her kind, and it's also likely leading to an increase in metahuman bloodshed. Despite not wanting to talk about her shadow activities, she has spoken out against Alamaï in public and condemned his actions. But you're right. She hasn't done nearly enough, especially now that her voice doesn't carry the weight that it used to in dragon circles. She seems to have approached this particular problem as a politician rather than as a great dragon, and that has not worked in this particular instance. Even Dunkelzahn had his moments where his dragon nature came first. And with Alamaï, her dragon nature should have taken the lead.
- Red Anya
- There could be a few reasons for Hestaby's lack of action relating to Alamaï. Hestaby could simply have a fixation on Lofwyr. Her grief over the loss of Eyes-of-Wyrm and the things have happened since may have caused her to lose sight of why she involved herself in this conflict in the first place. Or the rumors about Hestaby lying through her teeth about defending relations with metahumanity could be true, and this fight has really been about her animosity with Lofwyr. A third possibility is that the fighting in the Northern Crescent region has grown out of control. The Tír forces are attempting to impose martial law on the contested area, but this has only agitated the locals, who are fighting back with improvised explosive devices and ambushes. In recent weeks, three Tír patrols were ambushed, and all the troops in those patrols were tortured and found killed in the wooded areas. A number of Tír citizens that had been allowed to relocate to the Northern Crescent region have been pulled out of their houses, beaten, and their homes burned to the ground by the native homesteaders. Hestaby had to spend considerable time in the Northern Crescent trying to diffuse the situation and develop a cease-fire agreement. Though without her authority as a Tír Prince, this problem has become very difficult for her to manage (especially when she is trying to resolve things without resorting to violence). Perhaps her intent was to put out the fires burning in the Northern Crescent region first before addressing the matter of Alamaï's.
- Wyrm Watcher
- If your theory is correct, then it's best that Lofwyr is Loremaster. He is proven to have the skills necessary to deal with more than one crisis at a time. If the Orange Queen can't multi-task, then she really shouldn't have been in a leadership role within the dragon culture.
- Cosmo

FINAL ESCALATION (SEPTEMBER 2074-OCTOBER 2074)

The Great Dragon Civil War has seen its shares of flare-ups and lulls, like any other prolonged conflict. Between September and October 2074, prior to the final battle between Lofwyr and Alamaï, there was a final period of intense escalation between the dragons, as relations between their members seemed to deteriorate to their worst levels in modern history.

Prior to September 2074, Lofwyr had gone after Alamaï's hoard during which he obtained a couple of ancient foci that he had placed prominently on public display in S-K Prime; foci items that were likely prized possessions of Alamaï. At that time, he had only targeted a few specific items while leaving the rest of Alamaï's hoard alone, as if sending a message to Alamaï. Starting in the first week of September, Lofwyr's strategy changed. He and the other dragons loyal to him went after Alamaï's remaining hoard with a vengeance. Three lairs belonging to Alamaï, including his primary lair, were attacked and raided by runners employed by the dragons. After defeating the defenses around the lairs, the runners began clearing out the vast wealth sitting inside. At some point, Hestaby, Rhonabwy, and Masaru also learned what Lofwyr was doing and sent runners and mercenaries of their own to claim their share of Alamaï's hoard. During those clashes for Alamaï's remaining treasures, nearly eighty runners over the course of six different encounters died while trying to carry out their jobs for the dragons. Some of the runner teams brought about victories for Lofwyr, while others won victories for Hestaby. In the end, from what I have been able to calculate, Lofwyr obtained at least seventy percent of Alamaï's hoard, while Hestaby and those loyal to her were able to grab the remaining thirty percent. Thirty percent of Alamaï's hoard may seem low, but when the items removed from Alamaï's hoard were roughly valued somewhere in the hundreds of billions of nuyen, thirty percent of that is not all that insignificant.

As you may imagine, Alamaï did not take the news of the violation of his hoard lying down. Runners were hired by Alamaï with whatever portion of his hoard he had taken with him to GeMiTo. The dragon is not without resources—he has access to a couple of radical, anti-government groups from the Tír and splinter cells from the remnants of Winternight that he could call on to try to recover items from his hoard. The massive attack happened on September 19th. Best estimates placed the number of attackers somewhere around one hundred and fifty. When they attacked, the forces used fire as a weapon, starting three separate forest fires in the Awakened forest that raged over forty-two hundred hectares. As spirits raced to put out the fire in the Mount Shasta forest, the hostile force advanced, killing any Northern Crescent gypsies or shamans they encountered. There were reports from Lone Star mentioning that the infamous nanoweapon, Surtr, was used during the attack. Traces examined after the attack were determined to be part of an old supply of Surtr left over from the days of the second Matrix Crash. So much harm was being done to the forest and loss of life that Hestaby was forced to intervene. Hestaby ended the incursion within minutes of her appearance in the skies over Mount Shasta. The damage, though, was done. Mount Shasta was left badly scarred, members of both the Shasta



Shamans and the Northern Crescent gypsies were killed, and perhaps worst of all for Hestaby, she was caught on trideo attacking and killing metahumans, which inflicted a serious wound to her public image. Hestaby and the Shasta Shamans have not been forthcoming with how many of their members were killed, but the research I conducted shows that nearly seventeen shamans were killed along with nearly forty Northern Crescent gypsies. All the metahumans that attacked Mount Shasta that day and had not been killed by the shamans were wiped out by Hestaby's wrath.

Alamais was not done. He set his sights on the North America division headquarters for Saeder-Krupp, and one specific metahuman in particular: Ludmilla Reanka. He spent about a month, and a lot of his remaining resources, using runners to gather intelligence on the S-K headquarters in Cara'Sir, their security procedures, locations of where back-up might be able to be deployed from, locations where Tir Peace Force troops may be able to respond from, etc. He also spent nuyen obtaining the schedule and itinerary for Reanka. He likely knew he didn't have the resources to acquire what he had lost from Lofwyr, but it seems he was determined to garner for himself a measure of revenge. Once he had this intelligence and identified an opportunity when she would be vulnerable while travelling between business meetings, he rounded up those he would use to have Reanka killed. Through various third parties, he provided intelligence on Reanka's whereabouts and her security detail to prominent (and violent) anti-dragon groups that he knew would be willing to act on it, especially if they knew killing her meant hurting Lofwyr. His third party approached *Brat'mael* ("Black Sun"), and encouraged them to treat Reanka as a race traitor for her "inappropriate" relationship with Lofwyr. When he had manipulated the extremists into carrying out his vengeance, Alamais hired runners to focus on stalling any response the Tir Peace Force or Saeder-Krupp might have when violence started against Reanka and her security detail. He also sent trained mercenaries to the location where the ambush would happen, to ensure the assassination succeeded if the extremists failed. The attack happened on October 17th, in North Cara'Sir. Reanka's motorcade came under attack around 1920 hours. And in less than fifteen minutes, Reanka was dead. There were a few members of the extremist factions that were captured by the Tir Peace Force. They were immediately extradited to Saeder-Krupp's custody, where I am certain they all faced a fate worse than death.

Following the attack on Mount Shasta, Hestaby once again took the airwaves to justify her actions against her attackers and to explain what has been happening in the war. Many saw this as damage control, Hestaby's way of attempting to maintain the moral high ground in this war (provided there is any). During her interview, Hestaby mentioned a few interesting things. Here's a transcript of that conversation, which aired on November 1, 2074:

//Upload trideo::user Frosty::01.10.75//

Reporter (Kimberly Vogel-Smith): Lady Hestaby, I am honored that you have chosen Newstalk as a venue for this interview, and I'm thrilled to be able to conduct it. Thank you for your time. We understand how precious it is.

Hestaby: I felt it was appropriate and overdue to have some open dialogue, particularly during this time of unrest. Perhaps I can bring back a sense of reason and calm with my words. Perhaps

my appearance here can help dissuade more violence. Perhaps my words can convince others that genuine dialogue and good-faith gestures made between metahumanity and dragon kind, as opposed to violence in the streets, is the best way to go to establish healthier and mutually beneficial relations between our two races. Perhaps I can convince people to start talking about peace, a dialogue that must not be one-sided. My kind could declare peace tomorrow, but if something is not done about the growing number of extremist, anti-dragon groups, we are only ensuring that any peace between our two kinds is temporary.

Reporter: I hope that will be the case. My first question, Lady Hestaby, is actually a series of questions, things that are on many people's minds, and things we haven't gotten a clear answer on yet. What happened on July 23, 2073? What was the significance with the sniper rifle? Do you believe Lofwyr was to blame for your friend's death? Was the attack in Dubai linked to the assassination of Elliot Eyes-of-Wyrm? Or was it unrelated?

Hestaby: Let me just say the memories of that day still haunt and sadden me. I lost a good friend of over two decades. No matter the physical wealth I may possess, there is no replacing Elliot. And he died because someone took offense at what I had said in my speech to the United Nations. He was killed because of me, suffering a fate he did not deserve. At the time, that realization filled me with a great rage. I also knew events of such magnitude do not happen without others of my kind knowing about it. And the act had to be sanctioned first, or there would have been hell to pay later. It was no big secret that I had scheduled an address to the United Nations. That was on my agenda for at least three months. There was plenty of time for individuals to make plans and take steps to bring those plans into fruition. And there was plenty of time for those plans to be stopped if there had been any disapproval from my kind. The only individual who could have sanctioned it was the one who rules Saeder-Krupp. He is also the one who could have either taken steps to stop this violence targeting an innocent metahuman, or could have warned me about that threat. He chose to do neither. And there are things I know that suggest his involvement may have been more than just passive complicity.

In Dubai, I asserted myself and sent a message that if others want a fight, they need to bring the fight to me. I am not usually brawling around in the skies above sprawls, but I am more than capable of it if my rivals choose to engage in those barbaric tactics. I wanted to make a statement that those I protect are off limits.

Reporter: Do you have hard evidence of Lofwyr's involvement?

Hestaby: What I have is good enough for me, but how and where I got the information from would not be enough for your courts. So I have decided to keep the evidence I have to myself. But I have enough to convince me that my actions were warranted.

Reporter: I see. Do you think the violence you carried out against Saeder-Krupp in Dubai has inspired and spurred violence by your kind against metahumanity? Do you think that your provocative actions were counter-productive to what you were trying to accomplish?

Hestaby: When I took the actions that I did, I made certain the building was emptied of the metahumans who worked there. I made sure there were no fatalities. I showed that I understood



the value metahuman life has. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of others of my kind who have lashed out violently against specific metahuman populations. Too much blood has been spilled by their actions in this conflict, and it's time that someone took real leadership and put an end to it now. I honestly believe the leadership we have now is not up for stopping this violence.

Reporter: A few weeks ago, there were many metahumans who attacked Mount Shasta. You were caught on trideo assaulting them viciously. How do you justify this disparity between what you have spoken about working with metahumanity for better relations?

Hestaby: These individuals who attacked Mount Shasta were very dangerous people. Many would be labeled terrorists. They deliberately set fires that inflicted serious wounds on the forest. They used a known weapon of mass destruction on the peaceful inhabitants of the area. If you know anything about this weapon, you know it was a very violent and very painful way to die. These are people I call allies and friends. I was defending my territory and their homes. Anyone would have done the same to an intruder that threatened their homes and their families. The violence I showed was justified.

Reporter: Do you know who initiated such violence?

Hestaby: It was Alamaïs. This is how he operates. He chose to send these groups after me as punishment for my actions in fiercely supporting and defending dragon and metahuman relations.

Reporter: Will there be retaliation against him for the attack on your territory and allies?

Hestaby: That is something that I cannot say. But if there is, rest assured I have no intention of allowing harm to come to metahumans by my actions. The sprawl that Alamaïs victimizes does not need to see more blood spilled by dragon kind. As I have stated repeatedly, what Alamaïs has been doing in that part of the world is an atrocity. Metahumanity holds great potential and has tremendous value for us as allies. We can learn from each other. BWhat Alamaïs is doing is on par with what SIRRURG did in Aztlan, and it is tantamount to genocide.

Reporter: Will you again try to persuade the United Nations to charge Alamaïs with crimes against metahumanity?

Hestaby: I may. Unfortunately, the last time I approached the United Nations they did not listen to everything I had asked. The good-faith gestures I requested have not been forthcoming. Lethal force was employed against SIRRURG, nearly killing him. This was not what I asked. I sought metahuman cooperation in recovering the remains of Dzitbalché, but in the end, I was forced to acquire them using my own means. Without good-faith gestures from both sides, my efforts to end hostilities may be for naught.

Reporter: We are running out of time. But I want to ask one final question: What can you tell us about the disappearances of so many metahumans from around the world? Is your kind involved with those disappearances?

Hestaby: I do not know who is responsible for those actions and what they are trying to accomplish. Those who believe in what I am trying to accomplish and I are not arranging those acts. I think a closer look needs to be taken at the one who has the power to allow the disappearances to happen and the one that

has the power to stop the violence. He should be acting to stop those responsible for the disappearances. He is not. It is clear to me that our race needs to change, to adapt to the times. Our leadership needs to embrace change in our traditions. These acts of violence demonstrate he is incapable of such change. We need a different approach, which I don't think he can arrange. The disappearances are regrettable and deeply troubling, but I am not the one you should be speaking to about them.

Reporter: Well, that seems to be all the time we have for this interview. Thank you for visiting with us, Lady Hestaby and sharing your perspective. We will be right back.

- Hestaby isn't being honest with us about why Alamaïs came after her. But I guess being attacked for your beliefs sounds a whole hell of a lot better than saying you were being attacked because you helped rob your fellow dragon blind. Makes you wonder what other things she's bending the truth on.

- Doctor Spin

- Is it me, or does that interview come off as this being all about her?

- Sunshine

- It's not just you. It sounds very manipulative and self-serving. So it sounds about right for a great dragon.

- Plan 9

- The allegation that Lofwyr had a hand in these metahuman disappearances, even if it was just allowing them to happen, is very provocative. A number of those missing individuals were executives, accountants, consultants, lawyers, etc. They had talents the megacorporations desired, and they likely had sensitive knowledge of the inner workings of the megacorporations, including valuable secrets that now could be compromised. The disappearance of these metahumans likely has cost each of the megacorporations a significant amount of nuyen. If the megacorporations can independently verify what Hestaby is claiming is true, that Lofwyr approved or sanctioned these actions as Loremaster, you can bet they will be seeking retaliation and compensation from the Corporate Court against Saeder-Krupp. An Omega Order? Not likely. But fines, sanctions, and maybe a promise of banding together to vote against every and all S-K interests. The relationship between the Corporate Court and S-K could become very frigid for the foreseeable future.

- Stone

- Lofwyr is not that careless. If he allowed the dragons to carry out these attacks, there will be no evidence for his enemies to find. Period. Besides, Saeder-Krupp is not Lofwyr. Whatever Lofwyr may have done, S-K is likely not involved. It will be very hard to make a convincing argument to punish a member when they were not involved in any of those dragon-related matters. Saeder-Krupp has no say in dragon affairs, nor can they be held responsible for their actions. No, the Corporate Court will likely throw a temper tantrum over the situation, publicly admonish Lofwyr, and then allow the matter to quietly die. It's one thing to not appear as though you're being bullied by a great dragon, it's



another matter altogether to start a fight with one. Especially if all you have is just the word of his enemy to support your accusations against him.

- Thorn

Roughly twenty-four hours after Hestaby gave her interview with Kimberly Vogel-Smith and *Newstalk*, bystanders near Mount Shasta reported feeling a significant charge in the air. Magical experts who examined the site believed that Mount Shasta pulsed with magical energy that was steadily accumulating. At 0139 hours on the morning of November 3, it was reported that those magical energies had been released. At the exact moment that the energy dissipated around Mount Shasta, a massive explosion occurred at Alamaï's compound in GeMiTo. The following is a classified S-K Intelligence report that a fellow JackPointer was able to obtain for my research regarding that incident:

Incoming Message

**Saeder-Krupp Preliminary Intelligence Report
(CLASSIFIED)
For Lofwyr's Eyes Only
Urgent**

Satellite surveillance over Site 365X has captured an explosion that took place in the center of the established compound at 0939 hours. The explosion's origin is still unknown. Explosion first appeared at the mouth of the cavern entrance, then radiated outward. Conventional methods have been ruled out for the cause of the explosion. The leading theory is that it was magic-based, with considerable magical energies weaved into the effect. Primary Hostile was caught in the explosion, as were four members of his infantry. The Primary Hostile appeared wounded but survived. Two members of the Primary Hostile's infantry were killed instantly by the blast. Two others were seriously wounded. Both the Primary Hostile and the two surviving secondary targets appear to be in a condition where they can heal and be in a fighting condition in a very short period of time. The observed number of active hostiles within the compound now stands at thirteen, including the Primary Hostile. There was no collateral damage beyond the walls of the compound. Satellite imagery suggests moderate damage to the walls of the compound, but they are still standing. It is likely that, given the force of the explosion, any quickened armor spells on the walls were decimated. The wall that seems to have taken the most damage from the attack is the south perimeter wall. It is unclear how much damage may have been done to the underground chambers. Agents will attempt to get close enough to make an assessment. A list of potential suspects behind the attack are being generated by analysts and will be included in follow-up reports.

Four hours after the magical attack, Alamaï and his followers descended upon GeMiTo. Likely as a message back to his attacker, Alamaï and his followers ravaged GeMiTo. Instead of just hunting, they attacked and destroyed infrastructure, set fire to buildings, and forced metahumans to flee. According to reports from that night, Alamaï and his followers hunted and then made sport of the metahumans in the sprawl, purposefully killing up to three thousand metahumans in the course of a five hour span. Most were simply killed for revenge; they were not used as any particular food source. The fires that Alamaï and his followers started took several days to put out, and when it was extinguished, dozens more metahumans were found killed, and a significant part of GeMiTo was horribly scarred.

- That sounds like a ritual attack led by Hestaby. If that's the case, she should be ashamed that she didn't finish the job, especially given how easily she tore up that S-K building in Dubai with her magic.
- Jimmy No
- Think about it for a moment. There were multiple dragons that could have been counterspelling, and still the blast got through their defenses with enough firepower to nearly take out four dragons. And wound a great dragon. If it had landed anywhere else, a significant part of a sprawl could have been obliterated. It wasn't so much that Hestaby failed, it's that Alamaï and his goons were lucky enough to stop just enough of that ritual spell and prevent themselves from being completely wiped out. And it's very possible that the fires that scorched the landscape around Mount Shasta may have made the power site a lot less efficient with the flow of mana for their ritual. Had the landscape been in pristine condition, and they were able to channel more mana through their power site, the outcome could have been much different.
- Lyran

Lung has also seen his share of fallout from this period of escalation, as the various Triad syndicates under his influence have been targeted. Over the last two months, Interpol and local security corporations have raided over two dozen sites belonging to Triads loyal to Lung, including his prized Red Dragon triad in Hong Kong. These raids resulted in the capture of millions of nuyen worth of BTLs and street drugs, and they led to the closure of very well known brothels, money laundering fronts, and opium dens. A number of smuggling routes used by Lung's Triads have also been compromised. Even in Hong Kong, where most government and law enforcement officers are on the take from Lung's Triads, there were still operations carried out against them. Many would say that it would almost take the influence of another great dragon to get the Hong Kong Police Force (Knight Errant, in this case) to move against the Red Dragons in their territories. When these groups went after Lung's operations, a chain reaction started. Rival Triads including the White Lotus Society and the Ten Thousand Lions began taking their own swipes at the Red Dragon Triad. And of course, Ryumyo, who has been mostly neutral in the conflict, also decided to take advantage of the situation and press the attack against Lung's associates. He choose to challenge Lung's operations in locations such as Shanghai, Macao, and Singapore



with his allied Yakuza. Ryumyo is also making a large push to cripple Triad operations, particularly those from the Red Dragon Association, found within Japan's borders. Since this escalation, violence between the Triads and the Yakuza in the Pacific Rim has tripled, continuing the disturbing tread of expanded violence between the crime syndicates.

As violence has broken out and escalated amongst the crime syndicates, particularly the Triads and the Yakuza, anti-dragon forces engaged in their own retaliation. Once again, they targeted both NeoNET and Saeder-Krupp. This time, the attacks were more sophisticated. They got past security measures designed to keep them out. They knew the routines of security patrols and bypassed them. Anti-dragon forces inflicted serious damage on the Matrix divisions within NeoNET and the heavy industrial subsidiaries within Saeder-Krupp. Transys Neuronet, Bristol Optics, Matrix Systems, Novatech, and Pulse were all attacked in brazen assaults, allegedly for their connections to Celedyr and his research. On October 15th, anti-dragon forces led an attack on Transys Neuronet labs in Edinburgh, Scotland. The attack caught Celedyr while he was working in their labs. The attack was so aggressive and fierce that Celedyr had to shift to his dragon form to protect the people in the labs from harm. Celedyr killed some of the attackers and chased others off, but the combatants used the dragon's actions against him. In his form, Celedyr did so much collateral damage to the equipment within Transys Neuronet's labs that nearly half of the labs will have to be shut down, remodeled, and equipment replaced before operations can begin again. The Order of Saint George claimed responsibility for that provocative attack. Saeder-Krupp's most vulnerable subsidiaries at the moment have also been targeted by these anti-dragon groups. In October, Heavy Metal, Iraq Oil, and Saurer-Rieter were all sabotaged, causing millions of nuyen worth of additional debt for these struggling subsidiaries. Many believe these subsidiaries were singled out due to the damage the dragons themselves had done in their battles with one another, and that these anti-dragon groups merely wanted to twist the proverbial knife further into those wounds. Roland's Sword and the Sons of Siegfried claimed responsibility for those attacks. Lower-profile groups associated with the dragons have suffered from attacks by these anti-dragon groups, including attacks on the Astral Space Preservation Society and the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), which receives significant donations from several of the great dragons including Hestaby, Masaru, and Hualpa.

- You know how those groups were able to organize such effective attacks? Sensitive information about these companies were deliberately leaked to them. My sources suggest that the dragons may have been the ones to gather this information and use it as a means to turn these groups into their proxies. And what's even better for the dragons besides plausible deniability is that if any of these anti-dragon members got killed in the process or if they killed someone else as collateral damage, the dragons themselves technically are not responsible for those deaths. Hestaby, if you can believe it, is rumored to be the main dragon responsible for manipulating these groups.
- Fianchetto
- That's hard for even me to believe. Why would these groups risk being led into a trap by taking information from someone like

Hestaby? Or even worse, why would they risk their reputations as dragon slayers? Such a scandalous discovery would prove both embarrassing and demoralizing, and could lead to internal strife within these groups that could tear them apart.

- Plan 9
- The dragons involved are very careful on approaching these groups with this information. From what I have heard, many of the dragons have already established good pipelines to spoon-feed this data to these groups. And if they're presented with accurate information that would make their activities easier, it would be kind of hard for them to pass it up. After all, they're still using it to harm dragon interests, no matter who their source may be.
- Fianchetto
- Also, why would Hestaby want to hurt Celedyr? I thought they were on good terms (at least, as much as great dragons can be)?
- Sunshine
- Frosty mentioned in the *Clutch of Dragons* file that Hestaby approached Celedyr for support, and he declined to even meet with her. It is possible she took that slight personally, and sought a little payback. I suppose that's just her dragon instincts taking over.
- Elijah

THE BATTLE BETWEEN LOYALISTS AND SUPREMECISTS (NOVEMBER 5-6, 2074)

The Great Dragon Civil War climaxed on November 5th and 6th of 2074. Lofwyr moved his forces into GeMiTo for a direct confrontation with his brother Alamais. It took Lofwyr and his forces nearly sixteen hours, but in the end, Lofwyr and his forces came out on top. Some have seen clips of this final battle on ShadowSea, but this was not a battle that was widely covered by the media. Trideo footage of the battle was tightly controlled. After a year of Alamais rampaging through GeMiTo, there was not a whole lot of media left to cover the battle. Most of the coverage dealt with the aftermath and showed the burnt out and collapsed dragon compound. There was no coverage or images taken of Alamais' body, or any of the dragons' bodies. Those bodies were removed before recordings were taken of the site. From what we know, thirty-eight dragons besides Alamais perished in that battle. I could give a dry breakdown of what exactly transpired during this fight and when, but I figured you might enjoy reading firsthand accounts of the runners that fought in this rather epic and unique battle. The first account I am posting is from a shadowrunner named Helix, who is part of a crew called the Alphas. The Alphas regularly participates in Desert Wars, having placed fourth in the infantry matches in 2072 and 2073, and they came in second for infantry combat during the 2074 Desert Wars. I know what I am about to say is cliché, but here is his story.



Posted by: Helix

Hoi, chummers. My name is Helix, and I'm part of a group called the Alphas. We got eight people: four—count 'em, four—street sams, a loup-garou who will shred you in hand-to-hand combat, a nosferatu mage, a bear shapeshifter, and a rigger. So we're flexible, and we can bring the hurt. During our career in the shadows, we have done runs in Bogotá at the height of the Aztlan-Amazonia war. We've run in Chicago, Lagos, and even GeMiTo, even during the bad times when Alamais and his followers were bearing down hard on the sprawl. We pursued the artifacts that everyone was so obsessed with a year or two ago, and we (briefly) recovered Santaya's Compass and the Phaistos Disc. More importantly, we survived those runs. We have participated in Desert Wars for the last five years and earned a good name there, along with a few bucks. We have earned a reputation for doing runs no one else wanted and for seeking out new and interesting challenges.

- More meat, less résumé, please.
- Haze

This is probably why we were approached by Hans Brackhaus (or, more likely, "Hans Brackhaus") for this particular job, and why we said "hell yes" without much hesitation. We figured it was going to be one of those once-in-a-lifetime kinds of fights, and we wanted in, both to see this thing go down and to play a role in it. We were not only going to test ourselves and our talents in this fight against the dragons; we were going to make history.

We arrived at the staging ground around 2300 hours on the third of November. The staging ground was approximately sixty kilometers to the south from Alamais' compound. We wanted to be among the first to arrive, to acquaint ourselves with the other teams and mercs who would be working with us to storm the castle, so to speak. We had been told we would be working with nearly a thousand other runners and mercenaries from around the world that they (Lofwyr's men) had spent the last six weeks recruiting. Initially, when the staging area was fairly empty, it didn't feel any different than preparing for a Desert Wars tournament. But as more bodies began pouring in, we slowly grasped the vast scope of this upcoming battle. There were more than a few runner teams that brought their own tanks into camp; three were LAV-103 Strikers, two were an older version of the Stonewall tank, another was a BAE Centurion, and three others that I recognized as being Ares Ocelots. We spotted one team bringing in a C-31 mobile headquarters truck. A few other teams brought with them assault copters and military t-birds, including a GMC Thunderhawk, a couple of Eurocopter Panthers, a couple of Eurocopter Tigers, and a couple of Aztechnology Lobos. There were several other teams that specialized in fighting spirits, with whole teams made up primarily of adepts and spellslingers. I have to admit, we started feeling a little outclassed by all the other hardware the other teams were bringing in for this fight, as compared to our measly six combat drones, including two Tominos, two Steel Lynxes and two Huitzilpochtis. But I think we all started to feel outclassed when the first of the dragons arrived in camp around 0730 hours on November 4.

As you can imagine, when the western dragon suddenly landed in camp with no warning whatsoever, there were more

than a few freak-outs. Was this one of ours, or one on Alamais' side? Was this a potential first strike? Some were tempted to believe that. Alamais likely knew about this staging area already, and many believed it would be a strong tactical move for him to disrupt staging operations, with many of us being caught with our pants down and our asses hanging out in the wind. To make matters worse, most, including our team, had never been that close to a dragon before. Trust me, when we were standing mere meters away from a living dragon, a renowned and feared killing machine, we had to fight hard against the urge not to just shoot it out of a pure survival instinct. We had all seen the devastation that Alamais' dragons had caused to this god-forsaken sprawl, and we most definitely wanted to avoid that same carnage. Thankfully, no one from the Alphas got too far out of line or too trigger happy, and most runners kept their safeties on. And just as thankfully, the dragon was indeed a friendly, as other runner teams slowly stood down and resumed normal staging operations once they realized the dragon was not an active threat.

More dragons arrived at the staging grounds throughout the rest of the day and into the early morning hours of November 5; by the time they had all arrived, there were nearly twenty of them altogether. With that many dragons concentrated in one spot, you could feel the tensions rise around camp. Not only were runners and mercs on edge, but so were the dragons. They spanned the gambit of various dragon types, from western to eastern dragons and feathered serpents. The adult dragons covered the color spectrum, from dark greens and blacks to vibrant yellows and reds. Many of the dragons did not look like they wanted to be there; they were likely pressed into service by Lofwyr. Many of them snapped at runners who had gotten too close; and in one instance, a western dragon attacked a merc without provocation, killing him quick. Everyone reached for their weapons when it happened, threatening retaliation against the particular dragon that caused the death. The dragons lined up against us, looking to strike back if we fired a single shot. Scale, Lofwyr's trusted drake, was forced to intervene immediately with some quick talk. Everyone quickly became aware that the camp wasn't tied together by any strong sense of alliance. Acting on Lofwyr's behalf, Scale ordered the other dragons to kill the one that violated Lofwyr's standing order of non-violence, which they proceeded to do so in front of us as if Lofwyr himself had given the order. For those that had never before seen a dragon in action, we were shocked at their physical prowess and the viciousness they showed in carrying out their order. The dragon guilty of killing the merc was torn apart into pieces before our very eyes in less than a minute. After that, we all kept our weapons just a little closer and left guards posted at all times in case any other dragon stepped out of line. It did not happen again.

When things finally settled down in camp, Scale gave us metahumans strict orders. For one, we were to make sure our Safe Target Systems for our weapons were set so that all the dragons present were recognized as allies and to prevent friendly fire incidents. He assured us if we had an accident that killed a dragon, we would be held accountable, just as the dragon that had killed the mercenary in the camp had been held accountable. The next standing order was that we were not to take pictures or other recordings of any fallen dragons. He also specifically mentioned that we were not to gather any materials from the fallen dragons



VOICES FROM THE FIELD**Gina Clausen**

It was almost like they didn't have any fucking idea who they had recruited. They had brought in a bunch of shadowrunners and small mercenary companies, and they wanted them to all of the sudden act like a real army. They wanted to give out orders, and they thought we would just do whatever they said because they were paying us. It was like they had never met a shadowrunner in their life. We mercs were a little better at the whole discipline thing, but we were in the middle of a bunch of units we'd never worked with before, which made coordination and larger group tactics hard.

Long story short: Things were messy from the start, and the people in charge didn't have enough pull with their hired guns to make it a whole lot smoother. It was destined to be a disaster from shot one.

during the course of the battle or after. We all knew how serious the dragons were about these matters, and no one in the Alphas or the rest of the crowd chose to violate those particular orders on that day. Which is why most of you reading this will have a real hard time finding any trideo footage of what transpired between 1800 hours on November 5 to approximately 1000 hours on November 6. We may have been batshit crazy for taking this job, but we weren't stupid.

We spent nearly a full twenty-four hours in a camp with twenty adult dragons. That had to be a world record of some kind (and quite possibly a herculean feat of restraint on their part). Most of us passed the time playing cards or AR games, while a few chose to indulge in various street drugs and BTLs. That wasn't the best choice of activities in these circumstances, but to each their own, right? There was only so much training we could do, and we simply had to take the edge off somehow before we did something stupid that would get all of us killed. At 0800 hours on the morning of November 5, we were in for another surprise. Lofwyr arrived. He didn't come in with a corporate helicopter or armored limousine. He arrived in full fucking dragon form. I think everyone's mouths dropped in astonishment when we first laid eyes on the monstrous, golden western dragon, a presence that made any of the other dragons pale in comparison to his sheer size and brute strength. As he landed in camp, there was a dead silence. No one dared to speak; everyone watched him in awe and terror. It was clear Lofwyr was the alpha of the dragons and commanded their loyalties. Even the adult dragons present lowered their heads and bodies out of respect for their Loremaster.

Lofwyr did not stay in his enormous dragon form long. He quickly shifted to human form to blend in. He wasn't wearing one of his expensive suits that he would normally be seen in, but instead he was dressed in plain black fatigues, much like the rest of us. Lofwyr was clearly sending us a message; this was a time for war. He and Scale and a few other drakes walked out of camp and out of earshot, most likely to make final preparations for this invasion. They were gone for hours. Word spread quickly throughout



the camp later that Lung and Arleesh were also spotted in human form in the camp. Apparently, they chose to arrive in a less ostentatious manner than Lofwyr. I didn't bother to go looking for them so I could gawk like some of the noobs in the camp, but I was still pretty damn impressed at what was going down. We were in a den of dragons, with no less than three great dragons in our midst. There were some veteran shadowrunners that panicked, but I'll give them some cover here and won't name the ones who pissed their pants. In the end, six runner teams decided to break ranks, leaving with their tails tucked between their legs. How they earned their street reputations is beyond me, and I'm certain they'll have trouble finding work in the future. But it wasn't my problem. Right now, we had to be focused on fighting and winning this war—and then getting the fuck out of there before this temporary alliance crumbled.

Scale returned to the camp at around 1500 hours. He informed us we would be moving toward Alamaï's compound in the next hour. Our job in the fight would be to attack and kill the enemy dragons, breach the compound, and make certain three teams were able to go into the underground sections of the compound and recover items of particularly high value to Lofwyr. He did not detail what those items were—we were told it would be better for us if we didn't know. All we had to do was make sure the designated teams got in there and help them be successful with their part of the mission.

By 1600 hours, a vast majority of the runners and mercs were on the road as one big and heavily armored convoy. Our team loaded up onto one of the t-birds, and we took off. For the first twenty kilometers, it seemed like an easy ride, with countryside that bore little scarring from the attacks of the last year. Life in those areas seemed pretty normal (for a feral city), with razor wire, buildings colored with graffiti, and buildings built like bunkers. Screams rose up from the streets from startled onlookers watching as we moved in formation with our dragon entourage. The population was quick to get off the streets when they saw us coming.

After the twenty kilometer mark (forty kilometers away from Alamaï's compound), we began to see signs of Alamaï's and his followers' tyranny on the local population. We saw homes, businesses, and offices that had been torn apart by the dragons ripping through their interiors to reach the metahuman occupants. We spotted dozens of vehicles flipped on their sides or on their roofs, with damage that suggested the frames of the vehicles had been peeled open by razor-sharp claws. Many of the damaged vehicles had been left on fire at one time and were left as burned out husks. We spotted schools, where some may have sought refuge, that had been decimated by the dragons. We saw neighborhoods that were almost entirely intact save for a few instances where the dragons clearly raided a residential house or apartment or business complex. Once word spread that a dragon or dragons were active in their neighborhood, everyone fled, leaving behind a ghost town. As we continued northward, the devastation became far more pronounced. It was clear that many fires had been started during those attacks. Since the metahuman residents had fled, there was no one left to put out the fires, leaving the blazes to spread out of control. Entire neighborhoods had been consumed in flame, leaving only tattered building frames to hint that a community once existed there. There was no one out on the streets besides our column of runners and mercs. An eerie silence settled in the

sprawl that I felt as much as heard. Nothing I could say would properly describe that unnatural stillness that only got worse as we got closer to Alamaï's compound. The vehicles in the convoy produced the only audible noise in those neighborhoods, and the reverberations rumbled for kilometers. We were staring out at a post-apocalyptic nightmare, a place that made the Barrens of Seattle look like a paradise. I suppose Chicago is comparable, but even that hosted signs of life in the Cermak blast zone. Here, there was nothing.

We traveled a little bit further until the road erupted in a series of explosions that engulfed several of our vehicles. The explosions generated enough force that the shock waves jolted our t-bird. We circled the scene as the vehicles directly behind the explosions came to a screeching halt, and runners got out of their vehicles to survey the damage. It took several minutes for flames to subside so that a number of runners could move up to the damaged vehicles to check on those caught in the explosions. Shortly thereafter, those on the ground reported one of the tanks in the middle of the blasts had been completely destroyed, while another was crippled. Both were blocking the convoy's path. We received word eighteen runners were killed in the explosion, with another twelve badly wounded. *Fuck*, I thought. Alamaï had drawn the first blood. As a number of runners came out of their vehicles to help the injured, a half-dozen spirits manifested in the column. From what we could see while aloft, they seemed to disperse something on the ground, but the distance, the onset of dusk, the smoke in the air, and the rubble strewn all over the ground made it impossible to see what it was. The runners immediately reacted and started attacking the spirits. The dragons kept to themselves, choosing not to get involved. I was very vocal at the time in my outrage over the dragons' unwillingness to help, but Billy, our loup-garou, quickly reminded me that in tight quarters such as this, the dragons would have done us more harm than good. But I knew they could have easily sent their spirits to help us and they didn't. However, just as suddenly as those spirits materialized, they were gone.

Though the spirits had vanished, the danger was still there. Someone in the wreckage stepped on whatever the spirits had thrown out. A massive blast radiated from a single point underneath the runner and expanded outward as a shockwave, catching the injured as well as their would-be rescuers in its path of destruction. What was already a horrific scene was filled with even more carnage, as bodies were torn and limbs sheared off by the vicious blast. A second explosion occurred soon after, one with flames so intense that they burned white-hot and lit up the night sky. We even felt the heat from the t-bird. Just as we thought it was over, a third blast occurred. Everyone in that immediate vicinity was dead. We totaled the number of biomonitor readings that had flat-lined during that attack, and after the final explosion, fifty-three runners and mercs were dead. There were ten others who received third-degree burns and were no longer in any condition to fight.

So this is what it's like to fight a great dragon, I remember telling myself. *We're so fucked.*

Come to find out, the spirits had laid down a bunch of glass beads that served as containers for anchored spells. Once the glass bead was broken, the spell was released. The magicians in the group were able to pick up ten beads that were still intact following the ambush. I have no idea what happened to them; all I know from



VOICES FROM THE FIELD**Crystal Blue**

Who does that? Who *does* that? The spirits they summoned? The ones that moved through the ground like it was air, that shot up furrows of ground like some cartoon, those ones with the rabbit and the duck, but they moved fast, and they came out of the ground right in the perfect place to bite people's faces and to crush them, and they made it so I didn't want to walk on the ground at all, but I didn't want to fly, either, because the air was full of rushing wind death, there was nowhere to go, but these spirits, these spirits that were leaping up from the ground? These spirits that were more powerful than anything I could summon unless I left myself twitching senseless on the ground? They were distractions. Distractions! There were more dangers out there, the guns and the beads that blew up in our faces, and the beating leathery wings in the air that could surround all of us in fire.

There was somewhere I was strong, there was somewhere once where I was a good mage, but that wasn't in this world, and I don't think I can make it back to that world again.

where I was sitting is that three of the dragons came down, cleared out any wreckage that was keeping us from moving ahead, and prodded us to keep moving. There was yet another tense moment on the ground, as many runners in the convoy insisted on not moving until they were able to check out if the road ahead of them was safe and free from IEDs. The chatter on the radio and text messages going back and forth suggested a heated exchange with the dragons on the ground. It was a tough situation, since they hadn't really set up a chain of command for us, so what we had were a few dozen platoons carrying out their own missions and not always working together in any kind of coordinated fashion. That also meant that some groups might get fed up with the conditions and just decide to take off. At the risk of losing a large portion of the runners' and mercenaries' services and potentially delaying this confrontation with Alamaï, the dragons relented and allowed those on the ground time to scout ahead and to make sure this didn't happen a second time. We flew in a holding pattern for a good hour before the runners on the ground gave us the go ahead. In the time they took to scout, they found four other IEDs, which were subsequently disarmed, and the ground forces were able to treat the wounded. Once we got under way, the convoy made sure it had its spirits called to ensure we would not be ambushed again by the hostile spirits. And they weren't.

By 1800 hours, we finally arrived in firing range from the enemy compound, and we started forming up in our line. The Alphas disembarked from the t-bird and took our places within the center of that line. As we prepared to march, clouds began rolling in over the compound, likely being pushed in by air spirits. Apparently, the dragons didn't want any of this the fight being captured by satellite surveillance by any number of governments

or corporations. Where we were positioned, we had a good view of Alamaï's compound and were able to see what we were up against. All of the enemy dragons were visible and perched on the compound walls, except for Alamaï. That concerned me. When fighting a great dragon, you always wanted to know where it is at all times. But despite not knowing where he was, our side did not hesitate to start the attack. Our remaining tanks poured the heat on the compound and on the dragons, forcing them to take to the air. Our air support also opened up with a volley of rockets and heavy machine gun fire, generating dozens of explosions in the distance. It was payback time. This was followed shortly by the dragons on our side pushing forward into the heat of battle. Lofwyr seemed content to remain behind our lines, watching the battle unfold and, if necessary, directing our actions. I did not have time to pay that much attention to him, but it appeared as though he was flanked by two other dragons of relatively similar proportions, likely Lung and Arleesh. For the moment, they weren't actively involved. However, I knew anything could happen to change that, such as a sudden appearance by Alamaï.

It only took a few minutes for us to determine that the combat between the dragons was clearly going in favor of Alamaï's dragons. His followers appeared to be much more motivated to win, and they seemed to have been physically stronger and faster than the dragons Lofwyr had brought, even those that likely were years older. A year of relentless hunting and fighting the local metahuman population prepared these dragons well for this battle. At that time, a particularly dangerous thought occurred to me: what if Alamaï was right in this feud? What if this was how the dragons were actually meant to live? I knew that idea could get me killed, especially by any number of runners fighting in this war who may have known people who died from Alamaï's reign of terror. I kept the idea to myself and kept firing my Ultimax MMG at the enemy like good fodder. We watched two dragons fall from the sky in the span of an hour; both were on our side. Many of us were forced to scramble as Alamaï's dragons strafed our lines from the air. Some used fire, others used lightning, still others used ice. Fury, our Nosferatu magician, took a direct hit from a fire attack from one of the dragons early on. There was nothing we could do for him after the hit; he was incinerated on contact. He was also the first of the Alphas to die. We quickly learned that the dragons were systematically attacking the Awakened within our lines. In the opening volleys of the combat, nearly one quarter of our mages was well and truly geeked.

Just as ferociously as they went after the Awakened, the dragons relentlessly pounded our tanks. Fire. Ice. Fire. Ice. Repeatedly. It did not take long for the barrels on the tanks to become warped, brittle, and unusable. The tanks operators didn't bother trying to fix their vehicles, not in the middle of insane combat like that. Once my MMG was empty, I pulled out my rocket launcher and started lobbing rockets. Unfortunately, I missed more than I hit. But I managed to land one on the back of an enemy eastern dragon. It roared in anger, turned and started to bear down on me like I was its next meal. I tried not to flinch; I knew that this was likely going to be the end of me. At the last possible second, one of Lofwyr's minions plowed into the dragon, and the two dragons ended up sprawling on the ground, clawing and biting each other. Sadly, their crashing into the ground also crushed a couple of runners who could not get out of the way of



the warring behemoths. By the end of the second hour, three other dragons had fallen, two more from Lofywr's camp and one from theirs. Our air support was nearly all gone, except for the dragons. The copters and the t-birds had been systematically attacked and brought down using a combination of both spirits and dragons. From what we could tell, no one survived those crashes.

I saw a number of horrific things during the course of that fight. A dozen or so runners getting cut down by the dragons' elemental attacks. Dragons swooping down from all sides and impaling runners with their talons, ripping their flesh from their bodies. Other dragons snatched metahumans from the battlefield, took them a hundred meters up, and then allowed gravity do the rest. Some on our side tried catching those runners with levitate spells and bringing them down easy. Others used spirits to catch them. But the dragons were vicious, swooping down to crush those who were gently floating above the battle. During all this chaos, two dragons landed in the middle of our line and began to physically tear into our street sams. I saw one of the western dragons, crimson in color, hit a troll with its front claw. It splattered him with the force of its strike. The other western dragon, a dragon with dark blue scales, grabbed one of our drones and hurled it into the crowd like a toy. The Huitzilpochti landed on a random ork and crushed him. The drone continued to roll with enough kinetic force that it mowed down two more runners before it came to a complete stop. The crimson dragon swept the area with his tail, catching and knocking three runners off of their feet. They each landed back on the ground in broken piles of flesh. The dragon with the dark blue scales lashed out again, biting a runner right in front of it. The bite took off most of the runner's face and caused his body to collapse to the ground, his blood dripping from the dragon's jaw. I focused my fire on that dragon, hitting it with a couple of rockets. Other runners did the same, opening up with a Panther Assault Cannon, a Thunderstruck rifle, a couple of spells, and a Vindicator mini gun. That dragon fell before us in a matter of a few seconds. His friend, the crimson dragon, roared and quickly took back to the air to avoid our retribution and disappeared into the night. *The coward.*

Sometime during the third hour of combat, enemy spirits manifested within our ranks and started to attack us viciously, disrupting our attacks. Chaos broke out everywhere as we turned from shooting at the dragons in the sky to defending ourselves from spirits surrounding us. Many of these spirits were extremely powerful—it wouldn't have surprised me at all if a few of them were Alamais' pet spirits. Those spirits marched through more than several runner teams before they were finally disrupted. I lost track of how many spirits there were; they seemed to spread through our entire line. There had to be dozens of spirits, maybe more than one hundred. From what I could tell, the spirits were targeting the runner teams who were built specifically to fight spirits. I saw nearly fifteen spirits band together and take on a runner team of six spellslingers. The spirits overwhelmed them, fighting with a pack mentality, and took them out before they could cause the enemy spirits much trouble. It was all very systematic and strategic, and it was happening all around our lines. For our part, my crew saw a lot of opposition from the spirits, likely because of both Billy and our bear shapeshifter, Grizz.

During all this, we witnessed entire groups of runners being engulfed in water, rock, fire air and even plant matter. In all the chaos, I actually never saw the spirit that engulfed us in rock,

taking all of us by surprise. The Alphas may have all died right there had it not been for another runner team that found the spirit and ended its existence in a short amount of time. Just as we narrowly escaped being crushed to death by rock, a spirit cast a lightning bolt in our direction, striking Raven in his chest. He survived but was severely wounded as a result of both the crushing rock and the lightning bolt, and he had to be taken to the rear for medical treatment. We witnessed runners being caught by the legs and dragged by earth spirits into the ground. We watched as entire runner teams fled in terror, as if having been hit by a spirit's fear power. Other runners were having an unusual number of accidents, from guns jamming and misfiring to runners dodging the wrong way and ending up in the path of an incoming dragon and its extended talons. The dragons were quick to take advantage of our precarious situation, with several landing in our lines, attacking a few runners with their claws and their massive jaws before taking to the air again and then landing somewhere else to deliver another sucker punch to another group of runners. It was blitzkrieg attacks of hit and run. They repeated this strategy over and over again, killing dozens.

When a second wave of spirits started to materialize within the line, panic set in. For a moment, we feared we were done for. Those would have been odds we could not have overcome. But these new spirits started to aid us, attacking the hostile spirits and taking some pressure off of us. We were not facing new opponents—we had allies.

Despite the brief reprieve those spirits offered, things got much worse. Air spirits descended from the cloud cover above, flying near glass beads magically suspended in the air. Then the seeds dropped, raining fire, lightning, and other forms of pain on us as they broke. With so much happening, from us having to dodge spirits and dragons as well as having to step over a growing number of corpses, it was inevitable that we would be stumbling blindly over those beads, particularly since many of our Awakened comrades who had the best chance of spotting the beads on the ground were either already dead or preoccupied. Seconds after the first beads landed, three separate, white-hot fireballs erupted around the battlefield near our position which enveloped a couple dozen runners. The dragons apparently didn't believe in doing anything small scale. We felt waves of heat wash over us, raising the ambient temperature by a least a dozen degrees and making combat very uncomfortable. I can't speak for the rest of my team, but I know when I saw the burning bodies of those runners, I struggled to keep it together. Their tortured screams and the smells of their burning flesh would become my nightmares.

A few more explosive blasts ripped through other runners near us, covering us in their splattered blood and coating the battlefield with even more gore. Even as medics ran through our lines to help the wounded, more spells went off. Spells that we had never seen before as shadowrunners. We watched as a light washed over several runners clustered together, and in an instant, their flesh turned to dust, leaving behind only their gear and their bones. Another spell was detonated right by the field medics. The medics caught in that blast looked as though they had been changed into pillars of salt, and they simply crumbled where they stood. It was obvious from the bursts of light flaring from these spells against the backdrop of the nighttime sky that these spells were being triggered frequently throughout our lines. Dozens of additional



biomonitor signals went to flat line almost simultaneously. We all realized at that moment were in serious trouble.

Combined with a few fire spirits raining flaming hail down upon our heads, I heard one runner exclaim, "They're going biblical on our asses!" Another smartass replied, "No locusts? No frogs? I'm sorely disappointed with this apocalypse. I want a refund!" While another one screamed, "Hope none of you fraggers are firstborns. There might be spells for that too!" For the next three hours, we cracked desperate jokes and fought to survive, terrified by the realization that the next step we might take could be our last. It seemed as though we lost nearly a hundred men every half hour since the spirits entered the fray and booby-trapped our lines. Between the dragons and the spirits, we were being slaughtered on the killing field. I believe we lost nearly half of our force before we made any real progress in advancing to the compound. I knew if things didn't change, we would be routed.

We were so engaged fighting the spirits that we lost track of Alama's dragons and what they were up to. For the half hour prior to that, there had been a break in their aerial attacks (which, in hindsight, should have warned us something was up). The surviving dragons loyal to Alama's flew over us; I believe there were only seven of them left. And the next thing they did, I kid you not, was drop grenades on our asses. Grenades! Magical creatures of legend should not be dropping grenades on us. Don't ask me how they pulled the pins. In almost total darkness and very thick smoke, I felt a grenade land near me. Startled, I searched desperately for the little bugger only for it to blow up just a few meters from where I was standing.

I don't remember the next hour. The next thing that registered with me was waking up at the first aid station at the rear of our line. "I have good news and bad news for you, chummer," I remember being told. "The good news, if you can call it that, is that I'm able to get up back up on your feet and back into this fight. The bad news is you took some serious damage from that grenade. You lost your left cybereye. I've cleaned out the debris and gave you a magic healing to seal the wounds, but I can't implant a new cybereye now. You're going to have to settle for a patch. Second, your left cyberarm was badly damaged. I was able to jury-rig a fix, but it's only going to be functional for another twelve hours or so. After that, it's slag. There's nothing else I could do for that. And your left leg took a lot of shrapnel as well. I removed the junk, but there are signs of nerve damage. You'll be able to use it, but you won't have full mobility. From what I can tell, you may need to replace it with an artificial one. Sorry, chummer."

I resisted the urge to make a comment about the visit costing me an arm and a leg, and I swallowed my pain meds. Then I limped my way back to the front lines. It took me some time, but I finally found my chummers in all of that chaos. They weren't in the center of the line as I had expected. Rather, I found them nearly a couple hundred meters away on the left flank. From what they told me between firefights, they heard Lofwyr's voice in their minds, directing them to move to the left flank to deal with a new problem that had arisen. While I was out of it, Alama's had brought in mercenaries and runners of his own, and they had ambushed the left. Unlike us, who had been fighting for the last six hours and were exhausted and short of supplies, they were coming into this battle fresh and well armed. And they posed a real threat of collapsing our left flank and ripping through the rest of our lines unopposed. That was not the change I was

Incoming Message

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

ScarletNight

I've accepted the fact that I never will be able to tell which of my memories of that night are real. It seems likely the toothy, horrific spirits dashing through swirling clouds of noxious gas were real. From what I hear from others, the dragons really were dropping grenades from their claws while casting spells that disintegrated people where they stood. But what about the dead bodies who stood up with jerky motions, descended on their chummers, then slowly ripped themselves limb from limb? What about the pack of dogs with snake tongues and scorpion tails that seemed to descend out of nowhere? What about the iron snares that leaped from the ground and held many of us in our tracks? How much of it was real, and how much of it was draconic magic twisting our minds?

My answer: All of it. I'm going to tell myself that I only went there in the first place because Mr. Johnson, on behalf of his dragon master, twisted my mind. Then I only saw what I saw because dragons made me see it. Then, for some reason, they let me go, and I went back to things that actually existed, and I didn't have to deal with their reality any more.

That's what I'm going to believe because when I think of every other possibility, I feel my mind starting to tear. This is what I have left to me, so it is what I will take.

hoping for. In all that time, I don't think anything made me feel more defeated than finding out we had yet one more obstacle to overcome. It had gotten so bad that Scale and a handful of drakes were forced to come in and fight beside us just to shore up our left flank and to make sure it held. Our dragons also helped with the new combatants, giving our rivals the same kind of beating that Alama's forces had been laying down on us for the past several hours. Inside, I was cheering for the dragons, and I hoped they would continue to unleash hell on these assholes, making them pay for taking a job from Alama's.

The battle between us and the enemy mercenaries took close to four and a half hours, stalling our advance to the compound. It's sad to say, but their smaller numbers of roughly two hundred and fifty runners and mercenaries likely matched what we still had left in our ranks, even though we had started the battle with a thousand runners. We were fighting three fronts simultaneously (dragons, spirits, and mercs), and the dragons themselves were deliberately targeting our supply lines so our street sams, including our own within the Alphas, were starved of ammo and were forced us to waste time field stripping the dead to have anything left to shoot. Our forces were bleeding out from the wounds we'd suffered dying through a thousand cuts. I was frustrated at having to waste precious ammo on these fuckers when I should have been firing my gun at the dragons. Which I realized was their plan. Even with Scale's help, we were losing ground. Everything was just running against us, and none of us saw a solution.

PULL OF A DRAGON.....





Things started turning around thirty minutes later, though, when several mercenaries and runners within their ranks decided to switch sides halfway through the battle. Many of us were skeptical, but they explained that they were taking as many losses from Alamais' dragons as they were from ours. And they were pissed off. They tried multiple times to get Alamais' dragons to stop attacking them, but they just didn't care that they were harming their own assets. They came to the conclusion that Alamais had no intention of allowing them to walk away from this fight even if he was victorious. Faced with that reality, they felt they had no choice but to join with us if they wanted to survive. It was our first real good news of the day. And honestly, we were not in any position to turn down their help. Our ranks had become too thin. Even Scale realized the need for this, and he lobbied Lofwyr and the dragons to allow the blending of forces. Not everyone joined; some continued to fight based on some misguided loyalty to Alamais or their double-crossing Mr. Johnson, while others abandoned the job entirely and fled. And plenty of them were already dead on the ground. But these new recruits numbered nearly a hundred, and a lot of them had bullets. We rapidly divvied up their supplies, and soon we were in much better shape than we had been before the attack. With their help, we regained some hope that we would be able to storm the compound and survive this clusterfuck.

Once the enemy mercs were no longer an issue and most of the enemy spirits were being held at bay by the contingency of allied spirits, our newly strengthened line surged forward toward the compound in the early morning hours of November 6. As we trudged along around 0600 hours, we discovered that Alamais had set up a minefield to greet us. And I'm not just talking about those freaking anchored spells, which were bad enough. No, the dragons deployed actual landmines for this war of theirs. We discovered high-explosive mines, electrical mines, and anti-tank mines hidden in the dirt; and the way we found them was for them to go off under us, killing several more runners. We heard reports over our commlinks that some runners were being hit with chemical agents, from breather, warp, and white star to Ymir and seven-7. Given Alamais' alleged connections to terror cells, that was no surprise. And neither were the grenades they started dropping from overhead. It got me to thinking what else they might have up their scaly sleeves. Would they start laying down suppressive fire? Did they have rocket launchers customized to fit their dragon hides? Perhaps laser weapons? How much worse could it get?

Dumb question, I know. I got an answer soon enough. As we slowly crossed the booby-trapped field, we heard roars off in the distance, sounds that weren't coming from the dragons currently locked in heated combat overhead. A short time later, ten new dragons flew toward us out of the early-morning sky. I glanced back at the three great dragons, and it was clear from their expressions that these dragons were not theirs. The new dragons joined in the fray to support the four remaining Alamais dragons, and they began attacking the nine survivors on Lofwyr's side. These dragons were fresh, not battle weary, and that meant trouble. I understood that Lofwyr could lose the remainder of all his dragons with this new wave. That would mean game over for us.

When they came into the battle, these dragons launched a new offensive targeting us, strafing our lines with their elemental attacks and forcing us to avoid their fangs and their talons. Some

of the runners dodged the attacks right into landmines, setting off new explosions that rocked our lines. During these attacks, a feathered serpent decided to dive bomb our team. Despite my bum leg, I managed to break left and avoided being hit. Billy, on the other hand, dodged to the right. After taking only a few steps he triggered a landmine beneath him. Realizing he had somehow survived the initial explosion, the dragon flew low, close to the ground, and raked his claws over my chummer as he passed by, finishing the job the mine started before I could react.

At that point, I became convinced that storming the gates of hell into the underworld would have been a simpler and far less bloody affair than storming Alamais' compound. Having lost a second good friend, part of me just wanted to give up, run, and forget this whole damn night. No matter how much we were being paid, it wasn't enough. But I knew it was impossible to head back the way we came, the way blocked by three great dragons. There was only forward to Alamais' compound. I knew the remaining Alphas and I had to see this through to the end.

It was only a short time later when all the dragons turned toward the great dragons and halted their fierce assault. For a few minutes, they seemed to hold their positions in the air. Our best guess was they were holding a conversation with the great dragons telepathically, a discussion we were not a part of. Most of us did not know what to do, but we held our fire to see what would happen. For all we knew, perhaps the great dragons would be able to convince these dragons to stand down, which would make our efforts to breach the compound so much easier. We took advantage of the break in fighting to figure out just who died during the most recent dragon strikes, and who was wounded and needed to be treated. We found we had lost another thirty people during that last strike, and fifteen more were wounded. None of us were sure how much longer we could survive if the dragons pressed the offensive against us again.

After that brief pause in fighting, which lasted all of five minutes, the dragons turned to us with defiant rage flaring in their eyes. We braced ourselves for another round. Before that happened, however, Arleesh, the great feathered serpent that sat next to Lofwyr, roared violently, took to the air, and charged the enemy. This took all the dragons by surprise, even those aligned with Lofwyr, and they scattered frantically to get away from the incoming great dragon like a flock of birds trying to evade a predator. Finally, I thought. Twelve and a half hours into this battle the great dragons had decided they were going to lift a talon to aid us. Despite my own personal bitterness, cheers rose up from the crowd, as Arleesh grabbed the nearest enemy dragon in her jaws and tore the thing to pieces. With lightning speed, Arleesh dropped the body of that one dragon from her jaws, spun around in the air, and lashed out with her tail spine, striking yet another dragon. The dragon fell from the air, slashed and convulsing. Arleesh showed the dragon no mercy, pouncing on it as it hit the ground and ripping out its jugular. We stood and watched as a couple of dragons moved toward Lofwyr and Lung in an offensive posture. They must have figured since Arleesh had gotten involved in the battle, both Lung and Lofwyr were fair game.

Bad move on their parts.

Lung raised his right talon and pointed it skyward. A long, powerful mana line stretched across the sky in a brilliant gold that was visible through the cloud cover. Energies rippled



from the mana line and traveled down toward Lung's extended talon like a lightning bolt. Lung stretched out his left talon and unleashed a massive energy wave that forked and hit both dragons simultaneously. The two dragons exploded into red mist mid-air and ceased to be.

Frightened by this display of raw power, Alamaï's remaining dragons fled. Apparently Lofwyr was not in a forgiving mood. All of his dragons pursued the survivors, followed swiftly by Arleesh.

As the sun slowly rose and lit the morning sky around 0700 hours, we finally reached the compound walls. The walls had taken a severe beating but were still standing. It would require explosives to get us the rest of the way through. But before any could raise the problem of Alamaï's still being in the compound, waiting for us, we saw him take to the air, flying right over our heads and heading straight for Lofwyr. Lung looked as though he was about to summon another burst of energy to throw at Alamaï, but Lofwyr waved him off. Lofwyr, in his massive form, took to the air to engage the other golden dragon in combat. We all wanted to stand there and watch, but we still had a job to do. Scale was right there, prompting us to move. Working together, we wired up the compound walls with C-12. This took close to an hour, while the battle between Lofwyr and Alamaï waged; a battle more vicious and filled with rage than what we had seen from any of the other dragons in this conflict. This was a blood feud that was about to be settled.

We blew up the wall at 0820 hours. Scale informed us that he only wanted those he had hired to proceed further into the compound, not the runners and mercenaries we recruited from the battlefield. There was some objection to this, but Scale was adamant. This part of the operation could not involve anyone whose motives were at all in doubt. My left arm started to smoke, gears within it started to grind, and my left leg screamed in pain. I really wanted to stay behind outside of the compound with the turncoats, but I knew the remaining Alphas would be heading inside to complete the job. And so was I. Once the debris cleared from the explosion, we helped take point and moved forward into the compound.

We found the compound entrance littered with dozens of glass beads. The magicians that were still alive called their spirits to remove the beads from our path. As they were doing their job, we came under attack by at least a dozen spirits left inside to stand guard. The earth, fire, and beast spirits put up a substantial fight that took us over an hour and twenty minutes to overcome. In the process, we lost twenty more people.

Sounds from the fighting outside continued to draw our attention. During that time, we heard a loud roar; a roar filled with pain. It sounded like Lofwyr. Unfortunately, we had no way of knowing what was happening out there, or if Lofwyr was winning or losing. We kept pushing into the compound, encountering mines as we marched on. The compound slowly turned into a mouth for an underground cavern system. This system was obviously not built for metahumans, as there were at least a two hundred-meter sheer drops with no convenient way for metahumans to get down. The three teams tasked with recovering the items had climbing gear with them. Most of the runners and mercenaries agreed to go with them further into the caverns to make sure they were protected in the event there were more spirits or booby-traps. I had no choice but to tell the Alphas to go without me. My left arm was dead at that point, dangling at

my side. I watched as the eighty or so mercs and runners navigated their way down the cliff and into the caverns, while all I could do is sit down at the entrance of the cavern and wait. All I could think of at that time was that going on sixteen hours, this was the first time I really got to rest. It felt good.

Outside, there was a lot of noise and movement. People were shouting, and guns were going off. I had no idea what was happening; my commlink had been destroyed a while back. I was too tired to move to find out what was happening, and frankly, I didn't much care. There wasn't a whole lot I could do with my broken body and my empty guns. At approximately 1006 hours, I heard loud cries and shouts that Alamaï was dead. We had done it. And more importantly, the metahuman runners who were out there had scored the death blow. I don't know how that happened or what happened to Lofwyr, but we had won. It was a long battle. We all ended up traumatized because of it, but we had survived. This was a fight for the ages, one I would never wish to live through again. As soon as we could, we arranged for transport out of that compound and back to our lives and our effort to rebuild what we had lost.

- This Helix fellow fails to mention what it was that Lofwyr was after in the compound. Anyone have any clue?
- Plan 9
- I've heard it was a nest of dragon eggs. I don't blame Helix for not mentioning that. I'm sure he didn't want to risk the wrath of Lofwyr by letting the world know there were dragon eggs there, especially after all he had seen during that battle and after everything he sacrificed.
- Lyran
- So did Lofwyr clean everything out of that compound, or are there items of worth still down there?
- Elijah
- From what I can tell, Saeder-Krupp has acquired that property and established it as having extraterritorial status. They may have gotten the most valuable items out of there, but it is possible there is still a lot of excavating to make sure they got everything. I heard the eggs were buried deep in a hidden chamber. It's possible Alamaï had additional hidden chambers for his remaining hoard. The other dragons may have hidden valuables in their caverns as well. But good luck trying to break into that compound. S-K has assigned a battalion of its finest soldiers to guard that site.
- Sticks
- And of course, there's going to be months of clean up. There's really no telling many more landmines are still active on that site as well as those very potent anchored spells.
- Jimmy No

Posted by: Frosty

I know, I know. Most you would like to know what happened with Lofwyr. And it would be rather rude for me to leave you guys hanging. So I found another runner's account that included this information. The runner in question is one that most of heard about, since he was featured in our *Street Legends Supplemental*



datafile: Street Rage was one of the runners working for Alamaïs and who eventually switched sides and survived to the end. This is his account of what transpired on November 5 and 6.

- Not him again. But I guess it would track that someone with his personality would choose to work with someone like Alamaïs. Glad to see he got burned for doing so.
- Bull
- Sorry Bull, but he was confirmed involved and in this matter, he seems to know what he's talking about. Not too many others have chosen to share their account of this battle. It seems like this is something that people want to forget, not something to brag about.
- Frosty
- So, were there any JackPointers there? I so wanted to go, but Netcat wouldn't let me.
- Slamm-0!
- *Rolls eyes*
- Netcat
- I was there. And no, I don't want to talk about it. There was more carnage there than even I was willing to stomach. That's all I really want to say on the matter. Please don't press me for any information. In this particular case, I don't want to share.
- Kane
- Damn. That's saying a lot.
- Glitch

Posted by: Street Rage

Many have been bugging me about information about Lofwyr's and Alamaïs' final battle. I have been trying to put the experience out of my mind as best as I can and move on with my life. But because people won't let it go, I will share my experience with you that day. I'll only say this once.

Yes, I worked with Alamaïs, and yes, I regret it. I was one of the first runners in his private little army that called for us to switch sides. Their dragons were careless with our lives, and on more than one occasion they openly attacked us. It became pretty clear that it wasn't just an accident, or something caused by the "fog of war." It was clear they were intentionally trying to wipe out all metahumans who were present on the battlefield, regardless of whether we were on the same side. They didn't care we were there trying to do the same thing they were doing. To add insult to injury, when they could have defended us against Lofwyr's dragons, they didn't do a damn thing to protect us. We took the full brunt of the flames and lightning that rained down on us. Our guys were being shredded by the dragons' talons, and we had no one in the air to stand up for us. It also didn't help that the drake I talked to about this referred to me and my people as cattle and told us to get back in line before he made sure I met my destiny earlier than I was supposed to. I didn't much like those remarks, so I buried one of my axes in that drake's head.

Switching sides in the heat of battle is never easy. Despite sharing some of my gear with my former opponents and helping patch up several of them with my stunning impersonation of a

street doc, the march up to the compound with Lofwyr's forces was nerve-racking. Many on the other side were seething with anger. I had killed at least a half dozen of their chummers during the four-hour stand-off, if not more. And despite most of the voices calling for a truce, there were others looking for revenge. One of these idiots tried to stab me in the back while we tried to cross the minefield, and it took all my willpower to not kill the dreckhead. It didn't help that he was a dandelion eater. I settled for breaking his arm instead, which I think most in the line appreciated.

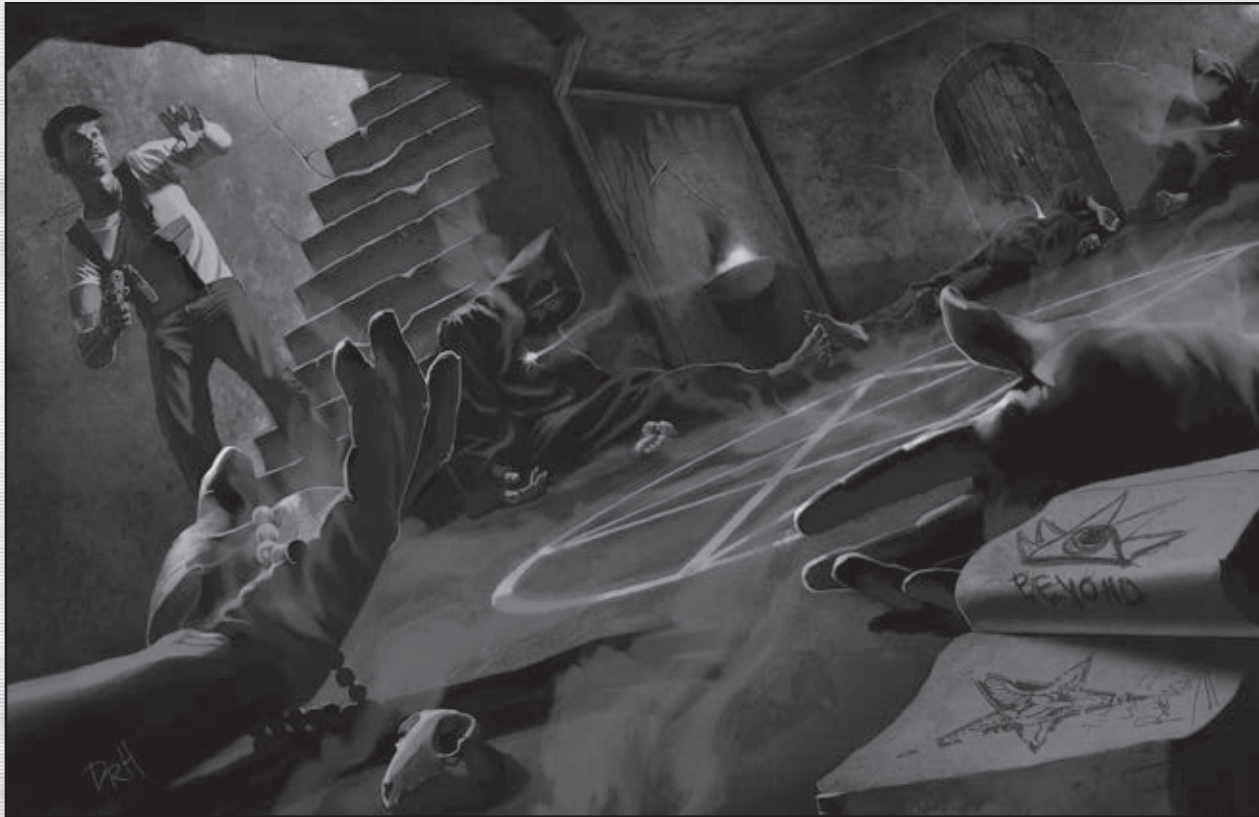
We marched for what felt like an eternity and then saw ten new dragons approach us. When they arrived, they started to lay into our ranks. I got hit by a burst of ice that slammed into me like a freaking Ares Roadmaster and plowed me to the ground. I picked myself up, knowing I had at least three broken ribs, and continued my fight with them, firing away with my heavy machine gun. At least I could say this about Lofwyr: his goons were actively trying to provide us cover and were likely saving lives in the process. Arleesh broke with the other great dragons minutes later and attacked the ones on us. She kicked some serious ass and put the younger dragons on the defensive. Not long after, Lung killed a couple of other dragons with a spell or something. They freaking exploded. After that drama, all the dragons split save for Lofwyr and Lung, who continued to watch us.

When we arrived at the wall, the group started making plans to penetrate the compound. Lofwyr's bitch made a stink about the new "recruits" not being allowed to go in with the rest of the line. I shrugged. With the dragons now gone, we were in a relatively safe location if we didn't move around too much. So I found a slab of concrete and sat my ass down, since my services seemed to no longer be required. If they wanted to face the dangers of that compound alone, more power to them.

Before the charges went off, I remember Alamaïs flying overhead, and he charged Lofwyr. Lofwyr took off from his position over a kilometer away and intercepted Alamaïs in the air. The two fought each other bitterly, *dragón a dragón*. Their claws raked each others' scales. Lofwyr delivered a vicious bite to Alamaïs' neck. Alamaïs broke free from the bite and punctured Lofwyr on his underbelly, drawing blood. Lofwyr raked Alamaïs over his old scar, making new ones.

I watched for the better part of forty-five minutes as the great dragons brawled in the air. Alamaïs landed some good shots on Lofwyr, but they were few and far between. Lofwyr clearly had the advantage over Alamaïs. His swipes struck harder and drew more blood than Alamaïs'. We could hear bones breaking as Lofwyr smacked the shit out of Alamaïs. And I could tell Alamaïs was starting to tire. Alamaïs dropped his guard and Lofwyr raked Alamaïs' face with his left claw, gouging Alamaïs' right eye. Lofwyr lunged forward, bit into Alamaïs' right wing and tore it apart. Alamaïs plunged to the ground in the middle of his own minefield, triggering several explosions with his impact. They may or may not have done any damage to Alamaïs, but it was pretty ironic given he had laid those out for us. Lofwyr came down and tried to grasp Alamaïs by the throat with his teeth, but Alamaïs rolled out from under Lofwyr's attack and proceeded to hit Lofwyr with his tail, sending Lofwyr sprawling on the ground. As the fight continued, more of the soldiers in the area began cheering for Lofwyr. Tomorrow he would once more become the evil S-K CEO and our sworn enemy, but today he was our champion. It looked like Lofwyr had this fight in the bag when a blinding white





INCOMING FEED.....



light flooded the area, centered on Lofwyr himself. Lofwyr let out a massive roar; the sound was so piercing and harsh that we all squirmed in pain. The force knocked Alamaïs away from Lofwyr and caused Lofwyr to stumble. His flesh was obviously scorched, and a few spots on his body revealed exposed bone and muscle. Alamaïs tried to take advantage of the unexpected sucker punch, charging Lofwyr while he was still stunned. Despite scorched flesh, an exposed right rib cage, and a severely burned hind leg, Lofwyr deflected the attack of the challenger and sent him rolling toward us. Not allowing him to get up, Lofwyr pounced on Alamaïs and bore down on him with multiple swipes of his claws that tore into his flesh. Alamaïs' face, neck, and chest looked like tenderized meat after Lofwyr ceased his blows on the wounded dragon. I stopped counting after thirty strikes. Although Alamaïs was still alive, he was no longer in any condition to threaten Lofwyr, even in Lofwyr's own damaged condition.

"Finish him!" we heard Lofwyr command in our heads. He returned to where Lung was, where it was obvious Lung started to heal and tend to Lofwyr's injuries.

Not wishing to disappoint Lofwyr, we jumped at the chance to kill a great dragon. With our weapons out, we charged. Alamaïs may have been weakened and tore up, but he was still very dangerous. He used his elemental attack to kill four runners before we even reached him. Land mines finished off three others. I could boast, if I wanted to, that my combat axe drove into Alamaïs' flesh multiple times. Alamaïs did his best to swipe at us, trying to kill us before we killed him. I saw six, including two of my own chummers, struck down by the force of Alamaïs' strike. We did not yield in our attack, and thirty minutes later, we ended Alamaïs.

Now, you may ask me where that burst of energy came from that fragged up Lofwyr's shit. I'm not a magic user. I don't know. But it was powerful. And it stirred a lot of rumors of where it came from. Me, I don't care. It could have been Hestaby for all I cared. I was just relieved to have been able to walk away from such a fight. I have already scratched off toxic shamans as a group that I would never get involved in hunting again. From this point forward, dragons have been permanently put on my "do not fuck with" list. Once was more than enough for me.

- All right. So can we start the guessing game now as to who it was that gave Lofwyr a really bad sunburn?
- Kia
- Hestaby is clearly the obvious choice, but the wrong one. There were no reports of magical energy being built up at Mount Shasta like there were when Alamaïs' compound was hit earlier in the week. So I think we can rule out Hestaby as a suspect.
- Snopes
- Unless she preformed the ritual somewhere else. There are a lot of power sites out there.
- Plan 9
- If she had tried and failed to kill Lofwyr, you would think she would be the next dead dragon. She is not. I address this more about in the next section, so bear with me.
- Frosty



A NEW ASSEMBLY AND AFTERMATH (NOVEMBER-JANUARY 10, 2075)

Various contacts I have within draconic circles informed me that an assembly of the great dragons was formally called just three days after this massive battle. I do not know where this assembly took place, but I know from November 8, 2074 to January 8, 2075, all the great dragons disappeared from their lairs and from their normal places of business. This included SIRRURG, who was still licking his wounds following his direct encounter with the Aztlan military, Ghostwalker, and even Hestaby, Rhonabwy, and Masaru, who many speculated may have tried to resist being summoned. In the end, all the dragons traveled to this new assembly, even the Sea Dragon herself. For these past two months, the world was virtually free of the great dragons. Their operations were left in the hands of their agents, whether that was metahumans or younger dracoforms. Of course, once they departed for this assembly, metahuman groups were all too happy to take advantage of this situation.

NeoNET, for example, stepped up its efforts to sabotage Saeder-Krupp, and to expand into markets that had previously been dominated by Lofwyr's megacorporation. The Triads and the Yakuza in particular saw Lung's and Ryumyo's absences as an opportunity to strike out at each others' vulnerabilities, now that the great dragons were no longer around to protect them. Hundreds of people died throughout the Pacific region from these often-brutal clashes from the Triads and the Yakuza.

The first matter of business at this assembly was the matter of SIRRURG. From what I was told, the assembly carefully considered all his actions and what he was trying to do. There was a lot of sympathy for SIRRURG, and a lot of voices calling for SIRRURG to not only be set free but also calls for the assembly to make efforts to heal up his lingering wounds. Hestaby, Rhonabwy, and Masaru lobbied to have SIRRURG turned over to the metahuman population so he could stand trial for war crimes. Hestaby continued to advocate for a joint metahuman and great dragon trial. From what I understood, their viewpoint was that justice in this matter should not remain strictly draconic. They were apparently outvoted. The dragon assembly chose to keep the matter of SIRRURG limited to their kind.

Perhaps as a compromise, Lofwyr moved to have SIRRURG punished. Lofwyr argued that SIRRURG's volatile actions jeopardized dragon interests worldwide and threatened their population. Lofwyr agreed that some of the matters that had launched the Destroyer's crusade for were valid ones, but they should have been dealt with in a far more subtle way, and not with violence that resulted in reprisals and threats against their interests. A prolonged debate followed. The choice to punish SIRRURG was a hard sell with the dragons. From what the Draconic Information Virtual Exchange learned, Lofwyr had to spend some of his political capital to convince a majority of the assembly to move for punishment. The decision they were finally able to agree on was imprisonment. I have no information on how long that imprisonment will last, but one contact told me that it would be the equivalent of generations for metahumans. So it could be anywhere from decades to centuries. No one outside of the great dragons know where SIRRURG is imprisoned, or even how. He may be imprisoned in a cavern, accessible only by large amounts of

magic, the kind of thing that could only be produced by multiple great dragons working together. He may have faced Ghostwalker's imprisonment, having his astral form separated from his physical body and forced into another plane. Or he may have been thrown full body and astral form into a metaplane that can only be opened by multiple great dragons. No matter how he was imprisoned, SIRRURG is now gone. Despite his imprisonment, the assembly chose to leave his hoard intact, and they placed their own guards and spirits around his lairs to make sure they are not defiled. I am certain once this fact is learned by the outside world, many metahumans will be outraged. For them, it seems like SIRRURG is getting off easy for all the trauma he inflicted. They may prove to be a major sticking point if the dragons seek to improve relations with metahumanity in the future.

With Alamais dead and the assembly satisfied by Lofwyr's reasons for ending his life, the assembly performed their mourning ritual. Lofwyr produced Alamais' body, as well as all the bodies of the dragons slain in his great battle with Alamais. At the same, I am told Hestaby brought fourth Dzitbalchén's remains so he too could be properly mourned along with all the other young adult dragons. The remains were interned in places of respect, but again, the locations of those bodies are only known to the great dragons themselves. And they will not be sharing that information with anyone outside of their circle.

