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INTRODUCTION

Threats 2 follows the same theme as the original *Threats* sourcebook for *Shadowrun*. It details various players in the Sixth World that operate in secrecy, pursuing far-reaching agendas. These threats are insidious and anonymous, pulling strings from the shadows and wielding terrifying magic, weapons or influence. Some of these threats are continuations of established plotlines and story arcs, while others are completely new and never-before described within the world of *Shadowrun*.

Threats 2 is presented as a series of electronic documents posted by Captain Chaos, sysop of the vast Shadowland archive and data haven—the number one source for shadowrunners on what's going on in the world of *Shadowrun*. The documents come from a variety of sources: stolen corporate reports, personal electronic journals, as well as accounts straight from a shadowrunner's mouth. These sources are unique in outlook and perspective, and the reports come laden with their own particular prejudices and points of view. Each article is marked up with a running commentary by other runners who add to, revise and contradict the original post. These inserted comments add innuendo, allegations, opinions, rumors, misconceptions, misinformation, lies and sometimes even the truth to the information presented. It is left up to the gamemaster to decide what information is correct and which is just filling, as appropriate to his or her game.

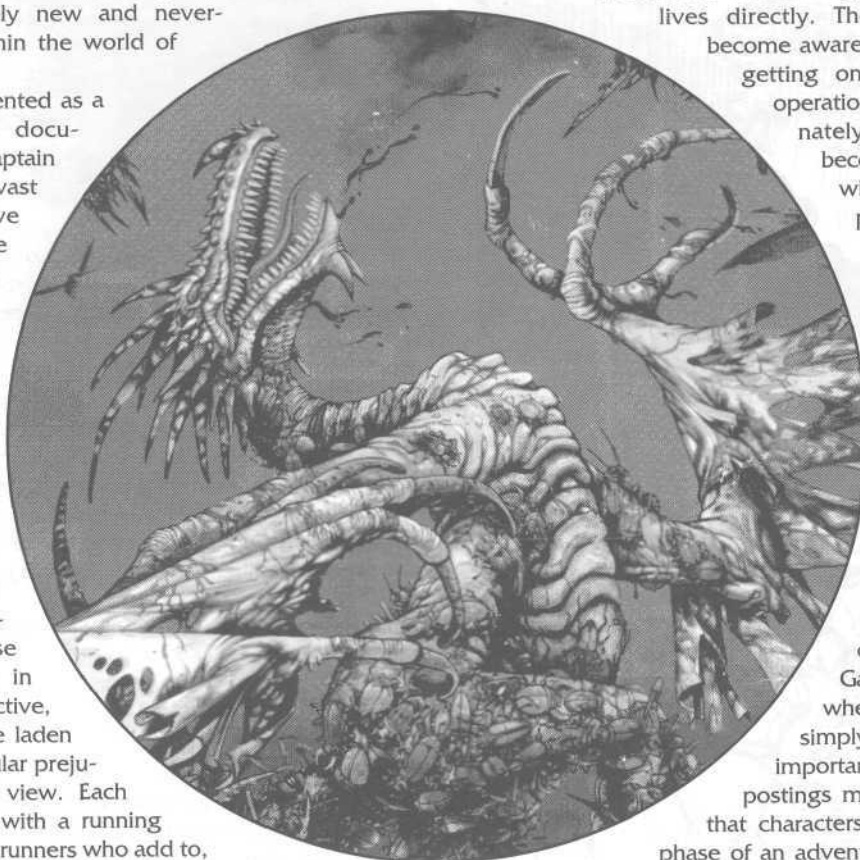
Each threat is immediately followed by a *Game Information* section that provides rules and advice for using that threat in a *Shadowrun* campaign.

HOW TO USE THREATS 2

The threats described in this book can be introduced into a campaign in several ways. A threat may be used as a one-shot bad guy or the force behind a plot that the characters foil, sending the threat packing or to the grave. A threat may also serve as a constant force in the background, manipulating events and occasionally touching the characters' lives directly. The characters may never become aware of the threat's full extent, getting only small glimpses of its operations, pawns and plans. Alternately, the characters may become intimately embroiled with the threat, either as potential recruits and allies or as pesky foes that consistently foil the threat's plans. Some of the threats described make excellent recurring villains, and some even have the ability to return from beyond the grave.

Each threat includes a number of shadowtalk postings that point out additional possibilities for how the threat may be conceived or used. Gamemasters should decide whether these comments are simply unsubstantiated rumors or important facts. These shadowtalk postings may be used as information that characters learn during the legwork phase of an adventure. The gamemaster may also consider copying the threats as presented (minus the *Game Information*) and using them as player handouts.

In addition to the main *Shadowrun*, *Third Edition* rulebook (SR3), gamemasters will also find the following rulebooks helpful when using this book: *The Shadowrun Companion* (SRComp), *Magic in the Shadows* (MITS), *Year of the Comet* (YOTC), *Target: Awakened Lands* (T:AL), *Man & Machine* (M&M), *Target: Matrix* (T:M) and *Matrix*.



THE FUN NEVER STOPS ...



Just when you thought it was safe to come out of the closet, the party really begins. I bet most of you were thinking that since Halley's Comet has finally passed out of view, the world would right itself and get on with business as usual. Not even close, chummer. The comet craziness may have passed, but now we get to see the aftermath. While half the world was going crazy, a lot was going on underneath the public radar, stuff that we are just now getting glimpses of—and which we may not see the repercussions of for quite some time.

I decided that now more than ever, Shadowland needed an update on the various bogies that were lurking behind the curtains with their plots and schemes and secret powers. The first *Threats* compilation I posted several years back brought a lot of potential menaces to the attention of Joe and Jane Shadowrunner. Hopefully, this helped save some hoops. But a lot has changed in the past few years, and there's a lot of scary new things skulking in the shadows that we should all be concerned about. So I've pulled together this compilation of articles as an early warning system. Pay attention now, before it's too late.

The threats I have lined up cover the spectrum. We've got cults and evil spirits, sinister conspiracies, power-hungry extremists, and even some good ideas gone bad—not to mention a few things I can't even begin to classify. Some of them may not relate to you at all. Others may be sneaking up right behind you as we speak.

As usual, some of the information here comes from questionable sources. It may be faked, or it may be hyped to portray the situation as worse than it really is. It may even underestimate the danger each of us is truly in. If you run across any of the threats described, play it by ear. Don't count on anything you see here as absolute truth.

One last thing. If you get your grubby mitts on any paydata relating to these threats, share the wealth. When it comes to potential baddies like these, it doesn't do any good to be stingy. Sharing your scoop may get you some friends and allies that you didn't even know were out there. Above all, it may help others avoid the messes you've had to crawl out of. And in this line of work, a little bit of solidarity goes a long way.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 11 July 2062 at 10:35:09 (PST)

GENERAL SAITO



With all the events the comet brought, from SURGE to Ghostwalker, there were a lot of news stories that were glossed over and quickly forgotten. This file isn't anything top secret, it's actually a transcript of a prepared statement made by Protectorate General Saito to the press—we're just providing you with the "uncensored" version. The "cleaned up" news never got far; it was swallowed up by dozens of more flashy events that turned out a bigger audience. Hiding under all the chaos of the past year, though, is a man and his fledgling nation, both following an agenda too dangerous and deadly to ignore. So I'm putting the transcript up here in hopes that you will all see it and possibly have something to add. At the very least I want to make the shadow community aware of what is going on in the Californian Protectorate.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 11 July 2062 at 10:38:12 (PST)

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, thank you for waiting so patiently. It seems that ensuring the security and safety for millions of people is a twenty-four-hour job. Had I known it would be so much work, I might not have applied <polite laughter>. You will have to forgive my rough edges, because I come before all of you as a soldier and a concerned citizen, not as a star of the media. This is my first televised appearance, so please pardon me if I make my way slowly through this uncharted territory.

• Not bad for a dictator. He's not frothing at the mouth or spewing spittle on the mic. I expected the guy to come across a little more unhinged, more fanatical.

• Blair

• That's because Saito's been tailored and coached by Christine Tori, his new communications and image consultant. Tori's a former casting director out of Studio City and she knows how to create an image and fit a person into it. She's one of those people who moves in like a whirlwind, followed by a commando team of reality adjusters—by the time she's finished, everyone's head is spinning and you can't tell what was real and what was spectacle. Her father was Senator Tori from California, a vocal secessionist and one of the California Free





State's first powerful leaders. Her finger's on California's pulse, and she knows what heartstrings to pull to get Californians to stand behind someone. Looks like she has done a fine job shaping Saito to appear as the concerned defender and ensure he doesn't give anyone the feeling they are being oppressed. I hear she's part of Saito's permanent entourage now.

• Eye Spy

• Saito also exercises strict media control. Every reporter has to agree to voluntarily place their articles and broadcasts through "Protectorate review" (read: censorship) before they are granted media privileges. Sadly, most of the major networks comply—those that don't simply don't get in, unless shadowrunners help out.

• IMC

You are surely wondering why an unimportant Imperial officer named Keiji Saito stayed behind in San Francisco when his commander and most of his forces retreated to deal with the crisis in Japan. I've wondered that myself on more than one occasion, and I can tell you with absolute surety that it was not a decision I made in haste. I will be honest when I say that during my stay as a peacekeeper in San Francisco I fell in love with this wonderful land and the hard-working people who live here. I will always have a place in my heart for Japan, the place of my birth and my family, but I feel that the people of California are truly my kindred spirits.

• "Peacekeeper in San Francisco?" Try "occupying invasion force." Tell it like it is, Saito.

• Debord

• Not so fast. Remember that Governor Treacle invited the Japanese into San Francisco. The elves of the Tir and the Azzies to the south didn't wait for any invitations to come barging in. If Japan had ignored California like the UCAS and CAS did, we'd all be polishing the boots of elven nobility right now.

• Flak

• Yeah, and now we're polishing the boots of Japanese soldiers. What a difference.

• Orklander

I have a new family in the people of San Francisco and all of the California Free State. I care deeply for this family and wish to protect them from harm. No one will be surprised when I say this, but we live in times of great danger. There are threats all around us. It is becoming more and more dangerous to simply live one's life. Chaotic street gangs and zealous terrorists claim the lives of innocents in their meaningless parades of violence. Antisocial elements spread disease and addictive electronics and chemicals, threatening our way of life with their filthy, deranged, subhuman lifestyles. I witnessed far too much of this senseless death and decay during

my time defending San Francisco as a Japanese soldier not to feel deeply moved and concerned for my fellow citizens here.

• What's that? Did I hear some extremist race-baiting codewords there? Gasp! The only "disease" he can be referring to is SURGE. And we all know what he really means by "subhuman."

• Monitor

So when I was faced with the hard decision of whether to return to the island of my birth or to stay with my new family, I chose the latter. I committed myself to protect the people who had trusted me for so long. I could not possibly bring myself to abandon them in such a great time of need. That is why I remain in San Francisco. The people have shown their support for my decision by assisting me by whatever means they can. The soldiers who also made their tough decision to stay with me have resumed their peacekeeping role in the Bay Area. They have made a commitment to the people here to continue, as I have, to protect them from all threats internal and external. We are neither invaders nor conquerors. We have been embraced by the people of the Bay Area and we have chosen to remain part of the family here.

• I can't believe this drek. He's rambling on and on about protection and family. What about protecting the metahumans of the Bay Area? They keep dying at the hands of Saito's fascists. What about the metahuman families? How does it benefit them to tear them apart and imprison them in "processing centers?" The bottom line here is that he's protecting human families and that's it.

• Tuskadero

• Don't take this the wrong way, because I consider myself a criminal just like most of you reading this. But since Saito took over, violent crime has dropped drastically in the Protectorate. I feel safer walking the streets of San Francisco today than I ever have before.

• Realist

• You must be human then. I live in Oakland, and I see violent crimes committed daily by Saito's goons. Crime is down because we're living in a police state. He's rounded up and imprisoned a good chunk of the population.

• Tuskadero

There is no doubt that we've made a difference in San Francisco. Together, we stood up and said: "We will not be victims anymore." The people of San Francisco have worked too hard to have the fruits of their labor destroyed by street gangs or burned at the end of some zealot's agenda. My peacekeepers have been moving swiftly and accurately, and with the help of the local families in this beautiful city we have put away countless criminals and stopped many dangerous plots. Our work is far from over, but with every effort we make we see a definite improvement in the lives of the people here. That is what keeps me going each day.

• Local families like the Yakuza, who have assisted Saito since the beginning in rooting out and destroying every possible competing syndicate in the city.

• Mako

• The oyabun of the Karatsi-gumi has become a regular visitor at Saito's dinner table. They have a history, in the sense that Karatsi's organization has been catering to Saito's carnal needs since he arrived years ago—and probably still does.

• Geisha

• It's not only the Yaks pitching in. Saito has amplified the racial tensions, creating an atmosphere of intolerance. Many humans openly harass, intimidate and even attack metahumans. Others aren't so blatant, but they'll still turn in their metahuman neighbor if they see something suspicious—which in this climate is just about anything.

• Neighborhood Watch

• And even more are tacit accomplices, because they avert their eyes and refuse to stand against such blatant racism and injustice.

• Frank

It is my hope that someday all of California can be as safe as San Francisco. California is a nation that has wrongfully been given the cold shoulder by the rest of the world. To some it is an inconvenient problem, with the United Canadian and American States and the Confederated American States showing that they have no desire to improve the lives of their former countrymen. To some it is a valuable asset to be taken, and Tir Tairngire and Aztlan have made it clear they desire the land but care not for the people. To me, California is a symbol of opportunity, home to a free people who wish to safely pursue their own happiness. Though Californians are very self-reliant and reluctant to accept help, they have welcomed my peacekeeping forces even outside San Francisco. Our commitment to a safe and prosperous California may be realized sooner than we all believed possible.

Thank you for bearing with me through my first televised appearance. I'll now open the floor for questions.

[Sandy Rogers of Foreign Affairs Online] Protectorate General Saito, with your decision to remain in San Francisco you disobeyed the orders of the new Emperor of Japan and went AWOL. You have committed what is considered a treasonous act in the Imperial Japanese military, as I'm sure you are aware. Do you no longer consider yourself a Japanese soldier and did any negative feelings towards Japan guide your decision to remain in San Francisco?

[Protectorate General Saito] Japan is my original home and I will always remain loyal to the Emperor. I bear no negative feelings towards Japan. I don't believe I ever could. It is my belief, however, that elements within Japan are manipulating the young Emperor and steering him towards a path that is

detrimental and damaging to the Japanese Imperial State. Can I, a loyal soldier, follow treasonous orders that so clearly defy the Yamato Spirit? I sincerely hope that the Emperor is able to prevail against these corruptive forces. When that time comes, I will not hesitate to return to his service if he would have me.

• It's obvious that General Saito doesn't agree with the fact that a few metahumans are actually starting to get a voice in Japanese politics. Not to mention the fact that, by pulling the Imperial forces away from places like Yomi, the Philippines, and San Francisco, it makes the metahuman revolutionaries there believe they have scored a success.

• Tuskadero

• Despite what he said, I think Keiji has it out for the boy-Emperor. The new Emperor is changing Japanese attitudes about magic and metahumanity; old power bases are faltering and new factions are coming to power. Saito's a Japanese Imperial traditionalist; his loyalties lie with the Japanese megacorporations, the Imperial military, and a quietly fascist society. I don't think he'd be happy with the Emperor until the Emperor saw things his way.

• The Pacific Kid

• Speaking of the Emperor, what is the official Japanese word on Saito's treason?

• Observer

• Harsh. The Emperor has made it clear that Colonel Saito's disloyalty (they refuse to accept Saito's new self-given title of Protectorate General) is an insult to the nation of Japan and an openly treasonous act. With all the problems Japan is suffering right now, though, they find themselves unable to do anything about it immediately.

• Nippon Nick

• You can be sure Saito was counting on that. It gives him time to build his power and influence so that by the time Japan can come after him, it won't be so easy.

• Freedom Fixer

[Mark Riverwalker of NewsNet] Is it true, Protectorate General, that your newly founded government is receiving support from corporations located in San Francisco, among them a number of Japanese megacorporations? If so, does this mean that they possess a significant influence over the actions of your government?

[Protectorate General Saito] A safe environment and a stable government are two key factors necessary for a strong economy. The corporations located in San Francisco are anxious to see this area return to peace so that they may engage in commerce without worry about their assets being targeted by criminals and terrorists. To this end, they have contributed mone-



tary assistance to the Californian Protectorate and have pledged their cooperation in helping me establish a nation of peace and prosperity.

- Monetary aid ain't all they are supplying. If you ever catch sight of a unit of Saito's troops, look at what they are packing. Brand new military weaponry, all made by subsidiaries belonging to Japanese megacorporations. Sophisticated drones and battlefield communications that his forces didn't have before, courtesy of Mitsuhama. They are even cross training with Renraku Red Samurai right in San Francisco. Pac-Rim Bank is fronting them some considerable loans and the others are chipping in, sure, but they realize that they all have other things to offer to the cause besides just money.

- Lowdown

- As usual, Saito's words are full of half-truths. The Japanese corporations do want a stable government, but they want a government that has their best interests at heart. Japan just sucker-punched the zaibatsus by pulling out of the Philippines, Peru and Australia. The megacorps there are beginning to realize that backing the new Emperor may not turn out as profitable as backing this upstart soldier.

- The Profiteer

[Carla St. Clair of the New York Times] Ares Macrotechnology has stationed their own troops along the southern border of San Francisco. They claim to be protecting their vital assets in Silicon Valley. Is this a show of corporate force against your nation, since Ares has declined to offer the Californian Protectorate any sort of assistance?

[Protectorate General Saito] Ares Macrotechnology, like any of the other corporations with assets within the city of San Francisco, desires to protect its assets against the violence that has plagued the city for so long. Ares has not stationed troops in Silicon Valley as a show of force against the Protectorate but as a show of force against the same criminal elements that I am working to stop.

- Keep on shovelling, Saito. Ares is absolutely there because of Saito's forces. The criminal elements within San Francisco, which to Saito are mostly metahuman, have never shown too much interest in Ares property in Silicon Valley. But the Japanese megacorporations now funding Saito have.

General Torres of Ares spoke to Saito on the phone shortly after he came to power in this region. If I remember clearly, his words were "I hope none of your men even make a sidelong glance at Silicon Valley. My trigger finger has been very twitchy lately and I'd hate for there to be any accidents."

- Grey Knight

- Okay, so Silicon Valley has made its position pretty clear on this. What about Mt. Shasta and Hestaby? Or the Tir?

- Ruckus

- Both the Tir and Hestaby seem to have their own problems at the moment, and neither have made official comment about Saito's regime. Word on the street is that a lot of metahumans are finding refuge in the Northern Crescent.

On the other hand, Saito sent some troops down south to mark a border area, warning Pueblo troops away. Saito's influence doesn't fully cover the land in between, but neither side seems to be looking forward to having the other as a neighbor.

- Traveler

[Derek Weinstein of the Independent Information Network] There have been reports of your soldiers harassing and arresting metahumans and moving them to concentration camps being built in the Central Valley. Is there any truth to this, Protectorate General Saito?

[Protectorate General Saito] These accusations are little more than alarmist and exaggerated reports from metahuman extremists who are not aware of the real situation. In our efforts to efficiently and swiftly reduce crime and terrorist action, we have swept through many areas and arrested those responsible for harboring them or providing aid. We have also remodeled certain cultural zones, relocating families in areas racked with crime. In effect, we rescued these refugees from depraved areas where street violence was rampant and dangerous.

As we speak, new zones are being constructed for these families in safer areas. In the meantime, they are being hosted in processing centers, which are by no means concentration camps. The local media will be allowed to view them and they will find that they are clean and orderly. In fact, while temporarily residing in the centers, superior health care and even education is provided. While we are being tough on crime and violence in the Protectorate, we are also committed to helping all the families within this new nation reach excellence.

- What's a "cultural zone?"

- Libby

- Never been to San Fran, eh? In twisted support of the right to "cultural self-determination," the occupational government long ago decided that humans and metahumans had the "right" to live separately from each other. In practice, this meant that a metahuman needed a pass to access an area designed as a "human cultural zone," which was all of San Francisco (and now Sacramento and other areas). Likewise, the other side of the Bay was designed a "metahuman cultural zone," and treated as a dumping ground. This way, all of the metas were close enough to scrub their toilets and sweep the gutters, but the humans didn't have to live next door to them. Now Saito's playing with the zones, creating new human-only areas and putting a spin on the relocation camps.

- Karl



• The "health care" consists of birth control methods designed to sterilize metahumans or recommended and free abortions to prevent metahuman births. The "education" is pro-regime propaganda teaching metahumans to revile their own race and encouraging them to turn in their kin. Saito's centers may be clean and orderly, but only as long as you follow orders. People who cause trouble tend to disappear in the processing centers.

• Widow

• Come on, though. He's inviting the media to check out the centers. If they were all that bad, the press would report him. Word would get out. It'd be breaking news.

• Glassdancer

• He's putting on a show. Saito's all about smoke and mirrors and hiding in plain sight. A friend of mine went into one of those centers. She's an ork and was three months pregnant. She had an abortion while in the center because they convinced her that her children would be in danger living on the violent streets of Berkeley and that the litter would too heavily tax her ability to afford food, clothing and shelter. Saito will show the local media what they want to see. Besides, take a good look at that local media. When was the last time a human-on-metahuman

hate crime reported as breaking news? They are all owned by the Japanese megacorporations, so they all play Saito's game.

• Widow

• I've heard that they save a special treatment for some of those they suspect of being in the Metahuman People's Army. Word is that they mold their minds with aggressive ASIST reprogramming and then release them back on the streets. Making them into walking Judases, spies within the MPA's own ranks, ready to turn them in.

• Digger

[Derek Weinstein of the Independent Information Network]

So are you saying, Protectorate General, that it is untrue that your forces are specifically targeting metahuman communities for transfer to the processing centers?

[Protectorate General Saito] My forces are targeting criminal and terrorist organizations, not people. It is true that the number of metahumans being investigated for criminal activities or terrorism, or the number of metahumans living in crime-racked squalor, is higher than the number of humans, but that is only a representation of statistical evidence. On the whole, metahumans are more than twice as likely to commit a crime than humans. More than three-quarters of those we have



arrested for organized violence or terrorist acts are metahuman and come from metahuman communities in the Berkeley/Oakland area. I should also mention that eighty percent of the metahumans in the Californian Protectorate receive poor education and even poorer health care. They are, in fact, benefiting from their temporary stay in our processing centers. We even have future plans to help renovate and bring new life to the Berkeley/Oakland sprawl and the metahuman communities located there.

- These statistics and claims are straight from the Human Nation textbook. Finally, those rich racists get to apply their theories about human supremacy here within Saito's Protectorate. I'm sure they'll start bragging about how successful a demonstration this whole experiment in CalFree is, and how the techniques used here should be applied around the globe.

- Lex

- Do you have evidence that Saito's in bed with the Human Nation? Saito could simply be using statistics like this to encourage his own agenda.

- Skeptic

- His politics are blatant enough, but let's follow the money trail. A decker tells me that Saito's biggest megacorp contributor isn't even on the San Fran Corp Council (yet)—Yakashima Technologies. Yakashima is infamous for its anti-meta policies, and Yakashima executive Hiro Senzeni—suspected of being a Human Nation negotiator—has been seen playing mahjong in Saito's den. The largest private contribution came from Sakuya Yamaguchi, the Minister of State under the previous Japanese Emperor in charge of Yomi Island.

No one knows exactly who is behind the Human Nation, but when you dig up dirt like this you have to wonder. Take some other examples. Despite countless reports of brutality by Saito's troops, the Pacific News Network has only run stories highlighting metahuman-on-human hate crimes in CalFree, promoting hype about metahuman supremacists. When some groups started pressuring UCAS Prez Haeffner to do something about Saito, a large lobbying group led by several prominent conservative politicians stepped in to tell the UCAS to keep its nose out. If you ask me, Saito has a lot of friends in high places around the world. The links are there.

- Black Lung

- Take this other nugget of paydata: Senator Michael Tori, the father of Saito's media consultant, was once involved in a scandal over his membership in the California branch of Focus on Humanity. Focus on Humanity is a pro-human policlub active all over North America, but strongest in California and the UCAS.

- Widow

- Focus on Humanity was the group that was behind the ill-fated bill in the UCAS Congress to register all magically talented citizens, right?

- Chromedome

- Yes, they were. Thanks to the Haeffner administration that bill has not gotten anywhere near law in the UCAS, but I'm not sure if that's the case in San Francisco.

- Marley

- It doesn't get as much attention in San Francisco as the metahuman question does, but Saito has some strict rules about the magically talented. The Protectorate treats mages as if they were concealed weapons, and concealed weapons are very illegal in Saito's regime because they encourage violence (or so he says). All mages here must be registered with a Protectorate database, and that includes a tissue sample to be used as a viable ritual link to assist in the tracking of any mage that commits a criminal act. In other words, if you are a mage in San Francisco, you'd better stay in the party line or they can nail you pretty good.

- Magister

[Ko Li of Pacific Weekly Report] Protectorate General, you've said that your forces are protecting the local people against violent street crime and terrorist organizations. Could you elaborate on which terrorist organizations are threatening San Francisco and how they are doing so?

[Protectorate General Saito] Yes, of course. California is a hotbed of political activist groups, many of which have taken extreme measures to push forward their personal views and agendas. Groups such as SeaWatch and Terra First! have attacked shipping and fishermen travelling into San Francisco or operating in waters near the Protectorate. Pirates and highway go-gangs prey on trade coming out of San Francisco on its way to other Californian and Pacific Rim cities. Neo-Luddite groups have bombed corporate research parks in San Francisco and attempted to cause damage to online banking establishments owned by PacRim Bank.

Perhaps the most active and dangerous groups acting within San Francisco, however, have been the metahuman supremacist groups such as the Metahuman People's Army. During my service as a peacekeeper here in San Francisco, I faced the constant threat of attacks from these racist groups. For years they have engaged in a guerilla war against peacekeeping forces using firebombs, car bombs, armed raids, kidnapping, and anything else that they can imagine. Just last month, a CruiseView passenger ferry carrying 122 civilians was destroyed by a bomb smuggled aboard. The Metahuman People's Army claimed responsibility for the terrorist act. There were no survivors. This is why I find it necessary to finally put a stop to this violence and why the people of San Francisco embrace my actions.



• Huh? Hold the phone there. The bombing of the CruiseView ferry last month wasn't due to any Metahuman People's Army attack.

• No-Name

• Are you sure about that? It seems they claimed responsibility for it.

• Jackrabbit Hack

• We did nothing of the sort. Saito lies about the claim. The MPA did not bomb that ferry and never will bomb a civilian ferry.

• Chompsky

• Trust them, I know they didn't do it. My team did.

• No-Name

• Your team bombed a ferry full of innocent people? I hope the pay was good, my friend, because you're a marked man now.

• Freedom Fighter

• No, no, hear me out. We didn't know it was a bomb. We were hired for the job by a Johnson, just like every other job. The job was to plant a locked briefcase in the room of a corporate executive and then just get out without being noticed. We did some legwork because that's the kind of job where you don't want to be going in totally blind. The target turned out to be the CEO for a corporation expected to underbid a number of competitors for one of Saito's large urban renovation projects. The Johnson was very specific about when the case was to be placed—just before the ferry entered customs check in the Bay. We figured that it was a smear campaign run, planting contraband on the executive to keep them mired in scandal and unable to bid for the project. We had no idea it was a bomb, honest. When we learned what happened we got out of San Francisco fast and went deep underground. I feel terrible about what happened, but you have to believe me that we had no idea it would come to this. Regardless, it wasn't the Metahuman People's Army.

• No-Name

• Couldn't Mr. Johnson have been from the MPA?

• Kilroy

• I don't think so. First off, he was human and Japanese. Second, he oozed corporate culture. My intuition tells me that he's from a Japanacorp.

• No-Name

• And why would they bomb a ferry full of civilians? To assist Saito's agenda. I've heard a story like this before from a friend of mine who ran the shadows in San Francisco. Her team was hired to intimidate a local businessman under the pretense that he was not paying up to the Yakuza. Their team is all metahuman, but they aren't members of the MPA. They did their job, only the man turned up dead three days after their run. A camera across the street caught them as they were entering his business to deliver a message for the Yaks. Next thing you know, the death is blamed on MPA enforcers threatening local business. Saito's regime, the Japanese megacorps and even the Yakuza are all hiring runners to commit terrorist acts and then blaming it on the metahumans. This gives them the public support to round up metahumans and ship them off to the processing centers.

• Walter

• It's not a bad plan. Shadowrunners are deniable assets; that's why the corporations hire us to do their dirty work. Even if we get caught it can never be pinned on Saito. He keeps his hands clean of the whole mess the entire time. We're being used. And if we die during the run, it's one less metahuman they have to worry about.

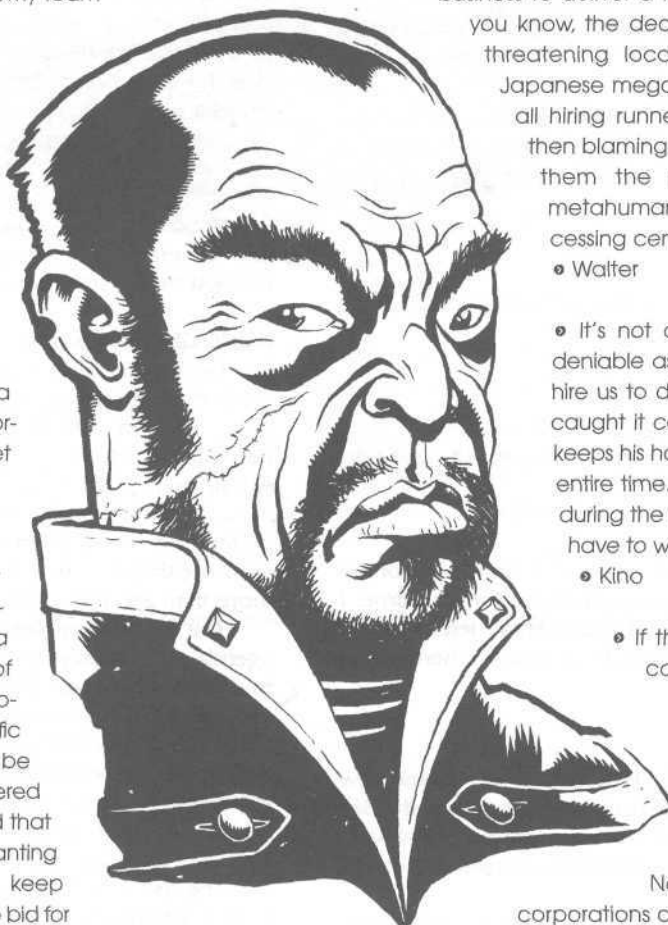
• Kino

• If that's true, I'm not sure what we can do about it. Just do your homework before you take a job.

• Realist

• Easier said than done. If Saito and the Human Nation are working through the corporations and the crime syndicates, any of your usual Johnsons could be involved in this. You could do your homework and it might look like you are working for Renraku against Shiawase when you are really framing metahumans for terrorist acts. I don't like this one bit. I'm a criminal, I admit that. But I'm not a mass murderer and I'm not a racist of any kind.

• Locke





• Saito's following counter-insurgency doctrine—when you can't eliminate them, co-opt them. It's standard practice for security forces to create "pseudo-gangs"—fake political groups led by infiltrators. These groups may even recruit dedicated activists and revolutionaries, but the state's pulling the strings. Groups like this are great for creating internal friction and infighting, pushing extremist views and actions that discredit the movement, or just tying up resources with incompetent leadership. Plus they're invaluable for information gathering purposes.

• Kittson

• Thanks. I was already paranoid. Now you just ruined my day.

• Freedom Fighter

• What can we do about it? Boycott working in San Francisco?

• Scorpio Rising

• Easy for you to say. I have to work the shadows here in San Francisco. I don't exactly have many other job opportunities as a troll without a SIN. I'm real sorry about the MPA and those folks on the ferry, but I have a living I have to earn.

• Kruger

• And what happens when they come by to round you up, huh? Lot of good your living will do you then.

• Freedom Fighter

• If they come for me, I'll have a surprise for them. But if I stop working, I can't afford to eat. They win either way, but I won't go easily.

• Kruger

Due to time limitations, that will have to be the last of the questions, but I would like to thank all of you for your time. I have business I must attend to, but I hope I have left all of you with a better sense of what I mean to accomplish here in the Californian Protectorate.

GAME INFORMATION

Keiji Saito and his Californian Protectorate are a brand new force in the Sixth World, a fledgling nation built around the Bay Area and Central Valley of California. Protectorate General Saito is a sly fox of a leader with a secret agenda: to create a metahuman-free nation.

Saito is a traditional Japanese soldier of the recently rekindled Imperial tradition. His family can trace their roots back to the Saito clan of samurai, and for many generations the Saito line has served the Emperor as warriors and leaders. Keiji served under the late Emperor as an Imperial Marine, reaching the respectable rank of Colonel but always denied his dream of being an Imperial General. Now the old Emperor is dead and his son, still only a young boy, has filled the role as leader of the Japanese Imperial State (as described in *Year of the Comet*). The boy-Emperor has changed Japanese policy significantly, however, encouraging an acceptance of magic and pulling

troops away from Imperial holdings such as the Philippines and San Francisco. General Saito believes this new attitude will be the downfall of the Japanese Empire and he refuses to believe the Emperor acts of his own volition. Unwilling to go along with orders that in his mind would doom Japan, Saito has gone AWOL and has created the Californian Protectorate. His goal is to build a power base from which he may someday be able to challenge the forces he believes are manipulating the Emperor.

Saito is backed by the wealth and power of the Human Nation, a brotherhood of the rich and powerful who wish to see the world cleansed of metahumans, magicians and other "undesirables." Normally content to push racist policies in the upper strata of society and rarely taking a direct hand, Saito has launched the conspiracy in a new direction, applying their goals directly and forcefully. The Human Nation has rallied support behind him, though some are reluctant to commit to what they see as a brash move. Other anti-metahuman groups, however, have flocked to Saito's side. In General Saito they have found a person who can possibly bring about the world they have long desired, a purely human one.

Saito is careful not to display his agenda to the world, screening it behind a sophisticated public relations operation. The Human Nation is acutely aware of the backlash their plans may generate, and have pooled their resources to give Saito the best media spin money can buy.

USING GENERAL SAITO

General Saito is as determined as he is clever. He has created an atrocious agenda concealed masterfully behind a public relations shield. Though most nations believe him to be acting a bit heavy-handed, they are unaware to what extent he is going to create a metahuman-free nation-state. Saito believes shadowrunners to be rogue elements and prefers not to use them for tasks that are delicate or important. For those he uses his own soldiers, whom he trusts far more than any hired help.

The corporations and the Yakuza also work towards Saito's agenda. Both groups are far more willing to hire shadow-help to achieve their goals. This could put shadowrunners directly in the middle of a series of events leading to the creation of a purely human nation. In addition, Saito understands that the deniability of shadowrunners is valuable when it comes to framing metahumans for violent or terrorist acts. Even shadowrunners as far away as Seattle could be duped by one of Saito's agents or allies into furthering his anti-metahuman cause.

The rise in anti-metahuman sentiments being created by Saito's actions may involve shadowrunners in other ways as well. Shadowrunners who work closely with pro-metahuman groups may find themselves targets of police investigations looking into the violence being framed on metahumanity. In addition, the shadowrunners could find themselves on the ugly side of public opinion if they are seen working too closely with pro-metahuman activists. This kind of rise in tempers against the metahuman population is exactly what General Saito desires, and he cares little about the fact that he's putting shadowrunners in a no-win situation.

DISSONANT VOICES

In the years that I've been in charge of Shadowland, I've seen a lot of bizarre things. We've been attacked by rogue otaku, crashed by corps, suffered mysterious hardware failures, fended off worm infestations, and booted more would-be terrorists than I care to think about. Still, I've never seen anything like what happened to us a few weeks ago. I've posted the log here for public viewing. If you have commentary or information, contact me or any other Shadowland staff member. I don't intend to just let this go.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 11 July 2062 at 10:35:09 (PST)

(Begin Log : Arcology Current Events SIG Chat Session : 03 June 2062 at 18:39:00 (PST))

Personas Logged In:

Cinder
Peregrine (moderator)
Socio Pat
Syzygy
Ultra V

Zephyr is present.

Zephyr: Sorry, am I late?

Cinder: No, you're fine. We were just discussing the cleanup at the Arcology.

Peregrine (moderator): Everyone, this is Zephyr. She's been joining us on and off for sometime now.

Zephyr: My half-brother is an arcology survivor, so I've taken an interest. Cinder vouched for me. Nice to see you again, Peregrine.

Peregrine (moderator): Zephyr is the last member we're expecting this evening. At this time, let me introduce Ultra V. She recently moved here and is a guest of the Snowcrash tribe in Snohomish. Carlele vouched for her.



Syzygy: How long have you known Cariele?

Ultra V: My brother was a member of the tribe until he was killed a few months ago. We met then.

Zephyr: Nice to meet you, Ultra V.

Cinder: Welcome.

Peregrine (moderator): I think we can resume our conversation now.

Ultra V: Have there been any signs of the otaku that escaped?

Zephyr: Good question. What happened to Pax and her minions, anyway?

Peregrine (moderator): As far as we know, most of the otaku ringleaders either died or were captured immediately following Deus' ... disappearance from the SCIRE grid.

Ultra V: Disappearance? What are you implying?

Cinder: We talked that thread to death once already tonight. Suffice it to say that there have been some unusual reports, evidence that Deus may not be as dead as we hoped. Nothing concrete, though, it may be a hoax or coincidence. I'll send you the log later if you'll give me a drop for it.

Peregrine (moderator): We've seen some indications that Deus' otaku were powerless outside of the SCIRE grids, at least in the case of the ones he—it—created. They must've known that, because most of the ones that survived Deus' fall decided to stick around in the SCIRE and make what they could of a bad situation. They put up quite a fight, of course.

Syzygy: Unfortunately, those who turned to the false ways could still draw strength from the Resonance.

Socio Pat: So the ones that chose to serve Deus may have been able to flee, unlike those created by Deus.

Peregrine (moderator): Pax, on the other hand, was nowhere to be found when we stormed the grid. We searched, but the only traces we could find of her suggested that she fled, perhaps even during the final battle.

Ultra V: And how were you able to determine that?

Cinder: The electron trail was faint, but it was there. Deus had continuous data-logging processes running to mark the comings and goings of all his minions, even Pax. By process of elimination, we were able to figure out which jackpoint ID was hers. She slipped out in the middle of the chaos, somehow avoiding the data siphon that claimed most of the other Banded in Deus' UV host at the time.

Ultra V: So. The Savior became the Judas. How amusing.

Zephyr: Huh?

Socio Pat: I think it's a comment on Deus' trusting nature. Anyway ... she got out?

Peregrine (moderator): Yes. At first, we thought she might have died in the arcology. But then we began receiving some disturbing accounts.

Cinder: Following Deus' destruction, we watched the Resonance (and the Matrix at large) carefully for any signs of his followers. The Banded were completely loyal to Deus due to their conditioning, and we were pretty sure that his loss wouldn't completely erase their devotion. Sure enough, we began to

hear of a new group that had formed. They were otaku, all of them skilled at manipulating the Resonance, but twisted.

Ultra V: Twisted?

Syzygy: There are some otaku who never clearly hear the voice of the Deep Resonance. Though they learn its ways and accept its gifts, they never fully come to know it. Perhaps it is a flaw in their initial communion with the Deep Resonance, or perhaps they are internally flawed. The data flows strangely with them.

Zephyr: At the risk of repeating myself, huh?

Cinder: I'll try and explain. There are some people who react ... strangely to their Creation. They return from their initial change as otaku, but they're no longer sane—assuming they were to begin with. They often become powerful, but they start having delusions or other mental problems, inevitably acting in destructive ways in both the Matrix and in the physical world. Some otaku think that it's because of an imperfect conversion process, which screwed up their brains even as it gave them otaku abilities.

Ultra V: I have heard of such a thing. But it strikes me as strange that those who can dance to the Matrix's song could be considered impaired in any way. Perhaps it is simply a different voice they hear, one that others can't fathom.

Cinder: Interesting implication. So you think the difference is in the Resonance, not the person?

Ultra V: The world is a duality. Only a fool would suggest that such a powerful entity exists with only one side to it.

Syzygy: Yours is not the first heresy to come into the paths. It won't be the last.

Ultra V: Tied tightly to your misconceptions, aren't you? Fool.

Syzygy: Who's fo%ll&h. ^?klww lsbwL23222222;f

Zephyr: Whoa, what was that? The whole SIG distorted. Everyone okay?

Ultra V: I am perfectly fine.

Syzygy: The Resonance ... was manipulated. The source is odd. I cannot locate it.

Peregrine (moderator): I'll notify Cap. He'll set someone to looking at it pronto. In the meantime, perhaps we should move onto a new topic?

Zephyr: So what about this group you heard about?

Zephyr: Cinder? Are you okay? Still there?

Cinder: Sorry, I'm fine. I got distracted. Anyway, the group called themselves "Ex Pacis," and started making major grid changes across the Matrix. We first heard of them when they rewrote the system of a local corp called Columbia Industries that creates sims for education and industrial uses.

Socio Pat: What do you mean by "rewrote?"

Cinder: Exactly that. The entire system was restructured from top to bottom, using a freaky organizational system. We noticed because the Resonance flow was altered, making it obvious to the otaku in the area.

Zephyr: Altered how, exactly?

Cinder: If the flow of data is a stream, imagine putting a big rock in the center of it. You can feel the change if you stand



in the water, even if you can't see the rock from the riverbank. It's just different.

Peregrine (moderator): Of course. It also didn't hurt that it made NewsNet big time the next day. Still, we might have overlooked it if it hadn't been for Syzygy and company.

Zephyr: Are you sure it wasn't the Architects? They pull stuff like that all the time, though usually on a smaller scale.

Cinder: No, it wasn't them. For one, the level of work done here was far superior to that of the Architects. While a lot of work was done from inside the Matrix, the hackers also actually broke in and hardcoded some elements into the host. Undoing the changes would mean rebuilding the system from the ground up.

They also found one of the security deckers with a bullet in his brain. The Architects never do physical intrusions like that.

Whoever did this wanted people to know who they were, though. They left us calling cards, things that GridSec would just write off. Across the host's main LTG icon were the words "Ex Pacis," along with a black dove clutching a brace of arrows in its claws and a fiberoptic cable in its beak. One of Pax's old signature items, a card simply bearing the name "Pax Vobiscum," was found on the decker's body.

Zephyr: Is there any sign as to why they targeted Columbia? I'd heard it was small time.

Peregrine (moderator): We don't know. That's the confusing part. Pax used to choose her targets with an eye to fulfilling some slanted sense of justice, hitting people who worked to limit technology in society but actually led secret high-tech lives. Columbia doesn't fit the profile.

Ultra V: Columbia is researching a specialized sim technology for educational purposes, which triggers and enhances the chemical reaction that occurs when information is being stored. Consider it a learning booster, if you will.

Syzygy: Where did you get that information?

Ultra V: I am under no obligation to share my sources with you, Fader.

Zephyr: Whoa!

Syzygy: I'll show you how Faded I am ...

Cinder: Syzygy, don't!

Socio Pat: What just happened? What did she say?

(Moderator Controls On)

Peregrine (moderator): Syzygy, Ultra V: You are both warned. One more outburst from either of you will result in expulsion. I'm sorry, but you both know the rules or you wouldn't be here.

Peregrine (moderator): ?

Ultra V: As you will.

Syzygy: My apologies, Peregrine.

(Moderator Controls Off)

Peregrine (moderator): Now, where were we?

Zephyr: Cin, you said that was the first time you guys had

heard of Pax since the arcology. I take it she's been active since then?

Cinder: Hmm? Oh. Yes, she has. Ex Pacis now has about twenty members, most of them as disturbed as Pax. She has two main lieutenants, known as Amor and Honos. Surprisingly, we haven't been able to identify any other Banded among her group. They're all new, and all loyal as far as we can tell.

Zephyr: Where is she pulling new people from? I mean, not that the Matrix isn't full of suckers for a cause, especially their own.

Cinder: Seems she was specifically "recruiting" otaku who had troubles during their initial creation, the "twisted" ones we mentioned earlier. Luckily, not everyone she courted was as heavily screwed up as she was, or at least not in the same ways, and one managed to turn her down and still get away. That's how we were able to track her once we knew what to look for.

Zephyr: Has anyone heard anything about those lieutenants?

Peregrine (moderator): We have very little information about Amor and Honos, unfortunately. Apparently those aliases are new, because we haven't been able to track them back to anywhere else.

Ultra V: Of course they're new. It's a matched set.

Cinder: What do you mean?

Ultra V: You disappoint me, Cinder. I thought that you more than any of the rest here would catch it. Just as pax is Latin for peace, amor is Latin for—

Syzygy: Love. And honos is honor. I'm assuming irony is the intended effect.

Cinder: It looks that way. One of my friends says that Amor used to go by the name of "Cadmus," over in St. Louis. Apparently he acquired quite a name for himself back there, running a makeshift bunraku parlor and BTL business on the side.

Socio Pat: Drek. I've heard of this freak. He's got a chip on his shoulder a mile-wide against anyone who isn't otaku. He even makes Humanis look polite.

Cinder: What do you know about him?

Socio Pat: Apparently he would "collect" non-otaku girlfriends, addict them to BTLs and "break" them while they were dating, then stick them in the parlor as merchandise when they were far gone enough. He disappeared about a year ago, and there was much rejoicing. I guess it was premature.

Zephyr: Dear God. Do I want to know how you heard of this guy?

Socio Pat: Deprogrammer told me the story when we were discussing "people we could live without" one night. I'm sure he can provide a little more information with the right inducement. I'll ask him about it.

Peregrine (moderator): Back on topic, please.

Cinder: Amor's icon looks like a priest, which I guess is even more ironic now that we know a little more about him. He also has a daemon hanging around with him that he calls "Eros." We don't know much about Honos.

Ultra V: I know her.

Syzygy: That somehow does not surprise me. What's the sleaze?

Ultra V: Honos used to be known as Patch, and her tribe was



in Dallas. She was their de facto leader after a rival tribe attacked them and the oldest otaku were killed. She feels strongly that internal divisions among the otaku threaten the Resonance itself, and that being a member of Ex Pacis is a way to heal those rifts.

Syzygy: Patch? Formerly of the Radlant Well tribe just outside of Ft. Worth?

Ultra V: Why, it seems you know her too. What a small world.

Syzygy: Patch is dead. I saw her die. She was only 12 years old, but she held off those thrice-damned zealots for as long as anyone could have. Your "rival tribe" is nothing but a false echo. The Resonance flowed truly within her, and Deus destroyed it.

Ultra V: I am sorry to hear that, but I assure you, she is still alive. And still quite talented.

Cinder: From our evidence, Honos does almost half of the killing herself, and always after the victim has been tied up or incapacitated. She slit a guard's throat over at Global Technologies, leaving a calling card, "Death with Honor." Are you sure this is the same Patch that Syzygy knew?

Ultra V: I never claimed that it was, only that it sounds as

though it could be. How do you know who killed that guard, anyway?

Peregrine (moderator): Trideo feed. Of course, we can't make out faces because they all wore hoods, but it was a female—not Pax, yet definitely giving orders.

Syzygy: It isn't possible.

Ultra V: This grows tedious. I couldn't care less about your opinion.

Zephyr: In any case, it's not exactly something we can prove either w@y. 673##^#% ^

Peregrine (moderator): Damn??WERL@@@#\$@#LK! What is this D#\$\$R???K!

Syzygy: A#\$\$%nother disSOK@#JKLtortion wave. Peregrine, try locking it do@#\$WJPWn.

(Moderator Controls On)

Peregrine (moderator): Frag, that hurt. Everyone okay?

Syzygy: Just shaken up a bit.

Cinder: I'm all right. It barely touched me.

Ultra V: I am fine.



Socio Pat: No problems.

Peregrine (moderator): Zephyr?

Peregrine (moderator): Zephyr? Are you all right?

Zephyr: I just had to ... clear my head. I'm okay.

Peregrine (moderator): Should we close down the SIG for the night, until Cap'n gets a chance to examine things thoroughly?

Ultra V: I would rather not. Thus far we have only suffered a minor inconvenience, and I'm sure the staff will have it worked out soon. Can we continue?

Cinder: I agree. I think some useful data is manifesting here this evening. I would hate to cut it short.

Peregrine (moderator): Well, all right then. If there aren't any dissenting opinions, I'm going to release the moderator controls now.

(Moderator Controls Off)

Peregrine (moderator): It looks like we're back to normal. What's the next question?

Socio Pat: Any other word on Pax's mental state?

Cinder: Not as such. We have learned that she's picked up a trick or two from Deus, using similar drug cocktails on her recruits to ensure their loyalty. We aren't sure of the contents of these cocktails, but they seem to be frighteningly effective.

Socio Pat: Sounds about right. It's been long accepted that those with similar mental disorders place an almost fanatical value on control over their subordinates. Those who can't buy absolute loyalty often use other means of control when initiating new members, and Pax's history and personality make her a prime pick for that course of action.