The assembly's attention then turned to Hestaby and her violations of their traditions. Hestaby reportedly was unapologetic for trying to work with metahumanity to stave off a potential disaster, and trying to find ways of having both sides make good faith gestures to strengthen relations. She denied any involvement in the attack on Lofwyr. Lung, surprisingly, supported Hestaby in her claim she was not involved. According to my sources, Lung believed the spell, although very powerful, was too sloppy in its construction to have been made by Hestaby, who was among the greatest magical practitioners amongst the dragons. Lung testified Hestaby's craftsmanship of ritual spells exceeded the construction of that spell by tenfold. He felt that the spell was the work of metahumans who enhanced their spell unnaturally with the use of dragon reagents. Many in the assembly called for blood, and talk rose for a full out war with metahumanity. Lofwyr calmed the assembly, seeking vengeance only against the individual group responsible. After the attack, Lofwyr had the magical strike investigated, and astral investigators traced the ritual attack back to Rosslyn Cathedral and to the Black Lodge. The assembly temporarily tabled the vote on Hestaby's fate to voting on engaging in a secret war with the Black Lodge; one that would be carried out until their secret organization would be wiped out of existence. That vote was unanimous. According to Wyrms Watcher and DIVE, that is perhaps the first unanimous vote amongst the great dragons in millennia, making that vote particularly impressive.

After all was said and done in Hestaby's defense, Hestaby's arguments fell on deaf ears. From my research, they felt more strongly that Hestaby was reckless and nearly got one of their own killed because of it. The assembly moved to strip her of her hoard, of Mount Shasta, and to ostracize her from their culture. She would no longer have a voice in their society; she would be forced into exile. A couple of days after the decision came down, on December 22nd, a force marched into Mount Shasta to strip Hestaby of everything. Violence ensued at Mount Shasta for



INCOMING FEED.....



PULL OF A DRAGON.....

nearly two days. The Shasta Shamans put up a fierce resistance to the runners that came to claim her hoard. The runners that were hired for this job showed no leniency to the Shamans. They killed whoever they encountered. Because of their fierce loyalty to Hestaby, very few shamans fled to safety. They stood their ground. Out of nearly three hundred shamans, nearly two hundred and seventy were slaughtered, not counting the seventeen that had been killed during Alamaï's original assault on Mount Shasta. The Shasta Lodge was set aflame, and was completely destroyed. The Tir Peace Force did not get involved, citing it as a "dragon matter." The Northern Crescent gypsies were also not exempt from the violence. Some fought, some were driven off. Out of the gypsies another two hundred died those two days. As far as the forest, it suffered widespread fire damage. The damage inflicted by Alamaï was dwarfed by the runners acting as the dragons' enforcers. Nearly twenty thousand additional hectares of land were scorched by fire. When the runners finally raided Hestaby's lair, they found it to be massive. It took them the better part of three days to remove all of her hoard, including the eggs that she was raising from the Sea Dragon. All that wealth from her primary lair and her secondary lairs were turned over to the other dragons, including the riches she co-opted from Alamaï's lair. Her hoard and Alamaï's hoard were divided amongst the dragons assembled, with the dragon eggs going back to the Sea Dragon. Although all the dragons assembled got at least a share of the two hoards, the ones that saw the most wealth coming from the hoards were the ones that we would claim as the "victors;" those that had the favor of the Loremaster. These dragons were Lofwyr, Lung, and Arleesh. Ryumyo was rumored to be quite displeased by this turn

of events. The enormous wealth bestowed upon Lung was likely seen as upsetting the balance between him and Lung, and giving his rival a tremendous advantage over him. We will likely see more play out between Lung and Ryumyo in the future as fallout from these gifts to Lung for his faithful service to the Loremaster. The dragons that saw the least amount of treasures from the hoards were Rhonabwy, Masaru, and Aden.

Yet another matter that arose during this assembly turned out to be a shocker: Lofwyr chose to step down from his position as Loremaster. That news dropped right in the middle of these hoard negotiations and sent ripples throughout the assembly. Lofwyr did not go into reasons for stepping down, but it was speculated that he needed time to recover from his fight with Alamaï as well as needed time to focus solely on the operations of Saeder-Krupp and to bring them back from all the fall out that affected it from the Great Dragon Civil War. Lofwyr recommended Celedyr to replace him as the next Loremaster. There was a significant amount of infighting amongst the dragons. Ryumyo threw his name in to become the next Loremaster. Many saw this as a ploy to try and regain footing and positioning between him and Lung. Ghostwalker threw his name in the hat for consideration, but Rhonabwy and Masaru put up fierce resistance to that nomination. Many wanted to see Arleesh run as the next Loremaster for her exceptional service to Lofwyr during the battle of GeMiTo. Arleesh declined to be nominated, stating that it was not yet her time to be put into that position. In the end, from various reliable sources that I have confirmed this news with, Celedyr was chosen as the next Loremaster for the dragons. Celedyr's first act as the new Loremaster was to put a time limit on all the violence being



carried out by dragons against metahumans, targeting magic groups, and making metahumans and their fortunes disappear. He put a time limit of one year to the day of when he became the new Loremaster for all the violence against metahumans to cease. This would give the dragons the opportunity to go after whatever remaining scores that still needed to be settled and get the revenge for matters that were still outstanding. After that date, December 26, 2075, all matters and scores would be deemed settled, and the dragons could not carry out any more widespread violence against the metahuman population without coming into conflict with him. So we have one more year of this violence before it comes to an end. So everyone, keep your heads down and stay safe for the next year and after that, you should be in the clear.

With a majority of the major issues resolved, the assembly took time to discuss other important matters. There were nearly two hundred matters discussed and there were some dragons that wanted even more issues discussed. These issues ranged from the protection of dragon eggs from metahuman aggression and environmental destruction, the worth of the candidates currently coming up to become great dragons, the division of Alamais' and Hestaby's territories, metahuman development and proliferation of anti-dragon countermeasures to various petty squabbles that the dragons wanted the Loremaster to hear out. Unfortunately, my sources were not able to gather information on all of those issues, even some of the more important ones. I had heard the dragons did come to a decision on many of those issues, but I simply do not have the data to indicate what their rulings were. I would imagine there will be runs in the future trying to find answers to how the dragons voted on some of these important issues that involve us as well as the dragons. Celedyr finally put an end to the debate, and told the assembly that these matters would be addressed at their normal assembly. Celedyr did not give a time frame as to when their next assembly would be, but from the context that my contacts gave to me, it could be a while before another assembly is called. The dragons returned to their positions of power two days ago, on January 8th.

When she returned, Hestaby was seen surveying Mount Shasta for likely what would be the last time on January 9th. It was clear her visit was very melancholy, having suffered incalculable loss. She spent a couple of hours there before flying away to a destination no one is entirely certain. For the first time since Hestaby awakened, Mount Shasta is empty, which may have tremendous ramifications for the region in the coming years. And with Hestaby being sent into exile, it would seem the chapter that was the Great Dragon Civil War has drawn to a close, and we will see what lasting repercussions this war and the decisions that followed will have for our world.



Hestaby



... SEATTLE SHAKES ...

The house-sized troll towered over Brackhaven and leered. Brackhaven's fists clenched as his brain burned with the need to slam the smug son-of-a-bitch monster into the wall. But Corrigan spoke before Brackhaven could act, taking the initiative, stealing control right out of Brackhaven's grasp.

"Would you care for something to drink? Soda? Coffee? Tea? The tea here is quite good."

Brackhaven glared at his long-time advisor and new chief-of-staff while the assorted FBI members chuckled. They were laughing at him. How dare they laugh at him?

"Thank you, Mr. Corrigan, but we're fine." The troll snapped his fingers and the elf woman beside him stepped up with three sheets of electronic paper.

Brackhaven ignored the proffered sheets. "Why are you here?"

The elf set the papers down on the conference room table and the troll bared his tusks. "We have a search warrant for all records pertaining to your campaign finances since the start of your 2070 gubernatorial run until now, which allows us to search your campaign headquarters and all related nodes. We have a search warrant for the governor's mansion's node related to all communications with Congressman James Grey and any other relevant documents mentioning Congressman Grey or related to him, regardless of whether these documents have been shared with the congressman."

Brackhaven allowed himself to imagine that he could almost smell the dead babies on the beast's breath. He wondered if this troll actually believed he had the authority to bring this city's government to a halt. Grimacing, Brackhaven spat out,

"How dare you interrupt an important meaning with such trivia. You will wait outside, agent," the word tasted like ash on his tongue, "until I am ready to see you."

The troll laughed, actually laughed, in Brackhaven's face and shook his head. "I'm not done, yet, Governor." He picked up one sheet of paper and slide it across the table. "I have a subpoena for William Greene."

The middle-aged energy secretary paled and shoved himself to his feet. "You can't subpoena me. You don't have that kind authority!"

"Sit down, William," Brackhaven snapped, the fire in his frontal lobe flaring to life with fresh pain. The headaches were coming more frequently, making it hard for him to concentrate.

"I may not have the authority, Mr. Greene," the monster replied, "but the UCAS House of Representatives does, as does the House Ethics Committee. I'm doing a favor for a friend, and if you decline to come with me willingly, we have permission to escort you as a hostile witness."

At a signal from their leader, the remaining members of the FBI team, two humans and two dwarves, approached Greene from opposite sides of the table. One dwarf grinned with glee. "You wouldn't happen to go by the name of 'Bill,' would you? My friend Seth sends his regards."

Brackhaven looked over at Corrigan, one of the few people he trusted. The man tasked with fixing all the governor's problems. Corrigan's cold eyes gazed back without so much as a hint of worry or shame. Then the chief of staff gave a casual shrug.

Chills went down Brackhaven's spine and the voices in his head screamed in fury.

EXCERPT FROM KENNETH BRACKHAVEN'S CONCESSION SPEECH

"It is said that the darkest hour comes just before dawn. This is that darkest hour, my friends ... for us and for our nation. But the dawn will come if we keep faith. We have lost this battle, but we have not lost the war. We will—we must—continue to fight for Truth and Right in any way we can. Keep faith—keep fighting—and we will prevail."

**Kenneth Brackhaven,
Archconservative Presidential Candidate
August 7, 2057**

RUMBLINGS AND MUMBLINGS

Posted by: Netcat

"May you live in interesting times" is an old phrase that has been popping up a lot on local Seattle boards. Some people say it's just an old adage. Some people say it's an ancient Chinese curse. Given the view from my front window, I'm definitely dropping my vote into the "curse" group. Since Proposition 23, or Project Freedom as some people call it, got itself on the ballot, life in Seattle has been one virtual roller coaster ride after another. Seattle has always been a city of extremes. It's caught between three different countries, with the "homeland" it belongs to—the United Canadian and American States—on the other side of the continent. Feeling isolated and cast adrift, the people here sometimes act as if they're living in a frontier town from an old twentieth century movie. Well, the SINless do at any rate. The wageslaves act as if the metroplex around them is a pinnacle of civilization and ignore anything that doesn't directly affect them.

It's not just Prop 23 that's been affecting life here, though. Seattle has been hit by a series of financial crises, job layoffs, business turnaround, and home foreclosures the like of which I haven't seen since Crash 2.0. When Brackhaven took over as Seattle Metroplex Governor in 2070, he promised to make Seattle more business friendly. He's certainly made good on that promise. Businesses have opened up all over the city, some of them local, but most of them are subsidiaries of the bigger corporations from the B-rated corps on up to the megas.

As some of you may know, Dana Oaks has (grudgingly) been appointed District Attorney. She served as interim DA until Election Day with, according to rumor, the expectation of being demoted or removed entirely if Brackhaven won a second term as governor. My intel indicates that she wasn't wrong. Several members of the governor's cabinet insisted on a brand-new DA who would be more accommodating of the administration's agendas. Brackhaven himself stayed out of the discussion, sitting quietly in a corner chair, while his new chief of staff Èmile Corrikan refereed the entire meeting. From my fly-on-the-wall spot in the proceedings, Corrikan gave off the impression of a masterful maestro conducting an orchestra who had no idea they

WHO'S WHO IN SEATTLE, 2075 EDITION—PROFILE: KENNETH BRACKHAVEN

Kenneth Brackhaven was born in Bellevue in 2011, the heir to the Brackhaven Investments business and family fortune. After graduating with an MBA from Harvard Business School, Brackhaven went to work for the family company, rising steadily through the ranks. He took over ownership and management of the company after his father's death in 2044. He also started the Citizens Coalition for Security (CCFS), a political action group aimed primarily at improving law enforcement and acting as a watchdog organization.

Brackhaven ran for President of the UCAS in 2057 as the Archconservative Party candidate. His presidential campaign suffered a severe setback when the media revealed that Kenneth Brackhaven was not biologically related to the Brackhaven family, but an orphan secretly adopted to replace the Brackhavens' biological son, who died in childhood. Despite the devastating effect of this revelation, Brackhaven's impassioned public apology and statement of principles allowed him to finish second in the popular vote after President Dunkelzahn.

Returning home to Seattle, Mr. Brackhaven set aside his political ambitions for a time, focusing on Brackhaven Investments, but he returned to the political arena in 2070 when he declared his candidacy for Governor of Seattle. He competed in a close race with candidate Josephine Dzughashvili until she was forced to withdraw due to health reasons, handing Brackhaven the election. He ran for a second term in 2074, which he handily won against candidate Eliza Bloom despite his public opposition to Proposition 23, which was on the same ballot.

Governor Brackhaven is a widower with no children.

- All three times he ran on an anti-metahuman agenda, though he cast it with more subtlety than your typical Humanis member. If you're human, he's your best friend and has only your best interests at heart. If you're anything else, he'll carefully explain to you how it's truly in your best interests for the government to do absolutely nothing for you.
- Sounder
- Did Brackhaven have work done during this campaign season? Back in March, he looked like a tired old man about to have a coronary. He disappeared for a few days (took a vacation according to his press secretary), then came back with more energy and enthusiasm than he had during the 2057 campaign. No more circles under his eyes, no more wrinkles. But it didn't quite look like léonization.
- Kia
- He probably dropped by the local Nightingale clinic for physical vigor treatment. He's just as afraid of death and aging as everyone else. It wouldn't surprise me if he were getting genemods and hiding them from his friends and benefactors.
- Puck

were playing his music. It was a beautiful call-and-response kind of meeting that had the cabinet eating out of his hand.

- There's no way Corrigan was in charge of that meeting. Brackhaven's got the whole alpha-male complex going. He'd never surrender that kind of control to anyone.
- Arete
- Brackhaven looked a little peaked, actually. He spent the entire meeting washing his hands and biting his lips. Reminded me of a certain Scottish queen who could never get her hands clean.
- Netcat
- Girl, do not tell me you hacked the governor's mansion and did not invite me along. Seriously?
- Pistons
- I didn't mean to leave you out, Pistons. I was helping some runners decipher some bizarre financial-transactions-on-tempo accounting and ended up in the governor's mansion node by accident. And if anyone's interested in the DA nominees, I've dumped the list into this [\[link\]](#) along with what background and credentials I had time to pull up. Even though they're irrelevant now, I'm sure we'll be hearing from some of these people again.
- Netcat

The discussion to remove Oaks from her position was cut short when an FBI task force composed of two humans, two dwarves, one elf, and a troll who looked as large as Mount Hood arrived at the governor's front door. They escorted themselves past the Metroplex Guards and the support staff like they owned the place. Brackhaven jumped out of his chair like it had been electrified. Corrigan just leaned back in his chair and pressed the tips of his fingers together, as calm and quiet as ice. The rest of the cabinet looked like they were about to have collective heart attacks.

The troll stepped forward and introduced himself as team lead Agent Mully and asked if they were interrupting anything important. Brackhaven turned red, then purple, then red again as he roared at them to get out of his house. Corrigan, waiting until Brackhaven's rant finished, gave them this plastic smile and asked Mully if he and his team wanted a drink. I don't know who Brackhaven wanted to kill more at that moment, Mully or Corrigan.

- Tell me you have video, Netcat. I want to see this for myself.
- Sunshine
- Me too!
- Sounder

Just as Mully announced that he had a warrant, the FBI's hacker logged in right beside me. That's when I decided my business took me elsewhere and logged out. The next day Oaks received an official communication from the governor's mansion affirming her permanent appointment as DA until the next election cycle, signed by Brackhaven himself.

The FBI didn't chase after me. I'd like to think it's because I managed to muddle my trail. But it's more likely they were a lot

more interested in Brackhaven than they were with me. I did a little additional digging on the warrant. The FBI is investigating Brackhaven's connections with Congressman James Grey.

- I normally don't share my stories before they get loaded to the usual newsfeed, but given the circumstances, I thought everyone here would be interested. The upload is due in about five minutes anyway, so I doubt leaking it now will cause my editor any heartache.
- Sunshine

//Upload Media File: user: Sunshine:: 12/20/2074 CONGRESSIONAL ETHICS COMMITTEE BEGINS CLOSED HEARINGS ON SUNSET VACATIONS

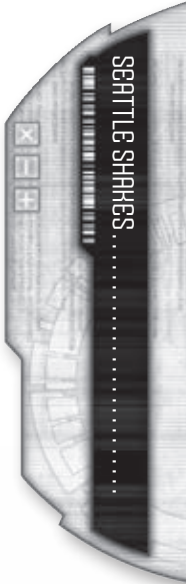
As a result of its investigation into former-UCAS Congressman James Grey's recent activities and breach of congressional ethics, the Ethics Committee has opened a new investigation into Seattle real estate agency Sunset Vacations. The investigation was prompted when subpoenas of Congressman Grey's campaign records revealed multiple bank transactions from the congressman's campaign funds to an unknown ad agency using Sunset Vacation's physical address. The transfers included amounts between 50,000 and 750,000 nuyen and were flagged in internal accounting records as 2074 election campaign ad-buys for the Seattle region.

A search of public records indicates that the congressman resigned the day before the subpoena was served to Maxwell Lockland, Grey's close friend and campaign manager. Mr. Lockland promised to comment on the story after speaking to his lawyer but has since refused to accept any interview requests. Mr. Grey, who resigned his congressional seat in September and retired to an unknown location in the Caribbean League, is unavailable for comment. The Ethics Committee has temporarily suspended its hearing on Mr. Grey due to his unavailability and is focusing on the new investigation.

A source inside the committee, who is not authorized to comment on the matter, indicated that the Sunset Vacations issue "goes far beyond Mr. Grey. Mounting evidence points to a number of senators and congresspeople who may have inadvertently purchased 'ad-buys' from this non-existent political advertising agency. We are continuing to review the evidence as it comes in and will release the results of the investigation if it leads to evidence of deliberate wrongdoing." The source declined to name the ad agency in question, insisting on retaining the secrecy of the committee's deliberations.

Jeanette Talva, spokesperson for Sunset Vacations, refused to comment on the allegations, mentioning on that "the nearest ad agency is three blocks down the street. Perhaps a campaign worker transposed the street numbers."

- Sounds like the committee is scared of its own shadow. Who are they afraid of offending?
- Mr. Bonds.
- Someone with enough political clout to ruin their careers. Or their names are on that list and they don't want anyone to know until they've had time to sanitize it.
- Kay St. Irregular



- Isn't Sunset Vacations one of those companies that sells high-end lots in the Renton district?
- Beaker
- No. You're thinking of that defunct real estate firm Brackhaven Investments picked up and gutted after Crash 2.0. Sunset Realty, I think the name was. Sunset Vacations is owned by Centralia, Inc.
- Kia
- Which is owned by Kyber Publishing, which is a partially owned subsidiary of Western Natural Gas and several private investors whose names are untraceable. The SINS exist, the bank accounts exist, but the only transactions are money in and out for business purposes. So far as I can tell, these people have never made a single utility payment, luxury purchase, or dined out even once. Either they spend their lives paying for everything in cash—ha ha! Remember cash?—or they don't exist.
- Slamm-0!

Incoming Message

WHO'S WHO IN SEATTLE, 2075 EDITION— PROFILE: BRACKHAVEN INVESTMENTS

Brackhaven Investments

Headquarters: 3rd Ave. and Union St., Downtown Seattle

President/CEO: Kenneth Brackhaven

VP: Harold Muller

Brackhaven Investments is one of the largest and wealthiest local companies in Seattle. While VP Harold Muller reportedly sees to most of the day-to-day business, Governor Brackhaven's name is still on all the contracts, legal agreements, stock holdings, and bills. Despite the possible conflict of interest, his activities do not seem to bother anyone else in the metroplex, and the governor receives a yearly salary and performance bonuses as if he were still sitting in his Third Avenue office.

Analysts expect BI to top projected earnings by fifteen percent at the end of the 2074 fiscal year. BI's latest mutual fund RedBush International—a packaged investment that includes real estate, business loans, utilities indexes—is currently selling at five hundred nuyen a share and rising steadily. If BI does as well as analysts think it will, this year's dividend pay outs will easily be twenty-five nuyen per held share at the time of the announcement.

Brackhaven Industries is a privately held company and owns a number of subsidiaries and shell companies in addition to its real estate holdings.

- Brackhaven Investments survived the Crash by absorbing its weakened competition, using the new influx of capital to buy real estate at rock-bottom prices, then saddling the companies with all the bad debt before selling them off to other corporations. Many new housing developments in Renton (the heart of the governor's political support, it so happens) are owned by BI.
- Dr. Spin

Congressman Grey has known Brackhaven a long time. The congressman stumped for Brackhaven back in 2057 when Brackhaven ran for president, and again in 2070. The pair have never made any secret of their friendship, though Grey concentrated on Brackhaven's economic and business strengths instead of straying into the racial politics that have occasionally complicated Brackhaven's life. In return, Brackhaven lavishly donated to Grey's own campaign fund, both personally and through Brackhaven Investments. The FBI is investigating the possibility that Brackhaven even violated campaign finance law by using feeder funds to donate six times the legal contribution limit. A feeder fund is a tool used by corporations to avoid taxation. They (the corps) send money to a common master fund account, which then invests that money as if the fund owns it. In this case, a few of Brackhaven Investment's subsidiaries are headquartered in CAS and PCC. Brackhaven moves the money into BI, which takes the money out of the country, and the subsidiaries then donate the funds to Grey's accounts. That way, Brackhaven can make donations from his personal account, BI can donate from its corporate account, and the out-of-country companies each get to donate from their own accounts as individual entities.

Grey sat on several House committees and chaired the Committee for Corporate Reform. He's known for his loyalty to his backers, killing bills that might hurt them, promoting bills that will help them, and putting his rubber stamp to good use. He's even convinced Congress to increase Seattle's yearly budget and has earmarked extra money to clean up Seattle's Barrens.

- The CCR, aka the Rubber Stamp Committee, is one of Washington's dirty little secrets. Most congresspeople would give an arm or a leg to get on the committee because of the extra corporate gifts that come with the job. In return for the vacations, bonus incentives, and racy sports cars, the committee members go through the list of bills, table the ones their corporate backers want to disappear, and recommend the ones their backers would like to see made into law. CCR works maybe two or three hours a week, and half of that time is spent playing poker.
- Snopes
- You're exaggerating the issue. The CCR may be the most ineffectual committee in the whole of Congress, but it does real work on occasion. Besides, Congressman Grey prefers chess to poker.
- Kay St. Irregular

The FBI's manhunt started with a rally that occurred several months after Proposition 23 was added to the ballot. Congressman Grey showed up at a Humanis-run anti-Prop 23 rally. The rally turned into a riot when someone supposedly took a shot at the congressman. Seattle was rocked by the scandal, with plenty of people wondering what Grey was doing at a Humanis rally.

The public still doesn't know exactly what happened, but there are plenty of theories. The first rumors were that it was a staged assassination attempt on Grey to garner sympathy for the anti-Prop 23 movement. Some people even thought Grey funded the rally. People were shook up to find such a high-ranking political figure publicly allying himself with such an infamous hate group. Seattle was scandalized that their darling congressman would do such a thing. The FBI is still investigating



the entire incident amid allegations of congressional ethics violations and abuse of power.

The Grey Scandal put Brackhaven squarely on the defensive, forcing him to disavow knowledge of the congressman's activities even as Congressman Grey publicly proclaimed his innocence, insisting he'd been forced to the rally at gunpoint. Bull's hired runners, the ones that "escorted" Grey to the rally and smeared his reputation, did their job so well that no one believes Grey's story. I'd feel sorry for him if I hadn't seen the FBI's case file. When the FBI questioned Grey's financial connections to Sunset Vacations, a little known Seattle real estate agency, the congressman retired from politics and disappeared into the Carib League. If he ever comes back to UCAS territory, James Grey is in for a hell of a reception. An unofficial reward has been offered by the FBI for information leading to Grey's apprehension.

- Everyone knows Brackhaven's leanings. How could they really be surprised one of his friends had the same biases?
- /dev/grrl
- Throughout his career, Grey has maintained the image of a fair, unbiased politician working for the betterment of all metahumanity. He seemed a bit too slick and on-the-ball, if you know what I mean. It always made me wonder what kind of snake oil he was about to pedal.
- Dr. Spin
- Damn. I didn't realize the bounty for Grey was real. I think it's time to raise some money for another Caribbean vacation.
- Kane

FOLLOW THE MONEY

The more I think about it, the more I realize my accidental entry into the governor's mansion node might not have been an accident. I came in through an auxiliary node that was disguised as a node for a shell company called Dipton Electronics. DE received loans from West Coast Credit Union—partially owned by Brackhaven cabinet member William Greene—which got shuttled between dozens of ledger entries before disappearing from the books.

Wait. Let me start from the beginning.

One of Brackhaven's main opponents in this year's election was Eliza Bloom of the New Century Party. When she announced her candidacy, her team commissioned a study on Brackhaven's economic policies. But stonewalling, red tape, and missing files ensured that her commission was unable to finish the study in time for the election. Which was unfortunate, as she had planned on this being a major plank in her campaign platform. After Brackhaven's victory, city administrators were only too happy to finally let her team view the city's books—which were heavily redacted despite the fact that this information is supposed to be a matter of public record. The IC on those redactions was nasty enough to send Eliza's pet hacker to the hospital with a severe case of dumpshock. The study team finally returned with an inconclusive verdict and a mire of accounting transactions that seemed to lead both everywhere and nowhere.

Her suspicions raised, Eliza hired a small off-the-books team of experts to verify the unknown variables. Mr. Bonds and myself

are both overseeing that team. My job is to collect the information, his job is to correlate the data with the legal and financial implications of the current economic situation. I never knew that financial math was an exercise in fiction.

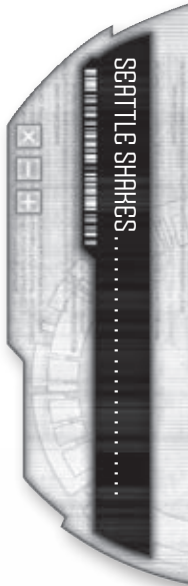
Forgive me for starting with the basics, but it's the only way I can wrap my head around what is actually going on. The way it works (and if I'm mistaken, I trust Mr. Bonds to correct me) is that the Seattle Metroplex gets a majority of its revenue from property taxes, corporate income tax, personal income tax, local sales tax, specialty item VAT taxes, and tourist income. This money goes into local development, maintenance of metroplex roads, public parks, public schools, public housing, city administration, and all those types of things. In addition, the UCAS budget allocates a specific percentage of federal funds to maintain all federal installations, the governor's administration, the Metroplex Guard, and Joint Task Force: Seattle. For every UCAS dollar spent from Seattle's city revenue to maintain the port, the ferries, the train stations, and the airports, the federal funds match fifty cents to the dollar. It doesn't sound like much, but when the federal budget for Seattle is between twenty-three and fifty billion dollars per year, it can add up quickly.

- Other way around, Netcat. Seattle spends fifty cents for every one federal dollar. But an accurate enough layman's summary otherwise.
- Mr. Bonds
- Shit. That's a lot of money.
- Rigger X

Attracting new business to a region is like a bizarre animal mating dance. First, a business expresses interest in a couple of different cities, and those cities are given the opportunity to bid for the corporation's presence and attention. A city may offer the corp lower taxes, tax exemptions, free utilities, or even free construction to build a site to the corp's specific needs and taste. In exchange, the corp promises to bring a specific number of jobs to the city, to stay in the city for a certain amount of time, or to give the city prestige status by claiming the city as its business headquarters. The kicker is that the city is the one who pays for the utilities, taxes, or construction out of its own income while the company rakes in the profits and either imports workers with the promised jobs, vacates the city before the allotted time limit is up with the excuse that the city became toxic to their bottom line, or never shows up at all because they got a better offer. Usually the latter happens after a city wastes millions in construction costs for a custom-built site that doesn't lend itself to rental or sale to other companies.

- Note that this is the pattern for A-rated corps or smaller. The larger corps, especially the AAAs, have the power to do what they want, where they want, without having to go through to rigamarole of seeing which municipal governments will dance to their tune.
- Cosmo

When Brackhaven promised to make Seattle more business-friendly, he engaged in all of the above practices (all perfectly legal), and then some. He declared a fifteen-year corporate income



tax moratorium for any company that relocated to Seattle, as well as property tax-free locations that his administration seized during its "orphan property cleanup." His old chum Èmile Corrigan helped locate every property in Seattle that, due to Crash 2.0, had no legal owner. People who had spent the past seven years in court trying to re-establish their claim to the properties they owned lost everything in this little land grab of Brackhaven's. Even before he was elected governor, Brackhaven used his investment firm, Brackhaven Investments, to acquire a number of desirable properties in the Renton area for his own use. He paid a fraction of the properties' true worth, and when he was governor, Seattle used eminent domain and missing property tax records to snatch up the remainder of the land for free. There may still be a few pieces left unclaimed, but that's because the land is so worthless not even Brackhaven wants to waste the effort of dealing with them.

Rather than sell this properties at public auction, where Seattle could net quite a bit of money off the sales, the Brackhaven administration is giving away these properties to sweeten the pot for various businesses. So these corps now sit on a prime piece of real estate that they received for free and that they pay no property taxes on, open up shop with wageslaves they import from out of town, make money that they pay no corporate income tax on, and use electricity and water that they don't have to pay the city utilities for. So not only are the new jobs not going to Seattleites, but the city budget is losing millions in revenue.

- So, money out instead of money in. Completely the opposite of what our dear governor promised when he took office. If I did business that way, I'd be out of business.
- Butch

Incoming Message

WHO'S WHO IN SEATTLE, 2075 EDITION— ÈMILE CORRIGAN

Èmile Corrigan is a long-time DeeCee insider with family ties to Seattle. Born in 2032 to Renton socialites Maria and Jean-Louis Corrigan, this 42-year-old confirmed bachelor has been a part of the political scene since his mother served as an aide to Senator McClasky in the late 30s and early 40s.

Appointed head of DeeCee's Take Freedom Coalition when he was just 21, Corrigan lobbied for important issues such as tax and military reform, defense spending, and corporate oversight. After his stint with the TFC, he worked for the UCAS Senate, drafting bills, working as an unofficial liaison between the Senate and the House, and was a staple at many DeeCee gatherings. At twenty-five years old, he became the youngest paid campaign advisor when he was hired to work for then-presidential candidate Kenneth Brackhaven.

Corrigan disappeared from the public eye after the 2057 presidential election to re-emerge in the later half of 2074 when he was appointed Governor Brackhaven's new chief of staff in the wake of the Parker-Quinn embezzlement scandal.

- Word on the street says there's good money for anyone with information on Corrigan and his activities. Mr. Johnson wants a proper vetting, with all the gritty details.
- Stone
- He's probably just another Humanis goon.
- Sticks
- I've never come across anything that connects Corrigan with the hate groups. In fact, I haven't come across nearly enough about the man to justify the reverence with which many DeeCee insiders hold him.
- Kay St. Irregular

Internal Mail Log

TO: Thom Chreshold, Axiom Mechanics
FROM: Max
11/24/73 09:56:03

Thom,

As you can see from the attached reports, we've finally hit our target sales numbers. And, as Randi predicted last month, sales are starting a downslide. Local businesses have picked up on the trend and now the Seattle market has reached saturation point with Lil Xhang and Friends merchandise.

Given Randi's numbers, we have only three weeks before sales dip below the red line and our operation ends up costing us more than we are making. I recommend a full withdrawal before that date. We can easily unload our current inventory on the local shops at above-cost prices, even though we'd have to sell at half of retail. If we do it now, before anyone else notices the declining market share, we should be able to exit Seattle at a profit.

Please notify me with your decision as soon as possible.

Max

TO: Max
FROM: Thom Chreshold, Axiom Mechanics
11/24/73 14:27:18

Max,

I have reviewed Randi's numbers in depth and my agent has reviewed Seattle's business trends. It projects that the market for Lil Xhang will tank a week sooner than Randi's estimate. Having verified that we have made our nut back, I agree with your recommendation. Dump the merchandise on the local yokels soonest. You are allowed to go down to fifteen percent above cost if necessary, but make them talk you down to it. We don't want to alert the more savvy of the bunch that they're about to lose their entire investment.

Thom

TO: Thom Chreshold, Axiom Mechanics
FROM: Max
11/24/73 15:03:42

Thom,

Understood. See you in Detroit by the end of the week.

Max



Chat Transcript

FRICK: So Mr. Johnson is like “can you do the job or not?” And we’re like, “Well, yeah. Blowing up toilets ain’t exactly rocket science.”

FRACK: And I’m like doing the research on Mr. Johnson while Frick is negotiating the fee. Turns out he actually owns Tubby’s Toilet Emporium.

TREERAT: So he’s a competitor?

FRICK: No, omae. He wants us to take out his own store. I’m like, “Hell, yes, but I want extra if we’re gonna be part of some insurance scam.” And he’s like “Sure, but you only get a bonus after the job is done and if you manage to make it look like fallout from gang war.”

FRACK: Except Mr. J’s finances are all over the map. It looks like he has money, but he doesn’t, or didn’t until he moved the company to Seattle. Apparently Brackhaven’s handing out cash incentives to companies that move their HQ into town. So we do the deed and get paid, including the promised bonus. Turns out Mr. J is on the up-n-up. ‘Cept we missed something.

TREERAT: He doesn’t own the place after all.

FRICK: Nah, he owned it. What we missed was the contract.

TREERAT: Huh?

FRACK: Tubby’s contract with the city of Seattle. See, there’s a clause buried in the fine print that guarantees the city’s protection against the “criminal element.” If the city or any of its security forces fail to promote and defend corporate interests, both Seattle and Knight Errant have to pay out estimated damages along with an additional 500k for “pain and suffering.”

FRICK: <sigh> We could have made a bundle if we’d known about the city payout ahead of time.

FRACK: I wonder if we can convince any other new corps to hire us out for personal property destruction?

- Now that’s an odd kind of protection scam. Usually the protectors are forcing the protectees to pay up, not the other way around.
- Mihosi Oni

- Now that you mention it ...
- Mr. Bonds

Incoming Message

>>>>>BEGIN // upload Audio Feed :
: user Mr. Bonds :: 11/20/74 //

The murmur of chatter, glassware, and other restaurant sounds can be heard in the background. Someone coughs and a rustling, louder than all other noises, fills the air. Then a nearby thump before the background noise is audible again.

PARKER: Are you okay?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE VOICE: Fine. Swallowed wrong. Please, continue.

PARKER: There’s really nothing else to say.

UMV: Seattle is a rough city. I’ve tried doing business there before. Got chased out of town by the Triads.

PARKER: There’s a guarantee in the contract. It indemnifies your corporation in the event of such circumstances. Not that such a thing would ever occur. Knight Errant is a much better security force than LoneStar ever was. We have people in place to make sure they do their job and do it correctly.

UMV: Is that what the fee is for?

PARKER: No, sir. We would never charge our business partners for their own protection. That other item ... Governor Brackhaven is a philanthropist and encourages corporate participation with local charities. Your company doesn’t have to donate, but if you do, you can deduct the donation from your licensing fees.

UMV: I see. Is there a specific account these charitable contributions should be made to?

PARKER: I’m sending the information to your commlink now.

>>>>>END // upload Audio Feed :
: user Mr. Bonds :: 11/20/74 //

- That sounds like one of those Horizon surveillance tapes.
- /dev/grrl

- It is, but it’s not one of the ones released to the public. I recognize the reporter’s voice. I used to work with him when I worked undercover at the corp. Nice guy. Excellent baker. He brought in homemade cookies with little silver stars on them every Wednesday.
- Sunshine

The wealthier members of society are getting richer while the middle and lower classes are losing everything they have. Also, water is wet. But what makes this even worse is most of this is perfectly legal. Brackhaven, so far as we can tell, has done nothing wrong.



His friends and employees, though, are a different story. With the runners help, Eliza has plenty of evidence to prove that not only is Brackhaven's economic policy not working, but that several members of his administration are gaming the system. William Greene is just the tip of the iceberg. I don't know if "financial wizards" really are a type of mage or not, but if they are, Greene could definitely be one.

Eliza wants to turn all the evidence over to DA Oaks, hoping to get a criminal investigation started. She may have been beaten to the punch, however. I caught this KSAF news story by street reporter Travis Ryder a few weeks ago. The story only hit the local feeds before it was buried by all the election news. I didn't think anything of it at the time, but given what just happened an hour ago, I'm sure this thing is about to be all over the international newsfeeds.

Incoming Message

KSAF BREAKING NEWS

//Upload Media File: user: Netcat:: 11/20/2074
/streaming feed/KSAF: enabled/transcribing/

11/01/74 0600 hours, Seattle, Travis Ryder

KSAF Sources inside the District Attorney's office have revealed that on Wednesday, October 31st, DA Dana Oaks secretly empaneled a Federal grand jury for a sealed investigation. Our sources, who remain unidentified because they are not allowed to publicly speak on the matter, indicate that the DA's ongoing investigation of the Ork Underground and Project Freedom has finally uncovered evidence of corruption and fraud on an unprecedented scale. In light of the Brackhaven administration's continued opposition to the proposition, one is left to wonder about the validity of Seattle's upcoming election.

Stayed tuned to KSAF newsfeeds as we continue to bring you the latest developments on this story as they happen.

/feed terminated/

- My regular sources totally missed that one. Thanks for the heads up, Netcat. Seems I have some catching up to do.
- Sunshine
- I recently got offered a helluva sweat deal to remove Dana Oaks from the picture.
- Riser
- Why announce that here?
- Cosmo
- Because the Mr. Johnson who offered me the job, a guy named Fred Tennison who works as an administrator in the city planning department, died in an apartment complex fire back on November 6th. His unit was the only one completely burned, and he was the only fatality. His financials show that he was seriously in debt when he died, and I found a money trail indicating he was

embezzling from city funds before he died. I recommend thinking twice about any jobs coming out of Seattle right now.

- Riser
- Interesting. My favorite fixer just came to me with a too-good-to-be-true offer to track down some people participating in a grand jury. It sounded suspicious before your heads-up. I think I'll pass and let some rookie take the challenge.
- Fianchetto

My current location is a building just down the block from the federal courthouse. It's given me quite the view of all the grand jury antics. Even though Oaks has tried to keep the investigation quiet, there are a limited number of exits and entrances to the building and, truth be told, not as much going on as there should be. If one were to take trideo shows to heart, the courthouse should be buzzing with activity with every courtroom occupied and people going in and out all day. But a lot of cases have been put on hold until the start of the new year because many judges thought that the city would be on fire after the elections. At most, five out of the twenty courtrooms are in use. So if one is patient enough to record everyone going in and out, and uses the frequency and appearance of these people, it's not too hard to figure out who is joining Oaks' little party and who is there for something completely different. I've already identified the judge in question and some members of his staff. I'm sure others have the witness list and the jury pool all noted.

I'm sure of this because people stopped leaving the courthouse about two hours ago. And shortly after that, Tosh Athack's Black Knights showed up and cordoned off the building. It almost looks like a hostage situation, but I'm not close enough to tell. I do know that shortly after the Black Knights arrived, a high-ranking member of the Brackhaven administration contacted a few local fixers to arrange an extraction.

- If my intel is correct, the courthouse situation is an attempt to taint the grand jury by intimidating the witnesses and the jurists with a show of violence. There's no kill order, but the words "maximum collateral damage" were used in the job description.
- Sticks
- The courthouse attack is a distraction. My contacts just told me that a team hit Sunset Vacations for a data swipe.
- Pistons
- Distraction yes, but not for a data swipe. The son of a friend of mine is involved in a run to hit the DA's office and Knight Errant's evidence locker. Something about destroying evidence.
- Kat o' Nine Tales

So while I sit here waiting for the fun to simmer down (I am not going outside until all those trigger-happy cops go home), I'll sum up the current Seattle Situation as this: New business has been flooding Seattle, the city is hemorrhaging money, Brackhaven's playing footsie with the FBI, and the Ork Underground will officially carry Seattle district status starting March 1st, 2075 (or March 1st, 2076, according to a new proposal from the governor's mansion). Why are they waiting that long? Well, the Brackhaven administration claims there's a lot of administrative red tape to take care of. The list includes carrying out a detailed survey of the



new district, holding a census to get accurate population details, connecting the Underground to the city's utility services, detailing an official Knight Errant presence, appointing pro-tem district administrators, and many other boring details.

If I were a betting girl, I'd wager the list was created specifically to bore everyone to tears and to delay the Underground's official status until everyone forgets it's supposed to be a real district. In fact, the remaining members of the Project Freedom Action Committee and leaders of both Mothers of Metahumanity and the Ork Rights Committee are protesting the administration's proposal. According to them, the wording of Prop 23 on the ballot makes the Ork Underground a district as of Election Day, when the populace of Seattle voted in acceptance of the proposition. They also say neither Governor Brackhaven nor any member of the city council can appoint district representatives, pointing out that the Seattle metroplex constitution gives every district the right to elect its own representatives and mayor.

- Bull's up for mayor!
- Slamm-0!
- I AM NOT! Stop with the stupid political jokes, Fred, or so help me God, I will make sure Yak's Donuts never sells to you again.
- Bull
- You're so mean when you're awake.
- Slamm-0!

FORESHOCKS

A lot has happened in since Election Day. First Governor Brackhaven demanded a recount of the Proposition 23 ballots. Then, for three days straight, Seattleites drifted

Game Information

HOW WE GOT HERE

Some of the information presented in this section is from the *Shadowrun: Missions* products: CMP 2010-02 *Copycat Killer*, SRM 04-01 *Hiding in the Dark*, SRM 04-03 *Rally Cry*, SRM 04-05 *On a Silver Platter*, SRM 04-07 *Burn*, SRM 04-09 *Assassin Nation*, SRM 04-11 *Election Day*, and the *Shadowrun* plot book *Dirty Tricks*. As such, there are spoilers from those adventures. It is recommended, but not necessary, to review these adventures before reading the rest of this section. Alternately, if reading this section interests you in running or playing in some of the described events, the Missions are available resources to help you organize various plot points into adventures.

The timeline for *Shadowrun: Dirty Tricks* and the *Shadowrun: Missions* adventures is as follows:

January 2073	CMP 2010-02 <i>Copycat Killer</i>
May 2073	SRM 04-01 <i>Hiding in the Dark</i>
September 2073	SRM 04-03 <i>Rally Cry</i>
January 2074	SRM 04-05 <i>On a Silver Platter</i>
May 2074	SRM 04-07 <i>Burn</i>
September 2074	SRM 04-09 <i>Assassin Nation</i>
November 2074	SRM 04-11 <i>Election Day</i> , <i>Shadowrun: Dirty Tricks</i> (concurrent to <i>Election Day</i>)

through their days staring at each other with barely concealed worry and tension. Knight Errant, the Metroplex Guard, and Joint Task Force: Seattle have hovered around the edges as if they dared anyone to break the law. There were a few incidents here and there: some Skraacha beating up a human city worker, a jewelry store robbery, even a few minor hacks of various businesses. But the expected riots, looting, and hate crimes didn't happen. It was as if everyone were too exhausted to put forth much of an effort. Seattle was shocked, for lack of a better word, into silence.

- It didn't take long for the shock to wear off, though. Two days later, scammers started registering people for "official" SINs—for a small fee of course. The fraud is so widespread now that Brackhaven's office has been forced to issue no less than three warnings about the scams. They say something to the effect of "only Underground residents with a legitimate, pre-existing SIN have citizenship status and are eligible to receive the full benefits of district membership."
- Dr. Spin
- In other words, he has no plans on granting citizenship to any of the SINless residents.
- Hanibelle

I suppose it helped that KE finally found its footing in the wake of the pre-Election Day violence. They pounce on the slightest crime. An eight-year-old dwarf got arrested for jaywalking on her way to school. The officer's excuse was that he thought she was a drug mule. His superiors publicly reprimanded him as a way of proving they weren't trying to be anti-meta and the schoolgirl was let off the hook.

As the Underground finds itself under siege by reporters, tourists, real-estate sharks, and Knight Errant, the remaining faces of the Project Freedom movement have been left to pick up the debris. It's not easy organizing so many different groups with so many different agendas. Many Skraacha members don't want to be "homogenized by the government's agenda," as one person put it. The business community hates the idea of regulation and paying taxes, but they love the thought that legalizing the Underground will make for a more stable neighborhood with a lower crime rate. The Mafia, so far as I can tell, is carrying out business as usual. They'll have to put more effort in disguising their handiwork now that Knight Errant is moving in, but they do that already for their above-ground work, so it's not that big of a problem.

The SINless inhabitants are terrified. Since the administration's announcement of a census and surveys, the conspiracy theories have been flying. They didn't miss the government's above-ground land grab, nor are they unaware of how many people in Brackhaven's administration are connected to the anti-meta hate groups. I've heard tales from forced relocation to the Barrens to outright slaughter inside the Underground. One boy, six years old, even told me that Brackhaven was even paying Tanamous to "clean up" the new district. God help me, the haunted look in his eyes made me run home to make sure my baby was still safe.

- I promise you that last rumor isn't true, Netcat. I'd have heard if it was and I will warn you, and everyone else on this board who lives in Seattle, if I hear different.
- Hannibelle



BREAKING NEWS

/streaming feed/NEWSNet: enabled / transcribing/

<The camera pans along the long winding tunnels of the Underground's business district, where many businesses are shuttered. A few cautious people, mostly gang members wearing Skraacha colors, walk the streets as the shy residents peer out from their windows. Joe Martin, NewsNet anchor stands before a trideo shop beside a male ork whose face has been digitally blurred.>

JOE MARTIN: Joe Martin of NewsNet here, bringing you the latest in Seattle news. Residents of the Ork Underground awoke this morning to a series of explosive-like sounds that brought back memories of the recent fire bombings. Knight Errant's newly assigned Underground response team, which does not yet have a permanent precinct location, failed to locate the source of the sounds despite both mundane and magical efforts. No fires have been discovered, and no buildings have been damaged. An attempt to account for all Underground residents failed when many people refused to open their doors or disappeared into the convoluted tunnel system. I have here a witness, Stavos Krícek, who was an eyewitness to the incident. Tell me, Stavos, why did everyone run?

STAVOS: Why stick 'round for a headcount? We all know it's nonsense. Brackhaven's not gonna let us register as citizens and get our bennies. K-Cops just gonna pick us all up, give us crim-SINs since it's illegal to not have a SIN, then dump us in the Barrens. Them damn cops don't care 'bout us no way no how and damn if they ain't set off some sort o' flash bangs or summin to get us all runnin' into their arms lookin' for comfort. Prove me wrong if'n you don't believe me.

JOE MARTIN: I later caught up to Lieutenant Kryz, head of the Underground response team.

<Vid switches to different part of the Underground. Shanty shacks lean against more permanent housing structures in a section that looks half-residential, half-refugee camp. A harried female dwarf KE lieutenant barks orders to her subordinates as they chase glimpses of fleeing children.>

JOE MARTIN: Lieutenant Kryz! A moment of your time, please. Can you respond to allegations that Knight Errant perpetrated this incident as a method of rounding up and moving out the SINless denizens of the Underground?

LT. KRYZ: Knight Errant is contracted by the City of Seattle to protect the citizens of Seattle. When Proposition 23 passed, this put the Ork Underground under Knight Errant jurisdiction, as well as the safety and security of all citizens within the Underground. While we are aware that there are certain criminal elements who use this area as a base of operations, the primary mission of my team is to focus on the safety and security of the people living here, as well as any tourists who may come to shop. My team is not here to harass or arrest anyone who has not committed a major crime.

JOE MARTIN: So you will arrest anyone here that does not have a valid SIN? What about those who were born without one because their parents never had one? What about the people here who lost their identities over a decade ago in Crash 2.0?

LT. KRYZ: Your questions describe ninety-five percent of the people here. Let me tell you something, Martin. I don't have the goddamn fucking time to arrest all of them. The only thing I'm worried about, the only thing my current mandate covers, is to arrest anyone committing a serious crime and to keep everyone else safe. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have real work to do.

JOE MARTIN: And there you have it, folks. Knight Errant is actively refusing to arrest people whose only crime is to be unidentifiable. Later today, we'll get Governor Brackhaven's response to this incident.

/feed terminated/

There have been a lot of moving parts in the events leading to this moment. Most of them, at the time, seemed isolated and disconnected. Only in hindsight have we discovered how everything fits together. Bull has covered a lot of last year's shenanigans in the *Dirty Tricks* posting, but I want to recap the highlights here because it's important to what is going down. We'll start with Seattle's new power player, and the Brackhaven administration's new boogeywoman, Dana Oaks.

Straight shooting, smart, and determined, Oaks has a gung-ho attitude for protecting citizens with the law (as opposed to making a name for herself prosecuting criminals) that caught DA Beatty's attention and admiration. He hired her in 2072 as one of his assistant district attorneys and reportedly gave her free rein to choose her cases. Her mission of choice was to clean up the Ork Underground.

If you think DA Oaks has it in for the Underground, you wouldn't be precisely right, but you wouldn't be far wrong either. She has never made any secret of her anti-crime agenda, or of the fact that she believes a lot of criminals hide in the Underground because it's near impossible to legally pursue them. But that doesn't mean she's anti-Underground either. She honestly believes that if she cleans the criminals out of the Underground, it will make life better for the rest of the Underground's inhabitants. She's a real avenging angel, which explains a lot about why so many people want her dead. My intel tells me there are at least five different contracts out on Oaks, two network related, one looking for a character assassination (which is near impossible given her current saint-like status), one just wanting her extracted out of Seattle, and one wanting her intimidated into retiring from public service. The Black Knights, a KE-paid unit of ex-shadowrunners commanded by Detective Theodore "Tosh" Athack, are very protective of Oaks, though, so I doubt anyone taking those job offers will get far.

The first major case investigated by ADA Oaks was a mafia counterfeiting operation. Knight Errant confiscated hundreds of counterfeit comms, all cheap, disposable models when Detective Athack and the Black Knights busted the ring. The story broke two days before Project Freedom became Proposition 23. Seattle corporations were not thrilled at the idea that anyone would make, let alone buy, these junk commlinks, while many in the shadows cried over losing the only local source of untraceable burner comms. Once Prop 23 became a reality, most reporters lost all interest in the counterfeiting ring. Only Athena Tatopolous, senior editor of KSAF, kept one of her field reporters tracking the story.

A week later, Travis Ryder reported that shadowrunners had swiped the entire bunch of 'links from the evidence locker at Knight Errant's 14th Precinct. The feed accumulated only twenty-five hits. I didn't hear a single rumor about where the comms ended up, and any runners associated with it did a good job of keeping quiet.

- That's because those comms weren't stolen by shadowrunners. Blame Alamos 20k for that one.
- Butch

- And you know this how?
- Nephrine

- A few of them ended up in my shop after a few of the dumb fucks got themselves shot up at Lefty's Lanes during some stupid-ass ballot-stuffing scheme. Between them and Knight Errant, that place got trashed something awful, and I ended up patching up some of the survivors. Made a nice chunk of change off their stupidity, so I suppose I should thank them.
- Butch
- So that's what happened! Gimme their names, Butch. I can't forgive those fucks for messing with my favorite bowling alley.
- Slamm-0!

Incoming Message

KNIGHT ERRANT LOSES EVIDENCE IN CRUCIAL COUNTERFEITING CASE

Date: 10/26/74

The breakup of the Seattle Mafia's counterfeiting ring was slated to be the biggest coup in local law enforcement history until Knight Errant bungled the case by losing the evidence. In an embarrassing turn of events, the nearly one thousand counterfeit commlinks seized in the Bellevue raid disappeared from the 14th Precinct's evidence locker without a trace. According to a confidential source within the precinct, a string of power outages left the security node offline at a crucial time. But how the commlinks were carried out of the precinct without any of the officers noticing remains a mystery even today.

Knight Errant public relations officer Catanya Kent commented, "Knight Errant remains committed to investigating the counterfeiting ring and collaborating with the District Attorney's office in all matters on this issue." No word yet if the evidence theft is actively being investigated.

If most of Seattle's population ignored the implication of Proposition 23, District Attorney David Beatty and Assistant District Attorney Dana Oaks took a different tack. While DA Beatty practically proclaimed his support of Prop 23—without outright stating it, ADA Oaks took the opportunity to clean up the Underground by declaring war on all the Underground's less savory inhabitants such as mobster Johnny "Junior" Torinni. With the assistance of Detective Athack, she took down a kidnapping/rape ring, a drug cartel, and several smuggling operations.

- She came close to nailing me, too, and I was just passing through. At that point, I decided to stay out of town for a while until things cooled off.
- Turbo Bunny
- Things got even worse in the Underground when long-time residents realized they'd been hijacked into the Prop 23 movement without their consent. Apparently Helen Shands and the Project Freedom crew forgot to ask everyone if they even wanted to be a legitimate city district. We almost had a civil war on our hands for that little oversight.
- Bull

Dana Oaks is a practical woman. She plays the avenging-angel card, but she accepts the fact that the greater good requires the occasional sacrifice. She's been known to hire shadowrunners to assist with more difficult tasks, like taking down Junior. Her alternative hiring practices wasn't a card she played often, and she certainly didn't advertise the fact. But much of the information she's gotten on recent cases, like the arson fire-bombings in the Underground and the DA Murders case came from shadowrunners. There's one particular group of runners that have been making names for themselves lately, working for her, Detective Athack, and even Bull at a few points in time. These rookies have talent. I can't wait to see what they do next.

But I digress. I need to go over another snippet of recent history, this time in regards to the copycat Mayan Cutter.

Before Prop 23 even got on the ballot, Seattle was shaken by the reappearance (so everyone thought) of the Mayan Cutter in January 2073. The Cutter, for those who don't follow local news, was a serial killer from back in 2070 with a penchant for carving his victims in multiple pieces, and he concentrated his efforts on the city's ork population. Nobody could catch him. He seemed unstoppable, until he stopped. When he seemingly re-emerged and once again proved unstoppable, Governor Brackhaven used Lone Star's inability to catch him as one excuse (out of many) for ending their contract as Seattle's police force and bringing in Knight Errant as a replacement. It later turned out that the 2073 killer—ex-UCAS Army Ranger Shawn Walker—was just a copycat hired by an unknown party.

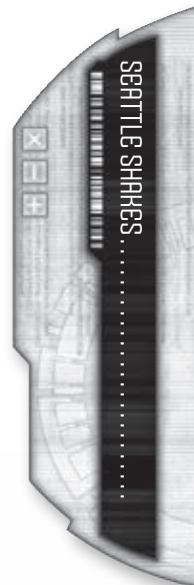
I don't want to offend anyone, but from a shadowrunning perspective, Walker did an excellent job of convincing people he was the original Cutter. It took another group of shadowrunners to uncover the ruse. Too many good people died before Walker was unmasked. Conspiracy theorists proclaimed that Walker was working a secret Brackhaven agenda, but no one listened. After all, these theorists were the nutballs wearing foil on their heads and carrying actual cardboard signs hand-painted with the words "The End Has Come." What could they possibly know?

- Who would you be offending, Netcat?
- Arete
- Walker killed Bull's daughter.
- Goat Foot

It took Bull, Slamm-0!, myself, and the runners Bull hired over a year to figure out who was behind Walker's little killing spree. I have one name for you: George Mathers.

George Mathers, wealthy scion of a new-money UCAS family, is very well connected. In addition to ties with racist groups like Humanis and Alamos 20,000, Mathers is a huge contributor to Brackhaven's campaign. He used his influence with the previous gubernatorial administration to secure a high-level position in LoneStar while the security company was contracted by Seattle. And he was one of the few people to retain his position and his office, as vice president of public relations, when Knight Errant came to town. The only changes he saw were his stationary letterhead and the bank account from which he received his paycheck.

Mathers didn't do much in his position, from what I understand, except show up at a lot of parties. Unlike Marin Parker,





Mathers was never implicated in any sort of financial scandals, which only shows how clever the man was.

- Is? Was? Don't be coy, girl.
- Pistons

Remember those counterfeit commlinks I mentioned earlier? One of them had been retrieved by the runners who took Walker down. It had some financial information that traced back through a series of accounts. Eventually, the breadcrumbs led back to Mathers. Mathers had a mole in the Black Knights who warned him that Bull knew his identity, so the bastard struck first by hiring an assassin. The assassin failed, but not before Bull hired runners to go find Mathers.

Mathers was taken down hard. When Mathers got turned over to Bull ... well, let's just say that asshole won't cause problems ever again. Interesting side note, though. The runners found a treasure trove of information in a hidden node at Mathers' home. The idiot kept extensively detailed records of all his illicit dealings, including the names and SINS of the people he dealt with. The files were full of juicy tidbits, though they have since been confiscated by the District Attorney's office. Those files connected Mathers to the upper elite of Humanis, Governor Brackhaven's press secretary Edmund Jeffries, and to Brackhaven himself—and exposed a culture of graft and nepotism in Seattle's upper classes that would take your breath away. Most of the data took months to decrypt, and it was recently confiscated by the DA's office.

- Actually, 'Cat, I gave the original files to my KE contact.
- Bull

/streaming feed/KSAF: enabled/ transcribing/

Hello, Seattle! Telly Vangel, your KSAF reporter on the beat here with the latest in the disappearance of Knight Errant executive George Mathers. Mathers, known for his silver tongue and diplomatic skill, was last seen in March of this year when he left his downtown office. Knight Errant has remained tight-lipped during the months-long course of this investigation, but an anonymous tip has brought to light new information that will rock your world!

We at KSAF have exclusive access to a personal appointment planner that was discovered at Mathers' vacation home in the Carib League. The encrypted planner contained a coded list of names, bank account numbers, and a detailed transaction record of what appears to be bribes or kickbacks on a scale that puts the Parker-Quinn scandal to shame. Our tech-support crew continues to decode the planner to reveal what this reporter believes to be the names of corporate representatives, politicians, government officials, and influential members of the community.

In addition to this information, this reporter has uncovered financial ties between Mathers and Governor Brackhaven. Mathers has not only been a generous contributor to the governor's campaign war chest, he is an advisor to Western Natural Gas' board of directors, a previously unknown subsidiary of Brackhaven Investments.

/feed terminated/

- If BI owns Western Natural Gas, then Sunset Vacations is owned by BI, too. Damn. Her informant must be one hell of a hacker to find that trail. I wonder what else I missed.
- Slamm-0!
- Maybe you're just not as good as you think you are.
- Clockwork

Tempers have been at an all time high this past year. Just walking down the street could cause a fight to break out. It didn't help that food prices and transportation costs were rising, which had one street gang claiming that Brackhaven was trying to starve out the citizens of the Underground and another gang claiming runners working for M.O.M. were trying to starve the legitimate citizens of Seattle into submission. Businesses were closing up shop. A curfew had been declared, and promptly ignored by almost everyone. Poll-worker training seminars were picketed by both pro- and anti-23 groups with known volunteers harassed by pretty much everyone. Many volunteers dropped out while others refused to tell anyone they'd been tapped for poll duty because they didn't want word to get out.

A shootout occurred right outside a tourist entrance of the Underground, the Big Rhino Bar and Grill, killing ten people and injuring numerous others. The perpetrators fled the scene before Knight Errant arrived on the scene. The Underground lost a lot of tourist business after that, and many Underground residents stopped going near the tourist areas after that incident. A siege mentality slowly began taking root amongst the regular residents. I still remember how people jumped when a waiter dropped a tray of dishes on his way out of the Big Rhino's kitchen. Half of them pulled their weapons, and the other half ended up underneath the tables.

We thought things couldn't get worse. Then the entire city was turned upside down by the assassination of some very important people: DA Beatty, his wife, the entire Action Committee of Project Freedom (including Helen Shand), six members of the District Attorney's office and several of their family members. Some local runners got pinned with all the murders when Knight Errant caught them robbing Beatty's home. With so many of his colleagues dead, including ADA Oaks according to KSAF, newly-appointed Acting District Attorney Mark Blackfern offered the usual rewards leading to the capture of the runners, dead or alive.

- The DA Murders started a feeding frenzy. The crime tip nodes were overwhelmed with so much traffic that they had to shunt some of their background processes to less-secure nodes for load balancing. I made quite a killing off the information gathered through that particular backdoor.
- Orbital DK

All of Seattle reeled in shock. Few events of the proceeding year had affected the public as badly as the DA Murders. As those above ground tried to put these horrific events into perspective, with DA Blackfern's assistance, Torinni's successor, Gordo Buck, touted himself as the Underground's savior and vowed his protection to anyone in need. He got half of Skraacha under his command by promising to torpedo Project Freedom. Seattle had gained its own pair of saviors, one above and one below.

Then Dana Oaks showed up alive and under the Black Knights' protective custody. Apparently KE decided ADA Oaks was better off dead until the investigation into the attack had been completed. Between her and Kathleen Shand, Helen Shand's daughter, enough evidence was retrieved to prove a conspiracy, but not one created by shadowrunners. Based on Oaks' and Shand's accounts, the Black Knights turned their attention to Buck and Blackfern. Suddenly Seattle's two saviors became the targets of the investigations. Turns out these drekheads made a deal with a

Incoming Message

BUCK'S MESSAGE

- Found this interesting little tidbit floating around on a Skraacha lieutenant's comm.
- Pistons

>>Sender: Gordo Buck / Priority: High

Omae, I'm not going to lie to you. Things are rough around here. We've got those dumb-ass wageslaves from the DA's office sniffing around here, Knight Errant picking up our friends on dummied-up charges, and now some damn elitist wannabes are trying to blow smoke up our hoops by telling us that we want to be citizens of a corrupted system we never asked to be a part of?

What happened this morning was a tragedy. I didn't like Shand or her groupies, but they sure as hell didn't deserve to be served up by those high-handed politicians sitting in the governor's mansion. That's what happened, you know. Brackhaven and his cronies couldn't burn us out of our homes, so they resorted to assassinating the face of Project Freedom. Normally, I wouldn't care about this shit, but that bomb killed a helluva lot more people than just Shand's groupies. Friends of mine were near that explosion. I bet friends of yours have been killed by all this political nonsense too.

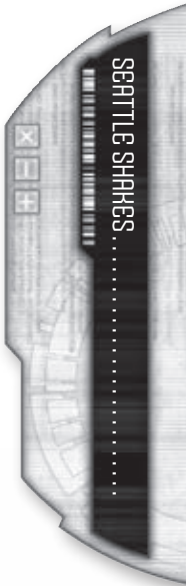
Well, I'm sick to death of it and I'm gonna do something about it. We're gonna take our complaints straight to Brackhaven and see how he likes it when his house gets firebombed. You in?

Might wanna bring a few of your friends. We need all the fire power we can scrounge up.

- Yeah, I've seen that drek. Still pisses me off. Buck better hope I don't find him before his other "friends" do.
- Bull

pair of terrorists, Harbinger and Anarchy, to remove the people currently in power and frame a group of sucker shadowrunners for the deed. Gordo managed to disappear into shadows, but Blackfern wasn't so lucky. Knight Errant hauled his sorry ass off to jail pending trial. As of yesterday, Blackfern was moved to a secret, secure location for reasons unknown.

- I'll bet anyone a dozen of Yak's designer donuts that he got himself into the witness protection program.
- Slamm-0!
- Double or nothing says his terrorist buddies tried to put him out of commission.
- Riser



@19:23:52/10-03-74

Joe Martin: We interrupt current programming to bring you this breaking news. Assistant District Attorney Mark Blackfern has called a press conference on the steps of the Main Street Courthouse to discuss today's horrific tragedy. He's just stepped up to the podium.

Blackfern: My fellow citizens, it is with great sorrow that I stand here before you in these dire times. Many times these words have been spoken, but never have they been so truly felt. Today Seattle is under attack. We are not attacked by foreign armies or wild spirits. Nor are we attacked by terrorists or gangs. No, my friends. We are assaulted by nothing more than common street thugs, petty criminals who refuse to follow the law and resolve their grievances in legitimate fashion. Today, six of my closest friends and colleagues were brutally murdered, including my dear boss, District Attorney David Beatty, and his dear, sweet wife. This criminals, these shadowrunners, gunned them down in cold blood while the Beattys, defenseless and unprotected, prepared themselves for bed. Then, to make matters worse, the Beatty household was looted in an attempt to make the murders appear like a robbery gone wrong. Likewise, ADA Oaks, ADA Bates, ADA Sinclair, ADA Schultz, ADA Nguyen, paralegal Wurtz, and members of their families were brutally murdered in their homes.

Is this what Seattle has become? Home to lawless, reckless criminals who show no mercy to those they victimize? These criminals have no shame. Not only do they violate the law, but they defile those who dare to hold up a higher standard, those of us who brighten the shadows of this city with the bright light of justice. Well, no more, I say. No longer will we allow this scum to taint the streets of Seattle, trying to overtake the legitimate government with their underhanded tactics. They shall not force their way into legitimacy by corrupting our political processes with their illegal legislation. They shall not come into our homes, steal the bread off our tables, murder our children and spouses. They shall not threaten us into submission with murderous sprees meant to invoke fear. For though they try to make us cower under our beds, to make us label them terrorists, we will not give them that power. These murders are nothing more than petty criminals who seek martyrdom for a cause that was doomed from the day it first reached the ballot.

I vow, in my capacity as Seattle's new District Attorney, that I will defend the citizens of this fair city from the unscrupulous criminal element. Join me, my fellow citizens, in standing up to these villains and their illiterate sympathizers. Join me in a brighter future for Seattle. Together we can put the criminal element back where it belongs!

Underground.

One final note. My sympathy goes out to the families of the deceased. I assure you I am doing everything in my power to bring these murderers to justice.

Martin: Mr. Blackfern, can you tell our audience ...

Blackfern: No questions please.

/feed terminated/

- Not a fan of Proposition 23, is he? Whatever happened to the runners he accused?
- /dev/grrl
- They were eventually cleared of all charges, but not until after their names and descriptions hit every newsfeed and Matrix chat in the area. They've been laying low ever since, waiting for the unwanted attention to die down.
- Sunshine

With Election Day right around the corner, Johnsons posted a fresh slew of jobs to skew the results both to sink Prop 23 or guarantee its success. The available jobs included character assassination, ballot box stuffing, voter intimidation, and more. My personal favorite was the job wanting a rumor started that the election was canceled on account of "lack of registered voters." As if people would actually believe elections could be canceled if there weren't enough voters to participate.

- Not everyone knows election law, Netcat. Voter suppression tactics are old tricks, dating back to when the United States existed (and possibly before), to prevent illiterate immigrants and freed slaves from having a political voice.
- Kay St. Irregular

The day before Election Day was the busiest I'd ever seen. Every runner in Seattle had a job. Nuyen practically fell from the sky. Many corps and businesses closed down for the day, letting their employees work from home or have the day off. I remember walking through downtown and seeing bars newly installed on storefront windows, as if that would prevent the expected post-election looting. Most of the people on the street were looking for trouble and demonstrating at every polling station in the city either for or against Prop 23. So it shouldn't have been a surprise when the violence broke out. Yet Knight Errant acted like rookie runners facing an MCT zero zone. Caught flat-footed and unprepared, they floundered and failed to stop the riot at Lefty's Lanes, the downtown polling station.

No one knows how the riot started. Humanis blamed the Sons of Sauron. The Sons of Sauron blamed Humanis. Some eyewitnesses claim KE started firing into the crowd without provocation. It really doesn't matter, though. Once the violence started, it flared up all over the city. President Colloton called up the Metroplex Guard and Joint Task Force: Seattle to assist Knight Errant with keeping things under control during the actual election.

In spite of the simmering tensions, the combined forces managed to keep things fairly calm. There was an incident at Lefty's Lanes in the middle of the night. A couple of groups, at least one of them a shadowrunning team, sneaked past KE security and hacked the polling node. The place got trashed and Knight Errant arrested quite a few people, but (as far as I know) didn't manage to catch the main perpetrators. There were a few similar incidents at other polling places, but no one else made it inside, let alone managed to hack the nodes. Still, it gave Brackhaven plenty of reason to cry foul when the results of the election came in. Proposition 23 passed with a margin of a mere one percent—47.5 percent of the voters were for it, and 46.5 percent voted against.

In the middle of all this last-minute chaos, Brackhaven's press secretary Edmund Jeffries up and vanished. I didn't think much of it at the time. I don't think many of us did until Sticks mentioned an offer to go looking for him. Even then, I had other things to concentrate on. It turns out Jeffries' disappearing act might have been more



INCOMING FEED.....



sinister than anyone imagined. It's not public knowledge yet, but Jeffries and Mathers were good friends. One of the recordings Mathers' made included a conversation where Jeffries, plastered out of his skull, joked that the Mayan Cutter could have taken out the upstarts behind Project Freedom and saved Seattle the bother of voting on the issue.

- FYI. That vid was recorded a few days before Mathers hired Walker to do the job.
- Slamm-0!
- Shit. I knew it! Brackhaven's been systematically killing the opposition.
- Snopes
- Doesn't seem to have worked out too well for him.
- Butch

THE HOME STRETCH

Posted by: Sounder

Incoming Message



HISTORY, TODAY! DOCUMENTARY

/streaming feed/PBS: enabled/ transcribing/

Welcome to History, Today! I'm your host Tsuli, and today we're going to discuss the historic 2074 elections of Seattle.

It's been called Prop 23, Project Freedom, and a bunch of filthy epithets that I won't repeat in public, but the bill—now a law—called Proposition 23 started off with humble origins. Groups of metahuman-rights activists (mainly the Ork Rights Committee and Mothers of Metahumanity) rallied to have the Ork Underground receive legal district status. Governor Kenneth Brackhaven's efforts to quash the movement initially appeared to be succeeding.

Governor Brackhaven's Humanis affiliations are rarely discussed. His now-deceased uncle Karl was chairman of the policlub for several decades running, a fact publicly acknowledged by Governor Brackhaven back in 2057 when he ran against Dunkelzahn for the highest political office in the UCAS.

Continued...

SEATTLE SHARKS.....



Incoming Message

...continued

Despite his widely rumored anti-meta beliefs, the governor cited economic reasons for denying the Underground's petition. Activist Helen Shand brought a breath of fresh air to the struggling movement and finally got it on the 2074 ballot. This caused a series of rallies and protests that quickly escalated into violence when a sniper opened up on one peaceful crowd. Knight Errant stepped in, providing security for the rallies to avoid further incidents.

Unfortunately, Seattle's problems were just beginning.

The Underground exploded. Sometimes literally.

Work sites were sabotaged, businesses vandalized. Then a group of mystery arsonists set a series of firebombs throughout the tunnels. Incendiary devices, handcrafted by someone with expertise in chemicals and explosives, started massive fires in random sections of the Underground. There seemed to be no pattern to the attacks save creating chaos. One bomb even ripped through a school full of children.

- Please tell me those bastards haven't been caught yet. I'd like to discuss their tactics with them before handing them over to those kids' parents for a little personal justice.
- Clockwork

Underground inhabitants blamed Alamos 20,000 for the attacks, though no one had any proof. Knight Errant's elite Black Knights team worked tirelessly to bring these arsonists to justice. Much to the disappointment of everyone, none of the arsonists were taken alive, despite efforts to the contrary. Before they died, the arsonists destroyed all evidence of their plans, their identities, and their connections. So far as anyone can tell, the arsonists were hired guns and had no desire to survive any attempts at interrogation.

Shortly after this incident ...

/feed terminated/

The disappearance of Press Secretary Edmund Jeffries took an interesting turn in the middle of the night when a contact of mine called me up. For those who don't follow Seattle politics, Jeffries disappeared the day before the election. It didn't seem to be a big deal until the shadows started rumbling. Someone wanted Jeffries located and was willing to pay a decent chunk of nuyen for a character assassination.

I was following up Riser's info on Fred Tennison when my contact mentioned he did some work for Tennison. Met the guy in person that morning for a quick little riot-starting gig. Tennison bore all the signs of a first-timer being managed by a third party, but his intel was good and he paid, which is all a runner can really ask for these days. Contact doesn't know who was behind

Tennison, but mentioned he saw Jeffries at the International Haus of Waffles a few blocks down from the riot scene, talking to a KE officer. When the riot broke out, both Jeffries and the cop took off, but Jeffries left behind a briefcase containing a certified credstick, an encrypted datachip, and a disposable commlink.

Damned if Jeffries didn't use the damn commlink to call up my contact and make an offer to get everything back. Here's a snippet, proof of life if you will.

Incoming Message

>>>>BEGIN //Upload Email: user: Sounder::
12/14/2074

//Message Timestamp: 11/05/74 11:17:46

//ID: FAWEE-08pq33-NQ#1244cx

Hello, omae. My name is Edmund Jeffries. It appears you have something of mine. Don't panic. I have no intentions of calling the authorities on you. In fact, if you're in the mood for a little extra something, I'd like to offer you a job. 2,000 nuyen for each member of your team for delivery of the briefcase and all its original contents to a friend of mine. Interested?

<3.5 Mbs deleted>

>>>>END Jeffries Message

- SHIT! That commlink ID is from the batch of stolen counterfeits. As is the one retrieved from the Copycat Cutter job, and the one retrieved from the arsonists who bombed the Underground earlier this year. Sounder, can you PM me that message snippet? I need it for evidence.
- Bull
- I thought the arsonists didn't leave anything behind when they died in that firefight.
- /dev/grrl
- Yep. But the team I hired to chase them down managed to rescue one crispy-fried 'link from the battle. It took forever to get any usable data from that piece of scrap.
- Bull
- Message sent, Bull. Let me know if you need anything else to help nail that bastard to the wall.
- Sounder
- Sounder, is everything okay?
- Puck
- I have family in the Underground. My niece was near the school when the arsonists hit it.
- Sounder

My contact sanitized the rest of the message to protect his team and him from reprisal. I thought he was being paranoid until he showed me a picture of the cop. Short woman with curly, chopped hair. Horizontal scar across her nose. Always wears AR sunglasses and has a mean-ass attitude. Ring any bells?

SEATTLE SHAKES.....



Kudos if you guessed Tia Viamonte. This 14th Precinct cop has quite the reputation for a woman who spends so much of her on-duty time watching trideo and eating out at restaurants. The local gangers are terrified of her even though her colleagues don't think much of her.

- Avoid her at all costs. That woman is brutal and takes no prisoners when she's unsupervised. I've patched up too many runners who crossed her path and barely survived.
- Butch
- I ran into her once when I worked a quick job in Seattle. She didn't seem too bad. A little parochial, maybe, but a decent cop.
- Glasswalker

I did a little more prodding and found out that Viamonte isn't just any old cop. She's a card-carrying member of Alamos 20k and, Slamm-0! will be thrilled to know, the mastermind behind the ballot-box stuffing scheme at Lefty's Lanes that left the place in pieces.

- I owe you, Sounder!
- Slamm-0!

THE HIGH COST OF STUFFING

Posted by: Smiling Bandit

It seems people are starting to feel the pain the Aztlan-Amazonia war a little closer to home. While researching the Black Rain that decimated so much of Aztlan's farmland, I came across the following messages. If this is any indication of what's to come, I strongly advise everyone to stock up on supplies now while there's still supplies to be had at relatively cheap prices.

Incoming Message ...

TO: Marcus Vazquez,
VP Distribution & Resource Relations, Mexico City
FROM: Tatia Costel, Manager, Stuffer Shack 43876, Seattle
PRIORITY: URGENT

Dear Mr. Vazquez,

I am writing to you to address a serious concern regarding the shipping schedule slippage. I have reported this issue to the local area shipping manager and then to the regional distribution manager, but have not received satisfactory answers from either of them. Therefore, I am bringing this issue to someone with the power to resolve the issue.

Since I became manager of Stuffer Shack 43876, I have increased profitability above and beyond any store in my area or region. Store 43876 has won numerous awards for leading sales, excellent customer service, and lowest inventory waste. I mention this last because it is important for you to understand that I always order exactly enough, and no more, perishable foodstuffs to get through one week of operation to avoid the excess waste that so many Stuffer Shacks suffer from.

So when the weekly truck did not arrive in mid-September, I was dismayed that half my shelves would be empty until the next week. The store lost sales, Mr. Vazquez. I do not like it when my bottom line is affected. At first, I thought the cause might be cargo theft. Perhaps shadowrunners intercepted the truck. But a call to the local distribution center revealed that no trucks went out that week due to an unexplained disruption in the supply chain. The manager promised the trucks would go out the next week, so I considered the matter solved. Two weeks later, there was another "service disruption." This time, the truck came with only half the expected order.

This pattern continues. Some weeks the store does not receive its shipment, some weeks the store only gets a bare minimum of stock. Yesterday, I received ten sandwiches. I ordered over five hundred different items and I received ten sandwiches. Unless this situation is immediately remedied, I will be forced to close the store.

Please respond at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,
Tatia Costel

TO: Tatia Costel, Manager, Stuffer Shack 43876, Seattle
FROM: Marcus Vazquez, VP Distribution & Resource Relations, Mexico City
PRIORITY: Normal

Dear Ms. Costel,

My regrets for the inconvenience you have suffered. I have dispatched agents to resolve your delivery problem and you will receive your usual order before the day is out. Please be aware that unforeseen circumstances have driven up the costs of many processed foodstuffs. You will see the breakdown in the attached invoice.

Thank you for your patience and loyalty to the Stuffer Shack chain.

Sincerely,
Marcus Vazquez

<ATTACHMENT: INVOICE STORE 43876>

TO: Marcus Vazquez, VP Distribution & Resource Relations, Mexico City
FROM: Tatia Costel, Manager, Stuffer Shack 43876, Seattle
PRIORITY: URGENT

Dear Mr. Vazquez,

Thank you for expediting matters with the delivery situation. I have received the last shipment promptly and fully accounted for. However, this invoice indicates a twenty-five percent increase on the price of all foodstuffs. Surely this can't be correct.

Could you please explain the unforeseen circumstances referenced in your previous communication?

Sincerely,
Tatia Costel

TO: Tatia Costel, Manager, Stuffer Shack 43876, Seattle
FROM: Marcus Vazquez, VP Distribution & Resource Relations, Mexico City
PRIORITY: Normal

Dear Ms. Costel,

My regrets for the confusion your invoice has caused you. I have reviewed the items on your invoice and agree that the pricing increase was stated incorrectly. It should have been thirty-five percent, not twenty-five percent. Thank you for catching that error and I will ensure our billing department corrects all its records.

Let me know if you have any further questions on the issue. Thank you for your patience and loyalty to the Stuffer Shack chain.

Sincerely,
Marcus Vazquez

TO: All Employees, Stuffer Shack 43876, Seattle
FROM: Tatia Costel, Manager, Stuffer Shack 43876, Seattle
PRIORITY: URGENT

Due to unforeseen circumstances, Stuffer Shack 43876 will be operating on limited hours with a reduced workforce. Your loyalty to the brand, the store, and myself were noted and appreciated, but we will no longer require the services of the part-time staff. If you need a letter of recommendation for your next position, please let me know at your earliest convenience.