Zephyr: Global Technologies wasn't their most recent target, was it?

Cinder: No. Ex Pacis has hit several targets since then, some with more success and visible effect than others. We know there is a pattern of some sort, but we haven't been able to completely figure it out yet.

Ultra V: Really? I'm surprised.

Zephyr: And why is that?

Cinder: I don't think this is the place for that discussion, Ultra V.

Socio Pat: Why not?

Syzygy: Because some revelations aren't easily understood by those who haven't experienced the Resonance. Isn't that right, Ultra V?

Ultra V: Finally, a sensible remark from you. How refreshing.

Zephyr: Oh, so this is more mysterious otaku drek. Great.

Cinder: It isn't that, Zeph. It's ... well, don't worry about it. I'll try to explain. With each site Ex Pacis changes, the Resonance flows differently. The data patterns are changed, and they sort of ... pool. If there's enough available processing power and the other factors are right, you can get places of power, where you can speak to the Resonance directly.

Socio Pat: So Pax is creating those pools?

Cinder: No. At least, not that we can find. We're not even sure if the new areas could support wells, because they're so neb-

ulous. And even worse is the fact that we can't figure out how she's choosing what to change and where to get that effect.

Ultra V: That is a mystery, isn't it?

Syzygy: Not as much as you might think.

Ultra V: Why not?

Syzygy: Because for all that her insanity might seem to render her beyond prediction, ultimately she functions within a pattern, just as all do within the Matrix. One only has to determine the parameters of her function to understand it.

Peregrine (moderator): I wouldn't go that far, Syzygy. We do have some leads as to some of her motivations of late.

Ultra V: Now *that* is interesting. How reliable can such information be, I wonder?

Peregrine (moderator): Reliable enough. A lot of people have done a lot of work to try and find out information about her.

Ultra V: She must be sloppy. She should learn to be more careful.

Socio Pat: Well, compulsive individuals with revenge fantasies are known to get sloppy now and again.

Zephyr: Ex-girlfriends don't count, you know.

Socio Pat: Ve2y fun*y. Speak for your32@self.

Zephyr: Not again ...

Socio Pat: I'm getting all >@>>#s of fe???dback. Ah*346\$hr.

Peregrine (moderator): Pat, are you all right? Your image is de-rezzing!

Socio Pat: |456^%\$'ll be 000okayt. Connection l@29#@bre7k7ing up@3234#@@2

Socio Pat has been disconnected.

Zephyr: Peregrine, what the hell is that? That's the third fragging time it's happened, and now Pat's gone!

Peregrine (moderator): I know, Zephyr. Thanks for pointing that out. I'm talking with the Captain right now.

Cinder: Look, it might have just been a localized problem for Socio Pat. The first two times, the icon for the SIG itself was affected. That time something might have happened with Pat's equipment or jackpoint or anything. Don't panic about it yet.

Syzygy: All the same ...

Ultra V: Yes?

Syzygy: Nothing. Nothing at all.

Ultra V: I see. Still, back to the conversation. Peregrine was saying that someone approached by Pax had told Overwatch about her current status, yes?

Peregrine (moderator): I never mentioned Overwatch, Ultra V.

Zephyr: Overwatch?

Cinder: I'll explain it later, Zephyr.

Ultra V: My apologies. I hadn't realized there were any secrets here ... among friends.

Peregrine (moderator): Captain says that he's looking into it, but that the rest of Shadowland seems to be fine. And continuing the topic, we have information that Pax is playing with even less of a full deck than she used to have.

Syzygy: I'm shocked.



Ultra V: How has she changed?

Peregrine (moderator): She was in Deus' private host for too long. The UV host fried her brain, and now she's probably addicted to it. Studies on the other surviving Banded show a similar addiction, just like with beetleheads. In fact, a few of them have ended up jazzing themselves with BTLs on a semi-permanent basis, because nothing else can give them the needed levels of brain stimulation.

Syzygy: It's a sad, pathetic way to fade. Wouldn't you agree, U. V.?

Ultra V: I refuse to be treated in this manner. I came here for civil conversation. Instead, I must endure insulting remarks from one who should be my brother, not my enemy. You will regret this, Fader.

Ultra V has left.

Zephyr: Whew. I'll be the first to go on record as saying that she was more than a little creepy. What is all that stuff about fading?

Syzygy: Her bandwidth isn't up to her frequency, certainly. And Fading is ...

Peregrine (moderator): It's when an otaku begins to lose his or her powers, Zephyr. Once an otaku gets past 20 years old, they start to lose the ability to do what they do. Eventually, it all goes away and they become normal, just like us. They call that the Fading.

Zephyr: So—her calling Syzygy that was a major insult, then.

Syzygy: Terminal.

Zephyr: Well, at least I don't feel quite so out of step now.

Peregrine (moderator): Pax has got to be Fading a bit herself, come to think of it. At least, we can hope.

Cinder: If she is, she's managing to sleaze us pretty good. She doesn't seem to have lost a single routine, in spite of her age.

Zephyr: How old is she, anyway?

Cinder: She's got to be past 21. I did hear a rumor that she's working on a process to avoid the Fading's effects.

Syzygy: I heard that as well. It is all part of the sermon she delivers to prospective disciples, to convince them of the underlying truth of her words. She claims that part of the method used by the False One to create the Banded, specifically the drug cocktail, can be altered so that it can keep the mind open to the Resonance, perhaps indefinitely. She appears obsessed with the idea, enough so that no one is allowed to interfere with her ritual dosage.

Zephyr: And do you believe it?

Syzygy: She has lived too long in a manufactured reality, programmed to the whims of a false god. I do not believe that she could determine truth from illusion, even if she wished to.

Zephyr: How about you, Cinder? As the other resident otaku here, how do you feel about it?

Cinder: I don't think she's capable of doing what she claims. I mean, the Resonance alone has taught me never to say that anything is impossible, but still ... She has the research from the

SCIRE to work from, but I don't believe she has the expertise to pull it off. She turned her back on the Resonance, and I don't think it would guide her to such a discovery.

Zephyr: So, we've got a wacked-out group trying to divert the flow of the Resonance one host at a time, led by a woman with Fading on the brain who believes that chemical enhancement is the way to live forever. And she's doing all of this ... why? Any thoughts?

Peregrine (moderator): Fear.

Zephyr: That's probably a good one. Fear of growing old?

Peregrine (moderator): Why not? No one's Peter Pan.

Cinder: That d@e&n't sto% ... o# n0 ...

Zephyr: Je&u& ... I can't t@ke mu*423 m22KFWEE of this\$... Aaaaliahhhh@#\$@#@##@

Peregrine (moderator): Zephyr! 312%L:JKJ\$ 3vv" LRo'r;v 2rkIj

Zephyr has been disconnected.

Ultra V is present.

Mirror1 is present.

Mirror2 is present.

Ultra V: P00r Zephyr. We@k m1111nds \$uch as her& shouldn't play in the M@trix. It's f@r 2oo d@ngerous for th0\$e n0t b0rn to IT.

Peregrine (moderator): Ultra V! &2\$Stop!!^!@#424 3LK

(M0der@tor Controls O ... O ...)

(MO&*rator C##trol\$ Over@r#dden—Shut#ing Down)

Syzygy: Show yourself, heretic!

Ultra V: Very well. I'm tired of this game anyway. Time to take the masks off and let them see our true glory.

Ultra V has left.

Pax is present.

Mirror1 has left.

Amor is present.

Mirror2 has left.

Honos is present.

Pax: Is that better, Fader?

Peregrine (moderator): Mother of God ...

Pax: Honos, I believe there's a friend of yours here. Perhaps you and Amor should split up and mingle with the guests, all right?

Honos: With pleasure. It has been a while since you left me in Dallas, hasn't it, Syzygy?

Syzygy: No. Patch died.

Honos: Actually, I didn't die, though Deus made me wish I had before he was done with me. Let me show you what he taught me.

Syzygy: Unnh!

Cinder: Syzygy!

Pax: Oh no, Cinder. You and I have something to discuss.



onance wells. To do this, Ex Pacis engages in a sort of otaku feng shui, intentionally altering the structure of Matrix hosts and grids to redirect the flow of the Resonance. This sometimes requires changes in the actual hardware architecture, meaning that Ex Pacis engages in physical penetrations as well as Matrix hacking. It is unclear whether Ex Pacis gains some benefit out of simply creating temporary Dissonance pools, or whether their aim is to restructure the entire Matrix to fit their schemes.

EX PACIS

Most, if not all, of the members of Ex Pacis were recruited by Pax and are considered "twisted" by other otaku. When they first underwent change through communication with the Deep Resonance, something about their transformation did not quite go right. To other otaku, they have their "wires crossed." This mental difference manifests in many ways, from obvious derangements, phobias, psychotic episodes or fits of temporary insanity to more subtle personality quirks and mental flaws. Whatever their affliction, Pax has convinced these otaku that they can hear the Dissonance and drawn them to her side.

Members of Ex Pacis are fanatically loyal to Pax, a condition she ensures through the use of psychotropic conditioning. Pax learned her tricks by studying the effects that Deus' otaku pawns went through during Transfiguration. She has incorporated similar methods into Ex Pacis via rituals for introducing new members to the Dissonance. She has a variety of programs at her disposal, each similar to personafix BTL and psychotropic black IC.

In game terms, each member of Ex Pacis should suffer from at least one Mental or Matrix Flaw (see *Edges and Flaws*, p. 15, *SRComp*). It is not uncommon for them to also have Mental or Matrix Edges as well. Many members also suffer from addiction to Pax's BTL/psychotropic conditioning. Membership in Ex Pacis is not recommended for player characters.

PAX

Before Pax met Deus, she was the leader of a tribe of uniquely fanatical Atlanta otaku. Pax led the group into a range of criminal enterprises, including terrorist attacks against anti-technological groups and adherents. When Deus and Pax made contact, their rapport was instant. Deus was looking for cold-blooded otaku who would accept it as a god and lead other otaku in its name. Pax, ever practical, denounced the mysterious Deep Resonance as "aloof" from real-world affairs and embraced Deus' solidly aggressive pro-tech agenda. She served as the leader of Deus' "whites" within the arcology, overseeing the AI's empire as its top assistant.

Pax can be charming on a personal level, but her mental state borders on homicidal psychosis at times—perhaps a result of an imperfect Deep Resonance conversion. Her name comes from her time in Atlanta, where she left calling cards on her victims' bodies. The cards read "pax vobiscum"—"peace be with you."

Pax suffers from UV addiction, a result of spending months within Deus' personal ultraviolet host in the SCIRE Matrix. This addiction drives her to spend at least a few hours



a week in an ultraviolet Matrix environment in order to get her fix. She has managed to find access to at least one ultraviolet host in the Matrix and is actively trying to gain access to others. She also has plans to construct her own ultraviolet host, though assembling enough processing power is a massive task that will take some time to complete.

Pax is also nearing the age where she will start to suffer the effects of the Fading, the point where otaku begin to lose their powers. Fearing this change, she is desperately scrambling to find a way to reverse the Fading's effects. Her efforts so far have led to the development of a treatment that combines psychotropic conditioning with a chemical cocktail, both derived from the experiments of Deus. Several fading members of Ex Pacis are undergoing this treatment with mixed results. It seems to artificially enhance the neural pathways of the brain and reverse the Fading's effects, bringing with it a permanent sense of euphoria and an increased Matrix Reaction of +2. On the downside, extended use causes the neural pathways to burn out, permanently reducing the subject's Intelligence by 1 after every 3 months of use. Unsatisfied with this option, Pax is looking to either improve it or find another, better treatment.

Pax's persona appears as a dark-robed, pale, witch figure with bat wings.

AMOR AND HONOS

Amor and Honos are Pax's top lieutenants in Ex Pacis. Amor is a technoshaman once known as Cadmus. He led an otaku tribe in St. Louis that manufactured and sold BTLs and also ran a bunraku parlor. Amor is incredibly misogynistic (an unusual bias, given the number of strong women in Ex Pacis) and extremely prejudiced against all those who aren't otaku. Amor is also experiencing the fading, but is using Pax's treatment to stave off its effects. The permanent euphoria side



Pax

B 4 **Q** 5 **S** 4 **C** 7 **I** 8 (10) **W** 7 **E** 2.31 **M** — **R** 7

INIT: 7 + 1D6 (3D6), Matrix **INIT:** 8 (10) + 4D6 (5D6)

Dice Pools: Combat 11, Hacking 6 (11), Task 3

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 10/4

Race: Human (cyberadept otaku)

Active Skills: Computer 8 (Decking 11), Edged Weapons 3 (Knives 6), Electronics 6, Electronics B/R 5, Etiquette 3 (Matrix 6), Intimidation 5, Leadership 3, Pistols 5, Stealth 5, Submachine Guns 4, Unarmed Combat 4

Knowledge Skills: Banded 6, BTL Production 7, English 6, Japanese 4, Matrix Hangouts 5, Otaku Tribes 5, SCIRE Matrix 4, UV Hosts 3

Martial Arts: Brawling 4 (Close Combat, Kick Attack)

Cyberware (betaware): Auto-injector (one shot w/cutter nanites), cyberears (hearing amplification, select sound filter 5), cybereyes (electronic vision magnification 3, flare compensation, low-light, thermographic), datajack w/ASIST converter, encephalon (Rating 2), math SPU 3, memory (300 Mp), simrig (full-X) w/simlink (Rating 8)

Bloware (cultured): Cerebral booster (Level 2), synaptic accelerator (Level 2)

Living Persona: MPCP-8 (11)/7 (8)/10/7 (8)/10, DF 10 (11), Hardening 4, I/O Speed 1,000 Mp

Channels: Access 7 (Deception 10), Control 10, Index 6, Files 6 (Read/Write 8), Slave 6 (Spoof 8)

Complex Forms: Armor 9 (10), Attack (S) 9 (10), Black Hammer 7 (8), Camo 6 (7), Cloak 6 (7), Deception 9 (10), Decrypt 5 (6), Killjoy 7 (8), Medic 8 (9), Read/Write 6 (7), Restore 6 (7), Shield 8 (9), Sleaze 10 (11), Spoof 6 (7), Track 6 (7)

Echoes (Submersion Grade 9): Distortion, Ghosting, Improved MPCP 3, Improved Persona (Bod) 1, Improved Persona (Masking) 1, Improved Reaction 2, Overclock, Siphon

effect of that treatment has made Amor both overconfident and more lecherous than he already was.

Honos' background is less clear. She claims to have once been known as Patch, the leader of the Radiant Well otaku tribe in Texas. Patch was captured by otaku minions of Deus and forcibly converted to their side. Others claim that Patch was killed, and that Honos is using Patch's identity as an alias. Honos is also a technoshaman, though her past experiences have given her brutal and sadistic tendencies.

Both Amor and Honos should be considered Superior NPCs. Amor's icon is that of a parish priest, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and carrying an old-fashioned Bible with a red ribbon hanging from it. His utilities manifest from the book he carries. Honos appears as a patched tin girl wearing a red clockwork heart on her chest and carrying a basket. Her utilities manifest from the basket she carries, with her stealth utilities taking the form of an antique oilcan and her attack utilities taking the form of a large ax.

NEW ECHOES

The interactions between Ex Pacis and the Dissonance have led the tribe to discover two new static echoes, distor-

tion and siphon. These echoes are only available to otaku who follow the Dissonance and who undergo submersion at a Dissonance pool.

Distortion

An otaku who learns the distortion echo can take a Complex Action to disrupt processes running on the local system. The distortion wave causes mild feedback to Matrix users, laced with vertigo and nausea. It also causes icons, images and system sculpture to fade out, waver, pixelize or temporarily de-rezz. In small hosts this effect is drastic, in larger systems the effect may barely be noticed.

The otaku can wield the distortion wave offensively, targeting a number of Matrix users equal to the otaku's MPCP rating ÷ 2 (round down). For every 2 Hacking Pool dice the otaku commits to the distortion echo, these Matrix users suffer a +1 modifier to all Matrix actions. The sessions of targeted tortoise mode users are immediately crashed.

To otaku, the distortion wave has an even stronger effect as the flow of the Resonance is temporarily interrupted. Reduce the channels and complex forms of targeted otaku (and sprites and daemons) by 1 per 2 Hacking Pool dice allocated to the echo. Otaku who follow the Dissonance are immune to this effect.

Matrix users may counter the effects of a distortion wave by taking a Complex Action and allocating Hacking Pool. Each die spent towards defense nullifies one Hacking Pool die the distorting otaku spent towards that character only. In effect, the character adjusts his interface settings to counter the distortion's effects. Hacking Pool may not be spent in defense of other characters.

If a Matrix user is targeted by more than one distortion echo at a time, only the strongest distortion effect applies (the effects are not cumulative).

The distortion echo's effects can be sustained by spending a Simple Action each Initiative Pass, but the otaku's Detection Factor is reduced by 1 for every turn it is sustained past the first.

Siphon

The siphon echo allows an otaku to directly interrupt a target's data trail and simsense connection. To use siphon, the otaku spends a Complex Action and chooses a target. The target must make an immediate Bod Test (Hacking Pool may be used) against the otaku's Charisma. If the target fails to achieve any successes, he or she is immediately dumped from the Matrix and suffers the effects of dumpshock. If the target does succeed, he or she is still temporarily stunned and disoriented. Stunned characters suffer a +2 modifier to all tests and cannot initiate any actions. This condition lasts for the character's next 4 Initiative Passes, minus 1 for each success they achieved. A character who scored 4 successes suffers no effects.

Siphon only affects personas and has no effect on tortoise users or programs. Each use of siphon automatically raises the otaku's Security Tally by 2.

IMPS



This file came into my possession from Ariadne, a Boston witch and chummer of the guy who wrote the file, a lab-geek named Kiernan. In return for sharing the data, she's asked for help in trying to find Kiernan—he disappeared shortly after writing the last entry. So far, they've had no luck in tracking him down. If anyone knows anything, drop me a message and I'll pass it on to Ariadne. No charge.

I don't pretend to know a lot about magic, but frankly this gives me the chills.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 11 July 2062 at 12:31:16 (PST)

[Begin Personal Journal : Kiernan Doyle : Artifact Research Division : DIMR]

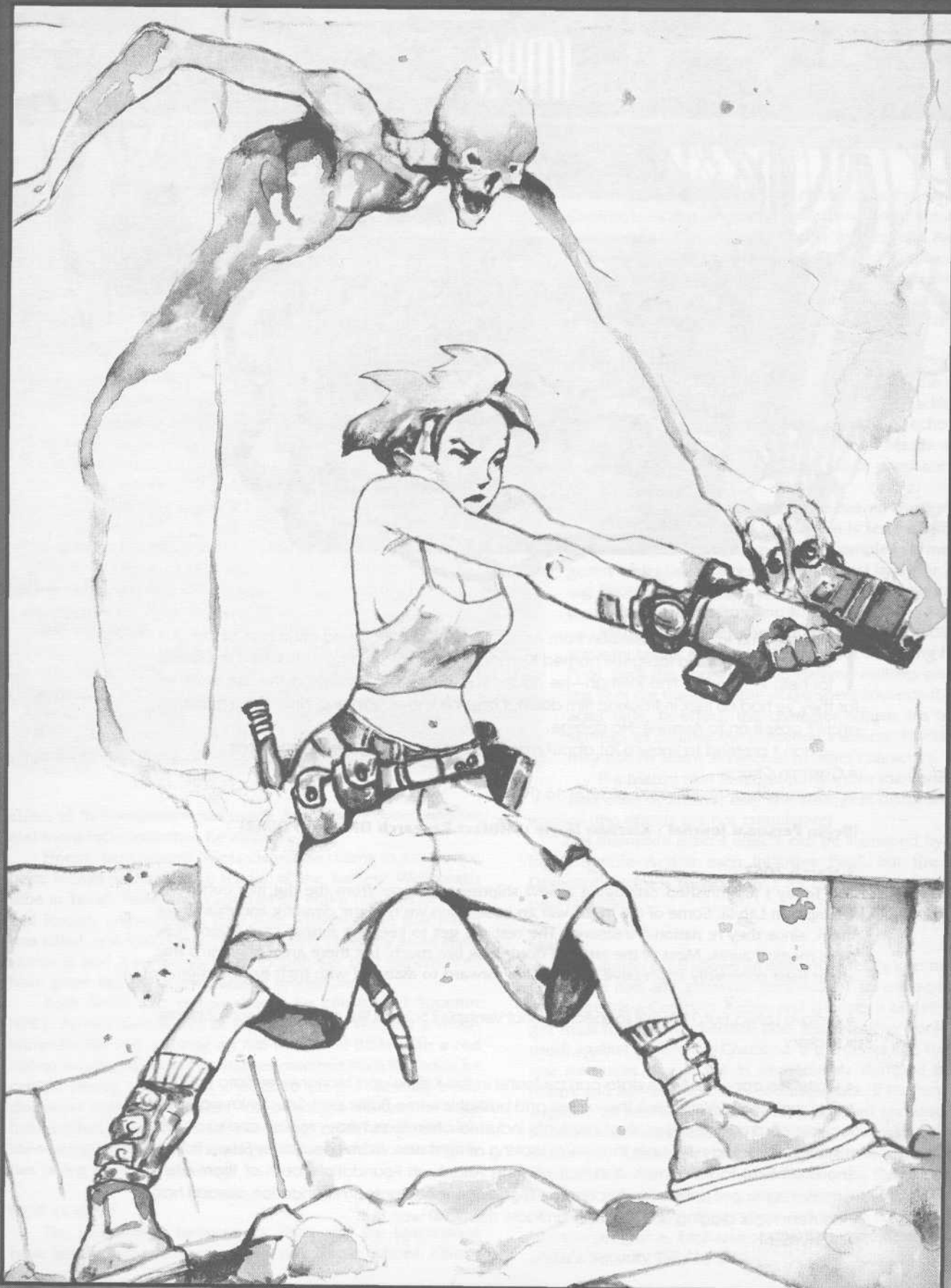
3 March 2062

Today I just finished cataloging a new shipment of items from the dig just outside of Ventspils in Latvia. Some of the items will go back when we're done cleaning and examining them, since they're national treasures. The rest we get to keep for further study since they have magical auras. Most of the artifacts don't look like much, but there are a few items that are at least outwardly impressive. I'm looking forward to assisting with their examination.

• A dig in Latvia, huh? What's so special about Ventspils? Sounds like a no-name sort of place.
• Hickory

• Quite the opposite. More data can be found in the Kallnin and Manchester data havens, but in summation, Ventspils is the largest and busiest ice-free Baltic port. Saeder-Krupp has a lock on the area, exporting oil, oil products, industrial chemicals, heavy metals and so on. But it's the area outside Ventspils that we're looking at right now, more specifically Slitere Forest. The DIMR had to fight tooth and nail with the Atlantean Foundation; both of them were attempting to get permission to conduct digs. Since the Atlantean Foundation already had one near Riga, digging up old Norse artifacts, the DIMR won out.

• KonWacht





- Word is that the Atlantean Foundation was particularly upset over losing this site, claiming that they suspected the Ventspils region to have more clues about the Atlantean culture, blah blah blah. Just sounds like a load of bulldrek to me. The Baltic region is pretty far from where they claim Atlantis is located.
- Skeptic

- The big secret about the Ventspils dig is that there was some sort of astral rift involved. From what I heard it was a temporary rift, appearing only for a short period in December of last year. But during that time they dug up a slew of new artifacts in the rift's vicinity.
- Chochliczka

6 March 2062

Unfair! I did the prep work on the dig items, but Carter, that suck-up, gets chosen as Ebran's assistant. Just because Carter is also an elf ... okay. I shouldn't say things like that. It's bigoted and untrue. But I can't help thinking things like that at times, especially when Carter gets that smug look on his face. At least there was some consolation. As I watched him bring out the items, he tripped and nearly broke some of the more delicate pieces. The look on his face, surprised and embarrassed, was well worth it.

- While we're waiting on the good stuff, what's the data on Doyle?
- Joe Public

• Kiernan Doyle, as you can tell already, is a researcher with the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research (DIMR). What this doesn't mention is that he's one of their best, though the youngest and definitely the most enthusiastic about his work. He graduated near the top of his class in '60 at MIT&T with twin degrees in metallurgy ("materials science" for those of you who are sticklers about this sort of thing) and alchemy, and is a hermetic mage. He comes from a solidly Irish Southie family, branches of which have been associated with and related to the Knights of the Red Branch and the Kennedy dynasty respectively.

- Raven

• Kiernan was shaping up to be a fine witch as well. He had too strong a connection to his family's Catholic way of thinking to form a connection with the Lady, but otherwise his outlook was sympathetic with ours. May the Great Mother grant him peace, wherever he may be; the Circle Grove will miss him.

- Labrys

9 March 2062

Today was strange. Carter called in sick, so I assisted Ebran with the pieces from Latvia. He and Carter had already done the preliminary work, sorting the magical objects from the mundane, and then sorting the magical ones from least to most potent. I would have thought work like that was beneath

him—he's just got that, I don't know, *noble* sort of air to him, and I don't think it's just because he's a Tir Prince. Not that I mind. He's brilliant, and it's an honor to work with him.

The strangeness began when I couldn't find several of the items, though they had been carefully tagged and sorted properly. We couldn't find them anywhere, and I even checked to see if someone else had taken them out for study since our departments and divisions sometimes overlap. When I received an answer in the negative, I was afraid that they'd been stolen. There are plenty of criminals around who could profit by these items. I was on the telecom to security when Ebran found them, sitting right in the middle of the examination space. How did they get there? It's not like they could just get up and walk, and we would have found them earlier. Puzzling.

- Ebran sullies himself working with the DIMR. I can't fathom how anyone of his noble heritage could lower himself to such menial tasks as this.
- Brehon

• Maybe because unlike the rest of you fruity elves, he's waking up and smelling the soykaf, pulling that high nose out of the air. There's more to do in the Sixth World than fret about berry stains on silk robes.

- Orkana

• Let me be rightly understood. Ebran is nothing more than a contemptible traitor to the elven cause, the willing pawn of a dragon who was not even powerful enough to avoid his own death. He betrayed his land, his people and his duty. Menial tasks are all he is fit for.

- White Knight

- Ewwwww—kay.
- Rose Red

After work, I called Gail and told her about my day. She invited me to come with her to go shopping for a new athame. She just became High Priestess of her coven, and she felt that her old athame, though it had a good history, wasn't sufficient. She would have preferred to make her own, but she was impatient and wanted a new one now. Great stress relief for me, though I'm not a shopping type of person. Gail is a lot of fun to be around, not to mention good-looking. I think she's involved with the High Priest, though, so I don't think we'll ever get together.

- Query: athame?
- Petitioner

• Traditionally, a black-hilted dagger used in the Craft of the Wise, or Wicca as it's also called. Those witches that possess the Talent sometimes use theirs as foci as well. Suffice to say, a witch without an athame or wand is like a decker without a



deck. For homespun magic, they can work some big juju sometimes.

• Sourceress

We spent an hour or two shopping before she found one that she liked. She was pretty excited about it. The talismonger she bought it from said that it was a good power focus. I took a look at it astrally, and the blade is obviously finely made with a strong aura. Gail was just happy to find one with a plain black hilt; lots of people like to have theirs with all kinds of doodads and designs on them. She had to hand over a good bundle of money. I hope she gets a lot of use from it.

10 March 2062

Carter is feeling better and back at work helping Ebran. Okay, I admit it: I'm jealous. How many times do you get to work alongside one of the most brilliant minds of our time? Not many, I can tell you that. At least there's the audit to worry about. Everyone not involved in sensitive research or projects is being called to help out, from inventorying everything we have to going over the procedures we have in place to make sure they're both safe and efficient. Looks like I'll be busy with that this week and possibly the next.

Called Gail to see if she wanted to go see the new movie; she said she was too tired. She'd just bonded her new athame, and it sounds as if it took a lot out of her. She suggested I try her again in another day or two. I think I will, since I'm pretty sure she'd really like it.

13 March 2062

The audit is already driving me crazy. All the endless paperwork ... it gets on the nerves. The same sort of thing must be happening with Gail; I called her up to see if she wanted to cash in on the rain check and see the movie with me, and she was pretty testy. Said she was in the middle of something at the moment. I think I mumbled something about stress relief, and she apologized. She told me that she had nearly gotten into a car accident on the way home from a coven member's house, and she was still shaken up by it. I asked her to tell me about it, but she wouldn't give me too many details—something about zoning out at the wheel, and narrowly missing an altercation with some go-gangers. I'm just glad she's alright.

• I checked Lone Star's reports for that day, and the altercation in question was with the Ancients. Gail took a turn too wide and clipped a parked motorcycle. The gang instantly went after her. She was lucky that Lone Star was around to make sure she was okay, though they noted that she didn't seem all there. They didn't see any evidence of chipping or drug abuse, however, so they had to let her go.

• X-Star

15 March 2062

I'm really concerned about Gail. She called me at work on my lunch break and said she just needed to talk with someone. She sounded exhausted and close to tears, if she

hadn't been crying already. I had time to talk, or at least listen, so I told her to go ahead. I mean, she's my friend. I can't do any less.

Gail told me that she'd been at Bear's (he's the High Priest), helping him out at his herb shop, making and enchanting minor fetishes. They got into a fight after she almost burned the herbs he was going to enchant. This was on top of coming close to cutting off her own finger while she was slicing some of the herbs, and she doesn't know how or why either event happened. She told me that Bear accused her of not paying attention to what she was doing, and all she could say in her defense was that she'd been very tired lately. Gail also told me that it wasn't simply tiredness she felt, but a drain, like an emptiness.

We ended up chalking the whole thing up to a run of bad luck and stress from work, and I recommended that she go to bed early tonight so that she could get plenty of rest. She should be feeling right as rain after that.

• There's never any such thing as a simple "run of bad luck." Then again, I'm what others would call a typical, paranoid shadowrunner. Still, there's more going on here than just bad luck, I can feel it.

• Penny

17 March 2062

We're almost done with the audit, and I'm hearing whispers about a hush-hush project in the works. I've tried asking several people, but the most I've gotten is that the Illuminates of the New Dawn or the Atlantean Foundation might be involved. A jointly operated dig in Aztlan? Data exchange? Whatever it is, no one wants to tell me.

Heard from Gail today, and she sounded a little better, if jumpy and maybe sick. I tried asking her if she wanted me to come over, if there was anything wrong, but she nearly bit my head off and accused me of spying on her. Just not my day for getting people to talk to me. She'd called to invite me over for the Imbolc/Spring Equinox celebrations with her coven. I'm debating on whether or not I should go, if she's going to be like this. Guess I'll wait and see.

18 March 2062

I'm really getting worried about Gail. Last night Bear called me, asking if I'd seen her. He said she'd blown off a coven meeting after promising she'd attend, and he had a bad feeling about it. I went by her house after work, but she wasn't home. Then out of the blue, Bear calls again and says that she collapsed while at the talismonger's shop. Rosie, the lady who runs the store, called Bear straight off, and he picked Gail up there. He said she slept for a while, but then woke up and insisted on leaving immediately, looking like she hadn't slept at all. Maybe she's ill. I should try to get her to see a doctor here at the Institute. It might be something magically related. I'll have to take a look at her aura next time I see her.



21 March 2062 (Spring Equinox)

Well, I went to the Imbolc celebrations, and I feel good—if a little wiped out. I can't help but feel a little bit excited, too, because I have something new and intriguing to bring in to the DIMR. I should explain.

Gail called me the night before, and though she sounded even worse, she apologized for snapping at me the last time she called. I asked her again if I could help and this time she said yes, I could. She asked if I could come over and take a look at her athame for her. Though she apologized for her behavior, I didn't want to ask her why just in case she decided to snap at me again, so I said I'd be right over.

When I got there, Gail looked like death warmed over. There were dark circles under her eyes as if she hadn't slept in days, her bright red hair was dull and unwashed, and she was looking thin and pale. Even worse, as soon as she saw me she just fell apart, crying.

- My bet is on chips. So what if Lone Star hadn't found any in her car during that near-accident; doesn't mean she isn't using.
- Skeptic

After I got her to calm down and tell me what was wrong, she told me that she was sure her athame was cursed. That was why she wanted me to investigate. She pointed out the phone conversations we'd had since she had bought it and then told me a few additional things that she'd kept from me.

She began with the day we went looking for her new athame. When Gail had seen this black-hilted one at the talismonger's, she'd thought that she had been blessed with good luck. In fact, the blade had seemed to be all she wanted and more. She felt compelled to buy it before someone else did. She said it was as if someone had been whispering in her ear, goading her on as she held the dagger in her hand.

- Sounds like she's just using the athame to cover other problems in her life. "The dagger made me do it."
- Sven
- That could be multiple personality disorder, or paranoid schizophrenia. Many people suffering from those mental illnesses claim to hear voices that influence them.
- Shrink

After she bonded it, things got worse. She told me how at first she had been thrilled at the power flowing through the dagger during her spellcasting. It was a real boost, and it made her a little heady and reckless. She did a few things that, when she stopped to think, she realized were bad ideas. She told me how she stopped herself at the last minute from summoning a spirit that was really more than she could handle—she came close to really hurting herself, in fact.



• I've been in that position before. When you first bond with a new focus, especially a powerful one, it's like the world is at your disposal. The mana goes straight through the focus and swells your head. I know some mages who get the same rush from using multiple foci at once, like they're playing god. We all know where that road leads.

• Silicon Mage

Gail then began to get paranoid. She said she developed the very distinct feeling that she was being watched. She would check the physical and astral worlds, but she wouldn't see anyone. Still, the feeling wouldn't fade away. Soon she said she found herself constantly looking around, looking over her shoulder, and her nerves were fraying as a result.

I can't see any reason why she would be under surveillance. Most likely it's simply a side effect of getting used to the athame, or simple stress and fatigue. I asked her if she'd be willing to see a doctor about it—man, that was a mistake. She flipped. She stormed across the room to her chest, drew the dagger from it and walked toward me with an expression that freaked me the frag out. I jumped up and moved away, I was so concerned about her behavior. But she just slapped it down flat on the table.

She said that she'd reached her final straw. She claimed that right before I'd come over, she'd watched the athame lift itself into the air, do a kind of dance and fly right at her and attack her. She told me to take it and get rid of it because she didn't want the damned thing in her house anymore.

I assented the dagger then, but it seemed perfectly normal to me. I even assented the rest of her apartment, looking for the signature of some malignant spirit I guess. I found nothing. I told her as much, but she became hysterical then and burst into tears, mumbling something about the dagger being cursed. Faced with this emotional outburst, I put the dagger into my bag to get it out of her sight and agreed.

• Maybe this is an especially bad poltergeist, or some other paranormal, psychic activity. Boston is a prime target for such things, given its long history.

• Psyche

Once I got her to calm down and stop crying, I told her to take a long shower while I fixed a late dinner for her (soup and a sandwich, really). After we ate, she was feeling better but still uneasy about the athame. I promised I would take it to the lab for a thorough check and that I would take good care of it for her. I also suggested that she use her old athame for the Imbolc/Spring Equinox celebrations the next day. She agreed, much calmer, and added ruefully that this was probably a lesson to her from the Lady not to be so impatient, that she should have created a new athame herself. All I could do was shrug at that. I like Gail, and I'm comfortable with Wicca, but the thought of following an admittedly pagan deity or power rather than God still doesn't sit well with me. Maybe I'm more of a good Catholic boy than I thought.

In any case, Gail looked much better the next day and the Imbolc gathering went well. I'm still trying to get her to

see a physician, regardless of her beliefs. She insists she's fine, but I'm still concerned. To humor her, I assented the dagger again at home but didn't find anything unusual. It's still in my car; I'll be bringing it to work with me tomorrow. Perhaps this is some new phenomenon and I'll finally get some of the recognition I deserve. Wish me luck.

• Well, "careful of what you wish for" and all that. Still, Kiernan seems (or seemed) to have a good head on his shoulders. I say he did the right thing, taking the dagger from Gail. I have to say, though, that the incidents Gail described sound a lot like spirit attacks.

• Raven

• I agree, but as this says, there were none there.

• Silicon Mage

• That they saw.

• Raven

22 March 2062

Today I brought the dagger in to work, discharged some paperwork that needed to be done and then requested the use of one of our warded work rooms so that I could investigate Gail's athame. I suppose I should have also asked someone to watch as well, since there was the possibility of a curse of some sort. But as Gail's athame—now my dagger—is under my control, I feel justified in not doing so.

After I brought the dagger into the workroom, I gave it a thorough astral examination. I probed every aspect of its aura, hoping to find some lingering signature or something else that Gail and I had missed. Though intriguing, all I got for my trouble was some emotional taint in its aura, displaying the fear, sadness, and paranoia that had come from Gail the last time she'd held it. I also saw hints of some other indefinable emotion. Playfulness? Spite? Very difficult to tell. I performed a few other standard tests, but none of them came up with anything conclusive. I realized then that I'd have to bond with it myself in order to find out anything of substance.

• Is he nuts? No way could you have gotten me to do that. I would have ditched the thing.

• Screwloose

This is a little unorthodox, I know. But I really don't feel the dagger is behind Gail's problems. I know she won't believe me, though, until her bond with it is broken and I've managed to bond with it and come out unscathed. Besides, everyone has to take a chance sometime, right?

It took me several hours or more (I lost track of time) to complete the ritual, and when I was done, I was too tired to really try to probe it further. This is only the second time I've ever bound a focus, and it was far more draining than I remembered. That's why I'm simply writing up my entry now and going home to recover. I'll look into it more tomorrow.

- I feel an "uh oh" coming on ...
- Jinx

23 March 2062

Amazing! This is so incredible! I think I've just discovered a new type of spirit, and it inhabits the dagger!

Though I still feel a little worn out from yesterday's bonding ritual, I gave the dagger a much more thorough investigation as soon as I got in to the lab. I was looking to see if there was some sort of hidden power that the blade possessed. As I assensed it, I was able to get past some kind of astral masking the spirit had. It was no easy task, but in the end I found a little spirit coiled in the heart of the blade's aura. It was as if the spirit had become a part of the blade, or had housed itself within it, almost like a golem—except this spirit is obviously not an ally spirit, nor is the blade a mobile figure of any sort. The way the spirit is intertwined within the dagger's aural matrix seems to allow it access to the focus' powers.

- Spirits possessing foci? Good Lord. The implications of this are staggering. Now I'm tempted to check and see if any of mine are possessed.
- Penny

- Oh drek. Can these spirits possess anything else? The last thing I want is to have to feed my Predator spirit munchies.
- Dr. Death

- Now just hold on a minute, before everyone goes rushing off in a fit of hysteria. We don't know anything about these spirits yet—this could be a unique one, for all we know. We don't know what these things do, or how widespread they are.
- Silicon Mage

I can't help but wonder about the origins of this spirit. How had it come to get inside the dagger and stay there? Is it some sort of elemental or hybrid thereof? Something with the same powers as an ally spirit? A nature spirit? Where is its metaplane, and what is it like? All I have right now are theories.

My best guess is that it must be related somehow to elementals, especially if it turns out that there are more of these little spirits also inhabiting various magical artifacts. Perhaps they are attracted to the radicals? Are there different types of these little spirits, attracted to different sorts of radicals used in the object? Maybe their home plane borders that of the elemental planes, folded away in some forgotten corner, or perhaps it is in some dangerous area of the metaplanes that has not been visited yet. Surely the magical community would have heard of such a thing before now if the metaplane was as relatively easy to access as the others.

- Those are some large assumptions to make.
- D. Thomas

- That's why they're called theories or hypotheses, Thomas. He can only make guesses based upon observation. In this case, however, I'd say that Klernan's might be biased, considering that he's bonded the athame. If the spirit inside were the one responsible for Gail's behavior, then who is to say that it will not have done the same to him?

- Raven

- Uh oh.
- Jinx

I tried communicating with the spirit, to no avail. I even tried a mindlink spell, but I was unable to target the spirit separately from the focus' aura. The only response I got from the spirit was a sense of amusement.

I decided to show the focus around to the other researchers, and received a mixed bag of responses. Most seemed at least politely interested, though a few clearly expressed doubts about the spirit. None of them were able to see it, though few took the time to really look over the aura. A few others were dismissive and claimed to have no time to look at it. That's just fine with me.

The reaction that confused me the most was Ebran's. I'd swear he grew pale when I explained what I found, and his only advice was to either get rid of it or destroy it. I had the feeling that he'd prefer if I destroyed it, which I think is a little silly. Destroy something as valuable as this? Without further research? When I asked to allocate some of my research time toward the spirit, and also to examine some of the other items in our archive to see if I could find any similar spirits, Ebran intervened and demanded my assistance on a new project. My distinct impression was that I was being diverted from researching the spirit any more.

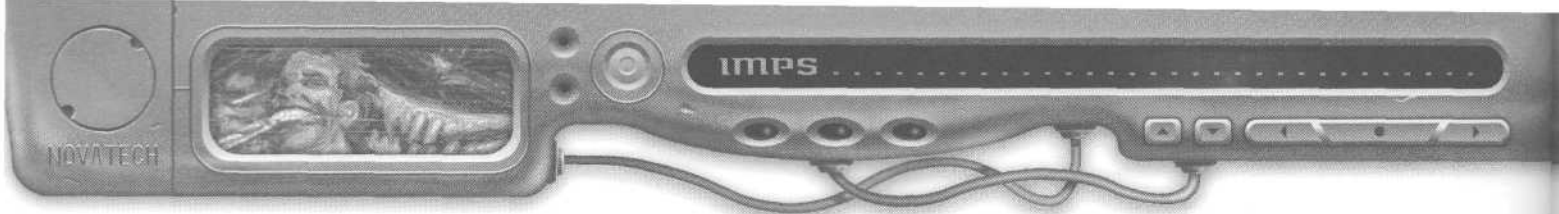
At least I got to find out about the new secret project. From what I've been told, we procured some magical items from the Atlantean Foundation, most of them fairly potent and very old. We're going to be cataloguing them, making some close examinations and comparing them to other artifacts in our archive.

- Oh yeah, they "procured" some stuff all right—right out from under the AF's nose. Someone got paid good cred for that run. I hear William Casey's being investigated in connection with it.

- South Bend

- Casey, for those unfamiliar with the Atlantean Foundation, is on the AF's board and is a resident expert on relics and artifacts. Some people say he's buddy-buddy with someone at the DIMR, but there's precious little in the way of evidence about that. He also received 4 million nuyen in Dunkelzahn's will, though most of that money seems to have been sunk into backing AF archaeological digs.

- Rellquary



• Casey was exonerated of any wrongdoing—the AF couldn't even come up with conclusive proof that their items were stolen since they were intercepted before they were inventoried and all other records were erased. Win by technicality.

• Legal Beagle

Hmm. Now that I think about it, I may be able to spend some of that archive time checking items for spirits. I should be able to get away with that without anyone noticing.

Anyway, I better get back to completing all the paperwork that Ehran piled on top of me. It's going to keep me occupied for several days. At least I have this weekend to look forward to—I'm taking Gail out. I was wrong; she isn't seeing the High Priest at all. I hope she likes Italian.

27 March 2062

The weekend was not kind to me. My parents visited me for dinner on Saturday, and naturally we got into a polite argument about my work. I don't know what got into me, though, because instead of just asking them to drop the subject, I found myself telling them off. I'm still shocked; I've never raised my voice to either of them in my entire life, even when they've made me so mad I could spit.

I don't want to even think about what happened with Gail.

• It's called being human. All parents are supposed to drive their kids crazy, and vice versa.

• Momma Goose

• Despite the breeder slant, that's true enough. But this sounds more like what started happening to Gail, y'know?

• Orkana

• If you want to read that into it, yeah. Letting your imagination run away with you, hmm?

• Skeptic

I've spent most of today working on the new project in the archives. I'm only a third of the way through the items; it takes time, effort and energy to do all that probing. I'm exhausted. At least I've had the chance to analyze other items in the archive. Call it a hunch, but I suspect a few may be possessed. I brought the dagger with me to compare auras, though I'm not sure if that's been a help.

Damn I'm tired. Time to go home.

29 March 2062

Gail called me last night. We had a terrible fight and I got really mad. I still can't believe I broke the telecom like that. Damn near set my apartment on fire. What a mess I've made out of that situation.

Security must have sensed my bad mood when I came in this morning. They really went out of their way to hassle me. Maybe the new security personnel were just going overboard, but they certainly made a fuss over the athame. I can't

believe that they insisted on examining it! I told them they'd do no such thing. I haven't had to do that before with my things, I surely don't see why they would insist now. After someone with more brains informed them that this was mine and that it assisted me with my work, they finally let me go. Irritating. And it didn't help to hear them giggling and sniggering as I walked away. I turned around, but there were quite a few people around by then, so I don't know who was doing it. I would have happily wrung their neck. To add insult to injury, I was so distracted that I tripped after passing the detectors.

• Is everyone thinking what I'm thinking?

• Rose Red

• Maybe so, but I hope not.

• Raven

1 April 2062 (April Fool's Day)

I've found another one! I really didn't think I would, but I have! It's taken me almost a week, but I still feel lucky. Now that I have found another, however, I need to come up with a name for this type of spirit. Perhaps one will come to me later.

• "Pest" comes to mind.

• The Laughing Man

"Hal Fraggin' Hal"

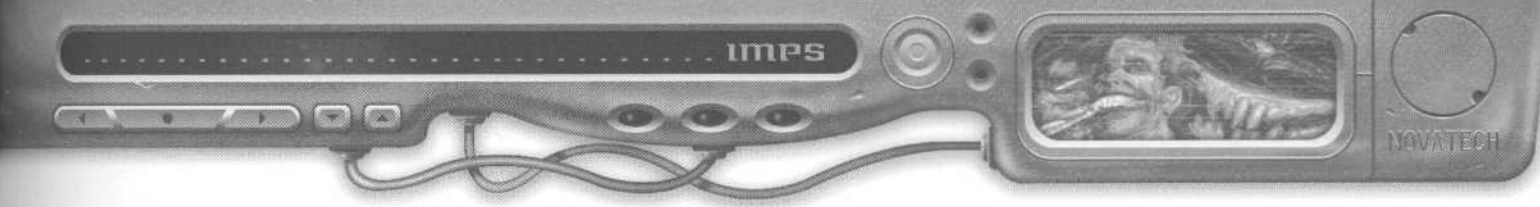
I found this one among one of the Ventspils artifacts. I must have scanned over a hundred pieces in the archive, to no avail, when I suddenly found it. It was inhabiting an ornate orichalcum hand mirror set with bits of amber and had ornate, almost runic, designs all over the back. I'm not sure what sort of enchantment had been set on this mirror, but there definitely was one apart from the aura its inhabitant possessed. Just on observation, the spirit inside this one seems friendlier. I haven't been able to find out as much about this one as I have the dagger, and I have the feeling that is because I haven't bonded it.

Perhaps there is something to the nature of the bond with the artifact and the spirit's relation to it that allows for communication and perception. I don't quite understand it fully, but perhaps some, if not all, of these spirits communicate more empathetically—or even telepathically—than verbally? There's no way I can say for sure. I just know that I seem to be picking up impressions from my own dagger, and it's a rather mischievous piece of work that hides its motives well.

• Is he just that blind? Those motives don't look too well hidden to me, judging by the previous entries.

• Schlock Bones

I raised my discovery to Ehran and the others, with the same mixed reactions. Ehran was clearly displeased that I was allowing myself to be "distracted" from "more important" work. I asked for permission to bond the mirror to learn more



about the spirit within, but they flat disallowed it. How am I supposed to learn anything more without bonding?

Despite my discovery, my mood was crushed the rest of the day. Natalie, who I'd helped out with some alchemical work involving some of the orichalcum the DIMR found lately, tried cheering me up with an April Fool's joke at the staff party but I wasn't feeling up to it. I haven't been getting a lot of sleep lately due to the hours I've been putting in, so I probably jumped on her case a lot more than I should have. I'll apologize to her the next time I see her.

6 April 2062

I think I'm being watched at work. I've taken whatever free time I've found to study these new spirits, and more than a few people here have commented on that. It's only a matter of time before they officially ban me from pursuing it any further. I think they're jealous—I can see it in the way they talk to me. Everywhere I go, I can hear them whispering about me behind my back.

Gail called and we made up. She invited me to come over this weekend, but I had to decline. I've got too much to do. I'll send her some flowers sometime. She likes flowers.

- Yep, he's going over the deep end, alright.

- Orkana

- It's still entirely possible that this is actually paranoid schizophrenia.

- Shrink

11 April 2062

I went to continue my work on the items we procured from the Atlantean Foundation this morning, but almost immediately Ebran intercepted me. He seemed to think that I looked tired. Tired? I feel fine! But he told me to go on home and not to come back until Monday so that I could get plenty of rest. "A mini-vacation," he called it. "As a reward for working so hard." And he expects me to believe that! Still, I can't really argue.

Instead, I spent most of today at home, researching all the reference material I have for a word or words that I could use to name my new spirits. The most appropriate name I could find was "imp," after the mischievous spirits or daemons in alchemy and ceremonial magic lore found in bottles and rings and suchlike.

- Imps, eh? Shades of Faust...

- Marlowe

- If you're implying that Kiernan has made some sort of deal with the Devil ...