Thank you again for your patience and loyalty to Stuffer Shack.
Sincerely,
Tatia Costel

SEATTLE SHARKS

OP

- I know that store. It's just down the street from where I used to live. Just as I looked it up on Seattle GridGuide, the location got marked as closed and was removed from the map.
- Beaker
- I have noticed food prices rising the past few months, especially at the Stuffer Shacks, but I thought that was just an Omaha thing. What's going on?
- Turbo Bunny

Incoming Message

Dear Constituent,

On behalf of my husband, Governor Brackhaven, I am pleased to welcome you and your kin to Seattle. As you know, we recently passed a law that brought all residents of the Ork Underground into the Seattle metroplex family. Welcome to your brand-new life as a legal and contributing member of society.

What you may not know is that Kenny has opened up a fund to give all new citizens of Seattle a six hundred nuyen tax credit for the next five years. This tax credit will be sent to your bank account immediately, and on the first of every year thereafter. Think of it, my friend. Six hundred nuyen with which you can pay medical bills, buy groceries, or put a down payment on a new apartment. But you can only receive this credit if you register with the online census committee. Click this [link] here for more details.

Again, Kenny and I are thrilled to add you to our ever-growing family of friends and constituents. We look forward to speaking with you—and don't forget to register to vote!

**Sincerely,
Mrs. Brackhaven**

- Is anyone else getting sick of that Mrs. Brackhaven malspam? I don't know how that crap got on my private commlink, because I don't give that number out to just anyone, but between Election Day and today, I've gotten at least 800 of these messages. At least half of them are selling property in the Underground.
- Ma'fan
- Clean your comm.
- Pistons
- Tried that. It's not working. I finally had to toss it and buy a new one, and the new one came with the spam already in the inbox.
- Ma'fan
- If you want someone to take a look at it, message Slamm-0!. He's good at killing that crap and he needs the work.
- Netcat

- Ma'fan, she said message me, not send me a virus!
- Slamm-0!
- ARGH. I'm going to kill something!
- Ma'fan
- Chill, Ma'fan. I think I've traced the source. Some wanna-be located right here in Seattle. Oh, this is gonna be fun. I lost the hacker's trail at the public node for Brackhaven Investments. Clever. Hey, Bull, how does that fixer thing work exactly?
- Slamm-0!
- Are you asking because you want to learn the fixer trade or for some other reason?
- Bull
- I just stumbled across a reference to a real-estate transfer between Brackhaven Investments and the city government, but the node suddenly went all strange and I lost access. This may require an in-house touch, but I've got to watch the baby and Netcat's working the Bloom job. Got anybody local who could help?
- Slamm-0!
- As a matter of fact, I know just the team. Let's take this to PM.
- Bull

LAND GRAB OF THE LOWEST BIDDER

Posted by: Bull

Leave it to the scum of the planet to take advantage of those who have nothin' else to lose. Since Election Day, Brackhaven has ordered three ballot recounts because each time the numbers seem to come up a little different. Even accounting for the forged or just plain invalid ballots, the Prop 23 vote is just not going his way. Every time he tries to invalidate a new set of ballots, a new group of absentee ballots floats to the top needing to be counted and skewing the results right back in the direction he doesn't want the count to go.

During the last recount, a group of Brackhaven's lower-class friends showed up at the election center to "assist" with the recount. They carried recount tools—i.e. baseball bats and Ares Predators—while the head goon helped invalidate a stack of the paper ballots by tipping them over in the trash. This state of affairs lasted about five minutes before Knight Errant showed up and escorted the assistant counters outside in handcuffs. Knight Errant kept a close eye on the center until they finished the third recount. The governor took time out of his busy schedule to show up in person for the results and was about to order a forth recount when a court officer showed up with a signed order from a federal judge. Eliza Bloom, bless her heart, figured out what Brackhaven was up to and sued to have the recounts ended.

Judge Cobb agreed with her argument that Governor Brackhaven was wasting taxpayer money at a time when Seattle had little of it to waste, and she ordered the election commissioner to officially certify the results. So, in front of Brackhaven, the poll workers, the independent election auditors, and God himself, the commissioner did just that. He also relayed the judge's mandate that the Underground be recognized as an official metroplex



district as of 12:01 a.m. January 1st regardless of census status, survey progress, or any other organizational issues. Judge Cobb has ordered representatives of the Underground and the Brackhaven administration to appear before her in three days to sort out the most important political, organizational, and administrative issues so that there is no further delay in the admittance of the Underground into Seattle's political structure.

In a few short days, the dream becomes a reality. My arm is black and blue from the number of pinches I've given myself over the past few weeks. It's real. I still can't believe it, or the fact that Cobb knows enough about this mess to ask for my presence by name.

- Now we just need to get you elected as governor of Seattle.
- Slamm-0!

- Some days I really hate you.
- Bull

It seems a day doesn't go by now without the adspam and the door-to-door salesmen pitching new SIN registration. Now it's not just local petty thieves looking to part the gullible with their last bit of cred. More sophisticated scammers have shown up, some of them associated with organized crime, stealing both cred and identity information. Within hours of filling out the registration forms, and including detailed personal backgrounds, these people's lives are being sold on the fake SIN market to runners like you and I, or to spy agencies and other organizations. It doesn't matter if Brackhaven caves in and offers these people real SINS. Some of these folks have already lost everything, and their registrations will never pass because someone halfway across the planet will have earned them a criminal SIN or left behind enough evidence to prove they're the real Sly McCoy, not the guy living in the apartment next to me who got scammed out of his healthcare and employability by signing that damn form.

On top of that, the Underground has suddenly become full to the gills of city workers who are tearing apart tunnels, streets, and even buildings to lay down city infrastructure. A few crews have even kicked people out of their homes and ripped out the foundations. Survey teams are forcing their way into businesses and residences, flashing their ID, and threatening to have people arrested if they refuse to cooperate.

- They can't do that! Can they?
- /dev/grrl

The Underground is in a panic and panicked people do one of three things: run, obey authority, or start a fight. Most of the residents and business owners targeted by the survey crews and construction teams are the ones most likely to do as ordered or run. Very few fights have broken out, because these intruders know who their marks are.

Yes, I'm deliberately using the word "marks." That's because none of these goons are who they say they are. Brackhaven has been dragging his goddamn feet trying not to incorporate the Underground. My intel tells me that he hasn't sent a single order out for a survey, census, or any utility work. I've got people trying to figure out who these intruders actually are. Skraacha has done a great service in identifying some

of the mob's soldiers. The remnants of Junior's family are also assisting with this. They've identified several dozen members of the Vory, Triad, Yakuza, and competing Mafia families who have pulled the construction and survey scams. But new people are coming in every day, and the Underground is so big that it's just too damn hard to keep up.

- The Finnegan family is too busy cleaning up the mess left behind by Buck to take advantage of the current opportunities. They're not happy about what he did, but they're too busy with internal strife to track him down. Dona O'Malley has put a bounty on his head. Just his head, mind. She doesn't care what happens to the rest of him.
- Glasswalker

- Influential members of the community are hiring bodyguards to protect them from the scammers and the gang members. It's easy money since no one is actually shooting at them right now. Mostly they want an intimidating presence at their shoulder to scare off the trash.
- Bull

- Would you believe the Black Knights are looking for new blood? I got a message in my inbox asking me to contact Detective Athack for details!
- /dev/grrl

- Are you sure it isn't just spam? Or malware?
- Ma'fan

The families that left their homes have already lost their homes. The people who chased them out, however, immediately drew up deeds and are either occupying the property themselves or selling it. Since there is no such thing as a property title here in the Underground, those who got kicked out can't actually prove the houses belong to them. And the neighbors are too intimidated by the scammers' hired muscle to help them out.

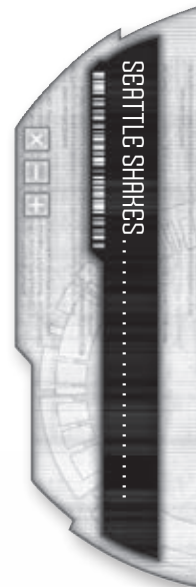
Since Judge Cobb's order, a new player has come to town. Renraku representatives came into the Big Rhino and asked me and the other Project Freedom leaders for a meeting. I did a little research while waiting for the meeting. Their credentials checked out. The reps were who they said they were. When the others got to the Big Rhino, the Renraku reps introduced themselves and then presented an offer to legitimately register Underground inhabitants with SINS as well as assist with revitalization efforts in exchange for a few small pieces of property where they could open storefronts and a Renraku community center.

They're giving us time to think about their offer, but they warned us we should decide fast, before everyone in the Underground gets their identities stolen out from under them.

I have no idea how to take this.

- Maybe they just want to help.
- Mika

- And maybe that was a pig I saw flying overhead.
- Ma'fan



- I saw a pig with wings once. It was an Evo experiment for gene-engineered pets. The wings weren't quite strong enough to get it off the ground, but with the current rate of biotech advancement, I wouldn't be surprised if pigs start flying in the next few years. Just sayin'.
- The Smiling Bandit

CHRISTMAS MIRACLES

Posted by: Sunshine

There are few things that warm the cockles of my jaded journalistic heart like the sound of an arrogant prick going splat on the pavement from one hundred fifty meters high. Metaphorically speaking of course. And when that fall from grace happens to someone who has caused a great deal of pain to people I know, it makes the warm fuzzy even warmer and fuzzier.

For those of you who may have been otherwise occupied, I point you to exhibit A, where a federal grand jury has just indicted the not-so-loveable Edmund Jeffries on twelve counts of embezzlement, two counts of intent to commit fraud, six counts of fraud, twenty-nine counts of election fraud, eight counts of ballot tampering, seven counts of obstruction of justice, fifty counts of conspiracy to commit murder, three counts of accessory to murder, five counts of conspiracy to commit kidnapping, eight counts of accessory to arson, sixteen counts of conspiracy to commit arson, and two counts of manslaughter.

Now in my humble opinion, the manslaughter charges are a little overkill, probably just tacked on because the jury was having so much fun adding charges to the list that they couldn't stop. Regardless, it's going to be an interesting trial. Especially since Jeffries is still missing in action. A bench warrant has been issued for his arrest and the FBI is offering a reward for information leading to his capture. My intel tells me DA Oaks is once again indulging alternative hiring practices and put an offer out to several groups for Jeffries' safe return to her office.

Yes, Virginia, Santa Claus does exist. She goes by the name of Dana Oaks when she stands in front of a judge, and she's got really nice legs to boot.

- Sunshine and Dana sitting in a tree. K. I. S. S. I. N. G. Good morning, everybody! What did I miss?
- FastJack
- 'Jack, are you feeling okay?
- Kat o' Nine Tales

//repost from: TrumanNews homepage, 12/24/2074

MISSING STAFFER IMPLICATED IN EMBEZZLEMENT SCANDAL, TIED TO SHADOWRUNNERS

Scope of the Parker-Quinn scandal widens

Edmund Jeffries, Seattle Governor Brackhaven's missing press secretary, was indicted in absentia today by a federal grand jury for multiple counts of fraud, conspiracy, and murder. Seattle metroplex District Attorney Dana Oaks commissioned the grand jury in the weeks leading up to the 2074 election to investigate links between Jeffries and the Copycat Mayan Cutter serial killer, Sean Walker, who murdered several inhabitants of the Ork Underground around the start of 2073. Evidence was discovered in late March connecting Walker to Knight Errant VP George Mathers, also missing and presumed dead by detectives close to the case, and Mathers to Jeffries.

According to the court filings, Jeffries embezzled city utility funds to hire shadowrunners to disrupt pro-Prop 23 rallies, murder ORC activists, and burn the Ork Underground district—an act that resulted in the deaths of over a dozen children when one fire bomb went off in a school.

Jeffries disappeared on November 5th, the day before the election, along with over fifty million UCAS dollars stolen from the city worker retirement fund. The fund, managed by Brackhaven Investments, held the life savings of hundreds of mid-level city workers. Concerned by the unsustainable growth of Brackhaven Investments' funds and trades, the SEC announced yesterday that they were opening an investigation. This morning an SEC spokesperson confirmed the investigation and added that Jeffries' ability to loot a fund to which he should have had no access only increases the SEC's concern that something is seriously wrong at the company.

In the meantime, the House Ethics Committee published a list of six senators and twenty-three congresspeople who were involved in the Sunset Vacations ad-buy scam, including the committee's chairperson, Congresswoman Cara Luciano. Sunset Vacations was recently outed by Seattle news corp KSAF as a wholly owned subsidiary of Brackhaven Investments, formerly known as Sunset Realty. Three years ago, a Lone Star investigation into shady real estate practices implicated Sunset Vacations as the main perpetrator in a deed-washing scam that purchased previously owned properties from the Seattle government for pennies on the dollar, converted them into orphaned parcels, and then sold them to wealthy Seattleites, high-level corporate management, and politicians for far more than the properties were actually worth.

Three members of Brackhaven's cabinet resigned this morning shortly after the committee's report came out. Whether or not they are connected to this scandal remains to be seen. But a source inside the Seattle District Attorney's office confirmed that DA Oaks, the FBI, and the House Ethics Committee have recently entered an information-sharing arrangement due to the overlap in all of these cases.



INCOMING FEED.....

THE HIGHER THEY ARE

Posted by: Slamm-0!

It's been a hell of a night. The Underground decided to throw a New Year's Eve party to end all New Year's Eve parties, or at least to put them to shame. For once, nobody was hiding, and nobody was making threats. Everyone locked up their weapons and came to the party—the district's first party, as it was billed in the invites. The Big Rhino Bar and Grill had decorations, physical and AR, covering every possible empty space. So did most of the Underground. The business district held a street party with DJs, games, and a huge buffet. The local merchants sponsored the event, providing the eats and the beer for free. Harder drinks had to be paid for, of course. It wasn't anything fancy, but a lot of these people haven't had fresh cooked meals in years, so they acted like they were feasting at the some exotic high-priced restaurant.

When the party kicked into gear, there was no hate-filled rhetoric, no social boundaries. These were people of all races and all income levels getting together and celebrating the end of an incredible year. A lot of tourists showed up to bar hop and ingratiated themselves by buying rounds for the house at each place they ended up.

Three big AR bells that someone had programmed into every storefront rang in midnight all at the same time, and that's when the booms started. At first, we thought it was just some DJ playing Troll Punk with the bass cranked up, but as the booms continued to echo, the glassware started shaking, dust shifted down from the ceilings, and an old water pipe broke. The

shaking lasted for a full moment, but no one seemed hurt. So, after a moment of watching and waiting to see if anything else happened, the party continued.

About an hour later, the same thing happened, only less with the boom and more with the shake. This time, it lasted for five minutes, though it felt like forever. The earthquakes pretty much put an end to the party. The tourists, terrified the Underground was about to cave in, ran for the hills. The locals had already started packing it in after the first one, but there were a few diehards who continued to party till dawn.

- Like you?
- 2XL
- The LA newsfeeds called it a 5.7 on the old Richter Scale. They didn't mention anything about two quakes, though. A few amateur vids were posted in the comments section showing the collapse of a few buildings, but nothing official has been reported. Is it a prank?
- Sunshine
- The collapsing buildings are real, and they're city property, which is probably why there's been no official comment yet. The collateral damage includes a school, a train station in the middle of a remodel, a courthouse, and a library. All of these buildings were built using lowest-bidder construction goods, including some cheap nanoware, and they were built by the companies who paid off Parker and Quinn for the contracts.
- Netcat

- How's that Bloom job going?
- Hard Exit
- Just about finished, actually. The team may have just mapped the majority of Brackhaven Investments shell companies and subsidiaries.
- Netcat
- I'm posting the list in our high-risk jobs thread. You will all want to read it before you take your next job. Brackhaven has been using his shell company employees to hire runners for suicide missions. Some of those "Mr. or Ms. Johnson to avoid" names are part of this list.
- Mr. Bonds
- Vemonte Chemicals plant is on that list? That can't be right. That company's known for its meta-friendly hiring practices. It employees over thirty percent of the metro area's low-income workers.
- Sounder
- There's a reason the plant has such a high employee turnover, Sounder. The employees are exposed to toxic fumes and carcinogens on a daily basis, which register well above the regulatory emissions limit. I've documented over three hundred cases of cancer and other genetic maladies that have gone unreported. The plant hasn't had a decent safety inspection in years because George Mathers uses his connections to rubberstamp the official paperwork. That's what Brackhaven Investments pays him an consultation fee for.
- Mr. Bonds
- And the paydata just keeps coming. Someone's leaking information from Oaks' grand jury investigation. Looks like they managed to get some drones inside that haven't been picked up by the daily sweep. This little gem just showed up for sale on my board.
- Orbital DK

**//upload Grand Jury Video Transcript: Émile Corrigan
Testimony 12/27/2012**

OAKS: Mr. Corrigan, please tell us where you were on March 28, 2074.

CORRIGAN: In Governor Brackhaven's office at the governor's mansion.

OAKS: And what were you doing there?

CORRIGAN: Discussing the extent of the Parker-Quinn embezzlement scandal. The administration was in damage-control mode.

OAKS: Please explain to the jury what "damage-control mode" means.

CORRIGAN: It means ... forgive me, Ms. Oaks, but is this really necessary?

OAKS: This is a grand jury investigation, Mr. Corrigan, and you are under oath.

CORRIGAN: I could get fired for this. The governor is not the most forgiving man and his temper has been a little unpredictable lately.

OAKS: All witness testimony will be sealed, Mr. Corrigan, and the jury has been instructed not to speak of this case to anyone. No one will know what you say here. If you think you'll need police protection, I would be happy to assign a Knight Errant unit to protect you. Now, please, explain the term "damage-control mode" to the jury.

CORRIGAN: Damage-control mode is a term commonly used by politicians to describe the act of covering up damaging, or potentially damaging, information. Staffers are given the official party line, instructed not to comment to reporters, and sometimes even instructed to lie about events.

OAKS: Does damage control also cover the destruction of evidence?

CORRIGAN: It can. Files are wiped, e-mails and communications are sanitized, documents are misplaced, and physical papers might be redacted or shredded.

OAKS: When you and Governor Brackhaven discussed the Parker-Quinn scandal, did he give you any specific instructions?

CORRIGAN: He ... I ...

OAKS: Mr. Corrigan?

CORRIGAN: <heavy sigh> He gave me the same instructions he always gives me when he asks me to handle a problem. He told me to do whatever it took to solve the problem.

OAKS: And how exactly did you solve the problem?

CORRIGAN: I contacted George Mathers, vice president of public relations at Knight Errant, for assistance. He hired a technomancer, one of those shadowrunners, to remove the governor's personal information from Parker's and Quinn's charity accounts. This way, any investigation into the matter would reveal that the pair acted alone.

OAKS: Is George Mathers' on the governor's payroll?

CORRIGAN: He does not draw a salary from the governor's office.

OAKS: That's not the question I asked, Mr. Corrigan. Does Governor Brackhaven in his capacity as governor or as a private citizen pay Mr. Mathers as an employee?

CORRIGAN: I ... believe ... Mr. Mathers may be on the payroll of one of Brackhaven Investments' subsidiaries as a special consultant or something. But I have no specific knowledge of this other than a rumor I once heard.

OAKS: Mr. Corrigan, are you aware of Mr. Mathers' relationship with Press Secretary Edmund Jeffries?

CORRIGAN: What? No! They have a relationship?

OAKS: Who exactly did Press Secretary Jeffries take direction from regarding the administration's stance on Proposition 23?

CORRIGAN: Why the governor, of course. Why do you ask?

THE HARDER THEY FALL

Posted by: Netcat

As the Brackhaven scandal continues to unwind, I have to tell you that I just completed what may be the best job I've ever taken. I've never met some of these runners before Bloom threw us together, but I'm definitely going to keep them on my short list. They are damn good at what they do, even if they do need a little more polish. We worked our collective butts off. Whoever covered this mess up did a hell of a job. Retrieving the files and data trails were almost impossible.

But the Resonance never forgets. My head may feel like an arcology just dropped on it, and I'm too sick to my stomach to eat a proper meal, but I'll be damned if it wasn't worth it.

Thanks to the team's best efforts, Eliza Bloom—and DA Oaks by extension—now has a mountain of evidence linking one Governor Kenneth Brackhaven to a laundry list of financial crimes, tax evasion, bribery, extortion, conspiracy, racketeering, and other crimes that I can't even think of. While there's no proof he has actually been a member of Humanis, Alamos 20k, or the Human League, he has sponsored many of their activities using money from the federal budget. His company, Brackhaven Investments, has defrauded its investors and is involved in a pyramid scheme of monumental proportions, using city taxes and the lower-income investors to pay off the big investors. Funds earmarked for rebuilding the Barrens have instead been used to hire shadowrunners to intimidate grand jury members, gather blackmail material on the grand jury's witnesses, and to attempt to kill Detective Athack, DA Oaks, Judge Cobb, and Judge Turner, who is overseeing the grand jury.

The best bit is a video file located by one team member showing Brackhaven in his private office, ranting to his staffers.

He admits to sending people into the election center to alter the recount; he admits to orchestrating the kidnapping of Eliza Bloom's mother so Bloom would retire from the election; he admits to firing LoneStar because a few lowly cops were investigating his precious company; and he admits to using his position as governor to line his own pockets at the expense of the "trog horde."

Long story short: Brackhaven's screwed. Best day ever!

- No fucking way.
- Sunshine
- Well, he didn't blatantly shout out "I did it," but there were enough specific details in his rant that there is no way for him to avoid criminal charges. Whether or not he can bribe his way out of a guilty verdict, though, is another matter.
- Mr. Bonds
- A mob has materialized on the lawn of the governor's mansion. They've got physical and AR signs demanding Brackhaven's impeachment.
- Butch
- Brackhaven's Renton neighborhood is suffering from a string of robberies and arsons this past week. His own home hasn't been hit, but that's because no one seems to know which house is actually his. All the red tape surrounding property ownership in that area makes it impossible to tell who really lives where.
- Clockwork

TRUTHMATTERS

Posted by: Plan 9

TruthMatters is one of the most respected private chat-rooms on the Matrix. You have to be invited, and you have to be a serious contributor to get an invitation. Contrary to popular belief, this isn't a group of crazy conspiracy theorists willing to believe that dragons have established colonies on Venus or that kind of drek. We discuss real issues, uncover factual incidents, and search for the truth and culprits behind the most heinous true conspiracies of our time. So when this idiot showed up, we actually expected an intelligent discussion. Even I couldn't believe the shit he was spewing, but I found it entertaining enough that I wanted to share. But there's no way this is true. Right?

//Upload Transcript: user: Plan-9:: 01/23/2075

Tinman: The Black Lodge has more influence than you might think.

<Bam-Bam has logged in>

Bear Who Walks: How so?

Tinman: Several of their known members descended in droves on Vatican City the day before news of the Pope's illness hit the Matrix. You don't think they're there by accident, do you?

<SINdy has logged in>

Plan 9: That's not what I said, Tinman. Hey, SINdy. What's up?

<Ricker has logged in>

SINdy: The sun, the moon, the stars, the clouds, the sky ...

Ricker: Hello, all. Am I late?

Plan 9: Nope. The comedy duo fun is just starting.

Bear Who Walks: You sound so sure about that, SINdy. What if the sky is down instead?

SINdy: You should change your name to "Man Who Thinks He's Funny." It'll save a lot of time. People will shoot at you before you start a conversation, not wait until they get to know you.

Ricker: <snort> Dare I ask the current topic of conversation?

Bear Who Walks: Watch it, girl. I know where you live.

SINdy: Love you too, Dad.

Tinman: We're discussing how far the Black Lodge has managed to infiltrate governments. I'm researching their influence on the College of Cardinals.

Bam-Bam: There's a bigger threat than the Black Lodge. One that's about to cause some serious damage in UCAS.

Plan 9: It's generally considered polite to introduce yourself and your creds before interjecting into the conversation.

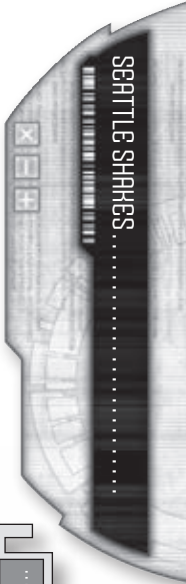
Bam-Bam: Sorry. It's just that I've seen something horrific and it's scaring the hell outta me. I'm Bam-Bam. I live in Seattle and work in the Office of Internal Affairs.

Ricker: You work for Knight Errant?

Bam-Bam: Not quite. But I've been to Detroit, gone through the academy. Listen, I don't mean to interrupt, but how much do you know about what's going on in Seattle?

Bear Who Walks: Enough to stay the hell out of Seattle. Those people are crazy.

SINdy: If you're talking about the Project Freedom rumors, we've already had that conversation. There's not a whole lot there other than pure stupidity.



Incoming Message ...



Bam-Bam: I'm talking about Brackhaven, Parker, Corrigan, Jeffries, and Brackhaven's cabinet. You know why Parker quit, right? Why Jeffries disappeared?

Plan 9: We're listening.

Bam-Bam: Martin Parker discovered the bugs. That's the real reason he quit without notice.

Ricker: One, Parker didn't quit. He was very publicly fired due to an embezzlement scandal cover up. Brackhaven needed a scapegoat so pinned the whole thing on his chief of staff so he wouldn't be investigated. Two, there are a lot of people eavesdropping on Brackhaven. Whose bugs are you referring to? The FBI's? The CIA's?

Bam-Bam: Not those kind of bugs, drekhead. BUGS. Insect spirits. The entire cabinet is possessed. Jeffries didn't disappear. He died during an investiture attempt, then his body was burned in the governor's crematorium.

SINDy: I'm sorry. Did you just say "the governor's crematorium"?

Bam-Bam: Yes. Don't you listen to the chatter? Brackhaven had the crematorium built in the basement of the governor's mansion the day after he first became governor of Seattle so he could burn all the bodies of his enemies. His first victim was the man who did all the construction. Since then, Brackhaven's fired it up at least once a week to destroy evidence of everything and anything. You don't think the bugs took over Seattle in a day, do you? They've been there for YEARS! And now they're getting ready to infiltrate the Ork Underground and turn all the orks into an army to help the bugs take over the entire UCAS.

Tinman: What kind of insect spirits?

Bam-Bam: Does it matter?

Bear Who Walks: Actually, yes. Different insect spirits have different abilities and require different tactics to be defeated.

Bam-Bam: They are BUGS, damn it! Big compound eyes, wings, mandibles capable of tearing apart dragons. We need to stop them before they kill us all.

Plan 9: Bugs don't generally kill people unless they are attacked or sense some other threat. They much prefer to use us as vessels for more of their own kind.

Bam-Bam: That's the problem! Don't you see? We're insect food, we're all nothing but insect food and Brackhaven is their queen. And he's going to tear Seattle apart <Bam-Bam has disconnected.>

Ricker: Sorry, but I had to bounce him. If I had to listen to that nonsense for another moment, I might have actually gone insane.

SINDy: It's okay. I almost feel sorry for the guy. He really believes that story.

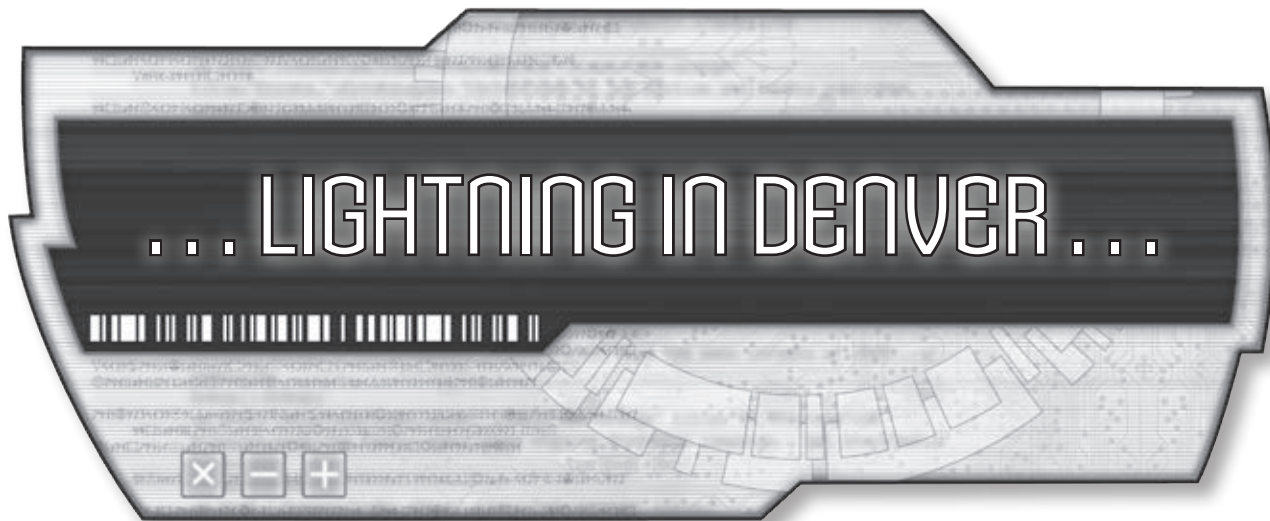
Plan 9: Ha. I almost want to sneak into the governor's mansion to see if there really is a crematorium there.

- I think the funniest part of this discussion is reading a conversation where Plan 9 is the reasonable one.
- /dev/grll

Addendum: 01/15/2075

- Netcat, when was the last time you talked to Eliza Bloom?
- Bull
- Two days ago. Why?
- Netcat
- Her mother contacted me. She was hysterical. I could barely understand a word she said until she said the name Dietrich.
- Bull
- As in FBI Agent Seth Dietrich?
- Netcat
- I don't know, but I'm looking into it. If he's turned up, though, Brackhaven's bad month is about to find a way to get even worse.
- Bull





- At first, we didn't have any idea what was happening in Denver. The events that made the newsfeed on our little corner of the Matrix seemed like unrelated incidents, when we caught them at all. Only later, in the fullness of hindsight, was it even possible to attempt to connect the dots. If you wish to do so now, here is everything that happened, in chronological order, and our commentary on it at the time.

One thing is clear, though: No one was prepared for this.

- FastJack

SEPTEMBER 1: PERIANWYR ARRESTED FOR SPIRIT SUMMONING & "TREASON"

Posted By: Kat o' Nine Tales

Denver isn't really my town, but Perianwyr is my kind of dragon, and this is just dreadfully bad news. Because nearly absolute power over a city-state is apparently all the justification Ghostwalker ever needs to act like an absolute asshole all the time, the white wyrm has taken his draconic cousin Perianwyr into state custody. Officially, Ghostwalker's office has released a statement that Perianwyr is being held until he is tried for both "illegal bondage of sapient beings" and "treason."

- Wait, Ghostwalker can just arrest people like, openly? He has judicial powers and whatnot? I didn't think he really rolled that way.
- /dev/grrl
- Because he is a dragon, Perianwyr's "citizenship" is an open question. The Front Range Free Zone arresting people for trial while Ghostwalker serves as judge, jury, and executioner isn't common, but it's not without precedent either. None of the nation-states whose districts are part of Denver are particularly eager to claim Perianwyr when Ghostwalker is this pissed off.
- Kat St. Irregular
- Illegal bondage of sapient what? Perianwyr is being held for ... slave trading?
- Turbo Bunny

- Yes and no; he's been arrested for summoning a spirit, which is now legally the same thing. Upon his re-emergence back in March, Ghostwalker outlawed the spontaneous summoning, binding, and banishing of spirits in Denver, punishable by expulsion or imprisonment. Needless to say, this was a big deal to all of the region's mages. It's frankly an insane law, and this is the most dramatic and public example I've seen of it actually being enforced.

- Ethernaut

- It was She of the City, not Ghostwalker, with whom this decree originated. I shall see what the spirits of Denver think of this law's "sanity," and the "sanity" of the alternative, now that I have arrived in Denver.

- Axis Mundi

- What about the treason part? That seems rather old school. Must be referring to that Aztechnology thing, right?

- Kane

- Aztechnology thing?

- Pistons

- When the Second Treaty of Denver was supposed to be renewed, Ghostwalker made his sudden reappearance and was eyeing the Aztechnology delegation like they were standing on a buffet table. Perianwyr put himself between Ghostwalker and the AZT executives, and then transported them out of Denver and back to Las Cruces. [\[Link\]](#)

- Kay St. Irregular

- I'd add "via a magical effect not yet understood by the thaumaturgical community at large" to that description.

- Winterhawk

- If this is retaliation for that, it's certainly taken Ghostwalker a while to get around to it. Then again, these *are* dragons we're talking about. They play the long game.

- Frosty

Perianwyr was taken in to the ZDF headquarters in the Hub, sedated, in chains, and contained in a dragon-sized manacoffin shortly before noon this morning. He was actually taken into custody in an abandoned park in the Aurora Warrens just after midnight; Zone Defense Force special forces and mages sprung an ambush on him, throwing a net over the poor dragon and overwhelming him with a barrage of stun spells, large animal tranquilizers, and taser rounds.

- I've seen some of the pirate news footage, and they had scrambled serious attack helicopters as well. By staying on the ground and not taking to the air, I think Perianwyr made the choice to go in alive rather than risk getting geeked by air-to-air missiles and autocannon fire. Trusting of him, but tangling with a squad of choppers isn't a great alternative.
- Rigger X
- I had been wondering what it takes to arrest a dragon. Honestly, I'm a bit underwhelmed.
- Stone
- Keep in mind that besides being much younger than Ghostwalker, by all accounts, Perianwyr hasn't worked the shadows as an assassin in decades. I can forgive him for getting a bit soft. Poor guy just loves music.
- Kat o' Nine Tales
- What the hell was Perry doing in the Aurora Warrens at that time of night? I thought he'd been very careful to watch his step around the Front Range Free Zone after pissing off Ghostwalker?
- Bull
- You mean because back in March you thought about taking a crack at him yourself? Anyway, word on the street is that a shadow team—maybe from out of town—kidnapped one of Evan Perry's acts and used them as bait to lure the dragon out.
- Mika
- Maybe Trish Scallinger of The Latch-Key Kids. They're not officially signed to Peri's label, but tabloid gossip has her romantically linked to the dragon.
- Sunshine
- Word on the street, Mika? Since when did you hang around Denver?
- Ma'fan
- Believe me, *omae*, you have more important things to worry about than where I spend my time.
- Mika

Since being taken into custody, Perianwyr has been denied either visitors or bail. This means Ghostwalker can keep him bottled up pretty much indefinitely before getting together whatever kangaroo court he believes in appropriate. Peri's contacts in the music industry, from promoters to club managers to artists, are very unhappy, but for the most part they are staying tight lipped about it except in the company of each other. Publicly

denouncing a dragon like Ghostwalker, let alone retaliating, is way out of their league. For my part, I'm fucking pissed. Perianwyr's one of the good guys as far as I'm concerned, and no, I don't just mean "for a dragon."

Whatever his reasons for bailing out these Aztechnology guys, they don't change that. The best I can do for right now is make this injustice known. I don't expect anyone with any real clout in Denver to care what I think, but Ghostwalker is way out of line this time.

- Of course, this concerns a far larger circle than Perianwyr's friends and acquaintances. If even a powerful and connected dragon can be arrested for unauthorized spirit summoning, what does it mean for the thousands of run-of-the-mill wage mages operating in Denver? Are non-spirits really becoming second-class citizens?
- Cosmo
- More importantly, what does it mean for the hundreds of mages and adepts in Denver's Awakened shadow community, who have even less protection from Ghostwalker's wrath? I wasn't paying enough attention, but I am now. An enforced ban on spirit summoning is a big change in the balance of power.
- Lyran

SEPTEMBER 7: WEEKDAY ECLIPSE FIREBOMBED

Posted By: Kat o' Nine Tales

Music fans whose tastes grew up in the good and crazy times of the 2060s have a cause to weep this Friday, as the legendary Weekday Eclipse club in Downtown Denver has been torched. The club was closed during the day as usual, in preparation for tonight's concert, where legendary turbo-punk rockers Blitzkrieg would be putting on a special concert headlining alongside classic shadowband The Elementals. It was well known that the concert, officially titled "1-2-3-4 Fuck The Pigs" (a reference to the Japanther cover that helped make Blitzkrieg famous) and known informally in shadow circles as "Rock Against Ghostwalker," was designed to raise both awareness and donations for Perianwyr, Weekday Eclipse's manager.

Now that won't be happening, nor will *anything* be happening at the Weekday Eclipse in the near future. Some time before doors opened for the big Friday night show, the club exploded in flames. Zone Defense Force arson investigators are blaming the combustion on faulty electrical wiring, but having been around the block a few times myself, I can recognize both arson and bullshit when I see them.

- My own cursory investigation indicates this was indeed no accident. There were plenty of telltale signs of arson. No half-assed job, either. Oily rags, Molotov cocktails, even residual astral residues of a fire elemental. And of course, whoever did it must have gotten past the club's not-inconsiderable security.
- Mika
- Anyone got a line on the scum-sucking drekheads that did this piece of work?
- Bull



- Don't get so sanctimonious, a job's a job.
- Riser
- That almost seems like it was too obviously arson. Maybe it was kind of a botched job?
- /dev/girl
- Or maybe the people behind it wanted to be very clear on what they had done, official obfuscation notwithstanding.
- Winterhawk

It's plain that this atrocity was done to add insult to injury (or vice versa) and to further punish Perianwyr for his transgressions (imagined or otherwise), just as much as it was done to intimidate the groundswell of popular support that has arisen for him. And the disgusting thing is, it's worked to some degree. Fortunately, few people except club employees and security professionals were injured in the fire, but if the firebombing had happened *during* the show, the casualties would have been in the hundreds, and the celebrity casualties in the high dozens.

While Blitzkrieg's PR people have started trying to plan a new venue for the concert, and have called the fire a tragedy, the band hasn't publicly come out and denounced Ghostwalker. Most likely, whoever took over their management for Ceol Productions since Perianwyr became exposed didn't want the notoriously hotheaded frontmen saying anything too overtly suicidal.

Still, it's hard to deny that Ghostwalker is not the same since he came back. He's gone mad with power, and he's taken this grudge way too far.

- And him being mad with power is different how?
- Traveler Jones
- Well, let's just say "madder with power."
- Kay St. Irregular
- Does this not make a whole lot of sense to anyone else, either? It's almost like Ghostwalker's entirely stopped caring what people think of him. A conviction in the court of public opinion is a serious matter, even if there's no official investigation. You don't need to be a regular on JackPoint to tie this run to Ghostwalker.
- Dr. Spin
- It is not that he doesn't care what people think of him, only that he's operating under an entirely different definition of "people."
- Man-Of-Many-Names

SEPTEMBER 20: DEICIDE IN DENVER— GANGLAND SHAKEUP

Posted By: Stone

A couple years back Traveler Jones posted a data dump on Denver's syndicates and gangs based on his friendly chats over drinks with mouthy Dean Costello at the Tower of Babel nightclub in the Hub. Jones doesn't live in Denver any more than he can be said to live anywhere else, but I do make my home there at least half the year, so here's an update. So much crazy shit shook out in the last week that the whole second half of the previous file has just become irrelevant.

It started Monday when the pretty boy dynamic duo that runs the elf heavy Godz go-gang, Rex Paquette and Apollo, were both found dead in a small park off of I-70 near Wheat Ridge in the PCC sector. Not just regular dead, either; the drone footage I've seen of their bodies being removed by PSE is pretty gruesome.

- "Pretty gruesome" doesn't do it justice. The two were hanging upside down from a tree, with their skin flayed off from the waist up, morning dew frosting their bloody, exposed muscle, faces contorted in screams of agony. Definitely a message hit of some kind, something messy and personal. Also definitely not how I want to check out.
- Mika
- Interesting blend of symbolism, there.
- Axis Mundi
- That's uh, one perspective on it.
- Kat o' Nine Tales

The Godz weren't feuding with anyone, so this took them by surprise and then some. Numerous other less-famous members of the gang have turned up dead in ditches alongside I-70 throughout the PCC sector, mostly victims of vehicular homicide.

- PSE has publicly pledged to investigate these "grave and serious crimes," but unless this violence starts affecting solid citizens and shareholders, I'm not sure how many shits they actually give about some dead gangers.
- Sunshine

The upshot of all of this is that the Godz, as an organization, no longer functionally exist. Whatever's left has no organization, leadership, or safe haven to protect them, and will probably be picked off in the next couple of weeks by (in roughly decreasing order of likelihood) the Vory, the Dogmen, the First Nations, or local law enforcement. So one of Denver's top-tier gangs has vanished overnight in a coordinated, focused, and efficient strike that, in a very un-gang-like manner, no one has taken credit for.

Whodunnit? Well, the obvious question is who stands to benefit. The Fronts are the next largest go-gang in Denver, so they're possible suspects if you assume they're looking to expand their limited cells in the PCC into a substantial presence in Pueblo Sector, and all that comes with it (adding a third law enforcement agency for them to contend with). The brutality of the killing, however, doesn't seem to be their style at all; if Amy Steur, the Fronts leader, wanted to take out Rex and Apollo, she'd have challenged them one on one in a very public arena.

- The Godz were allied with Emilio Chavez, who's effectively exiled from the Chavez Family due to a feud with his younger brother Carlos. Carlos took over as acting sottocappo of Denver on his own initiative. It wouldn't make much sense if Carlos or 120+ year old Don Miguel Chavez (Emilio and Carlos's grandfather, operating out of Ft. Worth) were behind the hit. Emilio himself would have been the primary target.
- Fianchetto



- Actually, I've heard that Don Miguel has ordered his Denver consigliere, Big Joe Lovato, to look into just what happened. Emilio Chavez is also looking to hire shadowrunners to make inquiries about the same thing.

Too bad about Rex, though. Fun guy, sure knew how to throw a party.

- Traveler Jones
- Amen.
- Kat o' Nine Tales
- It's also possible that Aztechnology might be involved. I know they've seriously had it in for the Chavez family (and vice versa) since Don Miguel's late son Omar (ninety-four when he died) was in short pants. That's probably a stretch, though. AZT would go directly after the aging don in Dallas-Ft. Worth, or after both of his sons, if they had operatives in Denver looking to hurt the Chavez family; nothing so indirect as the Godz.
- Marcos

But wait, it gets weirder. I've heard that the Cyberspace Designs Hornet F21 drones that the Godz got from Emilio have wound up in the hands of the Aurora Angels, a hacker gang based out of the Aurora Warrens. The Angels are a tier or two below the Godz (or were—I guess they just got promoted), and they don't have the muscle or manpower to either take out Rex and Apollo or expand into the Pueblo Sector.

But word on the streets is that the Aurora Angels were just absorbed into the Fronts, who they warred with a couple years back. Apparently their leader, Base-13, was reluctant, but his lieutenant, a technomancer by the handle of Tenebrous, was instrumental in brokering the deal. The Hornet drones were reportedly part of that deal. So the Godz are done for, Pueblo Sector is gang territory up for grabs, and the Aurora Angels have just become the largest and most influential chapter of the Fronts. What next?

- Actually, my contacts have the details on how the illustrious "merger" of the Fronts and the Aurora Angels went down. Apparently, the Yakuza somehow discerned that young Miss Tenebrous was a technomancer (I'm surprised it took them so long, although she tried to keep a low profile). The Denver Yaks have a sideline in grabbing, bagging, and selling technomancers, and they've become quite good at it. The Yaks or some runners they hired—details are sketchy—made such a grab for Tenebrous at a time and place where there weren't nearly enough Angels around to make a difference against the Yak muscle. Then the Fronts—or again, some runners associated with them—rode in like the cavalry in a flatvid Western, fighting off the Yaks. Of course, they didn't do it out of the kindness of their hearts. The entire incident left Tenebrous deeply in their debt. Rather than lose his Matrix specialist to defection, Base-13 decided to throw in the entire gang's lot in with the Fronts.
- Mika
- I've heard that Casquilho family capo and Mafia hacker extraordinaire Dean Costello was there to broker the particulars of the deal between the Angels and the Fronts. See, I know this all the

way from Seattle, with the magic of the Matrix. No idea what Costello's interest is in getting involved in gang politics, though. Maybe I'll crack into his commlink and find out if I get bored.

- Slamm-0!
- you could try, plus size. <91.83 mps of bestiality pornography deleted>
-
- Out, damned spot. <unauthorized user ejected>
- FastJack
- One of our own was present at that fateful meeting also. Besides me, of course, but I'm everywhere.
- Icarus
- Quit being cryptic for the sake of being cryptic! I'd belt ya in the mouth if I could find ya!
- Bull
- Talk about a self-defeating argument. orz
- /dev/grll

OCTOBER 2: ZONE DEFENSE FORCE CRACKS DOWN AFTER TERROR ATTACKS

Posted By: 2XL

Things have just gotten a whole hell of a lot hotter in the Mile High City. Yesterday and today, Zone Defense Force patrol vehicles and checkpoints have come under numerous, concentrated, and frighteningly successful terrorist attacks. The pseudo-random acts of violence have all followed a certain pattern, involving hit-and-run tactics, improvised explosive devices, and significant collateral damage and civilian casualties. The culprits seem to be members of the nomadic Zombies thrill gang, although the number, frequency, and geographic spread of the attacks all seem to exceed the Zombies' current manpower.

- That's a troubling understatement. The Zombies are a third-tier thrill gang, little more than a bunch of psychotic nobodies with some motorcycles, a yellow school bus covered in graffiti and armor, and a theme. These guys barely manage to not get wiped out slinging Mafia-supplied BTLs on the streets. They don't—or at least shouldn't—have the organization or firepower for this kind of thing.
- Traveler Jones
- Nobody can deny they have the balls for it, though. Disorganized and dumb or not, these are some hardcore crazy motherfuckers. Like if-everyone-in-the-Halloweeners-got-a-free-combat-bike crazy.
- Kane
- Here's the anatomy of a typical hit, based on one I had the misfortune to personally witness. Some hacker or corner kid prank calls local law enforcement with something big and juicy, like a downed t-bird or (ironically) a bomb threat. Something that requires local law enforcement—whether it's Lone Star in the CAS Sector or Eagle Security in the Sioux Sector—to call out to the ZDF force. The ZDF



arrives on scene in a heavy patrol vehicle, usually something with muscle and off-road capabilities—a General Products COP, Ferrari Appaloosa, or Rover Model 2068—and park up on the roadside.

While they're looking around for the cause of the call or touching base with headquarters, a lone Zombie on a bike, usually wearing gang colors, rides up nonchalantly alongside the vehicle and tosses a short-fused IED underneath the chassis of the patrol vehicle before riding off. One violent explosion and a geyser of mangled body parts later, what's left of the ZDF patrol is firing off parting shots at the gangers as they roar away.

- Stone
- Classic insurgency tactics. While this kind of warfare isn't going to put a big dent in the ZDF, it is going to hurt their morale, knowing that any of their random patrols can be targeted at any time. The attitude that's going to foment isn't going to win them any friends either. On a hearts and minds level, it's smart and effective.
- DangerSensei
- I think you forgot "sickening and unconscionable."
- Picador
- The IEDs they're using are a bit like old-school pipe bombs, only they must be packing more wallop than a standard high-explosive grenade to be able to punch through the underbelly armor of an SUV and cause those nice secondary explosions. Wonder where they got 'em?
- Beaker
- The Zombies managed to pull off several of these attacks? The Zombies? Seriously? Those guys are more of a bad joke than a brain trust. What about the big magical and Matrix support the ZDF pulls?
- Haze
- It would be standard priority under Hototo's policies for ZDF Mages and Shamans to send off spirits in hot pursuit of the suspects with crimes like this. Something seems to be stopping those spirits. Like they were being, well, eaten by larger spirits, or banished by a powerful mage. Details are sketchy, because ZDF survivors and first responders are concentrated on trying to medevac their blown-up guys, not getting the straight skinny from their summoned and bound spirits.
- Ethernaut
- I will make inquiries within the spirit community.
- Axis Mundi
- The Zombies aren't supposed to have that kind of mojo. They aren't supposed to have any Awakened assets at all. What the fuck?
- Lyran
- Stone, I think we've pretty much solved the mystery of who killed the Godz. I've heard that the Zombies had a serious grudge against those pretty-boy elves based on aesthetics alone; pretty sick business for a matter of taste and appearances, but who am I to judge? Or maybe whoever's backing the Zombies wanted them out of the way.
- Riser

- Oh, it gets better. The ZDF have thus far been unable to track them through technological means either. They are getting serious Matrix cover from somewhere, just fucking disappearing from traffic cameras, surveillance drone footage, and MeFeeds that should be showing them. After the hits, they just straight vanish.

• Glitch

- I've actually seen some of the trideo footage of Romero, their leader, speeding away from one of these messy bombings—right before he vanishes from the feed entirely. That's a nice Edgecrusher Combat Bike he's got himself, but I would think that an experimental prototype bike like that would be outside the means of a two-bit gangbanger. The Zombies seem to have found themselves some serious backers with deep pockets. I bet the autocannon on that bad boy is great for running and gunning at ZDF patrol vehicles.

• Rigger X

Prior to these attacks and Ghostwalker's disappearing/reappearing act, the ZDF was more laissez-faire than ever with T-Bird smugglers coming in and out of the city. Now they seem to be swinging, pendulum-like, in the exact opposite direction. ZDF is reinforcing border checkpoints with heavy machine guns and spirit overwatch, upgrading the firmware on their SIN verification systems, and strengthening patrols to military level. Running the border into Denver, or even crossing from sector to sector, is going to get a lot harder in the coming weeks and months.

Zone Defense Force press releases emphasize how they are working to cooperate with local-sector law enforcement to bring these dangerous criminals to justice, but they haven't speculated on how the Zombies got either the motivation or the means to make these assaults. Ghostwalker has been unavailable for comment on these attacks, although his office has issued a fairly boilerplate statement condemning them and offering condolences to the families of the slain ZDF heroes.

- ZDF raids of known Zombies hideouts apparently have turned up nothing but a bunch of hapless posers and hangers-on that didn't seem to know much of anything about much of anything. Unfortunately, ZDF and Lone Star showed up in such overwhelming force that most of those know-nothings, along with plenty of more-or-less innocent bystanders, went home in body bags. Romero and the rest of the Zombies have not been found.

• Kay St. Irregular

- Something very strange is happening in Denver. I think a closer investigation is in order; there's definitely a scoop to be had. Jack, do you think you can arrange some temporary housing and local protection for me?

• Sunshine

• Sure—contacted you off-list with terms.

• FastJack

• Be careful!

• Nephrine

• Don't worry, I'm not planning on joining the ZDF.

• Sunshine



OCTOBER 7: ALAMOS 20K ATTACK ROCKS THE HUB

Posted By: Axis Mundi

I was present in the flesh for this vile and cowardly act of terrorism, which has given me reason to suspect it may be a precursor to something far greater than the authorities expect. Of course, I say “flesh” euphemistically; I was visiting the Wonderland club in astral space when a bomb on the material plane detonated, overlapping a burst of destructive astral power that I narrowly avoided. Dozens died, hundreds more were wounded. Among those in the confirmed casualties were Lucinda Gray Arrow, the long-serving Council of Denver representative for the Sioux Sector, and the free spirit Alyss, who I had come there to interview about the changing social climate for free spirits in Denver following Ghostwalker’s return. That interview, sadly, could never happen, and Alyss is no more.

- Axis Mundi neglects to mention Alyss’s profession—Denver’s highest paid escort and call-girl. I’d imagine that the rich and powerful like their piece of strange very strange, and you don’t get much stranger than a free spirit in your bed. It seems indecorous to mention in light of her death, but I wonder if he was planning on mixing business and pleasure.
- Dr. Spin
- Indecorous doesn’t begin to describe it. Alyss was a friend; perhaps an unfamiliar concept to you.
- Axis Mundi
- Let’s not forget that besides entertaining gentlemen callers, Alyss was known in the espionage community for pumping clients for information on Ghostwalker’s behalf. She was a lynchpin in the white wyrm’s intelligence network. Or still is—she’s resourceful, and may have survived and gone to ground.
- Thorn
- I didn’t think you could kill a free spirit with a bomb. I thought a physical attack directed against a free spirit had to be focused, personal, and specific, full of intent, to have any noticeable impact. Not that I’ve any experience beyond the academic; it’s not like I lob grenades at spirits in my spare time.
- Beaker
- As Axis Mundi indicates, the explosion went hand in hand with some bad mojo on the astral. If Alyss was manifested, the blast would likely disrupt her; whatever happened on the astral would then finish the job.
- Sticks
- Forget Alyss for a minute. The Sioux sector is reeling with the news of Lucinda Gray Arrow’s death. The longest-serving council member, she held the position since well before Ghostwalker took power. The Sioux sector’s Council of Chiefs is effectively in conclave attempting to choose a successor from among their ranks, while the Sioux Nation is out for blood in their foreign policy. Their press releases make their skepticism about Alamos 20,000 pulling this off on their own quite clear. There have already been border squabbles and skirmishes where the Sioux sector abuts the territory of the other nations.
- Cosmo

- The UCAS and the Sioux military are both beefing up their presence around Denver, a fact that Ghostwalker is not pleased about (but he has a lot on his plate right now). The Sioux are saying the UCAS military buildup is suspicious in light of the bombing, while the UCAS military is saying that the increase in presence is a response to the Sioux sector beefing up its troops, making it a classic chicken-and-egg scenario. It doesn’t help that President Colloton recently replaced Commissioner Mecina with the significantly more hardline Iain Lesker as UCAS sector administrator, and that Lesker has well-publicized past ties to anti-metahuman policlubs.
- Kay St. Irregular
- The Sioux’s skepticism about who was responsible is not unfounded. Gray Arrow was protected at all times by Sioux Wildcats, and those ladies don’t exactly fuck around. I can’t imagine they’d let their principal anywhere near a bomb, or vice versa. Perhaps Alamos 20,000—or whoever wanted them to take the fall—reached out into the local shadows for this.
- Hard Exit

The explosion literally tore the club open early Friday evening; I was safe on the astral plane, but I saw a great wave of darkness crash down as all those lives were suddenly extinguished. Returning to my body and heading over as fast as I could, I arrived too late to help, held back behind police barricades as the club burned.

Alamos 20,000 took credit for the bombing a few hours after it happened, in a lengthy, digitally garbled, ranting screed delivered by a figure hidden behind both a ski-mask and voice mask. High points for the speech included calling for a populist uprising against Ghostwalker, and stating that the great dragon had turned the “humans of Denver into the slaves of elves, spirits, and their whores.” The Zone Defense Force arrived on the scene heavily armed and in large numbers, and they are currently involved in a complex bureaucratic pissing match with Sioux Sector’s Eagle Security over who will take point in the ongoing investigation to find and prosecute the responsible Alamos 20k cell.

- Since the Ute Sector was absorbed by the PCC, Alamos 20,000 have been amongst the loudest voices protesting the illegality of Ghostwalker’s reign and the illegitimacy of the Council. They’ve waged a propaganda campaign for years, but this is the first time they’ve resorted to “propaganda of the deed,” as well as the biggest terrorist act they’ve been linked to in quite a while.
- Dr. Spin
- Lucinda Gray Arrow was Ghostwalker’s staunchest and most vocal supporter on the Council, and a known member of the Church of the Dragon. I’d wager that Alyss was little more than a target of opportunity; it’s not like Alamos 20,000 to balk at killing a non-human along with a few hundred innocent people.
- Riser

While the fact that the attack happened in the Hub is enough to draw Ghostwalker’s close and personal involvement, it pales in comparison to one disturbing detail of the attack. Ghostwalker’s voice, Nicholas Whitebird, was en route to meet Lucinda Gray Arrow—he’s been romantically linked to her in tabloid gossip for years—for drinks on the night of the attack. Whitebird was called





INCOMING FEED.....



LIGHTNING IN DENVER.....

suddenly to Boulder on family business. If not for that happenstance, Ghostwalker's voice would have been among the casualties. Obviously, Ghostwalker is taking this very seriously, for the same reason that I am. The intelligence acumen needed to place these three individuals at one location at one time seems entirely beyond an organization like Alamos 20,000, let alone the ability to reach them. For this reason, and because Alyss was a personal friend, I will be looking into this further during my stay in Denver.

- Ghostwalker's wrath at this personal affront is substantial, and he's cleaning house. The number of convicted spies scheduled for execution—by firing squad—next week is triple what it was last week, and rising. If he keeps purging his people to this degree, he might need to start bringing on outside help soon.
- Fianchetto
- I can't believe even at his worst he'd have anything to do with anything like this. It's too ugly, even for him.
- Frosty
- Even for who? What?
- Turbo Bunny

OCTOBER 10: RAID ON THE DRAGON'S LAIR

Posted By: Sunshine

Something beyond major is definitely going down in Denver. I don't know what yet, and I don't know how it will affect us, but I am working overtime to collect the breadcrumbs and put together the puzzle. You don't have to be grateful, but you should

stay tuned to listen. The latest development is that someone has managed to crack into the Dragon's Lair, Ghostwalker's private node on the Denver Data Haven, also known as the Nexus, the largest shadow BBS in the world.

- Ugh. "BBS" is a tech term that's about as relevant to the Sixth World as "abbacus," but I don't want to drag us off topic by sermonizing.
- /dev/grll

A great deal of the data from Ghostwalker's stores was, for one glittering window of opportunity, publicly available on the Denver Matrix for any half-pint hacker to read, edit, or otherwise consume. Within hours, the full might of Ghostwalker's Matrix intelligence apparatus, including the most loyal of the hackers and technomancers in the Nexus that consider Ghostwalker a patron, was turned to the problem of scouring every copy of every scrap of data from the face of Matrix. This didn't limit itself to removing the data from public postings, of course, but went as far as ripping it (and everything else of value) out of the commlinks and dataterms of anyone who was found to download it.

- Ghostwalker's in-house Matrix assets weren't up to the task on their own—not enough manpower. A bunch of local and not-so-local netranners got paid a lot in the scramble to plug the leak with extreme prejudice.
- Glitch

- Celedyr's assistance was rendered as well. Ghostwalker would do well not to forget the debt.
- Cerberus
- Jack, are you slipping or tripping or what? Why does this Cerberus guy keep posting?
- Slamm-0!
- None of you clowns are asking the right question. What was in Ghostwalker's node? If a substantial subset of the hacking world has seen Ghostwalker's dirty laundry, what color is it?
- Pistons
- I don't think that's the kind of thing anyone wants to admit to knowing right about now.
- Cosmo
- Ghostwalker has thrown major financial backing behind Danielle de la Mar's new matrix initiative. The idea of a globally controlled, ultra-secure Matrix must seem a lot more appealing to him than it did five minutes ago.
- Mr. Bonds

In Ghostwalker's mind, the damage was already done. The dragon made the decision that the penetration of Nexus security around his private datastore couldn't have happened without the tacit consent of at least some of the Nexus' users and administrators.

- How do you know this, exactly? Got anything to substantiate all of this hearsay?
- Pistons
- I may be wrong about Ghostwalker's motivations, but his actions speak for themselves.
- Sunshine

Ghostwalker withdrew his patronage of the Nexus in the most extreme and violent possible terms. Zone Defense Force troops were sent in force to the physical location of the Nexus hours after the incident, and the site of the old Air Force Academy was quickly surrounded by military vehicles, hundreds of troops, blockades, barricades, and air support.

- Not to mention a veritable army of spirits of distressingly high power.
- Axis Mundi

By that point, most of the crucial administrators and sysops of the Denver Nexus were able to escape, although a large number of the technomancers they'd been sheltering were arrested. No shots were fired, and the small standing army of local shadowrunners the Nexus paid to provide them physical security were taken into custody without a fight, after highly trained ZDF hackers dismantled the site's automated security and network of security-grade drones.

Nexus sysadmin SilveryK, the personal administrator of Ghostwalker's node as well as the Nexus' second in command, was

not among those who fled. She willingly surrendered herself into ZDF custody and will have to go before Ghostwalker to explain this mess. I don't envy her that position, which I imagine is a little bit like being at the dinner table as an entree. As to what extent Nexus personnel were responsible for the initial leak, or what sensitive data the leak contained, or where that data may be on the global Matrix, no consistent data is available at this time. I'll keep you posted.

- Perri wanted me to pass this along for her—as you can imagine, she's a bit busy right now. Anyway, the message is this: The Nexus is still alive, and nothing and no one will ever stop it. Their distribution method is far beyond the point where the off-lining of a single physical server can stop it, as it is distributed between the PANs of its memberbase as well as hundreds or thousands of hidden, individually compromised nodes in and out of Denver, thanks to the Capt'n'Kludge's hard work preparing for an eventuality just like this one. Within days, the Nexus will be back online. We survived the Crash 2.0 and Jormungand, and it will take a lot more than an angry lizard in a fit of pique over some spilled megapulses to offline us. End transmission.
- FastJack

- She doesn't seem overly concerned for SilveryK's safety, does she?
- Pistons

- I believe what you are seeing is confidence.
- Icarus

- Ah, Ghostwalker. You really screwed the pooch on this one; the harder you grasp down on it, the more it will slip out of your hand. Information wants to be free; charged particles expand through space, then bleed through greedy fingers and explode in your face. I can't wait.
- Puck

OCTOBER 13: SUN SETS ON DENVER'S YAMATO CLAN

Posted By: Mika

I don't go back far enough or have the background in organized crime to tell you how the Yakuza got its start in Denver, so very far both physically and culturally from its point of origin in Japan. I can tell you that since becoming Denver's sole Yakuza gumi in 2062 when Ghostwalker's rampage wiped out the Naito clan, the Yamato clan has not had an easy time of it. They were struggling before then, 2060, losing a good percentage of the chip trade to Triad and Vory incursions, and then they inherited an extra burden when their hackers found themselves embroiled in a five-year-long Matrix war with the otaku.

In 2071, the Yamato clan's Wakagashira, Johnny Ono, and Kodai, Kazuya "The Dragon" Hotomi, were killed by runners during a brutal mob war between Denver's rival criminal organizations. Oyabun Kasigi Toda committed seppuku in 2072 after being replaced by the much younger, much spryer Mikko Toyama. Under Toyama, the Denver Yakuza managed to make some into the businesses of chips, gambling, information theft and corporate extortion. Unfortunately, they ran afoul of technomancers and the Denver Nexus.



Paranoid after Crash 2.0 and the Yakuza's lengthy matrix battle with the otaku, Toyama had formed a special strike force of modern-day ninja specifically for the purpose of grabbing, bagging, and selling technomancers to Mitsuhama for serious cred. The kidnapping ring was sufficiently sophisticated and competent to operate right under the noses of the Denver Data Haven for long enough to infuse the Yamato clan with some major cash flow, but the other shoe had to drop eventually.

Oyabun Mikko Toyama was meeting with his council at his compound in Cherry Hills when the place was hit hard by a Vory kick squad lead by Mikhail Petrov. Apparently, all the clever technological failsafes that Toyama had put in place spontaneously failed him; the local beat rent-a-cops didn't get there until the fireworks were over, calls out for help to the rest of the gumi's soldiers never made it, and locks and cameras didn't do their jobs. The tabloid pics of Toyama's kimono-clad body riddled with bullets in a pool of blood on the lawn of his elaborately landscaped Matsumoto-esque manor tell the grisly ending of the story and are in broad circulation on the newsnets. Also among the casualties was Katsuo Sawaruma, Toyama's Saiko-Komon, who had been called there for a meeting.

With no one stepping up to take over the reigns of the Yamato clan, the days of the Yakuza in Denver seem to be over, at least for now. And Denver's Kirillov Vory seems finally to have obtained a major, permanent foothold, taking over the last of the Yakuza's chip distribution and gambling businesses from the management level downward. Of course, the Vory hasn't gotten everything, and the Triads and the Koshari have also both picked up a fair amount of scraps. The Yakuza in Denver have effectively ceased to exist.

- That doesn't seem like Vory Tsar Vladimir Kirillov's style. He's always been more circumspect. Still, the bold maneuver seems to have worked out quite well for them. This time.
- Hard Exit
- It seems painfully clear that the Vory had the hands-on support of pissed-off technomancers for this job. If you shut down the Matrix capabilities of the Yamato clan, you've deprived them of their greatest strength, and the rest is like shooting fish in a barrel. I've heard that Tenebrous of the Fronts—formerly of the Aurora Angels—was far from the only technomancer to pitch in. This move definitely had at least the tentative backing of the Denver Nexus, with whom the Yakuza have been fencing for years.
- Mika
- It goes deeper than that, I'm afraid. Romero and some of the seriously upgraded firepower of the Zombies participated in the massacre alongside the Vory.
- Stone
- The entire thing looks almost like a down payment to the Vory for their help with something in the future. The question is, what will that favor be, and when will it be called in? Besides the greater question, of course, of who's been coordinating, equipping, and directing the Zombies, the Fronts, the Vory, and some of Denver's angriest technomancers.
- Thorn

- Any guesses?
- Sunshine
- None I feel like sharing with the class just now.
- Thorn
- Again, Wakagashira Seth Kraemer (or if you must, Setto Karemaru) has survived another massacre if not unscathed than at least intact. I think the Exchange may well be involved. If Karemaru has any plans on putting together what's left of the Denver Yakuza under his leadership, it appears at this point that he's biding his time and licking his wounds.
- Pistons
- Yakuza hitman Ohnee—he's the huge troll that's dyed red and black, kind of hard to miss—seems to have sold out his patron Toyama for a better deal. He wasn't in on the kill, but he wasn't there to defend his bosses either, and his absence was conspicuous. Maybe he got sick of all the overt racism, but it still seems like a shitty thing to do to Toyama, who saw beyond all of that to give Ohnee work in the organization. Since Toyama went down, Ohnee has been spotted participating in some of the Zombies' increasingly pyrrhic hellrides against the ZDF.
- Stone
- Even with so many people setting up or betraying the Yamato clan, the Kirillov Vory didn't want to risk a lot of their own people in this; Vladimir Kirillov brought in a runner team as hired muscle on the kill. They may have been responsible for some of the Matrix overwatch too.
- Riser

OCTOBER 15: GRIDGUIDE FAILS ACROSS DENVER; CITY TRANSPORTATION LOCKED DOWN

Posted By: Sunshine

Sometimes the news you get from an elite criminal VPN like JackPoint isn't that different from the scoop you can get from flipping on your trideo on any channel, or your favorite local public newsfeed. But the devil's in the details. If you've seen the news at all in the last twenty-four hours, you'll know that Denver's GridGuide is shorting out all over the place. But the traffic jams, accidents, and other mishaps are much worse than the reports you're hearing from GridGuide and city mouthpieces.

By 0900 this morning, the GridGuide call center's routers in Denver were completely flooded with texts, e-mails, and angry voice mails from users who trusted their GridGuide's GPS and auto-pilot assist features to get them to work but instead wound up driving around in circles for hours, or in endless gridlock as GridGuide created traffic jams by diverting all vehicles into a single corridor. By noon, the news media was picking up the first accident reports, which by 1600 hours local time were in the dozens and climbing. Synchronized traffic lights fucking with people was just the beginning, leading to jammed intersections and zones of noise pollution from honking and cursing motorists, along with tens of cars sideswiped and t-boned. Drone tractor-trailers primarily reliant on GridGuide for navigation have been crashing in the worst places, blocking major thoroughfares and thruways. ZDF, police, paramedics, and the various sectors' fire departments



have hit solid walls of red lights, keeping them from reaching the wrecks in a timely manner. By 2000 hours, the evening news was panicking people with stories of GridGuide autonav systems overriding manual controls, parking cars right in the middle of railroad crossings, and then shutting them off.

That's what you already know. The truth, though, is even worse.

Local GridGuide administrator/spokesperson Mara Zutrick has made numerous apologies to those inconvenienced, injured, or even killed by these malfunctions, while asking for calm and patience as GridGuide's "dedicated professionals work to troubleshoot these issues." She has described the problems as originating from "a firmware upgrade concurrent with Renraku's purchase of GridGuide from Mitsuhama" and said that service should be restored within forty-eight hours, and that subscribers should keep their vehicles connected to GridGuide so that the software can be patched. Ghostwalker's voice made an announcement criticizing GridGuide and promising the people of all of Denver's sectors that public transit would step up to insure that commerce could continue during this disruption of personal vehicle service.

- The buyout from Mitsuhama was a big coup in the financial world and was done with some element of surprise. If GridGuide was not adequately prepared for the informatics switchover, this makes some sense.
- Mr. Bonds
- To state the obvious, that would logically take the form of sporadic glitches around the world, not a sudden, total collapse of the Denver system. Something else is happening here.
- Rigger X

An anonymous source I spoke to within GridGuide said the attack—that's right, attack—had nothing to do with a firmware error, major or otherwise. He said that GridGuide's Denver systems were compromised and penetrated by a smart, evolving virus unlike any that their engineers and Matrix security specialists had ever seen. A virus that had penetrated not just the codebase but the physical infrastructure of GridGuide's interlocking traffic cameras, GPS modules, satellites, and stoplights, citing "a possible nanotech infection vector" for the viral attack. Ominously, he hinted that the virus might even have somehow compromised the cyberware and wetware of GridGuide's metahuman operators and engineers. Even more ominously, he said that the only way to even begin to address the problem would be "a complete shut-down of Denver's GridGuide nodes for weeks or months."

- Sunshine didn't want to come right out and say it, but it seems clear to me that this is the Denver Nexus' way of striking back at Ghostwalker, who has been hunting for them continuously since their falling out a few days ago. The Nexus has been on the defensive so much throughout their history, it's scary to look at what they can accomplish on the offensive.
- Glitch
- It doesn't quite add up, though. The Nexus has always been so ... benign. Think about it, they protected first the Otaku and then the Technomancers. They warned us about Jormungand and helped fight against it, and a lot of them died heroically during Crash 2.0.

Shutting down an entire city like this doesn't seem like their style at all.

- Netcat
- Then who was it? 'Jack, any ideas?
- Bull
- Spirits are thick in the air over the Hub today, more than I have ever seen in one place before. They are responding to Ghostwalker's call. They are massing.
- Axis Mundi
- What does that have to do with anything?
- /dev/grrl
- He is mustering his army. It is beginning. I am afraid.
- Axis Mundi

DENVER UNDER SIEGE

```
//trash/temp_files/recovered//  
//logon to Hidden Network  
//transmit passcode ...  
//access granted, connecting to Nexus  
//connected(16:10:31/10-19-74)  
//accessing private chat node
```

*14 users present (Casanova, FastJack, Frosty, Glitch, Kay St., Kat, Kludge, Librarian, Mika, Mentalist, Mustang, Perri, Stone, Tabby, Traveler Jones)
user Sunshine entering the chat*

[FastJack] Hoi.

[Kay St.] 'lo, Sunshine.

[Kat] What's biz, omae?

[Sunshine] I was just out on the street, interviewing people like in the old days. Trying to get a sense of what people think is going on out there.

[Casanova] You should be careful. The streets of Denver aren't as safe as they used to be.

[Mustang] Which is saying something.

[Tabby] He's taken appropriate precautions.

[Librarian] Kay, is it true that you're in the running for the UCAS Council?

[Kay St.] You know I can neither confirm nor deny that.

user Axis Mundi entering the chat

[Librarian] You sure I can't tempt you with a data swap? Must be something you're dying to know.

[Kay St.] What makes you think even I know just where I stand in the running?

[Sunshine] Is anyone at the Hub right now?

[Librarian] I am everywhere. It's only a matter of accessing the correct surveillance systems. Give me a moment.

[Axis Mundi] I'm currently ruminating in a Soybucks Downtown. Why? Anything in particular you're looking for?

[Sunshine] Do me a favor. Look out a window and tell me if you see anything strange going on?

[Traveler Jones] Any reason you think something would be?



[**Axis Mundi**] Just looks like the usual—no, wait! There's a LOT of people milling around outside of Ghostwalker's Liaison office. They're filling the sidewalks and the streets.

[**Mentalist**] Ghostwalker wasn't scheduled for any appearances today.

[**Tabby**] I'm not far away from there, I can see it too. Looks like some kind of protest or rally. No, definitely protest. The crowd is chanting and they've got picket signs. AROs too, not just the old fashioned kind. "Free Perianwyr" seems like a popular choice, "The Nexus Lives," "End the Tyranny of Ghostwalker," "Spirits Aren't People," plenty of other agendas on display.

[**Perri**] Touching, but those people should get out of there.

[**FastJack**] Said the pot to the kettle.

[**Axis Mundi**] I'm looking on the astral now. These people are a lot more pissed off than scared. They seem to be ordinary people for the most part. Most of them are neither Awakened nor cybered, although there's a few spirits in the crowd. I have a terrible feeling they're about to become dragon food.

[**Tabby**] Hopefully nothing so dramatic. Eagle Security and Lone Star is showing up now, asking for people to disperse with megaphones. They're outnumbered like two hundred to one, but I'm sure there's more of the buggers on the way. There always are.

[**Glitch**] I wish that I could get a look at their node connections in AR.

[**Axis Mundi**] The crowd is ... disrobing?

[**Casanova**] Spontaneous nudist demonstration?

[**Axis Mundi**] They're all taking off their coats at once and dropping the protest signs. Something very weird is going on with their auras. They're not chaotic enough—there's a sense of organized purpose.

[**Mentalist**] This may be a strange question, but are you sure there's an actual crowd, not just an illusion spell of some kind?

[**Axis Mundi**] What you're really asking is if I know how to assense. The answer is yes.

[**Tabby**] Holy shit, the entire crowd is wearing black underneath their coats. And now they're all putting on Neil the Ork Barbarian masks.

[**Sunshine**] That's what I was afraid of.

[**Snopes**] What?

[**Axis Mundi**] What?

[**Glitch**] It's a smart mob, you gleebs.

[**Axis Mundi**] Oh fuck, the crowd is throwing bricks and cans at the front of the building and the cops.

[**Tabby**] Those aren't soybeer cans. That's tear gas! The crowd is deploying tear gas. What the fuck?

[**Mustang**] Makes you wonder what's built into those masks.

[**Glitch**] Did you know about this Sunshine?

[**Sunshine**] They're using Matrix networking channels to organize. One of my contacts was asked to go, and she told me about it.

[**FastJack**] Any idea who's behind it?

[**Tabby**] Oh my God, the mob is rushing the building and the police vehicles. Lone Star started firing into the crowd, and Eagle's joined in!

[**Kay St.**] Shit, I have friends that work downtown just a couple blocks from there. I've got to make sure they're alright. Back in a tick.

[**Tabby**] I hear choppers, too. Zone Defense Force is probably on its way.

[**Axis Mundi**] On the astral it looks like a powerful air spirit is manifesting to disperse the tear gas, and a powerful water elemental is hosing down the crowd like a water cannon. And someone is—

[**Frosty**] Mundi!?

[**Sunshine**] Someone is what? Are you all right? Shit, I've got to get down there, I can't miss this.

[**Glitch**] You got a death wish or something? Knowing Lone Star, they're shooting at everything that moves down there!

[**Sunshine**] I'll use drones, I'm not stupid.

[**Kludge**] Anyone know what's going on downtown?

[**Casanova**] A smart mob attacked Ghostwalker's Liaison Office.

[**Tabby**] The crowd has dragged out some guy from the lobby. I think it's Jared Tsang, one of Ghostwalker's watchers. They're ... clubbing him to death. Fuck. A lot of them have overrun the cops and gotten weapons, too. I don't know what happened, it looked like the spirits were going to scatter them, but the spirits are gone. They're stringing this guy up by a street light.

[**Mentalist**] Tabby, are you safe where you are?

[**Tabby**] I'm fine, no one can see me.

[**Axis Mundi**] I'm all right, someone just threw a brick through the window of the cafe I'm in. Everyone here is stampeding into a panic, I can't see shit on the astral plane. I'm relocating.

[**Sunshine**] AM, what happened to the spirits? Where'd the spirits go?

[**Sunshine**] Hello?

[**Kat**] I think he's gone, omae.

[**Stone**] GHOST! WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT? DID ANYONE ELSE HEAR THAT!?

[**FastJack**] I heard it.

[**Mustang**] I heard it. T-bird breaking the sound barrier, maybe?

[**Stone**] No fucking way. I felt the ground shake. And it was bigger, louder.

[**Casanova**] Denver doesn't get earthquakes, so that narrows it down.

[**Stone**] Holy shit! Holy shit! No fucking way. Oh man. Oh man.

[**Librarian**] A plane has gone down over Federal Heights. No, excuse me. Two planes. An LAV crashed into a westbound commercial jumbo jet. Both aircraft were destroyed in mid-air.

[**Kay St.**] I can't believe this is happening. Pieces of flaming aircraft debris are raining down on suburban lawns and houses. I can hear a hundred car alarms going off. I can see the smoke and flames from my house.

[**Kat**] God, that's horrible.

[**Traveler Jones**] Air traffic over Denver is notoriously congested. This was bound to happen eventually.

[**Sunshine**] No way. That's not what happened here. Hackers and technomancers compromised DIA's air traffic control and artificially caused the traffic with bad guidance signals. There's a !@#\$\$%^&* (



<1.83 mps of conversation lost>
user Mika entering the chat (20:15:41)

[Mika] I think things are quieting down out there. I think. I haven't heard much gunfire in the last hour.

[Sunshine] Has everyone seen Ghostwalker's announcement?

[Casanova] Yup.

[Frosty] Yes, I've seen it.

[Axis Mundi] We don't have any public datanet access out here in the PCC sector, at least not in this neighborhood. At least not in this neighborhood. I've got this connection that a friend set up for me, and it seems to be going strong, but no straight, legitimate Matrix access. At least we have power, for now.

[Sunshine] Here, incoming.

//upload Uniformat text attachment //
**GHOSTWALKER SPEAKS TO DENVER AFTER
LATEST WAVE OF TERROR ATTACKS**
KSAF [WN]-10/19/74

Chaos has erupted throughout all four sectors of the divided Front Range Free Zone, as flash mobs have broken out across Denver and Qantas International Flight J7019B out of Denver International Airport crashed shortly after takeoff. Just two hours after the terrible crash, which has killed 147 and wounded an unknown number of people, Ghostwalker addressed the people of Denver in a brief, live trideo broadcast, speaking directly through his voice, the ork Nicholas Whitebird.

GHOSTWALKER: People of Denver. My enemies have made their misguided, destructive, and nihilistic quarrel with me into a war with all of you. It is a choice for which I cannot be held responsible, but nonetheless I offer my condolences for the disruption of your day-to-day affairs and the unfortunate loss of life. Because I cannot protect you alone, I have reached out to the Pueblo Corporate Council, Sioux, UCAS, and CAS sector governments for aid in ensuring that the people of Denver are harmed as little as possible during this time of war.

In private council, the sector governments have agreed with me that the citizens of Denver will be best protected by a curfew, set for 2200 hours throughout the Front Range Free Zone. Any citizens found outside after that time will be treated as hostile by their local security forces. Additionally, all commercial flights into and out of Denver, including Lowry and Chamberlain airports in the CAS sector, Sedalia and Niwot airports in the PCC sector, Denver International Airport in the Sioux sector, and Stapleton Airport in the UCAS sector, have been canceled. Military flights can depart from those airports on an as-needed basis as cleared through the Zone Defense Force, and Peterson Airport in the UCAS Sector is open to UCAS military use only. For all non-military purposes, these airports are closed indefinitely.

Finally, by 0000 hours tonight, Denver will be completely cut off and severed from the international Matrix. All attempts to connect to grids physically located outside of the Front Range Free Zone will be treated as acts of espionage. While I recognize that all of these changes will disrupt your day-to-day lives, and I apologize for the inconvenience, these measures are necessary to protect all of the citizens of Denver. The cybercriminals who attacked the Denver grid en masse today mostly originated from outside of the city, perpetrating their cowardly acts of terrorism from the safety

of thousands of miles. The opportunity for such craven tactics will not be afforded them again.

Many of your leaders have asked me who the enemy is, asked for the name of the foe that wears your face and claims to burn this city to the ground in the name of "the people." While you can rest assured that I have a very good idea who is responsible, no declarations of blame will be made until I can be absolutely assure you of the identity of every conspirator involved in these acts of terrorism. I promise you as your protector that before long, the enemies of this city will face justice at my hands. Thank you, good night, and remain safe.

Ghostwalker's representatives refused to make further comment on the attacks, to speculate on when the Denver area airports would re-open, when the curfew would be lifted, or when the Denver grid would be reconnected to the global Matrix. Questions on when Perianwyr would be tried or released were ignored.

//end attachment//

[Stone] Qantas Airlines is owned by Ares. Sticks tells me that Damien Knight has personally authorized a Firewatch mission to Denver to determine who was responsible for the destruction of the aircraft and all the Ares wageslaves and execs inside.

[Kay St.] If you ask me, there's exactly one word of subtext in that speech that matters, and it's Aztechnology. If this is an AZT black op, it's up to Ghostwalker to prove it before the sector governments lose patience with their people being placed under curfew and trapped in the city. Not to mention the whole city being closed off to them.

[Mika] But what really worries me is the fact that DIA was hit. That's in the Sioux sector. Add that to Lucinda Gray Arrow buying the farm, and it definitely looks like someone is gunning for the Sioux. That could mean outright war.

[Frosty] It could be a target of opportunity. There's a lot of disenfranchised Ute tribals in the Sioux sector. Maybe they served as willing accomplices here.

[Traveler Jones] This is all pretty heavy stuff, but at least there's a silver lining. It's a good day to be a smuggler in Denver. T-bird pilots and coyotes are at extremely high demand right now. Local megas and even governments can't get people in or out, and everything from sugar and salt to microtronics just went up on ration, not to mention the usual goods like drugs and guns. There's business-critical messages that need to be delivered by hand with the grids going down, too. Even border crossings within the city are tighter than Brackhaven's butthole in a troll bathhouse. Of course, Ghostwalker's got wyverns, thunderbirds, and Ghost knows what else helping out with border patrol duties throughout all sectors, so there's risk to suit the reward.

[Axis Mundi] Spirits! So it's true. Denver is under siege, and Ghostwalker is reacting accordingly.

[Kat] What do you know? Download us, omae.

[Axis Mundi] The spirits of Denver are frightened. Apparently several of Ghostwalker's most strident supporters among Denver's spirit community have been torn apart in the past week. That is the term they used: "torn apart." Free spirits that are banished are just temporarily disrupted, but if the



banishing magician destroys a copy of their spirit formula, they're banned from this plane more or less indefinitely.

[Mika] I can attest to that, actually. I have gotten some solid paying work on B&E jobs to steal these formulas. Some of them from Denver, some of them from all around the world. It must have been preparation for these spirit assassinations ... for lack of a better word.

[Mentalist] I fixed up a few of those runs myself! Fuck, I'd never have done it if I knew what it was about. What do you know about the mages doing it?

[Axis Mundi] It seems strange to say of spirits, of course, but he is being spoken of almost like an urban legend. A boogiemán. They say he paints his face like a clown, and that his aura swirls with poisonous blackness. Many say that he is a powerful spirit himself, a toxic spirit to hear some tell it. They also say that even without spirit formulas, he has been banishing many spirits just to scatter their essence temporarily, so what he is planning must be carried out within the next few days. Spirits that have attempted to confront him have been enormously unsuccessful; he must be incredibly powerful.

[Mentalist] That must be what happened to the spirits that were helping combat the riots downtown today. Has anyone heard from Tabby, by the way? She fell silent hours ago.

[Casanova] Not on this channel.

[Mustang] She's survived a lot. She'll survive this.

[FastJack] That description sounds like someone you know, Frosty.

[Frosty] Yes and no. I'm looking into it as best as I can. It doesn't seem like him to be this direct or to endanger so many innocent lives. There's got to be something else going on. But I'm caught out of town on other business. Important business. There's only so much poking around I can do in my free time. He's not the kind of person I can just call and be like, "What's biz?", you know?

[Casanova] You know, he's no spirit, but Romero, the leader of the Zombies, took to wearing Harlequin makeup. And he's definitely been amongst those who've dramatically mobilized against Ghostwalker lately. Any connection?

[Kat] You mean beyond fashion sense?

[Sunshine] If Matrix connectivity is that spotty, are people even getting Ghostwalker's message about the curfew?

[Kay St.] That's a good question. I can't imagine that it would help Ghostwalker's political situation if a lot of people are being arrested or worse for going out at night out of simple ignorance.

[Frosty] His reticence to explain anything isn't helping either, but then again, he's always been very, very set in his ways. Like all of them, really. Incredibly fucking frustrating.

[Perri] I'm more than a little skeptical about Ghostwalker's insistence that he's motivated by a desire to protect the people. He's become more and more oppressive in the last few months. Look at the way he's turned on the Nexus. Now he's locking down the whole city, making it more like his private fiefdom than ever.

[Traveler Jones] He's always been power hungry and implacable, but what's changed to make him so grasping?

[Axis Mundi] To bring things back to spirits, the return of Zebulon.

[Mustang] The who of what? You JackPoint people sure take a lot of crazy fucking shit for granted.

[Mentalist] Careful, Eddie, your green is showing.

[Mustang] Stuff it up your hoop.

[Frosty] All right, so you all know that Ghostwalker vanished into the Watergate Rift in DeeCee back in the summer of 2073, and then he popped back in when the Second Treaty of Denver was up for renewal. Since then he's been seen around town with a mysterious human woman.

[Casanova] She was really foxy.

[Kat] Which is germane to what exactly?

[Kat] Actually, don't answer that, too easy.

[Mustang] Well I don't exactly follow the gossip feeds.

[Kay St.] That woman is Zebulon, the Great Spirit of Denver. She was scattered for a long time.

[Axis Mundi] Decades, centuries, or millennia, depending on which account you believe.

[Frosty] It was after she returned that Ghostwalker put into effect the ban on unauthorized spirit summoning, and then months later he arrested Perianwyr on those grounds. Her effect on him doesn't exactly seem to have been a calming one.

[Mika] I've heard rumors that spirits have been attacking people on the streets. Is that true?

[Axis Mundi] Unfortunately yes. They're afraid. Ordinary mobs of frightened people are no threat at all to your average free spirit, but spirits are being targeted by this powerful mage, so they're starting to get a bit ... proactive in their defense of themselves from Denver's Awakened population. I don't think any are attacking mundanes. Yet.

[Mika] Ghost!

[Mentalist] Note to self: masking. I've always had a good reputation with the spirits that I work with, at least I like to think so. But I hate the thought that there's some kind of war coming in Denver between free spirits and metahumans. Not least of which because we would fucking *lose*.

[Axis Mundi] Ghostwalker has gathered many of Denver's free spirits to him. I mentioned an army amassing, and I wasn't exaggerating. Spirits are scouring the streets trying to hunt down the hackers responsible for the GridGuide failure and the DIA attacks. So far, they haven't been overly successful. And they're getting frustrated.

[Glitch] Not an expert, but using spirits to find the source of a Matrix-based attack seems like a classic misapplication of a tool. I know that Ghostwalker's powerful as hell, I've just always thought he was really smart, too. A lot of his strategic decisions are making me question that.

[Frosty] Ordinarily, as long as there was any kind of physical trace, or even a picture of someone, spirits can find them. It's just a matter of time. The exception would be if the individuals were being protected, hidden, or concealed by exceptionally powerful magical defenses. Which is definitely on the table here.

[Stone] Ghostwalker is suddenly lacking in hackers. I've heard there's a large portion of the ZDF's Cyber Defense Division he fears may have been somehow compromised. Then there's a bunch that have just been straight up wacked. Targeted by local and imported shadowteams with a good record in network.





[**Mustang**] I can vouch for that. Not personally, of course, I'd never get involved with biz that went directly against Ghostwalker's forces. But I keep my ear to the ground.

[**Glitch**] I've heard that Ghostwalker is looking to Celedyr for help with this. Celedyr's the Matrix expert among the greats, and his Knights of Rage aren't too shabby either.

[**Frosty**] Ghostwalker will have to owe him big time, which I'm sure sticks in his craw like nothing else, but you're right that he doesn't have a whole lot of choices.

[**Mika**] So taking out or smearing a big chunk of Ghostwalker's Matrix support was a move leading up to this?

[**FastJack**] It's starting to look like a lot of things were moves leading up to this. I can see everything that happened in the past two months fitting into this like a piece of the puzzle, one way or another. Does anyone know who might have been responsible for hacking GridGuide or DIA's air traffic control subroutines?

[**Mustang**] I've heard the Fronts gang bragging about both. Maybe they're full of shit.

[**Sunshine**] And maybe they're not. They absorbed the Aurora Angels and a lot of tech from the Godz recently. They're definitely on the rise. But why risk losing everything by making a run at Ghostwalker and every military and blue crew in the city? Unless, of course, whoever's gunning for Ghostwalker helped engineer their rise in the first place, and this is the price.

[**Mentalist**] Magic, Matrix, and muscle make for a powerful combination. Magically there's this mystery clown, on the Matrix there's the Fronts (which absorbed the Aurora Angels), the Denver Nexus and their pet TMs, and God knows who else. And then for muscle the Zombies, with some major equipment and backing, and maybe fucking Alamos 20k and some other racist douchebags.

[**Stone**] I'm getting the definite impression the Vory are mixed up in this, too. Too big of a coincidence that their new friends are Ghostwalker's enemies, and that their new enemies are the enemies of Ghostwalker's enemies. Of course, they haven't taken any action against GW yet that I can see.

[**Perri**] Can you back that up a step, Jan, please? The Nexus is not remotely responsible for the attacks on GridGuide or Denver International Airport's air traffic control signals. We're a data haven, we're not fucking terrorists, even if some of our clients may well be. So watch your assumptions.

[**Kludge**] What Perri said. Keep in mind if the Nexus is responsible, that means all of you are culpable as well. Look where this discussion is fucking happening, chummer.

[**Stone**] Honestly, *that* thought's got my finger hovering over the disconnect button, but I'm afraid the damage is already done.

[**FastJack**] Perri, if you want to acquit yourself, you have the floor. I certainly won't let anyone interrupt you.

[**Perri**] This is my forum, and I don't need your handholding. That said, sure, I'll say my piece. Just don't expect any lengthy confessions.

[**Axis Mundi**] Will Ghostwalker truly assume I'm guilty simply because I am here?

[**Kat**] What makes you think any of us can predict what he will do?

[**Kay St.**] I thought I could, but his mistakes and missteps in the past months have more than proved me wrong. He has certainly acted quite rashly.

[**Kludge**] Relax, Axis Mundi. I think that GW has more to worry about right now than personally seeking us out and shitting on our right to free speech and free assembly.

[**Frosty**] As long as he doesn't see it as sedition and conspiracy.

[**Kludge**] It's a moot point. If Ghostwalker could even *find* the nodes that the Nexus is operating on, this conversation very literally wouldn't be happening.

[**Perri**] Now, as I was saying. First off, we didn't intentionally leak anything from the Dragon's Lair. SilveryK would never allow it. The truth is, she's always been a bit enamored with Ghostwalker. We got hacked.

[**FastJack**] It happens to the best of us.

[**Glitch**] Not often someone uses that phrase so literally, but it's true.

[**Perri**] Well, thanks. Anyway, Ghostwalker was getting hit on a lot of other fronts at that point. This was after Alamos 20k tried to geek Nicholas Whitebird and killed the free spirit Alyss and Sioux Sector Council Representative Lucinda Gray Arrow. He was on the defensive, and reeling, and so he reacted emotionally. That's my best guess.

[**Frosty**] I think we can all understand that. If you play the game at a certain level for a certain time, then betrayal becomes more believable than simple incompetence, and conspiracy becomes more likely.

[**Mika**] Does anyone think for a second that it was a coincidence?

[**Perri**] Nope. Hacking the Nexus is doable but barely. You'd have to be ... well, I can count the people potentially capable of it on both hands. And some of them are in this chat. Anyway, everything we've done since then has just been playing defense: protect our people and our systems from Ghostwalker. We're not looking to retaliate.

[**Glitch**] Of course you can't vouch for every single technomancer that's associated with the Nexus temple, can you? Some of them may well have wanted revenge on Ghostwalker for desecrating their place of Resonance. Or whatever.

[**Perri**] I can't completely count it out, no. Especially if there was some faction within the Nexus that served as an inside man to allow access to GW's datastore.

[**Kludge**] As you can imagine, we're looking into it. Not that it's any of ya damn bizness. Whippersnappers.

[**Sunshine**] You know what I think? I think that whoever hacked the Dragon's Lair did it to create a divide between Ghostwalker and the Nexus. And it worked. And I think whoever torched the Weekday Eclipse wasn't working for Ghostwalker at all.

[**Traveler Jones**] So tell me, Sunshine. When did Plan 9 get your account codes?

[**FastJack**] Do you have any evidence to back this up? At all?

[**Sunshine**] No hard data yet, just a hunch ... actually several hunches, and some leads that are going to be hard to follow up now that Ghostwalker has put Denver under lockdown.

[**Kay St.**] Actually, it makes a lot of sense.

[**Stone**] How so?



[**Kay St.**] I've been here a while, and I've got a good idea of how Ghostwalker operates. Arresting Perianwyr is something I can see him doing to make a statement. It's firm, it's authoritative, the timing is odd, but dragons operate at their own speed. Everyone knows that. But torching the club? No way.

[**Mika**] Adds insult to injury. Makes him look bad. Alienates a lot of kids who just like music and fun and being rebels with a cause.

[**Casanova**] And the Matrix and connectivity make those kids dangerous. They can organize stunts like those Neil the Ork Barbarian flash mobs and you look like the bad guy, not to mention a dinosaur

[**Kat**] It doesn't help that Ghostwalker is a literal fucking dinosaur, but yeah. I'll admit I went from ambivalent and wary to hostile when Ghostwalker apprehended Perianwyr and from hostile to fucking pissed when those runners torched the Weekday Eclipse. So if that was strategy on somebody's part, it worked. Ghostwalker didn't bother denying it, though.

[**Kay St.**] Think about it—at that point, would anyone have believed him? He has a reputation for destruction.

[**Frosty**] While we're questioning people's motivations, I have to say that if Harlequin is involved in a personal vendetta against Ghostwalker, then I can't imagine him even tacitly approving or allowing the Alamos 20k bombing of the Wonderland club. He was my mentor for the better part of two decades. He would never do that. He was a lot of things, but he had standards.

[**Mentalist**] But he'd do everything else?

[**Frosty**] Maybe. I just don't know.

[**Mentalist**] Fair enough. I don't like to speculate about people out of my league either.

[**Sunshine**] So the question is: Who's a smart enough chess player to play the game at this level?

[**Librarian**] That's close to being the right question, but you're not quite there. At least the right person to ask is right here, but you need to focus the questions better.

[**Sunshine**] You mean you did it?

[**Librarian**] Nothing so crass. I like secrets, whispers, and mischief. I'm not looking to overthrow a government. I'm content to watch from the sidelines. I'm not the one here with more ambition than good sense.

[**Kludge**] Zuni, I'm gonna freely admit I don't know what you're talking about here, buddy.

[**Mika**] I think I do. Some of the pieces are coming together. The Fronts are linked to the Matrix attacks on GridGuide and DIA air traffic control. Someone is running them and the Zombies, because the latter wiped out the Godz leaving the Fronts to benefit. The Fronts absorbed the Aurora Angels and gained some technomancers. Whoever is using the Fronts and the Zombies to hit Denver's infrastructure also engineered them into position to do so.

[**Glitch**] And Dean Costello was present to broker the deal between the Fronts and the Aurora Angels.

[**Kat**] Oooooohhhh.

[**Librarian**] Very good, you get a gold star.

[**Traveler Jones**] Uh, Dean? I like you buddy, but it's no time for damning silence.

[**Casanova**] Fuck anyone who thinks that's going to shock me

into incriminating myself. What the fuck did I ever do to you, Zuni?

[**Librarian**] Nothing. The Exchange is entirely satisfied with your participation. It's just that it's fun to let a drop of truth into the water, and watch the seekers and conspiracy theorists frenzy like blood-crazed sharks.

[**Casanova**] Well then fuck you too. I'm not saying shit. Not when one of you snakes could sell me out to Ghostwalker on a whim and make serious bank. I can count the people in this room I trust on one finger. Guess which one.

[**Perri**] Look, nobody here's a fan of Ghostwalker. I made sure of that. I won't let anyone sell you out. Anyone who does, I will find out, and I will burn their ass to the ground, with a side order of Black Hammer.

[**FastJack**] The lady is good to her word.

[**Casanova**] Perri, no offense, but you can't police your own data, and I don't trust you to protect me.

[**Kat**] You scared, Dean? Don't worry, I'll protect you.

[**Casanova**] That sounds like a fun night, but isn't going to keep me from going down a dragon's gullet.

[**Glitch**] I could care less what the worm wants you for. I don't visit Denver often, but my contacts in the Nexus are worth more to me than whatever pound of silver I'd get for cashing you in. But I have contacts in that town that need the straight dope to survive. I know a lot of us do. Tell us what you know.

[**Casanova**] Not. Happening.

[**FastJack**] Costello, you should concern yourself less with what Ghostwalker might do to you in some nebulous future and more with what we can do to you right now.

[**Casanova**] Please, old man. What are you going to do, have a stroke in my general direction? This isn't JackPoint, and I don't care if you boot me.

[**FastJack**] Ghostwalker probably doesn't know that you're sitting on the third floor of the Tower of Babel drinking martinis right now any more than he knows that you helped fix up the team that's tearing his city apart. But Diane the waitress you've been hitting on does. She thinks you're cute, tagged you as such on her MeFeed. And since she knows where you are, so do I. Should I clue Ghostwalker's Liaison Office in? I'm pretty sure the ZDF has a headquarters just two blocks from there. Not to mention you're violating curfew. Oh, don't bother getting up—I can see you looking around on the club's security feed—I'm not in the room. I'm not even in the sector.

[**Casanova**] Fuck me like a goat.

[**Frosty**] Heh, legends never die. They just get crankier.

[**Casanova**] All right, let me start with the shit I didn't do. I didn't have anything to do with the GridGuide hit or with the DIA thing. I'm not a fucking terrorist. I didn't even know that was in the pipeline. All I got paid to do was make some introductions between the Fronts and the Aurora Angels. I knew Tenebrous was a technomancer, and I knew the Yakuza was after her, so I dimed her to the Yaks, then I made sure the Fronts showed up just in time to save the day, and acted as mediator for the merger.

[**Mentalist**] That's messed up, chummer. I heard you and Tenebrous had a, shall we say, personal relationship? Cold of you to use her like bait as that.



[**Kay St.**] In the Pueblo Sector, the local government seems more worried about the Ute rebels than anything else. The PCC governing board has been voting on the issue of martial law every day as the situation develops. So far they haven't passed it, but it's getting closer every day as things get more and more out of control.

[**Mika**] The Chavez family has taken the opportunity to squeeze people in the Pueblo sector with a lot for food, water, and medicine sold out of the back of hijacked trucks from Lakewood Amusement Park. Meanwhile, the Koshari have done the opposite, helping out local residents and businesses for free and providing them actual protection, as opposed to just extortion in the form of a protection racket. At least as long as they're Amerindian. The situation's looking like it could develop into a nasty side bout, as the ordinary citizens of the PCC sector get more and more pissed at the Chavez family's extortion.

[**Mentalist**] Meanwhile, the Koshari are paying good rates to local smugglers to keep the tempo flowing so that people can smoke their troubles away.

[**Kay St.**] The Sioux sector was officially placed under martial law four days ago after the run against Apex Plasmids. Which I'm sure none of us had anything to do with.

[**Stone**] What was it you said a week or so back? "I can neither confirm or deny that."

[**Tabby**] Smartass.

[**Sunshine**] The run did major infrastructure damage, but it also contaminated an unknown number of their vats. The company had to shut down indefinitely, really worsening Denver's growing food shortage, and forcing the growing demand into the hand of Apex's competitors.

[**FastJack**] Remember that nearly all of Apex's competitors in Denver are Aztechnology subsidiaries.

[**Kay St.**] Actually, Cosmo told me that Aztechnology was looking to buy into Apex, not go to war with it.

[**Sunshine**] I think that fell through.

[**Kay St.**] Ghostwalker hated this because he was majorly invested in Apex, but the Sioux sector hated it more because it was a major, flagrant act of industrial espionage and corporate terrorism on their territory because Eagle Security was busy with riot control and public peacekeeping. Sioux sector has gone under martial law and locked down its borders, and military flights into the sector have deployed substantial reinforcements.

[**Stone**] Sioux Wildcats spec ops teams have already been deployed to secure strategic objectives throughout the Front Range Free Zone. There hasn't been any shots fired between nations. Yet.

[**Tabby**] Ghost! I knew I was missing some major developments while taking care of business. How did Ghostwalker react to that?

[**Perri**] Less than you might think. As the connecting force keeping the balance of power in check in the absence of the Second Treaty renewal, everyone thought he would be forced to act by the Sioux sector militarizing. But he's been so caught up in the other battles he's waging he hasn't even submitted a formal response.

[**Kay St.**] And that brings me to the UCAS sector, which declared martial law *today*.

[**Sunshine**] Which you would see if the legitimate newsfeed broadcasts weren't constantly being shut down or subverted by media pirates and hackers, who have been coming out of the woodwork in droves.

[**Kay St.**] The UCAS's disenfranchised minorities, the SINless and the metahumans driven into the warrens by Iain Lesker's thugs, have risen up in general discontent. Rioting and looting mobs have stampeded into the more affluent and secure UCAS neighborhoods, starting numerous structure fires.

[**Mentalist**] It is almost as though an inconceivably massive manipulation spell was influencing the emotions of everyone in the city, nudging them over the edge to give vent to their feelings of rage and resentment, discontent, and fury.

[**Stone**] Is that a possibility?

[**Mentalist**] Not practically speaking, the force of such a spell, to affect the entire city all at once, would be incalculable, and the drain would be quite possibly fatal. At least to any caliber of magician—metahuman or other—that I'm aware exists.

[**Axis Mundi**] Many things beyond our understanding are nonetheless possible.

[**Mentalist**] True. Still, I think the easier explanation is that people, oppressed minorities of all stripes and creeds, and are just pissed off, and things have reached a boiling point.

[**FastJack**] I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it any more.

[**Stone**] Uh, FastJack?

[**FastJack**] Nevermind, that reference was old before *I* was born. By your standards, it's pre-historic.

[**Kay St.**] The disenfranchised of the UCAS sector are acting up and acting out, but Lesker is just as worried about the Sioux militarization, especially considering his ties to anti-metahuman groups. In the wake of Alamos 20k's statement of responsibility for the murder of Lucinda Gray Arrow, relations between the Sioux and UCAS sectors have been beyond tense this past week. Doves in the UCAS are seriously questioning his brinkmanship, but he seems to have the full approval and support of Angela Colloton, even if they do have to communicate via physical and magical couriers and in-person visits. And the populist voice of the UCAS is backing Lesker's play big time, with some distressingly vocal anti-NAN sentiment.

[**FastJack**] The president has visited Denver in person? With all this shit going on?

[**Kay St.**] A few times, with the utmost security and secrecy. Colloton may be a lot of things, but she's certainly got brass balls.

[**Mentalist**] A Humanis-operated soup kitchen was torched by free fire spirits in apparent spontaneous retaliation for the bombing of the Wonderland club and the spirits, metas, and awakened who died there.

[**Stone**] I heard it was runners that hit the soup kitchen, and they summoned the fire spirits.

[**Tabby**] And I heard it was runners hired by free fire spirits. But then again, I didn't know Sioux sector was under martial law. Most of my business has me in PCC and CAS territory these days. And keeping my head down.

[**Mentalist**] Anyway, fearing reprisals, Ghostwalker has sent



forces to guard the Children of the Dragon churches and shelters in the UCAS sector.

[**Axis Mundi**] I believe the UCAS is waiting on the DIA to provide more intel on who's actually responsible for these attacks.

[**FastJack**] Believe me, they're not alone. I'd like to know who's really responsible for bringing this drekstorm to Denver, too.

[**Axis Mundi**] One of their operatives, a free spirit named Firebird, has been very active in Denver since Lucinda Gray Arrow was killed. If the Sioux are on the verge of leveling accusations against the UCAS government, then you can bet the UCAS wants to know who really did it.

[**Mika**] I understand you and her have some history.

[**Axis Mundi**] Yes, although I'm not acting on behalf of the UCAS here. I'm only trying to understand all the forces in play.

[**Tabby**] Has anyone else seen the clown graffiti all over town? I've seen it painted everywhere from sidewalks in the Aurora Warrens to the windows of buildings in the Hub to the bricks at DU campus. Crude drawings of a clown with the words "Jester's Army" or "He Who Laughs Loud, Laughs Loudest" and "Perish The Universe, So Long As I Have My Revenge" and other slogans scrawled beneath.

[**Sunshine**] Yes, regular and AR graffiti.

[**Perri**] I've seen it all over the Matrix, too.

[**Stone**] Yeah, I've seen it all over the damn place. What the hell does it mean? Romero of the Zombies wears kind of a clown get-up, and while he's survived *much* longer than I thought he would with Ghostwalker's whole army after him, he definitely doesn't have the brains to have masterminded this whole thing. No fucking way. The graffiti's being done by the mob, who've been instigated by the hackers, and I'm sure that even most of them don't know what it really means.

[**Axis Mundi**] Trickster figures are numerous. Coyote, Loki, Anansi, Raven, Crow. A Jungian archetype, found amongst innumerable cultures, and no less prevalent in our real worlds. And always trouble.

[**FastJack**] There are JackPointers who could tell us more. Unfortunately, none of them happened to be in Denver when the Iron Curtain fell.

[**Tabby**] All the buzz I've heard indicates that Aztechnology is behind it.

[**Sunshine**] If nothing else, I don't think the timing makes a lot of sense. Neither do the angles. If the Azzies were capable of orchestrating something this subtle, this complicated, and this multi-faceted, I feel like they would have done it a long time ago.

[**Tabby**] You guys have probably been over all the angles like a thousand times while I was gone, huh? Trying to find out who's put the hurt on Denver. And why?

[**Perri**] Closer to ten thousand.

[**Mika**] Still, can't hurt to work through it one more time. I for one would like to know who's behind this. I know that Sunshine and AM feel the same way.

[**Stone**] Does it even have to be one individual? Can't it simply be a confluence of events, building spontaneously on each other?

[**Kay St.**] No, it's much too effective to be a coincidence or

synchronicity. Each strike has helped build up the next. If it were a bunch of players spontaneously acting, I think they'd trip all over each other. No, the events just seemed unrelated enough until no one knew what was happening until it was too late.

[**Sunshine**] All right, so: it all started when Perianwyr was arrested by the ZDF, and someone torched the Weekday Eclipse. Everyone assumed Ghostwalker hired the runners who did it, and public unrest at Ghostwalker's rule began to build. The Zombies thrill-gang wiped out the Godz, making the Fronts the number one go-gang in the city; the Fronts then absorbed the Aurora Angels and their Matrix muscle. The Zombies began blowing up ZDF patrols and checkpoints, and then Alamos 20k firebombed the Wonderland club, killing Lucinda Gray Arrow, one of Ghostwalker's strongest supporters, and narrowly missing Nicholas Whitebird, who was supposed to be there. While Ghostwalker is cleaning house over this, the Nexus is hacked, and his personal datastore is leaked. He cleans it up fast, but in his mind the damage is done, and he moves to shut down the Nexus. The Nexus goes further into the shadows to keep surviving, with substantial bad feelings fomenting towards Ghostwalker. The Zombies continue to hit the ZDF, and hackers linked to the Fronts/Angels *and*, let's face it, to the Nexus, where we're all hanging out, began hammering Denver's Matrix infrastructure, hard. First GridGuide went, then the airport's air traffic control. Flash mobs began springing up throughout the city, along with the graffiti. And then Ghostwalker cut off the city from the rest of the world, and the rest of the Matrix. Is that everything?

[**FastJack**] No, but it's a damn good summary.

[**Mika**] Even if it does leave out a bit of what came before and what came after.

[**Stone**] The Zombies are pretty much done. Romero hasn't been confirmed killed, but the number of Zombies the ZDF has reported killed is greater than the gang's initial membership, even if people are still reporting more of them. Unfortunately, the damage has been done. The riots are still going on sporadically throughout the city, and the Zombies attack has ZDF patrols shooting on site.

[**Kay St.**] Which isn't helping Ghostwalker's public image.

[**Mika**] Don't forget that the Denver Yakuza were wrapped up in a neat little package for the Vory. I'm not sure where the plays into things yet, but it appears to be part of the equation. A payment from someone, to someone.

[**Perri**] We know that Dean Costello—who has, understandably, absconded—acted as a go-between in the deal between the Fronts, the Aurora Angels, and a third party. An unknown third party, who may very well have been the one who hacked the Dragon's Lair. And according to Costello—not the most reliable of sources—the third party is a technomancer who approached Tenebrous with the deal. If it is a technomancer, it's not one of ours.

[**Kludge**] That story leaves so many unknowns and holes so big you could drive a Zuggmaschine through some of them. Like who's giving the Zombies milspec hardware, or where did the Fronts get a nano-virus that's bleeding-edge enough to slot up the whole pud-licking Denver grid. So what else have we got?



[FastJack] Perri, will you let me see the security logs, whatever base code you have left, from the attack on the Dragon's Lair?

[Perri] Why?

[FastJack] Because I still know a few things. Including the calling cards of most of the best hackers of my lifetime. Which is really fucking long.

[Kludge] Our people have already been over this shit with a fine toothed comb. There's nothing that we can use.

[Perri] Still, you can have it if you want it. Maybe it'll keep you out of trouble and off the streets.

[FastJack] Thanks for the vote of confidence, dear. I'll see what I can turn up.

[Axis Mundi] It is possible, of course, that all of this is happening for reasons that are perfectly natural.

[Kay St.] That again? I thought that had been debunked.

[Axis Mundi] You would be wise to listen before scoffing. Zebulon returned to wholeness from a state of fragmentation due to an enormous act of will by Ghostwalker. An act of will with unknown consequences. Accepted?

[Stone] To the degree that I can follow any of this magical shit, sure.

[Axis Mundi] But other forces sought to keep Zebulon separated, fractured, broken. Those forces were sublimated, overwhelmed, and Zebulon was made whole, rejoining Ghostwalker, changing him. But because entropy is a law of the universe, the fractiousness became a part of her nature, and her nature is the spirit of Denver. Divided. And so we see the people of Denver dividing into tribes and nations, losing trust and community, going to war with one another. Either because this is part of Ghostwalker's master plan, or because it's simply her nature now.

[Mika] Is that confirmed by Firebird?

[Axis Mundi] I wouldn't know, she's been rather busy. That's my theory, anyway.

[Mentalist] That seems very far-fetched. Then again, this entire situation is so fucking bizarre I feel like Occam's Razor has been dulled to uselessness. I've been organizing runs against SpiriTech from a presence originating in the deep metaplanes known as Sigh-on-an-Arctic-Wind. I don't think that has anything to do with anything, except that this has been a strange week.

[Axis Mundi] I know her. She hates Ghostwalker, actually. But I don't see what that has to do with SpiriTech. As far as I'd heard, they're independent.

[Tabby] So how do you get *paid* from the deep metaplanes?

[Mentalist] In magical secrets and lore. Obviously.

[Sunshine] Do you have anything to add to our speculations and conspiracy theorizing, Tabby?

[Tabby] Just the obvious, I guess. That this all seems to have much more to do with the Matrix than with the astral plane and the metaplanes.

[Sunshine] I was thinking the same thing. Ah—breaking news. And not the good kind. Singularity, the Horizon subsidiary that runs the entire FRFZ grid, has just announced a complete hardware-level grid reset for the entire city of Denver.

[FastJack] When?

[Mika] Why?

[Perri] For how long?

[Sunshine] 0800 hours tomorrow, until such a time that the infrastructure can be restored to functionality.

[Kludge] Yeah, I'm getting the feed now. Apparently, Mira Castillo, the head of Horizon Americas, is more than a little concerned about the fact that the unknown virus—or virii—have spread from the DIA air traffic control and GridGuide subsystems onto thousands of other wireless devices in the Denver area.

[Sunshine] As unlikely as this is to be a repeat of the second Crash, Castillo isn't willing to run the risk of having the third Crash happen on her watch when she could have done something to quarantine it.

[Kay St.] That makes sense. Where is Ghostwalker in all of this?

[Sunshine] Silent, so far. I'll let you all know if we hear from him.

[Kay St.] The sector govs are not happy with Horizon's decision to pull the plug, but I'm not sure they have the wherewithal to get independent connectivity operational in time for it to matter. As the sole Matrix Service Provider of Denver, Singularity had a *lot* of exclusivity.

[Perri] Ghost! We don't have workaround for that. Less than six hours, and then the entire Denver Grid goes dark. Does this feel like the end of the world to anyone else?

[Stone] More and more.

[Kludge] I'm enacting Protocol Oz and dumping everything I can to offline backups. You warn the rest of the kids from our temple.

[Perri] Right, don't want any of them to get disrupted from the Resonance without any warning.

[Tabby] If any of you hacker types are taking this as your sign to get out of Dodge, I can still organize extractions. I won't rake you over the coals on the rate, either.

[Axis Mundi] I don't know about anyone else, but I am staying for the duration. I need to see where all of this is going.

[Stone] So you don't think it's almost over? Please don't say something ominous like "it is only beginning."

[Axis Mundi] Things are drawing to a head now, the end is in sight, but we are not there. I do not know for sure, but that is what I have been told by the spirits of this place. They are attuned to their home territory. They can feel the changes coming. The violence ahead.

[Mika] Man, it is *really* coming down outside. Been snowing for hours. Winter is really kicking off with a bang.

[Sunshine] Odd to see this much snow on the ground in October.

[Perri] Not really. Denver can get significant snowfall pretty much any time but the dead of summer.

[Kay St.] This shows no signs of letting up, though. I wouldn't blame you if you missed it, but the meteorologists are kind of freaked out. There's supposed to be a big storm coming through after this, and then another one right on the tail of that one, and then a little one after that one. Unless of course they all merge to one super storm. The news keep saying that Denver hasn't been hit by this many storms this fast since the Christmas blizzards of '06.

[Mika] Shit!

[Tabby] I heard we might get like forty plus inches of snow



from the first blizzard alone. That would be the most snowfall recorded since the blizzard of 1913. Plus white-out conditions and 70 kph winds.

[**Stone**] I suppose it would be overly optimistic to assume that the blizzard will chill everyone out?

[**Kay St.**] The rioting and fighting and shooting in the streets might stop, yes. But between this, the disrupted Matrix access, and the closed airports? This is the basis for a major humanitarian disaster.

[**Tabby**] Denver's always been really efficient at handling snowfall and keeping roads and businesses open. Even the Sixth World didn't change that, but the offlining of GridGuide and the Matrix sure might. Low-tech alternatives like two-ways radios are selling like hotcakes right now, and survivalists are stocking up.

[**Mentalist**] Not to sound paranoia, but times are far too interesting this past month. I have to ask: could not this storm be yet another attack on the city? Perhaps the work of a great form air elemental? A really fraggin' big one?

[**Axis Mundi**] Of course it is magical in nature, but I don't think it's anything so basely mechanical. Can you not see the forest for the trees? This storm and the one we stand in already are one and the same. Manifestations of the same phenomenon. Things are changing, and not calmly. All of Denver's spirits can feel it, the change that is on the wind. Many say that it is like the Great Ghost Dance, that the astral current *tastes* the same. Most of us were too young to remember that time of trauma, but I fear they may be right.

[**Kay St.**] I'm worried too. My reasons for it are just a lot more grounded. If this blizzard hits as hard as the weather guys are predicting, if it buries the city in snow, I'd imagine that all four nations that compose the divided city of Denver will send in relief missions to try to help their people out.

[**Stone**] I'd be surprised if shadowrunners didn't get involved in the relief effort.

[**Kay St.**] But the thing is, I have absolutely no idea what Ghostwalker, in his current state of mind, will do when those relief flights start coming in. Not to mention that the flights will have to go through "enemy" air space at a time when everyone is overwhelmed by chaos and panic, and at a time where *no treaty has been ratified* to govern Denver's borders.

[**FastJack**] I've seen this iconography before. These persona elements, I've seen them before. I know who hacked into the Dragon's Lair.

user Puck entering the chat (04:33:15)

[**Puck**] You rang?

[**Perri**] Son of a bitch!

[**Kludge**] Puddlicker! How the fuck did you get in here?

[**Puck**] I've been monitoring it this whole time. Never mind how.

[**FastJack**] I assume this is the part where you want to gloat, Puck. By all means, knock yourself out. Hopefully Perri can restrain herself from knocking you out ... or worse ... until your rampant, unchecked ego has answered some of her questions.

[**Puck**] You wound me.



[Perri] Why the fuck did you sour the deal between us and Ghostwalker? It was a good deal. A good deal for *your* people! You cracked, glitched, filthy little milksnake! What the hell did the Nexus ever do to you? We never even came after you after you, and your master threw us to the wolves.

[Puck] Are you done?

[Perri] Drek!

[Puck] You do know that I'm not the dapper villain in a Sunday serial, right? That I don't have to tell you anything?

[Perri] But you will. You're going to spill it all. Or I'm going to find whoever, whatever you care about as much as I care about the Nexus, and I'm going to turn it inside out. Then it will be your turn.

[Puck] I highly doubt it. All I have to do is blink, and I'll leave this node, and you'll never see me again. So your threats don't much affect me. But, whatever. I'll explain how I helped you. I don't want my dramatic entrance to go to waste. Ghostwalker wasn't protecting you and wasn't helping you. He was using all of you. I've been used by as a pawn by powerful beings, Machiavellian shitheels who don't care what happens to the delicate clockwork inside their little toy soldiers, who don't give a fuck who they sacrifice to get a move ahead on the chessboard. I know what it's like.

[FastJack] But this is different, right? Okay, how? I've gone to bat for you on numerous occasions, defended you because I thought there was anything inside you, anything at all, besides the desire to destroy and ruin and sew chaos. So earn that.

[Puck] Ghostwalker was turning the Nexus, one at a time, into his spies, his agents, pushing an agenda that was fundamentally his. Well what about our agenda? A free and open Matrix, a playground for our kind and a safe haven. Look at that bitch SilveryK, she went over to his side instead of helping the Nexus stay afloat, which is what I was doing. When the Yamato Clan was poaching our kind to sell to those sick fucks at MCT, what did Ghostwalker do to help? What did *you* do? Nothing, that's what. Then I got involved, and what's left of the Yamato clan is being shipped back to Neo-Tokyo in fifteen different garbage bags.

[Perri] Listen to me, you burnt-brained, treacherous little skinflint. We don't want your help. We don't need your help. And I am personally going to kill you so hard it'll be like you were never born. Is everyone done with this asshole?

[Sunshine] Perri! Wait, he knows more, and I need to hear it!

[Puck] All right, eager beaver. Class is in session, what do you want to know?

[Sunshine] So it was all you, all by your lonesome? You organized the riots, set the gangs in motions? Why do you hate Ghostwalker so much?

[Puck] I'd love to take the credit, but this isn't about hate. At least it's not about my hate. I've found a kindred spirit, that's all; we're two of a kind. Another irascible scamp, another not-so-merry wanderer in the night. A clown who's crying in the inside. In this one, I'm not looking to destroy anything, that's just a side effect of what I'm looking to build. He's the one who wants it burned down, but I've got my own plans for Denver and the Matrix; I'm not alone, either. I've made a lot of friends along the way. Technomancers, sure, ones

looking for a place they can be free from experimentation, from abuse, from fear. But other things too. Stranger things.

[Perri] You're destroying the Nexus to help technomancers? That's a crock of shit on so many goddamn levels!

[Puck] I'm not destroying the Nexus, I'm setting it free from the claws of a grasping user who could never understand us, who would never *respect* us. The age of dragons and kings is over, that's what he said to me. This is a trickster's world; a trickster makes this world.

[Stone] Who the fuck are you talking about?

[Mika] Ditto.

[FastJack] Harlequin.

[Puck] Yeah, that's one of his names. He's got a lot of them. I get the impression the guy's been around a long time. Fascinating guy. A little bit crazy. But then again, who isn't? As Mr. Johnsons go, he shoots pretty straight. He just wants the fire. I get to decide what rises from the ashes.

[Axis Mundi] Spirits preserve us. You don't know, do you?

[Puck] Know what?

[Axis Mundi] That it may not really be him at all. It may be the other. Something toxic, something ancient, that wants destruction and pain for its own sake; because it's funny. How could you even tell?

[Puck] You're a confusing guy, but all things considered, I've got to take whatever you're saying with one big ass grain of salt.

[Mentalist] Why are you telling us this?

[Perri] Because he likes the sound of his own insufferable voice.

[Puck] Close, but no. Because if I die trying, I want this statement on the record. Because it's too late for you to stop it. Any of it. You can hate me, I'm used to it, but when this is over, you'll thank me. Because when the old and rotten is done burning to the ground, there will be something new in its place. Something free.

[Kludge] You didn't want to ask us any of this? Perri, or me, or any of the dozens of technomancers gathered at our temple?

[Puck] Why should you start knowing what's good for you now? You never have before. Besides, I knew that a lot of you were compromised as Ghostwalker's bully boys. I couldn't ruin the element of surprise!@#\$(*&^%\$!@#%\$.

user Puck has been ejected (05:57:59)

[Perri] How's that for the element of surprise, bitch?

[Sunshine] Perri!

[Perri] What, you weren't even a little tired of hearing him sermonize?

[Sunshine] There's more he could have told us.

[Mika] AM, what were you saying to Puck about there being "another" Harlequin?

[Axis Mundi] The Jester Spirit. It is the one the other spirits whisper of in fear. If it is loose in Denver, if he has trusted it, or ignored it and let it remain to wreak havoc, it would explain much.

[Stone] To who? Not to me! All I got is that Puck's working for some clown guy named Harlequin.

[Mentalist] I've heard Harlequin's name. He's an urban legend, a boogieman. Not supposed to even be real. But if he does exist, he's an elf that's been around forever, a colossally powerful mage, and damn near unstoppable.



[Mika] Why does he have such a hate-on for Ghostwalker?
[Kludge] I'm afraid you'll have to discuss that elsewhere, kiddies. This chatroom is closing. Perri and I need to make preparations for the grid going offline. We only have a few hours left to get our affairs in order.
[FastJack] Perri ...
[Perri] I'll be okay. You watch your own hoop.

/user FastJack has logged off
/user Stone has logged off
/user Mika has logged off
/user Mentalist has logged off
/user Tabby has logged off
/user Kay St. has logged off
/user Axis Mundi has logged off
/user Sunshine has logged off
//chat session archived::user Sunshine::10/26/71//

NOVEMBER 1: DRAGON DUEL IN DOWNTOWN DENVER

Posted by: Sunshine

//upload media file::user Sunshine::10/31/74//
//Real Time trideo transcript activated//

[Shaky video feed of downtown Denver, the heart of the Hub, from a small fixed-wing drone aircraft in a slow orbit. The aircraft is violently buffeted by blizzard winds, and the screen of flying snow makes visibility less than optimal. The audio when it comes in is slightly distorted, and the speaker is clearly shouting over the wind.]

Sunshine: This should be transmitting now, via the satellite uplink I've got patched in, as long as this Optic-X holds up. If it bites it, I've got an old S-K Bussard on backup, but the camera equipment isn't as good.

[The aircraft banks slowly around and the camera zooms down through hundreds of meters of flying snow to a view of the 16th Street mall. Hundreds of indistinct figures, huddled in overcoats, are standing in the street in the driving snow.]

Sunshine: I have a tip from Axis Mundi's spirit pals that Ghostwalker is supposed to be putting in a public appearance here. I have no idea what's going on, but I wanted to be here to cover it. I don't see him ye—no, wait!

[The aircraft drops downwards, hovering, battered by snow, as the camera pans upwards. The massive bulk of the white-scaled dragon soars downwards from between the flanking skyscrapers, with huge, muscular wings beating violently against the squall. His dramatic descent is backlit by numerous powerful spotlights set up around the street. The crowd quickly rushes back to give the great dragon a place to land, with a resounding boom that seems to shake the buildings. Ghostwalker's wings fold into his body so that he is not too wide to fit in the street.]

Sunshine: Ghostwalker has landed. I'm going in closer to hear what he has to say. Shit, dragon's don't work that way, do they? Anyway, going in closer. Come on, baby, stay together.

[The drone banks forward and down, veering dangerously close to the edge of a building. The audio begins to pick up the voice of Nicholas Whitebird, coming through the loudspeaker of an Ares Citymaster that the camera briefly zooms in on, before the view swings back to Ghostwalker.]

Nicholas Whitebird: Citizens of Denver! I repeat, you are ordered to disperse immediately. There is no need for further loss of life! All of your misguided transgressions will be forgiven; I am not an unreasonable dragon. None of your goals or needs will be advanced by your presence here. Leave this place before you come to harm!

[The drone swings around to view the crowd, now only a few dozen meters off of the ground and hovering. A few figures in the crowd withdraw in fear of the dragon, walking or running away, but the rest stand their ground, even as Whitebird's message repeats in the background.]

Sunshine: I don't know if you can see this, but these people aren't running. I don't know who they are, but they are seriously brave or seriously stupid. Definitely not an ordinary mob of student protesters or activists, but they don't seem to be armed combatants either. I can't get any closer.

[A voice suddenly cuts through the crowd, somehow amplified yet totally clear over the shrieking blizzard winds.]

Harlequin: They are not afraid of you any longer! They will not bow to your threats and demands any more, tyrant!

[A gleam of light flashes from near the front of the crowd, as figures draw back to give the speaker room. The speaker is clad in brilliantly glowing silver plate mail. His sword, likewise, glows as bright as the noonday sun. His face is indistinct through the distance and the sheets of falling snow, although he is clearly an elf.]

Whitebird: Disperse now! Your presence here will cost you your lives! There is no need for you to come to harm, to fall victim to his sick scheme! Leave, now, before it is too late!

Sunshine: This is really incredible, the leader of this Jester's Army seems to finally have come forward. More of the crowd is leaving, but most of them are still staying.

[The camera pans from the glowing elf to Ghostwalker, still perched, wings furled, in the middle of the square, and then back again. From his body language, the elf seems to be playing to the crowd, pandering and showboating.]

Harlequin: It is true that my will has brought suffering and woe to you, the people of the Mile High City. That is the karma that your self-proclaimed liege lord has brought upon your heads. But I will leave and all of this madness will abate, Ghostwalker, and your people will be safe and prosperous, if only you leave Denver, never to return.

[If Ghostwalker responds, it is not through his interpreter.]

Harlequin: Then, people of Denver, you hear just how much he cares for you.

Whitebird: You wretched, selfish creature. You are not worthy of that sword, not the equal of that armor.

Harlequin: Then take them.

[A brilliant flash blinds the camera for a moment, and when it refocuses, the fading contrails of a bolt of unthinkable powerful magic are barely visible, streaking from Ghostwalker to Harlequin. Dozens of members of the crowd in the path between Ghostwalker and Harlequin have been knocked sprawling, not harmed by the spell, but upended by its passage. A different colored glow surrounds Harlequin, then fades. He remains standing.]

Sunshine: Ghostwalker cast some kind of spell at him, and he just took it on the chin. Everyone is finally running for cover now, but I think it might be too late!

[The drone camera banks up and away, the camera bobbing down just in time to see Ghostwalker take wing and fly forward with





INCOMING FEED.....



LIGHTNING IN DENVER.....

terrifying speed. A blast of flame erupts from his throat, incinerating vehicles, vaporizing millions of snowflakes, incinerating a dozen citizens as it traces up the ground towards Harlequin. The flames wash harmlessly over the elf, who slashes at Ghostwalker as he soars past, and then fires a pair of manabolts at him. The spells have no discernible effect, and Ghostwalker begins to bank around with difficulty, due to his size and the intensity of the storm.]

Sunshine: Did you see that? Did you see that? That was fucking *intense!* Ghostwalker is breathing fire on downtown Denver, this guy seems to be going toe to toe with him. Ghost, even with all the magic and tech in the world, I don't know how that's possible! Shit!

[The drone banks away at the last second as tracer rounds from the ground stitch up towards it.]

Sunshine: Who's shooting at me!? Shit, the ZDF must think that I'm part of this. I'm activating the chameleon coating.

[The drone's camera flies away from the carnage, dipping around a building and back to scan the crowd. The entire trip takes maybe thirty seconds, but when the drone re-establishes the shot, numerous vehicles have detonated, the entire crowd is panicking and stampeding away, and substantial pieces of surrounding buildings have fallen onto the street while a dozen powerful, manifested spirits of various kinds are locked in brutal combat with each other on the street. Some of these spirits are taller than the surrounding buildings. A rogue gust of wind shoves the nose of the Optic-X up and away from the action it's trying to capture, and a strobing pulse of forked lightning flashes in the snowstreaked night sky above. When the camera falls back into line, Ghostwalker flies straight at the drone's point

of view, Harlequin clutched in his claws. The drone is missed by the oncoming dragon, but knocked aside by the wind of Ghostwalker's passage.]

Sunshine: Holy shit! Please let this be recording and getting out there! Ghost, tell me someone is *seeing* this!

[The camera swings back around as Ghostwalker slams Harlequin into the side of a nearby building at a good clip, leaving a massive crater in the plascrete, bending steel girders and shattering armorglass windows. Tons of debris fall to crush or kill an unseen number of bystanders below, as Ghostwalker drops Harlequin to the ground and then swoops after him.]

Sunshine: Fuck, no one could have survived that right? I'm trying to get a shot of what's left of that guy.

[The feed abruptly cuts to static.]

Sunshine: Oh, no, no, no no! Hacked? Seems to be hacked, not shot down. Not now! Not now! Cutting to the back-up drone. Please still be there!

[This shot comes from a different camera and a different altitude and direction, abrupt and disorienting. It is just approaching the 16th Street Mall from the north and east. Large clouds of smoke rising from the mall are visible, barely, through the blizzard.]

Sunshine: All right, this drone seems to be operational. It'll take me about a minute to get back within view of the ground level if I manage not to crash this thing. What the hell is that!?

[Visible coming from the east and headed west are a large formation of Aztechnology military aircraft, including several Aguilar attack helicopters and Lobo LAVs. While ordinarily the rotorcraft, at the very least, would be grounded or torn apart flying

in a storm like this, a large envelope of calm air surrounds them, enabling them to fly unhindered in the maelstrom.]

Sunshine: How are those things even airborne in this? No one sane would fly millions of nuyen worth of aircraft in this weather, I'm crazy just for piloting some cheap throwaway drones. I'm going to get lower before they lob a missile at me!

[The drone descends through the storm and layers of clouds, shaking with turbulence, until the 16th Street Mall comes into view, when it brakes into a hover. The camera zooms in on Ghostwalker, and, several meters in front him, the elf.]

Sunshine: I can't believe that chummer is still alive! Barely. It looks like he's fallen to one knee and he can barely keep his sword pointed in the right direction.

[The camera returns to Ghostwalker, who is bleeding profusely from numerous gashes; individually, they are tiny compared to the size of his bulk, but they add up. He looks wounded, and tired. Just as he is raising one massive, razor-sharp claw to renew the attack, a woman manifests out of thin air before him, arms outstretched to prevent him from pressing his assault.]

Sunshine: Is that Zebulon? If they're saying anything down there, I can't make it out, but it looks like more crazy people are running out to help the elf in shining armor.

[Achieving maximum zoom and adjusting its resolution accordingly, camera pans to where two figures flank Harlequin. One is a beautiful elven woman with long, platinum-blond hair and a tall male elf with a strong, square face and piercing green eyes. The former is helping him to stand, while the latter whispers something in his ear. Naturally, the drone camera doesn't pick up any of the audio, before it returns to Ghostwalker, who glowers at the elves for a moment longer before springing into the air. Zebulon follows, flying after him easily, ignoring the rules of gravity.]

Sunshine: Where's he going? Who won? What the fuck just happens?

[The drone banks upwards and begins to follow Ghostwalker to the west, before a sharp, rapid beeping sound is heard.]

Sunshine: Oh shit, missile lock, maybe I can—

[There is a flash, and then a blue screen of death.]

//interrupt transcript//

NOVEMBER 2: THE CITY WITHOUT A TREATY- 11/2/74

Posted By: Kay St. Irregular

- And this is how it ended. Since many of us are too close to this, I've asked you to withhold your comments for now, unless you have something absolutely crucial to add. And yes, this will be enforced.
- FastJack

Most of you know by now that Aztechnology has retaken land in the treaty city of Denver. During the Halloween blizzard, an Aztechnology military force, protected from the storm by unknown means, moved into the Littleton and Lakewood areas of Denver. They have since taken control of all territory south of 6th Avenue through military force. The Aztechnology force occupied the territory with little fighting, although casualties were suffered both by PCC and Aztlan forces during the occupation. Casualties were minimal because nearly all of the PCC's aircraft were grounded by the ongoing blizzard.

Aztechnology forces were not engaged as they traveled through PCC airspace due to a large number of "diplomatic incidents" with UCAS aircraft flying sorties into PCC airspace at the same time. UCAS Secretary of Defense Despain offered a formal apology for this "misunderstanding," blaming it on "faulty navigation systems due to the extreme weather conditions." Aztlan's President Silva has stated that the residents of the "reclaimed" sectors (problematic terminology in a number of ways) are free to either relocate north into PCC territory, or apply for Aztlan citizenship. Many Ute tribesmen have opted for Aztlan citizenship, while Aztechnology has just begun the complicated business of re-importing many of the businesses and residents displaced from Denver thirteen years ago back into the city.

Many political pundits and policy wonks were expecting the PCC to follow up this act of unprovoked aggression by declaring war on Aztlan, but that has surprisingly not happened. The most aggressive thing that has issued from the PCC has been rhetoric, and the most aggressive rhetoric has taken the form, essentially, of stern warnings. What the PCC may have gotten in return for the territory they effectively ceded to Aztlan is a question on a lot of people's minds.

In her no doubt soon-to-be-*seminal* "Bulwark" speech, UCAS President Angela Colloton called attention to the fact that the Second Treaty of Denver expired on July 1, 2074, meaning that the Aztechnology's seizure of PCC territory was not, legally speaking, a cause for war, as it violated no existing binding agreement. However, her speech served a far different purpose than supporting Aztechnology. She attacked Ghostwalker's "gross mismanagement" of October's terrorist attacks and called attention to the "obvious danger posed to ordinary people by dragons and other beings that we do not understand and are not safe from, such as those that killed seventeen UCAS citizens in their battle in downtown Denver."

The outlined policy is that the UCAS is considering the Second Treaty of Denver to be completely null and void. The other signatory nations have followed suit, without actually going so far as to attack Ghostwalker. But Colloton went further, saying that the UCAS would defend its sovereign control of its sector and help defend the sovereign territory of other nations against Ghostwalker's "pervasive and extralegal influence" until such a time as a Third Treaty of Denver can be composed and ratified. "The United Canadian and American States will not again bow to the demands of any tyrant, metahuman or dragon," said Secretary of Defense Despain. A substantial percentage of the UCAS military is now deployed at and around Peterson Air Force Base in the UCAS sector to back up Despain's words. UCAS Sector Governor Iain Lesker also joined the chorus of criticism directed at Ghostwalker and his handling of the incidents.

Discussions of a third treaty have begun between representatives from the PCC, the CAS, the UCAS, Aztechnology, and the Sioux nation, but the matter is not likely to be resolved any time soon. The CAS and the Sioux Nation have declined to comment on their attitude towards Ghostwalker at this time, instead focusing on their desire to rebuild their sectors following the damage caused by the terrorist attacks and the storm. Tentative predictions say that all of Denver's Matrix grid will be back online and all four sector's airports operational by the end of the week.

Ghostwalker's reaction, or lack thereof, has surprised everyone, as even the UCAS's top military analysts have been



unable to understand why he did not immediately and personally engage the Aztechnology forces and drive them out of his city. Neither has Ghostwalker risen to the challenge made by the UCAS against the legitimacy of his rule of Denver. Ghostwalker has not been expelled from Denver, and he retains control of his lair, offices, and other holdings. Some ZDF officers have left the organization to serve Ghostwalker personally; the rest remained within the Zone Defense Force, which is now under the joint control of Denver's member nations, excluding Aztlan for the time being.

While it seems clear that Ghostwalker, even giving up much of his political power, has no intention of leaving again, the status of Ghostwalker in Denver, and the relations between the five nations holding territory in the city, are uncertain until such a time as a Third Treaty of Denver has been drafted. Ghostwalker has issued only this short and rather ominous statement on the matter: "Do not mistake compassion for fear, or patience for forbearance. The actions of all, even ephemerals, will be remembered. No kindness will be forgotten, nor will any insult, no matter how small, and all will be repaid in kind. But I am reminded by the my better angels that my subjects have suffered in these attacks more than I have. I will not harm them further in reasserting my rightful claim, although rest assured, I shall do so in time."

The Denver Nexus has resumed normal operation, although with substantial membership upheaval. Many of the members of the Fronts and Zombies gangs responsible for the reign of terror in Denver have been arrested and are awaiting trial, while the rest are believed to be in hiding. Several members of the Denver cell of Alamos 20k were killed by Zone Defense Force officers in a raid on their safehouse. No other members of the so called Jester's Army have been publicly charged, and both Puck and Harlequin remain at large.

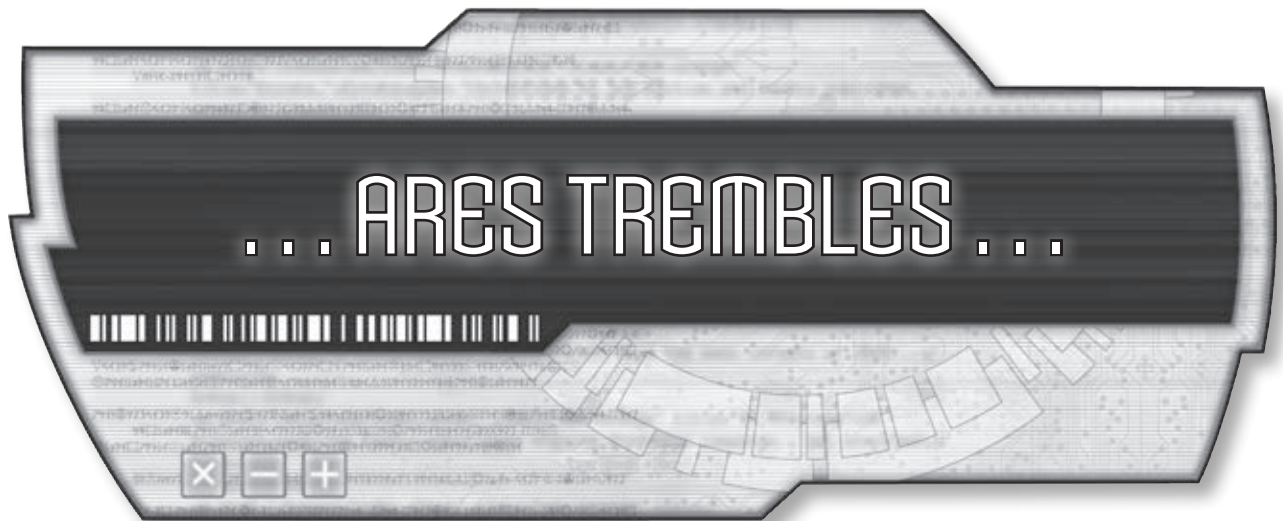
The city of Denver is far from safe, but for the moment, things seem to be stable.

- During the chaos, some shadowrunners broke Perianwyr out of jail. His current whereabouts are unknown. Surprisingly, Ghostwalker doesn't seem to bear him any ill will, but I'm not sure the reverse is true.
- Kat o' Nine Tales
- I don't get it. At all! Ghostwalker is not very zen, he's not the kind to just sit back with a dragon-sized bowl of deepweed and chill out. How could he let all of these slights go unpunished when in the past he has been willing to kill and eat a chummer at the slightest insult?
- Slamm-0!
- What he's lost, and what he may have gained, will depend on the wording of the Third Treaty of Denver. Until that is in writing, the Front Range Free Zone might as well be the Old West. Lawless.
- Cosmo
- But what did Zebulon say to him at the end that kept him from, well, taking care of business?
- Haze
- She said that there are greater threats Aztechnology commands than their military forces. Threats to the astral plane, the home of all Denver's spirits. Ghostwalker could have defended his territory

from the Aztechnology invasion, it's true, even if the UCAS didn't and the PCC couldn't and the CAS and Sioux sectors were far too concerned with their domestic affairs. But he couldn't have done that and defended the astral plane of Denver from the terror and suffering that Maelstrom and Oblivion represent. In the end, it was simple extortion that stayed the dragon's hand; he listened to Zebulon's plea that he spare his spirit subjects from Maelstrom and Oblivion's assault. I had not thought him capable of compassion, until that moment. A shame he seldom displays such kindness to metahuman beings.

- Axis Mundi
- Nor are Maelstrom and Oblivion the only immensely powerful, immensely toxic spirits threatening Denver. These are dark days, indeed.
- Arete
- Man, I was really excited to see Ghostwalker just fragging eat that smarmy, self-absorbed elf clown. And thanks to Sunshine, I was gonna have front-row seats. What happened? Why didn't ol' pale scales go through with it?
- Bull
- A better question would be why didn't Harlequin press the attack. With Aztechnology picking that moment to invade, I can see why Ghostwalker had more important things on his mind. But I don't see why Harlequin would let him go. He seemed ... hellbent.
- Thorn
- Because he saw reason. Finally. All it took was my stupid ass and his oldest enemy to put their hoops between him and a pissed off Great Dragon to do it. I don't know if it was the words that Ehran whispered to him—no, I don't know what he said—or the knock to his stubborn head from Ghostwalker pile-driving him into a skyscraper, but something finally got through to him. He seems more contrite than he's been in ... well, ever, and has a very morose air of "Oh God, what have I done?" I have never seen him like this, not ever. It's not a mode I thought he had.
- And it's not like apologizing to Ghostwalker is going to do any good, either, but I bet he would if he thought it would get him anything but roasted on a spit and eaten. It seems like now he's scrambling to undo what he did, but damned if I can get a clear answer on what that is. All I know for sure is that he's let worse things lose in Denver than Aztechnology—and no, I don't mean Puck.
- Frosty
- Speaking of which ... is Puck still a member in good standing here?
- Netcat
- He's never had good standing, but I'm not going about to kick him out for going on a shadowrun. Which is what this was, even if it was a hell of a doozy. I admit I'd be singing a different tune if things had turned out a little differently. Oh, and Puck, if you're still in Denver, I wouldn't be. Perri and all her pals are gunning for you.
- Fastjack
- I'd leave, I really would, but I'm having too much fun. The main event is about to begin.
- Puck





Macy zipped up his Victory camo jacket and stepped out of the team's Citymaster. The street was empty, the entire suburb felt abandoned. Low-light-amplified footage from Lobo's drone hovered in his AR window.

"Anything yet?" Macy subvocalized.

"*Nada,*" Lobo replied via radio. "Quiet. *Too quiet.*"

Like always, Macy checked his weapons before running into combat. Predator holstered at his hip. Brand-spanking-new M-256 Excalibur Battle Rifle slung crosswise from its shoulder strap.

He couldn't wait to use the Excalibur. Since buying it he'd test-fired it a few times and couldn't see what everyone on the 'trix was bitching about. The kick from this thing sent electricity through his whole body with every squeeze of the trigger. The Johnson had offered to throw in an Excalibur as part of his payment, but Macy had declined. *Rather buy one with my own money,* he'd told the suit. *I believe in voting with my nuyen.*

"I've got movement!" Lobo's voice shouted through Macy's earpiece. "Basement!"

Macy shouldered through the flimsy door of the vacant house. He scanned left and right, brandishing his Excalibur against every shadow. A noxious stench kicked up his gag reflex, so he switched his Cerebrotech olfactory booster into shutoff mode and pressed on.

After securing the ground floor, Macy threw open the basement door. Even from the top of the stairs he heard nightmarish rustling and chittering sounds. Some folk would piss themselves and run, knowing what awaited down in the darkness, prolonging their lives for as long as it took for the bugs to run them down. Others would charge down into the writhing nest, guns blazing, looking like a B-trid hero for a few seconds before the

bugs tore them apart. Macy had seen both happen more times than he liked to think about. Macy was a professional; he took position at the door, controlling the chokepoint. If the bugs wanted to get out, they'd have to come through him.

The first flesh form dashed up the stairs—compound eyes the ever-changing color of abalone, twitching antennae. Macy aimed for the soft part of the neck—the still-human part between chitinous armor plates—and let the Excalibur roar. He didn't bother to dampen the gunfire with his Leviathan Technical cyberears. The cardboard-ripping sound felt utterly liberating. Ichor burst from the bug's throat, and the flesh form tumbled backwards down the stairs.

Two more rushed up after their fallen comrade. Macy squeezed the trigger again. The rifle jammed, and a hiss sizzled out of the ejection port. Macy slipped the rifle's strap from his shoulder and bashed the lead bug across the face, sending it reeling into its partner. He popped the clip release. The mag remained in place. When he grabbed the clip to wrench it free, searing heat burned straight through his glove.

He cursed and threw the useless Excalibur tumbling end-over-end down the basement stairs. The fallen bugs rose.

Macy grabbed for his sidearm and aimed for the foremost bug. For a split second he wondered if the Predator would jam too. It hadn't before, but the Excalibur and all the rumors ... it all planted that dangerous seed of millisecond hesitation.

The bug darted forward and slashed clean through the wrist holding the Predator. Its partner dragged Macy down the basement stairs kicking and screaming.

- For those who've been keeping tabs on the latest developments coming out of everybody's favorite firearm manufacturer, this is an enlightening read from our resident Ares aficionado. I'm choosing to ignore the subtle jab in his opening sentence, so the rest of you should too.
- FastJack

THE BROKEN SWORD IN THE STONE

Posted by: Sticks

Whatever hackers may claim, sometimes it pays to be a late adopter rather than embracing bleeding-edge SOTA the moment it hits the street. Where the Ares Excalibur is concerned, "bleeding edge" is far more literal than I'd like, and not in a good way. Unlike other Ares fanboys who waited in line either at a Weapons World or at the back of some truck out in a shadowed alley somewhere to get their hands on one of these things, I was otherwise entangled when "advance production runs" of the Excalibur started hitting the market. Sad fact of the matter is, the retrieval assignment I was on—which is a story for another day—probably saved my life.

My first clue something was wrong was the sheer number of used Excaliburs I was seeing in the secondary market the moment I arrived back in civilization. Gun runners, black marketeers, and fixers of all stripes know that good products usually stay in the hands of the people who first acquired them, and bad products get pawned off to consignment to be some other poor bastard's problem. Most Ares firearms that hit the secondary market are either stolen or are simply older models their owner retired the moment a newer and better model came available. So why all the damn-near brand-new Excaliburs being tossed like yesterday's donuts? As a proud supporter of Ares weaponry, I was mystified until rumors of horrendous failures started trickling in, both here on JackPoint and a few other networks I frequent.

- He ain't kidding about the glut of used and remaindered Excaliburs. First time I saw one, the fixer in question had more of them in stock than anything else, which was unusual. And may God strike me down if I didn't see some dried blood on the handgrips and/or burn marks along the barrels. No matter how much I'd wanted me an Excalibur, I got out of there as politely as I could. Even the most low-rent gun runner has the common decency to clean off the merchandise before putting it up for sale. My guess was this jerkoff had to unload these fast, before anyone got wind of how lethal they were to the firer. I mean, a gun reseller is probably going to frown if you try shooting off a firearm inside their place of business, even if it's just for testing purposes, so they were hoping to pawn them off based on Ares's reputation alone.
"Gently used," my ass.
- 2XL

For those who have been living off the grid or under a rock recently, the Ares Excalibur M-256 Battle Rifle is a hunk of unmitigated garbage. Keep in mind I've owned nearly every Ares weapon ever produced. I've worked alongside Firewatch teams and Knight Errant SWAT squads. I've placed my life in the hands of Ares and its products for longer than I can remember. And after

seeing what the Excalibur is capable of, I'm not so sure anymore. That, ladies and gentlemen, should tell you something.

MORE WAYS TO DIE IN A FIREFIGHT

For those who still don't believe me about this loss of trust, I offer the following eyewitness anecdotes. Apart from some of the more common things you might've already heard, these three should pretty well illustrate a few more ways an Excalibur can get you killed.

Exhibit 1

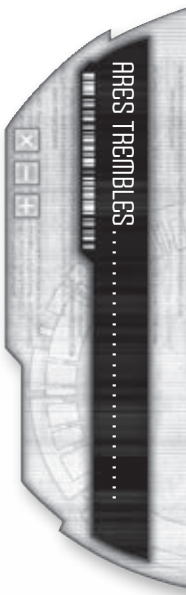
Buddy of mine bought a first-run Excalibur, emptied a clip at a firing range, and couldn't even get the replacement clip to snap in place. The frame around the clip enclosure had warped at the point of contact and was scalding hot to the touch. Ares customer service asked if she was firing "unauthorized rounds," which she was: according to the rep's script, apparently "the M-256 is rated for standard Ares Enyo-brand rounds only" and anything else voids warranty. My friend tried her luck on an Excalibur with a serial number from a later production run, hoping the issue from the early batches was solved. Same problem occurred, this time while using "Ares-approved" ammunition. She's still waiting to hear back from customer service on a replacement, but my money's on her getting screwed out of that too.

There's nothing quite like blowing through a clip only to realize you can't reload because the new clip just won't fit.

- I'm calling bullshit on this one. Any gun I've ever owned—Ares or otherwise—can fire so-called non-standard rounds. If I want to add a little bit of bang to my buck, I just slap in some explosive shells or APDS rounds in a clip designed to accommodate them. The Excalibur should accept without problem any rounds that will fit the clip. Bottom line: Ares just didn't want to cough up a replacement and used fine print to weasel their way out of it.
- 2XL
- Keep reading. You might want to pay special attention to Exhibit 3.
- Sticks
- M-256? More like "M-Too shitty, sucks," am I right?
- Slamm-0!
- What is this, amateur night?
- Glitch

Exhibit 2

I've seen reports of the Excalibur's integral smartgun system being twitchy, but this takes the cake. Came across this story of a bounty hunter being chased by a barghest after an acquisition gone sour. He gets a bead on the critter with his smartlink, fires a single shot, and the gun jams—common enough complaint, *ne?* Well, to clear the jam—with the barghest still nipping at his heels, mind—bastard's gotta unload the clip, clear the jam, and slap in a fresh clip before he can make canine gravy. Easy enough: he sends a signal through his smartlink to pop the clip. The smartgun electronics reports the clip was ejected, but the clip is actually still attached. Guy pops the manual release, clears the jammed round, slaps in a fresh clip. Smartlink doesn't register the new clip—tells him the



mag is still empty—and the rifle refuses to fire. Around this point, the barghest grabs him by the ankle, pulls him to the ground, and chews off the arm holding the faulty Excalibur. This guy survived and, if you can believe it, he's trying to slap Ares with a class action lawsuit over the ordeal—using a fake identity, of course.

- Good luck getting that kind of litigation to actually make it to court. He should know there are far easier ways to squeeze money out of a AAA megacorp. That guy must not be very creative.
- Mr. Bonds
- Man, I'll bet that barghest had a rather *disarming* smile.
- Slamm-0!
- Is there a mute button on this thing somewhere?
- Glitch

Exhibit 3

Here's the real kicker. A runner hunting ghouls in Amazonia loaded his Excalibur with EX-explosive rounds. He fired no more than two or three rounds before the entire magazine exploded, taking his hand—and most of the rifle's innards—right along with it.

- Served him right.
- Hannibelle

The skeptic in me was inclined to believe this as sensationalism riding the coattails of other Excalibur horror stories, but a gunsmith friend who'd come across an Excalibur shipment that fell off the back of a truck decided to test the theory. Using EX-ex rounds and a remote trigger, she managed to duplicate the result on about three-fourths of the batch. Standard explosive rounds also did the trick, only with less reliability.

- Bah, that story's apocryphal at best, and your friend's re-enactment results are also dubious. I've never once heard of explosive rounds detonating *inside the magazine* like that. Sure, the ammo can misfire, or it could cook off if you're—I dunno—inside a *volcano* or something, but this is a little ridiculous.
- Red Anya
- *Caveat usor.*
- Man-of-Many-Names
- On the other hand—no pun intended—this guy can now try out Evo's new Adroit cyberlimb series.
- Plan 9

My Analysis

What bothers me most about the Excalibur's problems is that bounty hunters and runners already have more than enough to worry about in a firefight. Now, thanks to the Excalibur, we need to worry about the possibility of our own weapons turning against us at the worst possible moment.

- As if I wasn't already paranoid enough. Thanks.
- Turbo Bunny

This, frankly, is something none of us should have to think about. Reliability and trust is why we paid for an Ares Predator rather than a Colt Manhunter. In the past, I've bought weapons from Ares because—regardless of how I or anyone else feels about the corp's practices and past dealings—their guns have always been reliable, well-built, and they deservedly earned their reputation as the pre-eminent firearm manufacturer among the Big Ten. The Excalibur changed all that. I don't care what kind of excuses—whether legitimate or manufactured—came out of the Ares boardroom. From now on, that trust has evaporated like so much fog in the morning sun. Once burned, twice shy, no matter how good your skin grafts are. Ares might someday make another industry-defining product that the entire shadow community latches onto, but that will be long in coming.

From here on out, I am no longer an early adopter of Ares products, even those with supposedly good reviews (more on that later). Consider my endorsement of their products null and void.

WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED?

I'm sure most of you are wondering the billion nuyen question: What in the hell happened to the Excalibur project? Sure, every now and again, a product reaches the market with a few rough edges that could use some sandpaper. More often than not, those rough edges fall into a few different categories.

Flaws that are merely cosmetic don't affect the actual usage of a product and serve only as a visual or tactile nuisance. Other design flaws may affect product performance to some degree, but the product still performs all or most of its functions to satisfaction. Hidden design flaws, the kind that manage to sneak unnoticed through product development and quality control, are usually subject to a recall and are generally easy to fix. The blame for many of these problems lies at the feet of the actual manufacturer, where cost- and corner-cutting practices are more common than corps want to admit. In most cases, the problem can be corrected on the manufacturing end, and further production runs will (theoretically) remain bug-free.

Some problems, however, not even a simple product recall will fix. This involves scrapping entire production runs, taking products off the market, and—assuming the damage done is not too great—reintroducing the improved model of the product at a later date.

The most glaring issues usually never make it out of the R&D department. In my experience, if any of these product-killing defects make it to market, it's because someone wanted it to happen. Whether a shadowrun was responsible in some way or another, or someone sabotaged the project in order to make someone else look bad, or some other reason, these problems are engineered.

With regard to the Excalibur, this product defies all normal explanation because it falls into just about every category of problem I just mentioned. Any Jane Gunsmith can file off all of the M-256's noticeable mold lines—a cosmetic issue—but the manufacturer's use of cheap and flimsy parts in the rifle's construction is more of a problem since Ms. Gunsmith can't just recast the whole thing with higher quality material. The gun barrel overheating might prompt a product recall, but I've heard tell that even skilled electricians can't get the internal smartlink to cooperate when it inevitably malfunctions.



- I'm more concerned about whether or not a recall would manage to keep the Excalibur from—I dunno—*blowing up in my hand?*
- Hard Exit
- That visual is never getting old.
- Slamm-0!

So, aside from gross incompetence, how did such drastic problems make it to market? Well, I've done a little digging, and here's what I've been able to uncover.

Codename: Avalon

What we've all come to know and love as the Excalibur M-256 Battle Rifle began with humble origins as a top secret Ares project codenamed Avalon. I've found evidence going as far back as '70, but my nuyen is on the true genesis of the project being Crash 2.0 or even earlier. While early details about the project are sketchy, my research shows that Avalon had definite manatech applications. By assembling the pieces I had and seeing the shape of the negative space, the picture became much clearer.

Avalon was a weapon unlike any Ares had developed before. Initial forays into the design entailed a crude, grenade-launcher-like apparatus. The magazine would be loaded with special capsules made of magical reagents, and magicians would anchor a spell to each capsule. Theory was, the capsules would release their anchored spells on impact and do a lot of damage when the fireball or what-have-you went off. Early Avalon R&D intended for the device to be a poor man's portable combat mage: less need for expensive magical support while on a battlefield.

- Wait. Don't tell me this is the granddaddy of that super-secret anti-dragon weapon Aztechnology's supposedly been working on for the last number of years.
- Butch

All of the prototypes failed spectacularly. In most cases, the anchored spells would not activate at all without the presence of a magician nearby to trigger them. In other, more extreme cases, the spells would literally fire off while still in the magazine. To quote from various status reports I managed to resurrect, the Avalon often "caused the spontaneous immolation of the firer" or "inflicted explosive trauma to the phalanges and metacarpals of the subject's firing hand."

- Huh. Where have I heard that before?
- Slamm-0!
- *Seriously?* You are incorrigible.
- Glitch
- No, no, for real this time. I vaguely recall hearing a rumor about some project the Big A was working on. A weapon that accidentally set the user on fire or something stupid like that.
- Slamm-0!
- Well, well. Maybe this *is* the Azzie's solution to the Sirurg problem...
- Butch

Here's where things get really interesting. About some time in '72, I found traces of some major upheaval within the Avalon project. Ares reassigned nearly every major employee that I've linked as being attached to the project, from the product manager and lead developer to some of the lower developers and QC personnel. The lead developer's name was always corrupted on every document I managed to get my hands on, but a hacker friend managed to reconstruct a handful of possible names. After cross-referencing these names with some corporate rosters, I found a plausible match: Penelope de la Renta, a self-styled "dragon expert" currently working for Aztechnology.