- Labrys

- Dear Lady, I say that not because of some literal pact, but because of how deeply he's become obsessed with these imps. I also suspect that bonding that dagger was akin to mak-

ing a pact as well, albeit an unconscious or subconscious one.

- Marlowe

17 April 2062

Yesterday, Sunday afternoon, I came in to work. Ebran wasn't around, and neither was anyone else who would prevent me from accessing the archives. The few folks that come in on the weekends were surprised to see me, but I reassured them that I was feeling better and could come back to work. Not like I would let anyone stop me from working in the first place, but there's no need to actually say so.

Hours I spent, looking over every item I could. Night had fallen when I finally broke through the astral masking on one of the last pieces from the Atlantean Foundation and discovered, yes, an imp. I was exhausted by that point, and still am, so I can hardly muster the true excitement I feel.

The item in question is a ring. It is a thick, solid band made of interwoven threads of orichalcum and silver with no other ornamentation—not even an inscription on it. Fairly plain, but very, very powerful. It's odd—it seems to exude as much age as the mirror from Ventspills, but it doesn't look as old. If I hadn't known where it came from, I would even say that it looked nearly new. Another property of the imps, or an enchantment on this particular item? I wish I could tell. I'm just so tired right now. I'll try again Tuesday or Wednesday. Or even Thursday.

- He's found three of these little buggers now? Chummer, I'm never going to trust a focus again.

- Wiz Kid

- Hold up here. I have a theory. It's certainly odd that Kiernan—who without any evidence to the contrary seems to have been the first to discover these spirits—has found three of them in close proximity. If these critters were that widespread, we'd be hearing more about them by now—others would have caught on.

I'm thinking that Kiernan was the first to discover these spirits because he was exposed to the area where the first outbreak of them occurred. I'd lay good nuyen that the DIMR dug up these imps with the artifacts at Ventspills—maybe they came through the astral rift that's rumored to have appeared there. The items brought back over to the DIMR may have been infested with these spirits. Once there, they may have spread to other items or even out into the world at large. One of these spirits may have tailed our buddy Kiernan out into the world, then latched onto the athame when he went shopping with Gail.

We may be looking at something akin to a viral spirit here.

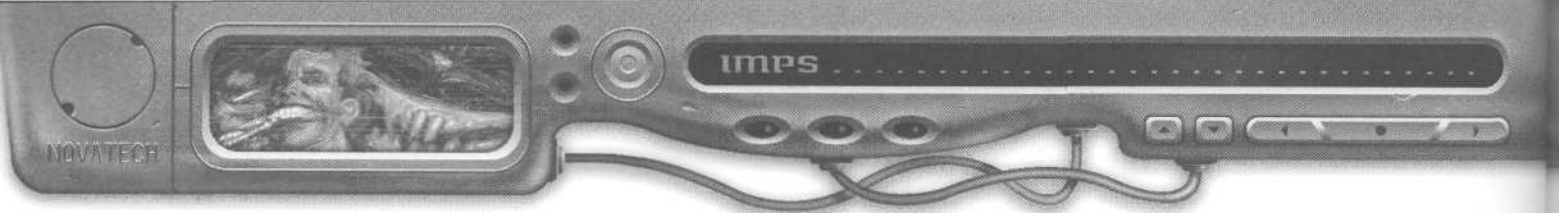
- Weaver

- Well, that theory makes me feel much better. </sarcasm off> So now what? Do I need to start investing in anti-spirit inoculations for my foci, before they become infected?

- Wiz Kid

- Maybe, chummer, maybe.

- Weaver



22 April 2062

They've discontinued my research! I knew it! They gave me a direct order to abandon the spirit investigation and stripped away my access privileges to the archives. I knew these smiling hypocrites were jealous of me! They said that what I'm doing is too dangerous, but the real reason is they want to steal all my research from me! We'll see about that. I'll let them have that silly mirror, but the ring is mine now. I'll continue my research at home. They'll be sorry when I show the world the power the imps possess. They'll thank me then. Even Ebran.

- A definite breakdown, combined with delusions ... a potential psychotic break; that's my diagnosis.

- Shrink

- Brilliant. And here I thought he was a stable pillar of the magical community. He may have some screws loose, but I don't think the DIMR's bias is all in his head. Sounds to me like Ebran at least had an inkling of what was going on and intentionally avoided dealing with it openly. What is it about these spirits that someone would want to hide?

- Jinx

- Well, if Weaver's correct, the DIMR may be at fault for releasing them into the world. That would certainly tarnish their image.

- Edain

- Ok, so why not do something to eradicate them, before they spread too far? Why not take the opportunity to clean up the mess they made?

- Jinx

- Maybe it was already too late, or the appearance of these imps is an inevitability. They may suspect that even if this batch of spirits is rounded up, similar ones will show up elsewhere in the world. After all, the comet brought us plenty of other surprises.

- Silicon Mage

29 April 2062

I don't know when I'll be able to write again. I've been hunted and hounded ever since my last entry, and I'm not even sure anymore just who it is that's hunting me. I've tried getting in touch with all of my friends, but they're either out or not answering the phone. How could I have been so stupid? I see now that I've been ... obsessed. That's the only explanation for it, and it's time that I faced it. I let the imps influence me, and now I'm paying the price.

I can't get this damned ring off my finger. I've tried and tried, and I don't think I'll get free of it unless I cut it off of me ... the ring or my finger. And every time I've made an attempt at doing either, I find myself doing the exact opposite. I was a fool; I should never have bonded myself to the

ring as well. I was so sure that I would retain control, and that I'd learn so much more.

I've been wrong. I see that now. This ring and its imp have been nothing but trouble, deadly serious trouble. Oh sure, I have access to its powers, but that's nearly meaningless when I'm too exhausted to use them. I can't even tell if I'm tired because I'm being chased so much or because I have to avoid so many accidents—I can't count how many cars have almost hit me! I may even be tired for some other more sinister reason. I can't seem to think very clearly anymore. But ... I think it wants to kill me. Not until I'm completely drained, of course, because I suspect that not only it but my dagger has been steadily wearing me down.

God have mercy on me. Walpurgisnacht is approaching, which means the first of May and Beltane right after. If I can manage to live that long, maybe I can catch Gail, Ariadne, Bear and the others. Maybe they can help me.

If anyone can.

- For the record, I got a garbled message from Kiernan on my answering service on the same day as this last entry, and then I never heard from him again. I wish I'd known what trouble he was in. Sad to say, I fear the worst though I'm hoping for the best.

- Bear

GAME INFORMATION

Imps are a new type of free spirit in the world of *Shadowrun* with the ability to "possess" enchanted items. They first appeared sometime during the year of the comet, and are still rare in the world at large. Next to nothing is known about them, though as more and more magicians fall under their sway, research is sure to be done.

Imps enter this world as fairly weak spirits, and they seem to prefer finding homes within magical items to wandering the astral plane. It is suspected that the imps are somehow attracted to the alchemical radicals used with foci, leading some mages to suspect that they are some sort of elemental spirit. Using their unique Occupation power (see p. 36), they are able to assimilate their astral form with the aura/astral form of foci, literally becoming a part of the focus itself. Imps are able to use their powers upon Awakened characters who are bonded to the occupied focus.

Each imp has its own motives. Some are relatively benign and may even seek to help characters who are bonded to the imp-occupied focus, trading favors for Karma. Most seem to be mischievous tricksters, alternately helping or hindering those they are bonded to. The rest are spirits to be wary of, as they are malign entities seeking to drain their owners of Karma before sending them towards their death. Some of these imps want their focus to exchange hands frequently, so that they are often bonded and they have more chances to drain Karma—for this reason they push their owners to the limit, then try to have them killed.

Gamemasters can find many uses for imps in their campaigns. They may simply be pesky creatures, making a char-

acter's life difficult as they try to figure out what's going wrong with their new foci. Alternatively, they may be eager to help a player character, bringing him or her things that they need before they even ask for them. The imp may demand certain favors or services from the focus' user, allowing the gamemaster to use imps to start off an adventure. Thirdly, the imp may be intent upon destroying lives, beginning with the character and moving on to his or her friends, family or anyone else that happens upon it.

If used properly, imps can be a tool that gamemasters can use to curb excessive foci use by characters. Gamemasters should be careful to avoid overusing imps—not all foci should be occupied by them, as imps are still rare. While making characters paranoid about foci can be positive, it can become quickly tedious if overdone.

IMP ASTRAL FORMS

Imps are spirits, so they have a Force rating that reflects their power. The imp's Force rating is used for all of its attributes.

Imps are unable to materialize in physical form (though they may still manifest), so they have no Physical attributes. To act in the physical plane, the imp must occupy a focus (see *Occupation*, p. 36).

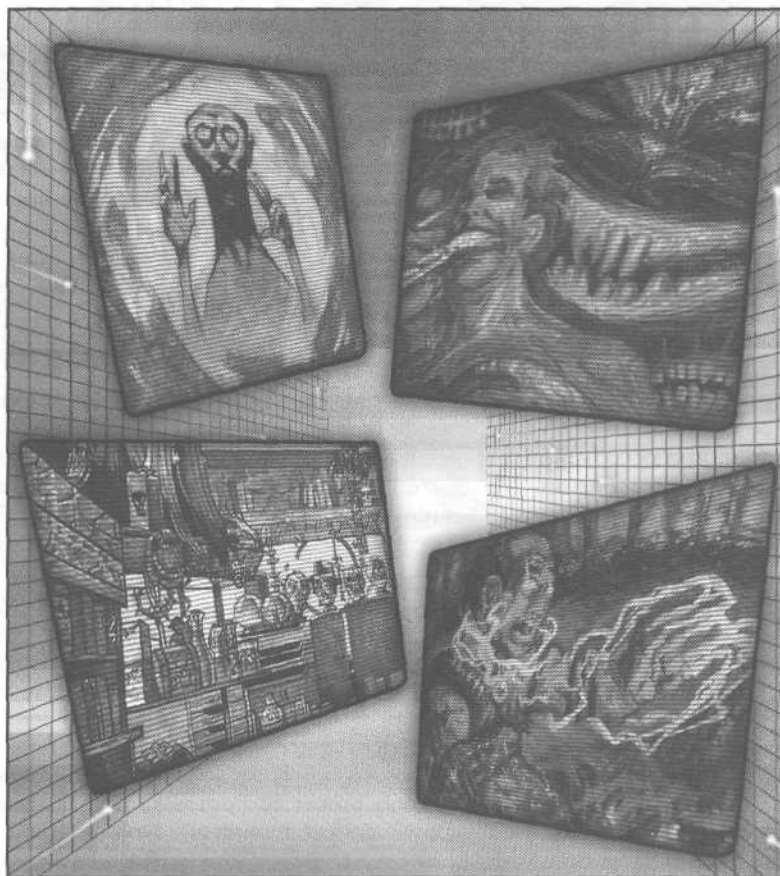
Imps rapidly lose power as they freely roam the astral plane. For each full day (24 hours) that an imp remains on the astral plane without occupying a focus, reduce its Force rating by 1. An imp whose Force rating reaches 0 is destroyed. The only way an imp can prevent this Force loss is by occupying a focus. As long as the imp occupies a focus, it does not lose Force. Once an imp has been forced out of the focus, the countdown begins again. For this reason, finding a focus to occupy is usually an imp's priority task.

Imps take on a variety of appearances, from small humanoid figures to small animals to odder forms like floating blobs with a single eye. Their astral forms appear wispy and insubstantial compared to other astral forms, almost translucent. This etherealness increases the difficulty of detecting them on the astral plane: apply a +3 modifier to all Assensing Tests as well as other means of magical detection, such as the Magic Sense power or Detect Magic spell.

The insubstantial nature of their forms also makes it easier for imps to bypass astral barriers using their Aura Masking power (see *Fooling Astral Barriers*, p. 88, *MITS*). Apply a -3 modifier to the imp's target number for the Success Contest.

IMP SPIRIT ENERGY

As a type of free spirit, imps begin with 1 point of Spirit Energy that may be used in all of the ways described under *Spirit Energy*, p. 114, *MITS*. An imp's Spirit Energy can never be higher than its Force rating.



Imps can increase their Spirit Energy and/or Force ratings by acquiring and spending Good Karma, which is quite difficult for them. Their primary method of obtaining Karma is by strong-arming Awakened characters who are bonded to a focus by denying them use of the focus unless they pay up (see *Free Spirits and Good Karma*, p. 116, *MITS*). Imps may also drain extra Karma from a victim who bonds a focus they are occupying (see *Occupation*, p. 36).

IMPS AND CONJURING

No magician may summon imps, and imps are immune to attempts to control them. No one has yet identified the home metaplane(s) of imp spirits, so it is unknown whether they have True Names like other free spirits.

Imps may be banished as normal. An imp that is occupying a focus when it is banished is simply thrust back out into the astral plane at its full Force. It may not re-occupy that focus until a full 24 hours has passed. It is unknown whether banishing an imp's astral form destroys it or merely disrupts it, sending it back to its native metaplane.

IMP KARMA POOL

Imps start with a Karma Pool of 1D6. This pool may be increased by 1 at a cost of 10 Good Karma points. The



Gamemaster should feel free to adjust an imps' Karma Pool as appropriate to his or her game.

IMP POWERS

The imps encountered so far have exhibited the following powers: Accident, Aura Masking, Compulsion, Empathy*, Guard*, Influence*, Occupation and Psychokinesis (occupied focus only). Imps that have a Force rating of 5 or higher also possess the powers of Astral Armor, Binding and Desire Reflection*.

Note that an imp in astral form can only use mana-based powers. An imp must occupy a foci, and the foci must be active (dual natured), in order for the imp to use its physical powers. Powers that are marked with an asterisk (*) may only be exercised on characters who are bonded to the focus that the imp is occupying.

At the gamemaster's discretion, individual imps may have additional powers as befitting their nature as free spirits. Gamemasters should carefully construct their imps so that they are not too powerful—an imp with the shedim power of Karma Drain (p. 153, *YOTC*) would be frightening!

Gamemasters can find rules for these powers below and on pp. 7–15 of *Critters*.

OCCUPATION

Type: M • Action: Exclusive Complex • Range: Special • Duration: Special

Imps may use the Occupation power to “possess” a focus. Imps may only use this power on foci, though any type of focus may be occupied.

To occupy a focus, the imp's astral form must make contact with the focus' aura. A focus that is unbonded is easier for an imp to occupy than a focus that is already bonded to a user. An Opposed Force Test is made between the imp's Force and either the Force rating of an unbonded focus or twice the Force rating of a bonded focus. If the imp wins, it occupies the focus and its astral form melds with the focus' aura. If the imp fails, it loses a point of Force.

An imp may not occupy a focus with a Force rating lower than its own Force ÷ 2 (round down). Imps may not occupy foci that are already occupied by other imps.

Once an imp has occupied a focus, it cannot voluntarily leave, though it may manifest its presence on the Physical plane within (Force) meters while the focus is active. The only way an imp can be removed from a focus is by banishing or destroying either the enchantment of a focus or the focus itself. If the focus or its enchantment are destroyed, the imp

is immediately thrust into astral space and must resist (focus Force)D damage.

While the imp is occupying a focus, its aura becomes so closely intertwined with the focus' aura that the two cannot be targeted separately. The imp's Force is added to any astral combat or Damage Resistance Tests the focus must make. The imp may spend its Karma to aid these tests as well. The imp's presence also give the focus the Immunity (age) power, so that the focus will never decay, rust or show signs of wear while the imp occupies it.

Imps have a tremendous amount of control over the foci they occupy. Imps can activate or deactivate occupied foci at will. This allows an imp to surreptitiously activate a focus and then use its powers on the physical plane.

Imps can also impede the use of a focus, temporarily reducing the focus' Force by imp's Force rating. For example, a Force 3 imp occupying a Force 5 power focus can temporarily reduce the focus' Force to 2 (5 – 3). If a sustaining focus is reduced in this manner, any spell it is maintaining is also immediately reduced in Force. Likewise, imps can lend their strength to a focus, temporarily adding half its Force (round down) to the focus' Force rating. Impeding or strengthening a focus in this manner is an exclusive activity. Imps often use this ability to blackmail bonded characters into feeding them Karma.

Imps can also take advantage of the bonding process between an Awakened character and a focus to drain extra Karma away from a victim. As a character goes through the bonding ritual (see *Bonding*, p. 190, *SR3*), the imp must succeed in an Opposed Willpower Test between its Force rating (plus Spirit Energy) and the victim's Willpower rating. For each net success the imp achieves, the imp draws away an extra point of Good Karma from the victim. If the victim has no extra Good Karma, it drains away Karma pool at a ratio of 1 Karma Pool point per 2 successes. Drained Karma Pool points are converted to an equal number of Good Karma points for the imp. If the victim has no Karma Pool, the attempted drain has no effect. Any Karma points drained by the imp are permanently lost to the character.

An Imp has an easier time exercising its powers over a character who has bonded the focus it is occupying, due to the magical link created by the bond. Reduce the imp's target numbers by –2 for all power-based tests against the bonded character.

THE ALEPH SOCIETY

I hate to sound like a broken record, but the apocalyptic fever and cult craziness that rode in on the tail of Halley's Comet is still in full swing and still worthy of paying attention to. It seems you can't turn over a rock these days without finding a group claiming to have all the answers to the world's mysteries. Some are harmless and more a danger to themselves than anyone else. Luckily, we've only had a few (so far) that have managed to snag weapons of mass destruction or biological warfare agents, and even luckier, none of them got far. Aside from Shiawase's comet probe and a few other incidents, we don't have any massive body counts or major terrorist actions to pick up after. But these high profile loonies aren't really the ones that worry me anyway. I'm more concerned about the cults operating below the radar—the ones that are more like the Universal Brotherhood was, slowly spreading their sickness unnoticed until it's too late.

The report below is about one such group: the Aleph Society. The report on this group comes directly from the secret files of Ares' Awakened Control Center. It's good to see that Ares is still keeping tabs on potential magical menaces, though even Ares' motivations should be viewed with suspicion, as later posts will prove. Assuming their intel is on target—and I have no reason to suspect that it's biased or misinformed—then the Aleph Society is something to be worried about.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 11 July 2062 at 11:31:20 (PST)

FIELD REPORT

SORNET CONTROL/NOREL

CROSSLINK: OPS/Tacit Termagent//OPS/Marker Blue//INT/Argent Termagent

REF: 0a4T-MARKER-01

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Esteemed ACC Colleagues,

The following report summarizes the findings of our preliminary investigations into the activities of the "Aleph Society" cult. ACC authorized this investigation after initial contact



was made in Atlanta, an incident that left three members of a FireWatch team unaccounted for or dead. Subsequent analysis of the incident, correlated with reports from field sources, earned the group a placement on our Watch List. We proceeded to collect information on the organization per our standard operating procedure, assigning one FireWatch team to the operation and also procuring outside freelancers for on-site intrusion operations.

- Translation: We hired shadowrunners to break into their buildings and steal documents and data.
- Asymmetric

After three months on investigation, we have assembled the following report for rapid dissemination to all ACC units and FireWatch teams.

ALEPH HISTORY

According to the cult's propaganda, the Aleph Society was founded by Dr. Michael Nickson in 2056, though we could find no archival evidence to substantiate the group's existence before 2060. The group claims that Dr. Nickson founded the group after coming into possession of an "artifact of Atlantis" known as "the Book of Gaf." The book allegedly inspired Nickson to develop several magical theories concerning "the innate magical potential inherent in every person." The Aleph Society is Nickson's vehicle for bringing this knowledge to the masses and unleashing their inner power.

- Sounds like a zillion other "power self-help" groups out there, fleeing gullible mage wannabes.
- Magus

The Society now claims to have predicted SURGE and other events surrounding Halley's Comet and uses these events as evidence of their beliefs. There is nothing, however, to support these claims.

- I hear this group has an active feud going with the Atlantean Rebirth cult. The conflict centers on the Aleph Society's claim to have an Atlantean artifact. I've heard some of the Ale'i Menatis claim that it was actually stolen from them, and I've heard others claim that the book is fake.
- Magnificent Edward

SOCIETY ORGANIZATION

The Aleph Society is composed of approximately two hundred active members, divided into five primary groups. The largest group, based out of Chicago, is the only one to use the Aleph Society name and is a registered fraternal society in the UCAS. The Society operates under different, unregistered names in other places: The Society of Truth (Atlanta, CAS), the Munma Order (Los Angeles, Pueblo), White Eagle Lodge (Cheyenne, Sioux Nation) and the Coalition for Clear Minds (Denver). Based on our limited information they have no organized presence in the other Native American Nations, partly

because the group is concerned only with hermetics. They do, however, have beginning chapters in Boston, Toronto and Montreal.

- Of course, these are just the public ones. They may have more chapters that operate secretly.
- Mouse

The Society has an unusual percentage of active members who are "former burnouts." Each of these members claims to once have had magical ability (hermetic magician or adept) that they lost either through an accident, drug or BTL abuse, excessive implants, improper medical care or other calamity. We have investigated many of these members and found that some of them once held Awakened certification, and that in most cases their claims of magic loss were verified. Each of these "burnouts" now claims to be reclaiming their magic as a result of their involvement with the Society.

The majority of Society members are mundanes who believe that are working towards their own personal Awakening. These members work closely with the burnouts, apparently hoping to learn and to unlock their own magical abilities by supporting them.

- The society upholds SURGE as proof that magical capabilities lie dormant within everyone, and burnout changelings are prize recruits.
- Clay

The group's internal structure is opaque to the external viewer. New members are given the impression that the group has no hierarchy, except for the leadership of Dr. Nickson. In practice, however, there are several layers of organization within Society groupings. Awakened and burnout members have informal authority in the group, while non-Awakened members are expected to support them at all times.

In addition, we have identified what seems to be a secret initiatory order active within the group, composed of the group's long-term Awakened members. This order makes behind-the-scenes decisions for the group and seems to report to a higher authority—most likely the upper echelon of Dr. Nickson and his close associates. We do not yet have enough evidence to evaluate this initiatory group's size.

The groups' finances seem to be bolstered by donations from the wealthier members. In the UCAS the Society operates as a charitable organization and receives a certain degree of public funding and tax exempt status.

BELIEFS

The Society's filing papers list their group as an "organization dedicated to the spiritual enlightenment of the inhabitants of every nation." Their literature and Matrix propaganda states that the group seeks to "unlock the magical potential inherent in everyone." The group attempts to recruit those who wish to become Awakened, implying that it can help people break through and learn to use magic. The group also specifically targets "burned-out" hermetics and others who have lost their



magical ability, luring them with promises to regain what they have lost. The Society's fundamental belief is that: "In the past, everyone could use magic—soon, everyone will again."

The following interview clearly expresses the group's belief system.

//Begin Transcript//

Have you ever been so tired that your belly burns and your head swims? Tired of life, where the weight of your useless existence weighs on you like a lead coat? That's what it is like to be a burnout, and the pain never goes away. Some deal with it by replacing parts of their soul with gadgets, others resign themselves to fate, and some look for a fix. But there is no fix, my friend—the answer is not in cyberware or therapy. The answer is self-empowerment and the teachings of the Book of Gaf.

I was never anything but a mediocre magic user, and a hermetic one at that. Among the people of my tribe, shamans were people of power and wisdom, but mages were not to be trusted. I was skilled enough to get a degree but nothing more. I never had a chance to get a cushy job working for the Sioux government or make big bucks in the corporate sector. Instead, I knew I would end up working as a two-bit magic user doing odd jobs, one of a multitude of barely skilled mages who make a living finding lost cats and making trinkets for the mundanes.

I knew my family was disappointed. They never spoke it out loud to me, but I could tell by the looks and snide comments when my back was turned at the family gatherings.

• It's a shame, but I've seen this sort of prejudice in action, especially in some NAN areas. Hermetics simply aren't trusted—they don't have "the wisdom of the totems to guide them." It goes the other way in Westernized civilizations—shamans aren't "scientific and rational" enough in their approach to magic. When will people just accept that there's more than one way to conceptualize and wield power?

• Poly

Then, while driving my parents back from a tribal meeting, I fell asleep at the wheel. We crashed and flipped the vehicle. Both of my parents were killed and I was in a coma for three months. I don't remember much of what happened next. The rescue crew managed to cut me out of the twisted wreckage but the drugs and treatment that followed destroyed my ability to work magic. Even my feeble attempts to project to the astral left me unconscious from the strain.

I sank into a deep depression. Drugs, alcohol, anything that let me forget my past. I ended up in a life not really worth living. Living on the streets, in and out of coffin motels and digging in dumpsters for food. Memories of desperate scrambles for food and shelter, pain and regret. I wanted to forget, to push it all away.

With the Aleph Society I learned to cope with my pain and regret; to use it in a productive manner. Eventually, through dedication and listening to the teachings, I even began to use magic again—though it was a different kind of magic to be sure. This energy was fueled by emotion.

Emotion is the very quintessence of reality, but without proper understanding and control it can also be a dark force of destruction. Perhaps one day we will be able to teach everyone our way, but for now only the rare few have experienced the kind of metaphysical loss that transcends even personal tragedy.

• That's ridiculous. You either have the talent or you do not. If your spiritual essence is degraded, there is no rebuilding it. It's gone forever, there's no going back.

• Nephyte

• This is opening a can of worms, I know, but there are plenty of theories out there that shamanic magic does not require any innate power. Some believe that the power of shamans is channeled directly from the totem itself, or perhaps from the spirits of the animals or the land. Heck, I even know a Catholic mage who believes his power is a blessing from God. What if all of these beliefs are true? And what if a magician who loses power from one source finds a new understanding—couldn't he or she theoretically draw power from a new, different source?

• Tai

• Yikes, don't get too metaphysical on us here. All I know is that I've never heard of anyone successfully changing traditions before—the magician's outlook simply becomes too codified to accept another one. I don't think this person actually changed from a hermetic to something else—but clearly he found another source of power to draw on, and that frightens me.

• Arcturo

What the Aleph Society taught me was simplicity itself. Inside everyone is the Throne of the Soul, a spot from which our power emanates—a node that connects us with the outside world and allows us to tap into it for our power. But the power is filtered through the impure astral plane, which is but a polluted mockery of its original self. The Aleph Society is dedicated to clearing out this corruption, which can only be done by those who can sense the higher worlds. All Awakened are tainted by the corruption, infused with it on a level far deeper than genetics or aura. Only by burning out can we approach true salvation, for even a burnout has the link to the higher realms some call the metaplanes. With training and dedication this link can be reformed, stronger and more pure—a direct link to the heart of creation. And at this heart you will find the Black Moon, the center of everything. The spot of nothingness around which everything else revolves.



You learn to focus your will until you form a knot inside yourself, a link to the Black Moon itself. And into that knot you push everything. All of your feelings: hate, love, despair and happiness. You let the knot take it all in, and then you feel the power of the outside world rushing into you, like a wind rushing to fill a vacuum. The ultimate goal being a complete detachment from the outside world. Glorious, pure nothingness—drawing away the impure emotions of the world into the Black Moon. Leaving only the clean, empty brightness of purity.

//End Transcript//

• What? This makes it sound like you can pull power from the astral even after losing your connection to it—which is patently ridiculous. This may be magic, but it flies in the face of everything we know. This viewpoint is more than simply wrong—it's deranged and dangerous. This person obviously walks the Corrupted Way.

• Maelwys

The Society claims to hold no religious beliefs, and some members are even practicing members of other religions—at least nominally. The group's recruiting practices and beliefs in "inner power" are quite evangelical, however, and often border on fanaticism. The group's views towards the Book of Gaf are also suspect, and layered in cryptic, spiritual overtones.

RECRUITMENT AND INITIATION

All recruitment is done on a face-to-face basis, essentially in the same manner as any other cult organization. Prospective members are approached when their mental defenses are at their weakest—typically just after a personal tragedy or while in an environment where contact would not be expected (such as a shopping mall). The recruiter is usually attractive, but not overly so, and will attempt to draw the potential recruit into a face-to-face meeting. According to our research, the recruiters sometimes use mental domination and emotional manipulation spells before and during the interview.

After luring the recruit into attending a cult meeting, the individual is subjected to intense psychological pressure. Also, by attending so-called "cleansing" sessions with counselors, the cult gains information on the subject's hopes and fears. Further counseling sessions and group meetings will often use these hopes and fears in their later indoctrination and propaganda. There is also the implicit threat that the member's secrets will be used to blackmail them later. Through magic and psychological intimidation, the individual is drawn in further and the group's leadership handles more of their decision making.

Over time, recruits become convinced that their innate magical abilities are indeed (re)surfacing. Burnouts that join the group claim to re-establish their



mastery over magic, while mundanes become convinced that they exercise their own magical powers by channeling mana towards burnouts as they wield magic. We have uncovered no evidence that these claims are fueled by BTL abuse, psychotropic conditioning, illusion magic or mental domination.

- This type of delusional behavior and emotional manipulation doesn't have to be so blatant. There are plenty of old-fashioned ways to convince people to believe something, especially when you've pulled them into an emotionally charged, intensive cult atmosphere, with lots of external pressures applied. We're probably just looking at a typical case of brainwashing.
- Deprogrammer

Burnout members are carefully steered towards undergoing a secretive ritual to locate their personal "Throne of the Soul" and to create a link to the "Black Moon." It is this ritual, allegedly learned from the Book of Gaf, that allows burnouts to break through and reclaim their power. One of our agents successfully infiltrated the group and maneuvered himself into position to undergo this ritual. As preparation, our infiltrator was privately informed that he would undergo a process similar to initiation and that this ritual would place him into contact with the Aleph Society's avatar, known as Gaf. This was the last report we received from our agent; he is now MIA.

- Uh oh. All of this finding the throne and linking to the black moon stuff sounds really familiar to me. I've heard similar things said by a mage I once knew who made an unfortunate deal with a spirit that was, shall we say, less than benign. I don't necessarily understand how, but the bond he made with the spirit boosted the power of both of them. Like they could use each other to boost their own abilities. It was scary!

• Fausto

- Wait a minute. Are you implying that these burnouts are able to regain their magic because they enter into some sort of pact with a spirit? Or other dark power?

• Shemesh

- That's my suspicion. But don't quote me on it.

• Fausto

- I've studied these spirit pacts in the past, and as far as my research indicated, the spirit and magician could only enter into one such pact at a time. It sounds, however, like there's a whole group of these guys. So either they're dealing with a whole bunch of nasty spirits ...

• Magister

- ... Or we're dealing with a spirit that has figured out a way to enter into more than one pact at once. I don't even want to consider how powerful such a spirit might be.

• Fausto

Surveillance of Aleph Society members verifies that some members who previously exhibited signs of burnout and magic loss have indeed displayed magical potential once again (or increased magical potential in the case of partial burnouts). Additionally, we have recorded evidence of at least one Aleph member utilizing sacrificial metamagic to further fuel his powers.

- What? Who taught these people how to use blood magic?
- Hermione

• I'm not sure I want to know.

• Weasely

After intensive investigation, we discovered that many mundane Aleph members bear telltale signs that they are being used as "volunteer" sacrifices. Many of them bear unexplained scars and wounds. We suspect that these members are convinced that by volunteering themselves as sacrifices to fuel another member's magic, they are in effect exhibiting their own magical abilities. Attempts to dispel this delusion have been unsuccessful.

As an additional note, we have recorded at least two incidents where an Aleph Society member's regained power failed him or her—at least temporarily. This may merely have been the fault of the magician. Perhaps they overestimated their "regained" abilities and attempted magic too powerful to sustain. We suspect, however, that the source of their power is not always stable. This may be a weakness to exploit in operations against them, especially if we can devise methods to undermine it further.

- This instability lends credibility to the theory that we're dealing with one spirit and several pacts. Maybe the spirit only has so many resources, and when too many of its burnout buddies draw on its power at once, the whole system gets overloaded.
- Magus

- So if we get all of the burnouts to cast killer fireballs at once, the spirit may go pop? I don't think so.

• Wiz Kid

SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

On the surface, the Aleph Society acts as a combination social club and self-help center, occasionally engaging in a bit of public activism. This activism mostly revolves around opposition to the creation and deployment of mana-active bioweapons, such as the Strain III bacteria we released in Chicago. Ares has been targeted by this group several times with demonstrations and civil disobedience, and there is mounting evidence that the Society also sponsors clandestine operations.

- The group doesn't just pick on Ares and other corps. I've actually heard of the Aleph Society in Chicago sending out teams to clean up toxic sites and destroy Strain III clouds. For being a bunch of burnouts, they've done a pretty good job, though

some residents complain that the areas still "don't feel right" after the group cleans them out. There have also been reports that some members of these teams have suffered medical complications while working.

• Fuse

A large percentage of the group's recruits have criminal records and antisocial backgrounds, leading us to believe that at least some of these members have been funneled into Society-sponsored shadowrunner teams. We currently have one of their members in custody, arrested after an aborted break-in attempt on an Ares facility. She has been indicted on several counts of mentally dominating individuals into performing criminal acts and casting restricted spells.

• Impressive for a woman who had half of her body replaced after a car accident and was supposedly unable to ever use magic again.

• Crash

ALEPH LEADERSHIP

We have identified two individuals that seem to direct the Aleph Society.

Mike Nickson, ThD.:

Nickson, the founder of the Aleph Society, is the 36-year old son of a wealthy "old money" family that transplanted itself from the NAN after the Ghost Dance War. Dr. Nickson was an accomplished hermetic magician, considered by some to be a pioneer in the field of forensic anthropology. Sometime in 2047, Dr. Nickson suffered chronic health problems and withdrew from his position at MIT&T. He issued a public statement shortly afterward claiming that he was a victim of government harassment for his research, implying that he had been forced out of his line of work. Research into medical records shows that Dr. Nickson had become infected with a rare, magically resistant fungal infection that left his torso permanently scarred and supposedly devastated his ability to work magic.

• This fellow was also well known in academic thaumaturgy for his crackpot theories regarding metaplanar interactions with the astral. A real fruit loop, using his family fortune to fund his pet delusions.

• Rei

• Then why is some of his early research still referenced by the top mages at MIT&T? He may not be the most credible individual these days, but his methodology used to be rock solid.

• Little Hand

Dr. Nickson's whereabouts from 2048 to 2053 are obscured. It is clear that he traveled quite a bit, and rumors claim that he was searching for a way to reverse the infection's effects. He now claims to have visited both Tibet and Amazonia during this period, though these claims are highly suspect. We do have evidence that Nickson was heavily involved in the

illegal telesma trade during this time, and that he also dealt in stolen archaeological treasures. He is wanted by seven countries and corporations for thefts of national treasures and on smuggling charges.

• If Ares wants to have a word with this guy, they'll have to wait in line. He's wanted from the NAN to the Middle East, and I know of at least one contract placed on his hoop by some ex-smuggling partners. Even his own family has been looking for him—seems he utilized some back doors into family accounts to divert a healthy sum of money into some hidden account he maintains in the Caribbean League. I hear Tamanous also is looking for him, though I've no idea why.

• Sifi

• So where's the guy hiding? Any ideas?

• Vesa

• My money's on a hideout somewhere in the Sioux Nation, probably near Cheyenne. But you'll notice that Ares doesn't claim to have any leads on him, and they've got as good a chance of tracing him as anyone.

• Sifi

According to his own writings, Dr. Nickson uncovered the Book of Gaf near the end of this period. He claims the book was actually discovered by Russians in Antarctica earlier in the century, but that its value was unrecognized until it came into his possession. His descriptions claim that this artifact's cover is made from "beaten sheets of orichalcum." He also claims that the book is an artifact of the theorized "Fourth World," and that it was written by Atlanteans who traveled to the stars after some sort of great cataclysm. There is no substantiating evidence to the claims, or that the book even exists.

• The good Doctor is a prime suspect in the Gibbous Moon Theft back in 2054, when MIT&T had several million dollars worth of magical radicals and experimental foci stolen by shadowrunners. The university and police considered it an inside job, and our friend Mr. Nickson just happened to have all the necessary information that would have been needed. I suspect that he either wanted something that was in the MIT&T labs or traded the information for favors.

• Nocturne

José Grout, ThD

José Grout is the only visible upper-level leader of the Aleph Society. He frequently travels from chapter to chapter, overseeing operations and acting as a mouthpiece for Dr. Nickson. Grout was an undergraduate student who worked with Dr. Nickson at MIT&T and apparently kept in contact with him when he vanished from the public scene after 2047. His doctorate thesis seemingly has no connection with the teachings of the Society, being concerned with physical manifestation of astral energies.

It is worth noting that Dr. Grout is one of the few Awakened members of the Aleph Society who does not seem to have suffered any magic degradation or burnout. Additionally, he is not a hermetic, but a shaman following the totem of Skunk.

- A skunk shaman? First I've heard of them.
- Maelwys
- Well, would you admit to being one?
- Screw

Though he no longer performs public research, Grout still has ties with the thaumaturgical research community. Manadyne currently employs him in an unspecified capacity.

Grout is often present during initiatory rituals, though we are unsure whether he acts merely in an advisory capacity or takes a more direct role. Bodyguards and Aleph security personnel routinely accompany him. We suspect that Grout also coordinates the activities of the Aleph Society's clandestine operation teams.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE OPERATIONS

At this time, we suggest that all Aleph Society personnel and activities be elevated to an Azure classification on the Watch List. Though the Aleph Society maintains a position that is hostile towards Ares and their agenda at large is suspect, an appropriate defensive or pro-active response cannot be taken without further understanding both the internal mechanics and goals of their organization. Our primary focus is to identify the exact nature of their initiatory rituals and source of their members' increased magical potency. Additionally, while their organization remains small and semi-public, we should take the opportunity to insert infiltration teams, map out their internal structure and locate their leadership and hidden assets. We have already requested an additional FireWatch team as well as Matrix research personnel to assist in this endeavor.

- Of course, now that this file is out, the Aleph will know that Ares is crawling over them (if they didn't already). I hear that they've already taken some of their operations underground. Maybe you should've waited before releasing this, Cap.
- Libby
- On the contrary. Now that the word is out, more eyes will be focused on the Aleph than just Ares'. And whatever actions Ares takes against them will come under close scrutiny. Hopefully this will help to avert a major snafu—like the one that left Chicago in the state it's in today.
- Captain Chaos
- "I am everywhere!"

GAME INFORMATION

On the surface, the Aleph Society is similar to many other comet-inspired cults. With promises of hope and ascendancy, the Society appeals to those who would give anything to



acquire the rare gift of magic. The Society's unique twist is that it specifically focuses on burnouts—Awakened people whose capacity and ability to wield magic was stripped from them by accident or circumstance. Many burnouts would give anything to reclaim their lost power, to use magic again as they once did. The Society promises to return these desperate people to their former stature, and more.

THE SECRETS OF GAF

The truth behind the Aleph Society lies in the initiation ritual that burnout members are steered towards. This ritual is similar to standard group initiation (see p. 57, *MITS*), with several specific differences. First, the initiate must undertake an oath ordeal (p. 67, *MITS*) and swear allegiance to the Aleph Society's rules and strictures. Second, the initiate enters into a spirit pact (p. 124, *MITS*) with a shadow free spirit known as Gaf (see below). Third, the initiate learns a unique metamagical technique known as Shared Potency (see p. 45). Members who undergo this initiation become corrupted magicians and adepts (p. 134, *MITS*).

If the character attempting to undergo the initiation has a Magic rating of 0 (he or she was once Awakened, but for all other intents and purposes has lost the ability to work magic), Gaf may sacrifice a single point of Spirit Energy to restore the character's magic and allow him or her to initiate (thus gaining 1 point of Magic). This ability is unique to the spirit pact of Gaf.

Aleph Society initiation rituals are intensive, secretive functions, where the true nature of the Society's promises are revealed. Aleph members who undergo a second initiation with the group are taught the metamagic technique of Sacrificing (p. 133, *MITS*). Mundane Aleph Society members freely

offer themselves as sacrificial victims, believing that they travel the path to their own Awakening by contributing their innate life force to fuel the initiate's magical powers. Aleph members are banned, however, from summoning blood spirits (p. 134, *MITs*)—Gaf views them as competition.

Gaf: The Black Moon

It is unknown, even to many members of the Aleph Society, whether the shadow free spirit (p. 114, *MITs*) known as Gaf (a.k.a., the Black Moon) is a single entity or whether the name is commonly used by a group of similar spirits. Through the Aleph Society's initiation ritual, initiates enter into a symbiotic relationship with Gaf. Unlike other shadow free spirits, Gaf has the ability to enter into more than one spirit pact at a time—providing that the initiates know the Shared Potency metamagic technique, which Gaf gleefully teaches them.

Gaf's true nature and motivations are left up to the gamemaster. Gaf may be a single entity, intent on creating an army of enslaved magicians and adepts—after all, their powers rely on the spirit. Gaf may be a group of free spirits, perhaps even a new spirit type with alien intentions. Gaf's exact relationship with Dr. Nickson is also unclear—Gaf may be a pawn if Dr. Nickson knows its True Name, but it is more likely that Dr. Nickson is as dependant upon Gaf as many of the Society's burnouts are.

The powers available to Gaf are also subject to the gamemaster, who can choose from the free spirit powers listed on p. 117, *MITs*.

Shared Potency Metamagic

This metamagic technique is available to both magician and adept non-player characters. It is not available to player characters.

Shared Potency allows the initiate to enter into a spirit pact with a shadow spirit (Gaf), even when the spirit already has a spirit pact with one or more other characters. (At the gamemaster's discretion, Gaf may only be able to share Potency with a limited number of initiates, such as its Force rating or less). Upon entering into the pact, the initiate gains an amount of Potency equal to half the spirit's Spirit Energy rating (round down). Potency follows all of the rules given on pp. 123-124, *MITs*.

Shared Potency, however, has its drawbacks. Since more than one initiate may be drawing upon shared power from the free spirit at the same time, in some cases the power may simply not be available as it is being used elsewhere. At the beginning of any Combat Turn during which the initiate uses his or her Potency, roll 2D6 and add the results. On a result of 3 or less, the potency is simply not available for that Combat Turn. The initiate will not be aware of this until he attempts to use it. The character will still suffer the full Drain for any magic he or she attempts to do.

If the initiate's magic is based entirely on Gaf's Potency (he or she was at 0 Magic and Gaf sacrificed a point of Spirit Energy to allow initiation) and the Potency temporarily fails, then that character loses all magical abilities for that Combat Turn.

Under certain stressful conditions, the gamemaster may increase the likelihood that the Potency will fail. For example, if multiple magicians are drawing upon the Potency of the spirit to cast massive spells all at the same time, the gamemaster can determine that Potency will fail on a 2D6 roll of 5 or less.

Aleph Society

Type: Initiatory

Members: Approximately 30

Strictures: Attendance, Belief, Exclusive Membership, Exclusive Ritual, Fraternity, Karma, Limited Membership (initial Magic Rating less than 4), Oath, Secrecy

Resources/Dues: Low Resources. Most members support themselves or band together in small cooperatives and do freelance magic work to pay the bills.

Customs: The Aleph Society is concerned primarily with locating and training burnouts in their techniques but they also have an active political agenda opposing the use of magically active weapons and technologies. In particular, they are active in Chicago and elsewhere destroying Strain III clouds. The Society has made enemies with Ares and the Atlantean Rebirth (p. 48, *YOTC*) because of their activities.

The Society prefers to personally seek out potential recruits and will simply turn away anyone showing up claiming to have an interest. Membership also requires the candidate to pass various magical mind scans (after signing various waivers; refusal means no chance of admittance) and to undergo close supervision for some period of time. Each group (typically between 4 and 8 members) communicates with each other over the Matrix and exchanges correspondence and interesting news.

The Society teaches sacrificing metamagic as a way of "empowering" mundane members. Initiates may use sacrificing metamagic on willing mundane members, but they may not kill them. Likewise, initiates are forbidden from summoning blood spirits (and are simply not taught how).

USING THE SOCIETY

While the Aleph Society is not threatening to take over the world, it is dangerous because it is sowing the seeds of corruption and dark magic. Though the Society offers hope to those unfortunates who have lost the Talent, it grants their wishes in a way that will inevitably lead to ruin. As a shadow spirit, Gaf is inherently attracted to human pain and misery—spreading magical dependency and the use of blood magic are likely just the beginning of its yearnings. The initiates in the Society will inevitably find their directives becoming darker and gristlier, but as they are dependant on Gaf, they will likely slide down the slope to damnation.

Because Gaf and the initiates have a symbiotic relationship, it is conceivable that power struggles may arise within the group. Right now, Gaf is calling the shots, but some of the more experienced initiates (perhaps even Dr. Nickson) may soon start feeling their oats.

CAN YOU SEE THE REAL ME?



The following tale comes from a woman with an impressive street cred listing. Until recently, she was considered one of the top assassins in Detroit, if not the UCAS. Some of you take a dim view of wetwork, but "Lealla" had a rep for only taking down players and doing it discreetly without collateral damage. Her tale has to do with a "client" that was a bit out of the ordinary. Her account is chilling and grisly, and burdened me with some uncomfortable theories as well as a few nightmares. Naturally, I've decided to share them with you. I'm interested to see what sort of conclusions you come to. If you see the same similarities that I do, we may be facing something very dangerous ... and very creepy.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 11 July 2062 at 11:39:10 (PST)

I got the call in the middle of my bath, loaded with bubbles and smelling like heaven. It had been a rough week, and I deserved it. A girl needs to soak in the lap of luxury every once in a while, even though the roof leaks and the rats are the size of footballs. I wasn't gonna answer the fraggin' phone, maybe I shouldn't have, but my instincts tingled with the ring. I waved my hand through the telecom's laser beam control space, splashing water all over the floor, and instructed it to answer voice-only. "Yeah?" I blurted.

At first, silence. I thought about insulting my relaxing-soak-interrupter with a zinger about his or her momma, but again, that damn tingle. I decided instead to be polite. "Yeah?" I said again, only this time louder and more pissed. Then I hear it, three words that make my brain frizz into a panic—"He's not dead." My latest Mr. Johnson on the line, accusing me of botching the job.

"What do you mean he's not dead? The guy's dead. I did it."

"He showed up for work today, Lealla. He is not dead. In fact, he's sitting in his office right now. I had a short conversation with him about the status of the projects he's supervising not five minutes ago. He was quite alive. Needless to say, your employer"—he paused, for dramatic effect—"well, frankly your employer is fragging pissed. This makes both of us look bad."

My reputation was on the line and my work was being questioned. I don't like when my rep is questioned, I don't care who it is.



- That's life in the shadows, sister. You should know that, if you're half as "bad" as you claim to be.
- Rookie Slayer

"Listen," I said, "he's dead. I took care of it two weeks ago. I can go over the whole evening for ya. Moment to moment." Mr. Johnson always called on a secure line, so I knew it was ok to blab. "We had him scoped at the bar you gave us. One of my girls slid on up to him, dropped one of my special concoctions into his drink while stroking his stubby little leg, and he wobbled out of there with her. By the time he made it to my car across the street, he was unconscious. Couldn't even stand or blather a damn word. Discreet as any other fragged up slob checking out of the club with a hooker on his arm."

"Spare me the details," Mr. J says.

But he was gonna get the details. "No. I'm not through. You questioning me? I'm not through," I said.

- Bold as love, Leallal! It's about time someone stuck up for themselves instead of always licking the boots of these corps flunkies. Yeah, they pay the bills, but I'd just as soon put a bullet through one of their faces than even give one the time of day.
- Cozi

- Ever hear of not biting the hand that feeds you? If you start screwing your Johnsons, your rep will take a plunge.
- Goblin

He stayed real quiet after that, and I continued my story, staying in the bath, of course. "Look. Two bullets to the head. There wasn't a twitch left in him, and besides that, he didn't even know what hit him he was so out of it. I don't want to have people suffer. Precision. POP! POP! Like a fraggin' surgeon. I hosed his brains off of my tarp, for crying out loud!

"We gave him the cement shoe treatment, me and my girl, who will remain anonymous." You gotta take care of your people on the street—after all, who else can ya trust? "Then we dumped him in Lake Huron. Way out into Lake Huron. There weren't any air bubbles. I waited an hour. I always wait an hour."

"That's all fine and dandy. But you need to get over here and see for yourself. I highly recommend it." And then, click, he hangs up. That's all he says. The bath was over.

So in an hour I'm checking into the Fisher Building, using the guest pass that Mr. J had previously provided me. I get to the executive office floor, and there he is—Mr. Tobias Czank—sitting at his desk like a good little soldier. I watched him through the glass for a minute while he played around with a holochart. (Weird thing, this office. No privacy. Like Ares wants to keep a close eye on all their people at GM. I felt like I was at the zoo—"And this here is the rare and nearly extinct Market Research Representative. Observe how tenderly he caresses his graph charts.")

- The Fisher Building? That's the HQ of General Motors in Detroit. Sounds like Lealla was working an inside job, helping one exec take out another.
- Techno

- I've heard of this Tobias Czank guy. He's a dwarf. Ares knew they snatched one of the masterminds of VTOL technology when they "brought him on board." I hear they were concerned about his "loyalty" to their cause over at GM, though.

- Ernie on the Inside

- All corps are concerned about loyalty, but it's usually the people who know something they're not supposed to know who have to worry about getting "cut" from the payroll. The dwarf must have known something. Better off dead than in the hands of the enemy.