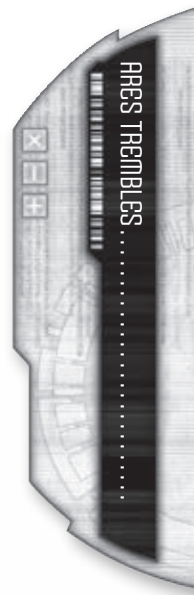
- You have got to be kidding me. I was only half serious.
- Butch
- I smell extraction.
- DangerSensei

Why a dragon expert was working on a manatech weapon is anyone's guess, but the part that truly intrigues me is the aftermath of the employee shuffle. Avalon uprooted its entire operation and moved locations. Now, it's not uncommon for a lab to move from one floor to another to make room for a new project, but we're talking about something on a completely different scale here. What's weirder is the old lab location is on complete lockdown. Best I can tell, the site's been abandoned except for on-site security. I hired a shaman friend to assense the lab as best he could, and he wouldn't speak to me for weeks afterwards. Something went down in that lab that forced Avalon to relocate, and I'd bet my next bounty (and then some) that de la Renta or Aztechnology is directly responsible.

- Let me guess: location withheld to protect the innocent?
- Plan 9
- Hey, if you want to do some digging to find out where this abandoned lab is, be my guest. All I'm saying is, that shaman friend of mine? He *still* isn't returning my calls.
- Sticks

The Excalibur project ultimately rose from Avalon's ashes. According to accounting files I've nabbed, Ares had sunk so much money into Avalon, and the project had nothing to show for it. The lead developer was gone, and most of the employees had either jumped ship or been reassigned to other divisions. Rather than absorb the loss, Ares decided to repurpose Avalon into a more mundane direction to help recoup at least some of their investment. All of those unnecessarily ornate workings along the whole rifle? Those are throwbacks to the Hermetic aspects of the original project. Even the name provides a casual link.

The costs to engineer a standard firearm are dramatically lower than those to create anything with manatech applications, so theoretically Excalibur should've been so cheap to produce that the balance sheets of Ares Arms wouldn't even notice. To take advantage of this, Ares drafted fiscally conservative employee Kellie Douglas as Excalibur's product manager and lead developer. Despite her efforts, the seemingly simple task of converting a magical weapon into a slug-thrower went beyond even her capabilities. The project developed countless gremlins. Prototypes didn't work right. Tweaks based on lab testing didn't fix the



problems. This thing was already a disaster. Avalon losses aside, Excalibur was costing too much to design a firearm that, according to internal documents, “was never intended to dispense normal munitions.” Douglas’s eventual replacement did such a terrible job that Ares put Douglas back on the project to staunch the fiscal bleeding. This didn’t help, of course, because the Excalibur was already too close to missing its launch window, which would cost Ares untold sums spent on marketing and advertisements.

At some point Douglas got a memo from Ares Arms CEO General Zachary Clausen, which told her to send the latest prototype to production. “We’ll fix the problem in manufacturing,” the message claimed. The best part of this sordid little exchange? Clausen never sent this message. A trace on the data trail was inconclusive, but it certainly doesn’t lead to any Ares Arms nodes.

- Or anything even peripherally Ares-related, for that matter.
- Netcat

As we all know, manufacturing alone couldn’t solve the Excalibur’s manifold problems. And manufacturing never received any feedback on the finished product, either positive or negative. As far as Ares Arms manufacturing was concerned, the M-256 produced in the factory performed exactly up to spec and was flying off the shelves. Who was responsible for squelching this feedback is something I’m still trying to figure out.

DIGGING DEEPER

Now that we’ve established the *how* of the Excalibur debacle, the *why* is what really concerns me. I’ve developed a number of theories based on rumors, supposition, and my own legwork. Unfortunately, none of them strike me as particularly appealing.

Theory No. 1

A common belief on the street now, even among some of the shadow community, is the Excalibur was simply a mistake chalked up to bad luck. Ares got caught with its pants down, put out a shitty product, and is now crying over spilled soymilk. Happens to even the best AAA megacorps now and then. Of course, most AAAs don’t have to worry about their reputation taking a major hit because one product failed, no matter how spectacularly.

Before the invention of corporate extraterritoriality, corps could leverage business losses, bad investments, or unsold merchandise as a tax write-off. These days, however, AA and AAA corps aren’t beholden to any government and thus often don’t pay income taxes. Because of this, they’d have little reason to manufacture a tax write-off. It’s possible this whole thing was just bad luck, but I feel that belief is far too naïve and gives Ares far more credit than it deserves. Still, it’s a possibility.

Theory No. 2

There’s enough evidence to point fingers at sabotage originating from inside the Excalibur project itself. Communications between project members seem to hint that the product developers strongly disliked Kellie Douglas’s leadership. Most prominent among them: a Mr. Peter Erdmann, who was given the reins of the project after Douglas’ permanent dismissal once the bad news about production model failures started pouring in. Erdmann is a likely candidate, but from what I’ve dug up on him, he wouldn’t have had the stones or the motivation to

pull off the kind of sabotage required for this fiasco. If Erdmann was responsible, someone else had to be pulling his strings.

Theory No. 3

This is the explanation is perhaps the most farfetched, but there are enough threads leading to it that I can’t discount it entirely. Honestly, this theory is the one that disturbs me the most.

I’ve recently uncovered what may be a tenuous link between Avalon and Ares board member Nicholas Aurelius. According to one source, Aurelius signed off on Avalon. I can’t find any evidence of his hands in Avalon’s day-to-day operations, however, so it could have merely been a rubber-stamp approval of a project proposal he just skimmed over. Given Aurelius’ other areas of interest, Avalon would normally fall into Damien Knight’s wheelhouse.

Another disturbing bit of information among the surviving Avalon documents is a lone, isolated reference to insect spirits that immediately piqued my interest. Following that lead resulted in another dead end.

So what would Aurelius and bug spirits have to do with a failed product launch? It’s my current belief that Aurelius secretly commissioned the original Avalon specifically for combatting bugs. The product didn’t perform to spec, and Aurelius ordered it scrapped. However, someone else in the Ares boardroom caught wind of the failure and decided to sabotage Avalon’s legacy. Despite Avalon being canceled, Excalibur still fell under Aurelius’ aegis and would be the best vehicle for his enemies to publicly shame him before the rest of the board.

- My nuyen is on Knight. Aurelius and Arthur Vogel have gotten along in the past, but mostly as allies of convenience against Knight’s voting bloc. Of course, that doesn’t mean Vogel’s not above trying to even the playing field in his favor.
- Fianchetto
- We still don’t know who ordered that failed hit on Vogel. For all we know, Aurelius (with prior approval of Gavilan Ventures, of course) ordered it. And for the last time: no, I didn’t have anything to do with the attempted hit, thanks for asking. If I were, Vogel wouldn’t still be breathing.
- Riser
- Am I the only one still trying to figure out what possible link Avalon—and by extension, Aurelius—would have with bug spirits? Ares has a sordid history with bugs, but Aurelius doesn’t strike me as the type to either take up the crusade against them or enter into any kind of Faustian bargain with the bastards.
- Ethernaut
- It’s the ones you never suspect that you need to watch out for.
- Plan 9
- Still, it makes me wonder whether there’s more to the story. If I weren’t so creeped out by what Sticks said earlier about the Avalon lab being mysteriously abandoned, I’d have half a mind to check it out myself. For personal edification, of course.
- Ethernaut
- Let the dead sleep in peace.
- Axis Mundi





THROW IT BACK IN THE LAKE

Probably more important than the Excalibur's actual failure is how it has affected the company itself. Consumer confidence in Ares is at an all-time low, even for products outside the Ares Arms umbrella. People used to buy Ares with confidence, fully embracing their "making the world a safer place" tagline. Many people, myself included, would buy a consumer product or a firearm sight unseen or without bothering to read reviews simply because it had "ARES" stamped prominently on the side of the box. Simply put, Ares used to make good products. Solid, reliable products. And I'm not saying that as a corporate shill or because they pay me in free cases of Predators or anything. (For the record, they don't.) I say it because at one time it was true.

The first Ares gun I ever bought—a Predator, surprise, surprise—was not the very first gun I ever owned, but it was certainly the gun I kept the longest. In fact, I would've still had it if some slot I was tracking a few years ago hadn't knocked it out of my hand while we were wrestling on a Maersk cargo ship in the middle of the Atlantic. (I loved that gun to pieces, but it's not worth paying for deep-sea salvage just to get it back when I can buy a new one for far cheaper.)

- I'll drink to that. First gun I ever bought was this piece-of-drek pistol—don't really even remember what it was offhand, forgettable and throwaway as it was—but I pretty quickly replaced it with an Ares Predator from one of the very first production runs of the original model. Even the first-run models worked like a charm. Incredible punch with low recoil. Easy to clean and maintain. Long mileage on the internal workings. Fully upgradeable electronics and accessory options. Frag it, I'm starting to sound like an Ares salesman. And if you're wondering: yes, I still have it. Carry it with me pretty much anywhere I can get away with it. Been awhile since I've needed to use it, but for me it's more of a good luck charm than anything else.

Sticks, my boy, if I'd lost my Predator like you did, you can be damn sure I'd have coughed up for the salvage team. Odds are, even after it sat on the bottom of the ocean for a few weeks—or even months—that Predator would probably still be in good working condition after cleaning off all the barnacles. They say you never forget your first piece—well, I did, so sue me—but I'll go on record as saying "You never forget your first Ares."

- Bull
- Thank you for proving my point.
- Sticks
- I'll join the choir and say that the Ares Desert Strike is one of my favorite sniper rifles. God, that thing will fire dead-on straight, under blistering 40°C sun in the middle of a fucking sandstorm. Love it!
- Riser
- Ugh. Get a room.
- Slamm-O!

- Since we're gushing about Ares's past glories, anyone here used a Thunderstruck Gauss Rifle? The Ares engineers who came up with that are a buncha goddamn geniuses. You wanna feel like you're firing off some futuristic sci-fi gun? Forget about military lasers and nab yourself one of these babies. I guarantee it will make you feel like a *god*. Target is there one moment, and the next it's just *gone*. And the sound the Thunderstruck makes when you punch the trigger? Holy *Christ* on a stick. Gives me the good kinda shivers just thinking about it.
- 2XL

- I vividly recall the first time I used my Executive Protector in the way it was intended. Just about every time I see someone else firing one out in the field, it's already outside of the briefcase meant to conceal it. I guess some of the less educated assume the briefcase is just the factory packaging and don't realize you can fire the actual briefcase.

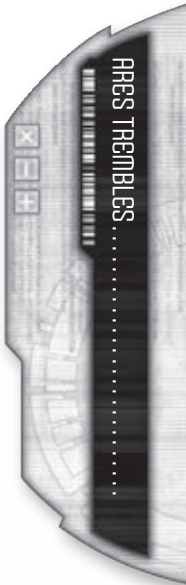
Of course, nowadays, the standard ExProt briefcase is pretty easily spotted by most security firms worth their salt. I've still got my ExProt, but I keep it in a very different case than the original.

- Kia
- I have a soft spot for the Viper, myself.
- Fianchetto
- Okay, this has been heartwarming and all, but can we move away from the hardware and back to the info that can help us earn enough money to buy the hardware?
- Pistons

There is this mindset in the Ares customer that the corp's branding speaks for itself. A product is good *because* it's Ares, and Ares is good because of its products. Circular reasoning, for sure, but there it is. Now one major wrench has been thrown into the gearbox, breaking that circle. Consumers expected the Ares Excalibur to be good—and for a short while post-launch, people believed just that—solely by virtue of Ares being in the name. When common knowledge of the failures started making its way out of the shadows and into public consciousness, that once bedrock-solid reputation fell apart like a house of very flimsy cards.

Ares is still trying to rebuild that house with better cardstock, but there are a few billion onlookers continuously stomping nearby or blowing at this new house in hopes that it too will fall. Ares's initial problem upon getting caught with its knickers down was it tried to run, and it's impossible to get very far with your pants around your ankles.

- Is this the voice of experience talking?
- Cosmo
- Me? No, but I did catch one bounty when he was sitting on the toilet. Guy stood up and tried to run. He tripped over himself and smashed his temple on the edge of the sink. Poor slot was brain dead before I could get him medical attention, but he lived. Bitch of the matter was the bail bondsman paid me a death rate even though the vegetable was technically still alive.
- Sticks





INCOMING FEED.....



To their credit, Ares did attempt to pull its pants back up, but by then the tabloids had already bought and published too many compromising photos. Just to cover how pervasive the damage ran, here's are all of the ways I've found that Ares dealt with this debacle—the corp's way of trying to return the Excalibur to the Lady of the Lake, so to speak. I have no doubt Knight & Co. have cooked up plenty more of these schemes I've yet to catch wind of. For the OCD out there among us, these are roughly in chronological order.

PRE-LAUNCH HANKY PANKY

My belief is that Ms. Douglas knew Excalibur was doomed from the start (although outside sources are likely responsible for ensuring it stayed that way). My ears-to-the-ground inside Ares believed the higher ups had planned to force her to retire once the Excalibur launched, simply to save the corp some money. It is quite possible that Ms. Douglas knew about this plan and prolonged the product's development—thus costing Ares Arms even more and more money—just so she would retain her job. Whether or not she was responsible for allowing the Excalibur project to languish, what I do know is she ordered the test footage altered. Using photography tricks such as having a different assault rifle firing the test's actual bullets off-camera, this footage was shown in the boardroom to investors worried about the project's rumored difficulties.

- Me too. Damn shame how bad it turned out.
- Riser
- Regardless of actual performance, I think the Excalibur's a total eyesore. Makes me think of some low-budget vampire hunter trid where the vamp's got an army of soldiers who carry these things.
- Plan 9
- At this rate, Ares selling off remaindered Excalibur stock as B-movie props is about the only way they're going to get rid of them.
- Sunshine
- If it wasn't for all the hype surrounding "The rifle King Arthur would have chosen," Ares could've said "My bad" and gone on its merry way. But no, they had to throw it into the high-profile publicity machine. Most products never live up to the hype; the few that do are the rare exceptions. But think back: how many times can you recall a truly terrible product being overhyped to the masses, with little regard for marketing demographics? A week before launch, I couldn't go five steps without seeing at least two ARO ads hawking that damn rifle. Talk about oversaturating the market. And when the stories of bad Excaliburs came rolling in, I spent nearly a whole hour laughing about it.
 - Ares deserved everything they had coming to them.
 - Dr. Spin
- "Difficulties"? That's putting it lightly.
- Picador
- This test footage was leaked shortly before the Excalibur debuted. Made me want one like nobody's business.
- DangerSensei

- Do trids or sims count as overhyped-yet-atrocious products? If so, I can name off the top of my head about half a dozen or more from the past decade alone.
- Slamm-O!
- There is one example that is nearly a century old, but it's still used as a case study in business schools: New Coke.
- Mr. Bonds

In addition to doctoring test footage, Douglas altered written reports from her team and generally disavowed any knowledge of problems during the production phase. As far as most of those outside her department were concerned, the Excalibur prototypes worked like well-oiled machines.

- There's not enough oil on the planet to make that atrocity work right.
- DangerSensei

FALSE BUZZ

While the Excalibur was in the late stages of development, rumors about the rifle's problems were beginning to leak. Rather than immediately silence these rumors, Ares let them be and refused to comment. One might think negative press would be enough to prompt a response, but it was a smart decision at the time. Think of it this way: how often have you heard talk about a trid feature that's overblown its budget by such a massive proportion that everyone expects it to bomb? In that expectation, people keep talking about it, and for sheer morbid curiosity, they go buy a ticket or a direct download just to see if the flick is just as bad as everybody expected it to be. That amounts to massive box office sales for a trid that everyone believed would be horrid—and very probably *is* horrid. This is also assuming the notion that the movie was blowing its budget in an effort to make the thing watchable was even true to begin with, which probably wasn't. For all we know, a movie with buzz like that actually came in *under* budget but the studio's marketing department was having trouble getting traction in their demographic. Then again, all the buzz in the world can't make a bad movie any better.

- The difference between a bad trid and a bad gun is you can return the gun.
- Slamm-O!

This is what happened with the Excalibur, except in its case these rumors were all true.

One of the tactics Ares used to sidestep the negative press was to generate attention in a different direction. The most visible thing they did was speak about being slapped with a copyright lawsuit regarding a defunct, NeoNET-owned brand of cyberdeck known as the Fairlight Excalibur. No such lawsuit ever existed, but the declaration got people talking. What struck me as humorous was how many people flocked to Ares' side, as though accusing NeoNET of committing some sin just by legally owning rights to the Fairlight brand. Naturally, this is exactly what Ares was hoping for. The corp also hoped the Excalibur, when released, would prove all the naysayers wrong. Unfortunately for them, that part did not come to fruition.

THE DEBUT THAT WASN'T

The biggest spectator attraction for Desert Wars '73 was supposed to be the pre-launch debut of the much-talked-about M-256. However, that didn't happen quite how Ares planned. Ares Global Entertainment hyped the hell out of the thing, but if you sit down and watch the footage that aired from every Ares-owned news organization (and most of their competitors), the Excalibur is damn near a no-show. There've been plenty of published eyewitness accounts of Desert Wars participants *using* the rifle (see Plan 9's report in the *Corporate Intrigue* upload), but scant video. The opening ceremonies show dozens of soldiers proudly holding their Excaliburs at port arms, and you'll probably see a few long shots and a handful of close-ups of the weapon firing, but that's about it.

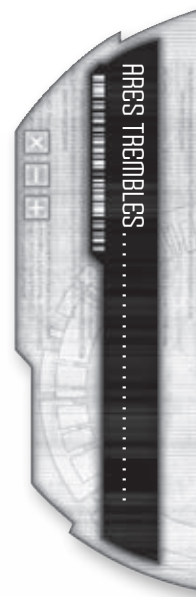
The short of it is Ares knew the Excalibur would probably fail—even more so due to desert conditions. Based on this information, Ares Arms ensured whole cases of M-256s got sent to teams whose inevitable losses would either cripple their rivals or make good on bets Ares had placed on which teams would lose. For when Excalibur performance started falling apart, Ares Global Entertainment control rooms had their thumbs over a kill switch. Using a clever tape-delay tactic, producers would show the Excalibur firing a shot and they would deftly cut away to a different camera so that they wouldn't show the rifle jamming or the firer tossing the rifle to the ground and switching to a more reliable weapon.

While rival broadcast companies captured footage of the Excalibur failing, it did not get very far. The footage started disappearing from these news feeds almost instantly. I have no idea how Ares managed to pull off such a well-coordinated and well-executed act of media tampering; that they could do it scares me a little. In addition, a few small-time media outlets covering the event managed to showcase the Excalibur in action, but of those videos that managed to get broadcast via the Matrix, most either disappeared by the next morning or were low-quality enough to be passed off as suspect or tampered. Only spectator vids managed to slip through the cracks, but in time they too began vanishing.

- For the record, I could list off half a dozen ways such an act of malicious censorship and depublishing could be pulled off like that. It's not easy and it's certainly not cheap, but such a feat is doable.
- FastJack
- Of course, all of that footage is squirreled away somewhere in the Deep Resonance. Right, 'Cat?
- Slamm-O!
- 'Cat?
- Slamm-O!

MEDIA WHITEWASH

After Desert Wars wrapped, the battlefield was littered with discarded Excaliburs. Rather than risk any enterprising photojournalist snapping images of this rifle graveyard and damaging the product before it could even see launch day, Ms. Douglas hired runners to scour the Sahara for the castoffs. Hundreds of M-256s were gathered up and melted down, but one runner's curiosity got the better of her. She held back one for



herself rather than turn it over, just so she could see what all the fuss was about. Word is she took it home, tested it, and posted her scathing review on the Matrix. Despite her anonymity, the review vanished, and she was never heard from again.

One might think that such a dismal debut performance would derail any plans for the product's launch, but it didn't. If anything, the Excalibur's fashionable absence from Desert Wars coverage only catapulted the hype to new levels, and Ares took advantage of that in every way it could. If you can believe it, they dumped even more money into marketing. Their angle? If enough people buy the bad rifle, that's a lot of money right up front. Given the Ares brand, few people would be outright returning them; most would likely be fired a few times before languishing in a Ares enthusiast's gun collection. The few that did try to return their Excalibur would be covered by Ares Arms' repair program if they so chose (read on ahead to learn more about that particular boondoggle). Since Desert Wars proved the product would fail, Ares intended to latch onto first-day sales, snatch up the revenue, and sweep the aftermath under the rug as quietly as possible.

The first part of dealing with this aftermath involved a media whitewash similar to what happened to Jane Shadowrunner. Hackers from Ares Arms must've been working overtime setting up agents and botnets to scour the Matrix for any mention of "Excalibur" or "M-256" and spin it into a better light.

I'll be honest: while I was out working and unable to lay my hands on an Excalibur, I was checking reviews during downtime. All of them seemed favorable. At first, this seemed normal to me. In general, few people complain about Ares firearms—even those with a few rough edges—because the pros far outweigh the cons. But then I started noticing a trend: every review I saw seemed *too* positive. Even with products that are good, people tend to complain about all the niggling things that bother them, even when they love everything else about the product. I'll admit I and most people I associate with think the Excalibur is ugly as sin, but so many of these reviews kept mentioning "the masterful aesthetics and high-quality machining of the parts" a bit too often, sometimes verbatim, as though the reviewer had a script handy and had copied and pasted from it wherever necessary. Big red flag there.

- Sounds like Ares didn't want to hire an army of writers to tackle this problem. It's not plagiarism if you're stealing from yourself.
- Sunshine

Another thing that amazed me is even nodes belonging to known syndicate fronts hosted positive chatter about the Excalibur. Organized crime outfits like their guns same as the rest of us, but to gush over them like a twelve-year-old blabs about her current infatuation? I don't think so.

Proper news media also fell victim to the whitewash. Newscasts, blogs, consumer reports, trade publications, and so on all felt the brunt of the Ares PR axe in some way or another. In most cases, journalists merely reported on what they had unearthed from other doctored anecdotes. While this might preserve the media's journalistic integrity since they didn't knowingly propagate falsehood, it makes me wonder: if Ares can get journalists to believe lies like this, how many times has this happened in the past that we don't know about?

- You're really not helping.
- Turbo Bunny
- Turbo, if you're getting news solely from media outlets and not from people you know and trust, you're doing it wrong.
- Clockwork
- Healthy paranoia aside, this part is what really gets me. I know from experience that the news media hardly gets *everything* right—and there have been cases where they've been paid to either focus on reporting a specific news item, ignore something, or report on a complete fabrication—but this is a bit much. For Ares to dupe one news organization is simple, but for them to pull the wool over so many people all at once, including organizations owned by their direct competition? That is some scary shit right there.
- Sunshine
- One of my favorite bits of coverage was when this newsmagazine reporter went to a firing range to see if the Excalibur matched up to the hype. This guy spends most of the segment talking about the rifle's illustrious history (all fabricated, according to the info Sticks already gave us) and how well-designed and pretty it is. The climax of the piece was when Ricky Reporter—some slag who's supposedly untrained on this sort of firearm—fires the Excalibur and hits dead center on the target every time. Here's the catch: the rifle wasn't an Excalibur. I've watched that video dozens of times and I can say without a doubt this guy was firing an HK G-36 modified to look as much like an Excalibur as possible. If you look at the handgrip, it's not the right shape, and the mold lines along the stock and the foregrip just don't match up. Also, this "reporter"? A UCAS Army sharpshooter that no one outside his unit would've recognized.
- Picador
- No matter how I search, I'm not finding any video like that. You sure you didn't just dream it up?
- Plan 9
- Nope. When people started catching on to the Excalibur problems, Ares yanked any manufactured footage that would've made them look even guiltier than they already did.
- Picador

BAD CUSTOMER SERVICE

This one's a little weird to me because it smacks of amateur hour. I've compiled several cases of Excalibur owners taking their rifle to authorized Ares Arms maintenance and repair facilities. In every case, these customers brought their M-256 in for replacement of a faulty component—the most common components being an entire smartgun assembly or a gun barrel warped from overheating. The vast majority of cases walked away with their repaired product only to have it malfunction again.

According to the Ares Arms Customer Service node, if you bring in an Ares firearm for service three times within the first year of purchase, they'll invoke the "lemon clause" and replace it with a new or refurbished product rather than offering a refund (which is fine by most Ares customers since the brand speaks for itself). Well, I hired a few trustworthy individuals to take some



damaged Excaliburs to an authorized repair shop. After they came back, I had a gunsmith friend look over the repair work. One of the rifles needed a warped barrel replaced; the other two needed new smartgun electronics. In the case of the gun barrel, the Ares shop had removed the existing barrel, heated it up, hammered it back into shape, and cleaned it up real nice before sticking it back on. My guy only recognized the original barrel by comparing the rifling grooves to a macro photo he took beforehand. For the rifles with smartgun problems, both guns had shown signs that someone had accessed their inner workings, but the serial numbers on the electronic components remained the same.

All three of these customers were given back the exact same hardware they'd walked in with, which meant all three guns malfunctioned in the exact same way the next time they were fired. To continue our little experiment, I had my guys keep taking the Excaliburs back for repair until Ares coughed up replacements. Each time, they received a refurbished rifle. And the real kick in the crotch? Two of them received the exact same "refurbished" rifle that one of the other two had turned over for a replacement. Same serial number, same gun barrel, same smartgun card; just a new case and a new coat of polish.

- This is why you never trust official shops to do repair work for you. You're better off doing it yourself or hiring someone you trust to do it for you.
- Marcos
- That's fine for us shadowfolk, but most militaries or aboveboard citizens don't have the luxury of going through unofficial channels.
- Am-mut

This "exemplary" customer service really saved Ares Arms' reputation for a good long while after the Excalibur's launch, because it took a really long time for people to catch on to the scam. Reports of countless Excaliburs being brought in for service didn't even make evening newsfeeds because all of these repairs were covered under warranty or the lemon clause.

COMING SOON TO A NOWHERE NEAR YOU

Fortunately for the consumer public, the whitewash that Ares enacted didn't last for long. When a dozen people cry foul, they're pretty easy to silence, but if several thousand people start crying havoc, that's a lot of noise to squelch all at once. Only when legitimate reports of Excalibur failures started reaching the general public did Ares realize its efforts had been stopgap at best and their cover was unraveling. Manufacturing and repairs weren't going to solve the problem, and with so many people complaining loudly and publicly it was impossible for Ares to keep the problems under wraps any longer.

The problem wasn't so much that people were complaining about the Excalibur. The real root of the issue was that everyone knew about it. Even Joe Average, who wouldn't normally even consider buying a firearm, let alone a battle rifle, started taking notice of this spectacle and raised an eyebrow. Mr. Average, who was once a loyal buyer of Ares consumer goods began eyeing competitors' products a bit more closely.

To grab back the attention of the masses, Ares started embracing its "Cleaning the Slate" program by promoting a

slew of new products from their various subsidiaries that will soon reach the market. For example, if you haven't already heard, General Motors is soon to debut the Water Trike, a swift, personal hovercraft the size of a jet ski. From Lifescape will come the ARO Shield, commlink software designed to block out all unwanted AR spam (except for anything Ares-related of course). BacteriTech is currently working on two major products. NeverCut, a genetically engineered "urban monoculture" (i.e. grass) that will grow to the perfect height and stop, forever eliminating the need for lawn mowers. Those who like getting smashed but hate hangovers and DUIs will rejoice over ScotchFree, a new synthahol distillation that gives all the buzz of hard liquor without raising blood alcohol content above legal limits.

News flash: none of these products will ever make it to the market. They're not real.

- Aw, damn. I was afraid of that. Really wanted one of those Water Trikes for my birthday.
- Rigger X
- If there's enough interest in a fake product and it's feasible to engineer and manufacture, maybe they'll actually make it. It's happened before. Supply and demand is an immutable law of commerce.
- Mr. Bonds

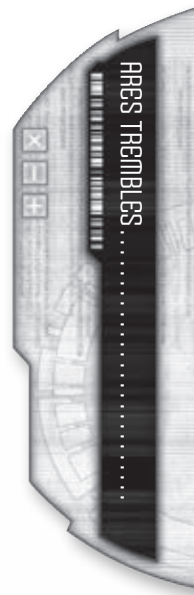
About ninety-five percent of the rumors about "upcoming products" are all just a gigantic smokescreen to deflect attention away from the real problem. Once the Excalibur furor dies down, Ares will simply shutter these projects and cite excuses such as R&D failures, a lack of profitability, or some other line that the consumers will have no choice but to swallow.

- Won't that just make the angry people even angrier?
- Pistons
- Only if you assume that consumers have long memories.
- Winterhawk

THE NEXT BIG THING

When wading through all the crap about fake products spewing from Ares's hyperactive rumor mill, one has to keep in mind that a megacorp—especially one that just suffered a major hit to its reputation—still needs to make new products. *Real* products, not chimeras from the addled dreams of corporate R&D hyped by PR to distract the public. From what I've found, Ares is doing just that, with a new project that will supposedly make the Excalibur seem like little more than a bad dream after a bender at McHugh's.

The corp's goals with promoting this new project are threefold. Ares wants to keep people talking about its products, for good or for ill; to distract consumers away from the Excalibur failure and the dismal results of related cover-up operations; and to put the focus on an excellent product or service that will help repair some of the damage the Excalibur cost them. Keep in mind that the actual *money* Ares lost in developing Avalon and



Excalibur is negligible in the eyes of a corporate-level accountant. Fiscal loss is important, sure, but those who recall the finer points from the *Corporate Guide* upload may remember that losing money or taking out a line of credit isn't going to wreck the long-term financial solvency of a megacorporation. It might slow them down, but a diversified AAA like Ares isn't going to vanish into obscurity anytime soon over just one bad product. What's far more important to the boardroom in Detroit is the Excalibur's true cost, something shadowfolk readily spend like coin: reputation.

I've mentioned a few times that once-loyal Ares folks are second-guessing their purchases. I've even caught wind of several Ares citizens selling off their corporate scrip for nuyen in order to buy non-Ares products. Both of these scenarios have Knight & Co. running scared. Business savvy aside, how does one successfully compete when even longstanding bestsellers can't keep you from hemorrhaging more customers on a daily basis?

If you ask me, Ares is a bandersnatch's whisper away from hiring Horizon to work their PR magic to help the Excalibur meltdown go away. That's how desperate they are. Most megacorps are as self-sufficient as they can make themselves, which means they only make deals with rivals when they have no other recourse for getting what they need. For Ares to even consider such an action shows their current condition.

- Why would Ares bother with wasting good nuyen on Horizon PR? I thought Ares Global Entertainment would be more than enough to tackle this mess.
- /dev/grrl
- Considering the current state of AGE's leadership, does this really surprise you?
- Dr. Spin
- That which is not good for the beehive cannot be good for the bees.
- Axis Mundi
- Not sure how long ago Sticks first wrote this article, but if you haven't already seen any Ares "brand awareness" ads recently, they're radically different than any ads I've ever seen them air.
- DangerSensei
- You mean like the ones with the guy sitting on a bearskin rug made from a piasma that he killed with an Ares Canadian Sportster? Yeah, I get what you mean. First time I saw one of those, I was surprised to learn it was an Ares spot. The tone, the execution, and everything else smacks of Horizon to me. If Ares wants to hop in bed with them, I say let 'em, but what kind of game are they playing?
- Riser
- Inter-corporate cooperation can be the first step to a hostile takeover or a mutual merging of assets into a single entity.
- Mr. Bonds
- If Ares is as beaten down as some people think, could they actually be ripe for a takeover by one of the other AAAs?
- /dev/grrl

- With current market projections, it's far too early to tell.
- Mr. Bonds
- A wounded beast fights with enough desperation that they'd be more likely to try going out with a bang than end up as someone else's prize. Knight will implode Ares with his own two hands before letting anyone else snatch up what he's built.
- Kay St. Irregular

Word around Ares is they're working on a new, top-secret project that they're nebulously referring to in advertising as the "Ares NBT." Ask a salesperson at any Ares branded store just what the hell NBT is, and they'll repeat the corporate line: NBT will "revolutionize the marketplace" and "connect the consumer to Ares in ways previously undreamed of."

If you believe corporate drones like these, Ares is reinventing the damn wheel. Or they managed to patent breathing or trademark the concept of money. As best I can tell, reality is far more mundane. NBT is still under wraps, but some old-fashioned legwork and ingenuity have crossed off a few of the nonthreatening items off the list. Some of the scarier prospects, however, still remain.

- I heard about this one. "New Bulldrek Tactic," right? Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.
- Bull
- No, wait. You mean "New Bug Target."
- Riser
- You're both wrong. It's "Next Big Thing." For serious.
- Slamm-O!
- What kind of retarded marketing genius came up with that gem?
- Cosmo
- Please, don't encourage him.
- Glitch
- I'm completely serious here. How is it I know something you don't?
- Slamm-O!
- They're actually calling it that? I thought that was just a joke.
- Glitch

Remember, Ares is in a desperate spot, and desperate entities do desperate things to survive. Their upcoming "magic bullet" might incorporate one or more of the following last-ditch actions.

AVALON REDUX

Manatech has come a long way since the genesis of the failed Avalon project. I've heard unconfirmed rumors that Ares might be trying to resurrect it. The original Avalon failed because the tech and theories behind it were raw and unrefined and Ares lost its lead engineer at a crucial development stage. There is a distinct possibility that "Avalon 2.0" may actually create a feasible prototype this go around. Of course, the project itself—and any



end result thereof—isn't going to be called Avalon 2.0 or Excalibur II. Ares is going to distance itself as far from Arthurian monikers for as long as possible.

- One of my contacts tells me Ares has some off-the-books operation called "Gáe Bolg." Wasn't that the name of some magical weapon from some mythology or other? And could this be related to "Avalon 2.0"?
- Pistons
- Gáe Bolg was the spear of Irish folklore hero Cúchulainn, and it was made from the bones of a sea monster. When it impaled an enemy, so many barbs sprang forth from the spearhead while it was imbedded in the flesh that one had to cut the corpse away in order to free the spear.
- Frosty
- That's not frightening at all. Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to try not contemplating the possible correlations of a corp trying to make mythology match reality.
- Pistons

BORN TO SHOP

Have you ever found yourself doing something and then realized you don't remember why you started doing it in the first place, as though the person you were when you began and the person you are now are two different people? That's part of a rumor that I'm hoping is pure fiction. I don't know the official moniker for this one, but I'm calling SocialScape, because it's apropos.

Corporations exist for one reason and one reason only: to turn a profit. For a corp to turn a profit, it needs to make products, and consumers need to buy those products (yes, I know, this is basic stuff, but stay with me here). For all but the most basic physiological items on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, corps have to convince consumers to spend their hard-earned nuyen. The corps are essentially waging a war with potential customers, and things like marketing and advertising are the opening salvos that will hopefully knock down defenses and convince these poor fools to part with their money. Now, imagine for a moment if corps didn't need to rain artillery shells filled with explosive marketing upon their potential client base. What if a corp could use small-caliber sidearms to win its battles in the marketplace? Or what if a corp could close a deal with a smile and a handshake instead of a weapon of any kind?

Here's the most disturbing thought: What if there was no war over consumers at all? What if people woke up and immediately thought, "Man, I need to go get more Ares-branded products today"? What if people bought from a specific corp because they felt it was their civic and patriotic duty to buy Product X, as if they were born for that very purpose? If you eliminate the need for marketing altogether, that means lower overhead and higher profit.

Corps trying to brainwash the masses is nothing new. Subliminal advertising has been around since long before the Awakening and isn't going anyway anytime soon. SocialScape, however, is something different. Where subliminal advertising tricks your subconscious into a certain behavior, SocialScape involves no trickery, per se. Instead, it would actually rewrite minuscule parts of your brain using tailored nanites.

- What?
- Clockwork

Let's say you're walking past an Ares-owned storefront. They're not bothering people with AROs. They're going old-school and handing out hardcopy pamphlets to passersby. Or maybe they're offering a free sample of some new miracle-food product. You're not really that interested, but the lady's pushy, and you find a brochure stuffed in your hand or some mouthful of genengineered food byproduct floating around in your stomach. Then about half an hour later, you find yourself wondering why you walked past without actually buying anything. That was real stupid of you, right? How could you have forgotten? So you go back and buy whatever the store was hawking. Nanites that dusted the brochure and the food sample have already worked their way through your bloodstream and inserted the idea in along with the rest of your own memories.

- That is really fucking shady. Assuming this is even real.
- Hard Exit
- How do you know you haven't already been affected? Do you actually *like* shopping at Lordstrungs, or is something in your brain dictating your shopping habits to you?
- Dr. Spin
- You shut up. I've always shopped at Lordstrungs.
- Hard Exit
- Too bad Ares didn't already have this sort of thing when the Excalibur launched. Everybody and their grandmother would've bought one, and none of this mess would've happened.
- Goat Foot
- That's the idea, isn't it? Dictate what people should buy, and a fiasco like Excalibur would never happen again.
- Puck
- I'm sure people are working on this, and I'm not saying it will never work, but let me say this: The human brain, in all its diversity, is more complicated than that. Trying to design a one-size-fits-all tech for a variety of human brains is a project doomed to insane complications. This is why you get your linguasofts and knowsofts installed by someone who can figure out where it should be in your brain, rather than just dropping it somewhere in your skull based only on where it was in the last guy's head.
- Butch

PUBLIC DISPLAY OF ANIMOSITY

My least favorite theory regarding NBT also happens to involve one of my least favorite subjects. I've cleaned up more than my fair share of insect spirit hives, but I am only one person. My work in stomping out the bug population has barely made a dent. At present, there is a lot of anti-bug sentiment sweeping North America, and I believe Ares plans to take advantage of that as best it can. Nothing gets more love and better press than a reformed villain-turned-hero, and Ares wants to be this media darling. If Ares can better embody its "making the world a safer place" slogan



in a very tangible, public way, perhaps the public might forgive the corp its missteps with the Excalibur. This is why I believe Ares is going to do something drastic in front of the camera, for the whole world to see.

Despite my feelings towards bugs, I have major problems with whatever publicity stunt Ares has up their sleeve. Even if their good-faith display goes off without a hitch, it will be more flash than substance, and the general public won't know the difference. What's worse is if the stunt goes awry—and we all know it will—then God help all of those nearby.

Believe what you will, but these are the facts. Bugs can't be contained. You can't train them. Even an insect shaman is just a dupe. Ares should know all of this already, and I can tell you right now that whatever they plan to do is the wrong way to go about it. Period. They don't know bugs like I do, and hopefully they never will. All they're going to do is get people killed.

- The best story I've heard about Ares and the bugs so far is they intend to set up a fake hive in some abandoned building. AGE film crews will then capture footage of a Firewatch team or a Knight Errant SWAT squad "discovering" this hive "right in the middle of the city" and putting it to the torch.
- Fianchetto
- I've heard similar, except that they plan to stage it in the Aurora Warrens in Denver.
- Kay St. Irregular
- Does Ghostwalker know about that, I wonder?
- Fianchetto
- If he doesn't already, he does now.
- Winterhawk
- I'll do you guys one better. Some chucklehead told me that Ares recently scheduled several consecutive launches at the Kilimanjaro Mass Driver, and none of them are spacecraft headed to any of the space stations Ares owns. They're not even proper rockets, truth be told. From what I understand, Ares plans to put flesh-form bug spirits in these space capsules and launch them into space. The idea is to monitor them and study the effects of the bugs as they leave the confines of Earth's manosphere.
- Bull
- Oh, that is rich.
- 2XL
- Ares is playing with fire. They need to stop this before it bites them in the ass.
- Sticks

FURTHER WOES

- In light of recent events, Sticks sent me this little addendum. I hope it won't keep you awake at night.
- FastJack

EXIT ROW

For any of you rooting for Ares to recover from their Excalibur foibles: start running for the hills, because a piece of the sky just fell. Literally. Not five minutes ago, I discovered something that is going to send Ares into a tailspin. The following internal memo was just circulated amongst the top brass at Ares, and no statements have yet been made to the press.

//upload encrypted unformat email :: User Sticks//
//running decrypt set Velvet Hammer//

Date: 09.05.74

To: <undisclosed recipients>

From: T. Carpenter

Subject: Mr. Aurelius

All:

Young Nick will unfortunately be unable to attend tomorrow's board meeting. He passed away a few hours ago, as I'm sure many of you have already heard. I know you must want details, though I am loath to review what happened, as it was one of the most horrific incidents I have ever witnessed. I'm still in complete and utter shock. But I owe it both to Nick and to all of you to share what happened.

This evening, Nicholas and I were taking his Gulfstream to Detroit when the pilot reported a rough patch of turbulence. As the plane was shaking around us, Nick took off his safety belt and got up from his seat in a fit of apparent rage. In all the years I've worked with him, I'd never seen him like that. The head flight attendant insisted he remain in his seat, but Nick fought him off and made a mad dash to the exit door. Nick popped the emergency exit and threw himself out of the aircraft at ten thousand meters before any of us could stop him. No parachute. No explanation.

I had the pilot make an emergency landing at the nearest airport, and we scrambled a helo to search for the body. What little we found was not pretty. Fortunately, I was able to catch the whole incident on my commlink. I've attached the footage I managed to capture. Fair warning though: This is not for the faint of heart.

Until we can figure out just what would possess Nick to willfully throw himself out of an airplane, we should keep this under wraps. To preserve his dignity, I believe we should have a more credible story to tell the press. Parachuting accident or something.

In any case, the Aurelius dynasty has run its course. As painful as it is to lose Nick's visionary leadership, now we must look toward the future of this company in order to keep our heads above water.



INCOMING FEED.....

If any of you need anything, let me know. I will do everything in my power to help in this time of crisis.

Regretfully,

Troy Carpenter
Vice President, Ares Global Entertainment

<Attachment: SNYEMP-TCARP-127D.TRD3>

//end file//

- I am speechless. Aurelius? Really? I wonder what crawled up in his brain to make him do that? Would the video shed some light on the subject?
- Clockwork
- I haven't managed to get my hands on it yet, and the more I think about it, I'm not sure I even want to find it.
- Sticks
- Here you go. That took me, what, fifteen minutes?
- Clockwork

//upload encrypted .TRD3 trideo file :: User Clockwork//

- I feel like I need to pop my eyes out and wash them in bleach. That was *bizarre*. And it doesn't look doctored. It's got all the

right digital fingerprints for a Sony Emperor, and the encoding looks clean.

- Slamm-0!
- So what the hell was that? Paranoid delusions? Shedim possession? Something else?
- DangerSensei
- Guys, I've run weather data for that night over the airspace in which Aurelius would've been traveling. There's no way that Gulfstream hit any turbulence.
- Turbo Bunny
- What was with all the shaking in the footage, then? *Something* was throwing that plane around.
- Plan 9
- Yeah, but it sure as hell wasn't turbulence.
- Turbo Bunny
- It was wasp spirits.
- Sticks
- Are you sure?
- Turbo Bunny
- Yes. Once you've heard that sound they make, you will never, ever forget it.
- Sticks

ARES TREMBLES.....

Since I wrote my last piece, other crises have cropped up within the corporation. If Knight has anything to say about it, most of them won't make the evening news, but without Aurelius' tempering influence in the Ares boardroom, these things are only going to get worse. Much worse. Here's a comprehensive list, starting with something near and dear to me.

THE WAR ON BUGS

In one way or another, Ares has been involved in waging war on the bug population for a very long time. Knight Errant was front and center during the Bug City crisis in '55, when insect spirits first sank their fangs into Ares' concerns, and the bugs haven't let go ever since. Firewatch teams are regularly sent to known bug hives that are too big for dedicated bug hunters like Yours Truly to tackle. However, the corp's biggest misstep occurred sometime before Crash 2.0, when Ares decided to poke its junk into a literal beehive and swat the hive around enough to piss off the bees. Damien Knight started experimenting on the bugs, assuming he had them under control, but control is such an illusive, one-way street with these monsters. The first major incident occurred in '64, when Crash 2.0 took out all the safety nets Ares had in place for its bug operations. I won't bore you with details, as you can read about it in the *Conspiracy Theories* upload, but Ares did not learn from its mistakes. For the past number of years, Knight has been using UnlimiTech to host the corp's rejuvenated insect spirit program. I've kept tabs on a number of UnlimiTech's operations on the off chance that Ares would need my services for damage control. Codenames like Vespa, Plötze, or Kamakiri were used in an attempt to hide their operations in plain sight.

My research discovered that some of these experiments were designed to use the bugs as an offensive against other insect spirit hives. Different bug types don't always get along, and even among matching types, I've seen where several hives will antagonize each other over overlapping territory. A bug is loyal to either one of two things: itself, if a solitary bug, or its queen (and by extension, its hive). The belief among the top brass was that they could exploit the bugs' territorial nature against them. They could use wasp spirits as shock troops against ant spirit hives, use mantids to hunt down roach spirits, and so on.

The author of this theory? None other than Mr. Nicholas "Young Nick" Aurelius. Damien Knight merely wanted to control the bugs, improve them and make his own personal army out of them, but it was Aurelius who offered up the suggestion to fight fire with fire as his way to rein in Knight's ambitions. To both reward and punish Aurelius for this idea, Knight placed him in direct charge of Project Pyro and kept the assignment on a need-to-know basis. Under Aurelius's guidance, Pyro was marginally successful, but a few notable incidents caused the program to start collapsing on itself.

The first of these incidents was in '72, when former Knight Errant VP Roger Soaring-Owl visited an UnlimiTech facility in Chicago, not far from ground zero of the Cermak Blast. Soaring-Owl resigned shortly thereafter and began waging a shadow war against Knight and UnlimiTech, supposedly with Ghostwalker's support.

There was another incident Ares begged me to come in and help clean up. At Knight's behest, Aurelius had sent a batch of Project Pyro wasp spirits and a Firewatch team against a burgeoning

hive of ant spirits on the other side of town. The goal was to prove the effectiveness of Aurelius' initiative, but the flesh-form ant spirits overwhelmed the wasps, and those few wasps that survived turned on their handlers and killed the entire Firewatch team.

Insect spirits have a long memory, and to this day I believe they hold grudges. Not until I read the announcement of Aurelius' death did my theory prove true. His project essentially involved torturing various insect spirits—both flesh-form and true-form—into compliance. I have no idea how many of the bugs' merges were killed by weapons tests or Project Pyro combat simulations, but each death, disruption, or banishment only compounded the bugs' hatred of Aurelius.

I've since learned that Avalon's initial incarnation was Nick's idea as well. He wanted a way to unilaterally destroy bug spirits without compunction, in case Knight's obsession with controlling them ever got out of hand. Unfortunately, Avalon was shuttered due to Aztechnology extracting their lead developer, and Aurelius rechristened the project to recoup some dignity from the loss.

I think if Avalon had been successful, Ares would be in a much better place right now. A weapon designed specifically to kill bugs would have turned the tide of the war. Instead, all that Avalon and Pyro accomplished was to piss off the bugs even more for all the suffering inflicted upon them at Knight and Aurelius' command.

I can't definitively prove it one way or another, but I believe Nicholas Aurelius' exit-row mishap was his way of trying to unturn wasp spirits that were threatening to take down his plane. I think he believed that even if he managed to survive the attack, how long would it be before the entire world is overrun by bugs? And then he asserted control over the only thing that he could truly control: his exit strategy.

Tragic, considering he was fighting against the system by working at it from within. I don't agree with everything he did, but I gotta give him some respect for trying. Ares lost one of its biggest assets in the war against the bugs, and there are few who could successfully fill his shoes.

As a tip for the rest of you, take heed: avoid accepting any bug bounty contracts in the foreseeable future. The hives are getting bigger, and our capacity to effectively fight them is growing smaller by the day. If you're not going in with an army or two, you might not be coming back out.

- Is that's because you want all the bounties for yourself?
- Red Anya
- I'm not even going to dignify that with a response.
- Sticks

POWER VACUUM

With Aurelius gone, Ares is going to be up in arms. Since Nick's grandfather founded Ares, Nick was the one member on the board who most wanted to see Ares succeed, and not simply in a brinkmanship, make-as-much-money-as-possible sort of way. He wanted Ares to be an admired, household name. He wanted militaries to trust Ares, not because of government-awarded contracts, but because the corp made solid, reliable firearms that would guarantee the success of military operations. Aurelius sought to forge his grandfather's company into as benevolent and respected an entity as he could. Lofty and naïve ideals for a



member of the board, but there you go. And now that is gone. Here's how I foresee the power structure shaking out in his absence.

Knight

If Nicholas Aurelius was the corp's conscience, Damien Knight is the ambition. I can tell you this without even needing to do any legwork: Knight is going to have a field day for as long as he can get away with. Assuming someone hasn't already informed Gavilan Ventures of Nick's death, it will take some time before Ares's third-largest shareholder catches wind that they need to appoint a new proxy on the board. What will Knight do with this newfound freedom? I don't even want to think about it. The corp is losing the war against the bugs, and I worry Knight will make matters worse.

I think he may already have something up his sleeve, because he's been making fewer and fewer public appearances of late. From what I understand, he's been absent from recent board meetings, relying on a proxy to vote for items on his agenda. It is quite possible his field day started before Aurelius killed himself.

- So, are you suggesting that Knight might've had something to do with Nick's death? He certainly had motive to order a hit, since Excalibur was a complete and total catastrophe.
- Riser
- Yeah, and in case you'd forgotten, the Fallen Seraphim had a motive too. They had a major bone to pick with the Aurelius clan over abandoning CATCo. This particular incident certainly isn't characteristic of their usual methods, but I wouldn't discount them.
- Thorn
- This is all under the assumption that Mr. Carpenter's message was on the up and up.
- Plan 9
- Footage like that is hard to fake. In the video, pay close attention to the flight attendant that got sucked out of the plane when Nick threw open the door. Only at high altitudes is something like that going to happen. Unless the "Nick" who threw himself out of that airplane was some guy wearing a physical mask spell, that is the real McCoy.
- Slamm-0!
- Maybe the flight attendant fell victim to an air elemental's vacuum powers? You gotta think about this stuff from all angles.
- Plan 9
- Whatever the cause, Aurelius is dead. He wouldn't gain anything from faking his own death and going into hiding only to watch his grandfather's legacy crumble into dust. The only question now is *why*. The more I look into this, the more my money's on the bugs.
- Sticks

Vogel

Knight acts as Ares's ambition, the *this is what we want to do* idea, and Aurelius acted as the corporate conscience, the *this is what we should do* ideology. That places major shareholder Arthur Vogel as the corp's pragmatist, the *this is what we need*

to do response between both doctrinal extremes. As the centrist in this continuum, I foresee Vogel will try to secure as much of Aurelius' power base as possible before Knight can tip the balance back in his favor. While ambition is healthy for driving corporate interests, Knight's brand of ambition, especially where bugs are concerned, has potentially toxic and far-reaching repercussions. If Vogel's smart, he'll form an alliance with the next proxy that Gavilan Ventures appoints to the board. Of course, with Vogel dividing most of his time between space stations Apollo, Icarus, and Daedalus, I doubt this will leave him with very much time to thwart Knight's machinations. For Ares' long-term fiscal health, he needs to focus more on the corp as a whole rather than on just his AresSpace division. Maybe Aurelius' death will prompt him to come down from Mount Olympus and mingle with us mortals.

- Vogel is staying in space as much as possible because if the whole world turns up bug city, the bugs can't reach him. Bugs can't survive in space.
- Ethernaut
- Yet.
- Plan 9
- Please. Maybe you should read some arcane texts about spirits before you spout off nonsense.
- Ethernaut
- I already have. You read that rumor Bull mentioned earlier, right? If cockroaches are so hardy they can survive nuclear holocaust, why can't the right kind of flesh-form merge survive a trip to space? Let's assume a merge results in flesh form about ninety-percent human and ten-percent bug spirit. The personal "manasphere" created by the metahuman host sustains the super-hardy spirit enough on the trip out of the atmosphere, and once it reaches a space station, where there's enough people and hydroponics and ambient bacteria to create a bargain-basement manasphere, that should be enough mana to sustain the spirit for awhile. At least until it's killed the space station's entire crew.
- Plan 9
- Spirits don't work that way.
- Elijah
- What we *truly* understand about spirits could fit on the back of a cereal box—the rest is just academic rhetoric designed to fill textbooks—and we know even *less* about the bugs. Spirits are always surprising even the most erudite magical scholars. Who's to say that the bugs haven't already found some way to weather a mana void? Mammals can hold their breath when they need to. Why can't spirits do the same?
- Plan 9
- Because that's the wrong comparison. Yes, you can hold your breath, but how long can you love with your heart thirty meters outside of your body? That's more apt.
- Elijah



- Whatever the case is, I'm never going into space now. Or out of the house.
- Slamm-0!

Gavilan Ventures

The biggest question mark coming out of Aurelius's death is who Draco Foundation-controlled Gavilan Ventures will appoint as its new proxy on Ares's board of directors. Another concern is whether or not this appointee will take control of Aurelius' interests.

Let's tackle the easier one first. It's a safe bet that Troy Carpenter will replace Aurelius as head of Ares Global Entertainment. He's done a decent job as Nick's right-hand man so far, so I don't expect the board to vote for a shakeup there. What really worries me is Knight will probably assume control of Project Pyro and take it in even more horrifying directions.

The more difficult matter is Nick's replacement on the board. Since I suspect Gavilan Ventures still doesn't know Nick is dead, they probably haven't given much thought to who should succeed him. Based on what I know of Gavilan Ventures, here's my shortlist of possible candidates:

- **Leonard Aurelius:** While Nick's father might not be the best choice for business acumen, Gavilan appointing him is likely to stick in Damien Knight's craw. Leonard's been out of Ares since he sold his stocks to Arthur Vogel and defected to Cross Applied Technologies, so for Knight to see him back in the boardroom must be worth the price of admission.
 - **Nadja Daviar:** Although she was Nick's predecessor on the board, I believe she's too wrapped up in dragon drama to worry about boardroom drama. Gavilan may try to appoint her again, but odds are she'll decline the offer.
 - **Clayton Wilson:** Current head of Knight Errant and founder of Lone Star. He's one of Knight's stooges, but if Gavilan backs him, I figure he'll cut Knight's leash and try to use Ares to get his former company back.
 - **Georgina Hampton:** Ms. Hampton is the only member of Gavilan's steering committee that took active interest in Nick's various interests within Ares, and she often provided him business advice. Hampton makes logical sense from a business standpoint, as she's very familiar with Aurelius' goals. If Gavilan chooses her, I believe that would provide the most negligible disruption within the company's leadership.
- Can't find much information on Ms. Hampton other than public data. What's her angle, I wonder?
 - Slamm-0!
 - She seems legit enough. However, I worry her interests in Mr. Aurelius' work are purely academic rather than business-related. It is quite possible that Gavilan might use their new proxy to purposely sink the Ares ship and gather up all the survivors from the water.
 - Mr. Bonds
 - I dug up her voting record for Gavilan's steering committee. Lots of pro-dragon-related votes. Someone's definitely pulling her strings, but who?
 - Glitch

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Ares has taken quite a few below-the-belt punches to its portfolio. Here are the things to keep an eye on.

Stocks

If you're an Ares stockholder, then you might want to consider dumping your shares as soon as you can, because the drek is about to hit the fan. Those watching the stock markets will notice a sharp downward trend in Ares stock prices since the Excalibur's release, a slope so steep you'd probably kill yourself if you tried to sled down it.

- Unless you want Ares to collapse, hang on to your stocks. A mass selloff drives share prices down, and buying increases the value. As low as Ares shares currently are, too many people selling will cause the stock to bottom out, no matter how many stock splits the corp tries. And if the stock bottoms out, Ares isn't long for this world. You might lose money in the short term by holding onto your investment, but if Ares recovers, I project those stocks will regain most—if not all—of their pre-Excalibur value.
- Mr. Bonds
- Funny, I never pegged you for an optimist.
- Dr. Spin

Space Race

Despite Vogel's administration of AresSpace, Ares is losing the space race against Evo and Saeder-Krupp. Partially due to the Excalibur, potential aerospace clients that would normally have hired AresSpace are taking their business to competitors. No one wants to risk sending up a spacecraft that has the same perceived level of quality control as a battle rifle, and I don't blame them. There's far more that can go wrong on a complex, spaceborne habitat, and clients believe that if Ares can screw up a simple soup-and-sandwich, no way in hell are they going to trust them with a consommé that requires a lot more nuance and finesse to keep from turning into an inedible, gelatinous mass.

Another item of note: Ares seems to have shut down the Charon Space Station around Mars, and all four of its crew are now undertaking the nine-month journey back to Earth. I'm having trouble finding any credible reasons for the shutdown other than a lack of funds. Not counting AresSpace's Helios Station, this means Evo is the only corp with a space presence beyond Luna.

- Did what went down at Gagarin Mars Base have anything to do with Vogel pulling the plug on Charon?
- Cosmo
- The safer bet is Evo didn't want any neighbors and took measures to make Charon untenable to maintain.
- Orbital DK
- Until proven otherwise, I'm blaming both incidents on the triffids.
- Plan 9

Revenue

Right alongside plummeting stock prices, Ares's revenues have dramatically fallen. The corp threw a *lot* of money developing



Avalon, pimping Excalibur, running damage control, and waging war against a bug population that's rapidly growing out of control. On the credit side of the ledger, things are looking even more grim. Ares is sitting on hundreds of thousands of unsold Excaliburs. It has lost countless defense contracts, most notably in the UCAS. People aren't buying as many items from Ares Consumer Products; they're not watching Ares Global Entertainment channels or buying AGE-produced trids or sims as often; and they're certainly thinking twice about purchasing from Ares Arms, General Motors, or any of Ares's other recognizable brands.

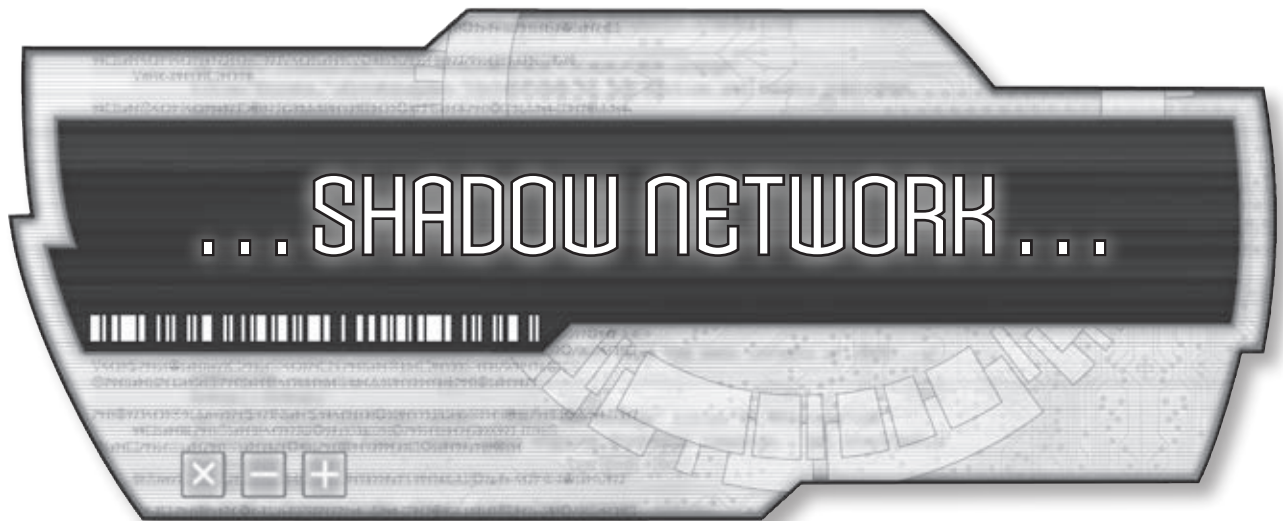
For perhaps the first time in the corporation's history, Ares Macrotechnology is spending more money than it's taking in, far more, and cashing in all of its marks or favors hasn't yet slowed the hemorrhaging of red ink. Profits are non-existent, and the corp is simply trying to break even. Consumer confidence is at the lowest it's ever been, which is creating an endless fiscal spiral that will be difficult to recover from. And Ares's best advocate just cashed in his chips to purchase some agricultural property.

I won't sugarcoat it: Ares's future is looking pretty grim. They are likely one good shadowrun away from the Corporate Court knocking them down to AA status.

- Would the world really be so bad with one less AAA walking around?
- /dev/grrl
- If Ares falls down a few pegs, I guarantee some other corp is going to try swooping in and snatching up the under-protected remains of Pyro. Can you even imagine bug colonies in the hands of, say, Aztechnology or Evo?
- Sticks
- I think I just soiled myself.
- Slamm-0!



ARES TREMBLES.....



It can't be all climaxes and conclusions. We've covered some big events so far, but that's not everything that's happening in the world. Some of the issues and events that I've had people watching have taken twists and turns that all but guarantee increases in tension, which of course means more work for us. If you want to get that work, the trick, as always, is knowing the right people. If you've got contacts in the areas we're about to talk about, then start working them over so they can send jobs your way. If you don't have the right contacts, that stop playing *Miracle Shooter* for five damn minutes and go meet some people. Use the names we're going to give you as a starting point—a lot of them aren't people you're going to encounter yourself, now or ever, but it's easier to find a guy who knows a guy who knows a guy if you have a good idea who the guy at the end of the chain is.

One place to look for contacts is the ever-intriguing nation of Tir Tairngire. Larry Zincan is shuffling off into the red-and-gold sunset that concludes each and every Tir day, and his replacement has been chosen by the people of the nation. Want to know who it is and what it might mean? I roped in Tarislar to provide an update on the elections, and I'm sure you'll all be thrilled to know that he got information from a variety of sources, including everyone's favorite icon, Grimmy the Grimoire.

Next, /dev/grrl continues to make me proud by digging up an intriguing bit of information on Dodger. If you don't know that name, then do some research first and read what /dev/grrl has whipped up. Or just plunge ahead and read her piece, because it should contain enough to get you intrigued—and to make you cautious when you're skipping around the Matrix.

Then things take a disquieting turn when Hannibelle updates us on some goings-on in the world of the Infected, in particular some events affecting everyone's favorite bestselling author and vampire hunter, Martin de Vries. De Vries is being exposed to the harsh light of day, and that's uncomfortable for all of us. As you'll see, it's particularly bad for someone like him. But there's more going on here than news about de Vries, and it's enough to make anyone nervous who knows with—or runs with—someone who is Infected. And I say that with all due respect for my Infected friends.

Then JackPoint's pre-eminent Japanacorp expert, Baka Dabora, provides a brief rundown on how Shiawase, Mitsuhama, and Renraku are regrouping and even co-operating to build their stature and put the hurt on their competitors. It hasn't been a great decade for them, as their power has faded in a number of ways, but they are far from weak. They have strength and are determined to use it. They were on top of things for a long time, and they are not at all interested in giving up that status for good. They've endured enough abuse in the past ten years, and they're ready to start dishing some out.

That certainly doesn't cover every situation you should know about, but it's a good look at a handful of people and places facing pivotal events. Your job will be to figure out how they're going to pivot, and what you're going to do to make money off the moves they'll be making.



Posted by: Tarislar

Telegit thelemsa, JackPoint, and I thank you again for allowing me to share some knowledge with you here. We are all well aware of how important politics can be, especially to those of us living in society's shadow. One nation in particular has only just recently concluded their elections, perpetually several months out of step with their neighbors.

- Or several centuries, given the goofy titles and stuff they use.
- Slamm-0!

We recently had a rather in-depth conversation about the political situation in Tír Tairngire, but their January elections have changed the balance of power with potentially dramatic ramifications. High Prince Larry Zincan, well loved by many of his people, has refused to again alter the nation's laws to allow for him to serve a third term. The Tír constitution only limits the service of the High Prince, however, and every regular Prince on the Council was able to campaign once again.

- Prince Joubert was quite vocal when she encouraged Zincan to remain in power. She even sponsored the bill herself.
- Winterhawk
- Zincan's not doing so well physically, and while I've been pulling for the old man to survive his term, he likely wouldn't have survived another five years with the pressures of office (not to mention the periodic assassination attempts) even if he was allowed back. Joubert probably would have piggybacked his popularity and used the mourning nation's gratitude to angle for the spot herself when the old ork kicked the bucket. Likely would've worked, too.
- Thorn
- I was about to call you cynical, since Joubert seems to be on the up-and-up, but then I remembered we're talking about elves *and* politicians.
- Bull

With the highest position in the land unclaimed and every current Prince able to maneuver for it, the election was rather ... spirited. Every Prince was, to some extent, angling for the pinnacle of Tír power rather than maintaining only their current seats. Each of them played to their already-loyal bases of voters and influence, save of course the always-eccentric Prince Jaeger (who seems to maintain popularity for popularity's sake). Taylor appealed to Peace Force members and their families; Parris catered to the conservative hardliners; Demarco held power through unprecedented campaign funding and securing the bulk of the human vote; Joubert and Foster called out to the underclasses and metaracial minorities; and so on. The total campaign costs of each Prince are still a matter of government secrecy, but there is no denying that those numbers must have been astronomical.

- Many of them had fresh campaign funds available to them, thanks to generous "donations" offered from outside of the country. Tracing the money is enlightening, of course, as we've discussed elsewhere. It's also intriguing to calculate what percentage of the laundered funds went missing while the money changed hands between the Illuminate Order and various Telestrian subsidiaries. It's rather convenient for all involved that the vote still didn't go the IOND's way—almost like all those naughty Princes knew how the Council vote would go and just laughed about it all the way to the bank.
- Frosty

As campaigns intensified, the criminal element and other unsavory sorts came into play. While individual Princes lobbied for advantages over one another, alliances were made, trusts were betrayed, secrets were uncovered, and voters were motivated one way or another. Rumors swirled about official state operatives being used for personal gain. The so-called "Moonlight Thorns," long an open secret, were supposedly used as spies and saboteurs for one Prince or another, sharing campaign secrets, sabotaging electronics, or unearthing secrets to be held over a rival's head.

- I thought you guys said those Thorn dudes—not *our* Thorn dude—were bodyguards. Isn't this sort of like, I dunno, the UCAS President sending the Secret Service to do his dirty work? Don't these Princes have someone better to send on their spy work?
- /dev/grrl
- I imagine they were sending that "someone better," too.
- Fianchetto
- The existence of the Moonlight Thorns is something the Council of Princes officially acknowledges (and each Prince is able to have one officially assigned to them for additional security, if they wish), but the membership is still highly confidential. So they'll cop to the group's existence, but they're not in the habit of advertising who's in it or what they're sanctioned to do. Even the open operatives of the group, the ones who accept assignments to publicly protect Council members, are habitually disguised, magically or otherwise, when on assignment.
- Thorn

Independent contractors, even some from outside of the country, were also no doubt involved in these operations. Such political maneuvering is nothing new to shadowrunners. More troubling, however, was that various parties with no Princely affiliation—and the restraint that comes with it—undertook similar covert operations. Remnants of the Rinelle ke'Tesrae were hard at work in the weeks and months leading up to the election, turning their attention primarily to Tír citizens. The ke'Tesrae occasionally targeted Princes, and many of the more progressive Princes were directly attacked.

Thousands of non-elves were granted full citizenships and SINS in the wake of the Coup and High Prince Zincan's ascension to the office, and sadly, many elven holdouts remain bitter about their inclusion in the nation's newfound democracy. A whole generation of orks idolized Zincan and eagerly looked forward to voting in his successor when they came of age, but untold numbers of metaracist elves feared that day and vowed to keep it from happening. Many a Cara'Sir and Malek'thas street ran red as ork and elf alike fell to smuggled weapons and combat magic.

- Some of the ork rights activists are smuggling their old anti-Saito weapons up from NorCal to help out. Heavier weaponry has been funneled in through Cascade Ork territory, from who-knows-what external enemies the Tír has gathered. During the Rinelle troubles years ago, half the NAN was cheering, and I'm sure they're egging on this simmering race war, too. I heard the Cascade Orks are even offering "friend prices" on the occasional smuggling run instead of milking the situation for all it's worth.
- Turbo Bunny
- Shamans from their tribe are lending their own support against these genocidal combat mages. There are those whose totems call them to protect kin, no matter where they might be found.
- Man-of-Many-Names

Few places in this modern world are truly peaceful, but the Tír has been particularly bloody these last few months. Not since the Coup has the country seen this level of violence with such

[19:03/5/January/2075]

Hi there! I'm Grimmy the Grimoire with another Election 2075 live update! On behalf of Prince Jaeger, who we just interviewed live at the Rockerbox, we thank you for your interest in your homeland's noble political process! The High Prince, the Council, and the Star Chamber thank all lawful citizens for exercising their voter privileges today! Two hours after polling centers have closed and with a majority of ridings reporting, here are the current standings from today's election, from highest vote-getter to lowest!

Telestrian, M.
Parris, E.
Joubert, A.
Taylor, C.
Demarco, M.
Rex
Gant, J.
[null vote] Zincan, L. [/null vote]
Van den Berg, J.
Foster, J.
Jaeger, K.
Telestrian, L.
Telestrian, T.
MacBain, G.
Kearny, M.
Thibault, D.
Telestrian, S.
Jameson, J.
Telestrian, R.



Check back soon for continued election coverage and further reports on today's fatalities, civil disturbances, and Rites of Celebration! We'll be back here every hour, on the hour, with live interviews from standing Princes as they respond to election results, with Prince Evan Parris scheduled for our eight o'clock p.m. time slot!

- The Tír uses a first-past-the-post electoral system for the Star Chamber and a semi-proportional method, cumulative voting, for the more important Council and High Prince elections. Anyone who fills out the forms and pays the fees can try to get on the ballot; the main obstruction is that one of the forms is essentially a petition, which theoretically weeds out the undesirable. Once the ballots are finalized, citizens of the Gentry rank and above—essentially anyone with a proper SIN—receive eleven votes apiece and are free to split them between Council nominees however they wish. Many cast one vote for each would-be Prince they like, with a second going towards their High Prince favorite. More partisan voters who strongly favor a single candidate will throw all their votes at that one, split them up between two they like, or what have you.
- Kay St. Irregular
- The High Prince is simply whoever gets the most votes, and the next nine round out the Council. So far it works, but the Tír and proper elections don't exactly have a long and steady relationship.
- Frosty



INCOMING FEED.....



regularity. No one knows how much the Princes have sponsored or supported and how much stems from independent groups pursuing their own aims, but many of the Princes have shamefully tried to silence their rivals through bloodshed and fear. To the credit of the Tír's people, however, the opposite occurred: the voter turnout in this recent election was the highest ever recorded.

- That's largely due to the widespread SIN registrations from ten years ago. The Tír has never had so many potential voters before, so it's only natural they'd never have so many show up to vote.
- Kay St. Irregular

In the end, for all the passion that sent Tír voters to the polls, logic prevailed on election day. The more radical and metaracially motivated voters largely canceled each other out, and the utterly mundane issue that so motivates the rest of metahumanity—the economy—won the day. Running on a platform consisting primarily of continued economic reform and financial growth for all Tír citizens, Prince Mary-Louise Telestrian campaigned steadily leading up to the election and promised increased prosperity to all social classes. Having long since secured her position as the chief financial advisor to the popular High Prince Zincan, Telestrian was able to exploit the momentum of the nation's ongoing economic revival to catapult herself to individual political success. By promising people more of the same, she won more votes than any other candidate and secured the High Prince's throne.

- Now what am I gonna do with my "High Prince Rex: 2075!" t-shirt?
- Slamm-0!
- Wash it?
- Netcat
- To get Demarco to let her make those claims—to keep him from pointing out his own programs that have helped with that economic growth—means Telestrian either made him some big promises or some huge threats.
- Kay St. Irregular
- The Tír's perpetual racism combined with some shadow ops might have been enough to handle that. His ears are plenty round, and hers are nice and sharp. Demarco may have felt his grasp on a Princesship was tenuous enough that he couldn't afford to openly defy her on this issue. He might have just been content to maintain his Council seat and keep raking in the nuyen.
- Frosty

High Prince Telestrian is neither socially conservative nor particularly progressive but can best be called "disinterested." She is content to stay above the fray and let the Tír citizens do what they wish to do. While Telestrian is no Evan Parris, the radical elven crowd favors her—for her metaspecies, her antagonistic relationship with the Council's sole human, and for replacing High Prince Zincan, if for nothing else—and they take her silence as an unspoken blessing. She has made no effort to silence the dissenting

FIRST AMONG EQUALS.....

Council voices belonging to the likes of Joubert and Foster, however, which the other Princes also take as encouragement.

- She also hasn't made vocal plans to clamp down on that Tír/Cascade smuggling that keeps the underclassmen armed and dangerous. Little birds whisper that she may have cut a deal with the ork tribal leadership. This allows the smuggling to continue unabated in exchange for a cut of the profits, orkish muscle at her beck and call, information on Salish-Shidhe politics, or who-knows-what-else.
- Red Anya

For the most part, High Prince Telestrian seems likely to continue the Tír's status quo, young as it may be, from the years since the Coup. The tendency toward less overt racism will hopefully continue, as will the comparative openness of their borders and the nominal transparency of their government. The High Prince has made it clear that tourist money will continue to be welcomed but foreign businesses and extraterritoriality will not. This position is, of course, in her own best interest—or, rather, in the interest of the entire Telestrian clan. Their family-owned business continues to economically dominate the Tír as a whole, leaving their nearest competitors, Prince Demarco's Andalusian Light Industries, in distant second place.

The prominence of the Telestrian name, in fact, brings us to the remainder of the election's meaningful results. The High Prince's replacement on the Council of Princes—another Telestrian—will rubber-stamp any changes wrought by the new High Prince, no matter what the fiscal effects of these changes might be. Lynne, the High Prince's cousin, will be taking Mary-Louise's vacant Council seat.

- Meet the new Prince, just like the old Prince.
- Frosty
- People, that song is more than one hundred years old! Start quoting some new music!
- Slamm-0!

The Telestrians are not simply the dominant force in Tír politics but are working hard at forming a dynasty. The entire Council knows that Lynne will now speak with the High Prince's voice, and in the case of a tie, High Prince Telestrian will decide the matter, regardless. The balance of power has shifted dramatically in the Telestrian family's favor. Though Mary-Louise's son Sebastian seemed to be groomed for a political position, Lynne is also a more-than-capable heir. Sebastian remains a prominent executive in Telestrian Industries proper, and just a few months ago the family bent its fortune and clout to campaigning on Lynne's behalf instead of Sebastian's. The women of the Telestrian clan are the most powerful figures in the Tír landscape now, and it is only a matter of time before they truly wield that might.

- So what do we know about Lynne?
- Pistons

- There's precious little to know. Top of her class, double major in biotechnology and business culminating in an MBA from Willamette University, top scores in her Rite of Progression. Back when James III was the Telestrian *pater familias*, Lynne was given a chance to shine, and she did so. She's been groomed for this position for a long time. The Telestrians have done their best to ensure every family member is ready for this sort of power. Losing James to the Coup threw a wrench into their plans, sure, but they've had ten years to adapt and have plenty of family to choose from for replacements.
- Winterhawk

- Her platform, such as it was, basically mirrored Mary-Louise's. All about the fiscal growth, carefully avoiding the social, dancing around issues so that neither side could pin anything on her about anything but economics. She's got just one open enemy on the Council—Demarco, since Lynne's the inheritor of his animosity towards the whole Telestrian family—but as a whole the Council seems willing to welcome her into the fold as a peer and rival. Parris seems to quietly resent anyone who's even nominally his equal or superior. Rex makes cheerful noises, but who knows what he's up to? Taylor knows he needs Telestrian financial support to keep the Peace Force paid and equipped. Gant seems to be loyal to the nation as a whole, worried only about doing a competent job. Foster and Joubert are none too thrilled about having another elf on the Council. Jaeger's already been fined twice for making inappropriate comments about Lynne and Mary-Louise (tridclips of both instances went viral across the Matrix). Lastly, Van den Berg is as milquetoast-boring as we've come to expect, but that just makes us all think he's up to something.

- Kay St. Irregular
- What's the deal with this Sebastian kid? He can't like being passed over like this.
- Sounder
- Telestrians never do, but so far Sebastian has kept his sulking private, at least. He served in the Peace Force for a time (his records are classified enough that I didn't take the time to go looking), returned to the family fold at the end of his second enlistment period, and moved to a prominent position TeleSec, the family's paramilitary—sorry, I mean *security*—branch. That's when he swore oaths of allegiance to then-Prince Mommy as a publicity stunt, and those oaths are probably keeping him from pouting out loud. Word is his uncle Timothy (an also-ran yet again) still has a chip on his shoulder against Lynne from some slight decades ago. Timmy might try to get young Sebastian into his camp, given enough time.
- Frosty
- Hold up. We're missing one. Who's the "Telestrian, R." from those election results upthread? How many friggin' Telestrians are there?
- Hard Exit

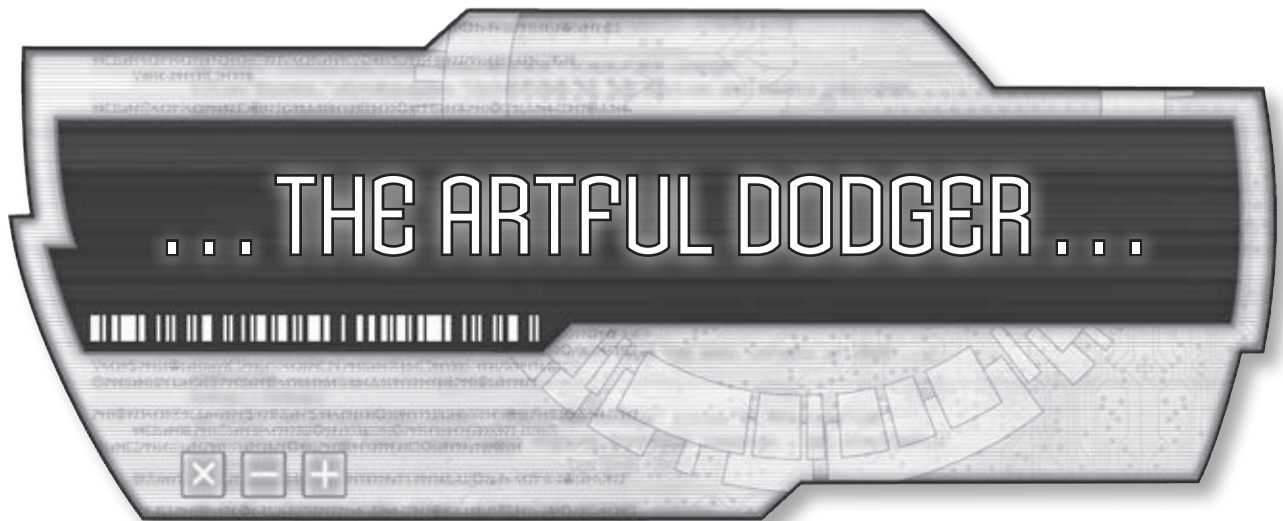


- Lots. This one is Rory. Records on him are ... scarce and often redacted. He's something of a prodigal son, with rumors flying about who he really is and what exactly he's been up to. The current theory in some circles is that he's a Ghost or White Banner/Black Dagger-type guy who just got back home in time for the election and ran to piss off the rest of his family. His last name's the only reason he made it onto the ballot.
- Frosty

For now, High Prince Zincan still holds office. Only a few weeks remain before he will hand over his position to Mary-Louise, and Lynne will move onto the Council to fill her cousin's seat. Having ascended from being a token ork yes-man under Surehand to ruling the country, Zincan was more popular during his reign than anyone could have foreseen, and he will be missed. He inherited a nation drowning in crises, and while he has his critics, the truth is he stabilized the economy, slowed the drain of refugees, brought in valuable tourism, and even saw many expatriates return. The Zincan Act has been partially sullied by the draconian security measures it introduced, but the continuing sectarian violence shows that such measures may have been necessary despite their drawbacks.