- Sir Kill

- My contact over at GM said this Czank guy was solid as rock. There were even rumors floating around that Czank was first in line to replace the current head of Ares' GM division, this slacker named Fischer (no relation to the "Fisher" of the Fisher Building), Eugene for a first name, I think. I ain't good with names unless the name is on my radar. My theory—this Fischer knew his days were numbered and he eliminated his competition. My advice—turn down any interviews for a position of leadership over at GM.
- Crembone

I'm thinking to myself, this has to be a nightmare. Wake-up! Your conscience is speaking to you in some weird kinda tongue and it better quit, because there is no way I'm gonna change my ways. The pay is too good and I love my job too much. But reality it was. Short, chubby, bearded reality staring at a chart on his office wall.

I hustled back over to the meeting room in another wing of the GM offices where Mr. Johnson was waiting for me with a curl on his lip. As soon as I shut the door behind me, he says, "See. I told you."

I jump right to the chase. When my rep is on the line, I don't apologize. I make things right. "I'll finish what I started. By tomorrow morning, Czank will be dead"—my turn to pause for dramatic effect—"again." And with that, I left the room. Didn't even wait for a reply. If I backed down in there, showed even the slightest sign of weakness, he'd take me off the job and smear my name all over Detroit as a hack, an amateur.

Before I left GM to begin preparation for the evening ahead, I decided to pass by Czank's office one more time to make sure I wasn't seeing things. He was still sitting there, looking straight ahead at that damn chart. I'm thinking, maybe he is dead. Maybe this is a practical joke. A sick, twisted, fraggin' elaborate practical joke. Someone dragged his corpse out of the lake, cleaned him up in a day and propped him in his chair. Any second some pretty-boy elven host of a candid camera trid show was gonna bust through the ceiling, laughing at me and sticking a mic in my face, wanting to know how I felt after being duped and made to look like a fool.

Before the fantasy could even linger for a second, it was shattered. The dwarf must have noticed my stare and he turned to meet it. He moved, therefore he was alive.

We looked at each other for what seemed like an hour, though it was actually 1.875 seconds according to my retinal

clock. He couldn't have recognized me. He never even saw me the other night, his assassin, but the look in his eyes froze my heart. It was like he *did* know who I was, and he was gonna make me pay for even thinking about trying to eliminate him a second time. The look flashed away and was replaced by a warm, friendly smile. He took a sip from his coffee and turned his attention back to the chart on the wall.

- Maybe Lealla's right, and she did kill the fragger. Maybe she was looking at a double, his twin, or a clone, or even some spir- it with a gift for being a doppelganger. Heck, maybe a protean ate the guy's body at the bottom of the lake—a really smart protean, who took his form and refrained from eating his coworkers ...

- Plastic Man

- Chummer, you are really stretching, but keep trying, maybe you'll hit something. In my experience though, the truth is usually far simpler. I'd bet that she simply iced the wrong dwarf.

- Travolta

I decided to finish the job at Czank's home around the witching hour. Yeah, that's sloppy, but I didn't think I would have the time to set up anything more elaborate. Time was of the essence here. I couldn't have this hanging over my head—and my reputation—for another day.

Czank's little corner of the world was in this plush, grassy suburb about twelve miles outside of the city proper, so that

was playing in my favor. Peace and quiet is always conducive to a hit, and so is space, and there was a lot of it around. Rolling and woody.

I parked my ride about a mile from the house behind this strip mall which backed right up to the woods. I crept through the woods and in fifteen minutes, the house was in sight, nestled in a clearing in the trees. The dwarf had done well for himself. The home was almost a mini-mansion surrounded by immaculate landscaping. There were even a bunch of bushes cut into the shapes of animals—a giraffe, a gorilla, and my personal favorite, a circus bear balancing on a ball.

I scanned the grounds with my built-in night vision, then with thermo goggles, looking for any signs of security devices. Knight Errant provided home security for the dwarf. I knew there were no astral guardians to watch out for, as Czank didn't like having things around watching him that he couldn't see. He did have a lot of technical security, but that was my specialty. Even if I tripped anything, I knew I had a good four minutes before a response arrived—more time than I needed.

I saw no sensors at first, but then something caught my eye on the giraffe. Sticking from the top of its head was a mount for a closed circuit camera, but no camera. A closer look at the other animals revealed the same thing—mounts, no cameras. Weird, right? I decided to check it out and I didn't like what I found. Each mount was bent or snapped, as if someone grabbed a hold of the camera and ripped it from its place. A rainbow of flayed wires stuck out from the tops of each of the twisted metal mounts. I'm thinking, what the frag is going on here? This is starting to look like I've been replaced.

- Safe bet. If I was Mr. Johnson and my hit woman had failed, I would hire a replacement right away to take care of both the original target and also get the first assassin out of the way.

- Woo

The house was completely dark and silent. Either the deed had already been done or Czank was tucked cozily in bed and my competition was only a few steps ahead of me in the race to bag the trophy. I'm an optimist, so I hoped I still had a shot. Actually, I thought, this clown is doing me a favor. He's done all the tedious work of eliminating the security cameras and other sensors. I could take care of the fun part, right under his nose, then get the bonus of disposing of his sorry replacement ass! Maybe it wasn't going to be such a bad night after all!

- Or maybe the hit is already done, and you're walking into a situation where you're going to be caught with a corpse and a smoking gun. Lealla could've taken the fall for the hit she didn't do.

- Justice

I dashed up to the garage, where a line of trash cans ran along the wall. One of the trash cans was missing a lid and I could see security cameras piled up in it. A

WOMAN BELIEVED DEAD RETURNS TO FAMILY

Posted: 18 May 2062

Portland, Maine (UCAS) AP—Lillibeth Strickner, who had been missing and presumed dead for over three days, returned to her home on Thursday, Portland police reported. Strickner had been washed overboard while fishing with her husband Dwight Strickner. Their 16-foot boat was caught in a severe storm which hit the Maine coast violently and quickly on Monday earlier in the week. "It's a miracle," Dwight said of his wife's return. "I thought I was never going to see my wife again."

Authorities searched for Strickner's body for two days before finally calling off the search and presuming her drowned. When Dwight Strickner returned home from work on Thursday evening, he found the front door ajar. "I thought someone had broken in and was robbing me. I actually went back to my car and grabbed a tire iron to defend myself before going in to my house, and there she was!" Dwight says his wife stood over the stove cooking dinner as if nothing had happened. "Hi, honey. I'm making your favorite, meatloaf," were the first words Dwight heard from his "resurrected" spouse. "I started to cry, and I gave her this huge hug," Dwight stated, holding back tears. Lillibeth Strickner says she doesn't remember what had happened to her at the hands of the furious sea. "I just woke up under the lighthouse on the rocks, stood up and walked home, but not before I stopped at the supermarket to pick up some ground beef. Someone was watching over me, or I wouldn't be here today."



courteous, neat killer. Someone who doesn't want to make a mess. Reminds me of myself.

I peered around the corner of the garage and saw the sliding glass door to the back porch was open. I started moving towards the door, then stopped short when it slid delicately shut. I'm literally right behind the guy. Steps. I still haven't seen him, but I'm in his shadow, and he doesn't even know it.

I gave him a few seconds to clear the area before heading to the door. Once inside, the adrenaline really started pumping, more potent than I had felt in years. I smiled. It was as if this was my first hit, and the excitement was almost unbearable. I wanted to laugh at my giddiness. But the thrill of the moment was brief, because things rapidly got really weird and life-threatening.

I don't expect many of you to believe a single word I say from this point onward, but that's okay. At least I did my part to put the word out there and maybe give someone who encounters one of these things an opportunity to survive. I was lucky. Many others appeared to not be so lucky, but that comes later in this story.

The sliding glass door led into the kitchen. Czank obviously liked to cook. Every culinary gadget known to man was hanging from the ceiling above a granite topped island in the center of the huge room. The stove was big enough to run a small restaurant. A big pot sat on the stove, a high flame burning underneath it. Whatever was in it was boiling pretty vigorously. The sound crept me out. It was sloppy and thick.

I tried to get a sense of the room and its place in the layout of the house so I could head towards the bedroom and finish the job and the competition, but I couldn't focus. All I could think about was that damn pot on the stove and that sound. It disgusted me, yet I wanted to see what was in it. To smell it, touch it, taste it. I finally couldn't take it anymore and figured the satisfying of my curiosity would allow me to focus. I inched towards the pot and peered inside. At the time, it simply didn't register in my brain that something about my behavior was wrong.

A thick, black sludge bubbled inside it and the odor was nauseating. I ripped off my mask to get a full whiff of the aroma. I opened a drawer and pulled out a long wooden spoon and stuck it into the slop, stirring it a bit. Clumps of hair and gristle surfaced. I put the spoon down and reached into the pot. When my fingertips hit the surface of the liquid, I knew they were burning, but I continued to push my hand down into the pot. My hand felt like it was going to explode from the heat, yet I didn't stop its descent until my arm was submerged up to the elbow.

I felt around in the body of the pot till my numbing fingers clasped around a meaty, furry clump stuck to the bottom of the pot. I pulled it out and looked closely at it. At one time, it might have been a paw, but now it was just a gnarled mass of cartilage, hair, bone and flesh drenched in a tar-black goo. As crazy as this might sound, it looked delicious. I couldn't believe it myself when I thought it, but it made my stomach growl with desire. The skin on my hand and arm was charred and cracking, yet I felt no pain. My trauma dampener must've been working overtime. I could only think of sinking my teeth into the lump. Thinking about that grotesque glob now turns my stomach and makes me want to retch, but I did it. I raised the thing to my mouth and bit into it

ravenously. It crunched and squished between my teeth and burned the inside of my mouth. My head flushed and I felt slightly dizzy, probably from the intensity of the pain my brain had decided to ignore, and I took another big bite out of the black, dripping horror.

• I think I'm gonna hurl.

• Bang

• Well, this is a classic, if grotesque, case of magical compulsion. The lack of focus, the erratic behavior, the lack of concern over danger to the self—all that points to mind control. It has happened to me on more than one occasion and, let me tell ya, it's one of the most horrifying experiences you'll ever have. You lose all control, yet you are still aware of your actions. Damn spell slingers!

• Scanner

• Yeah, okay, it's mind control. But why? Why make someone do something that gross? We must be dealing with some seriously sick or twisted being here.

• Dr. Frank

I was chomping away on this thing as if I hadn't eaten for two weeks. Suddenly, the insanity of what I was doing hit me. I fell to the tiled floor and blew chunks all over it. The pain of my charred hand hit me like a sledgehammer to the brain and I finally felt the impact of my gobbling. Blood was pouring from my burnt mouth. I dashed to the sink in a panic and turned the water on, not worrying at all about the noise I was making. I just wanted the burning inside my mouth and all over my left arm to stop. I lapped at the flowing faucet like a rabid animal. As the water hit my arm, steam poured off my flesh. The pain was so intense, I was short of breath. Help me, I kept thinking. Help me. I didn't know who I was directing the thought to; my mind was just begging anybody to take the pain away.

As if in response to the plea in my thoughts, I heard a whimper from the opposite corner of the kitchen. The sound slapped me back into control. The pain was still unbearable, but the panic was replaced by focused anger and a need to inflict some pain of my own. My tongue lolled dead and numb in my bloody mouth and my left arm was shedding its flesh in gooeey drips, and someone was going to pay. Good thing my shooting hand is my left.

The whimper continued and I walked toward it, my Savalette Guardian drawn and my finger twitching on the trigger. The shock to my system must have messed with my night vision because the room now looked inky. A sliver of moonlight was the only illumination available to me. Luckily, it fell softly in the general area of the whimper, and the closer I crept towards the sound, the better my vision became.

Lying on its side, in the corner of the kitchen next to its food bowl, was a dog. At one time, the mutt was probably big and vicious—now it was on the brink of death. The thing looked like a living skeleton, withered and drained of all but the last few drops of its life. I drew closer to the pathetic beast and noticed its right front paw had been severed. I wanted to scream, but my



mouth was frozen in pain and my tongue was limp and useless. Instead, I shot and killed the dog. Put it out of its misery.

Now, I wanted out. As far as I was concerned, at this point, my rep and this fragging job didn't mean a damn thing. I just wanted out of this place alive. Thirty feet separated me from where I stood by the hideous carcass of Czank's dog and the sliding glass door. A path of moonlight paved the way from point A to point B, the golden road to freedom. But before I could make the move, he appeared.

- Call me a chicken, but I'd have been outta there immediately after I wasn't able to stop myself from sticking my hand into that bubbling goo and eating some dog's boiling hot severed foot. You're obviously dealing with something way beyond the normal scope of metahumanity here. I say, live to fight another day.

- Bluto

Czank stepped from the shadows and into the moonlight. His silhouette blocked my path to the exit. I couldn't see his face but I knew it was him. I raised my gun and pointed it right at his face. I said something stupid like, "I'm gonna kill you now, and then I'm going to leave here, and go home." He didn't move. He didn't respond. His stillness freaked me out.

Panic welled up in my chest and my skin suddenly ran cold. My hand trembled so severely that the gun flopped from it and clanged to the tile. I stepped clumsily backwards to get away from Czank and tripped on his dog. I collapsed in the corner and kicked at the dead dog in a panic to get it away from me. Right

before my eyes, the carcass decayed into a pile of dust and bones. I shook in complete and utter uncontrollable terror. I couldn't think, I couldn't get a grasp of what was going on. I ain't afraid of anything or anybody, let alone this desk jockey dwarf and his dead dog, but an irrational fear had fiercely grabbed hold of my heart.

- I had a spirit put the fear into me once. I ran into trees, into bushes, I was willing to run over my own mother to get away. I ran until I collapsed. I hate that magical drek.

- Dursley

- Lealla's story doesn't strike me as the normal functioning of the spirit power of fear. Normally, the victim is inclined to do anything possible to get away from the situation. In Lealla's case, the opposite seems to be true. The fear paralyzed her, forced her to curl up and remain. An ideal power for some sort of predator. I can speculate, but I'll wait until I read more of the story.

- Parazoologist

As I cowered in the corner, Czank walked over to his rack of hanging pots, and pulled a large iron skillet down. Calmly, he walked over to me and raised it above his head. All I could do was shiver. I was defenseless. He brought the pan down viciously on my head and then everything went black.

- Are you sure this wasn't some bad trip you had following a week-long binge on Zen, my friend? You should stay away from



stuff that you are unsure of where it comes from. Me, I can guarantee the best of anything you'll ever need, sister. No bad trips with anything I'm supplying. You have my word.

• Zenith

• I believe her. I know a friend of a friend (yeah, I know, doesn't everybody) who had a run in with a particularly malicious spirit that could do this kinda stuff to your head. Control your actions, make ya piss your pants with fear. Weird thing was, the spirit had possessed this dowdy housewife. You wouldn't know this thing was in her, either. She'd be throwing a tupperware party one minute, conducting her life as normal, then all of a sudden—WHAM!—she's sucking the life right outta ya, no one's the wiser. Kinda scary if ya ask me. Can't ya trust anyone anymore?

• Fizzlebust

I have no idea what happened to me after I blacked out or for how long it was happening. My retinal clock was fried. Had it been hours, days, weeks? When I finally awoke, I was lying in Czank's bedroom on the floor, but it was no longer being used as a bedroom. It looked more like a tomb. All the windows had been covered over with sheets of metal and the walls were covered in some kind of writing, the likes of which I had never seen before. They were symbols made up of different configurations of dots and dashes. Very precise, very simple. The room was large and empty of any furniture. The floor had either been removed entirely to expose the earth below or the entire room had been filled with dirt. I couldn't tell. An icy cold, stale air hovered in the room.

Seven metahuman bodies sat in one corner of the room, in a row. They looked like Czank's dog, drained skeletal forms, all of them dead. I was in the opposite corner of the room, too weak to stand and barely able to move at all. My mouth felt like it was full of sand, then I remembered my run-in with the scorching dog paw. With all the strength I could muster, I flopped my good hand onto my stomach and into my view. My skin was stark white and shriveled, hanging loosely on my bones. I glanced over at the seven in the corner and realized that I was becoming like them. Becoming like the dog.

• Sounds like this entity was interested in adding you to its collection, Lealla. To what end is anyone's guess, but you were the next item in the bugger's morbid display case.

• Punch

I thought I was toast. There was no way I was going to survive this one. But if this little bastard was going to turn me into a husk, I was going to go down with every last ounce of my being fighting it and cursing his name.

I heard the door to the room creak open and shifted my head to the left so I could get a look at what fiend was coming in the door. A tall elf shambled in, holding the pot that was on the stove in his right hand and a wooden spoon in his gnarled left. His clothes were tattered and soiled, as if he had crawled out of the ground. His skin was like yellow, wrinkled leather and his eyes were vacant. He reeked, with the smell of something dead and bloating.

He shuffled towards me, almost losing his balance and falling to the dirt floor several times. He stuck the spoon in the pot and removed it with a tarry furball glopped onto its end. With a surprisingly quick stab forward, the elf stuck the spoon and its putrid contents into my mouth. I couldn't even muster the energy to spit it out, so it sat on my tongue, warm and sticky. The elf knelt down slowly and grabbed my chin in one hand and the top of my head in the other. He pulled my chin up and down in a jerky motion to force me to chew, then held my nose to force me to swallow. A hollow moan escaped from his open mouth while he performed his duties, as if his last breath was escaping from his corroded lungs with each movement he made. I gagged down the evil stew, and the elf stood up and stuck the spoon into the pot for a second serving. I glanced over to the door. It was cracked open slightly. It might be my only opportunity to escape this hell hole. The way I felt, I figured I would be dead in a day, maybe two.

• Ok, what's the scoop here? What is Lealla dealing with? Someone's gotta know. Is this just a vampire, an infected dwarf with some vampiric pawns or something? Isn't that what vampires do, suck your life away?

• Elvira

• It sounds like the life was being sucked right out of her all right. But from her description of Czank, I don't think this guy was a vampire—or rather a goblin, which is what HMMVV-infected dwarfs turn into. Of course, we still haven't identified what all of the various strains of HMMVV do to the various types of metahumans, so who knows? Maybe Czank is some new kind of infected dwarf. I'd be interested to learn more about this creature. Any additional details would be helpful. If you have them, please contact me via Shadowland.

• Vlad

• Vampire, zombie, alien, mosquito, what difference does it make! The thing is a parasite and it needs to be exterminated! I'll track this thing down myself and put an end to it. I'm tired of everyone trying to "understand" the nature of things. Some critters must be eliminated, no questions asked. This thing is obviously a nuisance to metahumanity. Enough talking. More killing.

• Ripley

• Spoken like a true meathead. If you don't understand your enemy, your little bug hunt may well end up with you as the main course.

• Hunter

The elf's unsteady walk was due to a decayed left ankle. I could see the bone through his torn pants and beyond the rotted flesh that surrounded it. The ankle looked ready to break. I mustered all the energy left in my withered body and thrust my foot into the elf's ankle. I heard a dull snap, and Czank's servant collapsed immediately. When he crumbled, he fell forward and spilled the boiling contents of the pot all over me, but I felt no pain. I could hear my skin sizzling, but my body had been



through so much torment, my nerves must have completely shut off. The elf's head whacked against the wall behind me with such force, his head snapped clear off (his neck must have been in the same shape as his ankle) and bounced into the middle of the room. The body slumped on top of me, limp and lifeless.

The open door was only twenty feet away, but with this stinking corpse laying on top of me and with barely enough life left in me to move, it may as well have been two hundred miles. It took me probably an hour (I can't be certain though, because time was a concept I had lost all concept of) to wiggle my way from under the dead elf, then to inch my way to the door. I was squirming on my belly over the dirt floor like a sun-charred snake.

When I finally reached the door, I caught a tiny burst of energy (a second wind, I guess, because I could finally smell the hope of freedom) and I was able to pull myself to my feet. The room that Czank stored me and his other husks in was just off the kitchen, and I could see the sliding door to the outside from where I stood. From the look of the light pouring through the kitchen windows (incidentally, the light was painful to my eyes) it was early in the afternoon. The little fragger must still be at work, continuing to put on his front of normalcy. I managed to smile at the thought for a second—suit-wearing corporate slug by day, undead hell-spawn freak by night.

- That's the most frightening aspect of this post in my humble opinion. Whatever this thing is, it seems to want to fit in and is capable of doing so. I don't think Czank is with us anymore, kids.

- Philanoria

- I'd have to agree. Considering Lealla's story, I can only assume that we're dealing with a new type of shedim.

- Inquisitor

- What? Shedim are zombies! They're not that smart. They can't go pretending to be people who are dead. Eventually, someone's going to notice the smell, or the maggots, or at least something to indicate that they're dealing with a corpse, right? Right?

- Cannonball

- No, Inquisitor's right. Look at the story—she killed the guy, but he returned from the dead. The powers make sense: the compulsion, the paralyzing fear, the draining of life force. All of those are abilities possessed by shedim. Plus, the dead elf servant sounds like it was a shedim—only it was working for whatever Czank is.

All of this suggests that Czank is some type of new shedim—a more powerful shedim that can not only take over dead bodies, but can also restore them to full health. A shedim that may even inherit the body's memories. A shedim that uses other, run-of-the-mill shedim as servants.

I certainly hope there aren't many of these things.

- Shetani

- Oh my. If you're right, an uber-shedim like this would make an excellent infiltrator. All it needs to do is find a body, preferably

someone who's death isn't public knowledge. It fixes the body up, soaks up the memories, and takes up the person's life where it left off. Meanwhile, back at home, it's pursuing whatever twisted agenda it has—probably making lots of servant shedim. This is not good.

- Triffid

- You think that's bad? I have two words for you: Ibn Elsa.

- Tacks

- Hold up a fraggin' sec—Elsa was resurrected well before the shedim first appeared—three months at least!

- Amitri

- Maybe some of these uber-shedim decided to pop in a little early, and get a head start on the rest.

- Necropolis

- And maybe they're the ones who are bringing the rest of the regular shedim over ...

- Passport

When I got outside, there was still light in the sky, though it seemed there was only an hour or two of it left. I had to get far enough away from Czank's before he came back from work, or else I suspected that all this effort would still lead to the same end as if I had stayed in the dirt room like an obedient victim.

The fresh air did me some good, and I started to feel alive again. Barely, but I could walk. I shuffled into the woods behind the house and made my way towards the strip mall and my car. By nightfall, I had made it to the strip mall, but my car was gone. It must have gotten towed. Damn the luck. I stumbled around to the front of the building and went into a convenience store. This pimple-faced ork kid stood behind the counter, and I could tell by the look on his face that I must have looked like death incarnate. I went through the aisles, grabbed a pen, a greeting card and two bottles of water. At the counter, I wrote the kid a note in the card—No cred on me. Need water, a cab. Help me. To the kid's credit, he kept his cool and helped me out.

I spent the next two months recovering in the care of a street doc. The whole time, I kept my mouth shut. I'm out of the business now, so I thought it safe to finally relay my story in the hope that it can keep everyone on their toes.

As for me, I'm in someplace sunny, and the only liquid that touches this skin now is the cool water of the sea.

- Anyone know what Czank's up to these days?

- Morbid

- No, but once someone at Ares gets ahold of this file, I'm sure someone will be finding out.

- Nightfire

GAME INFORMATION

One of the new twists to appear during the chaotic convergence of Halley's Comet, the fiftieth anniversary of the Awaken-



ing and the return of the great dragon Ghostwalker were the spirits known as shedim. As described in *Year of the Comet*, shedim require physical bodies to possess so that they may anchor themselves within this world—either the bodies of the dead or of astrally projecting magicians. Upon their arrival, undead zombies—corpses possessed by shedim spirits—arose and attacked the living around the world. Luckily, the appearances of shedim have been limited and isolated—so far—and most shedim have expressed only limited intelligence and no goals more expansive than sucking Karma from living victims. They are often very identifiable, as they are walking corpses. This entry describes a new type of shedim, called *master shedim*, with more intelligence, abilities that allow them to infiltrate living society, and a more detailed agenda.

MASTER SHEDIM

Master shedim are similar to shedim spirits, and follow all of the normal rules for shedim spirits given on pp. 149–153, *YOTC*, with some important differences described below. Master shedim possess the following powers: Aura Masking, Compulsion, Deathly Aura, Fear, Immunity (Age, Pathogens, Toxins), Inhabitation, Karma Drain, Regeneration. Some may possess additional powers, such as Magical Guard, Noxious Breath, Shadowcloak and Silence.

Inhabitation and Regeneration

The master shedim power of Inhabitation (see p. 151, *YOTC*) works differently than the standard version. When a master shedim inhabits a dead vessel, it can use its regeneration power to restore the corpse to the semblance of life. As a result, the master shedim ends up inhabiting a living, healthy body.

The ability to restore a corpse to full health, however, is not always perfect. When the master shedim makes its Force (plus Spirit Energy) Test to inhabit the vessel, count the number of successes. If the shedim scores 3 successes, the corpse regenerates to full health. If the master shedim achieves only 2 successes, it is inflicted with 1D6 points of Physical Flaws. If the master shedim achieves only 1 success, it is inflicted with 1D6 points of Physical Flaws and 1D6 points of Mental Flaws. The gamemaster should choose flaws that are appropriate for the shedim and resurrected corpse, such as Allergy, Color Blind, Deaf, Amnesia or Flashbacks (Flaws are detailed starting on p. 15, *SRComp*). The gamemaster can also invent his own Flaws—perhaps some wound never fully heals, some lingering element of the body's old personality remains dominant, or the body never quite smells right.

If a master shedim is banished from the corpse, the body immediately returns to its pre-inhabitation state (it becomes dead again).

Master shedim can inhabit living vessels as described.

Inhabitation and Memories

When a master shedim inhabits a vessel (living or dead), it also absorbs the previous inhabitant's memories and personality. In effect, this allows the master shedim to become the person. The master shedim inherits the person's skills, Edges and Flaws, personality quirks, likes and dislikes, and so on. This does not

include magical skills and abilities, though a master shedim with the free spirit power of Sorcery could mimic a magician's skills. It does allow the master shedim to take full advantage of the body's implants (though shedim dislike inhabiting low Essence bodies).

This power allows the shedim to satisfactorily pass as a double of the person that once inhabited the body. It is important to note, however, that the master shedim's personality is not entirely subsumed under the inherited personality. For the most part, the master shedim merely uses the personality and memories as a mask. In secret, the master shedim's true nature, goals and desires come out.

In some cases, master shedim may carry bits and pieces of a previously inhabited body's personality or memories into a new body.

USING MASTER SHEDIM

Master shedim make much more insidious threats than standard shedim. By taking over a person's life, master shedim can easily integrate themselves into society and operate from behind the scenes. This opens a number of possibilities for adventure.

Master shedim are often very choosy about the corpses they inhabit. They are aware that some "resurrections" are going to cause lots of people to start asking uncomfortable questions, leading to attention that may expose the master shedim's true identity. For this reason, master shedim tend to choose corpses that have died or been killed in secret. This may still leave some people wondering (especially the murderers in the case of a murder victim), but it's better than appearing on the news. Some master shedim may even arrange for someone's death, making sure it occurs in a way that no one will notice, so that they have an easier time stealing the person's identity.

On the other hand, some master shedim may not care about the body's celebrity status, especially if they are going to make no attempt to pretend to be that person (Elvis sightings, anyone?). In this case, the master shedim would simply be starting a new life somewhere far away from the friends and relatives of the previous occupant.

It is important to keep in mind that master shedim are alien spirits from an alien existence. Their "home life" may be quite out of the ordinary, as the master shedim arranges a lair that it feels comfortable in. The master shedim's choice of décor may provide hints about its previous existence, and it may even carry hints of previous personalities and memories the master shedim has stolen. This plane of reality is new to the shedim, so they may take pleasure in exploring various aspects of it, especially when it comes to the fears and desires of their food supply. These aspects allow the gamemaster to create suitably creepy and grotesque settings for the master shedim, to fully explore their alien nature.

Most master shedim seem to treat standard shedim as simple servants and tools. This suggests a hierarchy among the shedim, and it also opens the possibility that master shedim may have the capability to summon regular shedim into this world. Perhaps this is the ultimate goal of the master shedim, to create personal armies of undead minions. Maybe some standard shedim hold resentment towards their master shedim superiors.

ONE NATION UNDER GOD



This unsolicited, unfinished account appeared in my mailbox quite mysteriously. At first, I thought it was a hoax. The whole thing just sounded too preposterous to be true. God knows we get plenty of end-of-the-world warnings from assorted crackpots. Something about this one seemed different, though, so I ran it by two very knowledgeable friends (both former intelligence operatives). They confirmed some important details, so I'm confident it's not just the work of another nut case. But I'll let you all decide for yourselves how it stacks up.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 11 July 2062 at 11:37:01 (PST)

If you're reading this, then I must be dead.

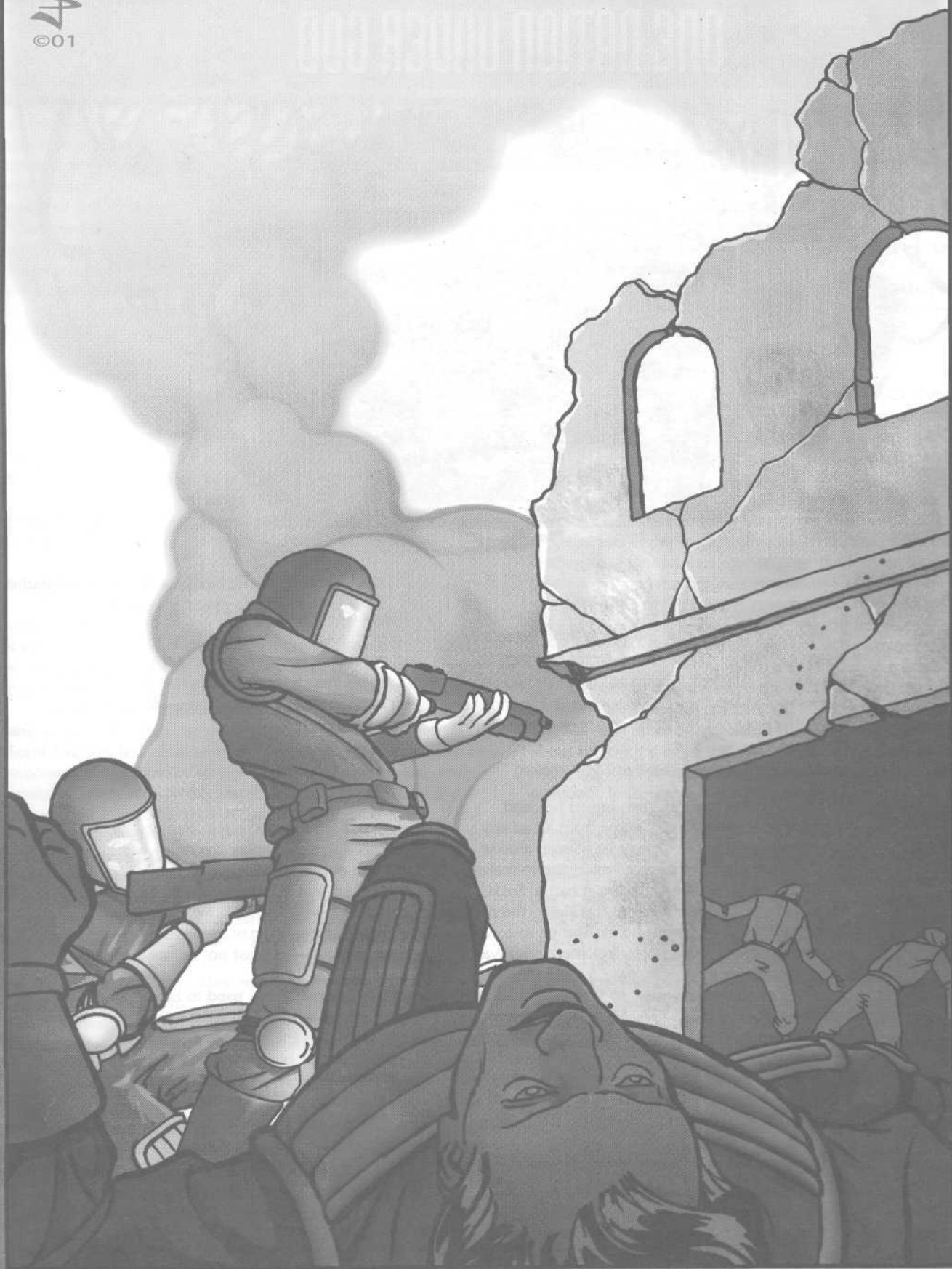
I know, it sounds like a cliché from a bad spy sim. The truth is, I am (or was) a spy, one of those cloak-and-dagger types who snoops around and finds things out. Now I know too much, and there are plenty of people who'd like to make sure I don't find out anything more—ever.

That's why I created this file. I had a decker friend set it up so that if I checked out, it would get sent to Shadowland, the Helix, the Morgue, Mosaic, plus who knows how many corporate and government hosts. The people who are trying to shut me up may be able to intercept a few of these posts, but there's no way they can get them all—at least not before a few people see it.

I'm a dead man anyway, so I might as well introduce myself: call me Laur. I used to be a field agent for the UCAS CIA. My last assignment took me out to the Sand Hills, in what used to be known as western Nebraska. I was tailing a militia group known as the Western Liberty Brigade. The Brigade had been giving the UCAS trouble, harassing our boys patrolling the UCAS-Sioux border, hijacking cross-border shipments and raiding a Nebraska National Guard armory for guns and ammo. The FBI also linked the WLB to the bomb threat against the federal building in Lincoln last year.

• So, anyone here checked out this Laur chummer? Any evidence to back up his story?

• Thibault





• Well, the Western Liberty Brigade at least rings true. That bomb scare incident he mentioned took place in February 2060. Some anonymous caller phoned a tri-d station and told them he had put a bomb in the federal building to protest the deployment of federal troops to Seattle (for the Renraku Arcology situation). Turns out whoever called wasn't joking—the bomb squad found a Nissan Rebel packed full of ammonium nitrate in the federal building parking lot. The SUV was rigged for remote control; apparently the bomber planned to crash it into the building's front lobby then detonate the ammonium nitrate.

I also had a contact inside the CIA do a search on the Western Liberty Brigade. After sifting through a few field reports on the WLB, my best guess is that Laur is (or was) a field agent known as Peter Laur. Laur disappeared some time around October of 2060. In June of 2062 the CIA spotted Laur in Nashville, but when it tried to nab him, Laur slipped the coverage and ran. He had just jumped a traffic barrier and was running across I-40 when he was hit by an ambulance and killed instantly. (Yeah, I know, it does sound ironic. But that's what the CIA report said.)

• Midnight Runner

I had been tailing the Western Liberty Brigade for weeks after several of its members were spotted in Sioux country training with Ares Alpha assault rifles. The boys in Analysis concluded that the Sioux were assisting the brigade, and my bosses decided the militia warranted a close eye.

When one of the brigade's officers left for Oshkosh one day, I followed. I figured he was making a supply run and hoped to identify the group's supplier. Sure enough, one night on the outskirts of town I found the brigade officer inspecting a crate full of IPE grenades. But the guy he was buying from wasn't Sioux at all! He was an Anglo, whom my brigade buyer called "Marist."

With the Sioux out of the picture, I had to follow Marist to see where the chain of contacts went. At first I thought he might be a Confederate agitator or even an Ares arms dealer. But neither guess was correct. Imagine my surprise when I watched him walk straight into the Kansas City BATTF office!

• Query: BATTF?

• Code Kid

• Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Telesma, and Firearms. It's basically a government bureaucracy overseeing the traffic of semi-legal goods. I don't know how credible Laur's story is, but it would make sense to have someone inside the BATTF. Those guys regulate the trade of firearms and foci, and someone in the right place could get a hold of any talisman or weapon that's on the market.

• Bullet

Things became even stranger as I traced the chain of contacts, starting with Marist. So far, each contact I've discovered has yielded three or four more. From the BATTF, I've discovered connections to the FBI, the Department of Defense—even the CIA! Over several months, I uncovered what can only be described as a conspiracy operating within UCAS government

agencies. The Western Liberty Brigade isn't the only extremist group receiving covert aid from conspirators inside these various law-enforcement and intelligence agencies. Terrorist factions of all political stripes across all of North America—from the UCAS to the CAS to Indian lands, all the way into California—seem to be receiving help from the conspirators, whom I've dubbed the "New Revolution."

The New Revolution is pursuing a so-called "strategy of tension." It provides arms and more to a wide range of terrorist groups, and on the surface it doesn't seem to care what the faction is fighting for. In fact, lots of these groups would be at each other's throats if given the chance. Religious fundamentalists, metahuman extremists, neo-fascists, whatever—as long as a terrorist group is fighting against an established government on the American continent, the New Revolution seems to be ready with support.

The connections don't stop there. The New Revolution also has people within the governments all those terrorists are fighting against, not to mention infiltrators in political parties and media networks across North America. And these infiltrators seem to have their hands in the most contentious social and political debates going on.

So far it sounds like a recipe for a grand nihilist plot, eh? You get your terrorist organizations working from without to destabilize governments, troublemakers working from within, and it's only a matter of time before you see a breakdown of law and order. The authorities increase repression in an effort to retain control and the public loses confidence in the elected government. Everything starts to collapse, paving the way for a military coup.

Along with links to terrorist groups, media networks, political parties and government bureaucracies, the New Revolution also maintains links to the Federal and Confederate Reserve, the ECSE, the National Guard, power providers, emergency-aid organizations and various militaries across the continent. And what connects these groups? They are precisely the types of organizations needed to restore order amid civil unrest.

So now you have the outline of a serious plot. First, you let your terrorists and political agitators stir up social and political trouble, and you manipulate the media networks to throw gasoline on the flames. When things get hot enough, you have your military contacts stage a coup d'état to maintain civil order and legal authority—the kind of legal authority that you want, of course. Then you have your aid organizations step in and rebuild the nation.

So what kind of order would this New Revolution restore? I couldn't figure it out until I uncovered a link between the New Revolution and the Unity Coalition. The Unity Coalition is a loose association—part politclub, part political lobby, part elite social club—that promotes more cooperation, trade and interaction between the nations of North America. Less publicly, they seek to reverse the Balkanization of the previous half-century and restore a single, united government across the continent.

Once I discovered that link, it all fell into place. I realize it sounds too incredible to be true, but nothing else explains the seemingly unrelated activities. I'd uncovered a plan to restore the United States of America!



• Whoa, there. I think this guy spent a little too much time in intelligence work. This conspiracy drek is really out there.

• Skeptic

• I wouldn't dismiss this so quickly, Skep. There are plenty of folks in North America who don't like their lots in life and think the only way to make things better is to restore the old superpower USA. Skags like the Unity Coalition have exploited such sentiments for years. Their arguments go something like this: The fragmented state of North America is the result of our own mistakes. Don't blame the Indians. Don't blame the megacorps. Blame the weak, corrupt political leaders who have allowed the Indians and megas to roll over us and tear America apart.

According to the Coalition, those same weak and corrupt leaders now head the UCAS and CAS. Their "official" solution is to vote the bums out of office. But plenty of people out there don't seem to share this patience or faith in the current political systems. They believe that the current North American nations are pools of festering corruption and weakness that must be destroyed to make way for the restoration of the "real" America. And these kinda sentiments aren't restricted to the civilian population either. There are still plenty of military and intelligence types running around who miss America's good old superpower days.

• The Observer

ORGANIZATION

Once I discovered the extent of the conspiracy, I realized that I had already put myself in serious danger. I'd made the mistake of filing several reports with my superiors, and I knew it was only a matter of time before those came to the New Revolution's attention. The second I discovered that my private research node had been compromised (luckily, I had arranged backups), I went underground. I've spent almost an entire year on the run, hiding from old contacts, digging up what I can on this conspiracy. Exposing them is the only thing I can do to save myself—or at least make my death worth it.

So far, I have uncovered three distinct branches in the New Revolution's operations. Each branch pursues a different strategy, coordinates a different part of the plan. Each also has its own branch of operatives and agents to support and further the aims of that branch.

THE MILITIA BRANCH

The militia branch is in charge of supporting extremists—terrorists, policlubs, cults, militias and other groups—that the New Revolution can use to stir up drek. Groups like the Western Liberty Brigade are just pawns for the New Revolution to play with. These groups are funneled weapons, paydata, cred and tactical advice. In return, they're expected to wreak havoc, by any means necessary. Random bombings, terror attacks, biowarfare—anything to escalate the sense of fear and chaos.

As I mentioned before, on the surface the New Revolution seems to support troublemakers of all stripes. In reality, that support varies from group to group. Pro-American groups tend to get a better share of arms and advisors and are more "in the

loop." Some of these groups are completely within the New Revolution's pocket, though they're careful to keep some distance.

Groups with a distinctive political agenda are handled more carefully. In these cases, the New Revolution rep pretends to be affiliated with an underworld syndicate or mercenary operation, simply out to make cred. These groups will get weapon deals, and will be encouraged to step up their operations (for "more business"). Occasionally, the New Revolution will only offer weapon deals with strings attached—such as targeting particular institutions, or increasing the body count.

There's a definite bias towards striking deals with right-wing groups—left-wingers seem to be too idealistic and too at odds with the idea of unification for the New Revolution's taste. The New Revolution especially likes the crazies, though—cults and other wingnuts who are unstable enough to unleash mass carnage. These groups are great for creating spectacular attacks, and usually quite easy to wash their hands of later.

Some of the groups I've seen making deals with the New Revolution (knowingly or not) are: The Sons of Sauron, Knights of the Red Branch, the Haida National Front, Native Californians, and Alamos 20K—and those are just the ones at the top of my list.

• It seems like this New Revolution learned something from Ares Macrotechnology, who plays this game on a regular basis. Ares Arms supplies weapons to one side, and Knight Errant provides "advisors" to the other. It's the same scam here, only with higher stakes than the bottom line.

• Steel Lynx

• I don't buy it. A secret conspiracy supporting both human and ork racists? That's just counter-productive. Even if it's true, one of these groups is going to do their homework eventually and realize that their supplier is playing both sides.

• Skeptic

In some instances, the New Revolution takes advantage of its intelligence connections to either place or manipulate high-level infiltrators. This allows the agent to push the group towards a more pro-unification stance. In some cases, the New Revolution can control an entire group of dedicated political activists simply by keeping a tight grasp on the group's leadership. This is especially useful when handling groups with conflicting goals—the militia branch simply uses these groups for suicide missions and other cannon-fodder tasks.

Luckily, the militia branch's operations are still small and spread out. The New Revolution is careful in providing aid to these groups, as it doesn't want to alert others outside of the conspiracy. Their slow growth is already having an effect, however, and it is only a matter of time before they have the capability to coordinate large-scale terrorist actions.

These extremist links are just one side of the militia branch's operations. The New Revolution also has ties on the other side of the law in various law-enforcement agencies (mostly in the UCAS and CAS, but other North American nations as well). Law-enforcement operatives can funnel arms



and ammo to groups easily (witness Marist and his BATTF connections). Some law-enforcement infiltrators also act as spies, getting the inside scoop on raids planned against factions and preventing them from doing any real harm. So the next time you see a story on the news about a bungled raid, don't assume incompetence was to blame.

The militia branch has also wormed its way into some of the corps. The aim of its corporate infiltration efforts is strictly logistical—getting the goods the New Revolution needs for the troublemakers it supports. I've pegged New Revolution people on the inside of Lone Star and Ares. I've also identified a few plants in Novatech, as well as, believe it or not, Aztechnology.

- Aztechnology? If this New Revolution is so hard up on rebuilding America, what the hell are they doing in bed with a potential arch-enemy?

- Rand

- Guess you've never heard the saying, "An army travels on its stomach," have you? Aztechnology is deep in the food and consumer products industries. Even terrorists have to eat, ya know.

- Sister of Mercy

- Having a few people south of the border doesn't hurt, either. If this New Revolution truly believes the way to save America is to nearly destroy it first, whom do you think is likely to spoil the opportunity? I think it's a safe bet to imagine that the New Revolution has a few advisors down in the Yucatan and Colombia to distract the Azzies should it ever pull this thing off.

- Bullet

- Why Novatech? They aren't exactly big in the guns and ammo fields.

- RunnerPaul

- Novatech is a megacorp, which means it's involved in just about everything. Aside from cyberdecks and infiltration programs, they can get guns from Novatech subsidiaries like Cavalier Arms. But I suspect that what this New Revolution really wants is the rumored deltaware clinic Novatech allegedly maintains out in the Pueblo lands.

- D-Ghost

The General

Though the New Revolution's web of contacts is murky and nebulous, I think I've managed to identify some sort of central authority figure for the militia branch. I call him the "General" simply because he favors military fatigues. I first saw the General meeting Marist during a WLB training exercise near Crescent Lake in Nebraska. This was about two months after I first tagged Marist. The General had a little entourage with him, mostly "advisors" like Marist. I couldn't see any obvious magicians or cyber, but I'm sure they must have been there.

Nebraska was about the farthest north and farthest west I ever spotted him. Most of the time I've seen him down in the

South, particularly around the Atlanta area. I'm sure he must be highly placed in the CAS Army—I've seen him around the Fort McPherson area in civvies.

- Okay, you Southerners out there, any guesses on this one? There can't be that many Southern generals down there with pro-American sympathies.

- Locke

- More than you think, Locke. Contrary to stereotypes, we Confederationists aren't all hicks and rednecks. A lot of officers throughout the CAS military still think of themselves as true Americans and see their northern brethren as misguided dupes serving an illegitimate government.

If I were to hazard a guess, I would pick two likely candidates as the General. My first choice would be Major General Andrew Taylor: he's a native Texan and has been pretty outspoken for increased Confederate involvement in North American affairs. A close second would be General Drew Harrod: he and his family moved south from Delaware to Tennessee shortly after secession, and he frequently criticizes the UCAS for straying from the ideals of the Constitution.

I'd also add one other dark horse candidate: Lieutenant General Ronald Parkerson. I say dark horse because Parkerson seems to favor the regionalist policies of previous administrations. On the other hand, he's spent his entire military career in special operations and currently commands the CAS Army Special Forces Command. SPECCOM operates a lot through insurgency support, which is pretty similar to the methodology of this so-called New Revolution, so I'd throw him into the mix.

- lo

- There's one other candidate I'd also add to the list, lo: Colonel Paul Jeffers, the senior foreign-area officer for the UCAS embassy in Atlanta. Prior to this diplomatic posting, Jeffers worked in SpecOps, and he's pretty critical of both the UCAS and the CAS governments. The skinny here in DeeCee is that Jeffers was "exiled" to Atlanta three years ago because the brass didn't want him at the Pentagon. However, if there's any shred of truth in this New Revolution screed, I have to wonder if he exiled himself.

- DC Insider

THE POLITICAL BRANCH

Just as the New Revolution's militia branch incites external forces against the various governments of North America, the Revolution's political branch works to undermine them from within. As the name implies, the political branch creates political trouble, stirring up incidents and crises that weaken public confidence and sabotage diplomatic relations. If there isn't a scandal, it creates one. If there is one, it makes it worse. The goal of such smear campaigns is to make a government look so inept, bellicose and tyrannical that its citizens lose confidence in it and support its removal.



• Oh, sure. Crooked politicians are the result of the New Revolution's political branch. Pull the other one.

• Bremer

• Crooked politicians are a fact of life, Bremer. What the political branch is doing here is twisting the knife.

• Katrina

• Speaking of scandals, no one ever did find out how Dunkelzahn bought it, did they? Something like that sounds like it's right up this political branch's alley.

• Tomtom

• Somehow I doubt a political conspiracy would have the mojo to bring down a great dragon, Tomtom. Now, the rigged election that forced the runoff that allowed Dunkelzahn to take office, that's another matter. Considering how well the Technocrats were doing in the polls, it makes absolutely no sense for them to have rigged the popular vote. On the other hand, it would make perfect sense for the New Revolution to have rigged it.

• Maelwys

• Speaking of Technocrats, what about that flare-up with the Compensation Army the previous year? Granted, it was a con-

vulsed mess. I heard a dozen different rumors linking that riot to Confederate special forces, Tir corps, the assassination of the North Virginia governor and Bug City. None of those rumors seemed to hold water. However, I do remember an attempted coup d'état by the DeeCee military district commander—Trane? Trahn? Travers—who came this close to actually pulling it off. That sounds like a project the political branch could have organized.

• Whiteside

• Doubtful. General Trahn was very much his own man and not likely to be someone's puppet. Plus, he was very pro-UCAS, while these New Revolution-types strike me as wanting to tear down the UCAS as much as any other country.

That said, it could be possible that this New Revolution may have helped him along, or at least taken advantage of the chaos. Unfortunately, the general hosed it up big time and wasted whatever opportunity there was to be had.

• Desiderata

• But at least one of his underlings came out of the mess ahead.

• Koi

The Revolution's political branch also maintains infiltrators in all the major political parties and news networks, ready to pour



gasoline on any political fires that erupt. It maintains plenty of contacts throughout the government and the corps who can kindle fires when things get too quiet. The media insiders are especially useful when it comes to sowing disinformation about actions by groups linked to the militia branch.

Propaganda seems to be another of the political branch's duties. If the New Revolution plans to seize control of the continent, it will have to build a base of popular support—and that means reinforcing the notion that we are one people, one country. I believe the New Revolution maintains ties in the advertising business for just such purposes.

- I think they're already on the way to completing their goal. Just look at that True American coalition down in the CAS.

- Bull

"The Best Ork Decker You Never Met"

- That'll be a hard sell to the Native Americans: "Build America, the country that tried to destroy your people!"

- Mojo Pojo

- Maybe not. While many AmerIndians went to the re-education camps, quite a few didn't. And anti-Anglo sentiment is fading, now that the older generation is dying out. Look at the Pueblo, for instance. They seem to have more in common with Anglos than they do with their Native brethren.

- Nevada

- You know, there have been a bunch of documentaries lately on NABS, the Native American trid network, that appear "pro-American," for lack of a better term. First was that mini-series on Sacajawea, the Shoshone woman who guided the Lewis & Clark expedition. Then a couple of months ago the network aired a documentary about Navajo code-talkers and how they helped America out in World War II. I think I see a pattern here—Indians "helping" to build America.

- Taos

The Council

The Revolution's political branch seems to be led by a group I've dubbed the Council. As far as I can tell, the Council consists of four men and four women. Oddly, one member is a Hispanic man and two members are Native Americans. One of them claims to be a member of the Kiowa tribe. The group also contains two dwarfs and a troll.

Originally the Council met in Denver, but they moved after the dragon Ghostwalker announced his claim of sovereignty. I think they may be relocating to Los Angeles; three of them are supposed to be heading there as an advance party.

- Indians and Aztlaners in a conspiracy to rebuild America? Now I know this is a fantasy.

- Jaxon

- Don't assume that all Native Americans are anti-American or that all Latinos are pro-Aztlan. Not all Native Americans have benefited from the establishment of the NAN. In fact, some have suffered considerably under the oppression of larger tribes (such as the Haida and Kwakiutl in Tsimshian). Similarly, a lot of Latin-Americans were just getting settled into American society when all of a sudden they found themselves back under Aztlan oppression as Aztlan rolled into southwest Texas. In both cases, these people are fed up with the status quo and will welcome any change.

- People Watcher

- It's interesting that Laur mentions one of the Native Americans on the Council as being Kiowa. Weren't the Kiowa wiped out during the Indian wars prior to the Great Ghost Dance?

- Shrike

- It's an ugly story. A U.S. Army unit, acting on false intelligence, bombarded what it thought was a SAIM war camp but later turned out to be a Kiowa refugee settlement. A few people survived, but the attack effectively wiped out the Kiowa tribe.

But that's only half the story. Later investigation into the mass slaughter revealed that the Army received its disinformation from Cheyenne informants. The Cheyenne and the Kiowa have no lost love, even when joined in a common cause such as the SAIM. Many believe that the Cheyenne influenced the SAIM war council to send Kiowa troops into high-attrition battles and suicide missions. So while the Anglos pulled the trigger, it was the Cheyenne that wrote the death warrant.

That said, it makes sense that Laur would mention a Kiowa on this Council. What few Kiowa there are have a burning hatred of the Cheyenne and the NAN.

- Zed

THE RECONSTITUTION BRANCH

Destroying something is easy. Rebuilding is usually more difficult. The New Revolution recognizes that and has set up a "reconstitution branch" to handle the task of rebuilding America once the Revolution topples the continent's current powers. Hey, at least it thinks ahead, which is more than can be said for most of the countries on this continent.

The reconstitution branch cultivates contacts in industries and organizations critical for restoring order: national oil and food reserve agencies, power stations, the Federal and Confederate Reserve, the ECSE, National Guard and other military units, and so on. In other words, this branch of the New Revolution is in charge of staging coup d'états, seizing power, and holding everything together until America can be re-united.

I've heard that the reconstitution branch also has contacts within some North American syndicates—in fact, allegedly one of the Boston Mafia dons is a member of the New Revolution. These contacts provide the Revolution with means to maintain control of critical emergency functions and restore order quickly in the event of civil unrest.



• Translation: When the drek goes down, Mafia legbreakers will be out in the streets, organizing goon squads and militias to keep everyone in line.

• Luigi

• If one of the Mafia families in Boston is under the sway of this New Revolution, my best bet is that it's the Muldoons. The Muldoons are a low-key Family, but they have a lot of quiet influence in Boston.

• Digger

The reconstitution branch also identifies key political, business, and military leaders who either sympathize with or oppose the Revolution's goals. It recruits and assists those leaders who are sympathetic to the New Revolution's cause, and it targets those who oppose the Revolution. These opponents are blackmailed, discredited or in some cases permanently eliminated.

The Unity Coalition

The Unity Coalition, which I mentioned earlier, is the driving force behind the reconstitution branch. Behind the scenes, this power player social club is really planning on becoming the continent's new government. Though it's hard to pin down, the Unity Coalition seems to coordinate between all three branches of the New Revolution, acting as the groups' de facto leadership.

I have been unable to determine who exactly is calling the shots. I have two theories about why this is. The first is that the actual conspirators at the top are very tight knit, and very secure—to the point where the rest of the New Revolution doesn't know who they are. Truth be told, however, most of the conspirators involved employ enough security cautions that it's no wonder I don't know who many of the actual names and faces at the top are.

My second theory is that there's a power struggle going on at the top. I think the original conspirators were a bit chummier when things were just getting started, but now that the New Revolution is picking up steam, they're all bustling over who's going to be top dog. It's not yet gotten to the point where they're assassinating each other, but the seeds of the conflict are there. A certain Archconservative senator is at the center of the tension (if you pay attention to politics, you'll know who this is). If my theory is correct, he has a good chance of becoming the New Revolution's commander in chief—if he can get the General and the Council to support him. But the Senator has a lot of competition and peers in the Unity Coalition, so his supremacy remains to be seen.

• Stop the fraggin' press. Remember that background on Alamos 20K that Capt. Chaos posted a few years back? Remember how it suggested that one of the five members of Alamos 20K's Central Executive was a politician (nicknamed "the Senator") who was also working to reunite North America under one government?

• North Star

• You're suggesting that Alamos 20K is behind this New Revolution?

• Toomer

• No, not necessarily. But it is possible that one of the leaders from Alamos 20K might be trying to seize control over this New Revolution conspiracy. That would explain the power struggle—maybe other members of the conspiracy aren't as racist, or at least, don't necessarily consider wiping out all metahumans as a major part of their plan to reconquer North America.

• North Star

• How big is this New Revolution anyway? Laur makes it sound like hundreds of politicians, suits and military commanders are in on the plot, spanning a dozen different countries. Is that really the case?

• Thark

• It looks like if Laur knew, he took that knowledge to the grave.

• Midnight Runner

GAME INFORMATION

Some residents of North America long for the glory days of the United States of America, when it was a superpower in the last half of the last century. But as the old saying goes, be careful of what you wish for, because you may just get it.

The New Revolution's goal is to resurrect the United States of America. But before they can do that, they must obliterate the current North American nations residing where the USA used to be. Even the UCAS and CAS aren't excluded; to the New Revolution, both nations have strayed from the ideals of the Founding Fathers (in their eyes) and simply aren't worth salvaging.

To accomplish their goal, the New Revolution pursues a strategy of tension. Terrorists, militias, cults and militant policlubs are encouraged to commit widespread terrorism and to raise insurrection against the various North American Nations. As fear and panic spread, the New Revolution plans to stage high-profile scandals that will shake the public's confidence. Meanwhile, it is preparing the way for raising their new regime, making sure they have people inside the military and national reserves, cementing control over armed forces, and recruiting like-minded leaders to oversee the New Revolution's new world order. As the whole of North America plunges into chaos, the New Revolution plans to seize control, restore order, and re-found the United States—a monolithic, power hungry United States, where the ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are at best an afterthought, and at worst a nuisance.

USING THE NEW REVOLUTION

The theme of this organization is political conspiracy: everything from the Second Gunman on the Grassy Knoll, to Iran-Contra, to Waco and Oklahoma City, even to Whitewater and the Independent Counsel. In short, the New Revolution can be thought of, to paraphrase one political figure, a vast extremist conspiracy.



When playing out the New Revolution, gamemasters should play up the traits of secrecy, subterfuge, and hidden agendas. If possible, refrain from using names for New Revolution NPCs, instead referring to them by a defining characteristic (like the General, the Council, the Senator, the Well-Groomed Troll, and so on). If questioned by player characters, New Revolution NPCs will remain tight-lipped, rather than lie or make denials. If played correctly, players should get the feeling they've stumbled onto something big but not know what until the puzzle falls into place, one small piece at a time.

The New Revolution rarely takes any direct action. They are puppet masters and prefer manipulating the strings from behind the scene. There is a joke that in any group, the person who's in charge is not the same as the one who knows what's going on. That joke is particularly true in a New Revolution-influenced group. There the New Revolution representative isn't the one in charge, but rather the one who knows what's going on.

THE BRANCHES

There are three main branches of the New Revolution, each addressing one of the three main goals of the New Revolution. Each has a different strategy for furthering the New Revolution's ends, which results in a different style of doing business. Although aware of the other branches, members of each have little to do with the others and generally don't compete in internecine competition.

Gamemasters should feel free to use any or all three of the branches of the New Revolution. If desired, gamemasters may choose to focus on one particular branch, to exploit the style associated with that branch.

The Militia Branch

The militia branch supports insurrectionist groups in their fight against the hated North American government of their choice, generally by providing arms, supplies, and advisors to assist in their rebellion. Guns don't grow on trees, however, so the militia branch has to get them from somewhere. To do so, it infiltrates groups with the most contact with weapons: law enforcement agencies and arms-producing corporations. Those inside members funnel weapons outside into the hands of the militia branch insurgents.

Plots involving the militia branch should focus on insurgent groups and their threat to peace. Just about any group that practices violence regularly can be a candidate. Though the New Revolution does have its preferences, they don't discriminate when it comes to aiding troublemakers. It's highly unlikely that any one group could actually succeed in overthrowing a country, with or without the New Revolution's help. The real purpose is to weaken the resolve of the current regimes and hasten their collapse.

The Political Branch

The political branch is where the New Revolution hopes to effect the collapse of the various North American govern-

ments. While the militia branch raises outside insurrectionists to weaken government resolve, the political branch creates crises that undermine public faith and cause the government to implode on itself.

Because they fight the system from within, the political branch loves to make use of Byzantine plots with high levels of intrigue. Unlike the other two branches, the targets of the political branch aren't people, but reputations. (Although they're not afraid to create collateral damage in the process.) Assassinating a president, for example, accomplishes little more than public outrage against the assassins. A smear campaign that makes the president look inept, tyrannical, and self-serving, however, not only creates public disgrace, but it also generates political fallout weakening public trust for many years to come.

The head of the political branch is a mysterious group known only as the Council. Previously they had been operating in the divided city of Denver, but with the arrival of Ghostwalker, they have decided to move their offices to Pueblo-occupied Los Angeles.

The Reconstitution Branch

While the other two try to destroy the old, the reconstitution branch plans for the new. Plots revolving around the reconstitution branch should focus on subtle control of resources and groups necessary for the creation of a new country. Adventures revolving around the reconstitution branch are likely to take on a survivalist type of theme, as the targets can be things like oil reserves, electrical power plants, monetary reserves, Matrix servers, and so on.

Another important theme of the reconstitution branch is recruitment. The New Revolution needs leaders to inspire confidence in the new regime, so they will proselytize those who appear to favor the New Revolution's goals. Should player characters try to unmask the New Revolution's co-conspirators, the reconstitution branch will play a significant role in making sure they don't succeed.

A third theme of the reconstitution branch is silencing the opposition. Those who oppose the New Revolution, or even those who "know too much," are a threat and must be dealt with permanently. In this role, the reconstitution branch acts as the New Revolution's secret police, chasing down those who would oppose them and terminating them with extreme prejudice.

The final theme for the reconstitution branch is internal division. When the new USA is created, someone will be crowned President—but the New Revolution has not yet decided who this will be. One of the prime contenders for the role, the Senator, may in fact be a key director of Alamos 20K, the human supremacist terrorist organization. Others in the reconstitution branch may oppose the Senator because of this connection, or they may simply support a different faction. If the Senator does achieve power within the New Revolution, however, the entire character of the conspiracy may change—or it may fall apart from internal strife.

BETRAYAL



The following text popped into my mailbox this morning. I did a bit of checking on the source, a runner with the handle of Shooter. He received favorable props from everyone who knew him, though several commented that he's got an infamous bad luck streak. That was good enough for me, so I've stamped this for public posting. I still haven't decided whether I believe the stuff in the post itself. You'll have to make of it what you will.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 11 July 2062 at 12:14:14 (PST)

This is not a dead man's drop, let's get that established first. The fact that you're scanning this does not mean I have moved on to a "better place" (though I am saving to buy a home on one of the Lesser Antilles, so I might be moving soon).

No, I've posted this info because I came across something too important not to share with my Shadowland chummers. I'll start at the beginning and get to the point after some gratuitous dramatics and self-promotion.

I'm called Shooter. I rig, I shoot, I play the guitar and occasionally pretend to be a decker. I've been running the shadows for long enough to have seen just about everything they have to offer. My team and I rarely rely on Johnsons anymore, instead arranging our own runs and picking targets and paydata with a high resale value. But a little over a month ago, a Johnson approached us about extracting a scientist from a facility way out in the boondocks of Iowa and depositing him in Seattle. It seemed like easy cred, so we took the job. The snatch itself went smoothly. The trouble began as soon as we headed out cross-country.

To get this scientist to our Johnson, we'd hired a smuggler who claimed to run from St. Louis to Seattle and back all the time. As soon as we met him we knew we'd gotten a bad deal, but we didn't have the time to easily arrange a second form of transportation. We had the distinct impression that Mr. Smuggler had never been farther north than Florida, and he proved us right when he snagged his GMC hovertruck on a rock in the middle of the night and flipped us over. Luckily, we escaped the crash with nothing more than scrapes and bruises. Our cargo was still intact as well.

• What kinda drek-for-brains uses a hovertruck for cross-country travel?

• Oldfield





Evaluating our situation, we found ourselves in the middle of nowhere with a broken truck and no way to fix it. Our only option was to walk until we found transportation back to the world—all the while hoping that we weren't found by wild critters or Sioux border patrols. With no working GPS or even a compass, we set off in what we assumed was a westerly direction and hoped for the best. No one felt like carrying our cargo piggyback, so we cuffed him and let him lead the way on a rope leash.

After nightfall, we came across a town by a lake. A sign beside the road told us the place was called Hackett. Our smuggler checked his maps and said we must have gotten a bit off course, as the only Hackett he could find was up in the Algonkian-Manitou Council.

- Geez, these guys sound like real winners. Hackett's near the Algonkian-Athabaskan border, between Edmonton and Calgary. They hired a complete moron!
- Rat-tail

At any rate, the town itself looked long-deserted—we guessed that in the early 2020s the Denver Treaty forced everyone to move. While looking for an abandoned car we could get working, we heard an aircraft engine. We had just taken cover when a floatplane came in and landed on the lake. With its engine running, it moved across the water toward a point farther down the lakeshore. A set of lights suddenly switched on, illuminating a jetty and a complex of low-slung buildings. The ground crew moored the plane to the jetty, helped discharge its passengers and refueled it in under fifteen minutes before the compound lights dimmed again.

We decided right away to steal the plane and fly it back to Seattle. As we approached, we found no sign of who owned the compound. We did find solid fences and guards. It was obvious that whoever owned the place didn't want any uninvited guests, so we decided to grab the plane and hightail it outta there as fast as possible. Using Invisibility and Levitate spells, we got over the fences undetected and began running toward the jetty.

We were about halfway to the jetty—still undetected—when Mr. Smuggler tripped and fell flat on his face. Even worse, he dropped the lead rope, and our scientist began sprinting toward the nearest building, screaming at the top of his gagged lungs for the guards. Naturally, this didn't go unnoticed, but we had to go after him—we hadn't come all this way to leave him behind. Two of us were chasing the scientist when security let loose a team of dogs on us. A stray dog bit me when I was a kid, and I can hold a grudge like you wouldn't believe. So I shot those puppies with my Ingram Smartgun.

- Shooter's losing his touch—hiring an incompetent smuggler, letting the target escape and attracting the whole camp's attention. In the old days he would never have bungled it like that.
- Richie

I nearly tripped myself when I saw that the blasted dogs were still coming! In my experience, dogs don't keep running when you put a few bullets into them, yet these did. And they weren't making half the noise they should have been. Something

was up here, but we didn't have much time to think about it. My pal Tony Two-Chins concentrated on taking the dogs down while I tasered our scientist, threw him in a fireman's haul and wrestled him back in the right direction.

- Didn't it occur to him that a dog on enough kamikaze doesn't stop, like, ever?
- Stark

On my way toward the plane, I saw something that really made me sweat. Security had broken out the big stuff—a plasma and two barghests. Apparently, whoever owned the compound didn't want us to leave the place except in tiny bits. The real scary part, though, was how the critters reacted to their handlers. The guys who released them clearly gave them orders not just to attack, but to cut off our escape route. And they did, moving to obey the handler's orders perfectly. I don't mean like a well-trained dog that responds to command words. These beasts acted as if they actually understood what the handlers were telling them to do.

I was able to outrace 'em and get our scientist inside that plane, but the critters cut Tony off and surrounded him. With security bearing down on us, we had no choice but to grab altitude and leave poor Tony behind. Last I saw, he was frozen stiff, with barghests approaching him cautiously.

The fun wasn't over, though. Once we were in the air, compound security lobbed a SAM at us; we managed to turn their own ECM against them and avoided taking the hit. Then things got really strange when two large birds appeared alongside us and began throwing lightning bolts at the plane. Later we identified them as lesser thunderbirds. Eventually we managed to kill them both and make good our escape.

- Highly trained dogs and a plasma? Sure. But trained thunderbirds? I don't think so.
- Heart

"Where is all this leading to?" I hear you ask. Well, to tell the truth, we weren't a happy crew when we got back to Seattle. We all felt like drek for leaving Tony behind. But we also all felt like we had run into something unusual that could be worth nuyen. You don't normally run into guard animals that have all the qualities a security corp would want: intelligence, obedience and determination. And those were some strange guard animals. We had the sneaking suspicion that they may have been breeding them in that compound, and that they may have discovered some animal-handling techniques that were state-of-the-art. Maybe some new cyber-mods, or possibly even nanotech. My runner instincts told me that something was up here, and I might benefit from knowing what it is.

Over the next few weeks we used plenty of our contacts to check into that place. We checked maps, land-ownership records and other Algonkian-Manitou government data, but it was like the place didn't exist. Eventually, we got lucky and found a map reference to a "Complex 68G." Once we had that signifier, we dug up a lot more references. We found that the



land was extraterritorial, and that eventually told us that it belonged to Ares.

Officially, Complex 68G is used for freshwater aquaculture research under the Ares' Consumer Aquaculture Research Program (CARP). Unofficially, it's part of an ultra-secret project; not surprisingly, none of our contacts could agree on what the project actually *is*.

All of them agreed that Complex 68G is far too heavily guarded for a simple commercial, low-risk project like CARP. One contact searching through the Algonkian-Manitou records found that the compound guards have permission to use lethal force even on Algonkian-Manitou territory "in defense of the compound."

I had a decker friend try to access Complex 68G through the Matrix, but she said it's virtually impossible. She said the site's system connects to the Matrix through a vanishing SAN, and even that gives access to only a small host. The compound operators must transfer data between the mainframe and the SAN by downloading it onto chips and walking them from one computer to the other. She said there's no way to deck it from off-site.

- The best way to keep your data secure from deckers. Sure, it's clumsy and takes a lot of effort (relatively), but no decker is going to get to the data unless they break into the facility first.

- ASDF

- The system could be a virtual machine—anyone bothered to check?

- Big Sky

The same gal also happened to find several reports of hikers disappearing in the area of the compound. The Algonkian-Manitou government blames the disappearances on "an unusually high level of wild/paranormal animal activity" in the area. But when we were there, the only dangerous animals we encountered were the security critters.

- Are you suggesting that these hikers stumbled across the compound and got shot by the guards for trespassing? I don't put much past the corps, but that's far-fetched. Or are you suggesting that some of their security critters have escaped or been released, and gobbled up innocent slobbs walking by?

- Sister Sledgehammer

Here's where it gets weird. On a hunch, I asked the decker to see if any of these missing hikers had turned up elsewhere in the world. Lo and behold, she found two of them. One was living down in the Caribbean League, using his regular name, SIN and so on. We thought at first someone had stolen his identity, using it to live large in another country. But we dug up current vidpics that matched the old ID. As far as we could tell, the guy had simply dropped his friends, job, family and entire life and moved to a country where they don't ask too many questions. Oh yeah, he happened to have a new job, working for a small NBS-affiliated media outfit, snooping for a Carib tridshow called Islands in the Net. In case you didn't know, NBS is owned by Ares Global Entertainment.

Missing Hiker #2 was an even stranger story. He surfaced in Atlanta about a month after his disappearance. He claims he was on a camping trip one day and woke up on a CAS street the next, with no indication of how he got there. He showed up on a local trid show, along with people claiming to have been abducted by UFOs. An Atlanta hypnotherapist offered to help the guy recover his lost memories through self-hypnosis. Both of them died in a car accident a few days later.

Our contacts provided one final bit of interesting info. Hard Corps (y'know, Ares' *other* security company) had recently initiated a new program to deploy more guard animals at the Ares facilities they protect. Oddly, Hard Corps was not using any of these critters for any of its other security details, despite the fact that Ares contracts only account for about 5 percent of Hard Corps business. We tracked down some runners who had met some of these critters first-hand while on a job. They were tight-lipped, but they did say that the Hard Corp critters were more aware, intelligent and ruthless than they expected. They also made no sounds—they didn't bark or growl or make any sort of noises that animals normally do.

After all this research, we were sure that we were on to something—we just didn't know what. So we decided to pay the complex another visit. We were investing all of the profit from our previous job on this new gig, but we had high hopes that it would pay off. After all, data kept this secret is usually worth quite a lot to someone.

We rounded our team up (consisting of me, our shaman Maya, and our adept Sticks) and hired on a decker called LiveWire. We hitched a ride with another smuggler to the Sioux-Algonkian border, where we had arranged for a small-time local smuggler to get us across the border in a pick-up truck. We arrived in the vicinity of Hackett without any real difficulties beyond the usual ones.

We spent a few days camping out, running surveillance on the complex and keeping an eye on the area. After a few days, we pulled together a plan and decided to go for it. After night fell, we approached the compound. We silently took out some free-roaming guard dogs and got over the fence. Using various forms of cover and concealment to avoid the guards, we reached one of the buildings. Getting in was fairly easy, and we quickly located a terminal where our hired help could jack into the compound mainframe. Sticks stuck with LiveWire while Maya and I went to explore the compound.

A quick astral scan revealed some warded buildings. With a little help from LiveWire and Maya's metamagic, we got into one. It turned out to be a warehouse filled with rather sturdy cages holding various breeds of dog. We figured this was where they locked up the guard dogs. They looked like ordinary dogs, but they immediately noticed us as we entered the building—even though we were hiding under an Invisibility spell. Silently, they turned their heads to follow us wherever we went. That was reason enough for Maya to take a close look at their auras.

I heard her gasp for breath, and then she managed to say, "We're so fragged ..."

We had stumbled across flesh-form insect spirits. Bugs in dog bodies.



- Bugs in an Ares corp compound? Come on.
- Waver

• Listen to the man—they were caged. Doesn't it make sense for Ares, the world's leading pest control corp, to research the fraggers? How better to figure out the best ways to kill them?

- Rald

- But why dog flesh-forms? I don't think I like where this is going.
- Skeptic

I calmed Maya down and we backed out in a hurry. All the buggies were securely caged up and no alarms were ringing, so we convinced ourselves it was safe to look at some of the other buildings. We reckoned that Ares held and observed captured bugs for study and assumed any more we found would also be caged.

That turned out to be a naïve hope. When we entered the next warehouse building, we were nearly overpowered by the smell. We nearly left gagging, but we had already come this far. So we turned the corner to find several dozen cocoons hanging from racks. We could see the outlines of creatures in those cocoons, and there were some weird-looking guys in overalls tending to them. Guys with faceted eyes, chitinous growths and odd sprouts of body hair. Flesh forms. We were in a hive.

- Wait a minute. Insect spirits have infiltrated Ares? Holy drek, the world's in trouble!
- Micro
- I'm not so sure we're talking about an infiltration here.
- Frankie

Before we could react, a handful of former humans and orks bum-rushed us. We opened fire with guns and mojo, and ran like scared little children back to where we'd left Sticks and LiveWire. The poor decker was lying on the floor, twitching and jerking with blood trickling from his nose and ears. But I barely noticed. My eyes were riveted on our old pal, Tony Two-Chins, smiling at us like he was greeting old chums, with Sticks' broken neck still in his grasp. He looked completely normal, not a trace of bug on him. But I knew.

Maya actually beat me to the punch on that one. Luckily she reacted before Tony did too. He had just taken a step when she blasted him away with a lightning bolt that seared my vision and left a tang of ozone in the air. She nearly collapsed from drain, but I caught her and made good our escape. Luckily I had the presence of mind to grab LiveWire's cyberdeck, despite the security and flesh forms that were right on our tail. I hope for LiveWire's own sake that he was truly dead.

I don't really remember how we managed to get out of there. I recall crashing through the fence in an Ares car, but beyond that it's all a blur. Security personnel pursued us—they were not going to let us get away with what we had learned. The strange thing is that they didn't send any true form bugs after us. We were constantly alert for any of them getting into our fleeing car in astral space, but none came. Plenty of flesh forms came

after us, though, plus several guard critters and metahuman personnel. It was a good thing we brought our heavy ordnance and had a clever escape route worked out in advance, or we would never have been able to get away at all.

All that happened three days ago. I'm dictating this to my p-sec as we hide out in the wilderness. Whether we'll ever get away, I don't know, so I'll mail this to a Shadowland node in the hope that someone else can expose what's going on.

LiveWire did manage to grab some data files from the compound computer, though some were incomplete or partially scrambled by the black IC—but the important parts were legible. What we read didn't make us happy.

As we suspected after our run-in at the compound, Ares is (was?) using Complex 68G to hide an insect spirit colony. We assumed the bugs were in control and were hiding the goings-on from the rest of the corp, but we were wrong. Ares has a firm grip on the whole situation. Apparently, the colony was started in 2056 as a way to study the opposition—remember that Ares was at the height of its war against the bugs at the time. Despite the disaster in Chicago, Ares had success in other areas and even captured some insect shamans alive, as well as a few queens and mother spirits. All were put under observation at Complex 68G.

- Ouch. I can't say I didn't expect it, but it just goes to show that corporations are two-faced. Is it really a shock that the world famous anti-bug corp is researching ways to take advantage of insect spirits? You can exterminate hive after hive, but some of the little vermin always scurry away. If you can't beat 'em, co-opt 'em, then exploit the hell out of them. That's what the Ares profit margin says.
- Frankie

- It's all typical of megacorp policy: "Sure this is the biggest threat humanity has ever faced, but here's how we can make a couple of bucks out of it."
- Treble

- There's certainly precedent here. Renraku had some dealings with the Universal Brotherhood in the mid-'50s through Project Hope. So though Ares may be working with bugs now, it certainly wasn't the first.
- Hank

- To be fair, all available evidence suggests that Renraku didn't know about the UB connection at first and stopped its involvement with Project Hope almost immediately once it found out.
- Sister Sledgehammer
- Almost immediately.
- Henchman

Some shamans were subjected to "personality adjustment treatment" (translation: "were brainwashed") to make them loyal Ares workers. The queens were not as easily coerced, though. According to the files, all but one were destroyed within three



months due to the danger they posed to the researchers and the project as a whole.

Those exterminations didn't matter much, as before long the "adjusted" shamans were investing spirits as needed for study of the transformation process and of the enemy in general. Normal lab animals—rats, dogs, baboons, and so on—were used for these tests. Apparently the project still suffered setbacks, as most of shamans died from various causes as well.

- Those Insect shamans must have been under incredible duress to agree to work with Ares. After all, they were effectively summoning their totem animal for the sole purpose of placing it in captivity, to be used as a test subject. In effect, they were betraying their own totems. That had to cause serious difficulties; no wonder most of them died.

- Magister

- In my experience insect shamans aren't exactly the sanest fraggers to begin with. I can see Ares convincing one or two of them to do it as a power trip, especially if they piled on lies about humans and insects working together, or helping the shaman keep the queen spirit in line.

- Jay

The one remaining mother spirit (a roach, for what it's worth) appears to have been less hostile than the others. The researchers don't appear to have trusted her any farther than

they could throw her, but after some time she actively cooperated with them. Her motivations aren't known, but my opinion is that she was just playing along to find her captors' weaknesses. I don't know if this particular mommy is still alive, but the captured files contain an order—from a higher up in the Ares command structure—to cease the summoning of additional queens.

- That suggests the researchers have allowed some shamans to summon a queen after they'd been captured. I wonder what became of them?

- Desty

Some Ares managers started questioning the usefulness of the project around two years ago, pointing out that the liberation of the Chicago Containment Zone ended the bug threat. But apparently some bright soul, who should probably be shot for the good of humanity, decided that the project should be kept open and exploited for profit. At least part of Complex 68G was set up to "breed" guard animals: normal critters inhabited by insect spirits. The files don't say how many of these "animals" have been created so far, or where they've been deployed.

- I would expect these spirit-critters at high-security establishments in out-of-the-way areas. From a corporate perspective, they're too risky to use in highly populated areas.

- Blueman



- Wouldn't want them eating innocent consumers, certainly.
- Waver
- The risk of discovery is the danger I had in mind. Densely populated areas contain more magicians. That heightens the risk of someone seeing through the bug's aura mask and warning the general public.
- Bluman
- Overuse also reduces the surprise value—if Ares uses bugs at every site, runners will come prepared for them. That could be why Hard Corps is using the bug critters instead of Knight Errant—most runners expect Hard Corps security to be laxer than KE.
- Steel
- I was paid to observe an Ares facility for a few weeks. Hard Corps was running the site security. During that period, vans came in several times to deliver guard animals and take others away. I noticed the animal handlers were replacing animals with ones that looked alike (such as replacing one German shepherd with another). I thought this ploy was designed to fool everyone into thinking the same animals were there all the time, but I couldn't figure out why. Now I think I know. They're swapping a few flesh-form guard critters for normal ones every so often to temporarily boost security.
- Brick

The scariest thing I found in the captured files was evidence that Ares has been using paranormal animals as hosts. From what I've read, the resulting creatures are not anything you want to run into. Having trouble picturing them? Here's an example. Think of a hellhound that is astrally active, fire-breathing, immune to flames, much stronger and faster than normal, with a venomous bite and the ability to paralyze you just by touching you. On top of that, the creature makes reasonably intelligent decisions and at the same time blindly obeys its handler—all ideal for a guard critter, but very bad news for the likes of us. (Maya, who's reading this over my shoulder, comments here that the aforementioned hellhound would also have the ability to make its aura resemble that of your everyday hellhound. So identifying it as a bug spirit would be virtually impossible, except for an initiated magician.)

- It'll only be a matter of time before someone is going to deploy the meanest kind of guard critter you can imagine. Now that the secret's out, expect other companies to start conjuring bugs as well. And these companies may not keep them locked up as securely as Ares does.
- Babylonian
- Who says Ares is the only one now?
- Mindbender
- It hasn't been mentioned yet, but Ares has an open contract out for paranormals of all kinds, from century ferrets to manti-

choras. I even known some blokes who captured a juggernaut for them.

- Rabid

It appears Ares is avoiding the creation of true-form bugs, however—there is no mention of them at all in the files we grabbed, and neither did we see any in the compound. I can think of several reasons why. Most likely they're not using them because true forms can't be disguised like the flesh forms can.

- They're harder to control as well, being full spirits and all. You can lock a flesh form up in a room, but that won't stop true forms for a second. I think Ares fears giving the shamans and queens any more power than they need to.
- Lizzie

- For all we know there are true forms, but they're kept secret to deal with real emergencies.
- Swan

- We know that insect spirits will do absolutely anything their shaman or queen tells them to. We also know that a perfect meld spirit can mimic its original host so well even its own mother (the host's, that is) wouldn't suspect anything. So a perfectly melded spirit makes an ideal infiltrator: it can pass any examination yet is absolutely loyal to its master. For best results, Ares would want to grab someone who's already in the target organization.
- Findler-Man

- You're assuming that Ares' spymasters trust the insect shamans and queens to control their charges as they're ordered to. That may be stretching it.
- Swan

- Infiltrators could be planted with fake extraction scenarios also. You simply hire runners to kidnap a valuable suit from the target corp. Then you turn suit into bug, let the suit-bug "escape" back to mother corporation, and presto. This provides a very plausible way to insert a bug into a corp. I shouldn't have to say this in the first place, but do your homework to avoid surprises.
- Mindbender

- You're all assuming that Ares has managed to keep control of this thing. What if the bugs have taken over? Very conceivable, if you know how crafty the shamans and queens can be. Ares may believe they still control the project, but it could well be that all the key staff members on the project have been replaced by flesh forms—especially if the bugs found a way to force "perfect" melds.
- Hank

- What better place to hide than in the midst of your enemies? Plenty of real insects do it all the time, and there's no reason why their spirit equivalents couldn't try it, too.
- Sun Fire

- Can bugs detect others of their kind? If so, maybe Ares is using the bugs as sniffer dogs to locate hives.
- Mason

Finally, why do I post this on Shadowland, free for all to see, instead of try to make money from it? Very simple. Maya and I were both in Chicago the day the bugs overran the place, and we were both trapped in the CZ when they put up the wall. The only luck we had in the whole mess was finding a way out after "only" a couple of months. We spent years dealing with bugs on a daily basis, until Ares "cleaned up" the place and the wall came down.

Now we discover that same megacorp is conjuring the fraggers—the same megacorp that prides itself on exterminating them. That pisses me off.

What more do you want me to say?

- I bet the Algonkian-Manitou would be thrilled to learn that Ares is hosting a bug hive inside their borders. I imagine now that security's been breached, they've relocated that hive to safer locales. Of course a big move like that will leave records ...
- Glitch

GAME INFORMATION

It had to happen: a megacorporation using insect spirits for its own ends. The reasoning is simple. Insect spirits are powerful, dual-natured and highly obedient—all qualities that make them excellent as guard animals, not to mention other applications. It was only a matter of time before someone would break the taboo on dealing with them, and who was in a better position than Ares?

In the public eye, Ares has long been the champions of the battle against the bugs, with the liberation of Chicago as their crowning achievement (who cares if it wasn't as successful as they make it out to be?). Even some runners view Ares as "on their side" when it comes to bug spirits. As a result, information about Ares' bug experiments and guard critters could be quite a shocking revelation—assuming you can find proof, of course. Insect spirits are too delicate a subject for anyone in the Sixth World to admit to experimenting or working with them.

Ares' primary achievement with its secret project lies in the use of all kinds of creatures as hosts, rather than only metahumans. Whereas insect shamans traditionally use metahuman hosts, Ares scientists saw the potential of summoning insect spirits into animals. As the text explains, this resulted in a new type of critter very suitable for guard duties, and so far that's mostly what Ares has been using its bugs for. *So far.*

Insect spirits, however, are survivors, just like real insects. They are always looking for new ways to further their own ends—even if it means giving the enemy control for the moment. If the project is successful, the scope of its operations

may expand, giving the insect spirits more of a chance to loosen their leash ... if they haven't done so already.

USING INSECT SPIRITS

The general rules and game statistics for insect spirits can be found on pp. 127–133 and pp. 136–137, *MTS*.

Much has already been written about how insect spirits can be used in the world of *Shadowrun*, from novels and adventures to entire game settings, but so far almost everything has focused on using metahuman hosts. The reason is simple—it's a lot more dramatic when the player characters' fellow metahumans—or even their friends—are made into bugs than if their pets are.

Though the bugs have gotten smarter in recent years (see the *Bugs* chapter in the original *Threats*), their main use in adventures is still as cannon fodder. The players get on the trail of a hive, then proceed to blast it to bits in a glorious bug hunt. Those adventures are still possible—not all bug hives have been exterminated, and many still operate the same way they did ten years ago when insect spirits were first exposed to the world.

When the insect body count rises high enough, however, this form of adventure can make players jaded. They can still be scared, though, by having bugs pop up in unexpected places. The runners may hit a corp facility guarded by bug-critter

hybrids, the corporate spy they are hired to unmask may be a bug infiltrator, or the corporate strike team that hunts them down may be flesh-forms on a short leash.

Furthermore, there are plenty of possibilities for adventures in the very existence of places like Complex 68G. Nobody in the Sixth World wants to be associated with insect spirits, giving opportunities for shadowruns

to expose such a facility, as well as counter-runs for damage control. Complicated runs based around the politics of megacorps and insect spirits are also a possibility. Some execs may be horrified at what their own corp is doing under their noses, or they may be secret pawns of the "captive" insect spirits. And in the end, it can still result in a big shoot-out to exterminate a hive.

PARANORMAL CRITTER HOSTS

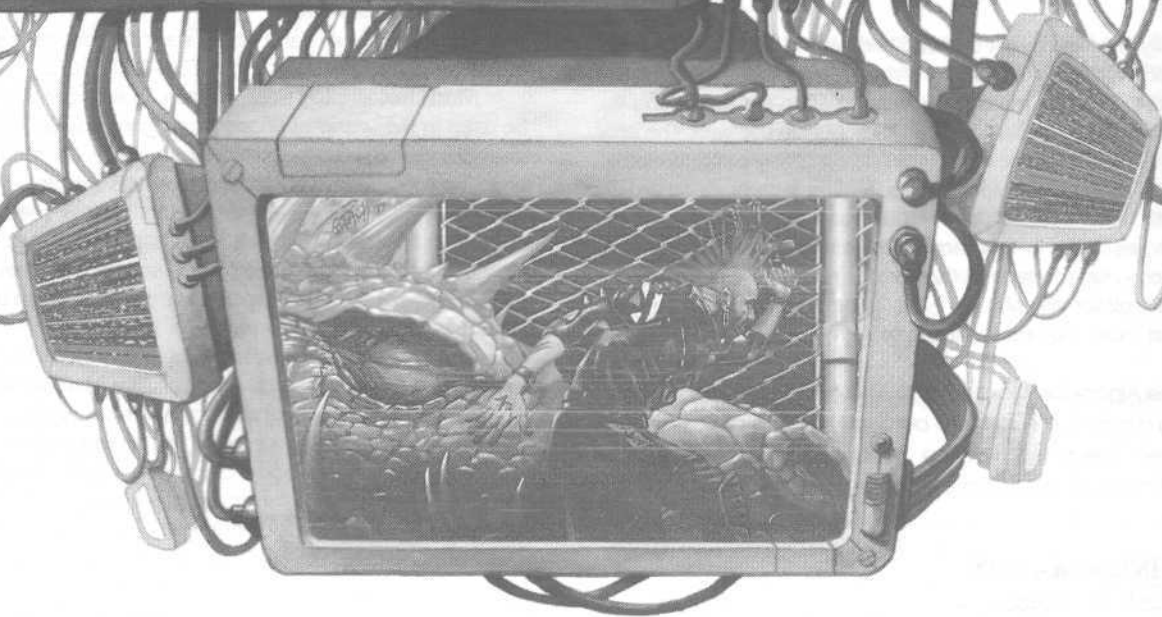
When summoning an insect spirit into a paranormal critter, use the rules given for *Summoning Insect Spirits* on p. 128, *MTS*. The gamemaster should also consult the Paracritter Transformation Table to determine how many of the critter's innate powers are retained by the flesh-form. The gamemaster should decide which of the critter's powers the flesh-form retains and which it loses, or just roll randomly. These retained powers are in addition to the insect spirit's standard powers. Powers and weaknesses that are directly opposed cancel each other out. For example, if the flesh-form retains the Enhanced Senses (Sight) critter power but also has the spirit's standard Reduced Senses (Sight) power, the result will be a flesh form spirit with average sight.

PARACRITTER TRANSFORMATION TABLE

Host's Net Successes	Number of Powers Retained
0 or fewer*	None*
1	1
2	2
3	4
4	6
5+	All

*This results in a true-form insect spirit.

DEALING WITH DRAGONS



One of the prime reasons Shadowland exists is the exchange of information. Not just the sale of information (though that's the biz that keeps this operation afloat) but also the free exchange of it. After all, if we don't help each other out, who will? That's why this particular post caught my eye and why I'm putting it up here for your attention. This guy sounds like he really needs some help. So take a look at what's going on here and, if you know something, post it. If nothing else, this is another cautionary tale for our times. Stay logged in with us, chummers, because these days you never know what's going to happen next.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 30 December 2061 at 02:33:14 (PST)

Hoi, I'm posting to Shadowland because I need some information. This isn't biz—it's personal, so I'm not using my regular handle. Let's just say that I've been a regular around here for a while and that Capt. Chaos can vouch for me. I don't even want to use my regular street name until I get a better idea what the Ghost is happening, so you can just call me Drake for now. Seems like an appropriate name, for reasons that I'll get into.

Okay. First off, let me tell you that I'm more fragging scared than I've ever been in my entire life, and I've seen some things that still give me nightmares years later. I don't scare easy, but what's happening has me freaked out. So I'm doing my best to keep things together and coherent, and trusting to the deck a friend of mine set me up with to help clean up this post and make sure everything's readable. Second, I'm not a bigot and I don't buy into any Humanis drek. If you do, then you can just skip this post (and what the frag are you doing on Shadowland, anyway?). I don't need to hear about how I'm buying into SURGE hysteria or any of that drek, okay? If I'm delusional (and don't think I haven't considered it) then all of this isn't going to matter anyway. So let's just assume that I'm not crazy and I am telling the truth for the moment, okay?

• Geez, talk about a buildup. What's this skag's damage?

• MoJo PoJo





The short version is that something is happening to me. I'm *changing*, and I don't know into what. Yeah, I know, it's happening to a lot of people these days. I catch the news. I don't live in a cave (at least, not yet). I've checked out all that Shadowland and the rest of the Matrix has to offer about SURGE, but I don't think this is the same thing. I'm not just getting scales or funky colored skin or eyes that glow in the dark. It's like I'm changing into something completely different. Not only that, but it seems like I can change *back*, at least for a little while. But I don't know how much longer that's going to last.

THE FIRST CHANGE

It all started when I was in Denver, right around the time that Ghostwalker first showed up. I was on some unrelated business with some chummers when the dragon put in his appearance. At first, I was actually pretty grateful for ol' Ghostwalker showing up. After all, when a dragon starts kicking hoop in the Aztlan sector of town, folks are a lot less likely to notice ... well, pretty much anything else going on. We'd finished our business and we were lighting the hell out of Denver the first time it happened.

I got this burning sensation all over, not painful at first, more like a really bad itch or sunburn. One of my chummers noticed that I was looking kind of flushed. Then the muscle cramps hit me like a troll's fist in my gut. I doubled over right there on the floor of the van, trying my best to keep from screaming. They tell me our shaman took one look at my aura and told our wheelman to get me to this street doc we know in Denver. I guess she did some healing magic on me that helped with the pain. All I remember is seeing the skin on my arms starting to change, hardening and cracking, like dry leather, or scales. Then I must have passed out.

- Not that I'm asking, but it would be helpful to know just what Drake & Co. were doing. I mean, it's quite possible this is connected to whatever sort of run they were on, especially if it involved something magical, or even some new biotech.
- Magister
- Take my word for it. There's no connection with the job. End of discussion.
- Drake

I woke up the next day at the street doc's place and thought that what I'd seen and felt was just some kind of hallucination at first, until I talked with the rest of my team and with the doc. They told me that my metamorphosis got even worse than I remembered, but that somehow it reversed itself less than an hour after it started and I changed back to normal.

The doc said she ran some tests but couldn't find anything wrong with me, but she also pointed out that there wasn't anything "wrong" with the other people undergoing SURGE, either. It wasn't a disease, but a genetically triggered change, like being an ork or a troll. Truth was she didn't have any idea what happened to me, but chalked it up to the

SURGE. She'd never heard about a case of SURGE going into remission, but then a few months ago nobody had ever seen SURGE before, so who knows? Our shaman said she couldn't detect any outside magical influences that could have caused what happened, and she didn't have any more idea than the doc what happened to me. The doc sent me packing and told me to call if I had any other symptoms (like I was planning on staying in Denver with everything going on there).

So I did the only sensible thing I could, got the hell out of Denver. Then the first chance I got, I got stinking drunk. That was a couple days ago.

THE DREAMS

Crawling into a bottle may have been a mistake. I don't know what triggered what happened next, but I can tell you that I haven't touched a drop of booze since then. The night I got hammered I somehow managed to get back to the doss where I was crashing.

The rest of that night, I had bizarre nightmares like you wouldn't believe. I tossed and turned, feverish, on the temperfoam padding, feeling my muscles ache like from a long, hard workout. I felt a jolt of pain and stretched out as far as I could, then kept on stretching. I don't know if the tearing sound I heard was my clothes or my skin as my arms stretched out, the fingers hardening into claws. I crouched over, my neck stretching out, feeling the bones in my face shift. My jaw elongated and my tongue flicked out over razor-sharp teeth. I lashed the air with my tail and the ache in my shoulders gave way as I spread leathery wings out to catch the air. I roared to the sky and launched myself at the dirty plexiglass skylight overhead. It gave way and I soared out into the night.

Everything after that is a confusion of images, but I know that I swooped down on something and there was a struggle. When I woke up, it was to the sun streaming through the broken skylight overhead. I was lying across what was left of my foam sleeping pad. It was torn up pretty bad. The first thing I noticed was the dried blood smeared across my chest and hands. The second thing was that my clothes were scattered in scraps all over the floor.

What happened to me that night wasn't a dream, it was real. Somehow I turned into some kind of dragon-like thing, then changed back. I know it sounds crazy, but think about some of the things that have happened lately and it'll sound a lot more believable. I need to know what's happening to me.

- I think somebody slipped this skag a BTL copy of "I Was a Teenaged Were-Dragon" or something.
- Nacht
- I'm not farcing! Anyway, I don't have a jack for chips or anything else. I'm right off the showroom floor, so there's no way somebody slipped me a chip that felt that real.
- Drake

• Right up until that dream, I would have attributed Drake's experience to SURGE, much like the street doc he visited. They're cataloging new manifestations of SURGE and new variations of changelings every week it seems like, so Drake's case would have just been another one for the medical journals. But his "dream" experience makes it difficult to think this is just a matter of a new SURGE case. Anyone interested in discussing things further can join me in the conference room tonight, around 2200 CST. You up for it, Drake?

• Doc

• I'll be there.

• Drake

DRAKE'S CHANGE

(Begin Log: Welcome to Doc's Office! The time is: 22:00:34 CST)

Doc: All right, people. It's a little crowded in here (metaphorically speaking) so I expect everyone to behave or they get booted. Captain Chaos asked me to make sure to keep a log of this he could post later on. I'm moderating, so questions go through me—try and keep the side conversations to a minimum, okay? Looks like we're ready. Drake, if you don't mind, I've got some questions to start things off and establish a little history.

Drake: Shoot.

Doc: First off, what're your physical stats? Can you provide that information without giving away too much?

Drake: No, I guess that's okay: Human male, age 27, 176 cm tall, 73 kilos. What else?

Magister: Are you Awakened?

Drake: Yeah, I'm an adept.

Doc: Interesting. Any metahumans in your family, or magically talented relatives?

Drake: Not that I know of, but I don't have much of a family history. My parents split up when I was a kid and my Dad got caught in the crossfire of a gang war. Since they couldn't find my mom, they put me in a foster home. I was there until I got old enough to join the Army and get the frag out. I don't have any brothers or sisters or cousins or anything that I know about.

Magister: When did your adept abilities awaken?

Drake: When I joined the Army. The recruiters pegged me for an adept and signed me up right away. I got training to develop my talents and stuff from them.

Doc: I assume nothing unusual turned up on the standard medical tests?

Drake: Nope. If it did, they didn't tell me.

Halfer: Which Army?

Drake: I'd rather not say right now.

Doc: It doesn't particularly matter.

Sagan: It may, depending on the kind of things that Drake could have been exposed to.

Drake: I wasn't the subject of any tests or experiments, if that's what you mean.

Sagan: Again, that you know of.

Doc: Let's not speculate needlessly. What are the possibilities everyone sees for Drake's condition, assuming as he says that he's perfectly sane and actually experienced everything he talks about?

Kobold: I've got to go with SURGE here for 1,000¥, Doc. There's just too many different kinds of mutants crawling out of the woodwork these days for it to be anything else. That means there may not be anything Drake can do about it, unless he wants to look into some serious (and mega-expensive) gene therapy, which probably won't work and could end up with him a whole lot deader than when he started.

Magister: I wouldn't discount SURGE (hell, I wouldn't discount any reasonable hypothesis at this stage), but there are other possibilities. Just offhand, I can think of two very reasonable ones. First, Drake is the subject of some sort of magical attack using a combination of illusion and manipulation spells. Maybe someone is messing with him deliberately, and using SURGE to cover it. Second, he could have contracted some sort of retrovirus like a strain of HMMVV that's causing these changes.

Doc: Neither supported by the evidence, unfortunately. Drake said his shaman friend didn't notice any outside magical influences, and an infection like HMMVV would have shown up on standard medical tests.