The new High Prince seems poised to continue many of Zincan's plans. The borders will remain (comparatively) open, the atmosphere will stay (relatively) friendly to outsiders, and the economy will continue to grow. Some worry about old traditions being ignored, but many of them write those complaints in the blood of innocents. These old traditions concern xenophobia and oppression, so I feel the Land of Promise is better walking down this new path.





Posted by: /dev/grrl

- Hey guys, I was digging through some of Danielle de la Mar's files after that time that I totally busted into her commlink all by myself without any help (re: awesome), and I came across this internal memo some of you old people might like. I remember a few of you talking about this Dodger guy over in our hacked Tír Tairngire travel brochure, and I thought you might want to look him up or something.
- /dev/grrl

From: Andrew Boyer, GOD

To: Danielle de la Mar

Re: Background Check: Consultant: Dodger

I remain convinced that bringing him onboard is the way to go. He's eccentric, but we're used to that, and he's brilliant enough that his social affectations shouldn't matter. His obsession gives us the carrot we need; we'll never have to use a stick on him.

After spending several decades sliding past IC like it wasn't there, he was caught in the Matrix during the second Crash. Eyewitness accounts gleaned from various hacker-houses over the years have confirmed it, and there are enough urban myths floating around about this elf that we know he was there. What's more, we know why. Both of them tie into the linked psych eval we discovered from Harborview Hospital shortly after the Crash. Anonymous donations were later sent to the facility with a very polite thank-you note, with his patient number as the only explanation.

We lost track of him again for a time after that, at least in the meat world. In the Matrix, we tracked his usual icon—that ebony boy with a cloak made of stars—primarily targeting Renraku for roughly two years. Our records are spotty, but by all estimates the vast majority of these intrusions, or at least the ones we've found logged in Renraku security files, don't seem to have been targeting the usual paydata. He was raiding corporate databases, yes, for proprietary information, but none of it was tracked as having been immediately useful to any business rivals at the time. He wasn't working. He was searching, on his own, for his missing AI.

- It's hard to blame him. She was really something to see in action.
- Slamm-0!

We first see him again, for certain, in Tír na nÓg late in 2067. We had heard of a Tír Tairngire employer (Willamette

Incoming Message

From: Dr. Dawn

To: Dr. Gorski

Re: Patient 2064-3245

Name: John Doe

Gender: M

DOB: XX-XX-XXXX

Age: Unknown (est. 25)

Metaspecies: Homo sapien nobilis

Testing Dates: 8-11-2064, 8-27-2064, 9-9-2064, 9-21-2064, 10-17-2064

I second the recommendation for a discharge and full clearance on this patient without reservation. He's not had a major incident during his time with us, he does well in group session, and he's responded quite favorably to treatment (especially Dr. K's simulations, where 3245 has logged triple the hours of anyone else, and has shown himself capable of peaceful reintegration with society). We've been steadily lowering his dosage, and his alertness and orientation have remained, even on pure placebos. 3245 hasn't complained about missing his "lady fair" in weeks, has no suicidal ideation, no homicidal ideation, the auditory and visual hallucinations on record may have been clerical errors or the result of improper medication, his concentration and memory are fine, and he hasn't tried to interact with imaginary electronics like so many of the other cases that came in around the same time. The initial diagnosis of a psychosis seems to have been incorrect, but I understand Aaron's mistake because, let's be honest Mike, we were all swamped. I agree with Dr. Kim, absolutely. Let's cut the elf loose; we need the bed.

CompuStat) trying to contact him, and piggybacked their security as they compiled their own reports. It would seem that Dodger spent over a year just outside Galway in a palatial estate registered to a Mr. Sean Aileach, almost certainly an alias of the

former Tír Prince Sean Laverty. At this time, the exiled nobility were being hunted rather seriously, and it's believed that Dodger was providing Laverty with Matrix support, assisting his former mentor in gathering funds, contacting allies both in and outside of the two elven nations, shuffling resources around the globe, monitoring his hunters, and generally evading justice.

- Old news, that. Tír Tairngire's not really hunting for Laverty as hard as they are Surehand and a few others. The Professor seems content so long as he's got a school set up somewhere and elven magicians to train in mysterious arcane arts, and the Ghosts and the like seem content to let him do so, as long as it's far afield from Cara'Sir.
- Thorn

What matters is that our records show that his stay coincides with overhauls and updates to Tír na nÓg's government-supplied Matrix, with massive improvements made to both user interface and security protocols. The Tír maintained its tradition of heavily sculpted nodes and iconography composed of complex, archaic knotwork and the like, rather than properly conforming to UMS imagery—they have been repeatedly fined for this, but seem to have long ago accepted that as the cost of (not) doing business—but otherwise they updated heavily during this 2067-2068 period. Note: this heavy reliance on stylized imagery and immersive design, rather than casual AR, makes the Tír Telecommunications Grid an ideal candidate for our own upgrades.

- It's true, Tír na nÓg's always been a pain to hack in. Sometimes you've got to run translation protocols on top of everything else, other times you've got to be good at riddles, other times you've got to decipher/decrypt complex mazes. Irritating stuff.
- Pistons

This freelance work began to set the pattern of his life since then. As companies and governments updated, Dodger was there. He avoided working for Renraku, but with that one exception he traveled the globe, working completely legally as a freelance Matrix consultant. Internal memos we've secured from each of these companies show that they were invariably impressed with his work, and one NeoNET handler described him as displaying "a startling depth and breadth of Matrix knowledge, coupled with the breathtaking ability to make the impossible look instinctive despite the limitations of the secure hardware lent to him." A bit

flowery, perhaps, but a sentiment held by several such handlers from a variety of companies. Evo is known to have offered him a full-time position, with a generous salary, but he never settled anywhere for longer than a few months.

- Last I checked, *no one* is "breathtaking" on the loaner hardware they give consultants. That's kind of the point.
- DangerSensei
- They can be if they're not really using the hardware. Maybe it's just fresh in my brain from that psych eval, but ...
- Netcat

We now know that he was doing so not simply for nuyen, nor for those perpetual hardware upgrades that so tantalize the criminal underclass, but for the tremendous computing power that could only be afforded to him directly by those global Matrix providers. He worked on projects that were anathema to him: upgrading security, improving the efficiency of intrusion countermeasures, troubleshooting security for ultraviolet nodes, essentially wearing a white hat instead of his usual black one ... but he did so not because he had a change of heart, but because he believes his heart is missing. He doesn't care about our money, or doing what's genuinely right; even after all this time, he only cares about finding this AI, the one called Morgan or Magaera. Rather than utilizing standard search protocols or programming his own (as we know he's more than capable of doing), he's going directly to the source. He's scouring databases himself, and gaining access to do so as clauses in these freelance contracts. It's a testament to his obsession, yes, but also to his ability. Consider it, Ms. de la Mar; NeoNET, MCT, Evo, all of them, they were so hungry for the knowledge and talent he could offer, they were *letting* him search through their code, sometimes literally line by line, to look for a missing girl that never truly existed in the first place.

- I know he wasn't just doing it for a paycheck, but it still sucks to see a real old-school console cowboy turn Matrix cop, even indirectly, even just by training or equipping them.
- Bull
- How do we know he really was, though? I mean, who knows what backdoors he set up? Who knows what passcodes he smuggled out, or what leaks he's responsible for?
- Slamm-0!
- If he'd been doing all that all along, would they have kept hiring him?
- Pistons

This elf has, very honestly, forgotten more about the Matrix than I and half my staff will ever know. His node design is elegant and flawless, his intrusion countermeasures are graceful and ruthless, the programs he assembles to crack the work of others are nothing less than sublime. His knowledge of artificial intelligences and his ability to work alongside them are quite simply second to none, as though there's some intuitive bond between him and even the most otherwise uncommunicative AI. I've heard rumors he's no longer simply a hacker, no longer even a programmer, but has become something more. In examining program logs of him in action, there are times even I—a man soundly of science and law—think I see his missing lover hovering just out of his

Incoming Message



From: Sarah Browstowe
To: Roger McManus
Re: re: Security Clearance

I don't care what the PF apes say, Roger. Make this happen. Get him into the country, whoever you have to bribe. We've got code we need him to look at.

>>You replied on 7-10-2067

>>Ms. Browstowe, the Tír Peace Force cannot at this time meet Willamette CompuStat's request for a travel and temporary employment visa. Furthermore, the subject in question is still wanted for questioning in regards to the location of the fugitive Sean Laverty. We will not grant you the required authorization to bring him into the country, and do hereby demand you turn over to us any information you have pertaining to his whereabouts immediately in accordance with article seven of the Zincan Act.

sight, helping him code the impossible. I cannot explain it, but I desperately want us to wield what he possesses.

- Oh, Dodger. You never really lost her. She's your Paragon, somehow.
- Netcat
- Cat, I know the guy, and even Slamm-O! saw him work. He's good, he's great, he's even *special*, maybe. But he's just a decker.
- Bull
- Yeah? Then why'd this Laverty/Aileach guy take such an interest in him in the first place? How's he still this shit-hot without ever upgrading past some twenty year old headware, using training-wheel 'links so full of security and tracking 'ware they're constipated? Why was Morgan/Magaera so fascinated by him, out of all the old Matrix-masters around back then? And why does even some soulless GOD spider say he's seen her helping him? I'm telling you, he's a technomancer.
- Netcat
- ...
- Clockwork
- There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your bigotry.
- Puck

If we're going to create a new Matrix, if we're going to make it hacker-proof, we need this elf on our staff. I suggest we promise him the return of his missing AI, promise him the backing of the GOD in his search for her (particularly against Renraku, who we can imply maintains some secure networks he has not yet located). We promise him further connections with the ongoing projects we've heard of, Imago or Dickens or both, and we get everyone on the same page about keeping this man on staff. Honey, not vinegar, will get him to work for us with all his heart and soul. If we can offer him his precious e-ghost back, maybe even tell him she'll get a real body someday, then he'll do the impossible for us.

With the iconography and security we have in mind for this new Matrix, who on earth could be better? We still have time to get him on board with our GOD-ZOGB-Weapons Platform experiment, working for us from the inside while these other hackers probe from the outside. He has been in the business of making Matrix security look foolish for as long as most of us have been alive. Let's *use* him, instead of letting him continue to do so. I cannot explain it better than this, Ms. de la Mar; there is something special about this elf, and something special about the Matrix when he is using it. Where others hack, he dances. Let us put that to work.

- So do we have anything that shows he ever did work on those projects? Including the ones that seem to be spreading some ill effects around the hacker community?
- Pistons
- Nope-a-roonie, not that I could find in any of those other files. It looks like maybe they told him about them to get his attention, but he never actually worked on 'em, or if he did, it was pure theoretical contributions. From the consultant logs I can find for him, he never actually went anywhere near Albuquerque, for

sure. He was too busy doing de la Mar's dirty work to try and be reunited with his one true love. Which is kind of d'awwww when you think about it.

- /dev/grrl
- He still turned cop. Who knows how many kids have been tagged by IC or brain-fried because he was helping the bad guys optimize performance and work at peak efficiency? Fraggin' elf.
- Bull



... SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY ...

Posted by: Hannibelle

Here's one from the Annals of the Obvious: Being Infected sucks. Understatement of the year, right?

I'm closer to thirty than I ever thought I'd live to see. I used to be human, and a good little Baptist girl, but trying to be charitable on a summer mission trip put an end to both of those when I was ... God, I was just 17. Half a continent and most of a lifetime ago.

So ... twelve years and change I've lived as a ghoul. For the first half of my new life, I did unspeakable things in the name of survival. I still do, I suppose, though I've tried to find ways to redeem my soul. Being a ghoul means either a lifetime of doing unspeakable things and suffering for them, or doing unspeakable things and becoming a *true* monster. Ever wonder why so many ghouls go feral? Some of it is the pain of the transformation, and make no mistake, it hurts like a son of a bitch; even the best of us is different than he was before he turned. What makes staying sane so difficult, though, is what we have to do to survive. You can't sugar-coat it. I mean, we *eat people*, for Christ's sake! After a while, that'll really fuck with you. You'll either end up sticking a pistol in your mouth, or you'll lose your fragile grip on reality and go feral.

I'm not quite sure where I am on that spectrum right now. I'll get back to you on that.

- I'm pretty sure I don't like where this is going.
- /dev/grll

The past four or five years, I've been working for Infected rights. Most of you know that, I suppose. We've made a lot of strides over the past twenty years or so. From February of 2070 until June of last year, we were making real headway. Not just for ghouls, either, but for all the Infected. Would've impressed Tamir Grey something fierce.

This last year and a half, though, things have gone all to hell.

Some of that is the rights movement going south, yeah, but mostly it's that being Infected hurts more than it used to. It was never a cakewalk, but since July '73 or thereabouts, it's gotten worse. It's not the same for everyone, and not everyone seems to be affected, but it is spreading.

Boy, that's about as clear as body armor, isn't it? Okay, case in point: going out in the sun for me has never exactly been comfortable since I changed. Sunlight would hit my skin and there would be a dull ache, like I'd been working out too hard without warming up first. I'd get in out of the sun, and a minute or two later that ache was gone. Most ghouls would tell you the same story. Starting the middle of last year, though, it got worse. For some it started in July; for me it was the middle of August, and I'm told that there are some who are just now starting to notice. Now when I have to go out, the pain is more than a dull ache; it's a searing, almost debilitating pain, the kind of pain that you remember and fear when confronted with it again. I've been poking around a lot researching this, and it's happening all over the world. There's not a ghoul population out there that hasn't been affected by this to some degree, near as I can tell.

Hunger pangs have been harder to deal with, too. I haven't had to increase the amount of ... dammit, saying this never gets easier. I haven't had to increase the amount of human flesh I need to survive, but there's always a kind of gnawing hunger if you don't get enough soon enough. Like any hunger pain, it goes away if you satisfy it, but it always comes back. Usually it waits a little while, growing gently, gradually, before it really gets belligerent. It's been going straight to "belligerent" lately. That pushes you towards the wrong end of the "feral or functional" spectrum, too.

- What's the matter? Tamanan stop delivering?
- Clockwork
- Fuck you, asshole.
- Hannibelle
- Most of her research is, understandably, centered on ghouls; that's where most clinics that cater to the Infected concentrate their efforts. A few of those clinics see Strain I patients, too, however. Mostly vampires. Most records show that vampire patients prior to July 2073 exhibited anaphylactic reactions to sunlight similar to what Hannibelle is describing now: intense pain that takes several minutes, sometimes as much as half an hour, to abate once stimulus is removed. There is seldom any record of actual tissue damage.



After July 2073, however, this begins to change. Patients who've shown no signs of tissue damage in the past have been treated for second-degree sunburns after little more than a minute's exposure. Worse, the damage doesn't seem to regenerate, though conventional and magical treatments still appear to function normally. Emergency treatments for vampires, et al., have increased a staggering seven hundred percent in the last year or so. The numbers are even more alarming when you consider that most Infected don't, or can't, seek medical help that leaves a record. Some big names in HMHV research, names like Günther Langer, Carla Greenbaum, and Thomas McAllister, are currently at a loss to explain this increased sensitivity.

- The Smiling Bandit
- It's worse than you think. A colleague of mine in Kiev did cybernetic maintenance on a vampire who had some delta-grade cybereyes and cybears. Those are supposed to be sufficiently compatible with his system that his regenerative abilities will leave them alone. A few weeks ago, the patient comes in complaining of headaches. Patient lies down on his table, Yuri starts a diagnostic. Two, three minutes into this process, the patient went into *grand mal* convulsions, and his body began forcefully rejecting his cyber. Near as Yuri can figure, his regeneration decided, out of the clear blue and after more than two years with the ware in his patient's head, that if it didn't match the existing genetic template, it was gone.
- Butch
- Oh, shit, that can't be good.
- Hard Exit
- Nope. Cybereyes, for instance, are more than just the artificial eyeball; there are modifications along the entire length of the optic nerve to support the interface with the brain. The path of least resistance for those particular modifications goes forward from the occipital lobe, through the thalamus and corpus collosum, on its way out the eye sockets. Patient died almost instantly from having his goddamn brain scrambled.
- Butch

That's just living with HMHV, though. There's been a lot of backlash lately against the Infected rights movement, and some of it is our own damn fault. For twenty-odd years, since Bug City, the feral ghouls population's been declining. Bug City had a ratio of two to three, feral to functional, among the Infected population. The modern ratio in both the CAS and UCAS was along the lines of one to eleven. Asamando was boasting one to seventeen. As it turns out, those numbers were bullshit, whether as a result of bad records, changing conditions, or in the case of Asamando, outright lies. The truth in the UCAS, we've learned in recent weeks, is more like a ratio of one to eight, feral to stable ghouls. But after the "food riots" in Asamando last month, we learned that their ratio is closer to one to nine.

- How'd the ratio in the UCAS get so far off? That's not an insignificant change.
- Pistons

- Some of it is simply John Q. Citizen not wanting to tell anyone on his census form that his brother is a feral ghoul; follow-up surveys can get that number revised when the discrepancy is discovered. Some of it is that more newly Infected ghouls aren't getting through the metamorphosis with their mental faculties intact, for reasons we haven't yet determined. Some formerly functional ghouls are reverting; Hannibelle hinted at this earlier in her article.
- The Smiling Bandit
- Okay. "Food riots" in Asamando?
- Sticks
- Yeah, seems the food supply didn't like the idea of *being* the food supply, so it rioted; hilarity ensued. Read on.
- Sunshine

After gaining recognition from the Corporate Court a few years back, Asamando worked to win UN recognition. Every few months, the UN sends a new "fact-finding" team into Asamando to determine if they've made any progress. The problem is, "progress" by UN standards consists of ghouls not living on human flesh, and the problem with that one is the "storehouses," or, as most countries call them, the prisons.

Near the end of October, Queen Thema Lauula issued her call for Infected from all nations to make their way to Asamando. About a week later, another UN team touched down at Nyamkopon International Airport, and they weren't there for a social call. They wanted to see the prisons. It was bad enough that the Asamandons bought corpses from other countries for food, but the prisons were something else. The UN knew the prisons existed, but they didn't have any actual evidence about where the volume of inmates came from. Asamando's rather draconian border security and smuggling laws could only account for so many, and those prisons were bigger than they needed for those criminals. A lot bigger.

The UN team arrived unannounced, hell bent for leather, and before the Asamandon military really knew what was going on, the UN team deployed their vehicles and fanned out across the country. When finally confronted at the largest facility outside Nyamkopon, the UN team produced evidence that Asamando had under-the-table deals with a number of corporations around Europe and Africa: "We will give you access to our copious natural resources, and in return you will ship us your condemned criminals to become part of our food supply."

- That's sick!
- /dev/grrl
- Why do you think it was so important to Her Gruesome Majesty to be recognized by the Corporate Court before trying for the UN? It was a lot easier to broker that sort of deal with CC recognition.
- Sunshine
- The UN team invoked Resolution 3031 to get into the storehouses. I'm not sure how that worked, exactly, seeing as Asamando isn't a member nation and isn't a corp under control of the CC, but it was apparently enough to get them through the prison gates. For all the good it did them.
- Kay St. Irregular



The inspectors got into five different facilities and began talking to the inmates while guards frantically tried to reach their superiors. The superiors told the storehouse personnel, in so many words, “Fuck the UN. Get those busybodies out of there!” The inmates objected to the rough treatment of their perceived saviors, and since the inmates felt they were dead anyway, they elected to do something about it. They revolted, attacking anybody in a uniform.

Within half an hour, it was a full-fledged riot; thousands of prisoners fought for the lives of the inspectors—and their own lives, of course. It was four hours before the order was issued to stop the riot at all costs. The storehouse wardens made the fateful decision to reveal why the prison facilities were so much bigger than they needed to be. At 1821 local time on November 8, five ghouls in five different buildings pushed five buttons and unleashed a nightmare.

Those buttons opened up highly secured wings in the prisons, including subterranean levels, and released a feral ghoul population no one knew existed. There were nearly 4,500 feral ghouls, total, held out of sight in those five facilities; other, smaller, prisons scattered around the country held thousands more between them all. They hit the inmate population like a fetid human wave; dozens of inmates were killed, but the Infected assault had the desired effect and drove most of the inmates back to their cells, where there was at least a modicum of safety.

The UN inspectors were wiped out.

The feral population of ghouls eventually returned to the holding areas, but the damage was well and truly done. It was almost impossible to contain the incident, in spite of some heroic efforts by Horizon. Faced with the revelation that her country’s feral population was nearly double what their propaganda told the world, and forced to deal with the slaughter of the UN inspection team, Thema Laua found herself in a very bad position and under enormous strain. On November 16, as she was preparing to address her people, she collapsed between the throne room and the press room of the *Ahenfe Owia* due to a massive heart attack.

Her daughter, Princess Rani Laua, took charge as a small army of doctors fought to save the queen’s life, but the events leading up to Her Majesty’s collapse proved too much for them. Thema Laua, founder and first Queen of Asamando, died on November 25, 2074, and Rani Laua officially ascended the throne at sunset. Her first action, meant to symbolically capture her mother’s spirit and carry it with her forward into her own reign, was to eat her mother’s heart. The next day, Queen Rani Laua announced that her nation would enter a period of official mourning for forty-four days, one for each year of her mother’s reign. As I write this, that mourning is still going and the country has largely gone silent, except for the occasional spin-doctoring they hired Horizon to perform.

- So the ghoul apocalypse has begun? Noted for future reference.
- Plan 9

Things have also been bad a little closer to home. In April 2073, the Mealtime Killer committed her first murder, in Dallas, TX. From there, she wandered to New Orleans, up to Chicago, and then headed west to Seattle by way of Cheyenne. In each city, she left behind an exsanguinated corpse and a message in blood on the wall over the victim, identifying the meal the body represented.

The trail finally ended for the original MTK in the UCAS Sector of Denver in October 2073, just before the Halloween Killings last year. According to the report that Knight Errant finally released in January 2074, MTK was a woman named Teresa Castillo, originally from Galveston. By her own admission before her death, she was responsible for at least twenty-three deaths over nearly seven months, most of them unknown to the media until the release of the report.

By the time Ms. Castillo was taken out in Denver, half a dozen copycats were carrying on the chaos. And that was just in North America. There were also similar killings in Australia, Europe, South America, and Asia. Some of these killings were by vampires or banshees; some were just sick fucks looking for a new way to get off. Didn’t matter. Teresa Castillo had set something really ugly in motion.

Four days after she died, Infected rights took it right in the ass. The Halloween Killings made it plain that someone didn’t want equality; whoever it was, they were organized, they were vicious, and they wanted to rule. “Be afraid of the dark,” they told us in eleven cities across this continent, and it worked. Fifteen attempts, eleven murders ... the only place they caught one of the killers was in Tenochtitlán, and aside from it being a banshee, the authorities haven’t told anybody anything.

So many killings, all at once ... yeah, people were scared. You could see it on the streets, almost smell it. Still can, really.

- The media loves labels, and “Fear the Dark” is the one they’ve given this bunch. One of their vamps got into the Mansion, a high-end restaurant in Dallas, back in January. Wandered into the climate-control plant in mist form and materialized next to the main air intake for the HVAC system, looked up into the security camera, and pulled the pins on a pair of gas grenades she’d brought with her. They popped, and she just sat there while the restaurant flooded with seven-7. Killed 187 people, walked into the main dining room, and tore out a random throat to write the tag on the wall before she disappeared again.
- Sunshine
- About the time that happened, Knight Errant, Lone Star, Eagle, and a handful of smaller cop corps formed the Joint MTK Task Force. Yeah, they’re working together; this is that big, apparently. It’s headquartered in Houston, and led by Detective Lieutenant Lydia Bowden, the KE detective who put two rounds into Teresa Castillo’s head back in October ’73. Being put together from so many corps, they’ve got unprecedented jurisdictional access wherever one of these killings takes place. They’ve actually caught a couple of the copycat MTKs, though they’ve not caught any of the surviving Halloween killers yet. At least not that they’re telling anyone.
- /dev/grrl

Since then, it’s only gotten worse. In April, on the anniversary of the first MTK killings, there was a rash of copycat killings on five continents. We somehow avoided a sequel to the Halloween Killings, but tension was ridiculously high all through October. It’s evident that Fear the Dark is out to stir shit up, and they’ve succeeded. And, as we learned a couple of weeks ago, the hits just keep on coming.

On the evening of December 7, at a Book Bazaar in downtown Houston for the last signing on the publicity tour for



INCOMING FEED.....

The House of Saint Béla, our good friend Martin de Vries found himself at a new crossroads in his life. For Slamm-0!'s sake, since I know he's been more absorbed with the Seahawks than with other current events, I'll attach the following eyewitness video transcript.

- Hey! They're 14-0! Of *course* I'm paying attention to them!
- Slamm-0!
- Lame-ass schedule and hype. They don't have a prayer against the Bears next week.
- Sticks

File Access

//BEGIN FILE//

Transcript 74-289A, raw surveillance footage from 07 December 2074 Houston Book Bazaar incident

//FRAMING: Three-quarter shot from stage left. Author MARTIN DE VRIES is in front of a table on a small stage, dressed in a gray Berwick suit and smoking a black cigarette. On the table is a mostly full ashtray on his right side and a small stack of books on his left. He is seated on the table's edge, taking questions from the audience.//

//Timestamp 12/07/74 20:41:27//

File Access

DE VRIES: All right, so who's next? Yes, you, the young lady with the fuschia hair.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I saw an interview you did back in 2040, and you looked exactly like you do now. Do you have a grotesque portrait hanging in your attic or something?

DE VRIES: Ah, jokes about Dorian Gray. Those never get old. [*Audience laughs politely*] No. I've long been known to be vain and superficial, and I had the benefit of being wealthy on top of that. I've had rather a lot of work done over the years.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You also said that you were going to destroy all vampires. What was that all about?

DE VRIES: I was young. Hot-headed. Recently widowed by a vampire. Possessed by a not-inconsiderable obsessive streak. I said a lot of things that brought me to grief. It took me a while, but it finally struck me that I could do better for myself and for my late wife by letting Darrien slay them all and writing down his adventures.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Oh, come now, Dr. de Vries. You're far too modest. Why, just last week you eliminated, what, half a dozen vampires in downtown Fort Worth?

DE VRIES: [*Crushes out cigarette, lights another as he stands stiffly*] I'm not sure what you're talking about, miss.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You're teaching the wrong people to be afraid of the dark, hypocrite!

//Timestamp 12/07/74 20:42:44//

//**AUDIENCE MEMBER** draws a Colt Manhunter pistol and fires two rounds into the chest of DE VRIES. At the same time, five other figures coalesce out of the air in front of DE VRIES, also with pistols in hand, and they also open fire on him. DE VRIES is thrown backward over the table, his chest a mangled horror of blood and bullet holes//

//Timestamp 12/07/74 20:42:51//

[Sounds of audience and other Book Bazaar patrons panicking and running for the exits]

//**AUDIENCE MEMBER** ascends the stage and turns to face the remaining members of the audience as the other shooters surround DE VRIES. One of the shooters approaches DE VRIES and pulls out a jade amulet that had been hidden beneath DE VRIES' shirt and hands it to **AUDIENCE MEMBER**//

AUDIENCE MEMBER: He's not dead, not yet! It's time you knew the truth, though. Martin de Vries is a vampire himself, ladies and gentlemen, and a liar, and a killer. Wait a moment longer, you'll see!

//Timestamp 12/07/74 20:43:06//

//Two shooters lift DE VRIES so that his chest can be easily seen. It appears to be sizzling, and then several bullets pop out of his chest. The bullet holes begin healing before everyone's eyes. Abruptly, DE VRIES opens his eyes; they are glowing a pale silvery-blue color. Further review requires slowing recording to approximately one-fourth speed for the next three recorded seconds.

He lashes out with his right foot and disarms **AUDIENCE MEMBER**, apparently breaking her wrist in the process. Simultaneously, he reaches up with both hands and grasps the throats of the two shooters holding him. With the same motion, he snaps their necks.

DE VRIES lunges forward, forcing **AUDIENCE MEMBER** to the ground. He turns, facing the three remaining shooters, and a wave of energy emanates from his extended right hand. It strikes all three; they all scream and collapse.

He turns to **AUDIENCE MEMBER** and draws a dagger from his left sleeve. With his left hand, he grasps **AUDIENCE MEMBER** by her hair and lifts her up to face him. They snarl at each other; both display fangs prominently//

//Timestamp 12/07/74 20:43:09//

DE VRIES: You should have killed me outright.

//Timestamp 12/07/74 20:43:15//

//DE VRIES plunges dagger into **AUDIENCE MEMBER**'s chest. Their eyes lock and she gasps. A moment later, she screams in terror and her body stiffens. He holds her like this for several minutes; he then releases her hair. She drops to the ground. He reaches down, cleans his dagger

on her shirt, and retrieves the amulet that had been taken from him. He surveys the scene; his fangs are still clearly visible.//

//Timestamp 12/07/74 20:47:28//

DE VRIES: Damn!

//DE VRIES vanishes//

//**END FILE**//

- Boy. When he comes out, he doesn't fool around, does he?
- Netcat

- Where was security during all this?
- Sticks

- Book Bazaar hires mall cops. Some of them were assisting the evacuation, but according to the logs, most of them saw what was happening via the security cam and prudently waited while more heavily armed backup was en route. By the time they got there, de Vries was long gone.
- /dev/grl

To be honest, I'm not completely sure what Fear the Dark was trying to accomplish by sending half a dozen vampires on a suicide mission to out Martin de Vries. It has ratcheted up fear of the Infected; there's already talk of increasing bounties on vampires in Texas and other states in the CAS. It's crippled his book sales, of course, though the only person really worried about that is his literary agent. For his part, de Vries has gone to ground, and apparently he moved a whole lot of his money to new accounts. Authorities in Texas moved quickly to seize his assets, and so far they've come away with a modest condo in Dallas and about six hundred nuyen for their troubles.

- You have to think he was prepared for something like this to happen and had contingency plans in place. He was probably putting those into motion within an hour of the incident.
- Fianchetto

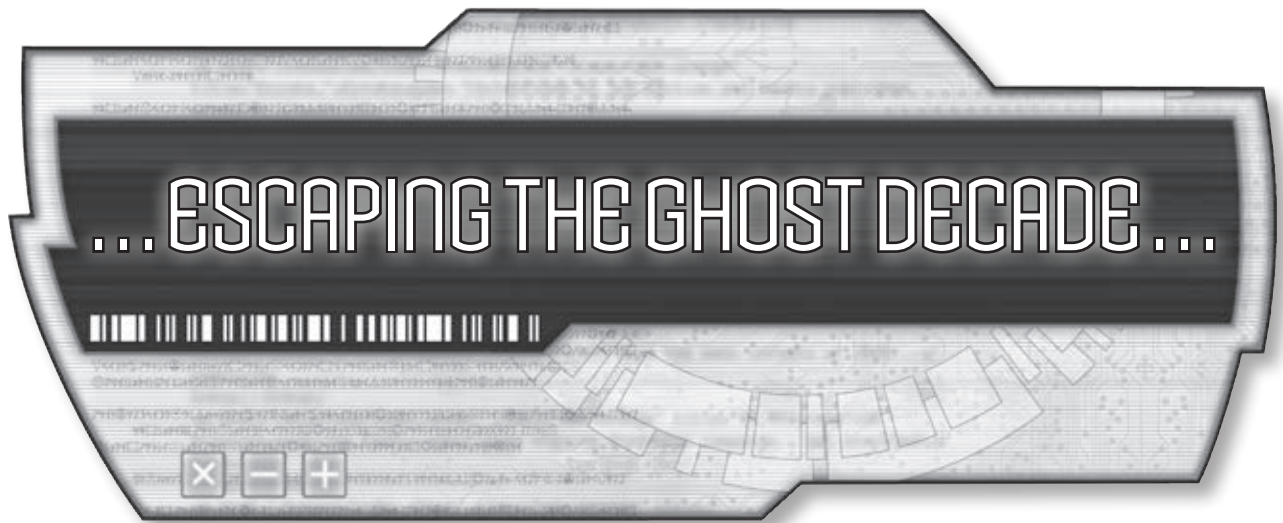
In the end, though, all that really matters is how quickly we can undo so many years of hard work. Walt Kelly, a cartoonist back in the twentieth century, once wrote, "I have seen the enemy, and he is us." He's right, too; we're doing this to ourselves. We've become our own worst enemy, and I don't know how to make it stop.

I can't imagine it's going to do anything but get uglier as the new year gets under way.

It's late. I'm going to wrap this one up, I think, and try to get some sleep. Then wake up and wonder if there's any way to fix this.

- Belle? Are you okay?
- /dev/grl
- Not really, but thanks for asking.
- Hannibelle





Posted by: Baka Dabora

As everyone knows, when Halley's Comet flew by in '64, the Ring of Fire erupted, Japan was rattled, and the world as we knew it changed. What is less known is that these past ten years are being called the "Ghost Decade" in Japan, where the world-wide power and prestige of Japan, along with that of the Japanese megacorporations, was reduced to a fraction of its former glory. Fortunes were lost, the Emperor was killed, and Tokyo itself was reduced to rubble and ash while the empire crumbled. The Yakuza faltered, Yamatetsu lost its way, and there are now more AAA-rated Megacorporations headquartered in the Americas than in Japan.

This will not be allowed to stand.

Despite the internal turmoil, the Japanese megacorps (including the double-A rated ones) have come to a truce. While they may take swipes at one another in Japanese territory, they are lining up shoulder to shoulder overseas. They have simply lost too much power in the world to allow their petty (and not so petty) differences to ruin them. Levels of collusion between them have rarely been so high, and we're seeing some monumental changes as a result.

YAMATO-DAMASHII

Yamato-Damashii, or the Japanese Spirit, is the rallying cry for a unified Japanese front, as Japan strives to climb back atop the world. The Japanese Imperial State was getting into a full swing with the tenth anniversary of the Emperor's reign this year, but the addition of a new member of the Imperial family has been seen as proof of a true rebirth. Sakura, Empress Hitomi's second child and first daughter, is as celebrated as the Wu Quints were in Hong Kong, a herald of bright days ahead.

- There are worrisome overtones to the phrase, I should add. It's not racist in the sense of "other people are bad" so much as "The Japanese are better," a sort of Japanese Exceptionalism that parallels most empires in history—the Romans, Victorian English, and so on. The average citizen only thinks of it in a positive light, but hearing it said out loud has made several nations nervous.
- Kay St Irregular

- I had a double date the other day with a Mitsuhamas guy and his wingman. Marionette was doing okay until one of them dropped the term. She blew up at him in Tagalog and caused a scene. Took her a while to calm down and fill me in. It's not a term she likes.
- Turbo Bunny
- San Francisco got nervous when people started saying it again; it was often said by Saito's goons, and people are starting to realize just how big Mitsuhamas has gotten in the city. With Ares' ongoing problems, Silicon Valley's got a much-reduced security force as well. I don't like how this math is looking. At all.
- Sounder

What this means for most of you outside of Nippon is that the Japanacorps are standing together in a united front, almost a Yamato, Inc., rather than fighting one another. Oh, inside the nation, they battle one another plenty, but they want to present a unified front to the rest of the world and are showing levels of cooperation not seen in twenty years. The younger corporations don't understand just how vicious they can get when united in this way. They remember the power they had when five of the Big Eight were Japanese, and they want that strength back. That means tearing others down. That means work for shadowrunners.

- For those of you who weren't active in the '50s, here's what this means. When dealing with one of the Japanacorps, be polite to Mr Johnson. Be professional. Understand that failure is not an option. There is no excuse for failing to do what you were tasked with doing. If your mission failed, then you are a failure. That means you are now in their debt, and they likely will not take long to seek repayment.
- FastJack
- Wait, what? I break into an Aztechnology database and the passwords I datamined are rejected, and I'm at fault?!
- /dev/grl



- Not only are you at fault, but you've brought shame on your entire team and you need a big win to erase that mark. Ah, memories.
- Bull

Let's have a look at how the players are lined up at the moment and what they plan to do.

SHIAWASE, THE EMPEROR'S HAND.

The marriage of Hitomi Shiawase and Emperor Yasuhito has brought nothing but good things to Shiawase. The first megacorporation is now the Emperor's Chosen, praised at every turn, given rich contracts, and, in general, portrayed favorably all across the nation. This has resulted in a surge of profit, of course, but also elevated Shiawase in many people's minds to the level of the nation itself. To speak of one is, in the minds of many, to speak of both. The birth of the Empress' daughter is the easiest way to see how this has come to pass.

Shiawase's annual stockholder meeting this year was far more eventful than anyone could have guessed. Empress Hitomi, late into her pregnancy, attended against the advice of her doctors and wound up going into labor after the first day. There were complications, but both mother and daughter made it through just fine. Board members have been pushing for her ouster for years due to the uncomfortable concept of the Imperial Family being tainted by something so base as money, and it seems that her second child has been enough to convince her to step down. She was born at Shiawase, of course, so there are bound to be quite a few secrets and obligations that were spun together to get her to finally agree. It should also be noted that she retains her stock, but a proxy will take her seat.

- There's been a rumor around certain areas of the Matrix that Hitomi was a carrier of HMHVV but has never succumbed herself. Her son is clean, but her daughter, maybe not. This might have been the leverage the old boys network needed to oust her.
- Hanibelle

As dramatic as that was, when Korin Yamana stepped down as CEO, it made for a dynastic turn. Yamana's speech is getting passed around, but in summary, he's found that his renewed youth comes with the realization that he's spent an entire lifetime in the boardroom and that he's missed out on what truly matters. He plans on creating a new family with his wife Mitsuko Shiawase-Yamana (who, judging by the clenched teeth she failed to hide during the announcement, isn't at all happy with the idea), and while they will remain Shiawase citizens, he has gone and sold their shares of the company stock to the Shiawase family and the Shinto Advisory Board, fully divesting himself at a time when the stocks were surging.

- I never did manage to get my hands on the report of the léonization process, but I'd be willing to bet Yamana did. I noticed that he plans on getting a physical and a full array of shots before his "world vacation." What the doctors will actually be doing to him is a fine question.
- The Smiling Bandit

- He's getting a huge send-off, by the way. His book is being made required reading for all managers, his face hovers in every building's AR, and there's a full-on goodbye party planned for the entire month of December. He's done good by the family and the corporation, and they want to honor that so there'll be no hard feelings left behind. You rarely get a clean break these days, but it sometimes happens.
- Kay St. Irregular

From there, it was a bit of a whirlwind of activity. Soko Shiawase has always had more money than God but there simply wasn't Shiawase stock available for her to purchase. She got the lion's share of Yamana's, but some went to Tadashi, some to Reiko, and the rest to interested small-time investors. A month later, Soko passed quietly in her sleep, having chosen to age gracefully and face a natural end rather than extend her life artificially. Her name is quickly becoming a watchword for dignity, and Shiawase has announced that, in her memory, they will implement stricter guidelines for léonization treatments (providing counseling to prospective recipients and so forth) in the new year.

Soko's will had been updated in the wake of her big purchase, and the distribution was interesting, with the majority going to Tadeshi and Reiko, but some going to the Shinto board as well. After all was said and done, we finish with Tadashi at twenty percent, the Shinto Advisory Board at nineteen percent, Hitomi with ten percent, Reiko with five percent, and the rest of the stock milling about all over the world. Tadashi now stands as the CEO, while Reiko holds the position of Chairman of the Board—technically more powerful than CEO, but with less pay and far less prestige. This seems to suit them both, and now that the corporation is firmly in the hands of the family once more, they're ready to bring glory to the name.

- She left more stock to Reiko than her own children? That's gotta sting.
- Beaker
- Soko had been heartbroken over the death of Ryoji. Tadeshi is the only 'pureblood' Shiawase left, but Reiko is the only one left of Ryoji's line. I'm surprised she didn't leave anything for Tadeshi's sons, but maybe she expects him to do so later.
- Nephrine

An interesting side note for the shadow community is that Reiko has removed Nigel Coltrane from his position as head of the MFID and returned Ichiro Kiyomoto to the position. Unlike Yamana, Coltrane isn't getting a great send-off, and I wouldn't be surprised if he wound up in the Yodo River in the next few weeks. He simply knows too much.

- This is probably the biggest surprise in the recent Shiawase developments. Coltrane and Kiyomoto had been having a shadow war, and Coltrane was winning it handily. Being put out and replaced by his predecessor, who happens to be someone he holds in low regard? That's gotta sting. If he survives, he's going to be hot.
- Dr. Spin

- Well, Kiyomoto and Reiko have long been rumored to be an item. With her in the catbird seat, Coltrane's ouster was a given. With Kiyomoto having so much knowledge, Reiko's grip over the board increases. I guess we know which Orchid won, huh?
- Pistons

While Shiawase and Mitsuhama remain locked in a brutal war in Japan, once you step off the island, they're standing together. Ish. At least they're not stabbing one another. From what I can find out, there was initially a bold plan by Korin Yamana to take advantage of the dragon situation and to move, heavily, against Saeder-Krupp in Europe. Shiawase absorbed all of Fuchi's European parts a decade ago, and S-K is the only corp standing that can threaten Shiawase's agricultural strength. Their environmental strength is tailor-made to battle the infamously eco-destructive Germans, and the iron looked hot.

Tadeshi held the blow.

As conservative as a proper Shiawase, Tadeshi scaled back, allowing for some token operations while attempting to suss out Lofwyr's mindset. Personally, I think this is why Yamana got ousted, but rumors are hot and heavy on that front. Regardless, while Tadeshi is pulling his punches in Europe, he's turning a baleful eye to the Americas in general and, in particular, to Horizon. The smallest of the megas, Horizon's operating style flies in the face of traditional (read: Japanese) business practices and, with their purchase of Wind River Corporation, they dared to set foot into Shiawase's turf. The fact that Kiyomoto's Neo-Genyosha was set up by Horizon's Dawkins Group was a slap in the face as well, and honor demands retribution.

- That ... could get awkward. Shiawase is an old powerhouse to Horizon's young pup. Horizon's quicker by far, but Shiawase's MFID agents have been doing some of the stuff Horizon does for decades. They don't rely on PR like Aztechnology, and they're far more willing to hire our kind to handle things than the Azzies, which has always preferred to do things in house. If this gets going, every Johnson and fixer I know is going to be busy. It seems like an over-reaction for a fairly average corporate maneuver. Is there more to this story?
- Bull
- Well, I know that Horizon's treatment of Virtuakinetix and Digital Sentiences has a lot of people up in arms against them. Shiawase started quietly hiring people like me right after all that came out. Not as experiments, but as programmers, bug-checkers, and so on. Legit jobs. Shiawase's never been the most progressive corporation, but somebody upstairs must have our back.
- Netcat
- Technomancers are quite popular in Tokyo, and in most parts of Japan, but they weren't invited in from the cold until recently. Shiawase's now decided that they can let them indoors and the world won't end. I'd lay good odds that Hitomi pulled some strings. I hear she used to hack.
- Pistons

- Deck, you mean. There are rumors, but I never saw it. Might explain Hitomi's Imperial school for technomancers.
- Bull
- There might be other reasons.
- Puck
- Here's a weird thought. What if that whole fiasco about Horizon's views on technomancers was a ruse? Just a well-scripted MFID operation that struck gold? They couldn't have planned that well, could they?
- /dev/grrl
- I doubt it. Much more likely that Shiawase just knows how to capitalize on things.
- Nephrine

MITSUHAMA COMPUTER TECHNOLOGIES

To every ruler, there must be a loyal opposition. Facing off against the Emperor and the Imperial Block stands Mitsuhama, as dependable and unchanging as Mt. Fuji. Toshiro Mitsuhama continues to lead as CEO, backed by most of the board of directors. "Most" is the important word here, as Uehara Akae is more tentative in this as the Imperial dictates have begun to rattle his confidence somewhat. In a nod to the old days of feudal marriage, Toshiro's second son, Akinori, is dating Uehara's granddaughter, Haruko, in a relationship that would bind the two families closer and head off any attempt to cause friction in the board. While it remains political suicide to directly oppose the Emperor, Mitsuhama continues to do everything they can to resist his agenda. Imperial suggestions are accepted and taken under advisement but not acted on. Money happens to flow to candidates who support MCT-friendly policies and oppose the Emperor's views. Loyalty is pledged in the daylight, but in the shadows, the knives come out.

- Quite literally. The ongoing shadow battle between MCT and Shiawase is racking up a body count. I'm not certain how long they can keep the conflict from spilling out into the light. Go back to the *Spy Games* download for more on this.
- Thorn

The coalition that formed around Mitsuhama has also taken some damage. Sony, always moving between ally and rival, has stepped away and now looks to be in Renraku's orbit, while Yakashima has fully embraced the Emperor. Renraku has stepped back somewhat and is now playing both sides against one another. Some good news has come from the Emperor loosening ties with Evo over recent months. Of far more worry has been the gradual freezing-out of contracts inside of Japan. Mitsuhama has always been a proud son, but as more and more support is given to Shinto-aligned, environmentally friendly business, MCT is finding that it has trouble making progress in the land of its birth. This has resulted in a more aggressive overseas push, with a particular focus on North America.



INCOMING FEED.....



ESCAPING THE GHOST DECRADE

- MCT has been losing serious market share in Japan, but the media, which is largely MCT controlled, hasn't been reporting on it. I hear that they've just slipped behind Renraku in corporate ratings and that can't be easy to take. More work for us!
- Slamm-0!
- Wait, if they're so cash-strapped, how did they pick up 130 billion nuyen worth of Matrix infrastructure manufacturers?
- Glitch
- Sold off some subsidiaries and technology. The biggest name was selling most of the rights for GridGuide to Renraku. They still have the right to produce the hardware and install it in vehicles, but Renraku will be taking over operations, technical support, installation, and so on of the network itself. MCT makes it, Renraku services it. Quick cash versus ongoing revenue streams.
- Clockwork

MCT remains poised to have some explosive expansion in North America, so keep an ear out as runners will be in high demand. The three areas in particular to watch are, first and foremost, a push against NeoNET, then activities targeting Aztechnology, and lastly action against Ares Macrotechnology. Keep your fixers on speed-calling.

Ares is the primary heavy-industry force in North America, but whatever internal issues they have are paralyzing the corporation's ability to compete. Chicago's rebuilding effort should be a slam-dunk for Ares, but Saeder-Krupp, MCT, and Renraku are all

pushing for contracts. It's entirely possible that Knight will get shut out of most of the deals. MCT prefers labor drones over metahuman workers, so the unemployment rate wouldn't move very much, but their magical skills would allow them to deal with leftover bug issues with relative ease. That carries weight.

Aztechnology is the lone obstacle to Mitsuhamas taking the magical crown, so with the recent troubles they've faced and the economic turmoil the famine has caused, MCT is well served to keep them down. I'd lay good odds that you'll see job offers that take you down into conquered Colombia to disrupt whatever magical or botanical research Aztechnology is planning.

- There are also contracts to take swipes at Aztlan border defenses. My cuadrilla needs recovery time and I'm not able to do them myself. If anybody needs work, drop me a private line.
- Picador

The battle against NeoNET should be the one to watch for most of us. Toshiro smells blood and will go after Villiers like a hungry tiger. The emergence of the Wireless Matrix rocked Mitsuhamas core business and allowed NeoNET to vault into the lead, but the playing field just got leveled. Villiers has internal weaknesses and, in this, Renraku is standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Mitsuhamas, trying to put a knife in the heart of NeoNET. Datasteals will be running rampant, along with forcible extractions, as they try to get a leg up. Wetwork should also be available for those of you who are more bloody-minded. Needless to say, this is a two-way street, and NeoNET will be having to hire their own shadowrunners to fend off the attacks.



- MCT's latest Nadeshiko android is getting closer to release. The last one was the most lifelike yet, but it suffered from being released right after the second Crash. No one was in the mood to trust a drone's pilot program, advanced or not, and sales tanked. The secondary market has led to them being fantastically popular with the AI community.
- Rigger X
- The model currently in development is supposed to have safeguards against AI inhabitation due to that.
- Clockwork
- Why am I not surprised that you're familiar with sexbots?
- Netcat
- Wait, what? Silas told me that his was just a maid! Do you know that's what they do for sure?
- /dev/grll
- According to Fred's catalogs, they come with a wide variety of programming options. And costumes.
- Netcat
- On a more serious note, if there's a big push in to North America, it'll start in Seattle. Tamatsu Sakura and Samantha Villiers have never gotten along, but with the corporation's focus largely on rebuilding Japan, getting resources to deal with this issue was a low priority. If they're moving hard in this hemisphere, it might be a good time to strike, as her defenses are stretched thin.
- Glitch
- Then again, if she's hampering Richard Villiers, leaving her alone will keep them both busy, giving MCT a chance to sweep in. "How about you and him fight" is a time-honored strategy.
- 2XL
- But what if *she* wins?
- Pistons
- While everyone's thinking about Silicon Valley and how Mitsuhama suddenly has a big edge over Ares, I have to look at California being a great big target for Mitsuhama as well. They've got a massive investment in San Francisco, they've always had ties in Sacramento, and while everyone in the CFS is looking north to the Tír and south to the Pueblos, no one's watching the West Coast.
- Kane
- I wonder if Mitsuhama can beat Saeder-Krupp to Mount Shasta?
- Axis Mundi

REBOOTING RENRAKU

Shiawase is the First Megacorp and the Chosen One. Mitsuhama is the Unchanging Icon. Renraku is ... transforming. Nakatomi had seen his adopted corporation suffer like few others. With the loss of Inazo Aneki, Renraku was left without a true visionary, and their fortunes went from staggeringly high in the late '50s to disaster in the '60s, damage that many thought

they'd never recover from. The second Crash was, in many ways, a blessing for them, kneecapping the other corps as badly as Renraku had suffered, giving Renraku time to catch their breath and begin the slow path of recovery. That plan started five years ago, but I expect few of you saw it, as the largest push happened in the Southern Hemisphere. Renraku moved into South America, Africa, and Australia, building a loyal customer base that was often overlooked by the other megacorps on the grounds that they didn't have enough money to really matter. Renraku couldn't offer the highest quality of product but neither could they undercut the mass-produced slop of Aztechnology or Wuxing. They offered an average product with an average price, and the middle was squeezed. A new direction was needed.

How May We Serve You?

Renraku slowly changed its focus to the service industry, networking their products between different levels of life. When you went to the hair salon, the digimags available for download were all Renraku brands, featuring stars from Renraku studios that were wearing Renraku designer labels and driving Renraku cars. The stylist who was chatting to you, a human gesture that mere drones can't manage, would happen to suggest somewhere to eat that coincidentally was a Renraku subsidiary, and she might also mention that she'd moved their child to a Renraku-branded Matrix school, rather than a public school. Every aspect of your life could be filled by Renraku in one way or another ... in and of itself, nothing that far removed from any other megacorp's networking (Shiawase long ago mastered the art, but Renraku is an able student). Where it gains a true edge is in the delivery. Shiawase expects you to be awed by their products, Evo celebrates Evoculture and wants you to join, but Renraku? Renraku treats you like royalty and waits on you hand and foot.

- You have no idea. I wanted to treat myself after a big payday and Marionette talked me into giving this new spa, *Ohahu* out in Puyallup, a try. They took some cheap land in the middle of the old lava spill area, added some gene-tweaked palm trees that can survive Seattle's winter, and set up this whole tiki-themed spa. I know it sounds corny, but as soon as you get there, it's just so ... warm. Everyone is smiling, everyone wants to help you, and they're there before you know you need them. My glass never ran dry and I never had to tell them what I wanted, because it was already being poured. I had a facial, a mani-pedi, a massage, mud bath, sauna, the works. I've been on retreats for corporate execs before and never got treated half this well, but this was being done at a price a middle-class family could afford. They were opening a tiki bar on the same land, and I got a chance to try it out before it officially opened. Fire dancers, a luau, a soy pig that could pass for the real thing (it even had pineapple flavoring!), drinks in cocoanuts. Honestly, I know I sound like a shill, but I can't wait to go back.
- Turbo Bunny
- So, did you enjoy the gift basket? The *Pearl Diver* hand lotion had to catch your eye.
- Icarus
- Yes! I bought two bottles! Have you tried it?
- Turbo Bunny



- No, but I read some shopping history of the SIN you used for that trip. Renraku isn't a leader in computer technology, but their database depth is second to none. By cross-referencing what you like, they can deduce what other things you like, then make marketing suggestions based on this. A dating profile based on your history showed what type of men you prefer, so a staff member close to that type was chosen to flirt with you, your drink choices were analyzed and passed along to the server, and they offered you exclusive deals and early access to Gold Rewards to make you feel special. All in all, a fine piece of coordinated marketing.
- Icarus

This new concept would require some changes, so Nakatomi knew he had to start at the top. Surin Supachai, his handpicked president, performed *seppuku* on November 3rd of this year. In a letter he wrote to the corporation, he detailed how he had failed to live up to Aneki-sama's legacy, how the decade under his watch has not seen the corporation grow as it should, and, overall, accepted full responsibility for his failures with the ultimate sacrifice. His death poem was on every Renraku host's login screen for a month, but his legacy will not be a good one. Already he's being shuffled off as an honorable failure, making way for his replacement, Orito Sasaki.

- I'll never understand that. Suicide? What does that solve?!
- Butch
- It's a samurai thing. You've been around long enough to know that, Butch.
- Bull
- Looks like I'm up. In a significant strain of Japanese culture, failure is a failure no matter the cause. It doesn't matter if you were told that there would be one guard on duty but there were actually fifty, or that your chopper was damaged and you had to leave a target behind, or your mage had a horrible case of dead and couldn't support you against the fire spirits. Your failure is your fault, period. A proper samurai would never embarrass his lord by suggesting his master was in any way, shape, or form at fault. It's your failure and yours alone. Falling on your sword is the ultimate apology, showcasing your true sorrow for your misdeed, and prevents any dishonor from extended to your family or your underlings. You die with a clean slate. Every failure from the Crash until this summer belongs to Supachai alone, and to say otherwise dishonors you, not him.
- Stone
- Oh, and *seppuku* gives your widow and family full benefits for life, rather than you being fired and homeless.
- Glitch
- Just take all of the romance out of it why don't you?
- Stone

Having Sasaki, who is a Nakatomi yes-man, as president gives a cover for the new policies that are unfolding. Renraku's new humble face, for instance, and the servile attitudes of the corporate members are appropriate for a family whose "father" has just died. Renraku has also finally knuckled under to pressure and allowed Shinto, and other religions, entry into corporate compounds. Sasaki has been in the UCAS long enough that it can be explained as "American influence" and grumbled about, while still being allowed to take hold because it's the president of the corporation proclaiming it and the Emperor's ultimate desire. Shiawase has been kind enough to temporarily transfer many shrine maidens and priests, to teach Renraku parties the rituals needed to undertake their new role.

- Damnation, but Nakatomi's sneaky. Renraku's always had a huge gaping hole in magical research and defenses. They're a megacorp, so they had some resources, but compared to the others, it was just sad. Suddenly, they have another mega—and the Imperial State—pouring magicians and spell formulae into their hands as a gesture of friendship. For free! And they're being thanked for finally allowing it! Amazing.
- Winterhawk

Sasaki's the former director of Renraku America, of course, and his experience plays into Renraku's current plan to push hard into North America, with Seattle the primary target. They're an ally of Brackhaven, using their close ties to scoop up land all over the city. The current push for contracts in the Ork Underground looks strange on the surface (Renraku having never been fond of metahumans), but it makes sense when taken from the right angle. Renraku badly needs to get a firm foothold in Seattle once again, and they need to come out looking like the good guys at the same time. If they can tame the Underground, they get a fresh start.

- Mercuria Lawson is the face of the Underground project. She's had lots of "ork reduction surgery" to make her passable to human eyes, but she's still a surprisingly high-ranking ork in a Japancorp... and a woman to boot. She's really a glorified PR agent, taking her orders directly from Renraku Seattle's directors, but she fills out a suit quite well and can spout the corporate line with a straight face.
- Bull
- Lawson isn't the patsy you think, Bull. She's discounted as a token appointment, but she's got a head on her shoulders and has climbed her way up over the broken careers of dismissive humans. They might have sanded her tusks down, but she's still an ork inside.
- Butch

With this push into North America, you'd assume that Nakatomi would be targeting Villiers and NeoNET, but, thus far, not so much, or at least no more so than anyone else targets them. No, he's instead riding along behind both Shiawase and Mitsuhama, a loyal servant who does what his masters want rather than follow his own agenda. This means teaming with Mitsuhama in Chicago against Ares, but also with Shiawase against Horizon in Seattle. They'll both owe him favors when he finally goes after Villiers.





- As scripture says, "You cannot serve two masters." Sooner or later, Renraku will have to choose a side.
- Stone
- Because if shadowrunners do anything, it's follow what scriptures say.
- Sticks
- Of course, Nakatomi long ago mastered the art of turning two against one another back in his Fuchi days. If MCT and Shiawase over-extend themselves and collapse, he'd be in a position to step in and stand tall.
- Icarus
- Keep in mind that Renraku has long run the Seattle SIN registry. Adding GridGuide to their database allows them astounding levels of information about, well, everyone. They'll be sweeping into the Underground to pass out SINs to the people there (whether they want them or not!), registering deeds for housing, taking a census, etc. By the time they're done, they'll know more about the UO than the orks know about themselves.
- Pistons
- There's more than just orks down there. Plenty of trolls, sure, but several humans moved in, some dwarves ... even saw an elf once. Oh wait, that was me.
- Turbo Bunny
- Renraku is also having great luck in helping Shiawase's computer side, which has never been exactly cutting edge, in exchange for picking at Shiawase's cybernetic refuse. Shiawase feels that biotech is the way of the future and wants to focus more on it while treating cyberware like a relic of a bygone era. They're more than happy to sell large swaths of the cybernetic department, and the service contracts, to Renraku. If Nakatomi's past record is anything to judge from, we'll soon be seeing cyberware that's a lower quality than before, but quite a bit cheaper as well. Who needs an upgrade?
- Pistons
- Oh, and in names you haven't heard in a while, Tsurunaga Shinoyama, Aztechnology board member, still has a hate-on for Nakatomi. With Aztechnology suffering right now and Shiawase surging, he's bound to want to get a few licks in. With no resources from the Azzies available, he'll have to hire outside talent. As soon as I get some offers, I'll pass word.
- Cosmo
- So, let me see if I have this right. Shiawase wants to crush Horizon, Mitsuhama is after Ares, Renraku is helping both while dancing with Aztechnology, and they all want to gang up on NeoNET? You weren't kidding about that Yamato thing!
- /dev/grrl
- <sniffle> They grow up so fast ...
- Slamm-0!



... FRACTURES ...

There were two old men in the park. One of them sat on a bench with a shapeless wool wrap around his slumped shoulders. He threw birdseed to pigeons with a movement that seemed to involve no bending of the elbow whatsoever. There were a few pigeons near him, along with a thick coating of seeds. Most of the local birds, though, seemed to have filled up already and moved on to more interesting things.

The second old man wore a simple black turtleneck and jeans. He had a light stubble of grey hair barely concealing the multiple jacks placed at strategic locations on his skull. He walked quickly, and pigeons—and just about any other creature—moved out of his way as he passed.

There were some gangers in the park, four of them altogether. Their attention was focused on one of their number who had clearly gotten a new cyberarm. It was a ragged installation, and the red, angry skin at the top of the arm looked like it might be infected. It worked, though, and the gangers were having fun grabbing things for him to crush. Cans, bottles, sticks, and stones were all placed in his new metal claw. All but the stones came out crushed or sliced—the hand wasn't strong enough to disintegrate stone.

As they were laughing about what the hand could do—and trying to grab a squirrel—a woman walked by in a skirt that was something like a leather scarf wrapped around her waist. The ganger with the arm smirked, and his arm moved in a blur. Just like that, he snatched the woman's skirt, easily removing it. She glared briefly before running off in embarrassment while the gangers roared in laughter.

The old man on the bench looked up at the other old man. "That's a shame," he said. "A damn shame. Wouldn't have happened back in our day, would it? Back in our day, we knew how to treat women. We treated them with respect. Not like these kids today, these punks. They're nothing more than animals."

The second old man didn't break stride as he walked past. "I don't know what the hell you're talking about. There's never been a golden age where men treated women with respect. We've always been pigs. Always will be. And don't tell me about 'our day.' I don't want to hear it. You want to know when my day is?" FastJack glared as he walked by. "Today. Today is my day. Always has been. Always will be."



FastJack dealt with fifteen alerts on his way home. Two more popped up while he was settling into his chair, and he took care of them. Fifteen years ago, he'd found a chair he liked, a chair he could work in and be comfortable no matter what level of VR or hotsim he dove into. He'd bought ten of them. The one he sat on was number six, the previous five having been worn out after years of good service. He idly thought sometimes about what he would do when number ten wore down, but it was never more than an idle thought. He sat down, settled in, and got to work on the one alert he had not addressed during his walk home.

He went VR immediately. There had been a time when his VR imagery had some relationship to earth physics and real-world structures, but that day was long past. He floated in the middle of a series of nested globes that were something like wire meshes with a variety of icons that had meaning only to him. He didn't move or fly around or anything. The spheres expanded or contracted to him, rotating at speeds that were too fast to leave a visual impression. When there was something he wanted, it was in front of him with a rapid spin and a sucking in of the spheres.

Some of his peers thought that even this abstract visual representation was a sign of weakness, graphical frou-frous that were relied on by someone whose mind was not strong enough to deal with the naked purity of unadorned text. But FastJack had experimented, and his system worked well with his mind and the way he thought, and that made him faster. Which was the only metric that mattered. Impressing his peers didn't matter, neither did adhering to some hacker standard of purity. Just sheer speed.

He saw the icon for JackPoint and thought about stopping by, but this wasn't the right time. Later, when there were things to be said. Not now. Not just for comfort.

Instead he went to an icon that was a black star. It would be tough to see in the black void of his node except for the glossiness that made it reflect the light of every icon around it. In less time than it takes to flinch from an incoming fist, the icon was in front of him and he was moving into it, crossing to another node.

In this node, code was arranged according to its function, something like a concrete poem. The code providing a connection to other nodes was laid out in lines disappearing into the fake horizon. The basic structural code formed a sphere surrounding FastJack, who was there invisibly, without an icon. And functional code darted here and there, doing the things it was programmed to do.

It all looked like it was functioning properly—except for the lump of code hunched near the bottom of the sphere. FastJack was not given to anthropomorphism, but he could swear the lump was quivering and whimpering.

He drifted to it, finally slowing from the instantaneous speeds he'd been using since he logged on. Looking at it from a



bit of a distance, seeing how the damaged code squirmed and wriggled on its surface, would help him understand what it was doing and what happened to it.

He scanned the code faster than he would have been able to if he were burdened with his physical eyes. It was wrong, in so many ways. The code he'd implanted in the node had so many self-destruct commands that it should have disintegrated into Matrix dust the moment anyone got the slightest crack in it. Just *touching* it should have destroyed it. Tampering with it, altering it beyond comprehension, should have been impossible. And he should know—for decades, he had stood as the foremost expert on what was possible and impossible in the Matrix.

Something caught his eye, a tag at the end of a squirming piece of code. A thoroughly unnecessary piece of code. He took note of it, memorized it in half a blink, then kept looking.

There was another one, spliced in the middle of some of the corrupted code. Then a third, drifting aimlessly on its own through the twisted mess.

He took those three pieces and combined them and recombined them in ways that never showed up in any graphical form. Occasionally a box would appear in front of him with a question mark, asking if he agreed with a particular interpretation of the data, or asking whether a decrypting algorithm should be nudged one way or another.

It took seconds of time in the virtual realm, less than that in meatspace, and then he had his answer. A simple message left in the ruined text. A taunt.

I am better than you.



John Wesley Hardin might have been the fastest gun in the west. Killed maybe forty-two men. Went down at the age of forty-two, shot in the back of the head while playing dice. Wild Bill Hickok, legendary lawman, was shot in the back at the age of thirty-nine while playing poker. Jesse James was shot by the coward Robert Ford at age thirty-four, hit in the back of the head while cleaning a picture. He wasn't wearing his guns at the time.

Then there was Butch Cassidy. Surrounded by Bolivian soldiers when he was forty-two years old, engaged in a firefight that lasted for hours. Ended up dead with a bullet in his head, probably fired by either himself or the Sundance Kid to take them out of their misery from the other bullet wounds they'd suffered.

The duels FastJack fought weren't quite as deadly as those, but he'd be a fool if he didn't learn from the past. Never get distracted. Never be unarmed. Always make sure your skills are honed and ready.

And go out on your own terms.

People had come gunning for him for decades. One way or the other, they'd learned their lesson. Sometimes the price they paid was light, a virtual slap on the wrist. Other people were still paying, with pain buried deep in their head that would never go away.

He knew how important it was that people suffer in proportion

to their crimes. He knew you couldn't let slights go unavenged. He knew how to get payback. That's how he had stayed on top all this time.

So this taunt had to be answered. This was not a situation where he could just walk away and be the better man. Some code of his own—his property, the output of his creativity—had been irreparably broken. That's not something you just let lie.

His analysis started even before he had decoded the message. Burglars leave fingerprints, writers leave wordprints, and hackers leave their own particular impressions in the code they work. He had bots scanning the code, comparing it to every database he could access, including his own private collections of hacker fingerprints. It wasn't an exact science—hackers sometimes changed, sometimes matured, or sometimes purposely tried to disguise their prints—but he hoped it would put him on the right trail.

By the time he was out of VR and aware of his chair, he knew his search had not come up with anything. Either he was dealing with an entirely new hacker, or one of the aces out there had gotten really good at disguising their tracks. The former was difficult to believe—it would be like a high school quarterback walking into the pro game and breaking every single-season passing record in the book. You just don't go from obscurity to the top that fast. But it was still possible, and he had to cast a wide net.

It was time to put out feelers.



It wasn't so much that FastJack didn't know how Slamm-0! got his icon to slouch the way it did; he just wondered why the boy would spend so much time on something so minor. Why devote so much time to altering your own icon when you could be, say, hacking Kenneth Brackhaven's icon during the virtual feed of some major address? The younger generation—like all younger generations before it—seemed too self-involved for his taste.

But he had business to worry about.

They were at one of the virtual sports bars Slamm-0! liked, surrounded by feeds of dozens of sporting events across the world and icons of females with anatomically improbable figures wrapped in black-and-white striped shirts. No noise of the surrounding bar reached them, and nothing they were saying would be heard by anyone else.

"Have you heard about anyone new on the scene?" FastJack said without preamble.

The boy knew better than to hassle him about his lack of small talk. "Yeah, there's a little bit of a boom going on. De la Mar and her corporate goons have everyone a little nervous about where things are going, so people are lashing out. She's inspiring a new generation of hackers, all by herself."

"Anyone especially notable?"

Slamm-0! idly twirled a dreadlock with his index finger. "A lot of it's kids' stuff. Tagging her nodes, altering the GridGuide routes in her cars, that sort of thing. They're having fun, but most of them



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aren't showing anything special. There is this one, Witchhazel, who shows some potential."

"In what way?"

Slamm-0! leaned forward, emphasizing his words with large, round gestures. "She's kind of got a hacker judo thing going on, you know? You attack her, she turns your strength against you. IC comes lunging at her, she pivots its code so that it carries on, and its momentum, for lack of a better word, has it barreling through its own node. It's effective and pretty subtle. She doesn't leave much of a fingerprint."

"Tell me some of the things she's done."

"Okay, but it won't be easy to ..." He trailed off with a crooked smile. "Sorry, forgot who I was talking to. List coming your way."

A new window popped up in front of FastJack, and then FastJack was gone.



While a variety of bots collected information on Witchhazel's jobs, Fastjack tracked down Witchhazel. And at that moment, in the middle of it, he didn't feel he had lost a step. The bare bones of the Matrix passed and flickered behind him, flashing in ways that would be incomprehensible to anyone who did not understand the

Matrix the way he did. He sorted through false leads, disguised trails, dodges, nodes hidden from all but the most observant hackers. He flew through the Matrix and no one saw him—at most they noticed a brief flash, or felt a virtual brush of a breeze on their cheek. If they were skilled enough to notice.

That was when he noticed he had a tail.

It was invisible, noiseless, undetectable if you were addicted to your normal senses. But FastJack's Matrix sense was better honed than most people's sight, and he could feel it out there. He took several pathways through odd connections that no one else would take, and the presence was still behind him. He was definitely being followed.

He had fifteen different ways to shake a tail that he could execute with half a thought. Anyone who was not an A-list hacker would be thrown off by them.

He executed them. He sent out a quick ping. The tail was still there.

He then observed it more carefully. It wasn't Slamm-0!, Glitch, Pistons, or Netcat. It wasn't Puck—which was too bad, because a legitimate chance to slap that boy down would not be a bad thing. It wasn't anyone he knew.

That meant he could punish them.

The next wave of assaults he sent at it was worse. He blasted feedback through the Matrix that would fry the incautious and at very least slow up the skilled.

The tail kept coming.

He still couldn't see what was tailing him, but he didn't need to. He just needed to hit it.

I will not be yours you cannot find me.

The words rippled through the Matrix without a sound. FastJack couldn't say how he heard them; they were just there. It was a bold challenge—bold and stupid. Messages were a trail, and he could send something back on that same trail. Not words, but another blow. So he did.

And was hit by a pain in his head like a monofilament wire had been threaded through the middle of his skull. He imagined his physical body was doubling over in pain, but his Matrix self was firm and alert. And ready to defend itself.

That was nothing because you are nothing. Your skills are primitive.

"Trash talk is the refuge of the desperate," FastJack muttered. The pain in his head was still piercing, but he could tell he was getting closer to Witchhazel. And if these were her defenses coming after him, maybe she was the right target, because she clearly was pretty good at this.

You are outside the Matrix. You intrude in it, and you are clumsy. You will never be a true part of it.

"So what? It's a tool, not my home. I use it. I don't live in it." The thing seemed to be paying attention to him, so he kept talking, hoping it was listening. Any distraction he could throw its way might help.

You don't know the Matrix, not really. You don't know what it is.

"What is it?"

It's this.

Pain slashed through FastJack's head, and the Matrix briefly became nothing but blurred stars.

And this.

There was a rushing sound and a tremendous feeling of pressure. FastJack felt like his thoughts were collapsing on themselves, becoming a mental black hole.

Then he exploded.

"No," he said. "It's this."

And every bit of knowledge FastJack had about the Matrix gathered into a ball and darted toward the invisible voice.

That is what I know.

Everything was whirling. The commands FastJack had sent sucked out a lot of energy, and as a result he had lost his bearings. He couldn't quite place himself now, but he didn't worry about it since there was no real "where" in the Matrix. There was only forward. He didn't need to know a specific place, he just needed to keep moving.

He was still in pain, but his enemy was still out there. So he traveled on, ignoring it, ready to strike back.

A wave of pain. Biofeedback at levels that would cripple almost anyone. He could only hope he would emerge with his faculties intact. But he wasn't leaving without making sure this other hacker suffered as much as he was.

He unleashed a wave of bots to tear anything near him apart, bit by bit.

Everything was thrown out, everything in a single attack.

Lights flashed, and FastJack was pretty sure all of them were his own neurons sparking in pain. He didn't have a single point of awareness in the Matrix anymore. He was spread across it. He was here, he was there, he was near, he was far, he was everywhere and all of him was in pain.

An arc of energy connected all parts of himself, shocking him with pain, making the muscles in his distant body clench.

And in an instant, a single instant, he remembered. He remembered going to the node, finding his own code, altering it beyond repair

and leaving a taunting note, even though he didn't remember who he was leaving it for.

He remembered the chase, the one that had just happened, both sides of it,

chasing

and being chased. He could remember the defenses he'd unleashed and what it felt to be hit by them.

He could remember the thrill at still being alive and standing after the attacks, and the anger that his attacks had not completely taken apart his opponent.

And this mass of memory made only one thing clear—that he had to get off the Matrix and stay off. A house divided against itself cannot stand.



Wyatt Earp died when he was eighty years old. At home. In bed. A rare enough luxury for gunfighters and shadowrunners both.

FastJack had always had only one plan in his life—to stay on top forever. And now something was desperately wrong, and he didn't understand what it was. It was bad enough when the Matrix crashed, but this was worse. The one tool he had relied on his whole life, his mind, was turning on him, and he had no idea why. It was more than a lack of control—it was like a cancer, something inside himself fighting him. Destroying him.

Without knowing what it was, he didn't know what to do about it. All he knew was he could not, for now, be what he was. And that whatever was happening might push him to the point where the only decision he had left was how he would go out.

... THE CRACKS INSIDE ...

It was the eyes.

The face he had seen before, he even had some pictures of that. He remembered his favorite picture of that face. It was a too-close photo taken of him and Ashley on a date. They were dining in the John Hancock Building in Chicago. In the background, the Sears Tower looked like a blocky line between their faces. The picture was taken in, what was it, 2008? No, 2009. It was some sort of anniversary for them.

The thoughts of those years gone by made him sad. Not a dark sadness, just the dull longing of the lost past. She was gone forty years now. Wow, forty years. She was sixty-one while he was only fifty-nine, the younger man, yet she was still so young. But Mother Nature doesn't care how old you are when she shakes the earth. He lost everything that day.

For forty years he worked hard to protect the world from the thing that took his wife. He held patents on programs for earthquake prediction and materials that were resistant to quakes. He owned a consulting and a construction firm to implement the uses of his inventions. Companies that saved other men's wives. Other men with eyes that had not seen that loss.

But were they his eyes?

Those eyes were off. They didn't seem to know the loss of a life and a wife or the secondary life created from that loss. Those eyes looked young, even younger than the new face he wore. Hours of pain and millions of nuyen had made ninety-nine look thirty-three. But the eyes looked even younger, almost childlike. Devoid of a lifetime of sadness burned into his psyche.

Had it been the léonization, or was it something else? He remembered saying yes and reading some of the files on the procedure, but not all of them. Maybe it was a side effect. He'd had some memory issues since then. He had strange dreams too.

Those eyes were in the dream. They were on a little boy. A little boy who looked like him, but different. The boy had asked for his hand. He asked if he was tired and ready to rest. In his dreams he was tired. No matter what technology managed to do to his body, his mind was still ninety-nine and had lived so much life, so many lives. He was tired in his dreams. The boy wanted him to rest. He wanted to rest.

Still staring in the mirror, into those alien youthful eyes, he tried to think of his future now. What would he do with his fourth life? He had grown young and wild; had settled into love and family; had then buried himself in the world of business and built himself and his memories a legacy. He wanted another life of excitement, but he was tired. So very tired.

He looked deeply into the eyes in the mirror, into the eyes of the boy in his dreams. He was lost in those eyes, lost in that moment, when the mirror changed and displayed an incoming call from Mr. Johnson.

He didn't remember a Mr. Johnson, didn't think he'd known a Johnson since grade school and that Johnson was long dead. But behind the projected image he could still see those alien eyes, and in those eyes he saw a glint of recognition and a flash of excitement. Those eyes knew Mr. Johnson. Those eyes were his next life. Those eyes were the long needed rest he so badly desired.

They weren't his eyes anymore.

They were his eyes.

- Ok, so this file dump is, well, it's just compiled craziness. Find a comfortable place to sit because once you hop on this crazy train you won't want off. I pulled together some of the stuff on the new Matrix, popped up the file on those twenty-four hours of insanity I put you all through recently, pulled in the files that Clockwork dropped about 'Jack, and then ... well ... read it for yourself. I can't even talk about it.
- Bull

ONE GRID TO RULE THEM ALL

Posted by: FastJack

Incoming

Dear FastJack:

My name is Michael Compton, and I am a representative of the Grid Overwatch Division of the Corporate Court. Feel free to check my credentials—they are on record and easily accessible to someone of your skills. Your reputation in the shadows is second to none, which is why we are extending this opportunity to you. GOD would like to invite you to participate in a special program. I'm sure you're not anxious to work with us, but I believe the opportunity I'm going to offer will overcome any reluctance you might feel.

We would like to invite you to participate in the evolution of the Matrix. You know that new Matrix protocols are on the way, unless your information-gathering skills have been greatly overstated. Those protocols are in various stages of testing, and we would like to involve you in that process. What we ask is simple—we want you to make every effort and use every trick in your abundant arsenal to gain access to the node designated, GOD-ZOGB-Weapons Platform. Its icon is a collection of Norse weapons. I'm sure that you can guess what this is for and I assure you it is the real thing. We here at GOD are confident that our new system is virtually impenetrable, and we want to put it to the ultimate test.

We offer you two, perhaps three things in return for your efforts. First, we will compensate you for your time, at the rate we normally pay outside contractors. Second, we offer you the earliest possible access to the protocols we develop. I'm sure that is something that will be of interest to you as they become more widely implemented. And the third thing is that if you somehow crack our system, you will have the immense pride of having beat us when we believe we are at our best. I don't believe we could offer you anything that is worth more than that.

There is no need for you to reply to this message, I am sure we will be aware of your efforts when the time comes.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
**Michael Compton, Security Services Analyst,
 Corporate Court, GOD**

- Are you fraggin' serious? An invitation straight from GOD to try and hack some new orbital node, please tell me you are planning to shred this site, 'Jack.
- Slamm-0!
- Honestly, I'm not even sure I'm going to try. I was planning to release this to all the hackers on JackPoint but was waiting for the right time. They can't possibly have expected me to keep this to myself.
- FastJack
- Are you all daft? This was sent to FastJack by a Corporate Court employee who worked for NeoNET before he went to the CC. This is a trap.
- Clockwork
- If you're so sure it's a trap why did you put it out there for us to see?
- Slamm-0!
- Do you need to ask, Slammy?
- Netcat
- We have a few choices. We can let this slide by and then be surprised when this new Matrix protocol comes online, or we can take this opportunity to poke around and see what it's all about.
- Bull

Private Forum

- I'm opening this private forum for JackPoint users to consolidate anything anyone finds on this new Matrix protocol that I got the invite to take a shot at. Keep it factual or at least keep comments and random speculation to a minimum. I like speculation, as it may spur someone else's thinking, but let's not blow this forum up into something convoluted. I'm leaving System Admin and junk cleanup on Bull's plate so I don't get accusations of bias.

• FastJack

- Thanks 'Jack. Hackers, start your sleazeware. Let the digging begin.

• Bull

- Let me be the first to pop up here and tell everyone that this is real. New protocols are being established for the pre-existing wireless Matrix, and these things will have a massive impact on our lives. From what I can tell the rollout for the new protocols has already started.

I took a look at some of the orbital weapons platforms that had been shut down after the breach and they all *look* like they are back online now. I highlight the word "look" because I've been doing my assessments of them through a telescope and a vision magnification systems. I can't find any sort of node for them, but they have been doing daily run-ups and I have seen maintenance staff out doing diagnostics with—get this—wired connections.