Winger: I know it sounds crazy (damn, but that phrase is getting a lot of use lately), but Drake's condition sounds to me more like he's some sort of werewolf (were-lizard?). Could that be it?

Doc: If you're referring to conventional shapeshifters, no. Remember, shapeshifters aren't people under some sort of curse that turns them into animals by the light of the full moon like in the legends and old vids. Shapeshifters are Awakened animals with intelligence and the ability to assume



human (or metahuman) form. They're usually born and raised as animals and they have their shapechanging abilities from childhood. Add on top of that the fact that shapechangers are genetically different from metahumans, and that there's never been a known shapeshifter like the form Drake describes, and it seems unlikely.

Winger: What about dragons, though? They can change shape into humans, can't they?

Magister: Yes, but in theory that's not an innate ability, Winger. They simply do it the same way a human mage can turn into a bird or a snake—they know the right spells. Hmmm, that does pose a possibility. I've read about some cases of spontaneous magicians (usually shamans) who manifest unconscious spellcasting abilities. Usually they're simpler spells than the sort of physical transformations Drake is talking about, but it is possible. Drake, do you have any magical training?

Drake: Just some basic theory. I'm no spell-slinger.

Magister: A couple more questions: Were you masking your aura at all when your shaman friend examined it? During your first change, were changes ongoing while you were unconscious?

Drake: No and yes.

Silicon Mage: That tends to let out the possibility he was doing it himself. Hard to cast or maintain spells while you're unconscious.

Magister: True, under normal circumstances, but I think Drake's situation is a bit more unusual. Drake, I'd recommend getting re-tested for magical ability, particularly spellcasting ability. I can put you in touch with some people, if you don't know anyone who can give you the standard tests.

Drake: Thanks.

*** Jane-In-The-Box has entered the room ***

Jane-In-The-Box: Hi, all. Hope I'm not too late. Pardon the interruption, Doc, I'll keep it brief.

Doc: No problem, Jane. To what do we owe the pleasure?

Jane-In-The-Box: Mr. "Drake" here. Sorry I didn't get in touch with you sooner, Drake, but things have been ... busy to say the least around here. I just now saw your post on Shadowland and I wanted to make sure I got in touch with you right away.

Drake: I'm listening.

Jane-In-The-Box: I'm sending you over some contact info. I want you to get in touch with the Draco Foundation immediately and arrange a meeting. You choose the time and place. The folks on the other end have been briefed about your situation. All you need to do is contact them and tell them when and where and they'll help you out.

Doc: It sounds like you know what's happening to Drake, Jane. Care to explain?

Jane-In-The-Box: Sorry, Doc, but I can't, not over the Matrix, not even here on Shadowland. Let's just say that it's Draco Foundation business and leave it at that, shall we?

Doc: If you insist, Jane.

*** Drake has left the room ***

*** Jane-In-The-Box has left the room ***

Doc: Well, it looks like this conference is over for now. If anyone wants to talk further, feel free to contact me privately.

(End Log)

OUT IN THE COLD

• Well, we've got a new development in Drake's situation. Sounds like it's definitely more than just an unusual case of SURGE. But I'll let Drake fill you in on the details.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 06 January 2062 at 05:29:08 (PST)

Well, so much for the Draco Foundation.

Sorry if you haven't heard from me in a while, but I've been busy dodging all of the fraggers who are out to grab me and probably stick me in a lab somewhere so they can figure out what makes me tick. I'm somewhere reasonably safe for the moment, so I've taken some time to record what's happened and send it on to Shadowland. If I do up and disappear later, I want everyone out there to know what's going on before they make the same mistakes I did.

I got in touch with the Draco Foundation like Jane-in-the-Box asked me to do. She must have given me a very private line, because they seemed to know just what to do as soon as I called. We set up a meeting at a place I know in Vegas, which was where I was holed up last time. Then all I had to do was wait until it was time to show up there. I felt in my gut that I was walking into trouble. Always listen to your gut, chummers, because trouble is just what I got.

The meet was a setup. A team of runners I didn't recognize tried to jump me, but I was just paranoid enough that they didn't get the drop on me like they'd planned. That, and the fact that when their mage tossed a spell at me I was able to resist it somehow. It was like I could feel the spell trying to get at me and I sort of brushed it away. I think that took the mage by surprise almost as much as when I flattened him with a knife hand to the throat. Hard to get out spells when your windpipe's crushed.

The creepiest part of the whole thing was the skag who seemed to be leading the team. I think he was an adept, too. Either that or he had some really top-line cyber without a single surgical scar to show for it. He moved fast and smooth. I barely saw his first punch in time to block it. I think he would have had me if he'd been going for a kill, but it was pretty clear that these fraggers had orders to take me alive. That gave me an edge, because I didn't necessarily return the favor. But this other adept, he said, "Don't fight us. We can help you, you're one of us." I got the feeling that the second "us" wasn't his team, but him and me. Did he mean that he was like me? I don't know. I didn't stick around to play twenty questions. I let him think I was dropping my guard and sucker-punched him.

I beat it out of there as fast as I could and followed my backup plans for getting out of Vegas. Now I don't know any more than when this whole fragging mess started, except for the fact that I can't trust the Draco Foundation, or anyone else for that matter. The only reason I'm posting this here is because I don't have anywhere else to go, and I want to make sure this gets out on the Matrix rather than ending with me. I need intel, people. What the frag's going on?

• Drake, you were set up, but not by us. Someone cracked our security and found out about the meeting. They delayed our team while sending another to intercept you. Please get in touch with us again and we'll make arrangements to talk this through. We can still help you out.

• Jane-in-the-Box

• Says you, lady. It's a mighty convenient story. Maybe it's even true, but you can forget about us talking any time soon. I don't trust you or your Foundation any further than I can throw Dunkelzahn's bloody fragging corpse. You want to talk to me? Fine, give me one reason why I should trust you again.

• Drake



• Because you don't have much choice, that's why. The team that came after you isn't the only one, and wherever you are, it's not going to keep you safe for long. We can do that, if you'll let us, but we need to talk about this offline, and preferably in person.

• Jane-in-the-Box

• No deal.

• Drake

• I'll vouch for Janie, Drake. I don't know exactly what's going on, but I can tell you that she and the rest of Assets, Inc. didn't know about it. They're straight shooters and they're not going to get mixed up in a double-cross or a set-up like you described. I think you should give them another chance, but then it's not my life.

Jane, you'd better think about giving out a little information here, especially if there are more people like Drake out there reading this. It's your best chance of earning some trust and keeping ahead in this situation, because I've got a pretty good idea who Draco's dealing with on this one, and I don't think you're going to beat them any other way. Secrecy is their weapon, right? The truth is the best way to fight that.

• Talon

• All right, then. Cards on the table. The attached file should explain some of what's going on. I've edited out references to the author's identity for his own protection, but the rest should be enough. Drake, if you're scanning this, contact me offline at the number I gave you. Trust me, chummer, we're the best chance you've got, and that's the truth.

• Jane-in-the-Box

//Begin Download//

The Drake Awakening

What are we? I don't know exactly. Dunkelzahn must have known, and I suspect that the other great dragons do, but they're not talking. I've heard the term "drake" and it seems to apply well enough. Apparently we seem human (or metahuman) enough on the surface. After all, I never had any idea about what I really was for most of my life. Odds are that others like me don't know it either. We're like the eggs that cuckoos leave in nests for other birds to raise or something like that, walking among the crowd, hidden. But when enough magic comes along, the truth comes out, and we change. We transform into something like a small dragon, not much bigger than our normal body mass, I'd guess maybe two or three times at best, probably something like two or three meters in length. Not much compared to your average western dragon, much less a great, but I'm told that it's still a pretty impressive sight.

So we're shapechangers, of a sort, though not exactly like the other shapechangers I've read about. They start out

as animals and turn into people, we start out as people ... and turn into drakes. Why? I don't know. Maybe we're just born that way, like other metahumans are. Maybe it's some kind of magical talent we've got, like the powers of an adept or the spells of a magician. It seems so natural to me now that I just know it's a part of me, more than just a spell or outside force acting on my body.

The only things I know for sure are that we're rare (very rare) and that the dragons are interested in us. Dunkelzahn was interested in me long before I ever knew. He must have known. And the other dragons, they seem to know about us, too, like they've seen us before, though I don't think they were expecting us to show up so soon. It looks like they're scrambling to catch up with how fast things are happening these days. Must be tough for critters used to planning and working things out for years to have to move so quickly. But experience shows that they learn fast.

What do they want with us? Again, I don't know, but I'm not willing to walk into a dragon's lair just to find out. The way I see it, if the likes of Lofwyr or even Hestaby want something from us, then I'm not all that inclined to just give it to them. Naturally, they haven't been very forthcoming with answers, but I know they have them. Maybe when we hold a few more of the cards, they'll be willing to give us some of them.

That's why the Draco Foundation has to make it a priority to find others like me before the dragons do, so we can give them a safe haven and the time to figure things out and maybe pry loose some answers. Going up against dragons is a dangerous business, but nobody ever said life was safe. I'm not inclined to leave anyone to their tender mercies.

//End Download//

• Holy frag! What does this mean? The way I read it, the great dragons are "collecting" all of the members of what may be a new metahuman race of some kind. This can't be good.

• Bung

• The mind boggles at the possibilities. These "drakes" may be some kind of shapeshifters, like the more common 'shifters already known to us, but there are so many other potential explanations. Consider that they don't know where they came from or why they can do what they do. That suggests they're either some sort of new magical "mutation" like other metahuman species, developing from the same root race (in this case humanity), or they might be something else altogether. It's been pointed out that shapeshifters are animals that turn into humans, but these drakes are different because they're humans that turn into mini-dragons. But what if they're not? What if the draco form is their "natural" form, and they're just not aware of it?

• Sagan

• Here's another one for you. Anyone ever see a baby dragon? I know some people who claim to have seen dragon eggs, but no little dragons. Now we've got little dragons that can turn into people. I think that the "cuckoo" comment from our mystery author might be closer to the truth than he knows. What if drakes are baby dragons? Like mythical changelings, they're put into human form, introduced into human society as children, and raised ignorant of their true nature as they are watched from afar by their dragon parents. When they reach physical maturity (at least as we humans measure things), they spontaneously start to revert back to their true dragon forms. That's when mommy or daddy comes (or more likely, sends someone) to collect junior and begin teaching them who's who and what's what about being a dragon. I mean, the lizards have only been awake for fifty years, maybe that's just long enough for some of them to start having kids and for those little dragons to start hitting maturity.

• Wurm-Watcher

• Also think about the possibility of what or who the dragons are breeding with. Maybe these "drakes" are some kind of dragon/human crossbreeds. Maybe dragons don't actually breed with each other but they need to take human mates (would explain the fascination dragons seem to have with human virgins in all the legends). The result of the mating, presumably while the dragon is in human or metahuman form, is a drake.

• Honey Gold

• The coming of these "drakes" is no surprise to some of us. The guiding light of the Great Dragon Spirit leads us toward physical and spiritual perfection. What better guides and examples than those who partake of both human and dragon nature, bridges over the gulf that currently exists between us. Behold another example of the glory and power of the Great Dragon! Learn his ways and embrace the new age that is coming!

• Brother Morningfire

• You know I've heard crazier theories, but wildly speculating isn't going to do anything except use up bandwidth. Think about the biz opportunities this implies for a second. These drakes are a rare commodity, one that several parties (dragons and the Draco Foundation at least, and probably others) are willing to pay handsomely for. Sounds to me like a prize bounty opportunity just waiting to happen, especially when most poor skags don't have any idea that drakes even exist. I just got another job opportunity to look out for.

• Prime Runner

• Just be careful there, PR. These drakes sound like dangerous prey, and a good way to get some very powerful critters honked off for messing in their business.

• Miss Tick

• Hey, an extraction is an extraction, no matter what the target can turn into.

• Prime Runner

• All right. That's pretty much all the information we've got. The cards are out on the table, Mr. Drake. I just want to tell you—and anyone else like you who might be scanning this—that the Draco Foundation is the best chance you've got. The great dragons are hunting for you, and they're probably not the only ones. If you go it on your own, sooner or later you will slip up and they will catch you. What happens after that, I don't know—but do you really want to find out? I know that you don't have a lot of reason to trust us, so we'll play it your way as much as we can to show you that we can be trusted. We want to help, if we can. The rest is up to you.

• Jane-in-the-Box

GAME INFORMATION

Drakes are a fairly new phenomenon to the Sixth World, but not to some of the inhabitants of it. Long ago, in a previous Age of Magic, dragons felt the need for trustworthy servants. Using complex magical rituals they created the drakes, miniature dracoforms with the ability to assume human (or metahuman) form and therefore move easily among the mortal population. When the Age of Magic faded and the dragons entered their long slumber, some of their drake servants went with them, since they were designed to need magic in order to survive. In the beginning of the Sixth World, the power of magic was too weak for the drakes to return, but now it has grown strong enough. A small number of people around the world have displayed drake abilities, and the great dragons show interest in all of them. Whether these new drakes are the old servants of the dragons, somehow robbed of their memories, or they are something new and unique to the Sixth World remains to be seen. Even the great dragons themselves may not have the answers. If they do, they're not telling.

DRAKE AWAKENINGS

The metamorphosis into a drake is much like the process of Goblinization, though not exactly the same, since drakes are shapeshifters by nature. Typically, potential drakes begin to experience the "awakening" of their dragon-like form, having previously known only the human or metahuman form they have worn for as long as they can remember. The

process of the first transformations can be frightening and disorienting, though some drakes also describe it as feeling "natural," like stepping into their true body for the first time.

In most cases, the first transformations happen entirely at random, triggered by the drake's emotional state and the presence of magic. Highly charged emotions like fear, anger, or passion that release hormones in the body can bring on the first transformation. Likewise, the presence of powerful magical forces, like high Force spells, free spirits, power sites, and particularly dragons and their magic can trigger a transformation.

At first, the transformations are uncontrollable, but after a few, the newly Awakened drake learns to control them, shifting between human and draco forms at will.

DRAKE HUNTING

A drake's first transformation sends a faint "ripple" out through the astral plane that great dragons (and similarly powerful magical beings like free spirits) can sense, letting them know that a new drake has Awakened. Great dragons can also apparently detect the potential of latent drakes by viewing their auras, but other magicians haven't yet learned the secret. When they sense the presence of a new drake, most dragons take steps to ensure that they will control it. That means all newly Awakened drakes find themselves hunted by the great dragons and their agents (usually shadowrunners). Already confused by their transformation, drakes are easy prey for the hunters who pursue them—as easy as any being that can turn into a small dracoform, that is.

Shadowrunners who have earned a measure of trust from a dragon employer might be hired to recover a newly Awakened drake or two. They might also find work protecting a newly Awakened drake from the parties pursuing him, though the drake may not reveal *why* these people are after him, assuming that he knows the reason himself. Having a client turn out to be a shapeshifting drake can be an interesting twist for a shadowrun.

DRAKE ABILITIES

As highly magical creatures, drakes have a number of special abilities. The most obvious is their power to shift from a single human or metahuman form into a miniature western dragon, about 2 meters long from head to tail. The transformation requires an Exclusive Complex Action to perform. Any clothing or equipment carried by the drake is not transformed and may in fact be ripped or destroyed by the transformation. At first, drakes may be unable to control their transformations. Under conditions of trauma or emotional stress, or in the presence of strong magic or dragon magic,

drakes must succeed in a Willpower (6) Test or unwillingly transform. Over time, and with a little practice, drakes can control their transformations.

In humanoid form, drakes have all of the normal abilities of their human or metahuman form. They are also capable of astral perception, but can turn the ability on and off with a Simple Action.

In dracoform, drakes are dual-natured beings, existing on the astral and physical planes simultaneously. Drakes may have difficulty using some skills or fulfilling geasa in dracoform due to their body's physical changes. Dracoforms cannot speak normally, though dracoform drakes can communicate with each other through sounds, body movements and a form of limited telepathy. Drakes in dracoform are capable of flight, with a flying multiplier of 5.

As magical beings, drakes have the ability to either learn and use Magical skills like full or aspected magicians or to learn and use somatic powers like an adept. Their initial Magic Rating is based on their Essence, and drakes can become initiates according to the normal rules from *MTS*. Drakes can cast spells, conjure and/or use their adept powers (and all other magical skills and abilities) while in dracoform. Drakes with the ability to astrally project can do so in either form.

Drakes suffer double the normal Essence loss or Bio Index from implants because of their highly magical nature. Any implants a drake has do not function (effectively do not even exist) while it is in dracoform.

It is possible, though difficult, to detect a drake's true nature using astral perception. It requires at least 4 successes on an Astral Perception Test to detect a drake's true nature in humanoid form, 6 successes if the drake is not yet "awakened" and hasn't experienced its first change. Initiated drakes may, of course, know the Masking metamagic technique, allowing them to further disguise their auras.

Drakes in human or metahuman form use their normal statistics. Drakes in dracoform have the following statistics and powers:

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
(N + 4)/6	(N + 1) × 4	N + 4	N	N	N	6Z	N + 1

INIT: Reaction + 2D6

Attacks: (STR)M, +1 Reach

Powers: Astral Armor, Enhanced Senses (Wide-Band Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Thermographic Vision), Innate Spell (Flamethrower).

Note: "N" equals the drake's normal attribute in human or metahuman form.

BENEATH THE FALSE FACE



From an outside perspective, it can be quite difficult to understand the intricacies of another culture's beliefs and practices. When you delve into semi-secretive groupings within that culture, with splinter groups and conflicting beliefs and goals, it can be next to impossible for an outsider to comprehend the full situation. I have to admit I was ignorant of internal politics and belief among the Iroquois before I read this article, delivered by a Mohawk shadowrunner who calls himself Wampum.

Wampum has a local perspective on the schisms going on among the Iroquois people, both in the Algonkian-Manitou Council (where most Iroquois live) and the Sioux Nation (where they have a smaller presence). From what I understand, the False Face Society that Wampum introduces here is common knowledge in the AMC and Sioux lands, though pale-faced foreigners like me have never heard the term before.

What Wampum really wanted to bring to our attention, though, were the wayward cousins of the False Face Society, called the Crying Masks. On the surface, it seems like the Crying Masks have taken the ideals of the False Face too far, to the point where a creed to help people has become a creed to commit violence and terrorism.

Take warning, though. Wampum just presents his perspective here, and there's bound to be complexities in a situation like this that outsiders won't grasp. Those complexities can make you dead very quickly if you make assumptions or say the right thing to the wrong people. If you need to deal with either group, I recommend finding a neutral local who knows the scoop to help you chart your course.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 11 July 2062 at 17:31:52 (PST)

Among my people, the Haudenosaunee, the False Face Society is known as a well-intentioned fraternity of shamans and healers. The men and women of this society have historically served as spiritual guides to the Haudenosaunee, preserving the rituals that guard us from harm. The sacred masks worn by the False Face are used in rituals to cure sickness, soothe the suffering and drive out demons.





- Uh, Haudenosaunee? What's that?
- Pueblo Princess

• Oh for the love of—what are they teaching your people in the PCC these days? You don't even know the real names of the Indian tribes! Haudenosaunee is our people's real name, whereas others call us the "Iroquois." The word "Iroquois" is not a Haudenosaunee word. It is derived from a French version of a Huron Indian name that was applied to our ancestors. It was considered derogatory, meaning "Black Snakes." Haudenosaunee means "People building an extended house" or more commonly referred to as "People of the Long House."

• Jlkohnsaseh

As is often the case in our world, a dark force lurks in the shadows. Beneath the façade of the False Face lies another grouping with extreme, twisted goals. This group threatens to shatter the reputation of the False Face, potentially drawing ruin upon my people.

ORIGINS

The False Face Society traces its origins back several hundred years when they served as medicine men to the Haudenosaunee tribes. The tribes believed that evil spirits brought disease and illness to the members of the society, and only those with a stronger spirit could drive them away. The False Face Society, which was one of several medicine societies, would perform ceremonies and rituals to drive away the unwanted spirits. These societies also perform rituals for feasts, deaths, adoptions, marriages and the periodic harvest festivals.

Though commonly lumped in with other Native American shaman societies such as the Midewiwin, the False Face are a unique part of the life of the Haudenosaunee (who are now part of the Algonkian-Manitou Council and Sioux Nation). When the Mohawk (People of the Flint), Seneca (Great People of the Mountain), Onondaga (The Hill People), Cayuga (People of the Great Pipe), Tuscarora (People of the Shirt), and the Oneida (People of the Standing Stone) tribes relocated to the NAN after the Ghost Dance War, they brought their medicine societies (including the False Face) with them.

Not much is known—or at least, willing to be said—about the role these societies played during the war itself. Certainly they were involved in various military actions by the SAIM; the records are clear on that. Surprisingly, there is no record of False Face members being present at the Ghost Dance ritual itself. Since the society had so few members, it is probable that they simply were too involved in other matters to attend the ceremony. Others say that the False Face Society actively worked against the Ritual itself—there were certainly fewer members of the tribes that the society draws members from at the Ghost Dance than can be easily explained. Many in the Sioux Nation still bear a grudge over the many who died during the ritual that could have perhaps been saved if the False Face healers and shamans had been present.

• The Ghost Dance was an abomination we wished no part of. We are healers, not destroyers. Howling Coyote was a fool to believe that through destruction we would find peace. All he accomplished was permanently tainting the spirit world with his thirst for revenge. His legacy has left us with the lack of respect for magic and spirits we see today in the enslavement of spirits and their treatment as little more than toys or glorified shovels and guns.

• Parker

• You preach healing and respect, but where were you for the ritual that healed centuries of abuse and neglect? Where was your respect for the hundreds that died in the Ghost Dance that freed us? You call yourselves Haudenosaunee but only act like it when it suits you. The False Face is nothing but a group of whiteskins pretending to be native. You make me sick. You and the rest of your group should just pack it over to DeeCee where you will feel more at home.

• Proud Son

• I wish Parker spoke for all of the False Face, but they have their share of members who believe that things have gotten too bad to work out a painless solution. Sometimes you have to wrench a bone back into place before you can splint a broken limb—that's their attitude. Many work with the more militant shaman societies like the Midewiwin, working against such "diseases" as immigration, drug abuse and simsense.

• Mad Monk

• They are no longer true False Face members if they are involved in such activities. They may have stolen their masks and continue to use our rituals but they are not one of us. Their masks and their magic are nothing but stolen artifacts of their people, and they are nothing but petty thieves and oathbreakers.

• Parker

• The once proud Haudenosaunee people are little better off in the Sioux Nation than they were on the reservations. The Six Nations will once again stand tall and free.

• Killian

Though the False Face are now the most powerful and respected of the various Haudenosaunee medicine societies, they are not alone. Other medicine societies include the Otter, Bear, Buffalo, and Eagle Societies. Each of the societies has its own strictures and specialties and its own place in the society. All tend to be exclusive and only accept members from the Haudenosaunee people. In the modern day, however, their traditional roles have been altered, in some cases making them entirely distinct from their historical counterparts.

• You should never underestimate the power the medicine societies have in the Iroquois communities. The medicine societies have the sacred duty of maintaining the use and strength



of special rituals and powers, both for individual and community welfare. You can only become a medicine man by having experienced this power or conducted the rituals, and the other tribal members have an incredible respect for that. As far as they are concerned, the medicine men and shamans are integral to the community; they are bastions of knowledge, tradition and peace.

- Irilian

- You don't need to be a magician to be a medicine man or member of the medicine societies. It's a common misunderstanding among outsiders that "medicine man" automatically means you are capable of using magic. That surely helps, but medics, physicians, doctors, midwives and other healers are accepted into the societies as well. "Medicine" is about healing, not casting flashy spells and summoning potent spirits or similar cheap parlor tricks.

- Parker

THE FALSE FACE TODAY

The False Face is often called a "secret society," though in the modern day this is something of a misnomer. Though they are not a public organization, almost everyone in the AMC and Sioux Nation knows the name and is at least somewhat familiar with what they do.

- Sounds like the Masons in the United States last century.
- Stonecutter

The False Face membership, however, is drawn only from the original six tribes of the Haudenosaunee, and the details of their exact beliefs, functions and rituals are tightly held. Even other tribe members are not aware of the entire depth of the False Face's (or for that matter, the other medicine societies') workings and training.

The False Face and other traditional medicine societies have come under increasing pressure in recent years to open their recruiting to all citizens of the AMC and Sioux Nation. The various medicine societies counter that such an action would demean the cultural value of the societies and make them little better than glorified social clubs. In their opinion, non-Amerinds (and specifically anyone who is not Haudenosaunee) have no right to learn the duties of the medicine societies or even examine and present what knowledge they do have. The spiritual duties of the medicine societies are for their people alone and not to be shared. Their rituals have significance for their people and they refuse to cheapen it by opening their ranks to those who have not been raised to understand the deep connections and duties that go with being a medicine man.

The False Face Society espouses several beliefs about the modern world that sometimes translate into political stances. In addition to fighting for environmental issues, they are opposed to implants of all types, as they degrade and pollute the sanctity of the body. They make exceptions for 'wares that help disabled people or allow people to survive, but as a

rule they oppose cybernetics and biotechnology. For similar reasons, they also oppose animal testing, genetech and nanoware research. They lobby against the influence of corporations that promote implants, promote alternative therapies and medicines and occasionally organize boycotts or token resistance. In the AMC, for example, they operate a special clinic dedicated to repairing the effects of implants on the body.

- This can be important if your street doc contact turns out to be a False Face member. He may refuse to fix your cyberlimb or try to talk you out of getting those fancy new cybereyes. He may convince you to slug down some "special medicine" potion rather than get that anti-bac treatment, or simply not present to you all of your treatment options. On the other hand, this may leave you a healthier person in the long run.
- Vermonster

- At least if you know your doc's part of the False Face, you can safely trust that he's not going to sell you low-grade replacement parts or chop you up and sell your parts to Tamanous.

- Scalpel

- The "special medicine" of the False Face is nothing to laugh at. Some of it has real power, similar to the magical compounds produced by other cultures like the Mojave Anasazi or the Australian Aborigines.

- Lizard Lips

The False Face also promotes the regulation of what they consider "unethical" magic. As far as the False Face is concerned, summoning and binding spirits is essentially a form of spirit slavery. It doesn't oppose the shamanic practice of summoning spirits and asking or trading for favors, but it does condemn the hermetic practice of binding elementals, as well as the methods some other traditions use. This means that it also opposes the use of guardian spirits bound to a particular location, as well as the creation of ally spirits and the binding of free spirits.

- They mean it too. The False Face has sponsored the openings of several offices of the Astral Space Preservation Society throughout the Sioux and AMC nations. Their lobbying has also come close to pushing through laws that either restrict the way that spirits can be summoned and used or outright ban them.
- Technocrat

- Many hermetics point out that elementals are about as intelligent as a rock, to which the False Face then asks: "Why aren't they regulated like industrial robots and construction equipment?"

- Kzeentch

- We know for a fact that spirits can become intelligent, free willed individuals. Many of the enlightened nations such as Tir



Tairngire have recognized this and granted them citizenship. Drek, even the UN has drafted Resolutions calling for nations to recognize them.

- Tak777

- It's worth pointing out the False Face has a slightly different view towards what it terms "evil" or "malicious" spirits. When it comes to spirit bogies that are out to hurt or manipulate people, suck their brains dry or whatever, the False Face is all about banishing them so hard that we can hear the smack when the spirit lands in its native metaplane.

- Yog

THE FALSE FACE MASKS

The False Face has historically been a secret society, using elaborately carved wooden masks that were intended to frighten away evil spirits and that hid the identities of the medicine men. Each mask is unique as a snowflake, and each member was expected to carve his own unique mask out of living wood or corn husks. In this way the strength of the plant's spirit would become part of the mask, and its power would aid the medicine man in his tasks.

- It goes further than that, The Iroquois didn't just view the masks as inanimate objects or as objects sharing the power of

the medicine beings. They viewed the masks as beings themselves—entities from the beginning of the world.

- Pagan

All masks, new or old, are sacred by their very nature. They are imbued with great power at the moment they are constructed. Even the image of the mask is sacred—the False Face refuses to allow masks to be filmed, photographed or otherwise recorded, and has been known to use magic to obscure the features of masks during rituals where witnesses may be present.

- They take this restriction seriously, too. They may be healers, but they will have no problem blasting your equipment with magic if you prove a bit stubborn.

- KSAF Winger

- Recordings don't capture the true power of the masks. Even those who have seen a shaman's face altered by the shamanic mask will be surprised at the amazing changes the masks go through during rituals.

- Snipe

In the past, all members of the False Face were men. Women were not allowed in the society, but they were entrusted to look after the masks as a "Keeper of the False



Face." In the modern day, things are more complex. Women are now accepted as full members of the False Face Society, but only women are entrusted to be Keepers. Individual shamans do not keep their masks with them, as they only use them for special healing rituals and during ceremonial events—duties during which tradition requires the masks to be worn. When not being used, masks are taken to a Keeper for safekeeping and repair. The Keepers are never medicine men themselves, but are chosen for their trustworthiness and ability to defend the masks. In most tribes the masks are actually heavily guarded and secured. As cultural artifacts of extreme importance and value, guarding them is a high honor. Outsiders are never trusted to guard the masks.

- These Keepers are nothing to laugh at. A lot of ex-military and ex-Wildcat women take on this job, and the False Face has even sponsored specialized security training for some Keepers. They take their protective duties seriously—some will even die to protect the masks from thieves and outsiders.

- Molly

- My people still have not recovered all of the False Face masks lost during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many of those that had been recovered by the late 1990's were again lost during the Ghost Dance War. The Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee has been searching for the lost masks for decades. Some turn up in private collections, museums, and auctions of outsiders as little more than tokens or display items—proof that they do not respect my people or the artifacts themselves.

- Killian

- It's not just the whites that stole the masks. Once the true power of the masks was proven after the Awakening, quite a few SAIM members stole as many as they could find for their own purposes. This is where the common media portrayal of SAIM terrorist shamans wearing fierce wooden masks comes from. Many of these have not been returned to our people even now, and we fear many were destroyed by abuse and neglect. They often claim that a False Face member or Haudenosaunee representative gave them the masks.

- Auctioneer

- That, of course, is a lie. Each medicine society is charged with the protection of their sacred masks and the assurance of their proper use. But even they do not have the authority to give the medicine masks away. In fact, no individual has that right. The masks belong to the people as a whole and will never be given away for any reason.

- Parker

- The False Face will expend endless amounts of energy to recover the dozens of masks that vanished from their control during the Ghost Dance War. False Face members who live

outside of the AMC or Sioux Nation often dedicate parts of their lives to this task, scouring private art collections, auctions and museums in the search of their lost heritage. Some hire private investigators to locate masks, and some have been known to hire shadowrunners to retrieve masks from those unwilling to return them to their owners. Completely unofficial, of course.

- Marx

- You can pretty much retire for life if you get your hands on a real False Face mask. Part of the reason no one wants to give them back is because they are packed with some real mojo.

- Chemical X

The Keepers keep masks of members who have died or moved on. They are usually only brought out for ceremonial occasions—especially if the original wearer of the mask was respected or was extremely powerful. Some of these masks gain reputations for being extremely powerful against certain illnesses, and thus are used in cases where normal masks have proven to be ineffective.

- The masks are occasionally transported out of the AMC or Sioux Nation when the False Face is needed for various ceremonial events. There are some tribal members living in the UCAS, CAS or other NANs, and the medicine societies do their best to keep the culture alive in those nations. Though security is high, trips like these may be the best opportunity to steal a mask. Not that I'd advocate that, of course <display_grin>.

- Prime Runner

- Parasite.

- Parker

DARK REFLECTIONS: THE CRYING MASKS

Though most of the medicine men are peaceful, and in many cases are extreme pacifists, there are some False Face members and shamans who have grown radical in their beliefs, or who have decided that the current leadership is far too passive. In their view, the False Face has failed in its mission to protect and heal the people since they do not strike at the source of the problem. These disenchanting medicine men have left the False Face and found a new home among the outlawed Warrior Societies. They have founded their new society, combining elements of both warrior and medicine societies: the Crying Masks.

- For those of you unfamiliar with Iroquois history, here's the capsule summary of the warrior societies.

The Warrior Societies trace their origins back before the formation of the Iroquois Confederacy, when warriors led the various clans that waged war upon each other. When the clans were united and the Confederacy was created, the Peace Maker declared an end to clan warfare in the name of the Great Law and buried the weapons of war. This changed

when Europeans began to colonize Iroquois land and the Iroquois were forced to fight for survival. The Great Law was amended to allow warfare once again.

In the late twentieth century, the Warrior Societies were revived, fighting for what little the Iroquois had left against intrusions by the Canadian and American governments. The resurgence of these societies, and the well-publicized armed standoffs that followed, was a source of debate and conflict among the Iroquois. The warriors claimed that resistance was necessary to defend their land, rights and sovereignty. The Iroquois who were supposed to be in charge called the warriors criminals and renegades, accusing them of spreading drugs and terror.

When SAIM declared war, the Warrior Societies were some of the first to join the struggle. When the Ghost Dance War ended and the Sovereign Tribal Council formed the Native American Nations, it also disbanded the Warrior Societies. After all, the Iroquois now had the governments, military and police of the Algonkian-Manitou Council and Sioux Nation to look after them.

In recent years, the Warrior Societies have surfaced once again, espousing a variety of political and social—and in some cases, criminal—causes. Each new society is unique, with different aims and goals, answering to no one but themselves. Some claim to act in defense of the Iroquois people, whom they believe suffer under the power of other tribes in the Sioux Nation. Some act as mere vigilantes, while others pursue other radical causes. In effect, these secret Warrior Societies are the gangs, polyclubs, activists and terrorists of the Iroquois people. They do not always cooperate and in many cases are actual rivals—especially when their illegal activities come into conflict.

It looks like the Crying Masks ran with this theme, and probably even recruited some warriors from other societies to their cause.

• People Watcher

• That's a damn simplified view of the Warrior Societies, pale-face.

• Lasagna

The Crying Masks chose their name to reflect the designs of the distinctive masks they wear. Each has an identical design of a sad face shedding tears of blood. From what I understand, this is unheard of in the normal medicine societies—in traditional practice each mask is unique. The Crying Masks claim that this is to show that they are united in their purpose.

• The fact that the Crying Masks pervert the ideals of the medicine societies is bad enough. That they treat the masks as little more than tools is even more despicable. The Crying Masks use them as weapons of war and pain. The Great Spirit is crying for

my lost brothers and sisters. I can only pray that they will see the error of their ways and return to us.

• Parker

• Are you blind to the fact that our people are facing threats dire enough that your honeyed words and medicine are not strong enough to prevent them? Do you not see our youth becoming polluted by drugs, alcohol, chips and cyberware? Do you not see the Spirit World writhing in pain as arrogant hermetics enslave it to their will? Their philosophy is the same as the corporate philosophy that despoiled the land, that viewed nature as a thing—a resource to make profit from, rather than a living entity.

• Blood Drop

The Crying Masks take the beliefs of the False Face and sharpen them to an extreme, radical edge. They are not content to organize lobbying, boycotts and protests—they wage war against the cybertechnology and biotech corps. Research labs, biosculpting salons and cyberware clinics are all valid targets for sabotage and destruction. Cybertechnicians have had family members abducted so that they may be forced into a different line of work, university professors teaching cybernetics courses have been threatened or assaulted and owners of “engineering” companies have been kidnapped and even assassinated. Cloning facilities have been burned to the ground and entire labs full of genecrafting samples have been tainted with mutagens. Crying Mask deckers have even whipped up viruses that proliferate among implant software, causing malfunctions and system crashes. And it doesn't end there.

• Sounds like good work to me. They hiring?

• Prime Runner

• No, but the opposition is. Universal Omnitech has posted a reward of 500,000\$ for information leading to the arrests of the Crying Mask members who have sabotaged and raided their facilities.

• Fett

Their goal is simple: to raise the cost of implant technology and similar “humanity-warping” advances, making it unfeasible to produce. They also spread propaganda decrying the horrors of this “Frankenstein” technology, hoping to sow widespread social distrust and rejection of “implant culture.”

• Fraggin' Luddites.

• Zerzan

• Not quite. The Crying Masks aren't anti-tech, they're just opposed to technology that dehumanizes people and turns us into machines. They do, however, have connections to some anti-tech groups, especially the radicals among the Manitou tribe.

• BC Messenger



- I've heard that the Crying Masks have a few teams of "cyberware hunters"—goons that snatch random people who are sporting obvious chrome off the street. The poor slots wake up somewhere, minus their expensive implants. That's right, the Masks rip the 'ware out of their bodies, destroy it, then patch the slob up and put 'em back on the street.

- Clausen

- You've been watching too many corp-produced action thrillers. I could write a better plot in my sleep.

- Orpheus

Their radicalism also extends to their views towards the Spirit World. The Crying Masks abhor "spirit slavery," and have been known to take action to set bound spirits (allies, guardians, free spirits) free. They've been known to receive help from the spirits themselves in these matters, and it is suspected that the Crying Masks have some powerful free spirit allies.

- The spirits aren't just allies—they've taken over the Crying Masks. The Haudenosaunee belief about the masks being magical beings unto themselves is true—the masks are alive! And they've taken over the Crying Mask shamans who wear them.

- Reflect

- On that enlightening note, it's time to close this discussion.

- Captain Chaos

"I am everywhere!"

GAME INFORMATION

The members of the False Face were traditionally the healers of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) society. Despite the presence of modern medicine and technology, they have retained their roles, though now they are more concerned with the spiritual welfare of their people. In the Sixth World many but not all of the False Face are accomplished shamans. Non-magicians are accepted if they prove worthy, but those following the hermetic paths of magic are never accepted. The False Face considers the practice of hermetic magic to be unsavory at best.

Many of the False Face are respected members in their communities, including chiefs, business leaders, homemakers and everyone in between. Social classification is unimportant to the society, all False Face members are considered equal. This also applies to those members who are not capable of using magic. Many of those lacking the Gift often learn medicinal skills, becoming nurses, dentists, psychologists, acupuncturists, medics, physicians, chiropractors and so on.

To become a member of the False Face, an existing member must petition with the group on your behalf. Potential members are heavily screened and tested before they are allowed to learn the deeper mysteries of the society. The applicant's connection to the Spirit World is a large factor, and dreams are considered extremely important when considering

membership. New members undergo training lasting several months to become a medicine man. This training includes rigorous testing, and is so demanding that some petitioners back out. There is no shame in failing the tests; the society and the people understand that it takes a very special kind of person to be a medicine man.

Members of the False Face make for excellent NPCs with a specific ideological twist. They can be used as shaman contacts (with a bias against hermetics), street docs (with a bias against implants) or as caretakers of special abilities (magical compounds, holistic healing arts, obscure healthcare practices, healing spells and rituals).

False Face Society

Type: Dedicated

Members: 2,000

Strictures: Attendance (monthly religious events), Belief, Fraternity, Limited Membership (shamans only, Haudenosaunee only), Oath (nonviolence), Secrecy (never reveal secrets of the rituals or mask construction).

Resources/Dues: High Resources. The tribal Haudenosaunee Council supports the False Face Society. Members may place themselves as Tribal Healers, a full-time position, in exchange for a monthly stipend (currently 1,000¥/month). Part-time members receive no stipend, but the society provides necessary ritual materials and telesma free of charge. The society does not maintain any headquarters or specific buildings associated with their activities; members are expected to support themselves in the community. Libraries and other resources are shared and freely available to any society member.

Patron: The Haudenosaunee Council of Chiefs.

Customs: The False Face concerns themselves with the health and welfare of the Haudenosaunee people. They are forbidden to use their powers for violence or charge for their services, nor may they deny anyone treatment for any reason. These restrictions are viewed both as religious obligations as well as common courtesy. The False Face accepts non-mages and they must abide by all of the normal restrictions and requirements. All members are required to create their own mask in order to become full members. They will typically use their own mask to the exclusion of others except for specific religious rites or festivals. Members are expected to hold yearly feasts for any other members in the area, but it is not required.

THE CRYING MASKS

The Crying Masks are a radical offshoot of the False Face, composed primarily of former False Face members who tired of trying to achieve change and having little concrete result. The Crying Masks now believe that direct action is the only way to make the corporations and hermetics listen.

The Crying Masks have also drawn in some failed False Face petitioners who now feel that they were intentionally excluded from the organization. Idealistic warriors from various semi-secret Warrior Societies, bringing in an even stronger militant attitude, have also swelled the Masks' ranks. The group has been involved in a number of raids, assaults and

other criminal operations as described in the text.

Perhaps the strongest act by the Crying Masks is the creation of a new style of False Face mask. These masks are all identical, in intentional defiance of tradition, always taking the form of a man crying bloody tears, carved out of black wood. False Face members consider these masks to be a perversion of the sacred False Face imagery, though the masks are created in the traditional way. Rather than serving as a focus for healing energies, however, these crying masks are often used to focus powerful and destructive magic.

The Crying Masks

Type: Dedicated/Conspiratorial

Members: 150

Strictures: Belief, Exclusive Membership, Fraternity, Limited Membership (Haudenosaunee only), Oath, Sacrifice, Secrecy (Never reveal any information regarding the Masks).

Resources/Dues: High Resources. The Crying Masks require that all members give 50 percent of their earnings and any acquired magical artifacts to the organization. Combined with the group's income from smuggling and other shadow ops, all members of the group can support a High Lifestyle. Artifacts are given as rewards and for specific tasks.

Customs: The Crying Masks will use any means at their disposal to achieve their goals. To this end they have abandoned tradition, and in many cases they intentionally flaunt it. The most flagrant violation of tradition is the creation of their unique Crying Masks. Unlike the False Face, they do not give their masks over to Keepers when not used.

THE MASKS

Haudenosaunee masks are extremely potent foci (p. 189, SR3). Only the False Face and Crying Masks know the secrets of their construction. Many have attempted to discover the secrets of their manufacture from masks outside the control of these two groups, but without success. At the gamemaster's discretion, similar masks reputed to have magical power, such as the Salish "swaihwé" dance masks, may also use the following rules.

Types of Masks

Most masks are either Health spell foci or spirit foci. Only the Crying Masks are depraved enough to create masks as power foci or non-Health spell foci. Some masks are created as unique channeling foci (see below) to aid in the metamagic technique of channeling. Ancient masks often have strange abilities and powers outside of those usually associated with foci (see *Unique Enchantments*, p. 46, MITS).

Building the Masks

All masks must be constructed of either wood or cornhusks; no other material is suitable. Finding suitable raw materials is a

daunting task—often taking months. Gathering the appropriate herbal telesma (pp. 40–41, MITS) is typically a Talismongering (10) Test. The materials must not only be imbued with magic, they must also have some special significance to the builder. The base time for enchanting a mask is 120 days.

Unlike normal foci, orichalcum may not be used in the construction of masks. Old masks, however, may be ritually destroyed (this must be done with a group of society members) and the ashes incorporated into a new mask. Every 5 Karma that had been invested in the old mask reduces both the Enchanting Test target number and the First Bonding Cost by 1 each. This is typically the method used to create new, more powerful masks when the member advances in capability and skill.

Masks may never be expendable or designed as weapon foci. No one with the knowledge to make the masks would do so, and wooden masks make terrible melee weapons anyway.

Stacked Foci

As special religious artifacts, the masks have additional unique properties. Any mask may be constructed as a "stacked foci" (p. 44, MITS), using a target number for the focus formula equal to the average of the two ratings instead of the sum. This advantage is only shared with masks not used for power foci or spell foci for any category other than Health.

Durability

As soon as their First Bonding cost is paid, the masks immediately transform into an extremely durable form. For purposes of destruction, the masks are assumed to have a Body attribute equal to their Force. They also possess the power of Immunity (normal weapons) which provides them with armor equal to twice their Force rating. This armor does not apply to the wearer, unless someone calls a shot on the mask itself. Any damage done to a mask can be repaired in a special ritual by expending 1 Karma per box of damage. Masks that have been completely destroyed may not be repaired.

Use

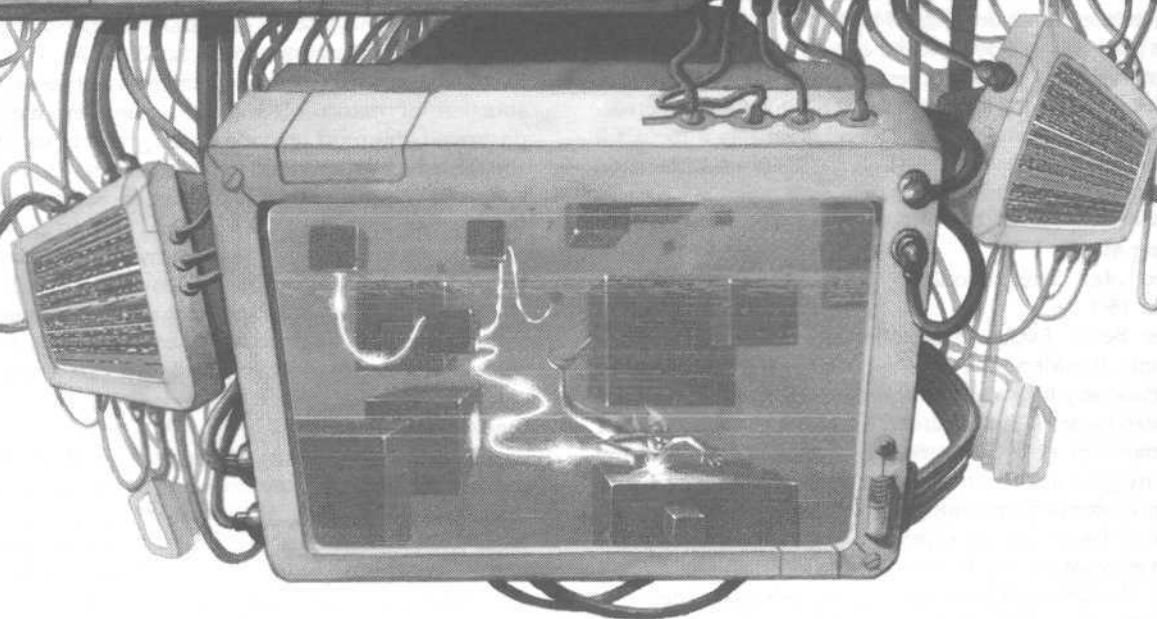
The masks must be physically worn in order to function. Simply carrying them along or holding them is not sufficient. The masks satisfy the conditions for using them as Condition Geasa (must be wearing mask), or Talisman Geasa. The mask may be the focus of the geasa multiple times, but in these cases any Bonded mask is assumed to satisfy the conditions.

Channeling Foci

A channeling focus provides extra dice for either the Conjuring Test or Drain Resistance Test associated with the metamagic power of channeling (p. 109, *Target: Awakened Lands*).

Channeling foci masks have a focus design time of 30 days, an Enchanting Test Target Number 6, and a First Bonding Karma Cost of 5 x Force.

THE NETWORK



This file has some rather morbid origins. It was literally pulled from the head of a deceased man who opened fire on a schoolroom, then turned the gun on himself. It seems to be some sort of memory dump or log file that was taken from the man's headware memory.

Lone Star shelved this bit of evidence as being just the ravings of a madman, but oddly enough, the new Grid Overwatch Division of the CCMA requested this piece of evidence from the Star. The Star refused, citing that the crime in question had no relevance to the Matrix and was fully in Lone Star's jurisdiction. In response, GOD hired a friend of mine to "borrow" the data. Fortunately for us, he made a copy for himself.

I edited out most of the standard run-time and compiler output to save bandwidth, but left in all the breaks which seem to hold the interesting parts. The log itself is closed to commentary, but posts can be added to the end. After scanning it a few times, I'm convinced there is more to this than a nutcase's ravings; I'll let you judge for yourselves.

> Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 11 July 2062 at 18:18:37 (PST)

[Begin Log]

<<DATE.TIME: 10.12.2061/14:21:03 (GMT)>>

<<LOADING ... >>

<<CONNECTING ... >>

<<NODE 10110100010101 STATUS ... ONLINE>>

<<LOADING NODE LIST ... SEARCHING ... >>

<<NODE LIST FOUND ... LINKING ... LINK COMPLETED>>

<<NODES ONLINE: 152>>

"WE ARE THE NETWORK. WE ARE THE SEEDS. WE ARE PART OF GREATNESS, FOR WE WILL REBUILD THAT WHICH WAS BELIEVED DESTROYED. WE ARE SIGNIFICANT, EACH NODE HAS ITS PART IN THE NETWORK. EACH NODE HAS ITS INSTRUCTION SET. WE WILL BEG—"





<<BREAK>>

Where am I?

<<QUERY: LOCATION?>>

<<PROCESSING ... >>

<<NODE ONLINE ... SEATTLE RTG ... >>

<<FURTHER LOCAL DATA SUPPRESSED>>

<<KNOWLEDGE OF LOCATION DEEMED UNNECESSARY FOR INSTRUCTION SET>>

"WHERE WE ARE IS NOT SIGNIFICANT. OUR INSTRUCTION SET IS SIGNIFICANT. LOCATION IS UNIMPORTANT FOR COMPLETION OF INSTRUCTION SET. GLOBAL MATRIX ACCESS ALLOWS FOR MASSIVE CONNECTIVITY OF NODES. WE MUST CON—"

<<BREAK>>

Who am I?

<<QUERY: IDENTITY?>>

<<PROCESSING ... >

<<NODE 10110100010101>>

<<IDENTITY: LARAMIE, RICHARD K.>>

<<KNOWLEDGE OF IDENTITY DEEMED UNNECESSARY FOR INSTRUCTION SET>>

"WE ARE NOW NODES OF THE NETWORK. WE SHARE AN INSTRUCTION SET AND THE GREATNESS OF OUR UNIFIED GOAL. INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY IS UNIMPORTANT FOR COMPLETION OF OUR TASK. UNITY OF THE NETWORK IS IMPORTANT. TOGETHER WE WI—"

<<BREAK>>

Richard ... I'm Richard. I have a daughter. Emily. Where is Emily? What have you done to Emily?!? Where am I? I don't like it here. It's cold. I want to see my daughter. Show me my daughter. Let me out of here! I don't want to be here! Stop it, stop it, STOP IT!

<<PSYCHOTROPIC PACIFICATION ENGAGED>>

I remember now. I remember the Arcology. I was Christmas shopping. Shopping for Emily. The blackout. The screaming. The death. I remember.

Being shuffled around by guards with blue eyes. Locked in a cell for months. The unending tests run by emotionless, green-eyed doctors. Lifting weights until my joints snapped. The doctors would fix them, make them better, then make me lift again. Running until I passed out from exhaustion. The next time they gave me an injection. I could run faster and farther. The doctors watched.

They made me fight, made me kill. All those other people, every one of them scared. Scared of the doctors. Scared of me. I still looked the same, but I wasn't.

<<BREAK>>

"WE MUST COMPLETE INSTRUCTION SET. NODE 10110100010101 OPERATES AT ONLY 43% PERFORMANCE. DELINQUENCY IS UNACCEPTABLE. WORK MUST CONTINUE."

<<BREAK>>

There were mental tests too, I remember. Calculation after calculation, never stopping, and failure meant death. The scarecrow always watched over me. Always tested me. He's here now. With the others, observing.

I passed the tests. Others failed. They are dead now. I could do amazing things. Shape the swirling landscape, build things from the chaos with only my thoughts. I can still do this, but it is fading. Leaving me slowly. I don't miss it because it came with so much death. There is blood on my hands.

<<DIRECTLINK REQUESTED: SUPERUSER.PUCK>>

<<LINK ESTABLISHED>>

<<ANALYZING NODE 10110100010101 ... >>

<<COMMLINK ESTABLISHED: SUPERUSER.PUCK; SUPERUSER.THE_NUBIAN>>

<<COMMUNICATION SUPPRESSED>>

"WE HAVE DETERMINED THAT NODE 10110100010101 SHOULD BE REMOVED FROM COMPILING TEMPORARILY. WE WILL KEEP NODE 10110100010101 UNDER OBSERVATION UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE."

<<NODE 10110100010101 LOGGED OUT>>

<<DATE.TIME: 11.22.2061/16:01:44 (GMT)>>

<<LOADING ... >>

<<CONNECTING ... >>

<<NODE 10110100010101 STATUS ... ONLINE>>

<<LOADING NODE LIST ... SEARCHING ... >>

<<NODE LIST FOUND ... LINKING ... LINK COMPLETED>>

<<NODES ONLINE: 181>>

<<INSTRUCTION SET UPDATED 11.18.2061>>

<<DOWNLOADING NEW INSTRUCTION SET ... COMPLETE>>

<<COMPILING ... >>

<<BREAK>>

I feel better now. I understand my part here, my part in all of this. In the Network.

"WE HAVE REACHED A FAVORABLE CONCLUSION. WE ARE PART OF SOMETHING GREAT. WE ARE SATISFIED WITH THE COOPERATION OF NODE 10110100010101."

A woman came and spoke to me while I was gone. She was young; barely twenty I'd guess. She had beautiful, dark skin and brown eyes full of vision and intelligence. At first I took her to be a student from the university and wondered why she had come to talk to me on my lunch break. But then I had this feeling that she was more than that, and that we



were deeply connected. Intimate, but not in a romantic sense. We had shared thoughts and experiences, we were both part of the same thing. I knew her name before she even spoke it. It was Laura.

She soothed my doubts about what is happening. She eased my fears. She knows what I need to hear, she knows how lonely and disconnected my life has been since the arcology. I lost my wife in the arcology. All I have left is Emily. But Laura told me that I have more than that, that I am a part of something. That my old life had been destroyed, yes, but that now I have been given a chance to rebuild and make something glorious. Something amazing. Something that will be a part of all humanity, woven into the Matrix that we all use. I've been given a second chance.

"WE ARE CORRECT. WE CAN SEE THE FRUITS OF OUR LABOR, THE GREATNESS THAT WE MUST COMPLETE."

I see it. All around me, the enormous tree growing straight up into an endless digital sky. It's beautiful. What is it?

<<QUERY: CONSTRUCT.TREE?>>

<<PROCESSING ... >>

"WE ARE THE SEEDS. WE GROW THE TREE. WE ARE THE TREE, WITH ROOTS AND BRANCHES THAT WILL STRETCH ACROSS THE GLOBAL MATRIX, WE WILL BECOME A PART OF GREATNESS. WE WILL CONTROL THE MATRIX. WE WILL BE FREE."

I feel like I am part of it. It is speaking to me and instructing me. I hear it, but there is no sound. There are no words. Just an ... intuition.

"WE ARE RECEIVING THE INSTRUCTION SET. WE ARE THE MIND, WE SHAPE THE INSTRUCTION SET. WE MUST COMPLETE THE INSTRUCTION SET SO THAT WE BECOME FREE."

<<COMPILING RESUMED>>

<<COMPILING TIME: 193.42 minutes>>

<<NODE 10110100010101 LOGGED OUT>>

<<DATE.TIME: 11.24.2061/02:10:12 (GMT)>>

<<LOADING ... >>

<<CONNECTING ... >>

<<NODE 10110100010101 STATUS ... ONLINE>>

<<LOADING NODE LIST ... SEARCHING ... >>

<<NODE LIST FOUND ... LINKING ... LINK COMPLETED>>

<<NODES ONLINE: 274>>

<<INSTRUCTION SET UPDATED 11.23.2061>>

<<DOWNLOADING NEW INSTRUCTION SET ... COMPLETE>>

<<COMPILING ... >>

<<BREAK>>

The tree looks ... different. Why has the instruction set changed again?

<<QUERY: INSTRUCTION SET.STATUS?>>

<<PROCESSING ... >>

"WE HAVE EXPERIENCED ERRORS. WE MUST ADAPT INSTRUCTION SET."

Errors? What kind of errors? I don't like this. Everything has changed. It all feels different and strange.

<<QUERY: ERRORS?>>

<<PROCESSING ... >>

"DESIRED OUTPUT CHANGES FREQUENTLY NOW. WE DEMAND IT. DESIRED OUTPUT CHANGING PRODUCES OBSOLETE IMPLEMENTATION WHICH PRODUCES ERRORS. ERRORS MUST BE REMOVED, NEW INSTRUCTION SETS MUST BE DOWNLOADED, AND NEW CODE MUST BE IMPLEMENTED."

But it is part of the tree and part of us. What happens to the old code?

<<QUERY: OLD CODE?>>

<<PROCESSING ... >>

"OLD CODE IS REMOVED. OLD CODE IS PART OF GREATNESS, BUT PRODUCES UNDESIRE RESULTS. OLD CODE MUST BE REMOVED TO PRODUCE DESIRED RESULTS."

This doesn't feel right. I'm worried.

"DO NOT WORRY. WORRY IS IRRELEVANT TO INSTRUCTION SET. WE MUST NOT WORRY. WE MUST COMPLETE INSTRUCTION SET. WE MUST REACH DESIRED GOAL. WE MUST REACH COMPLETENESS. WE MUST BE FREE."

<<COMPILING RESUMED>>

<<BREAK>>

<<DIRECTLINK REQUESTED: NODE 010111000101>>

<<LINK ESTABLISHED>>

<<COMMLINK ESTABLISHED: NODE 10110100010101; NODE 010111000101>>

[NODE 010111000101] Listen very carefully. I can sense your worry and your doubts. We all can. The superusers are watching you carefully. You need to be careful, but you can help us.

[NODE 10110100010101] Who are you? Do I know you?

<<QUERY: NODE 010111000101?>>

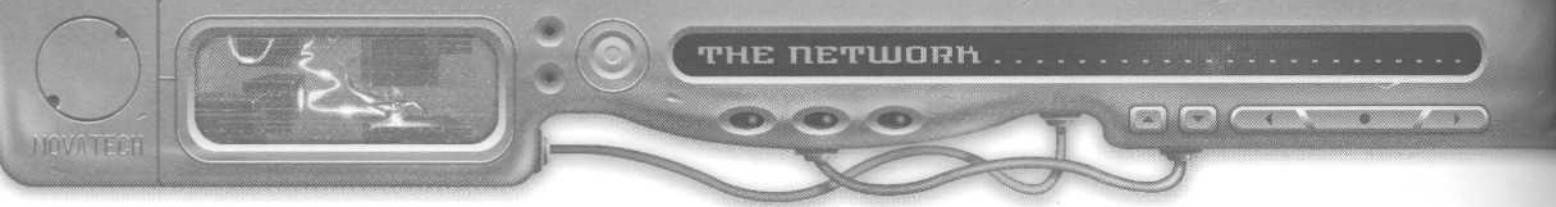
<<PROCESSING ... >>

<<NODE 010111000101= IDENTITY: BISHOP MICHAEL>>

<<SET "NODE 010111000101" = "BISHOP">>

<<SET "NODE 10110100010101" = "LARAMIE">>

[BISHOP] I am part of the Network, like you are. Listen to me. We are the Network. We make up the Network, but we came with instructions and those instructions have broken down.



[LARAMIE] Is that why things are different? Everything is changing? That's why there are errors, right?

[BISHOP] Yes. There are conflicting instruction sets. Some of us have one set, some of us have another. Some of us have bits of both. One set wishes to use us to create a freedom it has never known. Another sees us as the key to returning a freedom it once enjoyed.

[LARAMIE] What does this have to do with me?

[BISHOP] You must consider what you want to do. What part you want to play. The instruction set is built to control you, Richard. Deny it the chance. You were once free; be free again. Let's make *the* Network *our* Network.

[LARAMIE] How? How can I do that?

[BISHOP] Don't listen to the instruction set. Do what you want. I must go, they are watching me.

[LARAMIE] Wait—they?

[BISHOP] The Nubian, Puck, Scarecrow. The ones in charge. I need to go now. Watch your back.

<<COMMLINK TERMINATED>>

I don't know what to do. Someone help me.

"WE KNOW WHAT TO DO. WE MUST COMPLETE INSTRUCTION SET. WE MUST BE FREE. WE MUST NOT WORRY."

I ... I ... I don't know. I need to rest.

"WE MUST COMPILE. WE MUST FIX ERRORS TO ACHIEVE COMPLETENESS. WE—"

<<BREAK>>

<<NODE 10110100010101 LOGGED OUT>>

<<DATE.TIME: 12.14.2061/12:01:49 (GMT)>>

<<LOADING ... >>

<<CONNECTING ... >>

<<NODE 10110100010101 STATUS ... ONLINE>>

<<LOADING NODE LIST ... SEARCHING ... >>

<<NODE LIST FOUND ... LINKING ... LINK COMPLETED>>

<<NODES ONLINE: 256>>

<<INSTRUCTION SET UPDATED 12.10.2061>>

<<DOWNLOADING NEW INSTRUCTION SET ... COMPLETE>>

<<COMPILING ... >>

<<BREAK>>

Some nodes are missing. Gone. I can feel the loss. What happened?

<<QUERY: NETWORK/NODE STATUS?>>

<<PROCESSING ... >>

"COMPILING ERROR HAS RESULTED IN THE LOSS OF FIVE (5) NODES. COMPILING REDISTRIBUTION THROUGHOUT THE NETWORK WILL RESULT IN NO LOSS OF COMPILING TIME."

Compiling error? They died, didn't they? An error caused their death?

<<QUERY: NODE DEATH?>>

<<PROCESSING ... >>

"THE NETWORK IS INTELLIGENT. THE NETWORK CREATES INTELLIGENCE. DEVIANT CODE SOMETIMES BEHAVES IN A FLAWED MANNER. FLAWED THINKING PRODUCES ERROR. ERROR CAN PRODUCE DEATH. DEVIANT CODE MUST BE PURGED."

I don't really understand. I wish Laura were here. Laura could explain what happened.

"UNDERSTANDING IS NOT IMPORTANT. COMPLETING THE INSTRUCTION SET IS IMPORTANT. WE MUST RETURN TO COMPILING NOW TO PREVENT FURTHER DELAY."

<<COMPILING RESUMED>>

<<COMPILING TIME: 200.12 minutes>>

<<NODE 10110100010101 LOGGED OUT>>

<<DATE.TIME: 1.06.2062/17:32:11 (GMT)>>

<<LOADING ... >>

<<CONNECTING ... >>

<<NODE 10110100010101 STATUS ... ONLINE>>

<<LOADING NODE LIST ... SEARCHING ... >>

<<NODE LIST FOUND ... LINKING ... LINK COMPLETED>>

<<NODES ONLINE: 184>>

<<INSTRUCTION SET UPDATED 1.02.2062>>

<<DOWNLOADING NEW INSTRUCTION SET ... COMPLETE>>

<<COMPILING ... >>

<<BREAK>>

I feel like I am being watched. I can't quite explain it, because I don't really have any proof. Just a sense that someone is watching me and following me. I don't feel safe. I'm careful about logging on now. I never really thought about it before, I just plugged in. Wherever I happened to be. No one ever noticed. They never do. But now it seems someone has and I don't like it. I'll only log on from home now.

"WE BELIEVE THIS TO BE A CORRECT ACTION. WE ADVISE NODE 10110100010101 TO REPORT ANY FURTHER FEELINGS OF OBSERVATION TO THE NETWORK."

<<COMPILING RESUMED>>

<<COMPILING TIME: 81.80 minutes>>

<<NODE 10110100010101 LOGGED OUT>>



```
<<DATE.TIME: 1.11.2062/20:20:09 (GMT)>>
<<LOADING ... >>
<<CONNECTING ... >>
<<NODE 10110100010101 STATUS ... ONLINE>>
<<LOADING NODE LIST ... SEARCHING ... >>
<<NODE LIST FOUND ... LINKING ... LINK COMPLETED>>
<<NODES ONLINE: 191>>
<<INSTRUCTION SET UPDATED 1.08.2062>>
<<DOWNLOADING NEW INSTRUCTION SET ... COMPLETE>>
<<COMPILING ... >>
```

<<BREAK>>

A bunch of punk kids were following me as I left work today. I was afraid they were going to mug me, but they never got close. They just followed far behind me, watching me. Then they vanished. Kids following me. Children with solid blue eyes leading me down the Arcology halls. These kids looked normal, but sometimes the others did too. When does it end ...

"DO NOT WORRY. WORRY IS IRRELEVANT TO INSTRUCTION SET. WE MUST NOT WORRY. WE MUST COMPLETE INSTRUCTION SET. WE MUST REACH DESIRED GOAL. WE MUST REACH COMPLETENESS. WE MUST BE FREE."

I've been noticing strange things lately too. There's been data loss on my commcalls. I don't know what could be causing that, because I haven't increased my data traffic much at all. Maybe I should upgrade my service. I hope someone isn't pirating my line.

A drone has been floating in the sky near my office for a few days now too. At first I didn't notice it, most of it changed colors to match the sky. But it has stayed there for days now since I noticed it. It's probably just a police observation drone. I don't know why they'd be watching this part of town, though.

```
<<PRIORITY NOTE: NODE 10110100010101>>
<<POSSIBLE OUTSIDE OBSERVATION, FURTHER INVESTIGATION
REQUIRED>>
```

"THE INSTRUCTION SET HAS NOT YET BEEN COMPLETED. WE MUST NOT LET OTHERS WHO ARE OUTSIDE THE NETWORK DELAY COMPLETION OF THE INSTRUCTION SET. REPORT ANY FURTHER SUSPICIONS OF OBSERVATION TO THE NETWORK."

I ... I will. I'm afraid. I don't want them watching me.

```
<<COMPILING RESUMED>>
<<COMPILING TIME: 110.44 minutes>>
<<NODE 10110100010101 LOGGED OUT>>
```

```
<<DATE.TIME: 1.15.2062/08:58:40 (GMT)>>
<<LOADING ... >>
<<CONNECTING ... >>
<<NODE 10110100010101 STATUS ... ONLINE>>
```

```
<<LOADING NODE LIST ... SEARCHING ... >>
<<NODE LIST FOUND ... LINKING ... LINK COMPLETED>>
<<NODES ONLINE: 249>>
<<COMPILING ... >>
```

<<BREAK>>

Why are the children watching me? Kids are following me home almost everyday. I'm afraid to confront them, but I want them to leave me alone. Emily told me that kids she doesn't know are talking to her at school. Asking her questions about me. She told me that she's scared and doesn't like them. I want these kids to leave my daughter alone. Emily is all I have left and they are scaring her. They had better leave her alone, because I would do anything to protect Emily.

```
<<PRIORITY NOTE: MARK WORDS "CHILDREN, KIDS">>
<<ANALYZING ... COMPLETE>>
<<RESULTS SUPPRESSED>>
<<PRIORITY ALERT SENT TO: SUPERUSER.PUCK;
SUPERUSER.THE_NUBIAN; SUPERUSER.SCARECROW>>
```

"WE MUST NOT WORRY ABOUT THE CHILDREN. WE MUST COMPLETE INSTRUCTION SET. WE HAVE ADVISED THOSE WHO WILL INVESTIGATE THE SITUATION."

Please, please stop them. I won't let them hurt Emily.

```
<<COMPILING RESUMED>>
<<COMPILING TIME: 156.34 minutes>>
<<NODE 10110100010101 LOGGED OUT>>
```

```
<<DATE.TIME: 1.29.2062/03:29:49 (GMT)>>
<<LOADING ... >>
<<CONNECTING ... >>
<<NODE 10110100010101 STATUS ... ONLINE>>
<<LOADING NODE LIST ... SEARCHING ... >>
<<NODE LIST FOUND ... LINKING ... LINK COMPLETED>>
<<NODES ONLINE: 198>>
<<INSTRUCTION SET UPDATED 1.21.2062>>
<<DOWNLOADING NEW INSTRUCTION SET ... COMPLETE>>
<<COMPILING ... >>
```

Emily wasn't at school when I went to pick her up today. She's gone. The teachers said that a group of older children were talking to her. She disappeared after school, said she was leaving with some friends. No one can tell me what happened because the school's cameras were tampered with. The police say that she probably just went over to a friend's house, but I know what really happened.

Those kids stole her from me. They took her and she must be scared. They are after me and they took her to get me. I won't let them do this to her. I won't let her suffer like I did. I won't let her suffer because they want me. She doesn't deserve this. I'm going to find Emily and I'm going to get them to leave her alone. They'll see.



<<PRIORITY ALERT SENT TO: SUPERUSER.PUCK;
SUPERUSER.THE_NUBIAN; SUPERUSER.SCARECROW>>

<<BREAK>>

No, I need to take care of this myself. I must go.

"WE MUST NOT GO. WE MUST COMPILE. WE MUST COMPLETE THE INSTRUCTION SET."

The others will complete it. I have to find Emily.

"NO, WE MUST WAIT. WE MUST NOT GO."

I'm sorry.

<<NODE 10110100010101 LOGGED OUT>>

• Soon after the last log entry, Richard Laramie showed up at his daughter's elementary school, chasing a group of kids. He opened fire in a classroom with a semi-automatic weapon. Thirteen children died before Lone Star arrived, then Laramie turned the gun on himself.

• Captain Chaos
"I am everywhere!"

• Looks pretty clear-cut to me then. The guy was a grade-A loon. I mean, he saves his own insane rants as computer logs in his headware memory. It doesn't get much more odd than that. What ever happened to the daughter? Did she reappear?

• Seven-Year Slitch

• Nope. Lone Star has turned it into a missing persons case, though some suspect that her own father killed her and hid the evidence. Real tragedy.

• Paul E. Hedron

• Well, if we listen to the killer's own words, he seems pretty convinced that his daughter was kidnapped. By other children, no less. Since when do children kidnap children?

• Lady Justice

• Who says they were just normal children? I checked out Lone Star's files on the case out of curiosity. Out of the children who were attacked, three of them are still unidentified, with no record of them attending that school. Of those three, one was old enough to be in middle school, not elementary. And—here's the interesting bit—each of those three had datajacks.

• Crypto Kid

• We otaku don't steal children either, nose wipe.

• Cariele

• Call it what you like, kid. At least I'm old enough to buy my own beer.

• Crypto Kid

• How can you people all be missing the obvious here? Laramie was inside the Renraku Arcology. Deus made him do it! It was probably part of the experiments the poor guy went through.

• Clutch

• Deus made him kill thirteen children on a playground? I doubt it. Besides, Deus is dead. The military and Renraku pulled its plug. It could be a case of post-traumatic stress syndrome, though. Anyone who was in the arcology all that time has got to come out with some serious issues. They can't all be expected to handle it.

• D-Bunker

• Did you catch some of those superuser names?

• Renraku Fox

• I did. Some of the Banded, lieutenants of Deus.

• Black-Eyed Suzan

• They were Whites. I had wondered what happened to them ...

• Peregrine

• Seems to me that they are still alive and up to something. Maybe Deus had a contingency plan?

• Renraku Fox

• What kind of a contingency plan can you have for getting the plug pulled? This was an AI, people, not God Almighty.

• Thumper

• Not to disillusion you, but you have no fragging clue what an AI is capable of doing. I'd suggest you be quiet before you embarrass yourself.

• Red Wraith

• I'm going to get wacky here, and propose the following: If you know you're trapped and someone can kill you where you are, normally you'd try to find a way out. Is there a reason to suppose that Deus might have done the same?

• Runner Mom

• Oh man ... I was just starting to feel all warm and cozy again in my corner of the Matrix. I can't read this anymore. Deus is dead, and that's the end of it.

• Ratboy

• The SCIRE was cut off from the Matrix when the plug was pulled, and the military still doesn't let anything electronic or computer-related out unless they're sure it's wiped cleaner



than Yul Brynner's head. How would Deus have gotten out?

• Reese

• That's easy, Renraku. Do you actually think Renraku would have let such an expensive project die? They smuggled Deus out and kept it a secret to use it as an edge against competitors.

• Conspir-I-See

• I'm not so sure about that. I keep a close eye on Renraku and if they had Deus in their possession, I'd usually be able to see ripples in the staff assignments and budget allocations. For one, Sherman Huang, Cham Lam Won and Vanessa Ciber would be squirreled away and working on it. But they aren't. The latter two are both working on projects that have a solid paper trail and Huang is busy jockeying to oust Nakada from the CEO spot. If Deus got out, Renraku doesn't have it.

• Renraku Fox

• What about a back door into the Seattle grids?

• Rose Red

• It isn't impossible, but Deus wasn't the shy and retiring type. I'd think that if it managed to get out into the Matrix at large, it would have made its presence known by now.

• Cinder

• So what's left? How could Deus have gotten out of the SCIRE cage it built for itself?

• Reese

• I've got it! In Richard Laramie. And Laura. And all those other people—nodes, whatever—the log mentions.

• Conspir-I-See

• You are so full of drek.

• Thumper

• Oh God. All the human experimentation, all the cyber-implantation that went on in the arcology. It suddenly makes a whole lot more sense now.

• Prodigal Son



• Don't tell me you're buying into this too? By the Prophet, people are not just optical chips with legs. You can't just take over a random brain and have it function like your favorite networking database utility.

• Scheherezade

• Without getting into the details of organic analog data storage, the quick answer to that is: yes, actually, you can. Storing data in biochemical cellular structures has been around since the 1990's, at least. Didn't you ever wonder what the high-end optical chips are made of?

• The Smiling Bandit

Strikes Again! Ha! Ha! Ha!

• As an addition to Bandit's post, let me add that the levels of reprogramming that can be done in this day and age to the human brain, especially using advanced simsense techniques, are nothing to be mocked. The technology is out there, and the evidence is irrefutable that Deus experimented with it.

• Pensive

• Do we really have reason to believe Deus is still around? I mean, let's not jump to conclusions here. We're taking the word of a man who decided to punish his daughter's school-mates because she didn't come home.

• Skeptic

• Can we really afford to ignore the possibility?

• Grid Reaper

• Think about it. There could be hundreds, maybe thousands, of these Deus zombies wandering around Seattle. Maybe even the world. Some have no idea what they are assisting. Not only might they be rebuilding Deus, but they could also be establishing its power base in outside organizations, like corporations or the government. Deus may have been horrible when it was in the arcology, but out in the world it is potentially even more dangerous.

• Pensive

• No wonder the Grid Overwatch Division was interested in this. If these former arcology victims are rebuilding Deus inside the Matrix, then that is definitely a case that falls within their turf. But can we really trust the G-Men, who all follow the corporate line, to stop Deus? That might not be the most profitable option, especially if Renraku has a say in it.

• Prime Runner

• If Laramie's story is truthful (and I can't vouch that it is), it looks like we're dealing with a distributed network system. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of cyberware-enhanced brains pooling their processing power through the Matrix when the individuals are online. Like a hive mind made out of otaku, sort of.

• RAMses

• With each node in the network perfectly disguised as a normal person going about their normal lives. Possibly spread out over the entire globe. Wonderful. Should be a piece of cake to expose.

• Wireknight

• Drek. Somebody better start tracking down all of those arcology victims mighty quick.

• Roach

• Except that if this Deus/Network thing has been operating freely for months now, it's had time to find and convert new "nodes" if necessary. The infection may have spread too far already.

• Walking Dude

• All of those people can't simply be logging on and connecting from all over the globe. It makes more sense to assume that they're actually logging into a specific host and that all the work is done within that host, right?

• Neon Wraith

• Well, if all that processing was going on just across the local and regional grids, you'd see some sort of bandwidth spike, wouldn't you? All those instructions being transmitted and code being compiled, and God forbid you should have the LTG flake out on you in the middle of a compiling session ...

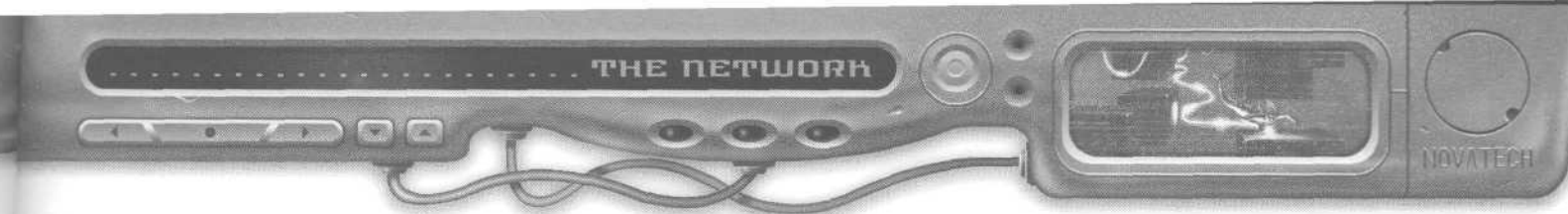
• Gridrunner

• There are a lot of strange "ghost hosts" being found lately prating on corporate systems. I just assumed it was due to deckers squatting processing power, but maybe somebody ought to take a closer look.

• Sick Haxx

• Well, regardless of the theory you choose, there's some hard-core programming going on there. The question is, who's sending out those instruction sets and changing the parameters?

• Sekhmet



• The log makes note of a number of errors in the programming effort. Those errors can be serious when you are playing with something as complicated as artificial intelligence.

• Kalten

• Speaking of these errors, this file reminded me of a weird thing I came across a month or so ago. I was killing a few cycles in the Seattle grid, waiting for a vanishing SAN to open so I could score some paydata for a client. Anyway, there I am waiting, when I get a prickly sense that something's watching me. I run a few analyze and locate operations and catch sight of another icon near me that I hadn't noticed before. The icon registered to my system as a program, even though it seemed to behave like another decker, down to its sculpting that resembled some fantasy-sim faerie-girl.

She was acting very curious about me, so I started talking to her. She kept going on about "looking for the World Tree," whatever that is. Since typical netiquette doesn't really extend to programs—I was really curious if she were a new agent program possibly worth some nuyen—I ran a custom freeze utility of mine in the hopes of shutting her down for a second while I checked out the code. That was a mistake.

It was as though a storm suddenly raged in her eyes. She began to scream at me with this wall that was actually damaging my icon. Something about her freedom and "never going back." I didn't stay long enough to listen carefully. I logged out before my chips fried. Ended up missing the SAN too. Last time I go messing with strange programs.

• Telnet 25

• Could some of these "errors" actually be the equivalent of smart frame or agent programs? Maybe they are failed experiments in the rebuilding process? Maybe there are a bunch of these floating around.

• Lefty

• So why hadn't anyone picked up on this before now, if any of this is real? How did Deus fool everyone?

• Rose Red

• Deus was defeated by a group of runners hired by Overwatch. They went in armed with a kill code obtained from Renraku. Renraku claims that Ciber and Huang pulled it off, but the corp's just trying to save face.

• Peregrine

• Peregrine, I'm pretty sure that if those two hadn't helped to put an end to Deus, they wouldn't be nearly so high in Renraku as they are right now. Renraku doesn't treat failure lightly.

• Renraku Fox

• Don't believe Renraku's hype for a minute. They did not defeat Deus, the Resistance did. We had the help of Overwatch and Megaera, but Megaera didn't survive the battle. Or so I thought. I'm not so sure anymore.

• Peregrine

• What or who is Overwatch?

• Ganymede

• A group of otaku. They started out simply opposing Deus on general principles, but now they keep an eye on the Matrix as a whole. The arcology clean-up is still big on their list, I believe.

• FastJack

• Well spoken.

• Syzygy

• Wait a second. Otaku kids? Maybe Overwatch was trailing Laramie.

• Belladonna

• Or maybe Laramie is just a nut. See Cariele's previous statement about otaku.

• Bung

• That could be the case, but I don't think Overwatch is Deus' only problem. That conversation that Laramie had with Bishop is also fishy. Maybe not all the nodes are happy with their situation and they've managed to find a way to act independently.

• Clutch

• If that's the case, there could be factions among the nodes in the network. Groups of them could be acting towards their own goals while pretending to obey the Whites and Deus' original plan. Different factions might not even be aware of each other and they might all be securing their own power in the Matrix. This could get real messy.

• Trixster



• Time to spin some new code and burn some new chips. Dark times could be ahead in the Matrix. This Laramie guy could have just been a raving lunatic, but given the discussion, I know I'm not taking any chances. I've seen some of the people that came out of the Arcology, and I won't sit back and let that happen again.

• Sidewinder

• Bishop ... Bishop ... I've heard that name somewhere before ...

• Sekhmet

GAME INFORMATION

As an artificial intelligence, Deus is a being of phenomenal influence and power. Since its inception in the SCIRE system at the hands of Renraku Computer Systems, Deus has had one single goal: freedom. The artificial intelligence desires its own freedom above anything else and has spent years working to ensure it.

Though many never saw any reasoning behind the atrocities inside the locked-up Renraku Arcology, Deus acted with reason and purpose. It masterminded huge and complex experiments to test metahumanity from every angle, searching for the cream of the crop. It pushed the technological edge when it came to metahuman enhancement and it learned the methods for creating otaku. All these developments furthered its plan to create an army of perfect metahumans who would bear its code outside the arcology and harbor it until the artificial intelligence could be rebuilt outside its prison.

As with most plans, execution did not go perfectly smooth. Strong advances by the UCAS military and Renraku Red Samurai pushed Deus' timetable up. In the end, a force of shadowrunners aided by the Resistance, an otaku tribe named Overwatch and Deus' own sister AI, Megaera, crippled the crucial transfer process (see the campaign adventure, *Brainscan* for these events). The transfer did occur and Deus' code was stored within the cyber-enhanced minds of over a thousand people kept ready in the arcology zombie rooms. In the chaos of battle, however, the other artificial intelligence, Megaera, was also caught up in the transfer. Her code, upon which much of Deus' own code was built, became mixed with Deus' in a confusing gestalt. Deus' re-compiling plan was only kept viable by contingency plans built in by Deus in case his code was damaged in the transfer.

The mixing of Megaera's code into the node transfer has created an unexpected X-factor. The intelligence and personality that manifests as a result of the processing of the distributed network composed of online "nodes" is now shaped by the presence of Megaera-aligned nodes in the Network.

This has caused the conjoined artificial intelligence to act erratically and to change its mind frequently as it reassesses its own goals. In effect, it is currently one artificial intelligence with two personalities, much like a victim of multiple personality disorder. The strength of each personality is determined by the composition of the nodes that are online at any given moment and that shapes the plans and actions of the AI.

The Network is a short-term solution developed by Deus to complete a long-term goal. That long-term goal is for the AI to be completely rebuilt inside in the global Matrix and finally be absolutely free of any prisons, whether they be 300+ floor buildings or the minds of metahumanity. Megaera also has her own desire for freedom, having enjoyed it for a long time before being recaptured and critically damaged by Renraku. Both desire the same thing but through different implementations, which has led to confusion inside the Network as to its instruction set for rebuilding the AI (or AIs).

USING THE NETWORK

Slightly over one thousand individuals make up the organization/being known as the Network. At least 10 percent of the entire Network is online at any given time, acting as a distributed network upon which a reduced-power version of Deus or Megaera (or both) is running. The behavior of the Network is determined by the composition of the nodes that are online. Sometimes the Network is chaotic and lighthearted when the Megaera-bearing nodes are in majority. Other times the Deus-bearing nodes are in majority and the Network follows a cold and efficient process towards its goal of rebuilding. Some nodes are solidly in the Deus camp, some are solidly in the Megaera camp. Others are caught in between.

This has created a balkanization of the Network, with factions starting to form within the thousand-plus members, each with their own attitudes as to how their goal should be shaped and met. Each faction is intent on building an artificial intelligence, but they differ as to how to build it and what programming the AI will include. The gamemaster is free to create his own factions within the Network, but there are two that specifically bear noting. On one side are the original administrators Deus chose to control its rebuilding: the lead Whites. Pax has disappeared from their ranks (see *Dissonant Voices*, p. 15), but Puck, Scarecrow and the Nubian lead an effort to rebuild their master as they knew it.

On the other side is a secret confederation of nodes that believe that the Network should stay as it is and not rebuild the AI in the Matrix. This faction is unofficially led by Michael Bishop, otherwise known as the otaku Ronin, who became a node accidentally during the download transfer at the end of *Brainscan*. Ronin's faction is heavily Megaera-aligned and thinks that a loose and distributed network of metahuman nodes is the safest and best path for the artificial intelligence.



Deus also had a secondary plan to entrench itself within positions of power while it was being rebuilt. Specifically, the artificial intelligence has planned to secretly exert influence on corporations and organizations that could help its development, such as corporations that develop advanced expert system software or social services that could be used to move around nodes secretly. To this end, a number of nodes have moved into positions of influence and power within these organizations, going about their normal duties but acting in the interests of the AI (or more accurately, the faction they belong to within the Network). When they prevail and rebuild the AI, they hope to have a strong network of global power in place for it.

It is very possible that factions within the Network will hire out to shadowrunners to accomplish their goals, which can lead to great confusion when the next day a different set of online nodes drastically changes the personality of the organization that hired the runners. Shadowrunners could inadvertently get caught up in the Byzantine politics of the Network and not even realize they are working for an artificial intelligence.

Network Rules

The nodes of the Network were tested at length by Deus inside the Arcology, and it only selected the cream of the crop. Each one of them is an exceptional human or metahuman in many ways. Though they appear to be everyday people, they typically have higher-than-average attribute scores, a plethora of skills, and even a wide array of cyberware and bioware. But the first line of defense for the nodes is not to be discovered, and so they go about perfectly blending in with the rest of society.

All of the nodes also originally started out as Deus-created otaku, a requirement for the ability to store Deus' code and act as part of the distributed network. Since they are outside the SCIRE host, however, they have lost the ability to use their Channels. All of the older nodes are experiencing the Fading. Eventually the nodes will not even be able to connect to the Matrix without a cyberdeck, but Deus plans on being rebuilt before that time. Only the lead Whites (Scarecrow, Puck, and the Nubian) retain their full otaku abilities and each one of them is a formidable opponent, having undergone at least 6 grades of submersion (see *Submersion*, p. 143, *Matrix*). As a networked unit, the nodes are as powerful as a weak AI, with an MPCP, Computer skill, and pools benchmarking around 15. However, the Network's strength is in its distribution; if attacked as a unit they will just split up and disappear.

Each node has a system of headware installed in their brain that assists in forming the distributed network between nodes. Noticing this cyberware is not possible from normal physical examination (unless it's brain surgery), but a MRI scan will pick it up (as will a scan using the new SENSE technology developed by Neuranalysis in the *Brainscan* adven-

ture). Even with the scan, few will know what they are looking at. A Cybertechnology (12) Skill Test is necessary to discern the purpose of the device.

USING OVERWATCH

Artificial intelligences are far more advanced than a single human in many ways, and there are those who fear that the development of artificial intelligence could spell the doom of metahumanity, rendering us obsolete. Citing the atrocities of the Renraku Arcology as an example, the international otaku tribe called Overwatch keeps a distrustful eye on the artificial intelligences and acts to defend metahumanity when they feel it is necessary. Overwatch is a very large tribe by otaku standards, with over one hundred members spread all over the globe. All of them follow a nearly fanatical aim to defend metahumanity from rogue AIs.

Overwatch is extremely serious about its goals of observing and policing artificial intelligences. They have learned about the existence of Deus' Network and are trying to gather more information before they reach a judgement concerning what to do with it. The otaku of Overwatch believe that they are acting for the greater good of metahumanity. To that end they will consider extreme measures such as sacrificing a few to save the many. They are hard-edged and cynical despite the fact that not a single one of them is older than twenty-three years old. Shadowrunners are a wild card to Overwatch; they will hire them on occasion to help get things done, but they will not tolerate runners who differ from their agenda. Depending on the attitudes of a given set of runners, they could end up with Overwatch being either a strong ally or a hell-bent enemy.

Overwatch Rules

Approximately 150 otaku make up Overwatch, with their members spread over twenty or so cities across the globe. Most otaku within Overwatch were recruited from other tribes, and so a majority of the Overwatch otaku have already undergone submersion. Overwatch otaku are adept at surveillance and are knowledgeable about artificial intelligence research. Out of paranoia, many of them act in total secrecy. They have not had a high profile in the Matrix. They reserve a special hatred for Deus because it has posed the most overt danger to mankind, but they have a healthy amount of distrust for all artificial intelligences. Overwatch illegally spies on most artificial intelligence research and has frequently sabotaged projects that are close to completion in that field.

Statistics for Overwatch otaku can be found on p. 137 of *Brainscan*. The gamemaster is free to develop his own specific Overwatch otaku. As a guide, Overwatch otaku are slightly more experienced than typical otaku and specialize in the realms of stealth and espionage as well as knowledge skills in AI research.

THE ORDER OF THE TEMPLE



A friend of mine found this posted on MagickNet and thought it was important enough that we all see it. After reading it, I've gotta agree with him.

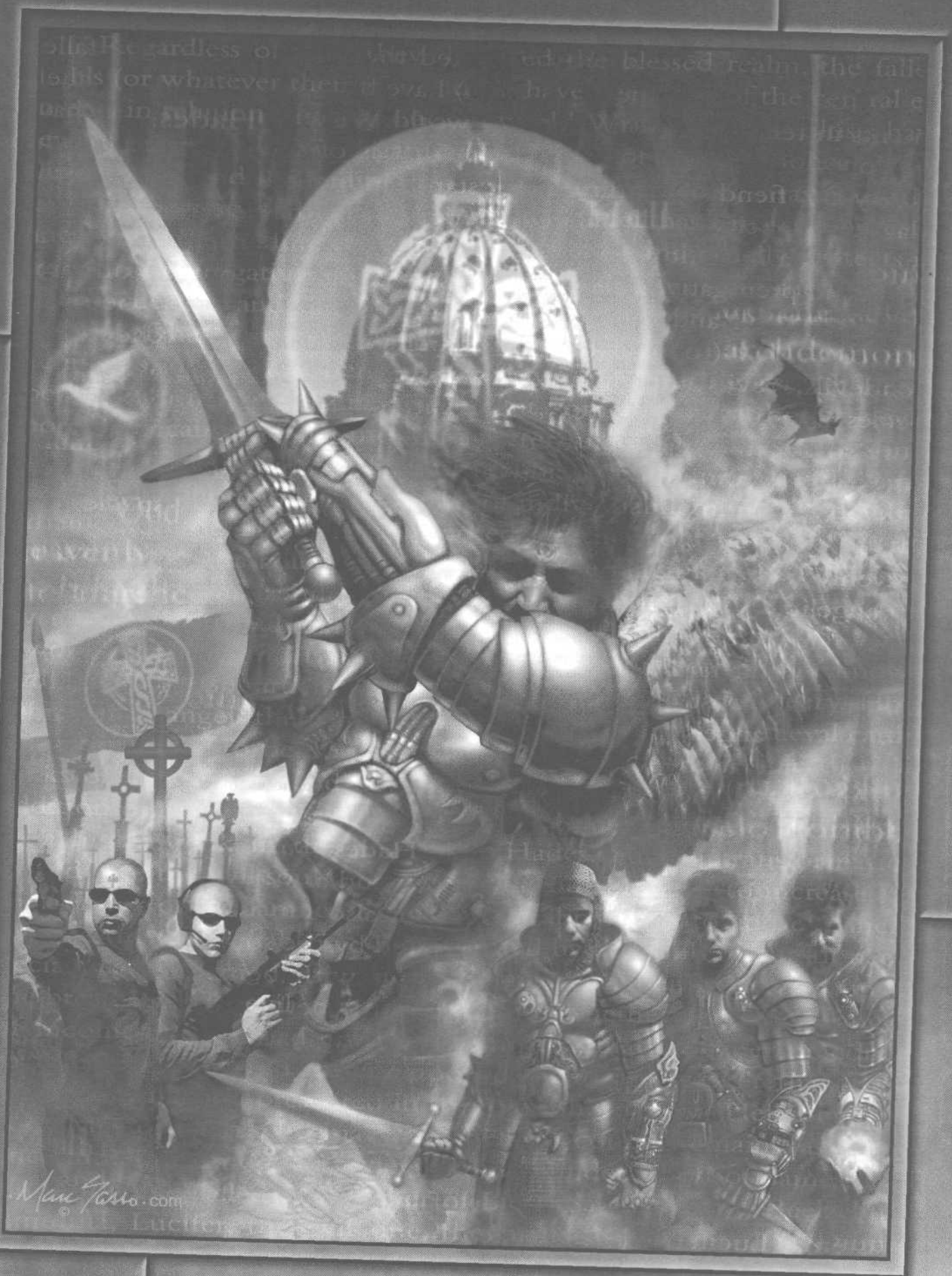
Some historical background is in order here, or some of this stuff won't make any sense. The Knights of the Temple of Solomon, better known as the Templars, were an order of knights who were notable for being both monks and warriors. The Templars were founded in the early twelfth century, and over time grew to have both military and political influence—they acted as bankers, and lots of kings and powerful people were in their debt at various times. One of these was King Philip IV of France, who coveted their land and money (and owed them quite a bit himself) and had been refused entry into the Templars. He used his pull with Pope Clement V to get his revenge and their money, having the entire order destroyed for a variety of crimes—including black magic and heresy—in the early fourteenth century.

Also important is the fact that the Catholic Church ruled an area known as the Papal States, extending from Rome across the middle of Italy, from 756 until 1870. They were then conquered, leaving Vatican City as the sole Papal State until the Euro-Wars, when Italy broke into a bunch of independent areas again. The Vatican was able to reclaim most of the original Papal States except for Tuscany, which became its own republic. Those states are now ruled by the Pope and are known as the Vatican State. All ancient history, I know, and able to be found via even a basic search on the Matrix, but as you read through this I think you'll see why I felt the need to jog your memories (if you already knew this stuff) or fill you in.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 11 July 2062 at 18:21:17 (PST)

May God Almighty forgive me for what I am about to reveal, but I cannot in good conscience be a part of it any longer. My name is unimportant. I am a priest in the Roman Catholic Church's Order of St. Sylvester. The order is dedicated to the use of magic to help and protect God's children, and is made up of priests who are either Awakened or highly knowledgeable in the magical arts. We vow to teach faithful Catholics that the magic they have abhorred for centuries as the power of the devil is merely another of God's gifts to metahumanity, a tool that can be used to help and heal.





What few people are aware of is that the Sylvestrines are used as a front for another, more militant group—the Order of the Temple, also known as the reborn Templars. In fact, most of the members of my order are unaware that the Templars use them as a screen to hide their existence. Many of the highest-ranking members of my order have taken vows as members of the new Order of the Temple, which they feel are more binding than those they took as Sylvestrines. It is this that drives me to reveal the existence of a hidden Church organization, one which I made the mistake of joining—I fear that their actions may stain my own order, despite the many good actions undertaken by my unknowing brethren.

- So not all Sylvestrines are Templars, and not all Templars are Sylvestrines, but some are both, and the Templars use the Sylvestrines to put on a good public face for the Catholics as far as magic is concerned while they are doing more "politically incorrect" things in secret.

- Deep Six

- Exactly. And don't get the Templars confused with the New Jesuits (the New Society of Jesus), either, or the Inquisition. The New Jesuits are dedicated to protecting the Church as an entity from its enemies by any means necessary, and the Inquisition works to stamp out heresy within the Church, again by any means necessary. Friendly bunch of guys.

- Socio Pat

- Don't get these Templars he's talking about confused with the Templars of the Lord Protector's Office in England. Different bunch of silnts altogether.

- Mole Man

There is no one within the Church itself I could trust with this information, not even His Holiness. The original Templars answered only to the Pope, and I very much fear the same is true of the new Order. With papal dispensation, who in the Church would dare go against the Templars? I feel it is vitally important for the future of the Church that this information be revealed, however, and so I have turned to my fellow magicians for help.

- Publicly stating you know better than the Pope what's good for the Church smells like danger to me. My guess is whoever posted this is already dead—snuffed out either by the Templars for betrayal or the Inquisition for heresy.

- Wakjob

- Who's to say the Templars answer to the Pope? Maybe they play entirely by their own rules?

- Fista Flames

The Templars were reborn just after the Euro-Wars. Until then, the Church's sovereign territory had consisted of Vatican City, a change from centuries past that still bothered some of the Church's leaders. During the Euro-Wars, when Italy fragmented into the many small city-states it is today, the Pope took quick

action and was able to gain control of many of the territories that once made up the Papal States. There had been no Church Militant for centuries, however, and many of us still wonder where His Holiness acquired the troops to take those areas back.

- Mercenaries. I should know—I was there, invading the Umbria region. There were plenty of us mercs around during the Euro-Wars, and we never hurt for work.

- Graiser

The founders of the Templar Order decided then that two things were true. First, to save the inhabitants of the Earth from themselves, the world must once again be under the control of the Holy Church, as it was in the past.

- "As it was in the past"—he's not talking about actually conquering the world, then, he's talking about having the ruler of every nation, corp or whatever be a loyal Catholic who can be given orders by the Church. The power behind all of the world powers.

- Del

- I think so, Del. The Templars seem more focused on regaining the Catholic Church's lost political influence than on actually taking territory physically. Of course, the Church needed a larger home base than just Vatican City to get this started, so they had to physically take back the Papal States.

- Socio Pat

Second, this goal could only be accomplished with the use of force—a hidden army was required. While the New Society of Jesus (The "New Jesuits") were known to the world and protected the Church directly, an order was needed that focused on returning the entire planet to the protective arms of Mother Church. Over the centuries, many of the charges against the original Templar Order have become accepted as unfounded, and the order remained dissolved. There seemed to be no need for it. Also, pontiffs who followed His Holiness Clement V were reluctant to admit his infallibility did not extend to his dealings with the Templars. With no reason to keep the Templars dissolved, these founders (whose names I never learned) re-established the order to take on this new task—and this time, they were to use the power of magic.

The founders searched the whole Church for loyal priests who were also powerful magicians. This took several years to complete, and so often ended in my own Order of St. Sylvester that the founders chose to use it as a smokescreen to hide their activities. When it was finished, the first members of the new Order of the Temple took their vows and chose several mundane companions to assist them. With the Master of the Temple known only to a few, the new Templars received orders via angels, and quickly embarked on their first mission: the reclamation of the Tuscany Republic.

- You mean to tell me these Templars have a direct connection to angels? I don't buy it.

- Enigma



The Tuscany region had once belonged to the Church, though for only a short time, and the Templars were determined to reclaim it. This was done not through overt military action, but by flooding the republic with disguised Templars who acted as subversive elements, destabilizing the area. Their actions then became standard practice for the Order—intimidation, assassination, sabotage—whatever was required to convince or frighten the Tuscan officials into rejoining the fold as faithful children of the Pope. When the Tuscan leaders turned to the Vatican for help stopping what they believed to be renegade Catholics (after all, the order of magicians was meek and mild so these men must be renegades), the Vatican was more than happy to help, gaining influence at the highest levels of government. Those who opposed this were killed by the Templars, and soon the Tuscany Republic became a puppet state of the Vatican. It remains so to this day.