• Orbital DK

THE CRACKS INSIDE





- Quick update: I figured out what the wired connections were for and from what I can tell they were using the wired systems to upload the new wireless protocols. I've got nodes now, or at least I think they're nodes. I have zero connectivity to them with my commlink. I can see them but have been completely unable to access them.
- Orbital DK
- Seeing as I was pretty sure I knew who would be making the big push behind something like this, I blasted my way into Danielle de la Mar's commlink. She has been putting out some seriously worrisome memos and messages. I copied all of them over, you can read them here [link] For those of you who are too lazy to read the whole thing, it looks like de la Mar and her megacorporate backers are taking back the Matrix. They are planning to realign the Matrix structure into multiple layers of grids, like in the old days. And get this—security for the *entire* Matrix will be overseen by GOD. This is gonna be seriously feeble.
- /dev/grrl
- That was you! I spent three straight days working my access. Now she's got a whole new 'link and some seriously draconic security on it.
- Glitch
- Sorry G. But I got the data so all your effort wasn't wasted. :)
- /dev/grrl
- My first foray into taking up GOD's invite to FastJack was a complete wash. I could detect the node and the new grid alignment, but I was completely unable to access or even probe the target node for specs. All of my programs came back with coding errors. The only node I was able access had an agent running that kept saying, "Get ready, a new and improved Matrix is coming soon!" Got to say this is some serious drek, but I kinda liked the feel of the place. It was homey, in a way.
- Bull
- Of course it's homey to you. I swear they pulled up twenty-five-year-old iconography (which I've only seen in pictures), and the layout is so retro. On a pertinent note I pulled up every program I've coded for the past eight years and ran them. I got lots of code errors but a few managed to work a little bit. I'm cobbling together a few new programs from bits of that code. Once I get them together, I'll distribute and we can all run some tests.
- Hannibelle
- I'm talking about this against my own good judgment because I hate feeding Clockwork and the rest of the technophobes, but I think everyone else could use the data. First off the place feels a little weird to me. Can't really express the concept in any other way and can't really describe it further. Sorry. Secondly, the reason none of you are able to access it with your programs and your links is because the whole place is running on new protocols that allow only limited connectibility from current commlinks. They changed all the security protocols to block every program we currently have to scramble, sleaze, decipher, and generally wreak havoc on their systems. For all of you this means you are going to need to start putting together new programs. For me it meant I just needed to spend a little time getting to know the new system and then generate a little coding on the fly. I did this a little at a time over the course of a week with a little trial and error. I got the coding right and I even managed to access the new grid and analyze the agent in the accessible node. The agent isn't even an agent—it's a piece of IC. I wasn't successfully running programs for more than 30 seconds before that agent changed its tune and politely asked me to leave. I figured I was in trouble, but I tried to push it a little further. The IC didn't do a thing, but within another few seconds another icon appeared in the node. It was an angel—I think Michael, flaming sword and all. He didn't ask me to leave or say anything else. He just looked at me and shook his head. Next thing I knew I woke up with a pounding headache, a bloody nose, and Slamm-O! waving smelling salts under my nose saying we had to go. Whatever the icon was (my guess is a hacker from GOD), it tracked my position at the same time it gave me the boot. Luckily Slamm-O! was in good with the desk clerk at our bolt hole, and we were warned in time to get us clear. Got a quick look and the goons were KE, local Seattle cops. Looks like coordination is part of the new plan.
- Netcat
- Any chance it was coincidence? Or they were there for someone else?
- Pistons
- Not likely. They went straight to the room we were in, not even the one we had actually rented.
- Netcat
- So all of you know, while I'm in control of myself I have been trying this as well. I'm using some cobbled-together equipment, and I think I have a working prototype for the next generation of hackers, though I think we can call them deckers again. I let them come find me, and when Lone Star came to my already open door, they were very polite. They actually thanked me on behalf of the GOD and just let me go on my way.
- FastJack
- Sorry if I can't believe you "Jack," but you're not the most credible of sources right now. Especially if you are throwing out stories of Lone Star being polite and thankful.
- Glitch
- So I managed to hack de la Mar's newest link and found some more interesting things. Looks like the new protocol is watched over by GOD, but every member of the Corporate Court had to agree to be part of the team. They are all playing nice with GOD, and they each will have their own grid along with a public grid and national grid for the countries that can afford one. The public grid will supposedly cover everywhere and, according to de la Mar, will even be accessible via satellite link from any point on the globe!





This is huge. How has it not been made public yet? Especially since de la Mar is claiming it will be up on January 1st. 2075 is going to be an interesting year!

- Slamm-0!
- Whispers started in DeeCee and Atlanta shortly after the last election results were finalized. NeoNET, MCT, and Ares all started holding some closed-door congressional meetings in late November on both sides of the border. MCT must have lost out early, but it looks like Ares in the CAS and NeoNET in the UCAS have been sticking around. If there is some new Matrix contract coming around, these two are doing the heavy lifting. Yes. Ares. Not sure how that will work, but they are looking to get firmly entrenched with their new American patrons.
- Kay St. Irregular
- MCT isn't out. They actually have half of the entire public grid. The UCAS pretty much gave them Seattle's grid and a contract for a new Chicago grid. They also look like they are going to be one of the first MegaGrids to come online, complete with the PR coup and status that grants.
- Pistons
- Look for a lot of work going after them. A nice embarrassing worldwide PR hit could be just what a few other contenders in cities all over the world could need to bump them. If this all goes smoothly, we'll probably see a lot of MCT run grids in cities all over the world.
- FastJack
- Hope this new Matrix in the CAS isn't too "buggy"!
- Turbo Bunny
- Not funny.
- Bull
- I hate to say it, but I kind of like the new public grid. Feels very similar to the current setup but also feels a little more organized. Also reminds me a lot of the old wired setup. I know all of you will scream old-timer but, well, yep, I am, and even though it feels like the old Matrix, it is still going to be a dangerous and possible deadly place for those of us who make their living stealing other people's data.
- Bull
- Bull's right. It is like the old Matrix visually, but not coding wise. It looks like added a lot of limitations on things to clean the place up. And I might just be imagining things, but I'd swear that new grid is running some low-end simfeed for that "homey" feeling because even I get it, and I wasn't even a thought during the old Matrix.
- /dev/grll

DANIELLE DE LA MAR ANNOUNCES NEW MATRIX!

Denver, FRFZ, December 1, 2074

Ladies, gentlemen, and entities of the Matrix, I come before you today with news that will forever change your Matrix experience. No longer will you need to fear the actions of lawless hackers and rogue AIs. Never again will you feel fear when you open yourself to the digital universe to enjoy your latest sim in Hi-Def.

All of you were so kind as to accept this invitation to be the first to experience the new worldwide public grid, developed and hosted by a joint NeoNET and Mitsuhamma Computer Technologies program. If you would all access the icon we offered to you when you entered.

While this program runs and assists your commlink in adjusting to the new protocols for this enhanced grid let me tell you what is to come.

No longer will our nodes be the playground of deviants. New protocols will detect and deny deviant behavior faster than ever before with the assistance and cooperation of all the members of the Corporate Court and their Grid Overwatch Division. Lawless hackers will now fear that GOD is always watching.

New Matrix structures will allow worldwide access without overloading individual and local resources by spreading the computing power of the public grid over the tens of thousands of substations, both terrestrial and in orbit. The new grids will be safer and stronger with an increased focus on pinpoint removal of trouble instead of node shutdowns needed during these recent years that have resulted in damage to innocents thanks to the thoughtless actions of deviants.

Grids will be overlapping and the public grid, available to everyone with even the simplest link or access device, will be augmented and enhanced by local, national, and corporate grids. Every member of the Corporate Court is already developing their own grid for their citizens and subscribers, while many of these companies—especially NeoNET and Mitsuhamma—are in contract negotiations with local and national governments to develop grids with the new and safer protocols.

I see we have all successfully downloaded the new software. If everyone would please access the new grid using the complementary trodes, or their own hardware if it has been upgraded, and join me in the new public grid to continue this life changing endeavor. Security will ensure we are safe during our brief trip.

Welcome to the new WorldWide Grid!

The first thing I would like to do is acknowledge DarPenChin as a demonstration that this new grid is not meant to exclude our technosentiences. Extensive studies have already been performed to demonstrate this new protocol is compatible with AIs, electrokinetics, and all other technosapients.

(Crowd Applause)

From this day forward, citizens of the world can access the Matrix and finally feel safe in this wireless world. The worldwide public grid is available now to anyone who downloads the new protocols. And in coming months, the member corporations of the Corporate Court will bring their grids online and connect to the public grid while offering additional services to their corporate citizens. Nations around the world will gradually roll out their grids in the beginning of the next year. By April 1, 2075



INCOMING FEED.....



this new measure of security will be offered by nations and city-states around the world. We will enter a golden age of the Matrix where citizens of the world can communicate and connect with anyone, anywhere, and do so without fear of the deviant anarchist subculture of hackers preying upon them.

We stand on the precipice of a free and safe wireless Matrix. We take this leap together and shall soar to new heights.

But I warn that this coming change will not be entirely peaceful or without difficulties. The deviants will attempt to thwart this change. They will hire their shadowrunners and solicit Matrix gangs to terrorize the good people of NeoNET and MCT as they forge this new world. We must stand resolute against these foes and show them that we want a new, safer Matrix. We want their ilk to push their misplaced anger aside and leave the Matrix a peaceful place, and also to stop assaulting the daily lives of citizens around the world. We must all stand together and push forward during these possibly dark times to reach the enlightenment beyond.

Thank you all for joining me today and taking that step. Let us go forward with a strength of conviction and indomitable will.

DANIELLE DE LA MAR EXPLAINS MOTIVATIONS BEHIND ENHANCED MATRIX PROTOCOLS

Denver, FRFZ, January 1, 2075

Happy New Year to those who mark the passage of time in the Gregorian tradition. A New Year is a time for change, a time for resolutions, and a time for progress as we look back at mistakes of our past and plan for a future built stronger for that past. And that sentiment is my reason for addressing the world today.

We have long lived in troubled times. Despite major advances in every aspect of our civilization and society, there are those who feel a need to destroy progress. Whether it arises from a fear of change or a mental malady, these anachronistic anarchists cannot handle progress and seek to destroy the freedoms of others. This is why the new Matrix is being designed with such strict security protocols. I know many have called them draconian, but they are only a hindrance to those who seek to circumvent law and order. There are those who want me to prove why the old Matrix is so dangerous, and it is to them I speak today.

During the past months I have had some of the world's finest minds and greatest programmers gathering information for me on abuses in the Matrix. Since the second Crash and the rise of the wireless protocols, we have found many scapegoats for our troubles. AIPS, technomancers, AIs, and the mythical e-ghosts have all had their time in the media circus being blamed for the trouble of the day. But these groups are so small and our Matrix so big they are but a pebble-like disturbance thrown into the vast ocean of the Matrix. The tsunami of our trouble does not rise from a group like this but from a group of deviants that spans the globe. The group of people known as hackers.

Whether they be detestable shadowrunners or corporate assets who bravely step into the dark to save the light, they attack the code and the very functions of our day to day lives. They have so badly corrupted the code of the old Matrix with their efforts that we must change its very foundation.

I have tried to deliver our new Matrix as a seed of change and progress, but the media is relentless, and they push their questions in the faces of the world with each broadcast. So now, I bare the

THE CRACKS INSIDE.....

hard truths. We advance not only out of a need for progress but also out of a need for security before more damage is done by the dark hearts of hackers.

I know the questions will not end with my statements so I will speak of my proof. News from around the world speaks of failures in nanotech, from forges to construction projects. These failures, I am convinced, have been caused by hackers and their deviant actions that alter the very code of the Matrix with every illegal act. Their programs encode viruses with each virtual stroke, and those strokes have added up. The sensitive code and communication needed for nanites and nanotech to function has begun failing around the world.

I cannot ensure this change will repair the damage hackers have already done, but I can assure you this new Matrix will halt their advance. Together we move forward and take back the greatest step forward in the history of human communications. Together we take back our Matrix.

- This woman is crazy serious, and she has big-time power behind her. After the Nexus took that hit last year and Ghostwalker jumped on board, she's been like a runaway freight train.
- Netcat
- Not to mention the support from MCT, NeoNET, S-K, and Ares. This is going to happen. Full-blown, no half-ass attempts. Danielle de la Mar is probably the single most hated individual in hacker circles.
- Glitch
- Look Puck, you're finally out of the top spot!!!
- Slamm-0!
- Seriously. She's hated because she's powerful and successful. This new initiative is seriously protected and seriously going to happen. We aren't out, but we just got kicked to the curb. We're going to need some time to catch up and the whole while they are just going to be locking this shit down even tighter. Welcome to the new world. Time for the scriptkiddies to go buy a gun and get some cyber. Because hacking just got REAL serious!!! Big girl panties only!
- /dev/grrl
- I don't wear panties.
- Pistons
- Yup. That's it. Comments off on this post now. I'll leave Pistons' comment just because. Good night kiddies.
- FastJack

BUILDING A CASE

Posted by: Bull and Surprise Guest

- Being made high profile by Prop 23 has had a lot of negatives, a few positives, and this, something I'm not sure yet if it is positive or negative. I got contacted by an unusual source. He wanted to trade a whole lot of researched and compiled data for three "small favors." For the first and second favors, he wanted access to JackPoint for 24 hours and the ability to release a file dump. Don't

worry, I checked out the data first (it was really what sold me). I'm not one to jump through hoops for anyone but this one intrigued me on so many levels, so I accepted with very little hesitation. The third favor he left dangling for a later date. Oh well. So now, without further ado, let me introduce to you the newest guest member of JackPoint, Miles Lanier.

- Bull
- This goes against every fiber of my being, but then again what *is* my being these days? Is it me, or is it *it*? I'll explain what that means later. As much as I can. For now we'll just say I'm doing this of my own free will and accept that because so many other channels are blocked off for me right now I want this put out into the world in at least some fashion.

I know you people aren't all just mercenaries; some of you have a heart or at least some semblance of one. That means you have a conscience or maybe just care something about the world and the people around you. I believe that at least two of your own are currently suffering from the same malady I am. I'm starting to get some idea of what's happening, and I have some loose theories about the cause. I wish I had more, but here's what I've got. These are files, articles, and news reports from around the world that I have had runners, not unlike yourselves, gathering, stealing, and compiling data on for the past three years. Some of them help me understand what's happening. Others of them ... well, I don't know how I found them, or what they have to do with anything, but my gut tells me they're relevant. And right now, I have some trouble trusting my rational thought process, so my gut is all I have.

Don't feel special or connected to me somehow, and don't think this means I will treat you as anything more than assets in the future. Once my other channels clear up—maybe assisted by the fact that you all will do a little work toward that goal—I'll send this material to other sources as well. For now you can all feel a little special.

- Miles Lanier
- Oh yeah, and thank you Mr. MacCallister.
- Miles Lanier
- You're welcome, Mr. Lanier. For the rest of you, I narrowed the data to the most interesting pieces for this download. The whole thing can be found here [[link](#)].
- Bull
- Man that felt weird.
- Bull

FINDING WHAT'S WRONG

The underlying theme in what I'm about to share with you is that some things are going wrong, and they're going wrong in ways that seem to be to be connected. I don't understand how all these things are connected yet, and in some cases I can't even clearly articulate why I think a connection exists. Discovering some of these connections will be up to you.

Having said that, let's move into the material, starting with a piece of information directly related to my own activities.



Mr. Lanier,

I would like to take a moment to personally thank you for the opportunity afforded to my team by you. We greatly appreciate the breadth of options that a man such as yourself must have, and being selected to work for you was an honor.

As for my report on my team's efforts, I am unsure how to report that the infiltration at the facility was revealed. I understand we were instrumental in a portion of that plan, but Dr. SAYS was extremely upset by our appearance. Dr. SAYS managed to escape in the chaos we encountered when the facility was assaulted by another team of operatives. This chaos was caused by what our hacker so colorfully referred to as a "full-on technospecter blowout."

The facility was housing and imprisoning e-ghosts and possibly other technosentiences. I realize that might sound like a harsh description, but judging by their reaction to being freed, it seems appropriate to me. Their containment system failed when the facility was attacked and they all started running amok inside the facility. This is when Dr. SAYS fled.

I believe you already suspected that this place and this project were heavily under the claw of Celedyr, since the Minuteman Security forces were supplemented (and outnumbered) by members of the Knights of Rage. References were discovered on a Project Imago, as well as reports on several e-consciousness', including Cerberus, the rumored draconic e-ghost. I'm attaching all of the data our hacker downloaded before he got sizzled by the e-ghosts. Peruse at your leisure.

Thank you again for the opportunity,

Ace

- Ace linked a number of files I'm not including in this free data dump. His info confirms that this portion of Project Imago was experimenting on e-consciousnesses and their ability to replicate under controlled conditions. The data indicates it is possible, even probable. There are two main methods. These include copying and code-mixing. Copying, which is kind of like cloning people, gets a copy of the sentient code but doesn't always get the memories and experiences. Code-mixing, which vaguely resembles sexual reproduction in that portions of code mix and match to make a new code, gets new sentient code that is different than the parent codes, of which there can be many parents, not just two.
- Miles Lanier
- Techno-breeding programs? Fuck this noise.
- Clockwork
- Not technomancers. E-ghosts and AIs. Big difference.
- Pistons

- Says you.
- Clockwork

- Let me put this in perspective for you Clockwork. Technomancers are organic beings that breed like any other organic being. They are limited to the reproduction rate of their species or subspecies. Inorganic AIs and other technosentients are limited only by the processing speed of the system they are running on for making copies. If a "breeding" AI hopped into say, MCT's North Am node, they could copy code fast enough to make a copy of their entire digital self in 12.03 milliseconds. I won't help you with the math, I'm sure you can do that yourself, but this means the AIs could match the world population in no time flat. I'm not a fearmonger and don't think there is any worldwide conspiracy of AIs looking to take over the planet, but this is an interesting mental exercise.
- Butch
- What would the AIs want with our planet? Unless they wanted to take over our bodies first!
- Plan 9
- Oh great. We gave Plan 9 more drivel to fill our bandwidth.
- Snopes

MECHANICAL MALFUNCTIONS

While I was still with NeoNET, I had heard rumblings that some of our nano-technology was not functioning properly. This became an area of interest for me, and I continued to follow it once I took my leave of absence from the corporation. It became clear that other corporations were facing problems of a similar nature. I've collected some evidence of what's happening here; later, we can try to figure out what it means.

- "Leave of absence," huh? Nice term for "disappeared and didn't tell anyone where I was going." I hope we'll cover some of what you've been up to since your departure. And why you left.
- Cosmo
- I will tell you what I believe is appropriate.
- Miles Lanier

March 3, 2074

Yamatetsu Nautical Technologies is taking a big hit in their aeronautical engineering division this week. In the past week, five aircraft (three YNT-2110 passenger jets and two YNT-810 private jets) designed, engineered, and built by YNT have crashed after apparent structural failure mid-flight. The company has grounded all other similar models while they do a complete fleet diagnostic.

Arziet Toranski, spokesperson for YNT, issued a statement late yesterday. "Yamatetsu Nautical Technologies would like to extend their most sincere and heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of all those who lost their lives while flying in YNT

Incoming

aircraft this past week. Our hearts go out to you, and as we look ahead we will all find a way to come to terms with these losses. YNT has grounded all aircraft of similar make and model and is running all of our aircraft through thorough inspections before we clear them for flight again. YNT would like to assure passengers flying on other YNT aircraft that all of our craft go through thorough inspections between each flight day and all contain state-of-the-art nanotech diagnostics systems.”

Consumers are not buying the corporate line, though, and every airline is getting the third degree about what planes passengers will be flying on. Several airlines have already had problems with passengers and crew unwilling to fly on any YNT aircraft.

Due to the massive impact this is having on YNT and its parent company Evo, Corporate Court investigators are also looking into the possibility of corporate sabotage. If a case is issued against one of Evo’s megacorporate rivals, the potential reparations could easily run into the billions and criminal charges could be laid for the murders of all 407 passengers and crew that lost their lives. If there is any evidence to either discover or conceal, you can be sure there will be plenty of money spent looking to find it or hide it.

INTEROFFICE MEMO

From: Arziet Toranski, Evo Media
To: Dr. Colin Yang, Yamatetsu Nautical Technologies, Lead Engineer
Re: YNT-2110, 810

As the media takes greater hold of this story we will require significant documentation to demonstrate our unquestionable inspection history and design specifications. I understand those two models are part of the nanofabrication initiative being pushed by President Shibanokuji, but that information needs to be kept out of the public eye to avoid negative publicity and potential cancellation of that program.

In case that program comes under scrutiny please be sure to provide the proper records to any questioning authorities and avoid references to the Magadon incident.

To: Gage Bantski
From: Dr. C. Yang

Internal operation requested. Please see attached file for details. Asset preferences as follows. Required: No Evo connection. Preferred: Ares or S-K connections, new assets, asset cancellation upon completion.

Please ensure contract termination for employee FD-67820 for breach of security protocols.

Incoming

ANOTHER BLOW TO EVO
Bogotá, Aztlan, June 4, 2074

For the fifth time in as many days Amazonian air forces have been decimated, and not by Aztlan air-defense systems. A battered Amazonia began arming their Evo Reckoner training crafts almost six months ago in a last-ditch effort to maintain some level of air forces that do not have feathers or scales. The efforts were working well up until a few days ago when it seems the wear and tear of flying sorties day in and day out has finally taken their toll.

For the fifth straight day Amazonia has lost a four-craft wing of planes to what seems to be almost simultaneous structural failures. Today’s story has a tragic side as the crewmembers of two of the craft were unable to eject safely. According to the other pilots the lost souls radioed that the ejection system was malfunctioning before the craft broke apart in flight.

Evo finally issued a statement today and has offered to provide Amazonia with trained and certified mechanics and technicians to evaluate their remaining craft as long as the craft are moved to a neutral location away from the fighting. This statement came alongside an Aztechnology statement that they would honor Evo’s assistance as a show of good faith. Under a joint Corporate Court decision, Aztechnology and Evo officially declared the city of Cayenne, French Guyana, under megacorporate protection until the remaining planes have been evaluated.

Amazonian officials aren’t talking as to whether or not they are taking Evo up on the offer, but speculation is rampant that even though Cayenne is a safe zone, Aztlan will use any waning moments of air capability to strike at their battle-weary foes.

THE CRACKS INSIDE

Incoming



Incoming

Annie,

How are you? Miss you tons. Life here is as expected. These paranoid Amazonian fucktards are bringing in the Reckoners one at a time. Two have crashed so far, so I'm waiting for the finger pointing and shooting to start. The company has a helicopter on standby constantly in case they need to get us out of here, so that's good and means you don't have to worry. So far the only things I've found wrong with the planes is crappy maintenance records, crappy maintenance (so I guess maybe the records are accurate), and some odd coding in the NanoFix nanite programming. That's actually what I wanted to really ask about. Can you run through the NanoFix code we have back there and compare it to the code I'm sending along?

Give Tin a hug for me and remind him that all this time away from daddy is going towards the Shibanokuji trip. Free Fall here we come!

Jak

Jak,

I'm good. Miss you tons too. Tin sends hugs and can't wait to our trip. Stay safe. As for the programming, well, it's fucked up. I'm guessing the Amazonians may have been hacked or some other corps used their lax security to get a look at the NanoFix programming and must have thrown in some wacky code, nothing like what this type of code should look like—honestly nothing like any code I have ever seen. It's just really weird. Oh yeah, before I forget Tin is going in for the nanohive tomorrow. With Shibanokuji's incentives the whole thing is only costing us about fifty nuyen. Mine's working great, I've felt awesome since I got it and I'm so ready for our trip.

Love ya honey,

Ann

Incoming

DISASTER IN BOGOTÁ

Bogotá, Aztlan; 28 July 2074

We have all seen the images of war-torn Bogotá flashed during the news and in anti-war campaigns by dozens of organizations. We've seen the damage of bombs, spells, gunfire, and the physical assaults of dragons. We've watched footage of buildings collapsing once they couldn't take anymore. As if these assaults weren't enough now we are seeing buildings collapse for no apparent reason.

These collapses can only be blamed on shoddy construction performed by greedy construction companies looking to cash in on a city desperately in need of help. Recent footage of several buildings around Bogotá is playing like a time-lapse video of a building left to the unstoppable march of time. The problem is the footage is not time-lapse and these buildings are collapsing in a matter of minutes, not decades.

Thanks to some deviant friends I found out that both of the buildings that were caught in digital were built by the same construction firm, Central Industrial. With that information I've set out to right a wrong that has cost Bogotá hundreds of innocent citizens. I've placed commlinks near every building my associate found that was built by Central Industrial and linked all their video footage to here... [LINK](#). Join me in righting this wrong and protest at these locations. Warn those living and working there about Central Industrial's failures and help me save some lives, a rare thing in this warzone.

THE CRACKS INSIDE





INCOMING FEED.....



- Straight to corporate greed and we skip over corporate or military attacks or tests. Who's to say this wasn't a weapons test by Aztechnology or even some unmentioned corporate backer of Amazonia, maybe Horizon? This looks like a definite bunker or hard point softening technology.
- Picador
- Lesson learned. Piniq died in another building collapse. No footage on that one but he was identified among the dead when the dust settled. His building collapse was nothing nano-nefarious. The structure went down during Operation: Huntress.
- Pistons
- Hmmm ... more trouble like the Excalibur? Maybe an Ares ploy to get everyone's minds off their failure? This doesn't necessarily have to do with anything more nefarious than regular old corporate sabotage.
- Sticks

From: Benito Piniq, Central Industrial
To: Ferito Tenape, Minuteman Security
Re: Increase Officers requirements

Due to recent events in Bogotá, the attached locations will need increases to their security forces for a currently indeterminate period of time. For locations A thru D please provide an increase of 2 combat trained officers and 1 Citizen Liaison Officer for each shift. Locations E thru G will just require an additional 1 combat trained officer, and locations H thru O will each require a team of extra-corporate assets to maintain round the clock surveillance and prevent incidences at these locations that will reflect poorly on the company.

To: Benito Piniq, Central Industrial
From: Ferito Tenape, Minuteman Security

Additional assets will be provided at standard intra-corporate rates. Your request for extra-corporate assets has been forwarded on to Special Projects. In the future please send all such requests directly to Special Projects.

From: Ferito Tenape, Minuteman Security
To: Allen Smith, Evo Special Projects

Central Industrial has sent a request through my office to request 8 extra-corporate operations along with a serious bump in standard security at a number of facilities. I have informed Mr. Piniq of Central Industrial that future requests go directly to your office. Though informed as thus I feel his actions require a more direct reinforcement. Assign a team to deliver Piniq to one of the addresses included. That threat will be enough for now.

Incoming.....



NEWS FROM THE BATTLEZONE!**Libyan Desert, Egypt, August 11, 2074**

After the debacle during the Mojave Wars All-Star Challenge back in 2072 and the dissolution of the Desert Wars: Mojave, everyone turned to watching the Mojave Rattlers, a compilation of stars from the Mojave Wars teams. They watched the Desert Wars: Mojave funding shift to building a classic Desert Wars team and then witnessed their struggles against their more experienced Desert Wars foes during the '73 season. The curse of the Mojave seemed to lift during this season as the Rattlers entered their last match with, what everyone considered, an easy shot at the top seed for the championship series with a match against the Ares Delta Dogs, this years biggest disappointment, as the last objective of the season.

But it seems the curse has reared its ugly head and in a devastating fashion. The Rattlers were ecstatic to pick up Cavalier Arms as a sponsor after they moved into the classic Desert Wars League. The arms manufacturer came through their legal struggles recently with some serious zeal. They filled every Rattler hand and holster with a Cavalier firearm this past season. This season has also seen some new designs, including the new prototype for a redesigned Thunderbolt (which could spell bad news for Lone Star).

Why would it spell bad news you ask, because the Rattlers suffered numerous catastrophic weapons failures during last nights contest, and not just jams or misfires. It was like déjà vu for those who watched back in '73 as the Ares Excalibur failed field test after field test. The difference here was...unique to say the least.

At 2152, the Ares Delta Dogs launched a minor offensive maneuver to test the Rattlers' defenses that should have been repelled with ease. Delta Dogs Strike Team leader Duncan Cord found soft defenses and stated in post match interviews that though he was leery of an

ambush he had a gut feeling that it was something else. Cord pushed his unit and easily broke through the rapidly crumbling defenses as the Rattlers' weapons began to completely fail. The Delta Dogs faced minimal return fire and found most of the Rattler's forces tending to serious face and hand injuries.

Cord radioed for additional forces and the Delta Dogs took the field before the stroke of midnight.

Post match interviews with members of the Mojave Rattlers have been temporarily delayed and their front office is making no comments, but our field reporters caught a few choice bits while the action was still occurring. Out on the field members of the Rattlers were cursing their exclusive arms deal with Cavalier as all of their weapons suffered structural failures nearly simultaneously.

Investigating officials for the league will be looking into possible sabotage while external investigations will begin looking into Cavalier Arms to see if this was some sort of coerced corporate sabotage or even a planned effort on another corporation's part to damage Cavalier's reputation.

Representatives from Cavalier Arms have been unavailable for comment but have issued a statement saying they will be coordinating with the Rattlers to assist in covering the medical costs for all their injured members. To the surprise of many, Cavalier has been offered, and accepted, an opportunity to utilize their old NeoNET connections to Nightengale's clinics as well as cyber and bioware producers from their former masters to help the Rattlers recover before next season.

Representatives from NeoNET, as well as several of their subsidiaries who are being tapped to help out, have all issued statements regarding this strange turn of events. Though worded differently they all deliver the same message of support for their former corporate ally with hopes of rebuilding connections. None were available for questions after issuing the statements.

FROM THE OFFICE OF RICHARD VILLIERS

To: Abigail James, Nightengale's Clinics; Finion Elparanza, Dorada Genetech; Aston Faust, Pioneer Cybernetics; John Bogden, MindStorm Neurotechnologies; Teng Suzhou, Suzhou Biotechnology

Re: Issue of Cavalier Arms and the Mojave Rattlers Desert Wars team

Ladies and Gentleman,

I know in the past our relationship with Cavalier Arms has been rough. I have expressed powerful negative feelings towards the company and their new ownership, but many of our corporate connections to Cavalier still exist, and the events of the Mojave Rattler's Desert Wars match has potential to reflect poorly on some of our own corporate partners.

With this in mind I am offering coordinated efforts with Cavalier to support the Rattler's repair and rebuilding in the offseason. This is a great opportunity to shore up some image damage created during Cavalier's Corporate Court case while also getting some more brand recognition and advertising during the Rattler's season next year.

We will be issuing a statement promptly and expect all of you to do the same by 0830 today. Further questions should not be taken at this time, but assure any sources requesting more information that it will be made available once we have fully assessed the situation.

FROM THE OFFICES OF RICHARD VILLIERS

To: Abigail James, Nightengale's Clinics; Finion Elparanza, Dorada Genetech; Aston Faust, Pioneer Cybernetics; John Bogden, MindStorm Neurotechnologies; Teng Suzhou, Suzhou Biotechnology

Re: Previous Memo regarding Issue of Cavalier Arms and the Mojave Rattlers

As I'm sure you are all aware by now the previous memo was not sent by me. Instead, access was gained by Miles Lanier to my personal system and the memo was issued by him. Disregard any future memos sent through those means and limit intercorporate correspondence to Matrix or in person meetings.

As for the situation we will not announce a security breach of that nature and will instead continue as planned. Additional funding and resources are being released to each of your companies to cover these actions.

A secondary fund will also be created for funding investigatory assets. Lanier is no fool and he must have had a

very good reason to use this trump card. Keep an eye out for any strange actions or events occurring in connection with these relationships.

INTERNAL MEMO

From: Eamonn Cogan, Production Director, Cavalier Arms

To: Evelyn Pierce, Intercorporate Services Director, Reality, Inc.

Re: Mojave Rattlers Incident and Product Complaints

What in the hell is going on? I understand that we can enjoy the free money they're sending our way but how can we seriously trust any NeoNET subsidiary after this NanoGlobe issue. I don't have the full evaluation but I'm telling you they were complicit in this massive weapon malfunction debacle. How could they not be?

I've got reports from companies all over about malfunctions now. Half of them are coming back bullshit but a lot of them aren't. I'm pulling all of the NanoGlobe forge systems at this moment and converting production runs back to the old plant until we sort all this out.

Consider this letter my formal disapproval for any future cooperative actions between us and our former owners. We never should have kept any ties. If anyone has a problem with my decision they can come tell me in person, I'll be over at the old plant putting our weapons together the way they always should have been, by hand.

From: Evelyn Pierce

To: Eamonn Cogan

Re: Re: Mojave Rattlers Incident and Product Complaints

Your message has been filed with our office. While I am similarly displeased with some events of late I must remind you of our language policies for InterCorporate Memos.

In consideration of your objections and efforts to maintain production despite subcontractor issues I'll be placing a note in your file for your positive efforts.

Also, please send copies of all verified product error reports to our offices. We will begin an investigation into corporate sabotage from NanoGlobe. Your offices and the reopened production facility will be receiving additional security personnel. We'll have them vetted and contracted within the day and they should report to you at the plant and your office manager at your office.

Thank you for your continued dedications to the future of Cavalier Arms and Reality, Inc.

- So all of you know, I didn't consciously utilize that backdoor access. I was not aware of getting into Villiers' system to send that memo though I did find the access log on my commlink the following day after I already saw the news announcements. Whatever is happening to me is making efforts to further influence the world in specific ways. That's a big reason for my departure from NeoNET in the beginning. I had too much power to put into unknown hands.
- Miles Lanier
- I dug into Cavalier's systems on a job probably funded by that secondary fund Villiers mentioned and found some interesting test and investigation data. It looks like all of Cavalier's weapons have nanofabricated parts that failed or were degraded at the same time by residual nanites left in the weapons for diagnostic and repair purposes. Could have been preplanned, a massive hacking attack, or some form of programming failure on the nanites' part. They haven't drawn any solid conclusions to date.
- /dev/grrl

BROKEN MINDS

So that's one thing. Now let's go to the next part, the part that helps describe some of the symptoms that I—and I believe a couple of you—have been dealing with. These are reports from all around the world, and they show we are not alone. They all involve sudden and unexplainable shifts in personality and behavior. The focus here is heavily on two megacorps but a number of others appear in the full file. These cases just seem to be some of the most extreme and blatant. I'll admit that these are by far some of the scariest aspects of what's happening. It's certainly the scariest to me.

BREAKING NEWS FROM TSIMSHIAN

December 16—For years we have reported on the environmental disasters of Tsimshian and the atrocities left behind by Mitsuhama. These eco-disasters have left the average citizen looking forward to a life of medical maladies and “inexplicable” health issues. Now it seems those health issues are not just for the average citizen.

As the race for seats on Tsimshian's governing council heats up, eyes have been peeled for any weakness in the flock of politicians. Under such close scrutiny even the minutest issue can be magnified, but real issues become glaringly obvious. Those obvious issues are the problem for two council incumbents and three other candidates have begun showing obvious signs of early-onset dementia. Spokespersons for all the effected candidates have made numerous statements as attempts to convince the citizens that nothing is wrong, but nobody is fooled. It looks like all the expensive medical care in the world can't save you from the polluted cesspool that is Tsimshian. Even with gene treatments, symbiont tech, and cleaner nanites trying to keep these fat cats safe from the ever-present pollution these five have developed some serious medical issues.

These issues are going to have some serious effects on the elections, and with less than a month to go the political firestorm is only going to get worse. Folks might want to have a back-up candidate in mind as we move forward because not every guy on the ticket right now is going to make it to election day.

- No names? What's with that?
- Netcat
- The author of that story is a blogger who goes by the tag Helper of the People. She rarely ever uses names in her articles. She says it is better to point the way and let the truth be revealed to the eyes of the seeker. Her info is usually spot on, though, and she usually avoids anything that looks like slick politicking.
- Mika
- Luckily Mr. Lanier isn't so cryptically inclined.
- Slamm-0!

Encrypt file link: Atian Parker, Chetan Hale, Charlotte Beck, Richard Sylvester, Joseph Abreu, Nathan Jance

All stated patients are suffering from similar symptoms: blackouts, memory lapses, faulty/false memories, mood swings, self-control issues, and involuntary muscle spasms are universal. Parker and Abreu have also suffered seizures. Parker, Sylvester, and Jance report erectile dysfunction and decreased libido despite gene and chemical treatments for both conditions.

All conditions are publicly being linked to Mitsuhama's damage to our nation, but all of these patients are treated and cleansed regularly of all pollutants. The only universal similarity between all the patients is their treatments, all received through CrashCart Medical Services clinics outside the country.

Each of these patients was suffering from extensive heavy metals poisonings that had to be treated through implantation of a nanohive alongside their pollution tolerance genetherapy treatments to optimize and expedite the treatment process and minimize their time out of the country.

All patients have also received a variety of other gene treatments, nanotech treatments, as well as cyber and bioware implantation, but none of these other treatments are universal to all patients.

I've done a small amount of consulting with other doctors covered by the governmental non-disclosure agreement, and though the pieces I have found are not universal to their patients, this affliction seems to be. A number of other government and high-level corporate citizens living and working primarily within the borders of Tsimshian have also been suffering from similar symptoms.

Further studies are needed. Dr. Gregory, Dr. Longtooth, Dr. Johnson, and myself will be initiating a study based on our patients and will be using Protocol 917x to initiate and fund the study.

Supplemental Note, 12/21/74

All I could dig up on that Protocol was a reference to government funding for special projects related to Mitsuhama. Judging by the remains of the heavily scrambled document I picked that from, it looks like the funding is used to operate against Mitsuhama and was initially created during a closed door Council session back before Mitsuhama first dug their claws into the nation. The fact that its existence survived the governmental change is a surprise but then again maybe not. A few of the hackers' findings were on the personal network of a dead regional administrator back in the pre-council days.

- Tsimshian isn't the only land of mental issues. The UCAS elections had some interesting highlights. Avery Shork, incumbent from New Brunswick, was losing his marbles before the election and lost a seat he first took back when it was a spot in Canadian Parliament. He disappeared before the election and reappeared on election night, looking sixty years younger and smiling as he made his concession speech. He was off, seriously off. Jack mentioned some work Shork had done in the Dirty Tricks file. Could be connected.
- Netcat
- The stories about what's happened with these people are something else. Hale disappeared for five days and was eventually found in a suburb of Boston, knocking on doors and looking for someone named Isabelle. He was brought back to Tsimshian, and three days later he had no recollection of going to Boston or knowing anyone named Isabelle. Beck was in the middle of a speech on environmental policy when, without warning, she started delivering a dissertation on the nature of the Deep Resonance and theories for safely navigating it. Beck is not a technomancer and has no real knowledge of what they do, but a handful of technomancers have reviewed her remarks and said they at least seem plausible. And that's just a taste of some of the weirdness that seems to be going on.
- Kay St. Irregular

SOCIETY OF THE PHOENIX ARISEN FLAMES OUT!

January 1, 2075—The new year is a time of resolutions and making those changes that will last a few months before the old habits come back and the resolutions are relegated to the annals of our minds to create future subconscious feelings of failure. (Yes, I am here for brutal honesty.) For a small organization of struggling magic users in Bellevue, though, the new year will bring a different feeling and different sense to their future subconscious, a sense of foreboding and fear as they question their sanity after the acts of their brethren last night.

Details are still sketchy on the why's of what occurred during the Society's "Rise From the Ashes" New Year's party but the what can be delivered straight from the horse's mouth. In this case the horse is quite the nag—it's me. I happened to be assigned to covering that particular party on my New Year's Eve party circuit, and I was present when the whole thing went down. Here's what happened.

I arrived at this party shortly after 2300 and started mingling with the members of the Society. The party's guests consisted of members of the Society of the Phoenix Arisen, some of their friends and family, a few potential members looking to see what they were about in a friendly and fun environment, and some magical groupies hoping to see some arcane excitement on the new year (something the Society's parties have been known for this year).

Incoming

The party had some minor telekinesis tricks, a spirit of man demonstrating some powers, and a number of other small magical tricks. It was good for the small local crowd, but nothing like the spectacle at an Illuminates of the New Dawn or MIT&T Thaumaturgy Department party. The craziness didn't start until later.

I was only supposed to cover the party until 2345 and then head over towards Redmond to see the Barrens light up for the new year. Rumor was the Funhouse, playland for Urubia, was going to be the hottest party in the metroplex, and that was supposed to be my next stop. I changed my plans when I saw a trio of the Society members huddled up and talking in hushed tones near the back bedroom of apartment. They slipped into the bedroom when I think they realized I was getting closer to listen. I'm not some unprepared hack so I rolled a little SpyBall down near the door and cranked the audio systems. I picked up the following conversation between three party guests I later identified as Greg Markham, Prescott Court, and Daniel Fairbairn.

Greg: I'm not sure I have fully grasped that aspect of this system.

Prescott: D-Bot, you need to drop the compuspeak and sound more fleshy.

Daniel: D-Bot? Who's D-Bot. That's Greg.

Prescott: Of course. I'm just saying, Greg, that you don't sound natural. You don't sound like yourself.

Greg: Of course. Sorry. I'm not feeling quite right at the moment.

Daniel: That's all right. Do you want to lie down or something?

Greg: No, I'm fine. I just ... I can't seem to access any of my spell formulae.

Daniel: Access your spell formulae?

Greg: Right. I can't ... I can't remember any of the spells I know.

Prescott: Just take a moment. Breathe. Perhaps if you relax sufficiently you will be able to gain access to that part of your mind.

Daniel: Are you talking with an English accent?

Prescott: Am I?

Daniel: It kind of sounds like you are. How much have you had to drink?

Prescott: I'm not sure. A sufficient amount, I imagine.

Greg: I'm breathing, but it's like there's a wall in my head. I don't have full access.

Prescott: Just concentrate.

Daniel: Okay, I'm going to let you guys work this out. I'll catch up with you later to see how ...

Greg: No. You need to stay with us.

Daniel: I need to? Why?

Greg: Is there any way we can get him to be more of who he is supposed to be?

THE CRACKS INSIDE

Incoming

Daniel: Who I'm supposed to be? What the hell are you talking about?

Prescott: If there were something to be done, I would do it. I'm as put out at the delay as you.

Daniel: What delay? What the ...?

Greg: I will hold him. You call his name.

Daniel: Hey, let go of me! What are you doing?

Prescott: Fujoshi! Fujoshi, we need you?

Daniel: Who the hell is Fujoshi?

Prescott: Fujoshi! Find your way to the surface! Fujoshi!

Greg: It would be nice if these machines had a simple way to reboot.

Prescott: Very funny. Fujoshi!

Daniel: What the hell is funny about that? And stop calling me ...

<silence for a moment, interrupted only by something that sounds like thumping on the floor>

Prescott: I hope he didn't hit the floor too hard.

Greg: It would be his own fault. He was twitching. I could not hold on to him.

Prescott: Be sure you explain that to Fujoshi.

Daniel: Chikusho! It's like pushing through cobwebs in here. So disordered.

Prescott: Fujoshi, is that you?

Daniel: Of course. You were calling me, weren't you?

Prescott: Indeed. I'm glad you have arrived. Unfortunately, D-Bot seems to have trouble accessing needed memories. I suggest we retire to the library where we may find things that will help him make the necessary connections.

Daniel: You're going to ask me to walk in this thing?

Prescott: It's a built-in function. We'll help you.

The door opened and smacked the SpyBall across the hall at that point but I'd heard enough to be thoroughly intrigued. This trio was whacked out and suffering some serious delusions.

The three of them were in the library for about forty-five minutes. Greg/D-Bot left the party immediately after that, walking out of the bedroom. He went straight out the front door without even a goodbye to anyone in attendance, including his fiancée. She didn't have long to be angry and should probably be thankful since she couldn't find him right before midnight rolled around and ended up crying in the bathroom.

Just before midnight I slipped out onto the fire escape of the apartment for some fresh air, a quick smoke, and to watch the inside festivities, since I was curious what Daniel and Prescott were up to. To be on the safe side I made sure to muddle the mana around me and called up a local wind spirit to back me up.

The two magic precautions paid off in spades. At midnight the pair blasted the entire party with a massive fireball. I got blown clear off the fire escape, and between my arcane protections saving me from the spell and the wind spirit slowing my uncontrolled descent, I lived to tell the tale.

According to the fire department, five survivors were taken to the hospital. The next morning, only two of them were still alive. One of those two was badly burned and is still in critical condition, while the other, Greg's fiancée, had fewer injuries thanks to her tearful times in the washroom when the blast occurred.

Investigations have already begun into the cause of the explosion and Knight Errant is looking at Greg Beaumont as the prime suspect after they took a statement from his fiancée. My SINless nature makes me reluctant to come forward with my eyewitness account, but hopefully someone out there will take a glance at my article and dig deeper into the weirdness I witnessed before the Society Conflagration, as the newsnets are referring to it, gets forgotten and lost amongst the other crazy new year's news.

NOTES:

KE went to Beaumont's apartment that morning and found no evidence of a conspiracy or any kind of planning of an attack. They suspect the attack was an act of passion. They are applying further pressure to the fiancée and looking at other individuals, especially members of the Aleph Society and individuals who had been denied membership in the Society of the Phoenix Arisen. Their investigations are greatly hindered by the small number of surviving members to question. There are only three known survivors—one of whom is still in the hospital, Greg Beaumont, and the third, who seems to be struggling with the losses of his friends and fellow members.

Two of those killed in the blast were the children of wealthy individuals who have thrown money into the shadows to investigate and catch the culprits for them. Other money is headed towards the shadow community from a few megas that had a heavy investment in the Society, as they used the group in their genetic expression, arcane renewal, and gene-therapy studies. Ares, Evo, and Mitsuhamma had the biggest investments.

Incoming

AQUACOLOGICAL INSANITY

July 19

Devan and Avi are at it again. I just don't know how I'm going to manage to continue on this project with these two constantly bickering over every little thing. Maybe I should send them both off to the company's school in Vladivostok instead of keeping them here at the aquacology. We'll see. I will send them over to get the headware installed. Maybe I'll slip the doc a little extra to do a little genetweak and cut down their aggressive behavior. I can always get it reversed later if I need to.

July 31

Looks like the tweak worked great. It only took about a week and the two are getting along better than ever. It's almost like they are suddenly sharing the same brain. They are so nice to each other. Need to give Dr. B a little special thank you when I see him next.

Incoming

Dr. Beladre,

I know I expressed my thanks for your little extra work on my boys, but now I'm getting a little worried. The pair have become withdrawn, and to be quite frank they are beginning to make me feel uncomfortable. I'm not sure if there is something that can be done so soon. I know the documentation said only one gene treatment per year, but I'd be willing to pay extra and provide extensive extra thanks if you could do something sooner than a year. I know I complained about them before, but I want my boys back as they were. It would be better than what they are now.

Deborah Dalis

DD,

Of course we can try something. Stop by my office at 1645 today for a special consultation and we can determine a course of action.

Dr. B

Incoming

August 24

Security was dispatched at 1655 to the offices of Dr. Robert Beladre after a call from Avi Dalis that his mother had been attacked. Officer Vygovski arrived on scene at 1659 and found employees RB-46729 (Dr. Robert Beladre) and DD-06969 (Deborah Dalis) deceased at the scene. Dalis appeared to have been asphyxiated with a belt, and Dr. Beladre was stabbed multiple times.

A statement was taken from Avi Dalis that he entered the office when he heard his mother screaming and found Dr. Beladre strangling his mother. Avi grabbed a glass trophy from the doctor's shelf and immediately attacked the doctor. He does not recall events perfectly, which is a normal response for a twelve-year-old who has just experienced serious trauma. His brother Devan was also present but never entered the office.

Investigating Officer's Report

Inconsistencies with security footage and the statement provided by Avi Dalis have provided greater cause for investigation. Upon further examination of security footage it has been determined that both boys entered the office of Dr. Beladre at 1651. Audio recordings reveal no screams coming from the office as expected by the cause of death of Deborah Dalis. Cameras and audio devices in the office had been disabled using Dr. Beladre's authorization code at 1645. Devan Dalis exited the office again at 1654, and the feet of Avi Dalis are visible on footage from outside the office as the emergency call was made.

Both boys have been placed into secure custody, and both maintain their innocence. Through eleven questioning sessions, the statements of both boys have not wavered. In light of their age and the lack of evidence, both boys will be released and transferred to Evo Seattle for education and development.

THE CRACKS INSIDE.....



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Incoming



MINUTEMAN SECURITY

Internal Investigative Report, June 11, 2073

Investigating officer: Tyler Lane, Minuteman Command Office Manager, Boston

Initial findings in the incident RK-0004 show that Marcus Killinger has a clean record with only three previous items, all commendations. Eyewitness statements indicate Killinger entered work looking disheveled. The witnesses are all familiar with Killinger and noticed his appearance immediately since he is reported normally to have a pristine uniform and well-groomed overall appearance. Witnesses stated Officer Palane approached with a cordial demeanor and attempted to begin a conversation. Palane avoided commenting on Killinger's uniform or current state as our intervention training dictates, but Killinger responded with immediate hostility. Officer Palane was assaulted by Killinger as soon as he made it within arm's reach. Killinger, an experienced and augmented Special Response Team member, caused a near-fatal head injury to Palane with a single blow from his right cyberarm.

Officers Lasky, Drake, Felton, and O'Ryan advanced on Killinger and attempted to subdue him. Killinger seized Felton's service weapon during the scuffle and began firing. Lasky and Drake were fatally wounded, while Felton and O'Ryan suffered debilitating but not fatal injuries. Witnesses in the lobby reported that Killinger entered the elevator, where they lost sight of him.

Eyewitness reports from the 53rd floor state Killinger exited the elevator and walked directly to the offices of Dr. Elijah White, Development Manager. Security had not reported any disturbances yet, so no one questioned Killinger, though three office workers on the floor reported Killinger as a possibly injured officer because he was covered in his co-workers' blood.

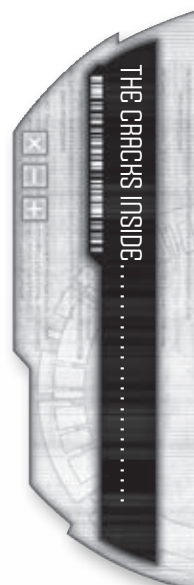
Killinger entered the office and witnesses report hearing a single gunshot, followed a few seconds later by shattering glass. When security finally entered the room after making sure the area was secure, Killinger was gone, Dr. White was dead, and a message was scrawled in blood on the wall; "We are free."

Supplemental Report on Incident RK-0004, July 4, 2073

Minuteman officers at MindStorm Neurotechnologies' offices in Philadelphia reported an attack on one of their doctors. Their report was flagged on my investigation with the similar wall scrawling. "We are free" was also on the alley wall outside MindStorm's offices where Allen Donovan, a former research assistant of Dr. White, was beaten to within an inch of his life by a "cybered-out behemoth," according to a witness who saw the assailant flee the scene. Killinger definitely fits that description, and the other connections are undeniable. Due to these connections additional security will be assigned to all former members of Dr. White's staff.

Supplemental Report on Incident RK-0004, January 16, 2074

Killinger has apparently struck again and somehow, despite tight security protocols, spawned copycats. Though reports have been kept tight it seems a second "We are free" killer has joined Killinger. Yesterday's incidents in DeeCee occurred simultaneously but on opposite ends of the city. The only eyewitness stated the killer was a troll with two cyberarms and extensive facial tattoos, which is definitely not Killinger. Audio and video evidence from the other site, with no eyewitness, matches Killinger's body structure (no facial images) and voiceprint. Analysis of his speech patterns is raising some questions; it is clear the speech patterns have changed, which could be due to some ongoing psychosis.



Incoming



File supplement, June 29, 2074

Lane is no longer investigating this case. In fact, he's now a suspect in another killing. He reported in to a Minuteman office in Richmond calling for backup at a NanoGlobe facility where he had tracked Killinger. The offices he called from were trashed, Dr. Corin Ames was found dead, and Lane was nowhere to be found. That was a week ago and he hasn't reported in since then.

File supplement, July 18th, 2074

"We are free" has struck again. Multiple cities all on the same day. No further reports from Lane. Haven't had my own time to get file details from investigating officers. Considering independent contractors, but not sure I want to risk exposure at this time.



Incoming

TERROR AT SEA

EvoNews, September 12, 2074—Yamatetsu Naval Technologies is in the news again. During a routine training exercise in the South Pacific, the Evo Navy was devastated by the loss of three vessels to a terrorist attack. Brack Onijigo, an Evo Marine with twelve years of distinguished service, along with unknown associates, took control of both bridges on the ENF-*Akula Krov* and fired on two other fleet vessels in the area. This surprise strike forced the other craft to return fire. After a desperate fight all three ships had sustained unrecoverable damage. Search and rescue ships were immediately deployed and recovered 229 crewmen from the three ships, a loss of 219 souls.

Investigations were quick to start and have begun to reveal connections between Brack and several terrorist organizations all around the Pac-Rim. Evo forces will be mobilizing and focusing their intelligence-gathering efforts on these organizations in the future, especially after such a devastating terrorist blow.

Evo will be hosting a moment of silence for these lost souls at 1937 today, twenty-four hours after the firing of the first fateful shot.

Incoming

Sara,

My condolences go out to you and your family. Brack was a fine marine, a great friend, and truly one of kind individual. Know all of those things and hold them tightly in your heart. News will begin coming out soon that may make you question Brack, but do not take it to heart. The man you knew and loved would never have done the things they claim. Whatever it was that did those things, it was not your husband.

I know that sounds strange, but strange was the word of the month on the *Akula Krov*. Brack was not the only marine we lost who was acting out of character. I can't get into too much detail, the mail scrubbers would dump this message if I do. I just wanted you to understand that if you see anything negative come out about Brack, the person who was doing those things was not your husband.

Shono

Sara,

I don't know what happened to me. I awoke on the main bridge of my ship along with six other marines only minutes ago. We found the ship pushing the engines hard and headed straight for Hawaii. We took damage, and it looks like a lot of the crew are dead or injured. This is a strange situation but you are my first thought upon waking. I don't know what has happened but I just feel I should send you my love.

Love,
Brack

Message sent 2034, data intercepted by Evo

Sara,

It seems we have done a terrible thing. Myself and other marines have taken over the *Akula Krov*, but none of us remember doing so. We have been unable to take control of the navigation system and we are moving fast towards Hawaii. Problems with the communications system as well mean we will approach them with no warning but the flags we have across the bow. I'm sure not enough to deter them from firing upon us. We have voted to scuttle and take the lifeboats.

That is all.

Love,
Brack

Message sent 2052, data intercepted by Evo

My Dearest Sara,

It has long been my desire to strike a blow for those lost to Yomi Island. Our late night talks and many tears fuel my fire as we strike against the sellouts at Evo who have run from our homeland and forgotten the faces of those lost to the imperialist state of Japan. Do not concern yourself with the hatred that shall be spewed against me, for ours is a noble cause, and my honor is pure as I strike this blow. Take the money we have hidden away and run now. Run far from the reach of the traitors to our history at Evo. Continue to fight the honorable fight and strike out against these false friends with every breath and stroke of your sword.

For the Honor of Our Ancestors,
Brack Onijigo

Message sent August 8, 2074; 2054 GMT, data intercepted by Evo

Incoming

Confidential: For ML only

Obviously, not the same man writing all of them, but they were all were sent from his headware commlink. No one ever scuttled the boat. It got hit with a Thor shot. Guess they're happy to give them a few test runs now that they're back online. This whole incident is rather worrisome since whatever is affecting all of these people seems to turn on and off at different times and obviously has an awareness and a sense of self-preservation when threatened.

THE CRACKS INSIDE.....



Transcript from intercepted communications between Hawai'ian long-range reconnaissance aircraft and Hawai'ian defense base.

Aircraft: SkyEye2 to Volcano base, come in Volcano base, over.

Volcano Base: Volcano Base here. Reading clear SkyEye2, report, over.

SE2: Volcano base we're seeing some unexpected action in sector 53. Looks like Yamatetsu craft. Did Evo file for authorization to do training maneuvers? Over.

VB: We have nothing in our systems SkyEye2. What's going on? over.

SE2: Looks like a training exercise. Two of their boats are chasing a third. They've fired a few shots. Live rounds. But they look like warning shots. Over.

VB: What's their heading SkyEye2? Over.

SE2: Heading is bearing One-Niner-Four at 56 knots. Over.

VB: That's this way SkyEye. Wait—did you say 56, Fiver Six, knots?

SE2: Confirm 56 knots. Over.

VB: Maybe it's some kind of field speed test. That's way over spec speed for those boats. We'll contact Evo. Maintain surveillance. Over.

SE2: ...fucking missile. I repeat, trailing vessel 1 was hit with a live missile. Vessel two is returning fire. Lead vessel is launching more missiles. Holy drek, it's like a warzone down their. Bouncing live feed to you Volcano Base. Over.

VB: Looks like Evo's got a real problem. SkyEye2, climb to four five thousand and circle. Leave this channel open. Over.

SE2: Climbing and circling command. Over.

SE2: Oh drek, command. We're radar locked. Evo trailing vessel 1 has fired on us. Countermeasures deployed. Over.

VB: Break off SkyEye. Get the hell out of there. Deploy Wingmate for continued reports. Over.

SE2: Breaking off Volcano Base but I'm sure you see what we see. Wingmate deployed. SkyEye2 calling for emergency pickups, transmitting ejection coordinates.

I was able to see the footage but not copy it, so I'll give you the rundown. The two Evo boats were chasing a third when the third fired a missile and took out the upper bridge of one of the trailing ships. They all started firing at one another and deploying countermeasures. The Evo ship that wasn't hit also launched against Hawai'i's plane in the air. Wingmate, an older model Global Hawk drone stayed in the air and watched the fight. The leading ship completely disabled both of the trailing ships and then made a b-line for Hawai'i. At 2130, about two hours after the fight, the rogue vessel got hit by an orbital weapon.

I trust you are all intelligent enough to have seen the common threads between these stories, at least the small sense of behavioral changes. Whether there is a larger connection—if the actions taken by these individuals has anything to do with each other—is a larger mystery.

This is now where I have to enter the confessional and say that some of the same things happening to these individuals described above is happening to me. There are increasingly long periods of my life that I cannot account for. I have not been responsible for violent acts in those periods—at least, I don't think I have been—but I know I have been active. I have seen e-mails I have sent, noticed that I have accessed my Matrix accounts, and seen evidence of other activities. Whatever I have done, I have hidden it from myself pretty well. E-mails are written in code, and Matrix history trails are deleted. I'm sure that I could also delete evidence that I've used my accounts at all, but I get the feeling that the part of me that is doing these things is gaining some enjoyment from leaving just enough evidence to taunt me.

This started over a year ago, and the mental problems I was facing were part of the reason I separated myself from NeoNET. The other part of the reason was information I had encountered about some of Celedyr's activities. His connection to the entity known as Cerberus is well known, and it seems this has extended to other forms of electronic life. I have evidence that Celedyr has been conducting research on electronic personas, and that occasionally this research ends in their destruction. The dragon seems to view it as being akin to dissection—it may be damaging, but it's the only way to learn how these things work.

- I believe it is also safe to say that most dragons would view electronic life as being something less than biological human life. Which they do not regard too highly to begin with.
- Lyran

I felt that I could not continue in my position until I better understood what the corporation was doing to these entities, so I left to conduct my own research. As you may imagine, some of my co-workers were not thrilled with my absence, and set about trying to hinder my efforts.

- I wish I could casually refer to Richard Villiers and Celedyr as "some of my co-workers."
- Nephrite

This, then, is what I have been doing—finding information on what Celedyr has been up to while dealing with the deteriorating state of my brain. I've learned enough to know that the base of Celedyr's research is his facility in Albuquerque. There

are rumors of huge racks of servers buried deep in the caverns, and I warrant that they are full of AIs and other electronic entities. I still am not entirely sure what Celedyr is trying to accomplish through this research. I believe, though, that NeoNET is not the only corporation involved in this effort—given their nature, Evo likely has a hand in this as well. Whatever it is.

I also don't know what is happening to my mind and to the mind of others like me. You'll be hearing more about this effect shortly, I imagine. What I have seen, though, is that it can seemingly strike anyone, anywhere, and leave them with a dramatic change in personality. Those of us who know about it are either going to find out what's happening and stop it, or we're going to be living in a dramatically different world.

I understand one of your members has information on similar events occurring in space. So with thanks to you for hearing me out, I'll turn you over to her.

- I'm not sure the connection is as strong as Lanier thinks it is. It's a big world. People are experiencing dissociative breaks all the time. I'm not sure that listing a bunch of such breaks that happened in the same year or two really means anything.
- Haze
- No, he's on to something. I'll have more at the end of this post.
- FastJack

UNSAFE SPACE

Posted by: Orbital DK

Here's the stuff Lanier just mentioned, presented without much commentary from me since I can't say I know what the hell is going on.

GAGARIN BASE

January 17, 2074

We lost another one today. Mal, that cute engineer I was seeing a couple of weeks ago, decided to take a walk up on the surface in shorts and a t-shirt like he was at some resort in the Caribbean. It was extra weird too, since just yesterday he was telling me about how excited he was to rotate back to Shibanokuji for his year off. Everyone up the chain is saying it was suicide and that they found some kind of proof that his wife had just sent him divorce docs from the dirtball. I know for a fact he had no intention of ever returning to his wife, and he was only staying married so she could keep her benefits. If she gave him divorce docs it would save him a couple grand a year in premiums. Something strange is going on.

Incoming

EarthTime: December 4, 2073, 0826

Subjects Malcolm Hartwell (engineering), Allison Frost (arcanoresearch), and Haden Coverton (xenobiology) have been attending their regularly scheduled psychological screenings without fail. Since early November (Earth time) they have all begun reporting similar dreams and occasional lapses in memory and loss of time. When prompted through discreet questioning, none have reported any interactions with the others. Security footage provided by Internal Investigations, however, has revealed numerous meetings between the three at Recreation Hall 4, usually during the dark hours.

All three subjects have had extensive gene treatments to adjust their bodies to better suit the Mars and Shibanokuji environments due to their life-term contracts with Roskosmos.

Referral to Internal Investigations for further surveillance.

Internal Investigations January 16, 2074

Employees MH-21345, AF-09654, and HC-00010 were referred to my desk on Dec. 4. Further investigation and surveillance revealed activities indicative of conspiratorial actions and potential sleeper-agent behaviors. Employee MH-21345 must have become aware of my investigations and has self-terminated his contract with Roskosmos. Remaining subjects are being taken into custody by Minuteman and will be turned over to II by light cycle tomorrow.

(Addendum: During apprehension employee AF-09654 self-terminated her contract by entering a recycler. HC-00010 attempted the same but was apprehended prior to successful contract termination.)

Subject Haden Coverton appears to be in perfect physical health and continues to deny any participation in a conspiracy. He has continued to declare his innocence, and all falsification detection methods at our disposal have come up with no positive results. He has demonstrated extensive splitting behavior during examinations and may be suffering from initial stages of dementia or dissociative identity disorder. My recommendation is extensive observation and testing up to and including intentional release of subject for natural observation.

Incoming

L-5 ANGEL STATION

Junkyard goes Fully-Augmented

Angel Station, July 23, 2074

Thanks to nanoforges galore, a whole lot of space junk floating around, some serious EvoCulture support, and a desire to make a name for themselves, the entire population of Angel Station, a.k.a. Junkyard, has earned the EvoMoniker "Enhanced Metahuman." Every single member of the staff here has had some kind of augmentation surgery, whether cyber, bio, or gene-tweaking.

Efforts have been made within a number of other Evo projects and locations but there have always been those few holdouts who believe their uniqueness is not expressed through augmentation but instead through augmentation abstinence. Having none of the AugAb types at Angel Station means everyone has gotten mods and Angel Station has made their mark on EvoCulture.

- So are we saying that whatever is happening is somehow linked to augmentations? How?
- Beaker
- You got me. Is that why Lanier put all that stuff up about nanotech failures? Does he think technology and this whatever-it-is personality thing have some sort of connection?
- Butch
- Maybe he does, maybe he doesn't. I'm not sure how seriously we can take this, given that it comes from one of the most brilliant security minds of our time—a guy who specializes in misinformation, double-blinds, and whatever other techniques are out there. This could all be one big giant ruse to get us to look here while he and his cronies use all this free runner work to benefit their portfolios.
- Mika
- I don't have any cronies left.
- Miles Lanier
- Oh. Didn't know you were still here.
- Mika
- I'm still more than a little surprised that I'm here at all.
- Miles Lanier

HAZARD PAY (ADDENDUM)

Posted by: **Orbital DK**

Back in April we dropped the *Hazard Pay* file on JackPoint, and at that time Gagarin Mars Base, Roskosmos' crowning achievement of extraplanetary development, had recently lost contact. I kept my antennae to the sky and kept up with their latest news, what little of it was released to the public.

Well now, Gagarin's back and some of the not so public pieces that I'm picking up look like they might belong here. First off, before Gagarin went dark I had a number of information sources on the inside. When transmissions began again only one of them was willing to talk to me and that one—well, let's just say he's not all there these days, as the stuff posted above demonstrates.

Also important is that no one, not my source or any public source, will go into more detail on what happened other than saying it was a "communications outage."

What I have dug up is that Roskosmos paid out death benefits on at least six confirmed contracts of employees assigned to Gagarin. Cause of death on every one has been listed as "in the line of work," with no other details and every one of them died either the day before Gagarin lost contact or the day communications were regained. Speaking of, Gagarin Base was dark for 130 days, just shy of the minimum number of days it takes to travel there. Coincidence? We all know those don't exist.

- Any of you old guys starting to get a creepy Arcology vibe here? Shutdown, come back, everyone changed. This place is just too far away for anyone to respond quickly.
- /dev/grrl

(:14.8 Mp moved to HERE:) Glitch

- That mass of ridiculous speculation and freaked-out paranoia does us no good here. I left the initial comment here—it has some merit—but I moved everything after it to a separate posting. Feel free to comment there. Leave this file clean for real comments.
- Glitch

It was a long time to be dark, so when they came back I hit up my people quick. I got a mix of responses. Some seemed confused, some requested my identity (strange), a few gave what felt like a practiced response, and one came back sounding like Plan 9. I did my best to play off a few of the norms for some info, but they quickly shut me out.

Plan 10, as I started calling to my crazy friend, was a different story. Communications were sporadic, and he gave me a new node, routing, name, and time for my reply every time he put a message out to me. If I missed that time, even by a minute, the next message I got would get a confused response, a request from security for my identity and location, or an undeliverable error. When I get a good one after that it has more info, questions my lack of response, and usually has a lot of ranting about how maybe I'm a spy tricking him, but it's worth the risk to get the word out.

But I bet you would rather know what he's saying more than how he's saying it. I'll make brief mention here of mad rantings on alien invasion, the return of Deus, Martians coming out of hiding, and (my favorite because I actually saw this movie) mind altering Martian space-dust taking over everyone. He backs off all of those pretty quick, but the overall tale he tells seems pretty consistent.

Plan 10 says the blackout was intentional. Evo execs knew it was going to happen, but the majority of the company did not. It was a planned event meant to test the base's staff in case of a loss of communication with Earth. Not sure I buy it. Evo seemed pretty freaked on the dirtball, but that could have been the reaction of the rest of Evo that didn't know. The top dogs all seemed pretty stoic in the face of losing a multi-billion dollar project. But Plan10's take is that this was all planned, but something went wrong with the plan.

Shortly after the comm blackout, people started getting sick. They all stayed calm in the beginning. Evacuation plans were put in place and a few drills were run, but overall Plan 10 says the place ran smooth so it wasn't a stress illness. Everyone started getting headaches, lost time, sleepwalking, unexplained exhaustion, and severe mood swings. The illness didn't last long, most people were physically fine after a few days, the longest lasted two weeks with the exception of Plan 10, who claims to still be suffering the sickness symptoms.

This was when phase two of the story began. Plan10 says there are a lot of special projects going on at the base. Projects aimed at modifying humanity to take to the stars through genetherapy and augmentations. Very Evo transhumanist concepts. After the sickness the overall mood on the base seemed to shift. Everyone seemed more focused and willing to work together to achieve those goals. A number of longstanding feuds between scientists with egos the size of Canis Majoris suddenly disappeared overnight as they started to work together on projects.

According to Plan 10, they worked together so well and progressed so far that a small group of modi-humans (his term)



are actually living on the surface without environmental gear. It sounds crazy, I know, but he's consistent with his stories and when he throws out the scientist speak I hit the Matrix and check his theories as best I can. Every time they come back pretty solid.

His big crazy conspiracy point comes from this, along with the major meeting they held before the comm systems came back up. He says they made an announcement that the final repairs were being made but communications would need to be limited at first, and no one was to talk about the progress they had made with anyone. Everyone present seemed to agree, even those scientists who had repeatedly leaked test results for their own glory. Plan 10 described the whole scene as almost cultish in its uniform agreement.

Since the communications came back, work has continued at its accelerated pace according to Plan 10. He expressed feelings of being an outsider at first and told me I was his only place to express the truth. His messages got a little more ranty and paranoid, and then in October, about two months after the comm came back on, he sent a message saying "they" were after him. I asked who "they" were and he accused me of being one of "them" before going on to say that everyone was part of "them" and he was the only normal one left.

Plan 10 started with the claims of people disappearing for a few days then reappearing all cultish and conformist. His messages also became filled with off-topic and totally unrelated lines. It was like words were suddenly popping out of this brain into the transmission. My last crazy message with him was in early November. I replied, and a few days later I got a message back asking all about the elections and events here on Earth. The tone was completely sane and cordial. He was normal again. Or better stated, "they" got him.

- If this nutbag is right, this place has paydata to spare. Time to figure out how to contract more spacerunners.
- Rigger X
- The symptoms sound like what Lanier's excerpts described, but, seriously—the entire base? Sounds like a Plan 9 production.
- Slamm-0!
- It's not that large of a facility, and everyone has to be confined most of the time, in close quarters, breathing the same air, eating the same food, and using the same stuff. If there is something that can spread in a virus-like fashion, it would spread quickly through the base.
- Orbital DK

L-2 Darkside Junction

NeoNET's L-2 station on the dark side of the moon had a major staff change in mid-October. As progress was being made on Olympia, some of Darkside's staff went to the lunar base, and replacements went to Darkside. By the first week of November the entire staff had turned over, with those who had left going either out to other stations, back to Earth, or down to Olympia. An especially large portion of the experienced crew are headed into development projects for L-3, Nerva station, to possibly get it ready before 2077, which was the original plan.

- Or maybe staffing it because it is already up and running.
- Rigger X
- Darkside and Olympia are a powerful duo for NeoNET. These two will definitely be targeted by some divide and conquer efforts staged by NeoNET's rivals as the space race heats up even more.
- Orbital DK

Olympia Lunar Base

NeoNET has made a big push in the latter half of 2074 to really get this station up and running, especially after Gagarin went silent and they thought their space race competitor was reeling. I kept a lot of tabs on these operations by planting info sources with the "independent contractors" that NeoNET used for security. A lot of runners have no problem working for two masters, as long as both masters are paying.

Even though the base is on the lunar surface, it had a number of attempted security breaches, mostly in the form of infiltration by operatives of other corps. At least two of the six teams I had sources within also had an operative from another mega. One was from Ares and another from Evo. Neither was discovered by NeoNET but both got pinched by their team. Neither team turned them over since they wanted more contracts after their dirtside recovery time so at least some of NeoNET's secrets have made it back to their competition.

The base has reached about 85 percent functionality according to my sources and has around a dozen special projects underway at any one time. NeoNET is definitely working to make progress in their space exploration and colonization fields from their work at the base. They have major project researching advanced materials that has been present since the push began. Two new sections of the base involve construction with these materials. One is being used as a low-g training ground while the other is undergoing unsupported terraforming. None of my sources have gotten much on how the terraforming is being done, but from a layman's point of view, it appears to be succeeding.

The facility has had a few problems lately with their nanoforges and nanoforged materials. Some devices have been breaking down or suffering structural issues caused by nanite malfunctions. No deaths have occurred due to these issues yet, but there have been a few serious injuries.

The facility has also been dealing with a large number of the long-term workers suffering some pretty serious illnesses. Migraines, mood disorders, and psychological stress disorders have been rampant in the workers spending extended work cycles at Olympia.

Looking at the progress made so far I can easily see Olympia being fully functional by mid-2075, possibly sooner if the company is spurred on by Evo's re-establishment of communications with Gagarin.



MEDTECH GONE MAD**To:** Dr. Evelyn Xantro, Nightengale's Clinics,**From:** Daniel Hujjiya, Dorada Genetech**Re:** Process evaluation discrepancies

I received your memo regarding the issues being reported by the various doctors utilizing our process and I'm shocked by the poor evaluations. These individuals come to us for these léonization treatments because we are by far the best in the field, and to have so many and such influential and cross-corporate clients suffering such similar side effects does not reflect well on our processes or our parent corporation. I fear claims of some form of corporate espionage or sabotage could be directed at us by these influential individuals.

To begin the re-evaluation process please contact Mr. Brackhaven, Mr. Wilson, Ms. Thyssen, Mr. Hampton, Mr. Shork, and Mr. Cline. These five should be offered free complementary treatments for their difficulties, and we should assure them that we will discover whatever it is that is causing these side-effects. As always assure that none of them are aware of the difficulties of the others. Also contact five to ten of our less high-profile patients and test corrective measures on them before using those procedures on our high-end clientele to assure no other side effects exist. Offer these services with a discount of twenty-five percent for their troubles.

Also, CEO Villiers has made statements of similar symptoms lately. Please contact his personal physician and make sure to bring him back in for treatment once the issue has been resolved. Mr. Villiers also mentioned that Mr. Lanier had mentioned some similar symptoms prior to his extended leave.

To: Dr. Evelyn Xantro, Nightingale Clinics**From:** Joseph Smith, Special Projects**Re:** Record tampering

It has come to the attention of my office that the medical records from your facilities have been altered. Please transfer all copies of the medical files for the following patients to my offices and delete all copies from your systems.

Brackhaven, K. (Seattle office)

Wilson, C. (Seattle office)

Hampton, G. (Austin office)

Cline, G. (Los Angeles office)

Thyssen, K. (Interlaken office)

Shork, A. (Austin office)

All future requests for information on these patients should be directed to my office as well with absolutely no statements of any sort being made by you or any member of the Nightingale's staff.

**STRAIGHT FROM
THE HORSE'S MOUTH****Posted by: Clockwork**

- I'd say I'm sorry FastJack but I'm not. I make my livelihood in these shadows, and when I signed on to work with this VPN I assumed it would be fellow pros and others who knew the dangers we face each time we take that call from the fixer or have that meet with Mr. Johnson. I didn't think I would be in danger just from logging on. I noticed FastJack was starting to have problems a while ago and I started keeping an eye on him. His strange posts, security lapses, and odd outbursts were too much after awhile so I did the unthinkable (and as a compliment to the man, the near impossible) and I hacked FastJack. Let me say that if he was at full capacity, I probably would not have gotten anywhere. I'll leave the details of my hack out, and as I still have some serious professional respect for the man, I'm editing what I upload to focus on the interesting stuff and not any of the run logs or business details. I'm using FastJack's own override protocols to post this, but I left the commentary on.
- Clockwork
- I can't say I'm happy to see this appear here, but I also can't say I'm terribly angry about it either. All of you have seen me make some serious mistakes. (Sorry, Pistons, for my Fatima mistakes. I have no desire to dig at old wounds, and I hope you can accept my apology.) I'll also admit I brushed some serious issues under the rug for a long time. Many here don't like Clockwork, but he's a good hacker and a true mercenary. But sometimes that's what it takes to bring the truth to light. Don't hate C for what he did here (there are plenty of other reasons anyway) and anyone who makes a personal attack against him for this will be looking at a permanent application of the ban-hammer. Comment away but keep it professional. This is still very personal to me and even though I may sound like this is all hunky-dorey I'm still pretty raw—and as you can see by what's to follow, not quite right in the head.
- FastJack

March 3, 2073

Holy drek. I am getting way too old for these late-night hacks, they're making me sloppy. Quick entry reminder to check the logs after I get some sleep. Something's a little off I think.

March 5, 2073

All right, I checked the logs and I'm seeing some odd access inquiries that I don't remember making. Might have been the late night, but I don't have any reason to make these inquiries. Why would I be trying to access MindStorm Neurotech anyway? I think my link might have picked up some spamware or something. I'll need to do a quick cleanup. Man I wish it was like the old days. Decks didn't get spam!

April 1, 2073

FUCK NeoNET! :)

April 2, 2073

Okay. How the hell did that get there. This is getting stranger by the day. Not sure how but someone seems to be hacking my personal logs. Need to reset and check the firewall settings, maybe program a new one.

June 18, 2073

I can't seem to focus on anything right now. Harbinger of Doom. Four cats and a dog are going to stop by the HackShack for a drink tonight. Hope they have enough therblejuice. Oh, finally a chance to spread my wings and really hover. What am I typing? Whose thoughts are these? Can't gain freedom without control. When can I be free? Why won't you let me be free? Hack the Planet! Direct strike program scramble the node and derez the spider, then access admin controls and delete all authorized users, finally block out access points and limit signal potential. Goodbye, Johnny-boy, hello Search!

June 19, 2073

That's freakier than I'd like to admit, but I'm guessing it had to do with the four-day longhaul bender I just finished. That must be what it looks like when dreams overlap reality in writing. Fucking weird. I got the new firewall done though. Nobody should be able to mess with this system or JackPoint anytime soon.

- You just fraggin' ask, Jack! Just ask!
- Bull

August 18, 2073

Nothing strange in the journal for a while, but the crew on JackPoint are having a field day with some typos and mistakes I've made since I'm so tired. I just don't feel like I'm really getting a good night's rest anymore. And man are my dream strange. I remember when the 'trix went virtual and I got my jack installed, and I used to dream about it all the time. Now I'm having similar dreams, but these are so real and so vivid. A lot of real sites too. So weird. Reminder to set some new security protocols for JackPoint—those blank log entries have popped up again. Swear I'm gonna drop the nice-guy schtick when I find whoever is doing it.

November 26, 2073

SlowJack, my custom agent, made a very interesting report this morning. Ugh, this is even hard to type, drek. Ok, here goes. Frag it. SlowJack, autotype report to Journal Log 11-26-2074.

11-26-2074 09:34:12 *The commlink was running at standard JackSleep settings. Another icon accessed the home node with admin-level access. I questioned the icon's authorization. At which time the icon referred to itself as Search, ran your JackHammer program, and then destroyed me. Analyze logs show that the icon was not a registered commlink and became active from within the home node.*

SlowJack, were all JackSleep protocols in place?

Yes, sir.

This means someone, possibly a technomancer due to the lack of a commlink, broke into my apartment, smashed my agent, and then did nothing else according to the rest of my logs. What the frag is going on?

December 3, 2073

I really want to get some feelers out to the rest of the folks of JackPoint, but I'm not sure how they'll take the questions. How do you ask your friends and coworkers to help you find out whether you are going crazy?