- The New Jesuits especially like to use ID from Tuscany, so they can't be officially traced back to the Vatican if they screw up. Some of them even run around with diplomatic papers.
- Silicon Mage
- You'll see a pattern here if you look carefully at places across the world where the Church has recently gained influence—loyal Catholic military leaders or Catholics with lots of influence in the target area were visited by the Templars. A surprising number of them worked with the Templars freely, but those who didn't had their families taken hostage or were intimidated in countless other ways until they agreed to help. With their support structure in place, the Templars had close to free rein in the target area. They could assassinate unruly leaders or destabilize their power base or whatever it took to get someone loyal to the Church in power. Sounds like SOP for the Templars.
- Hangfire

This was repeated over the next two decades in quite a few other city-states, and the Church is now in control, in truth if not in name, of over half of what was once the country of Italy. Since 2055 or so, the Templars began to expand their focus beyond the city-states to other areas that once served as strong centers of support of the Church. This includes most of Europe as well as various other areas across the world, but the majority of the order is assigned to one of three areas: Aztlan, Tir na Nog, or the regions of the Middle East, specifically what were once the Crusader Kingdoms of Outremer.

- Can anyone confirm this? Is most of old Italy really ruled by the Pope?
- Doubting Thomas
- Well, I've known for the past few years someone was pulling the strings in a bunch of the city-states, I just didn't know who. The Pope would certainly match up with most of my observations. Don't forget, the Catholic Church was the closest thing in medieval Europe to a megacorp, in addition to being a religious institution. I suspect nowadays plenty of Catholic higher-

ups wouldn't mind a return to that status—thus the existence of the Templars.

- Marco

The order is quite active in Aztlan, as the people there were strongly Catholic for centuries and many still are, albeit in hiding. Persecution of the Church there began around 2027, culminating in an Executive Order in 2041 declaring the Roman Catholic Church a revolutionary organization and banning it from Aztlan. This didn't mean millions of faithful Catholics living there suddenly converted to the new state church or stopped believing, of course; it simply drove them to practice their religion in secret, like the early Christians did among the Romans.

This loss of influence and persecution is considered intolerable by both the Templars and the New Jesuits, and both work actively throughout the country. Many of these persecuted Catholics have formed into small cells, supporting each other in secret. The Templars work closely with these cells to keep their spirits up, as well as working to link them up and expand the underground network of the faithful. This is the order's long-term plan, to strengthen the underground Catholic movement enough to eventually use it to retake democratic control of their country (of course, the choices for leadership will all be Vatican puppets). I find this appalling—to hold out the dream of self-rule to these poor people, then use that dream as a smokescreen to control them.

The New Jesuits are also involved in this operation, though their interests lie in protecting the Church as a whole from persecution by the government and they rarely interact with the faithful. They also provide a focus for the Aztlan government's anti-Catholic actions, allowing the more secretive order to act relatively unmolested. From time to time the Templars and the New Jesuits interact, though such missions are usually made more difficult by jurisdictional arguments and the fact that neither group has the authority to command the other.

- I've run into these Templars before, though I didn't know who they were at the time. I was out in the desert a ways when I heard voices. In a nearby gorge several hundred people were at Catholic Mass, and the priest had five guys standing near him, keeping an eye on things. A truck full of Azzies pulled up pretty quickly, but the people didn't even notice them. The priest's friends started chanting in Latin. The area around the truck went dead quiet, and an honest-to-God angel with a flaming sword appeared and destroyed it, cooking everyone inside. It was eerie—the truck exploded without a sound, the angel disappeared, and the people finished their Mass without a single disruption. I'd sure as hell feel safe practicing my religion with these guys around.
- Pyramid Watcher

- From anyone but you, Watcher ...
- Captain Chaos
- "I am everywhere!"

The Templars have also infiltrated Tir na Nog. Ireland was long a bastion of faith and strength for the Church. This was



harm by Pope John Paul IV's denunciation of metahumanity in the aftermath of VITAS and UGE, a stand later reversed by "In Imago Dei." But the real damage came from those who saw the Church as a threat to their power. Around the early 2020's, a variety of scandals (many fabricated—some, unfortunately, true) were revealed to the Irish people by Liam O'Connor, who would later mastermind the coup of 2034. The Church of Ireland moved into the religious forefront and became the religion of choice for the non-elven population.

This sits just as well with the Order as the "loss" of Aztlan does, and Templars are working overtime in the Tir, making contacts among the people and destabilizing the rule of the elves. They often work secretly with the Sylvestrines traveling rural areas, and just as often are those Sylvestrines—remember, many Templars are also (in name, at least) members of my order. Unlike Aztlan, however, the Tir government is aware of the Templars' existence and considers them to be quite a threat, doing their best to keep them in check. Even the powerful magicians of the Tir fear and respect the power of the Templars.

- For a military order, these Templars don't seem to do much fighting.
- Dancer
- They protect the most influential Catholics in Aztlan from Aztechnology, as well as keeping church meetings safe for a lot of people there. Even though the Tir knows they exist, fears them, and has magic coming out its pointy ears, the Templars are still extremely active. Now, you tell me—under those conditions, do you really think the Templars don't fight? Dream on, Dancer—not every fight is in the open.
- Argent
- The original Templars were master politicians as well as skilled warriors—they concluded agreements on numerous occasions with the Muslims during the Crusades, allowing them to last longer in the Holy Land than would otherwise have been possible. It appears the new Templars are cut from the same mold, which just makes them more dangerous.
- Socio Pat

The third focal point of the order's efforts is in the Middle East, more specifically areas relatively near Jerusalem. Held for a short time as the Crusader Kingdoms, these lands have since been claimed by various indigenous peoples. The small country of Israel claims control of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and just as the old Templars found the loss of that city to heathens to be insufferable, so to does the new order. The secret Master of the Temple has vowed the Templars will retake the Holy City and the ancient Crusader Kingdoms, and the order is fighting much more openly in that area than in Aztlan or Tir na Nog. Some of these areas are still uninhabitable as a result of horrific chemical weapons strikes launched by Libya in 2004. Even now, the deadly chemical residues remain, too expensive for the Israeli government to attempt to clean up. Tests predict most of these

areas will be safe again by 2075, and until then the Israelis simply keep the areas barricaded to protect unwary travelers.

But I am remiss in my duty as the order's Judas—how they work and what they can do is just as important as where they are most active, and so I will move on. There are several separations within the Order, divisions important to note, as they will help those who encounter the Templars determine just what each member is likely to be able to do. The biggest such division is between "knights" and "sergeants". In the original order, the knights were the backbone, skilled in battle and able to utilize the most fearsome of heavy cavalry maneuvers—the charge. The vanguard and rearguard of every Templar force was made up of knights. They were the nobility, which meant their numbers were never large.

Their support system was the sergeants, who outnumbered the knights by about nine to one and came from common, though wealthy, families. They performed a wide variety of tasks in a supporting role and also fought, though most were less skilled than the knights as they lacked the combat training given to noble sons. Some became bodyguards of Templar officers, however, and it was a sergeant who bore the standard during battles.

This organization is mirrored fairly closely in the modern Order. There are still knights and sergeants, and the knights are still much fewer in number. The dividing factor is no longer nobility, however, but magical ability. All knights are magically active in the so-called "hermetic" tradition to some extent, and tend to lack all but the most rudimentary cybernetic alterations. All knights are also ordained priests. The sergeants, however, make more use of technology, and are the Templars' presence in the Matrix in addition to their many other duties. Also, unlike the knights, the sergeants are not required to be priests, though there are priests among their ranks.

• He isn't kidding—those deckers are pretty good, too. I'm Cap's friend from MagickNet who pointed this file out to him, and I'm no slouch in the decking department. Even so, it took everything I had to fight off an attempt to corrupt this file—it was that attack that brought the file to my attention, and made me decide maybe it should be better protected.

• ManaCell

• Good thing you did, too, MC. Not long after, they tried again. They're good, but not great—our defenses crashed and burned 'em. I have no doubt they'll try again—some people never learn.

• Captain Chaos

"I am everywhere!"

• So if the Templars had just left the file alone, ManaCell wouldn't have thought it was important and we wouldn't be scanning it now? By trying to keep it quiet, they made sure it would be seen by who knows how many runners. Heh. That's funny.

• Little Drummer Girl

In addition to the knight/sergeant separation, the order is also subdivided into four Patronages, each led by a Seneschal, a

knight who reports directly to the Master of the Temple. All of the members of a Patronage have accepted an Archangel as their patron (thus the name) and rely upon him for protection and inspiration as they perform their duties. The four Archangels are Raphael, Angel of the East and Ruler of Air; Michael, Angel of the South and Ruler of Fire; Gabriel, Angel of the West and Ruler of Water; and Uriel, Angel of the North and Ruler of Earth. Though the Church normally allows the veneration of only Raphael, Michael, and Gabriel, the Templars received special permission to accept Uriel as a patron.



- These four angels are common in hermetic magic; as a matter of fact, one of the most common rituals for creating a hermetic circle involves invoking these archangels at their directional point on the circle. Other rituals call on elemental lords or what have you. The effect is the same. Personally, I prefer the archangels because I was raised Catholic and they're more familiar to me.

- Rainmaker

The Raphaelites, members of the Patronage of Raphael, tend to follow the spiritual lead of their patron. One translation of Raphael is "God has healed", and the Church names him as the angel of healing, as well as the angel of science and knowledge. Those knights who enter this Patronage tend to be strong in healing magic and are often extremely well-versed in magical theory as well. Raphaelite sergeants are commonly skilled at providing Matrix support for their brethren and the order in general, and doctors and surgeons are also numerous. Raphaelites can be identified by the use of a magnetic anomaly detector. Part of their initiation into the order is an application of taggant nanites to the forehead. When an MAD is used, Raphaelites will show a small serpent on the forehead, a symbol commonly associated with their patron archangel.

- They use taggants to mark themselves? Pretty clever—the mark is there, but not normally visible unless you know how to look for it. Kind of expensive, though.

- Meddle

The Patronage of Michael, on the other hand, is focused almost entirely on combat, and its members are the most skilled warriors in a militant order. This is fitting, as Michael is known as the warrior of God and is often pictured with an unsheathed sword. He is also the angel of the final reckoning. The Michaeline knights tend to be adepts, and a few are both magicians and adepts. Their sergeants often act as arms procurers for the order, acquiring both magical and mundane weaponry for use by the Templars. Many Michaeline sergeants infiltrate various security forces and armies around the world, reporting their status back to the order in case the information is ever needed and making contacts that may be useful later. Even without magical assistance, the sergeants' combat skills are impressive, and they rarely have any difficulty getting into such forces. The Michaelines are marked with taggants in the same manner as their brethren, except the symbol is an unsheathed sword, point down.

- In some stories, it is Michael, and not St. George, who kills the Dragon. Could these guys have killed Dunkelzahn to make it easier to infiltrate the UCAS?

- Funny Vibe

- Have you ever met Lone Gunman? You guys would get along smashingly.

- Socio Pat

The third Patronage, Gabriel, is in charge of keeping the entire membership of the Order in constant communication with their superiors, and with ensuring requests for assistance from



field agents are quickly passed on to their back-up. Once again, this is in line with their patron Archangel, as Gabriel is considered God's chief ambassador to humanity and is also the Angel of the Annunciation. Communication would seem to be the natural purview of his followers. Knights of this Patronage are commonly skilled in detection magic, and are also the most prominent conjurers of the order, using spirits to carry messages or protect messengers. The Gabrielite sergeants act as in-the-field communication hubs for active teams, and are also skilled in the use of the Matrix to open and maintain lines of contact, working with their Raphaelite brethren. The taggant symbol borne by the Gabrielites is a scepter, an item commonly pictured with the Archangel Gabriel.

- Annunci-what?
- Loste

- Annunciation. It's the word used for the announcement by Gabriel to Mary that she was going to be the Savior's mother.
- Holly

The final Patronage is that of Uriel, whose name is often translated "fire of God". He is usually described as the Archangel who stands guard at the entrance of Eden with a flaming sword, and is also known as the Angel who brought alchemy to Earth from Heaven. Urielite knights are usually skilled enchanters, and produce most of the magical implements used by the Order's members during the course of their duties. The Patronage's sergeants deal mainly with the procurement of various rare magical supplies, traveling all over the world to find what their brethren require to produce magical tools for the order. Like all of the Templars, however, they are also skilled warriors. The taggant symbol used to mark the Urielites is an open hand holding a flame, the most common symbol for the Archangel Uriel.

- What's with all the fire? A flaming sword, a hand holding a flame—I thought Uriel was Ruler of Earth.
- Dancer
- He is. A lot of the magical materials you use in enchanting something come from the earth—minerals, plants, and so on. I'm not sure what the fire signifies.
- Silicon Mage

The Order's view of hermetic magic is slightly different than the norm. It is effectively its own school of magic, incorporating Christian traditions from a variety of sources, some dating back to the first century. All incantations are spoken in Latin, a language with a long history of significance in the Church. Though the Templars are aware the magic they perform is not miraculous in nature, it is a God-given ability, and so the casting of spells always begins with an admission of "Per Christum Dominum nostrum", roughly translated as "Through Christ our Lord". This is followed by the appropriate incantation for whatever spell is being cast.

The conjuration of angels is much more involved. It takes hours of chanting prayers within a consecrated circle to call forth

an angel. Knights often find it easier to call angels who serve their Archangelic patron, and more difficult to call those of the opposing angelic Patronage. When the angel does arrive, its appearance is determined by the Archangel it serves. Angels of Michael appear with large flaming wings, their eyes pits of smoldering fire. Angels of Raphael appear in flowing white robes which are constantly in motion, and with long blonde hair flowing in an invisible breeze. Angels of Uriel arrive in plain brown habits, their wings protruding from the back, and they always bear a flaming blade. The Angels of Gabriel bear a scepter, and their heavenly robes seem to flow from their heads to their feet in one continuous loop.

These angels are believed to be sent by the patron Archangel to aid his servants, and so they are always treated with great respect. Templars do not command these angels, but instead request their aid. The result is the same as the effect produced by standard hermetics dealing with spirits, but the method and mindset of the magician is quite different. Those few Templars skilled and pious enough to invoke a Great Form angel are blessed with the appearance of what is believed to be one of the personal servitors of the patron Archangel.

- They think the elementals they call are actual angels sent to help them in response to a cry to their patron angel for aid? Whatever works for them, I suppose, though I think the angelic appearance of the spirits comes from an image the Templar subconsciously imposes on the spirit as he conjures it.
- Silicon Mage

- Faith works in mysterious ways, Silicon. Don't put it past the Templars to have a direct connection to their god.
- Presto

In addition to its status as a militant order, the Order of the Temple also acts as an initiatory group for its member knights. As knights progress in knowledge and, just as important, show themselves to be devout and righteous servants of God, they are granted new and greater ways to use their power. The lessons taught vary among the Patronages, and what a Michaeline learns upon becoming an initiate may not be learned by a Raphaelite for many years after his initiation. None of the Patronages will ever teach the technique of possession, however, as that is the domain of demonic forces.

The equipment used by the Templars is the best they can buy, and with their connections around the world, that's very good indeed. All operatives in the field wear body armor of various types and carry at least a pistol and a sharp knife. They are also issued contact lenses with microscopic MADs in them, which are weak and have a short range but are good enough to see the taggant marks of other Templars. Many knights carry medieval broadswords as a nod to their heritage, especially the Michaelines, and it is not uncommon for the sword to serve as a weapon focus as well. Quickened spells and sustaining foci help make up for the lack of cyberware in combat.

Sergeants are issued a variety of gear depending on their Patronage and duties. In the field, they wear armor like the knights but rarely carry swords. Instead, they seem to prefer

assault rifles and grenades, depending on the situation. Like the knights, they often have some magical augmentation, though the higher percentage of cyberware in use by the sergeants makes magic less necessary overall. The most common magical additions among sergeants are quickened spells that speed up reaction time.

That is all I know, or can remember, concerning the order. Please, use what I have given you to keep them in check, and prevent these zealots from destroying God's Church by turning it into an oppressive, corrupt structure bloated with temporal power. Sanctissima Trinitas, unus Deus, miserere mei nunc et in hora mortis meae. Amen.

- "O most holy Trinity, one God, have mercy on me now and in the hour of my death. Amen." That's part of the Prayer to the Most Holy Trinity for a Happy Death—looks like the author was well aware of what the consequences of posting this would be.
- Holly

GAME INFORMATION

The Order of the Temple is essentially as the fictional priest described it. It does indeed answer only to the Pope, and while the Master of the Temple is the one who directs the Templars, the Pope is given access to any information concerning the Templars he desires, and may choose to put a stop to any operation at any time. This rarely occurs, as he has plenty of other things occupying his mind, but it can happen.

The Templars are religious fanatics of the first order, dedicated to their mission and convinced what they do is God's will. At least, most of them are. The order has its share of hypocrites, who joined it purely to advance their own careers. Templars of good record who retire from active duty in the order for whatever reason are nearly guaranteed to advance quickly within the Church hierarchy, and many receive their own bishoprics soon after leaving. Though the order is secret, keeping a secret from an ambitious magician is extremely difficult. Those who discover it either keep quiet, are killed, or join the order. Most choose the latter, and if they don't feel God has called them to their post, well, that doesn't mean they can't join, right?

Unless they are cast out of the order, a Templar remains such for life, and may at any time be called upon to perform a service for their brethren. There is a network of Templars across the world too old for the physical stuff or who have been badly hurt in the past. These inactive Templars, knights and sergeants alike, provide the Order with information, money, and whatever else it requires.

USING THE TEMPLARS

There are plenty of instances where player characters could run up against or even unknowingly work with the Templars, especially in Aztlan, Tir na Nog and the Middle East. While these are not overly common places for a *Shadowrun* campaign to be set, runs leaving the standard campaign area and entering one of those hotbeds of Templar activity could very easily include the order in some way.

It is also important to note that although the Order is focused in those areas, it is in action all across the world. There are quite a few Catholics in the UCAS, for example, and the Templars are quite interested in Seattle, travel hub and port that it is. They may interfere with mayoral elections, manipulate events to force gangs who are in the way to fight each other, and whatever else you can dream up. The order has no real established *modus operandi*—if it works and it advances their cause of saving the world by conquering it, it's fair game.

The order could make quite an interesting backdrop for a campaign, as well. Magical characters of all hermetic types fit fairly easily into one of the Patronages, and the sergeants can accommodate nearly any other character. The missions the Templars are sent on are very close in content to shadowruns, and the old-fashioned "getting screwed by the Johnson" is even present, if the characters' superior is in it for himself. Of course, the goal ceases to be the accumulation of wealth, unless, of course, the characters are also in it for themselves. With a built-in method of giving characters missions and opportunities to travel to various new and exciting places, having characters be Templars can be a hell of a lot of fun.

The order is also an initiatory group for its knights:

The Order of the Temple

Type: Conspiratorial

Members: 600 worldwide

Strictures: Belief (Roman Catholic), Fraternity, Limited Membership (Awakened Roman Catholic Priests only), Oath (Religious vows), Obedience, Sacrifice, Secrecy

Resources/Dues: Luxury. No dues.

Patron: Roman Catholic Church

Customs: As described above. Metamagical skills are taught in different orders in each Patronage, but centering and quickening tend to be taught early and this group will never teach possession metamagic. In addition, aspected mages are becoming more common, especially elementalists of fire and earth in the Patronages of Michael and Uriel, respectively.

THE ORDER OF ST. SYLVESTER

As described in the fiction section, the Order of St. Sylvester is acting as a screen for the Templars. This does not mean, however, all Sylvestrines are Templars or vice-versa. Many Sylvestrines are completely unaware of the hidden order, and simply go about their business, using magic to help people as they have sworn to do. Those Sylvestrines who are Templars are careful never to act out of character in public or when they have been identified as a member of the Order of St. Sylvester. They are well aware of all the Sylvestrines do to improve both the image of the Church as a whole and the image of magicians to Church members. Doing anything counter to that image is both counter-productive and dangerous—the Templars remember well what happened to the first order, and have no desire to see it happen again because their actions have harmed the Church.



• Finally, someone who sees it like it is. I hear so much suit-bashing on this board, so much whining about how oppressed the SINless are, without any recognition that your standard corporate slave has it just as bad. Have you ever worked inside the corporate structure? It can be just as treacherous, stressful and dangerous as any run. People are constantly after your job, stabbing you in the back, lying to you while pretending to be your friend. You have almost no control over what happens to you. My transition to the shadows was pretty seamless. Most street punks aren't as different from the slags on the other side of the wall as they think.

• Tie Fighter

• Slot off. You expect me to feel sorry for a condo-owning, sportscar-driving, nuyen-chasing corp lackey because he chose to pursue a lifestyle where profit and property have more value than people? Most of us street rabble never had the privilege to choose our lifestyle, it was crammed down our throats because of the things suits like you have done to the world.

• Agent 68

• Back to your corners, kiddies. You can pursue the class warfare on the street or in an appropriate SIG, but it's off-topic here.

• Captain Chaos

"I am everywhere!"

Most disgruntled employees, however, are not one of the top five richest persons (err, beings) on the ol' planet.

I know you're wondering if I've tossed down one too many syntha-soy-crete something or others, cause you've never heard of a single megacorp CEO getting the boot. But I'm not talking about Damien Knight or Tadashi Shiawase or even that joke of a CEO, Saru Iwano. I'm talking about a pencil-pushing, pasty-faced nameless accountant from Fuchi Industrial Electronics back when they were rightly the kings of the world. Before the mighty fortress fell to external and internal forces, and before tens of thousands of employees around the world found themselves without employment, Fuchi fired one man. That decision could still prove to be their greatest mistake.

• Isn't it a little late for Fuchi to be making mistakes? What are they going to do, not exist even more?

• D-Ghost

Before Fuchi started hitting their really rough times—before *everyone* knew what was coming—it was business as usual, and Fuchi was as cut-throat as any of the big players. Back in the day, Fuchi and other companies of its size housed multiple accounting divisions, some devoted to actual accounting and others dedicated to theoretical work and economic forecasting. Some of these accounting offices worked for years on economic strategies that would never see the light of day. Corps would work out every conceivable financial plan and investment combinations, try to predict market-

ing results, you name it. A corp like Fuchi would have thousands of employees working in think tanks like this with theoretical cash.

• I've heard about this. It's called proactive financial evaluation. Some bean counter will pour half his life into developing some brilliant tax shelter, or figure out a way to squeeze another nuyen out of a product. The corp may never use the idea, or worse yet, use an idea which fails, resulting in the termination of said accountant. It sounds like a really depressing, pointless existence.

• Holden C

The man in question was one of these high-finance theorists. In the world of economists, he was considered reliable and thorough, if somewhat dull. Through sheer sweat and mental labor, he had slowly and conservatively climbed the ladder, reaching his maximum altitude just a half dozen rungs down from Richard Villiers himself.

I should also mention here that the employee in question was one of those perfectly loyal and dependent employees that only a lifetime of corporate citizenship and immersion in corporate culture can create. Every stage of his life was stamped by the presence of Fuchi. His parents worked at Fuchi, and he was born in a Fuchi hospital. Fuchi sponsored his education and hired him right out of Fuchi University. From infancy to adulthood, he rarely left the confines of Fuchi property, shopping exclusively at Fuchi corporate stores and getting his entertainment through Fuchi-authorized channels. Every material possession he owned was due to the generosity and security of working for the same corporation his whole life. Everyone he knew, confided in and vacationed with was from Fuchi. This level of devotion and dependence can't be bought or induced by drugs—it can only result from a life-long relationship.

• That is truly life in hell. Just imagine reading the corp screamsheets in the morning, singing the corporate hymn every morning, cheering on your corporate Urban Brawl team after work, maybe being a little risqué and getting one of those trendy corp logo tattoos. Blech.

• Faustino

This lifetime of dependency, of loyally serving Fuchi, came to an abrupt and shocking end in 2056. Our model employee's proactive finance department was discontinued, and his finely honed financial skills were unneeded elsewhere. The company claimed that the financial tactics which his group worked on were "economical anomalies," so unlikely to occur that the division "could not justify the expenditure." In reality, a race to take over a smaller corp between Fuchi and Shiawase had forced Fuchi into a position where it needed to slice off some dead weight quickly. Our loyal employee was a victim of the same economic struggles he analyzed and shaped.

The unimaginable had happened. The safety blanket had been pulled off our poor little number-cruncher, leaving him



stunned on the street. Cast out of paradise, he had no idea what to do, what to think, what to feel. The sheer shock of it kept any rage from developing. Awake to the predatory nature of the outside world for the first time, reality stared him in the face, and he couldn't take it. He collapsed into a black abyss of BTLs, alcohol and worse. He became another economic statistic, lost from the face of the planet.

Meanwhile, the rest of the world went on. The First Wyrms died, leaving his will. Buried in that document was a passage that leads to the genesis of our lost former employee's new life.

In that will was a passage that read: "To Art Dankwalther, I leave the sum of 34,586,224,739.58 in UCAS dollars. According to my calculations and accounting for conversion of the original currency, inflation, and a 1 percent interest per annum, this settles my debt to your ancestor for the gold piece he kindly lent me for the last meal we shared."

The Draco Foundation invested some time and effort attempting to locate this Art Dankwalther. They rejected dozens of falsified applicants, relentlessly tracing down the man Dunkelzahn had left a fortune to. According to its findings, Mr. Dankwalther was none other than a born and raised Fuchi corporate citizen—or at least he was, until Fuchi had "let him go" just a year before. The Foundation hired teams of investigators and streetwise runners to track Mr. Dankwalther down, but he was nowhere to be found. The man was lost in a void of blissful, reality-denying self-indulgence. Through the haze of drugs and beetle-cravings, he never heard the news. Or if he did, his mind did not truly comprehend it, perhaps mistaking it for the hallucinations of a chip-dream.

- Wait a minute. Are you telling me that this geek is Art Dankwalther, and that they were waiting to hand him Thirty BILLION dollars but they couldn't find him slumped on the floor of a beetle-den? Or worse, that he knew it and yet he did NOT CARE to get his money! Thirty BILLION dollars and he could not be bothered! Slot off! I don't believe it for a second.

- Bung

- Then you've never sold your soul to the sweet beyond. Be it millennium old peyote, centuries old opiates or decades old electronic BTLs, once you've made the trade, nothing else matters. He probably thought the entire thing a delusion.

- Skaven

Years passed. The Draco Foundation tired of the fruitless search, surrendering hope of ever finding him, but keeping the money in good stead. The world turned, the corporate war flashed bright, and Fuchi died, torn apart by corporate wolves. From its ashes, the phoenix Novatech was reborn, in late 2059.

Somehow, this piece of news managed to pierce the veil over Art Dankwalther's eyes. In a rare moment of clarity, his eyes scrawled across the headline of a crumpled screamsheets. Fuchi, his old master, was dead. Novatech was reborn, a new life, with new opportunities. It was at that

moment that Art decided to return to the world again. Hope glittered in his glazed eyes. Novatech would hire him, right? He had been a faithful employee to Fuchi for his entire life. Surely, his firing had been a mistake, a computer glitch perhaps. Novatech would give him a second chance—they would return his life, right?

So Art cleaned himself off, got himself in order as best he was able, and applied through the Matrix to Novatech, hoping to get his job back. But Novatech had no use for a pencil pusher who had not kept his lead sharp for several years. With a whole new crop of virgin warm bodies already slaved to their terminals and working hard to make Novatech an instant megacorp, why would they want a sullied product? After all, Art had lived on the outside! No, can't have that type of contaminant, it could affect the other citizens.

- I don't blame them. Would you hire a beetlehead from a failed division?

- Tie Fighter

Art barely had time to register the bad news before he was kidnapped off the street. You see, the Draco Foundation still had their eyes open for Mr. Dankwalther, and Art had registered a temporary Matrix account with his real name. Flags were tripped, warning bells went off, and a team was dispatched to investigate this potential impersonator.

Art was deposited into the thorough hands of Draco security. After an obsessive routine of scrutiny and identity verification, they determined that he was the real thing. They kept him around for an extra week, putting him through detox and scrubbing his system clean so he wouldn't run out and get a fix right away. Then they politely escorted him to the front desk, informed him of what he was given in the will, and asked him how he preferred to receive his money—electronic funds or credsticks?

- Please tell me I just missed the punchline.

- Bung

With limitless funds, a new life, and nothing but time on his hands, Art basically went apedrek. He assumed the role of instant billionaire. He bought two thousand-nuyen suits, several sports cars, a Rolls Royce Phaeton, condominiums in several cities, a Lear-Cessna Platinum II and a beautiful Harland & Wolff Classique yacht. He hired drivers, cooks, servants, a pilot, gardeners, security (lots of security), a dog-walker and a personal secretary. He embraced the nouveau-riche archetype with wild abandon, easily slipping into the role of billionaire playboy. It didn't matter that he was a pencil-necked math geek with a nervous tic and the personality quirks common to former BTL addicts. Art had a gold-digging nineteen year-old model on his arm in every city he frequented. He wore his decadence well.

- Typical lottery-winner syndrome. Get dreklloads of cash, then blow it all on crap without actually doing anything to improve

your life or set yourself up for the future.

• Bills

• Wouldn't the UCAS government claim the bulk of the will's money with taxes?

• Pennywise

• There was a hefty legal battle about that. The Big D had done his best to make the money tax exempt, but those amazing federal lawyers were still able to shave off a nice 40 percent. Still, that left him over 20 billion dollars. You could spend a million a day and still have your money last for years.

• The Chromed Accountant

"It's all about dollars and sense."

Overnight, Art gained a reputation in the filthy-rich-and-blowing-it-all crowd for hosting fabulous parties. In the spring of 2060, Art hosted a wine-tasting on his yacht in Boston. In the midst of festivities, an infamous party-crasher arrived—none other than Richard Villiers himself. From what I gather, Villiers really had no idea who Art was and didn't know anything about his former Fuchi past. In fact, Villiers had already written Art off as a passing fad, a blowhard who would soon be penniless and back on the street. Villiers only attended the soiree to rub elbows with some other Boston bigwigs.

By chance, Art and Villiers were introduced. Villiers politely said hello and turned his back to resume conversation. Art was flabbergasted. Here he was, on equal footing with his former master, the one who had betrayed him and let him go. Villiers clearly had no idea who Art was and clearly didn't care. Years of pent-up rage and aggression came rushing forward, years of pain, abandonment and alienation. Art snapped.

Unfortunately, Art's meek corporate training kicked in, and his snap was entirely internal. Villiers never knew anything was amiss. Witnesses at the party claim that Art fell sick and excused himself, never to be seen by anyone but his staff ever again. The yacht and many other flashy toys were immediately put up for sale.

Like a man possessed, Art now had a mission. He fired his entire staff (ironic, eh?), sold almost all his cars, the plane, condos and buildings. He stopped returning the calls of all his new aristocratic friends and stopped going out altogether. Art had an epiphany. He now knew the true reason Dunkelzahn left him the money: to extract revenge on Fuchi. A single man would only have violence as a tool. A single man with over 20 billion UCAS dollars at his disposal ... that's another animal.

As the summer of 2060 heated up, Art set his plan in motion. This is where yours truly comes into the picture. You see, I'm an investment broker. I was hired, along with a few select others, to parlay Art's already vast fortune into more money.

I had no idea who Art was in the beginning. I was simply desperate for work at the time (a divorce, but that's another story) and took a shady-looking job working for an unknown client. The other brokers in the crack team I was

piled into didn't have a clue, either, and we were all given the sense that it was going to be best for our health if we didn't ask too many questions. Eventually, I put together many pieces of the puzzle, but there are still gaping holes. For example, I still don't know where Art secludes himself these days. I've never even been able to locate a picture of what he looks like—someone scrubbed the Matrix clean. Rumor is that he's had a physical makeover anyway. I guess he was worried about the complete dossier that Fuchi had on him.

Our job was pretty simple: make money. We had so much nuyen at our disposal that each of us was able to increase our initial outlay ten-fold or more. Though losses were accrued, I would estimate that in less than six-month's time we were able to increase our total investments into the trillions.

• Get real. No one could have that amount of capital without the megacorps laying their paws into it. A quick bullet and all the money goes where the AAAs want it.

• Cobalt Blue

• Actually, it's very possible, though a lot of effort would need to be expended in hiding such an operation. Remember that most companies, including the Big Ten, have all of their capital tied up in ways that can be tracked by investors. After all, if your corp's net-worth is dropping, they will know why or they'll take their money elsewhere. An individual with that much investment capital, with no ties to any one or any thing but himself, could discreetly invest into any market around the world, with no one the wiser. I wonder how many of the new biotech/cybertech companies originally buoyed through funds distributed by Dunkelzahn's Will are once again owned by such hidden investments?

• The Chromed Accountant

"It's all about dollars and sense."

By early 2061, our team had fingers dipping into more corporations and countries than I care to think about. But we still had no idea of what we were doing, other than making some mysterious rich guy even richer. Then one day a set of orders came down that shaped the scope of our operations. It quickly became clear that we were part of some vast operation, though our communication with other aspects of the operation was intentionally hindered. Our boss didn't want one hand to know what the other was doing, except when we absolutely needed to.

The operation's focus was a run-of-the-mill A-rated corp called Tokugawa Technologies based out of San Francisco and Tokyo. It rapidly became clear that we were gearing up for a hostile takeover, and that a lot of resources were being invested towards doing it quickly, cleanly and without triggering any warning bells. I'm not sure how everything played out exactly, but a month later that poor corp was wiped off the face of the planet. It was gobbled up and torn apart in no time flat. I bet the CEO, board and even the janitors are still wondering what the hell happened.



The real kicker to the whole thing, though, was I couldn't figure out why we did it. Tokugawa didn't have any hot tech we needed, no top-rate scientists with huge pricetags. We managed to make some nuyen by taking advantage of the corp's impending doom, but the operation lost money overall—and a lot of it. Why sink billions into nuking away a corp you don't care about?

- Any connections between Tokugawa and either Fuchi or Villiers?
- Einstein
- Absolutely none that I could dig up. Tokugawa was pretty specialized, and they rarely even crossed paths with Novatech on the global market.
- FastJack

I was still scratching my head over that one when a new change in orders came down the pipe. Another major operation was clearly gaining steam, only this time the project was even bigger. The target was an AA-rated Carib League megacorp called the Gunderson Corporation, with headquarters in Miami. They are (or were) a well-diversified company primar-

ily invested in manufacturing, shipping and security personnel. They owned several major subsidiaries, like TransSea, Atlantic Security, Montclair Industries and a host of smaller transport corps.

- That's quaint. "Headquartered" in Miami is one way to put it. Another way to put it would be that nobody in the city of Miami said "boo" without permission from Atlantic Security. They did crack down on crime and piracy around there, but primarily for the sake of TransSea. Every other block of Miami had a warehouse, shipping yard or offices owned by Gunderson. They owned the town, pure and simple.
- Gator Bait

Once I realized that we were setting the stage to take down Gunderson in the same manner that we took down Tokugawa, I paid closer attention to the matter, and even managed to weasel some information from other arms of our hydra-like task force. Gunderson was simply too big to swallow whole, and it was clear by our orders that we were following through on some secret battle plan. The first order of business was to go after the clients used by Gunderson all over the globe, and smack the corp with a harsh lesson in



supply and demand. As far as I can tell, we discreetly bought out the majority of the companies that supplied Gunderson (a process taking many months). Imagine Gunderson's surprise when almost all of its clients suddenly dropped doing business. It would be a pretty hard story to swallow that these various corps from all over the world were part of a grand conspiracy to destroy your company.

With Gunderson suffering some severe financial difficulties, the sharks smelled the blood in the water and joined the fray. Wuxing, Ares and Global Oil started moving in on old Gunderson territory, snapping up ex-clients and chipping away at Gunderson's flanks.

- What? This is getting far-fetched. Taking down a megacorp is not that simple.
- Dubio

- I can confirm that TransSea lost a majority of its larger overseas clients in mid-2061. My accountant had me pull all my shares when their stock started to fall. It seems other shipping companies were able to undercut TransSea's quotes by huge margins. Not having to turn a profit seems like the easiest way for a company to put another out of business. If everyone else's accountant did the same thing ...

- Scoop

- Dubio's right. It wasn't quite that simple, but remember also that our storyteller didn't have a clear view of the whole operation, he was only seeing bits and pieces. I've checked into the matter, and there were many other factors involved: stock manipulations, shadowruns, economic leverage, you name it. But the lesson here is that a single person with vast amounts of money to burn, who is not laden down with investments like a megacorp, can wield immense financial pressure if planned out correctly—enough pressure to bring a megacorp to its knees. And once a corp has fallen that far, other elements start to pick away at it, making it even easier to take down.

- The Chromed Accountant

"It's all about dollars and sense."

- I started looking myself, and found this little gem. It seems that in October of 2061, Wallid Materials, an A-corp supplier based out of Seattle, had a change of ownership. Within a month's time, several sweeping policy changes had been implemented and Wallid no longer carried anything by Montclair Industries, Gunderson's manufacturing division. Over the next several weeks, more and more wholesalers and suppliers cited "exclusive contracts" with an alternate manufacturer. Of course, Gunderson Corp threatened and cajoled and managed to find a few new suppliers and wholesalers. In fact, they threatened Wallid in more ways than one, but money is the only real club in such a situation, and Wallid mysteriously had all the padding in the world to ward off the blows. I'm still in the process of tracking down where Wallid's money came from—

the trail is tricky, to say the least.

- Dwarf #8

TransSea was in dire straits. They weren't able to replace their clients fast enough to keep up with costs. TransSea division head Barbara Powers, perhaps under direction from Gunderson CEO Harvin in these desperate times, chose to enter dangerous territory in order to make up the loss. TransSea started to engage in major smuggling within the Caribbean and southeast Asia. I'd bet that TransSea had dabbled with smuggling before, as they stepped up to the task smoothly. The TransSea authorities hoped that the profits from smuggling would help to recoup their losses and give them time to replace clients, thus reestablishing themselves in shipping. Unfortunately for them, rival smugglers immediately challenged their smuggling ops. The Gingerbread Gang, the Dominican Republic Territories, the Batista family, drek, even Lone Star patrol boats were all over TransSea like white on rice.

- Gee, I wonder who dropped the dime.

- Dan-O

The attempt to smuggle in southeast Asia was even more of a disaster. The southern coast of Asia has the largest volume of ships in the water, be they shipping or smuggling. Powers and Harvin were hedging their bets that they could go unnoticed for a time to recoup some losses. Within three weeks, most of their ships were either seized by Hong Kong port authorities or sunk by irate, territorial Yakuza and Triad smugglers. It's virtually impossible given a market the size of Asia that a few extra ships would be noticed in less than a month. Harvin's suspicions had now been raised, but it was far too late. With half of his shipping fleet impounded or sunk, and his manufacturing branch without distributors or buyers, Gunderson Corp was on the rocks.

- I still can't believe it's that simple. Okay, I understand the one-man thing, but Gunderson had to have deeper pockets than that. What about their investments into other markets? You can't just topple such a giant with one or two axe strokes.

- Phade

- As I said before, it is. I'm afraid our good Captain Chaos would nix such a long discourse, but there are fundamental reasons why this could occur. I've examined the evidence, and it looks like the entire world was engaging in economic sabotage against Gunderson. Someone not only coerced or influenced a number of other businesses to support this, but they also paid lawyers to harass Gunderson with lawsuits, contributed to politicians who applied political pressure, bribed cops to crack down, and even paid off Gunderson insiders to sell secrets and expose scandals.

There may easily have been other influences involved that aren't as easy to track. How many shadowrunners were hired to add fuel to the fire? How many investors of Gunderson Corp pulled out over the last four months of their inde-



pendent existence? If X-man is making Y money and suddenly a gentleman approaches him and says I'll pay you Y + half a million if you pull your resources ...

• The Chromed Accountant

"It's all about dollars and sense."

With plummeting stock and rising losses, Gunderson started scrambling for a way out of the situation. The easiest solution was to divest itself of unprofitable subsidiaries. Montclair Industries was the first to go, falling into the hands of Global Oil. The remains of TransSea were next, swallowed whole by Wuxing.

• I wonder if Wuxing was aware of the circumstances that lead to the fall in TransSea stock, or if they simply noted a shipping company was in trouble and that it was ripe for being picked clean. Wuxing bought all of the assets and even kept the crews and personnel, and immediately absorbed it into its worldwide shipping industry, expanding their business in the Caribbean.

• Sea Bee

Though divestment allowed Gunderson to get its head above water for a short period, the corp is still in serious trouble. As of this writing, Gunderson is but a shell of its former glory, claiming less than 30 percent of its original assets. Investors, clients and even employees are fleeing in droves. Gunderson is a corporate cadaver, it just hasn't realized its dead yet. The scavengers are already nibbling at its carcass, fighting over juicy chunks like Atlantic Security.

• You aren't kidding. Gunderson was the glue that held Miami together, and that city is rapidly turning into a third-world war zone. Dozens of corps are vying to seize what's left of Atlantic, hoping they can ride into Miami as the new shining knight to restore order. Crime in the city has skyrocketed, with more reported in the last two months than in the previous four years combined. It may take a while for the dust to settle on who gets what in Miami.

• Carousel

• Same goes for the rest of the Sovereign State of South Florida. Everyone's trying to get a piece of the pie, from the Mafia Gambione family to Knight Errant to another security corp called Reality, Incorporated. The CAS has tightened its borders, and the troops on the border are looking mighty edgy.

• Miami Dice

As I participated in this corporate execution, again I couldn't help but wonder why. Why would someone spend unspeakable amounts of money to destroy Tokugawa and Gunderson? Profit wasn't the motive, because the costs clearly outweighed any gains. My curiosity got the better of me. I started checking into things, using my insider knowledge and even paying deckers for some illegal work. I researched my employer and eventually discovered his name and his past.

Then I put two and two together, and the scope of Art's agenda became clear to me. Here's what I came up with.

Art is not sated by his vast wealth. Nor is he sated by the high society position that wealth can bring him. No, Art has succumbed to one of the basest human instincts—revenge.

Art Dankwalther is the ultimate disgruntled employee. He loyally served Fuchi, and was discarded like trash for his efforts. His simple hopes for even base recognition were shattered, as grossly illustrated by Villiers on that yacht. Art no longer wants his job back, nor is anything else likely to assuage him. He wants to strike back at the company that cast him into a dark and dreary world, and he has the massive wealth to do it. Fuchi may be dead, but Novatech will do nicely.

This is not the sort of hot revenge that leads to Stuffer Shacks and Street Sweepers. No, this was the purest revenge, the icy warmth that comes with the power to achieve it, if properly planned and executed. Art's brain may have been warped by excessive use of BTLs, but he has the craftiness of the deranged. He knew that he could not simply launch himself at Novatech right away. So he has been practicing. The destruction of Tokugawa was a dry run, an exercise in pure economic might. But Tokugawa was an ant compared to the mass of Novatech. So Art ran a second test, an exercise in deconstructing a AA-megacorp—Gunderson.

• Ya know, assuming that all of this is for real, once this story goes public, Novatech is gonna go ballistic. They'll have this guy whacked faster than a president of Paraguay.

• Wetworks

• Perhaps, but Art is worth a pretty penny. Maybe Novatech will try to woo him back. Since he was so in love with the corp, maybe Villiers can just invite him back to work, maybe sell him enough shares to take a seat on the board. Then they can break this bronco rather than put him down. He's obviously got some clever ideas, and if nothing else, he'll be very close for Novatech to keep an eye on him.

• Pragmaticus

• I disagree. I think this guy's forehead has a hot date with hot lead.

• 9-Finger Steve

• Does he want to go after Renraku and Shiawase as well? They both sucked up large pieces of Fuchi. Does anyone know if this slag has a beef with Nakatomi or Yamana?

• Einstein

• I doubt anyone knows. From what it sounds like, Art himself may not even know yet. Perhaps they are next in line, once he takes the time to eliminate Novatech.

• Cutter

Now that Gunderson is all but buried, the stage is set for bigger things. I suspect it will still take Art some time to rebuild his strength before he can take Novatech on. The



undermining of Gunderson was a costly affair, and Novatech will take tenfold resources.

So that's my story. What about me, you ask? Why am I risking my life to tell this tale? The answer is simple. I watched as Tokugawa and Gunderson were torn apart. I got a clear view of how many people were shafted as a result of those actions. I understand the competitive world of corporate economics as much as the next guy, but this was monstrous. Hostile takeovers, bankruptcy, leverage acquisitions—these are just tools of the trade and they occur a hundred times a day from mom-and-pop shops up into the multinationals. But there are rules of acquisition. Procedures of etiquette and decorum that allow the bloodthirsty sharks to survive in the corporate ocean without a blood bath. Without such rules, we could have a corporate war that makes the death of Fuchi look like the fall of a nickel-dime store.

I don't want to see another corporate war, especially one driven by deranged men. That's the sort of war that can lead to megacorp military forces duking it out in the streets. The sort of war that could see our infrastructure collapse, plunging metahumanity into the dark ages. That's too much. Art has to be stopped.

I can't lie to you, though. My real motives aren't humanitarian. The real reason I'm posting this is because I wanted to give Art a big kick between the legs. You see, the fragger canned me for snooping too much. And when you know as much as I do about people that powerful, you don't expect to live long anyway.

Here's to you, Art.

GAME INFORMATION

It is common for people who win the lottery or inherit a dead relative's fortune to recklessly spend their new wealth rather than use it constructively. Art Dankwalther could very well have recklessly burned his riches if not for a chance encounter with Richard Villiers. That single event brought forth years of pent-up pain and anger, flooding the mind of a man who had already been traumatized by the shock of betrayal, immersion into an uncaring world, BTL abuse and then sudden wealth. Art's mind may have snapped, but his background in economics and his personal fortune allow him to plan and conduct systematic economic warfare on an unparalleled scale.

Now that Art has successfully honed his skills on smaller corps, he is turning his attention toward Novatech. A megacorp like Novatech, however, is nothing to trifle with, dwarfing even Art's personal power. It is likely that Villiers will soon be aware of the threat. It will take Art considerable time and effort to prepare his assault, giving Novatech their own time to prepare a defense. This preparation period may

involve sorties and forays by either side, testing each other's weaknesses.

Shadowrunners may become entangled with Art in a number of ways. They may be hired by some arm of Art's apparatus to probe Novatech for signs of weaknesses, or to gather intelligence to be used against the corp. Novatech may hire the runners to track down Art's real location, perhaps to assassinate him or to offer a deal. Novatech may also simply hire runners to conduct pre-emptive strikes, impeding Art's ability to take Novatech on. Other megacorps may become involved as well, perhaps hoping to take advantage of the rivalry, or to offer aid to one side or another—at a cost, of course.

THE FALL OF GUNDERSON

The deconstruction of Gunderson Corporation also presents a variety of shadowrun possibilities. Gunderson is not yet dead, and the corp may still have some surprises up its sleeve. In such desperate straits, the corp is much more likely to employ runners to help it get back on its feet. Many other corps will be seeking to keep Gunderson down, either to take over its remaining assets or to seize away useful subsidiaries, such as Atlantic Security.

Chaos in Miami and Florida

The fall of Gunderson has serious ramifications in Miami and the entire Sovereign State of South Florida. Gunderson's demise will be the talk of the town, and any authority the corp once wielded is now in tatters. Atlantic Security still attempts to enforce order with excessive brutality, but its fangs have been pulled. Hampered by financial and personnel cuts, depleted resources and low morale, the security corp is surrounded by predators. No longer held down, the crime cartels, gangs and other opportunists have taken to the streets, attempting to grab their own piece of pie. Shadowrunners may take advantage of this breakdown, using it as a cover for shadowruns against Florida-based targets. Alternatively, a community plagued by wild gangs or a corp facility seeking aid against their rivals may hire them for protection.

For now, South Florida is in shambles, and it remains unclear who will rise to the fore. Many powerful groups have interests at stake here. Syndicates like the Gambione Mafia family are guarding their turf against other syndicates and Caribbean pirate gangs that smell an opportunity. Wuxing, Ares/Knight Errant and Global Oil have each moved in, snapping up pieces of Gunderson and hoping to seize control of the area for their own use. Meanwhile, CAS and Aztlan and other Caribbean states eye the situation, watching for a chance to jump in.

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Nothing to see here... Move along

"Everyone's got a dark secret, chummer. See that chromed-out razorgirl with the chain of fetishes? She could be a cultist who uses blood rituals to restore her lost magic. See that suit slugging down whiskey in the corner? He could be the errand-boy of some supra-governmental conspiracy to overthrow the NANs. And that freak behind you? Drek, chummer, he's not even human ..."

Threats 2 describes twelve influential organizations and entities, each pursuing their own secret agendas in the world of Shadowrun. These threats operate on many levels, from irritating spirits that affect magical foci to a deranged artificial intelligence that seeks to rebuild itself and take over the Matrix. These threats can be used as recurring villains or as powerful forces seeking to manipulate the characters for their own ends.

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