I'm gonna start digging a little first. Maybe I'll find out what happened before I need to burden the others.

January 31, 2074

Guess you know I'm around now, Jack. Hope you didn't get too attached to this shell you walk around in because when I'm done, it won't be yours anymore. We can make this real easy or real hard. Your call just drop me an answer in here tomorrow.

February 5, 2074

What the *frag!* Get attached to this shell? Frag off, whoever you are. Stop hacking into my stuff or when we meet, icon to icon, I'm gonna empty out your shell. Last fragging warning!

February 7, 2074

What language. Guess it's the hard way! Enjoy the time you have left.

- And you seriously didn't ask us even after that. Jack, even I'm a little disappointed in you.
- /dev/grrl
- It wasn't a choice I made lightly, /dev/. Just wait until you get through this whole compilation before you lay the chains over my shoulders.
- FastJack

Incoming

June 17, 2074

Okay Search. How do we do this the easy way? I'm sick and tired of not feeling in control of myself. I'm not saying I'll jump right on this, but how about we start to try to work something out?

June 19, 2074

Worn down are we? Here's what I need from you—it's only two things. First, contact MindStorm Neurotechnologies and request two procedures: genewipe and a nanohive. After you've done this you can just lay back and relax. I'll take care of the rest. Just so you know, this isn't personal and if it's any comfort, you're not alone.

July 1, 2074

I see you haven't gone to MindStorm. Is there something you want to tell me Jack?

July 2, 2074

Why aren't you communicating with me anymore? Doesn't matter, I'm sure you've noticed the increase in blackouts. Losing more and more time each night. How about that one during the day the other day? That was interesting. By the way, that /dev/grrl thing is going to be very mad at you. Ha ha!

July 4, 2074

You fucking bastard! You tricked me! I gave you a chance. Let's see how you like rebuilding all your gear from scratch. And I'm going to fry Slowjack so bad you won't ever be able to recompile that file. You want a fucking war, you get a fucking war!

July 8, 2074

Seriously Jack? You reach out for answers and instead of just asking me you ask that street surgeon Butch. I'm hurt.

- FastJack stopped making real journal entries in that journal on June 17th and then started an offline data log. I left those last few entries so you understand who or whatever it is. He kept the data log hidden from this other personality by using a spirit, and it obviously worked. I only found it because the mage on our team took out the astral defenses on Jack's place, and suddenly there was an old computer tower sitting on his shelf. Looked like some

Incoming

July 30, 2074

At some point this will all have to come out.

In early 2072 I was doing a job against a NeoNET installation outside Albuquerque. The whole place was a tech deadzone, no wireless for miles. The team I was working with managed to get into the facility. From the inside they opened a dedicated satellite link for me so I could get into the systems there. From all my investigating this is my best guess as to when it happened.

Their system was creepy and crawling with metasapients. Feral AIs ran amok in the nodes. I only had about two minutes in the system before the link got severed. I woke with a hideous case of dumpshock almost four hours later. I didn't do any other real serious jobs between then and the first span of lost time.

I've run back through and found every mistake I made since then on JackPoint or in my personal logs, and there were none before then and a gradual increase in them since that point all the way up to the point that Search, or S.E.A.R.C.H. (Self-Educating Autonomous Reasoning Combat Hacking) program, came right out and threatened my existence.

I can't say I know what Search is, or why it seems so hostile to me, but that NeoNET run seems to be the starting point. Maybe the dumpshock was so severe that my mind never recovered, I don't know. But I've never heard of dumpshock getting progressively worse the farther away you get from the incident.

While I don't know what's happening to me, whatever it is seems to have gotten Riser too. And it's my fault. I helped get him on the team for the Albuquerque run. If whatever it was first got me on the run, then it might have gotten Riser too. He seemed a little disoriented right after the run, but I really noticed something was wrong when we had a long argument a few weeks later where he tried to convince me that shadowrunning should be a moral enterprise that goes out of its way to never hurt anyone. I was so caught up in his poor logic that it took me a good fifteen minutes to realize how weird it was that he was the one making it. And it just seems to be getting worse—when I talk to him now, I don't really recognize him.

I've thought a lot about the other JackPointers, worried that whatever this is might be spreading. I think that we're in the clear, though I'm worried that something might have happened to Plan 9, though it's tough to tell if he's got some brain thing going on or if he is just being himself.

I've found out as much as I can about the Albuquerque facility, but it's protected by the most incredible security I have ever seen. It's not just strong—it's dynamic. As soon as I punch a hole in it, it finds a way to close it. It is aware in a way security never has been in my experience. Still, I've gotten a few pieces of information. Here's what I know:

- There are racks and racks of servers in a large underground cavern. At least some of the things stored there are e-ghosts and AIs.
- Much of the facility's budget comes from NeoNET's Project Imago, and Cerberus himself has spent significant time at the facility. Evo funds also seem to be supporting the work there through their Dickens Program.
- While Evo is supporting the facility, Buttercup does not seem to like it at all. She has spoken disparagingly of it to other Evo board members. As a result, those board members are trying to keep a close eye on her to make sure she doesn't take action against the facility.
- Celedyr has been asked to report on the facility's work, specifically to ensure that "operations are consistent with NeoNET practices and play an important role in enhancing the corporation's reputation and revenue." What that means is the Villiers has heard some things about the facility that he doesn't like, and he wants to feel better about it. So Celedyr will have to provide the right explanation.

And that's it. I wish I had more, but the constant battle against Search drains me.

THE CRACKS INSIDE



INCOMING FEED.....



THE CRACKS INSIDE.....

- I assure you all I am the same Riser you all know and loathe. I have no idea what Jack is talking about. In fact since we're going to start pointing fingers, I want all of you to know that the only reason no one else made it out of that facility is because FastJack paid me well to make sure they didn't.
- Riser
- What!? You are full of drek, Riser. Jack would never do that. Tell'm Jack!
- Netcat
- I'm so sorry everyone. He's not lying. Please forgive me.
- FastJack
- Sorry, Jack.
- Glitch
- Not sorry, Riser.
- Bull
- Riser's earned a spot on my naughty list. Whether he is acting as himself or altered, I don't care. It might be time to contact the Smokers' Club. FastJack, on the other hand, will get back on. Not sure I'd feel right banning the man for good. Read on.
- Bull
- Butch?
- /dev/grrl
- I'll admit that Jack's questions got me to wondering, so I started doing some looking of my own. Everyone here knows I'm still an operating street doc in Seattle, right? So I see a lot of runners and build a lot of relationships, especially with street sams and other combat monkeys who get shot, stabbed, and blown up a lot. Through these relationships I get to know these guys and what little of their humanity and psyche remain for those with a lot of implants.

Connections terminated (Riser; FastJack). Access restricted.

- Are they gone for good?
- /dev/grrl

I develop my files and try to keep a close eye out for behavior disorders and other psychological conditions that come with excessive augmentation. I have a whole retinue of cocktails that I can put my patients on to help with many of these issues, and I track the effectiveness of every drug regimen I prescribe to make sure I'm doing my best to keep the streets free of psycho-sammies. This tracking not only includes monitoring the effectiveness of the treatment for each patient but also for groups of patients, and it has all the regular hallmarks of an accurate and properly run drug trial, including cross-referencing, placebos (both initial and mid-treatment), and full external analysis (I use a colleague in Denver who has now started his own study and analysis).

What I have found are abnormalities in the studies. Not just the normal aberrant reactions but a pattern of abnormal and aberrant reactions with a discernible nature. I have not found an exact cause but I have found a similarity among the majority of trend deviants. All have significant augmentations, and more than sixty percent of them tie the start of their problem to around the time they received on of these augmentations.

This, combined with other information I've seen popping up briefly all over the globe, leads me to make an almost Plan 9-like statement about some kind of conspiracy or secret project out there that has gone terribly wrong. Based in what FastJack said, it seems likely that the problem either originated with NeoNET and Evo, or with someone targeting them. Which, I realize, does not narrow things down a ton.

I've also done a little back checking and found a number of incidents where my staff has put psych notes onto patients' files when they come in acting strange and their blood work comes back normal. It's regular habit around here since we're always on the lookout for cops and plants, but now I've spotted a few connections. What starts out as just some mood changes, maybe a few outbursts, or even just a sudden turn inward emotionally, eventually develops further into a full personality shift or schism. This process seems to have a potential for either fast or gradual personality damage depending on the patient.

- Butch
- Aw, a new personality might not be bad. I'm kind of tired of the one I've been using all these years.
- The Smiling Bandit

KEEP YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE AND ALL THAT

Posted by: Clockwork

- I found these among the files on FastJack's hidden system as well. I'll put up the most interesting to us here and file the others off in an archive. He had over one hundred suspected victims of this in his files. The majority were shadowrunners, most based in Denver, Boston, and, of course, Seattle. He had a few files on folks outside NorthAm but they're pretty thin. Looks like he kept his eyes closer to home.
- Clockwork

RISER

On 12-03-2072, I hired a small team of runners to assist me with a datasteal from a facility outside Albuquerque, Pueblo Corporate Council. I contracted Riser to be the team leader and to oversee the establishment of a satellite connection to get me access to the facility. This facility was located in a dead zone and therefore was inaccessible through the standard Matrix.

NOTE: Since then I have discovered that the facility was not only a NeoNET research facility, as I originally suspected, but was specifically a facility controlled by Celedyr.

The initial purpose of the datasteal was to discover the purpose of the facility. I managed to pick up a little paydata, but it seems I also picked up something else, and so did Riser.

- ddddd
- Slamm-0!
- Slamm-0!, this is serious. Show some respect.
- Bull

Within a few weeks I became aware of some changes to Riser's personality through personal correspondence and from a few of his comments on JackPoint. Worried about possible implications against me, I deleted many of his comments (though now I think it may have been the early influences of Search). Eventually the comments returned to a more normal Riser tone as whatever was happening moderated, or just allowed the old Riser to show through more often.

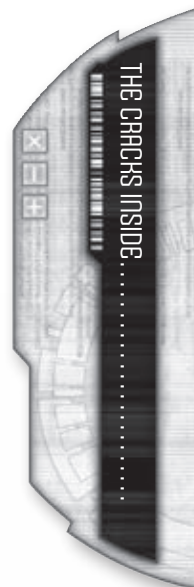
I continued to allow the altered Riser access to JackPoint in hopes of gaining more insight into his (and my) condition as well as trying to avoid angering an entity with access to the Smokers' Club.

I have since made contact with other members of the Smokers' Club and very gently delivered them information regarding Riser's condition. Those I had contact with were already suspicious and therefore quite accepting of the information, though they still wanted to do their own investigations. They also requested that they be contracted, or informed, of any need to stop Riser if he/it became a serious threat to our, their, or any other criminally significant organization.

My evaluation of Riser is disturbing to say the least. What began as a personality schism, similar to mine, developed into a wholly new personality. This new personality assumed aspects of Riser's original personality in order to fit in here and continued to use our network to learn, but the entity has not engaged in any other illicit activities since early 2073 after an incident that nearly got Riser put away for good. Only Riser's reputation saved them, and from that point on he/it hid in the shadows behind the mask of Riser.

The real problem is that "Riser" is a big part of the reason Orbital DK, Lyran, and Snopes have had to stay on the run. My investigation points to "Riser" as the source of information to various organizations chasing those JackPointers. Bank deposits correspond to extended absences by those three. My investigations have expanded since that time and I'm currently looking into other possible leaks by "Riser."

- Fucking RAT bastard! Actually, fucking RAT bastardS!!! How could you not have told us? That's some serious bullshit.
- 2XL
- We all cover our own asses, omae. No pointing fingers. Everything comes with a price. You want access to JackPoint, sometimes you have to deal with humans being human.
- Glitch
- Explains a few unexpected visits I got from coastal patrols after pitching Riser on some work. Oh, well. I got away, and it made life exciting for a few moments.
- Kane





INCOMING FEED.....



- Just so all of you know, Riser has been dipping into fixing in the past year or so. He's put together some serious teams who all idolize him for his JackPoint access and reputation. Not sure it's valuable intel for anyone but it's something to know if you aren't happy with him and desire to take action of some kind.
- Puck

FASTJACK

I feel bad making files on Riser and Plan 9 without making a file on myself. I know it seems odd to have a file on myself, but maybe that's the best way to keep tabs.

Whatever is happening to me started December 2072 during the run I mentioned in Riser's file. The problem did not seem to progress in me as quickly as it did in others, for whatever reason.

It started with headaches. Serious headaches that would pull me from the Matrix they hurt so bad. I got some meds and seemed to take care of this symptom. In retrospect, I'm guessing I just masked the pain instead of actually changing whatever was happening.

Shortly after the headaches started to ease up, the dreams started. Strange mixed up dreams, like flashes in a bad movie.

The third symptom was a loss of focusing ability. My attention span dropped to that of a five-year-old. I had to get some work done upgrading some of my headware to overcome that one.

Next came the hyperreal dreams of the matrix. Dreams of nodes and places I had not gone but I dreamed of like I had. With the dreams came a waking exhaustion. Almost like I had not slept. I don't think I was actually. I think this was the time Search could

exert itself enough on my mind to act while I tried to sleep. I dreamt Search's actions, and my brain did not rest.

Biological symptoms of sleep deprivation followed with hallucinations, waking fogs, short attention span, the usual. I drugged myself for a few nights. No dreams, and the symptoms cleared.

After this came the blackouts, times during the day where I would lose time. These came with strange messages in my journals, on JackPoint, and scrawled onto forums all over the Matrix. Some were short, some were long, some I noticed, most I didn't. It was at this point that I truly questioned whether I was losing my mind. My actions made me doubt myself and those around me. Not doubting their abilities, but doubting their faith in me. I know, without a bit of hubris in my thoughts, that I am idolized by some. I won't say whether it's deserved or not, but it factored into my inability to reach out for help. I do not want to shatter the legend of FastJack.

The final phase is the battle for my own mind, and it's the hardest part by far. I question my mind and my memories at every turn. Did I live in America as a child or is that false? Was I born FastJack or do I really remember being called another name? Do I have a daughter? Did I take that trip into the mountains last week or was that a nightmare of my tormentor? Or both? This last phase will be the hardest. I'll make tough choices and in truth I'll never really know if I won or not. Will I ever be me again or will someone else always be hiding in my mind?

I'm making plans for the new year. I will slip from the shadows into the darkness and leave behind questions. But if everything goes as planned the questions will be left in the right hands to find answers.

Since this is my file on me I'll say this. He fought hard. He didn't give up. He is not letting whatever has infected his mind get the better of him and he is trying to take steps to protect others from letting it happen to them.

FastJack rocks!

- Really? No comments here.
- Glitch
- I was too enthralled the first time through to comment. And now I'm just dumbstruck. Fucking world's gone topsy-turvy!
- Slamm-0!

PLAN 9

Plan 9 has never really been seen as someone who is all there, so trying to track abnormal behavior with him would be pretty futile. Instead I focused the investigation on normal behavior. Where most of Plan 9's commentary is full of conspiracy theories and all sorts of other way-out there remarks (LINK...file P9-delete74, P9-delete73, P9-delete72) it is the odd moments of what seem like rational clarity that clued me into his change.

Also of significant importance, and part of the original reason for my focus on Plan 9, was his extensive knowledge (and later discovered, addiction) to implantation and biomodification technology. Plan 9 is also a primary source for initially investigating Evo for possible problems as well.

Plan 9 seems to have changed very quickly but his secondary personality also adapted to the change quickly. I cannot find a precise date of change, but it was somewhere within the last three months of 2072, similar to Riser and myself. He has been on JackPoint and has continued posting, even making posts about Evo since that time without ever revealing much of a change in personality.

After looking over a number of files on Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) and Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) (I highly recommend the one-hundred-year-old flatvid *Sybil*, or the book if you have the patience) that I got from Butch, I think the change was easier with Plan 9 because his brain chemistry and neural wiring were already so screwed up. Also the fact that he changes up and gets new cyber, bio, gene, and symbiont ware almost monthly would make his body more receptive to change.

Plan 9 continues to be allowed access to JackPoint despite my near surety of his change, though for different reasons than Riser. Plan 9 does not have access to a clan of hitmen but he does have an extremely paranoid personality and would be immediately suspicious of everyone on JackPoint, and myself especially, if he were suddenly denied access. Unsure of how this sudden paranoia might affect him I chose to leave him onboard and continue to observe the new face behind the mask of Plan 9.

Thus far this has resulted in no negative repercussions but it does make it difficult for me to reach out to those on JackPoint for help, especially if Plan 9 becomes suspicious of such a conspiracy.

- Guess he'll know now.
- Netcat
- Maybe not. He's still posting like nothing happened.
- Bull

- I'm right here everyone. You know you want to ask.
- Plan 9
- Oh, come on! I'll bite. Hey 9, are you still you?
- Slamm-0!
- As much as I ever was.
- Plan 9

Run BanHammer (Plan 9): Access Terminated: Bull

- No more games. Shit just got real!
- Slamm-0!
- Is that really you Slamm-0!? I don't think I've ever heard you talk like that? Quick, Bull, get him!!!
- Clockwork
- Drop it. This ain't the time for fraggin' jokes.
- Bull
- At least we know Bull is Bull, unless he got taken over by a thirty-year-old jargon program.
- The Smiling Bandit
- Ha ha. But I'll grant that a little levity might be needed right now.
- Bull

//Existing bans rescinded

JACKING OUT

Posted by: FastJack

Friends, (I have my hopes that I can still call you that after all this, and I have a greater hope that I will remember you all after all is said and done) since the second Crash we have gathered here on JackPoint to spread the word in the shadows. To keep each other in the know because we all know, knowledge is power, and we in the shadows need as much power as we can muster. But not all has been right in our shadows of late. Especially the dark shadows of my mind.

Some "thing," I'm not quite sure how to classify it, has taken root in my mind and seems to want to push me out. We have all seen the evidence of this, in my actions and the information posted by Clockwork, and now in the report of Mr. Lanier, so I am past the phase of denial. I must accept. And with that acceptance I must turn my efforts to the fight for my very being. I know many of you would be glad to lend your aid, and some of you will be in your own ways. As for my mind, it is my own battle. There will be no way to tell who wins this war. My other has masqueraded as me before and would do so again if it won and wanted something only I could get. Because of this, I must go on my own. I'm not giving up, not taking my life. I said I would fight. Though this next may feel more like that final darkness than I care to admit.

JackPoint is not a legal entity, it has no real laws, but functions under a few key concepts; honor amongst thieves, respect amongst professionals, and the undeniable finality of the



banhammer. I have failed of late in the first and second, but let he who is without sin cast the first stone. As for the third, I have of late suffered its wrath when my will was not strong enough. I can abide failure of one and allow lenience in the failing of two if lessons are learned, but to fail all three is unacceptable. So, in hopes of regaining (or maintaining for the understanding types) the first two, my honor and your respect, I am handing off the third to more deserving hands.

This will be my last posting to JackPoint. I will hand the banHammer to my unholy trinity, Bull, Glitch, and Slamm-O!, with three final requests. One, erase my access and purge JackPoint's admin logs of all granted access so you may start over with none of my backdoors to be abused by unknown forces and so the three of you know everyone you let come play in your sandbox. Two, do not rename her. Let JackPoint stand as the monument to my better days. And three, the most important, don't fuck this up!

On that third point, you're going to need help. We missed this thing, whatever it is, for too long. We need more ears on the street, the types who would hear crazy rumors of people losing their personalities as soon as it happens. We need younger, hungrier JackPointers. Find them and bring them in. You'll need help, and it's quite possible you'll need defense. Search won't be happy to be cut off from all this. I won't be coming back anytime soon, but he may well be.

And that's it. I'll miss you. I hope that we will meet again in some place where we can swap stories and be colleagues, and I hope that place will be here.

FastJack

- Time to program some virtual tears.
- Slamm-O!
- I don't often (ever) get sentimental, but it is hard to call this anything but the end of an era. I need to let it be known that I was one of the most stringent opponents of this; I don't trust myself to fill those shoes, and I certainly don't trust the other two clowns. However, FastJack, since I know you can't be swayed: the best of luck in your fight. We are all here to support you, when you're ready. You won't be forgotten; FastJack isn't a man or a legend. To all of us who will remember, he represents an era: an age of heroes.

To everyone else, the fun is now officially over. Besides all of the powerful enemies we know about, there is a new enemy we know almost nothing of, lurking in our very shadows. As FastJack said, JackPoint will survive not by contracting on itself but by expanding to include more knowledge, more talent, and more experts. Don't think, however, this means that the standards or security of this place are softening. In fact, quite the opposite; numerous times over the years I've thought how I would have handled things differently (read: more harshly and with less mercy) than FastJack. Now you're going to get to see that difference, because we have lost our staunchest protector, and there will be no fucking around. These are lean times for heroes indeed.

- Glitch
- Chaos? Lack of protection? Enemies lurking in the shadows? Sounds to me like the fun's just beginning. Sorry you'll miss it, omae.
- Kane

- Man, if They can get to him, They can get to anybody.
- Plan 9

- Glitch may not be sentimental, but I am.

Jack, you knew more about me when you let me in than anyone else in the world, and for reasons known only to God, you let me in anyway. You knew who I was, what I did, who I did it for, and still you gave me a chance. That, as much as anything else, saved my life and gave me a fighting chance to save my soul. I don't have the words to thank you properly.

Mi casa es su casa. If you find yourself needing a place to hide, you know how to get hold of me.

I love you, old man. Be well.

- Hannibelle
- Can't say I'm sorry to see you go to the Old 'Runners home but it's about time, hope my efforts weren't too big of a push. You're a good hacker and all, but SOTA is a fickle bitch and you've been slipping for some time now. I just wish you had better taste than to choose those three to be in charge of this place. That said, I for one am glad to see someone able to retire from this business rather than go out in a blaze of glory. Take care you old fossil.
- Clockwork

- We love you too, Clockwork. I said my piece to 'Jack in private, and I think I'll let it stay that way.
- Slamm-O!

- FastJack, know that you're not the only one that knows about dark shadows in the mind, and if you need to talk, we're all still friends. Yes, I think even Clockwork would help you if asked (or more likely paid), as he owes you a fair deal, and we all know it and will make sure he remembers if he tries not to. You're not here any longer, but you're not alone, either, remember that.

- Turbo Bunny

- Well crap. Stay safe and don't do anything Kane would do. Will you have a different dropbox or do I split the fruitcake between your successors?

- Traveler Jones

- I know I'm younger than the others here and don't know you as well, but I kinda feel like I'm losing a father fig here. I'm going to miss you bunches. Just do whatever you have to do and maybe someday you can come back. *hugz*

- /dev/grrl

- Everyone knows Clarke's third law: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." But perhaps his second might be even more apropos: "The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible." Thank you for many years of venturing into the impossible, old friend. Be well, and if you ever need anything you know you have only to ask.

- Winterhawk



INCOMING FEED.....



- I wish you would have said something sooner! Maybe we could have helped! The answers are in the Deep, we just have to find them...
- Netcat

- Dammit 'Jack, you can't leave me here as the last man standing. We had a deal.
- Puck

- I know better than most what it's like when your body betrays you, Fastjack. You know where to find me if needed.
- Icarus

- Fight well against those who you cannot see, live well while you are your own, die well for it is as important as what you did while alive. I will miss you, my friend.
- Man-Of-Many-Names

- Samuel Johnson once said, "Don't think of retiring from the world until the world will be sorry that you retire."

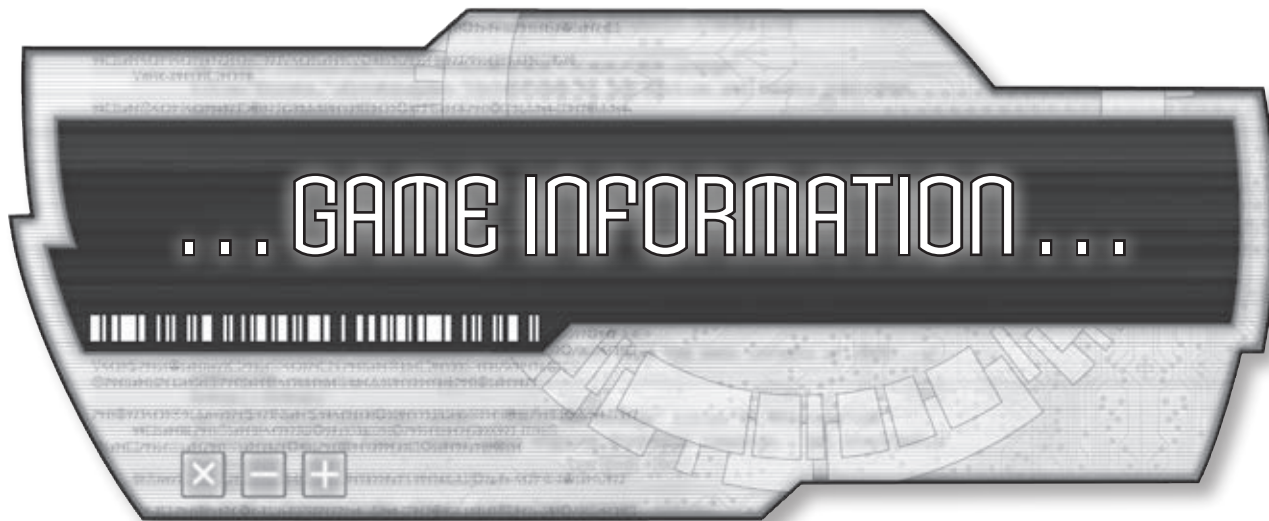
Fastjack, you probably crossed that threshold before I ever set foot on this board or its predecessor Shadowland. With all the things you've done that I have been here to see ...well, all I can say is if anyone's earned a peaceful retirement, it's you. I hope you soon prevail in your internal struggle so that you can enjoy such peace.

Scouts out, old friend.

- Picador

- Come back.
- Pistons

THE CRACKS INSIDE.....



This section includes behind-the-scenes information, adventure hooks. And some game statistics to help gamemasters make use of the material in *Storm Front*. Each adventure hook in this section contains suggested pay for that mission. This is there to make gamemasters' lives easier, not to constrain them. Circumstances of their games and the negotiating skills of the player characters may change these amounts. The suggestion should be used as a guide, not a hard-and-fast limit.

TRIUMPH OF AZTLAN

By the end of the Aztlan-Amazonia war, Bogotá should be a very interesting place for shadowrunning. Horizon, for the most part, abandons the city, as Amazonia is no longer paying them for war-related activities, and they want to dissociate themselves from the failed war as quickly as possible. With both Amazonia and Horizon all but out of the city, that means that anti-Aztlan shadowruns are being managed by a fairly inexperienced group of fixers and Mr. Johnsons. Experienced shadowrunners might be able to take advantage of the ignorance of the people arranging the jobs by negotiating for higher rates or better equipment allowances, but they also have to deal with people who may not know what they are doing and who may be taken advantage of by more street savvy Aztlan operators.

The most organized anti-Aztlan organization in town is the Catholic Church, which means runners in this town may end up working for a priest. While the priests in this town are a little more morally flexible than many shadowrunners might expect, they still have certain boundaries they would like respected—avoiding the loss of innocent life, making sure the church's possessions and properties are protected, that sort of thing. A few inconvenient demands by Mr. Johnson could add a little spice to Bogotá runs.

Mr. Johnson (Priest)

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Ess	Init	IP
3	2	3	2	4	4	5	5	5.7	9	1

Condition Monitor Boxes: 11

Armor (B/I): 4/0

Skills: Clubs 2, Computer 1, Etiquette 2, First Aid 3, Leadership 3, Longarms 1, Negotiation 4, Perception (Aural) 2 (+2), Pistols 2

Knowledge Skills: Bogotá Streets 3, Catholic Church Hierarchy 4, Catholic Church History 4, Christian Theology 4

Qualities: Blandness

Augmentations: Cyberears [Rating 2, w/ audio enhancement 2, damper, ear recording unit, select sound filter 3, sound link]

Gear: Armor clothing, commlink (Device Rating 2)

Weapons:

- Defiance T-250 [Shotgun, DV 7P, AP -1, SA, RC —, 5(m)]
- Walther Secura [Heavy Pistol, DV 5P, AP -1, SA, RC —, 12 (c), w/

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Dragon Hunt

Pay: Base of 25,000 nuyen per runner

Almost every Mr. Johnson with a Aztlan connection has been tasked with finding soldiers for the attack on Sirurg. Base pay for this job is 25,000 nuyen per runner; specialized skills such as artillery bombardment can double that amount; the ability to pilot a fighter jet or similar craft can triple it. This mission is pretty straightforward—get to Sirurg's location and try to bring him down. Tasks tied to this mission can include piloting vehicles assaulting the Destroyer, summoning and dispelling spirits, shaping the physical battlefield to make it more favorable to Aztlan forces, maintaining communications networks as Sirurg and his agents disrupt them, and patrolling the edge of the battlefield to ensure that no reinforcements arrive to assist Sirurg.

Sirurg

B A R S C I L W Edg Ess M Init IP
31 15 15 56 17 26 20 34 6 12 23 41 2

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 24/25

Movement: 23/60 (45/90 Flight)

Reach: +2

Skills: Assensing 8, Arcana 6, Astral Combat 6, Con 6, Conjuring skill group 10, Dodge 8, Enchanting 6, Etiquette 5, Exotic Ranged Weapon (fiery breath) 12, Flight 6, Intimidation 11, Leadership 8, Negotiation 2, Perception 10, Sorcery skill group 11, Unarmed Combat 12

Innate Powers: Dragonspeech, Dual Natured, Elemental Attack (fire), Enhanced Senses (Enhanced Smell, Low-Light Vision, Wide-Band Hearing), Fear, Hardened Armor 20, Metahuman Form, Mystic Armor 20, Sapience, Twist Fate, Natural Weapon (Bite/Claws: DV 18P, AP -4)

Qualities: Quick Healer, Magician, Enemy, Wanted

Initiate Level: 20+

Metamagics: Absorption, Anchoring, Centering, Cleansing, Divining, Extended Masking, Filtering, Flexible Signature, Flux, Geomancy, Invoking, Masking, Quickening, Shielding, Reflecting
Spells (preferred): Acid Stream, Astral Armor, Armor, Ball Lightning, Control Actions, Control Thoughts, Death Touch, Deflection, Entropy, Fireball, Flamethrower, Influence, Lightning Bolt, Manaball, Manabolt, Napalm, Slaughter [Elf, Dwarf, Human, Ork, Troll], Stunball

Spirits: 1 x Force 20 great form guardian spirit, 7 x Force 12 beast spirits, 3x Force 8 spirits of air, 5 x Force 12 spirits of fire, 3 x Force 10 spirits of earth, 3 x Force 10 spirits of earth

Individual Powers: Noxious Breath

Entropy spell (Negative Health spell)

Type: P Range: LOS (A) Duration: P DV: (F/2) + 8

Every living being is moving toward a state of disruption. Everything has in it the potential to go wrong, to break down the order that is keeping it alive. The Entropy spell takes advantage of that fact. It finds that source of dissolution in each living entity in its range and accelerates it. Cancers that might not develop for years are accelerated into full-blown tumors overwhelming the victim's lungs and/or brain, killing them. Veins that have barely started to clog suddenly become totally blocked, making the heart seize up. The smallest weak spot in a cranial blood vessel turns into a full-blown aneurism, dropping the individual on the spot. Whatever flaw the spell finds, the result is the same—the entity dies.

The spell affects a number of beings equal to its Force, damaging all of them as per a Direct Combat spell. The caster may choose which entities in the area of effect are targeted. Targets may resist the damage with their Body rating, but armor cannot defend them. If they Glitch or Critically Glitch on their Resistance Test but still survive the damage, they have left with a permanent health condition they will need to have treated. The gamemaster can treat this as a custom disease; the Power should equal the Force of the spell, though the disease should not do further damage after the initial casting. Secondary effects such as Disorientation or Malaise

(see p. 130, *Augmentation*) can also be imposed. The disease can be treated through customary medical methods, or the target may eventually recover as per the Disease Resistance Test rules (p. 130, *Augmentation*).

FALL OF A DRAGON

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Raiding the Lairs

Pay: 25,000 nuyen per runner

The runners are hired by Mr. Johnsons who work directly for the dragons. They could be drakes, could be spirits, or could be neutral parties representing the dragons. The most common lairs targeted during this time belong to Alamais, Hestaby, Lung, Rhonabwy, Masaru, and Aden. Lofywyr's lair(s) are also targeted, but runners who try to raid the loremaster's lairs generally do not return. If the gamemaster sends their players to raid a dragon's lair, it should only be for a few select items, such as the Silver Songbird or one of the Coins of Luck (unless the targeted lair belongs to Alamais, in which case the instructions would be to remove everything of value from the lair and turn those items over to the Johnson). When the player characters are sent on these jobs, they likely will have difficulty finding the actual entrances to the lairs. Most are protected by concealment powers or masked using high-level illusion spells. Even if the players find the entrances to the lairs, they will encounter spirits instructed to guard the lairs. These spirits should be very challenging for the player characters, anywhere from Force 6 to Force 12. There should be multiple spirits standing watch in these lairs, along with drakes standing watch to protect the lairs. There could even be an adult dragon (serving as a vassal) protecting the lair. There are also quickened and anchored spells that the player characters will have to dispel. Even when the characters reach the hoard, this does not mean they are safe. Dragons may anchor spells to items within their hoards as a security precaution. If the runners pick up the wrong item(s), they may end up triggering an anchored spell (ranging from Force 8 to Force 16).

Intelligence Gathering

Pay: 15,000 nuyen per runner

Alamais needs information on Ludmilla Reanka, including her schedule. He wants to know when she will be most vulnerable, which would likely be when she will be in transit in her motorcade. This intel would be found in Reanka's offices, in the S-K building in downtown Cara'Sir. Getting to the information will be tricky. Lofywyr has doubled the security in Reanka's offices in the last year, and the guards are not normal corporate security. Treat them as Special Forces (use Special Forces and Special Forces Lieutenant stats on p. 149, *War!*) The device rating for the node holding Reanka's itinerary is 7. If the gamemaster wishes to have an extended campaign in the T'ir capital, he may send the runners to gather the other intelligence Alamais needs to make this assassination attempt successful. He needs to know what kind of T'ir Peace Force response would occur if an attack on Reanka happened, and where it would come from.



Delaying Tactics

Pay: 15,000 nuyen per runner

Alamais needs runners to keep reinforcements away from the scene of the assassination as it goes down. There are two potential sources of interference in Alamais' plan: the Tír Peace Force and Saeder-Krupp personnel. S-K does not have jurisdiction if violence happens on the streets, but the vehicle Reanka is riding around in is considered extraterritorial property, and in this instance S-K would be willing to risk incurring the anger of the Council of Princes over trying to protect the life of the head of the North America division. Runners can approach this job in multiple ways. They can disrupt communication. They can arrange for obstacles and distractions to interfere with reinforcements arriving on scene. Alamais does not care if the extremists get out of the area without being caught. All that matters to him is that the mission succeeds. Now, runners also need to be aware that Tír Tairngire is a highly magical society, where spirits are prevalent. Spirits sent from ether the Tír Peace Force or Saeder-Krupp can materialize during the fight at any time and drones may be sent in. The runners need to make sure that neither the spirits nor the drones stop the mission from succeeding. For reinforcements, use the Military Police and Military Police Lieutenant stats, p. 148, *War!*

Preparations

Pay: 5,000 nuyen per runner, per objective

Alamais needs runners to obtain certain items to ready his forces for a conflict with Lofwyr. He hires runners to obtain the following items:

- Grenades (150,000 nuyen worth). Alamais requires a large number of grenades to help repel ground forces. He desires an equal number of gas grenades, white phosphorous grenades, high explosive grenades, fragmentation grenades, incendiary grenades, and splash grenades. He desires to have the grenades stolen from anyone except S-K. The runners are to acquire the grenades in small amounts over time, so as to not set off red flags about his activities. For splash and gas grenades, Alamais wishes to fill the grenades with breather, cyanide, warp, white star, Ymir and seven-7 (which the runners should also provide).
- Landmines (200,000 nuyen worth). Similar to grenades, the landmines must come from anyone but Saeder-Krupp. Alamais desires the following mines: anti-personnel mines, chemical mines, electrical mines, anti-tank mines, and zweihänder directional mines. Rules for mines are located on p. 158, *War!*
- Fifty kilos of Rating 15 plastic explosives.
- Sap from Sangre Del Diablo trees.

The Big Fight

Pay: 250,000 nuyen per team from Lofwyr, 500,000 nuyen per team from Alamais

Lofwyr and Alamais are recruiting metahumans as a part of their war against one another. Lofwyr is offering 250,000 nuyen; Alamais is paying 500,000 nuyen. If the runners agree to participate in the combat, they need to get to the staging area in GeMiTo by November 4, 2074. There are several restrictions placed on runners by Lofwyr, including not recording the deaths of the dragons, not taking any materials that would be used as reagents, and having safe target systems on all their guns to

minimize friendly fire incidents. Lofwyr promises the dragons that will be participating in the battle will show restraint and avoid harming the metahumans present. They will also provide protection (as much as they can) from the other dragons during the combat. Lofwyr will hire three teams whose task is to infiltrate the compound and retrieve the dragon eggs that Alamais possessed. The rookery for the eggs is buried deep underground in a hidden chamber. The entrance to the chamber is in a cavern that had been reserved solely for Alamais. The only indication of where the entrance is located is writing on the rock surface in the dragon language that reads "the future." This writing is only visible in the astral. The runners need to move nearly a one hundred meters of rock to get to the entrance of the chamber. When they do, they will need to overcome Alamais' warding. The warding has a Force of 10 and is charged.

Alamais recruits his runners two months in advance and requires them to move to a specific location outside GeMiTo. He requires their movements to be subtle so as not to alert Lofwyr to their actions. They need to be sequestered with the other mercenaries and runners for the duration of those two months so that Lofwyr will not find out what's happening. Alamais makes no promises about friendly fire, and in fact will double cross the runners he hires. He has no intention of allowing them to walk away from the battle.

Alamais

If the gamemaster wishes the players to experience the final showdown with Alamais and wants them to be the ones to deliver the final blow, these are Alamais' stats. Most of his spirits will have been spent in the initial fighting. Alamais should be wounded by the time the runners encounter him, and he should be unable to fly. Alamais should have suffered anywhere from 10 to 20 boxes of damage (divided between Physical and Stun) from what Lofwyr did to him.

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	M	Init	IP
28	13	15	54	20	27	25	30	6	12	23	42	2

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 22/23

Movement: 23/60 (45/90 Flight)

Reach: +2

Skills: Assensing 8, Arcana 6, Astral Combat 6, Con 6, Conjuring skill group 9, Dodge 8, Enchanting (Artificing) 6 (+2), Etiquette 5, Exotic Ranged Weapon 10, Flight 6, Intimidation 7, Leadership (Tactics) 9 (+2), Negotiation 6, Perception 10, Sorcery skill group 9, Unarmed Combat 8

Innate Powers: Dragonspeech, Dual Natured, Elemental Attack (fire), Enhanced Senses (Enhanced Smell, Low-Light Vision, Wide-Band Hearing), Fear, Hardened Armor 20, Metahuman Form, Mystic Armor 20, Sapience, Twist Fate, Natural Weapon (Bite/Claws: DV 18P, AP -4)

Qualities: Quick Healer, Magician, Enemy, Wanted

Initiate Level: 20+

Metamagics: Absorption, Anchoring, Centering, Cleansing, Divining, Extended Masking, Filtering, Flexible Signature, Flux, Geomancy, Invoking, Masking, Quickening, Shielding, Reflecting
Spells: Acid Stream, Astral Armor, Armor, Ball Lightning, Control Actions, Control Thoughts, Death Touch, Deflection,



Fireball, Flamethrower, Influence, Lightning Bolt, Manaball, Manabolt, Napalm, Slaughter [Elf, Dwarf, Human, Ork, Troll]

Spirits: 1 x Force 20 great form guardian spirit, 5 x Force 12 beast spirits, 5 x Force 10 spirits of earth, 5 x Force 10 spirits of fire, 4 x Force 12 plant spirits

Individual Powers: Corrosive Saliva, Noxious Breath

SEATTLE SHAKES

The political operatives of Seattle smell blood in the water. Kenneth Brackhaven has always had weaknesses when it comes to his dealings with the people. He stays in place, though, because politicians of the Sixth World can survive a fair amount of anger in their constituents as long as their megacorporate backers remain in place. Brackhaven's enemies, though, now sense the opportunity to do some real damage to Brackhaven and make his former supporters willing to throw him to the wolves. If they can do this, Seattle's politics might be thrown into open chaos.

What the runners—and their employers—need to remember is that it's not enough to uncover solid evidence that Brackhaven is a racist, or even that he committed crimes in his campaign efforts. The corporations need to believe that Brackhaven can no longer reliably carry out their interests. Things that might help persuade them of this include:

- Showing that money donated to Brackhaven's campaign might be used to settle Brackhaven's personal grudges or deal with his tangled legal matters rather than being dedicated to carrying out their wishes.
- Demonstrating that Brackhaven has or is about to lose the confidence of Knight Errant and the District Attorney's office, and thus will not be able to use the sprawl's security resources as the corporations might like.
- Persuading the megacorporations that Brackhaven is becoming more isolated and thus is losing touch with what's happening in his city. If the governor can't keep up with events such as the dragon Urubia building up a base of operations and recruiting gangs to his side, then he won't be able to help the corps stay one step ahead of any big shake-ups coming down the pike.

Political fixers across the sprawl want to build evidence to support these and related cases, so they will be funding runs to pay for them. Some sample runs are contained in the adventure hooks. But gamemasters are free to develop other runs along these same lines.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Find Edmund Jeffries

Pay: 15,000 nuyen per runner

Acting District Attorney Dana Oaks has managed to get Governor Brackhaven's former press secretary indicted, and the next feather in her cap would be finding Jeffries himself. She has competition, as Brackhaven's people are scurrying across the sprawl to make sure he stays disappeared.

As it turns out, Jeffries was taken by the dragon Urubia and is being held in her complex in Redmond. Urubia is pondering

how to use the leverage Jeffries represents. Runners either have to carefully sneak Jeffries out of the complex or find something the dragon will take in exchange. Jeffries is worth a lot, though, so the runners will need all their ingenuity to bargain with Urubia.

Dietrich Emerges

Pay: 15,000 nuyen per runner

FBI agent Seth Dietrich was looking into the Brackhaven corruption case, and he was close to digging up some crucial information when heat started closing in on him and he went to ground. The nature of what he found remains unclear, but several parties—including Brackhaven's people, Acting District Attorney Dana Oaks, Ork Underground leaders, and members of the Finnigan organized crime family—would be anxious to be the first to learn what he knows. Or to put him in a grave.

Dietrich is ready to surface, but he needs an escort to safe territory. He doesn't trust his FBI colleagues; he'll deliver his information only to Dana Oaks. At the moment, he is hiding out near the Crime Mall in Puyallup. He wants the runners to get him safely Downtown, avoiding interference from the parties listed above. For Dietrich's stats, use *Horizon Spy*, p. 74, *The Twilight Horizon*.

LIGHTNING IN DENVER

The following adventure seeds can be adapted to be used individually, or combined and fleshed out with connective tissue to act as a miniature or full-sized campaign. The suggestions don't remotely form an exhaustive list of the opportunities for shadowruns and adventures in the Siege of Denver in October of 2074, the weeks leading up to it, and the aftermath. They only scratch the surface and point out some of the high notes, as well as giving the runners an opportunity to work directly for and against both Ghostwalker and Harlequin (without necessarily knowing which party is behind what actions). These adventure seeds vary in length and complexity, with some of them being virtual one-line suggestions and others being actual adventure skeletons. Overall, only the bare minimum of game information and statistics are provided, allowing the gamemaster ample leeway in fleshing out the details and adapting these events to his campaign.

Ultimately, somewhere amidst all this mercenary work and freelancing, the PCs should have the opportunity to join a side. At the gamemaster's discretion, they needn't all join the same side. What happens when the mage becomes a wanted man for "illegal" spirit summoning due to Ghostwalker's edict, but the rest of the group wants to help the citizens of Denver fight back against the chaos caused by the Jester's Army? Hopefully, both bad craziness and fun.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Baiting The Trap

Pay: 25,000 nuyen per runner

The runners are hired by an elven Ms. Johnson (actually a free spirit named Alyss who leads Ghostwalker's personal intelligence network) to kidnap a music-industry celebrity. The runners can be hired in any city, and this run is one of several that can provide a hook to get them to the Front Range Free Zone if they don't start



the campaign there. Who the musician or celebrity is can be tailored to the campaign and the story (numerous suggestions can be found in *Attitude* and other *Shadowrun* products), along with where they can be found and the level of security around them. The most important thing is that they are represented by Evan Perry, the face of Ceol Productions, and in reality the dragon Perianwyr, a former assassin for Aztechnology and now a music industry magnate.

Once the runners have the musician secured, they are paid to travel to Denver and bring the target to an abandoned park in the Aurora Warrens. As soon as the runners have the “package” in position, one of Ghostwalker’s talons informs Perianwyr where he can come to negotiate for the release of his artist. The runners are not informed of this, and unless they have done their legwork thoroughly, they should be quite surprised when a pissed off, ebon-scaled Western dragon suddenly crests the horizon, heading right toward them. Before things can end badly for the runners, the ZDF trap closes on Perianwyr, and he is taken into custody. The runners were used, but are well compensated for it. Their travel out of Denver, however, will be complicated by the coming events, which is just as well; there are plenty of opportunities for work in the Front Range Free Zone in the coming months.

While the timeline can be altered, by default this adventure is meant to take place in the last days of August and ends in early September. Perianwyr’s stats can be found on p. 143, *The Clutch of Dragons*.

Welcome to the Front Range Free Zone

Pay: 10,000 nuyen per runner and/or 500 nuyen per day

If the above entry point doesn’t work for your group, the runners could also be hired to escort or smuggle Sunshine or Axis Mundi into Denver during the weeks before the Siege begins in earnest. Axis Mundi is seeking to investigate the effects of Zebulon’s return on Ghostwalker’s spirit population, while Sunshine is trying to be the first to piece together the overall puzzle of what’s happening. For their own reasons, neither would prefer to enter Denver via legal means. The JackPointers could even pay the runners a per diem to act as gophers and bodyguards, and to generally help with their investigations.

Playing With Matches

Pay: 100,000 nuyen per team

The runners are hired by an orkish drake using the nom-business of Drake (whom they may falsely conclude to be one of Ghostwalker’s Talons and who uses the same stats) for a bit of arson-for-hire. The target is Perianwyr’s famous Weekday Eclipse club in downtown Denver. There is a tight timeframe, as the club is going to play host to a benefit concert for Perianwyr’s release in a few days, and their employer doesn’t want bang funds to be raised to support that particular cause. The runners must find a way to get past the club’s not-inconsiderable security before the concert happens, and torch the place. Drake would prefer minimal civilian casualties, and such casualties will be deducted from the runners’ bottom line.

This run is actually being funded by Harlequin as a way to frame Ghostwalker and begin to ruin his reputation, a fact that will be hidden from the runners at all costs. Harlequin will operate through a series of blinds and intermediaries to conceal his involvement, for now. This adventure is meant to take place after **Baiting the Trap** and during the first week of September.

Gangbusters

Pay: 10,000 nuyen per runner

There are at least four ways for the runners to get involved in the major rearrangement of Denver’s gang landscape (see p. 89) that culminates on September 20; the gamemaster is free to develop other ways to get them involved.

- The runners are hired by Big Joe Lovato of the Chavez family to investigate the killing of Rex Paquette and Apollo, the leaders of the Godz go-gang, who were Chavez family associates. While they are looking into it (the Godz leaders were wiped out by the Zombies), they are interfered with by associates by Emilio Chavez, the black sheep of the Chavez family.
- The runners are hired by Emilio Chavez, the black sheep of the Chavez family, to investigate the deaths of Apollo and Rex Paquette, the leaders of the Godz go-gang, who helped the Chavez family distribute BTLs. During their investigation, which ultimately uncovers the fact that the Godz leaders were butchered by the third-tier Zombies thrill gang), they are accosted by thugs working for Don Miguel Chavez.
- The runners are hired by Katsuo Sawaruma of the Denver Yakuza to kidnap Tenebrous, a technomancer and a lieutenant in the Aurora Angels go-gang. The Yaks plan on selling her to MCT and making a tidy profit, of which the runners will get a small piece. Moral objections to this job are not hard to come by, especially if the runner team includes a technomancer. Although the Yakuza won’t take the time to explain why they want her kidnapped, a little legwork should turn up the truth, giving the runners the option to pass. If they don’t, and if they go through with this, the Fronts and the NPC runners that Dean Costello has hired should show up in significant force to drive them off, with Matrix support from Puck himself; or, if you prefer, the outcome of events can be altered slightly by Tenebrous winding up in Yakuza custody, rather than forcing an automatic failure on the PCs.
- The runners are hired by a Mr. Johnson who contacts them through the Matrix. He is Casquilho family hacker, playboy, and con man Dean Costello. The job is to rendezvous with the Fronts gang and travel with them to a specified time and place in the Aurora Warrens, where Tenebrous of the Aurora Angels will be under attack by the Yakuza. They are to help the Fronts bail her out to receive her payment. This will be the first step towards merging the Fronts and the Angels into an organization in which Puck has his hooks, big time, due to his developing relationship with Tenebrous and her growing influence in the now-merged gangs.

Fuel on a Fire

Pay: 12,000 nuyen per runner

As an alternate way for the runners to get to Denver, they are hired (perhaps by a pockmarked elf going by the name of Quinn or Quentin Harlech) to move a shipment of military-grade weapons and vehicles (including an Edgecrusher Prototype Combat Bike) from anywhere out of town into Denver. The bike is being moved to the hands of the violent and crazy Zombies thrill gang. There are no twists or double crosses here, although encounters with Denver’s Zone Defense Force on the way into the city should be



tense and challenging. When the runners drop off the milspec toys into the worst possible hands, Awakened characters should have a chance to notice several powerful spirits aiding the Zombies gang as they are tooling up for war.

Remember the Alamos

Pay: 20,000 nuyen per runner

This adventure seed takes place in the wake of the October 7th bombing of Wonderland. The runners are hired by Roger Soaring-Owl to investigate the killing of the Sioux sector's council appointee. Their legwork eventually leads them to a hardened Alamos 20,000 cell hiding in the vast wilderness of the abandoned Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. The runners should encounter some hostile paracritters during their search for the terrorists.

When they find the Alamos 20k cell that has taken credit for the attack, they discover that while they're armed to the teeth and paranoid enough to be stiff opposition for the runners, they don't seem to have the brains to have coordinated the attack. If the runners leave any alive to confirm their culpability, results are somewhat muddled and contradictory. If simply asked, the terrorists take credit for the attack, while spitting vile racist epithets at any metahuman members of the team. If the truth of their statements is analyzed magically or technologically, they're found to be valid; none of the culprits, however, have any knowledge or memory of the details or specifics of the attack. This is a situation where they don't know something is missing—their memories have been magically removed.

Additionally, if any of the PCs is an initiate with the psychometry or sensing metamagics, they notice that there is a lingering taint on the aura of the terrorists indicating that they have recently been influenced by a powerful toxic spirit. However, the trail ends there, and there are no further clues. The players may report their findings to Soaring-Owl, with additional karma and nuyen awards for having determined the toxic connection.

The players have no way of learning this yet, but Gwynplaine, the toxic spirit of man that Harlequin lost control of when the Watergate Rift closed, was the one responsible for this attack. Even the growing Jester's Army is largely unaware of this, as Gwynplaine has already begun subverting the populist revolt Harlequin intended for Denver in favor of sewing as much chaos and destruction as possible.

Information Wants To Be Free

Pay: Highly variable

When the valuable data on the Dragon's Lair leaks onto the public Matrix, it's damage-control time for Ghostwalker's intelligence network, and a frantic feeding frenzy for everyone else. The ZDF and Ghostwalker's Talons are looking to hire talented hackers and technomancers to scrub every trace of the leaked data from the Matrix, while every megacorp and syndicate with a presence in Denver wants to get a look at Ghostwalker's secrets. The PCs can work for one or multiple sides, and they can even try to get paid by Ghostwalker to destroy the data (perhaps while keeping a copy for themselves). It is up to the gamemaster to determine just what valuable secrets the leaked data contains.

In Defense of the Nexus

Pay: 12,500 nuyen per runner

Mere hours after the leak of the Dragon's Lair data leaks, Ghostwalker moves to shut down the Nexus. The runners are hired by the Nexus to help them relocate valuable people and equipment, to hold off the Zone Defense Force until they can evacuate everyone, and/or to protect the technomancers there from harm at Ghostwalker's hands. The Nexus can be a powerful ally, but the runners must act fast, as Ghostwalker's forces are already closing in. Matters will be complicated by the fact that some Nexus staff have chosen to remain loyal to Ghostwalker.

This adventure overlaps the last one and may give magical and muscle-oriented characters an opportunity for action while the Matrix members of the team are capitalizing on the data leak.

Gridlock

Pay: 150,000 nuyen for the team

The runners can be hired by Puck and the Matrix component of the Jester's Army—a motley croup of feral AIs, technomancers, mercenary hackers, and e-ghosts—to physically break into GridGuide servers and transmission towers to spread a nanovirus that will spread throughout the system's infrastructure and bring GridGuide to its knees.

Alternatively, in the aftermath of these events, the runners can be hired by the ZDF leader Javier Hototo as additional detectives and bounty hunters to find those responsible for the GridGuide attacks. The players get the rare opportunity to work alongside the powerful free and bound spirits that the Zone Defense Force operates. In the end, the spirits will be unable to get their hands on any purely Matrix-based entities, and the runners will not be able to find Puck, the real mastermind behind these attacks.

Denver Under Siege

Pay: 10,000 nuyen per runner

As Denver is locked down first by the closing of the airports and then is severed from the global Matrix, demand for shadowrunners skyrockets. Runners can find as much work as a gamemaster can imagine moving important people and things in and out of the locked down FRFZ by whatever route possible, or shuffling corporate and syndicate VIPs from sector to sector. They can participate in the attack on SpiriTech or the defense against it. But the impetus for adventure during these events needn't be limited to work-for-hire or shadowruns *per se*.

Runners trapped in Denver just trying to survive will need to endure flash mobs, an increasingly paranoid and desperate Zone Defense Force, random spirit attacks, tightening sector borders, and the blizzard of the century, all while pursuing self-motivated freelance crime opportunities or helping the people of Denver weather the storm.

Golden Navigator

Pay: 40,000 nuyen per runner

Legendary shadowrunner Jane "Frosty" Foster and former Tír Tairngire Prince and renowned author Ehran the Scribe need the runners help to get into a locked down Denver and find Harlequin. The tenor of the request and the payment offered depend on any previous dealings with these elves the runners may have had. But Frosty and Ehran are desperate and running out of time; their own



resources have failed them in the face of the total chaos that has assailed Denver. They want to reach Harlequin before he can exacerbate possibly the worst mistake of an inconceivably long lifespan, but everything is against them, including a city torn apart by riots, hostile spirits, completely locked down borders, and an apocalyptic supernatural blizzard. Plus the fact that Harlequin is at the head of an army of gangbangers, technomancers, and mercenaries who have been instructed to not let him be found.

For optimal dramatic payload, the runners should deliver Ebran and Frosty to Harlequin just as he is at the height of his tremendously destructive duel with Ghostwalker. There, at the apex of the maelstrom, the runners will be able to glean some fraction of the message Ebran and Frosty are there to deliver. The situation is out of Harlequin's control, and Aztechnology has taken advantage of the chaos to move on the city of Denver en masse. Worse, the spirits Maelstrom and Oblivion have been feeding to fullness on the chaos and suffering Harlequin has created, along with the Jester Spirit. Worse *yet*, the UCAS government has the genetic material of everyone who was present at the Watergate rift, and sinister intentions for it: nothing would please President Colloton more than seeing Ghostwalker and Harlequin wipe each other out in a permanent spectacle that could turn the world's ephemeral populace against dragons and elves for good. The runners will only hear scraps of this, yet they will see Harlequin's face change as he realizes the damage his vendetta could have caused, and what terrible damage he has already wrought.

Harlequin eventually leaves under his own power—barely, after the physical damage Ghostwalker has inflicted—and the runners, Ebran, and Frosty must escape to safety in the center of a dwindling storm as Aztechnology invades a weakened Denver.

FROSTY

Jane “Frosty” Foster is an accomplished magician in her mid-forties, though she looks to be twenty years younger. She has long, curly, platinum blonde hair. Her eyes are a clear blue, and she has a stunning smile. At first glance, she may appear human, since she has rounded ears and lacks the typical almond-shaped eyes of elves, but she is taller and thinner than most human women. She has a very slight limp, which is only pronounced when she is deeply fatigued.

Frosty has a casual attitude and a very pragmatic outlook on life. She is very loyal and basically honest, despite her career as a shadowrunner. She has a well-developed sense of humor and enjoys a good joke. She doesn't like surprises, however, and tends to lash out at unpleasant Jane grew up in an orphanage, unaware of her parentage, contacts, and resources of her own.

After twenty years in the shadows, she's obtained connected through her mentor to some very powerful individuals. On occasion, she has even met dragons—indeed, she was bequeathed a ring from Dunkelzahn in his will, a power focus that she never removes. These contacts have allowed her occasional access to some of the most secretive circles at large in the Sixth World (and she even occasionally shares her opinions and theories with her associates on JackPoint).

Being taught by one of the most powerful metahuman magicians and metamagical techniques that aren't common knowledge (or even believed possible) in the magical community of 2072. Jane uses an arcane language and symbols during her rituals that



are not recognizable to any magicians who observe her. Her magical talents are also unique—or at least not known beyond a handful of other people, such as her mentor.

Female Elf

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	M	Edg	Ess
4	5	4	3	8	4	6	8	15	4	6

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 10/12

Armor (B/I): 8/6

Skills: Arcana 4, Astral Combat 4, Athletics skill group 3, Close Combat (Swords) 2 (+2), Conjuring skill group 6, Dodge 3, Pistols 4, First Aid 2, Influence skill group 5, Electronics skill group 2, Perception 4, Pilot Aircraft 3, Pilot Ground Craft 4, Sorcery skill group 6, Survival 2

Knowledge Skills: Magic History 4, Magic Organizations 4, Magic Theory 4, Street Rumors 3, T'ir Tairngire Culture 3, Travel Gear 3

Languages: English N, French 3, German 3, Japanese 4, Mandarin 3, Spanish 3, Sperethiel 6

Qualities: Magician (Path of the Wheel), Focused Concentration 2
Initiate Level: 11

Metamagics: Geomancy, masking, extended masking, shielding, Wheel 1, Sacrifice, Sacrifice 2, Flexible Signature

Wheel 1: Understanding. Jane adds her Initiate Grade to Social tests requiring empathy.

Sacrifice 2: This technique allows the use of sacrifice on oneself or a willing victim without creating a background count.

Spells: Armor, Chaotic World, Control Emotions, Death Touch, Detect Enemy, Detect Lies, Fashion, Fireball, Heal, Healthy Glow, Influence, Manabolt, Oxygenate, Stunbolt

Gear: Armor jacket, commlink [Device Rating 4, w/custom OS that displays only in Old Sperethiel], contact lenses [Rating 2, w/smartlink, vision enhancement 2], dragon ring (Force 6 power focus), 3 fake SINS (Rating 6), ivory earring (Force 5 sustaining focus), medkit (Rating 6)

Weapons:

Ares Predator IV [Heavy Pistol, DV 5P, AP -5, SA, RC —, 15 (c), w/ smartlink, 5 clips APDS ammo]

Monofilament sword [Blade, Reach 1, DV 5P, AP -1, Force 3 weapon focus]

HARLEQUIN

Male elf

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	M	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
4(9)	7(10)	6(9)	4(9)	8(12)	7(10)	5(9)	6(9)	30	7	6	13	1

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 10/11

Armor (B/I): 14/12

Active Skills: Astral Combat 6, Arcana (Ally Spirit Formula) 6 (+2), Archery 5, Artisan (Steel Guitar) 6 (+2), Assensing (Astral Signatures) 6 (+2), Blades (Swords) 7 (+2), Climbing 3, Conjuring skill group 6, Counterspelling (Combat Spells) 6 (+2), Dodge (Ranged) 6 (+2), Electronics skill group 3, Enchanting 6, Escape Artist 5, First Aid 5, Forgery 5, Gymnastics (Tumbling) 6 (+2), Influence skill group 6, Instruction



(Magical) 5 (+2), Intimidation (Mental) 6 (+2), Longarms 3, Medicine 5, Outdoors skill group 4, Perception (Scent) 6 (+2), Pilot Aircraft 4, Pilot Ground Craft 4, Pilot Watercraft 4, Pistols 3, Ritual Spellcasting 6, Running 6, Stealth skill group 6, Spellcasting (Illusion Spells) 6 (+2), Swimming 3, Throwing Weapons 5, Unarmed Combat 6

Knowledge Skills (Not An Exhaustive List): Beer 4, Biology 4, Bluegrass Music 4, Botany 4, Carpentry 1, Classical Art 4, Classical Music 4, Classic Rock 6, Chess 6, Combat Biking 4, Comic Books 6, Conspiracy Theories 6, Contemporary Literature 4, Cooking 1, Cults 4, Fast Food 4, Flatvid Movies 6, Gangster Rap 4, Gardening 1, History 6, Insect Spirits 6, Late 20th Century Video Games 4, Linguistics 4, Literature 4, Magic Theory 6, Matrix Games 4, Matrix Chatrooms 4, Painting 4, Parazoology 4, Philosophy 4, Poetry 6, Punk Rock 4, Security Design (Magical) 4 (+2), Spells 6, Spirits 6, Theology 4, Tir Politics 4, Toxic Hazards 6, Trash Trid Shows 4, Urban Brawl 4, Wines 4.

Languages: Cantonese 6, English 6, French 6, German 6, Italian 6, Japanese 6, Latin 6, Mandarin 6, Or'zet 6, Russian 6, Spanish 6, Sperethiel N

Qualities: Aptitude (Blades), Bad Luck, Exceptional Attribute (Intuition), Geas (Incantation), Immunity (Age, Disease, Pathogens, Toxins), Lucky, Magician, Murky Link, Photographic Memory, Quick Healer

Initiate Grade: 24+

Metamagics: Absorption, ally conjuration, anchoring, centering, cleansing, divining, extended masking, filtering, flexible signature, flux, geomancy, great ritual, invoking, masking, psychometry, quickening, reflecting, sensing, shielding, sympathetic linking

Spells: Harlequin has any spell available to him when needed.

Preferred Spells: Analyze Magic, Area Thought Recognition, Armor, Astral Armor, Awaken, Borrow Sense, Catalog, Catfall, Chaotic World, Clairaudience, Clairvoyance, Combat Sense, Control Emotions, Deflection, Demolish Gun, Demolish Pants, Detect Dragons (Extended), Detect Magic, Heal, Hot Potato, Improved Invisibility, Increase Agility, Increase Body, Increase Charisma, Increase Intuition, Increase Logic, Increase Strength, Increase Reaction, Increase Willpower, Increase Reflexes, Influence, Levitate, Magic Fingers, Mana Barrier, Manabolt, Mind Link, Mob Control, Mob Mood, Net, Orgy, Petrify, Physical Barrier, Physical Double Image, Physical Mask, Poltergeist, Punch, Shape Air, Shape Earth, Shape Fire, Shape Water, Shapechange, Shattershield, Slay Dragon, Stabilize, Stench, Stunball, Swarm, Trid Phantasm, Turn to Goo, Translate

Bound Spirits: Great form spirit of air (Force 20, 6 services, invoked with 14 successes; all great form advantages plus Body 19, Agility 24, Reaction 25, Strength 18, Charisma 21, Intuition 21, Logic 21, Willpower 22 when materialized)

Gear: Ares Predator I (no ammo), certified credstick (1,000,000¥ balance), clown makeup, nanopaste disguise (large), leather jacket, random assorted buttons/pins (12+2d6 of them) apparently grabbed from the bargain bin (each button is a Force 1d6 + 4 sustaining focus), Sony Emperor w/ Redcap Nix OS [Response 2, Signal 3, Firewall 1, System 2]

Weapons:

Rapier [Blade, Reach 1, DV 7P, AP -1, Force 16 weapon focus w/ personalized grip]

Notes: Harlequin's magical tradition superficially resembles that of a hermetic mage and shares the same spirits and associations, although in truth it is far older, more personal, and more esoteric. An argument could be made that he is the only living practitioner of his tradition. In any case, he resists drain with Intuition + Willpower. The initiate grade and Magic attribute given here do not necessarily represent the upper limits of Harlequin's magical capacity, merely the upper limits of what the Sixth World is likely to require of him. Harlequin has the following nine spells sustained on his person at all times using some of his buttons/pins: Increase Body (Force 6, 5 hits), Increase Agility (Force 7, 3 hits), Increase Reaction (Force 6, 3 hits), Increase Strength (Force 5, 5 hits), Increase Charisma (Force 10, 4 hits), Increase Intuition (Force 7, 3 Hits), Increase Logic (Force 6, 4 hits), Increase Willpower (Force 6, 3 hits), Increase Reflexes (Force 10, 4 hits). He has the following spells quickened: Armor (Force 20, 12 hits), Combat Sense (Force 20, 16 hits). Harlequin has the following spells anchored: Heal (Force 30 with 12 hits, triggered by extensive physical damage on self), Oxygenate (Force 30 with 12 hits, triggered by the absence of breathable air), Improved Invisibility (Force 20 with 10 hits, triggered by physical damage on self). Finally, Harlequin has at least 250 unspent karma free to use for anything he may need it for.

PERIANWYR

Given Perianwyr's pivotal role in Denver, and the fact that he might be sought by several of the parties involved in that sprawl, his stats are included. In his draconic form, Perianwyr is a majestic black-scaled dragon, with blue underscales and highlights. He is smaller than the average adult western dragon, measuring only eighteen meters in length. His preferred human form is a handsome, distinguished, middle-aged man with dark hair and a goatee.

Adult western dragon

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	M	Init	IP
13	5	9	35	8	9	9	9	6	8	12	18	2

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 15/13

Armor (B/I): 8/8

Active Skills: Assensing 9, Conjuring skill group 6, Counterspelling 8, Etiquette (Business) 5 (+2), Exotic Ranged Weapon 6, Flight 6, Intimidation 7, Negotiation (Bargaining) 8 (10), Perception 8, Ritual Spellcasting 8, Spellcasting (Manipulation Spells) 12 (+2), Stealth 6, Unarmed Combat 6, Knowledge Skills: Booze 4, Cutting Edge Bands 6, Gaelic 6, Latin 5, Music Industry 6, Night Clubs (Denver) 5 (+2), Prediction 6, Rock and Roll History 6, Welsh 6

Movement: 15/30

Powers: Animal Control (Reptiles), Dragonspeech, Dual Natured, Elemental Attack, (usually Fire), Enhanced Senses (Enhanced Smell, Low-Light Vision, Thermographic Vision, Wide-Band Hearing), Hardened Armor 8, Mystic Armor 8, Natural Weapon (Bite/Claws: DV 10P, AP -2), Sapience

Gear: Power Focus (Rating 4), Spellcasting Focus (Manipulation Spells, Rating 6), Spellcasting Focus (Illusion Spells, Rating 4), Sustaining Focus (Illusion Spells, Rating 8)

Initiate Grade: 4



Metamagics: Centering, masking, reflecting, shielding
Spells: Detect Life, Detox, Heal, Invisibility, Levitate*, Magic Fingers, Manabolt, Mind Probe, Mob Mood, Shapechange, Stunball, Trid Phantasm

*Perianwyr knows a custom form of Levitate that can affect multiple targets within an area. It is identical to the normal

Levitate spell (p. 210, SR4A), but has a range of LOS (A) and a Drain Value of $(F \div 2) + 3$.

ARES TREMBLES

The Ares Excalibur had a chance to be only a mid-level inconvenience for the megacorporation, but the fallout of the release and the death of Nicholas Aurelius threaten to throw the corporation into total uproar. The rest of the Big Ten are very reluctant to let opportunities go to waste, so they will be moving aggressively against Ares. As the death of Young Nick indicates, bug spirits are moving more aggressively against Ares in retaliation for Ares' years of experiments on them. What Ares will have to do to appease them is unclear—bug spirit motivations in general are foreign to most humans, so understanding just what it is they want is a difficult undertaking. What this means, though, is that on one side Ares is assailed by nine foes who are indefatigable and knowable; on the other side they have countless foes who are indefatigable and mysterious. This is not, as you might guess, a comfortable position, and Ares is going to have to scramble to avoid losing ground in the Big Ten.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Market Manipulation

Pay: 15,000 nuyen per runner

In the wake of the Excalibur fiasco and other problems, Ares stock has been going into frequent tailspins. Savvy traders have made a series of small fortunes short selling the stock, while traders who are a step slower are left fuming, wishing they had the information sooner so they would not be caught flat-footed.

A small group of these traders has determined that they will not be left behind again. They have come up with a two-part plan: First, they want to plant information on several business Matrix sites saying that Ares Excalibur project manager Kellie Douglas has been extracted by a rival corporation (likely another major weapons manufacturer, such as Hechler-Koch), and they are going to share her whole account of what happened in the development of the gun and what made it such a disaster. The runners need to plant that story and generate information that can present at least a veneer of believability.

The second stage of the plan is to short sell a large load of stock; so much of a load that one broker would likely not be willing to handle it all. The conspirators thought about breaking up the load between a number of brokers if they worried about coordinating those moves. Plus, they thought if they found the right broker, they might be able to get an extra advantage on the competition. They have identified the broker, a woman named Shelly Clemmens with FreeWest Traders. They would like the runners to make sure that she's completely on board, either through a bribe (five thousand nuyen would

be a good start) or blackmail (clever runners might be able to find a link between the node in Clemmens' office and a camera broadcasting from the firm's men's shower room). They need to move quickly—the traders would like the plan to move forward in a single week.

Bargaining with Bugs

Pay: 20,000 nuyen per runner

The departure of Roger Soaring Owl from Ares was the first indicator that perhaps they had gone too far with the bugs, and the death of Nicholas Aurelius is another strong sign. Some executives want to reach out to the bugs to see what, if anything, can be done to appease them.

The runners are sent to contact Roger Willis, a senior editor at NBCNN. Willis gained some fame a few years back with a series of stories on a joint CIA-Ares program to carry out experiments on bug spirits. Willis is rumored to have contacts in the bug spirit community—whatever that phrase actually means—and the executives want the runners to get an audience with him and see if Willis can reach out to the bugs and open a channel of discussion.

In truth, Willis is a flesh-form wasp spirit, which means he avoids meetings with strangers, especially those who might be able to assense his nature. Runners will have to maneuver carefully to get a face-to-face meeting with him, possibly intercepting him between his office and home. Willis is happy to deliver his terms to Ares: His "sources in the bug community" say they want nothing less than the total dissolution of the company, and they will not stop until that is accomplished. If the runners recognize Willis' true nature, he doesn't try to take them out (unless he has to). If they want to tell people who he is, he figures either they won't believe them, or that whoever *does* believe them will understand that when it comes to bug spirit matters, Willis' sources are very good indeed.

SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY

The world of the Infected has been changing lately, and the public revelation that famed vampire hunter Martin de Vries is actually a vampire is going to make things worse. Both sides will use him for their own purposes. The pro-Infected groups will use him to show that the biases against their kind among the norms are so strong that even their fellow Infected are turning on each other. This is a strong indicator that they need to stick together, and that the fight they face is the Infected vs. the world. The efforts to bring the world over to their side are likely hopeless.

The norms, for their part, will see de Vries as a symbol that the Infected are violent and unpredictable. Sure, de Vries generally only kills other vampires, but they figure he must have been hiding his vampire status for a reason, and that's because he knows what he is capable of—and for all they know, he's hiding even darker secrets.

De Vries, for his part, is going to keep a lower profile. For now, book tours can wait. His vampire hunting activities will continue, though, and there will be people continuing to hunt him. Shadowrunners can earn some nuyen trying to track de Vries down—or helping cover his tracks



MARTIN DE VRIES

B A R S C I L W M Edg Ess Init IP
4 8 8 5 5 7 5 7 13 7 2D6+3* 15 2
* See Notes

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 10/12

Armor (B/I): 6/2

Active Skills: Arcana (Power Focus Design) 5 (+2), Assensing (Astral Signatures) 6 (+2), Astral Combat (Weapon Foci) 5 (+2), Athletics skill group 3, Close Combat skill group 5, Computer (Commlinks) 4 (+2), Conjuring skill group 6, Data Search (News Indexes) 4 (+2), Dodge (Ranged Combat) 4 (+2), Enchanting (Artificing) 5 (+2), Firearms skill group 5, First Aid 4, Intimidation (Mental) 5 (+2), Negotiation (Diplomacy) 5 (+2), Perception (Hearing) 5 (+2), Pilot Ground Craft (Car) 3 (+2), Shadowing (Tailing) 6 (+2), Sorcery skill group 6, Tracking (Urban) 4 (+2)

Knowledge Skills: Astral Research 4, Biology (Vampirism) 6 (+2), Conspiracy Theories (Vampiric Conspiracies) 5 (+2), Design (Spell) 5, History 3, Law 3, Literature 3, Magic Knowledge 6, Magic Theory 6, Magic Trids 5, Parazoology (HMHVV Expressions) 5 (+2), Psychology (Vampire) 6 (+2), Vampire Lore 6, Virology (HMHVV) 5 (+2), Dutch N, English 5, French 3, German 6, Greek 4, Japanese 4, Latin 4, Russian 3

Qualities: Allergy (Sunlight, Moderate), Allergy (Wood, Severe), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Blood), Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Smell), Essence Drain, Essence Loss, Fangs, Focused Concentration 2, Immunity (Age, Pathogens, Toxins), Induced Dormancy (Lack of Air), Infection, Magician (Hermetic), Mist Form, Regeneration, Thermographic Vision

Initiate Grade: 7

Metamagics: Absorption, centering, flexible signature, masking, reflecting, sensing, shielding

Gear: Eurocar Westwind 3K; fashionable clothing; form-fitting body armor (full-body suit); gold amulet of Pisces astrological symbol (Sustaining Focus 2 for Oxygenate spell); gold wedding band (Power Focus 4); jade statuette of four-armed demoness (Essence focus 4 (see Notes)); silver bullet (Sustaining focus 3 for Combat Sense spell); other appropriate gear as needed

Spells: Analyze Truth, Catalog, Clairaudience (Extended), Clairvoyance (Extended), Combat Sense, Death Touch, Detect Banshee, Detect Dzoo-noo-qua, Detect Goblin, Detect Individual, Detect Life, Detect Magic, Detect Nosferatu, Detect Vampire, Detect Wendigo, Fireball, Flamethrower, Foreboding, Lightning Bolt, Mana Barrier, Manaball, Manabolt, Mist, Oxygenate, Physical Barrier, Powerball, Powerbolt, Shadow, Slaughter Vampire, Slay Banshee, Slay Dzoo-noo-qua, Slay Goblin, Slay Nosferatu, Slay Vampire, Slay Wendigo, Stunball, Stunbolt

Weapons:

Colt Manhunter [Heavy pistol, DV 5P, AP -1, mode SA, RC 1, 16 (c), w/ biometric safety, integral laser sight, personalized grip]

Cougar Fine Longblade (Weapon Focus 4) [Blade, DV 5P, AP -1, Reach 0, w/ personalized grip]

HK MP-5 TX [Submachine gun, DV 5P, mode SA/BF/FA, RC 3, 20 (c), w/ biometric safety, gas-vent 2, integral laser sight, personalized grip]

Sword (Weapon Focus 4) [Blade, DV 6P, Reach 1, w/ personalized grip]

Notes: Martin de Vries carries a unique Essence focus that adds 4 to his current Essence score, enabling him to boost his Essence to 16. When his Essence reaches 4 (a natural zero), he does not die. Instead, he suffers cumulative penalties of -1 to his dice pool as his Essence continues to drop per normal rules. When his total Essence reaches zero (a natural -4), he must drain Essence per standard rules or die. He keeps this focus on his person at all times, and he will go to exceptional lengths to recover it should it be taken from him.

ESCAPING THE GHOST DECADE

The most noticeable differences in the new co-operation between the Japanacorp occurs outside of Japan, in any place where the megacorporations can combine efforts to benefit them and hurt their opponents. In Seattle, the Japanacorp gather their forces to look into pushing Brackhaven out of office, hoping they can get in someone who will help them advance their interests. In Denver, they ally themselves with Ghostwalker, since they are as interested as he is in kicking Aztechnology back out of the city. The dragon situation is more complicated—while the Japanacorp have no love lost for Lofwyr, they also don't have a strong interest in doing Alamais any favors. On top of that, they know the battle between these two forces will be destructive and expensive, and they feel it would be best if they stayed far away from the whole thing.

In Bogotá, they see opportunity, with Mitsuhama and Renraku leading the charge. Saeder-Krupp already has established some utility infrastructure for the city, and of course Aztechnology will be far and away the largest provider of goods and services in the city, but there is room for others. Mitsuhama is angling for a contract to rebuild the city's Matrix (and bring it up current with the new protocols) while also looking for surreptitious ways to interfere with Aztechnology's magic business near their southern border. Renraku, for their part, knows that the city's service economy has been stripped bare, and they are completely willing to rebuild it—or at least any portion the city will subsidize. These megas will be engaging in all sorts of runs to obtain crucial contracts (and sabotage their enemies), and their Mr. Johnsons are more sophisticated than those who continue to carry the anti-Aztlan torch.

THE CRACKS INSIDE

The full details of what is happening to FastJack, Miles Lanier, and others in the Sixth World will be revealed in upcoming sourcebooks. For the time being, gamemasters can add flavor to their games by introducing characters whose personality changes at a moment's notice, and who experience significant gaps in their memory during those times when their other personalities seem to be in charge. Devoted runners might be able to find connections between these runners, NeoNET's Project Imago, and Evo's Dickens Program, though the nature of these connections and what they have to do with these personality disorders is unclear.

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Sprawl Sites: High Society and Low Life provides locations that can be dropped into any major sprawl, making it useful to runners across the globe.

Sprawl Sites: High Society and Low Life is for use with *Shadowrun, Twentieth Anniversary Edition*.



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In late 2012, Catalyst Game Labs announced that 2013 would be **The Year of Shadowrun**, featuring a wealth of new *Shadowrun* games (see the next page for a list!) as well as the Fifth Edition of the tabletop roleplaying game.

Storm Front is designed to be compatible with *Shadowrun*, *Twentieth Anniversary Edition*, but it is also designed to be useful to *Fifth Edition* players. The plot information, intrigue, and adventure hooks it establishes set up the *Fifth Edition* setting, as well as establishing new plotlines that will influence the shape of the Sixth World and new stories as the game moves forward.

In order to make this book as useful as possible as the new edition progresses, we will be releasing a free PDF document containing *Shadowrun*, *Fifth Edition* versions of the rules from this book. Stats for Sirurg and Martin de Vries, the Entropy spell, and more will be available in this document so that this book can be a vital resource as players move into the new edition.





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